

Inside The Walls

Anson Correctional Institution

Polkton, NC



How the Bedbugs Tried to Steal Christmas

by Gwen Moorehead



Well, the bedbugs thought they would try to ruin Christmas, then there were movements from one unit to another, and on the units from one side to the other. A lot of these movements dampened a lot of

spirits because they were being separated from friends and longtime acquaintances who look forward to spending another Christmas together. Not to mention first-timers in prison who met others on reception and came here together only to be separated into a population not knowing anyone. What a scary feeling. Been there a done that.

Everything was cancelled the week of the December the fifteenth due to spraying for the bedbug problem. While there was no population movement our Programs Department was on the move. The Programs staff along with Ms. Williams were out delivering two Dunkin Donuts to each resident and a gift from the Anson Alliance Club. Gifts included things like novelty themed socks, hygiene items, hair accessories, and colored pens. Thank you to the Alliance Club and Ms. Lish for putting smiles on our faces in a situation that otherwise would have been a damper on our holiday. Props to you!!!

The staff was all smiles and enjoying what they were doing as they also passed out the annual gift from the prison. The

famous Keefe bags from a company that a lot of items on the canteen come from. The bags had their famous chips Shebang's, Moon Lodge and cakes, coffee and hot chocolate.

This writer talked to several people who were in prison for the first time. This was a surprise to a lot of the first timers and it brought smiles to their faces. They didn't realize that clubs and staff gave out gifts. It brighten their day to realize that someone cared enough to think about them.

The original plan was for each unit to come to the gym to hear caroling from the Anson Praise Warriors and enjoy a cup of Dunkin Donut coffee with cream and sugar or sweetener along with their donuts. Instead, the coffee was given out later that week when each unit had to sit in the gym for the day while exterminators cleared out the unit.

Reaching Out from Within had planned to be giving out Starbucks coffee and Waffles with toppings, but this was postponed until after the first of the year. So, we will be waiting on this sweet gesture. Thank you ROFW and Mrs. Lamar, who is this club's advisor.

On a different note, a gift box was brought to Ms. Williams' office in programs the next week. It was a gift from Richmond D Pod. This box was wrapped in beautiful silver and purple paper, with a silver iridescent bow.

And what a gift! Ms. Williams was speechless when she opened the box. She then called her staff that was working: Ms. Baldwin, E. Robinson and Mrs. Rorie. The three of them were actually scared to open the box, but once they did they were in awe of this gift. The gift consisted of notes of

Warden: Ms. Carol Torres
Publisher: Ms. D. Williams
Editor: Michelle Theer
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Mission Statement:

Our objective is to provide a platform for the voices inside, and to inspire positive change and prosocial behavior that demonstrates rehabilitation.

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Bedbugs continued...

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gratitude for what they did on Monday when they delivered the donuts and gifts.

This writer got to see their faces as they were all so shocked that this Pod took the time to recognize the little thing that they took time out for them to make them smile.

The Decorating contest was judged on Monday the 22nd. It was Ms. Williams and Ms. Pressley, who is over Policy Control, Ms. Torres, Ms. Gilmore, and Ms. Harris who judged each dorm. First Place went Union-D "Santa's Workshop." When you walked into the pod you were greeted by three diverse elves along with Santa, of course. Octavia Bennett who was the head of this project was moved during the completion of it." A lot of movements were being done, spirits were diminished. Octavia was moved right before the judging, took place, but she said this project lifted a lot of spirits as everyone came together and made this work. This Pod was "Lit." No matter how many people were moved out they kept working. Victoria Graham and Nancy Austin have bragging rights to being the oldest residents in this pod, but did whatever they could to help out. Both stated everyone was on one page laughing and having fun. Amy Piles and Amy Clew were the artists during this project. They made old-fashioned toys to help boost their ideas to becoming a winning Pod. Congrats!

Moore B was second place. Their theme came from a Christmas card belonging to Lisa Greene consisting of a story about peppermint candy canes and Jesus. Trisha Nelson was dressed up as Jesus. They had candy makers making candy, and showed how the theme that peppermint candy canes represent Jesus the reason for the season. Good Job!

Lee B- Pod came into third place. Kissey Oxendine and Krystal DeBernardis were the masterminds behind a Cartoon Christmas. There was a tree made out of yarn tied down to cardboard on the floor with chip bags made into bows tied as decoration for the tree. Then the dorm was decorated with cartoons from Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, Disney, and Hanna Barbara. They even had Lil Bill and his sister along with South Park kids. They had a skit directed by Kristy West. Kahani Moore sang the song they had written which tied in the cartoons with their theme. A person walking in would have been taken back to their favorite childhood characters homes. Good Job.

Overall the contest showed creativity and teamwork. This writer was floored by all the dorms visited, and everyone was buzzing around with excitement and joy. Proud of their accomplishments. Once again: Congratulations to all of you, you deserved it for your hard work.

Once again, what the devil sought out for evil (bedbugs) God turned it into good! (Donuts, Gifts, and Coffee) and a smiling staff delivering it. What a good feeling!

Gwen enjoys spending time reading and writing. She is 1st Chair of the Defenders Veterans Group. She gives her time to helping out wherever she is needed and is an avid Warriors and Cowboys fan.



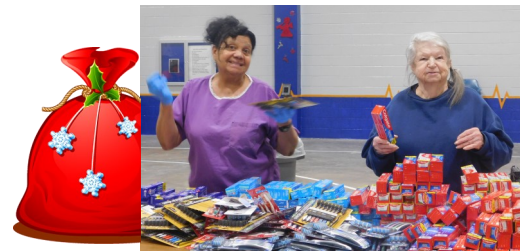
Pouf! Pouf!



Hygiene products purchased by the AAC, for the Christmas gift giveaway.



AAC members pack gifts for population.



AAC members Maria Monserrate & Jennie White pack gifts for population.

**AAC photos courtesy of Ms. Lish.*

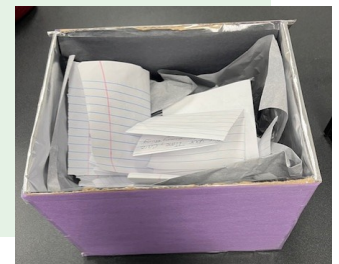
To Richmond D-pod:

I want to thank you for thinking of the program staff. We try to do our job and provide the population with programs and events as much as possible. The gifts we gave were from the facility and the Anson Alliance. We enjoyed seeing the smiles on many of your faces when you received the gift. We appreciate the letters of gratitude. This truly genuine gesture makes our job easier just to know that you all appreciate what we do. Hopefully 2026 brings more!!

D. Williams, AWP



The Silver Box.



Filled with thank you notes.

Dorm Decorating Contest

FIRST PLACE: UNION D-POD

*Decorating contest photos courtesy of Ms. D. Williams.



Santa & Mrs. Claus



Elves make toys in Santa's workshop.



Christina Walters narrated.



Elves welcome judges.

SECOND PLACE: MOORE B-POD

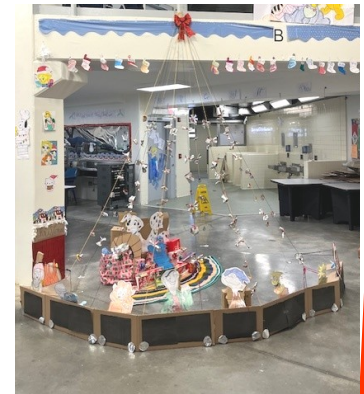


Trisha Nelson plays the role of Jesus while "candy makers" are busy at work.

THIRD PLACE: LEE B-POD



Making Magical Memories theme.



Invisible Christmas tree.



Moore A-pod



Moore C-pod



Moore C-pod



Moore D-pod



Moore D-pod



Moore E-pod



Moore F-pod

Paying It Forward with Grace It Up

by Michelle Theer



Those who were here for the Grace it Up (GIU) event in April surely remember the impact of the music, testimonies and the gift bags passed out at the end. So, the ripple of excitement throughout the facility was palpable when news spread they were back on the morning of December 3rd. Unfortunately, it wasn't for another worship assembly, but it did give over 50 residents an opportunity to pay it

forward and share the love of Jesus with their incarcerated brothers and sisters in Christ around the state by packing goodie bags for the holiday season.

Wednesday morning inside resident volunteers were called to chapel to meet with Chuck Neely and the outside volunteers to receive their mission: try to pack 5,000 bags to be gifted out at Anson, Brown Creek, and other nearby prisons. Volunteers from Changed Choices, K-LOVE radio, Jumpstart and area churches, including Elevation Church at Piedmont, came together to work for the first time as a team with residents inside a prison facility to package these bags.

They joined together in an assembly line putting candy bars such as Snickers, Skittles or M&M's, and crackers like Goldfish or nabs into the bags. Also added were treats like Oreo cookies, Hershey's Kisses, lip balm and an information card from GIU and Changed Choices. Resident Izabella Fuentes said, "To be able to give back while in prison is the best experience ever." Of the bags packed, 1,500 were designated to be given out to residents and staff at Anson as a reminder of God's love.

Chuck Neely kept the energy going throughout the two hours of packing bags, encouraging the helpers by giving them a running total of the number of bags filled as they were counted and boxed up. While bags were being packed, various residents went to the microphone and shared their testimony to those in the gym. These testimonies were especially encouraging to the outside volunteers who love to be able to see and hear the direct impact of the things they do throughout the year. Changed Choices volunteer Ann Marie said that coming to the prison with GIU was the one of the most fulfilling things she has ever done, "being able to be the feet of

Christ and talking with the women while we work." Resident Chastity Washington said, "I enjoyed being able to let the Lord use me."

Resident Ahmarie Gaines was ecstatic to be with the GIU volunteers and talked about the impact this and similar experiences, like Kairos and Elevation, have had on her life in the last six months. She said she has been freed in ways that she was never free at home, and they have prepared her to become the woman she is now. "I never felt fulfilled in the ways that God has filled my needs. I look for ways to spread the name of Jesus here and at home because Jesus didn't abandon me when I felt abandoned by the world. And I will never abandon Him."

As the final minutes and seconds counted down, the last packages were filled, taped shut and counted. Cheers

and clapping were heard all around. While the 5,000 count goal was not met, over 4,000 bags were completed. GIU Board Member Dr. George Sowerby ended with a short message. He asked everyone to recall the words from the 'Little Drummer Boy' Christmas carol, "do you see what I see?" Then he admonished, "You are not what people say you are. You are a child of God! Look at yourself in the mirror and tell

yourself, *I am a child of the Most High King.*"

As time for the session ran out, the volunteers fanned out and prayed for all those who wanted it. It was a spiritually nourishing morning, and those who gave of their time were smiling and joyful as they filed out of the gym. GIU Prison Ministry is dedicated to expressing the love

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Over 50 residents worked with outside volunteers to pack gift bags.



Outside volunteers and residents work together.

Grace It Up continued...

(Continued from page 4)

and hope of Jesus Christ to all incarcerated and recently released people. As Mr. Neely commented, "You are just loving on your brothers and sisters." They emphasize the importance of nourishing the body with good food and the soul with the Bible. Their mission at Anson last April saw many led to salvation and revival.

Michelle Theer loves the true message of Christmas. She strives to remember it, live it, and spread it to others all year round.



Cases of cakes and candies were brought in to pack bags.



Residents from all units came together to pack bags for the ministry with outside volunteers.



Completed bags are counted and placed in bins for delivery.



SEND A THANK YOU NOTE!

Would you like to write **Grace It Up** and tell them what their ministry has meant to you? You can send them letters or cards at the following mailing address:

Grace It Up Ministries
407 S. Summit Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28208

They would love to hear from you!

Your family can see information about their ministry or send an e-mail at their website:

Graceitup.org



Changed Choices volunteer & Abmarie Gaines complete and seal up bags.

Richmond Wins Basketball Tournament

by Gwen Moorehead

Mrs. DeBerry, Recreation Supervisor, hosted her last basketball tournament playoff for the year. It started on Monday, December 8, 2025 with the first game between Union and Moore. Union was at a disadvantage in this game due to all their former players, have been moved, transferred or gone home. This game was one of the biggest losses for Union this year with Moore beating them 43 to 9. Moore had almost a brand-new team in this tournament, Yamina Rookard and Sherece Parker were forces to be reckon with. Both of these members played with speed and precision that helped take Moore to the finish line. Due to time this was only a thirty-minute game imagine what the scored would have been if it would have been a full game. Moore, advanced to the finals to be played on Thursday December 11, 2025 at 1:00 pm.

On December 9, 2025 Lee had to forfeit their game with Richmond because they didn't have enough players. Richmond advances to the tournament also. So, Richmond loaned Lee a few of their players, they ended up playing a practice game against each other. Richmond has a great team going in this tournament. So, we shall see who will end up with bragging rights on Thursday.

Moore played Richmond in the Championship game that was held on December 11, 2025 at 1:00 pm. Both teams advanced to this level by winning their earlier games this week. The air was filled with excitement as the

unit's spectators were coming into the gym to watch a spectacular game. As the players entered the gym, so did the Anson Slide Steppaz. Before the game got started the excitement was already wild. As the Anson Cheerleaders began what they do;

Come on diamonds, Let go, come on diamonds, Let's fight!

Come on diamond (echo) Come on diamonds
Let's Win Tonight!"

This is the chant we hear as the Anson Diamonds cheerleading squad is yelling across the gym. These cheerleaders were awesome during the previous tournaments. We would not expect anything less during this tournament under the leadership of Milisa Robinson, captain and co-

captain Lonetta Ford. The squad was small but loud, "sometimes less is better." Go Diamonds great job!

The aura in the gym was so positive. Wardens Torres, Rogers, Mims, Williams, and Mrs. Bivens, and Ms. Baldwin were in attendance on the sidelines. The ladies each enjoying their bags of popcorn. So were all the Unit Managers and their Assistant Managers. Mental Health staff was there. So were a few Case Managers Thank you for coming and showing your support for this event.

The real excitement was this game, between Moore and Richmond. This game showed the skills of both teams as they battled for this championship. Both teams had great defense and great sportsmanship. The referees of this game were Mattie Bradford and La' Kendra Grady, who did a good job in calling offenses. Richmond started out making baskets and Moore

(Continued on page 7)

Winners!



L to R, Winning Team Richmond Unit: Kim Smith, Myasia Morange, Tracey Williams, Whitney McMahon, Rebecca Phillips & Breanna Marshall. In Front: Destiny Dudley & Jasmine Dottin.

Tournament Participants



L to R, **Cheerleaders**, Spring Stuart, Lauren Moss, Elizabeth Sanders, Lonetta Ford, Milisa Robinson & Jennifer Jean. **Richmond Team in Yellow**, Back Row: Breanna Marshall, Kim Smith, Whitney McMahon & Rebecca Phillips. Referee LaKendra Grady. Front row: Myasia Morange, Tracey Williams, Jasmine Dottin & Destiny Dudley. Recreation Supervisor Mrs. DeBerry. **Moore Team in Red**, Back Row: Joselyn Upchurch, Chastity Davis, Sherece Parker, Justice Williams & Karina Dargan. Front Row: Yamina Rookard & Shaniya McClain. **Anson Slide Steppaz**, Back Row: Sabrina Phillips, Kyia Hampton, Donna Walters, Takeyah Simpson, Quanisha Fennell & Audrey Cici. Referee Mattie Bradford. Front Row: Ta'jahya Appenwhite, Brenda Eney & Naveah Deas.

Basketball Tournament continued...

(Continued from page 6)

finally started to hit baskets also. But anyone who was watching this game would agree with this writer that this was “street ball” at its finest.

Richmond Unit Managers Mr. Ingram and Ms. Sion, were with their team coaching on the sideline, giving advice what they needed to do. Ms. Sion could be heard telling them “quit letting the shoot, block them shots.” Mr. Ingram had on a purple shirt walking around with a yellow jersey talking about he was going in to play with his team. Staff thought that was so funny.

At halftime we were presented with “Boots on the Ground” by 803 FRESH by the Anson Slide Steppaz under the leaderships of Mattie Bradford and Donna Walters.

The show was great, it had residents and staff nodding their heads and some residents joined in the hype that the Slide Steppaz were putting out. Congrats Mattie and Donna, keep up the good work.

Moore did a good job, trying to stay up with Richmond. But their mistakes hurt them the most careless ball throwing and fouling Richmond. This is what led Richmond to the final victory of 33-18. Richmond didn’t get the shut-out like this writer has seen them do. Moore played a good game, but Richmond’s game was better. Congratulations Richmond game well played.



Referees LaKendra Grady & Mattie Bradford kept the game fair.

**Basketball story photos courtesy of L.A. Bethea.*

The Winter Blues

by Michelle Theer



Happy Holidays! Merry Christmas! Happy New Year! But is it really? From Thanksgiving forward, everyone is presumed to be cheery, singing carols and scattering joy everywhere they go. But the reality is, in prison or not, this can be a sad and lonely time.

Every year some people notice a decline in mood, often called the winter blues. Shorter days mean a reduced amount of exposure to daylight and less intense sunlight at that. Colder weather often means less time is spent outside. Our brain has a biological need for sunlight. So, if you feel tired, lethargic, less interested in your usual activities, and are overeating and sleeping more, this decrease in ultraviolet light may be one of the reasons why. A severe form of this type of depression is called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and is experienced by some people every year beginning in November and ending around March as the days lengthen.

Beyond the biology of the problem, there are other factors related to feeling sad at this time of year. Feeling lonely because of being away from family and loved ones is one of the main reasons. While phone calls and video visits may be available for some, and are enjoyable, they are no replacement for the real thing. Very few are lucky enough to get one of the limited slots available at Visitation for an in-person meeting. In the past, a photo album to share with friends or look at in the dark hours of the night was a comfort, but physical photos are no longer available.

Recalling fond memories of past years is bittersweet. Did you know the word *nostalgia* actually means “pain of recall”? While it can be enjoyable to recall good memories of the past, it can also bring heartache to think of all the things one is missing now. Regrets and what-ifs haunt the darkest hours of night.

Many people seek solace in unhealthy ways: overeating, relationship drama, drugs, sleep marathons, movie bingeing and isolating themselves. At times, feelings build up to a boiling point, then explode when a trigger is set off

by a seemingly innocuous incident. It’s common knowledge that the holidays see a rise in people fighting, arguing, going to jail, quitting their jobs and getting write-ups in prison.

While holidays should, and can, be a time of joy and celebration, it is important to remember that for most of us it is also a time fraught with complicated emotions simmering right below the surface. Being aware of the issues you are dealing with will help you manage them better. Being aware that others are also struggling with their own turmoil may help you be more empathetic and considerate during this time of year.

What can you do when you feel trapped in this vortex of sad emotions? Spending time with others, even when you want to isolate, will help pull you from the depths of misery you feel in the dark night of the soul. Loneliness is said to be the new pandemic, so it is not singular to those of us here in prison. Remember you are not alone. Reach out to others, even if it means just going out to sit in the dayroom. Most importantly, don’t forget to call on God for comfort.

The best way to make yourself feel better is to take action. Just get yourself moving and doing something. Besides being around others and talking about how you feel, remember that reaching out to others is another way to get past your own misery. Perform an act of kindness for someone, or to give of yourself in some way. Share your knowledge or skills with a new resident. Write a thank you letter to someone who has impacted you this past year. Clear out your belongings and share what you no longer use with someone who really needs it. In doing these types of things, your brain releases chemicals that uplift your mood and make you feel better.

The winter blues are real. While you may not be able to escape them completely, be proactive and look for the signs in yourself and your friends. When you see them creeping up, take action. Do something to chase them away.



My Journey in Experiencing God

by Caitlyn Maynard

Upon joining the *Experiencing God* Bible Study, I had no idea what to expect. I had been struggling with my faith and at that point back in September it just seemed as if God had not been listening to me. Everywhere I turned seemed to be the wrong way, and I was struggling in more ways than one. But then God chose me to be a part of the most amazing group of young women and told me to be patient, and just pay attention. So, I didn't lose faith and trusted Him whole heartedly. Meeting those five phenomenal mentors truly gave me hope. Little do they know the impact they had in my life.

During those 13 weeks I learned so much about the different way God speaks, and that He loves us more than we can even fathom. My love relationship with God has never been as strong as it is right now. I know that regardless of my thoughts, or how things may seem, He is always there and always listening. But don't just take my word for it, here's what some my fellow sisters in Christ had to say.

Misty Reed said that upon first joining the class she thought, "gosh, when will these two hours ever end!" But by the end of the twelve weeks she couldn't get enough and never wanted it to be over. Cindy Hornbeck stated, "my love relationship with God has never been better and I'm so thankful." Hayley Burgette said "I'm so thankful for this time and those ladies. I never realized how much a relationship with God could influence my life for the better."

Marshje Swinson just loves God so much and was

blessed with this experience. Amber Whitaker loved the class so much and was glad to have that time

to grow closer with the Lord. Chelsea Ashley stated just how blessed her life has been upon joining and far beyond it after her relationship with God has never been better. There were others, but as you can see all these beautiful women absolutely adore Jesus Christ and were blessed beyond measure. They will continue this walk with Him and hopefully influence others to do the same. God, we love you, please continue to bless us with your presence!

Lastly, to the volunteers, thank you for everything. You gals are amazing women. You came every Wednesday without judging our circumstances and we are so grateful. Thank you for taking this journey with us and being patient and loving us as God does. Each one of you has left a footprint in my heart, and the fact we all shared the same goal worshipping our Father and loving Him so much it hurts made it ten times better! These ladies taught me so much, and I will forever be grateful. Thank you for coming on this journey with me and *Experiencing God*. I love all my sisters in Christ beyond measure.



L to R: Cheryl Richardson, volunteers Judy Fryar & Anne Myers, Sarah Smith.

Experiencing God by Cheryl Richardson

I was blessed to have been chosen to participate in the class *Experiencing God*. I learned of an intimate relationship with God where His will is revealed and then He invited me to join Him in along the journey. The goal of the class was not to finish the course, but to have a life transforming encounter with God. Along with my fellow classmates and the beautiful volunteers who graciously gave of their time each week of this 12-week study, I say thank you and may God continue to bless each of you in your personal walk with God, as I have been blessed. (Psalms 25:4-5)



Volunteer Nancy Paxton & Hayley Burgette



Experiencing God by Chanetta McCray

The class *Experiencing God* helped me follow Christ with 12 steps. These steps help me become a better woman in knowing and doing the will of God. *Experiencing God* really has inspired me on my walk from here on. All things through my Father God will never fail me, as long as I keep my faith in Him. Also, I learned it's all love from Him to me. I feel like He speaks to me through dreams, music, and watching preachers. I am more excited to share with my family and show them how God changed my life. He can do it for them, too.

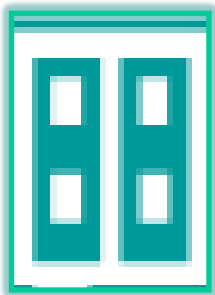


L to R, Back Row: Nancy Paxton, Hayley Burgette, Caitlyn Maynard, Chanetta McCray, Chelsea Ashley, Misty Reed, Amber Whitaker, Molly Neal, Andrea Verde, Cissie Isenbour, Shermanda Taylor & Marshje Swinson. Front Row: Cheryl Richardson, Billie Ogunyomade, Annette Harris, Sarah Smith, Judy Fryar, Anne Myers & Cynthia Hornbeck.

*Photos this story courtesy of OLC.

Behind the Door...Again

by Amanda Strack



I honestly had a huge debate with myself about turning any of my stuff in to the newsletter. I say that because I feel as if I've been judged and ridiculed my whole life. Women are not exactly great about building one another up, especially in a confined setting such as prison. Women are their own worst enemies; tearing others down just comes easy to more than not. Think about how amazing it would feel to be

supported and built up by your peers instead of beaten down. Sounds wonderful, right?

This is my fourth "ICON or Controlled Status" bid. Meaning I'm locked down behind this door 23 hours a day, for 180 days! Every other time I've received ICON, I've been very angry, bitter, overwhelmed, and blamed everyone else for my actions. This time I was angry at first, but then it's like something came over me and I've been so at peace. Now don't get me wrong, I do get a little sad and depressed, or feel a little disappointed some days, but in all honesty I'm where God needed me to be. I have felt blessed and thankful for this time to really get to know who I am.

Some of you might know me, but for those that don't let me tell you a little about myself. I've been in and out of county jail from a young age, and already did one prison bid. This is my second prison sentence. I've been subjected to every type of abuse (physical, mental, sexual) there is, and all of it started when I was a very young child. This led me to seeking drugs at a very young age and struggling with hardcore drugs. My life was so dysfunctional and chaotic that I honestly thought all of these things were okay and normal. I didn't really have great parents or much guidance. There wasn't anyone to teach me or point me in the right direction while I was growing up. I did the best I could, a child acting as the adult and raising younger siblings.

Obviously, I didn't do very well. I got caught up in the streets and I caught a murder charge at age 23. I was locked up a month after my birthday. At 23 I was given more years in prison than I'd even been alive! I went blank, numb, and didn't know how or what to feel. I no longer cared for my life, because it felt like I'd die in prison, or never leave. I was wrong! Everyone has trials and tribulations. It has been 13 years now that I've been locked up, and it's taken me this long to finally get tired, really want to change, and see the light of reason. I will be 37 in May of 2026.

Have you ever felt in your soul that you're a great person, and yet you constantly find your way into bad situations? Okay, what about this. Have you ever ended up somewhere you absolutely do not want to be, but in your gut, you feel it's exactly where you're supposed to be? That's God! I'm right where God, my heavenly Father, needed me to be so He could make me listen. Lord knows I can be stubborn and hard-headed, but you can only run for so long.



Today makes 105 days I've been in Segregation. Sounds bad, right? But I've been able to accomplish things in these last three months. I've completed 22 courses on Edovo and Hope University. That feels amazing and I'm learning so much about myself too. I guess anybody who's locked in a small room or a cell for 23 hours a day is placed in a position to find themselves. I'll be the first to admit, had I not found myself in segregation for this extensive period, I wouldn't have been forced to better myself with all my extra time. I've still got a lot to accomplish though. I'm currently enrolled in 14 other courses and actively working on those daily.

My whole life I've never known who I truly was, or even what I wanted to do with myself when I grew up. I didn't know if I had a purpose. Now, I'm certain that I'd love to work in Human/Social Services. I'm ready and willing to put in the work to earn my Associate's degree. I'm working very hard earning every certificate I can to help me towards my goals.

I've hurt and let down enough people like family, friends, and loved ones throughout my life. This goes back to even my preteen years. I don't just mean physically, but mentally too; both before prison and during my incarceration I've hurt people. I'm so sorry to have to admit it's taken a long time for me to accept responsibility for my actions and to ask for forgiveness. The good news is I've had enough of all the 'same old, same old' and doing the same things but expecting different results.

I love caring for and helping others. Helping others heals something inside myself. I can't wait to go home and be able to give back to my loved ones and my community. I've always been a nurturer by nature. I want to help care for everyone and help fix their problems. People used to pick on me and say I was always bringing strays home, that you never knew if it would be an animal or a new friend.

Funny, because that's still the truth. Since figuring out what I'm sure is my life's purpose, social work, I just feel so alive and different. It's hard to explain or to put into words. Simply, this time all these feelings are very different! It's like God directly spoke to me, showed me, told me, "Amanda, this is your path." I am ready to accept all of this— my purpose, my calling, whatever you want to label it. I'm tired of just running. I'm ready to accept the challenges that come along.

We all tend to wallow in our own despair, thinking that our situations cannot be changed. It might feel or be difficult and frustrating. But here's the thing, it will change one day! Let me say this, if you're just starting your sentence, or even about done, or in the middle, every moment counts! Ask God to help get you through these trying times. Philippians 4:13 promises, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

You'll never be at peace, or able to do time alone. No matter how much, how fast, or how far you think you can run from God, please know our Father is never going to

(Continued on page 11)

Don't Judge What You Don't Understand

by Sarah McCullough



I grew up fast. And when I say fast, I mean fast. I jumped off the porch at 13 or should I say 12. In and out of detention centers and group homes at an early age, I started stealing cars, carrying guns, and running with the wrong crew by the age of 16.

I was doing my first bid at NCCIW for robbery back at 18. Because I never had a plan, it landed me back again at 20. I turned, 21, 25 and 30 doing my best years locked up because I always left prison the same way I came in. I always wanted to get money and take care of my so-called people, but never took the time to take care of me.

I last got out of prison again in 2019, and now I'm back again. But I refuse to leave the same way I came in this time. God has spared me, so it's only right I switch lanes and try to be the best me I can become by all means possible. I have lain in my bed and asked God, "why me?" The answer I got from Him was, "Why not you?"

Change sometimes ain't fun, but when it's for the better it's worth a try. At one point all I cared about was hustling. What do they say? For love of money? Now I'm working on *for the love of me*. I was always a troubled offender doing time, letting the time do me. Now I have to fall back and do the time.

Well, the saying goes 'never say never.' But, I will say

I'm never coming back to prison because I'm planning my future now. I'm working in one of the most popular jobs in the prison right now – the warehouse. I'm also going to night school to get my HSE. I'm learning to stay positive by being around positive people. I stay to myself and away from prison drama. I go to church and stay sober and find time for myself.

I can't lie, sometimes I get caught up. Then I have to take ten steps back, and remember who I'm trying to become and where I'm trying to go. I won't let my past stop me from having a bright future. I'm up next.

This is my seventh time in prison and this is the last time cause seven is the number of completion. One of my sentences ends in May 2027 and the other in 2028. I'm planning on getting my commercial drivers license (CDL) and driving trucks for a couple of years and then become a celebrity barber.

I fail sometimes. Not because I plan to but simply because I'm human. Failure is a part creating who I am and building a great life. So now what I do is stand up to it, handle it, and keep pushing because I know I can.

Sarah is a smart, funny, outgoing people person. She enjoys spending time with family, staying fresh, getting money, helping others, shopping and making people laugh.

Parenting Class Graduation

By Valencia McLean & LaTonya Gattis

Considering I became a mother at the age of 13, parenting has always been a priority of mine. There is so much to raising a child, so the more knowledge you acquire, the better. Taking Parenting Class with Mrs. Green was very informative.

We learned about different parenting styles, how to communicate with your children effectively, how to discipline them with love, and how to apply what we learned with our actions. The material we went over caused me to reflect about the previous years of rearing my children. The different parenting styles we studied also caused me to examine how I was raised.

Our class had a lot of discussions that were enlightening and made me grateful for the way my parents raised me. The material Mrs. Green gave us with will help me return to "Mommy Mode" when I am released from prison.

I am grateful for Mrs. Green, for the time she took out of her schedule to teach us such vital information. She was coming to our need of information, patience, and attentive. She went above and beyond to make sure we were all included. I strongly encourage you to sign up for these classes because not only will it help you, but it will help the children who are in your lives. (VM)



L to R: Valencia McLean, Brandy McKee, LaTonya Gattis, & Chaneye Jordan

Mrs. Greene's Parenting Class is a course I think everyone should get a chance to take. I learned so much every week! I learned how to communicate better with my daughters, and effective ways to listen to them and understand how they feel about certain situations. Now our relationships have become more open and understanding than they have ever been before.

Mrs. Greene took the time and dedication to meet with us every week and I'm forever grateful for her and what I have learned in this class. This is a really great class to take. (LG)

Getting It Right

by Gwen Moorehead

The Getting It Right class had their graduation on December 2nd at 5:30 pm. This is a self-paced course that the inmates work at independently. This class lasted around seven months. There was a total of six graduates in this class. This class was a safe place for sharing and venting and talking about everyday issues.

Their first book was called *Getting It Right*, -it examine eight thinking errors that support criminal behaviors.

They worked out of different books that they use as journals for different situations such *Managing My Life*, which deals with they learn how life management skills can serve as a bridge to new behavior. There is also *Change Plan* this book recognizes how change is possible if you are willing to do the work. *Personal Growth* gives readers the chance to examine the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Sitting in this last class with them was hilarious, the conversation and interaction with Ms. Robinson was a good rapport that showed that inmates and staff can talk and laugh with each other without having to worry about negative outcomes.

Talking with a few graduates about this class, here are some responses, Latisha Beam had a lot to say this writer chose her best statement for report. She stated taking this class with Ms. Robinson has taught me to patient and to work hard in order to meet the goals I've set in place for myself. I've been taught a very useful set of skills that I can put to use not only inside an institution, but also when I get released back into society as well. Mrs. Robinson is a very caring and devoted woman that I'm so grateful I got the opportunity of meeting and being a student in her weekly class. I would like to encourage others to sign up for this class. Don't let your current position or predicament define you. There is always someone who's willing to listen. Elizabeth Carserino, stated, "I had some errors in my thinking that needed to be changed. No matter what the circumstance, how I was treated, spoken of or spoken to, ultimately my circumstances or reactions were my choice, no one else." Wor-rying about what other's want or think are no longer a concern of mine. I do have the strength to walk away and to stay away from bad and wrong situations now. I now chose strength and what is right; I choose God and me over all. Jackie Barr, said "Being in Getting It Right I've learned not only self-control but how to control my anger somewhat. This class is very useful for people who want to grow and don't know where to start. This class has made me handle situations differently and every action doesn't need a reaction, how to think responsibly, how to control my feelings not thinking impulsively. Getting It Right is the right way to go. Rebecca Phillips stated Getting It Right, is a daily mindset. Mrs. Robinson has opened my mind and made me aware that my thinking has to change so my actions can change. This class was a safe place to open up and be honest with myself. Now going for-



L. to R, Front Row: Elizabeth Carserino, Latisha Beam, & Jackie Barr.
Back Row: Yamina Rookard, Rebecca Phillips & Montaisha Sutton.

Photo by AAC Board Member Jenny Childress.

ward, I know what I really need to change about myself so that I can be the best version of myself. I'm finally Getting It Right for me and my family."

"Getting It Right has taught me how to reroute when I feel like I'm going left. This has been a safe space to unpack things that I once held on to which was no good for me. From confronting fears & triggers to honest self-reflection sessions. I done had to stop and rethink what I thought I already knew. Mrs. Robinson stood on straight business! Actually, engaging with the class, asking questions, offering feedback and extending the rawest form of reassurance, reminding us that its never hear late to get it right! I truly appreciate her and the lessons that were learned in this environment," stated Montaisha Sutton.

Yamina Rookard said "Being in Getting It Right has taught me that the way we think plays a big role in our everyday lives, and the choices we make. Before taking this class, I was stuck in my negative mindset and in my ways. This class and Mrs. Robinson have challenged me to think better and have a more positive change in my behavior and to not make permanent decisions off of temporary emotions so when I am outside of these gates I can be great and not backslide. If you feel like you keep going left, then you should join Getting It Right. Always remember it is never too late to get it right."

Behind continued...

(Continued from page 9)

turn His back on you. I'm a true example of this factor. Here's one final word of advice: don't sit around throwing yourself a "pity party" because there is always someone else out there that's got things so much worse in life. Stop being or acting bitter, and start doing or being better! Get active! Do things, positive things, with your time. I can't get the last 13 years back, nor would I even want to, because everything good, bad, beautiful, and ugly has all led me here right where God intended me to be. My heavenly Father has led here, to where I'm finally answering His calling and it feels amazing. I believe in you and so does God!

Praise Testimony

by Chastity Washington



Where should I start? I'm Chastity Washington from Rutherford County NC, small town friendly is what it's called. Oh man, God has saved me and blessed me at times I didn't even realize it.

To make a long story short, I used some type of drug or another from 1994 to 2023, when I was sent to prison. I started with weed, went to weed infused with cocaine, to pre-

scription pills. Then, once I saw meth was cheaper, that was what I went to.

I did the utmost down to my lowest to get high and stay high. I blamed it on the abusive relationships, just wanting to fit in with the crowd, or wanting to be loved. Shoot, at one time of my life I didn't consider anyone part of my life. I didn't believe anyone loved me. If I wasn't getting beaten, or getting high, I didn't think I was being loved. I had my mama's love for sure, but when she passed things just got worse. I didn't realize that I had God's love all along. Until God answered my prayers, I didn't realize He really loved me. To be honest even now to this day when someone tells me they love me or they care I give them the crazy look like, "yeah right."

I have six children, but God called one home in 2022. And to be honest we didn't have the best relationship (the one that passed away), but we loved each other. When she passed, I walked around for a year like the living dead, weighing 141-150 pounds. But eventually I got sick and tired of being sick and tired. I got weary of doing what I was doing to get money for drugs. I had started writing bad checks, just whatever. I was in and out of the county

jail, but I'd make bond and be back to writing checks doing whatever for that high to forget my pain. But it just wasn't enough.

One day I broke down and asked, no I begged, God to take me home to Him or else to sit me down. Boy, was I tired. I hated everyone, including myself, but I begged God for help. As you can see, He wasn't ready for me, so He sat me down.

Thank God He wasn't ready for me yet. My work here wasn't done. I go home soon and I can love everyone as He has loved me. I forgive everyone as He forgave me. My family is so proud of me becoming the woman, sister, and mother that they knew I was. I can't wait to get home to my five children and seven grandchildren so I can help them get a closer walk to the Almighty One, my Savior Jesus Christ.

Look at me now! I've still got a lot of work to do, but I thank Him for saving me and for giving me another chance. I feel good I found Him. I love Him.

I thank Him for forgiving me and teaching me forgiveness.

I thank Him for being patient with me and teaching me love.

I thank Him for a second chance.

I was so ready to give up, but God took His hand and lifted me up.

Praise God, this is my testimony.

Chastity Washington can't wait to get home to her children and grandchildren so she can help them get a closer walk to the Almighty One & our Savior Jesus Christ.

Doing Time While Doing Time

by Lenneek Thompson



So, here I am the voice of a Segger!! I know they going to censor me, because one thing I've learned in life is people hate the truth. It's bigger than race, gender, culture. Right now, I'm the voice of the people trapped behind the door, doing time while doing time. This isn't one of those articles you see, and maybe pass judgment because of who is writing it or what they are saying. This

is the truth that many feel but can't articulate it properly or are just scared to speak up.

I think we get so used to adapting to our environment because it's a way of survival. So I ask, being thrown in a cell for 180 days, what you going to do? Survive! But is just surviving changing the way we think? Is it helping us learn from our mistakes? I don't think so. It's simply adding more trauma to our lives, mentally and emotionally.

Let's say someone is addicted to using drugs. Do we throw them in a room and six months later expect them to not want to do drugs anymore? No, we provide them with classes to learn ways to think different, groups so they can have support. We give them therapy so they can have a one on one to vent, cry, listen and learn.

I think it's safe to say "control status" isn't very helpful. We need help with changing our way of thinking. You can put a scammer in the hood or suburb, but they still going to scam. All you did was change their environment. So, the truth I speak is please stop throwing us in Segregation on control without giving us an outlet to learn, grow and change our way of thinking.

Surviving is easy. Changing is hard. So many people do control more than once because they just adapt. Let's stop adapting to our circumstances and change our circumstances. But we need staff on board. All hands, on deck!!

Life Lessons from a Life Sentence

by Cynthia Rupel



From the time I was only a one-digit-midget, under 10 years old, I loved words. Their sounds, spellings, meanings, and all the ways they can make you feel. I perused encyclopedias. I read dictionaries. In my mind, language was a precise and precious thing, and I compulsively corrected others misuse of it. Yes, I was ridiculed, but I couldn't help myself. How disappointing that no one appreciated my efforts to "fix" them! And not just their words, but their actions and attitudes as well.

Life Lesson #10 is: Allow others the right to be wrong. I don't know why it took me so long to understand that correcting other people is not my job. More than just being stressful, prison life can get downright dangerous when I poke my nose into other folks' lives.

When I found Jesus and realized how much fixing my own life needed, I learned to back off from stressing over what others do. It's that whole metaphorical plank in my own eye versus the tiny splinter in yours (Mt. 7:3). The way Jesus deals with all my issues —slowly, gently, not all at once—teaches me to also let others be where they are, and to trust that He is working on them, too. He is the fixer, not I. (see Rom. 14:4).

My job is simply to love them as He does, with that I Corinthians 13 kind of love that is patient and kind, humble and unselfish, and all that other juicy spiritual fruit. After all, I don't know their backstories, what they've done or what's been done to them. For all I know, that person in front of me now may be a much-improved, and still improving, version of who they were before. They don't need another person telling them what's wrong with them. Especially someone with a whole set of their own wrongs. And when I discovered the power of saying the words, "you may be right," I found out that many times, they were.

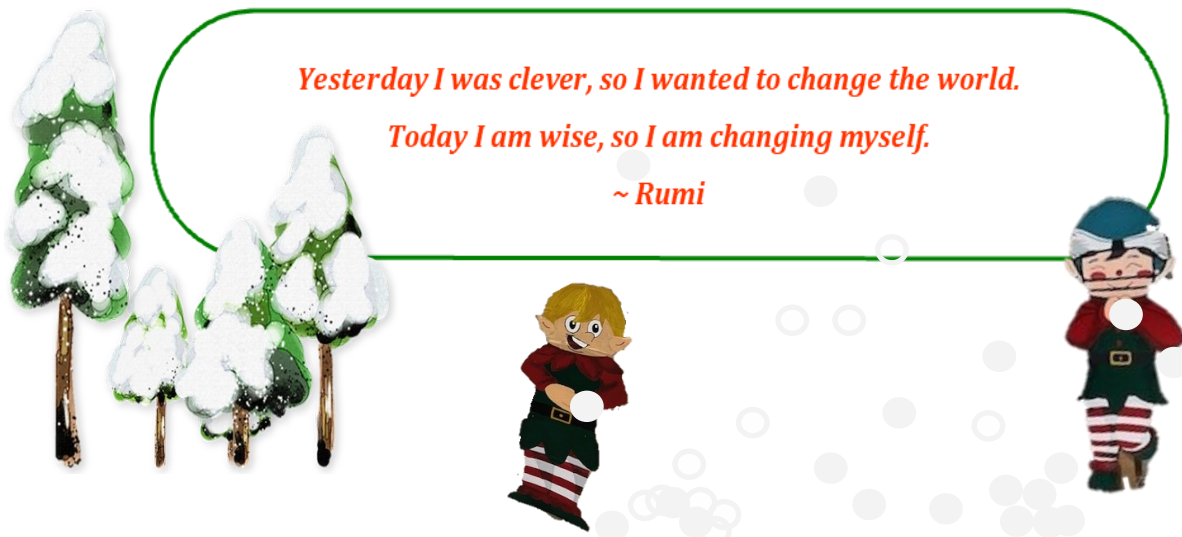
Once I gave up trying to fix people, I found it a lot easier to be kind. My days are now calmer, less frustrated. I get along with so many different kinds of people, it surprises myself. I take a daily, and often moment by moment, dose of letting it go and letting God. The officers, who are actually paid for this, deal with it. I'm learning more and more to take I Thessalonians 4:11 seriously, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business." And there's that rather graphic warning, "Like seizing a dog by the ears is meddling in a quarrel not your own." (Pr. 26:17)

Yes, there are times when someone has to step up to injustice to defend a victim, to right a wrong. This takes courage, wisdom and tact. And I found that if I generally mind my own business, people are more apt to listen when I do speak up. At the same time, I know that life is not fair. So, I don't stress myself over myriad little unfairness of everyday life, especially in prison.

If you want a little less stress in your life and a lot more peace and calm, let it go. Allow others the right to be wrong, to be where they are and who they are. Pay attention to your own life, and let God work in everyone as He sees fit.

Lesson #10
Allow Others
the Right
to be Wrong

Cynthia Rupel has been incarcerated since 2001. She is assigned to Anson Cares, and loves learning & reading. Life Lessons will be a recurring feature every month.



Fierce Ink



A special prayer for all in here,
To think about those near and dear.
With love and support you can pull through,
And prove to yourself this is what you should do.

Do what you can to better yourself,
Take your burdens and put them on a shelf.
One by one take them apart with your limb,
Don't forget to pray and give it to him.

Please help yourself to rid the fear,
Of your loved ones losing you and shedding a tear.
Even a stranger can have compassion for you,
Lower your guard, show your colors are true.

Open your heart, your mind and your soul,
Slowly focus on reaching your goal.
One day at a time, even at a slower pace,
Will prove over time, you'll win this race.

by Wendy Warren Haverstick



Cartoon by Jennifer Roberts

Baby Bird by Gracie Riddle



A bird, just a baby, attempts to fly for the very first time. He spreads his tiny little wings and takes off from his tree excited to be flying and finally free. Only, when he takes off he realizes that something is wrong. His tiny little wings just weren't that strong. Now he's falling. Unable to fly, he's falling to the ground out of the sky.

A bird, just a baby, opens his eyes and all he can see is a brilliant white light. The light speaks to him and says, "little bird, spread your wings and fly." But the bird, remembering now what had happened to him, was afraid to try it again. But the brilliant white light said to him, "Little bird, do not be afraid. You are in a wonderful, safe place." Hearing this the bird felt hopeful. So, he begins to open up his wings but then stops. He notices that these wings aren't the same. These are bigger, stronger, and well...brighter! He smiles, spreads his beautiful new wings and this time instead of falling, he's soaring. High up above in the sky. He now knows how it feels to fly.



Fierce Ink



THE 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS IN PRISON

ON THE 1ST DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... A TRIP TO THE INFIRMARY.

ON THE 2ND DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... TWO WHITE SHEETS.

ON THE 3RD DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... THREE HOT MEALS.

ON THE 4TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... FOUR PAIR OF JEANS.

ON THE 5TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... FIVE COUNT TIMES.

ON THE 6TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... SIX INMATES FIGHTING.

ON THE 7TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... SEVEN C/O'S RUNNING.

ON THE 8TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... EIGHT WRITE-UPS PENDING.

ON THE 9TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... NINE PAIRS OF PANTIES.

ON THE 10TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... TEN DAYS IN SEG.

ON THE 11TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... ELEVEN LEAKING TOILETS.

ON THE 12TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE PRISON GAVE TO ME... AND TWELVE MERIT DAYS.

BY MENDY HOLLEMAN

The Best Gift: created and performed by Lee Unit B-pod
(sing to the tune of *Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer*)

You know Scooby and Stewie, Tweety, Tom, and Jerry.

Rugrats, and South Park, and Cinderella's Fairy.

But do you recall - why we celebrate

Christmas at all?

Jesus, the Newborn Savior...

Born to free us all from sin.

All of the other presents - can't compare

To the Gift of Him.

All of our Christmas heroes,

Make us laugh and cheer with glee!

But the Babe born away in a manger,

Is the reason for our Christmas beliefs!

A donkey carried Mary to Bethlehem,

And God gave His son to the world.

The star led the way to the newborn King.

Now Christmas is here and we all can sing!

Rudolph, the Red-nosed Reindeer,

Joy to the World, Jingle Bells.

Kids watch cartoons of Christmas-

And learn about the First Christmas Tale.



Words are
mere
bubbles, but
deeds are
drops
of gold

(Performed at the decorating contest, which won them third place.)

Twas the Night Before Jesus Came

Twas the night before Jesus came and all through the house,
not a child was praying, a husband or spouse.

Their Bibles were dusty and long unread;
all forgotten what Jesus had said.

The children's sleep was restless and greedy,
thoughts of only presents, not the hungry or needy.

Mom was arguing with Dad about money;
calling him names, not one of them honey.

Dad ignored her while surfing the net,
on to a gambling site for a last-minute bet.
When out of the east, there arose such a clatter;
I sprang to my feet to see what's the matter.

Away to the window I flew like flash,
tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
And what to my wondering eyes should appear,
but an army of angels proclaiming Christ was here.

And in the clouds shining like the sun,
descended Jesus Christ, God's only begotten son.

He shone so bright I covered my head,

Jesus was here, just like the Bible said!

All my earthly cares, exploits, and dreams,
were nowhere near as important as they had seemed.

The wealth I had amassed availed me not,
for my soul's salvation could not be bought.

Jesus held the Book of Life in His hands,
listing the names of every saved man.

He turned the pages and searched for my name,
when He could not find it, my head hung in shame.

Hundreds of thousands ascended to sky,
while those left behind wailed and cried.

Many fell to their knees, but it was too late,
a lifetime of sin had sealed our fate.

The pain of loss cut like a knife,
my present could have been eternal life.

So, celebrate Christmas, if you must,
but pick up that Bible and blow off the dust.

While stockings are hung by the chimney with care,
there's a much more important message to share.

The star on the tree represents a direction,
a Savior born who commands our attention.

As the three Magi once traveled afar,
we also must look towards the star.

That star leads us to the cross,
where Christ was nailed to pay the cost.

He paid for our presents: forgiveness and love;
an eternal home with our Father above.

Santa is fake and so are the elves.

There is no North Pole where toys fly off the shelves.

No jolly Saint Nick, no flying reindeer,
yet there's proof a-plenty that Jesus was here.

It's fun to pretend, but don't lose sight;
A Merry Christmas to all, and may Jesus come tonight.



Give a gift of

The Last Word

You Have A Story!
Share It With Others!!

PEN America Writing Program

You can write to get a free copy of the *Handbook for Writers in Prison*. Write to:

PEN America
588 Broadway
Suite 33
New York, NY 10012



In addition, they sponsor an **annual writing contest**. You can submit fiction or nonfiction writings, poetry, screenplays or theatrical plays. Anyone incarcerated is eligible to enter. Prizes of \$250 for first place, \$150 for second place, and \$100 for third place are awarded in each of the following categories: poetry, fiction, drama, nonfiction and memoir. Send a copy of your work to:

PEN America
Prison & Justice Writing Program
Attn: Prison Writing Awards
120 Broadway, 26th Floor North
New York, NY 10271

The deadline for submissions is December 31st every year. When your submission is received you will be mailed notification that you have been entered. Winners will be announced in September of 2026. Winning submissions are then published in the in PEN America's annual Prison Writing Awards Anthology.

Send a Thank You for the Red

Boxes: The ladies of the NC Women's Missionary Union collect hygiene items and put together the Red Boxes for the women in prison every year. They want to let us know we are loved and prayed for by those outside the walls. If you would like to express your appreciation, you can send a note to them at the following address:

WMU-NC
205 Convention Drive
Cary, NC 27511



They are
the Real
Deal!!!

Rave of the Week: **Santa** made an appearance in the hallways for the first time in the Editors 23 years of incarceration. He was in the hallways directing traffic as everyone went to the dining hall to eat the **best roast beef meal** cooked up by the dining hall in recent memory. He brought a smile to everyone's face as they wished friends "Merry Christmas!" Kudos to the staff for making Christmas Day as smooth as possible with meals, yard call, and a Santa sighting happen.

Rant of the Week: New Year, New Count! That's right, they couldn't squeeze in yet out *another* time of day to make us stand by our door, so instead they just added in a ...(drum roll please)...mandatory Roster Count four times a month! Longer count time, everybody in your room with the door shut!

Letters To The Editor

Dear Editors,

We would like to give a shout out to Krystal DeBernardis (we call her Krazy). She went above and beyond for our pod for this year's Christmas decoration contest. She spent countless nights staying up on her bunk, hard at work drawing every cartoon character you could think of. Our pod couldn't have won without her artistic ability and creative design. In her words, "Knowing we beat all of 504 for the contest was the best 'prize' of all. Making everyone remember characters they'd long forgotten; bringing back memories and laughter was good enough for me."

Signed, Lee B-pod



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