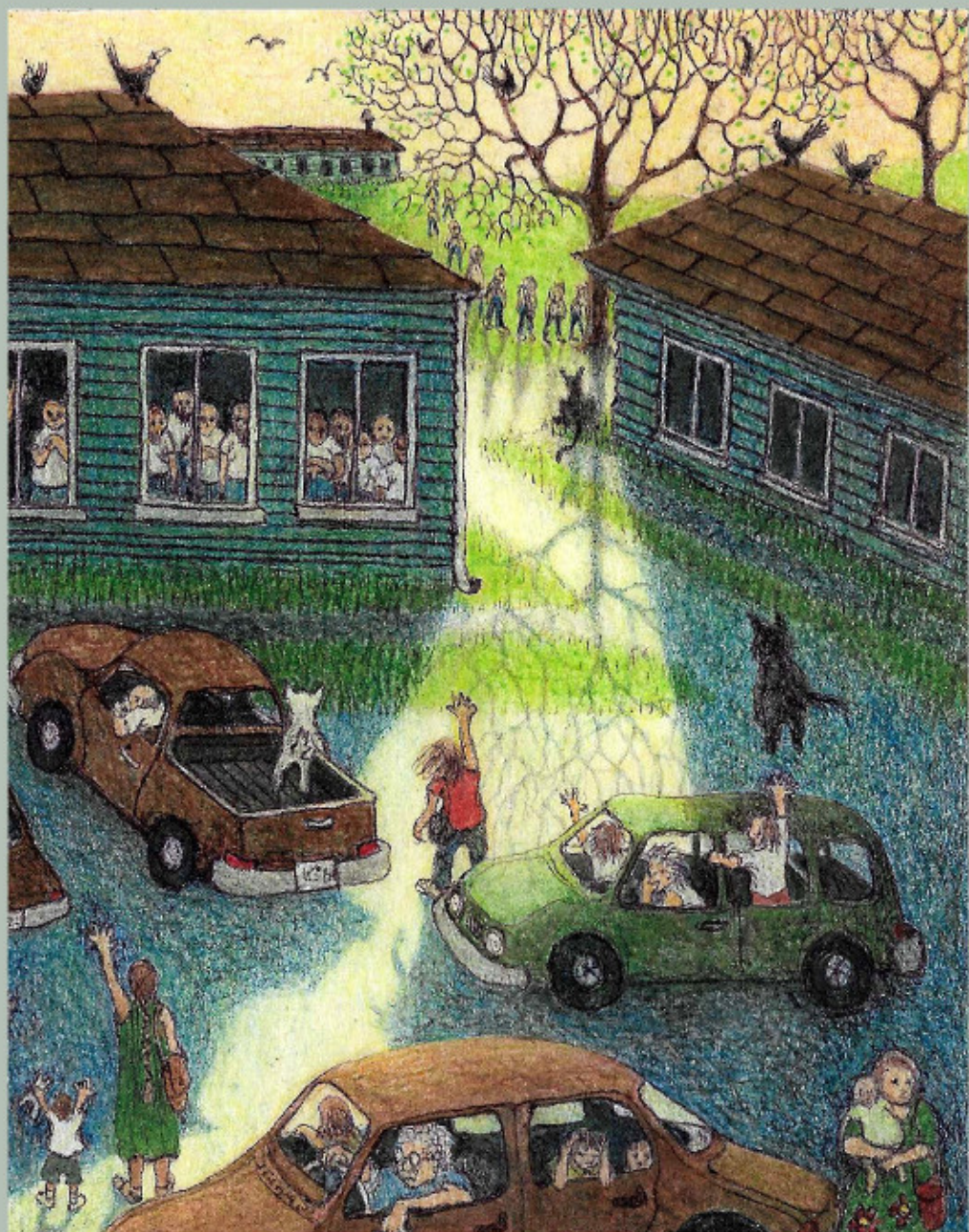


# These Were My Realities



By J H

These Were My Realities.

*Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice.*

*Henry David Thoreau – from ‘Civil Disobedience’*

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to those who told me their stories, many of which I have recorded here. But I also dedicate it to all the men and women who are being confined in those huge cages we call prisons, where they are treated worse than the animals we keep in zoos.

These men and women are victims of draconian laws that are created by politicians who cater to the prejudices of an ill informed public, and who carefully avoid exposure to any facts that might raise questions about mindless proclamations. Very few of those who are incarcerated pose a substantial physical threat to anyone. For the vast majority who do not, more human and productive ways of dealing with their real or imagined crimes could easily be created.

The huge number of people that American society incarcerates is the logical outcome of a nation that chooses to spend its money helping the already wealthy and trying to rule the entire world, rather than provide for the educational, health, and welfare needs of its own citizens. The sins of the incarcerated pale beside the sins of those who put them in cages

# These Were My Realities

By JH

*Could it be true? She turned her eyes  
downward at the scarlet letter, and even touched it  
with her finger, to assure herself that the infant  
and the shame were real. Yes! – these were her  
realities, – all else had vanished!*

## **These Were My Realities**

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The views expressed in this work are my own. But you can have some of them for free if you like.

The people who are described in this book are real. I hope I have been accurate and fair in my portrayal of them. All identifying information, however, has been altered to protect both the innocent and the guilty.

## I Am That

I am the sex offender that you read about  
Once again yesterday  
With only the names changed,  
And you wonder again what unspeakables  
Might be dressed up or perhaps even cross dressed  
In such abstract nouns as  
Victim.  
Unlawful.  
Assault.  
Love.  
Predator.  
Though of course love was never mentioned.  
I am that.  
The wolf under the bed that lingers into adulthood.  
The wolf now stalking Red Riding Hood in the woods.  
The wolf that will not survive the direct gaze.  
It is night in the forest.  
You turn to see me more clearly,  
And I am gone.  
I am a memory of when you touched yourself  
In that place where boys and girls are not so different really,  
And discovered what we might now call a Supernova --  
For it was more energy than you thought possible  
Consuming vast regions of space  
In a blinding happiness you knew you could not tell about.  
I am that bright star,  
Or the memory of one  
Seen only off to one side.  
It frightens you,  
So you kill me  
Thinking you can do so without also dying --  
That you can clang that huge door shut  
Only on me.

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# Preliminary Matters



# Preface

In the state where I was incarcerated, those who were doing time in relation to sex abuse charges are known as ‘skinners’. Skinner is a term of derision. If the word were to be found in your thesaurus it would be linked to such terms as shit-bag, baby raper, pedophile, scum, creep, pervert, fiend, demon, and monster. The skinner is the folk demon par excellence. He is the perfect scapegoat. He is the common enemy who allows an uneasy truce between competing and discordant factions within our society. It is the skinner who makes it possible for progressives, religious fundamentalists, the poor, feminists, family values people, the economic elite, and perhaps even a few carefully selected Moslems to all crawl into the same bed where, if they do not exactly make love, they can at least sleep together.

The only terms that come close to ‘skinner’ in negative emotional force are ‘nigger’ and ‘fag’. Certainly all these terms have the same purpose. They are used to degrade, to justify mental and at times physical attack and torture, to destroy the possibility of positive identity, and to exclude whole groups of people from the circle of acceptable humanity. Blacks often call each other ‘nigger’. Gays also have taken the terms originally used against them and transformed them into terms of defiance and ironic self-affirmation. But you will never hear one skinner use the term in a bantering or friendly manner with another skinner. The term reeks too strongly of violence and hatred. But even more than that, skinners for the most part share in the general consensus as to their nature. Perhaps that feeble point of unity – that shared perception of his profound and essential unacceptability – provides the skinner with some hope of eventually being taken back into the fold of acceptable humanity.

I am a skinner. But to myself I am not a shit-bag. I’m an ordinary person in the world whose energies are organized around a gestalt of hopes and fears that is distinctive to me. I am able to love and to be hurt. I struggle to maintain a coherent and acceptable identity in the face of difficulties. I am awed and frequently confused by the ultimate questions of death, time, responsibility, relationship, good and evil, and meaning. In other words, I am not very different from most other people. To myself, at least, I am not a monster.

The problem is that I loved children. Well, that requires some elaboration, doesn’t it?

The question is, how did I love children? Only very rarely did the physical expressions of my love take a form that would be considered inappropriate even in this society where every touch is scrutinized. But the question goes deeper than this. Was my love – the love itself – pure? Americans are firm believers that there are two kinds of love: pure and impure. They eschew the notion that most forms of love might be grounded in a sexual or erotic substrate. Sex is impure. Love is pure. At any rate, real love is pure. A little bit of sexual feeling might be allowed into heterosexual love relationships between adults, especially if they are either married or at least planning to get married. But children are pure, which is to say asexual. And the love of children – both the love they feel welling up within themselves and the love that others feel for them – must be pure. It must be devoid of even the slightest trace of sexual feeling.

The situation in reality is a bit more complicated. Sexual feelings keep seeping around the barriers that puritans, who would control even the mind, put in the way. Such feelings bubble up like methane gas in a swamp. Women who are breast-feeding suddenly become aware of an arousal in their genitals. Uncles who are horse-playing with their nephews become conscious of an impurity creeping into the play. Men and women who see naked children are struck by their incredible beauty – a beauty that reaches down and excites places it shouldn't. If these mothers and uncles and good citizens have any sense they will keep such feelings to themselves.

At least the children are pure. They are innocent of having a sexuality of their own. And yet this claim puzzles me.

Can it be that people do not remember their childhoods? Was I that unusual in the fantasies and practices that I hid from the adult world, and in the wordless but powerful longings that possessed me? And yet the fiction of the pure (asexual) child who is loved by the pure (asexual) adult must be upheld at all costs. No other norm can even be discussed.

The cost of suppressing any rational thought with regard to this issue is, indeed, very great. Those who are perceived to have broken society's laws of love are hounded by draconian legislation, and are mentally tortured in prisons and 'treatment' groups. Often they are physically attacked. Sometimes they are murdered. But there is a cost to the general society too – a cost that ordinary people must pay. Perhaps the most important cost of the child sex panic has to do with the alienation between children and adults that the current hysteria about impure love has engendered.

But my crime is clear. I loved with an impure love.

In loving children with an impure love I violated our society's central taboo. This has not been a particularly serious taboo in most societies most of the time. Some cultures – such as Japan and Greece – have known periods in their history where man/boy love was a central institution in their social structure, used in a pedagogical manner to inculcate in a youth the values of his society. The anthropologist Giesela Bleibtreu-Eherberg observed that in many pre-industrial societies "heterosexual and homosexual play among children, but also of adults with children, occurs and is hardly noticed, is smiled at, or is so common that it is a theme of ordinary conversations".<sup>1</sup>

I remember a movie called *The Black Crystal*. It came out some years ago and perhaps by now the people who have not seen it would outnumber those who have. It is a lovely and humorous fantasy about a society that had split into two groups – one that was good and pure, but debilitated, and one that was energetic and vital, but crude and base. The solution suggested by the movie for this fragmentation was not for the pure to overcome and defeat the base ones. It was for the two groups to merge, and thereby to regain the wholeness lost through their bifurcation into opposing factions. Perhaps this image might point a way to solving many of society's current problems.

.....

1 Giesela Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, 'The Paedophile Impulse', in *Dares To Speak, The Gay Mens Press*: Norfolk, England, 1990, p71.

This book is the story of what I experienced and what I saw around me while I was incarcerated for 3½ years as a skinner. In *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, the neurologist Oliver Sachs comments that the experience of those with right hemisphere damage is so foreign to the experience of the average person that “it is singularly difficult, for even the most sensitive observer, to picture the inner state, the ‘situation,’ of such patients, for this is almost unimaginably remote from anything he himself has ever known”.<sup>2</sup> This is similar to how the public has been taught to view ‘pedophiles’. I do not think, however, that the reader will have that much trouble understanding me. I suspect we are more similar than we are different. But readers will have to judge that for themselves.

## What Did I Do?

In March of 2000, I was sentenced to fifteen years in prison, with all but four suspended, and six years of probation. The probation agreement stipulated, among other things, that when I was released from prison, I had to be in a treatment program that would be approved by the probation officer, and that I was to have no unsupervised contact with anyone under 16 years of age.

Naturally the question comes up of just what I did to get myself into such a mess. For a variety of reasons, I am not inclined to go into much detail about my relationships with the two boys who were, in the politically correct language of today, my ‘victims’. Yet I can see that, if the reader is to be able to put the account that follows into a realistic perspective, the issue of what I did needs to be addressed in some way.

It is quite difficult in today’s world to get a clear idea of what might actually have happened in relation to any allegation of ‘child sexual abuse’. This has to do with what appears to be a deliberately misleading use of language. If, for example, one reads the word ‘violent’ one assumes the word denotes what this word means in everyday speech. In everyday speech, ‘violent’ would mean a physically coercive or hurtful act, or the threat of one. In the new speech that helps to drive the sex abuse panic, ‘violent’ can mean simply that in the opinion of the writer, the boundaries of the ‘victim’ were ‘violated’. This is true even if the ‘victim’ did not see himself as a victim and may have wanted the boundaries ‘violated’. What, after all, do children know? Or take the term ‘rape’. That term certainly evokes the image of someone forcing himself (always it is himself) on a resisting ‘victim’. But whether force is used, and whether the ‘victim’ is willing, no longer have any relevance with regard to the way the term ‘rape’ is used. Any sexually activity between an older and a younger person can be labeled ‘rape’, even if it is mutually desired. Children, after all, can’t consent.

I was, for a time, labeled a ‘sexually violent predator’. Yet there was not anything even remotely violent in the ordinary sense of the term, in what I did. In relation to a 10-year-old boy there was one incident of ‘illegal sexual touch’. That is true.

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2     Oliver Sachs, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat*, J Curely: South Yarmouth, Ma, 1986, p5.

I did touch him in an illegal way – in a ‘not-all-right place’ as the modern jargon expresses it. In relation to a boy who was just short of his 14th birthday, there were five incidents of mutually desired sexual contact. That did occur, and it was illegal. One can make whatever moral judgment one wants to with regard to that, but factually, in terms of what actually happened, nothing occurred that was violent, and nothing even vaguely resembling ‘rape’ or ‘assault’ in the normal sense of these terms. Nor did I stalk him like a vicious wild beast as the term ‘predator’ suggests. In the ordinary sense of the term he not only ‘consented’ to what happened, but he sought it out.

I share these facts about what I did, and this information about the deliberate use of the misleading and incendiary language of the sex abuse industry, for two reasons: first, in order to give the reader some general idea of what happened even though I cannot share the specifics; and second, to caution the reader with regard to reports of sex abuse in the newspaper. What is conveyed by a misleading use of terms may not be even approximately what actually happened in any given case. ‘Rape’ does not necessarily mean rape. ‘Violent’ does not necessarily mean violent. ‘Assault’ does not necessarily mean assault. ‘Predator’ does not necessarily mean predator. The Humpty Dumpty philosophy of words has been at work here. Words mean whatever those in power want them to mean. It’s important to understand that.

## Narrative Inquiry: First Formulation

As I thought about going to prison, I was determined that I would try to make positive use of an experience that I naturally dreaded. It seemed to me that making positive use of a negative experience was largely a matter of how I framed it in my mind. The first image that seemed promising to me was to think of the prison as a monastery or as a desert retreat – a place of suffering and privation that might lead to spiritual understanding. The second image was derived from sociology. Perhaps, I thought, I could envision myself as doing a participant observer study. I thought that perhaps I could discover some truths that might be of use both to myself and others.



While I was in Protective Custody I did some reading on ‘narrative research’. One of the more useful items I read was *Three Approaches to Participative Inquiry* by Peter Reason (from *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds, Denzin and Lincoln). The article by Reason offered me some incentive for clarifying my purposes in treating the prison experience as participant observer research with a narrative focus.

As I reflected on my motivation to do this kind of research, I defined the underlying impetus in the following way:

*I want to deepen my understanding of the nature and consequences of the discrepancy I experience between my own self understanding and the understanding that the accepted spokespersons of the dominant groups in*

*society impose upon me and my situation. I experience myself as a person of ordinary and generally benign inclinations and desires who has experienced a lifetime of oppression. The understanding of the dominant spokespersons is that I am a sick and depraved person, and a dangerous predator.*

I saw that the dominant culture imposes its view primarily in three ways:

- 1 It exercises almost absolute control of the legislative and judicial structures of society, including control of the language systems within which the issue of intergenerational Eros must be discussed.
- 2 It refuses to permit actual dialog on the issue of intergenerational Eros in any public forum. The issue cannot be presented in a balanced and realistic manner on TV, in magazines or books, in movies or even in professional journals. Alternative views on the subject are not open to public debate.
- 3 It systematically imposes the dominant world view on social deviants through brainwashing techniques that are mislabeled 'cognitive therapy'. The cost of resisting the imposition of the dominant 'narrative' can, in some cases, be re-imprisonment for 'non-compliance' with 'therapy'.

Peter Reason observes that "knowledge is always from a perspective and for a purpose". I concur with this observation. At the same time, some perspectives are more truthful than others. Reality isn't just anything we might fantasize it to be. The 'Real' vigorously resists some interpretations while remaining open to others. Claims of truth must be argued from evidence and logic. The fact that social power overwhelmingly supports the view of the dominant group has no truth value whatsoever.

With regard to subject matter I wanted to focus on several related issues:

- 1 The proposition that intergenerational and homosexual erotic impulses co-exist with heterosexual impulses as aspects of the normal and expected experience of most or all males.
- 2 The social and psychological consequences of society's choice to treat intergenerational and homosexual impulses as sick, sinful and profoundly shameful.
- 3 The role of narrative in coercing boys and men to manage their sex and love feeling both intrapsychically and interpersonally in a manner that is inconsistent with their inner self-experience.
- 4 The truth value of the dominant narrative about boys and men and the nature of their Erotic impulses and experience.
- 5 The possibility of an alternative narrative that would be more liberating, more consistent with actual facts, and more conducive to the wellbeing of men and boys.

My effort at a fuller understanding of this subject matter was to employ four methodologies:

- 1 Reflection on my own experience and my self-interpretive practices.
- 2 Reflection on and direct observation of others, especially on the stories they tell about themselves and others in the prison environment.

- 3 Reflection on the experience of others, as I have access to this, through self-reports, biography, autobiography and literature.
- 4 Reflection on the results of formal non-narrative social research.

On April 28, 2000, I had an interesting dream:

*I am having a therapy session in a car. This is followed by a publicly available description of the session. It wasn't exactly clear in the dream how this happened. I wonder about therapy being this public.*

This dream pointed to an issue I had not yet resolved. My journal was to serve three purposes:

- 1 Use with my counselor.
- 2 Keep my wife, Boo, informed.
- 3 Collect data for use in writing projects – research and fiction.

The question I raised was whether these purposes conflict. I saw possible conflict on two points: first, the sheer quantity (it seems to average 6 to 8 handwritten pages a day) was too much to expect anybody to read – yet it was all potentially useful material for me; second, the fact that it was too public might lead to inhibitions in what I remember or am willing to record. Mostly I record things in a pretty faithful manner. I have very few secrets from Boo, who is the main one who might read it before I had a chance to edit it. Even with her, however, there might be an occasional dream or thought I might keep to myself, or choose to share with her at some other time or in some other way.

As I thought about it, I felt that this dream might be pointing to a larger issue. My concept of doing a 'participant observer' study was probably still a bit too vague. If that meant engaging in an intense exploration of my life as a prisoner charged with a sex crime, then the data had to include both my observation of what is going on around me – how others behave, what they tell me about their lives, etc – and also how I respond to my situation, cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally, both in waking life and in dreams. To increase my capacity for intense and continuous awareness of myself-in-my-situation would seem to be the goal of therapy, the goal of spiritual growth, and the goal of narrative research. As I reflected on this it occurred to me that the term for what I am attempting to do here could be 'holistic inquiry'.

When we engage in holistic inquiry for the purpose of personal healing, with the aid of another person who helps by keeping us honest, providing support, challenging us with alternative interpretations, and providing an opportunity for some degree of healing or therapeutic regression, we call it 'psychotherapy'. When we engage in holistic inquiry in order to raise our consciousness and to achieve a less egocentric manner of being in the world, we call it 'spiritual discipline'.

When we engage in holistic inquiry in a public manner for the purpose of adding our grain of insight to the advancement of human understanding, we call it 'participant observer' research. It is generally thought that successful therapy requires privacy – confidentiality. I am strongly inclined to agree with this. But research, if it is to make a contribution, must be public. This is the unresolved dilemma toward which my dream points.

In any case, I decided to treat my prison experience as a participant observer study. A major element of what I intended to study had to do with the stories I told myself and that I heard others tell about themselves and the people around them. With regard to subject matter, my hope was to examine some of the sexual dynamics that were at work in the prison environment and to explore what this might tell me about the larger society. Certainly my goals were unrealistically ambitious, and my ideas about what I was doing lacked sufficient clarity. Even so, I feel I was in some limited way successful in gleaning useful knowledge from my incarceration.

## Note

The material in the next three sections was taken from the journal that I wrote during the first year of my incarceration and from the daily letters I wrote to my wife, Boo. I edited and re-organized that material, and changed the names of both people and places, but I made very few changes in the actual descriptions of either the events or the interpretation I had of them at the time. Most of the editing that I did was aimed at bringing together and organizing material that was scattered throughout the journals and letters.



# Part One



# Frankfort

# The First Nine Days

**Wednesday, March 22, 2000**

I think of March 22 as being the day of my execution. I went to court, and from there to prison. A plea bargain had been settled upon, that specified the maximum level of my sentence. We were to be able to argue for a more lenient disposition of the case. The prosecutor asked for the maximum sentence that was permitted by the plea bargain. She was inept – almost inarticulate. But that made little difference. My own lawyer gave a coherent and well-organized argument for a lesser sentence. However, both the boys' mothers gave very emotional statements saying I had taken the boys' innocence away and ruined their lives. Given the climate of the times, and the parents' testimony, I could have had Clarence Darrow as a lawyer and it would have made no difference. I received the maximum allowed by the plea bargain, as I knew I would, as soon as I saw what the mothers were going to do.

After court they allowed Boo and me a bit of time together in a little room off the courtroom. She told me that after I was taken out, the mother of one of the boys, who had just helped assure my getting the maximum sentence, came over to give her a hug. This was to express their presumed but non-existent solidarity. That disingenuous hug was perhaps the most amazing event of the day.

They took me out of the room and pushed me to one side as Boo left. As I was being taken downstairs, I asked whether the press would be there. The 'escort' nodded and said, "Can't be helped". We went out the back door and down a walkway where camera crews waited for their chance to get my picture. Clearly this was a courtesy arrangement between the justice system and media. They are all part of a single system of punishment.

I was taken into the space in the jail where they process new cases. There I was fingerprinted, asked various questions and had mug shots taken. They took my clothes and had me put on an orange jail outfit. Then they suggested I put myself in protective custody because of the nature of the charges. I agreed and wrote out the request as directed. Protective custody was housed in a very small 'pod', consisting of about five cells around a central room that was also being used as a cell rather than a common space. Most of the other rooms were filled with people who were there for disciplinary reasons.

The cell was small and barren. It contained a bunk with a hard green plastic mattress, a metal commode and a small metal partition giving partial privacy for the commode.

I received no lunch but was given supper. On the bunk I had two sheets and two very tattered blankets. My head hurt and I wasn't able to get any aspirin. So I made up the bunk and lay down, hoping to rest. For a while the other guys in this pod talked with each other. Their talk was childish – all about 'pussy', and clearly geared to show how macho they were – but it seemed harmless. Gradually one of them I couldn't see began banging on his door or walls, with his feet I presume, and shouting and screaming. It seemed to be an act put on to show his craziness in the hope of some legal gain. Some of the others also got into the business of

making a lot of senseless noise. When, after several hours, a guard came in to talk with them about the noise, one of the men, with a convincing display of sincerity, explained that they were upset because the new person on the unit was a child molester.

I tried to sleep that night, wondering whether I really had harmed the younger boy, who I'll call Stephen. The thought tormented me. I knew that the brief and superficial sexual contact I had with him had not damaged him. Nevertheless I felt that he probably was harmed by the violent and absurd societal reaction to the event, and it was my act that set these insane forces in motion for him. As I prayed it continued to come back to me that I was acting in accordance with God's purposes for me. But it was a night in hell. The guilt I feel for having exposed Stephen to these bizarre forces in his life is my Achilles heel. I remember that his mother testified about his reaction to being touched by her. He said if she didn't leave him alone he would have her put in prison for sexual abuse. This, I think, is his way of saying how angry he is that she used his disclosure to put me in prison. I don't think he is happy with this. In any case I am not responsible for the terrible relationship that he and his mother have always had.

### **Thursday, March 23, 2000**

In the morning right after breakfast a guard came by and had me change back into my street clothes. I was put into shackles and taken to a van with a second prisoner. The driver was a gray-haired sheriff with a stocky build. An older sheriff of slighter build accompanied him. They chatted with each other and ignored the other prisoner and me. The other prisoner was a rather pleasant guy who shared information about what I might expect at the orientation unit at Frankfort. From time to time I listened in on the conversation between the sheriffs. The driver had a second job – as a preacher. He talked about how that job was going. He was a little pompous but friendly. I thought about how he worshiped a God who believed in torturing his children – a God who would send them to hell if they so much as masturbated. In his job as a sheriff with the prison system, he worked diligently to help replicate his concept of God's order of things on this earth.

We arrived at the intake unit at about 11:30. To their credit I was given some lunch, then, once again I was fingerprinted, and asked some questions. Their main concern seemed to be to discern whether I was suicidal. Then they took me to a shower that was more or less shielded from the rest of the intake area. Here a guard had me undress and show him all parts of my body where I might be concealing knives, drugs, kiddie porn or any of the other unacceptable items known as 'contraband'. Then I was given some antiseptic-smelling soap in a paper cup and told to wash all over with it.

When the shower was done I put on a blue jumpsuit and was told to shave. Finally they took mug shots and made me an ID Card. I will always cherish this card. On it my number appeared – 40303. Number 303 Alice Avenue was my address where I grew up in Peoria, Illinois. All my life it has been my special number. The number 40 (1940) is the year of my birth. These peculiar coincidences with regard to numbers made me feel that I was still on course – in harmony with destiny.

Stripped, scrubbed and with my new identity in hand I proceeded down the hall, as instructed, to the next level of hell. I entered A Pod through the double metal doors and was directed to my room. A Pod consisted of a large central room surrounded by two tiers of cells. An enclosed area with a glass divider protruded from one of the walls. This was the 'Bubble' where the guards spent most of their time. My room was on the second tier. My roommate, a young man in his early 20s, was lounging on the bottom bunk. I introduced myself and we talked a bit.

Right off he asked me point blank what my charge was. This was the question I had dreaded from the beginning, but even though I had thought of doing so, I had not made up a story ahead of time. One of the reasons for my neglecting to do this was that I was pretty sure that people would either see me on the TV news, or run into an article in the newspaper. My plan, such as it was, was simply to be evasive until I could see whether I might slip by unnoticed. The most anxious moments I have experienced in this ordeal have generally been about being 'outed'. I remember how deeply I dreaded the consequences of my indictment and charges appearing in the newspaper and the TV. The media is a major player in the system of torture this society has established for the punishment of those who have offended its sense of decency. Punishment does not begin with a guilty finding in court but with the report of the 'alleged' crimes in the newspaper.

In response to my roommate's direct question I said "assault", and when he questioned me further I said I didn't want to talk about it. It was not smooth at all. But, as I was soon to discover, I was right in my assumption that there was no way I was going to slide by unnoticed.

I had a rather pleasant conversation with my roommate. It turned out that he was a drug dealer, and a general wheeler and dealer, but he was nevertheless a rather appealing young person. I was a daddy for him at first sight and it was clear that, except for the charges against me, I would have no problems coping with him.

After supper, which was served in the large enclosure and eaten at metal picnic tables, two other men came up to me to make my acquaintance. They also asked me point blank questions for which I was ill prepared. They seemed genuinely friendly, which turned out to be the case. However, under questioning I admitted that the charges concerned sexual assault. They told me it would be better not to admit this. They were being helpful. I left the encounter feeling I had made a mistake. I guess it was my fatalism about the problem being discovered anyhow that made me so ineffectual.

During the afternoon session in the Rec Room I watched TV, hoping it was not their policy to watch the news. They watched sports and I was left in peace.

After supper my roommate – George, I will call him – stood in the doorway to our cell while I sat on my bunk, and he told me about his current concerns. He had several cars, a fair bit of cash, and an odd assortment of other expensive goods he had bought with money he made selling drugs. His girlfriend had promised to be faithful to him while he served his four years, but she had sold all his goods and ceased writing to him. He couldn't even get her to send some money for the commissary. He also talked about his need for a father and how that would have made a difference in how his life was turning out. He said his mother claimed that she became pregnant with him after his father raped her.

The first indication that I had been discovered came to me when I heard someone from the next cell (or the one below mine) saying my name. Sounds are transmitted through the ventilation and plumbing system and it is hard to tell where they come from. Then I heard quotes from the local newspaper article about me. Even though I had neither seen nor heard the article I knew this is what it was. I could have written it myself. The voice from below got George's attention and told him he was rooming with a skinner. George looked shocked. His potential new daddy was a skinner. He asked me about it and I did not deny it.

George was about five-foot-ten and fairly well built. He was a lot younger than me. He certainly had more experience fighting than I did. However, he did not appear to be much stronger than me. I felt I would be close enough to being his match so as to not make it worth his while to try to beat me up. He was afraid of crazies and I could be a crazy if push came to shove. At first I felt intimidated by his swagger and bragging. But then I remembered the chimpanzee who discovered that by banging two garbage can lids together he could terrify the other males in his group and vastly increase his prestige. There is a lot of garbage can lid-banging in prison. Assessments of this sort went through my mind as I sat on my bunk and watched George react to the news. But he was not to respond with violence.

"I'm not judgmental," he said finally. He shook his head. "Still, I don't know what to think." He asked me more about it. I said I could not tell him what actually happened. But it was not the kind of thing one would assume from reading the newspaper. He pointed out that his friends were "solid guys". By this he meant the blustering would-be-alpha-males on the unit. They would not be happy with him. Still, he did not threaten me.

After he thought it through for a few minutes, George came up with his conclusion.

"Look, this thing could go one of three ways. First, I could get myself taken out of this room, I know how to make that happen. Second, you could get sent to protective custody." He spent a bit of time telling me why this was probably a good option – reasons, which I have since learned, were essentially accurate.

"Third," he said, "You could pay me something." There was no threat in this. He simply pointed out that he would get a lot of flack from the "solid guys", which turned out to be true. He needed something to make this worthwhile to him. He had no money at all now in his account. He desperately wanted a radio. He said he might be able to get some of the guys to back off a little bit on the harassment they would certainly give me. He could physically protect me if someone attacked me. And he could give me someone to talk with in the room.

It was a business offer. He neither threatened me nor implied he would rile up others against me. The threat from the others was real enough without his doing anything in that regard.

"I'm not rich," I said. "You may think I've got lots of money, but I don't."

"Could you come up with sixty or seventy dollars?" he asked.

The truth was that in many ways this did not sound like too bad a deal. Having a roommate with whom I would be safe and who might have some influence with the people on the unit who would probably be the most dangerous ones to me might actually be worth something to me.

"The thing is," I said, "suppose I paid you the \$60.00. What's to prevent you from deciding a week down the line that this is turning out to be harder than you thought, and that you need another sixty, and then another?"

He nodded. He understood this to be a reasonable concern. He looked down, scratched his head and said, "All right. Suppose we said \$100 and that would be all."

"Whatever shit your friends give you or anything else," I said. "This would be a one-time payment?"

He agreed.

"If you came back for more I wouldn't pay it ... whatever ...?" I said.

He nodded again and I told him I needed to think about it. I mulled it over in my mind weighing the potential risks and benefits as best I could in an unfamiliar scene. Finally I looked at him, still standing in the doorway.

"I can see you really need the money," I said, "and I'd like you to have it. Also I can see that your friends will give you a hard way to go if you room with me. But if they knew I paid you anything they might think I was an easy mark. Then, after you left, someone else might come after me for money, and I wouldn't pay them. So it's in your interest as well as mine that this is confidential."

He nodded. So we came to an agreement.

I suppose someone must have spread the news about why I was in prison during the last recreation period (between 7 and 8). At any rate on the first night of my stay in A Pod I experienced the night calls on the dorm. I was, of course, unable to see anything or even guess who was shouting. They were just voices and screams in the night – loud, raucous, full of hate and venom – animal-like voices in their primitive intensity but with a malice and hatred that was distinctively human.

"Hey, Hudson, you piece of shit."

"You go to 'check out.'"

"Why'd you do it?"

"Why don't you kill yourself? – I'll do it for you." And the chants started by one person and finished by another:

"Rip – per."

"Skin – ner."

It continued for perhaps half an hour and then died out. The newspaper article had not yet been seen by everybody, and they had not yet been incited to their full fury.

## **Friday, March 24, 2000**

One of the most striking realizations during my first days in prison was how hard it was going to be to accomplish the simplest tasks in life. To make a telephone call, to write a letter, to secure an aspirin for a headache, to use the commode, to cut my fingernails, were all tasks that would require planning and an investment of time.

Taking a shower was one of those tasks that would no longer be easy. The showers here are fairly visible from the 'tower', so there is probably only a minimal amount of actual physical danger. There are three shower rooms – all on the lower

level. For partial privacy they have some curtains hanging down in front of them – but the person in the shower remains partially visible. The situation is complicated by the fact that there are two shower heads in each shower stall – partially separated by a partition. The shower room opposite the tower affords the greatest visibility, which is a plus for safety even if a negative for modesty.

My first task was to figure out whether more than one person ever went into one of the shower units, even though they accommodated two. I noticed that a person wanting a shower would wait outside even if only one other person was inside using the double unit. So it was clear that it would have been a huge faux pas to go in when another person was using it – a faux pas that would have provided the night-time screamers endless material for innuendo and ridicule. The major mistakes that I made when I took my first shower were less serious.

I picked a time when about four-fifths of the inmates were out in the yard and nabbed an empty shower. However I had my watch, a pencil and a little paper with me, as I had been writing while I waiting for the shower to become available. There was no dry place to put these things. So I put them on the floor and undressed. When I hung my clothes on a hook it pivoted down and everything fell onto the wet floor. Something's wrong with the hook, I thought, and transferred everything to another one. Just as I put the last item on this hook it did the same thing. Finally I managed, by using two hooks, to hang my things up, take my shower, and return to my room more or less clean but with a lot of soggy things in my possession. In my room I noticed that the hooks there were of a similar construction. I had just never put enough things on them to cause them to collapse. The reason they are made this way, I am sure, is so that nobody with suicide impulses will be able to use them to hang themselves.

As I went to get into the line for receiving laundry, I noticed that the man who had questioned me about my charges earlier and had cautioned me to make up a story, went out of his way to fall in behind me. He had introduced himself earlier as Lance. "Don't pay any attention to that stuff they say at night," he told me. "They won't do anything to you – not here. Maybe on the hill." The 'hill' was the unit most men would be sent to after leaving the A Pod, which was the orientation unit. He went on to explain to me that things would get better once I got off A Pod – if I got the right placement. He gave his assessment of some of the options that might be available to me.

I was deeply touched by the kindness Lance showed in reaching out to me. In order to fully appreciate this kindness it is important to understand that if a man is openly friendly to an identified 'skinner', he risks being harassed as a 'skinner-lover', or even suspected of being a skinner himself. This was the first of a number of gestures of friendliness that I received or witnessed.

During the evening after the final recreation period, George stood in front of the door and began talking about his life. Occasionally I would try to add comments about my own experiences that related in some way to what he was telling me. But he would interrupt without registering anything I said, and would continue talking. Soon it became evident that he required very little input from me in order to consider our interchange a conversation. So I limited myself to nods, grunts and an occasional question.

He told me about a time he was younger when some other kids he was with beat him up, tied his hands with a plastic bag, and left him to freeze to death in snowy woods. He made it back and found various ways to get revenge on these people over the years.

He talked about the fancy clothes (color-coordinated right down to the socks), and the expensive cars he used to own. He was known as 'Pretty Boy' because of his attention to style.

Gradually the focus of his talk shifted to what he really wanted in life. His first choice would be to be a physical education instructor. He also thought about how nice it would be to be a police officer or a teacher. He said he liked kids and dreamed of opening a youth center to keep them out of trouble. He realized however, that most of these options were closed to him because of his felon status.

Then he talked about the important people in his life. His four-year-old daughter was the most important person. He would like to be able to pull his life together for her sake. He had a grandfather and a grandmother who had been good to him. Finally, the grandparents of his daughter continue to be supportive and helpful to him.

It struck me that what he most dreamed of having in life, and probably never would, were things that had been a part of my life up to this last year: meaningful work with children and adolescents, a stable family, and people I could depend on. It was curious how easily he poured his heart out to a contemptible skinner.

While he talked, the night screaming and chanting started up again. I sat on my bunk listening to him while he stood against the door as if shielding me from those voices we both chose to ignore.

### **Saturday, March 25, 2000**

I was so hyper-focused on the situation around me I hardly remember any dreams. This was one of the first ones after being incarcerated that I remembered:

*I am in a car being driven by a Native American woman. I am talking with her. "I always wanted to be an indian – especially as a boy," I told her. I said the things I thought about were hunting, fishing, not having to wear clothes, and living in harmony with the natural order. She seemed pleased.*



Early in the morning I watched a big yellow cat prowling through the garbage bags on the porch of another unit that I can see through my window. He pulled himself up on one of the garbage bags and began clawing a hole in it. All at once he turned and jumped back down onto the porch. He apparently had heard someone coming. He sat on the porch and looked around casually, innocent as a kitten. Even cats pick up the local culture here.

I was sitting at a table downstairs when a tall gangly young man came up to me and said I needed to 'check out.' This, I later learned, was Ron. I didn't understand at first. Thinking he was delivering a message from a guard to the effect that I should 'check in' with him, I stood up and looked around. Then I noticed that



Ron was presenting himself in a threat posture – arms away from his side and shoulders pulled back, head cocked to one side, mouth open slightly and feet apart. He rocked back and forth and said, “You got to check out man, now”.

I recalled now the meaning of ‘check out’. It was prison slang: ‘kill yourself’.

“I don’t need to check out,” I said, and sat back down.

Later George told me that this Ron had a charge of sexual assault against him and was trying to shift attention away from himself. Also, according to George, Ron’s mother pays \$30 a week to a muscular street-wise black by the name of Gordon to protect him.

I noticed that Gordon did in fact hover close to him and wondered whether this might be true. I am the one with the least prestige on the unit and Ron is trying to bolster his image by making threatening gestures toward me. It never occurred to me to actually be afraid of this guy. He seemed to me to be a malicious coward and a fool. Which was not to say, of course, that there was not some inner goodness that God, and apparently his mother, were able to see.

My roommate, George, managed to get himself restricted to lock-up during a recreation period. He was like a leopard confined to a small cage. During the long lock-up time between supper and the final recreation period I noticed that he was emptying the water out of the commode with a Styrofoam bowl (the sort that just-add-water soups come in). I sat up on my bunk and watched the process for some time. He offered no explanation. Finally I said, “I give up.”

“You want to know what I’m doing?”

“Yeah, I hate to think.”

“Watch.”

He drained the rest of the water out as best he could. The he yelled down into the toilet bowl, “Hey there. What you doing?” He laughed. “Somebody’s going to hear a voice coming up out of their commode.”

I laughed. “Hey. Anybody there?” he called. He made two or three more efforts to contact someone at the other end of the plumbing system and finally gave up. “Nobody’s there,” he said.

During the evening recreation I was sitting at the end of a table when a group came by and filled the seats all around. They began to play cards. I figured I was not going to be welcome and I began to gather my things together. A big guy sitting next to me motioned and said, “You’re all right”.

## **Sunday, March 26, 2000**

During the morning recreation period I sat at my table – the unofficial skinner table – and tried to write a letter. Buddha and Ron wandered over and stood close enough so that I could overhear their conversation. Buddha is a heavy-set, obviously street-wise, black who has his head shaved except for a pigtail hanging down in back.

“People who hurt children should check out,” Buddha said, “Before they get seriously hurt.”

He continued to talk in this vein for about five minutes with Ron nodding and agreeing. I pretended not to notice.

Throughout the day, wherever I went, I heard people taunting me with “skinner” and “ripper”. During lock-down times they occasionally called out of their cells. I heard “Hudson, you will die”, “Why’d you do it, Hudson?”, and “Skinner”, occasionally accompanied with loud banging. I also heard someone call George a “skinner lover”, which concerned me because I felt if too much pressure built up on him, I might lose the relatively secure situation I had in my room.

While I was in line for lunch I heard someone behind me say something about a counselor. I knew this is for my benefit. “Someone like that can’t afford to turn his back,” the person said.

Except for purposes of harassment no one ever sat near me or engaged me in conversation for fear of drawing attention to themselves.

During the afternoon lock-down I told George I didn’t know whether I could take it any more. I was thinking about asking to be placed in Protective Custody (PC) He tried to discourage this course of action. He told me that in PC “You’re in a room by yourself. You got nobody to talk to. It’s mostly skinnners”.

The more he talked the better it sounded – like that might be my briar patch. “There’s some rats there and a few punks,” he added.

“Why do the punks end up there?” I asked.

“Because they kept getting beat up because of their mouths.” As he tried to talk me into staying, George told me his philosophy of survival. “You can’t trust anyone,” he said. “I got no friends here – just acquaintances.” George apparently really did not want me to leave. I wondered about this. He had gotten from me about all that he would get and he had to put up with some flack for being my roommate. He said he didn’t want me to leave because “It’s not in your interest”. I wondered what his real reason was. He again mentioned the fact that I would be in a room by myself and wouldn’t have anyone to talk to. Suddenly it dawned on me; he likes me, and is able to talk to me.

That evening in the supper line I heard two people near me talk about a skinner who took advantage of some kids and “ruined their lives”. The person went on to say, “I hope something like that happens to him”.

In the laundry line, later, I heard one person saying to the guy beside him, “You hear about those kids who got their lives ruined?”

That night I jotted down some of the things that various people screamed out of their doors, so that I would not forget:

*“We’re going to strap you to the toilet and fuck you in the ass.”*

*“Push the fucking buzzer you piece of shit.”*

*“Ripper.”*

*“Kill yourself you fucking piece of shit.”*

*“Die, ripper, die.”*

*“I’m going to stick it in your hairy ass.”*

*“Burn skinner, burn.”*

*“Check out, Hudson.”*

*“Why’d you do it?”*

*“Little boy fucker!”*

It went on for about 45 minutes.

Then I was able to settle down and try to sleep.

## Monday, March 27, 2000

I woke at about 3:00am, and could remember several dreams. One seemed especially nice:

*I am baby sitting with a young boy of maybe six or so. He knows that I can tell stories and he asks me for one. I sit on a couch. He curls up in my lap and snuggles in close to me. It feels wonderful.*

*Then I am with a small black boy at a bus stop. We run to catch the bus. A woman sees us. She likes us. The boy goes to the back door. I call him to the front and we get on. I worry whether I have enough money for the fare. I pull out a billfold. I have money. I give the driver a five-dollar bill. I worry that he may have a wreck while he makes change and drives the bus at the same time, but he does OK.*

One of my thoughts about the dream is that I want to take my feelings about boys off the back of the bus, and bring them up to the front – where they are freely acknowledged – and become first class. My association is to the beginning act of the civil rights movement in Montgomery, Alabama, when Rosa Parks refused to accept a seat on the back of the bus. Whether I have enough money for the fare might refer to whether I have the resources to endure the degradation that is heaped on me. The price might be too great.

For some reason the dream led to my thinking about the time when I went with my Boy Scout group to Mounds State Park on Lake Michigan. A group of us climbed a sand mound and began leaping off the top. We would fall a considerable distance before landing safely on the steeply-sloped side of the mound. Then we went down to the lake. It was windy but warm. We stripped to our shorts and went swimming. Then several of us took our shorts off. It was the first time I ever went skinny dipping with others. It was wonderful. On the same camping trip I learned how to make a fire and cook hamburger casserole by wrapping it in aluminum foil and placing it in hot coals. This whole trip is one of the happiest memories I have.



Donald Moran called in the morning. Because he was a lawyer they took me to an office to call him back. One of the worst things about the first five days on the A Pod was that I had no way to contact Boo. I knew she would be worrying. I told my lawyer to let her know I was alive and surviving. He had called her already and said he would get this message to her. I was incredibly grateful to Donald for taking the trouble to make these calls.

When the call was done I talked with Bud Spellman, the case manager for the orientation unit. It was from the phone in his office that I made the call. I told Bud how things were on the unit and requested a transfer to another unit. He said it would be best to get through orientation on the A Pod. It would take about two months to get classified and another month after that to get transferred to Callum Bay. I asked about Amherst. He said that would be out of the frying pan and into the fire. He suggested that getting transferred would slow down the classification process. He pointed out the 'PC' is a classification and explained that 'Administrative Segregation' is a less restrictive classification than 'Protective Custody'.

When I returned to the A Pod it was during the morning recreation period. I sat down at my table to think about my conversation with Donald Moran and with Bud Spellman. Buddha came over, sat down at the table across from me and began giving me menacing looks. I got up and went to the drinking fountain. When I returned I sat some distance from Buddha. He got up and moved over beside me. He pretended to be holding some sort of weapon in his shirt. I went to another table. During the afternoon recreation period a person I didn't know came up to me with the pretext of talking with me about a mystery he was reading. Then he said to me, "Just stand up and do your time. Don't pay any attention to these guys. Nobody is going to hurt you". This was an unexpected and appreciated piece of kindness.

The pressure, however, continued to build. Everywhere I went people made comments. During lock-up I could hear people yelling out of their doors. Rather than leave me alone during recreation periods guys would sit near me or walk by making comments.

By the afternoon lock-down I felt that I had reached a point of emotional exhaustion. I told George that I was going to ask to be transferred and he called a guard who was going by. She came and talked with me.

"I can't take any more of this," I said. My voice broke.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"All the threats and stuff. I need to get out of here." I could barely speak without crying.

"I need to check with someone else," she said.

She left and I began writing a note to the effect that I felt my life was in danger. Within five minutes another guard came by. "We are going to have you talk with Sgt Carter," he said.

Sgt Carter was a neatly dressed and laid back man of medium build. He invited me to sit down and asked me what was happening. I began to tell him, but broke down completely, and started crying. It was probably two or three minutes before I could get control of myself.

As soon as I was able to, I told him what had been happening. He commented that people with my charges are often treated that way. He told me that it was unlikely I would be killed. Finally he said that he had no space that would be appropriate in another unit. If I insisted on being transferred I would have to be placed in segregation with the troublemakers. While I would be safe from physical attack there, he thought I would be tormented worse than on the A Pod. "Try to stay on A Pod until tomorrow," he said. "Then we'll see."

I agreed to this and returned to the unit.

During lock-down after supper I heard some people shouting and cursing at someone else – I couldn't quite catch his name. I commented on this to George.

"Yeah," he said. "When a new one comes in they start in on him."

"Why'd you do it?" someone screamed.

"Die you fucking skinner."

"Kill yourself. Do it now."

They were not screaming at me, at least for the moment. I felt relief that someone had come along to take the heat off of me. And I felt ashamed to feel relief for this reason.

**Tuesday March 28, 2000**

I was awake a good deal of the night, meditating, thinking and asking for help on how to deal with the increasing pressure that many of the men were putting me under. Obviously I wasn't going to hit anybody unless I was actually physically attacked. But what was I going to do? Finally I recalled a story I had read about Mother Theresa. She was being harassed on a regular basis by some men who did not want her working in India. Finally she confronted one of them. "Look," she said. "If you are going to kill me, do it. Otherwise leave me alone. I've got work to do." This seemed to be the right tack.

The next morning during the recreation period I sat down in my usual place. Buddha soon came by and sat down beside me. He was again pretending that he carried a concealed weapon. I doubted that he had anything as formidable as a knife, but was also sure I was no match for him physically.

I looked at the hand that was presumably toying with a weapon hidden in his clothes. "Look," I said, "if you are going to hit me or hurt me go ahead and do it. Otherwise leave me alone." I made no motion either to protect myself or to leave.

He stared at me a few moments. Then he made a gesture of appeasement – showing me the open, weaponless palm of his hand. "I'm a peaceful man," he said.

"That's good," I said.

He leaned toward me, again in a menacing way. I did not pull back. He stood up and walked around behind me. He hovered, close to my back. I didn't even look around to acknowledge his presence. Finally he left and began walking around the perimeter of the A Pod, as though he had nothing more on his mind than getting some exercise.

This was a victory for me.

I was elated.

At lunchtime I forgot to take my drink when I got my food. My place was only a couple of steps from the end of the serving line. I stood up and asked the inmate serving the drinks for my glass of juice. He, it seemed, was one of those with the self-assigned task of tormenting me.

"Oh, it's all out," he said. He jiggled the big plastic juice container by way of proof. I knew that he was lying.

"I guess I'll have to do with water I said. "I'll need a cup." He shrugged.

I took a paper cup and went to the water fountain on the other side of the A Pod. When I returned with my water I saw the juice man serving two guards.

"Oh, I see you found some," I said with a smile. "Great." I picked up an empty cup and handed it to him. The guards looked a little confused, and moved on. The juice man filled the cup almost to overflowing so as to cause me to spill it, and set it on the table. I picked it up carefully, took a sip, and returned with it to my place.

My second victory.

George has a business. He traces cartoons onto envelopes and sells them. This morning as he worked on his envelopes he repeatedly showed me two copies of the same design, with only the minutest variations, and asked me which was better. I admired his envelopes and generally said that I liked both copies. Occasionally I ventured a slight preference for one of them.

"I'm beginning to get orders," he said proudly. The simpler designs he sold for one postage stamp each, and the ones that took him longer to trace and color he sold for two stamps. I had lent him seven stamps, and wanted to establish the principle that I was interested in being paid back. "I'll tell you what," I said. "You owe me seven stamps. If you make me three envelopes, I'll call it even."

He agreed.

I thought about how dependent economic exchange is on the situation. I was bartering with a man who just a few months before was making a thousand dollars a day peddling heroin in Johnsbury.

I selected three envelopes.

George wanted me to see how he made his envelopes. He began with a cartoon he found in a newspaper or magazine. Then he would run a pencil heavily over the back of the paper. When he laid this on an envelope and traced around the cartoon it functioned like carbon paper, leaving a faint outline on the envelope. Finally he would darken the outline and color it in.

"I can't draw worth shit," he confessed.

In the afternoon George was called out. When he returned he was in a very elated frame of mind. He had been to a 'preclassification' conference. It appeared that he would be classified as medium security, which is as much as he had hoped for. The big news, however, was that he had been allowed to call his daughter and had actually been able to talk with her on the phone. He had also been able to talk with the girl's mother who promised that she and his daughter's grandparents would write to him.

I received a letter from a prisoner by the name of Jason Price today. He is in Amherst, on similar charges to me. He wrote because he found my name in the newspaper and he wanted to "extend my friendship to you". In general the letter was friendly and attempted to be supportive. It was a testimonial, similar to those one hears from sinners who come to Christ. But his conversion was facilitated by counseling. "The teenage boys that I abused were my friends. I loved them and to see the harm I caused them just tore my heart out. I could hardly live with myself. For years I believed that what I was doing was no big deal and to finally realize the harm was a major shift in my perception." He encouraged me to take advantage of the counseling that would be available to me so that I could go through the same healing process he had been through. He had a clear and simple dogma now, and a way back into the forgiving arms of the mainstream. It's a path that is not open to me. This was the only letter I had received since being in prison that I didn't answer. I didn't know what to say to him.

During the lock-down after supper I lay on my bed and listened to the screamers torment the most recent pedophile they have outed.

"I'm going to get you into a headlock and rip your head off."

"Why'd you do it?" ... etc.

All this shouting was, as usual, accompanied with growls, laughter and banging on doors. I still didn't know the new guy's name, but I caught a glimpse of him. He looked soft and gentle. He was obviously terrified. I heard from my roommate that he couldn't read or write.



It was clear to me that the systematic terrorizing of people who had been involved in any kind of sexual behavior with minors was a planned and institutionally supported aspect of the ‘pedophiles’ treatment. A few simple changes with regard to where people were placed and some modifications of administrative policy could have changed all this. It was the ‘good cop, bad cop’ strategy. This insane screaming and abuse is the artillery bombardment that preceded the arrival of the stern but sympathetic counselors with their demand for total surrender. A completely broken man could then publicly weep, confess his sins, and beg for forgiveness. At that point he would be ready to re-enter society and “begin the healing process”.

Sex abuse is Christian puritanism translated into the language of mental health. “I’m going to fuck you in your hairy ass, you piece of shit.” That is the voice of Christian puritanism as much as is the offer for forgiveness at the end of the ‘healing’ process. It’s the warp and woof of a single fabric.



Mr Morris is a big man who has been a guard here for a long time. He has a reputation for being tough. He was strict in enforcing the rules. The final recreation period ends at 9:00pm. Generally from about 9:00 to 11:00 there is some yelling out of the doors and banging around. But the serious abuse of the sex offenders generally did not begin until 10:45 or 11:00. At around 9:30 I head someone yell out of his door: “Hey Morris, you fat fuck.” Mr Morris was standing alone, down on the floor of the A Pod Rec Room. He yelled back at the owner of the anonymous voice: “No!” he corrected him. “That’s *Mister* Morris, you fat fuck.”

The screaming after bedtime was very loud and aggressive. It began in earnest after Morris – that is to say, Mr Morris – left. Some of it was directed at the new person, and some of it at me. In addition to the now familiar chants and curses, there were a few new ones.

“We’re going to get you in the morning, Hudson, and fuck you in the ass.”

“Be careful in the showers. You sucked a little kid’s dick; we’re going to have you suck a real man’s dick.”

After the screaming and banging died down I fell asleep and had two nightmares. I don’t remember the first one well – only that Boo was around and that I was going crazy. Then I dreamed I woke up.

*I am hiking with Boo along a trail. We encounter some dogs but they are friendly. It is dusk. She goes ahead of me and I lose track of her. I begin hunting for her. I grow increasingly frantic. It is dark. I am consumed with dread and horror.*

### **Wednesday, March 29, 2000**

During the recreation period in the afternoon, several guys I didn’t know came over and sat down across from me at my table. A thin man with a short beard seemed to be the spokesperson.



"How many books did you write?" he asked.

"Just one."

"I heard there were lots."

"That's rumors. How much can you trust rumors?"

Would I tell him the name of the book? I said no. What about the publisher? Again, no. He asked why I wouldn't tell. A couple of others came by and sat on either side of me.

"Any information that people get is used against me," I explained. "So much stuff gets thrown in my face at night, how can I trust anybody?"

The spokesperson looked at me, his eyes wide with innocence. "We aren't those," he said.

"How do I know that?"

A red pencil was on the table beside my regular one. I had brought it down to sharpen it for my roommate. The guy on my right said, "Hey, I see you got two pencils. I need one."

"Sorry. I need that." I moved the red pencil over in front of me and folded up the letter I was working on so they couldn't see it.

"How many here do you think are against you?" asked the spokesperson.

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe 99 percent."

"Shit," he said. "Half the people here are skinnners."

When I returned to my room at the end of the recreation period George wanted to know what had happened. I told him.

He shook his head.

"Don't trust anybody," he said. "This is prison."

During the last shift, Buddha sat down next to me and tried to read what I was writing. That night when the 11:00pm screaming began again I was asked why I didn't want anybody to know the name of my book.

## **Thursday, March 30, 2000**

In the morning I was called out to see the physician's assistant. We had no sooner exchanged greetings than he looked at me with his head cocked to one side and said, "If you don't mind my saying this, you don't look like a criminal".

I shrugged and contemplated asking whether he had studied phrenology, but decided against it.

"I don't know what to say," I said.

"Can I ask you why you are here?"

"It was a sex offense."

Curious. What does a 'criminal' look like? Someone from the lower classes, I suppose – a person with bad teeth who uses poor grammar.



A fight broke out at lunch. A man at a nearby table had a tray of food dumped on him. The guards were quick to respond and took the one who threw the tray out of the pod. When we went back to our cells I asked George whether he knew



anything about this. He shrugged. "The guy who got food dumped on him was a skinner," he said.

During the long lock-up time between supper and evening recreation George got to talking about his life. He stood in the doorway and I sat on my upper bunk – which is our usual arrangement when we talk. He went on non-stop for three hours. All the intrigues and struggles he told about are far too complex for me to recall or record. In general he focused on his three girlfriends. Interestingly, he was as attached to the families of these girls as much as he was to the girls. The most prevalent conflict related to his wish to have sex with any girl he wished whenever he wished, and the equally strong desire for love in a committed relationship. His longest relationship was to a girl who kept having sex with other guys, which would lead to their repeatedly breaking up. However, she would always come back, begging forgiveness, and he would take her back.

Interestingly he was drawn frequently to people with a religious orientation. These were, as might be expected, people from evangelical or very conservative religious communities and the gap between the reality of who he was and what they wanted him to be always proved too wide to bridge.

### **Friday, March 31, 2000**

The frequency and intensity of comments against me increased from the moment I came out for breakfast. In addition to all the previous comments I heard someone say something about the \$100 I had given to George. I knew now that he had bragged about getting this money out of me. But I felt there were also other causes for the intensification of hostility. Someone had decided to agitate against me in a big way. Everywhere I went I heard comments and threats both from people who happened to pass close to me and from the doorways of the inmates who were in their cells. As I started down the stairs on my way to the morning recreation session one of the biggest guys on the unit – one I had believed to be neutral toward me – sneered up at me. "I'm going to kill your fucking ass," he said.

I had not been sitting long at the table I used, when Buddha came over and sat down across from me. I ignored his initial comments – which on the surface were not hostile.

"I'm not going to hurt you," he said. "I want to talk for real."

"If that's for real, I'll talk with you," I said.

A guard came over to the table and sat down two seats away. Buddha explained to the guard that he was just going to talk with me – he wasn't threatening me. I signaled to the guard that it was all right and we moved a little further down the table and sat across from each other.

Buddha wanted me to know that he was an intelligent and serious person who actually was interested in Buddhism. I said I believed him but he wanted to prove it so he went back to his room and returned with four books that were in fact, serious commentaries on different aspects of Buddhist thought.

After showing me the books he told me that when he previously made those threatening gestures toward me he was just trying to scare me away, for my own good. When that didn't work, he said, he decided to talk straight with me.

"You know what I had in my hand?" he asked, with reference to the time he pretended to be threatening me with a weapon. "Just a little black stone." I recalled that George told me the same thing, which meant that Buddha had bragged about his performance.

Buddha wanted to know about the hundred dollars. I told him it was a loan – that I had not been threatened in any way by George. He didn't accept this. He said I would never see that money again and made some vague threats about teaching George a lesson.

"I don't want George hurt," I said.

"He took you for \$100."

"That was a loan. He said he wasn't going to talk about that."

"He didn't keep his promise."

I shrugged.

"Even so, I don't want him hurt. I know he's a hustler. But for whatever combination of reasons he treated me well as a roommate. He had to take some flack for that."

Buddha said that he thought I should ask to get into protective custody. He said that if I stayed on the unit I might get hurt by somebody, or set up in some way. He said that's what happened to Jaguar. Jaguar was the small man who appeared to be of Dravidian descent, who was in the first fight I witnessed on the unit. Someone hit him and he threw his coffee at him. Then, apparently, it was claimed that Jaguar had started it. Buddha said this led to Jaguar being sent to 'Max' and that it hurt his classification. What the actual outcome of this situation was, I don't know, but I don't doubt that the intent was as Buddha portrayed it.

As I listened to Buddha I weighed the factors that I needed to consider. It would be better if I were able to finish my orientation, as that would facilitate my classification process – which would enable me to move on. On the other hand, there appeared to be real danger to me – both of serious physical injury and of getting set up for difficulty with the system. If people located the notes for my journal they might interpret them in a negative way – inmates might see me as a 'rat', collecting information on them. Prison authorities might (plausibly) think that I was collecting information that could be used in an exposé. I told Buddha that I wanted to finish orientation and that toward the end of the day I would ask to be moved. Buddha asked me to tell the authorities when I talked with them that he had helped me out. I also decided that I would send my notes to Boo for safekeeping until I felt I was in a more secure situation. I was determined to have as complete a record as possible of my stay in A Pod.

It had, of course, been noticed that Buddha and I had been engaged in some sort of heavy dialog. When I returned to the Pod, George interrogated me about this. Had I told Buddha about the \$100?

"You must have mentioned that to someone yourself," I said, "because I heard about it first thing this morning."

"I said it was from my girlfriend," he said. "Just stick to that story."

I shrugged, intending by that one gesture to indicate that I couldn't undo his act of telling people about it.

"I told Buddha it was a loan," I said.

Then George disclosed the new wrinkle that had developed in the situation.

"Some guy claimed that when he came by our window and looked in he saw me on your ass," he said. He shook his head. "I ain't no faggot – not by a long shot. I can't let that go by."

"I understand."

He looked at me with a peculiar apologetic smile. "Don't get me wrong," he said. "I like you. You're a nice guy." He looked down and shrugged. "But I can't live with you anymore."

I felt he was genuinely sorry, and that he didn't want to hurt my feelings.

"I'm getting out of here before the day is over," I said.

"P.C.?"

"I'm talking to a guard this evening."

"Can't you do it sooner?"

"I want to finish orientation. They may have a session this afternoon."

"Morris is going to be on this evening. He may not let you go." He had a point there. Morris could be very obstinate. I thought about it and decided there was just too much pressure and risk in my staying, even for the rest of the afternoon. We agreed that when he went down for medication in about 15 minutes he would ask a guard to come up to speak to me.

When the guard arrived I said I'd had it, and was ready to go. He said he would talk to the officer in charge and left. About ten minutes later a guard returned and told me to pack up.

About five minutes later I left A Pod amidst hooting and jeering from the doors where people were locked up, and insulting comments from people on the floor.

I was escorted to a small office where Sgt Carter asked me to take a seat. In response to his questioning I told him what had been happening in the unit and said that I felt I was in danger of physical attack. He commented that some other high profile men with similar charges to mine were expected to arrive momentarily, and that they would probably take the heat off me. He also said that I might still face problems on any new unit. Nevertheless, he conceded I had made an effort on the A Pod and agreed to move me.

## Move To B Pod South

*Dream: I am with my younger brother, as a child. We are up on a hill. I look down over a beautiful winter scene. The sun comes out. I see a frozen lake. It reminds me of a Bruegel painting.*

Throughout my stay in the Department of Corrections facilities I often saw beautiful things in my dreams. After the horror of the first ten days I seldom had nightmares. I looked forward to going to sleep.

The new unit to which I was taken (B Pod South) was much smaller than the A Pod. B Pod South, at full capacity, contains 24 inmates as opposed to 90 on the A Pod. It is laid out in the same general pattern – small cells with two bunks apiece, arranged around a larger Rec Room with a small yard – but it was all on a smaller scale.

All the guys were out playing basketball when I arrived. I deposited my things in the specified cell and came out to the Rec Room where I made a call to Boo. Then I sat down to work on a letter. Suddenly, a glass full of water flooded down on my head, drenching the letter and other sheets of paper in front of me. My first thought was that someone had thrown urine on my head. However, the lack of odor assured me that it was only water. My second thought was, oh shit, it's going to start all over again here.

Almost at the same moment that I was showered with the water, the guys began coming in from outside recreation. A tall muscular guy I later learned was Tony asked what had happened.

"Someone threw water on me," I said.

"Did you see who it was?"

I shrugged. "I don't have any idea."

With a tone of genuine indignation, Tony said in a loud voice for the benefit of the whole unit, "It's not fair – whatever he did – to do that to an old man who can't defend himself."

I made note of the phrase 'whatever he did'. That was loaded with significance. Also, I decided that I was not above taking advantage of the status of 'old man'.

I went to another table and began to assess the damage and plan how to cope with it. People brought me paper to replace the paper that was damaged and offered me coffee. About five minutes later, a young man with two missing front teeth came up behind me and apologized for throwing water on me. This was Victor. He offered me his hand. Obviously someone had put pressure on him. I was astonished. I shook his hand and said, "That's all right".

A little later Tony came up to me and spoke in a confidential tone. "Don't worry. Whatever you are in for, they won't hassle you. Some guys have even said I was a skinner." The sequence of events surrounding my entry into the B Pod was the first hopeful thing that happened to me since my going into the courtroom on the 22nd. But I wondered whether I could trust it. Would something else come along to cause the bottom to drop out?

Later in the afternoon, I mentioned that I was cold and needed a sweatshirt. The laundry people saw to it that I had one by the time clean clothes were passed out that evening.

Things were looking up. But one obstacle in the course still remained. My roommate was a hard-ass.

I have noticed that roommates who are new to each other here waste little time feeling each other out. When the afternoon Rec period was over and we returned to our cells for lock-up, I met Burt. Medium height, stocky and surly, he lay on the bottom bunk and barely returned my greeting when I introduced myself. Before the hour was over, he had asked me what my sentence was, which I told him. He then asked what I was in for. I told him I didn't want to talk about it. He got out of his bunk and stood by the door.

"Why not?"

"Because it's nobody else's business!"

He frowned. "I guess that's right," he said. "But when a person doesn't want to talk about it, it makes me think he's probably a skinner."

I shrugged. "You can think what you want, I said. But I just don't want to talk about it." We discussed this at some length. Or to be more accurate, he told me at some length that if I wanted to survive here I needed to make up a story. This was not, of course, a new idea to me.

As supper approached, I said, "I don't think you like me very much, but if we have to be roommates, we might as well try to get along."

"That will depend a lot on why you are in here," he said.

## Baa Like a Sheep, Walk Like a Woman

Burt did not want to room with a 'skinner', and his request that we be separated was honored. On the morning of my second day in B Pod he was moved to another room. My second roommate, with whom I would share a cell for the duration of my brief stay on B Pod, was Tom. He was only in his thirties, but he was excessively weathered for his age. It was not only his bad teeth – which are common here – but his gray complexion and premature wrinkles. His dark eyebrows almost met in the middle of his forehead. He was almost never clean-shaved, but the stubble of his heavy facial hair was never allowed to grow long enough to be a proper beard.

During lock-down on the first afternoon we roomed together, Tom began telling me about his life. He pulled out photos to show me all his significant others – his ex-wife, nephews and nieces, his current girlfriend, and others. He related a long story of suspicious and socially unskilled people who were looking, usually without success, for lasting and loving relationships. Tom did better than most. He showed me letters from several women who are seeking his love, and read me a sampling of them.

Then he told me why he is currently in trouble with the prison authorities. He has refused to cooperate with his substance abuse group therapy program. In this program the participants were given an exercise in which they were asked to do such things as 'walk like a woman', 'pretend to lay an egg', and 'baa like a sheep'. Tom refused. "I'm not a sheep," he explained. He felt participation in such activities was degrading.

It was difficult to reconstruct in my mind exactly what happened between him and the group leaders and the guards. He expressed himself with more passion than clarity. At some point he refused to move when a guard asked him to, and he definitely refused to go back to the group. Participation is required to earn many of the basic privileges. He received a write-up for 'refusing to move'. He was afraid that he would be put in Max in about a week for all of this. He was hopeful, however, that his lawyer would come to his aid.

Tom liked me, and he knew that I was at risk of being attacked by some other guys in the unit. He said that I would eventually end up in the PC unit. In the meantime, he promised me that if any of the men messed with me he would defend me.

At lunch time during my third day on B Pod, I heard several of the men razzing Lewis, a tall, thin black man. Lewis had a slightly effeminate manner about him, which I suspected was the underlying reason the guys were giving him a hard way

to go. He was on room restriction for something, and I seldom saw him. Some of the guys were trying to drive him into the Protective Custody unit. Four letters have been sent under his signature, requesting that he be placed in PC. He claims these were forged letters. Speaking loudly for the benefit of some of the guys at another table, he said, with reference to the administrator who had called him out to discuss the letters, "I told her I ain't afraid to defend myself".

When we got back to our room, I asked Tom what he knew about the situation with Lewis. He says that a couple of guys who beat Lewis up were sent to an 18-month stay in the Super-Max. Some of the guys who were razzing Lewis were friends of one of the men who were sent to the Super Max. They blamed Lewis for getting their friend sent away.

Tom then told me a story about how he saw a guy being beaten up by "4 or 5 bikers" in a bar. It made him mad that so many were ganged up on one guy. When they bounced against his table and spilled his beer, that was the last straw. "You're going to buy me another beer," he told them, and beat them all up. When the owner of the bar got angry, Tom said he made the bikers promise to pay for damages in the bar room as well. Then he and the guy who was originally being beaten up sat at Tom's table drinking their beers in peace. "Nobody fucked with me after that," he concluded.

Apparently Tom had had time to think about his original promise to protect me from physical harm from other men in the unit, and he felt the need to modify the conditions under which he would come to my aid. He said if I got into a one-to-one fight, I was on my own. But if more than one guy attacked me, he would help. Realizing that such contracts were continuously and unilaterally re-negotiable, I concluded that in general it would probably be best for me to look after my own self.

Implausible stories such as the one that Tom told me about his encounter with the bikers are common. They are teaching stories that make two points:

- 1 I am a mean mother fucker.
- 2 The successful threat of, and if necessary, use of violence is the one thing that will solve problems and make you safe.

Tom taught me three games during the first few day that we shared a room together. The first one was Stratego. After we played about three games I began beating him. He lost interest in this game and taught me Casino. It took a little more effort to get onto this game, but the next night I beat him twice in a row. This really upset him. He joked that in revenge he was going to shave off my hair when I went to sleep.

The next morning, Tom taught me a dice game. This was the worst disaster of all. After practicing enough so that I could see how it worked, I beat him badly in the first game we played. He did not seem to understand the need to make some rough evaluation of probabilities, and instead threw away good scores while hoping for luck on wild chances.

After this he wanted to return to Casino. He beat me a couple of times at this game and that reduced the tension in the cell.

One day I noticed that Tom was trying to flirt a bit with Lewis, who was no longer on room restriction. Lewis pretended not to notice.

After I had been rooming with him for about a week, Tom told me that his future father-in-law owned a lobster boat, but did not know the business. He was going to have Tom teach him the lobster business, and then let him use the boat. After a couple of years Tom would need to get an assistant, and would continue in the business without his father-in-law. He asked me to be his assistant. I said I didn't know, but that was a long time from now. I was relatively sure it would never happen, but the fantasy of being out on the ocean doing mindless physical work in a socially neutral situation was not a bad one.

Tom always seemed to be saying "I don't care". He used the phrase in a number of contexts. Frequently it pertained to his purported willingness to fight anybody no matter how big they were. But he also used it to explain his unwillingness to compromise with the authorities or to pursue a rational course of action in his life.

One afternoon when he once again used this phrase I asked him what it was that he didn't care about. He told me that he couldn't see any of his kids. He has two children by his first marriage – a girl about 12 and a boy around 9. From another relationship he had a younger daughter. In both these cases the spouse separated from him and arranged to get the court to prohibit his having any contact with his children. He said he did not know why they were able to do this and I did not pursue the matter.

Tom told me about a situation where the mother of his youngest daughter made a false accusation to the effect that Tom had threatened them with a gun. He described in detail how he destroyed her case. By his description, he sounded like Perry Mason. He so impressed the judge that he told him he should take legal action against his wife for defamation of character.

The court story reminded me of the beating-up-the-bikers story. All of my roommates have told me stories that portray themselves as very powerful – almost heroic. Tom was as competent as Perry Mason. Yet somehow he still can't see his children.

When Tom came back from getting a shower wearing only his boxer shorts, I noticed that he had a tattoo in the center of his chest and commented on it. I can't recall his exact response, but it was vaguely suggestive. Later in the evening – just before I went to bed – he beat me at Casino. He was terribly excited. He made growling noises and yelled nonsense things out the door. I felt his excitement had more than one source.

One day Tom made special arrangements to call his mother who was having health problems. He returned with the news that she had breast cancer. Tom has a swelling and some soreness in his own breast, and is having it checked out. He told me that they plan to examine him with a surgical procedure sometime soon.

I recall having the following dream at about that time:

*I am sent downstairs to see someone. I find two beds there – side by side. A man wants to suck my penis, which I let him do. It feels fairly good even though I am not attracted to him. I don't want to reciprocate.*

I felt that the two beds represented the hetero and homosexual forms of sex. The dream is about the strong undercurrent of homosexual dynamics on the unit. Probably the man in the dream is Tom.



Shortly after this, Tom came back from disciplinary committee. He will be on room restriction for one week and then will be ordered into the program again. He thinks he will get into trouble again for refusing to return to the program. He speaks of getting a lawyer involved in this but I see no real movement in this direction.

"I'm not going to walk like a woman," he repeated. "I'm not one."

During morning lock up on my last day on B Pod, I wanted to sit on my bunk and think a bit about my coping strategies, but Tom was hyper. His subject matter this morning was all the things a person could use toothpaste for.

"It's a good glue," he said and demonstrated by gluing a piece of paper to the wall. He reminded me that the agent that held his home-made dice together was toothpaste. "You can use it for white-out too," he said. He pulled a letter out of the desk and showed me how you could wipe toothpaste over the writing. Sure enough, the writing disappeared. Then he squeezed all the toothpaste out of a very large, almost full tube, into the commode. It formed a rather nauseating looking white blob in the bottom of the toilet bowl – a blob that was not appreciable diminished by several flushings of the toilet.

"I can do a trick with this," he said, showing me the empty tube. He blew it up so that it looked full again. "I go to the guard and show him this and tell him I need more toothpaste. The guard says I have to use the rest of the toothpaste I have first. So I hand it to him and he sees it's empty." He laughed. "That always gets them."

## Testosterone

After supper one evening I became aware of two new people on the unit – a short, stocky, light-skinned black, and a heavy-set very big and muscular white, who looks like Li'l Abner. I wondered how this might change the dynamics in the pod, and whether either of them might be from the A Pod with fresh gasoline to throw on the fire of my harassment.

The testosterone tension soared during the evening recreation period. I noticed a great increase of male display behaviors – loud noises, rough horseplay chin-ups under the stairs, table lifts, etc.

A biography of Stone somebody, a wrestler, was showing on TV. It was a silly biography that treated all the shenanigans and absurdities of the wrestling scene as though they were real. The most striking thing to me about this biography was the contrast between the angelic beauty of the wrestler as a boy, and the gorilla-like ugliness of the man. From the physical grouping in the Rec Room, it was apparent that the unit was divided into two groups. In one group a great deal of testosterone behavior was going on, as the men showed off and vied for position. This group was in center stage. Off to one side a second group of men sat around and watched the antics of the first group with an air of boredom.

While I was watching both the wrestling biography and the antics of the first group, a fight broke out. It was between one of the weakest members of the group and Dumont. They threw a few punches and then ended up wrestling on one of the tables. There were not many guards in the Bubble – and none watching. Finally one of the guards looked through the window and hollered "break it up".



The fight stopped. The guard called the two guys out, and apparently they told him that it was just horseplay. No further action was taken.

Later I discussed this with Tom. He told me that he had returned to his cell because of the tension on the unit. He said he didn't care any more. He used to care, but that, he said, had changed in A Pod. "Let them kill each other." But he added that if anybody bothered Terry or me, he would get into it.

I woke at 1:30am and was awake for a couple of hours thinking about the fight. I tried to get clear in my mind about how much risk I am willing to accept in order to avoid being placed in Protective Custody, and thought about different ways of handling threats of violence.



The next day, Alan challenged one of the new men, Edgar, to a fight while Edgar was playing cards. Alan accused Edgar of acting like a tough guy. Edgar is heavy-set but walks with a limp. He ignored Alan and went on playing cards.



One day, not long after I came to B Pod South, Alan, who is clearly the alpha male in the pod, fell in with me while I was walking around in the unit for exercise. He told me that he had sent away to the address I had given him for Nolo Press, requesting a brochure. He told me a little bit about his legal concerns as we walked back and forth. He was being penalized for refusing to participate in the 'therapeutic community' program, both by a reduction from five to two days a month good time, and by some additional punishments on his probation. He felt that was double jeopardy. Possibly so, but I did not think he would be successful with his case. Still, I listened sympathetically. I felt that if I remained in his good graces I was less likely to be harassed on the unit.

## Leaving B Pod South

One morning after I had been on B Pod South for less than two weeks, several people moved out and some new ones moved in. Changes are always a source of anxiety. In this case my anxiety, as it turned out, was justified. One of the guys who came into the unit recognized me from the A Pod. He pointed at me and said, "I know who you are."

I shrugged.

"I thought you were in PC," he said. I shook my head.

"No, I've been in the general population for the last two weeks."

"What did you think of that joke we did on you and George?" he asked.

I didn't recognize this person, but suspect he had something to do with starting the rumor that George was seen 'on top of me'. In any case it was clear from his mocking attitude that he had been one of the people who had tormented me on A Pod.

His name, I learned, was Carl. He appeared to be about 20 years old. He was only average size, and I felt that if it came to a physical altercation with him, I could probably hold my own. My fear, of course, was that he might have the capacity to turn this unit into a microcosm of the A Pod.

Carl then noticed Terry. Terry was the smallest person on B Pod south, and was one of the guys who had been singled out for torment in the A Pod.

"Hey Terry," Carl said. "You were going to beat me up on A Pod, remember?" Terry tried to ignore him. But Carl continued to needle him. I gathered from this that Carl had been one of the main instigators with Terry as well as with me on the A Pod. And that he had brought Terry to the point of losing control at least to some degree.

After lunch Carl fell in with the alpha males and seemed to blend with them fairly easily. I think he may have already known some of them. Contact between Carl and either Terry or me was limited, but I was confident that Carl was doing everything he could to stir things up. The frequent raucous laughter, the male displays of strength, and the general increase in decibel level in the unit gave evidence of the increasing tension.

After supper, no guard came to the unit for an extended period of time, and the provocative talk began again. "Hey, Hudson, why'd you do it?" and "I'm going to smash him in the face". Whether the last comment was directed to Terry or to me wasn't clear. From the coldness and the vaguely threatening nature of the behavior of the others it was clear that Carl's agitation was successful. For example, Huey came and stood well within my social space and one of his friends made a gesture that he should not do something then. Perhaps his friend could see the guards in the Bubble from where he stood.

I don't recall the specific comment that Carl made, that finally caused me to respond. I think it was something about George and me. I went up to Carl and said "Why are you spreading all this shit about me around here? All you know is rumors and bullshit." He said something that was intended to be threatening – I don't recall what. I said, "I got along here fine for two weeks until you came along". He threw back his shoulders.

"You want to do something about it," he asked.

"You don't know shit about me," I said and walked off. I deliberately did not go back to my room but sat down at one of the tables. After he didn't pursue things any further for about a half hour, I finally did return to my room in order to let things calm down.

The tension was taking its toll on Tom. He hit his fist into his hand. "I'm going to deck someone," he kept saying. Then he told me a couple of his somewhat inflated teaching stories about how he hit people who threatened him – a guy with 'num-chucks' and his seven-foot-tall brother this time – and they never bothered him again. His actual advice to me, however, was to stay in my room until things calmed down. We tried playing cards for a while.

While I was in the room I discovered that someone had thrown salad dressing on the back of my sweatshirt. I told Tom I needed to think for a minute and climbed up on my bunk. I wasn't able to do much thinking, however, because Tom was so wound up that he talked non-stop about any and everything.

I heard shouts of 'hit him,' and a lot of commotion out in the Rec Room. They were threatening Terry – trying to get Carl to hit him, as far as I could tell. When I went to the door to get a better look, Tom told me to get back and mind my own business.

I realized that there was, in fact, nothing I could do for Terry if I did go out there – that my presence would probably just rile things up. I could see that Terry was not hurt – though he certainly looked frightened. But he still had the option of retreating to his room.

Finally a guard came into the unit and things settled down. I retreated to my bunk again to assess the situation. I thought seriously about hitting Carl in the mouth at my next opportunity. I tried to gain a more adequate understanding of the situation, but I was unable to get quiet inside myself.

Several considerations ran through my mind:

- 1 Carl had the unit with him – it was not simply a matter of refusing to back down from him.
- 2 I was angry enough to feel some risk of losing control and actually hitting Carl. What would have come of that, I had no idea. I doubt, however, that I would have walked off into the sunset and that 'nobody would ever fuck with me again'. And it would probably have blocked my getting to the PC unit, and would have created a problem with my classification.
- 3 I recalled that Buddha said that a lot of times they would set people up – would want them to react, and get into trouble. Also I recalled that the mental health worker told me that if you tried to defend yourself when someone attacked you, both people got into trouble unless a guard actually saw the person hit first. Again, this could lead both to lock-up and to my losing the chance to get the minimum security classification that I wanted, in addition to any physical injuries I might sustain.
- 4 The extreme speed with which the whole unit turned on Terry showed me how insecure any adjustment in the general population would be. They would gang up on me just as they had with Terry. If somehow I pulled through this crisis it would only be a matter of time before someone else would arrive from the A Pod with fresh gasoline for the flames.

For a variety of reasons, I felt that if I could get to Callum Bay I could survive. But I had no future here in the general population at the orientation unit. And I wasn't willing to live through another ten days – much less six or seven weeks – of the conditions similar to those I faced in the A Pod.

With the guard in the unit it was quiet. I went out and found Terry. It occurred to me that he might be intimidated from trying to get out of this unit because it was necessary to request a transfer in writing. I offered to help him write a statement that would get him into PC if he wanted. He declined the offer.

At lock-down time I told the guard I wanted to talk with him. After everybody else was locked in, he returned. I told him I felt threatened and wanted to be transferred to PC. He said to put it in writing.

My note was as follows:

*To whom it may concern:*

*For over two weeks I have managed to live on this unit (B Pod) without incident. I was hoping that this would continue. However, this afternoon the name-calling and threats of bodily harm, that were common on the A Pod, started up again. I believe that whatever strategies I use to get along I will be physically injured, perhaps seriously, if I am allowed to remain on this unit.*

As soon as the morning officer, a man named Doug, came by, I asked about the status of my request to be transferred. He knew nothing about this but said he would check it out. After breakfast he returned and had me write out the request again. He said they could find no record of my previous request. I wrote it out again. Shortly he returned, this time with the information that nothing could be done unless I named names. I told him I could not do this.

He shrugged. "I understand," he said. "But that's what I was told."

I requested an interview with the officer in charge, a Sgt Kelly. Just before the morning Rec time, Doug returned with the message that I couldn't see Sgt Kelly. They needed names. Again I refused to give them.

During the morning break I called my lawyer who said he wasn't sure what he could do, but he said he would call around.

Shortly before lunch the guard came in and told me to pack up. I was going the B Pod North. He told me to hurry so we could get out before lunch.

## Move to PC

*Dream (the night before being transferred to PC): I am with a younger person taking a tour of the 'Devil's Theater'. I understand 'devil' to be synonymous with 'Hitler' or 'Nazi'. We come to a room full of wonderful pianos. I hear someone playing on one. The sound is exquisite. We enter an auditorium which is an architectural marvel and full of eloquent furnishings. Someone has defended the theater against accusations of moral depravity. But then we come to the cafeteria. I notice there is no Jewish food. "But where is the Kosher food," I say loudly, being deliberately provocative. The person with me becomes anxious. Such insolence is likely to be punished. Then we are outside, walking. A black kid – maybe a teenager – joins us. I am very fond of him and put my arm around his shoulder. Then with a lot of emotion and some tears I say how much I want to find a world where we don't choose up sides and fight about things like religion, race, sexual orientation, nationality, etc.*

The 'devil's theater' is an image of American society. Sometimes in my waking life I refer to this country, as it is now governed, as the 'Fourth Reich'. It is showy, and one cannot deny its accomplishments and even its beauty. But when it gets down to feeding people it is discriminatory. I am one of the Jews that this society is persecuting. I long for a world in which conflict and violence over superficial and false distinctions will end.

Later that night I have another dream.

*A boy comes and sits on my outstretched legs, facing me. We love each other and are very happy.*

A female guard escorted me to my new unit, and to room six. The physical structure of this unit turned out to be identical with B Pod South. Room Six was occupied by Charlie, who was a diabetic with a colostomy. "He usually has this room to himself," the guard explained. She gave me an apologetic smile. "The smell is a little unpleasant. But you'll only be there for a day or two."

I smiled back. "It will be all right," I said.

Lunch was being served, so I set my bedding and the paper bag containing all my prison belongings down beside the door and ran to get my tray.

Where a person sits for meals is, in prison, as important as the pew one occupies in church. When entering a new pod I make a point of being at the end of the line so I can see what seats are left when everybody else is sitting. A number of people did not use any of the three tables, but arranged themselves in the chairs set up for watching TV. One of the tables had only two people sitting at it. I chose this table. "Somebody usually sits there," one of the two sitting at this table told me, as I placed my tray down.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I said, scooting over to an end seat. I found myself sitting across from a very obese man with several days growth of beard.

"Hi," I said. "What's your name?" He looked at me with dull eyes and continued to eat very slowly. God, what do they have this guy on? I wondered. "I'm John," I said.

"I'm Leon."

Without any further conversation, we ate lunch.

As people were finishing the meal I noticed a young man of slight build walking from one person to another with an odd stilted gait. He held his thumbs in the front of his pants and when he came to one of the other inmates he pulled the elastic band of his pants out. "You want to see Yoda?" he asked in a shrill soprano voice.

"Go away, Timmy," the inmate said.

Timmy approached a second inmate and repeated the performance.

I began to have second thoughts about my decision to get transferred here.

After lunch I moved into room six. Charlie had a gruff manner, but when I indicated a desire to be accommodating, he softened up. The room did smell and the floor looked decidedly dirty. But the worst feature of the room was the sink. Pooled in the bottom of this sink was what appeared to be the residue of his colostomy bag, which was drying on the narrow ledge. Several blobs of yellowish-green phlegm floated in the shallow brown water. As it turned out, the phlegm partially clogged the sink so that it was very slow to drain whenever any water went into it.

Charlie told me that it was recommended that he go to the infirmary because he was having new health problems. One of his legs was amputated and the other one was red and crusty. He said they were talking about removing this leg as well. An artificial leg leaned against the sink. Charlie told me that this cost \$8,000 but that he never used it because the leg he still had was not strong enough to walk on.

"I've spent a huge amount of time in hospitals over the last years," he told me. The biggest problem was when he got gangrene in his lower abdomen. "Let me show you something," he said. He pulled his pants leg up and showed me his stump. By pressing two parts of it together in a certain way he produced the rough appearance of someone's rear end. "I've got two butts," he said, and laughed.

I decided that the best way to survive in this situation was to spend as little time as possible in Charlie's room.



Timmy will get discharged tomorrow. While we were in line for supper on my first night there, the guard on duty made an effort to be friendly to him. "Where are you going, Timmy, when you get out?" he asked.

"To a liquor store," Timmy answered without hesitation.

At mail time I received a letter from my first roommate, George. It was chatty and friendly. Toward the end of the letter he promised that the 'loan' would be repaid. I knew it wouldn't, of course. I could accept that. But what I couldn't quite forgive was his telling the other men in A Pod about the arrangement between us. I can imagine how they laughed. So I set the letter aside and made no effort to answer it.

When things settled down after supper, I noticed that Albert, who had just taken a shower, was walking around the unit without a shirt. He is tall and thin, with the shape of an elongated pear. He sat down at one of the tables. Jim, a friendly and laid-back middle-aged man, stood behind him and combed out Albert's long hair, and then braided it.

I wandered around the main room during the afternoon Rec period, surveying my new environment. As I looked through the materials arranged on the book and magazine shelf I noticed a book by Emily Post. It was *'Entertaining: Answers to the Most Often Asked Questions About Entertaining at Home and in Business'*.

Right after lunch on my second day in the Protective Custody Unit, they called for Timmy. He is being released today. As he prepared to leave, several people shook his hand and at least one gave him a hug. Throughout the rest of the day various people repeated some of the things he had frequently said. "You want to see something you never saw before" (this was said with his thumbs down the front to his pants ready to pull them open. "Jeeyum, I need you." Etc. There was an effort to imitate his piercing soprano voice. It appeared that he would be missed, at least for a little while.

Throughout the first couple of days on the unit, people involved me in conversation, offered me coffee, or asked me to play checkers with them. It was not heaven I realized. There was some sort of conflict going on. A man confronted Charlie and accused him of always "trying to get things started". It related to an intrigue that I know nothing about, as of yet. But the problem, whatever it was, was getting addressed verbally. No one was threatening to smash anybody's face in.

Within the first week of my being transferred to the PC unit I had an interesting conversation with a guard. He told me that before he came to work in this prison system, he had been a guard for several years in New York. I asked him whether

there were a lot of differences between here and New York.

"This place is sick," he said. He explained that in New York the prison population is organized into groups – Black Muslims, Mafia, Arab terrorists, and some others. In general people leave each other alone there. He saw none of the tormenting of 'skinners' that occurs here – especially on A Pod.

"Why do they permit it?" I asked.

He said he didn't know, but that they could stop it if they wanted to. He went on to point out that when people fight in NY it is generally with weapons. The one way you could get hurt was to hassle someone in one of their gangs or groups. He said they would give you one warning. Then they would hurt you seriously.

Not long after being admitted to the Protective Custody unit I had the following dream:

*I am working in Hitler's institution. I am a spy. I am doing a cleaning job. A man hassles me about something and I talk back to him. Then I see him marching with Hitler and I realize how dangerous he is. I understand that I must keep a low profile – not call attention to myself. The assistant to Hitler has some rugs. They look like good oriental rugs to me – similar to the ones in my father-in-law's shop. He throws them in a pile for me to clean. I tell him that they are his rugs. He thinks they are not good enough for him, and he doesn't want them.*

My interpretation was as follows: Hitler's institution = prison, but also society as a prison. The dream seems to be cautionary.

Last night I had trouble getting to sleep. In part this was because I felt that society could, and very well might, come up with techniques that are even more intrusive and damaging to human reality than they presently employ – drugs, surgery and more aggressive brain-washing techniques come to mind. All this would be called 'therapy' or 'treatment' and would be justified as a benign and necessary means of controlling dangerous predators. The spirit of Hitler thrives in the mental health establishment because it has been co-opted by law enforcement and is dominated by the morality of the religious right. However difficult my life may be in some respects, I still have a degree of inner freedom; my thoughts and feelings are my own. That inner integrity and freedom is the prime target of the new 'mental health' establishment.

I'm afraid that the significance of the rugs eludes me.

## Wheelchair Charlie and His Loves

One day when a group of us were sitting around one of the two metal picnic tables on the unit, Leon accidentally brushed up against Charlie. 'Wheelchair Charlie', as he was known as on the unit, said, "Don't touch me."

"I didn't," Leon retorted.

"You were trying to cop a feel," Charlie said. And then added, "Do that again, sweetheart."

Leon touched him on purpose, and beamed. This was the first time I had ever seen him smile.



It was a joke, of course. But I came to realize that there might be something more to it. A few days later I was again sitting at the table with Charlie, Leon and Joseph. The four of us frequently sat together at this table. About five minutes earlier, the guard, Donna, had called Leon aside to talk with him. Leon was upset. Someone had told her he wasn't taking his showers – which apparently had been an issue previously with him. Leon is significantly overweight and I'm sure he would have a tendency to have body odor in the best of circumstances. I personally had not noticed a problem, however.

Leon was obviously feeling humiliated, and he asked us if we knew who had complained to Donna. Charlie frowned and looked down.

"It might have been anybody," he said. "But you do smell like shit. There is no excuse for you." Leon protested that he was taking showers regularly now. I wondered whether he might have just had some gas. In any case, Charlie continued to berate him for body odor. The irony was, of course, that Charlie himself is the most serious source of bad odors on the unit and is often the recipient of some pretty unpleasant comments because of this. I found myself quite irritated with Charlie. I recalled how he would continually put down Brian at meals – constantly saying how he was retarded and ignorant. But I bit my tongue for the moment.

Leon was quite dejected. After Charlie attacked him Leon remained at the table, but his eyes were dull and his head drooped on his chest. Charlie said, "What's the matter with you? Can't you even hold your head up?"

I could not restrain myself any longer. "I think maybe it's because of how you just put him down a couple of minutes ago," I said.

Charlie glared at me. "You need to mind your own business," he said.

I shook my head. "It's not OK to put people down like that," I said.

"You don't know anything about it," Charlie said. "When he gets out he may come to live with me. If he does and he smells like shit, I'm going to throw him out."

This was new information to me. That was when I realized that there was more to this relationship than I had realized up to that point. I tried then to soften my criticism. "If you really do need to confront someone about something, you can do it in a nice way," I said.

A few more words were exchanged and we fell silent. I did want to continue to be on friendly terms with Charlie and after a few minutes I tried to smooth things over. He, however, was hurt. He wanted nothing to do with me. Several times later in the day I made overtures to him – offered him food that I did not want, or said something friendly. But he seemed determined to be in a state of not talking with me. In some ways this was easier for me. Charlie was so touchy that I always felt that I was walking on eggs around him. Also he was continuously trying to drag me into conflicts he was having with others. Still, I had hoped to remain on friendly terms with him.

In his own way, Leon had physical problems that were as serious as those that Charlie had. He also was overweight and he wheezed and panted from the exertion of going to get his tray. In addition, he appeared to be drugged almost into oblivion. He slept most of the time and hardly seemed able to talk. I remember Leon standing near me in the compartment between the hall and the pods one day. His juice tipped over, drenching the rest of his food and splattering on the floor.



He wasn't even moving when this happened, nor did anybody bump into him. He just didn't manage to hold his tray level. He went out and got a new tray of food. When he came back and set the tray at his place the juice tipped again and spilled all over the table.

I tried to visualize how Charlie and Leon would actually get along together if they tried to share an apartment. It seemed to me that their physical problems would likely be the source of a fair bit of conflict, and that they would not have the skills to sort problems out in a constructive manner. Yet despite his harshness toward him, Charlie did seem to harbor some genuine and tender feelings for Leon. Perhaps they would need a bit of marriage counseling, but I was sure I did not want to be the one to provide it. I resolved that in the future, if they were having a quarrel, I would indeed stay out of it.



A few days later, when we were back on speaking terms, Charlie pulled his wheelchair up to the table where I was sitting. He had mentioned an interest in animals, so I asked him if he had any pets. In response he told me about his favorite dog, Princess.

Princess was a mixed breed dog who weighed about 60 pounds. Charlie was about 30 years old when he got Princess, and for the next fourteen years, they were as close as any two lovers. He told me that one day when he went out to get on his motorcycle, he found Princess sitting on it. The dog jumped down as Charlie got on, but then jumped back up. So Charlie experimented riding with the dog on the cycle with him. He told me that after he glued some rubber over the gas tank to give Princess more traction, she was able to go everywhere with him. He recalled one time when he was tearing down the highway at about 70 miles and hour, and Princess turned around to face him. She licked his face, and then turned back around to face the front.

"That was my companion," he said.

Another time he was driving through a town and happened to drive by a woman with a number of kids in the back seat. She laughed and said, "Look, that man's got a dog on his motorcycle."

Charlie drove around the block and came up beside the car with the woman and her kids in it. He told me that he loved the attention people gave him and Princess when they rode around together on his cycle, but could not bear it if he felt people were laughing at him. So he pointed to the woman and to the kids in the back seat of the car, and laughed. "Look," he said, "there's a woman with kids in her car."



Charlie was sensitive to any put-downs, real or imagined, and in prison there were a lot of real ones. Perhaps the most painful humiliation I ever saw him suffer occurred while we were eating supper. Doug, who was a rather aggressive younger man, was sitting at another table. For some reason he began making comments and

noises to ridicule Charlie. Charlie told him to shut up. This altercation escalated to the point that Charlie wheeled his chair back, clearly with the intent of going over to attack Doug, who was sitting at another table.

The guard, a woman by the name of Myrna, grabbed Charlie by the back of his t-shirt and in this way prevented him from continuing. He asked her to let loose of him.

"I can't," she said. "I'm preventing you from assaulting someone." Myrna's attitude was cheerful, as though the whole thing were a joke. The other men in the unit began making silly noises and guffawing.

"You are making a laughing stock of me," Charlie said to Myrna, but she still refused to let loose. Finally Charlie stopped trying to pull away, and briefly things began to settle down. Myrna even said something to the other men who were still making howling noises and guffawing to ridicule Charlie.

It became quiet. Then Myrna made a loud 'Hee-Haw'. I think this is the noise that they make on *The Beverly Hillbillies*. If I could translate my understanding of this rather confusing and ambiguous communication, I think it was something to the effect of 'wasn't that a hell of a scene?'. Everybody started laughing again.

I threw my fork on the plate, saying "It's not a joke". The fork fell off onto the floor. I picked it up and cleaned up the little bit of food that ended up on the floor. I'm not sure if people heard me at the other tables, or whether Myrna heard me. The unit did not get quiet. I looked at my supper and didn't feel like eating. "I guess I'm not hungry," I said. I took the tray of food to the place where we return them, emptied it into the garbage, threw the tray into the dish pan provided for that purpose and returned to my cell with an apple and a carton of milk to consume later.

From my cell I noticed Myrna talking with Charlie – by all appearances in a serious manner. Finally, as they finished supper I saw my roommate, Joseph, opening Charlie's door to let him into the room.

"I'm still going to get that bastard," I heard Charlie say.

Name-calling and put-downs are a way of life in prison. If one is especially sensitive to them, and responds in a strong but not especially dangerous manner, this serves as a source of amusement for some of the prisoners.

I recall Charlie telling me one morning how much he hated people calling him 'shit-bag'. He feels his situation could hardly be worse. It seemed that way to me. I'm inclined to think I would rather die quickly than deal with his slow death. He compared himself to Job. He felt that his suffering, like Job's, was a sign that God loved him. Some day, he told me, "it will be better". Yet he claims not to believe in a life after death. Where then, I wondered, will it be better?

On another occasion, as we were on our way to breakfast, Charlie was one of the first men to crowd into the holding area between the unit and the hall. Several people are ahead of me, but they seem slow to move ahead. I didn't want it to appear that I was crowding ahead of my place in line so I gestured a few of them to go on ahead of me. They gestured back to me to go ahead, which I did. Doug laughed. "See," he said. "Nobody wants to get close to him." He was referring to Charlie.

When we were back at the tables in the unit, Charlie said, very loudly, "He's a sick mother fucker". It's clear that he heard Doug's comment about people not wanting to get into the holding area with him.



I was sitting around the table with Kenneth, Lee, Brian and Jim. They were talking about seeing someone (I didn't catch who) rubbing Charlie's shoulders:

Lee: I would have got the CO and said, what do you call this?

Kenneth: Foreplay. That's what I'd call it.

Lee: I heard Charlie is a faggot.

Kenneth: He is. He told me that while we were in the infirmary together.

Kenneth then went on to relate what, presumably, Charlie told him. According to Kenneth, Charlie was staying with a family that had a 14-year-old son. Once, the son came in while Charlie was sitting on the washing machine. The son asked him what he was doing.

"It feels good," Charlie told him. "You want to know what else feels good?"

At this point, Kenneth said, Charlie gave the boy a blow-job, and this began a sexual relationship between the two that lasted a couple of years. For this, Charlie was sent to prison for 10 years. The washing machine incident seemed funny to the men, and they discussed how they might use this information to humiliate Charlie. They thought that they might start calling him 'Maytag Man'. The group then went on to talk about Charlie's health problems and his colostomy. The gist of their talk was that the severity of his problem was his own fault, for not keeping clean.

I was certain that two of the other men who were sitting with us were in for sex offenses with minors. I was fairly sure the other two were in for related matters. How did they justify this character assassination for something they also did? With Brian it may have been that the minors with whom he became involved were girls. The real crime here seems to be male homosexuality. All other crimes are forgivable.



Charlie rolled up to me one afternoon during Rec and told me he had a plan for a new business. He said that he would empty the contents of his colostomy bags into ice cube trays, and make poopsickles.

But he also had something more serious he wanted to talk about: astronomy. He wanted to tell me how incomprehensible it is that time and space should go on forever. I shared with him how the same issue had bothered me while I was growing up. This led to some thoughts about God – as the infinite in relation to the finite. I talked with him about the Christian myth of Christ as 'fully human and yet fully divine', and compared this with the Hindu idea of Atman and Brahman being one. I suggested that we could still find in these ideas an interesting way of understanding God's relationship to individual creatures. I think Charlie had the capacity to understand this, but he cut me off and went off on a tangent of his own. I think the idea of learning anything from another person is experienced by him as a humiliation.



Both Ben and Leon, who share the table with me, are significantly overweight, and they breathe heavily as though they have emphysema. As he eats, Leon sounds like he is having sex with his breakfast.

One morning, after I returned my breakfast tray, Jeff signaled me to come over to where he was sitting. Happy to distance myself from the somewhat embarrassing sounds of breakfast sex, I joined him at the chairs set up for TV viewing. He wondered whether I would like him to make an envelope for me. He said he had nothing he was doing right now. When I offered to give him something in return he said, "No, you're too good a friend".

Then Charlie called me over to the door of his room. He wanted to show me some of his drawings. They were abstract designs that generally were based on circles. They were symmetrical but the various sections of his design repeated each other with variations. He pointed out that many of the variations are reversals or opposites of the other parts. I told him that Carl Jung would interpret the mandalas as symbols of wholeness, and that his drawings might suggest an effort to integrate opposites in his make-up into a coherent whole. He liked this interpretation and said that all his life he was troubled with uncertainty and indecision because of the opposites in his personality.

During the outside Rec I heard one of the men complaining about people who accuse other people of being queer.

"If they teased me like that," he said, "I'd smack them." So much of the tense and aggressive talk, the razzing and the jokes orbit around this anxiety.

I came over to Charlie who, as usual, was ensconced in the doorway. I mentioned to him that in ancient Greece it was the norm for men to be bisexual.

"I know that," he said.

"It still is."

"They have a more open attitude toward it than we do," I said.

He nodded.

"What do you make of that?" I asked. "Is there any way of saying that one culture is right and another wrong? Or is it just anything a particular culture thinks?"

He looked down. He appeared to be a little irritated.

"I don't know," he said.

I felt that he was trying to dismiss the question. "It makes a difference in how one thinks about this," I said.

He continued looking down, and made no comment. But I think he had taken in what I said.

"One more thing," I said.

He nodded. He was not turning me off.

"Do you consider yourself a Christian?"

"I don't know," he said. "There are good and bad things about every religion. There are many roads to the city."

"That's what I think too," I said.

I felt I had pushed as much as I should for the moment and went off the do my exercises. But I knew now that God was one of his loves. One name he gave to his god is 'the City'. When I returned a bit later to where Charlie was sitting, he mentioned a dream he had been having over and over.

“What dream is that?” I asked.  
 “I dream I am running,” he said.  
 I glanced at his amputated leg and nodded. “I see.”  
 “I don’t think that it’s because of a wish,” he said.  
 I shrugged. “You dream it a lot of times?”  
 “I think it’s just because I can’t,” he said.  
 “That sounds right to me,” I said.  
 “It will never happen,” he said.  
 “You can’t be sure,” I said.

I had in mind a comment Kübler-Ross made to the effect that people regain their wholeness after they die.

I don’t know whether I believe this but I wished to hold it out as an image of hope. Charlie understood me to mean that if he tried hard enough he would be able to get up and run. This was the farthest thing from my mind. I figured that he would be lucky not to have his other leg amputated soon. He raved a bit about people who say they know people who are as bad off as he is, but are still able to walk around and take a shower every day. I knew that Jeff had said this to him. I said that was not what I meant. Somewhat lamely I added, “Nobody knows what happens after we die”. I was wishing that I had never tried to take the conversation in this direction.



A couple of months after leaving the PC unit, I learned that Wheelchair Charlie had been released to his home, and that shortly after that he had died. I never found out whether Leon ever moved in with him. But I was glad that Charlie had not died in prison.

## Confessions of a Checkers Punk

One day during my first week on the PC, unit I lost two games of checkers – to Charlie and to Jim. It depressed me. I decided I must really be rather stupid, and that all my goals to understand things more deeply through journal writing and ‘holistic inquiry’ were vain to the point of being ridiculous. “How can someone with a mediocre mind like mine expect to make any contribution to the self-understanding of humanity?” I asked myself.

In my self-image I am preoccupied with the issue of intelligence. On the one hand I have a profound sense of being stupid. At the same time I have inflated images of myself as having some degree of genius. I suppose I could reconcile these images in the idea of the ‘idiot savant’. But I would rather understand my feeling about this better, with two aims in mind:

- 1 To assess my capabilities objectively so that I might plan my life objectives more realistically.
- 2 To free myself from the obvious identifications I have with both negative and inflated images of myself.

The ideal, in my mind, would be to accept my intellectual abilities and limitations with no more pride nor shame than I would have in relation to the color of my eyes or my age. If I have a few people who love me, and whom I love, and some useful work in the world, it should make no difference whether I am more or less intelligent than somebody else. But in my emotional center I do not realize this idea. Far from it.

So I decided to become a checkers punk. A punk is a person who, within his little sphere of reality, presents himself as 'tough'. He may, for example, be a weight-lifter with fairly sizable biceps who is able to intimidate the less physically robust individuals in his environment.

It wasn't that difficult to become a checkers punk. While I practiced checkers, I observed why people lost or won at the game. Then I read the list of suggestions on the back of the checkers board that explained to beginners how they might improve their play. These few suggestions would not have sufficed to make me a checkers punk in a world of real checkers players, but here on the PC pod, it was sufficient. You need not be able to beat the heavyweight champion of the world in order to be a successful punk in a small pond. Soon I was unbeatable. I would still lose occasionally, due either to the unforeseen consequences of some move in the complex early part of the game, or when my attention wandered and I made a blunder. One of my discoveries was that being able to control my attention was at least as important as the capacity to see complex geometrical relationships. Generally speaking, after I read the few guidelines on the back of the checker board, if my attention did not wander, I did not lose.

"He's gotten better," Charlie said. "He can't be beaten."

So the pendulum of self-identity swung from 'I am stupid' to 'I am a genius.' I was no closer to my goal of non-identification with my self-image as either stupid or brilliant, but it was far more gratifying to be out there on the self-aggrandizement end of the swing.



I asked myself why it is so difficult to achieve anything resembling a state of non-identification with whether I am intelligent.

Why do I care?

First, I was brought up in a family where a great deal of emphasis was given to having a 'good mind'. When my mother used to lament about the damage my older brother had done to himself with alcohol and drugs, she talked about what he did to his mind – to his exceptional intelligence. The message, at least to me, was that to be worthy of esteem, and perhaps even love, one must have a 'good mind'.

Second, I feel myself to be at odds with society with regard to a very large number of basic values, and I feel that it requires intelligence to defend myself. There is some objective truth in this. Intelligence does have practical value in coping with complex situations.

Third, some of the life goals I have set for myself require a substantial degree of intelligence. Again, there may be some truth in this. But here the proof of the pudding is in the eating. If in fact I am able to analyze the basic ideas and

attitudes upon which our society is built, and criticize these ideas in a way that is convincing because of the evidence and arguments I bring forth, then I have enough intelligence to do what I want to do. This is true whether I have an IQ of 90, or 115, or 180 (whatever an IQ actually is). I am able to do this. If I have a fairly ordinary intelligence and am able to do it just because I work very hard at it – so much the better. It suggests that the average person has a good capacity for self-reflection and for evaluating the values that underpin their social groups.

A fourth reason undoubtedly plays a part in my preoccupation. Being seen as intelligent is perhaps the last shred of a positive social identity I have left. However much I may feel that this is a form of vanity, it is hard to let loose of it.

In my clearer states I think that there are different kinds of intelligence, and that I have an odd constellation of abilities. Objectively speaking, I do have clear weaknesses. My memory for dates, names, vocabulary words, random facts, etc, is at best, average. My ability for remembering proper names is rather poor. Whatever is required for spelling is even worse. The memory banks in my mind won't supply me with information to which I should obviously have access. Why? A psychodynamic explanation is possible in some instances, but in other cases my poor capacity for recalling information does not seem to be associated with any obvious cause for anxiety. Brain-hand coordination is average at best. On the other hand, I have an exceptional capacity for logical analysis and understanding any kind of theory. This, I think, is an objective analysis, based on my accomplishments.

I wonder whether some sort of dissociative phenomenon had something to do with my early school failure. I know that I did 'space out' a lot. But I did fine in the neighborhood where there would have been much stimuli. So probably my problem with school was simply that I had great difficulty making myself pay attention to anything that was not of intrinsic interest to me. In any case, even at my best I don't have a mind like Noam Chomsky's or Jacob Needleman's. And I think the tasks I have set for myself may require that kind of mind. In all this I simply have to operate on the faith that I do, in fact, have whatever abilities are required to carry out what I am truly called to do.



One evening I played a game of checkers with Brian. I played very incompetently. The other people in the unit were kibitzing, and I couldn't seem to focus on the checkers or see the patterns on the board. The game came to a draw because of a last-minute blunder by Brian. He should have beaten me. I was irritated with the kibitzers (Jim and Dana) and humiliated with the loss. Maybe I really am stupid, I thought. Once again I found myself in the clutches of spiritually base thoughts: "I have been humiliated. I must redeem myself. Who says it's OK to be intellectually slow?"

So when morning came I found Brian and offered, in a friendly way, to play some checkers. I annihilated him. Then, like a lion hunting for weaker buffaloes that might have strayed from the protection of the herd, I stalked checkers games. One after another I annihilated all the checkers players in the unit. I gloried especially in defeating Jim, who had been one of the kibitzers. And finally, I returned to Brian

and annihilated him again, more thoroughly than the first time. On the checker board all my egalitarian, bonobo ideals were set aside, and I became a chimpanzee. In this domain I was the the alpha male.

Suppose I ran into someone who really did know how to play checkers? I would, of course, be annihilated. Then, once again, I would be stupid and wonder about whether I have the intelligence I need for success in the life tasks I have set for myself. Sigh.

Things came to a head in a game with Dana yesterday. It revolved around the relationship of the house rules and the official rules. The key rule is the one that requires that you take a jump if possible. That rule is slightly modified in the unit. Here they use the rule that if you fail to take a jump you lose the piece that should have taken the jump. It's a significant difference because there may be situations in which it would be better to 'not notice' a jump and lose a piece, because taking the jump would lead to worse consequences. In fact, most traps and all strategies hinge on the rule that jumps must be taken. I had an agreement with Charlie that we play by the official rules. That meant that I was better able to use and learn a bit about strategy. Yesterday afternoon I beat him three games in a row and I think he was feeling discouraged. Also I think he understood that the 'take your jumps' rule was working against him. So he insisted that we play by 'house' rules. I said briefly why I thought the official rules were better, but he claimed that the house rules were what was described on the checker board. I felt it would be discourteous to press the point, so I did not pull out the board to disprove what he said. I agreed to play by the house rules.

Fairly early in the game I saw a way of setting up a situation in which I could take three pieces and gain a king. It entailed sacrificing two pieces first. The first sacrifice was no problem. Unless one saw what I was doing, it looked like a senseless mistake. He took it. I moved the other piece into position to be taken. Had he taken it I could have taken three of his pieces and got my king. Thus in the total series of transactions I would have gained a one-man advantage and a king. He failed to 'notice' the jump. I was able, by house rules, to take his piece. This meant that for the series of transactions he gained the advantage of one man and some advantage with regard to position.

My sense of frustration was extreme.

"It's only a game," I told myself.

"It's not fair," I answered.

"Relationships are more important than games," I said.

"It's not fair," I repeated.

"It doesn't make any difference whether anybody saw how well you set that up," I said.

"It was brilliant," I said. "I deserve credit."

"You're being childish."

"It's not fair."

This inner dialog distracted me from the events on the checker board. I made a couple of silly blunders and lost the game. I didn't care about that. But I did care that by the house rules the success or failure of a carefully laid out strategy depended on whether your partner happened to 'notice' he had a jump.



The inner argument continued as I walked laps around the perimeter of the unit.

"It's not worth making an issue of this," I told myself. "Keeping on friendly terms with the guys in the unit is more important than this silly game."

"But it's not fair," I answered.

"Look," I said to myself. "You're becoming a bully. These guys don't like feeling put down because you beat them all the time."

"Still," I answered, "we should play by the real rules." I debated with myself a bit about the meaning of 'real' as in 'real rules'. I conceded that the claim that some rules were more 'real' than others was a weak argument. But some rules were better than others. I felt that was objectively true. I thought back to the brief history of my checkers-playing on the unit and realized that most people wouldn't play with me any more. Even Charlie seldom asked for a game. I intimidated people.

In the realm of checkers I had attained the equivalence of bulging biceps.

I was a bully.

"Cool."

"All right. Who said that?"

No answer.

But I didn't need to ask. It was the same one who said that the house rules weren't fair.

I thought about Ritchie. He plays basketball so much better than anybody else on the unit that it's impossible to make up any teams that are fair. Whatever team Ritchie is on wins – with scores like 3 to 21. I overheard him talking with the guard. He had scholarships lined up with some colleges, based on his basketball playing. Somehow it didn't work out. He never said why. But he would have gone only so far anyhow because he was so short. He's no taller than I am. However quick he might be, and however skilled, he would never make the big league teams. I compared this with my poor memory, my poor spelling, my poor start in school, my slowness in learning foreign languages, and my only average reading speed. I am short in so many ways.

This naturally led to the realization that I had become a bully on the unit to compensate for my own feelings of inadequacy. I told myself that I should be ashamed. I even felt guilty. I'm sure I did – at least a little bit. Still, I thought, it's not right. I should at least say something about how the real rules are the right rules which are the ones written on the back of the checker board.

I went over to the table where Jim and Charlie were playing a game of checkers. When they finished I said, "I just want to point out why the official rules are better", and I did, using the last game I played with Charlie as the case in point. Jim argued that he never deliberately failed to notice moves. I didn't point out that this was not relevant. Charlie argued that the house rules were the same as the rules listed on the checker board. I didn't argue. I knew my opinion would not prevail. I only wanted to make my point for the sake of some obscure inner satisfaction it gave me. Simon was standing beside the table. He had been watching the game between Jim and Charlie.

"So life isn't fair. What else is new?" he said with a shrug. I glared at him. I don't know whether he noticed that he had been glared at.

"What does he care about 'fair'?" I said to myself as I retreated toward my room. "He doesn't even play checkers."

# Joseph And His Two Paper Bags

After only two days in the PC unit they moved me in to my new room. Immediately after introductions, Joseph, my new roommate, informed me that he was 'bi-polar' and 'schizoid affective'.

"That's fine," I said. What else could I say? He was gentle, and his room – our room at this point – was neat and clean. I calculated that I would be able to make a nest there.

Joseph, and I, as it turned out, got along quite well. After only a couple of days he was ready to share with me the poetry that he wrote. I read about 10 of the 36 poems that he kept in a manila envelope. They were free verse creations, expressing his feelings of depression, confusion, and loneliness. His efforts to find a way out of his unhappiness seemed focused on positive thinking, psychiatric drugs and Jesus.

Nowhere did Joseph deal with the shame he felt about his homosexuality, which I thought must play a major role in the 'mental problems' that he talked about. He kept a paper bag full of male erotica in a paper sack beside the commode. Near it there was another paper bag which contained the materials that were connected with his correspondence Bible study courses.

After reading ten of his poems, I told Joseph that I would read some of the others later. I wanted a chance to absorb them.

"They're very deep, aren't they?" he said.



A few days later Joseph and I were sitting at a table alone after just having cleaned up the pod with two men from another cell. We were listening to Tyson, a young man I did not know well, who was upstairs. He was talking nonsense in a loud shrill voice. Every other word was some derivation of the word 'fuck'.

"He wants to be a minister," Joseph said, and rolled his eyes.

I smiled. "Well, people are full of contradictions," I said. "Maybe he is sincere in his own way." Joseph nodded in agreement and I used this theme of 'contradictions' to open the door to talking a bit more. "That's one of the problems with organized religion," I said. I talked a little about how I believed that aligning ourselves with the will of God was the most important thing in life. In this way I was in agreement with what churches claimed. But I found I had to reject most organized religion because of what I believed were destructive beliefs about sex. Briefly I outlined my conviction that everybody had their own pattern of desire.

I used the term 'pattern of desire' for the idea of a 'bonding profile'. The 'bonding profile' is a concept developed by a psychiatrist by the name of Alan Horowitz. The basic idea is that sexual attraction is connected with bonding, and that each person has their own pattern. If one takes males and females as one dichotomy, and peers or younger people as the other, one can capture all the possibilities of attraction in a two-by-two box. One then assigns a number indicating the relative degree of strength of attraction one feels for each of the four categories – eg, younger and of the same sex, peers of the same sex, etc. One's bonding profile is the pattern of the attractions in the four boxes.

I did not use the term ‘bonding profile’ with Joseph. But I did say that that I did not see any reason to judge one ‘pattern of desire’ as good and another as bad. I felt, for example, that relationships between men and other men needed to be judged by the same criteria as relationships between men and women. Was it entered into freely? Was it loving? Was it non-exploitative? Was it based on honest and open communication? Etc. I said that I felt there could be love relationships between men and boys that were not bad, and hinted that, while men are not that sexually attractive to me, I did feel something about boys.

“Me too,” he said.

I pointed out that if our thoughts were known by too many people, it could create some difficulty for us.

He assured me that this conversation was just between us.

Later in the day, just before going to sleep I told him that I was glad he agreed with me. I wondered, however, whether this didn’t create some tension for him because of his deep commitment to the Mormon religion. He confessed it did, but said “It’s sorting itself out, slowly but surely”.

About a week after our conversation about patterns of desire and love, Joseph told me that he knew of a magazine that he thought might be of interest to me. We were in our bunks during a lock-down period. I expressed curiosity about this. He rummaged through one of the paper bags he keeps between his bunk and the commode and pulled out a magazine which he handed to me before retreating back into the cave of his own bunk. The magazine was full of pictures of men – mostly muscular men in their twenties – in sexy poses in which they usually displayed large erections. I thumbed through it for a while and then passed it back down to him.

“It’s nice,” I said. “But it’s not quite what is of most interest to me.” I reminded him that on my own profile was a bit different than his. “But this is not a problem for me,” I said with reference to his magazines.

“I see,” he said.

I thanked him for showing the magazine to me. I think he was disappointed that I did not have more interest in mature men, and at the same time I am sure he was relieved that I was not judgmental regarding his interest. I recalled his telling me a few days ago that he had told his mother how happy he was with me as his roommate. “I told her we can talk about anything.”



One day, Joseph told me that he was scheduled for his first ‘furlough.’ It was to occur from Friday afternoon, June 2nd at 2:30 to Sunday afternoon, June 4th at 3:00. He would be spending the time with his grandmother, his step-mother, and his girlfriend. In some detail, he told me about the barbecue they had planned for the Friday afternoon he was to go home. Food is a matter of some importance to Joseph. When his mother or grandmother replenished his canteen fund, he ordered bags full of Hostess Twinkie type food. For some days after one of the periodic replenishments of his account, I would be aware of the frequent crinkling of paper down below as I was stretched out on my bunk during the evening lock-

downs. In a remarkably short time the boxes were emptied. He seemed to have a hard time letting loose of his snack boxes even after they were empty. I notice that he seldom took them to the trash. Occasionally he sent an unsolicited bit of his loot my way. Once I found a rectangular chocolate-covered and cream-filled little cake at my place on the desk. Another time his hand reached up from below and placed a granola bar on the edge of my bunk. The snacks were taking their toll. Joseph was six-foot-three, and soft as a marshmallow. I could see that fat was accumulating on his stomach and thighs. He was not in good shape for a twenty-four-year-old.

Joseph was intelligent, friendly and reasonable. He listened if I talked, and shared very brief answers to my questions. But I seldom heard him express a strong opinion or a passionate wish. I think that, in addition to his being chronically depressed, his medications for his presumed bipolar and schizoid affective conditions leave him drained of psychic energy. Therefore I was pleased to hear him speak of something that brought some animation into his voice and manner. He was excited about his furlough.

When I first arrived on the unit and began sharing the cell with Joseph, I estimated that he slept about 15 hours out of every 24. In the late afternoon he would emerge to sit at the table in front of the TV with his friend, Charlie, who sat in his wheelchair at the end of the table. Wayne, who slept even more than Joseph, would sometimes join them after supper for a couple of hours. But as the time for the furlough approached Joseph slept less. He remained up for whole afternoons, and he worked with real industry on his correspondence Bible study courses.

Joseph spoke about how excited he was at the prospect of seeing his girlfriend on his home visit, but he never told me a lot about her. I speculated that the reason for this was because his real interest was in men. After I had been rooming with Joseph for a while, I went into a more complete explanation of the the idea of the 'bonding profile' than I had previously shared with him in our conversations. I suggested this might be a more flexible way of understanding sexual identity, and once again expressed my conviction that it was best to have an attitude of acceptance for the wide diversity of bonding profiles that are encountered in people. I went so far as to give him a general idea as to what my profile might look like.

About two weeks before he was scheduled to go on his visit, Joseph received a note from his case worker, Nancy, who is responsible for coordinating all matters related to furloughs. She was sorry to inform him that she had not heard from the Department of Probation and Parole. This was unfortunate as they had to complete a home study and get the results to her before she could OK the visit. As she was going on vacation in two days and would not be back until the ninth, Joseph would have to assume, unless he heard something different within a couple of days, that his scheduled furlough was canceled. Joseph showed me the handwritten message she had added to the bottom of a note he had sent to her. Well, there was still some hope, I suggested. Maybe something would come in the mail tomorrow. If not, within a few weeks the furlough would probably be rescheduled. Nothing came in the mail the next day, or the day after that. Joseph began sleeping a bit more again, and ordered another bag of junk food.



One evening I shared with Joseph my ‘three-pieces-of-a-puzzle-that-don’t-fit-together’ theory, of people who have strong but unacceptable sexual feelings. We are given three pieces:

- 1 The desire to find some fulfilment of a powerful inner yearning.
- 2 The desire to be an acceptable member of society.
- 3 The desire to be honest with self and others.

“Those are important pieces of a person’s life,” I said. “It’s hard to admit that there is just no way to make them fit together.”

“Yes,” he said. “That’s what I think too.”



“Guess what?” Joseph said to me on the on the first day of June.

“What?”

“I’m going on my furlough.” An interest in life was once again flowing in his veins. It brought color to his normally pallid face.

“Great,” I said.

I offered him ‘five’ and ‘gave him five’ in return. But I must have looked dubious. It was hard to believe that they had reinstated his furlough.

He gave me a somewhat confused explanation about a friend of a relative who was in prison and who had said that the house check by parole and probation wasn’t necessary unless you had certain kinds of charges against you. I was preoccupied with some concerns of my own, and didn’t pursue the matter further at that point.

Joseph went to our cell and made preparations for his trip. Presumably it was to occur the next day. I noticed that he came out of the room with a stack of magazines in his hand. I was sure that those were his homoerotic magazines and speculated that he was getting rid of them so that he could take his accumulated junk home without fear of being discovered. It did occur to me that he was taking some risk when he took them to the public trash can and, removing the cover, threw them in. Nobody paid any attention, however. I didn’t ask myself why he didn’t simply hide them in a different sack in the cell.

When we were locked up on Thursday evening, I questioned Joseph a bit more about how his furlough came to be reinstated. He was vague and evasive in his answers and I let the matter drop.

Friday morning Joseph told me he would be having a strawberry milkshake before the day was over. This was his way of reminding me about his furlough which was to begin in the afternoon.

“I hope it all works out,” I said.”

He nodded.

When I went out for morning recreation, Brian asked me about Joseph’s furlough. He had heard about it and was sure that if the home study by Probation and Parole had not taken place, there would be no visit. I was non-committal at this point, but did feel that probably Joseph was being misled by wishful thinking.

When I returned to the room I saw that Joseph had packed up the things he planned to take home. An assortment of plastic and paper bags was sitting on his bed. When they let us out at 1:00 he took a shower.

We went outside for Rec at 2:00. Joseph stood expectantly by the door. At 2:30 Jim was called out to join the family members who were to take him on his furlough, but no one called for Joseph. I overheard a conversation between a guard and a couple of the men about Joseph's furlough. The guard was saying that he knew Joseph wasn't going on his furlough but there was no point in telling him that. When I came in from outside recreation at 3:00 I found Joseph in our cell.

"I'm still here," he said.

I nodded. I asked again about how firm the arrangements had been and this time he admitted that he had received no messages from anyone at the prison indicating that the furlough had been reinstated. I commented that it was easy for us to give into wishful thinking about things we really wanted a lot. He agreed.

The mail didn't arrive until we were locked in our cell again. Joseph received an envelope from one of the groups that provide him with his correspondence Bible courses. He pulled a diploma out of the envelope, indicating that he had successfully completed another set of lessons. He held it up for me to see.

"I'm very proud of that," he said.

After supper Charlie called me over and asked what I knew about the furlough. I told him what I knew. He was hurt that Joseph did not tell him more about what was going on with him.

"I'm his best friend," he told me.

I said I didn't think it reflected on their friendship. Joseph was just slow to share with other people. Charlie nodded and asked what I knew about the magazines. I said I had noticed Joseph throw them away. I briefly told him my theory about the three puzzle pieces that won't fit together.

"I think this is Joseph's effort at a solution," I said. "He wants to reject that aspect of himself."

Charlie told me that he felt that Joseph had made a deal with God. If God would make that furlough happen, Joseph would dump the magazines. He told me that when he confronted him with this, Joseph admitted it was true. Joseph spent a long time in the cell after supper. When he came out he told me he had been sick again.

"I know what it is this time," he said.

"Yeah?"

"It's the fish." He remembered that he had also been sick last Friday when they had fish.

I nodded. "I guess it doesn't agree with you."

"I won't eat it any more."

"This has really been a shitty day for you," I said.

He agreed

## Shitting

One day when I returned to my room to get away from the noise and do some writing, I noticed that Joseph, my roommate, had left a turd in the stool. I flushed the stool, but it didn't go away. It was wedged in sideways. I knew he would be embarrassed about this, so I shut the door and used a little piece of cardboard to

re-position the turd, and I tried flushing the stool again. This time it behaved like a modest and self-respecting turd should. It disappeared.

We all shit, and we are all embarrassed about that fact. Even before coming here I was concerned with the issue of being able to shit in private. On my initial drive down to the prison I sat beside another prisoner. He was a rather pleasant man who had been in the system for a while and was happy to tell me something about what to expect. Under the general topic of getting along with roommates he mentioned the issue of shitting. In the 'Pods' (the intake facilities at Frankfort) two prisoners have to share one commode in a small common cell. He told me that there were two primary strategies for dealing with this. First, inmates tried to find time to use the commode when the other person was not present. If this would not work, then the person not taking a shit would lie in his bunk with his back to the room. This information was helpful, as it proved to be accurate. Also it made it plain to me that everybody had these concerns and it was better just to talk about it openly.

The cells in all the pods at Frankfort are about seven by eight feet. This limited space accommodates an upper and a lower bunk, a desk, a chair and a commode. There might be three feet between the edge of the bunk and the edge of the commode. On the A Pod we were out of the cells about four hours a day.

In the course of dealing with my first five roommates I learned what was important to most of the guys here. In general, the first thing they wanted to find out was what your charges are. There are only two relevant categories: you were a skinner or you were not a skinner. If you were not a skinner, you were a 'regular guy'. The second thing they wanted to deal with was the shitting policy. The rules were as follows:

- 1 Try to do it when your roommate is out.
- 2 If you can't help doing it while the other person is there, let him know and he will turn his back.
- 3 Wipe the top of the commode after every use.
- 4 Make sure the exhaust is not blocked so the smell won't linger.

My last two roommates were gentler types, and were not overly concerned about my charges, but we did need to negotiate arrangements for 'using the room'. I recall times when two of my earlier roommates were unable to avoid having an urgent need to shit while we were both locked in. In both cases they expressed a great deal of shame and embarrassment, especially with regard to the smell. Offensive smells are a matter that is given some attention here. Whenever anyone farts, others comment on it, much in the way elementary schoolboys do. If there is any noticeable odor they are likely to pull the front of their shirts up over their noses. One of the things that people frequently get razzed about is that they presumably fart more than others. One would think that the ones doing the razzing never farted.

Although I may be able to reflect on these issues more objectively than most other people, I share the sense of shame that they have about these bodily functions. The fact that I have a tendency toward constipation and hemorrhoids has not made my own adjustment easy. My immediate problem was that for years I had a regular time in the morning – about twenty minutes after breakfast – for doing my daily. Here a lot of people go back to bed right after breakfast and don't go out for the



morning Rec period. With my first roommate I negotiated an agreement with him that I would eat breakfast very quickly and dash up to use the room, and that he would remain out until the breakfast period (about 25 minutes) was over.

I hated stuffing my breakfast down like that, so with my present roommate I resolved to train myself to use the commode after lunch, and again in the evening if I felt the urge. However, I found that sometimes he went back to bed after lunch as well as after breakfast. This required that I give more attention to his sleep patterns. I calculated that he slept about 14 hours a day. I presume that it is a combination of depression and drugs that makes this possible. He denies being depressed, but certainly depression was a major theme in his poetry.

In any case, I asked whether he might let me 'use the room' around 1:00pm every day. This seems to be working.

I recall Simon telling me some more about Callum Bay. One of the advantages he spontaneously mentioned was that they had commodes in stalls with doors that could be closed rather than in the individual cells.

Yesterday afternoon I came in during Rec time to use the commode. It is common practice to put a long envelope in the narrow rectangular window in the call door. This serves to cover the bottom half of the window, and that gives the person in the room a little more privacy. The envelope also serves as a signal to the roommate that you are using the room. A guard noticed the envelope and banged on the door. I pulled up my pants and pushed the button that signals the control room to open the door. The guard told me that putting an envelope in the window like that was against the rules, even if I was taking a shit. He had to be able to see in to be sure I wasn't cutting my wrists or trying to hang myself. Later, several people came up to me and said that everybody used the envelope method for privacy, and that most guards ignored it. This was a new guard.

## Razzing

It seemed to me that one might learn something about the anxieties and concerns that people have by observing the manner in which they razz each other. I was interested both in the topics and in the degree of hostility that seemed to accompany the razzing. So I decided that for the duration of a couple of hours from time to time I would try to record all the razzing I heard, and assign to each instance an estimate of the hostility level that seemed to accompany it. My rating of hostility was done on the following scale.

- 1 = very friendly overture
- 2 = mildly friendly kidding
- 3 = mildly unfriendly kidding
- 4 = very hostile attack

In each case I also noted the theme of the razzing.

During the few days that I conducted this informal little piece of research, I recorded 23 instances of razzing. It should be emphasized that this represents only a few hours of observation, and does not give a clear impression of the large volume of razzing that takes place.



- Someone said to Leon, “If Leon could get paid for sleeping he’d be a millionaire”. Later, he confided in me, “They are jealous because I am able to sleep so much.”  
Rating – 3  
Theme – laziness
- Several guys in the unit razed a female guard about her age.  
Rating – 2  
Theme – age
- During outside Rec, Tyson commented on how Ritchie shoots baskets. Ritchie is by far the best shot around. “What is that called – the fairy shot? I see how your wrist flopped down.” This one is hard to rate. Tyson admits to being gay. Yet his comment seemed to have the intent of embarrassing Ritchie.  
Rating – ?  
Theme – being gay
- After supper Charlie commented that if Brian were going to join the military it would have to be the Coast Guard – not the Marines, “because the Coast Guard only patrols shallow water.”  
Rating – 3  
Theme – being short
- When I began to play Brian a game of checkers, Lee commented that I would beat him badly. “I don’t know,” I said. “Yesterday he damn near beat me.”  
“You must have been asleep,” Lee said.  
Rating – 3  
Theme – stupidity
- The Guard arrived on the unit. Brian says, “Oh no. You are here.”  
Rating – 1  
Theme (general) – he is a pain in the ass.
- Brian came to sit down with me. I said that we don’t allow short people at our table.  
Rating – 1  
Theme – being short
- Brian razed me in return about my being ‘an old geezer,’ who has ‘one foot in the grave.’  
Rating – 1  
Theme – being old and feeble; being close to death.
- The guard said to Brian: “I thought about you this morning. I was taking a Brian. I flushed and flushed but it wouldn’t go down.”  
Rating – 3 (although presented as a joke)  
Theme – you are a piece of shit, somebody very disagreeable that I can’t get rid of
- Someone (I didn’t catch who) accused the guard on duty of being afraid to work in any other unit.  
Rating – maybe 2, could be 3  
Theme – not being strong and manly

- When I win at checkers Charlie accuses me of cheating. “You just can’t catch him.”  
Rating – 2  
Theme – lack of integrity or honesty
- Guard picks up a toilet brush and says, “Hey Ritchie, you lost your tooth brush.” The guard goes out and returns with Ritchie’s name written on the brush.  
Rating – 3 (and I think Ritchie was genuinely embarrassed)  
Theme – being physically disgusting
- Guard from the tower calls over the public intercom: “Ritchie to the shower for customer assistance.” I think this was aimed at the idea he might be gay and want to ‘help’ someone else in the shower. Or it might have been a suggestion that he has poor hygiene and needs a shower.  
Rating – 3  
Theme – being gay or having poor hygiene?
- Ritchie complains that Brian is hanging around him too much. Someone says, “Its because he likes you so much.” The tone was suggestive of more than ordinary liking.  
Rating – 3  
Theme – being gay
- When I went out to be checked for sugar I was ahead of Charlie. When he came in I said “Where have you been, you lazy son of a bitch. I’ve been here for hours.”  
Rating – 1  
Theme – laziness
- Brian was looking for someone who might want a particular job. I express an interest. He says that I’m too old and lazy.  
Rating – 1  
Theme – being old
- In relation to a conversation about retirement Brian referred to himself as ‘retarded’.  
Rating – 3  
Theme – being stupid
- Lee commented on Brian’s hope to get a good roommate. He said the the new roommate with probably be a ‘big, black fag’.  
Rating – 2 or 3  
Theme – race and homosexuality
- I couldn’t hear the conversation that led up to it, but I heard several people and Brian arguing. “And you are a sex lawyer?” someone asked. I could tell by voice tones that there was some real upset.  
Rating – 3  
Theme – stupidity or pretentiousness
- Albert was pacing around the room with a new poem. “Water is free, so we don’t have to smell like pee.” This is for Leon’s benefit, who does, in fact, need to take a shower.  
Rating – 4  
Theme – bad hygiene

- During the TV time someone says “Ritchie is like the marines. He’s looking for a few good men.” This led to some bantering back and forth about who might be queer. It threatened to become serious.

Rating – 3 or 4

Theme – homosexuality

- Darrel said “Why is there so much talk about balls? It makes me wonder.” Someone had used a common expression such as ‘he doesn’t have the balls’.

Rating – 3

Theme – homosexuality

- I didn’t see what led up to it but I heard Darrel say to Dana and Brian, who were sitting together, “I’m not listening to your boyfriend.”

Rating – 3

Theme – homosexuality

My little survey was, of course, small, crude, and impressionistic. It would not be possible to derive any very firm conclusions from the results. However, the results may be supportive of some general observations. The total time I spent recording put-downs was about six hours. That would suggest a rate in the unit of three or four put-downs per hour, which for a small unit is quite a bit. Some people were targeted more than others. For those who were frequently targeted, the experience of being put down would have been a major aspect of their daily experience on the Protective Custody Unit. There was a wide range of themes – more than I would have guessed. Only about a fourth of the put-downs pertained to the issue of being gay, which is less than I would have expected. Still, alluding to the possibility that someone might be gay was the most common single theme, and the hostility ratings were higher for this concern. Poor personal hygiene and being intellectually limited were next in line for both the frequency and the intensity of put-downs.

## Real Men

After I had been in the PC unit a few days, a documentary appeared on the TV about a rodeo that is put on every year by the Angola State penitentiary, a huge prison in the south. Prisoners participate in a number of wild and dangerous rodeo events in front of a large audience. It’s open to the public and well attended. Three of the events stand out in my mind. In one they send out a number of riders on bucking broncos all at the same time. When you are thrown off you have to concern yourself not just with your own horse kicking or trampling you, but with several others that are all around you as well. In a second event, four men sit with their hands on top of a table in the middle of the arena. A raging bull is then released into the arena. The one who remains sitting for the longest is the winner. The bull, naturally, attacks the table and throws the men all over the place. In a third event they release a bull with a token tied to its snout into the arena. A number of men are in the arena. The contest is to see who can pull the token off the bull’s snout. This is virtually impossible without being attacked and tossed by the bull.

The participants spoke of the event with great enthusiasm. For many of them this appeared to be what they lived for. The other men on the unit found this documentary to be of great interest. The macho, risk-taking cowboys in the rodeo are the new gladiators. Are they victims? Is a willingness to participate in such events the true measure of manhood?

The night after seeing this documentary I had the following dreams:

- 1 *I see a couple of people breaking ice on a pond and then swimming in it. I think that I'm not that robust and I go home.*
- 2 *I am shopping. I am interested in buying some web t-shirts and underwear.*

My association with 'not robust enough' is the rodeo documentary I watched the previous night. If being willing to do things like they did is the sign of being a real man, I fail. I suppose that if the stakes were high enough for me – like I had a chance to get out of prison or save the life of a loved one – I might jump into the frigid water in the dream or go face the raging bull in the rodeo. But if it's just a matter of proving my manhood, forget it. Bowing out and going home makes a lot more sense.

Regarding the second dream, I see the web t-shirts and underwear as a compromise with a society that requires that we wear clothes. I want to let myself be seen. That's the central meaning. Obviously one could label this sexual exhibitionism. But labeling is not understanding. A major theme in my life has been the desire to set aside the persona that is forced upon me by society so that I might exist in the social realm as who I am. To do so would be to make myself vulnerable. That is what I would risk everything for. For that reason, despite the intense suffering it has caused me, I am not entirely unhappy that my propensity for loving boys has been discovered.

It is a part of who I am.

The men in the rodeo also made themselves vulnerable. They took huge risks and, however foolhardy they may be, that elicits a bit of respect. But as I see it, they risk everything in order to hide. 'Macho', as a way of being in the world, is a way of hiding. Men dedicated to being 'macho' make themselves physically vulnerable in order to hide their social and emotional vulnerability.

Hiding is associated in my mind with loneliness.



The day before Tyson was to leave I found myself in a group of men that included him. I brought the conversation around to the 'macho' philosophy. Tyson admits to being gay – but at the same time he engages in a lot of macho talk. I told him I thought that the macho philosophy was his enemy – and that it would get him into difficulty. At first he thought I simply meant that he would get into trouble because of his mouth. I agreed that this was a possibility, but said that I thought the problem went deeper. The macho philosophy would turn him against himself.

He seemed to understand.



During outside recreation one day I joined a group of men who were into a conversation about sex offenders. Addressing me, specifically, Simon said that he had read an article on new ways of treating sex offenders. His understanding of the article is that it was an alternative to prison. He said he would get me the article when we went in from recreation. I said I would like to see it.

A lot of the conversation had to do with how nobody right there actually did anything with an underage person. I certainly understand the need for this kind of denial, but find it depressing because it means that the issue can't be discussed in a real way. Even here we have to hide from each other.

Frank mentioned a roommate he had who was gay. Expressions of disgust were passed around the group. Frank looks as though he might weigh 90 pounds and he is about 50 years old. He bragged about how he would have beat his roommate to death if he ever 'tried anything'.

Then Albert came by. He was walking back and forth in the yard. He is tall and thin – and looks very unhealthy. He shifts his weight continuously from one foot to the other whenever he stands in one place. I would guess that he has some degree of brain damage from a combination of street and psychiatric drugs. He stopped behind Ethan and scratched him behind his left ear. Ethan is from the Administrative Segregation unit next to the PC unit. He is a small man, in his early 50s. He is bald except for a thin fringe around the edge. He pulled away and turned to see who was pestering him. Albert grinned at him.

"I heard that was how to get you excited," he said.

"Well, you heard wrong," Ethan said.

Albert continued his pacing, but repeated the ear scratching the next time he came by with similar results. When we returned to the unit, Simon gave me the article. It was an opinion piece from a magazine. It talked about the problems associated with the public identification of sex offenders who are returning to the community. It also acknowledged that there were some problems with simply putting offenders in hospitals after they are released from prison. The author suggested the a solution might be to put sex offenders in communities where they could live 'almost normally' except that no children could ever come there. It was a psychiatric leper colony. The article contained all the unexamined stereotypes of the 'pedophile'. The special community idea was put forward not as an alternative to prison but a supplement. The article ends with a word of advice to parents, They should continue to be vigilant in supervising their children.

This was Simon's idea of a more positive approach to the problem. Perhaps he didn't understand what the woman was actually saying. In any case, I found myself getting depressed after reading the article.



While I was still in lock-down one afternoon, I noticed Albert walking around the unit. He had been out doing clean-up. He was singing a little song: "I don't know, but I've heard them say, Brian Day is a little gay".

Later I was sitting around the table with Joseph, Lee, and Charlie. They were discussing getting discrediting information about people, as self defense, if people

attacked them. Lee said that there is a computer site where one can get that sort of information. He said that Doug goes around calling people skimmers and queers, but is himself in here for a sex crime – specifically for molesting a little girl. According to Lee, he confronted Doug about this. Doug defended himself by pointing out that it was a girl. Maybe it was illegal, but that didn't make him queer.

That evening Brian came by to talk with me while I was sitting in my cell with the door open. He had been quite upset with Jeff, a man from the other unit, earlier in the day. I asked him about this. He said that Jeff had called him a 'little skimmer'. He was going to talk with Jeff about this. You could joke about all sorts of things – kid people about their being old or short or ugly or whatever. But to suggest they were skimmers was simply not done – even in joking.

This may suggest a slight modification of the speculations that were prompted by my little razzing survey. I found in the survey that about three fourths of the razzing was not about the possibility that someone was gay or interested in below-legal-age people. But the seriousness of the kidding – the degree of hostility behind it – is much greater when one is accused of being either gay or a pedophile. With this data in mind, I think it is reasonable to suggest that anxiety about the issue of establishing a clear, socially recognized, exclusively heterosexual and (in short) 'masculine' identity is not just one concern among others. It appears to be the dominant preoccupation in the minds of most prisoners. Perhaps a few more examples will bring into sharper focus what this preoccupation looks like as it spins itself out in the interactions between the men.

- I heard Jim and Doug talking earlier. Jim had just returned from the infirmary. While he was there he had the opportunity to be in an office for a short period of time alone with a nurse. The gist of Doug's response was to emphasize how much he would have relished that opportunity. Then Jim mentioned that Joseph had also been alone with her. "No danger there," Doug said, and they laughed uproariously. Clearly the chance to contrast their assumed virility and masculinity with Joseph's homosexuality was a source of delight.
- Later at the table Ritchie bumped up against Sheldon and someone made a comment he was trying to 'stick it to him'. "You would like that, wouldn't you?" Sheldon said to Ritchie. It was said in a joking manner, but Sheldon, as he so often does, edged close to the danger point with this kind of 'kidding'.
- Doug and Sheldon were sitting at the other end of the table. I heard Doug saying "There's too many people around here who like to suck cock. I like to eat pussy." He went on to express his desire to beat up people who like to suck cock. "Maybe I'll provoke somebody."
- Ritchie and a guard were challenging each other again about who can shoot baskets the best. The guard suggested the following stakes: "If you make the shot, I'll buy you two dozen Dunkin Donuts. If you lose, you have to blow all those guys sitting there." He indicated the row of guys sitting against the fence. "It's a win-win situation for you," the guard added. Everybody laughed.



One morning during recreation I found myself sitting with Lee and Sheldon. They were engaged in a conversation about the various kinds of charges people get, and of course the ever-present issue of people who commit sex crimes came up. I wanted to challenge the prevailing views on both intergenerational sex and on homosexuality. So I brought up the example of the woman teacher in California who had a relationship with a 13-year-old boy.

“If they were in love and both wanted to express it that way,” I asked, “why does society need to get into it?” I pointed out that the boy had said he did not feel like a victim. Certainly it is far-fetched to say that he found the relationship with her ‘traumatizing’. The research shows that such a relationship is not, in fact, intrinsically damaging. In some societies it would not be frowned upon. Why then, should it be a crime in a free society? Answering my own question, I suggested that we are not a free society. We are a theocracy in which a conservative religious view of sexual morality – a view that can claim the support of neither science nor universality – is forced on all citizens.

I also shared my view that homophobia was the major driving concern here in prison and that, since homosexual feelings are almost certainly an aspect of almost everybody’s experience, this leads to the use of projection and scapegoating as defenses. I interpreted the kind of screaming hysteria that was characteristic of life on the A Pod as a form of psychosis exhibited by men who were driven to disown and deny one aspect of their own nature. I emphasized that the same dynamic was in evidence throughout the prison, and, only to a slightly lesser extent, in all of society. I then outlined what scientific research shows and told them about the effort to suppress this research by, among others, the Congress of the United States.

Mercy! I said a lot.

The guard happened to come by, so the conversation ended. I felt quite anxious.

Both Sheldon and Lee have continued to be friendly, so apparently I did not shock them too much. They nodded and seemed interested while I talked but did not share much in return. Will this backfire? How safe is it to share my thoughts, and with whom? How much risk do I wish to take in this direction?



One of the curious things about life in prison is the degree to which the men here feel obligated to monitor each other with regard to sexual identity and practices. I remember a little incident that brought this home to me. Charlie noticed that someone else had returned to his cell and locked himself in. The most common reason for this is to use the commode in privacy. But Charlie pointed out to the guard and to a couple of guys who happened to be sitting around that the person had been in the room for quite some time and the stool hadn’t flushed. The implication was that he must be in there masturbating. It was a revelation to me that Charlie noticed whether the man flushed his stool. It was even more amazing to me that he felt the need to draw the attention of the entire unit to the possibility that he might be masturbating.

# Political Analysis

Living under conditions of such extreme degradation, I naturally thought about what sort of political action might improve the situation. The obstacles to any significant political action seemed insurmountable. As I reflected on the political paralysis of sex offenders, and social deviants in general, I came to an understanding of one of the underlying causes.

Stigmatized people and social deviants who are placed in a highly demonized category tend to internalize the dominant paradigm, and this leads to their being incapacitated due to three factors.

- 1 Their resulting inability to remain open to their own spontaneous forms of subjectivity.
- 2 Their difficulty maintaining a tolerable self-concept.
- 3 Their reluctance to form supportive and politically useful links with others who are similarly demonized. The relevant dominant paradigm in this situation is puritanism. It is characterized by some of the following beliefs and attitudes.
  - The belief that certain forms of subjective experience (feelings or thoughts, independently of behavior) are unacceptable and indicative of a 'deprived nature' or an otherwise socially unacceptable identity. Some of the common examples of unacceptable forms of subjectivity that would be of concern to the puritan mind-set would be ambivalence about loved ones, lack of patriotic feelings, hatred toward or disbelief in God, and any but the most chaste and politically correct sexual desires or fantasies.
  - The belief that it is our duty to be vigilant in monitoring and censoring our subjective experience of reality as well as our behavior, to assure conformity with the ideal of purity.
  - A preoccupation with homosexual and intergenerational sexual feelings, which are considered to be especially vile. Any expression of such feelings, even if only in masturbation or in mutually desired and safe activities, is strongly condemned.
  - The belief that children are pure, which is to say, devoid of sexual interest or desire. Virtually all unequivocal expressions of sexual interest or desire by children are responded to with shock and horror, and are assumed to be a perverse or twisted development that could only be the outcome of sex abuse.
  - The belief (which would seem to contradict the previous one) that we are all born in sin.

The mental health movement, and the sex abuse industry in particular, has taken over all the tenets of religious puritanism. It simply dresses these same tenets up in the pseudo-scientific terminology of 'treatment'.

'Sin' becomes 'sickness'. The dynamics of social exclusion and condemnation and the requirement that a conversion experience precede any re-entry into society remain the same. In the religious version of puritanism the sexual mores of our culture are equated with divinely ordained laws; in the secular version, with the



laws of science. In both cases the experts set themselves and their beliefs above the processes of free and open discourse. This is bad religion and worse science.

In fact, secular puritanism discards all scientific findings that conflict with its dogmas. It is able to do this because it has effectively suppressed any real dialog in the culture – at least in all mainstream publications.

Homosexual and intergenerational sexual feelings are an extremely common if not universal dimension of human experience. Therefore the implementation of the puritan agenda entails teaching children and citizens in general to be fundamentally secretive and dishonest about the nature of their sexual experience. This dishonesty leads to major distortions in our perception of reality and to a profound alienation from the needs, wishes and experiences of the unedited self. This distortion and alienation is massive; it pervades all of society and impacts every citizen. When humanity invented the puritan paradigm it declared war on itself.

I have been able to identify several defense strategies that inmates use to try to deal with the unacceptability of their own experience. Six of these seven entail an effort to distance oneself from one's own experience.

- 1 **Noise.** The use of TV and radio provides a constant external stimulus that makes attention to one's inner reality very difficult.
- 2 **Drugs.** Both street and psychiatric drugs tend to break the connections between our thoughts and feelings and our situations. In this way they obscure the actual nature of our experience.
- 3 **Avoidance of dangerous discourse.** On a practical level honesty about one's experience is dangerous in a puritan society, and especially so in prison. Beyond this, discourse threatens to increase a person's awareness of his other defenses.
- 4 **Mislabeling.** This defense entails providing non-erotic terms for experiences that clearly have a sexual dimension.
- 5 **Disowning.** This entails a refusal to accept desires and needs that are socially unacceptable as aspects of the self. Generally this is accomplished by projection and scapegoating.
- 6 **Affirmation of sentimentalized and sanitized versions of reality.** This is the Walt Disney complex.
- 7 **Adapting the clown identity.** This defense is the only one that I have observed that owns the impulses. The self who is under the sway of the forbidden impulse, however, is presented as absurd and weak, and therefore harmless. Tension is drained off in laughter.

The sex offender is expected to go through very specific steps if he is discovered.

- Public Condemnation
- Exclusion and punishment
- Confession
- Conversion to the tenets of the faith
- Remorse and guilt
- Qualified forgiveness
- Partial but guarded re-entry into society

The court system is expected to ensure the first two steps. Sex offender 'treatment' is set up to ensure the last five.



It seems obvious that children and adolescents should be protected from unwanted sexual expectations and pressures. It also goes without saying that all people, of whatever age, should be protected from violent and coercive sexual assaults. But most sexual activity that people engage in is mutually desired, and with the exception of medically unsafe practices, most of it appears to be harmless. The draconian laws and practices that have emerged in the context of the current American moral panic about the sexual behavior of children and adolescents may be as harmful to the purported victims as it is to the identified perpetrators. Perhaps an important starting point in moving toward more humane and rational laws would be for society to do a serious re-evaluation of what it means to be a real man.



In Kingsolver's *'The Poisonweed Bible'*, I read about how Ike, of 'I like Ike' fame, ordered the murder of Lumumba, the popular and duly elected first Prime Minister of the Congo. The rich and powerful are seldom imprisoned for their crimes. It happens only when they offend those who are even more rich and powerful.

From an article in the National Geographic, February 1988, on the exportation of criminals to Australia, I read "the industrial revolution had created a new class of urban poor, hungry and bitter in their back-alley hovels. Crime flourished, and the elite's reprisal – the iron fist of the law – was severe to the extreme" (page 236).

If prisons are filled by social inequity and repression, then the distinction between political prisoners and regular prisoners becomes blurred at best.

## The Regressed Offender

During outside Rec one day, not long after I was transferred to the PC unit, I talked some with Simon. He has done time at Callum Bay, another facility in the State's correctional system. He was able to give me a pretty good description of how life is there. People are much freer to come and go. Everybody must work about four hours a day if they are to earn the full five-days-a-month good time. He told me that from 50 to 90 percent (depending on who you asked) of the people there were in for sex offenses. He said that new people there tended to receive a fair bit of verbal harassment, but that it was not the violent sort of thing I encountered in the A Pod.

As it seemed likely that I would be going there, I was interested in all the details I could get.

Simon wanted to talk about himself. He told me that as he was growing up as a foster child he had been in 14 to 16 homes, none of which worked out well. He felt that his lawyer and the Catholic priest at Callum Bay were about the only people that ever cared about him. He believes he has emotional problems that stem from how he was treated some years ago when he was placed in the A Pod on his first 'bid'. He went through very much the same kind of ordeal that I had just recently experienced there.

A few days later Simon called me aside. He wanted to talk with me about his relationship with an eleven-year-old girl whom I will call Ann. Ann is the daughter of a woman who was his girlfriend. He hopes he will be able to resume that relationship with her again. If I am to have confidence in his description of the events, she does not discourage him in this hope. There is also a boy in this family who I believe is 12. The former girlfriend has involved herself with a least one other man who has lived with her since Simon came to prison.

Simon is here because of having been convicted of two sexual assault charges against girls – one of whom was a neighborhood girl of about eleven. One of the two charges he denies. The other one he says he cannot remember because he was too much under the influence of drugs and alcohol at the time. He has some material from his therapist which says, among other things, that he is a ‘regressed’ rather than a ‘fixated’ offender.

My own assessment would be that there is probably a great deal of denial going on regarding the nature of Simon’s bonding profile, and that his therapist is doing his best to support this denial. From a practical point of view that’s probably to the good. In any case, Simon told me that young Ann’s mother told him that Ann had been talking about suicide. Simon was worried about this and drafted a rather touching little questionnaire for Ann to fill out. It was decorated with colorful little designs and had questions like “Do you know I still love you?” and “How is your brother treating you?”.

Ann returned the questionnaire, filled out and with a note on the back. Simon showed this to me. The gist of the response was that Ann misses Simon a great deal. She refused to take dancing lessons this year (which is a big interest of hers) because Simon would not be there to see her recital.

Simon asked me whether he had shown me the photos he has of Ann’s mother (his former girlfriend) and her two children. It didn’t seem to me that he had, so he brought out a little photo album that contained about a half dozen photos – all of his former girlfriend and her family. In one shot Simon sat on a couch with his former girlfriend. She is a plump and friendly-looking woman who appears to be in her thirties. She is bigger than Simon. Simon is short – probably about five-foot-five or five-six. He is fairly heavy set, but solid. To me, he has a Mediterranean look. The centerpiece of the album is a picture of Ann in a cowgirl outfit with a pretty smile on her face, posed in dancing position. This was, I think, taken at a dance recital.

“She would be able to have a solo dance if she took dancing this year,” Simon told me, proudly.

He said that since he has been in prison Ann has talked of suicide. Simon asked his own therapist to see her for counseling. Apparently Simon was able to persuade the girl’s mother to call and request an appointment.

I talked with Simon about how much he could do by mail. I pointed out that the most important thing for the girl is simply knowing that someone has an interest in her, and that a letter once a week could accomplish this. Also, even if he couldn’t go to her dance recital, someone could take a picture of her in her dance outfit and send it to him. He talked about how beautiful she was in her dance outfits. He said he loves her more than anybody else in the world.

As I listened to Simon I found myself irritated with him. I woke up the morning after our conversation thinking about that irritation. What was it about? Here was a man whose bonding profile was obviously very strong with regard to pubescent girls. Probably, in fact, that was the strongest one in his profile. It was equally obvious that, as always, the Eros that drives his feelings is strongly sexual as well as emotional. He was trying to do what most men in our society do when they are caught in this situation – which is to develop strategies of dissimulation aimed at reconciling one's actual feelings with the demands of society. To be drawn to the mother of a beloved child, and to define the relationship to the child in terms of asexual fatherly feelings is one common strategy. Simon has added to this the request that his relationship be monitored by his therapist. How could there be something wrong with his relationship with this child if he reaches out to, and is approved by, one of the chief guardians of public sexual morality? It's a bold strategy, one had to admit.

The dishonesty irked me. That was the source of my irritation. But my irritation with him was not fair. His life consisted of trying to solve a puzzle that has no solution – the same one that Joseph struggled with:

- 1 He must find a more or less satisfying way of responding to the deepest forces within his psyche.
- 2 He must feel, think and behave in ways that are acceptable to society.
- 3 He must be honest.

It simply cannot be done.

One of the three pieces must be set aside. He, like many people in a similar situation, had set aside the honesty piece, and that's the source of my irritation with him. Its personal – selfish if you wish. I cannot talk with people past a certain point if they are too deeply invested in the dishonesty solution. It's lonely. But given the circumstances, who can blame them?

To a lesser degree, I felt that same irritation with my roommate. He had not yet rejected his own homosexual feelings. But he sat around reading his conservative religious literature and taking his anti-anxiety pills. He could not see that there was no way to get the three pieces of his life to fit together – his feelings, his church, and his need to be honest, at least with himself.

Whether it is embedded in primitive religious imagery or in the pseudoscience that dominates the sex abuse industry, the thought forms that are strangling our society must be rejected before an honest solution will become possible.

## Jeff – a Preview

One day when I was sitting in my cell with the door ajar, Jeff came by and blessed me with his charming toothless smile. They call him 'Gummy'. He appears to me to be only in his middle or at most late twenties. That seems young to have lost all his teeth. He has a tattoo on his left arm that looks home-made. It says something about 'the beast'. He wanted to tell me about his daughter, Shelena. She is only seven or eight, and yet ... "She's a lot more mature than a lot of the guys here".

He told me that he and his wife lived in Chinatown ... “in the war zone”. They were, according to him, on a bus one day, going through a bad area when they got caught in a gun battle between two gangs. He grabbed his wife and tried to shield her, and then received a couple of superficial wounds. At first he thought that his wife was OK, but then realized that she had been hit, low in her chest.

“Don’t let them take Shelena from you,” she said. Then she died.

He said that a relative helped him to move to a more rural area where he would be less likely to go and try to kill the people who killed his wife. Shelena is staying with his girlfriend.

About half the things I am told here are stories that people make up for effect. I wonder whether the story that Jeff told me is pure fabrication or whether there might be at least some kernel of truth in it. Not knowing makes me feel lonely.

## The Get Well Card

For several days before Ben was taken to the infirmary, I had noticed that whenever he came back from getting his food he would sit and have to struggle to catch his breath. He was quite overweight and I assumed that he must have some emphysema as well. He and Wayne shared the table with me and I was quite conscious of their wheezing and eating noises. I was told that a couple of evenings before he was taken out, Ben had told the nurse that he was not well. The rumor was that his sugar level was way up and that he had trouble urinating. Someone said that he had liver failure. It sounded like diabetes with kidney failure to me, but it wasn’t clear.

Brian said it was Ben’s own fault that he might be dying. I disagreed with this and said I felt that the prison should have picked up on the fact that something was seriously wrong with him. Brian blamed it all on the fact that Ben had drunk an excessive number of sugary drinks over the two-day period before he went to the hospital. It seemed unlikely to me that drinking a bunch of sugary drinks for a couple of days was going to cause either liver or kidney failure unless something had been seriously wrong for some time.

But I let it drop.

A couple of days after Ben was taken to the infirmary, Herbert, one of the guards told the people sitting around the table in front of the TV that Ben was in a coma and not expected to live. His pancreas had ceased functioning. Herbert, more than any other guard, seemed to respect the inmates, and it is not surprising that he would have recognized our right and need for accurate information.

During the next couple of days there was not a lot of talk about Ben. People come and go. Others had died. The men on the unit try not to form deep attachments. On more than one occasion I have been told that while it is good to try to get along with people here, it’s not wise to make friends. The men grieve their losses, but the expression of grief takes a peculiar and muted form. I first noticed the pattern with Timmy, who left a couple of days after I arrived in the unit.

Even today, seven weeks later, I hear people imitating his soprano voice – “Jeeyum. Where are you Jeeyum? Don’t hide your true feelings, Jeeyum.”

Some mannerism or way of saying things would be picked up and imitated after the person left. Albert had left the day before. From time to time, I would hear someone repeating one of his little jingles in an imitation of his sing-song voice – “Soap and water’s free. That’s why we don’t smell like pee.”

Ben was a very poor checkers player but he loved throwing whatever pieces he did take with great force and determination into the lid of the checkers box. Since he left, almost all the checkers players began imitating this gesture. It didn’t seem right to me that Ben being in the hospital on the verge of death was an event that should simply be ignored. During evening Rec I asked some of the other guys whether it might be a good idea to send him a card.

“It might not make any difference,” I said, “because he’s in a coma. But maybe he will come out of it.” I went on to point out that some people claim that when a person is in a coma they are still aware of their surroundings. Lee had experienced an out-of-body experience once before when a prisoner strangled him and he almost died. He said that he had been aware of things that happened around him while he was to all appearances unconscious.

The idea of the card caught on. Darell was brought into the discussion and it was suggested that we get him to make a card. As Ben is a Mi’kmaq native American, Darell and Jim planned a card with a native American theme – based on the picture of a ‘dream catcher’. Jim said we would have to get permission from the Captain. The Captain had not been at work the day before, but Jim went ahead with the picture, which was a fairly simple decorated circle with some feathers attached to it. The idea was that the inmates would sign their names, and maybe add a simple message, and staff could sign it around the margins. The message across the top of Ben’s card read, ‘Hang In There Little Buddy’. The next day Jim got the project approved by the Captain and went around collecting signatures. The plan was to send it in a manila envelope on which Darell had drawn the head of a native American with a ceremonial headdress. It was Friday. We had to wait until Monday to send the card.

On Monday I sat down at the table in front of the TV. All at once I became aware of Wayne lowering his considerable weight onto the stool beside me. He commented to me and to Darrell, who was also at the table, that Ben was real sick.

“I hope he makes it,” he said.

A couple of days later Ben died. Not too much was said about it on the unit.

## How Life Is Lived

During evening recreation I sat down at a table with Charlie, Joseph, and Darrell. Darrell had the TV guide with him and they were engaged in a conversation about what they might watch later in the evening. Melvin came by and sat down at our table beside me. He is a young, slender man with a speech defect. Unless he slows down he is very difficult to understand. The combination of acne and the tiny sharp beard that extends an already sharp little chin, gives him the appearance of an awkward adolescent. He seems to know everything about TV and little else. He is always gentle and friendly – eager to get along, and seems to be remarkably free of malice toward anyone.

In the PC unit the control of what is watched on TV rotates through the various rooms. Melvin pointed out to Joseph that this coming Wednesday, which will be the day that Joseph and I will be in control of the TV, they will show a special on the famous *Peanuts* cartoonist, Charles Schulz. Melvin reads the TV guide from cover to cover. He described some of the cartoons that would be shown on the documentary. Joseph took the information in without comment. When Brian walked off to look at magazines and some books, Charlie turned to Joseph.

“As if you couldn’t figure out for yourself what you wanted to see,” he said.

“If he wants to see it, that ought to cost at least two candy bars,” Darell said.

When Melvin came back, the other guys treated him as though he were trying to get away with something. Darell repeated his comment that if Melvin wanted to see the Schulz documentary he should have to pay. Melvin was crestfallen. It appeared to me that he had only made a friendly suggestion and suddenly he found himself under attack. He simply turned and walked off. As he left, Charlie talked about how ‘they’ (a poorly defined group of ne’er-do-wells that at least included Melvin) want favors for free from you but didn’t give anything back in return.

This is how life is lived – not in large dramatic events for the most part, but in very small transactions that are soon forgotten. In the background the majority of people in the unit were watching ‘*Marshals*’, a movie full of large events – car wrecks, false accusations of serious crimes, etc. The real events that make up a person’s life are hardly noticed in contrast. They are not valued – are not reflected upon.



I would often wonder how my wife was doing. She is the most important friend I have. Sometimes I would visualize her going about her business in the house. It gave me a very lonely feeling.

# Part Two



# Amherst



## Departure and Arrival

Yesterday (the 9th of June), while I was walking to breakfast, a guard, Kenneth, said "You're out of here, Hudson."

"You're kidding," I said.

"Nope. Eat your breakfast and get packed up."

They gave me a big plastic bag to pack my stuff in. I ate my breakfast fast, and packed. Then I waited. As soon as the phones came on, at 9:00am, I called Boo to let her know as much as I knew. At that point I believed I was going to Callum Bay. I asked Boo to send me some money there.

When I approached Charlie to say goodbye, he said, "I never say goodbye to anyone. It sounds so final. I'll just say 'see you later.'"

I nodded. "See you later."

By morning Rec they still had not called for me. I sat at a table with Darrell, Lee, Jim and Brian. Brian was talking about another prisoner who was known to some of the others, but not to me.

"He was in prison for fucking cows," Brian said. I said I found that hard to believe. "Really," Brian insisted. "He told me himself."

Jim laughed. "That's just because he thought you were dumb enough to believe him."

I said that I didn't think it was against the law to fuck cows, but I didn't think it was something people really did that often. A rather confused conversation on cow-fucking ensued. Everybody agreed that it was a nasty thing to do.

"Still," I said, "if somebody does fuck a cow, why is that anyone else's concern?" Several people argued against this. The general thrust of their argument was that anything that nasty should not be allowed.

The level of the discussion deepened as we took the cow's point of view in to consideration. Suppose she liked it. "I mean she could just get up and walk away if she didn't," Ray said.

During morning lock-down I talked with Joseph about his efforts to reconcile his homosexuality with his Christianity. I was fairly aggressive in suggesting that the source of a lot of his psychological problems was almost certainly that he had not been able to reconcile these aspects of his life. At first he protested that the problem was resolved. "I threw away all those magazines last week," he said. I pointed out that you can't simply make a part of yourself evaporate like that. I also suggested that perhaps his homosexuality was created by God just as was the rest of him, and maybe he should respect it.

All this seemed new to him. He agreed to be put in touch with some others who were trying to sort out this issue from a non-homophobic point of view. I assured Eric that we could continue to be in touch by letter if he wished.

After lunch they finally called me out.

In the intake room they sorted through my things and I got into a van with three other men and a woman. I was told we were going to Amherst. "I think I'm supposed to make a connection there and be taken to Callum Bay," I said. The driver told me that this was not true. One of the four people being transported to Amherst was Jeff, the Jeff I knew on the PC unit.



The most disagreeable part of the intake process at Amherst was the strip search. Three guards, putting on rubber gloves, told me and the other two men to come into the next room. In that room they had arranged three semi-private stalls with curtains.

Each of us went into one. A guard stood in front of each of us and gave us instructions about how the search was to be conducted. After I removed my shoes and socks and my shirt they had me turn around, and two of them – one who was doing the search and another who was writing things down – tried to decide where the red birth mark on my back was located. They could see it but could not seem to describe it in words. Then I had to remove my pants and underwear. I was told to pull up my scrotum and then had to turn around and squat down “like a catcher”. While they looked at my butt I had to cough. God knows what that enabled them to see. Then I was asked to put my socks and underwear in a ‘zip-it’ bag, and zip it up. The reason for their keeping a pair of my socks and underwear that I had already worn was to preserve my smell so that, should I escape, their dogs would be able to identify my smell and be able to hunt me down. Presumably there are hundreds – maybe thousands – of bags of dirty socks and underwear preserved somewhere in Amherst. Escapes are rare in Amherst and, so far as I know, no one has ever been recaptured by one of their dogs. In any case, I was finally issued a new pair of underwear and allowed to get dressed.

The entire Amherst facility was housed in the buildings of an air force facility that had been closed down. The ‘receiving dorm’ was one of the old barracks. The dorm contained about twelve rooms which were roughly 20 by 30 feet. Each room contained two iron frame beds and a bunk bed. As the new prisoners were led into this building we were stared at by some inmates who were standing just outside the building. This initial scrutinizing by the other prisoners is an ever-present aspect of the intake process. Always the primary question is the same: are there any ‘skinners’ in this group? In this particular group I happened to be aware that all four of us qualified.

Jeff was frantic. He desperately wanted to be accepted by the punks and the rednecks. Somehow they knew that three of us had been in protective custody and the other had been accused of being a ‘skinner.’ The guards placed Jeff and me in the same room. One of our roommates turned out to be Harold, who had also been in PC. I had known him briefly. Harold confided, when he was alone with Jeff and me, that he had been harassed a fair bit when he first arrived, but that now they were letting up on him. Jeff kept interrupting with nervous random associations while I tried to find out from Harold something about the lay of the land. Harold is an electrical engineer – one of the few somewhat educated people here. He also mentioned that he had ‘accepted Christ’ and that was a help to him. If one accepts Durkheim’s equation of God = society (at least as being the most common form of idolatry), it makes some sense for the prisoner to accept Christ. It is very clear when you are in prison that Christ has your balls in a vise. In any case, the conversion of a certain number of prisoners to evangelical religion is an interesting phenomenon.

Within a half hour Jeff had bummed two coffee packets off Harold. He then went out to make friends with the other inmates, and bum some cigarettes from them. I suggested to him that bumming a lot of things from others might not be the best first step in making friends.

By now our other roommate had arrived. He was a 'regular guy' who fit in with the dominant population here – young, a weight lifter, and very much into 'macho puritanism'. Jeff bummed some cigarette papers off of him and then tried to ingratiate himself with him. Then he went out to mix with the others down in the TV room.

After a few minutes Jeff returned, crestfallen. "How long will they keep it up with their jokes?" he wanted to know. The 'jokes' of course, all had to do with accusing him of being a 'skinner'.

"I have a question," Jeff said to Miller, the macho regular guy roommate. Miller grunted. "Should I show them my papers?"

"If your papers don't show anything wrong," Miller said. It was understood by everybody that the 'anything wrong' meant being a 'skinner'. All other crimes were respected – in general the more violent the better. Scott rummaged through his things and pulled out a paper. I didn't see it but apparently it was one that specified that he had been placed in PC because of getting into a fight. On the other hand it didn't say what the fight had been about or why he was in prison in the first place.

"Look," Miller said. "I hate skimmers. I have kids of my own. But as long as they keep out of my face I leave them alone."

"I'm really not a skinner," Jeff pleaded.

"I don't know whether you are or you aren't Miller said. "I don't want to know."

Despite this lukewarm response to his 'papers', Jeff took them out to show others in the unit.

The day after our arrival Harold and Miller were transferred to an upstairs room. When I sat down at Harold's table at supper the following day I noticed that he looked very upset. I thought that perhaps he had been placed in a room with someone who was determined to continue to give him a hard time. However he was very cool toward me and it was soon apparent that he didn't want me sitting there at all, so I didn't ask him anything about why he was upset.

The next day I was more cautious about sitting down to eat with Harold. He gave a vague shrug of the shoulders in response to my asking whether he wanted company at his table, so I went to find another one. I had seen Harold treat Jeff with the same coolness, but Jeff was not as easily put off. My guess was that Harold wanted to distance himself from us because it was known that we had been on the Protective Care unit in Frankfort. Also there were some people here who had been in the A Pod with me, and I was confident they had spread the rumors that had developed there. Harold did not want his reputation hurt because of his association with us. A few nights later Jeff came back to the room that he and I shared and said he wanted to talk with me. He told me that Harold had told him point-blank that he didn't want to be seen with him because of what it might do to his reputation. Jeff was quite hurt by this. He felt people should stand by their friends.

The next day Jeff updated me on the status of his relationship with Harold. Harold had apologized to him, and presumably was now open to being friends. I said that this was good, both for him and for Harold.



A prison system is set up to impress upon prisoners their absolute powerlessness. The facilities I was in did not even have simple behavioral modification programs, so that one could have some confidence that specific behaviors would lead to predictable consequences. Another aspect of control has to do with the withholding of virtually any information that might be of concern to a person. I was told that I was leaving Frankfort only hours before the van left. I was not told my destination until I was in the van. I was later moved upstairs to another room without warning and without any information about my roommates. Information was not available to me, and the locus of control was entirely outside of me.

If I had not yet learned helplessness, I would here.

Everything was dependent upon the whim of the authorities. There were, of course, rules. But the authorities enforced those that they chose to enforce in the manner that they chose to enforce them. How they interpreted the rules was up to them. There was a grievance procedure, but the grievance never made it outside the correctional system for independent review, and it was therefore worse than a sham. One put oneself at risk by attempting to use it. The irony is that when one is ensnared in the American correctional system – which purports to be a part of the American law enforcement system – one is not any longer under the rule of law, but of caprice. An ombudsman system such as they have in European countries would go a long way toward correcting this.

## Freedom of Association

*Dream: I am in a house where a couple of boys live. One of them is very drawn to me. We talk about some concerns of his. Then I realize that in letting him come and talk with me I have violated the conditions of my probation. A man and a woman have seen me. I think they do not know about the conditions of my probation, but am afraid they will let others know about my contact with this boy. One of them is a professor of some sort, or a psychologist. He is not hostile to me. I find him to tell him not to let others know about this contact. I am still worried about the woman talking.*

*Then I walk out into a courtyard. Several houses open out onto this courtyard. In all of them artists and people of a very independent character live. This is a place I think I would like to live.*

I recorded this dream on the sixth of July, 2000. My associations and comments about it were as follows.

Anxiety about the conditions of probation and the risk associated even with the most benign contacts. Why now with so long to go before it could even be a live issue? I don't know. Maybe just feeling a little depressed that for years and years even the most ordinary contacts will be prohibited. The second part of the dream presents an image of my ideal of community. The common courtyard is a place of meeting – of interchange. Yet the people who meet there are individuals. Autonomy and belonging are reconciled.



One morning, not long after arriving in Amherst, I went outside to walk around the ‘yard’ – the little black-topped area beside the barracks. I encountered a man who looked to be in his early 20s. As far as I could recall, I had never seen him before. This was probably because he had been on room restriction. He was of medium build and had a gentle and pleasant manner. He had been lying down on one of the picnic tables. When I walked by the table, he sat up and greeted me. He introduced himself as Calvin. We exchanged a few pleasantries and then, to my surprise, he began telling me about various things that were troubling him, and his plans for dealing with them.

The difficulties centered around a woman he had lived with for some years. They had a daughter together. She brought two children with her from previous relationships. She kept going to bed with other men during their relationship, which led him to excessive drinking. He finally decided to leave this woman, and, among other things, was struggling to decide how to handle his relationship with his daughter. He seemed to find our conversation helpful, though mostly I just listened. He said it was useful to have someone to talk with who was older and more experienced.

After supper I went out to hear the birds and to relax a bit before going in to do some letter writing. Calvin came and stood beside me at the low wooden fence that enclosed the yard. He seemed very pleased to see me and began talking with enthusiasm about a book he was reading on Vietnam. I told him about *‘The Things they Carry’* and said I would get it sent in so he could read it.

There were three other men standing against the fence about ten yards away. One of them was a man I knew from the A Pod. I had been aware for some time that this man had been spreading the rumors about me that got started there, to the prisoners here. I knew that was unavoidable and had been ignoring the occasional comments and the fact that very few people here will have anything to do with me.

One of the three men called Calvin over and they had a confidential conversation. I was reasonably sure they were warning him against having any association with me.

When he returned to the unit without saying anything more to me, any remaining uncertainty evaporated. After thinking about it a couple of minutes I went over to the three men.

“I want to ask you something,” I said. This was received with a stony silence. “I’m not here to make a problem. I’m not a fighter. I just wanted to talk about something.” I received a couple a vague shrugs. “Did you warn that guy away from me?” I asked. They admitted that they had, because I was a ‘skinner’, and ... “people don’t like skimmers around here.”

I told them they didn’t know what I did or didn’t do. “So it would be better if you just let me do my time and you did yours,” I said. “I should be able to have my friends just like you do.”

One of them asked me about the newspaper clipping. Obviously he had heard about this from the guy from the A Pod. I told them that the newspaper account wasn’t accurate and that they were not my judge and jury.

One of them tried a favorite ploy.

"If you just admitted what you did we'd leave you alone," he said. Sometimes it takes the form of ... "Be man enough to own up to what you did." If you do, then they have it from your own mouth, and of course they don't then leave you alone. I told them I had no obligation to tell them what did or didn't happen. One of them proudly declared that his 'crime' was breaking and entering.

"I'm not afraid to say what I did," he declared pompously.

"There is only one charge here that gets you persecuted," I pointed out.

Then the guy from A Pod went on a bit about how a lot of the guys here had children of their own and didn't take lightly to anyone messing with them. I knew there was no point in pursuing the matter any further. I said so and withdrew to my former position along the fence.

I had not noticed it at the time, but my roommate, Jeff, had been out there. He had witnessed the whole interaction. He called me over to the opposite side of the yard and told me that I should not have confronted these men.

Later we talked about it some more. I agreed with him that there was probably little to be gained from any sort of direct confrontation of these punks. His solution was to try to convince himself that he was as tough as they were. Or if not, he could get in touch with his brother. According to him it was his brother that knocked out the two front teeth of the man from the A Pod. This was one of his many unlikely stories. I have noticed that he gets started on this kind of story when he feels threatened. In any case, I said I didn't care whether they could beat me up or not. I wasn't going to be intimidated. To try to prove to them that I was acceptable was just one more form of ass-kissing as far as I was concerned. I told Jeff that it wasn't the name-calling that I was responding to in this case, but the assumption these men had that they could say who could be friends with whom.

The issue of friends caused Jeff to associate to the situation with Harold. Yesterday at supper Jeff had tried to get me to say "Hi" to Harold. He asked why I had refused to. I told him that Harold had made the choice to cut himself off from me out of his concern for his reputation with the punks. He had made no overture to me saying he regretted this or wanted us to be friends after all. He couldn't have it both ways.

I said that whether you thought the punks could beat you up or not, you should not give them the power of determining who you would or would not be friends with. If you gave them that power you cast your lot in their camp, and you had to live with that. Scott's response was interesting. He went on a bit about who could beat up whom, and then got into fantasies about coming to my aid if anybody attacked me. Interestingly this is what my roommate on A Pod told me, and he dropped me like a hot potato as soon as the heat began to burn him. I thought Jeff might do better, but was not at all sure of this. I felt grateful for his thought at any rate.

Jeff told me that I was the first person he ever met who was like a father to him. He said he was going to hang in there with me no matter what. I said that was good but that I didn't want him getting into any fights for me.

I little later I saw Calvin in the hallway.

"Did those guys tell you not to have anything to do with me?" I asked.

"Yes, but I didn't pay any attention to that," he said. But I could see the fear in his eyes.

"It's OK," I said. "I don't want to be a source of trouble for you."

He assured me that he still wanted to be friends.

"It's good to have somebody older to talk with," he reiterated.

I doubted that he would risk going against the warning he had been given, but I promised him I would get him the book about Vietnam.



On 30 June, 2000 I found myself in a state of depression and rage as deep as I have ever known. I had lost two games of chess to another man there because I could hardly see the board. I found that chess was a fairly objective indication of the degree of my dissociation. I simply gave my queen away. It was the sort of mistake a third grader would make.

Intellectually the goal to 'not let others paint your portrait' was easy to understand. But the emotional center cannot help but respond to the daily – almost minute by minute – assault on one's sense of identity. It was like being hit a hundred times a day – by anyone, at any time, coming from any direction – on and on and on. You can tell yourself that you are not your body – refuse to identify with it – but eventually you will still die from enough beatings. Likewise, I could tell myself 'I am not what they see', but I still seemed to be dying from the constant battering.

The verbal assault on my identity was nothing new. As I tried to understand the depth of my rage and despair, I focused on the problem of my finding a network of friends here. I knew that there were a lot of people at Amherst with the same charges that I had, but a number of factors blocked me from having any meaningful contact with them. One major issue was that, unless they had been hopelessly outed by the system, and could not somehow lie their way out of it, those who were in for similar charges will, more than all the others, avoid me. To be seen with me threatens their own identity as 'regular guys' or at least as only 'suspected skimmers'. This is a part of the search and destroy mentality here. From the moment one arrives in this prison system he is scrutinized. No one first asks 'Is he kind?', or 'Is he a murderer?', or 'Is he a trustworthy person?', or any of the other things that one might expect. The first question is always 'Is he a skimmer?'. And one of the efforts to destroy the 'skimmers' that are discovered is to warn anybody who might be friendly to them that this is not safe.

The punks ran Amherst. They carried out the will of society. They were its heroes. They were the pilots who actually flew the bombers and the fighters. They might be a little rough around the edges, but they were red-blooded Americans. They cried at John Wayne movies. They were made of the 'right stuff'.

People with sex charges against them were forced either to hide, which is in itself a form of isolation, or to accept an enforced isolation by the system. This was what made all the other forms of harassment – and they were legion – almost unbearable. I wasn't even sure that it was only 'almost'. I had always believed that, whatever my situation, I would be able to find some way of coping. This belief



was being challenged. Most of my plans for coping seemed to be collapsing. Perhaps I really was checkmated. Perhaps there were some situations that were so unbearable that they really did just crush you. I wondered what that would look like in my case.

To ever find that courtyard I dreamed about – where I could choose whom I wanted to associate with, and where autonomy and belonging were reconciled – seemed at this time to be a very remote possibility.

## In My Space

Jeff was in his early to middle 20s (I never thought to ask him his age). He was nick-named ‘Gummy’ on the Protective unit due to his complete absence of teeth, natural or artificial. He said that someone in his family had agreed to pay for dentures and, on the basis of this promise to pay, the prison was going to make arrangements for him to get a set of artificial teeth. He is of medium height and build. His face is friendly, earnest and sincere – almost child-like. Jeff took a liking to me while we were both in the Protective Unit. A couple of days after our coming together to Amherst he explained the reason for this attachment he felt. “You know why I followed you around like a puppy dog? My father died when I was eight. You remind me of him.”

I liked Jeff but found several obstacles in the way of establishing a genuine relationship with him. A lot of his talk had to do with how his brother (or occasionally some other admired male) had ‘huge arms’ and was able to knock people around (as seen on Saturday night wrestling). His brother, of course, always had impeccably honorable reasons for beating people up. Usually the protection of women and children was involved. This introjection of the values of punk society sat like a peculiar and incompatible blemish on his essentially gentle nature. I waited for the opportunity to confront him on this issue in a friendly way.

A second obstacle concerned Jeff’s art work. He brought me samples regularly for my approval – as a young child would bring his or her efforts to a parent who was pretty likely to be appreciative. And I was appreciative. I did not voice either of my disappointments in his work – that it was not from his own soul, and that it was ‘cute’. I asked whether he had ever thought of doing anything based on his own dreams. He said that some of his drawings were. But in fact I saw only stock cartoon characters. The dream-mind and Walt Disney have different tastes and their productions are distinguishable at a glance.

The third major obstacle was the fact that Jeff frequently related made-up, or at least highly embellished, stories as the stuff of real life. The first time I suspected this was the when he told me about the shooting of his first girlfriend – the mother of his daughter. This is the story I narrated in Part One – the one that ended with his girlfriend saying “Don’t let them take Cyclone from you”, just before she died. I conjectured that something vaguely resembling what he had told me might actually have happened, but the story as he related it suffered from the cheap pathos and the unlikely timing of a B-grade movie. It lacked the clutter of real life.



There was a unit for women on the Amherst grounds. Several of the women worked in the supply department where we received our clothes. A couple of days after we arrived in Amherst, Jeff informed me that the inmate who helped pass out our clothes was here because she and her boyfriend had cut a girl on her back and drunk her blood. I asked where he had heard this. He said she told him this while he was getting his clothes. Aside from the improbability of a young and attractive inmate using this as her opener in a new relationship, I was there when she passed out the clothes to Jeff. I would have overheard a conversation, or at least a part of it, that was so involved. I expressed some skepticism regarding whether this girl with her boyfriend ever cut some poor victim on her back and drank her blood.

Another time I listened while Jeff explained to Harold how a drunk driver ran over his daughter, Cylone, and broke her leg. I had heard this story before and had no particular reason to doubt it, though it struck me as odd that the unusual name of his daughter was so similar to that of Simone, my own daughter. As he related the story this time the drunk driver got out of the car, came over to Cylone and sexually molested her. I knew before he told it that either he or his brother were going to give this despicable cur the beating he deserved. And sure enough, that is just where the story went.

It was too much.

"That didn't happen, Jeff," I said.

"It did."

"Someone who has just run over a child isn't going to get out of his car and go molest her," I said. "Things just don't happen that way." This was the first time I had ever confronted him that bluntly.

"It did happen," he said, meekly.

"Whatever." I shrugged.



A few days later I decided to confront Jeff more aggressively regarding my difficulty having confidence in the veracity of some of the stories he was telling me.

"It's a problem for me," I explained, "because I like you and want to know what really has happened to you. When I can't tell whether something you tell me is really what happened, it makes me lonely."

He did not seem to take offense but insisted that everything he told me happened just as he told it. I pointed out that his 'elaborations' tended to occur when he felt threatened, and frequently involved stories about how he and his brother, Sanford, protected themselves or some innocent victims in a very violent way.

Jeff told me that he grew up in the 'war-zone' around Chinatown in Boston. He told me that he spent a year living with a minister who seemed to have adopted him. This minister confronted him about why he presented himself as such a scary person. One of the 'scary' things that the minister gave as an example was his carving tattoos and letters into his forearm, causing it to bleed. Jeff told the minister that he was afraid of being attacked, so he developed that art of looking scary so people would leave him alone.

Another of Jeff's stories concerned the events surrounding the death of his sister, Hanna, from AIDS and cancer when she was 18. When Hanna was 14 years old she began going with a man named Willis who was 42. Willis was a drug user. According to Jeff, Hanna collapsed one day and had to be taken to the hospital. They discovered that she had inoperable cancer and was HIV positive. She died a couple of months later. Jeff said that he and Sanford found Willis and beat him up pretty badly. He said Willis would have been killed had he not restrained his brother. They blamed Willis for the death of their sister because Willis had not told her he was HIV positive. It was not clear whether the transmission of the virus was through sex or through shared needles.

"Suppose there had been no HIV problem, and that Willis treated Hanna good. Would the age difference have been a problem?" I asked.

"No," he said. "It was what she wanted."

The harassment from the other inmates was wearing Jeff down. He seemed to be getting more flack about being a 'skinner' than I was. He told me that he was afraid the 'monster' in him was very close to breaking out. The 'monster' referred to his wish to attack or hurt people. Hulk comic books provide the material for a common fantasy among those who are relentlessly harassed in a prison situation. You finally reach the end of your rope and in one dramatic moment you turn into the Hulk and pound the shit out of one (or several) of your tormentors, and from then on everybody leaves you alone. Generally speaking things did not happen that way. I felt that trying to act out this fantasy could get Jeff into worse problems than he already had. I talked with him about not letting others 'paint his portrait'.

What may have been Jeff's most outlandish fabrication was triggered by his seeing that I was reading a book called '*Satanic Verses*'. This seemed to worry him. I reassured him that it was just a novel, and that I was not into the practice of Satanism. He asked to see the book. After looking it over and deciding that it was, in fact, just a novel, he seemed somewhat reassured. I attempted to dissipate the residual anxiety by joking. I threatened to cast a spell on him. In this context I wrote a very silly little poem that served as the 'spell' to transform him into a toad. He responded by writing a poem that expressed his happiness at finding a father in me. Then he told me about his encounter with the satanic cult.

As he related it, one day a boy – I will call him Johnny – went missing. This was while Jeff was still living in Massachusetts. The authorities suspected that Johnny had been kidnapped. A search party, which included Jeff, was organized. Out in the woods the search party discovered a cave. They went in and found that a tunnel led to a big room in which a Satanic ritual was taking place. Johnny was chained to a stone altar and a priest was cutting the throat of a goat over him, bathing him in blood. Then a priestess, who was wearing nothing from the waist up, came up to the altar and performed some aspect of the ritual. When she was done, the head priest returned with a knife. He raised the knife over the boy and prepared to plunge it into his heart. One of the men in the search party shot the priest. At this point the worshipers turned around and saw the members of the search party. They started toward them. Several of the worshipers were shot dead before the rest of them retreated. The members of the search party freed Johnny and took him back to town.

By the time the search party returned to the cave with reinforcements, the worshippers who had not been killed had escaped, but the dead priest and the worshippers that had been killed were still there.

This time I was not so tactful. "Jeff. That just didn't happen," I said.

I think he was a bit startled by my bluntness. "I'm telling it to you just as I remember it," he protested.

I pointed out a number of things that were implausible about his story. Why had the satanists failed to post guards at the opening of their cave? Why were the members of the search party able to observe so much of the ritual without being noticed themselves? What were the odds of the search party arriving at precisely the moment Johnny was about to be sacrificed?

Jeff listened to my objections without interrupting. Finally I told him my most serious objection. "If something like what you described had actually happened it would have been big news," I said. "It would have been on TV, and there would have been newspaper reports all over the country."

Jeff claimed that it was in the newspapers. I told him that I would give him a thousand dollars if he could produce a clipping the described these events.

There was a long pause. Then he said, "If I do, you owe me an apology."



I found Jeff one evening with a badly bruised face and a rather deep cut on the inside of his upper lip. The cut should have been closed with stitches. Jeff told me that he had gotten into a fight. More accurately, Jeff had been beaten up.

After questioning him, listening to comments from others, and asking a couple of people what had happened, I pieced together an account of the incident that I think is probably fairly accurate.

Jeff was smoking a cigarette in the smoking room with seven or eight other prisoners. When he attempted to make a contribution to the discussion, Stanford, a tall blond man, stepped up to him and 'got in his face'.

"We don't like your kind," he said.

"I don't care," Jeff retorted.

"Shut up," another man, Willoughby, said.

"I'll speak my mind if I want," Jeff answered.

At this point Davies, a friend of Stanford, hit Jeff from the side. They wrestled around a bit and Davies managed to hit Jeff several more times in his face. Stanford backed off to guard the door to the room so that the fight would not be interfered with, and hopefully not even discovered. A guard apparently heard what was going on and, after some delay in getting Stanford out of the way, broke up the fight.



The dining hall was an old one-storey wooden building that is divided into two approximately equal sections – a dining room that held about 25 tables that sat four people each, and a food preparation area. The food preparation area was further divided into a large central room where most of the food preparation actually took

place and some smaller rooms, including four walk-in coolers, an office, a variety of storage spaces, and a dish room. The large central room contained a grill, a stove, several ovens and other pieces of equipment. A cafeteria-style serving line marked the boundary between the food preparation area and the dining room.

Jeff and I had both been assigned to work in the kitchen. I worked in the dish room. Every Monday after breakfast the entire food preparation area received a more complete cleaning than the general washing and mopping than it received after each meal. The floor of the dish room slanted toward the side where the dishwasher was installed. But the drain in the floor was in the center of the room. This meant that when everything was washed down after breakfast on Monday morning a lot of water gathered along the wall under the washing machine where it was very difficult to mop up, due to to number of pipes and other obstacles in the way.

The water that gathered along the wall under the dishwasher was more or less ignored during Monday morning clean-ups. The clean-ups involved copious amounts of bleach, so I doubted that much of anything grew in the unseen puddles under the dishwasher and sink. Still, the idea that this water just sat there from one week to the next bothered me. I had made some efforts to get at the area with a mop, but that was pretty unsatisfactory. Once I had even got down on my hands and knees on the wet floor and crawled under the sink to try to dry the area with rags. This was an heroic and time-consuming effort that might have been justified if the issue had been saving somebody's life, but just to mop up a probably harmless puddle, it didn't seem worth it. One Monday morning I pointed the problem out to Hooper, the man who worked in the window. I asked if he knew of any reasonable way of dealing with it.

"There used to be a water vac," he said. A little investigation by the two of us led to discovering that the little machine was still around. I brought it to the dish room and was looking around for a way to plug it in when Hooper came into the room with one end of a heavy extension cord. The floor was wet but there were no puddles there, so I figured that the connection where the water vac plugged into the extension cord was safe enough.

At this point Jeff happened into the dish room. "You can't do that," he said. "You can't leave the cord on the floor."

"Jeff," I said. "Will you just mind your own business?"

But he persisted. The rule that electric cords should never be left on a wet floor was on the list of rules we had to sign when we began working in the kitchen, he pointed out, and he lifted the cord up and draped it over the shelves that held the bags of soda for the soda machine. I became more frustrated with him and told him again to mind his own business. I may have said, 'your own fucking business'. My voice was loud. Elizabeth, the supervisor of the kitchen, came to the door of the dish room to see what was happening. Jeff explained to her about the cord and how it should not be on the floor. She agreed. Jeff was right.

I swallowed my anger, and crawled under the sink to suck up the water. When I emerged from under the sink Jeff was still standing in the doorway staring at me. "I'm sorry I yelled at you," I said, and tried to get past him with the water vac. He said something about how I shouldn't have yelled at him.

“Whatever,” I said. “Don’t accept my apology. Fuck you.”

I went into the back room where the washing machine and dryer were kept, emptied the water out of the bucket and cleaned it. When I looked up I saw the Jeff had followed me. He wanted to point out that he was right about the cord. It was dangerous. Why wouldn’t I listen to him? At this point I lost it again.

“I hear you,” I said. “You are right about the cord. Now I want you to hear me.” I told him that he was always into my business – telling me how to do my job. This really got on my nerves. He was into other people’s business too, and this was making him enemies. Again I was too loud. Elizabeth came into the room and said that if she had to talk with me again she was going to ‘write me up’.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I really am sorry. But can I just get away from him?”

She conceded that this would be a good idea, and sent me back to the dorm.

I do not record this incident with any sense of pride. I acted in the most childish manner. I liked Jeff and did not want to hurt him. I am not interested in justifying myself. But trying to understand why I lost control of myself is not the same as making excuses.

The issue behind this blow-up was my need – largely unmet here – for a little space, for a niche that is mine, for some boundaries around my physical self and my activities that can’t be intruded upon at any moment by any person who is around. Frankie told me a few weeks ago that he was reluctant to give up the pots and pans job in the kitchen, which is generally considered to be the least desirable job in the area. His reason was that he had his own little self-contained world there where people left him alone. This was a niche for him.

Hooper sits on two milk crates stacked on each other. This seat is squeezed between the wooden shelves where the bags for the the soda machines are stored, and the metal shelves on which the dishes from the dining room are received and sorted. When he is not busy, this is Hooper’s niche. That’s why it was so appalling when Jeff sat down there to eat his lunch and didn’t move when Hooper came in. Hooper said nothing but one of the other men in the kitchen came in and threatened to beat Jeff up for taking that seat.

I tried to get a small niche for myself on two other milk crates in the dish room – just a place to sit and rest my legs. Jeff would at times take this place. At other times he would stand so close to me that I would feel the need to move. That’s why it was so difficult for me to be around him all the time. I needed boundaries more than anything else, and he didn’t even seem to be aware of their existence.

The thing that made coping with Jeff’s constant intrusions especially painful to me was that his motivations were often friendly, or at least reflected a desire to be closer to me.

Example. There is lull after the men finish returning their trays and before the women start coming in. Especially if it was hot, I fell into the habit of getting myself some ice water during this lull, and I would always offer to get some for Hooper and for whoever was in the silverware wrapping position. Hooper always wanted some and was appreciative. When Jeff began working at the soda machine he would, in imitation of me, come in about half way through the meal with a couple of sodas which he offered to Hooper and me. He was wanting to be appreciated. He was also wanting to be like me. These were benign motivations.

Unfortunately he did not ask what anybody wanted, and he would arrive right at the busiest time when the sodas were simply in the way. They were generally warm by the time it was possible to drink them. If I then threw mine away, and he noticed it, or if I went to get cold water during the break, I would seem to be rejecting Jeff and his gift. The effect was however, that I lost the little job that I had during the break and neither Hooper nor I really had what we wanted. This seemed to me like being killed by friendly fire.

Further examples of the boundary problem:

- When I was talking with someone else in the kitchen, Jeff would push his way into the conversation, and focus it on himself. His motivations? Just to be included and noticed. Perhaps there was also some jealousy that I would give any attention to someone else.
- Sometimes when I stood in the doorway of the dish room Jeff would come and stand in the doorway with me. He stood too close – again I felt that he was in my space.
- I remember sitting on my two milk crates eating some desert while I handled the few trays that were coming in early. I got up to get something to drink. When I came back Jeff was handling the dishes and my space was gone. Again, he was trying to be helpful.
- When I would try to write a letter or a journal entry back in the room, Jeff would start talking with me about anything that came to his mind.
- Back in the room Jeff used my coffee every day. He made giant food orders for himself. He bought more things than I ever did. But he bought no coffee, no pens and no ibuprofen. He depended on me for these things. I told him I didn't mind lending him some of these things, but that it did bother me when he ordered himself all sorts of sodas, soups and candy and continued to depend on me for the things he didn't want to pay for himself.
- One day Jeff asked to use my earphones. I had always been lukewarm about lending them. "I'll be using them in a bit," I said. He asked whether he could use them until then. I said "I guess so". To most people "I guess so", in the tone of voice I used, would mean 'No'. He took them. Later, when I wanted them, he was asleep with them still on his ears. He was lying on the cord. I tried to get them back which I was unable to do without waking him.

The problem as I saw it was that I was in an environment where, in so many ways, I was allowed no boundaries. The TV was perhaps the greatest intrusion into my space. While it was blaring I had no space even in my own mind where I could think my own thoughts and pursue my own interests. In this context I experienced my friendship with Jeff as a Trojan Horse. I had allowed him past my few fragile defenses and with his oftentimes friendly acts he shattered my last effort at securing a small niche of privacy for myself. That, at any rate, was how I experienced him, and what led to my explosion.



Very often I would go out to the little yard before most of the other prisoners were awake. That was a way of finding a bit of quiet and solitude. One morning I was sitting on a bench out there with a cup of coffee. The sun had just risen.

I was thinking about spitting. The men here spit a lot. As I was waking up, the first thing I had heard was someone in the bathroom clearing his throat, and then clearing it some more and then some more. It had never occurred to me that one could invest so much aggression in just clearing one's throat. Finally he would spit in the sink and then repeat the cycle of clearing and spitting.

When I waited for lunch there were invariably two or three men leaning over the fence, spitting into the grass. When I watched men walking down the road, some of them would spit every ten or fifteen yards. Most of these men were able to spit with great force – projecting it several feet away from their bodies. When I walked to the dining hall and back, I could trace a trail of spit globs – some clear and some green with mucus – interspersed along the way. To me, spitting has always been in the same category as nose picking or masturbation.

I have nothing against these practices, but I always wished that people would limit them to private times and places. The men had recently been forced to stop smoking – one of the stupider institutional practices to be implemented. Some of the spitting seemed to be related to a real need to clear out their lungs. But much more of it was plainly a masculine display. The spit is ejaculated from the mouth with a certain 'fuck you if you don't like it' decisiveness. It was accompanied with a swagger. Those who are most practiced at it were the same ones who strut down the road with their heads cocked to one side and their arms held out away from their bodies as though they had rashes in their arm pits – the same ones who stand around with their hands thrust down the front of their pants.

While I sat there meditating on various displays of masculine virility, Jeff joined me. I knew that he would begin talking pretty soon. When I turned to look at him, I noticed that he was quietly spitting – not ejaculating the spit across the yard, but just allowing it to drop lazily from his lips to the ground. He studied it as it fell, almost as if he were meditating on it.

"I don't like spitting very much," I said. I was surprised at myself. I didn't realize I was so angry.

"Oh," he said.

I looked at the four or five globs of fresh spit on the ground between his feet.

"It's no big thing," I said.



I first met Shawn on a Friday morning. We were standing at the low wooden fence that marked off the small 'yard' to the Receiving dorm. He had just arrived the previous afternoon in the new batch from Frankfort. One of the first things he told me was that he had a glass eye. I probably would not have noticed had he not mentioned it. His main concern about having only one real eye was that it might affect his ability to box. He had heard that there were supposed to be some French Canadians that would be coming through who were 'mean as shit'. They were expert boxers. He was only average build, and was young – in his early



twenties at most. With his glass eye and inexperience I doubted that he would be among the most intimidating figures around even if the mean-as-shit Canadians never showed up.

Shawn was obviously afraid, and he wanted to believe that he could beat anybody up. He spoke about how tough he was. It was difficult to follow his talk because he spoke mostly in sentence fragments and enunciated as though he had a mouth full of mashed potatoes.

I was already aware when I met him that Shawn was mouthy to anybody he felt he could intimidate. He talked about how he was going to give some 'skinner' a hard time.

"People are miserable enough around this place without anyone going out of his way to stir things up," I said.

"But he's a skinner. He deserves it," he said.

"You're not his judge," I said. "And you're not God. You don't know what he did or what he deserves."

Surprisingly he accepted this from me, but it didn't stop him from being mouthy.

A few days ago Jeff told me that he and Shawn almost got into a fight. Shawn apparently told Jeff that with no teeth in his mouth he must really give guys good blow jobs. Seeing that the the topic was disabilities, Jeff retorted with, "Yeah, and with you having a glass eye it would be easy to give you a good skull fuck". Jeff told me that he had thought that Shawn was joking, and was just returning the banter. Shawn, however, did not find this bit of repartee amusing and asked Jeff to come into the bathroom where they could have it out. Jeff declined, saying that he did not want to risk his placement in the Work Release Program.

The evening after I had my conversation in the yard with Shawn, I was playing spades with Jeff and two others when Martell came up to our table. Martell was a young guy – tall and slender and very much identified with the punk culture in his manner, talk and dress. He was not a muscle-man himself and liked to play the game of 'why don't you and him fight'.

"Hey Jeff," he said. "I heard you punked Shawn off in the bathroom."

Jeff shrugged.

"Whatever," he said.

Martell left and shortly Shawn arrived.

"Hey Jeff," he said. "I hear you're going around here saying you punked me off."

Jeff denied this is what he said, but Shawn continued to insist that someone told him that he had heard Jeff say this. I pointed out to Jeff that Martell was behind this – that he was setting up other people to fight so he could enjoy it without risk of getting hurt or into trouble himself. I said that it really wasn't worth risking his work release placement just so that he could get into it with Shawn.

Shawn continued to provoke. He had an audience and was making his points. He went so far as to poke Jeff lightly in the face. Still Jeff refused to respond. Eventually Shawn gave up and left. After a short while Martell returned and began to jeer at Jeff. Jeff was 'fucked up', he said, because he talked like he was tough, but didn't back up his talk with action.

Later I heard a rumor that Shawn had a couple of heavyweights ready to back him up if he got into trouble. I was confident that I knew who these people were



and suspected they really were just interested in getting Shawn to act out, and that they wouldn't really risk much themselves if the going got rough.

Later in the evening Jeff came upstairs to our room. He found me there and told me he had a plan. He was going to talk with McNally – a streetwise man who had been friendly both to Jeff and to me – to get his idea about what he should do. As he left to go find McNally he said, “If I don't come back in five minutes come and find me”. I was dubious about McNally being able to help, but noticed that things seemed to calm down the rest of the evening. Later on Jeff told me that McNally had talked to both of them and somehow encouraged them to be friends.

The next morning I went out to have a little quiet time before breakfast. Dan Guay – a man in his early forties and one of the more settled guys in the dorm – was writing a letter at the picnic table.

“Did you hear the commotion last night?” he asked. I said I must have slept through it. He told me that Shawn got into a fight with someone last night, and ended up with a black eye. The guards went through the rooms downstairs looking at people's knuckles to see if they could figure out who had beat him up. They were able to prove nothing. It seemed reasonable to assume that Shawn had continued to be mouthy with people. I wondered whether McNally had gotten him.



Jeff and I stood side by side, looking over the fence around the yard. The sun had just risen. The evening before, the guards had told him that he was scheduled to go to his pre-release program today. When he told me about this I felt a huge relief, as though I had an abscessed tooth and had just been told that the dentist was about ready to pull it out.

“This is just like when I left my mother to be on my own,” he said.

“How is that?” I asked.

“Leaving you is like leaving her. You are like a father to me.”

“That's right. You haven't had a father, at least not since he died when you were seven.”

“Eight,” he said.

“Right. Well, maybe people want things they have never had.” He nodded.

After breakfast we found ourselves at the fence again. The guards showed no signs of taking him any time soon, and we had run out of things to talk about. We had speculated a bit about how it would be at the pre-release and he had assured me that he would write and would pay me back the \$23 he still owed me. I excused myself and came inside. I had my morning routine to attend to.

As I sat in the stall waiting for my bowels to agree that this was the time for them to do their business, I noticed someone come into the stall beside me. He sat down. I went on reading and ignored him. Then someone spoke to me from the next stall.

“Hello Johnnie.”

No one else called me Johnnie. It was Jeff.

I made a vague and non-committal noise in response.

“So here we are again,” he said.

There is no place I can escape to, I thought.

Later in the morning Jeff came into the room where I was sitting in my chair writing. He shut the door furtively behind him.

"I have to talk with you," he said.

I shrugged.

He told me that he heard there were some people who were going to 'get' me. It was a bit vague, but presumably a person or some people were going to beat me up. He explained that this was because he was leaving. They knew he would not back off, as I might, and that he would protect me. I knew that anyone who would be deterred by him would not be a serious threat to me. I also knew that he made up reality as he went along.

"I don't believe that," I said.

"It's true," he told me.

He did not seem offended at the bluntness of my response.

Shortly after lunch, while I was lying on my bed, I heard them call his name. I knew he was now leaving. I did not get up to go see him off, or even look out the window to watch him cross the road to the office.

I felt sad – sad that I had not met him when he was younger and I might have been able to be of some help to him, sad that we had not met in a different situation where I could have had some boundaries, and he would not have been such a liability to me, and sad that I did not feel more sad. To some extent I would miss him. But the relief was greater.

## The Urn

I barely knew Philip. He had made some friendly gestures in my direction, but his conversation had been guarded and superficial. I was a little annoyed when he intruded into my privacy in the early morning on September 17, and gestured for me to come and sit at his table. I did not, however, wish to be rude, so I joined him. Phillip was a slightly overweight, 34-year-old man with a receding hairline and a quiet, almost self-effacing, manner. I knew that he would be leaving in a few weeks and was not especially anxious to get to know him any better.

At first we talked about his current job placement, which involved some carpentry work. That led to his telling me about the new addition he built on his trailer about three years ago. He was still living with his second wife at that time. It turned out that the new addition was a bedroom that he had added so that a cousin of his, whom he called Rocky, would have a place where he could be comfortable until he died. Rocky had bone cancer, and had been told by the doctors that he had about six months to live.

Following that initial opening-up, Philip sought me out on about four occasions, when he found me alone in the game room or out in the yard. With only the slightest prompting from me he continued to tell me about his life. The center piece of his narrative was his relationship with Rocky. I have pieced this story together from bits and pieces he told me on different occasions, but have tried to relate his story pretty much as he conveyed it to me.

Throughout most of his childhood, Philip lived with his mother. His parents had divorced when he was about five or six. Philip's cousin Rocky lived in another apartment, in the same apartment building. He and Rocky were the same age and had been very close from the time they were quite small. When Philip and Rocky were thirteen they decided that they wanted to move away from home and set up housekeeping on their own. Apparently neither of them got along well with his parents.

Philip never did learn to get along with his parents. He was alienated from his father as well as his mother. He had tried to live with his father recently, but it did not work out. They would both drink too much and then get into physical fights that the police would have to break up. He said that on at least one occasion one of the policemen got hurt while trying to break them up.

I asked him why he thought he and his father had so much trouble getting along. He said that it was related to his feeling abandoned by his father when his mother and father divorced. When Philip and Rocky announced their intention to move out on their own, Philip's uncle (Rocky's father) suggested that they redo the basement. This was possible because Philip's aunt owned the small apartment building where they lived. The boys agreed to follow the uncle's suggestion, and soon had the basement converted into a third little apartment with two bedrooms. They even rebuilt the crude service entrance to the cellar to make a proper entrance so that they had an independent way of coming and going. Also, when they moved in they heated their apartment with a wood stove. The rest of the apartment house was heated with oil, but having the cellar warmed up with the wood stove made it easier to heat the whole building.

It was their own little club house. "That's where we entertained people," Philip said.

When Rocky was 16, he came down with cancer. "It was in his blood that time," Philip said.

"So it was leukemia?" I asked.

He nodded and explained that treatments were given that brought the cancer into remission twice, but that the third time he came down with it the cancer was in his bones. From the time he was 16, Philip found himself, off and on, with the task of trying to nurse Rocky through his illnesses. As Philip explained, "I took it upon myself to be my cousin's keeper, and that hurt my marriages. But that was all right. Rocky was the most important person in my life."

Philip had two marriages that were hurt by his relationship with Rocky. In the first one he married a woman who already had two small boys. This marriage lasted only nine months, because of his wife's jealousy of Rocky. However, Philip remained committed to being the father of the two boys. "I'm the only father they had," he explained. Philip owned the house in which they lived, but allowed them to continue living there after the divorce. Then he willed the house to the two boys, who were 11 and 13 at the time Philip was telling me this story.

It would have been rude to ask Philip why he was incarcerated, and he did not volunteer the information. I wondered whether he might be in on sex abuse charges. I also wondered whether there had been an overtly sexual dimension to his relationship with Rocky, but again did not feel that I should ask.

During one of our times together Philip went into some detail telling me about a couple of Volkswagens he had fixed up. Ever since he worked in a junk yard as a teenager he had an interest in fixing up old cars.

Philip had very definite attitudes and opinions about work. He did not like working for others, so he contracted to do various jobs, such as hauling, landscaping and roofing. He was a tough businessman who always insisted on working under a written contract that made it clear what he was to be paid and specified that he would offer no refunds. On one occasion he received \$3,000 to do a roof. The man who paid him in advance for this job then decided he didn't want the roof done after all. Philip said that he came to the house every morning for a week – ready for work – in case the man changed his mind. But he was willing to return only \$50 of the \$3,000 that the man paid him.

Philip's ideas about work included firm convictions as to what was woman's work and what was man's work. Once his wife came outside to help him with some wood-splitting so the work would be finished in time for them to go out to eat in the evening. He sent her back inside and told her that if the house was clean by late afternoon they could go.

Philip's health was not good. His drinking had seriously damaged his liver and he was legally disabled. Still, he continued working because he wanted to.

His second marriage, to June, lasted for about eight years.

Apparently this marriage was able to last that long because for most of this time Rocky's cancer was in remission and he was living with his mother. Then Rocky's cancer re-appeared – this time in his bones – and he asked Philip if he could live with him until he died. Philip agreed.

"Rocky lived another year and a half," Philip told me, with obvious pride in his voice. It was clear that he felt his care of his cousin enabled him to outlive the expectation of the medical profession.

June was not enthusiastic about Philip's decision to have Rocky live with them. During the entire year and a half he lived with them, there was an undercurrent of tension because of her unhappiness with the arrangement. On one occasion, for example, June refused to take Rocky to town to get some things he needed, and he had to drive there himself, which was not easy because of his physical limitations. This led to an argument between Philip and his wife – one of several precipitated by similar situations.

When Rocky moved in with Philip he wanted the wood stove in their place going for at least some period of time each day. They set up a screen so that the doors of the stove could be left open and they could look at the fire.

Philip had two dogs that became close companions to Rocky. One of these dogs was a fat little beagle that "was as wide as it was long". From Philip's description, I picture it as a brown and tan sphere with four stubby legs and a tail. The other dog was initially described as a pit bull. Later Philip conceded that it was only part pit bull, and that it had an admixture of undetermined other components.

The trailer in which Philip lived with June was about a three to five minute walk from a lake. Rocky liked to wheel himself down to this lake, and the two dogs would always accompany him. The beagle, due to its weight problem, did not like to walk, so it always pestered Rocky until he took him on his lap.

After Rocky died, the two dogs would always sit beside the wheelchair, which Philip kept in the living room. The dogs continued this practice until Philip finally moved the chair. Not long before he died, Rocky requested that he be cremated and put in an urn near the wood stove.

"He wanted to feel the warmth of the wood fire," Philip explained, "and listen to the snapping and popping of the logs." Philip complied with Rocky's request, building a little shelf behind the stove, on which he placed the urn.

June did not like this.

"Why do you keep that thing there?" she would ask.

## Silence

One of the greatest difficulties I had with prison was that it was not possible for me to choose what I wanted to pay attention to. If a car race or a football game was on the television, then I had to get away from the TV if I wanted to think about anything else. But my choice of environments was very limited. The chances were that if I went out into the game room, I would have to listen to the loud and rather mindless talk that was going on at the card tables. Also if I were out there, the chances were always very good that the talk would turn to some version of what scum skimmers were. To simply read a book, watch a program, carry on a conversation, or just think thoughts of my own choosing was a luxury.

This struggle to affirm a degree of control over what I choose to attend to has been an issue all my life. I think that my early school problems derived primarily from the fact that what I was expected to attend to had no relationship to my real interests. So in that sense I might have been described as having an attention deficit disorder, had the term and concept been invented by the time I was in elementary school. But I had no problem giving intense attention over prolonged periods of time to things that were intrinsically of interest. This is one of several parallels I found between school, as I experienced it as a child, and prison.

One of the ways I survived in the prison was to focus on what I was forced to attend to whether I wanted to or not, and to try to make some use of what I saw. I decided to take an interest in this strange, aversive, ugly and foreign culture in which I was immersed. I asked questions about it and decided to record what I heard and saw.

One evening, because of the harassment that I was receiving there, I was not wanting to return to my room until it was time to go to sleep. So I went into the TV room. A documentary on the search for the historical Jesus was showing. They were interviewing archaeologists and biblical scholars. Some of them, such as Crassen, I remembered from my New Testament course at the local theological seminary. The program was actually rather interesting. Unfortunately I sat down beside John, one of the guys I had been playing cards with to pass the time. John wanted to share with me his theories about various matters. His general theme seemed to be that we can't be sure about anything. I nodded and expressed my approval of this healthy skepticism and then tried to follow what they were saying about the social and political context in which Jesus lived and taught. But John persisted.

"Has the Tower of Pisa changed?" John asked.

"I think so," I said. "I understand that it has tipped little by little over a long time."

He wanted to know why I thought this was happening. I began to say something about the nature of the soil on which they built the tower when he interrupted me with his theory that it was because they were pumping the oil out of the ground.

"Could be," I said. I was trying to hear what the narrator was saying about the theories of disease and healing that were current during Jesus' time.

"They say that the earth turns," John said. I nodded. "Well, has anybody seen the earth turn?" he asked.

I thought about this, and wondered whether I should ask him if anybody had seen the hand on his watch move. I wondered whether the evidence of the astronauts would be persuasive.

"They haven't," he said.

I decided that my thoughts on the subject of the earth turning would not be heard by him. "Well, yes and no ..." I said.

He jumped to another point and I realized that I was not going to be able to see the documentary. He meant no harm, but even harassment from my roommates seemed better than this.

"Well," I said, "I have to get up early." I retreated to my room.



The discovery of earplugs was a turning point for me. As far as physical objects are concerned, perhaps no other single item turned out to be so important to my survival. The men are (presumably) required to wear earplugs when they work with noisy equipment, so they are fairly easy to get if you work in an area where they pass them out. The earplugs were simply bright orange, more or less cone shaped, little bits of foam rubber. The first time I experimented with them it was to see whether I could block out the sound of the radio of one of my roommates. I stuffed the earplugs in and put the earphones to my own radio over them. The earphones added a little bit to the muting of the noise, but their main function was to hide the earplugs when the guard stuck his head in the door to 'take a count', which he did about every half-hour or so.

The arrangement of the earplugs with the earphones on top of them was somewhat uncomfortable, but it blocked the noise completely. My roommate did not have the volume up very high so I did not know how well it would work with the TV on full blast, but this was clearly progress. I could have my own thoughts! It was bliss. I felt a little less helpless in the face of this highly intrusive environment.

I found people from whom I could buy these earplugs for packets of coffee. It cost the men I bought them from nothing. They only had to pick them up from their work sites, but it entailed some risk for them as they were not supposed to bring them back to the dorm. Even if they had been caught, the consequences would have been quite minimal, but it did raise a small ethical point in my mind. Was it permissible to buy these earplugs from an inmate who I knew would be stealing them? I felt that my scrupulosity was a bit excessive, and perhaps out of place in my current environment. Still, the question needed an answer.

I did not choose to be in this environment, I reasoned. I have no control over it, and am at the mercy of decisions and rules into which I have no input at all. In this environment I have certain needs that are very hard to satisfy. A major one is to have some privacy – a niche where I do not have to listen to the TV, to the radio, or to other inmates trying to deal with their chronic homosexual panic by means of screaming, gay bashing, and other loud displays of male virility. I had tried to obtain earplugs by ‘legitimate’ means. I wrote to the nurse about them, in response to which I received a curt, mindless reply. I also requested being placed in a quieter room, and that, of course, was also refused. Under these circumstances I concluded that minor thefts from the system were not unethical.

It was essentially the issue of slaves pilfering from their masters. They were not wrong to do so. Nor did I think it wrong for poor servants working in rich households to pilfer. These were interesting questions. To what extent is one morally accountable to rules that are laid down by an oppressive authority? Is it wrong to steal if one is trapped in a situation where the allocation of goods is grossly inequitable, and one has no way to influence the system. I think a majority of people feel that Robin Hood had morality on his side when he stole from the rich and gave to the poor. What if the poor simply stole for themselves – and left the middle man out, so to speak? Was that less noble?



I stalked quiet niches like a cat stalks a bird – with the same care and determination, and with about the same degree of success. Occasionally I captured one. The TV did not come on until 5am, so I regularly got up at 4am and found a table in the TV room where I could sit in quiet and relative solitude. Generally speaking there was at least one other person in the room who was waiting for that magic moment when the TV would come on. One morning I found two men there who, somewhat to my annoyance, were engaged in a conversation that interrupted my thoughts. There was a pause in the conversation. After a few seconds one of them said, “Christ, you could hear a pin drop in this place”. He found it upsetting.

It was hard for me to understand why silence was so disturbing to many of the men here – probably to most of them. I have a little trouble finding something in myself that connects with this, and am left with trying to understand it ‘from the outside’. Perhaps I am just too angry about the noise to allow myself to understand.

I remember one time on a 50-mile hike along the Appalachian Trail, back when I was working at a center for delinquent children near Washington DC. We had come to an overlook. I sat down with four of the boys and we looked at the valley below us, without speaking. Finally one of the boys said, “It’s so quiet”. He said this in a hushed tone so as not to disturb the silence. Having spent his whole life in the inner city he probably had never been in a quiet place before. It seemed to me that what he meant was “I can hear God”.

Craig, a tall and wiry man in his thirties, also got up early and sought out a quiet niche where he wrote in his journal. He used a small table that was dimly illuminated by light coming through the window of the laundry room. It was understood that between four and five in the morning this table, which was perfect



for writing, belonged to him. One morning I found him sitting by himself in the game room. He had finished his writing and had moved to chair in a corner of the room where it was still semi-dark. I sat down at the table by the laundry room window, but then felt the need to make sure he was done with it.

"You can have the table back if you want," I said.

He shook his head. "I'm just enjoying the peace and quiet," he said. I never got to know him very well, but I always felt a strong affinity with him.

Within a few minutes another man came into the room.

"Hey, you having a meeting with all your friends?" he asked Craig.

"All the ones I trust," Craig answered.

The man went over to where Craig was sitting and struck up a conversation. I had the sense that Craig's friend might have felt the need to rescue him from the solitude and perhaps from the relative silence.



It was 4:30am on September 29, 2000. I was sitting in the game room enjoying the solitude and quiet. Craig was at his place, writing in his journal.

A guard came by. "People are getting up too early," he informed me. He said that we were not to get up before 5am. I protested. This was the only time I had each day when I am able to be up without the TV on – the only time to be alone in a quiet place. 5am was exactly when the TV came on. I had organized my entire schedule around the one hour of quiet and solitude I found here. I bothered no one. I really needed this.

My arguments were of no avail. This was getting out of hand, I was told. I was astonished at his conception of 'out of hand': two and sometimes three people getting up early to find a quiet place to meditate and write. Well, one must draw the line somewhere. He let me know that this disruptive practice had to stop and he walked off.

"You are taking everything from me," I yelled at him. I picked up a plastic chair and threw it into a pile of other chairs. I was gratified at the loud noise it made. This was just what I wanted to say. I kicked another chair across the room. I didn't care at that moment what they might do to me. I felt that they were taking everything.

About fifteen minutes later I was called into the office. Two additional guards had arrived, making a total of four. I realized that they thought they might have to physically overpower me. That was a little gratifying as I was 60 years old and not especially athletic.

I explained that I was not a violent person and that even though I might occasionally lose it and kick a chair, I would never attack a person. Then I tried to tell them why taking my moment of quiet from me is such a big issue in my mind.

My needs, however, were irrelevant. I must not throw chairs. Rules are rules. I must not get up before 5am.

"But that's exactly when the TV comes on," I protested.

They neither understood nor cared why that was important to me.





One day not long after the chair-kicking incident, I came back to the room from working breakfast shift, hoping to have the room to myself. One of my roommates was still in the room playing a video game in which people were beating each other to death. The volume was fairly high. I managed to block it out enough with earplugs to take a brief nap. When I woke up he was still there. I was hoping he would be called out to work but felt it would be rude to ask, "Aren't you going to work sometime soon?" (smile).

Finally I got up and left, hoping to find a quiet place somewhere else.

Downstairs, Dr Laura was on the TV, telling me and everybody else how to live our lives. I could not understand why they paid her for her little gems of bigotry, but I knew I didn't want to listen to it.

So I went upstairs. Gerald, a rather limited and lonely little man who was also in for sex abuse charges, was there, and came over to sit down beside me. I moved to another place. I was aware that this was rude but he didn't seem to notice. He came to sit beside me wherever I went. He was bored. Somehow he expected me to solve this for him. I wished he would go watch Dr Laura. He was shunned by the others, and I felt sorry for him. But he didn't read. We shared no interests in common. I didn't want to be responsible for entertaining him.

I went downstairs and got a book to read.

People in a video continued to beat each other to death on the TV screen in my room. In the TV room Dr Laura, in her smug and self-assured manner, continued to dispense little platitudes of advice.

I went upstairs and sat down in a new place where I tried to read. Gerald came over and sat beside me, in silent expectation. His presence wore me out. I couldn't read. It was snowing outside. There was no escape. I was in despair. This always happens when I allow myself to hope, I thought. What I hoped for was a place that was quiet where I could think my own thoughts, read my own books, and write what I wanted to write.



My difficulty with TV has to do with both the process and the content. As a process it prevents thought. On the one hand you cannot entertain your own thoughts while it is on. In addition, the images flash from one to another so fast that you were not able to reflect on any of them.

But this is not to say that the content is not also an issue. I membered that Boo had pointed out that TV presented the events of the day pretty much as depicted in 'The Shipping News'. Each day, if possible, there was a drug bust, a sex offender story, and something about a terrorist. In handling each story, the news has to put forward two potentially contradictory messages:

- 1     Basically everything is safely under control.
- 2     Life is dramatic , and exciting and even a little dangerous.

These two messages are reconciled by a number of techniques. First, by the dramatization of ordinary events. The presentation of the weather is a good example. Every few years something truly dramatic happens – like the big ice storm. For the most part, however, the weather alternates between a little

sunshine and a bit of precipitation and temperatures that are either a bit higher than average, or lower than average, or close to average. Add to this that some days are windier than others, and you about have it. Yet almost every day there are dramatic announcements about what might be happening, weather-wise, in the foreseeable future, that you simply must learn about at six o'clock. The other way of reconciling the two messages is by combining them in a particular manner: "There are problems and they are very exciting (hence you want to keep your TV on to learn about them) but our experts and specially trained professionals have it all under control".

Clip One: Drug bust. Well-equipped and competent SWAT teams rush in and make a dramatic arrest.

Clip Two: Another sex offender is captured and placed where he belongs, along with rapists and serial killers. A shot of the metal door clanging shut.

Clip Three: Emergency vehicles rush to the fire or auto accident that occurred last night.

Clip Four: A terrorist is captured and/or executed. Alternative: a country that 'harbors' such people is at least threatened if not bombed by our highly competent military leaders.

Clip Five: The Lutheran Ladies Society is having a bake sale to collect money for Christmas presents for needy children, thus showing how we really do have compassion for, and take care of the poor (at least those who can prove they are 'worthy').

End of news. Tune in tomorrow.

Wow. That was exciting. I'm glad everything is under control. No in-depth analysis is required. The experts have done that. And certainly no systemic changes in our ways of organizing society need to be contemplated.

The reality in which the American mind slumbers is defined first and foremost by TV. TV is the solvent used to dissolve all individuality and political consciousness. And this reality, as I see it, is a sanitized, totally fanciful, Walt Disney spectacle.



*25 December 2000 – Dream: a boy I have previously seen in therapy comes to me. He wants to see me again. He has a new therapist now. However, it seems that if we get permission from his other therapist and if we define some special purposes for getting together, it might be allowed. We go together to the other therapist and ask. Apparently we are successful because in the next scene I am carrying the boy around. He clings to me with his arms around my neck. I realize that more than anything he wants to be comforted. I pat him and he snuggles very close to me. I wish that this could be a regular thing for a long time but realize that I will only be allowed a session or two with him. I think this is not enough, but it may help some.*

Association: Yesterday after working the breakfast shift I started back to the dorm. I paused for a few moments to look at the snow-capped mountain in the distance, and at the valley. The sun was still very low. It was quiet. No one else was

around. I was able to experience what real stillness was like – remember what it was. It was very comforting. I realized that I couldn't stay there. I thought, I don't get enough of this. But even a little reminder like this helped.

## A Skittish Friend

I had been working in the dish room only a couple of days when a pleasant-looking man who appeared to be in his early thirties approached me and said that he had been watching for me. This naturally intrigued me as I did not know him. He introduced himself as Ryan. He told me that a psychologist he saw as a part of his sex abuser evaluation had mentioned me. This psychologist had been a friend of mine while I was still working as a social worker. Ryan told me that he had been mistaken for me by the other prisoners and had been given a hard time because of this. I was, because of my professional standing, a fairly high-profile sex abuser in my area. For this reason some of the prisoners took a special interest in locating me so that they could harass me.

Ryan was a fairly well-educated person who was both friendly and articulate. He introduced me to John who was also one of the more articulate people at Amherst. John, like Ryan, was oriented mainly to boys and men, but he was in on an embezzlement charge. Both were interested in spiritual matters and both were Catholics. Ryan had an interest in spirit communication, reading the Tarot, and other new age type topics. Although I was skeptical about some of the things he believed in, I am not closed to any possibilities and find it interesting to explore such matters. I had more difficulty with John's commitment to a more conventional conservative Catholic understanding of things, but found him to be an intelligent, tolerant, and friendly person. I was pleased with the possibility of having such a friends while I did my time.



At lunchtime on the 23rd of June, I found Ryan and John sitting at a table with a third man. I joined them and that filled the table. Then a friend of the third man arrived and stared at us. Ryan and John got up to leave, so that he would have room to sit with his friend. The two men sitting at the table then made it clear by their looks that they didn't want me there. It was clear that these two men considered this their table. I shrugged.

"Didn't mean to get into your space," I said. "But my friends were there." One of the men looked at me with a sneer.

"Don't let it happen again," he said. His friend smirked. I realized that there was no way I was going to get through lunch in this social situation. I was furious.

"I guess I'm not hungry," I said, and took my tray from which I had not eaten anything, to the return window and dumped the food in the trash.

When I left the dining hall I ran into Ryan and John and told them what had happened and how furious I was. Ryan advised me to pray. "If you explode it won't help," he said.



Despite Ryan's original friendly overture to me, it seemed that both Ryan and John were ill at ease when I was around. One day I sat down to eat with them and they both acted 'punchy', making jokes I didn't quite follow. Then they got up and left before they had to. At other times they seemed friendly. I tried to make some sense out of the mixed messages I was getting. They were both 'gay' in the sense of being attracted to adult men (not just to pubescent or teenage boys). I didn't particularly care what bonding profile my friends had, but I have noticed that some gay-identified men seem to hold me at a distance even when I clearly would like to be friends with them.

This may have been a part of it, but I think it had more to do with them seeing me as dangerous. I had a temper that threatened to get me into trouble. But also, I had opinions that were dangerous if one ever wanted to be accepted by the mainstream of society, and I had shared these beliefs with them. I saw being accepted by the mainstream as a lost cause, and wanted in any case to think my own thoughts, whether they made me popular or not.



It was painful to feel rejected by the people I had hoped might be my friends and help me connect with others. When I focused on this during a meditation time, it came to me that they were attracted to me – even afraid of falling in love – and they were afraid of this attraction.

"Absurd," I said.

But then it was suggested to me that I created a small sensation when I arrived here.

"Equally absurd," I protested.

But I was pressed to look at this further.

Boo had said something similar to what came to me in my meditation in a letter to me written a few days earlier (2 July, 2000). In the relevant section she shared the following reflections:

*This morning what you said in your letter – "Christ! Don't these people ever think about anything else except locating and persecuting skinners?!!" – echoed again and again in my mind, and I found myself again sort of compulsively turning that over and over looking for a way to understand it. I think it is important to try to understand it – I don't know why – I guess just to get a better sense of what sort of phenomenon you're dealing with. [In her letter the word 'phenomenon' in the previous sentence had been written in over a whited-out word] The word I crossed out was 'animals' and I crossed it out because it's not what I meant. 'Animals' is how you feel when you feel like they are separate from you because the way they act and feel like acting is so foreign to anything we can imagine ourselves doing. So they seem like another species. And I'm not ruling that out – I really don't know: people do seem in a lot of ways to be different in ways that seem as basic as 'species'.*

In her letter she mentioned two possible reasons why these creatures of a 'different species' might be acting as they were.

One reason had to do with the need to put others down in order to bolster up one's own sense of esteem. I certainly agreed with her that this was a part of the picture. But the other reason she explored was even more to the point. This had to do with "*an intense and chronic panic about whether or not one is truly 'male' or 'very male' or 'very very male'...*".

'Male' males do not have any feelings except male feelings – and these are drilled and drilled and drilled into little males by parents, other grown-ups and other little males through ridicule and threat of ridicule mainly – from almost the time they can stand up and walk. I imagine most punks got a heavy dose of that repeatedly.

Little males who cry, who lose at games, who still like stuffed animals (past the age when they are not supposed to like them anymore), who are afraid of the wolf under the bed, who run from the alpha male on the playground instead of fighting, etc, etc, – are told unequivocally, repeatedly, from a very early age that as long as they do any of these things – to the extent they do – they are worth shit, and they disgrace their fathers (whom they love and from whom they want love and admiration more than anything).

These little males learn from an early age to take their warm fuzzy feelings – including their desire for intimacy with their fathers – and stuff them. They learn as soon as they can walk to pretend these don't exist – at least, they learn that is the way to please their fathers – who pleased their fathers the same way. Somehow this explains to me why an adult male would have intense negative feelings about another adult male who may have been intimate with a young male (in the way that he may have longed to be with his father or whatever older male he once loved, before he squished that feeling, realizing that such intimacy was – would always be – an impossibility (not be possible and co-exist with being able to face oneself and the world without intense, crippling shame).

I am older than most people here – and have gray hair. I am here because I acted on the belief that mutually desired expressions of love between men and boys are benign and perhaps even beneficial. It was possible that I was the most despised and hated person in Amherst. The inmates were, objectively speaking, obsessed with me. But was this obsession entirely negative? Whatever it was, it was not neutral.

My own speculation was essentially the same as Boo's. I thought that the hatred I was experiencing was based on the need of my persecutors to attack and destroy the one who had the power to kindle forbidden desires, on their hatred of all the desirable men that neglected or abandoned them as a children, and on their envy of boys who may have known the love that they once longed for. In short, it was grounded in the denial of their own needs. The more intense one's unacceptable needs are, the more violent must be one's reaction against them. The 'macho' syndrome is the end product of a history in which men have never known the gentle and unconditional love of a fathering person. So, of course, they long for it. At the same time this love is full of erotic overtones that must, at all costs, be denied. However much it might be denied, a need for love is the other side of the coin that is passed off as pure hatred.

This speculation was triggered by my reflecting on why Ryan and John were holding me at an arm's length. They would not experience the hatred of me that I am talking about because their rejection and condemnation of their needs is milder than the condemnation of their inner needs that one sees in the punks. They probably shared some fear of being seen with the chief corrupter of youth at Amherst. It is not entirely clear why I began thinking about Ryan and John and then leaped to some generalizations about the punks. I suppose the connection has to do with my thinking about the homosexual component that I believe is a part of every man's nature. In any case, I thought about what support I might find for my theory.

Thorkil Vanggaard, in his book, *'Phallos'*, put forward the theory that men were naturally bisexual. The term he used for the irreducible homosexual aspect of each man's nature was the 'homosexual radical'. He went on to suggest that the homosexual radical was specifically about mentor-student type relationships. It expressed itself, in other words, in exactly the kind of lover-beloved relationships that were characteristic of fifth century Greece, and in Hellenic culture up to the victory of Christianity around the fifth century AD). Vanggaard supplemented the material about Greco-Roman culture with examples from pre-modern Scandinavian society. Based on Vanggaard's theorizing, and on my own observations, my hypothesis with regard to why the punks around me were so totally obsessed with 'skinners' is as follows:

- 1 For some combination of historical and psychological reasons (which are not fully clear to me), our culture has attempted to aggressively suppress the homosexual radical in all its males.
- 2 Because of the shame that is associated with the now socially dishonored impulses, boys learn to disown their forbidden needs, and to project them onto selected others whom they treat with scorn.
- 3 This denial of the homosexual radical in human nature has profoundly distorting effects both on the culture as a whole and on the development of individuals within it.
- 4 Those who are the most damaged by this suppression of the homosexual radical are those raised without the benefit of a gentle loving relationship with a man. These are the boys who grow into young men with the most intense longing for a loving relationship with an older mentor in conjunction with the greatest degree of shame for such needs. This combination of 'need-for', and 'need-for-rejection-of' the shame-ridden longings leads to intense violence both in the intra-psychic and the interpersonal domains of life. In other words, it produces the punk – a bored, unhappy and violent man – a man who is preoccupied with doubts about his own masculinity and shame about his deepest needs.

I speculated about how one would demonstrate the accuracy or truth of this hypothesis. I understood that such a theory could not be proven. The most any theory can do is to provide an explanatory narrative – a plausible explanation of data that is not contradicted by any known facts. My general approach was based on a combination of the 'participant observer' and the 'narrative' approaches to research.

I believe that these are valid, quite necessary, forms of social research. But they need to be complemented by the mathematical and rigorous testing of formal research. An explanatory narrative will produce certain predictions as to correlations in the real world. If A (the narrative), then B will be correlated with C. For example, if my hypothesis about ‘punks’ is valid, then one would expect to find measurable correlations between certain observable child-raising practices and other definable and measurable aspects of an adult character structure.



On the 5th of September, 2000, I was working in the kitchen, getting ready to handle the lunch dishes which were just beginning to come in. Ryan came to the door where I was standing and said, “Something funny just happened”.

He told me that when he went back to the dorm after doing his bakery duties during the breakfast period he took a nap. He told me that he used to have a dog named Procter that he was very fond of. Procter has since died. “I hated dogs until I got him,” he’d said. He described Procter in some detail. He was part German Shepherd, but was small and had a narrower snout. He said that just as he was waking up he had this vivid sense that Procter was snuggled up against him.

“Then he woke me so that I would let him out to pee,” he said.



In summer we were permitted to walk around the playing field during the evening Rec period. Ryan had invited me to come with him to walk. He had also invited Alton, a young man who seemed to have taken a liking to Ryan, to walk with us. Alton was a thin man of about medium height. He had an odd bump on his left cheek – making it appear that he always had a jaw breaker stuffed into his mouth. Alton was preoccupied with the idea that he should put on some weight and get bigger muscles. After five or ten minutes I stopped trying to talk and allowed Alton to take center stage. Pretty soon Alton was telling us his life story. He said that when he was about six his father ‘divorced’ him. Apparently when his parents divorced, his father stopped seeking out any contact with Alton. Whenever Ryan tried to say something to Alton, Alton ignored it. This was not an act of deliberate rudeness on his part. He simply seemed unaware that he did not hear, much less understand, what Ryan was saying. I wondered whether Ryan noticed this.

The conversation came around to what we planned to do when we got back from recreation. Ryan said that he was going to get a shower and then watch the Disney Channel in his room. He does this every Monday night.

“What’s on?” Alton asked.

“It doesn’t matter,” Ryan said. He explained that he used to watch this program every Monday night “with my kids”. When he watches it here in prison he likes to think that they are watching it at the same time. That would mean that, in some sense, they were watching it together still.

Alton nodded and continued talking about what a disappointment his father had been to him.





Ryan continued to act as though he wished to be friends one minute and then as though he wanted nothing to do with me the next. I told him that he did this.

"How important is that to you?" he asked.

"It's important," I said, "because you are one of the few people, if not the only one, around here I could actually be friends with."

He said that other people had accused him of vacillating in his friendships. I said I wasn't accusing him. I was just checking out my own sense of what was happening, and trying to understand it. After he thought about it a while, he said that perhaps if he showed this ambivalence in his relationship to me it was because I was 'too needy'.

I had not, in fact, pressed myself on him or tried to monopolize his time. For the most part, when I spent time with him he had initiated the contact. But he would ask me to walk with him during the evening Rec period, and then make sure someone else was there or that he found something else to do. Was needing a person here with whom I could actually discuss things – a friend in other words – being 'too needy'?

Certainly it was a strong need. But apparently it was one I could not invest in him – at least not at this point. So I decided to pull back until he decided what he wanted to do. I decided that it was because I was a 'Steppenwolf' that he shied away from me. He feared being as alone as I am.



The 'yard' behind Dorm One was an asphalt-paved rectangle, about 20 by 40 feet, enclosed by a wooden fence. It was accessed from the upstairs Rec Room by a wooden staircase. There were two wooden picnic tables in the yard, positioned at opposite ends. One of them was canopied by a bedspread supported by two clothes lines. This sheltered one end of the picnic table from the glare of excessive sunlight on clear days, making it possible to use the table for reading and writing. Ryan set this area up as a niche for himself.

When I went out to the yard on September 13, I saw Ryan writing under the canopy. I thought he might wish to be alone, so I took a seat at the other table. He called me, suggesting that I join him. He wanted to tell me about a dream he had about his stepson.

Ryan was in prison because he had loved his his stepson, Blake, very much, and they had become involved in some sex play with each other when the boy was about 11. Blake wanted the sexual aspect of their relationship as much as Ryan did. Ryan remembered one time when they were out doing things in the world and Blake asked whether they could go back to the apartment and do 'that thing' together.

Ryan's view of this relationship was no different from that of the dominant society, and he felt terribly guilty about it. So he made the decision to turn himself in, hoping that his honesty and forthrightness in this act would cause society to view the matter in a compassionate and forgiving manner.



This hope proved to be ill-founded. He was demonized like anyone else who fell into this kind of activity, and was sentenced to a long prison sentence, part of which was suspended, but four years of which he had to serve. This gave him a somewhat more realistic picture of how the moral authorities in the society actually do see things.

The dream Ryan wanted to tell me about involved some sexual contact, but, as Ryan put it, “it wasn’t about sex, but something more”.

I nodded, and suggested that sex is always about ‘something more’ unless we have already become fragmented.

He said that the dream gave him both “intense pleasure, and terror”. The terror pertained, in part, to the fact that he was being trained to use a ‘stop’ technique in which fantasies and memories (and if possible, even dreams) based on ‘deviant arousals’ are stopped before reaching consummation. He felt an urge to follow the dream through to see where it would go – and to explore its meaning. Even while he was still dreaming, apparently, he was struggling with this conflict between his own wishes and what he has been taught to do.

I suggested to him that his dream mind was wanting to explore something – to learn something – and that he should indeed follow his own intuitions in such matters. Part of the terror of the dream pertained to the thought that emerged in his dream, that perhaps he needed to kill Blake. I suggested that the issue here was probably not any desire to murder his stepson – but that he was wondering whether he needed to end his deep relationship with him – to kill him as an intense psychic reality in his life. “That’s how dreams speak of such matters,” I said.

Finally he wondered whether he should share the dream with his group. I asked him why he would wish to do that. He said that he felt the need to process it, but acknowledged that the group would probably use it only as an example of the importance of using the stop technique. They would not explore with him the meaning of the dream – it would just be an example of the deviant arousal pattern as it persisted in expressing itself in his dreams.

In response to my strong negative reaction to the idea of his sharing his dream in the group he pointed out that he had to go along with the system if he was ever to see his two kids again.

I agreed. “But that doesn’t mean you have to share your heart with them,” I said.



Ryan gave me a copy of *Chicken Soup for the Prisoner’s Soul* to read. He said he found this helpful and I recalled his sharing with me the description of a couple of cartoons in it. Each book in the ‘*Chicken Soup*’ series consists of a large collection of very short and readable selections. Its perspective is entirely conventional. Prisoners are people who have made mistakes, but they can work on changing themselves and forgiving themselves, and they can seek reconciliation with a society that really does have their best interests at heart. That’s the gist of it. None of the really difficult issues are dealt with. That he felt that this was a good book disclosed to me the gap that exists between us. I lived almost entirely outside the dominant worldview of my society. He still did not. My need for companionship

had led me to perceive him as more liberated from conventional thought than he was. His relationship with me must have been a little frightening to him. As to my own experience of the relationship, it was an example of how my own needs, fears and resentments limited my ability to see what was there.

I felt that Ryan would eventually have to declare war either on his own inner reality, or on the worldview of the society in which he lived. That's what was at stake in his relationship with me, and I became increasingly aware that this was probably the source of the confusing ambivalence and resulting vacillation in his relationship with me.



On the 16th September, 2000, Ryan was talking to me about some of the things that happened to him in the past. He told me that his older brother "sexually abused" him. Then he paused, feeling the need to clarify the meaning of this term. "It wasn't anything bad," he explained. In a few words he made it clear to me that the behavior was mutually desired and consensual. I interrupted him.

"Why then," I asked, "do you use the term 'sexual abuse'?"

He thought about this.

"Because in therapy they insisted that I use that term," he said. I shrugged.

"You don't need to use that term when you are talking with me," I said.



One afternoon while I was sitting out at the picnic table in the yard, Ryan called out to me from one of the bathroom windows. He told me to come in for a haircut. I had planned asking him for a haircut and a beard trim and this seemed like as good a time as any.

It was very pleasant to sit with a towel over my shoulders while he cut my hair and trimmed my beard. We were using the time to catch up on the news when he noticed that Monson, the chief security officer, was prowling around outside the window. Apparently he had seen us. I wasn't aware that using the hair clippers was one of the gray areas regarding the rules. Prisoners are not supposed to have hair clippers. But these clippers had been around for a couple of years. The guards kept them and allowed the inmates to use them. This had never been cleared with the administrators. It was just one of those things that was allowed and that nobody said much about.

Ryan had been a hairdresser in the community and gave a much better haircut than the barbers that the facility hired. They came in once a month and gave adequate but very quick haircuts. I would guess that Ryan cut the hair of about a third of the men in Dorm One. He charged a couple of sodas and a bag of chips. That would have been against the 'no giving or receiving' rule, which prohibits any sort of economic exchange between prisoners. The guards knew that Ryan used the the clippers for his hair cutting business, and that he probably received some payment for this, but they looked the other way. Monson, however, was not the type to look the other way.

Ryan expressed some concern about how Monson would react, but decided that it was too late to hide, and that it was best just to carry on as though there were no issue. In about five minutes Monson came in and stared at us for a minute. Then he told Ryan that when he was done he should turn the clippers back in to the guards. It wasn't clear whether this meant that hair cutting and beard trimming would no longer be allowed.



One afternoon Ryan told me he was really depressed. I asked him what it seemed to be about. He very much wanted to talk and motioned me into the back room (the laundry room) in order to escape the attention of the other men – and especially to get away from Stan Ziegler, who tended to hover around whenever he saw us talking.

Ryan told me that when he was in high school he had sexual relations with a number of older men. He was 'passed around'. He was 'intrigued' by one of the teachers – he told me this when I asked whether he loved the man, or felt loved by him. He participated willingly, but now felt victimized – mainly, he told me, because he didn't feel loved by them. He said that he felt these men should "take responsibility for what they did". He said that he turned himself in so that he would be forced to end the sexual relationship he had developed with his stepson, but that nobody (including the courts) saw this as his taking responsibility for his actions.

I felt that he was contemplating turning in the men with whom he had been sexual to Human Services. I said it was easy to understand why he felt angry. Especially if you are young, if someone has sex with you outside the context of a caring relationship, you feel exploited. At the same time, I pointed out that neither men nor boys get any direction regarding how to integrate their intergenerational Eros into a complete loving relationship. Nor have most ever experienced a healthy intergenerational relationship. Therefore, perhaps these men should not be judged so harshly. At one point I said I didn't see that much would be accomplished by feeding the puritan power structure more victims.

Then he told me that he was thinking of writing to one of his teachers and asking for money.

"Why would you do that?" I asked.

"To get some money in my bank account."

"I don't think that's a good idea," I said

He asked why. I could only shrug.

Then he got to talking about remembering how he used to listen to Prairie Home Companion with his daughter cradled in his arm. This came back to him last night as he listened to the program. Also he thought about how much he missed his stepson Blake. He wanted to tell him that he wanted a relationship without sex.

"I guess you miss them a lot," I said. He nodded. "So it's not all that hard to see what you are depressed about." He agreed.

I talked a little about the process we are both going through as being like death. The grief comes and goes in waves. And at times it is hard to believe that there will ever be a rebirth.



On October 30, I was talking with Ryan and John in the kitchen. Ryan told me that he thought that Dan Levesque – one of the other men who was in prison for a sexual offense – did not have a clear sense of discretion regarding what was appropriate or even moral in the area of sex. I didn't totally disagree, but neither was I totally at ease with the tone of moral condemnation I heard in Ryan's comments. I went back to the dish room and thought about this for a few minutes.

Then it suddenly became clear to me just what I did think. I went out, as soon as I had a break, and captured Ryan. "Listen fast," I said. "I only have a minute." I said that it seemed to me that Levesque probably was unclear about what is right and wrong in the area of sex. This was because he had rejected the current system of morality because it was not appropriate for him (or for Ryan or me). The dominant moral understanding was based on repression and on a systematic misrepresentation of human reality. It should be rejected. We needed a new morality to guide us. A new morality needed to begin with reality and emerge out of an honest dialog. Honest dialog is not yet permitted, so people remain confused. For this reason, I told Ryan, he should not be harsh in his judgment of Levesque.



On the 17th of December, 2000, I asked Ryan why he hasn't read any of the things that I had sent his way – *Death in Venice*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and things like that. I think he thought I would be irritated with him. I told him that I thought there was probably a reason he was resistant to the things I had suggested he read. They point to an alternative to the dominant American world view. He is in a dilemma. He had to play the game – and that would be easier if he and his 'therapists' and his other jailers were all functioning with the same set of assumptions – if they were all on the 'same page', as they say. Then he would be able to participate in the rituals of guilt, confession and reconciliation with some sense of conviction. If his mind became infused with doubts about the validity of the whole game he was asked to play, it would become much more difficult to act his part convincingly. Yet he was very attracted, even fascinated, by a lot of what I was telling him.

"I have never heard anybody talk like you do," he said at one point in our conversation. From the first time he heard about me, from a therapist he said who knew me, he felt that we had business together in this life. But he remained very ambivalent about me, and understandably so.

"I'm older than you are," I said. "And that makes it a little easier for me." And that was true. I wasn't sure how I would handle it if I felt I had to locate some sort of job, and manage to work for another 20 or 30 years. I had only to find a way to get by financially for three years or so after my release. The rest of my energies could be spent on writing, exploring issues of interest to me, and on getting ready to leave this world.

## Being Looked After

Kim was a 24-year-old Asian man who roomed with Ryan. He was somewhat shorter than average – probably about five foot six, but was very muscular and athletic. I had watched him playing hacky-sack with some of the other men out in the yard. I was quite impressed with the coordination and flexibility he demonstrated in playing this game. It seemed to me that he was the best player I had ever seen, and I ventured one day to tell him so. Other than that we had never had a conversation. Then he saw Simone, my daughter. She had come to visit the same time he had someone visiting him.

The day after this visit he came and introduced himself. I was sitting at one of the picnic tables in the yard, basking in the warm sun. As he seemed to want to get better acquainted, I began asking him about himself.

It turned out that he was from Thailand, and when I expressed an interest in his country he became quite talkative. He came over from Thailand a few years ago on an educational exchange program with the State University. He said he did not know English at that time. His English was fine for ordinary purposes now, but I think his vocabulary was still limited. Kim told me that he ended up in prison because he made the decision at some point to make a little extra money by selling drugs.

We discussed very briefly some of the historical events in Southeast Asia – mainly the Vietnam war and the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia with its ‘killing fields’.

I asked Kim what he intended to do when he got out of here. He said “I may start a new revolution”, and he confessed that “I don’t like your government too much”. He told me that this was because of how the rich exploited the poor, which, he said, was even worse in the USA than elsewhere. He was referring to the extreme contrast between the rich and the poor in this country.

I told him that I agreed with most of what he was saying, and that I also hoped for a revolution, but I believed that it had to be a non-violent one.

We discussed religion. He seemed to know something about Buddhism which, of course, would be the dominant form of spirituality in Thailand. It wasn’t clear how deep his interest in any form of religion went. I shared my belief that we have something to learn from each spiritual tradition. When I made a vague comparison between Buddha and Christ he wanted to emphasize the difference between the two. He said that in Buddhism there is no belief in God, while Jesus *is* God. I wasn’t sure whether his affirmation of the divinity of Jesus was to please me (perhaps assuming that I shared the views of the evangelical Christians that were so common in prison) or if he actually believed it himself. Perhaps he just meant that Christians believe this, though that isn’t what he said.

He also told me a little bit about Thailand. There, he said, people had respect for their elders, unlike what he saw here in the US. This, I thought, was for my benefit. Finally he wanted to know whether my daughter had another visit.

A couple of days later, Kim and I had another conversation. He sat down across from me at the checkers table in the Rec Room, and we played a couple of games. He wanted to know more about my daughter. I said, “You think she is pretty?”

It wasn't that, he said. It was her smile that attracted him. She looked happy and full of life. "It's what's in the heart that counts," he said, with the appropriate gesture of his hand over his heart. He said he liked girls who had a good heart and who liked athletics. I asked him what sports he liked. He mentioned kick-boxing and soccer. I told him that Simone was a journalist who was going to be here only a couple more weeks before going to Bosnia to do some reporting. I mentioned that she would be there on a grant. He thought it would be nice to receive some postcards from her, showing what Bosnia looks like.

"Maybe she will visit Thailand some day," he said. I asked Kim whether he was going back to Thailand. He was unsure. He had relatives in Hawaii who owned a restaurant. Also he was considering opening a restaurant someplace – one that would serve sushi. He said rich people liked sushi, and he knew where the rich people vacationed. It was close to supper time, and he had to go, as they had called the upper deck. "Write your daughter," he said. "Tell her I am looking after her father – seeing that nobody beats him up."

## The Man Code

In the afternoon of 8 September, Roger McNally found me sitting by myself at one of the picnic tables in the small yard behind Dorm One. He joined me and soon he was confiding in me a great deal of sensitive information about his personal history. He said that he had been sexually exploited by his older brother from the time he was about 13 until he was 18. From his description, this really was exploitive. He was not a willing participant.

When it first started he told his mother. His mother believed him and chastised his older brother. The next time his older brother was baby-sitting with him, he shot Roger repeatedly with a BB-gun for having told.

After his parents divorced, the older brother became the 'man of the house', and was frequently put in charge of Roger, who was expected to obey him. Roger was terrified of this brother who, on at least two occasions, stabbed him. He showed me a scar on his hand that was the result of having been stabbed with a pair of scissors. Roger felt a great deal of shame about the events connected with his older brother. He asked himself why he had allowed himself to be placed in this unmanly role.

Roger told me that the sexual exploitation by his older brother had a lot of consequences for him. It left him with night fears, troubles in relating to women in a sexual way, self-contempt, and a propensity for getting into blind rages and fights. All of this created problems in his first marriage which had ended some years previously.

Clearly a lot of his self-denigration had to do with his internalization of the 'man code'. I held up the specifics of this code for his examination, and suggested that it was the linchpin of his difficulties. He was always comparing his real feelings, thoughts and behavior with those prescribed by the man code and finding himself wanting. Perhaps he was even gay. The problem, I suggested, was not that he was unable to conform to the man code, but that he had internalized it in the first place. He needed to uproot this code from his psyche and allow himself to be whoever he was.



McNally and I got to know each other a bit better because he was assigned to the dish room. One day he told me about an incident that happened during the breakfast shift. I didn't happen to be working that day. He said that the line got held up for some reason, and that the people waiting for their breakfast were getting irritated. In order to get them to lighten up a bit, McNally presented himself to them as 'the entertainment for this intermission', and he began singing '*The Wicked Witch is Dead*'.

The crew boss came by and interrupted him.

"If you don't have anything to do ...," he said. The implication was that if McNally didn't shut up he would get some extra work.

"I bit my tongue," he said. "They take everything away from you here. But they can't take my humor."

Hudson Luther in 1522 said, "the laws of the civil magistrate's government extend no further than over the body and goods and that which is external; for over the soul God will not suffer any man to rule."

McNally felt that his humor was very close to the center of his soul.



On 25 September, 2000, I was sitting in the Rec Room. I saw Roger walking down the stairs carrying a donut. It was one of the donuts that Elizabeth had made that morning for the people who worked in the kitchen. It was very much against the rules to bring anything back from the kitchen. Pretty soon I heard a guard call Roger to the office. He sauntered over, making no effort to conceal the donut, which he continued to stuff into his mouth. When the guard asked him about the donut Roger said, "Where would I get a donut?"

He claimed that he had an oatmeal cookie from his canteen and that he had eaten a hole in the center of it. Later he told me about the other things he brought back from the kitchen. He said when he brought steaks back he was able to sell them for cigarettes. "One steak, two rollies."



Dorm One was built on a split-level pattern. The 'Bubble' where the guards stayed was on the middle or main level. The TV room was about three-and-a-half feet down from this level. On the 27th of September, Roger and I were standing in the TV room, leaning against the wall created by the difference between the levels. I was tired and wanted to escape from the noise, but Roger was in a mood to talk, so I stayed. He was ruminating about the events that preceded his coming to prison about a year ago. This was an especially chaotic time for him. His girlfriend had left him. He was getting into trouble for everything from fighting with a police officer to violating a restraining order his girlfriend had taken out on him. By the time he came to prison he had accumulated 13 charges against himself.



Roger had no job and no place to live at this time. It was the dead of winter but he refused to live in shelters because he hated the regimentation there. "It's worse than the prison here," he said. His car had been towed in because of his being caught for driving without a valid registration. He would go to the lot where his car was impounded at night and sleep there. He would run the car for a while to heat it up. Then he slept under a bunch of quilts and clothes. He would siphon gas from other cars on the lot when he got low.



Over a period of weeks I watched Roger try to keep the lid on his tendency to explode. We were crammed into a space where people had trouble getting their most basic needs met, and there were a lot of people around who were mouthy and disrespectful of other people's boundaries. At best, one encountered a lot of provocative situations. With Roger being wound up to the breaking point the probability of a damaging explosion seemed very high.

As I thought about his situation, it occurred to me that it would be important for him to have a plan for life after prison that would give him something to hope for and towards which he could work. Without any hope invested in future goals he was excessively vulnerable to the pressures and irritations of the moment.

When I found Roger sitting in the game-room one afternoon, looking agitated and explosive, I decided to sit down and talk with him. Soon he was talking about his brother again. It wasn't right that his brother should have been able to abuse him and get away with it. All of his negativity seemed focused on this one point.

I realized that his wheels were spinning on the issue of justice. He was incapacitated by his inability to resolve the issue of theodicy: if there is a just God, why do bad things happen to innocent people, and conversely, why do people get away with doing bad things? Just a few days before, I had received a book called *'The Genesis of Justice'*, by Dershowitz. I assumed that a Jewish rabbi who was a friend of mine sent this to me. I mentioned this book to Roger, and this led into a discussion of the extent to which our lives were characterized by justice.

We considered the various possible solutions to the theodicy question and concluded that, at least as of then, we were unable to come up with an adequate answer. Why is it so often the case that good people suffer and bad people prosper if there is a just God? Who knows? I shared with him the metaphor of the ant trying to make sense of the Persian rug he is crawling across. Perhaps we just needed a larger perspective than it was humanly possible to achieve.

The ramifications of our discussion of theodicy for his situation seemed to be that if he was to have a life, he simply had to set the question aside, unsolved, and move on. I told Roger about how I sometimes ask for help on issues that are confusing or paralyzing for me, and about how I got past the paralysis that had once been induced by my skepticism with regard to the ability of the human mind to answer the basic questions of human existence. I told him that while it did not seem possible to know much of anything for sure, we could affirm some working hypotheses in our lives and base our actions on them.



I told him I had two working hypotheses (existential hypotheses, as I would call them) that were central for me:

- 1 That whatever it is that created everything is good.
- 2 That we can get help from this source of everything if we ask.

A few days later McNally told me that our conversations had caused a shift in his point of view. "I've always been afraid that maybe I'm gay" he said. "Then I said to myself, suppose it turned out I was? So what?" We discussed the improbability that most people only had one set of feelings and noted that he clearly had at least some interest in women. It was less than clear what his bonding profile would turn out to be, but he and I both saw how liberating it was for him to look at his feelings without fear of what he might find.

## Room Ten

About ten days after my arrival in the Receiving Dorm I was moved upstairs to room 10. When I first entered the room no one else was present. In addition to two single beds by the window, there was a bunk bed. The singles were taken, but neither the top nor the bottom of the bunk bed was taken, so I selected the bottom bunk for myself. Then I surveyed the room for some clues as to who my roommates might be. From a card on the door I learned that their names were Ellingwood and Dutch.

The two beds were made. A pair of gym shorts was neatly laid out on each of the beds. One pair was dark blue and other a light blue, but except for that, they were identical. They were the long silky ones that seemed to be popular. Clearly they were laid out in anticipation of their owners going to recreation together. I concluded that my roommates were young and probably somewhat in love with each other, though in all probability they would not put it this way. I also concluded that I might have a bit of peace and quiet each evening during Rec time.

A little later Griggs came to the room. He had been one of my roommates downstairs, and they had moved him to the same upstairs room with me. He was surly. He was obviously not happy that he would still be rooming with me, and that I had beat him to the bottom bunk.

Later in the evening when I returned to my new room from the card room, I found my two roommates (the owners of the gym shorts) playing a video game. In the game two very macho looking men were kicking the shit out of each other. When one lost, another came to take his place. My roommates barely grunted at me when I introduced myself. Dutch was 21 or 22. He had a friendly, child-like (almost cute) face. A white baseball cap was perched on his head with the bill aimed back, and he wore clothes that looked expensive. Ellingwood was about the same age as Dutch but was taller. His shaved head accentuated the general severity of his features. He looked mean.

Later that evening I had a brief interaction with Dutch. He was friendly and told me about his plans for pre-release. He had a tooth-ache and accepted the ibuprofen I offered him for this.

That night the verbal tormenting started up again. The door would open and then slam shut. People would stomp around near my bed. Ellingwood made comments about hating skimmers and rippers. People in the hall started some chanting about skimmers. It was more subdued than on the A Pod, but very similar in content. I decided that I would simply ignore it, however bad it got. So I lay in bed with my face to the wall and refused to respond in any way. I pretended to be asleep, though given the amount of noise around me, that was hardly plausible.

After it was time for the TVs to be off, the chants and loud comments stopped. Ellingwood and Griggs, however, continued to talk about me. Griggs, as Ellingwood pointed out, had socks that smelled like they had never been washed. He had deliberately opened his laundry bag, which was under the bunk bed, so that I would have to smell his dirty laundry. "I hope he chokes on it," he said.

"Who?" Ellingwood asked, trying to get Griggs to name me.

"That guy on the bunk below me," Griggs said.

Their comments were punctuated with the sort of guilty giggling one might hear between boys who were telling each other dirty jokes. Finally, around 1:30am, it got quiet and I was able to sleep. I had to be up at 5:00 the next morning to work in the kitchen. After this I requested a room change, without actually mentioning the harassment. I said that I was having difficulty sleeping, and that made it hard to get up for work. I don't know whether my request was given any consideration at all or whether someone talked with my roommates. It seemed to me that the majority of the prison officials wanted people with sex charges against them to receive abusive treatment. This was seen as a part of the punishment that they deserved. That made it hard to know what to do.

However, for whatever reason, the guys in the room seemed to make an effort to be friendly for a couple of days after my room change request. Then, a few days later, a new issue cropped up. When I brought my canteen order back to the room, Ellingwood asked, "What are you going to get us in your canteen?"

"Nothing," I said. "Why should I get you something?"

"That's not nice," he said.

"I'm not rich," I said. "I can't be buying canteen for everybody."

"That's not what I heard," he said.

I told him that I didn't know what he had heard, but that I wasn't rich.

That night, after we were in bed and the TV was off, Ellingwood started in with the verbal attacks again. At first he was mumbling and then he gradually became louder and clearer. He kept repeating the words 'skinner' and 'ripper', and said things like "Oh Daddy, don't stick your dick in there – I've got poop."

After this went on for about a half-hour or so a guard came by. Whether he could hear what Ellingwood was actually saying, I don't know. But he said "If you want your door open, you'll have to quiet down." It was hot and the door was open to allow for some cross ventilation.

For a while Ellingwood was quiet, but after a bit he shut the door and started again. He asked me if I knew George Moir from Frankfort. That was my first roommate there. Ellingwood told me that he heard rumors that I had paid him off for protection and he made it clear that his earlier comments about canteen were an effort at extortion. He demanded to know why I wouldn't talk with him.

"Why would I want to talk with you?" I asked.

"Because," he said. He had not yet returned to his bed after shutting the door. He started toward me in a threatening manner as though he planned to attack me. Then he seemed to think better of it. He went back to his bed and started in on the verbal abuse again.

"Why are you being such an asshole?" I finally asked.

He ignored me and became louder with the verbal abuse. Finally I sat up and told him that if he kept it up I would have to report him. He made the gesture of someone getting his throat cut. At this point I lost my temper and found myself yelling at him. I felt like I had nothing to lose. I told him that he could try to hurt me if he wanted to, but that if he did not back off I would see that he got hurt. I told him that if I got the shit kicked out of me that I would prefer charges. They could kill me if they wanted, but I could only be pushed so far.

He was afraid that a guard might hear me and told me to stop yelling.

I told him that I had listened to his yelling night after night, when I needed to sleep and that I was tired of his fucking mouth. "Why don't you just do your time and let me do mine," I said.

"Because you're a fucking skinner," he said.

"You don't know what I did or didn't do," I said. "You don't know shit about me. You have heard rumors and stories and you love them but you don't know what is true and what isn't."

He appeared to become more anxious about how loud I was getting and backed off.

For a while it was quiet. He sat on his bed mumbling along with tunes on his radio. Then he got up and rolled a cigarette. A guard came by for a room check and Ellingwood asked if he could go down for a smoke. The guard agreed and left. Ellingwood finished rolling his cigarette, and went out. As he came by my bed upon returning to the room, he said, "Don't tell the guard. You do your time and I'll do mine."

"That's cool," I said. "That's what I want. Then nobody has to get hurt."

"I don't want any trouble," he said.

"Me either," I said.



From my bed I watched Ellingwood and Dutch playing a video game in which super macho men, and an occasional Amazonian woman, hit and kicked each other to death. Dutch made a good move. "Hey, what did you do?" Ellingwood asked. They bantered back and forth, and then Ellingwood reached over and mussed up Dutch's hair in a spontaneous show of affection.



One of the striking things about Ellingwood was that he could keep you up half the night with his noise, insults and thinly veiled threats, and then think nothing of asking you for a favor the next day. One morning, after a particularly bad night, he

came to me and asked, with a smile, if he could borrow two sugars from me. I was impressed, actually, that he didn't just steal them. Without much enthusiasm I said, "I guess so." When I saw him coming back downstairs with the two sugars I said, "I don't mind lending sugars and stuff, but I'd feel better about it if you did your own time and left me alone."



Conditions went from bad to worse in the room when Ellingsworth was placed on room restriction for some infraction of the rules. Now he was always in the room. The noise never let up. Even when he was asleep he had his earphones on as loud as they would go so that I was forced to listen to the drone of country and rock music throughout the wee hours of the morning. It was not loud at night – but irritating, like a splinter under one's fingernail. During the day, the TV was on, non-stop. Country music, repetitive advertisements, superficial and often misleading presentations of the 'news', game shows, sit-coms, Jerry Springer and similar obscene shows that sell human misery as entertainment, car chases, and an assortment of other displays of violence were my daily fare. This endless spiritual cacophony crowded me out of my soul. I had no place to live. Also I was chronically short on sleep which further reduced my capacity to cope with the various stresses of prison life.



Ramsey was my roommate in Room 10 only briefly and I didn't get to know him very well. He was young and was always respectful and friendly in relation to me. One evening after returning from recreation he rushed into the room and said, "I just saw a fight." He was breathless with excitement. He sat down in the chair near my bed. "It started over an argument about a volley ball game," he said. "It was a really good fight – a fair fight – I love it."

"Was anyone hurt seriously?" I asked.

"No," he said. "But they got in some good smacks." He paused, and punched his hand. "I love that sound," he said. He talked about how it gets him "all pumped up" to see a fight and hear those sounds. Then he complained about the guards. "Those fucking assholes ended the fight."

"The way you are all pumped up, I guess I need to keep out of your way," I said.

"No," he said. "Not you. But maybe some of the others."

## The Dish Room

Shortly after I was transferred to Amherst I was assigned to work in the dish room.

The dish room was long and narrow – about eight by 16 feet. At one end a small window opened to the dining hall. It was through this window that the diners passed their trays and dirty dishes as they finished eating. At the opposite end of

the dish room, wooden shelves held the trays upon which the clean dishes were stored, ready for use. The room was dominated by the dishwasher that extended along one wall.

Three people worked in the dish room. The one nearest the window received the dirty dishes. He loaded the serving trays into the washing trays that were lined up to be pushed through the dishwasher, dumped the garbage into a milk crate lined with a plastic bag, put the glasses and cups into another washing tray, put the plastic 'silverware' into its own tray, and threw the rest of the dishes into the sink. The second person stood at the sink where he gave the bulk of the dishes an initial washing, loaded them into trays and pushed them through the dish washer. The third worker unloaded all the trays, placed the dishes on the shelves, and wrapped the plastic 'silverware' in individual packets in napkins – each packet containing a knife, a fork and a spoon. The wrapping of the 'silverware' was a time-consuming and tedious job. The third person usually fell behind on this task, requiring that the second person do some of the unloading of the clean trays as well as loading them at the other end of the washing machine.

I had the job of washing and loading the dirty dishes.



Kemp was a 22-year-old black from New York who had been arrested here while making a drug deal. He appeared to be about five-foot-seven but was very well built. The first time I noticed him he was sitting in the dish room flexing his biceps, which he examined with evident satisfaction. My first inclination was to hold him at a distance. He was assigned to the dish room with me, but I did not have to be that friendly. Much to my surprise, however, he seemed to take a liking to me. I suppose our bantering back and forth began when I heard him complaining about how Mr Chess was always strutting around like he was King Kong. 'Mr Chess' was the nickname we gave to a big very muscular man who was quite expert at chess. Kemp said he wasn't afraid of Mr Chess. Mr Chess might be big, but he himself was fast. He underlined this self-assessment by miming some quick boxing moves.

After Kemp's comments about Mr Chess I started strutting around like a muscle-bound fool, and announced that I had decided to become the head punk around here. Furthermore, it was my intention to keep the young punks in line. He responded, of course, with various descriptions about how he could beat me to a pulp without half trying. I doubted this. I felt that it would at least require some effort on his part.

The other thing that we interacted about was chess. He asked me to teach him how to play. So when we were back in the dorm I began teaching him the game. After a few games he showed some promise in that he seemed to understand what chess strategy was about. I encouraged him and taught him as much as I felt he would accept. He talked about how he was going to 'sweep me off the table', and we bantered a bit about this. I think he felt he really could beat me and was frustrated when he was unable to. I pointed out that playing chess well, like basketball, was a matter of both natural ability and practice. I had played quite a bit more than he had, and he couldn't expect to beat me this early on.

On occasion, Kemp wanted to test his physical strength against me. Except that he was a bit stronger than I was, he related to me as many younger boys did. One time he grabbed me from behind and we scuffled around, talking about which of us was going to throw the other into the sink. On a second occasion he grabbed me from behind and I was able to use a move I learned way back when I was a kid to get him into a hammer lock. I think that impressed him. I was a little surprised myself at my success. I was sore the rest of the day from the effort.

If Kemp was somewhat attracted to me as an older man who showed some interest in him, he was in love with Hooper. Hooper was big. He was a Hell's Angel in high standing with that outfit. By his own description, he loved bar room brawls, and had been known as one of the toughest guys around. He didn't have to take any shit off anyone. At the same time he was a surprisingly gentle person, and in relation to Kemp and me, or anybody else who worked in the dish room, he was always friendly and respectful.

He seemed to like me better than some of the others, mainly, I thought, because I was about six years his senior. It was, in any case, after I told him how old I was that I noticed a slight shift in his attitude toward me. He does tease some of the younger ones who work in the dish room, including Kemp, but there is never any real harshness in his joking with them.

When he was not actually doing his job at the window, he perched on his two milk crates, like a roughhewn Buddha. If he was not chatting with someone or eating, he tended to doze off – a picture of serenity.

I would no more have sat on Hooper's milk crates than I would have walked uninvited into a neighbor's house.

One day I noticed that Kemp had arranged a couple of milk crates for his own use, in front of the sink, quite close to Hooper. Here he dozed along with Hooper, like a disciple at his master's feet. But then on different occasions he began to actually sit on Hooper's crates. The first time I saw this Hooper was simply standing beside the window with a helpless demeanor.

I felt sorry for him.

About a week later, I came into the dish room and saw Kemp sitting on Hooper's crates, in sweet oblivion to his transgression or to the discomfort I felt it was creating. I knew, of course, that Kemp wanted to be like Hooper, almost to become him. I wondered whether the discomfort that he created in disregarding his mentor's boundaries was on some level intentional. Was there hostility as well as admiration in this intrusion past Hooper's boundaries? Was it an effort to take his place? Or was the discomfort he created simply a matter of his being oblivious to Hooper's existence as a real person in the world, separate from him. I had asked myself the same question about Jeff's lack of respect for the boundaries I need.

Kemp was half asleep. I looked at him perched in Hooper's niche. I looked at Hooper standing by the window of the dish room. I shrugged.

"I hope he's as quick to jump into my grave as he is to jump into my seat," Hooper said.



One morning toward the end of September, Hooper and I were sitting in the dish room waiting for the men to arrive for breakfast. Shirley, one of the more friendly supervisors, came in carrying a black cereal bowl with three eggs in it. I wondered whether they were hard boiled. Shirley was a slightly overweight woman in her forties. She would occasionally joke with some of the prisoners, and I had noticed that she seemed especially fond of Hooper. There was something slightly furtive in her manner as she gave Hooper the three eggs. I knew that this was not quite in keeping with kitchen protocol. Hooper thanked her. When she left, he removed the top milk crate from his seat, and placed the eggs on the bottom crate. Then he replaced the top one and arranged a rag over it – the kitchen had a supply of rags, cut out of old bedspreads in roughly the size of dishrags. When Hooper sat on his milk-crate seat, the eggs in the bowl beneath him were hard to see. When he is not sitting there you could see the bowl with the eggs in it through the plastic mesh of the milk-crate. The milk-crate looked like a little cage that prevented some small creatures from escaping. The eggs remained in their cage the entire day. I checked during each of the three meals. As of the time we left from the supper shift they were still there.

The next morning when we came to work the breakfast shift, Hooper gave me the eggs. He didn't want them, but he didn't want Shirley to know that. I felt odd about having them, but throwing them in the garbage seemed even sadder than eating them. So I ate them – two for breakfast and one for lunch. They were hard boiled. Not bad.



One day I was sitting in the dish room waiting for the people to arrive, when Bill Sawyer came by. Bill was a heavy, self-deprecating man who took a lot of flack from the other men because he seemed to be a bit slow mentally, and because he was always making excuses about the size of his belly.

"I got a letter from Massachusetts Social Services," he said.

"Yeah? What did they say?" I asked.

"They are putting my daughter up for adoption."

"Jesus!"

"My lawyer is going to fight it."

"That's good."

"Yeah. My wife is the bad person. Not me."

The next day he showed me the written notification he received from DHS. It was a one-page printed form with his name and the name of the daughter they were planning to take away from him written in the appropriate spaces with a ball point pen.



On 28 September, 2000, I listened to Hooper talk about the Olympics while I worked in the dish room. He was talking about the American wrestler who beat the Russian. Apparently the American was black. Hooper said, "They raised them big. They wanted them to do a lot of work."

His reference was to how black slaves were raised in the south. He said that for entertainment on weekends the whites would arrange for fights between black men – fights to the death. “They raised them for this. They boiled them in salt-water to make their skins tough.”



When my roommate, Paul, came to work in the kitchen I had the opportunity to compare styles of throat clearing. Paul continued to clear his throat in a non-productive manner every twenty or thirty seconds, and this continued to drive me crazy. Hooper, on the other hand, was anything but nonproductive in his throat clearing. In contrast to Paul, Hooper had a nasty-sounding cough. In his case, a little bit of throat clearing, produced substantial results, which he spat into the garbage. That seemed unfair to the pigs to whom the garbage was fed, but I said nothing. I suspected that the pigs were less fastidious than I was. When Hooper had a cold, it was especially bad. We wore white muslin pull-over shirts while working in the kitchen. When Hooper needed to blow or wipe his nose he simply pulled the shirt up and used the part around the neckline for a handkerchief. The Buddha never enters our lives in quite the form we expect.



Thanksgiving dinner was scheduled for the midday meal. When I went in to work I saw that the counter where people pick up the trappings – ketchup, butter, coffee, etc – was laid out with fruit ... bananas, apples and oranges. It was all very festive.

Later, as I began to clean and load the first dishes, Hooper asked whether I had seen the program on Germany the other night. I said I had not. He said the Germans planned to make huge amounts of English pounds and US dollars so they could flood the markets with them and undermine the economies of those two countries. In order to do this they took Jewish engravers to a special camp near a lake in Austria to do the work. One such engraver described how, when he was separated from his wife, they agreed to think about each other every night at 8:00. This was to be their way of keeping in touch. His wife was soon killed in a death camp. I wondered whether his experience of thinking about his wife at 8:00 every night changed after she died.

As I loaded the trays, the Jewish couple's commitment to think about each other every evening at 8:00 came into my mind from time to time. Whenever it did I came close to crying and had to make myself think about something else.



On the 1st of December we served pizza for lunch. One of the men had written 'Pizza Hut' on his hat and put it on sideways. The idea caught on and soon almost everybody was wearing hats identifying themselves as employees of Pizza Hut. Ryan had the pencil, so it was he who wrote the words on many of the hats. On Hooper's hat he had added below 'Pizza Hut' the abbreviated word, 'Manag'.



On my hat he wrote 'Manag. Trainee'. I felt some pressure to demonstrate how I was coming along with my training. So I showed some of the men hanging around what I had learned from Hooper. I leaned over one of the big mixers, and pretended I was calling out of the window in the dish room. "Don't even fucking think about it," I growled in an imitation of Hooper. This is what he yells at anybody in the line of people delivering their trays to the window who threaten to pile his tray on another one before Hooper had a chance to get it out of the way. People seemed impressed at my progress but it was understood that I would probably never have the flair for this kind of thing that Hooper had.

It was almost time for the dorms to start coming through the line when Blake, the supervisor, went through the kitchen with fresh white hats and told everybody to get rid of the ones with 'Pizza Hut' written on them. Everyone complied, but there was a lot of grumbling to the effect of 'what's wrong with a little fun?' No one was attacked. No rules were broken. Nothing interfered with the work in the kitchen getting done. It was a little difficult to see why he would have chosen to make an issue of it.

I went over to talk with Ryan for a minute before the dishes started coming in the window in the dish room. Blake came by to check out something about the baking. Ryan looked at him.

"What was that about?" he asked, clearly referring to Blake's decision to put an end to the Pizza Hut hats.

"You're acting like kids," Blake said.

Ryan told him he should lighten up. "You need more fun," he said.

Blake looked sullen and but said nothing.

I returned to the dish room, told Hooper what had happened, and brought him his regular, non-Pizza Hut hat. In a couple of minutes Blake came into the dish room. "Hey, I've been demoted," Hooper said.

Poor Blake was checkmated. If he chastised Hooper for being mouthy he would have looked even more like an uptight little fascist who was obsessed with his authority and couldn't enjoy a joke. But to have joked back would have validated the very kind of 'childish' fooling around that had just put an end to. He mumbled something unintelligible and left the room.

This wasn't the first time that I had seen staff respond to innocent fooling around as though it were a threat that had to be suppressed. Humor was dangerous. Curious. Perhaps they were right.



Most of the time I worked in the dish room, I found it to be a place where I was relatively free from harassment. As of the early part of December, the only one I had serious concerns about was Dupont, a burly, red-haired young man. He was a weightlifter. On the 5th of December he came into the dish room carrying two dirty cereal bowls. "Here you are, you son-of-a-bitch," he said. Because of his tone and manner I recognized this as a friendly gesture – his first one. When I mentioned this to Ryan, he said, "You're in." Later when Dupont happened to be walking by me I heard him sing, softly under his breath, "It's OK to be gay."

Meta communicative speculation: Was this a confession? Was it a way of belittling me?

A question?

An overture?

I wasn't sure. I think he was saying, "I am, you know. Is that a problem for you? Are you also?"



On December 27, Shirley came into the dish room and commented on how dirty the fan in the corner above the wrap-around counter for collecting dirty dishes was. The fan was a big square contraption, screwed onto a little wooden platform that is built into the corner. I said if she had a Phillips screwdriver we could take the grill work off the front and back and clean it right then. She returned shortly with a screwdriver and a pair of pliers. Even though I told him I thought it would be easier for me, Hooper insisted on being the one to work on it. A little later Elizabeth came into the room. Elizabeth is probably in her early fifties. Half her face is paralyzed. I don't know what from. She had a devilish grin on the good half of her face. "I heard that Hooper has three tools," she said.

I laughed. "So you came to see," I said. She nodded.



The fan cleaning project created a bit of camaraderie in the dish room. When we finished, Hooper was in a mood to talk. He told me a bit more about the book he was reading on the Hell's Angels. He knew some of the people that were talked about in the book. Then he told me a story about the competing motorcycle gang – the Outlaws. One of them had a 'girlfriend' who made money for him doing 'tricks'. Once she returned from an appointment with a man and she had no money with her. She claimed that the man did not show up for the appointment. Apparently the boyfriend/pimp did not believe her.

"He nailed her to a tree," Hooper said.

I made a comment to the effect that that was pretty horrible.

Hooper shrugged.

"Well, she didn't bring back the money," he said, as though that justified the act.

I couldn't tell whether he was serious, so I let the matter drop.

## China

*7 August, 2000 – dream: I am on a sailing vessel. I am going to sail across the ocean. This is a happy event and I am full of excitement. I notice a second vessel – a motorized ship. It is a companion. The two vessels will be going together. We begin sailing through the waves. I feel intensely joyful.*

*Then we arrive in China. That seems to be our destination. I am very glad to be here. I am expecting to meet some people who I think will be*

*very interesting. I am a little anxious that many people will be vying for the attention of one of the people I want to meet and that he will have no time for me.*

The central themes of this dream are transition and hope. It was about my moving from one environment to another. In the dream I am very hopeful about 'China' ... so where is China? There would seem to be two possibilities. One is that China represents whatever comes after death. The other is my move to Dorm One, which could occur within a couple of weeks.

Of course there is always the possibility of ending up with two punks who are friends, who love TV, and who hate me. But the odds of it working out relatively well are in my favor. Everybody says that things are quieter and more settled there. The chances are I will find people (not only Ryan) that I can talk with, and maybe some quiet times to write or even read a little.

I am guessing that Dorm One is the correct interpretation. The details fit. Here the popular person I think it may be hard to connect with is Ryan. I would like very much to be friends with him, but he seems a little standoffish. Also he has some other friends.



On 7 September, 2000, they moved me to Dorm One. My new roommates were Price and Kingman.

Price was a short man who appeared to be in his thirties. His double ponytail gave him a slightly exotic appearance. When Price was not working, he spent most of his time lying on his bed where he either slept or played a computer game on his PlayStation. He did not keep the volume up too loud, so this did not turn out to be that much of a problem. He was the only one present when I arrived, and he declined to speak to me.

The room was about nine feet square. It was meant for two people but they made it into a three-person cell by putting in a bunk bed. Price and Kingman had taken possession of the two little tables in the room. Price's PlayStation was on one, and Kingman's TV on the other. They also had all the electrical outlets in use. In addition they had claimed both of the larger lockers and one of the smaller ones – the two smaller lockers are supposed to be treated as a unit – the two of them together being approximately equal to one of the larger ones.

Kingman arrived a little later in the afternoon. He liked to play a racing game on his PlayStation – at a very high volume. When he was not doing that, he had his TV blaring, even when he was not in the room.

My first conversation with Kingman went something like this:

Me: I wonder if you would mind if I turned the volume of your TV down when you are not in the room.

Him: Why would you want to do that?

Me: So I wouldn't have to listen to it.

Him: Leave it alone. Do you have a problem with that?

Me: Yeah, I do. But I guess there is nothing I can do about it.

Him: That's right.

Kingman is a rough looking guy in his 30s. He lifts weights and is solidly built. Ryan told me that Kingman used to track down drug sellers, beat them up, and take their money. I have no idea whether this is true, but it was definitely the sort of thing one would imagine him doing.



I ran into a poem in the Library by a guy I had never heard of. It was not a great poem, but I found the thought relevant to my situation:

*Hope*

*Delicious Hope! When naught to man is left –  
Of fortune destitute, of friends bereft;  
When even his dog deserts him, and his goat  
With tranquil disaffection chews his coat  
While yet it hangs upon his back; then thou,  
The star far-flaming on thine angel brow,  
Descendest, radiant, from the skies to hint  
The promise of a clerkship in the Mint.*

*... Fogarty Weffing*

When we are thrown into a situation that seems impossible to endure, hope is a reflex of the soul. It precedes our finding anything to be hopeful about. It then attaches itself to whatever is available. Our ultimate hope is death.

I did a brief inventory of my situation. I had a top bunk, which was hard to climb into, one two-by-two, six-foot locker, the use of a straight chair, wall-to-wall noise 24 hours a day, and two hostile roommates, one of whom had a decidedly violent disposition. This was not the China I had dreamed about.



My first night in Dorm One was hell. Kingman told me that the light went off in the room at 10:00pm, which sounded good to me. For some time after that Price played his video game. When he finally turned it off I realized that there was still noise in the room. It was Kingman's radio. He had it tuned into an all-night country & western station. As he was already snoring it was plain that this radio was going to be on all night. I was in despair. I saw no way that I would be able to survive this. I tried blocking out the sound, and then I tried listening to it. "A person can get used to anything," I told myself. I tried to tolerate it. Then I hit myself very hard on my forehead with both fists. This gave me a headache. I thought maybe I could feign insanity. Maybe I could really go insane. Maybe I could try to get back into PC at Frankfort. Maybe I could break some rule and be sent back to Receiving. Then I remembered that I had some earplugs that I brought over from receiving. I found that if I crammed the earplugs into my ears just right I was actually able to block out the sound. This was heaven. The earplugs were a bit uncomfortable, but I did think I could get used to them.

The next morning I confronted Price with the fact that I was being denied my allotted space in the lockers. Kingman overheard me and I told him the same. He said that the way it was arranged was the way it had always been. Who was I to move into the room and on the first day tell them how it was to be arranged? I pointed out that I had no space at all. I understood they weren't happy to have me there, but that wasn't my choice either. Somehow we had to live together. Kingman backed off a bit. He didn't offer to give up the section of the locker, but we did find some other space for me here and there. He also said that when he went to work in the morning he would turn the TV off. I felt that they acknowledged that I was there and showed some willingness to negotiate with me. That made me feel a little better. I figured that if I could get used to the earplugs I would be able to survive.



On 9 September, 2000, I had a brief, almost friendly, conversation with Price. I had just climbed down from my bunk where I had been taking a nap. Price was, as usual, playing a fantasy computer game. I asked a few questions about the game in an effort to make some slight inroad into the world where he lived. He answered my questions in a civil manner, and then explained why he spent so much time absorbed in his computer game. "I hate this reality," he said. With a rather vague gesture of his hand he indicated the prison. "If they only knew, they would be writing me up for escape every day."



*12 September 2000 – dream: I dreamed about a blind man and a bull, both of whom were very dangerous. The blind man had amazing capacities for attacking people and finding his way around – almost like the superhero, Daredevil, except that the blind man was a negative character – an anti-hero. I am friends with a knife fighter who holds the blind man at bay. The bull attacks someone and it is decided that the bull must be killed. The knife fighter slices two strips of hide from the beast and he is attacked.*

Associations: The blind dangerous man may represent people here who are dangerous despite (or perhaps because of) their blindness. The bull likewise. He is a dumb beast who is dangerous. The knife fighter is my own aggressive side – probably expressed more in writing than any other way – but also in my defending myself here anyway I can.

Yesterday I thought about how hard it is to see people as they are, if they are threats to you. We naturally see people from an egocentric perspective – we see them in terms of how they are a threat to us, or how they might further an aim we have. Only when we feel safe from others, and are able to relegate their threat and utility to us to less prominent places in the assessment process, are we able to see them more objectively. What does 'objectively' mean? As they actually are? Is that realistic? Gaining an intuitive grasp as to how they experience themselves would be a step.

In any case, my dream reminds me that I am dealing with blind people and dumb beasts. They are, in some cases, dangerous. I do have to defend myself if I am to survive. But the attack on the bull showed unnecessary cruelty. I must learn to see outside, or beyond, the perspectives provided by fear, need and resentment. That is easy to see in theory. It is very difficult in practice if people really are dangerous or needed in relation to vital concerns.

McNally used the word 'uncrushable' in relation to me. I am, I think, tougher than most, and certainly more resourceful. But I am crushable, like everybody else. I need the ability to sleep at night, some places and times when it's quiet, the chance to be alone, and support from outside people – first and foremost from Boo but also from friends. The need for support from the outside reminds me of a principle of doing therapy. One must have a support system outside the therapeutic relationship if one is not to lose one's balance. It is inevitable that we begin to depend on our clients to define and support our sense of self – that we treat them almost as 'self-objects' – if we have no supportive network independent of them. The same thing applies, I think, to doing participant-observer research. One's sense of self must be grounded outside the system. It is not realistic that we can ground our sense of self totally in our own selves. It seems to me that ideally our sense of self should have a three-part support system:

- 1 Our own self-perceptions.
- 2 The perceptions of a self-selected reference group.
- 3 God.



During the next week and a half, the tensions built up in the room. Neither roommate would talk with me even to sort out the simple common problems that one encounters when living in close quarters. Kingman left his TV blaring – sometimes even when he went to work – and defied me to touch it. That would have constituted 'getting into his things', which was a transgression you had to avoid at all costs if you wanted to survive. Whenever the occasion presented itself he made pointed comments about child molesters. Also, no adequate accommodation was made for my needs for physical space. Living in an atmosphere of such intense overt hatred and latent violence wore on me.

On 19 September, 2000, I talked with the guard who was on, a woman named Kim, about my need to be placed with different roommates. I told her that the present ones hated me, and that it would be very hard to live with them over a long period. On the other hand, I was not claiming that they had done anything wrong for which they should be in trouble. She said that this should be taken to the CO2 (Commanding Officer, level 2). I explained that if possible I would prefer not to do anything that could be seen as an official complaint and wondered whether it could be handled informally. She said she would try.

Yesterday evening when I came back from working in the kitchen for supper, I noticed that there were quite a few new people here. A lot of changes were expected. I wondered whether I should go and mention to the guards who were on that I wanted to be moved, as there appeared to be many opportunities for this. But I held off.

My caution with regard to making an official request for a room change did not pertain to a fear of pissing off my roommates. Things could not get much worse there. I felt that if they started persecuting me more actively, or actually attacked me physically, that would bring matters to a head and the authorities would have to move me. That would be an improvement.

The problem was how could I request the room change without ‘ratting’ on my roommates? I had to give some reasons why I wanted to move. But if the reasons entailed behaviors for which my roommates could get into trouble that could be interpreted as ‘ratting.’ If I was identified as a ‘rat’ in the larger population that could create additional serious problems for me.

I thought all of this over as I took a shower. When it got dark so that I was unable to use the yard, I couldn’t find a quiet place so I went to my room and climbed into the top bunk which is the closest thing I have to my own space. I put in my earplugs to cut down on the TV noise and tried to think logically and calmly about my situation. Then, despite the earplugs, I heard some commotion out in the hallway. I pulled out my earplugs and sat up, trying to hear what was happening. I could not tell what the argument was about, or even who most of the participants were but I clearly heard Kingman’s voice. He was swearing at some of the others in the hallway in his most intimidating manner. Price was lying on the bottom bunk trying to read. He got up and went to the door. He pulled the roll of toilet paper that is used to prop the door open out of the way and closed the door. Then he went back to his bunk and resumed reading.

Price did not read long after closing the door before Kingman burst into the room. He threw himself on his bed and immediately complained to Price about his pulling the roll of toilet paper out of the way and shutting the door. Price explained that he did this because he was bothered by the noise in the hall. This didn’t satisfy Kingman. He verbally attacked Price for his poor hygiene, saying that it was because he didn’t want to smell his stink that he wanted to be sure they had some ventilation in the room. He concluded his attack on Price with the phrase, “You got a problem with that?”

This is what he said to me when he told me that he had no intention of turning his TV off when he was out of the room so that I could have a bit of quiet. It seems to be his way of saying “If you do have a problem with this, I’ll beat the shit out of you.”

I couldn’t see how Price responded and didn’t hear him say anything but he must have made some nonverbal sign of submission because Kingman said, “OK”, and seemed to calm down a bit. But he wasn’t quite done. He made a comment about the “skinner on the top bunk”, and said that if Price wanted to he could get into the top bunk with him (that is to say, with me). At the time this seemed like a total non sequitur. What did I have to do with any of this – either the altercation in the hallway or the issue with Price? I think I would have said something, even at risk of precipitating an attack from Kingman, but I really couldn’t think of anything. I simply couldn’t make sense of it, and didn’t want to respond until I could. I now understand that Kingman’s comment about Price getting into the bunk with me simply meant that if he wasn’t careful he would find himself relegated to the same incredibly low status that I, as an identified skinner, enjoy.

Kingman's comment resolved my ambivalence about acting a little more assertively in trying to get out of the room. It was clear that I had little to lose.

I found a guard and asked about the possibility of getting moved, now that there were so many changes taking place. He said that I had to put in a written request to the CO2 – that guards used to make decisions about moving people but that now only CO2s could do it. I still had some hesitation about putting my request in a formal written form.

In the game room I saw Norris, a prisoner I knew from the kitchen. He was aware of my situation, and had always been friendly to me. I mentioned my dilemma to him. In part, I was interested in his advice. But even more I wanted to get his reading on whether putting in a written request for a room change would be interpreted as 'ratting'. Also, I knew that he would take back an interpretation of what I did to others. He said that I had the right to feel comfortable where I roomed and encouraged me to put in my request. So I went to the officer and requested to talk to the other guard on duty. He confirmed what the first one said about the need to put the request in writing to the CO2. So I got the form and wrote out my request.

I remained in the Rec area for another hour or so and then returned to my room. As I was working the combination lock to my locker, Kingman, who was lying on his bed, said "So did you put in a request for a change?" I suspect he picked this up from Norris rather than from the guards. I had anticipated this.

"Yes, I did," I said, "I didn't think you would miss me." He didn't seem annoyed. I explained that I did not say anything to try to get him into trouble, but that both he and Price were treating me like shit, and ignoring my needs and I thought that would be hard to live with over a period of time.

"Basically what I first told you is what I put in my note requesting the change," I said.

He nodded, and asked whether their not speaking to me was what I was referring to.

"That's part of it," I said.

"Well, it's true I got nothing to say to you," he said.

"You should be in with your own kind," Price said.

"You got all kinds of preconceptions about who I am and what I did," I said, "but I'm not getting into that."

That seemed to settle it for the moment. I think we were in agreement on two basic points:

1 It would be nice if we did not have to live together, and

2 It wouldn't be a bad thing if I were to be placed 'with my own kind'.

Nothing more was said as I got ready for bed. When I was in my bunk and it was clear that I was settling in for the night Kingman said, "Goodnight, Mr Hudson". It seemed to me that there was an odd mixture of sarcasm and something almost akin to affection in this comment.

"Good night, Kingman," I said. I laughed. Then I said, "I'll see you in the morning."





My memo to the CO2 was returned the next day with a note on the bottom saying that my request was refused. This refusal meant several things to me. It meant that they used prisoners to punish other prisoners. They knew what the situation was when they put me in the room. They were using Kingman to punish me. It also meant that there was no sense in using the proper channels to get anything done. They *always* said no. That was a part of their power trip. Finally, it meant that they wanted to maneuver me into being a 'rat' before they would do anything to help, and they knew what this would mean in terms of my relationships with the other inmates.

I felt powerless to affect my situation. I had headaches, trouble sleeping, and diarrhea. I could not concentrate well. In short, I felt that I was coming apart at the seams. When I went to the dining hall that evening I found myself swearing a bit about the brutality of the system – not too loud, but my voice carries. A guard came by and told me I should watch my language. I'm afraid I told her if she didn't like it she could write me up. Something to that effect. I didn't know whether she would. It seemed to me that they pressured people relentlessly here, and then when you finally came apart they punished you for that. Never mind that you had asked for help and tried to solve the problem in the 'appropriate' manner.

I had to try something so I sat down and wrote another memo:

Memo 23 September 2000

Action requested: reconsideration of your refusal to grant my request for a room change.

On 23 September 2000 I received your response to my request for a room change. If I understood what you are saying, I must come up with specific allegations against one or both of my roommates before you can make an effort to help me. As you know, this would earn me the reputation of being a 'rat' in the inmate population and would make my situation even worse than it is. I have made it clear to more than one guard that the hostility to which I am being subjected in my present situation would be intolerable on an ongoing basis. Both you and the guards know the reason for this.

People with charges similar to mine are singled out for special persecution in the prison population. I believe I have right to do my time on more or less the same basis as other prisoners. You may say, and rightly so, that you cannot control the attitudes of the other prisoners. But there are things you and the other prison administrators could do to make the situation a little more equitable. Yet whenever I have gone through the formal and appropriate channels to get some help, no help has been forthcoming. My conclusion is that the authorities who control the system under which the guards operate agree with the 'punks' who control much of the inmate sub-culture. Those who are unable to hide the fact that they have certain charges against them should be subjected to special persecution. In effect, the authorities set it up so that one group of prisoners will punish another group for them. All I am asking, is that sometime in the foreseeable future, whenever it is convenient to the guards, I be moved into a

situation where my roommates will be halfway reasonable in their interactions with me. Please reconsider your decision. If you don't, then in the interest of trying to maintain my sanity I will have to appeal this to the next level



The next day, shortly after lunch, I was called over to the CO2's office. This is in a one-storey structure that also houses the visiting room and the rooms that are used to process new prisoners. Sgt Olson was the CO2. He had received and read the memo that I sent to him earlier in the morning. He invited me to sit down beside his desk and pulled out a little sheet of paper on which he had jotted down the points he wished to address. He appeared to be in his late thirties. He was, neat, business-like and well-organized.

Though the frustration and hatred I felt in relation to his having refused to consider my request for a room change was still churning within me, it was difficult to feel any real hatred for the man sitting in front of me. He was neither intimidating nor hostile. I had to remind myself that he was part of a system that, realistically, I could not trust.

He began our conversation by asking for a little more information about why I was requesting the change. He commented on my reluctance to make specific allegations, and pointed out that in the absence of these specifics it could appear that it was just a 'change of convenience', which they didn't make. He conceded that perhaps my request was 'in the gray area.' That is, it was more than just convenience, but it wasn't clear, on the basis of what I had shared with him, that it was a matter of necessity.

I had anticipated that I would have to address this issue of my reluctance to provide examples of harassment and threats. And I had given some thought as to how I would answer. I had known that Olson was black – I had asked which CO2 he was when I got his response to my first memo. I asked him to imagine himself as being a bit older and not especially an athlete. He was a prisoner who was placed in a room with roommates who were younger than he was, probably stronger, and certainly more experienced as fighters. Now, imagine that both of them are known to be members of the KKK. They both hate you, and consider you to be a piece of shit. Your needs are not given any consideration, and it is made clear to you, perhaps without their actually saying it, that if you assert yourself you'll get the shit beat out of you.

Also, in speaking to you, and about you, they use the most derogatory terms possible. I suggested that this would be very much like my situation, and that it was reasonable to request a change from a situation of such high stress. He listened. To what extent he agreed or disagreed, I don't know. But I had the sense that he at least understood what I was saying.

Consulting his list, Olson brought up my accusation that the system uses one group of prisoners to punish another group. With regard to this he made an interesting point. It was true, he conceded, that they deliberately mixed the populations. They did not want to have 'buddies with buddies and gangsters with

gangsters' to any great extent. But the reason was not to punish anybody. The issue was control. If the different groups were together too much they would become too powerful. He was dealing with violent, impulsive and dangerous people and the one overriding consideration in his mind was control. Control meant the prevention of too many violent acts, and escapes. It did not mean preventing people tormenting each other. That was probably not something he gave much thought to one way or another. One could argue of course, that by putting people in unbearably close quarters with other people that they hate, the authorities were increasing the general volatility of the population and making control a more difficult problem. My loss of control earlier in the week when I was swearing in the dining room, for example, was a direct result of their policy. But the way he sees it is that the networking of people of like mind is the greater threat to control. Divide and conquer.

As our conversation proceeded, Olson didn't say either that he would or he wouldn't have me moved. He raised two concerns. First, suppose he moved me and I didn't adjust to the new situation any better than to the one I'm in. What then? Second, by moving me he might be giving some people the message that if you didn't like your roommate, all you had to do was to give him a hard time and eventually they would move him. He said, "I'm not suggesting anything." Then he told me the two reasons for which they did move people: one, if they thought there was a health issue; or two, they thought there was a substantial risk of physical attack. He said he wanted me to stay in the situation for now and see how it developed.

While I was talking with Olson he received three or four phone calls. During one of them he was giving someone instructions for handling a third person – whether a staff member or prisoner was unclear. He said that they had to keep a record of what happened so if they had to take action at some point they could cover themselves. He instructed the person he was talking to that in the meantime he should let the problem person know what he was risking. This, Olson suggested, probably wouldn't get him to change his behavior but it was worth a try. Olson plays bureaucratic chess. That sort of thing is quite familiar to me.

As he dismissed me, he said he would be watching the situation and asked me to keep him informed if anything developed.

I left, trying to decide how to interpret what just happened. I thought that he did not want to deal with the hassle of me appealing the issue. He hoped to defuse me. Was it only a smooth brush off? Or was he saying that he would probably make the move I wanted at some point if a way could be found for justifying it so that he would not be opening Pandora's box. He didn't want lots of other people asking for changes he didn't want to grant.

I decided that for the time being I would just wait and see how it went.



The evening after my conversation with Olson, they were showing the Olympics on TV. The event was men's synchronized diving. I was just getting ready for bed. Kingman, who was lying on his bed watching the TV, said, "Look at those Japanese fags."

He was talking to Price, of course, as it was his policy to never speak to me. Price agreed. Kingman expressed his opinion that it was OK for girls to do synchronized diving but not OK for men. "I even saw them holding hands," he said. He pontificated at some length about how disgusting it was that some men were homosexual, and how offensive this was to him. Mostly Price made brief comments, registering his agreement that only fags would engage in synchronized diving. Kingman was genuinely upset. He expressed his hope that the US did not participate in such a demeaning event. "The US does not have to participate in every single event," he said. By the time I made it up to my bunk, the members of the US synchronized diving team had come forward and were preparing to perform their shameful act – a synchronized dive – right in front of millions of people. Kingman was appalled. By calling the divers various names he expressed his conviction that these Olympic performers had shamed their country and all the red-blooded American men within its boundaries.



At least for a while conditions in the room were a little better. Perhaps Olsen had talked with them. In any case, the comments let up. While I was still ostracized, I was not actually hassled by my room mates. I was able to settle down a bit.



On the 29th of September, while I was resting on my bunk, Price came into the room carrying a piece of paper. He told Kingman that it was a notice from the Department of Social Services saying that he owed \$53,000 in back child support payments. He was ordered to pay this at a rate of \$83 a week. This, of course, was absurd. He had no income and no way of getting one. He shook his head. "I didn't even know about that one," he said, referring to an eleven-year-old boy who they were claiming was his son.



During the second week of October, they moved Price out of the room. Then on the 15th, four men were brought over from Receiving. When I saw some clothes on the top bunk I knew they had moved in the third roommate. It took me a while to find out who it was. At around 8pm or so I found him in the room sorting out some of his things. I tried to talk with him about how some of his needs might be accommodated. For example, I moved my things under the bed down to allow him half the space. He complained about how he shouldn't have the top bunk because he had a back problem. He was not young – but he was younger than I was and I had heard nothing about his needing to have a bottom bunk. I was not about to give mine up. He was big and very muscular – solidly built. I figured he could get in and off the top bunk as well as I could.

Partly to be sure that he didn't simply take the bottom bunk, I sat on it and studied from my chess book. When I saw him climbing up the ladder I commented

that I had found it easier to use the chair, and that I'd try to see that it was placed where he could use it. He told me that he would solve his own problems. On the other hand he was friendly to Kingman. So it was clear he was going to align with Kingman against me. At this point I stopped making any friendly overtures, feeling that it would be demeaning, and knowing it would be pointless.

A little later, while I was lying on my bed trying to read, he and Kingman began to talk. Their subject matter was skinners. Kingman had left a newspaper article out on his chair for the last couple of days with an article about an alleged sex offender who had committed suicide. This was their jumping off point. They expressed satisfaction that he had killed himself. People like that were 'sick bastards' who ought to be killed. They gave an example of a man who killed a skinner with a butcher knife, who only got 15 years to serve because his victim was a skinner, and it was understandable why someone could not control the impulse to kill him. Each of them would be happy to kill a skinner and seemed to feel that if it cost them 15 years that would be worth the satisfaction the act would give them. Crawford (the new man) talked about how just standing behind someone who is known to be a skinner in the lunch line upset him so much he was shaking. It was all he could do to keep himself from attacking the man. They both agreed that whenever a skinner had contact with a child he ruined him for life – turned someone who might have been a decent citizen into a profoundly disturbed individual with uncontrollable criminal impulses.

After about a half hour of listening to their conversation – which was obviously directed at me – I decided that whatever happened to me I wasn't going to live with this. This was the A Pod all over again. So I got up and went to the guard's station and told them that I wasn't going to go back into my room – that because of the kind of talk that was going on I didn't feel safe. I emphasized the issue of safety because simple harassment is considered to be a normal part of prison life – something you just had to put up with. It would not have been a reason for a room change.

I was told that I had to write a request addressed to the CO2, which I did. One of the guards told me that I had to go to my room at 11:30. I told him that I simply wasn't going to unless they physically forced me. After submitting the written request to the guards, I went to the room and told Kingman and Crawford that I was asking for a room transfer. Then I went upstairs to the Rec Room and sat at the checkers table. I had no idea what the authorities would do or what the eventual outcome would be. I was prepared to sit up all night if need be, as I anticipated that one of their strategies might be to simply wait me out.

McNally, one of the men in the unit that had talked with me about some of his personal concerns, came by and sat with me from about 8:45 to 10:45 or so. He was very supportive, and I knew that he would get some flack for this so I was especially appreciative.

After he went to bed it looked as though nothing more was going to happen. So I tried to see whether I would be able to sleep sitting in my chair. Then, I think it was around 11:45, a guard came by and said it was time I should be going to bed. He was actually very nice about it – genuinely so – I felt. I told him I didn't feel safe in the room and wasn't going. I tried to explain briefly and in a calm way why I felt

this way. I said I would be happy to go along with any reasonable solution people could find. He said he would convey this to the CO2, and he left.

About a half hour later (I think around 12:15 or so) a guard came in and escorted me to the CO2 office. The CO2 was Skip who had dealt with me before. He was irritable and impatient with me at first, but I was calm enough to listen to him, and to keep my voice down, so he mellowed out a bit as we went along. He was at least willing to see it from my point of view. He, like the guards here, sees Kingman in a positive light. A guard in the unit had told me, "Kingman does good time". Skip told me, "We need people like Kingman to keep order". Odd. I had thought keeping order was the guards' responsibility, but I didn't say this.

Skip said that I had not been threatened. I used the analogy of a black being placed in a room with two burly (bigger than him) KKK members. If they started talking about how it was OK to kill 'niggers' and really there should not be much of a penalty for doing so as it was such an understandable thing to do, and they had this conversation in a loud and aggressive tone in front of the black, then it would be quite reasonable for the black man to feel threatened. The only difference I could see between that and my own situation was that presumably I deserved this because of my 'crime'. I kept my voice calm, and listened to Skip when he had something to say. He conceded that their conversation "might have been for your benefit – probably was."

Skip said he needed time, and that he would talk to the two men. He said he would seek an outcome that would ensure either that the two men let me alone "to do my own time" or we would be separated. I said that with that I could go back to bed.

It was probably 1:30am or so when I got back. Kingman was still awake. He had a couple of things to say about my 'whining' but didn't push it too far. I covered up without taking my clothes off, put in my earplugs, and went to sleep.

The next day, Monday, I went to work as usual. As I was finishing up on the lunch shift I was called over to the 'two's office'.

Skip met with me briefly. He said he had talked with both of the men and had been assured that the 'conversation' they had would not be continued. I said that I certainly preferred to be moved but that I would try to continue living there if they really would leave me alone. I emphasized that I wasn't trying to get these men into trouble. I just wanted to be relatively free of harassment at least in my room. He said I would first have to accept it that I would sometimes be harassed. I pointed out that if I was harassed anywhere else I could get up and leave. When it happened in my room there was no place to go. He said I should let him know if it continued there. Both Kingman and Crawford were in the room when I returned from working on the supper shift. I had to walk between Crawford and the TV in order to get to my locker. I said (as an habitual reflex), "Excuse me."

"There is no excuse for you," Kingman said. They were both glaring at me. Kingman was the spokesperson. He said that he was getting sick and tired of getting called over to the two's office. That had never happened until I started rooming with him. I said that I didn't like being here anymore than they liked me here.

"All you got to do is leave me alone," I said. "Anything else you do is not my business."

Both of them then took the tack that they had a right to have a conversation that consisted of 'two or three sentences' about the news. I rolled my eyes at this blatant denial of what they were really doing, but said I didn't see any point of our 'going there'.

Kingman seemed to be getting more agitated. He said I should listen to his advice. I said that I would at least listen to anything he had to say. His advice consisted of a recommendation that I be more aggressive in demanding a room change. I should be more persistent. I had almost made them give in last night but had backed down. I did listen to him and merely pointed out that I had done most of what he said. I also told him that I didn't care if they put me in Seg or sent me back to Receiving, but that I didn't really want to get sent out of Amherst because my wife could visit me here. He said we should talk with Max (a guard). I said that if he thought that would help I was all for it. Max, by the way, had heard Kingman talking in a loud voice and had checked in on us a few minutes before, I think to see whether I was in danger of getting beat up. I told him it was OK and he continued with his count.

So Kingman called him back in. Max listened and was sympathetic. He would make changes like this, he said, as he saw nothing to be gained by making people live in miserable and explosive situations. But the administration "takes a hard line on that here". He said that if it continued to escalate they would very likely put me in Seg. From there they might send me back to Receiving but they also might send me to another facility – presumably Callum Bay.

When he left, I said I would submit another request for a room change. I wrote one up trying to sound reasonable – but also emphasizing that my roommates felt very strongly that they should be able to have any conversation they wanted. That was a key issue as the CO2 told me they had agreed they would not "continue the conversation". Here was an issue that that might get me out of the room without getting transferred to Callum Bay on the one hand, or set me up to be accused of being a 'rat' on the other. I let Crawford see my request before sending it in so there would be no question about what I was up to.

During the next day Kingman and Crawford became even more consistently hostile. There was no let-up from the glaring, the pointed conversations, and the occasional comments. I tried to avoid the room when they were in it.

Eventually, though, I had to go back to the room to sleep. They kept the TV on at a high volume. I tried to block it out with earplugs. They kept up a fairly steady conversation – again in loud voices – periodically touching on the subject of 'child molesters'. I slept off and on and got up at 4:30am. As quietly as possible, I dressed and was gathering the things I would need. Suddenly, in a very abrupt manner, Crawford sat up and leaned toward me, glaring. He continued staring at me with a hostile expression on his face. That I couldn't even get up in the morning and tiptoe out of the room without putting up with their threats was too much for me. I gave him the finger.

"I don't bother you in any way," I said. "Why can't you just leave me alone?" I thought there was a good chance that he was going to jump down off his bunk and attack me. I picked up my cup with my toothbrush, etc. As I was leaving I saw that he was getting his pants on.



While I was brushing my teeth Crawford came in. He gave me the finger. I finished my teeth and left. Again I thought there was a good chance he would attack me. He never gets up that early. He was following me.

When I sat down at a table he sat at another one near me and began talking to a prisoner there. The other prisoner was surprised to see him up so early and made a comment to this effect. Crawford told him that I woke him up by making so much noise when I got up. I challenged this statement. I said I hardly made any noise at all. He claimed that I bumped into the bed on purpose and this “startled” him. The absurdity of his trying to turn the whole thing around to make it appear I was harassing and scaring him made me laugh. I got up and went upstairs to get away from him.

I realized at this point that Crawford and Kingman were not only going to continue to harass me, they were deliberately turning up the heat. My plan up to then had been to go in at 9:00pm, put in my earplugs, sleep however much I was able to, leave at 4:50am, stay out of the room when either of them was in there, and avoid them at all other times. I knew now that this was not enough. Whenever they were with me and out of earshot of the guards they were going to be after me. I also believed that, with his poor control of himself, there was a very real chance Crawford might do me serious physical injury. He had clearly given me every reason to think so. I could easily imagine a scenario of his seeing some real or imagined atrocity on TV or in the newspaper and deciding that it was his duty to rid the world of someone he believed might do that sort of thing. I could also easily imagine someone else stirring him up to an uncontrollable frenzy of rage and hatred.

I felt that I had no choice. I had to get out of that room whatever the cost. It was possible, of course, that I might end up in another equally dangerous situation. It was also possible that I would lose Boo’s visits by being sent to another facility. But my instinct for simple self-preservation dictated that I make at least some effort. So I went to the guard and told him what was happening and said that I was not going back into that room to sleep again. I said that this gave them a whole day to sort it out, but that whatever they decided, I was simply not going back there. The guard told me that there was nothing he could do but assured me he would convey this information to the CO2.

When I returned from working the breakfast shift I found Dan Levesque in the game room and I went to sit at his table with him. Crawford was sitting with another prisoner on the other side of the room. They were reading a newspaper article about a 13-year-old boy who the state was trying to place in foster care. I saw the article later. It had nothing to do with abuse.

Crawford started talking about how much danger a child like that might be in. He quoted the article saying that the boy was “anxious to please adults” and wanted a good relationship with an adult. “Yeah – in a good way,” Crawford said. Then he made a comment about “Chicken, 98 cents a pound. Ask him.” He nodded toward me.

There was more talk about child molesting and then Crawford said, “Yeah, you pay a price for that sort of thing.” He repeated the comment, again looking at me. Kingman had come into the room. He was standing near the wall and was participating in the conversation, but it was hard for me to hear what he was saying.



When I came back from the lunch shift I wanted to make sure that my concerns were getting conveyed to the CO2, so I wrote out a brief message for him and turned it into the guard. I mentioned briefly what it was about and was assured it would be conveyed to the CO2. I avoided my room and the afternoon break continued without any incident.

When I came back from supper I went upstairs and was invited to play pool, which I did. I interacted with the other men up there in such a normal manner that I could almost believe everything was all right. I then allowed Dan to persuade me to go see a video that was being shown by the prison chaplaincy group.

When I returned I went to the guard, again to make sure that my message had gotten through. He said this was the first he had heard of it. I again briefly explained the situation to him, again emphasizing that I would not go back into my room because I did not feel it was safe. He didn't show much interest in what I was saying but said he would let the CO2 know. He found the note I gave to the afternoon guard sitting on a ledge. He said it had not been sent over. After a while he called me back to say that the matter was going to be referred to the night CO2, as he was the one who had dealt with it before. After I mentioned the problem to the guard, I could tell that Kingman and Crawford, joined now by Morse, one of their friends, were stirring things up as much as they could. At 9:20 I saw Kingman and Morse walking across the open space on the lower level. Kingman looked up at me and said, "Come on you old chicken licker." Morse laughed and one of them began making clucking noises.

At 9:24 Morse came up the stairs near where I was sitting and looked at me as he walked by. "Come on you old chicken licker," he said.

Finally, I think it was around 10:00pm, I was called over to the CO2's office. There were two CO2s there, and a guard. The CO2s were quite hostile to me and not interested in hearing my side of the story. They seemed to blame me for the situation escalating. "You have to watch your mouth, too," one of them said. But they told me that I would be sent to Receiving, and that was the main thing. So I accepted whatever they said without much comment.

As we entered my new room back in the Receiving Dorm, it was dark and quiet. My two new roommates were asleep, so I didn't meet them. I didn't have my things and wanted to be quiet so I pulled the cover over me without undressing and settled down to sleep. Neither a radio nor a TV was playing in the room. For the first time in weeks – perhaps months – I slept without earplugs.



In the morning, before breakfast, a guard came and took me back to Dorm One to pick up my things. As we went into the dorm a number of men were up and getting ready for work or breakfast. Several of them greeted me in a friendly way and asked what was happening. They had all been aware of the trouble I had been having with my roommates, so very little explanation was needed. "I refused to go back into my room," was all I had to say.

As I was leaving, dragging two heavy plastic bags full of my things with me, Calvert, an older prisoner who had always been quite pleasant with me, smiled

and made the thumbs up gesture. It was such a friendly gesture I had to suppress an impulse to cry.

I thought about Kim who said to me the evening before, “You can come and be roommates in my room.”

“I would love to,” I said.

I thought of Craig, the journal writer, who had come to play a game of cribbage with me while I was waiting for the CO2 to respond, and another man, whose name I didn’t know, who coached me in my playing – I had played only a few times and had forgotten how it went. These men had gone out of their way to support me.



The next day I was supposed to go meet with the classification committee. This was the group to decide what is to happen next. As soon as I got up I thought about what I wanted to say to them and wrote the following statement, which I sent to them.

Statement 24 October 2000

I wish to make six points:

- 1 One could debate whether I was, in fact, in physical jeopardy. However, I genuinely believed that I was in danger of serious physical injury from one or both of my roommates, and I had reasonable grounds for thinking so.

Their extreme hatred of me was blatant and undisguised. In connection with each other and in direct comments to me they made on many occasions very thinly veiled threats. I had every reason to suspect that they had histories of violence.

I had reason to fear a loss of control on one of their parts even if they felt it would not be in their interest.

- 2 The only situation in which I have ever refused to follow a direct order was when I felt that obeying it would put me in danger of very serious physical injury. Normally, I’m not resistant to doing what I am told.
- 3 I tried very hard to use accepted and proper means to get my needs for personal safety taken seriously. I also gave a lot of notice that if I continued to feel threatened I might feel forced into disobeying an order. I asked for help on this issue repeatedly.
- 4 The previous time when I talked with a CO2 (Skip), he rejected my request for a room change, but told me that if the “conversation did not stop” I should let him know and at that point the room situation would be changed. I went back to my room with the understanding that I would try to live in that atmosphere, if they would simply stop harassing me. They did not stop either the harassment or the threats. Knowing that it would increase rather than decrease my level of risk I finally went back to the guards with this information. They continued to refuse to help me. Eventually I was blamed for the situation and forced into refusing to obey an order that I felt placed me in very serious and immediate physical danger.

- 5 If I am being harassed, there are only two basic ways of dealing with it so that it does not escalate:
  - a. Ignoring it.
  - b. Getting up and leaving.

If I am followed around and I have no room to retreat to, it leaves me with no effective strategy for dealing with continuing harassment and threats.

- 6 My record here, both in the units and at work, will show that I normally do, in fact, obey orders and comply with all expectations (such as doing my detail, etc).

Conclusion: I can make it here without being a disruptive influence. I can even be a calming influence in some situations (and have been). All I need is a room placement where people will, as they say here, “let me do my own time”.

Nothing happened that day, but the next day I learned that a decision was made to take me off administrative segregation and to drop the charge of failure to obey an order. I was very relieved. I anticipated that I would probably be moved upstairs to the Receiving Dorm again in a few days and back down to Dorm One after a few weeks. Also, I would be starting back to work.

## “I’m On a Journey”

Stan Ziegler was a big man – about six-foot-two or six-three, I would judge, and heavy-set. He had small eyes set in a round puffy face. He was in his early 50s. The first day he arrived, late in November, he sent his roommate out to let me know that he wanted to play chess with me.

According to his own report, Stan had been playing chess every chance he got for the last 25 years. It showed. He was pretty good – sly – but at times careless from moving too fast. I told him that up until recently I had played only casually, but that during the last couple of months I had made a real effort to improve my game. I told him about my ‘Chess Master’ program and about my book on strategy. He told me about spending hours and hours studying the games between Spassky and Fischer, and we showed each other our books. His Spassky-Fisher book was tattered from use.

For a period of time he won almost all the games and the best I could do was to pull off a draw on a couple of occasions. He was happy with this, though he complained that I took too much time moving. I resolved to refuse to be intimidated or bullied by Stan and soon found that I could beat him from time to time. He still had an edge on me, and won the majority of the games. But after a bit I won about a fourth of the time and a number of games ended in stalemates.

Any time I won he became very angry and attacked me verbally for taking too much time to make my moves – I could take four or five minutes to assess a complex situation. He was also frustrated with me for my not being willing to play as often as he wanted to. He told me that ‘real’ chess players (which somehow sounded like ‘real’ men) played 15 games in a day and thought nothing of it.

I told him repeatedly that three or four games in a day was the max for me and that I needed time to assess the board if I was to give him a good game. Twice, after losing, he told me that I was a 'baby' and that he didn't want to play any more. I said that was fine. If it wasn't fun for him to play chess with me, then he probably shouldn't. But that never lasted. Only hours later he would be after me for another game.

On November 9th I won a game from him after losing twice. He was furious that I wouldn't play another two or three games. I said he won two out of three for the day so that made him the winner and I went to my room. The next day I was in the game room at 5:00am, trying to get my quiet time. Stan was an early riser too. I had not been there long when he arrived and sat down at another table.

"I don't want to play with you any more," he announced. I nodded.

"OK," I said. "If you don't enjoy it, why should you?" It wasn't that simple, he told me. It was because of my timing.

"You stall."

"I'm not stalling," I said. "I need time to study the board if I'm going to play well."

"You're playing games with people," he said.

Again I reiterated that if he didn't want to play chess with me, that was fine. "I just don't want to fight with you," I said.

"That's why you are here," he said. "You play games with people."

This effort to attack me on the basis of the charges against me pretty well settled it for me. I was ready to be done with him.

"I'm really not interested in this," I said.

"You can play with that fucking faggot if you want," he said. I had played chess with two or three others in the unit here, but I didn't know whom he was referring to. I had never played chess with Ryan, and that was the only one that he would have known about who had a reputation for being gay.

When I didn't answer, he said, "You know what I mean?"

He persisted when I ignored him.

"I understand what you are saying," I said, finally.

"Don't tell me what I am saying," he said.

After that I refused to respond to anything he said and eventually he left.



Sometimes Stan would want to talk with me, and then it was as though we had never had any problems around the chess games. On one such occasion he told me about his theory that Santa Claus was the anti-Christ. This was because he made everybody want to buy things. This made poor kids unhappy because they could see what they didn't have. Interpreted on a symbolic level, I had some sympathy for what he was saying. But he seemed to take his idea about Santa being the anti-Christ literally. When I asked him a question or two to try to get a clearer picture of what he did mean, he became belligerent – and seemed to interpret the questions as an attack on him and his beliefs. So from then on I just listened.



On another occasion, I had just picked up my mail at the Bubble and was walking back to my room. Stan intercepted me. I was looking over the yellow memo from the Reclassification Committee, when he asked whether I had been given the job in the library. I told him I had. He said that he had been turned down on his request for a change because the committee felt he should have closer supervision. This led to his telling me about his propensity for violence. He said that he hit a guard in the high security prison with a hammer and almost killed him. He said he received 10 years for this. Stan said he had an evil side to his nature that he tries to control. This, he feels, is a result of his being abused as a child. He said he was beaten almost every day and grew up with thoughts of revenge.

Then Stan associated this to some of his experiences in prison. He was in a mood to talk.

It appeared to me from his talk that he had spent most of his adult life incarcerated – a good deal of it in federal prisons. The federal prisons, he told me, don't tolerate gangs. Whenever one begins to surface in any prison they move all the members to various prisons located all over the country. Even without gangs, he said, prisons are violent places. He said he once saw a man who had been stabbed in the heart and described in detail how much he bled before dying. On other occasions he witnessed people thrown from tiers that were four or five storeys high.

Finally Stan began telling me about the visions he has. A lot of them came to him at night. He emphasized, though, that they were not just dreams. He felt that they are given to him by God to teach him things. He told me that he had seen the sun exploding, the earth on fire, and four moons in the sky. He was not sure how to understand these visions. I planned at some point to try to explain to Stan how symbolic language and images function, and their relationship to the external events or our lives. I wasn't sure how far I would get with this, but it seemed worth a try. Psychosis is not a matter of having visions or intense subjective experiences, but of confusing the symbolic forms with external events.



On the 21st of February, 2001, Stan asked me whether we had any books on Geronimo in the library. His interest in this had something to do with Hayden, a man we had heard about who reportedly jumped to his death out of a window at Springfield – the facility for those with long-term or life sentences. It was alleged that Hayden had killed two of his wives – one by pushing her into a dangerous stream where she drowned, and the other by pushing her into a lake. According to the story going around, Hayden was found with tape over his mouth and a clothes pin on his nose. Stan told me that he knew this man. He did not agree with my conjecture that Hayden had probably been murdered. Stan felt that if he could learn something about Geronimo it would shed light on why Hayden committed suicide.

The next day while working at the library I found a book with a few pages in it on Geronimo and his beliefs. When I brought it back, Stan read part of what I think was a song written by Geronimo. It described a spirit journey. Then Stan explained to me that Hayden had an interest in Native American spirituality. He thought that he put tape over his own mouth and fastened the pin on his nose before jumping to his death in order to prevent any of his blood flowing out and getting in the dirt. Stan said his friend hoped that when he was freed from his body his spirit would fly up to the native spirit entity that takes care of those who die. As we walked to lunch, Stan continued to talk about his friend. He said that he had a conscience – he knew what he had done was wrong – and his suicide was a way of punishing himself for this.



I had heard that Stan was in prison for having killed either his father or his grandfather in order to steal a social security check. Whether this was accurate, I have no idea. When he was caught he had sworn to kill the whole family of the sheriff who had apprehended him. On the 10th of November I allowed myself to be drawn into playing chess again with Stan. I lost two games, and then, a little later, I won the third game we played that day. Once again he was furious when I didn't want to play any more right then. I told him that I had a radio program I wanted to listen to and I left.

The next day when I was working on the breakfast shift, Stan caught me on my way to the dish room, and started in again. Why was I such a baby, etc, etc. Elizabeth, who was supervisor that morning, heard us and told us to stop arguing. This gave me my chance to retreat to the dish room. Everybody in the kitchen seemed to have noticed the altercation between Stan and me. I wasn't in the dish room more than a minute when Richard Lyons came in. I was in my usual place by the sink, across from Hooper who, as usual, was ensconced in his cubbyhole on his milk crates. Richard was a youngish guy – probably in his late twenties – who was currently the third member of the dish room crew. He was a weightlifter who took body-building very seriously. For example, he stuffed himself with protein, in the form of egg whites, which caused him to produce copious amounts of gas. He was good-hearted and had been friendly to me since we met.

“What happened between you and Ziegler?” he asked.

I filled him in on the background of the conflict between Stan and me. Then he told me that his father was the sheriff who had arrested Stan quite some years ago – the one whose family members Ziegler had vowed to kill. One of the staff members had talked with Richard about this, so they knew the situation. That the administration would go ahead and allow the two of them to be working in the same area together seemed rather remarkable to me.



I woke up on the 27th of May, 2001, thinking about some rather severe harassment that I had been subjected to the previous day. I was especially in need of a few moments of quiet by myself to sort out my thoughts and feelings.

I was a bit disappointed therefore, when I went into the upstairs Rec Room and found that Stan was already there. This was the only place I could find outside my room where I did not have to contend with the TV.

I went back down to get my coffee and, as I returned, I decided not to say “How you doing, Stan?” I didn’t want to hear him say, “Wonderful. Never had it so good. We’ve never had it so good, have we Hudson?”. This had become his inevitable response whenever I asked him how he was doing. So I simply said, “Good morning”.

There was no response. I pulled a chair over to the spot where I planned to sit and I looked out the window. “It’s foggy,” I said.

“I like the fog,” he said, as though the fog were a friend of his that I had criticized.

“Hmmm,” I said. “Yes, the fog is nice.”

“It’s not so foggy,” he said. I continued looking at the fog and nodded.



As I was leaving the dining hall after working the lunch shift, Stan joined me. On the way back to the dorm he asked me what ‘suspended animation’ meant. I explained it to him.

Then he asked what a ‘double helix’ was. I told him a little about that, including how the scientist who figured out how the genetic material was organized first saw it in a dream. I asked him what made him curious about these terms. He said that the terms came to him as he was watching water go down the drain. We were able to see that the swirling of the water was similar to the double helix, and that the unmoving suds on the surface of the water was like ‘suspended animation’. I asked him what the water and these terms made him think about. He associated it to the spiral shape of the galaxy to which we belong. He felt that it must all be spiraling into a black hole at the center. Then the heat would cause it to explode again. I told him that was similar to what some astronomers, who believed in ‘Big Bang’ theory, thought might happen.

“If something like that is true, we could think of it being like God, taking everything back into himself, and then exploding out into another manifestation in time and space,” I said.

He seemed to understand.

Then he wondered whether his thoughts seemed crazy. I said that there was nothing wrong with his thinking but it was important to understand that he was thinking in metaphors. I asked if he knew what metaphors were.

“Sort of,” he said.

I tried to explain and ended up saying that they were ‘pictures of what something means’.

Then I raised the question about what these metaphors of a universe might mean to him. I explained the concept of the ‘macrocosm’ and the ‘microcosm’.

“You are the microcosm,” I said, “so maybe what you are thinking is that somehow you are like the macrocosm.” I painted a picture of how a person might, when he dies, be like the universe, contracting into that black hole – and that maybe we would then expand into another lifetime.”

Stan seemed to follow most of this.

As we were coming upstairs, he told me that sometimes he heard voices that told him good things that helped him understand things. I would guess that the expressions ‘suspended animation’ and ‘double helix’ – two terms he had heard but was hazy about – came to him in voices.

I said that if the voices were good and helpful, there was no reason not to listen to them.

He nodded, and said that at other times he heard crazy, violent voices.

I said that it was important to distance himself from those kinds of voices.

“Yes,” he said. “I need to put those out of my mind.”

It seemed to me that he was a little calmer as he walked on down the hall to his room.



One day while I was still in the Receiving Dorm, Stan expressed an interest in clocks and watches. It was a little difficult to discern the exact nature of his interest, but I told him that I might be able to find something that would be of interest to him in *Books in Print*, and that if so, I could try to order it through inter-library loan.

He said something that made me believe that he was convinced that no one else understood him or his interests. I said to him that I suspected he thought he was more different from other people than he was because he didn’t talk much to other people.

He said “I’m on a journey. That’s why I go to bed at 7:00. I lie in bed and think about my journey.”



I was not to continue to accompany Stan on his journey.

One day I was talking to a friend as we were going through the supper line. We were joking and laughing about something. Stan was working on the serving line that day. I pointed out something in the kitchen to my friend and Stan thought I as pointing at him, and that my friend and I were making fun of him. I saw his face turn very dark.

After supper, when we were all back in the dorm, I went to Stan and tried to talk with him about it. I wanted to reassure him that we were not laughing at him. But he was not to be convinced. On that day he became my enemy, and was to remain so to the day they transferred him to another facility.

He began hounding me.

Whenever I went out into the yard to try to find some solitude, sooner or later I would hear him calling me names, or making chicken noises, from windows where he could not be seen. He was encouraged to do this by other men in the dorm who liked seeing skinnners tormented.

This went on for months.



## Not a Violent Man

Early in November they moved me upstairs. Most of the time I was in my new room I shared it with Doug and Paul. They could not have been more different. Doug was young. His main interest was in playing a video game in which he could drive a car through the streets of a big city at breakneck speed. It seemed to give him a high. With Doug, between the impulse and the action there was never a moment for reflection.

Paul was older – close to my age. He was a Vietnam vet. He was kind, reflective, and very depressed. The one problem I had with Paul was not his fault. He had the habit of clearing his throat in a very non-productive manner every twenty seconds or so. For some reason this really got on my nerves. I wanted to say to him “Just try a little harder. I’m sure you can get it”. But that would have been rude. Paul worked in construction all his life. He had a number of health problems. One of his legs was shorter than the other, and he needed special shoes. He had a problem of some sort in one of his shoulders. But his most serious problem was his cirrhosis. Paul had about two more years to serve. He was fearful that his liver might shut down and he would die before he got out. “I’m not afraid of dying – but I don’t want to die in this place,” he said. He wanted to be home with his wife when he died. He hoped they would let him use the community confinement program, which he said, is supposed to be expanded.



During the evening on November 15, Paul, Doug and I were all in the room doing quiet things. Doug began making farting noises with his mouth. Paul, who was sitting on the bunk beneath him, seemed to think that these were real farts. This struck Doug as excruciatingly funny. In response to such comments from Paul as “There’s a crapper down the hall”, Doug would laugh hysterically, roll on his bunk, and kick his feet in the air. Then, after things quieted down a bit he would begin making the fart noises again. This cycle repeated three or four times before Doug tired of it.



One of the forms of ‘humor’ here is for people to scream invitations to self-abusive behavior at each other: “Kill yourself”; “Punch yourself in the balls repeatedly”; “Hang yourself”; “Smash your face into the wall”; etc. As a theme for humor, this is second only to jokes and taunts that have the general message of “I’m not gay (a laughable proposition), but you may be”. Yesterday afternoon Doug sat at the desk and kept his foot in the door to keep it open. He was suggesting self-destructive behavior to people as they walked by, and to other people in rooms where they had their doors open. “Why don’t you kill yourself?” A few people were screaming similar suggestions back at him. After listening to one such comment, he turned to me with a smile.

“I think I’m beginning to make friends,” he said.



On the 19th of November, when a guard came by while doing the count, he mentioned in passing that both of my roommates had visiting slips. Doug was amazed. He said that he had not had a visitor since he came into the prison system eight months ago. The mother of his son had visited him weekly while he was in the county jail, but that ended when he was moved to prison and was not as close. Doug put his boots on and hurried downstairs to pick up the slip. It turned out that he was scheduled for a visit from his father and his sister. He had received a letter from his sister, who was 12 or 13 years old, last week.

It soon was apparent that Doug was rather anxious about the visit. When we were alone in the room I asked him about this. He expressed some concern that someone might “say something” to his father that would rile him up. I reassured him that prisoners had very little to do with other people’s visitors, and that I had never seen anything like the kind of scene he feared.

Then Doug focused on his father’s appearance. He had a shaggy beard and looked like “a man from the woods, or a hippie”. I said that nobody was likely to make fun of his father’s appearance. He was also worried about the appearance of his sister who was overweight.

Then Doug wondered whether two hours was too long for a visit. I pointed out that he could end the visit any time he wanted to – he just had to tell the guard. I asked what his concern was with the length of the visit. At first he said that he was worried about his father’s health. He had a heart problem. Perhaps the visit would be too hard on him.

Finally Doug came to his big concern. He was afraid that his father and he could not be together for a whole two hours without getting into a fight. Doug had told me before that his father had hit him a lot. With very little encouragement he began talking about this again.

“I didn’t mind it,” he said.

“Yeah, you did,” I said.

“I got used to it.”

“A person doesn’t get used to getting beat up.”

“It got so that I hardly felt it.”

I expressed my doubts about this.

“Well, it didn’t do me any harm,” he said.

“Then why are you here?” I asked.

That there was any connection between the repeated beating Doug received from his father as he was growing up, and the troubles he was having then was an idea he resisted.

We had discussed this twice before. On the first occasion I suggested to him that kids really don’t learn a lot of good things from being beaten. This was discussed briefly, in the context of whether he wanted to pass this kind of thing on to his son. He said he didn’t, and seemed enthusiastic about doing something better for his son – of raising him with love. I also recalled that earlier in the day Doug had described how an eleven-year-old relative of his – a girl cousin – always ‘shaped up’

when an uncle of hers was around because she knew he would slap her if she got mouthy. This was said in praise of the uncle, and how his no-nonsense approach got the right behavior from the girl. I had challenged this. I told him I didn't think kids learned as much as we thought from being beaten, and that it really wasn't OK to hit and slap them. Nor was it necessary. At the time of that discussion Paul was in the room. They both expressed their convictions that I was taking an extreme position – though Paul conceded that maybe they didn't need a lot of spanking. Mike justified the hitting, but said that by the time he was 13 he had to get out of the house to keep away from his father. He also pointed out he couldn't talk with him.

"If the hitting was OK," I asked, "why did you have so much trouble getting along with your parents?"

He seemed to think about this.

As I thought about Doug's defense of the physical violence he grew up with, I recalled the frequently leveled charge that is made against skinners – they 'ruin a child's life forever.' The men with whom I deal at the prison are generally those who have had their lives ruined when they were children – in large part by men – by fathers who believed that tenderness was suspect and who 'disciplined' children with merciless and brutal harshness. Yet they, like Doug, often have trouble directing their anger against these men – men from whom they still crave love regardless of past brutalities, insensitivities and abandonments. These circumstances produce a lot of rage that is in need of redirection.

What many men who have been brutalized as boys most want is also what they most fear – a man capable of tenderness and love. This above all else must be defended against. To be affectionate with such a man would make one a faggot. To redirect the rage against gentle and nurturing men is therefore a logical solution.



When Paul is around Doug acts very goofy. The farting I described earlier is typical. He also calls Paul names, makes crazy faces, and pretends to threaten him with physical attack. Paul plays along, and threatens in return to strangle him. On the 23rd of November, after this had been going on for a while, Paul left the room. With a contented smile on his face, Doug stared at the door through which Paul had just departed. Then he turned to me.

"I never had somebody like that when I was little," he said.

Doug then started rambling on about one thing and another. Most of it I had trouble paying attention to. He went into great detail, for example, about how his legs are longer than his mother's, father's or sister's, and he told of various adjustments that each family member must make with the seat when they get into their car after one of the others had been driving. Then he began talking about the first thing he was going to do when he was released. He was going to spend the day with his son. He said that he would hold him, or wrestle with him on the floor, or take a nap with him – whatever his son wanted. Then he told me about sleeping over at the hospital for a couple of days after his son was born. With the same meticulous detail that he described adjusting the car seat, he told me about the first time he

held his child. He had to put on sterile covers over his shoes, and they barely fit. He told me just how big the baby was and how much it weighed. It was much less, he said, than a car motor. He held it first against his chest and then cradled it in his arm. The other members of the extended family had to stand in back of a yellow line, as only one at a time was allowed near the baby. It was Thanksgiving. In the evening, Doug announced that he had not eaten the Thanksgiving dinner that was served as the midday meal. It was not a bad dinner so I was a bit surprised. I asked him why not. He said he wasn't going to eat any holiday meals so long as he was separated from his son.

The following day he again mentioned his vow not to eat any holiday meals. But he said he could eat some of the leftover turkey because it was no longer Thanksgiving.



On the 29th, Doug interrupted my effort to read with the announcement that a five-year-old girl had been removed from her family. I nodded, indicating some interest.

"Yeah. It was for breastfeeding," Doug was horrified. A five-year-old being 'forced' to breastfeed. I questioned the use of the word 'forced'. "No," he insisted. "A baby sitter said that the mother forced the girl to breastfeed."

I told him I thought that was bullshit. The issue was that the mother and her daughter were doing something our society believed was abnormal. I said that I doubted that the girl was harmed by the breastfeeding, but that she was certainly harmed by being removed from her home.

I became impatient with Doug.

"Think about the things you see or read," I said. "What makes something wrong is that it hurts someone."



Early in December I had a conversation with Paul about dog-fucking. He had seen a story on TV about a man who tried to kill his son with a crowbar because the son (a grown man) tried to have sex with one of his dogs. Paul was both amused and appalled.

"There is no law against fucking your dog," he said.

"Why should there be?" I countered.

In the course of our discussion he gave three reasons why it should be against the law:

- 1 It's not normal.
- 2 It's disgusting.
- 3 It was embarrassing to the father.

Paul claimed to be an anarchist. But when I scratched the surface I found that he believed in the same repressive society as the religious right. He just wanted vigilante groups and individuals with guns to be able to settle matters in their own way when they felt they had been wronged. I asked whether he thought it was the

job of the government to enforce 'normalcy' or prevent people from doing things because others found them disgusting.

"Well," he said, "one has to set some limits somewhere. It is necessary for society to stop serial killers and pedophiles."

There it was again – that juxtaposition of pedophiles and serial killers. I should have known that it was not wise to get into a discussion about dog-fucking.



On the 3rd of January, 2001, while Paul and I were alone in the room, he got to talking about his experiences in Vietnam. He said, "I liked it at first." He went in as a paratrooper, and found it all very exciting.

"You say, 'at first,'" I observed. "Did something happen to change that?"

He said that killing people became a problem for him. His platoon would be asked to 'kill this group of men.' Then he would begin to wonder such things as 'Who are they? Why don't they want us here? Is he a father just like me?'



One day when I was in the room with Doug and Paul, we watched *'The Most Amazing Home Videos'*. One video concerned a group of four or five boys (teenagers) who got their thrills breaking into houses that were in the initial stages of being constructed, and breaking everything up. Doug was in a frenzy of excitement at all the violent and crazy things that were being shown. He expressed, however, a lot of indignation against these boys, saying how they should be severely punished.

I asked him why he thought they did that.

He said it was 'for the rush.' This, he said, was the the kind of thing he experienced when he stole cars.

"It was like taking drugs."

I was reminded of a young man down in the pods saying why he got into fights. It gave him a 'rush,' he said.

When Doug left the room I related to Paul what Doug had said. This got him to talking more about his Vietnam experiences. He told about one guy in his platoon who would empty a round of bullets (17 or 18 or them) into each or the Vietcong bodies when they went to do the body count.

"You must really hate these Vietcong," Paul had said to him.

"No," he said. "'I just like the sound of the bullets hitting the bodies.'"

Paul said, "You wouldn't believe the things that happened over there. We committed a lot of atrocities. They did too." He said he had trouble believing his own memories, but he knew they weren't dreams. He described another situation where one of the American soldiers would 'dance' with the bodies of the men they had just killed.

I shook my head,

"Is that just the way we are?" I said. "Or has something gone wrong?"

He shrugged.



Little by little I have pieced together some of Paul's story. Apparently he drank a lot over many years, and this felt more or less normal to him. In this way he developed a very high tolerance for alcohol. He was in a wreck that killed the other driver and almost killed him. "I was praying I would die," he said. He had a high blood alcohol count and was blamed for the accident. While he was still recovering from his injuries the lawyer of the man's family was already assessing the situation in financial terms. Paul's insurance provided for only \$150,000 dollars. The lawyer said that wouldn't be nearly enough. Paul was feeling miserable and became very angry at the lawyer acting in such a crass manner. He wrote a letter to him and the lawyer tried to make it sound like he was attacking the dead driver and his family.

During sentencing, the driving records of Paul and the man he hit became confused with each other. Paul had a very good record and the other man had an extremely bad one. On the basis of the confusion of the two records, the prosecution argued that Paul was a chronic danger on the road and that he should get the severest possible punishment. Paul admitted that he was the guilty party in the accident, but felt that his sentencing was not fair, as it was based in part on false evidence. He was trying to appeal this aspect of the case. He couldn't get a lawyer to take his case because the other lawyer was so successful in painting a picture of Paul as a remorseless villain who didn't even care that he had killed someone.

"People need villains," I told him. "The other driver could just as easily have been the one who killed someone." I told him that he was just an ordinary person, like anyone else.

"They don't see it that way," he said.



On 22 January, 2001, Paul told me that his wife had an interest in near-death experiences "Light at the end of the tunnel and that kind of thing." In his accident, Paul hit the other car head on, which gave a combined impact speed of 120 miles per hour or more. He was hit by the engine as it ripped through the cab of his truck which, not surprisingly, produced massive injuries. While he was on the operating table he 'died' twice, and had to be revived by the use of paddles. Later he was talking with his wife.

"You know about that tunnel that you told me about with the light at the end?"

"Yes," she said, hopefully.

"Well, I didn't see a goddamn thing," he said.



Later, during the same day that he told me about his near-death experience, Paul said "You know, I am not a violent man." He was lying on his bed, staring up at the ceiling or the top bunk, as though he might get an answer from there to a question that was on his mind.

"I don't know why I have done so many violent things." I made a comment to the effect that what we do is sometimes just an outcome of our situation and doesn't really have that much to do with our own decisions. I was thinking about the young men who find themselves killing people in a war situation because I knew he had his Vietnam experiences as well as his car accident in mind. "I was killing people before I was 19," he said. Then he commented about how 'childish' Doug seemed, "He's two years older than I was in Vietnam, and he still watches the Care Bears on TV. There must be something wrong with him."



I told Paul one day, in response to one of his raves against Doug's noisy and obnoxious habits, that if he killed Doug, the judge would probably only sentence him to 10 minutes in prison, with all but one suspended. After all, it was only Doug.

He picked up on this, and provided a different scenario.

"You're going to have to spend the rest of the morning in your room," he said, imitating a hypothetical stern judge who was handing down a sentence for his murder of Doug, "And don't do that again," the judge warned him.



Yesterday Doug moved down to Dorm One. As I was helping him carry his things down he told me, "I'll be back." He figured that people would harass him and that he would get into a fight. I told him to try to chill a bit – and to see who the people were in his room before getting carried away.

When I came back to the room, Paul was overjoyed. "He's gone," he said. He did a little dance in the middle of the room.

"Sometimes I pitied him," he said, "and sometimes I was afraid I would kill him."

Paul was not speaking figuratively. He went on to tell me how Doug provoked him to a point where he feared he would lose control or himself. "I can't let myself do that," he said. He told me that his goal was to live long enough to get out of here and have some time living with his wife before he died. With his cirrhosis, he feels that he is in a race against time. For this reason he can't afford any loss of control that might cause him to lose even a few days of good time.

## Family

On 9 January, 2001, I woke up at 2:00am, and didn't go back to sleep until 3:30. Then I had a complicated dream about not being able to get my own space:

*I am swimming – but suddenly find that I'm in a town and I can't find my way back to the secluded swimming place. Then I'm with Boo, We are trying to settle down for the night in a room that isn't ours. We are hoping we won't be noticed. People keep coming and going,*

*Then I ‘wake up’ (still in the dream) and Boo is gone. Somehow I find her and we are trying to sneak out of the house we are in without being noticed. A woman sees us and challenges us. Why are we in this house? Now it seems we have been using a sort of hallway shared by a group of tenants – but we don’t belong there. I fall all over myself apologizing. I say that we were short of money and could not rent a room – so we were just trying to get by. Then we are trying to sneak out and find ourselves walking through someone’s living room. Finally we are outside. We get into our car. Then it turns out we have only a bike. Boo sits on the seat and I begin peddling. I see Simone. She is little. I pick her up and put her on the bar and start off again.*

It was a very chaotic, confused dream, but the themes are clear. Whenever Boo and I are together it’s in someone else’s space, I’d like to pull the family together again even if all we had was a bike.

My 30-year-old daughter, Simone, first visited me on the 4th of September, 2000. She told me about a conversation she had with my mother. She said that my mother finally understood that the charges against me involved younger boys. “The scales finally fell from her eyes,” as Simone put it. According to Simone she has trouble understanding this. That would be my mother’s way of saying that I am condemned in her eyes.

My initial response was frustration. I had sent her quite a bit of material I had written earlier. If she had read any of it, the scales would have fallen from her eyes a long time ago, and she might actually have begun to understand not only what happened, but something about my experience of it. I suspect that Simone has also not read most of this material. She has never made any reference to it. Even my own mother, and my whole family, with the exception of Boo, is unwilling to hear a story that varies from the only one that is permissible to tell in the mainstream.

With regard to my mother’s shift, I found my reaction rather surprising. Beyond the frustration and irritation with regard to the fact that she would not read what I wrote and sent to her, I felt calm – almost relieved. I felt only a little grief and no despair. I think that I had always understood that this would be her real reaction.

When I was about eleven, I asked my mother whether there was anything I could do that she could not forgive. Her answer was that the one thing she could not understand (read, ‘forgive’) in a person was cruelty to a helpless creature, like a child or an animal.

One of the pivotal stories in my life concerns an incident that took place at the lake at which my family vacationed every summer. I must have been about twelve at the time. Another boy, with whom I was friends, and I, electrocuted a frog. We used his little hand generator. I felt remorse almost as soon as we finished the frog electrocution experiment, and I tried to revive him. I had, in my mind, committed the unforgivable sin. From then on I had the sense that my mother still seemed to love me, but that would probably end ‘if she really knew’.

I realized as I got older that a frog, after all, is just a frog, and my act might be forgivable. But my soul was not forgivable. I knew that the frog was a sentient being, and I deliberately subjected it to real suffering. That said something about who I was. This consciousness – not so much of having committed an unforgivable act, as of having an unforgivable place in my soul – has been a part of me for my whole life.



I was sure my mother bought into the American consensus that any sexual activity between a man and a boy was a violent act and always profoundly damaging to the boy, however much he may have wanted and enjoyed every aspect of the relationship. So it was out now. I had done the unforgivable thing. In accordance with the only story that is permissible to tell in such a situation, I had tortured, soiled the purity of, exploited, and irrevocably harmed vulnerable children. I was therefore cast into my mother's outer darkness.

I had faced the situation that I thought would be devastating, and found that I was still OK. My mother's love was not unconditional. I could do, and in fact had done, that which was unforgivable in her mind, and I was still OK in my own mind. My entire family of origin could disown me, and that would make me sad. It has made me sad, terribly sad, because that is what has happened. But I am still OK. I am not destroyed. That was the source of this odd mixture of sadness, relief and calmness.



Simone visited again on 22 September, 2000. One of the things we talked about was how learning about atrocities perpetrated by human beings on each other tends to take away a person's appetite for living. Such information tends to cause one to ask disturbing questions. "Do I really want to live in such a world?" "If this is how human beings are in their essential nature, are we not perhaps an experiment that would be better terminated?" As she talked about what was drawing her to Bosnia it seemed that this, rather than the question about how reconciliation between the warring groups could be effected, might be her central concern. The question about reconciliation is, of course, important and interesting, but the other question is more primary. If one can find no reason for hope in humanity because the species is thought to be somehow profoundly and irrevocably flawed in its essential nature, it is very difficult to become energized for the task of working for its salvation.

I suggested that if the questions about the essential nature of humanity was what was really drawing her to the area, then she should think about making that the explicit central thrust of her research there. How do people who have seen and been directly impacted by the atrocities find the appetite for continuing to get up in the morning to make efforts?



*15 November, 2000 – dream: I had sex with Theresa Gordon (a childhood girlfriend) and my mother found out. She was very upset. Then I was being taken to task by a former supervisor for a mistake I made while working in a residential center. I gave a girl permission to go to a store when I shouldn't have.*

Both dreams are about authority and breaking rules. Also it might be noted that my crimes derived from my being too permissive. I often wonder what the world

would look like if people were free to do as they chose so long as it was consensual (if it involved another person) and did not hurt anybody. People could express their love for each other as they saw fit. They could go to the store when they chose to. It's not so far-fetched, really.

My older brother was not picked up when he cried. The Fore (a rather peaceful group of preliterate people in Papua New Guinea) knew better than this. I was shamed for any hint of an interest in sexual matters – wanting to see Theresa Gordon in the bathtub when she took a bath with my younger brother, or letting her see me urinate, for example. The adults in the house were horrified. I was too old (maybe 7 or 8) for such things. Again, the Fore would not have responded this way. These are just examples that came to me as I thought about the dream. Normal upbringing in this society is abnormal. My family was certainly not worse than most.



On 26 December, 2000, as I lay in my bed listening to Christmas music, everybody else in the room was in bed. I was listening with my earphones. The program had been advertised as *'The American Boy Choir'* but in reality it was a collection of songs by more than one choir, interspersed with readings of mixed quality. For some reason, thoughts about my mother and family of origin kept intruding into my consciousness. In my mind I found myself writing them a letter. At one point I even got up and jotted some of it down. Paul offered to turn the light on. I thanked him, but said I wanted it off. He said that I must be having 'dark thoughts'. I said I was.

The letter went something like this:

Dear -----

During the last couple of years while I was being exiled from the human family and undergoing more losses and pain than you can easily imagine, I made overtures to you, hoping to find some understanding, acceptance and support. What I received was further condemnation, abandonment and silence. For the sake of my survival I feel that I must distance myself from such a family.

My family has for a long time lingered in a fatal illness. The name of this illness is puritanism. It is an illness of the soul that puts judgment and condemnation before compassion and understanding.

Although I confess to bitterness, on a deeper level I understand that no one is to be blamed. This puritanism is like a plague – it is something my family caught from the larger culture. I feel disappointment, but also relief and even hope. Perhaps if I extricate myself from this family, and make myself content to live on the fringes of this society, I will at least become free of the plague myself. Some day that may be useful to others as well.

Love .....

I doubted that I would ever send this letter to anyone. But I felt the need to say what I would say if I chose to be ruthlessly honest regarding my feelings at that point.

## The Chess Scene

Frankie was a small man with quick, bird-like, movements. I think he was in his early thirties. He and I first got together to play chess. He liked the game and I had decided to try to increase my skills at it. I found the game quite fascinating, but frustrating. I often made very stupid mistakes. Frankie had an independent mind and I enjoyed talking with him. We discussed everything from politics to the need to free oneself from 'ego'. Unfortunately he had bought into a very unsophisticated brand of christianity (complete with literal interpretations of scriptures, rejection of the idea of evolution, etc), so that put some limits on where we could go in our conversations.

One day while we were sitting out in the yard by ourselves, he introduced a new topic.

"I think I can tell this without crying," he said.

He told me that when he was little – 4 or 5 – he found a blackbird that couldn't fly. He thought he would try to save it, so he fixed up a box for it and made plans to feed it. "I now know it would have died anyhow," he said, the 'anyhow' foreshadowing something more ominous than a natural death. He thought his father would be impressed with the bird, so when his father got home from work, he took the bird to show it to him. His father picked the bird up, pulled its head off, and told Frankie that the bird would have died whatever he did.

Frankie told me that he began to cry then.

"Don't start that fucking crying," his father said.



On another occasion we had been talking about the idea that people who build themselves up at other people's expense have probably been made to feel very bad about themselves at some point in their lives. Frankie associated to incidents in his own life that posed a major shock to his sense of self. He recalled how devastating it was to be held back in the third grade.



When Frankie told me that he didn't want to play a game of chess with me, even though he was doing nothing else, I was surprised. I asked him why. He told me that one of the eight new inmates that had just arrived in Amherst was an excellent chess player. Frankie said he had never been able to beat him. Because of this man's arrival in Amherst, Frankie had lost all interest in chess. I met the new chess player later in the day in the game room. He became know as Mr Chess. Mr Chess was

taking on all comers. His style was fast and aggressive and he didn't lose. He was built like a weightlifter, and he communicated in the decisive manner in which he moved his pieces and the way he carried himself generally, that he was used to being in charge.

I offered to play him, though I thought he was probably better than I was. I could not play at his speed, and he was impatient with me. Yet by taking care I came very close to beating him, and then to getting a draw. But he held me to a bad King move because I had touched the piece – not moved it but simply touched it – and he was then able to win.

I was curious who he was, other than being a remarkable chess player.

I had taken a chess book out of the library in order to learn a bit more about strategy. A day or two after Mr Chess arrived in Amherst I was looking at one of the games in this book. It portrayed a clever sequence of moves including a very bold queen sacrifice. When Frankie came by, I showed him the game. Mr Chess was in the vicinity and came over to see. I showed him the moves and he shrugged. He did that sort of thing all the time. He went ahead and set the board up (giving himself the white) and offered me another game. This time I gave in to his pressure to play faster. I held my own to the middle game and then lost a bishop. Then, of course, it was his game.

When we finished I commented that he had obviously played a lot of chess.

"If I'm going to give you a good game I'm going to have to play more slowly."

"That throws me off my game," he said. "I'm used to playing fast." He went on to say that "I almost let you beat me yesterday." That I came that close to winning clearly upset him. "I play to win," he said. "I want to destroy you. I'm into warriorship."

He said he would play me even if I played slowly. He acknowledged that I must do anything it took to win. Still, he felt, it would improve my game to learn to play fast. "It would come to you," he said.

Perhaps he was right. I was beginning to see, however, how much time it took to become a really good chess player, and was not sure that I wanted to give that much to it. Mr Chess, wherever he went, did nothing but eat, sleep, lift weights, and play chess. That was not a lifestyle I wanted. Also, it was obvious that if I were to try to play at his speed I would have to lose many many times before getting to a point where I would be a match for him. I wondered whether I would be able to tolerate all the belittlement that would certainly be aimed at me from the other punks who can't beat me at chess, but who would enjoy seeing me trounced. I was not yet sufficiently free from 'ego' to be indifferent to this. Perhaps I would never be this free, or didn't even want to be. Also, I wondered, did I want to be a warrior at all?

Elsewhere I have written that I want to be a non-violent warrior. But it's not just the issue of violence that separates my ideal from the ideal that drives Mr Chess. His goal was self-aggrandizement. It's hard to be sure that's not my secret motivation as well, but at least it's not my ideal. My ideal, in fact, is the opposite. First, the non-violent warrior would seek non-attachment to inflated images of self and would wish to retain the capacity for being vulnerable, at least where it is somewhat safe. His warrior ideal was obviously aimed at overcoming his vulnerability to others and at identification with a glorified image of self.

Second, my ideal would be aimed at channeling my aggressive energies, and using whatever gifts I have, large or small, toward the maximization of values in the world around me – values that transcend my own ego.

But the heart is more devious than the mind. If the heart's basic needs are not met, it will, in the pursuit of what it most desires, subvert any ideal put forward by the mind. So we must begin again with what we most want. That is the touchstone to which we must always return. In the chess situation at Amherst, the relevant fundamental want for all concerned seemed simple and clear: to be able to feel reasonably good about oneself. This was what Mr Chess wants. It was what I wanted. It is what Frankie wanted. My starting point is that we cannot help but want this. What we most want is not open to negotiation. Even the most self-denigrating monk is secretly after the ability to feel good about himself. The question is, what strategies can we develop for feeling reasonably good about ourselves without blocking the realization of other values in ourselves, in others, and in the world around us?



A few days after Mr Chess arrived at Amherst, I encountered him in the game room one afternoon. I asked him whether he wanted to play a game or two. He said he was working out a game between a chess master and a computer. He had found it in the newspaper. The issue of computer vs person was quite interesting to me, so I sat down to watch, naturally rooting for the chess master.

Mr Chess got up and went down the hall for a minute, and as he returned to the game room I heard someone say “fuck you”. I was so accustomed to hearing people say this during any typical day, that I hardly gave it a thought. But Mr Chess did notice. He turned and looked down the hall at a person I could not see from where I sat.

“What did you say?” Mr Chess asked.

“You heard me,” the man in the hall said. “I said ‘fuck you.’” Mr Chess went back out into the hall to confront the person. I stood up and went to the doorway to see what was happening. I saw McNally. He was currently on room restriction for fighting. McNally seemed to like me and, in a tentative sort of way, had reached out to me. But this was at an early point in our relationship, and he was careful to let us get only so close. He was egging Mr Chess on. “You think you are such a tough guy,” he said.

Mr Chess tried to draw him into the game room where they would be less visible to the guard. McNally came in part way. I said, “Don’t get into this, McNally,” and tried to get them both to back off. I couldn’t tell whether McNally actually attacked Mr Chess, but did see Mr Chess take a swing at McNally a couple of times. McNally was able to elude him and continued to taunt him. “You still haven’t done anything to me,” he said.

Mr Chess then tried to kick him. At this point the guard saw that something was going on. He called McNally down to the office. Mr Chess came in and sat down across from me at the chess board. He assumed I would probably be called in on this as a witness.

“You saw him come at me first, didn’t you,” he said.

I said that I didn’t see who threw the first punch. I had made an effort to be friends with both of these men and didn’t want to take sides, nor did I want to be accused of being a ‘rat’. I was relieved that the fight was broken up before anyone got hurt.

The guard then came and told Mr Chess to come down to the office. I retreated to my room. As I thought about what had just happened, I could not escape the strange sensation that these men were fighting about me.



Mr Chess was able to beat me every time. Had I not felt intimidated by him so that I inwardly gave up before I began, I might have won occasionally. But I let him rush me and I found that I was unable to concentrate on the game when I was with him. Actually a part of his strategy was to fluster his opponents. This was not hard to do with me as I was slightly dissociated the whole time I was in Amherst and more so when I was with him. I did beat him once, and on other occasions I came close to winning, so I could tell that if I actually studied the game a bit more, and could make myself calm down, I could learn to play on his level. With this in mind I sent away for material on chess computers.

In some material I had ordered from the US Chess Federation, I found a selection of chess computers that ranged in price from \$29.95 to \$289.95. It appeared that the cheapest one that would allow a person to progress to an advanced level was \$99.95. It looked great. I imagined myself making extensive use of it over the next several years. To make sure that I would not spend my money on this computer and then find out that it was not allowed in the prison for some obscure reason, I checked with the guards.

They said I should write to the CO, which I did. In my note I described the item I wanted to buy, and assured him that I would not need batteries (which were not allowed) to use it. My note was returned from him with the following answer: “Not an allowable item under DOC [Department of Corrections] Policy and Procedure”. It was from S Richards, the officer in charge of security. It was totally beyond me how a small chess computer could pose a security risk. I was surprised at the depth of the rage I felt. I stormed around, swearing and raging against the mindless stupidity of the people who ran this system. I was disappointed and frustrated in the extreme. The thing, however, that I could not reconcile myself to was the depth of my powerlessness in the face of an ignorant, vindictive, and arbitrary authority. I knew that there was nothing effective that I could do. Nevertheless I decided to write him a brief note saying what I thought of his decision:

To: S Richards

I am sure it is pointless to respond to your refusal to allow me to buy a computerized chess game. You have the power. Therefore you do not have to be fair, reasonable or even honest. I have difficulty believing that DOC Policy and Procedures allow computerized video games that mainly consist of people beating each other to death, but do not allow a computerized chess game.

Why, I wondered, did I feel compelled to send such a note back to Mr Richards? I was sure that it would not lead to a change on his part, and it might lead to his lying in wait for me. It was a pointless risk on my part. I suppose it was an expression of the small range of power left to me in prison – the power to see things as I did, and to let others know how I saw them if I chose to. I am reminded of the t-shirt with the picture of the mouse giving the finger to the eagle that is descending on him. Also the expression ‘a cat can look at a king’ came to my mind. This expression did not make much sense to me when I first heard it. Now I see that it is about the power of the look. The question is – is it wise for the cat to let the king know what he sees?



It was a couple of days after I sent my memo of protest to S Richards. At 5am I settled into a seat at a table in the game room with a cup of coffee and a book on chess strategy, only to be joined by a man they called ‘Killer’. He sat at the table next to me. The story that goes around is that he murdered a man who raped his daughter. He was about medium build and height. He looked sinewy and tough, but did not have the build of a weightlifter.

The only other times I had seen Killer he was loud and aggressive. He liked to rant about how much he hated living in a place full of skinnies, rats and other bad types. He was demoted from Dorm One because of refusing to follow the warden’s instructions and he had been on cell restriction since being back in Receiving.

Killer asked me a few questions about chess. He knew who I was because he shared a room with Mr Chess who apparently had talked about me. Killer was thumbing through a magazine that advertised cars for sale. He told me that he wasn’t going to work. He said that yesterday he had received news that his 22-year-old son had been killed. He thought it was in a car accident that was the outcome of his son racing or ‘hot-rodding’.

“They don’t want me to know everything about it.” He said at first he had heard that his son hanged himself, but then they said it was a car accident. I ventured the opinion that they wouldn’t make him go to work after what just happened.

“I’m not asking them,” he said. “I’m just telling them. I’m 50 years old. I decide for myself.”

Killer had heard me raging about my not being allowed to buy a computer chess game a few nights ago and he wanted to know whether I sent my note to S Richards. He seemed pleased to learn that I had.

“I don’t think it will make any difference,” I said. He shrugged.

“It made you feel better.”

“Yes, it did,” I said.

He liked the idea that people who were ‘smarter’ than the officers in charge gave them a hard time in writing.

“There were a couple of professors here before – never mind what they were in for,” he said, and he went on to tell me about how they outclassed the people in charge in written exchanges.

As he continued talking about various matters I was struck by the way in which Killer's mind wandered from one topic to another. If there was a common theme at all it had to do with standing up against and trying to get the best of the authorities here at the prison.

During a pause in his monologue, I put my glasses back on and resumed my study of rook-king endings. He returned briefly to his magazine. Then he began talking about his interest in cars – specifically in hot-rods. His manner and tone were the same as when he was talking about his son's death.

Perhaps he made it up about his son. Perhaps either by suicide or in an accident his son really had died the day before, and he had no more feelings about that than about all the other things he talked about. Perhaps he was dissociated or hiding his feelings. I didn't know, but it was clear that he was going to ramble on and on about one thing and another.

I felt restless and found myself wanting to leave. Maybe I was uneasy because I could not discern with any degree of certainty the reality of his son's death or his reaction to it. Or maybe I was just frustrated that once again I could find no private space or time for myself. Whatever the reason, I made a vague excuse about needing to get back upstairs and left.



One day I was playing chess with Mr Chess at one of the picnic tables in the yard. There were a number of men around discussing various things, and the subject turned to gays. One of the men confessed that he didn't have anything against gays as long as they didn't try to push anything on him. Another man protested that he didn't want to have anything to do with gays under any circumstances. The first man said he was overreacting.

Mr Chess jumped into the conversation. He said that in a prison situation gays were needed. A couple of the men objected to this idea, but did not attack Mr Chess for suggesting that it would be fine to use a gay man to satisfy your urges if a woman were not present.

Later in the day I was out in the yard again, sitting near one the picnic tables. Glen, a man in his thirties who made no effort to hide his gay identity, was lying down on a bench. One of the men sitting at the other picnic tables announced that he was going to tell a joke about faggots.

"The word is 'homosexual,'" Glen corrected in his most swishy voice.

"Homosexual, then," the other man said. The way he said it reminded me of the way southern rednecks would try to say 'Negro' rather than 'nigger' back in the 50s. It always came out as 'nigra'.

The joke concerned a gay man who went into a bar to get a drink. He ordered a screwdriver in stereotypically gay voice, accompanied with swishy gestures. The bartender refused to sell him anything, saying, "We don't serve your type here." The gay man returned later and there was a repetition of the first scenario. The third time he returned with a huge dog. This time he was not only refused but was manhandled.



"That's it," he said. He turned to his dog and said, "Sic him". The huge dog jumped up on the counter and said, in a very weak, swishy manner, "Bow-wow. Bow-wow", while his paws flapped harmlessly in an imitation of the stereotypical limp-wristed mannerisms of a gay man. The joke was a huge success. Glen laughed harder than anybody. The joke was a tension releaser, but Glen retreated almost at once back into the dorm.

That evening I found a number of the men sitting around the picnic table in the center of the yard, with Glen standing off to one side. He was the center of attention in another discussion of gays. The guy who told the joke earlier said that some of his best friends in California were gays.

"They never bothered anybody," he said, and if he needed a place to stay, he could stay with them.

"That's true," Glen said. "Gays keep to themselves and never try to start anything." He went on to comment, somewhat out of context, that he had a 'partner' who died from AIDS.

## Treatment

At the time I was incarcerated I already had a clear idea about what 'treatment groups' were all about. As a social worker I had talked with men who were forced to attend sex offenders' treatment. It was quite clear to me that these groups were grotesque collages in which brain-washing, degradation rituals, attack therapy, the most oppressive forms of behavior modification therapy, and thinly veiled fundamentalist christian morality were all mixed together with a huge indifference to scientific facts. That the driving energy for the creation of such groups was hysteria was equally apparent. The groups were created to inflict revenge against those who dared to defy society's norms. I saw these groups as the Frankenstein's monsters of the treatment world. I wanted nothing to do with them. I knew that some form of treatment would be required, and was not averse to having someone help me understand and cope with my situation in the most productive manner, so I began seeing Dr Stanhope, a Jungian analyst.

A part of my plea bargain was that I would not be required to attend the usual forms of sex offender treatment. This was made explicit in court and presumably was a part of the court record. It was also briefly noted on my probation form. Ultimately the state was able to renege on this agreement. Among other things, I was not allowed to get a copy of my court record where the agreement was spelled out clearly. I did not yet realize that once one had been convicted of a sex offense, one no longer had a Constitution, nor a Bill of Rights. Even the Civil Liberties Union did not seem interested in the rights of sex offenders. To even raise the question of rights would be seen as an indication of a lack of remorse.

Just before going to prison I attempted to make arrangements to continue my treatment with Dr Stanhope. Our plan was that this would take the form of my keeping a journal, and his responding to it. The journal writing I did in that context was to become the source of most of the detailed material I have on my prison experience. I sent out a copy of the journal to my wife every day, and she made a

copy of it, and sent the original to Dr Stanhope. However, no provision was made for him to respond in a way that was confidential.

All incoming mail was opened and there was no way of assuring that it would not be read. Both Dr Stanhope and I felt that we needed a greater degree of confidentiality than this. If the incoming mail had been handled in the same manner as communications from lawyers, that would have solved the problem. But the Corrections system was resistant to this idea.

While I was still in the Receiving unit at Amherst, my friend Ryan talked with me one day about the treatment group led by Dr Dupruis. He said it was not a 'shame-based' group and he found it very supportive. He thought I should ask Dr Dupruis if I could join. It did seem to me that Dr Dupruis was trying to do something more humane than the humiliating and moralistic attack therapy that was currently the vogue. I told Ryan I would think about it.

I found myself immensely ambivalent about the group. On the plus side, I very much wanted to break out of my isolation so that I could begin networking with others here who had the same charges. Also, I felt that a group might be helpful to me in processing some 'here and now' issues with regard to coping with the insane environment around me. Finally, I thought that joining the group might look good on my record.

On the negative side, I was profoundly mistrustful of the system, and, however 'nice' Dr Dupruis might be, his services were paid for by the Department of Corrections. The state, therefore, had to be his first loyalty. I did not want him to know my thoughts, feelings, and plans past a certain point, because this information might be used against me in any of a variety of ways. When I shared these concerns with Ryan, he said that the sort of philosophical issues that I was concerned about keeping to myself never came up. Mostly the group members were talking about day-to-day concerns.

I did wish to be open to growth and change, and I understood that growth did not happen in isolation. It required dialog between oneself and others. But I felt that the mainspring for growth must be within. I had to be the one who would choose what I would take from the dialog and what I would reject. I would not willingly submit myself to any process in which the cognitive, behavioral and affective steps I would make were preordained and determined by an agenda in someone else's mind – unless that someone else was God. Very few therapists understand what a client-centered approach is. They tend to think it is just a matter of being nice to the client.

I wrote a note to Dr Dupruis saying I wanted to talk with him about a couple of things. I did not specify what those things were, but had the following issues in mind:

- 1 Was he willing to make any further efforts to open a confidential channel between me and Dr Stanhope, my Jungian therapist on the outside?
- 2 Was his group appropriate for me?

I found that the idea of participating in the group was quite depressing to me. As I believe that emotion is a form of perception, I knew this had to be taken seriously.

I determined that to the extent that I was able to put it in words, my negative effect was about the following perceptions:

- 1 I felt that the information that I would share might be used against me.
- 2 I was resistant to the idea of being in any kind of 'therapy' in which the outcome is already envisioned by the therapist (especially one whose ultimate values and commitments I might not share).
- 3 I was afraid that Dr Dupruis might see his therapy group as an alternative rather than a supplement to my work with Dr Stanhope.
- 4 I was concerned whether I had the capacity to keep my mouth shut on philosophical issues that it would not be worthwhile to process with someone who represented the corrections system.

I felt that if I could negotiate something with Dupruis that provided me with some assurance on these points, perhaps the group might be a good thing. In response to my note to him, Dr Dupruis called me over to his office to talk. I told him that despite my ambivalence I wanted to be considered for the group, and that I wanted to know whether he had any further information about my request to communicate with Dr Stanhope with a greater degree of confidentiality. Dr Dupruis began by saying there was an opening in the group, and he told me about the rules and procedures for the group. He said that a great deal of emphasis was given to confidentiality, and that nothing was forced onto group members as far as sharing or doing exercises was concerned. He admitted that despite efforts to keep the nature of the group confidential, probably a number of inmates had figured it out. Consequently there might be some additional harassment resulting from attending the group. Finally he pointed out that he offered some readings and work-books, and provided a private place to work on them.

He asked whether I had any questions. I said that his description of the group was pretty clear and that he had given me what I needed to know. He didn't seem satisfied with this so I asked him more about the 'model' that he had mentioned in passing during our first brief discussion a couple of weeks previously. He told me that the group was based on 'cognitive/behavioral' principles, and laid out the basic elements of this approach:

- 1 Readings on the subject of child sexual abuse.
- 2 Movies that showed the 'victim's point of view'.
- 3 Role playing – again to emphasize the 'victim's point of view'.
- 4 Techniques that associated 'deviant arousal' with aversive stimuli.
- 5 Prevention of fantasies that might lead to 'deviant arousal'.
- 6 Relapse prevention.

I reacted to only one of these six points. I said that I would not participate in any techniques that associated deviant arousal with aversive stimuli. I felt a bit trapped having said this. I had come to the meeting with a determination to neither argue with him, nor share my point of view. When he waited for me to explain why I was so vehement in saying that I would not submit myself to aversive conditioning, I simply said "I don't believe in it". I felt foolish about this response, but let it go at that.

The truth was that I was very dubious about participating in the group at all. One thing was clear. If I were to participate in the group it would not be possible to simply deal with 'here and now' issues and use it for support and networking.

It was evident that my profound differences with Dupruis both about philosophy of therapy and about the nature of intergenerational love would be impossible to avoid. Even setting the issue of intergenerational love aside, I knew that I was not interested in allowing psychological, social and medical technicians re-make me in an image that was more acceptable to the society that they worked for. What he was offering me was not therapy. It was law enforcement; it was brain-washing; it was oppression. I did not wish to be released from prison only to walk the streets being somebody other than who I really am. I understood why the christians refused to bow down to Caesar. It was a choice between two kinds of death.

Still, I preferred not to be eaten by lions. Perhaps there was a way to weasel out of this situation without selling my soul. It remained to be seen. But to join the group felt like offering the pinch of incense at Caesar's altar. I was not quite ready to do that.

After describing the group to me, Dr Dupruis went on to say he had met with the 'clinical committee'. This was composed of the social workers at Amherst and himself. They felt that no provisions should be made for me to have any confidential means of communicating with Dr Stanhope. I expressed my unhappiness at this, and asked why they did not wish to help me participate in a form of therapy that I had chosen for myself. He professed to have no answer to this question. I believed, of course, that he was lying. He sat on the committee while they discussed the issue. Did he sleep through the discussion?

I requested an interview with my case worker so that I could ask her why I my request was denied. I did not think this would do any good. But it was hard to get used to the depth of my powerlessness. Arguments for the reasonableness of what I wanted carried zero weight. I was owed no explanation. 'Truth' was dictated by power.

My social worker did not enlighten me as to why my therapist would not be allowed to communicate with me in a confidential manner, and I decided not to join the 'treatment' group. Before I had a chance to let him know my decision, I ran into Dr Dupruis as I was going to lunch one day. He asked what I had decided and I told him. He looked quite frustrated.

"Do you understand that you have a deviant arousal disorder?" he asked.

I only shrugged. I knew there was no point in arguing. He had the power of the state on his side. Therefore I had a deviant arousal disorder. Yet to myself I wondered, what am I deviating from? Was he simply saying that I had deviated from the law? I already knew that my behavior had deviated from the law. But could one say that the arousal itself was illegal? Surely that was not what he meant. Was it from God's will that I was deviating? Presumably the idea of a 'deviant arousal disorder' was not a theological concept, so that could not be it. So it must have been a violation of what is 'natural'. A friend of mine once argued that homosexuality was 'unnatural'. Her argument was that "the animals in the forest don't do that". Perhaps that is as good a litmus test as any for what is 'natural'. What do the animals in the forest do? The problem is, as the book *Biological Exuberance* made clear to me, the animals in the forest do, in fact, 'do that' – including having intergenerational contacts – about as often as human beings do. Also I knew from a variety of research projects that between 25 and 30% of all men were sexually

aroused to an equal or greater extent by children who were the age of my 'victims' as they were by adults. If being aroused in this manner is 'deviant' then it would seem to be so common as to almost be 'normal'. But surely the concept of a 'normal deviance' is a bit oxymoronic. What then? Well, it deviated from what a majority of people (raised by the puritan ethic) believed was acceptable. But basing it on 'what most people believe' moved it into the realm of sociology. In some societies having or acting on such arousals was deviant. In others, not. This, however, would not have been acceptable to Dr Dupruis because it would have disclosed the relative – one could even say arbitrary – nature of the norm. But he had the power. So I smiled, thanked him for considering me for his group, and went to lunch.

# Part Three



# Harassment

# Introduction

Society provides the language we use for talking about things. This makes for difficulties whenever one's sense of reality varies significantly from the dominant understanding. If we want to say something different from what is usually said, we have only the words supplied by society. These words have so many connotations and associations sticking to them that it is often impossible to use them without our saying something quite different than we intend. To open our eyes to new ways of seeing we must swim against the current of language. As I try to talk about my experiences in prison I run into this problem.

In the prison system where I was incarcerated, the primary term used for a person who was convicted of any sexual contact with a legally underage person was skinner. This term conveyed the meaning of 'contemptible piece of shit.' Of the three things that it was not permitted to be – a faggot, a rat, or a skinner – the skinner was the worst. The skinner was especially contemptible if the 'victim' was a boy rather than a girl.

There was some degree of ambivalence about men who were rapists – that is to say people who forced themselves on others by the use of force or threats. The crime of the rape against an adult woman was violent and therefore manly. It derived from a strong lust for women, which again was manly. If one raped a non-whore, it did violate the idea that 'decent women' should be treated with respect.

Even so, the rape of adult women, or of men in prison where women were not available, was a manly and understandable crime, and therefore easily forgiven. A man who forced himself on an adult woman was not a skinner, and indeed was anxious to distance himself from any association with skimmers.

The term 'skinner' did not allow any distinction to be made between whether the sexual act was between consenting individuals or was an act forced on one by the other. This state of affairs is reflected in both the legal use of terminology and the language systems imposed by therapy. From a legal point of view, an underage person cannot consent. If one mentions the distinction in a legal or treatment situation one will be accused of 'minimizing'. Consent, in its usual dictionary definition, means simply 'to give one's permission to do something' (hyper-dictionary) or 'to give assent or approval' (Webster). This is the common sense of the term. If we go to Humpty Dumpty for our definitions, words can mean anything we want them to, but then it becomes difficult to say anything at all to each other.

Using the term in its ordinary meaning, children not only are able to 'consent' to sexual experiences, they actively seek them out. This is certainly true of pubescent and adolescent people. But it is also true of younger children. I think that both ethically, and in terms of its consequences, it makes a difference whether a sexual act is forced on one or is consensual. The willing participation of a bisexual or gay 14-year-old boy in sexual acts with a man is not the same thing as the forcible rape of a seven-year-old girl – or for that matter of an adult woman or man. If we are going to think clearly about things we must use a language that permits our making crucial distinctions.

I do not think I am a contemptible piece of shit. Also I think whether a sexual act is forced by one person on another, or is between two people who mutually desire it, is an important distinction. Therefore the available language systems in this society do not work well for me. I am not able to create out of nothing an adequate language for talking about sexual matters. The prejudices and sex-negative attitudes of a puritan culture have become deeply embedded in our language over a period of centuries. This profound tainting of the language will not be easy to overcome. I do want, however, to comment on how I have chosen to use certain terms.

The distinction between consensual and non-consensual sex seems to me to be a crucial one. Therefore in speaking of people who have been convicted of child sexual abuse I will refer to those who forced themselves on children as either child rapists or child molesters, depending on the severity of the means of coercion. In those cases where there is no evidence of coercion I will refer to the adults as statutory offenders.

The term 'skinner' is really the less educated version of the term 'pedophile'. Both these terms are very vague with regard to denotative meaning. Is a pedophile anyone who has actually engaged in sexual activity with a child – even if his dominant sexual orientation is toward adults? If one is strongly or even exclusively oriented to children but does not act on these impulses, is one still a pedophile? If one is attracted to physically mature teenagers who are still 'children' only by a social definition, is this to be included in the idea of pedophilia? If a person is among the 25 or 30 percent of the adult male population that experiences sexual arousal for children that is as strong or stronger than what they experience for adults, is that person a pedophile? Does the term designate individuals who are attracted to anyone who would be illegal as a sex partner – from babies to adolescents? The denotative meanings are shifting and unclear. What remains constant are the connotative meanings. We are talking about sick, disgusting, sociopathic creeps. Those meanings are unequivocal with regard to both 'skinner' and 'pedophile'. In a case like this we could perhaps speak of the connotative meanings of a term overpowering the denotative meanings.

When this happens one has to ask whether the term is of any use whatsoever if one's aims are clear thinking and productive dialog. Tacitly, if not explicitly, these terms are always in quotation marks as I use them – and I am referring to a social construct – not a meaningful class of people in the real world.

Victim/perpetrator is a very important pair of terms in the current discourse on intergenerational sex. One will find one or both of these terms in most of the articles that come out almost daily about another sex offender being apprehended. The terms are also insisted upon in most sex offender programs. The use of these terms in this manner is political. It conveys the message that any sexual encounter between an adult and an underage person must be told as the story of a victim and a perpetrator. The idea that any sexual activity outside the limits prescribed by society could be mutually desired, or even part of a loving relationship, cannot even be discussed. That story cannot be told.

In my own writing I will limit the use of the terms perpetrator and victim to situations involving rape.



Abuse is another curious term. Not long ago the moral leaders of society were fond of talking about 'self abuse'. They did not mean cutting on oneself. The term referred to masturbation, which was assumed to be seriously damaging to children. In my writing I would restrict the term 'abuse' (sexual, physical or psychological) to situations in which at least one of two elements were present: demonstrable harm or lack of consensuality.

The belittlement and harassment experienced by individuals who were identified as 'skinners' in both the prisons where I was placed was severe and unrelenting. The alpha males in the system, and their followers, were obsessed with their ideas and images of who child molesters were and with those in the prison system who they believed were embodiments of their ideas. I speculate elsewhere with regard to the possible motivators or causes of this obsession. These speculations lead to some hypotheses that must remain open to further investigation, modification and debate. That is the nature of any scientific hypothesis. What is not debatable, however, is the existence of this obsession. The dominant males in prison were in a constant state of agitation with regard to people they saw as skinners. Daily life for a large number of the men in prison centered around drugs, status, food, sex, muscle building, and the harassment of skinners.

Men gathered articles about sexual offenders who might be coming into prison, and stalked them when they did. The first thing that had to be established when one met a new person was whether he was a skinner or not. A great deal of the talk centered around the topic. The issue of intergenerational sex was not one issue among others. It was one of the most basic concerns that organized the whole structure of prison life.

The impact of intense and chronic harassment over a long period of time is hard to convey to someone who has never experienced it. The daily attack on one's sense of self creates profound depression and bottomless rage. It is not surprising that so many sex offenders choose to commit suicide. Indeed, I was forced to conclude that driving the sex offenders to suicide was the real intent of the state's 'correctional' policies. If one judges people and systems by what they do rather than what they profess, no other conclusion makes sense. What is surprising to me is that so few sex offenders lash out in violent ways at a society that has condemned them, tortured them and disinherited them, while allowing them no place to escape.

The harassment of skinners was considered to be a normal part of the environment by staff and prisoners alike. If you were not on the receiving end of the harassment it was not seen as a problem. If sex offenders had too much visible difficulty getting used to being humiliated on a daily basis, they were likely to be sent to a more restricted setting for their 'failure to adjust'. In other words, it was the skinner who had to adjust to the system. That any fundamental changes should be made in the system so that they would not be subjected to this daily torture was not an idea that could be discussed. It was unthinkable. As the sun rose and set, and as the seasons changed, skinners were persecuted and tormented. Those were the eternal verities.

We were told by various people in authority that if we ignored the harassment, people would, in time, leave us alone. It was true that responding with visible anger

probably made things worse. But it was not true that not responding made the harassment stop. The prisoners who were into harassing the skinnners received all the reinforcement they needed from their fellow prisoners. Nothing that I could do was going to stop the harassment.

It was my policy to not respond. That is not to say that I was always successful in following my policy. There were times I lost control, and told people to go fuck themselves, or some variation of that message.

Most of the time I did succeed in not responding externally, but it is not, I think, humanly possible not to respond inwardly to the kind of humiliation to which I was subjected. Psychological pain is as real, as intense, and as unavoidable in certain circumstances as physical pain is in response to a physical attack. One can try to achieve a sense of non-identification with one's body, but if one is burned with a cigarette, one will still feel pain in the body with which one is presumably not identified. One can in a similar manner attain a degree of non-identification with one's social image. "I am not what they see. I am not going to allow them to paint my portrait." And, indeed, I was certain that I was not what they saw. But it was impossible not to respond, at least inwardly, to the intense, overt and public humiliation that I experienced day in and day out. Those who claimed not to respond inwardly were dissociating.

People tend to suffer from the illusion that psycho-social facts are less real than physical facts, and that that they can somehow be willed away. It is true that thoughts, feelings and behaviors mutually influence each other, and that on the basis of this fact we can to some extent control our emotional reactions to situations by thinking differently or by behaving differently. But this control is limited. In the story of the crucifixion Jesus is portrayed as being subjected to extreme mockery and social humiliation. One assumes that he felt the humiliation as intensely as he felt the nails in his flesh. He knew that he was not the person that they were seeing in that situation. He knew that the mob did not know what they were doing. His understanding of these points would, perhaps, have given him some limited control over his emotional reactions, but if we assume he was fully human he would still have felt the pain of the humiliation.

To some degree not responding to the humiliation externally actually intensified the inner response. I felt, "here I am, being mocked and ridiculed in the most degrading manner, and I do nothing about it. I take it." I felt, and still do, that if one is being publicly humiliated one should fight back. But there was the rub. All effective means of fighting back seemed to be blocked. Any form of fighting back – whether verbal or physical – threatened only to make matters worse.

After I was there for a while I ceased having an intense fear of physical attack. For one thing I was not afraid of being killed. I longed for death, and thought often about ways in which I might commit suicide. I was somewhat afraid of being maimed because then I would still be alive and in an even worse situation. Also I was somewhat afraid of physical pain, but I knew that this would only be a transient thing. But in general my fear of physical attack was nothing compared to the rage I felt at the constant humiliation. Some of the thinking that I did at that time regarding the matter of being attacked is summed up in a journal entry of the 4th of November, 2000:

I think it is unlikely that I will be attacked, but if I am I will simply try to make sure the other person is hurt before they do whatever damage they are able to do. I have a couple of advantages here. I am stronger than I look and will probably fight harder than anyone attacking me would expect. Surprise is on my side. Also, chess strategy has helped me focus on a simple principle. Pick a target where the other person is weak (an isolated pawn in chess) and go for it.

Whoever it is, his finger will not be stronger than my arm. If I can break his finger that will dampen his appetite for the fight. Target the weak point and throw everything I have into attacking that. Break a finger, bite him in the face, stomp on his instep, knee him in the groin, poke a finger in his eye, hit him in the throat.

The other side of the coin was that I was afraid I might lose control and attack someone else. The rage that I felt in the face of the constant belittlement and humiliation was profound and unrelenting. I remember standing in the lunch line one day, listening to a young punk running his mouth about skinnies, etc. He stood just behind me. I held a hard plastic tray in my hands. I felt an intense impulse to swing it at him. I would not have hit him over the head with the flat of the tray. Rather I thought about swinging it edge-wise, and aiming it carefully so that it caught him in the throat. Never before prison had I ever felt the desire to actually kill someone. It was quite disturbing to realize that I had the emotional and probably the physical capacity to do so. I am grateful that I didn't.

I do not believe in attacking people except in absolute self-defense. That may have been one reason that I did not lash out physically. There were a few people there that were bigger and stronger enough than I was, that I realized that, short of having a gun or a knife, there was no way I had much of a chance against them. Many of the guys who harassed me, however, were young punks who were not significantly bigger or stronger than I was. They were trying to make points with the Alpha punks. That I did not attack them at some point probably had more to do with fear than my moral beliefs. I was very afraid of two things. First, that I might do something that would get me put in a different institution and that my wife would have trouble visiting me there. Second, that if I hurt someone really badly I might have to spend even longer in prison.

On 12 November, 2000, I was told by my roommate that he had spent a fair bit of time at Callum Bay. He said that in that facility harassment, including the use of such words as 'skinner' and 'faggot', is a class A crime, and that is simply does not happen there. My previous roommate had also spent time at Callum Bay, and he gave the same report. The sort of harassment that was the norm at Frankfort and at Amherst could, in fact, be stopped. One of the guards at Frankfort had worked in the New York prison system, and he told me that in New York the sort of harassment he witnessed at Frankfort was not seen. Harassment at Frankfort and at Amherst was so prevalent because it was condoned by the guards.



After a period of time one becomes aware of various levels of harassment. The first is simply 'background noise'. This consists of negative comments about a group of disliked people, but is aimed at no one in particular. It would also include behaviors that would be almost invisible to the outsider, such as not speaking to a person of a particular group.

On 12 November, 2000, I tried a little experiment. I was walking down the hall upstairs in Receiving. I passed an older man. He had given me no indication – either positive or negative – about how he felt about me. Each time I reach out to someone in a friendly way only to be ignored or glared at is a slap in the face. With any given person I try to allow it to happen only once. But this man is unknown, so as we approach each other I nod and say "Hi". He reciprocates, even with the hint of a smile.

I proceed on down the stairs and as I walk by the TV room I pass a tall man with curly hair. He is also an unknown entity. Emboldened by my success with the man upstairs only a minute or so before, I smile slightly and say "Hi". He averts his face, and acts as though he didn't notice. Then I notice that there is another man in the TV room. So this is not entirely a fair test. Many people will be civil or even friendly to me if they feel they are not observed.

This was a constant undercurrent. I tried to feel out what I could expect from others. The 'all skimmers should die' faction ruled the social milieu. Few were willing to buck them. I was like a leper in the biblical accounts – going through the life ringing a bell to notify others that am am unclean. I, of course, had no bell to ring. Others, with their comments, gossip and ways of dealing with me, rang it for me. Ding, ding. They rang their little bells on a daily basis, and everybody shied away. Was I truly unclean? It was hard to avoid the sense that it must be true.

A second type of harassment might be called 'random harassment'. By random harassment I am referring to the ongoing pattern of belittling comments aimed randomly at whoever might happen to be around. I have selected a few examples as illustrations. Had I tried to record all the incidents of this kind of thing I would have written about little else. Loud talk aimed at making skimmers feel like shit occurred daily. There was an ebb and flow to this kind of harassment. At times one had to listen to it several times a day.

Here are a few examples from the time I was first in the Receiving Dorm.

- 1 I am leaning against the fence in the 'yard' of the Receiving Dorm. A crew boss has arrived to pick up a group to take them to work. I hear the crew boss telling about a farmer that he presumably saw fucking a cow. After the crew leader is out of hearing range one of the prisoners starts in on how it seems OK to abuse kids but not cows. This is his social commentary. His point is that society is too lenient on child molesters. If it were up to him, anyone who molested a child would simply be tortured and killed. His voice is somewhat louder than it needs to be to make sure that I am able to hear him.
- 2 I am standing in the yard waiting for our dorm to go to lunch. They always send the A Dorm first. As they file past on their way to lunch, one of the men from the A Dorm yells to one of the men from the

Receiving Dorm, “What’s the new crew look like?” He is referring to the new group that has just arrived for intake. “Not too bad,” the man from the Receiving Dorm yells back. “Don’t seem to be too many rippers.” ‘Rippers’ is an alternative term for ‘skinners’. The one who asked the question nods his approval. “That’s a first.”

- 3 While we are in the hallway leading into the lunch room, Levasseur starts in with the harassment talk (this is one of the most common places for this kind of harassment to take place). He makes several references to the Wednesday Group (a ‘treatment’ group for sex offenders) talking about who went there from his work group. Then he starts talking about how many skinners there are on the upper deck. He says that only his room and McCarthy’s room were free from them. He said he had to watch himself in the shower (presumably because a skinner might accost him in some way).
- 4 I am walking to the library with two others. A truck for one of the work crews stops at the Receiving Dorm to pick up the rest of the crew. As we walk past we hear people shouting, “There go the skinners.”
- 5 We just returned from lunch. Kingman is hanging around the upper deck. I go up there to fill out a form to get something out of Personals. When I get up and go to the stairs to go down and turn in to the Bubble, I find Kingman standing at the head of the stairs – with his hands on both railings. I feel it would be conspicuous if I went to the other stairs so I wait for him to move. He moves down the stairs very, very slowly. Gradually it dawns on me that this is for my benefit. When he gets to the bottom he begins walking very slowly toward the Bubble – and he moves off to the side to be in my way when I try to go around him. I hear Carson and someone else he is with (who are looking down from the upper deck) laughing. Finally Kingman meanders off to one side. I hear Carson say, “That was a good one, Kingman.”
- 6 I am standing in line for supper. Hoskins, a short but powerfully-built weightlifter, falls in behind me and starts talking to some of the others about how he plans to beat up a few skinners before he leaves. His point is that he had built himself up weightlifting and that it’s a shame not to be able to “use that power.”



A third type of harassment is aimed at specific individuals and might be called ‘targeted harassment’. In this case it is not simply a matter that the victim happens to be in the vicinity of a person who is feeling like he wants to harass someone. For whatever combination of reasons, I was one of those who was singled out.

# Chicken Run

Every Friday night, the staff brought in a movie to show to the prisoners. These films were made available on the closed circuit TV system in the dorm. On 23 February, 2001, the Friday night movie was *'Chicken Run'*. This was an adult full-length cartoon about a hen who realized that she and her sisters were oppressed. The truly remarkable thing about her was that she had the capacity to visualize an alternative. Perhaps the funniest scene was where she was explaining to the other hens that all they had to look forward to was laying eggs every day for the farmers until, when they couldn't lay anymore, they would be killed and eaten.

"Is this all you want for yourself?" she asked another hen.

Her interlocutor smiled sheepishly and shrugged. "It's a living," she said.

Pretty soon I began hearing comments being made, obviously for my benefit, about the 'chicken licker' movie. I am not exactly sure where the term 'chicken licker' came from. I felt that it was probably a reference to 'chicken hawk', which was a term that applied to males who cruised for adolescent boys. Whatever its origin, it was a derisive term that Kingman and his cronies used in referring to me. Often it was accompanied with clucking noises.

For some reason there was a significant increase in the intensity of the harassment around this time. I could hardly step out of my room without hearing comments. Certainly if Kingman was around, it was certain that I would be harassed – either by him or by one of his underlings who was anxious to show off.

I finally went to the guards and told them what was happening. Glen and Tom were on duty. I asked them what they felt I should do. Tom had always been hostile to me.

"What do you expect us to do?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. "But I think if the administration didn't want this kind of thing, it wouldn't happen, at least not to this degree."

Glen was more understanding. He said he wasn't sure what I or anybody could do, but that he would talk with Monson, the CO2 in charge of security.

I began feeling that maybe I could just not survive in Amherst, and I contemplated asking my social worker about requesting a move. I had a new job in the library which I liked, and my room situation was now OK. I was hesitant to give up these gains to move into a new and unknown situation. But my overriding concern was that Boo was able to visit me where I was and might not be able to if I were moved to a more remote location. So I began thinking about what could be done to change my present situation. In the movie *'Chicken Run'* the chickens ultimately escaped from the chicken farm where they were destined to be made into pies by creating an unlikely flying machine.

What sort of bizarre flying contraption was needed at Amherst? My goals were much more modest than the chickens' goals. They were able to escape from the farm, and were carried to a new place where they were able to establish a life of peace and happiness. My only goal was to get some freedom from the constant harassment and humiliation to which skimmers were subjected. I wanted us to be able to do our own time on the same basis as everybody else. I gave a fair bit of thought to the creation of the flying contraption that we needed. Several points

came into sharp focus with regard to the *'Chicken Run'* movie. First, organization had to be the key. Any single person acting alone would be crushed between the rock of the prison staff and the hard place of the hostile prisoners.

Tom's question to me clarified a second important point. "What do you expect us to do?" It was clear that the guards did not see the prevention of harassment to be a part of their jobs. To take seriously the idea of changing this situation was no more a real option in their minds than changing the weather.

So where did this leave us? It was also clear that we were not going to win if we chose to fight the issue on the punk's turf. There were more of them, they dominated the weightlifting room, they were, as a group, much more violent and experienced at fighting, and in the case of any fight the administration would tend to side with them. To organize ourselves for doing physical battle was not going to work.

The pivotal issue was that harassment was viewed by the guards and the administration as the accepted order of things. Skinners were supposed to be harassed. The guards ensconced themselves in their Bubbles, and came out only to do the count. What happened between the counts was of little concern to them.

So how were we to tackle this issue? To challenge the normalcy and justice of the daily harassment we experienced we had to somehow make this harassment visible. To do this brought us up against one of the most rigorously defended rules set by the prisoners: prisoners were not to rat on each other. For the most part, actually, I was sympathetic to this rule. One could see this mandate as an outlaw code of honor. I certainly never felt any impulse to rat anyone out for their cigarette and drug smuggling activities, or any of the other minor infractions against the rules I became aware of. All that was none of my business. But when they harassed me, then they made their behavior my business. The key to an effective strategy, it seemed to me, was to make this distinction clear to all concerned. To honor the 'no ratting' rule with regard to harassment in practice meant not challenging the normalcy of a system of psychological torture and degradation.

No ratting as a code of honor merited more careful scrutiny. If one is a part of a downtrodden group, a no-ratting mandate of some sort seems to me both honorable and necessary. But in fact the punks rejected the idea that we were a part of the same group they were. Even those sex offenders who wanted to be, were not accepted as fellow outlaws. If we were not a part of their group, then there was no ethical imperative that we adhere to their code of honor as they understood it. In fact, with regard to sex offenders the no-ratting rule was simply a way that the punks affirmed their right to harass without interference from the staff. Obviously to disregard the no-ratting rule entailed a number of risks, but the current pattern could not be changed without challenging it in some way. The risk that one might be killed for disregarding the rule was not decisive for me. I wasn't sure that I wanted to be alive. Furthermore, my experience with the punks was that most of them were cowards who backed off as soon as they saw that there might be a price to pay for what they wanted to do.

It is generally conceded in civilized society that the state has a legitimate authority for overseeing the social order. People are not to take the law into their own hands. If one is wronged, one is supposed to report it to the police or take it



to court. If I am robbed or mugged or slandered I am not expected to handle this by myself by challenging the offender to a duel, or beating him up, or breaking his legs. There is no dishonor associated with reporting this to the proper authorities. The outlaw code, based on the macho image of what it means to be a real man, brings the normal order of society into question. If one is a man he takes matters into his own hands. To report it to the authorities when one is wronged is a weak and sniveling thing to do. It dishonors one.

In a prison situation a sex offender is caught between two systems of law – both of which are to some degree hostile and prejudicial to him. He is expected by the prisoners to adhere to the outlaw code, even though he will never be accepted as an outlaw, and he is expected by the staff to respect a system of rules and procedures that is based on the assumption that he probably should be harassed.

The primary changes we had to address did not focus first and foremost on the punks. They were going to do what they had always done unless they experienced different consequences for doing so. We had to target administrative policy and the behavior of the guards. By working with the few employees in the system who saw something wrong with permitting the harassment, and by organizing, I felt we might make some limited changes.

In the long run, the administrative system had to be pressured to do one of two things. Either they needed to show that they could control the harassment problem when they put sex offenders in the general population, or they needed to separate the two populations. To be successful with regard to achieving this kind of change it would ultimately be necessary to bring pressure to bear on the system from powerful people outside the system. As it was, the corrections system had no motivation to correct itself. These were some of the thoughts that guided my efforts to cope with the harassment problem.

I began sharing my thoughts with the other sex offenders and gradually we came up with a strategy. I insisted that we honor the no-ratting rule insofar as it concerned behaviors that were none of our business. I did this for both ethical and practical reasons. I did not see it as our place to rat out the outlaws on their drug deals and other minor infractions of the rules. But when they harassed us, *that* was our business. There were two social workers who worked at the prison at that time who were sympathetic to our need to be left alone to do our own time – Cecilia Murray and Alice Rosso. Of the two, Cecilia was quieter, but she was also the one who was more willing to advocate on our behalf. We began systematically reporting incidents of harassment to these two people in such a way that it was not visible that this was being done. I also pointed out to these two people that there was not even a rule against harassment in the code of rules that the Department of Corrections put out for prisoners. And of course, I made the point that we had the right to do our own time on the same basis as everybody else.

Gradually we began finding out that some of the punks that were the worst ones for harassment were being called over to the administrator's office and talked to about their harassment activities. We overheard them talking about this. They were puzzled. Always before it had been all right to do all the harassment they wanted to. The guards could be depended upon to turn their heads the other way so long as one did not become too physical.



Things began to come to a head around the middle of April. On the 15th, as I sat in the pool room before breakfast, Ryan called me aside. He told me that he overheard Kingman talking to some of his lieutenants last night. Kingman was saying that the pedophiles and the skimmers were forming a group. He was referring to the increase in open socializing between people with known sex charges against them. This increase in socializing was something Kingman did not like at all.

Kingman's concern about the skimmers forming a group was quite interesting to me. It was my first objective corroboration that not permitting people charged with sex abuse to develop a friendship network was a conscious policy among the punks – one which they pursued with energy if they felt that their tacit rule was being broken: Thou shalt not have friends.

In the movie *'Chicken Run'*, the assistant to the owner of the chicken farm keeps seeing signs that the chickens are getting organized. But the owner never really believes him. Chickens he said, aren't able to organize anything. When it finally became clear that the chickens had succeeded in building a bizarre flying contraption that would carry them to freedom, the assistant said to the owner, "See, I told you they were organized."

Kingman was right about one thing. If he wanted to be sure that his favorite group of scapegoats would never gain the power to defend themselves, he had to keep them from getting organized. As is true in any situation, organization is one of the primary keys in promoting social change. Later that same day, Ryan took me aside and warned me that it was best not to hang out around the railing upstairs (where we sometimes talk). He told me that Miller was running around talking about "skinner rats" and how he and his buddies had to locate them and hurt them. I left, thinking it would blow over.

The next day I became aware that there was an increase in harassment that affected many people. While people are gathering around the door, waiting to be called for breakfast, Miller and Carson stood in the middle of the floor and they begin making very loud comments about rippers and skimmers. While I was out shoveling some snow I heard one or two people making chicken noises. It seemed to come from Carson's room. As I waited in line for supper a group of people fell in behind me and (clearly for my benefit) started talking about various ways they could beat up and hurt sex offenders. They mentioned things like cutting off their balls and running a broomstick up their asses.

As we are sitting around in the evening, Levesque told me that he had been harassed by Pratt for making a hanky with a picture on it for his daughter. Later that evening Calvin arrived back early from recreation. He told me that Carson challenged him and Laforest, and questioned their right to use the weight-lifting equipment. In the course of their conversation Carson made references to Calvin being a skimmer.

The next day, the 18th of April, 2001, Hoskins and Miller, two of the most energetic and dedicated harassers, were just a little distance behind me in the breakfast line. The entire time we were in the covered entranceway they talked about how you must "be careful what you say, or you might end up on the bus because there are skimmer cry-babies everywhere." That was very important information that they gave me, and I felt they were rather stupid for showing their hand like that. It

told me that they had been talked to by someone in the administration and that they had been told that if they didn't chill out on the harassment they would be shipped.

On our way back from breakfast one of the men told Dan Levesque that Hoskins had said he was going to "get" him. The same guy told Dan that he had heard some of the punks talking about how if they were going to be shipped anyhow they might as well have a good time on their way out. The next day Hoskins, Miller and Carson were shipped to a different facility. I think this may have been the only time I was in prison that I felt empowered to do anything relevant about my situation, and I am sure that many of the others who were on the receiving end of the constant harassment felt the same way.

The next day, Gail, one of the guards, told a prisoner that the reason for the people being shipped was that the sex offenders had "written letters". This was her effort to set the sex-offenders up for further attack. Still, it was a confirmation of the fact that at least in this situation, an organized effort could produce effects.

I recorded everything I saw and heard, and slipped it to Boo during her next visit, with instructions to send it to Cecilia Murray. I also told any of the others who had been harassed to continue to do the same should the harassment start up again. I also emphasized that we needed to stay out of every one else's business if they left us alone.

For a while the conditions were much more tolerable. A message had been sent and heard. However, It was not long before it all started up again.



Most evenings the men were permitted to go to the gym where they could lift weights or play basketball. Behind the gym, at the bottom of a hill, there was a baseball playing field. In the warmer months some of the men often organized baseball games there. Others walked around the perimeter of the field for exercise.

On the 6th of May, 2001, as I was walking around the field during the Rec period, I passed Claude, a friend of mine, who was walking in the opposite direction. He warned me to be careful. "They are throwing rocks," he said.

'They' referred to a group of men sitting at one of the picnic tables at the top of the hill. I watched as I went by. When I could no longer see them without craning my neck a rock did land not far from my feet. The next time around I watched more closely. This time I saw Houston shift a sizable rock from one of his hands to the other. The one that had landed at my feet did not seem to have been that big.

After a bit, a guard went over and stood near the men at the picnic table. I speculated that he was aware of the rock throwing and went there to discourage it. In any case, as long as he stood there the rock throwing stopped.

After about 10 minutes or so the guard left that area. I had been walking for about 45 minutes and was tired, so I sat down at a picnic table that was down at the edge of the playing field. After a bit I noticed that another rock (again a fairly small one) landed not far from me – and then another one. I got up after about five more minutes and picked up the second one that had been thrown and put it in my pocket. I walked around the field a couple of more times before we were notified that the Rec period was over.

As I climbed the stairs that led up from the playing field, I heard someone yell, "Hey, John, what you going to do with that rock?"

"I don't know," I said. I looked up as though searching for something. "It just fell out of the sky."

Then I heard a couple of them – I think it might have been Perrin and Hyde, saying things about my being a rat and how I might slip and fall down all those stairs.

I asked why I couldn't come down here without having to put up with all this shit.

The guards heard all this and did not intervene.

I asked one of them if this was all right – referring to the harassment and the rock throwing. He shrugged, and then said in a very half-hearted way, "Leave him alone, guys." Afterwards Dan Levesque told me they had thrown rocks at him too.



The day after the rock throwing during the recreation periods began I wrote to Cecilia Murray:

Memo

From: John Hudson

To: Cecilia Murray

Re: Harassment

7 May 2001

The harassment has started up again. As there still appears to be no harassment policy, this does not surprise me. The pattern of harassing a certain segment of the inmate population is deeply ingrained in the system, and you may recall that it was predicted that the familiar order would reassert itself if the reality of harassment did not get addressed on a policy level. I am only surprised at how quickly this happened. The action against some of the previous people who were the most audacious in their harassment of others gave many of us a brief reprieve and some hope. Your efforts and the efforts of anybody else who helped are appreciated. The problem has been identified, and perhaps made more visible, but it clearly has not been resolved.

In the absence of an official harassment policy I am reluctant to share with you the particulars of the increased harassment. Perhaps outlining the elements of the informal or effective harassment policy that is currently in place will make the reasons for my reluctance clear. The informal harassment policy is carried out on two levels – the inmates' policy and the guards' policy.

The inmates' current policy:

- 1 Those in the power elite among the inmates assume the right to show off to each other and to amuse themselves when bored by tormenting, oppressing, and harassing people who have been identified as sex offenders. This happens on a daily basis. It is normal life here.
- 2 The inmate power elite enforces a 'no-ratting' rule so that those who are harassed are afraid to complain. This no-ratting policy is enforced by threats of increased levels of harassment and by threats and acts of physical violence.
- 3 Those in the power elite among the inmates ingratiate themselves with the guards in order to minimize the probability of interference with their policies.

A complementary set of policies exists among the guards:

- 1 The guards ignore or minimize the harassment when they become aware of it.
- 2 They ingratiate themselves with the inmates in the power elite.
- 3 If an inmate complains too much about harassment the guards have him (the victim) moved to a more restrictive or less desirable setting.
- 4 The guards inform the inmate elite when anyone 'rats'.

It should be noted that not all the guards participate fully in these policies, but I believe I have accurately described the general pattern. It also needs to be mentioned that the description of the policies followed by guards and inmates with regard to harassment is based on observations of actual behavior which can be documented.

In view of the policies that I have outlined, for me to give the specifics of the new wave of harassment puts me at risk of a number of unpleasant consequences:

- 1 An increase of harassment.
- 2 Physical attacks.
- 3 Increased hostility from staff.
- 4 Being moved out of Amherst to a less desirable setting.

I have two things in my present situation that I value:

- 1 I live where my wife is able to visit me regularly.
- 2 I have a job in the library that enables me to feel useful and productive.

In a situation in which I am not permitted to have very much, I am anxious about losing these two advantages. So I must again ask for your guidance in dealing with this. You may share this memo with whomever you feel you need to. However, I ask you to keep in mind that I really am quite vulnerable. I trust your judgment.



Every year a little program that taught boxing to boys came to Amherst to put on a demonstration. This generated a great deal of excitement in all the men. I described what happened when I attended this event in another memo to Cecilia Murray.

Yesterday evening I decided to go to the boxing demonstration. Last year I had decided not to go, for fear that it would be a set-up for verbal harassment. However, things seemed to be going better, and several people assured me that there had been no problem the previous year. I was curious so I decided to risk it.

When I got there I deliberately stationed myself at the back of the ring of spectators and at some distance from those people who I felt were likely to harass me. With people having most of their attention on the boxing ring I felt that I was in a fairly safe position.

About half-way through the session I heard a group of people chanting my name. I heard nothing that led up to this. As my ability to sort out what is being said in situations where there is a lot of noise is not that good, I at first wondered whether I was hearing it correctly. But it was clearly my last name that was being chanted. I could not tell exactly what it was about but assumed it was not friendly. As I walked back from the demonstration a friend of mine told me what had happened. He was standing quite near the people who initiated this chanting at the time. I asked him if he would write up exactly what he saw and heard. This morning he gave me the enclosed report.

*[The friend's report described how two of the newer prisoners, Sawyer and Vincent, decided that the image of me boxing with some of these boys was too funny for words, so when the time came when the boys were to box with some men from the prison population, they instigated the entire group to begin chanting my name.]*

I might mention that later in the day I had heard from one of the people my friend mentions in his report. During the afternoon I was sitting outside. A friend came by the door and suggested I play a game of pool with him. I came up and we began playing. I heard someone behind me say "This is getting to be a pedophile haven". I turned around to see who said it. The one it appeared to be was new to the dorm. Later I asked my friend if that was the one who made the comment, and what his name was. He said his name was Sawyer and that he was the one who made the comment.

I have never talked with either Sawyer or Vincent and only learned their names after asking about them because of comments they had made. I am not especially happy to send you this report. Things have, as I told you the other day, been better. I suppose that caused me to let my guard down just a bit. I still wonder whether people realize how deeply these patterns of harassment are ingrained in the social fabric of the correctional system in this state. During the 15 months I have been in the system, the relative peace I experienced during the last few weeks has been the exception. The kind of incident described in the enclosed report has been the rule. I would be happy if, after you read it, you passed this note and the enclosed report on to the administration.

As I indicated in my report to Cecilia, despite the rock-throwing at recreation, things did improve a bit for a brief period of time after the administration put out the message that harassment was going to be taken seriously. However, Vincent and Sawyer were permitted to get the whole thing going again and were never effectively confronted. I think the administration decided that they had allowed an unpopular group of prisoners too much influence in the institution and they were anxious to see things return to 'normal'.

Not too long after the boxing incident, Cecilia Murray resigned – presumably for personal reasons. I have always wondered whether she had been squeezed out for her willingness to play an advocacy role for the sex offenders in the prison system, but never actually received any information that this was the case. After she left things did return to 'normal'. By that I mean that if sex offenders complained about being harassed they began to get the 'what do you expect us to do about it?' kind of response, and they found that they risked themselves for no appreciable gain. Without either an advocate within the system, or an ombudsman or other advocate outside the system, the probability of successful social action was minimal.

We chickens built our bizarre flying contraption, and for a brief moment it flew, and we were hopeful. We had visions of doing our time in prison on the same basis as the other prisoners. When one thinks about it, that was a pretty modest dream. But our flying contraption crashed while it was still within the fence. Life returned to normal and once again it was open season on skimmers.

So for the remaining two and a half years while I was incarcerated in Amherst I simply lived with the harassment on a daily basis. A great deal of this harassment was recorded in my letters to Boo, but I won't bother to include that material in this book. The names and specifics changed. Prisoners and staff members came and went, but the pattern that I described in my memo to Cecilia Murray continued without let-up. That skimmers deserved this special treatment was an eternal verity.

The pattern of belittlement and degradation was a timeless fixture in the universe. The social pattern was larger than any individual that lived within it. The intensity of the harassment waxed and waned like the moon – a little more intense now, and a little less then – but the kinds of harassment that I have described continued. I find it depressing to write about it, and assume that you, the reader, would find it tedious reading if I continued giving examples.

It's like the biography of an abscessed tooth:

Entry for Tuesday, May 27, 2001: It hurts a lot.

Entry for Wednesday, May 28, 2001: It continues to hurt a lot.

Entry for Thursday, May 29, 2001: It hurts a bit more.

Entry for Friday, May 30, 2001: It still hurts a lot.

How much more is there to say about the experience of an abscessed tooth? If one were to cover a period of two and a half years in this manner, it would make for a dull manuscript. But it did hurt – a lot – and I continued in various ways to try to advocate for a change.

# Part Four



## Reflections



# Introductory Note

As I indicated earlier, I understand what I have termed “holistic inquiry” as a fundamental mode of positioning oneself with regard to one’s experience. This manner of being in the world has relevance across a broad spectrum of fields – for philosophy, politics, literature and the human sciences. In various places throughout this document I have speculated with regard to some of these areas of inquiry. In addition, a variety of essays have grown out of the experiences I have related. These essays touch on a number of points that are of interest to me.

At this point my general conclusions are incompletely abstracted from the experiences. They come dragging the confusions, uncertainties, pain, hopes and ill-defined boundaries of real life behind them. Perhaps that is both a strength and a weakness. We want an ordered set of hypotheses in any field. At the same time it may sometimes be a mistake to move too quickly from the data themselves to a neat set of abstractions. In any case, such as they are, many of my “findings” can be gleaned from these essays.

## Narrative Inquiry – Conclusions

### **The narrative nature of reality**

Reality is intrinsically storied. Everywhere we turn, we discover stories. All stories are about either gaining or losing something that is valued. Metaphysically, my perspective of narrative is grounded in my understanding that the Being of beings is intrinsically directed toward the achievement or creation of values – values such as adventure, beauty, love, understanding, pleasure, and in general, the intensity of consciousness. Reality is not a huge Rorschach test that passively receives the narratives and meanings that we project there out of a need that is ungrounded in the fundamental nature of things. Any story that is only the artificial construct of an arbitrary imagination is not worth the time it takes to hear it. If story is intrinsic to the nature of things, then narrative inquiry can be explanatory as well as descriptive. It can disclose causal connections between events. This would seem – at least potentially – to place narrative within the realm of science.

The idea that reality is intrinsically storied provided the general frame of reference within which I asked the basic narrative questions while I was in prison:

- 1 What stories do I see enacted on a daily basis?
- 2 What stories do the people here tell about themselves and their world?
- 3 What are the major stories here that compete for the hearts and minds of the prisoners and the staff?

There is a fourth question about stories that is also very important: How do we assess the truthfulness or the falseness of a story? An attempt at an answer to that question can be found in an essay by James Hunter entitled, “Truth and Effectiveness in Revelatory Stories.” (Revision, Vol 6, No. 2, (Fall, 1983.)) In that article it is suggested that several criteria that might be used in assessing the “truthfulness” of revelatory stories. A revelatory story is, in the broad sense of the term, any story that acts as a window of perception into any significant aspect of

reality. Revelatory stories may or may not be literally or historically true. But they show us the meaning of the events that comprise our lives. It is argued in that article was the the truthfulness of stories can be assessed by the degree to which it facilitated or enhanced six values:

- 1 The coherence of experience
- 2 Integrated wholeness
- 3 Personal growth
- 4 Interdependence
- 5 Love
- 6 Understanding

The major point of the article was that the truthfulness of narrative stories can be evaluated by the values that they facilitate – values that virtually all more or less normal people would affirm. By these criteria, for example, a narrative template that divides the world into two warring camps – one good and one evil – is less truthful than one which grounds itself in a vision of the fundamental oneness of all humanity. This is not the place to argue this point in any detail. I wish only to suggest, in passing, that stories can be evaluated in terms of their truthfulness as well as in terms of their aesthetic values.

### **The four narrative templates**

When we tell stories we almost always fit them into prearranged structures that are supplied by society. These structures provide the teller of the story with the meanings of the events that are to be narrated and orient the listener (or reader) by providing him or her with a familiar pattern of meaning. I refer to these prearranged structures of dramatic meaning as “narrative templates.” As I reflected on the stories that I heard the various prisoners tell, it seemed to me that most of them were structured by one of four templates:

- 1 Stories of sickness and healing
- 2 Stories of the noble sociopath
- 3 Stories of sin, forgiveness and reconciliation
- 4 Stories of oppression and liberation



The last two categories are spiritual stories. I think it could be argued that all spiritual narratives fit into one of these two categories. The oppression/liberation story is clearly the dominant story of the Old Testament (The Exodus and then the return from captivity.) However the sin/reconciliation story is an important sub-plot there. In the New Testament the oppression/liberation story remains very central, but the sin/reconciliation story is also very strong. Paul attempts a synthesis. Our own sinful nature is seen as a source of oppression from which we are liberated by Christ. Are we dealing here with a new template, or is Paul co-opting the language of liberation for what is really a sin/reconciliation story?

The oppressor in the oppression/liberation story need not be totally external to the person. Invariably, in fact, we internalize our oppression.

So the task of liberation must begin with a struggle with oneself. Even so, the oppression/liberation and sin/reconciliation stories have very different centers of gravity. Stories based on the sin/reconciliation motif are centrally concerned with the need for obedience to a higher authority. Stories based on the oppression/liberation motif are centrally concerned with the need for self-realization. Since “higher authority” usually means society, the sin/reconciliation template tends to support the dominant social hierarchy. Therefore, while there are situations where it is the appropriate template, one must be cautious as it lends itself readily to the agenda of the oppressor. The excessive use of the sin/reconciliation template to the exclusion of the oppression/liberation template tends to have a repressive and reactionary influence on social processes. It is for this reason that the sin/reconciliation template is popular in prisons and is supported by the authorities. We see this sin/reconciliation template both in the kinds of religion and the kinds of “treatment” that are encouraged within the criminal justice system.

The sickness/healing story that is used by some psychotherapists seems at first blush to be an improvement over the sin/reconciliation story. It may generate less overt hatred and condemnation. Yet in some ways the sickness/healing template may give rise to the most oppressive stories of all. Almost invariably the psychotherapist buys into the dominant values and agendas of the society, in large part simply because they are the ones paying his/her salary. If you don't want to play the songs the owner of the bar wants, you have to go find yourself another gig.

When s/he uses the sickness/healing template, the psychotherapist internalizes the oppression of the “patient” through labeling. The patient is, for example, a “fixated pedophile.” Once the “patient” is labeled, and his or her behavior is defined as a part of a sickness, the whole agenda of the society can be contained within the prescribed treatment for that “condition.” The “patient” is utterly helpless in the face of the “therapist.” The therapist, after all, is the expert. Through the “expert” role, the therapist usurps the right of the client to be the judge and evaluator of his or her own experience.

This usurpation of the role of the self as the evaluator of his or her own experience, if successful, is one of the most profoundly alienating experience that a person can undergo. The label is the Trojan horse by which society gains access to the soul of its deviant members. The “expert” role is the sword by which society overcomes all opposition.

Traditional law enforcement was concerned almost exclusively with behavior. Treatment based on the sickness/healing motif permits access to, and manipulation of, thoughts, feelings, fantasies, dreams, hopes, aims and even the synapses of the brain. In this way it is far more intrusive than any other form of oppression.

The noble sociopath appeared to me to be the template of choice by the punks. It seemed to have a closer affinity with the oppression/liberation story than the sin/reconciliation story. This story does not seem to be based on a temporal dichotomy like the other stories – which are all stories of a movement in time from a state of wrongness to a corrected state. The noble sociopath tends to see the situation as static or cyclic. He or she will never overthrow society – but society will never fully rout out its sociopaths. Sometimes you get the bear and sometimes the bear gets you.

## The primary hypotheses

By listening to people around me and watching how they behaved, and by trying to be aware of my own thoughts, feelings and behaviors, I made the following observations:

- 1 While everybody may shift to some extent from story to story, each person has a primary understanding of his imprisonment based on one of the four stories. This story defines, above all else, the nature of one's relationship with society at large, and points to the way in which one must direct one's efforts.
- 2 Each person (staff and inmate alike) also has a characteristic way cataloging other people in terms of narrative templates. This choice of a narrative template determines in large part how one understands and treats the other people in the environment.
- 3 The primary personal choice with which a sex-offender is faced has to do with the degree to which he will accept the narrative that is thrust upon him by others, or seek to tell his own story in his own way.

I have abstracted two primary hypotheses based on these observations that I think have a much wider potential application than just sex offenders in prison:

- 1 That people organize their experience in terms of narratives.
- 2 A great deal of how people think feel and behave is determined by the stories that they select in their efforts to understand themselves and others and the world they share.

Based on the stories that are told about them, the same people engaged in the same patterns of "deviant" activity can be viewed as sickos, sinners, outlaws or reformers. Those who are viewed as "sickos" (mentally ill) are tolerated with a certain mixture of pity and contempt. Although overt expressions of hatred for sickos tend to be muted, once a person has been placed in this category his or her otherness is seen as greater than any other category of social deviant. "Sickos" are often subjected to a friendly kind of shunning that may be more difficult to cope with than overt rejection, because it is harder to see. Also the "sickos" are micromanaged more intensely than the others. Even their fantasies and the synapses of their brains are scrutinized and manipulated.

Criminals or "outlaws" are both feared and admired. They may be dangerous, but they are bold and easily understandable. America loves its sociopaths – it celebrates the adventures of its Bonnies and Clydes. Though they must sometimes be incarcerated or even killed, the stories told about them are tragedies. They are heroic people who fall because of an unfortunate but humanly understandable flaw. It is the criminals who are catered to in prisons, and who dominate prison life. They tend to be respected both by themselves, by other prisoners, and by the staff.

Our society also has a warm place in its heart for sinners. After all, the dominant spirituality in our society defines all people as sinners. Sinners violate norms, but do not attack the norm itself. Most violations of specific norms are forgivable – though sometimes at the cost of participating in elaborate rituals of submission, contrition and re-integration. These rituals are in large part concerned with validating the norm that was violated.

What is generally unforgivable is any effective advocacy for the elimination of the violated norm itself. This is rightly perceived as a greater threat to the social order than the simple violation of the norm. Hence the centrality of the question of remorse. In publicly professing remorse the social deviant proclaims his story to fit into the sin/redemption template, and he affirms the validity of the norm he violated. One who violates a norm without remorse is either a criminal or a political activist – a reformer. The reformer does not believe in the validity of the norm. His or her aim is not to only to evade society but to re-form it. Society has a certain pity for the sicko, a degree of tolerance or even affection for the its sinners, a begrudging respect for its criminals, but the reformer is generally perceived to be in the service of the anti-Christ. Whatever the cost, the reformer must be incapacitated and, if possible, destroyed. Above all his or her poisonous speech much be suppressed.

All of this speculation on narrative templates represents a shift from what I anticipated would be the primary form of conceptualizing my experience here for purposes of inquiry or research. My primary understanding of the transactions between punks and skinkers was based on the Jungian understanding of the projection of the shadow onto a scapegoat as a defense against owning unwanted impulses. I still believe that this perspective is valid. But it is not immediately clear how one would research the Jungian perspective. The narrative perspective seems more researchable because it is disclosed in what people say – with the “story” they tell about their relationship with others, while the Jungian analysis deals with dynamics that are hidden from the people who are driven by them.

The different perspectives may simply disclose different aspects of the reality and I feel that both Jungian and a narrative approaches are useful. It could be useful to think about how the Jungian approach might be related to the narrative one. Is there some over-arching theory that might incorporate both perspectives?

One thought about the relationship between the narrative and the Jungian approaches was that it might be necessary to focus on the “truthfulness” of the stories. If a person or group persisted in telling a story that is not truthful, even in the face of clear evidence, then one must ask why. This is, of course, exactly what happens in the case of a “moral panic.” A moral panic can best be described in terms of the narrative templates about folk demons and their victims that are insisted upon by society, even when they are not supported by evidence. The question of why evidence is ignored or even suppressed, however, might require a psychodynamic theory for an answer.

Stories are interpretive structures. A narrative template shapes how we tell our story, which in turn dictates how we understand our lives. We act as we do because we understand our situation in a particular way. The distinction between causal connections and interpretive connections is, in the last analysis, a false one – or at least wrongly formulated. Patterns of understanding are every bit as causal with regard to real events in the perceptible world as are the more mechanistic forces envisioned by empirical science. This is so because stories have a normative as well as an interpretive dimension. They serve both to evaluate how we are acting in the world, and to prescribe how we should act.

## Between desire and the world

Another way of categorizing narrative templates has to do with the manner in which they position themselves between desire and social constraints. From this point of view we can designate three types of narrative templates:

- 1 Normative: those with a more or less clear agenda to elicit adherence to a normative structure.
- 2 Libidinal: those we create from our desire.
- 3 Existential: those that serve to interpret our actuality – past, present and potential.

Of course there are stories that are motivated by more than one agenda, so my taxonomy may be a bit oversimplified. However, it seems to me that most stories are motivated by a central agenda which is discernible.

Normative stories take on the role of the super-ego in our lives. If they do not define the libidinal self as intrinsically evil, and to be opposed, they at least admonish the reader to show restraint in allowing expression to his or her passions and inclinations. In their most positive form normative stories are not hostile to the libidinal self as such, but they uphold the importance of bringing one's life into conformity with civilized standards of behavior. "To Kill a Mockingbird" might be a good example of such a story. Normative stories at their best emphasize such values as sharing, cooperation, perseverance in the face of adversity, taking the needs and wishes of others into consideration when we act, avoiding stereotypes, doing our fair share in a joint endeavor, etcetera. Libidinal templates disclose the realm of desire. In their simplest forms they are the fantasies that all people have on a daily basis. They may pertain to winning the mega-bucks, to finding the perfect sexual partner, to attaining some great success in one's business or profession, to receiving praise or fame, to finding one's "great good place," or to any other event we might wish for.

We cannot ultimately overcome what we most desire. To do so would be to lift ourselves by our own boot straps. We may set aside a very strong desire out of fear of reprisals, or we may limit the expression of a desire out of a commitment to a larger desire. But the heart of the self is the structure of what one wants. We want a wide range of things, from a slice of pizza to union with the Absolute, and sometimes these desires can compete with each other.

Libidinal narratives are helpful to us in that they disclose and clarify our patterns of love and desire. While they may serve a limited purpose, stories that speak to our desires outside of our real situation can limit us. They can become forms of escape literature, which may be fine in moderate doses. But libidinal narratives that in no way illuminate the actual situation in which we live serve to transform neither ourselves nor the situation around us. They are apolitical, and ultimately became vapid.

This brings us to existential narrative templates. An existential narrative is positioned more squarely between desire and one's situation than either of the other story types. If I may use a somewhat trite but particularly apt metaphor, this is where the rubber hits the road. This is where the action is. Telling truthful existential stories serves a number of important functions.

First, it interprets the actual. Existential stories provide us with a way of making sense of the ongoing pattern of events within which we find ourselves embedded. By focusing on the ordinary and specific events of our lives, the telling of truthful existential stories dignifies the actual. Our lives merit attention. Not just the large and momentous events, which in most peoples lives are spaced far apart, but even the small daily events have a significance. Truthful existential stories can open us to untested feasibilities. By disclosing other ways of being in the world, existential narratives suggest possibilities of transforming ourselves and the world we live in.

## **Narrative politics**

Narrative inquiry can lead in one of two very different but perhaps complementary directions. As the natural extension of Max Weber's concept of "Verstehen," narrative inquiry has an important contribution to make to Sociology. Used in this way, the one doing the inquiry would focus on the objective description of how the narrative templates serve to organize the understanding of actors, and thereby influence real and perceptible action in the world. It might also, in some cases, provide information about the truth value of some of the stories. We see this kind of analysis, for example, in the work some people have done on urban legends. A narrative sociology would be descriptive and explanatory but not normative.

We are not just dispassionate observers of the world around us. We are actors in unfolding stories that we care about. We are interpreted by the narrative templates of others – often in ways that are distressing to us. In short, we care about the stories of which we are a part. We want to influence what stories will be used and how they will be used. When we start asking questions about what sorts of things we feel should happen in the world, we move beyond sociology and enter the realm of politics.

One aspect of narrative politics has to do with the question of whether narratives are repressive or liberating. Because they are often normative – that is to say evaluative and prescriptive – stories can be used in a repressive manner. The repressive use of narrative has two aspects. First, a story may be intrinsically repressive in that it serves to justify the exploitation or repression of individuals or groups. Obvious examples would be stories that portray gays, women or blacks in stereotypic and demeaning ways. Perhaps a little less obvious are stories that serve to "normalize" or justify social norms that are repressive, but not generally recognized as being so. Stories that portray children as incapable of making their own decisions and as needed to be micro-managed by adults would fit into this category.

The second way in which narratives might be used in a repressive manner is found whenever any narrative template is upheld as the only one that is permissible to use in any situation. In this case the template itself may or may not be intrinsically repressive. It might even be liberating. But for those who are in positions of power to insist that we interpret our lives in a particular manner – in accordance with prescribed narrative templates – is always a repressive political act. This kind of repressive use of narrative templates is much more common than is generally supposed. It is universal in all public school curricula, especially in the manner



in which they present history to the students. It is also universal in the publishing business – but especially with regard to newspapers and TV. Increasingly this repressive use of prescribed templates is used in “treatment” groups in mental health programs which seek to impose the socially correct manner of telling one’s own story. Only certain kinds of stories can be told.

Not all normative templates are repressive. However, we see an unfortunate repressive tendency in operation in most if not all societies; those in positions of authority work very hard at micro-managing the behavior of all citizens. Templates are prescribed that serve to deny individuals the range of options that are needed if many very different kinds of individuals are to fulfill themselves. One finds templates prescribing how boys must act and how girls must act, what kinds of work various categories of people can and cannot do, how patriotic citizens must believe and act (including whom they must kill), what kinds of love relationships are permissible, and how that love can and cannot be expressed, who must give orders and who obey orders, how many people one can marry and how one must behave in that marriage, etc.

Whenever a society imposes narrative templates on people – that is to say whenever it excludes competing narratives – it is acting in a repressive manner. In fact, most societies not only interfere with the free competition of narratives, but the narratives that they do prescribe are very frequently quite repressive in themselves. The outcome is a population of people who are smothered under a blanket of limiting narratives and who lack access to narratives that might help them envision other possibilities.

Clearly my own interest in narrative inquiry goes beyond its possible sociological application. By being interpreted by other people in terms of narrative templates that are distorted to the point of approaching psychosis, I have been made into a demon, and consequently I have been made to suffer a great deal. I am not dispassionate about that fact. I believe that the boys with whom I became involved have also been made to suffer to an unnecessary degree by the imposition of an extreme and unfounded narrative template over the situation. The boys have, in other words, been harmed by those who purport to be protecting them. Here we move beyond the realm of sociology and into the realm of politics – the politics of narration. In the realm of narrative politics we must ask the question of how narratives should be used in the lives we share together.

The key political questions with which the citizens of every society must struggle are narrative in nature. Is there a place for the telling of unpopular stories – stories that challenge the current common wisdom? Is it a valid procedure for a person to be forced to tell his or her story in the socially prescribed manner, under threat of devastating sanctions for a refusal to do so, in the name of “treatment”?

What stories shall we expose our children to, and what shall we prohibit them from hearing? How can groups that tell very different stories negotiate a way of living together in the some social world? Can I tell my own story in the way that seems most truthful to my own experience – and make this story public? These are political questions. One would like to think that whatever behaviors society permits or proscribes, every person and group should have the right to tell his or her story in the way that seems most truthful to them, no matter how much this



telling might offend others in the society. Yet it is difficult to find real narrative freedom actually protected in any society. Stories are powerful, and the unorthodox story is always feared by those in control. Therefore new forms of the inquisition are forever being invented.

I find myself trapped in someone else's psychosis where I have been assigned a role and an identity that has nothing to do with who I actually am. I broke society's rules. By breaking those rules I exposed the boys to confusing and painful societal responses. That is true. It is a fact that has been, and continues to be, a source of intense pain for me. I cannot deny that I share in the responsibility for what has happened. But on another level I see both myself and the boys as victims of a rigid, hysterical and oppressive puritanism.

Time will tell whether those rules I broke are valid as they stand, or whether they will be found to be as absurd as the old rules and hysteria about masturbation. Obviously I suspect that something of that sort may be true. Pubescent and adolescent boys – even those who will grow up to be primarily heterosexual – are frequently interested in engaging in homosexual activities both with peers and with older males. There is no evidence at all that mutually desired relationships of this kind are intrinsically harmful to anybody, so I have trouble understanding why they should be illegal. It appears to me that society does great harm by resorting to such draconian measures as are currently in place to prevent harmless sex play and expressions of affection and love. But even if I am wrong – even if, for some reason that I don't yet understand, society cannot permit pubescent and adolescent people to have a sexual life that is closer to what they want – I am still not a monster. I am an ordinary person, capable of both love and mistakes, who has a difference of opinion with society as it presently stands. That, at least, is the story I tell about myself.

## Competing Gestalten

This is a little essay I wrote on 10/7/00, after I had been incarcerated for about six months. Except for changing proper names, making a few grammatical corrections, and altering the wording in a few places, I have left it as I wrote it then – as a record of my feelings and thoughts at that time.



The external facts of my life are at this point moderately difficult to deal with. But what eats at the core of my being, and threatens my ability to cope, is the inner judge who accuses me of having done irreparable damage to Terry. Suppose he is chronically depressed because of me – suppose eventually he even commits suicide. Since I am prevented from having any information on how he is doing, the situation is fertile soil for worst-case scenarios growing and thriving in my fantasy life, and they threaten to crowd out any happy thoughts.

One thing I am clear on is that the very limited sexual contact I had with him was not, in and of itself, harmful. It is the reaction of a hysterical society

that has transferred a fumbling, gentle, and perhaps ill-conceived effort on my part to liberate us both from the oppressive mentality of a puritan culture, into a wrenching and absurd melodrama. I have little inclination to seek forgiveness from, or reconciliation with, this society. I am its enemy. Yet it was my act that created the possibility for Terry being exposed to the confusion, grief and guilt that I think he undoubtedly experienced as a result of turning me in. If, for this reason, I am guilty of causing him profound suffering then I feel that I have no right to self-respect, meaningful activity or happiness. In short, the thought causes me to wish for death as the only escape.

This self-condemning way of seeing things competes in my soul with a second gestalt. In this gestalt I see myself as a very ordinary human being seeking to understand the love I have felt for certain boys, and who sought to liberate both myself and the boys from a society that condemns such love because it includes the sexual dimension – whether or not this is overtly manifest. It is my belief that so long as nothing is done to risk the boy's health, and nothing is forced on him, it is up to the boy and the man to decide how their love should be expressed. But to act on such beliefs, and to seek liberation in a society that condemns even the slightest hint of sexual feeling in such relationships, does create a situation full of risks for both the man and the boy.

In short, my self-perception oscillates between two conflicting gestalten:

- 1 The worthless piece of scum who is desperately trying to evade his responsibility for having perpetrated serious damage on a trusting and innocent child.
- 2 An ordinary person, who feels what most men feel, and who is seeking liberation both for himself and others from an oppressive, cruel and self-righteous society.

Naturally, as my perception oscillates between these gestalten, my mood and my appetite for life follow suit.



Three images of struggles for liberation haunt me:

- 1 A black man who has been fighting for an end to apartheid in South Africa (back when Mandela was still in prison) is being tortured outside a hospital where he has been brought to have his wounds treated. A doctor looks on helplessly. (From an article in *Granta*.)
- 2 A woman from England (or from some European country) is in India during the bloodshed between Hindus and Moslem's that followed India's liberation from England. From her car she sees some older boys attacking a dark-skinned boy. She doesn't see the outcome of the altercation right then. But when she returns later she sees the decapitated body of the boy. (Not sure where I read this. In "Thorn Birds"? Whether it was a novel or a piece of journalism, I'm not sure.)
- 3 A few days ago I watched a 12-year-old boy on television (a news clip) screaming in terror because he and his father were caught in a cross-fire between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The father was trying to

shield him. Later another news clip showed the two of them again. The father had been wounded by Israeli gun fire and his 12-year-old son lay dead beside him.

It would seem that any struggle for liberation elicits opposition and creates suffering. This is true even if the means for seeking liberation are based on a philosophy of non-violence. Does this mean that one should not engage in struggle for liberation? Of course one should do what one can to see that the innocent are spared. But an irreducible messiness characterizes all historical processes. We always do more than we intend and less than we hope for. The father of the twelve-year-old boy related that, after they had both been shot, his son said, “don’t be afraid.”



A week after writing the above reflection, I had two dreams that I remembered.

*First dream: I am sitting on a wooden platform that is part of a stair-case in an apartment building. A boy shows up on the floor above. He leaps over the railing and does a somersault (like an Olympic dive) across the stair well and lands on the landing in front of me. I am quite impressed with his agility, but tell him that I was afraid for him when he did this, and that I wished he would be more careful with himself. He comes over to me and sits in my lap. I kiss him on his forehead. I’m afraid that this will offend him. He looks at me with a quizzical expression, but I see that he is not upset. It is almost as though he is unsure whether I really kissed him or just accidentally brushed my lips across his forehead. With some uncertainty about how he will react, I kiss him again on his forehead – and am certain that this time it is clear to him that what I did was intentional. He smiles. He is very pleased to be kissed. His reaction is thrilling to me. He snuggles up against me and I feel very happy.*

*Second dream: An older man is talking with me. We are in a small bedroom or study. I’m sitting at a desk. He is from a very good seminary. We discuss a book I found quite interesting. I tell him that I had never heard of the author before, but that I liked him. He wants to discuss my beginning a course of study in the seminary where he works.*

I felt that the second dream was pointing toward the possibility of new ways of understanding.

Later in the day I was sitting in the Rec Room waiting for Boo to come for a visit. I was reading some Shakespeare sonnets, selecting them randomly. I began reading Sonnet 29, about a boy he loved:

*“When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes...”*

During my visit with Boo I told her the dreams. “That’s Terry,” she said, referring to the boy who did the somersault over the stairwell. I could not have had a better dream or a more helpful interpretation.

On 18 October 2000, not long after the above conversation with Boo I had the following dream:

*Terry and I had to have a goodbye visit. I saw him the night before the visit was to take place. He had come to find me. I was worried that his mother would find out. We hugged and cried. We were both sad. But I knew he was all right.*

# Love In a Slave Society

Visualize a society dominated by the institution of slavery. Imagine that this is back in the old days, before TV, before cars, before electric pencil sharpeners. Imagine that it was even before all the wilderness areas were perfectly mapped. These were the days when trolls still ruled the earth. Pretend that was a long time ago.

Suppose that a few slaves escape, and that they are able to survive in roving bands and in small communities hidden in the wilderness. A few even manage to disguise themselves as ordinary citizens and live double lives within the dominant community. Now suppose a slave living in disguise dedicates himself to the escape of other slaves. Call him Mr Byrd.

One day Mr Byrd is able to have a conversation with a slave boy named Jason. He explains to Jason that the system he lives under is immoral and unnecessary, and that there is some chance of his escaping. The boy is thrilled, and though he realizes the danger, decides to take the chance. Mr Byrd makes arrangements for the boy to meet up with Mr Malcolm, a member of one of the roving groups. They make contact at the appointed time and place and slip away into the woods. However, while they are camping out in the forest, Jason has second thoughts. He is afraid and he misses his mother. He wants to return. Mr Malcolm tries to talk him out of it, but to no avail.

Slave hunters catch Jason as he tries to return, and beat him severely. Jason has known nothing but slavery since birth, so the slave owners have little difficulty persuading him that it was a mistake to have listened to Mr Byrd or Mr Malcolm. Full of remorse Jason confesses all. Mr Byrd is caught and condemned to life in prison. A posse is sent in hot pursuit of Mr Malcolm. He escapes, but the woods are patrolled from then on with dogs to make sure other bad types never again get close enough to the plantations to enable others to escape. Jason suffers permanent injuries from the beatings he received, and his whole family is punished. Jason himself is watched more closely than any other slave on his plantation in case he should he ever entertain more thoughts about escaping.

Is it ever advisable, or even ethical, to allow sexual expression to the love feelings a man might have for a boy? The story above illustrates the context in which this question must be understood. We live in a slave society. We want to liberate ourselves and the boys we love from its bondage. Yet when we attempt to do this we place both the boys and ourselves at great risk.

Perhaps I am unfair. Do we indeed live in a slave society? And if so, who are the masters?

An old folk tale from Norway describes three troll brothers who have to share a single eye. They pass this eye back and forth as they stumble along together, taking turns using it. Western culture is ruled by three ideologies that stumble along, like the troll brothers in the story, with very limited vision. As any lover of fairy tales is well aware, knowing the names of one's adversaries gives us power over them. The three troll brothers who rule our lives are named:

- 1 Global capitalism, as seen in the practices of the international banks, monetary funds, and multinational corporations that now rule the world.

- 2 Behavioral technology, the belief in the use of biological, sociological and psychological knowledge to force human conformity to goals and aims that are not internal to the individuals being “treated.”
- 3 Puritanism, the driving force behind sexual repression.

What then is this one eye that these troll brothers share? What is the one thing that they see when they look out at the world? It is the need to control other people against their will. Around this goal they join hands, and with their limited vision they create a slave society. We work to make the rich richer, we behave like Pavlovian dogs to provide our behavioral technicians the illusion that life is predictable and controllable, and we repress our sexuality to preserve the Puritans from feeling defiled by our presence.

Sexual activities that are mutually desired between men and boys are not intrinsically hurtful. We know this through the study of anthropological reports, historical analysis, social research, and personal accounts. However our society seeks to repress such behavior through a variety of ruthless and draconian measures including ridicule, demonization of “pedophiles,” public disgrace, imprisonment, and “therapy.” Because of these punitive arrangements and attitudes, both men and boys who participate together in sexual activities are exposed to a variety of possible injuries.

Mr Byrd sits in prison and asks himself whether he has committed a crime against an objective moral order as well as against the state. After all only bad consequences have flowed from his action.

Question: Was he guilty?

## The Repression of Eros

Eros is the love of God incarnate in the world continually seeking new and more satisfying syntheses of all the manifestations of experience which constitute the universe. On the human level Eros seeks primarily more luminating patterns of understanding and more loving forms of community. Eros is at the heart of the motivational system of every person. It is the divine spark within. It can and should be trusted. Eros knows what we most want and need.

Unfortunately the child-rearing and pedagogical practices of our society are based on a profound mistrust of the Eros of children. We want children to cease to act from their own motivations. We do not want them to pursue those activities and relationships that most excite them, that they are most curious about, and that they most desire. We want children to relinquish any uniqueness in their ways of seeing. They should come to share uncritically the views, the loves, the hatreds, the prejudices and the vendettas of their society.

Those attacks on children that are aimed at suppressing their Eros by alienating them from their own motivations and ways of seeing have sometimes been referred to as ‘breaking the child.’ The cruel and violent practices often employed in breaking horses do, in fact, provide an apt metaphor for an egregious set of child-rearing practices. If ‘breaking a child’ cannot be accomplished by beatings or humiliations, it must be attempted by subterfuge.

More recently the degree of suppression that is needed for the normal functioning of our schools is accomplished with drugs. We give them Ritalin because we are no longer permitted to beat them. Always, of course, it is done in the name of the wellbeing of children. Often it is called therapy. But in reality the suppression of Eros is profoundly damaging to emotional and interpersonal health.

The central reservoir of desire in human beings is not, in its natural state, as Freud portrayed it in his concept of the Id — an antisocial monster bent only on the basest kinds of pleasure, and willing to destroy the social fabric if it gets in the way. It is important to correct this negative image of what human beings most want because it serves as the justification for all the life-hating pedagogical practices that are regularly forced on children. In so far as the most powerful life forces within children come to resemble Freud's Id, it is because these forces have been twisted through repression and fear.

Children do not need to be broken. From the moment of birth, children seek loving, bonded relationships. Children are naturally social. They want to please adults, and to imitate those that they admire. More than anything they want to belong. Children are naturally curious. They are full of questions — they want to know everything. They do not need to be broken in order to become either socialized or interested in learning. Breaking children, in fact, produces antisocial impulses and crushes the natural curiosity, which should be a primary motivation for learning. A society that requires the breaking of children in order to survive is not a society worth preserving. Even horses do not need to be broken.

Sex is only one of the many forms that Eros takes. However, in our society sex has a special significance because the most powerful attacks on the Eros of children are generally aimed at the body and its desires. The myth of the sexless child is used to justify the alienation of children from their own sexual interests and feelings. Any act on the child's part that challenges this myth is cause for concern and is responded to in a punishing manner. Children are only begrudgingly allowed to masturbate, are seldom allowed to run naked, are shamed if they express too much interest in the bodies of other people, are humiliated should sexual interest become attached to those of the same sex, and are verbally and at times physically attacked should they involve themselves in sex play with other children. And should a child exhibit that most horrifying of all possible manifestations of Eros — a sexualized interest in an adult — that is taken as proof that he or she has been abused. The cumulative effect of this is that children learn to experience the body as a place of dangerous, shameful, and dirty impulses. This is the normal way of raising children in our society. This is the way good parents and teachers do it.

When the natural Eros of children is crushed by their caregivers, children feel rage. The erotic impulses refuse to go away, even though their expression is forbidden. These impulses fester outside the range of verbal consciousness and then merge with the rage created by the repression. Finally, these combined energies re-emerge, organized around metaphors of sexualized rage: the club, the battering ram, the sword, the gun, the loud and powerful airplane or car, the missile, and the bomb. This rage must be displaced — it must be directed away from the parents, teachers and caregivers who are responsible for the repression. It is too difficult to live without the approval and support of the people one loves.

Certainly one does not want to destroy them. So the sexualized rage is redirected toward enemies. Any group that we can learn to see as less than human will serve as the needed scapegoat. The repression of Eros in children ultimately leads to the creation of violent, empty citizens who are alienated from their real needs and wishes and who are all too willing to persecute and even kill enemies of various kinds.

A society based on the repression of Eros requires enemies. It is not primarily within the exceptional and the deviant patterns in this society that we must seek the seeds of violence. Rather, violence is initiated, sustained and fostered by the normal and accepted practices with regard to how we raise our children and treat one another. Naturally any society is loath to permit any serious questioning its own most fundamental assumptions about the good life. But this is what is needed if we are to become less violent. Specifically we must reassess the deep-rooted assumption that civilized life requires repression. We must examine our fear of Eros and all the harmful child-rearing and pedagogical practices that grow out of this fear.

## Mental Health and Law Enforcement

Perhaps it was the experience of powerlessness in my own particular situation that prompted me write to a supreme court justice when a critical case having to do with expanding the power of the mental health section of society came before the Supreme Court. I was doubtful that I would have any more impact on there than I did on the people in my immediate circumstances who were frustrating my hopes and aims. But taking some action on a national level at least felt like a form of power and possible influence. I wrote the following letter:

Your Honorable Sandra Day O'Connor,

The Kansas vs Crane case highlights the issue of the role of the legal system versus the role of the mental health system in a free society.

Whenever the mental health system has taken a leading role in issues of law enforcement, it has been to the detriment of civil liberties. I would cite the incarceration of political dissidents in communist Russia in mental hospitals, the Chinese practice of brain-washing and the shameful role of psychiatry in the Third Reich as examples that are generally known. Sacrificing civil liberties and due process under the banner of mental health will have the same deleterious effects in the United States as in any other country.

Law enforcement is appropriately based on the science of jurisprudence. It is public in its mode of operation. It necessarily uses coercion, and it exists for the protection of society as a whole. Law enforcement focuses on behavior; it acknowledges that people are free to think and feel as they wish.

Mental health, on the other hand, is grounded in the sciences of sociology, psychology and biology. Its mode of operation must be private,



as it cannot function without the protection of confidentiality. Its primary mandate is to facilitate the health, happiness and self-realization of individuals. It is concerned with the whole person, including thoughts, feeling and behavior. The institutions of law enforcement and those of mental health are appropriately distinct in their methods, their domains, and their aims.

It is probably no accident that the most current move to allow the mental health system to usurp more of the power that is appropriately vested in the legal system involves a sex offender. The emotionality of the issue serves to obstruct clear thinking. As a group, people who have been incarcerated for sex offenses have been demonized and they have no effective advocates. They are unable to defend themselves. Over and above the issue that this group has the right to the same constitutional safeguards as any other group, there is a larger concern. A loss of constitutional protection for any group in our society sets a dangerous precedent, and is therefore a threat to the civil liberties of all citizens.

A number of misconceptions give the erroneous appearance of reasonableness to the notion that we can safely use the mental health system to decide which sex offenders will be incarcerated, perhaps for life, and which will go free:

- 1 It is assumed that psychiatrists are able to predict the future behavior of individual as lot better than other people. In fact the track record for mental health workers being able to predict future behavior is little better than anyone else's.
- 2 It is assumed that there is a distinct and fairly small group in the country who are sexually arousable to individuals of an illegal age, and that these individuals are incapable of controlling their behavior. In fact, social research shows that about 25% of all males are strongly sexually attracted to children or young adolescents with whom it would be illegal to have sexual relationships, and the vast majority of these people do control their behavior.
- 3 It is assumed that the mental health interventions are based on a scientific set of diagnostic categories of proved validity and reliability. In fact, the most generally used diagnostic manual (The DSM) is a highly impressionistic and political document with no coherent underlying theoretical basis. An example of this would be the debates that led to the re-categorizing of the diagnosis of homosexuality. Both the original classification and the change were based on political, not scientific, consideration.
- 4 It is assumed that we can safely entrust psychiatrists and other mental health workers to decide who shall be incarcerated and who shall go free with a minimum of legal constraints and safeguards. If history has taught us anything, it is that no individual or groups can safely be given near total power over others.





When the mental health system is enlisted to do the work of the legal system, it makes for both bad law enforcement and bad psychotherapy. Due process and safeguards for civil liberties are lost on the side of law enforcement.

Confidentiality and a client centered philosophy are sacrificed in the mental health domain. Everybody loses. I hope that the Supreme Court will view the matter of *Kansas vs Crane* in this larger context, and take this opportunity to reaffirm the constitutional principles upon which our country is based.

The health of our society depends upon preventing the further erosion of the distinction between jurisprudence and mental health.

## **The Further Adventures of the Bodhisattva**

The story is that the illumined one came to the edge of this vale of tears – this realm of duality – and was on the verge of stepping into the dimension of perfect unruffled bliss, and that he then paused and chose to return. It was, the story goes, compassion that brought him back and led to his famous vow that he would not separate himself from this world of struggle and difficulty until every sentient being was liberated from suffering.

Well, that's close. He was indeed compassionate, and that has something to do with the story, but actually it didn't happen quite the way it has been handed down. Being the most enlightened entity of his day he came to realize that he simply couldn't take that final step by himself, even if he wanted to, for the simple reason that on some deep level we are all one, and therefore so long as anyone suffers we all suffer.

Furthermore he also saw that the realm of perfect bliss in the unmoving center of all things exists as the unmoving center of a wheel, the spokes and rim of which are meant to move. Hence, the goal of spiritual development is not to escape this wheel which is the world of becoming, but to transform our manner of being in it.

His actual vow at that time was to hold off doing anything very decisive until he had a few more centuries to think it through more carefully. Later he came to think of this as his First, or his Wishy-Washy vow. It was not a vow he talked a great deal about, realizing perhaps that it didn't have a nice ring to it. "I vow to bide my time and think things through a bit more." It was not the sort of thing that makes for a good story or lofty poetry.

To his credit he tried to explain everything to the scribes of his day. He mentioned his vow, which he admitted, really wasn't so much a vow as it was an interim plan to tide him over until he could think of something better. He said he didn't mind if they chose to call it a vow, but he then tried to explain about how he couldn't have gone anywhere in any case, unless everybody was ready to go with him, which was really the important point. The scribes, however, were much like the scribes of every tradition and of all times, and they simply could not or would not hear any idea that varied in the least from what they already thought. So they wrote down an account that seriously misrepresented what he told them.

In time the Bodhisattva came to realize that, although he could live without eating or drinking, and could move mountains, and could understand mysteries

deeper than the oceans, and could heal the sick, and could work all manner of miracles, he could not change the mind of a scribe. So he withdrew from the realm of the respectable.

He became a wanderer once again – a vagabond – a man without a home either in this realm or the next. He wandered through many incarnations determined to understand why humanity could not realize its true nature. He became mentally ill and spent time in state hospitals. He became retarded and spent time in institutions for people who could not tie their shoes. He became a criminal and spent time in prisons. He became a bag lady and an illegal alien and a beggar. He spent several incarnations living the lives of different sex perverts, and he enjoyed their pleasure and suffered their condemnation. And he said to himself, “what shall I do for this humanity that cannot seem to understand that they share a single wound?” And that was when he made his vow.

He stepped outside the circle of acceptable humanity and went to live with the riffraff, the outcasts, the slime-balls, the ignorant, the deformed, and the demented, and he vowed that he would never step back into the circle of acceptable humanity again until every last broken and despicable specimen was welcomed back with him. He felt this was a great improvement over his Wishy-Washy vow. “For the whole problem is that we draw a circle that can leave somebody out,” he said. “That’s the most important Noble Truth.” He dictated this to the scribes, and again they couldn’t hear.

## Closing Note

One might conclude from the preceding account that I do not believe that intergenerational sexual activity between consenting individuals in the context of a caring relationship is intrinsically harmful to the younger partner. One could deduce from many of my comments that I feel it is grossly unfair to the “perpetrators” of sex crimes to fail to make a distinction between acts that actually are violent, intrusive and harmful, and those that are mutually desired. One might also surmise that I think that the manner in which this sort of thing is responded to in our society is hateful, unfeeling and barbaric in the extreme, and that it is driven by a sexual hysteria that is no more enlightened nor less damaging than the hysteria that drove the panic about boys masturbating in the 19th century. Finally one might be led to believe that I think that this hysteria seriously warps our society in a large variety of ways, to the injury of those who it purports to protect as well as to the general population. And all this is true. Those are my beliefs.

At the same time I would not encourage men in this society to allow their affectionate and loving relationships with boys to become explicitly sexual. The consequences that follow from breaking societal norms are culturally specific. In our culture the consequences for the boy as well as for the man can be catastrophic. This is true even if those consequences follow not from the intrinsic harm of the activity but from the blind and cruel reactions of society that is in the throes of a moral panic.