I started writing to Sonny shortly after reading his memoir called "I Cried, You Didn't Listen" about his exploitation and abuse at the hands of guards and counselors in the California Youth Authority. "Sonny" as he likes to be called, is Dwight Abbott, #T-88033, a person incarcerated for the rest of his life in California's Salinas Valley State Prison.

My work with prisoner support and prison abolition began in Chicago with a group called Midwest Books to Prisoners. We would receive requests—hundreds every month—for books and twice a month we would mail out hundreds of donated books to prisoners.

This experience opened me to the sheer volume of warehoused bodies—3 million*—and the desperation of people who have been ignored, stratified, and left to rot in cages by a sick society.

One way of fighting this societal illness is through highlighting the experiences and daily realities of those silenced by and entangled in the criminal justice system that would rather punish and condemn than rehabilitate and offer hope.

The formation of a personal connection with a prisoner has the ability to break down our fears and assumptions about the incarcerated created by our "law and order" society, while simultaneously creating a space for dialogue and understanding that re-humanizes the person that is incarcerated for the person on the outside as well as offering friendship and hope for both.

It is important to mention safety when corresponding with prisoners. People that are incarcerated are like people on the outside; they each have their own needs, desires, and abilities just like you or I. As someone who writes to a prisoner, you may be their only link with the outside, which can place needs on you not before seen. One should write and share what one feels comfortable with and not write or do anything that feels unsafe or coerced. This is not to legitimate societal fears or assumptions; this is just common sense when meeting a stranger and potentially forging a friendship. For more on writing to...

[HTTP://WWW.WASHINGTONPOST.COM/WP-DYN/CONTENT/STORY/2008/02/28/572008022803016.html (NO SPACES)]
August 25, 2008

Hi,

Not a whole lot going on around here, but that actually works well for me right now as I do not have but this one piece of carbon paper at the moment, and we are locked down. Beware, I’m in one of my philosophical moods but I shall, I must, make every effort to refrain from going there, though at the moment I do not think I will be successful. 65 years old and I am left with so many questions the answers to I doubt I will learn before I leave this place, stuffed inside the little cardboard box (I wonder if they recycle it) the state graciously provides those of us whom the “justice” system has, in all its wisdom, determined would leave prison only in a horizontal position; as more an more of us are, having been thrown away like trash a long time ago.

I know, I know – the bottom line is at some point ‘could’ have made different choices that likely would have kept us from here. I accept the role I took on that brought me to this end I have come to but, I cannot help believing it for many of us, whole lot of other things not happened being taken could have been different myself and a men I write for, had bad to us when wee tykes advantage of.

I remember only a few things before Mom & before my sister and I hall “to be looked after” were discharged from the little towheaded soldier with his brother where there was, in our eyes, a “huge” WW II green canvas army tent set up. Inside we had “secret meetings,” and hid our “secret stuff,” sneaked our first cigarette. To this day, if I carefully listen, I can still hear our carefree laughter as we chased one another, had rock fights, and wrestled one another to the ground.

Then there were the many trips to the Colorado River at Willow Beach, Arizona, where Danny and I were brave explorer’s; where we were outlaws hunted by large posse’s throughout the “bad-lands” in the surrounding hills, where we were “ranchers” rounding up the wild Burro’s
that had come to trust us, which I think had something to do with the beer we swiped and served to them.

I honestly do not recall anything "bad" happening in my life; I was about as happy as a kid could be with loving parents, a little brother I loved more everyday, step-siblings that had not yet begun to make my life a living hell - it was all good. Then, in less time than it took to blink an eyelid, the world as I knew it ended: At the Los Angeles County Central Juvenile Hall a nightmare began that was to send me into a nose dive, one I've yet to pull up from.

It was there, four short months, an "eternity," I was raped by a counselor, beaten by the older, bigger kids, and isolated for over three months in solitary confinement after I decided to defend myself. Even in Solitary, I could not get away from the perversion that defines incarceration. I was molested by a second counselor who promised I could go home if I let him "do it." I recall sitting on the edge of my bunk anxiously waiting for him to again unlock the door, only this time to take me from there. When they pushed the breakfast food tray through the slot cut into the steel door, it was only then I realized he was not going to. I was a frightened and confused nine year old who was to leave there an extremely angry little boy growing bigger everyday.

I have been in a dozen juvenile institutions since, and some bad things happened as they do inside of those places, but, to this very day only when I think of Los Angeles County Central Juvenile Hall does it become difficult for me to breathe: All over again I become so enraged I want to kill the people who did those things to me, and I would - suffering no remorse - if I were to somehow find I have been transported back to that time. No matter how I try, no matter I sometimes feel I have, I cannot forgive what was done to me - no more than my victims can forgive me.

It's that anger that has followed and motivated me most all of my life. It is an anger so intense that when it is 'suddenly there' churning in the pit of my stomach I am left feeling I am about to strangle on my own bile. For a very long time I could not control it, some times still can't: When 12 years old I had to get away from those I loved, "run away from home," rob and steal.

I would go out and pick fights, and as I was beat-down experience a momentary deliverance from the madness flooding through me from the pain - the anger. (A psychiatrist might want a piece of that.) Afterward I would be back in juvie, Mom and Dad sitting across from me in the visiting room; she crying, Daddy asking me what was wrong? "What have we done?" Drowning in shame, I never told them. They died thinking it was their fault; two more victims of my abuser's who broke something that could not be repaired.

My story is not unique. I have a lot of company all around me - the cell blocks are filled with men like me, and it does not have to be like this: The prisons do not have to be overflowing with graduates from the juvenile penal institutions - shut down those assembly lines, stop the State of California from preparing at any given time thousands of children to take our cells after we are carried from them.

Are you aware it is statistically shown people who fall victim to crime odds are 2 out of 3 the perpetrator, male or female, has from a preteen been "state raised"? That has got to speak volumes, or am I missing something? Do we not have good reason to suspect those we lock to, elected officials, hope we keep "missing something," that we continue to wallow in our ignorance? That's what gets them elected, over, and over, and over, whole nothing gets done. Possibly if the families of those incarcerated had a lot of money, stopped them? Unfortunately, it is also statistically known that most families with juvenile in crises has never lived above the poverty line.

"Where are we going to get the money?" is somehow always the leading argument considered against reform. "How can we afford it?" I suggest the question should be: "How can we not?" It will cost a hundred times-plus that, not to mention the 'lives' lost to violence, as these children, in their own defense, become hard-core predator's, live what is left of their lives victimizing society. One way or another it is going to cost - "how much" will be determined by the choices that are made by those in a position to bring change, and those 'choices' will largely depend upon how actively we involve ourselves to make sure the right thing gets done.

Or, as is often suggested by the very people who administer them, we could build more institutions to warehouse them in, at a cost to the taxpayers of over $200,000 annually for each child, until they turn 18 and graduate to the adult prisons. Once there it will cost but a measly $30,000 a year until they are stuffed into that cardboard box.

Though G.W. Bush has recently made such amounts of money appear but a 'mere pittance,' American taxpayers have paid out tens of billions of dollars for a dysfunctional, often rogue, system that has failed since its conception all it was intended to "serve," one more consequence of ignoring the existing problems by not becoming personally involved. If we unite and demand the juvenile penal Administrators do what was originally intended - rehabilitate societies 'offenders' - success would be far reaching. There would be, in part, a noticeable lessening of the odds homes will be burglarized, cars stolen. (Statistically 72% of all vehicles stolen are taken by children under the age of 18, and 59% of all homes broken into are entered by children between the ages of 12-16, of who 63% have had prior contact with juvenile authorities.) Did I mention that your chances of being mugged/assaulted, your personal possessions taken, will also lessen considerably?

Generally speaking, 'good folks' will be safer when they are out and about, as the groups of gangbangers hanging out on the street corners and the malls will be smaller in number - considering the majority of them 'posting' are between the ages of 13-17 years: State-raised, having "survived" two, three, four stints in juvenile hall, or "Youth Authority,"
they have “proven” they “are down for the homies.” The system not only returns them to the same neighborhood they were victimizing, it offers them nothing after their release, the same “nothing” they were offered when incarcerated.

Well, I did it again, but you must admit it’s a letter. As before warned, I do not have a whole of ‘other’ stuff to write about. Got to tell you, frankly I’m not all that certain how much longer I am going to be able to do this: Lately my memory has been playing games with me. Know what they do to convicts who experience dementia, begin to have trouble hearing, seeing, understanding commands? They are first knocked around by frustrated guards who feel “the old men are playing games,” and eventually isolated alone inside solitary-like confinement cells. Any of that sound familiar? Gotta go... To Be Continued. [Drawn smiley face]

Regards & Respects, [Hand written]
Sonny [Signature]

Letter #19

July 04, 2008

Hi, Ted,

My day has begun badly, but I have learned with my keeper’s I must bow my head so they cannot look into my eyes and see the wolf, remain subservient in demeanor, silent, generally pass confrontation. Ever have had difficulties me a long time to
In fact, after
the doctor ordered
where I have
in place of going
with everyone else
made by the guards

This morning

and the storm will
without further
since my stroke, I
swallowing, takes
ate as the result.
I’d lost 43 pounds,
I be fed in my cell
time to eat,
to the chow-hall
where no allowance is
for the infirm.

COURAGE

‘medical’ delivered
and instead of
morphine

(a “time release” thingy) not being crushed and
poured into water, as they normally do for me, all three were intact. When I
had trouble swallowing them, the nurse accused me of ‘playing games.’ I
fumed – silently. It is a bit humiliating having people young enough to be
my grandchildren talking down to me as if I were a child.

What is needed, and corrections has refused to supply, is turn one of its
33 prisons into a “medical facility” in which can be gathered together those
of us with chronic health concerns, instead of having us spread out over the
entire state, a hundred in one prison, a hundred in another, where we are “in
the way.” I assure you the guards do not appreciate the distraction we often
are when unexpectedly, or ‘expectedly’ depending upon one’s view,
become ill out on the yard, or in the cell block, as the guards attempt to
watch over thousands of healthy security concerns. Unfortunately, most of
the bulls make their resulting irritation obvious to us, no matter the “fault[]”
is not ours: Unless they see our growing old here, our health deteriorating,
as something we should have kept from happening. (If California did not
sentence its ‘offenders’ to so much ‘time’ we need to carry it around
wheelbarrows, this would not be
happening today - the growing population of aging convicts.

Presently when it is determined a prisoner has but a short time left to
exist he is placed inside a room, chained to a bed there, and that is where he
passes from his time on earth. I so would appreciate being allowed to
die better than I have lived but I suppose it is generally felt we do not
deserve to die so with any measure of dignity – I suppose one of the
consequences for having made the wrong choices. It’s about “punishment!”
to the very end.

I imagine some day there will be a ‘central’ medical facility but I doubt it
will happen in my time, which should surprise a huge number of taxpayers,
considering it would save a “strapped for cash” state billions of dollars over
the years if a prison medical facility was put into operation.

Sitting here this Fourth of July, thinking back over the many I suffered
through while an incarcerated child being ‘punished’ by a society that had
no idea I even existed, I am doing what I fear the most – remembering. The
holidays were the worst, especially Christmas. Believing no one cared is the
worst punishment of all for a young person, as it is for my cellie today. No
matter how bravely he struggles to hide it, I see the pain in his face every
time he looks at me whenever I am handed a letter.

I know he is close to accepting the “life” sentence he was given 7 years
ago, when he was just 16 years old, by a ‘justice’ system that decided to
throw him away: I know it’s not the ‘time’ – it’s the knowledge his family,
specifically his mother, father, and sister, has likely turned away from him,
deciding to go on without including him in their lives. Intimately I know his
pain – nothing is more emotionally destructive, there is no worse
punishment for a young boy, than to know/believe nobody cares. Been
there, done that, and it was so painful all I could think about was to escape or kill myself—I wanted to go home and there was nothing that was going to keep me from trying to make that happen.

I am 65 years old, have experienced things most people I know of will never experience, some events so unbelievable I’ve never written about them—never will. I have been stabbed, shot, beaten until I stopped breathing; handcuffed to cell bars and whipped to a bloody pulp by my guards. I wasted away inside solitary confinement for nearly five years; a dark cell in which I was unable to ‘see’ there was not a toilet, sink, nor bed—during which my best friend, whom I loved far more than most people could ever understand, was a sewer rat I had named “Warden.”

None of the above came anywhere close to causing the devastating emotional and psychological suffering brought on by the knowledge I had no one who cared about what was happening to me except my loyal friend Warden. Well, here I go again…. [The story about Warden is in CONSEQUENCE.]

What is the nature of punishment? Oddly enough, I began ruminating on this question—one that is rarely asked in this country—yesterday while looking at a Dennis The Menace cartoon. Dennis was in his familiar place in the corner facing the wall, a baseball bat, ball and mitt at his feet. “Baseball players are sent to the showers... not the corner,” the caption is quoting him as saying. One cannot help but imagine the defiant anger in his voice as he laments his victimhood...

Even at the age of six, when sent to the corner, Dennis becomes a victim in his own mind. “She did this to me,” his child’s mind thinks about his mother and temporary jailer. The cartoon drawing has not a hint of the crime that sent him to house arrest, except for the likelihood it is related to the bat and ball on the floor. And, as amused as we are at Dennis’ observation, we cannot keep ourselves from recognizing his sense of being the victim, and in a strange way we feel his pain.

But, without the critical connection between cause and effect, what purpose does his punishment serve? How do we define it? How do we distinguish between the immediate reaction to the behavior we want to correct—like a slap on the wrist when a child is found with his hand in the cookie jar, or when discovered playing with matches—and the more deliberately thought out consequences that are stretched over time, often involving formal and time-consuming processes before they can be implemented? Our notions of right and wrong, of acceptable and unacceptable behavior, are conditioned by those ‘instant’ responses to the choices we make. In those situations, it is impossible to escape personal responsibility. The nexus between what we did and the response is much too close to permit our minds to justify our acts or to lay responsibility on the shoulders of others. (Still with me, Ted? I’m on another one here.)

The juvenile system, societies “formal punishment,” on the other hand is a time-consuming process (whether we’re talking hours or years) which allows just such rationalization to occur, rationalizations which undermine its very purpose or, at least, the purpose we want to believe it accomplishes. Like Dennis standing in the corner, those we process through our formal system of punishment are so far removed from the precipitating cause of the system’s response, they are easily able to recast themselves into the role of victims and, indeed, they are. Now stripped of power to do anything but respond to officials, they are subjected to the indignities that those with newly acquired power over their lives routinely subject them to.

I spent years incarcerated in county juvenile halls and youth prisons, where pubescent children are routinely sent to “punish” them for criminal activity ranging from petty theft to stealing cars; from selling drugs to acts of violence—most often stemming from gang activity. Though they know they have been arrested and locked-up to be “punished,” who said what to do or did anything, every minute of every day (often subjected to arbitrary misuse of corrupting power) these young “criminals” invariably complain they are victims “being played” by the cops, by the courts, by the counselors, “by the system.”

It’s a very rare individual who actually ponders the relationship between the specific acts leading to long-term consequences and the degrading powerless position they are now forced to occupy. Even the ubiquitous “do-the-crime, do-the-time” response is nothing more than a cliché that prompts no real sense of ‘personal’ responsibility, the sine qua non of successful punishment, where success is defined as moderating future behavior.

Perhaps it is this ‘disconnect’ that leads to the astonishing rate of recidivism among California’s juvenile offenders, the highest in these United States. According to “California Division of Juvenile Justice,” until recently known as the California Youth Authority, “70% of state-committed youth are re-arrested (http://www.cjci.org/pdf/cijr国防部.pdf) within two years of their release.” I’m suspecting, logically speaking, the ‘actual’ percentage of “re-offenders” must be higher since so many perpetrators escape detection.

Again, “logically speaking,” I feel we can be certain no other government agency, or private company, would long remain in business with such a high rate of failure, yet we continue this long failed, long known to be rogue and dysfunctional, structure of crime and punishment. Which leads me back to the original question inspired by that Dennis The Menace cartoon: What is the nature of punishment? If the system does not work to end, or seriously curtail, the behavior we are trying to effect, then why do we keep using it?

When answering that question, keep in mind, ‘the system,’ is not “the best we have,” as critics of “prison reform” would have us believe. In fact there are a number of U.S. states, and several ‘countries,’ which have for decades been operating “functional” juvenile penal systems that serve well those entrusted to their care without incorporating corporeal punishment and solitary confinement.
We need to consider the answer(s) might have more to do with us, the punishers, than with the punished. Perhaps, as I have written in the past, because the reformatory effect of physical and psychological abuse as punishment so tantalizes our sadistic impulses and lust for revenge, we 'dig in our heels' whenever the question of reforming California's juvenile penal system surfaces? Perhaps we garner too much satisfaction from the punishment of our children who dare to disrespect us; who flip us the finger; who refuse to listen and not do what we tell them they must; who some time frighten us? Perhaps it's the sense of control we gain from exerting official power over them?

Or could it be, just maybe, our motivation is drawn from a deeper well, darker, more sinister — our reptilian brains — where lurk human traits we would rather not explore because they reveal more about us than we want to know about ourselves?

These are questions we seldom ask, reflections on a topic we seldom ponder, but until we do we all remain at risk, as abuse of our incarcerated children, as with all prisoners, leaves victims on both sides of the fences.

Now, in part, I share with you from the perspective of a Buddhist priest who, after years of raising his own children, teaching students, and counseling prisoners, concludes (quote):

“No form of punishment, be it corporal or psychological, works. It is injurious, causes [unnecessary] pain, and is counterproductive. The ‘deliberate’ infliction of pain on a child in response to an action after it has occurred can in no way change the effect of that action, nor can it serve to educate or awaken.” (unquote)

Would it surprise you to learn I agree? [Drawn smiley face] I’m being facetious. The physical and/or emotional pain of punishment done to children does nothing other than traumatize and instill fear. Besides, not only does it damage the young people, it damages and enslaves those who inflict it. [“Victims on both sides of the fences.”]

It is indeed difficult to clearly see the profound depth of this because we live within an oppressive and coercive environment. Our vision is completely blocked to the truth by materialism in the physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of our lives. With our arrogance forever seducing us, our aggression permeating every corner of our society, the judicial system, and even our religious traditions, we are blinded: It is the rare individual who sees clearly enough to question the premise of punishment on a fundamental level.

We live in a nation impregnated by violence, in which our wrath is felt throughout the world. Infliction of pain we worshipped in our entertainment, our media reporting, and our day-to-day interrelationships with one another. Most of us seem to have but a vague awareness that this is our legacy, that of anger, hatred and oppression, inherited from our parents, and they from theirs. “America” was built, piece by piece, state by state, on a foundation of violent conquest and enslavement of indigenous people! Along the way a few murders and assassinations of those who disagree continues to keep everyone in line.

We use our religious institutions to murder, justify committing genocide when it suits us, “In the name of God and civilization!” Oh, let’s not forget “in the name of” the economic gain for people of privilege and wealth. “In the name of” we excuse our cruelty, and Bien sure qu’il me pardonneriez; c’est netier. (“God will forgive me; that is his business.”)

I doubt we will any time soon get around to working things out, for our history reveals that ‘reason’ and working ‘together’ is not our best qualities. It takes deep felt interaction, an ability to communicate; an ‘understanding’ & accepting of our responsibilities, both to society and its children – keeping in mind we must first educate ourselves and learn self-discipline & restraint before setting out to lead our most troubled. We will accomplish nothing through fear tactics and intimidation via an antiquated, broke, ‘justice’ system that has been failing our children, and us, since its conception.

When I got to thinking about you today, and decided to write, I did not have a whole lot to pen. But I knew, as it always seems to work out, once I got started something will form, and this is what you got this time around. I’d appreciate your thoughts?

Do you still do that thing online, where you put some of my writings? If you find this to be worthy, please put it there…. I’m thinking the feedback, pro & con, would be interesting, and there is nothing I appreciate more than to debate “pro’s and con’s.” [Drawn smiley face]

So far, so good, this ribbon has given no sign of giving up the ghost. Should be good for another letter to you. As always, am sending my regards and look forward to hearing from you when the time becomes available to you. Much respect, my friend.

Sonny [In signature form]

November 17, 2007

Hell, My Budding Friend,

I hope you are well, sitting on the porch, guitar in hand, dressed in your “freedom of expression.” As hard as I have tried, I cannot picture what you look like, for obvious reasons. I would really like to know. Would you be so kind as to give me a verbal photograph? You all ready have some idea of what I look like from the photo in the back of my book; blond hair, blue
eyes, six foot, approximately 186 pounds. I was up to 240+ some years back before the Corrections Department took our weight piles, and most everything else we used to assist us. The prison administrator's actually got this accomplished by complaining prisoner's were "too big," very "difficult to restrain during times of unrest." Whatever works, I suppose. Even shut down the gymnasium's and use them now as dormitories "due to overcrowding." Then a rule was made we could no longer "exercise in groups," with other prisoner's. Not complaining here, Ted - just sharing.

I am presently growing a beard and allowing my hair to grow long; something I have never done and thought I would give it a try. Believe it or not, I don't have a whole of anything better to do.

A few moments ago another inmate was murdered; this time inside a cell directly across from me. As it always is when these things happen, the prisoners throughout the cellblock are exceptionally quiet - it's like a tomb in here right now. As I look out and am able guards now closing the light on, where the lay for some time until team" can be gathered. Coroner will be called it is he does, take etc...

all of that has been

white "body bag," and several guards will then carry him down the stairs where the coroner's gurney now awaits. Once the body is on the gurney, secured by straps, a purple cloth will be placed to cover the bag. From then it will be but a matter of a minute or two before the gurney is wheeled from the cellblock to the waiting hearse. It is a scene I have observed hundreds of times over the many years I have been incarcerated. It rarely plays out any other way.

It has been approximately four hours since the murder, and the prisoner's body is now being carried down the stairs. I note the guards seem to be doing so carefully, respectfully, which I personally appreciate. I have

seen prisoner's bodies in recent years, not so much in 'the day,' dragged down the metal stairs.

I see a lot of convicts standing at their cell doors. I will not here be so pretentious as to assume what they are thinking, though I personally believe the "new wave," other than those who associated with the deceased, could care less.

Would you understand this night I am in envy of that man? Four hours ago he passed from this stinking hole - will not suffer one more day of it. If there really is a Hell, I think not that is where prisoners go after death. There has to be another place because they have all ready experienced hell. If God exist, he would not be so cruel as to take us from one directly to another, would he? Duh, dumb question, huh? He won't even protect innocent children.

I must close –far to distracted. Only intended a note anyway letting you know I continue to breathe. I know you understand.

Much Respects, [hand written]
Sonny [in signature form]

Ted Forsyth, #11

February 22, 2008

I'm Back, Yikes!

Just as I begin to wonder if life beyond these walls does any longer exist, something happens and I am reminded there is in fact another world. Surprise, surprise, books or and magazines have arrived here, soon to be given me; a reminder I should write a letter and let you know I stumble on. How are you doing?

Unfortunately for you today, I am in one of my philosophical moods I like to of as "my turn" to be "depressed." There was a time no matter how emotionally & psychologically challenging, how physically painful from time-to-time, it got, no matter how many times I was knocked down, I would get up, shake it off, and begin again moving forward. Depression, that 'sense' of hopelessness and/or defeat, was but a fleeting irritant, a small part of this experience.

For years I noticed the guards looking at me. I 'thought' they did so in amazement that no matter what they did to me I kept going, like the
Energizer Bunny. A few weeks ago my bubble burst when I had the occasion to take a moment and more closely look at my keeper's staring back at me. Something was on their faces I had not before noticed – an ever so slight smile fixed upon their lips, a glint – humor? – in their eyes. The fine hair at the back of my neck raised, a chill ran through me, as I was reminded of something I had been entertained by when a child – the cat playing with a mouse.

With that realization I have again been challenged to run the gambit of emotions ran when all hope is gone, leaving only darkness in one's soul. I have always known for those who cannot dream there is no future; no respect for life – not for their own, not for that of others around them. I have always understood that without a future death and where death means meaninglessness. I am old: that gambit one last envelope,” or is it time fate?
that day at m guards it since a little boy have been like any broken and bleeding, chewing and chewing, am to escape I must sacrifice – unaware all the while the "trapper" is nearby, watching, smiling, being entertained, prepared to destroy me should I become free.... the cat playing with a mouse. I never had a chance.

Well, I had much to share but my emotionally rollercoaster ride today was quick, and now you shall not be made to suffer through it with me. Hey, I have my moments. Besides I noticed I am out of tissue. I sometime wonder if I experience from time to time manic-depression, a mild psychotic form of it? There are occasions during which I drop down to an all-time emotional low, and quickly I am back up to telling jokes. It does not happen often but it actually physically hurts when it does. Well, as I like to say, it is what it is – I'll get over it. If I do not I will be in serious trouble.

Around here one who has psychological ‘issues’ is treated in a manner that would be considered “punishment” in most sections of society. You might be shocked to learn how many men refuse to seek “mental health assistance,” fearing they could be made to suffer for having the nerve to become needy in that way, a choice that often has dire consequences.

“Jokes?” I got one for you I just heard: If a lady with huge breast is destined to work at Hooter's, where is a woman with one leg likely to end up working? HOP. Yikes!

I have no memory of sharing with you that recently Mark Batty Publisher, New York published Illustrations from the Inside, by The Beat Within. I Cried, You Didn’t Listen and myself received a mention during the Introduction, though the title was not correct. I intend to write to Mark Batty as I understand he might be interested in publishing some of my Works.

There is also a gentleman in Nyack, New York, who has written and asked if I would be interested in discussing with him his writing a screen play incorporating both ICYDI and CONSEQUENCE? I am presently waiting to hear back from him. Of course I will keep you up on how that goes.

There is a lot of excitement buzzing here: Many of these guys are thinking the could be released because of the overcrowding, and the possibility Three Strikes will again be addressed by the voters in November. Maybe cool heads and common sense will prevail this time around.

Two cells down from me is a man now in his late fifties who has been incarcerated the last thirteen (13) years, serving a life sentence under the Strikes law for stealing four AA batteries from a 7-11 store, and never during his lifetime has he been convicted of a “violent crime.” Though I am now often hearing similar horror stories among these guys, it is so difficult even for myself to believe. I had my doubts about this one until I was given the opportunity to read this individual’s court “Sentencing Report” which documents what he is complaining about as fact. It was never meant to be like that, or was it?

As long as there is punishment without rehabilitation I suppose the Three Strikes Law will seem necessary, for most citizens are ignorant of the fact it will not end, not even ‘reduce,’ the victimizing of ‘honest’ folks by “repeat offenders.” Only “rehabilitation” will bring that about, and reduce the present “76% recidivism rate” in California.

Lately I have been reading a number of books in preparation of my writing another manuscript, detailing facts proving that though “reform” of the juvenile and adult “Corrections” system has been an issue since I am able to remember, the only change has been the statistical numbers put out by the state and federal government. These numbers, and the stories behind them, prove the abuse of societies trouble children and its adult offender’s, instead of fading into the sunset, has increased. “Numbers” that support my
claim the reformatory effect of physical and psychological abuse as punishment is a belief that may never die, at best not for as long as it continues to tantalize our sadistic impulses and lust for blood, as I am so fond of pointing out given the opportunity. [Drawn smiley face]

At this time one of the books I am using to gather figures compiled 40 years ago is CHILDREN IN TROUBLE, by Howard James 1970 (Pocket Books) based upon a series of articles that appeared weekly in The Christian Science Monitor, March 31 to July 7, 1969.

For me to accomplish this at some point I must find a colleague who has the ‘time’ to collaborate and do research – gather the data/statistics I need, most that can be compiled online, otherwise I will have to do it through the mail which could take forever. (Just read that last paragraph and I was not ‘fishing,’ I understand your time is limited.) Of course, should that change, and should have any interest, find the project to be something you might consider participating in, you know where you can find me, and not even have to look hard. [Drawn smiley face]

Wow! Thank you, Ted. I was just handed The Week. Very kind of you. Actually, I must confess, when I asked you did not really expect it would happen, and had I – most certainly not as quickly as it did. I must be careful or my faith in mankind might have to be revisited. [Drawn smiley face] Not! If you would, please The Week and ask that it add A 1-109 to the address label, my cell number (P.O. Box 1050 A-109) or these folks are going to give me the blues by not issuing the magazine. Thank you.

Must be Christmas again – was handed a letter from you moments ago, just finished reading it, and believe it or not I don’t know what to write in response to your unfortunate, short-lived romance. I can share I am one of those guys who believe that in life what rare love and joy comes to us we must hold onto tightly, as it is certain whatever is then left of the rest of our lives will attempt to rip it from our grasp, skillfully using our weaknesses and exposing our imperfections.

I believe a person knows ‘when’ to grab on “tightly.” You know how something deep inside, “gut instinct,” starts screaming at you, if you are paying attention, lets you know what you need to do? I suggest you do not dismiss it as “meaningless.” One thing I am not is a man who is familiar with affairs of the heart, not for a very, very, long time. My only words of wisdom are – Stay true to yourself Ted, and some times that is going to hurt, but you will respect yourself in the morning.

Your mention of an earlier relationship with an ‘ex in Chicago’ that left you devastated caught me off guard, as I do not recall you sharing the story with me. If you ever feel ready, I’d like to hear your feelings and thoughts on that experience, if we are still ‘talking’ after you read on, my response to one of the questions you have presented.

Ted, I wish I could write and say ‘I am not a monster,’ but I would be lying. I am man; how can animal behavior be alien to me? Through my life there has been very little I have not done to ‘offend society’ – from stealing cars, assaults, robberies, rape, to several murders, before I grew old, less angry, much wiser.

I regret to inform you that you must tell your friends I am ‘an’ what they fear, the monster, the boogy man. Very little else will be found existing four consecutive life sentences inside a maximum security prison. I will respect whatever they choose to think and feel in response.

I understand it is not likely to matter to the great majority of people that today I am a senior convict, poor in health, in a wheelchair unable to walk, striving to bring reform to a broken system that has victimized more human beings than I and ten thousand just like me ever could in our combined lifetimes.

I respect we live in a unforgiving world out of necessity, for to do otherwise can be far too painfully destructive emotionally and psychologically, more than any physical trauma I have ever experienced, which has been considerable.

Certainly they should also know that I have lived over fifty-four years, nearly my entire life, incarcerated, caged inside a 4x10 foot cage, attempting to pay my ‘debt to society.’ I understand it will comfort some that what ‘society’ has extracted from me there are no words to describe, at least none I can think of to pen here tonight. Others it will comfort to know that I have grown old and frail in my concrete box, and that I sit here now forced to consider the possibility there is a hereafter, no matter my logic tells me it cannot be so.

Exactly as I have past written, the bad things I have done to others leave much to my imagination: It forms this ghoulous spectacle of being greeted below by hundreds of victims, now nightmarish figures in various stages of decomposition, animated by vengeace, reaching out hands dripping rotting flesh, grabbing, tearing my shirt, shredding my skin – ‘finally’ it is to be their turn. (How is my flair for drama? Am I good, or what?) :)

I understand how you must feel, being pressured to ask me what you have. I appreciate your feeling apologetic, but there is no need for that. I actually agree with those you have asked to in some way have dealings with me, as those you requested to send me Christmas greetings; they deserve to know who they are being asked to associate with. Please, let me be the first to ask that you suggest to them they choose to approach me cautiously, remain at a far, safe, distance, wherever they are most comfortable, not share nothing with me about their personal home-life. They are your friends – protect them.

I no way feel disrespected by their concern I could be the monster in their nightmares. I might be, for all anyone of them knows. I only ask of them, beg if necessary, they listen to what I have to say, hear me out. I believe I can teach much to people who enter my life desiring to learn about a rogue system that has failed society and its troubled men, women, and its children. If they are wise they will listen intently to all who speak, for even the most foolish among us know things a wise person does not.
Lastly, in response to this question of yours, in my defense I can state emphatically, if nothing else the one thing I have always been consistent with is being honest with myself and others about myself, and my history. I do not have a good enough memory to lie. ‘Should a man have two faces, he will bewilder himself,’ I’ve read somewhere.

I am so tempted to keep going on with this subject, mouth-mouthing that I have, but enough said on it. I’ll leave it with a question which I suppose can be taken as my being factitious, possibly even an attempt to defend myself, but not so! I ask it because I would really like an answer from those on the other side of the wall: Is it only a man’s past that defines him, or where he has journeyed to in the present? Is there ever a time when he can be forgiven?

I cannot say I am surprised by the “reason” AK gave for rejecting CONSEQUENCE. I am certain it had nothing to do with the story I told, or how I wrote it. I think it possibly the way I punctuate – it has been past brought to my attention. You may have noticed it in the letters I write? You see, my missives to you are written, when I am telling you “a story,” is how I wrote CONSEQUENCE. Whatever fault you find in how I write letters, so you would note in the manuscript. Your findings, thoughts, and any criticism, on this matter would most certainly be appreciated.

NOTE: “Paul, thank you for sharing how well my book I Cried, You Didn’t Listen has been received by your class. I’d very much like to hear their thoughts and questions shared with you. Is that possible? Of course, any questions you might wish to ask me in response to those your students have would be welcomed. If I have the answers I will share them.”

Ted, please never hesitate to order whatever newspaper/newsletter subscription for me you feel will interest me. I find very little lying around here, though I do from time-to-time discover a publication in the trash, or that has been tossed out onto the tier. I like keeping my reading easy, down to earth stuff, not bunch of high tech., nearly impossible stuff to figure out. I’m a simple person.

Anything to do with prisons, reform, both juvenile and adult, I seek. Certainly both Prison Legal News and Critical Resistance will be welcomed. What do you know of a newspaper published by an organization titled Prisoner’s Union, if anything? It may be limited to what goes on in California - I am unsure. Could you obtain information about that?

I am told there are a great many publications free to prisoners, relating a large number of issues, and any you can sign me up for would be much appreciated. I reiterate, the address labels must have both my prison and cell number on them or I’ll be given the blues on this end.

Dwight Abbott, T-88033
SVSP A 1-109
P.O. Box 1050
Soledad, CA 93960-1050

Anything similar to the above, with that information, will serve to assure my keepers have no excuse to keep the publication from reaching me. Please, anyone you can arrange, let me know about. Thank you, Ted. I’m grateful. Nothing yet, as of the above date, from Slingshot. I will keep you in the hat with everything that I do receive.

Tell me, my friend, what sort, if any at all, of responses do you receive from people online to things you publish there – such as my “Christmas Card”? Is there any real interest, any organizing among those seeking knowledge of “the system,” and its reform?

Closing: Would I be sticking my nose into business that does not concern me by asking if you would keep me up on you and your “mutual crush,” let me know how that is working, or not? I’m pulling for you, hoping that whatever you seek will be found, if not there – wherever it is waiting, and it is out there, somewhere, waiting, you know that?

Please write soon, and if you remember would you let me know if you have received all my letters as numbered 1-11?

My regards and respects,

Sonny [in signature form]

Ted Forsyth, #6
November 01, 2007

Received Your Letter,

Been sitting here the past several days waiting for my cell [block] to receive a ‘major’ search. It will be this morning, now that the other four cellblocks, and “gym dormitory” have been taken apart as prisoner manufactured weapons are sought.

According to rumor, “knives were discovered” inside the gymnasium where prisoners are crammed, forced to exist stacked three high on bunks in sweltering heat. For over a week we have now been on “emergency lock-down.” We sit, we wait, we are told nothing, as is always the way at times such as this.
In my experience, during these lock-downs is the most trying of
times for all prisoners; waiting for dozens of guards to appear, one then
entering into each cell to tear through its contents, as a dense bristled brush
drawn through matted hair until there are no more snags. Nothing escapes
scrutiny, most everything eventually dropped onto a growing pile upon
bunks and floor.

In contrast, ‘normally’ cells are picked at random each day for a
brief, cursory, search for items such as wine brewing under a bunk, a
‘nude’ picture taped onto the wall, a horde of “state issued” laundry.

I wonder if it might surprise people to learn each time this is done,
granted a necessary evil in prison life (though it is done from time to time as
nothing more other than ‘retaliation’) that I am left feeling ‘violated,’ even
after all these many years of incarceration.

We, most convicts, respond no differently than those in your world
returning home to discover someone has entered there without permission
and gone through
their personal stuff.
It’s never, not really,
been taken; most
replaced, somehow.
It is about
someone has
through, our private
what
our anger – the
us those
this thing
sadistically, with obvious relish.

A great many in your world, if I am any judge of human nature,
will say, “That’s the price paid by criminals.” I say they are certainly
correct, but must beware** for that is exactly the problem. Believing that
creating an environment in which nothing is ‘normal’ is “justice served,”
victimizes everyone, not just the criminals. Abuse, brutalize, place in
inhumane conditions, and victims are most certainly made on both sides of
the prison walls. Keeping in mind that for every action there is a ‘reaction,’
is it not obvious what ‘society’ will harvest from its incarcerated, mistreated
while hidden from sight by concrete and steel bars?

Allow an environment in which those who exist must shut down to
‘survive,’ a world in which one can no longer have the luxury of allowing
themselves to feel ‘something’ matters, not even death, and life becomes
meaningless, for which all societies members will pay the price, not just the
“scum-bags.”

We who “are nothing but criminals” become the wolf I believe I have told you about? The wolf that by its very nature limits the ‘meaning’ if
your existence? If not, please allow me to do so now.

Visit, walk among the catacomb of cells arranged here inside a
failed system that has been allowed to exist for nearly 160 years, where I
have been 56 years. Peer into the shadowed cages and you will find the
wolves staring back through the bars. In their eyes you will discover no
recognition of your humanity; they see nothing other than a shape, and
wonder how to get at it. The strength you notice is very deceptive as it is
purely predatory – none is the softness of morality or conscience – only will
to survive your presence that has long proven for them a threat. You, the
system” has wounded them: Never, ever, doubt a wounded animal will seek
out its tormentor to become their nightmare.

Is this how it was intended our penal ‘justice,’ ha ha, society serve
its members? Most in your world appear not to have any idea
this system has not only failed its troubled, (no matter, who cared?) but it
has caused more harm and damage to be done the “good folks” than is yet
to be understood, for is in the darkness these facts are kept by those you
elect to serve your best interest. (How am I doing – all the drama and stuff?)

Send away millions of damaged children, men, women, to further
damage them and what does ‘society’ think it is going to get back?
Considering it is a long known statistical fact 98% of all those who
“nothing but criminals” will return to “the neighborhood” at some point in
time, do not accept that question rhetorical.

“It doesn’t matter what happens to them” while incarcerated? “The
system is the best we got?” Somebody better wake up out there. America’s
penology has failed since its conception. Of the “98%” I just mentioned
above set-lose back upon their neighborhoods – approximately 78% return
to victimizing folks who have no idea they are on a collision course with
their worst nightmare, compliments of the criminal justice system.

Today’s prisons, exactly as yesterday’s, cultivate psychological
repression, breeds all manner of rage and frustration hidden behind
subservient demeanors, a surface appearance serving like a dam holding
every thing back behind it. Occasionally that “dam” leaks a slight bit and
ignored, often mistaken for nothing more than a meaningless anomaly,
rather than the warning it is.

Suddenly, like the snake that has silently crept up onto its intended
prey strikes, the dam breaks to pour forth waters pushing before it
tormented souls, uncontrolled, down, through, and over all encountered.
The prisoner will fight like a tiger, relentlessly, viciously, for even the most
gentle and tender of spirits are the most terrible when they fight for the sake
of their soul, leaving a wide path of death and destruction that did not need
to happen.
I'm sorry - ranting again. Thank you for allowing me to do that from time to time, and not running off. I sometimes fear I will chase you off when I get going like this, on a sort of 'rampage' one might view it as. [Drawing smiley face] I know I can get on a roll that could bore the socks off of you if I am not on a subject you can appreciate. I try to be careful. If I have learned nothing else in this life, I've been taught what little love that is sent my way I best do all I can to hold on tightly as it is certain fate will make every effort to rip it from my grasp.

Yikes! I just realized how far off onto a side road I have taken. Hope you have enjoyed the scenic view. I'm not even a good criminal - I 'feel' far too much, far too often.

November 04, 2007

Reading over what I wrote above, I am left to feel I must have had a premonition of what was about to happen. Two days ago we were hammered, hard! What the guard who was in my 6x10 square foot cell for nearly three hours did cannot be explained any other way than he had to be pissed off at the world. He took every book I had, all three of my dictionary's, Thesaurus', my word-rhyming dictionary, 6 CD's are missing, both mine and my cellie's toothbrushes are gone, on and on. It took more than a day and a half to return the cell to the order it was in prior.

I 'think' it was 'made personal' because my cell mate, who does nothing but read, finds a way to totally escape prison while reading, had over 100 books. The 'rules' state he is allowed no more than 10. This no doubt made the 'regular' cell block bulls appear as if they have not been doing their daily cursory searches, which in fact they have, and made things personal, as we refer to disagreements among parties. Somehow understandably, it does not matter there was never any deliberate disrespect of the Correctional Officers on our part; they were made to look bad and we have dearly paid the price for not thinking. Some of the items 'missing' took me years to procure.

A few other prisoners were also hit exceptionally hard, even lost their toothbrushes as well, for some weird reason - possibly a bull with a fetish? I have heard them yelling, kicking their cell doors, throwing temper tantrums that will get them absolutely nowhere. Myself? I figure we all pay the piper from time-to-time. I'll share my distress only with you here today and then erase it from thoughts. I refuse to walk around here 24/7 pissed off, will cut my losses and get on existing.

Hey, I have gone years in solitary with nothing. I'll make it past this. My cellie seems to be dealing with it, that is after he cleaned his dinner of the wall where he slung it. A momentary lapse in self-control. (We are being fed inside our cells, as we always are during these "emergencies." He'll be fine.)

I have explained to him, fact is it could have been a whole lot worse: Our radio could not longer been functioning; I could have returned to my cell and found my typewriter had "accidentally" dropped and broken. That in these events, should we be extremely lucky, we might could be "reimbursed by the state" in about a year. I think he has got my point.

Through the decades I have learned the hard way that no matter what they do it could have been worse. I have had it all done to me, some of me, keep me safe, rehabilitate me, turn me into a productive citizen...

A couple of years ago I received a letter from a woman citizen living in “Smiths Grove, KY,” who wrote she works at a state run youth prison, that after reading I Cried, You Didn't Listen she decided she was going to bring attention to “certain problems” she knew was ‘going on at the institution,” and asked if I had “any advice,” which of course I did. [Drawing smiley face] I mailed off to her a missive I hoped she would find informative, encouraging, and figured that would be our only contact with one another.

Well, not so. Friday I received another letter from her, dated 10-23-07, that I would like to here in quote for you. It spotlights exactly why I...

“Mr. Abbott,

Since our last correspondence, I have been officially promoted to "Counselor" at the Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center, I am now in...

Since our last correspondence, I have been officially promoted to "Counselor" at the Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center, and to deal with staff...

Since our last correspondence, I have been officially promoted to "Counselor" at the Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center, and to deal with staff...
have either been "pushed" out of the job, or moved to first shift where they spend less time with the residents and are much more easily monitored. I am currently doing a training for staff on appropriate communication, relationships, and appropriate ways to administer consequences.

I try to gain and maintain trust from the residents so they know they can bring staff issues to me. I think most of the long-termers know that I will do my best to take care of things because they have seen the result of telling me about staff problems in the past.

I thank you for, and appreciate, your guidance and support. As I continue to make changes in the lives of juveniles in my little corner of the world, I remember your story and your strive to right many wrongs.

D.W."

When I first began this usually thankless and often futile journey of mine to right things here in the California youth institutions there was no way I could have thought in my wildest imagination I would hear from a woman down Kentucky way. That what I wrote has made a difference in her life, and in how she now deals with things at her workplace to improve the care and treatment of troubled children, and making sure through her those kids have a voice that is being heard by her superiors. Wow & wow!

I confess there have been times I have been in situations that made me consider quitting, but it’s never got that bad — not yet.

As I read over this last letter of yours, another image that comes to mind is your sitting, pencil stuck behind one ear, hair mussed by your fingers, bent over as you labor to write me a letter. There are not a whole lot of people who bother to take that kind of time from their day to share with a stranger thousands of miles away languishing in prison. Trust me, after five decades of incarceration, I can assure you that there are not a whole lot of people like you. Thank you.

Saying that, I would take it no less personal if you were to type out your letter’s to me. Occasionally I have a problem reading some words and I have to wonder if I am missing something. Of course, I leave that decision to you.

I enjoyed learning about some of the things you do, the “cooperative," and your role, intentions, goals. I grew up during, and remember well, a time of widespread revolution throughout America, co op’s, the S.I.A., George Jackson (my association with him I wrote about in CONSEQUENCE, should I ever get it published) Attica, Hippies, much I missed out on as I was busy surviving the predator’s.

Much of what you shared in this letter before me has brought clear memories of those time back, and I am sitting here wondering if anything we did back then, bled and died for, is remembered today? Does anyone remember our struggle? Will yours be remembered? Will any of what we do make such a difference it will matter a hundred years from now? It’s got that leads me to doing so, but somehow I believe our journey will not be in vain, but then I am the optimist who invented the plane in a bed with the pessimist who afterward invented the parachute.

You have asked if I have ‘thought’ in response to something’s you wrote, and I do, if I have not misunderstood or failed to understand,

You wrote, “The “coop” is hierarchical... The shareholders or members vote the board into power. The board in turn is supposed to have a say in the way the “coop” runs. The board hires and fires the top management. The top management in turn hires other managers. All managers in turn hire their employees for each department...”

Ted, Ted – far too many chiefs, thus — in my humble opinion — the reason for the “disorganization” that is breeding “disinterest,” more a sense of discouragement, in the “coop.” You are absolutely correct that there is a very strong possibility compounding this is a lack of knowledge about the actual inner workers." Nothing like mismanagement, ignorance, and confusion to dampen enthusiasm.

There must be a leader who is passionate, their manner demanding respect, and whose knowledge is so appreciated it is sought by the others. Without all three of those attributes a person cannot lead for no one will pay them attention.

No doubt holding “political education meetings” on what the coop is about, its goals, you “idealized dreams of all it can be, along with giving “contemporary and historical examples of collective business,” are certainly necessary, as in any ‘business,’ but doomed to failure among those who do not feel the passion, who find the ‘classrooms’ are boring, uninteresting, which certainly guarantee’s there will not be ‘motivational value.’ Again, it takes a “leader.”

You suggest this could be done “without management, and yet that is truly herein where the majority of the problem lay. Just where the hell is management, Ted? If management was working successfully for the coop, again in “my humble opinion,” much of your concerns expressed to me would not exist today. 99% of the problems in any business is always “management,” and until they ‘manage, all the meetings held, “educational,” “motivational,” whatever, will not “serve the coop.”
Unless management manages, leaders lead and inspire, provide "opportunities" that encourage initiative and productivity within recognized structured guidelines, you and your crew may as well piss in the wind, or change management! Sorry.

One last thing before I begin boring you, in response to the person who was hired and felt to be incompetent, I am a firm believer whenever "management" will not listen, the "incompetent" person management hired. As I begin to close, I strongly encourage you to begin that Industrial Workers of the World Union, but don't do it unless you have a leader who when he walks into a room filled with peers they know him to be worthy of their trust and respect. Wishing you all good luck.

Please tell Frankie, who "is a she," I am grateful to her. She has done me, and hopefully many children, a kindness I shall never be able to repay.

My Respects, [written]
Sonny [his signature]

**Members of society should understand it is exactly that collective really begins, for everyone. You cannot knock someone down, place your foot on their neck, until they "give," and then, for so much as a second, think they do not plan repeated push and grind their face into the dirt, refuse to let them stand up upon doing you serious harm! The ones during which everyone knows, in this age, there is nothing to find, no bombs, guns, knives, hacksaw blades, concealed hot air balloons, the "in the day" usual convict job," they take the poor slob will there is no heat the extra bed sheet ball forming a "major finds," that

December 05, 2007

"Ho. Ho. Ho."

"I don't care who you are, fat man, get your reindeer off my roof."

I have managed to "be good" this year but I doubt there will be anything under the tree Christmas Day, that is if there was to be a tree. "What" would I want, that the guards would not deem to be "contraband" and take from me during another of their hundred's of fruitless 'searches.' The ones which everyone knows, in this age, there is nothing to find, no
The more than one, weekly, roll of toilet paper per inmate; the scotch tape wrapped around a pencil that was to be used to make Christmas cards; the 'extra' books, can't have more than ten (10), and then the mother-load of them all—a page torn from inside a Playboy magazine.

"How the f**k did they smuggle in that nasty skin flick—those perverts?!" Have I mentioned we are not allowed photographs of skimpy clad women?? Shame on heterosexual men!

Oh how I long for "the day" when guards would search our cells and only take our knives if you had more than one.

I won't lie, though I have, would, will, but not now, and I have written this before, there are several of these guards who somehow through it all have remained decent, who treat me as I am in the habit of treating them, respectfully, but there are the few who no matter will do all they can to make one's life miserable, and they do it well. Complaining? Not! I appreciate those who have it in their heart to be decent, and do all I can to avoid and ignore the others. If anyone has learned a "complaining" prisoner is folly in the flesh, it is I.

For the most part I seem to somehow skate past most of the madness, I would suppose that has something to do with being an old man among a bunch of young idiots. The guards are so busy trying to keep them in line they rarely have very little time to focus their attention on me. I done some stupid stuff in my life, but I was never too stupid to figure out what "flying under the radar" can accomplish.

I knew when I began this it is going to be one of my rare short, and pretty much meaningless, letters. Trust me when I say these few words here are less intended to be informative than they are to let you know you are in my thoughts, and thank you for reaching out.

This is my Christmas Card I hope will find its way to you before Christmas morning. That turtle they use is not getting any younger, leaves a bit to be desired.

Opp's, I forgot to tell you what I would wish to be under the proverbial prison Christmas Tree for myself, that might not be considered "contraband" as it is even more rarely sighted here than Santa Clause and his reindeer's flying through the sky....... Hope.

Hope it will be a good one for you, Ted,

Sonny

** It was determined nearly a decade ago that "the Christians" are right, that "lust is a perversion," and will make inmates rape and pillage "after they are released from prison." I am so appreciative they have saved us, and our souls. It is so much better to exist in an environment so restrictive, at some point through the years heterosexual men will begin to "lust" after the "pretty boys" that have the misfortune of being sent to prison at a young age. Once I was one of those "boys." Should I mention since Corrections decided to take away "cozjugal visiting" from convicts "serving life sentences," destroying marriages, entire family units, the bonds once shared, the consequences? That's possibly for another letter, a much longer one. (Sorry, can't seem not to get on my soap box.)
Hell Is Prison

Hell is here, in this bastion representing defeat, it's gray, granite walls sucking life as does a leach. Hell- massive is this warehouse of despair, loneliness its only harvested crop stored here. Hell- a grimy edifice of decay, social conscience rotting away.

Hell- a dismal structure built for those disgraced, where men and women are sent who have lost face. Hell- crucible, where anger and hate is fired, demonic criminal minds further inspired. Hell- a playground upon which is bred perversion, where "anything goes" being the only diversion. Hell- a monument built around lost souls, hiding remorseless cruelty its goal. Hell- a womb filled by violent, shameful deeds, where Satan lives, rapes, sowing his seeds. Hell- its fortress walls built over time, by the greedy with like criminal minds. Hell- a sac in which is brewed a fiendish bile, daily spewing from its bowels all that is vile. Hell- a rampart built from antiquated thought, that men and women are redeemed by wrought. Hell- catacombs of concrete and steel cages, where being stuck on stupid never changes. Hell- a hideous error beginning early time, a proven failure, itself a monstrous crime. Hell- grim, dark, a blight upon our land, wherever prison walls are built by man.

D. Abbott [hand written]
10-4-07 [hand written]
My Birthday [hand written with smiley face]

Prison Poster Project Is Seeking Illustrators

For more info, go to: www.prisonposterproject.org, or contact prisonposterproject@gmail.com

For the past 4 years, a collective of artists and activists on the outside have been working alongside artists and activists behind the walls to design a poster that could be used as an educational tool to raise awareness about the current state of the criminal justice system. Together we have interviewed, studied, met, and dialogued about what to put in this poster and create it.

We are almost done! We desperately need more help illustrating, especially from women!

If you are currently locked up, like to draw, and would like to help out, please get in touch. Please also enclose a sample of your drawing style so we can figure out how best to fit you into the project. We are asking that all illustrators who participate send a drawing and a self portrait. Please send any drawing sample or letter of interest to:

The Prison Poster Project
PO Box 71357 Pittsburgh, PA 15213

If you are not incarcerated but know an artist who is, please put them in contact with us either by sharing our info with them or sharing their info with us. You can email their name, doc # and address to prisonposterproject@gmail.com.

All drawings are donations to the project. All people involved in creating the illustration will receive documentation of the project. The PPP is 100% volunteer and not for profit.

The drawing is a little like a quilt with a cross section of a prison, then illustrations in cells and rooms of the prison. If you decide you would like to participate you will choose or be
designated a topic and hooked up with an outside collective member. The member will send you a template and ideas on the issue that were generated over the years. Some topics that still need to be illustrated are: protest from within, jailhouse lawyer, creating family on the inside, the INS, racism on the inside, tear gas, the visiting room, domestic violence survivor, issues specific to women, and the cafeteria. Please let us know if you’re interested in illustrating any of these ideas.

Because art impacts us on a level that keeps us inspired, enlightened, and committed, we believe that this poster will be an extremely effective tool for educating and motivating people around criminal justice system issues. Art speaks a universal language, helping to build coalitions that transcend race, class, gender, and geographic lines, and making knowledge accessible to our diverse communities. We are creating a poster that is the combined effort of many different people, using art to cross prison walls and unify us in a struggle for a more just and compassionate tomorrow.

The Prison Industrial Complex:

Three decades after the war on crime began, the United States has developed a prison industrial complex—a set of bureaucratic, political, and economic interests that encourage increased spending on imprisonment, regardless of the actual need. The prison-industrial complex is not a conspiracy, guiding the nation’s criminal-justice policy behind closed doors. It is a confluence of special interests that has given prison construction in the United States a seemingly unstoppable momentum. It is composed of politicians, both liberal and conservative, who have used the fear of crime to gain votes; impoverished rural areas where prisons have become a cornerstone of economic development; private companies that regard the roughly $35 billion spent each year on corrections not as a burden on American taxpayers but as a lucrative market; and government officials whose jurisdictions have expanded along with the inmate population.

Since 1991 the rate of violent crime in the United States has fallen by about 20 percent, while the number of people in prison or jail has risen by 50 percent. The prison boom has its own inexorable logic. Steven R. Donziger, a young attorney who headed the National Criminal Justice Commission in 1996, explains the thinking: “If crime is going up, then we need to build more prisons; and if crime is going down, it’s because we built more prisons—and building even more prisons will therefore drive crime down even lower.”
