



Spring 2022

WHAT KINDNESS REALLY IS

My dear friends,

It's my honor and privilege to serve as the new Executive Director of Human Kindness Foundation. There is such a rich legacy to build upon. Growing up, a copy of *We're All Doing Time* sat on the bookshelf in our kitchen. My mother sent the book to family members and friends in prisons across the Southeast. I've thought about the idea of us all serving time in one way or another throughout my life.

We all have prisons of our souls that keep us from being the strongest and most free versions of ourselves. There's a lot that holds us back from being free people. Some of us face more hurdles than others, that's for sure, but there are forces that beat all of us down. Pain is unavoidable. It's what we do with this pain—how we learn from it, use it and turn it into wisdom—that makes the measure of our lives.

When I lived and worked in Colombia and Northern Ireland, I saw how decades of violence and war affected every aspect of society, from national politics to family dynamics. I've watched members of my own family struggle with the effects of mental illness and incarceration. Working in prisons, jails and reentry programs, I've witnessed the frustration, pain and isolation of people experiencing incarceration and its long-term consequences. In all of these cases, I've also seen people turn pain into strength by drawing from life experiences to offer love, support and wisdom. I bow before you who read this for all the ways you have used the lessons you've learned from difficulties to help others.

Our greatest resource is you—whether you're in a prison in Alaska or an office in Arkansas. I hope our work at Human Kindness Foundation always helps you remember you are stronger than you think, you are brave and beautiful, and you have so many gifts to share. I'm excited about the work we'll do together in the months and years to come.

With love and gratitude,
Erin Parish



Poet Naomi Shihab Nye graciously gave us permission to share her beautiful poem, "Kindness." This poem speaks directly to our mission. It is the kindness we experience and show to others at the hardest moments in our lives that we remember most. Our pain can be the source of the kindness we offer, a kindness built on understanding what it means to love and lose and still show up for others and ourselves. We hope you love this poem as much as we do!

Kindness

-Naomi Shihab Nye

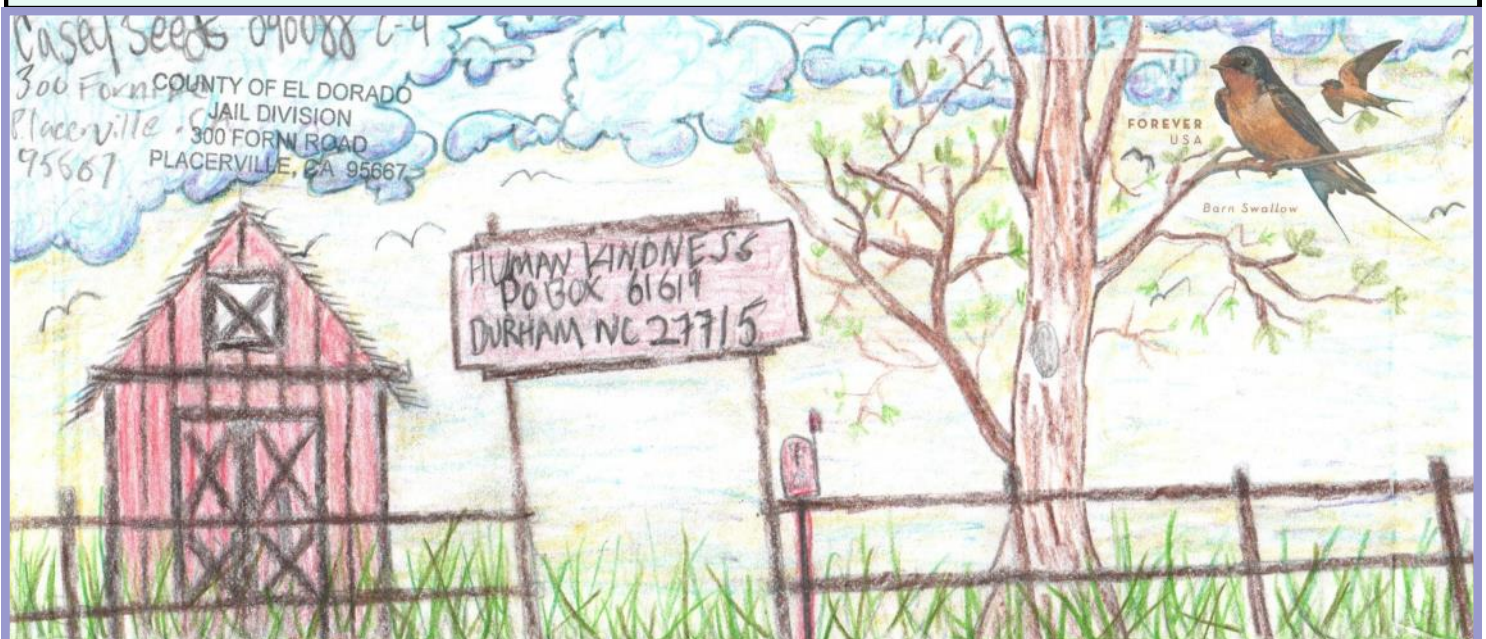
*Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.*

*Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.*

*Before you know kindness as the deepest thing
inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.*

*Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and
purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.*

—From **Everything Comes Next; Collected and New Poems**
(Greenwillow, 2020) Reprinted by permission of the author,
Naomi Shihab Nye, 2022.



On Shared Authorship

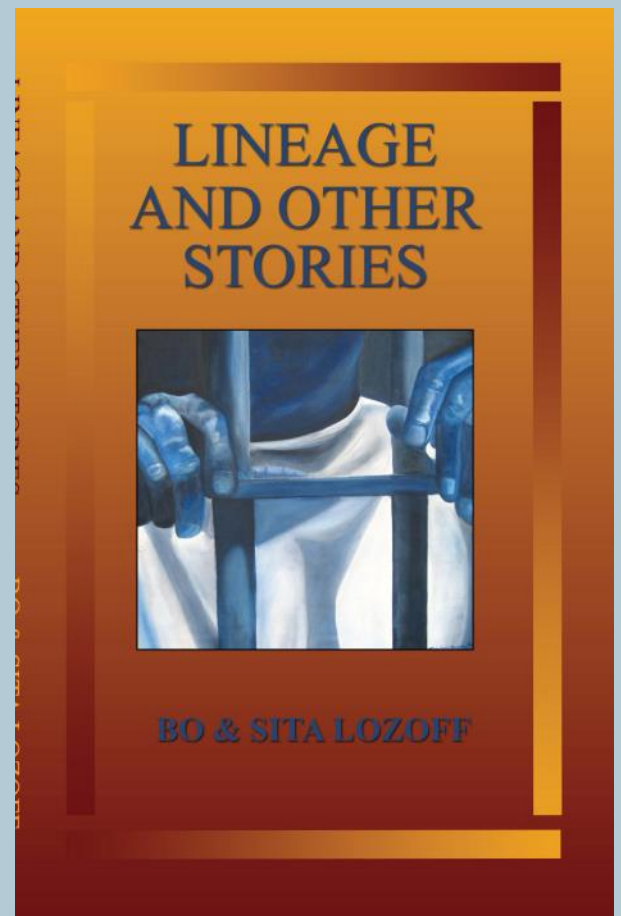
Human Kindness Foundation has a new author, although she's far from new to anyone in the family. Sita Lozoff is not just at the heart of HKF, she *is* the heart. For close to fifty years, Sita has provided spiritual leadership, emotional grounding and intellectual inspiration to everything Human Kindness Foundation has produced. That's why we are adding Sita as author to three books: *We're All Doing Time*, *Lineage and Other Stories*, and *Just Another Spiritual Book*.

No person is an island in this world. No one works in isolation. These books were co-created through a partnership between Bo and Sita. This change reflects the truly shared nature of writing these books. Each new printing will now have Bo and Sita Lozoff as authors, starting with *Lineage and Other Stories*. While this process will take several years to complete, if you're requesting one of these books, please ask for them by Bo and Sita Lozoff.

We hope to expand upon this framework of shared authorship. In the months and years to come, we are excited to call on our wider Human Kindness Foundation community to help us collaboratively author new practices and materials. We especially want to work with those experiencing incarceration—including family members of the incarcerated—to create new content to share. You have so much wisdom, knowledge and life experience! We want to create opportunities for you to share your voice. What this will look like in the future is not clear, but we'll let you know!

Human Kindness Foundation was built upon the spirit of unconditional love, unlikely connections and unquestioning inclusion. You are the spirit of Human Kindness Foundation. We thank you for walking this journey with us and look forward to the many ways we continue to build this path together towards growth, strength, connection and liberation.

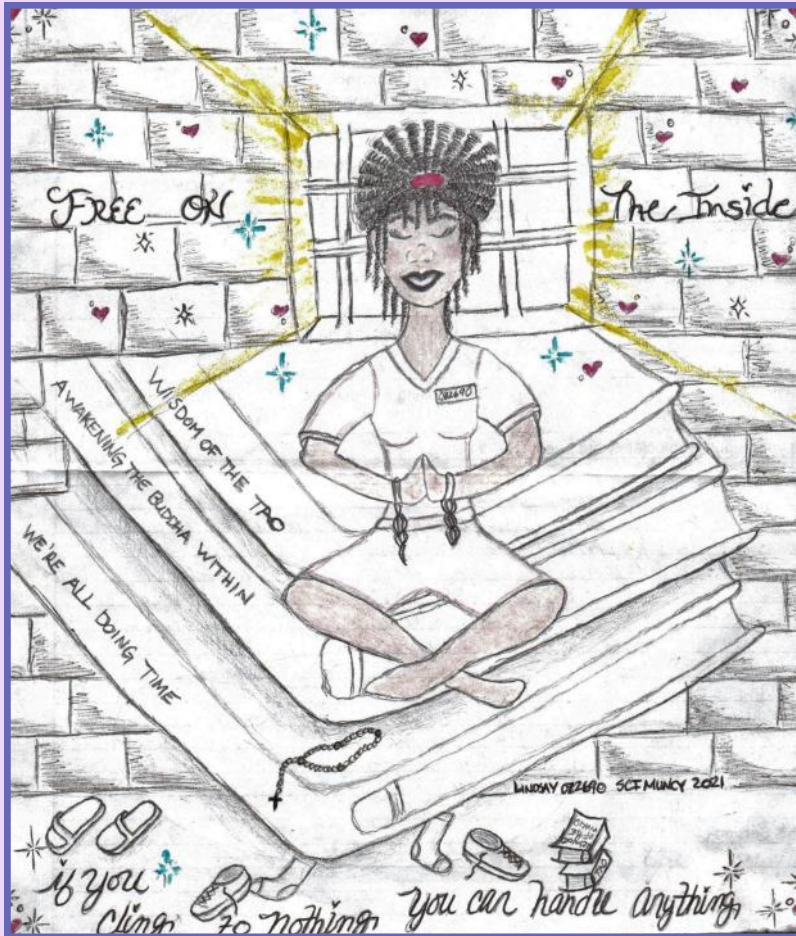
Love, Erin



Many thanks to the artists: p. 2: Casey Seeds, Placerville, CA; p. 4: Lindsay Gruss, Johnstown, PA; p. 5: Frank Langrick, Tulia, TX; p. 6: Jason Bruni, Graceville, FL; p. 7: Alan Piwowar, Jesup, GA; p. 8: Jason Henry, Taylorsville, NC

Blessings on Your Journey, Thich Nhat Hanh

World famous Vietnamese Buddhist mindfulness teacher and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh passed away at the age of 95 on January 22, 2022. Martin Luther King, who nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize for his activism against the Vietnam War, called him an “apostle of peace and nonviolence.” Thich Nhat Hanh witnessed horribly violent situations in Vietnam and responded with nonviolence and mindfulness. He attributed this all to the simple practice of paying attention to what he was doing. In 1999, we brought Thich Nhat Hanh to the Maryland Correctional Institution to share his teachings. Here are a few quotes from his talk.



"Sometimes when I am alone in my room in the dark, I practice smiling to myself. I do this to be kind to myself, to take good care of myself, to love myself. I know that if I cannot take care of myself, I cannot take care of anyone else."

"If we keep watering the seed of Hell in us each day, then Hell will be the reality we live in twenty-four hours a day. But if we know how to water the seed of the Kingdom of God in us each day, then the Kingdom of God will become the reality we live in every moment of our daily lives. This is my experience."

Stephen in Texas wrote to us about how Thich Nhat Hanh shaped his own spiritual practice in prison. Stephen uses the image of a spiritual wooden pagoda on a hill as a way to build a personal place of retreat deep within his spirit. Thich Nhat Hanh taught that in order to save the world, each of us has to build a pagoda, a sanctuary where you have a chance to be alone and face yourself, the reality of yourself. Stephen's pagoda helps him survive and live in peace and love in prison. "In my daily meditation practice," Stephen explains, "I am indeed saved from self-destruction. In such a place I find the courage to face and accept myself and the reality of my life in prison with a strong serenity and great devotion."

Together Apart

WHENEVER WE MEDITATE, OUR MINDS ARE ONE.

-Garchen Rinpoche

My very dear friends,

Our Together-Apart practice is taking off--I've even gotten a letter from someone in prison in Thailand asking me what time it is there when it's 7 o'clock on Wednesday evening here—(it's actually 7 a.m. the next morning in Thailand when it's 7 p.m. on Wednesday here!!)

So, my friends, we have an invitation for you. We would like to start collecting Together-Apart practices to share with you. Our invitation is for you to share your Wednesday evening practice with us. Please keep your practice to a few lines or a single drawing. It should be simple and easy to do, dear ones, keeping in mind that our motivation for getting together is to bring more love and light to the many suffering beings in the world at this time. You can address your envelope to **Together-Apart, PO Box 61619, Durham, NC 27715.**

Here is one practice I'd like to share with you:

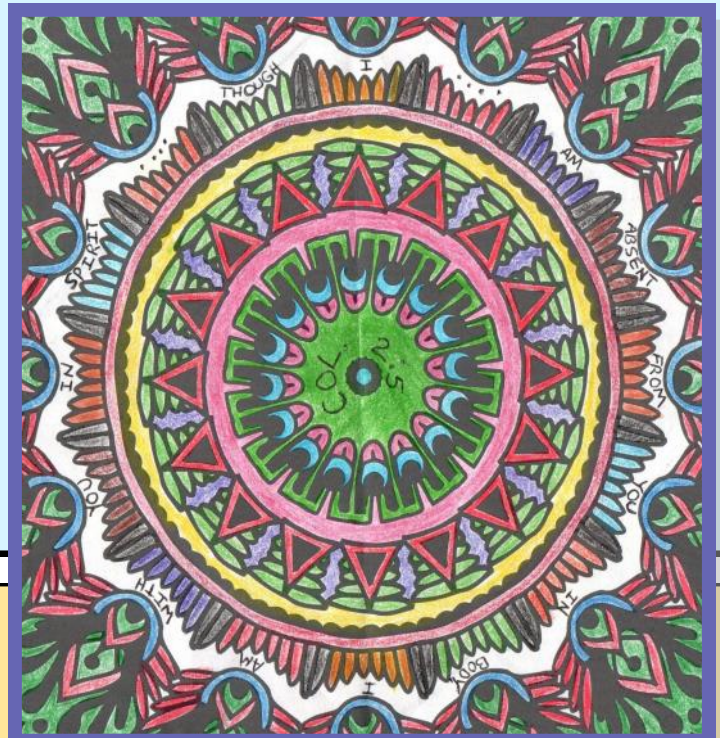
First, start by clarifying your motivation, which is bringing more love and peace into this suffering world. Then, focus your attention on your heart space. As though you had nostrils there, breathe in and out of your heart. With each breath in, you are bringing more love to yourself. With each breath out, you are sending love to all sorrowing beings.

Just in and out—deep and simple. You can end by dedicating your practice to all. May all beings be happy and at peace.

Much, much love to you all.

"See" you on Wednesday evenings from 7-8 p.m. EST (or any time on Wednesday if this time is too difficult for you).

Sita



"Though I am absent from you in body, I am with you in spirit." Frank Langrick of Tulia, TX has dedicated this drawing to Together-Apart.

Letters

Dear Sita,

I don't know if you remember me or not, but I wrote to you in 1989, and that was the first time I got *We're All Doing Time*. I have had many copies of that and many other books you and Bo have sent me over the past 30 years.

I've spent the majority of my teenage and adult life in prison. I'm considered one of the most dangerous offenders in state prison. However, I am no longer that person, and it has taken a very tragic and

unfortunate passing of my six year old granddaughter from Covid-19 to break me. It is very sad, tragic, and unfortunate that a six year old child had to die an excruciating death like that for me to make a change.

I've been observing the "Together-Apart" practice on Wednesday nights from 7-8 pm, and it has become a very crucial and needed practice for me. It has played a vital role in my grieving process and has saved my life as well as other lives.

This past July, an inmate attacked me in my cell. I had a blade on me. I slammed him on my bunk, head butted

him several times in the face, pulled the blade, and held it to his face. When he knew how close he had come to death, I threw the blade in the corner. Two years ago I would have killed him, but because of my spiritual practices, my emotions were bridled and I stopped for the first time in my life.

The profound part is, it was on a Wednesday, and after we both went our separate ways and cleaned up, I confronted him and asked him why he attacked me. He said he had heard that I was a good

fighter and wanted to see if I really was. We both understood how bad it could have been and we spent Wednesday night, from 7-8 pm together. We sat cross-legged; facing each other like Bo taught me all those years ago.

This offender has gone his way now, but we both make sure we remember all of this on Wednesday nights and we think of each other and send out energy of love, compassion and hope to each other. --S



Dear S,

Wow! Thank you so much for your letter! As a volunteer here, I have the great honor of reading and responding to a lot of letters at HKF, but yours was right on the top!

Your story about Bo working with you all those years ago and how you sat with that inmate that attacked you blew my mind! I will be holding that image in my mind on our next Together-Apart evening.

As to your precious granddaughter, we are so very sorry. Words cannot express the level of condolences we offer you. But wow, how you have allowed that to open your heart! That was her gift to you in this tragedy. Her bright star will be your new True North, to help you in your own soul's

journey. I am putting you both on our prayer list, and will keep you both in mind during our Together-Apart time.

Thank you so much for your letter. You don't know how much you have inspired our hearts. Your True North has shined her Light on us today as well.

Love, Donna – HKF



Dear Sita,

I have a single simple question for you: What does it mean to forgive from my heart, and how do I accomplish it?

I'm 84 years old and in no hurry.

Sincerely, B

B dear,

I would think that at age 84 you'd be in a hurry—I'm 77, and I'm practicing as though my hair is on fire!!

My personal forgiveness practice is that when an angry or vengeful thought comes up about someone who I feel has harmed me in some way, as soon as I remember that I **sincerely** want to change my heart, I send that person compassion by breathing love in and out of my heart space.

It may feel much too difficult to do at this point, but it does get easier with practice, I assure you. You'll be able to catch those painful feelings at the beginning more quickly the longer you practice.

I think we both know the pain of letting that feeling of anger into our own hearts. The Dalai Lama calls this practice wise-

selfishness—we forgive so that we can finally feel some peace ourselves, dear heart.

Try it and let me know how it works for you.

Love and blessings, Sita



Dear HKF,

I am 5 years into a 9 year commitment. I won't dig into my past—I want to talk about the present. To date, I have been clean and sober for more than 5 years. I read a copy of *We're All Doing Time* that was circulating around my block back in 2017. That book led to

a budding interest in yoga. In the 4+ years since, yoga has completely changed my life, I'm healthier now at 32 than I was when I was 22! I've learned to let go of my anger and have meditated my way through varying stages of grief, guilt, shame, and ultimately, forgiveness for myself. I developed a strong faith and foundation in Buddhism. Ultimately, I chose to start trying to give back as much as possible. For over a year, I was a mentor and led yoga practices several times a week on the mental health unit here.

I am now at a lower security level facility and am still working on my sobriety and helping others through yoga. I am hoping for a potential early release later this year, and after release, I'm looking into completing a yoga teacher training course for 12 step recovery.

I just want to thank everyone at HKF for that initial spark from Bo's book that led to this profound and amazing change in my life.

Love & Namaste, B

Dear B,

Thank you so much for your amazing letter! Forgiving ourselves is the hardest spiritual labor we ever have to do. We are incredibly proud of the ways you have transformed your life in the past four years. You've taken on some really hard personal spiritual work and turned it into a path of service to others. Thank you for turning a spark into a fire that helps you and others.

Many blessings to you on your journey, Erin





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"If you must
look back, do
so forgivingly.

If you must
look forward,
do so
prayerfully.

However, the
wisest thing
you can do is
be present in
the present...
gratefully."

Maya Angelou