

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Spring 2008

LIVING IN PEACE

Dear Family,

In the ancient Hindu epic *The Ramayana*, there's a passage where Rama, a young prince who is actually God born as a human being, is supposed to be made King the next day, and his people are the happiest people in the world because they love him so much. There's a classic line in this part of the story that I have remembered so many times in my life – "Many things can go wrong in the dark night before a King is made." How true!

And sure enough, that very night an evil influence overtakes Rama's stepmother, and instead of being crowned King, Rama is unjustly exiled by his father and ordered to spend fourteen years in the forest as a wandering beggar, enduring hardships and dangers. The kingdom is plunged into incredible grief. Now the people are the *unhappiest* people in the world. They cannot believe it, they don't know how they will survive this loss. They don't know how they will ever be happy again, how they will be able to laugh or have any pleasure while they know that Prince Rama is sleeping on the ground somewhere in the pathless forest, eating roots and leaves, enduring insect bites and having to keep watch for snakes, lions, wolves, jackals.

This is the worst thing that has ever happened in their country, the worst times they have ever known. Everyone in the kingdom is totally freaked out except for two people: Prince Rama himself, and his family's old wise man, Vashishta.

When the king's charioteer says to Vashishta, "Priest, the world has gone to hell!," Vashishta calmly replies, "I see the world much the same as ever." When someone says to Rama, "Disobey your father! Don't go! We'll imprison

him and make you our king!," Rama calmly says "Give up your anger. The palace or the forest are the same to me."

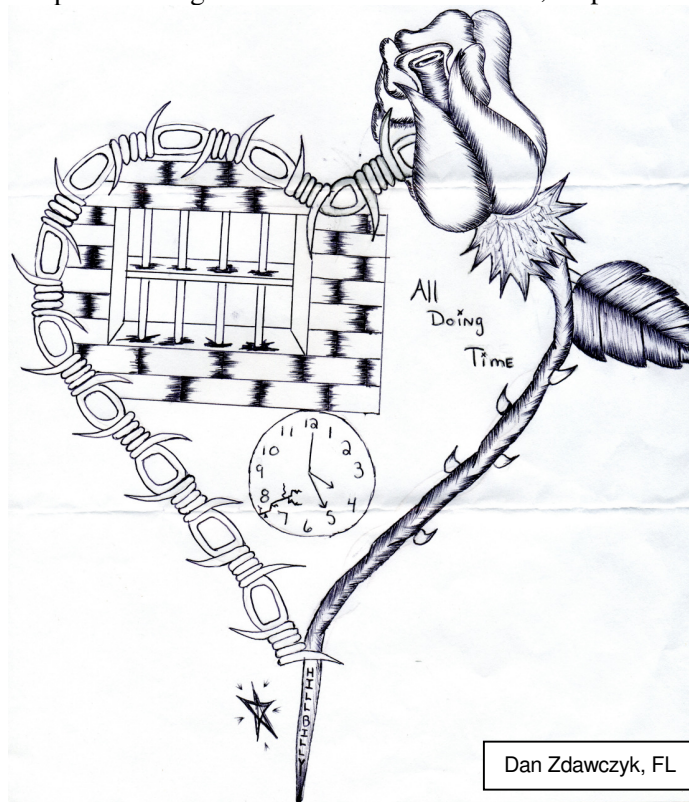
This is an important paradox to understand for our spiritual journeys – *The palace or the forest are the same to me*. The same in what way?? Certainly not the same in comfort or safety or wealth or social interactions. Yet there are prisoners reading this newsletter who do know how it is the same, in a sense, to be in the palace or the forest, to be on the streets or in prison, the way life is actually always the same, just an endless procession of events that make us happy or sad, up or down. The worldly person in us sees good times and bad times, big days and little days, while the old wise man deep inside us sees every day as equal, just one more opportunity to make choices about whether to be kind or unkind, selfish or unselfish, helpful or harmful, wherever we may be.

Both the warrior (the charioteer) and the wise man are right: This is a horrible time for their nation, *and* the world is much the same as ever – good times and bad times going round and round the wheel of time and destiny.

Being able to hold this paradox is an important key to our peace of mind. People who hold only to the dramas will never find peace, because the events of their lives will keep them dancing like puppets on a string, happy one day and miserable the next. But people who hold only to the "always the same" view can become passive, lazy, or detached, like many of us hippies did in the sixties – "nothing is real, nothing to get hung about,

strawberry fields forever." One popular spiritual teacher today claims she is in a state of "uninterrupted bliss" and promises you can be too. Yikes! Who wants to be in a state of uninterrupted bliss when children are starving?

The warrior and the wise man – the passionately engaged part of us and the calm, unruffled observer – both have



Dan Zdawczyk, FL

their place. The way Jesus put it is “Be in the world but not of the world.” The warrior in us is *in* the world while the wise man in us is not *of* the world. Our warrior-self must keep the action moving, must do what is right, take a stand, get involved on the side of what is good, while our deeper self stays still and reminds us that right and wrong will always be rolling along in tension with each other, and we will never have complete control over our destiny. The warrior acts responsibly, while the sage remembers life is a great mystery, a great adventure story, not just an endless burdensome battle between right and wrong.

Prince Rama knows his life will bring ups and downs wherever he lives, and so he can accept these fourteen years of hardship as part of the package of being alive. He knows his life will be a spiritual adventure whether he lives in the palace or in the forest. Do you?

Modern Times

We presently live in a world of horrors, hardships, injustice, and unfairness for the vast majority of creatures on this planet. Some of the very readers of this newsletter are sitting in prison for crimes they did not commit. Our own nation is subjugating countries all over the globe to support our addiction to consumer crap that has made our children the unhappiest kids on the planet, yet always wanting more. Anti-depressants are the most prescribed drugs in America, and murder is one of the leading causes of death among teenagers. Our politicians talk and talk without ever addressing our deep unhappiness and dysfunction. Total denial, no time for truth. Gotta just keep shopping, keep the economy rolling. These are sad and difficult times for our nation and the world.

Our spiritual challenge is to embrace the paradox of Rama’s exile – can we honestly acknowledge this period of adversity so that we can act with great courage and compassion to make things better, yet at the same time understand this as part of the cycle of human events, part of the cycle of world history? Can we “act great” as the Islamic poet Hafiz tells us, while also being the Beatles’ “fool on the hill,” watching life do whatever it must? Can we take full responsibility for doing our part to make our prison, our home, our community, our world, a safer and kinder place, while never doubting that Life is unfolding with a level of perfection we never fully comprehend? Can we have faith in the line from one of my songs that says “Life is good even when it’s not great, so don’t you give up on yourself.”

Suffering Gracefully

There’s another great quote in the old movie “Starman:” “You human beings are fascinating creatures; you seem to be at your best when things are at their worst.” My own Guru, Neem Karoli Baba, once said “I love to suffer. It brings me so close to God.” Okay, maybe I can’t honestly say I *love* to suffer, and maybe you can’t either, but we can certainly admit we think of God more when we do!

I’ve run into many people who seem scared stiff of suffering, scared stiff of acknowledging that suffering may be a big part of the spiritual journey, or that life is hard work. It’s the “Happy Happy Joy Joy” crowd you find in many “New Thought” churches. Just “don’t put any energy into the negative, and it will not exist.”

But fear and denial do not lead to peace. We begin to feel peace when we let it all in – the good, the bad and the ugly. When we humbly accept our portions of the cross while at the same time never giving up our faith that life is worth it – even sitting in an isolation cell somewhere, life is worth it. There is something real and beautiful and wonderful behind it all, and we catch glimpses of that constantly if our eyes, hearts and minds are open to them. That’s a good reason to do spiritual practice and take reasonable care of mind, body and spirit. But it doesn’t exempt us from our share of human suffering.

No one has an easy life for long, and no one gets out of this unscathed. We get sliced, diced, french-fried, freeze-dried, and crucified by the time it’s all over. We may barely recognize ourselves. Sita and I are in our sixties. I’m losing my hearing, Sita gets tired in the afternoons, the natural changes of life take hold of all of us no matter what fancy supplements we may take, or what magazines we can read about staying youthful. Staying youthful is not the goal. Do you hear that, America? Staying youthful is not the goal!

The goal is to touch the deep stuff while we’re here – beauty, love, talent, skill, sacrifice, transformation, gratitude, generosity of spirit, real friendship, and of course the “peace that surpasses understanding.” And that is what is always the same, whether we are “in the palace or the forest.” We are always somewhere and there are always things going on around us and always things to watch out for, always difficult people or situations to deal with. And we always have the opportunity to be among the many people who stay calm and choose faith, who choose love, who choose goodwill, who choose to see and touch the beautiful in life, not just be thrown by the ugly. We don’t succeed at this by *denying* the ugly, but by including it. And by focusing our precious energy on the choices we have of how to respond to life, not wasting our energy on what life is doing *to* us at any given time. This is what we’ve got. Now, how do we wish to respond to it?

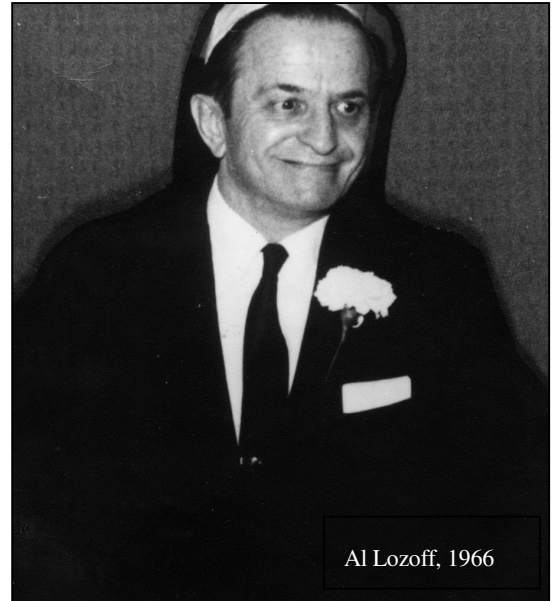
All my Love,



Robert Willey, VA

Practice: BECOMING THE RIGHT KIND OF SIMPLETON

When I was a small child, my father was paralyzed by a massive stroke that wiped out the left side of his brain, which is the side that has to do with thinking, intellect, reasoning, communicating. For the first couple years he barely recognized us or had any memory of who he was, but as he survived longer and longer, he regained the ability to say a word here or there, and although the right side of his body was totally useless, he learned how to hobble around the house with a brace on his right leg and a cane in his left hand. He couldn't understand any complicated chains of words or sophisticated ideas; he would listen to what other people were talking about and maybe have just the most general notion of what was going on. In the truest sense of the word, my dad became a simpleton. But God was kind to that sweet crippled man. His mind was wiped out but he had a humble and innocent heart that left quite an effect on those of us who knew him.



Al Lozoff, 1966

Sita and I were married during the height of the Vietnam War, and our nation was very divided (as we are now) on why we were sending our young men across the globe to kill and die. At our wedding reception in 1966, Sita and I got into an argument with her father about the war, and about a Green Beret captain, Dr. Howard B. Levy, who was on trial for refusing to train medics to serve in Vietnam. My father could hear we were arguing, and he slowly made his way over to where we were. After a minute or two he said “Bo, what?!” That was a full sentence for him – usually one or two words. I said, “We’re disagreeing about the war, dad, the war in Vietnam.”

My father just caught the word “war” and said, “War – bad.” Sita’s father said, “Well, you see, Al, it’s not that simple. This is a very complex issue, and...” but my father cut him off, hit his cane hard against the floor for emphasis and said “War – bad!” The conversation was over. A simpleton set us straight.

Sita and I have applied this great teaching from my father frequently in our lives when our minds start to get too fancy, too clever, for our own good. Especially when we get mired in blame or resentment or any kind of bitter feelings, or when we feel depressed, or when we feel like giving up, we often say, in my father’s halting style, “War – bad. Love – good.” No excuses, no sophisticated chains of reasoning to justify our crap. Keep it simple: Illwill bad, goodwill good. Giving up on yourself bad, trying harder good. Self-pity bad, faith in your life good. You can keep going with all the excuses or pairs of opposites you can think of.

Each of us has the opportunity to be a force of love or a force of war, a force of unity or a force of divisiveness, a force of goodwill or a force of illwill as we move through each day. Jesus said we should be innocent as doves but sly as a serpent. We may need sly, sophisticated minds to make our way through this high-tech world, but our hearts are supposed to be simple like my dad’s, where when it comes right down to the bottom line, even a simpleton knows God wants us to be kind to each other, even a simpleton knows we should not be making all kinds of complicated excuses for slaughtering our fellow creatures or holding on to resentments against others.

Try going through your day today with this simpleton’s wisdom in your complicated modern mind: “War bad! Love good!” “War” can stand for everything bitter or divisive or cynical within you. “Love” can stand for everything patient, accepting, kind, and unselfish. Watch how much the mind resists such a simple heart. Watch how the mind begins to say, “Oh, but you see, this is a very complicated issue...” and don’t let it finish its sentence. The heart is not a complex place. The heart is where we “become as these little ones” to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. My father couldn’t feed himself or bathe himself or tie his own shoes, but he knew what was right and what was wrong, and so do we. Keep it simple.

LETTERS

Dear Bo & Sita, & The HKF,

My name is S, I'm currently in jail. The D.A. is seeking the Death Penalty in my case. I tried to commit suicide and not wanting to leave my beautiful 6 yr. old twins behind, I made a terrible choice and strangled them to death. Well, I did not pass but my boys did. I'm having a very hard time accepting what I've done. I miss my children so bad. I contemplate another suicide attempt daily.

I'm not concerned with what the State wants to do to me as much as what I've done to myself already. I'm having a very difficult time living with what I did to them. I loved my boys very much. They were all I had. It was me & them only. I sincerely believed in God, but not any more. I don't have anything to live for. The only reason I haven't tried to hang myself yet is because of the rest of my family who are trying to be there for me. I was a very great mother. My children and I were very close. They were all I had.

I've been reading all your books but so far only the letters seem to put my mind at ease. Me & my children's father were together for 10 yrs. but separated in 05! I have a lot of anger and hatred towards him and his family for making me and my boys struggle for so long. I don't know how to deal with these feelings. It seems as though suicide once again is my only way out. I'm tired, very tired of suffering. All I ever wanted out of life was my own family. Something I never had growing up. Needless to say all my hopes & dreams are out the window. I'm 30 yrs. old and this is my first time in prison. I'm not sure how long I will be able to deal with this. Please respond. Let me know what you think of my situation. I'm on 2 counts of 1st degree murder. Thank you for the wonderful books.

Sincerely, S.

Hello S,

I'm so sorry to hear of your situation and can certainly understand why you keep thinking of suicide. I don't have a magic wand that can bring your sons back, or change the facts of your life right up to this present moment. All I can do is to remind you of some things that the wisest and most loving people in the world have

told us for thousands of years, and those people knew of tragedies like this, they knew how much we may suffer.

You say you no longer believe in God, but it sounds to me like you are hurt and angry at God. Right now your faith may be a life-or-death question for you, so be careful about saying you have no faith. God is not Santa Claus and the world is not Disneyland. It wasn't Disneyland when God's son Jesus was whipped, mocked, tortured and crucified. Santa did not get Jesus off that cross. Horrible things do happen in this world as part of God's mysterious creation. The fact that such a horrible thing has happened in your life does not mean there is no God.

So you have an important choice to make. Choosing life may be the hardest, deepest thing you have ever been asked to do. But when you say you are "tired" of all this, what you are really tired of is being a shallow, selfish little creature who thinks God and her ex-boyfriend and the world has handed her a raw deal. Life is a deeper, more sacred adventure than you have ever realized, and you now have the opportunity to make your life 100% about that spiritual mystery.

You truly do have nothing left to live for. But if you dedicate yourself to surrendering into the Love of God 100%, you can become a beacon of hope and peace and love for countless people. Most people will hate you now, and call you a monster. They will not want to believe that God would actually transform your life into a haven of peace and love after what you have done. Fortunately for us, God loves shocking such people. That's why He chose Saul of Tarsus to become Saint Paul. Saul was a horrible, despicable man who loved to watch Christians being tortured and executed. After his conversion, he spent many years in prison and wrote many of the letters in the New Testament from those terrible prison cells.

The key is humility and faith, dear S. Your letter is short on both. You blame others for your tragedies and you reject God. No wonder you're suicidal. It is not too late for you to turn toward faith and humility, and it is not too late for you to begin becoming a spiritual elder from the enormous pain you have caused by killing your children.

There will be sadness in your heart for the rest of your life, and there *should* be. But it can be a humbling sadness, a sadness that is the basis of your compassion for others from this point forward. Compassion and unselfishness will bring you peace, S. Nothing else. Your peace may always be a sorrowful peace, but that will be your value to others as well. Work with my story, "The Saddest Buddha" about using this kind of sorrow.

You are never going to walk the streets again. You may eventually be executed by the state. Don't fight these things, accept these realities about your worldly life so you can devote yourself entirely to your spiritual life. Let God take care of your existence while you turn your attention to compassion and helping others.

You are naked before the world now. Take the freedom to hide nothing, make no excuses, blame no one other than yourself. Surrender to the terrible mystery that has taken place in your life and be a humble servant of God until you draw your last breath. That's the only thing that will make sense now. You can do this, dear one. And we're honored to help. I love you right now, right where you are. And if I do, then imagine how God does.

Love, Bo



Dear Bo and HKF staff,

Last year, I had converted to Christianity. I had been a Buddhist, and had studied different things like Hinduism, Theosophy, etc. I used to say all the time "It's impossible for me to be a Christian. I'm too intellectual for it." And I meant it too. But, as the scripture says "What's impossible for man is not impossible for God." I was thus a first-hand witness of the miracle of being called to the cross (darn near kicking and screaming the whole way), and not choosing it.

But of course, I recognize and practice the "Deep and Simple" spiritual life of Christianity. The Holy Ghost has led me to see that the pinnacle of our faith is the same as I had been searching for in Buddhism and eastern philosophy. Two

scriptures easily outline this: Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." And 2 Corinthians 4:18 "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, ever as by the Spirit of the Lord." So, I used to look for enlightenment and Nirvana, now I long for the Divine Union and the Kingdom of Heaven.

But recently I've been struggling with prayer, worship and devotion. Like most Christians, prayer was for me a wish list of petitions (mostly spiritual, boiling down to "Bless me to seek to serve Your will with every fiber of my existence). But then I start having strange ideas. Like "What does He get out of my prayers?" or "What net gain does the Lord get from my salvation?"

We must of course think that God, who is All mighty and full of Good and Love and Truth does not gain anything from Human Salvation. His gain must therefore be like a parent, watching His children do what is good and right.

So then I wanted to add a layer to my prayer and devotion. I ask "What key element makes worship pleasing to the Lord? What can I do for Him?" It really seems like there is some sort of simple paradigm (that I'm likely overlooking) that makes prayer not only beneficial to the creature, but beneficial to the creator as well.

Maybe you could discuss this in a future newsletter. What type of prayer is pleasing to the Lord? What is the key ingredient? What is the proper motivation (the essence of the "pure in heart" statement?)?

I thank you for your time. You all are in my prayers. Thank you!

God Bless, With love, J

Hi J,

I say there is no difference between praying to become better servants, and pleasing God. Everything we pray for, or do, that results in compassion for others is pleasing to God. Everything we pray for, or do, that results in less selfishness, pleases God.

Our prayer life is an indicator of our maturity as spiritual people. In the

Dear Bo,

This is my first time writing. I get your newsletters and I've got We're All Doing Time, And I've read it page for page over and over. Now 5 years later I'm a new man, And I mean a new man. I use to harm people for the littlest thing. I've stabbed people! And beat people for little or no reason. I'm in a supermax prison. And in this place, this hellhole, I've first got to know myself!

And little by little I've reached out to people. Now I'm a Buddhist. There are no Buddhist Teachers here. But we have a lot of books and I read them a lot. And it helps me get by. But your words are so true! I can really dig where you're coming from! And right now today, locked in my cell in a supermax, I'm happy. Yes I'm a happy man because I'm alive. And I'm happy because I'm a new man! Every day I wake up and tell myself today I'm going to be a better person than I was yesterday. Today I'm going to be calm, and in control.

And for the last 4 years I've not got into no trouble. None. I came down to the joint in 93 and from 93 to 2003 I was a monster. I've caught so many write ups I can't even count. I got out in 99, came back in 03. And I couldn't stand myself. And one day I started reading We're All Doing Time! Now people tell me I'm a changed man. And people tell me I'm A Very likeabull person. And it just lifts me EVEN higher. So Thank you man And keep the news letters coming. And may you be A better person today than you were yesterday. I may never be going home And I may never get out of confinement. But I'm ok I'm happy to be alive and the person I am today. I wish everyone at the H-K-F peace and joy and true Happyness!

PEACE LOVE B

beginning we pray for stuff we want, like a letter to Santa Claus. As we get deeper and less self-centered, we pray for qualities that will make us better people – qualities like compassion, tolerance, generosity, unselfishness, courage, forgiveness, faith. That's a huge step in our spiritual development, but if you look closely, it's still centered on us, which means it is ultimately still self-centered. And from this period of our prayer life, we also receive many heavy challenges in our daily life, because in order to develop those wonderful qualities we're praying for, we have to confront our weaknesses and resistance.

In other words, if we ask for faith, we may be denied parole so that we have an opportunity to test our faith. If we ask for courage, we may be put in frightening situations. If we ask for compassion or forgiveness, we may get ripped off or harmed so we have a chance to respond compassionately. This is how we grow.

But then someday we find ourselves content with the life God has led us to, abiding in our faith and the practices that make sense to us, and we find that our whole sense of self has simply quieted down. Our prayer life moves naturally into concern for others – not self-consciously, like "I'm so unselfish that I only pray for others," but rather it just stops occurring to us to pray for anything about ourselves. We even move through the day not focused on ourselves. Instead of praying to become servants of the Lord, we quietly go about being servants of the Lord without even noticing it, including in our prayer life. We know we have everything we need, so our prayer life is either to pray for others, or to praise God, period.

Whatever stage we are in of our development, I think what pleases God is our earnestness, our sincerity – even when it is childishly asking for what we want. God will make sure we keep moving along. We will never be satisfied by getting what we want. Our only satisfaction will come from no longer wanting. I think it all pleases God, like a parent watching his child grow up.

I hope this sheds a little light on your question. Thanks for your heartfelt desire to share it with others.

All blessings to you, Bo



SITA'S PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

Beloved friends,

I've been home from India for two months now and my time there is starting to feel like a distant memory. I want to thank you for your prayers—while I was going through difficult times there, I could feel them, and it definitely helps to be prayed for in that way.

I made this trip alone, and this was an important part of the journey for me. I experienced significant loneliness and various hardships, while at the same time feeling that God was giving me those hard times to feel more of a connection to many of you who have these feelings often. I thought of you at those times and sent prayers and blessings your way.

Most of my loneliness was experienced in the ancient city of Varanasi, considered by many as the holiest city in this very holy country. It's said that if you die in Varanasi then Lord Siva whispers "Ram" (a name of God) in your ear and you immediately ascend to heaven. So it is thought of as "Siva's City," and you can feel death all around you there. I brought the ashes of our beloved Arjun Nicastro, who many of you prayed for when he was battling leukemia, and the ashes of another dear young friend. With the help of a priest (*right*), I submerged the ashes in the Ganges River. The priest said that they were both in heaven now, and I believe him.



Varanasi is famous for the open cremation of bodies along the Ganges River. I spent many hours watching bodies arrive (*left*), the bearers chanting *Ram Nam Satya Hai* ("God's name is truth"), the bodies being immersed in the Ganges one final time, and then being put on a funeral pyre. The mourners don't stay around to collect the ashes—everything goes into the Ganges and all ties to that lifetime are then over. Many years ago, Father Murray Rogers recommended to me that I sit at that burning site and read the Psalms while the bodies were burning, so I finally had the opportunity to do this. It was so powerful

that I came back and did it a second time. Although Father Murray died a couple of years ago, I could feel him with me strongly at those times, bringing a Christian elder's presence into those ancient Hindu ceremonies, like the merging of two great rivers into the Spiritual Ocean.

The trip wasn't all difficult, as I was able to spend some time with friends and elders like Ganesan in Arunachala in the south, and in Rishikesh in the Himalayas, where I had a very deep and meaningful meeting with Siddhi Ma, one of my Guru's oldest and closest devotees. Later I was able to sit with Swami Chidananda—a dear friend of the Prison Ashram Project for many years. He is hardly seeing anyone during these last days of his life, but because he loves you



and our work, he did grace me with a visit at his bedside. This photo (*right*) was taken when I asked him to pray for all of you who will read this newsletter. I'm so grateful that I had these precious opportunities.

Well, dear ones, of course the heart of my experience is not possible to put into words, but I trust that my work and life here will benefit from my time in India. That's the reason I went, and with God's grace it'll be true. My deepest heartfelt thanks to the volunteers here who helped to make this trip possible and especially to dear Catherine, our co-director—there's no way I could even have considered doing this without her love and support and hard work.



I love you all

Sita

GOOD NEWS!

Tall Tom Dodson is one of our longstanding prisoner friends and has been featured in this newsletter a couple times over the years. After twenty-some years on a life sentence inside the Texas system, Tom will be released probably by the time you are reading these words. Hallelujah! Following is Tom's last letter from prison, including his feelings about what he will miss from his many years behind the walls. Please join us in wishing him well in his brand-new adventure.

Dear Bo and Sita,

It's a beautiful springlike day here in East Texas. It's in the 60's, the sky is cloudless and there is a hint of a breeze. I love mornings like this. This is frisky weather. I live on a wing with windows that look out on the surrounding countryside. On the distant horizon are some tree-covered hills. The deciduous trees stand out like puffs of smoke amongst the evergreens. There is a break in the tree line that delineates where the river runs. Closer to the unit there are plowed fields interspersed with pastureland where cattle graze. Just across the perimeter road is a large manmade pond that is stocked with fish where the migratory birds stop by on their trips north and south. It's pretty cool. I've seen ducks, geese, gulls, pelicans, and even some swans. Yet the most amazing birds to watch are the predators. The local hawks, horned owls, and bald eagles are the rulers. The hawks and owls you can only usually see as they sit to spot a victim, then off they go. Sometimes you see an explosion of feathers, but not often.

The eagles are the most impressive. All my life I never even knew there were bald eagles in Texas. A decade or so ago one of my pals says, "There's an eagle." I said, "Dude, that's a buzzard." But lo and behold it was an eagle. A nesting pair live near here and we see them often. They go fishing on "my" pond. ☺ It's amazing to watch. The eagle makes pass after pass over the same thirty-yard strip of the pond, flying a figure eight and at the central point will dip its claws into the water. After ten or so empty passes it'll finally snatch a fish and then slowly lumber away barely gaining any elevation as it's weighted down with the fish.

I've conditioned myself to look past and around the razorwire, fences and guard towers. I disregard the cotton gin and old syrup mill that ties this prison system to its plantation past. I can pick out the beauty of nature, and it's the beauty I'll miss – the natural beauty I've described beyond the fence, and the beauty inside these men.

Last night I went to a program put on by the Islamic community. It was partially a celebration of Black History month and partially a graduation ceremony for classes the Islamic community offers to any inmate in population (business, Spanish, Arabic, Koran study and orientation). There were some heartfelt orations and even more soul-stirring music. It was a great gathering. The choir has taken their older soul songs and augmented them into what the new generation calls "mix music" that incorporates rap in with the older style music. It was done tastefully. Particularly moving was a remake of an old Ojays' song called Ship Ahoy about the slave trade. And they've got an organist who played professionally outside. It's impressive. Heartfelt!!! The beauty in the "community spirit" is overwhelming. I'll miss these guys.

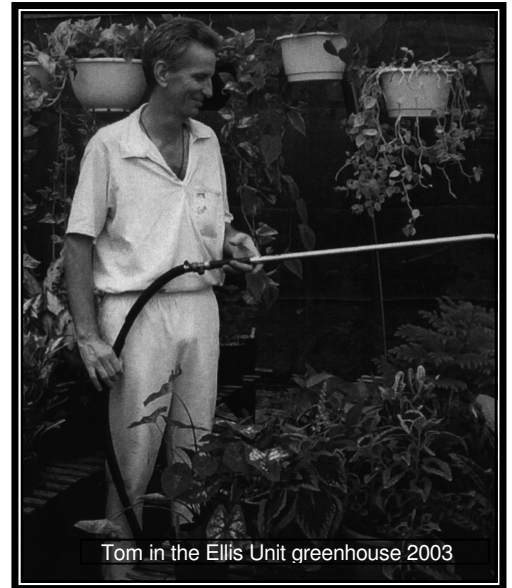
Fortunately some of them are coming home with me. One of the lead singers in Ship Ahoy and the chicano who taught the business class for the Muslims are both in the pre-release class I'm attending. I should complete it by the end of March and theoretically I could leave anytime after that. Yet at present the board has my date set for May. Recently they've been moving the outdates up after these guys finish the class. After 20 years, a month one way or the other doesn't matter. ☺ Can you dig it!?

Our pre-release class is a trip; sort of a psycho romper room. The material we are covering is topical and valid. The manner in which it's delivered is akin to having an AA meeting in an open bar with angry drunks yelling at you. It's chaotic. I listen when it seems prudent and when it's chaotic I try not to add to the din. Woe be it for me to predict anyone's quick return to prison, but I seriously wonder how many days some of these guys will last. Of course, my concern is me. Can I stay humble, be of service to mankind and surrender my will to God? Hopefully I can. I have the training, I have the support system, and I have faith that things will work out. I've learned to refocus quickly when I get distracted. If I get overwhelmed I have coping mechanisms I employ. God's hand has been ever present in my life for many years now and that fact is my greatest comfort.

I'll be on an electronic monitor at first, but that's okay. It's all just an experience. It'll give me time to learn things about how people function out there. I get to grow my own garden. ☺ Once I'm out I'll contact y'all. If you have any specific suggestions feel free to send them my way.

I'll never be able to thank you three—Bo, Sita and Josh—enough for all the love you've shown me all these years. It's been a blessing.

Peace be with you, Tom



a little good news

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