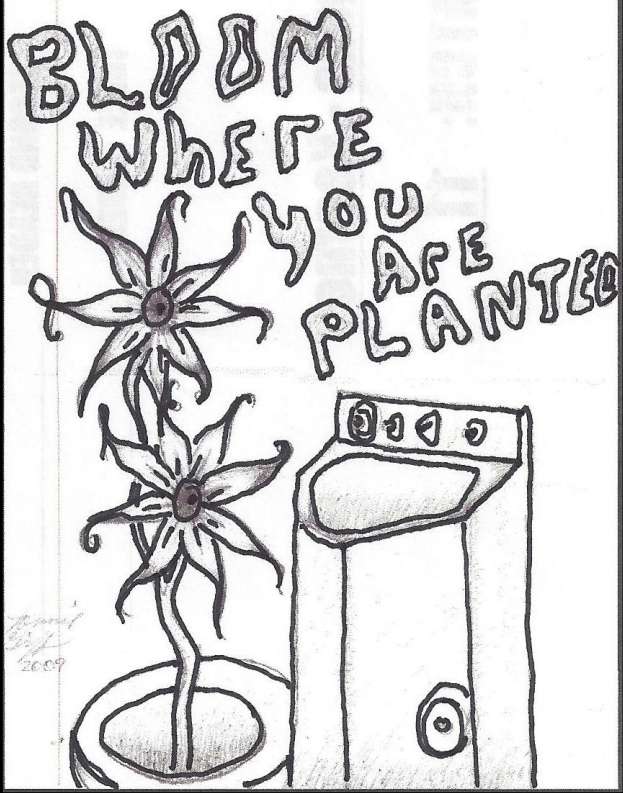


Human Kindness Foundation

A Little Good News

Spring 2016



BLOOM WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED

"If we forget that in every criminal there is a potential saint, we are dishonoring all of the great spiritual traditions. Saul of Tarsus persecuted and killed Christians before becoming Saint Paul, author of much of the New Testament. Valmiki, the revealer of the Ramayana, was a highwayman, a robber, and a murderer. Milarepa, one of the greatest Tibetan Buddhist gurus, killed 37 people before he became a saint.... We must remember that even the worst of us can change."

—**Bo Lozoff**,
quoted in *Utne Reader*

When we first started planning this newsletter a few months ago, we talked about featuring one person who is currently incarcerated. We thought it would be useful to explore how one person has used prison time to transform their life, to develop compassion in a deep way, to find a peacefulness so large it could inspire all of us.

Once we opened the door to that idea — or it might be more accurate to say we "opened our eyes" — we realized we had several stories to share, not just one. Our mail is always full of deep, compassionate messages from people who are locked up. The letter writers come from different parts of the country and different backgrounds. What they have in common is a commitment to living a life of compassion right where they are. From the hundreds of letters we get every week, we've chosen a few that we think will be useful to you, our readers, whether you live inside prison walls or not.

As always, we hope what we send helps you open your eyes as much as putting it together helps us. There are good people around you, even if you're in a place that seems full of anger and despair. Maybe something you do or say will touch somebody else who is working on opening their eyes. The smallest act of kindness can start something big. There is much goodness inside you. May we all find the love inside ourselves.

—HKF





Dear Sita, Catherine & family,

I'll be stopping to honor Bo on his birthday. I learned so much from him and the rest of you. Patience, acceptance, loving-kindness...that list just goes on!

2015 was a challenging year for me. I found out that my father, who I hadn't seen since I was 9, and whom I haven't heard from in over 35 years, died in September. That brought up a whole slew of emotions that I thought I had dealt with. I was very small when he and my mother split. I felt that somehow I wasn't good enough for him to care enough about to stick around. I recognize now that he had his own shit to deal with, and it really had nothing to do with me.

Then in November, I was diagnosed with a malignant melanoma. Totally

freaked me out. Man I was just too stunned to think. So I did what I had been taught to do. I sat with it. I just let it be. This does not mean that I haven't been aggressively involved in my health care, I am. What it means is that I sat with my fear and anger and terror and pain.

Then I started to do a whole bunch of Tonglen. Oh. My. God! Tonglen works! I "knew" that before I started this latest chapter of my life, but I never really "got it" as to how well it works to alleviate my concern for myself. As a result of doing Tonglen, I got more and more concerned for others, including my victim and his family, and less so for myself. A huge weight was lifted from me!

I've also been working on my relationship with my mother for the last six or seven years. We haven't seen each other since about a week after my arrest 16 years ago, but she has committed to come and visit me this year. She has gifted me this typewriter that I'm using to write this letter. I got it on the anniversary of the date that I committed my crime. It broke my heart. I thank her every time I use it and am sometimes unable to see what I'm typing through the tears in my eyes. She keeps telling me that I am loved. I didn't think that was possible for a very long time. All of you have so much to do with that. I could never have started down the road I'm on right now without your work and Bo's books.

A visiting monk asked me who my teacher was/is. My immediate answer was: Bo. He is the one who made it through the hard shell I had built around my heart and allowed me to feel. I can never pay that back. I'm trying though. Right now I'm teaching in our group. I've been practicing for 12 years or more and have been told that I should be teaching. So I've started to do so.

One of the things that I learned from Bo is that I can have a complete and real life here in prison. I spend part of each and every day in service. And while I fully expect to die behind these

walls, I'm okay with that. I don't plan on giving up my life of service if I ever get out of here. It's part of what makes me whole. Another lesson learned and lived.

So again, I say "thank you" to all of you. I would not be the person that I am today if you were not giving of yourselves. Your gifts allow me to keep giving.

I love you, M



M,

On behalf of all of us at the Human Kindness Foundation, thank you for such a thoughtful and inspiring letter. Sita and Catherine shared it with me, and I asked if I could write you back. I am a volunteer and on the board of HKF. I have never been incarcerated but I have volunteered in prisons leading yoga and meditation for more than 15 years. Still, I won't pretend to truly understand what you have experienced. But what struck me about your letter was the common situations we share with family and Buddhist practices. I very much understand the power of the emotions related to your father. Mine left my life when I was a baby, without a word for thirty years. I did get the benefit of a few years knowing him before he died of cancer. He was who he was, and as you say, "he had his own shit to deal with." In the end I was able to make peace with him and love the part of him I saw in me and the part of me I saw in him. In fact, through grace, he is the one who introduced me to Bo and HKF. The world works in mysterious ways, as you show!

I am so sad you never got that kind of closure with your father, but I am touched by how you and your mother are connecting. My mother died without that reconnection. And there were layers of emotion in the wake of that.

There is no more important phrase in your whole letter than "I am loved." Once any of us knows that, we have

much to give to others. And we are able to face mortality. At that point the wish to stay alive is less for self-preservation and much more out of hope for continuing to serve others, as you do. In that spirit, our wish for you is to overcome your cancer and enjoy a long life.

Tonglen is indeed the most humbling and healing of practices I have found. I respect the depth of feeling you have for your victim and his family. Your commitment to live in word and action in ways that honor that karma is all that can be asked or offered at this point.

Know that the love that is not even ours to offer is given freely to you and all you touch there in prison and beyond.

Your friend, Christopher



What is Tonglen?

Literally, “Tonglen” means “giving and receiving” in Tibetan. Although I have read many instructions for doing this form of meditation practice, **as an incarcerated practitioner I have developed my own method that works very well for me.**

It is important to have a clear state of mind before starting Tonglen, and ending the practice with the same clarity of mind. When practicing for thirty minutes, I like to just sit for ten minutes, do ten minutes of Tonglen, and bring the mind back home for ten minutes. I also break the Tonglen practice into four separate parts as follows:

1) Before you can benefit others, you must first have your own peace of mind. I start out by inhaling all of my own pain and confusion, filtering this “muddy” energy with love and compassion, and exhaling the pure white light energy that is inherently stashed away deep in our hearts.

2) As we all know, there is an enormous amount of suffering in prison. I like to focus on one noisy voice in the hallway or on the tier that is obviously driven by ego-ridden pain and confusion (I’ve yet to have trouble picking out such a voice). I’ll also sometimes think of some trivial altercation that recently occurred in the chow line, the tv room, etc. As I inhale, I concentrate on taking in all of the pain and confusion that feeds such altercations and noisy folks, and replace that pain on the exhale with warmth and compassion. With each breath, I move my concentration throughout the prison, even sharing some of this warmth with the hacks, who sometimes appear to be the most confused of all.

3) I then move my focus beyond the prison walls to my family and friends, and to others that I may have hurt along the way. I usually end up thinking about my young son, laying in his bed at night, wondering when I’m coming home. Once again, on the inhale, I focus my attention on the muddy, smoky suffering, and I try to exhale pure white light bliss energy.

4) Finally, it’s time to shoot the moon. I give a moment’s thought to all of the confusion and pain in the world — from

the guy in the next cell to the starving children of Rwanda, and everything in between. Once I have a clear picture of this darkness, I again inhale the pain and confusion, filter it with pure unconditional love, and exhale compassion and warmth.

As stated earlier, I spend the last few minutes of my meditation practice just focusing on my breath, and bringing a sense of clarity back home.

The really neat thing about this practice is that it’s a complete tear-down of the ego. Rather than “looking out for number one,” we are looking out for everyone else, by using our own heart as a filter.

The one warning I would give with the practice is not to get caught up in feeding the ego. It would be easy to give yourself praise for taking on such a practice at your own “expense.” I think it’s important not to conceptualize the possibility of any merit gained, but to just treat it for what it is; a practice of compassion — in the truest sense of the word, a practice.

***Written by
Evan
Rotman
while he
was inside.
We’re
happy to
say that
Evan has
been out for
many years
and is doing
well.***



Many thanks to the artists: Pg 1: Lonnie Griffin, Mayo, FL (upper); Suzanne “Smiley” De La Cruz, Seguin, TX (lower); Pg 2: Piper Rountree, Troy, VA; Pg 3: Thomas Parrotta II, Moulton, AL; Pg 4: Duane Raymond, Delano, CA (upper); Michael Jimenez, Susanville, CA (lower); Pg 5: Kevin Mayhew, Bowling Green, KY (upper); James Stine, Malone, FL (middle); Kameon Aaron, Grady, AR (lower); Pg 6: Bryon Babajan, Marshall, TX (upper); Hector Cupich Quinones, Dallas, TX (lower) Pg 7: Chris Brown, Ft. Lauderdale, FL (upper); Khampher Phakeovilay, Milton, FL (lower); Pg 8: Delia Davila, Marlin, TX.

After 27 years in prison in Alabama, Troy Bridges woke up the morning of his release date not knowing whether Mississippi would come pick him up to finish an old sentence there. He packed his possessions and was taken to the gate, hoping for freedom. Instead, he was shackled and put into a van for transport to Mississippi. This is Troy's story of that ride. He calls it:

Take My Seat

With little enthusiasm, I stare out the van's windows. We drive a two-lane country road that eventually goes straight through the heart of a small but bustling town. I look, but find little of interest—I'm too busy having a pity-party. When the British came to arrest him the last time, Gandhi said "I've been on many journeys. This is just another journey." But, I ain't Gandhi. And I ain't no political prisoner. I'm just a bank robber who escaped from a Mississippi prison twenty-seven years ago. Why pay attention? I ask myself. Why look at what I can't have? Looking leads to dreaming, and dreaming leads to despair.

That thought caused me to think of a self-help course that I took, and later had the privilege of facilitating. The course was called "Houses of Healing: A Prisoner's Guide to Inner Power and Freedom." Meditation was a key tool used in the course that taught emotional awareness/emotional healing. The primary question asked of participants was: "Who am I, really?" The answers varied. Some simply identified as prisoners. Others as fathers, sons, gang members, Christians, or Muslims. One or two identified as children of God.

At the center of our being, we are so much more than those subpersonalities. The subpersonalities are only masks that we had learned to wear to protect ourselves. At the very center of our being, we are the core self. The core self is unchanging. It



is, and will always be, basically kind, compassionate, and trustworthy, no matter the terrible things our subpersonalities have caused us to do in the past.

I can't help but smile, shake my head, realizing that the subpersonality that I have been identifying with since early this morning is that of a wounded, dejected, and mistreated prisoner. I have been seeing myself as the victim, when in reality it has all been karma balancing itself. As *Houses of*

Healing has advised: take your seat and trust completely.

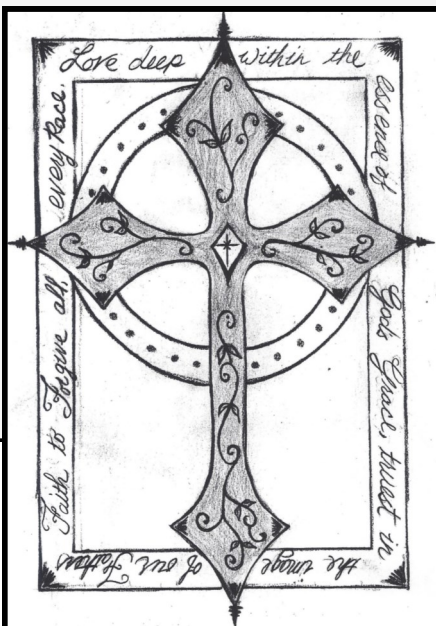
The universe has given me another chance. How will I respond? Has anything changed in me since this particular problem was last encountered? Yes. This time I will respond differently. I will take the path of surrender and illumination — "take my seat." I will trust that the universe will respond accordingly.

I look out the window. I see the "You Are Leaving Alabama" sign, and a moment later, "Welcome to Mississippi" signs flash by.

We asked the author of *Houses of Healing* to clarify what was meant by "take my seat." Here is the response:

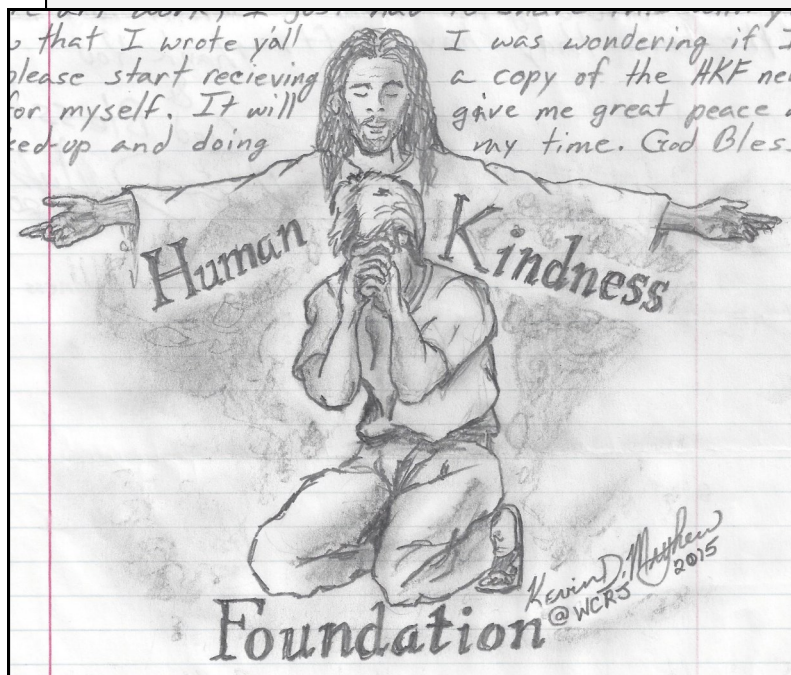
"Sit connected to the ever-present Self – to the peace, wisdom, and unconditional love that is at the center of who you/we are. If life is challenging one might think of it as being the calm at the center of the cyclone."

Librarians or Counselors can request library copies of *Houses of Healing* from Lionheart Foundation. www.lionheart.org



"Every time I'm reading one of Bo's books, it's like he's sitting on my bunk next to me teaching me face to face. I've come a good way in my meditation. When I first started I could only go a minute, now I'm up to 15 minutes. Even though Bo is gone, to me he is still the friend and teacher I never had."

I have given my life to helping others. When I was 18 years old I took a man's life and was sentenced to life without parole. That was over 20 years ago. I spent 6 of my first 10 years in high security housing for serious infractions and



escape attempts. I only saw a horrible situation with no way out and no hope for the future.

I finally took a hard look at myself and didn't like what I saw. I decided that it was time to change my life. I wasn't sure where to start, but I felt pulled toward the Church and became involved in services and classes. I never even imagined that peace and happiness could be found in prison, I just knew that I wanted to become a better person.

While in confinement in 2012, I fell to my knees and begged the Lord to take control of my life, to use me for good.

When I got out of confinement I signed up for classes and programs, including Victim Impact, Houses of Healing, From the Inside Out... and now I have taught some of these classes! My prayers were answered, my life has purpose.

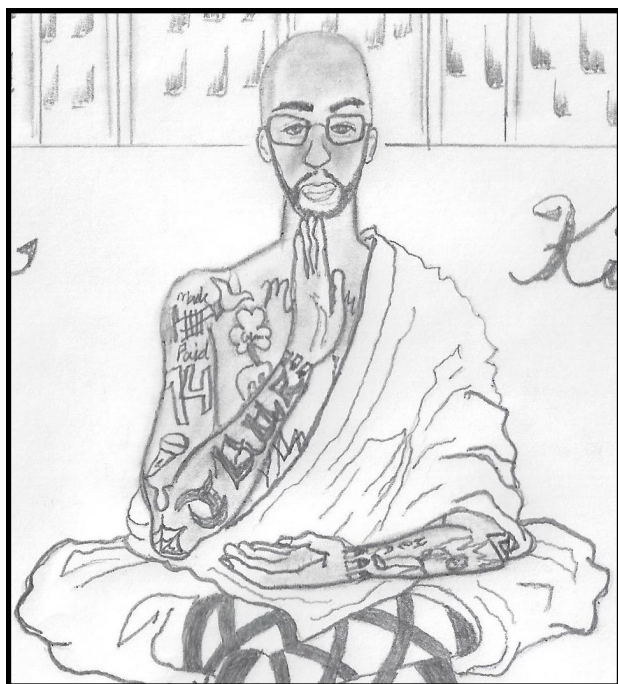
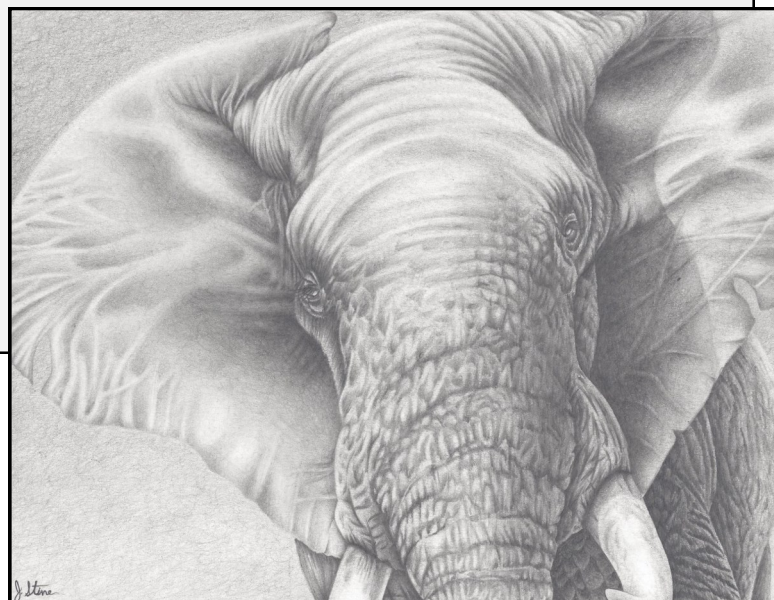
But that's not all! I started thinking about how I could spread some happiness to the outside world from in here. I asked my uncle how I could use my artistic talents to help people. He knew of a senior care center that

might appreciate some homemade greeting cards. So I got started, and to date have created 100 homemade cards for the elderly residents at the care center.

No matter how bleak things looked, I just had to open my eyes and use my mind. There is good in all of us. I was a teenager with a murder conviction, and now I'm using my life to help others. I am at peace.

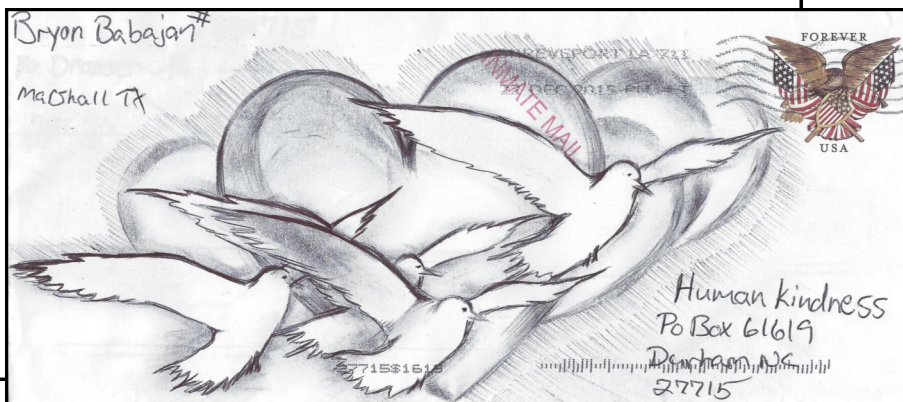
God bless you, Jimmy Stine

Editor's note: this elephant drawing is one of Jimmy's works of art. See a list of all artists in this issue on page 3.



When I think of others before my own self, feeling their pain and suffering their agony, praying for them and doing something to alleviate their situation, I also discover that there's always somebody else who's suffering more than I. Even though someone else's burden might be bigger and heavier than my own burden, its weight doesn't make me feel tired or overwhelmed. To the contrary, it is when I hold on to my own burden that this one feels heavier and very difficult to bear. The way to find rest in Christ's presence is by looking to the needs of others as much as we see to our own. *Edgardo, on California's Death Row, San Quentin, CA*

I hope this brief letter finds you in the very best of health and spiritually soaring like a dove in the sky. Unfortunately I'm in segregation right now. I'm mentally drained and have to **put some good old fashion meditation to use**. I'm just sitting back here on seg looking stupid because somebody lied using my name. Nevertheless, I'm going to maintain my good behavior and not allow them to trick me nor provoke me into the madman I once was. I feel better about myself doing the right thing, no saint but I've been doing well staying out of trouble. Thanks again for all the good news and newsletters.



In our Winter newsletter (Holy Days 2015), we shared some letters from "D," who was struggling to find compassion for himself and healing of his childhood sexual abuse. We received many letters in response. We've shared two here because we feel they can be useful to anybody who wants to deepen their compassion for all beings.



the first step in understanding others without a judgmental attitude. It's a long and often painful journey, yet the reward is a blessing! Even I am experiencing more peace and compassion for others (and myself) than I ever did in the past. With each new day which God allows me to have, I find it easier to apply what I learned from Bo's books.

I will keep D in my prayers.

Peace, Joy and Love Always, R.



Dear HKF,

I can empathize with D's feelings due to the fact that from the age of 6 through 14 I was forcefully abused sexually. When a child is raped, anger and hatred tends to become unbearable. Unfortunately in later years I became what I hated the most; I became the same "animal" which the people who raped me were. I dumped my feelings of hatred and anger on innocent people—ruining their lives. These feelings are like a cancer. Over time they eat a person up.

Then, through reading *We're All Doing Time* I realized that "we are our own worst enemy." Allowing myself to be like those who abused me only caused mega-problems for everyone involved. All the excuses I used were nothing more than donkey dung.

As a Messianic Jewish individual I really wanted to forgive my abusers, but it was too difficult until I realized that in order to forgive others I first had to forgive and love myself. I agree that "when a person finds forgiveness they enjoy peace," like you told D. Finding forgiveness for myself was

Dear D,

First, and foremost, I am truly sorry that you were traumatized by sexual abuse as a young child. It should not have happened. I know your pain as I too was sexually abused numerous times as a child. However, unlike you, I grew up to be that child predator. I am now doing a life sentence without the possibility of parole. I am at peace with my sentence.

I am concerned about the anger you seem to hold within and toward yourself. I too, until about two years ago, had all of this anger inside of me. I used any means necessary to avoid dealing with it. Finally, it took me to segregation. While there, through the books of HKF, I began both yoga and meditation and had a regular practice.

There was a posting for a group based on a book by Dr. Robert Enright, called *Forgiveness is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Guide to Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*. In all the time I've done, it is the only group that asked: "What happened to you to make you angry? Who hurt you?" It was a lot of work and a lot of pain, but it was also the best choice

I've made. I didn't trust anyone but now I believe I can trust every man in that group as a trusted confidante. I was also able to finally understand and let go of my anger through this process of "Forgiveness," going through all those who have severely harmed you and forgiving them. It's hard work but I'm glad I'm doing it. The biggest point that helped me was Dr. Enright's suggestion to look at what happened to the people who harmed you to make them the way they are?

Good Luck, DW

After receiving DW's letter, HKF contacted Dr. Enright to let him know we'd be mentioning him in this newsletter. He graciously gave permission to share this with our readers, about his forgiveness work inside a maximum security prison:

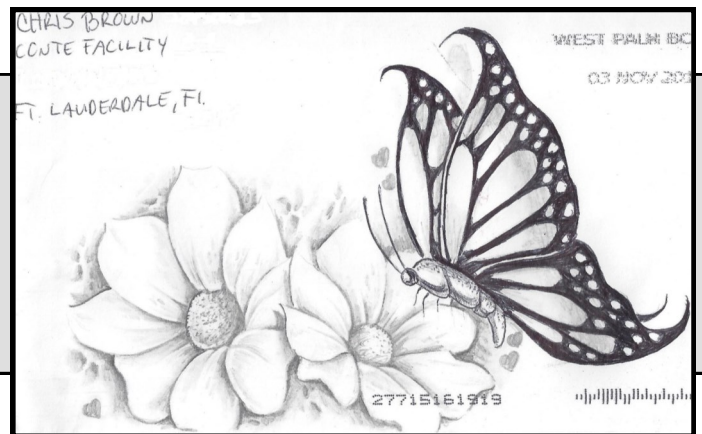
"The point was not to focus on those in prison seeking forgiveness for their crimes, but instead to help each of them to begin forgiving those who have abused them prior to their serious crimes. ... During

six months of forgiveness therapy...they gained the insight that their own anger, rage, and fury built up to such an extent that it came roaring out onto others. As one man said, 'Forgiveness is the enemy of hatred.'

Another man had this remarkable insight that anger, which is displaced onto unsuspecting other people, leads to the victim possibly passing that anger to another person, who may pass it on yet again. At some point, he reasoned, someone has to stop the passing on of anger and forgiving can do that job. He said this: 'When another is in pain, they are on the hook. Then they put you on the hook. Then you put others on the hook.'"

Dr. Enright, who has studied forgiveness for more than 30 years, believes that forgiveness can reduce anger and make prisons safer for everyone. He is a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Never forget that a saint is a sinner who keeps on trying.
—Nelson Mandela



So Many People Care

donations. We had a very generous offer of a \$50,000 leadership gift if others would match it during December and January. They did! Close to **500 people gave** during that time, bringing our total to **\$115,828**, which covers about 5 months of our operating expenses. Others let us know they'd like to give and expressed how much they care. We were deeply touched and humbled by the outpouring of love and support.



People care, and they come together for spiritual growth and radical kindness in ways that erase dividing lines such as "incarcerated" and "free." So many understand that we are truly all doing time together.

Here's a note from one of our donors: *"I find it sad that I discovered you so late in my life. (I'll be 79 on my next birthday.) I believe Human Kindness is what Jesus and Buddha taught. I'm sorry to say my whole life was just about ME!!! I found your book and I found you and my life took a better direction. God does wonders – don't you think? I will help you as long as I am able – just like you helped me – and are helping others."*

To those who sent gifts and to our great friend who offered to match them:
THANK YOU FOR GIVING AND FOR CARING!

Human Kindness Foundation
PO Box 61619
Durham, NC 27715
www.humankindness.org

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Durham, NC
Permit No. 205

SPONSOR OF THE PRISON-ASHRAM PROJECT

Return Service Requested



Rest in Peace, Darryl Hunt

On March 13, 2016, North Carolina lost a good man. Darryl Hunt was released from prison in 2004 after he was proven innocent. He had been incarcerated for over 19 years for a crime he did not commit.

The *News & Observer* quoted Rev. Carlton Eversley, of Dellabrook Presbyterian Church in Winston-Salem, saying that Hunt: ***“emerged from prison a man of grace and forgiveness with a remarkable lack of anger and bitterness. That was a remarkable spiritual achievement. ... He converted to Islam in prison, but I told him he had more Jesus in him than a lot of Christians.”***

Darryl Hunt spent his life helping others. He will be deeply missed.

