Caring for a Dying Man

“Choices for end-of-life patients in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation are few, not like on the streets. So we play the hand as it’s dealt. We have hospice, but that’s really only for the men who have days left. Palliative care is for the men who have months remaining, perhaps a year to 18 months. No matter what, a friendship happens.”

My Monday Privileges

BY TONY TRIPLETT  |  Tony Triplett writes from Stateville Correctional Center, Ill.

As I stand over the stainless steel toilet, brushing my teeth with a toothbrush that’s smaller than my finger, I can’t help but exude excitement. It’s Monday, which means a visit from my 9-year-old daughter. The anticipation is so overwhelming, I almost drink the brownish waste that comes from the sink. Gathering my bearings, I grab a bottle of water, rinse out my mouth and continue to prepare myself for a stressful two and a half hours.

Inside the walls of Stateville Correctional Center, every incarcerated resident is allotted a certain amount of privileges based on their individual behavior. Privileges consist of the following: recreation (yard), commissary, phone, tablets, job assignments and various electronic devices. Despite all those privileges allotted to us, no privilege surpasses that of the in-person visit. While the penal institution views you as a number, the in-person visit allows you to become a personal definition of yourself. In my case, an in-person visit allows me to become a father. After rinsing my mouth out, I dab on my cologne, which is made up of magazine strips diluted into water.

Now that I’m smelling good, I put on my pressed prison blues, which consist of a sky blue shirt and navy blue khaki pants. I slip on my all-white Nike uptown sneakers, and stare at pictures of my daughter while I wait for the officer to come and take me to the visiting room.

Out of all the pictures I have of me and my daughter, there are two that stand out the most. One is a picture of me and her at her kindergarten graduation. We’re standing side by side with matching smiles as our almond-colored eyes stare back at the camera. A smile that tells me two things: the first being that I’m still her hero, and the second saying “I’m gonna love you no matter what.”

... continued on PAGE 1

Earthquake Builds Community, Culture for Haitians

The PJP team annotated this article to give you an idea of what we thought worked really well and how we would further develop this piece to make it more journalistically relevant.

Left Behind: Why Aren’t More Rehabilitated, Aging Prisoners Being Released?

PJP writer Robert Ehrenberg writes about aging prisoners. According to a Marshall Project analysis of data from the National Corrections Reporting Program, the percentage of people in state prisons who were 55 and older tripled to 165,000 in 2016, compared to 2000. According to Bureau of Prisons data as of Sept. 11, 2021, more than 18,000 of the federal prison population are 56 and older.

“I know there are many people in society who believe in letting prisoners go if they’re rehabilitated. But if society promotes forgiveness, why then are men like Stan left behind and forgotten? There should be a way to re-evaluate and release worthy individuals through clemency, so they have a shot at redemption. I should not be an exception.”
Our team has one goal in mind when we show up to work every day: to train incarcerated writers to be journalists and to publish their stories.

Write for Prison Journalism Project

WHO: First-time and experienced writers and artists who are incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, family members, corrections officers, prison educators and others involved in the criminal justice system or affected by the experience of prison or jail.

WHAT: Submissions under 1200 words. No more than ONE STORY or THREE POEMS per submission. Please submit only your best work.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

A recording of yourself or an interview with others, no more than two minutes in length.

PHOTO ESSAY:

Categories

REPORTED NEWS AND FEATURES: Articles based on reporting and research that tell people about things that actually happened.

ESSAY: Essays and memoirs about something you experienced.

OP-EDS: Opinion articles and commentary with a thesis or a call to action.

NARRATIVE POETRY: Poems that tell true stories.

PHOTO ESSAY: Up to 5 photos with 3-5 sentence captions describing the photo and the context. The photos should collectively tell a story.

ART: Sketches, paintings and other art that illustrate a scene or person life as seen by your cell, Chow Hall, places of worship, the Yard, etc. Please highlight notable features in a few sentences.

AUDIO STORIES: A recording of yourself or an interview with others, no more than two minutes in length.

WHERE TO SEND SUBMISSIONS

Prison Messaging: We are on JPay, Securus, Corrlinks, DTL Connect Network and GTL Getting Out. Send messages to pjp@prisonjournalismproject.org

E-mail: submissions@prisonjournalismproject.org

Postal Mail

Prison Journalism Project
2083 Philadelphia Pike #1954
Claymont, DE 19703

Photos/Art Only:
PJP Art Department
2825 Alcatraz Ave. #238, Berkeley, CA 94705

The Prison Journalism Project is an independent, nonprofit, non-partisan national initiative. We work with incarcerated writers and those impacted by incarceration to train them in the tools of journalism and help them reach a wide audience through our publications as well as through collaborations with mainstream media. We believe that the deep reforms that are necessary to fix the U.S. criminal justice system can only happen by shifting the narrative. Intentional, responsible and well-crafted journalism from within the incarcerated community can break stereotypes, increase transparency and drive change.

PJP TEAM

Yukari Iwatanien Kane
Founder, Executive Director, Editor-in-Chief

Shaheen Pasha
Founder, Executive Director, Chief Education Officer

Kate McQueen
Director of Special Projects, Managing Editor of PJP Inside

Teresa Tauchi
Director of Product and Marketing

Brooke Lochiatto
Community Manager

Mike Givens
Copy Editor

Marcus Henderson
SPU PJP Chapter President

PJP 4 SCHOOL

Yukari Kane
Shaheen Pasha
Kate McQueen
Jim Marshall, Raz Sibi

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ince June 2020, we’ve started two publications that help us meet that goal. The first is our digital magazine – also called Prison Journalism Project – where we publish up to four pieces of journalism, opinion, personal essays, poetry or art daily. The second is this print newspaper, PJP x Inside. It contains only a very small digest of some of the favorite pieces published in our magazine during the previous six months, plus some educational materials designed to support independent learning.

We created PJP x Inside especially for our writers – past, present and future – so that you can read your work collectively and learn from each other. And who, you might wonder, is the target audience for PJP x Inside? Anyone with a computer or a smartphone and an internet connection can access the magazine on our website for free. Since we’re presenting new work, someone would need to collect a lot of data yet. But we do know PJP has a growing audience that extends across the U.S. and beyond its borders. We have readers in Canada, the U.K., and even in a few countries in Europe, Asia and South America. We believe that our online readers are people who care about social and criminal justice but aren’t necessarily touched by it directly. Going forward, we’d like to reach more friends and family of people who are incarcerated, so please encourage your folks to check us out on social media (Instagram, Facebook or Twitter) and on our website. If your family and friends are looking specifically for work you’ve published with PJP, they can find your name and a link to your profile page organized in the “Our Writers” section (under the “About” tab at the top of the website).

We hope that knowing a bit more about who reads your work encour-
ges you to keep submitting, or to submit for the first time!

With appreciation,
Kate, Yukari, Shaheen, Teresa, Brooke and the whole PJP Team

TO DONATE ONLINE

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To promote a writing program (contest, submissions call, etc.) in a future PJP Inside edition, contact PJP at submissions@prisonjournalismproject.org.
Caring for a Dying Man

BY RICK ALLEN VANCE
[Bio: Rick Allen Vance writes from California Health Care Facility in Stockton, Calif.]

I walk across the empty yard. It is 10 p.m. and everyone is locked up asleep for the night. But my day is just starting. I try and gather my thoughts before arriving at the palliative care unit.

I work at the California Health Care facility and I have one person on my watch who receives one-on-one constant care in his cell. There have been three long days for my friend who has “tipped over.”

The wind is cool as I make my way through the gate and process the question and begin to tell her the story of Marvin Wheatley, which some claim is a prison myth within the walls of any penal institution.

According to the legend, Marvin Wheatley was sentenced to life in prison. During a prison riot, he was stabbed 26 times and pronounced dead on the scene. His body was then shipped to the coroner’s office, where he miraculously came back to life.

As expected, Wheatley was sent back to prison to serve his sentence. Unfortunately for the criminal justice system, Wheatley’s attorney had other things in mind. Armed with incident reports and medical records, his attorney was able to get Wheatley’s sentence overturned to time served, since you only have one life to live. And since he was pronounced dead, his new life constituted a new sentence, which resulted in his freedom.

In a country in which we in a country in which we are taught to view the incarcerated population as numbers, this piece invites us to treat each number as a human being. The author is both a father and a son with emotions, desires and a sense of humor — PJP Fellow Justin Lukash

As if on cue, my daughter asks one of her off-the-wall questions. “Daddy, why would the judge give you two natural life sentences, when you only live once?” she asked.

I don’t answer immediately. I just digest her question, while my mother gives her a look that speaks volumes. I process the question and begin to tell her the story of Marvin Wheatley, which some claim is a prison myth within the walls of any penal institution.

According to the legend, Marvin Wheatley was sentenced to life in prison. During a prison riot, he was stabbed 26 times and pronounced dead on the scene. His body was then shipped to the coroner’s office, where he miraculously came back to life.

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My daughter takes in the story thoughtfully before finally responding. “Well, if that story’s true, Daddy, will you please die twice already?” she says in an annoyed tone.

I can’t help but laugh and cherish the moment. Because in that moment I become more than a number. I’m a son. A father. A human.

A new sentence, which resulted in his freedom.
As a journalist who is imprisoned, I have a somewhat unfair “inside” advantage when I report stories. Unlike outside journalists who don’t have the luxury of walking around a prison to ask inmates questions, I can conduct unrestricted interviews with any prisoner I come into contact with on the yard. I can also encourage prisoners to answer survey questions without the permission of the warden or the aid of a public information officer (PIO).

That being the case, I’m able to conduct controlled surveys and report on my findings. It helps that I studied statistics and research methods in college, so I know how to gather information, rank my data and create charts and graphs. I use that knowledge to conduct controlled surveys that I publish in San Quentin News, where I am on the staff. The Prison Journalism Project (PJP) has also published my survey on attitudes toward the COVID-19 vaccination.

In a carceral environment, it’s important to know what subject matter to write about and whom to interview. After 25 years, I know who’s who in prison. Many issues that affect prisoners are oftentimes of interest to me as a freelance prison journalist is a California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation release form. After I collect the 3-inch-by-5-inch slips of paper, I record and transcribe the answers and data onto a single page. I might use comments from the survey to answer survey questions without the permission of the warden on the day. I also provided a small space for comments. Because they were anonymous, I could not go back to someone who failed to complete all questions.

Like any survey, the questions vary, based on what the story is about. For many reasons I may have to target a specific group of prisoners or a specific inmate to do an interview. Regulations do not allow the outside media this kind of leeway. For example, one regulation reads, “Inmates may not participate in specific-person face-to-face interviews except as provided in subsection 3665.5(b).” Also, something else that does not necessarily apply to me as a freelance prison journalist is a California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation release form.

However, generally speaking it’s important to include all races (i.e., Black, Hispanic/Latino(a), White, Asian and other) to make sure your results are balanced. In my opinion, for example, it would be presumptuous and biased to assume Blacks are the only group with views on Black Lives Matter or that Asians are the only leading authorities on hate crimes against Asians. Every group in prison should have a voice.

When I pass my surveys out, I’m also careful to explain what my story is about and where you intend to publish it. And, unlike some journalists who sensationalize what takes place in prison, I make it clear that I won’t exploit anyone for a story. Like outside, there is a level of distrust of the media by some prisoners. Mainstream journalists sometimes encourage inmates who are not enthusiastic about being exploited for a story that may turn on its face and point to their crimes. I’ve seen circumstances where an outside reporter has taken an inmate’s statement out of context regarding the nature of a conviction. If a parole board reads that and sees how it contradicts the state’s official record, it can prove disastrous at a parole hearing, resulting in a denial. Believe me, it has happened.

Prison journalism has its own unwritten code of ethics. Because we’re all convicts we have an obligation to “do no harm” to each other. There are things inmates will say to each other, but they are supposed to stay off record. It’s important to know the difference because we’re not cops. An outside journalist may not care, but I have to live with these guys. Freedom of the press can result in a swift and decisive violation of one’s personhood.

After I collect the 3-inch-by-5-inch slips of paper, I record and transcribe the answers and data onto a single page. I might use comments from the survey to write a story or as a starting point when I interview people directly. Usually I do both. At that point I have enough information to write a story that is unique to San Quentin and a specific housing unit within the prison. The data collected typically helps the story write itself. I’m always open to changes and suggestions made by editors, but surveys tend to not be problematic because of their data-driven nature.

The only difficulty in writing a story based on a survey is all the footwork involved to pass them out. I walk up and down five tiers from cell to cell. But it’s worth it to allow marginalized voices to be heard.

By KEVIN D. SAWYER  |  Kevin D. Sawyer writes from San Quentin State Prison, Calif.

Do you edit or write for a newspaper or newsletter published at your prison? Please send us a copy of the publication to PJP’s Chicago address (3601 Southport Ave., #304, Chicago, IL 60657). We would love to connect and see how we can help amplify your stories.
Earthquake Builds Community, Culture for Haitians

BY RYAN M. MOSER  |  Ryan M. Moser writes from Everglades Correctional Institution, Fla.

On a humid late August afternoon in Miami — one that made the inside of C-Block feel like it was 100 degrees — incarcerated resident Renale Baptiste learned on the local news that a 7.2 earthquake had just struck his home country of Haiti.

"I was able to get through to my auntie in Port-au-Prince and she was all right, but many of her friends in Les Cayes were not answering her calls. Everyone was panicking and people were missing," he said.

According to USA Today, the earthquake that hit the southern peninsula of Haiti on August 14 injured 10,000 people and killed more than 2,000. The natural disaster displaced 1 million people — half of whom were children — and left 300 still missing and presumed dead. Days later, Tropical Depression Fred had pounded the island, leaving 400,000 without power and many of the newly homeless wading through stagnant wastewater in trail-filled streets.

Baptiste, a 34-year-old inmate, is one of over a hundred Haitian-Americans incarcerated at the Everglades Correctional Institution (ECI), many of whom have family still living 700 miles south in Haiti. "We're all concerned for the safety of our loved ones," he said.

Even those who are no longer strongly connected to Haiti have been worried about the magnitude of the problems being reported.

"I don't speak to my people in Haiti anymore, but I wonder if they're okay," incarcerated resident Hilberry Pierre, 37, told me one afternoon. Pierre has been incarcerated since 1999 and has extended family living on Île de la Tortue.

At ECI, many of the correctional officers are also of Haitian descent, living in Miami as part of a large Haitian diaspora, which numbers about 1 million nationwide, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates in 2018.

Concern for family and friends still living in Haiti is at the top of every conversation these days among residents as well as correctional officers. One of the dome-surgent inmates that he still had a lot of family in Haiti, and the past month had been hell for them, but Haitians were strong people.

Following the assassination of Haiti's leader President Jovenel Moïse in July, the West Indies republic had already been in a state of political unrest when the latest natural disasters hit, causing catastrophic damage to utilities, homes and basic infrastructure — much of which still hasn't been repaired since the last major earthquake in 2010.

Jean Salomon, 32, another Haitian-American prisoner at ECI, has family living in Petit that were promised housing 11 years ago, but never received help. "The Red Cross only built a handful of homes after the last earthquake, so nobody has hope right now. A lot of people are living under tarps and sheet metal."

The domino table on the recreational yard is a busy meeting place for the Haitian-Americans living at ECI. Haitian Creole and French can be heard all around as men greet each other with handshakes, laughs and slam bones on the table. Everyone seems to be nicknamed "Zoe" and all of them smile when you call their name. Each day they get together as a way to keep their way of life alive and stay close to one another through hard times. These men lift each other up in positive ways.

The largest meetup is a weekly called Peace Education Development, an opportunity for men from similar backgrounds to get together and talk about food, family and memories of home.

"The class is the closest I feel to my brothers because we can sit and share things about life. We know the same hang-outs in Miami and some of us have cousins in Haiti who are friends," Salomon shared. "We are all family in here."

Having community support during a time of crisis is important, and even more so behind bars. In a place where some men and women have no one to talk about their problems, a thriving and cultural kinship can make a world of difference.

After the latest devastation in Haiti, several men have told me that their families are living in fear of what's next and crying when they talk on the phone. Although these men cannot be there to comfort their loved ones who are suffering, they said they try to be there for another inside.

"Being around a lot of Haitians helps me stay connected," said Pierre. "Many of us attend a Congole church service here at the prison that makes me feel closer to our culture."

The beauty of Moser's story was that he took timely news that people outside were interested in, and found an angle that could only be reported from behind the walls. It's a perfect demonstration of how do prison journalism that is relevant to a general audience. Moser also had a succinct paragraph up high that explained why he was reporting on Haitians in America's prison (answer: it's a big community there), which grounds the story for an online reader with many distractions, who won't read the story if they don't understand what the point of it is. The reason why this story worked was that Moser put himself in the shoes of the reader and wrote the article, so it speaks to them.

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Ryan M. Moser writes from Everglades Correctional Institution, Fla. For more on the prison journalism at ECI, visit www.prisonjournalismproject.org.

ORIGINS OF "EARTHQUAKE BUILDS COMMUNITY, CULTURE FOR HAITIANS"

In one PJP-Journalism School assignment, we were asked to find a story that impacted a broader community, and find an angle that fits into the news judgement values of immediacy, proximity, etc. The day after the earthquake I was playing basketball with my Haitian friend and asked him how his family was doing after the natural disaster.

That gave me an idea: a story about how the large diaspora of Haitian-Americans living in Miami and specifically at my institution are dealing with the recent turmoil in their native country.

Setting Interviews was easy, but as usual research was difficult. As a prison journalist I have to utilize any resource to write my articles, including citing other media, magazines and newspapers that provide stats and data.

Yukari Kane gave me a professional eye on my first draft, and she was able to make corrections in structure and content, and give me other ways to look at writing news. As a new reporter, I need guidance. The key takeaway for me was to just write the best story I could and then rely on an experienced editor to polish it — it’s a symbiotic partnership.

Ryan M. Moser  |  Writer and PJP-Journalism School student
Dog Rehab Program Builds Companionship, Purpose for Those in Prison

BY LAURENCE MAY | Lawrence May writes from California State Prison Los Angeles, Calif.

From a distance, it appeared to be a caged lion. Immediately, I thought of the stories my parents told me regarding traveling circuses. Animals in cages, placed on wagons, pulled by horses from town to town.

Men in the recreational yard stopped talking and excusing as the cart approached, pulled by two women heading toward our building, where the Paws For Life K9 Rescue Program is housed.

There was a brown dog inside the sturdy metal cage. We thought he was vicious because he was caged, but we later found out he had been hit by a car. That was how I first met Casper. Little did I know I’d be assigned to care for him along with my two teammates, Jack and Tobias.

During the first month he was with us, we put him through his physical therapy exercises. Casper seemed to know we were helping him and he loved the attention. Massaging and stretching his injured hind leg brought Casper and me closer together. He enjoyed relaxing on my bed after short walks up a slight incline. I often had to tell him to slow down and take it easy; we didn’t want him to reinjure his fragile leg.

After a few weeks, his stitches were removed. We kept watchful eyes on his thigh and tummy to make sure they didn’t get infected. He had to wear a cone around his head. All of us, especially Casper, were happy and relieved when those days ended. We made his overnight crate safe and comfortable so he had a restful and peaceful night. He would sometimes get easily distracted by other dogs and people walking by, but this would subside as he got older. His transformation from being wheeled in on a cart and having to be carried outside to now leaping up onto my comfy bed has been a thrill to witness. Our motto is, “We work hard so our dogs can have a better life.”

Casper has done his part.

Our team divided our time with Casper. I usually shared the morning hours with him. I looked forward to getting up every morning, seven days a week, to work with Casper.

When he saw me coming at 6:15 am, I heard one of my favorite sounds: his tail banging against the plastic crate. I immediately take him outside and the desert sunrise wakes both of us up. He had a big appetite and enjoyed his healthy breakfast. Afterward, I groomed his beautiful fur with a brush.

We also enjoyed our strolls around the prison yard. When I stop and say, “Wait,” Casper automatically sits.

Gradually, we began working on the canine good citizen (CGC) test, which consists of 10 items. Casper mastered many of them. He loved to come when called but hated to stay put. Sit and down were easy items. Casper mastered many of them. He loved to come when called but hated to stay put. Sit and down were easy for him while he learned to heel and get his leash on.

Once he recovered, we began his training. He learned the commands sit, down, come, and stay in record time. Since Casper was only 6 months old, he was a playful puppy.

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His transformation from being wheeled in on a cart and having to be carried outside to now leaping up onto my comfy bed has been a thrill to witness. Our motto is, “We work hard so our dogs can have a better life.”

Casper has done his part.

The men on the yard all loved Casper and they came from near and far to greet him.

After he was adopted, we received the following note from Casper’s new family.

Hello Larry, Tobias, Jack and Allen,

Happy New Year from Casper’s new family! We appreciate the letter you wrote to us detailing all of the patience, care, hard work and dedication you provided to Casper so he could earn his Paws for Life Canine Good Citizen Certificate. Casper, renamed Cooper, is enjoying his new life taking walks and wrestling with friends. He especially likes one dog named Woodrow. I included photos of them rough-housing together.

We took Cooper to a veterinarian when we adopted him to learn what his limitations would be due to his serious car accident and the surgery on his left hip. The veterinarian was very impressed at the progress Cooper has made and said that he looks extremely healthy and happy!

This is all thanks to your dedication and love for him when he could barely walk. Now he bounds up the stairs, runs around the grass with other dogs, chases after balls and acts like any young, excited and carefree dog.

We want to thank you for being a part of this rehabilitation program with Karma Rescue and we are thankful to you all for bringing Cooper back from a terrible, near-death injury to allow him to lead a happy healthy life as the newest addition to our family.

Kindest Regards,

Dan

This is an article about a prison program. But it doesn’t focus on the prison program. Rather on the impact — inside and outside. After reading, I really understood why Paws for Life matters.

— PJP Executive Director Takan Kominami

Kirkland Cats

BY MICHAEL EGGLESTON | Michael Eggleston writes from Allendale Correctional Institution, S.C.

We exit the dorm in a line. Little furry creatures walking up behind. Maybe ten or more. I lose the numbers. They are at maintenance more than plumbers. If you have food in your hand, they will come. A chicken bone or turkey ham, they want some. You can call them by their names. Eating from people’s hands is like fun and games. Everywhere you go on Kirkland yard, the cats are there. Even at the cafeteria, with terrible food, they don’t care.

Waiting on breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Maybe thirty cats or more, trying to be a winner. At the annex, in front of F-2 lying on mats. All together maybe three hundred cats. Some of them are like movie stars. They will eat out of cans or jars. Cats get treated better than inmates.

Some staff will feed them on paper plates. Charlie, Blackie, and Tripod. These are the cat’s names and is where I start. I’ve seen a cat that shakes when he walks. If you go into operations, it’s one cat that talks. Kirkland cats are in full command. They roll in packs. Just like a band.

Meow, meow, or maybe a moan. They will hustle you, when you take them home.

This piece is so visual and engaging and fun.

— PJP Director Yukon Kominami

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Casper has done his part.

— PJP Executive Director Yukon Kominami

www.prisonjournalismproject.org
Mother in Prison, Son in Jail

When a mother fails, a child cries. Whether silently inside or openly and outwardly, the child suffers. Right now, my child is suffering as a result of my absence in his life, and I feel like an epic failure.

As my child sits in his jail cell, I sit in my prison cell. He is scared for his future, and I’m ashamed of my past. He is thinking of what he could have done right, and I’m thinking of all the things I have done wrong. Our thoughts are mirrored as we reflect on opposite sides of the wall.

I don’t know what judgment may befall my son and whether he will be treated fairly or unjustly. What I do know is that he is sitting alone in a cell because of my bad judgment. Although he is an adult, I cannot escape the thought that maybe things would be different if I had been there to raise him.

Soon after that meeting, I began participating in teleconferences with state senators, chiefs of staff and legislative directors, all in an effort to bring awareness about rehabilitated aging men with lengthy sentences ahead of them.

The number of aging inmates, like me, is staggering. According to a Marshall Project analysis of data from the National Corrections Reporting Program, the percentage of people in state prisons who were 55 and older tripled to 150,000 in 2016, compared to 2000. According to Bureau of Prisons data as of Sept. 11, 2021, more than 18,000 of the federal prison population are 56 and older.

I know there are many people in society who believe in letting prisoners go if they’re rehabilitated. But if society promotes forgiveness, why then are men like Stan left behind and forgotten? There should be a way to re-evaluate and release worthy individuals through clemency, so they have a shot at redemption. I should not be an exception.

As I sat here in my cell, days out from release, I hear their voices crying out. I feel their pain and longing for a new life. I hear Stan left behind and forgotten! "There should be a way to re-evaluate and release worthy individuals through clemency, so they have a shot at redemption. I should not be an exception.

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Ehrenberg uses personal experience and data, the cornerstones of a compelling op-ed, to advocate for an awareness about rehabilitated aging men with lengthy sentences ahead of them.

Robert Ehrenberg
Robert Ehrenberg is a writer recently released from Sullivan Correctional Facility, N.Y.

The number of aging inmates, like me, is staggering.
### The Locker

**Sketch**
Sixteen-and-a-half cubic feet seems like a lot of space when you first come to prison. But then you start buying the essentials such as hygiene products, staple food items, a couple of bowls, a coffee cup, and it starts adding up. So you get a “locker buddy,” which allows you to put all the ignorable little stuff away neatly on your locker door. I purchased a fairly durable one, allowed by the Bureau of Prisons, made of clear plastic. Some people make theirs from laundry bags or kaki pants legs. A couple of good ones—and really everyone ends up getting two—will set you back $7 to $9.

Then there’s that large Tupperware bowl used to store miscellaneous little things. A box of envelopes. A big folder of “important” documents. The note from grandma, when she was still aware of her surroundings. Letters from people you haven’t heard from in ten years. Photo albums. Bibles, BiBlics puzzle books and the books you keep in case of a lockdown so you have something to read. A big folder of “important” documents. The note from grandma, when she was still aware of her surroundings. Letters from people you haven’t heard from in ten years. Photo albums. Bibles, BiBlics puzzle books and the books you keep in case of a lockdown so you have something to read.

I’ve got the giant store-bought towel that Christian gave me. I’ve only used it a dozen times. He committed suicide and it just seems wrong to sell it, so I keep it in my locker. Those 16.5 cubic feet fill quickly. Which do you throw away?

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### The Gauntlet

**Poetry: Verse from Behind the Wall**

*POETRY*

**The Gauntlet**

By Eric Shibli | Eric Shibli writes from Dade Correctional Institution, Fla.

Tensions mount as a building full of geriatric convicts anxiously waits. And then they’re off!

When a buzzer sounds, and the blue steel door clangs open, there’s a wheelchair in front.

Bursting out close behind, is a man pushing a metal walker.

The wheelchair squeaks, and the walker-clutters on the concrete.

Quickly, they are overtaken by another man in a wheelchair, then more men in blue spill from the open doorway.

The two wheelchairs battle for position on a slight downhill grade that gives them a brief advantage.

Men with canes join the melee at a brisk pace, cane-tips tapping a cadence.

A pack of wheelchairs emerges each turning sharply.

At the first sidewalk intersection, several near collisions occur, as men jockey for position in the turn.

The two separate sides of our building continue to dispense men and machines, until nearly 150 inmates rush toward the main swath of concrete.

It’s a wheelchair in the lead, when the front runners turn toward a razor wire covered gate.

There, the guards start screaming.

“Get in line!

Get between the yellow lines!

Let’s go! Let’s go!”

These Instructions are ignored by out of breath old men, while they jostle each other nearer a twelve-foot-high gate.

There we wait for the gate to buzz and open.

Then we take off again, canes tapping, chairs squeaking.

It’s a mad dash for the next gate.

Guards wait at each corner screaming, “Let’s go! Let’s go!”

When we finally reach the dining hall, several hundred men wait outside. I park behind the last wheelchair in line, and watch a bag full of urine swing like a pendulum beneath its seat.

A man stops behind me, and I hear him say,

“Crap, I forgot my teeth.”

And then I smile, confident I will have an extra apple to eat …

The Gauntlet

From Behind the Wall

**Visit prisonjournalismproject.org/inside-story.**