

Compassion

Written by Death-Row Prisoners

HELPING PRISONERS ON DEATH ROW LIVE CONNECTED AND FRUITFUL LIVES

P.O. Box 623 | Perrysburg, OH 43552

November 2021 | Vol. 26 | Issue 123 (Bi-monthly)

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



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www.compassionondeathrow.net

MY WORLD

In my world, there are always voices crying in the night, people sinking beneath the loneliness and at the same time drowning in self-conflict because it is not easy letting go.

Holding on to the hurt and pain – that's what keeps you on the back foot. You CAN'T MOVE FORWARDS. You're scared of failure and always being laughed at and made fun of! Now, getting inspirations of hate, seeing no end of despair, hoping to vanquish the seeds of evil by defying the odds in my world of blind lost souls.

In my world, words are so much stronger. In my world, there's not much room for kindness...But, I have found there is a desire in my head and in my heart to let my words build up and show someone that chains can be broken and that indeed they were broken a long time ago!

Back in the day, an old preacher said, "The Bible was not given for our information but for our TRANSFORMATION." So, I tested that quote and actually found these words to be true. After I read

it, I was one of the few to be transformed within. For I was transformed by the renewing of the mind. All my life, I wanted to believe in something that was "better" in my world. So, when I read Romans 12:1-2, I was truly touched by Paul's writings, and so I worked on my mind because that is what we must focus on more diligently!

The battle is in the mind...We all grow up and have all kinds of bad things happen to us, and when there is no help, we're left to deal with those things from our own mindset and that mindset is in agony, but most of all ANGRY! However, if people would just BELIEVE then mountains won't seem so large and unapproachable. Here's why... Those mountains in your life can't grow anymore, BUT YOU CAN! God bless you all...



Steven Lynn Long
Texas Death Row
Livingston, TX

I'M STILL HERE

I saw that old man again this morning.

I'm not really sure when, But...

I'm now convinced he has taken up residence
Inside my mirror.

It causes me to ponder and scratch my head.

Trying to stay a few steps ahead,

Of life's woes and dreads.

Over the last few months and this past winter

My already too small world,
grew a little thinner.

I dare not say that I'm overly depressed

Still I'm pretty fed up with this
whole mess.

Yet as I count some of the gifts that I've
been given

Number one is being counted
among the living.



Al Harden
North Carolina Death Row
Raleigh, NC

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.

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

EDITORIAL:

FIX THE WINDOWS

...be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is. – Romans 12:12

Recently a friend told me about his church needing to repair the seals around its many stained glass windows, or else the leaks would damage the inside of the building – creating more problems. But some church members wanted instead to spend the money doing an outreach program. Having very limited resources, the church could only do one or the other. The answer seemed obvious: repair the church. Otherwise, they'd have no base of operations from which to do outreach. It's about priorities.

It reminded me of how I used to skip going to church, and neglected bible study. I figured my "good deeds" were an adequate replacement. Through my interactions with the unbelievers I was trying to help, I started getting weird, unbiblical ideas about our faith. And I wrestled with anger, impatience, and lacked peace and

joy. Although I knew the Gospel, I knew little else about the day-to-day aspects of living out our faith – which the Bible teaches us about.

I came to realize that studying the Bible and going to church is how we abide in Christ (the Word), and how we keep the Church fit for service. Now, not only can I share the Gospel, I can make disciples because I can teach people how to live **after** getting "saved." But anyway, I seldom have to choose between Bible study or helping someone – I have time for both; and I can do it without being corrupted with false ideas, while smiling!



George Wilkerson
Editor
North Carolina Death Row
Raleigh, NC

BOOK REVIEW

MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

Dr. Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor, was a psychologist before entering the concentration camps and founded "logotherapy". In his book he tells his experiences of the horrific circumstances in the camps and how his psychological approach fared under those conditions. His observations of imprisonment are so profound I felt like somebody finally understood what we go through. Frankl says the worst suffering is not knowing when it'll end – something we know all too well. He concludes that suffering is given meaning and purpose in service to others in the midst of extreme hardships not in their absence.

Without challenges or struggles depression sets in as we are meant to always be soaring onward and upward. Science shows how once a cell becomes too well adapted to its environment it becomes inert. This is a secular perspective that can fit into anyone's religious beliefs or stand on its own. It's a book that changed my life.

Kevin Marinelli
Pennsylvania Death Row
Collegetown, PA

Letters to the Editor:

To all on death row:

THE PRACTICE OF GOOD

Yes Lord Okay Will Do Right Away The Real Problem in Life is Me

Prepare to serve the Lord. Ready yourself to enter His kingdom of happiness. The exterior world and things in it all belong to God. He lets us use them in His service. We are taught to overcome evil with good. We have been doing the opposite. We have been in the habit of overcoming good with evil. We need to do what His word tells us to do.

I was led by the Holy Spirit to think about goodness, and to continue meditating on the good. A prayer was revealed. I was to pray a Christian mantra or an affirmation.

"Praise God Thank you Good God Good.

Good God Good God Very Good."

After 5 weeks of steadily pondering goodness, I was happily convinced that this was the path God willed for me. I started to love the good. The more I thought about good, the more I overcame evil.

I would sit and practice stillness, while chanting praise God thank you good God good. I would close my eyes to see in the spirit world. I would say to my body parts: Head relax, face relaxes, neck relax, shoulders relax. Arms relax legs relax, feet relax, mind relax, etc..

My attention would drop into the subconscious and imagine I was waiting at the door of heaven knocking and asking, "Father, let me in, I'm home" and the door would open. I was told to come to the threshold and watch and pray. As I exhaled I would pray the one word prayer of

"Good"

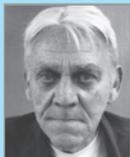
My subconscious mind is a synonym for soul – I would enter my soul and look for goodness which translates into

"The Kingdom of Heaven"

I was searching for God within my soul. As I prayed and watched there was nothing there. My whole physical world was gone and this emptiness turned out to be fullness; nothing became everything and everything was nothing. I was looking into blazing light.

I would sit in silent solitude praying the word good for an hour or so and return to sense awareness, renewed, invigorated, blessed, because of that command,

"Overcome Evil with Good."



Assistant Editor of Outside Communication
Dallas State Correctional Institution
Dallas, PA

HOW BEATS THE HEART

What gives you strength

O heart

that

has

died

a thousand deaths?

What gives you hope

when

it's gone?

What see you

with

your ancient sight?

O heart that has walked

many

a dark night.

How can you still Rhyme?

What grows in the dark

that provokes

a spark?

So many tears

You have cried...

yet

still

you thrive.

How can you prevail

after

walking through hell?

Please Do Tale!



Sarah Gilpatrick Venable
Gatesville, TX

Compassion scholarship recipient, Olivia Flacco's brother Nick was randomly shot and killed after a Phillies game on March 13, 2019. Olivia writes the article below as a tribute to Nick.

VICTIMS VOICE

The Best Brother Ever...



Olivia Flacco

Everybody who knows me knew how close I was with Nick. He was my big brother, bodyguard, protector and most of all, my very best friend; he was my whole entire world. His presence radiated happiness to everyone around him and his smile was contagious. He could laugh at something that wasn't even funny but you would be laughing too. He touched so many lives without ever knowing it. He had so much more time left and so many more things to do but I'm trying to focus on the time that he was here. Nick and I were incredibly close. When we were young, we did everything together. When we wanted to have sleepovers in the same bed and asked my dad, he would say no. Nick would respond, "But why, Dad, you get to sleep with your best friend every night."

As we got older, he tortured me like any big brother would but then we went back to being best friends. Everything I did, I needed his approval or I wouldn't do it. I would count down the days until he came home from college just so I could get one of his

perfect back cracking hugs. He would do anything for me and I would do anything for him.

Although he is gone he made sure to leave me in the best hands he possibly could. His friends were his family and now they get to be my family too. Sometimes people would think Nick was scary or a little much, but I wouldn't have him any other way. He taught me so much about life and gave me the best advice I could ask for. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be able to be this strong right now. All I ever wanted was to make him proud, and everything I do from now on, I do for him.

I'm sorry that no one else could experience having Nick as an older brother, but I'm so very lucky I got to call him mine. He was truly one of a kind. It's not a goodbye; it's a see you later. I cannot wait for the day I get to see my best friend again. I will love and miss him for the rest of my days. The world is going to be so different without Nick in it, but I promise to never let his memory die. Nick was the best thing in this world; him being gone just proves how much God needed him. I love you big brother.

THE FAITH MEANS EVERYTHING

In The Name Of God, The Gracious, The Most Compassionate

Peace To All —

What if all that we do in this world came to naught in the hereafter?! Today is the day of preparation, while tomorrow is the day of the race. The messenger, 'that prophet' came, imparted The Truth of the Faith to those who believed and warned those who denied. Not only is God Gracious, He is also Compassionate. We are informed by His Messenger saying, "God divided mercy into 100 parts and it is one part of this mercy by virtue of which there is mutual love between the people and 99 reserved for the Day of Resurrection."

God's Mercy has two stages. The first is in this world, where His Grace is for all creatures: whether human, animal or plant, whether righteous or wicked, believer or disbeliever; receive sustenance, health benefits and facilities. The second, in the hereafter, on the day of judgement, there is no longer any grace for those who refuse to accept

faith. They had their chance to acquire it, but they refused the truth, and must face the consequences of which they were warned.

Our hope of compassion is to be genuine rather than vain and foolish. We must work to earn this compassion by obeying God. We should maintain our ties with our blood relatives. God the Mighty, the Majestic said, "I Am the Merciful. I created kinship and derived a name for it from My Name. So whoever maintains it, I shall maintain him, and whoever severs it, I shall cut him off." God also said, "he who does not have Mercy on Mankind, God the Mighty, the Majestic, will not have Mercy on him."

God has called us to His Grace and Compassion. So we should be dutiful to Him and call Him by His Names. Better yet, begin all things with the Name of Grace and Compassion. This is done in every place and situation. So that God can bless us in our actions. So every action that's

void of Grace has no blessing in it, nor any good. Unfortunately, most of us take God's Grace and Compassion for granted. However, if we stop for a moment, and just reflect on the depth and extent of God's Grace we will be astonished beyond words.

Do people reckon that they will be left (to themselves at ease) on their mere saying, "We believe." and will not be put to a test?"

We're all in His Grace —
By "THE FAITH" OBTAIN HIS COMPASSION.

We must utilize our spiritual eyes, ears and heart. Compassion comes to the FAITHFUL.

Sincerely
Peace



Russell W. Tucker
W. 'Abdul 'Ali Mizan
North Carolina Death Row
Raleigh, NC

COMMON SENSE

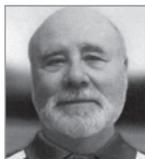
Common Sense is defined as "sound judgement derived from experience rather than study." It is actually one of the most revered qualities in America. It evokes images of early and simpler times in which industrious men and women built the world into what it is today. People with common sense are seen as reasonable, down to earth, honest, reliable and very practical.

But here's the catch. Common Sense is neither common nor sensible. The word common: suggests that this quality is held by a large number of people. But the idea that if a belief is held by a large number of people it must be sound has been disproven time and time again (e.g., the world is flat, vaccines are dangerous,

the death penalty stops violent crime, the covid 19 pandemic is a fake).

If common sense actually made sense, then most people wouldn't make the kinds of ill-advised decisions they spout. One has to wonder, do they really believe the words coming out of their mouths?

Time has come to ditch "Common Sense" as a standard and replace it with "Reasoned Sense". That is the kind of sense that makes the most sense, however common or uncommon it might be.



John Robinson
Kansas Death Row
El Dorado, KS

"If it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic."

– Through the Looking Glass, Lewis Carroll

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JINN

An amazing being, created before men,
Far beyond deadly, from smokeless fire
and wind

We see the sun every day,
but still we pretend,
Plants acknowledge it each dawn,
praying to Jinn.

Set off on a mission, it's how the world began,
If it wasn't bound by God, the universe
would end.

Found inside a blade of grass, or the
brightest star,
Town of Paradise was burned, to show
us who they are.

Satan is a Jinn himself, closest to the light,
Made a move which gave us all, the choice
of wrong and right.

May shift shape at certain times, with the
Lord's permission,
Can't deny the favors that our Lord has given.

Some of them might set your heart on
fire for the fight,
Others might be just enough, to keep you
warm at night.

Many Jinns might come and go,
but never think of man,
Others might mislead your heart with
what you'll understand.

Still there's only humankind, who has
himself to blame,
In the end the Jinn will say, "I just called,
you came!"

NOTE: A Jinn is a being in creation made of smokeless fire and wind. They can take on different shapes with God's permission. Satan is a Jinn that was in nearness to God, according to Al-Islam. Until he rebelled and refused to bow down to God's creation, man, made of clay.



Glenn Cornwell
California Death Row
San Quentin, CA

CONTENT TO BE ME

By James Freeman

It would be grand to be a panda;
You'd be the king of the zoo;
With a zoom and a zest they would
bring you the best
And juiciest shoots of bamboo.

But I am no such rare and
beautiful bear
that you would come running to see;
So I must be content to be what
I'm meant
To be, which is just to be me.

Though I can't be a panda, I can
be a Santa
And say "Merry Christmas" to you,
And then go on to say, "Happy
New Year's Day!"
It's for all of 2022!

submitted by
Frank Anderson
Arizona Death Row
Florence, AZ

RESOURCE

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(Free books and resource list
for prisoners upon request)

A TESTIMONY / PART 4

Over the next 8 years demons got smarter,
each day a test,
and the tests were getting harder,
In the school of self-destruction,
lessons are insane,
was covering guilt and pain with dirt from
my own grave,
then in 2012 went on a hunger strike,
protesting prison conditions and
constitutional rights,
but after 19 days I was broken on my knees,
found myself looking for God really wanting
to believe,
for the next 10 months I stayed in transition,
then I heard that sermon by Mike McPherson,
calling all listeners to a 40 day fast,
it's then I heard the same voice I'd heard
in the past,
"let go of the lies and surrender it all to God"
but I was still too afraid to confess what I'd done,
Still I'd fast from TV, music and magazines,
spend time in the Bible giving God the lead,
STARTED IN Matthew but it was in the
book of John,
God gave strength needed to overcome
my problem,
then the nightmares started thoughts of suicide
that's the first night demons came to my bedside,
But the next 6 nights they paid me a visit,
bringing my past with them, forcing me to relive it,
my dad, baby mom and my son,

had a front row seat to all evil I had done,
satan wanted to keep me, been here before,
so I knew my escape was surrender to the Lord,
was drowning in pain, chains of guilt, fear and shame.
And there in despair was the strength God gave,
as He pulled me in His love, I reached in His mercy,
and it's as I reached He broke the chains off me,
God set me free, resurrected new life,
by the grace, love and mercy, found in Jesus Christ,
as I'm led by the Spirit He brings transformation,
allowing me in Christ to work out my salvation,
because I accepted Christ don't mean
problems disappear,
it means I'm an overcomer not bound by fear,
He's building new bridges over a few I burned,
giving me consolation allowing me to endure,
but His consolation serves a two fold purpose,
by letting me be a light to those still hopeless,
all I endure lets me be more to man,
through which Christ shines the light now
living within,
His glory's in your story, I'm sharing mine
with the world,
praying the hope and love of Jesus reaches
every boy and girl.



Devin Bennett
Mississippi Death Row
Parchman, MS



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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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WHEN THE DIVINE SPEAK

It is the breath of winters past that shrouded my soul,

I inhale the memories and exhale ash and coal.

I searched for a thought that would warm me to my core,

But still only found my tomb in the darkened waters offshore.

I sought death, in vain, and pleaded to the sacred gods,

For an eternity of peace instead of thunder and lightning rods.

But to my surprise they turned and then spoke to me

“Thou shalt be blessed with mother of infinite mercy.”

Blue skies and gentle breezes, green hills and fragrant streams,

A specter rose from the darkness, the time of love's dream.

She said let's flee the arid sun of this relentless, barren land,

To where the sky will shelter our love hand in hand,

I forgot the world and lived inside the heart of your ecstasy,

No man or god ever burned with love like I do when your next to me.

Our love will thrive like flowers and laurels underneath the spring sun,

We will be each other's refuge until the stars are eternally done.

To desire you, to respect you, to love you is my destiny,

To devote myself to the passionate love of your Divinity.

My eyes are now open even when they are closed—your beauty so true,

And when my mouth is shut, I speak because I breathe-in only you...



Douglas Blaine Matthews
Florida Death Row
Raiford, FL

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LEGAL NOTES: HELP YOUR LAWYER

Note: I am not a lawyer and do not seek to give legal advice but only relay my experiences with the legal system and opinions developed there from.

As I delved into the morass of legal jargon and technicalities, of course my family was very concerned. I hadn't been much for books or high learning so it appeared I was way over my head, which wasn't an inaccurate assessment. I've always thought it a better idea to try to work with my attorney, than in place of, so I sought mostly to inform myself in order to best be of assistance to my counsel. I didn't know how much I could help until I knew what the law said.

As I informed myself I noticed where the prosecutor deviated from the legal norms. These were the things I needed to pass on to my lawyer(s). As I like to say, nobody knows your case like you do. I only have my case to be concerned with so I have all day and night to

devote to it. Lawyers have other clients with different issues so their time and resources are greatly divided. When my people realized how dedicated and tenacious I had become their confidence in me grew. I was not the man I was and they recognized that. It was also a relief to them that I could explain how things work and what was going on with my case. Clarity created calmness and their confidence in me boosted my self confidence.



Kevin Marinelli
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Pennsylvania Death Row
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