

Human Kindness Foundation

A Little Good News

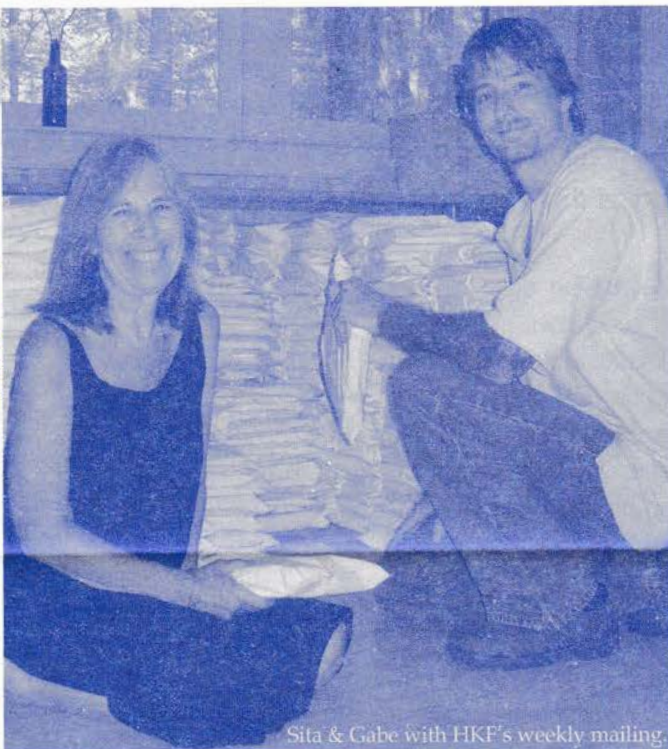
Fall 2011

GABE: "I JUST GOT HERE"

In spring 2005, Sita Lozoff and Josh Lozoff went to Northeast Correctional Complex in Mountain City, Tennessee to interview James Shute for the transformation series of our newsletter. James, now called Gabe, was in prison for murder, committed while he was a 19 year old drug addict. He described himself at 19 as "selfish and very immature. If there wasn't nothing in it for me, I wouldn't do it. I was very, very selfish. When I'd steal stuff from people, I always convinced myself that they owed me."

Gabe became spiritually transformed by using Bo's books in a deep and serious way. The first time he saw *We're All Doing Time*, he felt that "here are some crying convicts, just crying because they can't do their time," and he threw the book in a box. A few months later, he started noticing that even though he wasn't using drugs, he hadn't changed. He was still acting like his friends who were addicted, and he realized that he wanted something different. He picked up *We're All Doing Time* again, and started meditating. "I didn't understand meditating, but I knew there was something to it. It just felt good, even though it didn't make sense."

The letters section of *We're All Doing Time* became Gabe's favorite place to look for help. "Any time I have a problem, I go and look at those letters, I can relate whatever my problem is to one letter or another. Bo will say something that just makes sense — that'll make me able to handle it." Friends started noticing — and respecting — the change in Gabe. He said in the 2005 interview: "I always felt I was given a second chance at life, but wasn't sure what to do or



Sita & Gabe with HKF's weekly mailing.

how to go about it until Bo reminded me. And having hated myself and my life and praying every night to not wake up or to get some terrible disease, now it just feels good to be alive, relieved that life wasn't what I thought—that there really is more. I wake up and fall asleep saying thank you. All through the day I can't tell you how many times I just say thank you."

After 3 hearings, Gabe made parole, and was released on June 7, 2010 to live with his mother in North Carolina. He took a part-time job in the Human Kindness Foundation office.

After a year of working side by side with Gabe, Sita had the following observation:

In Bo's book of short stories, *Lineage*, his story called "The Saddest Buddha" is about a young man who kills two people while driving drunk. It's about what this man does with feelings of sadness and regret over something horrible that he has done that he can never take back.

Many times while I've been in our office with Gabe during this last year, I've felt that I was sitting with Bo's Saddest Buddha. Gabe is someone who has been permanently humbled by the terrible suffering he has brought into the world, and his life reflects it. He is not someone who walks around depressed or defeated, but he is always aware, as he put it in a recent letter: "I can live my life as an example of a guy that did some really horrible things but has turned his life around and now has something to offer others. I felt I owed that to the people I hurt..."

I'm looking forward to being a part of Gabe's continuing journey. —Sita

The following are Gabe's reflections on his one-year anniversary of being released:

My Dear HKF Family,

Well it's been a year now that I've been out and it still feels like I just got here. I'm still doing what I've done for years, trying to figure out how to make my life work and even though I didn't think I had any expectations about life out here, it sure ain't how I thought it would be.

After 19 years in the joint I knew I had to take it slow, but I had no idea of how lost and uncomfortable I would feel. Even the smallest things like getting gas or talking on the phone seem to be a struggle. I never thought I'd feel so weird being around people, just walking in a store or any social stuff—nothing to go back to prison over, but it is hard even with having all the practical things like a job, house, and car taken care of.

I can't imagine getting out without having done all the inner work I did. There's no way I could have made it. I think that is one reason I haven't gotten into trouble like so many do when they get out of prison. I practiced and worked with all those issues like drugs, lust, anger for years, and those are the same issues you face out here. I made the changes and it is paying off and I can face life without falling back into old ways and saying "screw it."

My crime is still a part of my life and it seems disrespectful to all those I've hurt to not do something positive with my life. I still have family that choose not to have anything to do with me, but I know there are some things we just don't get a second chance at. I've let those family members know that I haven't forgotten the hurt I caused, and I'm open to contact with them, but I'm not gonna keep bothering them. If it's easier for them not to be in touch with me, or if they never forgive me, that's not up to me. All I can do is make a better life and not go back to drugs or jail, and I accept that I might not get a second chance with that part of my family.

I sure don't wish I was back in, but I do feel that I was much more content with my life in prison—or maybe passionate is a better word. Maybe I'm not reaching out to God as much. I still read *We're All Doing Time*, at least a line or two every day. There's something to it, and it's just been

such a part of my life, it's not like I can just forget about it. I still do meditation practice, too, but it doesn't feel the same. I know I need to do it so I make myself, but it doesn't bring me the closeness I used to feel. But I know it's necessary, so I do it. Sita asked me if anything makes me feel that closeness that I felt for awhile in prison, and so far, no. But I just got here. I'm not giving up.

While I was in prison, I had more time to meditate, read, and do my spiritual work. Out here you have to make time. In prison, I always felt I was taking steps in the right direction—there were always opportunities to do something not just about me. I was faced with the issues, dealing with people on a daily basis. Out here I feel more alone in some ways, even though I'm around people. Sita says she has heard that from a lot of others when they get out.

When I was in prison, one of my main practices was "practicing the presence of God." I'd walk around in prayer, always thinking of a practice or doing a practice. Now it's just when an "oh shit" moment comes up, like when I'm getting on and off the expressway or there's a cop car behind me.

It's funny that I have the freedom, comfort, and safety I wanted for so long, and I felt more alive working to get it than I feel having it. Maybe this is my sign to keep on moving to the next part of my path, I don't know, after all I just got here. I'll keep you posted. —Gabe



Gabe at home with his dogs.

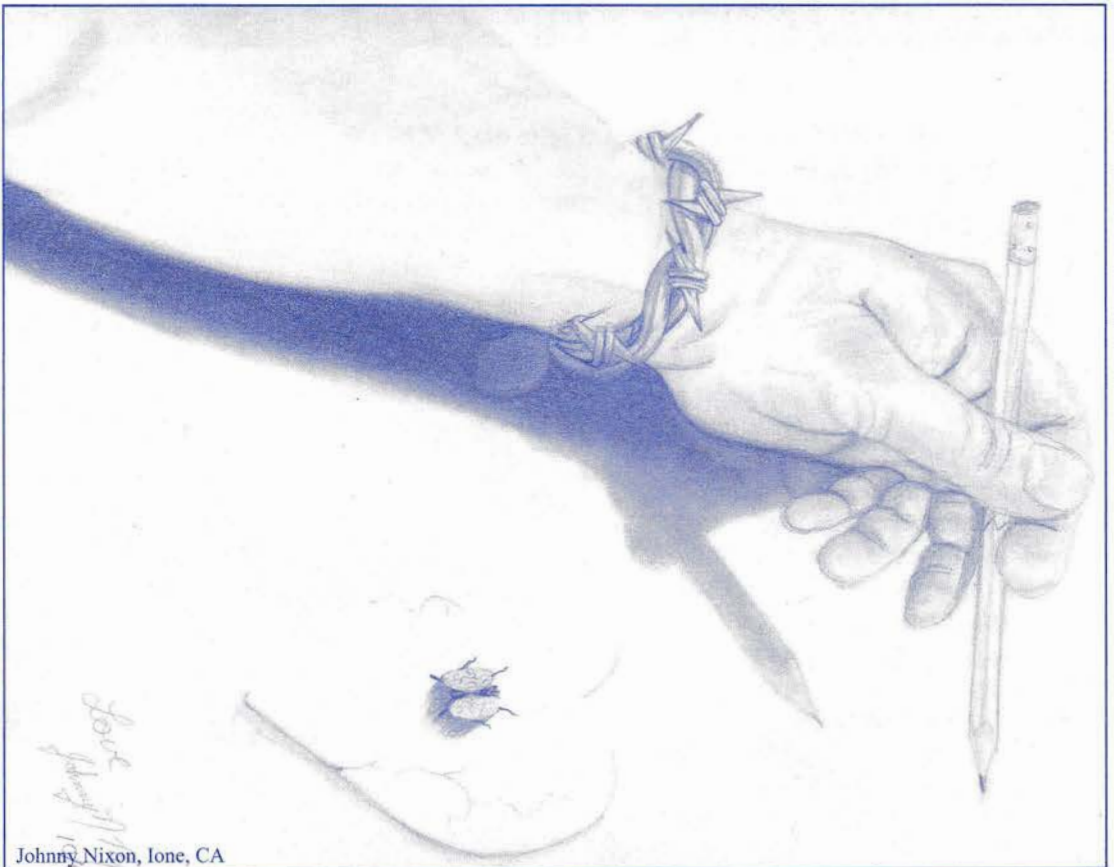
Human Kindness Foundation staff and volunteers recently visited the Buddhist group at Morrison Correctional Institution in Hoffman, N.C. Below is a letter from one of the inmate members of that group.

Dear Gabe,

What's up brother? I hope all is well with you and yours. I wanted to thank you for coming back inside to visit with our group at Morrison. You made a huge impact on me just by being there. When you introduced yourself it struck a chord deep within me, and I discovered just what I needed to keep moving forward. Thank you. When

you started, you spoke from the heart and pretty much said it's a struggle and you still have doubts. Me too brother. Some days I don't have a clue what I'm doing and others I wonder what's it all for anyways. You may not realize it, but you answered those questions. You said you get up and do what needs to be done and that's it. Whether it works or not you do it anyways. That's the answer. Just do it. There's nothing to doubt or figure out. Thank you for showing me doubts don't stop me unless I let them. You helped strengthen me in ways I can't explain. Times are hard on me right now and in 26 months, I'll be home having harder times. It scares me and I don't have a clue about living in the real world. I'm making it now which counts for something. The rest I'll leave up to LOVE. When I said LOVE is the name I give God, I saw some understanding in your eyes. I wish I could explain myself in a better way. Sorry. Just know that you helped bring the Love I put in the world come full circle. You proved that even in hard times and my mind being full of doubts, it's gonna be all right in the end. It's worth all the trouble in the world if I help one person. Please know that you gave me that, and keep doing what you're doing. It's worth it in the end. I'll be in your corner cheering for you. Thank you again.

Love, R B



Johnny Nixon, Ione, CA

A note from HKF:

In this article, Gabe has talked about difficulties in the first year of transition. We hope his experience will help you be prepared. There is a lot of joy in the transition, and of course we've enjoyed celebrating some of those happy times with several transitioning friends. There is also struggle. If you are released and hit some rough spots (*everyone* we've talked to has hit some rough spots in the first year or two out), don't panic! You may have looked forward to your release for so long, feeling like it is THE big goal in life. When that goal is realized, and you still have sadness or anxiety or discomfort to deal with; when you still have anger, lust, and addiction to confront; when life is not as rosy as you hoped... many people panic and land themselves back in jail. Instead, you can keep using your spiritual practices, and you can get through the hard times. Gabe says he will not give up, and we believe him. He will keep on, doing the next right thing and being patient while he gets used to being out. And along the way, he is already helping people, inspiring people, and having some fun, too. Like Bo says in one of his songs: "Life is good even when it's not great, so don't you give up on yourself."

LETTERS

Dear Human Kindness Foundation,

I have been blessed to have been reading and pondering Bo's perspectives for about nine years now. The insight stuck with me, although sincere personal change has been a very slow process. Nonetheless, Bo's teachings have always been urging me to change, and I appreciate that. I am changing, but I'm sadly at a point when most everyone has long given up hope that I would. I have wrecked my life and hurt many others along the way. I wanted to be accepted, at all costs—I wanted to be loved. But I've abandoned my leadership role within the Aryan Brotherhood—I've renounced bigotry—I want to propagate love—but I've made so many enemies, and I have these despicable swastikas tattooed all over me. The Aryan Brotherhood feels I betrayed them by leaving that deplorable organization, and I might get stabbed upon my reentry to population—I'm currently in segregation due to years of violent behavior. But do you know what? I've decided, Bo, that I'm going to love all who hate me, and I'm going to forgive, have mercy and be kind. Life is too short not to change. It's never too late to change. God knows my heart. I believe in an all loving, inclusive God—I'm trying—I just wanted to say thanks. I knew deep down long ago that you were right.

I love you guys,

M

M, dear,

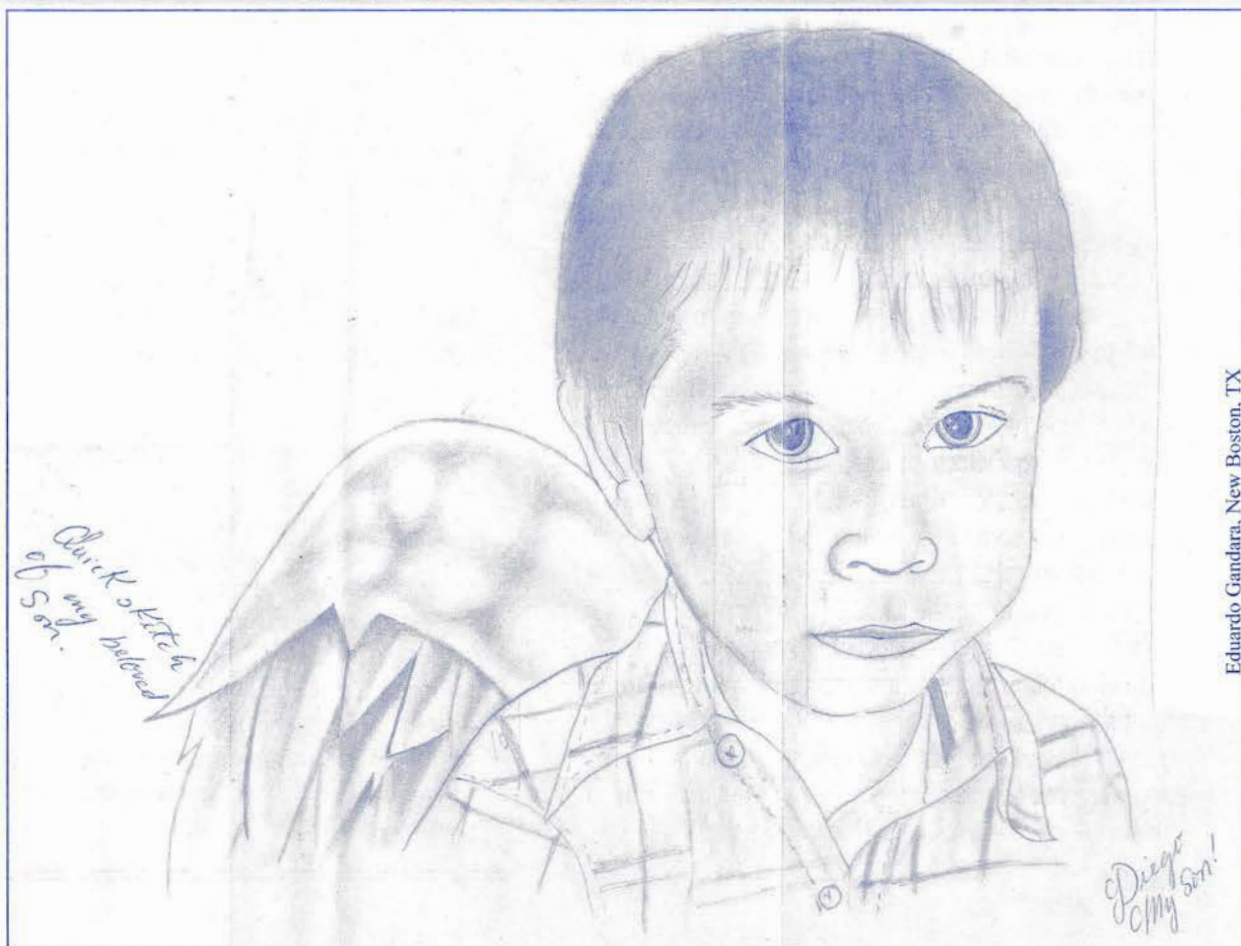
I'm so touched by your letter. Your present courage and willingness to put your life on the line for love is very moving. You have not "wrecked your life" because you're still alive, and this love that you're now talking about makes your present life and future well worth living—please trust me on this. Write me again and let me know how your pledge is going.

Love, Sita

Dear Sita and HKF,

Thank you for your very kind note of encouragement. You and Bo and everyone there have such huge, loving hearts—your compassion changes lives—I know because I have been wanting to be like you guys for many years. I just lacked the courage to be so vulnerable emotionally by allowing myself to empathize with people's deepest pain, so I tried to fortify my

heart with anger all of these years. I thought that the anger and violence would keep me safe and secure, but I now realize that a person who hides his vulnerabilities, who is afraid to be loving, isn't being tough at all—true strength comes from love and compassion. I want to BE LOVE. Why is that such a scary thing? For all of these years I took control of a gang and led it with ruthlessness—they were my personal army, and now that I've quit the gang and turned from the violent ways, the gang has threatened to stab me upon my reentry to population. They feel betrayed, and they feel that I know too much—and I remember how in years past when I ordered stabbings, and the men I personally tried to kill, my murders, every horrible thing I ever did. I keep thinking about Karma, and I weep—not for myself—I weep for those I hurt and for those I recruited into the Aryan Brotherhood. I weep for every pain I ever caused, and I accept God's will. If they stab me, I plan to tell them I



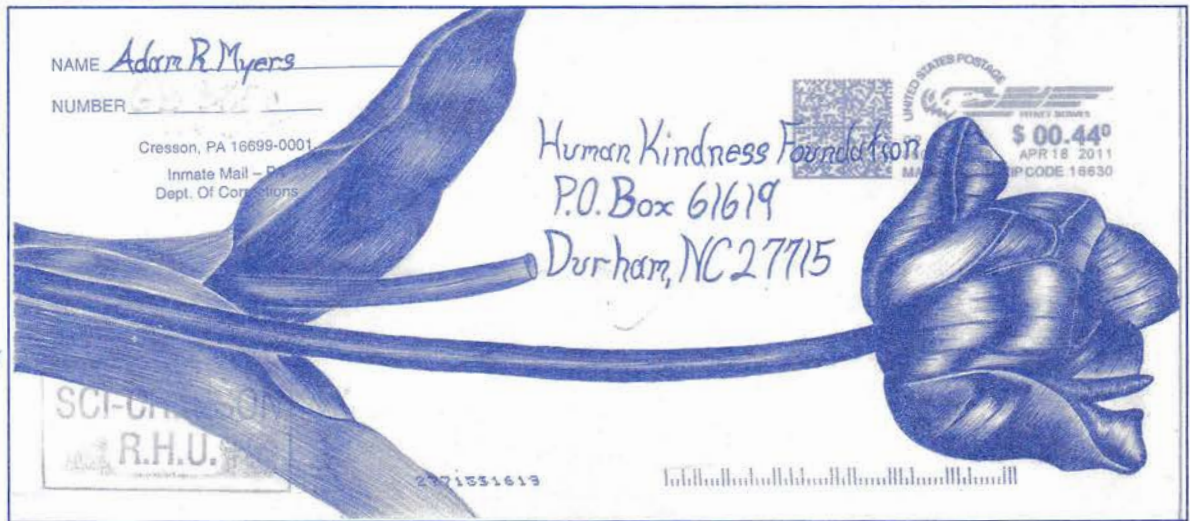
Eduardo Gandara, New Boston, TX

love them—I will die expressing my love. But maybe, just maybe, they'll change their minds. I've been in situations where I thought I would die, and I realized how unafraid I become when I know that death is imminent, so I know through experiences that I can die unafraid. It's not that I want to die—I actually want to live

to be at least 115 years old. I might even pull a Gandhi and tell my assassins that I love them and forgive them! I'll be thankful for every day and try to spend it actively loving others.

People in prison don't know how to take the new me. They are so used to the old me. Some get angry at me but a few.... There are dudes who have been ostracized for various reasons and those dudes have welcomed my friendship, so I feel like I've got a lot of new sidekicks who all are looking up to me. But most of the old tough guys still respect my reputation, so I'm now in a position where I'm the friend of tough dangerous men and also the friend of the outcasts. I can respect them all and love them all as brothers. Of course, all of these new friendships are occurring in the segregation cell block. I don't know what will happen once I go back to population again, but I hope to be the personified opposite of the shallow "convict code." I hope to BE LOVE, and if I can manage to talk the Aryan Brotherhood into sparing my life, and allowing me to be unaffiliated peacefully, then I plan on getting to work, convincing these guys that they are all lovable and worthy. If I hide from them, I'd save my life but it would reinforce their delusion of power, superiority etc, so I can't hide. As long as I actively BE LOVE then when the wind comes to blow me away, I'll fly with a smile—got all poetic there!

I love you guys, M



Hi M,

Sita asked for my take on your situation so I thought I'd drop you a note. I do know other convicts who have left the AB and were surprised that they were not killed, not really bothered much at all. Of course, having been in a leadership position you may be a bigger deal to some AB members. I wonder, though, whether it might help to approach some of the AB members who respect you the most and discuss the situation when you get back out in population.

If/when you do that, it is my strong advice that you rein in your enthusiasm to "convert" them to your new way of thinking. Be a loving man, but a quietly loving man. Give your AB brothers a little credit – if they are intrigued by your presence of being quiet, peaceful, emptied of that constant hostility that so many brothers live with 24/7, then the philosophical discussions may come about because of their curiosity.

When I stopped doing drugs many years ago, and it came up between me and my friends who were still using, my position was "Listen, everyone has their quota of how many hits they can do in a lifetime, and I just reached my quota, that's all." That certainly gave them something they could think about if they wished, but it also made it clear I was not on a campaign to change everyone in the ways I had changed. That tends to put people off and make them defensive. Just be a humble, quiet man with no agenda and nothing to

overtly teach others. Be the teaching.

That said, I also don't believe it would be "running away" to ask for a transfer if you feel there's an imminent threat on your life. That's just a practical step that might save one of your AB brothers from the karma of killing you. That's something new for you to think about as your philosophy evolves. I'm glad you're not afraid of dying, because of course any of us can be killed or die at any moment. But we don't want to make it any easier than necessary! This is a tough situation, brother. We'll be keeping you in our prayers.

Love, Bo



I have touched down for a unknown amount of time in a overflow unit of the MN Dept of Corrections. No school, no work, nothing to get in the way of my meditations. I still battle my fear and anger, but I have came a long ways over the years in large part due to the teachings, love and support offered by you folks. It was your words that first made me think that I did not have to be dehumanized by the prisons I've been in, in fact I could use them as temples of growth. Thank you from my heart. Your love has changed the world for so many." -- Duane

SITA AND HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

WARMHEARTEDNESS

I talked with Big Ern recently. Big Ern just got out of prison after 45 years. I told him that I was going to Washington, DC to receive an initiation for world peace from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I also told him that now that he was out of prison, he might have the blessing of being in His Holiness' presence at some point in his life. Big Ern said that he would do that "through you, Sita." So friends, both inside and out, with Big Ern's encouragement, I'd like to share my experience of this time with the Buddha of compassion. Here's a little introduction first:

In February, 1994, Bo and I had the good fortune to meet with His Holiness in India where he lives in exile from his home in Tibet. As we wrote in a newsletter at that time, *"Tibet sits atop the majestic Himalayan Mountains between China and India. For many centuries, Tibetan life revolved mostly around studying and practicing the Buddha's deepest teachings, under the guidance of each Dalai Lama.... After centuries of peaceful spiritual living, Tibet was invaded by China in the 1950s. In 1959—after years of trying to negotiate a peaceful settlement—the Dalai Lama was forced into exile. He and his advisors and family, like thousands of other Tibetans before and since, actually walked over the most rugged, snow-bound mountain passes in the world, hiding from Chinese soldiers all the way. Over a million Tibetans have died, either victims of the Chinese army, or casualties of frostbite, avalanches and other hazards of their journey to freedom. Sadly, this situation continues today.... Certainly, we [Bo and I] were deeply re-inspired by the example of His Holiness. Here is someone who has given up selfish living entirely and dedicated himself to the welfare of all beings: and the result is a presence of freedom, peace, and joy so strong that he can hardly say ten words without laughing. Living solely for the benefit of others, he is happier than anyone else we've ever met. With more demands on his time than we can ever imagine, he moves through his busy day with simplicity, humility and gracefulness. He is worshipped as a living God by Buddhists, yet truly considers himself a simple monk."*

On July 6, 2011 — his 76th birthday — His Holiness made his appearance in Washington. There were around 15,000 people there, and many sang happy birthday to him, many others did prostrations (full body bowing), and many, myself included, just cried—feeling the deep, deep blessing of being in his presence once again.

On stage with His Holiness was Arun Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King III, son of

Martin Luther King Jr., as role models of the nonviolence that His Holiness lives and represents. After wishing His Holiness a happy birthday, Arun Gandhi talked about the difference between physical violence, which we can all understand, and passive violence, which includes hate, anger, and even irritation and annoyance. He said that his grandfather told him that at the end of the day, he should look over his day and notice all of the passive violence. He asked us all in the audience to pledge, as a birthday gift to His Holiness, to make the effort to end passive violence in our lives. While joyfully making this pledge, I reflected on the fact that I've been working on this personally for quite a while now, and I felt that it has been a source of my present peace of mind.

When His Holiness spoke, he started out by saying that in Tibet the death day was more important than the day of birth because Tibetans remember the good things about a person on that day. He said that if we spent every day helping out whenever we could, then every day would have meaning. Each day we should have compassionate motivation, which means thinking of the well being of others; in other words, warmheartedness.

Although I've heard His Holiness use the words compassion and kindness many times, his use of the word "warmheartedness" particularly struck me at that time. I could actually feel the presence of warmth in my heart. Agreeing with Arun Gandhi and Martin Luther King III, he said that this would be the best birthday gift for him—warmheartedness toward all beings. His Holiness reminded us once again that this warmheartedness, this practice of kindness and compassion, was the actual source of our happiness. Just as gravity is an unchangeable law, this too is a law. We all grew up hearing the Golden Rule—"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." All religions have their own version of it, but what he was reminding us is that the Golden Rule is actually a law of nature and not just a philosophy. We can actually be happier and more peaceful by this loving practice.

My dear family, I truly believe (and my own experience supports this) that we can all begin to have this peaceful and happy mind despite the difficulties that life brings us. And from this peaceful mind, we are more able to make the skillful decisions required in our often difficult lives. Try it and see for yourself!

My deepest love and blessings to all of you.

Sita



Portrait by Lyn Roberts, Chapel Hill, NC

NEW! CHILDREN'S BOOK BY BO LOZOFF

Bo's newest — and oldest! — book

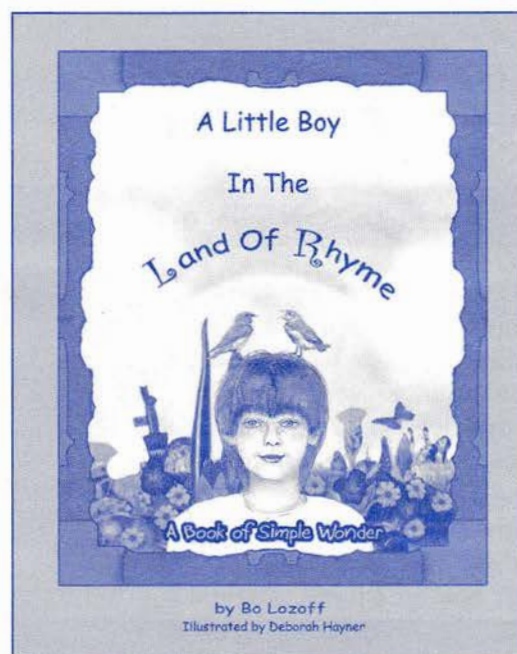
Before Josh was born, in 1971, Bo wrote *A Little Boy In The Land of Rhyme: A Book of Simple Wonder*. Just this year, it was published for the first time, with beautiful illustrations by Deborah Hayner. We've printed a full page below, to give you a sample of this delightful book. You can see more at:

www.humankindness.org

Order online or by sending \$20 plus shipping* to:
HKF, PO Box 61619, Durham, NC 27715

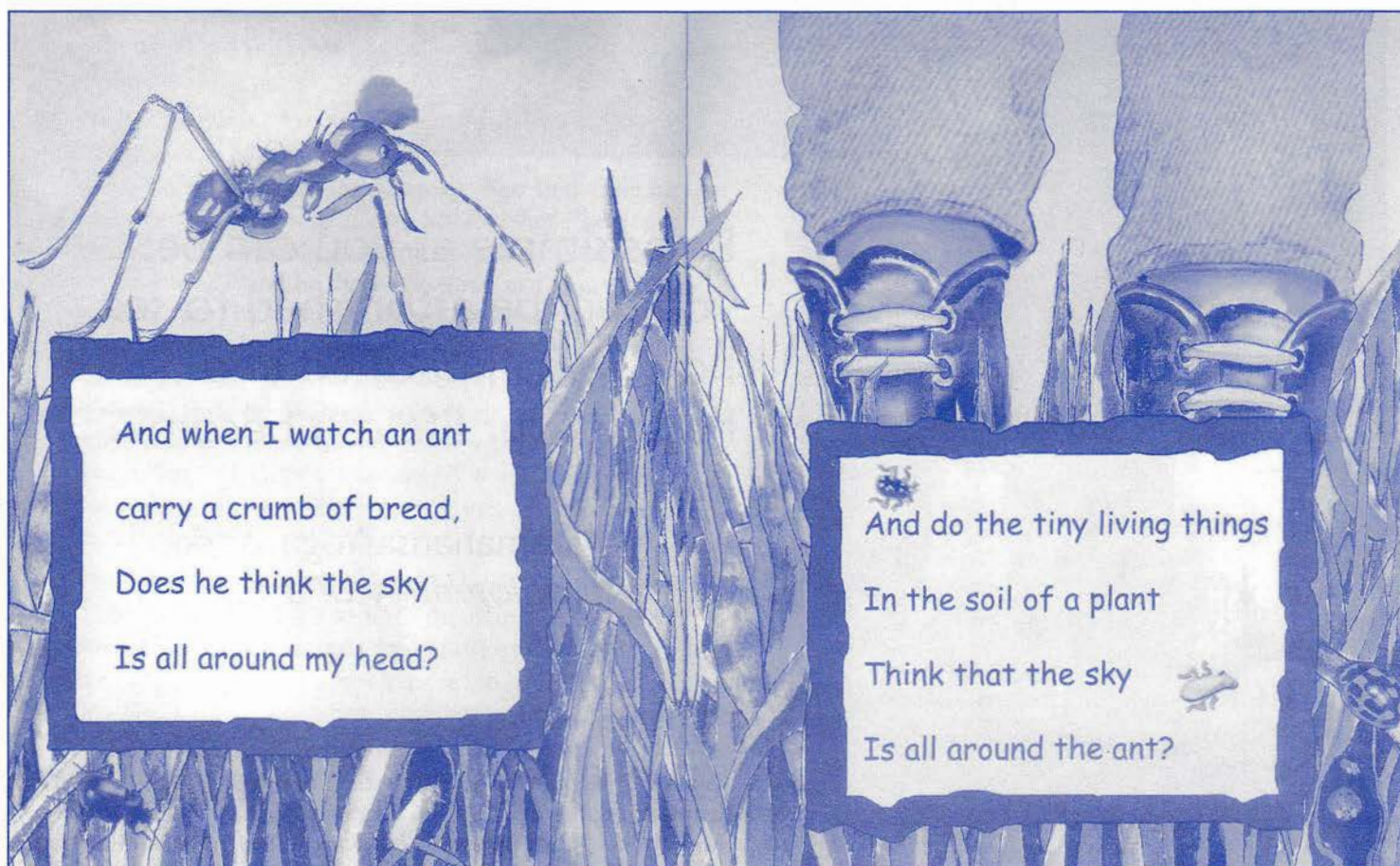
A note to our incarcerated friends:

We're sorry, we can't send the children's books for free, but we offer them at a discount for prisoners. \$6 each, includes shipping. These are **hardcover** books, and we can't send refunds, so make sure you can receive them before you order. Stamps welcome as payment.



*\$4 shipping for one book, \$1 per additional book to same address.

See details about Bo's other children's book, *The Wonderful Life of a Fly Who Couldn't Fly* (\$15) at www.humankindness.org

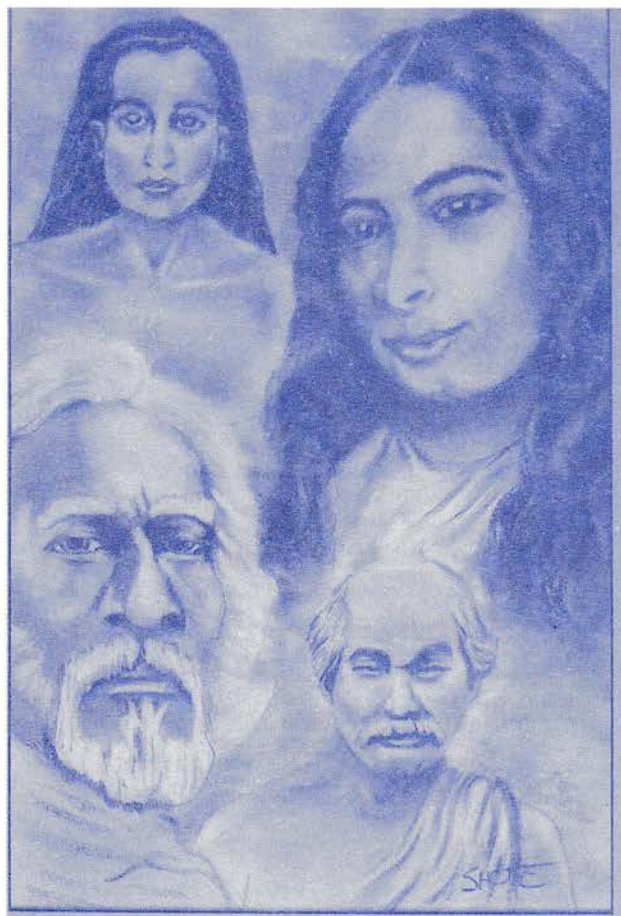


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If you have a % symbol before your name on this label, this is your LAST NEWSLETTER unless we hear from you. If you want to stay on our mailing list, please send a BRIEF note letting us know that you are still at this address.



Be as simple as you can be;
you will be astonished to see
how uncomplicated and
happy your life can become.

—Paramahansa Yogananda,
Autobiography of a Yogi

This is one of Gabe Shute's early charcoal drawings, drawn soon after he began studying the teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda. Yogananda (top right) is pictured here with earlier gurus in his lineage.