

Compassion

Written by Death-Row Prisoners

HELPING PRISONERS ON DEATH ROW LIVE CONNECTED AND FRUITFUL LIVES

P.O. Box 623 | Perrysburg, OH 43552

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



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www.compassionondeathrow.net

A TESTIMONY PART 1 OF 4 (1980 - 1991)

My problems began in the womb, due to drugs Mom used.

I came out jaded on the 11th of June, 1980, ever since then life's been real crazy. Started with Mom. Madness in the kitchen, drugs took over. We both were victims. When she overdosed they found her by a table. Paramedics brought her back but the environment was unstable.

Then with Dad, our house wasn't a home. His girl smacked me around when I did wrong.

Drugs, drinking and fighting all hours of the night, like bed bugs were biting, I rarely ever slept tight.

Next few years I saw more of the same. Then Mom in '86 said "time for a change." Start of 1st grade, Mom seemed stable, working at a bar, making tips waiting tables. Wasn't till '87 the good turned bad; when Mom started drinking my happy turned sad.

Liquor by the bed, pills in the glove box, late night drunk fights broke my lunch box; He-man edition, Castle of Greyskull, was a gift from Mom after another lie she told me. So angry with my mom, the life we were living. Seeing her have sex for drugs, money and attention, warping my perspective, the way I saw a mother.

Instead of being a mother she was being anyone's lover. Men touching on her, the example being

shown...they demonstrated, I imitated, not understanding it was wrong. When she pushed me away, I felt more pain and rejection, feeling that would affect me as they manifested.

Fast forward to '89. Mom overdosed again. Lights were everywhere, mom barely breathing, like déjà vu seeing what I'm seeing, the paramedics leaving, now I'm back with my dad at my first NA meeting. I'd just turned 9. I still remember being hyper, playing around inside. When dad and his girl were sober, things were pretty cool, but with all the back and forth I was struggling in school, wanting acceptance, acting out in class. I stayed in trouble, my grades were pretty bad. I started running away in the middle of 4th grade; stepmom was abusive so in the streets I stayed.

Dad started drinking, my behavior didn't help, behavior the expression of all that I felt; pain, fear and anger, burning deep inside, I was 10 years old the first time I got high...

PART 2 IN THE NEXT ISSUE...



Devin Bennett
Mississippi Death Row
Parchman, MS

Don't Let the Coronavirus Get You Down!



Make sure you test positive each day for laughter.

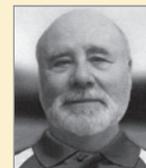
Keep a safe distance from doubt, and isolate disbelief.

Depressed, feeling sick, lonely, deaf-dumb, dying, dead?

Well you're not the only one in quarantine!

If a tiny virus can do this much damage,

Imagine what a positive attitude and a smile each day can do!



John E. Robinson, Sr.
Kansas Death Row
El Dorado, KS

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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Perrysburg, OH 43552

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

EDITORIAL:

disquieted



I was 11 or 12 when I saw a TV special about aboriginals who pushed drumstick-sized silver lances through their chocolate flesh and walked bare-footed across a stream of hot coals. Somehow their finger-thick lance holes didn't bleed (just gaped like dark eyes) and their feet's pink soles didn't blister. They didn't cry out, or even flinch. They had figured out how to absorb, redirect, and detach pain. That's what I wanted to do – detach.

The word evoked relief. No bruises, no bleeding, no searing, no tears. I could live with gaping black eyes all over my body as long as they were numb and bloodless. The notion soothed me. I began practicing drilling sewing needles into my arms and screwing lit cigarettes into my skin until extinguished. I'd close my eyes so the pain replaced the room around me; I'd fumble along its walls, searching for the switch, thinking: *detach detach detach*.

my dad used to brag
about how he had never cried
when his parents beat him.
if he could do it, I could do it.

detach detach detach

the softest sound turned my dad's fists
into pistons,
his heavy leather belt a whip. both had cracked
and snapped
our pleas to pieces.
even through this raging
quiet, we could hear his tenderness rattling
bamboo bars behind his eyes, weeping, begging,
as demons whipped his body into a frenzy
of flailing limbs raining blows upon his children.

detach detach detach

Sometimes
he'd break his p.o.w. cage,
his contorted face saying
he wrestled with God
within. when they won
he'd wrap us in a sweaty hug
that asked to be understood

we did:

he was our dad;
but he was our kid –
we boys had a responsibility
to protect. we blamed
broken bones on bike wrecks,
but otherwise my brothers
and I just shrugged and winced
out of shirts and pants
to compare backs and butts
decorated with badges
of blue-black bruises and red stripes
like dying stars and fading flags – tributes
to tours of duty
spoken on behalf of our dad:
he'd been taken captive in Korea
by an army of enemy voices in his head.

detach detach detach



George Wilkerson
Editor
North Carolina Death Row
Raleigh, NC

Letter to the Editor:

You Challenge Me

I read every mailing from the inmates who post in your publication and am touched by their sincerity and truth. I wonder if they know that there is more than one way to kill another human being. Words kill, abortion kills, indifference and intolerance kills. I have a letter to share with them, but I don't know if you publish anyone but death row inmates. I thought I'd take a chance.

Hello to everyone who contributes to and receives this publication. It is obvious that healing, wisdom, and warnings glow through your written words, that HOPE sparkles even amid your darkest words, poems, stories. I am moved by every story. I wish to suggest that there are life-ending events that don't require the payment of a penalty, bars, and loss of freedom. But the emotional consequences are very similar.

Every time I read one of the letters, I return to the time of my early adulthood engaging in the "party life," not considering the fall-out, the responsibilities, or the consequences of reckless actions. It is so easy to just have fun and live in the moment, until the moment becomes a life-changing event.

It did for me, twice, and I have lived with pain, shame, sorrow, regret and self-loathing for years. I ended two lives, two lives that I can't bring back. I walked into an abortion clinic not once but twice and ended my precious babies' lives. I may not look through iron bars, but I look through my own emotional bars every day. I am not incarcerated by law, but by my own flashbacks and shame. I knew I shouldn't abort a baby; I shouldn't take a life. I'm called a baby killer by different factions of the pro-life movement; they're right so I suffer in silence. So, some of us on the outside feel like we belong inside because of our legal deeds. I read your letters for hope and the knowledge that God forgives all sin. Thank you

for your honesty, your faith and your words of forgiveness and acceptance in your poetry, your essays and your prayers. You challenge me to journey toward forgiveness and healing.

Sincerely,

Kathy Varga, one of your devoted students
Curtice, OH

Dear Compassion,

I just wanted to express my gratitude for your insight and perspective in all your articles.

I look forward to every Compassion Newsletter I get. My heart goes out to you and everyone who contributes to Compassion.

In the thirteen years in Texas I have found that our past does not define us. It's what we are now. If only more could see this. I too have had a death sentence. A death sentence of another kind. In May of 2005 I was diagnosed with Leukemia and given a month to live. It was a heavy pill to swallow, and to be honest, I just wanted to give up. But we never know what our purpose on earth is and most of us never will. I always have seen life as a great mystery and when we figure it out we can go on to the next phase. One thing I do know is even behind these walls we learn how to be truly free. I'm not quite there yet but I push on to achieve that inner peace that you and others writers for Compassion have. So know...Your words are not lost on deaf ears. We are listening and learning.

Sincerely,

Shari Eggum



Shari Eggum
Gatesville Unit
Texas

LEGAL NOTES: KEEP IT CONFIDENTIAL

We all know not to talk about our case but most do anyway. This may be a very regrettable and avoidable mistake. Friends become enemies over night, a thorough dude may become an unscrupulous fellow in the future, and you never know who's listening. But for loose lips there'd be no snitches. Save your candid conversations for your lawyer(s) in a secure environment.

Don't discuss particulars with family and friends, although it's permissible to relay the workings of the legal machinery and where you are in the process. When discussing matters with prisoners speak in generalities and hypotheticals. When consulting an incarcerated paralegal give him some small token of payment, so being a hired paralegal he can't testify against you (but still

only reveal the minimum necessary). Don't put temptation before anyone. Hold your hand close to the vest while playing from the table.



Kevin Marinelli
(Paralegal/Legal Assistant)
Pennsylvania Death Row
Collegeville, PA

WHAT A MELON

On a hot summer afternoon there is almost nothing more refreshing than sinking your teeth into a delicious, juicy watermelon. Of course, a watermelon is made up of over 90% water, so why should it not be refreshing? Yet, not everyone is an avid fan of this summertime delicacy. Like me.

The first issue I have with watermelon is the seeds. It has more to do with the inability to take a nice bite of melon and enjoy the flavor, without having to swish it around in my mouth while trying to avoid swallowing the seeds. Instead, I bite into a piece of melon and begin targeting the seeds one by one to spit them out on the

plate (or on the ground if I'm fortunate to be outside at a picnic). The whole process just seems like a lot of work before I even get to swallow the melon!

I know, I know, there are some of you out there saying, "Just buy seedless melons." Well, that does take care of the seed issue, partially, except some "seedless" melons still have those pesky little white seeds that cling to the melon.

The second problem is that melons vary so much in flavor. Sometimes you get a melon that is dandy and has great flavor. Other times, you get one that tastes so bland you don't bother eating it after one slice.

I guess the reality of it is that it doesn't take me long to get my fill of watermelon in the summer.

I recall as a kid of 10, unloading watermelons by the truckload via a human chain when I worked at the A&P grocery store during the summer. We would line up and toss them to each other then make a big stack in the produce area. Needless to say, you had to be alert at all times. We did fairly well most of the time, but on occasion, one

would slip and take a bounce on the concrete floor. Watermelons do not hold up very well to that kind of abuse.

Yet, the thing that strikes me as one of the biggest assets of a watermelon is its durability to be used as a center piece on many occasions! It can be carved into many shapes, filled with a refreshing assortment of good fruits, like cantaloupe, blue berries, pineapple chunks, strawberries, grapes, honeydew melon, raspberries, and even an occasional watermelon ball.

I've been pretty hard on the watermelon, I know. It really isn't as bad as I've made it out to be, but it just isn't my favorite fruit (or vegetable for that matter).

So enjoy your watermelon. Just understand, I probably won't be changing my opinion of watermelon anytime soon.



John E. Robinson, Sr.
Kansas Death Row
El Dorado, KS

VICTIMS VOICE

Because of My Grandparent's Guidance

"Always treat others as good as you are" my grandmother would say to me as a child. She took the responsibility of raising me full time when I was four and lost my mother to domestic violence by my father. Growing up in the household with my grandparents was difficult at that time as now I was the only grandchild that didn't go home to their parents from a fun weekend at Maw Maw and Paw Paw's. However, with wisdom and guidance from my grandparents, therapy sessions, and prayer, I pushed through the biggest change in my life and it helped impact the compassion I have for others.

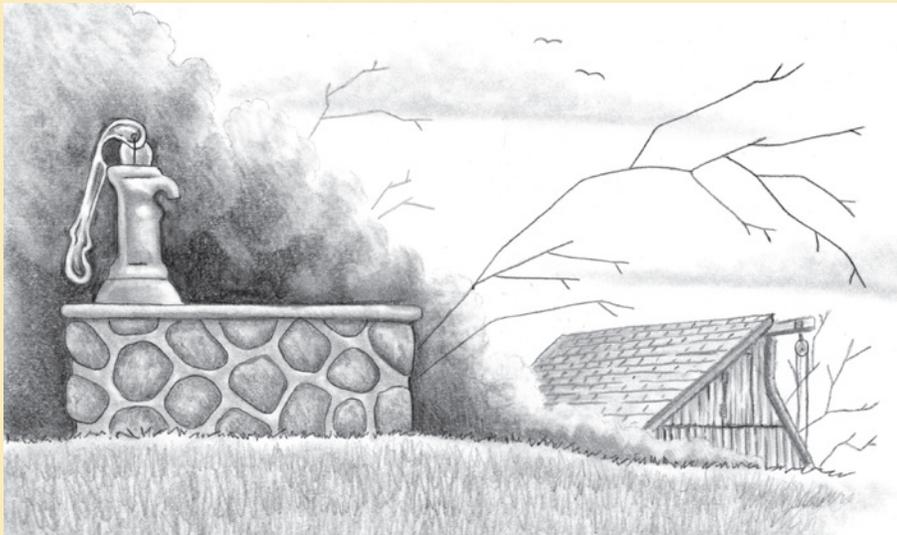
My compassion became stronger because of my story and what I have been through. The passion to help others makes me want to

do more for my small-town community and throughout the country. I have the desire to open shelters for women who suffer from domestic violence, and do summer camps for kids who suffer from troubled households. I want to make a difference the best way I know how and that's by giving back and showing my grace and empathy.

Choosing to be good to other people will always be a daily goal of mine. My grandmother nourished me to be a kind young lady through the example she set. The generosity she and my grandfather showed me by taking it upon themselves, at their retirement age, to raise their daughter's daughter will never go unnoticed by me. With guidance, love and prayer they have shown me how to treat others.

– Destiny Ordway / Lawrenceburg, TN

Original Art Work for Scholarships



UNTITLED

By Kevin Marinelli
Pennsylvania Death Row
Collegeville, PA

9" x 12" Pencil
\$50.00 includes
shipping and handling

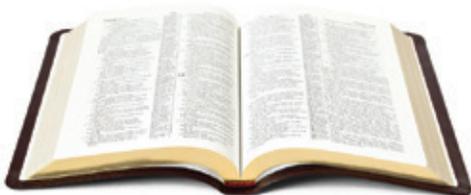
To purchase make your check
to Compassion and send
to the address on page 2.

COMPASSION READERS: To date \$58,088.72 has been awarded in college scholarships to family members for murder victims. Make a purchase of their artwork. To view available selections, view Art for Scholarship in the past issues at www.compassionondeathrow.net.

Call 419-874-1333 and ask for Compassion office to verify availability.

BIBLE TRIVIA

- ▶ The first three words in the Bible are 'in the beginning'.
- ▶ Although unnamed in the New Testament, tradition names the two thieves crucified at the same time as Jesus as Dismas and Gestas.
- ▶ There are nine choirs of angels. From the highest to lowest, they are: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels, and angels.
- ▶ Gabriel, Michael and Lucifer are the only three angels mentioned by name in the Bible.
- ▶ According to apocrypha, the seven archangels are Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Chamuel, Jophiel, and Zadkiel.
- ▶ Sheep are the most frequently mentioned animal in the Bible.
- ▶ The words, "Don't Be Afraid" appear 365 times in the Bible, the same amount of days in the year.
- ▶ The Seven Deadly Sins are lust, pride, anger, envy, laziness, greed and gluttony.
- ▶ The seven virtues are wisdom, courage, self-control, justice, faith, hope and love.
- ▶ The last word in the Bible is "Amen".



Al Cunningham
California Death Row
San Quentin, CA

BUT...

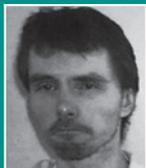
I may be young
but I feel old.
I have a heart
but I sold my soul.
My days are warm
but my nights are cold.
Life is short
but our love lasts forever.
Right now I'm hurting
but I know I'll get better.
I have no children
but many sisters and brothers,
no girlfriend now
but I had a lover.
I hear jokes
but still don't laugh,
searching for God
but find Satan in my path.
I'm going through hell
but looking toward salvation.
My bones are solid
but will soon turn to dust.
I wish I could trust others
but I only trust myself
– not even my mother.
It hurts because my scars are deep
but you won't hear my cries.
Though maybe you'll hear my weeps.
After you read this
you may have to rock yourself to sleep
but that's because you felt me.



Paul Sanchez
Nevada Death Row
Ely, NV

THE END

Goodnight. Farewell. Goodbye.
It's like, kiss it,
We're all gonna die.
It's like a skelton which has not life
Seeks aid from the wind
That howls in the night,
Like a shot in the dark
With no echo or sound,
Or lost in the forest where
You're never found.
Or wandering humanity
Never telling what you saw.
Or the last vestiges of life
From the depths of our fall.
Goodnight to humanity,
Farewell to you all.
Goodbye to our steps
Down heaven or hell's hall.



Tim Dunlap
Idaho Death Row
Boise, ID



SANT'EGIDIO FIND AN INTERNATIONAL PEN PAL

One year ago Compassion published an article offering death row prisoners the opportunity to write to someone overseas in an international pen pal movement. This was a huge success leading hundreds of those on the row in the United States to take part.

The Community of Sant'Egidio, an International movement fostering peace, reconciliation and friendship, has once again reached out to Compassion to see if you would like to join in connecting with a pen pal overseas. If so write a letter in English introducing yourself, giving your full mailing address and DOC number.

Mail to:
**E. RYAN,
PO BOX 221134,
KIRKWOOD, MO 63122**

WHY SO NEGATIVE?

I used to get mad when I heard people talking about "staying positive." I thought it involved saying you're healthy when actually you're sick; happy when you're sad, etc. I call that lying, or at best, delusional. But then a psychologist shared some reading material with me on the topic of optimism. And I discovered my assumption was wrong. Being positive is actually about seeing things as they are – in their changeability, duration, and cause. When unpleasant things happen to us, when we're suffering, humans tend to think (irrationally) that it's life-changing, it'll last forever, that somehow this is our fault.



Here's how the doctor's info helped me. First, it opened my eyes to this bias. Second, it gave me some practical steps to take to challenge and override my bias. When going through a trying time, I'm to ask myself:

- A. Does this actually affect every aspect of my life?**
- B. Will time change this?**
- C. Were the events actually caused by me, or by an external force beyond my control?**

I've found that almost always it only affects a small part of my life, will only last a short time, and was caused by forces beyond my control. It helps me to come to terms with it, and gives me hope because I know "this too shall pass." I also don't have to beat myself up, since there was little I could do to avoid it. Choosing to see things as they are has given me a more positive outlook.

Kevin Marinelli
Pennsylvania Death Row
Collegeville, PA



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Please mail your writings to:
COMPASSION
 P.O. BOX 623 | PERRYSBURG, OH 43552



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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TIME KEEPS MOVING

A Day, A Week, Months and Years.

A time of opacity, few smiles,
many tears.

Like society's black rose,
I'm planted behind these walls
When their sun rises,
the moon in here fails.

But time keeps moving...

Hearts still beat, minds still
wander, remember
the starlit November nights or t
he spring's blue yonder.
Dreams still float down the halls
of my mind,
drifting in my airy memories,
forever suspended in time.

And time keeps moving...

All things change from one day
to the next,
so I've learned to be patient
instead of vexed,
calmed by the presence of
parchment in care.
I have reasons to smile says
the gray in my hair.

Time keeps moving...

So I float on the waves of this
ageless current,
finding peace and stillness of mind:
contentment.

Obtaining what I need by
expecting nothing.
And listening for my breath while
time keeps moving...

Because time keeps moving...



Douglas B. Matthews
Florida Death Row
Raiford, FL

Compassion

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WORKS OF ART

Most artists can relate to this: While working on a new piece of art, I dislike when people come up and criticize my incomplete work. Some things they've said to me are:

- ▶ "Why did you put that color there instead of here?"
- ▶ "What is that supposed to be?"
- ▶ "I hope you are going to write an explanation to go with this because nobody's going to understand it otherwise."

Talk about making me insecure. Or giving me a complex!

As Believers we are a new creation in Christ. In fact, we are works-in-progress, as we won't be complete until the day we receive our resurrection bodies. Being an artist myself, I understand that a piece of art work-in-progress often looks nothing like the finished product. It lacks the beauty, the vividness, the glory.

Right now, we Christians seem rough around the edges, dull representations of the God we serve. Sometimes, it hurts me when I hear unbelievers criticize Christians in general.



Further, I am a Christian who happens to be a prisoner – on death row. When people who don't know me see me, they often see only my ugly past, not the beginnings of beauty Christ daubed on me. But as I read God's Work I am encouraged, for God isn't done with us yet. One day, all Believers, including me, will be the gloriously completed works that God always meant for us to be. And all of mankind will be filled with amazement at what God has done!

George T. Wilkerson
North Carolina Death Row
Raleigh, NC