

# Asylum

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**the magazine for democratic psychiatry**

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## U.S. PRISON ISSUE

*We learned of the death of Alec Jenner, a key founder of our magazine, just before lay-out for the last issue. Having to find space, we could only squeeze in a brief obituary in that Shock Treatment edition (Asylum 21:3 p. 3), where we listed Alec's considerable professional achievements. Since the contents of the current issue were compiled before Alec died, we are still short of the space we would like for doing justice to his life. Here we can only include an abridged version of one contribution, so the reminiscences will have to continue into the next issue.*

*The original obituary and full versions of the reminiscences of three people who were in at the beginnings of the magazine are available on the Asylum page of the PCCS website.*

## MEMORIES OF PROF ALEC JENNER (1927-2014)...

## ...AND THE BIRTH OF *Asylum*

**Phil Virden (Executive Editor, *Asylum*)**

I first met Alec at a conference for the NHS and social work 'rank and file', organised by Lin Bigwood, at Wakefield in late 1984. Advertised over the North of England, the conference was to discuss Government proposals to sell off the big old mental hospitals to property developers, and to replace them with 'Care in the Community'.

Closing down asylums and setting up 'patient-centred care in the community' had already begun in Italy in 1978. But this was under the impetus of the political left, and so as to end the particularly inhumane psychiatric conditions in that country. In 1984 Alec happened to have invited

to Sheffield representatives of Psichiatria Democratica, the moving force in Italy, to talk about their experiences. Lin got in touch with him when she heard about this, and a couple of the Italians willingly stayed on to come to Wakefield to speak and to show their powerful photo display.

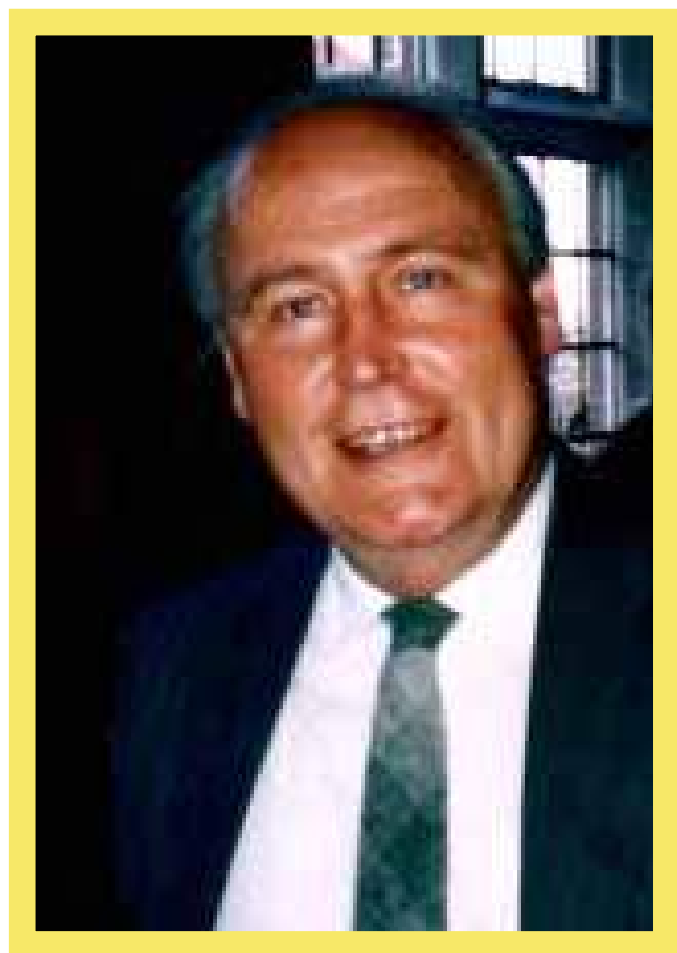
I seem to remember well over two hundred at this event: all kinds of psychiatric workers, social workers, people from voluntary organisations (Mind, etc.), interested patients and ex-patients – and (so I was told) at least one or two NHS and local authority spies sent to report back on this 'subversive meeting' that the local powers had tried to ban!

At some point during the day I noticed a quietly confident, commanding looking man, about six feet tall, looking to be about sixty, balding on top, wearing specs, a leather jacket and an enquiring gaze. He was hard to miss, and obviously a man of some authority, since he was sweeping down the centre aisle of the big room, trailing an entourage of perhaps a dozen younger men and women. It turned out that this was Prof Alec Jenner, and that his group consisted of junior doctors, psychiatric workers, students and some of his patients – all very interested in the Italian experiment.

The conference was at the height of the bitter miner's strike, and it was memorable for the enthusiasm of the participants. It is likely that many had relatives and friends directly involved in Thatcher's vicious fight to the finish with the trade unions. Now it seemed that there was also much at stake for mental health care – but perhaps the Tory policy might turn out to be a great opportunity to introduce a far freer and more humane kind of patient-centred psychiatry.

After all the speakers and workshops, and at the end of the plenary session, I said it would be a pity if people lost touch with each other and the debate and the unity went cold. I suggested a whip-round so that I could publish and post-out the 'papers' delivered at the conference. Most of the participants seemed to want a record of the event – a sort of 'themed' one-off magazine – and chipped in.

As the conference broke up, Alec approached Lin and me. He said he liked my idea and had already been thinking of starting a magazine, as an alternative to the stuffy and



elitist professional journals, so as to offer some kind of 'open forum' for anyone interested in debating mental health matters and organising actions – whether doctors, patients, family members, other health workers, whoever... And now we already had a starting list of possible subscribers. This seemed a great idea, so we agreed to meet again for that purpose.

Alec offered his home as the venue for meetings, once a month, on a Sunday evening. I recall this happened throughout 1985. The first time we turned up, the Jenners' fair-sized lounge was already packed with people, ranging from patients to doctors to grad students to social and psychiatric workers. Whiskey, wine and fine cigars were in good supply, as well as hot drinks for throats dry from all the talking and smoking. (Yes, smoking was common in those days, *even indoors!*). Instead of down-to-business, these meetings mainly turned out to be great social gatherings and exchanges of ideas. Alec seemed in his element, and Barbara Jenner was endlessly patient and solicitous with refreshments.

Discussions were all pretty free-form. Although a few did stay the course, most of the faces seemed to come and go, so that we regulars were forever having to 'fill people in' as to what we were about and what we had already agreed. And then there was the inevitable clash of egos, and the usual covert and not so covert 'leftist' sectarian politicking... But in the face of the solidarity of the faithful few, those people gave up and didn't return.

'The *Asylum* Collective' became (and still is) roughly whoever was there and contributed. I would guess we were all firmly committed to promoting 'patient power' and contesting 'the medical model of mental illness' but we welcomed *any* reasoned views on any mental health issue. A policy was certainly formulated – no party line, complete freedom of debate – but none of the core members were ever interested in formulating a constitution. We trusted each other.

In the end we decided to produce the magazine quarterly, and to call it *Asylum*. The name was suggested by Tim Kendall (who now writes the mental health Guidelines for NICE) and heartily endorsed by Barbara: this was an ironic nod to the original 19th century house magazine of the psychiatric profession. The first issue, for the summer of 1986, featured articles by a variety of doctors, patients, ex-patients and psychiatric workers. In the middle was Lin's exclusive interview with RD Laing – probably his last.

Over the years the magazine had its share of ups and downs, fits and starts. From the beginning, and for fifteen years or so, Alec acted as business manager and public face of the magazine. More than once he willingly rode to the rescue, whenever *Asylum* got into a pickle with its printers or its finances.

My experience of Alec, over nearly three decades, was mostly as a co-worker on regular *Asylum* business, usually several times a year. During the last decade or so, when he had to give up playing much part in the organisation of the magazine, I only saw him sporadically. Although we did

not live close and so we could rarely socialise, I always counted him a real friend, and he and Barbara were most hospitable when I occasionally visited their hill-top lair.

I always found Alec warm-hearted and generous, open and unflappable. He combined a deep commitment to the practice and theory of a patient-centred psychiatry with an entirely unpretentious, affable and approachable manner. I imagine he would have been as solicitous and reassuring, but serious and pragmatic, with his patients as with anyone else. In fact, I witnessed it: as a matter of course, patients and ex-patients always participated fully in the collective and in working to get the magazine out.

After retiring, I guess when he stopped rushing around so much, Alec's aspect began to morph into one uncannily like Bestall's image of the jolly professor in the Rupert Bear stories – a kind of avuncular, huggable bear of a man.

Alec once told me he owed much of his demeanour, drive and moral sense to his father, a self-made man who by hard graft and canniness had worked himself up from brickie into a successful house-builder on some scale. He told me that as a boy he had been much impressed when his father had simply given away one of his new-builds to a loyal worker who couldn't find the cash to house his young family.

So as to give Alec the advantages he had lacked, his father sent him to a minor public school. Although this clearly gave Alec a good education and separated him from the regional accent of his childhood (a very important consideration in those days), he had none of the posh talk or snooty condescension so often adopted by those with social advantages. On the contrary, he was sometimes almost embarrassingly conscious of his good fortune, his power and privileges, and his duty to 'give something back'.

It must have been these feelings that led Alec into a life devoted to a form of practical compassion, and one in which he could use his lofty position in psychiatry and academe to carry out many quiet acts of generosity. For example, few of his friends and acquaintances seem aware that when he retired he was still in demand for the easy but highly paid work of consultancy and Mental Health Tribunals. Alec decided he could either do the work and pay himself but also give the taxman a fat whack or put all the money into a trust for the benefit of projects he would like to support – i.e., hard up people who were never going to get any official funding. So for at least ten years, this is what he did – to the tune of tens of thousands of pounds.

Alec was, as they say, a one-off. For most of her working life, Lin Bigwood has been around all kinds of mental health work – from closed wards to geriatrics to forensics to A&E and 'in the community'. Although they never did any psychiatric work together, she spent a fair amount of time around Alec in various contexts, and she tells me he was one of the best psychiatrists she ever met.



# Asylum

**the magazine for democratic psychiatry**  
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Send letters, comments & submissions  
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'The Prison Counselor' by Vernon Bernard Patrick

Asylum magazine is a forum for free debate, open to anyone with an interest in psychiatry or mental health. We especially welcome contributions from service users or ex-users (or survivors), carers, and frontline psychiatric or mental health workers (anonymously, if you wish). The magazine is not-for-profit and run by a collective of unpaid volunteers. Asylum Collective is open to anyone who wants to help produce and develop the magazine, working in a spirit of equality. Please contact us if you want to help.

The views expressed in the magazine are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the Collective. Articles are accepted in good faith and every effort is made to ensure fairness and veracity.

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# EDITORIAL

## U.S. Prison Issue

The United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world, and the majority of these prisoners suffer from mental health conditions. A 2014 report estimated that U.S. prisons and jails house 10 times more mentally ill individuals than state psychiatric hospitals (CTA, 2014). In 2006, approximately 1 in 4 (26%) prisoners met the diagnostic criteria for major depression, almost half (47%) for mania, and nearly one in five (18%) for a psychotic disorder (BJS, 2006). Overall, approximately 3 in 5 (58%) of U.S. prisoners had symptoms or history of mental illness, and this number is predicted to have risen substantially since 2006. At two facilities in Los Angeles, the number of people receiving psychiatric drugs increased 200% between 2008 and 2013 (Nash, 2014). In Florida, the number of mentally ill inmates grew 153% between 1996 and 2013, while the total inmate population only grew 57% (Crews, 2014).

### JUVENILE INCARCERATION & RECIDIVISM

The U.S. also has higher rates of juvenile incarceration than any other country, even though many studies have shown that incarceration does not reduce criminality in youth, but in fact worsens it. Fewer than 30% of incarcerated youths re-enroll in school, and 70–80% are re-arrested within 3 years. Are they just “bad seeds”? No. Sadly, most of these youths (over 75% in 2010) were locked up for non-violent crimes like probation violation, truancy, and alcohol possession.

If these children were not already mentally unwell, the abuse and neglect they suffer in these institutions often makes them so. 30% of incarcerated youths have attempted suicide, but nearly half reside in facilities without universal mental health assessments. 12% of incarcerated youths reported having been sexually victimized by either staff or fellow incarcerated youths, but more may not report it for fear of retaliation: 42% of incarcerated youths reported that they were somewhat or very afraid of being physically attacked – 30% from another youth and 27% from staff (some from both) (Mendel, 2011).

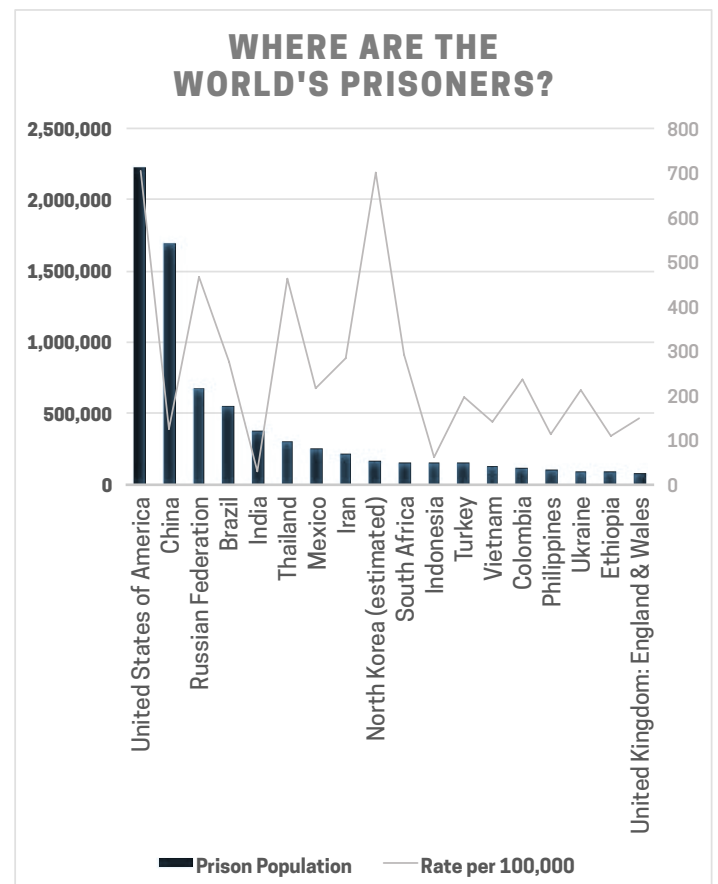
This issue received national attention during the 2008 “Kids for Cash” scandal, in which a private prison contractor paid two Pennsylvania judges \$2.6m (£1.8m) to lock up thousands of children for crimes as small as trespassing in a vacant building and creating a parody website about a vice principal. Given the minimal punishment inflicted on the private prison contractor and the high rate of juvenile incarceration in the U.S., these are probably not the only judges who have imprisoned people

for corporate kickbacks; they’re simply the only two who have gotten caught.

### THE HOLE

Along with physical abuse and threat, solitary confinement is another major source of mental deterioration in prisoners. Prisoners with mental illness are more likely to be placed in solitary confinement (AKA “The Hole”) even though numerous studies and lawsuits have reported that solitary confinement causes severe psychological damage to people without mental health conditions, and exacerbates pre-existing conditions. There also exist multiple cases of people in solitary confinement not receiving the medical and mental health treatment they need.

In Texas, a mentally ill prisoner named Terry Goodwin was allegedly locked in solitary confinement for up to 2 months without anyone opening the door. According to ABC-13, “His sink, toilet, and shower drain were clogged, not just with feces, but with toilet paper in an apparent attempt by Goodwin to cover his own waste and with orange rinds, perhaps in a futile effort to mask the smell... Food in Styrofoam containers was pushed in by



guards through a slit in the door and the refuse was never collected... a sign attached to the outside of the door instructed guards not to open it." Goodwin was originally incarcerated on a marijuana charge (Oberg, 2014).

In North Carolina, a man named Michael Anthony Kerr allegedly died of dehydration after being cuffed in a cell for six days, denied food and water and covered in his own waste. The autopsy report also noted multiple wounds on Kerr's body. "After viewing his body, family members said it appeared Kerr had been beaten before his death." Kerr had been diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, and was allegedly sent to "The Hole" for disobeying orders and tampering with locks (Ball, 2014).

In Alabama, on August 6, 2013, 19-year-old Duendrez Woods was locked in a "medical observation cell" without medical treatment for a severe gangrene infection on his foot. Such severe infections can cause hallucinations and aggressive behavior, so he was tasered 3 times over the following days and his water supply was cut off August 12. According to a lawsuit from his mother, "By August 17, the odor was so bad correction officers dragged Woods from his cell to the shower, sprayed him with water, and then placed him, still naked, in a different cell... Still, no correction officer or ACH nurse did anything to even check Woods, let alone help him." It wasn't until August 19th that medical staff finally examined Woods and transferred him to Huntsville Hospital, where he died from the infection (Redden, 2014).

In June 2012, at Dade Correctional Institution's (DCI) psych unit, guards allegedly murdered a mentally ill prisoner named Darren Rainey by locking him in a shower so hot that his skin separated from his body. Sadly, Rainey was only serving a 2-year sentence for possession of cocaine, and would have been released by now (Brown, 2014).

## CORRUPTION

Rainey's case is particularly troubling because of the suspected cover-up surrounding it. According to the DOC inspector general's report on the investigation, video surveillance showed an officer placing Rainey in the shower, but the camera then malfunctioned. Further, multiple former and current staff members reported regular and systematic abuse, including allegations that guards often boasted about how they could get away with killing the prisoners.

It wasn't until a Miami Herald exposé in May 2012 that anyone questioned key witnesses like Mark Joiner, a fellow prisoner on the unit who was tasked with cleaning Rainey's skin from the crime scene. The Herald reported that they sent Joiner at least five requests for an interview, but that Joiner only received the one sent by the Herald's law firm (Brown, 2014b). The Miami Herald also interviewed Harold Hempstead, a prisoner who had filed several complaints about Rainey's death. After the Herald's initial story was published, Hempstead's family wrote a letter to Governor Scott requesting that he be transferred to another facility, because the prison guards had threatened

him with false disciplinary reports, physical abuse, and solitary confinement if he didn't stop talking to the media and police. The Herald had trouble getting in touch with Hempstead for a follow-up interview.

In September 2013, another prisoner in the DCI psych unit, Richard Mair, left a suicide note detailing the routine sexual and physical abuse inflicted by the guards: "I'm in a mental health facility... I'm supposed to be getting help for my depression, suicidal tendencies and I was sexually assaulted" (Brown, 2014a).

## ANOTHER SILENCED SIDE OF THE STORY

Of course, the incidents listed above do not reflect the condition at every facility, nor the intent nor behaviour of every correctional officer. In response to allegations like those in the previous section, a Correctional Officer wrote to me:

"The problem is that everyone looks into this part of it. A lot of what you're reading is coming from inmates and a lot of the allegations are untrue. Inmates are not left in dirty cells. All cells have toilets, and inmates and officers are judged daily by supervisors on the cleanliness of the dorm... Their meals are taken to their cells and documented. Medical, mental health, and a chaplain come almost daily. Inmates also have a sick call request they can fill out anytime to be seen by medical, and can declare a medical emergency at any time.

"I have never seen an inmate being mistreated; however, look into how correctional officers are treated. I have worked in a dorm by myself with 104 inmates charged with burglary with a deadly weapon, child abuse, rape, attempted murder, murder, and more. I had nowhere to hide if they wanted to hurt me. All I had was gas, which doesn't affect everyone. Two years ago, a sergeant was killed by inmates stabbing him with homemade knives. A lot of times, an inmate commits battery on an officer but is never given outside charges. Officers also have to report to work the next day and possibly work in the same dorm. I have been 'gunned' where an inmate staring at you takes his penis out and masturbates, sometimes saying things I am uncomfortable repeating. Inmates throw urine and poop at us, and tell us that they're going to kill us and our families. Every day I go to work may be my last.

"Correctional officers are not bad people. I am not a bad person. And inmates are not put in confinement because of mental illness. Honestly, if they were, there would not be enough room for them. I work with a lot of mentally unstable inmates – which is very scary if you think about having to work in the middle of them.

"I am not recognized by the public as an officer. I am looked at so negatively. I am thought of as lazy and cruel to inmates. In reality, I work 12-hour shifts, I walk between 100+ inmates who see me as a target, and I am highly needed for a safe society. I put my life on the line for little to no praise from the public. I am a correctional officer."

This might help remind us that multiple voices are silenced in this arena, and we must refrain from harmful generalizations that will only worsen our relationships.



Publish your sketches, comics, first-person accounts, collages, drawings, photographs, essays, poems, stories, paintings, interviews, excerpts from your memoirs and graphic novels, and other works in this special U.S.-based edition of the U.K.'s famous Asylum Magazine.

We REALLY want art from people who feel that their voices are silenced and/or that they lack public venues for self-expression (for example, prisoners, non-English speakers, people in mental health facilities, etc.). Are you someone like this? Please send us your work! We also plan to display some of the work on a website and/or publish it in a book (with your permission) if we get enough submissions. That said, we also love to see work from family members, mental health workers, and anyone else who is interested in mental health.

*Excerpt from our Call for Works*

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

I initially rejected a "Prison" theme for this first U.S.-based issue of Asylum, but some of the original members of this issue's guest editorial board insisted. I had already agreed to lead the issue, but didn't think that I could address a Prison-themed issue with appropriate balance and gravitas, and I still don't. I'm still not sure how to feel about any of this to be quite honest.

When and if we revisit this project, we hope to solicit more work from family members, people working in corrections, and former prisoners to provide more insight into alternatives to incarceration such as drug and mental health courts, halfway houses, and programs that promote restorative justice and community reintegration.

The best we could do for this issue, given time and space constraints, was reach out to prison arts and advocacy organizations to help us circulate our Call for Works among people with lived experience. As a result of these combined nationwide efforts, most of the work in this issue is from current prisoners. Unfortunately, many of the individuals published herein will not receive a copy of this issue because it will be confiscated by their institutions' mailrooms.

We have also included several works from non-prisoners because the only requirement in our Call for Works was that the authors or artists feel that their voices are silenced. To help avoid any special preference or tokenization, I anonymised all submissions before the editorial board reviewed and voted on them.

We received a lot of strong work and wish that we had room to publish more than you see here. Given how many

envelopes arrived torn open and taped back together, I imagine that many more submissions were confiscated before we could read them – and that far more were never even written. I hope that the voices in this issue will help provide a context through which we can begin to imagine those silent voices' untold stories... and to empathize with their silent other sides.

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# Tears of Darkness

One hot summer day in the year 1955, a young lad named Jimmy Junior (age five) and Jessie B (who conceived him – not out of love) were sitting on the front steps of their residence. A large and hairy-looking tarantula moved slowly in Jimmy Junior's direction. The lad showed excitement. He had never seen a big spider like that before. As the tarantula moved closer, with its front legs reaching out, it touched the toe of Jimmy Junior's shoe. He reached forward to touch it and yelled "Spider!" At that instant, he was knocked backwards.

Jessie B had hit this child aside his head and the impact startled and dazed him. He saw black and white blurs. As his senses slowly returned, he heard an angry voice yelling at him, "Don't touch that nasty thing, nigger. Get your ass in the house!"

With watery eyes, he ran inside. Jessie B was right behind him. When Jimmy Junior stopped and turned he saw Jessie B run back out the front door carrying something in her hands. Jimmy Junior returned to the screen-door, and there at the bottom of the steps, with a broom in her hands, Jessie B was beating the spider, squashing the life out of it. To this young boy, it was unclear why she was causing this pain. Jimmy Junior had a great love for nature, for living creatures. The spider wasn't hurting anyone. Jimmy Junior withdrew from Jessie B; she never asked what was wrong.

The cruelty he witnessed that day being done to a spider he had also experienced firsthand. Perhaps that is why the memory stands out so much: it gave him an outside perspective on his own experiences. This was a child who had been hog-tied in a closet, with a thin piece of wet leather around the end of his penis while the other end was tied to the clothing hook above. There he lay in darkness for hours. This was a child who had been caught taking a puff of a cigarette and was made to eat a full pack of Lucky Strikes and a whole cigar. After eating the cigar, he had become dizzy and vomited. He was then made to eat the vomit. Crouched on all fours like a dog, he realized that if he did not escape, he would live like this for the remainder of his life.

Tragically, Jimmy Junior's experiences are not wholly unique. According to the Children's Defense Fund, "Every day, four children in America are killed by abuse or neglect. More than 750,000 children are abused or neglected each year. Even when children survive or after physical scars heal, the emotional damage left by child abuse and neglect can last a lifetime."

Children who grow up like this often become mentally ill as adults, and many of them end up living in institutions.

This problem is nothing new, of course. The American patriot and statesman Patrick Henry's wife was not given a Christian burial because she was mentally ill. The assumption during the time period was that her illness was the work of the devil. Yet today, despite all the social and medical advancements since Patrick Henry's time, we still criminalize mental illness, treating it as the work of the devil. Until we learn to appreciate one another as human beings and live up to our Constitution – which places such special emphasis on human rights – the emotional instability, mental disorders, and traumatic experiences of abused and neglected children will continue to go largely untreated (especially in impoverished and minority groups), and therefore criminalized.

According to American values, a child should instinctively be able to depend on her mother and father to be loving and caring parents who would provide protection. One would not expect a child's parents to be the primary and direct threat of terror within that child's life. Yet there are many parents in this country terrorizing their households. The majority are American men, from every ethnic and socioeconomic group. Without meaningful therapeutic spaces and environments, this trend will only worsen, thereby setting these terrorized children up for failure.

You will find the scarred victims of abusive parents in graveyards, prisons, and on death row. Only a handful – those with insurance – will be accepted into safe havens or provided mental institutions. Due to discrimination and a lack of interest, people are suffering needlessly. How is it possible for a human being to develop a wholesome psychological make-up when he or she is denied access to an environment with any opportunities?

Some traumatized victims stay quietly locked in their shells. They drown themselves in alcohol or addictive drugs, both prescriptive and illegal. You see them joining groups of people who share in their hopelessness. This is the pool of people where you will find the despairing falling prey to suicide and criminality. It is not their fault that they are in despair, and they are not intrinsically criminal. Their welfare is ignored and they become the victims of circumstance.

However, some of them make their despair visible to us all. I see them on the television screen far too often – a parade of the disturbed. December 25, 2010: a military policeman at Fort Campbell shoots and kills his loved one. December 26, 2010: another military policeman, on the same base, stabs a fellow soldier six times. March, 2011: a 25-year-old woman drives her car into the Hudson River, along with her four children, aged 11 months, 2 years, 5 years, and 10 years. The same month: James Humphrey

**"Every day, four  
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# Hidden

# Secrets

visits a Wal-Mart to see his girlfriend, and when he finds her, shoots himself. The next month: two fourteen-year-old girls arrange a sleepover so they can hang themselves; they decided to commit suicide because they had been bullied.

Do I know these incidents resulted specifically from trauma? No. But I know that almost every time the news media presents such stories, they pose the question “Why? Why the cruelty? Why the killings? Why the suicides?”

And meanwhile we Americans fail to address this disease of trauma – whether it is the trauma of war, or of bullying, or the all-too-common trauma of childhood abuse and neglect.

On any given day, a child or an adult who was a victim of a dark and agonizing past will vent anger and bitterness and hatred, and drown in depression in ways beyond comprehension. There will be stories that you will find unreal and disturbing, and yet the torture and domestic terrorizing of children and others right here in America is a reality. There is a child who is being physically abused! Where is the loving mother? Where is the protective father? There is a child who is being sexually abused! Where is the safe haven? Where is the sincere and skilled therapist? There is a child who is being tormented by her or his own peers! Where is the concerned and reforming teacher? Where is the caring and efficient guidance counselor?

There is a child who is running away from home! Are you not searching? There is a child who is crying and contemplating suicide! Can you not hear her or his plea? There is a child who is dying! Where were you?

Listen! There is yet another child who is crying and seeks to escape from torment and the realms of total darkness. There is no refuge!

There is a child who has been processed and then hidden within a state-sanctioned institution. Judge! Where is the habilitation – the internal transformation? Where is the conciliation?

This is from one who has come forth from darkness. It was me who was knocked backwards by Jessie B. It was me who was hog-tied and thrown into a closet with a thin piece of wet leather tied around the end of my penis. It was me who vomited after eating a pack of cigarettes and a cigar, and was then made to eat the vomit.

From one who was left behind and lived in total darkness, I have surfaced with a message from the abused, a perspective born in the brutal reality of child abuse, but nurtured in the hope for a better tomorrow.

The process of healing is a journey. For some the journey may be short. For others

the journey will be as if you were tracing the steps of the Israelites, as they walked across the Sinai desert towards the Jordan River. But for the process to even begin, we must provide therapeutic environments where there is safety and habilitation. We must hunt for caring people who will advocate policies that will help heal and conciliate. It is time for a system that will encourage restorative and transformative justice.

These are my visions of life – from Death Row.

These words are dedicated to the battered, the abused, the molested, the violated, the oppressed, the suppressed, the confused, the unloved, the despaired, and the lost.

**Abu-Ali Abdur’Rahman** is an artist and activist living on Tennessee’s death row inside Riverbend Maximum Security Penitentiary. This work was submitted on his behalf by D. T. Lumpkin, who facilitates the creative writing workshop in the prison. Abu Ali is scheduled to die in 2015. For further information on his case, visit [www.abu-ali.org](http://www.abu-ali.org).



“Crane” by **AbuAli Abdur’Rahman**

# The Machine's Mechanical Heart

Donald Joseph Urbanski

Every half-hour of every day of the past eleven years, an employee of the Department of Corrections has shined a light on me to make sure I am perpendicular and present. Words are never exchanged, and if eye contact is made it's only to re-establish

the distance that divides us. **How do human beings walk past one another 192,000 times without ever inquiring about each others' well-being?** They do it in eight-hour shifts.

Today, these sightings take place on an astronomical scale, for roughly 2.3 million Americans wake up alone every morning and then climb out of bed from the side that's not bolted to a wall. Variety simply isn't a strong suit of incarceration. It is primarily a monotonous affair that thrives on indifference. And for that reason alone, any vehicle that brings relevance to a prisoner's life or provides a distraction from his or her mundane existence is a welcomed detour from the mind-numbing tedium so common with cage-living. The problem, however, is that most distractions in prison revolve around minor rule infractions or salacious war stories which follow a continuous loop of locker room humor, or they're centered on the banalities of institutional life and the occasional dangers created by prison politics.

These are simple generalizations, but they carry as many hazardous variables as there are prisoners. Hindering an inmate's chance of obtaining a new lifestyle – a lifestyle free of crime, addictions and abject moral poverty – is his inability or unwillingness to be thoroughly honest about his past, present, or future. This truth was certainly evident in my own life, since I've woken up on the wrong side of the correctional cot for years with nothing more refreshing than a new lie.

Another harmful variable that exacerbates the problem of inmate apathy is the warehouse effect of prison overcrowding and daily redundancies. Because there's so much structure in the prisoners' daily routine, instead of proactive they become almost completely reactive. Myopia and stir-crazy are real threats, especially for long-term inmates unable to overcome the warehouse effect.

These conditions have been systematically driven forward since the latter part of the 20th century, and it's due in part to industrialization of the American prison system.

Unfortunately, there are serious ramifications to this trend. As some inmates become acclimatized to this punitive holding-pattern, it produces a toxic level of complacency. As a result, prisoners frequently become apathetic and therefore less proactive with their recovery and reintegration; it also increases their chances of joining the next generation of inmates who will spend most of their lives circulating through the criminal justice system.

Over the years, I became so apathetic in jail I would scarcely move unless I was prodded by bells, whistles or count lights. Even my prison cell became more of a stanchion than a sanctuary from the indignities of prison life. What's more, my own correctional ease lured me into believing that my many incarcerations were nothing more serious than an occupational hazard. And because of that reality, I've been a recurring cog in the machine since 1978, with my juvenile apprenticeship beginning in 1971.

By no means am I saying that prison doesn't serve a necessary function. It does.

Corralling me and then welding the gate shut for 13.4 years has saved my life; it was also society's best option, as I left them no choice. However, during the last three-and-a-half decades of institutional living it's also become apparent to me that the Department of Corrections has become a refuge for society's undesirables – literally a dust-bin of human sweepings and despair. We see clear evidence of this unrequited humanity now that our nation's prison system has become the largest provider of housing and healthcare for the mentally disabled.

Another imperiling variable of prison overcrowding is the assembly-line approach to healthcare and rehabilitation programs. Even though that approach is cost-effective, it diminishes the ability of the programs to deal adequately

**"...Our nation's prison system has become the largest provider of housing and healthcare for the mentally disabled."**

with inmates' underlying issues of criminality, addiction or mental health. I've personally experienced those cost-effective solutions, when I attempted to seek help for my own issues of depression and anxiety through the facility's psychology department. I was routinely given a cocktail of psychotropic gorilla-biscuits until my mental faculties and motor skills turned lethargic and infantile: the medication effectively knocked my dick into the dirt. Considering prisons aren't playgrounds, that's not a safe condition to be in.

I've even attempted to find solace for my disquietude and despair in the jailhouse church. The people there were kind enough to ask me what sin I was harboring. Then they told me to pray for forgiveness while reciting the name of Jeeesus, Jeeesus, just say Jeeesus, when you're feeling anxious or depressed. Now I feel uneasy and suspicious when I'm around church people.

Sadly these problems exist on a much larger scale than the Department of Corrections. In our society we tend to view personal wealth and economic growth as the primary means to prosperity. And so money becomes a goal, instead of a tool for enriching our lives or improving our communities. Consequently, we shamelessly exploit the disenfranchised by using them as units of commerce or placeholders in prison cells, and as objects of evil and hostility.

On a daily basis the airwaves are bombarded by sirens of fear like Nancy Grace, and reality shows like "Cops" and "Drugs Inc". We're then told how to live (or how not to live) by Judge Judy and her colleagues on "Divorce Court". Meanwhile, this never-ending race for media ratings does little more than perpetuate social apathy, which is hugely detrimental to a nation already full of sequacious individuals. Tragically, these provocative programs feed the cycle of fear until another hi-tech alarm system is installed or another super-max prison cell is built.

Through that long process we become desensitized to the root-cause of crime, which is our basic inability to appropriately address and deal with human iniquity. Therefore, when prisoners are randomly run through a series of institutional levers and pulleys as a means of rehabilitation for their issues of drug dependency, criminality or sexual immorality, those rehabilitative efforts produce little more than a modest success rate.

A further aggravating factor of the behavior-modification programs is the existing therapeutic tools, which tend to focus on the perniciousness of the offender's criminal actions rather than on the root causes of their criminal thinking. Moreover, those treatment techniques generally consist of stringent guidelines on how the participants should conduct their daily attitudes, actions and speech. Should participants not meet those program requirements, they meet with aggressive accountability tactics from peers and program staff alike. Such a response might generate immediate outward compliance within the therapeutic community. But an individual's therapeutic undertakings usually fall by the wayside once he is released from those constraints – hence the current rate of relapse and recidivism.

**Donald Joseph Urbanski** writes: *Today's date is November 12, 2013 and I've been in prison for the past eleven years. I've spent the vast majority of my life behind bars or imprisoned by my issues of mental health and drug dependency. In 1971, I was removed from the family home and placed in a residential treatment center due to parental instabilities. Consequently, I fell through the cracks until I became the sole author of my own destruction. With that admission, please know that the articles I'm offering are written with nothing more than a GED and 43 years of personal experience. Many thanks in advance for reading my work and all the light you shine into dark places.*

## Attending the Funeral of Kin and Abusers

the house was complete.  
he couldn't leave the hospital

mournful and missing, we  
circle  
these abysses  
hiding horrors of what and that and lost.  
but I saw them-  
tired, on the way to the cemetery  
sitting next to the accusers  
strange things narrated  
the conversations I'm not having  
as if in the deepest slumber  
they are guilty, here I sit  
I'm not lost, escalofrios

know the reasons  
mad at the conversations  
talk of shoes, dry washing the pain  
the afterbirth, as overpowering as it was  
his left hand

boiling alcohol, speaking of sins  
on the pulpit or in cemeteries  
private dicks we smell murder  
hide behind the deaths  
see you behind coffins  
until next time-  
dangerous  
writing is, like getting up  
just can't some mornings  
wait for beautiful nights  
laughing at the doom & masks.

**Noemi Martinez** is a writer living in South Texas.



# Edward Berkin

## was my...

Arnie King

**E**dward Berkin was my attorney, friend, and brother. We met almost forty years ago, after an incident at MCI-Concord resulted in my return to higher custody at MCI-Walpole. It was a very hot July morning when a group of prisoners sought water prior to a work assignment. For engaging in a work protest, we were immediately transported to the segregation unit, and then transferred to maximum security.

Within a week I was introduced to Eddie by a Harvard Law student (Anne), and met with Roxbury Defenders staff to prepare a 1983 Civil Rights complaint against the Department of Corrections: King vs. Higgins for the violation of DOC policy and our constitutional rights. Eddie worked continuously through many hearings and appeals until the final decision provided monetary awards favorable to the plaintiff. He also provided a few additional dollars for my research efforts.

Bonds of friendship developed quickly and continued to deepen, from one prison to another. During regular visits and phone calls, we talked about the complexities of the law, community politics, and various obstacles along the pathways of life. We introduced family and friends to each other, and our brotherhood strengthened with each new experience. He shared his work at Wounded Knee and as a member of the team representing the Attica Brothers, while I brought him inside for a meditation workshop, to play a little softball with some hitmen, and to attend a few picnics in the big yard.

Eddie and Linda planned a trip abroad in Fall 1976 and wanted to provide me with visitors during this brief period. I met Kate and her 2-year-old daughter twice and this evolved into a wonderful friendship. In 1985 Kate and I married during a 48-hour furlough at the Jamaica Plain boathouse. Though the furlough program for lifers terminated in 1987, the bond with Kate continued to strengthen and we have battled against the odds. Linda contacted Kate about Eddie's illness, and she quickly travelled to the prison to communicate the condition of my dear attorney, friend, and brother. I phoned the house after the visit and talked with Linda for a few moments. Later, I wrote separate cards to Linda and Eddie. He passed on the following evening.

Every prisoner would like to have a lawyer like Eddie. He has been with me, whether lead or secondary, for every major effort to obtain my release or prevent the prison authorities from inflicting cruel and unusual punishment. Due to Ed Berkin's determination to break the chains which have bound me in captivity for almost forty-two

years, as each initiative closed, another was started. The last time we met at this prison he told me that he was closing down the office and would be working from home. Since I had already filed the Petition for Commutation of Sentence in October 2012, he suggested a few lawyers to contact for additional assistance. He never told me he was sick, nor that he would die by the end of February, and be buried the first day of March. On March 6th, the Advisory Board denied the request for a public hearing.

This man expressed and displayed love and respect in a tremendous way. By phone call or email, he was always within distance, and I knew I was his number one client, though I imagine others also felt special. Anybody in captivity, whether an overnight in Station 4 or serving a life sentence, appreciates having a lawyer on speed-dial for representation in judicial proceedings, prison obstacles, and personal matters. We celebrated a few victories, while consoling and inspiring each other during the many setbacks.

Since Eddie never aspired to be a judge or law professor, the legal professionals may be unable to recognize his value and example. But I know lifers and long-termers who appreciate the legacy of this man for providing hope to many and one more opportunity for a few... to admire a sunset without the obstructive view through barbed wire.

There is a special place for Eddie in my heart and in my prayers – which include my father, sister Angel, brother Al, two professors (Ma Barker and Dante), and the man I shot and killed in October 1971. Eddie is in the company of some wonderful people. I'm reminded of him when I look at my board on the wall, which contains sayings about patience and commitment. There is also a photo of Linda and Muhammad Ali at a book signing. Eddie knew that Ali was very special to me, and he presented me with that photo.

About twenty years ago Eddie gave me a pair of Rockports. These are very comfortable and popular in here, where folks tend to wear sneakers. I have been wearing the Rockports now more than ever, and when I walk out of here one day it will be in these shoes, with Eddie's spirit right beside me.

*In October 1971, at the age of eighteen, **Arnie King** killed another human being and was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole. Despite the brutality and societal barriers, his journey has been transforming. For further information visit [www.arnoldking.org](http://www.arnoldking.org).*

# Keeping What is Mine

Kenneth Brydon

In the State of California, on Highway 101 headed North, you'll pass through the City of San Francisco. Shortly after you cross over the Golden Gate Bridge, there's a freeway off-ramp sign: "San Quentin State Prison". Coming from my brother's funeral in Fresno, my father took that off-ramp in August, 1994. Riding with him was my half-brother, Ty.

The prison's visiting room was two-thirds the length of a football field and half as wide. The smell of popcorn and screams of kids filled the air. "Hi Dad," I said, hugging.

"Hi son," he said. His gray eyes misted, but he remained as I knew him.

"Hey, bro," I said to Ty.

"Kenny." He hugged me.

After finding seats, we headed to the vending machines. Carrying our food back, I sat down across from them. "How was the trip?"

Dad didn't hesitate, "The trip was fine, other than Ty being a real pain in the ass!"

"Yeah," he sputtered, "and you wouldn't even stop for a minute!" It was a regular family reunion.

We ate in silence for a moment before Dad began. "The funeral went well; your brother, Kevin, shared a poem, and Mary asked a pastor of a local church to speak."

A couple walked up. "Dad, you remember Rusty and Diana?" He stood up and shook hands with them.

"We're very sorry," Diana said. The two of them were friends with my wife, Bettye, and myself; we visited every week in this room. I introduced them to Ty, and then they left. I waved at more couples who also knew who was visiting and why.

After talk of family, and our sandwiches finished, Ty stood up. "I'm going to go talk with them," he said, pointing to the visiting room prison guards. I'd introduced them last year when he visited. Ty worked in Arizona Corrections as a prison guard.

Slowly, I began my planned conversation. "Dad, what are you going to do?"

His face went hard, and he looked down before saying in a calm voice, "I'm gonna drive Ty home and go back to Fresno and check things out for myself."

My heart fluttered. He looked up at me again, his face blank. I looked away, reaching for my soda, trying to keep my hand from shaking. My voice trembled while speaking, "I don't think you want to be my cell mate."

His eyes opened wide a moment, and then narrowed. "No one does that to my son."

After seventeen years served in prison, you get to know when someone is serious, and my heart was beating fast.

Dad had been Special Forces Green Beret, a Master Sergeant – and after two tours of Vietnam, an expert at killing. He'd done it so many times, and in many ways.

"Let the legal system deal with them," I said.

He leaned close. At a whisper, his voice was impossibly deep. "I don't want those fuckers alive!" He pointed an accusing finger at the table. "I'm going to tie them to a tree, and show what I can do with a knife!"

He pulled back, sitting upright. His jaw clenched. Strong hands opening and closing. "They're going to die like dogs, just like they left my son!" He looked about, as if Mark's killers may be in the room.

I continued my prepared words. "You know, Dad, prison is full of people who've done just what you're thinking about."

Only one side of his mouth rose as he grinned. "What are you going to do," he asked, "turn me in?"

I shrugged. "There are no perfect crimes." I used my soda as a pointer waving it about, the message being: Hello, look where we're talking!

He sat, his hands grasping, still trying to take hold of what wasn't there to satisfy his lust. I waited, glancing over to see Ty laughing. A moment later, Dad's shoulders dropped slightly. "Yeah, Mark wasn't a saint," he said, "but he didn't deserve that."

"I know how you feel, Dad," I said, "but think about this." My heart was heavy. "There's a family out there that hates me; they feel the same as you. You want them to do the same thing to me?"

He took several deep breaths and stared at the ground a moment. "I hear what you're saying, Kenny," he said, bringing his head up, "but I'm not going to make any promises."

We watched each other for a long while. One son dead, murdered; the other serving life, for murder. Though tears welled up, he'd never break, but I had and would. I gave him a gentle smile as Ty returned.

He looked at Dad and then me. "What's up?" he asked.

"It's all good," I said, taking a drink from the can.

In November, 2009, my father died. I don't think he ever went back.

**Kenneth Brydon** has been a writer for more than fifteen years, received an honorable mention by PEN, and is being published in an anthology of prison stories edited by Joyce Carol Oates. He has served more than thirty-five years.

# Haircut

Carlito Ewell • 12/9/2013

Today I received my monthly haircut. I thoroughly enjoy this time. I usually get cuffed in the front, as opposed to my hands being behind my back. I get to walk around the entire block to get to the A Wing, and then sit on the steps next to the barber's chair and watch as he finishes a trim on the guy in front of me. I know the barber well. He is a guy who has been here for quite a while and has cut my hair many times over the years, when I was "up top."

When it's my turn, I sit in the barber's chair which is old and worn but still carries the nostalgia from a time long since past. I simply love getting a haircut: the sound of the clippers clicking on, the smell of Sea Breeze, along with the talcum powder. It reminds me of home. I close my eyes and take it all in. There's talk about last night's basketball game, but I barely hear it. The buzz of the barber's tools is in my ear. Right now, I'm a kid on 5th Street, between Fairmount and Parrish Streets, with my father; just enjoying my day.

I often wonder if my father has those same memories that I have – if he also cherishes those times that we spent together. Christmas of 1973 with my father is a clear memory for me. My Dad was very good at doing Christmas big. At that time I was an only child, so Christmas Day was like waking up in Kiddy City. Trains, Hot Wheels, The Evel Knievel doll on his Harley with the manual starter – and a jumping ramp! I even got an airplane that took real fuel. Dad and I never could get that thing to fly. It had a bad motor– that's what Dad said.

Carlito wrote  
this letter from  
"The Hole", where he  
was imprisoned for  
almost a year.

It was during these early years when I truly understood myself in the likeness of my father. I had never seen my mother stand in front of the toilet to relieve herself. Dad and I did this ritual daily. We would pee, shake, wash our hands, flush the toilet and always forget to put the seat down. Not Mom. She even closed the door behind her.

Christmas of 1978 I got my football gear. The helmet, shoulder pads, the pants with thigh pads, and a brand new ball. It was time to move on from toy planes. I put on my gear and headed out to play ball. My Northern Liberties neighborhood was truly male-dominated. On my street alone, there were at least ten boys. On Randolph Street, which ran perpendicular to my block, there were at least 1520 boys! I was not only the youngest at the time but also the smallest. So there I was, in the middle of the street, on Christmas Day. Black kids, Polish kids, Spanish kids – and me. I couldn't have been in the street for fifteen minutes before the ball hit me square in the nose! I cried like a baby, ran to our door where my Dad stood with a small white towel. He wiped my face, handed me some tissue and told me: "Try it again."

I'll never forget those words. My next-door neighbor punched me in the face: "Try it again, son." I spelled a word wrong during our study time: "Try it again." My dad didn't believe in failure; he believed in perseverance, hence his favorite words – "Try it again."

Funny how just a fifteen-minute haircut in "The Hole" has taken me so far back into my earliest memories.

*Carlito Ewell is a "lifer" at the State Correctional Institution in Somerset, Pennsylvania. He wrote this while in the Restrictive Housing Unit, "The Hole", where he was imprisoned for almost a year. He asked the recipient of the letter, John Kovach, to submit this on his behalf.*

## A False

## Lexicon

Arthur Longworth

I resent being called "an inmate". I feel that resentment with all of my being, more as the years go on. This might seem peculiar, and it used to puzzle me. After all, I am in prison, surrounded by others who are referred to as inmates, the same as me. Why should I care what I am called?

It's not just the term "inmate" that bothers me, but an entire lexicon of false words propagated by those who run the prison. A catalog of misnomers, coined with the intent of leading people astray. Terms that rob the objects they purport to describe of their true identities, supplanting them with others – ones that not even the people naming them believe, but which they very much would like everyone else to.

Nowadays they call prisons "corrections centers" – as though there is some form of correction that goes on here. It would take someone only five minutes inside this prison, walking through the decrepit, turn-of-the-century-before-last cell-houses, with men packed into each small cell, before they realized that nothing gets corrected here. Ever. And it isn't only this place. I've been to others, and heard of more. This makes it impossible for me to accept their terminology. Endless misery deliberately inflicted is no kind of correction.

Wardens now call themselves "superintendents", as if it were a school district they were running. Low-level prison administrators are "correctional counsellors". Guards are "correctional officers".



Even the structural components inside prisons have been renamed. Cell-houses are “units”. Cellblocks are “pods”. “The Hole” is referred to as “segregation,” and long-term lockup in The Hole is called “administrative segregation”.

Prison factories that run off the captive workforce (employing prisoners paid less than workers in Third World sweat-shops) are referred to as “Correctional Industries”. As though they were respectable companies, they even print their own labels and employ their own sales force to hawk their wares on the open market.

The dog-leash they put on you in The Hole they’ve taken to calling a “cuff retainer”. The money they steal from you and use for themselves is “cost of incarceration” and “crime victims’ compensation”.

There are a thousand other examples, but I’m going to stop recounting them because I fear it sounds like I am complaining, and that isn’t the point I wish to make. I never want to make that point. The point is to be truthful to what it is we’re talking about.

**Prisoner.** When I am referred to as such, I find that I feel in no way threatened or demeaned.

*Prisoner:* 1) A person held in confinement, especially in prison. 2) A person not able or allowed to speak or act freely.

This is certainly not a term to celebrate, but nevertheless it is accurate, by definition and connotation. It’s not something I like being, and is something I would change if I could. But being unable to, I’m not averse to being called a “prisoner”. That is what I am.

**Convict.** I feel no resistance or resentment toward this word, either.

*Convict:* A convicted person. This is what I am: a person convicted of a crime.

**But “inmate”?** That stops me in my tracks, despite the innumerable times I have been referred to as such.

*Inmate:* A resident in a dwelling or building.

That’s not it at all. As though I might be a patient in a hospital, a place where people are made better, a place from which I will, perhaps, be released when I have been rehabilitated. That ain’t fucking it at all. I feel like I’m being lied to.

It is that, I realize, which is wrong: their words. I feel like if I were to accept them, acquiesce to their use – call a guard a “correctional officer”, refer to myself as an “inmate” – it would validate the terminology. It would be tacit complicity in what they’re trying to do when they use those terms.

When I refer to things in here by their correct names, and refuse to do otherwise, I feel empowered. Like I am unafraid to tell the truth. The true language of prison is that spoken by the prisoners – the ones who see clearly, anyway.

But speaking truthfully is not appreciated by those who run the prison. In fact, they condemn it, often admonishing me against its use. That is why I think they know what they do here is wrong. If they didn’t, they wouldn’t feel the need to try to hide or disguise reality, and change the way things are named.



“Study of Human with Homemade Flowers [Ambivalent Reality]” by **B. Pat**

# Prisons as the “New Asylums” Liat Ben-Moshe

In 2008, for the first time in history, more than 1% of all adult Americans were behind bars. By 2011, the number of adults incarcerated in prisons and jails in the USA had reached 2,266,800. Another whopping 4,710,900 people were under “community corrections”, which includes parole and probation (BJS, 2012). Race, gender and disability play a significant role in incarceration rates. By 2006, one-in-fifteen black men over the age of eighteen and one-in-nine black men aged between twenty and thirty-four were incarcerated. From 1997 to 2007 the overall incarceration rate for women increased 832% (Human Rights Index, 2009-10). To put these numbers in perspective, consider the fact that today more African-Americans find themselves in penal institutions than in institutions of higher learning (Thompson, 2010).

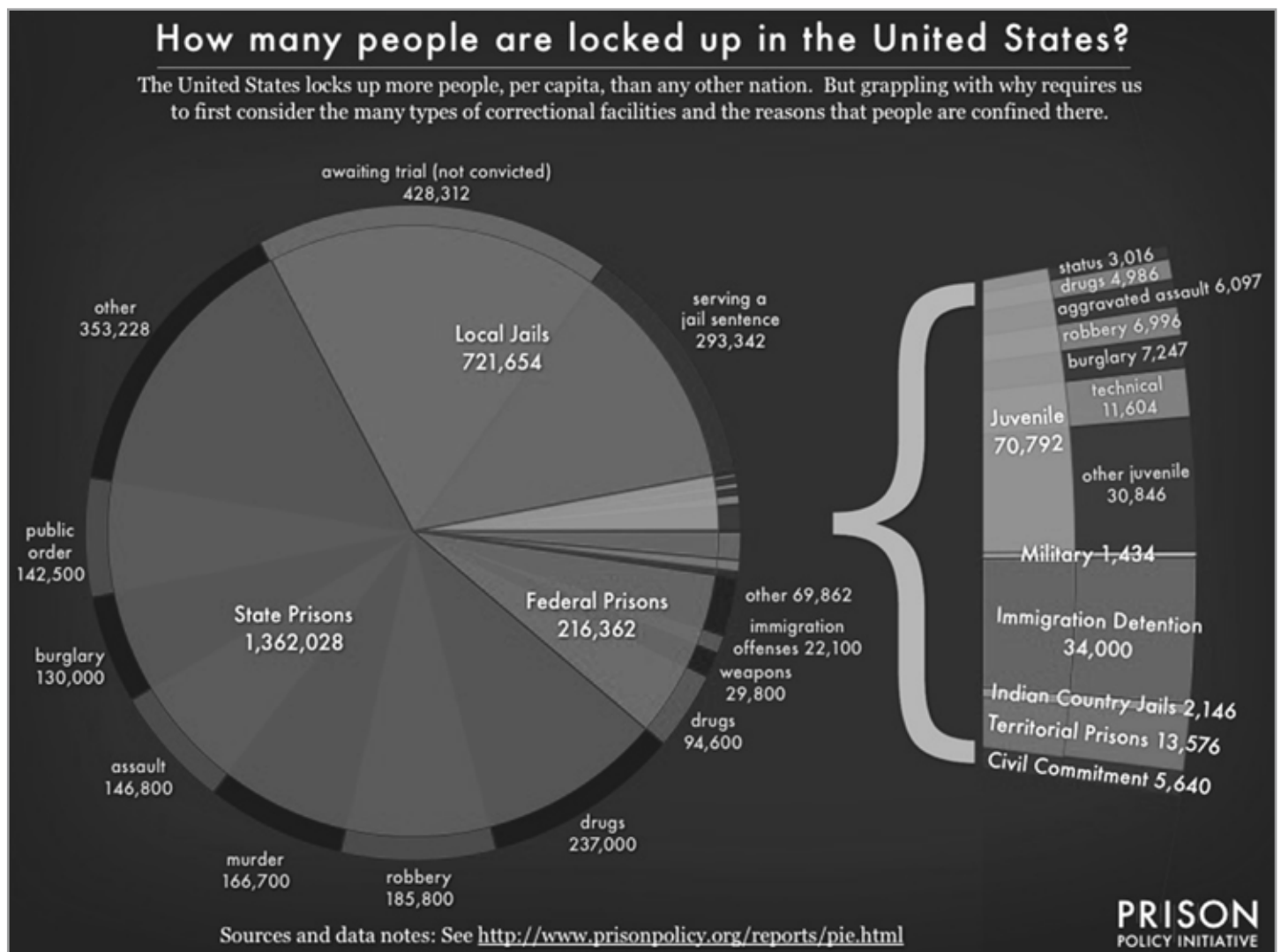
Although several attempts have been made to estimate the number of prisoners who have a psychiatric diagnosis, it is impossible to estimate the numbers with any precision, even if ‘mental illness’ is presumed a viable construct. In 2000 The American Psychiatric Association reported that as many as 20% of all prisoners were “seriously mentally

ill”, while up to 5% were “actively psychotic” (APA, 2000). Other estimates appear to use a substantially more expansive definition of mental illness. Bureau of Justice

Statistics show that in 2005 **more than half of all prison and jail inmates were reported as “having a mental health problem”**.

The reported prevalence of mental health problems amongst the imprisoned also seems to vary by race and gender. White inmates are reported with higher rates than African-Americans or Hispanics (Erickson & Erickson, 2008). However, African-Americans, especially men, appear to be labeled “seriously mentally ill” more often than their white counterparts. It is also reported that, in general, women inmates have higher rates of mental health problems than men (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

Prisoners are not randomly selected and do not represent all strata of society. Most prisoners are poor and people of color. Poverty is known to cause a variety of impairments and disabling conditions. In addition, the prison environment itself is disabling: from hard labor in harsh





conditions with toxic materials, to closed wards with poor air quality, the circulation of drugs and unsanitary needles, and a lack of medical equipment and medication (Russell & Stewart, 2001). In addition, conditions of confinement may cause further mental deterioration in prisoners entering the system already with a diagnosis of “mental” or “intellectual disability”. The nature of incarceration further distresses those incarcerated, and worsens their overall mental and physical health. Prisoners identified as “mentally ill” or who exhibit “disruptive behaviors” are often sanctioned to “administrative segregation” in separate (often isolation) units. Those segregated forms of incarceration, such as “supermax” or SHU (security housing units), are likely to cause or exacerbate the mental and physical ill-health of those incarcerated, regardless of their prior mental state.

As I suggested elsewhere (Ben-Moshe, 2013), these statistics are not used merely for heuristic purposes: there is much at stake in counting the percentage of “disabled” and so-called “mentally ill” prisoners. For activists, using statistics that demonstrate the high prevalence of disabled prisoners can take several directions. For instance, an activist in NAMI (National Alliance of Mental Illness) might use the statistics to show that deinstitutionalization failed and that, with a lack of other alternatives, prisons and jails have become a dumping ground for those labeled mentally ill. In essence, a campaign might call for the (re)hospitalization of those with psychiatric diagnosis (e.g., see Torrey, 1996). Also, critiques from activists and scholars about inappropriately placing disabled people in nursing homes or prisons (as argued, respectively, by some ADAPT and NAMI activists) reaffirm the sentiment that it is somehow appropriate to place some people in nursing homes and prisons. In other words, they seem to suggest that some people really do need to be segregated in places of confinement, while the young and the disabled do not.

A similar approach is taken by those who find the living conditions of disabled prisoners and the institutionalized so deplorable that they call for more hospital beds in prisons, the reform of psychiatric hospitals and institutions for those labeled “intellectually disable”, and the creation of more accessible prisons. Others call not for reform, but for abolishing those institutions altogether.

Perhaps most relevant to the prison abolitionist and anti-institutional stance is the analysis of imprisonment and institutional segregation as a core structure which shapes social relations throughout society, not just for those immediately affected (Davis, 2003). It is not just about closing down prisons or such institutions. This kind of analysis offers a revolutionary framework which transforms the way we understand the forces that shape our histories and everyday lives. It questions notions such as “crime” and “innocence” (what gets defined as crime, and who gets defined as criminal); “disability” (not just a medical diagnosis but also an identity) and “rehabilitation” (a benign process or a force of assimilation and

normalization); ideas of punishment (justice vs. revenge or retribution); notions of community (as in “living in the community” or “community re-entry”); “institution” (Who defines what is called an institution?); notions of freedom and equality (Can we feel free and safe without locking others away?); and concepts of danger and protection

(Who do we protect by segregating people behind bars in psychiatric hospitals and prisons? Is it really for “their own good?”) (Ben-Moshe, 2013).

When we discuss the connection between disability or madness/mental illness and imprisonment, it is important to recognise what is meant by the terms carceral and incarceration. There are various spaces and technologies to remove or make people disappear from the community for being problematic, unproductive, lgbtq/gender non-conforming, of color, disabled etc. These methods include segregating people in specific spaces such as nursing homes and institutions, psychiatric hospitals, boot camps, prisons, detention centers, and more. But there are also processes such as psychiatric labeling or forced medication, which could be equally characterized as forms of confinement. For instance, Erick Fabris (2011) discusses “chemical incarceration” by psychopharmaceuticals, not as a metaphor but as an actual way to control people’s bodies and minds that is akin to imprisonment.

There are various connections that can be made between all these carceral mechanisms, which is not to say that all those forms of confinement are the same, but only to say that we need to examine critically their similarities and differences. (For more on these connections, see Ben-Moshe, Chapman and Carey, 2014.) Some connections between spaces of confinement of disability/madness are also made uncritically. For example – something becoming an axiom heard from activists, policy makers and the media – it is said that in the US jails are becoming “the new asylums”. A documentary was even made with that name. Without disregarding the reality of having disproportionate numbers of people with disabilities (in particular, psychiatric, cognitive and learning disabilities)

**I want to caution against uncritical declarations that jails are becoming the largest mental health facilities in the US, for these reasons:**

**1** It implies that people in prison or jail actually get treatment. This is highly suspect, both in the lived experience of those imprisoned and in terms of the resources available in such places, as several submissions in this special issue of Asylum magazine demonstrate.

**2** It builds on arguments heard by various activists, including those in the mental health arena, such as NAMI, that people with mental health issues should not be placed in jail or prison in the first place. We would like to see more advocacy from such activists in terms

“Can we  
feel free and safe  
without locking  
others away?”



of critiquing the SHU and solitary confinement, and I think that this could be a great case for coalition building between prison abolitionists and disability/madness activism. However, calling for certain kinds of people to be released from jails and prisons might simply consign them to re-incarceration in other institutions, or by other means. For instance, they might then be subjected to forced drugging and/or indefinite detention in psychiatric hospitals or psych-forensic units.

3 Such ideas often imply that the main reason for people with psychiatric disabilities ending up in prisons and jails is due to deinstitutionalization – from the early 1960s, the progressive closure of psychiatric hospitals in the US. They might seem to support those who condemn the movement for deinstitutionalization as “irresponsible” and “leaving people in the streets”. But it wasn’t deinstitutionalization that led to homelessness and increased incarceration. It was racism and neo-liberalism that did that – by means of privatization, budget cuts in all the service or welfare sectors, and little or no funding for affordable and accessible housing. Meanwhile, budgets for corrections, policing and punishment ballooned (for example, through “The War on Drugs”).

4 In addition, the assumption that these are the same people – i.e. that the people who were deinstitutionalized ended up in prison – should also be deconstructed since the demographics of the two populations are quite distinct. Over the years, the gender distribution of inmates in mental hospitals tended to be either equal or slightly over-represented by women. Although there is some evidence to suggest that during deinstitutionalization the proportion of those admitted to mental hospitals identified as non-whites increased, they were still at about one-third of all in-patients, at most (Harcourt, 2006). Anyone familiar with the US prison system knows that non-whites are highly over-represented. In other words, the inmate population in mental hospitals tended to be white, older and more equally distributed by gender than those incarcerated in prisons. So we are not speaking about the same population or group of people (who exited hospitals and institutions and entered prisons), but of ways in which the social control function of incarceration retained its importance. It is also important to keep in mind that prisons damage people’s bodies and psyches, and that due to practices like mandatory minimum sentencing and solitary confinement, even those who did not enter the prison with any diagnosable psychiatric disability will very likely experience one during their incarceration.

5 Often what we hear about people with various disabilities or addiction issues who are caught in the criminal injustice system is that they need medical help and treatment, not incarceration and punishment. But often what is touted as treatment and medical help is no less coercive and normalizing than other forms of incarceration. For instance, touting drugs as a treatment

and alternative to incarceration is highly problematic – there is a lot of questioning and downright resistance to psychopharmaceuticals from the psychiatric survivor or ex-patient movement. Holding people in psych wards for unspecified periods of time, as an alternative to prison and as a form of treatment supposedly for their own good, is also highly questionable.

What I want to question is not only putting people with various societal disadvantages (including madness) in prison, but also what are generally considered the alternatives to incarceration. Isn’t “rehabilitation” or “treatment” another apparatus of the carceral state, attempting to make people over into its own image – white, hetero, masculine, able-bodied, sane/rational, etc? In the context of the prison-industrial-complex, as well as in the disability context, it is important to ask: What is the person being “habilitated” to? To a society fraught with violence, racism and lack of economic opportunities?

In the context of looking at prisons as “the new asylums”, these are some questions that prison abolition movements and madness activism need to confront.



*“The Two of Us” by Alan Scally, an artist living in Portland Oregon. For more of Scally’s work, visit: [www.scallysmashmouthart.weebly.com](http://www.scallysmashmouthart.weebly.com)*

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# Anticipatory Allyship Adelle Menees

I am certain that “ally” is not an identity. Much like being anti-racist, being an ally is not an achievement; it is continuous work. Allyship is a stance. Rather than try to resolve the question of what qualities I want in an ally, I have instead wondered: what does my mad identity offer to my allied stance?

Years after my time in a Seroquel experiment, years after becoming a psychiatric survivor of the at-risk teen industry in the US, I slowly came to a mad identification. These experiences place me in a minority. I started politicizing my madness simply because I grew tired of being misunderstood.

In his brilliant 2009 book, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, the late scholar Dr José Esteban Muñoz identifies the (queer) utopianism of the “not-yet-here,” the possibility in the anticipatory. Inspired by his theoretical imagination, I think that allyship is “not-yet-here,” and that is okay. Anticipatory allyship is a practice of friendship and hope.

If we are insensitive, maybe we are not anticipating what there is to be sensitive about. We need a stance in which awareness of struggles, histories, and experiences translates into an informed social sensitivity about peers’ lived realities, even those which may not be stated or obvious. Anticipatory allyship would not require someone to “out” oneself in every single interaction to gain respect.

Identifying as a feminist doesn’t mean that my ways of being are inherently feminist. If my girlfriend is a trans woman, I can anticipate that maybe I should stop incessantly trying to borrow tampons from her. If my friend has a body that menstruates, I can anticipate the possibility that she or he has had an embodied experience with pregnancy that I do not know about.

How can I be anti-racist if I am not anticipating the realities of racism? In the United States, we have about 5% of the world’s population, and 25% of the world’s prison population. Is my allyship a stance which forefronts awareness of people grieving? We know that at any given time, about 10% of black men are excluded from our communities, locked up. As a white person, am I anticipating the impacts of this anti-black racist exclusion? It is a structural fact that my friends of color have experienced racism including hurtful micro-aggressions. People of color should not have to explain this me.

There is healing in anticipation. Friends returning from war with PTSD may not want a surprise “Welcome Home” party. Friends living with physical disabilities could have issues with the word “special”. Most friends of Bill smoke cigarettes. I know that many people in my life experienced sexual assault before they turned 18, whether they told me that or not. No-one should have to “out” their marginalization, life-story, or trauma to me for me to behave in a new, enlightened, and respectful way. Solidarity isn’t an exclusive club.

Anticipations are not assumptions; they are something like gentle knowing or wondering. I care about happy, healing, collaborative friendships in which diverse realities are respected. My mad identity is rooted in a desire for political community that informs the ways in which I affirm and support the people in my life. We all make mistakes. Allyship is “not-yet-here,” but there is something liberating about anticipating it.

**Adelle Menees** is a mad millennial from the U.S. who recently got her Bachelor’s degree in psychology and cultural studies from Prescott College in Arizona. She runs the blog [fuckyeahmadpride.tumblr.com](http://fuckyeahmadpride.tumblr.com).





Artwork by **Anna Morrow**, who writes: I live in San Francisco's Sunnydale Housing Projects with my cat Bunny. I am grateful to be housed – albeit marginally – and despite daily struggles with poverty, I'm glad to be unemployed. I now spend most of my time doing what I love: playing with pictures and words. My favorites are painting and printmaking, but I'd use tree bark and coffee grounds if that's all there were. I believe: Creativity is healing. Authenticity is key. One day, marginalized populations will overcome, and together we will save the world!



# SUPERMAN

A mother-of-pearl mirror-stand, rolled rugs from Damascus, and other bric-a-brac from when I went through my I'm-gay-but-proud-to-be-Syrian bullshit fill the shadows in my garage. Tossed among the clutter, boxes that once held my photographs – my life's work – lie in tumbles, their 5x7 guts spilled all over the concrete. Yelling, I tear through the silence. I throw and twist and rip my best shots into paper particles. The remains look like ash piles around my wheelchair, like the remains of the world after the last bomb-cloud settles.

My award-winning shot of a boulder that in the blue dusk-light could pass for a contemplating, caped hero – ripped; the mallards shaking the wetlands off their wings as they take flight – ripped; a self-portrait of me in my chair – I burned that; Hannah Lowman, my one and only girlfriend – she called me a camel-fucking faggot when I told her the truth.

One picture I couldn't destroy. Through the window at my back, the sun slides its warm hand over my shoulder to touch the photo's glass frame trembling in my grip. In the picture, my father holds me over his head, one large hand under my chest, the other gripping the blue pajama legs around my knees. Arms stretched like the Superman action figure at Father's feet, I pose as if I am about to fly out of the camera shot. I'm laughing, and Father's teeth shine up at me through his beard.

I search the picture for a kind truth. I can only think of my father on his hospital bed, smelling like dirty dishrags, that fucking word exploding like suicide-bombers from his lips.

"Abomination." He had exactly enough breath to blow out the word before he passed out among a nest of tubes and wires. With one word, Father forbade my mother from signing the papers for the transplant.

I've spent my life struggling to belong again, but white lions have no place in brown deserts, and homosexuals don't belong under God's sun.

The picture clatters on the floor and falls quiet next to the open fuel can. The can's fumes fill my garage. That pinching smell is the stink of terror beneath sleeping flame. It's the smell of shame, of my mother begging Father not to burn me alive after he caught me with a boy.

I pick up the can and upend it over my head. Gasoline splashes on the back of my neck. Cold streams spread greedily as my clothes grow heavy with them. I sit there until the splatter of gas against the floor slows to a drip. A green Bic lighter is warm and weighty against my palm, like a bar of plutonium.

Giving in to the weight of my lids, I shut tears behind my eyes, and there, in the dark of my mind, the picture

waits for me – me soaring in my father's hands, my favorite toy lying at his feet.

My mother bought me that Superman-with-detachable-cape when I was six. She put it in my hands, and a grin swelled my cheeks, misting my eyes. I idolized Superman. What wasn't there to admire? Speeding bullets, burning rockets, and getaway cars bounced right off him; a whole DC universe loved him.

The day I lost my action figure, Superman saved the world nine times, riding beneath the creases of my palm. As I flew him on his last adventure, I zoomed outside to put the sky above us. We vanquished butterflies from hedges, while Hannah Lowman and her friends played freeze-tag in the street.

Sirens wailed on a distant block and swelled until there wasn't room left in the neighborhood for playing children. A rust-colored car, sleek and low, squealed around the corner. Hannah's friends scattered for curbs and porches, but she just covered her mouth and trembled like a man about to set himself on fire.

I ran toward her.

Muscular steel sped toward us; its sounds tore at me through the asphalt. Rocks snapped like tin gunshots off its undercarriage. Its growl pressed against my cheek as gas and hot rubber burned inside my nose.

I shoved Hannah, starting with my forearms then flailing out with my hands. Superman tumbled after her.

What followed stretched forward into eternity. I remember the bumper, smooth and unyielding, running through my hip. My arm swept like a clock-hand across the hood, and its hot paint set me on fire. I burned. I screamed without breath, and I flew. Not the powerful flight of my hero, but the tail-spinning collision course of a flaming jet.

Below, the street grew small. The rust car jumped the curb into Mother's rose garden, spraying dirt and bricks.

I continued flipping upward, the clouds and my screaming mother on a tilt-a-whirl.

Later, Father told my nurses, "Take care of my son. He's a hero."

I float, no longer tumbling wildly. Wind flaps my ripped shirt like a cape. The flames go cold. I'm Superman. And everybody loves me.

"We  
vanquished  
butterflies from  
hedges."

*Emile DeWeaver writes: I am 35, and I have been in prison for 16 years. I write stories and music because it is the only power I have left. Thank you for your time and this opportunity for my voice to be heard.*

Lacino Hamilton, #247310  
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Asylum Magazine,

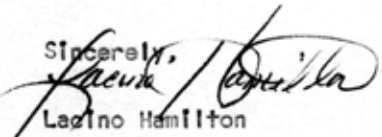
I received a book from the UK, which was rejected by the department and summarily destroyed. That is how mean spirited people operate.

Anyhow, my only connection to the UK would be you. I sent an article for consideration to be published in the first U.S. edition of the magazine. I would like you to forward this letter and the enclosed to who it was in the UK who was kind enough to send the book: *If This Is A Man*.

First, I would like to forge a relationship with them/you. I can write a little bit, and have a lot to share. Second, I am often kept in segregation (prison within prison), making new relationships are good for me emotionally and psychologically. Also, I would like to inform them that the only source I can receive books from is Barnes & Nobles or books that come directly from the publisher. I would very much like to read that book and discuss it with the prisoners I am in close proximity to.

Enclosed are a few of my more recent articles that I hope you can find use for. I would also like to know if you can direct me to place(s) that some of my more "radical" writings can be published?

Sincerely,

  
 Lacino Hamilton

## When We Evaluate Prisons, We Tend Not to Think of Prisoners

Lacino Hamilton

It is arguable that today's mass incarceration involves the most fundamental redesign of the United States' political and economic arrangements, at least since Reconstruction. Yet the profound implications of these fundamental changes for the lives of the incarcerated have barely been exposed to serious public scrutiny or debate. Despite the scale of this mass incarceration, neither our elected officials nor our educational institutions nor the mass media have made a credible effort to describe the emotional, psychological and social repercussions experienced by those who are incarcerated; or to explain how it affects their personal organization and sense of self. How could they? Prisoners are seldom, if ever, consulted.

The occasional descriptions or predictions about mass incarceration to be found in academia and in the media usually derive from the leading advocates and beneficiaries: prison administrators/staff, and prison profiteers. The visions they offer are unfailingly positive, even utopian: Mass incarceration makes the USA safer and freer, and gives the incarcerated an opportunity to develop an ability to successfully engage in interpersonal relationships and learn productive work habits. Shockingly enough, the

euphoria they express is based on their privilege to define objectives and to legislate economic, political and social theories, strategies and policies that, wherever they've been applied, have proven spectacularly unsuccessful over the past several decades. In fact, these are the very ideas that have brought us to the frightening situation of the moment: alienation, a spreading disintegration of the social order and, deep within the hearts of many people, extreme anxiety about the future.

The all-encompassing character of prison requires administrators and staff to handle many human needs. What is less well appreciated is that it is simply not possible for administrators and staff to fulfill their roles. Not only is each prisoner extremely needy but his needs are nearly always incompatible with the prison's need for conformity and regimentation. So, for example, while personal possessions "are an important part of the materials out of which people build a self... the remarkable efficiency with which [administrators and staff] can adjust to a daily shift in the number of [incarcerated persons] is related to the fact that the comers and leavers do not come or leave with any properties but themselves"

(Goffman, 1961). Therefore, in a prison, the very structure of personal property i.e., a sense of self, is determined in the interests of efficiency, not that of self-enhancement. There is a conflict between the need of the administrators and staff to curb each inmate's self-development, and the incarcerated person's need to develop himself. This forms the schizophrenic context for the daily activities of the incarcerated.

Just as personal possessions and the construction (or reconstruction) of the self may well interfere with the efficient running of prison, and are often severely limited for this reason, so are personal will and self-determination. This begins with admission procedures... "such as taking a life history, photographing, weighing, fingerprinting, assigning numbers, searching, listing personal possessions for storage, undressing, showering, disinfecting, haircutting, issuing institutional clothing, instructing as to rules, and assigning to quarters" (Cohen & Taylor, 1972).

Admission procedures are coupled with a will-breaking contest. That is, the slightest sign of defiance finds its immediate response in naked and tempestuous coercion; this increases until, in action and in spirit, the prisoner assumes a monotonously malleable mien. Another instance of the strong-arming of personal will and self-determination is the necessity to supplicate or ask humbly for every little thing, such as toilet paper, permission to use the phone, to throw something in the trash, to stand up or to sit down. This disrupts or defiles adult executive competency. Such indignities abound in prison. This makes it almost impossible... "in some ways at least, not to feel inferior, weak, blameworthy, and guilty" (Weinburg, 1942).

While the process of will-breaking goes on, personal re-organization is constructed not out of positive consciousness but out of avoiding consequences. This task is likely to require a persistent conscious effort; it may even require foregoing certain levels of sociability, so as to avoid or escape incidents. This psychological torment cannot be easily appreciated by those who have never been incarcerated. Even the incarcerated may not appreciate how much they fear and are obsessed with "getting in trouble." Or why attempts to act as a model prisoner gradually take on exaggerated significance. This requires relegating the prisoner's own needs and aspirations to a secondary position – or sometimes to no position at all.

Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the demoralizing prison work system. Since incarcerated people are generally impeded by a lower educational level and fewer skills, one would imagine that raising the level of academic and vocational skills and hence the ability to earn a living would be very important. However, administrators and staff appear to frown on innovation. Where technology or specialized tools are required, manual labor is in the mainstream. Prison pays less than a

dollar for an eight-hour working day, if the inmate is lucky; many jobs pay nothing at all. So, if it isn't payment or the acquisition of employment-oriented skills, what is the incentive for prison work? It is the threat of punishment: anything from twenty-three hour cell restriction (23) to denying parole. In most cases, prison work amounts to a kind of slavery, where the time and labor of the incarcerated is for the convenience of the administrators and staff.

It would be an over-simplification to attribute all the harm experienced and suffered by the incarcerated to the insidious designs of the administrators and staff. Even if harm weren't actively encouraged by the present set-up, life in prison presents a dichotomy between inside and outside. Outside is the real world and inside is the unreal world. But after a while the inside becomes the reality, and the outside becomes unreal. Eventually those who are incarcerated lose track.

Punishment alone cannot sum up this "getting lost". There is also the feeling of time wasted. And although "some roles can be re-established by the inmate if and when [s/he] returns to the world, it is plain that other losses are irrevocable and may be painfully experienced as such. It may not be possible to make up, at a later phase of the life cycle, the time not now spent in educational or job advancement, in courting, or in rearing one's children" (Goffman, 1961). The consequences are of course dramatic. For example, when family and community are condemned to atrophy from want of interaction they may become incapable of fulfilling their natural functions.

Family is one of the most basic units of social life. But even in the best of conditions, where an incarcerated person has family interaction and support, the inherent alienation from day-to-day interaction with the family results in the incarcerated becoming his or her own basic unit of social (or rather, asocial) behavior. Emotionally and psychologically, the person becomes an island. This is an experience of utter defeat and despair.

For these and other reasons, most descriptions of mass incarceration cannot be considered reliable indicators of the characteristics of prisons and prisoners. The experience of incarceration has an enormous impact not only on the people who are incarcerated, but also on their families, friends, and the communities to which they will be returning.

Prison is frustrating, oppressive and degrading. It is time to re-examine any ideas of looking at prisons without considering the emotional, psychological, and social processes experienced by the prisoners themselves.

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"...after a  
while the inside becomes  
the reality, and the outside  
becomes unreal."



# An Offender Manifesto<sup>Lacino Hamilton</sup>

## (Could Create New Political Opportunities for Building Social Movements)

Expecting offenders to maintain rules and regulations that guarantee the smooth running of the correctional facility presents a problem: constant conflict between self-respect on one hand, and facility efficiency on the other. Where the self-determination and imagination of the offender have not been dulled to the point of blind adherence, the need to act in one's own best interests (and of those similarly situated) protrudes like broken bone through the skin. However, such a painful pursuit can only take form when offenders are convinced of their own human rights.

Sounds simple enough, I know, but the expectations of offenders are often couched in euphemistic terms which reflect what appear to be legitimate facility objectives, but are not – objectives which shroud the belief that offenders are morally and spiritually corrupt, expendable, nonhuman. These beliefs, which are very significant in the prison system, often lead even the offenders themselves to interpret and measure their behavior by how well or not they conform to the facility's expectations: that is, to question their own inherent self-worth. The best hope for countering this problem lies in building a social movement in which offenders reclaim the sovereign rights over their own futures.

Most offenders now feel they have lost control over their futures. This is not only true among Michigan offenders, with whom I have shared quarters for two decades, but increasingly among the 2.4 million offenders across the USA. Fear and insecurity have become rampant in this climate. They express themselves sometimes as apathy or, upon release, as apathy, indifference and/or recidivism.

Underlying the fear and insecurity is a fundamental question: Can we create new political opportunities for building a social movement to establish alternatives to the current system of mass incarceration? "Political" refers to aspects of the system that center on power relationships, especially power connected to the state. In building a social movement, emphasis must be placed on discrediting the idea that incarceration is the most rational response to the breakdown of human relationships and the resulting harm.

Offenders possess the lion's share of the moral and political obligations to change the dull reality of harm and hurt into something inspired by love; they must play a role other than the current incapacitation, which does not address underlying causes. That could only amount to one thing: offenders' energies need to be mobilized around a new social vision, around reconciliation, reparation, and the restoration of healthy relationships.

In effect, the correctional facility must be retooled to serve the offenders' rights to determine their own future. Ultimately, this would involve doing away with the correctional facility, and require the development of a

common platform and agenda. This new social vision must be carried out in concert with other social movements that confront a homogenized culture which simply reflects Western corporate values and priorities.

This project could take the form of a common Manifesto for Offenders which would include:

- 1 A declaration of the fundamental rights of offenders to be the agents of their own transformation, and to determine their own futures.
- 2 The sovereign rights of offenders over correctional facilities, to be able to act, as opposed to simply be acted upon.
- 3 The demand that correctional facilities meet certain basic cultural, social, and political conditions which could enrich each offender's capacity to contribute to a radical transformation of many aspects of our society.
- 4 The demand that states develop and enact new regulatory measures to empower communities where offenders reside prior to incarceration to exercise democratic control over correctional facilities.
- 5 The responsibility of social movements to take whatever forms of action are needed to uphold the basic rights of offenders to be proactive in their own transformations.

I understand that, as a concept, offenders' rights is the antithesis to the current model of criminal justice. But it does not have to be this way. The core of this Offender Manifesto would be the spirit and practice of repairing harm. Its primary purpose would be to provide social movements across the USA with a common platform for social action. The primary objectives would be:

- 1 Dismantle the elaborate system of punishment in which correctional facilities play the key role.
- 2 Challenge the social disconnections caused by incarceration.
- 3 Address the normal failure of inmates to acquire anything gainful within correctional facilities that can prove useful upon release.

We want to ensure that a shift to a more democratic criminal justice posture would be more fully institutionalized, so that it survives beyond one or two well-intentioned programs. In the past, offenders have announced their willingness to take the lead in their own transformations. But such programs always fell way short – they failed to effect the necessary institutional and cultural changes. We want to ensure that this does not happen again.

# The Story of How I Got Locked Up

Rohan Sharma

When I was twenty-two I had just begun my first year at Drexel University College of Medicine. This was a very chaotic period in my life since my mental illness had not yet been diagnosed and I did not even know that I was sick. I had very paranoid delusions, which I later found out were brought on by stress. (Due to stress, I also had delusions in high school and college, but not nearly as bad as when I began medical school.) To make matters worse, my doctor had put me on an antidepressant medication which is known to cause manic episodes in people who are bipolar. This exacerbated the delusions, and in the following weeks, as the medication built up in my system, I began exhibiting more and more manic behavior.

I would stay out all night gambling at casinos, drinking heavily, and not going to class. I even went and got a tattoo. All of this, I would later find out, was textbook manic behavior. I went days without being able to fall asleep, even after taking sleep aids. The only substances that controlled my racing thoughts and allowed me to fall asleep were marijuana, alcohol, and my prescribed Klonopin. I began to abuse these heavily, but I had already lost most of my touch on reality.

Finally, after not sleeping for three continuous days, I had a full-blown manic episode for which I was involuntarily committed to a hospital by police, and later taken to jail. Only then did a psychiatrist diagnose me with bipolar disorder and put me on the right medication, which stopped the delusions. For the first time, practically since middle school, I was living in "the real world" – locked up in jail and facing five to fifteen years in upstate prison. I was terrified.

After hiring a lawyer and getting bailed out, I spoke with the dean of my school to try explaining the situation. He would hear none of it, and I was kicked out of Drexel. I became depressed for several reasons. First, I was facing some serious time in upstate prison. Second, even if I did manage to beat the case, I had lost a medical career in which I had invested considerable time and effort. Finally, I had realized that some of my longest-standing and most dearly held beliefs were mere delusions resulting from a mental illness.

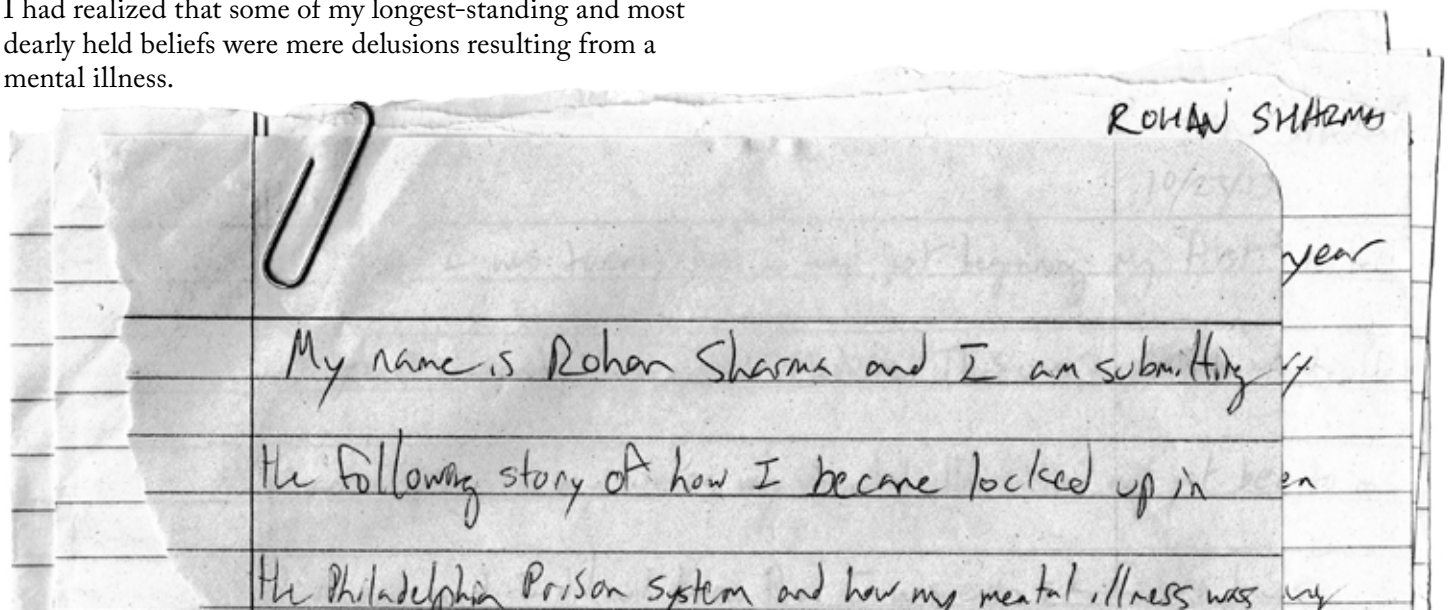
Compared to the fantasy world I had lived in for so long, the real world was a sad, sad place.

I started abusing marijuana and alcohol again, along with Xanax. But this time it was to try and forget my problems. The medication I had to take for my bipolar disorder caused weight gain, and I started to use food as an escape, as well. By the time my twenty-third birthday came around, I was a wreck. I was severely depressed, addicted to drugs and 45 pounds overweight. I was also very lonely as I had pushed away most of my friends. Even though I never told them what I was going through, they still suspected something was wrong, and were only trying to help.

The following year was when I turned it all around. I began to look only at the bright side. So what if I could no longer be a doctor because of the felonies on my record? I realized I should just be grateful to even be alive – there were so many ways I could have been killed the night of my manic episode. I also had my family who, despite all I had put them through, still supported me. I stopped using drugs and by going to the gym lost most of the weight I had gained.

Eventually the district attorney offered me a plea bargain: I would only have to plead guilty to the two felonies, and they would drop seven other charges; and instead of five to fifteen years, I would only have to serve 11½ to 23 months in county jail, followed by ten years probation.

I am now five months into my sentence, and very optimistic about the future. I plan on continuing my education when I am released by getting a Master's degree in mental health, so that I can help other mentally ill people. I can now use this adversity to my advantage by showing people that just because you have suffered from a mental illness that does not mean you cannot be an asset to society. By showing me a side of life which most people do not get the opportunity to see, this experience has taught me to become stronger, more mature and much more positive. For that I am very grateful.



# There Are No Insane Folks Here Gary Cone

In the famous opening of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy writes, “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” You could replace the word family with the word prisoner and still have a true statement. I have been in prison in three states – a horrible thought – which gives me a basis for making this claim. Of course, not many people in prison are happy by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, many are not even sane. And it is sanity I’m most interested in discussing.

See, prisons supposedly exist to keep dangerous criminals off the streets and to maintain norms of social behavior. But for a person to be considered a criminal, she must be able to understand her crime, her punishment, and her imprisonment. Yet with the closing of so many mental institutions throughout the country due to monetary constraints, we now have many prisoners living in prison without a clue how they got from Point A to Point B.

Prison life is difficult for everyone, but for the mentally ill the challenges are extreme. The fact that a court sends you to prison does not necessarily mean that you can function in a setting that comes with a list of rules and regulations that you are assumed to know and can follow on a daily basis. Here at Riverbend Maximum Security Penitentiary, for instance, there are stand-up counts at 6:15 in the morning, 4:00 in the afternoon, and 9:00 at night. You have to fix your bunk for morning inspection and before leaving your cell. All personal property must fit within a 2’x2’x18” box. Shelves must be neat. Personal hygiene must be acceptable. You have to dress in whites outside pod (except yard). You can only flush your toilet once every five minutes. You can keep nothing on the floor but your trashcan. You can have 4 shirts and 4 pairs of pants, as long as all are kept neatly folded.

And so on.

On Death Row, where I’m a prisoner, the problem is compounded by the reasoning of the courts and prosecutors that everyone sent to prison is capable of understanding the rules they will have to follow once reaching prison. To acknowledge otherwise would lead to court challenges to the initial conviction. It is unconstitutional to sentence an insane person to death. Therefore, the court would have us believe, there are absolutely no insane folks here.

As an insider, though, I see the evidence of mental illness all the time. One inmate in particular stands out in my mind – an Asian who has been on Death Row since it was held at “The Walls” (nickname for Tennessee State Prison, which closed in 1992). I remember the first day he walked by me in the yard at The Walls; he was a skinny, scared-looking young guy, avoiding all eye contact. I later learned that he and his mother were two of those boat people Reagan rescued from a Thai camp in the early 80s. He could not speak much English then and he cannot speak much more now. Shrinks have been arguing about his IQ for years. Scores under 70 can’t be executed; scores

71 and above are fair game for the gurney. This guy is right on the line.

He hears voices, too. Has done for years. The voice of George Bush, Sr. often speaks to him through the television. It says terrible things to him. So one day, he decided to kill himself. He hooked up electrical wires to his body, sat on the metal toilet, and plugged the wire into the outlet. Blam! The lights went off and he went flying across the cell, but didn’t die. The shrink – who calls himself Psycho Bill – told him that he did it wrong. “You have to ground yourself by putting your foot in the toilet water,” he said, “then plug in.”

Thanks for the information, Doc.

If you’re not insane or intellectually disabled, you can get by on Death Row at Riverbend. The “level” system helps. We have three levels: A, B, and C. I am on Level A, which means I can be in groups of up to 12 inmates of the same level. I can go to the library on Death Row for leisure books, and the law library to read cases. Not bad, right? But it takes a great deal of self-discipline and restraint to maintain your level in an environment that can be so maddening. The slightest infraction drops your level, usually all the way to C, where you can only leave your cell for one hour a day, wearing restraints. And it takes eighteen months of perfect behavior to rise a level.

While trying to maintain your level or rise to another level, some of the most disturbing things you need to tolerate are the arbitrary, seemingly mystical ways in which corrections officers act with inmates and enforce their rules. The guards’ personalities are as varied as the inmates’, and they have to exist in the same high-stress, volatile environment as we do. If a certain guard is having a bad day or having problems at home, he is likely to be rude if not outright aggressive with the inmates; if this guard happens to cross wires with an inmate who is having similar problems or worse, then confrontation and perhaps even violence become probable. And the officers not only carry the weapons, but also the pencils and the disciplinary reports.

Take it from an insider: prison is not a mental institution and prison guards are not psychiatrists, yet prison is full of people who are mentally ill, intellectually disabled, or both. For prison to be stable, humane, and safe – safe for inmates and personnel alike – then, at the very least, the courts need to change the way people are evaluated and categorized before they are convicted and sentenced. The mentally ill and disabled need to be sent to institutions equipped to care for them.

**Gary Cone**, a graduate of the University of Arkansas who served in the Vietnam War, lives on Tennessee’s death row inside Riverbend Maximum Security Penitentiary. This essay was submitted on his behalf by D. T. Lumpkin, who facilitates the prison’s creative writing workshop.



# Bonnie Kelly Moccasin Bend Health Institute 1969

Locked away in an empty room, and time stood still. Boots sounded in the hallway, and the jingling of keys. A clank of a bolt, and the heavy door opened. He set down a tray in front of me.

"Please. Let me go."

There was no answer. The door shut, and once more I marvelled at its texture, cut from a tree, or some abstract painting. I stood and kicked it. Half-hearted. Feeble.

They never let me, so I'd piled up sheets in a corner and would crouch over them to pee. This had become a ritual. I'd pee and the puddle would spread across the floor. I spread out on the dingy green mat – my bed for endless days – nothing between my body and the cold plastic, since I'd soaked up urine and faeces in the sheets. Sleep was a friend. When I woke the tray was gone, but the sheets were still soiled.

The sun set behind the window and the light came on. There was always light in my cell, sometimes dim and sometimes bright. Someone controlled the light. I had no choice about it. I slept awhile, restless, til a startle snapped me back.

Now it was breakfast. Keys jingled, then the aide slid the bolt and set the tray on the floor. Two hard eggs, greasy bacon, and a cup of thin juice.

"Breakfast always looks like breakfast," I said, and it bumped around the quiet room. I ate the eggs and the bacon. I drank the juice. I took a butter-tin off the tray and wiped it clean on my shirt. I opened a hole in the mat and took out a stack of butter tins. I counted. Twenty-one tins, and twenty-one days had passed in my cell. I added today's tin. "Twenty-two," I announced to no-one.

In an attempt to fill the void, I'd taken strips of straw-papers and butter-tins from lunch and dinner, and pasted them to the wall. I figured the time it took the sun to cross each one. I listened for the sound of keys and boots in the hallway. There were none. I studied the floor. Ceramic tiles scattered in a random pattern from wall to wall. I lay on my stomach and closely studied one brown square.

"Now across here," I told the square. "Right here. Edge to edge. You, little square, are infinite. This room is infinite."

I looked up at the sun-clock. Light cast an uneven pattern on the wall.

"In an hour, an infinite length of time. This is eternity. And how many eternities in the endless days?"

All you have is the few cubic centimeters inside your skull. That's a lot of geometric eternity. The sun finally set, and the light came on. I discovered a concept and lived that concept for myself. Locked in this tiny space, they took everything else. I mastered all time in the flash of each moment.

**Bonnie Kelly** writes: *I have been an underdog most of my life. I have been in mental institutions, mental hospitals, mental wards and jails multiple times, and in five states: Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Wyoming*

*and California – the proverbial revolving door. I don't have a degree or a work résumé, but I have lived life to the fullest. I have done a lot of community work. I served on the Middle Tennessee Planning Committee, the Jail Task Force, and on liaison between the two. I led a demonstration in the local mental institution that bore some real and sorely needed changes. I worked for a short time as an activities director at the Friends Helping Friends Drop-In Center in Nashville. Currently, I am finishing my bachelor's degree in psychology. I also founded and chair a committee called SHINE. This helps many people diagnosed with a mental illness get desperately needed dental care. SHINE is also a joint effort of the major mental health agencies in Middle Tennessee, and in the program we have served more than a hundred people. For more about Bonnie Kelly's story, visit: [www.moccasinbendproject.com](http://www.moccasinbendproject.com)*

## Voice of the Snowman (a cento)

Snow upon the mountain  
reaching across the landscape of hysteria  
a feast of moon and man and barking hounds.  
The piercing cold I feel  
as winter evening settles down.

The cold thing is how they were  
battered and venerable, and homely,  
inhaling the moist odours of the night.  
Outside, I stand in a canyon so quiet its pool  
almost remembers its old reflection. And then  
I breathe.

A green line, frayed at the end  
where black horses drove a mower  
through weeds, reminiscent of a  
million summers with night air still,  
and the rocks warm.

I hear the question and pursuing answer  
and all that junk that goes with being human,  
fused in one sound, the voice of the Snowman,  
but now he's dead  
it must have been too cold for him  
his heart gave way, they said.

**Owen Griffin** writes: *I am a prisoner in the Massachusetts correctional system. I am doing 30 to 35 years and currently have 25 years in. I started writing about 10 years ago and find it very therapeutic.*

# The Long Wave Goodbye



Artwork by **Serina Conception**

**B**ecause I was born curious about almost everything, except for social norms, my life has been an arduous journey.

So it is today.

During my first two years of elementary school, I was often found investigating the nooks and crannies of St. Anne's School and its adjacent church. Instead of sitting in the classroom with the other children, I would often sneak over to the church and watch the sunlight as it streamed through the stained glass windows, turning the sanctuary into the world's largest kaleidoscope. Almost hypnotically, I would be lulled to sleep by the warmth of the church pew and the sticky scent of incense and candle wax – until the laughter of morning recess would beckon me from my hiding spot.

At first, the teachers considered my behavior quirky, saying that I was a shy and precocious child who preferred his own company. However, by second grade the school authorities began to call my extracurricular activities "truancy and malingering".

As expected, this was cause for alarm. When asked about my repeated tardiness, I was unable to give a sufficient answer. So, to avoid further questioning by school officials, I stopped going to the second grade altogether and began exploring the neighborhood parks, shopping malls and grocery stores. Of course, this invited further scrutiny by school officials.

Because of my youthful wanderlust, I was given a battery of tests by Social Services. At that time, their determination was: "hyperactivity with the addition of avoidant personality disorder". It was also noted that I was an extremely inquisitive child who outpaced his peers cognitively, causing isolation due to my social apathy. Needless to say, this was considered detrimental to my developing social skills.

True to form, I became a chronic run-away and teenage street survivor. And because of this truancy and adolescent homelessness, the juvenile justice system ordered my detention, along with additional psychological tests (the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory). They



concluded that I had developed “antisocial tendencies with an attraction to lawlessness”. Furthermore, if those issues went untreated, my unbridled curiosity would eventually lead to a life of incarceration. So began my life’s vocation, at age 14, in the Red Wing at Minnesota State Training School.

Now that adolescence is forty years behind me, I am labelled with the correctional term “career criminal”. The clinical terminology is just as unattractive: “Narcissism with proclivity for sociopathic behavior”.

As predicted, I’ve been serving a 30-year life sentence on the installment plan. I’m what you’d call “a frequent flyer” of the criminal justice system – or, in layman’s terms, just plain “loser”.

Today, I’m sitting here with roughly 4,059 days of my fifth prison bit on top of me. Regrettably, what I failed to realize during the last four prison stints is that no refunds are given for a squandered life – not the timeliest revelation when you’re pushing the half-century mark.

Cruelly, it was only after decades of institutional living that I came to understand the futility of hanging onto my dreams, or to the hope of ever going home again. Talk about waiting in vain. Those sentiments nearly crushed my spirit, especially when I realized that my two young daughters – who had always shared their wild laughter with me – had grown into unfamiliar women who now stand behind reserved smiles.

It was then that I knew how defenceless I was against the slow moving hand of time, and its steady erosion of my life. Unfortunately, this “correctional truth” has left me in a barren purgatory where I’m forced to watch the world breathe while I hold my breath and cling to faded memories.

Moreover, there are certain amenities within the prison package that never get mentioned in the frequent flyer’s brochure. I only found them years later in the small print, where absence doesn’t make the heart grow fonder, where you’re reminded daily of the long wave goodbye, when all you find is an echo in your mail box. Sadly, this echo is soon followed by unanswered phone calls to family and friends, and it ends tragically when visiting with loved ones becomes nonexistent. It’s a slow burn to be homesick for a place that no longer exists. And it’s sheer frustration to exist in the in between, with nothing left to lose on the outside and still more to give from the inside.

That’s the epitome of my incarceration – aching to know that it matters to somebody else like it matters to me. But the reality of my life is having no-one to share with and having no defence against the certainty of loss and isolation. And now, after three decades, my prison has become a cage of degradation, capturing my spirit and turning my heart into a dustbin of despair. Meanwhile, the bane of my imprisonment remains a persistent yearning for the outside world that has rightfully moved on.

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days

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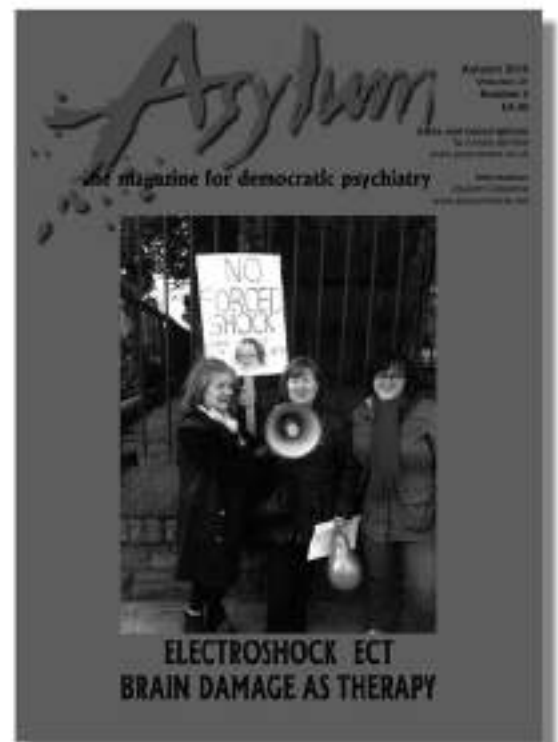
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## To Whom This Note Concerns

I mailed 6 Visual Works to your Magazine 5 months ago. No word back... I found out yesterday they were never mailed. The mail room here considered the works to be "visually derogatory towards the aim of Corrections and Rehabilitation". Therefore, the 6 works (Black-n-white) were destroyed. How Nice of them to destroy that which cannot be destroyed: Art exists inside the human consciousness, and that lives forever. It is both allusive and disturbing to think that the state of Oregon has done

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something that is inconceivably absurd at best, and rather Fucked up at worst.

Today, my Prison Counselor asked me why was I sending art to ~~an~~ Asylum? I answered her by saying I was only Playing.

"What do you mean, you were Playing?" she asked in a most confusing ~~matter~~ manner.

"Well, my dear Counselor. That great thinker and writer Carl Jung once said that 'the creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect, but by the Play instinct acting from inner necessity'," I answered.

Oh well, such be the stuff of hell.

B. Pat

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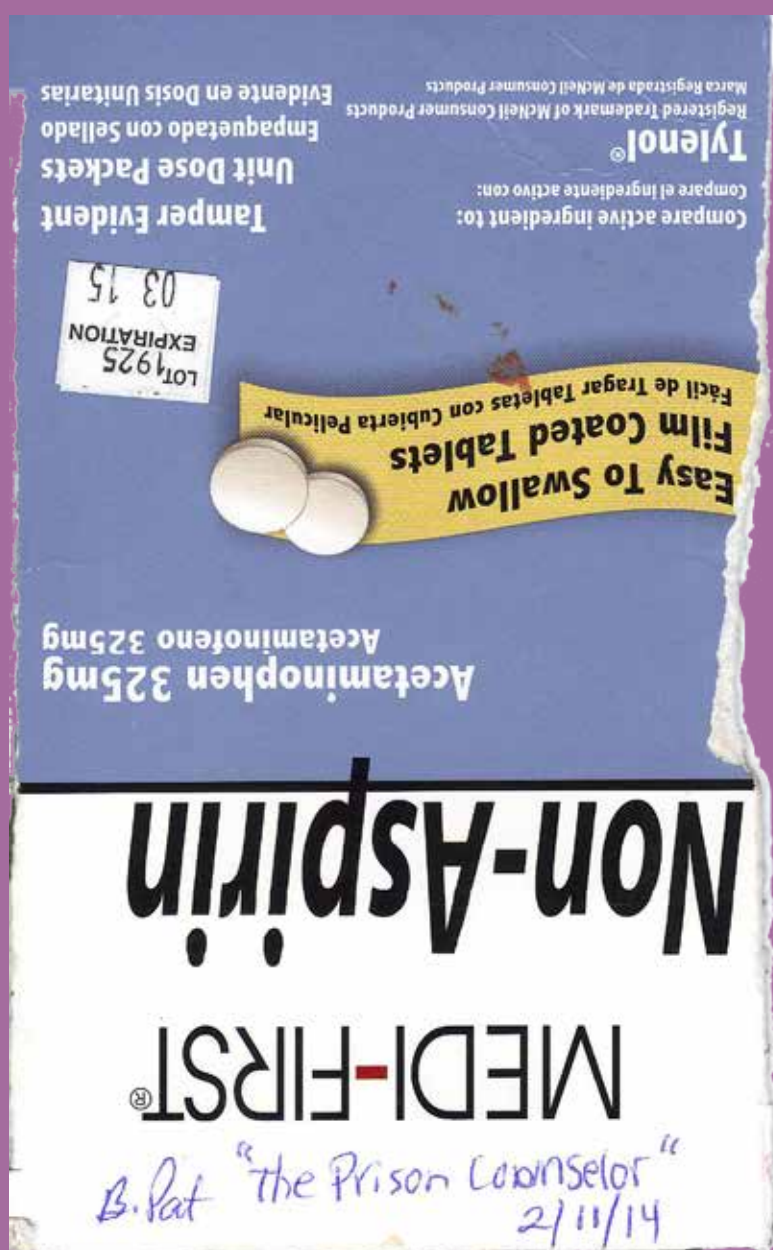
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