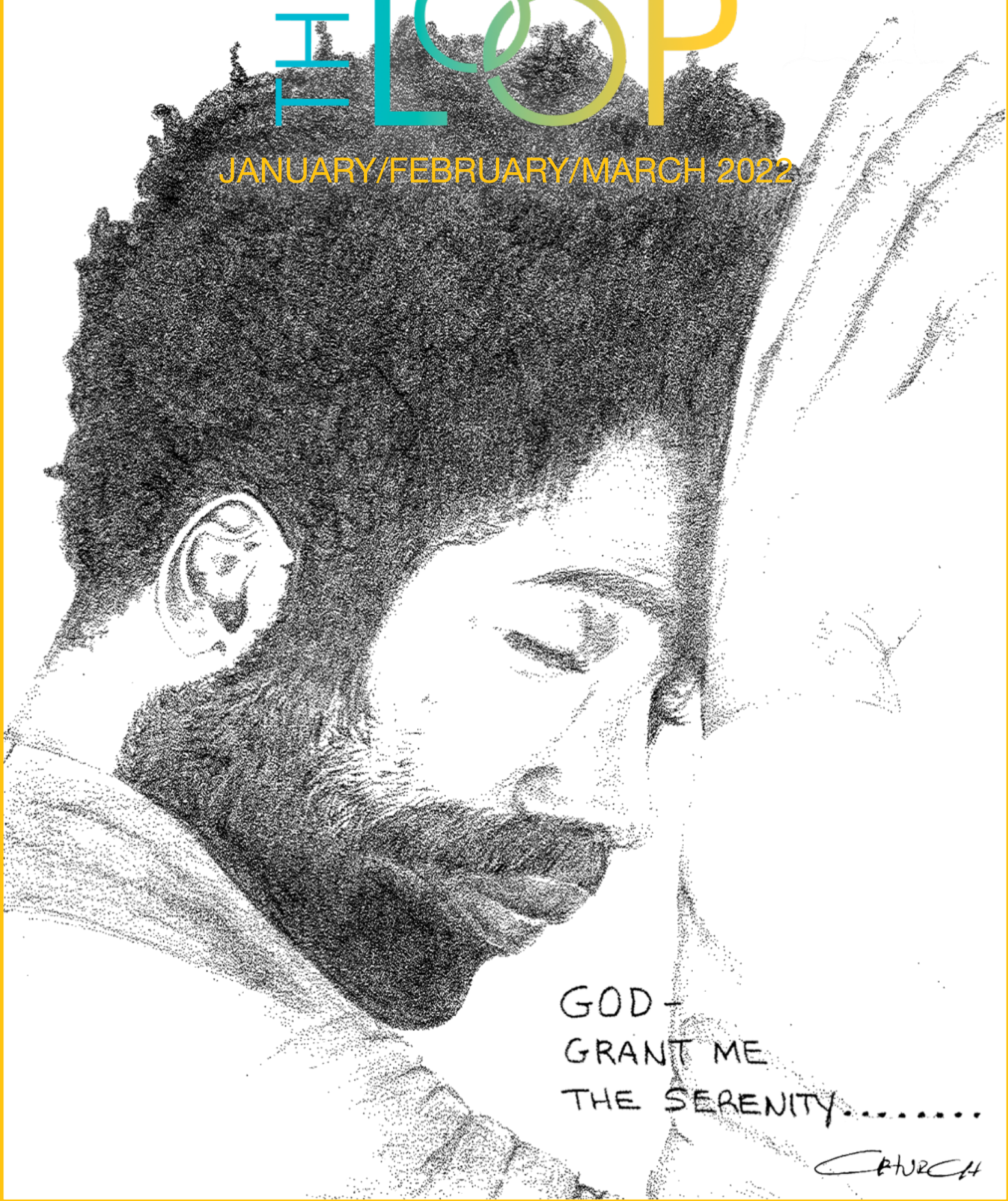


shininglight

THE LOOP

JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH 2022



GOD -
GRANT ME
THE SERENITY.....

CHURCH



Artwork by Felix R. Larios, Washington state

At Shining Light, we believe we each have the potential to shine light wherever we are. Through connecting with each other, being creative, and learning together, we can maintain or even brighten that light in ourselves and in our community, despite circumstances that threaten to dim it. The more lights we have, the brighter our collective light can shine, until the whole environment of prison is changed.

More than a single program, Shining Light is a community focused on the potential for personal growth in prisons and jails across America. We define this community as: an open circle of individuals (*all are welcome*) with shared values (*creative thinking, humility, working together, giving your best*) who engage (*actively participate*) in constructive information, activities and relationships that contribute to individual and community improvement (*for your own benefit, and those around you*).

In all of our programs and resources, like The Loop, we strive to be as supportive and relevant as we can while also meeting the expectations of our various partnering facilities and state departments. We welcome feedback from participants and administrative staff to help us improve our ability to affect change and unlock human potential.

The Loop is not just a magazine. It's a sense of belonging to something positive, a reminder that we're not alone, a push to keep going, and a compass to guide the way. It's how we communicate with one another, be it through shared creativity, thoughtful questions and activities, or updates and words of encouragement. It can even be a touchpoint for meaningful connection with loved ones who read it online! (*Every issue is posted at shining-light.com/theloop*)

It is you - the readers and contributors - who make The Loop so special. Your stories of engagement with exercises and the impact it is having, your creativity and insight, and your willingness to invite your peers to subscribe is what keeps momentum going. If you are new to The Loop, we consider you part of the Shining Light community. So when you're ready to join in our ongoing conversation, know that we're always glad to hear from you! We are selective in what we publish, however, so please check out the guidelines below so you know what we're looking for.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

If you would like to contribute to The Loop, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- We will credit contributions with First & Last Name, Facility, State, unless you clearly indicate otherwise.
- If you write anything in a letter that you do NOT want to be shared in The Loop or other Shining Light communications, please note that clearly.
- We reserve the right to edit your contribution as needed to fit space and/or theme.

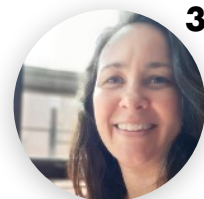
CONTENT

- Submissions should have a positive intention, which may include creative expression, encouraging words, or a constructive release of negative emotion.
- Remember to be inclusive of people of all faiths and backgrounds.
- Avoid details of your case or extensive criticism of the institution/DOC.

FORMATTING

- Write as legibly as possible (or type) so we can all read what you wrote!
- If possible, submit artwork and writings on blank paper.
- Be concise. Featured writings must fit legibly on 1 page. Responses to activities, questions, prompts, etc should be limited to a short paragraph or two so we can include more people!

In effort to stay in the lane of what we do, we cannot extend beyond that to offer legal or reentry services, penpal relationships, assistance with publishing original creative work, or any other personal requests for support. Likewise, we cannot guarantee a reply to requests in these areas.



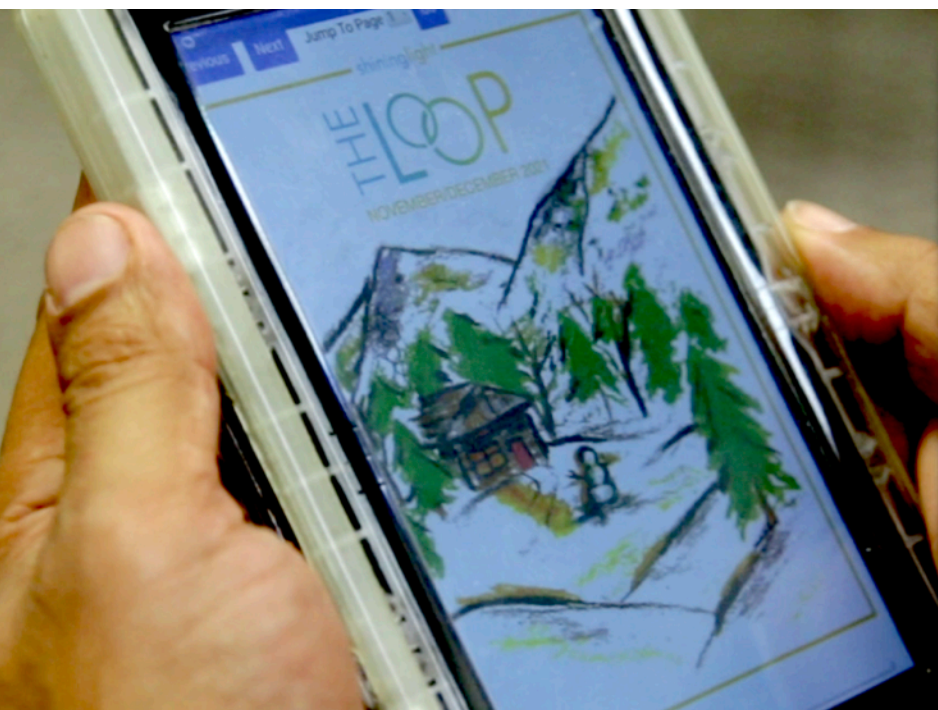
Kelly
PROGRAM DIRECTOR

We're so excited to be starting off 2022 with almost one thousand individual subscribers to The Loop, and nearly one *hundred* thousand having access through their tablets. (Special welcome to our new subscribers from Arizona, Arkansas, California, Montana, and Washington state!)

IN THIS ISSUE: We'll be taking a well-rounded look at the character strength of **Perseverance**. How do we keep moving forward towards our fullest potential in spite of mental, physical, emotional, or relational challenges? Is it possible to have too much perseverance? What are some ways to build more perseverance, starting today? Many thanks to "Church" (*SCI Huntingdon, PA*) for the cover art that sets this up so well!

We've added four extra pages to make more room for even more interaction this year! On p. 12-13, you'll meet our newest staff member, Rachel, who has some new opportunities for the creative writers among us. And for those who prefer to dabble in the visual arts, be sure to check out the Community Connection on p. 6-7 to be part of Jenny's upcoming Sports Mural. (You'll see the "Holding Hope" collage from her last prompt there, too!) Read to the end to find a brand new section we're calling "Constructive Debate." We're excited to try this out as a healthy way for us to not only practice thinking through and communicating our own opinions, but also to be intentionally curious and open to hearing other perspectives from our community as well.

You may have noticed that this edition is for Jan/Feb/March. We are adjusting our production schedule for The Loop so your copy arrives at the beginning of the cycle, rather than towards the end. Please bear with us as the timing of distribution will be a little off for a while. Our next edition will be April/May. 😊



SYMBOL LEGEND

Keep your eye out for these throughout The Loop. Each indicates a different action:



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

For these activities, your responses are essential to keep the conversation going.



RESPONSE IS ALWAYS WELCOME

For these activities, we would love to hear from you, but we may not publish your response.



SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

We hope these activities give you some food for thought.

FOR THE NEXT ISSUE we'll be focusing on the character strength of **Spirituality**. With 3 of the major religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) celebrating significant holidays in April, we thought it would be a good opportunity to look at spirituality more broadly. Part of the VIA definition of spirituality* is "...*having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort.*" Whether or not you identify with a particular religion...

WHAT SIGNIFICANCE DOES SPIRITUALITY HAVE IN YOUR LIFE?



We look forward to unpacking this together next time. For now, back to Perseverance!

*VIA Institute On Character. (n.d.). <https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/spirituality>

We hope your year is off to a good start! At Shining Light we are looking forward to the year ahead. Our mission is to help people in prison discover their potential, and we see many opportunities to do that in 2022.

Perseverance is essential. As you well know, working in prisons or correctional systems has many challenges. It is not hard to get frustrated. But staying focused on the next step of what we can do and not giving up can yield surprising results.

I wanted to share a little of our story, because it has taken a lot of perseverance to get the Shining Light community to where it is today. Shining Light started as an effort to help some young people discover that the world was bigger than their rural town in Pennsylvania. Our first step was taking a small group of singers to a Haitian church in Queens, NY in 1997. We never even thought of going into prisons then! But we discovered that by challenging ourselves to do things we never thought of doing, and seeking to serve others, good things happened.



Shining Light's first group of singers in a Haitian Church in Queens, NYC in 1997.



A Shining Light team on Rikers Island in 2010.

We focused on using the arts to connect local youth with people from other contexts and cultures, which led us into a youth correctional facility outside Chicago in 1999. There we first saw the need to build bridges between people inside and outside prison so we ventured mostly into prisons and jails over the next 15 years, going from San Quentin to Rikers Island. We learned how to work in prison, but most importantly we learned that the people inside did not fit the stereotypes on TV.

By 2015 we wondered what would happen if we provided the same opportunities for people inside prisons as we had for young people outside. That led to working alongside incarcerated men and women and the discovery of the tremendous potential in them and their peers. When the pandemic stopped all our in-person programming, we had to again take steps into the unknown and try something new. That led to The Loop that is in your hands today!



A Shining Light team in the Philadelphia Detention Center in 2017.

Today, hundreds of people from Maine to California engage in The Loop and other resources on their tablets every day. We also have character development programs and arts programs in a growing number of prisons in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and North Dakota. When I took 13 young people to perform in Queens in 1997, I would have never dreamed we would be doing these things. But it was just one step at a time for 25 years, pushing through the challenges, striving to help people discover their potential.

While we share many of your frustrations with our criminal justice system and hope positive changes continue to happen, our focus remains empowering those inside to become all they can be. Times of trial can become growth experiences. **Perseverance** is an essential part of that happening. As you deal with the challenges of prison, especially in these difficult Covid times, know that people on the outside are cheering for you. You have purpose and potential in this world. Persevere in discovering and carrying that out!



Jeff

**FOUNDER &
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**



ACADEMY UPDATES

The James River Correctional Center (N. Dakota) started a new phase of the Academy, where 4 graduates are assisting and supporting 13 participants in their next two Academy groups.

After persevering through multiple lockdowns, quarantines, and personal bouts with Covid, 13 individuals completed all 5 modules of the SL Academy at North Dakota State Penitentiary!

We look forward to celebrating the completion of Academies at Belmont CI (Ohio) and SCI Chester (PA) soon. Unfortunately, both groups have been stalled because of Covid. Yet again, perseverance. Can I get an amen?



TABLET EXPANSION

Our partnership with Edovo officially launched in December, making our tablet content freely available through their education platform in prisons and jails in 23 US states from coast to coast, with more being added all the time!

Hundreds of individuals are now interacting with The Loop, “Creations of a Caged Bird” and our Playwriting & Spoken Word Labs on a daily basis. Shout out to those who are reading this on their tablet right now!!!



WINTER ARTS COLAB BEGINS

Currently 15 participants have signed up, with 10 mentors eager to collaborate in poetry, spoken word, drama (stage and screen), songwriting, and dance!

This is an opportunity to collaborate with an outside professional to develop a creative piece of any genre - to either take it from a seed of an idea to full fruition, or to nurture and refine an already existing piece.

After three written exchanges with your mentor, you will receive a certificate and an invitation to submit your piece to be considered for publication in The Loop or “Creations of a Caged Bird,” or anywhere else you choose to send it.

If you'd still like to participate, please submit your idea/piece ASAP to

staff@shining-light.com

or mail to

PO Box 8606, Laverne, CA 91750

Check out full details in the Nov/Dec '21 edition of The Loop (p.9)

Real Talk



Naomi

PROGRAM CONSULTANT

COMMUTED LIFER

COMMUTATION SPECIALIST

REFLECTING ON PERSEVERANCE...

Right now I am persevering through quitting smoking! One thing that has helped is I put myself back on the inside where our cigarettes were taken away and we couldn't smoke. I ask myself, "What did I do when I couldn't smoke? I just had to go without." You know, perseverance means to overcome. To make it through. When I look back over my life, I got through it. And not everybody's religious, but I know that somebody bigger than me helped me to get to the point that I'm at today along with having family support. Knowing that someone really loves me. It wasn't always that way. My son went through a point in his life where he didn't speak to me. He didn't talk to me for a couple of years. But when he was a teenager we had a long talk on the phone. He cried, and I cried, and we've been like peanut butter and jelly ever since. When things aren't going well, and it feels as though we can never get over the hurdle, we have to keep on keepin' on. I would have to remind myself that, "This Too Shall Pass."

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

"I wanna know how....how do I keep moving forward with my life? How do I change it?"

In order for a person to move on with their life and change, it's something that they just have to want to do. It is something within yourself. If you want to do things differently, then you have to start thinking differently. Perhaps some of the people you associate with you need to disassociate with and start choosing who you associate with. Don't just try to fit in - if it's not for you, just leave it alone. Working on making the change could be things like changing your language, your vocabulary. It doesn't make you look tough to use four letter words! Perhaps change your dress or your hygiene. Of course, it doesn't matter how much you change the uniform - you're still in uniform - but look presentable. Start caring about yourself...

"People had talked negatively about me in jail. Have you ever had others on the inside talk negative about you, and how did you handle it?"

People are always talking! People would talk negatively about me - lies, lies, lies!!! My grandmother used to tell me that I was important when people talked about me - who talks about something that means nothing??? So, when those people have nothing better to do but talk negatively about you, know that you are important!!...

"I've been in the process of commutation and had some very positive feedback from my representative. I am becoming very anxious and thinking of all the 'what ifs.' Any advice for that?"

It's hard. Your anxiety just kicks in - it happened to me, too... You get built up mentally to be let down - you just see it happen all the time. For me, I just left it in the hands of God. I did my part, had supporters help out with letters. But it was a tough time, because you want to act like everything's alright, but you're just so nervous and your stomach is turning. So I'd say, maintain your composure as best you can and can and, y'know, just wait on God.



ASK ANYTHING

In my 37 years on the inside, I'm pretty sure I've seen it all! So bring your issues or questions to me, and if I can't offer any advice, I'll ask someone who can. And then without using your name, we'll post your question and my response so other people going through something similar can maybe get some help, too.

**Please note that while we will maintain a professional level of confidentiality, we are legally required to report any information that involves a serious threat or existence of harm to yourself or others.*



FIGHTING TO SEE THE LIGHT



Lee



Shun (Freedom)

PROGRAM FACILITATORS / COMMUTED LIFERS & ACTIVISTS

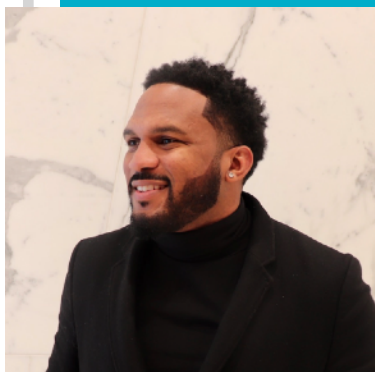
Our goal with this column is to help you to get free and stay free. We know freedom is not easy to obtain and keep once you've been to prison. Making parole is the easy part; for most it is a given. Getting to the "End of the Tunnel" is something else altogether. Even after parole, many will still be in the tunnel looking for a way out, trapped on a hamster wheel of dysfunction and living a life of missed opportunities.

This we know because we've been there, done that, and have felt how you feel. It's no secret, prison is a set back. However, as the saying goes, "a set back, is a set up for a great comeback." But before you can make a comeback you have to see the Light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. Seeing that Light is hard, especially if it's been muted by adversity or diminished by cynicism. The bottom line is, nobody gets to see it without a fight. We're talking about that "Rocky" fight inside of you that won't let you give up on yourself. That persistent attitude to get up every time you are knocked down. The drive to do better and to be better against the odds. The name of this fight is perseverance.

Sentenced to life without a possibility of parole for a crime we did not commit, perseverance was the wind at our backs, pushing us towards the light. No matter what circumstance knocked us down, perseverance stood us up, and fueled our ingenuity to create a way out of no way. Our motto was, "Free men free themselves." This meant no excuses. It was a hard journey but it was up to us to get to the end. There were no "they's" in our vocabulary that held us back, only "us" leaning into the truth of ourselves. It was our choice to take advantage of the time we had instead of letting the time take advantage of us.

A more salient example of perseverance are the men who have successfully completed the Shining Light Academy. They could have quit, but instead they persevered! They brushed past the obstacles and leaned into the truth of who they are and will eventually become. Even when it got uncomfortable they kept going until they reached the end. They tapped into the fight inside of themselves to see the light of their potential.

What about you? Are you persevering? Are you tapping into the fight inside of yourself to see the light of your potential? If not, what are you waiting for?



"OVERCOMING SHOWED ME THAT YOU CAN'T PLAY THE VICTIM. YOU HAVE TO SEE THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL AND BELIEVE IN YOURSELF. SOMETIMES LIFE DEALS YOU A BAD HAND, BUT YOU HAVE TO BE ABLE TO MANEUVER AND ADAPT."

EVERETT TAYLOR

MARKETING ENTREPRENEUR
BLACK ENTERPRISE

CREATIVE CONNECTION

"HOLDING HOPE" COLLAGE

Last edition's prompt was, "Draw/write what hope makes you think."

I am missed alot by my family,
 and I hope one day ill be free.
 the hope I have was sent to me
 by my heart and mine indeed.
 to me my kids they are my world
 their face I hope to see.
 we both have hope its pain to see
 its going to be you and me.
 Theris was a negative thought in mine
 to give up but I said nope.
 Because Im strong, I have no fear
 but I do have...

incredible hope

Hold on Pain Ends
 With each day granted to us were
 given another chance at life.
 Have Faith in yourself and
 hold onto HOPE ↓

HOPE



Back up your
 stuff, your going home.



Hope
 always
 remembers
 why you started
 why you cant give up
 it's the real bright blinding light
 that keeps you up late at night
 Reminds you the truth
 when your head lies.
 dont listen
 whispers
 Hope

Hope
Cheo

I hold onto hope the way a man adrift
 at sea holds onto debris. I/we need hope,
 for without hope there is no chance, no
 future. Hope, for better days, Happier Times,
 Joyful people and a meaning filled life.
 Hope for Hungerless Streets, homeful people and
 Racial Equality.
 Hope is Happiness Opressionless Perspective Empathy



Walking down a endless tunnel, still no sign of light
 Sounds of the enemy penetrate my ears
 I speak the word of God to claim Victory in this Fight
 Stumbling over barriers, how much longer can I take
 engulfed in the mist of total darkness
 my Natural eyes are useless, I must walk by Faith
 Committed to this Journey, Longing For this suffering to cease
 Fighting in this life changing war
 Blood, sweat and tears been shed, Now I endure in Peace
 Carrying the weight of my Family, they need me to make it
 Overwhelmed with their Pain
 faced with temptation I remain still and display patience
 I think on things above and Victory seems so close
 When all hell breaks loose, To Rise Above
 One must hold on to Hope!

Change is possible.
 It's never Too late,
 It wont be easy,
 But I promise
 it will be
 worth it.

H.O.P.E

I awaken
 each day
 with hope

Having Obvious Purpose Everyday.

NEW

SPORTS MURAL



When I think of perseverance, a lot of my thoughts turn to sports. The underdog who pulls out the win at the last second. The team who pursues greatness amidst struggle. The athletes who overcome disadvantages in all forms - where they grew up, what they had and didn't have, who counted them out, what injuries they experienced - and yet managed to persevere and rise above. I love it all. So in keeping with the theme, let's rep our favorite teams, athletes & sports as a reminder of what perseverance can look like. We want a mural that has a little piece of each of us in it. You can draw anything! A logo. A portrait. A favorite field or stadium. Or just the name of a team or person.



JENNY
 CREATIVE SERVICES



PREVIOUS: **LISTEN & LEARN BEFORE OFFERING ADVICE**

In the last edition, we looked at the use of social intelligence to care for others by being patient and listening, versus being quick to judge or share our own opinions or advice. While some (i.e. Certified Peer Specialists) have extra training in this, we can all practice it as a way to improve relationships and community.

Let's switch gears and think more practically. Perhaps you set for yourself a "New Year's Resolution," or at least some goals for 2022. Studies show that the best likelihood of achieving those goals is to create a series of smaller goals along the way, as stepping stones to the larger goal. Celebrating when those are achieved, while visualizing the end goal, can add even more motivation to keep going.



START SIMPLE

- **To develop a new skill, focus on applying it in simpler areas of life as a way to practice it.**
- **Think of it as learning to drive a car. Rather than immediately practicing on a highway, you should start in a parking lot.**

We encourage you to think of this idea in terms of personal goal-setting, skill development, or in creative endeavors. *(A blank page can be daunting, but the key is to start with a simple idea and let the creative process lead to more.)*



How might this also be used to develop or improve a relationship, or benefit a community you're a part of? Is there a collective goal you'd like to achieve? Are there positive changes you'd like to make in how you relate to others? *(See page 16 for helpful tools in setting "simple" goals that can add up to meaningful change.)*

"People say, 'What is the sense of our small effort?' They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time. A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words, and deeds is like that."

**Dorothy Day
(1897-1980)**

**Social activist & co-founder of
the Catholic Worker Movement**

Perseverance

Artwork by Brandon Richey, SCI Dallas, PA

"WHAT DOES PERSEVERANCE LOOK LIKE FOR YOU DURING THIS SEASON"

I believe perseverance is the epitome of life! In order to fully understand life & the meaning of life one must first learn to live. Everyone's got life because we are able to breathe, but only a few truly live to enjoy every breath; once I grasped the difference of life & living, perseverance became the foundation of my existence. I accepted in order to become my best self I had to persevere, before I started to persevere I used to live life as a race and always expecting things to happen when I felt they should happen. After a lot of mistakes, a lot of failures, & too many wrongs; I was humbled by being sentenced to 35 yrs in prison. As the years went by I began shedding my ego, pride, & my selfish ways; it took a lot of denying myself out when I finally accepted perseverance will always allow me to succeed not only monetarily, but most importantly as a man with direction.

Today I can honestly say my life is no longer a fast food lifestyle where I'm always eating on the run, but my life is a Thanksgiving, 4th of July, or Christmas cooked meal that takes time, love, preparation, and extreme focus!

By: VERNON WATTS
SHAWNEE C.C

ILLINOIS



Introducing Shining Light's newest staff member!

Rachel has been working with Shining Light since 2018, when she served as a teaching artist. Since then, she has produced several pieces in the “Creations of a Caged Bird” series, developed the Playwriting Lab for tablets and The Academy, and is the coordinator of our new project - the Winter Arts CoLab. She also works part-time with the Prison Education Project in California, and enjoys volunteering as a mentor with PEN America’s Prison Writing Project.

Last fall, Rachel received the L’Engle/Rahman prize in Mentorship, named for the late acclaimed author Madeleine L’Engle and her 10-year written friendship with scholar, writer, and former Black Panther Party leader, Ahmad Rahman.

Rachel was nominated by her PEN America mentee, Daniel Throop. Daniel had received an honorable mention in PEN America’s 2020 Prison Writing Contest for his play *The War Within*, after which he was paired with Rachel to collaborate on his unfinished memoir. (*Learn more about PEN America’s Prison Writing Program below.*)

FROM RACHEL: Hi everyone! I am, by training, a theatre professor and have taught in universities for over 20 years and still, one of my very favorite things to do is to read other people’s writing. It gives me such delight to see someone use a wonderful turn of phrase or create a character or situation that helps me to see the world in a new way. Recently, I have had the honor of working with Daniel, who is writing his memoir from inside prison in Norfolk, Massachusetts. His story is fascinating - he was instrumental in restarting the prison debate team at Norfolk prison, which competed against Boston College, Harvard and MIT, and is a tireless advocate for prison reform from within. In my correspondence with Daniel, I have learned so much about perseverance - he writes every day - despite lockdowns, delayed or lost letters and all of the barriers that you all understand so well. I hope you, too, are encouraged to keep creating and keep writing, because your story is unique, valuable, and worthy of telling!

FROM DANIEL’S NOMINATION ESSAY: *My favorite aphorism on the subject of human interconnectivity hails from the Aboriginal Activists Group: “If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine then let us work together.” Rachel personifies this collaborative credo better than most by actively honoring reciprocal evolution over basic reclamation. With a few inclusive strokes of her pen, Rachel has overwritten years of dehumanization.*

The mission of PEN America is
**“to unite writers and their allies to celebrate creative expression
 and defend the liberties that make it possible.”**

If you have original, unpublished writing that you are interested in submitting to PEN’s Prison Writing Contest for 2022, we would encourage you to do so!

**SUBMIT BY
 SENDING
 WORK TO:**

**PEN Prison Writing Program Annual Contest
 588 Broadway, Suite 303
 New York, NY 10012**



**The Freedom
 to Write**
 pen.org

POSITIVE NEWS FROM INSIDE

It is natural for us as human beings to be more aware of what's wrong than what's right in any given situation - it's what researchers call "negativity bias." Without intentional efforts to change this way of thinking, we can easily spiral downward or stay stuck in a pit...and we often drag others down with us, whether we want to or not! Here at Shining Light, we want to turn that around and lift each other up instead. We recognize, of course, that there is plenty that is wrong in any given moment within the context of prison - that's easy to see. But rather than dwell on that, we help each other focus on the positive - on what is right and good - knowing that perspective will lead to greater benefits in the end.

Many of our Academy sessions start with a ritual of each person sharing three things that went right since the last time we met. Here's how Dolph at North Dakota State Penitentiary described this experience: *"Doing 'What Went Right?' was dope. I would start to keep track through the day, like, 'I can say that tonight at class!' And I could hear from all these guys things that made me realize there are little things around that I can be grateful for."*

So tell us, what's going right?!

"I am getting myself together."

TABLET USER, MICHIGAN

"What Went Right?" responses from an Academy group at SCI Chester after a 3-week quarantine.

"I'm thankful for my health, and for waking up today. I'm grateful to be alive in spite of what's going on. Every day is a possibility to do better than the day before..." - Joe Kwaha

"MY PELL GRANT FOR FINANCIAL AID WAS APPROVED SO I CAN FINISH GETTING MY ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE AT EASTERN UNIVERSITY" - CONEIL MOORE

"I'm happy to be back at work [as a tutor] in my classroom with new students. It's so good to see them." - Lewis Manzano

I just had a visit on video from my daughters and other family and it was great. I saw their Christmas tree, presents and much more. I was so happy. I accomplished being a great father all these years even though being locked up. I am so lucky to have such a loving family.

-cheo-

LUIS "CHEO" RAMOS
SCI FRACKVILLE, PA



CALLS FOR CELEBRATION

- What accomplishments are you proud of?
- What good news are you excited about?
- Are you or someone you know coming up on your release date?

• _____

I feel more hopeful & directed in the future. More mindful of those around me, and found better more meaningful ways to interact with the guys around me! I consistently ask the guys in my unit what went right today and praise them/encourage them/rejoice with them.

-Jonathan McKinney

SL ACADEMY GRADUATE
NORTH DAKOTA STATE PENITENTIARY

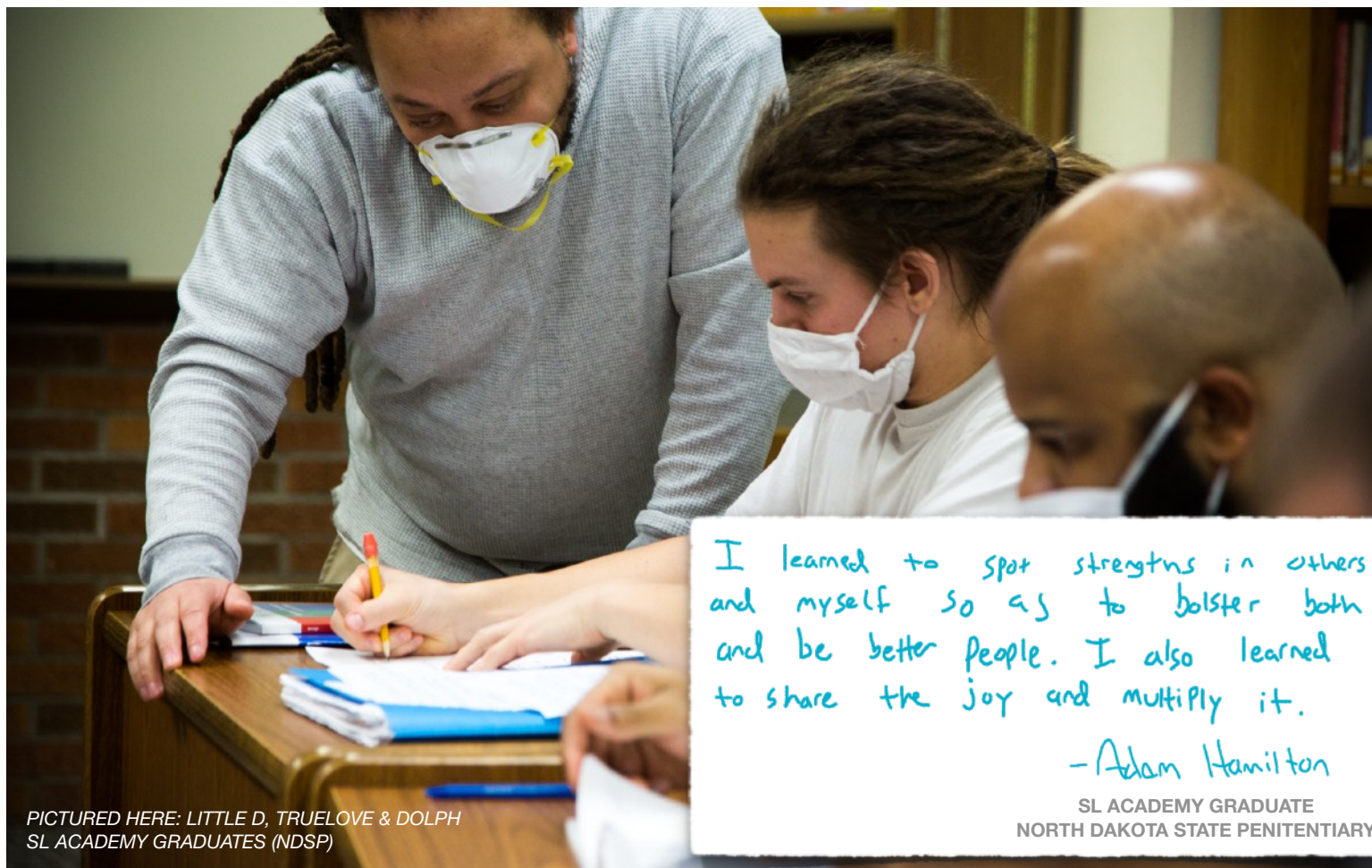
FOLLOW-UP: STRENGTHS SPOTTING

Last issue, we continued our exploration of strengths spotting, introducing the SEA model: Spot, Explain, Appreciate. How is this going? As we focus this issue on the strength of perseverance, keep an eye out for examples, not only in yourself, but in others around you who are carrying out perseverance in a way that benefits themselves or their community.

In the next issue, we'd love to highlight examples of perseverance in action and the positive impact that is having! So after you **SPOT** perseverance,



SHARE YOUR EXPLANATION AND APPRECIATION WITH US!



PICTURED HERE: LITTLE D, TRUELOVE & DOLPH
SL ACADEMY GRADUATES (NDSP)



COMBINING STRENGTHS



Strengths are used in combinations. Although we often identify a dominant strength, there are usually additional strengths expressed alongside the dominant strength. As you notice examples of perseverance, what strengths do you notice in combination with perseverance? Maybe you notice perseverance plus hope, or creativity, or self-regulation?

A character strength like perseverance can be helpful in a combination to develop other strengths that don't come as naturally. When you review the 24 character strengths, are there any strengths that you would like to develop more in yourself? Maybe it is humor, or bravery, or honesty, or _____. How could you use perseverance in combination with that strength? Let's use bravery as an example - maybe you thought about speaking up at a certain moment, but didn't quite get the words out. How might perseverance help in continuing to increase your bravery, or build up other strengths?

“Perseverance is sticking with things. It means being hardworking and finishing what is started, despite barriers and obstacles that arise. The pleasure received from completing tasks and projects is very important to those who are high in perseverance. Sometimes he or she must dig deep and muster the will to overcome thoughts of giving up. Perseverance involves organizing oneself to support activities (e.g., scheduling breaks and sticking to them, rewarding in small ways along the way), but when all else fails, this strength helps the person to barrel through until the project is done. This helps build further confidence for future successes and goal accomplishment. Perseverance involves the voluntary continuation of a goal-directed action despite the presence of challenges, difficulties, and discouragement. There are two vectors of perseverance. It requires both effort for a task and duration to keep the task up.”

VIA Institute On Character. (n.d.). <https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/perseverance>

Personally I feel I've persevered only due to the fact that I run this marathon with so many, for if I were alone, I may have been overtaken by exhaustion, despair, the peaks and valleys too daunting may have instilled fear to the point of resigning...

-LEX-

ALEX RODRIGUEZ
SCI DALLAS, PA

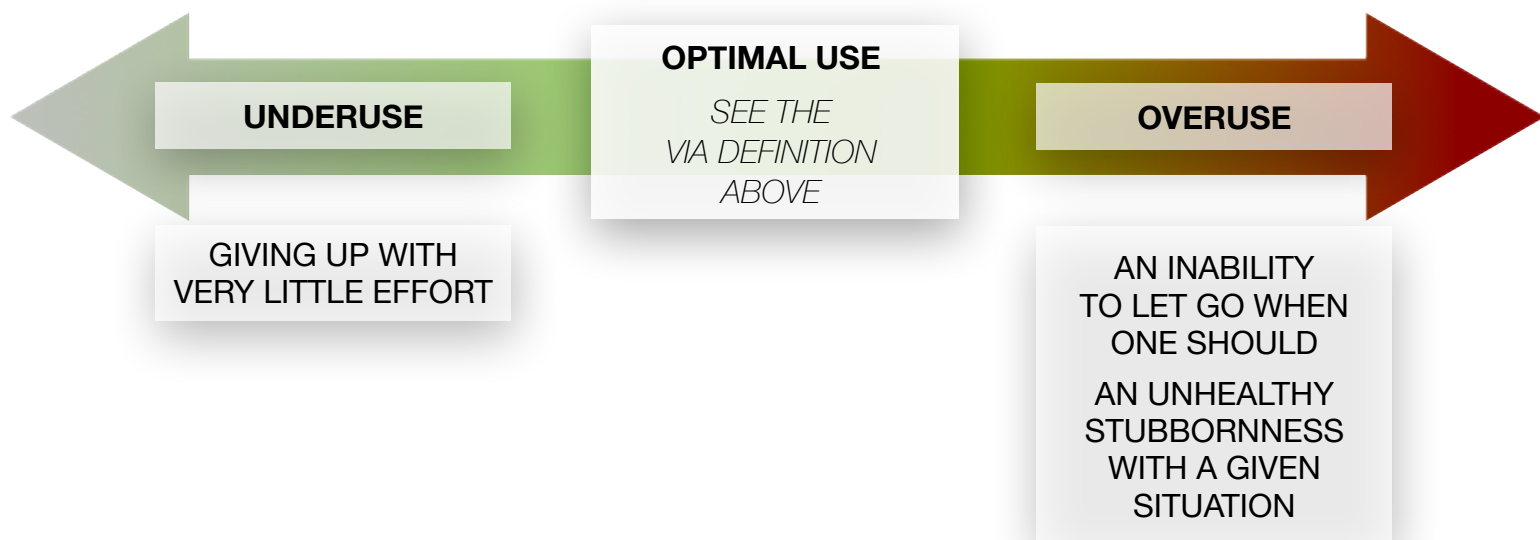
**OVER USE
& UNDER USE**

Another key understanding we want to start reviewing in The Loop is the importance of context in regard to Character Strengths. What I mean by this is that different contexts and situations require different expressions of strengths. For example, how we use humor amongst a group of friends vs. prison administration may look quite different. There is the potential for humor to be a positive/healthy way to engage with both friends and prison administration, but it may take a bit of wisdom to discern what that looks like. When done right in either context, it can be described as finding “the optimal use” of that strength. Otherwise, we may be over or under using a strength. (Niemiec, 2019)



Travis
PROGRAM DEVELOPER

SPECTRUM OF PERSEVERANCE



One area of life that is top of mind when considering perseverance is with work. As a way to reflect on over and under use, consider a challenge you have had - or could have - while working. Try to describe what underusing and overusing perseverance may look like in that situation. Then try to describe the optimal use.



As we mentioned the last time, some of you may have made some New Year's Resolutions or goals for 2022. Good for you! Goal setting often incorporates a combination of character strengths and provides a great opportunity to practice perseverance. Below are two reliable tools that can work together to help with this.

The SMART acronym below can be used to bring greater clarity to a goal we may have been thinking about, increasing the potential for success. I know for me, the biggest challenge in goal-setting is coming up with a goal that is actually meaningful - something that really aligns with my values and interests - and once I identify it, it is often too ambiguous. For example, one of my goals for 2022 is to communicate better with my partner, which could mean so many different things. But here is how I took this ambiguous goal and made it SMART.

AMBIGUOUS GOAL: COMMUNICATING BETTER WITH MY PARTNER

And now by applying SMART...

SPECIFIC - What goal is narrow enough that I can effectively plan?

- *I want to share my weekly work schedule with her before the week starts*

MEASURABLE - What is the specific outcome that I can keep track of?

- *I can keep track of the number of times I successfully do this*

ATTAINABLE - Is this something that is possible to accomplish?

- *I believe this is attainable, since it is both in my control and actually possible to accomplish*

RELEVANT - Does this goal align with what I care about and my values?

- *Yes, my relationship with my wife is incredibly important to me and communication seems key to being on the same page with things*

TIME-BASED - In order to keep it relevant and attainable, what is a realistic end-point?

- *I want to check-in on this goal after 6-months, but realistically see this being something I hope to do for longer than that*

Now that I have a clear, attainable goal, I will need perseverance to carry it out! The next tool I can use is called an "IF, THEN" statement, which will help me anticipate critical situations and obstacles. To come up with my "IF's", the idea is to brainstorm the potential obstacles (within my control) - what might prevent me from accomplishing my goal? After I identify an obstacle, I consider what I can do in response to the obstacle - this is my "THEN" statement. By considering this before it happens, there is a greater chance of persevering in the moment, because I already have a plan.

Following my example, one obstacle I can anticipate is being too busy that I will forget to share my schedule with my wife. To help prepare for this, here is my "IF, THEN" statement:

IF *I become so busy that I forget to communicate my work hours to my wife,*

THEN *I will share my work hours when I realize I forgot & will set an alarm for every Sunday night to remind myself to accomplish my goal.*

So what are your goals for 2022? How would you make them SMART?

What would be a helpful IF, THEN statement that you could use to help persevere through obstacles to accomplishing your goals?



PERSEVERING IN THE NEW YEAR

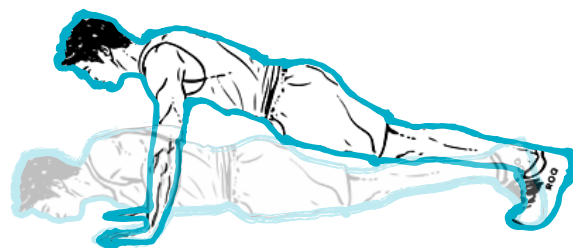
Last issue we looked at making a plan to get active during this season.

How is that going?

We asked Kurt, a member of the Shining Light Advisory Board, if he had any examples of perseverance from when he was on the inside and he shared the following story. We hope it is an encouragement to take your plan into action or to keep it up. Recognize the small wins, challenge yourself, and keep moving forward!

“During my incarceration, it dawned on me how important self-discipline was. The way I saw it, if I disciplined myself, nobody else would have to. Since I hated being told what to do, this seemed a sensible goal. To accomplish self-discipline, I would create uncomfortable goals for myself. Examples include splashing cold water on my face in the morning to force myself to wake up and do something with my day, being nice to the meanest of the guards, going outside even on the coldest of days, and eating ‘healthy’ food even if I didn’t like it.

One day, I got this crazy idea that I wanted to be able to do 100 push-ups. As a child, my brother was very athletic. Me? Not so much. So, I guess I wanted to prove to myself that I could do something I never thought I’d be able to. To accomplish my goal, I made a plan. I knew I could do 25 pushups. So that was a start. I decided each week, I’d add 5 more to my set. It took time and dedication, but over time my numbers grew. Many days I didn’t feel like doing push-ups, but I forced myself. When I hit 85, I thought, ‘Dang, I might reach my goal.’ It took 15 weeks to reach my goal, but I did it for no other reason than to prove I could. I persevered for the best reason in the world: Because I feared I couldn’t do it. And I’m healthier today for it - Mind, Body, and Soul.



Kurt performing in an SL production in 2017, when he was still incarcerated.



Don’t set goals you know you can accomplish.

There’s no fun in that.

Set goals that you think may be impossible.

Your victories will be all that more rewarding.”

ON THE NEXT PAGE, NEW SUBSCRIBER REGGIE WEST SHARES WHY WRITING HELPS HIM MAINTAIN HEALTH AND WELLNESS INSIDE.

WHAT PRACTICES DO YOU USE TO KEEP YOUR MIND AND BODY WELL?



"Why I Write"...

Hello Brothers and Sisters! 😊

Writing allows me to express myself, share my perspective, and use my voice. I use writing as a positive outlet to counter negativity and refocus my thought process, especially during trying times. It helps me to vent, providing relief from stressful situations!

Writing also helps me to assess and reflect on subject matter with patience, because I am my worst critic. But through writing, I can be thoughtful and take my time to create the message I want to share with others who are interested in reading it.

I sincerely encourage all of you who read this, to utilize the power of the pen to create a vivid expression that only your mind can create. In doing so you are not just freeing your mind. You are nurturing it to grow and expand!

Reggie West

Sci-Phoenix

PENNSYLVANIA

HELLO WRITERS! Each edition of the Loop includes featured writing, and we want to thank those of you that submitted work – we wish we could include it all! Is there something you would like to write about or to read about?

Reggie, who wrote the poem above, submitted the following prompt to get you writing for the next edition:

“School of Love: An essayist named bell hooks has written a book called, ‘All About Love.’ hooks claims that, ‘We learn about love in childhood. Whether our homes are happy or troubled, our family’s functional or dysfunctional. It’s the original school of love.’”



Rachel

PROGRAM COORDINATOR



What do you think about his claim? What have you learned about love?

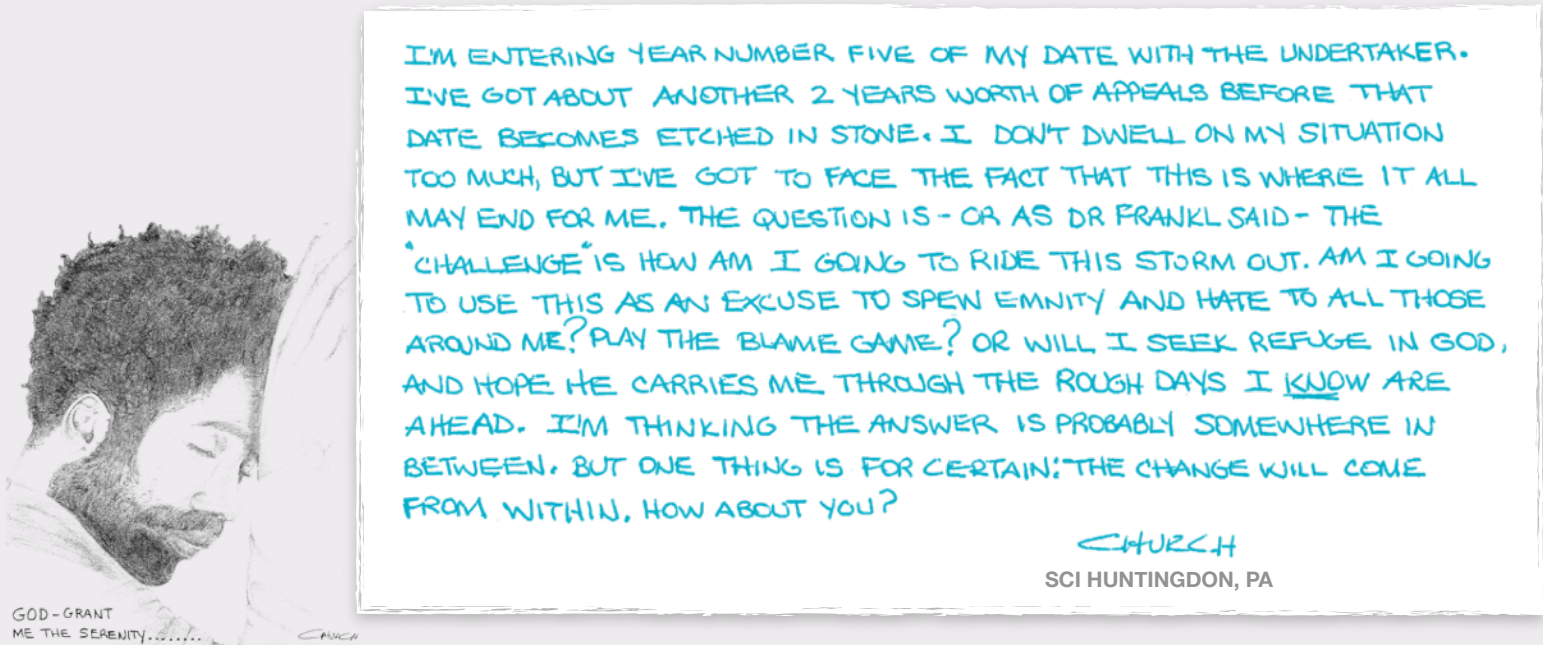
See the submission guidelines on p.2 if you'd like to have your work considered!

Is there ever a time to stop persevering? A time to let go?

You may recognize the phrase on Church’s pencil sketch as the first line of what has been called “The Serenity Prayer.” It has been used by recovery groups like Alcoholics Anonymous since 1955, but an article published by the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation* reminds us that it can be a powerful prayer for anyone of any faith or life experience. “It speaks wisdom to addicts and non-addicts alike. People who live this prayer discover how to strike a dynamic balance between acceptance and change.” *<https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/articles/the-serenity-prayer>

Besides his artwork, Church shared an essay he wrote called “To Change Or Not to Change” - read an excerpt below. He is also the author of “The Awakening” featured in the first volume of “Creations of a Caged Bird: Vol. 1” which is in some ways a memoir of his own journey through addiction.

Can you see the wisdom of The Serenity Prayer in Church’s artwork and writing?



We encourage you to take a few moments with The Serenity Prayer below. Repeat it as many times as you need to. Commit it to memory, as many have, drawing on it when stressful situations arise. Or, like Church, let your meditation on these simple but powerful words lead to creative expression.

Breathe in and out with each phrase, giving space for God to respond as you pray:

**THE
SERENITY
PRAYER**

**GOD GRANT ME THE SERENITY...
TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE...
COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN...
AND WISDOM TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.**

This prayer has been attributed to American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. It was originally much longer, composed in the early 1930s and adapted by Alcoholics Anonymous in 1955. Since then it has been used by many recovery groups as an anchor point for two of their core tenants of addiction recovery: surrender and acceptance.



Angelica

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

One sign of a healthy community or relationship is the ability to disagree respectfully. This can take a lifetime of work - it requires a balance of humility and openness on one hand, and clear thought and communication on the other. Though we are members of the same community, we may never come face to face with each other. But we certainly have a range of thoughts and opinions among us, and we want to provide a chance for you to share your differing ideas in a safe, constructive way. Think of this as a chance to develop critical thinking skills, hear a different perspective than your own, and practice shaping a careful & respectful argument.

I think maybe the first place I practiced this skill myself was in Speech & Debate in high school. We'd be presented with a declarative statement and make our case for or against, supporting or opposing. In this section, we'll offer an idea without a definite "right" or "wrong" - rather it will be up to you to work that out for yourself and share your perspective with the rest of the community. Then in the next edition, we will post a range of the most compelling (respectful) opinions, and leave you to consider the situation from a new perspective. *(Thanks to some of our staff for getting us started with some sample responses on the next page!)*

**HERE ARE SOME
GUIDELINES TO
KEEP IN MIND**

- There are several Community Codes that will come into play to keep this a safe space for healthy disagreement - please take a minute to review them in your Welcome Packet or tablet as you formulate your response! *Some of our favorites for this include...*
 - *Speak Life* • *Speak from the "I"*
 - *Be Open & Curious* • *Debate the Topic NOT the Person*
- Part of making a compelling argument is to be concise and intentional with your words. Please limit your responses to 100 words or less.
- Think Big! We're interested in big picture thinking on these topics. Any details that reveal personal information about yourself or others may not be able to be published.
- General submission guidelines (p.2) also apply.

**CONTENT
CONTINUES ON
NEXT PAGE**

**HOLIDAYS/SPECIAL EVENTS
COMING UP:**

**BLACK HISTORY
MONTH**
FEBRUARY

**WINTER
OLYMPICS**
FEB 4-20

**WOMEN'S
HISTORY MONTH**
MARCH

DAYLIGHT SAVINGS BEGINS
(CLOCKS SPRING FORWARD)
MARCH 13

**ST. PATRICK'S
DAY**
MARCH 17

ARE YOU IN SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION OF THIS STATEMENT AND WHY:

“SOMETHING SHARED IN CONFIDENCE WITH SOMEONE SHOULD NEVER BE DISCLOSED.”



If a person tells you something in confidence you should never repeat what you were told. It's a secret no matter what it is. At its core it is about loyalty, trust and honor: their trust in you, your loyalty to them, and the honor of not breaking your word. - Lee



Barbara
DIRECTOR OF
SUPPORT SERVICES

Just my personal experience - I have no control over the values and choices that others make. Therefore, if I disclose something in confidence, I really don't expect it *not* to go further. If I truly do not want someone to know something, I will write it in my journal or only share it with a professional who understands the laws around my "confidence!" or just keep it in my own mind. - Barb



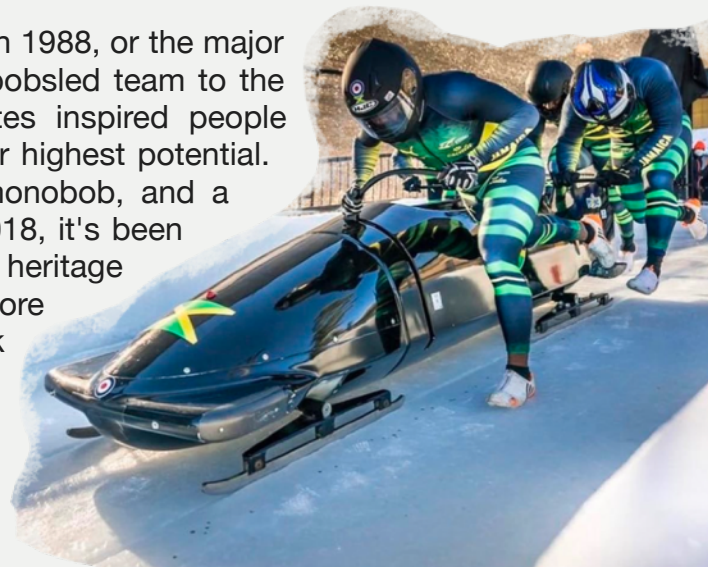
Lee

I would disclose something someone else shared with me in confidentiality under limited circumstances. I don't arrive at my decision willy nilly. I would only do it if the person is about to harm him/herself or others. There are times when we contemplate doing things out of anger, frustration or just plain not thinking straight and aren't open to advice. And sometimes we want help or support, but just don't know how to ask for it. So I would say something if it will keep the person from making a mistake and hurting themselves, others, possibly getting new charges or worse. - Freedom



Freedom

STAYING THE COURSE You may have seen the headline in 1988, or the major motion picture in 1993, when Jamaica sent its first ever bobsled team to the Olympics. The "Cool Runnings" of the Jamaican athletes inspired people around the world to defy expectations and achieve to their highest potential. This year, Jamaica will send three teams: a women's monobob, and a men's two and four. While a women's team qualified in 2018, it's been 20 years since the men have qualified for the games. This heritage of perseverance, even through decades, now sets more Jamaican competitors up to succeed than ever! Good luck to these athletes and all the athletes who exemplify perseverance, determination, and good sportsmanship!



FEATURED RECIPE: **CHOCO BALLS**

Tablet User, California

INGREDIENTS

2 Chocolate Nutritional Bars, crushed
 1 Cup (little bag) of Chocoballs Cereal, crushed
 1 small pack of Salty Peanuts, crushed
 1 small pack of Tropical Mixed Nuts, crushed
 1 little pack of sugar
 Swiss Chocolate Powder
 1 Ziplock Bag

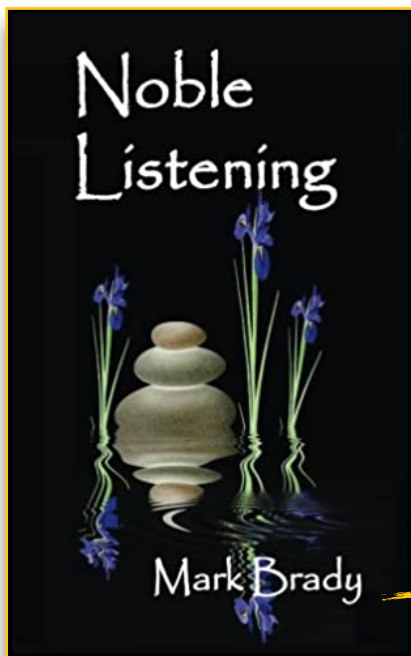
DIRECTIONS: Add all ingredients into the Ziplock bag, except the chocolate powder, and crumble it well if it's not previously crushed. Add a little hot water and mix it all into a nice dough-like substance. In a bowl, add some chocolate powder. Then with your hands grab a little dough at a time and form balls and pass them through the choco powder and Wala! Presto! Enjoy my Chocoballs!

NOTE: If you want them to be even more delicious, grab some rice krispies cereal in a bowl, and in a bowl melt some marshmallow. Pass the balls through the melted marshmallows and then through the rice krispies.

JUST
FOR
FUN



Keep your submissions coming - recipes, recommendations, corny jokes and puzzles!



BOOK RECOMMENDATION

SHAWN SAUNDERS
 SCI FRACKVILLE, PA

“Being listened to enlivens us and inspires opportunities to explore what we think, how we feel, what we want, who we are, who we’ve been and who we’re becoming... as individuals, and even more importantly, as members of the human community.” - Mark Brady



WORK OUT MIX TAPE

If you’ve ever tried to work out, you may have used music to help motivate you. So share the love and tell us your favorite work out song, and we’ll create a playlist from the submissions.



CORNY CORNER

WE KNOW YOU CAN'T HELP YOURSELVES

What do you get when you cross a snowman and a polar bear?

A brrrr-grrr

Probably the biggest disappointment on Noah's Ark was that when Noah grabbed his fishing pole, he realized he only had 2 worms!

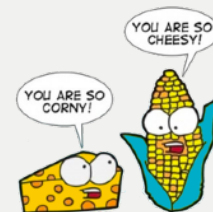
JEREMY MOUNT
 SHERBURNE CO. JAIL, MN

Who is Frosty's favorite aunt?

Aunt Arctica

What wears a coat in winter and pants in summer?

A dog



FOR THE NEXT ISSUE



HERE'S WHAT WE NEED TO KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

(Try to submit on blank paper if possible)

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME - P.3
SPORTS MURAL - P.9

POSITIVE NEWS - P.13
STRENGTHS SPOTTING - P.14

CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATE - P.21

SEND IN COVER ART FOR "THE LOOP" FOR A CHANCE TO BE FEATURED!

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: SPIRITUALITY

What significance does spirituality have in your life?

SUBMISSIONS DUE BY MARCH 1

Remember: We will credit full name, facility & state unless you tell us otherwise!

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shininglight

P.O. Box 267 | Annville, PA 17003

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& Jeremy Mount (MN)

Answers to Winter Trivia

1. b / 2. a / 3. c / 4. b / 5. c / 6. d / 7. d / 8. d

We look forward to hearing from you soon with new artwork & messages, encouraging comments and stories!

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