

# THE LOOP

Love

JUDGEMENT

CREATIVITY

PERSPECTIVE

HUMOR

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

SPIRITUALITY

SELF-REGULATION

GRATITUDE

TEAMWORK

LOVE OF LEARNING

HOPES

BRAVERY

FORGIVENESS

APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY & EXCELLENCE

FAIRNESS

CURIOSITY

HUMILITY

LEADERSHIP

HONESTY

KINDNESS

ZEST

PERSEVERANCE

PRUDENCE

charles



H

O

P

E





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

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

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

It is you, the readers, who make The Loop so special. Your stories of engagement with exercises and the impact it is having, your creativity and insight, and your willingness to invite your peers to subscribe, is what keeps momentum going.

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

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

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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

### CONTENT

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

### FORMATTING

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

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

# WELCOME, READERS!

Happy New Year! 'Tis the season for making life improvements, right? I've never been big on "New Year's Resolutions," but I do use the change of the calendar to take stock of the past year - highlights and hurdles - and look ahead to the coming year. Sometimes this includes setting specific goals; often it's more about how I want to approach life differently in general. But always, there's a sense of hope that the new year will somehow be better than the last. ***Is it hope or wishful thinking? What's the difference?***

Our readers have been sending in really great insight into this topic of hope, and some thoughtful questions, too. We've tried to include as much of this as possible, but our space is limited. So I also want to encourage you to share your insights and questions with other readers around you, or even outside supporters who read it online at [shining-light.com/theloop](http://shining-light.com/theloop).

**IN THIS ISSUE:** We'll unpack the idea that hope is different from wishful thinking. It includes optimism and a positive outlook on the future, but from a realistic point of view. As a character strength, hope is more active and involves a 2-part concept called "agency" - the belief that a goal can be achieved, and practical pathways for how to achieve it.

**Keep an eye out for some new section logos you've sent it - and keep them coming! (see p. 5 & 6)**

Congratulations to name **Charles Swint (PA)** for your 1st Place entry in our Cover Art Contest! See the 2nd & 3rd place entries on Page 7, along with other great artwork on the Gallery Wall and spread throughout (and in the "Creative Expressions" collection on tablets through Edovo). Charles sent in 17 pieces of art - including the cover and the Loop design you see on page 2 - and he had this to say to the whole community: *"For me the loop has in many ways inspired me and makes it easy to have hope. Hearing all the stories and where others are at in their lives shows me, proves to me that I can do it too."*

Many thanks to all 81 readers who mailed in artwork, writings and other responses as contributions to this issue... and to the record 390 who engaged via tablet!



*Kelly*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

*Special shoutout to those of you who submitted by mail for all 5 issues this year:*

- **Johnny Brown (NC)**
- **Gary Farlow (SC)**
- **Noel Gomez (PA)**
- **Wayne Greene (NJ)**
- **Jake Lampl (ND)**
- **K. Daniel Okken (AR)**
- **Christopher Parr (OH)**
- **Albert Ramos (NC)**
- **Larry Stromberg (PA)**


## TABLE OF

# Contents

To You, From Jeff	4
Positive News	5
Creative Connection	6-7
SL Updates	8-9
Community Spotlight	10
Strength Spotting	11
Creative Writing Part 1	12

Themed Responses	13
Real Talk with Ms. Naomi	14
End of the Tunnel	15
CS - Definition & Optimal Use	16
CS - In Practice	17
Community Code	18
Health & Wellness	19

Creative Writing Part 2	20-21
Constructive Debate	22-23
Meditation/Prayer	24
Holidays/Events & Books	25
Just for Fun	26-27
List of Contributors & More Information	28

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**



*Jeff*

**FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**Happy New Year!** May you start 2024 with great hope for what is to come. Hope has always been at the core of what moves Shining Light forward. We believe it can be for you too, regardless of how difficult things have been or may be today.

In this issue, you will read about people making the tough decisions to have and hold onto hope. Hope requires action, ranging from a simple choice to see what is going right when there is plenty going wrong, to stepping into new and unknown spaces, experiences, or relationships.

We provide all this encouragement through The Loop and other programs because we know hope just isn't always easy. Last night, I was in an Academy session with a group of men in a prison, and one of them shared, "I've been put down most of my life, and no one wanted to hear what I had to say, but SL made me see the light in the darkness." The world around him had not changed, but how he saw it had. Working at self-regulation and self-advocacy, he was starting to develop some hope for the future.

From my personal life experience, I offered him all the encouragement I could. I have had my own struggles with depression and a lack of hope for the future. Making the difficult choices to engage in treatment of various kinds and accept support from people around me has been helpful. But, in addition to that, the very basic tools we constantly promote in The Loop - things like "What went right?" - have been life-changing for me.

It is fascinating that while Shining Light's mission is to bring hope, as we go about doing the work, we need to constantly remind each other to stay hopeful, too. There are many voices challenging and questioning what we do. Finding the resources to keep up with the needs before us can feel impossible. But, we hold onto hope. We choose to believe in the potential of all people, and we act on that belief.

Your input to The Loop and your stories of hope inspire us and so many others in the Shining Light community, in prison and outside. Together, we can help people discover hope: hope for themselves and hope for others they once saw as hopeless. Let's look forward to what 2024 will bring!

**THE LOOP** | **BY THE NUMBERS**



	<b>2023</b>	<i>2024 (Goal/Projection)</i>
Total # of print copies distributed	<b>36,500+</b>	60,000+
# of Facilities (in # of States) w/ Subscribers***	<b>217 (30)</b>	325 (35)
Average # of Submissions per Issue (Mail & Tablets)	<b>1,000</b>	1,300
# of Individual Submitters per Issue (Mail & Tablets)	<b>350</b>	500
# of Completions of The Loop on Tablets	<b>11,900</b>	25,000

\*\*\*Due to mail restrictions, we are not able to process print subscriptions to jails and some state prisons. But we see you on the Edovo app - please continue engaging that way!



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



Logo Idea from K. Daniel O. (AR)

I am being resentenced in December 2023, and as stated in my letter to 2023, this year was all about progress + not perfection. I will no longer have the politics of a life sentence hindering parole chances or opportunities. 2023 is my year of thankfulness!  
-Daniel M. (MI)

I was given a scholarship status to earn a Bachelor Degree in Theology from a Bible Institute in Texas. Thank you Jesus! -K. Daniel O. (AR)

I'm hired for a 'Range Walker' job... just to be interviewed for this is an accomplishment let alone actually hired! Not only will I be able to become self-sufficient without hustling but it'll afford me the opportunity to send a little money home to my mom to give her a helping hand. The other positive is I'll be able to talk to guys that are in Smu (the hole) and maybe say something that'll help them or lift them up a bit. I've been on the other side of that door plenty and know just how isolated it can be.  
-Matt P. (OH)

"I have met a lot of good people, I have an open line of communication with my family, and God lives in my heart. My three beautiful kids are back with their mom & I'll be getting out soon, with a new look on life and a plan for spiritual growth."

-Eric Y. (SC)

MY MOTHER LEFT ME WHEN I WAS A CHILD DUE TO HER ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG USE. I FORGAVE HER LONG AGO. FOR A LONG TIME SHE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHEN MY BIRTHDAY WAS. SHE ASKED ME MANY TIMES WHATS THE DATE. I REALIZED THAT WAS DUE TO HER ADDICTION. OUT OF THE BLUE I RECEIVED A BIRTHDAY CARD FROM MY MOM, THAT'S A BIG DEAL FOR ME, WHERE I DIDN'T NEED TO REMIND HER. THEN SHE HIT ME WITH NEWS THAT I LONGED FOR, FOR MY WHOLE LIFE. SHE DOESN'T DRINK OR DO DRUGS ANYMORE AND HAS BEEN CLEAN FOR SOME TIME NOW. SHE ASKED ME WAS I HAPPY FOR HER. MORE THAN SHE KNOWS. -CHARLES S. (PA)

"I have successfully completed two modules in my 'Thinking for Good' class."  
-Rebecca G. (IL)

"I kicked a severe opioid habit."  
-Brenda R. (IN)

I wrote my grandma last night and right as I was about to send the letter out this morning I checked my commissary account to see how much I had on there and there was a extra \$50 on there because she had put it on there last night. -Chris P. (OH)

"I've worked at the sewing factory shop for 5 years! That's the longest I've ever held a job!"  
-Jocelyn N. (NE)

I just found out that my piece "Dear 2023" has been published in the shining light digital anthology "Creative Expressions from the Loop." Thank you so much. Inhappy to share my good news to my family.  
-Cheo (PA)

## 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?

"I have started exploring my creative side by delving into art lately, and I've become quite obsessed. I'm excited about starting my junior year in college...which is all made possible by the tireless work of the staff at the education department at RCI, SC. Thank you all. You know who you are. And my roommate is coming up on his release date, working diligently to earn his G.E.D., so he can enroll in college before he's released."

-Adam F. (SC)

I've been working with the Warden here at this facility, about establishing a Veterans Club, I am proud to say that we recently had a Veterans Day meal, for all the veterans here at the facility, and we were able to have family members attend. We also had a few keynote speakers, and veteran representatives from the local area. We are located in the middle of 3 major military installations, so we have access to many resources for vets. It was really nice to see guys visit with their family, and to be inspired by the representatives that spoke.  
-Michael H. (NC)

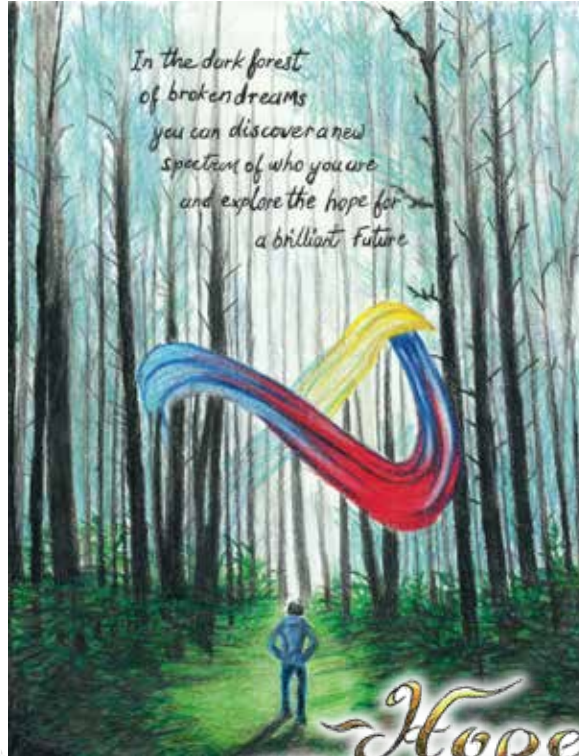




Logo Idea from Gary F. (SC)

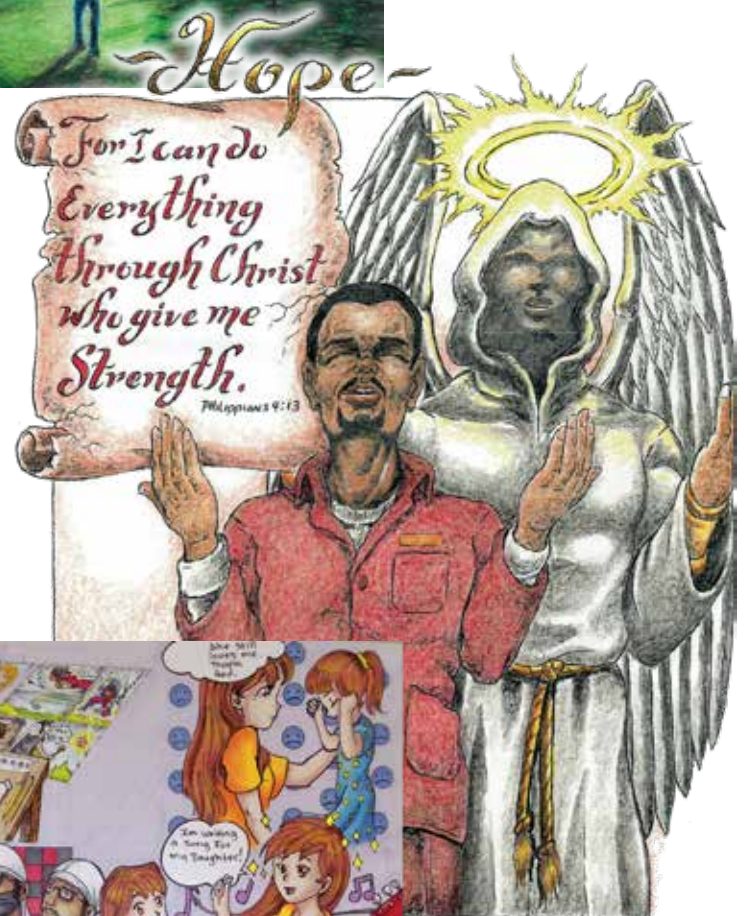


جوليا

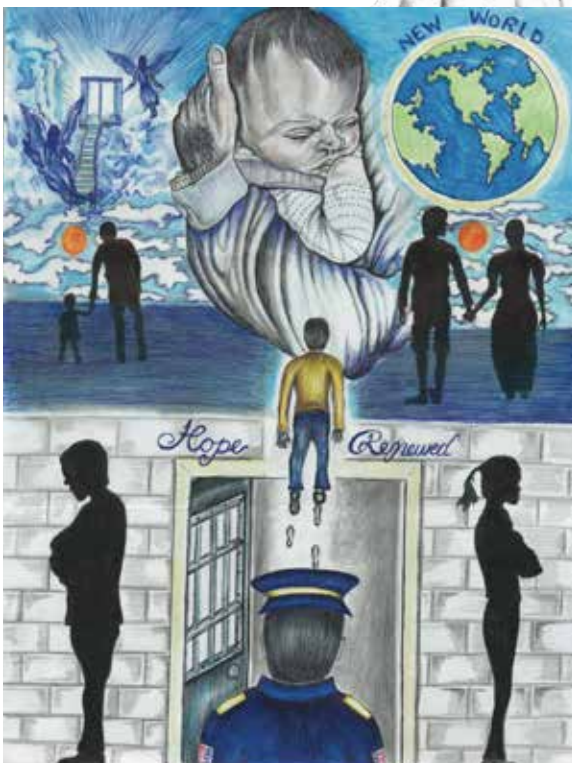


← Gary F. (SC) submitted this piece to go along with his Hope Sonnet (prompt on p.20).

Ms. Naomi then read that sonnet aloud for our SL Holiday Encouragement Video, available on Edovo!



By Joseph Lynch

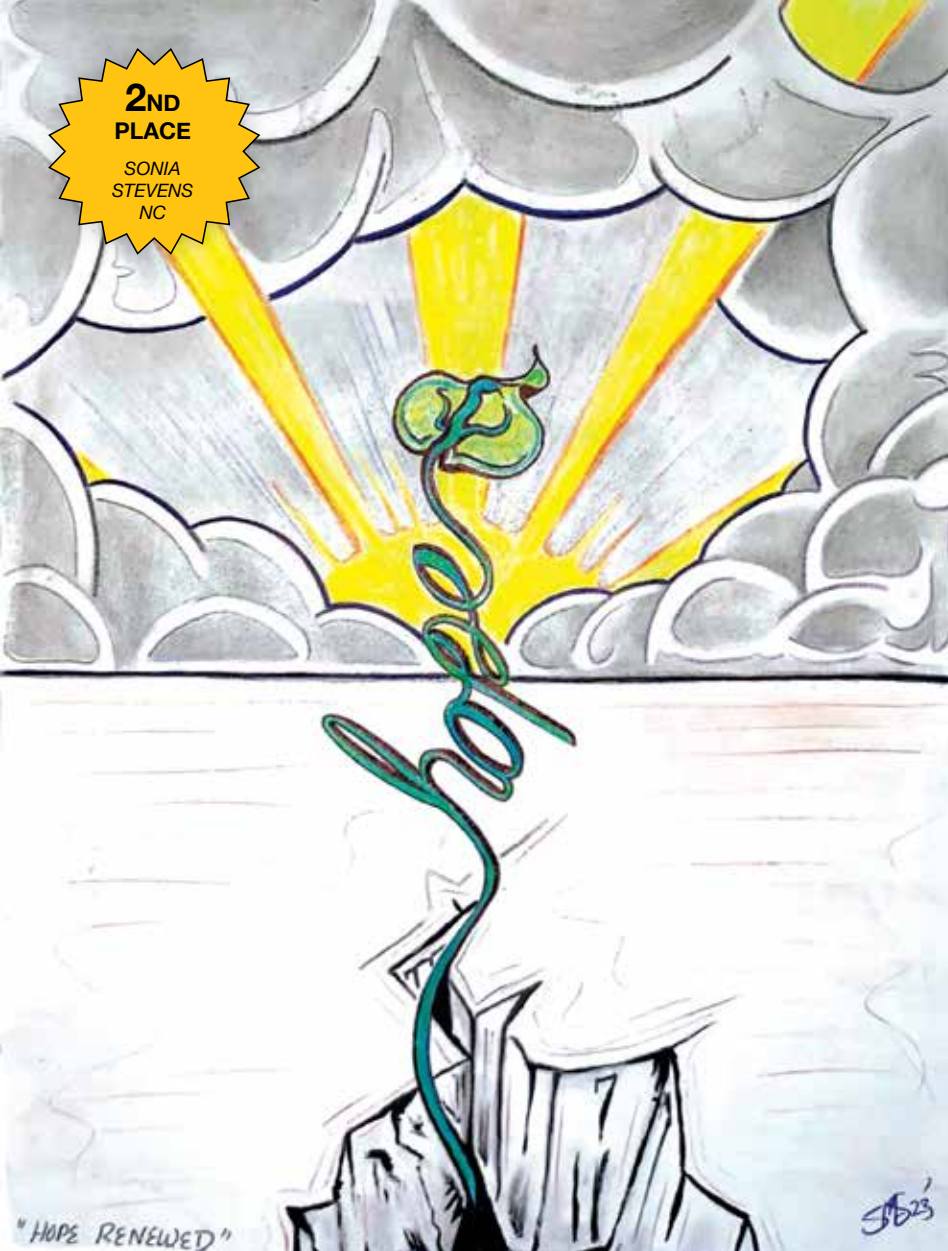


(Clockwise)  
 Submissions by:  
 Gary F. (SC)  
 Joseph L. (PA)  
 Joshua P. (SC)  
 Eugene B. (PA)  
 Jake D. (ND)



## COVER ART CONTEST

This is a chance to share your artistic creativity & help The Loop make a strong first impression across the country!



**2ND PLACE**

SONIA  
STEVENS  
NC



**3RD PLACE**

CHURCH  
PA

*"Hope is the seed that I carry with me. I carry it in my heart. Through the darkest of days, and the blackest nights, I hold tight... Until at last, hope breaks free. Stretching and reaching toward the sky. To greet the light of a new day. Hope renewed feels like the beauty that springs forth from desolation."*

- Sonia

*"There are a lot of men/women who are growing old, and have grown old in prison...some of these OG's shuffle along, bent over, but they always seem to have a kind word for their fellow inmates... it just goes to show no one is too old to shine their light on others."*

- Church

### PRIZES

- 1st Place - \$50 // 2nd Place - \$35 // 3rd Place - \$15 (All winners receive a Certificate of Appreciation)
- Prized pieces and honorable mentions will be published in the "Creative Expressions From The Loop" collection on tablets and in our online Art Gallery at [www.shining-light.com/showcase](http://www.shining-light.com/showcase).

### CRITERIA

- Originality, artistry, and connection to the theme
- Must abide by Submission Guidelines (p. 2)
- Must be portrait format (Keep in mind the logo will be added at the top)

### UPCOMING THEMES

- **Humility (think: "accurate self-assessment of limitations & abilities") DEADLINE: February 20, 2024**
- **Leadership (What are the marks of a good leader?) DEADLINE: May 5, 2024**

### PLEASE INCLUDE

- Your state-recognized name and ID#
- Your name as you would like to be recognized in The Loop or online, should your work be published
- Clear instructions on how to send funds directly to you should your piece be awarded a prize AND the name and contact information of an outside designee in case we are unable to send funds directly to you

*All mediums are welcome, though SL and DOC facilities cannot be responsible for providing supplies. Please note that we are not able to return original artwork. To send a digital copy, email [TheLoop@shining-light.com](mailto:TheLoop@shining-light.com).*

*Artists retain all rights to their work, and no proceeds will be received from their display.*

*(By submitting artwork, you are granting SL permission to publish in The Loop, on our website, and other related SL publications.)*

## PROGRAM UPDATES



State	Facilities	# of Graduates (to date)	# of Current Participants
North Dakota	James River CC, NDSP (coming soon: Heart River CC)	92	37
Ohio	Belmont CI, Noble CI	35	22
Pennsylvania	SCI Coal Twp, SCI Dallas (VSU), SCI Waymart	44	7

*"Every step moving forward, I will give more thought to my emotions and operate from a more logical perspective. Every moment is a lesson learned and incorporating these skills back into my everyday life." - Blue / Belmont CI (OH)*

*\*The SL Academy includes 50 hours of SL-facilitated interactions through video-conference and requires full support from the hosting facility. We are not able to offer this program everywhere, and the process for getting set up can take months, even years. But if you are interested in having this program at your facility, the first step is to ask a staff person or administrator to reach out to us for more information.*



Left to right: Chris, Naomi, Joel, Thomas, Alpo & John at JRCC (ND)

Carrying hope for others can be a challenging responsibility. We've seen Ms. Naomi do this so brilliantly as an Academy facilitator, having served 37 years of a life sentence before receiving commutation in 2019. So we asked, **"Ms. Naomi, what's it like for you to be a beacon of hope to so many still inside?"**:

*"I'm just a Pilgrim just passing through. I see my life differently now. I still want to be an encouragement because I know what it's like to be on the inside and away from family members and people who love you. I know what it feels like to be hopeless. But when you see someone who has overcome, you get that little spark in you and think, 'Well, if they can do it, I can do it, too!' Now, I want to be that example of what God did for me, and if it's possible for me, then it's possible for you. So, think it into existence, speak it into existence! There is hope and all things are possible. And I say to those who are doing life and long term sentences - don't even think that it's over!"*





*All across the country, groups of readers (“Loopers”) are getting together to discuss the content of *The Loop* and encouraging each other to respond in ways that are meaningful to them. Formally or informally, these gatherings are proving to be really positive experiences that are having ripple effects throughout the facility and beyond.*

Each Loop Group (LG) has the common foundation that is provided by the magazine and our core values, but there’s no limit to what your group does from there. Some are focused on creative expression, others on character strengths, others are looking for new service projects. Let us know what it looks like for you - we love hearing the variety! Here are a few of the latest examples:

In the last issue, we mentioned a 30-min play that was performed for us by the Loop Group at **NDSP (North Dakota)**. This group of Academy graduates began meeting weekly to stay connected in positive, like-minded community. The Loop offered starting points for discussion and prompted their individual creativity. When they heard our team would be coming in September, they pulled their strengths together and challenged themselves to use skills they learned in the Academy to write a collective play that would bring a message of hope, community, and the power of positive programming. We were their first audience, but since then they’ve been able to present it to the administration and staff, who are now looking into funding to perform the play for the entire population.



Last year, Loop subscribers Jim W and Jeff S at **London CI (Ohio)** teamed together to create a full 12-week elective class for the yearlong program they are part of, called Horizon Prison Initiative. This class (“Get Into the Loop”) incorporates the magazine with SL’s “Learn Your Strengths” video series<sup>[1]</sup>. It has been run twice, with a total of 16 graduates, and about 10 new students are signed up for a third session. Recently, Jim’s new 201-level curriculum (“R.O.A.D.M.A.P. to Character Strengths”) was approved as an advanced elective in the Horizon program, with 7 graduates of the prior class already registered. It is adapted from evidence-based techniques found in Dr. Ryan Niemiec’s book on character strengths<sup>[2]</sup> where he uses the acronym to invite us to Reflect, Observe, Appreciate, Discuss, Monitor, Ask, and Plan as a strategy to develop character strengths. This class uses SL’s “Apply Your Strengths” video series<sup>[1]</sup> to help facilitate the self-discovery process. With the successful pilot of this Loop Group on the Horizon unit, Jim submitted a proposal to the administration for a group in general population, which is currently under consideration and expected to begin soon!

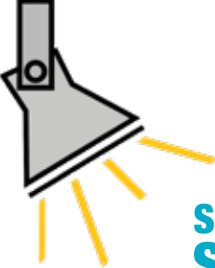
*[1] These video series are available on tablets through Edovo or on DVD upon request by a prison staff member.*

*[2] Character Strengths Interventions: A Field Guide for Practitioners*



The 2023 Writer’s CoLab Anthology is now available on tablets through Edovo! (Thank you to the 15 published writers for your generous talent and vulnerability...and your patience.) The CoLab Anthology is also available on our website for friends and family to see as well: [shining-light.com/writers-colab](http://shining-light.com/writers-colab).

Unfortunately, one down side of the exciting growth of *The Loop* and other programs is that we do not expect to have the available resources to offer a CoLab this year. If you are a new writer looking to get started, or an experienced writer looking to hone your craft or find publishing support, we encourage you to contact other organizations that are focused on offering these services. We plan to continue to highlight these on page 21 as we discover them.



## SL COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

### WALTER QUILLER

SL Alum 2018



*Performing in 2018 at SCI Frackville*



*Rebecca*  
CORRESPONDENCE  
COORDINATOR

Walter first connected with Shining Light in 2018 when he participated in an SL workshop at SCI Frackville in Pennsylvania. From seeing how everything came together in unexpected ways to the kindness of the SL staff, the experience was very impactful. “I’ll always remember them for the rest of my life,” Walter said. “They made us feel like we wasn’t in jail.”

Walter was released on January 10, 2022. Since then, Walter has secured a job, housing, and a car, and is actively taking care of his daughter and pursuing his goals. Even though things haven’t always gone the way he’s planned, Walter continues to hold tight to his faith and has seen God come through for him in countless ways.

For Walter, the biggest positive surprise in his transition is the fact that, 18 months later, he’s still home. Walter shared that in the past, he would be back inside after two to six months, but this time is different. This time he is recognizing and removing himself

from situations and company that aren’t conducive to his success. He is also maintaining the motivation to keep working hard, typically working every day, something he worried he might not have been up to doing. And as he practices generosity, Walter is experiencing the unique paradox where, in giving away, he somehow finds himself with more.

The biggest challenge, Walter shared, is dealing with things like unexpected expenses that make it hard to build up financial savings, and just the newness of all the things one has to negotiate on the outside. As Walter puts it, “Every single thing that I’m doing is new. ... But it’s been 18 months and I didn’t give up.”

When asked what words of encouragement he would give to those reading The Loop on the inside, Walter shared the following wealth of wisdom:

- “Continue to plan. ... You’re going to run into challenges out here, but it isn’t designed to destroy you. ... It’s designed to make you better. It’s designed to send you further.”
- “Be open to find help if you need it.”
- “I guarantee, you can make it out here, and everybody’s not out here to get you.”
- “For those that have been in programs, anger management, whatever it is, utilize those strategies. ... Make sure you have a coping strategy that not only works, but is healthy for you and whatever party is in your presence because other people are affected.”
- “Focus on bettering you because when you make yourself better, you make everybody else around you better.”
- “Being incarcerated, it can feel like everything around you is darkness ... but you have the opportunity to make the situation light and light up paths for other people. ... When you are that light, you show power. ... The power in darkness is the absence of light. But when the light is there, darkness can’t share the same room with light. So, it seems dark, but you can be the light for you and someone else.”

***Congratulations on your success, Walter - keep up the good work!***





## STRENGTH SPOTTING

### ZEST

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

“My friend Charles has been incarcerated since 1976. Although he is now age 72, he continues to have the zest of someone 27!! His mind has never settled in to prison, but continues to dream beyond the steel and razor-wire that confines his body.”

- Derek C. (SC)

“My teacher who will push you til you get it right, she takes the time to make sure we really understand the process.”

- Antonio H. (NC)

“I am currently in the hole and my celly wakes up everyday super excited and full of zest. He shows that even in the bleakest places you can bring light.”

- Michael M. (CA)

It's funny and truly quite simple, but I work out about 4 to 5 days a week and on Saturday Afternoons about 4 to 5 of us get together to do push-ups. We use a Deck of Cards and Do 15 for every card and 20 for Aces. We put 2 Jokers in as well. The funny part is that the five of us together represent nearly 120 years of continuous incarceration, yet we all come together to stay fit and healthy for that remote chance we are given a second chance. We all have a Zest for just the Hope of a better tomorrow.

- Richard H (OH)

“I think this would have to be John who just earned parole after 35 years. John has around 40 days left before he walks out the front door to finish his life on the outside. Since getting that final confirmation that he would in fact be released he hasn't stopped attending two programs he's been participating in, attending Church regularly and a very comprehensive bible study that meets later today. John has built an unbelievable network of friends and support on the outside as well as made a healthy amount of friends in here. He has no plans of slowing down when he hits the streets, I wish him the best.”

- G.E.S. (OH)



**For the next issue, tell us where you spot people around you using**

**HOPE**

**PREVIOUS PROMPT: “ZEST IS CONTAGIOUS”** // We asked for a short poem or essay that shows how our teams, families and/or communities bring zest to our lives.



Matt J. (PA)

**“Zest is from our teams, our family, and community, working all together, to express faith, love, and unity, deflecting all hate, building up my immunity so I can live right, in this free world, I’m soon to be livin’ life for good reasons, expanding my humanity, to come to better grips with my soul and my sanity.”**

- Adam F. (SC)



Joyce

PROGRAM FACILITATOR

## The Power of Zest - Zafir L. (PA)

The power of Zest inspires a feeling in my chest, causing my limbs to give actions of my best. Zest is contagious, brightening dark places with courageous yellow and blue hues, so intriguingly outrageous. Seeing how simple a smile can become charitable, removing a simple frown that could've been despicable. How it flows through the room like an invisible ocean, drowning everyone in its joyous motion. We shouldn't be so quick to judge or give up, but instead reflect and get up. Get up to inspire and motivate, extirpate the hate, because it's never too late. To become peacefully and zestfully salubrious...

**“I experienced contagious Zest when a group of local runners came into our prison to start a running club. Their passion, energy and enthusiasm infected us and soon we were all showing symptoms- long runs, strong hearts and shin splints! Haha :)”** - Clutch S. (OH)



### NEW PROMPT FROM ZEST TO HOPE!

Part of hope is believing in ourselves: believing that we will have the energy, focus, and drive to follow through with our goals. That means hope involves zest! For our next issue, **try creating a poem about the hope that comes from believing in yourself.** You know, deep down, that you have the potential to set goals and work toward reaching them—to have true hope. **Write about some ways in which you plan to draw out your zest and put that hope into practice in 2024!**

If you'd like your piece to be considered for publishing in *The Loop*, please keep it to 200 words or less. (Longer entries may be considered for the digital “Creative Expressions” collection)



In the last issue, we asked,

“Which of the character strengths addressed in 2023 - Bravery, Forgiveness, Judgment/Critical Thinking, Teamwork, and Zest - might be most useful in developing Hope as you prepare for a new year?”

Here's a breakdown of responses from readers on tablets:

ZEST - 20

FORGIVENESS - 38

BRAVERY - 26

JUDGMENT/CRITICAL THINKING - 18

TEAMWORK - 12

**Elicia B. (NC)** - “Reflecting back on the past year, **BRAVERY** is what gives me hope for the upcoming year. In my past I was so afraid of failure I wouldn't even try. After successfully completing my first year of college I know that I have to be brave and try. If I want something different I have to be brave and do different things or I will end up with the same failed results as before.”

**Jarmarcus “Cee-lo” P. (NC)** - “**FORGIVENESS** is the most useful for me to develop Hope, because if I could just get past that bump in the road and forgive the people who used to bully, and hurt me. And then learn to forgive myself. Then I would have Hope of closing this revolving door of pain and suffering, most importantly.... prison.”

**Adam F. (SC)** - “I believe **CRITICAL THINKING** would be most helpful in developing hope as I prepare for the new year, because it will allow me to better understand people's motivations as they are, and not as I see them to be through the lens of my own understanding.”

**Michael M. (MT)** - “**TEAMWORK** will be my critical skill to exercise this coming year, remaining focused on my team's goals will help drive me to succeed.”

**Zack F. (NY)** - “**ZEST** as described throughout his issue, and the lifestyle it helps to encourage, gives you exactly what you need to be hopeful for future blessings and great times ahead with those you love most. For me, zest helps me see that all that's happened in my life is part of God's plan for my life. What looks negative is really a necessary stepping stone towards a future full of blessings. I wouldn't be who I am today if everything that's happened to me didn't happen at all.”



## Real Talk



Naomi

**PROGRAM FACILITATOR**  
COMMUTED LIFER & ACTIVIST

*"You know, a lot of people on the inside want to have hope, but the hope is just killed. We're so used to someone telling us things that don't add up. It's hard for us to believe anything that's being said – families get the run-around, people beat around the bush, and there's never a clear answer. Others may think we are being negative when we hear talk about release or when those in power are passing bills, but we've heard this so many times before and another decade has passed... and we're still here."*

*It's hard to hold onto hope, but I think that people can find hope through others. You may see others that seem worse off than you, but yet their spirits are high in spite of it all. That's a beautiful spirit. Someone can find hope within themselves,*

*too. Perhaps they have changed and are now a different person than when they came in. They want to do good things; they want to help people and to be a positive leader because they are changed souls. Believe that God or your Higher Power knows you've changed too, and good things can now come. There can be hope in that."*

### **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.*

**Q: What advice do you have for someone who is afraid to come home and thinks the best thing they can do is to stay inside?**

**MS. NAOMI:** Please ask yourself if that is what you really want. Life is not over for you right now because you're in that situation. Give yourself a chance! Don't think that you'll get out and you can't make it. You'll be surprised. People help people if you'll ask for it. The world's not an entirely horrible place. That's why I'm always letting people know I was on the inside. So that they'll know that there are people just like me that are on the inside that are deserving of a second chance. ...Go out and try to make it. If you want to make it, you can make it.

Sometimes people feel as though, "They're putting me out here and I'm going back to that same old place that put me in trouble." They would rather stay where they feel safe than going back to a pack of wolves with the gangs, drugs and shooting. They are scared because they are going back to those same old people that mean no good.

And some of those old friends that you didn't get letters and cards from or couldn't make a phone call to - they're not your friends, so don't go out and associate with those people. They'll say, "Oh, I miss you," or "Why have you been gone so long?" They knew where you were and did nothing. They are not your friends, so don't mess with those people.

Sometimes we have to learn to speak up and advocate for ourselves to let people know we've changed. It's not just what you say but how you say it, and you can say it with love. You saying 'no' may not feel good to them, and you're not saying it to be mean; you're just telling the truth: "I'm no longer what I was, and my life is worth saving."

So give yourself another chance! Try living a normal, decent life, but don't try to stay behind bars. We're all trying to break those walls down. We don't want people to stay in. We want you to come home. You know how it is and you can become a voice for those who can't come home. There's so much you can do on the outside. So please, if you're given the opportunity to come home, come on home.

**F.E.A.R. → H.O.P.E.**

**FALSE EVIDENCE APPEARING REAL → HAVING ONLY POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS**





**FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**TOMORROW'S NEIGHBORS**  
 SL ALUM '18-'20

Around 2003, I and a handful of other inmates proposed starting an inmate organization at SCI Frackville, only to learn that one already existed. It was called H.O.P.E. (Helping Other People Everywhere), but to our knowledge, they were not actively doing anything to help the prison population or the local community, which is why we hadn't heard of it. Rather than give up on our idea, we got involved in H.O.P.E. and put in the work to make it an impactful organization. Over time, we donated tens of thousands of dollars to community organizations and planned many events to benefit the inmate population, all while adding purpose to the members' lives.

Simply hoping for a productive organization wasn't going to get us anywhere. We had to believe it could happen, and then take action steps to get there. We had to make the choice to grow the organization, and then act on that choice by personally investing in it. This is the "agency" element of hope. Agency is the capability of individuals to make choices and to act on those choices in ways that make a difference in their lives (Martin, 2004).

Having hope about reentry is the same. We can focus on all the obstacles in front of us and wait for some outside force to change our circumstances, or we can make the choice to overcome those obstacles with what is available to us now.

It's tempting to reserve hope for the future, especially while incarcerated, but you can't expect to have hope for the future if you don't have hope for today.

Early in my incarceration, I focused on maintaining hope by establishing goals for my day-to-day life in prison, rather than living in the future ("when I get out"). Every night before bed, I made a list of things I wanted to do the next day. This list kept me on task and productive, but it also kept me hopeful. I was able to maintain my own agency by making a schedule of my choosing, not merely following the prison's schedule. Eventually these lists included loftier goals for my future like getting an education, building a support system, and ultimately preparing for my reentry.

I've been home for more than three years now and I still make nightly lists. Only now I jot it down on an iPhone! And when I do, I smile because I can remember sitting in cell AC-14 holding my remote control against my ear, imagining what it would be like to one day use a cell phone, and considering the steps I could take to bring what I hoped for to pass.

If you struggle with hopelessness, I encourage you to try shifting your focus from the future to the present. There may still be obstacles to your future goals, but what changes could you make now to increase your hope for reaching those goals? What actions can you take to make those changes in your life? It won't be easy. You'll experience inevitable disappointments. But you will regain your own agency in this world, and with it, hope for the future.



***What do you think of Kurt and Ms. Naomi's perspectives on hope?***  
***Does hope come from people or sources beyond yourself?***  
***Is it something to be developed within?***

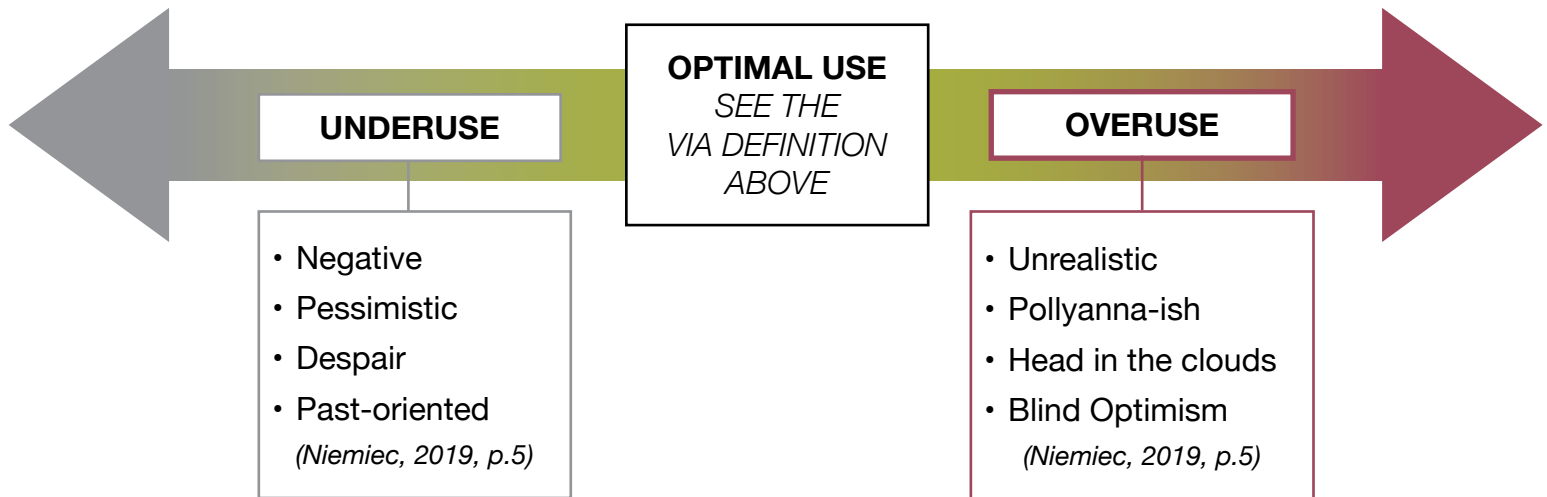
*Kurt is the Founder/Executive Director of a reentry nonprofit in central PA called "Tomorrow's Neighbors."  
 For more information, call (717) 241-8375 or visit [www.tomorrowsneighbors.org](http://www.tomorrowsneighbors.org)*

## VIA DEFINITION: HOPE

***"I am realistic and also full of optimism about the future, believing in my actions and feeling confident things will turn out well."***

"The character strength of hope has to do with positive expectations about the future. It involves optimistic thinking and focusing on good things to come. Hope is more than a feel-good emotion. It is an action-oriented strength involving agency, the motivation and confidence that goals can be reached, and also that many effective pathways can be devised in order to get to that desired future."

*(VIA Institute on Character, 2023, para. 1)*  
<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/hope>



Travis

PROGRAM DEVELOPER

The idea of hope can be split into two parts: Agency and Pathways. Agency involves believing you can reach your goals, and Pathways involves the belief that there are different ways to get there. From what I've seen, sometimes one part is stronger than the other, depending on the goal.

For example, let's talk about running - something I've been working on lately. There have been times in my life when I believed I could reach a 7-minute mile (agency), yet didn't really believe I would actually make the adjustments needed to achieve it (no pathway). On the other hand, there have been times when I was following a training plan and getting faster (pathway), yet didn't always have a specific goal I was hoping to accomplish (no agency). The best example of hope would be to both believe I can reach my goal time and follow a training plan I believe will work for me.



- ***Was there a time when you thought you could achieve something (agency) but had trouble figuring out ways to do it (pathways)?***
- ***Have you ever worked towards something without a clear idea of what you wanted to achieve? How did that make you feel? How might your strength of hope change as goals become clearer?***



To go a bit further, try this activity: Pick a goal you have - something you want to achieve in school, work, relationships, programming, exercise, or maybe even join me in running! Once you've got your goal, write down several ways you could reach it.

Take your time and try to think of at least three pathways. Think of it as brainstorming. You don't have to do all the ways you list, but consider the different ways you could go about achieving your goal. If you're struggling to have variety with your list, try asking a friend or peer how they might go about accomplishing the goal. Then, finish the statement at the bottom as a way to exercise your agency.

**GOAL:**

---

**PATHWAY ONE:**

**PATHWAY TWO:**

**PATHWAY THREE:**

I am confident I can achieve my goal because \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

*Based on the following research studies:*

*Feldman, D. B., & Dreher, D. E. (2012). Can hope be changed in 90 minutes? Testing the efficacy of a single-session goal-pursuit intervention for college students. Journal of happiness studies, 13, 745-759.*

*Snyder, C. R., Rand, K. L., & Sigmon, D. R. (2002). Hope theory. Handbook of positive psychology, 257, 276.*



*The Loop Group (LG) at Ross CI (Ohio) was initiated by peer facilitator Roger S. Black, Jr, who has stepped back to facilitate an informal LG in his housing unit, along with many other in-house groups throughout the facility. Although most groups are not affiliated with Shining Light, as a facilitator Roger is intentional about incorporating SL's Community Codes and as well as character strengths into all of them. So we invited him to share how the strength of hope can be applied through the Codes, from his perspective.*

### PREVIOUS: LISTEN & LEARN BEFORE OFFERING ADVICE

This Community Code is important, because we must understand the position of the individual we're giving the advice to. Here at RCI, I have found several opportunities to put this into practice by sitting one-on-one with guys that need to talk about both good and bad issues they are dealing with. Oftentimes it is helpful for them if I simply listen. Occasionally they may ask for my advice, and if I have something to share I will. Regardless if I share or not, by actively listening I gain more insight into their situation and their position. More importantly, it often gives the other person a sense of hope simply by allowing them to feel, and be heard.

**NEW**

### START SIMPLE & SPEAK LIFE

One program I developed and now facilitate is called Fitness, Yoga, and Information (FYI). This program allows me to utilize my experience as a Wellness Coach in order to motivate and assist participants with achieving their goals. While guys come to workout, stretch, and get a little helpful information, some would often tell me they also gained a sense of hope.

In the FYI program, one thing we focus on is setting goals. This helps participants to remain future-minded and optimistic, which are two fundamental aspects of hope. Participants set intermediate ("stepping stone") goals, and when they achieve these goals, it helps them believe they can achieve the bigger goals. Starting with smaller, manageable tasks and goals helps them better see progress and remain focused, instead of failing and giving up. Sometimes guys express doubt, but I simply tell them I believe they can do this or that, or "don't worry about what others are doing," or "don't think about what you used to be able to do." I have them track their forward progress, and cheer them on along the way. If someone does fail at a goal, I assure them with something like, "Aren't you still doing more than you were before you started the program? Focus on what is going well, not what went wrong." More often than not, I see them pick themselves up and push forward even harder after speaking life-giving, encouraging words.

*When we speak life we are able to have a lasting impact on others in ways we may not realize. We can motivate and encourage others to set out to achieve things they'd like to accomplish by getting them to start simple, and break the tasks down into smaller, more manageable tasks.*

***How can you put the Community Codes of Speak Life and Start Simple into play?***

*Maybe you could start by simply listening to someone today.*



#### SHINING LIGHT COMMUNITY CODES

##### SELF-CARE

- Be open, Be curious
- Brush Off the Small Stuff
- Accept Non-Resolution
- Start Simple

##### CARE FOR OTHERS

- "Speak Life"
- One Mic
- Step Forward/Step Back
- Speak from the "I"
- Debate the Topic, Not the Person
- Listen & Learn Before Offering Advice
- Confidentiality





## Honing 4 One's Potential Endeavors = H.O.P.E.

Greetings my fellow Loopers. In this issue we are grappling with HOPE! Hope looks different for each person. It is as individual as a fingerprint - uniquely yours if you choose to have it (or use it). It is my hope that you make that choice. Hold on to it, treasure it & persevere to attain it. It is yours for the taking.



*Dorman*

**PROGRAM FACILITATOR**  
SL ALUM '18-'20

When I first started my bid in 1996, I'll admit I did not see hope. I was very familiar with the idea, but my situation felt too bleak. Hope for my future seemed unbelievable at that time - I had just been sentenced to serve 25 to 50 years! Angry and bitter, hope was the last thing on my mind. Yet there was an ember of something burning within the depths of my soul. Things had to change! I had to change.

I would soon come to see hope as a prized possession I couldn't do without. I wanted to apply it and practice it in every area of my life - mentally, physically, and spiritually - starting in the weight pit. I had lofty ideas of getting stronger, but it was the hope and belief that I could achieve this that kept me going - that, and a whole lot of commitment, patience, and perseverance. Ultimately I went from barely bench pressing 135 pounds to a max weight of 365 pounds!

Weight lifting restored confidence in myself and my ability to reach the goals that I hoped to achieve. Hindsight being what it is, I can see that the tools I utilized in getting stronger were transferable skills that I now have for the rest of my life. My hopes to be mentally, physically and spiritually balanced were also achieved by going to school, attending church, and reading hundreds of books, which I still do to this day.

When I decided to start my journey of hope, I looked at that day as the first day of the rest of my life. And the practice and exercise of hope I developed has stayed with me. (I try to think, "What do I want to accomplish?" and then shape my life choices around that goal.) It's about always Honing 4 One's Potential Endeavor!



*One of the most dominant athletes of his generation, native New Yorker & weightlifter John Davis compiled a 15-year winning streak that included eight world championships, and Olympic gold medals in both London (1948) & Helsinki (1952). Despite his success, Davis was quoted as saying, "But outside of weightlifting, I don't think 15 people ever heard of me."*

*At 5'8", he was shorter than most of the other weightlifters, but he became the first person to clean and jerk more than 400 pounds.*

*After retiring from competition, Davis worked as a corrections officer at Rikers Island, where he developed weightlifting programs.*

*(Article from the United States Olympic & Paralympic Museum)*



***I'm curious to know what hope looks like for you.  
What acronym could you write to describe how you see hope?***

***H \_\_\_\_\_ O \_\_\_\_\_ P \_\_\_\_\_ E \_\_\_\_\_***

*Try This*

***Consider one thing you can do to get physically stronger/healthier over the next 3-4 months. Set a realistic goal for yourself that you'd like to accomplish and then think of what changes you may need to make to your schedule or lifestyle to help you get there. Tell someone your goal so they can support you and cheer you on. And most important: believe in yourself - have hope that you can do it!***

## PREVIOUS PROMPT: HOPE SONNETS

We encouraged you to try your hand at writing a sonnet on Hope. You gave us so many great examples!

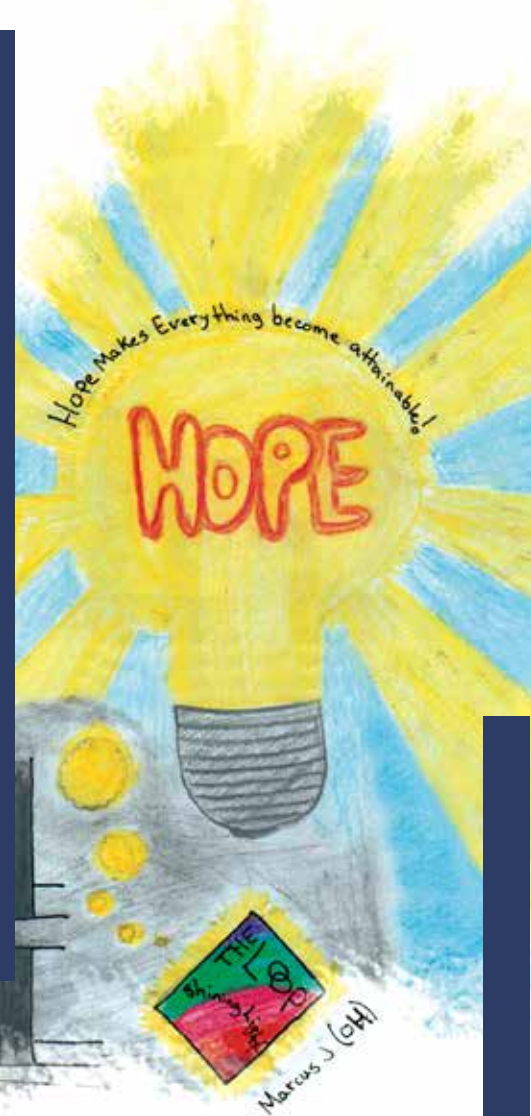
### Friends, Family and God

We play jacks and we jump rope  
They make me laugh and we all tell jokes  
High fives and pats, they are my folks  
They have my back, friends give me hope.

We share our fate and dare not hate.  
They are my blood, there's no debate.  
From birth to death we celebrate.  
My family, no mistake.

Alpha and Omega; Omnipotent and Love.  
Carpenter and Maker; A gift from up above.  
Potter and Creator; descending like a dove.  
In Him my life is greater; God's who  
I'm speaking of.

Hope gives us a reason,  
to push past adversity and to see it  
as a season.  
— Alina M. 2023 C.A.



By Zack F. (NY)

All the trials and challenges I've faced  
I wouldn't change them if I could  
God's plan makes them necessary...  
Stepping stones for my greater good.

I may be locked away, and kept from true progression  
But there's something great back home that keeps me from depression  
It's the most beautiful thing in the world, the creation of new life  
Already three new family members.. Talk about a great "life" lesson!

In Buffalo, its "Bills Mafia"  
Win or lose, embrace the thrills  
All year we wait; all season we groan  
But either way we say "GO BILLS!"

Whether its faith, family, sports or other things looming large for you  
Without hope holding it together you're missing the essential glue.





## PELL GRANT

For this issue's Writing Resource we include good news about an important educational resource: the reinstatement of federal Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated people. Here is a summary from the U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid page:

***"The FAFSA Simplification Act, signed into law in December 2020, restored Pell Grant eligibility to confined or incarcerated individuals for the first time since 1994. The new law requires a 'confined or incarcerated individual' . . . to enroll in an eligible prison education program (PEP) in order to access a Federal Pell Grant. . . . [The] final rule [went] into effect on July 1, 2023."***

Eligible persons are "confined or incarcerated individuals in Federal or State correctional facilities."

Pell Grants can provide significant aid in support of higher education. If you're interested, contact your facility's education department to learn more. You might also reach out to colleges and universities that interest you, to see if they are eligible PEPs (prison education programs). An eligible PEP's Financial Aid office should be able to assist you.

### STEADFAST HOPE

I STAND STILL IN THE LAST HOUR OF NIGHT  
AS LIGHT TURNS THE SKY RED IN THE EAST.  
I CANNOT IMAGINE A MORE BEAUTIFUL SIGHT  
THAT DRIVES AWAY THE NIGHT TIME BEAST.

JUST LIKE MANY MY FAITH MAY RISE AND LAPSE  
DOUBTS ASSAIL QUICKLY WITH LIGHTNING'S POWER  
WITH CONFUSION'S LOUDER THAN THUNDER CLAPS  
BUT FAITH PERSISTS FROM ITS STRONGHOLD'S TOWER.

JUST AS EACH NEW DAY STARTS OVER OR ENDS  
THERE ARE THINGS I CAN USE TO HELP ME GROW.  
HUGS FROM FAMILY OR SOME DEAR OLD FRIENDS,  
BELIEF IN MYSELF IS VITAL I KNOW.

RELY ON OTHERS, TRUST YOURSELF TO COPE.  
USING THESE THINGS STEADFAST WILL BE YOUR HOPE.

JAKE(U.D)

### "Hope in Darkness" By Aaron B. (OH)

I see hope in smiling faces here  
In prison where skies are overcast.  
The world seems dreary, dark, unclear  
But I know that such things will not last.

I hear hope in the laughs and yells  
Of people passing through these halls.  
The sounds reverb like ringing bells  
And echo through the cavernous walls.

I feel hope in each handshake and hug  
From those who comfort weary souls.  
They make me feel comfy and snug,  
Illuminating the hidden holes.

The nights seem long with pain and strife,  
But hope stays here and brings me new life.



### NEW PROMPT: HUMILITY HEROES

**In 300 words or less, tell the story of a person who, in your view, embodies true humility.** This might be a family member, a friend on the inside or outside, or someone you've never met but have admired from afar. Be sure to include specific examples of *how* this person demonstrates humility in your story.

Joyce



# CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATE




Angelia

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, **“Expect the best, plan for the worst.”** Here’s what our team of thinkers had to say:

AGREE

IT'S COMPLICATED

DISAGREE

“I disagree because I believe I should expect the best and back-plan for the best. I believe that, because I believe in the Law Of Attraction. Wherever your mind is, your energy is also. That’s why the saying is “be careful what you say” because words are power, although energy is much more powerful. So if you plan for the worst, that’s what you’ll attract..When things are hard doesn’t mean the worst, because with practice and planning

even the hardest things become naturally easy.”

- Ernest W. (OH)

“I agree. The reason for this is because I was supposed to receive a 3 year sentence(expect) but I ended up getting 6.5 years(worst). I kinda knew I was getting the worst. So I had planned for it so it wasn’t as bad in my own mind.”

- Anthony W. (OH)

## “EXPECT THE BEST, PLAN FOR THE WORST.”

“Disagree!!  
Expect the best and survive the suffering.”

- Chris M. (NC)

“Honestly, that is contingent upon the context of which it applies to. Prison, or judicial proceedings in general are one of the things I believe it applies to. I would also say just about any situation that has a great deal of uncertainty. If it were something that is dependent on your own efforts, then no. Only because YOU are responsible for your own success or failure when it is in YOUR power to do so.”

- Mark S. (OH)

Maybe, instead of saying “plan for the worst”, how about saying “Expect the best, and be prepared for the alternative”. Sometimes, we may not reach a desired goal, but it doesn’t mean, that it’s the worst, that could happen. As long as we are still breathing, we haven’t seen the “worst”. Stay inspired, and proactive, and “expect the best, and plan an alternative route, that leads to “good things”.

- Michael H. (NC)

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

“Agreeing with the statement ‘Expect the best but plan for the worst’ seems sensible. However, the statement “Hope for the best reasonable outcome from productive endeavors, yet prepare for any unforeseen eventualities that may result” seems to be more beneficial. Waiting on a decision from the Parole Board, or searching for gainful employment and safe affordable housing after release are challenges most convicted felons may face. Depending on the individual circumstances, reaching those goals are either more or less difficult. Whatever the case, one has to be fully committed and invested in obtaining that which they hope/expect to achieve, because more often than not there's a cost that should be calculated and a clear recognition of what one is up against.”

- David R. (PA)

“Where I'm from the statement is, ‘Hope for the best, plan for the worst.’ This makes more sense to me because hope keeps you afloat and driven/motivated to keep working for the better outcome, while planning for things in case they go wrong keeps you from having false hope. False hope is toxic and can absolutely destroy you.”

- Zach F. (NY)

I agree with this statement! Its gotten me througan a lot. due to the fact that if you Plan for the worst you'll be ready for things like loss, heartbreak, failure, incarceration and more. if you expect the best you'll be ready for some of the most positive moments of your life like, a baby, family, graduation, freedom and more! but most importantly it helps you never give up and thats important in life. Stay strong everyone. Love you all! ♡

-Summer S. (Pa)

“No, I disagree. I expect the best, and then I plan to receive it. If I “plan” for the worst, then it's as if I doubt my expectations of receiving the very best.”

- Derek C. (SC)

“I try to always expect the best but I don't plan for the worst because for me even the hard times are a chance for growth and learning.”

- Michael M. (CA)

“I expect the best, and plan for the worst everyday. I was sentenced to a LWOP sentence at 20 years old and now after shortly turning 49 I have the possibility to not only be resentenced but to possibly be released as well. How do I deal with that after so long? I hope for the best and plan for the worst.”

- Brian S. (CA)

For the next issue, do you agree or disagree about the following statement:

🚫 **“HUMILITY IS OVERRATED”**



Marchell B-W (NC)



*(God), thank You for hope. Thank You for its light in the darkness. Thank You that no matter how dark the night, You are with me. My situation and circumstances may look dark, but I know You not only go before me, but You also walk with me. As I pray, please fill me with even more hope for now and for my future. I trust You, even in the midst of this seemingly hopeless season. Amen.*

*\*The above is an adapted Christian prayer from Life.Church. If you have a different religious practice, we encourage you to consider it as a guide for prayer to the god of your understanding.*

Hope can be a fickle thing. One day we have it, and then we don't. Things start looking up, then we receive crushing news and hope seems to disappear.

It can feel like there is a hefty price to pay for hope; at times it may actually feel too costly. But what if the cost of letting go of hope is even greater?

How can meditation and prayer help us hold on to hope when it starts to fade? Meditation simply means thinking about or reflecting on something, which our minds often do without conscious effort. For me, there are times when the thoughts running through my mind bring me down faster than the actual challenges I face. As a person of faith, I am told to be full of hope, but I find it easy to feel anxious and worried instead. Is there something practical we can do to counter this negative spiral?

You may have traditional meditation exercises or a prayer practice that works for you. Below is another approach to meditation that can help our spirits and minds find our hope again when we lose sight of it.

Try one or more of the following:

1. **Consider a faith passage or inspirational saying that brings you hope. If possible, read it out loud.** *(Feel free to use the prayer above if nothing else is coming to mind.)*
2. **Take two minutes to reflect on or pray through the passage.**
3. **Highlight it in your book of faith, or copy the passage on a piece of paper, slowly and thoughtfully.**
4. **Underline, circle, or box any specific words in the passage that impact you.**
5. **Begin to memorize it through repetition.**
6. **Read it in the morning, to start off your day.**
7. **Read it before bed, so it's the last thing you think about.**

Meditating on a positive passage can give us a renewed perspective on our lives and circumstances. It helps us focus on good things that are before us. It reminds us that even in the challenges we're facing right now, **there may be a bigger plan we cannot see.**



*Nina*  
PROGRAM FACILITATOR



***If Hope were a person, how would you describe your relationship?*** *(non-existent, on-again-off-again, surface-level, rich & thriving?)*

***How does a meditation exercise like this encourage or challenge you to increase in hope?***



## HOLIDAYS & SPECIAL EVENTS: COMING UP

**MLK DAY**  
JANUARY 15

**BLACK HISTORY MONTH**  
FEBRUARY

**CHINESE LUNAR NEW YEAR**  
FEBRUARY 10

**SUPERBOWL LVIII**  
FEBRUARY 11

**LEAP DAY**  
FEBRUARY 29

*Does anyone out there have a Leap Day birthday?*

### LEAP DAY FUN FACTS:

- In Ireland, and many other European countries, women can propose to men. If the man refuses, according to some European traditions, he is to buy the woman 12 pairs of gloves to hide the shame of not wearing a ring
- In Greece, getting married during a leap year is considered unlucky
- Every February 29th, “Leapers” (or “Leaplings”) can gather for a huge birthday party in the town of Anthony, on the border of Arizona and New Mexico
- On common years people born on Leap Day celebrate their birthdays on February 28 or March 1
- In 1988, TIME magazine proclaimed that Superman was a Leap Baby!



## WHAT WE'RE READING

### BIOGRAPHY

#### EARNING FREEDOM: CONQUERING A 45-YEAR PRISON TERM

by: MICHAEL SANTOS

“This book will inspire and motivate anyone with a lengthy sentence to work hard to earn freedom. Michael Santos has great content on Edovo which includes: Prison Professors, Straight-A-Guide, Earning Freedom, CEO of Your Life Series, and Personal Leadership, and tons of video content about reentry.”

Johnny B. / NC

### FICTION

#### FAIRY TALE // by: STEPHEN KING

“I just finished this book and it was good. It had the ‘keep you on the edge of your seat’ kind of thing and sadness, as well as adventure. It was like three types of books wrapped in one.”

Summer S. / PA

### NONFICTION

#### THE SENTENCES THAT CREATE US // by: PEN AMERICA

“It’s a wonderful book about and by incarcerated or previously incarcerated people who have become authors. They talk about the art of creative writing: Grammar, Sentence Structure, Content, how to get published while incarcerated (as well as on the Outside!)”

Wendy D. / PA



## SNOW, SNOW, AND MORE SNOW

This puzzle contains 22 words that begin with “snow-.”  
See if you can find them all!



©2007, Julie Vickery-Smith



### WINTER MATH

Figure out what number the lanterns, snowmen & trees represent to solve the final equation!

(Credit: Reader's Digest / Evgeniy Yes)

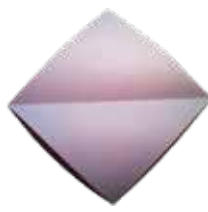
## ORIGAMI HEART



Start with a square piece of paper.



Fold it in half, top to bottom.



Open it back up.



Fold it in half, left to right.



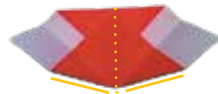
Open it back up.



Fold the top corner to the center.



Fold the bottom corner to the top edge.



Fold the bottom left & right edges to the center.



Fold the top and side corners back.



Voilà!



## STARBUCKS LATTE

by: Isaac "The Recipe Scientist"  
(CA)

## INGREDIENTS:

- Chocolate powder
- Hot water
- Coffee
- Almond creamer
- Milk powder
- Mints candies

**DIRECTIONS:** In a bowl, add two spoons of chocolate powder and add a spoon of hot water, and mix until it's like a syrup. Set aside. In a cup, add the chocolate, coffee, almond creamer, and 4 mints. Pour hot water and mix nicely and cover and set aside. In a second cup with a lid, add the milk powder and enough hot water to cover and mix nicely with a spoon and then cover and mix the hell out of it until it's nice and foamy. In a ziplock bag, add a few mints and crush them up nicely. Then we add the foamy milk carefully on top of the chocolate coffee mix to create peaks. Gently drizzle the chocolate syrup on top of the foam, and sprinkle mints on top and you're done! Enjoy your Starbucks Holiday Latte!

JUST

FOR

FUN

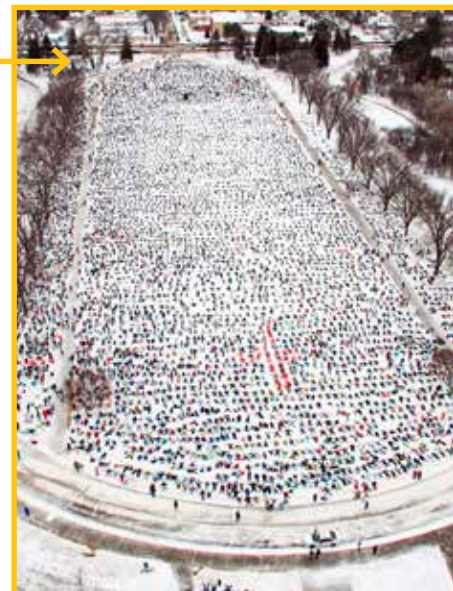


The tallest known snowman was 124.8 feet...taller than a 12-story building.

## WINTER FUN FACTS:

- The first candy canes were made without stripes.
- A snowflake can take up to two hours to fall from a cloud to the ground.
- The North Pole is actually warmer than the South Pole.
- **8,962 people made snow angels at the same time on the grounds of the North Dakota state capitol.**
- It gets so cold in Siberia that your breath can turn to ice in midair.
- Almost 90% of snow is air.

(Credit: National Geographic)



## MS. NAOMI'S CORNY CORNER

WE KNOW YOU CAN'T HELP YOURSELVES

*Why can't a bike stand up without a kickstand?*

**It's two tired.** - Jeff P. (OH)

*What does the gingerbread man have in his bed?*

**A cookie sheet.** - Christy S. (NC)

*Never trust an atom.*

**They make up everything** - Jake L. (ND)

*Do you know how Moses made his coffee?*

**Hebrewed** - Anonymous (TX)

*I had a date last night, it was great..*

**Tomorrow I think I'll have a plum.**

- Anonymous (NC)



## SPECIAL THANKS TO THESE 52 CONTRIBUTORS:

### COVER ART:

Charles Swint (PA) - 1st  
Sonia Stevens (NC) - 2nd  
Rudolph "Church" Churchill (PA) - 3rd

### FEATURED WRITING:

Aaron B (OH), Adam F (OH),  
Alina M (CA), "Clutch" (OH),  
Jake L (ND), Zach F (NY), Zafir L (PA)

### COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT:

Walter Quiller (PA)

### COMMUNITY CODE:

Roger S. Black, Jr. / Ross CI (OH)

### OTHER REFLECTIONS & RESPONSES:

[AR] - K. Daniel O.

[CA] Brian S., Isaac S., Michael M.

[IL] Rebecca G.

[IN] Brenda R.

[MI] Daniel M.

[MT] Michael M.

[NC] Antonio H., Chris M., Christy S.,  
Elicia B, Jamarcus "Cee-Lo" P.,  
Johnny B., Marchell B-W., Michael H.,  
& 1 Anonymous

[ND] Jake D., Jake L.

[NE] Jocelyn N.

[NY] Zach F.

[OH] Aaron B., Anthony W., "Blue",  
Chris P., Ernest W., G.E.S., Jeff P.,  
Marcus J., Mark S., Matt P., Richard H.

[PA] Charles S., "Cheo", David R.,  
Eugene B., Joseph L., Kelly F., Matt J.,  
Summer S., Wendy D., Zachary E.

[SC] Adam F., Derek C., Eric Y., Gary F.,  
Joshua P.

[TX] 1 Anonymous

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

## NEXT ISSUE'S THEME HUMILITY

## SEND US YOUR BEST COVER ART!

UPCOMING THEMES: HUMILITY & LEADERSHIP



One important factor in developing the character strength of Hope is having realistic expectations. Another strength that may be helpful to do this is Humility. According to viacharacter.org, "Truly humble people think well of themselves and have a good sense of who they are, but they also are aware of their mistakes, gaps in their knowledge, and imperfections." ***How might developing the strength of Humility help you also increase your Hope?***

**SUBMISSIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE DUE BY FEBRUARY 15, 2024**

Shining Light | PO Box 267 | Annville, PA 17003 | [theloop@shining-light.com](mailto:theloop@shining-light.com)

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

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

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



*"Just writing to say that I came across your publication through my tablet. I enjoyed the literature, artworks and poems. I hope I can contribute also since I am an artist and poet... I read some comments by inmates and it made me happy to know that there are kind souls in prison." - Arnoldo J. (CA)*