

shininglight

2023 - ISSUE 2

THE LOOP

— FORGIVENESS —



Gary K. F.



THE LOOP

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

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

If you are new to The Loop, we'd love to consider you part of the Shining Light community. The best way to do this is to mail in your responses or artwork to the address below so we have your name and address. If you are in a prison or a jail with an existing partnership, we will attempt to send your own (free!) copy with your name on it. Anytime 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

→ **Send Submissions To:** Shining Light, PO Box 267, Annville, PA, 17003 ←

- 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.

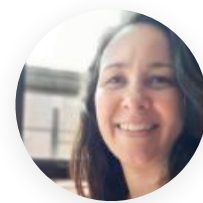
FORMATTING

- 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!

IN THIS ISSUE: As you may know, each edition of The Loop is based on a different “character strength” - 24 positive traits we all possess, which can be developed to improve personal well-being and relationships. Some of these strengths can be easier to wrap our heads around than others...and “forgiveness” is one of the *others*! By nature, forgiveness is connected to painful experiences between complex human beings, so it is a deep and complex topic to unpack. It may be tempting to run the other way and just try not to think about it, or depending on the degree of the offense, the idea of forgiving may feel unjustifiable or simply impossible. Even if we *want* to forgive, it can sometimes be hard to know where to start.



Kelly
PROGRAM
DIRECTOR

Forgiveness is so important for our own inner healing and freedom, yet there are no “5 easy steps” or “one size fits all” solutions. Every individual has their own process and timeline, and that’s okay. In this issue, we will hear from each other about our struggles and questions around forgiveness as well as perspectives and experiences that have helped us through. Ms. Naomi (p.14) asks, “Have I really forgiven if I haven’t forgotten the offense?” and Dormen (p.19) shares about the ongoing challenge to forgive himself. The Horton brothers (p.15) share their remarkable journey to forgive when severe injustice is at play. There is an entire page with some of your own reflections (p.13) on the connection between bravery and forgiveness, and the Loop Group at London CI (Ohio) provided great content for our Community Code section (p.16).

Many thanks to all 56 readers who submitted artwork, writings and other responses to this issue! 😊

A Comrade of mine, graced me with your magazine and I love it. It was as if it was meant for me to read & subscribe because your next issue is about what I am currently working on in my life... "Forgiveness".

Shout out to Gary F (SC) for the awesome cover art!

**If you're a visual artist and have an idea for a cover, please send it in!!!*

Themes for upcoming issues include: Judgment, Teamwork and Zest.

Thank you for being a vision of hope for all of us - I look forward to receiving my own copies.

-Lori (PA)


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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

Greetings! We again welcome many new participants to The Loop community. It is hard to believe, but this all began in 2020 when we mailed an encouraging letter to 280 people. That became “The Loop” in mid-2021, and now over 15,000 people will be reading this magazine on tablets or print!

In the Loop, we offer inspiration, connection, and tools to empower you to discover a path toward your potential and goals. We also offer The Loop as a way to support and inspire each other - even looking beyond the magazine for opportunities to encourage the people around you every day. This could be as simple as greeting someone on your block, or it could be bringing together a few people to discuss the ideas in The Loop.

I continue to be motivated by the men and women inside prisons who have been able to rise above injustices, trauma, extremely difficult circumstances, and more. I have met so many people who have every reason to be angry and miserable but with their strength of forgiveness have found a way to be full of joy, purpose, and life. Several examples of this are spread throughout this issue.

Forgiveness is a choice, but it is often not easy. There are always other people involved, and we can't control their responses! It is a journey that varies by the circumstances, the people involved, and more. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, condoning (excusing), or even reconciling. Healthy boundaries are a vital part of moving forward in a relationship with forgiveness. The pain doesn't immediately go away, and scars can remain. But, the alternative to forgiveness is destructive to ourselves and others.

We hope this issue can help you on your journey. If something raises questions for you or touches on some unaddressed pain or trauma, we strongly encourage you to talk to a counselor, chaplain, or mentor. These are people with experience in helping people deal with forgiveness and its challenges. Our role in connecting an extended community - a broad circle of people - is to provide ideas, encouragement, and tools to help you on your journey. We all also need people to walk alongside us daily and in person - an inner circle. Maybe you need to take the difficult and courageous step of seeking new or different people for your inner circle. Share The Loop and use it as a tool to start some discussions. You may discover some people seeking the same thing who you never expected. Please send us updates and encouragement to share with the entire Shining Light community!



Jeff

FOUNDER &
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"I just found the Loop today and I found it interesting to see so many people incarcerated and coming together as a community. It struck me to see so many things we all can come up with as a whole and mean so much to one another, and it made me want to be able to join and tell my stories and write... I can't wait to see what I can do and grow with u all. Thank you for letting me in"

- Shannon (OH)



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...

My best class, R.A.M., has allowed me to identify my true self and find out who I need to be by setting goals while in here as well as once I am released. I never knew how easy things can be in life as long as you know what you want and do what is needed to get it.

-Michael (OH)

I finally made it out of a 4B Block & got to see my mom in person & received a hug, pop & SNACKS

- ROACH (OH)

My "cellie" & newfound friend, was just released, after living with me for nearly 1 year... By God's grace I got to live with and bond with a great person. I knew he had many struggles to face upon release. It brings me great joy to see him overcome that adversity & enjoy life as a free man.

☺ -KASHIIE (CA)

* Scored low on the Ohio Risk Assessment score! (O.R.A.S)

* Won the Black History Month spelling Bee Contest

* Won 3rd Runner up in the Art Contest through Union Supply

JOE - OH

I just finished a 5 month long Pre-apprentice program. There were many days I wanted to ditch class - but I forced myself to stick with it. I have a tendency to leave things incomplete which in turn leaves me feeling bad about myself. Sticking with it, and in the end, acing all the exams really made me feel good

☺ Audria N. - (MT)

I completed the Military Prep Program along with 6 others in my group this last January.

I then sketched a patch that represents our unit Class 22 01.

Our motto is "A1 on Day 1!" Which means being prepared for the first day of our release.

My friend then took my rough draft and made it super nice to a finished product. Shout out to you Mr. Wise! Thanks! ☺

-DANIEL (OH)

I have done over 20 Bible studies, I have worked in The Kitchen over 10 1/2 months Finished one of my 3 programs. Got A halfway house Already I'll be going to IN less than 23 months. I'm coming up on my release date on 1-2-25 I have been down since August 2, 2020. -Paul / PA

I realized that I was surrounded by many people that didn't do their crime and other reasons to be incarcerated. I started meeting people and making friends. Then I started taking courses and then taking music lessons. After a ten year hitch I found myself hurrying through my sentence, gaining college credits and adding a third instrument to my life. (Clarinet, Sax, and Guitar) -M. Bland (OH)

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

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

I'm excited about getting resentenced and judged as the Changed Man I Stand Today... ~ Wayne Goo NJ

Recently I received permission from the prison administration to call into my Alcoholics Anonymous home group (the main AA group I attended weekly prior to my incarceration). It meant a lot to call in and listen and share experience, strength, and hope with the meeting. I'm grateful to maintain a tie to the community despite being in prison and I recommend the 12 step programs for anyone struggling with something they want to quit but can't.

-James L. (NC)

My Security level got lowered and I'm now waiting to go to HAT block!

-Gilly - (OH)

I WAS Able to meet one of my heroes. I am one of the biggest Cleveland Browns fans ever. I met Josh Cribbs and got his Autograph. Awesome.

-Finley (OH)

With my family's help I been blessed to have a work of fiction published. It is called "The Art of Forgiveness."

We are expecting another before Summer. -Rodney (SC)

I'm very superstitiously confident, secure, and self-asserting. I will be moving mid-west when I'm released.

& My new pen pal - Tiff & TJ (OH)

6 **CREATIVE CONNECTION**

MERIT BADGE:

Thanks to everyone who sent in their badges! It was encouraging to see how many different things are badge worthy for our community. I would wear this jacket any day :)



Surviving
Drug Addiction/
Overdoses



Daniel describes his
"A1 on Day 1"
patch in his Positive
News submission
on p.5



I learned to ride a unicycle
at age 11 and went on to doing
tricks and stunts I haven't even
seen done in shows, like riding
down steps, bleachers, & ramps.



I came up with an empowering slogan
and clothing brand called, B.A.G.L.I.F.E.
BEING A GENERATOR and LIVE INFLUENCE
of EXCELLENCE. I generated a space
inside my state issued quarters
to write, draw, and continue my education.

NEW FLOWER FIELD

I'll be honest. I've never been much of a flower person. Bouquets are lovely, but it was actually when I first went to a field of wildflowers that I really appreciated the beauty and uniqueness of each one. Our SL community is like a field of those flowers. We're so vast and so unique that I'm often left in awe of the beauty we're creating through this.

To celebrate that this spring, I'd love to create a virtual field of flowers that you design. And I know anyone can draw a flower, so no excuses :)

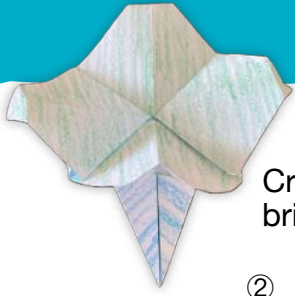
They can be simple. Complex. They can be symbolic. Or they can just be...a flower. I want to fill this page and maybe create a little bit of that awe for each of us.



JENNY
CREATIVE SERVICES



Kelly's contribution →



ORIGAMI FLOWER

Create some spring blooms with this paper folding craft! Keep to brighten up your space or give away to brighten someone else's!

① Color one side



Side A

② Color the other side



Side B

③ Fold the top left corner down to the bottom right corner



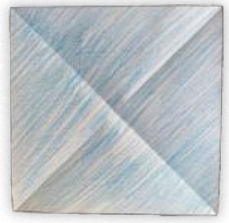
④ Open it back up



⑤ Fold the bottom left corner up to the top right corner



⑥ Open it back up



⑦ Flip it over



⑧ Fold the right side over to the left side



⑨ Open it back up



⑩ Fold the bottom edge up to the top edge



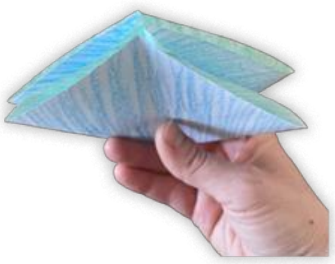
⑪ Prop the paper up on its edges so that it looks like this from above



⑫ Pinch the sides together & flatten down...



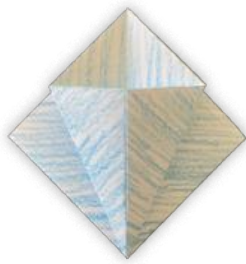
⑬ ...so that the whole paper has become a smaller square with a "mouth"



⑭ Lay the square down so that the "mouth" is at the top



⑮ Fold the right and left edges to the center crease then...



⑯ ...flip it over & do the same thing for this side.



⑰ Fold each point downwards to create petals.



⑱ Experiment with any shape you want!





SL ACADEMY

NORTH DAKOTA: After the graduation of the group of men in segregation at NDSP, a second group is underway, along with a fourth cohort from general population. Seven men will also be finishing up a Playwriting Extension Course at NDSP, and a fifth cohort from JRCC began in March.

OHIO: A fourth Academy cohort at Belmont CI is underway, including a handful of participants who were motivated to sign up after participating in the new “Loop Group” (see next page for more)

PENNSYLVANIA: New Academies at SCI Waymart and SCI Coal Township are going really well, nearing the finish line!

**The SL Academy includes 50 hours of SL-facilitated interactions through video-conference and requires full support from the hosting facility. With our limited resources, we are not able to offer this program everywhere. If you are interested in having this program at your facility, the first step is to ask a staff person to reach out to us for more information.*



WRITERS COLAB

Shout out to the 25 writers who have finished, or are nearing the end of their 3-month creative process! Final drafts for the Winter 2023 CoLab are coming in, and certificates will be awarded soon. If you'd like to participate in this writing mentorship in the future, keep your eyes out for the next announcement. **If you have Edovo on your tablet, be sure to check out last year's CoLab Anthology of poems, short stories and plays!*



NEW TABLET COURSE

Our newest video series is now available on Edovo! This follow-up to the “Learn Your Strengths” video series looks at a few specific Character Strengths in depth, with tools and practices to develop those strengths for the sake of yourself and those around you. Like other videos on Edovo, this is designed to be beneficial for individuals who take the course on the tablet, but could also be used as a group study for even greater benefit. Why not grab a friend or two and do the course together?





*If you've read *The Loop* before, you've heard us talk about "Loop Groups." These are simply groups of readers who get together to discuss the content and encourage each other to respond in ways that are meaningful to them. Several formalized groups are happening across the country, proving to be really positive experiences that are having ripple effects throughout the facilities. Here are a few we're aware of in the state of Ohio.*

BELMONT CI - The new "Loop Group" birthed out of the SL Academy is a huge hit! This initial group of 17 (including Academy graduates and other subscribers) met for 4 consecutive weeks, and not one person dropped out! In addition to discussing the questions and articles, they encourage each other to contribute with artwork and creative writing. And as an extra show of teamwork and kindness, a few participants with extra means have agreed to take turns covering the postage by sending in all of the contributions in one envelope. There's already a waiting list for the next two sessions, and the SL community there has grown exponentially since offering this group opportunity.

GRAFTON CI - This group is very intentional about finding creative ways to engage others in the facility who may not ordinarily sign up for *The Loop*, including things like the Cover Art Contest (which yielded last issue's cover on Bravery). They also organize events called "Blank Canvas Presentations" where participants share original artistic expressions (songs, poems, monologues, visual art, etc) that resulted from previous Loop Group discussions. These presentations are open to the general population and include basic information about *The Loop* and the Shining Light community, sample discussions, and an invitation for audience members to sign up for the magazine and/or a future group.

LONDON CI - This pilot group consists of six men from the Horizon Prison Initiative (see p.16), a special unit within the facility. Two Horizon residents came together to write a full 8-week curriculum combining *The Loop* and Shining Light's "Learn Your Strengths" video course. They added creative instructional elements they felt would pique the interest of others on the unit and fulfill the requirements of the Horizon program. This was approved by Horizon as well as facility administration, with hopes that after a successful trial run with the small group, it could be adapted as an offering to the general population and peer-facilitated by the original group participants. So while these men are working their way through the curriculum - and loving it! - they are simultaneously promoting *The Loop* throughout the facility.

Each one of these facilities has added over 100 new subscribers since starting Loop Groups, which just shows that people are definitely excited to have something positive to do and talk about together. We know there are other groups happening in other states as well, which we hope to feature in the future. If you are part of a group that discusses *The Loop* together - even if it's informal - let us know what's working for you so we can inspire each other to shine our collective lights even brighter!

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

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

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



SL COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

DOLPH & ZECH



Several incarcerated Shining Light participants, pictured above, recently had an opportunity to speak at a committee hearing for the North Dakota House of Representatives, held inside the North Dakota State Penitentiary. This was a historic occasion as it was the first time legislators in the state held a meeting inside a maximum security prison. The legislators eagerly listened as staff, outside partners, and residents (as incarcerated individuals are called in ND) shared about the innovative approach to corrections underway in the department.

Zech (2nd from the right, next to Jeff) is a Shining Light Academy graduate and Academy Assistant for SL classes in the Behavioral Intervention Unit. Here is some of what he shared with the legislators:

"I spent 24 years in prison...the majority of it in segregation. I knew violence very well. Shining Light has given us the chance to live, to be real, and to be vulnerable. It gave me the strength to change my ways. It gave me purpose in life when I had none... I am now a caregiver in medical. I went from taking lives to taking care of lives."

Afterward, Zech stated, *"To speak before the Senate on behalf of Shining Light is an honor that I hope will bolster others to believe in themselves... To share Shining Light with the government in a meaningful way and use our community codes of bravery and social intelligence is humbling. I am grateful."*

Fellow SL Academy Assistant Dolph (2nd from the left) had this to say:

"Shining Light changed how I view myself and others. It made me realize I am not useless... Today people say, 'Hey man. You're different!' and I'd say, 'I'm not different, I'm just better.'"

Several other Shining Light participants represented other in-prison programs that have been implemented in North Dakota since 2015, as part of the state's efforts to implement Norway-style prison reforms. The ND Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation has been described as "leading the nation" in these efforts towards "normalization" and "restoration."

The Representatives went back to the capitol with such a good report that a Senate Committee had their own hearing in the prison four weeks later! In their role as legislators they primarily look at numbers, but this hearing put real faces, stories, and purpose behind those numbers. After the Senate Committee hearing, the Chairman stated, "This is not what we expected. It was way better." One legislator even described it as the best day of his 26 years as a legislator.

Pennsylvania's former Lt. Governor John Fetterman led the charge as chair of the Board of Pardons to commute Freedom (Dennis) and Lee Horton's life sentences to time served. In February of 2021, PA Governor Tom Wolf ordered their release from prison. Soon after, the brothers joined Fetterman's successful U.S. Senate campaign as field organizers in Philadelphia, and in January now-U.S. Senator Fetterman invited Freedom to be his guest at the State of the Union Address in Washington, D.C.



Freedom & Senator Fetterman at the State of the Union Address in D.C.

According to Senator Fetterman, *"The incarceration of Dennis and Lee for a crime they did not commit is a stark reminder of the work we need to do to make our criminal justice system more equitable and fair." He adds, "...as your U.S. Senator I will continue to push for second chances for those who deserve them. We should not be a society about vengeance, we should be a society about redemption."*

Following this once-in-a-lifetime experience, Freedom commented, *"Sitting in the House chamber was so surreal. We used to watch the State of the Union every year from our prison cells... Senator Fetterman only had one ticket, but he chose to invite me. I was honored to represent everyone watching from prison."*



STRENGTH SPOTTING

BRAVERY

"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.

THE ONE INSTANCE THAT STOOD OUT MOST TO ME IS THAT FIRST DAY AT THE START OF ANOTHER SHINING LIGHT ACADEMY. A LOT OF NERVOUS OR STOIC FACES, BUT THEY SHOWED UP JUST THE SAME.

- JAKE (ND)

I See true Bravery all around Me when incarcerated Men and Women Look Within themselves to Make a Change for the better. They ignore the Critics even though they are Loud. They enroll themselves in School and Programs so it's easier to Apply the tools to educate the Mind. Understanding where they went wrong and willing to Make it Right. To Me that is True Bravery.

~ Wayne G ~
NJ

"I recently showed bravery to show initiative in my life by voluntarily completing a cell study on Anger Management. Finally realizing I have an anger problem was hard to do, but my family encouraged me and told me it was a brave thing to do." - Michael / MT

I'm around people using bravery everyday by standing up and talking about things that were traumatic in their life at one point in time and that is not an easy task to do.... I too have overcome a lot of obstacles to let down walls and barriers to open up and talk about things that have hindered and haunted me from my past... - Angela / SC

Often, I see volunteers who bravely come into these walls for the first time. These are often ones who have never been in prison or been inside for any other reason. I often ask "Why would they want to come inside such a place as this?" Most of their answers are always the same. "To help those that others try not to think of." Their bravery says that they should set aside time to help "The Lost & Forgotten"; Look into the eyes of criminals and show them that someone actually cares. - G. Allen / OH



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

Rodney's and Peter's essays are powerful reminders of the bravery that is abundantly present in our prisons and jails.



Joyce

PROGRAM FACILITATOR

Rodney reminds us of the “drive, determination, and guts” that are required to rise to the challenge of each new day when you are incarcerated.

“Bravery” = “Everyone serving time in a prison or jail, no matter the level; displays a sense of bravery. Waking up to live another day in a place that we all wish we could rip ourselves away from says something about drive, determination, and guts that one would not understand unless they had to do it. GOD BLESS ALL who keep fighting. Your day will soon come.”

Rodney N (SC)

Peter sees bravery as “an interwoven thread in the fabric of prison life.” He draws our attention, particularly, to the courage of those who choose to become “a Positive Example.”

Imprisoned Bravery

Throughout my 37 years of incarceration I have witnessed bravery upon bravery and more bravery. In one way or another bravery is an interwoven thread in the fabric of prison life. As plentiful as it is there is one form of bravery that stands out. The imprisoned who lives not as a follower is brave. The imprisoned who maintains uncompromised principles & values is brave. The imprisoned who strives daily to be a better person is brave. In a world where status, reputation and association defines you, the form of bravery that stands out the most is the imprisoned who becomes a Positive Example. While prison life exacerbates the tension between right and wrong, the road of the righteous is much more tempestuous.

By: Peter S (OH)



NEW PROMPT

We do not live in a forgiving world. Our news feeds and TV screens are filled with stories of conflict and revenge, not forgiveness. You may feel like you're standing alone when you choose to forgive, but in these divisive times in the U.S. and throughout the world, we need people with the courage to forgive more than ever. That's why I'm grateful for my Quaker friends, who remind me, always, that it is our task as humans on God's planet to seek “that of God” in everyone we meet—even people we may deeply disagree with, or see as enemies.

As you read through this issue on forgiveness and consider what it means for you, try writing a monologue or spoken-word piece that begins “**I forgive you because . . .**”

If you'd like your piece to be considered for publishing, please keep it to 200 words or less.

"HOW DO BRAVERY & FORGIVENESS INTERSECT FOR YOU?"

Bravery and forgiveness didn't always intersect for me. Pride used to be a big problem for me. I saw forgiveness as an act of weakness. I used to tell people "one and done", meaning they got one chance with me. If they made a mistake I would cut them out of my life. I now understand that I was afraid. I cut people off before they could hurt me. I have to be brave to forgive someone, because giving someone another chance allows us the opportunity to bond. It also allows them the opportunity to hurt me again. I now believe that most people don't want to intentionally hurt me. We all make mistakes and all deserve for others to be brave and forgive us. -Roger (IN)

IF YOU'VE EVER HAD TO FACE SOMEONE YOU SERIOUSLY HURT. IF YOU'VE EVER HAD TO MAKE YOUR AMMENDS. YOU DO SO KNOWING THEY DON'T HAVE TO GIVE YOU FORGIVENESS. YOU DO SO KNOWING YOU OPEN YOURSELF UP TO THEIR PAIN, THEIR RESPONSE, THEIR JUDGEMENT. THAT TAKES BRAVERY OF A HIGH MEASURE. FORGIVENESS HEALS BOTH, BUT NOT ALL SEE THAT OR ACCEPT IT.

JAKE. (ND)

Bravery looks at forgiveness as it stands amidst the crossroads of freedom and victimhood, and proclaims, "If you're ready, I'm here to help you let go." Bravery helps relieve the burden of heavy memories. It is the door from which forgiveness steps through, and finds a life in liberation.

Albert (NC)

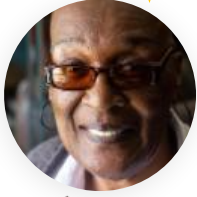
Being transparent and completely vulnerable, I can admit that I have been hurt. And those who hurt me, I vowed to never allow them to hurt me again. I harbored hate, resentment and anger towards those people, especially the ones who were supposed to love me, like my parents. It was easier for me to not forgive them, for I was not going to give them the opportunity to hurt me again. So to forgive them, I had to be brave. The fear of them hurting me again, was controlling my thoughts and hindered our relationship. I refused to be paralyzed by fear, I had to forgive them, but it took for me to be brave.

Marcus (OH)

Forgiveness is not forgetting, condoning, or excusing the harm done. Forgiveness is simply the start of the healing process... as I work through the steps, I know I was hurting inside and my actions toward others were sometimes harmful... I can truly love myself as I forgive others and self. This journey of cognitive restructuring (changing my self-talk), changing my belief system, changing thinking errors, and righting wrong attitudes has taught me to be comfortable in my own skin and healthier in mind, body, and spirit. So is forgiveness a character strength? Yes, it's a way of life that involves love of self and others. You must be brave to forgive. -Edward (PA)

"Forgiveness is the bravery my broken heart seeks to be restored and renewed. Renewed to smile again and feel the true joy of the smile; to laugh again and let the moment of the laughter be life to me; to dream again and put action to faith to bring them to pass; to love again and accept and know that I've always deserved to be loved and receive love when I was told I wasn't. These crossing roads weave the ridges within my broken heart and fill it with a remedy to forgive myself for what I didn't know and what others who hurt me didn't know. Forgiveness is my bravery." - Camilia / OH

RealTalk



Naomi

PROGRAM CONSULTANT
COMMUTED LIFER
COMMUTATION SPECIALIST

"Sometimes I have questioned if I really am a forgiving person. I say this because when people have hurt me, I often don't forget what they did to me and because of that I don't trust them anymore. I may speak to them or even associate with them from time to time but there is still that remembrance of what they did to me. It makes me wonder if I really have forgiven them."

I know that often the hardest thing for people in prison to do is to forgive themselves. My journey on the road to forgiveness was not an easy one. I found it really hard to forgive myself for going to prison and leaving my 10-year-old son to be raised by my parents. Thinking that I was going to die in prison made it that much more difficult for me. I did a lot of praying, and eventually, I was able to forgive myself. If I didn't forgive myself, it would be hard for me to find contentment and to have a relationship with my son. Forgiving myself was one of the best things I have ever done."

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

**Please note that while we will maintain a professional level of confidentiality, we are legally required to report any information that involves a serious threat or existence of harm to yourself or others.*

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Q: "I have trust issues with a lot of buried skeletons in my closet. How can I talk about them with my counselor so I can forgive, forget and put them to rest for good?"

MS. NAOMI: A very good question. You should know, secrets really do make you sick. You're holding onto stuff that you really want to talk about, but you don't because you don't want people to know that that person could have lived in you, and they will look at you in a different way. This is what you have to get over and not worry about - how people look at you. Whatever you talk to your counselor about is confidential. You're holding onto a bunch of garbage that you need to get rid of. You need to throw it up, get rid of it and I promise you, you will feel so much better.

Q: "I really like my friends but they all use drugs. Do I have to stop being their friend to be better?"

MS. NAOMI: It's good that you like your friends. Obviously your friends don't like themselves too much. I say this because I too, used to be a drug addict. And of course all of my associates were drug addicts as well. I liked a lot of them, and still do, but for those that are still getting high - we have nothing in common anymore. So I don't think you should be around those that are still getting high because eventually you will start dipping and dabbing yourself and I think for your life to be better, you should stay away from them.

Q: "How do you stop the hatred of the people who abandoned you during your incarceration?"

MS. NAOMI: When you hate, it really does something to your inner being. Don't hate the people who abandoned you, just know that those people are not in your corner. You'll always find out who cares about you when you're sick in the hospital or when you're locked up. Those people that you thought were your friends, when they don't show up in your time of need, just drop them. Know they are not your friends. But don't hate. It only makes you sick.



FORGIVENESS: THE KEY TO TRUE HAPPINESS



Lee



Freedom

PROGRAM FACILITATORS / COMMUTED LIFERS & ACTIVISTS

In 1993, we were arrested and later convicted of second degree murder, sentenced to life without parole for a crime we did not commit. You can probably imagine the anger and pain we carried around with us while trapped inside a cage for all those years. Anger is an understatement; the math of our feelings was “rage + hatred x fury.” It was directed at the lawyers who sold us out, the police who falsely arrested us, the prosecution for its misconduct, the judge who let us get railroaded, the prison staff who held us, the men in cells all around us... Forgiveness was not even a thought back then, it was the enemy.

Our first fifteen years in prison were the hardest. There were times where we didn't think we were going to make it. It seemed like the sun never shined. Sleepless nights, and deep pain and depression nearly pushed us to the brink of no return. Looking at us from the outside we were like EPMD: “Strictly Business” - no smiles, no rap, suited and booted for battle. But on the inside, Tupac said it best: “Every day (was) a struggle trying to hold on.”

We were the victims of a tragic injustice and our anger was eating us alive. As the saying goes, we were “drinking the poison hoping that someone else would die.” We were unhappy, joyless, and without purpose. We were trying to obtain our freedom but every decision was infected by our anger. Forgiveness to those who had injured us so deeply felt like betrayal, as if we accepted our wounds of injustice. We didn't know how to start or where to begin. Indeed, anger was our comfort zone.

At some point however, because of the kindness that so many people had shown us, or due to our desire to educate ourselves, we came to understand **“Forgiveness is not something you do for someone else; it's something you do for yourself. To forgive is not to condone, it is to refuse to continue feeling bad about an injury.”** (Jim Beaver, “Life's That Way”) We learned that refusing to forgive was actually keeping us from moving on. So eventually we let it all go.

Taking those first steps towards forgiveness was very hard, but even harder was uprooting the beliefs that fueled our anger and unforgiveness. They had been with us for so long it was like trying to lift a 250-lb weight on the first day of starting to work out. At first it seemed impossible but we started releasing our resentment a little at a time, first forgiving those who had hurt us in minor ways. And as we healed, we let go of more and more until we were able to forgive all the people who we believed caused harm or wronged us. The more we let go, the better we felt and the more benefits we saw. The sun came out, the pain went away, and even though we were still in prison, happiness, joy and purpose entered our lives. Although we will never forget what happened to us, we made a choice to leave it behind and refocus our energy towards doing whatever we can to fix the broken system that caused us so much harm in the first place.



When it comes to forgiving others, what parts of the Hortons' journey did you relate most to?

What might be the next best step for you in your own journey?

“THE WEAK CAN NEVER FORGIVE. FORGIVENESS IS THE ATTRIBUTE OF THE STRONG.”

- GANDHI -



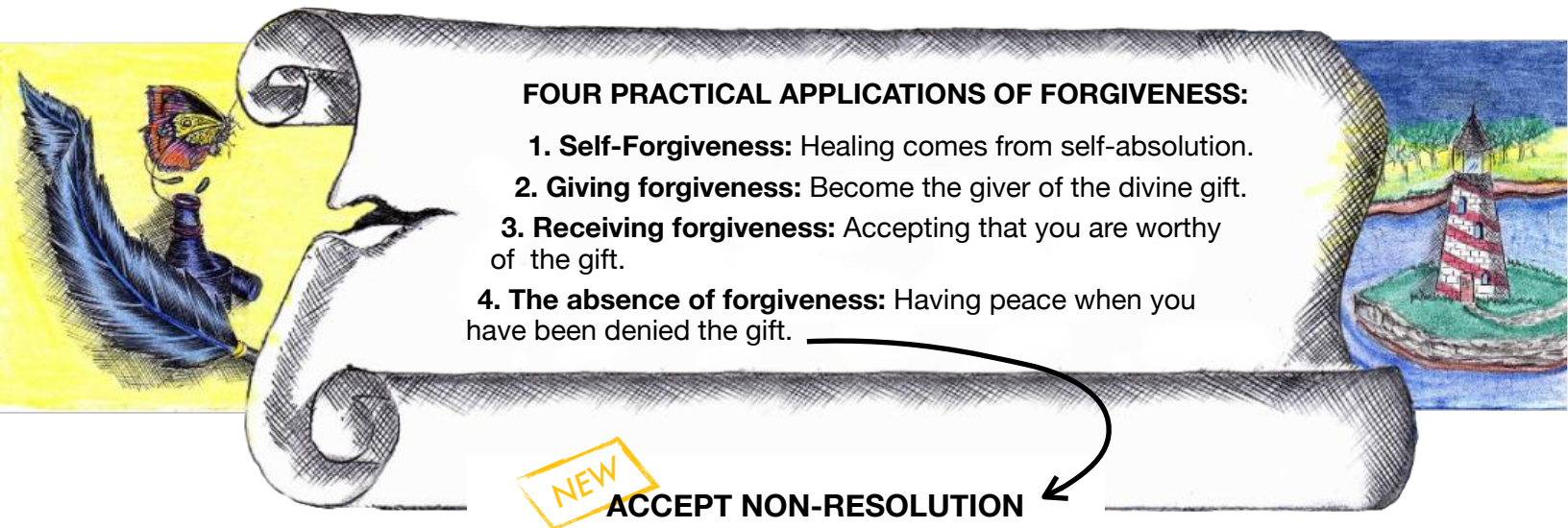
*All of the content below comes to you from the Loop Group at London CI in Ohio.
(Read more about them on page 9!)*

The Horizon Prison Initiative (also in Ohio Reformatory for Women) is a 10-month interfaith program that focuses on living in community with one another, designed to help the participants examine the issues that brought them to prison, their current choices, and their successful reentry into society. In addition to doing daily life together, participants are required to attend programs and electives that are in line with the program's core values of Spirituality, Accountability, Respect, Community, and Change. Naturally, during the ten months, the character trait of forgiveness is something that each participant regularly works through, individually and among each other.

PREVIOUS: **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The 'Loopers' from Grafton have created a community where trust exists because "...what's said in the group, stays in the group". Perhaps the city of Las Vegas was on to something. If respect for one's privacy is understood while creating unspeakable memories, imagine the power of healing that can come when we want to finally dump the affliction of unspeakable memories. To do so requires a safe place and assurance that our pain doesn't become the fodder that fuels the flames of gossip. If confidentiality (i.e., trust) is broken, our indefectible response is the need for forgiveness.

At the risk of hyperbole, forgiveness is the code that all other strengths hinge upon. Forgiveness is the most divine act and gift one can give to another. Why is it divine? Intrinsicly, our reaction to offense may be anger, bitterness, resentment or revenge; but forgiveness requires a power beyond our capabilities. We need help in understanding and applying the principle of canceling debt. Forgiveness says, "I require nothing from you; go in peace."



As one comes to a pivotal point in their life where change is eminent, seeking forgiveness from the person(s) to whom we have caused heartache, pain, loss, or trauma becomes important. But often, being able to encounter that person(s) and express remorse is not possible. So one must allow a power greater than we are to give him/her the peace needed to continue their life change(s). This is where one must enlist the practice of one of Shining Light's Community Codes: Accept Non-Resolution - when the other party is either not available or not receptive, or restoration of the relationship is not possible. Learning to have peace within yourself is a life-long journey, but with spiritual guidance the journey can be rewarding.

Have you come to a place in your journey where you felt that you needed to seek forgiveness from the person(s) you caused harm to?

If that was not possible, or the other party was not receptive, how did you respond?

How can you still find peace within yourself?



VIA DEFINITION: FORGIVENESS

“Forgiveness means to extend understanding towards those who have wronged or hurt us. It means to let go. In many cases this is the letting go of some or all of the frustration, disappointment, resentment, or other painful feelings associated with an offense. Forgiveness, and the related quality of mercy, involve accepting the shortcomings, flaws, and imperfections of others and giving them a second (or third) chance. As the expression goes, it is letting bygones be bygones, rather than being vengeful. It is a process of humanizing those who have led us to feel dehumanized.”

It is important to distinguish forgiveness from:

- *condoning* (removes the offense)
- *forgetting* (removes the awareness)
- *reconciliation* (restores the relationship)”

(VIA Institute on Character, 2022, para. 1)
<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/forgiveness>



As our team was preparing for this issue, one key word in the VIA definition that stood out was “process.” There can be a lot of complexity in this process since every situation is unique and it involves individuals being wronged, but it may be worth considering for a variety of reasons. Researchers have identified that people who are more forgiving experience less anger, anxiety, depression and hostility, and that forgiveness is associated with emotional well-being, social support, spiritual well-being, and healthy lifestyle behaviors [☆].



Travis

PROGRAM DEVELOPER



Each time I read the VIA definition of forgiveness I get something different out of it. I'd challenge you to read it a few times to see if you have a similar experience.

What key words or aspects of the definition stand out to you? We'd love to know!

[☆] Niemiec, R. M. (2018). *Character strengths interventions: A field guide for practitioners*. Hogrefe Publishing.

Niemiec, R. M. (2019). Finding the golden mean: the overuse, underuse, and optimal use of character strengths. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 32(3-4), 453-471.

PICTURE THIS:

After winning a competitive game of cards a friend accuses you of cheating in front of a group of peers.



As a way to practice forgiveness, write out three scenarios of what underusing, overusing, and optimally using the strength of forgiveness might look like.

UNDERUSE:

OVERUSE:

OPTIMAL USE:

As you consider the scenario around optimal use, what is another strength that would be helpful to use in the process of forgiveness and why would this be helpful for you? (Example: The strength of perspective would be helpful in recognizing that [person doing offense] is a complex human that has shortcomings.)

Niemiec, R. M. (2018). *Character strengths interventions: A field guide for practitioners*. Hogrefe Publishing.

Forgiveness for me means acknowledging someone has wronged me, knowing that it's not okay to accept that type of treatment, and then letting it go, not bringing it back to life again... For me this is a way of living. I will forgive everyone, that doesn't mean that I have to allow them to hold weight, or keep them in my life. But it does mean I won't use it against them later in life.

-Dana B.
Ohio.



HEALTH & WELLNESS

EMBRACING THE F WORD: FORGIVENESS.

I have to admit, it is difficult for me to write to you about this subject because it is something I continue to struggle with. Not wanting to be a hypocrite, I'm always going to keep it 100 with you. I always want to be in the mindset of a person with the philosophy to "do as I do, not as I say." It's no coincidence that I'm writing this today, because the topic of forgiveness is something I've been dealing with for a long time and has been on my mind a lot. It hits home for me, personally. However, I am that much closer to Healing and am honored to invite you on that journey with me.

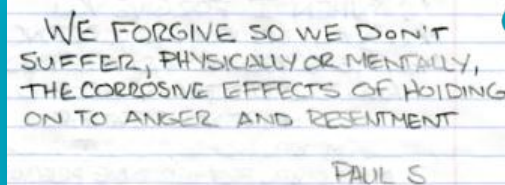


Dormen

PROGRAM
FACILITATOR

Forgiving others has not been the difficult part for me; the issue I have is forgiving myself. Not only for the harm that I've caused my victims, my community, and my family, but also the harm that I've caused myself. Looking into the mirror, it's hard to see my whole self at times. There's like a dark veil covering parts of me that I can't forgive - even though I know others have forgiven me. Recently though, a friend reminded me that as a Christian, I'm called to believe there is Someone greater than myself who has already forgiven me, fully. How do I not accept that as my truth? That would be to say what Jesus did wasn't good enough for me. This is my personal path toward peace.

It is often said that bitterness corrodes the can that it is in. We are that can. Holding on and not forgiving is detrimental to our physical as well as mental health. In many cases, the person we are struggling to forgive is someone outside of ourselves. In my case, the only person I am holding a grudge against is myself. It is my hope that with self care, we can come to grips with forgiveness and allow the healing to begin. By not doing so we are only hurting ourselves.



WE FORGIVE SO WE DON'T
SUFFER, PHYSICALLY OR MENTALLY,
THE CORROSIVE EFFECTS OF HOLDING
ON TO ANGER AND RESENTMENT
PAUL S



← *An original painting by Dormen of an incarcerated man being comforted by an angelic being.*

Try This: As the weather starts to get better, I am encouraging all who are able to commit to walking at least one mile whenever you have rec. Walking is fundamentally one of the best exercises we can do for our mind and body. It gets the oxygen flowing and allows us to clear our head. Plus, we get that vitamin D from the sun!

In maintaining the mindset of "do as I do, and not as I say," I will also commit to walking a mile a day. So as you are walking, know I am walking with you. If a mile is too much, "start small" and commit to a lap around the track. I will be looking forward to hearing about your experience with walking and forgiveness. Until we meet again, be safe and remember...

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



What's working for you?

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

Forgiveness is something
 that everyone needs,
 forgiveness is gentle,
 like the wind in the trees.
 Forgiveness if you lack it,
 it can be like a boulder,
 But once you obtain it
 takes the weight off
 your shoulders.
 Forgiveness is hope,
 Forgiveness is kind,
 Forgiveness helps you
 ease your mind.
 Forgiveness is there
 for you and me,
 it can help restore us
 to sanity. ♡ ♡
 —Kaisha R.

OHIO

Like the back of an intricate tapestry.
 All the little knots and tangles
 represent your hurts, your pain
 that once turned over
 reveal the work of art that is . . . you.

—Gary (SC)

“FORGIVENESS IS...”

Last issue I challenged you to use figurative language (similes and metaphors) to construct an 8- or 12-line poem about forgiveness. I love the similes in Kaisha’s sweet and positive poem. She presents forgiveness as something that’s “gentle, / like the wind in the trees,” and the lack of forgiveness as “like a boulder.” Then she tops it off with a metaphor for forgiveness, writing that it “takes the weight off your shoulders.” I so often need to be reminded that forgiveness—both giving and receiving it—can be a way back to “sanity,” to the quiet peace of letting blame and bitterness go.



Many poems that were submitted for this issue presented unique outlooks on forgiveness. “Forgiveness is something we all need,” Willie (PA) wrote, “. . . like air, essential to breath.”

We’ve included excerpts from several other poems:

So don't be stingy with your forgiveness,
 but give it in abundance,

To the poor and the rich, the corrupt and the righteous,
 To the victim and the suspect, the just and the wicked,
 Wrap it with love and give it as a gift.

—PAUL (PA)



A NEW PROMPT

The next issue’s theme (see back page) is on the character strength of “judgment,” or critical thinking.

If you’re like me, maybe you struggle a bit with the word “judgment.” It’s hard not to connect it with the word “judgmental,” which is something I never want to be. We often do the same thing with the word “critical” (*Don’t be too critical!* my creative writing students used to say to me, and to each other). But the character strength of judgment is a vital character trait that underlies many of the others—especially, for instance, forgiveness. Thoughtful judgment requires careful *critical thinking*. And critical thinking means taking time to think carefully, not jumping to conclusions, and, sometimes even changing our minds.

In a poem, song, or brief essay of 200 words or less, share your thoughts in answer to these questions:
When has your judgment allowed you to consider all sides of a situation and change your mind?
When has it helped you to *forgive*?



WRITING RESOURCES

The Marshall Project

<https://themarshallproject.org>

The Marshall Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization focused on the U.S. criminal justice system. For their weekly series titled “Life Inside,” they seek 1,000- to 1,400-word nonfiction pieces about personal experiences with the criminal justice system, from the perspective of people who live or work within the system. They advise writers to “Focus on telling a good story — one that is vivid, surprising, instructive or enlightening to a reader who may not share your frame of reference.”

To submit, send your piece and a short note introducing yourself to...

**The Marshall Project, Studio Cityspire
156 West 56th Street
3rd Floor
New York, NY 10019**

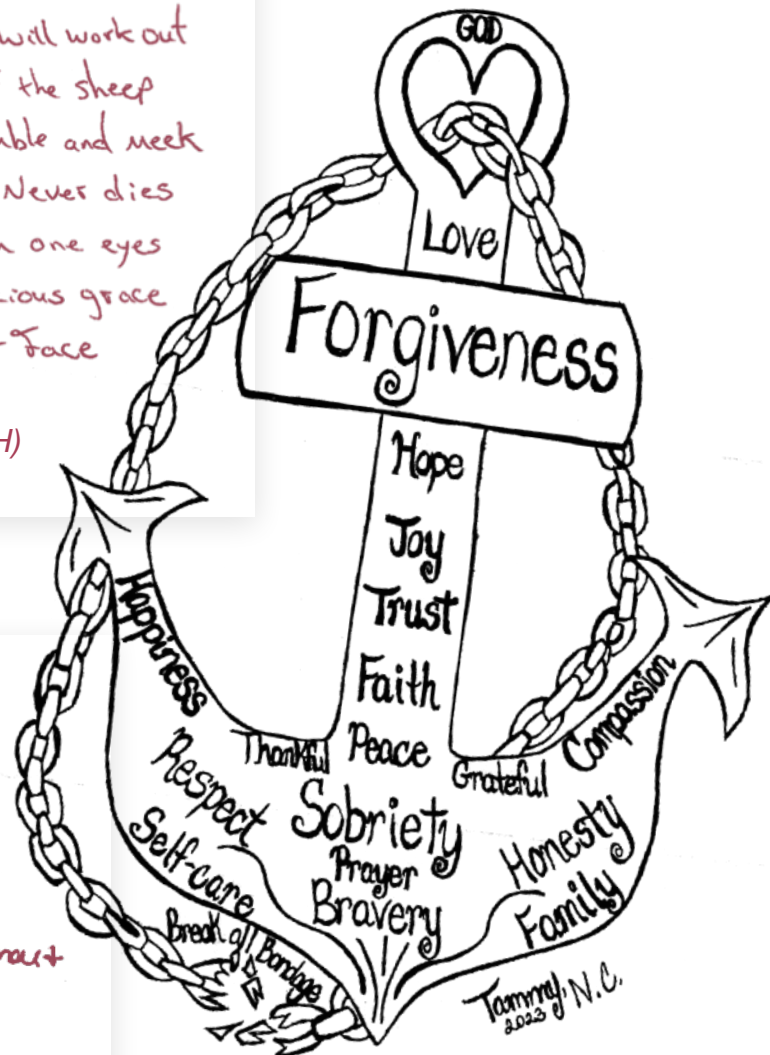
Also note: You can subscribe to The Marshall Project’s print publication, *News Inside*, by asking someone on the outside to sign you up at themarshallproject.org/news-inside.

Forgiveness is hard to do like climbing Mount Everest
but in doing so you'll experience a never before state of Bliss
Forgiveness is like finishing the last set of an intense workout
knowing pain is part of the journey but all things will work out
Forgiveness is often overlooked like the strength of the sheep
for it is easier to destroy with might than to live humble and meek
Forgiveness is beautiful like radiant flowers that never dies
shining light in dark places, removing the stick from one eye
forgiveness is simply divine love like God's precious grace
extending heavenly compassion despite the foul or face

By: Marcus (OH)

Forgiveness is rebelling against the
hierarchy of vengeance,
there is no getting even,
...
Forgiveness is kin to hope,
A passport on a journey to a better life without
the burden,

By: Asra (IL)





CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATE




Angela

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

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

Last edition we proposed the statement, **“Every individual is responsible for advocating for their own needs.”** Here is a range of responses:



AGREE



DEPENDS



DISAGREE

“I strongly agree with this because nobody can do a better job than advocating for your own self.”

- Angela/SC

“I've heard it said that ‘Rights aren't given, they're asserted,’ and while I believe that its vital to advocate for what you need (a silent soul doesn't get nourished like a closed mouth doesn't get fed) I don't believe that I'm the only one who should advocate for my needs. As a long-time mentor there have been times that I have spoken up for someone else's needs and for many different reasons. For instance there was a program that had very limited space that rejected one of my dudes due to his past behavior and it took me and a couple guys going to bat for him with the program director and unit manager for them to form a different view of him in their minds. They accepted him into the program because of our advocacy. Often we are unable to see ourselves or love ourselves the way others do and it's a blessing when someone who sees your potential and knows you're worthy of being loved is willing to speak up for you and/or love you until you're able to realize your potential and love.”

- Anon/OH

“I agree, however in order for each person to advocate for their own needs they must first be given the tools to help them effectively understand, know and communicate their needs to request, receive and have them met and then they can pay that forward.”

- Camilia/OH

“EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ADVOCATING FOR THEIR OWN NEEDS.”

Its Never about being weak, Its about Not knowing your voice yet or Not knowing your power, some people just need a little help, maybe from a peer or case manager for such things as help with housing or even mental health or Reunification with their children
~Shanda (OH)

You're responsible for yourself. Ironically being responsible for myself has been the toughest thing. I'm naturally able to take care and advocate for everyone else's needs. This year my goal is to advocate for myself more. I can and I will be able to complete so much I'm grateful in ways for you because I'm learning how to advocate in positive ways. I still didn't give up. Praise be to God. This year's a new year and everything gonna be up.

-Ciara (PA)

“Yes, I do believe it's true you have to advocate for yourself. It's basically like sticking up for yourself. If you have someone doing it for you all the time you'll expect someone to advocate for you all the time.”

- Josh/MT

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

Remember Uncle Ben's motto - "With great power comes great responsibility." Well, knowledge is power. There are many who do not know how to fend for themselves, and I believe it is my responsibility (being given this talent) to advocate for their needs. Though I only know life from my perspective I am blessed with knowing the basic necessities which apply to every human, indiscriminately. If I do not advocate for those who for any reason are incapable, by default my silence promotes their suffering. Respectfully, I disagree.

- E.R. Gray (PA)

"Absolutely! If not yourself then who. Bottom line."

- Anthony/NY

"I believe we should advocate for our needs. But I also know that there are people in this world who silence the voices of those in need. So as I advocate for my needs, I should also be aware of the needs of others around me. As Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

- Johnny/NC

"Advocating yes. However we are social beings and cannot, are not meant to, survive alone. Everyone has needs and everyone needs others to help meet those needs. The trick is not to become complacent and rely upon someone to supply for our needs freely."

- Tom/NC

"'Closed Mouths Don't Get Fed.' That being said, there are many who don't have a voice or who are often quelled when they do speak up. The needs of others, especially when social injustice is concerned, is the responsibility of ALL of us. Humanity is supposed to be United! We must all be concerned for the needs that aren't being met in our society or our society WILL crumble!"

- G. Allen II/OH

For next issue - do you agree or disagree with the following statement:



"YOU CAN'T BE FREE OF THE HURT UNTIL YOU FORGIVE THE PERSON WHO HURT YOU"

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

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



WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH HIGHLIGHT - A globally recognized leader in the movement for disability rights, Judy Heumann dedicated her life to creating a world where people with disabilities would be accepted, respected, and included in society. From her work with presidential administrations to her key role in creating legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act, Heumann's advocacy has significantly improved access, inclusion, and quality of life for countless individuals with disabilities. Judy Heumann passed away on March 4, 2023 in Washington D.C.; she was 75.

"On a daily basis, I try to be aware and take action to make changes in my life that advance justice and equity for all people." - Judy Heumann

From an interview with Marc Climaco, Ford Foundation

Forgiveness may sometimes require a strength and courage we can't seem to find on our own - after all, we're only human. Drawing inspiration from others' stories can help, as can support and counsel from a trusted friend, loved one, and/or professional. But especially for deep, prolonged, or repetitive offenses, forgiveness can feel impossible even with these supports. This is often when we become aware of our need for the God of our understanding to intervene.

In the African philosophy of ubuntu, one of the main tenets is forgiveness. Below are five guided reflections based on the helpful steps recorded in the book "Everyday Ubuntu" by Mungi Ngomane (granddaughter of Archbishop Desmond Tutu). As a way to wrap up this issue on forgiveness, we encourage you to read through them and circle one that resonates most with where you are right now. Then set aside a separate time to reflect on it further, calling on God to lead, guide and support you as you open yourself up to new possibilities.

- *Slowly breathe in and out.*
- *Remind yourself that you are human - imperfect, full of a range of emotions and thoughts.*
- *Ask God to bring comfort and truth to you in these next few moments.*
- *Re-read the one step that resonates most and consider the best way to respond.*

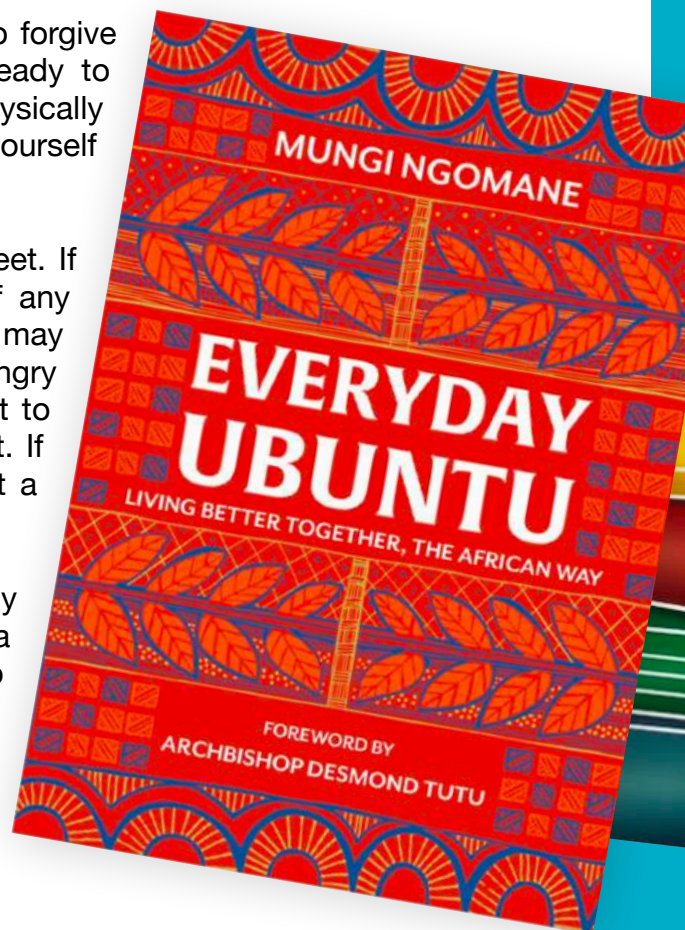
"Forgive yourself first" for your negative emotions. Write down all of the ways you feel wronged - start with what the person did, how you felt at the time, and the negative feelings you're still holding on to. Read it out loud to yourself, if possible. Then verbally forgive yourself for feeling this way. If it helps, throw the paper away as a symbol of letting go.

"Think of all the advantages of forgiving." Allow yourself to imagine how your areas in your life would improve if you made this choice. What would it feel like physically to release anger and bitterness? Would there be space cleared in your mind if you were no longer fixed on a certain situation? How might it impact your relationships? Your ability to be creative? Your ability to be happy?

"Work toward forgiving." Staying committed to wanting to forgive is a significant part of the process. If you are not yet ready to directly forgive the person who harmed you, or if it is not physically possible to speak to them, speaking the words out loud to yourself or to another trusted person can be a liberating step in itself.

"Accept it can take time" and may not be a two-way street. If you are ready to offer forgiveness, it is best to let go of any expectation that the other person will respond well. They may not apologize or take responsibility; they may even get angry that you brought up the offense. This is why it is important to remember that the choice to forgive is for your own benefit. If the other side is receptive and shows grace, consider that a bonus.

"Keep going." If your old wounds resurface (and they likely will), repeat any of these steps that you find helpful. Go for a walk, talk with someone you trust, read about someone who inspires you. As author Mungi Ngomane says, "If you keep choosing to move your energy and focus away from the hurt, eventually it will lose its stranglehold."



RAMADAN
MARCH 22 - APRIL 21

PASSOVER
APRIL 5-13

EASTER
APRIL 9

MOTHERS DAY
MAY 14

MEMORIAL DAY
MAY 29

The three most popular world religions - Christianity, Islam, and Judaism - all celebrate major holidays in the springtime. Not all of the holidays are specifically related to forgiveness, but all of the religions place a high importance on forgiving others and seeking forgiveness from God. If you know someone with a spiritual belief system different from yours, consider asking how their faith plays into their experience with forgiveness.

NATIONAL HAIKU DAY
APRIL 18

A haiku is a Japanese poetic form that consists of three lines, with five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third.

HAIKU:
DEW OF THE MOUNTAIN
FLOWS OUT GREEN, RED, EVEN BLUE
GIVE ME MOUNTAIN DEW
-DREW (OH)

NATIONAL SUPERHERO DAY
APRIL 28

The first character traditionally thought of as the first "superhero" was Superman in 1938, but ever since the debut of Hugo Hercules in 1902, superheroes have come in all different forms.



 **WHAT WE'RE READING**



BIOGRAPHY

SHANTARAM // BY: GREGORY DAVID ROBERTS

"A wonderfully written memoir about life/culture in India, the unknown struggles of being a fugitive, surviving trials in a foreign prison, and becoming successful after release despite the past." - Kayonie / CA

FICTION

THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU // BY: H.G. WELLS

"Some may be familiar with the film adaptations, but let me tell you! If you are a science fiction person, this quick read classic is a must for you!" - Kelsey / OH

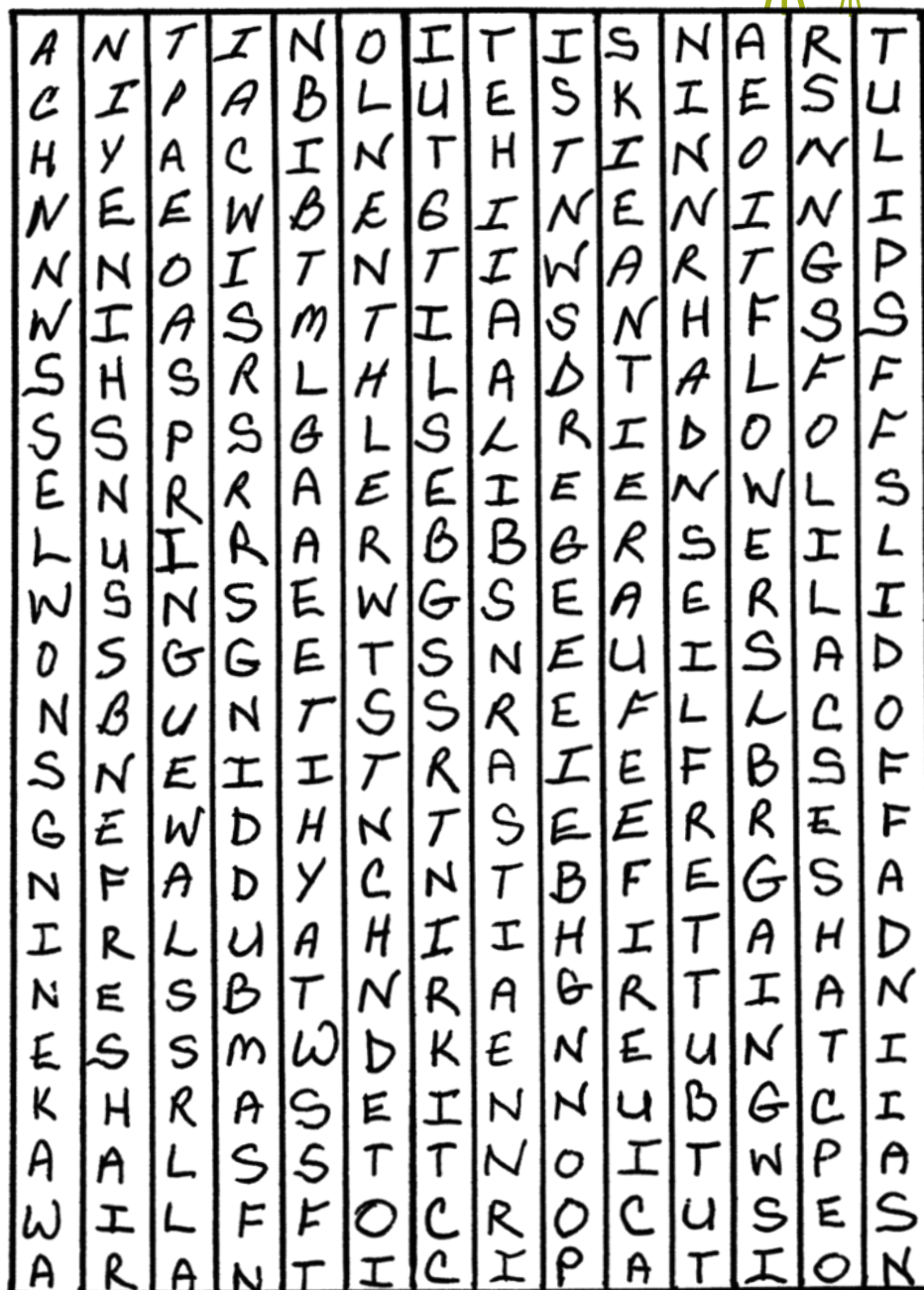
NONFICTION

THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE // BY: DR. VAN DER KORK

"This book explores the lasting impact of trauma across our lives and also summarizes the many different treatments that are presently available. I wish they handed this out at jails, let alone prisons." - James / NC



Anticipation
 Awakenings
 Birds
 Bluebells
 Blue Skies
 Budding
 Bunnies
 Butterflies
 Crocuses
 Daffodils
 Easter
 Flowers
 Fresh Air
 Green grass
 Hyacinth
 Iris
 Lilacs
 New Beginnings
 New Birth
 Rain
 Renewal
 Spring
 Snowless
 Sunshine
 Transition
 Tulips
 Warmth



WE WANT YOUR PUZZLES!

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

RIDDLE ME THIS...(Courtesy of Reader's Digest)

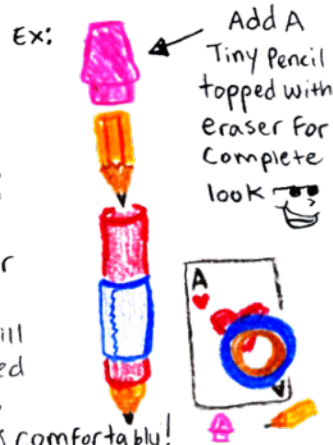
1. I have cities, but no houses. I have mountains, but no trees. I have water, but no fish. What am I?
2. You measure my life in hours and I serve you by expiring. I'm quick when I'm thin and slow when I'm fat. The wind is my enemy.
3. What is seen in the middle of March and April that can't be seen at the beginning or end of either month?
4. You see a boat filled with people. It has not sunk, but when you look again you don't see a single person on the boat. Why?

PRACTICAL TIP

Are you tired of writing with tiny pencil stubs?
 Is your hand suffering from cramps & Aches?
 If so...What you need is a pencil extender/crutch!

Required materials:
1 old playing card
1 product label or Tape

Directions: Take playing card and roll it into a tube lengthwise. I make sure to roll the tube tighter than the thickness of a pencil. (Since the playing card is old it will loosen up over-time) once card is rolled add label or tape to hold it in place. That's it. now you can use tiny pencils comfortably!



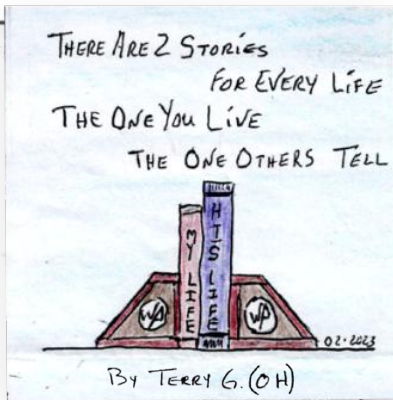
"WRITE ON YALL"
 -KayoniE 2023'

JUST FOR FUN



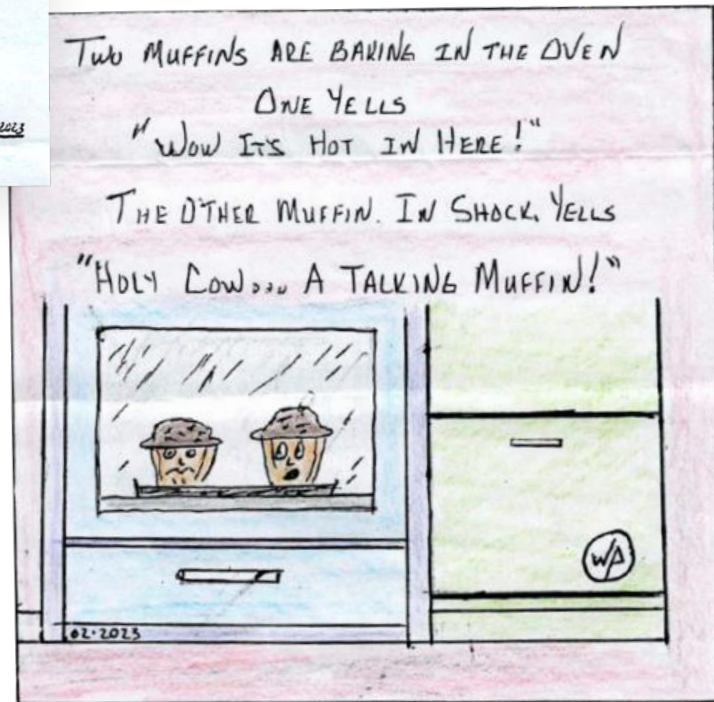
HAVE ANY PRACTICAL TIPS?

Send us any tips you've discovered that make life a little easier!



THERE ARE 2 STORIES
 FOR EVERY LIFE
 THE ONE YOU LIVE
 THE ONE OTHERS TELL

By Terry G. (OH)



By Terry G. (OH)

"I love the corny jokes. Thanks so much! They help me stay connected with my little nieces and nephews when I share with them."
 Michelle / NC

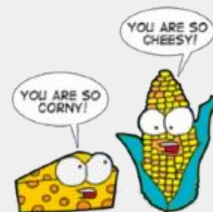
MS. NAOMI'S CORNY CORNER
 WE KNOW YOU CAN'T HELP YOURSELVES

Why did the chicken cross the road?
The real reason? Just wanted to show the opossum that it could be done - Wilbur (NC)

If April showers bring May flowers, what do May flowers bring?
Pilgrims

What did the janitor say when he jumped out of the closet?
Supplies!

How does the moon cut his hair?
Eclipse it.



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2 Anonymous Tablet Submissions from NY & OH

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!

RIDDLE ANSWERS:

1. A map / 2. A candle / 3. The letter "R" / 4. They were all married

**NEXT ISSUE'S THEME
JUDGMENT**

SEND US YOUR BEST COVER ART!

Upcoming themes - Teamwork & Zest



This word can have many meanings and often negative connotations, but rather than "passing judgment on someone" the VIA Institute looks at judgment as "critical thinking." It is all about using your head -and not just your heart- for evaluating ideas, making decisions, and relating with other people. It often involves keeping an open mind about a situation or person, and may lead to a change in beliefs, plans, or relationships. **How might this strength of Judgment (Critical Thinking) be useful when it comes to practicing Forgiveness?**



SUBMISSIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE DUE BY MAY 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 (brand new) Apply Your Strengths video courses.**
- **Share your experience with loved ones on the outside and invite them to read *The Loop* online at shining-light.com/theloop**

... "I love this publication and I checked every other day for the new edition" - Edwin (NC)

... "Thank you for making these virtual issues available to us. I recommend them every chance I get to my neighbors whenever we are allowed to use the tablets." - Kayonie (CA)

