

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Spring 2003

THE REAL DEAL

Dear Family,
It seems from your letters that many of you have been waiting for me to come out of silence and get back to being the old Bo with lots of words to share. It's ironic how life unfolds. You and I have been supporting each other's spiritual journeys for a long time now, praying for deep change in ourselves. Yet when *really* deep change takes place, we may resist it and say "come on, get back to 'normal' already!"

I do seem to have changed a lot from the past two years of silence and solitude. I don't know when or IF I will be the "old Bo" with lots of words, lectures, books, tapes. I offered my life to God, and God seems to be calling me away from that sort of teaching for the time being. I'm not abandoning you, I'm doing the same thing I have always done and encouraged you to do: Keep following the spiritual journey and dedicate that journey to the common good. That hasn't changed, I promise.

My first forty-day retreat, from September 2nd to October 12th, 2001, was more intense and confusing than any other time of my life. When I came out of retreat and heard about 9/11 and watched the fanatic hostility of our country's *response* to 9/11, I realized the whole world was in an intense and confusing period, especially my own country. So why should I expect to be exempt?

The spiritual journey is not an escape from the world. The great masters, saints, the Messiah, come into this world, suffer along with us, and show us how we can respond when times are crazy, cruel, sad or unfair. The gifts of Spirit they give us have never resulted in political peace or social stability, but rather a personal, *internal* peace that "surpasses understanding." Life is hard and uncertain right now for most people on the planet. So if my own life is hard and uncertain too, that's okay with me. I can work with it. How about you? Can you "suffer hard times gracefully?"

My old friend Stephen Levine uses an image of "soft belly." We can go through hard times with a soft belly, a sense of humility and acceptance, without throwing up walls of rejection and resistance and fear. And we can use our rough times to strengthen our compassion for the world, for everyone who is also having rough times.

You may ask, what distinguishes this state from a passive acceptance of depression or despair? Love. Love is

always the key to the spiritual journey. To be in love with God, with God's mysteries, God's power, God's love, God's laws, even God's many apparent cruelties. As most of us have discovered, being in love does not necessarily mean we feel happy all the time. One of my favorite Bob Dylan lines, from *Buckets of Rain*, is "Everything about you is bringing me misery!" That's definitely part of love, especially when we love God! Read the lives of the great saints, especially in the Christian tradition. Misery upon misery, pain upon pain, but underneath, a Love that purifies, consoles and heals.

So I think it is love that makes the difference. I think many people these days, in the onslaught of daily chores, pressures and fears, have lost love. It has slipped away. So when they get depressed or unhappy, there is nothing underneath it to help them endure. But Love endures. We all have the capacity to love something. Find out what you love at your very core, and don't let it slip away. Hard times are hard, it is a drag to be unhappy, but it is not the end of the world. Love endures. We can endure.

And that's basically what I am doing these days. This is not a happy period for me and not a social time. But I have not gone off on a detour. My path just seems to have changed a great deal, at least for the moment.

My days are spent in supportive tasks – milking the cow, cutting firewood, fixing vehicles, plowing gardens, keeping our computers running so you can receive our books and tapes, etc. I work hard, I meditate, pray, chant and sing a couple hours a day, and wait for God's further leading. Waiting is not fun, but it humbles the arrogant spirit. It quiets the mind.

So I am still here, still your friend, your brother on the radical spiritual journey, but I'm not spinning out new combinations of words all the time. The star of the show should always be God, Life, The Journey, Dharma, or whatever you wish to call that single idea or reality that makes EVERYTHING else worthwhile. If we bring ourselves and others closer to constant awareness of that central loving force, then our lives are not wasted. If we do *not* bring ourselves or others closer to that awareness, our lives are wasted. It doesn't matter how popular we are or how wealthy or how busy. Nothing else matters. I'm still here with you, breaking new ground together. Hang in there with me, okay? I love you very much.

Bo

PRACTICE

“Anyway”

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

Honesty and frankness may make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.

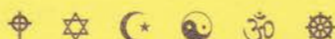
What you spent years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you help them. Help them anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you may get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you've got anyway!

Sign on the wall of Shishu Bhavan-
Mother Teresa's children's home in Calcutta



How Nelson Mandela Did His Time

The following is a passage from Nelson Mandela's biography, Mandela. This is the advice he gave his wife, Winnie, about how to use her upcoming jail time. You may already know that Nelson Mandela spent twenty-seven years in prison before becoming President of his country. We feel this seasoned advice to his loved one fits perfectly in our "Practice" section, because he practiced this for all those years he spent inside.

“You may find that the cell is an ideal place to get to know yourself, to search realistically and regularly the process of your own mind and feelings. In judging our progress as individuals we tend to focus on external factors such as one's social position, influence and popularity, wealth and standard of education...but internal factors may be even more crucial in assessing one's development as a human being: honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, purity, generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve your fellow men – qualities within the reach of every soul – are the foundations of one's spiritual life.... At least, if nothing else, the cell gives you the opportunity to look daily into your entire conduct to overcome the bad and develop whatever is good in you. Regular meditation, say of about fifteen minutes a day before you turn in, can be very fruitful in this regard. You may find it difficult at first to pinpoint the negative factors in your life, but the tenth attempt may reap rich rewards. Never forget that a saint is a sinner who keeps on trying.”

— Nelson Mandela



GOOD WORKS Interview with Marietta Jaeger Lane

Ms. Lane's seven-year old daughter was kidnapped and murdered in 1973. She worked toward forgiveness of her child's killer and has visited prisons speaking about her experience and offering inspiring words to those she sees. She is on the board of Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation. We reprint this interview from Compassion, a magazine written by death row inmates.



Your struggle to come to forgiveness must have been very difficult. Was there one particular thing that contributed most to that end?

My struggle to come to forgiveness was indeed very difficult; it took daily, diligent discipline. I'd have to say that my foremost motivation was wanting to live out my Catholic-Christian faith with integrity, and to do that meant that I was accountable to God to practice forgiveness. But we are human beings, creatures of time and space, and it takes time and space to heal, so forgiveness did not happen overnight. I had to start with giving God permission to change my heart because I couldn't do it by myself, and I believe in a God who never violates the gift of free will. Then I had to cooperate in all the ways I could—by reminding myself daily that my faith tells me that the kidnapper of my daughter was just as precious to God as she was, by speaking of him with respectful and not derogatory terms, and praying for him daily, genuinely trying to want him to experience God loving and blessing him.

What would you say to murder victims' family members to help them with the struggles they face?

I often speak to murder victims' families and I always start by telling them that in the beginning I wanted to kill the kidnapper myself, but, although I struggled with it, the bottom line for me was what my faith called me to (forgiveness) and my own knowledge that hatred was not healthy. I also tell them that in the 25-plus years I've been working with folks like them, I've seen repeatedly that people who retain a vindictive mindset, however justified they feel, only end up giving the offender another victim—themselves. Healing only comes with letting go of the rage and desire for revenge. But, I also tell them that forgiveness takes time and that God will be faithful to them if they start to work towards it. God was willing to wait a million years for the dinosaurs to finish eating the leaves off the trees before He ever brought us humans on the scene: He has patience aplenty to wait for and work with us if we're trying to do what's right and life-giving, for victim and offender alike.

What would you say to those wrongly convicted death-row prisoners to help them face their struggles?

I find it terribly difficult to think about the inconsolable angst of wrongly convicted death-row prisoners. I know the helplessness I felt. I, through my daughter's horrible death, was victimized by a person; they are victimized by the "system." Years of their lives have been stolen from them and just as I will never see my daughter again in this world, they will never regain those years taken from them. I can certainly understand their anger and bitterness; I've known those feelings too. And, just as it seems that the kidnapper had control over me, so, too, does it seem that the "system" has control over them. But it can never own their souls, their spirits, the places where we can always be free, whatever our external circumstances, if they do not let "them" fill their very beings with hate. If they do, the system will have won; the system's treatment of them will have determined their response. But if they choose not to have their feelings determined by others' behavior, if they choose not to have their psychic energy drained from them by negative feelings, and instead use their free will to choose for themselves what will be most life-giving to them—faith, hope, civility, moral behavior and forgiveness; they will retain their own inmost power and they will survive with human hearts still capable of friendship, trust, love, understanding and compassion. They will be mentors, mediators, life-givers and lifesavers in the cruel, mean and brutal barbed-wire existence of prison.

To those who are facing death for crimes they committed, what words could you offer to help them?

Also, as a woman of faith, I would be remiss if I did not remind that God is crazy about each and every one of us, no matter who we are or what we've ever done, and that if we call out to God, He will hear our prayers and be faithful to come to our aid in ways we might never have realized. Our spirits, the place where the Divine Life dwells within us, will triumph and God will be our recompense. We will find that we will have gained far more than we have lost. That is my own inexorable experience; that is what God wants to do for all of us! But God needs our genuine faith in the God we need in order *to be* the God we need. Not that God can't be a totally, all-powerful God, but again, God will not renege on the freedom all creation is given as a free gift. God gives us the right to choose; our faith is the key to the reality we seek. We need to believe in a God we cannot feel, we cannot hear, we cannot understand. We need to believe, not in a God who is "out to get us if we're bad" but in a God who is grieving with us and for us, a God who wants joy and gladness and blessing for us no matter what seems to be happening to us. That is what faith is. It's a tough order, but we will not be disappointed. But all of this takes discipline, daily, diligent discipline and prayer, too. In that sense, in a perverse sort of way, persons on Death Row are blessed. They have the time to practice that discipline, and pray those prayers. And, God will not fail them or forsake them! Many of us on the outside work constantly to abolish capital punishment, but even if their physical lives are taken from them, as horrible and scandalous as that is, their spirits will live for all eternity, in a place of peace, joy and freedom.

LETTERS

Dearest Sita,

I have been rereading Bo's book *Deep and Simple* for the last several days. I have read it a couple of times before and I thought it was pretty good but this time it has been like rereading a piece of literature I read as a teenager. This time I'm "getting it" at a far deeper level. The pain of the last several months and the Grace of God are definitely clarifying my understanding of the spiritual journey. During this time while Bo is not teaching, I feel he has given us a gentle reassurance and powerful reminder: God will never abandon us. There is "One Great Reality which hasn't the slightest imperfection or disappointment or confusion." And we are dead wrong if we think it's going to be easy on this journey. No way around the pain—only through it. And the only way through it is with absolute faith and absolute love for others.

Love, K



To whomever may be interested,

I want to say thank you for a certain practice in *Deep & Simple*, regarding how to go about your day.

I ran into some serious trouble here in prison, which I had absolutely no way out of. Nothing to do, nothing to say. All night I was wondering how to go about the situation 'til I finally decided to pick up *Deep & Simple*. I ran into a practice (pg. 165, *Practicing the presence of GOD*). It shows you how to remind yourself all through the day that GOD is with you. So in the morning, when it was time to face the "trouble," which I was absolutely sure was going to turn sour, I went ahead and repeated the "practice" before I stepped out of my cell. To my big overwhelming surprise, it was all a big misunderstanding. I could've sworn it was a done deal. After confronting the so-called trouble, I looked up to the sky and thanked the LORD.

To this day, I constantly remind myself of the LORD'S presence. And I feel a major change in my attitude. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely yours, HR



Drawing by Christopher Reid, North Dartmouth, MA



Bo,

First I wanna say that I think what you and Sita are doing is a good thing mostly. It is not my thing (I don't even try it), but some people in this world just need somewhere or something to lay all their bullshit. I am doing a four-year bit (it ain't nuthin and I ain't whining) and I have been in the hole for 112 days now with no end in sight for mutual combat. Someone sent me your book *We're All Doing Time* and I read it. I am an ex- Hell's Angel (out in good standing) and have been through some heavy shit believe me. I just want to say your sympathy for child molesters is a waste of your time. I treat them like shit every chance I get and they deserve it. Children are the only true innocents in this world. Joe on page 222 is a piece of shit. Fuck him and fuck you.

T

Hey T,

Nice to meet you (I guess, even after you ended your letter with "fuck you...").

I do understand the "fuck you," and in friendship I throw it back at ya — fuck you, too. You sound like a tough guy, and so am I — in fact, I'm tough enough to take the heat of all the tough guys who think child molesters are a piece of shit. A HUGE percentage of those pieces of shit were innocent children who were molested themselves. So you have sympathy for the children, but not for who they become after such a terrible thing happens to them?

The main thing is, T, I'm old and gray and have been around long enough to see many pieces of shit become extremely good, decent people. So what can I do? I'm stuck with the wisdom of my own life-experience — I know people are basically decent deep inside, and I don't have a crystal ball to see which ones are going to make that

change and which ones won't. So I treat everyone with respect. Not bull-shit, bleeding-heart liberal candy-ass pampering, but just the respect that says "somewhere in there is a good, strong person, and I greet you there." That's all. I obviously wouldn't allow a child to get molested. If I knew it in advance; I'd do WHATEVER NECESSARY to stop the offender, just like you would. But when that person is safely locked up and reaches out for help and friendship, what can I do?

That's my job. Just like responding in friendship to a biker who signs off, "fuck you."

It's still good to know you, brother,

Bo (another old biker)

Bo, I received your letter today. I can't say it changed the way I feel about child molesters, but your points are well taken. I must say, I do enjoy reading some of your material, and I look forward to seeing your other books. I don't claim to have the wisdom that you possess. I guess my hang-up about child molesters is something that I and they will have to deal with.

With respect, T

PS: I would think that someone who was a victim of child abuse would not want anyone else to suffer it. I was, and I wish it on no one.



Dear Bo & HKF,

When I first sent for your books, I never realized what a difference would come into my life. No, nothing mystical, magical, no harps or inner peace (yet...). No, what happened was that I found your work to be so sincere, so absolutely compassionate, I was moved to tears time and time again.

I never imagined anyone could really care for me, a murderer, or really want my time to be anything other than punitive. The first info I got from you had a note handwritten across the top, "Your books are on the way, J. ♥." When I saw that scrawl and went on to read the info, for the first time I actually was looking forward to something here. That info along with the note was a turning point.

I received the books and read them, piece by piece. I felt a deep dark hole in my soul being spoken to. Your inter-faith view of

the world was refreshing and your techniques and explanations brought my dreams and hopes back.

I am at a loss for words to convey my thanks. ♥. You have renewed my hope that the future holds good things along with the struggles.

Your friend, J



Dear Bo,

It took ten years in prison for me to begin to understand how people face life. And it has taken two years beyond my release to understand that those incarcerated are not the only ones susceptible to this way of thinking.

Most of us seem to face life in one of three ways: escape reality, endure reality, or embrace reality.

I've known the guys who refuse to wake up and face their environment, face themselves or face the big picture. Daily they lose themselves in card games, T V, radio or tall tales. They escape reality.

I've known the guys who seem to have a more active role in prison life, but they are always complaining. The food is lousy. Their detail stinks. Inspections are too long. Yard calls are too short. They are miserable and make sure everyone within earshot shares the misery. They endure reality. They are the guys you hope don't share a chow hall table with you; the guys you hope don't get assigned to the same detail you have; the guys you hope the captain of your yard-ball team doesn't pick, no matter how good they are.

And, finally, I've known the rare few who, at first glance, seem to be a bit off. You may even think they enjoy being in prison. They speak. They smile. They don't have to put others down in order to feel good about themselves. Rarely do you hear them complain. They embrace reality. Not that it's all good, or all right. But they seem to have a way of squeezing some good out of the worst situations. They seem to realize that life is a gift and each day comes but once.

As I said, I became aware of these ways of relating to the world while I was in prison, but now that I have my physical freedom, I see that inmates are not the only ones who relate to

life in these three ways. The tactics may be different, but the over all philosophy is the same.

Escape—whether it's cards, television, headphones, tall tales, or drugs, work, [food], sex, _____ (fill in the blank), it still can be considered escape.

Endure—whether it's food, the detail, inspections, yard call, or whether it's home life, a job, a bad relationship, _____ (again, what might yours be?), it is still only endured.

Embrace—living in the moment, finding the silver lining, getting the most out of every day and giving the best to that day.

I choose to embrace. I didn't enjoy prison, and, quite frankly, freedom with a prison record can be overwhelming at times. But I refuse to escape. I refuse to simply endure. I'm alive, and I plan to make the most of life. I've finally learned that when all the choices of life seem to be out of reach, I can still choose how I will respond. That choice can't be taken away.

I hope this is worth reading by others.

S



[editor's note: The next letter is from a young man who spent eight straight years in a lockdown cell, and then was put in population for a short time but could not adjust. Bo wrote to him during the years when D. felt that the solitude might make him insane.]

Hey Big Brother,

"Love all of it or none of it, and stop

complaining." I love that quote! Big Brother, you can stop worrying about me ever going wiggly; that's no longer an issue in my life. Solitude is no longer an ugly word for me, or ugly place. It is part of my journey, a journey that will help me to "love all of it."

So please know, that I am focused and with both feet firm on my path, ready to deal with the good & bad of my journey. I will pray for you and the adjustment you are facing in your own life. You are not alone!

Do me a favor, next time you milk that cow, drive that tractor, or do carpentry, or kiss a baby, do it with my love of it! You tell that cow I love it, drive the tractor an extra mile, hammer that nail with my strength, and kiss that baby on the other cheek for me! Love you, bro!

The Temporary Hermit, D



Dear Friends at HKF,

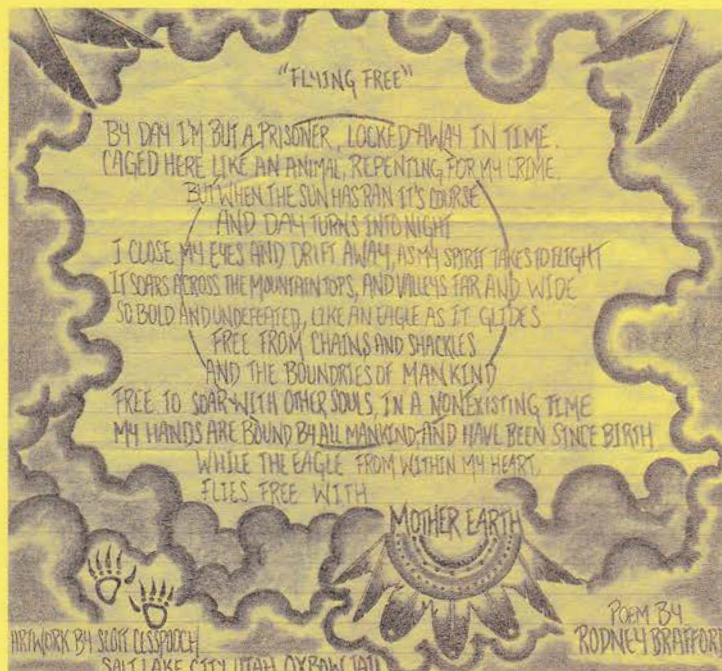
I first came in contact with Bo's writings in the Alabama prison system in 1988. Unfortunately I wasn't ready to change my path. It was my first time down and after 22 months I was out and back to my old tricks.

That led me to Texas, where I've been since 1992. I was lucky enough to run up on your newsletter and you have been a constant source of hope and support. You have become my surrogate family so I'm never alone. I don't expect to ever be out from behind these walls but I am freer in spirit than ever before. THANK YOU!

Give Bo my love. I took a day of silence to see what it's like. It's wonderful but awful hard to do here. You are all in my prayers. God bless you all with more of this peace and love you have shared with us all for so many years.

I don't write very often because I don't want to be a burden when your books and newsletter give me all the answers. It's just up to me to figure out the right questions!

Love and Peace, D



NEWS, NOTES, AND OFFERINGS

THE PASSING OF OUR 'BEAUTIFUL NEIGHBOR'

Many of you may be surprised to learn that Fred Rogers, the beloved "Mister Rogers" who died in February, was one of our most enthusiastic supporters and a dear friend of our community. Fred Rogers was one of the most loving and unselfish people we have ever had the good fortune to know, and a tireless activist for children's rights and for the kind of television programming that would help young minds grow strong and free instead of warped by greed and violence.



For many years, Fred bought every one of our books and tapes as soon as they were released, and quoted Bo in his public talks and television interviews. He firmly shared our views about simple living – he drove an old car, bought his clothes at the thrift shop, and lived very modestly with his wife, Joanne, and their family. He agreed that everyone deserves love and respect no matter what they had done. He was an ordained minister who also believed very strongly in interfaith friendship and understanding.

Fred had many conversations with Bo & Sita through the years, about prison work and the effects of incarceration on children, about general principles of child raising and education and many other topics that have influenced our work significantly. In a recent magazine interview, Fred was asked who his heroes have been, and we were deeply moved that he included Bo on that list. Well, Fred, you are on *our* list of all-time heroes – a dedicated, courageous and compassionate man who spent your entire lifetime spreading love and goodwill against the formidable challenge of high-tech greed and consumerism. Fred, we miss you and love you! May you be blessed!

OUR OWN BOOK TITLE CONTEST

Many thousands of people have loved Bo's *Just Another Spiritual Book* since it was first published in 1990. Some of our close friends even feel it may be his best book. The board of directors at Human Kindness Foundation is finally ready to take the advice of many of those readers, and give the book a more dignified title for its future printings. Bo may also do a little bit of editing, general tinkering with it, maybe a new introduction, but it will remain mostly the same book. We have scratched our heads for a new title, and it occurred to us that maybe one of you in our larger family may come up with something "just right."

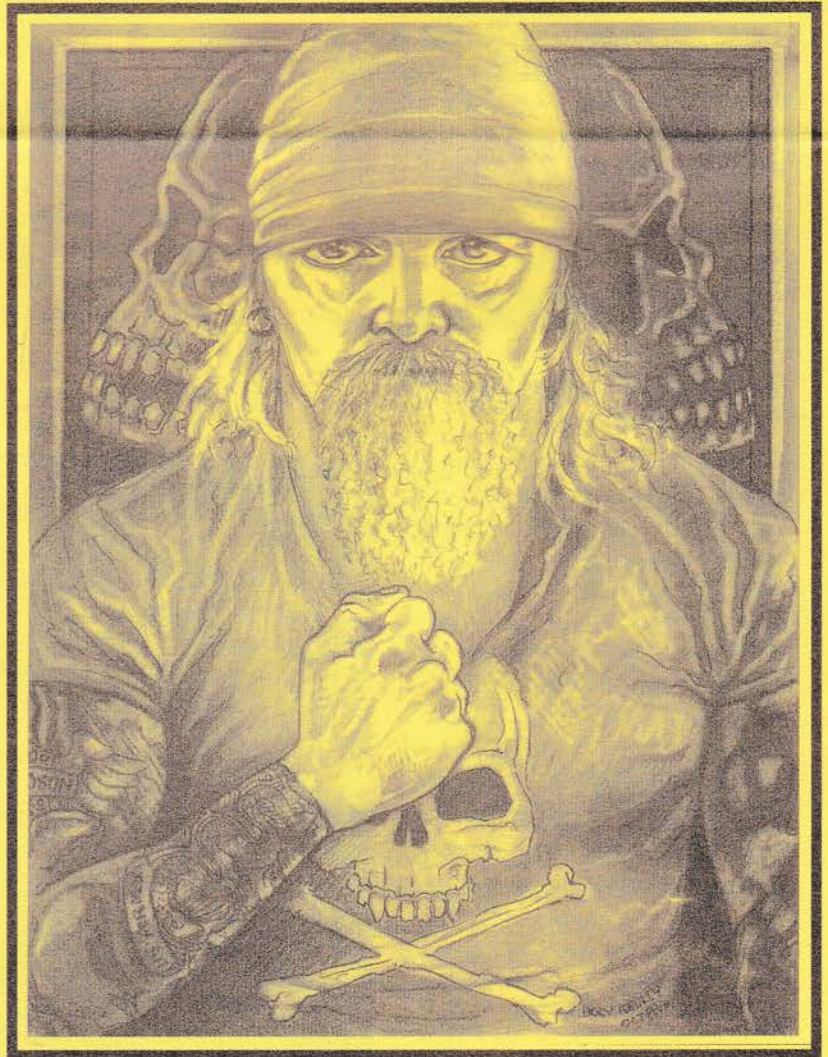
So this is an official book-naming contest. The winner will receive a signed copy of the very first book off the presses with the new title and cover, plus one of our "Be Love" t-shirts. If you are an artist and wish to include a rough sketch of the cover art you feel suits your title, please enclose it so long as you don't need it returned.

Of course, you should be familiar with the book in order to suggest a title. If you have not yet read it, just write us at our regular address for a copy (free to prisoners, \$12 + \$4 shipping to others).

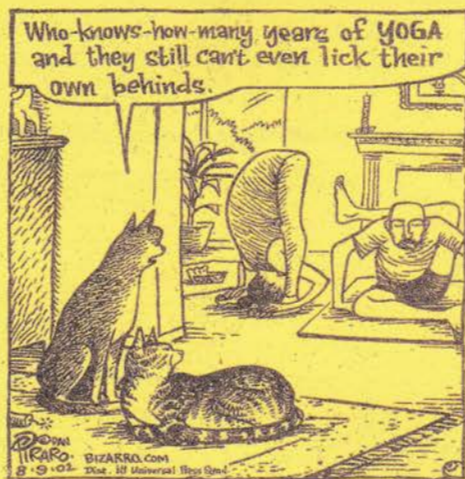
All entries must be received by us no later than July 15th 2003, and must be addressed as follows:

**Title Contest/HKF
PO Box 61619,
Durham NC 27715**

Entries must contain no other letters or requests, please! We will not be able to reply except to the one we choose as the winner.



Self-Portrait, Kelly Stewart, Portland Oregon



EXPANDED HKF CATALOG NOW ONLINE

Nonprofit organizations around the country have noticed a significant drop in donations since 9/11, and we are no exception. In fact, combined with Bo's year of silence, the drop has been drastic enough to motivate us to become more self-supporting so that we are not so overwhelmingly reliant on donations.

Toward that end, we have expanded our catalog and put it on line with the ability to take credit cards, etc. Our catalog page of the www.humankindness.org website now offers more books, tapes, cd's and videos than we have in the past, and ALSO other items that our community holds dear to its heart: Incense, t-shirts, juggling sacks, beautiful bows and arrows made by family businesses, and artwork and stained glass creations by our own resident artists.

Please check out our catalog when you have gifts to buy. We enthusiastically recommend every item we carry. If we don't love it, we won't sell it. *[Other than our own books and tapes, please understand that we cannot afford to send catalog items free to prisoners.]*

ART & WRITING FORUM FOR INMATES

Create Me Free is a free program for all imprisoned artists & writers to express themselves, explore ideas and artistic techniques and gain an audience for their work (there is no compensation). Create Me Free considers art to be a tool for growth and a way of raising public awareness of the issues which are relevant to prison life. Create Me Free produces a quarterly magazine of art and ideas. For more information or to contribute artwork (you will not receive the artwork back), write to:

Create Me Free
PO Box 26044
Tucson AZ 85726-6044

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

It's time again for our annual weekend retreat open to anyone fitting any of the following categories: Ex-cons, prison staff, or corrections volunteers. The date is set for June 20th to 22nd, 2003.

If you are interested in attending the retreat, 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!

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 write:

Dharma Instructions, NFPP
23611 NE SR26
Melrose FL 32666

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



Envelope Art by James Russell, Somerset, Pennsylvania

a little good news

is a publication of 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 and workshops and the other projects of the Foundation.

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Photo by Bill Wagner

OPEN AND CLOSING CELL DOOR

*Cell door makes magic melody
When I'm waiting to exit*

*Cell door clangs discordant cacophony
When I'm trying to sleep*

*But when I am just being
So is the cell door*

Poem by Doug Ankney, Pound, Virginia