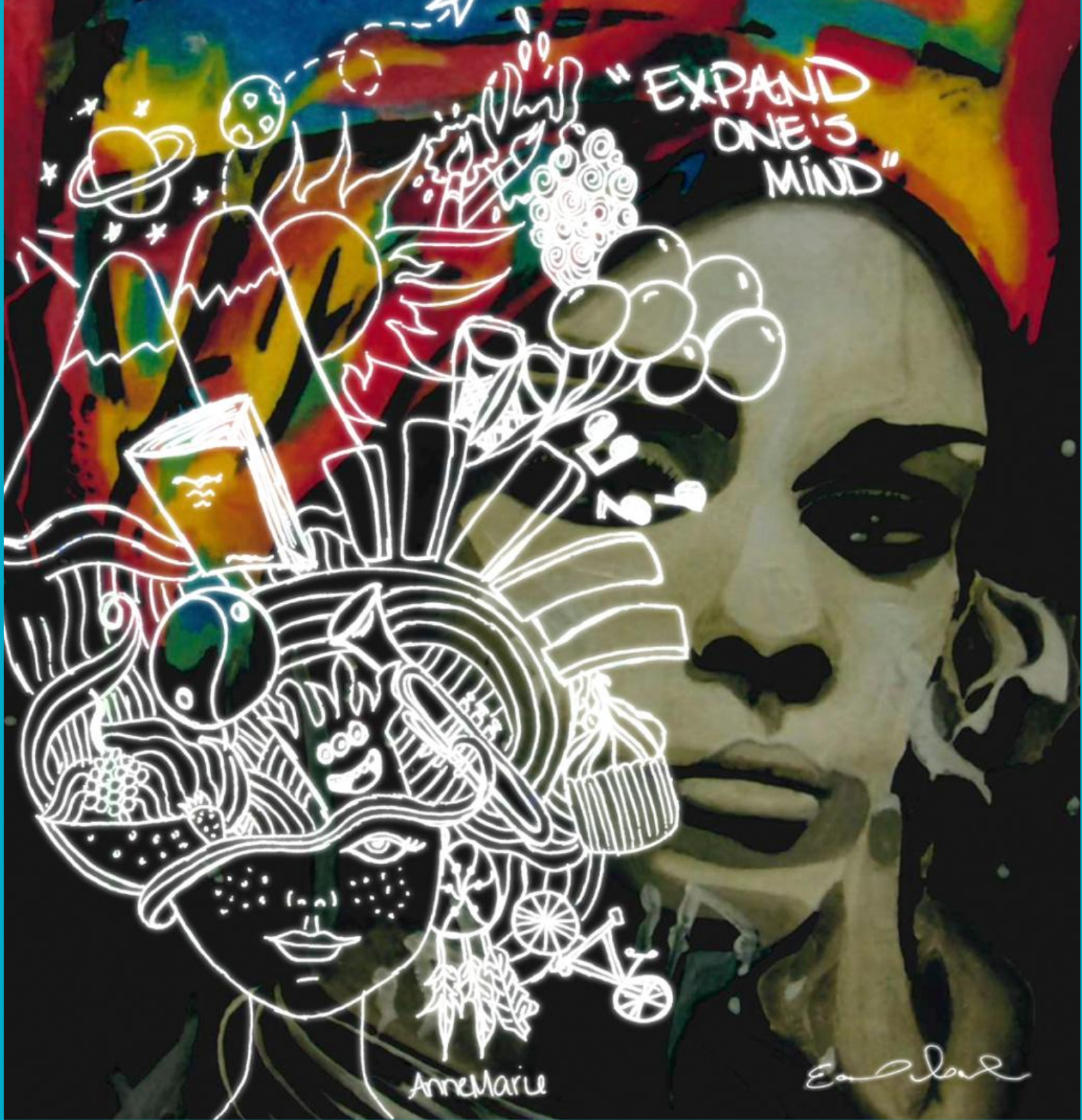


shininglight

THE LOOP

JUNE/JULY/AUG 2022

"EXPAND
ONE'S
MIND"



AnneMarie

Earl Juel



The Loop

Samantha

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

- 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!

We believe it is important to clearly define who we are and what we do to avoid getting pulled in too many directions and spread too thin. Please understand that Shining Light does not provide legal or reentry services, penpal relationships, mentoring, or assistance with publishing creative work, though we will direct you to other organizations that do.

IN THIS ISSUE: We'll be combining two closely-related character strengths: **Curiosity & Love of Learning**. According to the VIA Institute, "While curiosity is the motivating force that leads you to seek out new information, love of learning refers to the desire to hold on to and deepen that information." (See more description on p. 15) I personally see it as curiosity tends to carry bursts of energy and excitement about new experiences and/or relational connections that expand perspective, where the love of learning is more of a calm, consistent pursuit to expand knowledge. Both will be addressed in the following pages, and we encourage you to think about which one comes more naturally or is more exciting to you. We'll be looking at what it means to apply these strengths to our own personal growth and how we relate to others. Make sure to check out Ms. Naomi & the Horton Brothers' takes (p. 6-7) and our Community Spotlight (p.12), which features two groups that have been engaging in The Loop together!



Kelly
PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Did you know that the cover art is actually two pieces combined? To me, this is an expression of curiosity & love of learning in itself. Separately, the "Expand One's Mind" sketch by AnneMarie R (PA) is perfect for the theme, and the painting by Earl G (PA) is just so well done. But when our creative designer Jenny got curious and wondered what would happen if she merged them together, we thought the combined result was even better! What do you think?

Huge thanks to AnneMarie and Earl for sharing your talent with us! *If you're a visual artist and have an idea for cover art, please send it in!!! Themes for upcoming issues are on the back... 😊*

A LONG & DARK ROAD HAS TAUGHT ME THE TRUE VALUE OF WHAT YOU DO TO REACH, CONNECT, & INSPIRE OTHERS. WITHOUT THE STRENGTH & COMPASSION OF THOSE WHO FOUND THE SUN & THE DECISION TO CLIMB BACK INTO THE CAVE TO TELL THE REST OF US, SO MANY MORE WOULD BE LOST. SO SINCERELY, FROM MY HEART TO YOURS, THANK YOU. I ALSO APPRECIATE THE INVITATIONAL CARDS TO THE LOOP... I'D ALSO ASK YOU SEND ME A FEW MORE INVITE CARDS SO I CAN SHARE THEM WITH ANY WHO ARE INTERESTED. I TRULY WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN THE WAVE OF COMPASSION & LOVE STILL RIPPLING THROUGH AN EVER DARKENING WORLD.

-LUKE (MT)

SEE BACK PAGE


TABLE OF

Contents

To You, From Jeff	4
Program Updates	5
Real Talk w Ms. Naomi	6
End of the Tunnel	7
Creative Connection	8-9

Community Code	10
Featured Writing	11 / 18
SL Community Spotlight	12
Positive News	13
Character Strengths Deep Dive	14-16

Health & Wellness	17
Meditation / Prayer	19
Constructive Debate	20
Holidays / Events	21
Just for Fun	22-23

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

TO: YOU
FROM: JEFF

Greetings to all our readers! The character strengths featured in this issue, Curiosity & Love of Learning, are high on my list. Logically you might guess that I loved school, but the opposite was true. Sitting in a classroom, listening to a teacher and studying for a test did not interest me. Conforming to arbitrary expectations was also tough. The learning I enjoyed was when I could actively discover things on my own.

In my years of working in prison I've met a lot of people who also struggled to fit in the mold in school but had found a way - despite their environment, life challenges, and others' opinions or parameters - to become the smart, curious and creative people they were made to be.

Curiosity and Love of Learning was critical to this process. It seemed to start with a desire, sometimes small, to overcome their situation, which was the first step of a journey that often led to unexpected places. In SL, we have had the opportunity to work with so many people who entered our program not sure why they were there or what they might learn. But they were curious. They wanted more out of life and they were on a mission to find it.

One man who exemplified this was Antonio Howard in Pennsylvania. When we met him he had been in prison for 26 years, since age 16, serving life without parole. According to him, even though he did not sing, dance, or act, he signed up for our performing arts workshop because he wanted to learn. We

walked beside him as he overcame shyness, feelings of inadequacy, and hopelessness, and he did things he never thought he could do. It became clear that "I'll give it a try" was how he approached many things in life. Two years after legislative changes gave him an unexpected second chance at life, he credits his success to all those hard, sometimes overwhelmingly scary steps into the unknown.

Antonio now has a job as a paralegal, is an award-winning painter, has published several books, and leads an advocacy organization. He says, "I chose not to sit around and blame others for my problems (abusive relationships, lack of opportunity, etc.) ...Those things were true [but] I made the decision to be there for myself in the way that I tried to be there for others. I wanted other people to give me opportunities, but I had to be willing to create some for myself. I had to learn to listen to my own inner voice rather than turning my voice off and listening to somebody else."

Our mission is to help people discover their potential. We want to encourage you on **your** journey, no one else's. Use your Curiosity to discover and pursue your own interests and strengths. In the process you may find that you have much more of a Love of Learning than you imagined. There are lots of examples, encouragement, and personal stories in this edition of The Loop. We look forward to hearing your story in the future!



Jeff

**FOUNDER &
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

"My curiosity comes from always asking 'why' or 'how'. Even in a confined world, you can still be curious to learn something new."

- Christopher/AZ

PROGRAM UPDATES



SL ACADEMY

Graduates of the SL Academy at North Dakota State Penitentiary were invited to continue on in a 10-week extension course of either Playwriting or Spoken Word, and both classes shared their final presentations in May.

First, the spoken word group pictured here, left to right - Ash, Jake, Silent, Diablo, and Dolph - performed their original poems, inspiring the small audience of peers, staff, and state DOC officials with their brilliant displays of vulnerability and confidence.



Then, the Playwriting group - Doug, Diablo, and Perez - bravely turned their scripts over to professional actors who performed a “zoom reading” where the writers could see the impact of their words to tell clear and moving stories. As one of them reflected on the process and his piece that is profoundly personal, he said “Just hearing it actually being read brought tears to my eyes.”



WINTER ARTS COLAB

The 16 participants of SL’s new writing mentorship program are nearing the finish line! These writers are spread out in prisons and jails throughout Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Washington state - humbly taking advice from SL mentors to develop and refine their original pieces for submission to be published. Let’s cheer them on as they complete their 4th & final drafts, approaching the finish line of this marathon that started back in February!



CREATIONS OF CAGED BIRD - VOLUME 3

“Creations of a Caged Bird - Volume 3” is officially under consideration. (Hopefully you’ve seen previous volumes on your tablet or on the prison TV.) For this 3rd installation, we plan to feature the work of our participants from the Winter Arts CoLab and Academy Extensions. In addition, we are also **CALLING ALL VISUAL ARTISTS** in The Loop community to submit original paintings, sketches, etc.

The due date for submissions is September 15, and all artwork should fit the theme “Rising Above.”

**Please note, this is still in the early stages of consideration, with no set timetable. We hope it’ll happen this year!*

Real Talk



Naomi

PROGRAM CONSULTANT
COMMUTED LIFER
COMMUTATION SPECIALIST

REFLECTING ON CURIOSITY & LOVE OF LEARNING...

You know how they say you can't teach an old dog new tricks? I'm an old dog. I'm open to learning, but there's not too much that I've run into since I've been home that I haven't experienced in my life. Been there and done that. But I'm open. Right now I'm really interested in learning new ways to sing. I would like to do some runs. And that's something I don't normally do, so I want to learn by listening and practicing. And I'm learning a lot from doing the class with Shining Light. When we do the three things that went right, those were things that I never thought about. I could tell you what went wrong! And the character strengths, those are things that I pay attention to now. And not just because it was something that I wanted to learn, but it was given to me. I'm accepting it as a gift and I am learning and I'm using it, and I see that it does work. For me that's part of my love of learning.

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

“What can I do to help others in their time of need so that they don't make bad decisions to end up incarcerated?”

First of all, you need to speak from experience, then you can guide people. You can't take them down a path that you haven't been down yourself. Even if you had a really bad experience before being incarcerated, then that could be something to tell them. And let them know, if you are incarcerated, that they don't want that either. Be open and honest and don't try to sugarcoat it, but say it with love so that they don't make those same mistakes.

“Will it be better to stick with yourself for a while and not move too quickly as you reenter into society?”

No. Now is the time to make choices of who you should and should not associate with, because everybody needs somebody and you can't just come out and make it on your own. Things have definitely changed - the technology, the city you came from. You need somebody. It has to be up to you who those somebody's are going to be.

“How do I build the trust back with my son?”

That is an easy question for me because I had to build that trust with my son, because there was a point in my life when I was on the inside that my son did not speak to me. He was angry with me because I was in prison and doing a life sentence and he was angry with me for leaving him. We are very close now, but I had to gain that trust by my actions. He sees what I'm doing. He sees the crowd that I hang with. He knows I'm not that person that I used to be before I had gone to prison. I didn't have to do any talking. I just showed him. He sees how I walk, and that was enough proof in the pudding for him. Be an example. Show that you're not the person you used to be and you will gain that trust back.



A LEARNING AFFAIR



Lee



Freedom

PROGRAM FACILITATORS / COMMUTED LIFERS & ACTIVISTS

Most of you have probably heard the old wife’s tale: “Curiosity killed the cat.” What you may not have heard is the second part of this saying, that “Satisfaction brought it back.” In life, everything has its pros and cons, and curiosity is no different. On the one hand the saying is a warning to be careful because curiosity misused can be harmful. But the second part tells us that curiosity used the right way has great value and that the satisfaction of learning or understanding something new about life makes being curious worth the risk. We know this first hand.

In 1993, we were the cat. Curiosity placed us at the wrong place at the wrong time, leading to our wrongful conviction and sentence to life without the possibility of parole (LWOP). By the same token, where LWOP meant that - like the cat - we would die in prison, curiosity brought us back by leading us to investigate thousands of case laws in search of the keys to our freedom. Along the way it led us to where we needed to be, placed us around wonderful people who gave us hope and helped us to conclude that regaining our freedom was not impossible, but that we were “free men” and we could “free ourselves.”

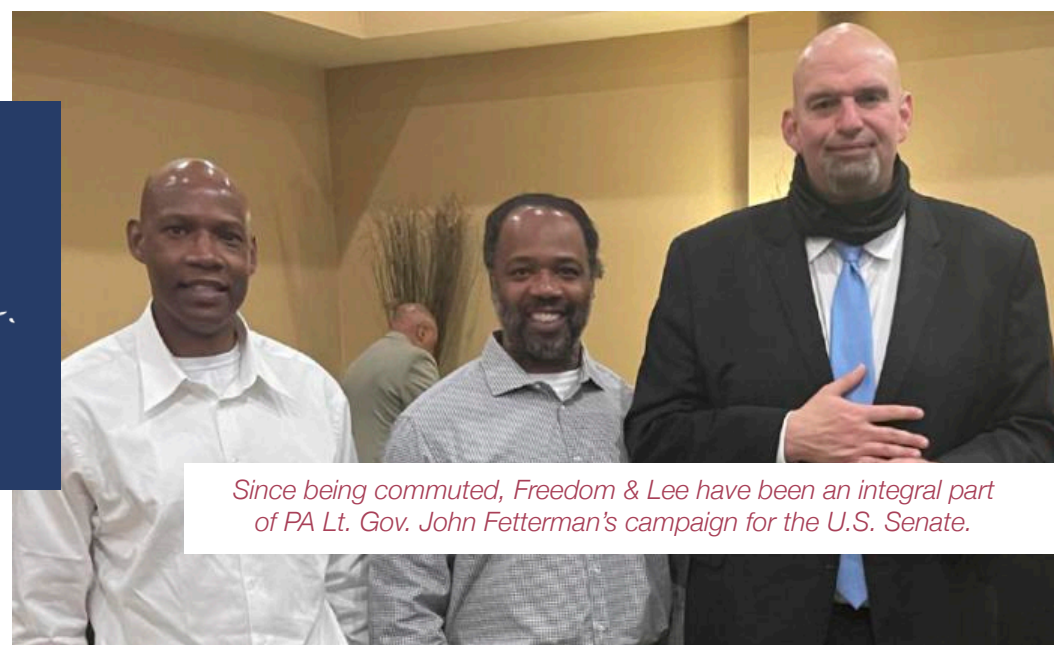
Curiosity and love of learning for us went hand and hand. Indeed, as we quenched our curiosity for justice and freedom, we fell in love with learning. But this wasn’t always the case. Although we were introduced to learning in grade school, by high school, she was only a passing acquaintance. After high school we went our separate ways only to meet again several years later in the prison law library between the pages of case law, criminal, and appellate procedures. Initially it was curiosity that had invited us there, but it was a love of learning that kept us going back.

Learning had become the most beautiful thing in the world and we were smitten. After that day, whether as students or teachers we have been in a relationship ever since. Love of learning was by our side as we read over two thousand books, completed dozens of educational programs, watched hundreds of C-span conferences, and created numerous programs and events. It was a love affair of insight and comprehension, accomplishment and understanding. In the end, it helped us become more ourselves than we had ever been. We admit that it was curiosity that sent us on our journey for freedom, but it was a love of learning that helped us sustain the effort to make reaching that freedom a reality.



*How would you describe your relationship with curiosity and learning?
Does this story inspire you to take any steps to nurture that relationship?*

*I always heard,
if you're the smartest
person in the room,
you are in the wrong room.
- Anthony -
(PA)*



Since being commuted, Freedom & Lee have been an integral part of PA Lt. Gov. John Fetterman's campaign for the U.S. Senate.

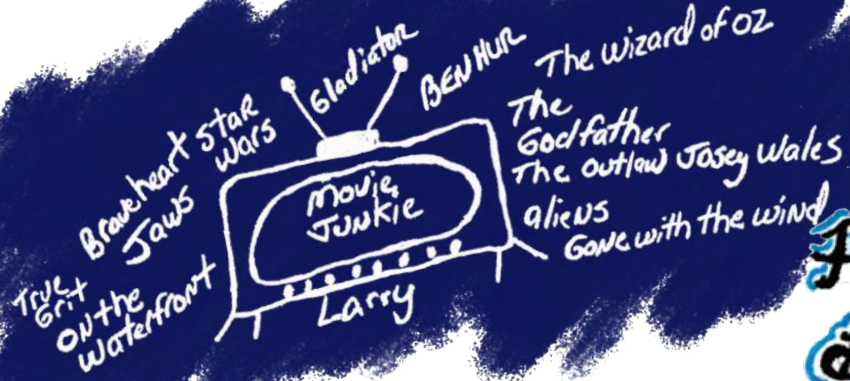
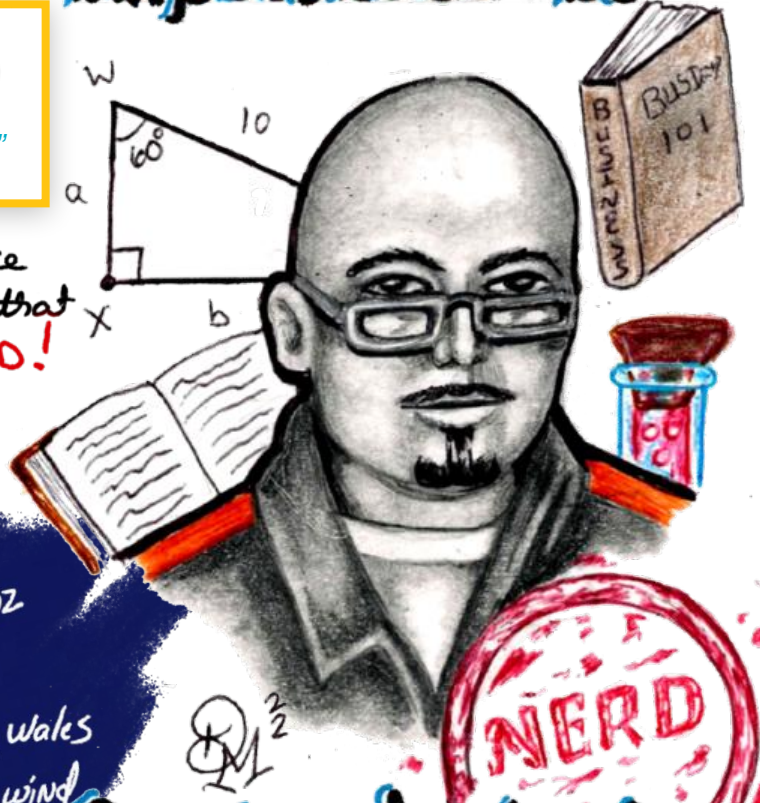
CREATIVE CONNECTION

CURIOS TO KNOW

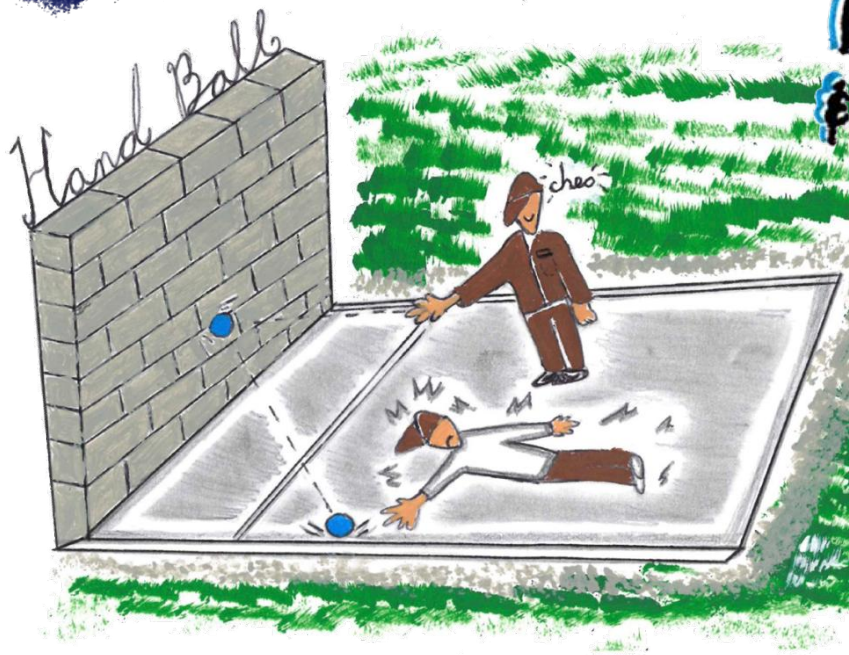
Last edition's prompt was, "Draw something about yourself that other people might not know about you."

The tear drop & :- tattoos on my face do not allow people to perceive that I am actually a deep covers **NERD!** Thankfully my reading glasses covers the face tattoos!
- Daniel

Freud may have said that the Irish are impervious to

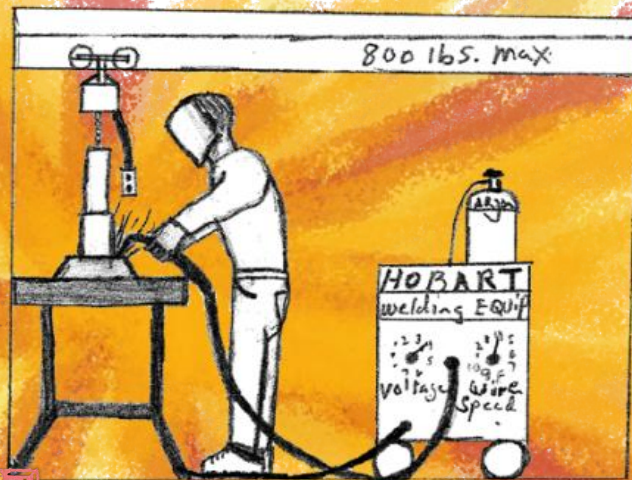


Psycho-Analysis; But, Did you know he was a Physician & not a Psycholgist?





Im NOT much of an artist, NOT with a pencil at least. Im a welder By trade, so Im somewhat of an artist in The welding PRofession so heres a clip of my Life share



My talent is I kinda know how to

-Night
DRAW

NEW

BROKEN & BEAUTIFUL



For a really long time, people have been using pieces of stone, glass, or ceramics to make beautiful and elaborate pictures, called mosaics. Even back in Ancient Rome, mosaics were popular as floor or wall decoration. Nowadays, people use all sorts of found objects to create something new, repurposing things in ways that celebrate the beauty that can be found all around us.

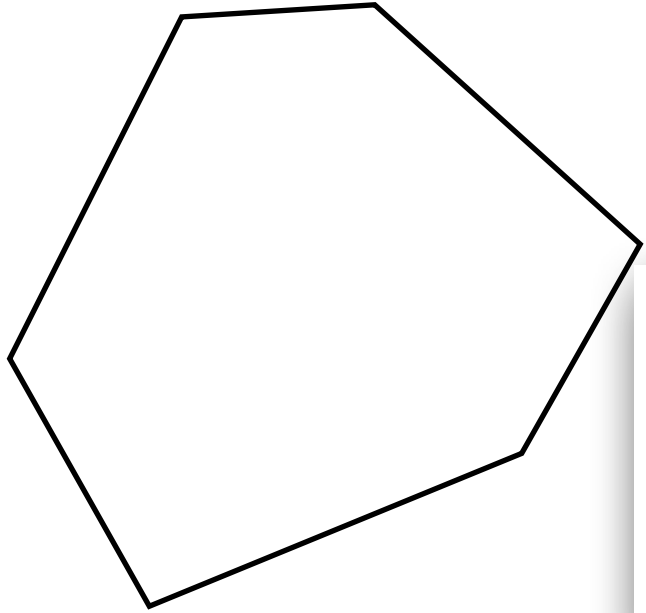


JENNY
CREATIVE SERVICES

I've often felt like mosaics are great representations of life itself, as we all try and find ways to make sense out of the broken pieces of our lives.

So for the next edition of The Loop, I'd love to see us make our own mosaic by **filling in the piece to the left with whatever "beauty" means to you.** That could simply be a color or two. That could be a picture of someone or something. Check the back page for more ideas. Also feel free to copy the shape and send in multiple pieces! The more I have to work with the better, and together, we'll have a mosaic that reflects how the SL community is finding beauty in the different pieces of our lives.

BEAUTY IS...



Example Mosaic





In the last issue, we zoomed out to look at the purpose of Community Codes in general. Some are about self-care or personal responsibility, and some are about caring for and valuing others. We learned how this “self-and-others” approach lines up with the African philosophy of *ubuntu*, and as Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis said, can provide a way to “...engineer a badly needed love revolution to rise up out of the ashes of our current reality.”

To zoom back in and take a closer look at this issue’s Community Code, let’s consider one of the fourteen lessons of the *ubuntu* philosophy outlined in the book, “Everyday Ubuntu” (by Mungi Ngomane). Lesson 3 is simply: “Put Yourself in the Shoes of Others.”

“*Ubuntu* encourages us to drop our judgements and embrace compassion and understanding. It invites us to turn down the volume of our own (often) self-righteous inner voice and start asking questions on behalf of the other person. Only then can we understand what someone else might be thinking. Or feeling.”

Remember, this is part of the core philosophy that fueled the peaceful resistance to the horrific oppression of apartheid in South Africa! Genuinely seeking to understand someone else’s perspective and/or circumstance is revolutionary, and very challenging. But *ubuntu* reminds us that it is also possible, and necessary if we want to make the world a better place.



BE OPEN. BE CURIOUS.

- “Be open” can help us be willing to adjust our attitude about ourselves and others.
- “Be curious” can help prevent us from judging something or someone before knowing the full story.



Choose one person you’ve been at odds with and consider how you can be more open and curious towards them. Start with asking questions of yourself, like “If I were in the same situation, how would I handle it?” Or “What else might be going on to cause that behavior that I might not know about?” Perhaps you want to go a step further and seek an honest conversation with this person to ask questions, and then humbly listen to their perspective without judgment.

Practice patience and listening. Become curious & love learning about your peers. Underneath the territorial exterior of every inmate is a hurt and overlooked child... Look for commonalities instead of differences. Build bridges instead of walls.

— Luke (MT)

Being open and curious goes well beyond experiences of conflict. Consider applying this to any situation or relationship that feels awkward or uncomfortable!

I HAVE FOUND I REALLY ENJOY MEETING SOMEONE NEW. REGARDLESS OF AGE THE “STORY” IS NEW, THE PERSPECTIVES DIFFERENT AND THE EXPERIENCES ARE FRESH. I HAVE LEARNED A LOT MORE BY BEING OPEN AND LISTENING THAN I’VE EVER LEARNED FROM A BOOK.

— JAKE (ND)

This month we feature the writing of Rodney M (SC), whose personal essay beautifully illustrates curiosity and love of learning by taking us through key moments from his elementary school experience. Unfortunately, we couldn't include the entire essay, but have quoted a few excerpts from it here.

In the essay, we meet the school principal, "A little bitty ol' lady with a huge heart"; the guidance counselor, Mrs. Thacker, who "even when you knew she was going to get you she made you know she loved you"; and Mr. Benson the music teacher who recognized Rodney's talent and put him in the annual school play. But it was Mrs. Clyburn, his sixth grade French teacher, "by far the most beautiful woman at the school" who planted the seed of his love of cooking through the "lesson of the Croissant."

"Hidden Treasures Uncovered"

Mrs. Clyburn brought these tasty treats in for class one day. She taught us how to slice them in half and spread butter on them. She also brought in different flavors of jelly for dipping. I know this is a far reach to Knobbs Creek and Jack Daniels, but I am convinced that my love of the French Cuisine began in this beautiful lady's class.

A love that took him to work with a variety of chefs developing his love of French cuisine,

I love nothing more than to cook with wine and liquors. Whether it be a white wine to reduce a sauce for Shrimp and Grits, or adding a two finger pour of bourbon to butter and thick maple syrup to baste a pan seared pork chop and sweet apple halves.

Rodney shows how the people that cared for and took an interest in him when he was young had a huge impact on him as he got older:

It has now occurred to me that I have fond memories of my childhood that I thought never existed. They lay underneath pains, pangs, and anguish that I adopted by way of involuntary generational circumstances and choices I made because I thought I knew everything, when in fact, I knew nothing at all.

I believe we all at one time or another have been asked, "if there was anything on earth you could have; what would it be?" before. Oddly for me, I would want to return to these times of my life. I wish I could return to the one place where I knew without a shadow of doubt, all of the grown people truly wanted what was best for me. I wish I could return to Houston Elementary.

Rodney M.



Here is a collaborative art project completed by women in the **THRIVE** unit at **Cook County Jail** in Illinois, which is specifically for those interested in participating in positive activities and programs during their time. For the past year, through a partnership with an outside organization called Kolbe House, 3 groups of women from this unit have been working through the pages of The Loop together. One of them, Dominique B, got to celebrate with her peers in the group when she read her own poem published in the previous issue!

DID YOU KNOW?

THERE ARE LOOP DISCUSSION GROUPS IN 4 DIFFERENT STATES



Another Loop group is at **Grafton Correctional Institution** in Ohio, where we connected with the recreation director to learn more about what's going on there...

Can you give us a quick introduction?

It's a group of 12 men - and counting. They read The Loop on their own, and every other Wednesday at 9:30 am they get together and have meaningful discussions around the publication's content. The name of the activity is called "Let's Talk About The LOOP" and their tag line is GET LOOPED IN!

How did this get started?

The Loop was made available in the recreation department and the living units. I pitched the idea of a group to a few men as a way to promote positive discussions - a think tank for the information the men receive on a daily basis. Initially a handful of 5 men met and came up with the name, and then interest grew by word of mouth. Each month, 2 or 3 new men want to be a part, and no one is turned away.

What difference does it make?

The impact is positive. The men feel like this is something they can see themselves being a part of by contributing content to the publication that will inspire others.

Is there anything they'd like to say to The Loop community?

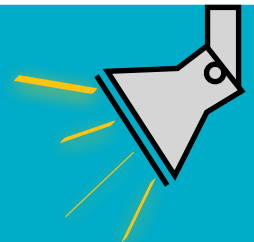
The men at Grafton would like to encourage other men and women across the great state of Ohio to become LOOPED IN - start reading The LOOP and develop a discussion group at their institutions.

**Editor's note: This encouragement goes for any readers of any state! ;)*



If you have a project or program that you've started in prison that is making a positive impact on others, let us know - or nominate someone from SL Community who's made a significant impact on you!

**For those who submit, we appreciate your patience as we navigate the proper approval process for publishing your story.*



"As someone with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) and my days grow shorter, I still passionately learn, live, and focus on the good. It is all around us. Be the good in the world."

Christopher/AZ

I am finally in the ending process of commutation... A lot of this involves waiting, which is not the easy part. But nothing can dampen the joy of having my institution's recommendation.

-Loni (PA)

"I'm learning more about myself every day and it's extremely freeing."

Steve/CA

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?

"We have the cleanest showers in the prison. They are almost sterile, which is no easy task. Our shower porter and a 70-something-year-old volunteer scrub our showers for hours everyday. Thank You Pat & Jessica!"

Terese-Marie/AR

I accomplished 1 of 2 goals which is getting an illegal sentence vacated, the second is a new trial which is currently being reviewed by the Pa. Supreme Court.

-Night (PA)

"I've been clean for 18 months."

Bradley/AZ

Getting my third Associate's, working on my fourth.

-Gregory (PA)

"Covid 19 restrictions are slowly coming to an end."

Joseph/MT

I got closure with my grandfather on a Zoom visit before he passed away. I have an amazing fiancé Emily, holding me down and staying focused and keeping me focused on life.

-Bryan (PA)

I PRESENTED MY SHINING LIGHT: SPOKEN WORD PIECE TO TWO GROUPS OF PEOPLE AND WAS AMAZED AT HOW WELL IT WAS RECEIVED AND IMPRESSED BY THE POSITIVITY THAT WAS VOICED.

-JAKE (ND)

"My friend left in February and is doing so good out there."

Chris/SC

I finally found out that within 6-months I will start doing some of my programs. Knowing this is going to motivate me into staying out of trouble.

-Cheo (PA)

"My son is playing football."

Lorenzo/AZ

"I got to see my family for the first time in almost three years."

Cassi/SC

"I avoided a big fight today."

William/SC

I'm sitting here trying to understand how I am up for parole in June. Since joining the Shining Light family, things have changed! All the writing got me to actually write as a way to cope, making me understand my feelings. The support you gave me changed my life. Thank you!

-Bug (ND)

"I've learned to control my anger."

Ashlie/OK

The biggest accomplishment that I am proud of is my sobriety and recovery. There was a time in my life when I couldn't stay sober for five minutes. Now with almost five years sober, it feels amazing to have a choice, to wake up everyday and strive to do better and be better! I am also training to become a certified peer recovery supporter. I'm excited to be able to give back and provide hope for others! ☺

-Shawna (OH)

I have always been rebellious and ignored "small rules." About 5 months ago I challenged myself to the discipline of following the "small rules" to make a genuine effort to stop doing everything my way & address the roots of my criminal behavior - pride & selfishness. I have become known by my peers as a bit of a square, also honest, trustworthy, humble, & very self controlled. It's truly an honor to hear them say when we all joke & jest "Nah, I don't believe it, he wouldn't do/say that."

-Luke (MT)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

DEEP DIVE

Did you know the list of 24 Character Strengths we know today was originally much longer? The team of scientists who identified them pored through texts from religious and philosophical traditions and cultures from around the world, seeking a set of universally-valued virtues that seemed to transcend both time and culture. To narrow it down to what we have today, they used 10 distinguishing criteria. All of the current strengths meet at least 8 of the criteria, and about half meet all 10. One that all

strengths meet is that **their use contributes to the fulfillment of a good life for both oneself and for others**. When someone taps into their curiosity, for instance, it is personally fulfilling and can even be contagious to those around them. Love of Learning is similar. The word “love” is intentionally part of this strength - it may not be as gleeful of an experience, but when someone is using this strength and acquiring knowledge, they feel a sense of fulfillment and can elevate the people around them with this new found knowledge or through their example.



How have you seen Curiosity or Love of Learning contribute to the fulfillment of a good life for oneself and others?

How do you see this in other character strengths?

“I develop curiosity in my current situation by being curious in how I can make a difference not only in my life but others. As I teach students at our school here, I am curious about what I can give them, what they need, and what approach is needed. I am curious about the success rate and the desire for us to learn together. I am curious about what they can give me in this two-sided situation.”

-Anonymous, SC



STRENGTH SPOTTING

HERE'S WHERE YOU SPOTTED SPIRITUALITY...

“A friend of mine pursues her relationship with God with all that is within her. She never allows the disappointments of life to drag her or keep her down. She does what is needed for her to move forward in all situations. She inspires me and I look up to her in a lot of ways.” - *Anonymous, SC*

“There was a former prisoner who is now a parolee. Nobody thought he had a chance at parole, but he remained steadfast in his faith that God was in control of his future and life. In Michigan the parolable lifer serves an average of 44.5 years before even being considered for parole... A lot of guys would do all they could to deter the guys' hopes...but nothing they said or did worked. He prayed and relied on God and his wife. Long story short, this Lifer was granted a public hearing (after 23 years) and was released on parole last Fall!” - *Anonymous, MI*

“My Mindfulness Meditation instructor, Andre, experienced his son being murdered, but the tragedy did not blind him towards prison inmates. His practice of Tibetan Buddhism fills him with tremendous compassion and I have never seen such in another human being.” - *Anonymous, SC*



For the next issue, tell us where you spot others using Curiosity and Love of Learning.

VIA DEFINITION: CURIOSITY

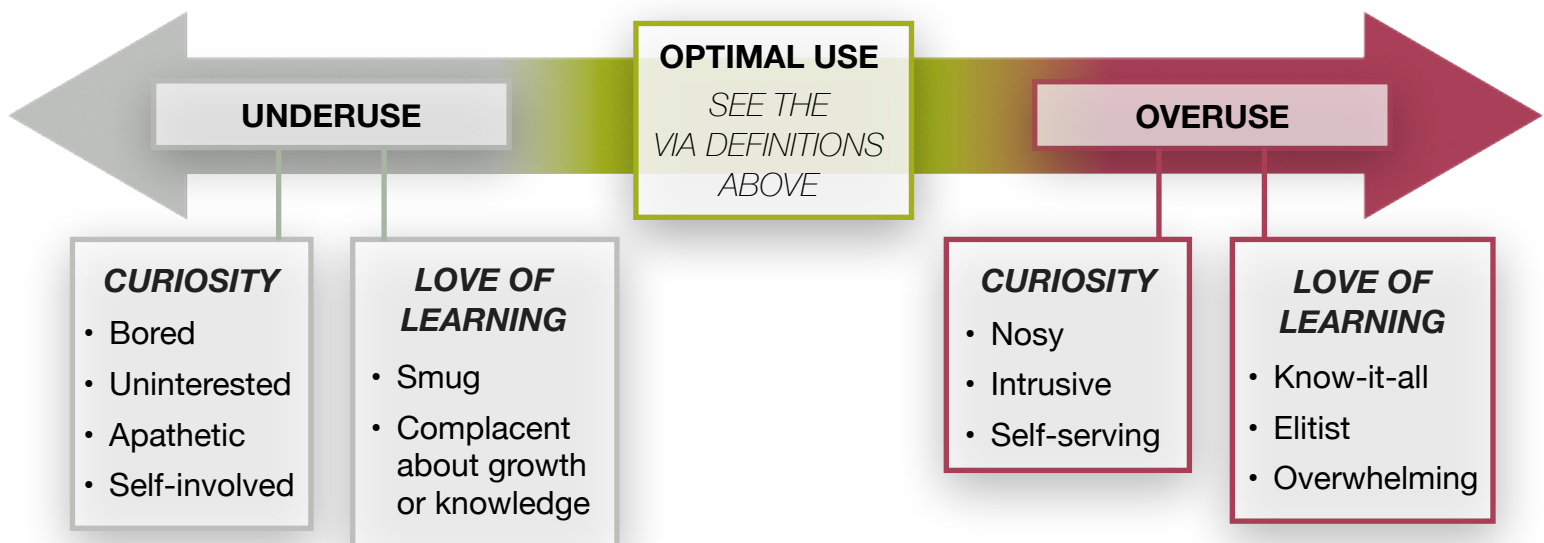
“To be curious is to explore and discover, to take an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake. It is fulfilling to journey toward an answer, to engage in a new experience, or to learn a new fact.... There are two key components to curious individuals: They are interested in exploring new ideas, activities and experiences, and they also have a strong desire to increase their own personal knowledge.”

<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/curiosity>

VIA DEFINITION: LOVE OF LEARNING

“Love of learning means a passion for learning, a desire to learn just for learning’s sake. While curiosity is the motivating force that leads you to seek out new information, love of learning refers to the desire to hold on to and deepen that information. The curious person is motivated by the pursuit of knowledge; the person who loves learning is motivated by the expansion of their fund of knowledge... [Love of Learning] has important motivational consequences because it helps people persist through challenges, setbacks and negative feedback.”

<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/love-of-learning>



I hope these definitions and the spectrum of use help bring clarity and additional wisdom for how to best express these strengths. As a way to go deeper with your reflections, consider the questions below:

- Make a list of topics that have provoked curiosity or love of learning in the past. When you reflect on this list, do you notice any themes?
- What obstacles exist for you to use either of these strengths? How might you overcome these barriers?
- What might it look like to be actively curious as opposed to responding to something new popping up in your environment?
- How might your love of learning positively impact the people around you?



Travis
PROGRAM DEVELOPER

CURIOSITY & LOVE OF LEARNING: IN PRACTICE

It can be super helpful to see how different people are practicing these strengths while inside.
Thank you to those of you who shared these examples!

I read books on many different subjects. I actually started doing this the first time I was in the RHU. I asked the CO to pick out two books for me, regardless of what they were about. Even if I wasn't interested in the subject of the book I read it anyway. Doing this opened my mind up to new ideas and helped me to learn about things I ordinarily would stay away from. I was also able to turn my negative experience of being in the RHU into a learning experience.

-Erica (PA)

"My curiosity started when I saw my cellmate had written a handful of poetry before he came to the cell we're in now. I started reading his stuff and thought 2 things. 1, I can relate to that and 2, I want to be able to express myself in poetry also. Little by little he started hearing out my poems, giving me pointers and now I have a love for writing." -Anonymous, AZ

"I develop or cultivate curiosity in this box by mustering the esteem to read, write, exercise, and pray daily. No T.V. for me." -Anonymous, WA

I've learned that Change is inevitable so I've become curious with the Unknown! So when new skills are learned & practiced daily they become exciting.

-Robert (MI)

Now, let's consider how there can be a connection between our attention and interests. For example, vacuum cleaners are pretty dang boring until we need to buy a new one. Pens and pencils don't seem that important until you can't find one or have limited access to them. What I am trying to say is that if we don't give something attention it won't be interesting, and if we do give something attention, it might become interesting!

So **as a way to practice curiosity**, over the next day or two - in a moment when you are feeling bored - **make a conscious effort to direct your attention to something new in your environment**. Maybe when you're done eating, take a moment to notice all the conversations happening around you. Or when you're waiting in line, notice the posters hanging on the wall. After you do this, consider the following questions.



Would you say you are more energized by being bored or being curious?

What are some interests that you haven't been giving attention to in a while, but would like to?

You develop curiosity by noticing something excites you that didn't before or more than it used to so you tend to start wondering about whatever that may be.

You develop love of learning when you hear about something that attracts you and when you look into it it's fascinating and you can't enough of that specific thing.

-Night (PA)



Cheo (PA) wrote in a wellness practice he has, which combines breathing, stretching, and visualization:

I like to breathe in slowly, releasing all the air from my lungs while stretching. I stand, my back against the wall, then I take a breath, then slowly let my lungs clear out by breathing out slowly. Then I close my eyes - I picture myself at a quiet beach feeling so much, so much peace. Then I lift both of my arms to the sky, then slowly lower them down like you're making a snow angel, but standing up.

~Cheo~



I'm not sure about you, but I (Travis) often only associate **stretching** with intense exercise, like running or doing long workouts at the gym. However, it is suggested to be something completed daily to keep muscles flexible, strong, and healthy. Basic stretching helps maintain mobility and balance, especially if one's daily routine involves a lot of sitting.^[1] It is also shown to increase blood flow and boost oxygen, which can help with things like depression or diabetes.^[2]

One aspect of stretching that I really appreciate is the cumulative effect of it, where over time you can see clear progress being made with muscle flexibility. I'm thinking of the times when I wasn't even close to touching my toes, and then that moment when I could finally touch them again! This happened through a simple daily stretch of my hamstrings (back of the thighs) - standing with my legs straight, then bending at the waist and reaching for my toes. This can also be done by sitting on the floor with your legs straight out.



Set a weekly stretching goal. Consider using your strength of Curiosity or Love of Learning to help you set, and reach, a goal that's best for you.

Remember the community code "Start Simple," and look for ways to keep yourself motivated as you begin to establish this new routine.

Pro Tips to Maximize Effectiveness ^[1]

1. If your stretch is connected to a workout, start with a short warm-up to get oxygen to your muscles. And don't forget to stretch afterwards!
2. Stretch far enough that you feel tension or even discomfort, but stop if it turns to pain.
3. Hold each stretch for 20-30 seconds. (Hold still! Bouncing can injure your muscle)



What works for you?

**SEND US ANY PRACTICES YOU USE
FOR HEALTH & WELLNESS**

[1] Harvard Health Publishing (2022) <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-importance-of-stretching>

[2] Timothy Miller, MD (2017) <https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/blog/benefits-of-stretching#:~:text=Stretching%20increases%20blood%20flow%2C%20boosts,dioxide%2C%20ammonia%20and%20uric%20acid>

*No content from The Loop should be used as a substitute for direct medical advice from your doctor or other qualified clinician.



Rachel

PROGRAM
COORDINATOR

FEATURED WRITING

In response to our last prompt, "The Importance of Having a Vision," this piece from Jacob L. (CA) speaks to seeing confinement both as a physical and mental state, with a challenge to see beyond the surface.

Jacob was inspired to write after watching the Spoken Word Lab on his tablet, which you can find too, through Edovo.

(Freedom is OVER RATED)

I FELT AS IF / I was being strangled by a
Sickness / unable to focus / unable to deal with it /
caught up in addiction /
like a fish in a net / a bird with no wings /
destined for death / a fool it seems /
acting senseless / LIKE, TRYING TO DRAW
a fish / or throw a bird off of a cliff /
what was I doing? / None of it made any
sense / so it seems / Before I got locked
up / I was already in Prison / Inmate with
no number / yet another statistic /
Bars created by the thoughts in my mind /
Narcotics, paraphernalia intertwined / with razor
wire fences / designed to KEEP me inside / captive
in the sense of hopelessness and despair /
guarded by the feelings that nobody cares /
But the clock / don't stop / THE TIME IS
now / to Break free from this HELL / Unlock
this door and open this CELL / step through
the threshold and REALIZE I'm REALLY IN
Jail / So, Now I SEE / They had to cage my
body / so I could set my mind free!

Jacob

Our next writing prompt is inspired by Tammy E. in Illinois, who writes:

I wake up everyday to see what I can do to better myself. No walls or wired fences
stop my determination. We might be in bad circumstances, but it doesn't change who
we are and who we can become.

- Tammy

**"How have you turned a negative experience
into a learning experience?"**

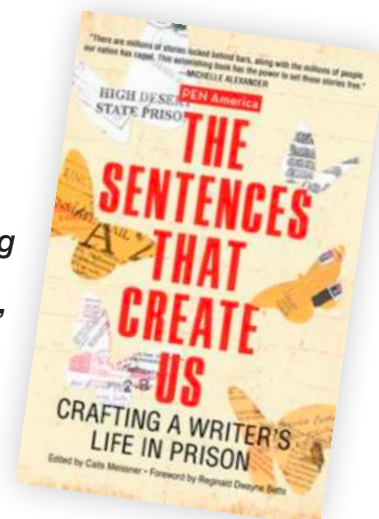


In his chapter of the incredible book, "The Sentences That Create Us,"
Curtis Dawkins includes a number of rules for writers,
and I think these three are very helpful:

- "Publication doesn't make you a writer, writing does..."
- "Every writer is first and foremost an avid reader of thought-provoking books..."
- "There is no such thing as writer's block. That is only 'fear of writing badly' masquerading as something that sounds official. Every writer writes badly every day - it's the only way to get to the center of things." (172-3).

So this month, I encourage you to write just for the love of it. Write badly, write broadly and write with curiosity of what you might discover!

To request a copy of this book, visit: <https://pen.org/prison-writing/the-sentences-that-create-us/>



Let's turn our curiosity inward by being attentive to our feelings and emotions. Much of the following information is derived from an article* by Andy Otto, who described feelings and emotions as "spontaneous mental states that arise within us, often accompanied by physical sensations, which may drive us to a certain action." As human beings we experience these every day, often varying throughout the day. Yet how often do we stop to recognize or name them? Not to mention, their effect on our physical state or resulting behavior.

Examining our own feelings and emotions can give us more control over them, making us free to respond in thoughtful, constructive ways rather than reacting on impulse. Here the Community Code "Be Open, Be Curious" applies to our own self-examination. We need to be careful not to quickly judge or dismiss our feelings, but to gently ask questions and seek to understand them.

In the 1970's, psychologist Paul Ekman identified six basic emotions considered to be universally experienced, which our staff demonstrates below. This can be a good starting point as you consider the following practice. Build it into your daily routine, or use it whenever you feel your emotional pulse rising...

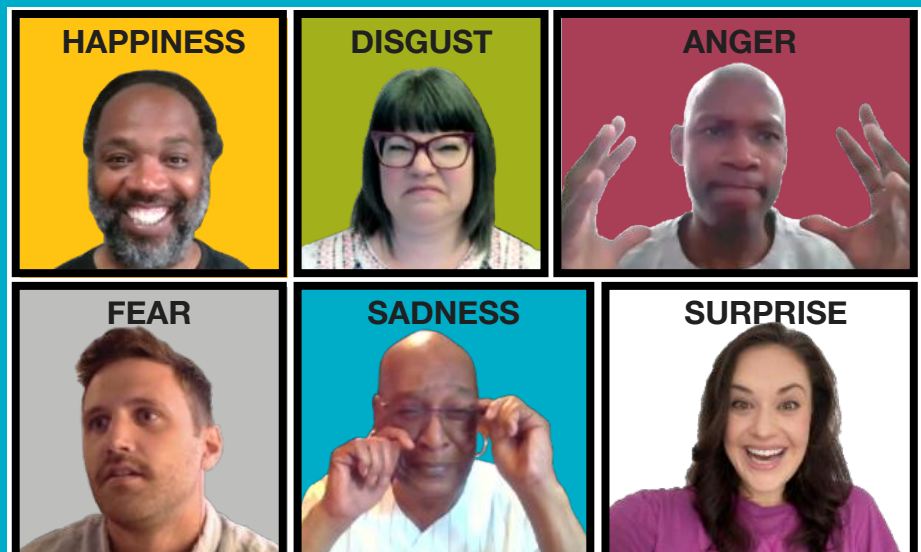
1. ***Find a comfortable position, then take a few deep breaths to focus and calm your mind.***
2. ***Within your faith tradition, invite God into this moment with you as a source of wisdom and insight beyond yourself.***
3. ***Review the day in your mind, and make a list of all of the emotions you experienced. Try not to get stuck on any one, but write them down and keep going. Thank God for each one, as they remind you that you're human.***
4. ***Give extra attention to any emotions that have consumed your thoughts, and ask questions to better understand the emotion and its effect on you.***
 - *What is causing this feeling? Was there a particular event? Is there a deeper emotion underneath?*
 - *What do I notice physically in my body as I examine this emotion?*
 - *How do I want to respond? What is the best way to respond?*
5. ***Ask about God's feelings about the situation. Does God share in the emotion with me? How might God respond?***

**<https://godinallthings.com/2021/11/01/feelings-and-emotions-be-curious-in-prayer/>*

SIX BASIC EMOTIONS (DR. PAUL EKMAN)



If you tried this exercise and are willing to share your experience, we'd love to hear how it went! What did you learn about yourself in this process? Do you feel any more in control of your emotions as a result?





CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATE




Angelina

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

Welcome to our Constructive Debate Team! 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 below and asked if you agreed or disagreed with it. Here's what our team of thinkers had to say:

AGREE

DEPENDS

DISAGREE

"I disagree. I have seen people at their worst come out on top and influence others and help them out with what they are struggling with."

- Jesus/AZ

I AGREE. It is very hard to understand what a person is really going through, because I may not see things the same way. I can allow myself to go through the same situation & come out with a different perspective. Sometimes you just never know until it happens.

- Samantha (PA)

"I agree. We as human beings are all different...we see, feel, and understand differently. We are all like fingerprints, none of us are exactly the same. While we can relate to one another through our experiences, it is very important to recognize that the fact remains that we have differences that stop us from having the ability to fully understand things exactly the same. It doesn't mean we can't relate or understand things at all, it just means that we have to be real and know that there are some things that we will not see the same, and we will need to approach the situation with a respect and attention some can't do."

- Daniel/MI

"Some can understand what others go through if they have gone through the same thing themselves."

- Crystal/PA

"NO ONE CAN EVER FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT SOMEONE ELSE IS GOING THROUGH."

"Yes, no one has had the same life experiences as you. But if you look around you can find people with enough similarities in their experiences that you can get the help or advice you need. That is why self help groups are so popular and successful."

- Bradley/AZ

"I agree. We may not understand, but we CAN be empathetic. Choose kindness over judgment."

- Christopher/AZ

"No. We might have had the same experience."

- Cal/MT

You can never fully understand what someone else is going through, because we all perceive things differently, even if we're in the same situation. For example, 2 guys in jail go to the hole. One thinks, "Now I'm away from everything. I'll miss out!" and the other thinks, "Finally I get some time away from all those things for a while." - Night (PA)

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

FOR OUR NEXT EDITION, WE WANT TO KNOW...
DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THIS STATEMENT AND WHY:




**“THERE IS A PURPOSE TO EVERY
HUMAN LIFE ON THE PLANET.”**

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

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

WE CAN'T WAIT TO HEAR FROM YOU!



Let
Your  Shine

*This symbol is called an ankh
and means "life"*



HOLIDAYS/SPECIAL EVENTS COMING UP:

May was Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month | According to Cynthia Choi, co-executive director of Chinese for Affirmative Action and co-founder of Stop AAPI Hate, “This is a celebration of our history, of our culture ... and all the different ways in which our community has really demonstrated that we're not only here to stay, we are a part of this fabric — a part of this country.” May 7th marks the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants to the United States in 1843, and May 10th recognizes the completion of the first U.S. transcontinental railroad in 1869, which stretched from coast to coast and had significant contributions from 15,000 to 20,000 Chinese immigrants.

Learn more at www.history.com/news/transcontinental-railroad-chinese-immigrants

<https://www.npr.org/2022/05/02/1095812576/aapi-asian-pacific-heritage-month-origin-may-why>

June is LGBTQ+ Pride Month | Pride Month “...commemorates years of struggle for civil rights and the ongoing pursuit of equal justice under the law for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community, as well as the accomplishments of LGBTQ individuals.” June 28 is the anniversary of the Stonewall riots of 1969, which followed a police raid at a popular bar in NYC’s Greenwich Village, where many members of the LGBTQ community were harassed, violated, and arrested.

Learn more at <https://www.britannica.com/story/why-is-pride-month-celebrated-in-june>

JUNETEENTH
JUNE 19

FATHER'S DAY
JUNE 19

INDEPENDENCE DAY
JULY 4

LABOR DAY
SEPT 5

Juneteenth commemorates the emancipation of enslaved people in the US. This longest-running holiday for African Americans (originally called “Jubilee Day”) is celebrated on June 19 in recognition of the day in 1865 when slaves in Texas were officially declared free under the terms of the Emancipation Proclamation, which was signed two and a half years earlier in December 1862. As of last year, 2021, Juneteenth is now officially a federal holiday.

Learn more at <https://www.history.com/news/what-is-juneteenth>

GAMES & ACTIVITIES



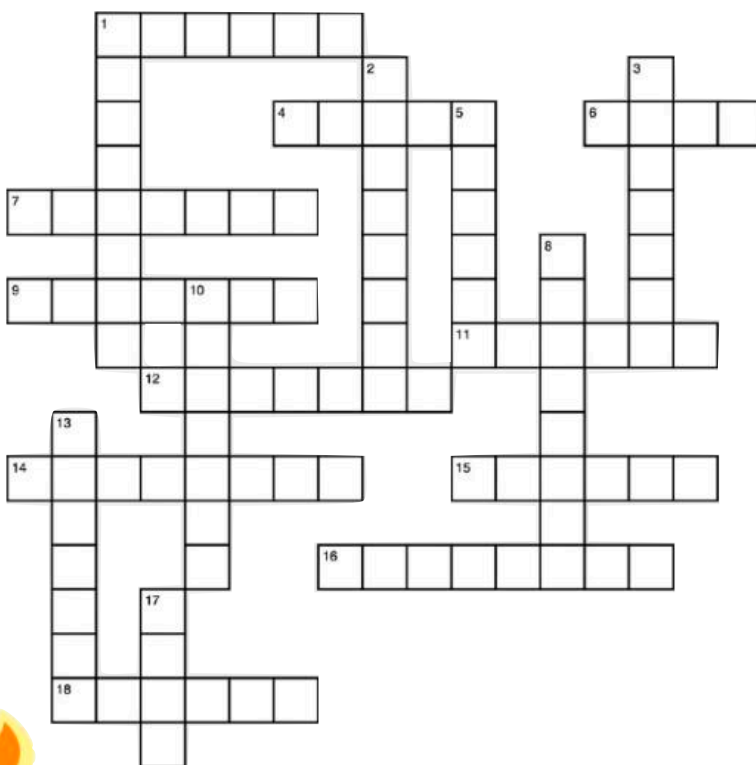
SUMMER CROSSWORD

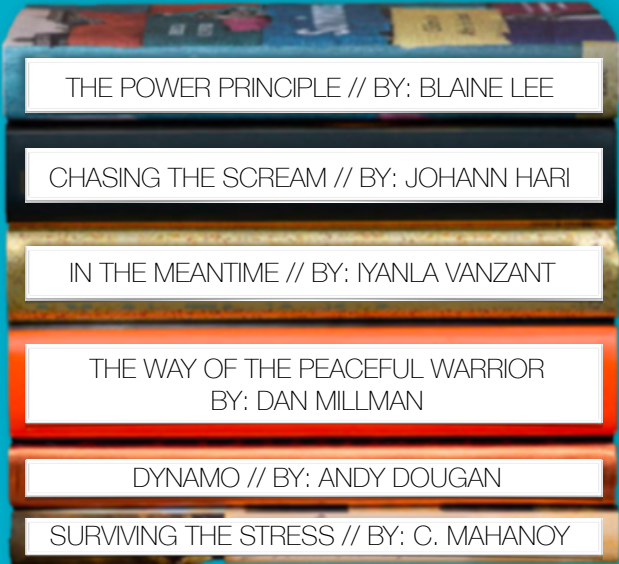
ACROSS

- 1) Beachgoer's pride
- 4) Surfer's hangout
- 6) Dog days month
- 7) Rod & reel sport
- 9) Disk you whisk
- 11) Make a bed?
- 12) Roughing it, perhaps
- 14) Treat on a stick
- 15) Alfresco meal
- 16) Parlor treat
- 18) Bermuda _____

DOWN

- 1) Beach attire
- 2) Worker's respite
- 3) Not indoors
- 5) Tramping on the trail
- 8) Outdoor cookout
- 10) Lake activity
- 13) Ballpark fare
- 17) Summer cooler





ANONYMOUS / MT

MARCUS / AZ

ERICA / PA

DANIEL / MI

ANONYMOUS / AZ

RONNIE / MI

JUST
FOR
FUN



WORK OUT
MIX TAPE

Last call! As you're working out this summer, let us know what you're listening to!



KEEP THE
RECIPES COMING!

POTATO SALAD

- 1 bag instant mashed potatoes
- 1 tsp or more dried onions
- 4 hard boiled eggs
- 8-10 packs mayo
- 1 pack mustard
- Cook potatoes until thick and crumbly.
- Add cut up eggs, mayo, and onions.
- Mix well and let set!

- Terese-Marie (AR) -

POTATO BALL

- A bag of plain chips or bbq chips or your liking
- Crush 'em up and add a soup (pack of noodles) or two, however much you want
- Add the pack of salt with it or half or not at all (it'll already have flavor from the chips)
- Crush up the soup and place it in the chip bag
- Add enough water that if you squeeze the bag, the water doesn't spill
- Shake it up- mush it a little 'til it's kind of pasty and fold the bag over itself tightly
- Let it sit for 5-10 minutes depending on how hot the water is
- Unwrap the bag
- The bag may have to be cut because the food should be solid
- Add squeeze cheese, honey, or ranch dressing...and there's your potato ball!

- Night (PA) -

SUMMER
SPUD
SNACKS

I also go by Spud.



MS. NAOMI'S CORNY CORNER

WE KNOW YOU CAN'T HELP YOURSELVES

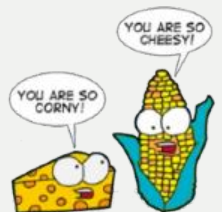
Why didn't the sun go to college?
It already had a million degrees

A Catholic priest, Buddhist monk, and a Jewish rabbit walk into a bar. The rabbit says, "I get the feeling, I'm a typo."

AN 11-YEAR-OLD AT KELLY'S CHURCH
PENNSYLVANIA

What did baby corn say to ma corn?
Where's popcorn?

How do you know the ocean's friendly?
It waves



According to the VIA Institute*, there are three types of goodness we can appreciate, each with a different response from the beholder. Physical beauty produces awe and wonder; skill or talent (excellence) inspires pursuit of one's own goals; and moral beauty/excellence makes one want to be a better person. With this definition in mind...

What is one example of beauty or excellence that has impacted you in the last 10 days?

*https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths



SUBMISSIONS FOR NEXT EDITION DUE BY JULY 25



SPECIAL THANKS TO THIS EDITION'S 46 CONTRIBUTORS

COVER ART:

AnneMarie R. (PA) & Earl G. (PA)

FEATURED WRITING:

Rodney M. (SC) & Jacob L. (CA)

OTHER REFLECTIONS & RESPONSES:

[AR] Terese-Marie M.

[AZ] Bradley S., Christopher N., Jesus H., Lorenzo P., Marcus S.

[CA] Steve

[IL] Tammy E.

[MI] Daniel M., Robert B., Ronnie T.

[MT] Cal L., Joseph M., Luke H.

[ND] Doug G., Jake

[OH] Marcus J., Shane S., Shawna N.

[OK] Ashlie M.

[PA] Anthony F., Bryan S., Cheo, Crystal C., Erica H., George E., Larry S., Loni K., Night, Samantha A., Wendy D.

[SC] Cassi, Chris C., Gregory D., Mr. William F.

7 Anonymous Tablet Submissions from AZ, MI, MT, SC (3) & WA

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!

DO YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW WANT TO SUBSCRIBE TO THE LOOP?

I was blessed to discover your "The Loop" newsletter after being placed on DLC status. The young gentlemen I was placed in a cell with handed it to me and said, "You might like this." and I did. It was the Jan, Feb., Mar. issue for 2022 and I found it uplifting, insightful and relaxing. I am very eager to begin receiving my own copy.

Sincerely, George

If this was your first time reading The Loop, or if you're in the habit of just picking up one of the extra copies at your facility, we hope you'll consider joining nearly 1,500 others inside who have subscribed to receive their own copy.

It's totally free - just mail in this card!

If you're already a subscriber, we challenge you to think of at least one person to share your copy with so they too can join in. Our goal is to have 2,000 subscribers by the end of the year. That's 2,000 individuals engaging in this community of "positive change makers" in prisons around the country. Let's get there together!



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