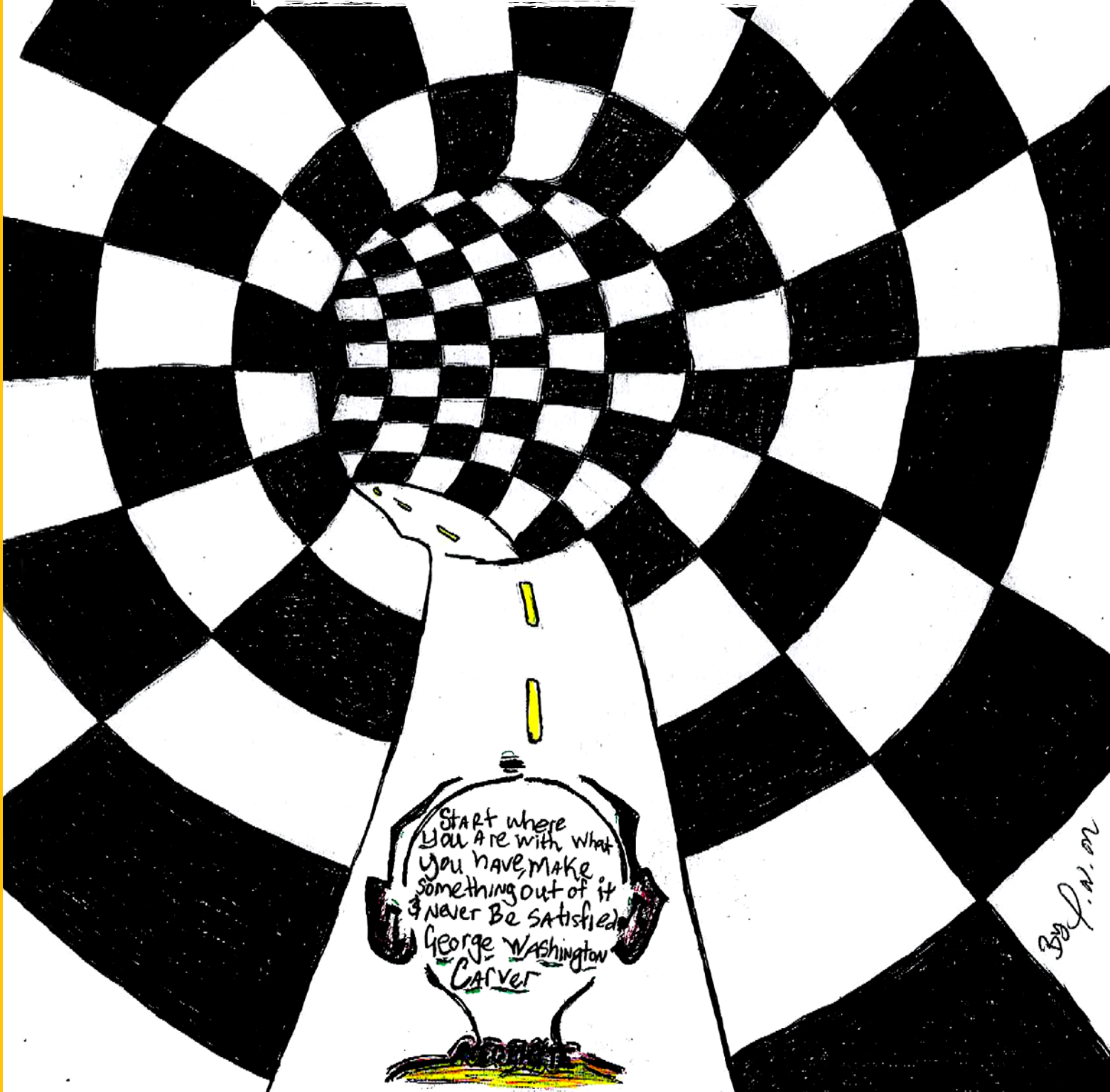


shininglight

# THE LOOP

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

WARNING  
FRAGILE



Boj.w.or

**TO: YOU**  
**FROM: JEFF**

*Greetings and welcome, especially to all our new readers! The team at Shining Light is doing very well and we hope you are too.*

This issue is about the character strength “Creativity,” which can be defined as thinking of new ways to do things that are useful. It happens to be one of my top strengths, and has been a core value of Shining Light since the beginning. When people ask me, “How did you come up with the vision for Shining Light?” most expect a profound revelation from God or a brilliant idea, but the reality is nothing so profound. This all started in 1996 when I used creativity to meet a need I saw, with the tools I had.

My goal was to stretch the perspective of a group of young people beyond their hometown and families so that they could see their potential, understand others, and be better prepared for their futures. I wasn’t a teacher, coach, or preacher, but I knew something about music and the power of the arts. So I had that group learn a few songs, then we added some movement and a short play and took our modest production to a place outside our comfort zone - from a small rural town in Pennsylvania to a Haitian church in Queens, NYC. And in the process they learned a lot about themselves and other people, and wanted to do more!

That led us to a youth correctional center near Chicago in 1999, which eventually took us to San Quentin, Rikers Island, and facilities across the country - places that we never had dreamed of going to; places that never dreamed of hosting the production we brought!

The needs we saw inside were so great that in 2015 we adapted our program to work directly with the residents themselves, rather than bring groups of performers in. People thought we were crazy! But we tried anyway, and discovered more was possible than anyone had imagined. We learned that people in prison had so much potential and the interactive, creative process helped them discover it.



*Jeff*

**FOUNDER &  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

When the pandemic stopped everything, we had to be creative yet again, asking “How can we serve those inside in new ways?” That led to this newsletter, new artistic collaborations, new programs and new delivery methods. Today, our facilitators in New York City, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia are video conferencing with groups of men in prisons in North Dakota, PA, and Ohio. Who would have thought this was possible two years ago? Or 25 years ago???

We hope this edition of The Loop encourages you on your own journey. Be creative! Try doing something in a new way! Most steps are small, but add them all together and you may be surprised where it leads.

## WELCOME, READERS!

We are so excited to see our community expanding every week! Through your referrals to friends, new participants in the SL Academy, and a growing presence on tablets, thousands of individuals are now being encouraged, equipped, and energized through this resource. Many thanks to those of you who’ve contributed your stories, creative expressions, and questions. Please keep ‘em coming! Just look for the 📧 and respond with whatever catches your interest. (We may not be able to publish everything you send us, but we sure do appreciate hearing from you!)

Remember, a digital version of The Loop is available on our website at [shining-light.com/the-loop](http://shining-light.com/the-loop) or through email: [TheLoop@shining-light.com](mailto:TheLoop@shining-light.com). This can be a great way to share a connection with loved ones on the outside, and for you to stay connected with us in the SL community when you get out!



*Kelly*  
**PROGRAM  
DIRECTOR**

## CREATIVE CONNECTION

Thanks to everyone who sent us their “Loop” notes and creations! Feel free to keep sending them in as you feel inspired. You never know where they might show up!

*Keep in mind...*

*... When you are flipping through The Loop, be sure to take a moment and consider all that has to be endured to create such an interactive, inspiring, and sensible publication.*

*To The Loop and contributors: I was staring down that cliff's edge today. I'm a few miles away once again. Thank you for making me smile. Thank you for reminding me to push forward.*

*- Eddie*

"The Loop"



*I'm Here For You!*  
*Jenny*

*We all share the same home.  
When viewed from a larger perspective,  
the borders cease to exist.  
Division is an illusion.  
We are all connected.*

*~ Robert*



**JENNY**  
CREATIVE SERVICES



**THERE ARE MOMENTS  
IN LIFE WHEN YOU MISS  
SOMEONE SO MUCH THAT  
YOU JUST WANT TO PICK  
THEM FROM YOUR DREAMS  
AND HUG THEM FOR REAL.**  
**FRANK**

NEW

## ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE SEASON



We know it feels too early to talk about another holiday season just around the corner, but through The Loop, we can support one another using the incredible creativity, kindness and healthy perspectives that exist in our community. Please consider how you can encourage others in The Loop by sending us either:

- ⦿ **A HAND-DRAWN HOLIDAY THEMED CARD**
- ⦿ **AN ORIGINAL POEM ABOUT THE HOLIDAY SEASON OR NEW YEAR**
- ⦿ **YOUR THOUGHTS ON THESE QUESTIONS:**
  - *What would you say to someone experiencing incarceration through the holidays for the first time?*
  - *How did you handle that challenge?*
  - *What brings you hope and encouragement though this season?*



## Real Talk



Naomi

PROGRAM CONSULTANT

COMMUTED LIFER

COMMUTATION SPECIALIST

***Hi my sisters and brothers! I was just thinking about y'all, and wondering if you are keeping HOPE ALIVE!!!***

I am a firm believer in what good things happen for one, it can also happen for you. I must admit that there were many times when people would be walking their papers, I used to wish it was me! But you know what I did? I occupied my time and my mind by doing some of the things that made me feel good on the inside. I got creative and I did my music. I wrote poetry and put music to it. I crocheted and even found a way to get some privacy to have a good cry...in the showers! I established a relationship with God. Now I know that everyone is not on the same page when it comes to God, but you must find something in your heart of hearts that will help you do your time. I tell you this because I know what it is like to be on the inside and have nothing to do with that time, or get that feeling of hopelessness. I encourage you to really search your heart today and get on that road that will help you to make it out of that place (*On your own two feet and not in a bag*). Enjoy your day as much as you can, and if you need to get creative in order for that to happen, then, DO SO!!!



## ASK ANYTHING

The struggle is real in prison. And sometimes it is hard to know who to trust with your situation, because people like to talk. That's why we have this section - your secret's safe with me. And listen, in my 37 years on the inside, I'm pretty sure I've seen it all! So bring your issues or questions to me, and if I can't offer any advice, I'll ask someone who can. And then without using your name - we will keep it confidential - we'll post your question and my response so other people going through something similar can maybe get some help, too. Feel free to keep your questions about legal processes or re-entry coming, too. We're not lawyers or social workers, but we'll answer them as best we 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

Most of your questions have been about how to access resources when you get out. Every system is different, so we can't get too specific here, but know that each state's re-entry department is required to provide resources to help you. Unfortunately, the burden is often on you to find them, but they are out there! We suggest you start where you are - meaning, think of who you know that might be able to point you in the right direction and then keep asking around until you get what you need. Here are some suggestions of who you can ask for information, or at least guidance in your search:

- A social worker, counselor, chaplain, or program manager
- The person who oversees your housing area (in some states this is the "unit manager")
- If your prison hosts a job fair, find out who runs that
- If your prison has a re-entry program, find out who runs that (even if you can't get in the class, they should have resources to share)
- If all else fails, write to parole and/or the re-entry administrator at central office.

In most cases, you CAN find the answers you're looking for! It just takes creative thinking, relentless hope, and a lot of perseverance - character strengths that you already have within you!!! Keep your eye on the prize and don't give up ❤️





## STEPPING OUT OF THE DARKNESS OF INCARCERATION INTO THE LIGHT OF REENTRY

There is an old saying that goes, “Knowledge is power,” and it is the truth. Knowledge unapplied, however, is nothing but knowing something. In prison we met some of the smartest, most creative people anyone could imagine. They adapted and overcame the adversity of prison life. They made a way forward out of no way at all. Think about it, people in prison use potato chip bags to create arts and crafts, folders to make the best greeting cards, and t-shirts to create masterpieces to sell. People have invented all types of gadgets and gizmos to get by. The ingenuity that exists in prisons all over the country is amazing. Here is the thing though - what if we took that same creativity and applied it to our reentry into society? What could you “invent” to change your life? Think on it hard and long - you probably got the time so let’s make it work for you.

Here is an example of what I mean. My brother and I recognized almost twenty+ years ago that when we finally got out of prison we would be way older than the average person just starting out into the workforce. So we knew we had to be creative in getting ready for our eventual release. Remember at that time we had no release date. But our fight for freedom became our training ground for reentry. In everything we did we asked the question: how can this benefit my reentry?

Over the course of our time in prison, we went from doing legal research to becoming jailhouse lawyers, from participants in programs to facilitators, then to creators of programs and annual events. We wrote, produced, and directed full length plays, where our peers inside built props from cardboard boxes which were mistaken for the real thing. It was creativity at its finest. Many of the volunteers left prison and used the skills they acquired to their benefit.

Our work as facilitators and Certified Peer Specialists inside has now translated to our work in society as program facilitators with Shining Light and Advanced Level WRAP facilitators with a company called Advocates for Human Potential. Also, because of the legal knowledge we acquired while fighting to prove our innocence, we have been invited to the National Justice System Peer Support Council, the NYC Justice Peer Center, and the PA Assistant Attorney General’s Criminal Justice Action Team.

So as you see that light at the end of your tunnel, think creatively about your reentry.

***What talents do you possess, and how can they aid you in your transition back to society?***



**PROGRAM FACILITATORS**



*Nelson Mandela revisiting  
his prison cell in 1994*

*Among all of the activities Freedom and Lee mentioned, both took to creative writing as an outlet for stress and a vehicle to help others. Read their poem “Struggle Is How We Bleed” on page 14.*

**“It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given,  
that separates one person from another.”**

**- Nelson Mandela -**

PREVIOUS: **BRUSH OFF THE SMALL STUFF**

In the last issue, we asked how you practice self-regulation in your challenging environment - how have you learned to “Brush off the small stuff?” Here are some words of wisdom from a new subscriber, Damien!

the way I've learned how to deal with those situations is by focusing on what I'm motivated towards. It's said that when you're sufficiently motivated towards something the discipline to block out everything that gets in the way of it takes care of itself. I'm sufficiently motivated toward bettering myself, being a good example of a life surrendered to God, and my freedom. Being motivated towards those things helps me to be discipline about brushing off the small stuff that comes my way – I don't have the time nor the energy to focus on things that doesn't aid the things I'm motivated towards.

*Damien*



**NEW: BE OPEN. BE CURIOUS**

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

The great American poet, Walt Whitman (Leaves of Grass), famously said, *“Be curious, not judgmental.”* Curiosity stretches the bounds of our imagination, which can lead to new ideas we wouldn't otherwise think about. Having an open mind - not immediately judging our ideas - is important for creative brainstorming, whether it is for an artistic endeavor or solving a problem.

How can this be applied to relational situations? Is there a person, or relationship, or perhaps a conversation you can try to approach with more openness? What would it look like to be curious and ask questions to understand what's under the surface, rather than being judgmental and assuming you already know?

*Try out this Community Code in at least one interaction and let us know how it goes!*

CHECK OUT PAGE 12 FOR AN EXERCISE TO GO A STEP FURTHER



*“We learned to be patient observers like the owl. We learned cleverness from the crow, and courage from the jay, who will attack an owl ten times its size to drive it off its territory. But above all of them ranked the chickadee because of its indomitable spirit.”*

– Tom Brown, Jr.,  
Author of *The Tracker* and  
student of the Apache elder, Stalking Wolf

**CALLS FOR CELEBRATION**

**YOUR  
CELEBRATION  
GOES HERE**

We don't have to look far to find the bad around us - it's often where our minds automatically go - but how can we counter the negative by training ourselves to see the good? On a personal level, we suggest simply starting or ending your day by thinking of 3 things that went well (or that you anticipate going well). Collectively, we can spread the joy of someone's good news by celebrating with them. That's what this page is all about! So tell us...

- *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?*

The Choice

Own my past, Create my future.  
It is because I made the choice -  
I ruined my marriage  
I was left with my 4 boys alone  
I put ~~Zero~~ effort into employment  
I fell deeper into my addiction  
I respected no law earning my spot at the Pen  
It is because I made the choice -  
I am clean and sober nine months  
I am making positive changes to my life  
I work on the relationships I've lost  
I was able to speak to her, and her daughter  
I am building the character, I was so blind  
It is because I made the choice -  
It's been 2 years clean on Parole  
I have my relationship with sons again  
I have an amazing job creating security  
I am engaged to the one I love for 20 years  
I have 'em all, my 4 boys, my wife, my flowers  
It is because I made the choice.

All my love  
MR. Duff

Doing the long Covid 19 spell, I kind of stayed to my self. starting in sept, I'll be enrolled in a college course. I owe it to myself to grow in more ways than one 😊  
Thomas

I'm thirteen months away from my release. "Glory To God" This Journey that changed my whole life and prepared me to be a better person. I'll be going to Culinary School and taking classes to be a Certified Peer Specialist. I know that GOD will help me to open my Food Truck, Starting my Prison Recipes, Write my Cook Book and Open a Re-Entry Program for Women and Children. I believe in bringing women here back with their children.

Nyia



## SL PROGRAM UPDATES

We've been up to a lot these past few months, and want to be sure you know of some of the ways SL is seeking to unlock human potential in prisons around the country. Unfortunately we're not able to offer all of these programs everywhere, but several conversations are in the works. Expansion is definitely happening!



### NEW ACADEMIES KICKED OFF AT BELMONT CI (OHIO) AND SCI CHESTER (PA)

Meanwhile, our pilot Academies at James River CC and North Dakota State Penitentiary are wrapping up! *(Read more on the next page)*



### THE LOOP IS CATCHING ON ACROSS THE COUNTRY!

- Over 470 subscribers from 54 facilities in 8 different states
- Now available on tablets in South Carolina, Ohio and NYC



### CCB - VOL 2. IS NOW AVAILABLE! ASK ABOUT IT AT YOUR FACILITY

To make the most of this peer-driven resource, we have...

- Promo flyers & a video trailer to help get word out!
- Reflection & discussion questions to keep the conversation going
- A 4-part group series to strengthen community & creativity



### SPOKEN WORD LAB IS NOW ON TABLETS!

- Similar to the Playwriting Lab, this video series is hosted by professional poets and features real-life examples of pieces written & performed by participants of past Workshops.
- We're exploring other ways to make these videos available inside, so if you have any ideas, let us know!



## ACADEMIES IN NORTH DAKOTA ARE IN FULL SWING!

Five groups like the one pictured above are well on their way to completing the 26 videoconferencing sessions of the SL Academy. So far they have discovered their Character Strengths and learned how to spot them in others, then applied them in a Creative Writing course, built up more tools for well-being and character, and even wrote a play together as a team. Their last step is to take inventory of all the tools they acquired and devise a plan to use them to maintain a state of wellness in the midst of stress and setbacks.

One participant, Doug, was so inspired after the first day of Orientation, he immediately wrote a poem called “The Choice” (page 7). He told us, “No more. No more. I will own the past but never again. I hope one day to be just like Ms. Naomi, Lee, and Freedom.... I will break the chain and help others in my shoes.”

Here’s what some other guys had to say at the halfway point:

- ***“Having to just create something on the spot is a new challenge, a new skill for me... But life does happen on the spot, as it turns out. So having that skill is a good thing.” - Jeremy***
- ***“It helps you be comfortable with being uncomfortable.” - David***
- ***“I’ve been working on not judging people but judging behavior (including my own), and to be able to find what good things people do, and commenting on that. You don’t hear a lot of comments like that in this environment, so since I’ve been in this class I catch myself strength spotting people.” - “\$ixty”***

***See page 19 for a comedic poem Mano wrote for the Creative Writing course.***

If you haven't done so yet, we encourage you to consider what your top character strengths are. You should've received our Welcome Packet when you subscribed to The Loop, which includes a full list of the 24 character strengths - or you can flip to page 13 for a quick refresher. Shawn took some time to identify his top strength and shared his thoughts with us:

I chose Bravery, because bravery best explains my character transition. Every step I've taken, and continue to take requires a certain level of bravery. Stepping outside the comfort zone requires a level of bravery. Facing a challenge & obstacle with a positive attitude requires a level of bravery. Self-regulation requires a level of bravery. Be brave in your walk.

Shawn

Thank you Shawn for sharing about bravery and some examples of what it looks like for you. One way our staff has explored character strengths is through what is called **strength spotting**, where we take time to identify examples of when we saw a teammate use a character strength to accomplish a task or connect with another person. If you are having trouble identifying your character strengths, try to spot strengths in others and then ask yourself, "What strengths would people spot in me?"

**Before we explore the character strength of creativity,** we want to look back on the last issue's strength of self-regulation. To practice and build muscle in this area, we suggested the WOOP exercise. (As a reminder WOOP stands for Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, and Plan.) Robert and Cordell shared some of their thoughts in regard to this character strength and the exercise. Take a look at what they had to say:

LAST ISSUE



SELF-REGULATION

Self-controlled.  
Manages impulses  
and emotions

- Regulating what one feels & does
- Being disciplined
- Controlling one's appetites & emotions

I really like the self regulation theme. Self discipline is something that I've been practicing for a little while now and it is really empowering. To be mindful of how you are feeling during a conflict or a potential conflict can help de-escalate a situation. Watching your emotions closely can help you control them instead of the other way around. But it is like a muscle; it takes time and effort to master yourself and grow. So don't give up when you lose control. Just regain yourself and continue your path of self-mastery.

~ Robert

The quote I heard many years ago that changed my life goes "Allow a person to control your emotions, and they'll have control of your actions. If they have control of your actions, then they'll also have control of your destiny." I also found that doing the WOOP exercise is an excellent practice for self-regulation. I'm a visual person, so writing down the things I need to do is a perfect reminder of the things I really want to do.

Always Love,  
Cordell





**CREATIVITY**  
Original & Adaptive.  
Clever. A problem  
solver. Sees and does  
things in different ways

## VIA DEFINITION: CREATIVITY

*“Creativity is thinking of new ways to do things. It involves producing ideas or behaviors that are original. However, originality is not enough: whatever is created, whether an idea or a product, must also be useful or adaptable.”*

*“There are two essential components to Creativity- originality and adaptiveness. A creative individual generates ideas or behaviors that are novel or unusual and these make a positive contribution to the individual's life or the lives of others.” (VIA Institute on Character, n.d.)*

Oftentimes when we first think of creativity, we think of some type of art form, which can be a meaningful way in which people express their creativity. The below abstract gives an overview of a chapter that looks at the variety of reasons why creativity in an art form can be advantageous, both by the direct enjoyment of the art form as well as the longer term indirect ways it can positively impact relationships and emotional regulation. Take a look and consider how the arts and creative expression impacts you.

*VIA Institute On Character. (n.d.). What is Creativity?.*  
<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/creativity>



*Travis*

PROGRAM DEVELOPER

**ABSTRACT** “For many, there is little more rewarding than the feeling of curling up with a good book, wandering a famous art gallery, or listening to a favorite musician perform live in front of an audience. But do the arts, music, and literature actually make our lives happier, richer, and more meaningful? We suggest they do. In this chapter, we review empirical evidence for the psychological benefits of the humanities, including art, music, and literature, and find that across a wide variety of samples, exposure and engagement is consistently linked to greater well-being. In particular, we suggest that the humanities may increase well-being directly by providing people with enjoyable, rich, and meaningful experiences, as well as indirectly by fostering skills and abilities that contribute to psychological well-being in the long-term. These approaches map onto two mechanisms: 1) direct affective benefits that create enjoyable, rich, and interesting experiences, and 2) indirect cognitive benefits, including social abilities and motivations that promote subjective well-being via interpersonal connection and self- and emotion-regulation. Art, music, and literature may not only provide temporary nourishment for a good life, but teach people lasting skills they can capitalize on to increase longterm well-being (Westgate & Oishi, 2020, p. 1).”

*Westgate, E. C., & Oishi, S. (n.d.). Art, music, and literature. Download Art, music, and literature: Do the humanities make our lives richer, happier, and more meaningful? In L. Tay, & J. Pawelski (Eds.), Oxford handbook of positive psychology on the arts and humanities. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Manuscript in preparation.*

**CREATIVITY IN MOTION:** Sarah, one of our teaching artists and choreographers, shared this exercise. It may feel a little strange - you may want to give your cellie a heads up, or convince him/her to join you - but consider giving it a try!

- 1 - Observe an interaction between at least two people
- 2 - Note 4-5 different physical movements or gestures (ex: head turn, step, lift keys)
- 3 - Take on those movements in your own body, making them bigger or smaller, faster or slower, etc
- 4 - Find an order to string them together in a “phrase”
- 5 - Explore: How would you physicalize this phrase in a confrontative way? A welcoming way? How do they feel different?

Put on some music and see how your movement changes to match. Try different styles of music. Add new movements & phrases to choreograph an entire song!



Although important, creativity as a character strength goes beyond artistic interpretation. It can be applied to almost anything: a job, relationships, communication, etc. (So even if I “have two left feet” or “can’t carry a tune in a bucket” I actually do “have a creative bone in my body”? Yes, figuratively speaking, you do!) We want to challenge you to think of creativity beyond artistic expression. When was the last time you felt creative in solving a problem with a friend or at your job? What are examples other than an art form where you have been creative?

Try the exercise below to practice creativity in a new way.

**Think of a current situation or problem you are facing. Take some time to think about the multiple solutions you could use to resolve it. Make a list of potential ideas no matter how crazy they might be. The goal is to brainstorm a variety of ways to solve the problem with the mindset that there is not just one correct solution. Based on (Niemi, 2018)**

*What is the current situation or problem?*

*What are all of the ways you could solve this situation or problem?*

*(Remember not to judge your ideas as you brainstorm - be open and curious)*

*Which way would move you closer to your bigger picture goals?*

### What makes it harder or easier for you to think creatively about the situation or problem?

**SOMETHING TO KEEP IN MIND:** Creativity has been shown to be enhanced through environments that are supportive, open, informal and reinforcing. (Niemi, 2018) **What can you do, within your control, to create an environment that enhances constructive creativity?**

*Niemi, R. M. (2018). Character strengths interventions: A field-guide for practitioners. Boston, MA: Hogrefe.*

## STRUGGLE IS HOW WE BLEED

BY LEE HORTON & DENNIS “FREEDOM” HORTON

Nothing is freely given  
Trying is the demand  
Difficulty is fertile ground  
Giving up is a con game  
Failure is a strategy without a plan

Swimming against the current  
Pushed back by the waves  
Arms fatigued  
Heart pounding  
Legs giving out  
Brain on fire  
Tired

Move forward  
Keep moving  
Never stop moving  
Hold on  
Breathe

Don't listen to the  
Haters hiding in the darkness  
Trying to start a fire  
With wet matches  
Failing

They are handcuffed to fearful shadows  
Of I might not make it  
So I  
Never tried  
Sum total of the next day is unknown  
Life is full of wounds liberated by scars

Progress is falling down  
Struggle is how we bleed  
Mastering emotions is a defense  
Humility is the witness  
Adversity is the investigation  
Uncovering the will to succeed

## IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE OUR NEXT ISSUE WILL BE THE LAST ONE OF 2021!

Ready or not, the days are getting shorter and the nights are getting colder. For many, this can lead to a sense of dread about the holidays. So for our Nov/Dec issue, we're going to do things a little differently... Instead of focusing on just one strength, we'd like to address the strength(s) that you might find most helpful and relevant during this season. It could be one we've touched on in the past, or something new.

*Here's a quick refresher:*

**FROM 2020: GRATITUDE // PERSPECTIVE // KINDNESS // LOVE**

**FROM 2021: HUMOR (JOY) // HOPE // HONESTY // SELF-REGULATION // CREATIVITY**


**15 OTHERS:**

**APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY & EXCELLENCE // BRAVERY // CURIOSITY // FAIRNESS**

**FORGIVENESS // HUMILITY // JUDGEMENT (DISCERNMENT) // LEADERSHIP**

**LOVE OF LEARNING // PERSEVERANCE // SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE // SPIRITUALITY**

**TEAMWORK // ZEST**

 Remember, we each have all 24 strengths within us to help us live to our fullest potential, despite whatever circumstance we find ourselves in. **Let us know what strengths you might rely on to maintain a healthy perspective over the next few months.** Our plan is to touch on as many of those strengths as we can in our next issue. Let's all be in this together!

*When I received my first issue and saw "The Loop" at the top I immediately felt a feeling of connectedness. In that title, you perfectly captured the condition of an incarcerated person: Out of the Loop. The enemy takes every occasion and uses every circumstance to hammer home this lie that we are isolated and alone, and disconnected from a body. But when you guys came in to do the workshop you strengthened our community in here and left us feeling even more connected to you. And it seems that you are continuing with that very important assignment. Thank you for reminding me that I am In The Loop.*

*lol*

 **WE NEED COVER ART. FOR REAL.**

Alright everyone. It's time to get real. We know you draw. We know you paint. We know you sketch. We've seen what kind of talent exists among this community (don't make us name names), so stop being shy. In this edition, we're celebrating the creativity that resides in each of us, so we're making a special section to highlight this request: we want to display your artwork on the cover of The Loop. Please flood our mailbox with the creative expressions that are waiting for you to put them to paper. Your art could be the inspiration someone else in this community needs to see, so please take some time to send us something to share! Thanks to Tony in South Carolina for the cover art for this issue!



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: TAMIKA BELL



*Tamika was given a life without parole sentence at age 16. But because of a change in PA legislation, after 24 years, she was released on January 31, 2019. Since that time Tamika has been on a mission to “change the conversation to help get people out of prison and give them the support they need.” She is now living in her own home in Philadelphia with her husband/childhood sweetheart, 2 Shitzu dogs, and three cats. She feels “blessed and alive” and appreciates every moment and opportunity that comes her way. But she emphasizes that she “will never forget her sisters inside who raised her, and everyone else inside.” Tamika wants to write a book to help those coming out, and has a job at a Philly nonprofit that serves those in need in the community. Later this year a PBS television special will feature her story.*

### **What are highlights for you since your release?**

My first meal was at Red Lobster where I got to touch and use a cell phone...and Facetimed with someone! Being interviewed by the New York Times, Philadelphia Inquirer, and BBC where I could share a good story about someone who spent years in prison. Having my quotes and picture featured in a large mural project in North Philadelphia. (pictured)

### **What were your challenges upon release?**

I felt like an alien. It took me a long time to get used to all the changes in the world, especially since I went in so young. I had never touched a cell phone, it took 45 minutes to order a sandwich with the touchscreen, and the bus talked to us!

### **What would you say to those inside?**

Do all you can to prepare for release, even if you are a lifer. Take all the classes and programs you can. (And I urge prisons to offer more classes to more lifers.) Get used to using electronic tablets. Take advantage of therapy while you are inside and when you are released. Find safe, positive people to be around who you can talk to when you get stressed. Know it will take time to get acclimated to the world if you have spent a long time in prison. It can take 6-12 months to appreciate and get used to freedom.

## HOLIDAYS/SPECIAL EVENTS COMING UP:

**HISPANIC HERITAGE  
MONTH**

SEPT 15 - OCT 15

**INDIGENOUS  
PEOPLE'S DAY**

OCT 11

**DAYLIGHT SAVINGS ENDS  
(CLOCKS FALL BACK)**

NOV 7

**VETERAN'S DAY**

NOV 11

**HEALTH & WELLNESS**

We learned yoga in prison - first taking some classes and then becoming certified yoga instructors. At first it felt awkward, but after a while, striking yoga poses became reflex. Practicing yoga freed us mentally and physically. Every breath and posture was cathartic and healing. "Inhale - expand and lengthen," we would guide our students. "Exhale, contract and release. Let go of the negative, and free yourself to live your best life." For us, practicing yoga in prison was like poetry in motion, each breath a verse and every pose a stanza, opening a pathway to inner peace.

*Here are some beginner yoga poses to try!*



I rely on extremely basic breathwork, simply observing the breath coming in and out of the nose, especially the feelings of the breath at the base of the nose and just below the nose. We all breathe many times each day, but we forget to observe the breath. If I am particularly anxious or tense, I will then observe the breath and let my chest cavity inflate like a balloon, concentrating on the breath going down to the diaphragm.


*Candice*

**HEALTH & WELLNESS TIPS FROM OTHERS**

During the day I thank Father Sun for giving us light and warmth. At Night I thank Mother Moon for her guidance and strength. I pray to them both and others for love, knowledge and peace in my heart.  
-Wendy-

When I do my rounds as a Peer Support Specialist (CPS) worker, I always say "Help me, to help you!" It always works.

*Yancy*

 Send us any practices you use to keep your mind and body well!

## FEATURED WRITING

Each Day Brings a Chance  
To do Better.

How often we wish for another chance  
to make a fresh beginning,  
A chance to blot out our mistakes  
And change failure into winning  
And it does not take a special time  
To make a brand-new start  
It only takes a deep desire  
To try with all our heart  
To live a little better  
and always be forgiving  
And to add a little sunshine  
To the world in which we're living  
So never give up in despair  
and think that you are through  
For there's always tomorrow  
and a chance to start anew.

Yummy  
(



Many followers of the world's major religions believe in a divine Creator, where the earth and seas, the stars and galaxies - and every living thing - is the work of God's hands, created out of nothing. Perhaps this explains the human connection to art and beauty. Ever wonder how a piece of music stirs up buried feelings, or how a sunset can stop us in our tracks? How can a TV commercial move us to tears???

As we explored in the last issue, each one of us is uniquely wired to experience a connection with the sacred in different ways. One of the most common is through meditation on the created world. David, a lifer, found a way to continue this practice from the confines of his own cell.

***“Art enables me to expand my vision beyond my limited world, while changing my perspective of that world’s limitations...painting has become a great avenue & has helped enormously in dealing with the whole Covid lockdown. God knew I'd need it! :-)”***

***-David***



We encourage you to spend some time looking at this photo of David's painting, called "Good Morning," created in March 2021. As you meditate on this work of art, take a few slow breaths and imagine yourself in this scene...

- Are you standing on the shore? Lounging in a boat? Flying through the mist?
- What can you see? What can you hear? Smell? Feel?
- What thoughts or emotions are you aware of in this moment?
- Is there anything God might want to say to you? Anything you want to say to God?

# GAMES & ACTIVITIES



Angelina

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

## DRAWING BASICS FACES



## RECIPES

Here's My Recipe:  
Cold Delicious Salad  
Ingredients:  
Noodles, Meat, Cheese, Mayo  
Pickles, Ranch, Season Pack, Salt,  
Pepper, Onion, Garlic  
Mix: Meat with Mayo, Pickles  
and Ranch with Season Pack  
Salt, Pepper, Onion and  
Garlic  
In A Bowl Then Add The Noodles

Nyia

### Tuna Wrap

mayo Pickle Tuna  
Bag of Hot chips  
Ice Tea Drink, ☺  
Thomas

## TABLET MIX-TAPE

Song Submission: Inspirational

Song: 'Seasons' By: Donald Lawrence & The Tri-city Singers  
Shawn

Wake-up: Third Day Born Again  
Work Out: Jennifer Lopez Lets Get Loud  
Anything from the album "Furious Angels" by Rob Dougan  
Meditate to: Search for "Jason Stephenson" (artist)  
(relaxmeonline.com)  
Sing-along to: Brandon Heath The Light in Me  
Groove to: Train Drops of Jupiter  
Sting

Candice



## KEEP THE SUBMISSIONS COMING!

We'll keep adding any song recommendations, book reviews, recipes, and of course puzzles!

## CORNY CORNER

### THE KNOCK KNOCK EDITION

**Knock knock? Who's there?**

**Jilly.** Jilly who?

*It's jilly in here! Can you ask somebody to turn off that air!?*

**Knock knock? Who's there?**

**Quacker.** Quacker who?

*Quacker nother corny joke, and I'mmmmm leaving!* 😊

**Knock knock? Who's there?**

**Bolten.** Bolten who?

*Bolten this door so you can't get in!*

**Knock knock? Who's there?**

**Bacon.** Bacon who?

*Bacon you a commissary cake for your birthday!* 😊

**Knock knock? Who's there?**

**Des.** Des who?

*Des no bell...that's why I knocked!* 😊

**Knock knock? Who's there?**

**Cash.** Cash who?

*The nuts you ordered*



DRAIN TEASERS

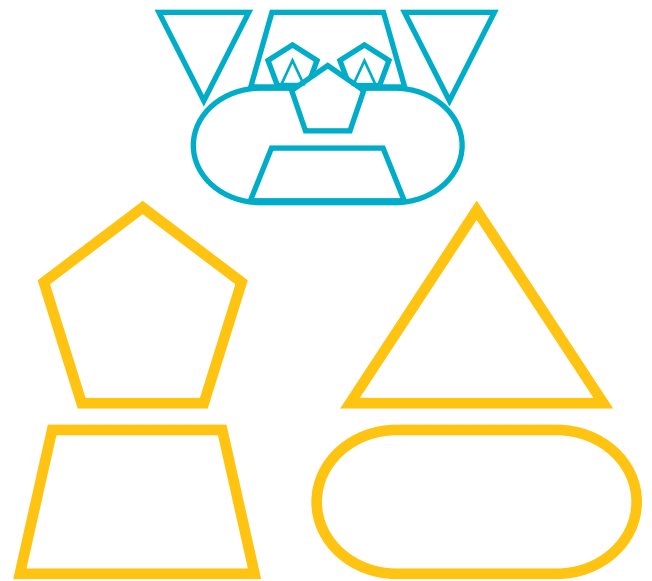
1. A man pushes his car to a hotel and tells the owner he is bankrupt. Why?
2. A man stands on one side of a river, his dog on the other. He calls his dog, who crosses the river without getting wet and without using a bridge or boat. How did the dog do it?
3. What makes this number unique?  
8,549,176,320
4. I am the beginning of sorrow and the end of sickness. You cannot express happiness without me yet I am in the midst of crosses. I am always in risk yet never in danger. You may find me in the sun, but I am never out of darkness. What am I?
5. What can you hold without using your hands or even touching it?
6. What 5 letter word becomes shorter when you add 2 more letters to it?
7. Your parents have 6 sons, including you, and each son has one sister. How many people are in the family?



## MADE OUT OF SHAPES

As a staff, we've played a game where someone has to describe an object using only shape words. The rest of the group has to draw the object being described as best as they can. So for example, if a T.V. is being described, someone might say, "Draw a square. Then draw two lines diagonally coming out of the top of that square." etc. At the end, we see who has the most accurate picture.

So to reverse the exercise, try and create an everyday object using only the shapes below. Here's an example of a "dog":



**SHAKESPEARE WITH STYLE** While practicing Shakespearean Sonnets in the Academy, we got inspired by contemporary songs rewritten in Olde English. Mano from North Dakota took this theme song and rewrote it as an incredible throwback with style and class. *Can you guess the inspiration for this poem?*

*Thus rest yourself and head to a story,  
A fable of an auspicious voyage...  
Commencing from a tropic anchorage  
Aboard this wee vessel.*

*The mate was a handy Mariner man.  
Thy commodore daring and firm...  
Five wayfarers set abroad that day,  
For a jaunt just three hours, a jaunt just three hours...*

*The weather began blowing abrupt.  
The wee vessel was cast about.  
For not the mettle of the valiant crew;  
Lost would be the vessel, lost would be the vessel*

*The vessel ran aground upon the shore of  
this uncharted, barren isle.  
The Mariner,  
The Commodore too,  
The Entrepreneur and his spouse,  
The Thespian,  
The Professional and Mary Ann,  
Here upon Mariner's Isle.*



# FOR THE NEXT ISSUE



## OPPORTUNITIES TO CONTRIBUTE

(Try to submit on blank paper if possible)

Encouragement for the Season - p.3  
Ask Anything - p.4  
Community Code - p.6  
Positive News - p.7

Creativity in Practice - p.12  
Strengths for the Future - p.13  
Cover Art - p.13  
Health & Wellness - p.15

Games & Activities - p.18  
Made out of Shapes - p.19

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

### LONI'S RIDDLES

- ANSWERS
1. He is playing MONOPOLY.
  2. The RIVER WAS FROZEN.
  3. Each Number is listed in ALPHABETICAL ORDER.
  4. The letter "S."
  5. YOUR BREATH.
  6. SHORT.
  7. 9 total - 6 SONS, 1 DAUGHTER AND 2 PARENTS.

### SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

You are always welcome to write to us and share whatever's on your mind. If you would like to contribute to The Loop specifically, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- Our goal with The Loop is to "Speak Life," so submissions should have a positive feel, which may include creative expression, encouraging words, or a constructive release of negative emotion.
- Remember to be inclusive of people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds. We have a really diverse community!
- If you submit a longer piece, please try and keep it to one page.
- If writing a submission, please try and be as legible as possible so we can all read it!
- Avoid details of your case or criticism of the institution/DOC.
- If there is anything in a letter you do NOT want to be shared in a newsletter, please note that clearly.
- Published submissions will be credited with first name, unless you specifically request to remain anonymous.
- Submissions should be mailed to us by **NOV 12** in order to be included in the next issue of The Loop.

**shininglight**

THE LOOP INTERACTIVE NEWSLETTER  
SUBSCRIPTION CARD

NAME / #: \_\_\_\_\_

FACILITY: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

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Send us this card to subscribe today!

**Shining Light**  
P.O. Box 267 | Annville, PA 17003

Thank you to all who contributed to this issue of The Loop & we look forward to hearing from you soon with new artwork & messages, encouraging comments and stories!