

# Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Spring 2002

## TRANSFORMATION: RICK'S STORY

*[Editor's Note:] This is the first in a series of interviews with people who have gone through tremendous spiritual change while in the prison system. We hope these stories will be powerful and inspiring in two ways: First, as a voice – however small – opposing the popular attitude that criminals will never change, and should be locked up forever; second, as a reminder of hope and encouragement to all of us who wonder whether our own transformation is possible. Josh Lozoff interviewed Rick, as he explains below:*

*[from Josh:] Rick Smith has served 21 years on a life-without-parole sentence in Alabama. During that time, he has gradually transformed from a self-centered, violent young killer, to a true elder in his prison community; one who has helped thousands of other cons get their lives together. Rick helps run a therapeutic community unit at Donaldson prison, leading classes on men's issues, psychology and spiritual growth. The prison authorities denied my request to interview Rick in person with a tape recorder, so he and I corresponded by mail over the course of several months. I have been personally very inspired by our exchange. Rick's story is a wonderful and powerful reminder that true change is possible.*

***Rick, what kind of guy were you when you went to prison? What were your values?***

I don't think I really had any values by the time I got locked up. Human life meant nothing to me, I was so hurt and angry about the way my life had turned out. Life just sucked... big time! The only thing important to me was getting high so that I could escape the pain. I was very, very immature, filled with self-pity. I partied a lot to take away the pain.

***Did you think about your future?***

Yes, although it was bizarre really, it seemed I was waiting for Santa Claus to come. I expected that someone would recognize my greatness and get me out of the mess I had made of my life, and then life would be happy ever after.

***And then?***

When Santa Claus didn't come I became dangerous. In my memory today, it's like I was two people. I could be kind and gentle to my family, and then walk out the door and kill. One night while sitting at the table stoned and drunk, I told my girlfriend "I need help." She said "What kind of help do you need," and I said "I don't know, but I need help bad."

***Can we talk a little about your crime?***

Well, a few days later on the coldest day of the year, I found myself sitting in my car lashing out at God. I was in a RAGE! It was like I was trying to blackmail God. I was so sick. I was sober and I could feel the full impact of all my pain. I can remember threatening God with killing someone – who, it didn't matter. I said to God, "You made me who and what I am, You can change me. You're God." Then I felt God telling me to go home, everything would be alright.

But instead of going home, I noticed a shoe store and went in. A lady came from the back and asked me what she could do for me. I told her to give me all her money, and she did. I told her to empty the cash register, and she did. Then I told her to lie down on the floor, and she did. But that didn't seem to suit me so I told her to get up and go in the back of the store. As she passed by me, I stabbed her with my knife, and I continued to stab her until she was dead. This period of time seemed surreal. It was as if time slowed down. When I came to, I was standing over her

and I'm tripping out about the violence I've done in a matter of seconds. And then I go out the door, walk to the car and sit there stunned.

Two days later I was arrested for capital murder and placed in jail with no bond. I sat in jail looking back at the horror of what I had done. I was so overwhelmed with guilt and shame. So much so that it didn't even occur to me that anyone in my family would come to jail to visit me. After all I am a "monster." When I was informed that I had visitors, I was shocked. I had not bathed and I looked exactly how I felt on the inside. My family looked at me and regarded me as the victim of the local authorities arresting anyone they could just to pin the murder on. To them, the man they knew could not have done such a thing.

Throughout the whole process, they showed immense courage. Even 21 years later, my heart breaks when I think of the negative effect I had on their lives. The ripple effect I had on so many lives in the community reaches deep in my heart today and keeps me sober, clean, nonviolent and very changed.

***What was your reaction when you heard your sentence?***

I was probably relieved, as strange as it sounds. And also numb. I couldn't grasp a life-without-parole sentence, it just doesn't sound real. I knew I had a shot of dope ready for me when I got back to my cell. The dope would help me get through it. It messed my family up, they were almost hysterical - you'd have thought I was sentenced to die. I guess they knew more about what life without parole meant than I did.

***Do you relate to the term "transformation?" Do you feel you've had one? More than one?***

Yes, I feel I've had one, I also feel it is a lifelong process.

***How did yours begin?***

In 1983, I tried to escape from Holman, which landed me in lock-up. There I hit my all time low. Believe me, it let all the air out of me to not get away from prison. My heart ached... I can remember saying to myself "there has got to be a better way" and a voice that was definitely not mine answering, *Yes. Are you ready?*



But then I forgot about it for awhile. Months later in lock up, I wanted to kill this other guy bad! I had a job in lock-up which put me in the hall each night. One night I went to the cell of a man who was known for his ability to make and keep knives in prison. I told him to give me a knife. But a true friend of mine two cells down yelled to the guy not to give it to me, that he would kick his ass. So the man didn't give me the knife, and I left fuming and angry. The next morning, before I had a chance to do anything more about it, I transferred out of that prison.

*Looking back, you now see God's grace in the voice you heard in lock-up, and being transferred before you could kill that dude. But when and how did you start becoming aware of a process of deep transformation?*

Well, arriving in lock-up in this prison, I met a prison legend. He became my first teacher and role model. He'd just arrived here himself from the federal system, where he'd learned yoga and meditation. His name was Buddy. He wrote out hatha yoga postures and explained breathing techniques to me.

The postures were difficult to me, but Buddy had a simple way of explaining things and I trusted him. He got at my life habits, from smoking to the amount of sweets in my diet to being overweight. He filled out my store orders and wouldn't let me order so much sugar products. I hated him for the "change" I would have to make.

*Do you feel, just by meeting Buddy, this "change" sort of happened to you, or were there some hard choices you had to make along the way?*

Well, even though changes were occurring in my life – meditation and yoga were making a big difference – I was depressed and was at a point of wanting to cash it all in. I didn't think I would get out of lock-up anytime soon. I was burnt out. I had spent over 3 years locked down since I was arrested.

Finally I got on the phone and told my mother that the big Segregation Board would meet in May around the 17th, and that if they didn't let me out of Seg I was going to take out whoever was standing in front of my cell when the door opened. Mother did something I wouldn't know about for many years. She called the warden, and begged him to give me a chance in population.

Well the board met, including the commissioner who'd told me that as long as he was in charge, I'd never be in population again! And the warden went against all the Montgomery officials and the commissioner. The board let the warden have his way, and Buddy and I both were released to population the next day. I had only served 9 months for escape. It was a miracle!

The first day I was in population I ran one mile. The area where they moved us was so "wide open" that it was like going free. I didn't sleep for about 3 days. Buddy and I had an effect on the area. No one had ever seen yoga before – it was so exotic. Men are very afraid of yoga, and the postures you perform in yoga are not the kind of physical poses you want to do in full view of prisoners – such as a posture with your butt in the air ☺!

Even though Buddy taught me yoga, when we went to population, he gradually returned to the behavior that made him a legend as a kingpin and a dope trafficker.

*That's what I mean by "choices." You say that Buddy returned to his old behavior. But it seems you continued this process of spiritual transformation. Did you just have a hunch that you were on to something better than your old way of life?*

The reason I stayed with the meditation, yoga, and running is the simple fact that I could feel a shift occurring. I didn't really know how to express it then, but I just knew that being disciplined felt good to me. Good habits take over and the negativity slips away – you starve it to death.

*How did your pals react to the changes you were making? Did you have people you could share your thoughts with?*

About a month after I got out of lock-up I met a man who helped me through so many stages of transformation. His name was Micheal Nicastro [now Arjun Nicastro, Program Director of Human Kindness Foundation] and we seemed to like each other right from the start. He'd also just gotten out of lock-up. We both liked to smoke pot and he became my workout partner.

*Was meeting another spiritual seeker like Arjun a coincidence, or were you consciously looking to associate with a different type of person than you would have several years earlier?*

Meeting Arjun was not a coincidence, it was a true miracle. I don't think I was consciously looking for a friend to go deeper with. We met and it was like there was something "deeper" there for both of us. We were adventurous, curious, and there was an easygoing nature to our relationship – I think we made contact with "trust" for the first time. I trusted Arjun and I think he did the same. Oh, it was scary, but even our fears, we could laugh about. Men in here

really have a hard time trusting each other. Even respect in here comes more out of fear than love.

*In 1999, when my mom and dad (Bo and Sita) and Arjun's wife, Janaki, got to step into the cell where you and Arjun spent seven long years opening up to each other, they were deeply moved by the history of that tiny, dark little cell. You both became real human beings in there. What are your personal spiritual practices now?*

I use the time I have alone with myself for meditation and reflection. I practice "mindfulness" daily and I have found great benefit from it. In this prison they feed the masses breakfast between 3 & 4 am. I do not eat breakfast, I use that time to sleep. To me, the body's meditation involves exercise. I do calisthenics and stretch and run.

At night I practice a discipline that is awesome in scope. It is called "Retrospect" and basically I reverse the day and as I go over my day mentally, I change the errors I made mentally and it clears the residue for me to head into the astral plane. Retrospect also makes me live differently during the day because I know I will be looking back at the day that night. I practice affirmations morning and night. I have a set of rosary beads that belonged to a real prayer warrior, a devout catholic nun. I use the beads to keep up with my affirmations in sets of 10. I also love to read inspirational literature – sacred scriptures and poetry, literature that makes me think about life.

*What were the hardest tests of your transformation?*

The hardest test for me has always been letting go of my "escape" agendas. When you have life without parole it's almost automatic that you think about leaving prison. It's just





there in the background like a ghost.

A couple of years ago, I went through a real rough period and I was spending about 3 hours a day in meditation and God took me through a dialogue about my escape fantasies. God has to speak to me like a convict or I will miss him. He shared with me that with his ability to run a whole universe and it be "perfect," did I really think he needed *me* to plot an escape? God pointed out that I need to totally "surrender" once and for all.

Another big thing for me several years ago was smoking pot - I didn't see anything wrong with it until it finally hit me. It was getting so I could smoke pot and it would bring me down. I was surprised when after several months, I really wasn't tempted with pot.

*You've already talked some about the effect your crime had on your family. It must be even harder - scarier maybe - to think about your victim and her family. But I imagine dealing with that has been part of your journey as well.*

It seems that guilt, shame and remorse is a process as well. When I first got locked up I couldn't really feel for anyone, even myself. After I got into treatment and therapy, I had the opportunity to open up my heart center and feel the terrible anguish of the horror of my actions, and the pain and suffering I have caused to so many people. I've been in treatment now seventeen years, and I still have moments when my heart goes through this tremendous aching. It wasn't until about 1996 that I came in contact with the massive amount of suffering to my victim's family. I hadn't been able to ingest the depth of my crimes to so many.

*How do you process those feelings, now that you have a deeper perspective in which to examine them?*

I lecture to the guys in this program every day. So I have the opportunity to use my crimes as a channel to show other men how to deal with their guilt and shame, how to accept working with remorse. The horror of my past is a tool for me to reach my peers. I use the pain of it all to probe, shock and bless others. I don't want to forget my past and what I've done. It keeps me clean, sober, and very humble. I know that but for the grace of God and the thousands of human beings sent to help me through all this, I would be nothing. The process to human being has been a lengthy journey for me.

*Do you feel you're able to make the world better from inside?*

Most certainly. The biggest service is example, especially with the young men in here. They need to see their elders with the right attitude. When men in here can see a fellow convict who is clean, sober, non-violent, and peaceful in his lifestyle, it gives them hope. Men in here will listen to you if you are not a hypocrite. You cannot speak about things if you are doing the things you speak against.

People in the free world do not seem to comprehend that almost all of these men will return to the streets one day. The real issues have to be looked at. I feel what I'm doing in here affects everything. Prisoners are just as important as any people on Earth. Since I can't do things for others who suffer across this planet, I can contribute to the area I'm related to the most. I can also meditate and pray and raise awareness about the suffering going on across the planet as well as the planet itself. I can share with these men that it's important to be related to the earth we live on and all people who live on it. There's so much work to do.

Caring about people takes a lot of time, energy and devotion.

The rewards are incredible though.

*Is service work a conscious and important aspect of your path?*

Service work to me is my path. Caring for others is a divine manifestation of our highest way of being related. To seek God and serve others is to have abundance. The fullness of a life devoted to others is bliss.

Oh, you have days that you get stressed out and you can burn out. That's why it's important to keep balance and know when to say "no" - my new job has to do with this. I've held many positions in this drug/alcohol treatment program. I was originally hired as a "clerk," then I ended up a staff-aide, and then a program coordinator, then they changed that name to "mentor." Now I'm Educational Coordinator. *Whatever* ☺!

*How's your relationship with the guards and other prison staff?*

I get along with C.O.s who are down on the floor with us "roving" and in the cubicles and gun towers. Some supervisors I respect and get along with. I have a strong relationship with most officers because I've been here so long. As far as the higher authorities, I don't have a lot of respect for them. We have yet to have a pro-treatment warden at this facility. We have graduations where they never come, we do not have their support. We are viewed as property and industry. But over the years I've had some great experiences with guards and other staff.

*For instance?*

Back in 1985-86 I had an officer who used to give me the blues about crossing the hall to get to my partner's cell. Years later I asked the officer why he was so hard on me. He said he knew I was only wanting to go to the other side of the block to get high. Since he knew I was trying to change, he wanted to help me the best way he knew how. By denying me passage, he also taught me self-control and tolerance. At the time, I wanted to blow a fuse, but I cannot see him today without grinning ☺.

Once at a banquet, one of the psychologists at Holman Prison told the crowd that many years earlier, he hated me so bad because of my attitude and how sick I was, that he'd actually had thoughts about bringing in a gun and shooting me! Then he spoke about me in a positive light that left the audience blown away. I wasn't even there. When I found out, I had no idea he felt that way.

I can remember officers in one block liking Arjun and me so well because of the Peace Advocacy they knew we promoted, that even when we did things wrong they seemed to cut us a lot of slack. One night after smoking dope, one officer came by and said, "Man, that smells pretty good, you need to get a hot rail before you get busted" and just grinned and walked away. We had a lot of experiences with officers that came out pretty cool because they could see that we were human beings. They treated us like humans. I've had officers come by during count and throw me snack cakes.

*Have you been involved in, or witness to, the spiritual transformations of other guys?*

Not many, but a few. I've seen some changes. But I've only seen a few go *real deep* and get serious about soul work. Most guys in here can do okay for awhile but then eventually the "script" kicks in and you are seeing the same guy you met to begin with.



**Will you ever get released?**

Yes, but when, only God knows.

**How do you know? If you believed you were going to die in prison, would that change any of your spiritual perspectives?**

Well, what I've discovered these past few years is that courage is indeed its own reward. I'm basically a coward; I have been all my life. The thing that offsets it is my recognition of that and my letting go. The life I lead today is all I know. I don't have a life apart from "The Life" that God has shown me. I trust God today, so my future is no longer in doubt. There are different ways my life can go, but I feel whichever way I go, I will go with God.

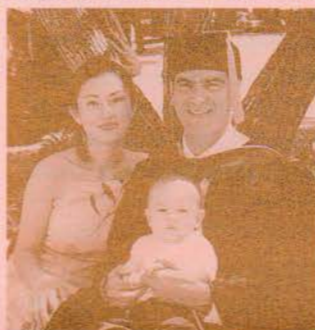
Of course, I have a preference to get out of here because I'm human. However, every day when I awaken to the Great Mystery, I find out how truly blessed Life can be, including life sentences without paroles. There are beautiful, wonderful human beings suffering on this planet today, and they did not kill anyone. They are suffering, yet committed no crimes. Who am I to not accept what my life has come to?

Arjun and I were in our cell meditating one night and I was in need of affirmation, and suddenly it was like God sent all the "wildlife" in the area around Donaldson to be outside our window and sing to us for the length of time we were sitting. It was clear that God was telling us we were loved, not forgotten. God is constantly showing us His/Her face each and every day. You just have to put on a pair of God-glasses to see it. ☺

## GOOD WORKS

### Another Ex-Con Tells Us His Success Story – Alan Mobley

Most of what we read in the news and hear on TV about ex-cons is negative, but I promise you life after prison is not all about hard knocks. I have been out of prison for seven years and finished parole two years ago. Each of these facts is cause for celebration and makes me something of a success story.



When I went in I was 24 years old and had a 45-year sentence, with life special parole. To say I had a bad attitude would be an understatement. Still, I decided that I should try to stay out of trouble because trouble would only make my situation worse. More than anything I wanted to survive. After about six months I figured that getting high made my time harder so I gave it up. Same with watching TV or going to any movies. Sports like handball and weight lifting gave me something to do and made my body feel good. They also helped relax my mind. My cell time was spent reading books. First I read novels but after a while my interests in other things began to grow. In federal prison they want you to work, so I got the easiest jobs I could find. I had plenty of time to goof around, but within a couple of years just hanging

with the fellas started to get old. I was lucky enough to be at a joint where college classes were offered and I enrolled. School kept me busy during the evenings and gave me something to do that I thought was valuable.

I became educated, but felt insecure about my lack of knowledge about most everything. I was accustomed to bluffing my way through life, acting tougher than I actually was and like I knew more than I really did. The strategy worked to keep most people away from me and I interpreted that space as a security zone. Defending my space and my image was pretty much a fulltime job, but still I suffered some defeats. The times that people called my bluff were embarrassing and sometimes painful, but I have to admit that they provided some of my greatest life lessons.

Perhaps the greatest lesson was that being real is easier, more fun and safer than trying to defend an image. I learned this through much pain and totally against my will. It happened during my seventh year when my entire world crumbled around me. When I got busted I lost most everything I valued, but that seventh year I lost the rest. My wife left me, the parole board gave me a Buck Rogers release date, and I noticed that my youth was gone. I felt that my present was intolerable and my future sucked. Thoughts of hatred, panic and paranoia filled my head and I thought I was losing my mind.

I found my way to the chapel. There was no way I was going to be weak and become religious or anything, but I heard about a meditation and yoga program taught by people from the street and I thought it might help relieve my stress. What can I say except that that stuff saved my life. The volunteers would come in each week and teach us to sit and watch our breath. I immediately felt a sense of peace and openness that rocked my world. I started to meditate daily, starting with five minutes or so and working my way up to a half-hour per day, and sometimes more. Meditation was like a lifeline for me in many ways. It helped me to learn about myself and taught me that I could free my mind from being stuck in negative thoughts.

In the next three years I finished a bachelor's degree and a master's. It was very hard to do, especially as there seemed to be as many forces set up to hinder me as to help me. After I had about 9½ years inside I saw the parole board again and still got no action. I felt desperation for the first time in a long time. But I wrote to the judge who sentenced me and asked for a sentence reduction. Considering my record and accomplishments, he gave me a break and I got an order for my immediate release. I enrolled in a Ph.D. program my first year out. School was obviously a lot different than the joint, but I managed to adapt all right. Today I am finishing my degree and soon I will be a professor. My research is all about helping prisoners and their families gain a voice in the world.

My advice to those inside: Until we can convince the world that prisons are unnecessary, those of us caught up in them have an obligation to do our best to make the most of our "time out." Prisons are tailor-made for spiritual journeys. I used to think that the noise and filth of prisons made them lousy places for concentration, but I now know that life on the outside is far more distracting. I learned to do easier time by not dwelling on the things lost to me while in prison and instead taking advantage of the opportunities some time apart offers. Use what's there to get closer to yourself and allow good things to happen. They will.



# LETTERS

Hello Bo & Sita,

I have been reading "We're All Doing Time" and I got to the letters. When I got to Mickey & Paul, it really helped me a whole lot. I was real depressed, but after reading, I felt much better.

I am 33 and have been incarcerated 13 years. The reason – a drug deal gone bad. I shot one person & critically injured two by running them over with my car. Luckily no one died. I was given 7 ½ - 15 years, which at the time (I was 20) I heard these words from the judge, it seemed like life.

You might ask why I am not out yet. You see, I don't like following orders, so I refuse to do what the C.O.'s tell me. I am constantly going to the hole, [then] get out to do the same thing all over.

But the good news is, as I've been reading "We're All Doing Time," I can feel changes taking place. For instance, here you have to stand for count. When they come to my cell, I tell them to go f— themselves, and basically, when they see it's me, they just keep going. But today they announced count, and I stood at the door. The C.O. said "You're standing for count?" and I said "Yes sir," and wished him a happy holiday. He said "What are you, sick or something?" I said "No, I'm just trying to change my ways," and he said he could see. And I told him about your book that I was reading.

And how about this, he was at one of your workshops you gave a while back and it really messed me up. He actually opened my cell, came in, sat down on my trunk and talked about meditation. He told me he meditates daily, sometimes 3 or 4 times a day. He asked do I believe in God, and I told him "I believe in a higher power than myself I choose to call Allah, so yes you could say I believe in God." And he asked me to pray with him. We held hands and we prayed, and tears just came out of my eyes. It was kinda embarrassing in front of another man, but this is my brother so it is ok. He told me "Well, I just wanted to share that with you."

Well, it's getting kinda late and I want to get this letter out to you.

Love always, your bother, H



[editor's note: The following letter is a good reminder that prisoners aren't the only ones working on their journey ....]

## The Whisper

As a correctional officer and a social worker, I have the unique opportunity to enter a peculiar world each day. It is an incredibly noisy place. The only way for young men and women to communicate is by constantly screaming over one another. Some inmates encourage violence, relying on intimidation and exploitation, while others try their best to remain anonymous and blend in with the institutional scenery. It is a bizarre place, entangled in regimented schedules, daily head counts, and endless boredom.

When I began my career as a correction officer, I saw those in my charge with a prejudiced and distasteful eye. I also let them know, full well how I felt about them by my attitude and judgements toward them. During this period, my only religion became an unwavering set of man-made rules, reinforced with the fear of immediate retribution if those rules were broken. This philosophy seemed to be effective at keeping me away from my charges, as well as their suffering and pain. After all, this had nothing to do with me – right? I was comfortable with who I had become and what I believed in.

Several years into my career, I heard what seemed to be a "whisper" of sorts from deep within myself. It was subtle and indiscernible at first, yet it was also a persistent voice beckoning me. This whisper made me feel uncomfortable with my secular "religion" and the way I viewed those I encountered each day in the jail. Its murmur seemed to encourage me to honestly look at myself and weigh out my actions and beliefs towards those I despised and felt no compassion for. This faint voice from within suggested that I risk going beyond my stiff-necked pride and contemptuous attitude and gaze upon myself in a totally

honest fashion. Crazy as it seemed, this whisper had asked me to move not further away but rather closer to the collective pain of those I loathed.

I tried my best to put this whisper to rest by relying on my ego that reassured me that I should ignore the voice. An ego that attempted to convince me that I had worked too hard to be accepted by my peers and earn the reputation of enforcer to risk losing it all now. In spite of this reassurance, the whisper continued and now invited me to see the pain, suffering, and yes – even the sin I shared with those around me.

That was over fifteen years ago and as I now reflect on this period of my life, I see how very blessed I am now to be faithful to a much different set of rules. Rules established by an individual who I had once turned my back on and someone who was also ostracized by society, imprisoned, and eventually sentenced to death. This individual is Jesus Christ and He is the one that I now aspire to emulate, in spite of the stumbling block of sin. Ironically, what I once believed to be an empty, violent, and Godless world proved to be without question – fertile ground for my own conversion! God used what I had despised the most (the inmate) to change my heart and bring me back to where I needed to be.



Artwork by Steven Czifra, California

This conversion experience, involving outcasts and their pain led me to become a certified substance abuse counselor and a licensed social worker. My dual experience as a correction officer and a social worker has helped me understand that these two roles are more alike and synergistic than I could have ever imagined. I stand convinced that Divine Grace exists in the most unlikely places, including our jails and prisons. There are two significant pieces of sacred scripture that I relate to regarding this experience. The first describes Jesus inviting Mary Magdalene to share a burden on her



heart and then offers her the forgiveness of His heavenly Father. The second portrays a son who leaves his family, squanders his wealth, realizes his poor decisions, and returns to a father who welcomes him back with open arms. I now know how this young man felt as he walked into the embrace of his father.

God has allowed me a unique opportunity to learn invaluable lessons from this concrete world and lessons that I can easily equate to the outside world. I've been fortunate enough to meet some of the most gifted inmate artists, musicians, writers, poets, and comedians behind the wall in which I work. Although many of these struggle with problems [like addiction and mental illness], they clearly exhibit to some degree the goodness we all possess from our Lord. It is still easy for me to pass judgement on others at times and I must always be conscious of this. Amidst all the noise, confusion, and distraction that saturate both worlds, there is always God's whisper for all people. We all possess the ability to share our personal healing gifts, such as those of the religious, the physician, the parent, and the social worker. We can all be healers in many different ways, if only we pay closer attention to the whisper of the Divine. Finally and without doubt, that gentle, loving, and sacred whisper never gives up on either the prisoner or any one of us.

Listen closely and pax vobis cum! E



Dear Bo and Sita,

I want to give you all at HKF my deepest and most heartfelt thanks for sending me a copy of We're All Doing Time. I really needed to read it when I did.

I'm serving a 45 year sentence for killing my fiancée and have been locked up for the past 14 years. About 1992 (5 years after my crime), I started hearing "voices"-namely my fiancée's- calling me a "killer" and telling me to end my life. Since '92, I've been housed in a mental health unit and have been "pumped down" w/ so many different meds I've lost track of them all (and for an 11-month period don't remember anything - total blackout). The voices became like a symphony about 6 months ago and have filled my every waking moment since then (not just a few hours a day or when feeling stressed as they had previously).

Two months ago, I resolved to kill myself. I gave away all my personal property (even my TV set which took me 2 years to save up for). I decided on a plan. I even wrote to a pastor and asked if he thought I'd "go to Hell" if I killed myself. He told me "No" and sent me a book about suicide from a fundamentalist Christian viewpoint which said I wouldn't go to Hell if I did it. Needless to say, that "cemented" my resolve, but a tiny, tiny voice inside of me said "Get another opinion." I ignored it for a couple days but it persisted; doubt about my "eternal destiny" crept in.

For some reason, as I was throwing away old papers, I came across a "Prisoner's Resource List" with addresses of various organizations. I was about to chuck it when I thought "I'll write to 7 addresses on the list for help. If I don't get a response or one I don't like, I can go ahead and get it over with - but MAYBE, just maybe, I'll get a different point of view concerning suicide." Out went 7 letters; one was to you. In fact, you are the ONLY one who responded to my letters (even good old Billy Graham didn't). You sent me "We're All Doing Time" and "Lineage & Other Stories."

I started with Doing Time. I read through from the intro. to the preface and thought "What kind of New Age bullshit is this?" I was going to chuck the book, but since I no longer had a TV or reading material, I decided to read it, just for something to do. I read through "The Big View" 4 times! I must say that the concept of karma scared the shit out of me! Here was the 2nd opinion the "tiny voice" told me to get: I wouldn't go to "Hell" if I killed myself (or to "Heaven," for that matter!) However I would create a serious "stash bag" of karma if I did it, and "the piper must be paid." I learned and meditated on so much in those first 21 pages. I continued to read (and re-read thrice) to the end of the book.

I need you to know - it made a difference in my life. There are no "coincidences" in life - everything happens for a purpose - I believe fully that God put you on my path, because He knew I was serious about killing myself, and you were my last hope. I prayed like never before after the "Getting Free" section - straight up, honest, no punches communion with God and actually did something else I've never done - I sat in silence for 4 hours listening in prayer - just being mindful of the inner quietness. After about 2 hours of

this, I started to feel a descending peace which gradually increased, from the body to mind. I started some of the meditations and yoga, especially breathing exercises, and incredibly the voices became a dull roar! As of today, they're manageable once again.

Each Sabbath (I'm a Messianic [Christian] Jew) I do "retreat" all day long. What a blessing to not have a TV! I also keep busy as a mentor in the cellblock orientation program and teach computers in the afternoon. I've switched to the 'common fare' menu - a vegetarian meal offered for people who don't eat meat - I am feeling much healthier now. I think I'm the only 6'3" 280 lb. vegan in the prison. I have been doing lots of reading - my "escape" from these walls.

Needless to say, suicide isn't a viable option at this time. I'll continue to "fight the good fight of faith," and pray for the best. I still hate myself for killing the only person I've ever loved and I think of her every day, even though she died 14 years ago. I miss her terribly and pray that one day I'll see her again.

In closing I'd like to share a meditation by the Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem M. Schneerson (a Chasidic Jewish leader).

#### The Aura

Each of us builds our own prison or our own palace.

Every conscious thought, every utterance of our lips, every interaction of ours with the world leaves its imprint upon an aura that surrounds each of us and stays with us wherever we go. All life, all blessing, all that is transmitted from Above must pass through that aura. Even if it be the greatest of blessings, the aura may distort it into an ugly noise. Or it may resonate and amplify it even more.

An aura of beauty attracts beauty. An aura of love attracts love. An aura of life and joy attracts unbounded light.

Only you are the master of that aura.

Only you have the permission and the power at any time to transform your thoughts from the ugly to the beautiful, your words from bitter to sweet, your deeds from death to life.

And so too, your entire world.

Clear skies, S





## NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS

### FREE RETREAT FOR EX-CONS AND CORRECTIONS WORKERS & VOLUNTEERS

Every year the Human Kindness Foundation tries to sponsor free weekend retreats for ex-cons and corrections workers & volunteers. This year we will do it slightly differently – instead of having a separate retreat for each, we will hold two weekend retreats open to anyone fitting any of those categories: Ex-cons, prison staff, or corrections volunteers. The two weekends to choose from are June 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>, and June 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup>. They will probably be an interesting and unique mix of people!

If you are interested in attending one of the retreats, contact us for more details and let us know how you qualify. Please do not plan to show up unless you have reserved a place ahead of time. We look forward to seeing you!

### UPDATE ON BO

By the time you read this, Bo Lozoff and another of our staff members, Shabari Ma, will be in their eighth month of silence. They send their blessings to you all and they hope you will keep them in your prayers. Bo also spends one week per month in solitude and retreat. He and Shabari are both doing fine and learning much, as are we all. Their period of silence will end in September.

### 100-DAY NOBLE SILENCE PROGRAM

Free Dharma instructions (meditation, Buddhist spirituality) are available for anyone in or out of prison, and to institutions anywhere in the USA or Canada. This is NOT a Book, but rather instructions. For more information, call 904-782-1069 and ask for Ted, or write:

Dharma Instructions  
5725 NW 237 Terrace  
Lawtey FL 32058

### KARMA BOOK STILL AVAILABLE TO PRISONERS

Larson Publications has funding to send out more free Karma books. The book *What Is Karma?* by Paul Brunton, is being offered free to prisoners in the US and Canada. The book is a positive view of karma: What karma is, how it works, its relation to forgiveness and freedom, and how to get it working for you. (Please check your regulations to make sure you can receive the book. Also, be sure to tell them about any special requirements, and include your ID#.) Write:

Larson Publications, Dept K  
4936 Route 414  
Burdett, NY 14818

### RESEARCH STUDY

A research study concerning stress caused by going from the free world culture to the prison culture is looking for people who are:

1) **First-Time** inmates 2) at a **Medium, Maximum or Super-Maximum** security State or Federal Institution, 3) with **six months or less** time served so far.

The research study is being done by an inmate in Iowa, working towards a Doctorate.

The survey will take approximately 30 – 45 minutes of your time. A self-addressed, stamped envelope will be provided, and all responses will be strictly confidential.

If you meet all three requirements and are interested in participating, please send a postcard or letter with your name, number and complete address **no later than July 10, 2002** to:

Psychological Research Associates  
PO Box 1002  
Bolivar, MO 65613-1002



Artwork by Dino Weiss, Florida

*a little good news*

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