

Human Kindness Foundation

A Little Good News

Fall 2010

M I C R O C O S M & M A C R O C O S M

Dear Family,

There are times in our lives when our problems seem so overwhelming we don't have any idea what to do next in any significant way – how to change our lives, how to address the biggest problems, how to heal the damage between us and our loved ones, how to motivate ourselves to even get out of bed to tackle each new day. Our prayers may be sincere but we may not be hearing any answers. We don't understand the Big Plan a loving God may have for why our lives are so hard, and we just don't have a clue as to what to do next.

In my experience, when I feel I have no power whatsoever over the largest arena of my life – what you might call the *macrocosm* – the only shred of power I can exercise is over the *microcosm* – the smallest realities of what is right in front of me each minute. During very hard times, when friends have asked “how's your life going?,” sometimes I have said “Well, I don't understand my life at all, I don't have a clue what to do from here in any large sense. But I do understand how to straighten that picture on the wall, how to sweep the floor, how to sing and play guitar, how to make myself a decent meal, how to do my spiritual practices, how to be reasonably kind to others, so that's what I'm doing. I'm doing the simplest things I still understand how to do.”

Do you understand the biggest picture of your life? Probably not. But do you understand how to jiggle the toilet handle to stop that sound of water being wasted?

Yep. Do you understand how to heal your damaged relationships? Maybe not. But do you understand how to share that last piece of pie with whomever is at the table who also wants it? Yep. I admit, the things we *don't* understand seem a lot bigger and more important than the petty little things we *do* understand, but ironically, if anything is going to help us to get in better shape for those big things, it's paying attention to the little things and doing them well. As my son's acting coach once told

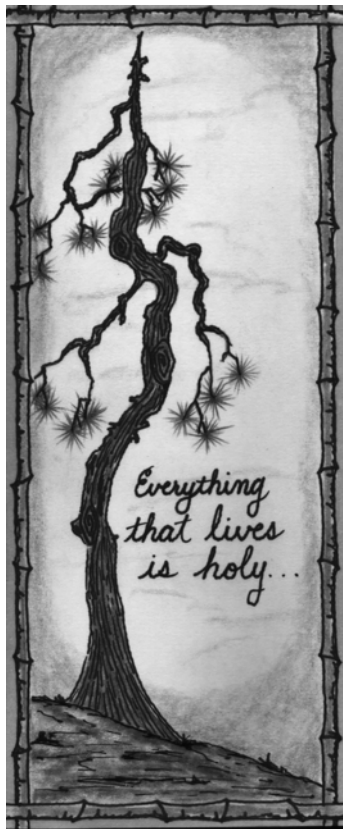
him, when you get out on the stage, you have to start from exactly where you are. If where we are is total confusion, then we need to look at the most immediate thing in front of our noses, no matter how trivial it may seem, just find one tiny little thing that is *not* confusing, and attend to it.

I've had a string of very tough years recently, and I've been at a total loss to understand the purpose of some of the setbacks I have experienced or what I am supposed

to do with them now. But I know how to sing. I understand what that's about. I *love* it. I can pour myself, my soul, all my emotions, into every song I sing. Thank God for music, it has saved my life on many days. It doesn't change any of the conditions of my life, but it keeps me going. I also know how to build things, how to make things out of wood. Something else that I understand. So I do those things too. When I see a hitchhiker on the side of the road, that's a human being who is hoping I'll pull over right now. I understand that. So I can do that too, even if they're a little flaky or smelly or annoying. Everybody's just doing their time the best way they know how. I understand that.

So even when we feel life is a cruel joke that we seem to be the butt of, even when we feel stripped of all power over our lives, there are still things we can understand, and power we can express, in the little immediate choices we make. Sometimes God has us in a headlock and we can barely breathe, and it just seems

He is not going to let go anytime soon. Well, do we believe that God is cruel for no reason, or do we believe that even if the headlock feels horrible, God's got something in mind that will be revealed when the time is right? That's another choice we can make, another form of power – the choice of faith. Not a sappy “New-Age” type of denial-based faith that tries to put a pretty face on everything negative, but rather a deep choice of faith that *includes* all the negative and harsh experiences life



Art by a Texas prisoner

may be throwing at us.

The ancient Carthusian sect of Christianity used the expression “the *darkness* of faith.” We can be in a very dark place and still have faith that God is behind the darkness, that God creates the darkness, that there is a purpose – even if it is excruciating – to the darkness. Feeling harshly treated by God is very different from feeling there *is* no God. Even feeling *abandoned* by God is not the same as feeling there is no God. When Jesus cried on the cross, *Father, why have you abandoned me?*, don’t forget, he was still calling to his Father whose existence he was not questioning. I knew a mentally ill woman many years ago who was furious with Jesus for allowing her to be mentally ill. She had hundreds of little sticky-notes pasted on her walls with angry diatribes to Jesus. When I tried to counsel her a little about not being so angry toward Jesus, she looked me straight in the eyes and said, “Don’t interfere in a lovers’ quarrel!” At that moment I realized the incredible strength of her faith, and I did indeed shut up. Faith is not always pretty. But being angry with God is very different from feeling there is no God.

Life is extremely hard for most of the people on this planet right now, including most of the people reading this newsletter. Life is hard. What do we have power over and what do we not have power over? The word “macrocosm” means, basically, the biggest arena of life, and the word “microcosm” means the smallest arena. For those of you in prison, the macrocosm includes your prison sentence, the courts, the parole authorities, decisions that your family members may make in your absence, losing contact with your children – all the big structures and groupings you cannot control. You may have some influence, but very little real power over the macrocosm of your life. Really, no one does. Anything could happen to any of us at any time.

The *microcosm* of your life is the part of your life that is right there in front of you all through the day, over which you have a lot of power – especially the power of how you *respond* to the conditions and people in your daily life. Viktor Frankl, a survivor of the Nazi death camps, said the ultimate power no state, no force, no

outside entity, can take away from us is the power of how we respond to anything life hands us. That is the microcosm.

The microcosm is what lies within our grasp, it’s what lies in the realm of our range of choices. We can live today in such a way that at least we have not made our big problems in the macrocosm any worse. We can live today in such a way that we have strengthened our good qualities and hopefully weakened our bad habits, addictions, and selfishness. We can live today in such a way that we have said at least one kind word to a stranger or to someone who feels lonely and uncared about. We

can live today in such a way that we gave more than we took, that we paid life back for the air, water, food and space we used up today by being a decent human being who did some simple things we knew and understood how to do, and we did those things well.

I have studied the bibles of all the world’s great religions and I have read many ancient scriptures, and I even have an honorary doctorate in theology, yet neither I nor anyone I have ever met knows how to guarantee any results on this worldly plane of activity where so often it looks like the bad guys win. Jesus was crucified, people tried many times to kill Mohammed and Buddha and Krishna, innocent monks and nuns and saints and seers have been burned at the stake, boiled in oil, drawn and quartered, thrown into dungeons. We all do our best to

change the world into a place of greater peace and harmony and yet it seems like that is a never-ending struggle over which we have very limited power. So we start from wherever we are – even the most awful, dark, miserable places in our minds and

hearts – and we try to do one little simple thing right. And then another. And then another. That may be the most ultimate application of the practice of Mindfulness. It may help to keep us intact while God is busy putting us through the larger trials and struggles of our spiritual journeys.

*Life is sad, life is a bust.
All you can do is do what you must.
Do what you must do, and you do it well.
-- Buckets of Rain, Bob Dylan*

*They say faith’s a candle that lights up the darkness
So you can get a handle on your natural loneliness,
And sometimes faith is all you can do.
And hope’s just a memory in the center of your soul,
Of how it ought to be, and you don’t know how you know it,
And sometimes hoping is all you can do.
-- All You Can Do, (song) Bo Lozoff*



A TRAGIC LOSS

A Note from Bo: Our dear friend and colleague, David Lewis, was murdered on June 9th, 2010, after devoting nearly twenty years to help his community of East Palo Alto to reduce the scourge of violence and drugs that once made it the murder capital of the United States. David was 54 years old. Please join us in sending prayers and blessings to his family and community and co-workers. David's power and influence will not end with the death of his body; it may even become greater in the days and years to come. If and when his killer is caught, we should also remember that David would want us to treat his killer with compassion and give him opportunities to turn his life around.

The following is reprinted from our Christmas 1997 newsletter:

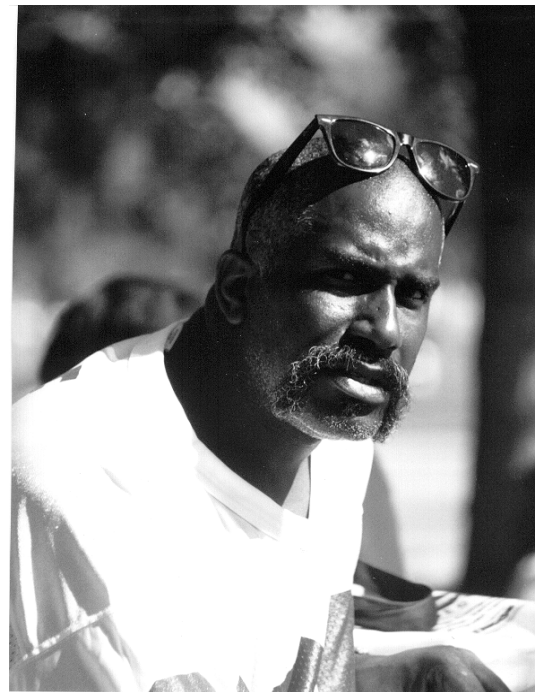
David Lewis is FREE AT LAST

Born in one of the toughest cities in the nation. Dropped out of school at fifteen. Sentenced to ten-to-life in San Quentin when he was nineteen. Spent seventeen years behind bars by the age of thirty-nine. David Lewis didn't have much going for him when he finally decided, in a prison cell shaking and swaying from the big earthquake of 1989, to make his life count for something.

Today, David is a humble, hardworking community leader who is responsible for the new-found hope of thousands of addicts, people with AIDS, and many others who were headed for San Quentin or the morgue. He is a powerful reminder of how much we can change.

FREE AT LAST, which David co-founded in 1993 with Priya Haji in East Palo Alto, CA, is a multi-purpose community center which he describes as "an emotional emergency room." People come there in need of food, drug counseling, relief from abuse, or just plain kindness. They come at the rate of about a hundred per day. During FREE AT LAST's first year of operation, the city's notorious rate of violence dropped an astonishing 87%.

FREE AT LAST sponsors several small residential programs and continues to plan and create every sort of program or facility which the community may need. Its staff and volunteers come from the same streets and understand the same difficulties as the people they serve. David is no Big Boss or Top Dog; he is a member of the community too. He is more grateful than proud. He was as good as dead, and now he lives. He loves others and is loved by others. He has given up self-centered living and realized his connection to the community and the world.



Editor's update: David continued to expand his service since 1997 when we wrote the article above. He was speaking nationally, and was featured in the Bill Moyers documentary "Circle of Recovery." He was well loved and respected by many, including former President Bill Clinton, who called him a "towering figure in stature and spirit." Over 700 people attended his funeral. An East Palo Alto resident who knew him well says:

"I believe that if David were here he would probably turn around and offer to help the very person who just shot him."

Art by Dane Woodson, Susanville, CA

LETTERS

Bo and friends,

Thank you for what you do for us inmates. I'm writing you because I agree with you--there is a God. I believe the God of Judaism is the same God of Christianity and Muslims, etc, but my problem is I have no reason to be thankful or to worship God. I have several mental problems, I'm in prison, I can't handle being around people – especially the aggressive maniacs I'm surrounded by, and it seems that my life got worse after I confessed to Christ.

I've been told God's punishing me for disobedience. True, I'm sure I'm not obedient--don't know if I know how to be. It seems God is really on my ass. I feel like why should I worship a God who's layin the smackdown on me? The worse it gets, the more I say fuck you to him. He just keeps pouring more and more on me.

I'm not gonna go into all the details but every day is a little worse. Today I got transferred to a new house. Now I'm stuck beside a guy who's threatened to stab me before. It's either deal with it or go to the hole for another 60 days. Not a lot of choices. I really feel like God is punishing me even more for my disobedience and mockery. What do I do? How do I get this monkey off my back? And I don't know if I want to

worship a God who's willing to make me suffer so much.

Ron

Hey Ron,

I hear you loud and clear, and maybe I can help you think this through a little. Let's look at what you might call your strengths and weaknesses around your relationship to God.

#1 – strength: You’ve got great faith. Nowhere in your letter do you doubt God exists, you’re just pissed off at Him. He can handle that. You’re definitely a believer. Faith is the most important thing on this journey, so you should be grateful that you’ve got strong faith even when you hate what God seems to be doing in your life (and by the way, who do you think gave you this faith?).

#2 – weakness: You’re basing your entire attitude toward God on “*I’ve been told God’s punishing me for disobedience.*” Whoever told you that is wrong. Your belief in God is not the problem here, it’s your belief in “religious” people who claim to know why God does what God does.

The people who have told you God is punishing you for disobedience are no different from Job's arrogant friends in the Bible who kept telling Job the same

exact thing. The real saints and sages who do understand God a lot better than we do, never say simplistic things like that. We're supposed to be humble before God, not know-it-alls.

#3 – another strength: Endurance. You’ve made it so far even with all the problems you described. Endurance is important. You may be hanging on by a thread, but thank God for that thread! Hang on.

#4 – another weakness: Bitterness. You're backing yourself into a very tight corner, Ron – believing in God but also believing God has it in for you. That's like being married to a wife whom you think hates your guts. How many good things will you be able to accomplish in such a partnership? How well can such a couple face hardships together?

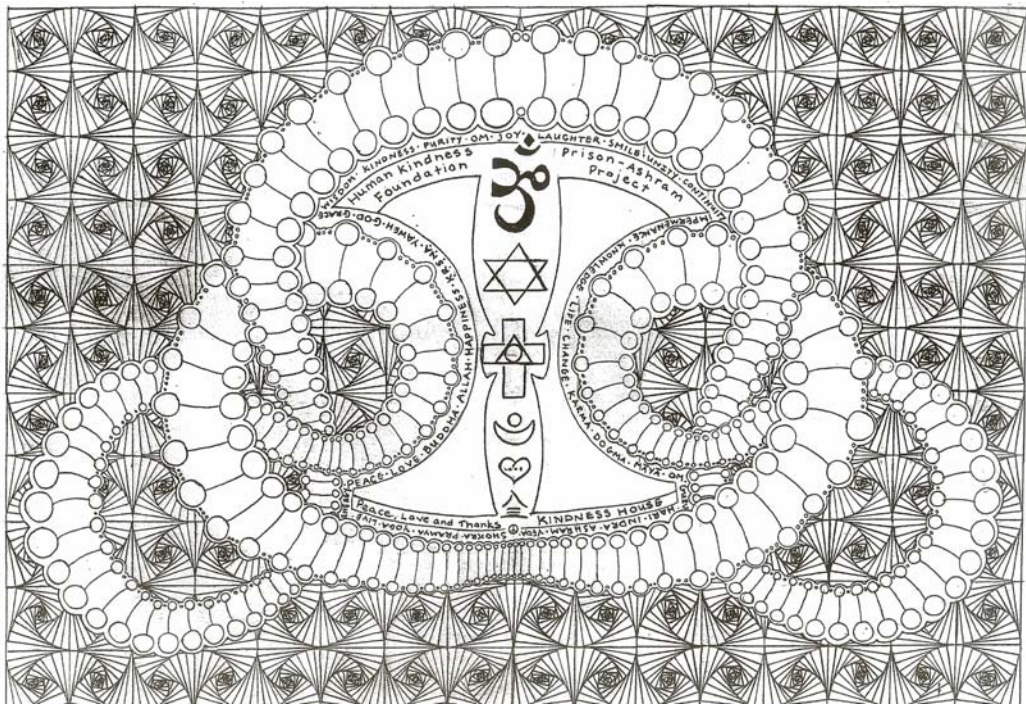
The best and wisest people who have ever lived say that God loves you more than you can imagine. None of us completely understands why there is so much suffering in the world. Why did Jesus have to be crucified and why did He tell us to “pick up your *cross* and follow me”? That’s not an invitation to punishment, that’s a deep spiritual mystery.

Ron, I don't know exactly why your life is so hard. I do know life is very hard for most of the people on this planet. About one-fifth of the world's population doesn't know whether they will survive until tomorrow. Life is hard, and I also know, from my own direct spiritual experiences, that God is a God of Love, not a God of anger and punishment. There's a quote I used from a Christian saint on page 158 of *We're All Doing Time*:

We may rest assured that nothing whatever happens on Earth without God's permission.

What a source of consolation to know that even the sufferings & adversaries which God sends us are for our very best, and have in view our eternal salvation.

Ah, how great will be our shame when we stand before the judgment-seat of God and see clearly the loving intention of Divine Providence in sending us

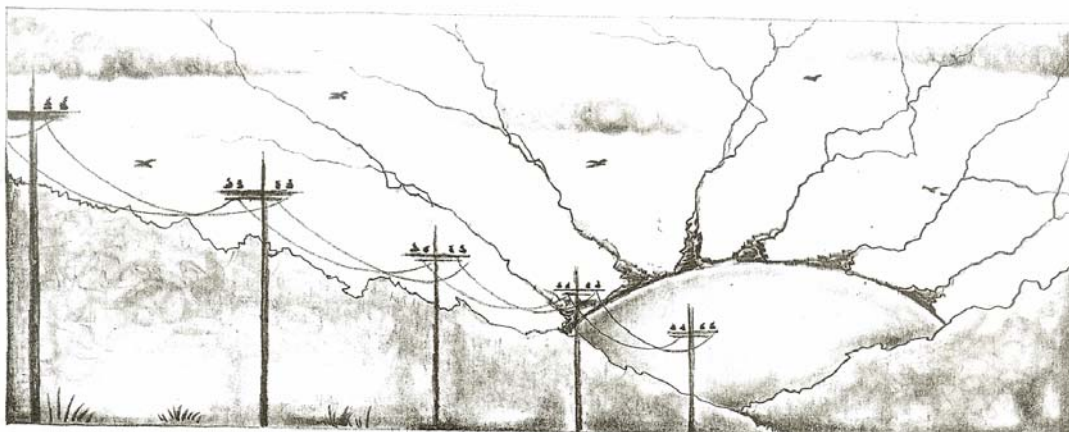


William Skach, Charlotte, NC

those trials which we tried to evade, thus battling against our own Salvation!

--St. Alphonsus Liguori

It's possible some of the problems you face could go a lot easier if you were trying to work in partnership with God instead of feeling like He's tormenting you. Asking a God of Love for help is very different from blaming God for your problems.



I was gazing out my cell window at the setting sun behind the power lines, and catching an image of the cross in the sun, I couldn't help but feel the love and warmth of God. Jason Lee Ostrom, Wasco, CA

The Tibetan Buddhists have a rock-solid faith in Karma that has carried them through years of imprisonment and torture by the Chinese. They believe with 100% certainty that nothing can happen to you unless it is your karma, and that you need to experience all of these things in order to purify your past actions and move ahead on your spiritual journey. So they accept their suffering without hating the Chinese, because they see the Chinese prison guards as mere pawns of their own karma.

The bottom line is whether you choose a view of life where God is always waiting to *getcha* like some horrible third-grade teacher, or a view of life where God is a force of supreme goodness, and loves us more than we can imagine. TV evangelists tend to take the first view, and they make a lot of money off of your fear. Saints and sages tend to take the second view, and many of them suffered a lot more than you and I, being burned at the stake or crucified or thrown in the dungeons by the people of the first view. Whom do you feel like trusting with your life? The ones who ride around in limousines? Will you find Christ in a limo?

Maybe one practical thing you can do is to work with the chapter on Prayer that begins on page 97 of *We're All Doing Time*. Take it personally, my friend.

Your Friend, Bo



Dear Mr. Lozoff,

I've read your books, which help me get through the times I've been incarcerated. Now I've been sentenced, and I will be

deported to Mexico any day of this month.

The reason I'm writing to you is to ask for advice. I am turning into a very bitter person, and I don't like these feelings. I cannot help to have this anger against the jails or "justice" system that have ruined my life forever.

I am a mother of 4 children. My 2 youngest are autistic. I have been living in the USA since I was very young. During all these years, I have never committed a crime of any kind. My mistake was to take a nursing assistant test for a couple of friends. They got caught and told about me and I got arrested, and I will be sent away.

I was in the process of legalizing my immigration status. Now I have lost everything and my innocent children will be suffering the consequences.

I am not myself anymore. I am full of hate against everybody, even to myself.

I want to tell you that when I looked at your sweet face and those eyes in your book, that they have something that calmed me down. I felt there is hope for me.

Well, thank you for the time you'll take to read and understand my letter. I wish you and your wife and son are in good health. I think you're wonderful people.

God bless you, Rosa

Hi Rosa,

I'm so sorry to hear about your terrible misfortune. I have heard many "horror stories" from people like yourself about what the U.S. government is doing to

people who get into trouble. So many deportations, so many broken families. We will certainly pray for a miracle for you and your children in the face of such a heartless "justice" system.

But becoming a bitter, angry person is not something the government can do to you. It is something only you can do to yourself, and as you can already see, it does not help your situation at all, it only makes everything worse. If you become bitter and hateful, then they will really have defeated you. It is times like these that our deepest faith in God is tested. Do you believe God knows of Rosa and all her children? Do you believe God is a loving God? Do you believe it is possible that this terrible situation is a part of your life's journey that was determined before you were even born?

These are the kinds of questions we ask ourselves to see whether we are a "person of faith" or not. People of faith believe there is a good and loving God even when things are at their worst. People who do not have faith believe good things and bad things just happen by accident and nothing has any deeper meaning.

There have been many saints and sages throughout history who have experienced terrible injustice, imprisonment, persecution and even crucifixion. They knew what it is like to be treated unfairly, and they still told us to love our enemies. These are such difficult teachings when we are treated unfairly! Believe me, I know how hard it is. But do we have any other choice? Does it help you or your children to be bitter and angry and hateful? When I have been overwhelmed

by bad things, when I cannot see how I can possibly have a good future, when I cannot understand how anything is going to get better in my life, the only thing I can do is to look at this very day, this very hour, and do something that I CAN understand -- like being kind to the person in front of me, or helping my child, or doing a good job of *anything that is right here in front of me*, even just sweeping the floor.

We can always understand how to do something positive in the moment, and sometimes there is nothing larger that we can understand. I wish I could help your larger problems, but all I can do as your friend is to give you this small advice for now -- resist bitterness and be positive about whatever is right in front of you today, do a good job of whatever little things you need to do today. And of course, pray constantly for God's help. But like the old Christian song goes, "Lord don't move the mountain, but give me the strength to climb." This is such hard advice when what we really want is for God to move the mountain out of our way! But this is what the great holy ones have taught us forever.

Rosa, if you were truly a bitter and hateful person, you would not have written me for help, would you? You are being tempted by bitterness and hate, and you wrote me because you knew I would try to help you resist this temptation. So I am doing exactly what you hoped I would do, and I hope it helps.

All my love and prayers are with you,
Bo



Dear Bo and Sita,

Thank you so much for the books *We're All Doing Time* and *Lineage* and other Stories. I learned and am still learning a lot from them. I pass them around in our 50 man cell-block, and everyone loves them.

I have been in prison 25 out of the last 30 years, just was released last May, '09, then got addicted to oxycotin and robbed two drug stores for pills. Here I sit again waiting a plea bargain.

Bo, I saw when I was released it was stressful & hard to cope out there. I'm calmer and more peaceful in here. Can I ever become peaceful calm & responsible again when I'm out there? That is the question. Am I institutionalized?

I know you're real busy but If you can help I'd appreciate it. I have been reading your books for many years now and feel like we're family. Much love to Sita and your son.

Love, Manny

Dear Manny,

Yeah, you are probably institutionalized to some degree, but that's not like having some terminal disease. It's not something you can't get rid of. Being aware of it is the first step, so you're already taking that step. It's easy to understand why you feel calmer and more peaceful inside. Prison life is all laid out in front of you, you have no responsibilities for food or shelter or income, and you've had 25 years' experience in learning how to get along in that environment. The outside world is very complicated and you have to earn a living, show up on time, be reliable, and make decisions for yourself. That's hard work!

But the thing is, hard work isn't a bad thing, and it's not impossible for you to do. You can do hard. You just haven't made the commitment to yourself yet. You need to stop thinking of "hard" as the same thing as "stressful." Hard is just hard, it doesn't have to be stressful. And your automatic response to stress is to find some drugs. You need to change all of these assumptions. Hard work is not stress, and drugs are not the solution to hard work *or* stress.

I know thousands of people who have been released from prison. Some of my best friends who spent most of their lives inside are now out and doing great work in their communities, raising families, having fun, and dealing with all the complex stuff the world throws at them, *without* thinking of drugs as an option. You need to work with this three-word "mantra" about drugs: **No Matter What**. In other words, "**No matter what**, I am done with drugs! **No matter what happens on the outside**, drugs are no longer an option! **No matter what**

stresses I encounter, drugs are not the way I will cope! **No matter what disrespect or rejection I receive from others**, I am finished with drugs." And you need to really mean it. Because life outside will definitely be hard at times, and people will definitely look down on you at times, and some employers will definitely not hire you because of your past, and many relatives may not believe you will amount to anything, etc., etc., etc. Life is often tough for an ex-con.

But many thousands of ex-cons and recovering drug addicts are succeeding anyway, and you just need to decide whether you are going to become one of them. If that's what you really want, then **take responsibility**, both spiritually and practically: Spiritually, start praying constantly for help, and make time every day for some spiritual practices. Practically, take every opportunity that comes your way for recovery programs, 12-step groups, drug counseling, mental health counseling, and really throw yourself into them with all your heart. Worse addicts than you have gotten out and created great lives for themselves. You are not doomed, I swear! You can do this. But it will take all your energy, all your attention, all your heart and soul, to set yourself firmly on that successful path. To me, the key underlying all the rest, is to decide that you want your life to be about something bigger than yourself. I know many recovery groups say "you can't do this for anyone else, you have to do it for yourself," and I understand the logic behind that statement. But on the deepest spiritual levels, we are not just about ourselves. You need to do this not just for yourself, but for your family, for your community, for the world. You need to do this so one more addict can see someone else in recovery. You need to do it so you can give your testimony to young people *before* they spend 25 years behind bars. You need to do it so your family and others who love you and believe in you can see they were right all these years not to give up on you! This isn't just about you, it is about your contribution to the world. This is the time, little brother, and you're the guy. Get off the fence and do this. No matter what.

All my Love and Support, Bo

NANTUCKET FILM FESTIVAL FEATURES "DEEP & SIMPLE" CONNECTION BETWEEN MISTER ROGERS AND BO.

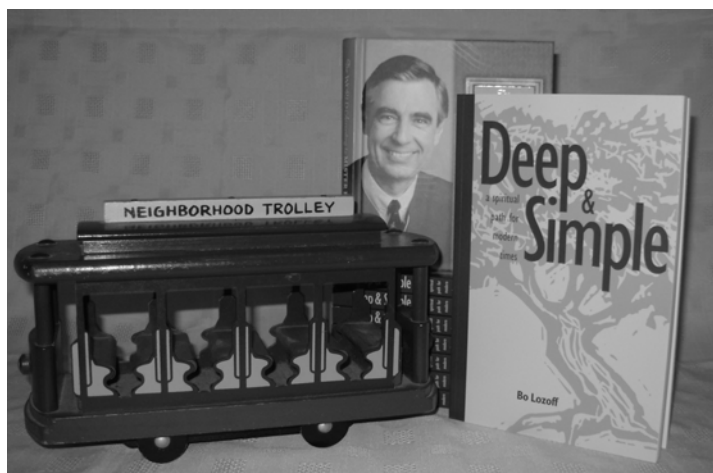
Bo Lozoff is featured in a new documentary, which debuted at the Nantucket Film Festival on June 18, 2010.

Mister Rogers and Me; A Deep and Simple Documentary was produced by Wagner Bros. Films.

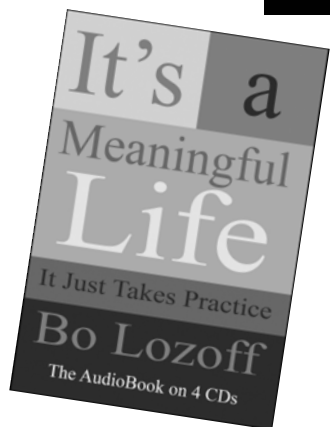
While making their film, Benjamin and Christopher Wagner spent two days interviewing Bo and visiting HKF, because Mister Rogers frequently quoted Bo's writings. The brothers were moved by the affectionate connection between two unlikely friends: a soft-spoken children's TV star and a man who is known and loved in the world's toughest prisons.

You can find out more, and watch a trailer about the film at: www.misterrogersandme.com.

"Within minutes of the film starting, my goosebumps (not to mention tears) suggested that I was going to walk out of the auditorium forever changed by what I saw and heard, and in a very simple and deep way, that's exactly what happened." - Rosanna Caviello Callahan



2 NEW AUDIOBOOKS AVAILABLE!



We're pleased to announce *It's a Meaningful Life, It Just Takes Practice* and *Lineage And Other Stories* are now available as audio books, read by Bo Lozoff.

It's A Meaningful Life; It Just Takes Practice: abridged version of the book, on 4 CDs. \$22.00 plus shipping (or \$6 total if you are incarcerated*).

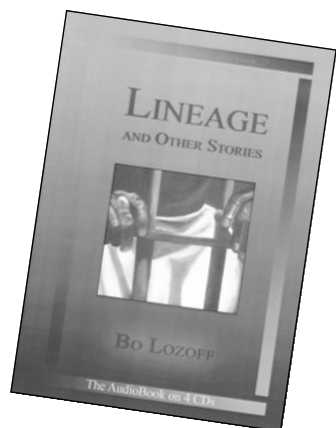
Lineage & Other Stories: the full book, on 4 CDs. \$22.00 plus shipping (or \$6 total if you are incarcerated*).

If you have access to the Internet, please go to www.humankindness.org, and visit our online store.

We have a great selection of books, music, t-shirts, DVDs, and artwork available.

Purchases from our store are an important source of support for the free books we distribute.

*Because of the high cost of production, we're not able to send these CDs free to inmates. But if you are incarcerated, *and allowed to receive CDs*, you may purchase these audiobooks for \$6 per set, prepaid. Send check, money order, or stamps along with your order. Please let us know which audiobook you are ordering, and please make sure you are allowed to receive them. *We are not able to send refunds* so check your regulations first!



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of peace and
thousands around
you will be saved.**

—Saint Seraphim of Sarov

Saint Seraphim spent 1000 days and
nights on a rock praying to God for
forgiveness.



By Gabriel Shute, Mebane, NC