

Human Kindness Foundation

A Little Good News

Spring 2017

HOPE BEGINS IN THE DARK



HOPE BEGINS IN THE DARK,
THE STUBBORN HOPE THAT IF
YOU JUST SHOW UP AND TRY TO
DO THE RIGHT THING, THE
DAWN WILL COME. YOU WAIT
AND WATCH AND WORK: YOU
DON'T GIVE UP. —ANNE LAMOTT

Here at Human Kindness Foundation, we get a lot of letters from people who feel hopeless. Some have given up on the possibility that their life will ever have meaning or joy or friendship. Some feel no hope that they'll ever get justice, or recover from addiction, or heal from childhood trauma. Sita and I began talking about how to use this issue of our newsletter: could we find a few words that

would encourage those who might read this at a time of deep hopelessness?

I was working on that theme on a trip to visit my son. Time on a plane can be good concentration time, so I took some newsletter pages along with me. I sat down beside a woman, exchanging nothing more than polite greetings as we began our flight.

Before we reached our destination, the woman beside me had told me that one of her sons was incarcerated, and while in prison he died by his own hand. She had begged him not to do it. She knew the goodness in him, and she tried hard to let him know that there are people who need him. The pain she shared with me felt like confirmation that we need to talk about a danger of hopelessness: suicide.

Sita and I turned to two of our favorite teachers for words of hope. On page 2, Bo Lozoff tells us about a man who found meaning and salvation in the very last hours of his life. On page 4, Father Murray Rogers tells us that Easter can give hope to every moment, no matter what is happening. And on page 5, you'll find an invitation to receive some loving blessings from kind-hearted volunteers that come to the HKF office.

Father Murray and Bo had very different personalities. Father Murray felt like a gentle, cheerful grandfather. Bo was often gruff, using some "salty" words, sometimes yelling. But they both had what Father Murray calls "Easter Eyes." Both men looked at people—from babies to the toughest dudes in the meanest prisons—and saw their goodness. One of Bo's songs describes it this way: *"I saw the Earth and everyone on it, I saw the Light all over me; the good in everybody, I saw it the way that He must see."*

The cheerful old priest in monk's robes and the exuberant biker in a leather jacket had similar effects on me. Both looked at me with their "Easter Eyes" and inspired me to work harder at opening my heart. To keep trying, because even if I fail almost every moment of every day, it's worth trying to live with an open heart. They made me want to be better than I am. Lucky for me, I know there's still hope that I'll live up to what they wanted for me. **They wanted it for you, too.**

Life is hard—unfairly harder for some than for others. And life is astonishingly, breathtakingly beautiful. Stay with us, friends. Let's keep walking this path together.

—Catherine, with love from your whole Human Kindness Foundation family





Bo and Matthew had this correspondence in 1996. When I came across these letters recently, I was very deeply touched by them, and I sincerely hope they'll be meaningful to you as well, dear friends.
Love, Sita

Dear Bo,
I hope this letter finds you and your family in the best of health. I wrote to you about 16 years ago. When I wrote you last, I explained to you that I was only two years into a 30 year sentence for killing my ex-girlfriend. At the time, I was

in so much pain and so lonely that I was contemplating suicide. In your response, you explained to me that even Moses was a murderer, and that I could use this time to turn my life around and never hurt a living thing again. Bo, you saved my life back then and gave me a purpose to live. Right now, I have 18 years in on that same 30 year sentence.

Bo, I have sunk into a deep hole that I cannot seem to claw out of. While I was meditating about 3 weeks ago, I started to think about my old girlfriend. I met this girl when I was 15 years old and she was 18. We were each other's first love. I was young and immature. Instead of accepting her love, I had to make her jealous and grew controlling because I was so terrified of losing her.

That's when my nightmare came true. After three years, I was holding on too tight and I lost her. I was not physically or mentally well, and I eventually murdered her with the belief that my pain would stop. Obviously it didn't. With your help and advice, I have endured the pain for 18 years, but recently all of my old feelings came rushing back. I haven't been able to get her out of my head. I thought I was making progress, but I'm hav-

ing thoughts of suicide. I can hardly bear the pain. Bo, depression and despair are eating

me alive from the inside out. My guilt is so overwhelming that I have barely eaten or left my bed for weeks. Bo, I really miss her, and the guilt of killing someone who I loved more than my own family member is driving me to have suicidal thoughts and feelings. Why did this have to happen?

I love you all so much and have been struggling to

in my soul that I share with the world. I love you all.

Your friend and student, Matthew

Dear Matthew,

When someone writes a letter like yours, any response in words feels puny. But I'll try, because you asked me to, and because we don't seem to have any other options for the moment.

You did a terrible, terrible thing. You know that. You can't take it back. You know that, too. You'll be experiencing the consequences of it for the rest of your life, whether you get out of prison or not. You know that, too. So you already know all the things that look hopeless and painful and make you consider suicide.

But what you don't know is that life is solely, totally, entirely a spiritual journey. Even now. Even for you. You also don't know that it is never too late to realize this. Think of Dismas, the thief on the cross next to Christ. If it was ever too late for anyone, he would seem to be the guy: his whole life was a total bust, he was crucified and in the middle of dying. Yet even then, he chose to surrender to the spiritual journey and Christ told him, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise."

And here I am 2,000 years later talking about Dismas to encourage you not to give up. Do you get what that means? It means not only did that "no-good thief" find personal salvation, but even his whole life, which seemed a total waste, wound up having tremendous and lasting meaning. His crimes, his failures, his life were not wasted. Yours need not be wasted either.

In every religious tradition, murderers have gone on to become saints. That doesn't mean it's easy, nor does it mean the pain all goes away. Read my story, "The Saddest Buddha," in the book, *Lineage & Other Stories*. It's a lot like your situation. For whatever reasons, you did what you did, and so now this is your path up the mountain. There's no going back. If you take a selfish path, basically just trying to make your pain go away, you will be living in hell. If you take a deeply spiritual, unselfish path of trying to gain wisdom and compassion and dedicating your life to something meaningful, then you will experience the genuine Mercy of God in its purest, highest sense.

See yourself as a humble student beginning a well-worn path to salvation. Whether you know it or not, you will have the invisible help and blessings of all the saints and sages right there where you are.

Unselfishness and spiritual practice are your keys to the Kingdom. You need to devote your whole life to this, Matthew. If you choose suicide, you'll discover that the pain doesn't end when your body dies. The pain changes when you have turned your life over to goodness and kindness and holiness. You notice, I didn't say "ends," I said "changes." Ending the pain is merely one more example of selfish thought patterns. That's what prompted the murder in the first place: incredible selfishness. You will not find your way out of this through selfishness. You will find meaning and purpose and strength only by changing that lifelong pattern of selfishness, which will take a lot of practice and constant vigilance.

And that's what we're here for. That's what we do in our own lives, too. We dedicate our lives to kindness and a whole lot of practice—meditation, healthy diet, yoga, etc.—because we have felt this Great Love and Mercy and we know that it's really all that counts. Nothing else matters. Whether you get out of prison or not, whether I die now or in twenty years, nothing else matters other than the ocean of love and mercy and holiness which the spiritual life is about. There are

You are not alone, you are not unloved, and you are not beyond repair.

deep mysteries, profound truths, indescribable realizations for you to experience. And no

one is holding you back except yourself. I hope you decide to go for it, and if you do, we'll be going the distance with you.

Practically speaking, that means no drugs, no booze, no scamming, no porno magazines, no bullshit games, it means really becoming like a monk in that cell. Study my books and put them into practice. Meditate. Develop self-discipline and true kindness. See yourself as a humble student beginning a well-worn path to salvation. Whether you know it or not, you will have the invisible help and blessings of all the saints and sages right there where you are. You will have guidance when you need it. Christ, Buddha, Krishna and every other master has promised that when you call on them sincerely, they will come. It's completely true. You are not alone, you are not unloved, and you are not beyond repair. Don't try to make the pain go away. Begin praying for help to allow the pain to bring you true compassion for all beings, so that you could never harm another soul. Read "The Saddest Buddha" and work with that teaching for a while.

And then, in a few months, let me hear from you and see what your life looks like then. We all send you our blessings and prayers that you turn in the right direction, brother. We love you and we know you can do this even if you don't know it yourself.

Love, Bo

This drawing by Roger Tad Price is on five envelopes that line up together with beautiful precision.





This photo was taken near the end of Father Murray's life, when Sita visited him in England. His body was weak, but his eyes still sparkled.

Easter Eyes By Father Murray Rogers

The following is an excerpt from a sermon given in Jerusalem in the 1970s by Anglican priest Father Murray Rogers, one of Bo & Sita's beloved elders.

Early in their lives, Father Murray and his wife Mary chose to live in poverty with the people they served as missionaries in India. Later they practiced radical simple living in Canada, where they worked among the Mohawk people. He mostly wore monk's robes, and when he visited North Carolina for several days, he brought only a small cloth sack. He knew that physical comfort and material belongings were not ever going to bring him peace. Only a heart open to the suffering and the joy of the world can have real peace.

The Telegraph called Father Murray "an Anglican priest of infectious holiness." We hope you will feel the holy, infectious joy in his words below. Sita and Catherine remember Father Murray's visits to Human Kindness Foundation with gratitude for the gentle spirit and joyful wisdom he shared.

Easter— I know it is a historical event: something that happened once, on a particular day, in a particular place. That event was an un-dreamt-of marvel to that small group of the followers of Jesus who thought they'd lost their Master forever. But now, it is the Event of all events—the Feast of feasts: it is the celebration that makes human life not bearable but wonderful!

How badly we need to let Easter be as all embracing as it is. It touches everything and everybody; there's not a joy and there's not a tragedy that is not transformed by the Reality of Easter. There's not a situation, however full of oppression and horribleness, that is not turned into living hope by Jesus's act of Resurrection.

The marvel of it! Drink it in! Would your wildest dreams have been able to equal such a stupendous surprise? Open your eyes and mouth and ears and hands and heart—drink it in if you can. Have you ever tried drinking the ocean?!

God is offering us "Easter Eyes," and if we accept, everything we see is extraordinarily transformed.

Easter Eyes cover everything—they include everything. To have them is an altogether special way of seeing and perceiving; of looking at ourselves and other people, at the people we love and the people who are appallingly difficult to love. It is an altogether special way of seeing events and happenings and situations. Very many of these happenings remain terribly painful and tragic—Easter Eyes don't help us to escape any pain. Easter Eyes are all

...if we accept, everything we see is extraordinarily transformed.

about telling us that every bad Friday (or Monday to Sunday for that matter) has an Easter attached for those who begin to believe. Easter Eyes are an extraordinary and wonderful gift we are offered—almost too good to be true. Friends, please don't be so crazy as to refuse such a marvelous present.

Remember that Easter came after the murder of the cross, and in the face of whatever may happen to you, dare to live with all the Life that God gives. Easter is the wonderful gift of God to you, given each day, of Life and Love and Joy, for which each one of you were born.

I'm deeply thankful for Easter; aren't you?





Please Don't Lose Hope

As Bo writes on page 3, suicide doesn't stop the pain the way we might think it does. The mother I mentioned on page 1, who generously shared her story with a stranger on an airplane, is a reminder that others suffer, too. Family and friends carry the pain of suicide for a long time.

In your worst moments, you may feel that there's no one in the world who would be sorry if you die. Don't believe your own thoughts about that. If you've lost touch with everybody from your previous life, write to us here at HKF. Send us a photo of yourself if you can, or a drawing, or simply a note that says "I'm running out of hope." We'll put your picture or note on our prayer wall, where Sita and all of our volunteers can see you and send you blessings.

If you ever feel that there is no one in this world who loves you, take another look at the photos on this page. These are just a few of the people who spend time at HKF because they care.

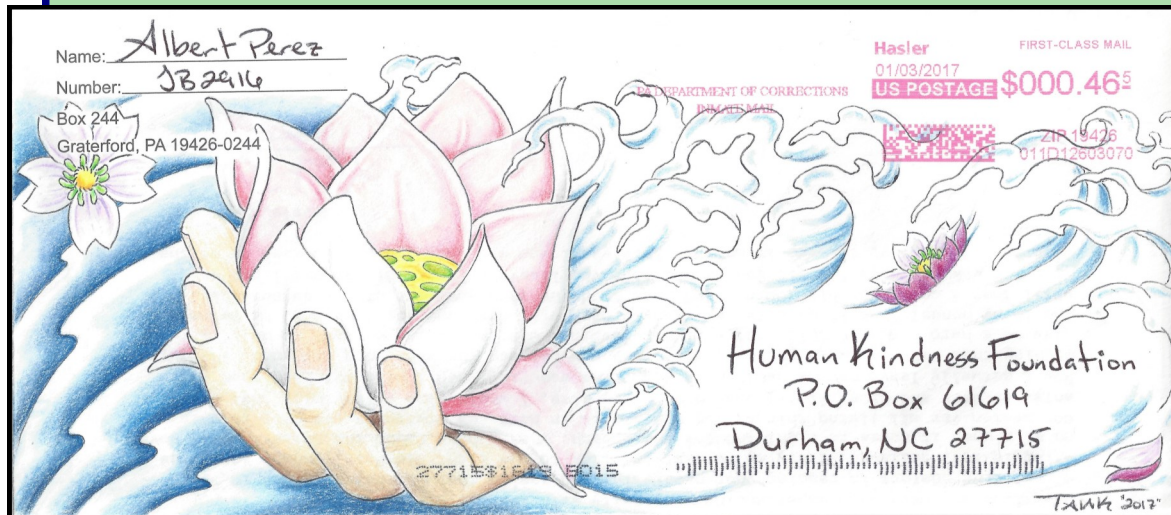
Love, Catherine



Sita was a young woman with a small child when she and Bo started sending free books and newsletters to people in prisons, encouraging them to become spiritual seekers. That was more than 40 years ago, and now the two things that delight Sita most in life are her grandson Joey and the work of Human Kindness Foundation. She loves reading your letters, even when she gets so many letters she has to get help from volunteers to answer them. And she loves you. Sita's love for you is real. She wishes you every good thing and most of all, she wants you to know you are loved.

Photo by Satsuki "Sunshine" Scoville, 2017

I'm sitting here on Pennsylvania's death row, wrongfully convicted and fighting for my freedom for the past 8 years. I'm not as mad as I was at the beginning and have even managed to forgive those who lied and manipulated and got me in here. I found that that was possible to do because I became a prison monk. I find comfort in reading your newsletter and seeing that I'm not as alone in my struggle as I believed. I try my hardest to stick to the Buddha's Eightfold Path though sometimes I do slip when it comes to right thought and speech. What I have found the easiest is to have



compassion for all living things, big and small. In here, we obviously get many roaches, ants, spiders, and mice. At the beginning of my time, I would step on anything that moved. Now I actually leave crumbs behind, talk to them assuring them I will not harm them while

wishing them well on their journey, and I catch and release the mice in the yard. The guys give me a hard time about it, but I simply respond, "What would you want me to do if it was you in my hands?" That usually gets them to back off.

One day I hope to be released, but until then I continue this journey and hope to do as much good for others as possible. I thank you guys for all you do and hope you like the little bit of art I put on the envelope. Namaste, Albert Perez

Many thanks to the artists: pg 1: Jason Bruni, Graceville, FL (top), George Cyrus, Dallas, PA (bottom); pg 2: unknown; pg 3: Roger Tad Price; pg 4: Michael Couvson, Soledad, CA; pg 5: Satsuki "Sunshine" Scoville (photo of Sita Lozoff); pg 6: Albert Perez, Graterford, PA; pg 7: Roger Tad Price (top), James A. Johnson, Nashville, NC (drawing of His Holiness the Dalai Lama); pg 8: Thomas Parrotta, Moulton, AL.

Letters

Dear HKF,

I've got your books, and I'm working with them, but I feel I'm missing the next step of the journey. How can I love? I'm surrounded by ignorance and arrogance. It seems impossible to feel HONEST compassion for these people. I have made plenty of mistakes yet I cannot empathize with these people. They seem to be proud of their ignorance, and I've always yearned for more. How can they be so simple minded? Biased? Prejudiced? Can they not see? They won't listen. My heart aches for these people. I also feel guilty for looking at them in this way. I don't want to feel self righteous or better than anyone, but what is this? Can you clarify

this for me?

Jonathan

Dear Jonathan,

Hello friend, my name is Gabe, and I'm a volunteer here at HKF. Sita read and gave me your letter thinking I might be able to help in some way. I am after all an "expert" on dealing with some of the issues you wrote to us about. OK, well maybe not an expert, but I have had lots of practice! I did 19 years in prison for murder and have been out now for almost 6 years. My practices, patience, and most of all, Bo's books, are what helped me.

By your letter you sound like you're already working with Bo's books-- you

just need some more practice. Since you asked for our help, I would recommend re-reading some of Bo's responses to the letters in *We're All Doing Time*. Man there's some good stuff in there to help on this crazy journey and Bo has a way of saying it in just the right way. I always read each letter like he was talking to me, and his answer was a response to my current situation.

Your struggle to "LOVE" others in a place filled with so much bad stuff is a struggle we all face while making some real and deep changes in prison, but where else would you get so much practice? You talk about your struggle, but you also write about not feeling good about the way you feel. Bo helped me

find that that alone is a type of “LOVE.” If you were content to have these feelings, it would be a lot different—I hope you can understand what I mean by that. So, I think it just takes time, man. You can’t just change all those past years of negative thinking habits in one moment. Not all of them. At least I couldn’t.

When you truly open your heart up, you learn to accept that everyone is on their own path just doing what they know. Saying that and REALLY feeling that are different things. It’s not our job to tell them shit—just do your thing. There

were plenty of those in prison, and out here, that I don’t care much for and stay



away from, but I still know they are on a journey just like I am, and I still feel some kind of respect for the part they don’t show.

I know when I was locked up and dealing with this it seemed like the

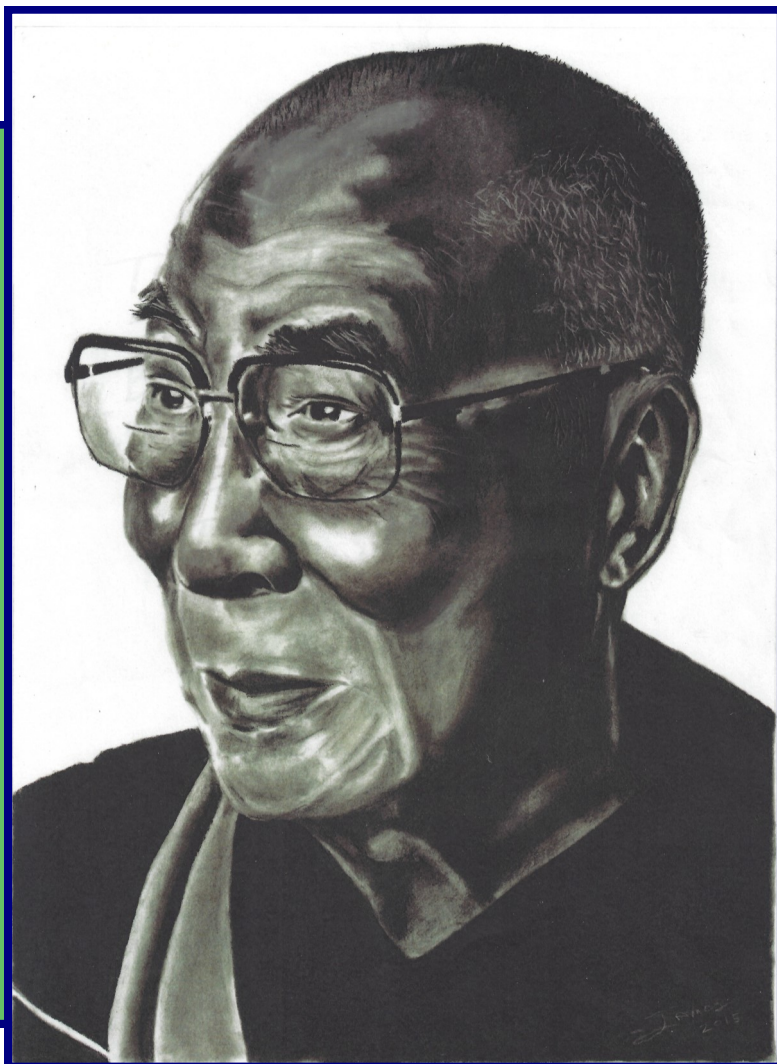
harder I tried to not feel anything negative towards others, the harder it was to be positive. Looking back I guess it was just the first step in realizing that that is something I wanted to change, and I was recognizing it more. It’s just a step on your path, brother, and shows you’re on the right path. I don’t say this lightly, but if I can do this so can you. I really didn’t give a damn and hated everyone in the place I was in. Lots of one-on-one talks with God and a daily meditation practice sure helped me.

What else can I say, man, you know most of this, but it’s always good to get some confirmation. And go easy on yourself when needed (but not all the time!), because if it wasn’t this it would be something else, and when you get done with this step, it will be something else. Please know that we’re here and have great respect for the work you are doing. Keep it up. All that’s going on now is making you the man you want to be.

Your friend, Gabe

You can accept that your relationship with your neighbor is difficult and that you would like to improve it. You may or may not succeed, but all you can do is try. You cannot control your neighbor, but you do have some control over your thoughts and feelings. Instead of anger, instead of hatred, instead of fear, you can cultivate compassion for them, you can cultivate kindness for them, you can cultivate warmheartedness toward them. This is the only chance to improve the relationship. In time, maybe they will become less difficult. Maybe not. This you cannot control, but you will have your peace of mind. You will be able to be joyful and happy whether your neighbor becomes less difficult or not.

—His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet



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*Magic happens when
you don't give up,
even though you
want to.*

*The universe always
falls in love with a
stubborn heart.*

—JmStorm