

Freedom



Inside

A Newsletter For Prisoners
Based on the Conversations with God Material

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Random Acts...

How often do you hear that people are so much more selfish now than they used to be? That way back when, people could walk anywhere without fear of violence; that neighbors could count on one another in times of need.

It seems to me that nowadays the news broadcasts are full of examples of men and women being randomly violent, thoughtlessly and often cruelly selfish. Road rage, drive-by shootings, people being mugged, raped, or even murdered just because they happen to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Many of our movies today show the very same thing: random acts of violence.

Is it any wonder we all have come to believe we live in a world where it is every man /woman for him/herself? But is it really how things are?

If people will only act if their own survival is somehow guaranteed or enhanced by their behavior, what then of all the heroes of the world? The ones who put themselves in danger in order to save a stranger? Firefighters do that all the time. But one could say it takes a special kind of person to

choose to become a firefighter. So how about those who come to the rescue of accident victims on the side of the road?

When you ask them why they jumped into a burning car to save

"If people will only act if their own survival is somehow guaranteed or enhanced by their behavior, what then of all the heroes of the world?"

a complete stranger, they very often say they didn't think, they just acted. On the other hand passersby often state they didn't get involved for fear of injury, that is, after having evaluated the danger, they choose not to act. How could rescuers do what they do if we were fundamentally selfish, if survival was the most powerful force within us? If self-interest guides our most basic actions, how then can we explain the action of the rescuer when he sometimes doesn't even stick around to be thanked?

It is one of my most profound beliefs that we are not inherently selfish people. That there is a reason we say giving is better than receiving. That none of us can truly be happy unless we contribute to the world in a very meaningful way. And that the more

meaning we give to our contribution, the more happiness we feel. How's that for a rose-colored, goodie-two-shoes point of view?

I can just see you guys rolling your eyes (and while your eyes are off the page, take a look around you) and thinking, "Janine is really living in a dream world, isn't she?" And maybe I am...but I like it a lot...so bear with me for a bit.

What if I'm right? What if we are all made of the same stuff? The same good, strong, loving stuff?

That would explain why if I ask you to remember a time with you felt really happy, you'll remember a time when you loved and were loved? How come I know that?

(By the way, I'm willing to be proven wrong here, so I'm sending a challenge, a dare even: tell me of a time when you felt wonderful about yourself, truly happy and it had NOTHING to do with the love you had to give. I dare you, double dare you! But first, you'll have to decide and tell me what happiness is for you. See box on page 2)

So let's get back to my point here: what if we are basically good? What if the random acts of violence we hear so much about are a cover-up for who we really are?

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Random Acts...
(continued from page 1)

What if the rage is covering up a hurt we've been feeling for so long we can't even imagine not feeling it anymore? What then?

few and far between acts of kindness can feel in there.

Unobtrusively. Anonymously. Let's spread kindness wherever we are and not expect anything in return.

Have any of you read the book, "Pay It Forward", by Catherine Ryan Hyde? (They made a movie from it). It is about a boy who decides to help three people, asking each one to help three more in turn. It was his hope that this chain of kindness would go all around the world and would make it a better place.

Some say they are also infrequent on the outside.

It can be a kind word, a small gesture, a smile, anything that occurs to us on any given day.

The author, Ms. Hyde, was victim of an accident like the one I described at the beginning of this article. She was rescued from her burning car by two strangers who covered her with a blanket, called 911, and disappeared. She wanted to at least thank them but was not able to find out who her heroes were.

*What Is Happiness?
What does happiness look like to you?
Is it being in a romantic relationship?
Is it being successful at work?
A raise? A promotion?
Is it having children?
Is it finding True Love?
Getting married?
What is happiness to you?*

Mother Teresa used to say there was no such thing as true altruism because we always receiving something very valuable whenever we help another.

Let's prove her right. I know this will change our lives. I know that the simple fact of focusing my attention on whom I can help will make my day brighter. I know this. I just know it.

She vowed to "pay it forward" and has been doing so whenever the occasion arises. The only thing she asks is that the people she helps pass the kindness on whenever they can.

Think about it for a bit and see how you would answer this question. It's not as easy as one would think, especially seeing how often we say we want to be happy.

*What would make you completely happy?
What kind of things would keep you happy?
Can someone else 'make' you happy?
Can someone 'make' you unhappy?
What does it feel like to BE happy?
What does it take?
Think about it
Find your own answers
And share them with us if you would
That would make me really happy!*

Please join me in this chain of kindness I am starting and if you wish to write about the difference it is making in your life, I would love to hear from you.

Random acts of violence. Random acts of kindness. Or unconscious acts. Only one of these is designed to make us happy. Only one of these is who we are.



The choice is ours to make each and every day. It is the eternal choice between love and fear.

A movement called World Kindness was born in Japan in 1997. This is where the idea of 'random acts of kindness' was born. Today over 20 different countries have similar organizations (US, Canada, Brazil, Australia among others). Could this be happening if we, as some think, are basically selfish people?

I am asking each of you to start thinking about acts of kindness. Random acts of kindness, meaning they are not to friends, family or loved ones. And, if you feel like joining the major league, make your acts of kindness totally selfless, not designed to help us in any way, including receiving a person's gratitude.

Are we willing to choose Love? Are we willing to let go of fear? Are we willing to love beyond all understanding? Beyond all reasoning? Beyond all? Are we willing to love as God loves us? It's your choice. It's my choice. It's our choice.

I would like us to start our own movement. Those of you living in an incarcerated setting know how

Let's all try to find small ways to make someone else's life better.

*Let's choose wisely.
In love,
Janine*

Happiness

by Marianne Williamson

For almost every worldly source of happiness, there is a fear-based reason to worry. We may have incredible children, for instance, but a day doesn't go by that we're not concerned about their welfare for one reason or another. The very fact that we love our children so much, juxtaposed with all the danger in the world, is enough to keep any parent anxious. We may have a great career, but the pressures are intense. We may have wonderful relationships, but people are still people. We may have a lovely home but there are big responsibilities to that one, too. Children are happy be-

cause they don't yet have a file in their minds called "All the Things That Could Go Wrong". They don't have a mind-set that puts "Things to Fear" before "Things to Love". Unless we can be like little children, we can't enter into the kingdom of heaven; unless we can be like little children, we can't be happy. Children are happy because they don't have all the facts yet. Facts are what we must completely let go of if we want to be happy. We must *decide* to fly above the turmoil if we really want to fly above it. We must ignore, maturely not immaturely, a whole realm of so-called meaning. As

long as our self-identification centers around what we call the real world, no profound happiness is possible. Happiness requires that we give up a worldly orientation—not worldly *things* but a worldly *attachment* to things. We have to surrender all outcomes. We have to live here but appreciate the joke. In order to be happy, we must become bigger than the worldly self. It's a phenomenal challenge to do that, because the world does not support our expansion into superbeings. Just as children play games in which they pretend to be adults, and thus pave the way for adulthood, so you

and I must pretend to be angelic, noble, enlightened spirits just visiting here, in order to actually become them. This planet is being peopled by superior creatures who are going to save us, but they aren't arriving from the outside; they're our future selves coming back to pick us up, in order that there might *be* a future. We're being beckoned by fellows up ahead on the road, and as we look at them, our walk to where they are goes faster. That's how religious worship works: It collapses the time it takes to reach the spiritual vicinity of who and what we worship.

Dear God,

Please make me a force for Good.
Remove from my awareness all thoughts that keep me bound here.
Every goal I surrender to You.
All agendas I surrender to You.

All I have and all I am I give to You.

I ask only to be carried in Your arms that I might know the joy of full surrender.

May I not be tempted to think about meaningless things
and give them weight and suffer thereby.

Please send Your spirit to lift me up, above the pain and turmoil of this world.

Please give me new youth, and a free and joyful spirit.

Show me the happiness of full forgiveness.

Whomever I do not forgive, dear Lord, please show me how,
for I wish to be free of the guilt of this world.

Dear God,

Please make me happy.

I am ready to outgrow my childish pain.

Amen.

from: Illuminata. A Return to Prayer (1994)

Stories from
Chicken Soup for the Prisoner's Soul (2000)
Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen and Tom Lagana

Its Rightful Owner

A smile is the shortest distance between two people.

Victor Borge

I spent twenty years at Bastrop Federal Prison and didn't open up to the friendship around me until the last few years. My past crimes included assaults and escapes, and for the first fifteen years, I was known as one of the coldest, most hardened criminals in the system.

One morning while I was in the hallway, a prison psychologist, Dr. Geraldine Nagy, stepped out of her office and almost bumped into my 275 pounds of brutal hostility. As we made eye contact, a smile appeared on her face. "Good morning, David," she said, as she stuck out her hand. I was dumbstruck that she knew my name; I had never gone near her office.

I managed to say, "Good morning," as I shook her hand.

Dr. Nagy walked down the hall, then turned back and said, "Do you ever smile?"

"Yeah," I answered, "sometimes."

"Find somebody you feel comfortable with, and try it today." She smiled, waved and walked away.

Dr. Nagy's moment of kindness toward me that day helped change my life. I took her advice and the smiles led to friendships—and ultimately to a pivotal, permanent change in me.

After twenty years in prison, I'm now free and successful. Practicing random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty helped hand my life back to its rightful owner—me.

David Smith

Submitted by Perry Arledge

Serving Others While Serving Time

The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.

Albert Schweitzer

After being released from thirty hours in a holding cell without a bed, I was shown to my bunk. I was scared, angry and upset—mostly with myself. My designated spot was the top bunk (without a ladder), in a group of four double bunks. They were squeezed in a small alcove outside some cells. The prison was overcrowded with nearly a thousand prisoners in a facility meant to hold less than four hundred.

I arrived there about 1:30 in the morning and collapsed in exhaustion, despite the bright overhead lights.

At 6 A.M. we were awakened for breakfast, which consisted of a small box of cold cereal, milk and Kool-Aid. In the bunk below me was a stocky, bald man in his mid-thirties, who introduced himself as DeMo. It took me a while to get the rhythm of his speech. He not only spoke in street language, but he had a slight speech impediment.

DeMo asked me, "Wha fo dey gots an old man likes you up dere?"

"I guess it was the only bunk available," I answered.

"We sees bout dat," he said, and left me wondering what he had in mind as he walked purposefully down the stairs to the

tier below. He came back a few minutes later, and informed me that one of the other prisoners in our little alcove was moving to another module that day, and I would be moving into a bottom bunk. Later, I found out most inmates had to wait several months before moving to a bottom bunk. DeMo also got me an extra pillow and blanket. He filled me in on the basic routine of our module, which contained about 120 prisoners on two levels. I thanked DeMo and asked if there was anything I could do for him. He assured me there wasn't.

Now, I have to confess I was somewhat suspicious of his kindness and hospitality. After all, this was just my third day in jail. He didn't seem a likely candidate to make any undesired advances, and I couldn't imagine what else he might want from a fifty-six-year-old man. My cynicism quickly abated as I began to understand that what DeMo most craved in his life was order in the midst of chaos. He made certain our little alcove was always clean and neat, no one stole anything and we got extra treats from time to time. This crack addict and dealer from the streets of Oakland was a superb manager of his environment.

As we became friends, I came to understand DeMo. Through his numerous experiences in prison, he learned that serving others was a satisfying way to serve time. I started looking for ways to contribute. I became a human spell-checker for the upper tier. When an inmate was writing a letter and needed a word spelled, I was there to

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Stories from
Chicken Soup for the
Prisoner's Soul

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shout it out.

When I was transferred to a federal institution, we had typewriters available. As an accurate and fast typist, my services were in high demand, so I found another way to serve. I became friendly with Jihad 2X, the Nation of Islam minister/inmate, who was a gifted, though not professionally trained, speaker. I shared some of my twenty-five-years of experience as a professional speaker with him.

Another friend, Luis, was intimidated by a literature course offered by the local community college. I encouraged him to overcome his insecurities about the English language. He in turn helped me learn some Spanish.

I did these things because they took me out of myself and out of my own difficult situation. They also empowered me. Although I'm serving time in prison, I can still encourage and support other human beings. There's nothing more spiritually rewarding and satisfying on this planet than loving and serving others.

Jerry Gillies

The one thing we have to offer in this life, of any real value, is our time to others.

Richard Ogren

Do you have a poem that reflects the message in Freedom Inside?

If so, send it in, it just may be chosen for a future.

POETRY CORNER

Excerpt from *Man's Search For Meaning*
by Viktor E. Frankl (1959)
a survivor of WWII concentration camps

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded into the form of the typical inmate.

Seen from this point of view, the mental reactions of the inmates of a concentration camp must seem more to us than the mere expression of certain physical and sociological conditions. Even though conditions such as lack of sleep, insufficient food and various mental stresses may suggest that the inmates were bound to react in certain ways, in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally, therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him—mentally and spiritually. He may retain his human dignity even in a concentration camp. Dostoevski said once, "There is only one thing that I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings." These

words frequently came to my mind after I became acquainted with those martyrs whose behavior in camp, whose suffering and death, bore witness to the fact that the last inner freedom cannot be lost. It can be said that they were worthy of their sufferings; the way they bore their suffering was a genuine inner achievement. It is the spiritual freedom—which cannot be taken away—that makes life meaningful and purposeful.

An active life serves the purpose of giving man the opportunity to realize values in creative work, while a passive life of enjoyment affords him the opportunity to obtain fulfillment in experiencing beauty, art, or nature. But there is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces. A creative life and a life of enjoyment are banned to him. But not only creativeness and enjoyment are meaningful. If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.

The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity—even under the most difficult circumstances—to add a deeper meaning to his life. It may remain brave, dignified and unselfish. Or in the bitter fight for self-preservation he may forgo the opportunities of attaining the

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Excerpt from *Man's Search For Meaning*

(continued from page 5)

moral values that a difficult situation may afford him. And this decides whether he is worthy of his sufferings or not.

Do not think that these considerations are unworldly and too far removed from real life. It is true that only a few people are capable of reaching such high moral standards. Of the prisoners only a few kept their full inner liberty and obtained those values which their suffering afforded, but even one such example is sufficient proof that man's inner strength may raise him above his outward fate. Such men are not only in concentration camps. Everywhere man is confronted with fate, with the chance of achieving something through his own suffering.

[...]

We have stated that that which was ultimately responsible for the state of the prisoner's inner self was not so much the enumerated psychophysical causes as it was the result of a free decision. Psychological observations of the prisoners have shown that only the men who allowed their inner hold on their moral and spiritual selves to subside eventually fell victim to the camp's degenerating influences. The question now arises, what could, or should, have constituted this "inner hold"?

Former prisoners, when writing or relating their experiences, agree that the most depressing influence of all was that a prisoner could not know how long his term of imprisonment would be. He had been given no date for his release. (In our camp it was pointless even to talk about it.) Actually a prison term was not only uncertain but unlimited. A well-known research psychologist

has pointed out that life in a concentration camp could be called a "provisional existence". We can add to this by defining it as a "provisional existence of unknown limit."

[...]

One of the prisoners, who on his arrival marched with a long column of new inmates from the station to the camp, told me later that he had felt as though he were marching at his own funeral. His life had seemed to him absolutely without future. He regarded it as over and done, as if he had already died. This feeling of lifelessness was intensified by other causes: in time, it was the limitlessness of the term of imprisonment which was most acutely felt; in space, the narrow limits of the prison. Anything outside the barbed wire became remote—out of reach and, in a way, unreal. The event and the people outside, all the normal life there, had a ghostly aspect for the prisoner. The outside life, that is, as much as he could see of it, appeared to him almost as it might have to a dead man who looked at it from another world.

A man who let himself decline because he could not see any future goal found himself occupied with retrospective thoughts. In a different connection, we have already spoken of the tendency there was to look into the past, to help make the present, with all its horrors, less real. But in robbing the present of its reality there lay a certain danger. It became easy to overlook the opportunities to make something positive of camp life, opportunities which really did exist. Regarding our "provisional existence" as unreal was in itself an important factor in causing the prisoners to lose their hold on life; every-

thing in a way became pointless. Such people forgot that often it is just such an exceptionally difficult external situation which gives man the opportunity to grow spiritually beyond himself. Instead of taking the camp's difficulties as a test of their inner strength, they did not take their life seriously and despised it as something of no consequence. They preferred to close their eyes and to live in the past. Life for such people became meaningless.

Naturally only a few people were capable of reaching great spiritual heights. But a few were given the chance to attain human greatness even through their apparent worldly failure and death, an accomplishment which in ordinary circumstances they would never have achieved. To the others of us, the mediocre and the half-hearted, the words of Bismark could be applied: "Life is like being at the dentist. You always think that the worst is still to come, and yet it is over already." Varying this, we could say that most men in a concentration camp believed that the real opportunities of life had passed. Yet, in reality, there was an opportunity and a challenge. One could make a victory of those experiences, tuning life into an inner triumph, or one could ignore the challenge and simply vegetate, as did a majority of the prisoners.

from:

Man's Search For Meaning
(1959) pp 65-72

By Viktor E. Frankl

Living for Life

Think as I think,
 And try as I might.
 Writing every night,
 I pray for some Light

From darker than darkness
 To brighter than light
 My shadow-self wants to hide
 My inner-self want to take flight.

In my soul, I'm free
 But in my ego, I'm chained
 For a lifetime of struggle
 Little has been gained.

I'm learning to be
 Rather than trying to try
 I'm living for life
 Rather than dying to die

Then my mind came to a rest
 And I finally learned to let go
 Now, I'm loving what I reap
 Because I'm blessing what I sow.

WPR
 MD

The Sunset

I watched the nicest sunset last night.
 It had the most vivid
 pinks and oranges.
 I sat watching the beautiful sky; it is so strange how
 something so simple can change your emotions.
 I sat watching the sunset, sitting in the cold
 fresh air,
 staring at the sky
 and even the razor wire fence in the midst of it all
 somehow disappears
 and everything is so perfect, no matter where you are.
 I am in prison and yet I can walk around
 so happy
 because of an every day occurrence like that.
 So simple and yet so complicated,
 When you look at the bigger picture.

JS
 FL



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