

# Feather Bricks

The Official Newsletter of North Park Theological Seminary's  
School of Restorative Arts



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# Welcome from the Editors



Dear Students, Writers, Thinkers,

Here is our first newsletter. A huge congrats to Damen Price for providing the title *Feather Bricks* and the following explanation: "This title is in harmony with Galatians 6:2: 'Go on carrying the burdens of one another, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.'" This edition's theme, "growing," is based on author and Professor Emeritus Peter Elbow's idea from his book *Writing without Teachers* that writing is a "growing process" involving four stages: "start writing and keep writing; disorientation and chaos; emerging center of gravity; mopping up or editing" (25). The word "growing" also reminds me of this summer season before a harvest, specifically in my community garden. Because of Covid-19, I had no access to my garden until June. (Usually, we start planting in April.) When I visited for the first time since winter, I was surprised to see that my Calendula or marigold flowers had re-seeded themselves from the previous year and were sprouting up everywhere. I learned that the word "Calendula" is a Latin diminutive form of "calendae," meaning "little calendar," and that the common name "marigold" refers to the Virgin Mary. The petals are edible and used in salads, and the oils have been deemed by some as medicinal. These little orange and yellow flowers, like the writing SRA students are doing, just keep growing and growing. I hope you enjoy reading examples of such growth in this newsletter.

Write On! Professor Melissa



Welcome to our first issue of *Feather Bricks*! As I reflect on the theme of growing, I have realized how far I've come as a person and writer. It's close to being six years since I began my journey as a writer, and I have to tell you the truth: my first piece sucked! The story was good, but the method and vehicles I used to tell it were not. It took a lot of writing and growth to get better at it. Melissa and I believe that there is a writer within everyone that is dying to come out. Yet, for some reason we find more reasons to suppress that inner-writer. We also come up with reasons to delay or negate the greatness within us. We hope to dispel these ideologies through *Feather Bricks* and ask that you channel your inner-writer within you. If you do so, greatness will soon follow...

Alex Negrón

THEME:

# GROWING

Excerpt from Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers*

Growing is certainly a proper word for what people and other living organisms do to arrive at a “grown or “mature” state. They go through a series of changes and end up more complex and organized than when they started. It is no metaphor to speak of a person in the following way: “He really grew...” I wish to speak of groups of words growing in the same way. I advise you to treat words as though they are potentially able to grow. Learn to stand out of the way and provide the energy or force the words need to find their growth process.

*“I advise you to treat words as though they are potentially able to grow.”*

The words cannot go against entropy and end up more highly organized than when they started unless fueled by the energy you provide. You must send that energy or electricity through the words in order, as it were, to charge them or ionize them or give them juice or whatever so that they have the life to go through the growing process” (Elbow 24-25).



# Letter to Peter Elbow

Benny "Don Juan" Rios

Dear Mr. Elbow,

I hope and pray that you and your family are well, especially during this world pandemic. I first became familiar with your work when I took a Tutoring Writing class and was assigned a handout that you wrote about freewriting. It really resonated with me because I realized that freewriting was already a practice of mine, and I didn't even know I was doing it. During this Covid-19 crisis the administration put the facility on lockdown, which resulted in North Park students in here having to finish our assignments via correspondence. Professor Melissa sent several students here your book *Writing without Teachers* for leisure reading and asked me if I wanted to write about my reactions to reading your book. One of the writing prompts included writing a letter to you, so here I am, writing you this letter.

Overall, I really appreciated your book, and I strongly believe that a teacherless class in the art of writing is possible here at Stateville. Our study hall classes are nearly three hours long once a week, which makes it ideal to form a small group of

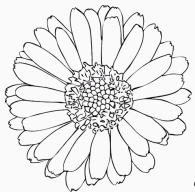
up to 12 students to meet once a week for at least 10 weeks. It will certainly be a diverse group both in writing styles and in life because it would include both inside and outside students. Even though your book was published in 1973, I find that the ideas in your book are still relevant today, especially in the prison context since we continue to learn and operate without today's current technology. For instance, on page 62, you mention getting ideas onto index cards when growing your writing, whereas today students would use their phones, tablets, or laptops. For us, we'd still be using index

cards. Also, on pages 136-137, you write about how we should just keep writing without worrying about grammar. Today, technology offers spell and grammar check, so students most likely write without worrying about grammar because they have a device that takes care of that for them. We, on the other hand, have to be mindful of grammar, so it's still a learned practice for us to just write without worrying about grammar.

*"I find that the ideas in your book are still relevant today, especially in the prison context."*

On page 139, when writing about "The Yogurt Model," you claim, "Therefore, any class which really achieves this take-off level should see in themselves a precious culture to be preserved. Yogurt. Not a class with an end, a 'term.' They should think of themselves as having created a living culture that can continue even when the membership has changed." This is exactly the type of culture that we have created through North Park here at Stateville. This is the main reason that I am certain that a teacherless writing class that you advocate for would work here. Being that our community and our culture is all inclusive and always has its doors open—I'd like to extend to you an open invitation to visit one of our classes that is led by North Park's writing center. If you are ever in the area, it would be an honor to have you as our guest so that together we can all learn as students as we come up with new and innovative ways to become better writers. Thank you so much for your contribution to the writing community. God bless you, and as our Professor Melissa says, "Write On."

Sincerely, Benny "Don Juan" Rios



# Letter to Peter Elbow

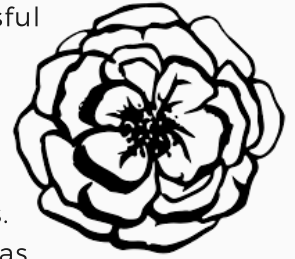
Mr. "Tall Mike" Sullivan

Dear Mr. Elbow,

Hello. Approximately a month ago my professor sent me a copy of your book *Writing without Teachers* and asked me to engage with its contents. After I did so, I found myself engulfed in a feeling of optimism and confidence in the way I approach writing. I especially enjoyed how you pointed out the flaw in the ingrained and backwards thinking in the way our society is taught how to approach writing. The way I interpreted society's teachings on writing, before I read your book, was as my coach telling me that running backwards is the correct way to reach my maximum speed. I also enjoyed and appreciated how you presented a more natural and comprehensive approach to writing. I believe that your philosophical approach would be successful here on the inside if it was fully instituted. In saying that, I shall make an attempt to explain my position.

Our writing center here in this maximum security prison is made up of predominately people of color who, due to their circumstances, decisions, and life experiences have acquired more self-education than formal or institutional education. This story also includes myself. Most people of color who come to prison were living on the margins, which is a place where survival of the moment is more important than learning how to write the traditional way. Therefore, our natural abilities become our guide through life. What that means as it relates to the realm of writing is that the institutional format of outline and diction (in that order) have not been ingrained in us. It is because of those circumstances that the natural progress of organic development is our foundation in thought and actions, which translates in our approach to writing.

By me having that historical understanding of the constructs of our country, I became very interested in knowing how successful your theory of writing without teachers was when you introduced it to Boston's black community in the 1960s.



I have a hunch that it was successful there, which is why I believe it would be successful here. These two communities (both Boston and this prison), while miles and decades apart, parallel each other in one aspect: our society does not demand prisoners or black communities to write according to society's standards unless they are forcing themselves into mainstream America as a skilled worker or pro' se in court.

As stated above, I believe that your theory of writing without teachers is a good philosophical approach with use in here because you would not have to uproot any bad habits, which would allow your theory to be built on the foundation of human nature. I also believe the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) gives credence to your theory. In one of Kant's writings, "The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals" (1785), he says that Ancient Greek philosophy was divided into three sciences: physics (laws of nature), ethics (laws of freedom), and logic (reason). Now you may be wondering what this has to do with writing. Well, Kant goes on to say that there are universal rules of thinking within the human mind which follow the path of the laws of nature. It seems to me that you understand, like Kant understood, that the natural process of the way human beings think and grow should dictate our behavior and approach to things, which includes writing. That's why I believe having you come to our writing center and explaining your philosophical approach to writing will help liberate the writers here and give them the confidence to write with the freedom which is a necessity for success.

Sincerely, Mr. "Tall Mike" Sullivan



**Scripture: 1st Corinthians 15:35-37**

“Some will say, how are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? You fool! That which you sow does not happen except it die. And that which you sow, you do not sow the body that shall be, but mere grain--that it may be of wheat or some other grain.”

Before I came to prison, I lived an unholy life that was enslaved to the Master of sin and destruction. Part of me wanted to change, but my addictions to drugs and the street life were deeply entrenched in every fiber of my being. Before I could surrender and before I could grow into the person God had destined me to be, my old life had to perish.

This passage is a great illustration of what God’s purpose is for His illustrious kingdom. We might start off one way, but with the planting and the watering of the Holy Spirit in our lives, our growth as citizens will be plentiful and fruitful. In order for growth to occur, some part of you that is not needed has to die first.

**Prayer:**

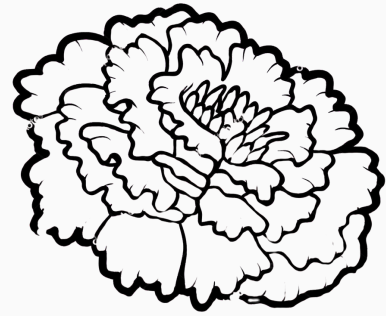
“Heavenly Father, we are in a season that is filled with pain and great sorrow. In the midst of this sorrow and pain, we ask that you open our eyes so that we may see our growth—whether it be spiritually and/or mentally. We ask that you allow us to grow in love, compassion, and mercy. We ask that you allow us to grow in strength and forgiveness. We also ask that you get rid of anything that impedes that much needed growth in our lives. Amen.”



# INTERVIEW

*with*

## PROFESSOR ANDREW MCKENNA



Q: The theme for this first newsletter is based on writer Peter Elbow's idea from his book *Writing without Teachers* that writing is a "growing process" that involves four stages: "start writing and keep writing; disorientation and chaos; emerging center of gravity; mopping up or editing." What do you think about Elbow's idea of "growing"?

**A: I think Elbow's got it right. I recall a statement from a wise book on science and philosophy: "All writing is rewriting." Perhaps that summarizes Elbow. As to "emerging center of gravity," I would elaborate a bit on that compact metaphor: Look for the links in what you've written to find your thematic center, what in sum you've been trying to get at, and rebuild around that. By rebuild, I mean editing: revise, eliminate here, elaborate there.**

Q: How do you see the idea of "growing" apply to your work in the classroom?

**A: "Writing is thinking." So says Toni Morrison in an essay of hers, but others, including myself, have put that out there, among them James Reston, noted NYT columnist for decades: "I don't know what I think until I read what I write." It is essential to get over the idea expressed by "I know what I want to say but I don't know how to say it." Not true; it's not how our brains work. There are vague ideas, words, phrases, rolling around in our mind and thereafter flowing from our pen at first, but thinking them through to clear and organized statements, that's real writing.**

Q: Do you have a favorite quote you'd like to share with readers that is related to the idea of "growing"?


**A: Ben Franklin addressing the founders of our nation: "We have to all hang together or we'll all hang separately."**

Q: What else would you like to share with our Stateville SRA students in the context of these times?

**A: Well, I've often had occasion to say that the Bible is telling us our story, especially in "these times," which are potentially the worst the world has seen. Yahweh gave his people the famous choice between life and death, flourishing and destruction, by which we have come to understand in "these times" as self-destruction. The notorious, uproarious, and on occasion hilarious excoriations against idolatry that the prophets warn us away from, as from self-destruction, compel our attention to the idols we worship today, however "Christian" and "modern" we may see ourselves. If we think it's just about "graven images," we are the "refuge of lies" that the prophet intones against.**

# *Rhymes & Reasons*

## **"WHERE HAVE YOU GONE, BLACK MAN?" BY WILLIAM T. JONES**



"Where have you gone, black man?  
Have you gone back to being the great  
King you once were in the past?

Where have you gone, black man?  
Have you gone back to the mother land,  
Where the sun always shines warm on  
your ebony body and gives it strength  
And adds to the richness of its blackness?

Where have you gone, black man?  
Is it to the black woman,  
The mother of all people, the beautiful  
African Queen?  
Has she engulfed you with her love and filled your days with  
freedom?

Where have you gone, black man?  
I witness you stand strong and  
proud all through history.  
I saw you lay the first stones at the pyramids. I also saw you riding  
in the space shuttle with so much pride.

Where have you gone, black man?  
Is your house now found in a crack pipe?  
Is your home now found in a dark, dirty prison cell, lost and  
forgotten for all time? Where have you gone, black man?  
The little black children, and mothers, would sure like to know.



# Rhymes & Reasons



## “IS WAR REALLY NECESSARY?” PROUDLY WRITTEN BY JAMIE THOMASSON, U.S.N.V.

Is War really necessary? Ask a Veteran, he'll know.

For when your family sleeps safe at night, He is the one who is told to go.

You say cowards have white faces, but white faces did not fly those planes.

Why is everyone looking at my ancestors, Why do they get all the blame?

Have you fought in a war? Does your PTSD drive You insane?

I know you are hurting, I am hurting too. I have news for you.

Your ancestors have white faces, just like mine.

See it depends where they migrated

Where they had spent the most time.

Were all descendants of Noah, everyone was saved after the flood.

Don't worry when I say all this to you, for I only speak out of love.

So if blaming one skin color of people is your medicine of healing  
and it helps to ease your pain

I will forever be your huckleberry and I will do it in Jesus' name.

Since you have never met me or have seen my big heart in action

I will simply say this to answer the original question:

Is War really necessary? Next time I am told to leave in the middle of the night

Know I do it out of love, so you and your family can sleep safe, warm, and tight.

I am simply not one out looking for a fight.

So I will leave it up to you to correctly answer the question,

Is war really necessary?

Please Take Care and God Bless as he saves you while you take all your medicine.

P.S. I did descend from people who refused to die, that's why when they had

Dropped me into the war zone, **I made it back Alive!**

Thanks be to God, **Jesus Saves**, Amen.

# Rhymes & Reasons

## VIRTUAL CONCERT BY RYAN MILLER

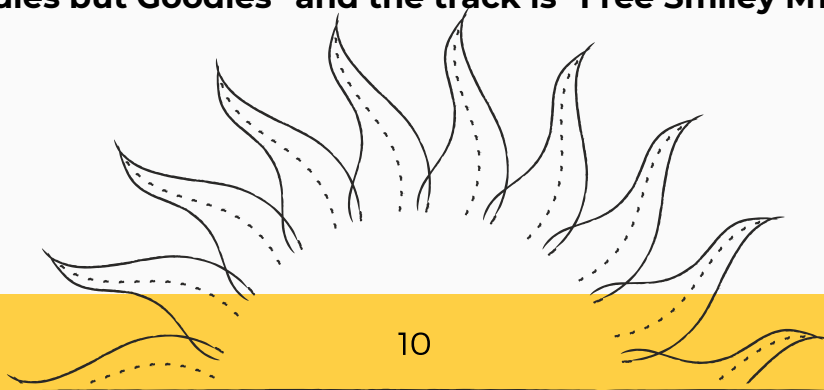
"I WANT TO THANK EVERYONE FOR COMING OUT TONIGHT...YOU'RE AN AMAZING AUDIENCE. YOUR ENERGY IS RIDICULOUS! AIN'T NO PARTY LIKE A NORTH PARK PARTY! WHERE ARE MY VIKINGS AT? MAKE SOME NOISE!! I KNOW THESE ARE PERILOUS TIMES-BUT BE NOT AFRAID! I'M GONNA KICK THIS CONCERT OFF WITH A SONG CALLED "LET IT RAIN." GOD, LET YOUR WILL BE DONE..BECAUSE WE ARE GONNA PRAISE YOU THROUGH THIS STORM...LET'S GO-"



"Let it Rain" Verse 1 by Lazarus

Lord show me your benevolence-show me your omnipotence  
 Valiance & vigilance-God I need deliverance  
 Shelter in your pavilion-cover me with your pinions  
 Lord I need your strength-Lord I need your resilience  
 Perseverance Persistence-Shekinah glory your presence  
 Stamina endurance-every moment every instance  
 Forecast is overcast-downpour got me downcast  
 This outlaw gon' outlast-I'm a bounce back Lord cuz' I-  
 Been through the fire been through the flame  
 desert the tundra every terrain  
 Valley the plain-wind & the rain-earthquakes hurricanes & I've  
 Never given up-Jesus' blood inside my cup  
 Satan don't hit hard enough. I'm a keep on lookin' up  
 Stayin' motivated & dedicated-armor plated & consecrated  
 Soul can't be incarcerated-Praise I elevate it  
 In trials tribulations-Circumstances situations  
 Through the precipitation. I see your orchestration. (Let it rain.)

**P.S. I actually wrote "Let it Rain" to an instrumental I found on my tablet by a guy named "Hydrolic West" who happens to be incarcerated. The album is "Oldies but Goodies" and the track is "Free Smiley M13."**



# WA Corner

## The Burroughs Writing Center: Preserving her Legacy by Alann Vega



The honor of being a former student of the legendary Dr. Margaret Burroughs' creative writing class and my current experience as a tutee with North Park's writing center here at Stateville Correctional Center have given me a vision for writing centers on the inside. Yet, by no means is my vision an attempt to argue a "one size fits all" model. After all, the history of writing centers on the outside has taught us they can take on a variety of forms. Thus, we can expect the same in the making of the history of writing centers on the inside. In spite of the variety of forms writing centers can take on anywhere, there are things that unite writing centers such as our writing and the relationships that are made in those spaces. Grounded in my experience thus far, my vision of a writing center on the inside is one that will emphasize restoring and creating relationships among our inside-out communities.

Dr. Burroughs understood the complexities and trauma that led most of us on the inside into contact with the criminal justice system. The first time I met Dr. Burroughs was in 2007 inside Stateville's panopticon. At that time, prison administrators were using the panopticon to house residents placed in segregation status for violating prison rules. Back then I was one of those residents placed in segregation status for six months for violating a rule against the use of drugs. Yet, Dr. Burroughs did not allow anything to deter her from walking the long length of the panopticon as she visited cell by cell. I will never forget the day she stopped in front of the cell I was in and began talking to me in Spanish. As we spoke, Dr. Burroughs handed me a copy of a newspaper and shouted,

"Read, write, don't just sit there! This is not a cell; this is your workshop, so get to work!" Following my release from segregation, I signed up for her creative writing class and got accepted. From that point on, my writing journey began.

Twelve years later, my experience with North Park's inside-out writing center also began. There I was, introduced to my writing partner Amy, a young lady in her third year of undergraduate studies working as a Writing Advisor for North Park's writing center. Up until that point, I didn't know there was such a practice called Writing Advisor. Our introduction took place when we were matched as writing partners through one of North Park's Urban Studies courses. In spite of the challenge of getting my draft back in time to meet my professor's deadlines, I found the creative approach of receiving feedback from Amy to help revise my paper very effective.

On the inside, most men, women, and children find themselves here as a result of a dysfunctional upbringing with more opportunities to do wrong than right. Thus, our dysfunctional upbringing led us to offend, hurt, and take others' lives. In gang culture, most of us inherited gang wars, and we don't even know why they began. For example, if we were to take a survey asking current and former gang members what was the original reason that caused them to become rivals, none would have the answer. At least on my behalf I admit that I don't know the answer to that question the same way I admit I don't know what models, ideas, or to what degree it is possible to imitate the roles and practices on the inside that are already happening on the outside in writing centers.





I do know, however, that the value of creative and restorative practices within any space, in return, allows limitless possibilities.

For the many people who didn't get a chance to meet Dr. Burroughs, it may come as a surprise to learn that she never did take the role of a teacher in her creative writing class, and she did not like accolades. Instead, Dr. Burroughs gave birth to a mother and son relationship with each and every one of her students. As a result, those of us who were her students began to address her as "Mama B." Her creative writing family was composed of Hebrews, Christians, Muslims, and Revolutionaries. Like North Park, Dr. Burroughs did not close her door to anyone with the desire to learn, and if you didn't have the desire to learn, she visited you in your cell as she did with me. Mama B emphasized with all the pain, trauma, and anger her sons had bottled up deep inside. Her dedication to raise her sons up to respectable men was extraordinary. Mama B's genuine love and dedication created space where we could discover our voices, be it through a poem, essay, song, painting, or sculpture. Dr. Burroughs' methodology was simple: she listened. She would listen to our stories as she encouraged us to "Write it down and protect your voice!" Twelve years later, Amy reminded me of the importance of listening, and to this day Dr. Burroughs' words continue to echo in my mind every time I write or speak.

In conclusion, the legacy that Dr. Burroughs made here at Stateville Correctional Center cannot be forgotten and overlooked by those with the desire to create writing centers on the inside. Nor can we allow the value of inside-out writing partners through correspondence to be depreciated. For those who have genuine desire, love, and dedication, my vision of a writing center on the inside that emphasizes restoring and creating relationships is possible. The space Dr. Burroughs created and North Park's inside-out Writing Advisors and writing partners model can allow us to preserve and continue to offer the space to restore and create relationships with each other, be it inside or out. A writing center in prison should be a space that allows writers to feel comfortable in sharing their stories, struggles, and visions as we seek to answer Dr. Burroughs' question, "What will your legacy be?"

*"Community does not necessarily mean living face-to-face with others; rather, it means never losing the awareness that we are connected to each other."*

*-Parker Palmer*

# WA Corner

## Excerpt from “An Outlook from Within” by DeCedrick Walker

Whenever I hear someone rap, I take notice of two things: word combinations and how lyrics are delivered. The great ones are able to combine both, and if they are overlooked or underrated it is usually because of something inadvertent like time or chance, but the most common factor is relatability. But those who breakthrough, like a Jay-Z or a Nas, recognized these factors and adjusted accordingly. For instance, in the movie *Belly* there is a scene where Nas, whose character was Sincere, sits on a park bench in front of a project building with a 12 year old smoking a blunt. The 12 year old shows Nas (Sincere) a pistol as a way to demonstrate the height of his status as a street cat. In return, Nas implores the youngster to rise above the madness the youngster described by thinking outside of where he was. The scene ends with the youngster acknowledging Nas' wisdom and them parting ways. The power of that scene was in the fact that a lot of people from black and brown communities who are imprisoned were that 12-year old at one point or Nas at another point, or they had witnessed a similar encounter. Being 12 and living like a grown man isn't an anomaly in our community. Back to an earlier point, the 12 year old was maintaining the public identity of his culture. It took Nas (Sincere), who understood that level of identity maintenance, to give the youngster the information he needed to help him get out of his condition.

The most important tools I have been exposed to as a Writing Advisor are the various ways in which conversations could be facilitated by specifically framing them as collaboration, as Andrea Lunsford refers to “...a dizzying variety of modes about which we know almost nothing” in her article “Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center” (95). The modes I have found to have universal appeal are the positive politeness strategies that Brown and Levinson outline in *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors*: 1) tutors can give understanding and sympathy; (2) tutors can notice or attend to students' accomplishments or conditions; (3) tutors can convey that they and the students are co-operators (Fitzgerald and Lanetta 428-429).

In the movie scene, Nas has utilized all three of these strategies, but specifically he demonstrates the effectiveness of (2). By extension, a man improves himself if he humbles himself to simply ask for assistance in a prison setting, but it is up to the person whom he has asked to recognize how much intestinal fortitude it took for someone who has been psychologically and culturally trained to demonstrate high status performances to demonstrate that kind of vulnerability. But, like in the movie scene, vulnerability does not always show through asking a question. Sometimes it comes out or shows through men conversing informally. Given the fact that, as stated in James and Drakich's work, in “mixed-sex informal conversation, the amount of time women talk is equal to or exceeds the talk time of male peers” (29), it does not stretch the imagination to conceive of an environment where men are not inclined to share what they are thinking.

Thus, any theory proposed that neglects to accommodate the challenging conditions of a social group neither accepts the legitimacy of its concerns nor, as James Baldwin notes in “If Black English Isn't A Language, Then Tell Me What Is,” “the acceptance, and achievement, of one's (the social group's) temporal identity” (Baldwin 157). Worst off, in this specific instance of incarceration, that is mostly-overwhelmingly comprised of black and brown faces, this kind of neglect highlights the “brutal truth...that the bulk of white people in America never had any interest in educating black people (Baldwin 159), and that our experiences are despised. Nas first told that story (movie scene) in a rap called “One Love” years before, and he was able to transmit that portion of a verse into a scene in a movie. Ultimately, what he only took seconds to say likely took considerably longer to film. Most prisoners are trying to learn how to formally transmit the legal ideas executed through an informal course of conversation into a real life trial scene in order to be freed. Writing Advisors equipped with the right tools can assist with this process.





# WA Corner

## Excerpt from “Collaboration” by Robert John

A writing center is not an actual physical location, at least not in a prison context, but rather, it is a community of like-minded individuals comprised of writers, aspiring writers, writing tutors, and even writing professors, who collectively make up a fluid, adaptable network, or, as Kenneth Bruffee would likely refer to it in his article “Peer Tutoring and the Conversation of Mankind,” as “a community of knowledgeable peers” (329). In such a community, information and knowledge are both created and discovered through conversation, collaboration, and the sharing of resources, or, once again, as Bruffee would describe it, through “normal discourse,” which is the basic operation under the premise that everyone within that network understands what is legitimately relevant, or not relevant, as it pertains to their craft (329). Thus, our writing center here at North Park School of Restorative Arts, Stateville Campus, is no “center” at all, but more so a non-binary entity which I call a Mobile Writers Network. As with any network, collaboration is the essential ingredient and determining factor in the success or failure of the entire operation.

*“As with any network, collaboration is the essential ingredient and determining factor in the success or failure of the entire operation.”*

The functioning Mobile Writers Network was born out of necessity, as most worthwhile inventions usually are, due to the unique set of circumstances facing incarcerated writers that make it doubly difficult to progress as a writer, most notably a lack of basic resources most non-incarcerated writers have at their disposal: reference books, computers, the internet, or the freedom to simply drop by the local library--or campus writing center-- to run some ideas by a colleague. Ironic, isn't it, that a lack of freedom could be such an inconvenience for the incarcerated writer? Nevertheless, just as running water always seems to find a pathway through whatever obstacle is in its way, so too does the Mobile Writers Network.

Incarcerated writers have learned to utilize one another as resources, which is exactly what makes collaboration the essential component in the success of the overall network. This goes far beyond merely loaning one another a dictionary or thesaurus, though we do that too. The resources we share among one another are far more valuable than any book or paper—we share our time, our ideas, suggestions, critiques, experiences, and knowledge. We make room for the conversations that need to take place in order for one or the other to find something along the way to get them to the next level of their writing. As Alicia Brazeau so astutely observed in her article “Groupies and Singletons: Student Preferences in Classroom-based Writing Consulting,” “writers both need and want discussion that engages them actively with their ideas through talk and permits them to stay in control” (285). This is a concept we go to great lengths to promote within our network of writers. A relevant case in point comes to mind. Due to the recent Covid-19 pandemic, those of us within the academic community at Stateville Correctional Center have been faced with a complete institutional shutdown. Though our counterparts at the North Park campus in Chicago have had to deal with inconveniences of their own, what makes this different is that the entire prison facility is locked down, meaning no incarcerated person can leave their cell for anything other than a medical emergency.

All visitation has been suspended, as well as all academic programming, which means that, regardless of whether any of us may have assignments due, we do not have the opportunity to go to the library to do research or speak to our professors about what they expect with these upcoming assignments, or perhaps more importantly, take part in the many spontaneous collaborative sessions that take place among our peers at school or other locations we tend to congregate. Simply put, we're kinda isolated from the community we've come to depend on. Yet, as I stated earlier, collaboration is the essential component to the success of our network. Knowing that I had this collaboration essay due, I knew I was going to have to figure out a way to communicate with one of my trusted fellow writers to run my ideas by him and see what type of feedback he would offer—which is a part of my normal writing process.



# Book Review

*The Right to Write* by Julia Cameron, reviewed by Ignacio “Nacho” Alvarez

I remember that when I first received Julia Cameron’s book, I was none too pleased. As a matter of fact, my first thought was: “Not again!” What exactly did I mean by this statement? Well, that I would be required to read another drab book full of methodologies on writing effectively and eloquently. I even hollered over at Scott Moore, a “published author” of the highest quality, that I was going to toss this little yellow book off the gallery. (Which I really wasn’t, as I was just venting my disappointment.) Nonetheless, I’m glad I did not go ahead with my empty threats because I must admit that I really enjoyed Cameron’s book.

It’s not at all what I was expecting. If anything, it felt like Cameron was addressing an audience of one: Me! It definitely felt like she understood me and the writing that I aspire to bring to the table. She spoke a familiar language that was not over the top. She kept it simple and to the point but with a tremendous amount of depth within that simplicity. What really hooked me, however, was her opening sentence in the Author’s Note. She used a word that caught me off guard. That word was “dismantle.” This word just pulled me in like a fly being drawn to the light of a fly zapper, but unlike the fly, I have

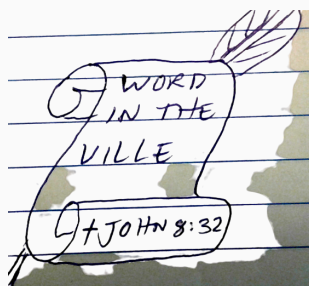
lived to tell the story. I knew from the moment I saw and read that word that this book that I was about to chuck off the gallery was not your ordinary run of the mill type book. If anything, it was unique quite simply through the implementation of that “disjunctive” word: dismantle.

Julia Cameron, through that singular word, had me at hello, but most importantly she aided in my deliverance. I know this might sound a little over the top, but it’s pretty accurate, at least in my eyes. For me, Cameron didn’t dismantle the myths and old wives’ tales associated with writing. But what she did do was dismantle the ideologies I had contrived within the chambers of my heart and mind. Her writing, essentially, stripped me down to the bare essentials, which was much needed. But in the stripping down, there was actually a peeling away of layers of bias and prejudice towards this discipline. There was also, thank God, a re-mantling. There were seismic shifts in my paradigms, broadened lenses, and an embracing of that which I fought against for so long: writing.



# Guest Columns

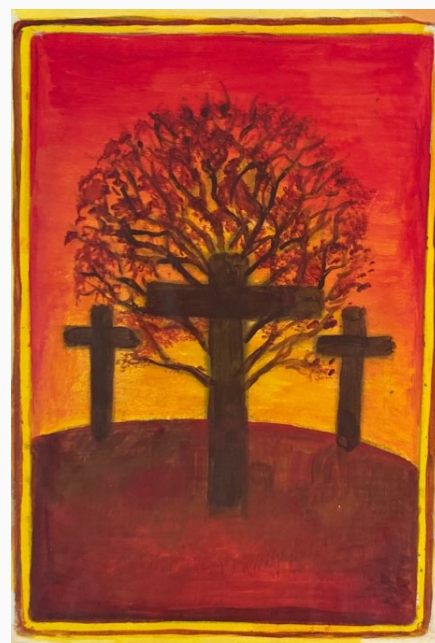
We held a vote to elect a title for our newsletter. Overall, 55 votes were cast (28 from inside students, 24 from outside students, 2 from professors, and 1 from our Educational Facility Administrator.) In addition to our winning title **Feather Bricks** submitted by Damen Price, we would like to honor our runners up by dedicating a section in upcoming newsletters called **The Amplifier** (title submitted by Alex Negrón) *as a space to highlight new voices and writers previously unpublished in Feather Bricks* and a column called **Grafted In** (title submitted by C.D. Everett) that *focuses on examples of building community*. Finally, thanks to Steven Ramirez for **Word in the 'Ville** which will title a space for you to relay kudos, prayer requests, and notes of mourning. Be on the lookout for **The Amplifier** and **Grafted In** columns in our October/November newsletter.



(Image by Steven Ramirez)

## WORD IN THE 'VILLE

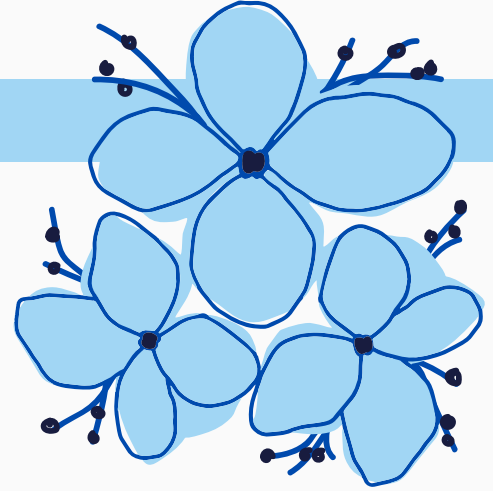
- Ryan Miller would like to honor Chester (C-Mac) McKinney and Jacob Miles for "being so kind and helpful since I have moved into F-house. Is it possible to get them certificates for faith in action or something?"
- The Writing Center would like to give Extra Mile Awards to Scott Moore, Michael Pizarro, Benny Rios, and DeCedrick Walker for continuing to document writing conferences and submit written conference reports during the pandemic.
- The Writing Center extends *mil gracias* to Ignacio "Nacho" Alvarez for his valuable feedback on Neisha Anne S. Green's article on code meshing. Nacho's feedback will be used in a fall anti-racism training for incoming Writing Advisors.
- The Writing Center awards special thanks to GED teacher Ms. McGrath for copyediting and to outside Writing Advisors Darby and Belinda for layout and design on this newsletter's inaugural issue.
- *Feather Bricks* welcomes submissions for our Oct/Nov issue; we would also love to add a matching logo to our title in the form of original artwork you submit.
- As a community, we continue to mourn the deaths of Ronald "Rusty" Rice, Joseph "Big Fella" Wilson, and the loss of other family and loved ones, with special condolences expressed for Amotto Jackson's loss of his wife.
- We continue to hold all affected by the virus in our thoughts and prayers and welcome future prayer requests here.



"Grafted In" image by C.D. Everett

# Self-Care: American Heart Association

Tips to Manage Stress (Adapted from the American Heart Association)



## Positive Self-Talk

We all talk to ourselves. Sometimes we talk out loud, but usually, we do it in our heads. Self-talk can be positive ("I can do this" or "everything will be OK") or negative ("I'll never get better" or "I'm so stupid"). Negative self-talk increases stress. Positive self-talk can help you calm down and control stress. With practice, you can learn to shift negative thoughts to positive ones.

For example:

Negative	to	Positive
"I can't do this."	→	"I'll do the best I can. I've got this."
"Everything is going wrong."	→	"I can handle this if I take one step at a time."
"I hate it when this happens."	→	"I know how to endure this; I've done it before."
"I feel helpless and alone."	→	"I can reach out and get help if I need it."
"I can't believe I screwed up."	→	"I'm human, and we all make mistakes."

# Self-Care

(Adapted from the American Heart Association)

## Stress-Busting Activities

Doing things you enjoy is a natural way to relieve stress and find your happy place. When stress makes you feel bad, do something that makes you feel good, even if only for 10 or 15 minutes. Some of these activities may work for you:

- Make art -- draw, color, paint, write, or sing.
- Read a book, short story or magazine.
- Write a friend or loved one a letter.
- Meditate or stretch.
- Write down a list of 10 things that make (or have made) you happy.

The key is to find your groove and make it a practice. You'll be amazed at how quickly you may start to feel better once you disrupt the cycle of stress.

## How to Draw a Marigold



### Step 1:

Show the position of the flowers by lightly sketching three circles and an incomplete circle behind one of them. Lightly sketch several stems. Sketch one of the stems so that it bulges out as it meets the circle.



### Step 2:

Inside the circles, draw petals using a series of curving, wiggly lines. Draw several lengthwise lines in the bud.



### Step 3:

Add short, curved lines to the petals to make them look tufted. Add a few more wiggly lines to the petals so some of them look as though they are bent back.



### Step 4:

Redraw the leaves to give each leaf a jagged edge. Draw a line lengthwise through the center of each leaf to show the vein. Redraw all the stems, making sure that each flower has a stem.

# Sudoku

Logic-based Number Game

**Easy**

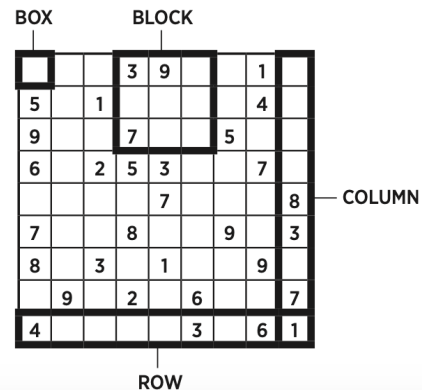
		6			1
3	1	4	5	6	
1		2		3	5
6	3			2	
			4	1	6
4	6	1	2	5	3

## How to Play

1. Each block, row, and column must contain the numbers 1-9.
2. Do not repeat any numbers within each block, row, or column.
3. Use the process of elimination to determine the correct placement of numbers in each box.
4. The answers appear on the last page of this newsletter.

**Hard**

1	8							7
		7		9		2	8	
2	6	5		8	7	9	4	1
7					3	8		4
		6			4	7	2	
	4	8		7	5		1	9
6	7	2				1		
8			7	2	1	4	9	
		4	6				7	2

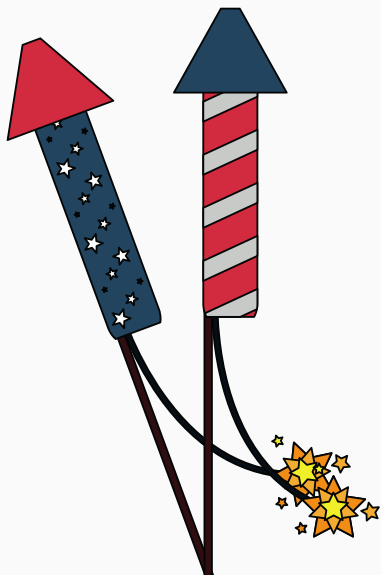


# Creative Nonfiction

"Memory" by Thomas Mills

Well, today is the 4th of July. I guess ever since I could remember this day has been about BBQ and fireworks. The celebration of this country's independence never held much importance in my mind. For some strange reason, I awake thinking about two near death experiences that happened on the 4th. On one 4th my grandfather gave my brothers, sisters, and I a large box of fireworks to share. He gave us all just one rule: "All fireworks must be lit by a wick."

Yeah, I know I took it more like a suggestion. Plus, it's more fun throwing fireworks compared to lighting and running. To make a long story shorter, one firecracker blew up in my hand. I was more shocked and scared than hurt. Yes, my hand hurt, but I had all my fingers, so no need to tell anyone, right? The swelling of my hand got so bad I didn't have to say anything; it did all the talking.



My second experience of near death came from me throwing the spinner firecrackers out my bedroom window. Light, throw, and repeat. Sounds simple enough, right? The great thing about spinners is if you time them to blow during flight, they will take off like a rocket. The throw in question I thought was good. The spinner caught flight but flew right back into my room.

Yes, you guessed it. I had a fire in my room burning paper, clothing, and the rug. The room quickly filled up with smoke. I started this story with two near death experiences. I felt that way because I almost blew off my hand and burned down the house.

Most people would believe that was enough to qualify as near-death. I would say it was the beating I received behind both experiences that qualified them. It's crazy that I woke up thinking of those rememberable life experiences. My mother and I should have a good laugh about this later today.



# *Creative Nonfiction*

*The Gift of Honesty by John E. Taylor, Jr.*

*I will never forget when my father took us to McDonald's and what happened. We went through the drive-thru to get our order. The worker had put in the bag more food than we ordered and paid for. My Dad got back in the drive-thru line to give the food back. I said to my father, "Dad, why would you go through the trouble of returning the food you did not pay for?" He said, "Jr., God has a greater gift for me for being honest." It wasn't the only time I witnessed my father returning something he shouldn't have received. It just so happened the Manager was at the window with the worker. He gave my Dad a gift certificate for being honest.*

*In 2013, we were receiving our commissary brought in bags in the cell house, instead of walking over to commissary. When my commissary arrived, I did not go through it to make sure everything was in it. The Sergeant walked off and said, "Mr. Taylor, if you are missing anything just let me know." He knew if I was missing anything, I would tell him the truth because a couple times I had things in the bag I had not ordered, nor were the things reflected on my receipt. I would always give it back to the officer, in spite of my cell partner telling me, "Man, you are crazy; that is a gift."*

*Later that night, I noticed twenty stamped envelopes were not in my bags, and the stamped envelopes were on my receipt. I needed the stamped envelopes because I was out of postage. The next morning, I told the Sergeant I had paid for the stamped envelopes but they weren't in the bags. The Sergeant asked me, "Who passed out the commissary?" I told him who was working the previous evening. The Sergeant said, "He is working overtime in C-House. I will call him since he passed out the commissary."*

*The Sergeant came back to the cell and said, "Taylor, give me your receipt." I asked him, "What did the Sgt. Say?" He said, "If Taylor said his stamped envelopes was not in his commissary bags, he is telling the truth." Before the shift was over, the Sergeant made sure I received my stamped envelopes. I smiled when the Sergeant gave me the stamped envelopes. The Sergeant asked me, "What are you smiling about?" I told him years ago my father had taught me about the gift of honesty. I am in an environment where over 90% of the staff doesn't believe us. But I shall continue to be honest at all times.*



# Creative Nonfiction

*“Ootu, Part I” by Luigi Adamo*

*When I was a young child of six or seven years old, I had these very strange recurring dreams. What made these dreams so strange was not only their substance, but also how vividly realistic they were, and how I was able to remember them so clearly after waking. These dreams weren't subject to the “shadow memory” that normal everyday dreams are--where we wake up and forget them soon after brushing our teeth. Not these dreams. I still remember them all with crystal clarity some 30 years later. I remember those dreams even better than I can my actual memories from around that same period of my life.*

*I loved having these dreams, and I would actually get excited as my bedtime approached. Other children would fight and argue with their parents to stay up past their bedtimes, but I never would. I'd rush off to bed as quick as I could, and try to hurry off to sleep, but my excitement over having one of my special dreams often prevented me from doing just that.*



*Whenever I did have one of my dreams, they would always begin the same. I would drift off to sleep, then in my dream I would wake up, get out of bed, and walk into the adjoining bathroom. Once in the bathroom, I would begin staring into the bathroom mirror, looking into a reflection of my own eyes for a period of time until something about the world around me seemed to shift. My consciousness would no longer be with the actual me looking into the mirror, but with the reflection of me in the mirror.*

*As the reflection of myself, I walked out of the reflected version of the bathroom, into a reflected version of the world, leaving the actual me staring blankly into that bathroom mirror. I never seemed to be solid as my reflection self, and I would walk through doors and walls with ease like they were made of smoke. Perhaps it wasn't me at all but the world itself that wasn't solid; I can't be sure, but I would walk through any walls and doors that stood between that bathroom and my backyard. I would walk around the back side of our family's above-ground pool, to a corner of our property where a 7-foot wooden fence and the walls of the above-ground pool created a blind spot that no one who wasn't in it could see, and there I would meet with Ootu. (To be continued in our next newsletter...)*



## *Creative Nonfiction*

*Boy, Can Jesus Build Great Sandcastles by Ronald “Rusty” Rice*

*Last year, after I wrote a paper about the greatest commandments and the Good Samaritan, I realized that my love for others was restricted by how poorly I loved myself. In order to increase love for myself, I meditated and focused on the love God has for me. I went from being self-centered to other-centered. One method I meditated on that helped is the following “dream”:*

*What a beautiful summer day it is! The sun is shining with only a few white, puffy clouds in the sky. I decide to go to the beach where the stiff breeze of the ocean will keep me cool. When I arrive, the wind blows through my hair, tossing it in every direction. I walk on the beach barefoot and feel the warm sand between my toes. I hear the roar of the surf as the waves come pounding in on the sand, followed by the quiet hiss of millions of tiny bubbles breaking as the air escapes from being trapped by the waves. I close my eyes and let the sounds wash over me. It is so peaceful and calm. I feel the tension in my back and neck melt away. I feel alive and content. I open my eyes and see a playground in the distance where a man is pushing a small boy on a swing set. I can hear the boy’s laughter, so pure and innocent it makes me smile. As I walk closer, I recognize who these two people are. Before my astonished eyes, the man is Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior; the boy swinging is me when I was seven years old. I look up at Jesus and say, “Thank you Jesus for taking such good care of little Ronnie.”*

*“You’re welcome,” Jesus replies. “I like being with you and little Ronnie because I love you both so much.” My heart is so full of love that it feels like it will burst right out of my chest. Turning back to little Ronnie, I remember all the bad things he is about to go through with no one to help him. I feel so sad for him. I tell him, “Little Ronnie, sometimes the world can be a hard place to live. I won’t lie; you will go through some tough times. I want to let you know that you won’t go through them alone because Jesus will always be with you. I am here to tell you that when you turn your heart to love God and Jesus, you will know they love you too. That love will be with you forever. You’re going to make it, Little Ronnie!”*

*Then Jesus, Little Ronnie, and I go back to the sandy beach and make sandcastles together. Boy, can Jesus build great sandcastles! Jesus says, “I have made castles in heaven that are much better than these. They are there waiting for you to live in. I built them because I love you and others so much that I want you near forever.”*



# *Alphabet Inspiration*

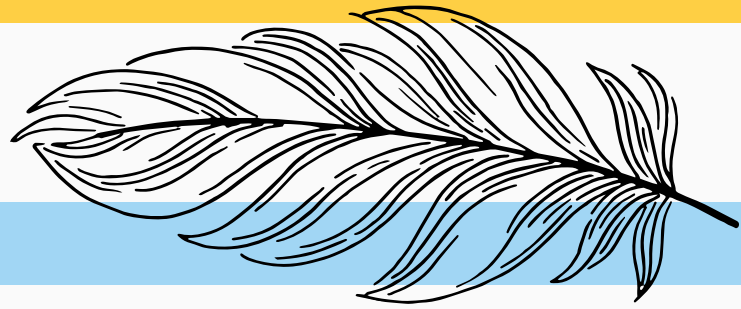
by Elton Williams

Choose one letter of the alphabet and express a thought wherein each word begins with that chosen letter. This is meant to be a fun exercise in vocabulary expression. The more profound the statement or quote, the better. Submit your creations for letters "B" through "F" to be printed in our next newsletter.

## Elton's example:

Able Abraham authorized an all-American amendment aimed at abolishing abuses against Africans. Anarchists, absurdly assembling as adversaries, actuated aggressive action, agitating already angry associates and attempting attrition.

# Closing by Dean Kersten



It is with great joy and excitement that I receive the news of the development of this first newsletter. I love every aspect of its collaborative planning, its deep spiritual creativity, and the raw honesty of its many voices. It came as a great gift to both Sandi and I, as our commitment to the SRA has been a compelling force of spiritual and prophetic renewal since we began this journey with you. The theme of this first edition of growth is so fitting. Growth is an act of the will and issues forth out of the heart. Thanks to all for the determination to bring this project forward, and a particular word of thanks to Melissa Pavlik and to all of the inside out collaborators. Celebrating with you the growth of the beloved community. Grace and Peace.

David Kersten, Vice-President of Church Relations and Dean of North Park Theological Seminary

3	1	6	4	2	5
6	4	2	5	3	1
1	6	4	2	5	3
2	5	3	1	6	4
5	2	1	3	4	6
4	3	5	6	1	2

**Easy**

1	8	9	5	4	2	3	6	7
4	3	7	1	9	6	2	8	5
2	6	5	3	8	7	9	4	1
7	2	1	9	6	3	8	5	4
5	9	6	8	1	4	7	2	3
3	4	8	2	7	5	6	1	9
6	7	2	4	5	9	1	3	8
8	5	3	7	2	1	4	9	6
9	1	4	6	3	8	5	7	2

**Hard**

## Sudoku Answers

