

A high-contrast, black and white photograph featuring a spotlight effect. A bright, rectangular beam of light descends from the top center, illuminating a white, triangular sign. The sign is positioned in the lower half of the frame and bears the text "THE WORD IS" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The words are arranged in three lines: "THE" on the top line, "WORD" on the middle line, and "IS" on the bottom line. The sign is set against a dark, textured background that appears to be a stage or a large hall. The lighting creates strong shadows and highlights, emphasizing the three-dimensional quality of the sign and the dramatic atmosphere of the scene. The overall composition is minimalist and focuses on the interplay of light and shadow.

**THE
WORD
IS**

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POETRY

Body Language

by Promethea

The thing that makes me crazy is how much I wanted her –
 the simple act of longing
 year after year, till finally
 she took my hand and held it
 pressed to her small right breast. That kind of longing
 turns your whole torso into a cavern where despair echoes
 wall to wall and hope leaps like a foetus. My complicity
 confuses the issue. How to say the word: abuse
 when my body tells another story – not a tale of clenched self-
 protection but an epic, my young arm
 reaching out for her breast,
 my back spreading wide to her touch?
 The thing I go back to is
 the rain on the window –
 water washing all over the pane as hand moves to breast
 and someone seduces someone else. My complicity clouds
 the definitions like that misted window,
 one side of its thin old glass
 steaming with the heat of breath and skin while the other leans
 into the storm, weeping.

As Time Could Only Tell

by David Jr.

listen to my plea:

As time could only tell were it all become
For neither of it, cause it all remains the same
As time could only tell like when it first ever rained
Now than you'll find a way to change your hurt and pain
If not you might stay deep insane
As time could only tell, But always remember
Stay strong in every way
Just like when you were a child full of love and peace
As time could only tell, like the way I've always thrived
To keep my pride, from the darkness of evil that comes my way.
So now I must say, Thou shall not fear, from now till the end of
my time.

As time could only tell,
cause growing up to become a father was no easy way.
Trying to stay alive was a must. As time could only tell
Because some days and some nights, I find myself going out of
control

Can't even think why I feel so cold, As time could only tell
Like the sun when it appear way above, only soon to disappear,
Into bright shinning stars, that lay before the darkness of our
time.

As time could only tell, so let us all be patient in finding ourselves,
In peace with many nights and days, to be filled with our Pride
and Joy,

With lots of blessings from above, cause time could only tell

Solitary

by Michael Zwick

This is my poem... Just pages of my life
This past year brought me many experiences,
I love and I love, but found no lover
I try my best not to stress...

I sit here in solitary, and try to lean back
This cell is making me crazy without a love
In my life, I take this time to ride the ride
And come out on top because still I try...

I face my dilemmas just like anyone else
A beautiful person you are with a lot of pride,
So forgive me the pain I will not run and hide,
And keep you near my pride...

I sit here in solitary and keep my dream alive,
I wait for you to be the love of my life...

Our Best Friend

by Hannah Eve Israel

As the day wains,
to darkness on the streets
The players walk,
unto their lonely keeps.

Another day gone,
seeking a special one.
You do the search,
for they never come.

Then in a flash,
a new life will begin.
You have found them,
the person you call FRIEND.

They are there now,
waiting for your word.
They will listen,
so that you know you are heard.

These special ones,
you should know who they is.
They printed this,
and have made you their biz.

This one is yours
Oh QPIRG!

Loud and Proud

by Jenna Lyn Clawson

This place won't accept me
I'm glad I don't pursue
Love or concern or acceptance from you
Your mind is small
And your comprehension much smaller
I won't be beaten or made to feel uncomfortable
I'll wash your walls with rainbows
and peace
I'll fill your empty hearts with purpose to beat
I'll always be me
transgender and proud
I'll always shine bright
like the sun when no clouds
I'll make you understand that to grow is
human
I'll make you see that although
I was born a He
but live as a She
I'm still very much human
Your words can't hurt me
I'm immune to that
So many scars
I'm tough as an alley cat
You'll one day realize

probably a little too late
We're here for good
And we're not going away
in this world
It takes all kinds
So why not us too?
We are millions strong
not just a few
You're being ignorant
So rearrange your view
the sun will shine brighter
the sky appear even more blue
Because it's a good feeling
to learn something new
Open your mind
As I will do so too
Anyone can learn even us two

I AM ME

by William "Edmond" Gossett

In all the world there is no one like me. All that comes out of me is authentically mine, because I alone chose it. I own everything about me. My body, feelings, mouth, voice and all of my actions. I own my fantasies, dreams, hopes and fears. I own my triumphs and successes. I own my fail-ures and mistakes. Because I alone own all of me. I am able to love everything about me. I un-derstand there are aspects about me I really don't understand. I am ok with this because it's what makes me. I can look and sound the way that pleases me. I say and do what makes me happy. I make all my own choices. I can be close to others, or as far away as I chose. I can be productive or do nothing at all. It is my choice and mine alone. I can make sense out of all the confu-sion around me, or disregard what I chose to ignore. But it's my choice. No one owns me or can control me. I have the choice to be happy, or sad. I am responsible for my actions. I will accept any consequences from choices I make. I will always love me. I am comfortable with me. I am me and I'm ok!

JUST 4 u

by Ty Sangwais

I would pull a star out of the sky
if that was possible to do
to show the power of the love I feel
I would give it straight to you
that love can bring a new life
where feelings start to grow...
may not be able to give you the stars
because truthfully there's no way
But I can show you true love
each & everyday we're together...

If reaching the stars could be done
believe me I would definitely try
I would do almost anything 4 U
Like even touch the sky...

DEPARTED

by Mikey Beauchamp

As I sit in quiet awe,
Remembering,
Where I went wrong,
I linger a time that's gone.

Like the petals on a rose
I slowly wilt and decompose,
I wander the streets like a wraith,
No one can see my heart is grey.

Emptiness has filled my room,
My lights become a darkened gloom,
I'm screaming, crying out for you...
There's nothing else that I can do.

Trapped inside a world of strife,
Wishing I could leave this life.
In a prison built inside my mind,
I keep our memories locked inside.

untitled

by Mikey Beauchamp

The odds have always been stacked against me, for as long as I can remember. It seems like the only time I've gotten a break, is when I broke the law! Now, all I want is to break the cycle and find a hand up, instead of a handout. It's taken me a long time to understand what acceptance is and what it means. Acceptance isn't something that has been easily grasped in so many different aspects of my life... But I don't believe that acceptance can ever truly be mastered, just learned through experience. Because the more we experience, the more we learn how to come to the understanding of what acceptance is and what it means, sometimes these lessons life has set in place for us to learn can take us to our lowest lows, bringing pain and despair lasting what can sometimes feel like a lifetime. Before we can learn acceptance, and find the courage and strength to open our hearts and minds as we search ourselves knowing where we are as well as where we've been to pre-pare ourselves for the road ahead in the hope of helping another person as we place our hand out to offer a hand up and break the cycle, teaching what we've learned and learning by what we've taught, two wrongs don't make a right.

untitled

by Tatia Marie

Did we forget to say that you are beautiful?
The best of our best.
Condemned by family
Condemned by society
Condemned by law
Did we forget to say that you are, still, beautiful?
The best of our best.
Yea, you stole
 you robbed
 even killed

Even so, did we forget to say that you are
beautiful? The best of our best.

The rose has thorns, yet, do
we not say that it is beautiful?
The best of the best

Gratitude, and eternal love.
The best of the best

My World of Concrete

by Billy McKenzie

Verbal orgies devoid of sound
I spend my nights with imaginary lovers renowned
Father son holy ghost
Comfort to some, in here, fable to most
Kidney failure, hep c, HIV, a spiders bite if you please
Mostly Mrs. A brings us to our knees
Financial struggle cheap wine, cupids itch
Soon or later, we all come to realize, lifes a bitch
The battle fields full of surprise
The one least likely always rises
Look down upon you his ice cold stare
Is he your creation, could be, he is our creation
Day after day, living under his exploitation
A killer, a convict, a lover, a whore
Gathered around me now, they're psychic Carnivores
Their bodies lay bleeding across the dayroom floors
Crimson blood, shines bright, as it flows under my cell door
Passionate love, his knife still in his hand.
As the guards just watch this, knowing
They dont give a damn
I'm just longing to be understood
Why cant you act as we know you should
Sorrowful tears escape my tired eyes
Wondering how many more must I witness die
Each day I prostrate myself so humble

For my angry god to see
Each day I ask him to take my battered soul
For what? A quantum of control
My eyes take in this chaos, in a panoramic view
I listen to you laugh at me for what I just said
Knowing in your heart, you wished me Dead!
So for you I lay a pistol against my head
Because I cant take anyore of this dread
As I draw my knees up to my chest
I wish my friends, even you, the very best
With one quick blast
Its over at last
This was my world of concrete
A killer, a convict, a lover, a whore
No longer gathered around me, any
Psychic carnivores.

Trans

by Ebony Delaney

Translucent and transparent-opened for all to see.
Exposed to the world, hiding nothing that defines me.
A kaleidoscope of life's colors, a prism of life's glow.
A spectrum of the imagination, a dazzling and beautiful
rainbow.

Transferred-the guilt with which you desire to define,
My spark, which love ignites; My spirit that's so divine.
A bellwether of inspiration, a trendsetter by design,
A renewer of hope, an enlightener of the mind.

Transforming-the minds of this transphobic world.
Graceful and dignified, a triumphant message to be herald.
Behold the beauty of a metamorphic change open for all to
see,
Uncaged, unchained, uninhibited, unbound by acceptance
of me.

Transporting-the hearts, eliminating the stereotypes.
A warrior for the inclusion, refusing to yield the fight.
Lifting the veils for discrimination, obliterating the
disgraceful stains.
No longer tied to the shadows, but proud to be called
Transgender by name.

When I Think of LGBTQ Individuals

by Dwight Hines

I think of our sense of humor, our
Caring and our compassion... All those
Things that remain so much a part of
Us, despite the obstacles we face.

When I think of LGBTQ individuals,
I think of our courage and our quiet
Strength.

When I think of LGBTQ individuals
Which I often do these days—I think
Of how many lives we have touched and
What a difference we have made in this
World, but most of all, I think of how
Much love, encouragement and hope we give
To everyone.

Distant Star

Cherry Bomb

I feel my soul, the pain from the sword.
Time had caught me, the web full of
thorns...
I can't keep a smile, my heart is in sorrow.
Sleepless nights, I feel so alone
In circles I roam, I'm losing control
My mind is a storm, you can adore
Your eyes are beautiful, my sight is so lost
My love is so deep, my passion is so lost
This cloud is hell, but in heaven I'll dwell
Your beauty I will hold
I'm in your powerful spell
I can't never reach for you
A distant star, so far apart
But I'll always cherish
Our beautiful people L.G.B.T.Q
This powerful rainbow of pure love

Struggling with Existence

by Pieface

3:37 AM

The brickz are speaking 2 me
It seemz failure materialize outta thin air.
The more I try, the more I fall down
So tonight I out my fear away,
Letting go of my breath
That waz never given 2 me
Blood rain down my arm causing me 2 be
memorized by the fire
Authoritiez tried 2 help, but I became more
rebellious to their homophobia eyes.
Against time, the colorz we're a disguise
My mask of shame their patronizing mindz
encourage me 2 let go,
Causing me to powerdown cry out the emotional
pain
Story to the many facez of this world, who haz given
up,
Due 2 hard timez, struggling w/ they're identitiez,
and existence to live.
Itz going to alright. You were me, and I am you.
Your not along, and everyday I will listen 2 you
heart.
Keep yo' head where the starz be.

Learning to Love

by Pen of Passion

When to learn to communicate
You learn to be understanding
When you learn to be understanding
You learn to care
When you learn to care
You learn to love
When you learn to love
You learn to be patient
When you learn to be patient
You learn to appreciate to one you love!

A Letter from My Jail

From Sara G. Outman (Widow)

When you look in the mirror and see a stranger staring back;
When your outward appearance repulses you to the point of
physical illness;

When you want to be seen and accepted for who you are on
the side;

When being forced to undress and shower without privacy
causes an uncontrollable anxiety;

When you're called a sissy even when you act as best you can;
When you've felt this way since you were but five years old
and it never went away;

When you are comfortable, confident, and empowered
while dressed in "traditionally" female clothes;

When you struggle with an untold and pervasive depression;

When your gender is in complete discord with everything
your heart and soul says.

Then, and only then, will you comprehend why we cannot
live by your gender binaryism and demands!

Not until you allow me to live as my own person;

Not until you stop attacking my presence within women's
facilities;

Not until you understand my medical and surgical needs are
not "cosmetic";

Not until you accept me as a human;

Will I be allowed to be who I am and deserve to be!
I'm not going to try and deceive you;
I'm not going to change or grow out of a "phase";
I'm not a deviant or a freak;
I am only; I am solely; I am wholly
Who I am born and meant to be!

Our Powerful Rainbow

Cherrie Bomb

The beauty in the blue sky
Also in our hearts
I'm happy with our people
We are everywhere in life
Straights hate us even kill us
But there misled and afraid
Our path is hard but we love everyone
Regardless of homophobic's sour souls
We are strong and precious people
All sex is good sex in my book
I'm universal I love both genders
But I go crazy in love for any red head transgenders
Our colorful flag I'm so proud of
I'm fully out the closet not afraid to show my face
My family is religious and disowned me now
But with my art skills I will survive on my own
I love looking at our rainbow in the clear sky
I'm proud of our community who is strong and proud.

Determination

by Patrice Daniels

The determination to transcend the narrow confines
of this temporal plane
is at the very core of who I am as a person.
Determination allows me to face each and every day
of this incremental
death sentence with purpose, relative peace of mind,
curiosity, courage,
relative compassion, and a spirit of general
optimism.
Determination gives me the ability to reject the
stereotypes, profiles, and
statistics that would otherwise box me in.
Determination has afforded me the ability to see
beyond the
regrettably horrible crime I committed and yet still
carve out
some semblance of self-worth/value despite.
And that's not at all meant to be dismissive—nor to
minimize —
the mere acceptance of full responsibility for my
actions and voluntary
efforts towards changing says plenty about my
genuine, heartfelt remorse.

Determination is in large part the engine that drives
this vehicle—
and without it my life would be wholly stagnant and
frankly a waste.

A Love Letter to the Orlando Nightclub Kidz Starkissez to All 49 Soulz

by Pieface

Legacy...Beautician...Gaga...Tremendous...

My flavour is L.B.G.T.

Oh, and by the way,

I'm different.

Dancing w/ him in the ocean seahalls, only to see
nemo,

Hi, nemo, have you found dory, ? Freedom iz looking
4 you.

Hate of someones gum, materialize outta thin air.

My friendz, my dear friendz, my love,

Why do you fear our gay? My style, being different, my
beautiful smile of free life. Is that why you abuse me?

Flaunt my love,

Judging my sexuality w/ bullets,

No more crying queer, our tears are being taken 4
granted.

Were going to show them fire & rain, bury hate and
control (you).

Whatever it costs, send it to space so it can't breath
and hurt us anymore. It'z not about being gay, it'z
about our humanity and civil rights of freedom. Is
this America, or a dictatorship of genocide w/ people
who lookz different in love.

Do you fear my everything? Are my colorz 2 bright,
or your Christianity too conservative lace w/ being a
hibernate,

my play w/ wordz are intentional, because you ho'z
are so hilariously.

My mama taught me to fight w/ my intelligence.

Your mask of shame, (is not my fault)

you swim w/ shame bitch and see how far that gets
you.

Patronizing faces encourage rage,

caramelsweet orlando nightclub kids, I'll give up
my life to hold you in gods empathy, without fear of
oppressive-hearts.

Humans look at your identities as if they're your
children, and surrender humanity's love.

It's going 2 be alright orlando world, one day life
will be different. No bitternezz in your conscience
spirit, your joy of singing w/ Rihanna, will keep the
mosquitos away.

Send my hugs 4 you,

wine kisses w/ warm giggles, and pecan pie will
keep you sweet.

Orlando nightclub kids, lets dance 4 the fallen,
shake yo' hips boo-boo kitty

Censor Me That

by Darren Seawell

Censorship is not just about limiting your words
It can limit the way you move and sway
Dictating how you can live your life,
Love you love, and fly your colors
Censorship can protect children
And teach them lessons, on a good day
But unfortunately it's usually used
To make people feel less
Than the norm.
I will dare to be weird
If I want to be queer,
Let me be queer
If I want to be gay, hey!

untitled

by Catarina Wesa Patience

Censorship, you wish to silence my voice, as if life gave me a choice. I am who the hell I am and for that I rejoice.

You say...

Keep quiet and don't draw attention to how you look, you damn sure picked up the wrong book, the rough path seems to be the one you took. Shook you the fuck up too when you finally saw me.

That's right,

Yes... me... the truest person that I can be. Not the normal image that you want to see. I refused to compromise, screw your censorship, my voice shall be free.

Transgender

by Sasha

Who can understand my struggle?
To be a woman held prisoner in a man's body
Filled with complex emotions and irrational thought
patterns
At least that's what society says
I have never felt comfortable in my own skin
You see... my father is a Christian
My mother is a Christian... my brothers are
Christians
Then there's me
Yo I've spoken with Christ
I mean... I've spoken with one of Christ's
representatives
And he says there is no place in heaven for people
like me
I was only seven when a man told me this
All I could do was smile
Don't blame me for what I am... Blame God
I did not wish to be born into such a loveless world
For what you see in me is the result of HIS flawed
craftsmanship
My soul declares my perfection
Monotheistic religions...
Nothing more than cultural and ideological
constructs created

by superstitious men
I do not fit into their box
My very existence transcends their knowledge
Knowledge I call ignorance
Knowledge I call bigotry
Knowledge I call delusion
Don't be mad at me... I call it how I see it
They say women should know their place
Forgive me... I don't think I ever will
For there is no place for me in your holy looks
But I will not be denied by you or your God
For your faith is but propaganda to my truth
A truth I've lived everyday of my life
And so I ask... can you understand my struggle?
No!
You cannot...
For you have no idea what it's like to be a woman
held prisoner
In a man's body
So spare me the rhetoric
My identity is not a disorder...
But your way of thinking... is.
Sasha

Molvel-Ment

by Divine

From the moment of the pop of the first Stonewall
riot gun
We been balling like 361... "Autobahn"
Movement steadily gaining weight and pace
While you stay planted in place..."Audubon"
Still can't cipher "why?" Society; labels our leanings
impropriety
Maybe we grew too fast - so I ask as I blow past...
Why are you so afraid of what's inside of me?
Are you intimidated by a sultry switch, make-up,
and tits? (or)
Perhaps cause I wake up on my shit ASAP..."Rocky"
Couldn't envision - me grinding and celebrating,
Each GLBTQI decision that supports the Vision
As soon as they touch down..."Shockey"
As we dispense with the hits on our "Queer Bucket
List"
At a pace break-neck... cross-check..."hockey"
Perhaps you realize you can't stop me?
And can't drown the dream—My triple-crown team
Throwdown like secretariat
You just a jockey, who can't ride me—ain't no hariat
That's why you can't understand how Ms. Major can
lead the ram
Above-ground to the Promised land; like a modern-

day Harriet
Continuing the Stonewall/Tenderloin Missions—in
the tradition
Of Sylvia and Marsha—Like a mantle she carries it.
Carefully selecting allies whose actions and eyes
Convey “they” are not some NewAge Judas Iscariots

Don’t get all A-“twitter,”
Cause we ain’t fully “Linked-in”... yet
These just a few matches in the game
It ain’t the whole set!
—and—
While I’m proud that Laverne can star in Orange is
the New Black
we still got a lot of fighting to do
To beat this “Trumped-up” White House misogyny
back

Just because a few songs—say our names
Don’t mean they want us at the dance
Keep in mind—this Move-ment
Is about more than the Mo-ment
We can make our facebook status
Fluid, Intersex, Non-conforming, (or) Trans!

untitled

by Glider

Life is a journey
That sometimes leads us
Through rough places...
But the walk
Is so much easier
When we travel
Beside one another.
That way we can reach out
And find help
When we need someone
To lean on

It doesn't matter
Whose turn it might be
Or how much time it might take
Until the path
Becomes smooth again.
All that does matter
Is that we're there for each other
And that we'll keep walking
Side by side
Wherever the road may lead us.
And I want you to know
I'm at your side right now.

Look to the Future

by Gregory Berin

Dedicated to: Those who lost their way

As you journey down life's golden path
It can be filled with joy and lots of laughs
At times it may be filled with pain and sorrow
Never give up-there's a brighter tomorrow
Keep alive your hopes and your dreams
Never give up your pride and self-esteem
Reach for the stars and beyond
Never lose sight of your golden path
Keep your spirit alive and your heart full of love
For peace in life is as free as a dove
Keep alive your dreams and your heart free from
sorrow
And when you grow older-and your hair is gray
Keep your memories alive and in your heart every
day
Never forget the path you chose to take along the
way

"Yourself"

by Greg Berin

Take off your clothing,
Features, Pictures;
I don't want you like that,
Masked as another,
Always a lover of someone.
I want you pure, free,
Irreducible you.

I know when I call you
Among all people
In the world,
Only you will be you.
And when you ask me
Who is calling you?
Who want you his,
I will bury nouns,
Labels history.

I will tear apart
All that they threw on me
From before I was born.
Finally, back in the eternal
Anonymity of the naked,
I will tell you.

“L.G.B.T.Q. Love”

by Dwight Hines

LGBTQ love is an endless love.
Special love that knows no limit. A pure
Love that continues to flourish and to
Transform, yet also remains the exact,
LGBTQ love is a true love that comforts
And nurtures the heart. A tender love
That reminisces in the gratifications and
Fulfillments and in the heartbreaks and
Losses. LGBTQ love is sculptured by
Every face of our living from the
Unpleasant to the extraordinary. LGBTQ
Love was pre-ordained. LGBTQ love is
A most beautiful destiny

Twinkie Time

by P.N. Champion/Catherine Lynn Quick

Twinkie Time
Who can resist,
that tasty treat.
On it you can subsist,
and the flavor can't be beat.

Spongy light cake,
with a vanilla filling,
for heaven's sake,
it fits the billing.

I share them to,
With my lover Tim,
it something we do,
thats between me and him.

Then we lay nude,
and I see his hard sign,
this may be crude,
but it's Twinkie Time.

A Place Far Away

by P.N. Champion/Catherine Lynn Quick

As I lay me down,
at the end of the day.
I find myself drifting,
to a place far away.

I see you smile,
and hear your sweet voice.
In this place far away,
I can forget that horrible choice.

Yes I chose to walk away,
and I lost your loving heart.
But in this place far away,
I can have a new start.

I know it's not real,
as I hold you close to me.
I was stupid and wrong,
and to blind to see.

It is all I have left,
of our loving life.
So I can still hold you close,
and call you my wife.

As I lay me down,
at the end of the day.
I'm with you my love,
in this place far away.

Take Notice

by Billy

Picture the snow slowly falling, beauty for all to see
A man stands at his window, alone but not lonely
No one knows when the snow will stop, or when it will come
again
The man in the window knows his battle will come
Whether by sword or by pen
No one can ease the forces of nature
We know it's beyond our control
The man in the window meets a man in the street
Two singles that now form one whole
Powerless to the needs instilled at birth
Fighting the odds for a peaceful calm earth
When is a choice no longer a choice
Listen to me I too have a voice
Not looking back or too far ahead, I've already made my
choice
Frustration bottled up deep inside
Ready to raise my voice
I've dealt with persecution for far too many days
I say this "Nothing will change the course of my ways, I'm
gay."
People "take notice", it's time you heard my cry
No longer will I be denied, it's my turn to try

Themed Submissions

LGBTQ Safety

Timothy “Cat” Jones

Some people may not like what I am about to say, but I have 26 straight years of being in prison and gay that I base my next statement on:

85–90% of all dangerous or violent situations that a bi, homo, or trans person finds themselves in are a direct result of their own actions.

That’s right — what we do is usually what brings on the problems. We, as prisoners, live in a world full of predators, cons, and manipulators. Rarely is anything — not even the “I’m fixing to dump this, do you want it?” cup-of-coffee — free. Flirting is taken seriously, being overly friendly is taken as an invitation, and a sassy attitude is taken as disrespect.

Yes, there are times when some asshole takes it upon himself to force his anti-gay opinions on us. There are times when perverts see a fag and decide it is OK to put down on us. But most of the time it is how we interact with others — how we carry ourselves — that draws attention to us.

We must be aware of what type of environment we live in and

what type of people we live with every day. LGBTQ safety starts with us conducting ourselves in a way that does not open doors for others to step through.

Some of the most common areas I've seen cause problems, and how to avoid them, are as follows:

Accepting things from others. When people give a girl something, they usually want something in return, even if they say they don't.

Going into other people's cells to talk. If someone wants to talk with you, do not go into their cell alone. Once you are in a cell, you are trapped.

Wearing skin-tight clothing. If you advertise your goods, people expect you to kick out.

Being overly friendly. If you are too nice to someone, then that person, in their own warped mind, can convince himself that it means you really like them and want them.

Insinuating that a person has a chance. We've all done it — told someone, "We might do something in the future," whether it was to get something we wanted or just to get them to stop bugging us. Do not lead others on. Do not give them false hope of future sex or relationships. No means no. Yes means yes. "Maybe" means yes to most guys in here.

Think before you speak. Many “men” in prison look at us as less than men because we take dick. One of the popular phrases in Florida DOC is, “A bitch needs to stay in a bitch’s place.” Knowing this, we need to keep many of our thoughts to ourselves. Do not give anyone an excuse to claim we “disrespected” them.

Don’t rush into a relationship. Be sure to really get to know someone before you get involved. Many guys are nice and sweet just to get you to make a commitment, then their true nature comes out. Take the extra time to learn if they are who they appear to be. And remember that a lot of guys have the warped view that once you make a commitment, you are theirs — forever.

If you are in a situation you cannot get out of, do not turn to another man just to get you out of it. This will only lead to a worse situation. If you have no other choice, do not hesitate to go to protective custody. Yes, sometimes PC can save your life, even if it has a bad reputation.

If we are going to be safe, then we must take the first steps: stay together, give each other support, and show some unity.

Be safe. Be strong. Be yourself.
Meow.

Ms. Selene K. Vinson

Here in Texas we have nine units with part of the general population set aside for safe-keeping status inmates. I'd venture a guess that 95% of us or more are LGBT. I include lesbian because, as a transwoman myself, I only like women. I am not at all interested in sex with men. I began my transition years ago. I am on hormone therapy here in Texas. Yes, we have finally advanced out of the Stone Age slightly.

So basically you'd think we are safe since we are isolated from sexual assaults, harassment, or abuse. For the most part that's true due to the presence of willing sex partners here. HIV is rampant — it's like a breeding ground. But the threat of brutal rape is nearly nonexistent. Too many willing participants.

Yet there are a lot of sexual predators here. Not to toot my own horn, but I am a well-shaped and in-shape transwoman. I am continually pursued by men who identify as heterosexual yet are "gay for the stay." "Titty queens," as us developed transwomen are referred to, are a hot commodity in here.

Obviously the more advanced you are in transitioning, the higher up you are in desirability. I'm pretty well passable. I stay safe by not allowing myself to be in a vulnerable position. I stay in places where help is always available. I hang around gay men who will afford me a certain amount of protection from predators, especially the ones who identify as hetero.

I admit I do not let my safety concerns affect how I express myself. I present as totally effeminate in appearance, manner, and attire. My clothing is altered to fit more like ladies' attire. Bras and panties are everyday undergarments. With makeup and the like, I present as 100% woman. It's how I am perceived also. For the most part I only get sexual advances — never physical contact. I am in safe-keeping and on camera surveillance 24/7 except in my cell and the showers.

I do believe gays in prison, as a collective, provide us with a measure of safety. People will attack singles or small groups, but cowardice will not allow them to attack larger groups.

I believe the biggest threat to LGBT people is ignorance and fear of the unknown. The more people are enlightened to how normal LGBT people are — as people, not objects — the more familiar we become and therefore more accepted. We must try to educate the public to the fact that we are people with only a slight difference. We think, act, work, pay bills, eat, and sleep as all folks do. We just have feelings and sexual desires different from heterosexuals. And us trans people are altogether different from our bodies, but the same people as hetero women.

We must find a non-offensive way to educate the masses to negate fear of the unknown and eliminate ignorance.

What do I need to be safe? Security in the knowledge that I

will be accepted as a person, as all people should be, regardless of sexuality, race, religion, or creed. I do not believe safety comes from discriminating against or harming trans people, lesbians, bi's, and gays. It's a never-ending loop of madness.

We can only make the best of it and hope for better.

Robert Patnoudé

When I was first sent to prison someone told me the easiest way to protect myself was to keep my back to the wall. To this day I am thankful for that advice. After so long you learn what things to listen for to know when something is going to pop off.

Ironically, even though I am incarcerated in the southern US, I have never felt threatened because of my orientation. When I came out of the closet, I told myself I would not go back in for anyone. I still live by that. I think that has proven beneficial because I've always been real about who I am.

We live with predators of all kinds here. When someone puffs up and puts themselves in everyone else's face, that's when people take notice. Some feel their heterosexuality is being threatened because there's a "punk" in the dorm or talking to them. That makes those guys act out in violence to protect their reputation.

Remember: the unknown breeds fear, and fear breeds violence toward it.

The best way to make our community safer, in my opinion, is to educate the masses. The states allowing same-sex marriage is a wonderful step forward, but this is not the end of the race. We still must fight for those who cannot, and even those who won't fight for themselves.

We have a long way to go before we will be truly safe. Until that day, we must keep our heads up, remain vigilant, and be ready to make a difference.

Shane Knight

Hello to all of you in the LGBT community. I wish you love and happiness.

My name is Shane Knight, and the first letter I ever wrote about being bisexual in prison was to this newsletter. I wrote about watching an openly gay Hispanic man leave—someone I was very much in love with. I still miss him to this day.

Since then things have been a struggle. This prison's white population is the most homophobic I have ever seen. Every white gay or bisexual man that comes here is either threatened or made so uncomfortable that they get chased into protective custody and wait months in SHU to be shipped somewhere

else. They literally choose isolation over living here.

I am a fitness instructor and very solidly built. I am known to handle myself well. Because of this, when I began telling selected people I was bisexual, no one was willing to confront me. I think they are cowards. Because I am physically imposing, teach mixed martial arts, and don't fit their mold of what a "queer" should look like, they will not confront me the way they do others.

I yearn to have companionship with other gay and bi men. I am trying to get moved to a more diverse, LGBT-friendly prison. I should not be forced to live under hateful conditions.

If anyone can assist me with information on who to contact or how to be moved to a safer federal prison, please share it. I also wrote to LA GA asking for help. I am the only bisexual or gay white man that I know of at this 1,600-man facility.

Because I teach martial arts, if I defend myself I will likely be the one charged. That makes this an unsafe, unfair environment. I keep my head down, study, work hard physically and mentally, and help others through fitness and self-defense.

My family has not responded well to me coming out as bisexual. Being isolated here makes it harder.

If anyone knows of a law or policy regarding safe housing for

gay inmates, I would appreciate the information. I only want to live and communicate with other bi and gay men without having to answer ignorance with violence.

I have a struggle right now, but I will make it to the place I want to be. Anything worth having is worth the fight.

Jiordi Russel

My name is Jiordi Russel. I am currently residing in Nevada, USA, and received the Winter 2014–15 newsletter from Prisoner Correspondence Project. I was blown away by the humanity in it and had to join in.

Queer friendship and LGBTQ safety are not mutually exclusive; they are customary bedfellows.

In working closely with inmates for years, I have seen how power perceived is treated as power achieved. This is backwards. It is a systemic belief of gang mentality that if you look dangerous, you probably are — yet few truly are.

If gay, bisexual, transgender, lesbian, intersex, or gender-nonconforming people would take control of their safety, their confidence would peak. Maintaining that control allows confidence to remain steady even when circumstances shift.

I worked out, practiced mixed martial arts, and studied human

behavior. Understanding the psyche supplements physical strength. Strength must radiate from you — not necessarily violence, but confidence.

Ideally you never want to hurt anyone. But you must negotiate from a position of strength. That strength allows you to protect yourself and pass it on to others who may not yet have it.

All my love to you —
Jiordi
Standing in the gap

Rogue

I am constantly reminded of the need to educate both inmates and correctional staff who play a role in brutality directed at the LGBTQ community.

Staying safe in prison is based on common sense, especially when you are at an institution where the community is not represented and you stick out. Identity is everything in prison. Having an identity as a bi or gay male can mean the difference between comfort and discomfort.

The biggest threat to our safety is the misconception that all gay prisoners are looking to have sex with everyone in the institution. That cannot be further from the truth, but the stereotype threatens our welfare.

When I came out, I knew things could escalate quickly. I do not allow fear to define who I am. I struggle to maintain a sense of self — for myself and for those who do not yet have a voice. It is that struggle that propels our community forward.

Safety is knowledge of self and dedication to prevail.
Safety is love.

Ms. Jazzie Injustice

Once again, it's Ms. Jazzie letting you know I'm out of SHU. It was a hard fight, and I stayed strong.

We talk about justice, but often it feels like “just us” — the privileged, the rich, the educated — while the lower class is left behind.

Why don't citizens raise hell when innocent people are convicted? Why do politicians only care about high-profile cases? If you write them personally, you get a stamped reply.

To my LGBTQ family: we must stand together in a real way if we want real change. Stop the backbiting and cattiness. We are all we've got. The COs don't care about us, and other inmates often see us as targets.

Yes, progress is happening outside. But what about us behind

these walls? We must fight harder.

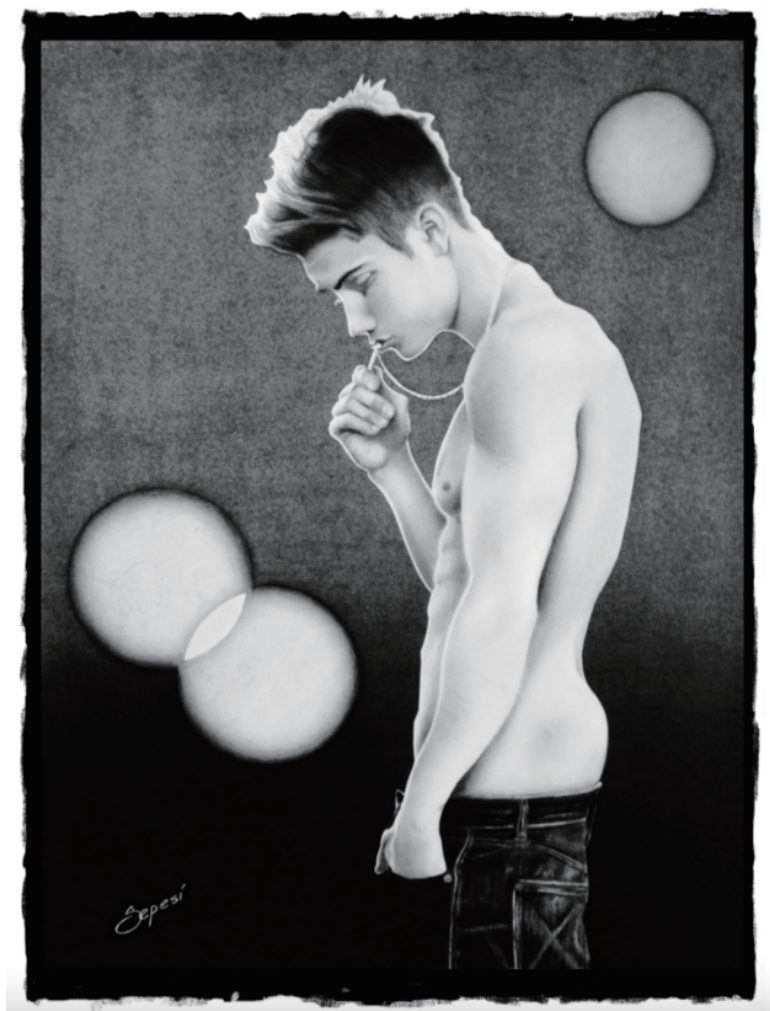
If we want panties, bras, cosmetics, safe housing — we must learn the law and push together. Strength is in numbers.

Gays, lesbians, and trans people are being raped and beaten because of sexual preference. We cannot afford to fight each other.

So I challenge us: stand back to back with our brothers and sisters. Stand prideful. No hate. No cattiness.

We stand as one. LGBTQ power.

Much love,
Your sister,
Ms. Jazzie



The Housing Issue

Jiordi Russell

Hello again, everybody. It's Jiordi. I hope you're all well. I responded to the winter 2014–15 newsletter from our friends at the Prisoner Correspondence Project for the Queer Safety and Visibility installment of LGBTQ SAFETY and was apparently well received since, when I turned again to the column in the summer 2015 issue, there I was. My cheeks are still aching from all the smiling.

So six bullet points for HOMO IS WHERE THE HEART IS; hmm...

“1. Some of us just land there, but if not, how did you find out which were the prisons with the larger LGBTQ populations? Who told you and how did they know?”

When I put this question to the guys I'm corresponding with from out here, they agreed they just land where they land and only afterward find out the extent of the GLBTQ community in a particular facility, but they also indicated this “intel” only reveals itself after placement. A substantial amount of stress is also connected to being forced to navigate the always-hostile “straight?” population in prison. Unfortunately, it's a trial-and-error proposition. In a prison environment, errors can be dangerous.

“2. Are they always the better place to be?”

Shane Knight was correct: “I think they [homophobes] are cowards... because I am physically imposing...”; power achieved. Start training; be visible...; power perceived, because you just don’t know. I’ve been told, also, facilities with larger GLBTQ populations are not always better due to attitudes and competition creating drama, hurt feelings, etc. How well would you get along at an all- or mostly-queer facility where everyone competes for himself? If you’re too busy competing for yourself, how can you compete for each other?

“3. What are the tips and tricks to having your transfer request approved?”

In the U.S., after the passage of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) by the U.S. Congress, it is now possible for the GLBTQ, intersex, gender non-conforming, and others to evaluate a facility relative to their personal safety. Observe your facility as a whole. During your observations, take concise notes and also contact your district PREA investigator and ask them to send you information on facility compliance for your facility. Then interview any GLBTQ peers you may have; ask them for their observations. Finally, compare your findings with the legislation itself to determine whether, and how much of a chance, you have to get a transfer request approved. This will be time-consuming, but you’ll only have

to do it once because, by process of elimination, you'll become familiar with all of the facilities in your particular system and be able to do this again and again.

"4. What do you take into consideration when deciding if you should enter protective custody/administrative segregation?"

A lot of collective foot-shuffling and/or hem-hawing... Generally, though, responses were fairly consistent on this one: DON'T (unless you have to). I took this to mean unless the danger to your health or welfare is substantial and imminent, avoid P.C./ad-seg like the plague. In a word, I think the best description is anathema because inmates tend always to think the worst (e.g., snitch, sex offender, gay, owe debts—especially gambling debts). But besides this, and in my opinion more important, the classification is highly restrictive of your liberty and isolating. In addition, in most cases, education, programming, and socialization are non-existent.

"5. What are steps we can take to make this knowledge more widely accessible? Or should we be trying to make change where we're at?"

Both or, depending upon the relative politics of your facility, either. Again, as I said earlier, it's a crapshoot. What works at one facility may not work at another, and a mistake can really ruin your day. That said, honesty and up-to-date intel from prisoners is key to getting truthful information. This is serious. There can be no "that bitch stole my man!" or anything else

attached as a condition on who benefits from this information. The GLBTQ community, together, is a force to be reckoned with. Separately, we're just a bunch of noncohesive individuals, lacking direction, not deserving of any serious consideration—easy to pick off one by one. It's all or none.

As this information becomes available, it should be collated, compiled, and published in 'zines on the Internet, and links should be provided for family and friends on the outside who are Internet-connected and who may also use Internet-connected computers provided by public libraries, Internet cafés, etc.

"6. How were/are you able to find gay-friendly post-release housing? Is it something you worry about?"

After PREA, no post-release or transitional housing designated as such or licensed by a state for the maintenance of former state prisoners transitioning from state custody back into society may deny individuals equal treatment commensurate with that enjoyed by similarly situated individuals due to sexual identification or orientation. This becomes a slippery slope for sex offenders, however, because while any may identify as "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," etc., based on the relative gender of victims, state officials purposely limit post-release and transitional housing—one of the undeclared "parole restrictions" in addition to those declared against sex offenders' liberty. A way to bash queers on the down-low, as I see it, since if you come out in prison, parole counts a point

against you and/or if caught having a relationship in custody.

I propose our community inside and outside prison come together, pooling our knowledge and resources the same as we've always had to do when our backs were against the wall (a stone wall, as it were), and make a way for ourselves. Because it is important and something we should all worry about if we're serious about community. We've been here before. Just housing alone can provide liberty, and not only from the P.C.

Hell yes, making changes where you are, ideally, is what you should be doing—not neglecting problems, allowing them to persist when it's within your power to solve them.

Maybe for the next installment of LGBTQ SAFETY our friends at the PCP can be intrigued by a bullet-point discussion on achieving power: what forms power may take, how you manage power, when to use power, and more importantly, when not to.

All my love to you, and all my love to all of you,

Jiordi

Standing in the gap...

Divine

Being from “Philly” (Philadelphia) and having been immersed in a very active LGBTQI community that is both out and aggressive, I’m used to always being able to readily find goods, services, and support (shout-out Washington Project). However, that is in the “free” world. Unfortunately, such is not the case in the PA-DOC (especially the further you are removed from the geographical Philly area).

Now I am incarcerated in the Southern Baptist Bible Belt (NC-DOC), and it’s almost like pulling teeth getting help (inside). The administrations are non-responsive (at best) and openly hostile at worst. Support groups and educational avenues are near zero. The crazy part is that because I am straight-“appearing,” it’s only through my constant requests for counseling (through mental health), access to services, educational materials (programs/medicinal), and my attempts to create groups that I am recognized as being LGBTQI. Yet since I don’t “appear” gay or gender non-conforming, I get a harder runaround than the girls who have established trans status (through their own fights/battles). Trying to explain GNC-pansexual to a NC good ol’ boy who is still working to understand how a “man” chops off his wood and acts like a “woman,” or a woman “grows” one (the concept that genitalia does not equal gender ID is like speaking Klingon to a sea turtle [lol] to them, etc.). So let’s just say offering any or all of the individuals who committed acts that affront their pseudo-Christian beliefs any services at all is simply (for now) out of

the question.

Any help you can offer on how to address such with the administration would be a blessing.

Sex, love, and solidarity,

(Lick u later...)

Divine

Brittany

The answer to the question of whether a girl in a men's prison should ever seek Protective Custody protection is as varied as queers themselves. For example, while I'm not at all that effeminate in my actions, I am definitely feminine, and most prisoners and staff at my prison have no problem identifying me as a girl upon meeting (or even seeing) me. Other girls, however, are harder to spot, which gives options I don't have. Likewise, while I'm not ashamed of who I am—in fact, I love being queer!—some girls are much more flamboyant, while others prefer to remain in the shadows. Everyone's circumstances and disposition are different. Ultimately, it's the differences that will help you decide whether or not to seek Protective Custody protection.

That said, based on nearly 15 years as a girl on state, I believe it should be a last resort. Protective Custody (or safekeeping, as it's often called) robs a girl of two important things: her

dignity and the respect of the men around her, often making her a mark once she's returned to the general population. At least here in North Carolina, Protective Custody is little more than another form of long-term lockup. PCers are locked in solitary confinement for up to 23 hours a day, eat all meals in their cells, are restricted from some of the perks of general population (such as ordering holiday food packages), are not allowed to use the phone or have contact visits, and are treated as though they are the cause of problems rather than the victims. Perhaps in severe situations this loss of dignity may indeed save a girl's life, but those are extreme cases. Otherwise, I can't imagine it's worth it. Protective Custody may very well protect my girly body, but it's a direct assault on my girly heart.

Also, a girl who seeks Protective Custody protection, or even files a PREA complaint, jeopardizes the already fragile respect of the men around her. (PREA, the Prison Rape Elimination Act, was signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush.) Girls already have the stereotypical reputation as emotional whimsy, and seeking PC protection can needlessly reinforce this view and, paradoxically, make future harassment worse and more violent.

Let's face it: unless you are at a truly oppressive prison that has somehow escaped the tentacles of the PREA mandates, actual violence against girls is rare. I personally believe PREA, like most prison-related legislation, does more harm than good, especially when it's misused by officials to harass

LGBT prisoners and split up consensual relationships. It did, however, most certainly shift the balance of power from the predatorial men to us girls. Just knowing that all hell will break loose should I scream PREA keeps even the horniest alpha in check.

Yet that power ultimately pales in comparison to an even greater power: the respect I've earned by not yelling PREA, by not seeking Protective Custody protection. I was raped early in my bid and almost raped by two prisoners a few months after PREA became law. Since then, I've endured the harassment all feminine boys on state endure—the ass-grabbing, the pornographic letters handed to me in the chow hall, the juvenile taunts and obnoxious threats, the clandestine requests for blowjobs or to see my pussy, the hard dicks pulled out in my presence—all of which are punishable under PREA. Yet I have never written a single statement against any of these men, nor have I ever “checked off” to escape a situation.

Recently, days after my man shipped, a prisoner who's wanted to fuck me for some time stormed into my cell, put his hands around my throat, and said that if he ever saw me talking to a certain dude again he'd kill me. I was his bitch, he said. It's common knowledge that I like strong, dominant men, so perhaps he thought I'd like his aggressive approach, but I set him straight quickly. I ordered him out of my cell and told him that the next time he entered my room intending to put his hands on me, he should bring a shank and kill me, because if he left me alive I'd spend however much time was

necessary—a week, month, year, decade—plotting my revenge until I killed him. “You’ll never know what hit you,” I warned as I stared into his dark eyes. “You crossed a line—never put your hands on a girl.”

For a week this man tried to apologize, worried to death that I’d yell PREA or seek PC protection, which he knew would bring him down, unconvinced by my threat but genuinely sorry for what he’d done. I refused to accept his apology, as much for myself as for the next girl, and swore I’d rather kill him than snitch. He finally checked off himself, amazed that I’d kept my word but unwilling to test the limits of that promise.

It wasn’t my muscle that scared him away; I have the arms of a junior high girl. It wasn’t even my brain, though I used it to outwit him often. It was my inner strength, made more evident by my refusal to be intimidated and my refusal to run to the police. I earned his respect, even as he lost mine, and sent a message to the other men in the block that I never could’ve sent from a PC cell.

Again, every situation (and every girl) is different. Just promise yourself you’ll never underestimate your own inner fortitude, no matter how girly you are or how obnoxious the perverts and predators are. If possible, find that rare correction official you can confide in without writing statements (for me this is our prison psychologist) and use him or her as a release valve. If Protective Custody is truly your only option, don’t

hesitate to ask for it, but it will then be up to you to fight every second to maintain the dignity that is intrinsic to every human being—girls included—and you will have to work even harder to gain respect once you return to general population.

So choose wisely.

Tart-Ti Smith

A big shout-out to our collective trans-identified imprisoned and free-world families. I hope most of you have found your own way to be safe and stay safe, and we must not accomplish this by becoming a rat or snitch to those whose livelihood is to keep us behind bars.

I write to share with you my eight years of insight from being held in administrative segregation housing. My intention is to give a list of a few critical circumstances that may give rise to dangerous conditions to those held in ad-seg housing—things that would be wise to consider before you opt to be segregated permanently from the general inmate population.

Once in ad-seg you will never be allowed back amongst general population inmates. You will be considered a rat, snitch, sex offender, gang drop-out, or worse, and dealt with accordingly. Why is this so important? Because gen. pop. enjoys certain privileges and comforts denied to those in ad-seg.

Standard treatment in ad-seg includes meals that are much smaller and stripped of all extras (such as chips and nuts). Even the canteen list is stripped down to only a few basic items and usually has a limit of fifty dollars. You will certainly go many days hungry. The standard issue of clothing is curtailed to only boxers, T-shirts, and socks—no pants or shirts allowed. And sometimes no jackets either, even during winter months. Law library is curtailed to once every two months. There is limited access to books (once a month), paper (five sheets a month), ink pen fillers (once a month). If you're disliked, you could go for a year straight without laundry exchange and phone privileges. There is in-cell feeding with no communal tables or day rooms for congregation. For outside recreation activities (usually once a week for 1½ hours), there is no yard. Instead, you're locked solitary in a small cage that has no exercise equipment like weights or pull-up bars.

This, as described, is all bad. But the worst shock to come is the realization that this is exactly where the authorities want you to be if you have been singled out for a covert beating or worse. For in ad-seg everyone is enemies, snitches, and a place for all types of creeps and scum to hide out. You are very likely surrounded by neighbors who loudly scream at their doors both day and night with total disrespect because everyone is chained or cuffed or caged when not in their cells. Expect nothing from authorities. There is NO protection from them, and you will be vulnerable and subjected to being

victimized.

In some cases, it may be better and safer to select the least of the undesirables who are controllable and “put out” in a minimalist fashion for protection until you can be transferred to a better general population facility. I personally would not suggest nor recommend ad-seg nor “sensitive-needs yards (SNY)” to anyone except those in imminent need of protection from a demonstrated threat and as a last and desperate resource. Wisely think before you leap and ponder the path before placing the foot.

Wishing you the best, LGBTQ. Stay safe and, always, resourceful.

Michael Shields

I have been in solitary now for 15 months. Most guys are able to get their sentences suspended early on in their segregation sentence. That has been unavailable to me because I am gay and, in coming out, I pissed off a lot of people. Second, I am not from Nevada, so I don't know a bunch of people. My seg time is up in January, and I have worked hard to get set up with a move to an LGBTQ-friendly prison. Most of the correctional staff were not helpful (not surprising). Eventually I developed a line of communication with the psychologist. He has a huge caseload, so it took months to really get the conversation onto the right topic.

The psychologist proved to be more empathetic to my situation and was finally able to help me get tagged for the right move. At the same time, I had a hateful caseworker trying to have me moved in with two different inmates that would have ended in violence. They hate that I am gay. They hate that I am a paralegal and help guys file lawsuits. It has been a bumpy road. Finding the right advocate (in my case the psychologist) made my life safer and future housing less problematic. Try different angles to find that advocate where you are. And if you have people on the streets, have them call in and help you find that right person.

Michael Desmarais

First, I would like to say that this is not my first submission to “The Word Is Out.” In winter 2014–2015 (issue 13), I had a letter published in the “Importance of Queer Friendships” section. That letter was under the name “Michael Pelletier.” After seeing it in print, I was ashamed—I felt hypocritical for hiding behind a false name. I vowed to henceforth use my name as it is.

I also wish to extend kudos to Jordi Russell for his honesty in his letter in summer 2015 (issue 14). What he wrote also impacted my decision to use my real name.

This issue is to be about “Homo Is Where the Heart Is.” Some

may not appreciate what I write. My words are based on my experiences and observations. My “truths” may differ from others.

While in prison in the state of Oregon, I saw that the more the gays and transgenders were out, the less risk they had to face. Again—strength in numbers. When alone, you’re an easy target for predators (haters). But as the overall population realizes that there are quite a few gays, the acceptance level increases. Whether in a prison of 2,000 or 3,000 like I was in, the open gay population was a safety net. Personally, I felt no danger.

In Canada it is different. By contrast, the prisons are small—populations of 200, 300, and 500. There is a lot more of “everybody knows everybody” or about everybody. Such a smaller environment creates more familiarity, which, as the saying goes, can “create contempt.” One is more cautious in seeking out fellow gays. Fear and pain versus openness.

I transferred out of Alberta to BC. A main reason is the more liberal political atmosphere and a more open metropolitan aura. I had been denied two previous transfer attempts. The third time, as part of “Why do you want to transfer?” I made a bold decision. I openly stated that as a gay person, I needed to be in a place where I could reach out to gay support groups in the community. That is impossible in Alberta. I got my transfer.

I ask that you reach out. Discover the others within your own prison. They are there. Communicate with people in other prisons. If you just stay in your cell hoping but never trying, you'll have a hard time. You, we, are people too. Enjoy who you are. Sometimes the "straights" fear us more than we fear them. I've jokingly told some straight prisoners, "I'm lucky. I can have sex with my cellie!" Instead of them throwing you a punch, throw them a curve.

The Prisoner Correspondence Project is a valuable source. Contact them.





On Power

Jiordi

O.M.G., when I stuff my foot in my mouth, I don't fool around, do I? I just go clear to the hip.

Hey everyone, Jiordi here. First, let me express gratitude to CHRis Riley (The Word Is Out, Issue #15, Winter 2015: "The Housing Issue") for taking me to task about what apparently was too harsh an article from me (The Word Is Out, Issue #14, Summer 2015: "Safety In Numbers"). Generally, I'm not so brittle. As I remember when I wrote that article, that day had been anything but stellar for me. No excuses. Just sayin'.

To you especially, "Joey" (The Word Is Out, Issue #13, Winter 2014: The "Queer Safety" Issue [I think]), to all the other "Joeys" who read that article (Issue #14) and, I hope, are reading this one: If my words hurt you, "Joey," or any of you anywhere who finds him- or herself in that place of relative warmth and comfort, cheering all of us from the sidelines, I truly apologize. Hopefully you'll forgive one really foolish mistake made by one: me, who actually came out of that same comfortable, warm place not so long ago. When I close with "All my love to you, and all my love to all of you," I really mean it.

I've also got to shout out to Michael Desmarais (The Word Is

Out, Issue #15, Winter 2015: “The Housing Issue”), who, despite my admittedly harsher-than-was-necessary article, nevertheless treated it as a positive nudge in his regard. To you, dearest Michael, there are many good reasons for using a pseudonym, not least of which is your own personal safety. My intent never was that you, Michael, nor anyone in our community, would feel ashamed, hypocritical, or negated in any way due to my words. To you, Michael, I also truly apologize. And yet, I am applauding you for the tack you’ve taken because of my article.

It might interest us all, though, that use of a proper pseudonym in the right circumstances, whether preexisting in and of themselves or springing from decisions we make on our own, can be used in ways to intercede on behalf of others in our community.

An interesting thing has happened, though, because of the harshness I displayed: it created dialogue. That dialogue brought us together: CHRis, Michael, and myself. Harshness notwithstanding, how my words are perceived by each of you makes all the difference in whether they create substantive participation and that our discourse be more than the homogenized, fortified regurgitation of special-interest shows shot for mass consumption.

Since I happen to be writing for “The Power Issue,” it behooves me to reiterate a truism of power: “The pen is mightier than the sword.” If you will just ask “Why?” you’ll

get some very interesting answers. How this article came about is one example.

Debt is another. Not only does the pen have power to create debt, the same pen that created the debt can discharge it. Debt is even connected to war. For example, when a country signs a treaty by which it binds itself, a commercial interest is created. Where a country violates a treaty, a breach of contract occurs. That breach is an act of war under certain circumstances because what was once a mutual agreement is now a debt owed by the breaching country. One finds it ironic how the U.S. avoids this. Congress simply declares U.S. national sovereignty would be infringed by the treaty, or parts thereof, and it is therefore not self-executing—read: the treaty issuing from the United Nations Convention on Human Rights isn't worth the paper it's printed on.

All the forms power may take can't be summed up in a word, nor even in pithy sayings. Power is neither the hanging sword of Damocles nor the finger hovering just above the button. It is not the cocked hammer or the rule book, and power given is just as easily taken away as it is lost by using it when you shouldn't or to hurt when you could just as easily have healed. And if able to build individual power into collective power, you have reached what is "consensus." Consensus is reached by knowing what to speak, when, and when you've said enough (T.M.I.—too much information—can sandbag the most common consensus).

Finally, power just comes. We bid power's gracious presence

by knowing what outcomes the decisions we make will have at particular points in our lives. From the time we're taught that one station in life is better than another, we begin courting that station. We begin courting power. It is our participation—he who is willing to participate. Power comes to he who is willing to sacrifice his all for the good of all, not just himself.

All my love to you, and all my love to all of you. Standing in the gap...

Todd in FL

To me, the word “power” at first seems to belong only to the system. It has the power to investigate you, the power to charge you, the power to convict and imprison you. It is abuse of that power that sometimes puts innocent people in prison like myself, CHRis, and many other readers. Maybe even you.

But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that we, too, have our own power—something they cannot touch. Ours is the sense of community and solidarity, both with those in our own institutions who are also gay and also with other LGBTQ inmates in other prisons. What you are holding and reading is power. The power to communicate with each other is a vital way for us to lift each other's spirits and make all of us feel like we matter. Giving someone a reason to keep going and not let the legal system drag him or her down to the depths

of despair is a power beyond anything those who imprisoned us can comprehend. It's love in its truest form.

We give this love just by taking the time to write what we are going through. Letting someone know they are not alone is a powerful means to help them cope. Having people who have the same feelings for others close by makes you feel less alienated. Even if you are different from them in whether you are masculine or feminine, top or submissive, just having another who loves their own gender and is proud of it makes you feel less lonely. And the ability to put down in pen how much I care about my fellow LGBTQ inmates around the world is very empowering. I feel like I am giving you all a piece of my love and inviting you into the safety of my heart to give you the strength to carry on.

That is power. And I hope that sharing with you gives you a sense of the word you've not experienced before.

Nick E. Lythe

Power while in prison, to me, was it being taken from me or having given up, but realizing that I can regain it as an individual. I hold it by respecting myself first, then others. By gaining understanding of myself and others, I grow in power. I do not do drugs or alcohol, which gives me power—my control over it. My sexuality inside and out is one way I share my power with others. I gain knowledge and wisdom and

educate myself, giving me greater power. Sometimes, by pouring myself out, I gain power. So I've found that to gain and then to give it away as much as possible brings me joy, happiness, and more power—freedom.

“Sincere”

Maison

Power is the theme for this issue, as we all know. I have never written a submission before, so please bear with me. When I was younger, I thought money was power. If you didn't have it, nobody would respect you or truly love you. So I strived to make money any way I could, from stealing to robbery. I didn't care how. I got it and, as long as I was getting it, nothing else mattered to me. I ended up destroying connections with anyone who was close to me—some in violent ways that I still regret to this day. But at the time, I didn't care. I thought, with all the power I had, I could just get new friends and family, and I did. The problem was, they weren't really loving me. They were loving the money. When that ran out, they were gone too.

Even when I found myself broke and alone, trying to beg my family to forgive me, I still held in my heart that money equaled power. With the money I got from my family, I bought myself the tools that led me to the prison cell I sit in now writing this. I've noticed now that I'm able to slow down

and think that money ain't power—not for real anyway.

Real power comes from love. With it, you can change the world, brighten someone's life, or just someone you care about. It will just keep building up until it's not just you with power, but the ones you love also. Love is what keeps people together for years. We all have felt love one way or another.

Sitting here writing this, I can remember the first guy I ever fell in love with and how scared I was that my dad was gonna find out. However, after Dylan told me he loved me too, I didn't care if my dad did. Dylan's proclaiming of love was a promise to me, no matter what my dad thought or did.

I told my dad, to his face, that I liked men just as much as I did girls. He ended up beating my ass while calling me a faggot. But Dylan was there at my side to play nurse, so it worked out sorta. So that's what I think power is: a four-letter word called LOVE.

In love and solidarity,
Forever yours,
Maison

Shawn L. Perrot

For the most part, prisoners lose all power, real or imagined, the moment the sally port gates close behind their transport. Guards run around screaming and shouting senseless orders, not because the tasks are necessary, but because protocol demands that we be broken as quickly as possible, while at the same time showing us that, regardless of what we may have been told, they're the ones running the show.

Our every move is dictated to us by an unfeeling collective dedicated to supporting even the dumbest decision made by one of their own, especially if it involves a need to respond violently. We're told what to wear and how to wear it, when we can eat and what we can eat, even when to use the bathroom and how much privacy we're afforded while using it.

For most of us, once the initial shock wears off, we respond by trying to acquire whatever power we possibly can, and in the process of doing so, our humanity. While some are able to acquire a measure of power during their time spent in processing, for the most part we exit the reception centers and head toward our final destination with little to no real power whatsoever.

Power is subjective, at best. The very thing which makes us appear powerful in one situation or set of circumstances may, in another, make us appear weak or vulnerable—powerless. For instance, if you lived miles away from the nearest body of

water and your only mode of transportation was a canoe, then your neighbor, who has a driveway full of vehicles to choose from, would look pretty powerful indeed. But take that same situation and add a flood to the equation, and all of a sudden the balance of power shifts. With all of his vehicles submerged, you and your canoe are now perceived as powerful.

In prison, though, this subjectivity is even more intense, albeit incomprehensible. Knowing nothing more about each other beyond the committing offense(s), if that, a new power structure evolved—a hierarchy based on the heinousness of our offenses. Contrary to what Law and Order: Special Victims Unit would have you believe, sexually based offenses, while looked down upon, are not the most heinous offense in prison. That distinction goes to murderers, and the more violent the murder, the more power that person is perceived as having. As power is subjective, it becomes necessary to continually demonstrate both the willingness and capability to act in a manner consistent with how this position of power was achieved in the first place, which usually involves repeated acts of violence.

Fortunately, there's another more effective way of obtaining power that doesn't involve the use or threat of violence. I refer to knowledge, because "knowledge is power." Even the weakest individual is perceived as having power when (s)he possesses important knowledge that others don't and need. "Knowledge is power," and nowhere is this more apparent than a courtroom, where even the most powerful criminal

turns to his attorney for help avoiding punishment.

More often than not, power obtained through the use of violence dissipates exponentially as it's shared, but power obtained through the acquisition of knowledge has the reverse effect. For starters, sharing knowledge places you in a teaching position—which, by its very nature, places you in a position of power over your student, which is why even adult administrators are forbidden from engaging in relationships with their students. At the same time, there are many situations in which knowledge possessed and employed by numerous people operates more effectively than knowledge possessed and employed by an individual. This is why unions are so effective, why protests don't succeed if they don't involve large groups of people, and why class action lawsuits stand a better chance of success.

This concept is no less effective in prison, but sadly, the inmates who do have the knowledge usually don't like sharing it, for fear that doing so diminishes their perceived level of power. Because of this, there are fewer people with the knowledge required to challenge the system's ongoing elimination of prisoners' rights—hence the importance of sharing your knowledge, thereby increasing your power and, more importantly, the power of your position.

Some people argue that it doesn't matter one way or the other how you achieve power, especially in a prison setting, so long as you do. However, this argument fails to take into account

the consequences, good and bad, of the methods employed to obtain that power. For example, power obtained through the use of violence not only means restrictions against the offender; it also means increased restrictions directed toward people who weren't even involved, as officials strive to stop future acts of violence. Power obtained through the acquisition of knowledge also possesses the ability to employ it responsibly, in a manner that promotes achieving their goal without a loss of life, rights, or privileges.

They say that "hindsight is 20/20," but hindsight, by its very nature, means that damage has already been done. By the time we look back, we've already violated the rights of more people than we can count and, in the process of doing so, we've become a slave to the power we sought instead of the other way around. Some of us are fortunate enough to learn this lesson before it's too late. For others, we die full of regrets, unable to control the monster we've become.

Amber Fayefox

People often speak of different kinds of power: physical, mental, sexual, financial...

I say they may be different in form and execution but, in fact, they are the same in essence. They are all just a means to an end for accomplishing our goals. Granted, some forms are more suited to certain tasks.

Me? I'm 5'9, 120, girly-girl. Moving a 300 lb weight does not play to my type of power. On the other hand, convincing a super-muscled beefcake to move it for me, with nothing more than a joke and a smile, does. Either way, the goal of moving the weight is accomplished.

The illusionary distinction between different forms of power becomes more apparent when we consider the foundation of personal power:

- Awareness of a choice
- Ability to carry out a choice
- Will to act once a choice is made

Regardless of what form of power plays to your natural strengths, or what form of power you choose to develop, awareness, ability, and will are the tripod on which it rests.

Let's pretend, for a moment, that you want to become a top-ranked MMA fighter. First is awareness of choice. Do you know how to eat healthy and exercise? Have you found out how to sign up for a local fighting league? Are you aware of what your options are?

Second is the ability to carry out your choice. Are you naturally well-muscled, or do you need to spend a lot of time at the gym? Have you studied kung fu (or whatever)? Have you gathered the supplies and developed the skills needed to

accomplish your goal?

Third, do you have the will to act once you've made your choice? Are you willing to spend 3–6 hours a day in the gym and dojo training? Can you physically hurt someone you're not angry at? Can you take a hit and not freak out? Do you have the mental fortitude to make the necessary sacrifices?

We can always increase our own power by becoming aware of our choices, developing the skills to make those choices into real options, and strengthening our will so we may carry out those choices.

From sex to high finance, the formula is the same. Once we understand the foundation of power and have decided how we wish to empower ourselves, the question becomes: what are we willing to invest to do so? Time? Energy? Money? And for ye future Faust—immortal soul and firstborn child? Just like any other investment, you gotta have money to make money. Thankfully, with the smallest amount you can do great things.

With the power of good study habits, you can gain the power of an education. With an artistic eye, you can gain great fashion sense and style. There is no counting the number of people who have become rich, famous, or, at the very least, awesome with nothing more than self-confidence and stubbornness.

So how do we develop power individually or as a group? The

first step is recognizing what power we already have.

Glitter-bombs, blessings, and sisterhood!

Gina

Many of us underestimate ourselves and the power we possess as members of the LGBT community. As a transgender woman, I am often reminded that no matter what environment I find myself in, whether it be prison or any other kind, I will not allow it to force me to submit to their ways or structure. My power is full of solid strength and, with that, I clench my fist in the air with my head held high and face my daily struggles head-on. I have been incarcerated for almost 13 years, with many more to come, and I have seen many bad days. I have also seen many good days because of my refusal to allow any hostile negativity to affect me. I am humble in my ways, yet I am cautious. When the situation calls for it, I can definitely become a diva and stand my own ground.

That power there is what has gotten me this far. Early on in my incarceration, I remember a time when I was tested and doubted whether I could survive this prison experience.

Many years back, a few cowards had been concocting a plan to corner me in the back area of the run, where it was not only dark but also very hard for any officer to see. The thing was, they were attempting to plot to rape me. My cellie, who was a

good person and never had any intention to fool around with a girl like my kind, caught wind of what these cowards were planning at breakfast and was able to get a hold of some protection. He told me, "Listen Gina, you are a good person and these cowards are planning to rape you, and because you bother no one and treat everyone with respect, I am going to help you stand up to those cowards."

Sure enough, when we came back from breakfast, there they were, idling by our cell. When we approached them, it seemed weird, but my cellie and I pulled out our protection and demanded that if they did not leave, we wouldn't hesitate to use it. Of course I was scared as hell, but it was important for me to stand my ground and show them no fear, despite how I was feeling inside. They were totally not expecting such a reaction, and it left them dumbfounded. Because of this, they decided to leave like cowards, with their tails between their legs.

That day, I learned two very important things: (1) good people do exist, even if they do not agree with my lifestyle, and (2) a girl has a tremendous amount of power and, sometimes, us beautiful beings underestimate the strength of the power we possess, especially when it matters most. Thanks to my first cellie, I was able to see that power manifest before my own eyes.

Sadly, our LGBT family in prison are easily targeted because of this misconception that, because we love men or engage in

sex with men, we are less than human and therefore deserve to be victimized by any coward looking to rape us. When we stand up with the same hostility that they attempt to use to make us submit to them, they become dumbfounded and scared and simply retreat.

There will always be a jackass dumb enough to try that mess on a girl. I encourage my sisters to respond, if there are ways to take a stand for yourself. Do not allow yourself to become a victim because of who you are. Take a stand! If you have to do what Ms. Brittany did and threaten to scream PREA, do not be ashamed to do so. I'd rather my sisters be safe than be victims of an ignorant idiot.

Auntie Em

Well boys and girls, here's where I am. Power is nothing more than honor, respect, and loyalty. Power is gained by your words: "When you give it, you keep it." By doing this and showing honor, respect, and loyalty, you gain power.

Give an ear when needed, give advice when asked for, and, in doing so, you gain the "Power of Asked For." In doing so, you give the "Power of Respect and Honor." You have given an ear, a shoulder, and some advice without using it for your own influence or selling it for favor.

Power comes in many forms and is easily earned. If done

right, it doesn't have to be used. Loyalty is a type of power gained by standing up for your beliefs and for your own (brothers and sisters), as well as for yourself. No matter if you have to stand alone or in a group, whether it be for religious beliefs or your rights and identity as GLBT, or for those things for others, whether they are the same as yours or not. Every person has the same rights as you.

Because of these simple things, you are a force to be reckoned with. People know that you have information that was freely given and not asked for about themselves. That gives you the "Power of Fear," which should only be used in extreme situations, as it may get you labeled as a sellout or unconfidential.

P
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Krysta Marie

Mooningstar

'15











Femme & Fierce

Amber Fayefox

Recipe for DIY Lip Gloss

You will need a tube of lip balm, powdered sugar-free instant juice, two pieces of plastic wrap, the bottom half of a paper cup, a plastic bowl, a hot pot, and ice.

Once you've gathered your supplies, wrap the lip balm in the plastic wrap and place it in the bowl with just enough water to cover the lip balm. This goes on top of your hot pot, creating a double boiler. When the water in the bowl is just passing "warm" and approaching "tasty," the lip balm should be melted. Pour the lip balm into the paper cup and add your sugar-free juice. CAREFUL: HOT! The more powder you use, the richer the color you end up with. Quickly pour this back into the lip balm tube, wrap it with plastic wrap, and put it on ice.

After it solidifies, enjoy!

Fatima Malika Shabazz

Defining the Divine

Recently The Word Is Out asked if contributors would send in work on being fierce and femme. So let me tell you who I am. My name, for those who don't know me, is Fatima Malika Shabazz. I am at the moment confined to one of the State of California's many gulags. I am an African American transwoman, attempting to navigate my way through the maze of homophobic hatred that sometimes is overbearingly prevalent in the system; however, through all of that, the good and the bad, I make every attempt to stand firm on my womanhood, which, as you can imagine, is an everyday, overtime job.

So in answer to the questions posed to your readers, here you are. I have had the misfortune of serving time in various states over a lot of years, so I've seen how gender roles and the expression thereof have changed over the years. Historically, the role of gender establishment is predicated on the jungle mentality. The stronger "Alpha Males" usually dictate who is what and what the person is supposed to do.

Depending on your level of aggressiveness and your ability to defend yourself, you will either be a part of the dominant culture or not. So in the good ole days (so to speak), if you presented as effeminate in any way and could not defend yourself, you became the maytag, meaning you cooked,

cleaned, washed clothing, and serviced whomever you were told to service. However, if you were challenged, be you GLBTQ or not, and could defend yourself (like the legendary Mother Dear), you were actually left alone and, in most cases, very well respected.

So early on, my choice was to be very, very good at defending myself. Conversely, my life on the outside was very different. When I originally began presenting full-time, I had already established myself where I lived at the time, so I came into a welcoming environment as opposed to the one I grew up in. It has had its challenges, but I've managed to overcome them for the most part.

My thoughts on being feminine are very simple: I believe being a woman to be the best damn thing on the face of the earth. I love every aspect of my womanhood and would not trade that for anything on earth, and being in prison has not changed my feelings in that regard. What has changed is my ability to outwardly express that feeling in my everyday presentation. In the State of California, we have been fighting for some time now to be allowed to present in our gender identity, and despite winning a court decision to that effect, the state is still being highly obstinate in giving us what we have coming. This is very disconcerting and rather depressing.

Being as feminine as I possibly can helps me get through not just my day but (for lack of overexpressiveness) it helps me get through my life. But as I stated previously, the state makes

it hard for us as transwomen to present in a feminine manner; the prevailing statement is, “This is a men’s prison.” At every turn, we are reminded of our “biology.” What is needed to address the issue (at least in this state) is more understanding from the human level. The staff in this state are only driven to respect paperwork. If it is not written in a memo from Headquarters, they are not compelled to care. And as long as the governing administration doesn’t say it’s wrong, the custody staff will perceive all they do as right; so basically, since their bosses did not tell them it is wrong to mistreat trans inmates and be discriminatory toward members of the GLBTQ community, it gives them license to do as they please in committing acts of homophobia in the name of “policy.”

Despite all this, I still make every effort to maintain my femininity. My DIY stuff is also fairly simple. I use colored pencils to create makeup; something as simple as paint and floor wax becomes nail polish. Though I don’t do my fingernails much anymore, I give myself pedicures regularly and make every attempt to keep as many paint shades as I can get my hands on. I also do a lot of sewing, making skirts and dresses out of repurposed things like sweatpants and very big T-shirts I cut down and fit to my size. I can’t wear any of the outfits outside the building, but whenever I am in my housing unit, I am always dressed in female clothing.

My inspirations are wide-ranging, from my friends like Sarah, Anita, Jordan, and the girls at STELLA, as well as all the volunteers at QPIRG in Canada, to my people here in the

States—Robyn and Tsunami, my sisters (Jennifer in particular), and Rani. All the way to people like Janet Mock and Laverne Cox. Not to mention Martine Rothblatt and her wife Beena; the two of them are amazing in what they have done across the board, not just for the GLBTQ community. We also have all the people at TGJIP and Janetta Johnson from Stiletto.

The list of people who inspire me is endless. I'm even inspired by rapper Foxx Jazell. If you don't know her, then you should get her "Boy Girl Whatever" track and check her out. To my knowledge, she is the first transgender (transwoman) hip-hop artist. I'm inspired by any transgender person who has the courage to stand against racism and discrimination and for human rights, and to do it not because it's fashionable, but because it's the right thing to do.

In the future, I plan to create and build a nonprofit organization based here in Los Angeles for the purpose of helping to build a better GLBTQ society—and by this, a better society at large. If you are anywhere in the known universe and want to be a part of the Griot Soul Collective, if you want solid, positive change for the better, then we want to hear from you.

In the meantime, you can check out my written work at the following site: fatimaspeaks.weebly.com. For those who want to know about the Griot Soul Collective, email Sarah Mangle at the same site, and she and I will discuss it. Thank you all for your great work at QPIRG; you all do a great service for the

GLBTQ community, and I, for one, greatly appreciate all of you.

In Solidarity Forever,
Fatima Malika Shabazz

Jiordi Russell

Dear Family,

I hope you're well and warm because you are all definitely loved. The gang (figuratively speaking) at the PCP asked for experiences, stories, and feelings regarding being fierce and femme. But to be honest, I'm much more butch; I have my moments though... tee-hee (Oops! That was one).

"How are gender roles established in prison? How does this compare with your experience on the outside?"

Gender role for me, no matter where I've been: cis male. Categorically and character-wise, I exhibit strong maleness wherever I am. But like any of us, in circumstances where I can relax, I tend to channel some of the more feminine traits.

In prison, for some, it's a bit different. If you're "out," even if you present like me, you're pursued by predators, at least at first. I define a predator in prison as anything from a gangster to anyone pretending to be "straight" in front of their

“homeys,” and yet gets down with men in secret. I’m careful to exclude anyone who’s simply “closeted” due to fear and isn’t trying to subject anyone to his will against their own.

“What are your thoughts and experiences of being femme or feminine? How did being in prison change this?”

The way I see myself and what I feel are what matter to me. I matter to me. So my experiences are of me. Prison won’t change that. I’m too arrogant, conceited, and self-absorbed to lie, pretending to be someone I’m not, and don’t care what inmates think about me. They’re just inmates.

“Does being feminine help you get through your day or sentence? What challenges do you face? What changes need to happen to address these issues?”

What helps me, regardless of the day or circumstances, is based on my own self-knowledge. Self-knowledge can make you self-determined. But whether this takes a gender-specific form? No. Not only that, the sole mission of prison is to deny you self-determination, which ensures your return. Your will to be self-determining is challenged and shouldn’t be.

Changes? Abolition. Alternative means of securing justice. Short of that: zero tolerance, strict enforcement of PREA against prison employees who lie about and misrepresent PREA, which compromises the safety of the very people PREA was passed to protect; segregate gangs, gang “drop-

outs,” and other troublemakers at high-security facilities—not medical or convalescent or “soft” yards, which should be classified for senior prisoners, medical treatment, healing and physical therapy, and for prisoners who have exhibited no history of, or propensity for, violence during their time in custody, and strictly construed and narrowly defined to particular instances on a case-by-case basis.

“What are some of your ‘DIY’ or ‘do-it-yourself’ tricks and tips to expressing femininity in prison?”

No tricks. Just “be.” Butch, femme—how you feel is what matters. You are who you are. Be proud. Be happy. Be fierce. If you’re in a bad place, be smart. I happen to be at a facility that’s slightly more “progressive.”

“Who are some of your femme inspirations?”

I’ve been isolated from popular gay culture since 2001 because I “came out” in prison. I guess you could say I’m “media-challenged,” having had no access to TV, radio, etc. I saw a copy of Rolling Stone with an article about Adam Lambert. He presents what I’ve termed “male drag.” He’s the limit for me for femme inspiration.

Tiffany Joy Fairfax

These are my thoughts of reality. My love and sincere thoughts

to all our friends and their families who became victims from a senseless act of violence that took place at the “Pulse” nightclub in Orlando, FL, USA, 2016. I visited there many times. It was my safe haven.

I’m in full support of equal rights for all who are part of our community. I’ve been part of the “LGBT” family since birth, if that’s possible. I’ve gone by the name Tiffany Joy (T.J.) since 11 years old. I identify myself as female. There isn’t one ounce of masculinity within me. I walk, talk, dress, and think as any woman would. No one will ever forcefully change me nor take it away. I’m honest with whom I keep company and never use my femininity for gain or to directly or intentionally deceive.

In my DOC surroundings, I’m observant of individuals who act, so I would come to believe, that they have the female role down. They’re very flamboyant. They say they are trans. I just see them as flamboyantly gay. I don’t consider myself gay and, by far, have no flamboyancy about me. I see another side of some. In a situation or confrontation, I kick and scratch and maybe even bite. Some who say they’re like me fight better than Mike Tyson. I’m comfortable, for the most part, while here and with who I am. But why am I 97% girl, yet others don’t conduct themselves close to how I am? It’s hard to relate with most girls here. Who knows if they are being truthful with me or even themselves? I have a naive side about me that I have to keep in check. I’m an easy target for manipulation or even rape, which is what one fears the most.

You would think being in an all-male institution would be like a kid in a candy store. However, it's far from that. You get a lot of unwanted invitations like "I'll do this for you, baby" or "I'll protect you." I'm like, "Oh please! I can kick and scratch just fine without you." There are some, though, that genuinely do care. I do get lonely here. I'm a hopeless romantic and one that needs love. So as a remedy, my connection with y'all fills that void in my life for now.

Life is tons different for me now versus life on the street. I'm constantly having to remind myself about the way I walk. My hips have a natural swing about them, and it's a dead giveaway when sometimes I let loose. However, it once again brings unwanted attention.

Some things I won't give up: shaving my underarms—it's a must—shaping my eyebrows, which I enjoy doing, and spending lots of time on my fingernails and toenails. I miss having them done. Just a few normal enjoyments. When it comes to my hair, well, it was a little past my shoulders with bangs. Now it's at the top of my ears and bangless. I miss my hair. My bras and panties are another thing I miss. Jailhouse G-strings—been there, done that.

I've adapted by watching others and choosing for myself what type of normalcy would work and what type definitely would not. In prison, I'm trying to live life with some type of normalcy to it. Sometimes I become too relaxed, believe it or

not, and have to reel myself back in. It's very frustrating for me.

I receive gifts from the women's magazines I subscribe to. Sometimes I'll receive samples of eye shadow, foundation, or even lip gloss. The lip gloss is my favorite—once again, normalcy in my life. My girlfriend applied some red M&Ms to my eyelids, but it's not the same. I was in a two-person room at the time. I miss it, but the temperature was way too hot in the summer (no A/C).

Before I was hauled off to DOC (single digits and counting), I was to start my hormone therapy. I was so looking forward to this, then finishing up with my gender reassignment. Can I still do this while on probation? It's my body. Maybe Sara, a.k.a. "Widow," can enlighten me in the direction I need to pursue in DOC and on the outside. How much is reassignment now? Hormone therapy? It's been a while.

Living on the outside, my true girlfriends always looked out for me because they loved me and—well—that naive thing again. Not about who I am, but because I have an open heart and tend to believe anyone or anything that is said. This default of mine, I believe, is what keeps me pure, and being pure means a lot to me.

And finally, with my long-winded self, I've been asked a lot about how I chose my name "Tiffany." Here it is in a nutshell. I was 11 years old at the dinner table with my mom, dad, and

siblings. Out of nowhere I said, I don't like my name; it doesn't fit who I am. (My birth name is Robert.) My family is very supportive of my lifestyle. My mom looked at me and asked, "Well, what name do you feel would be more fitting?" It was quiet for a moment. I looked up as though to ponder, and above our table was a beautiful hanging Tiffany light. Without hesitation, I said, "Tiffany." My mom, I remember, hugged me and whispered in my ear, "Tiffany is a beautiful name, and you'll bring a lot of joy and love to the world. I love you." From that day forward, most all recognize me as "Tiffany Joy Fairfax" (T.J. for short). Fairfax is the street we lived on when I chose my name. My favorite color? Pink and purple, of course.

My love to all LGBTQs around the world, especially to my new family!



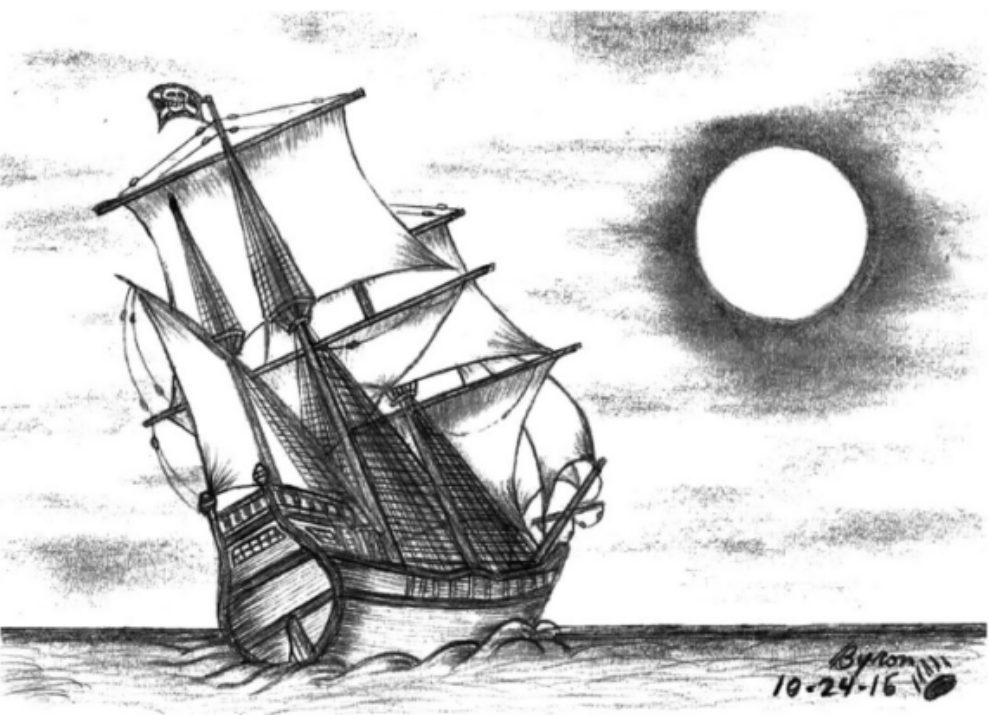
TRANS-AVenger





A
Fairy*
Tale!









Queer & Trans Organizing

Jeff Utage

Dear PCP and Family,

Here is a really simplistic way of putting how I got an LGBT Support Group and an LGBTI Pride Celebration Month in the same year. I wanted to share my thoughts on the creation of LGBT peer support groups.

I have spent the last 2½ years fighting for an LGBT peer support group here in prison, and I have to admit that I was shocked at what it took to finally make it happen. It is for this reason that I feel compelled to pass on what knowledge I have, because if more of us can get support, then we have a much higher chance of safety, which allows for rehabilitation. It is important to note that I am in a long-term minimum/medium security facility in a highly progressive state (Washington). Despite this, I ran into fierce bigotry where my life was threatened on multiple planes. Those brave people who did dare to openly help me were ostracized by their peers.

I was not expecting this kind of reaction, and it seems that the very mention of LGBT people having fair and equal representation in DOC matters of any kind is laughable to most and threatening to some. When you ask for peer support in prison, you have to remember that you are not dealing with

normal circumstances. Prison has long used segregation and prison politics as a means to keep us controlled. After all, when there are gangs doing the dirty work of policing and enforcing compliance, why would they ever want to change? An LGBT person asking DOC to help against this very thing is a wrench in the program. However, I will admit that not every prison is like that, as some of you well know. Then again, some of you have experienced extremes of the opposite sort, submitting to the defiling of your temples (your body) so that you can be protected from a very real and very dangerous mainline. My hope is that with activism such as this, we can end this type of oppression.

First, I submitted a proposal detailing what I wanted. I solicited as many LGBT family and friends as possible to find out who had the best writing skills. Then I had them write the proposal several times. We painstakingly went over every word and its implications and did our best to pick apart the things that the administration would use to deny us. We must have revised a four-page proposal over a dozen times before we came up with a suitable copy to submit.

Second, I did elevator pitches. For those of you who don't know, an elevator pitch is a 30–90 second sales pitch, which is ample time for the breezeway when you see your Superintendent or other administrative people. Every time I saw them, I pitched it repeatedly, each time expressing our desperate need for help. I brought up our unique challenges, and every time I gave the pitch, I would revise, edit, and

repeat. I paid close attention to each person's reactions and adjusted my pitch for our next chance encounter.

Third, I put it out there in the yard. I wasn't only pitching it to staff, but to inmates too. Staff's biggest concern was that the mainline was not going to take it well, so I had to change the atmosphere on the mainline, which took surprisingly little effort. Most people have no problem taking advantage of someone weaker than them. But when you tell that same person about a whole group of people being treated unfairly, suddenly you have a fierce protector. Most of us know that when men feel like they are protecting something and doing it well, they are at their best, and whatever is being protected by them rarely gets more attention. So I began to detail the real struggles to anyone who would listen and my proposed solutions.

What I found was that many guys had great ideas on how to help in nearly every area of our lives: everything from protecting us, equal rights, recidivism, staff interactions, safer sex, healthier relationships, and the list goes on. As soon as I realized that I could include everyone in our success, it grew like wildfire. I went from being one little activist fag to witnessing an entire mainline demanding that we all be treated fairly. Nothing was done through violence. Nothing was done through prison politics. Everything was done legally. You would be surprised at how many people want to be a part of something that is just.

Fourth, I conducted myself righteously—not to be confused with religiously. I didn’t do drugs. I abstained from sex. I listened to every person’s point of view (even when it infuriated me) with patience and love. I made myself available. I educated myself on group therapy. I attended mental health (yes, you need to document that you are suffering distress as a result of being separated from your peers. Why do they allow gang members to fill an entire unit but won’t allow gay guys to cell in together?). But most of all, I pressed hard. I never let up. Every time I saw administration, I brought it up. They knew what to expect from me whenever I saw them and began to avoid interactions with me as a result.

Fifth, I started a blog, which wasn’t effective for gaining the support I had hoped (though I still write on it daily), but it was effective for letting administration know that I was getting the message out to the public. I was not doing it secretly either. I let them know, “I’m blogging this entire process and I am going to let the world know about the bigotry here,” and then I would—even to the point of being investigated formally and my messages being censored and ultimately rejected.

This is the simple version. I had a lucky break when a whole new administration came in and demanded equality. It was one of the first proposals that were formally enacted. We had our first meeting on December 1st, 2016, and we had our first cultural event just six months prior on June 30th, 2016. I cried both times because this road wasn’t easy. I wrote hundreds of letters both to administration and organizations. I was

ridiculed by staff and inmates. I was accused of organizing a prison gang. I was called a shot caller and even had to defuse other gang leaders from seeing me as a threat to them, having triple and, in some cases, ten times more people than them. I had to assure them all that the gays were of no threat.

I had weeks and months of silence from everyone. I was completely isolated from everyone and everything. I watched helplessly as friends attempted suicide, were brutally raped, extorted, and pimped. They were drugged and taken advantage of in the name of “hustlin’,” and all I could do was pray. Every time it happened, I would place blame squarely on the shoulders of the staff. They were failing to keep us safe.

I learned more about myself in this process than I ever expected. After about 18 months of constant, relentless pressure, people began to root for me, and slowly people started looking forward to it happening. Then I had them start sending messages to administration asking for approval of the group. We made it hard to ignore.

But the most intense moments were when I doubted myself. If you have to fight as I did, then you will have times of doubt—long nights where all you can think about is why things aren’t working and why everyone is ignoring you. Fighting for equality is not easy, nor will it ever be. You are fighting against people who do not believe that you are equal to them. How would you react to your toilet if it said that it wanted to be treated equally? How can you listen to something

you piss in?

The ones who are most threatened by our equality are our biggest predators—the ones who gain off of our fear or addictions. By uniting and getting each other help through peer support formally, we threaten their hustle, their means of getting sex or power or money. Keep heart, my dearest family, and know that we are all fighting, we are all hurting, and we are working for solutions. The best solution of all is to do the unthinkable: fix ourselves, leave this place, and perpetuate that knowledge on the outside—preventing those who are walking in our footsteps from doing what we have done. We know what brought us here, and we can identify those who are about to make the same mistakes. End the need for this devilish place and its inhabitants.

I have so much more to say, but I know that space is limited. My website is lgbtqprisonsupport.com. We are working on a Facebook community site and revamping our current site to be less blog-oriented and more formal.

Stay focused, friends. Love,
Jeff Utnage

Celeste

INMATES TAKING ON THEIR OWN EDUCATION IN PRISON

Having college-level courses available to prisoners who truly want to better their lives and improve themselves is not new. However, the hard truth is that funding and financial aid are often denied to prison inmates, which means they have higher barriers to postsecondary education. The availability of college-level classes in prison has been viewed as a necessity for progressive inmate reform for years, but when the same classes are being taught by prisoners to the imprisoned population as a way of creating a liberating learning community that is committed to reform, it becomes more than progressive; it becomes a revolution.

Why is this even necessary? I had to ask myself this after reading an article about it (2015, Carter). Ever since Congress passed the Violent Crime Act, aka the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, in the 1990s, which restricts access to Pell Grants for prisoners, state legislators have been following suit to cut funding for prisoners' state and federal college education. Now I remember signing away my Pell Grant in 1994 for a college computer class I never finished due to the state moving myself and others. I bet they got the funding and I got the shaft.

Only one year after Washington, the Act, Washington State passed a law prohibiting the use of public money to support any education beyond A.B.E. (Adult Basic Education), G.E.D. (General Education Diploma), and E.S.L. (English as a Second Language). That was Washington State; here in Texas, college-level courses and degree plans were cut by at

least 50%. You used to have to go to G.E.D. class without wanting to; now it's only if you want to.

Most classes that the Texas Prison System is pushing are trades, and those trades are only trades that will help with the maintenance and operation of this vast prison complex. They couldn't care less about my college degree because it doesn't help cook food, fix air conditioning units, plumbing, electrical, or other basic service needs that will save the Texas Prison System years of budget battles because they have free labor for very high-end jobs. Texas doesn't even pay their inmates for any of our labor but charges us \$100 a year for medical care. Those trades would be alright if they were really worth a damn, but they only teach you to maintain their prisons.

That's why I chose college from a free-world source: Texas A&M Central Campus, with professors who came in to teach. I also know I can use my field to help my community. Due to the uproar over illegal immigrants having access to U.S. resources, I really feel Texas will be hit even harder shortly due to the change of office here in the U.S.

While most of society may think of prisoners as being unworthy of education, the education we so crave is being taken to pad the pockets of politicians to keep us "stupid criminals," as they say. An educated man will not come back to prison. The hard evidence shows that prisoners who receive post-secondary education cut their likelihood of returning to prison by 65% — that's over half. So why do the government

and society do things that contradict their stated desire to reform prisoners and make them productive, taxpaying members of society? Is it possibly a desire to save money by not spending it on those considered “worthless”?

It now costs over \$100,000 per year to keep one person in prison, and most prisons are now privatized or semi-privatized, where a large private “agency” works under a perpetual contract with the state. The prison industrial sector is now a multi-billion-dollar industry — that’s with a “B,” folks — and it has become a huge lobbying bloc, with shares of stock available to the public paying dividends to stockholders while receiving state and federal funding to house each prisoner. Look on the Dow Jones Stock Market USA under T.C.I. and you too can buy into this Texas sham. They make money from industrial operations utilizing free inmate labor, in that prisoners can legally be forced or coerced into what is legalized slavery. These are the only people with a truly vested interest in keeping prison populations high while simultaneously sucking taxpayers dry. Again, look at the number of just Texas inmates, along with paroles or probation combined, and we lead the whole world put together.

Now, I will give Texas credit — that might not be true if China and Russia released honest numbers. Therefore, the possibility that this bloc is behind these laws, albeit still unsubstantiated, must remain.

Even so, when inmates got fed up with the status quo, they

took matters into their own hands. T.E.A.C.H. (Taking Education and Creating History) was created by B.P.C. (Black Prisoners Caucus) in 2013 to teach world literature, biology, and college math. This began because the sentiment among prisoners was that the Washington Correction Center for Women and Men was not doing enough to help prisoners return to society. At the Washington State Reformatory, U.B.B. (University Beyond Bars) was started. In addition, F.E.P.P.S. (Freedom Education Project – Puget Sound) is active at both the Washington Correction Center for Women and at the State Penitentiary in Walla Walla. Not all have inmates designing curricula, facilitating or teaching classes, and organizing board meetings, but those that do have some of the best courses that could be taught at any upper-tier university.

Inmates may always be looked upon as “worthless” convicted felons, but when it comes to wanting to turn their lives around, actions are clear — the sound these taskmasters hear. These inmates do not want to return to prison. They long to feel normal again, or for the first time in their lives, like me, and they want to leave as better people than when they came to prison: college-educated students.

I remember something I read in school, and it rang so true for me I cried when I read it:

“Education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence; about renewing the

vitality of life. It is about finding and claiming ourselves and our place in the world.” (bell hooks, Teaching Community)

Well, my family, every time I remember that quote it rings so true throughout my life in every corner, not wanting to come back here to transitioning. Well, this girl is tired, and I will say good night. I wish this finds y’all very happy.

Lisa Strawn

My name is Lisa and I am one of 17 transwomen at this facility. I’m the first transwoman to be the Chairperson for the girls on the Inmate Advisory Council. I check on the girls to support them and help them get into programs here or advise them on how to navigate the all-boys club. I’ve advocated recently to allow the girls to have mammograms done, which they can now have.

We have several support groups here. We have a transgender-only group that meets and discusses any concerns the girls have. The girls receive updated material from myself about current medical standards, as well as any information they need for re-entry to the community. As well as the transgender group, there are three LGBT groups that meet each week. I recently started the third group as the co-facilitator with a staff member. This group is a creative group. We support each other, but we also support outside LGBT centers and many publications that we are allowed to have. We now will include

The Word Is Out.

I had a vision for a different group. So anyone wanting to start any group should be very passionate and have a purpose first. I simply asked staff to help me push it to administration. In two months the PACE group got approved. PACE stands for Positive Actions Create Everything. I put in the effort for the group because I wanted the LGBT population to have a place to go where they can express themselves on paper. Everyone loves the group. The staff here are very excited as well.

I had a vision, as I said, and because I'm a girl I wanted to make sure that I sent a loud message to the males here that I can do the same things that they can, but for a different reason: to allow anyone to be who they are and have a place to go where they won't be judged.

I also help facilitate the largest of the 32 groups here — usually 60–80 men. I am the secretary. I speak each week about how to be better and to also have tolerance for others. This is an Alcoholics Anonymous group and one of my favorite groups.

Make no mistake, I do all I can to give anyone something positive. We can all be better if we try a little harder each day. Outside of prison I have aligned myself with several organizations. Just this month the Transgender Justice Project came on a visit to see me with three of their members. I had stayed in touch with them and arranged the legal visit.

Spending almost two hours with Kelly, Coral, and Waze, we talked about many issues: name and gender change, S.R.S. sex surgery, and many other issues that pertain to transwomen. We had a great visit. I was left very inspired.

My time is spent advocating for us in here and keeping connected with the outside also. It is very important. We never know how we can impact someone else's life. I am blessed to have the ability to support others equally and to stay focused on the positive. I am not the person to bring another girl down.

My best advice to anyone is to be involved not just in your life but in the lives of others. Just as *The Word Is Out* has asked for submissions about support, it is our call to answer. This is how we stay united. Have a passion for what you do, and do not let anyone tell you that you can't do something or you can't be who you are. We are all destined to be great. Just know how to push yourself where others aren't as supportive. Never give up on you. When you attempt anything and it doesn't work out, it isn't failure — at least you tried. Be proud and always be who you say you are. Always.

Be inspired. Be you for you.

Tiffany Joy

VOLUNTEER 4 ADVOCACY

My name is Tiffany Joy, a transfemale since birth. I'm temporarily incarcerated within the walls of the Florida Department of Corrections. I enjoy advocating — it's way cool. I do so through newsletter publications, sitting on committees, and conducting surveys/Q&As within D.O.C. This produces valuable feedback and information that helps support the movement of the LGBTQ mission in all situations.

I'm sharing reality with y'all for important reasons. I am, and will be, the voice for those who are in fear of being heard because of the retaliation within. Our incarcerated family members are not only at a higher risk but experience inadequate health care, inequity, rape, and mental and physical abuse daily because of who and what we stand for. I tell you this from my own personal experience.

We, the incarcerated, are just a small percentage that are suffering from all this. In the free world, my advocacy participation was, at best, minimal. It wasn't until I landed in prison that I came to realize, "My God, there's a lot of work that needs to be done here." How out of touch I was with advocacy work. I let valuable years slip by, letting others fight the battles, ignoring their active participation in the movement toward abolition and unselfishly focusing their efforts on the entire LGBTQ family. Why? Selfishness? Laziness? Too busy? My excuse was, "I didn't know how."

Well, look around you. I can assure you that the person next to you, the PC organization, or even myself would be more

than happy to share how. All you have to do is ask. Just a few hours of your time each day, week, or month can change lives for a lifetime — and maybe even save a life.

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

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

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

Much love and solidarity to all,
Tiffany Joy

MS. Jazzie Ferrari & MS. Breonna Miller

TO: THE L.G.B.T.Q COMMUNITY

Once again, this is MS. Jazzie Ferrari wanting to drop a few

lines of empowerment. What I learned about being a Transgender in our situation in prison is that we really have to do for ourselves.

While people like the A.C.L.U. have done a tremendous and really unrewarded amount of work on our behalf in the courts and the streets through the decades that have eased our undue burden, they can only do so much. We must learn how to do it for ourselves.

Go to the Law Library and get up on the law. See what legal self-help resources they have. Do outreach (and not a little). Find legal and other prisoners' rights groups. Expand your knowledge and ability. Put the junk novels and smut away and learn the rules of the law. Become a jailhouse lawyer. No one can fight for our human dignity better than us. Make prison a campfire for brain power.

We need as much intellectual power as we can accumulate. It's a big fight. It's never too late. Take advantage of it. Start now. If prisoners are found guilty of a rule or law violation in the course of protecting their health and life because prison guards "would not help," then on the surface it seems they may have a legal claim under the 9th Amendment (Cruel and Unusual Punishment) for failure to protect that resulted in personal injuries (rape, mental health issues, criminal charges, additional prison sentence), especially if they had foreknowledge of the threat, which can be evidenced by their taunts ("stop complaining or we'll put you with sex fiends

where you'll get raped").

Get busy. Crack open the books. Go for it. The housing for the fags in the hole is for their protection where there is no formal safe housing. The program is addressed differently by the courts; research the ruling and work with the favorable ones. The prisons aren't going to give us anything on a platter; we must take it. Go to the Law Lab. Do the math or don't complain. Sounds tough, I know, but most of us came up that way and recognized there are no free rides in this fight. Of course, there should be safe housing in all prisons, though it's best to do away with prisons. Until that time, it's all on us to survive. Do your part. It's a collective, community fight, and every effort matters. I stand with you in this fight for life.

In solidarity,
MS. Jazzie Ferrari & MS. Breonna Miller









The Butterfly Effect

Willie “Divine” Craig, Jr.

How have I affected someone just by being me? Here’s my experience:

I was sitting and reading *Passage & Place* (a queer anthology on Home by Deviant Type Press) when a dude came up and went into a tirade about how I’m reading “gay” shit.

He said he could spot a faggot a mile away and would whip one’s ass if they gave him some gay shit to read. Furthermore, he would never deal with or talk to a “punk,” so he couldn’t understand how I could read that shit.

I laughed and opened the book to page 125 and asked him to humor me and read it.

He read the entry on a trans-loving man and how he would/will treat his woman. I could see the hatred and rage on his face. However, the bottom fell out when he got to the name and mailing info for the writer. It was my name and number, and the prison address. That shit stopped him cold.

Seeing his reaction, I asked how he could not know I wasn’t heterosexual, and if he still would whip any faggot’s ass who spoke to him.

His response was a stutter because we both knew he could not whip me. And for months he had been seeking out and utilizing my advice — to his benefit.

So I gave him some more. I advised him to never make broad-stroke statements and/or assumptions because gay, trans, bi, lesbian, or pansexual (my ID) do not equal soft or punk. They equal free. Lastly, for all our differences, we humans are all, for the most part, alike.

After he stomped off, a young dude who banged came up and started asking me questions. Turns out he was bi and afraid to let anyone know, lest he be targeted.

He asked me how I was able to do (and say) what he had seen and still walk the yard. Most importantly... How could he?

My advice:

A) Get out of the gang — you have no business being part of something that doesn't want you.

B) Be true to you. People might not like it, but you can win respect just by being genuine.

Later that night one of the transgender girls on the block came to my cell and asked to read what I had shown him earlier.

After doing so she started talking, telling me how alone and afraid she felt at times, but how strengthened and empowered she felt by what she witnessed (and read). Turns out she (and

many others) were watching the entire exchange. Wow.

Of course, some people stopped talking to me (including the first guy mentioned), but a lot more started.

All I lost was some dead misogynistic weight, but I gained some sisters (as word spread quickly to all the girls) — and at least one little brother.

My advice to anyone similarly situated: Don't let others' outlooks stop you. The only opinions that matter in your life are those that matter to your life. Choose those wisely.

Lick you later, lovers...

Bellaboy

“The Butterfly Effect”

My dearest PCP friends (and the rest of the LGBTQ community),

“The Butterfly Effect”... hmmm... I LOVE IT. Very beautiful topic.

I am a 25-year-old gay male. I am currently incarcerated in MODOC and have been for the past seven years. When I first came to prison, very few inmates knew I was gay. I would get defensive about it if asked because I was so scared that I

would get raped.

Well, I was in AD-SEG and came across this white gay named “Buck.” I liked him a lot — enough that it was near impossible to hide my “fem” traits. He finally called me on it and told me how much he liked me. We started dating. Needless to say, it didn’t last. However, it made me open up and see how much the other inmates respected me for being myself (there was still a lot of hateful discrimination, though). So Buck convinced this pretty (and believe me, I am pretty, honey) little butterfly to flap its wings.

Well, because of the flap, six years later I have met the love of my life. Why? Because I wasn’t hiding who I was. I wasn’t flaunting either, but I caught his eye — all because Buck wasn’t scared to get me to be me. I flapped my wings. I also encourage others to be themselves.

Gay, trans, bi — it doesn’t matter.

And a little word of advice for a fellow queen: Listening to Adam Lambert will help you through anything and change your life. Listen to “Outlaws of Love” on his *Trespassing* album.

With love for all,
From my husband and I,
Bellaboy AKA “T.T.” (and Bobby)
“Never Let Go!”

Michael J. Desmarais

Sometimes small things go a long way.

I was a unit rep in Edmonton Max in 2010. At the time prisoners could order magazines once a month from a distributor. I would take their requests, submit them, receive them, and hand out the magazines when they came in. Only I knew which magazine went to which prisoner.

Lots of guys ordered soft porn magazines such as Playboy. I knew of at least one other gay person on the unit. I suggested to him that he is also entitled to porn and mentioned Playgirl. He feared others knowing he had male porn. "No one will know. I'll make sure no one sees me give you the mag." He agreed.

The staff was hesitant, so I reminded them it would be discrimination to deny a magazine based on sexual orientation. The next month I delivered a Playgirl and made someone happy. Oh yeah, there was also a Playgirl for me.

In 2016 I sent an open letter to a gay newsletter in British Columbia. I expressed a desire to reach out and appealed to others, whether prisoners or in the community, to do the same. My letter was published and my name and address listed as "Pen Pals Wanted." The newsletter also goes to some prisons in Alberta and Saskatchewan. A few months later, two other prisoners were listed. One I wrote to has written back.

Perchance a new butterfly will spread wings.

These are not major events, but the point is to start somewhere. Little things can create major effects. Anyone can contact me at:

PO Box 4000
33344 King Rd
Abbotsford BC V2S 5X8

Ravyn Marie

While reading the last two issues of *The Word Is Out*, I see so many of our family in the LGBTQ community struggling in so many ways, and it genuinely makes me very sad to hear of everyone's struggles. Sometimes I even cry, liberally. I just wish I could hold every single one of you and be that shoulder you can cry on and that person you can come talk to when you need help.

In here, I help out as many of my brothers and sisters as I can, whether they need someone to talk to, advice or legal help, or hygiene. I'm there for them regardless, no matter what. I truly respect all those who do the same thing I do for our brothers and sisters, even the people at PCP who put so much of their precious time into doing everything they do for us. Remember that a little bit goes a long way, and even the smallest things are always helpful. People will always remember what you've

done for them.

I, too, have my struggles here. I get harassed by officers and all sorts of things. They don't do it much anymore because I stand up for myself and they know I'll just put grievances in on them. Believe it or not, the officers here are pretty much afraid of me, grievance-wise and legal-wise, so they tend to give me a wide berth. I've been educating myself on civil law for two years now, so I'm pretty educated legal-wise.

I was reading a submission by Jakaelynn in Issue 17 of *The Word Is Out*, and she mentioned the "freeze-frame" policy. I am going through the same dilemma here. I have a lawsuit against medical for refusing to have me evaluated by a transgender and Gender Dysphoria specialist and for not providing me any treatment at all. I was even told by several medical staff that they don't provide treatment if I wasn't previously receiving it prior to incarceration. This policy also gives them an excuse not to do evaluations while the person is in jail.

In my opinion, this is a violation of inmates' rights, and I intend to prove that in my lawsuit. I don't have a lawyer, so I'm probably going to face some hurdles, but I'll manage. If I prevail in this lawsuit, then it'll help the next trans girl in here who is denied access to treatment.

If for some reason I do go to prison from here, I intend on starting a support group for all LGBTQ family that are in

there. I want it to be the type of support group where everyone can go to discuss all their problems, concerns, ideas, and even where everyone can just be themselves without worrying about being judged. I also want it to be a place where everyone can bond, get to know each other, and become a closer-knit family. I'll probably need to find a couple more people to help me organize everything.

I also want to set up a charity where people in the support group can donate items to help those who don't have anything, such as hygiene items and similar necessities. I think that all jails and prisons should have those kinds of support groups for our LGBTQ members.

Lisa Strawn

I made the decision to have an LGBT group here that would truly change the lives of my brothers and sisters. What I didn't know is just how much it would impact not just their lives, but mine too.

The first time all of the members were in the room, I became very emotional. I started to cry because I felt so overwhelmed that the 13 people in the room thought enough of me to show up and support me.

It was at that moment, while crying, that I knew this would change all of our lives together. I saw that we all had a place

where we could truly be ourselves, even if only for an hour.

Now, almost eight months later, we are going strong and putting together meetings about acceptance, love, forgiveness, “Who I Am,” and many other topics. What I see in the group is people who have never been able to express themselves totally without judgment now being able to do so.

It is so freeing to be able to share our lives and learn and grow with each other, because that is what life should be about. What can we bring to one another when the world around us isn't so kind and tolerant?

I am so very blessed to have given my brothers and sisters here a place where they can support each other and continue to put together such powerful stories from their lives.

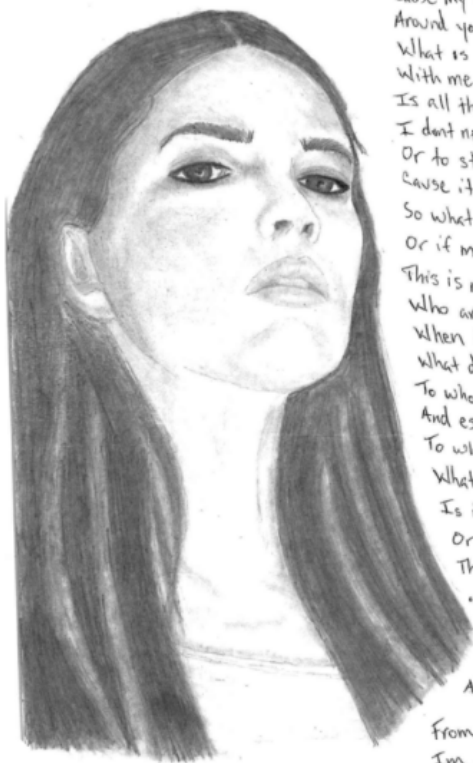
I am so humbled that as a transwoman in a men's prison, no matter who you are or where you are, you can make a difference in the lives of others and yourself.

So for everyone — whatever you want in your life — you will create.

“Positive Actions Create Everything”

To look at me with disgust
And yet to secretly crave my touch
Is enough to make you distrust
The fortitude you've built up
While stewing in the fact
That I can have your woman
And even your man too...
Doing what's taboo
Has you in the grasp
Of what's best described as a S.N.A.F.U....
And it's an example of vast views
When what's good becomes great
And the beauty found in the awkwardest places
Becomes the stasis of fear that's queer and audacious
And is the basis of the statement I'm making...
Cause when strangers meet
It's dangerously sweet
As from the embers of society's proprieties
Arises what's unique...
And to me it's plain to see
That complicated communication
Obscures the articulation
Of the ones who can't perceive
That I don't need you to attempt
To scientifically understand me
As if me being what I'm supposed to be
Is a type of disease
And anything other than a beautiful entity of energy...





This dungeon you put me under
Could make me wonder
If I'm man, trans, or woman
But your rose wont take me under
Cause my resolve doesnt revolve
Around your conundrum...
What is it that you cant percieve
With me being what I'm supposed to be
Is all that you will ever see?
I dont need make-up
Or to stand up and pee
Cause its obvious you'll still label me...
So what if I kiss girls...
Or if my girl was born a boy?
This is my life to live and enjoy
Who are you to envision the paths I take
When its me you didnt create?...
What did I do except be true
To who I am
And eschew your views
To what I'm supposed to be?
What fuels your rose?...
Is it the rouge...
Or that I'm painted and dusted
That has you straining to discuss me?
... Your hate is disgusting
And means nothing
Because I'm strutting
Above the banal discussions...
From my crown to my feet
I'm fucking beat
And your glance is on repeat
The world is my runway
And its plain to see
Your facetious labels dont pertain to me...

-Mike 21 Oct 2017
AKA Mike



Pappas
2017

ON CENSORSHIP

MICHAEL J. DESMARAIS

Greetings to all the boys and girls out there. Special shout-out to Willie 'Divine' Craig Jr., Bellaboy, Ravyn Marie, and Lisa Strawn for their submissions to the Butterfly Effect in Issue 19.

A grievance filed in 2013 in a prison ended up in a Canadian Federal Court. The issue was the prison system cancelling TV channels that showed late night porn. One reason for the ban was female guards saying they were sexually harassed by prisoners after prisoners had watched porn. The federal judge dismissed that argument as unproven. And as recent news stories have shown, female staff in prison face much more harassment from their male counterparts. Based on the court's ruling, the TV stations in question were given back. The ruling was in 2015. Here in British Columbia, in October 2017, the stations again were taken away. Censorship. I have yet to hear of the situation throughout the rest of Canada. Nor can we get magazines - porn or otherwise. Lock someone up for an amount of time and through censorship, remove any means of proper, mentally healthy, sexual relief, and you create more problems.

When I was in the Oregon prison system there was censorship. Porn was frowned upon. Gay porn, most definitely. I could

not get magazines of gay orientation.

They would not allow individual pics of touching an erect penis (self-touch), much less any two-person contact. So I purchased a book by Thomas Eakins, a renowned photographer of male nudes. His works are not classified as porn, but as art. My purchase was approved. When it arrived, I was given the book, approved by the mailroom, I was not surprised to learn that everyone on my unit had “heard” that I had the book. Didn’t care. I was fighting the system’s censorship.

Put the book in my cell. Went to chow. Came back and the book is gone and a confiscation slip is on my desk. Ask the guards - they said it is porn. So, file for a review of the confiscation. At the review I was prepared. Art, not porn. I lost. Why? They pointed to one photos out of 100’s in the book and said it suggested “child porn”!! The captioned photo was of a father and his son walking on the beach. Yes, they were naked... walking away from the camera and the photo was taken from at least 200 feet from the subjects. Bullshit. The only straw they could use to censor what they did not approve of.

Now I admit to censorship of my own. I was extremely pleased at the letters I’ve received from all over in response to my Butterfly Effect letter. Thank you. I say “censored” because of the expectations of some writers. Some asked for money. Some sent me mag subscription cards for me to buy them. Some want me to set up Facebook pages for them. Sorry. Censored. Not going to happen. I am in prison! The

address may seem “street”, but in Canada we do not need to put a prisoner number or prison name as our address. Many US prisons censor mail by not allowing prisoner mail. I still wrote to most who wrote me. I hope you get my letter (based on my non-prison looking address). If your prison does censor and disallow my mail, maybe you have a third party out there that could be used as a forwarder. Some states do allow it, so Mark in Oregon, sure hope you write. To all the gays, bis, trans, females that wrote - thank you. Yes, I did write back. And Canada - what the...?! Only one Canadian prisoner wrote. Reach out. As the line goes, “come out, come out, wherever you are.”

Many, many thanks to PCP for supporting this avenue of needed and appreciated communication. Let’s all keep talking.

BRANDON PIERCE A.K.A. AKASHA

In a previous newsletter published by PCP a single writer had quoted a law affecting the legal status of law enforcement punishing two consensual adults - specifically of the same sex - because of sexual activity. The law DOES make it unconstitutional for law enforcement to punish LGBT sex that includes two consensual adults. However, and this is very important: the Department of Corrections have managed to circumvent that law by relying on the 14th Amendment’s

privacy protections & that not all of these protections extend to those incarcerated in due process. The courts are currently accepting this argument's controversial claim because of the lack of privacy an inmate receives in prison.

Any individual who wishes to challenge the court's decision must create a new argument around privacy inclusion and exclusion that the courts have not previously heard and rejected. Of course, it would be extremely wise to find other constitutional matters to lean on as well because the Dept. of Correction will do anything and everything to keep us all down. Including hiring correctional officers who are vehemently bias against LGBTQ people that make derogatory remarks at "work" where everyone can hear it. And then there are those conservative whack jobs who get hired and tell inmates that "if it were up to me all of you would have to stay on your bunks 24/7 with only the Bible! No music, no TV, no email, no other books but the Bible." The same officer drinks until drunk and then drives. The city covers him because he is a correctional officer and at this prison they are short staffed because it's a shitty job with even shittier pay.

I can agree that a small amount of SOP/Policy is to protect the inmate but only because failure to protect the inmate can lead to court issues with the DOC. But they know some/most only harms the individual. In the Idaho Dept. of Correction I have constantly - repeatedly - watched the lesser crime-based "kids" come into prison at young ages - I was 26 - and learn to be "better" criminals. The lesser crime of buying meth

every now and then winds up to be that individual left prison knowing how to cook meth and now has bigger connections. That's only one example not including the same people being sworn into gangs.

Things get worse when President Trump makes screwed up racial comments that divide us and reveal how much division we already have. I would love to see the tyranny fall. I just do not know how it's possible. But I choose to be a part of the solution not apart from the solution.

In Amor et Levis (Latin)

In love and light

CHRIS RIDLEY

Here in North Carolina, censorship has been reduced by a federal lawsuit that the prison system lost. Some activist material is still rejected as detrimental to security. Some pornography is rejected as offensive to staff. Throughout this state's prison system, half of the staff are female. This state also forbids us to receive mail from anyone incarcerated in any state or federal prison.

The effects of this censorship is keeping society in the dark about what really goes on "behind the wall" and keeps the inmate population in the dark about issues that impact them. It allows the administration to push their narrative of how we

are “less than human” and “society’s undesirables”.

I unsuccessfully challenged the prison system’s restriction of our ability to receive hardback books. The current policy restricts the size of books we can receive, with religious material being exempt. What this does is restricts access to quality dictionaries and other life reference books. The state court threw my lawsuit out as frivolous. Just more proof that North Carolina deems education as frivolous.

JON SCHILLACI

The Inside of Censorship

While it is certainly inconvenient - frustrating and annoying - when we are censored by authority, I believe that far more dangerous to the community is the censorship that we do to ourselves and to each other. The saddest censorship is not the message that was stopped or blocked in transit but the one that was squelched before it was ever uttered.

At least when I face a rejection from the prison mailroom, I can challenge it. A long line of options are in front of me, including appeals, grievances and lawsuits. Even if I lose, I am not helpless. Even if I am denied every step of the way (or if for whatever reason I choose not to fight in a particular instance), I still walk away knowing that someone, somewhere, was trying to make contact and that I am not alone.

But what happens when the community itself decides to never write that letter? There is no way to appeal the absence of contact; against whom would I file, if no one at all is trying to communicate? The community censors itself deciding, "We will not speak in that direction. We will not include in our message those people in those places. We wish to be heard, but only by convenient ears."

There are many reasons why individuals might think this way, and many of those reasons sound plausible and sincere. It is hard to argue when "Our organization just doesn't have the resources..." or "We only focus on one subset of the community to which you do not belong." And there are completely reasonable concerns: prison inmates, after all, are in prison for something, and that means we are dangerous.

Directly dangerous, on the one hand - "That guy is a murderer and if I bring myself to his attention, he might decide to murder me!" - but also dangerous to our reputations and to what we are trying to accomplish: "We're trying to gain mainstream acceptance for gay couples and transgender individuals, so we certainly shouldn't undermine our own case by locking arms

with drug addicts, child molesters and robbers." So we censor the entire community to our convenience. Only these people count; only they get voices; only the well-groomed and well-behaved should be invited to the meetings because after all, you never know who might be watching.

This censorship works in both directions, because at the same time inmates are not considered viable correspondents in the larger community, that lack of contact also means their voices are never heard by the larger community. It is simple availability: if no one will contact me, then when the moment arises that I might have something to say, to whom do I address the letter? I am more censored by the turned backs of our community than by the gathered prison officials waiting to pounce.

Of course, nothing is only one thing, and there are always exceptions to the best of praises and the worst of criticisms. There are organizations that try to reach out to inmates, but those organizations themselves are often victims of the apathy, discomfort or outright indignation of the rest of the community. Inmates may find an occasional voice in their newsletters, but often

what they have found is a stoop from which to shout in their very own ghetto, a brief letter to the editor in a newsletter whose mailing list is almost exclusively other inmates. That is not to denigrate the efforts of these fine organizations - if it were not for these ghettos we would have no place at all - but it is to say that the argument, "See, LGBT inmates aren't being cut off and marginalized; after all, they have their very own newsletter!" is simply an example of censorship in action.

When I face censorship on the part of prison officials, I feel angry and motivated to fight back. This can be empowering

even as it is frustrating. But when I face censorship on the part of my very own community, all I feel is hurt and alone. This is not empowering, it is devastating. Certainly I applaud the people who stand up to every level of oppression, whether from their

next door neighbour or prison officials or the federal government. But I wonder if, even as we are standing together demanding that our voices be heard by those outside our community, we are simultaneously shifting many voices within our community. Censorship is not just an inability to speak; it is equally an unwillingness to listen.

Perhaps the intentions are good; perhaps it is the aforementioned bid for respectability (“The general public won’t accept us if we allow criminals in our ranks”) or an effort to show strength in unity (“We’re fighting for gay marriage, so clearly any gay who has different priorities has no place in our community”) or simply a desire not to spread oneself too thin (“I’m too busy trying to get funding for HIV drugs to worry about funding transgender hormone treatment”). But the question I am left with is: how can we make the best decisions for this community’s tomorrow if we are unwilling to embrace the totality of what it is today?

DARREN SEAWELL

Censor Me That

Censorship is not just about limiting your words

It can limit the way you move and sway
Dictating how you can live you life,
Love you love, and fly your colors
Censorship can protect children
And teach them lessons, on a good day
But unfortunately it's usually used
To make people feel less
Than the norm.
I will dare to be weird
If I want to be queer,
Let me be queer
If I want to be gay, hey!

NIKIA ZYAIRE AKA STARR

Growing up transgender, I were always censored. I've been told I can't do this or that. I had to fight in school, the streets, even in prison, with people who tried so hard to object to the life I were living. As I continued to stand up and be accounted for, not letting anyone tell me what I can or can't do with my life. Only God could judge me, because he's the judge over us all. I'm still being censored by the police of the prison system, but I'm only going to allow them to do so much before they are shut down. Our voices as brothers and sisters shall always be heard for what we stand for and believe in as a whole because our strength is enough for us to censor others and point fingers at them for the wrong that has been done to the LGBTQ community.

CATARINA WESA PATIENCE

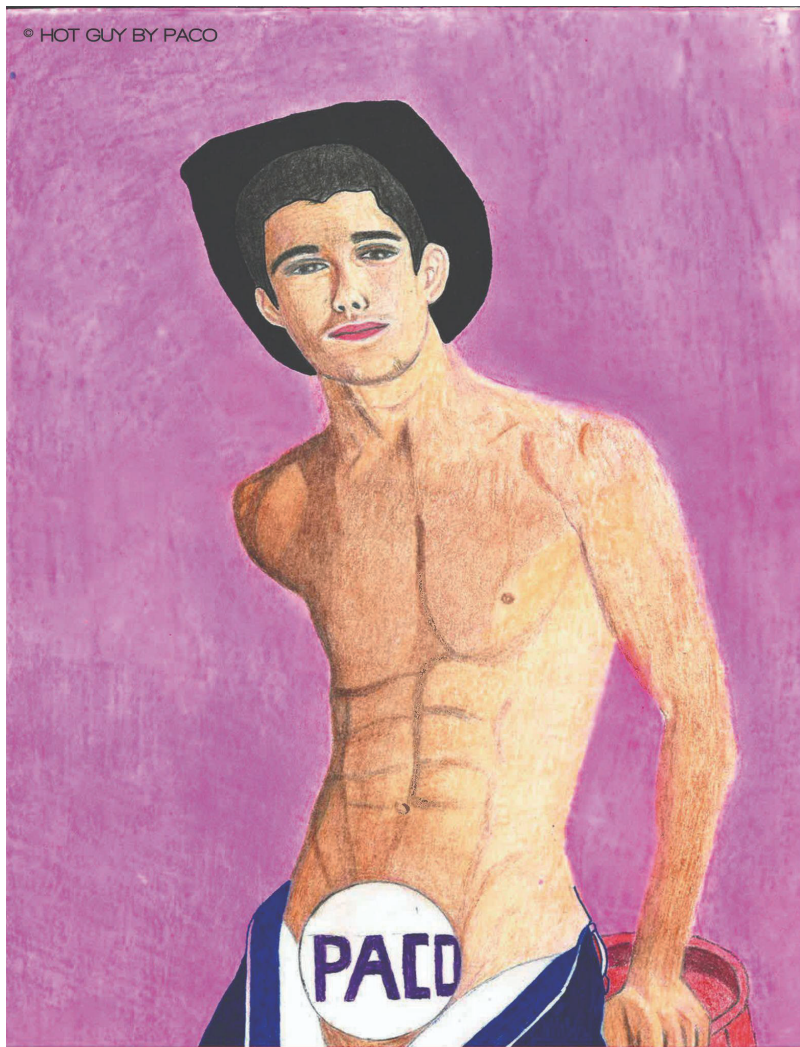
Censorship, you wish to silence my voice, as if life gave me a choice. I am who the hell I am and for that I rejoice.

You say...

Keep quiet and don't draw attention to how you look, you damn sure picked up the wrong book, the rough path seems to be the one you took. Shook you the fuck up too when you finally saw me. That's right,

Yes... me... the truest person that I can be. Not the normal image that you want to see. I refused to compromise, screw your censorship, my voice shall be free.

◉ HOT GUY BY PACO





*O*N FOOD: YOUR FOOD WEAPONIZED

MOTHER CAT

HEALTHY SELF MEDICATING FOR THE TRANSWOMAN

This will not do those in prison a lot of good, but once you are out, this Info should help you out a lot.

The reason for writing this is simple, I tried to get my HRT out in the real world and they want to charge you hundreds of dollars for blood tests, then you have people refusing to prescribe for religious reasons.

But did you know that God/Nature gave us a way to do this on our own?

Estrogen is found in nature in the very foods we eat, and so are anti androgens.

The two biggest estrogen based foods are :

Flax seed

Soy Beans

And the biggest anti androgen food is Soy Beans.

So if worse comes to worst, you can do it naturally by watching what and how you eat.

I've had no choice being stuck in the Bible belt and facing a bunch of gender hatred as well as financial obstacles.

One other thing about this that is good news for the poor among us, is that you can acquire this using the food stamp program or what is called SNAP out here now.

Oh, you will be eating a bit of it to get to levels you need, but proper exercise should help you stay in your svelte form for as long as you wish it.

Well that's it for now, for a listing of other estrogen rich foods, just go online or Google it, you will be amazed at what is available.

MOINEZ MUNOZ

Hello,

I hope you all enjoy the holidays and brought in the New Year with a bang. First off I want to thank you for my winter newsletter, me and my cellie both enjoyed it.

I would like to take a few seconds to touch the theme for the next issue of *The Word is Out*. Food in prisons is not something

many of us inmates can look forward to but those who have no family support it's all they got to eat. Here where I'm at in the High Desert State Prison in Susanville California the food you simply got to imagine taste to it for it got's no taste whatsoever and it's always cold and barely enough. It's lacking salt and seasoning and I don't think it has the right calories we need. As for those who are cultural or health related dietary requirement it is as first difficult to get your meals established and staff are not consistent with the meals so, yes, this has been an issue for us inmates in California. I would love to see this food situation improved for us and everyone in prisons statewide. We may be inmates but we are still human beings!

Once again thank you for involving me in all your programs and helping us behind the walls cope and give us something to look forward to.

KINK YUNKI

Dear LGBTQ Family at the Prisoner Correspondence Project,
How are you all doing? This ya bi-boy Kink Punk Thinking Kinky Thoughts That Are Punk Rock! Ha!Ha! Anyway, I am writing in to submit a recipe, give an address update, and request back issues of Word is Out.

The recipe is:

2 oz syrup

6 oz Powder Koolaid Mix

And a bowl

Put Koolaid powder in a bowl. Then pour syrup over powder and mix til it's a thick goop. Make multiple little balls out of your mixture and let the balls sit for 24 hours. Soft chewy sweet n sour candies. Easy, fast, fun, and delicious...like sex with some Kink.

Thank you fam! Love Kink Punk!

DAVID S. CARDWELL AKA SCOTTY-TO-HOTTY

I'm in a F.M.C. here in Kentucky for the past 8 years. When I first got here the food was amazing, had napkin dispensers and a condiment rack on every table. We had grapefruit, oranges, pears, peaches, strawberries, watermelon almost daily. Now we're lucky to get an apple or banana that's not rotten. Now we have to buy and bring our own condiments and a hanky is helpful since they always seem to run out of napkins. Now there's a hot bar in every dining room but none of them have a plug to plug in so the food comes out of a hot box then put on the bar. If you're lucky by the time you get there it's still luke warm. I've seen them run out of food on the 2nd unit. There's 7 units. They're supposed to follow the national menu but they like to be clever and make their own dishes out of the national menu, which sucks. Last night was roast beef, green beans, mashed potatoes and gravy. Well the roast beef was paper thin and smaller than your hand, no

green beans and we needed a straw to drink the gravy and potatoes with no spices at all. So I eat out of my locker most of the time.

But when there's a big government inspection we eat like kings for the day. On a side note I like to comment on the mail censorship. I've been lucky on that, penpalling is my thing. I've been able to send and receive letters from state inmates only so currently I have 17 sexy men I write. Porn is not allowed nor nude pics of any kind unless they're covered in certain spots, but bare butts are ok. And we can get sexually related reading matter like gay erotic novels.

JORDAN BERG

I'm an inmate in the Wisconsin DOC. Food's good. Food's bad. It all depends on where you go.

In my 8 years of incarceration I've been to 2 facilities. New Lisbon and my current Bick box Columbia Correctional to which I've only just arrived.

Food was pretty good at the New Lisbon, especially during summer months because they have a pretty robust garden with about 1 ½ acres of growing space. They grow cucumbers, lettuce, onions, peppers, tomatoes, beans, herbs, watermelon, zucchini, squash, you get the point.

The institution reaps its bounty and passes the good diverse

food thru the kitchen to be cooked into the bellies of inmates on the units.

I worked 3 years in that garden and proud. There's nothing better than eating something healthy and nutritious that you yourself planted and can say so. It sure beats the heavily processed food of where I'm at now. Since I've arrived at Columbia I've detested the food. All vegetables are canned whereas at New Lisbon they bought flash frozen veggies. Here at Columbia you barely get meat with your meals. I'd loaded with soy. Now, I'm a farmer, so I support soy but in moderation!

Wisconsin's DOC is hurting for money. Soy may be healthy but it is also more expensive than beer, turkey, or pork. Plus red meat is essential in the American diet. The over consumption of soy in a lazy 21st century society contributes to more fat on our bones. You don't burn it you gain it. Simple as that.

Look at the vast amount of inmates in Correctional Systems in Wisconsin. People are overweight. Due to lack of funds food, also due to lack of funds for hiring employees which leads to "modified movement." Essentially nothing happens.

The world loves processed food. It's cheap and affordable. That's why institutions love it. But processed food is terrible. Look at our canteen. What isn't processed? How do you stay healthy? It's a toss-up. Eat the institution's crap or try to make

a "healthy" meal yourself. You really can't. Even the tuna has preservatives in it. A couple years ago I had a discussion with a prison doctor at a Diabetes Awareness Group about preservatives. He told me about a recent study of the rates of decay of those pre-preserved and those post preservatives. The results are astonishing. Our bodies are literally preserving themselves. Just like beans in a can.

The healthy eating era is here with lower and lower prices. Institutions need to accept that and place better foods on our menus and canteen sheets. Stop torturing us with food that even wild animals would pass on. This isn't 1960 its 2019! If you can't afford decent meals, let inmates go so those who have to stay get a healthy meal. Healthier meals leads to less health problems.

Taking vegetarian or vegan diets, the prison only allows one-vegan-diet, in which every meal is one bag of rice, one "vitamin-enhanced" kool-aid packet and one other miscellaneous item. It's an inmate rule in our prison to not eat with other races at the chow hall, and we are discouraged from making meals with other races on our own time. Even if a person has money, it's hard to eat healthy here. For those of us without money, we have no option but to eat a diet almost exclusively consisting of bread, processed meats, and sweets.

VANESSA VAN VLERAH

So my story starts out like this...

It's a wonderful New years day. And Boy, the chow hall is serving one of their more palatable meals - BBQ pork with a baked potato.

Everyone comes. I'm standing in line, and the first thing I witness is someone with gloves on itching their face. In this prison, they sometimes serve by hand (as in literally grabbing a handful, no ladle, and plopping it on your tray). Usually they do this with a salad or coleslaw. This time was coleslaw.

Having witnessed offence #1, this should have forewarned me on how the rest of the meal was going to go. So I make it through the line, find a spot to sit, and as I glance down into my tray I see something strange in my pork.

Now it's not the best pork, so sometimes the meat does look funny. But upon closer inspection, I saw that it wasn't meat skin.

It was a used band-aid.

I shot up from my spot so fast, tray in hand, went to the serving window, shoved it through to the lead cook and asked loudly. "Can I have another tray? This one has a BAND-AID in it."

There started a chorus of people still waiting to get their trays.

"Ooo gross!" "nasty!"

They snatched my tray back and quickly handed me another one. As I was walking away, a voice from the kitchen line worker said "oh, that was on my finger"

So happy new years to me. I take it as good luck, kind of like those cakes with the almond in it where the person who gets it has good luck for the rest of the year. I'm taking it that way - some people get lucky almonds. In prison, you get lucky band-aids.

So as you can see here, sometimes things are just gross, meals hardly change - ours are quick chill (in food bags).

You heat and eat. No nutritional value, plus loads of carbs.

I've been watching my food intake, and it's hard. The soy meat is the best I can get. I wish fresher options were available, and less carbs, but I dont think that will ever happen. Also some interesting things I've heard found in food: rocks, hair, nail clippings, a piece of brillo pad, and live maggots.

So watch what you eat...

DWAYNE R. SMITH

This is concerning the theme for the next issue of The Word is Out Magazine. Here at Florida State Prison and other institutions in Florida, food are constantly being weaponized as a method for the warden and his staff to procure financial

gain. Canteen Provider and Prison administration all in Collusion. Prison personel are repeatedly utilizing Klu Klux Klan tactics to encourage inmates to buy high priced food items from the Canteen.

Tactics that reduce the serving inmates receive from the Prison Chowhall to the smallest possible amount.

Inmates should have access to a Canteen Provider that hold their best interest in mind and not in the interest of the Prison administration and the amount of capital gain from employing a particular Canteen Provider.

The kickback received by Prison administration amounts to bribe and are conflict of interest, 'if it ain't it should be'. The money gives Prison Personel incentive to utilize tactics to discourage inmates from eating the food served in the

Prison Chowhall. We are lacking competition.

SPENCER BUTLER

I hope this letter finds all of you beautiful people doing great. I want to begin this letter by saying thank you very much for the wonderful newsletter. I look very forward to receiving it here in the US-TDCJ (Tx. Dept. of Criminal So-called Justice)

Through your last newsletter in 2017 there was an article entitled "The Butterfly Effect"

and in the winter 2018 issue one on censorship with an address. I really thought the "The Butterfly Effect" was a nice article, so I wrote the author who responded to me and now...lol...well lets just say beautiful. My heart is in Canada and I'm doing my best to get there.

Well anyways in the winter 2018 issue it says the theme for the next issue is "Your food weaponized: eat at your own risk", and I wanted to say something. Here in Tx we are periodically placed on a unit wide lockdown where we have to tote all our property to the gym, get it searched and random things thrown away, while we look the other way (we're not allowed to watch) Anyway, this takes 2 weeks to 30 days and while this goes on we're not allowed out of our cells for any reason. And for breakfast we are brought 10 prunes (yuk!), two pancakes with p-nut butter and jelly on them that looked like they were stepped on, two orange? boiled eggs, (yes, orange!), and a small container of "scooters" cereal that are out of date. These items vary daily.

For lunch and dinner we are brought the same cereal but with a stepped on PB-Jelly sandwich that has been laying out so long the crust and most of the bread is as hard as a you know what!

Anyways, for those of us that don't have commissary we eat and ask no questions or give no complaints. Recently though I noticed the "scooters" smelled funny, so just out of curiosity,

I checked the date and the expiry date was nine months ago!
Imagine that! I've come to see that part of the reason for the lockdowns are to get rid of old food!

One year we even had bananas that dripped out of the black peels!

To top it all off for the past 2 ½ weeks the cell toilet has not flushed, so between that and the old, bad food (prunes, old meat, moldy bread, bad scooters) it's a pretty...uh... bad situation! It literally stinks! Anyways I just wanted to send that to the theme. Thank you so very much.

P.S. I have enclosed a poem.

"Safe word"

The straps are tied tight
The blindfold is in place The mouth gag is secure
I feel the lashes of the whip And the blunt force of the paddle
The crop leaves it's mark
And the candle wax dries and tightens
This bondage is real
But there is no safeword

BRANDON ROBBINS

Most of the food is ok, even though there is a label on everything that says "for prison and farm use only." Armark is who does our food. Most of it is good but some of it, you don't know that it is! Like today was nachos, its mystery meat!

There was a rock in my potatoes one year!
 Chipped my tooth : / I have to change the subject to Mrs. Major real quick. She says in the states the south fuck our cousins, HAHHAHA! That is simply not true! I was born in Georgia and was raised in Central Kentucky! WE DO NOT FUCK OUR FAMILY! Pretty funny though. And the celebrity gossip on Ellen DeGeneres. You telling me for over 15 years Ellen has been faking being gay? I watch her show faithfully Mon-Fri at 3pm for over 10 years btw! It's just hard for me to believe. And I used to live in Long Beach, CA and would go to Burbank and she/her face would be everywhere! I don't know about that one. Back to the food. I truly believe we are not getting the right portions of food/calories. Sometimes it will be so little, you don't even wanna use the restroom because you'll be hungry! Kentucky's prison system is so fucked up. A person can kill someone and get 20 years 85%. But dude makes Meth and gets 30 years 85%! | got 10 years for robbing my weedman! I've only got one newsletter from you guys but I love it. It's so open, I hope the project goes on.

MR FURRLY

Hello my dear friends. I got your letter and I was thrilled to hear from you. The food they have here is somewhat you call pink slime, but when you cook it it turns brownish red. When I work in the kitchen at another prison I seen the food before the workers cook it and it's an ugly sight.

It look like a big square pink, red, purple and blue color of

slime. The food is lacking the real quality of meat, not something that is made in a lab. The revolution I want to see is real food in prison. I like the pictures and how everyone be themselves. I hope to hear from you.

ROBERT SPAHR AKA RUFIO

From the pain of incarceration...there is no pleasure. In the state of Nevada the N.D.O.C goes off of one menu for all of its 7 prisons and camps in the state, and for the last 13 years I have been eating that food. In June of 2018 the prison Doctor told me I had really Bad High Blood pressure, and with the N.D.O.C menu having a lot of stuff on it that has way too much salt in its food and the lack of Healthy food it happened to me. Yes they do put a little handful of salad on dinner trays and a little vegetables, but this is not cutting it for healthy foods that an inmate should be eating. I am in a Max prison and some of the units are 23/7 lock down in your cell, so you lack the exercise you need to burn off the food you eat. On top of all this the Max prison is sitting in a small ass town where the 40 come from and 95% of them hate the L.G.B.T. community and sometimes try to not feed us if they know about your sexuality, so you have to hide your true self when they're working your unit.

So as a Bi male I have a hard time getting fed my food by my unit 40, because as of a couple months ago I told myself I will not hide who I am anymore. So I say to anyone dealing with

any of the issues I'm dealing with, I say - stay strong and keep your head up, you're not alone out there. The L.G.B.T. community as a whole need to stay strong and needs you to not give up, so my last words are get tested/ checked up by your doctor for high blood pressure your food might be hurting your beautiful self like it did me.

RANSOM TEMER

To my Loving Family,

Hello and how are you guys! It feels so good when I hear from you guys. It's like a big weight off my back. Well, you guys want to hear about the food we eat here in prison, well Potosi food is the best out of all the prisons I've been to. We eat a lot already. Bag foods that's already pre-cooked, but we also eat chicken patties, salisbury steaks, meatloaf, BBQ pork, BBQ roast beef, fish patties, chicken nuggets, dinner sausage, truck driver special, pastey item, biscuits-n-gravy.

Next subject, I really don't like it here, it's too racist, and a lot of gay haters here at potosi, you got co's here always harass you and push your buttons, but this prison was built for death row inmates, and life without parole inmates, but now its changed a lot since they been accepting anybody here now. I don't believe I'm safe here, that's why I'm trying to get away from here. I'm already far away from home.

Now far as healthy foods, they got diet trays, it's called (C.R.D.) Certified Religious Diet. It's got all healthy food on it. Vegetables, vitamin koolaid, milk, cottage cheese, vegetarian beans, peanut butter and jelly, tuna, raw spinach, raw cabbage, cold cereal, fruit, you got to sign up to get on these (C.R.D.) diet. It's very very healthy, I've been on it a few times on this bit I'm doing you know! Here real soon I'm gonna get back on it. I want to see more healthy foods on the regular trays but I doubt if it ever happens you know! Well I hope to hear back from you guys soon, and that I covered all what you been asking about our food. I also hope to hear some good news when you respond back to my letter! I hope you understand I'm lonely and I'm waiting.

God bless you all and hope you enjoyed your holidays and New Years!

Yours always,
~ransom with love~

TERRIE DRAKE / GYPSY ROSE

Dearest Family,

Thank you so very much for The Word Is Out, winter 2018 issue #20, I received it Christmas Eve while locked-down. I am a Transgender Female, in an all male federal prison. I've been in the federal system for 16 years now, I've been a

Transgender Female for 2 years, I'm Hormone's Therapy for 1½ years, my prison name is Ms. Gypsy Rose. On November 13th, 2018, me and another Transgender asked the federal prison here at U.S.P. Marion, for the right to get married to each other, under the Same Sex Marriage Law. We are in hopes we get approved. We love each other dearly! Ms. Jamie's butch, I am all fem.

I am sending some of my poems in hopes you will print them in your summer issue? I pray you won't hold it against me, because I live in this fucked up country called the U.S.A.

Food at this federal prison is a sad joke, the food is always cold, never hot, we get chicken 3 to 4 times a week in some type of mess, we even get some shit called Chicken Tacos.

I eat in my cell most of the time, peanut butter, soups, refried beans, cheese, things me and my lover buy from commissary. We both work a Unicor here at the prison, last month I worked 182 ½ hours was paid \$97.62, I earn 46 cents an hour or somewhere around there. Ms. Jamie made over \$300 for the same hours as me, she's a higher pay grade. Hope this helps you to know me better.

I Stand before the MIRROR,
Often for Minutes at a time,
gazing at My Reflection;
At the WOMAN, i see there,
partially hidden, by my

perception of My
still-as-yet, male body.

He/She who AM I

The Mind-yearning, seeking, questioning,
emerging/Female

The Body-betraying the Mind/Male

Can one express/what it feels like
to be a Transgender Female

Before I was a man, and was treated
like a man/and-

after I will be a WOMAN,

Now I Am - both/neither

Is there anyone, who will Accept Me

As I am, or will I onl be

Accepted/Rejected

for who I WAS/will be

Is it too difficult, for others to Comprehend,
or is it/too difficult for me to explain.

Loneliness and Isolation

are all I now know/

who am I really/

can you please tell Me

DANIEL HUGHES

Almost every meal we receive has two pieces of bread, to help fill the minimum calorie requirements. Every other morning, for breakfast, we receive three small pancakes, oatmeal, and ground up meat - the box for which contains label "not for human consumption." Only on the weekend mornings are we served canned fruit, and only once a day are we provided vegetables, and also no vegetable options in the commissary. For dinner each weekday we receive 'socks' which consists of a small bag of popcorn, four slices of bread, a slice of meat, a bag of peanut butter, one mustard packet, and two cookies. We are not served lunch on weekends, but "enhanced breakfasts" which are supposed to last all day. On the outside, I was vegetarian for ethical reasons. In prison, to dissuade prisoners from





GRIEF

JJ

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

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

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

I watched and listened in disbelief as the news anchor gave

random commentary on facts that were sketchy at best. I glanced out my tiny window to see several COs patrolling the yard with less lethal shotguns and live ammo MP5s. They were busy shuffling bound inmates from a completely unlivable and burned out housing unit. I stared at the commotion, hoping

I could stave off the anger and pain from learning my friend was dead.

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

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

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

That was almost five years ago. Sean is still gone and there is

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

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

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

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

Rayne Violet

Hello PCP Peeps!

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

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

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

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

Tyana Hubbard

My grandmother Willie Mae Crenshaw was my world. I have never met a beautiful black queen like her. She taught me how

to be proud of being gay. She taught me how to love all of god's creation. I lost my grandmother the year of 2009. My life has been so lonely since that day, my world was turned upside down on that day.

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

I love granny and I will see you again. Before I close this letter, I want everyone that's reading this to always cherish their loved ones. We never know when that day will come. May god bless my mother, loved ones, and everyone else's mothers and loved ones.

Eric Duprey

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

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

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

Jasper said, “Why don’t we read one column to each other every night after lights out, in honor of your dad?” Now, Jasper wasn’t a very emotionally expressive person, and it took

me a moment to realize that this was his way of expressing care and affection- and helping me through my grief. So every night after lights out I waited for him to come over so we could

huddle together and read to each other, illuminated by the glow of my book light. Not only did our readings help to ease my grief, but they also brought us closer together.

Cody Riley

Dear Family,

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

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

I responded to an internet ad for sex from someone local who claimed to be 18. Two weeks later I learned the truth—he was 16—when I was arrested. After my trial, my jury forewoman said the jury didn't care about the age because he'd lied. Their choice was made based solely on my HIV status. My max sentence without HIV was 20 years, so 50 years of my sentence is simply because I'm positive. I see cases like Micheal Johnson in Missouri "recklessly infecting" partners and he got 10 years. Now he's on parole.

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

Brain Fuller

BLURRY RIGHTS, VIVID WRONGS

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

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

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

Unfortunately, it was then that I gained the valuable insider

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

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

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

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

underestimate the objects of their treachery. They fail to realize how quickly the tables can be turned and hunter becomes hunted.

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

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

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

We must inject some integrity, accountability, and equanimity into all matters regarding criminal acts and social justice. Why is it that millionaire NFL players are allowed to viciously rip the helmet off another player's head and bash them over the skull (that is agg. assault) but if one doesn't have the cash to participate in the organized extortion racket that is our

corrupt legal system, then you're not allowed to defend life and property from home invasion robbery? Why do we continue to accept such blatant duplicity? Is our due process of law really up for sale?

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

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

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

Matthew Feeney

TOXIC AVENGER

I am overflowing
with toxic sludge.

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

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

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

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

Where would I be now?
Not in prison.

Jennifer Rose

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

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

In addition to this death in my family, we've had at least five trans women that were murdered over the past several years in the California state prison men's facilities. One of these fallen sisters was Carmen "Pumpkin" Guerrero, who was killed around Halloween of 2013 at

Kern Valley State Prison, where I was incarcerated at the time. I actually crossed paths with the hater that killed her, Miguel Crespo, who I confronted directly and fought in 2017 at Salinas Valley. I believe strongly in Natural Law rights of individual and collective self-defence, so when he approached me on the yard I deemed him an imminent threat to myself and other women!

Anyway, how do I deal with all these terrible traumatizing events of death, hatred, and violence? How do I deal with

grief? I have some advice for anyone in the LGBTQ community.

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

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

Ms. Jazzie Farrari

My sisters and brothers in the LGBTQ community:

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

Needless to say, doing time isn't easy. But you, like me, can overcome the daily turmoil of prison life, particularly the loneliness and isolation. When I began my prison sentence, the prison authorities forced me into protective custody. Their reasoning for such a move was because I look too much like a girl. I was put in solitary confinement, where I spent a lot of time

in deep thought. Prayer and my hope for a better day sustained me through that very dark period of my prison term. But as I stated earlier, I spent a lot of time in deep thought. Instead of looking outward for some help, I looked inward, making an honest assessment of myself. In doing so, I became acutely aware of my faults, strengths, and past failings. I also became aware of how positive and negative thoughts affect emotions and actions. I embraced it all and reached deep down into my soul, into that pool of strength, making it possible for me to touch the face of

the universe and assert my strengths with the affirmation that "I am a human being. I am a woman of excellence."

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

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

I'm not as dependent as before on the approval of others because I'd found myself in that solitary cell. Self affirmation is a very powerful weapon for the transgender woman trapped in a male prison. As long as I have me and am happy with me, that's all that matters.

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

Chris Ridley

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

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

Jeremy Rutherford

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

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

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

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

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

Sean Price

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

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

Since I've been incarcerated, I've lost my mother, my father (both have died), and multiple friends or partners. My wife left with my kids and I've lost my house. I get out in Oct of 2020 and I have no family left to go out to.

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

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

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

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

You saved me, and for that I promise to make all your dreams come true.

Richard Risher

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

Eric Hudson

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

Shon Pernice

SELFISH VS. SELFLESS : WHEN SUICIDE SPEAKS

I've given numerous presentations to outside guests about life inside prison. In one topic, Psychological Prison, I discuss the process of how an inmate is informed about the death of a loved one. I begin by asking the inmates on my panel to raise their hand if they have had a family member die while they were incarcerated. The majority of hands go up. I cover the inmates' notification process and possible outcome if they show any form of sadness: suicide watch in segregation. That is the worst place to be while processing pain. You are locked up, no sheets, only a smock to wear, nobody to talk to, no access to your personal property, and alone. You are not going to attend a funeral, like shown in the movies. Closure most likely will not start until you are released, and the death becomes real. I have never had to experience that scenario in my nine years of incarceration—until now.

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

My daughter, the one thing I held dear to my very existence,

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

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

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

MIND FIELDS

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

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

I found myself trapped in a thick darkness from which there was no escape. My heart had been ripped out and my soul was missing. I was a zombie, a hollow bag of skin. I hurt in such a way that intense physical pain would be a relief. I was

focused on the here and now and the most obvious consequences of my actions did not register. My loss of control backed me into a corner as my mental calculations and reasoning become primitive. I wanted control back. My life was control, so I would take it.

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

When I made the decision to kill myself, my senses, although numb in appearance, were hypersensitive to justification. Even after I decided to die, I still listened to key words, expressions, and the body language of those I encountered. If I sensed that you didn't care—a wrong blink, look, word, or laugh—that was confirmation of my lack of value. I was actively looking for someone to disregard me, prove that I was worthless, not believe that I hurt—I'd show them. Or treat me like a victim—I'd be a victim soon enough. The questions "Are you ok?" or "How are you doing?" were worthless and you would get a one-word response every time.

You already knew something was wrong with me. Don't be stupid. If you asked, "Do you want to harm yourself?" You'd get a big fat lie of "nope." You were not going to lock me up, punish me, prevent me from killing myself, or poor babying me. However, the question "How bad are you?" would get my attention. You verified my world of pain, you respected it, and so I was challenged to think about an answer. I had to process this question from my dark place, due to the fact that I did not have an automatic reply for it. No one-word bullshit answer. That was your open door to buy me some time. My invisible walls had to be breached before the inevitable.

On the mission to end my life, I still sought rationalization to reinforce my decision. I made a few telephone calls to non-family members who would not be biased. One resource walked me through the Bible verses that had been my fixation, one of the justifications to kill myself.

He searched for it while we spoke and then educated me on the context of the whole story, not the eternal damnation of a single verse. That lowered the threat level a notch, but I still wanted out. I was reacting in desperation, caused by intense emotional pain.

I called resource #2 and talked about my daughter's tragedy. After hearing me out, as I talked in circles, he expressed empathy, but then spoke of a story I had recently written. I mean come on! My new son-in-law drowned, daughter witnessed it, and I was done living. And this guy was talking about one of my stories? That confused the heck out of my one-sided thought process and emotions. That sly individual took my focus off the grave momentarily, and I had to process

one of my accomplishments. Someone was buying me more air to inhale as my focus shifted. I had no clue what was going on in our conversation, as I wanted to go back to the tragedy. The refocus was a condiment in the recipe for my survival. At no point did I tell anyone of my intention to kill myself.

I spoke to staff soon after I had discovered the horrible news, when I was deep in the hunt for justification. I was offered to speak with mental health and the answer was premeditated, “No.” I just wanted to die. However, after speaking to those previous resources, I gave in and informed staff that I was willing to see a counsellor. I wanted to see my mental health specialist just one more time. The next day, during my appointment, another key discovery gave me purpose. It was brought to light that I might be the only person my daughter could relate to, since I had been intimate with death during the war. I might be the only person she could connect with. Now, I had synapse firing parts of my brain that were shut down. The mental walls had been breached. She might need me. Enough said! I could honestly say that mental health and their bag of tricks interrupted my After several people refused to give up on me when my depression made loving me a task, it came down to this: Yes, I hurt bad, I blamed myself, and this pain wasn’t going away anytime soon so I could not minimize it. Let’s talk fairness. The main reason I could end my life was due to the question of “Could my daughter, a 22-year-old widow, handle two funerals in a week? And due to my actions?” I could not do that to her. Not now anyway. So I needed a purpose, a mission.

I am a soldier.

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

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

AFTER ACTION REPORT

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

ground type warriors. I prefer rock drills and plain talk.

My previous situation of despair will be discussed by utilizing three popular military war movies: *Top Gun* (1986), *Flight of the Intruder* (1990), and *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001).

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

In *Behind Enemy Lines*, actor Owen Wilson is shot down in Siberia. He is being hunted by a sadistic foreign army, just witnessed the execution of his co-pilot. He is battling the environmental elements in a county where friend and foe is a blur. The scene where Wilson is speaking to his commanding

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

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

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

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

-Albert Schweitzer



TYANA HUBBARD

VINSON W. FILYAW



MICHELLE AUTUMN





THE REAL LIFE GYPSY'S
SKID ROW PICTURES presents
ORIGINAL STREET
+ SINISTER + HOEST +
TRAMPS + NASHVILLE

the stories
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POSAANYT
NEED \$\$\$
(Love you!)
4-A HOTEL
+ PENIS (stunt)

HONN
3-6
↑
SICKLE
?
VILLIAN
666
MAFIA
SLAYER
TWERK
ASS LAPDANCE
25
CASH
GRASS/DIRT
x + x

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

7 Laws of Pride!

39% of Community

1. Love only those who show you
2. Loyalty equals Trust!
3. Honor
4. Pride
5. unity
6. respect
7. Equality

(LGBT)

Take Pride in your equal & remember to Never put a Label on them, There Free will to Choose ones Life style is being Unique. Accept & Let your equal be The Image that they seek. Not what you seek only you can see the Flaws in your self. Dont let others Judge you. Be Proud in your own skin you have a Choice & a Voice it takes one voice to speak to the right ears to make a Change Like the ripple Effect, IM Bi, but No Matter what (LGB, T, Q, A, O, P) We are Considered Fags in the eyes of outsiders. Well Im a Proud, Loud STRONG FAGG!

IM GAY, IM Proud
IM Bi SEXUAL
IM Transgender
IM Lesbian
IM Queer
But IM 100%
UNIQUE &
AND PROUD IN MY SKIN

Only I Can Judge Me!!

X=Y=Equality
Y=X
= Zero Label
Always Equal...
Be Proud In Your OWN SKIN!

GAY
R
EYES

Bi-LAW OF EQUAL...

M2FABO
Proud to be 727 MOB
Pride
Globe

(LGBT)
PRIDE

HEALTHCARE

Nova

There is no doubt that the global pandemic has changed every aspect of what was considered normal living. From Zoom calls to terms like “masking up” and “social distancing” entering into mainstream language. You go to the grocery store and toilet paper and bleach are as scarce as clean water in third world countries. Life within the walls of Eyman/Cook Unit however, is bad, if not worse, than being homeless on the street. “Hey CO, could I get a new mask?” one inmate asked. “Why can’t you just wash the one you got?” the CO replied sarcastically. “I’ve had this mask for two months now” explained the inmate. “No!” the CO responded back while closing the door at the Captain’s area.

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

promised.

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

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

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

I know there is no one-size-fits-all solution for every problem for the coronavirus, but efforts to mitigate exposure are grossly mishandled by the new staff at Cook Unit, including Captain Bowers. The problems in the world are getting worse, not better. It's the staff coming and going who pose the greatest threat. We as inmates are willing to comply with reasonable methods to stay safe. The entire organization of the Eyman complex needs to be accountable for their lack of diligence ensuring the absolute physical well-being of their staff, inmates, and others coming into the facility. The cost of providing cleaning supplies should not ever outweigh the cost of lives, unless they want lawsuits—it could happen.

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

Nicky

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

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

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

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

The unfortunate side effects of this lockdown are many people

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

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

Much love family, Big Cee

From my observations over the past five months California prison administrators seem to have stuck their heads into the sand and are losing at a battle of tug of war between science, common sense, and the Governor. Governor Newsom has been on TV expressing his belief in science, the reasons for an

adherence to COVID guidelines and the need for everyone to wear a mask. He's been doing the right thing in the eye of the public and advising correctly, but in private he chose to imitate Trump followers by mingling in large crowds without a face mask and giving the middle finger to science.

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

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

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

There is a viable way to minimize COVID-19's grip on the population and they don't need to scramble for bed space to do it. They should simply open the gates to those inmates who are within 180 days to parole. That's both a scientific and political method to lower the state's responsibility for inmates getting exposed to the virus. Of course, that's too much like the right thing to do, coupled with the Governor's aspirations towards a possible run for President in the future. In the meantime, state guidelines say that "any person who has come in contact with someone who later tests positive should also go into quarantine for 14 days." The guidelines do not state that they should be set free into the prison population. I'm sure the powers-that-be know this so there must be another reason that administrators deviate so far from

scientific methods that prevent infection. I won't venture into conspiratorial spheres but it's worth an extra look, because none of them are as stupid as their actions evidence.

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

In no way do I just blame these administrators for their incompetence in dealing with this virus. I know most of them (even the staunchly Trumpian staff) are just as scared of this thing as I am. I do also blame inmates who do things knowing that this virus is circulating among us yet continue to act as if nothing's the matter. For instance, I stopped shaking hands years ago during cold and flu seasons simply so that I didn't catch it and for me rejecting an outreached hand is a normal thing. But I see inmates exchanging everything from hugs, handshakes, daps and kisses to sharing cups, spoons, bowls and every other item that can potentially spread the virus. Follow me, this unnamed brother who I've known for several years made his way to a table that I sat at in the chow hall. He sat down with his tray, pulled off his facemask, dipped his spoon in his food and stuffed it in his mouth. After chewing a few times, he nonchalantly stated "Man, I feel sick!" Every

part of me wanted to jump across that table and slap that food out of his mouth. I could even picture it in my mind, but that impulsive thought quickly subsided with the knowledge that I would go up for parole board in 2023. And I'll let you in on a secret, ain't nobody in this world meaningful enough for me to do an extra day in this evil system beyond the 31 years that I will have by my board date. Wisely I stood up and told him "don't ever speak to me again!" then I walked out of that chow hall.

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

Anyway family, please pray for those of us who are in the belly of the COVID-19 monster trying to bob and weave this death sentence. Please take all those steps you know you need to take in order to be safe and not laid up on some bed with tubes stuffed down your throat. Don't ever allow your feelings

or “I don’t want to hurt their feelings” type of attitude to be the reason. And by all means if you’re feeling sick, get attention, stay six feet away from the people you say you give a f#%k about. Believe in science.

Mike Phillips

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

Because I had never been in jail before, it took me several months to stop behaving like a zombie. Once I began to resurface, I made every effort to function in this horrible reality. Those first few months my “Public Pretender” was able to manipulate me, especially since I knew nothing of the gross inequity of the legal system. I was forced into indigency by the police. I had always been a “boy scout” who didn’t necessarily trust police, the largest organized gang in the U.S., but thought they might at times be necessary. In jail I found

nearly every one of them to be vicious brutal bullies with few exceptions. This, of course, made my PTSD worse. Thankfully, when some inmates could see my near comatose state of mind, they showed me kindness: a book, a little extra food, etc.

After about three months in jail, once I realized my lawyer was colluding with the prosecutor to set me up, I began going to the law library to study law relating to my case. No one else was fighting for me. The more I study law, the more I hate it because of how it is set up to harm poor citizens. But it is necessary to study it if one wants to protect themselves.

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

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

When I reached prison my foot injuries became serious. Before my illegal incarceration, I was in very good physical and mental health. The deterioration happened because of

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

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

My bone infection led me to being housed in the prison hospital which blessed me with single housing, a better bed, slightly better food, and a building without politicking. It isn't perfect and many of the problems are still there, but any situation which gives small improvements makes it better. Everyone isn't the same and how PTSD manifests itself for you will most likely be slightly different for each of us.

We all deserve love and respect because of the fact that we were born and are alive. Love, respect, and appreciate

yourself. For me, my spiritual life helps keep me balanced. I don't drink, smoke, or do drugs. Being interested in many things and attempting to enjoy life has been my high.

I regret that I was so naïve about the cruelty and criminality of laws, cops, lawyers, courts, and prison. I am less naive now, so I have begun a book about how the justice system ensnares us to make money off of us, how it continues the slave system, how both the guilty and innocent needlessly suffer. Find your center, hope, and strength and work towards your freedom. I hope you can do this to help battle your PTSD and regain a life in your control.

Ian Burrow

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

By the time the hurricane that all but destroyed my facility in October 2018 hit, I had never received an optometrist visit, or a dental visit, and had to turn around the blood test because

the nurse told me that she would only spend her money to order one if I told her I had been having unprotected sex with other inmates and the names of those inmates, and that it should be known that she will be forwarding that “confession” to my facility’s SIS department for investigation and possible discipline.

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

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

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

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

Autumn Phoenix

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

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

Since the guards gave very little details as to what happened, I am leaning towards believing the inmates' accounts. The inmates' version sounds like me; the guards' version makes

me sound like I did so for no apparent reason.

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

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

Christopher Martz

In prison, being part of the L.G.B.T.+ community, there's a lot of sex or sexual activities that one can get HIV/ AIDS or STDs from! What do we have to do to be safe? Get tested by the High Security Unit and that should be that right? Nope, because the healthcare personnel won't let me be tested at all unless I've been exposed to "a lot" of fluids. You can't get anything unless that happens! I've been in prison since 2007 and I don't get out until October 17th of 2026. I've had sex

(anal and a lot of oral). That's a lot of cum/body fluids that could get me an STD or lead to me having HIV/AIDS. I was done fighting with HSU staff on getting tested. So when I get out I'll get my full health checked out.

With this COVID crap going on, you really don't get tested or anything, but we get our temperatures taken every morning before we go to work or groups/classes. The staff here get tested every month and for two days we're locked down until they are done with the testings. Other than that, it's a waiting game for anyone waiting to be seen by doctors or to go out for a medical trip.

Blair Diehl

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

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

On November 25th, 2020 Wisconsin public radio announced that we were around 15% infected and that there had been 11

deaths. OSCI has 11 buildings that house 200 inmates. The building I live in has been on lockdown since September 28th, 2020.

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

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

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

Jay Sun

Before the days of COVID-19 there was a chorus of Before the days of COVID-19 there was a chorus of voices, from whispers to shouts, about the poor state of affairs regarding medical care here at Lompoc. Then COVID-19 hit and those voices became cries of despair as nearly 1000 inmates contracted the deadly virus and four inmates died. One of the four who died was a close friend, thus I must own the bias I

have against the BOP. However, what is presented here is all supported by facts. Those interested can read up about Lompoc's inmates' lawsuit against Lompoc and the BOP as a result of its/their response, or lack of, to the pandemic: Torres, et al. v. Milusnic, et al. Case No. 2:20-CV-04450-CBM.

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

As court proceedings moved forward, the revelations as to the true nature of medical care at Lompoc exposed a nearly non-existent regular and chronic care medical services situation. This conclusion applied to both the COVID-19 response and care before the onslaught of the virus. On September 25, 2020, as directed by the court, Dr. Homer Venters submitted his report "COVID-19 Inspection of BOP Lompoc". Perhaps, for all of us, the most sobering and damning finding by Dr. Venters was revealed: "Multiple patients who died from COVID-19 appear not to have received regular or timely medical assessment after being identified as ill with COVID-19... resulting in terminal hospitalization".

Understanding as to why previous cries of help, preCOVID-19, went unheard was made evident when Dr. Venters included in his report the following, "...the intimidation and threatening

of detained people to behave in a manner prescribed by correctional staff during the inspection is another very concerning example of a punitive response to the COVID-19 outbreak in the facility.”

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

Jimmie Eskridge

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

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

fight these Correctional Officers for a shower.

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

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

Rob Poizner

A report conducted by medical staff from UCSF on the San Quentin population re: COVID 19 outbreak has declared that they recommend the prison population be reduced by 15 RELATIONSHIPS The theme for our next issue is

RELATIONSHIPS. How do you maintain meaningful relationships within the limitations of incarceration? How has being inside changed your relationships? How have you built networks of interdependence and care in prison? We want to hear about your relationships with other prisoners and people on the outside: friends, family, lovers, mentors, community, younger generations, comrades, penpals...the most important people in your life. What obstacles do you face in trying to keep connected? What are your strategies for building and maintaining ties? What mistakes have you made and what lessons came from those experiences? Tell us about your support system for collectively surviving homophobia and transphobia, and how you care for other LGBTQ prisoners. Writing! Poetry! Art! We love to see it all! As always, feel free to send us your submissions about anything, even if it's not on topic. Please let us know if you want your name or a different name attached to it. 50% (and I have heard that they are making some plans for this). A Stop San Quentin Outbreak Coalition was formed with the help of former San Quentin inmates Adhan Khan and Eric "Masarat-E" Ambercrombie who have taken to the airwaves through social media and radio. The Coalition even reached the front gates of the prison (more than 100 of them), all of them chanting "Free Them All". I myself had seen this on a few of the local news stations. Furthermore, they held a press conference with 3 elected officials from the State Senate and Assembly. The Coalition is urging California Governor Gavin Newsome to pay heed to the demands of their findings.

They are:

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

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

Tyanna Hubbard

Family is something that we all have, and I hereby state that what I'm about to write is the absolute truth. This place is made to destroy us mentally and physically. I have been in the system for several years now, all flat time since I was thirteen. I'm twenty-eight now. I'm healthy mentally and physically. I can go long periods without corresponding with my family

because of the energy that we share but I still get emails from my family which is a good thing. Never cross your family and you will receive a reward that's so beautiful.

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

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

I try to watch what I touch now. I eat packaged food and any open food I put salt on it to give it some type of sterility. We are living in the end times and we must live accordingly. We must stay strong. I don't take medication but to others

I hope that they remain well. Death is the most beautiful thing

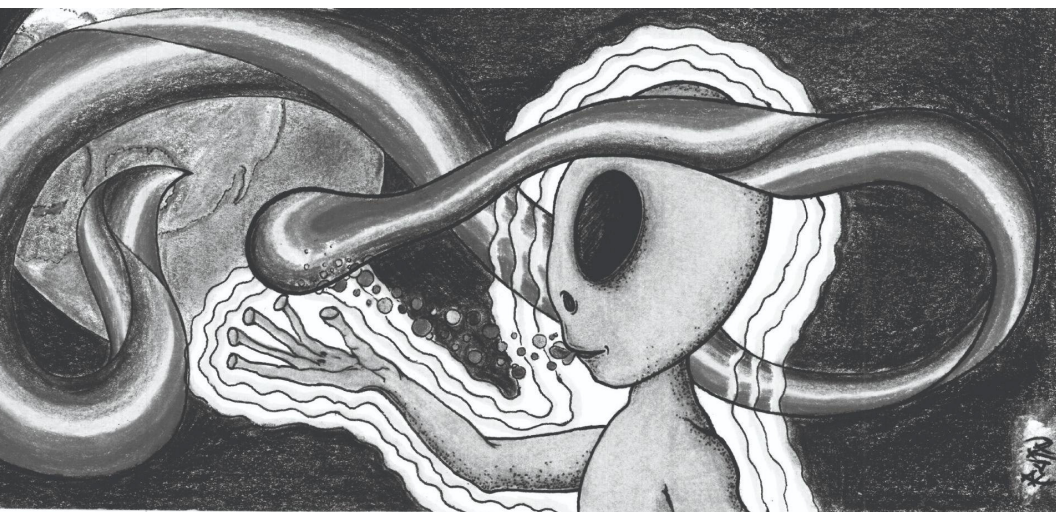
in life, our next abode will be much more pure than this one. We aren't from this planet anyway. If we were, we would be able to handle everything that this planet has to throw, the sun wouldn't be able to burn some of us to death and so on. But who am I, just an offender that's aware of the evils all around the board. This place has opened the third eye on me. I hope that this written formation finds its way into the right places. Power to the people and love for those who love back.

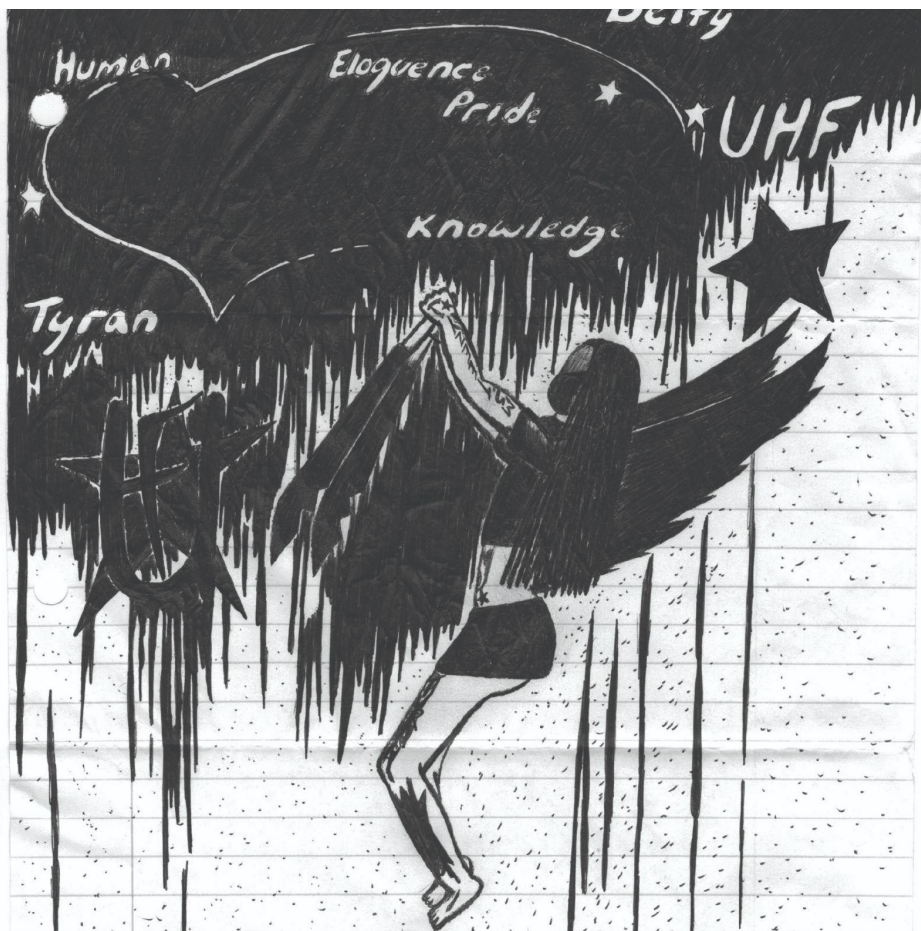


DYLAN



TOBY





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

By Tyana H.

*R*ELATIONSHIPS

Penni B

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.

Rolf

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.

Rayne Violet

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!

Micheal Desmarais

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?

Chris Cross

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.

Halo

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!

Jose

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.

Cordaryl Williams

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.

Shariff Taylor

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.

Mocha K. Scroggins

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 cling 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.

Wayne Walker

I noticed that the theme for this issue is “Relationships” and I just lost my fiancé to suicide in

November 2020. Everyday is a struggle. Before I got 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!



TYLER RANDALL

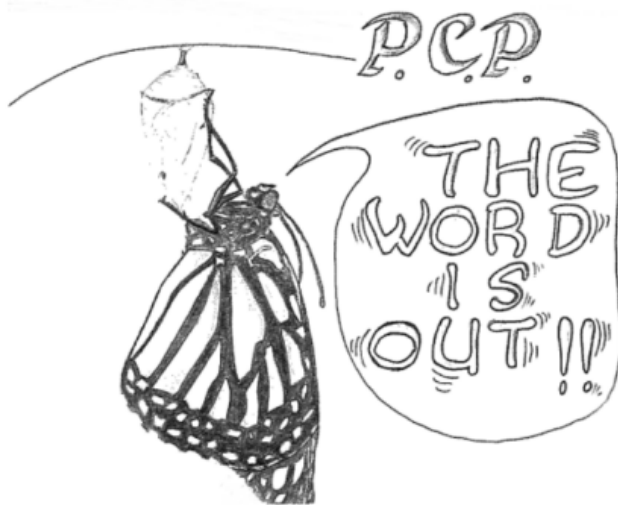
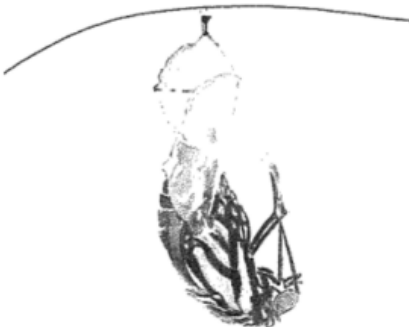
- Cook together. Eat together. Clean up together. As opposed to the "you cook, I'll clean" division of labour.
- Go for a walk, or sit and bird watch. Wrens, starlings, finches, sparrows, ducks, pigeons, crows, and even those ever present flying poo bags, the seagulls, are always good entertainment. 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.

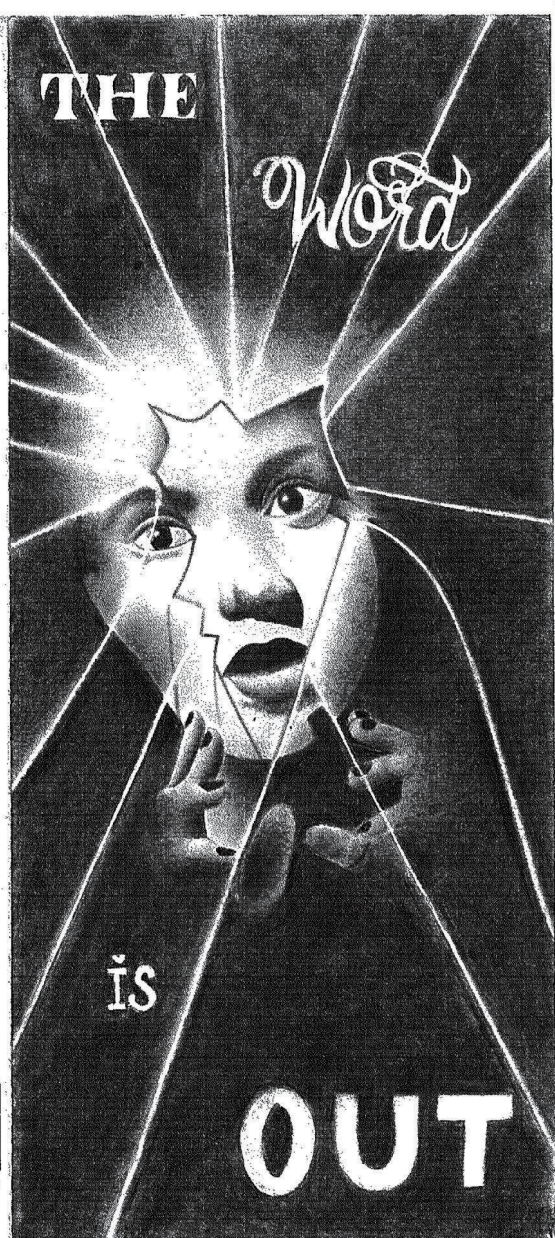
At the end of the day the real question is, "How do I make my significant other feel Significant, Special, Important, and Loved." The vast majority of that is spending time together and investing kindness and caring, which in my mind is the entire point of getting into a relationship in the first place, 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.







A DAY IN MY LIFE

Kwaneta Harris

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

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

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

together.

Yesterday, the white female warden stopped at my door. Every encounter, she feels compelled to comment on my hair. Why do white people feel it's their right to police Black people's hair? No, not all white. I had my hair in a bun on top of my head. But, because it's long and heavy it was leaned to the side as the day progressed. Her comment: You're not twelve, why do you have your hair like that? I ask her to move me to another cell because the severely mentally ill lady beneath

me keeps blowing out the power by throwing water in the electric sockets. I'm not able to turn my fan on or listen to the radio because she believes "Demons" are in the electricity. The Warden ignores me, as usual. Last night someone was gassed because they were suicidal. The effects still linger and my nose is still running. It's a new stronger chemical gas.

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

Yvette

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

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

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

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

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

I kinda wish that she got the attention from all media platforms to recognize her for being a first. All the media should write a story about her because she did it. She achieved the dream and she told me she's never been more happy in her life. We are in a male prison and she's a legal woman walking around as an inmate. I cannot believe this. I'm baffled and honored to have had the opportunity to interview her and know her story. She's a bad bitch and we need to follow in her footsteps. OK, time to check out.

Spark Dalmatian

December 9, 2022

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

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

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

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

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

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

Astro

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

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

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

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

It's morning. I'm woken by the sound of the dorm's loudspeaker making announcements that never inform me or direct me. They're just blasted at me. It's the third time I've

heard it this morning. Even though I sleep with earplugs, that speaker is my enemy. It's excruciatingly loud. Might as well get up.

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

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

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

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

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

Time for lunch. I couldn't eat breakfast because the texture of that meal makes it inedible. I hope lunch has something I can eat. As the hours pass, I crave lockdown time. Everyone else hates it. I love it because it is quiet. Well... quieter. I know my room well. I don't have to worry about others interrupting my tasks or bothering me with useless small talk. I can shut out the chaos (mostly) and shield myself. I can use my desk lamp as a dimmer source of light that doesn't give me a headache like the dorm lights do. I don't have to worry about a CO or staff member taking me out for some unannounced reason. I can put in my headphones to drown out the chaos, wear what I want (because the uniforms make me feel stiff/itchy) and I can escape the overwhelming environment that is the dorm.

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

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

Ariana Bushie

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

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

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

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

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

Ashley Delrio

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

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

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

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

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

Mocha K. Scroggins

12/07/22, A Day in My Life

Here in prison land, I've taken a lot of classes that teach bridge building through listening and communication skills. And by a lot, I mean sixty certificates for these various programs. I am in at least one class every week. One of my favorites is the Life Skills class. What is the purpose?

Interesting you should ask. I have a serious anger management problem. It is mostly under control. I don't feel I will ever have to hit anyone again.

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

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

Although I've been working as a Janitorial (SSI) for a while

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

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

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

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

David Boone Terre

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

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

Honestly Missouri needs serious help and support to help end these conditions that are causing more like myself to think and have these thoughts. When will a day in my life receive the help to be normal again?

Richard Risher

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

I am lucky to have the job as I tend to be very confrontational, but that is a good thing for my spot. I'm no pushover, and the administration values that. After work (I'm off and back at my cell by 1300 each day) I relax in my cell by listening to music and writing or drawing. There are also the times I hook up if I've got a boy-toy or some such. Right now, I have a cellmate who is cool with my sexuality. We respect one another and that is cool. I've had horrible cellmates more times than not.

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

I tend to crash around 2000. At times I've been much more "adventurous," but as parole looms for the first time I'm really trying to hold it together. That's tougher than most people

think. I have no tolerance for: phobics (trans, homo, etc.), antisemites, bullies, or close-minded people in general. I still end up fighting a lot even at 49 years old. Really trying to get a hold of that. As of this letter I've been "punch-free" for five weeks!

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

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

Happy Stomping Bear

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

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

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

Some days consist of a lot of reading. I may lay here and there and get on a writing kick. I'll write letters to old friends or different organizations. I write stories/essays for a few places, mainly prisonjournalismproject.org but some others as well. I have a lawsuit, so sometimes I'm swamped with legal work, reading case law and writing motions. I do a lot of "fishing" to help out my neighbors, gotta fish for the phone or a book or magazine or whatever. I wrote and created a Pathfinder adventure, did all the stuff that came with doing that. Sometimes I'll look at the TV, maybe watch a movie on the weekend.

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

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

I wish I had a motor...I'd be inked up by now! I clean up a few times a week, including light clean daily. And that's day in my life: reading, writing, and fishing. I hang out too, socialize with my neighbors and all that.

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

Jane Doe

1/22/23

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

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

Also I enjoyed going to church that morning. I love how gentle Daisy is when she touches my shoulder to tell me something. This morning she said I looked very pretty (funny, because I didn't even feminize myself much). I do miss having more female connections in my life. Gosh, I am grateful for Alexis. She is amazing, and talking with her feels somehow different than chatting with any of my transgendered

female friends, but I don't know what to attribute the difference to. Somehow, it's as though my trans friends are more "flamboyant", whereas Alexis seems more "wholesome" or "wholly-through" feminine.

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

Anthony Wheeler

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

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

I suffer from mental health issues, so I battle negative thoughts and emotions throughout the day. Medication helps, though my anxiety medication has ran out and is in need of a refill, which has me a bit edgier and hyper and emotional. The holiday season was rough for me, but I did my best to get through it and I did make it. My days are simple most of the time, which is a blessing.

Today involved a conflict between me and my buddy but we

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

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

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

LOST IN A CAGE

Jamie McCallum

LIVING WITH EARLY-ONSET ALZHEIMER'S IN PRISON

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

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

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

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

It's funny, the things I forget in short periods of time. You see, Alzheimer's doesn't take away every thought all at once. I

could only be so lucky. It's taken away from the sound of my mom's voice, the smell of her hair when we used to hug, the way my dad sounded when telling me I'd be okay, kiddo.

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

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

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

I've forgotten details of my case now. I forgot a lot of people

I've hurt all the years I was using and I've forgotten a lot of how we met or the first time our eyes met.

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

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

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

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

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



MOCHA K. SCROGGIN



Our hearts love our hearts make a tune,
It's the loveliest sound and it soothes.
With you it's love at first sight a beautiful Angel god is
Sendin,
Whoever gets you as a wife their time and energy will
be worth spendin.
Gold cant buy it steel bars cant cage it its a love
That is strong,
It reaches the corner of space and makes it over
Any valley no matter how long.
Your eyes and face are so beautiful the prettiest
models want what you got,
Your bodys amazing your hair is lovely the list
can go without stop.
The most beautiful Angels in heaven wish god
made them the way he made you,
elegant and without blemish your a spectacular
sight to view!

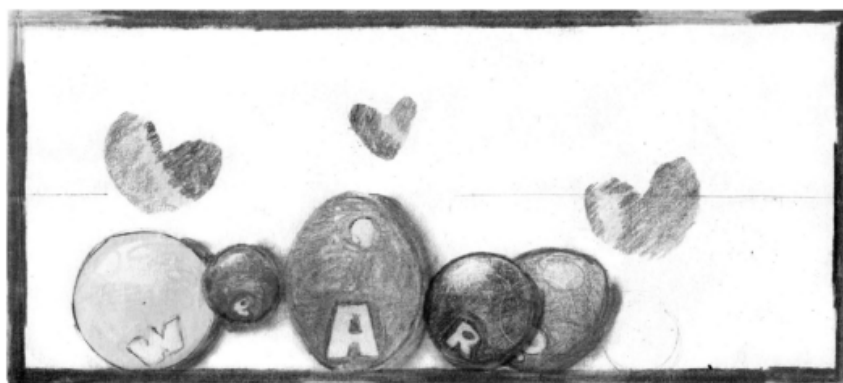
BY: T. and GABBI SINGER POET







HORACE THOMAS





MOCHA K. SCROGGIN





Jack Morgan
90172-051
"Gigi Gorgeous"

WOLF '23

C oming Out

“Once they realize that we are indeed their children, that we are indeed everywhere, every myth, every lie, every innuendo will be destroyed once and all.” - Harvey Milk

Sincere One

I have been in prison now for 14 years.

In 2009, I chose to get involved with a gay man – feminine gay nonetheless. He was not the first, and although whatever the score is or was, I knew at that moment I wasn’t being reserved with my sexuality any longer.

I left that institution, returned to an institution I had been to before...when I was reserved. People come and go in prison – gossip stays, and rumours fester. So I developed a mantra of sorts... “If you want to know something – ask. Ask if you want to know the answer. Do not be offended by the answer to the question you asked.” With that, people who wanted to know would ask. Don’t lie. In prison, alliances and associations are sensitive. Give people the truth, allow them to deal with you or not, whether anyone likes it or not, everyone can respect someone who does not hide. Only telling a few is dangerous in this respect because people and prisoners get offended if they feel they are being made a fool of. In regard to this, I’m open, honest, and proud of who and what I am – gay!

There was no traditional coming-out party or uneasiness, and

I've been fortunate to have strong familial ties and support. My decision to be who I am wasn't motivated by race, although most prisons are racially divided. Those politics should not affect any decision for anyone and never will mine.

If you don't stand for something, you'll end up on the bottom rung of the ladder, being someone you never imagined you'd be, thinking back to how things were. My choice? To stand and be counted, which brings me to the close of "Coming Out." We are perpetually coming out – with everyone we meet. My personal favorite is when I'm playing sports. I'm not a feminine man and am competitive and aggressive in sports. The day always comes when someone who isn't around me constantly asks if I'm gay – it's not disgust on their face as I answer, shoulders square and looking directly in their eyes, it's surprise. That millisecond after "Yeah, you didn't know that?" Sometimes it costs a potential friendship – sometimes not. Who wants a friendship based on judgement? It's challenging, but I look at how long people fought for what they believe is right. I get my strength from our struggle, my inspiration from other LGBTQs and live vicariously through them. I have a sense of self, our struggle and widespread acceptance is bigger than self; we are represented by each other as a group as well as individuals.

I love you all.

Billy Mackenzie

First, your quote is spot on from Harvey Milk. Only for me, I

didn't realize I was indeed "their children" when I was growing up, especially in Texas. I had no others to look up to me to let me know that I wasn't a child of Satan. Watching the news and seeing it in school, people who were just thought to be gay getting beaten up or worse, just sealed my closet, I thought, forever.

My coming out has nothing to do with politics; it was an extremely personal transformation and has developed what the rest of my life will be. What better place to exit the confines I had locked myself away in than do it here in prison, where I am hated by inmates and the system alike. I've endured quite a lot in my 21 years, but I've received so much love and support, it's worth it. Not only does it turn me from victim to survivor, but it also allows me to be someone part of a greater good. Someday, the teenagers of today and the children of tomorrow don't have to look at themselves in the mirror and cry out, "Am I the only one who feels this way about myself, my body, or who I am?"

I could have done it quietly, but that's what I did my whole life, sneaking into movie houses, spas for just a quiet little bit of time to be with someone just like me. That's why I made it very clear to myself the day I got to prison, I would (and have remained) abstinent. For me, when I fall in love, I will not allow the system to move one of us and keep us apart, as my fear has done on the outside. Because if I had just come out as my first boyfriend asked me to do, I would have saved myself and the people I harmed so much grief because I thought they

wouldn't love and accept me.

He's the great gift, once I come out, and learned to love and accept who and what I am, everything is so real. As a very dear friend told me once, just before I'd made the wrong choice, "Billy, God don't make junk. If he accepts you, you have to accept you." She was absolutely right. I also believe that coming out in prison has given me the ability to share what mistakes I made, and still am sometimes, which allows me to show instead of tell you how you should do it.

At first, I was so self-conscious that any word spoken about gays was automatically directed toward me, and we all know gays take everything personal. LOL. I think my coming out in prison was best done to anyone who asks. It's a little harder, though, due to the convicts' perception of what a "punk" should be. That he's always a man who is very "fem." I do not fit that description, and I never could because I'm a gay man, deep voice, who loves men. I don't have a girl's mannerisms. I also don't have a different name than the one given me. It confuses a lot of men in prison. They don't know what to think of it. I call it the "Locker Room Shock." They're like, "You can't be gay, you're one of us."

For me, this has been a blessing in disguise. Saying no has been easier for me. If I had done this in the free world, it could have been disastrous for me. I knew where all the candy stores were, and I wouldn't have set boundaries for myself as well as others. Billy would have sampled every sweet in each store,

and that's not what this is.

There is no right or wrong way to come out. No "magical moment." You just do it. Don't expect, as I did, to do it perfectly. Maybe it won't hurt as bad when you fall on your ass, like me. Just know this, when your tears allow you to see, you will see many hands reaching out to help you back up and moving forward. Always move forward.

A very precious gift has been given to me. You will find that those who judge won't matter to you anymore. And those who matter to you won't judge you.

When you leave that closet, close the door behind you, and break the key off in the lock. Make sure you leave two things in that closet. Your anger and your fear. That's what I did in prison. I've made some very loving relationships inside and out, which have shown me a great deal of support.

Know that I love you, and my hand is always here, like others have been for me.

Please remember just one last thing – Always stay on the yellow brick road.

Steve Howe

Coming out in prison is way harder and can be very dangerous.

There are so many guys who are to the extreme with hate and homophobia. They could have so many other issues in their life and decide to not want to be on the yard anymore and a queer is a top target to attack. Or you will get guys who are so hateful and ignorant to anyone who's gay and they will just cut you or beat you. So it's very hard to be out or let it be public info in here that you are. I've seen some very ugly situations because of it. I decided to finally come out when I finally got sick of hiding and lying, and I'm fearful daily of some wacko coming after me because of it. But I try to be aware. Once it's out, it's out and it's going to be a topic of conversation always because it's such a small world in here and it will be common knowledge until you leave. It's impossible for only a few people to know about it. There are no secrets in here and the general consensus in prison is "Nobody cares about anything or anyone except themselves" Guys in here are worse than gossiping women.

Coming out as a political strategy is not realistic and it's because there is so few of us on any yard. My yard has 1000 inmates and the most gay or t's at one time is like 9 or 10 total so there is no strength in numbers to have political strategy.

My challenges are alienation. Once you're out, you are constantly put down, made fun of, sexually harassed, stolen from, pushed around, no one has respect for you. Guys who like you don't care about you being gay, they will get harassed for being too close to you so it's easier to just stay away from them. It's very hard to find a cell mate to accept you. Guys

either don't want you in or their homeboys will give them shit if they see you in a cel with a straight guy. The cops don't care and try to force

you in and you end up getting beat up for going in or getting a write-up for not going in so you end up with a gay cellie or some weirdo that no one else will live with. It's very hard until you're able to find a spot. All the officers really don't care at all and 90% as homophobic as the inmates and they think it's funny to see us get beat up or harassed all the time and they couldn't care less if you are happy or comfortable so you really don't have anyone to turn to at all. It's very frightening most of the time. I don't know where to find any resources and would love to find some. Like this penpal you all offer is very exciting to me. I have grown very lonely and don't get mail much and I'm dying to have someone to write to. As far as what to be ready for, I advise to keep your coming out to yourself un-

til you have been on the yard a while and learn how things go and who people are. Watch other fags and see the way they get along and be ready to deal with it all for good, no turning back.

My race had no effect on my coming out, it's the same for all races. We get it from everyone. My race tells me to never mess with other races or I will be on my own and I don't expect them to put much in protecting me ever. But I follow the rules to not make any extra drama for myself. It is hell and it never feels comfortable. I'm on my toes all the time. I am treated like I have leprosy, and I only have been close to other

fags and it seems as if they never stay or last very long. I'm miserable, lonely, and scared. I hate it here and I can't wait to leave.

Thanks,

Respect,

Steve Howe.

Rogue

I think coming out in prison is a catch-22 in regards to the cultural environment in prison. A while back I wrote an article that Black and Pink printed called "Is it taboo to be black and gay?..." when I decided to come out a lot was going on in my life that had be pulled in a million and one directions. My decision was purely based on the fact that I was educated in knowledge of self and in the traditional sense and we always hear people say "as long as I'm comfortable with me I don't care what people think." That is an oxymoronic lie. We do care and it is that care that shackles us to that fear. Society is forever depicting "ho- mosexuality" as a sickness and a curse which plays on the mind of the person who is not in a hetero relationship. It is not wrong to love the person of your respected gender. Being gay in prison is chopped up in the different groups: your tops, bottoms, versatiles, and the branches of those groups. You find your particular fetish and you run with it. I love trannys, but I don't define myself by just that. There is no question to it, coming out in prison is more harder because you live in a fishbowl society and when

you break news that big, it becomes cannon fodder. Prisoners are more brutal in that aspect than people realize because prison has that “hardcore” image to uphold. I came out in ’08 because I was tired of lying to myself and there was so much chatter about gays and gay bashing that it was time for me to stand up and be accounted for.

It is possible to be out to an inmate group in prison but that becomes a problem in the long run being that intimate groups will not be around you always and men love to gossip just as much as the females. That’s fact. I think also one of the reasons I chose to come out was you hear that quote, in quote “gang members are not gay and have no reason being gay.” Well let’s just say I am gay, a gang member, a blood, and have a reputation. My story will take more than 500 words, but the fact is I was no longer in fear of what I am and embraced it as days went on and am very proud

to be black and queer. Wouldn’t have it no other way. Coming out in prison is in a sense political cause now in California they are segregating gay prisoners from non-gay prisoners. As for losing, I actually gained in a sense a beautiful understanding family that makes one proud. My mother has been truly supportive. Wish I could say the same about my brother and so-called homeboys. In their

eyes I’ve committed the ultimate sin. My support system consists of my mother and a true dear friend whom I love deeply. I am blessed to have the support system I have. To say it is not hard, that’ll be a lie, but racial background always plays a major role in coming out or being out in prison. Blacks

actually embrace the queer population over the other groups to a certain degree which is kinda ironic when you look at it in its totality. When it's all said and done though, be proud of who you are. Don't be discouraged behind what the next person says and think about your sexuality. Know that who and what you are is no different from who and what you are racially.

Love yourself, and love what you represent,

Yours truly,

Rogue

Me – me

I have been bi since I was in my 20s, but my problem was that I was always the pitcher (is this term still used?) I am a Mexican, I came to prison again in 1991 and am still here, 23 years, a very long time for any human. Finally I've had the guts to do what I have been wanting to do for so long, and that is be the catcher. Now let me tell you, I am still in the closet. It is hard for me to come out because I am supposed to be a vato firme, a hard-ass dude. Even though I let everyone know that I mess with gays, so I guess I have that closet door open, eh? Anyway, I met this lovely African American, and he would go to my cell at least twice a week. Everyone thought that I was the pitcher because they all knew that he was gay, but when we were in my cell we both pitched and caught and it was the greatest sex I had ever had!

I told my family that I was bi about 10 years ago and I have

yet to receive a letter from them though Mom, Dad, Grandma were gone before I had a chance to come out to them. So how do I feel about them cutting me off? Plain and simple. Fuck them! I am now 53 years old and am still running and jumping around as if I was in my 20s. And I know when I get out in 2 1/2 years from now I will find someone who will love and care for me and me for him.

Shane Knight

First and foremost let me say this outloud so everyone in the world will know the truth about me. My name is Shane Knight; I am 41 years old; from Atlanta, Georgia; I am a white male; and I am bisexual. I love both men and women equally and have my entire life. So this is my Coming Out. I have spent the last few months trying to quietly and carefully come out to only selective people in

this prison, and in my life. I can only hope and pray that other people in my situation have more success and better results. I am so thankful that I found the Prisoner Correspondence Project and its members because the information and support I have received from you has kept me positive and confident in who I am. The letter of support from Amber, the newsletter, the openness of the

materials I have received has helped me understand and accept I am not alone. I am not weird. I am not a freak. But most importantly I am not alone. I have felt so trapped and so alone for so long.

Coming out in a federal prison is a very difficult choice. You open yourself up to a lot of different things. People will automatically think they can say and do things to you they never would have dared before. But you have to be ready to handle it with patience and a level head. One of the reasons I am making this decision is I recently had to watch someone leave I was deeply in love with and could never be without of fear of the prison's reaction. I am a white gay male and I fell in love with an openly gay Hispanic man, who is the most beautiful man I have ever seen. I regret not standing up and saying it so bad it hurts. I will not let my fear of being judged and what people think destroy the possibility of a great relationship. Everyone's situation is different, so only each individual person can make the decision to tell the prison population "I'm gay (or bisexual)." Some simply can't because of violence. This is very sad. I wish strength, happiness, hope, and lots of good luck to anyone out there in prison stuck in their decision to come out. Only you know when and where is right. Thank you for letting me share a little of me with you. My life really has just now started. Now I can be ME!

Sincerely,

Shane

Samantha

I suppose I came out when I was in my early 20's and when I

did it felt fabulous because a heavy load fell from my shoulders. My father wouldn't speak to me for a whole year because of it. He said I "soiled" the family name. My mother though it was wonderful. Hell, she grabbed me in an embrace and squeezed telling me she "was happy because she finally had a daughter!" She even cried. As the tears ran down her cheeks my father told me to get the fuck out of his home and never come back because he didn't raise no queers. I knew he was just upset, so I hugged my loving mother and left. And even though my heart was crushed from what was said, I was also happy it was out in the open. After a year, my father and I reconciled, telling me I'll always be his baby. I cried with complete awe and joy. My older brother says he's alright with it, but yet, he refuses to write me. Anytime I write to him, he always has his wife write. This is pretty much an omission on his part. It used to bother and hurt me a lot, but I've come to accept his decision and respect his feelings as well.

When I first came to prison in the 90s, I heard so many horrible and horrific tales about what can happen to us transgender women, that I shaved off all my hair and began to use a razor to my face so I could grow hair. My counselor during that time gave me two choices of prisons I could go to: Mule Creek or High Desert. They sent me to High Desert of all places, a level 4 maximum state prison where they sent the most violent inmates. For a while no one really noticed that I acted a bit flamboyant. I got along pretty well but was expected to be down for the whites on the yard. I understood that politics were a way of life in prison and you didn't falter one

iota, otherwise you got dealt with. After so many years I began feeling guilty and hating myself because I locked myself

back in that dark closet again. I couldn't take it anymore so I sat my cellie down and explained to him who I truly was. When I finished he told me that if I was in my right mind I would lock it up. He also said he suspected I was queer but never said anything because I was cool. So I locked it up and came back out for good. Now I'm SNY and even though I'm out and proud I still keep the respect of others at my right hand. Don't get me wrong, I know that there are a lot of haters out there that still give

us a hard time, but I let their words roll off me like water from a shower. I realize there will always be people who think we (transwomen and the gay community) are an abomination, but I keep my distance from people like that.

My support comes from my family out there on the streets as well as friends but, in the prison system, my transgender sisters. They are a select group because many have too much baggage and are sloppy in what they do. Don't get me wrong, because I know they themselves are going through difficult times, I just try to stick with as few as possible, is all. In some cases it depends on the institution you are at whether or not race plays a part. Like I used to get the blues because I had a Hispanic husband, and even been in several altercations because of it. But then they left me alone after they saw I wasn't going to let them get the better of me.

When I explained to my family and friends that I'm in a relationship in my prison; they always ask if the person is good to me; then when I say yes, they are relieved. They know I'm safe in other ways as well.

My challenges are trying to be able to be called by the right pronouns – Mrs instead of Mr, as well as getting cup-bras and makeup. We as transwomen should have the same rights as the women in CDCR prisons around the state. CDCR should respect and understand that we are women too, and with that I bring this to a close.

With love and solidarity,

Samantha

Todd Moritz "Toddles"

Coming Out in prison can be hard for some people, especially men. In my 10 years in prison I have seen a lot, some are open from day one, some get caught in sexual acts then decide they might as well be open, some finally can't hide their true feelings and get overly stressed so they come out, and last but not least are those who hide it.

We'll start with those who hide it. Why, some may ask. Mostly it's a pride thing, a lot of men in prison have a fear that if they are gay or bisexual they aren't really men. They worry what others will say about them or directly to them. They are afraid of being titled as queer and don't

want the reputation of a gay man, that they will be picked on and ridiculed or won't be respected. Others are just straight afraid of being picked on, possibly assaulted, or extorted.

I personally have been open the whole time. Yes, people have called me names and said things to try and hurt me, but I know who I am and don't care what they say or think about me. I feel most of these men are hiding something in their own closet, and use the ones who are open to try and make themselves look better or manly and tough. I don't want those people in my life anyway, and I am happy they stay away from me. Mostly, I'm respected for my honesty, some may not like my lifestyle,

but respect me because I don't hide who I am. That's the positive-type people I want around me, not those who are so negative.

I chose to be open because for me after hiding my sexuality for so many years, I am relieved to be who I am, without living a secret life or having to lie all the time. It's like the world was lifted from my shoulders and I was finally free from it all.

I have found being open to only a few people could be like playing with fire. It's very hard to trust others in prison and most of the time secrets are not held for long. I'm not saying it isn't done. Do I have secrets about other men? Yes, but most of the time one person confide in another and before you know it everyone is talking. Being in prison is like a giant

soap opera – everyone is always spreading a rumour and saying something about someone else. So I feel the best policy is just to be open and honest, then there is no chance to get burnt by that fire.

The challenges of coming out or being open in prison can vary, depending on who you are yourself.

Everyone handles things in different ways. Personally, I ignore the bad comments and actions that ignorant people may say or do. I realize they are the ones who have issues that only they can deal

with. Since I came out before coming to prison, I experienced how good it felt to be the

true me and not live a lie like I did for so many years. It was like the world was lifted from my

shoulders and I never want to go back to them lies again.

At first, my support came mainly from my family; they are still very supportive of me and my lifestyle, I eventually looked to other people in the gay community to have someone to talk to who understood how I felt and could relate to things I was going through. I would encourage anyone who may struggle with their sexuality to first of all be honest to themselves, then their family. After that seek someone you are comfortable with who is already out, and talk to them on how they handle things and what they may have gone through. If necessary, talk to a counselor or psychologist on what you're going through. I just know from personal experience that being who I truly am is such a relief and makes me feel so

much better and whole.

As for relationships I've had in prison, I have never had a problem talking to my family about that. I

learned to be honest and open about everything, especially with my mother; it has made our relationship so much stronger and I am now closer to my Mom than I ever was. If your family knows of your sexuality, then it shouldn't be hard to tell them of a prison relationship. If your family doesn't know, I would suggest breaking that to them first and letting them have time to digest that before letting them know you are also in a relationship.

I hope my writing has helped someone somewhere. All I would like is for someone else to feel the happiness I have enjoyed since I learned to be open.

Todd Moritz "Toddles"

Selene K Vinson

Coming out in prison means you lose any respect you have had whereas in the freeworld coming out gains you respect from the people around you who can appreciate your resolve and strength to be who you are.

I chose to come out cause it's such a burden and load on a person's mind to pretend who they are not.

I am a woman. Pretending to be uber macho was a façade that stressed me out.

So coming out as transgendered has been a slow process for me. I told my wife of ten years that all my life I've felt I was a woman in the wrong body and I am going to change it so I slowly broke my family in by cross-dressing. Taking estrogen secretly and what once was breast forms I wore turned into small b-cup breasts and dressing appropriately as a woman all the time as was best suited for who I am. I use female bathrooms and live full-time as a woman. I was accepted by my parents and wife only. No one else understood nor took the time to understand.

Now I am in prison where I have to be many or face punishment. I've been off my hormones for 4 ½ years. I am miserable but I've never given up the fight to be the woman I am and I never will. I have moral support from some acquaintances in here and few gay guys I associate with. I identify as a woman/lesbian. I am sexually attracted to women. Very few men attract me sexually. So I guess to an extent I am bi. But my sexual attraction is majority for women. My (real female) wife and I love my choice to be a woman as is suited to my spirit and soul.

Coming out with the support of a loved one is so easy. The ones who don't have love and support have it hard. But I would still encourage them to do so. It takes off a sever burden off their hearts and minds. Be who you are and love who you

love, everyone, and the world will be a better place. Come out!

Love,

Selene

Patrice Daniels

For many in prison, coming out is a very scary thing. Prisons are primarily all-male facilities with an emphasis placed on masculinity. Overt maleness is celebrated. Homosexuality is almost exclusively cast in a feminine light. Even before prison, males are inundated with this narrative. Physically weak boys are labelled and called “sissy”. No one wants to be called a sissy, right? So for many of us, hiding and suppressing things started at a very early age.

Also, in prison the environment is a very predatory environment. And homosexuals are often the prey. It’s also about power and control in here. Prisoners have very little external control over things so many look for ways to compensate for that absence. Which often manifests itself as rape or exploitation. Prison has a social hierarchy that’s almost always adhered to and homosexuals are right before pedophiles and rapists and child killers in that structure. Meaning – we are pretty low on that totem pole. So there is little incentive to come out (at least visibly).

There is a community of closeted individuals who know each other and are only out to each other. So – it is possible to only be out to a few people. Most often they keep the secret because you keep their secret (and often you guys sneak and have gay sex – relations - etc).

Sometimes people are forced out of the closet. Which sucks. I believe it should be someone's own choice. Now, the only exception would be if the person being outed is someone who openly publicly talks bad or negative about homosexuals. Often the loudest “gay bashers” are in the closet. I have heard guys talk bad about homosexuals and personally know I had recently received oral sex from them or was anally penetrated by them. I will bust a guy out if he is misrepresenting who he is (via verbally disrespecting homosexuals).

As a black gay male it also complicates things. Homophobia is extremely rampant in the black community in America. Most of us were raised with the Biblical mandate to not engage in gay sex. We were taught it is taboo and sinful behavior. So at an early age I was placed in a very precarious situation. I had these desires and urges and yet the people I loved most told me they were wrong. So once again I had to learn to suppress what I felt.

To be perfectly honest – I didn't decide to be authentic ALLY myself until I was about 31 (I am now 38). I lived a life of external validation for many years. But once I learned to like

and love me – internal validation was something I truly cherished. I no longer cared about what others thought of me.

The other fact of the matter was this – there was a small openly gay community in prison and they were tightly knit. So it wasn't like I was going to be completely alienated. Human beings are social creatures.

As far as my immediate family was concerned – they loved me no less. They didn't necessarily approve but they didn't condemn me either.

I believe coming out is more about personal development and transformation than politics. Ultimately, we are human beings and there is nothing defective about us. The key is for us to accept and believe that – despite what others say. With that said, coming out can be a political statement as well but it rarely is – unless you're a public figure or a celebrity of some sort or someone highly visible within the community.

I hope my insights have been of some use. Ultimately I want my narrative to be one of solidarity with all oppressed people.

Thanks for your time,
Patrice



**GRANT ME THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT THE
THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE
THE COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN
AND THE WISDOM TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE**

*I*mportance Of Queer Friendships

Michael Pelletier

I have been in prison since 1992. I was sentenced in the State of North Dakota to 20 years for murder. At the time, I was in my 34th year of existence. I had known from a very early age that I was gay, but growing up in a catholic family in the 60's and 70's, I was so far deep in the closet that I dared to never venture out into 'my true world.'

Prior to this prison sentence, I had only had a handful of gay experiences (more so of an experimental thing). I had met a guy while serving a provincial sentence in Ontario and that was wonderful, but I returned to the closet as soon as I was released from prison. In North Dakota, I met someone who became my lover. We were very, very careful not to be exposed for our 'crime' of homosexuality. To be caught would have been devastating to both of us. In the closet in prison. In effect, a prison within a prison.

In 1996 | was transferred to the State of Oregon, where I learned much about myself and the whole underground prison gay community. I met many gay prisoners. The first one taught me an extremely basic, but difficult lesson. We must be true to ourselves and live as we choose to be. We will be

judged by others, hated by many, but if we stay hidden in our own shells, happiness and joy and love will always elude us. I had spent all my previous years of existence living as a hypocrite -- pretending to be what I wasn't. I was married (to a woman) for 11 years, raised a stepson, and played the game of social acceptance. I was very miserable. That was more of a prison than any sentence handed down by a judge.

Now that I was beginning to accept myself as who I truly am, many doors opened for me. I actively sought out fellow gay prisoners. There is a sense of fellowship that develops with others of the same orientation. There may be various reasons for this: a need to feel accepted, to belong, a sense of security in numbers (not unlike those who join prison gangs), the need for sexual satisfaction, friendship, and understanding of one's position in life and within the prison system. Or there may be another reason, the one which, for me, has been the driving factor-love. Everyone needs someone to love and to

My sentence in the United States ended in the year 2009. I was immediately deported to Canada and am now serving a life sentence on a separate murder charge. I began this sentence in February 2010. In the four years that I've been in the Canadian prison system, I have served time in 4 different prisons. Many believe that the U.S. prison system is worse than Canada's. In many respects it is, but I know as far as being a gay prisoner, Canada is much more difficult to survive in.

I have met many gay prisoners since my return to Canada, but the issue of openness and acceptance by the straight population

is more intense.

For me I have taken the following stance: if someone asks, I will not lie about being gay. Just ask and I'll tell. But I do not openly flaunt my orientation. I will not stand on the table top and shout out that I am queer. I have been asked by gays if I was, and then we move forward from there. I have been asked by some straight prisoners and I told them I was gay. I always follow that up with the question, "Is that going to be a problem?" One in particular had asked me that question because someone told him to stay away from me because I was gay and "after him." After an open conversation, he accepted me as I am. He is not gay but we have become very close friends. We've been separated for three years now and remain in constant contact.

There is an inherent danger to anyone who is known as gay in the prison system, more so in Canada from my personal observations. But one can exist, survive, and actually 'live' within the system. Some people have instincts that tell them who they can 'hang' with, and who they shouldn't. It doesn't always work-I've been burned and betrayed upon occasion. But if you don't take the risk, seek out those that appeal to you, you will never know. Worse than taking the risk and reaching out is to remain within the self-imposed prison of

I've found love and sex in prison. It can be so. The journey and the rewards are worth the chances one must take. Be yourself. Reach out. When you find one, use that friendship

and support to keep you going. If you're extremely lucky you may even find 'The One.'

Cody Riley

One of the key factors in making any kind of friend is having things in common. Meeting other gay men develops a special bond because you're connected on a higher level than with ordinary friendship. As gay men face persecutions and struggles our heterosexual counterparts are spared from. Overcoming this adversity is what builds that strength. This was apparent with the Women's Rights Movement of the 70's and the Civil Rights Movement of the 50's and 60's. Adversity drew like minded people together.

In prison, we're drawn even closer. Prison is an environment where the gay man is nothing more than a sissy or a punk. Developing queer friendships reminds us that we aren't alone in our battle. It gives us confidants to talk to and people we can confide in. Sometimes it's just nice to be able to admire someone's ass together with someone else. Sadly there is often the added benefit of safety. I say sadly because it's sad that there are still gay men and women out there being assaulted and abused due to their sexual orientation.

For me, friendships like I had with Selene and that I have with Mallory allow me to feel more comfortable in expressing my thoughts and emotions. Knowing you always got your gurl

there to watch your back makes prison life just a little more tolerable. So cheers to all the queers-and their friends too!

Joey

To come out in prison is a bold and daring move. For many it can be dangerous, risky, ostracizing. I'm proud of those who have; envy; respect them at the same time. In my situation, it's so different, my upbringing, the gang, politics, homeboys, reputation of being a hard and respected individual. Plus, I have kids, a wife, lots of females I've known intimately. I'm attracted to women as well as transwomen, especially feminine guys. Being in and out of prison all my life is how I realized how real that interest is. Very salacious thoughts constantly flood my mind. I chose to not be out in prison to avoid all the unwanted drama and negative responses it will bring. We all have our positions and chosen standings in prison, certain things are unacceptable. So I chose to keep it on lock.

On the streets, I've only engaged in 2-3 experiences. None of them broadcast my/our business. To this day the one who meant most and understood me still writes. My only regret is not being able to be in her life 24/7. She's everything I still dream of to this day. Complete fulfillment in every way. I can't wait to get out. Politics is different, for me, it would be personal growth, acceptance and development. I'm worried that I'll disappoint my family, my kids, hurt my wife. When

I'm able to I also write penfriends who are understanding fear. and on my level and who can relate. Race isn't an issue, I'm Mexican and so are those I'm involved with outside.

But in prison yes it is an issue for me. It would cause a lot of issues I'm not sure I'm prepared for. I wish I could say different, but for the most part for me, I'm okay with waiting til I get out. My interested are outside these walls. A lot of in prison relationships are without protection and can entail a lot more than I'm willing to risk. So when I think of my situ-ation, It's not exactly on the same level as others who do come bursting out from confinement and need to have their 'real' side out. In a sense, I am, but in truth I am not. So again I do admire and am very proud of all of you, envy is a sin I'll some day overcome. My love, respect and support to you all.

DeSean

I have been bisexual since I've been old enough to understand the reasons behind my thoughts of women and men. At a young age, I was caught giving oral sex to my classmate in the restroom at elementary school. Needless to say my Dad beat me for an hour saying he was not raising no homo's in his house. But, what my father didn't know was that his baby boy (me) was the subject of sexual experiments by his two older brothers. It started by me putting my older brother's dick in my mouth while he was asleep and beginning to suck when he woke up. I guess I was pretty good because he never stopped

me and this became our "little secret." Later on I got bold to my other brother and he played mad. He fucked me in the ass in return for him to keep my secret from our father. Sounds fucked up right? Well that was my childhood until my brothers grew out of their "needs", but I never stopped needing.

I knew I was gay the first time I watched porn and I was turned on by seeing a women give head and wanting to do or give the same pleasure. But back to the subject... All through middle and high school I had to play straight, and this troubled me a lot. I had built a reputation among my peers but I was only living the half truth. It was not till I got incarcerated in my 10th grade year that I learned the value of Queer Friendships. There was a Queen named "Mercades" that I had a relationship with that opened my eyes to what had been missing. Upon my release from jail me and "Mercedes" hooked up and she showed me or introduced me to the queer side of town. I'm from Hous-ton, Texas, so of course I'm talking about "Montrose and Westheimer".

Being around friends who understand me is the best feeling in the world. I don't have to close the door on my bisexual side like I do with certain people, but I can be myself and be accepted for who I am. It takes the pressure off day to day living too, believe it or not. You would be surprised how simple things, like not having to limit your conversation, goes a long way. And when me and my Gay and Bi friends go out, it's the best times I have! So if it's just conversation, or physical bonding, queer friendships are very important. Those who

don't take things for granted understand. I'm currently locked up in Texas Prison, and you would be surprised how many inmates are living a lie and not being their true selves. But that's a whole different issue! :)

Justin Wilson

Having friendships with other queers in prison is cool. Being in prison it's hard to express your feelings to other straight men. They don't open up as much on certain topics. It's easier to sit down or walk the track and open up to other queers. It gives you the opportunity to talk about the guys you like, think are hot or ugly. You can talk about what guy you want to do or be done by, lol. It gives you the chance to laugh and cry about whatever you want.

Friendship with queers on the street is just as important as well. Not only can you do all of the above, but the gay bars are even an option. There is more support such as parades, communities and many other activities.

Being in prison I have had a few very important queer friendships. I would say it was a few years ago with two men. Chris (aka Tinkerbell) a feminine man and Joseph, who was kind of feminine. We met when I was put in an open-boy dorm with them. They would come sit by my bed and talk about the streets. Chris and I would play cards. Joseph and I would play chess. Of course, I would always beat their ass, lol.

I would write to them regular letters and dirty letters; telling them all the freaky things I would do for them if we were behind closed doors. I was very romantic with them. I would write them poems, draw them pictures and share what very little canteen I had. Only once I actually had fun with one of them. One day Joseph squatted down and gave me oral sex in the shower while another gay dude watched us and looked out for us so nobody would catch us. It was amazing, but I wish we could have done so much more. When it was time for me to leave that institution, Chris and Joseph both cried and didn't want me to leave. I realized how much they really did care about me. To this day, we still write by 3rd party (two years later).

In prison sometimes there is an automatic base for friendship with other guys and sometimes there isn't. I think it depends on the situation. Queer friends don't always have to negotiate sexual tension. The feminine queers usually never have sexual tension towards each other. They don't base their friendships on that. They just like to get into their title groups and associate and open up to each other. They are very supportive with each other. Usually though when it is a feminine and masculine man there is sexual tension from the beginning.

In conclusion, I think queer friendships are great. I enjoy it in prison. And I hope that I meet queers once I am released to the streets, I hope to find and make gay, bisexual, lesbian and transgender friends. I hope to get involved in the community and that I get to go to gay bars in my area. I hope

this could have been of some use to people and thank you for your help.

I want to say thanks for letting me share my thoughts and opinions. I love you all!

Rogue

Before there were such places as PCP, Black and Pink, etc., queer inmates did the best we could to maintain correspondence with each other. Today it's a different story where the world is literally opened up to the LGBTQ community in prison. The show of solidarity from the community helps those who have lost support of loved ones due to perpetual systemic ignorance. When I read the question on the importance of Queer Friendships, I immediately thought of my dear dear dearest friend Bex whom I met through penpal, so this subject matter fits just right.

Bex and my friendship is actually hard to define but without question, I value Bex's friendship with all of my heart. At times I find myself asking myself is she real due to the fact she is completely genuine, really funny, and I believe an intellectual juggernaut. Our letters aren't letters but mini discourses ranging from various topics and she has opened me up to the world of transpolitics on a scale I thought wasn't possible. Fact is I wasn't aware that there was one until she enlightened me on the subject and we were just scratching the surface on that subject so...See that's Bex, she'll ask you if you

know about 'such and such' and would love for you to read 'such and such' and dialogue that way. I enjoy her friendship immensely. Inspiration comes in many forms and yes, Bex is inspirational, for her perspective gives me clarification on things I've read, written about, or thought about writing.

Friendships are great character builders and we rely on friends to be that extra voice to tell it like it is when no one else will and in an environment such as prison, pushing that proverbial rock up that hill wouldn't be possible without that encouragement. Queer penpals I believe (and I stand on 100%) are forged on trust, honesty and truthfulness. Without these three affirmations, friendships would not stand a chance. Yes prisoners' intentions, 3/4 of the time are not sincere. That's fact, and it's these intentions that do the most harm, as we all know, cause people will misrepresent themselves just so they may get a leg up and eventually ruin something solely based on greed and material. I believe it was my second letter where I made my intentions clear with Bex, reminding her of the trick (cons) prisoners say and do just to "win".

Family and friends cannot for whatever reason relate to you as a queer peer can despite there being a "cultural" (prison) difference. That I believe stems from the solidarity and struggle that all queer women and men under the rainbow banner fight for. Justice, equality, freedom and happiness and knowing someone out there actually cares for you despite what you're in here for says a lot. I am grateful for Bex's

support and friendship more than she even realizes for showing me things which I believe would have went unseen. The lessons taken away from it all is simple-be thankful, grateful, and most of all sincere with yourself and your queer peers. I look forward to the day to return the favor cause I know the importance of what a letter can do to an individual's spirit. It brings happiness and calm into his/her sphere. | I don't know how often it is said, but without question from one queer inmate to you, thank you for all that you're done, the material shared, allowing us to voice our innermost thoughts and having a true family who'll never turn your back on us because of one's sexual orientation.

With Love and Solidarity Always,

Rogue



Mi Bella





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