



Behind the Walls

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By Larry Baker

*A faithful friend
is a strong defense
and he that hath found one,
hath found a treasure (Aprocrityph)*

One of the hardest things to do in prison is to say, "Thank You" and mean it in all sincerity. Another is, to be a convicted prisoner, who has his own column in newspapers; especially when you try to be a good writer who writes on people, places and things that happen in prison on a constructive, unbiased and non-fearful basis.

It's difficult because in the beginning, there is a mental price to pay. You find yourself being twisted in all directions. If you write on safe issues such as sports, music and books, then you are not pleasing your fellow convicts with articles about prison violence, abuses and disturbances. And there is the inner fear that if you don't write about those safe things, the guards and prison officials will become upset about the writings of issues happening within their prison such as: a correctional officer sexually assaulting an inmate, or prisoners having to pay an outrageous amount of money for drugs brought in by a

prison employee. So in the beginning you try to please everyone by trying to write between that thin margin of fiction and fact, heated issues and praise, steel blade in the back and bum administration charges.

Hell, all you want to be is a writer, because when the urge hits, it's a pure beauty never before witnessed in your entire life. There is a feeling of you not being alone in your guarded, tiny world. It's a deep beauty because each week, someone beyond these tall, grey concrete walls, may be enjoying the topics and subjects you write about. After all, the *Portland Observer* is found in nearly every home throughout communities of Oregon. And after all, this is a family newspaper.

Last week, this correspondent celebrated his third year in the birth of "Behind The Walls" column. I don't know how to thank those of you who have flooded my cell with cards and letters enough for me to scream my deepest appreciation. Because, in the beginning it was not easy.

The Lord only knows how many times I wanted to throw in the towel...give up...quit, because of

some prison employee insults or prisoner's petty jealousy and even the hatred of a few public citizens, who didn't feel that a convicted felon should be allowed to communicate with society, in any form. But I believe a prison should not be built to let a mind rot. It should be built to make a person think.

Deep within, I don't know what type of column I've created. One to love, hate? At any rate, I have enjoyed the relationship formed with other prisoners behind these walls whose hidden talents have emerged: the David Wrights, David Crawfords, Snowdens, and many others. I have been introduced to scores of reporters, columnists, and editors, who have given me the opportunity to share my articles in their newspapers and magazines.

Yes, in the beginning the road was rough and also was the fear...but the reward and the enjoyment I found in prison writing - to this day - was worth it. There are millions of stories to be found, and there is nothing to fear in my being able to see them in print, but fear itself. At least we have found this to be true at the Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem, Oregon.

Lucid walls of time

Editor: Julius Snowden 38013

As I sit here watching the sun go down
and turning the sky its deep reddish purple...
I think of the many times I sat on the hill top,
singing my special love song to the four winds, hoping my
lady will feel it as it flows over our Mother Earth.

I look up, I see two birds, my winged relatives.
They fly together in the sky, telling everyone, "Look
at us, we have nothing weighing us down...that is
why we can fly together and be free...for our
hearts tells us so."

I look down to the valley below, I see two horses,
my four legged relatives, running side by side,
their manes flowing together in the wind, their hoofs
lightly touching the many rolling hills they go over.
As they gallop away, they seem to say, "Look at us,
we have nothing to slow us down, we run together
in harmony...for our hearts tells us so."

As the last sun rays go over the mountain, I think
of all I have seen today...and I am happy. For
once again, the natural people showed me a
lesson.
Now I too, shall go to my mate, remembering
the things I have seen...and do what my
heart tells me.

By Looking Hawk

By Steven H. Daniels

Freedom lives on,
Though I am not free;
Free, yes, in spirit
But not bodily.
These bars may restrict me,
But my mind is still at large;
My spirit is the one thing
Of which I am still in charge.
My spirit roams the universe,
My mind travels far and wide;
You are all in one big prison,
Where there is no place to hide.
So please keep your pity for yourself,
I don't need it in this cell;
You're the one who is in prison,
I am merely
IN HELL!!!!

Cell Talk

Asmar Abdul Seifulla, Editor
aka Joe West 40404

365 Days A Year

By Nathaniel Scott 41877

While listening to the radio the other night, I heard Miss Lanita Duke expounding on the virtues of Black Awareness Month and how wonderful it would be if we celebrate Black Awareness 365 days a year. This begun to make me think about how complacent, self-satisfied and apathetic Black people have become since the 60's.

I delved further into this train of thought and I began to realize that Black people as a whole were either being misled or were misleading themselves as to the relevancy of awareness. There are those among us who are under the impression that we've made great gains in our struggle for liberation. Our predicament and social and economical standing in this country seems to have been forgotten. We need to set the record straight, we need to get back to the basics of freedom. I like to state a few nationally and universally known facts about who we really are.

First of all, we are the descendants of Kings, Queens, Princesses and Warriors who were brought here against their will, they were sold as chattel on the auction block of slavery. Fact two: our ancestors died, sweated and gave birth to what is presently known as colored people; they fought in every major and minor war and confrontation this country has ever faced. The bugle has played taps of the corpses of Black people more frequently than rabbits multiply. Fact three: of a long list too numerous to mention is the misconception that Black people as a whole have made gains in this foreign land. If we chart the progress of whites as compared to Blacks then, we're still in slavery or a condition comparable to slavery.

If I'm mistaken then someone please set me straight as to the original state of Black people and their present state. While I must applaud those brothers and sisters who supported and help bring about Black Awareness Month, it still isn't enough -- it won't ever be enough until all Black people live "Black Awareness" 24 hrs a day -- 365 days a year.

One of the first things that we must become aware of is what awareness is. In a few words awareness means to know what's happening, to be aware of what's going down and who's putting down what. For years now Black people have been in a state of mental sleep; the man has been putting down such heavy games that most of us haven't been able to keep up with the pace or the flow. And now we're running around spouting awareness phrases, strutting our stuff and talking 'bout how cool everything is going to be. There are too many key issues that we haven't addressed ourselves to for us to even begin to think that we're doing anything. Busing, tokenism, prison and its long range effect on Black people are just a few issues that can be mentioned. Nine hundred Black people were just lead to the grave by a mad peckerwood in Jonestown and we're talking

about awareness. We've really got to spend some time figuring out what the man is really doing to us. White supremacy is a world issue that effects all people of color. "White supremacy" is "Black inferiority" and until we deal with it on this level there can be no real awareness. There can only be the shallow attempts we make at being Black.

I don't mean to take anything away from the people that are trying to do constructive things in the community, but let's not fool ourselves any longer about the strides we must begin to make to obtain the

liberation we yearn. With these things in mind, I would like to have each and everyone of us think about what awareness really is and from that thought, let's begin to mold our tomorrows into what yesterdays and today haven't been.