

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Summer/Fall 2005

FINDING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IN PROFOUNDLY NEGATIVE TIMES

Editor's caution: This writing, Bo's first in several years, may be jarring. We encourage you to read it through to the end, and work with the practice section that follows.

Dear Family,
Practically everyone I know is having a hard time. Hard times usually seem to involve personal issues or struggles. The point of this writing is to encourage you to back up a few steps from the appearances, and look at the underlying energies instead. A little perspective can go a long way in helping us to make peace with what may be widespread hardships that aren't likely to go away anytime soon; problems that will keep shifting from one object to another as we keep thinking we've solved them.

When ten people are exposed to the same cold virus, each may catch the cold in different ways, because our vulnerabilities differ. One of us may sneeze and cough while another is sick to his stomach. My back may ache for a week while you may lose your voice. One of us may get mildly ill while others become severely ill. One may get a secondary bladder infection or kidney problem. The same germ has invaded us all but it doesn't look the same by the time it gets through with us.

I see this phenomenon happening around the world in the largest sense imaginable. The "virus" is, to put it simply, a lot of ugly karma ripening at one time and merging. The way we have been treating each other and the planet's resources for thousands of years is simply catching up with us from so many different directions that it has merged into an enormous tsunami of profoundly negative energy that engulfs the world. Ecosystems, cultures, nations and individuals may exhibit countless different symptoms from this wave of energy, but we all share the fact of it. It is simply the age we were born into.

Just like we are born into the *benefits* of accumulated inventions and discoveries, we also inherit the curses: the withered vitality of nature, global warming and unpredictable winters, fiercer wars around the world with bigger stakes and more harmful weapons, diminishing innocence in our children, an absence of ethics or integrity in our political leaders at home and around the world. In short, we have inherited a planet and a species that grants us better health, longer life, more astounding gadgets, and is also way out of balance and seriously ill. The various components of our imbalances and illnesses have now, in our generation, become intricately intermingled around the

world. If you think that the extinction of the dodo bird is not connected to the tension in the Middle East or to the growing number of American teenagers who are murdering their parents and schoolmates; if you think that oil prices and attention deficit disorder and an epidemic of depression have nothing to do with each other; then you're not getting my point. Earth itself is struggling, and therefore we, its creatures, are bound to struggle on her surface as well.

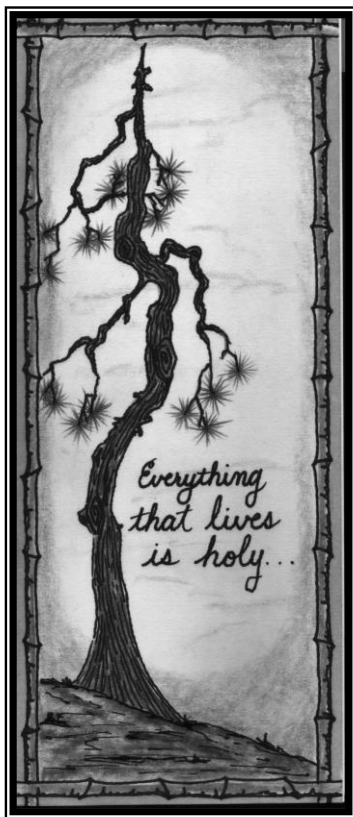
In our own nation, our "manifest destiny" came at a price of genocidal destruction of the Native American civilization. Then, our roads and cities were built upon the kidnapping and enslavement of Africans and Chinese and others. Once all that was in place, our consumer economy has depended upon the wanton destruction of clean air, water and other natural resources we need for our well-being. Isn't it reasonable that we would someday have to pay the piper for these tunes we have so foolishly and carelessly played?

On any given day, RIGHT NOW as you read these words, the amount and kinds of suffering in our own nation and around the world are literally too horrific to imagine. Children are being beaten, raped and sold; hopeless, listless kids are toiling in sweat shops as slaves; soldiers are killing and being killed by the thousands; hundreds of millions of refugees and others are starving, many of them foraging through garbage dumps to feed their babies; government-paid assassins are stalking their prey without the slightest twinge of conscience; world leaders and corporate giants are conspiring to do truly evil things that would astonish us; guards are brutalizing prisoners; convicts are gang-raping young inmates while they scream in pain and horror; BILLIONS of sweet, innocent animals are being tortured and killed in the name of medical science, cosmetic testing, and factory farming; tens of millions of lost, hopeless people are taking anti-depressants or mood stabilizers to get through the day – truly, the litany could go on forever and sap all our energy merely to read the words.

Human and animal suffering are truly unimaginable. Add to this the suffering of mountaintops, rainforests, oceans, rivers, lakes, and skies as they lose their vitality to sustain us on this beautiful little blue/green planet that we have seen gleaming like an innocent jewel in space.

So what's the point – "Stop feeling sorry for yourself," or

“count your blessings,” or “let’s all give up and jump off a cliff together”? Not at all. My point is simply that we can each become a more conscious participant in this tremendously difficult era we all share. The early Christians would call it “claiming our portion of the cross.” If the planet is engulfed with suffering, why would you or I be exempt from our share? Why would we want to be?



This is truly a time to “think globally, and act locally.” In other words, think globally enough to understand the deepest source behind the difficulties we face, and accept what we cannot change. Then deal with our personal and local difficulties as best we can, without any underlying sense of uniqueness or victimization or “unfairness” that often accompanies our problems and makes them worse.

Back to our example of the common cold, if my symptoms are mostly backache and yours are mostly nausea and someone else’s are mostly chills and fever, we may require different remedies and different ways of making

ourselves comfortable. Yet for the most part, however we treat our symptoms, that virus is still going to run its course for about a week. Of course, if someone doesn’t pay any attention at all to being sick, doesn’t stay warm and dry, doesn’t get any extra rest or lots of fluids, that person’s cold may last a lot longer and even turn into something worse, like pneumonia.

This happens a lot with other forms of suffering as well. If we resist our struggles through denial, ignorance, fear or anger, our portion of the cross may snowball far beyond what life had allotted us. If we don’t waste our energy like that, we refrain from making things worse, and we can even make things better for ourselves and others as well.

If we make peace with the FACT of suffering – which coincides with the Buddha’s First Noble Truth – then our challenge is mainly to find ways to help ourselves and others endure this hellacious virus we are all suffering from and not keep making things worse. By making peace, I mean first of all accepting that this worldwide tsunami of negative energy is a sad but true, logical consequence of humanity’s deeds. It’s not just chaos or bad luck, not an uncaring God or the supremacy of the Devil. Prophets and sages and scholars and scientists have been warning us forever to change our ways, and we haven’t. So let’s not

quibble now over who was to blame. The future has arrived and we all need to deal with it.

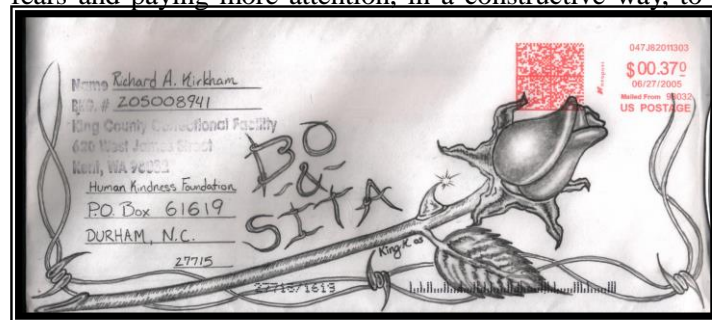
Once we accept the fact that life may continue to be hard for us and our children, then it stands to reason that we want to take a look at the best “home remedies” we can find so we don’t let this cold develop into pneumonia. What I’m calling the “cold” is the part we must accept. What we can prevent as “pneumonia” is dragging ourselves, our families, our communities and the world down even quicker through discontent or griping. The home remedies are the lifestyle we choose. What’s the one you most believe in as a positive response to negative energies?

I believe in some of the simple principles handed down in every age and culture – take care of mind, body and spirit, and love thy neighbor (the whole world) as thyself.

Obviously it is a good idea to take care of our bodies with diet and exercise, and refrain from harmful substances like cigarettes and other drugs. How do we take care of our minds? Our spirits? Our neighborhoods? Our world?

Living according to the highest principles and for the highest good couldn’t hurt. We can keep our minds relatively quiet through meditation, and refrain from mind-pollutants such as too much television or computer use, too many violent movies or pornographic images, too much useless anger over things we can’t control – things like that. Respect our mind’s need for proper input and restraint.

We can feed our spirits through making sure we take time for beauty – the beauty of nature, of music and the other arts, literally taking time to smell the roses and to notice the sky. We feed our spirits by lessening our own desires and fears and paying more attention, in a constructive way, to



the world around us.

We can lift up our neighbors, communities and the world by engaging in a lifestyle and livelihood that helps rather than harms, something we feel good about rather than something we’d hate for our kids to follow us into. We can drive less to reduce pollution, live more simply to reduce consumerism, waste less to reduce the amount of garbage in the world.

Remember, none of these suggestions are for the purpose of saving the world or transforming this cosmic tsunami of negative energy into a joyful “new age” where everyone shares and all is as it should be on Gumdrops Lane. That’s not going to happen in the foreseeable future. Tensions are increasing around the world, not decreasing. We’re running out of oil, which will be a profound shift for civilization in

our own lifetimes. My suggestions are simply for the purpose of doing our best, for bringing relief and comfort and slowing down the degradation. Nothing less than Grace is going to turn it around.

It is also useless to argue over whether these are the End Times or the Dawn of the Golden Age. For our work on an everyday basis, it doesn't matter. The Kingdom of Heaven is right here, right now, a simultaneous reality that isn't the least bit polluted or depleted or worn out. It's not in time, and therefore is not dependent on anything but itself. There is no past karma to be purified, because there is no past. There is nothing to wait for, because there is no future. Jesus said "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." It's right here— not in time and space, but in our respect, our humility, our submission to God's commandments to love and care for each other and all of creation.

Being in the Kingdom of Heaven doesn't mean we're having constant fun or are perpetually smiling. St. Stephen was in the Kingdom as he cried, "Father, please don't hold this against them," referring to the mob who was at that moment stoning him to death. Most of the original Apostles were tortured, imprisoned or executed. They suffered. But

Heaven is far more profound than our childish images of a place where everything is rosy. The Kingdom of Heaven is a softness, a presence, an equilibrium, a peace that surpasses understanding. It is the reality that dawns upon us when we are living as we were created to live; when our priorities are in place; when we are treating all of creation as we were created to treat it. The Kingdom of Heaven is a sense of connection to the Divine Forces which make even the worst worldly catastrophes seem trivial, fleeting.

Imagine two people confronted by a barking dog. One was raised with dogs, the other has a phobic fear of dogs. Two people experiencing two very different realities. Both must figure out what to do about getting past the dog, but the fearful person is likely to make things worse, isn't he? The dog-friendly person has more of a chance to understand why the dog is barking and to learn from the dog itself how it needs to be handled. This is how you and I can be in a suffering world. When we primarily reside in the Kingdom, we still must get past all the barking dogs and we may even occasionally get bitten like anyone else, but we tend not to make things worse through fear and selfish agendas.

If the world *is* at the dawn of a new golden age, the best way we can prepare for and hasten that transition is to live in the Kingdom, with a reverence for all creation and total devotion to God's highest principles. If the world is instead coming to a bitter end, then the best way we can prepare for and slow down that demise is to live in the Kingdom, with a reverence for all creation and total devotion to God's highest principles.

Any "Age" is still in time, and all times will end. Eternity is not in time, and therefore has no beginning or end. Things Eternal are beyond our ability to discuss or understand. Like Joseph Campbell said, "Eternity is not just a long time!" But we touch Eternity when we enter the Kingdom, and something deep inside us knows everything is okay, everything is always okay, and we gradually see that we have the capacity to be "in this world but not of it," to occupy a total paradox in our daily lives. The mind reels and staggers under this paradox but the Heart grasps it perfectly and feels no paradox at all. *Yes, this is how it's supposed to be. Oh Lord, it's so simple and clear.*

This is all too much to take in and digest in one sitting. Just accept your burdens in solidarity with all the rest of us, and deal with them honorably. Keep your every deed and impulse life-affirming; reject selfishness. Make room for nature and things of beauty in your life. Do not lose your sense of wonder. Reject despair. Let your heart be aware of the world's pain; reject denial. We do not have to sugarcoat the truth in order to live fully with lots of spirit and even occasional joy. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, "Never give up." That's all.



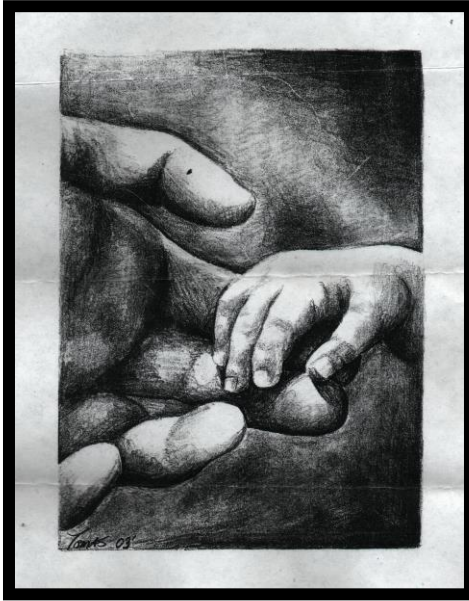
Practice: TOUCHING BEAUTY, BEING BEAUTIFUL

Part One: TOUCHING BEAUTY

One practical way to keep our spirits up during hard times is to find a connection with something we consider beautiful. For many of us, the arts bring beauty into our lives – music, literature, dance, paintings, leatherwork, stained glass, woodwork or whatever connects us with the universal human drive to create and express art, or even just gaze at, listen to, or appreciate other people's art.

Countless prisoners have sent us beautiful artwork on everything from napkins to envelopes, some have made impressive jewelry from materials like plastic toothbrushes and coconut husks. And of course, tattoo art is common in prisons around the world. Some people melt into a state of peace when they lay back and listen to music they really love, while others get energized by struggling to learn guitar or harmonica, or to pen a poem from the depth of their hearts.

These may seem like random or even meaningless personal interests, but they can actually be life-saving connections to powerful forces larger and deeper than the psychological mind. Our souls *need* a connection to something we consider beautiful. I sincerely believe this is one reason that tens of millions of people are so depressed or hopeless – they have lost all contact with anything they feel is noble, beautiful, larger than their problems. Therefore they spend all their time either battling their mundane problems, or else escaping through mindless television, video games, ugly and violent music, gambling, drugs, compulsive sex, or working so hard they have no time to notice how unhappy they are. Might this be true of you?



So the practice for part one is to make sure you take time to explore whatever it is that you find inspiring or beautiful. This is a priority, not a luxury. Make a little room in your schedule to be involved in a thing of beauty. If you've "been meaning" to take an art class, take it. If you "used to love" playing guitar, pick it up again. If you're stuck in an isolation cell and the most you can do is to sing your favorite songs or draw with your finger in the dust on a wall and then wipe it clean every day, do it. It's important. And do it with as much excellence and dedication as possible. Do it with more skill every day. Struggle to make it more and more and more beautiful.

Tomas Tibetan Buddhists spend days creating exquisite sand mandalas, then wipe them out shortly after they are finished. It's about the doing of it, not the finished product. This sort of personal practice can give us inner strength and a calm nature even when things are at their worst.

Part Two: BEING BEAUTIFUL

A whole other way of creating and expressing beauty is to *be* beautiful in how we do everything we do, how we go about the day, how we relate to people and events. The basic mindfulness practice, of paying full attention to whatever we are doing, is a key to this form of beauty. The modern world has become so jangly, so agitated and noisy, that a person moving about with calm and focused energy can become a quiet reminder of gracefulness and beauty.

Try it.

LETTERS

Dear Bo,

First, I would like to thank you for sending me some of your books—they have meant so much to me. Truly, your words have helped me keep my sanity while I have been here at Terminal Island. Your straightforward, honest and sincere writings, and the work you, Sita and the rest of the wonderful people at HKF do has touched me deeply. For the first time in a long time I feel there is not only hope for me, but I feel a strong pull on my soul to do what I can for others when I get released.

It's been pretty amazing the last 2 ½ months for me. I have an excitement for

life that I thought I would never feel again—especially not while I am in prison!

I had taken this meditation class and for the first month or so I actually started to get more angry, pissed, feeling more guilty and ashamed of myself. Boy, I thought what the hell was going on! Then one Friday night we had this group come in from the Agape Church. They really believe in the power of meditation and had asked the group what changes they had experienced since they started meditation. Everybody was sharing their experiences saying how much better they felt. I remember sitting there just so pissed off. It came my turn to share and I

told them I really did not want to. They insisted and the other prisoners also did. I don't know what happened other than for the first time in a long time I got honest with my feelings. I told them how angry, upset, pissed off and that I was full of guilt and shame. I said that if the world ended tomorrow it wouldn't bother me, and then I shut up. Well the most unexpected thing happened. One of the other prisoners who I know started telling me that I was a good person and that he loved me. Well that was it. I started crying silently and a bunch of the other guys told me that they loved me. Here was a bunch of bad asses I thought and they loved me for who I am. It was

so beautiful I tear up whenever I think about it. I pray that all people, not just the prisoners of society, but the people on the outside can experience the unconditional love like I did that night. Since then my whole outlook on life in here has changed. My whole day revolves around recovery and spiritual practice.

One of the many cool things that I've found in here is that at Terminal Island the warden meditates Monday through Friday at 7 a.m. with whoever wants to come. I hope that other institutions can have someone as insightful and spiritually motivated as we do for a warden. I think this has a lot to do with the work you've done the last 30 years. It's really paying off by having people in some places of authority practicing and believing in a lot of the things you've expressed. Our warden talks about you a lot and really thinks along those spiritual truths that you do. He even holds a Friday morning book discussion group. The last book was "It's a Meaningful Life, It just takes Practice" by some wild dude named Bo Lozoff! This month it's "Man's Search for Meaning" by Victor Frankl--pretty cool for someone that all prisoners are supposed to not get along with. I'm rambling now, but I just wanted you and Sita and everybody there to know you're reaching people and touching people's hearts--some people that were so hardened by life they thought nothing could get through. Please keep up the great work!

Peace and Love, R



Bo,

I'll warn you now this is going to be a letter written while I find myself in a state of mind that is not very good. I started writing you and getting your books about a year ago. Since that time I have written a number of letters to you and have read We're All Doing Time, Deep and Simple, Lineage, Open Secrets, Finding Freedom, and I just finished Just Another Spiritual Book. The books were informative and have helped me so far. A question I have for you is in your books you include extensive sections of letters written to you and your response. I understand that the amount of letters you receive must be immense. My question is why have I never heard back from you?

Anyway, this is where I am right now. I am serving a 60 year sentence for bank robbery. I just started it 2 years ago, so needless to say, my trip has just started. I'm at a super maximum security prison and I'm pretty much losing my fucking mind--what's left of it anyway. I'm 31 years old and doing time is nothing new to me. I have been in one institute or another for the past 19 years. What's new to me is never getting out again. I have over 50 years to serve on my sentence. Basically, I'm fucked. I don't know what to do. I never really have I guess. I didn't belong on the street, and I don't belong in here. I just don't fit in anywhere. I have accomplished nothing in life except hurting those who love me. I have no friends--never have--never had any girlfriends, never worked a job longer than a month in my life, never had a license for a car, never had an apartment or bank account, nothing. I've either been locked up or on the run. I've sold my body for food, killed people for pocket change, all the while looking for "something." Always that "something." Well, I've never found it, and I'm sick of the anger, pain, loneliness and misery. I want to die, plain and simple. Bo, I'm not crazy--desperate, yes, but not crazy. I just don't know what to do anymore. Reality is slipping away and my mind is getting sticky. Please help me, if that's even possible, I wonder. I'm stuck in a hole that is rapidly filling in around me, and I don't even have the will to do anything about it. I'm trapped under ice, cold and alone watching the world go by. If this is life, I don't want it.

C

Dear C,

Well, it's me this time -- Bo. I haven't been ignoring you, little brother, it's just that my job has changed a lot since the letter-exchanges you've read in my books. We get about a hundred letters a day, every day, addressed to Bo. How would you handle that if you were me?

The thing is, my books are all very personal, very direct, like letters to a friend. You have read hundreds of pages of advice and sympathy and friendship from me to you. There's nothing I can say in this letter that can help you more than the classic ideas and practices I wrote about in my books. My books are about you. They're about the journey each of us takes from a life of selfishness to a life of devotion -- devotion to something bigger

than ourselves. When you understand that, you'll be on the road to inner peace, even if you never see the streets again. If you do not understand it, your life will continue to be hell even if they let you out tomorrow by some kind of clerical error or miracle.

From selfishness to devotion. Just focus on that one simple idea. Your life has been so selfish you "killed people for pocket change." You are living in Hell now for that degree of selfishness, and it has little to do with being in prison. Were you happy before you got locked up?

I know many prisoners who devote their lives to helping other cons learn to read, or file court papers, or who help new young prisoners to avoid getting raped, or avoid falling in with the wrong people. I know many cons who help make their cellblock a less violent place. Anywhere we ever find ourselves, there are always people who need kindness; there are always little improvements we can make in our neighborhood. Somehow you desperately need to find a way to begin the slow, patient process of changing the habitual way you see, think and feel -- because it's always been about you. Yet for all that self-centered behavior, where did it get you? Isn't it time to try a different strategy? That's all my books are about, C. I suggest you start them all over again, but this time taking them personally and beginning to make the actual changes in your daily life. Take a brutally honest look at how you spend each day, and begin to experiment with various forms of self-discipline, a schedule of spiritual practices, giving up smoking and excessive sweets, junk food, etc. You say you hate life, but do you hate it enough to make some bold changes? That's the big question.

There are bound to be other cons in your prison who are on this same journey. You may not have noticed or found them simply because you haven't been on it yourself in any real, practical way. You know the old saying, "God helps those who help themselves." It's true. If you begin to do your part, you'll find all sorts of little surprises and helping hands from unexpected sources. Life works, little brother. But like they say in twelve-step groups, "you have to work the program." In life, the program is unselfishness. No excuses. All the power is right there in your hands and heart. I offer you every blessing and good wish for turning it all around, C.

GOODWORKS

FREEBIRDS

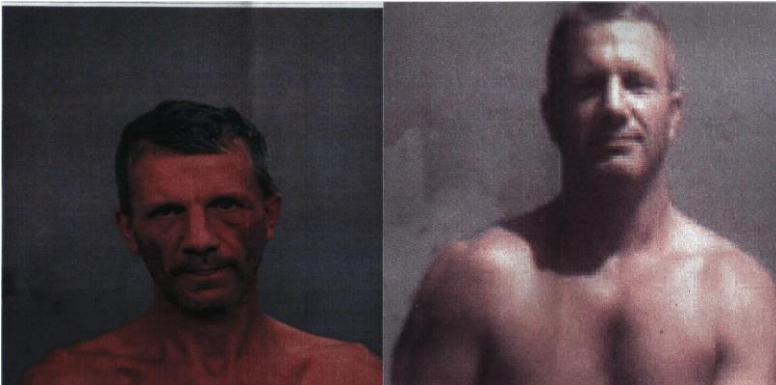
On October 30th, 2002, Jack Tanner was a meth addict and alcoholic living with his dog in a filthy R.V. in Indiana, running from everything and everybody. Even his own dog looked at him as if he were a pathetic little wretch committing suicide on the installment plan. Jack broke down crying and prayed to a God he didn't believe in. He had a bottle of rum in his hand and said "Okay God, if you're real, then get me out of this. It's not fun anymore." He finished off the bottle and passed out.

The next thing Jack remembers is waking up in the drunk tank at the county jail. In a blackout, he had driven across town in his underwear, hit some guard rails, blew out two tires and nearly lost his life. Jack Tanner had finally hit bottom.

In the tank, Jack met someone whom he used to do dope with, who was now practicing unselfish service as a path to recovery. Jack didn't understand it, but was moved by the man's example. After about two months, Jack's head started to clear and he ran across the book *We're All Doing Time*. That, plus the AA book and the Bible, finally started to make sense out of life. What influenced Jack the most were Bo's writings about karma – what goes around comes around, you reap what you sow.

Vigo Co. Sheriff's Dept -- Oct '02

Now



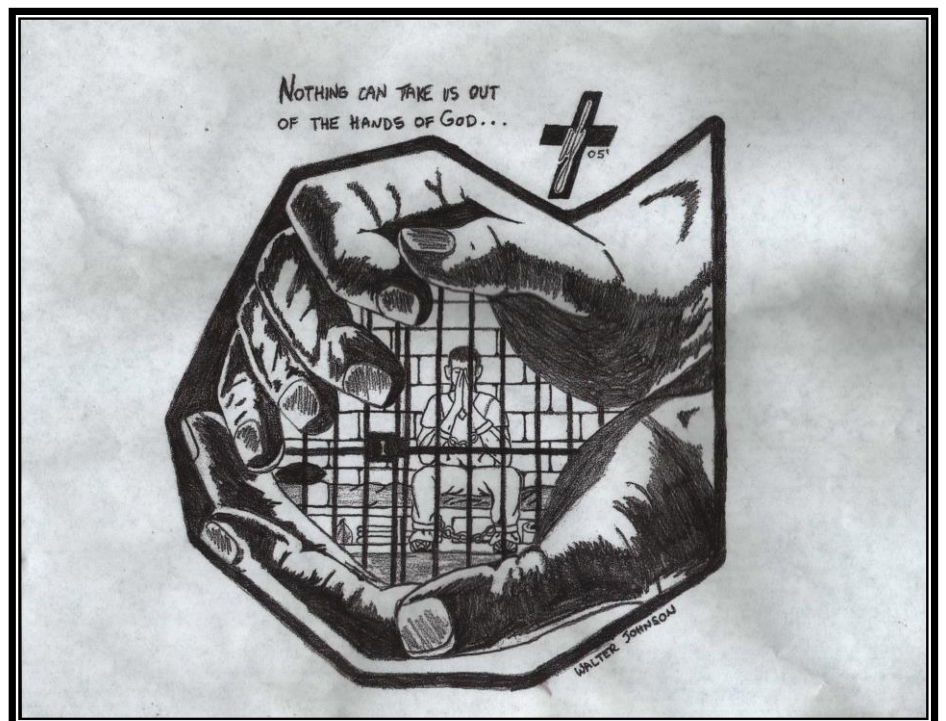
While in jail, Jack and a few guys decided to start a support group for those getting out, and called it Freebirds. They started having meetings inside and formed the non-profit group Freebirds to create a sober living house outside. Freebirds Solution Center, Inc., (Freebirds) now has co-ed recovery and transition facilities, vocational training, spiritual counseling, 12 step meetings, and drug and alcohol education.

When Jack Tanner was released, the city of Terre Haute gave the Freebirds an apartment building, but one thing led to another and they gave it back. Then one day at a yard sale, Jack was telling a man about giving the building back, and he asked Jack if they could use an old school. He said he would buy it for the Freebirds, give

them time to get it going, and then sell it to them. Five men, including Jack, moved into the old school building with only a few blow-up beds, a toaster oven and a microwave. They took showers out of a mop sink, and ate dinner and cooked in what is now their dry goods closet.

Now the Freebirds have 42 beds and a lot of people involved in running their programs, including a volunteer staff that consists of professional teachers to help clients study for the GED test, an RN for all medical problems, and Christian counselors. Jack describes his turnaround as "from death to life," and has discovered the powerful truth of "doing well by doing good."

Freebirds Solution Center, Inc.
145 East Voorhees
Terre Haute, IN 47802
888-889-1700



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a little good news

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*"Ah, the joy to discover that there's no happiness
to be found in the world."*

— Anonymous Asian Monk

