

# Compassion

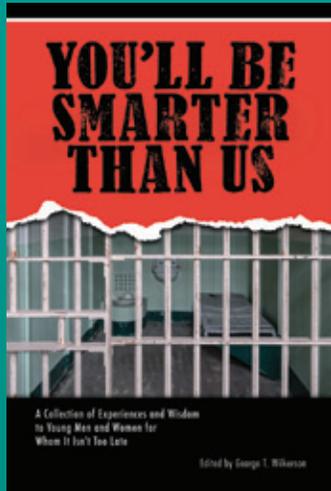
Written by Death-Row Prisoners

HELPING PRISONERS ON DEATH ROW LIVE CONNECTED AND FRUITFUL LIVES

140 W. South Boundary Street | Perrysburg, OH 43551

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Publishing compassionate and introspective articles written by death-row prisoners.



Compassion Newsletter is happy to present the release of death row prisoner's newest book, "You'll Be Smarter Than Us."

Our book is available on Amazon.com either in print copy or ebook.

## Please check it out!

If you wish to purchase a quantity of 5 or more please contact us for special pricing.

[www.compassionondeathrow.net](http://www.compassionondeathrow.net)

## My First Bicycle

When I was just a little boy my mother gave me my first bicycle. My first ride, boy was I joyously nervous. Mom helped me get on and said, "It's okay son," and the whole time I told myself, "It's okay. It's okay I got this." Then she started to push me, ever so gently, forward. My feet began peddling; I started smiling. She was all smiles with me, and then she did what all mothers do – she let me go! There I was, riding my bike all my myself. Wow, I was on top of the world! But then came the most important decision in my whole young life: How do I turn around? As I tried to pull my bars to the left I panicked because I was going too fast. I started shaking and all of a sudden – concrete. Bam!

I was on the ground crying, "It's all your fault!" at my mom. She rushed up to me with tears in her eyes. She pulled me up and told me "No son, it's the bike's fault. You were just going too fast." She wiped my hands off, and, with a gentle smile, asked me, "Do you want to do it again?" I looked down at my bike. I began to smile too, and said, with all the boldness of a child, "I made it!" My first crash.

Life would bring many more of those. I should know because I still have the scars to prove it. The scars we receive in this life will be with us forever. Jesus still has His scars to this very day! I read in a book recently that, "if Jesus chose to live with His scars for eternity and not be ashamed, then why should we be ashamed of ours?" Life's scars can hurt us to the point of despair, which drives us to a place that will eat at our hearts. All the troubles, all the pain and sorrows and the agony of being defeated every time can take a toll on us. Most just give up and quit! But Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Yet most won't turn to God for help; instead they'd rather live in misery. We have a hope that stands ready to pick us up just like mom did. All we have to do is reach up. My hands are held high! So come and join me; will you?



Steven Long  
Texas Death Row  
Livingston, TX

## True Character is Forged Under Adversity

Take everything that I have,  
Subject me to ridicule and scorn,  
Annihilate my essential being,  
Decimate my self-esteem,  
Tear apart my soul,  
Bury me in a prison built with bricks  
of shame, and  
Subject me to torment in that human  
cesspool of pain,  
But fully realize and deeply appreciate that,  
You have not, nor will you every destroy me,

But instead,  
You have helped me forge a true and  
unbreakable spirit of fortitude,  
And for this my friend,  
I am, and always will be earnestly and  
eternally grateful!



Wesley I. Purkey  
Federal Death Row  
Terra Haute, IN

# Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor are welcomed from all prisoners (this includes non-death row prisoners) and the outside community.

In submitting letters, we ask that compassionate and introspective guidelines apply to your communications.

Limit size to 400 words or less. Letters may be edited for clarity and space considerations.

## SEND ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO:

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**PLEASE NOTE:** Any opinions expressed in this publication are those of the individuals writing them and not of Compassion or other staff members. Anything death row prisoners write may jeopardize their future appeals. This may limit the scope of their expressions.

*All stories are subject to editing for grammar, sentence structure, and clarity.*

# EDITORIAL:

## Resisting Stereotypes: Humanity Isn't Black & White

**T**he light in which we see ourselves – how we identify and define ourselves – colors every corner of our existence: our values, our morality, our treatment of others, how we make decisions, who we gravitate toward (or away from), our self-esteem, what offends and inspires us, our goals. Similarly, the way we regard others influences our interactions with them. Living with limited beliefs about who we are, or can become, handicaps our growth, imprisons our potential, and distorts our perception of reality. I believe there are many major ways we tend to identify/define ourselves and others:

► **By roles** – parent, teacher, convict, brother.

► **By age, race, gender, culture, religion** – Baby Boomer, Female, American, Christian.

► **By personality traits/dispositions** – obsessive, kind, insecure, greedy.

► **By place** – where we've been, where we live, where we're from.

► **By things** – what we have and don't have.

► **By experiences** – what we have/haven't done; what has/hasn't happened to us; drug addict, straight/gay, victim/victimizer, artist – i.e., behaviors, what we do/don't do.

► **By tastes and looks** – likes/dislikes, clothing styles; height, weight, eye color.

These qualities and characteristics describe fragments of our humanity, and habitual or familiar ways of relating to and engaging with others. But they aren't the whole picture. As human beings, we embody ambiguity and ambivalence, blurred lines and shades of gray, neither exactly this nor precisely that, but rather a mixture of them all. The whole ensemble is greater than the sum of our constituent pieces.

Stereotypes dehumanize by confining the spectrum of humanity to solid-colored categories, but we cannot be so simply summed up or neatly boxed... unless we accept those mental limitations. We often select a few prominent features and let them define us altogether. We stereotype ourselves. When I came to prison, I embraced prison culture by identifying as a "convict", and it determined my values and subsequent socially acceptable behavior – according to that standard. But then I identified as "Christian", and there came times when the two identities were mutually exclusive. I have to pick one (Christian).

Over time, I realized I am first a Christian. The other ways I identified myself were/are best described as vines growing within the lattice of Christian Morality and worldview. I am a Christian, a man, an artist. I am a writer, a philosopher, a friend. I am a son, a brother, and a poet. I am a childless father, a brideless groom. I've been colored and discolored and I've done the same to others. My kindness, generosity, mercy, and patience come from a place of strength, not weakness. I am a former criminal and addict.

People can and do change. I'm proof of that. I am many things to many people, have been many things I am no more, and will be many things I'm not right now – but to me, I am only me:

**Unnamed, undefined, except by God.**

**I simply am who I am, as designed,**

**Beautiful and ugly and everything in-between.**



George Wilkerson  
Editor  
North Carolina Death Row  
Raleigh, NC



## FIRST PLACE O.HENRY CONTEST WINNER'S SUBMISSION

# From Within

Standing over my sink and looking into the cold stainless steel mirror, I see the dark eyes of the broken man that was once so lively. How could I have gone from such a happy and considerate young man to one that was convicted not just of murder but for murdering an innocent and precious child? How have things gone so wrong?! There is nothing to justify my actions or excuse what I've done. No button to rewind the events that occurred that night. So many people hurt with such a senseless crime.

I have to get these feelings out in order to hold on to some of my sanity. I have learned the best method is to write. I have tried to self-medicate on psych meds but they only serve to numb the madness. They do nothing to deal with the problems that lurk beneath. The only way to deal with this is from within.

Do I just roll over and let it all consume me or do I look in the mirror, into the depths of those dark eyes staring back at me and figure out how to reclaim my sense of self? The only way to remove this darkness is to fill it with light.

Anyone got a match?



Beau Maestas  
Nevada Death Row  
Ely, Nevada



With life comes wisdom –  
the challenges, the experience.

the long walk – a road

I travel that I can map,  
like, been there, done that!

I see yesterday's memory today  
and for the rest of my days.

I've seen

many come and go, doors opened  
doors closed; slips, stumbles, falls  
yeah, and rebounds; smiles

and frowns – just so much  
in the world, even now I'm

absorbing it all. But for what  
it's worth, the wrinkles of time

on my face are my badges  
of understanding,

proof of my ongoing discoveries  
as they pass by me, proof

of my embracing  
the good, the bad, proof

of my becoming  
resilient, proof of knowledge:

that I know how to navigate  
these rough waters.

## Letter to the Editor:

### Greeting Compassion!

This newsletter has meant so much to my journey, ever since I came to death row in April 2017 – on my birthday. The first thing I asked for was a Bible to study from. At the time, I had a hardback Good News Bible that the prison forced me to put in storage. I thought it strange: I could purchase Playboy, Hustler, Penthouse, etc., but I couldn't have a hardback Bible.

Anyway, somebody introduced me to Compassion, and when I requested you add me to your mailing list, you did. I share my issues with others in here, mail them to family and friends around the world – it's a ministry. God gives everybody (His children) talents and gifts to further the kingdom, and part of mine is sharing the gospel by sharing my compassions.

And the Victims Voice section really touches my heart. I am amazed at how strong those people are, how they're able to forgive the offender and find healings. They are a great example to what it means to be on fire for The Kingdom, no matter the cost!



Michael Singley  
Pennsylvania Death Row  
Waynesburg, PA



Santiago Martinez  
California Death Row  
San Quentin, CA

# VICTIMS VOICE We Forgive



Vera Crutcher

Vera Crutcher's son Donald was a cabinetmaker. At the young age of 22, became a victim of homicide on August 20, 1978.

Donald and his girlfriend, Lorelei were invited to a birthday/going away party of a friend. Lorelei left the party and went to the parking complex of the condominium across the street to get something from her car. Lorelei was approached by a group of young men that she did not know. Whatever they said to her scared her enough for her to lock herself in the car. She started yelling and honking the horn as she called for help.

The men tried to break the windows trying to get her and one of them shot twice at her, but the bullets became lodged in the door. When Donald came out of the house he saw someone slashing his tires. When he approached a person turned around and stabbed him in the stomach and shot him twice. He tried to get away while holding his stomach. He tried to make his way around the car leaving his bloody prints on the vehicle in that effort but he never made it.

Vera in honor of her son reflected saying: "Even though we hurt, we forgive. We forgive because that's the only way we are going to heal. If we do not heal we'll have this anger eating at us like cancer."

For more information visit [www.journeyofhope.org](http://www.journeyofhope.org).

## Wesley Purkey

I am here this evening to tell you about Wesley Purkey. Wesley is an inmate on Death Row at the Federal Penitentiary in Terre Haute and has been assigned an execution date of December 13, 2019.

I have been corresponding with Wesley for more than 10 years after I first chose a tag from a holiday project we have here at St. Bartholomew for children and grandchildren of inmates on Federal Death Row. The holiday project is called the "Giving Tree." The "Giving Tree" provides Christmas gifts, in the name of an inmate, to his/her children or grandchildren who are separated from each other during the holidays. Wesley had 2 grandchildren at the time. After I purchased and mailed the gifts to his daughter's address, I wrote Wesley to inform him of the gifts his grandchildren were receiving in his name. Wesley wrote back, and we have been corresponding ever since.

**THIS WAS WESLEY THEN:** Wesley grew up in a dysfunctional family with alcoholic parents. He suffered physical, emotional, and sexual abuse during his childhood. He states that when his parents were drunk, if they were not trying to kill

one another, they would beat the living daylights out of him. When Wesley was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, he was living with his aunt. He came home early from school one day following basketball practice and immediately sensed that something was not right. Even though his aunt did not drink, the smell of alcohol was in the house, and his pet German Shepherd was not waiting for him at the front door as usual. As Wesley walked toward his bedroom, he brushed back the curtain that served as a door and discovered his father sprawled sideways across Wesley's bed. His father had committed suicide in Wesley's bedroom. The image of his father's suicide, along with the pain he felt that his father committed suicide at his home haunts Wesley to this day.

**THIS IS WESLEY NOW:** Wesley has a loving relationship with his daughter, son-in-law, and 3 grandchildren. He is very proud of his oldest grandson who is serving in the U.S. Army. His 16-year old granddaughter volunteers at an Animal Rescue Center, and he has an 8 year-old grandson who loves to ride the new bike he received for his 8<sup>th</sup> birthday. Wesley's daughter and son-in-law recently quit smoking, and Wesley talks about how very proud he is of them, and that he is showering them with accolades. I have also come to know Wesley through his writings as an Assistant Editor of Compassion Newsletter.

Compassion Newsletter publishes introspective articles written by death-row inmates. It also works to develop healing communications between capital punishment offenders and families of murder victims. Through his articles and poems, Wesley provides hope and encouragement to other inmates. His writings have been healing for him as well, reflecting his transformation to a compassionate human being.

Wesley understands that he cannot take back the past. In his writings, Wesley talks about being in the depths of despair, wanting to die, expressing guilt, grief, and remorse for the suffering he has caused other people due to his long history of drug addiction. He talks about his own unadulterated, complete and total ignorance (He always spells Ignorance with a capital I), and that change only happens in a person's life when a person accepts responsibility for his past actions and asks for forgiveness and mercy. Wesley writes that it is easier to extend empathy and mercy to another person than to yourself, and that true character is measured by a person's empathy and compassion for others.

Given that there has not been an execution at the Federal Level since 2003, the news that executions for Federal Death Row inmates were

*(continues on page 6)*

# The Fallibility of Memory

Over the past many years, I have read a lot of articles and psychology books about the unreliability of eyewitness testimony. Many of the examples are of men and women who swore they had seen something, or someone, only to be confronted with a truth that was vastly different. Some mistakes were amusing, others shocking, and a few even horrifying (such as the mistaken identity testimony that kept a man on death row for decades).

Personally, I'm terrible at remembering faces and names. I know I would never be a good eyewitness myself. I've learned my memory has "stages" of recall and at time inserts pieces to make sense of it all. Recently I learned just how fallible and tricky a vivid memory can be, even when it's something that doesn't involve a crime, even when it's just an old painting.

A month or so ago, I saw the movie about Lady Jane Grey, the unfortunate 16-year old girl who was the Queen of England for nine days before being deposed by Mary Tudor and later beheaded. I immediately recalled this very dramatic and moving painting of the execution I had once marveled at. The beautiful but blindfolded girl was trying to find the block on

which to rest her head, reaching with her hand. The hooded executioner was burying his face in this hands, hating and embarrassed by the horrible act he was about to commit.

I looked in some of my art books to find it but was unable to, so I asked by sister to locate it online for me.

A few weeks later, a letter finally arrived. There was the picture I had seen years ago: Paul Delaroche's portrait of The Execution of Lady Jane Grey (1833). It is still a very striking picture. In front of me was the actual picture and my mind reeled. The executioner, a whole scenario I have obviously created in my mind is not in the picture at all.

The next time I talk about something and think I'm absolutely certain about what I saw or heard, I'll try to remember this lesson... but, I'll probably forget.



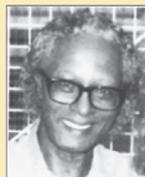
John Robinson  
Kansas Death Row  
El Dorado, KS

## Attitude

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of Attitude on life. To me, attitude is more important than facts. Attitude is more important than the past, than education, than money. Attitude if more important than circumstances. than failures, than successes, and it's more important, even, than what other people think or say or do. Attitude is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company...a church...a home.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past. We cannot change the inevitable. But one thing we can do is play the single string we have: our Attitude. I am convinced life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I respond to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our Attitudes.

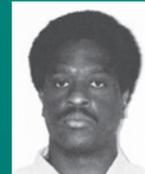
attitude  
is  
EVERYTHING



Written by Charles Swindoll  
Submitted by Al Cunningham  
California Death Row  
San Quentin, CA

## Trauma Unit

every day i rise  
i see steel bars;  
every night i go  
to sleep with these scars, guards  
on guardrails bloated with  
ammunition –  
authorities that  
permit us to live  
we don't always  
see the horror  
after decades of numbing  
convict showers.  
my willpower's fled, leaving  
only my emotional scar tissue  
death hangs  
like a lasting afterimage  
until one day i leave this  
dimension then it's on  
to the next journey, no more  
harassment burns, no more  
hurt – am i a devil  
or an angel or a victim of law?  
for i'm traumatized by this  
death by incarceration.  
eaten alive by endless time  
as if by cannibals. yet  
i'm not dead...just  
separated,  
cuffed to the slave ship  
i hated. as demented  
as my captors. mental  
problems ticking  
into billions of chapters.



Christopher Henriquez  
California Death Row  
San Quentin, CA

# Peace in Time

As my head loses its cover  
And my hands their grip  
As my hair loses its color  
And my thoughts their grasp

Youth is a faded memory  
A past full of sorrow and regret  
It seemed so temporary  
Something I thought I'd forget

As my height is bent  
And my hinges rusted  
As my form is spent  
And my windows busted

The past is a dim reality  
Only the joys forgotten  
Lost in youthful futility  
While hurts turn rotten

As my years grow long  
And my time drags on  
As my pain gets strong  
And my haunted life lives on

I've learned from the mistakes  
That I can't change the past  
Forgiveness is what it takes  
To obtain a peace that lasts



Kevin Marinelli  
Pennsylvania Death Row  
Waynesburg, PA



*Continued from page 4*

## Wesley Purkey

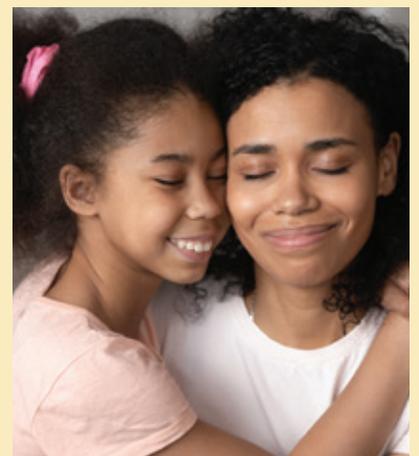
being resumed came unexpectedly and "out of the blue" and has a significant impact upon Wesley. He is very concerned about his family and the impact that his coming execution will have on them, particularly his daughter. He is also concerned about at least 15 other inmates on death row in Terre Haute whose appeals were exhausted years before his own. If his final appeals are denied, Wesley is resigned and ready to see his grandson who passed away 10 years ago and others whom he dearly misses and cherishes. Please think of Wesley in the days and weeks ahead. We also must not forget the victims. Wesley is aware that we are holding the Prayer Service this evening. I asked him if there was anything he would like to share and he said "yes." Wesley asked everyone to "Please keep my victim's family in their prayers and thoughts, as well as my daughter and her family."

I leave you with a few words from on of Wesley's Poems Titled:

## True Treasures Are Found In Others

Do not pass your days and nights away  
Permeated in boisterous internal chatter  
Take care of your essential activities  
Without enormous vainglorious clatter  
Reach out and help others and find  
your true path  
For it is there that life's true treasures will last.

Author Anonymous  
Submitted by: Wesley Purkey  
Death Row Federal Pententary  
Terra Haute, IN



**Please mail your writings to:  
COMPASSION**

140 W. South Boundary St. | Perrysburg, OH 43551



*If you want to share someone else's work, please be sure you include the name of the author or its origin.*

**PRISONERS OF DEATH ROW  
YOUR ASSISTANCE WILL BE APPRECIATED**

**7 Suggestions and Guidelines**

1. Write about an experience that impacted you.
2. It doesn't have to be religious. Here are some themes: anger, apathy, beauty, betrayal, boredom, change, complacency, courage, fear, friendship, growing older, jealousy, pride, purpose, vices, and wisdom.
3. Use sensory details — the smell, who said what, its color, how cold it felt. Sensory details connect your experience to your readers.
4. There's no need to use big words when a simpler one suffices: leave your ego at the door with your case: this isn't the place for either one.
5. Look for ways to unify; help; and solve problems.
6. Be authentic. Be yourself. No one's perfect.
7. Try to limit it to 400 words or less, and if possible enclose a photo of yourself.

As there are numerous submissions it may take up to eight months for selected articles to be published.

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# a body's onomatopoeia for "it's over"

i was fine until i tried to say her name.

suddenly my body felt enflamed,

swollen, merely forming

my vocal chords around her

image mashed my mouth  
meat together:

tongue shoved against teeth cheeks

caved-in lips puckered – no room

for spit, let alone speech

as if

i could not disentangle

the angry-salt-dogwhistle

taste – sound – feel of her

name, as if what i am too

soft to do

body did without me.

as if my face SLAMMED

the door in her face

and walked away

---

George Wilkerson  
Editor  
North Carolina Death Row  
Raleigh, NC

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## A Puzzled America

"Daddy! What does it look like?" the little girl pestered her father again. He was trying to read a magazine and relax. He described it to her again, and tried to shoo her away. But this time she pouted and crossed her arms, dissatisfied.

"I want to see a picture!" He was still flipping through his magazine when he saw one: a map of the United States.

He said, "Here's one...I'm going to make you a puzzle." And he tore out the page, then tore it into little pieces and gave it to his daughter, who loved games. Thinking to buy himself some peace and quiet, he said, "Now go into the other room and see if you can put it together correctly. Go sit at my desk; you can use my tape dispenser."

Thrilled, the little girl ran from the room with her prize. The man sighed. But about five minutes later, his daughter returned, "Daddy daddy!"

She handed back the map, correctly fitted together, though the tape-job was horrendous. Nevertheless, the father was surprised and impressed, and asked, "Sweetie...how did you finish so quickly?"

She said, "Oh...on the other side of the paper was a picture of Jesus! I know what he looks like. When I got all of Jesus back where He belonged, the country just came together." She was obviously very pleased with herself.

May we all be so wise.



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