

# Human Kindness Foundation

*a little good news*

*The Last Christmas of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

## FINAL ENDINGS AND FRESH BEGINNINGS

**A**s this whole millennium draws to a close in just a few days, the comedians and columnists, the talk shows and merchants and beer companies, the party stores and cruise lines, will be having a field day making money off the whole thing, and I guess there's nothing wrong in having a great excuse to party.

But you can use this major event in deeper ways as well. You can look honestly at your own life, at the parts that bring you shame, despair or frustration, and the parts that spark your hope and faith and determination. You can look at the best and worst of yourself, and create a ritual of some kind to leave the worst behind you, and create a new and better life in the next millennium.

Changing for the better is one of the most fundamental human urgings, yet we are more sophisticated about how to use high-tech cell phones and VCR's than how to change bad habits into good ones. We may go round and round the same circles all our lives rather than consider that we're not seeing our behavior patterns clearly, or we may be failing to respect the process of change itself.

This is not new territory. Two thousand years ago, St. Paul lamented:

My own behavior baffles me. I find myself not doing what I really want to do, but doing what I really loathe. ...I often find that I have the will to do good, but not the power. That is, I don't accomplish the good I set out to do, and the evil I don't really want to do I find I am always doing. What a wretched man I am!

Romans, 7: 15-24

Is there even one of us who has not shared St. Paul's frustration? Yet we know that change—even major, enormous change—is still possible. Let's not overlook the fact that, for all his self-proclaimed wretchedness, Paul went on to become a saint.

So, how about you? How about, for the sake of the world, leaving behind the biggest things that keep you feeling small, weak, wretched, unholy? How about entering this new era with firm resolve to bring your life in line with your deepest, noblest beliefs? If you dislike yourself for smoking, then make this the last and final time you stop smoking. Same with drinking, drugs, stealing, scamming, and anything else that makes you feel low. Seize this opportunity to make a new beginning. Say it, do it, and stick to it. We need you to become your true self!

We have a saying around Kindness House: *You can do hard*. The reason we say this is that in modern times, the words "it's too hard" have become an anthem for giving up. The message is: Have an ache or pain, reach for a pill; get depressed because you lose your job, take Prozac. A friend once confided to me that she regretted divorcing her husband. She said the only reason she did it was a prevailing attitude among her friends that "If it gets really hard, why make yourself suffer?" Maybe we have become convinced that we can't do hard things.

*You can do hard* is a way of reminding yourself that you need not run away in fear just because something is greatly challenging. You can do challenging. It might even be scary, but you can do scary. You can do hard. Really, you can. Don't let a shallow culture fool you into thinking you'll crumble when the chips are down. Human beings were designed for the chips to be down sometimes.

Imagine a runner who begins a race and, after running twenty yards, has to jump over a hurdle. *Damn it, what's this thing doing here? It's in my way!* Another twenty yards, another hurdle. *Damn!* Then another, and another. His annoyance grows into anger; he loses focus; he risks injury; he loses steam.

But knowing from the outset that the race is actually a hurdle event puts everything in a completely different perspective, doesn't it? The same effort is required, the same hurdles need to be jumped, but now they are part of the challenge instead of being unwelcome obstacles. Bad habits and qualities or situations that need to be changed are hurdles in our lives, not obstacles. We waste enormous power if we misunderstand this.

In these last days of 1999, there are far too many wars and prisons, far too much poverty and hopelessness; but also many great things happening among committed spiritual seekers and social activists. You and I have an opportunity to be on either side of the balance. The world really needs us to become joyful and enlightened human beings. What do you think? I beg you, for the sake of us all, to make at least one serious, major change by New Year's Eve. Step into the new century with renewed commitment to yourself and the world. The teachings, principles and practices are right here within your reach. And the need has never been greater.

*Love, Bo*

## WE'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY

When Bo and Sita first started going into prisons in the early 1970's, hardly any prisoners or staff had ever heard words like "meditation," "interfaith," "yoga," "restorative justice," or "victim-offender mediation." Few prisons allowed twelve-step meetings behind the walls. The Quaker's AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) was just getting started in a couple of prisons in upstate New York.

Now, thirty years later, there are hundreds of meditation and yoga teachers going into prisons, AVP prison groups all around the country, thousands of twelve-step meetings inside the walls, and a growing movement for "restorative justice," which brings everyone from victims and offenders to police and judges and wardens, all working together to come up with responses to crime that heal the community rather than merely punish the offender.

Bo gets invited to many interesting meetings and conferences in these various fields of prison work, and when he is able to attend, he tries to bring along a friend or co-worker who is a former prisoner. Each time, those friends say, "You know, convicts don't have the slightest idea people actually get together in big groups like this to talk about all of this stuff and try to help."

But they do. Many people care, and many people are working very hard to change the brutal and self-defeating mess we call a prison system. Bo recently attended two such conferences, one in New Mexico – which he attended with Micheal, a former prisoner on our staff – and the other in Washington, DC.

The meeting in New Mexico was convened by Joan Halifax, a well-known author, teacher and Zen priest, at her Santa Fe retreat center called Upaya. This was Micheal's first trip to the American southwest, and he spent part of his first day there running up a little mountain right across from Upaya and playing games

with a coyote. Bo spent his first day leading workshops for staff and inmates at the NM State Penitentiary and the local county jail (neither place would allow Micheal to come in because he is on parole).

Joining Joan, Bo and Micheal in their "Prison Working Group" meeting were about thirty-five teachers, activists, administrators, doctors, therapists, and even the warden of a large women's prison back east. Ra Chaka, featured on our "Good Works" page this issue, was also there.

The diverse group spent nearly three days getting to know each other, meditating together, and discussing a wide range of ideas about how to do their work more effectively and on a larger scale. The friendships

and strategies that came out of that meeting will continue to grow and take root in ways that will eventually affect the nation and even the world. Nearly all the participants have

already agreed to continue working together, and to meet again next year.

The very next weekend, Bo was one of the main speakers at the National Restorative Justice Conference, held at the National Cathedral in Washington DC. This event, attended by about three hundred activists and religious leaders, was sponsored by the Episcopal Diocese.

Bob Schieffer of CBS News introduced Bo and two other speakers for the plenary session. When a member of the audience asked Bo how to change the public's fear of prisoners and ex-offenders, Bo said, "Well, the public's fear is caused by the media, so we need to ask Bob Schieffer to go back to CBS and lead a campaign to report some of the *good* news about ex-cons instead of only the bad news." Let's hope he took the message to heart.

In this era when prisons have turned into big business and we are locking up more men, women and children than any nation has ever imagined, we just wanted to give you a little of the good news you do not often hear about. People care. Many people are working very hard to make things better. Pray for them, okay? They pray for you.



## PRACTICE: MINDFULNESS AS SHOWN BY A MASTER

### Thich Nhat Hanh's First American Prison Workshop

All of us at Human Kindness Foundation had a rare privilege recently: We brought the Vietnamese Buddhist master, Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced Tic Not Hon), into his first American prison to talk with inmates and staff about the practice of deep mindfulness. We chose Maryland Correctional Institution at Hagerstown for this special event because Bo had been there recently and had been very moved by the spiritual sincerity and strength of the prisoner community. Many of the prisoners have taken the Alternatives to Violence Project training and have been involved with our books and tapes as well. (Special thanks to Emma Lou Davis, of CCSC in Hagerstown, for coordinating the whole event).

About a hundred prisoners and two dozen staff and volunteers assembled in the chapel for Thich Nhat Hanh's talk. But before he said a word, the teaching had already begun merely by observing his presence, the way he walked into the room,

the awareness and concentration with which he conducted himself in every way. Thich Nhat Hanh (called "Thay" informally, meaning "teacher") bases his whole life around the practice of mindfulness: paying utmost attention to everything you do; performing even the most basic tasks, such as walking or breathing or brushing your teeth, with the same quality of attention as if you were delivering a baby or saving the world.

Dr. Martin Luther King twice nominated Thich Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize for his peace work during the Vietnam War—for which he has been in exile from his country for many years now. This elderly monk has seen some of the most horrible and violent situations imaginable, and has responded to them with nonviolence and mindfulness in ways that have affected millions of people around the world. He bears genuine spiritual power and he attributes it all to the simple practice of paying attention to what we are doing. Here are some brief excerpts of his teachings.

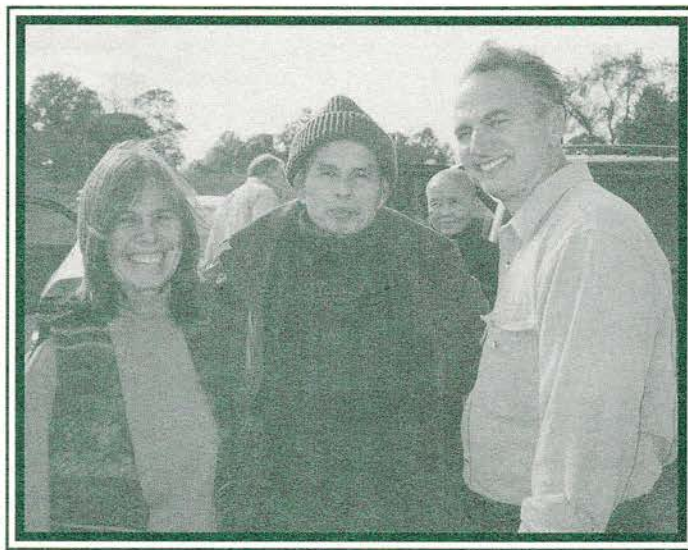
[Excerpted from *Peace is Every Step* by Thich Nhat Hanh]

Every morning, when we wake up, we have twenty-four brand-new hours to live. What a precious gift! We have the capacity to live in a way that these twenty-four hours will bring peace, joy, and happiness to ourselves and others. We can smile, breathe, walk, and eat our meals in a way that allows us to be in touch with the abundance of happiness that is available.

Although we walk all the time, our walking is usually more like running. When we walk like that, we print anxiety and sorrow on the Earth. We have to walk in a way that we only print peace and serenity on the Earth. If we can take one step like this, we can take two, three, four, and five. When we are able to take one step peacefully and happily, we are working for the cause of peace and happiness for the whole of humankind. Walking meditation is a wonderful practice.

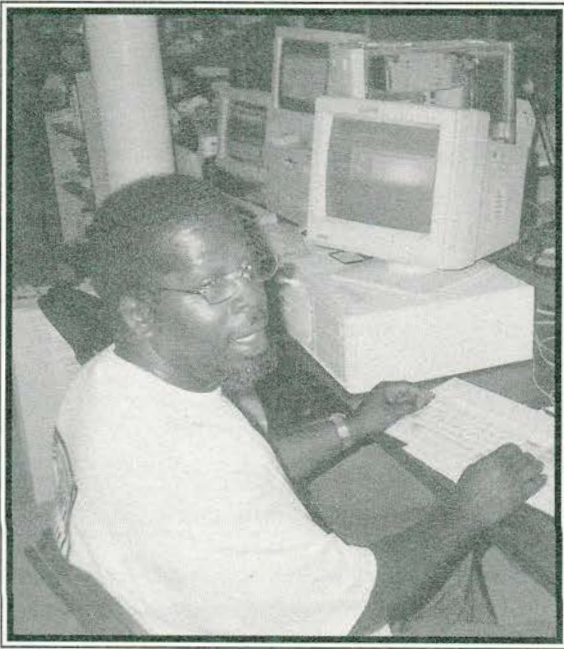
When we do walking meditation outside, we walk a little slower than our normal pace, and we coordinate our breathing with our steps. For example, we may take three steps with each in-breath and three steps with each out-breath. So we can say, "In, in, in. Out, out out." "In" is to help us to identify the in-breath. Every time we call something by its name, we make it more real, like saying the name of a friend. If your lungs want four steps instead of three, please give them four steps. If they want only two steps, give them two. The lengths of your in-breath and out-breath do not have to be the same. For example, you can take three steps with each inhalation and four with each exhalation. If you feel happy, peaceful, and joyful while you are walking, you are practicing correctly.

Be aware of the contact between your feet and the Earth. Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet. We have caused a lot of damage to the Earth. Now it is time for us to take good care of her. We bring our peace and calm to the surface of the Earth and share the lesson of love. We walk in that spirit. From time to time, when we see something beautiful, we may want to stop and look at it—a tree, a flower, some children playing. As we look, we continue to follow our breathing, lest we lose the beautiful flower and get caught up in our thoughts. When we want to resume walking, we just start again. Each step we take will create a cool breeze, refreshing our body and mind. Every step makes a flower bloom under our feet. We can do it only if we do not think of the future or the past, if we know that life can only be found in the present moment.



## GOOD WORKS

### Chaka Helped Out When He Got Out



Bo met Ra Chaka at a conference in Chicago a few years ago and was deeply impressed by his commitment toward helping prisoners pull their lives together. Chaka certainly knows what it is like. He spent about thirty-three years, off and on, behind bars from the time he was nine years old until his early forties, when he was finally paroled (for the LAST time!) from the Illinois prison system after serving a straight twenty years for armed robbery.

Chaka's mother died while he was a baby, and his father was in and out of prison. He was passed from family to family and started getting arrested at age nine. He was locked up in his first reform school at the age of 11. After earning two 20-60 year adult sentences in 1976, Chaka decided that it was time to change his life's direction. Internally, he meditated and began the process of centering himself. Externally, his mission became one of service to both the imprisoned and the outside community. In his words, "I focused more on the other prisoners' problems than my own; thereby coming to know myself, and being able to dump many years of my own garbage!"

Chaka was paroled in 1996 to St. Leonard's House in Chicago, and soon began working with the Prison Action Committee (PAC), a corporation

formed in 1992 by prisoners and ex-prisoners to become advocates for prisoners, their families, and the community. Chaka is now the Director of Community Affairs for PAC. It is his responsibility to communicate with prisoners in the prison community, with family members of prisoners, and with the general community. He talks with school children, social groups, churches, and travels to conferences to speak about prisoners, prison conditions, the prison industrial complex, the criminalization of youth, etc. Chaka is a strong and quiet man who speaks from the heart, and so people really listen. Nearly all his co-workers at the Prison Action Committee are also ex-prisoners who did similarly long sentences before getting their act together. The Prison Action Committee is now getting involved with nearly every aspect of community life – skills training programs for parolees and their families, job counseling, recovery programs, family counseling, support groups, hands-on construction work, legal work, etc. They are not only a great group of people, but a fine example of what ex-cons can do if they pool their energy and persistence and truly want to make a difference in the world. Thanks for your own example, Chaka.

### Always Trying Something New

(submitted by Tall Tom, Ellis Unit, Texas DOC)

*[EDITOR'S NOTE: Tall Tom is one of our favorite examples of becoming an elder in the prison environment. He has been inside many years and has a ways to go, so he has decided to create his little piece of heaven on earth right where he is. As a member of our Interfaith Order of Communion and Community, Tom is required to be involved with service to others. He is always coming up with some new way to peacefully challenge the violence, stealing, gossip, and fear of prison life, and replace it with kindness and friendship and good humor. This is his latest experiment in community service, excerpted from a letter he wrote to Micheal on our staff.]*

I know you are familiar with black market prison stores. The ones in here used to charge 100% interest. These days they charge 50% interest. Several months ago I started entertaining some different ideas about doing some regular charity food deal around here, yet I never talked to anyone about it. In early August I decided my best workable plan was to give away noodle soups. Almost everyone eats them, and although they really aren't nutritious they will help keep the wolves away until you can get something else. Plus they work well as a stretcher – you can add the noodles to some canned goods and double the number you feed. So I bought 30 extra soups.

Now at this point, I still had never talked to anyone else. When I finally kicked my idea around with some people, I was amazed at their variety of reasons that this wouldn't work. Some of them sounded so reasonable from a prison mentality that I'd get scared and think "Yeah they're right," but then my faith would kick back in and I just stayed my course. My thinking was that I needed to follow that inner urging and even if it didn't work out, I'd learn some interesting lessons.

I approached a black friend of mine (I'm white) who has similar spiritual beliefs to help me pass out the soups. I told him I'd fund it all, so as to not put any undue pressure on him. He agreed to help me, and that has worked out well because between our different work schedules, one of us is around 24 hours a day.

My final move was to get a sign made. The sign is 18" x 20", and it's posted on our bulletin board. It reads: [See frame]

No sooner than I hung it up, several guys asked me if it was a joke. I explained to them that it was no joke. They asked "What's the catch?" I told them there was no catch, it was just free soup for anyone who is hungry. Me and Herbert had to answer a lot of questions, and we also had to visit with each other some on the concept. I originally intended to give soups to guys who were down and out. But I soon realized I had no way to determine who was down and out. So we threw the doors wide open to everybody, and I liked that idea best. Come one, come all!!

Herbert liked the feeling he got so much from helping give the soup away that first week, that he kicked in some money too. A week ago we put 60 soups in the kitty, and so far we're averaging giving away 30 a week. We've been getting a lot of positive feedback, and it's been a great experience so far.

As you well know, men that are really poor are very conscious of being poor (financially) and many of them are reluctant to take what they consider to be handouts. It's that pride thing, and I can well understand their position. So we are trying to deal with that part of it delicately in an effort to honor each of these guys as a unique and valuable human being. Sometimes that means we let them "borrow" the soup and they can pay us back whenever they are able, and feel the inclination to. We are also letting some guys trade us one stamp for one soup, because they just will not take something for nothing, and the stamp will go to some worthy use. Both Herbert and myself always attempt to convince the men who want to trade a stamp for the soup to just keep the stamp and write a letter. And some guys will do that when we urge them to.

So far everything is going well, and all the guys are becoming comfortable coming by for a soup, and sometimes some conversation. I set January 6, 2000 as an end date because that's my sobriety date ... and actually I don't see it as an end date. When I set the date it was actually the maximum amount of time I was willing to commit to this project to see if it worked out reasonably well. I hope and pray that there is no end date, and that it only grows and grows.

I started not to tell you about this because it's really small scale stuff, yet in this place it's something that's never been done just like this. Myself and any number of other guys have always tried to look out after some selective people who were down on

their luck, and I likewise have been selectively looked out for from time to time. Yet almost all charity seemed to be issued prejudicially, or with the price of a sermon, or something, and hopefully no one perceives what we are doing as having strings, because surely our intention is not to have any.

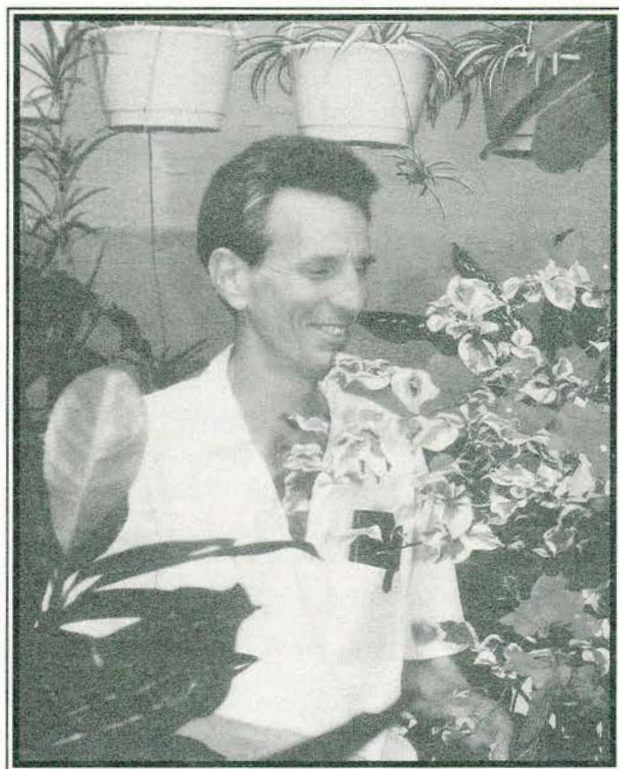
I've told you this long story not as a way to say we are great guys or I'm some hellafied dude .... I tell you this because I love you, and this path we share brings me much joy. You people give me permission to take some baby steps towards creating a new man who can better serve his fellow man.

This whole thing has been scary at times because I had no prison role model to follow. It's scary sometimes just stepping out on faith and doing something completely different. Yet the examples that you people set for me give me permission to take these steps. I want to tell you this: Once I put the sign up I had this very strong feeling that this was the perfect action, and ever since that day I've had any number of cool little God-moments with a whole new group of men. It's a neat deal.

May the universe bless you with an ever increasing amount of wisdom as you grow in clarity.

Peace be with you,

Tall Tom



**ARE YOU HUNGRY??**

Free soups are available at the  
**BAR NONE SOUP KITCHEN**  
**ALL ARE WELCOME!!**

**OPEN FROM:**

Now (Aug. 15th) till Jan. 6, 2000

Contact: Tall Tom or Herbert

## LETTERS

Dear Bo, Sita, & HKF staff,

Wow you guys are fast. I just received Deep & Simple and the new copy of We're All Doing Time I had requested. Thanks sooooo much! Actually I hadn't expected to see them for at least another week or two; I know you guys must be awfully busy. Thanks again!

And Sita, thank you, for your kind note of inspiration; it truly meant a lot, possibly even more than you realized at the time of writing it. And you're absolutely right, everything IS second (or at least should be) to my spiritual work. It is hard enough, so very hard. Especially in here, dorm life is so loud it makes it hard to study, let alone practice meditation. But, then again, that's just another excuse, isn't it?

Truthfully, I guess I've actually been hiding behind all sorts of "excuses." Excuses that have resultantly placed my spiritual work far behind ALL the "nonessential" things in life.

I am a reincarnationist – I believe in the laws of cause and effect. However, I also believe in the law of Grace. So, I am finally beginning to see that there is indeed a reason I have been brought to this unit. Your note of inspiration and Bo's words in "Deep & Simple" have pushed me past feeling sorry for myself and assisted me in opening my eyes to the fact that this is just another stepping stone in the school of life on my way to spiritual enlightenment.

Thanks to both of you, Bo and Sita, for providing me with words I obviously needed to hear in order to open my own eyes in order to see exactly what I had already known in my heart yet remained blind to in my mind.

Bo, your words at the bottom of page 38 of Deep & Simple were written, unbeknown to you at the time, specifically for me to read. "Even if you serve forty years in prison in this life, you won't remember it in your next life. But you will be the product of how well or poorly you used your time." This passage hit home. It literally stopped my reading COLD! I have 32½ years left to serve on a forty year sentence. Thanks Bo! Thanks for

opening my eyes to the light in my own heart. May God Bless you eternally.

Until next time, Peace be unto you all.

G (Arizona)



Dear Bo & Sita,

You haven't heard from me since 1977, when I was at the Diagnostic Center. At that time another convict turned me on to a well-worn copy of Inside Out. [Inside Out is now called We're All Doing Time]. Using some of the tapes you sent, we started our own meditation class. Although it was only seven inmates, we had some powerful, wonderful experiences. Within a year we all transferred to different locations and the class was no more, but it was a huge success while it lasted.

I felt my spirit grow and I learned so much from you & Sita. But after being released somehow I began to backslide. And now here I am doing time again.

I thought about you two many times over the years. And you have had a profound effect on my life. In your eyes what you do may not seem so significant, but please believe me, you are shaking people's lives to the very core. I consider meeting you the most important event in my life. Without you I would still be lost in the grind.

I had lost hope of finding you again, when out of the blue I stumbled across a copy of We're All Doing Time. And after all the nickel-dime novels – what a breath of fresh air! Thank you so much for doing what you do. You've given so many of us that little push we need to get us on the right path.

Bo & Sita, before I close I would like to relate a little story to you about how powerful your work really is. It was Christmas 1977 and men were feeling low at the institution as is true at most prisons near Christmas. I'd been abandoned and didn't receive much mail – so when my name was called at mail call there was a little stir among the inmates. (The same inmates usually got mail over & over.) You and Sita had sent me a Christmas card – the

only one I received that year. I was awed that someone I barely knew would take the time to send a card. I was yelling the news to a friend several cells down and my next door neighbor overheard. Now my neighbor was a very notorious individual. 300 pounds of pure hate. He would make Freddy Kruger seem like John Boy Walton! Anyway, he overheard about the card and slyly began questioning me. He's like – "Hey man let me look at the card – I just want to see if I know them." I pass the card over – he studies it for a long time and says something about you're just a couple of weirdos. I told him about your books and tapes but he made it very clear he wasn't interested. He was not the kind of guy you push so I just let it go. News was all over the cell block about the card and it was passed around. Next day my book and tapes disappear while I'm on the yard. It was the first time in my life that it actually felt good to have something taken from me. A week later the book and tapes mysteriously reappeared on my bed. No one ever copped out to taking them, but sometimes late at night I could hear a very low chanting noise coming from Freddy Kruger's cell. And did that dude ever change! He actually started being nice to people. He eventually dropped his tough guy image and within the next year became more and more like a giant 300 pound lamb. What a drastic change. And it all began with a Christmas wish and a little card from Bo & Sita!

I know firsthand the power of your lessons and your advice. And after 20 years you're still at it. Thank God for brothers and sisters like Bo & Sita. It's great to see some of your material again. We're All Doing Time is Right On!

Gotta go for now. Please take care.

Love Always,

M (Georgia)



## UPDATING OUR PRISONER MAILING LIST!!!

Our postage costs have risen so much (over \$3,000/month, plus over \$4,500 for our last newsletter mailing), we need to cut down on as much waste as possible. Of the 35,000 prisoners who receive these newsletters, there may be thousands who no longer care to read them. So, this is a **BIG** clean-up. **If you want to keep receiving these newsletters, you MUST tear off this half of the page at the perforation, and return it to us before March 1st, 2000. Your mailing label (other side) must be included! Even if you are one of our closest friends, our computer will not know that, so please send this form back to us!**

Prison mail regulations have gotten much tighter lately, so be sure to note any changes we should make on your label (on the other side of this page) in order for you to receive your mail more reliably. Whenever you move, it would help us a lot if you would be so kind as to drop us a line and let us know. Uncle Sam is making a killing off of our return postage, and there are a lot better ways to spend our limited funds.

We will be receiving maybe 20,000 of these, so please don't ask anything that would require us to respond right now. It'll take us a few months to process all these replies. Just know that we love you and are always sending you our deepest blessings and prayers. Our next newsletter should arrive in April.

✂

## NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS

### FREE "Bhagavad-Gita" LESSONS

The International Gita Society now offers lessons on the "Bhagavad-Gita" to all prisoners. The Bhagavad-Gita is that famous chapter of the Mahabarat wherein Lord Krishna instructs the warrior Arjun in the deepest mysteries of Life and Spirit. Print your name and address clearly, and send a Self Addressed Stamped Envelope (SASE) directly to:

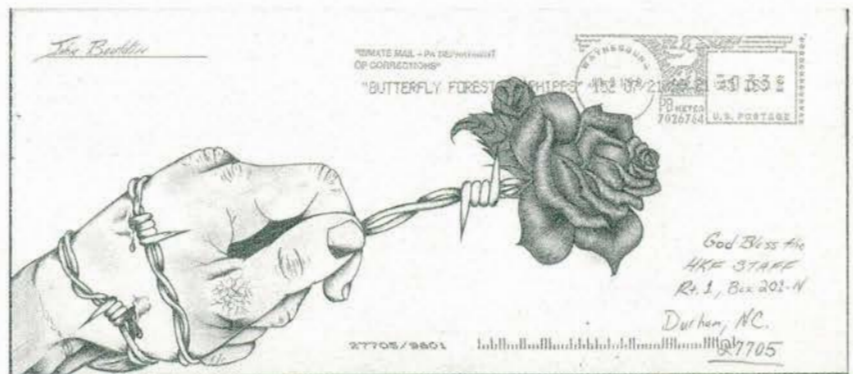
INTERNATIONAL GITA SOCIETY  
PO Box 2778  
Fremont, CA 94536-0778

### FLOODING IN NORTH CAROLINA

Lots of people have asked us if we were hit by the flooding in North Carolina. We were fortunate and did not have any flooding, though just two hours East of us was where the worst flooding took place. Our community spent a day helping them clean up, and hope to do more in the future. Please pray for those who were not as fortunate as we were.

### 2ND ANNUAL CORRECTIONS WORKER RETREAT

Our weekend retreat for prison workers in March 1999 was so well received, we were asked to make it an annual event. We are planning the 2nd annual retreat to be held in spring of 2000 (probably April). If you work in a correctional facility and are interested in attending, please contact us and we will send you more details once we determine a date. The retreat is free of charge (donations accepted but not required), and is a great opportunity to meet like-minded prison workers from all over the country and even further.



John Bouldin, Pennsylvania

a little good news

is a publication of the Human Kindness Foundation, which is non-profit and tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code. Donations and bequests are welcomed and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. All money goes directly to support HKF's work, helping us to continue producing and distributing free materials to prisoners and others, and sponsoring Bo Lozoff's free lectures & workshops and the other projects of the Foundation.

© 1999, Human Kindness Foundation

# Human Kindness Foundation

RR 1 Box 201-N  
Durham NC 27705  
[www.humankindness.org](http://www.humankindness.org)

*Sponsor of the Prison-Ashram Project*

Return Service Requested

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



recycled paper

**Updating our *PRISONER* mailing list: See other side of this page. YOU MUST REPLY TO STAY ON!**



**HAPPY HOLY DAYS FROM ALL OF US AT HUMAN KINDNESS FOUNDATION**