

A JOURNAL OF EXPRESSION FROM BEHIND BARS

PAPER CHAINED



DANGER


CRC community
restorative
centre

ATFJ

ISSUE 18 / JUN 2025

Posted free to incarcerated people


UniSQ

 **Curtin University**

ASHLEY

PAPER CHAINED



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Published by Vigilante Studios
Issue 18, June 2025
ISSN 2653-0775 (Print)
ISSN 2653-0783 (Digital)

Cover art by Ashley McGoldrick
Inside cover art by Damien Linnane

Paper Chained is printed and produced on the stolen lands of the Awabakal people. We acknowledge the rightful owners of these lands; sovereignty was never ceded.



Activist Meredith Burgmann being dragged away by police from the Sydney Cricket Ground in 1971, after protesting against apartheid in South Africa. The tour of the South African rugby team at the time sparked anti-apartheid demonstrations around the country.

WHAT'S ON THE INSIDE

***Paper Chained* is a not-for-profit quarterly journal posted free to incarcerated people, funded primarily by the Community Restorative Centre. This issue is also made possible with the help of Curtin University, the University of Southern Queensland and About Time For Justice.**

If you would like to support *Paper Chained* through sponsorship, please contact us. Donations can also be made via our website.

If you are currently in prison, have experienced time in prison, or have a loved one in prison, we welcome your contributions to the next edition of this journal. Contributions from those supportive of prison reform will also be considered.

Submissions are accepted all year round. Contributions can be writings or artworks in any style. While exceptions can be made, we strongly prefer that submissions do not exceed 1,500 words. Please advise us if you would like submitted art returned.

Please also specify if you would like your contributions to be anonymous. If you choose to publish under your own name, please specify if you do not want the postal details of your prison published alongside your contribution.

If you are currently in prison and would like to receive a posted copy of the journal, please provide us with your name, ID number, and postal address, as well as your earliest possible release date (if you have one). Those outside prison may access the journal free online via our website, **PaperChained.com**.

TERMS OF PUBLICATION

Handwritten contributions will be typed unless the author requests to have a scan of the original text in the journal. *Paper Chained* reserves the right to edit contributions for grammar, length, clarity, and to excise any stigmatising language. Please advise us if you are not open to your contribution being edited.

Copyright for art and writing is retained by the contributor. Contributors are free to have any work that is published in *Paper Chained* republished elsewhere at a later date. However, please advise us if submitted contributions have previously been published elsewhere.

Please be aware that due to limited printing space and other logistical concerns, accepted contributions may not necessarily appear in the next issue of *Paper Chained*, and may be held on file for subsequent issues.

We will not publish any contributions that are perceived to contain racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, nationalism, xenophobia, ableism, evangelism, or other forms of oppressive language, or any material that encourages violence or violates the privacy of others.

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WE WELCOME CONTRIBUTIONS FROM:

PRISONERS

EX-PRISONERS

FAMILY OF PRISONERS

Post submissions to:
Paper Chained
PO Box 2073
Dangar NSW 2309
Australia



Curtin University

Study at Curtin from Prison

At Curtin, we want everyone to be able to access the benefits of higher education.

We provide a range of Curtin courses that our incarcerated students can study while in prison, helping them gain valuable skills, confidence and enhancing their career opportunities.

We know that as an incarcerated student, you have a unique study environment and may experience restrictions with internet access, accessing learning materials and undertaking assessments. So, we provide support and adjustments and flexibility to accommodate your student needs.

Courses currently available include:

- **Enabling pathways** - Uniready and Indigenous Tertiary Enabling Course (WA prisons only)
- **Arts** (History, Geography)
- **Construction Management**
- **Commerce** (majors in Management, Marketing, Business Law, International Business, Taxation)
- **Fine Arts** (Justice and Equity Through Art program)
- **Health Science, Health Safety and Environment, Health Promotion**
- **Indigenous Mental Health**
- **Science** (selected foundation units only)

For more information, speak to your prison Education Officer.

Curtin University Prison Outreach
GPO Box U1987 Perth 6845
Phone: 08 9266 5671
Email: prisonoutreach@curtin.edu.au

ABOUT TIME FOR JUSTICE



Todd and Jacob Little. About Time For Justice founders, former prisoners and survivors of institutional abuse.

About Time For Justice is an Australian family-owned and operated organisation specialising in assisting survivors of historical institutional child abuse and stolen generation members in seeking justice, healing and possible compensation.

Our passion is helping survivors who have been affected by abuse within private and public institutions across Australia. The team from About Time for Justice understands that taking the first steps towards seeking justice can be intimidating, especially for those who have had issues with trusting people, systems or organisations they have been exposed to in the past. Our experienced team, many of who have shared their own story and experience in this area, are trained to eliminate stress and navigate the complex process of approaching and dealing

with the most appropriate legal representatives. They are trauma-informed and culturally trained to deal with the most complex stories.

We provide full support to our clients so they know all the options available, taking away the anxiety of having to tell your story to many people, and assist in liaison with legal firms and lawyers to minimise the fears involved in taking legal action. We partner with legal representatives from some of Australia's largest firms, as well as smaller specialised law firms that provide targeted legal advice based on client needs. Our team have the skills to explain what is happening with your matter in simple terms, is available to answer any questions, and works flexibly with each survivor to achieve the best outcome for their individual circumstances.

Write to us for more information or call for an obligation-free chat.



About Time For Justice
PO Box 1182,
Kingscliff NSW, 2487
NSW, ACT, VIC, TAS:
02 5632 1291
QLD: 07 4911 3237
NT: 08 7918 0817
SA: 08 7079 8356

AboutTimeForJustice.com
@AboutTimeForJustice

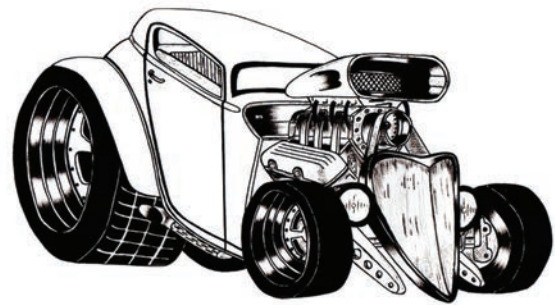
About Time For Justice is one of many organisations offering no-win-no-fee services for victims of institutional child abuse. Other similar organisations can be found on the National Redress Scheme website. A prison support officer may be able to print you a list of organisations operating in your state by visiting <https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/institutions/joined-scheme>

LETTERS TO PAPER CHAINED

Hey everyone, I've been reading *Paper Chained* for a few years now and love reading the write-ups, poetry and looking at the artworks. I've followed Damien's art for years, and when I first saw his sketch of Amandine from *Inside Out*, I couldn't believe it was a drawing. I've been painting for about 15 years, I was initially taught by my closest friend Rod, an amazing artist, then about 5-6 years ago I started doing art by pen, the solid black is paint, and the shading and outlines are with just a black Bic pen. The photocopies don't really show the detail in the shading. I've also been following Samantha Brownlow, Ojore McKinnon, Kelly Flanagan, Yolanda Shaw, Len Pen and Scott Darlymple. I get ideas and inspiration from your artworks, I still learn techniques each time I do a new artwork, and want to continue and pursue my art upon release, which is under a year-and-a-half away.

I hope everyone is well and look forward to the next issue. And a big thank you to Damien and those involved in making *Paper Chained* possible.

Take care, Mark – "Motion"



DO YOU HAVE A LETTER TO SHARE WITH
ALL THE READERS OF PAPER CHAINED?

POST IT TO US SO WE CAN PUT IT IN
THE NEXT ISSUE



University of
**Southern
Queensland**

**Supporting
Incarcerated
Students**

At UniSQ, we believe everyone should have the opportunity to access higher education. To support our prospective and current incarcerated students, we've developed a selection of resources that will support individuals make well informed career decisions and a suite of programs that can be studied whilst incarcerated.

We understand that as an incarcerated student your needs are unique and internet restrictions will impact how you are able to study. UniSQ has developed learning materials in an 'offline' format which means you will be able to complete your program without the need for online resources or internet access.

During your studies, Correctional Centre staff such as an Education Officer may be able to provide you with support throughout your program including by communicating with UniSQ, applying for and enrolling you in courses, submitting assignments and coordination and facilitation of exams.

UniSQ has developed a series of workbooks called *Unlocking the Future*, which are designed to help you with the decision to study at university and provide support for students soon to be released from a correctional centre. If you would like a copy of these workbooks, please ask your Education Officer.

Unfortunately not all correctional centres can facilitate students studying at a tertiary level. For further information, or to talk about enrolling, please contact your Education Officer.

ART AND WRITING

WINTER

The air conditioning not changed in our cells
 The coldness piercing like ringing bells
 Early morning fogs like pea soup
 Not much to do when you are in this coop
 Put on an extra coat
 Oh how they make one bloat
 Pelting rain
 Can't go outside; such a drain
 Each night freezing without a blanket made of mink
 Unfortunately, no hot chocolate to drink
 Days grow long
 We need to remain strong
 Fingertips turn blue
 As all around the wing abounds the dread flu
 Achoo, achoo, achoo
 This is Winter!



Writing and art by Katrina W
 Silverwater Women's Prison



Art by Colin Burke, UK



Art by Joel Minor E31433
 Woodford Correctional Centre
 Private Mail Bag 1
 Woodford, QLD 4514



Art by Kris, QLD

ABOUT TIME

It's about time, I outline, the walls we're within. No doubts fly, that no routes fine, the way I'm living. I shout, whine, but still I'm stuck in prison. Mistakes, lies, of all kinds that aren't forgiven. I did lines, my shout guys, insight went missing. My fam cries, I got time, charges have arisen. No goodbyes, no wise guys, at large just wishing. Chose mob ties, not outcries, I've been losing my vision. The cops bite, one more time, they're ankle nipping. I got high, now gotta find my own remission.

Not guilty we all cry, there's no admissions. Prosecution all sigh, got 'em power tripping. They see nothing we do's right, that's the stigmatism. All criminals, all fight, try to sit and listen. It's about time to outline, the truth you're gripping. I'm trying to shed light on your firm position. 'Cause we are drowning in blood, from the law's incisions. Not all of us are all bad, your pocket's been pissed in.

Generational trauma, got some pathways missing. Some of us just made some bad decisions. Others were in raids that our peers positioned. Of all the charges laid, a lot of facts went missing. At the back of the court room, hear the snakes all hissing. A few are innocent black slaves, to some cruel traditions.

I'm not gonna lie, some are plain Kool-Aid sipping. But the generations born with stigmas are slipping. So it's about time, we outline, corruption's given. To all of mankind, it's time the subject's risen. Before more sons and daughters die in this system. Or another rise, in rates of recidivism. I just hope you'll listen, to these words, from Risdon.

By Storm Tientjes

FRIENDS

Written with a pen
Sealed with a kiss
If you are my friend
Please answer this
Are we friends or are we not
You told me once but I forgot
So tell me now and tell me true
So I can say I'm here for you
Of all the friends I've ever met
You're the one I won't forget
And if I die before you do
I'll go to heaven and wait for you
I'll give the angels back their wings
And risk the loss of everything
There isn't a thing I wouldn't do
To have a friend that is you.

*By Christine Lyons, 207942
DPFC, PO Box 497, St Albans, Victoria 3023*

SON DAY

They say it is a tradition
For a father to cut the cord
When a baby girl or boy is born
My hands were shaking too much
For me to carry on this tradition
So soon after your life's down.

We'd waited far too long for this day
To welcome a child into our lives
No children between us, now we had one.
The joy was writ large on your mother's face
Her dream along with mine had come true
As we welcomed to the world, you, our son.

We took you on long drives when you were young
Smiling as you slept in the backseat, before
Showing you the wild animals at the country zoo
Watching you swiftly grow, from a crawl to a walk
The smile on mum's face as she carried you on her back
For the morning run, snug and warm you.

The years have flown past and now you're a man
An adult's life and adventures await
As you move forward, bold and loud
In pain I've missed your teenage years
A time when a son should have his Dad
But of you each day, my son, I'm so incredibly proud.

By Dave

KING'S CROSS PRINCESS

She traded her hopes of glass slippers for the unreality
of a glass pipe.

And traded her dreams of being a twirling ballerina for
twirling round poles and twirling pipes.

She likely doesn't know or care who Jean Paul Gaultier
is, she's not wearing French perfumes, just coconut
lotion.

She's far less interested in a diamond ring than
little bags of crystals.

She no longer dreams of meeting a prince but would be
happy to meet a half-decent guy, even just once.

Her hair's not long and draped from a castle window;
she's got the new style of punk-bitch undercut to say
"I'm tough".

She's dying on the inside, but doesn't have time to think
about it as it's show-time at Porkey's in a minute.

That's just how things go for girls in the city sometimes.

But sometimes, just sometimes, those same girls come
out on top in the end.

Here's hoping.

There's always hope.

*By Alex Freeburn, 211722
Karreenga C.C. 1200 Bacchus Marsh Rd, Lara, VIC 3212*

LOVE POEM

When you're having a down week
Please always think of this
You are the most amazing woman
That will ever and forever exist

Always know I'm here for you
and love you from the heart
We will be a loving family
That can't be torn apart

You will always be my one true love
Smart, loving, sexy and kind
You're my every breath I take
Our love forever intertwined

*Poem and art by:
Aaron Matthews 186464
Mount Gambier Prison
PO Box 1498
Mount Gambier SA 5211*



A BROTHER'S CODE

The bond a brother shares between him and his brother is
an unbreakable bond, and while I live and breathe, I will be
my brother's keeper.

Even if it costs me the life God has granted me, for my
brother I will lay down my life willingly.

Back2back we stand and back2back we will fall. Through
good and bad, the Lord has our back, this is certain.

For my brother I will go to war and if needed fall on my
sword. Love, respect and loyalty is what we stand for.

And if my brother shall fall at the hands of another, then I'll
wage war and vengeance will be mine that's for sure.

The world can hate and condemn me but in this world only
God can judge me. For I am my brother's keeper and he
is mine.

Anonymous

Galahs shriek loudly
Water drips off galv roofing
Nature passes by

Haiku by Clayton

ONCE ELYSIAN FIELDS

Across the fertile grassy plains
That seem to stretch toward forever
Along the scrubby desert fringes
That bordered the sacred land
Where the spirits of myth and legend
Told the stories of their existence
They danced to the throb of beating drums
And drew their totems in the sand
They lived a life unknown to others
That would journey from foreign shores
To seek and steal the abundant riches
Of which they knew not of their worth
They lost that of which they were entitled
They heard not of words like plunder
The invaders came with savage intent
And left a scarred and desecrated earth
There were once Elysian fields
Defiled not by man's encroachment
Where verdant forests harboured life
That encompassed all of nature's legacies
But still they came and pillaged
And took the gifts that nature valued
Defying those that stood to bar their way
With ranks of guns and worthless treaties
Time's light has not shone kindly
On those who sought to preach their doctrines
To ancient fragile cultures
Existing long before the written word
Their rites and ways and customs
Are but ephemera to the civilised
Their primal art in the dust decaying
Long forgotten languages no longer to be heard.

By DeWitt B



Art by Jean-Paul Issa

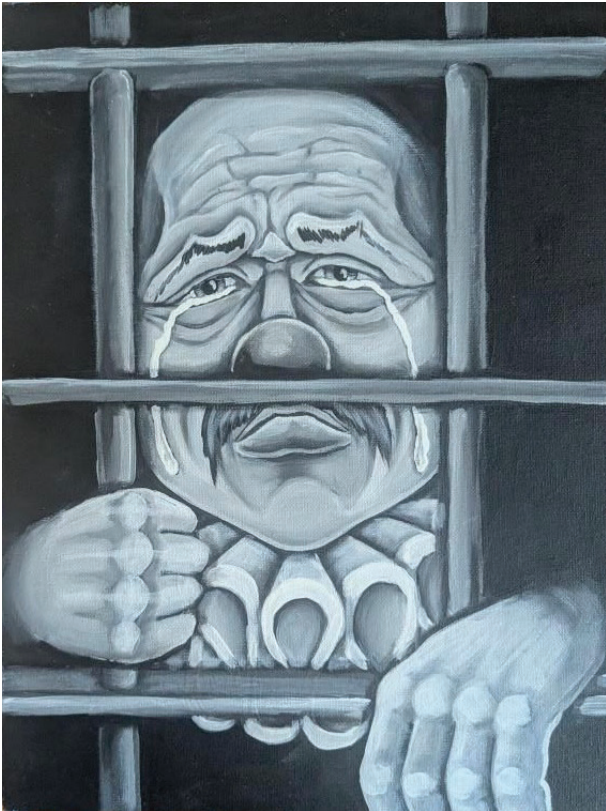


Art by Samantha Brownlow, D56930
SQCC, LMB 1008, Gatton, QLD, 4343

Peter,
to my husband peter
that's been waiting the past 6 1/2
years and still has 1 1/2 year
to wait for me to come home,
I want to thank you and let
you know it's you and your
love for me that's got me
threw this hell, your visits
every weekend, your voice on
the phone when I've had a
nightmare of a day,
your loyalty to me has been
totally faithful and constant
I need you to know how
truly grateful I am for
you and how much I love
Respect and Value you,
Soon Baby I'll be home to
take care of you,
Forever yours Jo
XXXX
Janne Mauley h.j.c.c.



Art by Scott D



Art by Cheeba, South Coast Correctional Centre
Cheeba's family post his art on Instagram @cheebaink



Art by Henry Akano, #208546
Loddon Prison, LMB 3, Castlemaine Victoria 3450
Contact Paper Chained to purchase Henry's paintings



Art by James Mutugi, Kenya
Follow James on Instagram: @wangechijamesmutugi



Art by Jayde Farrell
Follow Jayde on Instagram: @jaydefarrell.artist

DREAMZ? WHY?

Why aren't I having any of the good dreams?
Why are the bad dreams the only dreams it seems?
Why can't I dream of good times and happy days?
Why is it that when I dream, that I am still stuck in my ways?
At night I dream of violence, dream of death,
Wake up, and I'm struggling for a breath.
I feel something watching and that something isn't good,
I cannot see a face, but I can see a dark, black hood.
Why are the dreams repeating where I've died?
Falling from the sky, until with the earth I do collide.
I am in my dreams and someone is trying to get me,
Stuck on a memory's street that is desolate and empty.
Try to jump a fence, but I can't jump at all,
I see his Freddie's claws; he's scraping down the wall.
I just want to run, but my legs don't seem to move?
My feet are stuck in quicksand, the situation won't improve.
I am back at my old house, the place I grew up in,
Someone looking in the windows, my head begins to spin.
Who is he, what does he want, why am I seized with fear?
There's a window he could see me,
Oh no, please don't look in here.
Now I'm laying upon a cold ground, a pistol at my head,
He is about to pull the trigger; I know soon that I'll be dead.
Why does he want to kill me, what have I ever done to him?
I'm drowning in a sordid dream sea, I can no longer swim.
I can't escape, I cannot wake, I cannot make it end,
Stuck inside a dreamworld, where I do not have a friend.
Who is in control in here, I really do not know?
Every situation could finally deliver my deathblow.
As my minds inside a dreamworld, my body does shake,
Until my cellmate freaks out and he rouses awake.
(R.I.P. Benny!)

By Gareth Buck #143272

HMP Loddon, Locked Bag 3, Castlemaine, Victoria 3450

BEAUTY

When exposed to your beauty I was taken aback,
my heart under fire you launched an attack
I had trouble breathing I needed some air
because you were stood in front of me there
surely I'm dreaming I must be asleep
barely keeping from falling down in a heap
never before has my heart beaten so fast
could I be under a spell you have cast
one thing's for certain I will not forget
this life changing moment now we have met
I don't think I'll bother attempting to speak
to witness such beauty is just so unique

By Josh McElhinney

Cooma Correctional Centre

1 Vale St, Cooma, NSW, 2630

FACING FATE

I sit here in jail and wait
For a bunch of strangers to decide my fate
They have no former training
Yet somehow are fit for arraigning
I'm supposed to trust these people with my life
Holy fuck I'm in some strife
I wouldn't trust them with my ride
Never mind my fucking hide
How do I get out of this?
Go back to a state of bliss
Living with my darling miss
I can't believe I'm missing my kid for this
Someone's taking the fucking piss.



Writing and art by Lewis Comb

Woodford Correctional Centre

PMB 1, Woodford, Queensland 4514

TICK, TICK, TICK

Emotions run through my head
Happy, sad, in love, confused
At times I feel all lost inside,
Of course I ended up locked up cause I was fried,
Both ended up lit up like dynamite,
Cause all I thought was fight or flight,
Something took over all I saw was black,
Now sitting here looking at a decent wack.
Hoping I get a judge to cut me some slack,
Days and weeks and months have passed,
I just wanna know a sentence at last
Cause the unknown is the worst part!

By Jordan Spencer

Dame Phyllis Frost Centre

PO Box 497, St Albans, Victoria 3021

YOUR HAND

I would have given anything
To have held your hand at last
But now the chance for that
Is buried deeply in our past.
You tried to make it obvious
As you sat down next to me,
I wanted to hold it but couldn't
It was just inches from my knee.
It's a simple thing to do
With the one who's in your heart.
A sign of being together
Like "til death do us part"
Even the Beatles sang about it
That great British band,
It was a breakout song for them
"I wanna hold your hand"
Yet my brain had it all wrong
Each and every day,
I loved you so very much
But continued to push you away.
Other couples did it
And clearly with no fuss
At shopping centres, on trains,
And even on the bus.
Your hand was on the lounge
Oh so close to me
A small example of my love
Is all you wanted to see.
I wanted to, I did
But I couldn't find the start
Of that simple, simple process
Of showing the love inside my heart
I hope you never have to experience
The pain I daily live
The rejection of you too often
Who had so much love to give
It shouldn't be a hard thing
This touching of the skin
Now I'm forever from your heart
Never to be allowed back in

By KCDC

I SWEAR

I've sworn I have no heartbeat
That life itself can't go on
Everything that's meant to be right
In my life, always went wrong.
Some paths led me to a light
But in the end, they went dark
I've felt myself closing in
While leaving me out in the stark.
I've sworn that it will get better

I'm built from tougher than tough
Pushed myself till I shattered
Until I knew I wasn't enough.
Wondered alone in this life
Never wanting to stay.
Swore the devil could have my soul
Cause no god would take me away.
Raised by a monster and steel
Coddled by darkness and blood
Shown it was never real
Every time I felt loved.
I've sworn to keep my walls high
To never wear my heart on my sleeve.
Knowing that when someone knows me
That's when they'll always leave.
Assuming I'll die alone.
That nobody was made for me
So, to make sure I still see tomorrow
I swear, that's how it shall be.

By N. Lewis

FAREWELL TO ME

I stand high, in wings and ponder,
Of mortal men, whose eyes hold wonder
Are we here, or are we not?
Life has its turns, for all man's lot
I see the empty expression of fate,
Of times we've missed the golden gate
For freedom's eye, we long, but nigh,
A dream we think, in my mind's eye
It's time, the devil in idle hands,
Time of use, for wicked plans
We dream out loud, with laughter's cheer,
The nightmare, we hold with a suppressing sneer
Truth is smothered by mortal fear,
Like raging rivers, it drowns the weir
To dream too much, would break my heart,
To dream of light, not of the dark
Patience I say, with cries of help,
The pain within, the lash works well
I've felt my soul, of parts turned black,
Parts that die, and won't ever come back
It's like to mourn a dying friend,
Who helped me survive, when others went
Farewell, but soon I must go alone,
Farewell, go sit upon the throne
The throne of pain, of keepers' dreams,
Alone you'll be with their deadly schemes
You'll torment no more, my old friend,
With love in life, I'll fight to the end
I'll look for you, in crowd, in face,
In another's soul you'll infect with hate
Be warned my friend, go to the night,
For I'll battle, with love and all my might!

By Kenneth John Monley, written in 1994

TIME

Seconds
Every second goes by
Feels like an hour
In the blink of an eye
Wilts the petals of a pretty flower

Minutes
Another minute passed
Fifty-nine more to go
Wait until the last
Watch it pass like a TV show

Hours
So many hours in a cell
Count the seconds of the unlock
Too many stories for one to tell
First times feel the shock

Days
There goes a sunny day
Flew by through the bars
Don't matter what they say
This place will leave some scars

Weeks
Knocked a week off the wall
I can tell by the visit
At least we had a few calls
It's all we got so we live it

Months
Last month went by quick
It's strange now in hindsight
Lost time makes me feel sick
Her love helps me win the fight

Years
One years all but done
How many more left to go
Jail ain't no fun
Welcome to the prison show

*Poem by Joel-Reid Roe, 218534
Darwin Correctional Centre
PO Box 1066, Howard Springs NT 0835*

Face-to-face visits
Family travels far
Hard for everyone

Haiku by Clayton

BUPE

The prison doesn't distribute it as an opioid substitute. I saw it ready to use. A reddish-pink liquid, transparent. It was sitting in a plastic spoon on a power switch attached to the fence. Unattended. Officers walking past. Right there.

My cellmate used it. He'd get cuts off a strip, a few hundred dollars a line. The dealer would write him out what he wanted for buy-up the next few weeks. Paid in noodles and chocolate. My cellmate borrowed a needle to shoot it up. The needle was blunt. Old. Very old. Used. Shared. Passed around. He flushed it with Fincol and then he flushed himself. The bupe eased his hallucinations. He was schizophrenic but the nurses never gave him his medication. He brought some back into the cell. "Add water", he explained, "snort it up", he snorted it up, "and it gets into your sinuses, goes up into your brain." He tapped his head, where his brain was.

I see guys throwing it over the fences. "Give me ya' shoe", they ordered a guy. He gave them his shoe. They packed it and lobbed it over to the neighbouring unit. Right over the officers' heads. Loud slap as it landed. They didn't do anything. They watched. They all did. A new guy on the job would try to do something. "No. Don't worry about it," the seniors seemed to tell them. And they didn't.

I saw a guy sit on the yard toilet and shoot it up into his penis every day. Everyday. Helping another guy hit an artery in his neck. I'd be in the shower and they'd go, "Hey can I just clean this real quick?," and they'd lean in and rinse their needle in the hot water.

I saw a guy stand up on a table, reach up to the steel beams of the yard pergola. Pulls down a packet off the rafters.

"You smell that?" a kid drug dealer asks me. He had blurry prison tats. I smelled what I thought was petrol, diesel. He said, "That's bupe. Smells good, 'ay?" It didn't.

We get napkins along with a journal, Christian calendar and gummy lollies from the Salvation Army around Christmas time. We used to get socks too. They were too thin. I was in the yard and I smelled bupe. "You see this?" a guy asks me, pointing at brown flecks on a salvo napkin. "That's bupe."

That's bupe.

I tried to get some myself once. I was coming apart. I had asked my cellmate to pawn my pocket radio for a line. He forgot. He forgot a lot. He had brain damage from when he hanged himself. That's how I didn't end up using bupe.

By Kyle Zammit

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SURVIVE?

It is 04:38 and as I lay here in this steel-framed bunk bed; the quietest hour of prison that is allowing for introspection, I pose the question...

What does it mean to survive?

It is to rise above the misunderstanding of others who imply, infer or suggest you are not as good as you may think you are.

That those who choose to remain blinded by their own inadequacy while you see through the transparency some try to hide behind as they say...

That because of what you have done decades ago, which will haunt you until the day you die, literally, that does not define the man or woman you are in a world bigger than the minuscule confines of the mind that thinks such things. To survive is to move through the impossibility others say cannot be done and already from the beginning you have won by the character, maturity and determination of who you have become by what you have done for the glory of your God and yourself in spite of the past acts that got us to where we are.

That the physical walls that surround will never keep us bound down, for our mind flies freely every second of everyday on angels wings.

To survive is to take action differently...

By rising above the expectations of the prison environment we stand out to show society that bears upon us in its limited view from mass media that projects biased concepts, we are not who we once were.

For we rise above the yesterday, acknowledge what was done and give insight so that others can be deterred from being where we are or go through what has already been a devastating experience for so many.

To survive means that by having the scars upon ourselves and inflicted upon so many, in time we can look upon this life and be grateful for the ability to stand and breathe.

We strive to be free where freedom does not exist; remain strong in our weaknesses and love in the hate.

We are survivors.

*By Jeffery A. Shockley - ES4796
SMART COMMUNICATIONS/PADOC SCI-FAYETTE
Po Box 33028, St Petersburg
Florida 33733, USA*

PRISON LIFE

Staring at the window, another storm rolls in
Looking back at a life, wondering what might have been
Stuck in a system of lies and abuse
That lacks in belief - I'm of no use
Most days all I see are the walls of my cell
There's no-one that cares about our existence in hell

On the other side of the fence society thrives
They're clueless to the waste, destruction of lives
The place we get sent to is meant to 'correct'
We live in a place deprived of respect
Treated like animals, denied basic rights
Its small fuckin wonder each day there's fights
Fights for human decency, some time in the sun
Is it too much to ask for, as inmates "we're scum"
For change to happen its not too much to expect
Those paid to turn keys act worth some respect
For many in here the opposite is true
None of us here want to be like you
Our sentence was being removed from 'out there'
You're not paid bonuses adding to our despair
The lockdowns fuck us up in ways you don't know
When we get out, where are we meant to go
Broken, destroyed and disrespected all these years
Alone in the darkness no one sees our tears
Time in prison is meant to effect change
Society cares more for a dog with mange
Just cause we're not seen, doesn't make it all OK
We're voiceless, made worthless and just long for the day
That we have the key for our door, that we are home
That we can finally live, love and not be alone
Then try to heal from all that you've done
As an inmate at Holtze where you treat us like scum.

*By Jason Ryan, 595683
Darwin Correctional Centre
PO Box 1066, Howard Springs NT 0835*



Art by Kaylene Melville, WA

EVER AFTER

I have given my heart – only to not accept
the hand of true beauty – true love
I have so much to express – the heart beats'
Seeking a second to believe or not believe
I can only hope to be loved and not
addressed as a broken soul that's seen
broken dreams, hearts have been disappointed
minds have been reopened, so I pray to have
unworthy as my past, and find true love
I pray to be worthy and end my broken soul.
Come back and share your sacred heart,
which floods me with its love,
Do you think I am not touched, the
truth lay's beneath within my heart skips
a beat, the one time made me smile
I knew I was a worthy man ...
So I speak only to who is worthy
I do not allow myself to rest,
What can I say, find me, help me,
I want to be accepted my love,
Is it time for me to rest?
I'm going on, I'm going to keep going on,
I speak to your heart
I've found what's worthy.

*By Malcolm Wilson #144590
Yatala Labour Prison
1 Peter Brown Drive, Northfield, SA 5087*

A little over two months in Jail,
So far, it's not too bad, met some decent people
The days go long when you want them over
My mind just tics away wondering what will come
Next, I am not waiting for anything, only my release
My mind is racing but my thoughts are empty
I am not sure how that works but it does.
Is this a dream or an illusion or is this just reality
Seems like it could be all three combined
It's funny some days you want to talk to someone
but you don't. The idea of it sounds good, but
putting words into action sounds exhausting
I get headaches constantly because my mind is racing
Some days I want it to stop other days I find it
keeps me sane to a degree. Is this normal?
It doesn't feel that way to me.
Sitting here wishing I was with my daughter;
It's one of the hardest things I have ever faced
If only she knew how much I need her as she needs me.
Being behind bars is a place I've cried the most
Not because I'm scared, it's because you have to sit with
your own thoughts and that is one scary place.
Not jail, not the people, but yourself.

Untitled writing by Leon Fraser, NSW

GONE

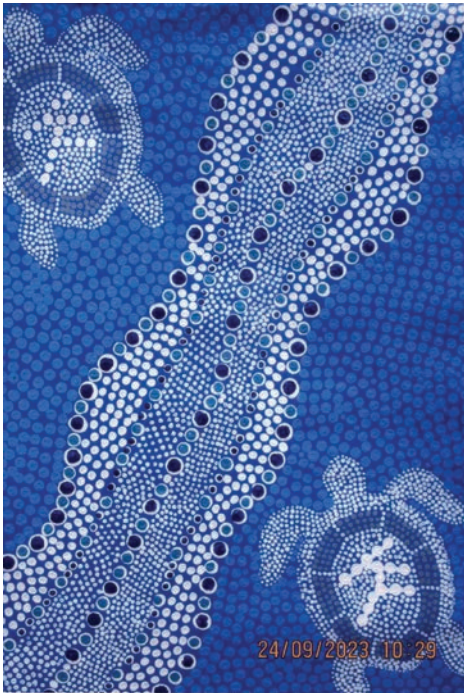
When times get tough, and things get a little rough
I think of my girls, like little shiny pearls
The site of razor wire burns like wildfire
Nine years and counting, and never bouncing
The mistakes I've made will never fade
Head up high and keeping strong
I'll keep trying to do no wrong
With parole on my mind
Paper waiting to be signed
My little pearls, growing up so fast
Not to worry, I'll be home at last

By M. Sawden

ODE TO A DAUGHTER

You won't remember the first time we met
An embrace of love, your head upon my chest
A sharing of warmth mixed with tears of joy
The overwhelming feeling that this was the best
You were the first to do this
I couldn't do it with your brother
We lay together on that hospital bed
As we waited for your beautiful mother.
Do you remember your childcare days?
Through the sand and gardens you'd roam
You'd see me and scream "Daddy"
When I came to take you home
Then there was walking back from primary school
With your friends you'd be playing in the park
So happy you were to do this
You would have stayed until it was dark.
Then there were the ballet concerts
A parent's patience out to the test
I was always so very proud to watch
Because I knew my daughter, you were the best.
Now how much I yearn to hear
The special word you used to say
It was when you called me "father"
It would truly make my day
I miss you all so much
My daughter, your brother, your mum.
As I clear the tears from my eyes
From the deserved kick in the bum.
Maybe one day you'll have children
If this world doesn't get too bad
And perhaps with them you'll smile a little
When you remember you once had a loving dad
There is no making up for the time
That has seen us grow apart
But I want you know, my daughter,
You are always in my heart.

By Dave



Art by Kelly Flanagan
View Kelly's art online at <https://thetorch.org.au/artists/0039s000005gd4saaa/>



Art by Mitch Barbieri, #518825
Wellington Correctional Centre
PO Box 386, Wellington, NSW 2820



Art by LenPen, Victoria

LenPen
HCC 14-11-23



Art by Preston
Brisbane Youth Detention Centre



Art by Nigel G



Art by Phillip Galea
Ravenhall Correctional Centre



Art by Simon
New Zealand



Art by 'RFGY'

OPEN ROAD

The sky is blue, scarcely a cloud in sight,
The sun is warm and the wind is light,
A perfect day to cruise the open road,
Something that can't be done from prison,
my current abode.

Surrounded by walls and fences electrified,
The totality of feelings I have can't be specified,
I suffer with anxiety and depression,
Something commonly felt when surrounded
with heartache and aggression.

In a place that is supposed to rehabilitate, I do confess,
Gives only an illusion of hope, but rather it breaks you
From all the stress,
It shatters your hopes and destroys your dreams,
Crushes your spirit and undermines your faith in the legal
systems.

Friends tell you to be strong and to hold on,
Be busy and it won't seem so long,
But a family man being kept from family is just wrong.
Being kept apart even for a day, is too long.

Though you're surrounded, loneliness tears you apart,
You try staying sane by painting, crafting, partaking in
various forms of art.

It's easy to be overwhelmed by intense feelings of
hopelessness, only when released will you again
experience true happiness.
I can't wait to ride the open road once more.
Good times will be in store.

*By Matthew Hobbs
Mount Gambier Prison
PO Box 1498, Mt Gambier SA, 5290*



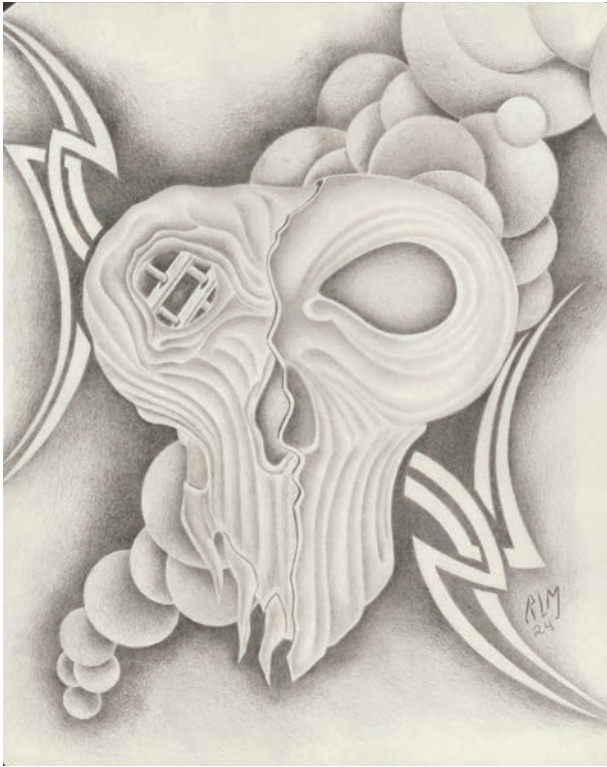
Envelope art by Pixie

TRAPPED SOUL

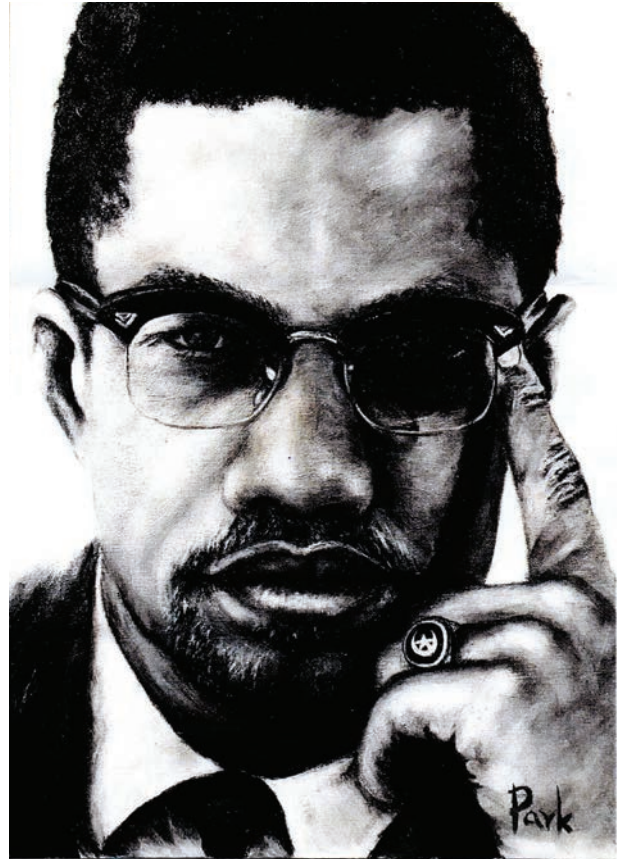
Steel bricks surround my sight
I'm stuck with bad nightmares at night
I keep keeping composed keeping my feels tight
Prison beds cold at night
Zoom visits bring together laughter to a tearful sight
Aye, I need to get my head right
But bro how it starts, I will never know
Loved ones come and loved ones go
Memories forever shattered like a falling snow
Only time will show if they stay, if love
continues to grow I know "it's true"
When I say my souls screaming out of my chest
Believe me I'm doing my best
To hold it all deep down inside my chest
Behind these rusty bars is a life
This ain't no test
All the shit I've missed since arrest
To make changes wish me the best
Aye I feel like a trapped soul
Strings getting pulled like a voodoo-doll
I can't let go, I'm trapped in my thoughts
Of a life that's a mess, I can't get no rest
My emotions grew numb when I reflect on this mess
But I still feel blessed: two beautiful twin baby boys
I am blessed!
But I'm hooked by a life I can't escape
Stuck behind this prison gate, I was given choices
And I chose my fate, stuck to the bed pack waiting
For my date, my mental in an unstable state
Music to heal the pain, make me feel great
I can see my future, Imma change it before I'm too late and
lose it all, Imma keep my cool
I ain't no fool, I ain't gonna fall
Double clutching fast on these bars never gonna stall
Climb to the top ain't gonna stop till I have it all
And make it out of the trap, the trap of being in fear,
Think of family I shed a tear
Aye I'm a lost soul
Floating in a sea of pain
Stuck in this dark hole
I need to gain control before I let go
Feels like times going so slow
Brothers keeps my blood on the flow
Always on our ten toe
Yeah, we're lost souls stuck behind the steel door,
Feelings shackled to the chain,
Hoping Neverland will be no-more!

Shout to the brothers SKITZ & MOOKZ
Love and loyalty always x

*Rhyme/Rap by Justin Jessop, #175292
Port Augusta Prison
PO Box 6, Port Augusta, SA 5700*



Art by Robert McCullough P78220
Correctional Training Facility
P.O. Box 705, Soledad, California, 93960, USA



Art by T. Park



Art by Malnight



Art by ShadowArt

WHY, WHY ME?

Like a weathered old gum tree, standing all alone on the river bank, watching the river of life pass him by, ignored by all who use the coolness of his shade. A lonely man thinks to himself, as he looks to the sky... "Why, why me?"

With strength, dredged up from deep within, as days turn into years, going through life, alone, he battles life's bitter hazards, playing it by ear. With a padlock tight around his heart, a sign for all, "Do not enter, this heart is broken." Tired and defeated, he goes to his bed, every night, thinking... "Why, why me?"

Tormented in his sleep, his pillow soaks up the tears he'd weep, dreaming of the hurt, love once caused, he tosses, he turns, his brow wet with his sweat. Now he dreams of a new love, one he's not yet met. Awakes abruptly, from his fake sleep, dazed, with these familiar words, coming to his lips. "Why, why me?"

Another new day, but still no time to think. From out of nowhere, her refreshing words come to him. "Hello there," she said, with his fears rising, he looks, he likes what he sees. "I've come to visit, I'd like to spend some time with you, please." He couldn't think of what harm a visit could do. Regrettably, he gently asks... "Why, why me?"

She had seen photos, even heard their criticism of him, but she too, had some experience, the kind that came first-hand, like him. She had suffered the same kind of fate in a previous life. As they talked and tear drops fell into their coffee, they took turns in saying... "Why, why me?"

Cook and clean, her 'ex' would say. Do as you're told, or my time with you will grow cold. I'm going out, look after the kids, stay at home. So she stayed inside, cursing the day she became his bride. Tending to the kids needs, and the pain in her eyes, asking... "Why, why me?"

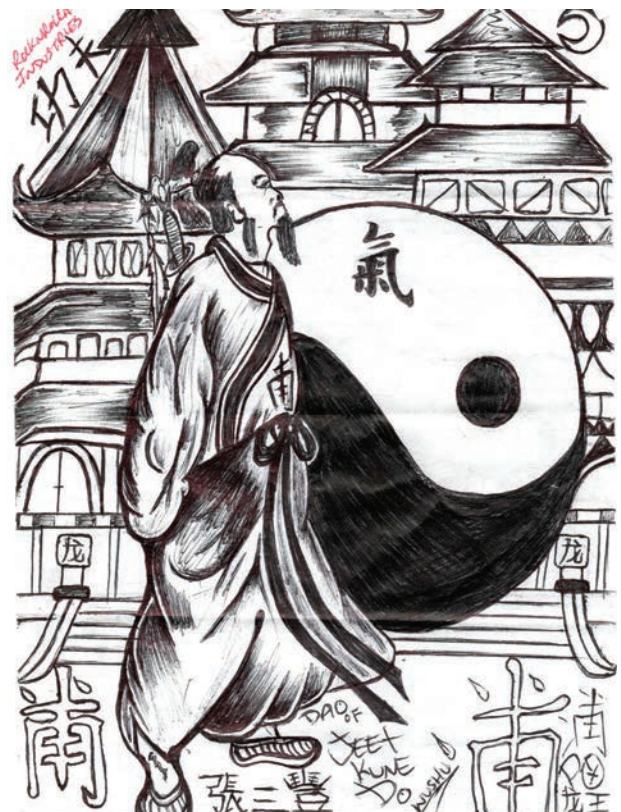
The 'ex' looks at her, with no respect, wanting to squash her, under his foot, like an insect. No thought spared, for the love they once shared. "I'm going out again," he said. She knew the ropes, stay at home, giving up all her hopes. Work and tears. What a decree, sighing... "Why, why me?"

"We've been lonely for many years," she said, holding back the tears. "I've heard things about you, just like 'he' says about me, I've lived through the same pain in my life." "How about a coffee?" "We have some words to share" but all they could share, was... "Why, why me?"

Now, since that day, with her words, the padlock to his heart she broke. She's settled in there now, and they feast on the love that they share, together. Looking one another in the eye, promising never-ending love, continuing even after they die. Still wondering... "Why, why me?"

He still thanks her, for the coffee and words they shared. Showing to him, how much she'd care. He's no longer a lonely gum tree, their lives have changed. No need to weep, they hug each together tightly, in their sleep, dreaming and singing together... "Why, why not me!"

*By Dimitri
Loddon Prison, Victoria*



*By Sheikh Jaxan Khalil Assad O'Reilly, E14572
Woodford Correctional Centre
PMB 1, Woodford, QLD 7074*

RIDDLES

I stood behind my father, yet my father stood behind me.
How?

I'm the beginning of the end, and the end of marriage.
What am I?

What always comes but never arrives?

Submitted by Dwayne Welsh. Answers on page 38.

BOOK REVIEW

BY ZOE WEATHERILL
CRIMINOLOGY STUDENT

Holly's Hell: Seven Years in a Thai Prison

By Holly Dean-Johns

Holly's Hell: Seven Years in a Thai Prison, tells the incredible true story of Holly's experience in the infamous 'Bangkok Hilton' Women's Prison, known as Lat Yao. After being sentenced to 31 years at the age of 29 for attempting to transport 15 grams of heroin from Bangkok to Australia and narrowly avoiding a death sentence, *Holly's Hell* recounts the inhumane conditions, traumatic experiences and uncertainty that Holly faced within the Thai justice system, all the while making enduring friendships with her fellow inmates, tackling and recovering from drug addiction, and living through moments that would change her life forever.

Holly begins her story with an insight into her childhood – her Mum running an escorting business from their home and becoming addicted to heroin, and her father's abuse towards her mother. As Holly then tells of her own drug addiction as a teenage and her siblings often being in jail, she speaks of these experiences as being completely normal to her at the time and reflects on the impact that her dysfunctional home had on her, and her future.

The plot thickens when Holly meets her soulmate – Stephen, and the two becoming addicted to heroin together. Following a drug-deal, Stephen escapes to Thailand to live a life on the run. In mid-2000, after attempting to post 15 grams of heroin to Australia, Holly is caught and arrested by the Thai authorities, and her seven hellish years in the Thai criminal justice system begins.

As Holly lives through what can only be accurately described as hell, she recounts the good: making lifelong friends and overcoming addiction, as well as the connections she made with people who helped her and who visited her. She also recounts the bad: being imprisoned in a foreign country and struggling with the language and customs, being away from family and friends, fighting over basic necessities, and fighting for her freedom. And the ugly: facing withdrawals and illness without any proper medical assistance, watching her friends and those around her dying of preventable diseases, and being treated inhumanely by the prison officers. After seven long and arduous years, Holly's application to be transferred to an Australian prison is granted – but not without a fight.

Holly's story throughout the entire book was captivating. The style of writing, being almost conversational and very 'Aussie,' made it feel as though I was sitting down and listening to an old friend (who is also really exceptional at story telling). The length of the book, with short and easily readable chapters, was just right. I found that I became involved in Holly's life and felt the love she gave for others, to the point that it felt heartbreaking when a happy ending



for all did not come. *Holly's Hell* tells a real and inspiring story of living, struggle, trauma, resilience, growth, and healing. The photographs of Holly and her family and friends throughout the book also added to this feeling of really knowing Holly and hearing her story straight from her, truly and authentically.

At times, particularly in Holly's earlier years, it was difficult to follow the timeline of the events she was recounting, time often skipping forward and backward, which would leave me momentarily confused as to where Holly had taken us in her story. While there were some minor editing faults throughout the book, these were exactly that – minor, and they did not impair or take away from the impact and emotion of Holly's story.

Overall, I found *Holly's Hell* to be an incredible, spellbinding and, at times, tear-jerking story of struggle, friendship, and growth. The familiarity of Holly's language made her story both relatable, easy to understand, and an absolute delight to read. For all those who love a fantastic true redemption story, told by a fantastic story-teller, *Holly's Hell: Seven Years in a Thai Prison* is definitely for you.

LETTER FROM THE TRENCHES

A STORY BY ASHLEY COULSTON

Corporal Frank Jackson paused, and leaned against the dirt wall of the trench to allow two men carrying an occupied stretcher to pass him by. Smoke rose from the prone man's cigarette as he was manhandled round the sharp angle of the trench. He had a smile on his dirty lips.

Despite his obviously painful wound he winked at Frank, and said, "I'm going home, lad; I'll be looking for you."

They shook hands quickly.

"Watch out for those lonely nurses, mate; I hear they'll have you up before the minister before you've finished saying hello."

They both laughed.

Frank walked to his rough shelter, passing out the water canteens he had filled as he went.

"Post's in, Frank," someone yelled in the dark.

After lighting the wick of a crude candle, Frank carefully opened the letter he found on his makeshift bed. The letter, he discovered, contained a photograph and two pages of closely written script. The photograph was of his wife, Audrey, and his newborn son.

He pushed back the dusty sackcloth of his shelter. "I've a son," he said proudly.

Congratulations rang the length of the trench.

He read the letter twice then pulled his notebook from his tunic pocket. Frank settled himself in his shelter and began to write.

Dearest Audrey

I wish I were with you now. How I would like to have young George in my arms, to feel his untarnished skin against my tanned cheek.

He paused to collect his thoughts.

The sun will soon rise and it looks like it will be another clear and sunny day. The weather here is generally good but the nights can be cold. Thank you for the photograph; I should scold you for the expense but after looking at our son I could never think to do such a thing.

News from home means more than you know. We could be on the moon for all the news of home we receive.

He ran his fingers over the growth upon his cheeks. Even in the darkness of the shelter the swirling dust from his bristles brought back painful memories.

Good water is in short supply here and we need all we have for drinking; would you like your man to come home with a beard?

Dearest, I told you once that I would like to live by the sea, to feel the cool sea breeze of the evenings. This shingly cove has cured me of that dream, I could never think of such a place without memories of Gallipoli following me. Hills covered with tall green trees fill my dreams now. An occasional bushfire would be worth the cost.

Hurried footsteps and voices brought Frank out of his narrow shelter.

"It's over the top at dawn, lads," said the tall captain. "Australia, and England, expects you all to do your duty." He bowed his head to look at his muddy shoes for a moment then walked off quickly, to spread his tidings amongst the rest of the men.

Frank sat on the fire-step with his face in his hands. "Over the top," he muttered softly, over and over again.

"I heard they're making a landing just north of here," someone said quietly.

A parachute flare burst in to life, it lit up the trench and the men in it. The bright, young eyes that only shone dimly in the darkness were suddenly shielded from the high, swinging light.

The naval bombardment started then.

Cheers echoed through the trench.

That'll wake up Johnny Turk," someone said over the din.

After stubbing out his cigarette Frank returned to his letter.

We're going, over the top in the morning. There's no need to worry I've been trained for this; I'm still finding Egyptian sand in my kit. But, as we discussed before I left, I could well fall.



The ground shook, as a mis-aimed naval shell struck close by. Frank dusted off his notebook.

You'll be seeing Simon Brown soon. He took a bullet in the shoulder, but should recover well with the care of our own nurses; at least he's out of it.

Rubbing his hands on his trousers to clean them, Frank gently caressed the photograph's edges, wished he had taken the photograph himself, been able to hold his family in his strong arms. He kissed the image of another life. *Our son may be walking before I see him for the first time I fear. He may have started his schooling, so much for this war being over before Christmas; well this Christmas anyway.*

I miss the feel of you at night my dearest wife. The lads are but little substitute for kind words on a dark night, but we only have the other here. I have made many new friends who care for each other like brothers.

Flinging a hand to his head to scratch out lice interrupted his thoughts. The hardships and the misery suddenly welled up. Frank began softly crying. He recovered slowly then looked at the photograph again.

I see that you've kitted out our son in my own baby clothes. Mother thought she would have a need of them again eventually, or maybe, despite my wild youth, she had the dream of becoming a grandmother eventually.

The ground shook violently. Dust filled Frank's shelter. He rolled into the trench and rubbed his eyes then stood, rifle in hand, waiting, and listening, before he returned to his notepad.

You would think, if you saw me, that I was a Roman man running from ash-strewn Pompeii. The very air can, at times, seem alive with dirt. Oh, how I would like to soak in a bath, to dream of nothing for hours on end, to ease away thoughts of this hard place.

Those navy boys have it good. They gave each of us a hot mug of cocoa before we left ship; bless 'em.

The Turk, on the other hand, greeted us with Maxims and spiked pits. Be we showed them that we would not be driven off so easily. The spirits of the lads to be finally doing something rose despite our losses. The names of our brave fallen will adorn the Argus' pages.

Frank thought back to his first night ashore. The terrible cries of those brave men filled his days, and every long night too.

The very worst thing a man could do was to let down his mates. Cowardice and fear were things that tugged at his soul. But Frank beat them down like wild bulls, as every fighting man must.

A call brought Frank out into the trench for a mug of sweet black tea and a thick slice of bully beef.

"We're going shortly."

The men sat silently, each mind thinking of hearth and home, of loved ones and sweethearts too. None thought less of a man for shedding a tear; others joked to ward off their deepest fears.

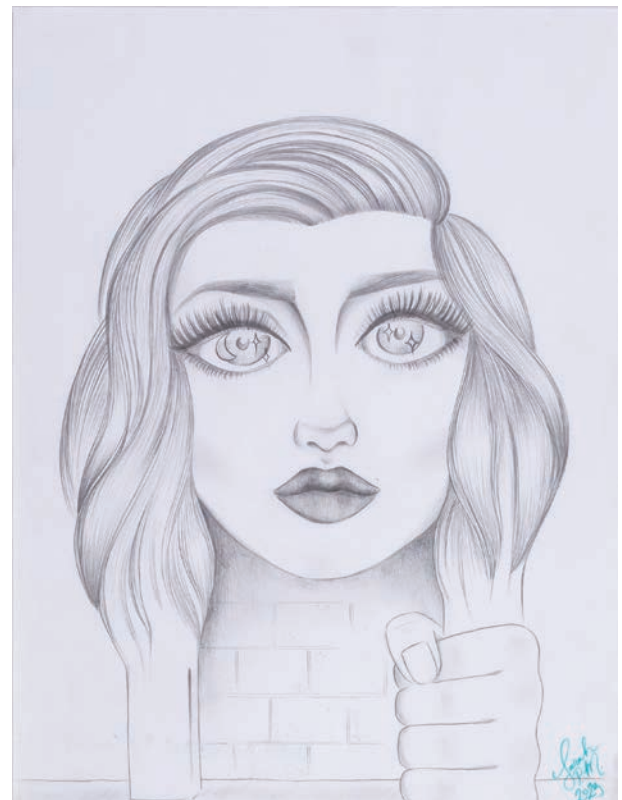
Frank rushed back to his shelter to add these few lines.

Dearest, you must be prepared for the worst. This very morning could be my last. All I shall ever ask of you is that you always remember that I love you.

I have some spare pages in my notebook; I shall continue this letter when I return.

By Ashley Coulston, Victoria

Written in 2005, and previously published in War Cry Magazine in 2011.



*Artwork by Sarah Montoya, #WG3594
Central California Women's Facility #512-10-4L
P.O. Box 1508 Chowchilla
CA 93610, USA*

LAST WORDS

BY ASHLEY MCGOLDRICK

Obtaining authorisation to add a telephone number to an inmates allocated phone list is a difficult and convoluted process at Queensland's Woodford Correctional Centre. Trying to call a historical figure who has been dead for well over 100 years is even more so. However, our protagonist, Robert Juniper did not receive a 10-year custodial sentence for allowing common sense to get in the way of his ambitions.

Using Ned Kelly's date of birth, and the Melbourne area code, Robert came up with the number 03-021101855. He then filled in the appropriate form and waited for the process to achieve its conclusion. Taking into consideration that time in prison does not follow the same rules as it usually will in polite society, coupled with the fact that the Queensland Corrective Services bureaucracy has no concern with reality: permission was granted; much to Robert's delight.

After a basic rehearsal of the conversation he was about to have, Robert walked to the phone, accessed his account, then made the call.

In a dark, dark and dirty cell where misery had covered every surface with hopelessness and despair, Ned Kelly restlessly paces back and forth. He was killing his time by counting down the hours, minutes and seconds until his execution the following day on 11-11-1880.

Experiencing every emotion between rage, wretchedness and remorse. The last thing he expected was the sudden appearance of the small white box that was attached to the sandstone wall next to his bed.

The mystery was rectangular in shape and about 20x30cm in size. It had an attachment that was hooked onto the box, yet also connected by a spiralling cord. Small panels on the front of the enigma were engraved with the numbers and symbols 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0, # and *.

Perplexed by the situation and starting to wonder about his own sanity, Ned could only stare with bemused curiosity. While wondering what new cruelties the universe had hit him with this time, the contraption started to make an extremely loud and annoying noise. Astounded Ned tentatively reached out to touch the white conundrum and in doing so, knocked the attachment off its perch. Thankfully the sound stopped. Yet even as he stood bewildered and alone like a child lost in a jungle, Ned heard a voice emanating from the appendage.



Ned Kelly's armour is permanently on display at the State Library of Victoria. Photo by Damien Linnane.

"Hello? Hello?...."

"Hello? Hello? Are you there? Is anybody there?" enquired Robert.

"Is anybody where?" was the confounded reply.

"There. You. Hello!" stumbled Robert.

"What devilry is this?!" demanded Ned.

"OK, alright. Look, I know this must be confusing," Robert regrouped.

"My name is Robert Juniper, and I'm calling you from Queensland."

"Calling me what?" challenged Ned.

"I'm not calling you anything. I'm calling you on the phone. That thing in your hand is called a phone," explained Robert.

"Why?" asked Ned.

"Why what?" asked Robert.

"Why is it called a phone?" Ned asked again.
 "What? I don't know. That's not important," Robert flummoxed, "OK, first thing first, am I speaking to Ned Kelly?"
 "Yes," answered Ned.
 "Great, that's great. Secondly what is today's date?"
 "It's the 1th of November, 1880."
 "Great! I mean, well sorry, I guess it's not that great for you. Today is the day before your execution."
 "I know," said Ned, without inflection.

Robert could sense the exasperation that Ned must be feeling. This conversation wasn't as easy as he first thought it would be.

"I'm sorry, mate. I don't mean to be insensitive, but the thing is, I'm calling from your future!" explained Robert.
 "Impossible!" retaliated Ned.
 "Ned, think about it, has anything about our talk seemed possible?" queried Robert.
 "You may have a point," reasoned Ned.
 "So why are you calling from the future?"
 "To talk about your last words."
 "What? What last word?" replied Ned.
 "Your last words, before you ... well die" said Robert apologetically.
 "Have you planned anything?"
 "Of course not! Who would plan such a thing? If I do say anything, I'll probably improvise, or curse, or both."
 Ned then asked, "Why? Are you a newspaperman? Historian? What?"
 "No, I'm simply curious. I'm also locked-up in prison, and I've always had an interest in historical criminal identities."
 "Why are you in gaol!?" Ned inquired.
 "Drug dealing", replied Robert.
 "Drug dealing? Are you a doctor? A chemist?" questioned Ned.
 "No! "Laughed Robert, "Nothing like that. Listen Ned, we're getting a bit off track here. About your last words, they're legendary, and I've always wondered whether you actually said them or are they myth?"
 "Why would they be myth? "Ned wanted to know.
 "I've always thought they were too clever, too considered, too articulate."
 "Are you saying I'm not clever, considered, or articulate?" interrogated Ned.
 "No, no, of course not," stammered Robert.
 "I mean too clever in a contrived or conceited kind of way, perhaps a myth."
 "Well, tell me what my last words are supposed to be, and I'll tell you whether or not I'd say something along those lines."
 "I can't do that, I may inadvertently influence your decision."
 "Do you think this entire conversation and how it has taken place hasn't influenced my last words?" asked Ned.
 "You're right, but I assure you, that was not my intention. In all honesty, Ned, nothing about our little chat has gone according to plan," said Robert despairingly.

"Cheer up Robert! After all, I'm the one getting executed tomorrow, not you."
 "Sorry Ned, all I wanted to do was either prove or debunk the legend, that your last words have become."

"Very few things in this world turn out the way we expect them to. Take me, for example. I certainly never thought that I would hang at the age of 25. Such is the way of the world, such is life."
 "What? What?! Did you just say, *Such is life*?"
 "Yes, I did, 'such is life', interesting turn of phrase, isn't it? Profound yet succinct."
 "Have you ever used that phrase before?"
 "No, that was the first time. In fact, I love the term so much that I will use it tomorrow as my last words. You've inspired me Robert, I would never have thought of these words without you."
 "You can't do that! I can't be held responsible for this!"

In a dark, dark and dirty cell in Melbourne Gaol, misery relentlessly hunts for any signs of hope and positivity.

Tiring of the discussion with his fellow inmate, Ned Kelly hangs-up the phone (thus becoming the first person in history to do so), after saying, "Such is life. Robert, such is life."

Story and painting by Ashley McGoldrick
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DYING OF SPITE

BY CAMERON TERHUNE

Imagine you are unwell. Someone calls an ambulance and you are whisked away to the hospital. There you meet your doctor, who takes down your history, gives you a thorough examination, then tells you that the hospital won't do anything to help you, nor will you be discharged. You can but wait to die.

Ridiculous as such a scenario sounds in a civilised world, it happens every day. We are bearing witness to a mass casualty event and squabbling over pennies, politics, and philosophies while people lay dying underfoot. As they beg for help we bandy rhetoric about, debating vague 'solutions' that are too divorced from reality to ever bear fruit. Finally they fall silent, resigned to the only fate we don't exclude. In the wake of their passing, we congratulate ourselves for our wisdom: helping would have been a waste of our precious time. Even worse – if we didn't succeed, we might appear to be fools.

We are the biggest fools on the planet.

Human beings are not naturally inclined to quit. When we fall down, we get back up. When a bridge collapses, we rebuild it. When a plane crashes, we don't forswear flying. Our dauntless species scarcely hesitates to tackle any number of grand challenges, yet when it comes to fixing our prison system we can't give up fast enough. Surrender is the default position the moment incarceration enters the conversation, our hands thrown skyward so long that we've lost sight of the thumbs we evolved in order to do what humans do best: effect solutions to our most pressing problems.

Prisons are man-made disasters, spanning generations and swallowing millions of lives. Of its many failings, our justice system's ultimate punishment is the most egregious. Beyond questions of morality, there exists no greater waste than executing someone. To impose the death penalty upon a single person takes decades and costs millions – for zero benefit. Nobody looks back fondly on an execution: "Remember when we killed Joe? That was great. Life's so much better now." And besides the acute waste, capital punishment carries a grave opportunity cost as well.

What could the person we throw away have done in the half-a-lifetime it takes for the state to kill them, were we to give them the chance? Thirty years can pass as these cases wind through the torturous appellate process – we can turn a foetus into a brain surgeon in less time. To pretend we are incapable of discerning the roots of a

person's behaviour and guiding them back to wholeness in the same span is absurd. But we don't even try.

And it is not only those who we condemn that we are failing. While thousands are living to die on death row, hundreds of thousands are sentenced to lifetimes in prison, dying to live more than the basest existence. Rather than offer them a path towards a positive, productive future, we treat them as though they were lepers. When our prisons operate like doctor-less hospitals, what outcome might we reasonably expect? Some lucky few may pull through, but we can take no credit for successes that occur in spite of our best efforts to prevent them.

Hospitals are filled with the sick and injured. Prisons brim with the same, except that the wounds tatter hearts and minds. Hospitals hold our society's most vulnerable members in their care, and are tasked with returning them to wellness. Prisons are no different, except we root against healing. There is no question that the patients who fill prison wards deliver themselves into their own predicaments. They are not blameless, but that makes them no less ailing.

Just as the doctor would never withhold treatment from the smoker, the fast-food fanatic, or the exercise-averse, it is abhorrent to withhold treatment from the people we incarcerate because we resent their antisocial behaviour. It is, in fact, monumentally short-sighted to do so when those same people, healed or not, will eventually be ground up and spat out of the system and back into the streets of Any-town, USA to make room for even more shattered souls. Alienated or not, they are coming back.

Human beings are the least helpless species on this Earth. With our hands and minds and wills we have accomplished wonders to make even the most strident pessimist crack a smile. Our Homeric failure to fashion a carceral system that does anything but undermine the foundational values of our society, then, is born not from honest trial and error but from a brainless knee-jerk reaction to blame patients for their illnesses.

It's time to abandon our surrender and start using our thumbs.

*By Cameron Terhune, AD0786
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BREAKIN' THE PRISON NARRATIVE: AN INTERVIEW WITH BRENT BUELL

The small budget 2023 film *Sing Sing*, which tells the true story of a theatre program at New York's notorious Sing Sing prison, has taken the world by storm, winning many awards and being nominated for Best Actor (Colman Domingo), Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Original Song at the 2025 Academy Awards.

To learn more about the film and the story behind it, *Paper Chained* Editor Damien Linnane talks to Brent Buell, a former theatre director with the Rehabilitation Through the Arts program, which operates programs in prisons all over New York.

When did you start working in prisons?

In 2001. My journey has been interesting. I grew up in Southern California in a right-wing home. And because of the Vietnam War, I was a conscientious objector. That was my first taste of how tough the government can be on people they don't like. I was always interested in theatre, but I got pretty disillusioned with commercial theatre. I was producing and directing shows in New York in the 1990s, and I just felt something was missing. I started working with the Reverend Al Sharpton, and the civil rights organisation the National Action Network. And boy, that was an incredible education for me. It opened my eyes to things. Even though I was a progressive politically, I had no idea about how people were being oppressed. But Sharpton always said to me, don't just follow me. Do what you think you're called to do. And then I got invited to come and teach at Sing Sing. And I'm telling you, it was like the gates of heaven opened.

Was that with Rehab Through the Arts?

Yes, they started in 1996. I first came on board as an acting coach. Another person was directing, and I think that was the first sort of big show that they had done. It was an adaptation of Richard Stratton's *Slam*, about the young rapper who gets put in prison and ends up stopping a gang war just through his poetry.

Did you ever act in theatre or were you just directing?

I acted for many years in theatre productions in the community, but inside prison I was directing. I think there were a couple of times that I did walk-ons. But most of the time I just directed and it was the best experience of



my life because it wasn't commercial theatre. It wasn't all about making money. It was about making art. And then the incredible men that I met there. I didn't expect that. I went in expecting that we'd work together and do shows. But I didn't know that there could be that level of empathy and care between a group of men. I'd never seen it, even on the outside. It was like the most remarkable thing that developed and the trust that came to be between them and me, I'm very grateful because they welcomed me into that circle, and to watch people just do so much to elevate one another. And the movie is right about that.

I suppose when you're having a theatre group in prison, that's the main thing the men have. Whereas on the outside, it might be just a side-hustle.

Exactly. I've never had better students. They really were wanting it to give them a key to life and theatre. I can say a lot about why, but the dedication that was there and the desire to really do the theatre right, was big.

How did the idea for the film first start?

As is shown in the movie, in 2005, we had just done some big drama plays and they said, "We don't want to do another drama. We've got enough drama in here. We want to do a comedy." So I went out and tried to find a comedy that had roles for 25 men and maybe two women.

We did have female actresses that would come join the plays in limited numbers. But I couldn't find anything.

I came back in and told the guys I couldn't find anything. And I saw the look on their faces. It was heartbreak. I couldn't stand it, so I said, "I'll write one for you!" And then I freaked out because I'd never done anything like that, never promised them anything that I wouldn't come through with. I just was sweating. I went home and started to write. It was terrible. That was a Wednesday night. All day Thursday, I just wrote shit. I couldn't get it going.

Then on Friday, at 3 a.m., I remembered the guys had said things when they were making suggestions. They said, "We want to do something like *Blazing Saddles*, with cowboys!" Someone else said "No, I want to do something about gladiators." "No, I want to do something about Freddy Krueger." "No, we should do something like Robin Hood, steal from the rich and give to the poor!" They'd given all these ideas, and I thought, let's put them all together. And in the next three days, I wrote this 140-page play called *Breakin' the Mummy's Code*. *Esquire* magazine did a beautiful piece on the play back in 2005.



The original performance of Breakin' the Mummy's Code in 2005, showing male prisoners acting on stage alongside a female volunteer. Photos provided by Brent.

From there, we move on to the next project. And 11 years later, at midnight, I got an email from the filmmakers Greg Kwedar and Clint Bentley saying, "We're interested in talking to you about your work, particularly *Breakin' the Mummy's Code*!" I thought they were probably two graduate students at New York University or something. I'd never heard of them. Turns out they're very up and coming directors in Hollywood. They flew out to New York. The first thing I told them was I didn't want anybody to cheapen and mess up the story because it's a beautiful story and it had to be told truthfully. No prison tropes, none of the stereotypes of prison. And the second thing I said was, "This is not a 'White Saviour' story and I won't let it be." It never was. Those guys in prison saved me.

The directors were very interested. They said they'd even thought about casting men who were in the program.

So I said, "That means you've got to come to my house for breakfast because everybody comes over and we get together." So they came and they met all these guys. And essentially that is where the casting began. We worked for six-and-a-half-years on the script.

We'd had so many false starts and bad starts on a script, but that story of the friendship between the two main characters, Clarence and Divine G, was the thing that really that coalesced. They ended up helping tailor the script, as did Colman Domingo, who plays Divine G in film.

So then we had the script, but Colman only had 18 days between filming *The Colour Purple* and doing some re-shots on the film *Rustin*. He said, "I've only got 18 days." And Greg Kwedar said, "We'll take them." We shot the film in 18 days, between Colman's two other commitments, much to his credit. Colman is just wonderful.



A scene from the film, showing Clarence 'Divine Eye' Maclin, who portrayed himself (left), and Colman Domingo (right) who played John 'Divine G' Whitfield.

So the main character, Divine G, is a real person?

Yes, his name is John Whitfield. He was falsely accused of a murder and did 25 years. They finally released him, but he's still got "Murderer" on his record. So we're working very hard to get him exonerated. The police had a confession from another person. They all knew he wasn't guilty. But you know, they never will back down and say they were wrong.

So what's portrayed in the film about his case is true?

Yes, and the scene in his parole hearing is actually a verbatim transcript of his parole hearing, where one of the parole officers asked him "Are you acting now?" because he was an actor in prison.

I'd love to know if that parole officer knows the conversation was turned into a scene in the film.

I hope so, and I hope they have a weak heart. *[Laughs]*

Why didn't John 'Divine G' Whitfield play himself?

He had just gotten a job as a New York City subway operator, which had been a struggle to get. He could not get time off. There was just no way he could do the schedule. Also, Colman was available to play the role. Star power is a big thing, so he passed on it and let Colman take the role, and the rest is history.

Why didn't you play yourself?

I would have been willing to. Up until about three weeks before we filmed, we still didn't know if I'd be playing myself. But at the last-minute, Paul Raci became available. I absolutely love his work, and it's a huge asset to the film to feature an Academy Award-nominated actor. I couldn't have asked for anything more authentic than his performance. We became close friends, we'd have breakfast in the morning and talk about the day's shoot. He'd ask so many good questions: "How did I react? Where did I get mad? Did you laugh it off?" It was great.



Brent Buell (left), and Academy Award-nominated actor Paul Raci (right), who portrayed Brent, pictured on the set during filming of Sing Sing.

Were you involved with filming?

The entire time. Greg, the director, said he wanted me on set at all times, and if there was anything that I saw that didn't seem authentic or that seemed off, to bring it up so they could re-shoot. That was kind of my role, as well as just being there, because the men and I are so close that it gave them reassurance that I was there and giving them feedback. It was wonderful to be together again.

The movie was filmed in a prison that was actually only decommissioned two weeks before we got in there. They were still carrying stuff out the front door when we

arrived. We had a psychologist on set in case anyone had problems, because a lot of the guys were tense being back in a prison. When it was time to leave one day, one of the men was supposed to ride with another one home. They got separated, and he got lost in this labyrinthine prison. He said he had just a moment of panic when he realised he was lost in prison. And then he stopped and he went, "Wait, I'm a free man, and I can go anywhere I want in this fucking prison, and I can go explore it. Or if I can find the front door, I can leave it." And he said it was like the most liberating moment that he'd had. From then on, he was just completely cool with being in there. In one way or another, that happened to a lot of the guys. And we didn't have anybody who went through painful trauma during filming because their purpose was so clear about making a movie that they didn't really have time to focus on anything else. They were just beautiful.



Filming in one of the corridors of Downstate Correctional Facility, a former prison in New York.

Did you ever have to tell them the filming wasn't authentic?

Yeah. It wasn't much, but there were there were a couple of times where something would get said, and I just didn't think it sounded like the way people talked. But there was nothing horrendous.

Is the conflict between the two Divines in the film real?

Yeah, it's a combination of what really happened and then some dramatic license. I was there when Clarence Maclin came into the program. I was directing that show, so I was his first acting teacher, his first director, and he was just the way you saw him in the movie. That is very authentic to who he was and to his credit as an actor, that he was able to go back and portray a version of himself that he has long since left. That's tough acting. I found out later that he actually was always carrying a shank the whole time we were doing the plays in prison, as was depicted in the film. At the time I had no idea.

But he loved acting from the first time he walked on that stage. He wasn't actually cast in the play originally. One of our guys got blocked and so we needed a replacement.

He came in and it was an Elizabethan comedy. He had to wear this very not-Clarence Maclin outfit. It was kind of a tunic with these flaring things that hung down, and he walked on stage and he said, "Here I am." And he spun around in the whole outfit, and it flew out. I thought, "This guy belongs on stage. He's going to make it!" And I just came to love him like a brother. He's a tremendous person.

Obviously when you're condensing a long period of time into a film that is less than two hours, there has to be some dramatic license. You said the cast was actually 25 people in Breakin' the Mummy's Code. I'm guessing the reason there's only about half that many actors in the film is just because it's hard to flesh out 25 characters?

Right. Budgetarily we couldn't do it. In the program, there were times that we had 60 people involved, so it became really big. We had various classes going on, acting classes, improv classes, script writing classes. And around the last year that I was there, we were even running Acting 101 classes. We had like 100 people on the waiting list and these new guys would take that class first before they participated in an actual production.

The recidivism rate for people who participated in our program was 3%, when the national average is 60%. When our detractors hear that, they would say "Oh, you probably just picked the goody-two-shoes guys. The guys who were Mr. Obedient." That was the farthest thing from the truth. The men who got in the program were selected by our steering committee, which was five men on the inside. They picked not on the basis of who was going to be the best actor. They picked the guys who needed it the most.

I remember leaving one day and being told I had a call from the superintendent. I picked it up and he said, "Brent, I hope to God you know what you're doing. You just let the most dangerous man in Sing Sing into your program. Don't turn your back. He'll stab you for a cigarette. I'm not kidding you." I said, "He'll be fine." And you know, the people would be challenging. It wouldn't be easy at the beginning. But in a period of six months, I'd watch a person's life turn around and they'd open up. That particular guy is now teaching at a university, 1,000% away from the man he was.

And I'm such a convinced believer in the power of just doing theatre being able to change people. And I'll tell you why. If you're doing things that hurt other people, your level of empathy has been damaged. You're not seeing other people as real. When you're an actor, you have to see the character you're playing as real. You have to step inside his skin. You have to see through his eyes. And that would be a very challenging thing for men. When they began, I'd say, "Well, what do you think your character is feeling right now?" They'd say "How the fuck should I know?" And I go, "Well, try and think. If you were him, what would you be feeling right now? You want to act this character? This is the first step in doing it."

And as they would begin to have that sense of becoming that person, and really giving thought to what they might think or feel, it was really a revelation to them. It was an opening up of that ability to think about the thoughts and feelings of another person and have them matter to you. And then that would translate to the whole group and that tremendous care that built between people, all because they were learning to act.

In prison, every order that you're given is in some ways demeaning or lessening. Like, "Up against the wall." "Shut the fuck up" So here I come as a director and I have to give orders to people. Like "So you're going to move from that chair downstage left. And that's where you're going to give your speech." At the beginning everyone was like, "Who are you to tell me what to do? I'll do it my way." But little by little, it dawned on them that there could actually be instructions given to you that were for the purpose of making you look better, not demeaning you, but making you look better and making you stronger and better at what you were doing. It was a huge revelation to the guys. So just step by step, all the things that happened. When the female actresses came in, the degree of respect that the men showed them would make them cry sometimes. They'd say, "Why can't I meet a man outside that treats me with the kind of respect I'm getting in here."

I noticed in the film that most of the people in the program were African American, but not all. There are a lot of politics regarding race in prisons in America. Did people work together really well in the program despite that?

American prisons are disproportionately Black and Hispanic. I'd been working with Al Sharpton for three years, when I started teaching in the prison. And I knew about the racial divide in America, and I knew of the unfairness of our punishment system. It's not a justice system. It's a punishment system. And yet, my first time in Sing Sing, walking down a corridor and having 200 men walk past me and not a single white face, I just broke down. I just started to sob because it's so clear that the disparity that is here. But within the program, the men came to be like brothers. There's a lot of racial strife in the prison, and things are very divided in so many ways. But the men in the program led the way. And it spread.

I always wanted to sit out in the audience with population when our plays were done. The COs wanted me to sit with them, but I sat with the guys. Once I was sitting out there and our play had begun, and there was a group of guys over to my left that kept talking and just talking, and then they'd laugh and stuff, and I was getting pissed. And I'm like, giving him the screw eye, like shut the fuck up, you know? And I was really getting angry at them. And finally, I thought, I'm going to go over and tell them to be quiet. So, I started to stand up and I felt two arms on my shoulders push me back down in my seat. A guy behind me who I did not know leaned forward and said, "Have some respect".

And I went, "Those guys are driving me nuts." And he goes, "Those are the Hispanic guys. They're translating your show so the other guys can understand it." And you know, for me it was just like such a beautiful criticism and such love shown to me. These guys were working together to have other people enjoy the show. The guys in our program became like stars in the prison. I mean, people would come up and want to have them say their line from the show, and they had a very big influence in terms of being useful to people and helping them to correct their lives, and not just people in the program.



Another photo from the original theatre production in 2005.

Are you still doing plays in prison?

I'm not working inside prisons now. Most of the guys that I worked with are now home. I've been doing a whole lot of work with transition. Just last year one of the men came home and lived with me wife and I for five months. It is very important for us to understand the challenges that face people as they come home. As much as I knew from other people's experience, it was eye-opening to have someone under our roof who was going through what he was put through, and seeing the roadblocks that were put in his way. For example, somebody at the place where you get your driver's license from knew that he was coming home from prison, so they thought it would be fun to give him a hard time. It took him five months to get his state ID just because someone was messing with him. We found out after five months that he had all the necessary papers the first day. But they made him keep coming back. Those are the kind of things I'm working on now. Also the film been a massive undertaking.

Are you employed to help with transitional services?

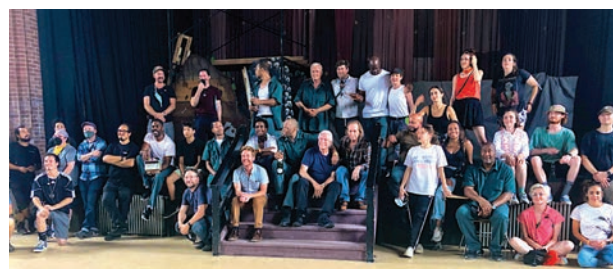
No, it's all volunteer. I never was paid for the theatre shows either. Not even transportation money to get to the prison. It's a passion for me. I continued to do commercial theatre on the outside to make money. But all the work in prison was voluntary, and it's entirely voluntary now because I love these guys. This is a chosen family, which is such a wonderful thing to have. We get together when we can. Everybody comes over and has breakfast and hangs out.

The reception of the film has been phenomenal. Have you been surprised at how well it has been received?

We are all astonished. We knew that we had made a good film and we were proud of the fact that it told the truth and didn't have all the junk that prison movies usually have. But we had been turned down for a couple of film festivals before we were accepted for our premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival. That was in the Royal Alexandra Theatre, which seats about 1200 people. The night before we went to see the film *American Fiction*. At the end, the audience stood up and applauded, and I turned to my wife and I said, "If we could get a response like that it would be incredible." So, the next night we went to see *Sing Sing*. Every seat sold in the entire place, and we could hear people laughing and crying and things all the way through. When we got to the end just before all the credits roll, and the words *Sing Sing* appeared on the screen, the whole audience leapt to its feet and just started to scream. I could cry saying this. And then when they saw in the credits that the men played themselves, it just continued. People were just screaming and applauding while they're standing. And then they called all of us up on stage. Canada would only let five of our men in. They have this very awful policy that no one with a felony record can get into Canada. Except maybe Donald Trump.

Anyway, they got us up on stage, and there was a four-minute standing ovation. They just didn't stop. And we were all standing there with tears in our eyes. And finally, Coleman stepped forward and sort of said, "Thank you so much, you know, but sit down. We have things we'd like to say." I've never seen anything like it. And that reception has continued. It's happening at the award shows too.

It has been hard getting people in to see the movie. But once people see it, they're so sold on it that they come back again and again. They bring people with them. And now all the people voting for all these awards are just passionate about this movie. And to us it's not the awards, it's being able to have a vehicle to get our message out. I know you share that with your magazine. Being able to have people see that there are real human beings incarcerated, that these are not people different to you and me. They are real human beings with all this potential that just need a chance to unlock it and rebuild what has been broken. That's our reward. That and knowing that this is beginning conversations all over the country.



The cast and crew of Sing Sing on set.

FILM REVIEW: THE BIKERIDERS



A real biker movie for all bike-loving viewers. *The Bikeriders*, an American crime drama released in 2023, is a brilliant look at the world of motorcycle groups from the inside. The film depicts the rise of a motorcycle club and its subsequent transition into a patched brotherhood to its contemporary form, generally a criminal enterprise that just so happen to ride motorbikes. The story is told using honest dialogue and confronting action scenes.

The film explores the love, loyalty and pain that lies at the core of the relationship between the primary protagonists. *The Bikeriders* deserves plaudits for its unique approach to illustrating stories in this genre. The director lays bare the realities of life within a motorcycle group without glorifying the gory underbelly. The lead actors, Jodie Comer and Austin Butler, deliver outstanding performances in their portrayal of Kathy and Benny. It is difficult to identify a weakness in this film; however, if pressed, the movie doesn't shed too much light on how Kathy and Benny make a living during their time in the motorcycle club. Having said that, this is a minor oversight in an otherwise thoroughly entertaining piece. Rating: 4 out of 5 'Jailbirds.'

By Vincent Carlino #678937, Long Bay Correctional Centre
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FILM REVIEW: SING SING

BY RISHIRAJ SINGH RATHORE, CRIMINOLOGY STUDENT

At one point in this euphoric creation, Greg Kwedar says, "When we are born, we cry because we're born to a stage of fools". He asserts this idea by uncovering the unseen side of the prospective rehabilitation of those excluded from society's vision of progress. The film showcases the Rehabilitation Through Arts (RTA) program, which has been employed in several prisons with the purpose for helping incarcerated individuals rediscover themselves and giving them new motivation while serving their sentences.

Colman Domingo's role as Divine G exemplifies the effect of the RTA program that was run in Sing Sing prison. Divine G's charismatic attitude brings hope to other inmates, while also improving them as human beings. He firmly believes in "trusting the process" and embraces the restraints of the incarcerated life. This film captures the innocent and aspirational perspectives of Divine G and his fellow detainees, and shows the power of this artistic venture within the fences of their prison. Collectively, they embody the light-hearted playfulness found in the dramatic works of school-aged students. These amateur actors are full of exuberance, and they cherish both the splendour of uncomplicated narrative and the unadulterated bliss of creating something just for the love of it. In their impromptu performances, they find joy in little things, uncovering a sense of freedom and happiness even in the depths of their stark situation.

The shift in trajectory is reflected in Clarence Maclin's role as Divine Eye, who in real life served time for armed robbery and now steps into the limelight to play a dramatized version of himself. Early on, the film gives the impression that it's building toward a clash between the two Divines. The screenplay adaptation stands at an unobtrusive vantage point, capturing Divine Eye's profound metamorphosis, from bold and aggressive to a transformed individual, shaped by the journey of this theatrical endeavour. The core takeaway presented here is transcendental: rehabilitation facilitated by art is not merely possible, but indispensable. Kwedar does not shy away from breaking the shackles of conventionality as he assembles a remarkable cast where approximately 85% of the actors are former inmates of Sing Sing.

The longer you engage with this film, the more you appreciate all that it symbolises and accomplishes. The final smiles of all the inmates at the end reminds us that these lives still hold enduring value and significance.

BAYWATCH: AN INTERVIEW WITH KIT SHEPPARD

In issue 13 of *Paper Chained*, we interviewed Phillip Player, about the banning of the Long Bay Correctional Centre publications *Rogues* and *InLimbo* in 1990. Following those publications being shut down, Long Bay would be without a prison magazine until *The Rattler*, which ran from 1993 until 1996, and was followed by *BayWatch*, which ran from 2000 until 2012.

Paper Chained Editor Damien Linnane talks to Kit Sheppard, a former teacher at Long Bay who was involved in the production of both magazines.

Tell me how The Rattler started?

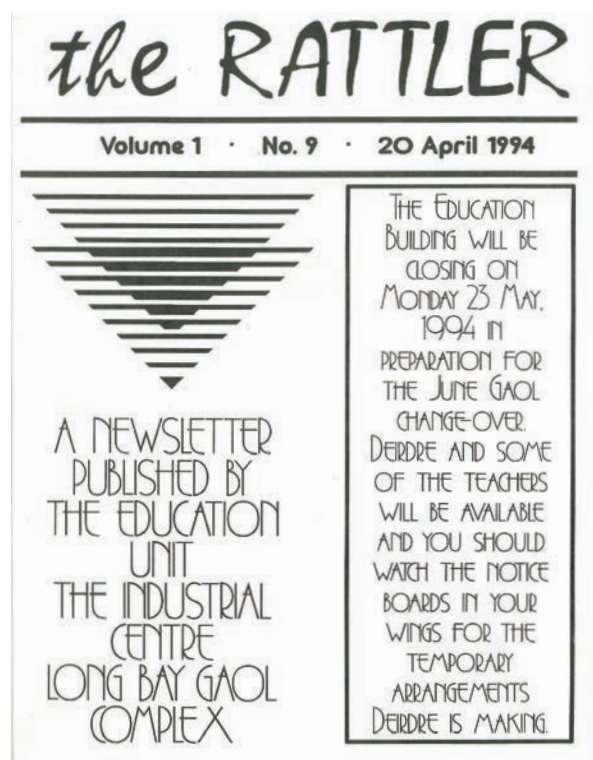
The Rattler was made in the MSPC (Metropolitan Special Programs Centre) at Long Bay. An inmate approached the education section, with the idea for a magazine, knowing that I would support that. He chose the name *The Rattler*, which seemed like a pretty descriptive name. He was a very keen person who wanted to use his time well, wanted to be treated with decency and to feel like an ordinary human being. And he was very open to learning what was involved and exploring how to make a magazine. He was the inmate editor. We had to have one of each; a staff and an inmate to do the project. I was one of the teachers. I was teaching English-as-a-Second-Language, and writing.

Were there any particular issues with censorship?

The only thing that pops in my mind was one of the images on the front cover, which I objected to. We would have been selecting some of the texts, and also have been looking at the quality of contributions, depending on how much material we received. But nothing major. But the education department had to remain its own gatekeeper as well, so we didn't want the magazine to bring us down.

Was BayWatch at the MSPC as well?

Yes. I don't remember why *The Rattler* stopped being produced and *BayWatch* started. Probably it was just a clean sweep. The first editor probably was released. The other came on board and was also quite keen. I remember him, but I didn't know him so well. He was very competent in the job.



The Rattler was started by prisoner Inosi R. Cooper, who chose the name for the joint reason of being woken up each day by keys rattling to unlock cells, and the idea of 'rattling people'; 'getting the gaol community together by saying their bit instead of just doing their own thing.'

How was it printed?

It was done at the Governor's photocopier. *The Rattler* as well. That was like a special pilgrimage I had to make to the Governor's office and sort of butter them up because, there was a lot of paper and a lot of ink involved, and a lot of time. I had to actually talk to the Governor about it. They were looking over my shoulder.

The low-tech assembling of the magazine was done by me, hours and hours in the library at night, after everybody had been locked in. I had the use of a large table on which to lay out and physically cut and paste everything because I didn't have the skills to do that on a computer. I don't remember whether we had the computer programs to do anything like that anyway.

Anything that was outside the main functions in the jail was regarded as something of a nuisance, and you had to make a case for it to be done. But the other disciplines got interested as well because the AOD (Alcohol and Other Drug) workers and the psychologists would take interest in it. So it was sort of like something that brought the cross disciplinary connections.

Do you have any particular memories with BayWatch?

How it touched people, how people would talk about the importance of having the time in the jail to reconnect with their own interest in reading. The magazine provided a sense of a private space for them. For some of them, they hadn't actually enjoyed school at all. And it was a way for them to come back to doing something informal that was also stimulating for them intellectually. It was those things that as a literacy teacher I found very encouraging, because it wasn't a regimented program, it wasn't a curriculum, it wasn't part of an assessment process. So, there was a certain freewheeling freedom about it.

Bay Watch went from 2000 to 2012. Do you remember anything about why it eventually stopped?

I don't remember exactly why it stopped, but there was no controversy. It just needed us to keep carrying it. We had a very interesting team in the education section and the magazine was a bit of a spark of life, something extra. And because we were all in one little education building, there was plenty of opportunity for that sort of sense of sharing what we were doing.

What education was available at the time?

There were computer classes, art class, and music. That was probably all there was at the prison. There were some distance courses too. Business skills: Certificate Two and Three. Maybe something in horticulture as well.

How long did you keep working at Long Bay?

I was there until all the teachers in NSW prisons were fired back in 2016. I might have been able to do another job at the prison, but I chose to leave at that point as I was probably going to retire in a few years anyway. I'd been working there for 23 years and I'd had enough. I mean, I really liked the work. I wouldn't have left if I they hadn't fired the teachers. But it was not an easy time.

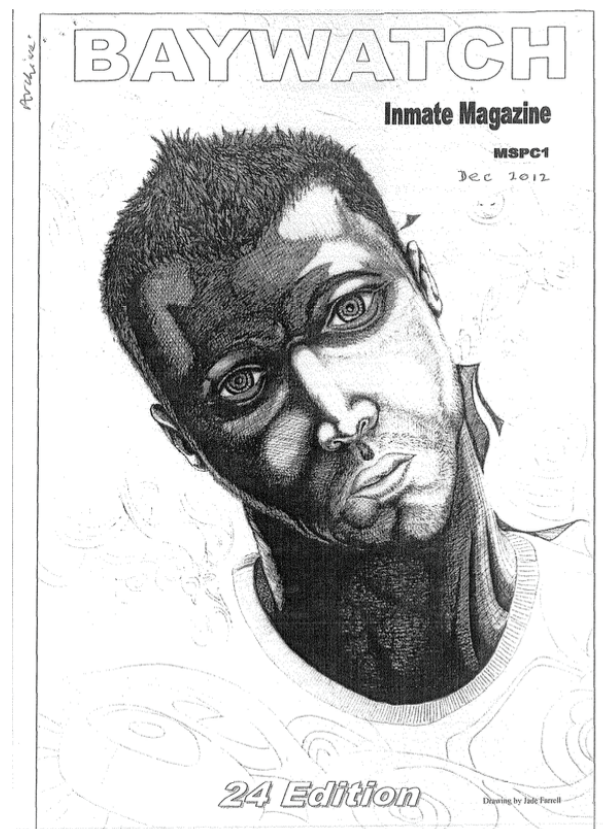
A lot of us were really upset, on behalf of the students and on behalf of the education programs we lost and the generic courses that replaced them. I mean, at least we could tailor what we did to the students. We had been teaching students as people, rather than teaching them as mouths to be fed. We were largely upset about that. It was the smashing of something which was very successful and very interesting in favour of something of far lesser

quality, as we knew it would be. It was a case of trying to do things based on the economy, rather than people's wellbeing.

There are so many difficult choices about how resources are used in jail. Of course, people who are highly motivated and educated want to be as stimulated as those who have had no education at all and who are considered to be the most needy. But I guess everybody has their own level of need. It's divided: administrators have difficult decisions.

What got you into becoming a teacher in prison?

I'd always been a teacher. Before that I was a teacher in the adult community sector, so people who were outside the main formal education systems. I began with migrants and refugees out near Villawood. And then probably after five or six years, another opportunity came up which was teaching deaf and hearing-impaired students with an interpreter in the classroom. That was fascinating. And after a number of years, a friend told me about this other option in prisons. I was just exploring the different contexts in which adult community education occurred. I love adult education. You're among peers as a teacher, and it's a question of drawing the student into the learning process. It's a very creative thing. And it's part of personal development so much for adults. If they're choosing to do it, it takes a lot of courage to take it on and for some people, they really discover an aspect of themselves that they've never really had the opportunity to explore.



The final BayWatch issue featured cover art by Jayde Farrell

INSURANCE WITH A CRIMINAL RECORD

BY DAMIEN LINNANE

I was employed before I went to prison, and also ran a very small business, which I could not legally operate without insurance. As I knew it would be more difficult for me to find a job with a criminal record, I decided to focus on self-employment after my release. I applied to renew my business insurance, but the company that I'd been with for the last several years prior to my arrest, Insurance House, flatly refused to continue covering me after I was honest on the application form about my new criminal record. They also refused to provide any clarification about the matter. Here's the actual email I sent them in 2016, in response to their rejection letter:

"I was hoping to be approved considering that my criminal record is in no way related to [the specific job], fraud or sexual offences ... Should I consider myself ineligible for [business insurance] for the rest of my life?"

The response I got from the consultant was frustrating:

"Unfortunately I was unable to gather any more information into a timeline. The insurer said that the risk falls outside their guidelines and therefore cannot place the policy. Sorry that I could not get any more information."

There is no law stopping people with a criminal record getting insurance. However, insurance companies are indeed allowed to ask about records, and also to decide whether they will insure you. Companies have different policies. If applying online, you may even be rejected immediately when ticking "Yes" to the criminal record check in the browser. Others may increase the cost of your premium as you are considered a higher risk. Every type of insurance you apply for will be different.

In 2024, Peta Taylor, a publisher at finder.com, tested applying online for car insurance with 55 companies. When she ticked "Yes" to having a criminal record to see what would happen, only three of those companies were still willing to give her a quote: NRMA, RACV (Vic) and RAC (WA). Two others, RACQ (Qld) and CommBank, said they would need further information to make a decision. The other 50 companies refused entirely.

The best advice I can give you is to not immediately give up, and to instead shop around. After being rejected for business insurance by Insurance House, I applied with AON, who didn't even ask whether I had a criminal record, though did ask if I had ever been rejected for insurance. Ironically, I then had to explain I had just been rejected on the grounds I had a criminal record. Even after explaining this, though, they still offered to insure me.

If you're having extreme difficulties, there are even brokers who specialise in finding insurance for people with criminal records, though be aware that their costs will likely be considerably higher. Insurers do need to have proper reasons for refusing insurance, so if you think you've been treated unfairly, you can also ask the Financial Ombudsman Service to investigate.

One of the main reasons I was facing difficulties, however, is because it had been less than five years since I was convicted. As my top sentence was two years, and my non-parole period was less than that, I was released well within five years of my conviction. While some insurance companies will ask for any criminal records, many will only ask for crimes committed in the last five years, and sometimes they will only ask if you have been convicted of specific crimes. For example, applications for car insurance will likely ask if you have driving convictions. Home and contents insurers, however, may consider driving convictions irrelevant, though will likely ask if you have convictions for crimes such as theft, burglary, fraud or property damage.

Unfortunately for me, I also wanted home contents insurance after my release, but three of my four charges were related to property damage. I therefore found myself in a position where most companies would indeed ask about my charges, and the few that would approve me would charge much higher premiums. As I was a financially struggling university student at the time, I made the decision to wait until it had been five years since my conviction before applying again, at which point I would have significantly less trouble.

Ironically, this means that those of you who are serving longer sentences may be more likely to be approved for insurance after your release. Remember, companies will probably be asking if you were *convicted* in the last five years, not whether you were in prison. If you were in prison for six years, for example, and had no fresh charges, you can say 'no' when answering this question.

While it may be appealing to save yourself the hassle and just lie on your application, I strongly discourage this. While an insurance company will likely not go to the expense of checking if you have a criminal record when you apply, they will almost certainly check if a claim is ever made. If you lied on the application, the best outcome you can hope for is your claim being rejected and your insurance cancelled. You won't receive a refund for the premiums you already paid, but you may receive a criminal charge for fraud, for lying on your application.

WHAT WE DO TO SURVIVE

BY ANNA FISCHER, FOUNDER OF TRAUMA SENSITIVE LAW

There are things that humans will do in order to survive that are inexcusable, unjustifiable, and totally explainable. When I was young, I was friends with a boy named Micah. Micah was intellectually gifted, so when his family moved to a new state when he was thirteen, his parents put him into an elite private school. Micah kept up with the academics easily, but because he was different from everyone else there, he got bullied – very badly – until he finally graduated about four years later. The abuse was overwhelming and inescapable, especially when it came from the teachers as well as his classmates. Micah ended up developing something called Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which can show up when a person has many different traumatising experiences (or one trauma repeated over and over) throughout a certain time period. Micah's parents didn't catch onto this until one night, after about an hour of arguing with his little sister, she teased him about how skinny he was, and he tried to kill her. Now luckily, Micah's parents were in the next room and rushed in before he did irreparable harm, but those familiar with the science of trauma know that if they hadn't, Micah likely would've ended up in custody.

What Micah did was terrible. It damaged his relationship with his sister for life. At the same time, his actions were completely explainable and even predictable to anyone who understands how trauma affects the brain. The human brain has a built-in protocol for dealing with danger. It's called the threat response, and it's what triggers those fight, flight, freeze, faint, and fawn instincts. When your brain perceives a serious threat, it floods your system with hormones that help you hit harder, run faster, react more quickly, etc. Once that happens, the parts of your brain motivating you to act through feelings like panic, fear, or rage can actually override the parts that handle rationality, planning, morality, communication, and more. Why? Because we're hardwired to survive, and sometimes our brains help us do that by sidelining non-essential functions so that all our energy can go to those most likely to keep us alive, like running and fighting.

When that process works properly, it will (ideally) save your life and then shut back off, returning you to a regulated state of calmness, clear thinking, and intentional, planned behaviour. Sometimes, though, a threat can feel so overwhelming that even after the immediate danger goes away your brain will keep that threat response active, keeping you in a state of perpetual survival mode, watching and waiting for the next danger. This is what unresolved trauma often does to us. Whether we were abused, neglected, or left alone when we needed someone to stay, our brains can end up frequently reminding us – normally through symptoms like flashbacks, nightmares, “random” pains, or bursts of overwhelming emotion – that dangers like the one from long ago could reappear and hurt us again.

When our brains get locked in like that, even a small threat that's just a bit similar to the old, big one will often be enough to send us back into full-blown fight-or-flight mode. When that happens, humans will often do all kinds of things to regain their sense of control over the danger – the same danger that they had no control over when it overwhelmed them before. For instance, a boy who endured years of cruel bullying might instinctively react to his little sister's teasing with extreme violence, looking to control the situation by eliminating the threat. The teasing wasn't actually a big danger, but it felt familiar, and because his brain was still hyper-aware of anything resembling the old abuse, it immediately jump-started his threat response to help him survive it better this time by fighting back.

I want to say two things here. First, the threat response is completely physiologically normal. The trouble comes when it hangs around because the event or events that first triggered it are unresolved in the brain, stored as trauma. Second, if you have ever been incarcerated, there's a high likelihood that you have experienced trauma. The process surrounding incarceration has been shown to be potentially traumatic in and of itself, but also, those in the criminal justice system report very high rates of unresolved trauma from their earlier lives.

Now, it's very difficult to heal from unresolved trauma without the help of a trained professional. Unfortunately, access to therapeutic care is extremely limited during a custodial sentence, so what can be done before we regain our access to that care? Well, we work to notice the threat response when it shows up, we work to develop different coping skills to keep us from acting out of rage or fear or pain, and we do our best to stay regulated as often as possible, reminding ourselves that even though this process is a normal part of our physiology, it doesn't have to rule our lives forever.



Anna's work as a speaker, trainer, and professional consultant centers on increasing the legal field's awareness of how mental health, trauma sensitivity, and ethical client care influence all aspects of the legal process.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Many individuals leaving the prison system face a multitude of challenges, including addiction, mental health issues, and unresolved trauma. This trauma often stems from childhood experiences, institutional abuse, witnessing domestic violence, or growing up in environments surrounded by crime. To cope with these experiences, many resort to drugs and alcohol. Unfortunately, drugs remain prevalent in prisons, and some individuals become further entrenched in their addiction while incarcerated. In some states, methadone and Suboxone programs are available to prisoners coming down from heroin or other drugs. These medications are widely used, but even when not prescribed, prisoners may share them with others.

In states without these programs, drugs like methadone and Suboxone are often brought into prisons through loved ones or some correctional officers. This exacerbates the addiction cycle, making it more difficult for individuals to break free. Additionally, prisons frequently prescribe a range of anti-psychotic medications, many of which are unnecessary, adding another layer of complexity for inmates upon release. Many are left without proper prescriptions or support to manage withdrawal, leading to severe mental health challenges. A 2018 report identified that 39% of the prison population is diagnosed with a disability, and the actual number is likely much higher when considering undiagnosed cases. Upon release, many former inmates are given only a Centrelink crisis payment, if at all, and lack proper identification to access housing, financial aid, or employment. Coupled with the stress of having to check in with police within 24 hours for parole or bail conditions, the lack of coordinated care for mental health, addiction, and re-entry needs often leads to re-offending. Without adequate support, these individuals find themselves caught in a cycle of crime and incarceration that is extremely difficult to escape.

To break this cycle, a comprehensive, person-centred approach is needed. Providing access to stable housing, employment assistance, and healthcare—including ongoing mental health and addiction treatment—is critical. Governments and community organisations should work together to ensure former inmates have immediate access to Medicare, Centrelink, and identification documents upon release. More funding is required for rehabilitation programs both within prisons and in the community to support long-term recovery. Furthermore, expanding peer-led support networks and mentoring programs can help individuals reintegrate successfully. With the right structures in place, we can provide a pathway out of the justice system and create opportunities for a more stable and productive future.

By Jacob Little, About Time For Justice

TELEPHONE INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICE

Are you coming up for release in NSW soon? Do you need some help in working out what you're going to do once you get out or where you're going to live? Interested in being referred to a post-release program run by the Community Restorative Centre (CRC)? Or maybe need to know where you'll be able to find some free clothes or food in whatever area you are released to?

CRC has a Telephone Information and Referral Service, which is usually known as 'TIRS'. It is staffed Monday-Friday 9am-5pm and is there for anyone affected by the prison system. There are a few ways to get in touch with TIRS, even if you aren't easily able to call us. If you can call, we're always pleased to hear from anyone still inside. The number is (02) 9288 8700, which will be answered by reception and passed on to a TIRS Worker.

If you can't call or would prefer not to, you can write to us instead and we will write back to you as soon as possible.

Community Restorative Centre
PO Box 258, Canterbury NSW 2193.

Just include your name, MIN, which correctional centre you are in and what kind of information or help you are looking for, and we will send you as much information as possible, with as many options as we can find. Another way to get information is by asking a friend or family member to call or email us (tirs@crcnsw.org.au) and we can pass information on to you on through them.

We have a database full of the resources that people often need to access when they are released. It includes crisis, transitional and long-term accommodation options, drug and alcohol supports, mental health services, information about services run by, and for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or people from other countries and cultures, employment services that are best placed to help people who have a criminal record to find work, legal help and more. We are NSW-based but can also refer you to services in other states and territories as well. We can also talk you through CRCs post-release support programs and help you decide whether one might be right for you.



Paper Chained will run a regular column providing information from TIRS in each future issue.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Answers to page 20 riddles:

1. They were standing back to back.
2. The letter 'E.'
3. The future, or tomorrow.

ISSUE 19 DUE FOR RELEASE IN SEPTEMBER 2025



A SUCCULENT INTERVIEW

Former prisoner Jack Karlson, best known for the 'Succulent Chinese Meal' meme, died in August 2024, a few months after speaking to *Paper Chained*. In our next issue, we'll finally share our interview with him.



JAPANESE AND FILIPINO ART

Paper Chained is expanding its reach overseas. In the next issue you'll see our first contributions from incarcerated people in Japan and the Philippines.



FILIPINO PRISON VISIT

Paper Chained editor Damien Linnane reports on visiting two Filipino jails to talk to incarcerated people there about making art and handicrafts.

SHOUT-OUTS

Shout Out to My little Sisters Ruby Smith & Kymbo Curtis @ S.G.C.C Sending lots of Love your way from Twll
Stay True, Stay you my girls @

Also a big Shout out to all my brothers at LG, TMCC, C.C.C, Woodford, Arthur Corrie & Borrallan you know who you all are Be good or Be good at it
Stay outta your selfs "LOL"

Love, Loyalty & Respect Always
Big Sis Kylie @.

P.s Haves another shout out if you get a chance!
To all my Bros, HOES AND OTHER FELLOWS. Keep ya HEADS UP! AND 2 MY X PRINTER AND BABY
MOMMA, I LOVE YOU ALWAYS AND THANK 4 BEING A GOOD MUMBO
MAOI, IVY, AND MY BOY KIANE. MY NIDS & MES

By Mathew S



a Big Shout out to my fellow
CANADIANS
BANGED UP at home AND ABROAD

Much Love,
LOYALTY,
+
Respect

-WAYNE HACKETT
"CANADA"



KAHLEY