

# Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Fall 1997

## I'LL REMEMBER YOU....

*There's some people that you don't forget,  
even though you only meet 'em one time or two;  
In the end, my dear sweet friend,  
I'll remember you.*

— Bob Dylan, "I'll Remember You"

Dear Family,

Sita and I have been travelling, going to prisons, churches, schools and spiritual centers, meeting with thousands of friends along the path. We are truly blown away by the love, respect and affection we feel when we meet with you. Thank you so much for welcoming us into your homes and hearts as you have.

This newsletter is mostly a report on those travels. In this section, I'll mention some memorable people & moments, both happy and sad. In the letters section, we share some of the responses from the people we met along the way. In the practices section, we describe some of the basic methods of change which we shared in our workshops.

### Texas-Size Love In Texas

In April, we visited about 2,000 friends in eleven different Texas state prisons (including death row). Texas has never allowed us in before, so this was a long-awaited journey through one of the nation's largest, most notorious prison systems. In every unit we were welcomed by people who had been in touch with us for as long as fifteen or twenty years. One fellow said he had done time many years ago with Maury Logue, and wanted us to know how much that chapter in *We're All Doing Time* (pages 254-273) meant to him. Another brought his battered copy of the original printing of *We're All Doing Time* and said it had saved his life not once, but four times when he hit bottom. With tears in his eyes, he hugged me and said, "Thanks. I really love you guys."

Many of the inmates asked about our son, Josh, and were delighted to hear that he has moved back home from L.A. and is working with us now. They're proud of him that he's almost a black belt in Aikido. Many have "known" him since he was a baby. Some of them said that our family gives them hope in family life. Some have a photo of us on the wall of their cells. It was very touching.

Most of the prisoners we met have been inside for many years and have many years to go — which of course is so sad and wasteful. We went to one unit specifically for older inmates, some in wheelchairs or walkers. They were soft-spoken, kind men who help and support each other a lot. With the hard lives they've lived, the humility and



Photo: Steven Paul Whisitt

Bo & Sita with friends at San Francisco County Jail, 1997

insights and compassion they've gained, they could be valuable elders in their families and communities. Instead, taxpayers will pay \$30,000 - \$40,000 per year to keep them locked up until they die. An intelligent society should have more common sense than that. **We put more effort into recycling cans & paper than human beings.**

Texas's death row was another intense place to meet in the Spirit. With nearly 500 condemned, it's the nation's largest. Texas is murdering six or seven of them per month. Texas has a homicide rate of 9.1 murders per 100,000 population, while states *without* the death penalty average 4.7 per 100,000. But Texans don't seem to tie those facts together — that killing leads to more killing.

Our meeting on death row was intimate and honest; it's easy to feel the preciousness of life, the joy of this one present moment, in the presence of so much senseless killing. We truly "met" each other with no games, no cleverness, just profound goodwill & affection. People can and do change even after committing horrible crimes. Some of these changed inmates could be invaluable in working with violent youth. By executing them, we cut ourselves off from any benefits of such transformation.

Probably the most disturbing prison we visited was the Ferguson Unit, an adult maximum-security institution for violent offenders. **Of the 300 inmates who attended my workshop, approximately 200 or more were 14 - 17 years old!** If that's the best we can do with teenagers who commit crimes, we're in serious trouble. It's hard to imagine a young man coming out of the Ferguson Unit better off than when he went in.

And yet, even at Ferguson Unit, we found respectfulness and attentiveness — despite the staff's warnings that "those kids won't be able to sit still for fifteen minutes; they have no attention span." They not only sat still for three hours, but made mature comments and asked penetrating questions. They're not really unreachable or incorrigible — yet. How long will it be before we call off this war on our own children, and come up with more intelligent ways of dealing with our social problems?



## Inspired By Staff

The bureaucracy may be brutal, the system itself insane, many policies primitive and destructive, but there always seem to be a number of compassionate, dedicated people who work in these places and manage to care about the inmates anyway. Sita & I met a lot of them in Texas, and we deeply appreciate their work and their hospitality.

It's hard to be a "perfect" employee of a typical prison. Decent staff members know that many indecent things go on all around them. They can't change them all. And if they quit their jobs because of them, then there's one *less* decent person working in that institution. Yet on the other hand, they can't *always* turn their heads away from injustice and cruelty, or they'll lose their own humanity. It's a tough bind, a real tightrope which they must walk day after day: Is this a time to look the other way, or is this something to stand up against?

I hope all you prisoners who are reading this will reflect on how difficult it is to work in a prison, and make sure that you appreciate the staff members who are trying to do a humane job. When I ask them the best part of their job, they always immediately reply, "working with the inmates!" They love you. Maybe you can let them know the feeling is mutual.

We were hosted in Texas by the substance abuse staff, and got a chance to meet with about eighty-five of them from across the state — people working long hours for low pay, with tremendous dedication. Even among the custody staff, one correctional officer didn't just guard the room, as most do; instead he watched and he listened. I hurried up to end it on time at 9:30 PM, and when he was walking us out he said, "Hey, you didn't have to rush. I would have let you go 'til midnight! This was the best thing we've ever had here. Will you come back and do an in-service training for all the chaplains in the TDC? They really need to hear you talk about goodwill and compassion. The Protestant chaplain and Muslim chaplain in this unit don't even speak each other. What kind of example is that for the rest of us?" I think if no one had been around, that tough Texas prison guard would have hugged us goodbye at the gate!

## Old & New Friends in Canada

A few days after we returned from Texas, we went off to do workshops and meetings around Kingston, Ontario. First, we helped our eldest board member, Father Murray Rogers, celebrate his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Sita and I stayed in Jyotiniketan, a small prayer community in which Father Murray and a few others have lived since 1954. We celebrated mass and took communion each morning, as they do seven days a week, year in and year out. The list of people they pray for takes about twenty minutes to read, and this is something they do every day as well.

It's such a comfort to have elders, and to see that there is no such thing as "retiring" from caring about all of humanity. For many years Jyotiniketan was based in India, and their lifestyle even in Canada reflects the simple, humble ways of Mahatma Gandhi, who was a major influence in their original community. Their hard,



Bo, Father Murray Rogers, Sita, Mary Rogers, Heather Sandeman /Jyotiniketan Community, Canada 1997

Photo: Steven Paul Whittitt

narrow cots are no more luxurious than most prison cots. They have a minute or two of hot water in the shower. They set their heating thermostat around sixty degrees, if they use it at all. They don't have television or a toaster or a blender. They wash their clothes by hand. They know the names of their neighbors' six children.

These are radiant, gentle, joyful followers of Christ. They are genuinely humble, yet take a strong stand on issues of freedom and justice around the world. It was very inspiring to be in their presence for twelve days.

The famed Kingston Penitentiary is a formidable sight, surrounded by a massive stone wall about fifty feet high. There and in several other Canadian prisons, we were hosted by very kind, open-minded chaplains who contend daily with a strong climate of Christian fundamentalism. We were surprised that we encountered as many fundamentalist challenges in Canada as we did in Texas. In both places, I tried not to spend too long arguing, but rather to leave it with something like, "I'll tell you what: When you and I both become perfect in the love and goodwill which the major religions all *agree* on, then we'll get back together to argue about the differences."

I was invited to give the Pentecost sermon in an Anglican Church in Kingston. It was beautiful, sunny and windy; people all decked out in their Sunday best. Pentecost is the Christian holiday of the Holy Spirit descending to Earth. The Bible describes it as a dramatic event with a "roaring" sound, a very real and exciting thing. I asked, "How many ex-cons in this congregation?" No one raised their hands. I asked, "How many ex-prostitutes? Dope fiends? Pimps?" Still, no one raised their hands. They were starting to squirm. **I asked them how they expected to experience the Pentecost if they didn't allow any of Jesus's favorite people — reformed sinners — into their congregation.** I suggested that they begin to seek such people out, not in the manner of "we're so wonderful that we'll let scumbags like you join our church," but rather, "please do us the honor of being a valued member of our community. We need your insights and experience to be a truly Christian group."

If Christians want Christ to show up, they'd better include His beloved "least of these" in their hearts and churches. Sita and I feel that churches are a major key to helping people not return to prison. The parole authorities don't provide community or friendship. Employers don't



usually provide community or friendship. The church needs to do it. **When people have true community, they are unlikely to commit further crimes. Churches should be proud to have ex-cons in their congregation.** If society at large has 2% ex-cons in the population, then a decent church should have at least that percentage in their congregation. Otherwise, where will those folks go?

Our Canada trip also included a couple of talks at a youth prison and at a big Catholic high school, where we met some wonderful staff and students seeking the same Big Truths in two very different settings. A very jarring note at the high school came in the form of a poster which reminded us of the insane degree of selfishness we continue to cultivate in our children. The poster was about volunteering at a summer camp for mentally & physically disabled children. It listed **FOUR GOOD REASONS TO VOLUNTEER THIS SUMMER:**

- 1) IT'LL ONLY TAKE AN HOUR OR TWO EACH WEEK.
- 2) IT'LL LOOK GREAT ON YOUR RESUMÉ.
- 3) YOU'LL LEARN NEW SKILLS.
- 4) IT'S FUN.

Whoever designed the poster was surely trying to get kids to volunteer for a good cause. But look at the extent to which selfishness has been accepted as the proper motivation for everything we do! Nowhere on the poster did it mention helping others. Nowhere did it mention making a difference in a disabled child's life. Instead, it got right to the modern nitty-gritty: Here's how it will benefit you. **Is that how we want our kids to think?** The views in that poster are multiplied a thousand-fold daily in school and on TV. Like Alice in Wonderland said, "If you drink every day from a bottle marked 'poison,' it's bound to affect you sooner or later."

### California — Land of Extremes

At 7 PM on June 8<sup>th</sup> in San Quentin, standing outside the Islamic Chapel before my workshop started, I looked up at the crisp blue sky and felt the cool bay breeze on my face and I said to the guy standing next to me, "Beautiful day." With eyes closed, his shiny black, shaved head tilted toward the sky, he softly replied, "Every day." Is that how the public imagines the rough, tough inmates at San Quentin?

We arrived at "The Q" with about twenty-five people — a few from our own community in North Carolina, the others from the AVP (Alternatives to Violence Program), which helped arrange our visit. We were met inside by about a hundred inmates and the San Quentin inmate blues band, who favored us with a few great songs before my talk. As in Texas, some of the guys had known us for many years, so there was a great deal of affection and joy in being together. I especially loved when one of the guys asked

how Josh was doing, and I was able to say, "Why don't you ask him yourself? He's sitting right over there." They almost had tears in their eyes as they hugged.

At the end of the evening, one big tough-looking hombre approached me and whispered, "Hey Bo, I gotta ask you for a personal favor, man." *Uh-oh*, I thought, *Smuggle out a letter? Smuggle in a joint? Cash a money order?* I said, "Well, I don't know, what is it?" He replied, "I know you're in a conference tomorrow with the Dalai Lama, and I need you to ask him to say a blessing for my wife, Juliette. She's having a real rough time these days." The Dalai Lama and 3,000 others were very moved to hear that request, and the blessing given.

The next three days we were fed and housed by the wonderful folks at San Francisco Zen Center while we attended *Peacemaking: The Power of Nonviolence*, a huge conference featuring His Holiness the Dalai Lama and two other Nobel Peace Prize recipients, Jose Ramos Horta from the nation of East Timor, and Rigoberta Menchu from Guatemala (she was sick, but her sister spoke in her place). Other speakers included diverse activists from around the country, and a group of about two hundred youth activists, mostly from inner cities. It was an impressive range of people.

To be honest, though, it was also a poignant reminder of some anger & intolerance in the peace movement — a lot of "correctness monitoring" about whether the currently "right" words were being used, and whether all the "right" bandwagons of the day were being supported. I used to be an angry activist too, so I can sympathize. But that frame

of mind boils down to trying to blame and control others — which is not peacemaking, it's war-making. Heartfelt peace requires heartfelt *tolerance*, because the whole world is never going to speak & act exactly as we think they should. We need to feel somebody's heart rather than insist they dance to our tune.

Many inspiring activists were there, like the heads of GreenPeace and Rainforest Action Network, and American Zen master Bernie Glassman, of Yonkers, New York, who has done amazing work transforming inner city areas into sustainable housing, and creating businesses employing former addicts and homeless folks. I also met David Lewis, who spent 17

years in San Quentin and now is director of *Free At Last*, a program which helped reduce the crime rate in East Palo Alto by 87% in one year. We need to let more David Lewises out of prison and get them to work transforming their communities. We desperately need their help.

We also made a nice connection with some young people from Amer-I-can, Jim Brown's program in L.A. which works with gang leaders, at-risk youth and ex-cons. We



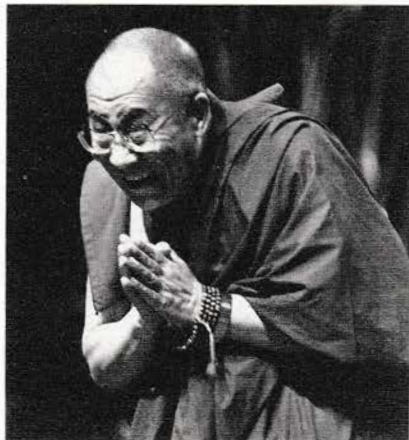
Photo: Steven Paul Whitsitt

Bo & friend at San Francisco County Jail, 1997



hope our organizations can support each other's work. The second day of the conference, the youth group noticed the irony of talking about all this noble stuff *inside* the convention center while dozens of homeless people lay in the grass across the street. So they made up a huge batch of sandwiches and handed them out to all. That was a good reminder of the beauty of the youthful spirit which says, "Let's do something NOW."

And of course, it's always great to be in the presence of a living saint like The Dalai Lama. His compassion and his blessings are a constant inspiration for us at Human Kindness Foundation. Watching him thread his way through the projections of all those people — young, old, seasoned, naïve, angry, peaceful, burned-out, fresh, skeptical, faithful; the environmentalists, feminists, radicals, leftists, centrists — was a clear, shining example that respect and goodwill are always the key to things turning out as well as they can. Not *great* every time, but as well as they can go. His spirituality doesn't have to avoid or ignore anything; he faces life exactly as it is and applies the timeless principles to each situation. To be so unshakable, to have a peace which is so solid and unafraid, requires more than the right thoughts or words. He spends hours every day sitting alone and silent. Let's not forget, an important part of "The Work" is always right here on our bunk.



His Holiness the Dalai Lama, San Francisco 1997

Photo: Steven Paul Whisitt

### My Favorite "Warden"

While we were in San Francisco, I gave a workshop at one of the big city jails. The head of the place (they don't call him 'Warden,' he's actually the 'Under Sheriff,' which is an even higher post) is an ex-con named Michael Marcum. I'm not talking about a lightweight offender. Michael was a convicted killer who served hard time. After meeting him a couple of times now over the past few years, **it occurs to me that being an ex-con should be a requirement to be a warden.** He knows what it's like. He understands the problems on both sides. He genuinely cares. Michael was profiled a couple of years ago on *60 Minutes*, and there have been many angry protests as you may imagine. But Michael Hennessey, the Sheriff of San Francisco County, has stood by him. It's always going to be a drag to be in jail, but the inmates in that one are lucky to have a brother for a warden.

### A Great Day With The Ladies

Our last couple of prisons in California were in Chowchilla, a few hours' drive inland from the Bay Area. Valley State Prison for Women and Central California Women's Facility are by far the largest women's prison complex in the world, housing between seven and eight thousand inmates. CCWF allowed 250 women to attend;

VSPW planned to limit it to about sixty, but they let the room bulge to about a hundred instead. The staff said it was the largest program allowed since the prison opened.

We meditated together, talked, laughed, cried; and both places provided us with guitars so that Josh and I could do a few songs together, with the women helping out. It was great! The questions, too, were deep — "How do we deal with the pain of being separated from our loved ones?" "If we become peaceful and contented, then how will we be motivated to change?" Once again, just human beings wrestling with important issues of living a good, productive life no matter where they are.

### Back At Home, Remembering, Reflecting...

Everywhere we went, we invited people to meet with us in peace and goodwill and unselfishness, and they did. We invited people to recognize their own depth, and they did. We met together as decent people trying to make sense of our lives and address the real issues of making a positive difference in the world. From the young violent offenders in Ferguson Unit to the seasoned cons on Death Row and at San Quentin, to the heartbroken mothers in Chowchilla who miss their children, we touched hearts with thousands of people whom the mainstream society would rather forget about. Many of the people we met have done unspeakably cruel and violent things. But all are still human beings, and have depth and sincerity too.

It is our deepest prayer that someday soon our society sees fit to make prison the kind of place that helps the process of transformation instead of making it so hard. We are all related. If we don't start acting like it, we may not survive the next century. We're building too many prisons. We're sentencing too many human beings to death and we're executing them too frequently. We're giving up on our young people and sentencing younger and younger teenagers to adult prisons. We're justifying too much anger and rage and racism instead of looking for practical solutions to our communities' problems.

Every time we do a prison tour, one of the things we say is, "If only we could take every voter in the country into these places with us." It's not because we're naïve about the dangerousness of some of the people we visit; but rather because if everyone could just see that other side which we get to see, then they would know that nearly every single convict is redeemable. If we made prison into a place where the best, deepest parts of a person could flower and grow, instead of a place where the most violent and fearful parts get reinforced every day, we could not only save ourselves the misery of locking away millions of our citizens in a nation behind bars, but those very people might be the instruments of major change in the most troubled communities in this country. This is not fantasy. We are overlooking a vital resource: People like David Lewis who may start out terribly, but whose compassion awakens later in life and works great wonders.

If you only knew them as we know them....

*See my love, Bo*



## Practice: “VOW PRACTICE”

Many of us complain about how hard it is to start doing daily meditation or yoga, or to quit smoking or lying or biting our nails or masturbating or any number of things connected to “turning over a new leaf.” We may make solemn resolutions, but within a short time we often find everything is back to the way it was. Then we gradually become cynical and conclude that we may as well give up; that “we’ll never change.”

Vow practice is more formal than making verbal resolutions. Most of us at Human Kindness Foundation work with vow practice and we have found it extremely helpful for making real and lasting changes.

The basic elements of our vow practice are **Preparation**, **Declaration**, and **Implementation**:

1. **Preparation** — Plan ahead a week or two. Vows taken impulsively (or angrily!) usually don’t last. Spend time in prayer and reflection about any changes you want to make — major or minor, lifelong or temporary. Think ahead to the ways this vow may affect your life, your friendships, future plans, etc., and accept those consequences. There is no gain without some amount of sacrifice or loss.

Then work on the wording of your vow. One prisoner wanted to take a vow of total silence for a year. We said, “What if a c.o. speaks to you and requires you to answer?” We advised him to do two things: Include in the wording of his vow something like “except in cases of genuine emergency or having to respond to an official;” and we also suggested he let the warden know about his desire to take a vow of silence, and ask for his cooperation. Mature planning makes for a mature vow.

The most important thing about a vow is, **don’t take it until you know you will keep it**. So if you’re unsure of whether you can live up to “I will always...” or “I will never...,” then use the wording “**I will strive to...**” That way, your sworn commitment is to *try*, and sometimes this may actually work better anyway. Honoring our promises is essential for self-respect and any success in life. So, think carefully about your vows, and discuss them with someone you trust (we’ll help if you have no one else).

2. **Declaration** — Once a vow has been properly prepared, the next step is to “declare it” in a little ceremony with one or more friends as witnesses. This is important, because like a marriage ceremony, you are obligating yourself publicly to follow your vow. If you break it, others will know you have let yourself down. You will have let them down as well, because they may not have as much faith in themselves after seeing you break your vow. It is important to commit ourselves in front of others, and it is also very encouraging to know they support our struggle to abide by the promises we have made. After you declare your vow, the witness or other friends can just say something like, “We respect your vow, and we receive your vow.” We usually do this while bowing to each other with respect.
3. **Implementation** — Then comes the bottom line: Day by day, abiding by the vow you have taken. **We strongly encourage you to repeat your vow out loud, alone, at the beginning of every day.** Read it or recite it as sincerely as you did that first day, and remember the feelings which prompted you to take this vow. If you are in a dormitory situation, you may have to do this in a whisper, sitting up in bed, facing a wall, on the toilet, or whatever—but it’s very useful to repeat your vow every day. You are actually *taking* the vow every day. This would be a powerful practice even for marriage vows: Both husband and wife repeating their vows to each other every morning of their lives. Believe it or not, although it sounds like it would get stale, daily repetition is actually a way to keep the vows very fresh (and that’s a good reason for vows to be worded briefly instead of long, dramatic declarations).

**Respect all vows equally.** Whether you or a friend take a vow to stop eating sweets for one week, or to never take a sip of alcohol for the rest of your life, a vow must be respected fully. A sincere vow is an expression of our willingness to work, to sacrifice, to change. It shows that we understand how life works — that change doesn’t come just because we whine about it. Real, lasting change requires planning, effort, and perseverance.

**A Vow is also a good way** to initiate yourself into daily spiritual practice. Vow to do a half-hour of meditation the same time each day for three months. Then, whether you are sick or well, tired or alert, bored or restless, you just do it. It doesn’t matter whether you feel like it, or whether it seems to be doing you any good, or whether you’re good at it; you’ve taken a vow to do it anyway. What a relief! Vow practice gives us a major freedom to change our lives by giving up some minor freedoms of changing our minds. Try it and see.





## LETTERS

Hello everybody,

This letter has a little something in it for your whole family. It was really great to finally meet all of you. I have loved you guys for a long time, and funny as it may sound, I was even glad to be at San Quentin to do it. I'm sure you remember me, Tony, and my young friend Wes. We sat in the first two seats, in the front row with Sita, and Bo mentioned us by name several times during his talk.

When we arrived, I saw you Sita first, and even though we had never met, your eyes sparkled with a joyous welcome for me, and I saw the illumination, and felt the wonderful warmth of the "Love" you radiate, (with a capital L). I felt as if I was a long lost, much loved relative returning home. Thank you Sita.

Bo, I found "We're All Doing Time" in 1988, in a cell in Mule Creek State Prison. I've spent most of my 40 years alone. I ran away from home from my abusive father and uncaring mother, at twelve years old, (I had an extremely low self image after they told me I was unwanted, and they only had me because abortion was illegal at the time). I took to the streets of NYC, stealing, and living wherever I could.

Then hitch-hiking across country to California when I was fifteen, I began my twenty-year heroin addiction, supporting my habit with a gun. Living in the streets, I became aware of how little life was worth, and how quickly a life could be extinguished. But there were several times that I feel I was brought to a particular place, at a particular time, for the purpose of saving another human being's life from death by heroin overdose. And the feeling I was left with from those acts, was indescribable. And I believe perhaps those acts were the catalyst, which began cracking the armor that had grown around my heart.

But I couldn't stop the ride I was on, I had a long way to go yet, I was still an addict. So I continued in what I knew until, after a few more years, I was finally stopped and sent to prison. The end and the beginning.

The end of darkness, and the beginning of light. I now had a ten-

year sentence, and during the first year I found a copy of We're All Doing Time, and it helped me realize where I was and where I wanted to go. I didn't have to walk blindly in the dark anymore.

I began doing heart meditation, and though there were some terrible things I had done, and were done to me, things I did not want to think about, I knew I had to travel through them again. Each time I meditated, something painful came up that I had all but forgotten about. It seemed as if the Spirit was bringing these things up one at a time for me. And often the images caused discomfort, almost a physical pain. But after a session, I would send mental images of love, and forgiveness to everyone involved, including myself.

Nothing evident happened, but after a while I began to feel noticeably lighter. The anger and hatred I had harbored for so long was dissipating. The horrible memories of being abused as a child, violence, loneliness, and all of that stuff, began to lose their weight and power over me. Now, today I can even speak about them without attachment, to let others know, in a compassionate way, that they're not alone. I still have a long way to go, because I know this journey is a never ending one, not until everyone reaches realization. Thanks Bo, for caring, and just for being you.

And Josh. My brother Josh. I'm smiling now thinking about it. At the end, after I had shook hands with Bo, and hugged him and Sita, I was leaving, about to walk out the door when Josh saw me, reached out with one hand, grabbed my shirt, pulled me to him, and hugged me. Then placed his hand momentarily over my heart. No words were spoken. None were needed. I felt the connection Josh. Thank you. Thank you all.

Love, your brother Tony (San Quentin)



Dear Bo and entire human family,

Since you all were here yesterday I have felt overwhelmed with joy, gratitude, happiness. You confirmed my greatest joys, the comfort of my prayers, my Islamic Creed: Love for

all, hatred for none. You confirmed and encouraged our teachings that our only purpose for living is to serve God by serving mankind.

I was very touched at the sincerity you generated, I think you touched us all to our very essence.

I have been blessed to be raised from among the spiritually dead, but I have 8 months left to live here in the agony of the dead.

I have gained much more than punishment, I am free mentally from a life of illusion & pretentiousness. I leave here in recovery, armed with the tools of consciousness, soul discipline, my thoughts rotating before my minds eye, on a quest for divine guidance.

Bo, please continue to help us cultivate and water our spiritual gardens from the springs of meditation, and harvest them with purification & cleansing prayers. May peace and blessings follow you on the path.

Yours humbly, Clarice (Chowchilla)



Dear Bo and Sita,

After knowing you through your literature for about 13 years we finally got a chance to meet today here at the Michael Unit. You didn't disappoint me with your eyes, or your message. Your sincerity, dedication, commitment & genuine belief came shining through, much as I expected. I really appreciate your continuing endeavors with those of us in cages.

I'm the large fellow who sat behind Sita during your visit — I don't expect to have made an impression upon you, I just want to say thanks for the time you spent here, and for what you shared; the nice quiet "time-out" & the hug. All of those things filled a strong need in me today, much as everything you've shared with me up to now.

One of the messages that came home to me today was about learning to separate the impulse from the act, & that critical bit of self-examination one makes (or should make) before acting on an impulse. Also, the message concerning the fact that there are only two true emotions: love & fear. I've heard that before



but didn't get it, & forgot it, until today. A nice reminder. "Anger is only fear." I need to embrace that one, & get a really good grip on it, so I don't forget it in the future.

Sita, you promised me that if I kept struggling, I would see some breakthroughs. I have, too. A great deal of learning & changing has manifested in my life this past year. A lot of nonsense, grow up, dump the blame, unload the stresses kinda stuff that makes people like me regret having taken so damn long to make the honest effort to cure what ails us.

It's not such a hard thing to take the sort of personal responsibility that creates an honorable life. It's not. And the rewards are many. Some of us actually "get it" after a while.

*I Love You! Charles (Texas)*



Dear Bo and Family,

First, THANK YOU for coming into the Estelle Unit to share with us. My heart is still in remembrance. I am so grateful for all you and Sita do. Your lives are witness to a great blessing and your inspiring words have not landed on deaf ears. You are wise in speaking to troubled individuals, for a "broken heart is an open heart."

I meditate everyday 15-45 min. I've had many spiritual experiences, direct baptisms or annointments, OBEs and etc... I am joy-filled and have been blessed to my very core. My present passion is sharing a smile, giving encouragement and plain old human kindness.

*Caught up in the moment, Greg (Texas)*



Dear Bo and Sita,

I thoroughly enjoyed meeting both of you in person. It really was an honor to have you put so much time and energy into the Texas prison system. You guys had the mailrooms hopping here for a week. It was neat to just chat with y'all some there at the end. The whole evening will be logged away as one of my more pleasant memories.

The sad news from here is that Texas is executing people at a record-setting pace. Yet here is an interesting aside... the man they executed last night was a Christian guy. He went out with a Bible on his chest, and his last words as the drugs hit him were "I'm coming home."

Last week I went to a Muslim service, which I do every so often, because I like to support their work in the prison community. This was a special affair to celebrate the completion of an inter-faith basketball tournament that consisted of three teams, Muslim, Protestant and Catholic.

Once the tournament was over they all got together to celebrate having been able to do it in a peaceful, respectful manner. They gave awards to all the participants. They had some music, which always touches my heart, and through the course of the night they had speakers from each faith that was involved in the tournament.

One of the speakers asked everyone to bow their heads in silent prayer, then as he read a list of the men who've been executed this year he

asked everyone to offer them up in prayer. It touched my heart.

At one time during the evening they asked everyone to turn to his neighbor, repeat an affirmation about brotherly love and unity, and shake hands. It was way cool. I admire the spirit in which the Muslim community brings these things together. A number of the Muslim brothers came to see y'all too.

I graduated from 2-year college after 22 years of taking classes off and on! Next month my brother will mail you a copy of my cap and gown photo.

This past Monday we were afforded the opportunity to sit down with two people from the Victim Services branch of TDCJ-ID. It's a program called Victim Offender Mediation/Dialogue.

It was an excellent meeting, and we collectively determined that something more can be done to bring about a healing in the victims of crime. A dozen of us inmates volunteered our services, and now we'll just wait on things to come together.

May the universe continue to guide and bless you all. My love goes out to you everyday, to all the HKF staff and wildlife. Speaking of which, one of our cats is recovering nicely after being cut real bad in the razor wire. Cats have unbelievable healing powers. As time goes on, I hope to further access that healing power within myself.

*Peace be unto you, Tall Tom (Texas)*



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envelope art by Tall Tom Dodson

*a little good news*

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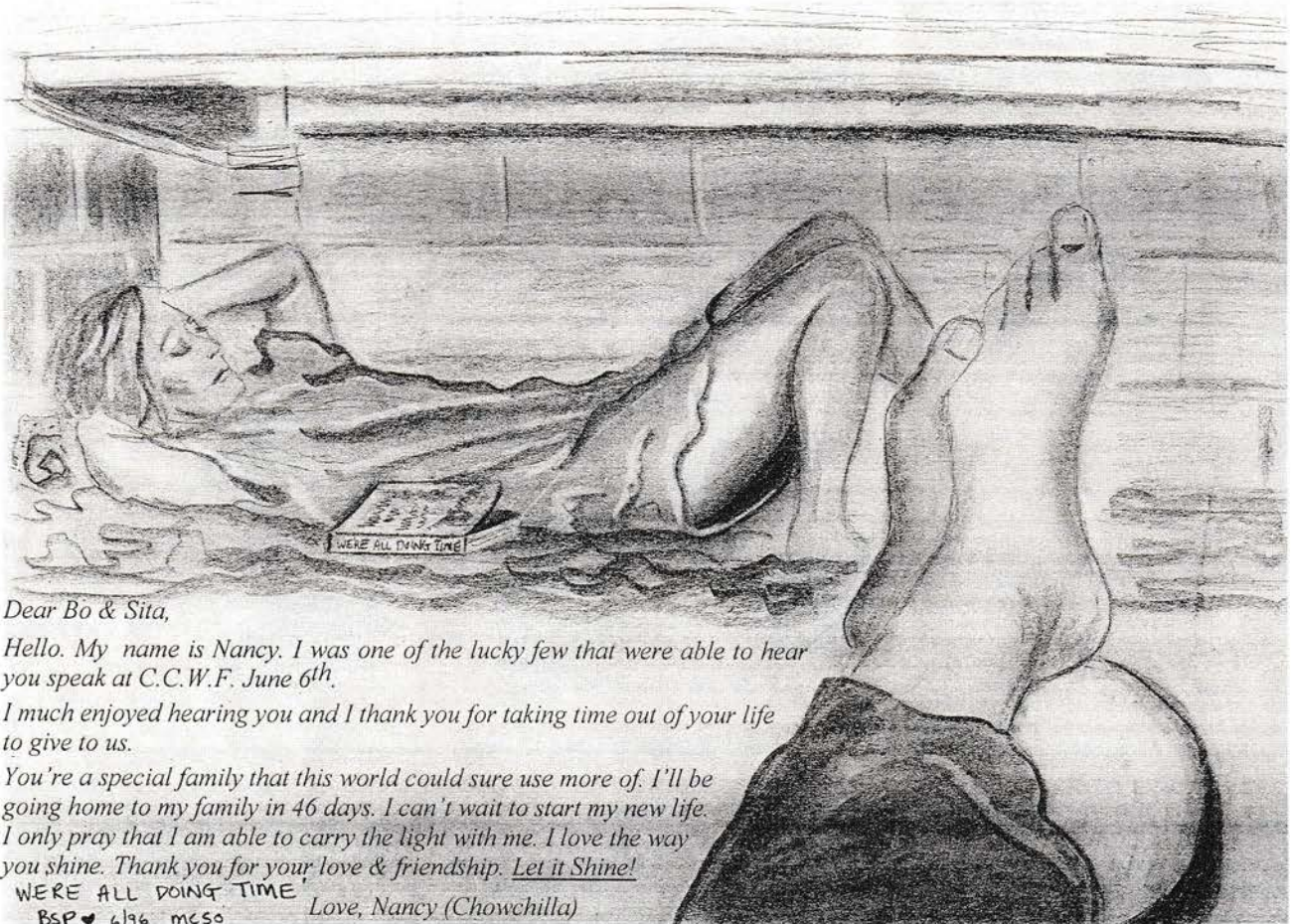
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Dear Bo & Sita,

Hello. My name is Nancy. I was one of the lucky few that were able to hear you speak at C.C.W.F. June 6<sup>th</sup>.

I much enjoyed hearing you and I thank you for taking time out of your life to give to us.

You're a special family that this world could sure use more of. I'll be going home to my family in 46 days. I can't wait to start my new life.

I only pray that I am able to carry the light with me. I love the way you shine. Thank you for your love & friendship. Let it Shine!

WERE ALL DOING TIME

BSP ♥ 6196 MCSO

Love, Nancy (Chowchilla)

Unknown Artist (We sincerely apologize to the artist for not documenting your name.)