



War, Peace, and Love

Spring
2024

Sometimes it seems like the whole world is on fire. Maybe it has always been this way. Perhaps every generation since the beginning of time has wondered why we live in a world with so much war and so little lasting peace. From wars in Israel, Palestine, Russia, Ukraine, and Sudan, to battles in our streets and in our souls, conflict surrounds us.

Struggle, violence, war, and loss are all painful moments of individual and societal transformation. The question is - what comes afterwards? Pain can harden us and cause us to lose hope. Pain can make us dangerous to ourselves and others. There are other paths, however, that pain can take us down. We can build community from shared pain. Both our own pain and our empathy for the pain of others can bring people together in search of meaning and hope for healing.

If the opposite of war is peace, the antidote to war is love. In *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*, former war correspondent Chris Hedges recounts the only place he felt truly safe during conflict was in the home of a loving couple.

The totality of their love for each other felt like protection from the violence that surrounded them. Love can't stop bombs, but love can help us weather the storm. Love can't save us from loss and pain, but it can save us from losing ourselves in hatred, anger, and revenge. Love can't prevent violence from happening, but it can stop the cycle of violence.

We can view the world through a lens of love or a lens of hate. This is our choice. This is our power. When we choose love, we start to see the world differently. We start to act differently, and these changes affect others. We may not be able to stop a war across the world, but we might be able to stop one on our block or in our hearts.

If we believe in a loving God and that God is Love, then we do God's work each time we turn towards love instead of violence. This work starts with recognizing our shared humanity—that we are all equally human, equally worthy of love, and capable of loving others. We are all fellow travelers trying to do the best we can with what we have.

We begin to stop violence when we start seeing people as part of the "we" and not as "them." When we see others as members of our community, we see that their safety and wellbeing are connected to ours. Despite the violence and pain that surrounds us, we are all connected to each other. We all need each other. May we recognize and nurture these connections, remembering the power of love that lives within and connects us to each other is stronger than the forces of violence that work to keep us apart.



Hope Is Action: Craig Waleed



HKF recently welcomed Dr. Craig Waleed to its Board of Directors. Craig is an educator, counselor, certified Restorative Practices group facilitator, author, and motivational speaker. His podcast, "Prison to Promise," can be found on Edovo. After spending eight years in the New York state prison system, Craig dedicated his career to disrupting the community-to-prison pipeline. He currently serves as Project Manager for the End Solitary NC Campaign Against Solitary Confinement. He is an incredible communicator and connector, has a huge heart, and is a genuinely kind person. We're delighted to be able to share his thoughts and wisdom with you.

When did you first hear about Human Kindness Foundation and what has our work meant to you?

During my time in New York state's prison system in the mid-1990s, I came across the Prison-Ashram Project through the pages of the book *We're All Doing Time*. This literary discovery served as a catalyst, sparking my journey toward internal self-discovery and freedom.

What role has religion and spirituality played in your life, both in prison and beyond? I grew up in a religious household, and as I matured, rather than subscribing to a specific religious doctrine, I leaned towards what many call spirituality. I listen to my internal voice as a guide toward understanding my meaning, purpose, and interconnectedness with all living beings.

What role has education played in your life, both in prison and beyond?

Distinguishing between education and academic achievement is crucial. The term "educate" has its roots in the Latin words *educō* and *educere*, implying the process of drawing out, developing from within, or manifesting. True education involves recognizing and understanding one's innate tendencies, abilities, and potential. It entails leveraging available resources to stimulate and engage these internal qualities, contributing to a better existence for oneself and those with whom one interacts.

During my time in prison, I came across research indicating that incarcerated individuals who attain academic proficiency substantially reduce their likelihood of returning to prison. Eager to avoid returning to incarceration, I dedicated myself to pursuing higher education while in prison, ultimately earning an Associate of Arts degree before my release. Since my release 26 years ago, I have earned a Doctorate and remained free from criminal activities, arrests, or a return to prison or jail. This attests to the transformative power of education in my life.

What have been your biggest struggles and what got you through? My biggest challenges have been internal and psychological. Initially, a significant hurdle for me was the struggle to feel a sense of belonging in spaces where I often found myself as the only person with a history of incarceration. Another major obstacle involved confronting and processing the childhood trauma I experienced.

What propelled me through these profound struggles was the understanding that my ancestors not only endured one of the gravest atrocities faced by humanity but also flourished afterward. This realization affirmed my belief that I could survive and thrive. To navigate these challenges, I adopted physical practices such as exercise, embraced the solace of reading and studying, incorporated meditation and moments of silence,

and drew strength from a supportive community of family and friends. These elements collectively played a vital role in helping me overcome and transcend my internal and psychological struggles.

What did you learn from these struggles? I discovered a greater capacity and power within myself than the larger society had led me to believe. I realized the solutions to life's challenges often lie within my mind. The realization that most aspects of life begin and end in my mind taught me how important my thoughts and beliefs are on the outcomes and experiences I have.

What are you most proud of in your life and what did you have to do to get there? My most significant source of pride stems from the transformation of my life, successfully steering clear of prison for 26 years. The endeavor to remain outside prison walls was, and continues to be, an internal journey that began during my time behind bars. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to staying out of prison; instead, it demands a combination of factors and a profound personal commitment. My trajectory involved a candid self-assessment coupled with a dedicated approach encompassing:

1. A commitment to personal growth and self-improvement.
2. Actively participating in rehabilitation and education programs available within the prison system.
3. Establishing and sustaining a robust, informed support system with access to resources.
4. Steering clear of negative influences and engaging with pro-social associates and activities.
5. Abstaining from the use of mood-altering and intoxicating substances.
6. Strict adherence to all conditions set by parole officers.

This multifaceted approach played a pivotal role in my successful journey of steering clear of reincarceration and underscores the importance of a comprehensive and committed strategy to staying on the path of positive transformation.

How have you worked to create peace in your heart and your community? The journey to foster peace within myself and my community began with my ability to embrace and accept my life's experiences without letting them define my identity. I aim to share the lessons I've gained through ongoing self-acceptance and a continual commitment to learning from these experiences. I am focused on reaching individuals in prisons and jails and those from backgrounds and communities like mine. My aspiration is that the insights they derive from my experiences will help guide them on their path toward emancipation.

What are the causes you care most about and how have they guided the work you have done? I am deeply passionate about several interconnected causes, including disrupting the community-to-prison pipeline and reducing recidivism and reincarceration rates. This commitment defines my life's work, and I am fortunate to be employed in a capacity that aligns with these crucial objectives.

What is your greatest hope? I recognize hope as an action word. My greatest hope is not merely a wish but a commitment that demands effort. I aspire to see historically marginalized groups, those who have experienced incarceration, and individuals who have received the least from our society granted equitable opportunities and resources. This vision is not just wishful thinking; it is an endeavor that, if realized, has the potential to alter and improve their paths toward self-actualization profoundly.

What is one message you would like to share with our readers? Achieving success in any endeavor originates from one's mindset, so dare to THINK BIG! Combine ambition with realism, formulate a viable plan, and proceed with unwavering enthusiasm, burning desire, and a persistent, determined attitude.

The Creativity of Kindness

For our 50th anniversary, we celebrated the creativity and generosity of artists and writers experiencing incarceration with an art exhibit, performance, and poetry. Our first art show ever, "Art from the Inside," ran from December to February at the Eno Mills Gallery in Hillsborough, North Carolina. This exhibit featured art we have received from artists in prisons and jails



Sita and friend stand in front of 50 years of artwork at "Art from the Inside" exhibit.

across the country over the past 50 years. We were so excited to share the beauty you have offered us with a wider audience, and people loved what they saw! How could they not? On display were decades of creativity, generosity, and kindness.

Our legal system offers little space for curiosity or creativity. There's a lack of curiosity about who people are and what happened to them before they came to a courthouse or jailhouse. And there's a lack of creativity around what rehabilitation can look like outside of a purely punitive framework. That's why the artwork we receive is so inspirational. It shows that creativity and curiosity will find a way to survive and even thrive, regardless of the circumstances. The artwork in the exhibit and the art you continue to share with us is a revelation of the beauty, softness, kindness, generosity, curiosity, and creativity that lies within us all. It calls us to ask what a justice system would look like if it embraced each person's creativity and was curious about everyone's past experiences and future potential.

"Hearts starve as well as bodies. Give us bread and give us roses," was the slogan of our country's first female-led strike that took place in 1912. People will fight for beauty because beauty is worth fighting for. We will use the tools at hand to make this beauty, whether it's made of a grievance form from an unanswered complaint or with dye from skittles. Thank you for the roses you have sent us over the past 50 years - for the roses in our mailbox today and those that we know will arrive tomorrow. We honor the light and love you give us. It is our privilege to share this beauty with others.

Together-Apart

My dear friends, please continue to sit with us on Wednesday evenings from 7 to 8pm (or any time on Wednesdays that might be more convenient for you) as we send love, prayers, and blessings to the many suffering beings in the world. Use whatever practice is meaningful to you, beloveds. "See" you all on Wednesdays!

Love, Sita



Dancing in a Sky of Kindness

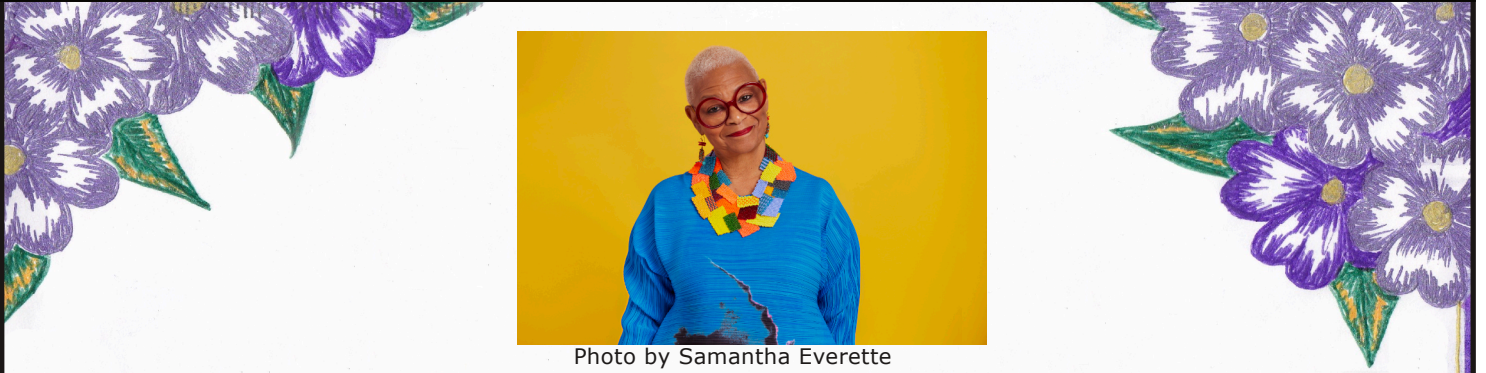


Photo by Samantha Everette

When we asked for poems about the meaning of kindness, you responded! We received over 50 beautiful submissions, which our new board chair and North Carolina poet laureate Jaki Shelton Green artfully wove into a new poem, "Dancing in a Sky of Kindness." The full poem is 1248 words—1019 of which came from incarcerated authors. Below is an excerpt of the poem, with Jaki's words in purple. We hope you enjoy!

We are all dancing in a storm. Learning
to kiss the sky in all our beauty, our ugly,
our pain, and our joys.

Our footsteps know each other.

My strength is nothing without yours.

I will be kind because I have worn
different shoes.

Kindness is giving your last, when you
don't have it to give.

We are the ones we've been waiting for.

I am free.

Be blessed. Be a blessing.

Roam in the sky

Picture yourself on a cloud

You are free.

Tenderness unto the unknown is
tenderness unto oneself.

Who will stand and look injustice in the
eye

Who will stand and speak truth and
power to a hurting society

Who will uplift and not let down those
who believe in us as a people.

Light dwells in all human beings.

As we sit within our prison walls,
Built by choices and decisions we have
made,

Saddened by the pains that have been
caused,

Contributing to a world deeply in pain,
Now is the time, a time for change.

Picture a free world that can be free to
see through a lens of honest
transparency, as we appreciate our
differences, embracing similarities,
Meeting each other, serving our needs.

Kindness is good medicine

We can be the change the world needs.

I heard a gentle warm voice.

Kindness was when you told me I DIDN'T
have to die.

I heard a gentle warm voice.

If there was no shadow there would be
no light.

A life force rekindles the fires we've
never lost

Leaving embers to be born.

I heard a gentle warm voice.

Kindness is planting seeds that will
blossom into something great. Kindness
is always the right choice.

Enlightenment in this life is for only the
truth winning.

You can only begin at the ending.

"A Little Good News" is a publication of Human Kindness Foundation, a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. Donations & bequests are welcomed and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. With your help, we send over 20,000 freebooks annually to people who request them while they are incarcerated. You can request books by writing to HKF, PO Box 61619, Durham NC 27715. www.humankindness.org

Letters

Dear Sita and Izzy,

I got the books today! Thank you so much!

I have three boys! I've missed everything! Birthdays, holidays, first day of school, and daycare, even just spending quality time with them.

I want to change! I need to change! But how? I speak to my boys daily. The two younger ones are somewhat unaware of my circumstances or what's going on or even where I'm at. But my oldest, who's 8, the more we talk, the more he asks me, "Daddy, are you ok? Daddy, I hope you come home in 5 business days. Daddy, I got my fingers crossed. Daddy, I'm not sad, I just want you to come home and not miss my birthday!"

My question to you, Sita and Izzy, is what do you do when you realize you are the main source of the pain? God knows I'm trying! I've been trying! What's stopping me from just doing? Doing what's right.

I made bail/bond, then boop! I'm back in jail! I work, take care of my family, then boop! I'm in jail! I don't want to be a father from jail.

Jerrod, Hartford, CT

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Dear Jerrod,

As a great grandmother, I understand the passion you have for your son and family. When I read your last sentence-I don't want to be a father in jail-my heart knew that you have within you what it takes to be back with your family forever.

So Jerrod, now that you have the books, they can help you understand what in your life needs transformation. The books were meant to bring up possibilities that help guide your decisions. What do you think it will take for you to change? What is key within you that needs to change? Is it commitment, attitude, acting out of habit?

And, what needs to happen for you to feel self-respect, self-acceptance, and self-love? To move forward in your journey with an acceptance of your own worthiness?

Can you sit with how it feels in your heart to be able to participate fully in your kids' lives? Stay with this yearning of yours, along with what sounds to me like prayers from your son for your return. He has made a significant impact on you and somehow, he knows you can make it happen. To be home with him.

Jerrod, you matter more than you could ever imagine. Please consider your value. Let the light in. Yours is bright. We support your journey.

With love, Izzy



Please note HKF may anonymously publish letters you write to us in our newsletters or other publications. We may also publish artwork sent to us with attribution whenever possible. Please let us know if you do NOT want your work published. Thanks for filling our publications with your spirit and wisdom!

# Letters

Dear HKF,

I am doing 10 years for stupidity. I can be out in 6-ish. I've got 3 in. The days are long and drawn out. I continue to read each newsletter when I get them. I'm going through a hard time. My grandfather died last year and now I've got no support from the outside. Plus, I've been getting high, here and there.

I'm into Buddhism and meditation, but I find it hard to get myself to do it. I also suffer from anxiety as well. I'm in a 6-by-8 cell by myself. No TV, no form of entertainment but books. As such, it's very lonely. I'm sure you've heard the same story a thousand times. I was wondering if you could send me a couple more books and some encouragement.

Hope to hear from you. God bless.

Tony

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Dear Tony,

Thanks for your letter, and I'm sorry to hear about your grandfather. HKF is your family too, and we're here to support you.



In this world of endless distraction, it's easy to feel uncomfortable when those options have been removed. Even harder when what's left is you and your thoughts/emotions in a 6-by-8 cell.

As someone who is very familiar with anxiety and how intensely it can hook us, I can relate to that feeling of needing to escape. Anxiety and lots of other negative feelings can fill the entire window of our minds and make it difficult to make decisions from a place of clarity or reason. Drugs and other distractions may provide temporary relief, but ultimately, the drugs take you further away from the peace you're looking for.

This is why we practice. If what you're doing right now isn't clicking, maybe it's worth trying something different? With something as physically and mentally consuming as anxiety, the breathing techniques or yoga asanas taught in *We're All Doing Time* can be helpful.

These practices are the exact tools to turn to in moments of anxiety or when you feel the urge to get high and escape. And doing these practices on the better days too helps strengthen the muscle of habit, so we can stick with them on the harder days.

Doing this takes a leap of faith. We are here for you. You truly can become the person you want to be.

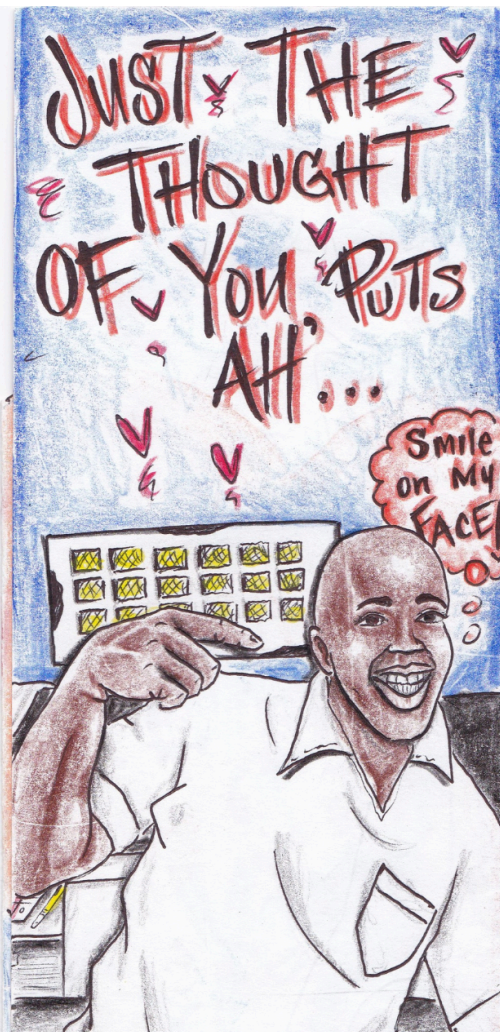
With love, Mokshani

Many thanks to our artists: page 1: Steven Owens (beats), Stephen Stoeltje (love/peace), Frederick Marine (eye); page 4: Robert Joseph Swainston; page 5: Lloyd Furness (flowers); page 6: Alexandria McCahan; page 7: Wade Holman; page 8: Donald Caine.



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“This life has never been about me...
and it’s not about you.
It has always been about us.”

Tony, 2010

Reflection

Your pain is my pain; your joy is my joy. I work to end your suffering to end our suffering; I work to bring you joy to increase our joy. When we move from you and I, from us and them, and towards a “we” that means all of us, then we have created the Beloved Community. Tell yourself today: There is no you. There is no I. There is only we. We who make this world go round. We who hold and help each other. We are all we have. We are enough. We are everything.

Questions

When are you most aware of your connection to others? How does this make you feel?

What makes it hard to feel connected to others?

What could you do to feel more connected to others?