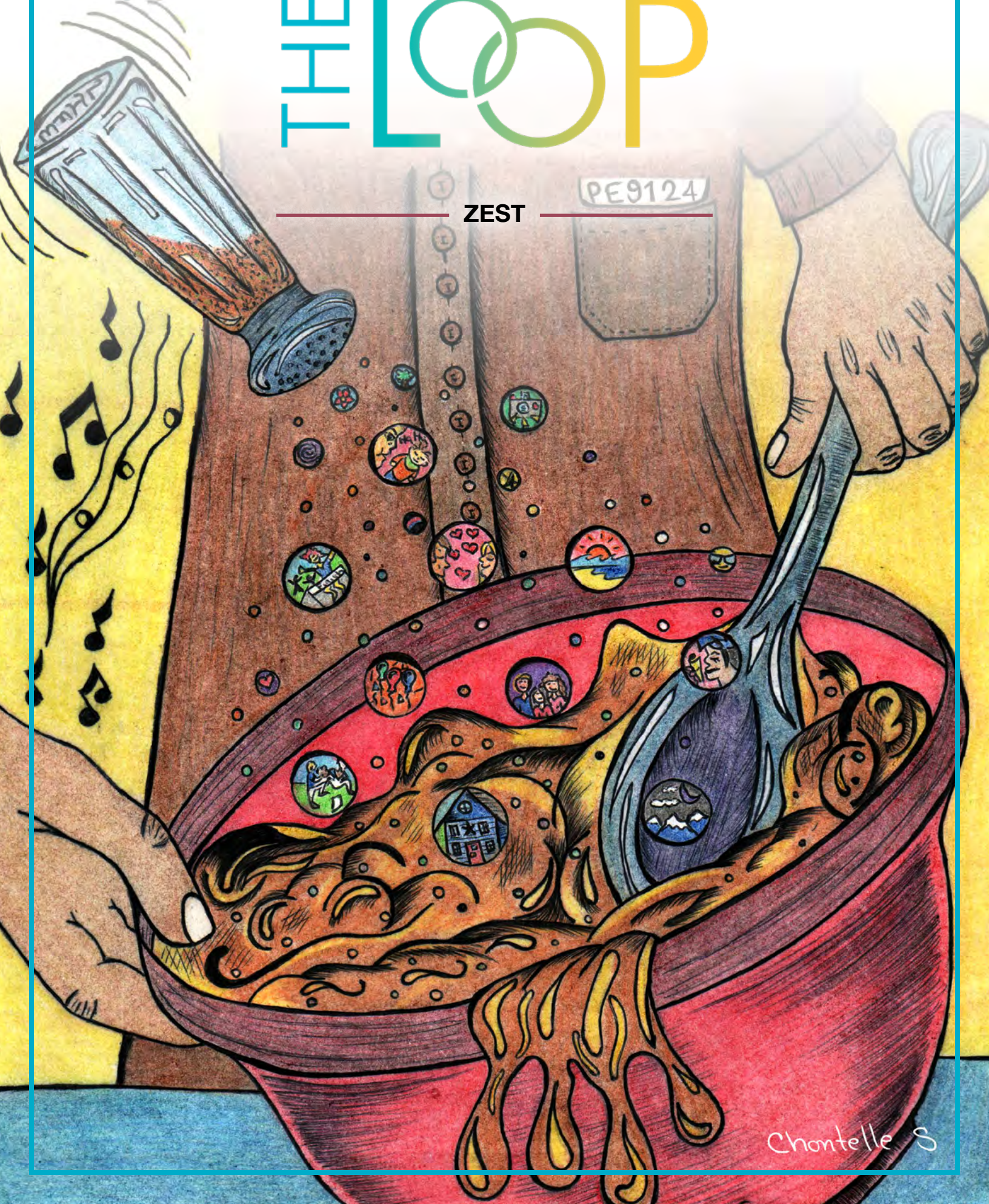


THE LOOP

ZEST

PE9124



Chontelle S



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)

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.*

I used to think of zest like a personality trait - either you're a zesty person or you're not. But as a character strength I now see that we all have zest, it's a matter of how much we use it. It may come more naturally to some, but it is always there within us, ready to improve the quality of our lives and those around us. Studies have shown zest is one of the two character strengths most linked to life satisfaction. So why not use it all the time? Why do we not see zest elevated as a value in most of American society? Instead, children who bring extra zestful energy to the classroom are oftentimes punished for being disruptive. Adolescents who show zest among their peers are often misunderstood and labeled "obnoxious," "overachiever," or just "weird." As adults, living with zest can be seen as childish, immature, or out of touch with reality. Most of us learn at some point to "tone it down" in order to fit others' expectations, and without realizing it, we become less of who we were created to be. It seems like this would be especially true in an environment like prison. And yet...



Kelly

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

IN THIS ISSUE: What if zest is actually a key ingredient to doing your time in prison, and "not letting the time do you" as they say? What if zest is key to achieving goals and succeeding in reentry? Ms. Naomi, Kurt, and Dormen speak into this from their collective 87 years of personal experience inside, on pages 14, 15, and 19. We've received more examples than we could publish on how readers like you are combining zest with teamwork and perseverance to make life better for other individuals and whole communities. On pages 8-10 you'll read how we witnessed this first hand during our staff's recent visits to North Dakota - reminders of what is happening everywhere through our nationwide Loop community. Another example is on page 18 where Timir W, the Loop Group peer facilitator at the SCI Dallas (PA) Veterans Service Unit, shares how zest applies to their daily living. And if you need a quick boost zest for yourself, check out all the Positive News (p. 5). There's so much to celebrate - again, way more than we had room to publish!

Congratulations to **Chontelle Shirk (PA)** for your 1st Place entry in our Cover Art Contest! Her piece depicts "what it looks like to be excited about life and all the wonderful things in it." See the 2nd & 3rd place entries on Page 7, along with other great artwork on the Gallery Wall and spread throughout.

Many thanks to all 168 readers who submitted artwork, writings and other responses to this issue!


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

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



Jeff

**FOUNDER &
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Greetings to the Shining Light community! I hope you are all doing well and making the most of the adventure life has for you today. I intentionally use the word “adventure” because it is the word that helped me connect with the character strength at hand. Zest is not a word I would typically use. In fact, I didn’t think much about it until our staff started talking about it in preparation for this issue. But it has since become a new motivation for me and helped me in ways I didn’t expect. Perhaps you can relate...

I quickly identified with the parts of the zest definition (p.17) that talked about “approaching life with energy,” and “not doing things half-heartedly.” But I realized that many days I am not “excited to get up in the morning” or “living life like an adventure!” I was starting to view much of what I had to do as problems to deal with rather than part of a worthwhile adventure. I justified my negative attitudes by the 24 years of working with/ in correctional facilities and trying to raise money to enable that to happen. Every setback, obstacle, and “No,” “You can’t do that”, or “Why would you want to do that?” had started to cloud over the excitement of the many opportunities we’ve had to impact lives in positive ways. True, sometimes the journey is hard. The challenges can seem insurmountable. But by developing the strength of zest, we can see our journey as an adventure rather than a minefield. For me, that means striving to shift my perspective.

On page 9, you’ll see an update from a member of our SL community, Doug Gerard. He has a quiet demeanor, but shows a lot of zest in the way he lives every day as an adventure and gives 100% to whatever he puts his mind to. Doug recently told us that two years ago when we met, his reentry plan was to “go back to using meth until he wound up back in prison or dead.” But through the Academy he discovered the power of identifying character strengths in himself and others, and started applying many other tools (like those offered in The Loop) to his life. Today Doug is running a sober living community that is helping people who are exactly where he was just a few years ago.

I encourage you to discover how this might apply to you. Try seeing life as an adventure. There will always be challenges, but try drawing on the strength of zest within you to view them as part of your unique journey. You may be surprised where the adventure might take you!



I just started 2 read the loop n as i was reading i found that it hit home with a lot of the things that were said it was something i inspired and found touching! Thank You for making my bid easier along with how i view things 😊

★♥-Shaylee O-♥★

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

I completed the syllabus for a Mindful Meditation course I will lead here at McDougall CI soon once approved.

-Gary K. F (SC)

"There is a guy in the block I'm housed in that came to me and asked me to help him learn to read. I noticed that Issue four of the Loop was on the tablet...so I began going through it immediately. I had a realization - I can use The Loop as a two-fold method for this 'student'. I plan on using The Loop as his primary content. Not only will it be ideal for him to listen to the recordings and follow along with the captions, but it will also fill him with positive information and wisdom. He will be able to practice his reading between our meetings as well. I look forward to beginning this with him."

I JUST filled out an application to become a mentor in restoring Promise initiative to help young adults ages 18-25, and should be getting an interview soon!
Hunter H. (ND)

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've recently made contact with Mr. Michael Santos, [founder of Prison Professors!] He's an awesome advocate for education and breaking the cycles of recidivism!"

-Roy P. (AL)

-Roger S. B. (OH)

I went to a graduation ceremony on August 16th here at Coal Township and felt really proud. Not of my own accomplishments, it was the accomplishments of two of the younger men I influenced to further their education. BG graduated from HVAC and Glenn graduated from CSD. Congratulations to both!!

-Virgil T (PA)

I have just completed Life Skills and two UNC courses (made A's)!

-Marchell BW (NC)

"The entire prison is being repainted. Our crew on Union unit has done the hallways, the offices, the horseshoe and we just finished the fourth pod last night. Only 2 more pods to go!"

-Michelle T. (NC)

"My 17-yr-old son (whose mom O.D.'d recently & I'm here) has held a job the past 3 months & is enthusiastic about going to Job Corps to learn a trade. I'm very proud of him & relieved his life is moving in a positive direction."

-Norman H. (ME)

I got an 8yr. cut. So instead of seeing the board in 2035, I get to see them in less than 4 yrs! 2027! Also my birthday is in 3 days on the 13th of September, I'm 41!

Timothy S. B. (MI)
AKA Shadow

That I was able to help someone dealing with the loss of a loved one. I'm grateful I took the time needed to help this individual. They needed someone to listen to their pain. Now, they're going forward, even in the struggle.

Larry S./PA

"I passed 2 parts to my GED."

-Zahara M. (OH)

My granddaughter will be 2 years old when her paw-paw comes home to enjoy her company. So she is truly the neon light at the end of my tunnel. She changed my life for the better. 😊
NC-Bubba-Sparxxx

"I'm looking forward to my family making a 5 hour trip across the state to come visit me after being gone for a year now. With distances so great in Montana, visiting is rare for many, and I'm thankful to have the opportunity to see them after so long."

-Michael M. (MT)

"I am proud to say my two-year-old daughter is going to be enrolled in early childhood development classes in September."

-Rebecca G. (IL)

"I am being reviewed for early release to a program known as Teen Challenge..I am excited but nervous as well! I've never made a plan for life, I've always winged it!...I challenge each person to start planning your release! And give give yourself a plan A, B, C...etc."

-Kate (MI)

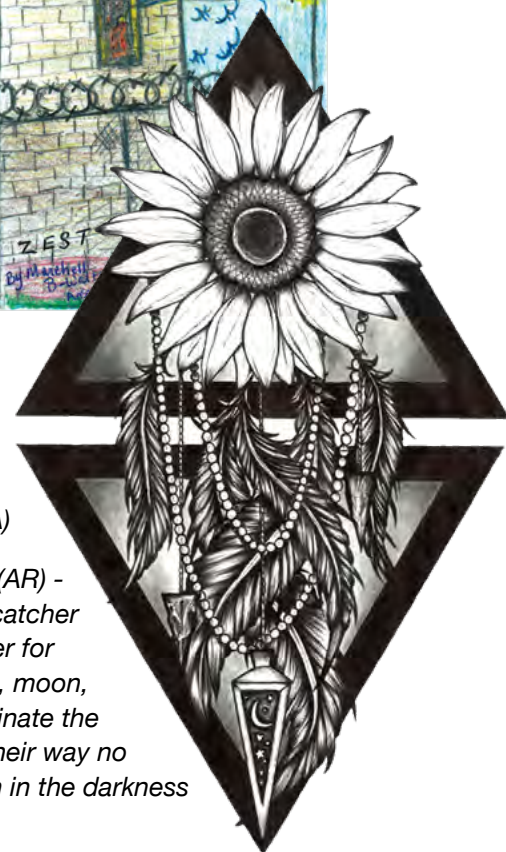
"After 3+ years of being separated, my son and daughter were able to spend a few days together. I pray daily that one day I will be able to be reunited with them also."

-Scott F. (CO)

I recently completed Victim's Awareness. My Apology Bank letter was accepted. My granddaughter called me 'PoP-PoP'! I decided to apply for commutation in December.

Ade Yele-PA

W GALLERY L



Cover art entries by Kasheyon L.C. (PA), Kelsha B. (PA), Marchell B.W. (NC), & Patricia B. (PA)

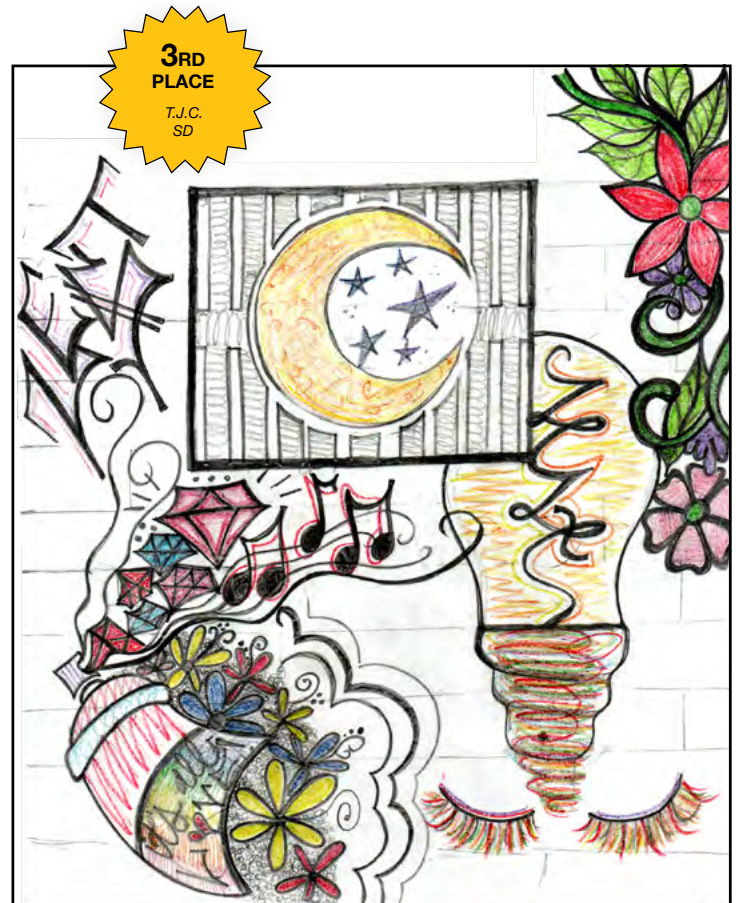
And a piece by Douglas T. (AR) - "a cross between a dreamcatcher & a lamp. The dreamcatcher for peaceful sleep and the sun, moon, and stars are lights to illuminate the darkness so one can find their way no matter where we are - even in the darkness that is prison."



**2ND
PLACE**

JOSHUA
PARHAM
SC

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



**3RD
PLACE**

T.J.C.
SD

A rendition of a "stained glass" piece that T.J.C. created for her cell window

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.

CRITERIA

- Originality, artistry, and connection to the theme. Include 1-3 sentences describing your piece.
- Must abide by Submission Guidelines (p. 2)
- Must be portrait format (Keep in mind the logo will be added at the top)

UPCOMING THEMES

- **Hope** (How does it feel to have hope renewed?) - **DEADLINE: December 15, 2023**
- **Humility** (Accurate self-assessment of limitations & abilities) - **DEADLINE: February 20, 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.

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.)



LOOP SECTION LOGOS - Do you like graphic design? Sketching logos? Now's your time to shine! Next year, we want to redesign the section logos for The Loop and we want it to come from you! So if you have a logo idea for *any* of the sections, send it in! (i.e. Positive News from Inside, SL Community Spotlight, Strength Spotting, Real Talk, etc.)



This fall, we were able to step away from our screens to enjoy in-person visits with the graduates and participants of SL Academies in North Dakota, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. What powerful reminders of the hard work so many of you are doing in your own ways to discover and strive toward your fullest potential as human beings, despite the environment that too often threatens to squash it. Character Strengths and Community Codes were on full display - individual and collective lights brightening entire facilities!

NORTH DAKOTA: We were able to visit both NDSP and JRCC to celebrate 87 total graduates to date, along with 26 first-time participants currently in the Foundations Course. →



← **OHIO:** Our visit to Belmont CI was both a reunion for the 28 graduates to date and a shot in the arm for the 11 participants currently persevering through the Foundations Course. At Noble CI, we were able to encourage the 8 trailblazing participants piloting the Academy there.



PENNSYLVANIA: Congrats to the participants in four PA facilities that have successfully piloted the Foundations Course: SCI Chester (15), SCI Coal Township (10), SCI Dallas (10), and SCI Waymart (15). Talks are underway about what comes next - can't wait to watch you build up from here!

"There are a lot of programs in here that try to change you. The beauty of Shining Light is that it helps you become more aware of who you are in an encouraging and supportive environment." - Jesse W, SCI Dallas

While the SL Academy itself may not be available in your facility, we hope that you are encouraged by what is happening in these few locations. May you be inspired to consider what it is you can do to bring more light to your own life and the environment you find yourself in.



All across the country, readers of The Loop are meeting to discuss the content of The Loop and encourage 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 has the common foundation that is provided by the magazine and our community codes, but there's no limit to what the groups do from there. Some are focused on creative expression, others on character strengths, others are looking for new service projects or recruiting new subscribers. We love the variety! Here are a few of the latest examples - let us know if you have one to add:

- One highlight of our visit to **North Dakota State Penitentiary (NDSP)** included an impressive 30-min play written and performed by their Loop Group. **More about this in the next issue!*
- The group in the **Veterans Service Unit at SCI Dallas (PA)** uses items from The Loop as ice breakers or discussion starters at their dorm's weekly S.T.A.R.S. (Straight Talk About Real Stuff) meetings. **See page 16 for their Community Code reflections.*
- Participants in a brand new Loop Group at **Ridgeland CI (SC)** wrote mini mission statements related to zest and their commitment to change. **Read some examples on page 13.*

If you'd like to get a Loop Group going at your facility, Shining Light has a Start-up Guide that is available upon request.

Dear Shining Light Family,

I would like to take a moment and share with you one of the most exciting & enriching experiences I have had in a long time. I have been working with SL as an academy assistant for the past year, and the relationships cultivated in that time, via zoom, have been incredibly rewarding & meaningful. Even so, I could not wait to see them all in person. As you can imagine, the anticipation among the academy members was palpable. Though expectations were high, we were not prepared for the reality of the day. The amount of love, acceptance, encouragement & support that they showered on - not just us - but the entire facility, was really something to see. They spent the day walking among us, engaging with everyone, and left an indelible impression on everyone they touched.

Here at JRCC we have a very active SL population

After our visit to JRCC in North Dakota, Matthew H., one of the Academy Assistants there, sent us this letter..

indelible impression on everyone they touched.

Here at JRCC we have a very active SL population & are fortunate to have an administration that supports our individual endeavors. But our individual paths often take us in different directions. One of the most powerful and unexpected takeaways from that day was the reminder that we are not merely individuals, but members of a thriving & powerful community. By the end of the day, it was clear to everyone that this wasn't just a visit, it truly was a family reunion.

Thank you SL team for your continued motivation, inspiration, & reminding us that together we can achieve anything.

-Matthew

UPDATE FROM DOUG GERARD, SR

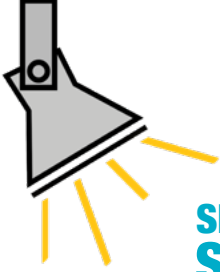
(Featured in Issue 1, 2023)

So many thoughts ran through my mind as I drove the miles to Bismarck to be reunited with the SL Crew. I was invited to spend an evening learning of the past year's events in ND and tell my own story to the crew. It was an amazing meal, followed by a group discussion that really recharged my batteries. Then in the morning, I had breakfast with Ed Duffy, retired warden of Rikers Island who is on SL's board. It was amazing - a man of his experience having the same ideas of future reform in the justice system. We were just two men having breakfast, not an ex con and ex warden.

Soon after though, my anxiety peaked as I entered the North Dakota State Penitentiary to represent the F5 Project at the Community Resource Fair. I was lost with fear and bad memories. Sweat dripped off my head, soaking my tee shirt. Thank goodness Stacie, the head of the treatment department, came to talk to me. I calmed down a little.

Being part of the F5 team that offered hope and practical services to these guys at NDSP was one of the most amazing feelings I've ever had. I knew 80% of the residents and staff. Everyone was very supportive of me and glad that I lived by example that change is possible. Thirteen months ago, I was in a prison cell with a rap sheet of 44 arrests and 10+ years in custody. As of today, I am nearly 3 years clean, working for the agency that helped me get there. Just last month I was promoted to the housing coordinator of F5's brand new sober living house in Minot. If I can turn my life around, so can you. Follow your heart! You are worth it!





SL COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

ZACH & DREAD

Co-Hosts of Chainz 2 Changed Podcast



Rebecca

CORRESPONDENCE COORDINATOR

Not many would envision a prison cell as a space from which to spread hope, but two members of our Loop community at NDSP in North Dakota are doing just that. After persevering through more than 6 years since they proposed the idea, Zach and Antonio (Dread) now host a podcast called “Chainz 2 Changed” from inside a converted prison cell on their block. The mission of their podcast is to let the world know that people in prison are more than what they’ve done. They want to share about the journeys of change that many inside are on, influence changes to laws and policies on the outside, and, overall, create hope and positive community.

Zach and Dread’s “studio” is located inside NDSP’s Restoring Promise Unit, where both serve as mentors to younger residents ages 18-25 - roles they earned through consistently demonstrating good character. Guests on the podcast so far have included administrators who were integral in bringing the podcast to fruition - Unit Manager Lacie Zander, and North Dakota’s Director of Facility Operations Colby Braun - and one of their peers, David Lee, an SL Academy graduate. During our recent visit to NDSP, members of our own staff - Jeff, Kelly, Travis, Nina, Dormen, Joyce, Jenny, and Ms. Naomi - had their turns in the hot seat! From their relaxed and humorous banter, the guests they bring on, and the insightful questions they ask, Zach and Dread create a listening experience that is both inviting and enlightening for the outside world. They really drive home the fact that no matter who you are, where you’re from, or what you’ve done, change -while a process- is possible.



Episodes of the “Chainz to Changed” podcast are available on tablets throughout prisons in North Dakota. People on the outside can listen on Spotify, iHeart.com, and at chainz2changed.libsyn.com/site.



BONUS STRENGTH SPOTTING - “I would like to take this opportunity to strength spot my dear friend and fellow Shining Light alum, Matthew, for the amazing job he did last week in welcoming our Shining Light family to the facility and leading us all on an energetic and entertaining tour of the grounds. As an aspiring leader myself, I am humbled and inspired by Matt’s unwavering ability to so bravely lead with **love, gratitude, social intelligence, humor and zest** – and I don’t just mean during tours! As the assistant facilitator of Matt’s SL Academy course I have enjoyed a front row seat to Matt’s remarkable journey of growth and self discovery as he embraces his passion to inspire hope in others through service. Matt is now an assistant facilitator for Shining Light and leads several other group projects that he has founded. I can’t wait to see what wonderful things the world has in store for Matt, and what Matt has in store for the world! Let’s GO!”

– Jeremy M. (ND)

For his friend, Matt T., whose letter is featured on p.9



STRENGTH SPOTTING TEAMWORK

"Strength spotting" is the intentional act of noticing when someone uses one of the character strengths. Developing an awareness of strengths, both within oneself and in others, can be a constructive practice. It can be especially motivating when sharing the observation of strengths with the person who possesses them!

"I serve alongside 31 men, in addition to numerous security and mental health professionals, as inmate mental health companions. Our supportive role in the Crisis Stabilization Unit is to help men in crisis by being a calm presence, a listening ear, or a safeguarding observer. Our unit appears more often like an orchestrated beehive than a typical dormitory. Working together for those in crisis is never easy or perfect, but it's certainly rewarding whenever someone in crisis becomes someone strong and stable again." - Derek C. (SC)

"I have seen the women who work in our Canteen show teamwork as they work together to serve our compound." - Monica H. (SC)

"...When either a Signal 3 Medical Emergency or a Signal 3 Inmate Fight is called, these officers use teamwork to control the situation before it gets out of hand." - Justin A.H. (OH)

"I see people around me using teamwork every day. In my unit all of us mentors and recovery coaches come together and put our ideas to come up with different groups and activities for the ladies to do who are working on their recovery, and because we work together that also helps us in return." - Shawna N. (OH)

"I've seen inmates using teamwork to make a pod potluck happen where everyone pitched in their food from commissary." - Rebecca G. (IL)

"I attend a daily AA meeting & the men in that meeting reach out to each other for help & respond with amazing care for each other's well being. It is teamwork at its finest." - Norman H. (ME)

I spot team work everyday when I go to school and I see the professors, Principal and the teachers assistants all working together so they can provide the best Education and Guidance to all students that is involved in The NJ Step College Program.
~ Wayne G ~
NJ

The best example of Teamwork around me, I can honestly say is my family. I received a long sentence and the stuck together as a team to be able to walk me through the process and keep myself and themselves as positive as possible. Even today, 5 yrs into 20 they are still working together through their own busy lives to make sure that I'm doing OK. I owe them a win!

Nick R. (PA)

There is a class in our dorm where we are placed in groups at the beginning of the class. When quizzes and test are going to be given, each group is responsible for encouraging and helping each of their members study. While walking around the dorm, I always see people from other groups quizzing each other, taking time out of their day to ensure they all pass. This method works effectively, for everyone in the class is maintaining a passing average. -Demarian M (SC)



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

A poem by Shawna N. (OHA)

When choosing my team I gotta be careful and analyze,
 Are you gonna take me to the bottom or help me to rise?
 Are you lyin' and scheming just to get high,
 From behind these walls makin your babies cry,
 Always chasin a fix just to get by.
 Rippin and runnin through the dorms all night,
 You think the way you're livin is alright.
 If this is your team then it isn't for me,
 I've got goals and a different dream,
 I'm tryin to be better for my family,
 Going back down that road will be the death of me.
 Today I choose a different team,
 One where I help others to feel heard and seen.
 We doubt ourselves but I help em believe,
 This isnt the person that they gotta be.
 We work every day to stay sober,
 Fighting like hell to not let em win us over.
 On our team we give inspiration and hope,
 Instead of selling false dreams and dope.
 I choose the team of recovery today,
 So join us and we'll teach you a better way.

The Divine Team

Our world is hurting
 Chaos is overwhelming
 We need a team to save humanity
 One team that truly cares about society
 Come forth the Divine Team
 Earth needs you!
 Fight against all injustice
 Stop the death of addictions
 I know you won't back down
 You won't give in
 Or give up
 The Divine team is growing
 Please join now, my friends
 The team needs you!

Larry S./PA

LAST ISSUE

“CHOOSING OUR TEAMS”

We asked you to reflect on this:
 “How does our good judgment
 help us to make wise decisions
 about group membership, family
 relationships, and more?”



Joyce

PROGRAM FACILITATOR

A Word on Teamwork and Judgment

You cannot go it alone. To accomplish a task we need a team. For my hopes and dreams to come to fruition I need a supportive group of people or team that will help me. I see God placed people in my life to help me and lift me up to support me. I see the work being done behind the scene; and so I take this and build a good support system (a Team) and I am at work namely, teamwork.

I use good judgment to discern whether I am living a lie or I am living what I was created to be. To make and accept decisions and to humble myself when I am wrong.

I built a team namely people who support me, people who I will work with to accomplish my goals, the employer's or community's goals. Shining Light community is part of my team.

When I get out of prison, the community I will be released to is going to be my team. The people by God's providence who support me emotionally and morally is my team. It takes trust, positivity, sanity, resolve, and teamwork for a task. I use good judgment to accomplish this.

-Noel G (PA)



NEW PROMPT ZEST IS CONTAGIOUS!

Our Shining Light staff got a BIG boost to our team's “zest” during our September visit to North Dakota. The connections among the community of Academy graduates and participants were inspiring! From my perspective, one thing that magnified our zest was the joy found in supporting one another.

Have you experienced this kind of contagious zest, the kind that happens when members of a community help and support one another? If so, please share a poem or brief essay that provides examples of how our teams, families, and/or communities bring zest to our lives.

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

**“HOW CAN THE STRENGTH OF ZEST HELP YOU,
AND THOSE AROUND YOU, END THE YEAR ON A POSITIVE NOTE?”**

For me living life with Zest has become an everyday thing. I believe that having Zest for life gives hope for a better tomorrow...and we all need hope to survive. Living with Zest creates its own hope even when you can't seem to find it anywhere else. So all I can say and advise is to look around you for the blessings you do have, be Zestful about them, focus on them, live them, and watch the hope grow and as this year closes, you'll find yourself looking forward to what next year has to offer! Smile, life is great no matter where you are!

- Richard H (OH)

Mark S. (OH) - "Well we can all start by knowing that the year is coming to an end. With the end of a year - for those of us in prison- means another year off the sentence. Instead of being down and depressed, we can try to help out with dorm decorations and try to spread the love of the holidays with those around us. Give someone a Christmas food bag, make a thanksgiving meal or Christmas meal with the people you hang out with. Buy some cards for people to send home, things like that."

Jean D. (NC) - "Zest can help me end the year 2023 by enveloping all of my hopes and dreams with tenacity, faith, courage, forgiveness, acceptance, creativity, fearlessness, spirituality, fairness, and a sense of humanity. The introduction to Shining Light has brightened my journey. It is my hope to become a subscriber and participator in one of the most empathetic works I've had the pleasure to read. It is comforting to know upon my release I can continue to follow the magazine online."

Michael M. (MT) - "Zest will always ensure you get the most out of life by pursuing everything with your highest level of enthusiasm. Being a source of excitement for your family and friends will ensure healthy relationships and get you the most out of what you put into life."

Roy P. (AL) - "It gives hope. It brings quality and enjoyment to life. It makes life worth living."

Austin R - *My zest for life comes from me wanting to be better at all aspects of my life. Once I was committed to change I was able to start achieving my goals.*

James B - *I experience zest each day that I begin with an expectant attitude and thankful heart for what God chooses to show me about Himself!*

Adam F - *I show my zest for life by learning and building new and productive ways of life for myself.*

Ray G - *Mentally, spiritually, and physically I have a zest for life and I try to do my best to help those around me to be better.*

**FROM THE
LOOP GROUP AT
RIDGELAND CI (SC)**

Real Talk



Naomi

PROGRAM FACILITATOR
COMMUTED LIFER & ACTIVIST

“Like a lot of us, when I hear that word ‘zest’, I just think about the soap! But really, I would say after all that I’ve encountered, I now have a zest for living! I’m not saying that I didn’t before, but now it’s just so different; I see life through different eyes now.

This is really important when you’re on the inside because if you don’t have that zest in your life, you will be a very depressed person. You have to put positive things in your life, have some zest about your day to get up out of that bed and out of that cell to work for those pennies. It’s very hard, but I would tell myself that I’m working for God; I ain’t working for no one else! I had that zest that I just wanted to continue to do something to keep my energy up. Nothing comes to a sleeper but a dream, and I didn’t want to just lay dormant in my bed, in my cell.

We draw out the zest in one another. People come from all walks of life on the inside. We don’t know where a person’s mind is, and perhaps they may want to be zestful, but they just don’t have the energy. If you treat them with a positive attitude, you can help people to start to believe in themselves. That zest will start to show. They’ll feel it and they will want to do things for themselves with zest.”

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 can you give to those of us who’ve been away from our children for several years? What should we be prepared for when we go home?

MS. NAOMI: We’ve been out of their lives for however long and we have to realize that our children change. So just try and be understanding and show the change that you’ve made. I was away from my son for 37 years – he’s a grown man now! I’m still learning him and he’s learning me. I make no demands of him, and he makes none of me; we play things by ear. We just don’t know where our children’s minds are, but you know, give them a fair chance to make their decisions on their own.

Q: When it’s your time to be released, what documents do you have to have? What if you don’t have a ride and you have to fend for yourself?

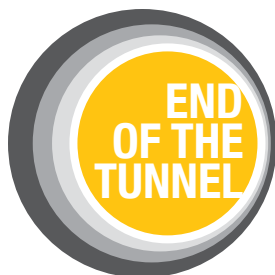
MS. NAOMI: Most institutions are not going to let you fend for yourself. You may not have family pick you up, but the institution will see that you get to a center, or that you get home, especially if you’re on parole. When I was on the inside, they didn’t talk about these things, but someone there should arrange for you to get your ID, tell you where you can get food stamps, and find clothes. If you’re of a certain age, there are programs available for transportation. As far as credentials are concerned, they should allow you to keep your identification from the prison.

Q: There is so much negativity in prison, how can you avoid negativity and proceed on a more profitable and positive journey?

MS. NAOMI: Well, that’s up to you. There were thousands of women around me in the decades that I had been in prison – a lot were negative, but a lot were positive as well. It’s already a miserable place, but if you want to remain positive, find people who like to laugh and people with positive vibes. Surround yourself with positive company – they’re there. I’m telling you, it would help you to sleep better in that place and go throughout your days without the burden of all that negativity.

Q: How have you dealt with the feelings of depression and loneliness while incarcerated?

MS. NAOMI: I was lonely for my parents and my family, but I always talked to God. You know, I love the Lord. And I talked to Him like He was my roommate! I would be in the chapel, pray, sing songs and just ask the Lord questions. I don’t want to make this a church thing, but that was my peace. I had peace in knowing there was somebody bigger than me who was responsible for me. And then I didn’t feel so lonely.



DID SOMEONE STEAL MY ZEST?



Kurt

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

*Aside from being a bar of soap, I think of Zest as our vigor and enthusiasm for life. It is our driving force, our motivation, the thing that makes us want to get out of bed in the morning. **It's also a crucial element of successful reentry.***

But what happens when you feel like your zest has been stolen by circumstances in your life? Can you get it back, or is it lost forever?

Early in my incarceration, I was actually bothered by individuals with zest. I would mumble, "What's he so happy about? Don't he know he's in prison?" It literally made me angry when I would encounter individuals that rose above their circumstances and maintained a positive outlook on life. Looking back, it is clear I resented them because I felt I would never get my zest for life back. But eventually I discovered that my zest didn't go away - I just replaced it with anger, resentment, bitterness, and hopelessness.

We can 100% get our zest back, because as a character strength it is always within us. It starts with reminding ourselves about our priorities in life. What are you most passionate about? It could be learning, music, being a parent, striving for social justice, or even proving your innocence. Once you have identified what you are passionate about, focus on it and fight the temptation to allow negativity to overshadow your zest. When you get distracted by the inevitable stressors in life, find ways to refocus yourself. Some tricks include hanging photos in your cell, calling home, reading, listening to music, journaling or drawing. It is also helpful to surround yourself with individuals with shared goals who are there to support you.

Keep in mind, though, that zest is not necessarily doing only things you are passionate about. It's being driven enough to do whatever you have to do to accomplish the things you do have zest for. For me, I knew I wanted to create change in our system. My zest came from wanting to help individuals coming home from incarceration. To accomplish these goals, I had to do plenty of things I didn't particularly have zest for: I had to follow rules to make parole, I had to humble myself, I had to study my butt off to graduate from college, and I even had to sacrifice activities that I enjoyed because they stood in the way of accomplishing my goals.

In my work with fellow reentrants, I see many struggle because they lack zest. They have given up hope, or had it beaten out of them. Some think they will automatically get their zest back upon release. But this is naïve optimism. Zest, like all character strengths, must be practiced and developed or it becomes dormant. Therefore, I encourage each of you to find your zest now. Practice it. Grow it. And then allow it to motivate you toward your goals.



Both Kurt and Ms. Naomi talked about the need to find zest within yourself, even when the environment or people around you make it really hard.



***Is there something or someone that has robbed you of your zest?
What might be one thing you can do today to help you reclaim it?***

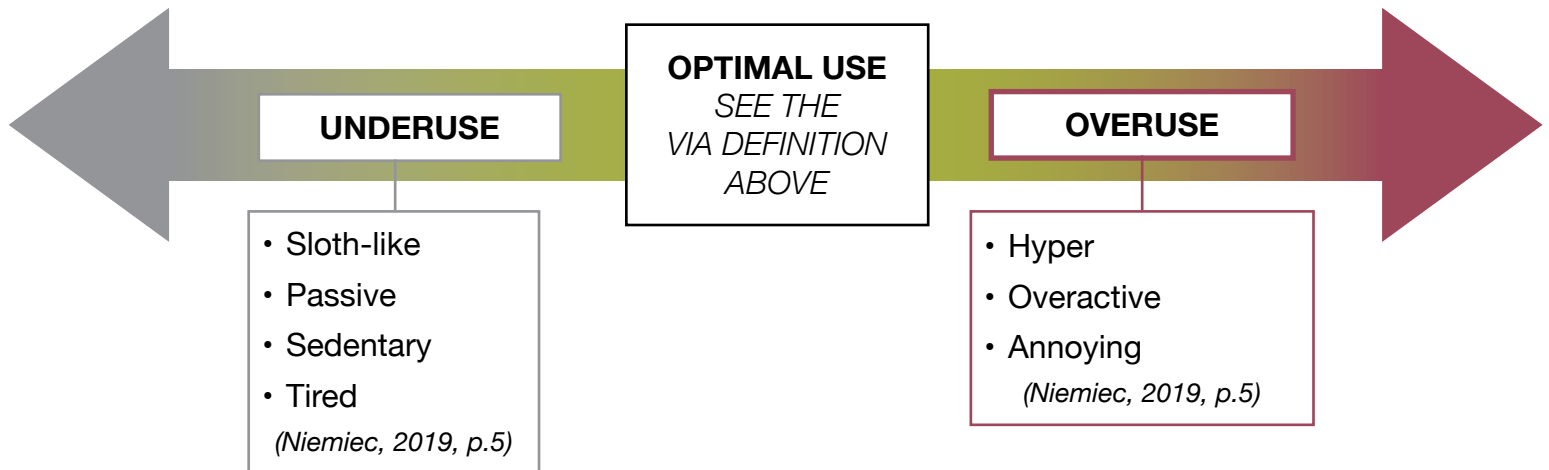
Kurt is the Founder/Executive Director of a reentry nonprofit in central PA called "Tomorrow's Neighbors." For more information, call (717) 241-8375 or visit www.tomorrowsneighbors.org

VIA DEFINITION: ZEST

***“I feel vital and full of energy,
I approach life feeling activated and enthusiastic.”***

“Zest means approaching a situation, or life in general, with excitement and energy, not approaching tasks or activities halfway or halfheartedly. People who are high in zest are excited to get up in the morning, and they live their lives like an adventure. Zest is a dynamic strength that is directly related to physical and psychological wellness. This strength has the strongest ties to overall life satisfaction and a life of engagement.”

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



Travis

PROGRAM DEVELOPER

When I read this definition, I usually think of people who are really outgoing and enthusiastic. I imagine folks who are super friendly and show how excited they are about things. But that’s just one way to think about ‘zest.’ While zest means having lots of energy and excitement, that can be shown in lots of different ways. It’s not

just about being loud and outgoing. You can use your zest when you’re doing things like writing, reading, or drawing just because you love it and want to express yourself.



On the flip side, you might think really outgoing and excited people always have zest, but that’s not always true, either. They could just have a boisterous personality or a desire for attention.



How can you tell if someone is living with zest or not?

What does zest look like in your own life?

As a way to activate your zest, I want to challenge you to think of an activity that brings you energy and excitement. Perhaps it is something from this issue of The Loop, or a similar activity. Or maybe you want to consider something for the holiday season - for example, creating a gift to a loved one on the outside or someone on your block who is having a hard time. Push yourself as far as you'd like, or lean into the community code "start simple" if this feels like a stretch for you.

Use the space below to describe what it looks like to start the activity, what it looks like to complete it half-heartedly or halfway, and what it looks like to complete it with zest.

ZESTFULLY

HALF-HEARTEDLY

TO START:

ACTIVITY:

TRAVIS' EXAMPLE:

START HERE

- **ZESTFULLY** - This would include personalizing each card, sharing a memory from the year or intentional words of encouragement that apply to each neighbor.
- **HALF-HEARTEDLY/HALFWAY** - For me, this would look like rushing through all of them and only saying short generic phrases, focusing on just getting them done instead of making them meaningful.
- **TO START** - I need to get either blank greeting cards or paper and some colored pencils, markers or pens.
- **ACTIVITY** - Holiday Greeting Cards for Neighbors

Here on the Veteran Service Unit (VSU) at SCI-Dallas we strive to implement programs and services that assist incarcerated veterans. This specialized setting offers us the unique opportunity to create an environment where we can better access the tools we truly need to succeed and flourish when reentering society. We use a lot of the Community Codes in our Code of Conduct Policy that everyone agrees to when being placed on the unit. We also use them for Ice Breakers at our weekly S.T.A.R.S. (Straight Talk About Real Stuff) meeting, and in workshops facilitated on the unit like Character Development & Taking Responsibility. The success of this unit has come from knowing how to use strength spotting and identifying areas where we need assistance. We are the first VSU in the PADO, and coming up on our 10-year anniversary of its inception has brought a profound Zest to the block!



Artwork by Dave O. (PA)

NEW

LISTEN & LEARN BEFORE OFFERING ADVICE

The Community Code that I and my fellow Coordinators must use regularly is "Listen & Learn Before Offering Advice." By using empathetic communication we can see things through the perspective of others, and seeing things the way they do helps us better understand their circumstance, therefore enabling a higher level of assistance. Knowing we are surrounded by people who have our best interest at heart gives us the enthusiasm to become the best versions of ourselves.

Perseverance has been the key to any new endeavor we pursue. You will continually run into obstacles, especially in an environment such as our own. Having the ability to navigate those obstacles to secure the desired result is what implementing the Community Codes can give you. Through identifying and exercising our character strengths, the VSU has one of the highest parole rates of any unit in the PADO while also keeping some of the lowest recidivism. Invest your enthusiasm and energy in something of value to you and your community. Being in prison doesn't take away your ability to be a paragon for change.

**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



Veterans Day is November 11th. To those among us who have served in any branch of the U.S. military, we salute you and thank you for your service. Even off the battlefield, we have seen how the bravery, perseverance, teamwork, judgment and other strengths borne from your experience can benefit all of our communities across the country.

Here is one example from another veterans' group in Ohio.

"I am currently a part of the Veterans Coalition here at Chillicothe CI in Oh. We not only work within the prison but we also take up blessing boxes that are donated outside throughout the communities, to help families with food and hygiene items. I have been a member since 2018 and I am so happy and glad that I can take part of something so huge."

- Donald D (OH)

Artwork by Chris L. (PA)

What's up, my fellow Loopers!



Ahh, zest! Can you feel the energy?! Zest happens to be one of my signature (top 5) strengths, yet I had a difficult time writing about it because it can look so different for different people. You may not have the outward energy of a “zesty” person, but that doesn’t mean you don’t put forth your best to achieve the things you set out to do. Zest can also work behind the scenes to help us persevere towards a goal when we’re not in the mood to do what we need to do.



Dormen

PROGRAM FACILITATOR
SL ALUM '18-'20

Think about “leg day” in the gym. (If you are an avid weightlifter, you know what I’m talking about!) The fun days in the gym are doing chest and arms and even sometimes back. Doing legs is a whole different animal. Leg day just means pain. Still, it has to be done - working out your legs is foundational to strengthening your body. So you may not like doing legs, but zest can help you do it like you love it, in order to help you achieve the goals you have in place for yourself. Not to mention zestful energy is contagious, which could be advantageous to the people you are working out with, which may come back around to energize you all the more.

This idea can be applied in all areas of your life. Maybe you have a job you just don’t feel like going to. If you have it in your mind that “I’m going to do this to the best of my ability and give it all my energy,” it will likely make the day go better or the job easier. Are there other situations like this for you, where there are things you don’t feel like doing but you know are good for you in the long run? ***How can zest help you continue on towards your goal and/or make the hard things more enjoyable?***

Now that the days are getting shorter and yard time may be limited, there are still indoor activities that can be done with zest. To maintain physical fitness, why not create a workout routine that could be done in the cell? Maybe for you, the extra down time allows you to focus your energy on something to benefit your mental fitness as well, like reading a new book or (my favorite) Sudoku puzzles. Or maybe this is a good chance to try a new hobby or “do that thing you’ve been meaning to do.”

It’s all about perspective - how you see this change - taking what you have access to, flexing your creativity muscles, and making the best out of the situation... Continuing your efforts of doing time and not allowing time to do you!



Try This Here is a sample of a circuit workout based on some exercises that kept me in shape when I couldn’t get to the gym or yard. I encourage you to give it a try or adapt it to suit you!

If you already have a workout regimen feel free to build on this by adding new exercises, increasing the number of reps, or whatever will challenge you to give your all. If this is new to you or if you haven’t done it in a while, remember to “start simple!” Feel free to do less reps, or pick just 2-3 exercises at first. Do whatever works best for your body, but then, with zest as your secret weapon, push yourself to get to 20-30 minutes a day, at least 3 times a week!

Full Body Circuit (Repeat 3x)

Goal - 20 min

<i>- Arm Circles - 5 each side</i>	<i>- 10 Push Ups</i>
<i>- 10 Jumping Jacks</i>	<i>- Wall Sit - hold for 10 sec</i>
<i>- 10 Squats</i>	<i>- 10 Tricep Dips</i>

**As always, use your best judgment to avoid injury or other physical harm.*

LAST ISSUE "ZEST WISH LIST"

We asked you to reflect on this: "What helps you find zest in your day-to-day life?"

Jackson P. (SD) - Zest: Finding joy in the little things; not always that what's best. Working out with your fellowship, or maybe much-needed rest. Writing a song with your friends, whom you consider close. Playin' ball out in the rec yard, or tellin' stories about ghosts. Sometimes you gotta find the moments where you're dancing in the rain. Laughing with your homies is the best to hinder pain. I'm lookin' at the pictures of my family today, and I know they're waiting for me and my bear hug - love's embrace. Tuesday mornings, we get oatmeal, and on Saturdays it's gravy. I'm on my way to meet my goals, I'm pushin' past the "maybe"s. I'm proving to the public that I'm better than my charges, so I gotta keep on going; zest is pulling me the hardest! But I couldn't stand the tallest if it weren't for my Creator. I know for more than fact He's on my side; so for Him I'll say, "I made it!"

Jacobi (NC) - Does anyone hear the buzz around the segregation block? It's the world turning inside of a box inside a box. It's the cars zooming, birds chirping, and the sun rising and falling. But even in the place meant for bad, it's life still moving.

Rebecca G (IL) - I hear the buzzing sound of the door so very very loud, and for a few hours that lonely feeling is gone; hearing the laughter and seeing the smiles, the positive feelings going for miles and miles; the sharing of food and strength of friendships, the love we show each other is at the top of my zest wishlist.

Excerpt from "Season's End"

Each season has its own beauty
as so do we
it's all in how we feel
and the pleasures we can see
For me the seasons are a blessing
a God given fate
to see the wonders of it all
as I move closer to a date.

by Lori A. L. (PA)

Excerpts from A ~~BOOK~~ CELL WITH A VIEW

FOR ME TO BE EXCITED ABOUT GOING FROM ONE PRISON TO ANOTHER IS INDEED AN ANOMALY, BUT I GOTTA TELL YOU FOLKS, I'M FEELING KINDA GOOD. WHY? BECAUSE MY NEW CELL HAS A WINDOW, AND THE WINDOW OPENS AND CLOSES! THERE ARE NO BROKEN WINDOW PANES!

AS I SIT WRITING I'M BEING BUFFETED BY SOFT GENTLE BREEZES. TO STAND AT THE WINDOW AND LOOK BEYOND THE RAZOR-WIRED FENCES AND SEE IN THE DISTANCE TREES POKING THEIR HEADS ABOVE THE ROOFTOPS IS... CATHARTIC.

I LOOK OUT THE WINDOW AND SEE LUSH GREEN GRASS MANICURED TO PRECISION. I SEE CLUSTERS OF FLOWERS IN A BRILLIANT ARRAY OF YELLOWS, PINKS AND REDS, PURPLES AND ORANGES. I THINK BACK TO ALL THE TIME MY GAL USED TO SPEND IN THE BACKYARD, PERFECTING HER "COTTAGE GARDEN". SHE CREATED BEAUTY THAT WAS RIGHT THERE BEFORE MY EYES BUT I DIDN'T SEE IT. I SEE IT NOW...

MANY YEARS AGO SOMEONE ENCOURAGED ME TO TAKE IN AS MUCH FRESH AIR AND SUNSHINE THAT I COULD, SAYING IT WOULD DO WONDERS FOR MY SOUL AND SPIRIT. I DIDN'T BELIEVE IT BACK THEN BUT OVER THE YEARS I FOUND THAT TO BE TRUE. TODAY I FEEL LIKE NEW LIFE HAS BEEN BREATHED INTO ME. IT MAY NOT LAST... BUT FOR NOW I'M GOING TO SAJOR EVERY MINUTE.

C. HURCH (PA)



WRITING RESOURCES

For this final issue of 2023, here's a recap of the Writing Resources we shared this year...



JUSTICE ARTS COALITION

Various modes of creative writing and visual art published regularly

P.O. Box 8261
Silver Spring, MD 20907

 The Marshall Project

THE MARSHALL PROJECT

Short nonfiction essays on personal experiences with incarceration

Studio Cityspire
156 West 56th Street, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10019



“READERS’ CIRCLE” (USC’S PRISON EDUCATION PROJECT)

Volunteer writing mentorship and editing service

950 West Jefferson Blvd.
JEF 150
Los Angeles, CA 90089-1293



PRISON JOURNALISM PROJECT

Telling stories using the tools of professional journalism

2093 Philadelphia Pike, #1054
Claymont, DE 19703

HOPE AND ZEST

*IF Zest and Hope is in the air,
Smiling faces will surely be there.
For Hope is always better than Hate and
So Many of us Can Surely relate
from prison yards in every State,
add some Zest and what else will we need,
The Loop to read will be fine indeed,
Through all our trials and every test.
Our lives are So Much better
When they're filled With Hope and Zest.*

© Jackson-W-2023 N.C

Jackson shared that this was the first poem he's ever written! Way to go, Jackson!



NEW PROMPT: “HOPE SONNETS”

One of my favorite poetic forms to talk about in the SL Academy is the sonnet, with its reminder of poetry's roots in the body (iambic beats that sound like our heartbeats, for instance). For our next issue, why not try a sonnet on the topic of hope? See if you can write three stanzas, each about four lines long and each focused on a different person, place, or thing that gives you hope. Then wrap everything up with a two-line couplet at the end, telling your readers what you want them to know, or understand, about hope.

Here's what I think I'll try: first stanza about babies, second about the arrival of spring, third about our Shining Light Academy students and Loop contributors. And then a final couplet that somehow incorporates these famous lines from Emily Dickinson: “'Hope' is the thing with feathers - / That perches in the soul.”

Joyce



CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATE




Angelina

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

One sign of a healthy community or relationship is the ability to disagree respectfully. This page offers a chance for you to practice critical thinking, hear different perspectives, and share your own ideas in a safe, constructive, and concise way. 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, **“Hope is the most important thing you can give a person.”** Here’s what our team of thinkers had to say:

AGREE

IT'S COMPLICATED

DISAGREE

“It’s in the mix. I believe love comes first. Without love, some find it hard to have hope.”

- Phillip B. (NC)

“I think Time is the most important thing you give a person. Once the time is in play then hope takes it part.”

- Jesse T. (WI)

“Yes, hope is the most important thing you can give a person. Without hope a person is lost. They can find themselves giving up on life or humanity itself. That person becomes someone very dangerous to themself and maybe even society. Women and men need to be able to grab onto something bigger than themself. Men and women in a situation like myself need that hope that one day incarceration will be over, and we will get the chance to prove to ourself that we are better than what the court and others had to say about us. Give me HOPE!”

- Ronald Y. (IL)

“HOPE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN GIVE A PERSON.”

“I agree, hope is a very important thing in life. Hope is where dreams begin. I think of a life absent of dreams, being like a stream without a current - eventually it becomes stagnant. Hope is what leads us forward in life. Hope is what tomorrows are made of. A life with no hope isn’t really a life, it is merely an existence.”

- Tonya P. (AR)

“Yes, I agree. No matter how hard the road, don’t give up. You can face any challenge, climb any mountain, and conquer any obstacle when you have hope. Hope is the substance of things not seen. Hope doesn’t disappoint. It is Hope that inspires dreams, and Hope stirs courage to make your dreams become a reality.”

- Jimmy C. (OH)

“Hope IS A DANGEROUS THING, Hope CAN DRIVE A PERSON CRAZY.” - “Red” SLAWSHANK REDEMPTION ~
I BOTH AGREE AND DISAGREE AS TO THE IMPORTANCE OF INSTILLING Hope WITHIN A PERSON. I FEEL THAT A HEALTHY DEGREE OF Hope COMBINED WITH TEMPERED AND REALISTIC GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS IN RELATION TO Hope ITSELF, IS A MORE SOLID WAY TO NOT FEEL DISCOURAGED OR HOPELESSLY UNREALISTIC ABOUT THINGS IN GENERAL.

~“BLACKHART” (CPA)

“I think hope gives you purpose but you also need grace and understanding. Remember it’s progress not perfection.”

- Stone L. (NC)

“I agree. When you give someone hope, they feel motivated instead of overwhelmed.”

- Sam G. (OR)

I do believe that hope is very important to give someone. Although I believe the first thing we should give someone is respect. Treat others how you would like to be treated is one of the first things I give other people. and then it goes from there. Compassion and hope for others depends on a person's character in my opinion.
-Adam K (AZ)

"Yes and No, because hope is a good thing to give people but I believe love is the most important because a lot of people in the system don't think they are loved and it makes them a lot better to know they are loved by many people."

- Anonymous (SC)

"Hope is one thing, but SUPPORT to accomplish the thing you hope for is the MOST important thing. A person can Dream all they want, but you have to support your goals to achieve your desires (your hopes) This support can come from others (one of the best kinds of support in my opinion, since this is one form of support I have YET to attain) but, the initial support has to come from YOUR OWN SELF. To hope is to sustain and assist with your dreams and desires. It starts with you. Then the possibility of influencing others to support your cause (your hopes) becomes a reality. Isn't that what hope is? A wish that some want of yours will be fulfilled?"

- Terri G. (OH)

"Yes, because without hope they would give up on life. You need hope in order to survive in this world of poverty, racial discrimination and hateful people."

- Timothy B. (MI)

I believe that statement is complicated. While it is important to give people hope, sometimes it can be their undoing. Hope comes in many shapes and sizes and people wrap and unwrap them in many different ways. I've seen people in situations where hope is the worst thing you can give them, and in instances like that you must show them the harsh reality of what's going on.

-Demacian M. (SC)

***Please Note:** some answers have been abridged for space

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



**"EXPECT THE BEST,
PLAN FOR THE WORST"**

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

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

Artwork by Brian B. (PA)

“People who are high in zest are excited to get up in the morning, and they live their lives like an adventure.”

(VIA Institute On Character, n.d.)

How closely can you relate to this statement? For me, it's hit or miss...



Nina

PROGRAM FACILITATOR

A lack of motivation and weariness can be quite common. At times, I feel more motivated to stay in bed rather than head straight-on into a new adventure. What was once a very ambitious and creative person has been packed away. She is still there, but the path back to her is unclear.

Many of us long for the enthusiasm of who we once were. Could it be that through mindful meditation, we can once again see the world through new eyes of zeal and wonder? Will the zest of life return simply with a new perspective of our present reality?

Let's try something new! Consider tapping into the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and textures that surround us every day. A variation of the 5 Senses Exercise below helps to ground us in the present moment by acknowledging details of each sense. The 5-4-3-2-1 technique was developed by bioengineer Alexander Lowen as a tool for managing anxiety that can be used anytime, anywhere. Perhaps it can also be used to generate zest!

Try to focus on the following:



5 THINGS YOU CAN SEE: Look around at the colors, textures, and movements that surround you. Mentally, take note of each one and how it relates to the rest of the environment.



4 THINGS YOU CAN TOUCH: Focus on things that feel comforting, such as your ring, your coffee cup, or your pen. Notice the texture – Is it soft? Rough? Flexible or hard? Heavy or light?



3 THINGS YOU CAN HEAR: Challenge yourself to listen to the more quiet sounds that tend to be in the background unnoticed - refrigerator hum, someone scratching their head, or leaves blowing. Notice which sounds bring you a sense of comfort and calm.



2 THINGS YOU CAN SMELL: You can choose to smell things like your hair, your shirt or a nearby book. Notice those scents and release them with a deep breath in and out.



1 THING YOU CAN TASTE: Consider popping in a piece of gum or a mint, or taking a sip of your drink, or simply move your tongue around your mouth. Notice how your taste buds respond and take note of how you feel.



How can this concept of appreciating something from different angles be used to add zest to some of your daily activities?



HOLIDAYS & SPECIAL EVENTS: COMING UP

NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH
NOVEMBER

DIA DE MUERTOS
MIDNIGHT OCT 31 - NOV 2

THANKSGIVING
NOV 23

Artist - Kenny D. (ND)



“Day of the Dead, or **Día de Muertos**, is one of the most important celebrations in Mexico...commemorating death as another element of life and as a way to remember and honor loved ones...Families carefully place photographs of their ancestors on colorful displays of ofrendas, [which are] altars to invite the spirits of the dead back into the world of the living.” (*Oscar Lopez, The New York Times, 2022*) In 2017, the holiday received more worldwide attention after Pixar debuted the film *Coco*, a story of a boy on a journey to connect with his ancestors.



Images from
Pixar's "Coco"



WHAT WE'RE READING

BIOGRAPHY

THE ROSE THAT GREW FROM CONCRETE // poems by: TUPAC SHAKUR

“My favorite book. It has inspired me to write and reach out to help others.”
Jesse T. / WI

FICTION

HOW THE GARCIA GIRLS LOST THEIR ACCENTS

by: JULIA ALVAREZ

“I recently finished this book and it's very humorous.”
Albert R. / NC

Hispanic Heritage Month was Sept 15th - Oct 15th & this book is based on Julia's personal story of immigration to the US.

NONFICTION

DEEP WORK // by: CAL NEWPORT

“It deals with how people have gotten away from thinking deep and being pulled away by constant interruptions and how technological advancements have played a part of this. For me it hits home in that I spent over a decade in ad/seg,shu confinement which allowed me time to think deep and master such skills that afforded me opportunities as a result of time thinking in a manner that my creative mind was active and mental resources tapped into as well. Enjoy the reading!”

Michael P. / CA

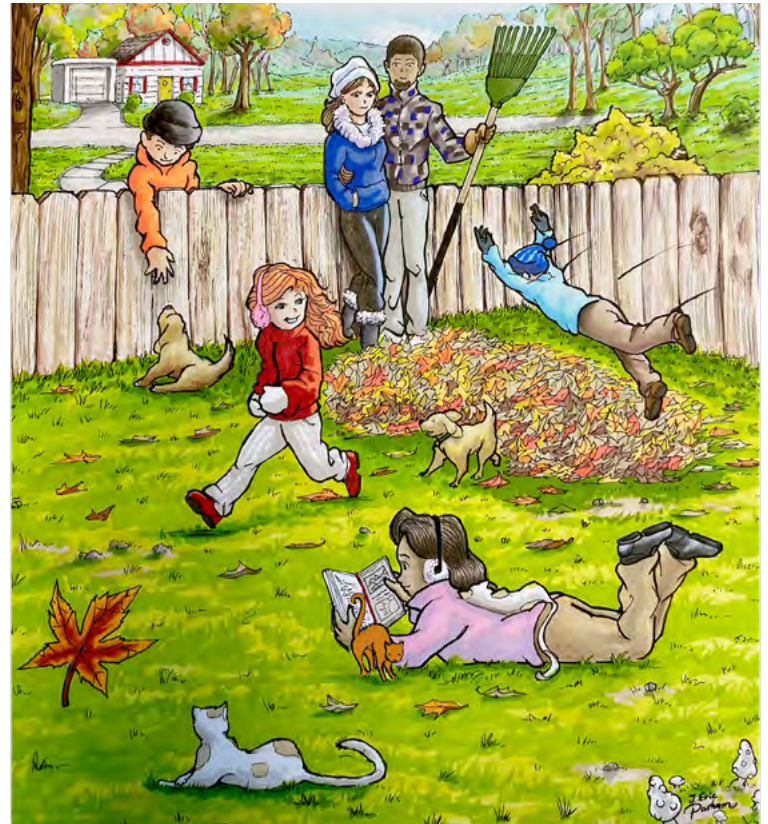


- Shining Lights
- The Loop
- Second chance
- gratitude
- Freedom
- Bravery
- Dream
- Teamwork
- create
- Family
- Patience
- Character
- grace
- Peace
- Light
- Zest
- Health
- Faith
- Love
- Forgive
- Chose



SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Joshua Parham (SC) got 2nd Place in our cover art competition with this piece, and then we thought it would be fun to turn it in to a Spot The Difference. See if you can find all 12 differences!
(If you have an idea for a Spot the Difference picture, send it in!)



THE SHINING LIGHT
ANTHEM

ONE, we are the;
TWO, mighty shining light;
THREE, gonna create some love;
FOUR, for the world to share;
FIVE, shining light so bright;
SIX, never losing sight;
SEVEN, always in the fight;
EIGHT, staying in the light;
NINE, holding on so tight;
TEN, representing shining light;
ALL TOGETHER FOR THE LOOP!



JUST

FOR

FUN

 **RECIPES**

As colder weather heads our way, we'd love to feature your favorite soup recipes so send them in!



Peace in Love,
BIG BRA from Shining Light Academy - SCI Coal Township.

Our brother and facilitator, Freedom, requested that I submit this Pop Sonnet to the Loop Magazine. To my surprise the group along with the great facilitators in the Shining Light Academy was able to awaken a creative side of me that I never knew existed, and it manifested in the form of an inspiring fight song!!!

Thank You, God Bless!

HOLIDAY CARDS

A few people in this issue mentioned making cards as a way to bring hope and love to others this holiday season. Feel free to use this Snowflake Maze as a template you can trace for a design on the front of your card, or the other snowflake designs we've included!



MS. NAOMI'S CORNY CORNER

WE KNOW YOU CAN'T HELP YOURSELVES

How do you wake Lady Gaga up in the morning?

P-p-p-poker face - Jacinda Lee A. (PA)

What do you call a pile of cats?

A meowtain. Just kitten. - Taylor C. (SD)

What did the buffalo say to her son?

Bison. - Maurice W. (ND)

A string walks into a bar. The bartender says, "Sorry, we don't serve strings here." The string goes out back, frays up his top & ties himself into a knot. He walks back into the bar & the bartender says, "Aren't you the string that was just here?" The string says, **"Nope, I'm a frayed knot."**

- Edward G. (PA)



SPECIAL THANKS TO THESE 71 CONTRIBUTORS:

COVER ART:

Chontelle Shirk (PA) - 1st
Joshua Parham (SC) - 2nd
T.J.C. (SD) - 3rd

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[CO] Scott F.

[IL] Rebecca G. & Ronald Y.

[ME] Norman H. & Shaylee O.

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[SC] Adam F., Austin R., Demacian M.,
Derek C., Gary K.F., James B., Monica
H., Ray G.

[SD] Taylor C.

[WI] Jesse T.

*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 HOPE

SEND US YOUR BEST COVER ART!

UPCOMING THEMES: HOPE & HUMILITY



What better way to start the year than focusing on Hope? This can be a complex or even challenging word - as we've seen in the various responses to the Constructive Debate section. As a character strength, Hope goes beyond faith or spirituality. It also includes having a positive mindset and optimism about the future, as well as realizing our abilities and opportunities to create pathways toward that desired future. **When you consider the character strengths of 2023 - Bravery, Forgiveness, Judgment/Critical Thinking, Teamwork, and Zest - which one(s) might be most useful in developing Hope as you prepare for a new year?**



SUBMISSIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE DUE BY DECEMBER 10



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



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

- **Tell your friends!!!**
- **Write to us with your feedback, responses, writing, or artwork**
- **Find more creative inspiration through our "Creations of a Caged Bird" videos or our new Writer's CoLab Anthology.**
- **Hone your own creative writing skills through video-based courses like Playwriting and Intro to Spoken Word.**
- **Continue developing your character through our Learn Your Strengths and 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**

... "I soooooo look forward to Each & Every installment! Keep up the Great Work! Lots of Love! God Bless all the Staff, Readers, & Contributors! You are ALL so Loved! Happy Holidays Everyone! & Happy New Year! :-D" - G. Allen II (OH)