

Compassion

Written by Death-Row Prisoners

HELPING PRISONERS ON DEATH ROW LIVE CONNECTED AND FRUITFUL LIVES

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Publishing compassionate and introspective articles written by death-row prisoners.



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www.compassionondeathrow.net

Tribute to Our Mothers

When you love someone, there's almost nothing you won't do for the one you love. Perhaps the most well-known verse in the Bible is John 3:16 which says, in part: "God so loved he world, that he gave..." How desperate was the love of God? Consider this story from South America.

There were two warring tribes in the Andes. One nation lived in the lowlands and the other high in the mountains. The mountain people invaded the lowlanders one day, and as a part of their plundering of the people, they kidnapped a baby of one of the lowlander families and took the infant with them back up into the mountains.

The valley tribe didn't know how to climb the mountains. The mountains were unknown to them. They didn't know any of the trails that the mountain people used, and they didn't know where to find the mountain people or how to track them in the steep terrain. Even so, they sent

out their best party of fighting men to climb the mountain and bring the baby home.

The men tried first one method of climbing and then another. They tried one trail and then another. After several days of effort, however, they had little to show for their efforts, and feared that, were they to continue, they'd lose their bearings and never find a way out. Feeling hopeless and helpless, the lowlander men decided that the cause was lost, and they prepared to return to their village below.

As they were packing their gear for the descent, they were startled to see someone approaching them on the trail. It was the baby's mother! They realized that she was coming down the mountain that they themselves – experienced warriors, and men – hadn't figured out how to climb. How had this woman reached heights they had not been able to reach?

Continues on page 3

Cherry Blossoms

Cool winds through the trees.

Pretty pink petals drifting.

Light all around us.



Kurt Michaels
California Death Row
San Quentin, CA



Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor are welcomed from all prisoners (this includes non-death row prisoners) and the outside community.

In submitting letters, we ask that compassionate and introspective guidelines apply to your communications.

Limit size to 400 words or less. Letters may be edited for clarity and space considerations.

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All stories are subject to editing for grammar, sentence structure, and clarity.

EDITORIAL:

Notes On "Hope"

- Hope is an emotion: the pleasant, excited feeling of anticipation.
- Hope, like all emotions, is the product of a thought process, whether consciously or unconsciously.
- By definition, to hope is to look forward to something with a reasonable confidence it will come about.
- To "hope against hope" is to hope for something even though the evidence that it'll happen is against it. It is to hope despite the odds.
- Hope is the result of a rational process; that is, because of facts, evidence, and logic, we conclude that something we desire will probably come to pass. Thus, hope is born. Thus, we can look forward to something.
- Without the element of rationality, "hope" is just a wish wearing a mask.
- Wish: to want; to desire; to long for.
- Notice wishes have no rational root. Wishes are simply desires.
- Today, people use the word "hope" to express their will:
 - I hope that next year my team will make it to the finals.
 - I hope we get a new president.
 - I hope all is well with you.
 - I hope you have a nice day.
- To say "I hope for X" is more socially acceptable than raw desire; it sounds suitably noble. To say "I wish..." sounds flighty, airy, wistful. To say "I want..." sounds selfish, petulant, childish. Thus, by misusing HOPE we have altered its meaning, disconnected it from its basis in rationality.
- Hope without evidences = unreasonable expectations = disappointment.
- To hope, to look forward to something, is to anticipate the future. To hope is to enjoy some of the future NOW. Imagine being in the parking lot of your favorite club, where you always have a good time. You aren't inside yet, but you hear the music, already it sways your body, already you derive pleasure from what is to come. You have your entrance fee, you have your I.D., you are over 18 – and since these are all you need to gain entry, you anticipate what's to come. You have genuine hope.
- Hope is like music rippling into us from a future we believe in.
- Ask yourself, "What do I hope for?" If you can list evidences and reasons to conclude that an outcome you desire is likely, then you have a reasonable hope. Hang onto such a hope. Don't let anyone take that from you. Keeping hope alive helps keep us alive.
- It is said that we can live without food for weeks, without water for days, without air for minutes – but we cannot live without hope even for a moment. We all need things to look forward to.
- If we set reasonable, attainable goals, we will generate our own hopes. Remember: a goal without a plan of action is just a wish.
- If you believe in God like I do, then read the Bible, because God makes thousands of promises to His children, which, if we believe them, our faith activates. Since God never breaks His Word, we can look forward to those promises. The Bible is a bottomless well of hope for those who trust in God.



George Wilkerson
Editor
North Carolina Death Row
Raleigh, NC

Letter to the Editor:

The Cell

The cell is an ideal place to learn about yourself, to search realistically and regularly the process of your mind and feelings. In judging our progress as individuals, we tend to concentrate on external factors such as one's social position, influence, popularity, wealth and our standard of education. These are of course important in measuring one's success in the material matters, and it is perfectly understandable if many people exert themselves mainly to achieve all of these. But internal factors may be even more crucial in assessing one's development as a human being.

Honesty, sincerity simplicity, humanity and pure generosity, absence of any vanity, readiness to serve others: These are the attributes that are within easy reach of every soul – and are the foundation of one's spiritual life. Development in matters of this nature is inconceivable without some serious introspection, without knowing of yourself, your weaknesses and mistakes. If for nothing else the cell gives you the opportunity to look daily into your entire conduct, to overcome the negative and bad in your daily life and then to develop whatever is good inside of you. I find that regular meditation can be very fruitful in this regard. Now you may find it difficult at first to pinpoint the negative features in your life. But after the tenth time that attempt will yield rich rewards for you. Give it a try.

Darrell Sharpe
Massachusetts Correctional Institution
Norfolk, MA

Why Not Be the Beggar?

Ever have that fellow prisoner who is always in need of something? A soup, a shot of coffee, a bar of soap, a little shampoo or even a pair of shower shoes?

Indigent prisoners who are not afraid to beg give more fortunate prisoners the opportunity to do good for God's sake.

Society calls beggars "losers" or "bums" – gives them a bad rap. God says the needy are special and need special attention. God cares for the needy: "As long as you (helped) one of the least of my brothers you did it to me." (Matthew 25: 40)

"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done." (Proverbs 19: 17)

When faced with the needs of others, how do you respond?
With contempt, indifference, or compassion?

Cliff Smith
Avenal State Prison
Avenal, CA

Tribute to Our Mothers

Continued from cover

And then they were further astonished when they saw that she had the baby strapped to her back. How could that be?

Their leader said, "We couldn't climb this mountain. How did you do this when we, the strongest and most able men in the village, couldn't do it?"

She shrugged her shoulders and said, "It wasn't your baby."

The power of love! We are the children of God. We were lost, but God found a way to find us. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son..."

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for your searching and relentless love! Amen.*

By: Timothy Merrill
Submitted by: Daniel Cummings
North Carolina Death Row
Raleigh, NC

VICTIMS VOICE

LET ANGER GO



Sharon Pinkelman with family

Sharon Pinkelman's husband, Dale was an engineer for Jeep, and on the side they ran a collectable shop that sold baseball cards and coins. In August 1992, Sharon was driving back to Ohio from visiting her daughter in Georgia. When she reached Dayton, Ohio she had a feeling that something was not right. Not knowing why she had this feeling, Sharon prayed the rest of the way home.

That same day Dale had attended a show to sell some of his cards and coins. When he got back to the shop to put things away, he was attacked by Gregory Bryant Bey and stabbed to death and the money was stolen.

Sharon has always been against the death penalty because, she says, "Only God gives life, and only God has the right to take that life back." Eventually in their own time, Sharon's six children have come to the same realization. Her son still prays for his father's murderer.

Because of his work as an engineer, Dale always carried a notebook in his shirt pocket. After his death Sharon found a note that Dale had written while listening to the priest's homily the previous Sunday. The note said, "Trust in God." "I still have that note," recalled Sharon. "It has carried me through many rough times. The big thing is that you have to get over the anger. That can take years, but you eventually have to let it go or it will eat away at you."

For more information visit www.mvfh.org

Grieving Your Freedom

There are 5 stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance. When we lost our freedom the grieving process started, whether we like it or not. Of course, when we first were confronted by this new reality, shock and disbelief (Denial) resulted as we came to understand why and how anger welled up in us, or just from the limitations that frustrates us at every turn. There is hurt when our loved ones abandon us or because the judicial system of the country you love has let you down.

Who hasn't come to the point of thinking "I'd do anything to get my freedom back"? (Bargaining). Some focus on the law or less constructive endeavors. We'll play the "what if..."/ "if only..." game, the worst words a prisoner can ponder, driving themselves crazy with alternate scenarios, which leads to feeling overwhelmed and frustrated and eventually depressed.

For us it's uniquely challenging to "accept" our loss. If we give in and say, "This is now my permanent reality" we abandon Hope for something better which signals the end for us. We've all been there or seen people there and it's not pretty. Therefore, we can't fully grieve the loss of our freedom. We're stuck in Limbo!

My outlook is "Hope for the best, prepare for the worst", but also "prepare for the best". Our life must be lived, day in and day out, in our current circumstances. We can't be blind to the reality of our situation but must live with hope for a better tomorrow. Hope buoys a man in hard times, and these are the hardest. Like a long-distance runner over rough terrain, we must accept our surroundings while hoping for clear ground ahead, making best use of what we have while keeping our eye on the prize.

When NASA was faced with the seemingly insurmountable task of reaching the heavens,



they started with feet firmly planted on the ground and eyes lifted skyward while level-headedness won the day. Hope even when it seems insane; hope nonetheless, because in the end is there anything else?



Kevin Marinelli
Pennsylvania Death Row
Waynesburg, PA

Equal Love

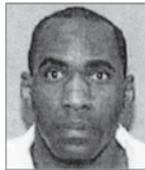
I've never seen a bird get stressed out because it didn't know where it would get its next meal.

Nor have I ever seen a bird get racially profiled or bullied, just for being perched on a tree branch, or flying across a human's field.

I've never seen a bird suffer from a lack of sleep or wonder where it will live because birds make their own homes, using their beaks.

They don't have to worry about their light bills because their light comes naturally from the sky, their plumbing comes from the rain that falls from on high.

If the Creator of the birds can look after such a small creature and tend to all of its needs and if the Creator can protect the bird from hurt, harm, and danger, and give the bird unconditional love, then I know He will take care of us whom He made a little lower than the angels, because His love is unconditional for you and me.



Kyre Allen
Texas Death Row
Livingston, TX

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Untitled

By Kevin Marinelli
Pennsylvania Death Row
Waynesburg, PA

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the address on page 2.

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My Rock

I've learned that we all
need some encouragement along
this life,
and there are always those who help
in their own kindly and loving way,
a spoken word, a flashing smile,
a visit, a letter, a call.

Within our hearts we realize
that each of them stands tall.

But there's a Great Rock,
above it all,

and He will always lift us up
if we, on Him, will call.

He is the Christ, The Living Lord,
He's our Rock and our strength,
Along this life of day.



George Lopez
Pennsylvania Death Row
Waynesburg, PA

...pray on...

When you're living in a concrete see-through box,

Trying to be conclusive

It can sometime prove to be very elusive.

It can leave you feeling trapped and exposed.

If you're trying to stay curled inside your own little world,

A good book might allow your mind to travel,

But it can also cause your heart to come unraveled.

It's most certainly a daily plight.

Trying to walk the narrow path of... do - right.

Your insides sometime buck and scream:

"Please let me out of this horrific dream!

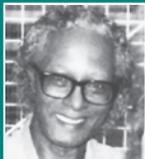
You're no longer sure Just how much more you can take.

You plead, "Lord Jesus,... Let me awaken!

Only a solid prayer life will make you stronger,

Because...

Obviously the Journey is going to be a little longer.



Al Cunningham
California Death Row
San Quentin, CA

Be Like Water In Finding True Peace and Happiness

When we have buoyancy, we realize there's no hindrance, no obstacles to block life's paths.

It is neither fixed, nor rigid, it is fluid and flexible; like water it flows around rocks and continues to grow!

It shows that there is always some other way to live, In finding true peace and happiness.

It teaches us that we do not arrive at true peace and happiness, but instead that we are actually traveling in their paths!

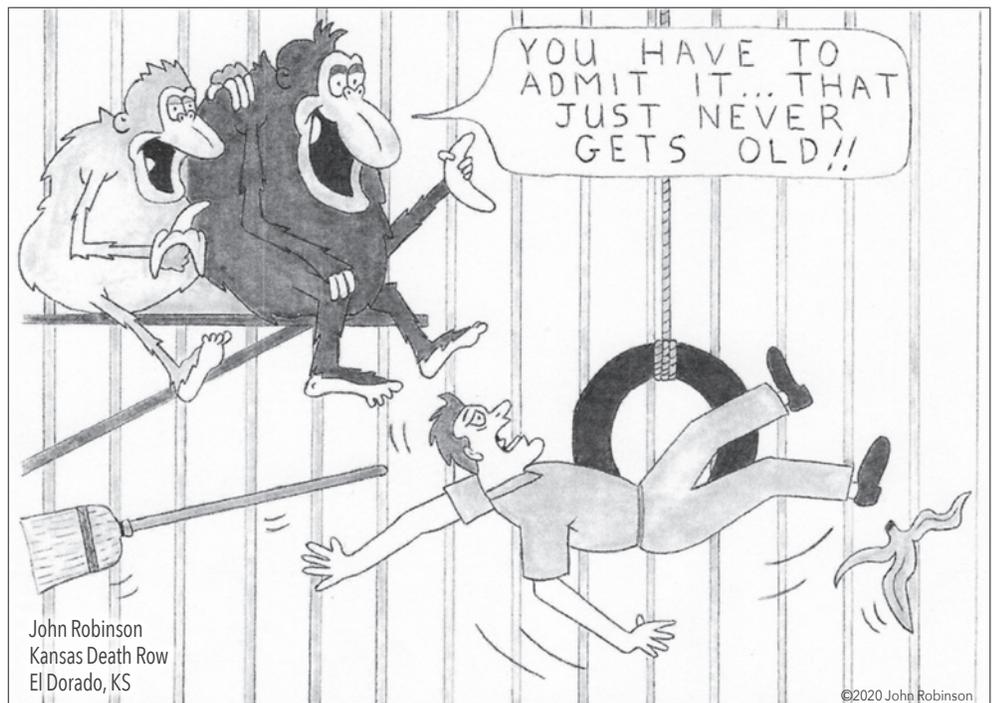
True peace and happiness are found in nurturing love and compassion, for others and self. It is found in the essence of learning in our lives, and that we need to listen to such teachings. And to listen, we need to be quiet!

It is through such quietude that fortitude manifests; then true peace and happiness are found in our lives, especially when we stop the wars within that plague us from the cradle to grave!

Be Like Water in Finding True Peace and Happiness



Wesley I. Purkey
Federal Death Row
Terra Haute, IN



John Robinson
Kansas Death Row
El Dorado, KS

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**PRISONERS OF DEATH ROW
YOUR ASSISTANCE WILL BE APPRECIATED**

7 Suggestions and Guidelines

1. Write about an experience that impacted you.
2. It doesn't have to be religious. Here are some themes: anger, apathy, beauty, betrayal, boredom, change, complacency, courage, fear, friendship, growing older, jealousy, pride, purpose, vices, and wisdom.
3. Use sensory details — the smell, who said what, its color, how cold it felt. Sensory details connect your experience to your readers.
4. There's no need to use big words when a simpler one suffices: leave your ego at the door with your case: this isn't the place for either one.
5. Look for ways to unify; help; and solve problems.
6. Be authentic. Be yourself. No one's perfect.
7. Try to limit it to 400 words or less, and if possible enclose a photo of yourself.

As there are numerous submissions it may take up to eight months for selected articles to be published.

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Somewhere In This World

Somewhere in this world my other half is hidden.

Somewhere in this world my one soul waits.

Somewhere in this world there's that one compassionate soul

Willing to accompany me in my journey.

Somewhere in this world there is a good friend,

Waiting to be my friend.

Somewhere in this world Mother Justice Waits with my freedom.

Somewhere in this world one day I will be.



Pablo Moldonado
Georgia Death Row
Jackson, GA

M'aidez

Help me see the truth,
All the possibilities,
Through your eyes I will.

My mayday is heard,
You help me see ways to grow,
Beyond safe harbors.

Wherever you are,
Broadcasting your mayday
I will come for you.

Kurt Michaels
California Death Row
San Quentin, CA

(Mayday is an alteration of The French term m'aidez Which means "help me")

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Post Turtle

Many years ago, while driving from Chicago to Kansas City with my Grandpa Steve, we talked about damn near everything. Baseball and our favorite team the Cubs, the state of our world, religion, and the news of the day. Eventually the topic of politics came up.

Grandpa Steve said, "Well, you know, politicians are like a 'post turtle.'" Not familiar with the term of course I had to ask. Grandpa Steve said, "When you're driving down a country road, you come across a wooden fence post with a turtle balanced on top of it - that's a post turtle."

Grandpa Steve saw my puzzled look, so he smiled and continued to explain. "A turtle sitting on a wooden fence post can't do anything. With their shell centered on the post they flail their

legs, stretch out their head and neck, but can't grasp anything but air, so they can't move, they are stuck on the post." Not seeing the connection, I had to ask, "So how is a post turtle like a politician?"

Well Grandpa Steve said, "You know they didn't get up there by themselves, they don't belong up there, they don't know what to do while they're up there, and you just have to wonder what kind of person would put them up there to begin with."



John Robinson
Kansas Death Row
El Dorado, KS