ART ON THE INSIDE

UNDERSTANDING AND HELPING IMPRISONED ARTISTS

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1. CREATING ART IN PRISON

Salvatore Dali put it best. "Even if I were in prison, even in a concentration camp, I would be supreme in my own world of art, even if I had to paint with my tongue on the dusty floor of my cell." Such is the determination of artists in or out of prison.

But in prison, there are special factors at work. Men and women there have the time to create, while they must be creative in the art they do. In prison, they cannot go to their local art supply store and select what they want. If their art is music, they cannot go to the music store and pick out an instrument and music books. If they are a writer or poet, they probably won't have an updated or comprehensive dictionary, if they are lucky enough to have one at all.

"No one made you come here! You did that to yourself," is the reply often heard from prison staff when inmates ask for something to assist them in creating art. If they go higher up to prison administrators, they are likely to hear the word "security" used in denying their requests. By that, they mean the jailor must run a tight ship; always warding off potential mutiny. The fewer things inmates have to use against them and their "correctional officers," the better.

Prison officials understand that they are dealing with a unique and potentially volatile population. It is not that the inmates are necessarily dangerous people by background. Indeed, most of the men and women in prison are there for victimless offenses. They were caught using or trading "controlled" substances, just as thousands of people during the 1920's were jailed for taking a sip of wine or beer. Many others are locked up for conspiring with someone else – often a soliciting police undercover agent – to do something wrong, without ever actually doing it or even sincerely wanting to. For example, entrapment is carried out by plainclothes cops who offer destitute women in need of rent and other essentials money for sex and then arrest them for accepting. No wonder the United States is the world's leading jailor. We have five percent of the world's population but 25 percent of the world's prisoners. It's hard to imagine that prison officials are afraid of the majority of men and women in their charge.

Still, there is a basis for some fear. Among the more than two million men and women locked away, many are seriously impaired; they belong in a psychiatric ward since they have once and could

again do serious harm. They are impossible to spot, however. You likely find out who they are after it is too late. Even those who come to prison as harmless people do not necessarily stay that way. Prisons are called "hate factories" for a reason. We all know what happens when you throw a rotten apple into a barrel of good ones. The same principle applies in prison. People learn trades there that are not legal. They adopt defensive strategies that border on act-first-and-ask-questions-later. Do unto others before they do unto you. Save your skin and your dignity at all costs.

There is also the overriding thought of escape. No matter how you got into prison, you want out. Maybe an opportunity will present itself to make that possible, an event created by man or by God; anything from an earthquake to a riot. That makes inmates tricky, and potentially dangerous.

Wardens know this. That's how they were able to rise to the top, and remain there. Call it survival of the fittest, or the smartest. Or call it self defense. Calling the shots, as they do, they are like most cops who seek to protect and serve, beginning with protecting themselves and their staff.

Inmates who create art represent a special problem, though also a potential solution. On the problematic side, such individuals think for themselves. That may be good when they get out of prison – if they ever get out – but it can be a problem on the inside. Wardens want conformity, obedience, institutionalization. They want to keep their job, and they will not have one if the prison burns down or if their staff does not show up for work because they are in fear or in the hospital.

The very definition of art is sometimes a problem for wardens. Think of Andy Warhol's frequently quoted definition: "Art is anything you can get away with."

In prison, inmates try to get away with as much as they can. There are a few reasons for this. First, it gives them a sense of freedom, of power, of normalcy. Consider that they are told what to do all the time, handed a list of rules and regulations that are oppressing if not impossible to follow.

Prisoners often acquire things that they are not supposed to have. In some prisons, pens are not allowed, only stubby pencils. But when a staffer drops a pen or leaves one lying around, inmates covet and stash it. This does not only apply to writing instruments. Consider the common prison practice of hoarding and fermenting fruit to make wine, fruit that is supposed to be consumed at each

meal. Inmates see no reason not to drink alcohol since they are not going to get behind the wheel of a vehicle anytime soon.

Above all, they need to cover up their misdeeds, thefts, and transgressions, large and small. Any admission of guilt can get them more time in prison, or make their stay less comfortable. They will be stripped of any "contraband" they might have, from soup to nuts if they are beyond the small limit that can be bought at the canteen. They can also be put in the *hole*, known sometimes as the box, which it most closely resembles. It's a square cell that keeps them confined most of the day, unable to partake of the limited activities that prison offers, such as going to the library and chapel.

Hiding their guilt when they break a rule can be easier in prison than on the outside, another source of frustration to prison officials. Inmates are surrounded by tough guys, people who were made tough by the prison experience. They will not break easily when interrogated. Snitching is rare in prison since social pressure among inmates is high. The "us-against-them" attitude is deeply ingrained. Besides, a snitch cannot do much damage in prison. The rules of evidence are much different there than on the outside. They have to be to avoid an uprising. In the free world, people get convicted of crimes due to the word of an informer. "I saw him use drugs." That statement alone, if believed by a jury, can get a person convicted and put away for years, even if the alleged incident occurred a long time ago and no drugs remain as evidence.

Such a finding of guilt cannot occur in prison. If someone says a prisoner uses drugs, prison staff will have to find them in the prisoner's possessions to sustain a verdict. No direct evidence, no guilt. No wonder some people come to jail again and again. There are logical rules of behavior there that often do not exist on the outside.

What does a warden do beyond a lot of yelling and posturing to keep inmates in line? Not much. Even the hole is hardly a deterrent. Prisoners call it "room service" since meals and other necessities are delivered to them there.

When prison staffers undergo training in preparation for placement on the job, they are told what they are up against, sometimes in exaggerated terms. Better to err on the side of paranoia than to sugar coat their difficult jobs. For example, a joke is told during training, "How do you tell when an inmate is lying?" The answer, "When he opens his mouth."

It is not far from the truth. Prisoners want to protect the little privacy they have, including the privacy of their own thoughts or the few instances of unobserved behavior they have.

I remember a stay I had as a prisoner at Atlanta Federal Penitentiary in Georgia. I was there for a few weeks as a stopover inmate, en route to another prison. I was housed in the compound's largest and oldest building, where Al Capone lived during his time there. With multi-level tiers and catwalks, it seemed like a Hollywood version of prison. Still, we had relative freedom. The cages were open much of the day so we could visit each other or congregate on the ground level, which contained televisions, fans, tables and chairs.

I used the opportunity to interact with several of the guys. Maybe I was looking for a reincarnation of Capone; or just a good story to write. I came across several stories when I encountered a group of bank robbers. They had not known each other before meeting behind bars. But here they were, comparing experiences and techniques. It could have been a convention paid with a government grant. Indeed, the taxpayers were footing the bill. Society would pay even more when these men were released. They would be more proficient in their craft, without any remorse except the regret of having gotten caught. Would they be captured again? Not if they acquired the knowledge needed to escape detection and to do their jobs as bank robbers better. In their group discussions, they hung on to each word, comment and critique. Perhaps in them they would find the wisdom to improve their craft.

As I listened, I had a different objective. I hadn't hurt or stolen from anyone to get locked up, and didn't intend to start when I got out. My stays in prison had been due to acts of civil disobedience, or false accusations when I ruffled the feathers of politicians. I had fought many people in power who had passed morality-laden laws in the area of drugs, sex and other consensual behavior, laws they themselves did not obey. "Do as we say, not as we do," they seemed to preach.

The main thing I learned in prison is that punishment does not work. That should not be surprising. How do you punish your spouse, for example, if he or she does something wrong? Lock him in a room for a set time? Deny her food? What about children? Spanking them? That is now illegal. What else to do? Gather all the bad boys in the neighborhood and put them in a basement together for a set period of time, be it a day, a week, or a year?

What do you think will emerge; what even harsher acts will they be prepped to do upon release?

Listening to the men share their bank-robbing exploits in Atlanta, I learned that they had robbed usually with only a toy or inoperable weapon. The men were not evil, only misguided. Indeed, they were all mentally ill. What else can you call those who enjoy and take by force the fruits of another's labor? In reality, they were no different than drug users who are similarly engaged in destructive or socially disapproved behavior, with the victims being mainly themselves. Does punishment make sense? Or does it push these people further toward personal insecurities and self-loathing that caused them to commit their crimes in the first place?

Had I been a visual artist, I could have used a paintbrush to depict these men in heated exchange as they taught each other principles of bank robbery. But I am not a painter, rather a writer. So I used a pen.

When I got through with my note taking, I went back to my cell to finish the project. Emerging the next day, I had a completed 10-page essay entitled, "How to Rob a Bank."

Leaving Atlanta Penitentiary a week later, my possessions underwent a search; normal procedure when transferring from one prison to another. The prison officers were looking for sharp instruments that could do damage to them or others. They found none but did come across my essay. It aroused their curiosity, but not in the way you might imagine.

First, you should know that there is freedom of expression in prison. Courts have decided that the First Amendment applies to inmates in what they write and send out, with the exception of escape plans and other direct "security" concerns. But there are no banks in prison, so my essay was in the clear. Andy Warhol would have been proud. I had created something controversial that I was poised to get away with.

"Did you write this?" one of the officers asked. I was knowledgeable enough about the First Amendment as it applied to prison writing to know that I did not have to lie. But I did anyway. My personal writing was none of their business, and I was not trying to send it to anyone. "No, I didn't write it," I said. The officer immediately turned to his colleague with a smile. "See, I told you he had copied it from somewhere." He made this statement, despite the fact that my byline was on the essay.

I had opened my mouth and I had lied. My spirits soared when I realized that I had gotten away with the falsehood. It put another

layer of insulation between me and those who intended to administer punishment. Let them punish, but they would not be doing it to the person they thought I was.

Friction is common between inmates and staff. There are parallels in the caste system of India. In America, prisoners are the untouchables. It's like the distance and distrust that military officers and ordinary soldiers have for each other. In prison, inmates are the grunts who are commanded to carry out the will of the officers. Inmates are inclined to despise and ignore their superiors whenever the chance presents itself.

It is an uneasy arrangement that leads to relative peace in prison but does not make for a low recidivism rate. The opposite is true, mostly because the concentration together and punishment of law violators are counter-productive.

The goal of wardens is not to fight crime but to keep inmates from getting away and to insure their safety and the safety of staff. In these objectives they largely succeed. There are few escapes in America. Prisons are relatively safe, despite Hollywood myths to the contrary. You have a higher chance of being killed on the streets of a major city than in prison, according to reliable homicide statistics.

An artist in prison changes the dynamics of incarceration. He ignores his environment, using art to create an entirely separate world. The most graphic example of this is the imprisoned artist who paints a mural on his cell wall. It might be a forest scene or an ocean vista; or a family outing, either the inmate's own or an idealized family. By viewing the mural during waking hours, the prisoner is transported beyond time and space. To a large degree, he can disregard what goes on around him. This can have both good and bad consequences in the eyes of prison officials.

From a positive standpoint, the inmate is above peer pressure that could lead to disruptive behavior of the most dangerous type: group organizing and united revolt. He does not care what others do because he is in a different world, or in the process of creating one. He controls that world. Why stray beyond it? It may be make believe, but it beats prison reality.

Not only peer pressure, but individual impulses to rise up and resist are quashed through art. Artists may be moody while in the process of creating, but they are normally peaceful. Poets simply do not make good warriors. Nor do musicians, painters, writers and sculptors. What they share in common is a buffer that art provides. Even if they have a desire to go to war, they will do so in their

imaginations by creating warlike scenes. Battles will be fought with paint strokes or clashing musical notes, not with swords or guns. The end result of art is something contemplative, not antagonistic. At the same time, art distracts its creators from life's petty annoyances that can trigger negative behavior. And sometimes the annoyances of prison life can be more than petty. Art shields the creative inmate from these aggravations.

Wardens appreciate this. But they also know there is a flip side. Prison artists who are truly committed to their work put their art above all else, including prison rules. They get what they need to create art, even in the most restrictive places. This can entail the use of staff to provide supplies. Such supplies could come from parts of the prison that are off-limits or even from the outside. This is easy for staffers to arrange since they have freedom of movement. Or the goods can come from inmate trustees who have special movement privileges and access to materials. Not only do imprisoned artists have the commitment to get what they need, but they have the means. Their art can serve as currency and the basis for favor-making. Artists who can paint or draw portraits from photographs are in demand. Who does not value an original rendering when the subject is a person's spouse, parent or child?

Such independence and resourcefulness can be a problem for wardens who like to see a fully compliant inmate population. Potentially, an inmate could trade his art for a rope or weapon, or the ingredients to make such verboten items. An artist can also be propelled into a leadership role, able to inspire and manipulate others who have been influenced by his art.

In reality, these fears are largely exaggerated. What usually happens is that an artist in prison gets what he needs without compromising anyone. Take the example of Mark, an inmate in New Jersey who works in acrylics and canvas. Acrylics were easy to come by through his prison's craft shop. But securing canvas was a problem for him. He used good art paper, but it did not have the same feeling for him. His art was so good that it cried out for the permanency and presentability of canvas. Mark set his mind to getting some.

It is said that anything is available in prison, and this is largely true. Mark got help from supportive inmates and staff who conducted a search throughout the compound. Paydirt was hit in one of the classrooms of the prison's school. There an outdated and soon-to-be-discarded wall map of canvas was found. The back of it

could be used by Mark. Large and in relatively good condition, it was ideal.

But there was only one. While more might be available in the future, a realistic estimate would be one discarded map per year. Mark, however, created a new painting every month. The supply would not be adequate. He had found bronze but not the gold he hoped for. The search continued.

Then it happened. More canvas than he could imagine, right under everyone's nose. The discovery was made in the prison machine shop. This is a standard unit in every prison. It's a place where the prison's hardware is repaired and replaced. Everything from air-conditioning to heating to mechanical components of every description are repaired in this shop. Only the most trusted and knowledgeable prisoners work there. They labor under the careful supervision of staff whose chief concern is making the prison a tolerable place to live and work. Even the inmates appreciate what they do. The few creative comforts that exist in prison are largely due to their diligence and effectiveness.

To do the needed repairs, the machine shop orders parts regularly. The standard way for manufacturers to ship these parts is to wrap them in canvas. When the inmate artist was brought to this location, canvas was unfurled before Mark's beaming eyes. Clearly, here was the steady stream of canvas that he sought. A weary prospector who had unexpectedly hit motherhood could not have been happier. Then a problem surfaced.

As good as the canvas looked, it was far from perfect. A closer inspection—and artists always look at their materials closely—revealed that the machine parts that the canvas had covered left small streaks. The day was saved when the canvas was turned over. The reverse side was spotless. It would be usable after all. Arrangements were made for the steady supply to be furnished to the artist. Mark now had all the canvas he needed.

This example shows that accommodations can be made for determined artists in prison without breaching security or compromising staff in any way. The canvas in this example would have been thrown away as useless if the creative prisoner, with the assistance of staff, had not made the discovery.

In another instance of staff interaction and support of an imprisoned artist, the outcome seemed problematic for a while. It began when a prison officer approached an inmate artist named Ray in Texas about creating a work of art for him. Unclear in this case is whether any prison rules were broken by the officer making the

offer. In some prisons such an arrangement is acceptable, while in other prisons it is not. Even where such a thing is officially banned, it often takes place. When you have a service that's in demand—artistic talent—there will always be a source of buyers. Economists call it the law of supply and demand. The free market operates in prison, just as it does on the outside. Regulations in prison, just as the failed drugs laws on the outside, cannot override the rules of the marketplace.

Ray accepted the offer from the staffer for a few reasons. First, he was not in the middle of any pressing projects. Indeed, there is not much in prison that can be called pressing. Put another way, there is no such thing as a starving artist in prison. They eat three meals a day and have a warm place to sleep whether or not their art sells. If an opportunity comes to do something of particular interest, little will stand in the way. Artists elsewhere might refuse commissions if they're highly challenging or poorly compensated. Not so in prison, where artists are constantly trying to push the limits of their abilities. The more demanding the project, the better. It's likely to make the assignment more interesting. The irony of this is that artists on the outside tend to be more bored in their work than their incarcerated colleagues. On the inside, artists only take what they want, their financial needs being few.

Another reason Ray liked the offer was that the officer could provide compensation beyond what fellow inmates could offer. This does not translate into cash, which is of little use in prison. In fact cash can and will be confiscated if found in an inmate's possession. In the 1990's most prisons changed from a cash commissary to a debit system. If you want to use funds sent to you to purchase something from the commissary–which is virtually the only place to spend money in prison–you have to do it through your debit account. Funds come from friends, family or customers. Like having a bank account, your prison ID is your debit card.

A prison officer who wants to help an inmate can do more than put money in his or her account. He can bring things from the outside that inmates only enjoy in their dreams. We are not talking about anything illegal, but rather ordinary items that a free-worlder takes for granted. It might be a Big Mac from McDonald's, a catalogue from a local art gallery, or a download of art images from the Internet, which is off limits to prisoners. Whatever harmless gratuity that the inmate gets from the staffer, there is an understanding between them: the source will not be revealed. One cautious staffer said in giving a prisoner pages he had printed for

him from the Internet, "If anyone finds them on you, eat them." They both laughed, knowing that such an extreme action would not be necessary. Anyone on the outside can print and put Internet pages in an envelope and mail them to a prisoner. Not just a staffer can provide them.

The same thing cannot be said for food. If it comes from the outside and isn't remotely similar to what is provided in the prison chow hall, a staffer had better be careful in conveying it to an inmate. One officer promised to split a pizza from Dominos with a prisoner. He made good on his word but used extreme caution.

The inmate was waiting for him in a prison shop when he returned with the pizza, a delight in which the prisoner had not partaken in recent years. The officer opened the box and took out half the pie for himself, putting it on a plate. Then without looking at the salivating prisoner, he said, "I believe I'm not going to be able to finish this pizza. I guess I'll just have to throw it away." With that, he closed the box carefully with the prisoner's half still hot in it and placed it gently in a trash basket. Then he walked away, leaving the inmate alone to retrieve and enjoy the treat.

Prisoners know that staff can deliver. No one wants to renege on a promise in prison, not with the close quarters and close-knit nature of this community. With few possessions in prison, including no guns for the guards, one's reputation as a stand-up person is an individual's biggest asset.

The inmate artist and the officer who wanted him to do a painting to order had struck a deal. When the subject of the painting was described, the prisoner became particularly excited about the project. The staffer, a free wheeling bachelor in his personal life, wanted the prisoner to paint a nude to be used as a centerpiece in his bedroom.

Not just any nude, but one that had style and class, albeit campy in the eyes of any serious art connoisseur. He wanted Cleopatra naked, reclining on a couch in the opulent setting of her palace.

It's been done before, but not as the prisoner intended to do it. The staffer gave the inmate a clipping from an art magazine showing what he had in mind. The prisoner looked at the woman and her setting. "So you really like her body?" he asked the officer. "Well," came the reply, "I guess she's a little heavy in some places, and a little light in others. Also, maybe not enough hair on her head, while too much elsewhere."

The inmate gave a knowing smile and assured his new client that he would fix everything. If you're paying for a woman or asking to

have one created from scratch, there's no reason why she shouldn't meet your most stringent, exacting specifications, he figured. The prisoner told the officer that naked women were his specialty. Not only did they occupy his dreams at night, but they consumed many of his working hours as an artist. Without going into much detail, in men's prisons there is a great demand for naked women. Sometimes they are encountered in the flesh. That shouldn't be surprising since love and lust find their way into any setting. In most male prisons, a large percentage of staff is female. Sometimes they cross the line between supervising and seducing men. Opportunities are rampant and randyness is an occupational hazard.

The men have little to do all day but keep their bodies in shape and think about sharing them with women, which make them particularly attractive to females working in prison. When the men encounter the women, they go out of their way to act as charming and flirtatious as possible, even as sweat glistens from their well-toned physiques. A quick roll in the bunk of a vacant cell is not unknown.

More often, however, the naked women encountered by prisoners are of the picture kind. Once, men's magazines could be easily received by inmates. But as prisons became more restrictive, security conscious and punitive, such libidinous reading and viewing became harder to come by. Even photographs sent by a wife or girlfriend were carefully screened for propriety. You might think that a prisoner's First Amendment right would be violated with this censorship, particularly concerning photos of one's own wife. The matter has been brought to court by inmate rights groups with an eye towards changing the policy. But judges have sided with prison officials, as they usually do. They consider the sensitivity of the prison setting and the argument made by wardens that they know best. Wardens tell judges, "If you don't like the way we run prisons, try running one yourself." While a few judges have jumped into the fray by actually taking over prison management, most decline.

In the case of the ban on naked photos of one's spouse, the courts give the following rationale. If a man has such photos of his loved one, they become a source of potential conflict. If another inmate tries to steal these photos or even comments unfavorably, a fight or murder may take place. Better to keep such commodities from prisons.

But there is nothing to stop a prison artist from creating whatever he wishes. Drawing sexy pictures–what is called *whicky-whacky* in

some prisons–is a source of income and prestige for many prison artists. If a man can't have the real thing, he will take what he can get.

When the inmate artist who specialized in nudes was approached by the Cleopatra-obsessed staffer, he knew that the assignment would take him beyond whicky-whacky. The officer was a good-looking man capable of engaging women for any purpose, and in the free world he had much access to them. The Cleo portrait would be a statement of who he was, a liberated male with many sexual outlets.

Enthusiastically going to work on the project, the artist took great pride in every detail. He was not the only one to admire the work as it progressed. Inmates and staff were frequent visitors to his study, which consisted of a corner of his cell. They knew what he was doing and shared with him the joy of each completed stage of its completion. An arm here, a breast there, and so on. The fascination of admirers made him think he was working in a sophisticated lab attempting to create a clone of Elizabeth Taylor. In fact, his Cleopatra bore a resemblance to her. No matter that this was a fantasy. An artist can take liberties.

Finally, he finished. Cleo, in all her color and glory, was ready for delivery. She would soon depart his cell for classier environs, leaving it a barren shell. While there she had made it a sophisticated, if somewhat dated brothel.

But the staffer didn't show up. The inmate wondered if the officer had not gotten word that his lady was waiting. Was he having difficulty coming up with his end of the bargain? Had a new prison rule gone into effect that gave him cold feet?

As it turned out, there was a new person on the scene. But it wasn't the warden. The officer who ordered the salacious portrait finally showed up, his speech slow and his eyes lowered. "Sorry it took me awhile to come by. Heard you finished her, that you did a good job."

From under his bunk where it lay protected, the prisoner retrieved the masturbatory masterpiece. He wasn't upset about the delay in his customer's coming. That meant he had gotten a few more nights to sleep with Ms. Taylor beneath him.

The staffer looked at it, but not with eyes of admiration. Instead, he displayed guilt. "I've been caught," he finally said. The prisoner processed this for a moment to consider the possibilities. Officers get busted from time to time, but they don't usually continue to walk the compound.

They might get caught bringing in drugs, or providing cigarettes to inmates, a hot and highly lucrative contraband since they were eliminated from prisons. Or doing a hundred other things that made them unwelcome by wardens. When detected, such staffers are booted out, some transferred to another prison, others reassigned to a job outside the compound such as patrolling the perimeter. And a very few are arrested and turned into inmates themselves.

A wide smile suddenly broke out on the staffer's face. "I've been caught, but not in the way you think." He shifted his position to show strength and fortitude. "I'm getting married." Joining him in his good cheer, the inmate shook the officer's hand. Still, his mind was running at high speed trying to determine the relevance of this development. Had the staffer's finances tightened because of it? Did he expect the painting to be given to him free as a wedding gift? The inmate would not do that, even if he were a friend. An artist in prison has to survive, if only to get incidentals. Besides, staffers and inmates are from two different planets. This man smiling before him would shoot the prisoner if he tried to run away. They could be cordial but, as in war with each wearing a different uniform, they could not be friends.

The officer explained that his bride-to-be knew about the painting and was firm in her decision not to have it in their home. He could not take possession of it. She said he could have her or Cleo, and he had decided on the former.

You might think that this would be highly upsetting to the inmate, causing friction between him and a staffer that he probably never should have been dealing with in the first place. But it wasn't. First of all, the officer provided a generous token payment. Editors of magazines do this when they change their minds about an article they asked an author to write but no longer intend to publish. It's called a *kill fee*. The inmate artist got one, which greatly diminished his disappointment.

Another factor in minimizing any discord between the two men was that there is a standard rule for commissioned works of art, whether created on the inside or the outside. Their acceptance is always contingent upon the approval of the buyer. If this were not the case, there would be no protection for the purchaser if an artist got lazy and produced substandard work. If a buyer were obliged to accept the end product, he could receive anything, whether or not it met his or her standards. Just as retailers operate under the dictate that the consumer is always right, so an artist must have the same view.

In fact, artists in prison have a toughness about them that is the envy of their often fragile free-world colleagues. It comes with the territory. Prisons can be harsh at times, even murderous. Compliments are the exception, rejections the rule. Jimmy Lerner, an ex-prisoner turned author, captured this well in his book, *You Got Nothin' Coming*. The title derives from the response he most often got from prison staff when he asked for the smallest consideration. Can I have some paper to write with? Can I exchange my worn out socks? Can I get a new spoon to eat with? Again and again he saw heads shake in negative reply, followed by the words, "You go nothin' coming."

Inmate artists are braced for rejection, though it doesn't mean they like it. They are prepared more than outside artists to accept it and move on.

Before concluding the story of the rejected Cleo and how the persevering artist ultimately found a home for her, another tale is in order. In it we again see the strength and independence of imprisoned artists and the stoicism they bring to their interaction with others. Insulated by their art and conditioned by the cold environment in which they find themselves, they are prepared for any reaction to their work.

An inmate named Jerry in Pennsylvania gave a photo of his mother, about 50 years old, to a fellow prisoner named Mo who was known for fine portraiture. Jerry wanted Mo to use the magic of his colored pencils to render mom in all her warmth and loveliness. Mo took the assignment with some reluctance. Mothers can be a sensitive issue for prisoners. A sure way to get into a fight is to criticize someone's mom. Even the hint of disparagement can get a man's blood boiling. Indeed, mothers tend to stick by their incarcerated sons after wives, siblings, and others have departed. I remember my stay in prison when everyone dropped out over time except mom. And when she died, my sister and adult son, who were once close to me, became outrightly antagonistic. They had their eyes on my substantial inheritance, which they ultimately cut me out of. There was probably also jealousy at work in that I was leisurely developing my art of writing and music while they were struggling daily in routine jobs.

When you go to a prison visiting room, you find mostly mothers there. And when it's time for a prisoner to go home, they usually head for mom's place, with or without a father present. My mother died shortly before my release so her invitation for me to live at the family home until I got on my feet did not materialize. My sister

sold the place, with my lawyer son's help, before I could get there. They pocketed the money and I was forced to live in a homeless shelter until I could manage on my own.

Prisoners who attempt to escape are often motivated by a desire to see their ailing mothers. Prison rules do not usually allow furloughs, even under armed guard, until a relative dies. This explains why escapes are not as common during the Christmas holiday season, as one might expect. They occur on Mother's Day.

Painting a picture of his client's mom would require the artist to use his greatest skills. He steeled himself to do so and negotiated a price that would adequately compensate him for the extra care he would take. With the agreed upon amount–actually a certain number of items from the prison commissary–he proceeded to undertake the project.

When completed, Mo presented it to his prison-uniform-clad art patron. The reaction Mo got was not as expected; not for the extra care he took in creating the delicate piece. The artist had not just drawn the woman, he had idealized her. He had eliminated her most noticeable wrinkles. He had brightened her eyes. The smile in her face had no hint of worry, as it did in the photograph. Who would not be proud to have such a picture of mom?

In a sense, Jerry concurred. "It's a great picture of a mother," he said. "But it isn't my mother." Both men stared at the portrait and the photo beside it. Mo said to himself, "If he wanted an exact copy, why didn't he just have the photo enlarged?" Then Mo realized that such enlargements are not possible in prison. That's what Mo as an artist was supposed to do.

No kill fee was paid to the artist in this instance. He didn't want one. Proud of the work he had created, Mo was determined to find a home for it where it would be appreciated. "What are you going to do with it," said Jerry as he walked away with his photo. The artist responded with a not unkind grin, "What do you care? It isn't your mom; you said so."

We now have two prison artists, Mo and Ray, with a similar problem: unwanted art they created that they believe has value. How and where to place it?

The answer came to both when they thought of an enterprise in Washington, D.C. called the Prison Art Gallery. Operated by the nonprofit Safe Streets Arts Foundation, whose mission is "rehabilitation and victim restitution through the arts," the gallery receives art from men and women in prisons across America. Located in the nation's capital and with branches elsewhere, the

Prison Art Gallery contains over 1,000 works of art created by over 300 imprisoned artists. The pieces are shipped there by artists or their families for display and sale, with 40 to 50 percent of the sales price going to the artists. The exact amount is determined by how much work is required to professionally mount, frame or restore the pieces for presentation. There is never a charge to the prisoner or his or her family for this preparation.

Coming from prisons located in two different parts of the country, the two rejected pieces–Cleo and Mom–found a warm reception at the Prison Art Gallery. They were carefully mounted and displayed: the first, "Cleopatra in her Glory," and the second, "An Inmate's Mom." Accompanying each piece was the story behind its creation.

As someone who helped to establish the Prison Art Gallery upon my release from prison, I helped to formulate its policy: No art of any worth created in prison is ever turned away.

Before concluding this introductory discussion of art made behind bars, I'd like to share one of my own experiences. Here again is evidence that artistically-committed inmates can be of service to prison staff without compromising them.

While much of my time in prison was spent writing works of fiction and nonfiction, I did more than write. I learned to play the guitar, becoming proficient to a degree I never expected. Later in this book I will provide details of how I went about doing this. Suffice to say that this avocation became a calling. I eventually reached a point where I was considered the best musician in my prison, and there were many good ones there.

My reputation brought me to the attention of a prison staffer who wanted to learn the guitar. By mutual agreement, he put me on "work" detail so I would be in close proximity to him. My job consisted of 15 minutes of cleaning a small office each day–his office–and the rest of my time went to practicing my guitar. I also gave him a few lessons each week.

He wanted the lessons because I had a reputation among inmates for being a good teacher. Whether that was justified or not, I prided myself on being encouraging to all, and having patience. Maybe that's all that's needed to be able to teach. Inmate students advanced quite a bit when I worked with them.

The other component of my teaching was that I developed a simplified learning manual. I felt that it was better for the men to master easy material than to get lost in complex stuff. So I took songs with a dozen chords and rearranged them to have only three

or four. I even found songs like "Electric Avenue" that had just one chord. That's the way this Eddy Grant tune was written, and it became a big hit for him. This was usually the first song I introduced to students since they could play it during their first lesson. With no chord changes to make, all they needed to do was keep their fingers in one place and provide a little rhythm to their strumming. No one failed to master this, and it gave the men great confidence to go on to more complex tunes. I did not build them up to knock them down with overly difficult numbers. By more complex, I mean songs with two chords, like "La Cucaracha." Only very gradually did we advance from there.

Being approached by the staffer to give him lessons was both an honor and an opportunity. The man had connections, being in the administrative end of the prison. He could pull strings if I got into a jam. Not that I planned on doing anything that would get me in trouble. But you never know in prison when you might get "caught up" in something. Your cellmate might have some type of contraband, such as a little bit of cash he was able to smuggle in. If a search is conducted and it's found, you will both go to the hole.

It doesn't take much to be put there. It may not even be done as punishment, just a place where you will be separated from others. Sometimes a stay there is called "administrative segregation pending investigation."

As for the example of finding contraband in one's cell, an inmate will remain in the hole until a determination is made that the cash isn't his. That could take days, weeks or months. For most inmates, the wait is not a big hardship. They're still doing time; the clock continues to run. But for a person like me who uses a guitar each day, it can be onerous. A prisoner can't have a guitar in the hole.

I knew that having a high level staffer on my side would help me avoid this fate. Even if he didn't want to do it as a favor to me, he would do it for himself. After all, if I wasn't around to give lessons, he wouldn't get any.

When I was approached by the staffer for guitar lessons, I didn't feel I was being taken advantage of in the least. Teaching music is something I like to do. It allows me to impart knowledge and techniques while showing off my own skills. You're in the spotlight without being under pressure to perform. Your students will look up to you no matter what you pluck. The best compliment of all is their request for you to teach them a song you have just demonstrated.

Being approached by a staffer had a special appeal to me. I had been teaching inmates for some time during my prison stay, and it was rewarding. I never accepted anything from them for the lessons, though I probably should have. It would have made them feel better, more independent, less like a charity recipient. If I had taken gifts, I would not have broken any prison rules. After all, I was not an outside volunteer or staffer constrained by the rule "don't accept anything at anytime from an inmate, not for you and not to be passed on to others." Inmates exchange things and barter with each other all the time. I didn't accept out of a sense of personal ethics. Also I had a desire to be fully independent.

Prisoners generally have so little that it's hard to take something from them. That's particularly true for me because in prison I didn't need anything. I took what the chow hall and prison clothing room gave me, and made do. Rarely did I visit the commissary, and then mostly for postage stamps. My other reason for not wanting to be paid for lessons is that I wanted to provide the lessons on my own terms. If I was getting paid, the purchaser would be calling the shots. That's what I mean by independence. I didn't want to be beholden to anyone. The last thing I desired in prison was a job, and I avoided having one for most of my stay. In particular, music seemed to me so pure and satisfying that I didn't want to soil it with money, even in the form of the commissary snacks offered to me. On the outside where you have to provide your own room and board you might have to prostitute yourself, but not in prison.

Still, staffers as students have some things to offer that fellow inmates don't have. Beyond material possessions, which didn't interest me, staffers have connections. They can help arrange a daily schedule of your own choosing. My objective was to have as much time during my waking hours to write prose and study and write music as possible. The staffer helped me do that. More, he got me access to areas of the compound where I could write and study peacefully. These things were more important to me than a pile of gold, tobacco, marijuana, or anything else available.

Something else the staffer provided was perspective. He became my first free-world student. I wondered: How would he compare to the inmates I taught? Would he be as appreciative? Would teaching him require any special techniques? Being a professional administrator and far more educated than most of my students, would he be a quicker learner?

Undertaking the assignment, it soon became clear that he wasn't going to develop much competence as a guitarist. On the other

hand, he was a delightful student to have. Content and happy in his personal life, he came to the lessons with good cheer and a pleasant demeanor. That's when he came at all. He cancelled a number of sessions for a variety of reasons, all good ones. He might have an unexpected meeting to attend, or he had to leave the prison early because of a dental appointment, or he could not take a break for music because his office paperwork had piled up and he needed to cut it down to size.

My inmate students had spoiled me. They had no responsibilities to compete with their time. No families, no homes, no automobiles. They were in the same position as the hobos whom Roger Miller sang about in his classic ode to freedom, "King of the Road." A line from the song that comes to mind: "No phones, no pools, no pets…"

But vagabonds differed from inmates in one important way. They were constantly on the run, a nightmare for any teacher. Prisoners, on the other hand, do not go far. If they do, they get shot. Not by their teacher. Guards who inhabit prison watchtowers, whether musically inclined or not, frown on inmates who try to leave the prison before their sentences expire.

Beyond availability for the lessons, my inmate students differed from the staffer in another way. Because of lack of responsibilities, they had time to practice, and practice they did. Nothing is more important in learning to play music, not even a good teacher. There's an old joke that makes this point. A visitor to New York asks a street musician how to get to Carnegie Hall. The answer he gets: "Practice, practice, practice."

When you're juggling family, job, home, commute, money management, and a host of other things, your spare hours in the day are limited. But when you have none of these things on your plate, you can invest lots of time in your passion of the moment. If that's music, you will learn to play well. Hard work over time is the key ingredient to excelling, with "natural" talent being highly overrated. Thomas Edison put it well when asked how he came up with so many inventions, from the light bulb to the movie projector. He said, "It's one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration." To find the right filament to make the light bulb work, he had to perform over 2000 painstaking experiments to eliminate the materials that didn't work.

There was something else besides hard work that I came to admire in my inmate students. Mastering the guitar meant a lot to them, and I understood why. In prison, there's not much

opportunity to accomplish anything. But the need to do so is great. Prison is a place where dignity and self worth are constantly being assaulted. Where a name is less important than a number. Where behavior is directed by others. Where people are counted each day as if sheep in a field, a fenced field. And if one turns up missing, the sheep dogs are dispatched to apprehend.

In such a sparse and assaultive place, one needs to latch onto something to restore self image; something to prove to oneself and show the world the humanity and capability of the person. That a prisoner is not, as Shakespeare said, "a beast whose chief good and market of his time be but to sleep and feed."

Not all my students held the spark that propelled them to high levels of music ability. But most of them did. Perhaps that's why they gravitated to music lessons in the first place. They were not willing to give up on life, even in prison. I was pleased to be the captain of their courageous and ultimately successful voyage.

I took joy in working with my staffer student too. He may have been a bit flustered at times, but he was a contented man who never failed to convey a pleasant attitude. Serious artists are not like that. They do wild things like cut off their ears or smash and burn their instruments. Sometimes they even do things to get thrown in prison if an insane asylum doesn't grab them first. At the very least, people who are serious about their art are not usually sociable. Oscar Wilde, the great playwright and novelist of the late 19th Century who spent two years in prison for violating England's anti-gay laws, noted this. Wilde said that true artists are boring people because they are so focused on their art. Such focus prevents them from getting out or interacting with others outside of their creative shells.

These factors make prison an ideal place for artist training and development. In prison inmates are in a shell, automatically, whether they want to be or not. Why not make that shell a place where art is created? It could be the opportunity of a lifetime. Even art students in college have distractions to contend with. They have easy access to the opposite sex, they can travel off campus at will, and they can quit and leave school for any reason, serious or superficial. Such choices do not exist for an inmate who chooses art as an endeavor. His or her options are limited to remaining in or leaving the security of their island of art and going swimming in the cold, dangerous and unending sea around them. The world of artists who are attached to their work, whether forcefully committed or not, is not a happy one by the standards of most people. The average

person defines a happy life as one containing a constant flow of love, laughter and latitude. Take these things away from people and they become depressed.

In prison, one is already depressed. The people and things that used to make prisoners happy are no longer available to them. They are paddling in an ocean without a life preserver; and the frosty waves are getting choppier by the minute. Coming to this realization many men and women in prison commit themselves to art. If they can't be happy, they figure, at least they can be fulfilled. If they can't find beauty in their surroundings, they can create it by their own hands. They may not be happy as they engage in the painstaking task of developing into artists, but neither are their inmate friends. The non-artist prisoners roam the compound in a fruitless search for replacements of the personal treasures they left behind. To view the sad faces of these unhappy men and women is depressing.

Having a joyful student for me was a welcome change when the staffer came under my instruction. I even knew why he was happy: good job, good pay, good clothes, and a good-looking woman waiting at home for him. He proudly displayed the picture of his happy wife on his desk. The music lessons may not have been fulfilling for either of us considering how lightly he took them and how little he practiced. But they were pleasant enough and, for me at least, productive in other ways. He was my benefactor on the compound, a commitment he took more seriously than the music. The help he provided, all within the realm of his official duties, lasted until the day I was released.

Most inmates upon leaving prison get no more than $50 to spend in the outside world. More is possible when staff determines a "special need," but it's rare. When I looked in my envelope I was stunned. It was two hundred government-provided dollars that my staffer-student had secured for me.

2. MEN AND WOMEN WHO MAKE ART IN PRISON

It's difficult to characterize who ends up pursuing art in prison and who doesn't. The same, of course, holds true for the outside world. What inspired Andy Warhol to use soup cans, Coca-Cola bottles, Marilyn Monroe, and the Empire State Building as subjects for the enormously successful art he created? Or led composers Paul McCartney, Smokey Robinson, John Lennon and Stevie Wonder to create such enduring songs?

The Prisons Foundation distributed a questionnaire to imprisoned artists across America asking them how they began their art in prison. I had the opportunity to read the 200 questionnaires that were returned. Many inmates began their pursuit of art in prison as a previously unfulfilled dream. At an earlier time in their lives, often childhood, they had fancied becoming an artist. Either a teacher or relative had noticed the promise they showed in the rudimentary art they created. "You'll make a great artist someday. Stick with it and you'll be famous."

But they didn't continue. Life's temptations got in the way and they headed down another road. Instead of the arduous process of making art, they opted for easy money alternatives. If they had a violent or aggressive streak in them, they took up robbery or burglary. Others sought the lucrative business of selling drugs, without benefit of a medical or pharmaceutical license. Still others led a conventional life but momentarily snapped into another mode when human error occurred. During that brief interval they did damage to someone–perhaps fatal damage–that led them to their new prison home.

While there they began their Spartan life doing what most prisoners do in such barren, unfamiliar surroundings. They thought long and hard about their existence, past and present. It's a painful process. So much so that author James Clavel, who was incarcerated in a prisoner-of-war camp in Japan during World War II, dwelled upon it in his bestselling prison book *King Rat*. He called the pain he felt "the cancer of memory."

Prisoners in the Prisons Foundation survey who had been encouraged once to pursue the budding artistic potential of their youth now acted to do so. They realized that the opportunity had arrived, particularly if their sentences were lengthy. Here was the

chance to see if they had it in them. Were those earlier encouragers being honest? The opportunity to find out was now at hand.

Another group of imprisoned artists, though fewer in number, had excelled in art before coming to prison. When they arrived in their new barbwire environment, they scoured what supplies they could muster and went to work. Sometimes all they could get was pencil and paper. If they were lucky, they might find colored pencils. And if they were really fortunate, they found a prison craft shop where many art supplies were available. Whatever they could find they used. Having been professionals on the outside, they realized the creative possibilities of art on the inside.

One artist whose work eventually found its way to the Prison Art Gallery where it sold well was Richard, a prisoner in Nevada. This artist, well trained in art before he arrived in prison, enjoyed critical success on the outside. Richard's work was featured in gallery showings. He came to prison because of a temper that caused him to overreact when two men attempted to burglarize his property. Rather than call police or use less fatal means to stop them, he shot them both dead.

Like so many other people in prison, he justified his actions that got him there. The difference with Richard is that an appeals court eventually agreed with him. The court said that his actions were justified as self-defense and ordered him to be set free.

During the years he spent inside prison, Richard worked on his own art and instructed others. Rather than a celebration when he left, the artists under his supervision were glum. They knew that Richard's gain of release was their loss of artistic guidance.

The Prison Art Gallery suffered as well since he had regularly shipped from prison several pieces of remarkable quality and creativity. One series he did in full scale were renditions of his fingers, toes and other anatomical appendages. He explained that doing this was a means of leaving prison, "mailing myself out one body part at a time."

In addition to prison artists who had some involvement in art in their earlier lives, there were others who took up the endeavor for the first time in prison. These inmates were usually inspired after seeing what other prisoners produced. Said one woman with a lengthy sentence: "I saw this gorgeous painting by a prisoner come alive before my eyes. I figured that, with a little help and a lot of practice, I could do the same."

Imprisoned artists are normally generous with their time in helping others. After all, with 16 waking hours per day to kill, they

know they can't fill it with their own art without losing patience and perspective. Another advantage of assisting others is they are rewarded by being perceived as masters, not to mention the canteen goodies bestowed on them. Who doesn't like to be looked up to? This is especially true in prison where inmates are normally looked down upon: by outsiders, by staff and often by themselves. Spending time each day giving guidance to and getting compliments from neophyte artists can go a long way to making prison more bearable.

Here's some background about my own experience of how I came to do writing and music in prison. I arrived in prison with no illusions of getting out soon. I was in my late 40's with a level of maturity that informed me I would be there for awhile, perhaps a long while. My faith in the criminal justice system to undo the wrong done me of a false conviction and excessive punishment was low. Better settle in and make the most of it.

I adopted goals as soon as I got there. I had enjoyed a level of success as a writer on the outside, specializing in nonfiction and academic works. It was the type of writing that made me a living but not a name. I always wanted to do more popular writing, and now I had a chance to see if I could. I wondered how I could train myself for that. The answer seemed simple enough. I would carefully read the authors I admired. I had studied very few of them on the outside. Maybe prison would not be such a bad thing if I could make up for this glaring gap in my education.

Settling in I read volume after volume of Ernest Hemingway, John Grisham, Stephen King, Cervantes and many others. These authors were more than wordsmiths. They were writers, capable of telling stories, shaping emotions, and providing insights, and doing it in a most entertaining way.

More than read them, I absorbed them. I underlined passages and took notes. It soon became obvious that these writers were not interested in impressing readers with their vocabularies but rather in conveying ideas. Hemingway, for example, always used the word "said" in quoting his characters. Kevin said, Anita said, Jahi said. He disdained substitutes for this word like "Jahi noted" or "Kevin responded."

Mark Twain, who wrote terrific nonfiction in addition to his famous fiction, advised writers to keep their words simple. In his humorous style he told how he wrote articles for newspapers at the beginning of his career, being paid five cents per word. "I wanted to make a living with minimum effort, so I always used the word

cop instead of *policeman*. Same nickel so why not? I would not use the word *metropolis* for *city* if paid three times that amount."

I saw that my writing improved over time. Indeed, even from my prison cell I submitted and had some of my work published. My reading also improved. When I exited prison my reading speed was three times faster than when I had entered, and with higher retention.

There was one other task I set for myself as a writer. It had been a glaring omission in my background that I am almost ashamed to admit. I had never learned to touch type. The first opportunity I got in prison, I entered a typing class. Fortunately, I found myself in a place that not only offered typing but computer word processing training. It served me well throughout prison and has been an important aid ever since. A friend on the outside who doesn't respond to my emails with more than a few words told me that he never learned to type. "Dennis," he says with a laugh, "maybe I should have gone to jail too."

There were a number of fine writers I met in prison. I learned much from them. They would critique my work and I would do the same for theirs. Many of them had minimal educational backgrounds but that didn't stop them from putting their hearts into their writing. We traded manuscripts frequently, creating our own library. One autobiography I read was so crudely written that its hundreds of pages were presented as one long paragraph. There were many run-on sentences in it. But the work vividly captured a life of criminal adventure and frivolity, which made for exciting and insightful reading. The author inmate was not glorifying his past but trying to explain it. He tried his best to minimize sensationalism, a desire partly fueled by his newfound jailhouse Christianity. Profanities were eliminated, sometimes with amusing results. In one passage that originally read, "She offered me her pussy for the drugs I provided," he changed it to, "She offered me her cat…." He assumed the reader would know his meaning.

I came across another man who was at the other end of his writing proficiency. An accomplished author, he told me he was under contract with a film studio to complete a movie screenplay. He said he was on deadline and had to finish it while in prison.

Inmates can make up any lies about themselves they want, and they often do. The most common untruth told is what brought them to prison. If their offense involved something of a controversial nature, such as a crime against children, they had better hide the truth. There are many violent, unstable people in prison who will

look for any excuse to lash out at someone. It's best to keep your private information to yourself if there is any possibility of others disparaging it. You don't want to run into violent inmates.

That's not the only reason why some people in prison lie. Being in a new environment with new acquaintances, they have an opportunity to make themselves over. Instead of telling the truth about their outside minimum-wage job and impoverished living circumstances, they can present themselves as successful business owners with high-flying buddies and bulging bank accounts. Who's going to know the difference? Beyond being elevated in the eyes of fellow prisoners, albeit particularly gullible ones, they might be able to convince inmates to buy them things at the canteen. "I'll pay you back as soon as my money comes in. My accountant has already cut a fat check. I'll pay you when it arrives, plus give you a nice gift."

I once befriended an inmate who had raised this scam to a high level. I knew the man was fibbing, but he did it so well that I wanted to hear his story again and again. His ongoing and increasingly creative embellishments made his tale irresistible. I think his English accent was real, but that was the only authentic thing about him. His story was that he had come from a family of high-level professionals in England who were well connected to royalty and top political leaders. He mentioned several of them and told vivid tales of his interaction with them. Calling himself a financial expert, he said he helped many notables increase their fortunes and avoid the pitfalls of the market. Even in prison, where he said he was sent for harmless insider trading, he stayed in close touch with Wall Street movers and shakers, he said.

It didn't take a genius–just a worldly person who had been in prison for a while–to know where all this was leading. One day he sprang it on me. "My friend, I'm going to tell you something that I don't want you to repeat to anyone else. Can you promise me that?" I nodded as he continued. "There's a gold fund that will triple in value in a few weeks. It's a chance to make a killing; I just called my family and they are going to invest a lot. But there is still room for another investor. How about it? You want in? I don't want a penny from you for this tip. I'm doing this because you're a sharp guy and I like you. You're my friend."

We were indeed friends, even after I discovered him to be a liar. The proof I had was in checking up on his claims of knowing famous people. He said that as a young man in the 1970s he met Winston Churchill and that he traveled in the same social circle as

him. They were not close, he said, because the former prime minister and war hero was arrogant. Still, they exchanged handshakes and a few pleasant words on occasion.

My eyebrows rose upon hearing this, but only slightly. I believed from the beginning he had been exaggerating, but I could not be sure. Now I would make certain when "count time" came and I returned to my cell. The first thing I did there was take out my trusty Merriam-Webster Dictionary. I looked in the "biographical names" section and found Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill. The famous statesman died in 1965, so even the briefest handshake with him in the 1970s was impossible.

Equipped with this knowledge, I didn't say anything to my friend. I regarded him as an excellent actor. Watching him operate was a good show. It was also fine exercise, as we did all our talking while walking briskly around the expansive track in the prison recreation yard. This is something I did for an hour or so each day, so having him walk with me provided great entertainment. I never grew weary of him, but he eventually did of me.

I constantly said I'd "think about" sending money to one of his friends so it could be invested in one of his "unbeatable deals." But I never did. Finally, he got disgusted with me. I understood the reason since time is a con man's stock in trade, as it is for a lawyer. He had wasted a lot on me and didn't intend to spend anymore. The day we parted company, he said to me, "Dennis, I thought you were a smart guy, a decisive guy. But you keep on passing up these great opportunities. What is it with you? Did I peg you wrong?"

His words weren't harsh. Using his terrific English accent, they were more a plea than a criticism. "Alright," I said to him, "I'm going to tell you the truth. I recently inherited 50 million dollars but can't touch a penny of it until I walk out the gate. That's a big responsibility to have that much money. The last thing I want is to acquire more money! But thanks anyway." He walked away with an exasperated look on his face. We smiled at each other on the compound from time to time but never exchanged another word. He never got any money from me, even with the best of his stories. It proved the saying that you can't cheat an honest man. And sometimes you can't cheat a dishonest one either who would lie about his own financial worth.

My other friend who had claimed to be a professional scriptwriter could offer no proof. But to this day I believe he was telling the truth. His aloofness was one indication. Another was his constant access to a typewriter. That's not an easy thing to get in

prison. He must have showed staff some documentation of his screenwriting assignment for that arrangement to be made. He never asked anything from me. The few times we spoke were at my instigation. I asked him for writing tips. I can't say that he was generous with his time, but he was responsive. The tips he gave me proved to be worthwhile. For example, he told me that in writing fiction, you should make up as little as possible. "Use real people and real places even as you change their names. That way your descriptions will be correct to the smallest detail."

When I left prison I exited with a few manuscripts I had written. They generated some interest among literary agents on the outside, but no firm offers except one. The agent who praised my work proved to be a fake, though his background credentials read well. As soon as he asked for money from me "for expenses," I knew I had encountered another con man. An Internet search revealed that he had unhappy clients.

I also wrote poetry in prison. I had no particular motivation to do so except self-amusement. Here's one poem about the ambitious man who prosecuted me after I turned down his offer to plead to a misdemeanor and accept probation for an offense we both knew I didn't commit:

My main goal in life
(Or maybe there's two)
Is to outlive my prosecutor,
(Perhaps even you).
He's younger than me,
So this won't be easy,
He never looks sick,
Not even queasy.
But his heart is as foul as the sludge in a well.
He'll have plenty of work when he goes to hell.

Another poem, written at the end of my first year in prison, I sent to my harsh judge in a New Year's card. The poem ended with these lines:

Another year to write more prose and poems
Forever terse,
To sit here hard and naked and massage
Erupting verse.

The judge didn't write back but instead complained to the prison staff about the "obscene" poem I sent her. She wanted me to be punished for it. Prison staffers turned down her request and in fact had a good laugh about that with me. I recalled the story about Russian revolutionary Lenin and how he wrote freely in jail, gaining much support while there.

I sent some of my poetry to a prominent university press while I was in prison. The letter I got back from the chief editor said he liked my work but that his poetry editors probably wouldn't. "Anything that's remotely comprehensible," he said, "they seem to turn down." I never heard from anyone there again.

My chief artistic ambitions could not be accomplished with a pen. Rather I needed a guitar. They aren't hard to come by in prison. Transferred from prison to prison over the length of my sentence, I found guitars in every location. Sometimes they were located in the prison chapel, sometimes in the recreation department, and occasionally among prisoners themselves. At one time, prisoners could have their own guitar freely. A friend or relative could send one and the inmate could keep it in his or her cell. But as security in prisons tightened, fewer prisons permitted it. Inmates had to go to the rec yard or the chapel to use one. That works out okay since even as prisoners are waiting for one to become available, they get to hear and see others play. It can be a great learning experience, plus a way for potential teachers and students to connect.

Before going to prison, I played guitar like millions of other people do: a little strumming, a little picking, a lot of singing. I knew very little musical theory and could not read music. Chords yes, notes no. I had a limited repertoire because I had to commit everything to memory due to my musical illiteracy.

Arriving in prison, I wanted to become a good guitarist, maybe even a great one. I am proud to say that I advanced significantly during my time in prison. Within a year after I got out I was playing $100-an-hour gigs. Before I went in, a hundred pennies would have been good after I passed the hat. I also played gigs at the Kennedy Center. I'm set to do more there featuring original music I've written. I can now sit in a session with university trained musicians and hold my own.

How this miracle happened is not unusual for those who seriously pursue the arts in prison. When one has the will, the way will follow. People around the artist see the commitment and they want to help. Aid comes from inmates and staffers alike. I got

plenty of assistance. People on the outside sent me music books. But most of the help I received was in the form of inspiration. I came across prison musicians who were excellent. Even those who didn't take the time to instruct me showed me much through their playing. Mostly they showed me that the path to musical proficiency is in anyone's grasp. If they could do it, so could I. Being in prison was like having a scholarship to study music, write books and compose poems.

Men and women who take advantage of this opportunity come from all backgrounds and walks of life. The spark that motivates them to pursue their art derives from various sources.

In California in the 1960s, an inmate sat in a prison auditorium waiting for a show to begin. He was excited about it because a well-known guitarist-songwriter was the headliner. The inmate's name was Merle Haggard. He waited for the star to appear.

Attending shows in prison is not unusual. Such events are held every week, or even more often. Mostly they take place in a prison chapel. Gospel groups are the most common to come to play for inmates. The caliber of their music tends to be very high. For aspiring prison musicians and singers, there's a chance to speak to group members after they perform. The men and women of God who sing and play the Supreme Being's praises will readily answer questions. "What was that second song you did? What are the chords? How can I get a copy of the music? Are there variations of it that would work well as a solo or instrumental?"

Inmates gravitate to these people because they admire them. Gospel groups often travel a long way to play for prisoners. Interaction and feedback are welcomed by group members. By the same token, they have admiration for inmates. They appreciate prisoners listening to them. A group might start its performance by saying, "Thank you for coming to hear us tonight. We know you could have stayed in your cellblock playing cards, watching television, or doing other things. The fact that you chose to come here shows that you want to reach out to the outside world, that you are getting ready to come home."

Ongoing friendships occur between listeners and performers. When the performers make a repeat visit to the prison, they usually inquire of their inmate acquaintances how their own music is progressing. Perhaps they have even sent letters in the interim that include sheet music or some other aid to inmates' artistic development.

When a big name performer comes into a prison to entertain inmates, such closeness is usually not possible. Security is high on these occasions and the time of the star is limited. Merle Haggard knew this as he sat in the large inmate audience waiting for his musical hero to appear. Even though he knew that speaking to the "Man in Black" would be near impossible, he wanted to see first hand what a great singer and songwriter would do on stage. He hoped that the star would perform the song that made Haggard's prison famous, "Folsom Prison Blues."

When Johnny Cash took the stage, there was mass applause. The high level of enthusiasm continued throughout his performance. Cash related well to his audience, partly because he knew he could have easily been an inmate himself. Cash had once been arrested for his drug addiction but his fame and money got him off. He knew that favored consideration was an integral part of the American justice system. If a person is thought to be of value to society, special treatment is given by cops, judges, and prosecutors.

This realization prompts many inmates, particularly those with needlessly long sentences, to spell justice as "just-us." It refers to the people of money and influence who have little fear of police and prosecutors, no matter how flagrantly they violate drug and other laws. Even when their violation is serious, such as murder, they are given far less than the maximum punishment allowed by law than others receive. Of the 4,000 men and women on death row waiting to be executed in the U.S. today, not one is a millionaire.

Merle Haggard and the rest of the inmate audience did not begrudge Cash for his success and his escape from prosecution. Instead, they admired him and held him up as a model. This was especially true of the musicians, singers and songwriters in attendance. If only they could be like him. Some would never get the chance because their prison sentences were so lengthy. By the time they got out they would be old men, if they got out at all. In their twilight years on the outside they would be lucky to walk, much less hold a guitar. Entertaining people would probably consist of others laughing at their senior ways. Still, watching the great Johnny Cash helped and inspired them. Instead of aspiring to be famous on the outside, they could be stars on the inside. Every prison has an inmate band, often several. When there is more than one they are divided into various categories. Each focuses on a different type of music: rock, soul, country, gospel and so on. "Stars Behind Bars," as they are often known, lead these bands. They might not get the pay or the press of their outside counterparts,

but they get much favorable attention in prison. Both staff and inmates hold them in high regard and attend their concerts, which are usually held in the rec yard on major holidays. It may not be the Kennedy Center but it's the best that prisons have to offer.

Those singers and prisoners who will leave prison before their youth has departed will go with dreams of being successful in the music world. They soon find that a lot of dues need to be paid before they are "discovered" or even before they can make a decent living. Most will give up their dreams and opt for a regular job, maybe two, to provide them a standard of living higher than what they had in prison, even if only marginally so. The smart ones will keep their music alive by playing part-time in different venues, even for free. Churches are always looking for volunteer musicians and choir members. It often leads to other opportunities, as it did for Whitney Houston. She started her public singing as an unpaid choir member.

As he clapped for Cash after each song, Merle Haggard resolved more than ever to scale whatever obstacles presented themselves upon his release. Fortunately, that was not far away. He would still have the drive and energy of youth. One obstacle he envisioned was his criminal background. He would not try to hide it. Instead, he'd use it to his advantage.

Cash sang about Folsom Prison but had never been an inmate there. Haggard had direct experience, knew the stories of the men there, and had his own tales to tell. He incorporated these in his songs. Seeing Johnny Cash on stage and, particularly hearing his monologue between songs, convinced Haggard that he could succeed. Cash was candid. He took the side of the inmates rather than the system that sought to lock them away and forget about them; a system that branded them for life with a stigma and a number. No matter if that life were spent inside or outside the walls, their past would follow them. Those responsible for the "just-us" system would make sure of that.

No wonder Cash sympathized with his audience. He did it in outspoken terms. His brief visit to prison to perform let him see some of the substandard conditions the men faced. They couldn't get decent water, he noted as a glass with a yellowish liquid was handed to him on stage. He cursed it to show his intolerance at the way his fellow human beings were being treated. Haggard came away from the concert encouraged more than ever. He would do whatever necessary to gain a foothold in the music world.

Upon release he played wherever he could, either for free or fee, even the smallest places. His past was not only made known but incorporated in his songs. Here are the words to his tune "Branded Man."

When they let me out of prison
I held my head up high,
Determined that I'd rise above the shame.
But no matter where I'm going
That foul mark follows me.
I'm branded with a number on my name.

If I live to be a hundred
I'll never clear my name
'Cause everybody knows I've been to jail.
No matter what I'm doing
I got to tell 'em where I've been.
And they'll send me back to prison if I fail.

I'd like to hold my head up high
And be proud of who I am.
But they won't let my secret go untold.
I paid the price I owe them
But they're still not satisfied.
Now I'm a branded man out in the cold.

Other songs that Merle Haggard wrote featured fellow prisoners he lived with. The most famous of these songs, "Mama Tried," contained the following lyrics:

Dear old daddy, rest his soul,
He left mom a heavy load.
She tried so very hard to fill his shoes.
Worked long hours without rest
To give me the very best.
She tried to raise me right but I refused.

And I turned 21 in prison
Doing life without parole
No one could steer me right but mama tried.
Mama tried to raise me better
But her pleading I denied'
That leaves only me to blame 'cause mama tried.

Merle Haggard isn't the only big name performer to come out of prison. Chuck Brown, the Godfather of Go Go, spent years on the inside playing with prison bands and absorbing the knowledge of fellow musicians. "It was in prison that I learned my craft," he told me. In his prison, there were many opportunities to study and play music. Performances were given on special occasions. Inmate musicians spent months in rehearsal seeking to replicate soul songs and other music made famous by outside stars. The closer they came to the originals, the more their inmate audiences cheered. During rehearsal, they listened to recordings of hits carefully, day after day, note for note. In this way they practiced to sound as good or even better than the musicians who made the songs famous. It was a way of proving themselves accomplished craftsmen.

Brown departed from cover songs on occasion and introduced new tunes he'd written in his trademark *go go* style. He had a good crowd to play them for since the prisoners longed for entertainment of any type. They kept an open ear. Anything to interrupt the boredom was appreciated, be it familiar or new sounds. When Chuck got out, he already had a following. The men who applauded him in prison often wrote their families about this musical genius. Relatives came to the prison on family day to see Brown perform for them. His Virginia prison was known as a family-friendly place and his concerts attracted outsiders who came to visit their incarcerated kin there. They spread word about Brown. Many people attended Brown's outside concerts upon his release. To his thumping go go sound they shouted in unison, "Wind me up, Chuck."

Another famous performer, decades before, also made a name for himself in prison, Huddie T. Ledbetter, who used his prison nickname of "Leadbelly" throughout his professional career. He came to the attention of musical researchers who were studying songs written and sung in prison. When they arrived at Leadbelly's prison, they did not know about Leadbelly. But everyone there did. Staff and inmates alike pointed him out as a musical prodigy with his 12-string guitar and his knack for songwriting. Many of Leadbelly's songs have become classics, including: "Cotton Fields" and "Midnight Special." Here's the refrain of "Midnight Special":

Let the Midnight Special
Shine its light on me
Let the Midnight Special
Shine its ever-loving light on me.

For a prisoner, the words have great meaning; they signify getting out of prison. The song tells of a train called the Midnight Special that passes by the prison. But the prisoners never see its light because of the prison wall. Only when they are set free does the midnight special shine its light on them.

There's another famous song that Leadbelly wrote in prison. When the musical researchers came to interview him and record Leadbelly's songs, they asked if they could do any favor for him. He said they could press a record of one of his songs and give it to the governor. He hoped the governor would give him a pardon after hearing it. They agreed and a recording was made of a Leadbelly song that pleaded with the governor to set him free. The governor didn't care for it, thinking that an inmate, however musical, was just trying to pull a con job on him. But he was struck by the song that Leadbelly included on the flip side of the record, and Leadbelly got his pardon. It was a throwaway tune that Leadbelly had written for his fellow inmates that lamented losing a love by following the wrong path in life: "Irene Goodnight." Recorded by the Weavers in later years, it became his biggest hit.

Quit your rambling
Quit your gambling,
Quit your staying out late at night.
Go home to your wife
And your family
Sit down by the fireside bright.
Goodnight, Irene, Goodnight Irene, I'll see you in my dreams.

Going back even earlier in time, to the late 19th Century, we find another inmate who excelled in his art: William Sydney Porter. William Porter had been a third rate newspaper writer before going to prison. Not content with the money he was making, he took up a secondary profession as a bank embezzler. When he was detected, he escaped to South America. Even at that time, well before the advent of computers and data bases, the law had a long reach. He was caught and sent to prison in America.

Porter found it an ideal place to practice and experiment with his creative writing. There were no deadlines to meet, no petty people to interview, no uninteresting subjects to examine. He had no cigar-smoking editors over him to dictate how or what to write. It was like being a rich kid who dabbled in anything he chose, free of all

constraints. With his new-found independence, Porter used his pen as he wished. Prison presented him with that opportunity.

First, however, he had to get hold of a pen, not always an easy thing in prison. Then, as now, there is a notorious lack of supplies for prisoners who want to do more than eat and sleep their sentences away. Many people are so depressed in prison that they seek to do little more. During their waking hours, activities are often limited to television watching, playing board games and reading fantasy books. Is it any wonder that most inmates are ill equipped to enter society as productive citizens after an extended period of such unproductively?

Persevering to get the paper and writing utensils he needed, Porter determined to reinvent himself as a writer. Instead of writing nonfiction, he focused on fiction. His reason for doing this was partly preference, but mostly necessity. In nonfiction writing you have to do research. That often entails interviewing your subjects by going to their locations. Then you need to check facts, which often involves more travel. In prison, you aren't able to do that. Your contacts are limited, and your travel options nonexistent. A writer must rely upon available resources and the thoughts in his own mind.

With fiction, that's all ones needs. In fact, insulation from outside distractions can be an aid in spinning fanciful tales. Writers can be as creative as they wish. What makes the task difficult is that their stories must be logical; they need to be believed. Mark Twain once said, "Of course truth is stranger than fiction; after all, fiction has to make sense." Twain was a contemporary of Porter. Both died in the same year, 1910, well after Porter had emerged from prison as a first-class writer of fiction. For a time, his work was more popular than Twain's.

The transformation from mediocre journalist to world-renowned writer would not have happened without the time and opportunity that prison provided. Porter was able to experiment with different ideas without time constraints. There was no one hounding him to finish by a specific date. He developed his writing the way he wanted, all in his own time; improved his style, refined his voice, and came up with a writing formula that people found appealing. It could not have happened without the support of those around him. Other prisoners encouraged him. They read his work and provided valuable feedback. Prison officers did the same and also provided him pens, paper and pencils. They did it not only out of altruism but to get something in return. Porter on occasion helped the

officers with their own writing: letters, memos and other communications. These were important, such a note to the warden requesting a promotion.

One officer in particular stood out as a valuable helper. This staffer believed in Porter from the beginning and never failed to come through with writing materials. Porter was so grateful that when he left prison he adopted the officer's name as his own pen name. In doing so, he never used the officer's first name. That was done out of respect for the prison tradition of officers not revealing their first names to prisoners. To this day, the badges that prison officers wear contain their first initial and last name only. The world may not know the name William Sydney Porter, but everyone knows his pen name of O. Henry.

Well-known artist and ex-prisoner Tony Papa credits a prison staffer for helping him get out of prison. Even so, the real hero was Papa's extraordinary art. The critical recognition it received as he created it in his cell provided the key to unlocking the prison gate. A lot of incarcerated artists escape prison through their art, metaphorically speaking. But Papa did it literally.

He first arrived in prison in a state of shock. It was a place he never thought he would see in his lifetime. Suddenly he faced the prospect of spending the rest of his life there. Papa came from a stable working class background. He had labored hard to get the things he and his family needed. Living in New York City, those things did not come cheap. Still, even in his most desperate circumstances, the thought of hurting, stealing from, or cheating anyone never occurred to him. He wasn't brought up that way; his values of honesty and gentility were too deeply ingrained. Never did a time come when he was tempted to violate those values.

An example of a crisis he encountered was the day his car broke down. He needed to get it repaired to go to work, and he didn't have the money to do it. He desperately called friends and relatives to see if they could help. Papa didn't want a gift, only a loan. Even better, if the money provider had work for Papa to do, he would do it.

Papa, a personable individual with a reputation for reliability, wasn't surprised when a friend came through for him. The man agreed to provide the money, demanding only one thing in return. Papa would have to deliver a small package. Although the friend told him that the envelope contained cocaine, he assured Papa that he wouldn't have to touch it, sell it or even look at it. This was only a delivery, an exchange between two consenting adults. Papa went

for it and fell into a trap. His friend, it turned out, had been arrested sometime before when he sold drugs to police in a sting operation. They let him go but kept him under close surveillance. His condition of release was to trap others. That way the police would have several people to put in jail, not just one. Papa, who had to be talked into taking the package to an eagerly waiting police undercover agent, became one of the man's victims.

This was a serious jam in New York at the time. The state once had a governor named Nelson Rockefeller who had ambitions of being the president of the United States. He had the money, the connections, and the name, being part of an American dynasty on a par with the Kennedys. He only lacked one thing: a political reputation to distinguish him from other ambitious pols. With the help of his strategists, after throwing his conscience to the wind he soon found one. At the time of Rockefeller's governorship, the "war on drugs" was a popular gambit pushed by office seekers across the country. Never mind that the earlier war on alcohol had been fought and lost. Booze prohibition put politicians in power, just as drug prohibition did. Rockefeller wondered how he could get on board this gravy train, already crowded with fear-mongering, false-solution-offering, anti-drug warrior pols. His advisors pointed the way. The governor must pass "zero tolerance" drug laws in New York with penalties so draconian that he would be seen as the leader of this angry mob. In this way the infamous Rockefeller Drug Laws were born.

They never reduced drug use in New York, but they filled New York prisons with thousands of users and petty sellers who were quickly replaced on the outside. Even on the inside, drug use was not diminished. Rockefeller never got to be nominated president. Some say his harsh laws worked against him, making him look more like a demonic figure in a dictatorship than a reasonable leader in a democracy.

Still, like crucifixions in the Roman Empire that emperors swore prevented peasant uprisings, the harsh laws became Rockefeller's legacy. New York politicians after Rockefeller did not want to tamper with them for fear of being labeled "soft on crime." Even as enlightened voters criticized these sadistic statutes for what they were, governors who followed Rockefeller said, "I had no hand in proposing or passing them." It is an axiom of American politics: Getting laws passed is easy, repealing them–even the worst–close to impossible.

Tony Papa was given a choice by prosecutors. He had to name other drug sellers that they could also entrap, or face a long sentence, up to life in prison. With a family that depended on him, he didn't want to go to jail. As a first time offender, he didn't think he deserved that. But the Rockefeller laws were unmerciful. Tony Papa faced the rest of his years in prison.

Prosecutors didn't expect Papa to help them. They realized he was a novice who didn't know anyone in the drug trade. Even with Papa's desperation for money, his police-controlled friend had to talk him into delivering the envelope. Should they ask Papa if he could get a friend or relative to do the same? Perhaps his devoted mother would go for it. They decided not to ask, knowing they were dealing with an amateur who could screw things up. Better to have a jailbird in the hand than two in the bush.

Finding Papa guilty, the judge did not take background, circumstances or community reputation into account at sentencing. He couldn't. The Rockefeller Drug Laws dictated that Tony Papa must serve 15 years to life.

In the beginning of his sentence he slept a lot. Then he got angry at what happened. Finally, he adjusted to his fate.

The desire to paint came to him in a gradual way. He saw other inmates do it and he could see what it did for them. Rather than internalizing their anger and frustration, they were expressing themselves. What came out were works that compelled attention, sometimes of beauty, but always with strong meaning. Papa decided to put aside his anger at the world for its harshness and the anger at himself for his stupidity in blindly trusting another.

Experienced inmate painters sensed Papa's commitment to use art as a survival tool, just as they had done. They took him under their wing, teaching him what they knew and encouraging him to grow in his own style. What emerged in him eventually was a master artist.

The quality of Papa's art was not only good but highly original. In addition to being creative, he was captivating. Being in a prison in New York, which is the media capital of the world, the press eventually discovered him. When a letter came requesting an interview, Papa was ready. He cooperated fully, knowing this could lead to other things: prestige, prizes, pen pals, and perhaps freedom? Prisoners never close the door to hope. You won't find an inmate anywhere who doesn't believe that imminent release is possible. Perhaps a law will change, or maybe the prison will

become overcrowded, or perhaps the country's leaders will grant pardons.

Likewise, no prisoner believes that he or she belongs in prison. If they committed an offense that involved no victim, such as violations of drug laws, they feel there is no reason for them to be caged like animals. Either the U.S. is a free society that tolerates alternative lifestyles–including how we medicate ourselves–or we are not. What about people who go overboard and get addicted? They are sick and should have treatment options available, not punishment, many people believe. What about the men and women in prison who have hurt or stolen from others? As irritating or dangerous as they are, they are still sick people. Citizens are increasingly asking themselves, What kind of a society are we to believe in punishing or even killing our sick? They may need to be constrained for their protection and the protection of others, but doing so under inhumane and punitive conditions is more than wrong. It's counterproductive, having the potential to worsen an already damaged individual.

In the years that Tony Papa has been out of prison he has proved that the public didn't need to be protected from him. He has excelled in his art, in his citizenry and in his social activism. Unlike other prison artists who drift away from their art after they leave prison, Papa kept his alive. Indeed, if not for his art, he might well still be in prison.

After his work came to the attention of the New York media while in prison, Papa enjoyed a brief period of fame. Much to his disappointment, however, it did not lead to his release. He had only become the media story of the month. When that month ended, a new story occupied the authors of articles and the writers of headlines. Still, Papa pursued his art. He had created his own world of contentment and creativity within the confines of his prison world. It wasn't the world he wished for but it was one he knew could be productive in. He had proved that he could get the attention of the outside world with his art. Maybe next time it would raise him to such heights that he could scale the prison walls.

The day came when he received a letter that astounded him. It was from the famed Whitney Museum in New York City. They had heard of Papa's work and wanted to acquire one of his pieces for a special exhibit. The piece they had in mind had been featured in a magazine article about Papa. It was a dark portrait of him in anguish. Showing both hands holding his head, a paintbrush

protruded from one of them. It captured him being pushed to near insanity by the injustice done him, his art being his only lifeline.

Papa recognized this invitation for the tremendous opportunity it provided. Being exhibited in the Whitney Museum was equivalent to winning the Nobel Prize. He knew it would be his ticket out of prison. A New York landmark, the Whitney has high stature and influence. Any New York governor who allowed an artist on display at the Whitney to remain in jail would be the laughing stock of the world.

Just as his hopes were raised, they were quickly dashed when he read the Whitney offer in its entirety. Because of Papa's 15-to-life sentence, they assumed he had committed a serious crime, perhaps a murder. Indeed, if he was not a murderer, he could not be part of the exhibit. They explained in dispassionate detail that this special show called for the art of a killer to be at its centerpiece. Could he, Mr. Papa, kindly confirm that he was one?

Normally an honest man, Papa could not let this opportunity go by without a fight. He'd rather be known for his untruthfulness as a free citizen than his honesty as an incarcerated one. He wrote the Whitney to assure them they had found their man. Killing ran in his blood, in his genes, in his thoughts, in his temperament, in his art. How perceptive of them to recognize it. He had gotten his long sentence, Papa said, because he had murdered not one person but two. His cold tone gave the impression that he wasn't through murdering yet. If any prison officers annoyed him, they might be added to the list.

The Whitney Museum was elated. Their search for an artist for their exhibit was over. They wrote Papa the good news. But the letter wasn't all good tidings. In it they asked if Papa could please give them the name of an official at his prison to confirm his murderer status. They were sorry to inconvenience Mr. Papa with this small request but they had to follow their procedures. They hoped Mr. Papa would cooperate promptly so they could proceed to acquire his work and let the world know about the opening of this important exhibit.

Once a passive person, art had given Papa the confidence to do virtually anything. But how could he do this? He racked his brain to think of a staff member who might have the courage and compassion to help him. He thought of an administrator who seemed a possibility. Papa went to see him.

The man refused. He pointed out to Papa that lying is not right under any circumstances, that it could never lead to any good.

Besides, even if Papa's inclusion in the exhibit somehow led to his release from prison, how could Papa live with himself knowing how he had achieved his freedom? Papa said he would deal with that on his own, and didn't anticipate having any guilty feelings in the least. Frankly, he said, he felt guilty about being in prison while his family struggled on the outside without him.

Finally, the administrator leveled with Papa. "Look, I'd like to help but I could get in trouble here if I do." If that was not enough, he pointed out that as a Catholic he could not tell a lie. It was against the church's commandments, not to mention the dictates of the Pope. Surely Papa did not want him to go to hell.

Papa pointed out that he himself was already in hell, and unjustly so. How could religion stand in the way of a good deed? Besides, didn't he want to be a VIP on opening night at the Whitney? He would meet the governor who could do more for his career than a dozen Popes. The Whitney would not happen however without his assistance. Slowly and hesitantly, the man crossed his heart and agreed to help. That's how Papa came to be shown at the Whitney showing and then pardoned by the governor.

When he left prison Papa was intent on leaving the United States. He settled in Brazil to pursue his art. But he kept himself informed of developments at home. He longed for the day when America would end its cruel and costly war on drug users; when it would set free the thousands of men and women—most of them of color like Papa—who had been enticed to become combatants and ultimately victims of this war. He waited a long time in Brazil but it didn't happen.

Finally, he decided to return to the U.S. to help the process along. He joined the staff of the Drug Policy Alliance as a communications specialist. The Alliance had long fought for a saner drug policy in America. Papa was soon helping the group carry its message across America, including arranging public awareness events featuring his art. His art still spoke to the masses, even though they now understood that Papa had never killed a fly, much less a human.

If there was any attempt at killing, it was done by Nelson Rockefeller. But he did not succeed in burying Papa. Art enabled Papa, as it had for Leadbelly, to escape prison in the spirit and finally in the flesh. In March 2008, Papa was quoted in newspapers around the country as the Rockefeller drug laws started to be repealed, led by a new governor of New York who had once been arrested himself in opposing them.

3. HOW PRISONS OPERATE

The joke is told about a second-rate radio station that sponsored a contest. The first-place winner got a week in Newark, New Jersey. The second place winner got two weeks there. In reality, Newark is not a bad place. It just has a bad reputation. The same can be said for prisons. People hear rumors of violence among prisoners and abuse by staff that are largely exaggerated. Still, the bad rep sticks. When isolated incidents occur, or the rare uprising takes place, people assume it is the norm. It isn't.

One thing certain about prison that causes people to steer clear of them: Once you enter, you are stuck there. You can't leave no matter how much you plead or scream. Only a judge or the end of your sentence can get you out. The description that follows is typical of most prisons and jails in America.

A typical day in prison starts with early morning breakfast served between six and eight AM. It comes even earlier in jail, four to five AM. The difference is that jails are short-term places that hold people waiting for or in the midst of trials. They have to feed them early so the prisoners can be packed (in handcuffs and leg irons) and hauled to the courthouse. There their fate is decided. If at the end of days, weeks or months of trial, a judge gives thumbs up, they are released. If the judge gives thumbs down, they spend up to a year in jail eating breakfast and then trying to go back to sleep at that predawn hour. When the sentence is longer than a year, they will wait in jail for a heavily guarded window-barred bus to take them to a prison.

Relocation to prison is an upgrade. Not just a later breakfast hour but nearly everything else is an improvement. One downside is that those in prison are usually farther from home, which means fewer visits. If their family and friends are not firmly committed to standing behind them, they might disappear entirely. Another difference between jails and prisons that makes the latter undesirable is that prisons emphasize a work ethic. In other words, they put inmates to labor, even if that means assigning them the most menial and senseless jobs. We have not come very far from breaking rocks in many prisons. Today prisoners might clean a small patch of the prison recreation field for hours on end. In jail, they don't do such things, so inmates are left alone. Remember, in

jail most inmates are presumed innocent, awaiting trial and a judge to affirm their guilt.

Breakfast in prison doesn't mean eating in your cell unless there is a lockdown in progress. In fact, you might not even have a cell. A lot of prisons have dormitories. They give the appearance of military sleeping quarters rather than punishment blocks. There is no reveille either, so if you want to skip breakfast and stay in bed, that's okay. You will only be saving taxpayer's money. Many men and women in prison eat all the meals just for spite. "The judge said I was going to get everything that's coming to me," you sometimes hear, "so I'm going to eat whatever is offered."

When the breakfast call is made, several dormitory buildings and cellblocks are "released" one at a time. When you hear "chow time" called, the secure front door of your building is unlocked. You can now walk to the cafeteria or "chow hall." There, depending on the prison, you can either make a selection of breakfast items or accept what is put on your plate. If no choice is given, that doesn't mean you can't modify your meal. Just call out to anyone within earshot, "I've got milk for an apple" or "I've got grits for eggs." With scores of inmates around you, chances are you will make a trade. In most chow halls you can eat at your leisure, but in some you will be chased out by prison officers as soon as you stop chewing. Prison cafeterias can be hot spots for arguments and fights. We are not talking food fights but tray and fork fights, albeit with plastic utensils. The quicker that chow halls are emptied, staffers believe, the better.

Exiting, you might be detained by an officer. He or she is there to search you to make sure you are not taking anything you are not supposed to have. What you are usually allowed to take is a single piece of fruit. Some prisoners try to take more to have snacks later. But the rule is that only what you purchase at the commissary is for that. Prison officials believe that unwrapped food taken from the chow hall can create a vermin problem. Why only one piece of fruit? Because if fruit is accumulated in housing quarters it can be fermented and turned into wine. Another reason for the search is that inmates who work in the kitchen preparing food are notoriously theft-prone. Even if they were not thieves on the outside, they often do it for amusement or bartering on the inside. When they end their shifts each day, they are carefully searched. But that does not prevent them from giving items to their friends during meal times. That's how to get a few pounds of sugar out of the chow hall, a needed ingredient for the fermentation process.

Returning to bed after breakfast, inmates need to make sure that it is made before they leave again to avoid a "write-up." That can cost them good-time credit and prolong their prison stay. If they get enough write-ups, they can wind up in the hole, which is a lot like jail. While prisons can vary greatly in amenities, rules and regulations, this bed-making requirement seems to be universal. Even during the bad old days of Nazi concentration camps, such a rule existed. Then, as now, it probably had more to do with control than anything else. If the behavior of inmates can be so directed first thing in the morning, it can be more easily channeled throughout the day.

After everyone comes back from the chow hall, a head count is made of all inmates. This is a procedure that occurs five or so times a day, after which the dorm and cellblock buildings are again opened. After the morning count *clears*, it is time for inmates to go to their "job assignments." For the most part, these are not conventional jobs, rarely constituting full-time employment. Nor do they pay like a real job. Typically inmates get only pennies an hour, and sometimes no compensation at all. One exception is work in a prison factory. Many prisons have them. These are enterprises that manufacture items for government agencies. Print plants are common. They publish government reports. There are also factories that produce electronic and other components for the military. One popular form of prison enterprise is office furniture manufacturing. Many a government bureaucrat today is sitting behind a desk or using a file cabinet constructed in prison.

Working in these factories, an inmate might get as much as a dollar an hour, even more. That's big money in prison considering that food, clothing, and shelter are paid for. And there are no travel expenses. In the event an inmate has to go back to court or be treated in a hospital, he or she will get a free round trip. It might not be the most comfortable journey, considering that the inmate is shackled and accompanied by easily spooked armed guards, but it's free.

Most prisoners don't work in a factory. The prison might not even have one. If it does, there will be far fewer positions than inmates available to fill them. Some prisoners do not even apply. They figure that since they are getting everything they need in prison for free, why exert themselves? Some feel they have been imprisoned unfairly or have an excessive sentence. Why feed the mouth that bit you by going to work for the government, particularly at a sub-minimum wage?

The alternative to a factory job is prison "detail" work. This can range from picking up litter around the compound to serving as a clerk in a prison law library. Except for kitchen work, none will be overly taxing. Usually when inmates arrive at a prison they get the worst jobs. That usually means going to the kitchen and scrubbing tables, floors, pots and pans. It is a far cry from the relaxed pace—with ample loafing and reading opportunities—that other compound jobs afford.

New arrivals in prison are often assigned to the kitchen because they don't know influential prisoners or staff that can help them find better jobs. In a month or so after they make these contacts, they can usually get transferred to much easier work.

Even a prisoner who has been around for a while can lose his footing and a plum job. That usually happens when he gets in trouble, say for a fight, and goes to the hole. When he gets out in 30 or so days, his good job will often be filled by someone else. Then only a kitchen-scouring pad awaits him. Here is a big reason to avoid trouble in prison.

Not that working in the kitchen is the worst thing that can happen. After all, you'll get the choicest food, and as much as you want. In some prisons, there's a far more demanding and degrading job than kitchen work. These are prisons that have chain gangs. They consist of putting leg irons on 50 or so men each morning and marching or driving them to a worksite to labor all day. The work can be road cleaning, construction or park maintenance. Some prisoners refuse to be part of these slave crews, but they are often enticed by special offers. Such offers consist of a promise of a plum job after 30 days on the chain gang. Prison officials make and keep such arrangements because they need the cooperation of prisoners to make chain gangs work. After all, if an inmate refuses to participate, nothing can be done except putting him in the hole where he will still get food, clothes and shelter. Prisons in the U.S. have evolved into institutions where neither corporal punishment nor deprivations of basic needs are permitted. Instead of pushing prisoners into the chain gang, or anything else they might find distasteful, they must be enticed.

For the typical prisoner in a standard prison, the morning work call after breakfast means going to an easy job on the compound. The work will provide a little exercise and a lot of leisure. Maybe the prisoner will write a letter home, read a book, or take a snooze while doing the job. At 11 AM or so, the inmate will be called back to his housing quarters to wait for lunch. Then one by one, the

buildings are unlocked so prisoners can go to the chow hall for lunch. The process of feeding everyone can take two or more hours. The cafeteria has limited space and there are often lines to get in. Inmates have nothing to hurry for. Life may be short, but sentences can be very long. So they take it easy and smell the flowers along the way. Sometimes literally. Thanks to inmate horticultural programs that provide flowerbeds in some prisons, it's a common occurrence.

When inmates return in the afternoon to their jobs, chances are they will have less to do than they had in the morning. If assigned to keep a stretch of walkway clean that was swept in the morning, there is usually no need to do it again. They find a shaded spot, if they can, and wait for the call to quit between four and five.

Everyone then goes back in their housing buildings for another count. This is to make sure that no one has somehow slipped through the fences or walls during the day. Though rare, it happens. Sometimes a missing inmate means an escape, but more often he has fallen asleep and failed to hear the quit call. The biggest reason for a count not clearing is a miscount. The officers responsible for counting inmates often don't get it right. Then the entire process must start over, with all prisoners re-counted.

At the "clearing of the count," the inmates are again released from their housing buildings to have dinner. So begins the third daily trek to the chow hall. It is a bigger meal than the others, just like the outside.

Speaking of food in the free world, prisoners constantly compare what they get to outside fare. As a result, there are many complaints. You hear prisoners conveying this to friends and relatives when they come to visit, or during phone calls. Letters too are a means of sounding off about the "lousy food here." It is a favorite topic for inmates. The truth is that prison food is healthy, well balanced and served in adequate quantities. Inmates complain about it, not because it is bad but because it is different. We all have our habits, good and bad. In the U.S., most people have bad habits when it comes to what is consumed. Take a look at the success of fast food establishments. You rarely see older people eating there because if they did, they wouldn't live to be old. That may be an exaggeration but the fact is that very few people eat right in America, and fast food places–even when a few healthy items are on the menu–provide a golden-arches opportunity to eat wrong.

In prison, you don't have it your way. Chow halls give you what you need, not what you want. Nutritionists decide the menu for each

meal, and they know their business. Your well-being is important because unhealthy inmates cost prisons money. If wardens spend their budgets on sick inmates, they won't be able to hire the staff they need or push for the raises they feel they deserve. Here is one instance where humanitarianism and economics are on the same wavelength. A healthy inmate is a low maintenance one.

It is not only the type of food served but the quantity that riles prisoners. Used to dining at all-you-can-eat places or ordering seconds and thirds, prison is a disappointment. Inmates have to be content with what they get. Of course, there are always snacks to buy at the commissary, if affordable. For inmates in the chips, they can buy and use chips, candy, nuts, pretzels and more to supplant or supplement the sensible food and portions they get at the chow hall. When it comes to obesity, where there's a will there is always a wide belt waiting.

A lot of men and women enter prison out of shape. But they come out fit and trim. This is more a product of the practices of prison chow halls than personal willpower. When inmates start seeing the results, they often embrace and maximize them by adopting an exercise regime. It is no wonder that prisoners are usually in better shape than prison staff.

Following the evening meal, inmates have several hours of virtually complete freedom. The only thing they have to worry about in exercising that freedom is not getting shot. That won't happen if they don't try to scale the outer walls or fences of the prison.

There are several options during the evening**.** Inmates can go to the rec yard and walk around the perimeter, or participate in various individual or group activities there. All prisons have baseball fields and basketball courts. Many have tracks that surround football fields. Some prisons even have tennis and bocce courts. Shuffleboard and horseshoes are common. A number of places have indoor gyms complete with bleachers. That means on inclement days inmates can still get recreation.

Even in prisons where there is no inside recreation space, inmates are usually permitted to go out in the rain. Many do so even though they will return to their living quarters in need of a change to dry clothing. Why do they do it in the absence of umbrellas, not available to prisoners because of their potential use as weapons? Because being close to the elements gives them a sense of freedom. Also, the rain beating down on them can distract them from the emotional pain they may be feeling.

Two Tennessee inmates in the 1950s, Johnny Bragg and Robert Riley, wrote a song called "Just Walking in the Rain" for their inmate vocal group "The Prisonaires." It became a hit when singing star Johnnie Ray later recorded it. No one knew it was written in prison where inmates have no choice but to walk in the rain if they're going outside on inclement days. Here are the lyrics:

Just walking in the rain
Getting soaking wet
Torturing my heart
By trying to forget

Just walking in the rain
So alone and blue
All because my heart
Still remembers you

People come to windows
They always stare at me
Shaking their heads in sorrow
Saying, who can that fool be

Just walking in the rain
Thinking how we met
Knowing things have changed
Somehow I can't forget

In fact, there is more to do in the evening in prison than go to the rec yard. Other options include a walk to the prison library or chapel. These places exist in virtually every prison and they are used heavily by inmates.

The library is where books can be checked out and reference works used, including encyclopedias. There may also be computers to search informational CDs. But don't expect Internet access. Except in the rarest of cases, it doesn't exist for prisoners. Some countries like Australia have it, touted as an aid to inmates' job preparedness. But not in the U.S., where the politics of punishment take precedence. In the United States, politicians get elected by telling voters how much they are making inmates suffer. No one seems to care that suffering men and women will someday be their neighbors. Ninety-five percent of prisoners will be released back into their communities.

Something else that prisoners usually don't have, though they once did with never a problem: weight-lifting equipment. It served a useful purpose by allowing inmates to vent their frustrations. Vigorous exercise is a good way to channel stress. And pride in one's body as it becomes stronger and firmer is a source of self-esteem. In prison, this helps men and women keep their sanity. Being in a situation where they are constantly looked upon as failures, anything they can do to improve their image in their own eyes and in the eyes of others is worth pursuing.

Weight lifting equipment was removed from most prisons because politicians sought to exploit public fear and vengeance. Regarding vengeance, the public was told that the removal would make prisoners suffer more. Gone would be one more "amenity" that inmates "did not deserve" and would no longer have. About public fear, politicians convinced people that prisoners who worked out and developed strength would be more dangerous upon reentering society than inmates who are kept puny. As if muscle men like Arnold Schwarzenegger are more prone to muggings and murder than others.

At the prison library where even supervised Internet use is forbidden, there are other attractions that keep a steady flow of inmates coming. To begin with, there are books in the circulating collection. You will find a surprising number of new and popular titles here. They come from two sources. If the prison has a budget for acquisitions, the books will be purchased from publishers and booksellers just as other libraries get their books. But many prisons do not have such budgets. They must rely on book donations. The new bestsellers that are donated come from inmates who have received them from friends and relatives. After they get through reading the books, close prisoner friends get them to read. After the request list is exhausted–which can take as long as a year–the volumes are given to the library. There is no other place for them to go since inmates cannot maintain a personal library of more than a few books given the limited living space they have.

Donated books also come from other libraries. None of these books are recent. They are the surplus of what those libraries have on hand, books that have long passed their peak of popularity and are no longer in demand. The irony of this is that many of these books are rare and valuable collector's editions. Many a prisoner today is reading a book by Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and others with the original preface and dust jackets. These are volumes that any rare book dealer would drool over. The throwaway books from

well-financed libraries end up in the hands of the throwaway men and women in prison.

Out-of-date reference books also wind up in prison as donated volumes. They also have a bright side to them, apart from their rarity. Reading an old encyclopedia provides insight into history. Inmates will come across a number of items that are politically incorrect by today's standards. Take a look at how blacks, women and American Indians were disparagingly discussed in the 1940s and 1950s. No wonder black power, women's rights and Native American justice became major movements in our society.

A standard reference work in all libraries is Books in Print. It is published every year. Free-world libraries throw away last year's edition when the new one arrives. The tossed-out volumes often end up in prison libraries. As a result, many of the books listed in an old Books in Print are no longer in print. What possible utility can such a volume be to inmates? It can be very useful, even more than a current Books in Print. The reason is that most prison libraries allow inmates to request books from local public libraries. It is called an "Interlibrary Loan." Prisoners complete a form to request books they desire. But they have to know the name and author of the books they want. Not being privy to the Internet or outside library catalogues, they use old editions of Books in Print. Unlike the latest one which has eliminated many books no longer being published, the older ones tell of volumes that had once been published and now are probably sitting on a library shelf and available to them.

Prison libraries contain other resources. Principle among them are law book collections, usually quite extensive. Some prisons even have law books on computers, making the number of law books available to inmates vast. A few CDs can hold thousands of books. And they are searchable. Whether on computers or on the shelves, inmates pore over these volumes. Some use them to try to determine if their lawyers did an adequate job in handling their cases. Did he or she use the right strategy, reference the best case law, or present the strongest arguments? If not, there are legal ways for inmates to get their cases back in court for a fairer hearing and perhaps a better outcome. Even if they can shave only a little time off their sentence, the legal research will be worthwhile. In truth, most prisoners do not succeed. But the mere attempt to do so has therapeutic value. It is never a bad thing to be knowledgeable about the law. Maybe next time a person will know better about the

matter that got him or her into prison. Or at least they will put money aside so that they can afford better legal representation.

The law books can serve another purpose. Prisoners sometimes encounter rules and decisions by prison administrators that are unfair, even illegal. There is recourse often in the courts if the grievance procedure that must be followed in prison does not produce satisfactory results. The best way to find out what your rights are and how to pursue them is by delving into law books. No matter what situation you encounter, chances are that you will find a similar case in these books, possibly several. Use the cases as a guide and make reference to them in filing a grievance; and if the grievance is turned down, make a court pleading.

Besides law books and conventional books, other attractions of prison libraries are the non-print media they often contain. CD and DVD players and a collection of disks ranging from classic movies to documentaries are common. The movies are often relevant to the prison experience. That is no surprise since inmates encourage staff to order them. A favorite movie is the classic film *Judgment at Nuremburg*. A major motion picture when it was released after World War II by famed filmmaker Otto Preminger, it tells of a group of former Nazi judges put on trial after World War II. Their defense for sending people to prison and to the gas chambers was that they were only following the law. Never mind that those statutes were passed by politically-expedient lawmakers under the influence of Adolph Hitler. The judges felt compelled to enforce them. In U.S. prisons many inmates find a lot of meaning in this movie. I remember a man sentenced to 30 years in prison as a 20-year-old who sold drugs to his friends. In sentencing him, the Nazi-type magistrate said, "You'll never amount to anything."

Another popular movie found in prison libraries equipped with DVD players is *High Noon*. The 1950s film stars Gary Cooper as a throwaway lawman in a town about to be taken over by thugs. People have given up and are resigned to their fate to be ruled by ruffians. Only Cooper is willing to stand up for justice, but no one will help him in his battle to keep the town free. They want him out before noon when the rascals arrive. Cooper's presence and firmness makes them look bad. No one believes that he, even with their help, can beat the forces of evil. So he stands alone and becomes the most hated man in town. Even his new bride, a nonviolent Quaker played by gorgeous Grace Kelly, leaves him. His best friend argues and gets into a fistfight with him. Still, Cooper perseveres. He battles the thugs and through skill, luck and

unexpected aid wipes them out. Before leaving town, Cooper removes his star and throws it in the dirt. U.S. Patriot John Wayne hated the movie, calling it un-American. The movie was made when purges and jailing of presumed communists were at their height in America. Few citizens were willing to stand up to political thug Senator Joe McCarthy who was behind that reign of tyranny.

In addition to going to the prison library or the rec yard in the evening, there is the option of spending time in the chapel. Here is a place of true serenity in prison. Rarely will you find an argument, much less a fight here. Usually, there are a number of rooms in the chapel, including a library. Books, CDs and DVDs of a religious nature are available. Many of them are thought-provoking and of high quality. Some of the greatest films ever made have religious themes, including *Ben Hur* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. Books found in the chapel can be inspiring and enlightening, especially biographies of religious leaders and martyrs. It doesn't matter what your beliefs are. If only for their determination, these individuals are to be admired. Jesus Christ, at the very least, can be looked upon as a historical figure who spoke out against injustice. He was eventually imprisoned and subjected to capital punishment for it. Here is a poem about this Christian hero that I wrote in prison:

Jesus was a criminal, Judas was a snitch,
Mary was a two-bit whore, the judge a son-of-a-bitch!
I'm talkin' Mary Magdalene, not Mary teenage mother
Who loved the boy, her pride and joy
And would not trade for another.
When Christ was born that Christmas morn,
A code of honor he would spawn.
He did the time without the crime.
I thank him from the gut.
He makes my bit a lighter hit,
A superficial cut.

In addition to books, music and movies of inspiration, one also encounters inspiring people in the chapel. Whether other inmates, staff or outside visitors, they are there to reflect and rejoice in some way. That makes for a very positive situation. Where else in prison can inmates sing their hearts out and be applauded for their voices, no matter the quality. When they open their mouths to sing in the chapel, the only advice they get is to "make a joyful noise."

Every night usually features an organized service or program in the chapel. More often than not, it features an outside minister, speaker, or musical group. They bring word from the free world while they also bring "the word of God." The first can be very informative, while the latter highly uplifting. The theme of most sermons in prison is that God doesn't make mistakes, so everyone is there for a reason. Even if the prisoner had never hurt anyone and is locked away because of a bad law, bad lawyer, or ignorant jury, there is logic to it all. Perhaps God wanted to steer them clear of a worse fate. Maybe it is intended to be a time of rest and recuperation. Whatever the reason, it is the will of God. Who are we to question it? One prison chaplain said to his felonious flock: "Let's face it; you're here because a mistake was made. What's the difference if you or a judge made that mistake? You need to get over it." He then asked everyone to join him in prayer for "you, me and all sinners."

Inmates usually leave the chapel renewed, refreshed and reinvigorated. Sometimes they leave singing. That's especially true if they have heard a band perform there, either an inmate group or one from the outside. Chapel bands in prison are common, choirs universal. They are often very good. That's partly the result of having lots of time to practice, and partly a desire to excel through the serious application of oneself.

When the "house" band is not playing, there are outside groups. They come from a local church or from a ministry far away. They have done this before in prison and know how to work the crowd. Songs include the gospel standard "I'll Fly Away." It's a prison favorite because of its lyrics: "…like a bird from prison bars has flown, I'll fly away." Whatever they play will get a good reaction. Their benevolence is like giving water to people stranded in a desert. More than a captured audience, these inmates are a thirsty crowd.

A unique feature of religious services in prison chapels is the absence of collection plate. Christians, Jews, Muslims and other inmate faith followers are rich in both leisure time and enthusiastic acceptance of what they hear, but poor in finances. Even if they had funds on the outside, only a limited amount of money is permitted on the inside. It must also be deposited entirely in their commissary account. Like everything else in prison with the exception of the commissary, religious service is free, so this is no problem.

A final option in the evening for inmates is to stay at *home*. That means not leaving your "housing unit," the building in which you

reside. A lot of inmates choose this because they have had their fill of the compound during the day. Besides, there are a number of things to do there.

The most uncreative activity is watching television. There are a few sets. They feature different channels and programs to reflect the various interests of the prisoners. The officers assigned to the housing units select the channels. But the inmates state their preferences. It can be a trouble spot as favorite programs vary among prisoners. Arguments, even fights, break out when disappointed inmates don't get their way. More seasoned prisoners are accepting, learning to like programs they would not normally watch in the free world. Some dispense with television altogether. They read books, knowing they have full control over when to start, stop and exchange them for another.

Some prisons, especially new ones, have dispensed with TVs, just as they have eliminated weight-lifting equipment. And for the same reason: public office holders who control these prisons don't want to appear "soft on crime." They would rather err on the side of excessive and meaningless punishment. Many would probably bring back the days of whipping prisoners and giving them bread and water if they could. Going back even further, an option in corrections was cutting off offenders' hands.

Politicians who eliminated TVs offered a rationale other than punishment. "Watching TV makes the mind mushy and wastes time that can be used for reading positive works and pursuing education." But many prisoners can't read. Those who can prefer anything but heavy works. They want fantasy and romance novels, a means of escape in the mind if not in the body. When the light books that most inmates like are not available, and when TVs don't exist, they must entertain themselves. That usually means bragging about and justifying whatever brought them to prison. This is how crimes are learned and improved upon. It is a strong argument for keeping TVs around. Better to have mushy minds than malevolent ones.

Prison officials have their own reasons for fighting politicians who blindly want to take away the idiot boxes. TVs are used by staff as a "management tool." That means officers can control their use to influence how inmates behave. If their behavior is acceptable, prisoners get to watch TV. If it isn't, the plug is pulled. Staffers can't punish prisoners by sending them to their rooms without dinner or even without dessert as parents on the outside still have an option to do. That would be a violation of the prisoners'

rights, constituting *cruel and unusual punishment*. But they can suspend TV watching.

That TVs are popular in prison is a testament to the boredom felt by most inmates. They enjoy watching TV even under the least conducive conditions. The open areas in housing units where the TVs are located are often noisy. That's because there are other activities going on. Card playing, board games and animated conversations are popular in the evening. With space limited in housing quarters, "day rooms" and open spaces where TVs are located compete with these activities. Some prisons have gone high tech, enabling inmates to listen to TVs using wireless earphones. The devices are purchased for a reasonable price at the commissary. As a result, TV can be heard despite noisy surroundings.

One thing that can't be controlled is when counts take place and how long they take to clear. They are the bane of television watchers. You might be in the middle of watching a drama or sports event when you hear the dreadful words "count time." That means you have to go to your bunk. There is no reason to delay going because the TV will have already been turned off. The on-off switch is usually controlled at the officers' station, a reinforced Plexiglass enclosure sometimes referred to as "the bubble." You are reminded by the officer that the sooner the count clears, the quicker you can return to your viewing.

But by the time you get back to it, chances are that the show you wanted to see is over. Most counts don't clear quickly. There is human error in counting, inmate error in not being where they are supposed to be, and other factors. Except for violence and open rebellion, nothing is taken more seriously in prison than counts. If a warden can't find all prison inmates, what good is he or she? Helping prisoners prepare for release may be a good thing, and safeguarding them from abusive fellow inmates and staff even better. But if a warden can't keep prisoners from getting away, their job will go to someone who can. The count is conducted several times a day to make sure that no one has left without a judge's seal of approval.

Besides the counts, there are other interruptions that can put TV watching and similar recreational activities on hold. Lockdowns are common. They occur when an emergency, or threat of an emergency, presents itself. If an officer is hurt, a lockdown will occur while an investigation is done. If there is a security breach, such as a rope or an escape tool found, there will be a lockdown. Even when a rumor circulates that something bad will happen, the

warden will freeze the compound while officers can check it out. There are instances where prisons are locked down for months at a time. If it means preventing the loss of life, or unauthorized departure by inmates, a warden will issue such an order.

Modern prisons are designed to be open arrangements so that inmates have some freedom of movement. This not only helps them from going stir crazy, but is a cost-effective way to operate the place. When prisoners can travel from one building to another for various needs, it cuts down on the need for staff to bring necessities to them. An example is the feeding arrangement in prison. There is a central kitchen and cafeteria, the chow hall, where inmates go three times a day for their meals. If the meals have to be brought to them, as is the case of jail where prisoners are mostly confined to cells, it is more costly.

While prisons are largely open, they are also designed to be closed up quickly. In a lockdown, the place closely resembles a jail. Until the state of emergency ends and the prison is back to normal, all activities are curtailed. Even the chow hall may be shut down for a time as bag lunches are brought to inmates. In a gradual resumption of movement, the prisoners may be marched to the chow hall in single file with several officers accompanying them; they are counted upon their arrival and their return. Most nighttime activities outside the housing unit are suspended.

Even a lengthy lockdown is modified after a while to provide some freedom. Otherwise inmates would be pushed to take matters in their own hands, such as starting fires and making toilets overflow. Plus all manner of debris and waste might be thrown from tiers. A mess results, with accompanying loss of staff morale, if not staff itself. It is something no warden wants to contend with. Better to lift the lockdown as soon as it is safe to do so. The first things to be resumed are all regular evening activities in the housing units. The TV is again turned on. Inmates can also cluster together for other nighttime amusements.

Card games are common in prison. Often, bets are made. How can this occur when inmates can't have money? They can promise each other goods from the commissary. That amounts to IOUs. More preferred by prisoners is betting with unused postage stamps. These are the equivalent of cash in prison. While you can't use them as such at the commissary, you can trade them with other prisoners for anything you might need. There are even a few companies on the outside that cater to prison gamblers and will send a money order to their account equal to 60 percent or so of whatever

unused stamps inmates send them. These companies are advertised in *Prison Legal News* and other popular publications that inmates read.

All this may sound sinister, and indeed it is since gambling is a bad idea under any circumstance. Especially in prison it can be a problem since nerves are frayed and paranoia–"Have you been cheating me?"–runs high. But there is a form of gambling practiced in prison that presents no risk of conflict. Fortunately, it is the most common type you will find there.

You see it when a card game ends and the loser is made to "pay up." He does so with great fanfare, usually under the gaze of other inmates. All join in to do the counting. Their goal is to make sure that the loser pays in full. He gets on the floor and begins. "One, two, three…" When he completes the 20 or so pushups he has bet, his debt is paid. He now begins another game with the intent of forcing the same fate on his opponent. The odd thing about this is that if the obviously health-conscious players were not engaged with cards, they would probably be exercising in some fashion elsewhere. The games are therefore all good-natured.

Board games are also common in the evening, checkers and chess being the most popular. Scrabble, Monopoly and other standards can similarly be found. Whatever the game, there are prisoners waiting to take on winners. Beyond games and TV, there is "mail call." That's when you find out who your friends and enemies are on the outside. It's hard to believe that people would write condemning letters to their friends and relatives in prison. But they do. An example is when an ex-spouse writes. Here is an excerpt from a letter sent to an inmate by his bitter estranged wife. It contains more clichés than creative thoughts, but is clearly coming from the heart, though a foul one. "Heard you finally got caught. I couldn't be happier. You are an evil fuck who deserves everything you've got coming. While you are there, I hope you get cancer of the penis."

Most letters received by prisoners are, fortunately, loving and supportive. If they were not, the high suicide rate in prison would be even greater. Sadly, more people die by their own hands in prison than are murdered. That is a reflection of the relatively good job that wardens do in keeping inmates safe, and the lousy job outsiders do in keeping them hopeful and optimistic about their future. One inmate in Florida practically went into a catatonic state when he got a letter from his mother in the last of his 11 years in prison. "I love you dearly and you will always be my son. But I

want to change our plans about you living with me when you get out. I just can't handle that kind of pressure at this point. It has taken me awhile to look good again in the eyes of my neighbors, and I want to keep it that way. Hope you understand and will accept this. Love, Mom."

In addition to receiving and reading letters, evenings are the time to write "kites." That's a prison term for letters, probably derived from the fact that the flying contraptions can go over prison walls and be seen by people on the other side. Letters from prisoners are an ancient tradition, though now falling somewhat by the wayside due to the wide use of phones by inmates. More about that in a moment.

Letters are written by prisoners with a number of goals in mind. Some write to stay in touch, to let their friends and loved ones know they are not forgotten. By the same token, they hope the free-worlders will not have forgotten them. One of the worst things about being in prison is the feeling that you are not remembered. Once in the U.S. there were laws saying that if a man's sentence exceeded five years, he was declared legally dead. That meant his wife could marry without benefit of divorce, his wealth used by others, his property sold. This happens today, without such a law. Inmates are looked upon as the departed, and not the dearly departed. Their enemies grow more hostile and their friends more distant. No wonder so much letter writing is furiously engaged in by inmates. It's their last hope.

Much of their correspondence writing expresses fury. There is hostility about the fact that visits and letters are not more frequent; that requests to handle personal matters on the outside are not followed with urgency; that loved ones are having too much fun in their absence, including extramarital fun. Such letters usually lengthen the distance between insiders and outsiders. Free people resent that they are being asked to add responsibilities to their already busy lives. In some ways, they consider the man or woman in prison freer than they are. Outsiders indeed have less leisure time, more bills to pay, and work harder to make ends meet. They also have emergencies. Prison, they believe, does not constitute an emergency. It's merely another type of living, and largely one of the inmate's own choosing. Even if the prisoner is innocent or violated a victimless law, he or she could have exerted greater caution to avoid prison, they believe. If the convicted didn't want to get burned, they should have stayed clear of fire.

In view of such opinions and low priority treatment of inmates by most outside acquaintances, the old law that declared them dead made sense. At least prisoners then knew where they stood. Today prisoners often resemble the walking dead. They have not yet been buried but are considered far from alive by the outside world. When visits are made to prisoners, they resemble outings to a cemetery. There is crying, hand-wringing, and other carryings on by visitors. Looking at the inmate is like viewing a gravestone. It is not an easy time for either the visitor or the visited.

What can a prisoner write after such a visit? That it was pleasant, that it was productive, that it was hopeful, that it was happy? Or should he tell the truth that he now resides in a different world from outsiders, that they live in the world of the living and he in the world of the dead? Because these spheres are diametrically different, communicating across them is close to impossible. Over time, visits get rare and often end completely. No wonder that recidivism is high for people incarcerated for long periods. Many seek to return to the world of the prison that they know and understand, where the language of callousness and casualness they have learned is spoken.

Still they write letters hoping to connect to someone, somewhere. Even the dead can dream. Some of the letter writing by prisoners takes on an odd tone. Rather than reaching out for love and understanding, they reach for anything they can get. Inmates who have given up on the outside world and the people in it have adopted an "us-versus-them" stance. If outsiders can no longer be their friends and confidants, they will be their victims.

Inmates don't have much in their arsenal of weapons to exploit outsiders. But they have their pens and can use them freely without a conscience to confine them. To tell outsiders whatever they want to hear. Then ask them to send the one thing free-worlders can easily supply: money. It might be a few dollars or a few hundred dollars. The amount doesn't matter. A thief gets a thrill out of a successful caper no matter the take.

"Dear Beloved Aunt Judy, I am writing you before my birthday [or Christmas, or whatever] to let you know how bad things are here. The food is inedible, the water undrinkable, and our clothing pure rags. Inmates are getting sick and dying here all the time." [More lies are here told since the inmate has plenty of time to think them up.] "My only chance of survival is to buy what I need at the commissary. Won't you send me a little money so I don't wind up

in the newspapers as another casualty? Fifty dollars would hold me over for a month; $200 for four months so I won't have to trouble you for awhile. I know that Jesus will bless you, and I will too. I know I did wrong and deserve my 20 years in prison for the marijuana I grew. You were right when you said I shamed the family. I am so very sorry. But do I deserve to die? That would only splash me and my crime all over the newspapers again. I've done enough damage to you and the family and don't want that to happen. Please help me survive by sending money today. Thank you from the bottom of my barely-beating heart. Your loving nephew, Darrin."

Many prisoners engage in such fabrication. They have no misgivings about their deceitfulness. All is fair in love and war, and especially when inmates find themselves in the middle of these two conditions. They feel they can no longer be honest in what they say to get a positive response. Why spin one's wheels and increase hostility with outsiders when it's easy to roll over and play dead, at the same time increasing the funds in one's commissary account.

The use of telephones in prison is common. Here a new form of exploitation enters the picture. Phones in most prisons carry an exorbitant charge for their use. Generally speaking, you call collect and the receiving party ends up with a whopping phone bill. A single call can end up costing $10 or more, even a local one. Some families and friends are paying more for calls from prison acquaintances monthly than they pay for rent or mortgages. Here is another powerful reason for outsiders to break off contact with inmates they once knew and loved. Their upkeep is more expensive than a funeral plot. Phone contact is expensive because communication companies and prison administrators care more about profits than people. The companies know if they get an exclusive contract to provide inmate phone service they can charge whatever they wish. Without the need to contend with competition or conscience, the sky's the limit. Those who run prisons like the scheme because of kickbacks generously provided by the companies. The payments swell their budgets, allowing for salary increases, fringe benefits and other additives.

Prison routines on a day-to-day basis don't vary much. We have seen what goes on during a typical weekday in prison. On weekends and holidays nothing is much different. Saturdays are filled with competitive sports, Sundays with religious services. To an inmate who has a do-nothing job during the week as most do, the

weekend and midweek days are indistinguishable. Instead of loafing at their work station, they get to do it in their living quarters.

Special foods are served on Christmas and other holidays. But they are not very special compared to outside fare. Institutional food has its limitations. When you cook for a family, you have certain options. When the number is over 1,000 and security measures apply, you are severely restrained.

Still, the holidays offer advantages. There's likely to be better-than-usual entertainment on the compound. A prison band, or several, might play. Having rehearsed for months for a holiday show, and knowing the songs that their fellow prisoners like, they provide a good time for all. Perhaps an outside group will come to add to the festivities. That can have the advantage of inmates seeing members of the opposite sex perform. It is always nice when old sexual feelings return, even if it is just to know you still have them.

On Christmas, many prisons give gifts. They might consist of bags of snacks and candies, usually items not available in the limited commissary offerings. Again, a feeling of normalcy will touch inmates.

All that's missing is everything else prisoners once held dear. But they are in no position to turn back the hands of time. They can't even return to their early days in prison when there were lots of people on the outside who loved and cared about them. These people regarded them then as living and breathing human beings who might yet give the world something of value. That was before they were seen as the corpses that society judged them to be. It was before outsiders saw the deterioration of the inmates' lives, before they smelled them rotting away. When they realized their incarcerated loved ones were gone, truly gone, and would never come back in any recognizable form, they acted. They decided to pull the plug on the inmates' life support system and let them go. They were that life support.

It was not pure selfishness or emotional cost saving that caused them to do this. There was fear. They wondered how a person could be subjected to the torture of being in prison day after day, year after year, and not come out unscathed. Going into prison with certain faults, how will those faults be fed and mutated by the end of a long sentence? Surely, prisoners will come out as monsters, madmen, or mindless wards with no goals or values except the prison motto: live minute to minute without a thought for tomorrow.

George Orwell in his book *1984* had much to say about the effects of confinement and psychological torture. In the totalitarian society he created in his fiction, there was no need for dictator Big Brother to kill the enemies of the state. All he had to do was subject them to correctional treatment, which like today did not involve physical pain. Rather it was the prospect of facing one's worst fears. Prison, to most people, is their worst fear. And when they get there they find out why. It is a place of solitude, of reflection, of penitence, all in excess. Like water, which is not a bad thing in itself, when applied in a certain way and over an extended period, it becomes an ancient Chinese torture. Orwell's hero, Winston Smith, came out of jail a shell, which he soon filled with alcohol. He didn't need to be killed by Big Brother since he had already killed himself. Still, no one lives forever. One day while in his alcoholic stupor, someone put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger. He was shot not for being a threat to the state, but for being a drain on it.

A day in prison is a day in hell. But only if you are still among the living; only if you have not yet "shuffled off that mortal coil," to quote Shakespeare. The flames of hell–the daily longing, oppression, injustice–cannot be felt by the dead. It is not surprising that people who adjust well to prison do badly upon release. When one accepts bondage and worse for an extended period of time, adjusting to freedom is difficult.

The fault is not with prison officials. They are trying to survive too. It is much easier for them to run a prison that is transformed into a cemetery than be a conclave of angry convicts. Kill the spirit and the body will be easy to handle.

One of the paradoxes of prison is that drugs are easy to get there. People are surprised by this since many men and women end up in prison due to drug use. Inside, inmates can get high to their heart's delight. There are illegal drugs, anything available on the street. It comes in through staff, visitors and other means, such as hidden in shipments of prison supplies which are often opened and stored by inmate trustees. But prisoners don't have to rely on illegal drugs to get high since prescribed ones are plentiful. All one needs to do is go to a prison psychologist and complain of "adjustment" problems, adding in feelings of "self destruction." The "psych" will have the inmate zonked out with happy pills soon enough, perhaps with an extra supply for his friends.

The American Correctional Association, representing wardens and staff, publishes a magazine for its members called *Corrections Today*. In one issue an interview was conducted with a film

producer who made a stereotypical, highly distorted movie about prison life. It showed daily stabbings, weekly murders, and nightly rapes. When the inmates were not doing awful things to each other, they were planning or participating in rebellions against staff.

"How can you make a movie like that," the magazine editor asked the producer, "when it has little relation to the truth. Prisons are not dangerous places. It's a misconception. Statistics prove that. A person is more likely to get hurt on the outside than inside prison."

The magazine editor felt it had boxed the producer into a corner, to the point that he probably felt sorry he had agreed to the interview. He surprised them by admitting that his movie distorted the facts. But he felt justified. The violence in his movie, he said, was a metaphor for the stultifying, mind-numbing nature of prison. It's torture that's slow and methodical. There is no way of dramatically showing on film people being psychologically slain without mercy in prison, so he sought to present this horror in the form of bodies being destroyed and degraded. In one sense, the filmmaker had demonstrated favoritism to prison staff. It is much easier to repair bodies than it is to salvage crushed minds.

Like a tale of horror in which the dead walk from their graves, release from prison is a similar scenario. In a horror story, once the undead pass the cemetery gates, the community is in for a reign of terror. The once-living creatures have no regard or respect for normal people. Humans are regarded as so much clutter to be disposed of. Since they are dead, they want others to share their fate. They walk around with vacant eyes and soulless strides until the day they stand before a judge who sends them back to the cemetery where they know they belong. That's what recidivism is all about.

4. ROLE OF THE ARTS IN PRISON

Art can be an antidote to prison. It is a way of keeping the spirit alive and affording the inmate who engages in art a chance to succeed upon release. Rather than leaving prison as a mindless menace, he or she can exit with the outlook and opportunities of someone who is esthetically nourished.

Let's take a look at one prison artist. His name is Rene. He was given a 20-year sentence for robbery, assault, and kidnapping. Now 31 years old, he's in the middle of completing his sentence.

Rene was once an angry man. That was at the beginning of his sentence. Soon that anger transformed into passivity. He slept 15 hours a day and didn't care about anything or anyone. When he wasn't sleeping he was watching TV, reading useless novels or taking long showers. Then he found art and his life turned around. He again became part of the living world.

In his art he distanced himself from the world around him. More importantly, he insulated himself from destructive memories of the outside world and the grave injustice it had done to him. Rene was an innocent man who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. He was at that place to do a benevolent act, not unlike the most famous martyr in history: Jesus Christ. As the saying goes, no good deed goes unpunished.

Rene's journey to prison started when he traveled with a friend to another friend's house. There had been discord between his two acquaintances, and Rene sought to be the mediator. He wanted to patch things up. In going to the house, the two young men brought a third acquaintance who had offered his car for the trip. The driver said he would wait for them and would stay out of the way. Little did the two friends who drove with him know he was a thief. This would be an opportunity for him burglarize the home.

When they arrived, Rene walked to the front door with his friend Hank, who was a safe distance behind. Eddie, the driver was still in the car, his eyes fixed on the house and its various entrances.

Hearing a knock on his door, John opened it. He wasn't in a good mood, having just had an argument with his girlfriend who was upstairs. He demanded to know what Rene wanted. Suddenly the cantankerous and sometimes volatile John froze. He spotted Hank behind Rene. For a second his eyes and his blood pumped hard. Then he acted, throwing a punch that landed squarely on Rene's jaw. A solid man of large stature, Rene was more stunned

than hurt. He put his arm around John to hold him still. There was no injury to John and the immobilization did not last long. Still, in the eyes of police who later came to investigate, the act of keeping John immobile was assault and kidnapping. After all, this took place at John's house where Rene had been uninvited.

The police might have never been called if something else hadn't occurred at the moment the scuffle took place. Eddie had seen his opportunity to get into the house, and he took it. Inside, he loaded his pockets with any money, jewelry and other valuables he could find. Then he came upon John's girlfriend and intimidated her to lead him to other items of worth. "Your friend John owes some debts, and I'm here to collect!" he said. Eddie had never met John but knew his name, knew this was his house, and knew he was well off. Scared, the girlfriend obliged. Eddie couldn't hear the distant police sirens, but they were on the way.

A neighbor, seeing a physical encounter at the front door as a stranger entered a side window, had called the police. Rene and Hank heard the sirens and went to the car. Seeing that Eddie wasn't there, they called for him. No response. "Eddie's an odd guy," said Hank. "He probably decided to take a walk up the street. Let's get in the car and go look for him."

That's what they did and, not finding him, kept on going. The last thing they wanted to do was deal with police while the homeowner, their ex-friend John, was still angry. It seemed a wise decision since the police did not come chasing after them.

A few days later, Rene and Hank heard what happened. Eddie was caught red-handed and jewel-laden when the cops arrived. He was immediately booked and jailed on burglary charges. After a month passed, Rene and Hank were also arrested.

Eddie had made a deal with prosecutors as his trial approached. He would give up the two men. To do that he had to concoct a story to implicate them in his actions.

"We planned the whole thing together," he said. "The only thing that went wrong was that those two fuckers left without me. Guess they got scared. We were going to split everything three ways. In fact, the job wasn't my idea. I didn't know where the house was. They showed me it and gave me orders of what to do there. How could I say no? It was two against one."

He got a deal of five years in prison for agreeing to give this statement at Rene and Hank's trial. Prosecutors believed they had an open and shut case. They even had John's statement that there

had been much friction between him and Hank. That was the motivation for the robbery the police believed, beyond the loot.

About the hapless Rene, police surmised he was the ringleader, and not just because the true robber had said so. He was the only one with a prior criminal record, and it was for robbery.

When he was a young man barely out of his teenage years he was spotted in the middle of a drug market. Police charged him with distribution. He faced ten years in prison with a minimum mandatory drug sentence, and he did not see a way out of it. Then the prosecutor approached Rene's attorney. There was an unsolved crime, a robbery that had occurred near the drug market. The man who did it vaguely fit Rene's description. The prosecutor wanted to close that case. If Rene confessed to it, he would get a three-year sentence, guaranteed.

He went for it. His lawyer had told him that drug laws were strictly enforced with maximum punishments meted out. Rene said, "But there aren't any victims in drug violations." His lawyer said, "That's the problem. Were there any victims there might be some wiggle room." "I don't get it," Rene said. The lawyer answered, "When you have a victim, you know if the person was really hurt and how much the loss was to the person or his property. But in a drug violation, society as a whole is said to be the victim. It's like disobeying one of the Ten Commandments by committing a sacrilegious act. Another example is treason. That carries the death penalty." So Rene pled guilty to the robbery.

Rene's decision to plead to something he didn't do was now coming back to haunt him. How could he defend himself against the current charges? What jury would believe him when they learned of his "prior?" He didn't care. He would stand his ground and go to trial.

And stand his ground he did. Right to the point that he was buried in it. He was convicted on all counts. On the day that the jury deliberated his fate, a newspaper article appeared about a young couple who went to the house of an elderly pair they know. The older couple had a good reputation in the neighborhood for being helpful to all, particularly youth in trouble. The young couple went to them under the pretext of getting help. But their true intention was robbery. It went wrong and the older man and woman were killed. The young murderers left with some of the household furnishings and the couple's credit cards. They bragged to their friends about a successful heist, which is how they got caught. The

full story, including their bragging, appeared in that day's newspaper.

The jury read it when they had breakfast in the morning. When they arrived in court to decide the guilt or innocence of Rene, they felt the weight of the world on their shoulders. The criminal world. Maybe Rene really was innocent, that his story of ignorance of what robber Eddie did was true. Who knew? They weren't God with the Almighty's omni-presence and omni-wisdom. What they did know, from newspapers and TVs, was that crime in their city was out-of-control and that anyone could be the next victim. Better to convict Rene just in case he was guilty. Isn't it always better to err on the side of caution? In sentencing Rene to 20 years in prison, the judge felt the same way. He too was influenced by the media. Besides being a judge, he lived in the same community with loved ones to protect.

As a judge, he paid particular attention to stories in the newspapers about "lenient" magistrates. Harsh ones never made the papers, at least not in a negative way. He also felt he must punish Rene severely for another reason. The defendant had used the court's scarce resources to go to trial. Exercising that right is a rarity in America today. Most men and women who are arrested plead guilty to something, anything. Over 90 percent of them do this to avoid a trial. They know how harsh judges are when you "waste their time" with a trial. It threatens the assembly-line system of justice in America, which accounts for the high incarceration rate. More than nine out of ten defendants bring their own heads to the chopping block rather than have a jury do it for them. They know that the axing will be much bloodier if others lead them there.

After his sentencing, Rene was returned to jail. He had been there for several months as he awaited his trial. His lawyer was unsuccessful in getting him reasonable bond. The bail judge pointed to both Rene's prior conviction on a similar charge, and the severity of the new accusation. He said that Rene was a "danger to the community" and posed a "risk of flight."

After returning to the jail following sentencing, he continued to engage in his daily jailhouse routine. By now he was resigned to his fate, his lawyer having told him all along that he must prepare for the worst. Besides, he knew he wouldn't be in jail for more than a few weeks before being moved to greener pastures. No, he didn't have suicide in mind. The greener pastures would be the grass he would find in prison, having been there before. Unlike jail, which is highly confining and all concrete, prisons offer more breathing

room and greenery. A jail's rec yard is all concrete, while prison rec fields are more like parks. You might even find a tree or two there.

The highlight of Rene's days in jail was sitting with a friend in the common area of his cellblock. In that section, there were rows of tables that resembled picnic tables. Except these were made of heavy-duty steel. Also, the backless benches on each side of them were welded to the tables. These fixtures, in whole or in part, weren't going anywhere.

The two men sat and talked, though Rene did most of the talking. His friend Henry was busy drawing but politely nodded his head occasionally to acknowledge Rene's presence. The drawing was done on standard #10 business envelopes. For some reason, these were plentiful in the jail that month. Plain paper, meanwhile, was near impossible to get. The commissary ran out of it and the jail didn't have any to give inmates. When Henry approached a "white shirt" (lieutenant) about getting some from the prison administrative office, she said, "We ran out ourselves. We can't even do memos. Paper's on order and should be here soon."

That didn't stop Henry from doing his job. He considered drawing his job because he got paid for it. There wasn't any money exchanged but when Henry finished drawing on an envelope he would offer it to others. Payment would be a small bag of candy from the commissary, which carried a price of 53 cents. The bag contained 21 pieces of hard candy, five ounces. It was a bargain, but so was the art that Henry traded for it.

You couldn't say that Henry was a diversified artist. But he was good at what he did. The men appreciated him because Henry brought beauty into their cold and colorless surroundings. Not only the men but their families appreciated Henry. The outsiders received his envelopes from their incarcerated loved ones who purchased them from Henry. The brief notes on the inside would be written by the prisoners on the backs of any paper they could find: a legal document they had received from their lawyer, a prison form, a piece of unused toilet tissue or, for slightly more bulk, the outside wrapper of a roll.

Henry's drawings consisted mostly of flowers and hearts. Those were his specialties and he rarely deviated from them. He was also good at calligraphy, which he used to put the names of people furnished by his customers into his drawings. "To Mylene from Alexander, with all my love" is one example.

When he got to the jail a few months before, Henry was already versed in his drawing technique, though a bit rusty. He had

developed his skill during the tail end of a five-year sentence he had previously served. Henry was back in jail because of that earlier bad-check writing offense. He hadn't broken the law again but had broken a few appointments with his parole officer. Henry had apologized to the judge when he was brought before her on the parole violation. He said the missed appointments were unavoidable and asked for another chance. But he didn't say it very convincingly. Henry actually considered his period of imprisonment better than his time on parole. He disliked his parole officer, a man who offered more obstacles than assistance. The officer's attitude was negative and demeaning. Had he been a military officer addressing a grunt, it might have been understandable. But he was supposed to be a bridge to the outside world for returning inmates. Instead of helping Henry on the road to re-entry, he delighted in creating roadblocks.

Upon his arrival in jail, Henry did not appear unhappy in the least. He knew he was there to do his "back-up time," the remainder of his parole period. When he got out next time he would truly be free. His only regret was that he had left prison in the first place. He should have refused to go, should have turned down parole. Then he would not have had to contend with a disrespectful and degrading parole officer.

He knew how to live in jail without getting in trouble. Mind your own business, stay busy, and don't let your temper get the best of you. The last thing that Henry wanted was a new charge. It happened often when an inmate assaulted a prisoner or officer, destroyed something, or got falsely accused by a desperate snitch. Best to have an outlet, and Henry knew the perfect one.

In getting back into his art, he didn't have much to work with in the beginning. Besides being limited to envelopes, he only had pencils to draw with. The commissary was not only out of paper but pens as well. Drawing with pencils proved satisfying, however. After all, graphite renderings are considered a highly respected form of artistic expression. Still, Henry wanted more. One day he came upon an inmate who wanted a drawing done and had a pen to trade for the art. Henry accepted and suddenly had two drawing implements. His drawings now took on a more dramatic tone. He outlined the flower, heart or words he created with the pen, then did shadings and shadows with the pencil. Customers called them classy. A short time later, he ran into a prisoner who had a special pen, very unusual for the jail though not for the outside. It contained red ink. The inmate who had it was an aide in the jail

GED program where inmates sought to obtain their high school equivalency diploma. Such pens were used to correct practice exams.

A barter was arranged so that the pen came into Henry's possession. That was the ticket, he knew, to liven up his drawings. He used the new pen for special effects, such as filling in the heart with red or outlining the word love with the new color. It was also effective in making a broken heart look that way, complete with dripping blood. And of course red roses could now be drawn to near perfection.

Every morning after the count cleared, Henry sat at one of the heavy picnic tables in the day room to do his drawings. He could have stayed in his cell since that's an option that inmates have. In jail, inmates have relatively little to do compared to prison, and little space to do it in. Still, they can go out of their cells for most of the day. Usually they're locked in only for the counts: one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one in the evening. They can each last several hours, depending on how quickly they clear. Inmates are also locked in at night when it's time to go to bed.

There are other times that inmates are locked into their cells. If a fight breaks out, if there's a shortage of staff, if maintenance has to be done in the cellblock, or if there's any inkling among staff that trouble might be brewing. Lockdowns in jail are more common than in prison because jails are more dangerous for all concerned. The inmates are in far closer proximity to each other than in prison. The resulting congestion and lack of movement is not a good thing. Add to that the absence of activities in jail and you have a potentially volatile situation.

Understanding this volatility, Henry didn't mind the lockdowns. He knew that being in his cell would keep him out of harm's way, while keeping inmates who annoyed him and whom he might harm out of his way. It's not that he was violent, but he was human. No one has a disposition that's always calm and under control. Insanity, temporary or long-term, can infect anyone. In jail, it's easy to break and go off the deep end, even if only for a few minutes.

Henry knew it was also a mistake to stay in his cell all the time. Prisoners have to practice their fleeting social graces in order to preserve a few; they have to communicate with others in order to keep declining mental health from completely slipping away. So Henry often did his drawing at one of the steel tables.

The morning was his favorite time, right after the 9 AM count cleared. Most of the men were still in bed and would remain there

for the rest of the morning. Many had trouble sleeping the night before, insomnia being a common jail ailment. They laid awake thinking of the worst, usually meaning the worst sentence they could receive. Or the worst that could happen to their family in their absence. Or the worst that could occur to them in jail. Many were afraid of sleep because of the dreams they might have. The men were like battered ships that tottered in rough seas. It would not take much of a gale to sink them completely. When they didn't sleep they fought the oppression of memory. Some went to their cell doors to call out to or make a new friend among other prisoners. Conversations took place with multiple participants. The sound could grow very loud but no one complained. All knew that suffering was being alleviated in this way. Somehow, it helped everyone sleep better.

Occasionally late at night, someone would begin a familiar song and others would join in. It was art, performing art, and the results could be miraculous. It might be a gospel song, but more often it was a popular tune. Not everyone shared the same religion, and no one wanted dissension at a late hour. The leader of each song was appeared spontaneously. If you knew the words, you were the leader. The quality of your voice didn't matter since you would not be alone for long. Others would lift you up with unison singing and harmonies, and this would lift them up also. If you were lying on your bunk, you might be lulled to sleep by the sounds. If you were part of the singing you would have an advantage when you finally did lie down. Rather than unpleasant memories of the past, your mind would be filled with the words and melody of the art you just created. Your accomplishment would be admirable under any circumstances, but here it's a lifesaver, giving a new perspective, a new lease on life.

Henry fell asleep early each night as he listened to the live radio of the tier, which consisted of the men openly conversing or their impromptu concerts. His mind was not as troubled as others. While some prisoners were looking forward to the day of their release, Henry was looking forward to the next morning when he would resume his art. Like everybody else, he wanted to be home; he missed the hustle and bustle of the outside world. But Henry's art had allowed him to put that in perspective. He saw that the world wasn't black and white, but rather shades of gray. Just like the shadings of his drawings. Had he been home he would have many responsibilities and different priorities. Art would not be one of them as much as he and others enjoyed his work. He would not

have been able to afford to do it with bills to pay and errands to run. A trip to the supermarket for milk, for example, took an hour. Here a container of milk was brought to his cell each day as he planned his next art piece. All he had to do was drink it when he was ready. People who go off to college or to art school miss their old life too. But their accomplishments and advancements soon outweigh their homesickness.

During the mornings as Henry labored at one of the tables, he invariably attracted attention from other prisoners who saw his creations in progress. Traffic was light and passersby could linger. Because there are no jobs in jail for inmates except limited trustee work, they have the option of sleep or anything else they chose, for better or worse. For better because their time is their own; for worse because many don't know what to do with that time. The last thing they want is more hours to think. Sleeping late each day helps reduce that time.

Others like Henry who get up and leave their cell enjoy a relatively tranquil period. Henry got a good head start on the day. He knew it would get noisy later, and there might be a fight or other turmoil. But by then he would have already launched his artistic creations for the day. Once in flight they would sail easily over any battle taking place.

Beyond wanting to get out of his cell as early as possible to enjoy less claustrophobic surroundings, Henry liked to do his art on one of the tables because it put his work on display. Since this was gainful employment for him, as well as a labor of love, he needed all the advertising he could get. The inmates who passed by his table often remarked about Henry's drawings in a kind way. Sometimes they commissioned a work or bought one of the completed envelopes that Henry kept on hand. He had made extra envelopes on days when he had no orders. They represented his inventory of generic renderings. Flowers, hearts and words that could apply to anyone. "Miss you." "Love you." "Take good care of yourself." If you wanted something quickly, these ready-made envelopes were your ticket. Impulse buying in prison is as common as it is on the outside.

With Rene often sitting at the table with him, Henry spent the entire morning immersed in his art. The light, the attention, and the expansiveness of the setting inspired him. At 11:30 AM he would return to his cell like everyone else. That was the time that lunch came, give or take half an hour. Trying to eat as healthy as possible in jail, Henry had opted for a "special diet." That was a tray of food

that differed from normal fare in that it had less fat content. For example, noodles were served without gravy, chicken without skin, dessert without cake or cookies. For the final course, you got an apple or some other fruit. It might not be as big or as fresh as you would get in a supermarket but Henry treasured every piece of fruit. Usually, he would save it for a snack between meals as something to look forward to. Or eat it mid-afternoon when he began a new art session. It was a structured way of getting started, a celebration of sorts. A little bit like a bon voyage party when a ship sets sail. Henry's art vessel sailed each day for ports known and unknown. Sometimes his art had a clear objective, other times it was exploratory. At all times it took him away, far away, from his immediate surroundings. While other inmates were tortured with bleak thoughts, Henry entranced himself with beautiful images, and got paid for it.

But all work and no play is not good for anyone. Even a good thing like art is something a person can overdue. Henry sought to live a balanced life in jail, which he had also attempted to do on the outside. His parole officer, his boss and his girlfriend sometimes got in the way of that. But none of those people could get to him in jail. He smiled at times to think of his newfound freedom. The clarity of his thinking would not have been possible without his art. It took away the pain long enough for Henry to come to grips with his status in a realistic way. The art allowed him to step back, to think clearly, to assess his new world with facts rather than negative emotions; to get over the shock of living in a nation that would needlessly throw its citizens on a trash heap and leave them there for months, years or forever. The garbage pile known as imprisonment.

After objectively assessing the facts of his situation, Henry realized that the house of horrors in which inmates reside was largely of their own making. Like a spook house in an amusement park designed to frighten and intimidate, jail can be harmless if you don't take it seriously. The key is to always stay calm, to not lose your head. Like a horror attraction that warns people with heart conditions not to enter, jail should carry the same warning. Other advice would be: Don't panic, don't seek an early exit before the ride is over and don't try to stand when going through tunnels. Permitted are yelling or, better yet, singing; or any other form of art. After all, the entire place is a work of art fabricated to instill a sense of terror. It has to go far enough so people feel they are getting their money's worth. Taxpayers must know that a jail is sufficiently scary. Whether a jail, or an outside attraction, such an adventure

can only be designed to go so far. Once it steps over the line and people get physically hurt, inevitable lawsuits and political pressures will close it down. You can leave shaken from the experience, especially if you have a vivid imagination. But you won't leave physically harmed if you follow rules and maintain self control.

As a seasoned inhabitant of the prison world, Henry knew this. He also had a preference for jail over prison, which few others could understand. Inmates have more room in prison, more options, more diversions. Why would anyone prefer the compressed space and lack of planned activities that exist in jail?

If you are an artist, you would understand. Shakespeare, the world's most accomplished playwright, understood. He said, "Even if I were bound in a nutshell I would count myself a king of infinite space." One way to have that perspective is to be devoted to your art.

Henry had breakfast every morning at four AM, complete with coffee. The meal was brought to his cell, as it was to the cells of others. But Henry didn't return to sleep after having breakfast as other men did. To Henry, this was the beginning of a new day and he wanted to make it as full as possible. Still, this was not the time for his art. Seeking to exercise self discipline, he scheduled his art for later in the morning, after the first count. Then he would be more alert, more receptive to new artistic ideas, more aware and sensitive to his every line and shading.

At four AM, he had had only four hours of sleep. But who could return to sleep after having breakfast and coffee? The answer is just about everyone in jail, their state of depression and lack of direction being great. Those who don't go back to bed are the pitiful souls who are ordered to go to the bullpen just inside the entrance of the jail. There they are handcuffed and shackled, then crammed onto a barred-windowed, heavily-guarded bus to take them on an excursion of high anxiety. A day in court!

Most men Henry knew feared this more than anything they might find in jail. Upon arrival in the courthouse basement, they encountered guards who were abusive in word and deed. The guards could afford to be sadistic because they saw new faces everyday. Unlike officers at the jail who acted more civilized because they encountered the same inmates day after day, the court basement lock-up was like Grand Central Station taken over by terrorists. The guards even looked the part with their tight-fitting clothes. After being pushed around verbally and sometimes physically by this

brutal lot, inmates went in front of judge. They were there for a trial, a guilty plea, or a sentencing. Considering the odds they were up against in getting a fair hearing, the women usually left in tears while the men sometimes on a stretcher. There has been more than one heart attack and stroke when a judge made his final fiery pronouncement.

Back at the jail, most inmates remained in bed, like lambs waiting for slaughter. But Henry was not among them. He had started his day after breakfast, reading a lively book, or writing an even livelier letter. He planned to decorate the letter later with flowers along the edges. He would do it after count when he began to draw. After an hour of reading or writing, he grew tired. Time to go back to sleep and prepare for a full day, which would begin in a few hours. He dozed off as he waited for the first count to clear. When that happened, a voice on the loud speaker made the announcement. Such proclamations are a recent innovation at the jail. They are intended for both inmates and staff and they have the result of bringing the two groups closer together. That is a good thing in a place where miscommunication and misinformation can lead to unnecessary tension. The loud speakers in every tier not only provide information directed at prisoners but some words aimed specifically at officers. For example, if the officers are eligible to attend a training seminar, they will be informed in this public way. You might think that some rebellious inmates would make negative comments upon hearing such news, but they don't. If anything, the image of staff as professionals is enhanced when the announcements are made.

After the 9 AM count cleared, the electronically controlled cell doors were not immediately opened. An officer walking the tier first made a cursory inspection of each cell, looking for one thing. If the inmate's bed was made, the door would be opened. Of course if he was still sleeping, he wouldn't want his door open anyway.

Henry was anxious to get out. As soon as he heard the "count clear" announcement, he was up, dressed and making his bed. As he exited his cell on the tier and headed for the day room a few feet away, he recited to himself the words of Dr. Martin Luther King: "Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, I'm free at last."

It was relative freedom, of course. Still, it would grow and approach the real thing as Henry immersed himself in his art. He began his drawings, blocking out the world around him, just as outside artists do. You might think that Rene sitting next to him and making light conversation would be a reminder of where he was.

But the conversation dealt with art, not jail. And Rene was not showing signs of being a depressed or desperate inmate. He was simply another lover of art who wanted to delve more deeply into its mystery and its making. "How did you learn to do that? Where did you get the red pen? If you didn't have to use envelopes, what type of paper would you use? How many customers do you have?"

Henry answered all Rene's questions methodically. He paced his words with the careful and deliberate strokes he was making. "Wait till you get to prison," he told Rene. "You will have a lot of supplies to work with and a lot of people around to get advice from. Especially, the lifers. Some of them are true masters."

He knew Rene's tragedy in court. That he would be going to prison. For a long time. It was in the newspaper. Two men on the 150-man cellblock subscribed. That was enough to keep everyone informed. The paper came in the morning, and by the evening everyone knew what was in it, including the illiterate. Even without the newspaper, chances were that Henry would know about Rene. Word spreads quickly in the small confines of jail. Rene had told his roommate. He had to in order to get it off his chest, to relieve the pressure, to dissipate the intense pain he was feeling. And when you tell one person in this family of fugitives you tell all.

As the two men sat, talked and observed the art that was being created, the jail was slowly waking up. Two inmates in Henry's block were reading their newspapers, anxious to finish them for two reasons. First, by absorbing the news of the day they would be in demand as sources of information. Second, there was a long list of prisoners waiting to read the paper after them. The subscribers didn't want to be known as news hogs.

Other inmates awaked to use the phones. Eight phones hung against the wall in the day room. But only five worked. If you wanted to be sure of making a call, you had to get to the phones early. There were several phone hogs on the block. When it came to staying in touch with their family and friends, they didn't care what anyone called them. The phones resembled coin-operated devices in the way they were wall-mounted. But none took coins since no inmates had any. Prisoners' funds in their commissary accounts were used. When they ordered something from the commissary, which they could do once a week, the money was taken directly out of their accounts. The same thing happened when they made a phone call. Rates were affordable at this jail. Each local call cost $1.65 for up to 15 minutes. Long distance ones were more. If you didn't have money in your account, you could make

your calls collect. The receiving parties would have to pay, with an additional charge added to their bills.

Lunch arrived late morning. That meant everyone had to go back to their cells while meals were brought to them by the "detail" inmates: trustees. This lockdown was considered the best way to keep track in jails of meal distribution, making sure that nobody got more than one meal. An exception was sometimes made when a special TV program was on, such as a home team football game. Then the men lined up for their trays at the officer's station. The detail crew passed them out as one of its members marks off cell locations to minimize double dipping. It was not perfect but it kept the men happy who wanted to quickly return to their football program.

Henry ignored TV and took his tray back to his cell. It was quiet there since everyone was now in the noisy day room eating, talking and watching TV. Even his roommate was there, an amiable but sometimes loud individual whose ex-wife has charged him with violating a stay away order. He had sent her a greeting e-mail on her birthday and her new boyfriend saw it. She felt compelled to press charges.

Thanks to his art, Henry often went against the trends found in prison. No one tried to pressure him to do otherwise. They knew how much he valued his art and they respected him. Besides, as paying customers they wanted him to work under conditions in which he was comfortable. The happier he was, the better the art they would get for their money.

He rarely drew in the afternoon because of other things going on. These distractions he welcomed. They included "outside rec," which an officer jubilantly announced. The staffer wanted to get as many inmates out of the block and into the recreation yard as possible. His purpose was two-fold. One, it helped relieve stress that inmates often felt. Second, it helped the officers with their own stress by emptying the block of many of their wards. The fewer inmates there, the less likely the chance of trouble erupting. The national life expectancy of men and women in this profession is not high due to stress.

Whenever there was an "outside rec" call, Henry went. The call didn't come everyday since inclement weather, staff shortages, lockdowns and other things got in the way; so best to take advantage of it when it happened. An entire week could go by without outside rec.

There was also a chance of going to the law library in the afternoon. An inmate didn't need to do legal research to pleasantly pass an hour or so there. There were computers where they could practice their typing. They could print out a love letter to mom or a hate letter to a judge, even if the inmate didn't send it. If you wanted to do any legal research, there was an inmate paralegal on hand to give guidance. An inmate could find out why his life had been put on ice while legal maneuvering was occurring. But they shouldn't expect any startling revelations that will lead to freedom. As Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "The law is not common sense, it's experience." To make his point clearer, he also said, "The law is an ass."

Another count came in the late afternoon. Again, all the orange jumpsuit-clad chickens came home to roost. The cell doors were locked as two officers in each block made the rounds to tabulate the number of prisoners present. After making sure they came up with the same totals, one of them called in the figure to the jail's command center. There, the tabulations from all the blocks were added together to determine if the number of inmates counted totaled the jail's official population. If it did, the loudspeaker announced "count clear" and the cell doors were unlocked–maybe. The one thing standing in the way of that happening was the imminent arrival of dinner. If the food was on its way or had already arrived in the cellblock, the inmates would be kept in their cells until it was distributed. A look beyond the officers' Plexiglas-enclosed station would tell prisoners if the food was there. It came on a large rolling steel cart. It took a hefty inmate to bring it from the kitchen to an elevator and then to the block. It was packed with 150 trays that fit snugly one on top of the other. Each stack of 25 to fit into various compartments of the cart. The contraption and its components did the job of keeping the food warm.

After dinner the cells were again opened and the prisoners were free to roam the block. This served the purpose of allowing them to return the empty trays to the cart. If they didn't do that, the detail men with a supervising officer in tow had to spend a half hour or so collecting them from the cells. The officer came along to make sure there were no problems. Food can be a sensitive issue in prison, and the detail inmates usually get the brunt of complaints. If the food is cold, the portions small, or something about it unappetizing, prisoners will complain loudly. This can trigger a fight if an officer isn't present to cool things down. A typical fight happened when an officer walked away for a moment. Two prisoners jumped on and

punched a detail inmate. You might think this to be a terrible thing for two to gang up on one, but consider the facts. The detail man in question had a reputation for being an obnoxious bully. Only a few minutes before when the officer had turned his back, he showed his true colors. An inmate had complained about the food and the bully took it personally. He cursed at and challenged the complainer to fight him. He did this often when confronting prisoners older or smaller than him. When the man declined, the bully tossed a tray in his cell, hitting him in the head. A short time later, two friends of the stricken inmate who had themselves been insulted by the bully previously did something about it by jumping him. Everyone involved went to the hole, including the guy who had been hit by the tray. The rest of the block got locked down. When violence like this occurs, prison administrators don't want to take the chance that it might escalate.

After dinner, Henry was again in his creative mode. It didn't matter whether or not a disturbance or lockdown had occurred. He intended to stay in his cell anyway to pursue his art. Here he could work with minimum distraction. He concentrated on completing paid assignments. If he had none, he created drawings to add to his inventory, replacing designs sold. He worked into the evening, which gave him the peace and serenity he needed to have a good night's sleep.

While he worked, he rewarded himself with treats, such as candy or nuts purchased at the commissary. Or perhaps a leftover portion of his meal: an apple or carton of milk. To take a break, he had a shower. There were eight stalls clustered near the officers' station. At mid-evening, one was usually free. Most inmates were then watching TV or playing cards or games on the steel tables. Others were shooting hoops on a small basketball court that each block contained.

Occasionally, Henry got an evening visit when a family member or friend came to call. Sometimes communication between them was difficult, with resulting stress. While inmates look forward to visits from outsiders, they also fear them. So much is happening in the outside world that it seems a jumble; people are scrambling, running a competitive race. Most of what is happening is beyond their control. They can express their opinion when outsiders come, but it doesn't count for much. They can make requests, but they are in no position to see that they are fulfilled. Visitors have their own world to return to. It is a world where no one feeds, clothes or shelters them. They have to do that themselves. It takes time and

resources, which are often scarce. When requests are made by an inmate, it can be taxing. "Pay my car payment while I'm in jail…buy and send me books…put money in my commissary account." Acquaintances may agree to do these things when they are visiting an inmate. After all, no one likes to say no, particularly to a person who seems sad and lonely. But follow-up can be a problem. More than "out of sight, out of mind," promises probably should not have been made in the first place. Procrastination is easy on the outside. A year filled with activities, opportunities and amusements can go by quickly. On the inside, a year, with its unvarying pace and drab surroundings, can seem like a lifetime.

When Henry is summoned to the visiting hall, he is often disappointed. First, there is the indignity and difficulty of trying to speak to someone with a glass wall separating them. A phone is used so that the two can hear each other. It doesn't always work well. As an inmate, you get the feeling you are a disease that needs to be contained. When conversation begins, communication can be difficult because two languages are being used. One is the language of freedom—freedom of choice, freedom of time, freedom of action. The other is the language of desperation.

Returning from such a visit, Henry knows the way to set his mind and heart right. That's why he ends each day with his art. It's something he does to set up a place he can go where no others can follow. Other inmates might create their worlds of art but they will never enter his. Not completely anyway. Not unless Henry opens the door. He chose to do that with Rene because he believed that Rene had what it took to become a good artist: the need to remold his own universe.

The first time that Rene sat down to observe Henry drawing, Henry could see the urgency on his face. It was as if Rene was the only person left on earth, and that the planet was on a trajectory to collide with the sun. He needed to find another domicile, and quickly. All was spinning, all was melting around him. Time was running out and his choices were limited. Henry took him under his wing right away. He knew that although Rene had been defeated, he wasn't a failure. He was still alive, capable of achieving any goal. Henry also saw that he was smart. Rene had already figured out what art had done for Henry. He knew it could do the same for him.

Their interaction only lasted a few weeks, as they knew it would. One morning after the clearing of the count an officer came to Rene's cell. "Pack your stuff," he said. Rene gathered his

belongings and put them in a sturdy plastic bag that the staffer had provided. He took a few books he had yet to read, some letters he had read and wanted to keep, and various legal documents he had not wanted to read but his attorney insisted he do so. The latter showed how a clever prosecutor could bend facts to present to a paranoid jury; how an innocent man can be convicted and have a large portion of his life taken away from him.

Beyond the books, letters and legal papers, Rene did not have much more to pack. A change of socks and underwear, a toothbrush, toiletries. He was on his way to prison and would be traveling light. Had he left the jail a few weeks earlier–directly after his sentencing–he would have traveled much more heavily. Then his heart and mind were made of lead, pounded into that dense substance by the judicial treadmill from which he had emerged. His heart was so laden he could not feel it; his brain so compressed he could not think. Had he left jail in that condition, the prison where he was headed would have had a basket case on their hands. And if he ever emerged from that catatonic state, they would have had a troubled, trouble-making inmate to deal with.

Rene now had hope. He had the ability to brighten his existence with red roses, red tulips, and red hearts. He had crudely drawn some of these on the back of the legal papers he carried. When he got to prison, he was certain he would find other colors of pens and pencils, maybe even paints. Henry had assured him it would happen, and he trusted Henry. Rene knew that he had found someone who did not need any validation from others about the worth of his life. Henry's art had allowed him to set his own path, to make his own mark. Let others say what they wished about Henry. Artists are often misunderstood, and frequently envied. Rene trusted Henry because he didn't make excuses, didn't compromise, didn't give up. Everyday he created something of beauty, for himself and for others. He had a purpose in life, he had a goal, he had a future. He didn't need to lie to anyone because he didn't need anything from anyone.

On the bus headed for prison with the other shackled inmates, Rene saw all manner of color; in the people, in the buildings, in the cars and, most strikingly, in the gifts of nature. The trees, sky, flowers and foliage all beckoned to him. Soon they would all be his. It would take time to capture them accurately, to render them faithfully. But Rene would have plenty of time. He could even afford to squander some for exploration and experimentation. What would it matter if he spent a year losing himself in a world of

abstract art? Maybe it would work for him, maybe it would not. But he would now have a chance to find out.

Even wealthy people usually don't have such an option. While they can take a year out of their lives to create any esthetic work they wish, they don't have a compelling need to accomplish excellence. Nor do they get the honest support they need to arrive at such a goal. The key word here is *honest*. Only the most dedicated and the toughest artists like to hear honest opinions of their work. Just because a person is wealthy doesn't mean he or she is tough. People will defer to them because of their wealth. Potential critics don't want to take a chance of hurting their feelings even when asked for a candid opinion.

But if you are a prisoner *and* an artist, people assume you are tough. Your fellow inmates are loathe to pull any punches because they want you to excel. If *you* look good, everybody wearing a prisoner's uniform looks good. It's best to give you the hard facts you need to improve and grow.

Rene took in a lot during the two-hour trip to the prison where he was headed. Each new scene that had artistic possibilities he committed to his mind, as if his brain were a digital camera. He knew there would be magazines in prison to refresh his memory, but seeing the real thing was special. It did more to inspire than inform. The images would remain with him always.

As the bus journey came to an end, the prison loomed ahead like an outpost in the wilderness. It looked like a fortress. Rene had heard of prisoner-of-war enclaves that turned into defensive forts. This one looked like it could do that. The prisoner-of-war sites had made the switch when a war went badly for the side that had built them. Suddenly, their goal was not to keep the enemy captives from getting out but to keep enemy forces from getting in.

As the bus came closer to the prison, Rene changed his mind. It wasn't a fort but a collection of buildings with a fence around it. It could pass for a college campus except the buildings were not attractive. Solid, but unattractive. Then again, maybe that is what a serious college looks like. Nothing to distract or interfere with studies or interrupt progress. A school of higher learning where you don't go to party or waste time, but to learn.

The bus pulled into the first gate. There was still another one to enter but here is where the validation and checks occurred. Between the two gates the vehicle and the escorting officers are checked and cleared for full entry into the prison. Most importantly, their guns cannot be taken inside with them. They were entering a college

campus, after all, and the last thing anyone wanted was for the police to shoot students.

The truth is that this was a college of crime, and the residents could make mischief of anything available to them. You didn't want to think about what some of them would do with firearms. It was enough that officers posted in guard towers had them. They could stem any attempts at early withdrawal from this anarchist academy. And if unarmed staffers got in trouble on campus, a special enforcement crew equipped with ample firepower could be sent to extricate them. This is what the felonious student body referred to as the "Goon Squad."

Cleared for landing on this strange and barren planet, the bus passed through the second gate and deposited its human cargo. This was done so mechanically and with such little fanfare that the vehicle could have been a dump truck.

It took him a few days of orientation but Rene soon familiarized himself with his new home. He was not displeased. The shock of incarceration had dissipated at the jail when Henry had taken him under his artistic wing. And now Rene was in this expansive terrain. It was a breath of fresh air, literally. Here he would spend more time outdoors than indoors, breathing as much of it as he could. His commitment to art would grow. He felt he would need it now more than ever. He knew there was more chance of getting hurt in prison than in a jail. That's one of the trade-offs of having greater freedom. Nazi Germany in the 1930s was safer than free-wheeling America, unless of course you were a Jew.

When Rene was given his lengthy sentence, he didn't care whether he lived or died. But now he cared very much. His goal of being a good artist would guide him as well as protect him. It would be a beacon that he and others could follow. At the same time, that beacon would illuminate the world around him, allowing him to avoid the pitfalls of prison life.

Maybe if he became good enough, it would help transform others. When he was in jail he had read a story in the newspaper about an inmate in another jail. The man was considered the jail's "artist in residence." The way he acquired that title was that jail officials decided they wanted to make their structure look less sterile. After all, the prisoners would be returning to their communities someday. Why not ease the transition from jail to the free world by giving them a visual taste of what they will see on the outside?

They found an inmate within the jail who could paint murals. They put him to work. The inmate agreed because he wanted as many people to see his art as possible. If it were on walls, the entire jail staff, inmate population, and outsiders who came to visit would see it. That pleased him. Another motivation was that the officers would provide support to him in creating his art. Not only would they give him wall space, but he would get ample supplies to use. The staff were there to cooperate, not compromise his work. If the murals looked bad, so would they. Finally, he knew he'd get preferential treatment. They had to treat him well to get the best work out of him.

He was allowed to work under the most ideal circumstances, and alone. In rooms such as a classroom where he painted murals, he was left inside so he'd have no disturbances. When he moved to hallways, those hallways would be off limits to others. To guarantee that he wouldn't be interrupted, he was allowed to paint when there was minimal activity in jail, from 11PM to 4 AM. Most importantly, he would be released early to go home. The jail officials would give him "project" credits that would allow that happen. This is something they usually did to motivate inmate high school dropouts to study and get their GED while in jail.

Reading the story about the mural artist, Rene wasn't surprised at the power and influence that art had. He saw Henry's efforts draw many compliments and open several doors. Rene would strive during his time in prison to push the boundaries of art as far as possible.

As he began his sentence, he saw himself improving week after week, month after month, year after year. He eventually forgot the injustice of the past, the mistake that had been made. He was no longer the man who had gone into severe depression upon being removed from the free world. He had become an artist with his own interpretations of the present and visions of the future.

5. HELPING ARTISTS IN PRISON

I will begin this chapter in a very personal way because I got a lot of help furthering my art when I was in prison. Some came from the inside, some from the outside. The end result was that I became a proficient guitarist capable of reading music. Upon release, I was able to get good performance opportunities, right up to gigs at Kennedy Center.

The help I got can be divided into two categories: materials and instruction. Insiders and outsiders provided both, though the materials came mostly from outsiders, and the instruction primarily from insiders.

Materials to further my musical development consisted of songbooks and instructional books. Songbooks are compilations of tunes published as sheet music. I collected a large number in prison. My family, supportive during the beginning of my prison stay before they died or drifted away, sent the initial songbooks that I requested. I was selective in what I asked for because I didn't want to be too much trouble to them. Besides, my storage space was limited. Also over time I transferred from prison to prison and was concerned with how much I could carry with me. Prisoners have to carry their possessions when boarding a prison bus or airplane. The buses are used for transportation between prisons in the same region, while airplanes are used for traveling from a prison in one section to a prison in another. The Federal Bureau of Prisons, which operates prisons around the country, relies heavily on airplanes. They don't look much different than other large jets, but their passengers are easily recognizable. They all wear prison uniforms. Also, there are no flight attendants, only officers barking orders. These are not the friendly skies. Nor is the ground friendly when inmates board or exit the aircrafts. Passengers are greeted by a dozen or more officers with shotguns and rifles in hand. This airline wants to keep their clientele badly. So badly that passengers will be shot if they try to walk away. Female and male prisoners fly together, but there is no intercourse between them, social or otherwise. Women are placed in the front of the plane, and men in the back. All are told to put on their seatbelts for the journey. They are further constrained by handcuffs and leg irons. Even in the worst disaster, they won't be flung anywhere.

Traveling on a prison bus when transferring to a new prison is a little more convenient for carrying inmate possessions, buses being more spacious than airplanes. But even there prisoners are advised to travel light. With wrists locked in handcuffs and legs in irons causing them to walk like ducks, the less they have to carry, the better. When they get to their new prison, they can't be sure how much storage space will be available to them there. Most likely they'll get a foot locker that's two feet long, three feet wide and two feet high. In that space inmates must place all their worldly possessions, including clothes, books and everything else. Some prisons of the newer "get tough" type provide even less storage. There, a single drawer that slides into a bunk is all that's given. It holds about half of what the foot locker can accommodate.

The problem of storage made me wary of requesting too many songbooks from the outside. That didn't impede me much since there are songbooks at each prison owned by musical prisoners. We were a close-knit group, so we did a lot of borrowing from each other. Looking over someone's music book, I would write down the songs I wanted to learn. Sometimes I was able to have them photocopied. It wasn't always possible, but with the right prison connections I could usually get it done. In talking to staff, I focused on who had access to copiers in the administrative office. I also determined who was approachable to make copies for me.

The best arrangement I had was with an officer who had a key to the education building, which he patrolled at night after walking the yard. He was an easy-going man. That he was a fan of my music made him even more willing to help me. I would come to the rec yard in the evening with a songbook I had borrowed from a fellow inmate musician and tell the officer that I wanted to get part or all of it copied. If it was a small book or if I had designated only a few songs in it, he would do it himself. He'd return with the copies after he made his rounds. If the book was large, he'd take me with him. While he checked the various rooms and halls in the building to make sure that all was quiet, I labored at the copier. This arrangement worked well because I could reduce or enlarge pages to my heart's content. If a page of music was small, I could make it bigger so the notes and words were more readable. An oversized page would get opposite treatment: a reduction to fit on an 8 ½ by 11 sheet to insure that none of the music spilled off the edges. Working on my own, I could also use the 2x button and make an extra copy of the songbook for a friend. Such courtesies were appreciated. More importantly, they were reciprocated.

Unless you've been a prisoner, it's hard to imagine how important a copier is in helping you develop your art on the inside. When you settle into a new prison, the location of a copier is one of the first things you want to learn. In addition to finding copiers in the education department and administrative offices, the prison library generally has one. In rare instances, you might even find a self-service one there. That is unusual because most wardens are paranoid about giving prisoners access to *any* office equipment: computers, typewriters or copiers. Their fear is that inmates, in their desperation to get out, will create realistic-looking documents to further that objective: for example, creating a letter on letterhead or a message allegedly from the warden giving permission to the bearer of the letter to be in a high security section of the prison where escape is possible. Or a mischievous inmate might create an official-looking notice to start a rumor or a panic, such as announcing that lunches and all but one shower per week were being eliminated.

On one occasion I succumbed to creating such mischief by doing something along those lines. Like the actor-writer Orson Welles whose radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds* convinced America that the nation was being taken over by aliens, I sought to use my graphic art and writing skills to pull a prank. It wasn't on the same scale, nor did anyone take it seriously. I didn't want to get in trouble or cause anyone to get hurt by disrupting the operation of the prison in any way. My goal was to get a few laughs, and in that I succeeded.

I composed a notice informing inmates of a new initiative that was being introduced for their benefit. If they chose to participate in it, they could get "good time" credits that might allow them to be released early. I called it "boat camp," a play on *boot camp*, which in fact had recently been introduced. Boot camp consisted of a military type training center where inmates were treated harshly, like new recruits in the army. Through grueling exercises and constant badgering by officers, the inmates presumably learned the meaning of discipline and developed a willingness to subject themselves to authority. The theory behind this was that prisoners led a criminal life on the outside because of an undisciplined lifestyle and no respect for authority. The boot camp experience sought to fix that, the theory went, because participants would lose all sense of self. They had to obey every command, which were frequent and severe. If they put themselves above authority, they would be punished with extra chores and physical exercises. To

make them feel even less worthy of making their own decisions, they were cursed at and belittled frequently. It is the same treatment that grunts get in the military to condition them to the demands of officers and the need for complete, unthinking obedience. The last thing a commander wants is for his or her soldiers to think for themselves, to fear for their own lives rather than fear superiors and the consequences of disobedience. Officers yell at and denigrate soldiers in training so they will think of themselves as worthless, of no value even to themselves. As an inmate friend said to me as we walked the rec yard and discussed boot camps, "Unlike military officers who are only play acting when they call privates pieces of shit, when prison officers call inmates that, they really mean it."

My concept of *boat camp*, which I spelled out in my bogus notice, was similar to boot camp but took place on the water in a large old-fashioned vessel. In the boat, inmates who chose to be part of the initiative learned the meaning and value of hard work. Through their efforts, the ship was propelled forward without the need for a motor. This helped the environment since no gasoline or diesel fuel was burned. Only inmates' muscle power was used. They learned to work in tandem and to respect authority. If they didn't all act together upon the command of an officer in charge, the boat would not move properly and everyone's safety would be at risk.

In addition to good time credits and the value of team experience, the inmates would get out of prison for the time they were on the boat. But there was a negative side as well. Because of security and escape concerns, the inmates would be chained to their work stations below deck. Also, they had to sign a waiver before boarding that they would allow themselves to undergo corporal punishment by whip if their rowing did not keep pace with the others.

What I was describing, of course, was a Roman slave galley ship.

The harmless prank worked well and everyone got a chuckle. Had I not had access to a word processor and copier at the prison, I could not have pulled it off. Unlike other prisons where an inmate can use his commissary account to pay for copies on a self-service basis, this prison didn't have that option. There was no copier for inmates to use. Nor was the staff cooperative, not wanting to risk their jobs, although the risk would have been minimal. A copier in the law library was designated solely for reproducing legal papers. That is a common policy in prisons. Just as common is the

designation of a prisoner as the law clerk who is assigned to enforce that policy. He is the one who makes the copies, and he does not scrutinize what you give him. He doesn't want complaints to be made about him by inmates. Nor does he want word to spread on the compound that he is pro-staff and anti-inmate. Worse than being punched, he could be socially ostracized for that. If an inmate gives him material to be copied and says its legal papers, he usually won't question it.

I was in such a prison when I had my Boat Camp notice copied. I placed the copies made for me on inmate bulletin boards located in each of the housing buildings. Soon I was giving the law clerk music sheets and my creative writing to copy. I now knew he would present no obstacles. Beyond his pro-inmate stance, he owed me for a favor I did for him whenever I requested copies. With each request I gave him an envelope that satisfied his addiction.

It wasn't pot, heroin or cocaine he favored. Nor was it the assorted pain killers that were so easy to obtain from the prison's medical staff. Those professionals wanted the prison to stay calm and mellow for their protection and the protection of others. If they are over-medicating the men or getting them addicted to prescription drugs, what difference did it make? They were in a world where no outsiders could easily get access. Supervision of this medical staff was minimal. If they could keep themselves safe and prevent the prison from being burned down by giving inmates happy pills, they would be fools not to do it. Inmates were not going to get behind the wheels of cars where they could be a hazard driving while high. They were not going *anywhere*.

No drugs were in the envelope I gave to the law clerk. Instead, the envelope contained packets of sugar. He was a ten-pack a day addict, using it for his coffee and as an additive to foods like oatmeal and farina. The prison only supplied five packs daily per inmate, the flow of sugar being strictly controlled. Officials felt compelled to do that because they knew the men could make a dangerous drug with it; a substance that altered their behavior more than any other drug. They could make wine. All you needed was fruit, sugar and a little knowledge of fermentation to create this behavior-altering inebriant.

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In addition to music copied from others and music sent to me from the outside, there were materials that helped me develop my

music. Theory books on music and biographical works about musicians were particularly helpful.

I didn't know what books on musical theory to request from outside supporters. I had learned a lot about theory from experienced inmate musicians whom I admired. A few had been professionally trained during their pre-prison lives. They knew theory well and generously shared their knowledge with me. But they were selective in what they told me, and for my own good. "A lot of music theory is outdated or useless," my friend Cedric said. He had graduated on the outside from a music college and once played violin in a symphony orchestra. "If you are a student who has years to study music, go ahead and study all of it, even if you never use it in the music world," he said. "The theory is interesting and if you end up as a teacher, as most music majors do, you can teach it to others." But Cedric emphasized that if you wanted to play, and play well, "you best limit theory to what is useful and directly applicable."

It was only after I had learned advanced theory from Cedric and others that I understood his point. By then, my level of playing had improved a lot. Just as I could evaluate a music sheet to determine its adaptability to guitar, so I could judge the relevance of a theoretical concept to my playing. Some theory did not fit into my music making. It had historical interest, it had pedantic interest, but it did not have direct applicability. Besides, I was coming up with my own theories. These were based on the practical needs I had in reading and playing sheet music. If either my own or someone else's theory did not allow me to play better, I did not want to waste my time studying it. So my request for theory materials from the outside was done with great care. If something arrived of limited usefulness, I would be stuck with the challenge of storing it. Plus I would be using up a favor from an outside supporter. I decided to save my requests for what was truly important to me.

My opinion of the limitations of most theory was confirmed when other inmates showed me materials they had received from the outside. Some of those items were so useless, they were depressing. That was the result they had on those guys. The inmates who got them were so overwhelmed by the theoretical materials that they had little motivation to continue playing music. They felt suffocated and inadequate, believing themselves to be stupid. Because I had advanced far in music before I decided to seriously delve into theory, the lack of useful theory did not make me feel ignorant. It angered me. What right did the so-called experts and

academicians have in causing needless confusion or crushing the ambitions of promising players? They should keep their historical and esoteric ideas to themselves.

Not all the theory books I came across were useless. Many of them contained insights that helped me. But I had to wad through a lot of junk to get to them. I pitied the men who did not have the musical background that I had acquired as they tried poring over these texts. Their failure to understand the often unfathomable discouraged them, turning them off to music. If you are ever in a position of sending an academic work to a prison artist–no matter his or her field–make sure it is practical or don't send it. You don't want to create unnecessary setbacks by introducing uncertainty or confusion. As in any field, instruction comes a distant second to practicing one's craft.

Leon Uris, famed novelist of *Exodus* and other seminal works of fiction, tells the story of a world renowned writer who was invited to a college campus to give a lecture on how students can become better writers. His talk was brief. In fact, it consisted of only one sentence. The author walked onto the stage, looked at his large audience and said, "Go home and write!" Then he left.

One of my music teachers, an outsider named Paul, came to prison under contract to play piano in the chapel for various religious services. He was both an inspiration and a practical help. Paul gave me a lot of pointers and provided music materials. He brought sheet music that I would look over while he played in the chapel. I would select what I wanted and exit the building with them. Before he completed his playing and was ready to leave the prison, I had returned with the copies I needed. Paul was a stickler for rules, which he had a right to be. He wanted to keep his paid employment. One of those rules was that whatever he brought into the prison he had to take with him when he left. That included books and other materials. He would bring me items I requested or things he thought I would find useful. But he needed to leave with them after his hour or so of playing came to an end. He had trust in me because I never failed to comply with his wishes.

When he gave me materials to review, I would go over them briefly to decide if I wanted to copy them. If I did I would do it there by hand if there was not much I wanted. If there was a lot, I would leave the chapel and go to the library or educational department to have it done. When I had difficulty getting access to a copier or finding an agreeable staffer to do it, I would lie my way

into getting the copies made. "Paul, the musician at the chapel, needs copies of these pages. He's waiting for them!"

The staff who complied never checked with Paul about this and probably knew it was a lie. It didn't matter since they were covered. No one could accuse them of doing a favor for an inmate. Probably had they checked with Paul, he would have backed me up. After all, he did need copies–for me. Like a library that allows patrons to make copies of books, the staff does not want anyone to feel a need to rip out and steal pages. Interestingly, the chapel had its own copier, but the chaplain in charge was unreasonably cautious about what he would photocopy. He would examine materials to see if they were copyrighted, as virtually everything is. Then he would refuse, saying he would be breaking the law by copying them. I knew this was just an excuse. It was not the law that guided him but his laziness. Confirmation came a year later when he was arrested for violating much more serious laws. My experience is that many people who don't want to help others often have something to hide. It is not rational to deny a little help to someone in need.

Still, the chaplain had provided me Paul, for which I will always be grateful. I performed music with Paul on occasion, even got a chance to rehearse with him. That would not have been possible without the chaplain's cooperation. I remember the day I approached the chaplain about working with Paul. He yelled at me but still paved the way for me to do it. "You are not gong to work *with* Paul, you're going to work *under* him!" It did not matter how he said it as long as I could do it. In one sense the chaplain's sternness toward me was a benefit. It made me humble. That is an important trait for any artist to have. It makes us strive harder for excellence. Along those lines I learned that the chaplain's favorite song was "Guantanamera," a Cuban favorite though he was not from that country. By the time I felt comfortable playing the guitar arrangement I had created to surprise him, the police had already removed the man from the prison.

Paul remained, however. And the valued materials he provided kept coming. One day he brought a special book at my request. I had asked him to bring his favorite theory book and he complied. It was the text used in a music theory class he had taken in college. As Paul played music in the chapel, I reviewed the book to determine what chapters or pages I wanted to photocopy. I decided only to make a few handwritten notes, there was so little in the book that would help me. Most of the text was a turn-off for its excruciating analyses. Reading it was like dissecting and interpreting in detail a

common act of sex, and thereby taking all the fun out of it. I think people who do that probably hate sex, just as people who dwell on music theory might dislike blues, folk, rock and roll and maybe all music. In the book, for example, there was a detailed discussion of a concept known in music as the "Circle of Fifths." It is a way of theoretically determining the number and names of sharpened and flatted notes in whatever key you are playing. It will tell you that the key of F has one flat, a B flat. But if you practice playing enough, you will know that already. Writers who know their ABCs don't need a detailed discussion of a theory that might be called the "Circle of Letters" to know that C follows B in the alphabet. If you waste time reading and studying such theories, that won't increase your ability to be a creative and accomplished writer. It will probably have the opposite effect.

Paul did what most mentors should do. He provided a little help and a lot of inspiration. His playing was honest and heartfelt, just like Paul himself. "Here is a song that has made me a lot of money over the years," he said, and proceeded to play "Manhattan." He did it while we were alone, before church service began. He performed it because I asked him to play one of his favorites. "When I play at dances with my orchestra" he said, "people request 'Manhattan' a lot. I guess a lot of people come from New York and are homesick." I didn't tell Paul that I had the same reaction to the song.

I let the song wash over me. It inspired me to attempt to create a credible guitar arrangement of "Manhattan." But the song seemed to lend itself more to piano or orchestra than guitar. So I gave up the effort. Still, I never tired of hearing Paul perform the tune.

Coincidentally, I picked up a book about that time in the prison library. It was an outdated biography of composer Richard Rodgers. I say outdated because the book was written while he was alive, indeed before he had achieved his peak of fame. It was a throwaway book from an outside library which was ashamed to have such a volume, like having a history of the Vietnam War that was written before the conflict ended. In fact, the bio of Rodgers concluded with the future looking bleak for him. His partner, Oscar Hammerstein, who wrote the lyrics for Rodgers' songs, was in good health, but Rodgers had been diagnosed with cancer. Would they be able to finish a musical they were working on together? It was about the king of Siam and an English teacher who came to that country to teach his many children. The musical, *The King and I*, was not only completed but the writing team went on to compose

other hits, including *Flower Drum Song* and *The Sound of Music*. Years later, after Hammerstein died, Rodgers continued to compose music. The book did not state this because its author, writing in 1951, could not know. But he did know that the song that first brought Rodgers' talent to the world, composed 26 years before, was "Manhattan."

After Rodgers wrote the music, his lyricist partner at the time, Lorenz Hart, penned the words. It was the beginning of a long, productive and very unhappy relationship between the two song masters. The problem was that Rodgers put their music first, while Hart's first love was liquor. Whenever alcohol plays a primary role in a relationship, it's doomed to failure. Still, over a 15-year period they created many hits that have become music standards: "My Funny Valentine," "Where or When," "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered," "Blue Moon," "The Lady is a Tramp" and more. Each triumph was a gut-wrenching experience for Rodgers, and a booze-drenched one for Hart. Rodgers wrote the melody, then waited for Hart to write the words; often waited a long time. It was a torturous process as Rodgers stood by in anticipation of sobriety and productivity returning to his partner. He felt frustrated, believing they could do a lot more if Hart were not addicted to his mind-altering substance. Rodgers proved his point when he hooked up with Hammerstein and entered the most prolific period in his life after Hart died.

Had Lorenz Hart been a poor man instead of an affluent and popular lyricist, he would have probably ended up in jail with some of the antics he pulled when he was drunk. Instead, he went to an early grave. Rodgers chose his replacement carefully. Hammerstein had a reputation for excellence and reliability. His entire family did, their roots in New York music and show business going back many years. Hammerstein himself made his reputation as the lyricist partner of Jerome Kern. Together in 1927 they created the musical *Showboat* with its popular songs "Old Man River" and "Can't Stop Loving that Man of Mine." The words to these classics were written by Hammerstein. Just as Rodgers grew weary of Hart, so did Hammerstein have a problem with Kern. It surrounded the proposed 1943 yet-to-be-written musical *Oklahoma*. The project was offered to Kern, but he didn't think it had any potential to be a hit. Rodgers knew better and signed on, drafting Hammerstein who also accepted. There was no guilt for either man since Hart had recently died and Kern would soon join him. Rodgers felt good about having a sober partner, but he didn't want to take any chances.

He changed his pattern of working. This time his lyricist would write song words first, then Rodgers would compose the melody. Then the song would be complete. No worrying and no waiting for his lyricist.

Take the song "Bali Hi" which they wrote for their hit "South Pacific." Rodgers was having dinner at a restaurant with his family when Hammerstein presented the lyrics to him. Between his main course and dessert, Rodgers wrote the famous captivating melody, notating it on a dinner napkin.

I got information of this type from biographies I read in prison. Such details not only inspired me but gave me insight into how I could get better musically. In writing music, for example, I always thought that the melody had to come first. Rodgers proved otherwise. I tried his approach in creating my own compositions and had good results. This was useful in prison since I did not always have access to a guitar. When I didn't I composed words first, later creating a melody.

More than reading books and reviewing music materials that came to me, the biggest help I got in furthering my music was from hearing songs played. Whether people on the inside or those who came from the outside performed them, or even if they were on CDs, I internalized the sounds. In prison, you are like a sponge with highly aware sensors. What you hear sticks; the good, the bad and the musical.

For example, Paul's rendition of "Manhattan" deeply penetrated me, like a hot knife laying upon a tub of sweet butter. I knew I would always have that mark inside me until I soothed and lifted it by learning to play the song. My goal in prison was to get better at reading and playing music so that I could accomplish that before I exited.

But, I didn't achieve my goal. Still when I got back into the free world I was motivated to do many other things with this song inside me. First, I listened to recordings of it by various artists. I did that by going to a major library and delving into large CD collections there. Each version of the song I came across added to my insight and appreciation of it.

Then the opportunity came for me to spend a week in Manhattan, the urban island that is the heart of New York. It came from Helen Thorne, a resourceful woman of great compassion who had been my principal outside mentor during the last portion of my prison sentence. Helen had provided me with music books. Upon my release she had a guitar waiting and more. Helen became one of the

incorporators and directors of the arts foundation I started to help artists in prison use art for their survival and rehabilitation and for victim restitution. Helen also became its primary fundraiser, giving generously of her own finances. She served as the foundation's first president.

You get to know people when you meet them, but you get to know them even better before that happens if you're a prisoner reaching out for their help. Helen came to me through an ex-girlfriend who dumped me while I was in prison but gave me Helen as a consolation present. She thought we would be compatible. Never mind that Helen was gay and I am not. Not only wasn't I gay but I wasn't even mirthful during the early part of my prison stay. Helen too had once unnecessarily spent time in prison. By helping me, she helped herself get over it. And a tremendous help she was. First, she provided me with catalogs from music book publishers. When I received them, I completed the order forms and sent them to her so she could enclose payment and forward them to the publishers. She never failed to provide what I needed, and did so expeditiously. I made my selections with great care since I didn't want to take advantage of her. Besides, I was running out of storage space. I once wrote Helen to tell her about this dilemma. I said there were three music books I wanted from a new catalog but only asked her to order one. Which one should it be? I told her that she should make the selection.

Helen chose a songbook of the music of Billie Holiday. I studied it while I simultaneously read a biography of the famous blues and jazz singer and composer. I could see how appropriate the selection was for Helen to make. Holiday had done hard time on two occasions, both involving the use of her body in a way that society did not approve. In the first instance, she sold it; in the second, she self-medicated it. Upset and defiant at the two criminal convictions, she sang, "T'ain't Nobody's Business if I Do." In one of the lines of the song she said that even if she "gets a notion to jump into an ocean," it is her business and her business alone. Not only was Holiday's stamina and self-determination after her prison stays commendable, so was the range of her voice and repertoire. She sang sad songs and happy ones, songs about injustice and valor, pain and pleasure, and more. They came from the pens of many men and women, black and white, old and young, the famous and the obscure. She even sang a song that Frank Sinatra wrote, though he himself could not make it a hit. It is a lovely and haunting tune called "I'm a Fool to Want You" and it fits perfectly into Holiday's

song list. One other thing about Holiday that attracted Helen and me to her: she was a Manhattanite. That is where Holiday lived and worked when she was not being hauled off elsewhere due to the demands of fame or the police.

Manhattan was both kind and cruel to Holiday. The kindness lifted her up to heights of international stardom. The cruelty came when her unconventional personal choices became public knowledge and her fans turned to less talented but more conformist performers. Still, Holiday knew she had to be in Manhattan, the cultural capital of the world, the place where famous music tunes and shows are born; the location where Rodgers and Hart wrote their seminal New York song that I still had not learned at that time.

Arriving in Manhattan and meeting Helen after prison, I savored every moment of the woman and the island. Immediately, I fell in love with her. Upon introduction later that day, I also fell in love with her domestic partner Lori. During my time in prison, I had lost my sister. Now, I had two of them. My sister had not died while I was away. She got lost in the world of materialism. When my mother died she decided to grab all the inheritance due to me for herself, getting help from my antagonistic lawyer son. The first step in doing that was to cut off contact with me and condemn me as much as possible. It was not just greed on her part but sibling rivalry. Whether the payoff for her was more financial than emotional, I can't say. Whatever the reason, she had chosen to kick me, someone she once loved, when I was down.

My sister too was fascinated with Manhattan, as our parents had been in the previous generation. Our father had been employed by the subway system there while mother taught in New York City public schools. For a time, my sister had an apartment there. I remember how upset she was the day it was burglarized. Maybe that experience helped her form a low opinion of anyone who went to prison, in or out of our family. The odd thing about my sister is that she had spent a lifetime trying to help people, including serving as a Director for United Way. I guess that when I landed in prison she felt it was time to help herself.

Helen and Lori lived in Manhattan. They also had a summer home on Long Island. During my trip to New York, I stayed at their Manhattan apartment, enjoying every minute. Not that I spent much time inside. Throughout the daytime and part of the evenings, I visited all the attractions that the city had to offer. I knew about them from two sources. My Mom and Dad had shown me around repeatedly while I was growing up and even into adulthood when

they became my close friends. My father always said, "If you can't get it in Manhattan, it isn't worth having." He and my mother could not only get it, but they got it in all its varieties, and at good prices. That applied to everything from food to Broadway shows, to the latest in electronics, this last item being a favorite of my Dad's and a constant source of irritation between him and Mom. However, they always overcame their differences because, among other things, of the love they felt for the city to which they always returned. The song "Manhattan" could have been their personal anthem.

While both were dead by the time I exited prison, they very much lived in spirit in the city they so loved. While visiting there, I could feel their presence everywhere. I went to the places they had showed me and I experienced newfound excitement. Now I had great music inside me to accompany the tour. While I still could not play "Manhattan" as a solo guitar arrangement–though I could play it in ensemble with others because I had left prison as a good sight reader, a literate musician–I had committed all the words to memory. The lines that Lorenz Hart had composed for Richard Rodgers' lovely tune included:

Summer journeys to Niagara
And to other places aggra-
Vate all our cares, we'll save our fares.
I've a cozy little flat
In what is known as old Manhat-
Tan, we'll settle down, right here in town.

That's the introduction to the song, which is sometimes not played by musicians or sung by singers. That is a pity, in fact a crime, since it is so beautiful. With all the silly laws around dictating what a person can do with his or her own body, there should be one to protect this song. What better place than prison for someone who abuses it by performing it incompletely? This is one reason that I did not learn it in prison. I began it as it should be started, with the intro, and couldn't master *that*. Still, I wasn't giving up. Perhaps this visit to Manhattan would help me, I thought.

In fact, the song is not about Manhattan. It is about all of New York City, which consists of five sectors, known as *boroughs*. Manhattan is one of them. Don't think that the song makes any false pretenses. It does not. Just as the city is known for its brutal

honesty–"fuck you" being among its favorite expressions–the song also pulls no punches. Its opening line after the intro is, "We'll see Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island too." The rest of the song deals with attractions inside these boroughs, from New York's famous zoo in the Bronx to the pushcarts of Mott Street in Manhattan. A fourth borough is also referenced when Coney Island is mentioned, which is located in the borough of Brooklyn.

I was determined to visit all these places in New York during my week there, using the subways my father helped run and the determination my teacher mother had given me. My base of operations would be "a cozy little flat in what is known as old Manhat-tan" that my wonderful new siblings, Helen and Lori, furnished. But I would not stop with the four boroughs.

My study of the arts in prison had taught me to improvise and be creative. You need to do that because, as Mick Jagger sang, "You can't always get what you want but if you try sometimes, you just might find you get what you need." In the world of art, whatever you find can be incorporated in your creations. Inside prison, whatever art you create is based on what you find. Outside artists have more options in what can be found, from scenes to paint, to supplies to use. They seemingly have a distinct advantage over their incarcerated colleagues. But the advantage can be erased.

Let's take an example of a form of art in which everyone thinks they have talent: writing. Practically anyone who has ever written a sentence feels capable of writing a book, if only the time were available. Now let me put a question to you, assuming you can type in some fashion and know the value of a word processing program: Would you rather write your book using a modern computer or a stubby pencil with no pencil sharpener available? Most people would not hesitate to take the computer, which will allow them to work cleaner and faster. But that might not be a wise choice if you have nothing interesting to write about. The computer might be located in a sterile suburban home with no lively neighbors around to stimulate you. On the other hand, prison writers must use a pencil or other hand implement. Still, in prison, there are hundreds of fascinating stories of justice and injustice waiting to be told. As long as you can put an interesting story to paper, what does it matter what device you use to put it there? To increase the chances of getting published, some would-be authors would use their own fingernails as writing implements, utilizing as ink their own blood. I understand them.

The most important tool that a writer in or out of prison has is his or her imagination. This must be constantly stimulated. The second most important aid is a dictionary. If you want to help serious writers in prison, which everyone on the inside has the potential to be, send them dictionaries. With the right words at their fingertips, it doesn't matter whether they write in pencil, pen or blood.

You can't send pencils, pens or blood to someone on the inside since only letters and books are allowed. But you can send a dictionary. Nothing is more valuable to writers except their imagination, and you can't help with that. Not to worry. The writers are in a place where information and ideas that are decidedly not run-of-the-mill are exchanged daily.

The same needs that have been described can be applied to all artists. It is not a matter of the quality and quantity of supplies and materials available in determining who will become an accomplished artist. If that were the case, only the rich would prosper. The term "pampered artists" is not usually connected to those on the rise as they are being discovered. Instead, the popular term is "starving artists."

When people are starving or are in prison, the choices of what to do with their time are limited. They can engage in activities that potentially make money, such as creating art, or activities that will cause them to spend money; just about everything else. Starving, imprisoned artists use their art as a form of self-entertainment. Even if not good enough to make money, the artist may someday be able to do that with enough practice. It's just a matter of time and application. Being jobless or incarcerated gives a person that opportunity. Add motivation and confidence, which are things that mentors can help supply, and success is within reach. Arthur Sullivan, half of the English music writing team of Gilbert and Sullivan which produced 20 popular operettas in the late 19th Century, put it well. "Musical composition, like everything else, is the outcome of hard work…If I had waited for inspiration I am afraid I should have done nothing."

The rich don't have to work at anything, and the employed are already fully occupied. If you are in prison, all you have to do to get the job of art creation done is be creative. And that usually comes with the territory if you are sufficiently motivated to pursue it. Take a look at the fine pieces in the Prison Art Gallery in Washington, D.C. You will see art that was created with all types of materials, from conventional art supplies that some prisons allow inmates to have, to scraps that prisoners find on the ground and in

trash cans. Regardless of what they use, their creations are guided by their imaginations.

In one prison in Georgia that offers artists little to work with, an artist named Jasper was determined to create art by any means possible. His specialty became collages created with different materials. The materials had been thrown away and destined for the garbage compactor. But staff and inmates alike put them aside for Jasper if they thought he could use them. In fact, Jasper could use *everything*, his imagination was that strong. Even leftover food had potential if, like spinach, the coloring in it could be transferred to paper or cloth. Bits of string, ends of rubber, and pieces of plastic all found their way into his art. One location in the prison that he visited frequently for materials was the laundry. The inmates who worked there admired Jasper's work, even more so his ambition. Before they threw away a torn shirt, frayed uniform or odd button, they thought of Jasper. They put the items in a box with the artist's name on it. When he saw these collectors, he examined the box and took what he wanted. What he left behind was thrown away.

Jasper's work came to the attention of outsiders who were astounded by his artistic ideas and creative capability. They assumed he could get any supplies he wanted and that he was being inventive in the odd materials he selected. A group of men he had drawn, for example, were completed as a three-dimensional piece. In place of mouths, they had buttons attached by strings so they jiggled to give the appearance of talking. His other works were similarly eye-catching.

Admirers of Jasper's work on the outside wanted know how they could help him. They sent money for his art but it wasn't of any use to him. His prison was so restrictive that the canteen didn't even sell colored pencils. Nor was there an art program he could participate in to get supplies. Jasper could not even use the money that had been sent him to order supplies by mail.

His free-world supporters were stumped as to what they could do to help. Finally, one of them came up with an idea that seemed extreme but worth a try. She proposed writing a hand-written note to the warden asking if she could send Jasper a box of supplies of his choosing.

It did not appear a viable idea because Jasper was in a prison known for its ultra-tight security. That's why the canteen sold only consumables, why there was no art program where supplies could get in the wrong hands, why an inmate couldn't order from the outside, even "sealed" supplies from a reputable mail order

establishment. The sealing of items appealed to a lot of wardens since it meant that drugs or other contraband would not be included. But it did not make a difference to the warden at Jasper's prison.

In composing her letter to the warden, Jasper's supporter knew she was asking the near impossible. What she did not know was that anything is possible in prison. That's because a warden is like a dictator, and can often be a benevolent one. Whatever he or she says goes. Few professionals, in or out of government, have as much independence and power. The warden's world is largely a secret one. What goes on in prison is hidden from public view. Most people don't want to know, and the few who seek to find out usually can't penetrate the curtain of confidentiality that exists.

That's the case because prisons, as they exist today on a massive level, are a relatively new phenomenon. For most of human history, people accused of breaking laws were regarded as enemies of the state. If they could not follow the rules of society, they were judged unfit to live in it. They were either executed or banished and thrown into the wilderness. When Socrates in 399 BC Greece was convicted of wrongdoing, he was given the choice of death or banishment. He chose the former as the lesser of two evils.

The Roman Empire changed the concept of punishment by making it harsher. Banishment did not make sense to the Romans since their massive society headquartered in Rome covered most of the known world. There was no place to send outcasts that was not part of the empire. The far regions not yet under Roman control were at war with Rome. It didn't make sense to send them potential soldiers. Best to kill criminals and to do it as cruelly as possible to discourage others. One method was crucifixion.

In the middle ages, perhaps due to the influence of growing religion that emphasized a degree of compassion, death became only one option. If an offender committed a minor act of theft, a judge might order getting rid of the offending part of the thief's body instead of the entire person. Cutting off a hand became an option for punishment. Executions also grew more merciful. Hanging or decapitation became common. The chopping block was used to remove heads, though this was sometimes criticized for producing sloppy, unnecessarily painful results. If the executioner who wielded the ax was not skilled in his gruesome work, the cut on the neck of the condemned might not be complete and would have to be repeated. A humanitarian French inventor found a solution by coming up with the guillotine.

It was only in the 19th Century that the use of prisons as long-term ways of dealing with law violators came into general use. They too can be traced to the influence of religion. Not only was prison considered a more compassionate approach to earlier punishment methods but a godlier one. If we are all God's children, as the bible teaches, sinners must be forgiven. They need to be welcomed back into the family of society after doing proper *penitence*. This is why the first prisons were called *penitentiaries.*

There was a precedent for such institutions: monasteries. Monks prayed in solitude for the forgiveness of their sins and to become better servants of God. Prisons were modeled after these austere places, right down to the small plain rooms where prisoners slept. They were not called rooms because monks did not sleep in *rooms*. Even today in monasteries around the world the residents live in their *cells*.

But there were detractors of prisons who said they also did not meet the standards of a civilized society. An early critic was famed author Charles Dickens. He argued that prisons did more harm than good. Dickens visited some in America during the first half of the 19th century. He was horrified by what he saw. Indeed, in these early prisons, silence and discipline were strictly enforced. Inmates worked alone in their solitary cells. They ate together in a chow hall but could not talk to anyone there; not a word. They were marched there in single file in complete silence. Dickens noted that what he saw was a recipe for insanity and suicide. Indeed, those were the common results.

Thanks to late 19th Century reformers like John Howard and groups like the American Correctional Association, prisons changed in how they operated. A movement also began to establish and expand mental hospitals as an alternative to prisons. There was growing recognition that many people, if not most who ended up in prison, were mentally ill. Individuals needed to be treated, not punished. By the mid 20th Century, prison growth had slowed considerably. But mental hospitals overflowed. It seemed to be a liberal's dream. An alternative to widespread incarceration had been found.

Then scandal hit the mental wards, proving that for many there these places of confinement were far worse than prisons. People could not leave them for decades, even though harmless to others. Courts had ordered them to stay "until cured." Or family members had put them there, often for ulterior motives. If grandpa or an aging dad had valuable land he didn't want to part with, family

members would grab it by joining together and claiming he was insane. His oddities would be exaggerated and reported as signs of mental illness. His gestures of kindness interpreted as threats. Mental hospital doors were always open to help the courts and families of the afflicted. But they didn't open easily once a person was locked inside.

The problem with being sent to a mental hospital was that you had few rights there. Even less than people in prison. After all, you were considered crazy, so whatever was done to you was for your own good. Whether you were constantly on medication and turned into a zombie; whether you were made to live in restraints so you fouled yourself daily; whether a surgeon forced a lobotomy or sterilization on you; whatever was done, you had no say because you were judged mentally incompetent. In the eyes of the state, you were a vegetable that could be cleaned, scraped and diced at will.

The worst thing about mental hospital confinement was that you might never get out. Unlike a *correctional* facility where you stayed for a set period of time and then had to be released whether *corrected* or not, your commitment to a mental hospital could be forever.

When scandals of mental hospital abuses were reported, they hit big. Articles reported minor law violators spending their entire lives inside where they were subjected to constant abuse. Some had not even violated the law but had the misfortune of finding themselves in a family with greedy siblings or unscrupulous children.

Lawsuits were filed by groups like the ACLU. As a result, mental wards were closed. That's when prisons came into popularity again. Civic leaders began to construct them with no end in sight. Politicians started calling acts of nonconformity crimes and demanded that they be punished. President Richard Nixon declared a war on drugs that would fill many prisons. It's not that drug users are hurting anyone. They are simply different, preferring substances other than liver-damaging liquor to get high.

And so by the first decade of the 21st century, the United States had more than 5,000 jails and prisons filled with two and a half million people who were largely no threat to anyone, including themselves. They had simply been an embarrassment due to their unconventional ways. Instead of banishing them, we chose to lock them away. But we also emphasized that they should not be harmed. That would make us look like barbarians. We wanted prison staff to keep them out of sight, so they would be out of mind.

You can see why wardens have a free hand. Mess with them and they might say to you, "Here, you take over." That's exactly what they have said to judges who have criticized them.

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In writing a letter to the warden of Jasper's prison, the woman who wanted to help the imprisoned artist knew enough not to criticize anyone. Her intuition and experience led her to another approach. She had worked in museum management and knew that flattery and gentle persuasion were the best means of getting things done.

She began by telling the warden about the terrific response that Jasper's art had received. The warden, she said, was clearly doing something right in nurturing such talent. He should be proud. She also invited the warden to visit one of the galleries that featured Jasper's art "should you ever have a reason to come to this city." She offered to personally escort him these places. Then came her request for the supplies Jasper needed to make his art even better. Could she send them to him, with the warden's approval?

Within a week after mailing her letter she got a call from the warden's secretary. All was good to go. Jasper had already been instructed to prepare a list of what he needed. The warden would approve it and send it along. That was it! No approvals to get from the governor, no changes needed in the rules that normally prohibited this, no fuss or delay of any kind. The warden had spoken.

In composing the list of his needs, Jasper continued to be creative. As an artist who had gone through an extensive period of imprisonment, he didn't know any other way to think. That would serve him well when he left prison.

Indeed, that kind of thinking had served me well upon returning to society. I measured everything when I came back in relation to my life in prison, not my life before prison. In other words, I did not take living in the free world for granted when I got there. Many outside conveniences I passed up because I no longer found them necessary. For example, I walked wherever I could, forgoing mass transportation or an offered ride. I had walked everywhere in prison, even around the rec yard 20 times nightly for exercise. It lead to healthy stamina and a trim body. Why give that up?

The thought of acquiring a driver's license and a car never occurred to me when I returned after my lengthy imprisonment.

Both had once been mine before, but my license had expired during my time in prison. Replacing it and getting a car seemed foolhardy. That could only make me dependent on something I didn't need and didn't want. Maybe I never did want them. Paul Krassner got by well enough throughout his life without them. If you don't know the name, Krassner is a legendary publisher and author, the biographer of Lenny Bruce. He was a big help to me while I was in prison. He was one of the many celebrities I wrote to, and one who wrote back. Paul supplied me with good reading materials, including personal letters expounding on his favorite subject: Paul Krassner. He hated cars and lamented that they had been invented. Paul's autobiography, which I read in prison after he sent me a copy, was a great source of guidance and inspiration. He started out as a musician, a child prodigy. He played at Carnegie Hall when he wasn't much bigger than his violin. Then he gravitated to humor, politics, writing and publishing. His life had been centered on creativity and independence. I had met Paul before prison when he did stand-up commentary in a small theater. The favorable impression I got of him lasted a lifetime. That was years before I went to prison. It happened in Manhattan.

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Now I was back there. Seeking to relive my family's past and the words of a song that haunted and challenged me during my incarcerated years. The visit, I hoped, would give me inspiration. I went to all the places mentioned in the song.

And tell me what street
Compares to Mott Street
In July?
Sweet pushcarts
Gently gli-
Ding by.

I not only visited the pushcarts of Mott Street, buying an inexpensive belt from one of the vendors, but sought to find another pushcart that was legend in my family. It was a variety store that sold closeouts. My Uncle Morrie had introduced me to it when I was young. It was appropriately called "the Pushcart." I had continued to patronize it well into my adult years, once buying an Indian sitar that I never learned to play. I now wanted to go back

but could not recall its exact location. I scoured a two-block area in lower Manhattan where I recalled it being located. But I didn't score. Finally, I asked some people, but no one proved helpful. I shook my head to think how careless New Yorkers can be as shoppers to overlook such a gem of a bargain store. It wasn't Macy's but it had appeal and purpose. Whenever it rained, customers fled from the street pushcarts and entered this indoor replica. Finally, I went into an old liquor store and asked the most senior clerk about its location. He smiled before answering. "The Pushcart has been out of business for at least 20 years." After a moment's hesitation I smiled back. "Guess I've been out of touch for awhile."

It didn't come as a shock to me. Nothing does after prison. I continued my journey through Manhattan and the other boroughs, even the one not mentioned in the song: Queens. Why overlook this sector of the city since, in my considered opinion, it has as much charm and character as the others. Of course, I might be biased since Queens is the place where I was born. I'm sure that if Rodgers and Hart were alive today they would include it with all I could tell them. They valued creativity too, and Queens had to improvise a lot over the years to keep up with its sister boroughs.

I visited my old haunts and found some semblance of New York's, and my, past. The highlight was entering the elementary school auditorium where I had given my first public performance. I had used an accordion, my first instrument. The only thing I remembered about the engagement was that it was spontaneous. There was a school program in progress when my father unexpectedly arrived with my accordion and got permission from the principal for me to play. I protested but not strenuously. It was always a wonderful experience for me to perform. There must have been 10,000 people in the audience. But when I looked at the auditorium during my after-prison visit, I wondered how that could have been. It now looked small, its seating capacity no more than 200.

After the school visit I went to see my Aunt Rose, then in her 90s. I had tried to reach her by phone before the trip but could not get through. A neighbor in our old neighborhood had given me her address and phone number after I explained I was Rose's nephew. Yes, they had heard of me. Rose had told them good things.

I wondered why she did not return my call. Had my antagonistic sister and son reached her? Was this part of their plan to isolate me so the truth of their theft would not come to light? I remained

optimistic, even buying flowers on my way to give my aunt! Surely someone would want them if she didn't. I thought about how sweet Aunt Rose had always been. Surely she would do the right thing, the honorable thing. She did. She died. I confirmed it with her apartment doorman and also with another reliable source. I gave the flowers to Helen when I returned to Manhattan where I continued my musical journey.

The great big city's a wondrous toy
Just made for a girl and boy.
We'll turn Manhattan, into an isle of joy.

In the months that followed my trip, I continued to listen to different renditions of the song. Finally, I came upon the key to learning it when I heard a version by Blossom Dearie. Here was a singer of extraordinary verve and down-home soul. And her home was Manhattan. She sang the song like no other, breaking it down into its starkest, most penetrating components. The tune now fully possessed me, giving me no choice but to learn it.

I did so, including the intro. The tune is now a standard on my song list, coming after Bach and before the Beatles. Learning this song was a major accomplishment for me. It was the culmination of the success I had with art inside prison. It would not have happened without the support of people on the inside and outside who helped me. The materials, the guitar and other tangible items they provided were critical. But their greatest gifts were their encouragement and the confidence they instilled in me. They were there when my family was not. They didn't step on a brother when he was down. Instead, they provided the words and the ways to lift this prison artist up and allow him to stand tall on any ground, whether in Manhattan or anywhere else in the world.

6. GETTING STARTED AS A MENTOR TO ARTISTS IN PRISON

The first thing you need to do to become a mentor to an imprisoned artist is to decide if this is what you truly want. If the answer is yes, you need to examine your motivation for wanting to do it. People gravitate to working with prisoners often for the wrong reason. They seek the excitement they believe prison offers, without actually being an inmate themselves. The term for this is *vicarious thrill*. When you approach a mentoring opportunity in this way, you will be disappointed. And so will the person you mentor.

We have already noted that prisons are not particularly dangerous places. Nor are they necessarily exciting. They are more akin to warehouses that store humans for months or years at a time. Except for isolated incidents, nothing dramatic goes on there. It is a costly arrangement, to be sure. Warehouse space does not come cheap in America. That is particularly true if the things being stored are living, breathing people. Temperatures cannot go above or below a certain level. Food and sanitation must be provided. Clothing too, since society frowns upon nudity. There must also be supervision because the men and women being stored must leave physically and mentally unharmed, to the maximum extent possible. All other needs, including medical and dental care, must be met. If wardens do otherwise, they will appear insensitive. More, they will lose their jobs and possibly end up in prison themselves. The U.S. Constitution protects men and women in prison from the abuses of their overseers.

Inmates can even get married while they are there, complete with a ceremony in the prison chapel. That right and many others are guaranteed by the Constitution. The U.S. Supreme Court has so ruled. The worst recorded case of a warden failing to warehouse his inmates properly was in a Southern prison called Andersonville during the Civil War. The warden was eventually put on trial for murder, convicted and hung.

Andersonville was an exciting prison because of its rapid turnover. Inmates dropped off like flies. Simultaneously, real flies multiplied due to poor sanitation. Many men tried to escape that hellhole, but they were shot. People were miserable, including the guards who could not escape the stench. But no one was bored. One day a group of Southern citizens traveled to the prison to help the inmates. They did not bring musical instruments, paint brushes,

sketch pads, music books, or other artistic aids. Instead, they brought a wagon full of fresh food to save the men's lives. The warden turned them away. The incident was used at his trial to condemn him for his atrocious warehousing methods.

Having entered a more modern age, most prisons today are air conditioned. Everything needed to sustain life is provided in abundance. It is better to give than to receive bad press, lawsuits and job demotions if you are a warden. Most wardens know that mass incarceration does not make sense. You cannot punish people for wrongdoing while at the same time take on the role of their Sugar Daddy who will take care of all their needs. Should we seek to punish at all? When a person steals from or hurts another, shouldn't the perpetrator be given an opportunity to provide compensation? What happened to an eye for an eye transplant, a television for a television, and so on? Wardens think about this too but they shrug their shoulders. If the current system of warehousing offenders is good enough for politicians in power and the constituents they represent, it's good enough for them.

Wardens also know how expensive it is to do it right, as they must do. Taking into account food, medicine, security, staff and all the rest, $100 per day cost for each inmate is common. Surely a futuristic novelist somewhere is looking at less costly human warehousing methods. Perhaps slowing inmates' metabolism and putting them to sleep for the duration of their sentence, or maybe developing an aging pill. Take one and age a year. Got a 20-year sentence? You must take 20 to avoid incarceration. Of course, that number may kill you if you are an older person whose life expectancy is not long. But you would die in prison anyway if you went in at an advanced age. Wouldn't you rather expire in the free world?

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Before deciding to become a mentor to imprisoned artists, you should understand the absurdity and dullness of the system in which you are getting involved. There is little excitement for you if you merely correspond with inmates from the outside, even less if you go inside. At least on the outside you will get letters from inmates exaggerating their concerns and conditions. They don't want to disappoint you and may give you what they think you expect. When they describe atrocious happenings, you should take them with a grain of salt, maybe two. If the place were as bad as

described, the prisoners would not survive, or they would kill themselves. Who could be enticed to work as staff in such a place?

On the inside you will mostly see inmates playing cards, sleeping or mopping floors. The floor mopping, the most observable inmate activity on any given day, is almost always done at the inmates' request. They are so bored that they welcome any diversion. Pushing a mop, instead of reclining or sitting down, is an attractive option. Why would an outsider want to work with people in such a sterile and stagnating environment? Why would someone want to enter such a setting, even for brief visits? Don't people have enough depression in their own lives?

Your motivation to become a mentor to artists in prison must be pure and more than short term. This is not a quick thrill. It's a long struggle in which the results may not be readily apparent. Keep in mind that you are dealing with damaged goods. The damage was done before prison in most cases. In all instances, the prison experience militates against recovery. Imprisoned men and women who succeed in bettering themselves do it in spite of their circumstances, not because of them. You must understand that you are dealing with abnormal people, and that their abnormal setting is not a positive influence in helping them. As long as they remain there, they are likely to become more damaged by the day.

In view of the obstacles that exist, you need to decide whether you believe you can be effective. And you will not be unless you adopt a perspective that differs from the view of many in the help professions. Sad to say, there are people who look down on those they seek to help. Their thoughts are usually contained in their eyes, if not their words. "What a poor thing you are," they say. "How awful that this should happen to you. I feel so sorry for what you are going through."

What they are really saying is that they are superior. Maybe they are. More likely, it is what they want to be. By working with people who are going through hardships, they can lift up their own lives. Feel they are better off.

Is this necessarily a bad thing? An argument can be made either way. On the one hand, patronizing those being helped can be seen as condescension, which is elitist and evil no matter what. One's motivation in helping others should be wholesome and above board, not some form of self-adulation. If you cannot accept the people you seek to help as your equals, regardless of their circumstances, you should leave them alone.

That is one school of thinking. The other is that the reason why people choose to help others does not matter as long as they provide help. Think of yourself in an emergency. Does it matter why someone comes to your aid? Even if they are there out of morbid curiosity, the important thing is that they have taken the step to lend a hand. Even if their eyes or words are derogatory, you don't want them to go away. Even if they invoke a god who is not your God, or you do not believe in God at all, why question the helper's motivation? It makes no sense if they are effective in aiding you.

Pat Nolan, senior associate of ex-Watergate felon Chuck Colson who founded Prison Fellowship Ministry, has provided good insight on this. Nolan was once a state legislator in California before he was caught taking a bribe. Then he went to prison. When he got out he became a champion of rehabilitation and reentry programs. He saw first-hand that prisoners were not getting much help to improve themselves on the inside so they could "make it" on the outside. Nolan used his considerable influence, ideas and intelligence to remedy this. His decision to become affiliated with a religious group was carefully considered. He knew from his time in prison that Colson's Christian ministry did more than pray for prisoners. They also did more than lobby for them, although they do that as effectively as any other group seeking to improve the lot of inmates. The ministry went the extra measure and provided direct assistance. Not from a distance, but in the prisons themselves. Prison Fellowship Ministry is known for providing legions of volunteers to go into prisons and helping inmates in a variety of ways. They provide counseling, entertainment and personal development programs. Christian or non-Christian, everyone is welcome and can benefit. While each program has a religious theme, its references to God are not done to the point of suffocation. You can come with your own ideas and they will be heard.

With a budget of more than $50 million annually and a network of volunteers covering virtually every region in America, the Colson ministry has much political clout. It uses it whenever necessary if a warden puts a roadblock in its path of reaching out to prisoners. For example, when programs conducted by the ministry are held in prisons, the volunteer men and women who coordinate them insist that the warden roll out the red carpet for them and their inmate participants. That includes making meeting rooms available that are not usually provided to prisoners. Or allowing prisoners to enjoy snacks such as fresh cookies during the program that the chow hall prepares. Most wardens would rather not provide these special

privileges. They involve time and trouble of prison staff and they give inmates more than they are legally entitled to. But wardens also know they are dealing with a strong force in Prison Fellowship Ministry. If they refuse, they will be triggering an army of opposition, one dedicated to human advancement and humanitarian with no less than God on their side.

Nolan does a lot of public speaking, and he is good at it. He often lectures to large groups that have no interest in religion. Sometimes their members are downright anti-religious. How does he justify his affiliation with Prison Fellowship Ministry? To his credit, Nolan never uses the word God in addressing nonreligious skeptics. He does not want to appear superior or arouse their suspicions by telling them that he is doing the work of God, which he believes he is. Nor does he quote the Bible when he speaks to secular audiences, although there are good passages in it about the need to visit prisoners and to help the downtrodden.

Instead Nolan quotes bank robber Willie Sutton. When Sutton was asked why he robbed banks he said, "That's where the money is." Nolan says: "You can say the same thing about churches. That's where the people are." By that, he means the people who are willing to help; the people who will come forward to put their words of assistance and outrage into action; who are not afraid to get their hands dirty by comforting prisoners or confronting wardens. People who will give up time, money and more for a cause they believe in. What's the difference if that cause is rooted in Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or any other religious ideology? Where are the atheists and agnostics who are organizing themselves to come into prisons to positively interact with prisoners and staff? This is not to denigrate nonreligious people. Following a religion is a matter of personal choice. The U.S. Constitution that guarantees freedom of religion also insures freedom *from* religion.

Religion may or may not play a part in motivating a person to become a mentor to imprisoned artists. Whatever the motivation, however, it must be an unselfish desire to improve the human condition in prison and beyond by aiding in the development and dissemination of art. At the risk of upsetting Nolan, Colson and their colleagues, could a desire to stand head and shoulders above prisoners be motivating Christians to get involved in such a ministry? Do those who visit prisons go to observe and secretly mock those they believe are greater sinners than they are? It may be the case with some.

The problem with this type of motivation is that it eventually produces disillusionment on the part of mentors. They end up suffering more than the inmates they seek to help. And it's usually only a matter of time before they throw in their sketchpads and discontinue their mentor roles.

The best way to become a successful mentor is to have a pure desire to help. Approach the prison artist on an equal footing, or even look up to that person. Superior to you? Think about your situation, and compare it to theirs. Do that strictly in terms of art. If you are only a follower of the arts rather than an artist yourself, the comparison is simple. You are like a roadie who is helping a rising star. You put the star on a pedestal even if his or her star is not very high in the sky at the moment. Why else would you be there, particularly if your roadie work is done without compensation? You would not be a rational person if you took on the position to disparage the person you want to help.

Try to be as encouraging and complimentary as possible. You want the artist to succeed. Because if he or she does, your own position will be elevated. You will then be in the spotlight, feted at prestigious events, enter first-class surroundings. As the crowds grow to see and hear the artist, your own worth will increase. You stuck it out, you were there at the beginning and you always knew that the person had the drive and talent to be a big success.

Why don't you attach yourself to someone who is already a star? Maybe because that person doesn't need you; or perhaps because you believe your artist is better even without star status and a large following. Talent is not always immediately rewarded. Sometimes it never is. The great organist and composer Johann Sebastian Bach, who lived from 1685 to 1750, was not considered important during his lifetime. More than 100 years passed after his death before his compositions were played and appreciated beyond the small sector of Germany where he lived and worked. Forty-six pieces of Bach's music that were to become world renowned were written by him while he was incarcerated. He did time when he got into a disagreement with an influential duke. Bach had agreed to play for him and then changed his mind. The duke called it fraud, and a judge agreed. Those who mentored to Bach while he was in jail did not think they were helping someone who would become famous. But they all knew that Bach had the potential for greatness as every artist has. More importantly, they looked up to him because of their personal appreciation of his work.

No matter the person you choose to assist in prison, if the artist is dedicated you will find reason to show respect and admiration. A committed artist will be productive in creating a steady flow of art. The quality may not be good in early stages. Or it might be excellent. Good art like beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. The fact that a body of art exists and is growing should be enough to keep you an active and encouraging supporter. The point it that you must believe in the artist or you will not be happy or effective as a mentor. If you reach a stage where you do not believe the person is serious, you cannot be serious about your role. That's the time you must move to another artist or give up mentoring. An artist who does not believe in himself or herself is finished as an artist. And your position as a mentor should be over too.

When you decide to become a mentor to an imprisoned artist, you need to start on the right foot. You should always keep an eye on that foot to make sure that the ground is not shifting to such a degree that you need to find new territory. The correct foot means the right artist. You need to separate real artists from fake ones. Anyone can claim to be an artist, but the proof is in the output. We are not talking about *quality* here. That word is meaningless in art. It is like saying that one smile is superior to another. Is the grin on the Mona Lisa better than the smile of a Cheshire cat? Particularly as a non-artist you cannot be judgmental, only encouraging. An artist in prison must be judged by the quantity rather than the quality of work produced. Bach is a case in point. The 46 compositions he created in jail were done entirely during his one-month sentence. He was a serious and productive artist. His works were not all considered outstanding. None of the 1,200 pieces he created in his lifetime were. But no one while he lived could deny his dedication to art, in or out of jail.

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Let us look at one incarcerated artist who became famous. This artist had a mentor for his entire life because of the dedication that the mentor saw in him.

The artist is Vincent Van Gogh who only began painting at the age of 27 when he found himself alone and destitute. He created art to raise his spirits, not his income since he did not sell a single piece either then or during the rest of life. Not that his mentor, his brother Theo, did not try.

Theo was in a position to attempt to make sales since he was an art dealer in Paris. Both brothers were born in Holland, Vincent in 1853. After Theo established himself in Paris, he asked Vincent to join him. They labored in the retail art world, though neither was an artist. Vincent, the less stable of the two, decided he wanted to leave that comfortable life. He became a missionary in Belgium where he shared the poverty and hardships of miners. When he couldn't get along with his superiors, he was kicked out of the mission. It was 1880. That year Vincent decided to become a self-taught artist.

From the beginning he was prolific. But he was not very good. As an art dealer who thought he knew what was saleable, Theo made constructive suggestions. He convinced Vincent to return to Paris to interact with influential artists like Degas, Gauguin, and others. After Vincent incorporated their impressionist techniques, he headed again on the road. Producing much art in the new style, but unable to live without the subsistence checks that Theo sent, Vincent went insane in 1888. The last two years of his life saw his confinement in mental hospitals. Here was his imprisonment. During that time he needed his mentor more than ever. The period he was locked away turned out to be the beginning of the most productive segment of his life. The many astounding paintings he produced were vivid in color, with flame-like forms. They expressed his deepest emotions and would eventually establish him as a master artist. But neither he nor Theo would live long enough to see that happen.

Theo did his job of mentoring well. He encouraged quantity, which finally produced greatness. All of Vincent Van Gogh's many works are valued today. They are located throughout the world, with the greatest number, 200 paintings and 600 drawings, on view in two museums in his native Holland.

In the late 20th Century, a major motion picture was made entitled, *Vincent and Theo*. It dealt with the relationship between the artist and his mentor. It is worth seeing for anyone who wants to become a mentor to an imprisoned artist. Theo is depicted as a patient, caring and quiet person, but not a pushover. He exposes Vincent to different artists and art styles, always emphasizing the need for experimentation and development. Theo sought to help Vincent but he also wanted something in return: art. He needed to know that he was aiding someone serious about his craft. There was never any question in Theo's mind that the greatness of Vincent would someday be recognized. It was just a matter of time. That is the attitude that all mentors need to have.

As a patron of the arts though not an artist himself, Theo represented the first category of mentors. The second are those who are artists. These mentors perform both a supportive and a teaching role. They are cheerleaders as well as members of the team. Helen was a mentor to me in my musical development, but Paul, the musician for our prison chapel, was teacher as well as mentor. Helen gave me music books, encouragement and a guitar. Paul gave me advice and a great model of musicianship in himself. I saw Paul at least weekly. Helen never came to visit, nor did I ask her too. I felt she was doing enough. She was my mysterious lady whom I idealized. I saw her as a woman of so much warmth and compassion that she could have melted the prison walls. I would have been disappointed had she visited and the walls did not crumble.

My relationship and long-distance dependence on Helen is not unique to artists, in or out of prison. Peter Tchaikovsky, born in Russia in 1840, became famous for his ballets, symphonies, the *1812 Overture*, and the *First Piano Concerto*. His mentor played a prominent role in his success. She had first contacted him to offer encouragement and support shortly after he attempted to commit suicide. That happened when he found himself in an unhappy marriage. In fact, Tchaikovsky was gay. The woman who became his mentor was several years older, a wealthy widow. In offering support, including money to pay his bills so he would be free to compose, she specified that she did not want to meet him. She wanted to interact with his art, not him. That way she could focus on it and make objective suggestions without being influenced by her personal feelings toward him. After he accepted the arrangement, a long period of mentoring followed. She attended performances of some of his works and they sometimes spotted each other in crowds. But they carefully avoided meeting.

The relationship between Helen and me was not so extreme, but it came close. Not only did she never visit but I never called her while I was in prison. I could have easily done so because telephones in my federal prison were reasonable and accessible. Still, I was not motivated to call because I wanted to keep both of us focused on my music. That's easy to do in letters because they are composed with care and forethought. In personal conversations, anything can happen, particularly if you are in a state of emotional deprivation as I was after my family abandoned me.

Unlike Tchaikovsky and his lifelong mentor, I eventually met Helen. It happened because I no longer needed the mentoring that

she offered. Leaving prison, I entered a strange new universe where I needed a friend. Helen fulfilled that role well with her many contacts and worldly insights. She told me what I could expect and how I might utilize my options. Remember, Helen had also traveled the path from incarceration to freedom. As good as a mentor that she was, she turned out to be a better friend. Helen helped me bridge the two worlds well. Tchaikovsky may have wanted the same of his mentor when he was about to leave one world and enter another. On his death bed at age 53, he repeatedly mumbled her name.

Whether mine or Tchaikovsky's, a mentor who is not an artist herself can easily admire the artist she is supporting. Without technical knowledge of how or what the artist is creating, all she needs is faith.

But suppose you are a mentor like Paul who understands music and knows the steps needed to make it better? And suppose you are much more technically advanced than the artist you are mentoring, as Paul was in my case? In such a situation, you have to be careful in evaluating why you want to help. Your technical know-how puts you in a position to dampen a prisoner's interest in art. All you have to do is be overly critical and overtly condescending. While you can be of more direct help than a nonartist mentor, you can also do more damage. Some of that damage can come back to haunt you if the artist proves you wrong.

Paul had the right motivation for helping me, I believe. He did it to give me a shot at being a better artist. I would be out of prison someday, he knew, returning to the free world, possibly as his neighbor. Why not allow me to be the best I could be? As an artist, Paul knew the transforming power that art has. He saw me as a willing person eager to be transformed. He did not want to pass up the opportunity to help. At least, he wanted to see where it went. I'm sure he would have pulled out of his role if he saw me loosing focus of my art. He would know when that happened as an artist himself. I might have been able to fool Helen for a time, but not Paul.

Perhaps Paul's selfless motivation came from his religious devotion. His spiritual training told him to help others when he could. But it also instructed, "God helps those who help themselves." Had I not shown I was willing to do that, I don't think he would have mentored me as much as he did. Maybe he would have even backed away completely. As an excellent musician in great demand, he certainly had a lot to do. Either because of or in

spite of his religion, Paul had another trait that helped him in his mentoring role. He was humble. This played an important and positive role in our relationship. It revealed itself in a few ways. Despite his superior knowledge of music and his supreme ability to play it, never once did Paul laugh at my mistakes. He did not even frown. That was important to me since I felt comfortable experimenting, a key component of learning. His corrections of me were gentle, his words as soft as his playing was fierce. There wasn't anything that I was reluctant to ask him. He listened and responded thoughtfully to my inquiries. Never did I ask a question, no matter how simplistic, that he would not answer with care and respect.

In short, Paul treated me as an equal, even if he did not see me as one in all respects. That was a good thing for both of us. For me, it helped maintain a high level of enthusiasm. I felt that even if I were not his equal in music I could be someday. I thought that if he, an accomplished musician, felt so strongly about my ability, why should I take a lesser view of what I could do? At the same time, Paul's egalitarian outlook was good for him. Had he demonstrated the attitude that I was an inferior, either because of my prisoner status or my musical deficiencies, he would have eventually become disillusioned. I had many things going for me as an imprisoned artist that free-worlders did not. Perhaps he sensed that. Had he started out being disparaging of me, I think he would have ended up being envious. I know he was impressed with how much I was learning, both through him and on my own. You might think that my doing that while being locked up was not easy. But I had time and I had motivation, and that is all you need to learn and make music proficiently.

Imagine if you lived in a community where all services were provided. I'm not just talking about fire protection, police and sanitation. I mean food shopping, meal preparation, laundry, clothing purchase and everything else. As soon as I adjusted to prison life and saw what was being provided for me, I began wondering what this so-called punishment was all about. This could be heaven or it could be hell. It all depended on my outlook. I could act like a spoiled kid and complain about everything. After all, this was not where I wanted to be. It was not *home*; it did not have my favorite foods; the décor did not include my preferred colors. On the other hand I could go with the flow. Pretend that I had entered a college whose amenities were few. But I had been admitted on a full scholarship, with room, board, school uniform,

medical, dental and other expenses covered. What did I have to complain about since my field of study could be anything I chose? That's when I chose music and writing, two lifelong interests that I never had the opportunity to pursue seriously in the bustle of everyday life. Now the opportunity had arrived and I was determined not to squander it by acting like a dilettante or complainer.

Could the judge who sentenced me have envisioned this? He was not stupid so he must have known. What then could his concept of punishment have been? Perhaps he was not sure about my guilt. Maybe he believed me when I testified to the truth. In his uncertainty, he sent me here where he knew the level of punishment would be anything I accepted.

Early on, I chose *no punishment*. I decided to use every day, every hour and every experience as an opportunity to create and improve my art. So steadfast was I in that determination that I eventually refused to do even the slightest prison job unless it was related to music or writing. Send me to the hole if you will but send me with my music books and writing implements as I knew would be the case. My scholarship called for it. My education would continue there.

Staff came to respect my commitment to art and assigned me to teach other inmates, first writing, then guitar. When Paul arrived at the prison, I was ready for him. But was he ready for me? Did he realize the opportunity I had, with or without his involvement? Would he understand that I was his equal—maybe even his superior—in all that was available to me to develop my art? If he did not accept me on those terms, he would have had a sad awakening. Whatever Paul thought when we first met I don't know. But I know that he rapidly became in awe of my ability to absorb what he showed me and the ease in which I adopted the suggestions he made. It had nothing to do with brilliance on my part, and little or nothing to do with talent. In fact I have no belief in either. What he saw was an artist striving for perfection in an environment where I had everything I needed to advance. I had time to study and practice, time to experiment, time to develop. Most importantly, I had the need to succeed. Fellow prisoners and staff sensed that and helped me when they could. And if they couldn't help, they stood aside and let me move ahead on my own.

My son Teague, while he was still speaking to me before falling under the influence of his older lawyer brother, asked me what prison was like when he came to visit. I thought for a moment and

then told him. In answering, my intent was neither to glamorize nor shock. "It's like the 1980's movie *Groundhog Day*." In it, urbane Bill Murray makes a work-related visit to a small town where he doesn't want to be. His one night there turns into a lengthy period, much to his horror. Each day when he awakes, the day does not change. It is always the same date on the calendar, Groundhog Day. He must greet the same people in this tiny enclave and go through the same routines, day after day. He has few choices of what to do and where to go. He hates it so much you would think he will kill himself, or those around him. In the beginning he indeed gets violent and reckless. But he eventually develops the maturity to calm down and accept his fate. His one-day vacation, he realizes, could last a lifetime. He may as well make the most of it. He searches out the small town piano teacher and begins taking lessons. It becomes part of his daily routine, as does practice. His goal of becoming a world-class pianist is eventually reached. The spell is finally broken and he leaves the town an accomplished artist and a better human being.

Sometimes in dealing with Paul I felt he would have changed places with me if given the opportunity. Before I left prison we were making music together and had a large following among both inmates and staff. Even nonreligious prisoners and officers came to the chapel to hear us. I may not have been Paul's equal when I began, but I believe I eventually got there. The transition was smooth for both of us. It would have been disheartening for Paul, I'm sure, had he not treated me as an equal from the beginning. I think that a colleague is what Paul wanted all along, someone with whom he could share and exchange his art. He was neither surprised nor disappointed when that happened.

Examining one's motivation to become a mentor to artists in prison is the first step in undertaking this role. The second is to pry open the door to your local jail or prison so you can get your foot in it. A good place to start is to obtain a DVD that contains the highlights of a series of mentoring workshops conducted by the Prison Art Gallery in Washington D.C. The workshop DVD includes the presentations of prison officials and formerly imprisoned artists about the role of mentors.

The DVD represents more than an opportunity to obtain valuable information and insight from experts and ex-prisoner artists. It is a chance to understand the thinking of jail and prison officials as they provide an introduction to the prison world. There is no substitute for this first-hand information since we are talking about a highly

secretive world: the heavily guarded barbwire fortresses known as jails and prisons. Such places are designed as much to keep people out as to keep them in. When you have the rare chance of hearing directly from officials work there, you need to take advantage of it.

Of course you do not need to go into a prison to be a mentor to an artist there. You can assume a role similar to what Helen adopted with me. Whether or not you are an artist, this can lead to a fulfilling and effective mentoring relationship. To get started you will need the name and address of the artist you want to help. You can get that by going to the Prison Art Gallery in Washington, D.C. and examining a cross section of the hundreds of pieces of art there created in prison. Pick out the styles and themes you like and then write to the artists who made them, offering encouragement and help. Chances are you will get a positive reply, and a mentoring proposal to consider. This may sound overwhelming. So let's look at the details.

The Prison Art Gallery is in downtown, D.C. Admission is free. There is no time limit on how long you can spend there, so take your time. Do not expect a traditional gallery. This one is geared to the artists, not the customers. It is meant to give imprisoned artists a platform and forum for their art, no matter what level of development they are at. Selling art is secondary to showing it at the Prison Art Gallery. Giving artists an ego boost is more important than giving them money, although that also occurs when their art sells.

While its holdings are large, the space of the Prison Art Gallery is not big, though a major expansion is being planned. There are plenty of framed pieces on walls, so many, in fact, that no wall space remains uncovered. Most gallery managers would be flabbergasted to see such complete use of space.

It doesn't stop at the walls. At the Prison Art Gallery there are canvas display racks filled with art. A great deal of art is also propped against the walls. "We have so much, and most of it very good," says gallery curator Anita Winston. She has been to prison many times herself, but not as an inmate. She has a son in prison that she visits. Winston is an artist, while her son is a writer. "I illustrate a lot of what he writes," she says. He is a Washington, DC prisoner serving time in a federal prison in Florida. All DC residents convicted of offenses with a sentence of more than a year are sent to distant prisons. That's because the city of Washington does not have a prison of its own, only a jail for short-term prisoners and those awaiting trial. The distance to far-flung prisons is a

hardship for families; they can't visit their loved ones as much as they would like. Winston has another son at a local jail. He's a corrections officer, recently promoted to a supervisory position.

The Prison Art Gallery contains a wealth of art for two reasons. First, artists in prison tend to be highly prolific. There are some who submit work every month, and one artist who sends work every week. Secondly, no work is rejected by the gallery; no evaluation and no censorship applied. Even the condition of the work does not matter. "Some of it comes in very bad shape," Winston says. One of her specialties is restoration. She leads a staff of mostly volunteers who mat and frame art. They also write letters to prison artists to assure them that their work arrived safely. At the same time, compliments and words of encouragement are provided. That, and a guarantee that when a piece is sold the artist will get a substantial portion of the proceeds, makes the Prison Art Gallery a popular place for prisoners to send art.

There are a few reasons why it is a good place for outside artists and nonartists wishing to become mentors to visit. They will not only be looking at art there but reading about the artists. Personal details and stories about the artists accompany each piece, often written by the artist. A good way to start to start looking for an artist to mentor is to select a category of art that is personally appealing. The gallery organizes its collection into various sections, such as landscapes, portraits, abstracts, still life, religious, erotica, prison themes and so on. Having a subject interest in common with an artist can help foster a relationship.

The next thing to look for is how the work was executed. This will help potential mentors decide what level artist they want to assist. All levels can be found at the Prison Art Gallery, from highly polished to "developing." All artists in prison are in need of mentoring, even the most advanced. That's because they work in an environment where options are restricted and creativity often discouraged. A mentor can alleviate obstacles, or at least soften them. Bringing an outside perspective and the ability to initiate Internet messages and make contacts can do miracles. Just because an artist is a master doesn't make him or her exempt from the pressures that life brings, especially prison life. Van Gogh had just exited his asylum imprisonment and was producing the best art of his life when he decided to kill himself.

Don't overlook artists still in training. Their art on display at the Prison Art Gallery will show rough spots, but to them they are gems. Otherwise they wouldn't have sent them to the gallery.

They'd have had no reason to send art if they thought it would not be admired and purchased. It's not easy for inmates to pack and send art from prison. And they do so at their own expense. They don't expect that their work will be ignored or ridiculed. Viewers of their art can't help but be impressed. There is a labor of love in what they do; their commitment is so strong that they are blinded to shortcomings. Will this be a permanent condition of their art? Not if the artists keep working and developing. A mentor can help with encouraging words and gentle suggestions such as "try something new."

An experienced free-world artist who wishes to become a mentor might want to look for art done in a medium in which she or he has worked. A watercolor artist, for example, would be an ideal match for someone in prison doing, or attempting to do, that type of art. Or the alignment might be in the subject of the art. An abstract artist in prison would be inspired by an outside counterpart as a mentor. There would also be great respect for any suggestions of change that the mentor made.

A final factor in picking prison artists for possible mentoring is their physical location. You may wish to pick an artist who is in a prison close to your home. That way you can visit easily if your intention is to go beyond correspondence. Having the option to visit is an advantage. Of course an artist can be at a distant location and still be within reach. Think of friends and relatives you might have across the country. If you find an artist to mentor where one of these acquaintances is located, you can arrange a trip where both can be seen.

After finding artists in prison you want to mentor, your next step is to contact them. I use the plural here because you'd be wise in writing more than one artist. The problem with contacting only one is that you may not get a response. The inmate may have been transferred to another prison since his or her art and bio were submitted to the Prison Art Gallery. Or released. Even with a response, you may not want to take the next step by offering support. You need to evaluate the answer you get to determine if this is an individual you want to help. Be wary of hustles, especially any requests for money. Regardless of the reason given for needing money, you should discontinue contact at that point. That's because you've reached an artist who is a scam artist. There's no compelling reason to have money in prison unless you're a gambler. Some inmates use their art as a hustle, talking about how they'll repay the smallest loan when sales are made. Why the

money is needed is fabricated. They might say it's for an appeal attorney, medical expenses, healthy food from the commissary to avoid the "crap and poison" served in the chow hall, and a lot more. Don't believe any of it. Helen never sent me a penny, nor did I ask. I only wanted materials and connections for my art.

There may be other reasons for not wanting to continue interacting with an inmate after his initial correspondence is received. If art is not uppermost on his mind, you best steer away. That assumes you want to be a mentor instead of an inmate's girlfriend, boyfriend, spiritual advisor, pen pal or some other role. There are places to go for that, such as pen pal organizations and religious groups. Don't compromise your mentor position by trying to mix them. It's not fair to the artist who holds the key to independence in his art if he gets the right help. And it's not fair to you since you are being asked to stretch your time and emotional resources by losing focus.

Below is a sample letter that can be used to initiate correspondence with an imprisoned artist. Note that it begins with the first name of the artist rather a more formal opening. The reason for this is that formality smacks of prison bureaucracy for inmates. They are routinely addressed as Mr. and Ms. by prison officers who want to maintain distance from them. "Mr. Smith, your day of execution has arrived and the warden is in the hall waiting to escort you to the death chamber." You should distance yourself from that mode. Here's the suggested letter:

> Dear Anthony,
>
> I was at the Prison Art Gallery in Washington, D.C., where I came across your exceptional painting of a country scene that you so aptly entitled "Solace." I also saw other fine work that you did. I greatly admire your drive, talent and determination. There's no doubt in my mind that you will accomplish much in the world of art, beyond what you have already accomplished.
>
> Please understand that my interest in writing you is strictly in your art, as art is important to me. I think you have what it takes to be a real force with your work. While my own resources are limited, perhaps I can assist you by going to the Internet and printing items that may be useful to you; or

providing you with art magazines that may help you.

I took forward to hearing from you. Please keep your letter brief since I have a busy schedule and limited time. Also I imagine you must want to spend your own time creating as much of your wonderful art as you can.

Thank you,
Jane Doe

This letter may appear cold, but you're dealing with a deprived person. You don't want any misunderstandings or overreactions to your offer. Ground rules need to be set in the beginning by you. You'll determine from the response whether the inmate can follow instructions, if he is trustworthy. Even your request for a brief response is important. You don't want a long hard-luck story as a reply, whether the story is real or fake. You'd rather the inmate work on his art rather than spend hours and pages trying to patronize you. To encourage anything else would be a disservice to him. Even if he is genuinely grateful and wants to write you an elaborate, highly personal letter, you must discourage him. He should stick to his art since that will likely be around after you've departed.

Depending on his response, you may wish to make your exit without answering. That will also help him develop his art. He will know to act more seriously in the future when someone offers help. Certainly if he doesn't follow the ground rules you've set, you shouldn't reply. By keeping correspondence short, you will not get a letter with one page about his art and art needs, and ten about his other interests and needs. A mentor sometimes has to be tough, and it's best to start that toughness at the beginning. If he wastes words in his short reply talking about anything other than his art—"what do you look like?" for example—he's not a serious artist.

Your return address should be a post office box. Another option is to use the address of a nonprofit organization where you volunteer, such as the Prison Art Gallery. Most nonprofits will allow you this privilege if you are helping them.

While on the subject of addresses, let's consider how to get them for artists in prison. Some addresses will be on the backs of art pieces at the Prison Art Gallery, if you choose to go there. When the artist address is not there, the prison location will usually be. With that information you can go to the Internet and get the artist's

prison number and prison address. You will need that in order for your letter to get to the inmate. All jurisdictions in the U.S. contain a website where you can locate and get details about prisoners. If you don't find the person there, the inmate has probably been released.

Doing this Internet research is important even if you get the full address when you inspect the art at the Prison Art Gallery. You need to verify that the address is up-to-date.

Another way to get the address of hundreds of artists featured at the Prison Art Gallery is to attend one of the gallery's free mentoring workshops. The last portion of the day-long workshop is a review of art in the gallery, with an eye toward finding artists to pair with mentors. This is the same exercise that one can do on their own, but there are advantages to doing it during a workshop. Then, ex-prisoner artists will be on hand to help you with your selections. They can provide insight into obstacles and needs of prisoners who work in various art styles and media. Another advantage is that the current addresses of artists you select will be provided to you by workshop leaders. This confidential information is not provided at any other time. The reason is that, just as prisoners can exploit outsiders, so they can be taken advantage of by outsiders. There are unscrupulous art agents who prey upon prisoners. They offer help but only want to steal art. Some even charge a fee as they plan their theft. They call it an agent fee, entry fee, expense promotion fee, or some other nonsense. Reputable groups, such as the Safe Streets Arts Foundation, never charge prisoners or their families for restoring, framing, displaying or representing work to be sold.

Anyone can visit the Prison Art Gallery and copy the names and prison locations of artists, then go to the Internet for their addresses. But that takes a lot of work when many addressers are sought. At the workshop the addresses are provided, up to five per participant. Addresses are given freely to attendees because they have shown their commitment to prison artists by giving up their time to participate in the training to assist them.

If you are unable to come to the Prison Art Gallery or attend the free mentoring workshops, there are other options for getting prison artist names and addresses. Go to the Internet and search for "prison art." You'll find a number of organizations that work with artists behind bars, including one in Florida called "Art Behind Bars." It was started over a dozen years ago by a husband and wife team, Lynn and Ernest Vantriglia. Lynn is an artist and Ernie was a musician. I use the past tense for Ernie because he died in 2008.

He had a long and productive career, including touring Europe for several years with his guitar. People there saw a star without name recognition, which allowed them to see Ernie often for free. He never lost touch with those in need, which made his transition to helping prisoners easy. With a half-hour's notice, Ernie performed at the first prison art show in Washington, DC, in 2004, sponsored by the Prisons Foundation. Never far from her devoted husband's side, Lynn was also on hand for the show. She helped organize and present the art she had brought from Florida prisons and pieces provided by the Prison Art Gallery. Lynn reacted to Ernie's death with newfound determination to continue their important work.

Art Behind Bars operates differently from the Prison Art Gallery in that instead of giving artists money from art sales, the funds go to needy community organizations. The artists know this in advance. If they seek an arrangement in which they or their families can profit from sales, Lynn gives them the name and address of the Prison Art Gallery.

When doing an Internet search for "prison art," Art Behind Bars and several other groups will appear. You need not try to determine which ones are reputable. Your purpose is to locate men and women doing art in prison. On many of the websites you will see their art. If the names of the artists and the states in which they are located are provided, you can go online to the inmate locater of that jurisdiction to get their number and prison address. Then you can write a letter of the type suggested.

Beginning a mentoring relationship through correspondence is not the only way to get started. Rather than contacting a prisoner, you can start with a prison official. You'll have to be patient in going that route. Unlike inmates who have a lot of time on their hands to answer letters, prison staff are hard pressed to find a few moments to spare.

I remember being in jail during nightly lockdowns. That's when everyone at the end of the day has to leave the TV room and other common areas to return to their cells. At that hour, between 10:30 and 11:00 PM, inmates are engaged in various activities. The officers in the cell block have their hands full rounding everyone up; literally putting them to bed. This is typical of how frenzied the work at a jail can be. There are many mouths to feed and voices to hear, and double that number of ears that may not always be receptive to instructions or commands. At night in the block, prisoners are doing many things besides watching TV. They are exercising, playing cards or board games, speaking among

themselves, talking on the telephones to their loved ones, or participating in bible study or group prayer meetings. None of them want to be disturbed. The immediate reaction of most is to ignore the lockdown announcement. There are 150 inmates versus three, at most, officers. The beleaguered inmates, who since the last count at 8pm are enjoying the small amount of freedom afforded them outside their cells, are not immediately cooperative. They will not go gently into that good night.

The block officers try persuade them by using all the psychology and know-how they have. These staffers resemble mother hens trying to rein in their chicks. The hens barely bring in one chick when another wanders away. This exercise in patience and persuasion not only takes place at night but at several points during the day. Each time a count is made or a meal arrives, staff has to discontinue what they were doing and undertake the monumental task of sending inmates to their cells.

The tasks that staff must discontinue when counts are made consist mostly of helping inmates. Some prisoners may need medical help. Headaches and other ailments are common in jail. Others may need psychological services. In between there are a hundred needs to be met: toilet paper and writing paper; eating utensils; information and advice of all kinds.

In addition to officers being taxed severely, staff who work in administrative positions at the jail are similarly overwhelmed. Jails are small, congested places with inmates all over the place. Some are on their way to see visitors; others have needs that cannot be addressed in the cell block. Administrative personnel are not in an insurance office where they are pushing paper around. They are juggling people by the thousands. It is important to keep this in mind when you make contact with a jail or prison and offer to mentor inmate artists there.

How should you make contact and with whom? Your first approach should be by telephone. That will help you get to the correct person who works with volunteers, which is what you hope to become.

Some jails and prisons have a staffer whose title reflects her or his role in recruiting and supervising volunteers. That title might be Director of Volunteer Services or something similar. In other places, there is no one with such a title but instead a staffer who wears several hats. At the Washington, D.C. Jail, which is appropriately located between a morgue and a cemetery in southeast Washington, the Reverend Betty Green holds the job. She is also the

jail's chaplain. Her religious duties are extensive; mostly arranging for outside preachers of all faiths to come to the jail *every day* to conduct services and religious study for inmates.

Green also coordinates volunteers who seek to help inmates at the jail with education, art and other needs. She has been doing her two jobs for years and she takes them very seriously. While wardens and heads of other departments at the jail have come and gone, Green has remained, respected by inmates, staff, preachers and volunteers alike. This is not to say she is popular. The jail is not a place where you try to win a popularity contest. Being popular usually means you are regarded as a pushover. Such a compliant person is a danger to herself and others, including inmates. Green listens to everyone, whether the speaker is a prospective volunteer giving a glowing report about previous experience, or an inmate presenting a hard luck story. She suspends judgment until she gets confirmation from a reliable second source. After all, a volunteer can be seeking entry into the jail to help a friend in an escape attempt. Or an inmate might tell her that he needs a one-day furlough, sometimes provided under armed escort, to go to the funeral of a deceased father who is still in the peak of health.

If you sit in her office during a typical day, you will see how busy Green is with her various tasks. Her phone rings constantly. As she talks to one caller, there may be two on hold. In addition, there may be inmates in her office with whom she is simultaneously dealing. I saw her once with two inmates who had very different concerns. She somehow managed to keep both of them content. One of them sat in the corner of her office to use a spare phone. She allowed him to call his sick mother, a situation Green earlier verified. The other prisoner had sent her an "Inmate Request," stating he was a musician and wanted to play at chapel services. The Reverend called him into her office from his cellblock so she could audition him. While he was playing the gospel standard "In the Garden" on a guitar that the Prisons Foundation had donated to the jail, Green took more phone calls while also monitoring the inmate on the phone to make sure his mother had not made a miraculous recovery and was now discussing nefarious plans with her son that could do the jail and its staff harm. On top of this, another inmate entered Green's office. Although the office has a door, it's rarely closed. The new inmate was there to secure a dictionary and a religious book from the "take one" table at one end of her office. On the other end of the office is Green's desk, which

looks massive but is not. Her entire office measures only 8 feet by 10 feet.

This is the person whose attention you are trying to get when you inquire on the phone about mentoring opportunities. If you attended a mentoring workshop at the Prison Art Gallery where she is one of the presenters, you could have met her. She is gracious to all, but particularly so if you are known to her and she believes you to be a sincere person. If you have not met, you will have to convince her of your honorable intentions and qualifications. Understanding and respecting her hard-pressed schedule is the first step toward your entry into the jail's foreign and fragile world.

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In your initial phone call to a staffer, you should briefly introduce yourself and confirm that you have reached the coordinator of volunteers. Then ask for the person's e-mail address and offer to send an e-mail to describe yourself and your interest in mentoring to prison artists. She may have other ideas, such as asking you to send her a letter and resume. Be sure to include your Certificate of Completion from a mentoring workshop or any other specialized training you may have had.

Regardless of the jail or prison you contact, you will have to complete a written application and have it approved to move to the next step. The standards for approval take into consideration any criminal convictions you might have. These don't necessarily exclude you unless something dramatic jumps out, such as a prior conviction for trying to help someone escape or a current job as a helicopter pilot. In fact, some experience as an inmate may be seen as an advantage. People with such a background are in an ideal position to understand the workings of prisons and what prisoners endure. But if your stay was in that particular prison and it was recent, you will probably be excluded because of fear that you might be able to relate *too* well. No prison staffers want a situation where you will put them at risk because you strongly favor and want to help inmate friends you left behind. Helping is one thing, but compromising prison staff is another entirely.

Not just volunteers but some prison staffers have served time. Many have since had promising careers in corrections, some moving up to the highest ranks. They know how to befriend inmates without accepting their bull. When it comes to negotiating problem situations with prisoners, few can be as effective as

someone who has been in their shoes and jumpsuits. Answer the questions about your background honestly since the information can help you. Besides, the truth will come out sooner or later.

The same truthfulness is recommended for another important question on applications. Do you have a relative who is an inmate where you wish to perform your mentoring role? Your answer may be more difficult to check for prison administrators, but if you lie and the truth is revealed, the consequences can be severe. Not only will you suffer but so will your relative in prison, even if you attempted or secured entry without that inmate's knowledge or consent. Such inmates are often transferred to a distant prison when the truth is learned. The theory is that they should be moved far away from home so that another relative doesn't try to pull the same gambit as you did. An inmate can have many relatives. Since prison staff cannot get rid of all the relatives, even if they could identify them, they get rid of the inmate. That's why prisons have "interstate pacts" so that the final destination of an inmate can be a prison anywhere.

We have seen that getting started as a mentor to artists in prison can be approached in different ways. Correspondence with an inmate artist will assure you an immediate connection. You can repeat the process with a number of prisoners until you feel strongly about someone's potential for artistic growth and accomplishment. After you establish a relationship you can decide whether you wish to visit the prison to mentor in person or continue to do it from a distance.

The second approach is to begin at the prison as a volunteer. In that capacity you will have an opportunity to be a mentor to several inmates. You can choose which ones you want to focus your efforts on as you go along. The advantage of this approach is that you will see the prisoners in their environment as they interact with others. The insights you gain will help in your mentoring role by allowing you to tailor your efforts to the needs at hand.

As you begin your mentoring work, you need to know the promises and pitfalls of your calling. Let us first consider the duties of a mentor, and later the dangers that need to be avoided.

7. DUTIES OF A MENTOR TO ARTISTS IN PRISON

If you ever have a chance to meet Reverend Betty Green, chaplain of the D.C. Jail and coordinator of volunteers there, you will go away with a favorable impression. You will also leave with a packet of information that includes an application to become a volunteer at the jail. The packet contains a "Dos and Don'ts" sheet that provides guidelines for your behavior as a volunteer. The dos are a matter of common sense: do be considerate, do be careful, do be punctual. The don'ts often make no sense, such as don't touch an inmate under any circumstances, not even a handshake. If you have ever been an inmate at the D.C. jail you will know that officers tend to be very physical with prisoners, such as giving them pats on the back, reassuring touches on the arm and, yes, handshakes. It is their way of letting inmates know that they are human beings.

Still, rules must be taken into consideration as you perform your mentoring role. You should know about them, even the ones that are counterproductive and unenforceable. In our discussion here and the next chapter, we cover what you must do to satisfy the regulations of a prison and the guidelines for following the dictates of your own conscience.

The first and most important duty of a mentor, which no prison rule book will tell you, though if you are a physician you can guess it, is to do no harm. The potential to do damage exists because inmates are relying on you. Many have a fragile ego. That's the result of two factors: being an inmate and being an artist.

While artists in general have a high degree of self-esteem, they also possess insecurity as they wonder about their achievements. Remember, art is something nebulous. Unlike an athlete who is judged by objective measures of accomplishment, an artist is evaluated in an ever-changing world of art interests. Athletes know at the end of a contest whether he or she has won. But artists only know what other people say, and can never be certain of the truthfulness of opinions. While athletes routinely compete against others, artists primarily compete against themselves.

It's no wonder that artists, before being "discovered," feel uncertain about their work. This uncertainty can multiply when they labor in a prison environment. They are not only in a place where their sanity is in jeopardy, but where their very art is in danger. It's not that they will encounter vindictive people who will

destroy it, but they are in a place so crowded that it is necessarily at risk. For example, because of the need to conduct periodic searches of inmates' possessions to safeguard the prison, art is often damaged. There are few places to store art in prison that are safe, so an artist has to take chances.

The possibility of another inmate damaging it, even inadvertently, is rare. Prisoners normally have great respect for other inmates' property. They will sometimes steal something that is immediately useable to them, such as a radio or canteen snacks, but they will not destroy. To do so in a place where there is little would be self defeating. It would also be a sign of *disrespect*, a concept that prisoners hold dear. If you steal from someone, you are valuing what a person owns. As such, theft is a compliment. Think of someone who owns a Bible or a Quran that someone steals. A religious person in prison smiles to think that someone wants to share his faith. He can always get another book. Just don't destroy what has been taken.

Prison officers do not follow the same rules. They're sometimes careless because of the demands of their job. Searching 20 cells in an hour can leave damage behind. They might be insensitive to how they handle inmate possessions. While most staffers respect the humanity of prisoners, some do not. The famous robber and escape artist of the 1930s, John Dillinger, made a comment on this. While breaking out of a jail, he pointed a gun at a jailer and demanded the keys. The jailer had a reputation for being the nastiest officer there. He was reluctant to hand over the keys, so Dillinger said, "I hope you give me a reason to pull the trigger. You're one of those guys who likes doing his job a little too much."

There are plenty of opportunities for prison officers to be sadistic, though not as many as there once were. Lawsuits won by prisoners who have been physically hurt or otherwise abused changed that. Courts have recognized that working in a prison can appeal to someone who wants to lash out and hurt others. They have directed wardens to be careful about whom they hire and to monitor how officers behave. Here's one reason that women started working as officers. They proved gentler than men, thinking with their brains rather than depending on brawn. Another bonus: men tended to be better behaved when women were in their presence. That applied to both male officers and male inmates, men representing more than 90 percent of the inmate population.

Even with less sadism practiced by staffers in prisons today, there is much insensitivity. It sometimes shows in the treatment of

art that inmates create. Whether during the course of a search or a transfer to another prison, inmate artists hold their breath in hopes that their art will not be damaged.

Worrying about both the safety and the worthiness of their art, it's no wonder that prisoners are paranoid. Enter you as a mentor who wants to help and the first thing you need to do is listen to their fears and concerns, and to take them seriously. Even as you advance your mentoring role, you need to tread lightly.

An example of a mentor who showed such awareness and concern was Joel. A professional writer in a major city, Joel found an inmate to mentor after he read a collection of published writings by prisoners. They were nonfiction essays. Joel was particularly struck by one of them. It was autobiographical, allowing Joel to understand the background of the writer and why he wrote so passionately. But the prisoner did not write particularly well. Joel sent him a letter offering help. He made clear in his letter that he was not offering to become the man's editor. Joel did not have the time for that, knowing that editing can lead to re-writing, even ghostwriting. He also knew that it was not the proper role for a mentor. A mentor should help a prisoner develop on his or her own. Anyone can be made to look good. The trick in mentoring is to lead an artist to be good.

With his letter, Joel included a self-addressed stamped envelope. After introducing himself and saying positive things about the inmate's writing, Joel invited the prisoner to send him new writing he had done. The inmate sent him a work of fiction, a short story. The prisoner explained that this was the type of writing that interested him now. The desire to write fiction came from reading back issues of the *New Yorker,* a magazine known for its quality short stories. Surely that type of writing could not be difficult for him to master, he felt. Joel knew better. He sensed the inmate's naiveté, which was confirmed when Joel read the first story the inmate wrote. It was worse than his flawed nonfiction writing. Joel sent the untouched original back after making a copy, as the inmate requested. The prisoner had wanted a security copy to exist outside prison. Joel did not tell him that the story was not worth the effort of copying it. Instead, he commented on the few good things he saw in the writing. "You've got a good ear for dialogue," he said as he thought of a joke he didn't share with the prisoner. It concerned two parrots in a cage, one saying to the other, "My agent says I've got a good ear for dialogue."

The correspondence between the two men continued and new stories kept coming from the inmate. With each, Joel responded. His comments were always positive. This continued over a six-month period. The final story the prisoner sent Joel stunned him. It was very good. Not good enough to be published, in Joel's opinion, but a marked improvement over the previous stories. He wrote back to the inmate, "Now you're starting to get it." After the letter was put in the mail, Joel thought about what he wrote. Had he tipped his hand? Would the prisoner suspect that Joel had been less than candid all along?

That was indeed the inmate's reaction. But it didn't matter. He smiled to think that Joel had withheld the truth of his opinion to encourage him; and it had worked. Joel had acted like a film director who does whatever is necessary to get a good performance out of actors. Some directors have been known to pinch an actor's foot to get a passionate facial expression during a love-making scene.

Joel had been the inmate's mentor for a half year. It was long enough for trust to build between the two. The inmate knew that Joel meant well. He was grateful that Joel had not leveled with him from the beginning. All along, the inmate thought he was a great short story writer, and this motivated him to continue writing in that medium.

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Besides encouragement, another duty of mentors is to help artists diversify. It's important for artists to vary what they create, both in subject and in medium. Two of the best artists the world has known, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, are examples of this. As unsurpassed as they both were in painting, they also excelled in other art.

Leonardo's diversification seemed to know no limits. He may have even gone overboard in his ambitions since many of his projects remained unfinished at the time of his death. Still, no one could deny the genius of the Mona Lisa and other works he did complete. He was born in 1452, forty years before fellow Italian Christopher Columbus came to America. His mother gave birth to him without being married, a scandalous event at the time. But that did not stop Leonardo from pursuing his many interests and growing up to become one of the greatest "universal men" of the Renaissance. His first love was painting. He became so skillful at it

that established artists who saw his work stopped painting. They considered him so superior they believed they could never compete. He achieved excellence by taking every advantage to learn, and by practicing intently. He saw art as his chance to become not just a first-class citizen but a famous one.

Whether out of boredom or ambition, Leonardo sought to also master other art fields. Even in times of war, which were common in that period, he wanted to make his art useful and in demand. So he let his imagination run loose. The result: he created technical drawings of advance war apparatus. Leonardo is credited with inventing the tank and other armored fighting vehicles, the submarine, the airplane and the helicopter. He was so advanced that it took hundreds of years for these inventions to actually be built. Leonardo also became skilled in architecture. His technical drawings of buildings he proposed are still striking today.

His diversification is reflected in a letter he wrote in 1483 to the Duke of Milan in which Leonardo noted his own military innovations. He added, "In peace I believe I can give you as complete satisfaction as anyone in the construction of buildings, both public and private….I can further execute sculpture in marble, bronze or clay, and in painting I can do as much as anyone, whoever he may be." Because Leonardo had the ability to back up his bragging, a lot of important and prosperous assignments came his way. One was a portrait of a *femme fatale*, the wife of a government official in Florentine, Italy; to this day, more than 500 years later, it is considered a feat of supreme oil technique. We are talking about his famous painting known as the "Mona Lisa."

Leonardo made a great name for himself while making a great living. He died in 1507 in an elegant chateau that the King of France had given him. Both his art and his diversification changed the image of artists forever. Up until Leonardo, people thought of painters as mere artisans who were paid to cover a certain number of square yards of wall per day. After Leonardo, artists were perceived as intelligent and creative thinkers, the equal of philosophers. It brought dignity to a profession that had long gone without it.

Our second example of diversification, Michelangelo, was born during Leonardo's lifetime and survived him by many years. He admired and learned from Leonardo but was also critical of the older master for not completing some of the work he began. In contrast, Michelangelo followed through, not letting his diversified interests get in the way of solid accomplishments. One of his projects that still stands as a testament to fine art and unfettered

ambition was begun in 1508. He accepted an invitation by the Pope to paint the ceiling of the expansive Sistine Chapel in the Vatican of Rome. He hired other painters to help him, but none could come close to Michelangelo's extraordinary ability. So he fired them and committed himself to do the vast job alone. Four years later it was complete. Despite appalling and dangerous work conditions, he persevered. The first half took longer than the second to paint since he had to perfect his techniques for painting a ceiling. He learned to live with the fact that he could never get far enough away from the ceiling while painting it to see what he was doing.

Like Leonardo, Michelangelo was a world-class sculptor. One of his finest works was a colossal bronze statue of Pope Julius. The piece only survived five years, through no fault of the artist. The Pope had gone out of favor and his battling opponents destroyed it. Local warfare was typical of the period. Once Michelangelo himself had to go into hiding when he supported the losing side of a dispute. A friend gave him a secret room in a house. The building still stands, with the artist's drawings on its walls. A principal tourist attraction, it's similar to the work of prison artists today who draw on their cell walls. Michelangelo eventually emerged from the room, was pardoned and continued to work in the open. He engaged in painting, sculpture and, like Leonardo, architectural drawings. Extending his creativity even further, Michelangelo wrote prose and poetry, including an autobiography. He penned the book because he was displeased with a biography someone had written of him. He wanted the story of his long life to be accurate. In old age, he produced some of his best writing and poems. He died in his 89th year, still hard at work on his diversified art.

Mentors to imprisoned artists use Michelangelo and Leonardo as examples of diversification. These famous artists benefited by having varied interests, making them more energetic, more creative, and more in demand. On this last point, artists in prison should be encouraged to diversify even beyond art so they can support themselves upon release. Mentors should make the importance of this clear. Very few people use art as a means of support on the outside. Even some of the best artists need an ordinary profession to fall back on should the need arise.

Charles Ives was an American composer who lived from 1874 to 1954. One of the best composers that the world has seen in recent times, he is famous for unconventional piano works and symphonies, one of which, his Third Symphony, won a Pulitzer Prize. But Ives never made a cent from his musical works. His

income came from working in the insurance industry. He did well there as he devoted himself as much to his job as he did to his music. He provided for a family, giving them a home in the city and a spacious summer residence in the country. Inside the summer home were books of all types, and outside, domestic animals, including a horse.

With such a comfortable life he gave his family, Ives did not have to compromise his music to bring in money. That didn't mean he worked less hard at his music. But he could be independent and go against trendy tastes to create and experiment to his heart's content. He didn't care about being popular. Once he said, "I'm the only one, with the exception of my wife and perhaps one or two others, who likes any of my music." Even when he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, he did not change. The substantial prize money did not mean much to him because he didn't need it. In fact, he gave it all away. Although most people could not relate to his music because of its newness, music professionals and scholars could. Though little of his music was performed in his lifetime, by the late 20th Century Charles Ives was the American composer most frequently heard in orchestral performances.

Ives is an example of a great artist with marketable skills beyond the world of art. He used those skills for stability, becoming his own patron from which he derived support. Unlike Tchaikovsky who had a benefactor he had to please, Ives didn't have to satisfy anyone but himself. His music shows it with its uniqueness, making him a legend.

Letting artists in prison know about Ives and others with dual careers is important because creating art in prison is not the equivalent to creating it on the outside. Prisoners have lots of leisure time; no one is compelled to work there. Many prison rule books will say the contrary; that all inmates are required to work. But the jobs are not full-time, and most of them can't even be called jobs. They are brief diversions, such as painting a room once a month. These diversions exist mostly so officials can tout the number of jobs in their prison. The jobs that entail more work, such as kitchen positions, can be refused by inmates. Staff are limited in how they can punish inmates who refuse. Putting them in disciplinary confinement only means that the inmates can't roam the compound like other prisoners? As a result, meals have to be brought to them, the same food that others enjoy in a noisy chow hall. If an officer strikes an uncooperative inmate, he will end up in jail himself. The U.S. Supreme Court has so declared.

In the past when parole and good-time credits were widely in use, you could coerce inmates to do things they might not want to do. If they did not cooperate, they would stay in prison longer. But today, with "truth in sentencing," prisoners must serve their full sentences, whether they are cooperative or not. While it is generally not a good thing to bite the hand that feeds you, there is no reason now for a prisoner not to do so. Lie down and take it easy, or get up and help your jailors; the choice is up to inmates. Prison artists adapt especially well to disciplinary confinement since they can work on art there undisturbed. Staff know this and leave them alone, or assign them a job that incorporates their art, such as teaching art to others. Whatever the assignment, it will only be regarded as a minor inconvenience rather than a true job.

This pro-art, anti-work attitude among imprisoned artists can work against them if carried into the outside world. No matter how good a prison artist is, he needs to know that art alone will probably not earn him a living on the outside. A mentor needs to drive home this point, gently but firmly. No one wants to see an artist become sad and disillusioned upon release. That can only lead to recidivism. Men and women return to prison because they don't understand the outside, particularly if they have been in prison for some time. They do not realize that prison is easier in many ways than the free world.

As a mentor, you need to encourage your artist to develop diversified skills. Make him realize that he will have a heavy burden to bear upon release. Art may open doors for him, but chances are that it will not put food on the table. There is no free chow hall to got to on the outside when one gets hungry. No free room, not even a cell, to call one's own. If a released inmate plans to stay with a friend or family member until "I can get on my feet," he should be prepared to be thrown out at any time. No one has never-ending patience. If an ex-prisoner is perceived as a loafer or a dreamer, he may not have the comfort of a home and free meal for long. Unlike prison where he can't be evicted until his sentence ends, on the outside an ejection can come at any time. He himself may choose to leave free accommodations if there is constant nagging, such as: "You need to get a job, you need to sleep less, you need to take more responsibility, you need to carry your own weight." Even the worst prison officers are not like that. How does one file a grievance against a family member whose love and caring seems to have morphed into shame and contempt?

Learning a marketable skill in prison is not as difficult as it may seem. Opportunities are provided in most prisons. An inmate can also do it on his own. Mentors should know what these options are, and should encourage their artists to take advantage of them. All prisons have GED programs in which a prisoner without a high school diploma can get one. Inmates attend classes in math, writing, and other subjects in preparation for taking the GED exam in prison. If they pass, they get their diploma. If they do not, they get to go back to classes to work on weak areas. They can take the exam again and again if necessary. When they pass, they not only have a diploma in hand but useful skills in their job hunting arsenal upon release. Whatever profession an inmate enters, he or she needs to be able to read, write and do math. Being able to read instructions, write notes, and add figures are all vital.

Besides basic, and sometimes advanced, academic skills, most prisons offer specialized vocational training. The selection of programs varies from prison to prison. One prison may offer courses to learn to become a plumber, electrician, or carpenter; another may provide training in metal work and car repair, or air conditioning and heating maintenance or masonry and drafting. All these and more can lead to good jobs. They can mean the difference between an ex-prisoner staying out or going back to prison. Art is good to share beyond prison walls, so the goal of a prison artist should be staying out.

Vocational and academic classes can also be good diversions for imprisoned artists. Many prisons even have elaborate ceremonies where the graduating inmates get special treats. It is a touch of normalcy, good for self-esteem and for preparation for the free world, where little is free. Instead of having one poker in the fire with one's art, inmates should have several.

Preparation for a conventional outside job can also come from on-the-job training in prison. This is recommended after an inmate completes vocational training in a given field. For example, if he completes training to become a plumber–a process that usually takes three months to a year–he should consider joining the plumbing department of the prison, at least for a time. All departments that deal with the prison's upkeep, from electrical to carpentry, offer helper positions for inmates. They represent a good learning experience and not much work since there are usually many helpers. Headed by a staffer who has been trained in that field, inmate helpers learn from that person. Upon release, being able to indicate work experience on one's resume in addition to providing a training

certificate in a field can mean the difference between getting employment and going back to prison. Even a dedicated artist needs to buy supplies and have a place to create art. Working 40 hours a week, and sleeping 8 hours nightly, leaves more than 70 waking hours for art weekly. Forty hours is a small price to pay to keep the prison gate from turning into a revolving door.

A final way for prison artists to achieve diversity and acquire marketable skills is to engage in self study. This can be done by reading books and completing correspondence courses. If the book an inmate needs, such as one about computer programs, is not available through the prison library or through an inter-library loan, the prisoner can still get it. *Books in Print,* which every prison library has, provides a list of books in every field of interest. A prisoner can request these books from an outside friend or from a family member, or from a mentor.

As a mentor, you will serve your artist well by discussing these options. Providing books and magazines about art will be appreciated by the artists, but sending materials in a vocational field that they can study is vital. You will want to ask in a letter or during a meeting, "What would be your ideal job on the outside to support yourself while you are seeking a following for your art?" Whatever the answer, whether landscaping, food preparation, sales or something else, you should provide him with one or more books on that subject. You might also suggest that he incorporate his studies into his art. For example, he might paint a scene of a beautifully landscaped garden, of delicious food being prepared, or of a salesperson amiably going about his work, reflecting his field of interest. The composer of the hit musical *Rent*, Jonathon Larson, worked as a server in a diner during the years that he wrote and marketed his music. Only when it was accepted for production and he received a substantial check did he quit his job. There is video footage of Larson on the last day of his job as he goes from table to table with everyone he serves congratulating him.

Beyond encouraging diversification and flexibility, a mentor should suggest that inmates focus on art that is uplifting and positive. Of course, artists should be able to select subjects of their own choosing, even the most dismal. Sometimes dealing with an unpleasant subject in art is a way of coming to grips with it. A person who is afraid of "evil spirits" may wish to see what those demons look like. He will then have a better chance to overcome his fear. Still, too much of a bad thing leads to a fixation and can be detrimental. Even a horror movie has its light moments. And a

person who likes horror movies usually includes other fare in his or her entertainment diet.

In prison, there is much evil to dwell on. Many inmates have done tragic things to get into prison, or have had terrible things done to them, including draconian sentences from misguided magistrates. If as a mentor you can steer them into creating happy art, this can take the place of happy pills that prison clinics so readily dispense. One reason that I studied music in prison was to play gleeful songs. Even the choice of guitar as my instrument was done with a positive purpose in mind. The guitarist known as "The Edge" in the popular band U2, was asked in a *Guitar Player* magazine interview why the guitar has such wide appeal. He answered, "I think it may have something to do with it standing for freedom, somewhat like the automobile has meant for freedom over the last century. Since the invention of blues and rock and roll, the guitar has held that kind of feeling for people. It probably always will."

How can the blues be equated with freedom, love and happiness? Isn't it just another negative form of art, another way of feeling down? No, that's not the case. Singing or playing music is a joyful experience in itself, regardless of the things being sung. Think of all the terrific music that millions of people sing every Sunday in churches around the world. It rejuvenates them and makes them feel good. But take a close look at some of the words and you have to wonder why. Many songs deal with the execution of a good man, whom many regard as the Son of God. One exuberant song is entitled "At the Cross." It deals with the crucifixion of Jesus, a torturous form of execution. People smile and clap their hands when they sing it. Why? Because they are getting their emotions out into the open. It is not the execution that makes them sing, but the love and commitment to faith that it enforces in them. They are accepting a tragedy and using it to shed light on themselves and the world around them.

Blues does the same thing, which is especially important if you are in prison. There you don't want to keep your bad feelings inside where they will fester. You want to shout them out or, even better, sing them out. Songwriter Neil Diamond wrote a song called "Song Sung Blue." One of the verses is, "When you take the blues and make a song, you sing them out…" It's a joyful tune with a fast pace. Why keep the blues to yourself in prison or anywhere else when you can "sing them out."

Musician Miles Davis once had a conversation with a young contemporary, John Coltrane, about this. He said to Coltrane that

whenever something bad happens to Coltrane in his life he should "turn it into art." Davis went even further and said, "Without pain, there is no art."

That may be an extreme statement but there is truth in it. Certainly, the pain of imprisonment motivates men and women to create art. Tony Papa, whose art got him out of prison because of its high quality and its acceptance by a major museum, is in agreement. Since leaving prison he has been hailed as a hero because he had gone to jail after being entrapped and punished severely for a victimless crime. Papa has been given many opportunities to lead a comfortable life. The reception has made him happy, but the contentment has showed in his art. Papa says, "I'm still unable to achieve the quality of art I once made in prison."

As a mentor, you must instill in your artists an appreciation for pain and setbacks. Since the hardships of prison and separation from loved ones cannot be obliterated, they should be used to advantage. Do not despair but convert bad experiences into works of power, of insight, of beauty. "Turn it into art!"

You can also tell your artists, truthfully, that many creative people on the outside envy them because of their situation. It's hard to convey intense emotions in one's work if there is no pushing and probing to feel anything. Even people who are stimulated to create great art in the absence of challenges sometimes feel the need to exaggerate a background of pain and hardship to convince supporters that they are the "real deal."

Eddie Vedder, founder and front man of the megastar band Pearl Jam, did not have a difficult life before fame and fortune came his way. So he made one up. He said he had been thrown out of his home as a teen by a dysfunctional family. To stay off the streets, he said, he had to take any work that came his way, no matter how menial or degrading. He claimed he hated everyone and always found himself alone, often with thoughts of suicide. One graphic scene he described to interviewers was seeing teens his age coming into a drugstore where he worked, laughing at Vedder as they bought condoms. Vedder said about them in the interview, "Those fucks." With no friends, he had little to do at the end of each day but trudge back to his "shitty neighborhood" and escape into his music.

Vedder felt he needed to convince the CD-buying public that the songs of Pearl Jam he wrote were more than figments of Vedder's imagination, that he had lived the pain expressed in his music. After he had achieved stardom the truth was revealed in a *Rolling Stone* article. Growing up, Vedder was a privileged middle-class kid, and

a happy one. He was well-liked everywhere, in school and in his affluent community. Vedder was talented for sure, and a great songwriter. It came from deep psychological concerns, not physical hardships. He connected with the right people to get the breaks he needed; not because he was an introvert, but just the opposite. His outgoing personality allowed him to become a networker, to reach out and become known.

Vedder considered his non-difficult life an obstacle, however, and he worked hard to overcome it. Still, when the truth came out he was rejected by others who used his easy upbringing against him. Kurt Cobain, of rival band Nirvana, called Vedder "a fake." Vedder responded by calling Cobain superficial. Cobain finally won the contest between them by proving he was the more conflicted: he took a shotgun and blew his head off.

Vedder and his fellow Pearl Jam members went on to achieve high levels of fame. Still, they avoided making the road too easy for themselves. Once they fired the drummer of the band for becoming too outwardly contented with their success. The group wanted to give the appearance of being unhappy with life in general. Vedder, though not an alcoholic, gave the impression of being one. Every time he stepped up to the microphone on stage, he carried an open bottle of wine with him. In truth, the band never used alcohol or drugs of any kind. That helped to account for their long history of success. When they wanted to let off steam, they used their art.

Men and women in prison face many difficulties after release. But they don't have the problem of not having an interesting background. The lack of such a background in many artists is probably the reason why they create problems on their own: taking risks, assaulting fans, using harmful substances, and other antics. They want to have something to complain about, to recover from. They want their music to be listened to as something interesting because they themselves want to be seen as interesting. If they aren't, they will often do whatever is necessary to get attention.

In this light, the hardship of incarceration for an artist can be seen as an advantage. The dreaded question on an employment application, "Have you ever been convicted of a crime?" is not posed to artists. Instead, they are asked to show what they can do. If their past imprisonment is made known during a performance or art show, it will be used as a marketing tool to attract people; to encourage patrons to pay greater attention, to convince them that what they are beholding is authentic; that the artist has been through

life's struggles, has taken all that life has to offer and here is his or her art that reflects it.

As a mentor, you need to remind your artist of the enviable position he is in. Prison may not be pleasant for them, but it can be good for their art. Do not fall into the trap of being sorry for the artist, which can only be condescending or depressing. Instead, talk about the opportunity that prison presents and why they shouldn't squander a minute of their time there.

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Another duty of a mentor is to show concern for the physical and mental health of the imprisoned artists they seek to help. If you as a mentor see something amiss, you should do everything in your power to make it right.

During the final segment of my time in prison when I had a few mentors who were helping me with my writing and music, I had an opportunity to get out of prison early. I needed to get into a special program that was offered in my prison. I tried hard to get into it, but could not on my own. It took direct action by my mentors to get me approved for it. They had to make calls and write letters to the warden. I was not sure whether they'd do this for me since I considered it above and beyond their call of duty. But they didn't see it that way. They were looking at me as a whole person, not just an artist. I took my future very seriously and they did their best to help me plan it. Getting out of prison early, even by a few weeks, meant a lot.

They sent me copies of the letters they wrote to the warden, which I greatly appreciated. The letters were eye opening. In them, my mentors gave the warden glowing reports of their interaction with me. They had remembered things about me and my art that I had forgotten, good things I had lost sight of in that difficult setting. At the same time the letters revealed things about the mentors that I hadn't known, that I had never asked. In writing to the warden, they poured it all out. Their goal was to impress him with their own accomplishments, to assure him that they were no lightweights and that their opinion of me and my worthiness for the early-release program meant something.

That experience convinced me that I was dealing with honest and caring people. I resolved that when I got out of prison I would show them every courtesy. They would not be disappointed.

Other artists I knew in prison got help from their mentors in other ways. An inmate named Alan who painted had a mentor who visited him regularly. The mentor wasn't authorized to come into the compound as a volunteer, only as a visitor. She had never gone through the process to get authorization to become a volunteer. Her decision was based on a few factors. First of all, she had very limited time to spare since she worked full time as an art teacher and had a busy after-school life. She wanted to mentor only Alan, not others. The second reason she didn't want to become a volunteer was that she didn't live close by. She could fit a trip in her schedule and budget to visit Alan every few months, but no more. With such infrequency she knew she wouldn't qualify to be a volunteer.

Alan and his mentor wrote to each other once a week. They had agreed on this schedule at the outset. He also had her phone number, but they had an understanding that he would only call in an emergency. Once he did when he couldn't get medicine from the prison clinic that he needed, though it was promised to him. She called the clinic directly and after she threatened to call the media if anything happened to Alan the clinic agreed to give Alan his medicine.

Their letters to each other concerned Alan's art. But she sometimes commented on other things if she felt that Alan was headed for difficulties. After she visited she would send him a follow-up letter. In one she commented that his prison uniform was wrinkled. Couldn't he do something about it? Why were the uniforms of the other men in the visiting hall much neater than his? She wanted him to take pride in his appearance because she knew that this would serve him well on the outside. When she went on a job interview she knew how important her appearance was in getting the job. Being a good artist counted, but so did being a neat dresser. She shared this advice with Alan to encourage him to take greater care of himself.

Famous composer Ludwig van Beethoven had a similar disinterest in his appearance. Music was his life, so he cared about little else. His dad started him on piano lessons when he was just four years old. He then had to stand on the piano bench to reach the keys. Beethoven became a child prodigy and his parents showed him off at every opportunity. By the time he was 12, he had a job as an organist in a royal court. But the piano remained his first love. Eventually, he became known as the greatest pianist of his time, something the older Mozart had predicted. He had seen the young

Beethoven play and said, "Keep your eyes on him. Someday he will give the world something to talk about."

Unfortunately as he grew into a man, some people were also talking about his shabby appearance. He didn't cared about his clothes since they had no relation to his music. But they did relate to his ability to make money as a music teacher, which he relied upon. His friends took the matter into their own hands. When Beethoven went to sleep at night they replaced his clothes with clean and pressed garments. He never knew the difference when he put them on in the morning.

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Alan wasn't offended when his mentor brought the clothes matter to his attention. Like Beethoven, he hadn't realized the poor appearance or the importance looking better.

Another way a mentor can be helpful is to be a role model. Although this applies to non-artists as well, it is particularly important for artists. I recall how much Paul inspired me when he came to the prison chapel to play as its contract musician. One thing that impressed me about him was that he got paid. That encouraged me. He was a professional musician doing a gig, so why shouldn't he get paid? I guess I was used to seeing a lot of mercenaries in prison work, men and women who didn't like their prison jobs and were only doing it for the money. Here was Paul who took the money and ran his hands up and down the keyboard in marvelous fashion. It convinced me that you can make money while making great music.

This insight served me well when I got out of prison. I was so anxious to play music that I performed at every opportunity. But I always aimed for paying gigs. Before long, they started to come my way. When that happened, I had no misgivings about turning down freebies. Of course I made exceptions for special events, such as fundraisers for important causes. That was not only good for my conscience but an aid to my career. There were also times when a free performance opened doors to venues that could afford to pay well. Whatever I did in my music, my focus was on using it to produce income. Paul had inspired me in that regard.

Another way that Paul shaped my thinking was his flexibility as an artist. His broad repertoire appealed to many people. No matter one's age or ethnic background, Paul had a tune to get their toes tapping. If they were young he'd offer the latest Broadway fare. I

recall him playing songs from the then new musical *The Producers*. The Mel Brooks tunes from the show were the latest rage. Never mind that some of these songs were provocative, such as the lyrics, "I always had the biggest hits, my showgirls had the biggest tits." It appealed to the modern generation, so Paul played them. Nor did the fact that his venue in prison was a chapel discourage him. He wouldn't play secular music during religious services since the chaplain would view that as inappropriate. So he did it before the services when inmates were arriving, then afterwards while they were still milling about.

I remember that Paul repeatedly played a controversial song that one of the inmates favored. The song was the theme from the *Godfather* movie. The person who wanted him to play it had been a high-ranking member of the mafia. The first request by this prisoner came after Paul had played for a service. The inmate said it reminded him of the joke that he and his fellow Mafiosos told each other when the film was playing in theaters. "Are you going to see the Godfather today?" they would ask. The question was posed as if the Godfather were a real person instead of a fictitious character in the film. Now Paul played the song every time he saw the man enter the chapel. It always brought a smile to the inmate's face, and to the other inmates.

Had it not been for having Paul as my mentor, I might have been very conservative in developing my own repertoire. But his example convinced me that I needed to be broad in what I played. If I hadn't seen and heard it with my own ears and eyes, I wouldn't have believed it. Here Paul was in a church, being paid by a conservative pastor, playing provocative and politically incorrect music. And getting away with it! I learned a valuable lesson from this about Paul's flexibility. He wasn't playing a wide-range of music of every taste to hurt his job security, but to help it. Paul knew that the most important thing in art is to engage one's audience. That's particularly true if one intends to make a livelihood from it. Another way of stating this is that the customer should always be made happy, or at least kept interested. The chaplain at the prison may not have liked everything Paul did, but he couldn't deny that the inmates loved him. Had he dismissed Paul, we might have set the prison on fire. Or at least fired off a lot of grievances that would have buried the pastor in paperwork.

The importance of having broad artistic offerings was reinforced by another person I met in prison. His name was James, a musician who visited the prison regularly to entertain inmates. On the

outside, he performed at Holiday Inns and other lounge settings. James had an advantage inside prison, though perhaps a disadvantage on the outside, of once having been an inmate himself. I admired that he would return to help those he left behind. He encouraged me by bringing cheer and his terrific songs. Since he was just a one-person act with his guitar and harmonica, he didn't play for large gatherings at the prison. Big concerts, usually reserved for major holidays, were the domain of multi–musician bands, whether made up of inmates or outsiders. A lot of noise was needed to fill the ears of a thousand or so convicts who would gather in the rec yard to listen.

James played in smaller prison spaces. His services were used for vocational training graduation ceremonies, AA dinners, and other celebrations. I always marveled at how well he adapted his music to the event at hand. "I guess you have to keep your listeners connected to what you're playing," I said. James agreed but went further. "If you're playing night after night in the same place, you not only have to keep customers happy but management. And they're much harder to please." James wasn't talking about the quality of his music but the quantity. He stressed how important variety was to enable a performer to avoid boring bartenders and other employees. These people influence owners. A performer's goal is to play without being repetitious. "I can play for a whole week without doing a song twice," James said. It wasn't an empty boast. He proved it by showing me his song list. It contained over 500 tunes of every description. "Go ahead," he said, "pick one, any one." I did and he played it beautifully.

"Can you play all those songs as good as the one you just did?" I asked. He smiled and shook his head no. "But I can play them all passably well so they'll be recognized by listeners. It's important to know a lot if you intend to be successful on the outside. You can be a perfectionist with some things you do, but you have to be flexible with the rest." I took James advice to heart and became a collector of songs as much as a performer. Once on the outside I got a request for a song I barely knew, having played it only once or twice before. But that didn't stop me from jumping into it with full enthusiasm. I covered my mistakes as best I could. I was pleased that I got most of the melody correct. Still, there were mistakes. The person who made the request looked at me strangely. I smiled and said, "I thought I'd do the jazz version for you." He then nodded his head in approval and gave me warm applause.

Mentors who give a prisoner insight into their own art provide an important contribution. They are treating an inmate as a future colleague. That has a tremendous impact on motivation and learning for an imprisoned artist.

Some mentors go well beyond what any inmate could expect from them. As a result, they are more then appreciated, but cherished. Such a person was Samuel. He had spent more than 20 years of his life in prison; not as an inmate but as an officer. After he retired, he decided to return. He became a full-time art mentor, neither asking for nor receiving compensation.

Samuel had been an artist from an early age. Had he resided in a major city he might have made a living at it. But employment options in his small town were limited. So he decided to become an officer in a nearby prison. Over the years he acquired a reputation for his compassion and fairness. The men who created art also saw him as a guiding light. He always commented favorably on some aspect of their work. Sometimes he shared insights with them about his own artistic development. Still, he had a job to do, a family to support, a mortgage to pay. His duties as an officer and his role as a mentor could sometimes clash. For example, he would encourage inmate artists to be creative in the materials they used. But as a staffer he had to participate in searches of cells and confiscate items that were not on the "approved" list. He knew he was part of the bureaucracy and had to follow rules, whether or not they made sense to him. He developed two personalities, one as a liberal artist and the other as a conservative staffer. Most of the men understood and accepted this balancing act. But Samuel had difficulty at times accepting himself. Because of his frustration, he often felt he was doing time with the inmates. But he stuck it out, figuring he was doing more good than harm.

His release came with his retirement. He wasn't away long before he decided to come back. This time it wouldn't be as an officer but as an artist. He was finally ready to begin mentoring without the restraints of having to earn a paycheck.

For several years until his death from cancer, Samuel acted as a beacon of light for inmate artists. He established an prison art shop, using free space he was able to locate. His years of working there gave him information about what could be done for prison artists, and where activities could take place. There were few stone walls put in his path that he couldn't scale. For the most part, he avoided the walls because he knew who to go to in the prison hierarchy when he needed something. Information is power, and Samuel had

a lot of it. He no longer felt threatened with loss of income. Samuel was finally his own man and could act in accord with his conscience.

No longer taking a back seat in helping inmates develop their art, he sat at the front of the prison art shop he established. Everyone who came in fell under his gaze, both staff and inmates. As long as a prisoner came to participate in the creation of art, he was welcome. If he had no interest in its esthetic or redemptive possibilities, he was advised to stay away. This was no longer just a job for Samuel but a mission.

Most of what he did on the days he opened the art shop was nothing. He merely sat at his front desk and read art magazines before passing them on to the men. He sometimes spent time creating his own art. Rarely budging from his seat, he didn't go around the room to the art tables and look over the shoulders of men, even to make positive comments. As an artist he knew that creating art is a solitary task. If you're in the presence of working artists, your primary duty is to stay out of their way. No one knows what a piece is going to look like until it's completed, not even the artist. That's not to say that Samuel didn't get involved before that point. But he only did so at the artist's invitation. Either an artist would invite Samuel to his work station to make a suggestion or evaluation of art in progress or the artist would bring the unfinished piece to Samuel. Samuel could always be counted on to make constructive suggestions if he believed that an improvement was possible, or to show a positive reaction, even if just a nod.

Samuel respected all art. He knew he was there to facilitate the creative process, not control it. He understood his role and believed that anything in art is possible. As John Lennon once sang, "Give peace a chance." Samuel believed in giving art a chance. Creativity can die on the vine in prison as inmate artists give up because of hardships and obstacles they face. Samuel sought to prevent that from happening.

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There is one obstacle that artists in prison face which a mentor can easily help overcome. In prison, there are a limited number of scenes available for artists to paint. Inmates have to use their imagination as much as possible. Sometimes they want more subjects. As a mentor, you can provide them.

If you're mentoring an artist who paints nature scenes, you can supply magazines that show the great outdoors. He will use them the same way an artist does who travels to various locations to paint. Or if your prison artist is interested in doing portraits, you can provide photos of the men and women he wants to paint. Another option is to get him magazines that feature a broad range of photographs. That way he can select subjects for himself. A magazine like *Best Photos of the Year* will serve this function well.

A note of caution: Before you go out to gather magazines for your inmate artist, keep in mind that most prisons won't let you mail them directly to him. As with books, magazines have to come directly from publishers. That means you need to subscribe to the magazines you want to put in the hands of your artist and have them sent directly to the prison. Or get the publisher to send single issues.

This is an important role for a mentor. A prison artist is limited because he can't go to locations on the outside that might stimulate his art. On the other hand, this limitation didn't stop some of the world's greatest artists from creating whatever they wished. The imagination knows no restraints.

Stephen Foster is credited with being the first significant composer in America. Born in 1826, he wrote such popular songs as "Oh! Susanna" and "Beautiful Dreamer." More than 100 years later in the 1940's his tune "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" was on radio's popular Hit Parade with millions of people learning and applauding it. Foster wrote songs that captured the essence of regions across America which he never visited. He was fascinated with the South, collecting books and maps of it so he could imagine being there. When Foster's song about a river in Florida was published, he had never been farther south than the Ohio River. Legend is that he picked the name Swanee off a map. Today, "Swanee River" is the official state song of Florida. Another song he wrote which was selected by Kentucky as its own state song was "My Old Kentucky Home." Again, Foster had never gone there.

A prison artist is restricted in where he or she can travel but a mentor can provide unlimited vistas. New horizons are only a magazine subscription or a book away.

8. Dangers to Avoid When Mentoring to Artists in Prison

Care should be taken in assuming the role of a mentor to imprisoned artists both for your protection and for the benefit of the artists.

For starters, in making contact with an inmate you should assume that you're dealing with a potentially dangerous person. Even if an individual went to prison after being convicted of a minor or victimless offense, you can't be sure that he's still harmless. The prison experience can produce a lot of anger. Until that anger is dissipated through the arts or some other means, mentors must watch their step.

Keep this in mind when you make your first contact with inmates. As previously suggested, don't use your home address. You don't want anyone showing up at your door next year or ten years from now without an invitation. Also, be careful how much information about yourself you reveal. Knowledge is a powerful weapon that can be used adversely in many ways. If you don't want the world to know your personal life, keep it to yourself. Even if the inmate you're dealing with doesn't use it against you, he may tell others who might. In his nonfiction book *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote tells of prisoners who shared information about a supposedly wealthy family one of them knew. Eventually the family was targeted for a burglary by one of the prisoners who heard the story and got their address before being released. When the burglary "went wrong," the crime turned into a multiple homicide.

This advice is not intended to make you paranoid but to make you careful. You are dealing with an unknown individual. That assumes he is indeed unknown to you. If you've known him on the outside or he is referred by someone you trust, that's a different story. But you should still exert caution, at least to a limited degree. After all, prison may have changed him for the worse.

When they undergo training, prison officers are advised in dealing with prisoners to keep private matters to themselves. Even their preferences in clothing can be used against them. Imagine an officer receiving a gift by a prisoner of the style, size and color sweater the officer prefers. The officer will be hard-pressed to explain such a gift. Had a favor been performed for it? Even if the officer doesn't get in trouble, he or she will be seen as careless or,

worse, stupid. Such a staffer can present a danger in a prison where volatile situations can erupt.

Once you get to know an inmate artist, you can let your hair down somewhat. Inevitably you will exchange letters, assuming he passed your initial screening by demonstrating he's seriously interested in art. With each letter you write, you will inevitably reveal more information about yourself. Even if you only react to the information he provides about himself, you will be telling much about who you are. It doesn't take a genius to connect the dots, and some inmates border on genius. The deductive powers of prisoners are great because of the enormous amount of time prisoners have to ponder and turn things over in their minds. With enough hours in the day for thinking, any mystery can be figured out with minor clues.

After you have full faith in your artist, you can get somewhat personal. But not too personal, even if you are completely assured of his good intentions and sanity. You don't want to get too close for his sake as well as yours. Your goal is to establish a professional relationship, not a personal one. He or she may need a friend, perhaps even a girlfriend or boyfriend. But that friend should not be you. If that happens your effectiveness as a mentor will be compromised. Your opinion will no longer be believed by the artist, who will stop soliciting it from you. How can he believe you if he thinks you won't say anything to hurt him because you like or love him? Or if you have an argument and then trash his art. He will dislike you immensely for that, and for good reason. You will be using his art as a weapon that you have no right to do. You've become personally involved; you have lost your objectivity.

It's best to keep your interaction on a professional level. Should that change, you should have the good sense to step away from your mentor role. Help him find someone to replace you as a mentor, a person who can keep her or his distance. A good mentor must be a gentle critic as well as a granite supporter. You will be able to do neither if you lose your perspective.

If you go beyond corresponding with the inmate artist and arrange to see him, there are a few things to keep in mind. First, visiting a prisoner can be an arduous task, especially if the jail or prison allows "contact" visits. Such visits entail having physical contact with an inmate, usually limited to a hug or a handshake. The other type of visit is when a glass partition separates the two parties and phones must be used to speak to each other. These non-contact visits can be frustrating because of their impersonal nature.

Sometimes the phones don't work well and you have to shout or use improvised sign language to get your thoughts across.

Contact visits are better since you can sit across a table from the inmate you're visiting. If you've used your correspondence to figuratively pat him on the back for his artistic devotion, you can now do it literally. But with the advantages of a contact visit come dangers. Be on your guard because if you mess up in even a minor way you can be barred from future visits. If you err in a major way, you can become an inmate yourself.

When you go to a contact visit, you will be scrutinized far more carefully than if you go to a non-contact one. The reason is simple. If you don't have physical contact with an inmate, you won't be able to give him something he's not supposed to have. Contact visits offer a lot of temptation, all of which must be avoided.

An inmate might request that you bring him a favorite treat from the outside, such as a candy bar not available in the prison canteen. Or he might request an over-the-counter medicine that he can't get inside. Whatever it is he asks for, you must not agree to even *think* about providing. That will only result in false hope for the prisoner while potentially involving you in a conspiracy to flaunt prison rules. The regulations are clear-cut: you cannot give anything to an inmate during visits.

Even if an inmate requests a seemingly harmless item like a single dollar bill, it must remain in your pocket. Cash in prison is used for illegal transactions, so this ban is reasonable. If you are caught passing anything to an inmate you will at the least be asked to leave and be prevented from returning. Even if you don't get caught, you will be put on a no-visit list if the inmate is later found with the item. The discovery can happen easily since inmates are constantly searched. The first search will occur on his way out of the visiting hall. It will be a strip search, meaning he will be examined while nude. At the same time, his prison uniform and undergarments will be carefully inspected. If he somehow manages to evade detection during that encounter, there are periodic searches of cells. When a discovery is made of something that came from the outside, prison administrators will look at visiting records. If you were the last person to see the inmate, you will be blamed and prevented from coming back.

The consequences can be far more serious if you are caught passing an *illegal substance* to an inmate. You will be punished whether you were aware of the illegal nature of the item or not. For example, passing him a sealed envelope or bag whose contents you

don't know won't exonerate you. When detected, you will be detained and face criminal charges if drugs are found. This situation is taken seriously, and the consequences are harsh. The inmate you are trying to help could well get out of prison before you.

By the same token you shouldn't take anything from an inmate during a visit. The chances and consequences of detection are considerably less, but this should still be avoided. Why would an inmate give you anything to take with you? There are a few reasons. Foremost is that he wants you to mail a letter he's written or have you hand it to someone on the outside. This usually means that he doesn't want the party receiving the note to know he's in prison. Prison administrators are sensitive to this, perhaps overly so. They believe that recipients of inmate letters must know where they're coming from. Some prisons even apply a bold rubber stamp to outgoing inmate envelopes declaring, "This envelope was sent to you by a prison inmate. Please use caution in responding. We take no responsibility for it."

If such warnings are not given, or at least if the prison return address of the inmate is not clearly indicated, prison officials say that the public can be "duped." Their concern may or may not be justified. But the fact is that prisons are managed by these officials and you are their guest. As such, you are wise to respect their rules.

Of course, an inmate in giving you a sheet of paper during a visit may simply want you to have a poem or something he's written. Accepting it is still improper, but the chances of anyone caring are slight. Besides, how would they know where the paper came from if it should slip from your clothing on your way out? Taking such a minor item with you is the type of decision you need to make on your own.

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Let's assume you've been accepted as a volunteer and have permission to enter a prison. What do you need to watch for as you undertake your mentoring role there? Just as your freedom of movement increases, so do the dangers.

First, consider the risks to your safety that you need to be aware of. You are entering a place where many people have psychological problems. That's why most wind up in prison, even if they didn't hurt anyone.

Those inmates with drugs addictions might have been harmless on the outside but not necessarily on the inside. On the outside they

were getting what they needed to "mellow out." Indeed, drugs cause aberrant behavior only in the rarest of cases. People who take drugs do it to cope, to mask problems, to feel normal. Some of them die because they don't know the strength and purity of what they're taking. The same thing happened in the 1920's and 1930's when alcohol was illegal. People drank impure booze, which blinded or killed them.

When individuals who had a drug addiction on the outside come to prison, they are largely cut off from their drug of choice. Of course, there are drugs in prison. But they aren't as plentiful as on the outside. Plus they are more expensive, a direct result of limited supply and high demand. A lot of people "in need" go without. It shows in their behavior. They "act out" their feelings of anger and pain, and it's best that you are not in their way. Particularly new inmates who are going through withdrawal are in this "watch out for them" category. But you won't know who they are until it's too late. You need to keep your distance from all inmates until you get to know them individually.

Don't go to a place in the prison where you can't be observed by a prison officer. Call for help at the first sign of suspicion or discomfort. It's better for you to apologize to an inmate later for acting too quickly, than for him to apologize later in court for a crime he committed against you.

Besides mentally unstable people in prison suffering from the effects of withdrawal from drugs, there are others you need to watch out for. Assuming you are a woman, you should know that thousands of men are in prison for sexually assaulting females. One of them is Harry. He came to prison on charges of multiple rapes. He doesn't believe he was guilty of any of them.

If you met Harry, you would believe him. He is a gentle person, soft spoken and very polite. Harry wears glasses and gives the appearance of being a quiet librarian. There is bookish handsomeness to him, as if he could take off his glasses and turn into Superman. Harry is a gossip in prison, complaining about the faults and lack of social graces of others. A perfectionist, he doesn't recognize shortcomings in himself. Prison administrators feel much the same about Harry. His reliability and capability in performing clerical work has elevated him to trustee positions, including office aide.

About the sexual assault convictions that brought Harry to prison, he is not reluctant to talk about them. People who believe they are innocent are usually happy to find receptive ears. In Harry's

case, that doesn't include the ears of women. He thinks females are a strange group, particularly in regard to sex.

"I didn't have much experience with sex when I was young. I never got married," Harry says. "The reason I didn't is that I didn't want to do bad things to women during sex. I didn't want to hurt them, even for their own good." Harry says this because he had gotten bad information as a youngster, the result of poor sex education and no parental guidance. The information came from friends. Maybe they were pulling a joke on him, or perhaps they didn't know better themselves.

"When you have sex with a girl who isn't experienced," he says, "she sometimes locks up on you. Her legs cramp and she doesn't know her own strength and can break your back if you don't get free. The only way to get free is to undue her, something you do by giving her sharp punches in the side. That's why I never had sex until I got to be a man. I didn't want to hurt and have to punch a girl to get my thing out."

Not surprising with this type of misinformation was his preference for considerably older women when Harry became an adult. But how to approach them? He didn't have a clue since they traveled in different social circles than Harry because of age differences. He also lived in a Bible belt community where sex wasn't discussed openly. These obstacles called for a creative solution on Harry's part. Aging widows were waiting for him, as anxious to resume their sex lives just as he was to begin his, he believed. Assuming this to be true, he decided to take a bold step. He bought a gun that he used as the ultimate icebreaker.

Harry says he had no intention of using it to hurt anyone. Just the opposite, he wanted to help women. "When I saw a lady somewhere, I could tell if she wanted to have sex with me. But I also knew she had inhibitions that would have to be overcome. Women don't agree to have sex unless they're pushed to do it. At least decent women don't. But once the act begins, they get right into it. You just have to get it started and then it goes by itself."

He followed them home and managed to get inside their dwellings. A clever and well-spoken man, he rarely had to force his way. Then he pulled out a gun and put it to their heads. "I don't want to hurt you so do what I say. I think that once you get into it you're going to have a good time. Trust me; this is going to be fun for both of us. Please try to relax and forgive me for having to keep this gun to your head."

His directions demanded that the women get naked and position themselves for sex. After they performed the act, Harry left. He never told the women not to call police. Why would they do that when they wanted him as much as he wanted them? Just because he had a gun? How was that any different than a guy who tricked a woman into having sex by lying to her about his job or marital status? Or getting her drunk. Harry had employed a more honest approach, in his opinion, using fear instead of subterfuge. Surely the women knew after they began sharing the delights of sex that he wouldn't hurt them.

Then why did they call the police? Harry has an explanation for that too. "Felt guilty. Sometimes when a woman has too good a time in bed, the feeling of shame will force her to put the blame on someone else. You know, 'The devil made me do it.' Or, Harry made me do it. Damn, I'm no devil! Don't even look like one."

Another example of a potentially dangerous person that a female mentor might encounter in a men's prison is Eliot. Like Harry, Eliot presents a respectable outer appearance. In fact, he's a very good looking man with a fine build and a pleasant outgoing personality. You'd expect to find him on a movie set, not a prison compound.

He doesn't try to explain the behavior that brought him to prison. Nor does he attempt to justify it. All he knows is that he lost control on the outside when in the company of certain types of women. Could it happen again in or out of prison? Eliot does not venture a guess, but he hopes not.

Things have changed for Eliot since he's been on the inside. Before going to prison, he was overweight. There were certain types of food he could not get enough of. Potato chips led the list, primarily the barbeque flavor kind. In prison he has gone without them and has also foregone other junk foods. His healthy eating has less to do with reduced desire than with availability. While chips and other snacks are sold in the prison canteen, Eliot can't afford them. He's in a prison where no pay is given to inmates for the work they do. He does not even get a few pennies per hour. If he did, it would add up so he could buy a bag of chips every few days. It's his misfortune to be in such a place.

Also to his dismay, Eliot does not have any money of his own on the outside to draw upon. He had money once, even a good professional job. The work was with the planning department of the city where he lived. His duties consisted of doing "land use surveys." That entailed being outdoors a lot, driving around in a government car with a map of property ownership lines. He would

mark each property with one of several colored pencils to indicate its usage. The job not only paid well but allowed Eliot to see the entire city. Unfortunately, it also helped him find opportunities to commit his crimes. No woman felt safe in this beachfront community until Eliot was apprehended.

The savings he accumulated were used when he went to court. The attorney that he chose to represent him charged a lot. Eliot did not qualify for a public defender and might not have chosen one if he had. They handled so many cases that he did not think they would give him a fair shake. When he got to prison, a fellow inmate told Eliot what his public defender said when he lost his case: "You only get what you pay for." Eliot paid a lot to his private attorney, who only spent two days in court with Eliot: once, when Eliot pleaded guilty and also on the day of Eliot's sentencing. Still, the lawyer was effective. Eliot felt he got his money's worth, even though it left him destitute. Had it not been for his attorney who knew "a lot of people," Eliot's sentence might have been twice as much as he got.

Without money of his own in prison, he wrote to friends and family members for financial assistance. But no one was willing to write back, much less put money in his canteen account. As soon as he had gotten caught, they cooled to him. When details of his multiple crimes hit the media, they disassociated from him entirely. Eliot never thought that what he did was a big deal, much less a crime. Oddly, the media seemed to make light of it too. But after the women whom he had victimized spoke up, everything changed. A groundswell began that would put Eliot on ice for a long time. Anything to keep him far away from the beaches where his crimes occurred.

What Eliot had done was repeat an act he had performed on his sister in childhood. Somehow, he had never grown out of it. The act consisted of pulling down the lower portion of his kid sister's two-piece bathing suit. As an adult he did it to women. More than embarrassing for them, it brought terror, particularly when done in remote sections of a beach with no one around.

Eliot never explained himself. He apologized in court because his lawyer said he had too. In prison he did not even do that. He simply did not see the harm in his boyish pranks, just as he didn't know why he had continued to do them. Perhaps it was a compulsion, just like his addiction to junk snacks. He wasn't sure he'd overcome either. Despite his trimness and good health, he still thought about barbeque chips. And despite his courtroom apology,

he could not help thinking about forcibly disrobing women and the sexual arousal it gave him.

Eliot and Harry are two types of people you're likely to meet as a mentor in prison. Neither happens to be an artist, but you might still have contact with them when you enter a compound.

Of course, you could end up with worse. The point is that you should always be on your guard. Women in particular must recognize that they are vulnerable because of sexist attitudes that some male prisoners have, and the sexual deprivation all of them experience. Many will view you as more than an attractive bag of potato chips but rather a scrumptious piece of meat. It's best if you keep the packaging discreet and the sizzle low.

If you dress *too* provocatively, you will not be let into a prison. That prohibition applies whether you are a volunteer or a visitor. Women get upset when they are turned away, which happens frequently. Even on the hottest days you can't wear shorts, not even if they're loose fitting. There are other dress rules for both men and women. It's best if you check the regulations in advance and plan your attire accordingly.

Beyond following rules, you need to use common sense. Think conservatively until you develop a comfort level on the compound and with the men with whom you interact. After a time, you can return to less conservative approaches. By then, you will know where the officers are to call for help and who the trustworthy inmates are. If an uncomfortable or dangerous situation develops, you can go to either. Yes, you can count on prisoners to help you in a bind. Most of them will do whatever they can to assist. That's one reason that so many female officers are employed. They know that most men in prison are decent and would not hurt them. Since such trustworthy inmates greatly outnumber the other kind, women know they will get help if they need it. The tougher inmates will not think of hurting a woman; only the weaklings will, and the other prisoners will restrain them quickly.

At all times, you need to stay visible. Avoid rooms and enclosures where you are the only one there. If you find yourself alone in a room or with just one man whom you do not know well, sit near the door. You do not need to keep it open since all doors in prison where volunteers work have glass panels.

While I have indicated that it is important to get acquainted with inmates so you will know whom to trust, you must keep a rein on your curiosity. The story of an on-site volunteer mentor named Robert gives insight into why this is important.

Robert came to prison once a week to help in the arts and crafts shop. He was able to make this commitment despite a full-time job as a graphics designer because he arranged his own work schedule. Both he and his employer believed that Robert serving as a mentor to imprisoned artists constituted important community service. Robert also said that it invigorated and inspired him. "Some of the inmates come up with great ideas for art," he said. "It challenges me to think more creatively in my own work."

The fact that Robert did his mentoring in a women's prison was another source of motivation for him. He knew he was greatly needed because women do not have as many programs available to them as do male prisoners. That's partly because so few women are in prison compared to men. They comprise less than 10% of the inmate population in the United States. As a result, educational, vocational and other programs are geared to men. Women also have special needs that often go unmet. Some come to prison pregnant. They do not get much special consideration before or after a child is born, with often traumatic repercussions for both mother and child.

Men also can get what they want from prison hierarchy under threat of hurting officers or rioting. Women do not do this, in part because of their generally smaller stature. Also, they usually have stronger ties on the outside and do not want to do anything illegal or aggressive that would prolong their sentence. Instead they cry when they are denied basic amenities such as a needed roll of toilet tissue beyond their weekly quota. Women are also taken advantage of sexually. Unscrupulous staff will compromise them by offering that extra roll of tissue or something they might need in exchange for sex. Sometimes the women are sexually assaulted and too scared of retaliation to complain.

In working with female artists in prison, Robert found them to be highly receptive to his help; sometimes too much so. From time to time, women in his presence would make suggestive offers. He thanked them politely but firmly declined. "We do not want to do anything that would get us in trouble," he would say. "Something that could make my stay here shorter and yours longer." Word soon spread that he was a serious and committed individual, a man not inclined to take advantage of his situation. Robert even averted his eyes when a woman tried to get his attention by wearing her uniform in a tight or open-buttoned way. He smiled to himself as he recalled the words of a Madonna song. "When the working day is done, girls just want to have fun." The working days for women in prison effectively end when they are incarcerated.

Inmates whom Robert encountered were generally well-behaved and cooperative. Most women in prison are not dangerous, even the ones who got there through acts of violence. They either helped their husbands or boyfriends commit a crime, or fought back when these men subjected them to abuse. It is still a fact in America that women are exposed to domestic violence and that police often cannot get to a scene quick enough to protect them. Many, rightly or wrongly, take the law in their own hands and deal with their attackers themselves. Most of the women in prison were not prone to violence under normal circumstances, and will usually not repeat their acts. Even those who committed murder with less than reasonable provocation will rarely strike again. It is a well-known fact that killers, male and female, have an extremely low rate of relapsing. When they get the violent act out of their system, it is usually gone for good.

Female inmates whom Robert helped were a cut above the rest. In order to be allowed into the arts and crafts shop at the prison where Robert volunteered, they had to be part of the arts program. Not every inmate could do that. She had to have an exemplary prison record free of rule infractions. In addition, she had to show financial responsibility. How could she do that? Inmates were given a small amount of payment each month for the jobs they did, whether they swept a walkway or cleaned a bathroom. The compensation was $5.25 per month. That's a small amount, but it represented true discretionary income since everything was provided at the prison that inmates needed, from medications to tampons. The things of importance to inmates that were not provided, such as that extra toilet tissue roll, couldn't be purchased at the commissary. Only junk snacks and fattening foods could be bought there.

To be admitted to the arts program, a woman had to have $25 in her account. If she saved for five months, she would have it; or someone from the outside could put it in her account. No matter how it got there, she had to have such an amount and keep it at that level to be part of the program. The reason for requiring inmates to show they can maintain such minimal savings is that prison officials do not want the art program used for financial gain. Women who are desperate for funds might do that, they believe, using materials in the shop to forge documents for compensation.

Robert lasted about eight months as mentor to the women before he was forced out. Just as curiosity killed the cat, so it had the same virtual outcome for Robert.

Robert couldn't get out of his mind the question of what had brought these generally kind and considerate women to prison. Still, he knew about prison etiquette practiced by both inmates and staff, that you never ask a prisoner why he or she is incarcerated. It's not only none of your business but, if inmates don't want you to know, they will lie about it. There may be a good reason for the concealment. Some crimes, such as the abuse of children or the elderly, do not sit well with other prisoners. Remember, many are mentally unstable. If they can find someone else to look down on, that person will become a convenient scapegoat. "I am not so bad, look at her!"

Robert never asked. But sometimes he was told. And on one occasion he was told in great depth. It was a fascinating story, and probably a true one. The inmate seemed to be the victim of circumstance, of doing someone a favor. It did not occur to Robert that his own good deed of letting the inmate vent her frustrations by talking about her offense could lead him into hot water. So he listened: how a friend of hers who ended up in prison for drug selling asked her to pick up a small amount of cash that was due him and then to have her send the money to his commissary account. She did it and was arrested later, the money having been owed for a drug deal. Her judge pronounced her guilty by saying that she either knew or "should have known" where the money had come from based on her friend's reputation and his recent conviction.

In telling Robert the story, the inmate was in tears. She did not know about the origin of the money, she said, otherwise she would not have done it, friend or no friend. Robert listened with sympathy but said nothing. It seemed terribly unfair to him but what could he do? As it turned out he would be asked to do a lot. And because of the way he was asked, he would have no choice but to comply. The request came in a subpoena served on him when he was at the prison. The woman's attorney was demanding that Robert testify at the inmate's "post-conviction hearing." This is a court procedure that some prisoners qualify for when there is a question about either their guilt or the possibility of some impropriety in their original trial. Robert showed up and went through a day of excruciating testimony and cross-examination. He was asked about what she had told him during their prison conversation and whether she appeared to be telling the truth.

Bad as the day was, the worst part was yet to come. He was summoned to the warden's office and told that all of his privileges

were being suspended; that he was barred from coming back to the prison for life. They could not take a chance that he would again develop a "personal relationship" with an inmate. "You gave testimony at her hearing because you had something to give. What will you provide another inmate next time? Escape tools?"

A warden has to assume the worst. Had Robert been a prison employee, a union might have come to his rescue. But as a volunteer, he had few rights. So he was history.

The sad thing about Robert's situation, and also sad for the women who depended upon him whom he left behind, was that he had tried to use extreme care in all he did as a mentor. He simply was not careful enough. No one had offered him anything to listen to the prisoner's story. Aside from being considerate and satisfying his curiosity, he had nothing to gain from it. That cannot be said for another mentor who also ran into hot water.

Her name was Faith and she operated a small prison ministry called Faith Abounds. It was a one-person operation but there was a lot of Faith, both physically and spiritually. Because of her large size, the name of her organization was unfortunate. Still, it fit her expansive energy.

There were three prisons in her region, and Faith served as a mentor in all of them. I distinguish her from a preacher because she did not come to preach, at least not exclusively. Faith was a professionally-trained musician who made her living evenings and Sundays as a church organist and choir director. On weekdays, she visited the prisons where she conducted workshops for men who wanted to advance their singing abilities. Hers was not so much a religious endeavor as a music ministry. Of course the music was of a decidedly religious nature. After all, she was using the prison chapel for her classes.

No one was excluded from participating. You did not even have to join her in her brief opening and closing prayers. Whether you were a Jew, Gentile or generally disgusted with religion, there was something for you to learn from this enormously talented and dedicated woman.

When it came to mentoring and motivating inmates, Faith knew what she was doing. More than teaching the men music, singing, and song composition, she let them create on their own, then gently corrected. She established the perfect vehicle for doing this: a pageant in the chapel to be performed for the entire inmate population. Imagine a day of original theatre in prison! A world premier of a new musical! It gave new meaning to the term *Off-*

Broadway. As far as Broadway was concerned, the prison was off limits. But that did not deter a packed house for each performance. The inmates and staff appreciated the diversion.

The productions were of surprisingly high quality. Faith even had a headliner, a star. And he was a real star. Pete was not just a good performer, he was exceptional. His musical ability had been discovered well before he arrived in prison. He had once auditioned to become part of a world-renowned singing group, and was accepted as a member. They toured the globe, making a big splash everywhere they went. After a few years, however, their popularity faded. Pete's extravagant life was suddenly over. Yet when the large sums of money suddenly stopped, he could not adjust to a lower standard of living. So he used other people's money, without their permission. He obtained credit card numbers and went on telephone buying sprees. When he got caught he had a lot to pay back, plus a few years to serve in prison. There he regained his stardom, albeit on a restricted basis.

In prison, he had time to practice his singing as he expertly accompanied himself on the chapel piano. The performances he gave during the pageants, as well as on other occasions when he soloed, were stunning. Good as his previous engagements were on the outside, on the inside they were close to perfect. His audiences, albeit confined, were mesmerized. He transformed the chapel into Carnegie Hall. After hearing Pete play and sing, inmates imagined they had died and gone to heaven. A musical genius who had a song for everyone, how could Faith help herself from being seduced?

The seduction took awhile and it did not follow conventional lines. Faith was committed to celibacy, conditioned by her ungainly body and her strong religious beliefs. It would have required more than a convincing crooner to get her to do the "wild thing." In her mind, there was never a possibility that it would happen with Pete. Coincidentally, Pete shared that view. There was a reason they both felt that way, aside from any personal reservations they had. Pete was gay. He had no guilt about his sexual orientation. In fact, he reveled in it.

To put a gay man in a men's prison is akin to putting a heterosexual woman there; or, putting a straight man in a women's prison. In such cases, the inmates can be expected to have a field day. They have their choice of the litter, and a big litter it is with an average of 1,000 bored and sexually deprived inmates in an average prison. There is much sex in prison, and 99% of it is consensual. The reason is explained in the lyrics of a Rolling Stone song: "You

can't always get what you want, but if you try sometime, you might find you get what you need." Put a person in prison long enough and he or she will do anything to survive: nutritionally, socially, sexually. Like all animals, we are adaptive. Maybe that explains why we have lasted so long as a species; or how men and women in prison can get through lengthy or even life sentences without committing suicide. Basic needs will not go unmet. They will be satisfied one way or another. In Rome, do as the Romans do; in Greece, as the Greeks do.

Pete had no problem "hooking up" on the compound. After all, he was a star, and a good looking and talented one. He wore his homosexuality on his sleeve. That included tapered sleeves along with careful tailoring and stylish alterations of the rest of his uniform. It was good advertising. "Hey fellows, I can show you how to enjoy having sex with another man. I have been doing it for years, inside and outside prison. Why not give it a try? Take a walk on the wild side. Give your own hand a rest and let me give you a helping hand."

Don't think that Pete was not selective. He was, but that did not stop him from having a very busy sex life. The prison was a harem for him, full of attractive prospects, with more arriving daily. When the prison bus arrived with fresh meat, Pete was on hand to greet it wearing his freshly pressed uniform which served as a sort of butcher's apron, albeit without any actual bloodshed.

There were other openly gay men on the compound, but Pete was the most outgoing and colorful. Some men quietly laughed at or prayed for him. Others contemplated approaching him to end their own celibacy. At no time did any inmate pose a threat to Pete, though some of the staff did. They sought to enforce the prison rule that outlawed sex among inmates. Some of the more homophobic officers were more than eager to enforce it now. Pete, perceived as the queen of queers, stood as their number one target. One day they would catch him in the act and throw him in the hole. Then, after a "disciplinary hearing," he would be stripped of good-time credits, prolonging his sentence; maybe even transferred to a tougher, higher security prison. That would show him that an inmate is not supposed to have a good time in prison, even with other consenting inmates. It was bad enough that inmates read books, attended classes and went to religious services. Some outsiders don't have the time to do such things?

When Faith fell under Pete's spell, they both knew what he could do for her. Pete, a powerhouse of a performer, still had strong

connections on the outside. Faith drooled to think what his contacts could do for her tiny ministry. Just as Pete had traveled around the world to spread his music, so she might similarly distribute the word of God. Pete was more than the golden ring she had been waiting for all her life. He was the golden chalice.

She made no secret about her adoration of Pete during the pageant rehearsals. The other inmates did not mind since they too saw him as a special member of their troupe. They knew that Pete did not have a romantic interest in Faith. They barely had a sexual interest in her themselves and they were straight and horny as hell. Surely what transpired between him and Faith after the music mentoring sessions when Pete lingered behind was professional and aboveboard. What they did not know was that Faith and Pete were planning a partnership after he exited prison. They wanted to work together so that Faith Abounds could fully spread its wings. These plans were kept secret because they violated prison rules. In most prisons, staff and volunteers are not supposed to have contact with inmates for a set number of years after their release. Faith liked Pete a lot, and she loved her ministry. The rule would be ignored by them.

The day came when they both got busted. First, Pete got in a jam. He was caught making love to another inmate. With some difficulty they were pulled apart and carted off to the hole. Separate cells, solitary. Pete could not handle it. Unlike other inmates who had grown used to the lack of intimacy with others, this proved traumatic for Pete. He also worried about being in jail longer than he otherwise would by losing "good time," and of being shipped to a worse prison. By the fifth day of solitary, he was ready to make a deal. He asked to speak to a "white shirt," a supervising prison officer distinguishable from the others by his or her light shirt color.

Pete revealed the closeness that he and Faith had shared. Not only had they made plans to get together immediately upon his release, but Faith was bringing him items into prison to make his stay there more bearable. At the end of most rehearsals she had a small treat for him from the outside. It might be a jelly donut, an exotic fruit, or a deli item. He hated to turn her in, he said, but wanted to prove to the warden that from now on he would respect all the rules. Couldn't they go easy on him? The next day Faith was summoned. She knew enough not to deny the allegations. As part of the deal that Pete made with the prison, he was prepared to testify against her. The prison officials who interviewed Faith told her she could avoid further "consequences" by leaving quietly. She would

be prohibited from ever entering the prison. In addition, all other prisons in the region, including the two she regularly visited, would be off limits to her. Sadly, with head bowed, she knew there was nothing more to say but goodbye.

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Serving as a mentor to imprisoned artists is fraught with dangers if one doesn't exercise common sense and good judgment. Mentors can suffer as much as inmates for mistakes.

Henry and Priscilla never intended to be mentors to a prison artist. They fell into the role in an accidental way. It started with a visit to the Prison Art Gallery in Washington, D.C. Unlike many other potential mentors, they had gone there only for the purpose of buying art. Collecting original art and showcasing it in their home had long been their interest. If the art were socially meaningful and had an interesting story behind it, so much the better. In discovering the Prison Art Gallery, they knew they had come to the right place to further their interests.

The couple took their time looking at the art. They not only examined the pieces but read the inmate information on them and noted the various prisons from which the work originated. Finally, they selected a piece to take home with them. It was an eye-catching rendition of a religious object that was commonly seen in worship services attended by the couple. They were curious about how the prisoner knew about the object. Was he of the same faith? And if so, was he brought up in it or did he adopt it when he became an adult? Were his beliefs strong? Or was he simply and superficially practicing a jailhouse religion?

With the painting they bought hanging in their living room, their questions multiplied. Who was this mystery painter and how did he end up in prison? Why did he choose this particular subject for his painting? Other pieces by him that the couple saw at the Prison Art Gallery, through as skillfully executed, dealt with other themes.

Finally, they could contain themselves no longer. They got on the Internet to locate the prisoner, an easy endeavor since all art pieces on display at the art gallery contain the inmate's full name and prison location; often their prisoner ID number as well. A page came up on their computer with information about the inmate. It did not tell them much except the institutional number and mailing address of the prisoner and when he would be released. It was quite a distance into the future. The state in which he was imprisoned had

a policy of revealing little more about prisoners. Other states provide much information about their inmates, including the inmates' current and prior criminal offenses and a current photo taken in prison. None of these were offered about the prison artist with whom the couple had become fascinated. Their questions remained unanswered. Still, with his address they could communicate directly and find out what they wanted to know. They decided to do so.

Their initial letter stated that they had purchased one of his fine works. It ended with a few questions about his background. They provided their return post office box address. He was welcomed to write them "if you have the time." That's like asking a lifeguard at a beach whether there is enough water for a person to take a dip. Prisoners have lots of time. The couple included a self-addressed stamped envelope to encourage a reply. They didn't realize that many prisons do not permit inmates to get such envelopes since sending a prisoner stamps is prohibited. Fortunately, the policy at his prison did not extend to this prohibition. Even if it had, the objectionable envelope would have only been removed and returned to the couple. Their own letter would have gone to the inmate.

When he read the letter, the prisoner felt a strong sense of accomplishment. The couple lived thousands of miles away, yet they admired him, owned his work, and liked it so much it hung in their house. He immediately wrote back and answered all their questions. He also offered other details about himself.

Henry and Priscilla were impressed with the response. They particularly liked the fact that the inmate told them about other works he planned to complete, including ones with a similar religious theme. It made them want to keep writing him. They were determined to keep it all about art, and apparently, so was the inmate. More letters were exchanged. The confidence they had in each other grew. With this high level of comfort, the couple made their next move. It was not a good one. They asked the inmate to send them one of his pieces instead of sending it to the Prison Art Gallery. In their mind, they would get the piece quicker. Why risk another patron of the gallery buying it first? Unstated but also in their mind, they could get it cheaper.

The inmate's first reaction was to not go along with this request. He had both ethical and practical reasons for feeling this way. In the end, however, he agreed to do it. The chance of losing this admiring couple as his friends was something he did not wish to

hazard. Let him please them so they would continue to write and encourage him.

By making this agreement, all parties knew that the Prison Art Gallery, operated as a nonprofit organization, would suffer a loss of income. Perhaps it did not occur to them that the gallery remained in existence because people supported it by purchasing art there instead of going directly to the artists. The gallery does not operate as a commercial venture and therefore does not have the same protections as a commercial gallery. For example, a for-profit gallery would conceal the location of their artists so that contacting them directly is difficult. Compare that to the Prison Art Gallery where artists' prison locations, sometimes even their addresses, are displayed. That's done so that mentors and enthusiasts can freely contact the artists to explore mentoring relationships. It is not done to chip away at the gallery's bottom line. With enough chips, its future would be shaky.

Such a negative outcome might not affect the couple who purchased art directly from the artist, but could hurt the artist in a few ways. In this instance, the artist ran afoul of a prison regulation by "engaging in a business." In most prisons, such a rule exists. The Prison Art Gallery gets around this because it is a nonprofit organization that accepts works of art by inmates as contributions. Indeed, artists are not paid directly for their art. The art stays with the gallery until sold and then the money from the sale is sent as an "appreciation grant" to the artist, or whoever he or she designates, In other words, an artist can get money for his or her art as long as it is considered a gratuity rather than a direct payment.

There is precedent for this in the way that inmates are compensated for the work they do in prison, when they are paid at all for their efforts. Where factories exist in prison, inmates are given remuneration. That is necessary in order to recruit prisoners as workers. Remember, inmates do not need any income to live in prison since room, board and other expenses are fully paid for. To get them to work labor-intensive jobs in a prison factory that makes license plates, prints government reports or produces other items, an incentive must be provided. Otherwise, they would refuse, even if it meant being sent to the hole. There they will still get everything they need to survive. Some inmates who disobey rules such as refusing to work end up there a lot. They enjoy the solitude that is often absent in a noisy prison. With everything brought to them, they sometimes call it *a vacation.*

Factory pay in prison is not the same as it is on the outside. Politicians, who ultimately make the rules, think that this would send a bad "soft-on-crime" message to their constituents. Never mind that most people who exit prison leave without savings and are in need of quick cash even if by illegal means. Prison factory pay can be as much as one dollar per hour, but usually no more. That is enough to attract inmate workers but does not come close to satisfying minimum wage laws. How can prison officials pay sub-minimum wages and get away with it? Why don't they themselves wind up in prison for doing that? The reason is that they do not call them wages but *gratuities*.

The Prison Art Gallery is on safe grand by following this precedent. And inmates are protected. But when individual buyers step in and deal directly with inmates, repercussions can and do occur. Most outsiders who land in this pond of quicksand will do what they can to save themselves rather than try to help the inmates they bought from.

As a mentor, you need to be mindful of prison rules. If you are unsure of them, ask an expert like the ACLU National Prison Project or the Prison Art Gallery. You can also speak to the warden of the prison in question. He or she will steer you correctly since it is in everyone's best interest. The goal of prison officials is to strike a reasonable balance between protecting security and promoting rehabilitation. Most will recognize that you are there to help. You will be appreciated for your care and concern.

9. MENTORING OVER THE LONG HAUL

Prison sentences in the U.S. can be catastrophic in length. Judges do not hesitate to send people away for five, ten or twenty years, even for a lifetime. Either they do not know the cost to the individual and his or her loved ones, including society as a whole which has to sustain the cost, or they don't care.

Judges get to sit on the bench in one of two ways. They are either appointed or elected. The appointments come from high level elected officials. The president of the United States, for example, appoints federal judges and the judges in the District of Columbia. Hundreds are appointed annually, from U.S. Supreme Court justices to D.C. Superior Court's Small Claims Bench judges. They qualify for appointment if they have a clean record, proper political allegiance, and the right friends.

State, city and county judges are either elected or appointed. Either way, they need good political connections. In running for election, they won't win unless they have a party machine behind them. Without it, they have no practical way of shaping the vote or bringing out voters. Even if they have a lot of money to spend on their election, they need to use caution in spending. Remember, a judgeship is a staid and respectable position. The last thing judicial candidates want people to think is that they bought their positions through well-financed elections. They may indeed be buying them but they do so in a discreet way. They make contributions to the prevailing political party. Or better yet, they get friends to make contributions so the funds will not be traceable to the candidates. Acquaintances can always be reimbursed if they don't have money to contribute themselves.

As a result of this process of judicial appointments and elections, we tend to get judges who are affluent and elitist. Most of them do not need the salary that a judge is paid. In fact it is not very high. What candidates are often seeking is power. In locales where the execution penalty prevails, it is the power of life and death. In other places, a life can still be taken away as an unending life sentence. Even ordering people to spend less time in jail can be devastating. While a hand is no longer removed for a crime, a person can easily get five or ten years removed from his life. Who can say which does the most damage, even if a prison term is survived?

What goes through the minds of the men and women in black robes who hand out lengthy sentences, sometimes for the most

trivial of consensual acts**?** Political payback is one. They seek to appease the people who helped put them in their jobs. Their duty is to punish and, unless they have a conscience and no further political ambitions, that is what they will do. If they err on the side of excess, who is going to care? Certainly not people of affluence or influence who rarely are punished severely for anything they do. The public, with exaggerated fears of crime, infrequently criticizes a judge who is too harsh in sentencing. One of the few magistrates vilified for going overboard in punishment was Pontius Pilate, and that was 2,000 years ago. It didn't even happen in Pilate's lifetime.

In contrast, judges are condemned frequently in the media for their light punishments. No wonder many delight in inflicting severe harm on others. A sadist fits well into the role of judge. That's the only reasonable explanation for the harm they do in dispensing unconscionably long sentences. There is a limit to what even the most politically ambitious will do to a fellow human being unless it satisfies personal sadistic tendencies.

Some judges have very impressive backgrounds. They are trained in Ivy League schools and attain senior partnerships in major law firms. Their annual salaries are in the millions. Still, they have a need that is unmet: power over others. Keep in mind that a lawyer, even the best, is no more than a "mouthpiece" in the eyes of most people. Jokes abound about lawyers. Like all jokes, there is some truth to them, which is why many lawyers despise such humor. Some would trade a million-dollar-a-year job to get even. To show the world that they should not be taken lightly, that their days of being pushed around as hirelings and scorned for their wealth are over. They end up doing with a gavel what a mass murderer often does with a gun.

The judges put on trial at Nuremburg after the fall of Nazi Germany were found guilty of atrocities, even though the facts showed they had followed the law. In applying that law, they had satisfied their blood lust, as many judges in America do today. U.S. prisons are packed with their victims. Some of the throwaways are artists. By becoming a mentor to them, you are reaching into a world that should not exist in a civilized society.

No modern nation is as cruel to its citizens as the U.S. when they run afoul of laws, even bad laws. Maybe that's because America is so prosperous; it can afford to throw lives away and put families in hardship and distress. Incarceration is expensive, particularly the way America does it with high security. In America there are few opportunities for furloughs, work release, house arrest, electronic

monitoring or other means for a person to maintain ties with family and the community. It is not only unfair and counter-productive but expensive, both in the short and long run. Jails spend $100 or more per day to keep people there. Prisons are not far behind. Most of the cost is for security staff to make sure inmates do not walk away.

In most European countries, walking away is encouraged. Of course, permission is first granted by the warden, but that's not difficult to obtain. The goal there for prisoners is re-integration into society, not institutionalization as in America. The quicker an inmate in Europe can stand on his or her own two feet, both economically and socially, the better. Prisons are not places for punishment there but for preparation. Why take a person and put him somewhere to inflict pain day after day, year after year, only to let him out as a bruised and angry person? Even if he is never released, society will suffer, and not just with the high cost of his upkeep. Think of the loved ones left behind, the children. The bruises and anger will be transferred to them as they grow up. Instead of having one law violator, the result will often be a family of them.

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Clearly, a prospective mentor is entering a world in which her or his services are sorely needed. If pain can be used to create art, as Miles Davis says it can, then prisons are a fertile domain for artists. But artistic excellence will not happen on its own, or quickly. While long prison sentences are a bad thing for people, they can be good for art.

Art, in its essence, is experimentation. That's what the creative spirit is about. One tries to do something and when it does not work, another option is tested. Even if something does work, few artists want to be repetitive. On the outside, if an artist is dependent on art for a livelihood and finds a successful formula, repetition may be a necessity. But if all living expenses are being paid by someone else, the artist can experiment without end. With esthetic goals uppermost in one's mind, and no financial needs, a world of unrestricted creativity lays ahead. As a mentor you can help prison artists focus this way. Feel free to use famous artists as examples, such as Chopin.

Frederic Chopin was a Polish composer who immigrated to France to become a world sensation with his romantic music. He is credited with establishing the piano as a solo instrument. Today,

more than 150 years after this death, no music is played on piano more than Chopin's.

Incarcerated artists can get a lot of inspiration from Chopin. For example, the famous composer took his time in what he did. He had no reluctance about throwing away or revising drafts of his work. A piece could go through many incarnations before he was finished. Once, it took him six weeks to write a single page of music. Nor did that mean he was done yet.

He paid no attention to his surroundings. All that mattered was his art. His wife did not mind that Chopin's first love was his work and not her. She too was focused on art, an independent woman in every sense of the word. Her name was Aurore Dudevant, but she used the pen name of George Sand so she would not be discriminated against as a woman in getting her novels published. More than 60 of her books appeared. She helped her husband, and he helped her. They did this mostly by staying out of each other's way.

She greatly admired his commitment to his art. Chopin sought self-realization first, financial gain second. With a piano in the bedroom, he would get up in the middle of the night to play if a musical idea came to him. Said his wife, "He does not know on what planet he exists."

But being on planet Earth, he had to bring in some income. He did it by teaching music. Commanding high fees because of his composition fame, he only taught a few well-heeled students per day. Even so, he did not take their money directly. He wanted to emphasize that he was only accepting it so he could pursue his art. When his students entered his studio, they placed the money on a mantel while he looked out the window.

Interestingly, high-class escorts use a similar approach by not touching the money they receive when providing their services. They seek to reassure themselves and their customers that they are doing it for reasons beyond money. But of course they are prostituting themselves, just as Chopin did when he gave music lessons. He was not fortunate like Tchaikovsky**,** who had a generous patron. Nor did he have taxpayers providing his living expenses like men and women in prison who pursue their art.

As a mentor, you must make your artists aware of the positive aspects of their situation; that they now have the time to develop and experiment. There will be plenty of opportunity after leaving prison for these inmates to use their art to prostitute themselves, if they so wish. Or they can continue on the outside to be creative and

do art that satisfies them. They can do that by earning their income outside the field of art. As a result, their art will be pure and untainted. Whenever a professional takes up a hobby or a pastime, be it art or sex, and converts it into an occupation, the joy of creativity and spontaneity is lost. Is it worth it? That depends on the individual and his or her need for money. In other words, how much is required by the person, and how much can be gotten for her or his "art."

Even the most famous artists through the ages have prostituted themselves. Think of the Beatles. The band members all had conventional jobs when they began but gave them up when their music started to become popular. It was providing them with a modest living. Playing together nightly, they became a tight band and got to know each other's creative potential. It was on-the-job training. At that point, they were just a fair band. But they had a dream of someday returning to their original roots of being true musical artists, coming up with new and experimental creations rather than performing old ones.

The opportunity came for the Beatles when they were "discovered." Attracting a good manager and a great producer, a recording contract and spectacular record sales followed. The most successful musical group of all time, they were soon free to do as wished. But first came a few more years of prostituting themselves. Not only did they want money that touring provided, but their manager pushed them to do it. Just as a pimp might know the sex business, so manager Brian Epstein knew the music business. To make the most of their creations, the Beatles had to advertise their wares. That meant traveling from country to country and city to city, strutting on stage, giving interviews and making television appearances. Free samples, so to speak. Their manager proved he was right. The formula produced tremendous income.

Some artists can do that type of hustling forever and be content. Think of the Rolling Stones or the Commodores, each performing and touring for more than 40 years. Or a professional escort who practices her skills as long as she can stand, or lie down, well into her senior years. The Beatles, for their own reasons that we may never fully discover, didn't want to go that route. They sought to create pure art. They therefore ended all performing and touring. No longer would they be at the mercy of the public for their income. If more income came from record sales, that would be fine. If not, that would be alright too.

They isolated themselves in a studio without time constraints, a kind of prison. There they created. They experimented beyond anything they could possibly do on stage. Much of what they came up with was trash. But they also unearthed treasures from their artistic imaginations. Some songs were so wildly creative that they could not be performed live even if the Beatles were inclined to do so. The songs were too complicated and only attainable during studio production. In fact when they were released as recordings to the public, people had to listen a few times to fully appreciate them. But when they did, they embraced the Beatles as musical geniuses of the first order.

The two principal songwriters in the group, Paul McCartney and John Lennon, were mostly responsible for the artistic phenomenon that was the Beatles. Said McCartney of their collaboration, "Every time John and I sat down together to write music, we were on fire."

But the fire eventually went out. Or maybe it grew too intense. After a period of incredible creation with many brilliant songs composed, they and their fellow members, all songwriters, began to bicker. With no need to make a living, they had plenty of time for both art and argument. Eventually the latter eclipsed the former and they split up.

Seeing eye to eye with others in the creation of art and in the guidance of one's careers is always difficult in a partnership. It is one reason why artists often create on their own rather than with others. The most prolific songwriter of the 20th century, Irving Berlin, wrote both words and music without anyone else's help. So did Cole Porter and Stephen Sondheim. Partnerships can take on a life of their own, so breakups often leave members in the cold. They find that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Even the great songwriting team of William Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan ended, despite the two men getting along well, albeit at a distance. They were rarely in the same room together. Instead they communicated their creative ideas by mailing letters to each other. Even so, there was a dependence in their relationship that could not be broken in order to keep their art alive. When Sullivan died, Gilbert announced that his career as an artist was also over. "A Gilbert is no good without a Sullivan," he said. He didn't need money and didn't want art in his life at that point, choosing instead to spend the remaining 11 years of his life at play. He died at 74 of a heart attack while swimming in his private lake.

Michelangelo didn't need money when he entered his senior years, but he kept creating as long as he could breathe. His life

ended a year before his 90th birthday. He learned a lot in his lifetime, including the fact that his need for income during his early years required him to compromise his creativity to satisfy the demands of customers.

One customer was Pope Julius III. He wanted Michelangelo to create a fitting tomb for him during the Pope's lifetime. Together they signed a contract. The artist was paid to sculpt a freestanding monument to entomb the pontiff. The contract called for 40 figures that Michelangelo had to create. But he kept delaying because of other artistic interests. Julius finally died and was buried, but his relatives wanted the tomb finished to put him in. They finally brought charges of fraud against the artist but dropped them when Michelangelo agreed to proceed. Artist and family came to an agreement for a lesser tomb. Being dead, the late pope could not object, and the family was easy to satisfy. At least so the artist thought.

So he kept procrastinating. More years went by without the tomb built. The contract was modified three more times until it became a simple undertaking that hardly required the great artist's involvement. In fact he didn't do it but assigned the job to his assistants. To this day the tomb stands, a poor version of the original concept. Still, it is a testament to how money can corrupt an artist and lead him to do things he would not otherwise do.

From the time he signed the original contract with Julius until the tomb was completed, 40 years of harassment and threats against Michelangelo had occurred. The money did not compensate him for that level of aggravation.

Almost 500 years later in America, ex-prisoner Arned made a similar discovery. The art that he learned in prison was photography. Ten years after his prison stay ended he had yet to make a penny from his art. It was frustrating since he had high hopes for it when he was in prison. He had intended to make a living from his photography, maybe a great living. But it didn't happen.

During his time in prison, Arned had focused on creative photography. He was fortunate to find himself in a prison where that was possible. Most wardens are highly skeptical of photography or videography of any type. They believe that images can be sent to outsiders who will know the layout and security features of the prison. Such information can lead them to assist in an escape attempt. The other reason that wardens usually ban any equipment that can capture images is they believe inmates can use photos to

blackmail prison officers. For example, a photo of an officer committing even the smallest illegal act can cause her to lose her job. Best if she makes a deal with the inmate photographer to obtain the photo.

But Arned's warden didn't care. He said, "If something's going on in this place that's not supposed to, I want to see it." In fact, the presence of cameras and camcorders at his prison kept everyone on their best behavior. Arned was also fortunate to have a good mentor who stuck by him during and after his prison years. Photography was a hobby for her, but she took it very seriously. She provided Arned with a camera and sent him instructional books. He in turn sent her many of the photos he took. She wrote back her comments.

Upon Arned's release, his mentor and her husband were waiting for him. They greeted each other enthusiastically. Arned was also anxious to see his father who had stayed in touch with him over the years. Dad owned a small plumbing business and wanted Arned to work with him. Arned had prepared himself in prison by taking a vocational class and getting experience in the prison plumbing department so he would be ready. He had so much free time in prison that he easily squeezed this in along with his photography pursuits. Could he maintain the two interests in a satisfying balance on the outside?

With the help of his mentor and father, he managed the transition well. With good income he got from the job and the creative satisfaction he got from his art, Arned led a happy life. He made a point of taking his camera with him on plumbing assignments. If he saw an interesting street scene, he photographed it, always emphasizing creativity instead of commercialism in his photos. He knew that the images wouldn't get him a job as a commercial photographer, but he didn't care. The more he thought about it, the less he envied working photographers. Sure, they didn't have to do plumbing or anything else to get by, but then Arned didn't have to compromise his art in any way for income. His was fine photography rather than for-profit picture taking.

Although he didn't get money for his art, he did get recognition. Arned's images were accepted in a few photo shows. He even got publicity. One newspaper's review of a show singled Arned out as having the best work there. "His photos are as startling as they are quirky," the review wrote. "The public needs to see more of these highly original images."

Arned and his dad laughed when they read it. Their plumbing customers also took note. It made the customers feel they were

getting more than plumbing when they paid their bills. They were patrons of the arts. Arned sometimes thanked them by giving them small prints of his photos.

Unknown to Arned, also reading his reviews was the acquisition editor of the photography books division of a major publishing house. He contacted Arned to see more of his work, then offered him a publishing contract. Arned was finally able to leave plumbing and devote himself full-time to his art.

In prison, an artist produces his creations independent of the need for income. As a mentor, you should praise him for this and encourage him to continue this approach on the outside. It can avoid a lot of disappointment while he strives to create art beyond the prison gates. The option will always be present to become a full-time artist. But first an ex-prisoner needs to survive, and to do that a steady income is required. To try to make art fulfill that role will hurt both the art and the chances of making a successful re-entry.

Art should never be abandoned, even under the worst of circumstances, in or out of prison. To do that would be to throw away a lifeline to self–fulfillment, which is vital for a happy life.

One of the keys to producing satisfying art is creating it over time. Patience and perseverance are required in order for this to happen. Few artists, even the most famous, experience success overnight. They cultivate their ideas, nurture them, and finally develop them. There are many examples of artists who took their time to create, consuming years or even decades to achieve the artistic and, when it happened, commercial results they desired.

Johannes Brahms, who lived from 1833 to 1897, was a German composer who wrote masterpieces in almost every musical form. He is famous for his four symphonies and his beautiful piano compositions. He took his time because he knew, as the saying goes, you don't get second chances to make a good first impression. Then as now, music critics were merciless. In showcasing his music to the world, Brahms wanted it to be correct in every way.

He was the type of artist who would have benefited from a ten-year prison sentence. That's a common prison length in America, partly due to "minimum mandatory sentencing" laws. Such laws require people convicted of certain offenses–mostly in the victimless drug category–to be hit hard. If judges who hand out these sentences are sadistic, the lawmakers who create these harsh statutes are worse. The laws don't take into account the facts of the offense or the background or family circumstances of the person who committed them. As the gavel falls, a son or spouse left behind

suffers as much as the man or women sent away for ten years, or whatever the law mandates.

It didn't happen to Brahms but it almost occurred to another famous composer, Sergei Prokofiev of Russia. He lived during the harsh reign of Stalin. Ten-year sentences for minor or harmless offenses were the dictator's favorite punishment. So common were they that people who ended up in prison would know whether to be wary of another convict based on the length of his or her sentence. If someone had ten years, the person was considered harmless. Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who himself did a "ten-er," discussed this in his famous book *Gulag Archipelago*. He said there was no need to know why someone was in prison if that's the sentence he or she got. It was always a trivial offense.

Imagine Brahms being in prison for that length of time. How would he have fared? Chances are he would have done well, particularly with a mentor in his life to reassure and encourage him. Brahms never cared much about his physical surroundings. He could have adapted easily to being in a cell or prison dormitory wearing an inmate uniform. His art was everything to him. Each day when he went out he wore the same shabby brown coat. Since he smoked carelessly it was always smudged with ashes. His living quarters were modest. He didn't desire to improve them even when great fame and fortune came his way. For 26 years he lived in the same apartment. Brahms didn't want any personal attention, so being an inmate would have suited him well. He grew a beard because it allowed him, he said, to "trout about so nice and anonymous." Even eating in a prison chow hall would not have been a hardship for him. He ate simple fare. For breakfast, he had sardines and drank the oil right out of the can. Such table manners are not looked down upon in prison.

Brahms didn't have a wife or family to leave behind had he gone to prison. He liked to be self reliant, making no excuses to anyone about his art being his first priority. Whatever he needed he paid or bartered for. Again, this would have served him well in prison where inmates can get anything they want as long as they have something to offer in return. Brahms got affection from children and something more from adult women he fancied. Each day he took long walks with his pockets filled with candy and small trinkets for neighborhood children he encountered. At night he went to the brothels with cash in hand. Born and raised in Hamburg, where sexual enterprises were and still are legal and open to all, Brahms bragged about the efficiency with which he managed his private life.

Had he been away in prison for ten years, nothing would have changed in his absence. He could have easily resumed the pay-to-play bohemian life he loved.

Incarcerated, how would Brahms have composed? The answer: as he always did, on a piano. There isn't a prison or jail in America that doesn't have a keyboard. It's standard in every prison chapel, and equally universal in prison recreation departments, which also often contain a music section where several keyboards are available. Given his dedication to music, Brahms would have found a way to get assigned to one of these locations. That would have afforded him plenty of time to compose. If he needed more time, he could use his evenings in his cell to create. As long as he had paper and a pencil, he didn't need a piano. When Beethoven became deaf he dispensed with musical instruments altogether, creating some of his best work without them. Brahms would no doubt still want to hear what he silently created in his cell, and he could do that the next morning when he returned to the prison pianos. He could even assemble a small audience to hear his newly-created music. That's easy to do in prison where idle inmates are everywhere.

Who would be Brahms' mentor to help him during his years in prison? That's easy to answer. It would be the same mentor he had on the outside: Clara Schumann. Here was a woman who had experienced her own setbacks in life, and used them to advance her art. She was married to a brilliant composer, Robert Schumann, one of the icons of the Romantic Period. Their life together was not easy, with him showing early signs of mental illness. She became a widow at thirty-seven when Robert died in an insane asylum. A fine pianist herself, she decided to devote herself full time to playing music. For almost 40 years, she traveled around the world performing her late husband's work in concert, as well as her own compositions. In many ways, she had been Robert's mentor, and after his passing she kept his music alive.

Without the intimacy of a romantic partnership, she established the same bond with Brahms. Fourteen years his senior and more accomplished as a musician than him, she served as an ideal mentor. She gave him piano lessons, helped him secure music jobs, and encouraged him in his composing. Brahms confessed to his acquaintances that he wrote much of his music with her in mind. She even advised him on nonmusical matters such as how to save and invest money. As a result he always made more money than he spent. The surplus went in part to take care of relatives in Hamburg after Brahms moved to Vienna. Schumann took care of the rest. He

valued her advice so much that he sent her his money to invest for him, no questions asked.

A lengthy stay in prison for Brahms would not have changed his lifestyle, nor would Clara Schumann have done less for him while he was there. Being in prison probably would not have changed his music output either, at least not for the worse. Brahms worked hard on his compositions, taking time to attend to every painstaking detail. He was the opposite of a sloppy composer who doesn't care how crudely notes are placed on manuscripts. Brahms also took great care before he considered his sheet music ready for publication. If it didn't play the way he thought it should, he would burn the manuscript and start over.

As a result of his meticulous composition methods, Brahms took fully ten years to write his first symphony. It was a masterpiece, as were the other four that followed. Chances are the quality would have been the same if he wrote them in prison. Mentor Schumann would have encouraged and accepted no less than his best.

The long-term work habits of Sergei Prokofiev were also impressive. A 20th century Russian music writer who lived from 1891 to 1953, he is known for his concerts, operas, symphonies, film music, and ballet scores. Perhaps his most famous work is the children's piece, *Peter and the Wolf*.

From an early age, Prokofiev wanted to write music of significance. His role model was fellow Russian, Tchaikovsky. As a youth, he saw Tchaikovsky's *The Sleeping Beauty* and wanted to write equally beautiful compositions. He practiced the piano a lot, even when there was none around. His long arms and big hands were always moving over an invisible keyboard, even in his sleep. Unfortunately, Prokofiev's artistic skill did not equal his enthusiasm for music, at least not at first. Critics laughed at his first compositions. They compared his music to banging on instruments or of trees being violently uprooted. But he never gave up. When people walked out of his concerts, he blamed the people, not his music. Still, he always endeavored to make his work better. He kept all his reviews, even the bad ones. Whether producing anger or elation, they fueled his drive to get better.

His big break seemed to come when his music was chosen for a performance in America. But it didn't appeal to many people when performed there. Prokofiev's reaction was to spend hours in New York's Central Park gazing at the skyscrapers that surround it. Eventually, his fury at "the wonderful American orchestra who

cared nothing about my music" subsided. He rededicated himself to working extra hard to develop new ideas.

He spent up to 14 hours a day on his music, only stopping long enough to eat or tell his children to keep quiet. When he was not writing music, he relaxed by playing chess which, coincidentally, is the most popular game played by prisoners.

The work ethic that Prokofiev developed served him well in the long run. His music eventually clicked, elevating him to the status of a master. But he did not let up on his high productivity. It had become a way of life. He wrote so many songs that he tended to forget some of them. Once he commented favorably about a song he heard on the radio and then realized he wrote it.

Living in Russia under Joseph Stalin, Prokofiev knew that the dictator liked to put artists in jail, along with millions of other citizens. Prokofiev avoided imprisonment even though his final opera, *A Tale of a Real Man*, was considered politically incorrect. Stalin banned it from being performed, yet allowed the composer to live in freedom. The opera finally saw the light of day and the sounds of singers and orchestra after Stalin died; but not before Prokofiev also died. As fate would have it, the two famed Russians passed away on the same day.

Examples of famous artists who have persevered over the long run serve to inspire prisoners. One of many good female role models is found in Georgia O'Keeffe, a painter from Wisconsin. O'Keeffe had a long and productive life, dying in her 99th year in 1986. Like most artists, her road to success was a long and winding one, but she stayed on it until she achieved her goal. She was 30 years old before she started painting the abstracts that would bring her fame. Even then she stuck to her conventional employment of teaching school.

Her preferred medium was watercolor and her abstractions were based on landscapes and vegetation. She found her subjects in the Southwest United States; not only plant life but the bones and buildings she discovered there. O'Keeffe traveled widely as she sought teaching opportunities, winding up in such diverse places as Texas and Virginia. She was discovered as an artist when a dealer named Stieglitz recognized her talent and potential. Eventually, they became husband and wife. He never stopped admiring her work.

Though she started late, just as most artists in prison do, O'Keeffe stayed with her dream until she achieved international recognition. Even when success came she continued to experiment.

She completed one of her most ambitious projects when she was 79 years old, a mural that was displayed in a Chicago museum. When she entered her final decade of life, O'Keeffe decided to go beyond visual art and write a book. She undertook the project with the same positive attitude and focused energy that characterized her other work. At the age of 96, her book was completed and published.

One of the good things that can come from a lengthy commitment to art is the ability to switch direction, whether one continues working in the same medium or utilizes a new vehicle for expression. An example in the field of music exists in the internationally successful rock group Radiohead. To see them on stage, you'd guess they were a collection of vagabonds steeply enmeshed in the drug culture. In fact they are the product of a university. All of the members disdain drugs as an impediment to their art.

No band in the early 21st century has produced CDs as popular as Radiohead. Lead singer and principal songwriter Thom Yorke always wears his trademark sunglasses in public. There's a reason for that since his left eyelid was paralyzed in a childhood operation. He embraces the glasses so audiences will not be distracted by the eye and can focus on the music that Radiohead produces. About that music, it constantly changes as the group discovers new ideas. Yorke describes the musical evolution of Radiohead as an "organic process." The result is CDs that are very different from each other, giving fans fresh reasons to listen.

From the outset, Radiohead said their goal would be to continually experiment and change. They took this commitment seriously. The band avoided the standard formula for success of repeating what worked for them before. If a musical group releases a CD that sells well, they often put the same type of material on the next CD. This Radiohead refused to do. They wanted to be artists, not mechanics, no matter how well it paid. Why turn a love of art into a conventional job of cranking out formula CDs? Each time they made a new one, they sought to break the mold.

Their main criterion for recording songs: if a tune sounds like something they did before, they would not record it. As a result, the creation of each new CD took a lot of time and patience. Sometimes the band worked in a studio for months and did not come up with a single new song that met their high standards. Fortunately, they had a producer in Nigel Godrich who gave them excellent mentoring support and suggestions. He didn't want them

to become slaves to their earlier success. Like Yorke and the other band members, he wanted them to be more than popular, but great.

With pressures on the group, they began to disagree and bicker. Godrich expected this and knew that the tension could have a good outcome by opening new creative doors. He did whatever he could to turn destructive tendencies into constructive energy. That sometimes meant temporarily disbanding the group so the members could go off on their own to pursue individual projects. He knew it would invigorate them, that when they returned they could make a new start.

Had it not been for their wisdom in understanding that the creative process can take a long time to germinate, Radiohead might have packed it in at the first sign of frustration. But they had faith in their abilities, as did their mentor. Though under contract with a record company to produce CDs, company executives knew they would get a mediocre product if they pushed too hard. Seeing the band's commitment to originality and excellence, record executives therefore told Radiohead they could take as much time as the needed.

This is how the band became one of the top groups in rock history, earning millions of dollars for each member. They wouldn't let time dictate their creative schedule or their artistic achievements.

With many hours available to prisoners, they should look to Radiohead as an example of the value of taking time in attempting to make a masterpiece. The process of doing this involves a lot of effort and experimentation. A prisoner may not be able to see this on his own since his need for self esteem may be immediate. As a mentor, however, you can help him understand that excellence in art can't be rushed.

On the other hand, you don't want your imprisoned artists to procrastinate. Encourage them to do side projects while waiting for inspiration or additional skills or materials to complete major works. Taking time off from art entirely is not a good idea, though. If they drop out for a while, they might not return. They might find other things to fill their lives. When people drop out of school, many find that coming back to formal education takes a back seat to other priorities that have entered their lives. This isn't to say that school is the only road to success. After all, Bill Gates is a college dropout. But it can be very important in helping people lead better, more fulfilling lives. Can art be replaced? Except for the most committed and self assured artist, the answer is yes. Art is not food that one's body depends on. A person will not wither away without

it. It's food for the soul, which can take a long time to die in its absence. The pain of death can be masked with anything from drugs to TV watching, all generously available in prison.

Don't let this happen to your artist. Keep him involved even as you warn him about rushing to seek perfection. If he only spends 15 minutes each day on his art, it will keep the door to creative expression open. People who exercise only 15 minutes daily get good results. The key is to be consistent and to *never* miss a day. Beyond muscles that are developed in this way, the exerciser will be conditioned to taking on other physical challenges such as long walks. It can mean the difference between living an active life and succumbing to a heart attack.

In prison, continuing one's art, even while in an energy lull, can make a big difference as well. There is the expression that "the devil makes work for idle hands." It especially applies to prisons where idleness is endemic. Prisoners don't need to exert themselves in any way. Regardless of what they do or how they behave, they will have a warm bed and balanced meals provided. A judge has already declared them to be a bad person, so they would simply be living up to that expectation if they kept getting in trouble. It's easy to find mischief in prison considering all the destructive people one is surrounded by. Finding them is easy since they all wear the same uniform. The challenge for inmates is to do positive things and leave prison a better person than when they entered.

Art can be crucial in this, particularly for the long term. Prisons are becoming safer places due to higher security measures and better-trained staff. But that's only physical safety. The minds of prisoners are more at risk than ever. If inmates leave prison without a mind of their own, they may as well go on drugs, and the sooner the better.

Prisons are becoming increasingly sterile environments, which militates against mental health. Wardens don't want injuries or deaths to their staff or inmates. They therefore take away items that can be used for destructive purposes. A partial list of removals at many prisons in recent years includes typewriters, hardbound books, and pens. As good as these are for the mind, they are bad for the body if prisoners use them as weapons against each other or staff. Packages from home have also been banned despite the mind-stimulating materials they once contained. Wardens were concerned that concealed in them might be contraband.

What you have now are prisons that are safer for limbs but more dangerous for brain lobes. The theory of wardens is that if you lose

your body, your life is over. But a destroyed mind can be regained. How long will that take on the outside where there is an abundance of typewriters, pens, knives, guns and explosives is hard to answer. Do wardens care what happens when an inmate leaves the prison to interact with outside society? Many wardens will say that it's not their job.

Art can be used to insulate an inmate from the stultifying and negative aspects of modern prisons, to free the mind even before the body is released. George Gershwin knew what he was doing when he put his art before anything else. The famous American composer led a productive and satisfying life. He created popular songs, musicals, film scores, the opera *Porgy and Bess* and orchestral works. As an example of how busy he was, he once accepted an invitation to write music for a special concert but he forgot about the deadline. One day his brother Ira showed George an article in the newspaper that spoke about the concert just a month away. The reporter wondered what George had written for it; George himself wondered. He put aside his other projects and got to work.

Fortunately, Gershwin worked well under pressure. That's not surprising considering all the deadlines he had previously imposed on himself. He had no problem working day and night in pursuit of his art. The evening of the concert came and Gershwin introduced the world to his latest work. It was on the 12th day of February 1924 that the famous *Rhapsody in Blue* was first heard.

As a child, Gershwin took piano lessons. That was not the intent of his Russian-Jewish immigrant parents, who had bought a second-hand piano for older brother Ira. Call it sibling rivalry but George was the one who chose to play the most; so he got the lessons.

Entering his teenage years, he wrote and played music every chance he got, even securing a job performing for buyers of sheet music. He pushed his own songs when he could. One of the biggest stars of the time, Al Jolson, picked a Gershwin song to record in 1919 when the young songwriter was barely 20. The song, "Swanee," sold two million records and made Gershwin wealthy and widely known.

From that point until the end of his life, he maintained a heavy work schedule. Brother Ira proved to be good with words, so George enlisted him to write the words to his tunes. Together they created some of the most memorable songs in history, including "Summertime" and "I Got Rhythm." When Gershwin was not composing music he was playing for friends. Arriving at a party he would find a piano. No one had to ask twice, or even once, for him

to play. He did it automatically. When asked why he played rather than socialized at gatherings, he said. "That's what I enjoy doing the most." After a party he would return home and compose songs, sometimes until the early morning. He did not always go home alone. He was considered a "ladies' man." In fact, Gershwin was a master at seduction. When a woman lingered near him while he played at a party, he would launch into a new tune, telling her she had just inspired it. In fact, he had a number of *original* romantic tunes ready to play on such occasions.

He sometimes had steady girlfriends but they tired of Gershwin when they realized he was a confirmed bachelor. Did he get upset when they dumped him to settle down with someone else? Gershwin said on one occasion, "I'd feel terrible if I were not so busy."

Surely Gershwin as a prisoner would have taken the same attitude. It might not have come on his first day in prison, or even his first year. But eventually, he would have realized that his commitment to art was his life preserver in the vast sea of emptiness that prison represents. Perhaps his older brother, Ira, as mentor, would have confirmed this for him, leading George to a sane path far away from the trials and temptations of prison life. Who knows how much more music he would have created under such circumstances?

10. MARKETING ART MADE IN PRISON

If you seek to help artists in prison market their creations, you need to understand the appeal of their art to the outside world. Then you must determine how to get it in the hands of willing buyers.

The first step is to get the art out of prison in one piece, without any harm coming to either the art or the prisoner for participating in such a transaction. Wardens are not only concerned with the security of their prisons, but their budget. If they receive enough money, they can hire adequate staff, pay for upkeep and equipment replacement, and satisfy other needs. The funds they get are determined by political factors, which is influenced by public opinion. If politicians who hold the purse strings feel that the public is happy with the way a prison is run, they will be generous with taxpayer funds. Otherwise, they will be frugal. The question before a warden: how to make the public happy. It is a near impossible task in that if he or she does too much for prisoners, conservatives will be upset. If too little is done for them, liberals with squawk. Caught in this no-win predicament, it is best that he keep the operation as low-key as possible, even secretive. Speaking at a conference of the American Correctional Association, one warden said, "We are in a unique business where any publicity is bad publicity."

Wardens do not mind art being created in prison. They know it helps inmates avoid the pitfalls of prison life while serving as a rehabilitation tool to prepare them mentally and emotionally for life on the outside. But they are wary of reactionary segments of the public claiming that this is "coddling criminals." Why should inmates have time to prepare art in prison when free-worlders sometimes have to work two or three jobs to get by? some say. Keep them chained to a wall. Let them defecate in their uniforms.

Many people believe that inmates are treated this way, or should be. When they learn that there is humane treatment of inmates in America, they are surprised; some are disappointed.

To show how difficult it is for wardens to walk the fine line between praise and condemnation, both of which they seek to avoid, here are a few examples. In one prison that treated inmates well, word leaked to the press by a disgruntled staffer that too many amenities were being offered them. The warden tried to avoid a request made by a reporter to tour the prison. He cited "security reasons." In the end the reporter used her political connections to get the tour.

The warden scrambled to hide musical instruments, art supplies, exercise equipment and other things offered to inmates for which he could be criticized. All nonessential programs for inmates were cancelled on the day of the tour, including a concert by a prison gospel band in the chapel and a movie in the recreation hall. He did not interfere with the prison school that offered various vocational and academic classes. But he did instruct teachers to put on a show of being strict and even being mean to their students. Inmates and staff were aware of the hoax, which they pulled off well. Something else that the warden left in place was a toys-for-tots project in the craft shop that the prisoners ran. Here they made wooden toys for children that the head of the prison recreation department delivered to needy families. He was known in the community for this operation and intended to use it as a springboard to run for minor political office someday. He too wanted to conceal aspects of the prison that might show the place as being too "soft."

The reporter came and went, spending several hours on the compound in the company of the warden. Everyone was on their worst behavior, an atmosphere of tenseness pervading the compound. It was all a fabrication created for the benefit of the writer. She believed that prisons were filled with unhappy, sinister people, and now her beliefs were confirmed. What she was not able to verify, however, were the humanitarian aspects of the prison since they were hidden from her. She might have pried and made some discoveries, but her comfort level was not high enough to delve. Inmates and staff had done their "snowjob" with precision, as if conducting a complex Civil War reenactment with authenticity.

Still, the reporter had to give her reactionary readers something to chew over and gripe about. Her article highlighted a feature of the prison that she knew would upset them. She reported that the walkways between buildings contained benches and flowers. The warden had said to her during the tour that the flowers were planted and tended by inmates enrolled in a vocational landscape training program. Benches had been made by vocational carpentry students. The benches had been requested by the medical department of the prison for elderly inmates who sometimes needed to rest when walking from one building to another.

The reporter knew but did not include this background information. She simply wrote that the prison resembled a "well-kept, up-scale park with its maze of custom built benches and exotic flowers." In hindsight, the warden knew what he had done wrong. He should have given the inmate grounds clean-up crew the day

off–maybe the whole week off–so that the place would have been strewn with litter. The reporter would have then seen the grounds as an abandoned ghetto park rather than the pleasant corridor that the men took pride in. Now, it was too late. To save the positive features of the rest of the prison, the warden had to destroy the ones that the reporter noted. Without delay, he had every bench disassembled and all the flowers uprooted. With such gaps in the landscape, it now looked like a war zone. Hereafter, the inmates, young and old, would have to sit on the ground. Instead of looking on floral foliage, they would conjure scenes from their own mind, not always rehabilitative.

Another example of a warden called on the carpet for trying to do something positive can be described as "the cookie scandal." In almost all prisons, desserts are prepared by inmate kitchen workers. Sometimes these inmates are very limited in what they have to work with, but they do their best. If they did not, their friends on the compound would complain to them. Peer pressure can be a strong motivating factor in producing good work, or in this case good cake.

Located in a southern state that prided itself on poor treatment of inmates, food portions were skimpy and the quality of ingredients poor. Some of the meat was so tough that it was not chewable. Inmates who lost too much weight went to the medical department. There doctors bound by the Hippocratic oath and their desire to avoid inmate lawsuits prescribed "snack bags" between meals for endangered prisoners. The bags contained cheese or peanut butter sandwiches. It was not much, but enough to keep a person alive who did not have funds in his inmate account for canteen food purchases.

With the exception of outside politicians, no one in the prison was happy with this situation. But what could be done? Food supplies arrived in insufficient quantity and had to be distributed evenly.

One day an inmate cook noted that one item existed in ample quantity: cookie dough. Could two cookies be given to inmates at each meal instead of one? The officer who supervised the kitchen said no. It would go against regulations. He had to follow strict guidelines for the preparation of each meal: one cookie per inmate was mandated. What about the extra cookie mixes? If unused, they would go bad and would have to be thrown out. It was beyond his control he said. Still, he was sympathetic and tried to keep the conversation light. "That's the way the cookie crumbles."

Here is where inmate ingenuity entered the picture. The cooks enlarged the cookies they baked for inmates. In fact, they doubled their size. These food preparers became instant heroes on the compound. Even the staff applauded them. Why not? If the inmates were in a good mood, their jobs were easier. Besides, it is always nice to be around people smiling rather than frowning.

The arrangement lasted over a year without a glitch, with ample cookie dough to spare. Even during months when supplies ran a little low, the cookies would be only slightly downsized. Making up for this were other months when they were almost tripled in size. The warden enjoyed one of the cookies now and then herself, glad to see surplus food put to a good purpose. She only hoped that no one on the outside would find out. She believed there was little chance of that happening. Anyone visiting the compound would be kept away from the chow hall, and for good reason. It's a busy place that is considered a hot-point in prison. Inmates have trays and utensils there that can do much harm. If a prisoner wants to settle an old or new score, the chow hall is the place to do it. With so much noise and activity going on, he might even get away with it. When this is explained to outsiders, they specifically request *not* to go there.

Still, a leak occurred. It happened during an evacuation of the prison when a flood threatened the region. The flood never came, but for a week all inmates were relocated to other prisons in the state. They did not take their cookies with them but they did take their desire for them. When the prisoners arrived at the new compounds, they discovered small cookies along with small portions of food. They did not register any complaints, knowing better. After all, they were guests and susceptible to mistreatment, even getting worse care than resident inmates. But they did commiserate with other prisoners. They nostalgically told them of the large cookies and how they longed to be "home" to once again fill their stomachs with them.

Prisons are like small towns. Not just in terms of the small number of residents, usually about 1,000, but the close proximity of the inhabitants to each other. When something happens on a compound, good or bad, everyone learns about it quickly. Word soon spread in the host prison that large cookies were provided at the flood-threatened prison. Why couldn't such items be given at their prison? What was happening to the excess cookie dough there? Maybe the warden and staff were taking it home. Or maybe

a “Cookie Monster” was at work denying the men of their just desserts.

The warden of the host prison reacted in a decisive way. He was adamant in retaining his small cookies, whether or not there was a surplus of dough. He regarded the large cookies as politically incorrect. While seemingly a small issue, he knew that with the yeast of public opinion that ambitious politicians can add, it could be made into a large matter. He could visualize a super-sized cookie on the front page of a tabloid with teeth marks and the caption, “Are Convicts Taking Too Big A Bite Out of Taxpayers?”

The distressed host warden spoke to his offending colleague who had ordered her inmates back to the home prison. He convinced her. They would return only to find small cookies waiting for them. The last thing she wanted to do was rock the boat and upset her fellow professionals. After all, they were all members of the North American Wardens Association. They could poison her cocktail at their next conference reception. Or as bad, poison the ears of politicians whom she needed for reappointment to her job and advancement in her career. It was not all selfishness on her part. She knew that if she pursued this small cookie matter, she would be distracted from the solid improvements she hoped to make at her prison, such as upgrading medical care.

Such is the sensitivity of prison officials to outside pressure. Translating this to prison art, if wardens view such creative enterprise as an asset to the image of their prison, it will be encouraged, or at least tolerated. But if they consider it a liability, it will be discouraged and suppressed as much as possible. As a mentor, you need to know what you are up against and to develop your strategy for helping your artists market their work carefully.

Of course, helping them market their work may not be your objective as a mentor. You might be of the opinion that you only need to help your artists develop their art, not sell it. That whether they intend to use it for fun or profit is none of your concern.

Such a point of view is not realistic, however. The fact is that whenever we create something we want it to be valued by others. That does not mean we are creating for others or even judging ourselves by the values of other people. But we are all social creatures who require the approval of others at some point. This is true whether or not we are in prison. But particularly in prison, it is important. There we have been relegated to the lowest level of society. We have been told we are no good to anyone and that our

presence around "normal" or "decent" people is not wanted. That we, and all we are capable of producing, are worthless.

You can understand why, under these circumstances, imprisoned artists want to show and sell their work. It is affirmation of more than their ability but of their humanity. A message in a bottle that they want someone somewhere to pick up and read. To learn that they are not dead, but just the opposite. That they are growing, with incontrovertible proof. Their art is the evidence. All they need is a display vehicle so people can judge for themselves.

There is a great deal of marketing of art already within prison walls in which mentors do not have a significant role. Still they should have some knowledge of what goes on in case they are called upon to help.

A prisoner named Pat was a sketch artist, known to his mentor as Patrick and to his fellow inmates as Bones because of his slender frame. Pat was considered one of the best portrait artists on the compound. Others who were near his level of ability had been trained by him. He did not have to go outside the prison for customers. His friends in prison, staff and inmates alike, came to him. When he was low on money he preferred assignments from prison officers because they paid more than inmates. When he was low on self-esteem, he liked to work for prisoners because they showed their compliments with their eyes and their smiles.

Pat charged inmates $5 for a black and white portrait made with pencil, and $8 for a colored portrait made with colored pencils. The rate for staff was double, still a bargain considering the quality of his work. The reason for putting a higher price on the colored renderings was two-fold. First, they took longer to do. Second and more importantly, colored pencils were hard to come by in his prison. Pat got them in one of two ways. Either a staff member would furnish them, or a prisoner newly transferred from another prison would provide them.

Pat would get them from a staffer through a mutually agreed upon "theft." The inmate would arrive in the office of a prison official to get a portrait assignment. There would be colored pencils on the desk as pre-arranged. After the conclusion of the conversation and agreement, the staffer would move papers around on his desk so that the pencils fell to the floor. He would then pretend to be engrossed in one of the papers as Pat bent over to surreptitiously pick up the pencils and put them in his pocket. Then he would walk out.

The other source of the prized pencils was inmates newly arrived from other prisons. Pat's prison was unusual but not unique for not selling colored pencils in the canteen. There was no reason *not to* sell them except for bureaucratic stagnation. Personnel who operate canteens are not anxious to make more work for themselves. Whenever a new item is added, extra paperwork has to be done, forms must be revised and computers have to be updated. Wardens don't want to burden staff if they can help it. Besides, if too much is offered to inmates in canteens there may be political repercussions. Conservative elected officials would say they are being too kind to inmates. In one region such politicians discovered that a prison charged prices to inmates below what area retail stores charged for the same items. They did not care when the warden explained that inmates have less to spend since they made little or nothing from their prison jobs. Or that the canteen was profitable because there were no advertising expenses. It did not have to advertise since it already had 100% market share, being the only store accessible to inmates.

None of that mattered to politicians who knew a good media story when they saw it. They endeavored to make it into an issue. Instead of asking the warden to up his prices, which he would have readily done to avoid controversy, the politicians lobbied the state legislative body with much fanfare and trumpet blowing. A new statute was passed that required prison canteens throughout the state to charge "prevailing local retail prices" for all items sold to inmates.

Artists in Pat's prison routinely waited for inmates from other prisons to arrive in the barred-window security-equipped Bluebird prison buses. As the inmates stepped off, they were asked about colored pencils and other art supplies they may have brought. Trades would be arranged on the spot. Not only were artists interested in what these newcomers brought with them, but so were other inmates. No two prison canteens carry identical items. One will sell things that others don't offer, like a certain type of candy. Enterprising prisoners stock up before their transfer. When they arrive at the new prison and reveal what they brought with them, they are treated like merchants who have come from the orient with rare spices and silks.

Equipped with his pencils, both plain and colored, Pat had a heavy schedule. He worked almost exclusively from photos his customers provided him. They wanted him to draw their loved ones so that they could send the portraits home as gifts for special

occasions: birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas and, especially, Mother's Day. There might be other requests as well. Once, a prisoner presented Pat with a photo of a five-year-old girl. The inmate said she was his daughter with whom he lost touch ten years earlier when he started his prison sentence. Could Pat draw her portrait so the father could see what she might look like now as a teenager? Pat took special care with this project. The inmate father beamed at the result.

Pat was lauded on the compound for his artistic ability. He took great pride in his work and always did his best. With everyone crammed together in this close-knit community, he knew if he produced something of low quality, word would spread quickly that he was "slipping." Pat believed that his best years were ahead of him, in and out of prison, and he made sure that quality was reflected in every piece he created. He frequently tore up drawings and started over when he was not satisfied. Once, a client whom Pat had referred to another artist because he was too busy to do the work himself showed Pat what had been drawn for him. The customer was satisfied with the portrait, but Pat was not. He insisted on doing it over at no charge. After all, he had made the referral.

Pat had a mentor who wrote and visited him regularly. She sent him books on portraiture and other art subjects. Most importantly, she encouraged him. She advised, for example, that a caricature artist could make a good living at parties on the outside. Pat should practice this form so that he could do them quickly and proficiently. She sent instruction books and examples; she critiqued the work he sent her in return. She had every confidence that Pat would eventually master the style.

It was early in their interaction that a problem developed that neither had anticipated. He told her in a letter how happy he was to be independent in prison, thanks to his art. Pat went on to describe how he had customers inside the prison who valued what he did and compensated him. He was careful not to mention staff as clients in case his letters were read before being mailed by prison mailroom personnel. He knew that staffers in that prison were not supposed to accept anything from inmates, and vice versa. Pat also did not say that his payment sometimes came in the form of money orders from family members of inmates for whom he did portraits. He knew that this could be construed as "operating a business," prohibited by this and most other prisons. Pat therefore only wrote his mentor that

inmates for whom he did art bought him items from the canteen to show their gratitude.

Though his letters were cautious, they still landed Pat in the hole. An employee in the mailroom took her job overly seriously. She read every word of every letter that inmates sent or received, sometimes staying after hours without compensation to accomplish the task. She was as dedicated as a Nazi death camp exterminator who forever sought higher body counts. One day she went overboard and the police came to get her, escorting her off the compound under arrest. She had destroyed an inmate's legal document. But until that happy day for inmates arrived, a lot of them suffered under her eager eyes and evil heart. One of her victims was Pat. Another was an unpublished inmate writer of short stories. He sent one of his pieces to the *New Yorker* for publishing consideration, but it never got there. The mailroom officer forwarded it instead to an assistant warden after she circled unflattering references it contained to certain local politicians. The assistant warden yelled at the inmate for writing it and refused to either mail or return the story. When the prisoner argued his First Amendment rights, the official put his hand on his mace and said, "Get the fuck out of my sight!"

Another victim of the mailroom officer was a writer of letters to his girlfriend. These the officer found to be obscene because they contained explicit sexual references. She forwarded them to the prison chaplain who had a reputation for being sexphobic. The pudgy prudish pastor used the letters to embarrass the prisoner in front of his family when they came on their next visit.

In Pat's case, the mailroom officer determined that he was engaging in a business by bartering with other inmates. Prison officials should take action against him, she argued, to set an example for others. Rules must be followed in both spirit and substance, she said. Pat got a disciplinary citation as a result, spent 30 days in the hole and lost good-time credits which effectively lengthened his sentence. The mailroom officer continued her reign of terror until she was carted away.

Pat's suffering would have been greater had his mentor not intervened. Hearing about his citation, she wrote and called the warden to express her concern. She wisely did not attempt to criticize prison rules or to justify what Pat had done. Instead, she appealed to the warden's sense of fairness and mercy. She also offered any assistance she could provide to help Pat become a

"model prisoner." Finally, she said good things about the prison that had allowed such a fine artist as Pat to develop his craft there.

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While many artists like Pat barter or sell their work in prison, others look to the outside. One of the most reputable and reliable outlets they have found has previously been discussed: the Prison Art Gallery, in Washington, D.C., with traveling exhibits and art shows around the country. Sponsored by the Safer Streets Arts Foundation and the Prisons Foundation, the gallery accepts work from inmate artists and sells it on consignment. There is no charge for inmates to participate, and all preparation costs are absorbed by the gallery. Much favorable publicity has been received by the gallery and by the inmates whose work is shown there. Other outlets for prison-made art include an annual auction by the Fortune Society in New York. But the Prison Art Gallery is the most extensive and inclusive year-round operation.

As a mentor, you can help your artist locate a place for his or her art. You can also caution them against marketers who do not deliver what they promise. Such operators fall into two categories: the well intentioned and the fraudulent.

In the first category are good-hearted people who do not have the means or experience to sell art created in prison. They understand the significance of showing and selling such art but not the requirements and resources needed for doing so. If it is true that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, it is equally the case that the path to obscurity and failure in the art world is similarly paved. A solid plan is needed to market art, particularly prison art. And an entrepreneur must have the means to put that plan in action. Otherwise, the results will be disappointing for both the sellers and for the men and women in prison who put their trust in them.

Well intentioned but ineffective dealers of prison art often start out by knowing an artist in prison. The inmate artist may be a friend or relative. He usually starts out by writing to the outsider, "Not only me but others here have art to sell. We are in here but you are out there where the buyers are. Why not take what we have and show it around, maybe set up a gallery? We can all make money that way, which I know you can use, and so can we."

It is an intriguing proposition, particularly for someone who has never been in the art business before; or any business. Such a person does not realize that the main reason for failure in enterprises

is undercapitalization. People who go into business, even with the best ideas, often run out of money. It takes time for the public to find out what a business has to offer, and additional time for them to respond by their spending money. While months and sometimes years pass before that occurs, there needs to be funds to pay the bills. It's called start-up capital.

One of the attractions of getting art from prisoners to set up an art business is that the owner gets free inventory. Unlike other enterprises in which owners have to spend a good deal of money to stock shelves, here the goods come without initial cost. But this is only a minor advantage. In fact, there can be drawbacks to it, such as not being able to pick and choose the art to be sold. Rather than catering to the tastes of customers, the business owner is at the mercy of art suppliers. The owner also may not get enough art to give customers the choice and confidence they need want to buy.

Besides, inventory is only one component of an art business. Art has to be prepared in an attractive way, whether by framing or by matting. As is said of the restaurant business, you are selling the sizzle as much as the steak. Packaging can be costly.

Also important is advertising since this stimulates customers to buy, even when they already know of the art's availability. Think of McDonald's and how much it spends on advertising, though everyone knows of its existence, with easily accessible restaurants in high visibility locations. But there is a big step between customers being aware of what is available and actually taking money from their pockets to make purchases.

Lastly, there is the matter of physical presence, whether a permanent location or a temporary display. It must be of high quality, and that isn't cheap to accomplish. When is the last time you walked into a shabby store or restaurant…without walking out? A gleaming, well-designed presence is needed to convey to customers the quality and care that will be provided them.

Falling down on any of these requirements dooms any business, particularly prison art dealers. Start-up dealers usually have full-time jobs in unrelated fields. To be successful in any new business takes a lot of time and attention. You hear of people spending 12 to 16 hours a day trying to get their business off the ground. There is a reason for such a heavy commitment. It takes time to experiment, to adapt and to constantly think of new ways to get customers to buy. You can't do it without substantial effort, whether that means going into the community and approaching potential customers or parading around with a sign on your back. If a person is already

secure in a job, he or she will usually not have the time or willingness to do that. It could jeopardize the "day job" if the person becomes too high profile in the new venture. Yet being aggressive is important to make a business work. Even if one is criticized in the press for selling the art of "convicted felons," that can be an advantage since any publicity will be helpful in letting the public know what is being offered.

Above all, an owner has to have a tough skin. He or she must be willing to throw oneself in the path of any public relations train that threatens to derail the operation. The owner will have a problem doing that if he or she is wearing two hats and needs a conventional job to survive. Most people want to keep what they have rather than risk it for something unknown and untested. The entrepreneurial spirit lives in America but relatively few people understand and are willing to internalize that spirit. A lot of us want to be successful in business but few want to do the hard work and take the risks needed to succeed.

Well-intentioned sellers of prison art rarely have all their ducks in a row. They are honorable people who usually bite off more than they can chew. They believe that just because they have an interest in helping men and women in prison, they will succeed. But in the world of business, it takes more, much more. And unless you approach the enterprise as a true business you will disappoint yourself and the artists you represent. Chance are you will end up storing the art you receive from prisoners under your bed or in your closet. Should you relocate, you will be tempted to leave it behind, lying in the dust that accumulated due to infrequent trips it made for showings? You may be a good person but a bad businessperson.

There are also bad people whose intentions are not honorable to begin with. These individuals are predatory. They advertise in prison publications that they will sell art for inmates and will give them most of the money from sales, as much as 80 or 90%. This should be the first sign that something is amiss. Reputable art dealers give a far smaller percentage to their artists, with 40 to 50% being the norm. Few, if any, of the charlatans who offer a higher percentage have a physical gallery where the art is displayed. They might say that all their art is sold on their Internet website. But even if that's true, this is not an effective way to sell original art. Both Art Behind Bars in Florida and the Prison Art Gallery in Washington, D.C. have tried online sales without much success. Go to any mainstream gallery and you will not find art on its website.

When people buy art, they like to see it close up. That's true for any one-of-a-kind items, including antiques.

Art auctions conducted over the Internet are an exception. But they have to be well advertised and promoted. The Fortune Society in New York does it well during its annual prison art auction. But that organization is well-established with a good reputation and a large following. When the Fortune Society announces its auctions, word reaches thousands of supporters. In addition, this organization arranges promotional events prior to the auction to interest the media and build momentum. But even with all this, some items do not sell, and the organization has a no-return policy.

The biggest player in online auctions, of course, is eBay. If you go to its site and search for "prison art," you will usually find a number of items on the auction block. But with rare exceptions, they do not sell for much money. For example, a piece of prison art that is sold at the Prison Art Gallery or Art Behind Bars for $80 or $90 might go for $15 to $20 on eBay. That's not surprising given that the site is known for bargains. It's like trying to sell art at a flea market. Even the best art will not fetch much there.

An exception on eBay is celebrity prison art. When a well-known person in prison creates art, eBay is the place to sell it. Such art can easily attract thousands of dollars in bids. But even here, people have to know about its availability. Media attention allows that to happen because celebrities, in or out of prison, are always considered newsworthy.

What can we make of prison art sites that claim to do brisk sales, regardless of the non-celebrity character of their art and the lack of mainstream advertising and publicity? The only conclusion is that the operators of these art enterprises are lying. The art that they receive from prisoners is neither promoted nor sold in more than a miniscule way. For the most part, it sits stagnant, and inmate artists do not get it back, or any money for it. Their letters of inquiry either go unanswered or the responses received contain lies.

The motivation behind these bogus operators is not hard to find. You need only look at their policy of charging inmate artists whose art they offer to sell. No reputable agent, whether in the field of art or literature, has such a policy. It is equivalent to saying, "We do not think we can sell your work, so we at least want some money up front for our efforts in trying."

Why would an artist fall for something like this? For starters, he wants to keep his dream of becoming a famous artist alive. It may be his chance to get out of prison. Also attractive is the high

percentage that he is promised for each sale. People who engage in fraud dangle a large financial reward in front of their victims. The fee that the unwary are asked to pay is seemingly small. What the victims do not realize is that if enough artists sign up and pay this amount, the operator will make a good income without selling any art at all. In fact promoters will be more motivated to advertise and attract new artists for more fees than to find art buyers. It is expensive to locate art customers and to encourage them to buy. Also, there is much effort needed to pack and ship art to buyers. Far easier to accept art and money from artists. The art can be stored, or even thrown away, and the money taken directly to the bank, without sharing it. Artists may think it reasonable to pay for "processing" and "art preparation." But no honest agent imposes such fees.

Let's take a close look at how a reputable operation like the Prison Art Gallery operates. First and foremost, it never charges a fee to artists to have their work prepared and offered for sale at its gallery or touring art shows. The shows take place around the U.S. and are sponsored by organizations that have an interest in justice reform, prisoner rehabilitation or victim assistance. The entire network is supervised by the Prisons Foundation, which established the original Prison Art Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Incarcerated artists learn about the Prison Art Gallery in a number of ways, including word-of-mouth and news articles in prison magazines and other publications. They either write to the Prison Art Gallery (1600 K St., N.W., #501, Washington, D.C. 20006), call it (non-collect calls only, which many prisons now allow), or have a family member or friend call (202-393-1511) or email (Staff@prisonsfoundation.org). The writer or caller need only say: "I would like information on showing and selling art made in prison at your gallery." By providing an address of the inmate artist, an information packet and necessary agreement forms are mailed to the artist.

The envelope that the artist receives contains several items. First, there is a cover letter explaining the operation and the efforts made to promote and sell prison art. Included is contact information that the artist will want to have. Also in the packet is a two-page question and answer sheet. It tells realistically what response artists can expect from their art at the gallery. Factors that determine response include the art's subject matter and its quality. Artists are not given false hope. Some art does not sell well. As a result, its

price is continually lowered. The gallery does not return art to inmates. All art is eventually sold regardless of price.

The forms included in the packet ask the prisoners to describe both their art and themselves. These descriptions are attached to the back of the art. The information provided by artists becomes strong selling points. Buyers of prisoner-made art often are attracted to the story behind the pieces as much as the art itself. Visitors to the Prison Art Gallery do as much reading as they do looking. Artists are encouraged to write interesting descriptions, and to include any details they wish. Whether or not they care to state what brought them to prison is up to them. The Prison Art Gallery does not add to or delete any of their words.

All art is priced by the gallery. The artist can suggest an amount but the gallery makes the final determination. Most of the art sold by the gallery ranges from $80 to $250. The highest amount that has been received to date is $900 and the lowest amount is $5. As Resource Director, Kevin Horrecks says, "Our objective is to get the art in the hands of people who care about the justice system in America and who will use the art to inspire themselves and others to bring about needed improvements. If that means selling art to them at a reduced price, we will do that."

The information packet also includes an agreement for the inmates to sign. It covers a number of points for the protection of both parties. The percentage that the artist will receive for a piece when sold is stipulated. The formula is 50/50 but does not include art preparation and restoration costs for which the Prison Art Gallery needs to be reimbursed *after* the sale is made. As a result, the artist will often wind up with 40% of the amount that the gallery receives for the art, but never any less. The artists specify in the agreement how and to whom the funds from sales are paid. For example, if they are to go to an artist directly, is a money order required in accordance with prison rules? Or does the artist want a group like a victims' organization to get the money. Another option is for a family member to receive the funds.

Great care is taken in the wording of these materials to make clear that the nonprofit Safe Streets Arts Foundation and its sister organization, the Prison Foundation, are conducting this program as a fundraising effort. In addition, the funds that go to the artists or the organizations or individuals he or she designates are considered grants. In this way, the artist will not be "conducting a business." He or she will be assisting the Safe Streets Arts Foundation. Indeed, the only one conducting a business, and this strictly for

fundraising purposes, is the foundation. Discretionary grants are given to the artists or their designees upon the "placement" of their art.

Finally, the information packet includes endorsements that the Prison Art Gallery has received. These are mostly newspaper articles by reporters who visit the gallery and interview staff and art buyers there. The articles point to the achievements of the gallery in educating the public about the talent and humanity of men and women behind bars. Groups often come to visit and they are welcomed. They range from high school and college classes to tourist and civic groups visiting Washington.

Beyond endorsements in the form of newspaper articles, there are encouraging letters from prison artists. One reads in part, "I sent art to you a year ago and waited with patience. Finally, a money order arrived with a letter that my art was placed. Than you for not giving up on me and for all the good work you do." The name and address of the prison artist who wrote this letter is included so that anyone can write him to verify its authenticity.

Beyond establishing a gallery in Washington, D.C. (soon to be expanded and renamed Caged Bird Sings Gallery) and sponsoring touring art shows, the Safe Streets Arts Foundation has experimented with other ways of presenting and placing art made in prison. For example, it acquired a few vans to set up mobile art displays in and around Washington, D.C., including at some of the area's busiest intersections and tourist spots. The right to do this on public space, without the need for a special permit or license, was won for the foundation by the American Civil Liberties Union. The ACLU prevented the government from its misguided effort to shut down these outdoor mobile displays, even winning a monetary award for the foundation. The gallery used the money to expand its outdoor operation by buying a mobile travel home to use as a movable art gallery. Under the management of artist and ex-prisoner Jahi Foster-Bey, the traveling gallery has gone to art festivals and other venues near and far. "We are the main attraction wherever we go," says Foster-Bey. "There are more people with friends and relatives in prison than anyone realizes. They applaud what we do, as does most of the general public."

As important as the group's mobile exhibits are for selling prison art, they also serve another valuable purpose. A sign-up sheet is used at all locations for people who want to volunteer for the foundation. As a result, a network of friends and supporters has developed that consists of several thousand people. This is

important when rallies or special events are held, such as the foundation's annual "From Prison to the Stage" program at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Using this list, word spreads rapidly of the need for plays and songs written by prisoners and ex-prisoners for the program. The Kennedy Center event consistently has standing-room only attendance. Says ex-prisoner and international art collector Lloyd Rubin whose Art Appreciation Foundation has underwritten the free event, "Making art in prison deserves special recognition, and I can think of no place of greater stature than the Kennedy Center."

Like other events in which the Prison Art Gallery is involved, "From Prison to the Stage" at the Kennedy Center is an opportunity for people to acquire prison art. All around the stage and in the back of the theatre prison art is displayed. There are also ex-prisoner artists and gallery curators on hand to explain the art. With a hand held satellite device used to approve and process credit card purchases, there is nothing to stop audience members from going home with a beautiful work of art created in prison. An impulse purchase for some, it is a demonstration of support for all.

Another promotional approach used by the Prison Art Gallery is its acceptance of invitations to show art and provide ex-prisoner speakers on college campuses. All schools of higher learning have budgets for special activities. The art pieces and people who hail from the Prison Art Gallery have the ability to draw the interest of both students and faculty. Prison artists are considered to be on the cutting edge of art and justice reform. Ex-prisoners not only tell what goes on in prison but illustrate it through art. Whether they are showing drawings or sharing songs with college audiences, as I have often done, the reception they receive is positive and enthusiastic.

Undergraduate and graduate universities, art colleges, and law schools are among the places where such programs have been conducted. They often consist of a week-long exhibit of art at the student center, a reception at which an ex-prisoner musician performs, and a panel discussion that features professors and Prison Art Gallery staff. Not a lot of art is sold at colleges because of limited income of students and low salaries of teachers. In California where prison officers are represented by a strong union, their pay is higher than college professors.

Though little original art sells at colleges, art prints are popular. The Prison Art Gallery created a series of prints using images of the best art it received. Sale of these pieces helps to pay the gallery's

overhead expenses. Fees it receives from colleges to conduct exhibits and programs also help.

Other venues that the Prison Art Gallery has used to showcase and sell art include conferences of professional associations and conventions of justice groups. The organizations that have contracted with the gallery to provide art and artists for their events include the International Community Corrections Association, Innocence Project, American Correctional Association, National Public Defenders Association, Congressional Black Caucus, American Civil Liberties Union and North American Wardens Association.

Wherever an opportunity exists for promoting its artists and placing their art, the Prison Art Gallery takes advantage of it. In 2008, a new museum opened in Washington, D.C., called the National Museum of Crime and Punishment. It came as a shock to the Prison Art Gallery, and not because of the new museum's unusual name that included such a negative and emotionally-charged word as "punishment." At the time that it learned the museum would be opening, the gallery had plans to establish its own "Prison Museum." Such an operation would have included artifacts and information about prisons, past and present. It would attract people to the museum who wanted to get a feel for what it's like to be incarcerated today, and what it used to be like. Thanks to lawyers like Alvin Bronstein, Elizabeth Alexander, Arthur Spitzer, Phillip Fornaci and Ivy Lange who have challenged and corrected bad prison conditions, the welfare of inmates has greatly improved.

Fortunately, the gallery was at the beginning of its planning for the museum when it heard about the similar one about to open. It immediately stopped its efforts at capital accumulation and ended talks with people who would guide the project. One of those people was the general manager of the International Spy Museum in Washington, D.C. That operation had opened in 2002 as a highly speculative venture. It charged a high admission, a necessity because of its profit-making status and private financing. The investors wondered: would anyone go to it in a city where free museums supported by government and nonprofits are plentiful?

The Spy Museum became an immediate sensation. It remains today a cash cow for its investors who had put in $35 million. Because of its success, the board of the Prison Art Gallery started to think along similar lines for its planned prison museum. Surely, there were as many people interested in prisons as spying. Many popular prison movies have been released to eager audiences,

starring such theatrical titans as James Cagney, Burt Lancaster, Steve McQueen, Clint Eastwood and Sean Penn.

When the Prison Art Gallery in late 2007 approached The Spy Museum management about participating in the planned venture, the latter was receptive. So were others who pledged to offer advice and financial support. There was even talk of having a Jail Café on site that would feature such dishes as Warden's Delight, Cellblock Salad and Parolee Pizza.

Then came the announcement about the Crime Museum's imminent opening. It had a prime location in downtown DC that was being completely remodeled. Also, most of its exhibits had already been acquired, including art created by prison inmates. With $22 million in start-up capital, it was not as well financed as The Spy Museum. But making up for that were the two principals behind the project, both shrewd promoters with reputations for delivering the goods. The money man was John Morgan, who had been Johnnie Cochran's law partner. Together with the famous Cochran, Morgan had established the Cochran Firm with offices and lucrative clients across America. It was an idea whose time had come for a celebrity obsessed public who sometimes needed an attorney to settle multi-million dollar injury claims and other matters.

The other partner of the new museum also had much to offer. John Walsh, as host of the popular television crime-solving show, *America's Most Wanted*, had a huge following and an instinct for knowing what intrigues people. His loss of a young son to a crazed criminal made his personal commitment strong and his motives for opening the museum beyond reproach. Because he wanted to produce his television show at the museum, a state-of-the-art studio was built there for him.

Seeing that the National Museum of Crime and Punishment was a serious undertaking, the Prison Art Gallery immediately scrapped its plans for a museum. It took a realistic position: If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. It sent emails and made calls to the people connected to the museum. Since it had not yet opened, the gallery asked if it could get involved in some significant way. A favorable response was received. Due to construction delays in building Walsh's new studio, there was time to negotiate.

Crime Museum management was impressed with the solid record and substantial holdings of the Prison Art Gallery. They forgot about the fact that they had already acquired prison art. As a profit making enterprise depending on the public for attendance and

support, they wanted the best. The first of several visits to the Prison Art Gallery followed. They negotiated the purchase of several pieces, including an intricate sculpture made from soap, another made from egg shells, a painting that utilized instant coffee for its coloring, and a drawing that looked as realistic as a photo yet was made by a prisoner with only a ballpoint pen.

In addition, a steady supply of Prison Art Gallery prints were selected for the museum's gift shop. A partnership was formed. Both groups were highly pleased with their working relationship. It would be ongoing, not only because the gallery had become a supplier to the museum's gift shop, but because the museum appointed one of the gallery directors to its Board of Experts. That person was me.

I remember the VIP grand opening reception at the museum. I was permitted to invite ten guests. My selection: people who had been supporters and friends of the Prison Art Gallery. We all had a good time. We were particularly impressed with the prominent exhibits containing prison art, our art. It was a proud day for the Prison Art Gallery. The exhibits of our pieces contained information about the inmates who created them, sometimes even their photos. In some cases they were prison photos, but not always. One showed a happy prison artist in the visiting hall with his wife. Thousands of people would see the humanity of prisoners in this way, and hopefully they would care more about them. I have learned that since the opening of the museum, a prisoner whose work is on display there has applied for clemency, using the museum as a character reference.

The night of the reception at the museum gave me and my guests an opportunity to meet the two Johns responsible for the project. I expected John Walsh to be the more aloof because of his celebrity status. Also, I wondered how he would react to my Prison Art Gallery affiliation in view of his conservative stance about laws and law enforcement in general. He turned out to be very gracious and was particularly kind when I told him how the gallery and the foundation tried to prepare men and women for release. He understood that people who leave prison need help to re-enter society successfully. He did not say with a sour expression, "I do not think many people deserve to be released from prison." Instead, he said with a warm smile, "Good job! That's important work you're doing that needs to be done."

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Marketing art made in prison is all about making connections. Knock on enough doors and some are bound to open. When they do, you need to have enough art on hand to make a good impression. An art gallery, whether featuring art made in prison or anywhere else, should have at least a hundred or more pieces in its collection. People respond well to variety, even more so when they understand the extent of a reputable gallery's resources and the depth of its commitment.

Acquiring a work of art created in prison is a political statement for buyers. They are acknowledging that a person on the inside is not always an outsider. There is a connection through art, a means of communicating, a way of raising consciousness.

If you plan to sell prison art, every marketing tool must be employed. It is not enough to have good art and a good cause. If people do not see the first or do not understand the second, art created in prison will not reach its broadest possible audience.

11. HELPING ARTISTS AFTER RELEASE FROM PRISON

Mentors committed to helping artists in prison are noble people. They understand the importance of creating art in helping inmates survive the prison experience with their souls and sanity intact. They also understand that the stark environment of prison can either nurture or negate the creative spirit. It all depends on what encouragement and stimulation are provided. To watch an artist grow and prosper in prison is a wonderful experience. To know you are part of that development is even better.

If an artist is like 95% of the inmates in the United States, he or she will be released some day. When that day comes, what role will a mentor play? Usually, only a limited one. By the time an inmate reaches the gate of a prison, the road ahead will be determined largely by his or her own preparedness. Having some money in savings can be helpful but it is not essential. The same applies to availability of family and friends who may be waiting. If they are there, the transition back to the free world will be more palatable. But the long-range chances of success, of not returning to prison, are not necessarily greater when there are loving arms waiting to enfold released prisoners. Those same arms can hold them back, or steer them in a direction that is detrimental, whether intentionally or not. That is especially true if an inmate was close to those people before incarceration.

Picture a loving mother who had once demanded good behavior from her son, yet he defied her by committing a crime and going to prison. Ex-prisoner songwriter Merle Haggard dealt with such a situation in his song "Mama Tried."

> One and only rebel child, from a family meek and mild
> My Mama seemed to know that lay in store.
> In spite of all my Sunday learning, to the bad I kept returning
> 'Til mama couldn't hold me anymore.

When such a prisoner gets out, will it be beneficial for his mother to be waiting for him, to promise to love and care for him no matter what? Not necessarily. There is such a thing as smothering a person with too much love. If the ex-prisoner is still a "rebel child," that is not a good thing. It prevents growth. He will not have the opportunity to grow out of being a child. Chances are that the

prison world did not allow that transformation to occur. In prison he was taken care of. The warden was his mother, and if he behaved himself by staying calm and quiet, she furnished everything he needed. Even if he did not behave well, she did not stop taking care of him. By law, she couldn't. That's a situation that militates against growing up in or out of prison.

The irony of the free world is that nothing is free. If you do nothing more as a mentor to prepare an inmate for release than instill this in him, you will have done a lot. Even if a loving family is waiting who has offered support, what will that support cost the ex-prisoner? Debt will accumulate every day that he cannot pay for his own expenses. In a week it will be high; in a month, astronomical. Attempts to collect that debt will first come in a subtle way. "Is there anything we can do to help you find a job?" "Even if there is nothing in the newspapers, maybe you can go out and knock on some business doors to see if anything is available."

A person who has returned from prison finds this annoying. After all, he has only been out for a week or so. That's no time at all in prison where your sentence is measured in months and years. The simplest request in prison, such as getting a replacement bar of soap, can take a week to answer. He tells his family: "Give me a break after all I've been through. You don't understand how tough it was."

In fact, the prisoner probably doesn't understand how tough it was for his family while he was away. He may not have contributed to his family before prison, but on the inside he was a liability, a drain. The collect calls he made to his family came out of their pockets, not his. The money sent to his commissary account came from their earnings, not his. The visits they made to see him used their time and money. There were indignities they experienced when they went to the prison and when they got home. In the community, people looked down on them. Prison staff did the same when they came to visit. They had to undergo invasive searches and interviews that hurt their dignity.

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After a month goes by on the outside without the ex-prisoner contributing to family expenses, exchanges can be heated. Each side expresses anger, frustration and disappointment. He: "You are worse than the prison officers in trying to tell me what to do!" They: "We were better off when you were in prison!"

In his book, *A Prisoner: Released*, Brian Brookheart tells of his difficult transition to the "free" world. He succeeded, he believes, only because of his strong work ethic, fueled in large part by his Christian religious fervor. He was committed to doing something with his life to earn his own keep. When he could not get a job, he volunteered wherever anyone would have him. "Get a broom," he now advises others, "and start sweeping at any location where your work is appreciated. And do not stop until you get a paying job."

Unpaid employment may strike ex-prisoners the wrong way. They are wary of exploitation. But in fact they are compensated by the experiences they get in interacting with free people and by making new friends and contacts. Brookheart, years after his reentry, used some of his early contacts to get financing for his own successful business.

A person exiting prison with artistic skills has something to offer beyond sweeping floors. He can help organizations and businesses in several ways. For brochures and flyers, he can draw pictures of businesses and their happy customers. His work will get the attention of prospective employers. He may not get a job doing art. But when a person is fresh out of prison, any paid work is better than none. He can always move up the ladder after the initial paychecks come. But first he has to be on the ladder, even at its lowest rung.

Many inmates come out of prison with high hopes, often with unrealistic expectations. That applies to artists as well as to other prisoners. They have delusions of grandeur, believing that the world owes them something and that they are now in a position to collect. Prisoners often commit crimes when returning to the outside in an attempt to do this. When they find they cannot collect through legal means, they fall back on the illicit kind.

No one wants to start at the bottom of anything, particularly for little or no money. We all hope to somehow start at the top. For men and women in prison, that usually means becoming the boss of something, of anything. They are sick of being in a subservient role as an inmate, of being told how to conduct their lives down to the smallest detail. When they hit the streets, they want to be free in every sense of the word. What is the good of freedom, they believe, if that is not possible? What joy is there in taking orders from a work supervisor who has replaced a prison officer? "I have paid my debt to society, now I want to be free of all restraints."

The fallacy and terrible fallout of this type of thinking are clear to everyone but the newly released prisoner. He has been denied

independence for so long that he has forgotten that freedom comes with a price. That price is obtaining gainful employment, paying one's living expenses, and being obedient to the laws of the land, whether one agrees with them or not.

Prison artists, often due to the influence of their mentors, often leave with a different point of view. Will it be enough to overcome the inertia and negative conditioning of prison life? That depends on how serious they were about their art and how well their art insulated them from incarceration's worst effects.

A serious artist blocks out the world around him. He endeavors to create his own world. In prison, this is tantamount to freedom. As a result, when a prison artist reaches the street he is not in another world. He has carried his world of art with him. He is simply relocating it to another space.

During my first day of freedom, I escaped into my art when everything on the outside seemed to be caving in around me. I had been given a ride to the local bus terminal by a stoic inmate trustee, a ticket put in my hand to return to my hometown of Washington, D.C. The Trailways bus was set to leave in a few hours, so I checked my belongings with the counter agent. I had a lot of things in my possession considering the lengthy time I had spent in prison.

I had the address of a local synagogue, where I headed. A guitar sent by my mentor Helen was waiting for me there. She had arranged this with the cooperation of prison rabbi Dennis Beck-Berman.

It was a longer walk than I expected and all uphill. The return trip was hampered by my hunger. It occurred to me with some discomfort that it was "chow time" at the nearby prison. But there was no free food in this cold world. And cold it was on that January day.

I finally made it back to the terminal only to find that my bus had left without me, along with all my possessions. Would I ever see them again, including the many music manuscripts of songs I had written in prison? The terminal agent was nasty to me for missing the bus. He knew where my ticket had been issued and he wanted me out of town asap. While the prison helped the local economy, it was not something that town residents were proud of. It was like having a fertilizer plant in the neighborhood. Here I was, a piece of crap from that operation, not leaving town as quickly as I was supposed to.

Thankfully, I had taken a shower that morning. But when or where I would get my next one was anyone's guess since my

relatives had departed while I was in prison. The good side of my family had died, and the bad side, headed by my government attorney son and my United Way director sister, were busy spending my inheritance they cheated me out of.

The only thing I had in the world at that moment was the guitar I carried. I smiled to think that it was all I needed. After determining the location of the next bus that would be leaving in a few hours, I found a nearby wall. I sat down with my back against it. Then I removed the guitar from its black canvas case and began to play. It took me into a world that I knew and loved, my world of art. I had created this world by compiling songs that satisfied any mood I might want to put myself in. There was no getting on my nerves or grinding my spirit when I made that transition.

In choosing to play music at the bus station as a solitary endeavor, I wasn't trying to be unsociable. True, I had picked a spot to play away from people. But I was being considerate. People could see me, maybe even hear a little. To listen better, all they had to do was come closer. I knew that the counter agent would not do that because he despised me for my prison background. Perhaps my guitar case held a gun; maybe I intended to rob him.

Someone else came by instead. He was a street person. Who else would have the courage? I welcomed his company as he stood nearby watching. His face beamed as he tapped his foot to my music. We were communicating. Finally, he said, "It's been a few weeks since I've seen you out here. You're sounding good." He apparently had me confused with someone else, but I accepted the compliment.

Then again, maybe I had been there recently. It's possible that part of me slipped through the prison gates to play on the outside. After all, anytime I entered my world of music I escaped to all kinds of places. Perhaps this bus terminal was one of them.

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I adjusted well to my reentry to society, in no small measure due to my art. No matter how unrealistic some of my plans proved to be, I found it useful to call a temporary recess and retreat into the sounds of my guitar.

It is amazing how unprepared some inmates are when they leave prison. That's true even when they exit with the most detailed plans. The problem with such plans is they are inflexible. If they leave

with art, however, they have a good chance of creating balance and finding serenity when they need it most.

Arthur came to prison with an extremely long sentence. He got there by playing a minor part in a small crime. But he had the misfortune of appearing before a judge who showed no mercy to anyone who took their case to trial. He wanted everyone who appeared before him to plead guilty. He took the same view as most citizens have of people accused of crimes. If the police made an arrest, you must be guilty of *something*.

It took a lot of effort by the prosecution to convict Arthur. Such a task is always difficult when the case is weak or nonexistent. The judge, being at the centerpiece, had to stay alert, or at least awake. At the end of the long trial, he was not a happy or merciful man. He threw the book at Arthur, and then some.

The newly convicted felon arrived in prison as a dazed person. A young man, he would be a senior citizen by the time he got out; and a person with a criminal record. He had to find a way to cope, to somehow get through all the years of separation from all he knew and loved on the outside. He found religion and thereby introduced an element of joy in his life. It is hard to feel sorry for yourself when your mind is focused on religious martyrs who suffered far greater than anything modern prisons can dish out. When engaged in singing religious songs, you cannot help but smile.

Prayer occupied much of Arthur's time. He asked for a miracle, that he be released from prison early. There was no doubt in his mind that his request would be granted. From his jovial disposition, you would think that such a miracle had already been granted. To anyone on the compound who asked him how much time he had left to serve, he would answer enthusiastically, "Oh, I'll be going home soon." Only his closest buddies knew that his sentence was 30 years.

A nonreligious inmate heard of Arthur's unrealistic expectation and decided to teach him a lesson about putting false hopes in one or more gods. This man was considered the best jailhouse lawyer in this prison. He asked to see Arthur's trial transcripts, planning to explain to him why he was guilty as charged.

Though the jailhouse lawyer was gruff and his words risqué, Arthur saw him as a messenger from God. Arthur was convinced more than ever that it was just a matter of time before the expected miracle was delivered.

To everyone's surprise except Arthur's, that's precisely what happened. The jailhouse lawyer completed his analysis and

solemnly announced to Arthur, "You've been fucked!" He then committed himself to try to undue the damage.

He prepared a *Writ of Habeas Corpus* with great care, including hand lettering so skillfully executed that it looked typewritten. With no typewriter available to inmates at the prison, he knew that courts were not interested in reading the illegible. He had therefore developed superb calligraphy.

Arthur won his case but was not set free; at least, not immediately. The victory consisted of him being granted a new trial since his first trial was judged unfair and tainted. The prosecutor had failed to abide by all the rules of court, and the trial judge had failed to correct him. Could the prosecutor convince a second jury of Arthur's guilt now that he had to play fair? Rather than take the chance, he offered Arthur a plea deal. Arthur decided to take it since he felt he might not get another miracle so soon. It meant another two years in prison for a crime he probably did not do, but he was too afraid to take a chance. If the judge could sentence him so harshly for going through one trial, what punishment would he give for two? It was a question that Arthur did not want answered.

Two years more in prison made Arthur a "short-timer." Now his thoughts focused on what he would do when he got out. Paradoxically, while Arthur had only been on the periphery of criminal behavior before he entered prison, he planned to take a front and center role when he got out. He did not realize he would be doing anything wrong in carrying out his plan.

As he explained to a friend, "I've got this great idea for making a good living when I get out, and of being my own boss. I will get a computer to burn CDs and then buy some best-selling music CDs to run off copies. I will sell them a lot cheaper than stores can." His friend thought that there might be a legal problem with that. But Arthur was convinced his friend was only jealous and he resolved not to tell anyone else. How could there be a legal problem, he wondered? He was using his own equipment and supplies, not taking anything from anyone else.

Even if someone had told Arthur about the law of copyright and "intellectual property," Arthur would not have believed the person. As far as he was concerned, the term "piracy" referred to high-jacking boats on the high seas.

Having unrealistic plans upon release, or even bad ones as Arthur had, are all too common among prisoners. Inmates are often so insecure about their abilities and options, once they arrive at an idea they think is feasible, they refuse to let go. They rarely have

backup plans since that would be acknowledgement that they might fail. With so many failures before prison, they don't want to think about the possibility of more. So throughout their time in prison they become fixated on a single magic bullet to take care of their future income needs.

When mentors find prison artists stuck in this rut, they must tell them to look to their art for guidance. Just as art evolves, so must the inmates' future. Even when an artist creates a masterpiece, it does not mean the time has arrived to hang up his or her paint brushes. Masterpieces might not sell immediately. By the same token, a great income idea might not pan out. One needs to have several ideas in the reentry arsenal.

George had a ten-year sentence. He felt he knew what he would do at the end of it. The idea occurred to him when he watched television ads and saw how easy camcorders were to use, and how inexpensive to buy. His plan for a business was legal, he knew. But he did not realize that it would probably be unfeasible, at least the way he planned to approach it.

He considered himself a good business person. In fact, that's what got George into prison. Had he gone out of business, he would not have been convicted. Or if he had been convicted, he would have gotten a lighter sentence. But George was a survivor who had stuck it out, eventually making a lot of money. There was luck involved but also skill in his outmaneuvering competitors and overcoming other problems that threatened his enterprise. He was also good at customer relations, and he knew where to get, and how to offer, superior product. He even understood the concepts of business surveillance and security, which were important to his drug operation.

His plan upon his release from prison was to return to his glory days, but this time with a legal enterprise. That way he could continue to enjoy his plush life of classy clothes, flashy cars, and sassy women. They all came with a high price tag, he had found. That did not concern George. He felt he now knew how to make big money.

His idea was to get a camcorder and let people pay him to video their family and business events. He could rapidly expand with several employees since camcorders were so cheap. His staff would not have to carry guns. There would be no need for bail bondsmen, criminal defense lawyers or other costly business expenses. The money would roll in.

Having arrived at this vision for his future, George put all worries aside. Instead of studying or taking vocational classes in prison, he spent his time looking at glossy magazines that featured clothing, cars and women. He was making his selections in anticipation of his release and success.

What George did not realize was that his understanding of an illicit business and his operating a legal one were not one and the same. He had been lucky to last as long as he did in his drug enterprise. The money was good because the risk and his luck were great. Like a game of Russian roulette, he had avoided a bullet for a long time. That gave him a chance to accumulate customers and income. Most of his competitors had not been so fortunate. They were picked off one by one by police. Others were shot when drug deals or turf disputes got out of hand. The same violent end would have been in store for George had he not been arrested and forced into retirement.

Some days in prison when he played baseball or ran the track, he marveled at seeing his limbs in action. They were still intact. Not many of his friends in the drug trade on the outside could say that. George was more determined than ever not to get back into "the game" if he could avoid it. Surely his video-making idea would allow him to prosper without selling drugs. How could he miss given his big dreams and his desire to make big money?

It did not occur to George that establishing a legal business is not easy; not as simple a showing up on a street corner somewhere after it had been vacated by a drug merchant who had been killed or incarcerated. In a legal enterprise, one has to do advertising and marketing. Competitors do the same. It's a race of who will win the market. In the drug trade, success can mean the beginning of the end for a business. A successful operation stands out and the police target it. Or there is a shootout by those who envy the operation. In a legitimate field, knocking off a competitor means taking his or her customers away through nonviolent means. Otherwise, the businessperson will not remain legal. None of this registered with George, a young man who had lived a narrow life in a constricted setting.

Would his planned enterprise be among the 90 percent of new businesses that fail in their first year? Chances are great that it would be. What would he do then except return to his former occupation since he had no plans in reserve?

The problem with George is that he defined success solely in terms of income and what money can buy. Had he been an artist

who created rather than consumed in prison, he might have thought differently. For most prisoners, life on the inside amounts to accepting the bed, food, clothes and medical care provided, and giving nothing in return. The prevailing attitude is, "I didn't ask to go to jail. Why should I do anything while I'm here? Go ahead, spend money to take are of me, or let me go."

That may sound callous and bitter, but think of long sentences often given for minor offenses in America. The United States is a rich country that can afford to lock up a greater proportion of its citizens than any other nation. But that does not make this good policy. Judges tend to go easy on defendants with money, power and good legal representation. But not on others. Those who end up in prison are usually the poor and politically unconnected. When they get there they understand the unfairness of the system. The last thing that most inmates want to do is appear to be *model prisoners*. Being productive is not on their agenda. "I'm here to relax, watch TV and sleep, so go ahead and take care of me." People who were materialistic before going to prison will be even more so when they get out. That's what living with a negative attitude will do. Prisoners learn how to be fully taken care of. Many will forget the meaning of creating anything of value.

An artist in prison has a chance to escape this self-destructive thinking. The art he or she creates is not only a reward in itself but a bridge to a productive life after prison. After all, creating art is work, hard work. It is also rewarding labor, but not necessarily in a materialistic way.

A mentor can reinforce these positive attitudes. That's particularly important when a person approaches the end of his or her sentence. There is a need then, more than ever, to leave prison with an understanding that the world is a place to give as well as receive; that one must give before they get anything. Moreover, what one is prepared to give had better be something that people want. Otherwise, do not expect to get anything in return. Prisoners who create art know this already, both from the reactions to their art and from mentor reminders. Successfully bartering goods for art in prison or selling it on the outside means that artists are producing something that others value.

Entering the free world with this realistic thinking, prison artists are several steps ahead of laid-back prisoners, those who took a break from life's realities for the duration of their sentence. No wonder they have an untenable view of how they are going to survive.

Being a mentor, you need to share what you know about reality. You face it each day in the "free" world. It is up to you to convey the harsher aspects of it to your artist. Artists in prison are not immune to the obstacles waiting for them on the outside. One of the most famous prisoners of the 20th Century, Nelson Mandela, exited jail after 27 ½ years to be greeted by thousands of cheering supporters. In prison he had tremendous support. That is understandable since, as a well-known leader heading the equal rights effort in South Africa, he became a national hero while in prison. He endured the hardships that all prisoners experience, such as the loss of loved ones when he was imprisoned. In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela tells of the pain he felt when he was not able to be with his mother as she lay on her death bed. He writes, "It added to my grief that I was not able to bury my mother, which was my responsibility as her eldest child and only son."

When he got out, Mandela's choices were many. He could have asked for a lot, and he would have received it. That's not unusual for prisoners who return to society. They come back as larger than life figures. It's as if they had an extended stay in outer space. In a sense, prison is like being on another planet. It is an alien place that is not conducive to life as we know it. When people first see a returning prisoner, they are in awe that the person survived and is still intact. In fact, most people come out of prison in better physical shape than when they went in. They got rest, a balanced diet and peace of mind. They were away from bills and all other financial responsibilities. Also without a refrigerator for their personal use, there was no binging and adding pounds when anxiety or depression struck.

In returning to their communities they get people's attention. Friends and family wonder about their state of mind, as they did in Mandela's case. He writes, "Was Mandela the same man who went to prison 27 years before, or was this a different Mandela, a reformed Mandela? Had he survived or had he been broken?"

During the time that people wonder, they are often generous. Some fear returning prisoners for the tremendous strength they believe they have; other freeworlders seek to harness that power and use it for their own ends. Who else but a person of great strength and endurance could get through prison? It is best to give them whatever they want, at least until they can be sized up.

Here is the trap that many returning prisoners fall into. They keep taking what is offered until they are buried in kindness. Then

they retreat into their former selves. Even worse, outsiders who had showed them generosity while they were in prison usually expect a payback in a big way. After all, an inmate who survived prison must be a god, someone capable of doing the supernatural.

Mandela's marriage to his wife Winnie survived all his time while incarcerated. But it did not last long when he got out. He says, "She married a man who had soon left her; that man became a myth; and then that myth returned home and proved to be just a man after all."

He also says, "I am convinced that my wife's life while I was in prison was more difficult than mine." Such is a common situation. As a result, the expectations of family members for the returning prisoner are unrealistically high. They feel they should be compensated for standing by the prisoner. Mandela faced a choice: either try to appease his wife or follow his own conscience. His announcement of their split read as follows: "In view of the tensions that have arisen owing to differences between ourselves on a number of issues in recent months, we have mutually agreed that a separation would be best for each of us."

Mandela knew his mind well when he exited prison, in part because he had kept it in such good shape. While inside, he read and wrote extensively. His writing was his art. Among other things, he produced an autobiography. With great difficulty, he smuggled it out so that it could be published. But it was not published and got inadvertently destroyed. He eventually re-wrote it as a free man. Yet even art that does not survive serves a purpose. For Mandela, the writing gave him much satisfaction and self-awareness. It helped him cope when he got out, to make intelligent decisions. He faced his whims head on, and put them in perspective.

"My dream upon leaving prison," he writes, "was to take a leisurely drive down to the Transkei and visit my birthplace, the hills and streams where I had played as a boy; and the burial ground of my mother, which I had never seen. But my dream had to be deferred…" He felt he had much to do before he could indulge himself. Mandela wanted to keep up the momentum he started in prison, which proved to be a place where he had done everything but take it easy. He did not want to forget about his accomplishments there but rather he intended to build on them. When the opportunity came to return to his former prison to volunteer his services, he jumped at the chance. "After all the years of being visited by others, it was a curious sensation to be a visitor," he writes. It was also a reminder. If you do not know where you

have been, it is hard to visualize where you are going. He called his trip back to prison a "homecoming."

In fact, Mandela could have gone anywhere he wished. What he wanted was to distinguish himself as an exceptional citizen who would bring about positive change in his nation. He accomplished that goal beyond anyone's expectations by becoming his country's president. Not bad for an ex-con.

The obstacles he faced along the way were enormous, and they were not always easy to recognize. People wanted to provide him with a great deal, but he was selective in what he accepted. First came his choice of a place to live. His supporters offered him a spacious and beautiful home. But he turned it down. He had an image to safeguard: a man of the common people. It was best to be on their level. His friends were surprised at his rejection of their gift. After all, during the last portion of his prison sentence when the world had embraced a "Free Mandela" campaign, jail officials had given him extremely comfortable private living quarters. Mandela did not care if his accommodations in the free world were not equal to it. "Any house in which a man is free," he writes, "is a castle when compared with even the plushest prison."

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On the other side of the world in California, another famous prisoner, Huey Newton, was released a few years earlier. But Newton chose a different reentry path for himself. He went from a prison to a penthouse, and he lived to regret it.

Huey P. Newton was the founder and head of the Black Panther Party. This group had a 10-point program that covered the advancement of blacks. Point seven was of greatest interest to the press, police and prosecutors: "We believe we can end police brutality in our community by organizing black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our black community from racist police oppression and brutality. The Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States gives citizens a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all black people should arm themselves for self-defense."

At the time of the party's formation, October 1966, the police were running rampant in black communities, with little or no accountability. They had no qualms about stepping on toes, backs, or faces of black citizens. Newton researched the law and found that any citizen could carry a loaded weapon as long as it was in plain

view and it didn't point at anyone. Newton bought a shotgun of the type that police carried in their patrol cars. Soon hundreds of his supporters did the same. They became watchdogs intent on monitoring the police. Their mode of operation was to observe the police when they confronted black suspects. The Black Panthers sought to be present in case intervention was warranted. Police became very restrained and well-behaved under such circumstances.

They also felt intimidated. What if one of the crazy "Negroes" decided to shoot first? Or even second? There would be a dead cop, perhaps several, to contend with.

Politicians, who catered to white voters and the white police union, decided to intervene. Though blacks were breaking no laws by carrying their guns, that did not mean the laws could not be changed. That's what politicians do: make and change laws.

Passing new statutes to pull the rug from under the Black Panthers proved an easy matter. So was setting up Newton to insure he would spend time in jail. Maybe that would cool him off to the thought that America was a free society for blacks.

The three years he spent in prison before he was exonerated was a rough time for Newton. But he brought most of the misery on himself. He was bitter and refused to compromise. He did not lift a hand to assist the prison in any way, not even to go through the motions of the lightest prison job. If he was to work, he said, he wanted at least union wages. Such is a near impossibility in prison where work is neither long nor hard with so many inmates to share jobs. Even Mandela, who worked in a prison lime quarry, said he did more talking to fellow inmates than working when he was on the job. He expended more energy in the long daily walk from the prison to the quarry than the work itself. But the walk lifted his spirits, he said, allowing him to breathe fresh air and commune with nature. His next prison job was gathering seaweed at a beach. This brought new scenery. It also resulted in seafood being caught by inmates who cooked it for themselves and the appreciative officers who furnished the cooking equipment.

In contrast, Newton in his rage passed up opportunities that would have made his prison stay easier and more fruitful. Paradoxically, his anti-work ethic was put aside in later years when he lived in communist Cuba. Because he liked the politics there, he endured the work. In obedience to Castro's no-loafing law, he labored in a cement factory 60 hours a week at sub-minimum wages. He was not even allowed to spend his small earnings freely

since workers, though not tourists, were restricted in where they could shop and what they could buy.

While in prison in the U.S., Newton could have easily pursued and developed his artistic interests. He would have left a more balanced man, capable of making rational decisions rather than the disastrous ones he made. What art did he have an interest in? As a child, Newton was trained as a classical pianist. He kept playing into adulthood, but never had the time to get into it seriously. Prison presented the ideal opportunity for advancement and mastery. Music books could have been sent to him and he could have used pianos in the chapel and recreation department of his prison. But first he had to compromise and work at a token job. Such proved impossible for Newton due to his stubbornness. So he languished, lashing out at everything and everyone during his years inside. No wonder he was not able to think clearly when he was released. Art would have helped him.

His first decision upon release was to live life big. Newton went directly from a cramped cell to a castle-like apartment. There, drugs, booze and women flowed freely. His enemies, principally the FBI, were quick to take advantage of his materialistic leanings. They documented and distributed facts about the private life of this "advocate for the people," now living like an inebriated sex-obsessed sultan.

A major California newspaper, *San Francisco Examiner*, ran a front-page story about Huey and his "plush penthouse." No matter that the rent was paid by celebrity friends in Hollywood who wanted Newton to have all the comforts he had been denied in prison, and then some. His detractors saw this as proof he was out of touch with those who suffered. They felt that the money for his lavish expenses could have been channeled to more urgent needs within and outside the Panthers.

The FBI knew a good story when they saw it. And they made sure that others saw the negative newspaper articles that appeared. To insure that would happen, they took the liberty of making mass copies and mailing them anonymously to Black Panthers and other leaders near and far. Newton ended up looking like a pink panther, if not a yellow snake. Having neglected his duties as head of his party, the demise of the movement he pioneered was not far from happening. Newton quickly slipped into drug-addicted obscurity. He died in a street altercation with a crack seller. Perhaps the argument was triggered because Newton had no money, but felt he was entitled to drugs nonetheless. By then even his girlfriends knew

his habits and were hiding their purses so he could not steal from them.

Newton was a brilliant and dedicated activist. Yet prison destroyed him. It didn't have to. He could have made better use of his time there, and art could have helped him do that. What about the taint for him of having been to prison? In the political and social activism arena, it doesn't necessarily exist. Newton himself knew this. When ex-con-turned-prominent-writer Eldridge Cleaver sought a meeting with Newton, Newton's friends tried to discourage him from meeting Cleaver. The author of the bestseller *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver was criticized for his aloofness. Newton, however, insisted on the meeting saying, "He can't be all that bad, he's been to prison."

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Having been to prison need not work against a person, not if he or she came out a better person than when having gone in. People who are fearful of associating with ex-inmates think they are sub-human in some way. But showing an inmate's art can alleviate such fears. Ugly does not make beautiful art since one is not compatible with the other.

Mentors with an understanding of people on the outside should not fail to reinforce this optimism in prisoners. Inmate artists rarely think of themselves as failures when they leave prison. Still, having a certain amount of insecurity is natural. Let them know that success awaits them as long as they stay on a positive track. Overnight fame and fortune are a rarity. They may not even be desirable for newly returning prisoners. First, let them get oriented by walking slowly before they start running. Spending some time in anonymity while getting acclimated to the free world can have a lot of benefits.

The highly popular English rock group of the 1970s, T. Rex, was headed by pop sensation Marc Bolan. Before hitting it big, the group bounced around from one small venue to another. Their unknown status helped them lead a normal life beyond the glare of the spotlight. They were able to develop and experiment with their art without fear of losing a following. On one occasion, they decided to change from acoustic to electric instruments. It was a dramatic departure but they did not care. They were in a position to be as independent as they wished. They could have been criticized for it, such as being called "a garage band that should get back into

the garage and leave the car motor running," as a critic called another band The Clash, but it didn't matter. T. Rex was not in a position to be knocked down since the only way they could go was up.

The day arrived when stardom arrived for T. Rex. The lives of Bolan and his band mates were never the same. They had finally developed a successful musical style that the public wanted to hear, and they were now stuck with it. Promoters and fans had to be satisfied, they felt. In concert they had to do the same songs, day after day, over and over. Fans were everywhere and would not leave them alone. Whenever band members were spotted, an obsessed and adoring public wanted to talk, touch and otherwise descend on them. As Bolan biographer Chris Welch wrote, "It was a long hot summer, and yet it was impossible for them to go out and enjoy themselves unmolested."

Anonymity has its rewards. Upon leaving prison, artists should take advantage of being in a world still moving slowly for them.

Your advice as a mentor should be for them to look around, take their time and get the lay of the land. They should never forsake their art since that's the world that will always bring them comfort and rejuvenation. Even if they never use it to earn a living, it can be a springboard to finding work or in shifting careers. No less than the great artist Raphael, one of the luminaries of the Renaissance, recognized this. Art created many options in life for him. He began his career by attempting to prove how serious he was as a creator of beauty. He studied the newly painted *Mona Lisa* and decided he could do comparable work with portraits. Art critics began to praise the pieces he completed. When Raphael heard that the Pope was taking occupancy of a new home in Rome, he traveled to the city with portfolio in hand. He sought and was commissioned to create art for the Pope's residence. From there he became the principal painter retained by the Vatican. Only Michelangelo was considered on his level, and Michelangelo was not available at the time since he was fully occupied with his long-term project of painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Raphael distinguished himself in more than art. He was an active social networker who prided himself on having friends of influence in many places. This was a new role for artists who normally were not highly regarded outside the world of art. They were hired to do a job and nothing more. People wondered what they could possibly know about economics, politics and other subjects. In Raphael's case, he knew a lot. Using his reputation as an accomplished artist,

he entered classy places, from parlors to palaces. There he confronted the intellectual and the powerful, communicating on their level. As a result, the world opened to him far beyond the sphere of art. Later in life, rumor circulated that the hierarchy of the church was considering offering Raphael the exalted position of cardinal. He died an untimely death while this was still being discussed. Whether true or not, the rumor and the seriousness with which it was accepted by people showed the mark of the man. Raphael was considered qualified to do much more than art.

Art, being highly visible, is an effective calling card. After leaving prison, an artist can easily demonstrate what he has done. "See what I accomplished on the inside with all the limitations I faced. Imagine what I can do on the outside, and not just in the field of art. When I set my mind on a goal, I accomplish it. Take a look!"

What employer could resist considering such a person for a position, whether or not the job has anything to do with art? In creating art there is a beginning and an end; artists in prison bring their projects to a finish. In a world where so much is left undone, where irresponsibility is commonplace and excuses flourish, that says a lot about a person.

Mentors should assure their artists that completed works of art are valued by all. No matter whose name appears on it, viewers will pay attention to it if they find it interesting and attractive. Music is said to be the universal language, but all art fits that definition. It crosses lines and communicates unlimited ideas.

People who leave prison are often disappointed that their memories and expectations of the outside world fall short of the realities they face. Mandela, when he visited his former residence, could not believe how small it appeared.

When artists get out of jail they sometimes face the challenge of feeling normal in their new surroundings. Everything seems little except the obligations and demands suddenly placed on them. But when the sky darkens, their art can be use as a torch to brighten it. All the ex-prisoner artist has to do is keep that torch from going out.

In the 1960s, rock guitarist Carlos Santana made it big in the music world. But his fame and income ebbed when he produced no more hits. It took him nearly forty years to get back on top again. What sustained him all that time? What motivated him to keep the torch, his guitar, at the ready? What made him keep his art alive? In the book anthology *Playing From the Heart*, Santana provides an explanation. His words are an inspiration to any artist who finds

himself or herself on the sidelines, whether because of being in prison or struggling to find success on the outside. “God made the world round so we could all have center stage,” said Santana.

When artists leave prison, mentors must remind them of their ability and potential. Mentors can do this with their voices, but words are not essential. A sustained interval of applause will suffice.

12. CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR MENTORS

Our discussion to this point has assumed that mentors are people who perform their roles without pay. Whether they labor as volunteers within prisons or are engaged as visitors or correspondents of inmate artists, the satisfaction they receive is personal rather than pecuniary.

But if an income is needed, there are viable career opportunities to consider. Before exploring these, mentors must ask themselves, "Is this what I want to do in my work life?" If the answer is yes, or even maybe, there are several options to explore.

First and foremost is a staff position in a prison. With over 5,000 jails and prisons across the United States employing almost one million people, there are opportunities everywhere. Some are in administration, though most are in security: officers who patrol prisons, make counts and maintain order and safety.

There are also tens of thousands of jobs in "program" areas. These are the first positions you will want to investigate. Programs in prison refer to anything that keeps prisoners constructively occupied. They include educational, religious and recreational activities. There is usually an Assistant Warden for Programs who supervises and coordinates them. He or she is the key person in your city or region you will want to contact. Your purpose initially is to determine whether there is an art program for inmates and, if so, who is responsible for it. If there is a person in charge, contact him or her, put in a job application, get hired and begin your career.

In reality, it's a long shot that everything will fall into place that easily. Chances are that there is no position available beyond the one held by the person who is in charge of the art program, if there is such a program. If there is, the lack of a vacancy should not prevent you from discussing the program with the person in charge: how it operates, who participates, where in the jail or prison it is held, what happens to the art produced in it and other points of interest. Also, make sure you describe your own background and goals in mentoring to inmate artists. All this can be done in a telephone conversation.

At the very least, you will have raised the curiosity of the person with whom you are talking. If you handle the conversation correctly, essentially by conveying your objectives and sincerity, he or she will want to meet you to learn more. Keep in mind that the

program coordinator is probably overwhelmed by the task of helping imprisoned artists. There are never enough hours or supplies to do the job fully. So whatever support you can give, even if only moral support, will be appreciated. You stand to benefit in that there is a chance that a position will be added or that the current coordinator will leave.

Rather than count on either, you should explore another possibility. Often in prison, job titles do not reflect the full range of duties involved. For example, the Chaplain of the Washington, D.C. Jail, Reverend Betty Green, whom we met in an earlier chapter, serves as both chaplain and coordinator of volunteer services. The same is true in other jails and prisons throughout America. A prison security officer, whose official title is usually corrections officer, is an example. There is very little "guarding" involved in his or her work. They are peace officers whose jobs are to keep the prison safe. That's not an easy task when there is so much undiagnosed mental illness among inmates. To do the job well, officers must strike a balance between firmness and compassion. They must not be overly pushy, but they should not be pushovers either. Not only are colleagues depending on them to keep the place calm and orderly, but so are the prisoners in their care.

Prison officers work in every section of the prison. Wherever inmates are located–from the chapel to the education department to the rec yard–such personnel are present. Mostly, however, they are stationed in the cellblocks and dormitories where prisoners live and sleep. Sometimes inmates spend all their time there when there are lockdowns, or in maximum security facilities. But usually inmates are allowed to leave for hours at a time to engage in job assignments or attend educational or other programs.

No one has more sustained personal contact with inmates than prison officers. And no one is a greater influence in their welfare and development. After all, a prison is the inmate's home and these officers are the most visible presence there. Think of your own home. If you had a staff to run the place, their personalities and priorities would have a great impact on you.

Is this a suggestion that you start at the bottom and become a prison officer? It's worth considering in view of all the mentoring possibilities that the job affords. As you walk around the cellblock or dormitory, you will see a lot of positive creative activities going on. Inmates like to write, particularly letters to their loved ones. If your writing skills are good, you can advise them and suggest

corrections. Your view will be respected since their writing is intended for outsiders and you *are* viewed as one.

You will also see art being done all around you, if however rudimentary. Inmates love to draw and decorate envelopes, often using no more than a pen or pencil. If colored pens or pencils are available, that greatly enhances their lives by enlarging their artistic possibilities. Think of the difference between a black and white TV and a color one. You will often be in a position to supply those colorful items. They can come from another section of the prison or even from the outside. Churches and other nonprofits can be mobilized to collect and donate such things.

A well-known fact in prison is that what comes in, both illegal items such as drugs as well as legal commodities, are carried by prison officers who report to work there each day. If you supply something such as a red pencil and drawing paper, no one is going to care. It may even be in your job description to do so.

If the prison has an art program, there will be an officer assigned to it, whether or not there is an arts professional on staff who oversees it. Many art programs merely consist of a room where prisoners who clear security and are interested in creating art go to do their projects. These rooms are sometimes designated as *arts and crafts shops.* There you will find everything from leatherwork to woodwork to sculpture to painting going on. A prison officer is usually needed to make sure that only pre-qualified inmates enter and that all are on their best behavior. Sometimes, no other staffer is present. There may not be enough money in the prison budget to hire anyone else. An officer with an arts background can usually get assigned there.

Examples abound in prison of officers who gravitate toward their fields of interest. For example, a prison laundry may have an officer assigned to it who operated a commercial laundry on the outside. He or she may still be involved in managing one on a moonlighting basis. That is an acceptable choice for officers since after-work hours are their own.

There is an example of a highly successful writer who got employment as a prison officer, albeit with a specific purpose in mind. Ted Conover was a writer for *The New York Times.* He wanted to write a book about a famous prison, Sing Sing, in his home state of New York. But he could not get the cooperation of prison officials to do the necessary research. They were unwilling to be interviewed by him or let him inside. Prison officials avoid publicity since whatever is said about their prisons will draw critics,

one way or the other. It's best to put inquiring reporters in the same category as destructive prisoners, maybe even consider them more dangerous. After all, the words they write can have the same effect as explosives.

Journalist Conover, when stonewalled at the prison ramparts, put his backup plan into effect. If he could not beat the system, he would join it. He filled out an application to become a corrections officer at Sing Sing and was accepted for the job. After a short period of training–to which he devotes an entire chapter in his book *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*– he was given access to more information, inmates and personnel than he could have ever hoped for as an outsider. His well-written, incisive and humorous book is a must read for anyone who works, lives, visits or wonders about prisons.

Becoming a prison officer in the absence of an available arts position is not the only option for a mentor seeking gainful employment. There are other jobs, such as teachers in prison education departments. They usually involve preparing inmates without a high school diploma to pass the GED test. Teachers focus on a small range of subjects: math, English and social studies. For the most part, students take practice GED exams in class. Teachers correct their answers and provide guidance to do better. The teaching and tutoring focus on their weak areas.

Teaching in prison is very labor intensive work. Little or no time is available to do art mentoring, and GED tests do not cover art. You will be stuck in a classroom where you will be under the constant watch of education administrators.

Another employment option in prison is to become a counselor, sometimes known as a case manager or classification officer. The job, as important as it is, is not what it seems. Instead of advising prisoners of their options while in prison, the counselor generally is giving them orders and guidelines of what is expected of them. That includes job assignments and program requirements, such as the need for them to enter the GED class if they do not have a high school diploma. The same mandatory placements apply to drug programs and pre-release classes. The latter deals with such things as personal finance and civic responsibilities. They assume that inmates are ignorant on these subjects. Prisoners who do not want to participate in a program are often forced to. As a result, the learning environment is less than ideal. Counselors have their hands full dealing with different types of inmates and they have a lot of paperwork to complete.

Promotions are common in prison, so it's possible to start in one position and move to another. Wardens look at their labor pool first as a place to fill supervisory and other staff vacancies. They know that the prison world is unlike any other; that outsiders misunderstand and often exaggerate it. If a person has direct prison experience, he or she has more than half the knowledge needed to fill any position. No wonder that virtually all wardens are career professionals who have moved up the ladder. A few even had their lowly beginning in prison as an inmate.

Geraldine Buckley, who started out in a Maryland state prison as a volunteer, eventually became a paid staffer. She considered herself fortunate. She ended up making a living doing what she happily once did for free. Getting paid relieved her of the need to juggle an outside job for needed income. Obtaining her prison job had other advantages for Buckley. She could suddenly come to and leave the prison when she pleased. As a volunteer, she only had a temporary pass to be on the compound at specific times. In that pro bono capacity, she was also limited in where she could go in the prison. Volunteers do not have the complete security clearance of staffers.

But there was a downside, though Buckley eventually overcame it. As a volunteer, she had been greatly admired and trusted by prisoners. They saw her as a woman with a big heart whose interest was only in helping them, not helping herself to a pay check. Before she came to be employed by the prison, Buckley was perceived as independent minded. If the warden stepped out of line, she could call him to task, call the newspapers, call in political favors.

That was the perception of inmates. Little did they know that a volunteer is far more subject to summary dismissal than a paid prison employee. Volunteers do not have union connections. Such ties can go a long way to secure employee rights and get a fair hearing if accusations of wrongdoing are made. When a volunteer is accused of a rule infraction, even a small one such as the nebulous "jeopardizing institutional security," she or he is immediately escorted off the compound. With the stroke of a warden's pen, that person is permanently banned from coming back.

It took a while, but Geraldine Buckley convinced inmates that she was sincere in her desire to keep helping them. She might be a "cop" now, which is how inmates label anyone on the prison staff, but she wanted to be a good one. It should also be remembered that a cop has powers far beyond ordinary citizens. Buckley intended to use hers for the good of the inmates.

Speaking of good cops, I recall a helpful prison officer in a place known for its harshness toward prisoners. Not that the warden was an evil person. She just wanted to run a tight ship. When she took over, there was much violence. Deciding to do something about it, she modeled her prison after a military training base, with her serving as its head drill instructor. Not only inmates but officers had to obey strict rules, including having tidy uniforms and treating superiors with respect. An inmate might hate the officers, and an officer might hate his or her superiors, but they had better not show it. The warden would punish her staff by assigning them to unpleasant duties or unwanted shifts. Inmates who did not toe the line were placed on lockdown status, the equivalent to being thrown in the hole. At one point, half of the inmate population in her prison were subjected to this. To accommodate so many problem prisoners, she converted entire buildings to holding pens where rights and privileges were minimal.

Few people liked this woman, but all came to appreciate her results. Like a dictator who creates a crime-free though socially-restrictive country, the warden knew what she wanted to achieve, and she did it.

This did not stop the "good cops," who were in the majority, as they usually are in prison, from continuing to be kind to prisoners. They just had to be more formal. The ones who had been mentoring inmates in the arts and other areas became more appreciated than ever. In the new tranquil, highly regimented environment, the arts played a significant role. They brought color and creativity to a place where both had been largely squeezed out.

Staff mentoring of prisoners also had other value. Personnel made a connection to inmates that could in particularly trying circumstances be a benefit to both groups. One day, for example, the warden decided to suppress a gambling enterprise on the compound. It had not gotten out of hand as such an operation sometimes does in prison. That happens when inmates go into debt they cannot pay, and violence is used against them by other inmates to collect. The warden did not want the gambling operation on her watch to go that far. Using informants who were anxious to get out of lockdown, or who had recently gone into debt, she compiled a list of suspected inmate gambling operators. Then she sent out the "goon squad" to pick them up.

Prisoners knew that another sweep was coming because the entire place was put on temporary lockdown. There was no reason for it to occur except for the sweep. Had a fight broken out or

vandalism occurred, the lockdown would have been predictable. Or if an inmate count had not cleared and a special "census count" were required, it would have been done. Such a special count is conducted by officers going from cell to cell and bed to bed to check inmates by name and number from a master list. Normally, counts only involved head tallies. But if the numbers do not match the official prison totals after repeated counts, a census is undertaken. Then the warden will know if anyone is missing so that a thorough search inside and outside the prison can be launched.

A special temporary lockdown takes place when the warden has a specific purpose in mind. On the day of our example, the warden employed her squad to bring suspected wrongdoers into custody. The elite squad was not the same in this prison as is in most others. Elsewhere, it refers to a collection of prison officers who form a sort of posse to carry out a warden's wishes. There is nothing special about them except for their large cluster, perhaps 10 of them, and their weaponry, often a billie club and mace. Such items are not normally carried by prison officers since they can get in the hands of inmates and can be used against the staff. But when officers travel as a pack, they can protect each other. Unfortunately, they also take on a swagger and perhaps even a bullying attitude that they would not otherwise have. It's called strength in numbers. Hence the term *goon squad*.

The squad at this prison was anything but a ragtag collection of officers. The warden wanted more from the squad then to merely intimidate prisoners into quick submission. She wanted to scare them lifeless. So rather than a posse, she created a paramilitary unit, complete with special uniforms. These consisted of outfits that could have been worn by Nazi stormtroopers. They included helmets that contained full dark visors. Each member of the group was indistinguishable from the others. They were all Darth Vaders. Rather than a loose goon squad, they had been transformed into a tight death squad. Completing their image of terror was the lock-step way of marching together, the result of thorough training.

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Suddenly the door swung open in the dorm and there they were. The squad's front man, or perhaps a woman since genders could not be determined, had a list in hand, a death list. The inmates sat straight on the edges of their beds, as they were instructed to do. Like a machine moving in precise unison, the

squad advanced. The sound of their heavy boots was the only noise heard in the cavernous dorm. None of the inmates knew who the squad would apprehend and take with them since their purpose was unknown. Everyone was at risk.

Finally, they stopped by the bed of one inmate, a relative newcomer who had not seen the squad in operation before. He was scared beyond measure. Before the leader of the group could order him to get up and go with them, the man started whimpering uncontrollably. Everyone was embarrassed since virtually the entire dorm knew that the squad's bark was much worse than its bite. Finally, to break the drama and tenseness of the scene, one of the squad members spoke in a pleasant voice that belied his costume. "Jimmy, it is me; Mel, Officer Mel. Everything's going to be okay. You won't get hurt. The warden just has some questions to ask you."

The officer who spoke had previously mentored to this inmate. Like the other squad members, he had been picked for this temporary duty at random. His words broke the tension and put a sheepish smile on the prisoner's face. He then walked out of the dorm with the group as if they were going to a Halloween party. He came back later still smiling and unmolested.

While working in a prison provides opportunities for mentoring inmates, a prison is not the only paid career option for mentors. There are nonprofit organizations that hire men and women of various skills and backgrounds to help prisoners. Many of the people hired are lawyers, and their job is to investigate prisoner complaints to see if conditions can be improved for them. Such groups include the National Prison Project of the ACLU and the D.C. Prisoners' Legal Services Project. Effective in what they do, they look into substandard prison conditions that can prove life-threatening to prisoners, such as poor medical care. Staff of these groups are constantly meeting with prisoners and ex-prisoners, advising and reassuring them as well as representing them in court.

Other organizations, such as the Justice Policy Institute, are more research than service oriented. Still, the studies they compile and the reports they issue reach many inmates. These organizations also get a good deal of correspondence from prisoners. Inmates hear about the work of the groups through newspaper articles which often emphasize the over-incarceration of Americans. Prisoners write to lend their support, and in return they get encouragement and sometimes guidance.

There are also nonprofit organizations that specialize in publications for prisoners. One is the Coalition for Prisoners' Rights based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In its eight-page monthly newsletter, letters are published from inmates seeking to improve their circumstances. Also included are resources for inmates, such as where prison artists can show and sell their work.

In Vermont, there is an organization called Prison Legal News which publishes a monthly journal by that name. It contains information about cases decided across the country that either expand or reduce the rights of prisoners. Not only prisoners but outside lawyers subscribe to this publication. They find it helpful in understanding legal matters affecting inmates.

Whatever nonprofit you choose as a place to apply for employment, you should know how small most of them are. Their staffs normally comprise less than 10 people, sometimes as few as two or three. In addition, the pay is not high. Obtaining funding for these groups is always a struggle. Also, there is not much turnover of staff because of the dedication most of them have to their work. Many of these individuals have been to prison themselves, or they have family members there. Their work is an attempt to turn America around from its thinking that virtually every wrongful, sinful or nonconventional act should result in imprisonment. It is an uphill struggle considering the political winds that blow in the opposite direction. Politicians seek votes, which people in prison cannot give them. Even after release from prison, many men and women cannot vote. It depends on the state in which they live.

If you want to join one of the nonprofits as a staff member, you are going to have a lot of competition. Interest in helping prisoners is great, and it is growing. There is always the option of forming your own nonprofit organization. Anyone can do it. All you need are three people to serve on your board, a certificate of incorporation, and an IRS exemption. Then you are in business. It does not take a lot of money to do. To obtain an incorporation certificate, you need to file incorporation papers with your state government and pay a small fee. If you are not a lawyer and cannot or do not wish to hire one, you can complete the papers yourself by looking at the wording of other nonprofit incorporation papers. They are public documents, so reviewing and copying them is easy. For the IRS, there is a form to fill out. You will have to attach your certificate of incorporation and also your incorporation papers for the IRS to see. But as long as they are completed properly and

cover all the nonprofit elements, following the examples of others, the process will go smoothly.

The next step is to create a budget and to gather money to meet that budget. Here is where *angels* come into play, both real and imaginary. The human ones are the members of your board. As few as three people can be on the board, or you can choose as many as you wish. Organizations often have a requirement for board members that each is responsible for raising a specific amount of money. It is the primary way that start-up funds for an organization are acquired. No board member, by the way, can draw income from a nonprofit. It is against IRS rules. And of course, there is no stock to be issued or profits to be distributed. All income goes back into the organization. That means if you intend to draw a salary from a nonprofit, you cannot be on the board. It may sound like a big sacrifice but really it is not. Even if you were on the board, you would only be one of three or more members. You could be out-voted on any matter, even kicked off the board and out of the organization. But in practical terms, you will be valued as the founder or co-founder of the group. After all, if you are disposed of, you can start a competing organization. Here is the reason why top executives in firms are paid so well by their boards, particularly if they were responsible for the establishment of the organizations in the first place. They can pick up stakes and use their connections for a new enterprise any time they are dissatisfied.

Having established a nonprofit with yourself as executive director, you will have two ongoing concerns. One will be to carry out the mission of the organization and the other to raise funds to meet the group's expenses. It is instructive to see how one organization, the Prisons Foundation, went about doing this.

The group began with no office and no staff, only a board of three who hoped to use the arts in prison for rehabilitation and victim restitution. One of the members had a lot of time on his hands. He was newly released from prison. There he had used art in preparing for his release. He left a lot of artists behind whom he now wanted to help. The second board member had been this man's mentor. She had little time to devote but had some funds available, which she donated generously. The third member had time and valuable knowledge of Internet marketing and web development to contribute. These three individuals were Dennis Sobin (author of this book), Helen Thorne, and Jim Pruitt, respectively.

Even before additional funds were solicited, the recruitment of volunteers was a top priority. That's because letters were starting to

come in from inmate artists from around the country. They resulted from publicity the foundation received in prison publications; it represented itself as an aid to imprisoned artists that would soon publish a newsletter to help them. Meanwhile, a call went out to volunteers through free ads in local newspapers, particularly in an alternative weekly that was published in the region. The ad read: "Imprisoned artists need your help and encouragement! Answer letters from prisoners, help us prepare a newsletter and assist with other projects." Both a telephone number–a cell phone of the managing board member, which was answered at all times–and an email address were included. Over 50 responses were received in the first month, with a dozen people proving to be both capable and committed to help.

Without an office or conveniently-located residence for meetings and work sessions, a suitable alternative was found. Arrangements were made for the free use of a meeting room at the local public library. One weekday night each week, the group met there. The foundation director who organized and supervised each meeting came to the sessions with two shopping bags. One contained letters received from prisoners that required answers. The other was filled with juices, sodas, pretzels, nuts and other refreshments. At the meetings the letters were answered in a convivial atmosphere. Many of the inmates who wrote wanted to send art, but there was no place to store it. Responses written by volunteers to the letters were encouraging; some contained specific information that inmates had requested. In the middle of the large conference table around which everyone sat was a resource list that one of the volunteers had compiled. It contained legal groups, religious organizations, correspondence schools, and other contacts that would be helpful to prisoners.

If an inmate who wrote to the foundation wanted information that the resource list did not contain, there were two options in responding. One, a volunteer could take the letter home and answer it after doing Internet research. Or a polite answer would state that the foundation did not have the information requested. Regardless of how or where letters were answered, a sample newsletter soon published by the foundation entitled *Art for Justice* was included in the response. The newsletter was compiled by volunteers, principally Carolyn Cosmos, a photographer and art critic for area publications and a local college professor of writing. Contained in the newsletter were tips for prison artists and inspiring stories about

prisoners and ex-prisoners who were gaining a following through their art.

Meanwhile, the foundation sought to become involved in victim assistance projects. It became a co-sponsor of events for National Victim Awareness Week, including providing volunteers to help conduct activities. At a reception sponsored by the National Organization for Victim Assistance, the foundation provided ex-prisoner musicians to perform.

So much for the mission of the Prisons Foundation. Now let's take a look at its finances. In publishing *Art for Justice*, the foundation hoped to use it not only to distribute information but to raise funds. The latter did not come to fruition. The cost of copying and sending it to prisoners exceeded the modest contributions requested from inmates for the monthly publication. The foundation never expected to receive much from inmates in view of their low, often nonexistent finances. It pinned its hopes on free-world donors who might see the value of the publication and would want to lend support. For them, the suggested cost of subscribing was much higher than for inmates. But the results were also disappointing. It was not that there weren't outside supporters willing to help, but reaching them proved a problem. In contrast, spreading the word about *Art for Justice* to prisoners was easy. When a copy arrived in a prison, it would be passed around and discussed extensively. Other prison publications also publicized it.

But the media beyond prison walls were silent. Neither the foundation nor *Art for Justice* were considered newsworthy in comparison to dramatic regional, national and world events occurring. The idea of doing a mass mailing occurred to the foundation's board. But such an effort would be expensive to do correctly. A slick mailing piece would have to be designed and printed, a large mailing list of prospects obtained, and postage provided. Even if the board could come up with the money to do this, there was no guarantee the mailing would succeed. They might be pouring funds down the drain and thereby hastening the demise of the organization.

An idea was conceived that made sense. They needed publicity and they needed funds. Why not take inmates up on their offer to send their art? They could sell it. All they needed was a place to do it. That's when supporter Elie Robbins suggested her church, New York Avenue Presbyterian in downtown Washington, D.C. A beautiful, centrally-located structure with a congregation of justice-minded people, it seemed ideal. Arrangements were made and plans

set. The foundation would have a Prison Arts and Crafts Show. There was a lot of work to be done to insure its success. A date was set for the following year, giving plenty of time to accomplish two major tasks: acquire enough prison-made arts and crafts to have a major show, and publicize the event so a lot of buyers, collectors and supporters would come to it.

During the next 10 months, both tasks were handily accomplished. A news release went out by email and snail mail. Some regional publications responded and ran stories, including one in the influential *Washington Diplomat*. Several prison publications also published the news release, specifically noting the need for art made by prisoners. In the final months before the show, a huge amount of art arrived.

Inmates got half of whatever was obtained for their art. They understood that everything would be sold, regardless of the amount received. Nothing would be returned to them due to the cost and difficulty of doing so. By their signature on an agreement, the artists agreed to these and other conditions.

An estimated $50,000 worth of art was gathered for display at the show. The foundation would make $25,000 if all sold, since costs were negligible. All the publicity was free, as no newspaper charged to run articles. Also close to free was the preparation of the art for exhibit. Volunteers, several with art backgrounds, mounted the art, working day and night for two weeks prior to the show. With the publicity received, everyone was pumped up and giving it their all. If successful, the foundation might even be able to hire its first employee. That person would likely come from the pool of volunteers. During the week before the event, a simple but catchy flyer was printed and placed in public locations throughout the city. Again, this was done by volunteers.

The Saturday in September designated for the all-day show arrived. There was a dignitary on hand to officially open it. Former mayor of Baltimore and Rhodes scholar Kurt Schmoke did the honors. It seemed very fitting to have this smart and courageous man had once proposed *considering* decriminalization of drugs in his home state of Maryland. Had that happened, there would have been a lot less people in jail there. Instead, Schmoke's enemies used his proposal to end his political career. He became dean of Howard University Law School in Washington after leaving Baltimore.

Many people came to the show. A lot of art was sold. But not nearly as much as Foundation directors had hoped. In retrospect,

they realized that their expectations were unrealistically high. Sales came to just over $5,000. That meant that 90% of the art still remained unsold. An attempt to sell some of it at the end of the day by auction proved unsuccessful.

The foundation would have to find another way to dispose of it. And so the group decided to go into the business of selling prison art. For the next two years it held four shows a year, one during each season. Another church in the city was chosen as the site for the shows, First Trinity Lutheran Church. Its pastor, Tom Knoll, offered the foundation an expansive fellowship hall to conduct the shows. He also provided storage space for the art that kept arriving. More art came because, after the first payments were mailed to prison artists, word spread that the foundation kept its word and could be trusted. The organization would never be short of art to sell.

As the quarterly shows were launched, more valuable publicity was received. Within a two-year period, three *Washington Post* stories appeared. The only thing that was not happening was greater art sales. Each show averaged $1,500 to $2,500. And half of that went to the artists or their victim restitution accounts.

But things were looking up. A few benefactors came along, including one, Lloyd S. Rubin, who flew higher than any angels on the board or volunteer rooster. He was generous in both his criticisms and his currency. Together, they brought the organization to the point that it could do some hiring.

Then three developments took place to assure the organization's stability and growth. One was a lawsuit won on behalf of the Foundation by the ACLU, including damage compensation. It allowed the foundation to sell prison art in outdoor kiosks on the busiest streets in Washington, without the need for a permit. The second development was the awarding of grants to the foundation by the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities. Third, the organization was able to open a Prison Art Gallery in the heart of D.C. It was not ground level space and the principal occupant was not the gallery but the nonprofit NORML Foundation. Still, it was a place to show and sell art in a safe and accessible, if somewhat cramped, location.

Advantages of sharing the space with a much larger nonprofit included having a small amount of rent to pay. The staff of NORML was on hand to accept money for art sales when no foundation personnel could be there. Foundation staff spent most of

its time at the outdoor kiosks and at university and art fair exhibits that the foundation spent a lot of time organizing.

How much more growth is in store for the Prisons Foundation and its sister nonprofit, Safe Streets Arts Foundation? How big can it get? "That's a good question," says Jahi Foster-Bey, an ex-prisoner artist who is a director the group. "We are exploring various options." Foster-Bey has held positions ranging from arts director for the foundation and manager of one of its outdoor kiosks. "I'm optimistic that we have something special here. We inspire prisoners, help victims and get the attention of the public with this beautiful and meaningful art we show."

The Safe Streets Arts Foundation has launched a program to expand the operation. That should be of interest to entrepreneurs everywhere. Mentors seeking full-time employment in the field may wish to explore this opportunity.

The foundation is seeking to open a branch of the Prison Art Gallery in other regions of the U.S. The revenue arrangement is generous for people who seek to operate such an enterprise. The foundation will ship prison art to any location, a hundred or more original pieces ready for display and sale. The local entrepreneur will sell them on a contingency basis. The seller retains 40% of the sales amount, forwarding the rest to the foundation, which shares the money received with prison artists and victim restitution accounts. The only up-front cost for the seller is the shipping expense, which is estimated at about two dollars per art piece when sent in bulk. A deposit is also required for each piece, which is fully returnable upon its sale or return.

Thus, a mentor can become an entrepreneur and make a full-time living in this way. Besides original works of art, the foundation has reproduced a series of prints of the best prison art that has come into its hands. Mentors can use them for fundraising, allowing supporters to obtain one or more in return for donations. Each work is 11 by 17 inches and is attractively mounted on a sturdy 16 by 20-inch matte, then placed in a durable acetate enclosure. They are numbered, making them especially suitable for collectors. The standard price for limited edition numbered prints is much higher than the foundation charges.

If all this sounds too good to be true and you are wondering what the catch is, read on. There is indeed a requirement to be part of this franchise-like program, though it has nothing to do with financial matters.

The operator of a regional Prison Art Gallery must be an established nonprofit organization involved in the justice field. In addition, it must have a location such as an office where the public can come to view and purchase prison art. That means a full-time staff member on hand during normal business hours to accept payment.

You may already be affiliated with an organization that meets these rudimentary requirements. If you are, you probably will not have much difficulty convincing the leadership of that group that this is a win-win situation for them. Their only investment is wall space and a corner or two in the office for an attractive canvas art display rack containing original art pieces and reproductions. The only staff time necessary is when payment is accepted and a receipt is written. But the revenue, which on a $500 piece is fully $200 for the group, is substantial. Not only that, but the sales receipt contains the name, address and email of the person to whom it sold the art. Each buyer represents a potential donor for the group. Inevitably the buyers will learn something about the organization and will leave with literature as well as art. They represent future volunteers and goodwill ambassadors. Every time they get a compliment on the striking art they purchased, they will talk about the organization from which they obtained it, and its good work.

Another advantage for the host organization is that it puts itself in line for grants. Many sources of money are available for funding of arts in America. At the national level there are agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts which provide money generously. After all, the arts are considered the "soul of America," and no one wants to see a soul die in or out of prison. At local and state levels there are funding agencies such as D.C.'s Commission on the Arts and Humanities. Each provides millions of dollars in grants annually for art projects. The D.C. Commission has funded prison artist mentoring training workshops and prison art shows, and it has paid mentors to go into local jails to assist incarcerated artists.

Private foundations are also a source of grants. The Ford Foundation, for example, funds conferences that focus on art therapy and rehabilitation through the arts. Hundreds of other private funding sources like Ford exist. You can find out about them by visiting the Foundation Center and accessing its free database. Help is provided there by their team of specialists. They will reveal who is giving art grants and what it takes to get them.

The Foundation Center is based in New York City but has fully functioning branches in several cities across America.

When a nonprofit group establishes a regional Prison Art Gallery with the help and art provided by the Safe Streets Arts Foundation, it is in an ideal position to attract grants. Not only does it have its own accomplishments and track record to tout in the proposals it submits, but the credentials and success of the Safe Streets Arts Foundation can be used as well. The foundation will furnish winning proposals that can be used as a basis to write and submit grant applications. That way the group overcomes the difficulty of being viewed by art and justice funding sources as the new kid on the block. It is on the block with an experienced player who has the experience and know-how to get art that is created in prison shown and sold.

If you are an individual with limited mentoring or justice-related experience, you might not be involved in an organization that qualifies to become a regional Prison Art Gallery. But that does not mean you cannot find such a group in your area. Even a church or synagogue with a prison ministry can qualify. It is up to you to search them out and begin dialogue. Your goal is to create a job for yourself so that you can mentor to prison artists as your full-time employment. Any organization will hire you if you are responsible for bringing in sufficient revenue. It has nothing to lose since you will be paid from funds you generate, whether they come from art sales, donations or grants.

Go to your local jail or prison and find out the names and locations of groups that are currently working with prisoners in your region. Chances are that you will be provided with dozens of them. Go down the list and make calls. Always ask to speak to the top person in the organization, but settle for an associate if necessary. Explain that you have been mentoring to artists and you would like to expand your role by helping their organization. That you also have access to a lot of art created in prison (through the Safe Streets Arts Foundation). You can help the group use this art to secure new sources of revenue, donations, publicity and grants.

There are not many leaders of groups who will turn down this opportunity. At the very least, they will want more information. That gets you a step closer to your goal of making mentoring to imprisoned artists your full-time employment.

And you could not ask for a more rewarding occupation. Extremely wealthy people, from the Rockefellers to the Whitneys, turn to art collecting late in life as their ultimate dream of a

satisfying existence. You will be starting early and your rewards will be greater. Not only will you be immersed in art that is beautiful, but art that is significant. Each stroke by an imprisoned artist carries a story, each line a living testament that there is hope for our sadly complacent and convulsive society that would lock up so many of its members. Such is the magic of *art on the inside.*