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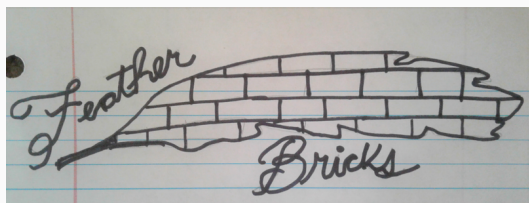
Feather Bricks

Cover Art by Michael Sullivan

Feather Bricks

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Letter from the Editors



Dear Readers,

One of my favorite books is *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl. It's about a survivor of the Nazi death camps who became a psychotherapist. This book is Frankl's story with psychological applications to the traumas of being locked up, isolated, oppressed, and abused. The author's basic point is that in survival, life, getting through anything, everyone has a "why," and that's the motivation of life. So, this newsletter theme "What is your Why?" brings all kinds of responses. We learn from reading these responses that "your why" isn't necessarily just about survival, but also about why we are even here on earth, made by God. In this issue, I thought of a few new sections like "Dialogue & Discuss" where a person can respond to something someone else wrote in a previous issue—if they wanted to. Plus, "Dialogue & Discuss" includes new pieces that speak out on social justice controversies and offer praise to writers previously published. "Scripture Challenge" is another new section I hope we can each work on living a scripture-rooted lifestyle and add a new Bible verse (or verses) to our spiritual memory and arsenal for years to come.

--Leanne Childs, NPTS School of Restorative Arts Student, Logan Cohort

Dear Intellectual Travelers,

At night, when I lay down in my bed (or my mom's couch during the summer) I sometimes contemplate "Why am I here? What is my purpose?" I often fall asleep without a definitive answer, but I've recently come to a conclusion (thanks to a conversation with my mom 😊). Our purposes and whys can change throughout our lifetime. When I was little, my why was to wake up and see my mom's face every day. When I was a teenager, my why was to make it through high school to become an adult (even though much hasn't changed since then). And now, my why is to continue with my growth into a better person each day that can be remembered for such generosity and willingness. I'm really grateful for the opportunity to read and dwell in the spaces that keep you all moving every day. May we all continue our search for meaning!

--Ameerah "AB" Brown, NP Writing Advisor, Chicago Campus



Dear Readers, Writers, Thinkers,

Happy 1st Anniversary to *Feather Bricks*! Leanne asked, last semester, why I had paired her with AB as a writing partner for our WRIT5000 course for Logan SRA students. Whatever my answer was then, I have a better one now: Leanne and AB so consistently offered one another writing support, they established a flow that allowed them to co-edit this edition--without the chance to meet in person--or even on Zoom. How meaningful it is for this publication, under these co-editors' guidance, to serve its purpose: to reach a readership such as yourselves. Write On! Prof Melissa



Scripture Challenge with Leanne Childs



I would like to introduce this new column, and I ask that in future issues the rest of you will contribute in order to keep this going. I'ma kick it off with one of my favorite scriptures (and one of the few I actually do already have memorized, which means, yes, admittedly, I have an advantage for this month's challenge). The idea behind this "Scripture Challenge" is for each of us readers to incorporate whatever scripture we have read from the bimonthly *Feather Bricks* into our everyday living; hence, the "challenge."

In a daily devotional or daily bread type of meditation, you are introducing yourself to a new concept every morning, and, if you're like me, anyway, you likely forget everything you read about before that first hour of the morning is over with. My hope in this challenge is that we will be providing ourselves with many opportunities over the course of each day and weeks to find success in committing one verse to memory and to our lifestyle. We will be able to give full focus to only one concept at a time so that we all get an idea of what this new column and challenge entails. Simply submit your scripture—let the editor choose that month's one entry, and then let God do His own work through His own Word by allowing the Holy Spirit to make sense of that scripture for each individual.

***Where can I go from Your spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend up into Heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
If I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there shall Your hand lead me,
and Your right hand shall hold me fast. (Psalm 139 :7-10)***

Remember the challenge: FOCUS. When you realize you are forgetting to focus, re-focus and try again and prayerfully; by the time the next issue comes out, each of us will be living more habitually in God's love and faithfulness as described in Psalm 139:7-10. - Leanne Childs



I like Leanne Childs' concept to not only read a daily devotional, but also to "own" a scripture to live by and memorize. It is equally important to not just memorize but infuse in one's life. My scripture I'm still applying since my yester-years trials' and challenges at Menard C.C. is fruitage of the spirit at Galatians 5:22-23. Each morning I lay on my bunk, I pray for endurance to face the day's challenges. Also, let me be quick to listen, slow to speak, and try not to let anyone or things spoil my joy, peace, love, also, have respect for all even though some may not reciprocate my kindness. Faith is guidance to build attitude of patience (long- suffering), kindness, goodness, and mildness. My self-control was hard back then. Some cellmate (celly) may try to throw you off your square (Christian behavior). I used to count to ten. However, along the same lines I recite the nine fruitages of the spirit with a small prayer of discernment (2 Tim. 2:23-26). Galatians 5:22-23 I try to infuse into my inner-self, daily.

--George Ross, NPTS School of Restorative Arts Student, Stateville Cohort

Dialogue & Discuss



Response from Antonio "Slim" Balderas

I overwhelmingly enjoyed the poetry submission in the June/July Feather Bricks from Jami Anderson, "Be the Voice," and the submission "Overcomer" by Deborah "Dee-Dee" Sims. I felt the profound spiritual depth and insight in these beautiful poems. In some ways, it might be difficult to fathom or fully understand the spiritual connections characterized in these women's poems. However, one can't help but reflect upon the clear and very personal introspection as these poets' written words come alive and cast a very vivid and clear reflection of their presence. The selfless intensity of these women's writings gives off a great feeling of quality and depth. In closing, all I can illustrate in response to these special poems and poets is "I feel you." I remain, your new friend and very esteemed comrade,

Antonio Balderas (Slim),
NPTS School of Restorative Arts
Stateville Cohort

Responses to Leanne Child's "Resilient Dwelling Vs. Homemaking: Where Shelledy Went Wrong"

Response #1 by Priya Bajracharya

There are a few quotes or points that I really thought were important, and interesting as well, in the essay. The first quote from the essay is, "She challenges the idea that in-person instruction is less about academic and more about providing the incarcerated with a means to be able to self-reflect, find growth, and further develop within that education" (Childs 24). In my opinion, education or academics in an incarcerated environment is a method of self-reflection and development for an individual in different areas. Through the education provided in the incarcerated environment, individuals should be able to find the meaning to life and a new future path for them. They might be able to seek different opportunities to be happy and successful in their life journey.

I believe that most scholars and incarcerated women would readily recognize that the majority of people who are in prison have suffered in multiple degrees of traumatizing events throughout their lives, which likely contributed to their choices to engage in criminal behavior" (Childs 25-26). Personally, I agree with this point because I also think the majority of events in one's life leads to individuals engaging or not engaging in criminal behavior. Take an example of theft, an individual involved in stealing something might have some issues of their own which may be related to their financial problem, due to which theft was the only option they thought they had in order to fulfill their necessity.

"Her position is that higher education is not as much about finding ways to be able to temporarily adapt, as it is about taking up residence as well as using agencies of the classroom while in prison as a means of growing and developing towards personal betterment" (Childs 26). The quote itself highlights the importance of academics or education in one's life through the example of incarcerated individuals. It talks about education not just being a temporary method of adapting school life or life in general; instead it is an idea and a method which teaches individuals the knowledge of self-development and growth towards improvement.

Response #2 by John E. Taylor, Jr.

Thank you, sister Leanne Childs, for a powerful academic essay. There were so many powerful moments; it is obvious you already have a good writing foundation that will prove to be helpful throughout your academic journey with North Park Theological Seminary.

First of all, I want to commend you for purposefully aligning yourself with a positive community because it will continue to open up doors you cannot imagine. I do like the example you shared about the value of the community when you wrote, "Resilient dwelling is a concept used by all individuals in survival mode.

It is well-documented that the Jewish people suffered horrendous torture and oppression while caged inside the Nazi concentration camps, yet those who survived found their strength to hang on to their humanity, help each other, and found recovery despite the atrocities they suffered." I want to inject one factor that helped the Jews: they remained a positive community. Beyond remaining associated with a positive community that helps support your academic desires and soliciting others to join your community, there will be a number of academic challenges. As a seasoned academic in this SRA program, let me offer some helpful contributions for your academic journey:

1) I would secure a composition book or notepad to take notes from every book you are assigned to read. Also, look at your syllabus for what will be required for the various writing assignments. As you read the various books, when you come across something you may use in one of the writing assignments, highlight it in your book notes. Also make sure you write the author's name, book title, and page number where the note came from so you don't forget to cite it later on.

2) I will never forget what my Old Testament Professor Dr. Jerome Ross told us the first day of class: "Seminary is not a Bible Study or Sunday School experience; it is an academic experience." You will read and hear things that may contradict what you have learned from Sunday School or Bible Study. There will be things in books or various Professor's lectures you may not accept or believe. You will eventually have an opportunity to support or defend what you believe by stating why you believe what you believe, against what you may have read or heard.

3) Time management will become your best friend. You will have to sacrifice some of your regular TV shows to complete various writing/reading assignments on time. If you are going to be successful in your courses, your studies will have to be your priority.

4) Please don't hesitate to ask your Professors any questions you have concerning the coursework. They know that the course materials may be challenging, and they will address all your questions.

5) Your first two semesters will probably be the hardest semesters.

Again, thank you for such a powerful essay. I hope the contributions I've shared will prove to be helpful to you and your fellow students in your cohort. God Bless each of you.

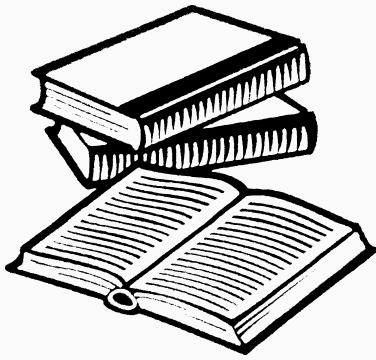
Shalom & Agape, JT, Stateville SRA Cohort

Response #3 by Thomas Mills

Greetings! I found myself proud in our Writing Center summer "book club" to read Leanne Childs' response to Maggie Shelledy's article. I feel that she represented the views of most incarcerated beings well. I have a few points I'd like to highlight to the group.

First, I agree with Leanne's views on education's importance. Like her, I seek education as an avenue to grow and learn. I believe that most incarcerated beings desire to better themselves, just not everyone has the opportunity to obtain improvement through formal education. Leanne shares a point I believe gets little consideration when talking about studies, that each person is an individual with different levels of autonomy and self-awareness. Now, add the effect of traumatic experiences—you have broken beings whose deficiencies manifest in the inability to make conscious decisions toward self-improvement for different reasons.

Second, post-trial detainees who seek education most often upon release move on to productive citizenship; the numbers support that. However, I wouldn't place all the credit on education as the reason for decreased recidivism. I would argue that individuals who seek improvement regardless of location desire more out of life and for themselves as the reason.



Education is just one avenue some take for improvement.

Next, Leanne raised an important consideration about the role of higher education in society moving forward. Is higher education as it is a waste? I would argue continued learning is never a waste. Now, higher education is one of many ways incarcerated beings can maintain their humanity, be empowered, become self-reflective, and grow. Whichever avenue a person chooses, the goal of education is to develop knowledge and expand one's thinking in new areas. Pedagogy does offer students a wider range of views and perspectives from history, and teachers and other students can improve on the application of the tools already possessed. At the same time, placing students in such an environment enables the discovery of new tools. We all have heard the saying, "You can learn a lot from a dummy." Imagine what can be gained by its counterpart.

Last, I couldn't end without voicing my agreement that prison will never be considered my home. Yes, it can be described as a dwelling place, but never a home! I believe most would state their home (heart and mind) are far from prison: with family and friends, even if they were fated to die in prison. Childs states, "resilience comes from a struggle to get through or past a circumstance." I would add that reflection works in similar ways in seeking to find the answer to the how's and the why's. The difference is that some are able to find answers, and others need help. Nevertheless, all parties can benefit from the help of understanding the answers found. Resilience and reflection are tools to move forward, but never to welcome prison by making it a home.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH by Larry Luellen, Jr.

MONKEY,BOY,NIGGER,

Whatever they want to call us, I love my people my people! Especially the sentiment expressed in the recent actions of these courageous, fearless, and fed-up radical youths of the John the Baptist Generation, whose screaming. "No Justice, No Peace, Defund the Police!" From Philadelphia to Texas, Vegas, on down thru Chi-town, Black folks demand to be heard and certainly our enlightened comrades ain't playing and surely, they ain't hiding nor laying down, ish, look around they got hundreds of thousands of boots on the ground and they'll go the extra mile to turn this racist nation upside down, in memory of our ancestors in the Tulsa massacre who were viciously beaten, murdered and torched out. How dare Chauvin to even imagine that he could suffocate the last words of Big Floyd out, instead, he's unleashed a sleeping giant whose cry is optimistically dismantling the wicked works of our biased oppressors influence that arose way down in the back of the confederate south! Yeah, no doubt, our fight has been an ongoing bout and now my brothers and sisters are marching progressively to the blood-stained steps and marble flo's of the White House, where Jay Z, Beyonce, and Janelle Monae's are still echoing throughout. However, we can link arms or bear arms , but one things fo 'sho , we ain't gone do is run, ish, God knows we've done that for far too long and right now we're advising dem so-called righteous patriots to scoot the heck over because it's our turn. Young, determined and bold, pardon me, even the old, we've tallied up our loved ones and released our anger at the polls, therefore "Black Lives Matter" debates are being conducted nationally on House and senate

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH by Larry Luellen, Jr. cont.

flo'. So, they hate us, embrace us, or shun us, kill or be killed, 400 plus years of slavery and bondage that way of life is no mo, and for the record they can stop criticizing us and publicize the truth on how they kidnapped Africans from the inhabited shores and plains scattered alongside the motherland Congo. Furthermo', yall heard the sayings " Iron sharpens Iron and Each one Teach one and when you know better," So, no mo turning the other cheek taking on the passive approach of Dr. King, oh silly me by all means necessary let's elaborate and narrate his dream, as powerful kings and Nubian Queens since our skill sets witness to the prominence of our extraordinary genes. In fact, it's my duty to espound on Anglo-Saxon Europeans ill-gotten pursuit against Blacks which to date has been considerably extreme, "Emmit Till" would still be alive if U.S. laws would have acknowledged him as more than 3/5 th's of a human being. "Michael Brown's" corpse wouldn't have been desecrated on that Klu Klux Klan Ferguson, Missouri scene neither "Laquan McDonald be over killed by 16 hallow points and stem. Yet, justice looks like Judges, Prosecutors, Police, Police, Lawyers and Politicians all on the same ridiculous school to prison pipeline and civil rights and human rights are rightfully taking a stance in between; thus, my question to you is your conscious pricked in this season of racial reckoning that's once again esteemed ? Because structural racism is not a 21st century hoax, but a live element that exist and equality for all is a laughable indicator of the white supremacy regime that's comparatively forgetting more than Negroes heritage and culture , but the very essence of our dreams, to be Free from all systems of racism that oppress because of the paint job that darkens the tone of our beings!!!

A Life Sentence-1

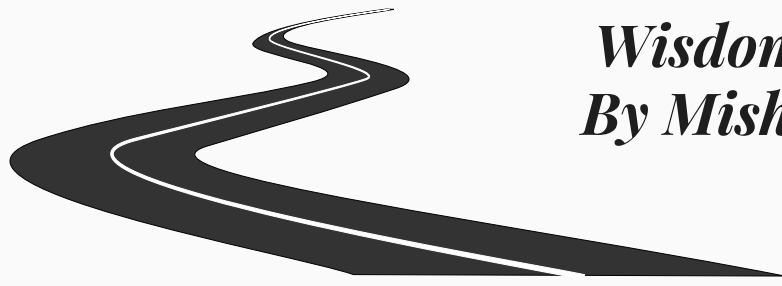
by David "Nazeeh" Bailey

The possibility and reality of dying in prison never really occurred to me. Actually, I gave the subject very little thought until several years ago, when a very close friend of mine was killed (James Calvin Jones). I had already spent approximately eight years at one particular facility (Pontiac) and had heard all the tales concerning individuals being killed, and the old who helplessly fade away with time. Nothing could have prepared me for the death of one who I had grown to know as well. The reality of seeing him just lying there draining away touched the inner most depth of my soul.

I never thought that serving a life sentence meant just that--doing a sentence until death came your way. I had always imagined that you would either be released or perhaps at the most would die of old age, as I had known to have happened. Not to die in your early thirties, with so much of life still waiting to be lived. He was to serve a life sentence also. To see a human being terminated and the fulfillment of his sentence which had been imposed by the powers to be, this not only affected me to the core of my very existence, but most importantly, this brought the realistic truth finally home.

That reality is that a life sentence could easily be paid in full at any given time.

What this does for me as an individual serving a life sentence is put reality in its proper place. Life in prison or elsewhere could end at any given moment: just as the sentence which has been imposed shall be served accordingly. I now realize that and make every effort to do every good deed humanly possible. As we should already know, it is only the creator who actually knows when and how my sentence or for that matter anybody's sentence of life may end.



Wisdom Blvd: Forgiveness *By Mishunda Davis-Brown*

Now just as we're cruisin' down Wisdom Blvd. the road gets rocky, and I end up with three flat (unforgiveness) tires (people). Not fixing (forgiving) these tires (people) kept me in turmoil, at a standstill, and had much power over me, which didn't allow me to move forward for a while. I'm sure many of you can relate to forgiveness being a difficult flat tire, but I'm here to share with you the wisdom that I received from my experiences. I want you to know that it's possible to forgive the flat tires (people you haven't forgiven) in your life. Some you may be able to fix these sooner and some later, but it's possible and in your best interest.

Throughout my life there have been people I held resentment towards and had a difficult time forgiving. These people are my mom, stepdad, and my kid's father who all made my life a living nightmare. My mom always put men before me, didn't protect me, and put me in bad situations growing up. My stepdad tortured me as a kid from the age of four by physically abusing me, my mom, and little brother in front of me, forcing us into battered women and children shelters where we'd eventually return to him until DCFS stepped in. And my kids' father who I got with at the age of 16, although he was 10 years older than me, was found to be a master manipulator, self-centered, unfaithful, abusive in every way, and irresponsible even when it came to our two children. How do I begin to fix these three flat tires? Do I even care to fix them? was the question.

Now, my mom was a tire I cared to fix because of who she was to me. So, with my maturity and growth I had to look at things another way. I first had to strip her title of being my mother and look at her as an individual human being that's imperfect with many flaws, such as myself. So, who was I to judge her? I'm not God, and if God forgives me repeatedly who did I think I was not to forgive her? This wisdom was a

check. From there I began taking a lot into consideration such as her age (18) when she conceived me, her not having her mother who passed before I was born, her father kicking her out when she first got pregnant, being with older men that she looked up to who abused her and had mind control over her, plus the fact that she was poor and trying to survive in the streets with her babies she kept having. So, when I began to look at her as a person and acknowledged her struggles, I began to understand, which led to compassion and forgiveness in my heart for my mother. Plus, she began to change (people can change) which also made it easier and I fixed (forgave) this flat tire. So that was one down ...two more to go before I could move my vehicle forward down Wisdom Blvd.

My stepdad was the next tire I needed to fix "for me" because harboring the pain and torture he put me through as a kid kept me angry and hurting inside. I didn't respect him and didn't want anything to do with him although he was still in the picture. However, at the age of 18 I had my first child and wanted to put my past to rest in order to move forward for me and my child without resentment and anger from my youth. I found out that he was bipolar, schizophrenic and on drugs back then. This put a lot into perspective for me. So, armed with this knowledge of his mental health issues and drug abuse, I again grew understanding which led to compassion and forgiveness in my heart. So, one day as we sat on the porch, I was ready to fix this tire. I faced him and told him that I remember everything he did to me as a child, but I forgive him. Once those words left my mouth I felt relief, which let me know that forgiveness for you, about you, and will help heal your wounds. It's like dumping out your trash. My stepdad looked surprised and shocked that I could

Wisdom Blvd Cont...by Mishunda Davis-Brown

remember at such a young age. He was speechless and although he never admitted to it, I felt better and was ready to move forward for me and my child. So this tire was fixed and I had one more to go.

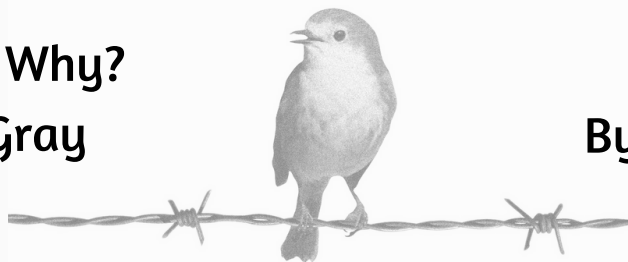
This last tire was my kids' father, which took the longest to fix because I was in love with a disturbed individual who I didn't know how to leave. I didn't understand why he did a lot of what he did to me. After we split, I was left like a scattered 1,000,000-piece puzzle to put back together, which left me hurt, bitter, angry, and resentful. I knew I needed to forgive him and let go of all he did to me and put me through, but I didn't know how to fix this tire. How do I forgive a man that I felt intentionally continued to hurt me, my children? And family? He wasn't my mother, and he wasn't mentally unstable. So, I felt there was no excuse or reason to forgive him. I didn't want him in me or my kid's life. I wanted to forget him, but this behavior and thinking would only affect our kids and keep me in turmoil. So, I didn't know what to do but pray for him because I couldn't forgive him. Praying for him made me cringe inside. It was so hard praying for someone I didn't want to pray for. It was like being forced to eat something distasteful to the point of throwing up, but I didn't know what else to do but take it to God in prayer and work on myself. And to my surprise praying for him got much easier and I began to feel better regaining the power that he had over me. Then as time went on his life began to take a turn for the worse (car accident, stroke, dialysis, and a type of confined nursing home). To witness his downfall broke my heart despite all the pain he caused me and my loved ones. I actually feel sorry for him and how his life turned out, which softened my heart and helped to fix (forgive) this tire.

Yet, the Bible reads in Galatians 6:7-8 "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature he will reap destruction: the one who sows to please the spirit, from the spirit will reap eternal life and Proverbs 5:21-23 reads" For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord and he examines all his paths. The evil deed of a wicked man ensnares him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline led astray by his own great folly." With that being said, God sees everything, so no one gets away with any wrongdoing. Forgive who you can by understanding that we're all imperfect human beings, and pray for those you feel you can't forgive.

So, I encourage you to forgive and pray. In Mathew 6:9-15 Jesus states, "This, then is how you should pray : Our father who art in heaven , hallowed be thy name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your father will not forgive your sins. Now with all 3 tires fixed, I can continue cruisin' down Wisdom Blvd. I hope you enjoy Wisdom Blvd, and I look forward to hearing from you on Wisdom Blvd. or something you learned through experience and drew wisdom from personally. Also, if you have any struggles or questions that you may need help with, feel free to send them to Professor Melissa. Have a blessed day and whenever you feel the need, come take a ride down Wisdom Blvd.



"What is Your Why?" by Marcos Gray



Why Choose Love? By WA Jamie Thomasson

My initial reaction to seeing requests for a submission to *Feather Bricks* was one of indifference. I then said to myself, "If I write too often, what I share will have less of an impact." Then, it dawned on me that I don't submit enough for that to hold weight. Plus, since I reread Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (Beacon Press, Boston 2006), I felt it was incumbent upon me to explain "What is my Why?" I'll try to be concise (I know--fat chance) with doing so. But before I can do that, I'll explore what is my what. My "what" is the fragile faith that I possess that compels me to forge on to the spiritual heights I read about in Scripture, or even the enormous strength Frankl demonstrates in his book.

If you haven't read the aforementioned book, in a nutshell it is this: a successful Jewish psychologist lost his pregnant wife to the Holocaust while he himself was in captivity for several years. His life makes me feel as if my faith were to be "weighed on the scales, "that it too would be found wanting" like King Belshazzar in Daniel 5:27. But, this could only be true if I attempted to add "pressure" to those scales by solving my own problems. This would mean that Christ couldn't engage to his fullest capability because I would be impeding his will (works) in my life, all because I didn't possess the faith to entrust him with the task.

Does anyone really choose love or does God choose for us? There was no need for the app called "Tinder," for the heart was our matchmaker. To say we know what's best for our lives is nothing more than a pre-requisite for our death and resurrection. Did I really choose love, or, did love choose me? How did I ever learn to love without first being loved? So again I say, Did I really choose love or did love choose me?

So Why Choose Love?

With human beings' spirits living in a body containing a soul, God had programmed us from the beginning to love and be loved. I long for my soul to become intertwined with another and for two spirits to become one. I dream of the day I lend you the shoulder in which you cry as we hold each other close, dancing through the night. I desire the one I give my everything to and wake up beside each and every morning. As passion is expressed, the temperature begins to rise, making the excitement almost too much to take. It was not too long before the decision was made to drive many miles across the desert in Nevada. Playful banter along the way centered around those famous words "What Happens Here, Stays Here." The weekend was quickly coming to an end, and I was never happier to have spent 50 bucks to see a cheap imitation of Elvis and get the opportunity to put a ring on a finger. That 1½ carat fine cut diamond ring is what stood left of that wild and crazy weekend that was built on impulse and represents a lifetime of love. So why choose love? The answer is quite simply for all of the above.



A Valorous Vision -An Expected End....

By Marcos Ramirez

"A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the 'why' for his existence and will be able to bear almost any 'how.'" --Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p.80

Twenty long arduous years surrounded by concrete, steel, and razor-wire fences. Each shiny point reveals its piercing gaze into my naked soul as I traverse its cold barren borderline with deft respite. Armed guards overhead with mini-14 rifles on stand-by awaiting the next fist fights so they can fire off warning shots. I brush off their threatening postures with apathetic defiance as I grow stronger with every press of the rusty iron weights on the yard. This is my daily resistance against the oppressor that ancient systemic Gestapo; this life sentence, a murderous capo looming over my starved metaphysical frame like an SS officer looking for any reason to gas me.

I.D.O.C. is my Auschwitz-G.O.D. is my liberator. I can hear his voice like Gideon telling me "I'm with you, O mighty man of valor! At once I tighten my body to conceal my weakness. I stand firm to boldly project strength from my inner vision board. From way down in the abyss of meaning, I treasure within like a relic of my past life with family feasting and joyful Caribbean rhythms. Transcending through time and space, I can hear my mother's sweet, nurturing voice calling out for me and my siblings to get ready for church on a Sunday morning. I see my two sons in the visiting room studying my facial expressions with a satisfying sense of familiarity as they look to one another in laughter, confirming their instinctual attraction to their ancestral roots. I feel the fresh warm breeze of summer air gliding in from the eastern lakeshore to greet my future wife and I with an affirmation of heaven's blessings.

This is the past, present, and future itinerary of my resilient dwelling in this camp life. All these years of separation and isolation, the pain and loss of relationships, of dreams and aspirations dying a slow death, of seemingly unanswered prayers gradually fading from my mind. The darkness around me, it sticks to the walls of my cell like black mold and Covid 19. Creeping into my lungs like dust – mites infecting my brain like typhus and causing delirium, weakness, and brokenness in my spiritual equilibrium. I wanted to give up. I wanted to evaporate into the smug prison air and escape from this present misery, out into the grey cloudy nothingness over Chicago's pristine skyline, just so I could overlook the city and peer into the homes of family members whose lives would continue in without me just as they've already grown accustomed to doing so over the last two decades. "Oh well, I have nothing to expect from life anymore," I thought.

[Viktor Frankl's voice speaks to Marcos' conscience]- But "Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost" (Frankl 76).

"Hugh?! Am I hearing voices in my head now?!"

[Viktor Frankl's voice continues ...] – It doesn't really matter what you expect from life, but rather what life expects from you, Marcos. You must take the responsibility to find the right answer to your problems and to fulfill the tasks life is constantly laying before you with your right actions and in right conduct because they will form your destiny. You must have the courage to suffer through what you're going through in your life. You must realize that life is still

A Valorous Vision—An Expected End.... (Cont...)

expecting something from you; something in the future is expected of you! For you, it's your mother, your sons, your nieces; it's the youth in the community who are at risk of falling victim to violence on the streets or coming to prison. You started your inside-initiative project from a prison cell to help people in need, and only you can complete the work you began that's specific to the vision and mission God put in your heart! Your family and community need you out there, and they are expecting you to come home and do what God has placed in your heart to do! What you have experienced in your life up until now i.e., all you have done, whatever great thoughts you've had, all you suffered, all this not lost, though it is past; you have brought it into being. It is all still with you and in you—carry God's prophetic vision for your life forward with you" (Frankl 76-82).

"Well, I'll be ... he's right!" I thought out loud. It was at this point that I remembered what I once was or rather who I still am as a child of the Most High God! Who I had become over the years through my sufferings as a mighty man of valor. A man with vision and purpose during the first 5, 10, 15 years of my incarceration, and I remembered the things I've done to help my neighbors, to minister to my family and friends, and to serve my community. Those were the times when I have felt most alive, like I was smack-dab-in-the middle of God's purpose and calling for my life. This is the place I need to get back to, facing my daily battles with boldness and resisting the many temptations to doubt, to be afraid, and to give up. I had to preserve this valorous vision God gave me to live a victorious, prosperous, blessed life both now and after my release. I need to continue trusting in God and his promises over my life to deliver me and set me free from prison. I have to keep holding on to God with an expectant hope—my expected end—liberation from imprisonment and reunification with my people.

The reason people cast off restraint when they don't have a prophetic vision from God is that there is no guidance, no instruction, and no moral

code of conduct to live by without God's law (Proverbs 29:18). I would have lost heart if I had not believed that I would see (look upon) the goodness of no sense of direction and no purpose for living. This is why Viktor Frankl's logotherapy therapy is, in my opinion, such an effective method of dealing with the trauma we experience in our lives as individuals in custody. We've dealt with decades worth of separation and isolation from our loved ones: the pain and suffering that ensues from the loss of a family member, a mother's ongoing battle with cancer, a child's struggle with anxiety and depression.

It's all a part of our story and we have the responsibility to fulfill the tasks set before us according to God's prophetic vision for our lives. Our suffering is not about us; it's for the people, the causes, and the important work God has placed before us. If we suffer in faith and with courage and hope in our hearts, God produces pure gold in us out of our fires of affliction. He produces the fruit of the spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control (Galatians 5:22) in us so we could love and help our neighbors and do justice in our contexts.

"For I know the plans I have for you declares the lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). We need something to look forward to in our lives, a vision from God that's beyond these prison walls. We need to be bold in our spirits, courageous in our hearts in order to acquire this valorous vision of freedom, purpose, and prosperity from God. We must nurture our faith with God's prophetic word and promises of provision, protection, and deliverance from our captivity in order to cultivate the byproduct and substance of our faith which establishes an expected end for our lives – the fulfillment of God's vision, the manifestation of our prayers being answered, God's prophetic word (our dreams) coming true.

A Valorous Vision-An Expected End.... (cont...)

My "Why" is God's vision and promise for my life, a future and a hope of being free at home with my mother, my two sons, my siblings, nieces, nephews, and grandparents; and out there on our North Park campus continuing my education, building beloved community, worshipping God, fellowshiping with the church, and further developing my life work and vocation which I started while being in prison via my Inside Initiative on Restorative Justice Project. Wherever God sends me, I will go to complete my portion of Jesus' Great Commission.



"Have I not commanded You? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).



"What you have experienced in your life up until now i.e., all you have done, whatever great thoughts you've had, all you suffered, all this is not lost, though it is past; you have brought it into being. It is all still with you and in you- carry God's prophetic vision for your life forward with you" (Frankl 76-82).



**"Why" by James Soto,
Northwestern Prison Education Program
(NPEP) Student**



I oftentimes awake and ask myself the questions, "Why am I caged in these concrete and steel structures? Why have I been in here for all these years?" In October of 2021, I'll have 40 whole years served. I believe it is a natural inclination for anyone who is caged to ask the question, "Why?" But I don't want my "Why me?" to sound like a "Woe is me." It is not my intent to invite people to a pity party. Instead, I would like to explore the reason why I came to be here at this station in life.

I could ask the bigger questions like: Why are so many Black and Brown males incarcerated? Why is the criminal justice system seemingly racist? Or why is structural racism tolerated in our society? I could probably provide a very long laundry list of whys. But how does this really answer why I remain caged?

I could ask other questions: Why was I targeted by the Police? Why were the prosecuting attorneys so set in convicting me? Why did my trial lawyer fail me? Why did I lose my appeal? Why is it taking so long for the Governor to decide my "Early Release" petition? Why are the courts taking so long to rule on my current petitions? I am not unique in expressing the above, and it could explain why I remain in here. It makes me think of why I am able to survive this oppressiveness caused by my incarceration.



This question made me reflect on my many years locked up and how I've managed to cope with it. I came to the conclusion it is maintaining HOPE. I have seen how people in here who lose hope seem spiritually defeated or dead. A person without hope is like a ship at sea without a rudder, aimlessly drifting around. It reminds me also of the movie *The Shawshank Redemption* when the character Andy says, "Hope is the best of things." Another character, Red, says, "Get busy living or get busy dying." There are people in here who have lost the ability to hope; the system has wore them down, and they lost their desire to live a fulfilling life.



On the other hand, I know people filled with hope. They are vibrant and getting "busy living." I've heard it said: "Hope springs eternal," and I remain ever hopeful that I will be released back into society despite being given a natural life sentence without parole. That is why I must agree with Andy that "Hope is the best of things." It is what keeps me going, what got me into Northwestern Prison Education Program (NPEP), it motivated me to seek and obtain legal assistance, and it is what makes me feel like a Human Being. They may have taken my freedom and many other things, but the system cannot ever take away my HOPE!

Book Review



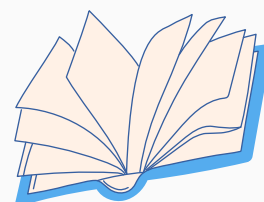
(Available through Amazon, Barnes and Noble and in the Stateville Resource Room/North Park Brandel Library)

BOOK REVIEW ON VIKTOR FRANKL'S "MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING?"

By Marcos Gray

Although I feel Frankl's text deserves more than a "brief commentary" from me, I also feel that this book is of FAR too great of importance for our spiritual journey for me not to comment. Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* offers spiritual components with a psychological tilt that anyone could appreciate. There isn't a person alive who hasn't wrestled with the "meaning of life" question just as there isn't one alive who will not have to deal with suffering. Sometimes the depths of our suffering contaminate our ability to see what our lives mean. This tainting of our value easily allows us to relegate our past/present to a place of prominence within our psyche. That's the opposite of what Frankl espouses. This is why I'd presume that those who didn't want tragedy to tether itself to their worth read this book.

I will address another reason why this book is worth the praise I give it. Even presuming that I'm unimportant enough to offer any recommendation for this book, my humanity and familiarity regarding life's meaning grants my qualification to do so. Frankl gave us "permission" to question life, but he also surmised that we should believe "that life, pre-supposedly, has potential meaning under any condition, even those that are miserable" (137). I believe that not only can we find a sanctity in our suffering, but we can also transcend our suffering if we realize that it is what we may endure, but it is NOT who we are. So, in a somewhat subtle way, Frankl suggests that we are "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Christ) (Rom 8:37). So, how can the value of this book's potential be ignored?



This issue's meme:



Maxims & Memes with Marco Ramirez with an assist from Sara Woody

From Marcos: I imagine this column to be a sort of Urban Garden Sanctuary where we can share and exchange wisdom quotes that will encourage each other, nourish the good ground of our hearts, provide some Godly guidance, as well as educate us as student writers. For those who like to read the funnies in the newspaper, this column could serve as a good bathroom reader!

Definitions :

1. Meme - a unit of cultural information, such as a cultural practice or idea that is transmitted verbally or by repeated action from one mind to another. [shortening (modeled on Gene) of mimeme < Gk. mimēma, something imitated< memeisthai, to imitate.] See mimesis (related words - mimetic, mimic, mimicry, mime.)

2. meme/mēm/noun - an element of a culture or system of behavior that may be considered to be passed from one individual to another by nongenetic means, especially imitation. A humorous image, video, piece of text, etc. that is copied (often with slight variations) and spread rapidly by internet users.

1. Maxim - a succinct formulation of fundamental principle, general truth, or rule of conduct. [ME maxime < OFr. < med.Lat. maxima< maxima (propositio), greatest (premise) fem of Lat. maximus, greatest

2. maxim/maksem/noun - a short, pithy statement expressing a general truth or rule of conduct, for example : actions speak louder than words.

This issue's maxims:

"I write; therefore, I am a writer. Stay Sanitized!"
-Antonio "Slim" Balderas

"Some of the greatest facets of our humanity sparkle in our ability to learn from our mistakes, make better decisions for the future, and encourage others to do the same." -Eric Watkins

From Sara : One of the reasons memes and maxims stick with us is because they remind us of our purpose simply. In my vocational excellence class two years ago, one "maxim" we received was: "Preachers should always have a favorite poet who teaches them the economy of words." As someone prone to being longwinded, that stuck with me. Memes or maxims are a form of poetry, excising our "Why" in as few of words as possible.

From Marcos : Memes and maxims are like vitamins and minerals that we can take daily during our devotions or otherwise short meditational moments day or night. It's true that they are synonymous and can be used interchangeably, but they also can sometimes differ from one another in their contexts and intent of usage. Memes and maxims can vary as far and wide as our thoughts, emotions, experiences, and imagination can take us.

What is Your Why? ***by Antonio "Slim" Balderas***

Why is the world so divided?
Why is there still homelessness in the world?
Why do human beings judge each other according to the color of their skin as opposed to their character
Why isn't the Bible taught in schools?
Why don't the powers that be (government), support a living wage for all of its citizens and migrant workers?
Why does most of society view the world through The lens of male dominant society?
Why do we the people continue to support the United States Constitution when the document is Constitutionally flawed on its face because the white framers were slave holders themselves, and didn't view people of color, (the Negro), as a human being or equal when such a flawed, yet historical document was crafted?
Why does woman and man continue to destroy and overuse the raw materials provided by the earth?
Why does man and woman have such a depravity to commit sin?
Why does God not intervene upon world suffering, hardship and destruction?
Why do the government continue to sponsor abortion and capital punishment (death penalty)?
Why doesn't the government fight world hunger, instead of World Wars?
Why today in a modern technological society does the presumption of innocence mean we should legally ignore clear video evidence? Is Justice Really Blind?

**** Why is there a freshness date on sour cream when it's sour anyway?

Voice Of the Poor and Incarcerated (V.O.I.P.A.I.) and (official/unofficial?) North Park Poet Laureate

HAIKU

BY WILLIAM JONES

Darkness overtakes me.
The broken tree branch on the ground.
No thoughts of my own.
"Why am I here?"
God, I do belong.

A Letter to the Founding Fathers

Dear Sirs:

I am writing you and your falsely esteemed compatriots this short missive, to express my sincerest dismay over why, certain human beings of color were purposefully left out of your so-called Declaration of Independence during such an historical American period in time?

I dare point out Sir(s), that the absence of my descendants and Native Americans along with all races of color turned a supposed great document into a flawed piece of parchment paper...

I further believe today, unlike you did in your historical period of time, that all men and women were created equal by God, no matter race, color, or gender according to God, not man!

-Antonio Balderas

“Untitled”

I see the beauty in green.
I see the beauty in blue.
I see the beauty in myself.
I see the beauty in you.

The feelings are always there,
Even when they aren't shared.
I feel the energy as it bounces around
I feel it enough to care

I hear the silent cries, the tear-stained pain
I hear the soul as it is being drained.
I hear the laughter that sounds like light
I hear the thoughts of the heart in the night

I know what it's like to be beautiful, to see
beauty in the broken.
I know how to feel, allow myself to be healed, to
keep my mind open.

I know when to listen, when I should be heard
I know that love is an action
So much more than just a word.

“Divided We Stand”

Why would I ever compare myself to you?
A wise man once said, “to thine own self be true!”

I can only be me and you can only be you;
Therefore, I'll attend to being the best at what I do.

My levitation should not bring you down,
Why, when you see me smile, do you frown?

What happened to empowerment? Uplifting and
encouragement?

I want to see you prosper, not use you as a steppingstone.
We supposed to be stronger if we stand together but I
always find
myself standing alone.



“I Ask Myself”

Who? Who am I when the curtains are drawn, when the lights are
out when the eyes of others are closed?

What? What do I do? What does my life consist of? What does my
behavior reflect? What are my hidden thoughts?

When? When am I happy? When do I decide to make the right
decisions, the wrong decisions?

When am I okay? When do I laugh? When do I cry? Where? Where
do I hide? Where do I go? Where are my friends? Where is my
lover? Where are my feelings supposed to go when I don't want
them to show? Where is help when I need it? Where am I? Where
will I end up?

Why? My goodness why??? Why am I here? Why am I there? Why
do I feel? Why do I care? Why do I want? Why do I choose? Why do
I try? Why do I lose? Why do I bend? Why do I fall? Why do I feel
like it was never anything at all?

Why are you here? Why are you there? Why don't you feel? Why
don't you care? Why did you stay? Why did you go? Why can't you
see? Why don't you know?

How did I get here? How do I get out? How do I figure out what
life is all about?

How can you be silent? How can you be okay? How could you pass
it by? How could you not know?

How could I not see that I would not be able to grow?

I could go on and on with questions, doubts, statements and facts.

My heart and mind are full, curiosity

runs deep. Feelings on the surface, Feelings buried. Hidden
feelings, Feelings that show.

Emotionally scarred, beaten, battered, and bruised. Feeling
mistreated. Feeling misused. Unappreciated. It is I who knows my
worth.....Right?

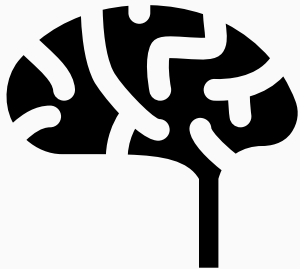
It is being able to live life that will enhance my insight. But will I
ever get answers?

ENCHANTMENT

BY DONALD "TALIB" MCDONALD

Ovals with tales swimming in dry wells, vulnerable in an acidic passage, they race thousands to be first to forcibly perforate the ovum...

Combative little embryos endure to prevail hampered by fleshly cells, bone starts to form, as derma bears down on bone, limbs, eyes, nose, and mouth contours and sprout, suddenly compelled from the womb into life...



Now begins worldly strife, learning to talk, walk, write, make friends, antagonize too, ascertain right from wrong, mistakes are due, this is the being, the endurance, the dissension of created things, violence into light, struggle to endurance, through dissension violence, existence, order, conception, childhood, adulthood decrepit.....

Manifestly, fabricated to improve ourselves, families, and society, evolving into a community of righteous goals and conduct guided by the spirit of genuine thought, until we rise, ascending to the throne of judgment, and arriving at the final destination, the green fields of rapture....



"Sanctified I's" by Christopher D. Everett, CD Everett

This is an introduction to the Called
whose stance blazed trails across space
and time

These are the "Sanctified I's" – Past, Present,
and Future

The "I's" that believed – Freedom's – a –
callin'

The "I's" that seen that Ole' – ship – a –
comin'

The "I's" that waded in – da – water

The "I's" that made it over and under.

The souls of a People like ole' Israel
Down in Egypt land where's Pharoah make
hell

The "I's" that grieved – makin' haste to flee

The "I's" that steal – a – way to Thee

The "I's" that act by Faith and glee

The "I's" knowing nothing 'cept "shine on
me..."

The tide that turned for the sanctified
Over-flowin ole' Master bye-and-bye
The "I's" that struggled–sweat and tears
The "I's" showed the way to the children for years
The "I's" were given life–That Northern light from
above
The "I's" were on a "King" that dreamed – Equality
and love.

Marked by sacrifice and chafed by hate
3/5th they were labled of what is human and race
The "I's" knew better as they are well known
The "I's" on freedom spoke loud the oracles of God
The "I's" led marches – sanctified – Arm and Arm
The "I's" took pride singing "We shall overcome."

No bondage or hate – Industrialized
Or segregated schools making prisons multiply
The "I's" foretold and were sold that war on crime
The "I's" now grieved by that trick of time
The "I's" still stand – universal and wise
The "I's" revolution – exposing their lies.

“Sanctified I’s” by Christopher D. Everett, CD Everett cont...

The proliferation of packed prisons for Black and Brown crimes
 The destruction of critical resources – leading communities in decline
 The “I’s” impatience swelling – voices saying, “Black Lives Matter!”
 The “I’s” motivation breeding action – over most politician’s chatter
 The “I’s” whole-hearted “Don’t Shoot!” movement
 Reinvigorated that Black Power
 The “I’s” “sanctified” though few in number – upholding truth this very hour

What will become of our future if we placate the insidious trends
 Who will then be up-lifted except the Grand Dragon –
 If we allow this White House to win?
 The sanctified “I’s” paved the way – to counter and defend.
 Their blood, sweat and tears were sown – through graveyards
 Of lost kin’ and friends
 As the green grass grows on old Millennial ground
 The echoes of battles they fought is still heard – how sweet the sound
 The “Sanctified I’s” will forever rise when they heard the call
 As Black History has taught us – Even taking –
 The proud will always stand Tall.

(This poem was CD Everett's Black History Project that won 1st place at Stateville in 2018.)



“A WORD TO THE ALMIGHTY”

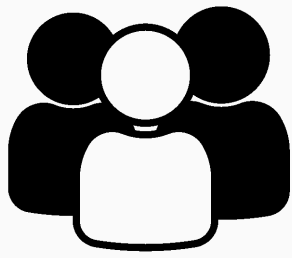
BY LARRY LUELLEN, JR.



Extremely gracious for all the mercy and favor you’ve bestowed on me.
 My LORD, My Savior, My King nobody else worthy of my praise but thee.
 You washed me in your blood you even tacked my sins unto thee, Surely I’ve never experienced such rich love like this, no other on “I AM’s” green earth ever dared to die for me.
 You quietly carried the cross and irresistibly endured the beatings, yet, in still they nailed you to that Ol’ rugged tree and pierced your lung to exhaust your breathing.
 You gave up the Ghost and they buried you in Joseph’s borrowed tomb but on the third day you rose defeating death, hell, and the grave for those whom the world describes as illiterate fools.

Thus Heaven and Earth rejoice as the enemy and his lies are put to share; therefore, Victory belongs to you KING JESUS, so, does all the power, authority, and reign.
 Today, I am an inheritor of your eternal life because I believed and received your promises which the spiritual blind of the world consider to be delusional and insane. However, its my responsibility to be your witness “JEHOVAH” and I vow to plead fervently with man, so, they don’t harden their hearts in ignorance refusing your give to Salvation and forever promise to rise them up as sons and daughters again!!!

Thoughts and Prayers about Why by Mike Simmons Inspired by Dean Kersten's devotion on Psalm 133



My why is grace because by it, I have been made whole
 often bearing within myself this much needed reminder
 For surely from the outset, I was able to see.
 A beloved community
 I saw men and women like myself: Imperfect. Strong. Broken.
 Angry. Resilient. Vulnerable. Courageous. Hopeful.
 I saw a beloved community. Why? Because of God's grace.
 For why then should i've allowed this beautiful picture in
 my mind to be reduced to a broken frame whose contents
 waste away
 For what am i seeing? Where, even how, have i now looked?
 Perhaps through eyes decorated with lashes of shame, reminding me
 of the nakedness in front of me?
 Of course, then there is no beautiful unity where eye have not remembered
 To see with my why.
 My community is the same one that I initially saw and hoped. No. Even better.
 Forgive me father for failing to see your covering.
 Thank you for your amazing gift. My why. Your grace.
 Thank you for my beloved community.



What is Your Why? (Spoken word) by Eric Watkins

What is Your Why? calls attention to purpose, an introspective
 perspective on our selfish n' selfless motives and service.
 Every creation has a creator.
 Thus, what's our why? should be defined by the most high,
 cause there's none greater than the definition of our Savior.

But if our existence isn't heaven sent
 and arrived n' derived from a nonintelligent haphazardous
 event,
 then all of our whys are unwise,
 useless foolish tries, to ascribe
 meaning to ultimately meaningless lives.

And I realize, my logical ontological whys
 seem like teleological lies to willfully blinded eyes
 or many may despise how my whys reflect the depths of my
 identity
 - not IDOC's I.D.'s pinned on me, nor the charges they penned
 on me -
 but how I'm able to stand, imprisoned, with God's hand on me.

Son, saint, and citizen in the Kingdom of God.
 Servant, King, priest, warrior - the combination is odd.
 And even though my inner me is my enemy it won't get
 the end of me.
 I'm already seated in heaven places - inhabiting eternity.

This why I excel in a cell
 - prevail in a system designed for me to fail.
 But what's victory without adversity in this university of
 life?
 That's why I love deeper, stand prouder and speak louder
 in Christ.

And my "Y" is more than I in the chromosomes of my
 daughters within.
 I got greatness in my genome, by the blood of Jesus
 Christ I'mma be home
 - witnessing to the lost and born-again - that His why
 makes me a good
 Man, father, son and friend.
 Written for encouragement; to the glory of God in Jesus'
 name.

A Rose that Rose from the Concrete

by Mishunda Davis-Brown

I grew from the concrete behind these brick walls,
came in at 18 had no clue at all,
used and abused didn't know how to leave,
the man that I thought would protect and love me,
Seven months pregnant signs of postpartum
depression,
didn't understand then why I was always stressin',
No goals or direction didn't know how to cope,
I needed some tools Lord give me some hope,
No high school diploma and no G.E.D.,
No goals or No dreams I was covered in weeds,
I didn't yet know how this seed would succeed,
Buried in dirt beneath the concrete,
Then one day it rained and seeped through the
crack,
And nourished this seed that took her life back,

And through this small hole I could see the light,
Which gave me the might to continue to fight,
I pushed my way through the trauma and pain,
Enrolling in classes in order to gain,
I began to change it was something divine,
G.E.D., college, I accomplished in time,
With continued nourishment I transformed and arose,
I pushed through through that crack and there I rose,
with view from the top, I looked down to see,
all the dirt and concrete that once held me,
I now realize and can see it more clearly,
Those things that once held me were all necessary,
They made me the strong beautiful rose,
you see,
which from the beginning I was destined to be.
Embrace your life experiences. Learn from them. Grow
from them and help someone else from copying them.



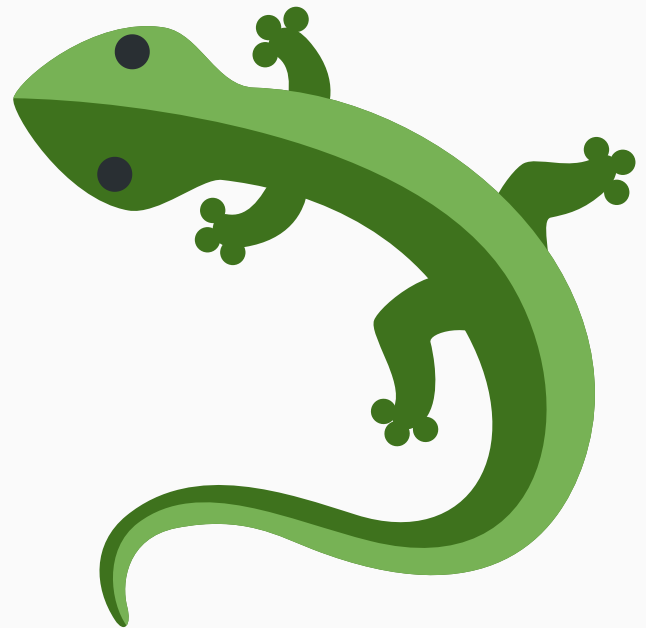
Today vs. Tomorrow by Tony Triplett Northwestern Prison Education Project Student

I'm stuck in a place
where "tomorrow" isn't guaranteed.
you receive less of what you want,
and none of what you need...
anticipating mail,
commissary,
and a visit.
I feel like trash
by a garbage can,
waiting to be thrown in it...
I cry on the inside.
because tears serve no purpose
It's like trying to grow a seedless flower.
Without the surface.
Without one or the other,
either can't exist.
On being locked up for natural life.
and don't feel missed
In this place.
"Today" could be my last
So I disregard "Tomorrow",
because "Today" is all I have...

I met with Ootu behind the pool in my dreams countless times. I would say that I would dream of Ootu at least twice each week. Sometimes more. You never could tell when Ootu dreams would come, but I always hoped they would. Although these dreams spanned a fairly substantial part of my childhood, I never once told anyone about them back then. Not my parents, not my cousins, not even my baby brother Tony, who was always found under foot in those days. The part that I find hard to explain is that I wasn't consciously hiding Ootu or trying to keep those dreams a secret. It was just that I honestly never thought to talk about these things with anyone. As important as Ootu was in my dreams, and around bedtime, he never really came into my waking thoughts, so I never spoke about him.

As I look back over these things, I believe that I had some sort of a subconscious block that put Ootu in the back of my woke mind, preventing me from speaking or thinking too much about him. Perhaps Ootu himself did something to "influence" my mind in such a way that made it impossible to do so. I really can't be sure. My brother and I were very close, and I do remember at one time that I wanted Tony to meet Ootu. In one of my dreams, I asked Ootu if such a meeting would ever be possible, but Ootu refused, saying "no, I'm not to be seen by that little one yet. He's far too young. It would cause him much confusion and complicate his life in an adverse way."

"Ootu - Part 5" by Luigi Adamo



Ootu then projected the image of my little brother wondering around lost in a maze of mirrors, scared and alone. That image came with all of the corresponding emotions I felt that my brother would have felt if he were lost in that maze. I felt how lonely and scared he was. How confused and lost he would be, and I knew that this would be the result if Tony ever met with Ootu. That experience, that projected image and all of its accompanying emotions, slammed shut the door of introducing Tony to Ootu.

To the best of my knowledge my brother never met with or spoke to Ootu. He never even saw Ootu. At least not until my 11th birthday. The day Ootu left me.

Thoughts on Having a Letter Partner by WA Ariana Muniz



I sit down, typing and gathering my jumbled thoughts about my experience working at North Park's Writing Center as a Writing Advisor and having a letter partner who is a Writing Advisor and School of Restorative Arts student at our Stateville campus. The first thing that I can think of is that having a letter partner has impacted my life in such a positive manner. Before working with a letter partner, I was very skeptical about what I would have to offer. I was always worried about not having the "right" things to say and felt like my life was not interesting enough to share the small details with someone. I was hesitant to become a letter partner since it can be quite intimidating to be vulnerable with someone. It is terrifying to open up to someone and share small pieces of your academic and writerly hopes and dreams. Vulnerability can be a scary thing. However, having the tiniest bit of courage within to be brave enough and share your story and the small bits with someone can be a transformative experience.

My writing partner Antonio Kendrick (TK) has learned so much from me, and I have learned a tremendous number of new things from TK. TK and I have shared similar experiences and values about social change and social justice. I created the idea of having a subcommittee in our writing center called SCAA (Social Change Activist Alliance), and the idea derived from a summer book club with Professor Melissa Pavlik where we read *Freedom is a Constant Struggle* by activist Angela Davis. Before the summer book club, my entire life I had felt passionate about making a difference in the world, from creating activist-related artwork to protesting for basic human rights. After being a part of the summer book club, this memorable experience helped me decide that I wanted to start the SCAA committee in our North Park's Writing Center. As an inside Writing Advisor, TK is still an active member of the Social Change Activist Alliance committee. Within our committee, we have held events on the outside such as a food drive during the COVID-19 pandemic to Brave Space Alliance that works towards empowering BIPOC, Queer, and Trans voices.

We have also held a Cross-Cultural Open-Mic event across different university campuses. Student writing from the inside/outside related to social justice was shared during the open mic. Additionally, we have held book clubs related to our Social Change Activist Alliance committee. For example, a group of inside and outside Writing Advisors read *Hood Feminism* written by Mikki Kendall during the Fall 2020 winter break and processed ideas from the book via written correspondence. This past summer during the month of July 2021, we held another reading club where inside/outside students participated, sharing their thoughts and writing about podcasts, articles, excerpts, and poetry. These experiences make room for both inside/outside students to connect as a community and to amplify their voices, which serves as an opportunity to simultaneously learn from one other, especially when we discuss topics such as food insecurity, police brutality, feminism, and why we should not call individuals in custody 'inmates.'

Having a letter partner has been spectacular; not only have we worked tremendously within our subcommittee, but we also plan on continuing to develop new writing center projects and movements that can positively impact our world through our writing, in hopes of creating a safer, happier, and more inclusive atmosphere someday. One example is a project to raise awareness of how the North Park community can prevent sexual assault on campus through reading and discussing material on bystander intervention and taking a pledge. Being a letter partner with a student of the School of Restorative Arts builds an opportunity for both inside/outside students to receive feedback on their essays for credit-bearing classes. It gives students an opportunity to connect and discuss their writing. I look forward to receiving feedback letters on my writing and ideas from TK every week or whenever it is possible. More than anything, I always enjoy setting aside time to write a letter to TK regularly. During the writing process, I have noticed that writing allows for self-reflection, a recap of what has been occurring daily or what is yet to occur. Most importantly, it makes room for educational growth between the inside/outside students.

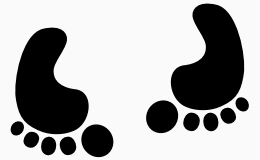
The Amplifier with Alex Negrón and Karen McCarron



From Alex Negrón: Thank you very much for your brief argument for a true parole system that follows this intro, Karen McCarron. Since readers will learn from you what the difference is between Parole and MSR, I want to quickly talk about the legislative proposal Parole Illinois has tirelessly worked on for the past three years or so. The Earned Discretionary Reentry Bill SB2333/HB2399 allows people with long-term sentences the opportunity to earn release based on good behavior and rehabilitation. The core provision of this bill is to give those with long-term sentences the opportunity for regular review by the Prisoner Review Board when they have served at least 20 years in prison. We came very close to getting it passed in the House last May, but a few representatives pulled out at the last minute. We have a chance to get this bill passed in November, and I'm asking all members of the SRA and North Park University to put ten toes down and get their State Reps to vote for this bill which has been endorsed by over 10,000 individuals and more than 50 organizations. If you don't know what district you're in, go to:

<https://www.illinoispolicy.org/map/illinois-house>

<https://www.illinoispolicy.org/map/illinois-senate>



We need 60 votes in the House and 30 votes in the Senate to get this bill passed into legislation. The goal for this North Park SRA program is to equip students both inside and out with the tools needed to become restorative agents in the communities we belong to. This legislative proposal puts us on the pathway to realizing this goal. So, if you have a vote, please call your State Reps and ask them to support it. If you have family members and loved ones who vote in this state, please ask them to do the same. For more information, you and yours can go to: <https://www.facebook.com/paroleIllinois>

Thank you for your time. Enjoy Karen's essay that follows, and may the true definition of freedom embody us all.

Why Illinois Needs to Bring Back Parole for Determinate Sentences by Karen McCarron

The U.S. is the nation that incarcerates more of its population than any other nation, not because we have more criminals or higher morals, but because incarcerating people is a business. Americans are becoming more aware of this fact, but most don't know what to do about it.

America is ranked with third world communist countries in incarcerating its citizens, and some say Illinois is one of the worst states to be incarcerated, ranking just above Alabama, not something Illinois should be proud of. One of the reasons that Illinois ranks so poorly is that it lacks a parole system.

Illinois, one of only two states that lacks a parole system for those with determinate sentences, causes individuals in custody to serve their entire sentence prior to being seen by the Prisoner Review Board, which then only determines their conditions of Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR). Illinois has thoroughly confused its citizens about MSR, mistakenly calling it parole. MSR, an esoteric term, is not the same as parole.



The Amplifier with Alex Negrón and Karen McCarron

Why Illinois Needs to Bring Back Parole for Determinate Sentences by Karen McCarron

Parole is defined in Webster's as "the release of a prisoner whose sentence has not expired on condition of future good behavior." MSR is an additional supervisory punishment set by the judge tacked on to a full prison term and has nothing to do with good behavior.

There is no incentive for positive change within the prisoner, currently. Rehabilitated individuals in custody become hopeless, serving long sentences with no recognition for their accomplishments. Aggressive and unstable individuals in custody act out in suicide attempts and aggression towards officers as they see that even being a model prisoner makes little difference. The staff, in turn, see the community could care less about these individuals in custody, so staff sexual misconduct incidents rise and unprofessional behavior becomes the norm. This behavior becomes so egregious that outside attorneys file lawsuits, costing a near-bankrupt state millions.

In 2009, the Illinois legislature passed the Crime Reduction Act (CRA). CRA caused the establishment of the Risk, Assets, Needs Assessment Taskforce (RANA). RANA called in the Vera Institute and Orbis to make a computer program called SPIn, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars to assess each prisoner on what they need to do to rehabilitate and function in society. I have been incarcerated for 13 years with others who have been incarcerated one and two decades more. I just received RANA testing in May 2021. Out of a high score (highest recidivism risk) of 28, I scored a 1. I scored a "one" because I was not married.

I am extremely conflicted and annoyed about the State of Illinois using my marital status in assessing my risk for recidivism. First of all, many women here came from abusive, ugly marriages prior to prison. Telling women that they "should" be married to lower their risk of returning to prison when, in fact, the abuse in the marriage led them into prison in the first place, is sexist at best. Second, the divorce rate for most married women entering prison skyrockets.

Most men will not stand with their women through a long prison sentence. Prison sentences destroy marriages and families, which, in turn, destroys communities. Finally, nearly insurmountable hurdles are put in place if one even has the blessed opportunity to marry a non-felon/outside citizen. I wonder if RANA and SPIn are based on outdated research that focused primarily on incarcerated men.

Currently, Logan Correctional Center releases individuals in custody without SPIn/RANA assessments, the reason stated being that understaffing makes it impossible to assess individuals in custody in a timely manner, which can be viewed as an excuse for not following the law for the last twelve years. Instead of working smarter by using technology and resources on hand, undermining of the IDOC mission statement continues.

A community that cares and victims that want restorative justice instead of vengeance will critically review and support legislation to bring back a true Parole Board System to Illinois, making the justice system accountable and Illinois safer for all.

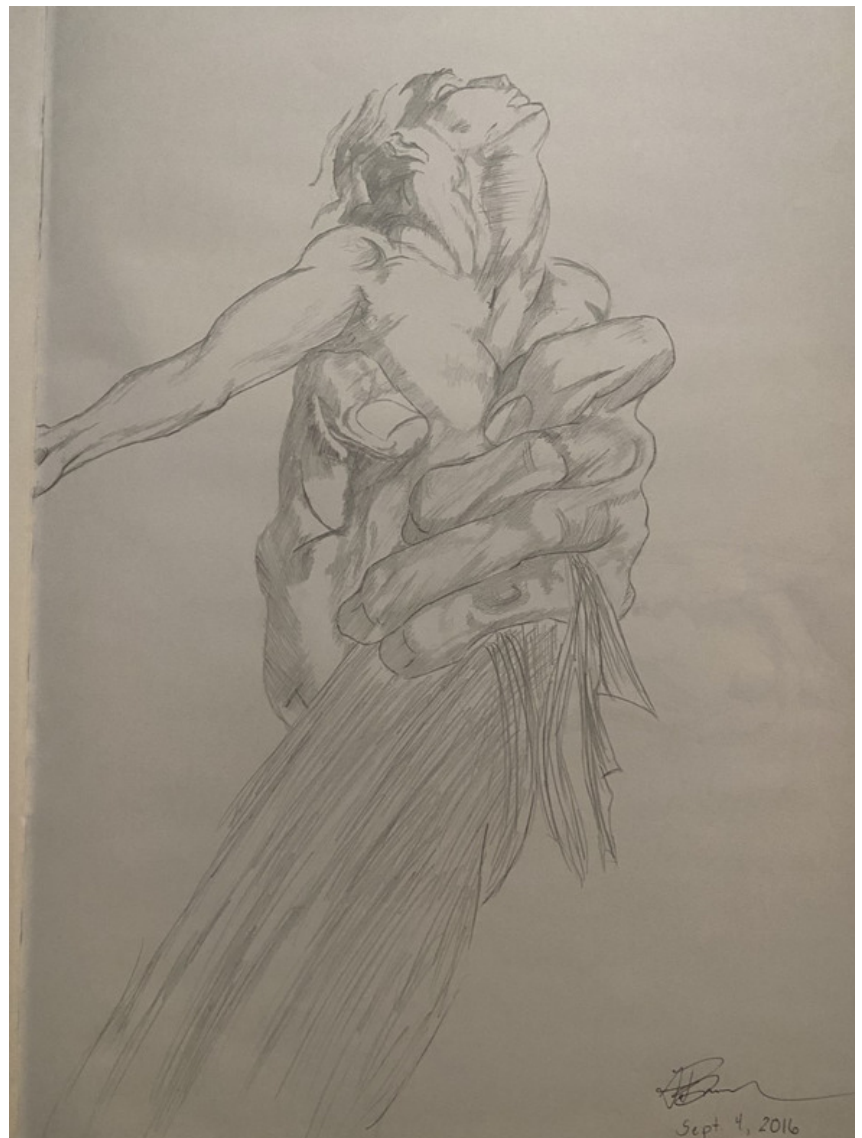




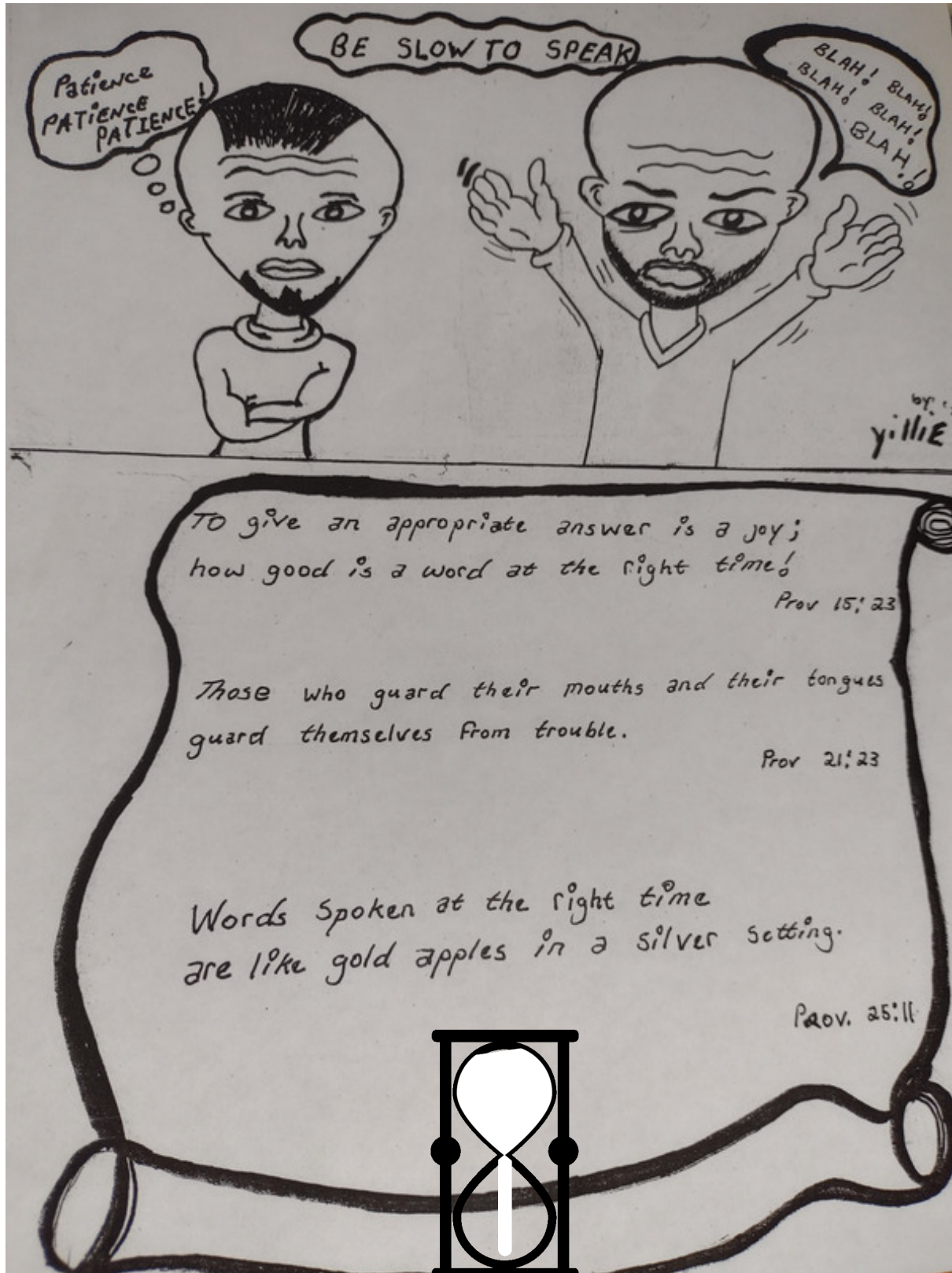
"Something that brings me joy: to be free to live up to the fullness of my potential in becoming a great son, a great brother, a great father, a great friend, and a great servant to society...I know I can do better, if I could be better...My artwork reflects decades of transformations - especially in areas of patience, humility, and wisdom...Blank canvases and notebooks are vehicles for freedom." *Eric Watkins*

By Eric Watkins,
NPTS SRA Student and
Writing Advisor

**May God Heal You
and Bring You The Best**
by Ameerah "AB" Brown,
NP Writing Advisor,
Chicago Campus



By Aryules Bivens,
NPTS SRA Student, Stateville Campus





Artist's interpretation of **Part I** (published in the June/July *Feather Bricks*):

It is said, "A picture is worth a thousand words," and perhaps it is so. Often when I read, my mind does form pictures; therefore, I have taken it upon myself to draw up a teaching of some depth. As I drew, I wondered, what will they see? Do they see God in me? Am I encompassed with fire? Covered by His blood and giving forth rivers of living water? Or am I the one who has only caught a small spark, a small flame and only beginning to drip water? Many there are right at the waterside; they see the water, never being far from it, yet never partaking to quench the thirst. No-no--that is not me, but is it? What do others see? Others yet, they have never seen the fire nor the water; theirs is truly a dry and thirsty land. How do I reach them? Looking once more to this mirror drawn in pencil and ink, I wonder what do you see? Does it inspire you to introspection on the hard question, "Who am I, and who do others see in me?"

The visual art below is a sermon in itself. and **Part 2** in this series.



By Ted B. Gray ("Country"), NPTS SRA Visiting Student and Writing Advisor, Stateville Campus

WITH SPECIAL GUEST MARSHALL STEWART

Turabian Time: Plan to Meet Your Audience's Needs



Two North Park students are walking along the Chicago River and take notice of a puppy fighting to stay afloat in the water. Immediately, they dive in to save the puppy. Following the rescue, they notice a second puppy in the water and then a third. One of the students continues saving puppies, but the other rushes to shore and runs up the bank of the river. When asked where she's going, she responds that she's headed up stream to stop the person who is throwing puppies into the river.

This parable is used to raise an important point: all too often we become so focused on coping with problems right in front of us that we fail to consider whether we need to look "upstream" and prevent those problems before they occur. As we begin a new semester, we look "upstream" to Kate L. Turabian for her five tacit strategies to facilitate the organization of your paper to address the audience's knowledge of a subject, as well as create a smooth transition for readers to be able to understand your points.

According to Turabian, producing the best order for your paper centers around your audience and their needs (71). A way to do this begins with placing your foci on the "values and beliefs of the intended audience," and this is called "pathos" ("suffering" or "experience" in Greek)" (Ramage, Bean, and Johnson 55). If you have taken undergraduate English courses, you may remember the rhetorical triangle and its elements: Logos-Ethos-Pathos. Often the pathos is connected with appeals to the audience's emotions; however, if we dive a bit deeper, the pathos axiom is centered around the "audience's imaginative sympathies" (Ramage, Bean, and Johnson 55). In application, meeting your readers' needs begins with inquiry of the audience:

PATHOS: -How do you allow the audience to be receptive to your message?

-How do you appeal to your audience's values and interests?

-How do you engage your audience?

In regards to this inquiry, as SRA students we must ask ourselves who is our audience and how extensive is their knowledge of theological topics? Turabian explains that when organizing a paper, always "reflect your readers' needs, not the order that the material seems to impose on itself..." (72). For SRA students, we should evaluate our audience's prior knowledge (i.e., Theology Instructors) to facilitate their efforts to grasp our argument. By extension, the cliché "preaching to the choir" rings true! This begs the question: how do we pivot to accommodate the SRA audience of theologians who have prior knowledge of our subjects? Turabian proposes that we consider using one or more of these options to organize our paper:

-short to long, simple to complex. Most readers prefer to deal with less complex issues before they work through more complex ones.

-more familiar to less familiar. Most readers prefer to read what they know about before they read about what they don't.

-Less contestable to more contestable. Most readers move easily from what they agree with to what they don't.

-Less important to more important (or vice versa). Readers may prefer to read more important first, but those reasons may also have more impact when they come last.

-Earlier understanding as a basis for later understanding. Readers may have to understand some events, principles, definitions, and so on before they understand another thing (Turabian 71-72).

I pray this "T-Time" will ameliorate how you communicate your organized datum to meet the SRA audience's needs.

-Marshall Stewart, Christ's Servant and LDt Chippewa tribal member

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THANK
YOU

Staff Salutes & Shout Outs



Feather Bricks would like to thank all Illinois Department of Corrections staff for their support of educational programming such as North Park's School of Restorative Arts. We'd like to give a special shout out to those at Stateville Correctional Center (Principal Costabile, Sgt. Brown, and Officers in the education building) for their efforts and dedication to maintain a safe, positive, productive environment in the school building these past months. Much appreciation also goes to Ms. Johnson, Ms. Baez, Ms. McGrath, and Ms. Kettmann for assisting with organization and delivery of homework packets and copyediting early newsletter drafts. And so many thanks to all at Logan Correctional Center, such as EFA Davison and educator Adele Wheeler, for their assistance and support. Without all of you, we would not be able to hold classes that lead to the academic discussions about writing that are needed to produce a newsletter such as *Feather Bricks*. We welcome your feedback and would love to publish staff writing in future editions of this *School of Restorative Arts* newsletter.

Closing by Cean Gamalinda

It is with joy and a renewed strength of affirmation that I receive this latest issue of *Feather Bricks* and reflect on the resolute thoughts of its contributors. As a writer and poet myself, I am always a bit in awe of the hard work and coordination it takes for those behind the scenes who edit, typeset, and format each page as well, of course, as those who share their words with us on them. Alongside Melissa and Vickie, I've had the opportunity to work with those who make papers and packets for classes each week, and often feel myself to be working behind the scenes to hold that small bit of space that lets us all stay in community in this difficult moment. The body of writers, thinkers, and scholars at Stateville can also seem unfairly behind the scenes sometimes, though this issue of *Feather Bricks* reminds me that together, we are the scene, the sight to behold, and that meaningful words and thoughts, when given space, will always emerge from behind the curtain or the cage. I believe that when we hold this space together, we are capable of cultivating something beautiful and powerful — as Mike Simmons observes:

"A beloved community
I saw men and women like myself: Imperfect. Strong. Broken.
Angry. Resilient. Vulnerable. Courageous. Hopeful."

Sending grace and peace to you all.

Cean Gamalinda, Class Coordinator for the Prison+Neighborhood Arts/Education Project (PNAP)