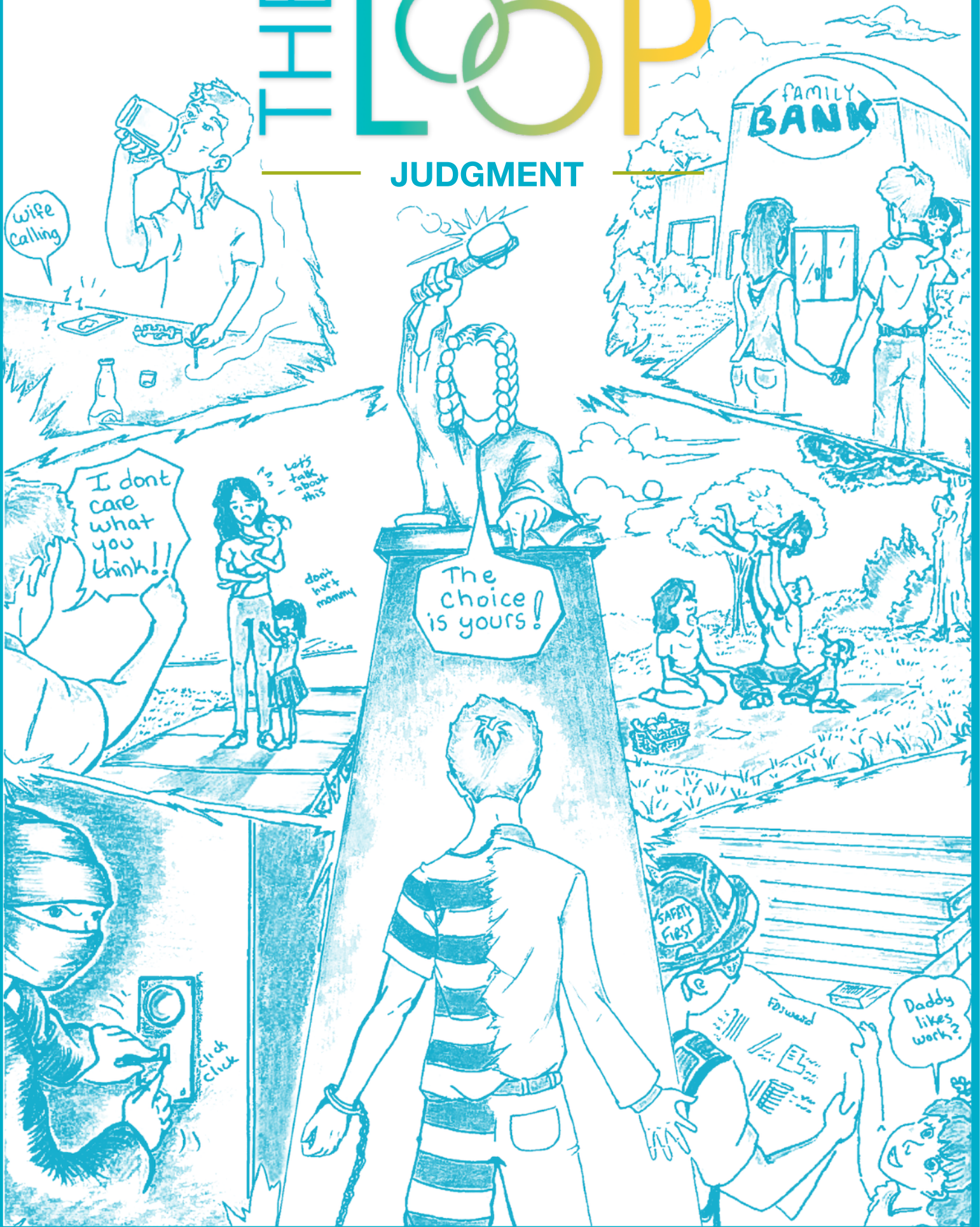


# THE LOOP

## JUDGMENT



# THE LOOP

At Shining Light, we believe each one of us has the potential to shine light wherever we are, regardless of our circumstances. Through human connection, creativity, and mutual learning, we can unlock this potential in ourselves and maintain - even brighten - that light in ourselves and in our community. The more lights in the room, the brighter the collective light can shine, until the whole environment of prison is changed from the inside out.

The Loop is more than a magazine; it's how our community of light bearers communicates with each other. It's a source of belonging to something positive, creative inspiration, a reminder that we're not alone, a push to keep going, and a compass to guide the way. It can even be a touchpoint for meaningful connection with loved ones! *(Every issue can be viewed online at [shining-light.com/theloop](http://shining-light.com/theloop))*

If you are new to The Loop, we'd love to consider you part of the Shining Light community. One way is to "subscribe" by sending in the card on the back, so you can start receiving your own (free!) copy with your name on it. And when you're ready to join in our ongoing conversation, know that we're always glad to hear from you!

It is you, the readers, 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.

With limited space and a growing number of contributors, we are selective in what we publish. As a community focused on unlocking the potential for good in each other, and the environments and systems we find ourselves in, all content is filtered through the "Community Codes" we seek to live by. These codes are sent to everyone who requests a copy of The Loop, and we encourage readers to refer to them often.

In addition, please review these guidelines so you know what we're looking for:



## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- We will credit contributions with first name, last initial, and 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 and keep criticism of the institution/DOC constructive, focused on ways to create something better.

### 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!

*PLEASE NOTE: We are limited in the practical services we can provide at this time, and therefore cannot fulfill requests for legal or reentry support, penpal relationships, or assistance with publishing creative work.*

## WELCOME, READERS!

What comes to mind when you hear the word “Judgment?” If you’ve been impacted by incarceration, you may think of a judge and jury handing down a verdict. Or maybe you think of judging the character or behavior of a person...maybe even yourself. These are both real and valid definitions, and we will touch on them in some ways in the following pages. But we will also stretch our minds to think about judgment as a character strength we can develop to improve our lives and benefit others.

To put the VIA definition (p. 17) in my own words, I see the character trait of Judgment as the ability to make healthy decisions and form accurate opinions. It is the willingness to factor in a variety of ideas, opinions, and facts we may not instinctively want to consider in order to come to the best conclusion or make the best choice for ourselves or others. Another term for this is “critical thinking.”

**IN THIS ISSUE:** Be sure to read the words from fellow readers on p. 13 about ways they’ve found judgment and critical thinking to be helpful with forgiveness. You’ll also see great insights from Ms. Naomi (p. 14), Freedom & Lee (p. 15), and Dormen (p. 19) who’ve all used “good judgment” to not only navigate their decades inside, but also their transition back into society. The same is true of Ms. Maggie, our Community Spotlight member (p. 10), who shares how she used critical thinking (judgment) to form healthy boundaries as a loving CPS worker inside, and today as she cares for others in her workplace. A variety of other insights, information, and creative prompts are included throughout to help us understand and practice this strength that is so important if we are to reach our fullest potential.

Many thanks to **Joshua Parham** (SC) for the cover art and to the other 66 readers who submitted artwork, writings and other responses to this issue! 😊

**NEW!**

We will be awarding Certificates of Achievement to anyone who has submitted content by mail to **all 5 issues from this year**. Shout out to the 12 of you who are already 2 for 2! For everyone else, it’s not too late - just include a response to at least one prompt from each of the previous two issues (Bravery & Forgiveness), and we’ll count it!


When I opened and started reading all of the stories it made me feel connected and not alone. I truly want to say thank you for all the kind words and encouragement that you all bring. I am excited to grow with you all.  
-Melanie M. (OH)

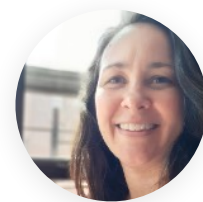
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Look for the  that notes the various prompts and activities. Then write to us about your experience so we can keep the conversation going!



Kelly  
PROGRAM  
DIRECTOR

TO: YOU  
FROM: JEFF

**Greetings!** I hope everyone is getting a chance to enjoy a little of the sunshine and warmer weather that is coming with spring. In this issue, we are tackling another important strength that affects all of us all the time, whether we know it or not. According to the VIA Institute (see page 17), Judgment is about “making rational and logical choices, and analytically evaluating ideas, opinions, and facts.” Using this strength includes “weighing the evidence fairly, thinking things through, and examining the evidence from all sides rather than jumping to conclusions.” Judgment can also be called critical thinking, which involves “being open-minded and able to change one’s mind in the light of the evidence, remaining open to other arguments and perspectives.” It all sounds great. It makes sense, and we may even accept this as the best way to approach every situation.



Jeff

FOUNDER &  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

If only it was so easy. Mistakes we made in our youth may redirect or redefine the rest of our lives. Our circumstances heavily affect us and limit our choices...or broaden them beyond what we know what to do with. There is an emotional part of us as humans that can negatively impact our ability to make clear-headed decisions if we’re not careful. Sometimes there is little time to think critically. And sometimes we can consider everything, examine the options, and still be unsure of what is a better choice.

So judgment is not always black and white - there are a lot of challenges and complications - but we can grow and learn. We can discover how to weigh our emotions. We can develop patterns that help us make good decisions even in the most difficult circumstances.

The personal and external challenges you face every day in prison can be used to help you develop good judgment. Look around and find people whose judgment you respect. Who seems to be thriving despite their circumstances? Some of the people I have met who are serving long or life sentences have developed impressive judgment skills. Learn from them and anyone else who may be helpful. There is a lot we cannot control in our life’s journey, but there is a lot we can. Focus on what you can control and develop your judgment strength!



"I really enjoyed reading your newsletter for the first time, and appreciate the time and effort that's being put into establishing and maintaining some form of inspiration and hope to those either incarcerated for the first time, or stuck in a revolving door like I am, unfortunately... There's no other resource available that's been able to motivate me or give me some form of hope and willingness to pursue my natural creativity."

- Michael M (MT)

At Shining Light, we want to be a community that helps each other focus on the positive in the midst of the challenges and painful situations we can't avoid. (We're not ignoring the bad; we're just finding a way to rise above it!) This page is all about celebrating accomplishments and good news, so tell us...

I recently enjoyed a video visit with my wife and two children. It was my first visit with them in over 4 years. I can not express in words the joy I felt when the video screen came to life and I saw their smiling faces. For 45 minutes, the walls, fences, and oppression melted away. -Jim S.(PA)

"I was told today at my work release job I will be getting a new position and a raise. I felt pride when he said I was being given this promotion because of my job performance and professional attitude."

Anonymous / NC

"I was screened for the Reach Out Program and could leave very soon which is exciting. I am wanting to go to rehab not only for myself but for my child. I'm looking forward to going to rehab and I'm proud of myself for taking classes and even graduating from a resiliency class in here at Estrella."

Kyro W. / AZ

"My father is participating in my recovery. Also, I finished the 'Art of Soul Making' course."

Laura B. / SD

I just had my Clemency hearing which my lawyer said went well. I'm also almost finished with the horticulture class. I'm taking for 110 college credits...! -Danielle A (IL)

I am excited because ANSON correction is the FIRST WOMENS PRISON in North Carolina, and First PRISON in North Carolina to start The F.R.E.S.H program (Family Re-Entry Support and Help program). We just had our FIRST CLASS and it was AMAZING. It is a 12 WK program which would allow us to gain strength in our relationship with our children.

-Shalee B (NC)

"I was watching JEOPARDY! Friday night and I got the response to the clue for Final Jeopardy correct. Even though I was just guessing and I wasn't sure my response was correct, when I saw that my response was correct, I was so happy."

Aaron B. / OH

"A piece of my art was celebrated as 'gallery ready'." Joy H. / OH

"My dad recently was cleared of all cancer." Kevin A. / NC

There is a man at our unit, a gentle giant of a man, 7 feet tall and 440 lbs. who is going home in May after serving 43 years in prison...he is going home to family, who has reconnected with him after many years of rejection. Praise God! -K. Daniel O (AR)

"I'm blessed that my kids are still in my life through this journey. I'm blessed that I have my parents and my sister that loves me and are on my side through thick and thin."

Jose A. / OH

"I learned that my oldest daughter made the deans list with distinction this past fall. I also sang a lead solo in the peer support community choir. I am nervous in front of people so that was an accomplishment for me."

J.M. / OH

I got married on April 19<sup>th</sup> and I see parole in August. Blessings on top of blessings... Oliver L (PA)

"I was recently voted Sgt. of Arms for the American Red Cross." B. Gore / OH

## WHAT WENT RIGHT?

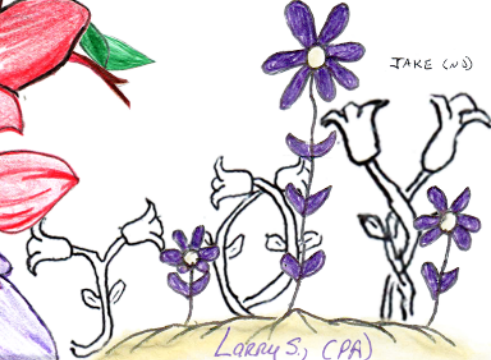
- What accomplishments are you proud of?
- What good news are you excited about?
- Are you or someone you know coming up on your release date?

TJ (OH)

JAKE (W)

LARRY S, CPA

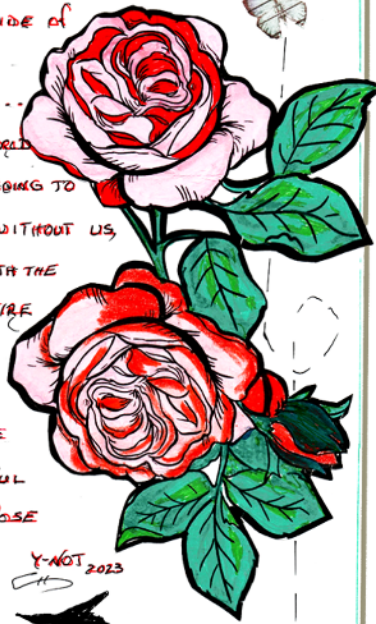
NOBY



"SUNDAY MORNING—NATURE'S WORSHIP SERVICE:"  
BLUEBELLS, MORNING GLORIES,  
AND JACK-IN-THE PULPIT

Bro. Ken He Art

I SAW A BLOSSOMING ROSE  
ON THE OTHER SIDE OF  
THE FENCE TODAY  
AND I THOUGHT...  
THE BEAUTIFUL WORLD  
WE LIVE IN IS GOING TO  
GO ON... WITH OR WITHOUT US,  
AND IT WAS WORTH THE  
PRICE OF MY ENTIRE  
INCARCERATION,  
TO BE REMINDED  
BY THE MESSAGE  
OF THIS BEAUTIFUL  
BLOSSOMING ROSE



Y-NOT 2023

COMPARE ECCLESIASTES  
CHAP. 6



Shining Light

2023

ADRIA ND

NEW

# THERE'S NO "I" IN "TEAM"

*And no, there's no "me" either :)*



If you're a fan of team sports, you understand this concept. Even the award for "Most Valuable Player" is questionable to me, since their success was dependent on the work of so many others (*I'm lookin' at you, Aaron Rodgers*). The fact is, we live our entire lives as part of a team, and our success is often dependent on the efforts of those around us, both the work we see and don't see.

So with the next issue's theme being "Teamwork", this Creative Connection is going to be dedicated to the MVP's in our lives. Draw a picture honoring a person and/or people who have supported you, inside or outside. The drawing could be a portrait of them or just a sketch of their name or even of something that symbolizes what they mean to you.



**JENNY**  
CREATIVE SERVICES

## FLOWER FIELD:

*Thanks so much to everyone who sent something in for the flower field!*

Let's create a grandstand of support with our artwork and shout outs.



NEW!

## COVER ART CONTEST

*with Prize Money!!!*



- The Loop is distributed in prisons in 38 states through 7,000 print copies and on +70,000 tablets, and each cover makes a first impression! We recognize the talent inside and specifically want to feature work that comes from our own community. This is an opportunity to share your artistic creativity with peers across the US!
- The following cash awards will be placed directly on recipients' books, whenever possible:
  - First Place (published on the cover of The Loop) - \$50
  - Second Place (published inside The Loop) - \$35
  - Third Place (published inside The Loop) - \$15
- Artists for each of the three prized pieces will receive a Certificate of Appreciation for this act of service.
- The top three pieces and select honorable mentions will be published in our digital collection "Creative Expressions From The Loop" (see p. 8). All pieces will also be published in the Art Gallery on our website ([shining-light.com/showcase](http://shining-light.com/showcase)). Artists retain all rights to their work, and no proceeds will be received from their display. (By submitting artwork, you are granting SL permission to publish in The Loop, on our website, and other related SL publications.)
- All mediums are welcome, though SL and DOC facilities cannot be responsible for providing supplies.
- Please note that we will not be able to return original artwork. If you are able, feel free to send a digital copy to [TheLoop@shining-light.com](mailto:TheLoop@shining-light.com).
- Selection criteria:
  - Originality, artistry, and connection to the theme
  - Positive, affirming imagery (see general Submission Guidelines, p. 2)
  - Must be portrait format \*Keep in mind the logo will be added at the top!
- Upcoming Themes (Prompts) & Submission Deadlines:
  - **Teamwork** (*What image comes to mind when you hear, "We're all in this together"?*)  
**DEADLINE: July 20**
  - **Zest** (*What does it look like to be excited about life?*)  
**DEADLINE: October 1**
- With your submission, please include
  - Your state-recognized name and ID#
  - Your name as you would like to be recognized in The Loop or online, should your work be selected for publishing
  - Clear instructions on how to send funds directly to you should your piece be awarded a prize, AND the name and contact information of an outside designee in case we are unable to send funds directly to you for any reason.

Shout out to the 18 writers who finished the Spring 2023 Writer's CoLab!



Arizona	Dominique B., Chaimara W.
Arkansas	K. Daniel O.
Illinois	Jeanine E., Oscar G.
Maine	Matthew B.
Michigan	Robert N.
Montana	Luke H.
North Carolina	Johnny B.
North Dakota	Jake L.
Ohio	Jason S.
Pennsylvania	Andre W., Isidro A., Jason H., Kristen L., Reginald L., Quintin K.
South Carolina	Gary F.

We're so proud of each participant for exhibiting strengths of bravery, creativity, love of learning and humility in making the most of the mentorship opportunity! The final pieces will be published online and on tablets through Edovo later this summer. If you'd like to participate in this writing mentorship in the future, keep your eyes out for the announcement in the next issue.

Creative Expressions from The Loop is our brand new digital collection of your visual art and creative writing that is submitted from each issue! We are always excited to look through the variety of pieces sent to us in response to the different prompts, but remain limited in how many we can publish in The Loop. This platform gives us a way to share more of your inspiring work with peers in prison, as well as with the general public! We are still somewhat selective in what we publish in this collection - *submission guidelines still apply* - but we hope this encourages you to do your best and take the chance of sharing your work with us.

*\*If you have Edovo on your tablet, you will find this free resource in the Arts & Entertainment section. Online, loved ones can access your work at [www.shining-light.com/showcase](http://www.shining-light.com/showcase).*

**NORTH DAKOTA:** There are three Academy groups working through the Foundations Course at NDSP, including a second group in segregation. And at JRCC, one group is working through the Foundations Course and another is diving deeper into playwriting through an Extension Course.

**OHIO:** The fourth Academy cohort at Belmont CI continues to work through the Foundations Course.

**PENNSYLVANIA:** Congratulations to the first round of Academy graduates in two new facilities: 10 at SCI Waymart and 9 at SCI Coal Township! Can't wait to see what's next!







*If you've read *The Loop* before, you've heard us talk about "Loop Groups," where readers get together to discuss the content and encourage each other to respond in ways that are meaningful to them. Several formalized groups are happening across the country, proving to be really positive experiences that are having ripple effects throughout the facilities.*

### **Hear what two Loop Groups in SOUTH CAROLINA are up to...**

**ALLENDALE CI** - This is a unique programs-based facility focused entirely on preparing its residents to enter back into society. They have several peer-facilitated programs centered on leadership training, reentry skills, and character traits, and the Loop Group functions as one of these. This group of 20-25 active participants has been meeting weekly since 2022, with members from each of the 4 general population units. As a group, they engage with each other by sharing personal thoughts, poetry, and visual art based on topics covered in *The Loop*. Peer facilitator Cornelius D. recently said, *"We also use the time to refresh our minds - really helps with mental health."* This year, the group is hoping to enhance the visual art component by exploring the therapeutic benefits of painting.

When asked to recruit new subscribers at Allendale, Cornelius requested a "booth" for intake residents, where they learn about different programs at the facility. This generated a lot of awareness and interest for *The Loop*, which contributed to a boom of nearly 250 subscribers in one month!

**MACDOUGALL CI** - The Character Building Unit (CBU) at MacDougall formed a Loop Group out of their ongoing Poetry 101 class, with a mission to "foster an appreciation for the written word and inspire an atmosphere of creativity and self-expression." Participants meet weekly to discuss pages from *The Loop* and share artistic works that show their creative voices, utilizing the prompts from *The Loop* or ideas of their own. Submissions for *The Loop* are then collected by the peer facilitator (Gary F.) and sent to *Shining Light* together. According to Gary, *"Reaction has been 'stunning'... Shining Light and The Loop have truly lit a spark of creative energy at MacDougall and with the support and encouragement of Programs Director, Michael Arnold, the Loop Group has planted seeds of poetry that is bringing forth a true garden of positive energy in the unit."*

The Loop Group at the MacDougall CBU is also creatively utilizing SL's video series which are available on tablets or DVD (upon request by facility staff). The Spoken Word video lab is helping them prepare for a Poetry Slam to be held in June. Plans are also in the works to sponsor a Playwriting Lab which would lead to a "mock trial" performance with the audience as a jury.

***If you are part of a group that discusses *The Loop* together, let us know what's working so we can inspire each other to shine our collective lights even brighter!***

If you'd like to see a Loop Group at your facility and don't know where to begin, start simple:

1. Set a regular time to meet with a few friends to read, discuss and/or create together.
2. Explore new ways to make your gathering more meaningful, based on common interests.
3. Gauge interest among peers for participation in a formal group.
4. Find a supportive staff member who might supervise/ provide space for a formal group.
5. Investigate the requirements of your facility for starting a formal group, and if necessary, work with the staff member to draft a proposal.

***Shining Light has a "Loop Group Start-up Guide" that is available upon request.***



**MAGGIE STEWART**  
SL WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT  
2016



*Ms. Naomi, Ms. Maggie & Jeff at a reentry event in Harrisburg, PA*

Ms. Maggie got connected to Shining Light in 2016 when she participated in a SL production at SCI Muncy in Pennsylvania. “I’ve always wanted to be on stage ... Of course, my life took a drastic turn when I was growing up so I never got the chance to pursue that thing that I most liked doing, so I enjoyed it ... I think I kind of excelled there.” Decades into her sentence, Ms. Maggie started the process of seeking a commutation, which she was ultimately granted. After 35 years of incarceration, Ms. Maggie was released on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

Having worked as a Certified Peer Support Specialist in the mental health unit while inside, Ms. Maggie is continuing her service to others through her employment with Resources for Human Development, where she works as a Direct Support Professional at a homeless shelter.

The process of transitioning back into the community certainly comes with challenges. The biggest challenge for her, Ms. Maggie shares, is the financial aspect of life on the outside. “Sometimes it gets a little harder living, paying bills that you never paid before, making sure you stay up on it ... Sometimes you find there are things you need and ... you can’t afford it ... It gets a little hard sometimes, especially when you start thinking about where you would like to be and it’s taking longer than you thought it would to get there.” But, while the challenges are real, there are also positive surprises. The biggest positive surprise in Ms. Maggie’s transition? “That even though it’s a struggle out here, there’s always somebody to help.” She recently experienced this when, several months ago, she was chosen to be the recipient of money from the *Softer Landing Fund* through the non-profit organization *Let’s Get Free*.

When it comes to critical thinking, Ms. Maggie sees it as something we use all the time to get through life. During her time inside, she used critical thinking to navigate difficult staff interactions and to support fellow residents, including the women she helped in her role as a CPS, like when determining the right thing to say to help calm a woman who had become upset. On the outside, Ms. Maggie uses her critical thinking in similar ways, from determining an individual’s trustworthiness to knowing when to speak, when to stay quiet, and when to seek support in dealing with a challenging client at work.

Even though life isn’t always easy, Ms. Maggie offers these words of encouragement: “Even as hard as it can be on the outside, stay positive. Remember the goals that you’ve set for yourself and move forward trying to obtain those goals ... It’s hard to do a lot of times, especially behind bars because there’s so many distractions ... so many things go on ... Stay positive. And use your critical thinking skills. [Some] don’t realize they have them.”

Lastly, we want to share that Ms. Maggie will be celebrating her birthday on June 24<sup>th</sup>! Your Shining Light family wishes you a very happy birthday!



## STRENGTH SPOTTING

### FORGIVENESS

“Strength spotting” is the intentional act of noticing when someone uses one of the character strengths. It can be a helpful way to become more aware of strengths in both oneself and others, and especially when it is shared with the person using the strength, that can be incredibly encouraging.

There's a program called (Celebrate Recovery) where individuals have a chance to open up about their issues in a safe setting. I've seen forgiveness given, forgiveness received and sincere forgiveness expressed in that wonderful program.

Larry S, (PA)

THE CLEARST, EASIEST TO SEE, ACT OF FORGIVENESS I SEE IS THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS WHO COME TO VISIT AT PRISON, THEY SHOW UP SHOWING THEIR FORGIVENESS AND SUPPORT, FORGIVENESS IN ACTION IS NOT OFTEN SEEN.

JAKE (M.D.)

I'm around other women who are applying forgiveness in their lives and importantly forgiving others. I am in ACDP which is a Drug Treatment program offered in ANSON Correction, which I feel is allowing each one of us as individuals to let our past, and past hurts go so we can move forward in our recovery and life. I am learning to overcome a lot of obstacles that once blocked and hindered me in growing. But today I see forgiveness is the key to growing and progressing in life.

- Stacey B (NC)



**For the next issue, tell us where you spot people around you using  
JUDGMENT (CRITICAL THINKING)**

Last time we asked what words stood out to you when considering the VIA definition of Forgiveness. Here are the key words people mentioned:

RECONCILIATION

FORGETTING

PROCESS

FRUSTRATION

ACCEPTING

UNDERSTANDING

RESENTMENT

SECOND CHANCE

SHORTCOMINGS

DISAPPOINTMENT

IMPERFECTIONS

HUMANIZING

MERCY

LET GO

FLAWS

“I like the 'extend understanding' but the part I love and relate to the most is the 'letting go'. I'm at a point in my life where I gotta let go anything that is hindering me. And for so long it has been my anger, my pain, my resentment. So I gotta let them go, I'm tired of carrying that load on me. It has only brought more anger, pain, and resentment.” - Marcus J. / OH

**Rachel's "I forgive you because..." piece** takes my breath away. First, it speaks to me personally, and all I want to try to be and do in my own relationships with others. Second, it has this unforgettable line: "I forgive you because I know how it feels to be unforgiven." And third, it expresses what I also firmly believe, which is that the change I long for in this world will only happen if each of us steps up to forgive, and to love, and to start "the ripple effect that has the potential to change the world."



*Joyce*

PROGRAM FACILITATOR

I forgive you because it weighs me down to carry the extra weight...

I forgive you because I choose to let go of the bondage you tried to inflict on me.

I forgive you because I can see the light growing stronger in me when I do.

I forgive you because I know how it feels to be unforgiven.

I forgive you because if God can forgive me for all I've done then who I am I to withhold that from someone else.

I forgive you because it needs to start somewhere that ripple effect that has the potential to change the world.

I forgive you because love and light flow through me more and more each day and I want you to experience the joy of it and pass it on.

-Rachel K (PA)

Rachel wrote another beautiful piece called "Our Journey" which was produced as a short film by professional artists in Los Angeles and is featured in Volume 2 of our video collection "Creations of a Caged Bird." If you have Edovo, we encourage you to watch this and other incredible pieces like it!



Also be sure to check out Rachel's response to the Constructive Debate (p. 23), where she expands on the themes mentioned in her poem, applying them to the practical role forgiveness plays in moving forward from pain.



## NEW PROMPT: CLOUDED JUDGMENT

When we hear the word "judgment" we might think immediately of other people's judgments of us. But judgment also refers to our own choices and decisions—and the thinking behind those choices and decisions. Consider what we mean when we say "something clouded my judgment." Then write a poem that describes an experience of clearing away those clouds in order to make clear, carefully thought-out, and wise decisions in the future.

If you'd like your piece to be considered for publishing in The Loop, please keep it to 200 words or less. (Longer entries may be considered for the digital "Creative Expressions" series - see p. 8)

In the last issue on Forgiveness, we asked,

## “HOW MIGHT THE STRENGTH OF JUDGMENT (CRITICAL THINKING) BE USEFUL WHEN IT COMES TO PRACTICING FORGIVENESS?”

Here are some of the thoughtful responses we received:

Whether one is trying to forgive themselves or someone else, it is important to leave room for understanding. For example, in order to forgive ourselves we must commit to the journey of self-discovery... Through self-analysis we truly get to know ourselves. Part of knowing ourselves is taking responsibility for the part we have played in our own suffering. Once this is acknowledged, we become aware of the agency we have. We begin to realize we can reinvent ourselves. Applying critical thinking to the practice of forgiveness creates a solid foundation for the reconstruction of our lives.

*“To accept one’s past - one’s history - is not the same as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it. An uninvented past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressures of life like clay in a season of drought.” - James Baldwin*

Kahlil B (W.J.)

"Some things should be forgiven for the relationship to grow, and you need to use critical thinking to determine if the person should be avoided so being hurt doesn't continue." - Deven H. (TX)

"Judgment gives us the ability to think our actions through to the end and play out the tape of what could happen in a given scenario. It shows us that road of forgiveness and the road of anger and tells us which one will make us better and which will lead us deeper into delusion."

- Danielle C. (OR)

Using discernment, being wise, is vital to our own emotional well-being. Forgiveness is healthy, but we cannot allow ourselves to become a "doormat". No one can take advantage of you unless you allow it. While to "err is human, and forgive, divine," forgiveness does not entail condoning or forgetting.

As an old adage goes "first time, shame on you, second time, shame on me." We must use good judgment to safeguard our own health.

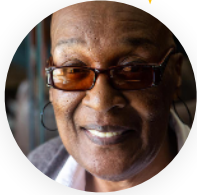
Gary K. F (SC)

"When we are practicing Forgiveness, Judgement is very important as it can open our minds and allow for a more clear understanding of the situation we are dealing with." - B Vaughn (OK)

"Having an open mind because then you can put yourself in the other's shoes and maybe empathize a bit. I know for me it's still hard to forgive that person but I'm trying everyday to understand." - Damontri M. (WY)

"I recently watched a movie called "ACOD" (Adult Child Of Divorce) and it changed my view of my parents. I was always stuck in the middle as a "Go-Between" with my parents as well as with my sister. I hated my role and came to resent all of them over time. I have tried to just forgive them and move on, but my lack of understanding has held me back. Now however, I see that they actually cover up their lost love with hatred and malice - I can now see their pain & be more empathetic - I forgive them." - G. Allen II (OH)

## Real Talk



Naomi

PROGRAM FACILITATOR  
COMMUTED LIFER & ACTIVIST

One of the key ways judgment is used is as “a corrective strength in that it counteracts faulty thinking, such as favoring your current views or favoring ideas that are considered the dominant view...it is the willingness to search actively for evidence against your favored beliefs... and to weigh all of the evidence fairly when it is available.” (See p. 17)

In the following response, Ms Naomi shows a real example of how judgment is a key character strength that can be used on a relational level.

*“I’m not a judger. Trust me, my backyard is not clean. People need to clean their own backyard before you come to clean mine. I’m not going to talk about your dirty back yard and if you choose to live in that filth that’s on you. People go through all kinds of stuff in life and you never know where a person’s head is.”*

*There was this one woman who was in prison for a horrible crime. I honestly thought something had to be really wrong with her, but I didn’t share this with anybody, because I didn’t want them to feed off what I was thinking. And then I got to know her. I invited her to church and we became really close, and I started*

*to see the good in her. Now, I love her and I am so glad that I did not shun her because of what she had done. For her to even be so close to me to cry on my shoulder and come to my cell and talk with me was an honor.*

*Everybody has a story. We don’t understand everything. So I just try to be an encouragement, no matter what.”*

### **ASK ANYTHING** *And if I can’t offer any advice, I’ll ask someone who can!*

*\*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.*

## YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

### **Q: “How do you overcome hiring biases after release?”**

**MS. NAOMI:** People can be really prejudiced against hiring convicted felons in their establishments. A good friend of mine who had spent many years in prison and then went to look for a job would write a note saying that he was in prison and describe some things about himself and put it with his applications. He got hired because the proprietor appreciated his honesty. You will be surprised how many people will hire an ex-felon even before a person on the outside because they know they will be a hard worker. Just be up front and you will make out just fine.

### **Q: “After being incarcerated for so long, how do you remain joyful and upbeat?”**

**MS. NAOMI:** After being incarcerated for many decades, how could I not be joyful and upbeat? This life is so short. It would only be a waste of life to be any other way.

### **Q: “Ms. Naomi, how do you deal with missing those birthdays and holidays for your kids? I’m not sure if you have kids or not, but if not, how did the women around you?”**

**MS. NAOMI:** I do have one son and when I went to prison, he was 10 years old. When I came home he was 47 years old. When I was on the inside, I did as much as I could for him for birthdays and holidays. I would send cards, money, or gifts perhaps that I had someone on the inside make for me. You can’t get back the years you lost, but you can send a little package here or there, and when you get home show them all that love.



## TRUE MEASURE OF WHO WE ARE



Lee



Freedom

PROGRAM FACILITATORS / COMMUTED LIFERS & ACTIVISTS

***The End of the Tunnel is about empowering anyone who reads its paragraphs with tools for life betterment. Read about Judgment and be empowered.***

As former prisoners, we have experienced a faulty use of judgment firsthand. We were found guilty for a crime we did not commit, which led to our wrongful imprisonment and the loss of our freedom for 28 years. Our experience with the legal system has given us a unique perspective on the concept of judgment. From our point of view, judgment is complex and multifaceted, only sometimes fair or just, because it can be based on flawed evidence, biased opinions, and societal prejudices.

We know full well the devastation that a flawed use of judgment can have on a person's life. However, our time in prison has also allowed us to reflect on the concept of judgment as a good thing, beyond our negative experience, and one that we have the ability to control. We realized that judgment is a double-edged sword, swung by all of us at some point, with the potential to cut happiness or sadness into each other's lives. Snap judgments are often based on societal norms and values, varying greatly depending on things like culture and geography. But if we take the time to get to know more about the person, our judgments can have the power to shape and impact their life. Our case is an example of both good and bad judgments. A bad judgment led to our wrongful imprisonment and the loss of our freedom; a good one freed us.

As we reflect on our experiences of being judged and making judgments about others, we are left mostly with questions:

- How can gathering accurate information, weighing the evidence, thinking things through, etc be helpful in making judgments about others?
- How can we work to overcome faulty thinking or false/incomplete information to ensure that our judgments do not perpetuate inequality, discrimination and/or lead to harm of others?
- How can we challenge our biases and preconceptions to be more open as we make judgments based on appearance, gender, religion or sexual orientation?

These questions are not easy to answer, but they are essential for us to consider if we want to build a more just and equitable society.



***Pick one of the above questions to consider how judgment & critical thinking plays in your life and your relationships?***

**“It’s easy to judge. It’s more difficult to understand...Understanding requires compassion, patience, and a willingness to believe that good hearts sometimes choose poor methods... Through judging, we separate. Through understanding, we grow.”**

- Doe Zantamata -



In the last issue, the Loop Group in the Horizon Unit in London CI asked: Have you come to a place in your journey where you felt that you needed to seek forgiveness from the person(s) you caused harm to? Here's what some of you so bravely shared:

**Wayne G. (NJ)** shared about seeking forgiveness from a woman he hurt emotionally & mentally, after completing a program called Focus on the Victim where he came to understand the long-term effects that such harm can cause.

I wrote an apology letter to her hoping that time has healed her pain and she is open to forgiveness. Even if she is not receptive to the letter my heart and mind is at peace. I now look for strength and peace from within, helping others learn to forgive those that hurt them and reminding them that forgiveness is not forgetting.

∞ Wayne G NJ ∞

**Daniel M. (MI)** reflected on the importance of truly bearing responsibility for your harmful actions before seeking forgiveness.

It's very important to realize that the root of reconciliation begins within, where your inner-peace/balance is founded on the acts of responsibility and accountability which is then expressed in your seeking forgiveness (pardon) ... the people/person you are seeking this from, may NOT forgive (pardon) you or even respond; but that is not your/my burden.

- Daniel M. [MI]

**K. Daniel O. (AR)** shared about seeking forgiveness from family once he realized the extent of the pain his actions caused them.

Although only my wife and one daughter has responded positively to my repentance, I have forgiven the rest because I understand their pain. I have peace with God and myself because I know I have changed by the grace and mercy, and power of God whether others care to acknowledge that repentance and change, or not.

K. Daniel O



### TAKE YOUR PICK!

Judgment (critical thinking) is a strength that is helpful for all areas of life, in various aspects of relating with other people. It makes sense, then, that it can be applied to practically any of the SL Community Codes. We encourage you to review that list, which was included in the Welcome Packet sent to you when you subscribed; it can also be found on tablets through Edovo.



Consider how Judgment might be useful to carry out 1-2 Community Codes in your environment or situation, and let us know what you came up with!



## VIA DEFINITION: JUDGMENT

# CHARACTER STRENGTHS

## DEEP DIVE

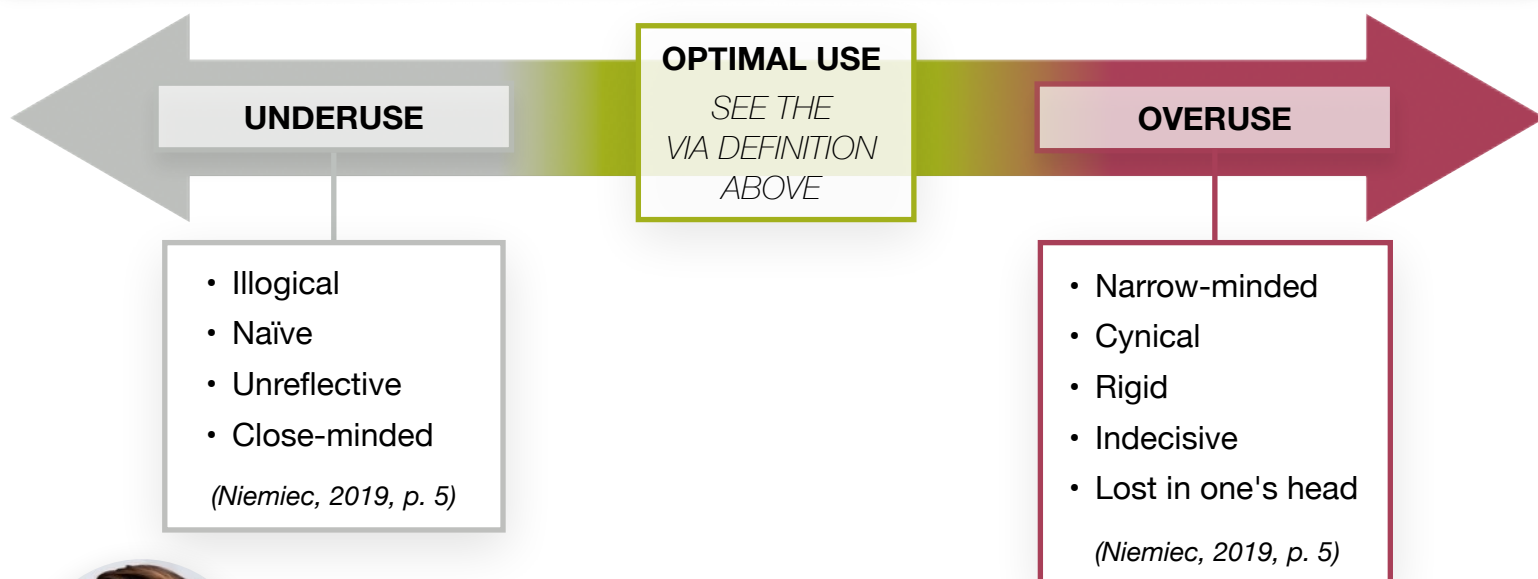
***"I weigh all aspects objectively in making decisions, including arguments that are in conflict with my convictions."***

"Judgment involves making rational and logical choices, and analytically evaluating ideas, opinions, and facts. To use a term that originally came from outside the character field: it is critical thinking, weighing the evidence fairly, thinking things through, and examining the evidence from all sides rather than jumping to conclusions. Judgment also involves being open-minded and able to change one's mind in the light of evidence, remaining open to other arguments and perspectives. It should be clear at this point that judgment is a core "strength of the head" — it's a very thinking-oriented character strength.

The strength of judgment is a corrective strength in that it counteracts faulty thinking, such as favoring your current views or favoring ideas that are considered the dominant view, and therefore giving less attention to the less-dominant view. It is the willingness to search actively for evidence against your favored beliefs, plans or goals and to weigh all of the evidence fairly when it is available."

*(VIA Institute on Character, 2023, para. 1)*

<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/judgment-critical-thinking>



Travis

PROGRAM DEVELOPER

One of the key points of discussion around this definition within our staff was that the word 'judgment' can have a variety of meanings. When reading the definition it brings some clarity to what it means in this context, yet it can still be a challenge to separate the word from negative connotations like being a judgy person. As a character strength, however, "critical thinking" is oftentimes used equally to the word judgment. If it is helpful, I would encourage you to think of it this way.



*One activity our team did was consider what other character strengths are related to this one. (Perspective, for instance)*

***Which strengths do you think of when considering the definition of judgment (critical thinking)? What connections do you see?***

As a way to practice using judgment/critical thinking to consider different ideas and perspectives, I want to challenge you to write out an argument in the form of a skit! Below are some steps to think through, but the important part will be to “search actively for evidence against your favored beliefs, plans or goals” as the VIA definition says. Feel free to start with something light and fun, and consider how this practice of writing out both sides of the argument could be helpful with more serious situations. *(Adapted from Peterson & Seligman, 2004)*

**SETTING**

Where is this argument taking place?  
*(example: chow hall)*

**TOPIC**

What is being debated?  
*(example: Michael Jordan is the greatest athlete of the 20th century)*

**CHARACTERS**

Who are the people involved in the argument? *(example: Bobby & Jose)*

**DIALOGUE**

What do they say to express their side of the argument?



Feel free to give it a try and let us know what you come up with and/or how it goes! Rachel, one of our playwriting experts on staff, had the following comments on writing scenes like the one above.

*“This scene includes key elements in developing critical thinking. When writing dialogue, you are developing characters who are in conflict. In order to create interesting characters, you may include characters with your point of view, but dynamic characters are created when you explore other perspectives and develop dialogue that reveals those perspectives. By exploring not just what people say but what they don’t say, you develop not only critical thinking, but empathy as well.”*

***If you're interested in exploring more about playwriting, be sure to watch the Playwriting Lab on Edovo with Rachel!***



## HEALTH & WELLNESS

Welcome back! In this issue, we are tackling the character strength of judgment. Our use of judgment determines the outcome of our choices and decisions. Everyday we are faced with making judgment calls, on the Inside as well as on the Outside, and sometimes we have mere seconds to do so. When confronted with what appears to be a negative situation we have to be careful not to just react. We have to pause, listen, and assess the situation. What's the whole story?

What's really going on? Consider what we know about the person or the situation to get a more accurate picture. If we see them or deal with them on a daily basis, and we see them acting out of character, we know something is out of sorts.

If you find yourself in a tense interaction or confrontation, try taking a step back and remember to breathe. Because if you are not breathing your brain is not getting oxygen, and you cannot make a good judgment call in this state. The outcome of the situation relies on you! Your judgment call could save yourself, the people around you, and the person you are being confronted by.

The discipline of this character strength of judgment relies on you to collect information necessary to critically think! This goes for relationships as well as other decisions we don't even think about sometimes.

Like in the weight pile, especially if you're just getting started. I know it is tempting to want to pick up as much weight as you possibly can on the first day, but to avoid injury it's important to start small until you know what your body can do. It can be intimidating to see guys lifting hundreds and hundreds of pounds. I get it. That's okay - but I promise you they did not start out that way. (When I was inside, I started out with a 25 lb plate on a standard bar. Ultimately, I was able to bench press 385 pounds. Haven't been there in a long time, but I've been there!) For physical self care, we have to make good judgment calls to get optimal use out of our workouts. So check your ego at the door!

Also, in these warmer temperatures, we have to be mindful of the extreme heat and how our bodies are responding to it. Stay hydrated! Drink plenty of fluids - namely that good h2o - if you plan to go outside and workout. Most importantly, have fun! Trust that with commitment and good judgment you will see positive results in a safe and healthy way. And remember:

*How you treat your insides will reflect on your outside, inside.*

*Try This:* **CARDIO CIRCUIT: REPEAT 5 TIMES**



40 seconds of **jumping jacks**, then 20 seconds of rest



40 seconds of **mountain climbers**, then 20 seconds of rest



40 seconds of **high knees**, then 20 seconds of rest



40 seconds of **reverse lunges**, then 20 seconds of rest



40 seconds of **planking**, then 20 seconds of rest

*As always, be cautious and use your best judgment to determine what's a safe and effective exercise for you! Think through a plan that's achievable and determine the steps to getting there!*



*Dormen*

**PROGRAM FACILITATOR**

SL ALUM '18-'20



*What's working for you?*

*Send me your suggestions for keeping up with your Health and Wellness on the inside.*

I didn't know what the judge meant  
when he said I lacked remorse.  
And so upstate is where I went,  
my life so far off course.

But I was determined to put in the work,  
to understand that judge.  
I read and I railed against old ways of thinking,  
and soon after felt them budge.

I know now that my own poor judgment  
is what landed me here.  
And my new and improved critical thinking  
is what will see me clear.

One day soon I'll leave this place,  
and with it the hurt and shame.  
I'll demonstrate in how I live,  
through better judgment  
I *overcame*.

Kris L. (PA)

## JUDGMENT & CHANGING MINDS

*In the last issue, we asked: "When has your judgment allowed you to consider all sides of a situation and change your mind?" Kris's poem gets right to the point, describing the judgment handed down by the judge in his own case, who found him "without remorse." Instead of arguing with that assessment, Kris has written a poem about truly thinking about it—carefully, critically, and honestly. Through "putting in the work," Kris is able to envision his future self: someone with better judgment, someone who will overcome those instances of poor judgment in his past. This is an inspiring poem for all who hope to cultivate clearer, and better, thinking and decision-making in their lives.*



In a longer essay, Albert R. from North Carolina shared with us on some philosophies and practices of Buddhism, he wrote about working to cultivate "a mind of equanimity toward all sentient beings"—in other words, a calm and patient response to all conscious beings. In discussing the practice of Buddhism, Albert writes that:

**For some, in our early and developing practice we tend to point out, hyper focus and define others by their shortcomings, worst moments, and weak habits. We view certain individuals as unworthy of our time, and incapable of rehabilitative change. Conversely, we see ourselves, our family, and friends as noteworthy and on track toward enlightenment.**

But through Buddhist practices, Albert says that, "As an alternative to viewing others as obstacles, we begin to see each individual as commendable of our empathy, placing their innate goodness at the forefront in our interactions with them." He goes on to add that when we have "a steady practice of equanimity, we no longer view correctional officers or program staff as enemies." Instead "they become deserving of our tolerance, our gentleness, and our empathy."

We can see this principle at work here in Albert's brief response to last issue's prompt. He tells a clear and simple story about a rainy day in the yard, and a change of heart in response to a particular corrections officer. "No one is inherently bad," Albert writes – would you agree?

**One time, a particular officer who is very nice to everyone was responsible for yard duty. It began to sprinkle rain and they closed the yard on us. Some guys expressed anger & frustration. I felt empathy for the officer, because they tend to interact nicely with us. I easily forgave them. Conversely, a different officer constantly threatens to give us, residents, infractions for minor wrong doings. That particular officer had yard duty and it started to pour rain. However, they chose to keep the yard open – much to our disbelief. My core beliefs went haywire! I chose to forgive this officer for their past enforcement. In turn, I had to question my past negative judgment about them. No one is inherently bad & sometimes people have to make tough decisions. Keeping an open mind keeps us from wrongly assessing individuals' innate worth.**

– Albert R. (NC)



## WRITING RESOURCES



USC University of  
Southern California

PEP READERS' CIRCLE



The University of Southern California Prisoner Education Project “Readers’ Circle” is a volunteer-based editing service that pairs writers in custody with students and faculty at USC to provide feedback on their work. In their words, “Whether you are a beginner looking to develop your writing skills or you have already finished your masterpiece and just want to have it checked over, we would love to hear from you!”

**Send writing by mail to:**

**USC PEP Readers' Circle  
950 West Jefferson Blvd.  
JEF 150  
Los Angeles, CA 90089-1293**

You can also send your work through your facility’s electronic mailing system. If a friend or family member has a digital copy of your work, they can email your document to [uscpepreaders@gmail.com](mailto:uscpepreaders@gmail.com). Try to keep a personal copy of everything you send, and allow 8-10 weeks for them to process shorter pieces (under 10 pages) and up to 6 months for longer pieces. You may send material as often as you’d like, but please submit only one project at a time.

Provide the following information with your submission:

- Name, ID Number and Facility
- Mailing address where edited work should be returned (please include any mailing limitations they should be aware of).
- If you would like to be contacted by electronic mail, let them know which system you are using (e.g., Jpay, Getting Out, etc.).
- The type of work you are submitting (e.g., creative writing, nonfiction writing, autobiography, poetry, screen- or playwriting, other) and the kind of feedback you’re looking for—e.g., proofreading (spelling and grammar check), copy-editing (help with structure and content), general feedback (comments, reactions), typing/digitization only.

Also let them know if you would like to receive a copy of their free Publishing Toolkit (containing advice on how and where to submit your work).



## NEW PROMPT BETTER TOGETHER (TEAMWORK)

While many of us often prefer to do things on our own, there’s no denying the fact that many tasks are easier, and are done better, when the labor is shared. And sometimes it is also more fun! Try to think of a time when you were involved in a project that worked better because it was completed by a group. What made that group work out so well? How did people do their part? Was the work hard, fun, or maybe a combination of both?

**See if you can tell the story of that experience in a brief essay of 200 words or less.**



# CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATE




*Angelina*

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

One sign of a healthy community or relationship is the ability to disagree respectfully. We want to provide a chance for you to share your differing ideas in a safe, constructive way and practice critical thinking, hearing different perspectives, and carefully crafting a respectful argument. Life throws us situations where we need these skills all the time, so think of this as your practice ground.

Last edition we proposed the statement, **“You can’t be free of the hurt until you forgive the person who hurt you.”** Here is a range of responses:

 AGREE

 IT'S COMPLICATED

 DISAGREE

“In order to truly be void of the pain associated with trauma it is essential that a person free themselves from the binds that hold them captive. The only way to do that is extending unconditional forgiveness to all those who have wronged them and choosing to move on.”

- Ryan H./MT

“I think it's a matter of considering the word "forgive". For me, forgiveness isn't for the other person, it's for me. I forgive so I'm not taking the poison of my hurt and expecting the other person to die (or be hurt as well).”

- Danielle C./OR

I believe you can be free of hurt from the person who hurt you by not giving them the power or control to continue and hurt you. I personally can relate I did this a couple years ago. I let someone hurt me for years and when I became incarcerated I was full of hurt and one day I asked myself why. I left it all to God prayed everyday and told myself "No more!" I set myself free. I control my life, emotions, feelings no one else. Respectfully I do not agree nor disagree.

-Andrea M.(PA)

“Every person is different and the way people deal with situations is different. So this is a very tricky topic. Some can do what they think is forgiving and move on and others can just move on. So it really depends on the person.”

- Damien G./NC

## “YOU CAN’T BE FREE OF THE HURT UNTIL YOU FORGIVE THE PERSON WHO HURT YOU.”

I agree with this statement because we sometimes don't realize that not forgiving the person or person's that hurt you, we're hurting ourselves more. Holding on to past pains only leads us to long suffering! "Forgiveness is the ability to give up the hope that the past could have been different". We have to remember everyone has been hurt some way some how and hurt people hurt people. But if we can get past the hurt we can break that cycle. We can grow from that hurt. And be healed once we forgive

-Vasia R./PA

“I really don't believe in forgiveness, this is something that I'm struggling with in regards to my faith which it requires you to forgive.”

- Clifton/MI

“I agree, but it's a difficult journey and I believe that it's more important to begin by first forgiving yourself, before you can move on to forgive the one who hurt you.”

- B. Vaughn/OK

“...To not forgive, is holding yourself prisoner.”

- Laura B./SD

(please note: some answers have been abridged for space)

Its about stopping the cycle. Hurt people, hurt people. Its a work in progress. When you speak forgiveness over someone whos caused you hurt its as much for you as for the other person. It also isnt a cure all. The pain can come back when you least expect it. The physical hurt will heal over time, as will the emotional and psychological. However it doesnt happen over night not if you do it right. It takes work on your part each and every day to promote the healing. All of us have scars we carry with us because we tried to rush the healing process its a lot easier to take proper care of the wound so it doesnt leave a scar in the first place than it is to try and remove a scar after its formed. Make life easier. Take time with yourself to address the hurt, forgive, let it go and take the steps to bring full healing to you who matter and are worth the time. - Rachel K / PA

It may always be there! so dont be too hard on yourself. Continue to love with all. Laugh and smile. -thats what truly helps heal the heart. - Janelle R (IL)

"When we hold on to anger and choose to not forgive, it blackens our heart, obstructing the light of Jesus and His forgiveness towards us." - Terese-Marie M./AR

"To an extent, forgiving or giving grace to someone who has wronged you does help you, but you have to do that with boundaries and it might depend on what the wrong was, whether it was a wrong, or abuse or a violation against you can make a difference, disassociating from the incident to fill the void it created is oftenly needed...but when you can try to understand the issue from their perspective or reactions, it can help you forgive and focus on the better more happy things in life that you encounter, or hope to encounter. Forgiving doesn't mean forgetting, it just stops the internal subjugation to the incident." - E.R.A./CA

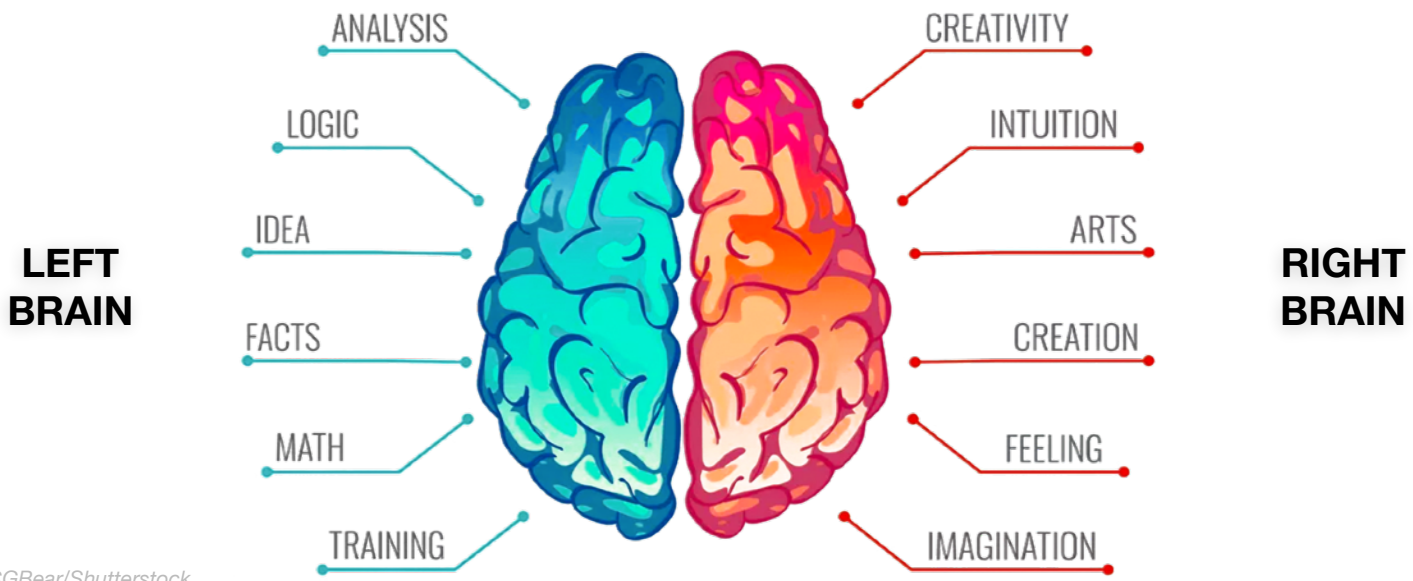
"I agree, because now I'm learning how to forgive myself and others for the torment I put myself and others through." - Gregory W./FL

For next issue - do you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
**"WE SHOULD MAKE DECISIONS LOGICALLY, FREE FROM EMOTION."**



Send us a few sentences & keep our Community Codes in mind, especially:

- Speak life
- Share ideas, not ID's
- Speak from the "I"



"God, today help me to set aside everything I think I know about myself, everything I think I know about others, and everything I think I know about you so that I may have an open mind and a new experience with all these things."

– The Set Aside Prayer

Although created for use within the AA program, the Set Aside Prayer is a way for anyone to lay down fixed assumptions and ask for an enhanced level of awareness and understanding. Open-mindedness is not a simple practice, especially when it's turned inward. We can think most critically about ourselves - past choices, current circumstances, and what we believe we are worthy of in our futures. We need courage to examine the things we thought we knew - reevaluating memories and experiences in light of existing evidence and what we've learned. The process can be difficult, confusing, and sometimes painful.

This practice can also be life-changing. In addition to helping us learn new things and grow as individuals, it can help us become more optimistic and resilient in the face of change and life's challenges. It takes a lot of mental effort, but we can gracefully give ourselves space to be more open-minded.

#### IN PRACTICE:

One way to approach open-mindedness is to play your own 'devil's advocate.' Actively considering another perspective may help to open a crack on some strongly-held opinions. Feel free to use the questions below as a starting point. To answer them thoughtfully & honestly requires a great deal of self-reflection and open-mindedness, so take your time.

1. Begin by finding as quiet a space as possible
2. Focus your attention on your breathing - the natural rhythm in your inhale and exhale.
3. When you are relaxed in stillness, recite the Set Aside Prayer (above)
4. Mindfully explore one of the following questions, perhaps choosing a new one every few days.



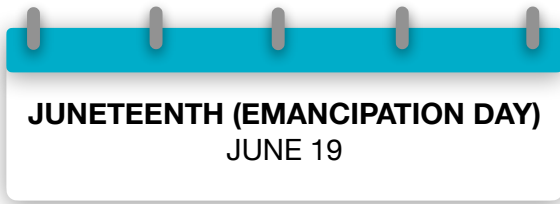
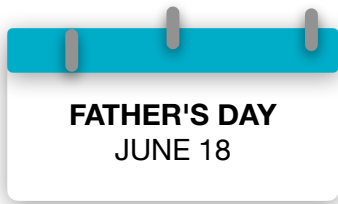
*Nina*

PROGRAM FACILITATOR

- *Do you need to let go of something?*
- *Did God create us, or did we create God?*
- *Do you see things as they really are, or are you seeing things as you are?*
- *What makes people different from each other?  
What makes us the same?*







**JUNE IS PRIDE MONTH**

The topics of sexual orientation and gender affirmation can be controversial, uncomfortable, or triggering for many people (especially in the prison setting). Perhaps this is an area to practice considering a less-dominant or unfavored viewpoint, or “weighing the evidence” by getting to know a fellow human being who may have different beliefs than your own. We want to recognize the LGBTQ+ members of our community for the bravery, love, wisdom and creativity you express in your contributions to The Loop. Some of you have also shared with us about how you are making a positive impact on your communities inside as well; others have shared about the struggles you face in your situation. We support you all as valued members of our community.

*"If the left half of the brain controls the right half of the body, then only left-handed people are in their right mind."*  
W.C. FIELDS

*"Life without left handed people wouldn't be right."*  
C.R. MANSKE

"Around 10%-12% of the population is left-handed...Polls show that life is genuinely harder for left-handed people, but you wouldn't know it from these folks..." (Jennifer Martin, CBS News)



*Here are just a handful of famous lefties:*

*President Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, LeBron James, Julia Roberts, Hugh Jackman, Lady Gaga, Babe Ruth, Bill Gates, Morgan Freeman, Chef Gordon Ramsey, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Paul McCartney*



**WHAT WE'RE READING**



**BIOGRAPHY**

**ALICIA: MY STORY** // BY: ALICIA APPLEMAN-JURMAN

"This is the memoir of a girl who survived the holocaust and the after effects of the partitioning of Europe. She lost her entire family, but survived on her own ingenuity and a little help from others." - K. Daniel O. / AR

*"This memoir is heartbreaking. I hope it will be read by Jews and non-Jews alike."*  
- Elie Wiesel, author of Night

**FICTION**

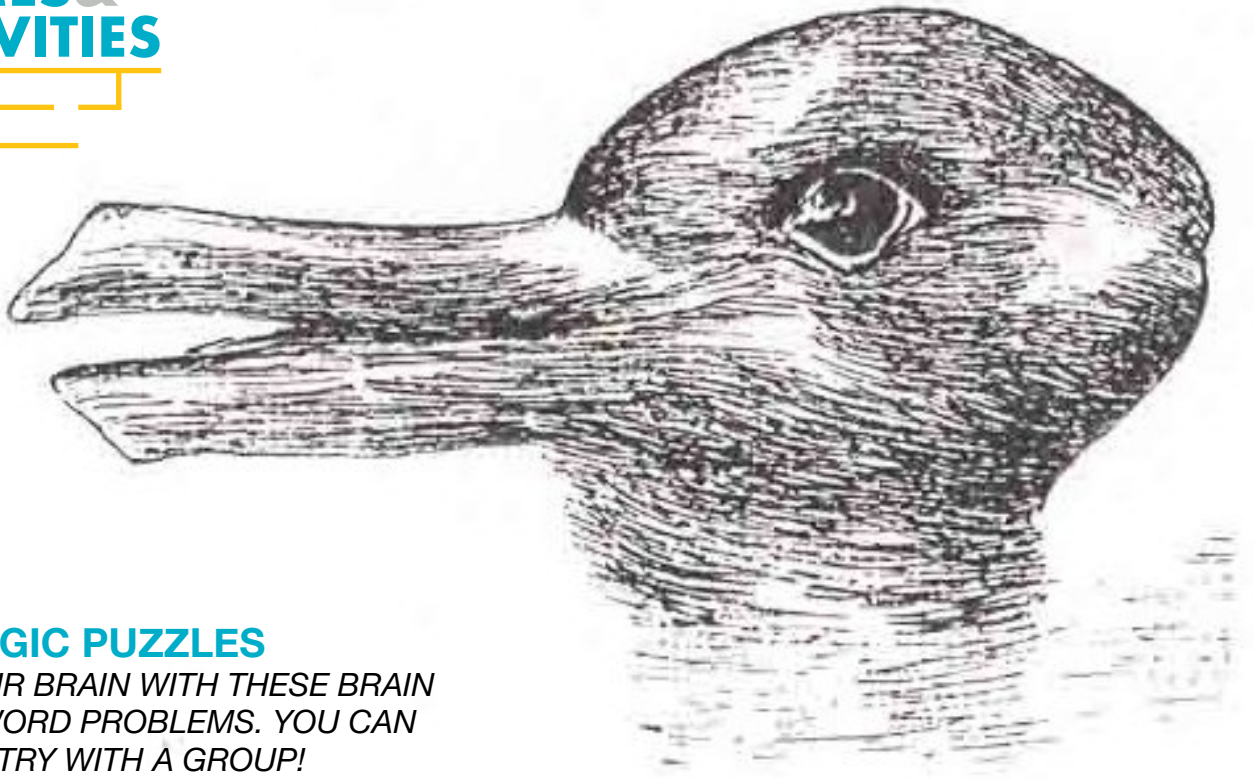
**THE ALCHEMIST** // BY: PAULO COELHO

"It is a very insightful and interesting book full of life's lessons found familiar by the memories of past advice by the elders in one's life." - Charles B. / NC

**NONFICTION**

**WHATEVER IT TAKES: MASTER THE HABITS TO TRANSFORM YOUR BUSINESS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND LIFE** // BY: BRANDON BORNANCIN

"Entrepreneur book - very inspirational." - Andrew N. / OH

**LOGIC PUZZLES**

*EXERCISE YOUR BRAIN WITH THESE BRAIN TEASERS & WORD PROBLEMS. YOU CAN ALSO TRY WITH A GROUP!*

**ONE:** What's a 9-letter word that becomes a new word each time you drop a letter?

**TWO:** A farmer named Jeff wants to cross a river and take with him a wolf, a goat and a cabbage. He has a boat, but it can only fit himself plus either the wolf, the goat or the cabbage. If the wolf and the goat are alone on one shore, the wolf will eat the goat. If the goat and the cabbage are alone on the shore, the goat will eat the cabbage. How can the farmer bring the wolf, the goat and the cabbage across the river without anything being eaten?

**THREE:** Dormen has 53 socks in his drawer: 21 identical blue, 15 identical black and 17 identical red. The lights are out and he is completely in the dark. How many socks must he take out to make 100 percent certain he has at least one pair of black socks?

**FOUR:** There are three people (Freedom, Joyce and Angelica), one of whom is a knight, one a liar, and one a spy. The knight always tells the truth, the liar always lies, and the spy can either lie or tell the truth. Freedom says: "Angelica is a liar." Joyce says: "Freedom is a knight." Angelica says: "I am the spy." Who is the knight, who the liar, and who the spy?

**FIVE:** Four people are crossing a bridge at night, so they all need a torch—but they just have one that only lasts 15 minutes. Kelly can cross in one minute, Lee in two minutes, Nina in five minutes and Travis in eight minutes. No more than two people can cross at a time; and when two cross, they have to go at the slower person's pace. How do they get across in 15 minutes?

***We'll publish the answers in the next issue!***



**WE WANT YOUR  
PUZZLES!**

We're looking for submissions of **originally designed puzzles**. Think summer, sports, holidays - whatever inspires you!

## CROSSWORD

Adapted from  
Frank Longo - New York Times 2014



JUST  
FOR  
FUN

## HAIKU:

"Do not waste your time  
Not too late to change your mind  
Get into the Loop!"

Jim W. / OH

## ACROSS

- John or Samuel who signed the Declaration of Independence
- Take a breather
- German city in which Einstein was born
- Cul-\_\_\_ (dead- end street): Hyph.
- Divided Asian country
- "Soul Food" actress Long
- First signer of the Declaration of Independence: 2 wds.
- Toward the back of a boat
- Cruel Roman emperor
- Suppresses
- And so forth: Abbr.
- New York baseball team
- "\_\_\_ won't!" (firm refusal): 2 wds.
- Loop with an adjustable 14-Down
- \_\_\_\_\_ Congress (legislative body that issued the Dec. of Independence)
- Up \_\_\_ good: 2 wds.
- Jefferson who signed the Declaration of Independence
- Word preceding a maiden name

39. Bus driver on "The Simpsons"

- Having organs of hearing
- Independence \_\_\_ (building in which the Declaration of Independence was adopted)

## DOWN

- Word that modifies a noun: Abbr.
- "Gloria in Excelsis \_\_\_" (Christmas carol chorus)
- Bonfire remnant 4 "Death in Venice" author Thomas
- Underhanded plot
- Enormous bird of myth
- Greek god of love
- Religious offshoot
- Receipts of money earned
- Like certain rights, in the Declaration of Independence
- \_\_\_, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness (rights that are 10-Down)
- Doorstep covers that may say "welcome"
- Shoelace snarl
- "All men \_\_\_ created equal" (Declaration of Independence statement)
- "When in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary \_\_\_ one People ..."
- \_\_\_ Canals (Great Lakes connectors)

## MS. NAOMI'S CORNY CORNER

WE KNOW YOU CAN'T HELP YOURSELVES

aka Dad  
Jokes

What do you call a pig with three eyes?

**Piiig** - Matthew M (NC)

What do you call it when Batman skips church?

**A Christian Bale** - Joe F (NC)

What goes up and down but doesn't move?

**Stairs** - Jennifer M (OH)

A toothless termite walks into a bar and says...

**"Where's the bar tender?"** - Jenny (PA)

What has holes in it but can still hold water?

**A sponge** - Tyreece S (SC)



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*Thank you to everyone else who submitted work we weren't able to include. Please keep writing in! We are encouraged and inspired by all of the letters, artwork and other expressions that come our way, and we hope that you find something meaningful in the process, too!*

**NEXT ISSUE'S THEME  
TEAMWORK**

**SEND US YOUR BEST COVER ART!**

*Upcoming themes - Teamwork & Zest*



Each one of us is part of a team of some sort, whether we know it or not. This might be by choice (*a sports team, marriage, club or study group*) or by circumstance (*a required class, cell block, family or neighborhood*). Either way, the character strength of Teamwork is about being reliable and committed to contributing to the success of whatever group or partnership we find ourselves in. **What is one team you find yourself part of at this current moment? What might it look like to be committed to this team's success?**



**SUBMISSIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE DUE BY JULY 20**



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Through **edovo** more and more people are accessing *The Loop* and engaging in other video content, too. If you have Edovo on your tablets, be sure to check out our channel and tell your friends!



**IF YOU ENJOYED THIS ISSUE OF THE LOOP,  
HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO NEXT...**

- **Tell your friends!!!**
- **Write to us with your feedback, responses, writing, or artwork**
- **Find more creative inspiration through our "Creations of a Caged Bird" videos or our new *Writer's CoLab Anthology*.**
- **Hone your own creative writing skills through video-based courses like *Playwriting and Intro to Spoken Word*.**
- **Continue developing your character through our *Learn Your Strengths* and (brand new) *Apply Your Strengths* video courses.**
- **Share your experience with loved ones on the outside and invite them to read *The Loop* online at [shining-light.com/theloop](http://shining-light.com/theloop)**

"I fell in love with *The Loop* the very first time I picked up and read it. It has so much to offer for us as inmates to respond and participate in. I love the detail and colors of the magazine you all go above and beyond also with *Shining Light* you definitely can get on our level and relate to our time in need in a very dark place. Thank you for all you do...

Much love, Angela R. (SC)