



**LET'S GET FREE | SPRING 2021 ISSUE**





## Knitting Black Liberation

Read more on page 4.



## Tamie's Corner, Volume 3

Read more on page 2.

## 'Starship Enterprise' by Elena House-Hay

Read more on being an artist in prison on page 7.



*Dennis Horton, Dr. Brown, Cousin Billy, and Naomi Blount!*



The image on the cover was made by Katie Kaplan in collaboration with Ivy and the People's Paper Coop (PPC) and sold as a fundraiser for Let's Get Free's billboard campaign! PPC writes: Our friend Ivy Johnson, who served decades in PA prisons, designed and made this photo, and Katie did the incredible design work that includes Honeysuckle and Marigolds- both plants that Ivy identified as being full of power, beauty and resiliency all characteristics of folks she knows on the inside.

The People's Paper Co-op is a women led, women focused, women powered art and advocacy project at the Village of Arts and Humanities in North Philadelphia. The PPC looks to women in reentry as the leading criminal justice experts our society needs to hear from, and uses art to amplify their stories, dreams, and visions for a more just and free world.

The sales from this print generated \$2000 which is just enough to cover the increased rate for renting billboard space near Philly! Look for our billboard on the turnpike between Philly and Harrisburg from October 15 - December 6, 2021.

Why hello there!

Welcome to the first magazine format of the Let's Get Free newsletter. This year has been full of newness and change for us at LGF with the long awaited return of Avis Lee. We continue to be motivated by her insights and presence! It can happen to you. You can come home after being sentenced to life.

The inaugural issue of *Daughters* was received with much appreciation by many across the state. Vern Robinson from SCI-Phoenix shares, "I just received my first issue of *Daughters* and I have to say that I am impressed. It is a pleasure to see the women getting much deserved attention. I've said before--and I continue to believe--that women are pivotal in highlighting the outright evil that this sentence embodies. Women's plight starts with their maltreatment before incarceration and is only exacerbated while incarcerated. Sarita Miller did a good job of talking about women's different needs that aren't addressed. The mothers of our world are SOMEHOW forgotten, as evidenced by the large disparities between men and women in releases, whether through commutation or new sentencing or exonerations. I just want to say that *Daughters* is a great publication."

Patricia Rorrer from SCI-Muncy writes, "*Daughters* Magazine is GREAT! I received it this week, and you can't imagine how it feels to finally see women being featured in a magazine forum!"

Our original plan was to flip flop the Let's Get Free newsletter with *Daughters*:

- *Daughters* #1 - Winter 2021
- Let's Get Free Newsletter - Spring 2021
- *Daughters* #2 - Summer 2021
- Let's Get Free Newsletter - Winter 2021

Because there is such encouraging feedback for *Daughters*, Sarita and I are strategizing about how to get *Daughters* to you more frequently. Stay tuned and thanks for all your feedback.

We are still figuring out a process to handle submissions to both publications. At this time you are welcome to send us submissions but we can't guarantee that it will be published.

Not sure if it will still be SPRINTER (spring + winter) when this publication makes it way to you but whatever the season, I leave you with this quote from my dad: "The weather is in your head".

Solidarity and Movement Love, etta 5.13.21

## WHAT'S INSIDE:

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Legislative Updates.....	1
Tamie's Corner.....	2-3
Let's Get Free's Boom Box.....	3
Knitting Black Liberation.....	4-5
Let's Get Free Snapshot.....	5
PA Turnpike Billboard Update.....	6
On Being an Artist in Prison.....	7
Prison Radio Seeking Correspondents.....	7
Reflections from Knotweed Salon.....	8
Merit Review & Public Hearing Updates.....	9
Commutation Support Kit Updates.....	10
A Tribute to Coolpop.....	11-12
May 6 Merit Review Report.....	12
Free the Vulnerable Rally.....	13
DANC Corner.....	13
Re-Entry Revelations.....	14-15
Call for Art Show Submissions.....	16-17
Inside Poem Submission.....	18
Call for Submissions: In the Belly Journal.....	18

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## LET'S GET FREE | SPRING 2021 ISSUE

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# Legislative Updates

by Jane Hein

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Senator Sharif Street is proposing three bills aimed to release people from Pennsylvania prisons. The Senator reintroduced the lifer bill on January 28, 2021 as SB 135. This bill was known as SB 942 in the last senate session. SB 135 is the same as last session's SB 942. Originally the bill would have created parole eligibility for all lifers after serving a 15-year sentence. It was modified in the last senate session to be modeled after how juvenile lifers are treated in current statute. The current bill, SB 135, sets parole eligibility in the following way:

- 25 years for those convicted of 2nd Degree Murder
- 35 years for those convicted of 1st Degree Murder

There is an exemption for anyone who is convicted of murdering a law enforcement officer, who will continue to receive a life without parole sentence.

Many abolitionists oppose the law enforcement exemption, and support making 1st and 2nd degree the same. The important thing to keep in mind is that abolitionists are attacking DBI sentences from many angles and any win is a victory. With enough small victories, DBI will end.

Street is also proposing a Medical Parole Bill but he has yet to submit it. The bill creates a new medical parole process authorizing a court that imposes a sentence to modify a term of imprisonment when any of the following apply:

- The individual has a serious health issue such as a terminal illness, a chronic and debilitating physical or medical condition or disease or deteriorating physical or mental health due to the aging process.
- The individual is at least 55 years of age who has served the lesser of 25 years in prison or one half of the minimum term imposed for the offense for which they are currently imprisoned.

The third bill Senator Street is proposing would expand eligibility and improve the process for reprieve of prison sentences for the elderly and infirm during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the beginning of the crisis, and especially since November 2020, the rate of COVID-19 infections has increased dramatically at our state correctional institutions. To date, over 9,200 incarcerated people and 4,065 institutional staff have tested positive for COVID-19. This, in turn, has resulted in 97 deaths for those confined within the prison and sparked possibilities of community spread with prison staff. 20% of those deaths have taken place in the first two weeks of 2021, and incarcerated people are dying at a rate three times higher than Pennsylvania at large.

The Senator announced this bill on January 28, 2021 but has yet to submit it. This is unconscionable given the urgency of the problem. Vaccines are beginning to be delivered to the state prisons so this bill becoming law seems to be too little too late. Hopefully the Medical Parole Bill mentioned above will have the desired results (i.e., freeing the vulnerable) and will be applied even after the pandemic is over.

State Rep. Morgan Cephas, D-Phila., and colleagues, have proposed Pennsylvania's Dignity for Incarcerated Women package of legislation that would help incarcerated women and parents in PA. Cephas plans to introduce two bills: one would create a Women and Girls Committee within the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency; the other bill would require the PA DOC to submit an annual report on healthcare screenings and care services they provide to the House Health and Human Services committees and the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

Other legislation in the package would:

- **Bring ombudsmen and offer reentry mentoring program;** sponsored by Rep. Elizabeth Fielder, D-Phila.
- **Require state prisons to provide free feminine hygiene items to all female inmates;** bill sponsored by Rep. Isabella Fitzgerald, D-Phila.
- **Provide alternative sentencing for pregnant women,** bill sponsored by Rep. Summer Lee, D-Allegheny.
- **Require trauma-informed care,** bill sponsored by Rep. Summer Lee.
- **Free monthly phone call to incarcerated parents** sponsored by Rep. Donna Bullock, D-Phila.
- **Expand benefit programs to incarcerated people reentering society,** sponsored by Rep. Joanna McClinton, D-Phila./Delaware.

As mentioned earlier, abolitionists are attacking DBI sentences from many angles. To that end, on July 8, 2020, people in PA serving Death By Incarceration sentences, commonly known as LWOP, filed a lawsuit challenging the state's prohibition on parole eligibility for those serving life sentences after convictions under the felony murder rule. In PA, people convicted under that rule are mandatorily sentenced to life imprisonment, even when they did not take a life, or did not intend to take a life in the course of the crime. A separate provision of the law prohibits parole eligibility for any individual serving life. By filing this and other lawsuits, abolitionists are attacking DBI through the judicial branch of government as well as the legislative bills outlined above. You can help by writing to your legislators asking them to please co-sponsor and support these bills.



# Tamie's Corner, Vol. 3

Interview by Alan Lewandowski

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**A**S SPRING LOOMS INTO SIGHT, Tamie and I sat down to discuss her winter residence and some of Pittsburgh's floral and fauna treasures that helped to make the season bearable.

LGF: Tamie, I know from our time together that you are a true animal lover. Patrick(dog), Tidbit and Max(cats) went into serious withdrawal when you moved out, and anytime you come visit or babysit, they are on cloud nine. Are you considering getting any pets of your own?

Tam: My landlords absolutely forbid me to have any pets inside the house, including their own cat, but that hasn't totally stopped me from having pets.

LGF: How is that? Tell me about your pets..

Tam: My numerous pets! Let's see. I have roughly seven squirrels, close to a dozen mourning doves, four sets of cardinals, and three woodpeckers!

LGF: What types of woodpeckers?

Tam: Two little downy woodpeckers, a male and a female, and one big red cap. I also have seven bluejays. I've basically got a whole wildlife preserve. Since I couldn't have pets, I had to make my own plan. Don't know what's gonna happen in the summertime.

The cardinals are fat and there are super fat squirrels as well.

LGF: Animals are getting fat in this pandemic. Our grackles in Lawrenceville are as big as mourning doves.

Tam: You mean the big nasty looking ones with the yellow beaks that come in a mob. They're not out there anymore. I buy loaves of bread and feed them to the bluejays, and the grackles come too, but I always chase them away.

I also have 40 little sparrows who live across the street. When I'm waiting for the bus, I can hear them all up in the big bushy tree, just singing away. Sometimes they come out and sit on the fence.

LGF: They like our neighbor's bushes as well.

Tam: They must be trying to get warm. I bought some suet feeders for them all. I didn't put my other bird feeders in the tree, because I didn't want to bother the landlords.

When all the snow came, I started putting the birdseed on a plate--they actually love eating off the plate. I throw peanut shells on the landing outside my door too. Squirrels come up and eat them. The landlady has mentioned me feeding my pets. I say, don't worry the shells will turn to compost, and they'll be good for your stinging nettles in the spring.

Plus they have natural salt in them so it keeps my steps from freezing. She told me not to throw salt on the steps because of the plants below. She asked how I knew they were nettles. Well, I brushed up against them when I first moved in, and my leg was on fire. I wonder why she has them under the steps.

She does make tea out of them. She grows mint too. I cut some down last year and let it dry, and I've been using the dried leaves all winter for tea myself..

I keep trying to talk to my landlady about putting in an actual garden, instead of putting everything in pots. If she would give me permission, I'd put in raised beds for us, and I'd even be willing to pay for the dirt and do the work to install them. I did buy some seeds, and we ARE going to have some vegetables this year, whatever it takes.

LGF: It's nice to have a yard.

Tam: Yeah, but it is a little different in the city. My mom tried to give me a recipe to make ice cream out of snow, and told me to take some snow from the yard. I told her I'm not eating the snow here! I've got too many animals eating out there, and there are too many people with pets around, and you never know what's in that snow.

I did get excited when she said she was making homemade ice cream out of fresh snow. I like the idea, but not here. Maybe I could get it somewhere else, like Schenley Park.

LGF: How about the cemetery?

Tam: I ain't eating nothing out of the cemetery! No thank you! If I want ice cream I'll buy some milk and ice and make some. Or just buy some ice cream. Though my ice cream doesn't stay frozen. I bought some Ben & Jerry's made out of oat milk and ate a little. I went back later after it'd been in the freezer, and it was soft. I even put it behind other frozen things. For some reason the ice cream never really stays frozen. I found out ice cream is supposed to be 0°. My freezer is not that cold. They say stores keep it at 10°.

LGF: So now you buy smaller containers? ►

## ► TAMIE'S CORNER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2.

Tam: Yeah, I have to be able to eat it in a day or two. It gets a little soft, but that's ok. I'm afraid to turn my dial up. When I open the fridge, cold air comes out. If the freezer's too cold, it freezes everything in the fridge. Sometimes the landlord turns the heat off in the garage, which makes the whole kitchen freezing cold, so I turn the fridge down more.

LGF: So you're still having issues with a cold kitchen?

Tam: Yes, the garage is often not heated. One day it was 9°, so I asked my landlady to turn on the heat down there, and she did, but it is often off. Also, I recently noticed that the garage door does not close all the way. Now I know why the previous tenants had so many pest control products. There are big gaps everywhere. There used to be an inch and a half gap around the whole kitchen where the wall meets the floor. Not any more! I filled it with spray foam insulation.

LGF: How'd that go?

Tam: Haha! A big mess, but I'm gonna carve it back and make it neat and clean once the weather gets warmer. I can't understand how someone lived here for seven years with those big gaps. It had to be cold. Now I know where that great big gigantic spider went when he ran across the floor. He had his own highway! He doesn't have it any more. Nobody's coming in any more!

Also, I hung up some big curtains that I bought at Ross'. That makes the rest of the place a whole lot warmer. I stumbled upon the Ross' when I was looking to go to Coldstone Creamery at Waterworks shopping center. The curtains were worth skipping the ice cream for.

LGF: Before we close, I know that you have been able to have a few visits to Phipps Botanical Gardens recently. That's a great place to see some nice plants in the winter. Any highlights?

Tam: All the different orchids are my favorite part. They are just such beautiful flowers that you never get to see in most places. And the Cuban room is the best spot in the wintertime. It's nice and warm and it has all the waterfalls. There's a chocolate tree there too, and a big fish pond full of koi. Everything's in the Cuban room.

I'll be going back to Phipps soon with Nancy and my landlady for the Spring Flower Show. Can't wait!

LGF: Girls day out! Any parting news you'd like to share?

Tam: Just wanted to share with everybody on the inside that people on Tik Tok have been posting that they are crushing cookies in a cup with milk or water and baking them in the microwave. And they think they've discovered something brand new! If only they knew.



In the spirit of trading mixtapes or mix CDs or playlists on USB drives, welcome to our new column!

Wanna suggest a playlist? Send it in: 25 songs or less. Include song title and artist and a name for the playlist if you have one. This inaugural playlist is by etta cetera:

- **We Survived** by Climbing Poetree, Jasmine Burems & King Aswad
- **Cut Em In** by Anderson .Paak
- **Energy** by Sampa the Great, Nadeem Din-Gabisi
- **I Can't Get No Satisfaction** by Cat Power
- **Where My Girls** by Dai Burger
- **Dutiful Servants & Political Servants** by Chumbuwumba
- **Everybody Loves the Sunshine** by Roy Ayers Ubiquity
- **Hell You Talmbout** by Janelle Monáe, David Byrne
- **Sunu** by Rising Appalachia
- **Long Time Coming** by Las Cafeteras, Degruvme, La Mera Candelari
- **Levitating** by Dua Lipa, DaBaby
- **We Trying to Stay Alive** by Wyclef Jean, Refugee All Stars
- **Back to the Land** by Lester Young, Nat King Cole
- **Corazon de Rubi** by El Buho, Minuk
- **The Barrel** by Aldous Harding
- **Lock Down** by Anderson .Paak
- **Get Free** by Mereba
- **Love is the Answer** by Aloe Blacc
- **Shelter** by Vic Mensa, Wycliff Jean, Chance the Rapper
- **BLK Girl Soldier** by Jamila Woods
- **Better Change Your Mind** by William Onyeabor
- **Da Menor Importancia** by Maria Beraldo

# From Sojourner Truth to St. Louis: Knitting Black Liberation

by Al DePiro

One of the most famous images of Sojourner Truth shows the abolitionist and suffragette seated and holding a knitting needle in her right hand. Born a slave in 1797, Truth bought her freedom, became a Methodist minister, and successfully litigated for the freedom of her son. While well-known for orating for abolitionist causes, it is less often known that she often used knitting and sewing to advance the abolitionist cause. In the mid 1840s, Truth moved to the Northampton Association of Education and Industry, an abolitionist community that served as a cooperatively run silk mill, an alternative to the slave produced cotton fabrics of the time. It was through this work that Truth supported herself, and later through knitting of goods to be sold at speeches. This method of fundraising took off and was used throughout the civil war as a way for women to raise funds used to purchase clothing, medical care, and food for soldiers and refugees. While leading slaves on the underground railroad, Harriet Tubman was known for often knitting, and using sales of the goods she crafted to fund her travels. It was also common at the time for women's abolitionist groups to sew clothing for enslaved Black people who escaped to Canada.

In addition to gaining material goods for the movement, textile production has a rich history of being a way [SL1] to build community. While some historians have raised disputed claims that quilts held secret codes conveying messages about the underground railroad, it is indisputable that quilt making was a central part of enslaved people's social lives. On quilting nights, enslaved people from the house and fields were able to come together to share news, perform marriages, and engage with community. Truth held knitting circles with both white and black women, one of the few integrated abolitionist spaces of the time, where women could talk politics and get to know each other in a relational way. Most abolitionist spaces were strictly divided by "the color line," and white Northerners who were advocating for the freeing of slaves, refused to socialize or organize with free Blacks. The knitting circles that Sojourner ran were one of the few spaces where Black and white people were coming together to work collectively.

After the civil war, most white abolitionists moved on to other causes (suffrage or temperance) and did little to support newly freed Black folks and refugees. Truth remained involved in the cause, and taught cooking and textile production to free Blacks to provide them with skills and resources they could use to support themselves.

More recently, textile "craftivism" has taken hold in anti-war movements and as a way for activists to build community and cooperative economics. In the 2000s, many anti-war protests centered on the use of yarn and knitting because of its relationship to home and family. Anti-nuclear activists in 2014 knit a 7 mile long pink scarf to mark the anniversary of the Nagasaki bombing and protest nuclear weapons. In 2006 artist Maryanne Jorgensen collected small pink knit squares from around the world, and used them to create a covering for a military tank, displayed in protest of US, British and Danish involvement in the Iraqi war. Such outdoor displays of knit protest are often referred to as "yarn-bombing."

Yarn-bombing is a form of graffiti/installation/street art, in which artists hang knitted items or other textiles in a public space. Some yarn-bombings are about aesthetics – adding

brightly colored knit products around trees, benches, bridges, and other unexpected/typically utilitarian places. Others focus on activism, such as the projects mentioned above.

***"Remember to imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you dismantle the worlds you cannot live within."***

- Ruha Benjamin

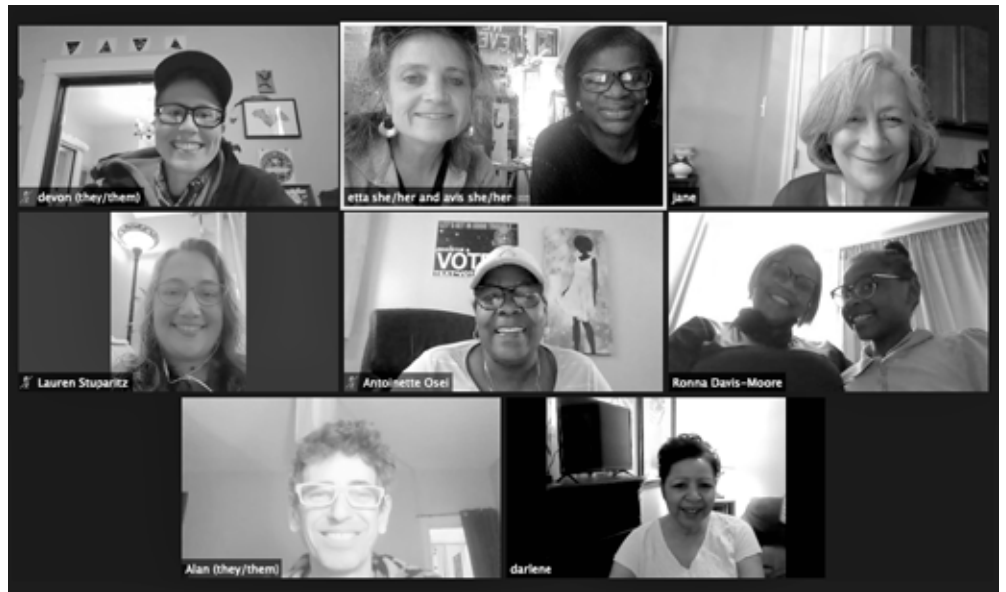


## ▶ **KNITTING BLACK LIBERATION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4**

The anti-war sentiments of activist yarn-bombing, along with abolitionists' historical use of textile crafts as a tool for Black liberation, positions yarn-bombing an interesting tool for protest in the US. We can understand war as a colonialist, imperialist project – the use of violence and force by western nations to surveil, politically influence, and control access to resources in areas primarily populated by Black and Brown people. Within the region commonly known as the United States, we can see a war on Black, Brown, and Native peoples that has existed since colonists claimed ownership of (stole) this land, since the first ships of stolen people (slaves) arrived on its shores. That war has continued through systematic defunding of public services in the areas primarily populated by Black and Brown people. War is continued in the use of force and violence against Black and Brown people by police. War is continued through targeted surveillance of Black and Brown people. War is continued through voter suppression and denying the right to vote to those convicted of crimes. We can see the effects of this war through the loss of Black lives in this country. Lower life expectancy, higher maternal mortality rates, higher infant mortality rates, higher rates of death from COVID, disproportionate rates of death at the hands of police.

Can we look back to the accomplishments of the abolitionists of the past to move toward liberated futures?

In St. Louis, after the murder of Mike Brown, a knitting collective was formed as a way for Black women to hold space together outside of protest. Yarn Mission works to fight racial injustice through community organizing and by supporting Black creators' work. It also serves as a space for Black folks to discuss the traumatic events that happened in Ferguson and that continue to happen in St. Louis. Other knitting and crafting circles have been formed across the country – to sew masks for those in need, knit blankets and scarves for the houseless, and ultimately to bring together folks who share a vision of a society where all people can have their needs met.



*Screenshot from a recent Let's Get Free Board meeting on Zoom*

## **LET'S GET FREE SNAPSHOT CURRENT PROJECTS, PROGRAMS, AND CAMPAIGNS**

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### **LET'S GO HOME:**

Initiative to get housing and other resources for people coming home from prison

### **KNOTWEED SALON:**

New political study and discussion group

### **OPERATION BREAK BREAD:**

Visiting program, connecting people on the outside with women and trans people in prison; virtual and/or in person. Our current capacity limits us from expanding this program to all genders.

### **COALITION TO ABOLISH DEATH BY INCARCERATION:**

We are a part of this coalition working to end DBI sentencing in PA through legislation and the courts.

### **CREATIVE RESISTANCE:**

Committee that works on the annual art show, public service announcements, social media graphics, films, magazines and newsletters and all things creative. Let's Get Free has used art as an organizing tool since its inception working to raise awareness about women and trans people in prison.

### **LET'S GET SMART:**

Project working to make free online college courses accessible to all in PA state prisons.

### **CAMPAIGN FOR MEANINGFUL COMMUTATION:**

Support for long timers filing commutation applications and pressuring the state to reform the outdated and dysfunctional clemency process.



# The PA Turnpike Billboard Update

Our first billboard was installed on January 18!! The billboard is moving to another location on the western part of the PA turnpike on April 19th. Millions of impressions are expected to be made upon drivers heading from Pittsburgh to Harrisburg and Philadelphia. Many of these people will be exposed to this issue for the first time.

With sponsorship from CADBI West, the Prison Radio Project, the Human Rights Coalition and the People's Paper Coop, we have secured rent for one billboard on the turnpike for this entire year. Each group donated amazingly generous amounts!! That's one billboard up in different places during the merit reviews and public hearings for a total of 8 months throughout the year. (Just so you know, to keep one billboard up for the whole year costs \$18,000 and we just don't have it like that. However, when we drove by on April 2, it was still up!! Billboard rent bonus!)

In addition to rent, printing each billboard vinyl costs \$1,300 and we decided to change the design for the next billboard. Going high speeds on the turnpike, we realized our original design is a bit too wordy: "5647 people in PA are sentenced to die in prison." So we hope to simplify it to "Life Sentences are Death Sentences" with "End Death By Incarceration" along the bottom. The vinyl signs can be reused as long as the billboards are the same size, so we're planning to reuse our first design in a city, near a stop light for instance.

A note on the statistic in the billboard message: this number is as accurate as it can be with the reality that it fluctuates. As of November 2020, the DOC listed 5191 people sentenced as adults serving and as of September 2020, 276 people sentenced as under the age of 18 still serving. So 5,467 was true as of Winter 2020. We know that number has already gone down slightly for both joyous and heartbreaking reasons. 13 people were finally released on commutation and we have lost many to COVID.



*Above: the billboard off the PA Turnpike near Somerset!*

**UNFORGIVE -ness**  
Keeps US STUCK  
-CYD BERGER.

**How much punishment is too much?**  
**END DEATH BY INCARCERATION**  
**LETSGETFREE.INFO**

# On Being An Artist in Prison

by Elena House-Hay

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To me, art is an ambitious expression. It takes ephemeral images, impressions, and thoughts from my brain and forces ghosts out through my hands. That any art - writing, drawing, painting, or otherwise - can capture thoughts is ambitious; it takes enormous concentration and technique.

The issue in prison is that all concentration and technique is stunted. Being an artist in prison challenges creativity, and despite scarcity and bureaucracy, creativity overcomes.

The challenge lies in limited supplies and in the stress of our environment. We're allowed a narrow range of media, a range that shrinks every year. Each pencil or tube of paint becomes sacred as resupplying an art stash is a multi-month-long negotiation of paperwork, security checks, and DOC restrictions. With scarcity embodied in even a single pen, there arises pressure in losing creativity.

For me, the pressure urges me to be perfect. Every drop of paint becomes a sacrifice, every square inch of paper a narrow escape for my potential. The scarcity of supplies mixes with a strain of mind and motivation, strengths regularly drained by the hardness and dehumanization of prison. The stress leaves me afraid that I will waste my supplies on hands too unpracticed to express my thoughts. I fear that what is in my mind will disappear and deflate from one criticism, from one bad moment.

I worry that my flaws will render my ambitious expression into nothing - that it will not be heard, that I will ruin it all, my visions failing inside me.

The only remedy is to work. The work frees me, and suddenly my ambition feeds dedication and the carefree joy of creation. Overriding the 'I can't do this' is 'just paint, just write, just draw' and I transition into frenzied generativity. This is art. There is fire in refusal, exhilaration in breaking doubt. Potential ceases to frighten and 'what is' takes over.

When I am done, my art is never perfect. It has consumed sacred supplies. But all is well because in communing with creativity, I've managed my ambition. I set something free that was not free before and it is real. Real as every emoted stroke and swirl. Satisfaction may fade the next moment and my fear will inevitably return to veil my ambition. But even then, the visions of rapture remain, entrenched, never satisfied and ever yearning to be free. All art is triumph, a refusal of dehumanization, and it is never ending, even if it is hard to rouse.

Being an artist in prison functions to make art my hard-earned salvation. It is restorative, unshakable hope. If my art can be free - of prison, depression, and fear - so can I. And that is the promise, the lure, the most ambitious expression I can seek.

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## Prison Radio Seeking Correspondents

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Prison Radio is a nonprofit organization that seeks to amplify the voices of incarcerated people by publishing commentaries that are only a few minutes long. We receive commentaries of all kinds: poetry, autobiographical pieces, audio essays, journalistic reporting, and so on.

If you are interested in calling in, please **call Noelle Hanrahan at 415-648-4505** at any of the following times:

- **Sunday: 6 pm - 9 pm EST**
- **Monday: 4 pm - 9 pm EST**
- **Tuesday: 6 pm - 9 pm EST**
- **Wednesday: 4 pm - 9 pm EST**
- **Friday: 4 pm - 9 pm EST**

**COMING  
SOON:**

A future issue of this newsletter magazine will focus on mental health.

Send us your tips, strategies, and advice for how you cope day-to-day.



# Reflections from 'Knotweed: Salon Through the Walls'

This past month we wrapped up our first full round of *Knotweed: Salon Thru the Walls*, our political education group consisting of both inside and outside folks. Each round we read and respond to articles on a topic, then read and respond to each others' commentary.

This past round we discussed the topic of reparations, reading Nikole Hannah-Jones' New York Times Magazine article, "It is Time for Reparations" and zuri arman's medium article, "Why I Don't Support Reparations: Why I Want More."

Feel free to reach out if you would like copies of these readings!

Through these readings and our discussions, we thought about what reparations is, what it might look like if enacted, if it could ever be enough, whether reparations feels like justice, and what it means to seek reparations under the capitalist state.

We imagined reparations in different ways: money, housing, education, health care, land, and more. The overall sentiment was that while money would help people in the near term, money as the only form of reparations is wholly insufficient as a mechanism for "repair" or "justice." Many folks thought reparations is way overdue, and many doubted the government's commitment to anything pro-Black. In thinking about logistics, we considered the US' other forms of reparations, like to Japanese Americans post-internment, or all these stimulus checks we now know the government can cut. While some people thought reparations would be a helpful tool, others thought that it might serve as the buying of silence and perpetuation of white supremacist state. We also thought about the ways reparations for Black folks in America brings in overlapping questions with indigenous liberation, especially when thinking about reparations in the form of land.

Below are some of the responses from both rounds:

"At the root of the word, reparations is the word repair, to mend. The reparations will not be worth much if the majority of the American public still does not see Black people as human beings and worthy of the same rights, dignity, respect and opportunities."

"My first thought is that using the word 'reparations' feels weird to me because I don't think anything can be done to repair the trauma - physical, psychological, emotional, generational - that black people have experienced in America."

"Reparations should play a role in every aspect of tearing down the web which is the legacy of slavery."

"One theme that I saw across responses, particular from people that identified themselves as black, is the need for autonomous, non-hierarchical, horizontal social relations. Truth is, we have nothing without each other, so why not act like it?"

"It appears to me, we need to use the best of all our ancestors' ideas in pursuit of liberation, including reparations. It shouldn't be the main ingredient but one of the elements toward empowering our people."

"Money doesn't fix injustice. It's like America is in court versus the black community trying to settle instead of receiving criminal charges of murder, assault, kidnapping, rape, battery, and theft."

It's been a great learning experience, and **we are excited to start our next round in April on abolition feminism.** Our topics are deep but our readings are short! We'd love to have you learn with us, so please **let us know if you'd like to join.**

# Merit Review & Public Hearings: March 5, 2021 Update

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LGF reached out to PA abolitionist ‘Data Diva’ Elaine Selan, who provided us with the chart at right detailing the votes for those with Life Sentences seeking commutation at the March 5th Board of Pardons Public Hearings. Two of the six (Kennard Short, Felix Rosado) did not end up getting voted upon at this session, but were instead continued until the next session.

We rejoice to see James Inge and Irvin Moore receive the board’s recommendation for commutation! Now they only await the Governor’s signature before they walk into freedom! Also, Carlos Estrella was approved for an open hearing! Elaine Selan also informs us: “a man w/a 3rd degree homicide conviction from Lehigh Valley received a recommendation for a pardon! This is important and uplifting news, too.” We rejoice with these four men, their families and loved ones, and the statewide movement for abolition.

Our joy is tinged with disappointment and sadness for John Brookins and his family, as Mr. Brookins’ commutation was denied. We send them encouragement and solidarity

to continue seeking clemency. Mr. Brookins has gone 30 years without a misconduct. He also has strong claims to innocence, as evidenced by the presence of a representative from the Innocence Project who spoke at the hearing on Mr. Brookins’ behalf. This is by no means the end, and we trust that Mr. Brookins will find his way home before long. Let it be!

Finally, Elaine fielded a question for us proposed by Ronald Milton (SCI Mercer): “What percentage of successful commutation applicants has been represented by private counsel at their hearing?”

Her answer: “That is not information that is shared publicly. What applicants need is good coaching and mentorship, not legal representation—just my opinion. I have seen lawyers speak with best intentions but then say too much. The person’s representative should be someone who knows him/her very well and that is not always one’s lawyer.” Also, LGF’s very own Avis Lee reports that she followed advice to not appear with private counsel at her successful hearing.

## Upcoming Merit Review & Public Hearing Dates

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Typically, the Board of Pardons will hear lifer cases on the second day of hearings (usually the day after they conduct applicant interviews). The only exception to this is when the BOP will hear reconsideration or Held Under Advisement (HUA) cases (for lifers) under old or new business, in which case, they typically take place on the last day of hearings.

Below are the 2021 public hearing dates. Friends and Family can witness public hearings through a links and numbers posted on the Board of Pardons Website: <https://www.bop.pa.gov/>

- Thursday, May 6, 2021: Merit Review Session – Skype Session 3:00 pm (***\*Read the report back on page 12!***)
- Wednesday, June 23, 2021: Public Hearing – Zoom
- Thursday, June 24, 2021: Public Hearing – Zoom
- Friday, June 25, 2021: Public Hearing – Zoom
  
- Thursday, August 5, 2021: Merit Review Session – Skype Session 3:00 pm
- Wednesday, September 22, 2021: Public Hearing – Zoom
- Thursday, September 23, 2021: Public Hearing – Zoom
- Friday, September 24, 2021: Public Hearing – Zoom
  
- Thursday, October 28, 2021: Merit Review Session – Skype Session 3:00 pm
- Tuesday, November 30, 2021: Public Hearing – Zoom
- Wednesday, December 1, 2021: Public Hearing – Zoom
- Thursday, December 2, 2021: Public Hearing – Zoom



# Hearing Update Continued

Amistad Law Center posted this following the hearings:

We are deeply troubled by the Board’s decision to deny John Brookins a recommendation for commutation. John Brookins has been incarcerated for 30 years, and has not received a single misconduct while in prison. He has become highly skilled in yoga, meditation, and horticulture and is eager to contribute to his community outside of prison walls. He was highly opposed by Bucks County District Attorney Matt Weintraub who is also refusing to retest DNA evidence in his case. In 2018, DA Weintraub opposed the commutation of Craig Datesman while members of the victim’s family publicly clamored for Mr. Datesman to be shown mercy and testified in favor of his commutation. When it comes to mercy and justice at the Board of Pardons, DA Weintraub cannot be seen as a credible voice.

We continue to be concerned about persistent limitations of the commutation process, and the entrenched norms of the current Board’s approach to commutation. During the 1970’s, it was routine to see over 30 people granted commutation every year. The process was shut down by the mass incarceration politics of the ‘tough on crime’ era. In 2020, the Board recommended 16 people for commutation. Today, only two applicants were recommended. The Board and the Governor must commit to bringing home at least as many people every year as in the 1970’s.

COVID-19 has highlighted what we have long known to be true: mass incarceration is a crisis in Pennsylvania. Our society continues to fail victims when we provide them with little but the promise of punishment. While our communities are crying out for resources, our prisons are overcrowded with rehabilitated and elderly people. Instead of permanent punishment, we must invest in the resources people need to grieve, heal, and thrive. Lives are at stake right now, and the Board has a critical role to play in making Pennsylvania a place where everyday people can truly find justice and mercy. At the same time, we know the Board will not be able to interview and evaluate people at a rate appropriate to the scale and urgency of the problem. That is why we fight for parole review for all lifers. Our movements know how to hope and know how to fight, and we will keep fighting until all people who have turned around their lives are free.

Commutation Public Hearing Results for March 5, 2021 | Information charted by Elaine Selan

Last Name	First Name	Number	Location	Conviction	DOB	Age	Race	Conviction Year	Years Served	County	Votes					Decision	Notes
											Grayson	Williams	Gubernick	Shapiro	Fetterman		
Brookins	John	BW7444	Phoenix	1st	5/26/64	56	Black	1992	29	Bucks	No	No	No	No	Yes	Not Recommended	
Inge	James	AF8705	Phoenix	1st	3/10/53	67	Black	1978	43	Phila	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Recommended	
Moore	Irvin	AF0768	Rockview	1st	8/8/46	74	Black	1971	50	Phila	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Recommended	Was not interviewed by board
Short	Kennard	AM8197	Rockview	1st	10/25/66	54	Black	1983	38	Phila	-	-	-	-	-	Continued	
Reconsiderations/UA																	
Rosado	Felix	DB0028	Phoenix		6/29/77	44	Hispanic /Latinx	1996	25	Berks	-	-	-	-	-	Continued	No vote for open hearing
Estrella	Carlos	NR2059	Frackville	1st	4/6/95	27	Hispanic /Latinx			Lehigh	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Approved	

# Commutation Support Kit: Updates & Friendly Reminders

as of March 2021 | written with Avis Lee, Elaine Selan, Ellen Melchiondo, and etta cetera

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- **Your filing date & patience:** This process requires a lot of patience! After you send in your application it will be officially “filed.” This means the DOC submitted it to the Board of Pardons; once received and reviewed, you should receive correspondence from the Board that has your Filing Date. From that point, it can take up to two years from your filing date to get through the commutation process. With the Board’s goal of getting the timeline reduced to one year, this target has not yet been reached due to several factors: COVID; increased number of applications; and limited prison and Board capacity.
  - **Interview with DOC Secretary John Wetzel:** It has long been thought that Secretary Wetzel interviews each applicant as part of the prison review process; this is not always the case. We have learned not everyone will have a video interview with the Secretary. However, if you get scheduled to meet with him, it is very common for him to postpone these scheduled interviews and as a result, delay your application process.
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## CHANGES ARE COMING...

- Naomi Blount, a Commutation Specialist working for the Lt. Governor, advises: “Stick to the questions asked on the application form. Don’t go into what happened in the courts. Make your application clear, so readers do not have to guess as to what you may mean. Most importantly... TELL THE TRUTH!” Remember, excluding information or facts will be viewed as being untruthful.
- Letters of Support (There are two types of letters):
  - **§ Character Statements:** letters from family and friends demonstrating support for your release and speaking on your character. The Board will accept these letters of support when you send in your application or anytime after.
  - **§ Reentry Support Letters:** The reentry support letters are the most important; these are letters about home plans, jobs, financial support – any tangible support to facilitate your successful reentry. It is strongly advised that these letters be sent once you get your official filing date, or later, because they can become outdated or no longer accurate.
- **Home plans are important!** It’s ok to have more than one home plan but having a home plan that is located in PA is essential. When your sentence is commuted you must reside in Pennsylvania for one year [12 full months]. No wiggle room on this requirement; this is the law. You are technically on furlough for a year. This means your assignment to a Community Corrections Center [CCC] can be modified so that you will be permitted to spend extended periods of time at your home plan location. You will be able to do this once your home plan is approved. Remember a home plan is simply a promise of a place to stay; you will be able to modify the plan, if needed, once you are living in the CCC.
- **Innocence Claims and Wrongfully Convicted:** The Innocence Project is collaborating with the Board of Pardons to create an addendum that will be used specifically by those who have a claim of wrongful conviction will include questions specific to these issues . This additional form is being finalized; and should be available by the end of 2021. The commutation process is not designed to address or resolve actual innocence claims so unless you can prove it, keep guilt or innocence out of the application. Focus on compassion, mercy and your accomplishments/prison record. If the PA Innocence Project supports your innocence claims, they will write a letter on your behalf to include with your application.

### PA Innocence Project

#### Philly Office:

1515 Market St, Suite 300  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

#### Pittsburgh Office:

914 Fifth Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

- **Digital Application Coming Soon:** The application process is hoped to become completely digital no later than February, 2022. When this happens, each applicant will have their own account – applicants and their support people can help file the application, make modifications and check on status of the application. There should be an identified location in each prison where one will be able to use the technology.



Please write to our mailing address to request the complete Commutation Support Kit.



# A Tribute to William 'Coolpop' Abbot

compiled by Alan Lewandowski

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*Earlier this year, the pandemic claimed one of Pennsylvania's brightest lights, inside elder, organizer and educator, William "Coolpop" Abbot. Let's Get Free asked some of those who knew him to contribute their reflections on this exceptional human being, and to create a tribute to his life and work through their words. His closest associates and fellow freedom fighters at SCI Forest, Tony Brown and D.M., stepped forward to honor Coolpop, along with fellow jailhouse lawyer Curtis Brandon. Outside perspectives from Miracle Jones and myself are offered as well. Long live Coolpop!*

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The following is written by Tony Brown and D.M.:

In January 2021 we lost a true Freedom Fighter due to COVID-19 at SCI Forest. One of the many unacceptable human tragedies. William "Coolpop" Abbot was born and raised in SW Philly, which they called "Black Bottom" back in the day. Coolpop spent the final days of his life fighting for freedom for all "lifers." His role in everyday life was guiding others to fight by having good behavior and working on their law work. He would tell anybody, "If you need help, I will help you." He also fought for all lifers over 55 to have the opportunity to see parole.

Before the pandemic, Coolpop had been leading the education class on commutation every Sunday night. When everything was shut down, he still kept working, continuing his efforts towards creating an organization he co-founded called Gray OWLS (Oldheads With Life Sentences) that would help all men 50+ at SCI Forest. He also continued work on helping his brothers get an education. There was a Pennsylvania prison correspondence project called, "Address This!" Coolpop was working on making a course for H.F.C. (Hope for Change), so the men here could request to be signed up for the program.

Coolpop was on the Lifers and Long-Timers Committee, a part of H.F.C. here at SCI Forest. He was a member of all chapters of CADBI, and he was also in touch with Rep. Joanna McClinton (D-Phila) in regards to challenging prison gerrymandering. One of Coolpop's notes was, "Many of the prisons holding these people are in rural areas with low populations. When prisoners are counted as residents of the towns where they are serving time, those numbers have a direct impact on political power

and resources, and this practice harms the communities where the prisoners come from."

When you saw Coolpop walk from afar, you could tell he stood out from the rest. His old school stroll with his hat tilted slightly to the side was a beautiful sight to see. He would express his love for chicken cheese steak as well as his great love for music, singing and songwriting--playing all instruments and possessing the rhythm and harmony for R&B and Blues. I mean, he was like a library when it came to music. During Black History Month here at SCI Forest, his playing the congos, it was something to see. I must say, he was one of the finest congo players I have ever seen. And his Black History stories showed him to be a great historian and student of history.

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***"He was always upbeat, no matter what the situation was. No matter how dire it was, he always found something good, something positive. The two of us were the last to speak with him before he left the block. Even to this day, we talk about him, and it puts a smile on both of our faces. May God bless his family, and may his memory be a blessing!"***

-Tony Brown and D.M., SCI Forest

***"Coolpop participated in all Black History festivities within this facility, playing the drums and reciting his poems that he wrote for Black Unity. Coolpop always tried to mentor the youth in prison, to curtail any violent attitudes and to stop the youth from stabbing each other over foolish nonsense. Coolpop was always in the library whenever scheduled for it, fighting for his freedom. We always sat at the same table at the law library, where we often discussed precedents to research. A lot of people here miss Coolpop since his January 19th passing."***

-Curtis Brandon, SCI Forest



***"I was fortunate enough to meet Coolpop on a visit with CADBI West. He was warm and engaging right off the bat. He was full of stories about his life and living behind the wall. We spent the majority of the visit talking about his life before he came in, how he enjoyed not having to live with people who talk all the time, and how proud he was to know that people were returning home to continue the work and not forgetting those on the inside. He was full of life and laughter. He did not sugarcoat things, and was inquisitive on how the world was working in his absence. He was an all around cool person. I know he will be missed, and he should still be here planning for his future outside the walls."***

-Miracle Jones, CADBI West

***"When I read a report of COVID related deaths at SCI Forest, I was stunned to see William Abbot listed among them. William Abbot is not William Abbot, he is Coolpop! And this can't be! I cursed aloud. I asked God, 'how could you take this freedom fighter from the world at a time when the world needs freedom fighters more than ever?' And then I sat in my chair and cried."***

***I knew Coolpop through his letters to LGF, which were always full of reports of his working on legislation, or inside organizing and educating. His work with Tony Brown in the Lifers and Long-timers committee and the Grey OWLS exemplified freedom fighting. Carrington Keys referred to him as a good elder and comrade. Coolpop had so many ideas, and yet he always asked for us to share any ideas we had, as if he had an insatiable hunger for ideas towards his solitary goal of freedom and a good life for all. We met once in the visiting room at Forest, where cross-talking is not encouraged, but his demeanor radiated a Christ-like spirit and humanity at its finest. In the last correspondence I received from him, the very final sentence was a reminder about an earlier request to send a representative to Forest to give a lecture on the commutation process. Let us celebrate the life and work of this fierce advocate of collective learning and liberation! Let us rejoice as I imagine he would, with the knowledge of a life well-lived! Blessings in your new life Coolpop. May your friends and family find comfort, and may your spirit have wings!"***

-Alan Lewandowski, Let's Get Free!

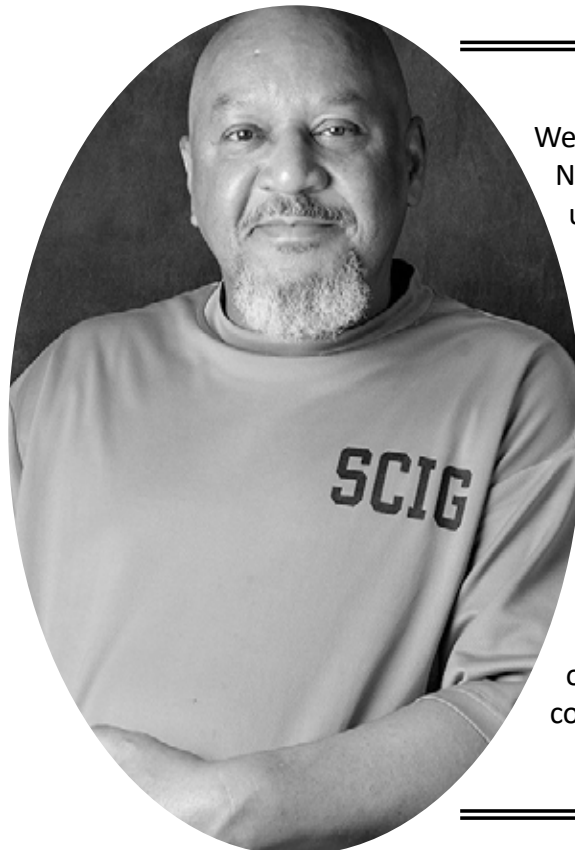
## May 6 Merit Review Report

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As many of you know there were merit review hearings recently on Thursday, May 6. The results are mixed - both joyous and heartbreaking. Below are a few updates. We will have more results in the summer issue of *Daughters* after the June public hearings. The following reports are excerpted from Lily Rorick, who keeps us all informed through the Amistad Law Project's Twitter Feed. Please forgive the brevity in this report.

- The Board unanimously recommended Denise Crump.
- The Board denies Phoebe Tomasek an opportunity for a hearing, 3-2. John Fetterman implored the Board for one more "yes".
- Yvonne Cloud was unanimously denied.
- The Board denied both Percy Johnson and Terry Kightlinger an opportunity for a hearing. Marsha Grayson and John Fetterman were the only votes for second chances on these cases.
- The Board unanimously recommends Jesse Faust for a public hearing.
- The Board denied Marc Draper a second look, with Gubernick, Williams and Attorney General Shapiro voting "no". The Board unanimously recommends Wayne Covington for a public hearing. He has been incarcerated for over 50 years.



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We lift up Bruce Norris who was unanimously approved by the Board to come home last fall, but contracted COVID and passed while waiting for Governor Wolf to sign off on his commutation.

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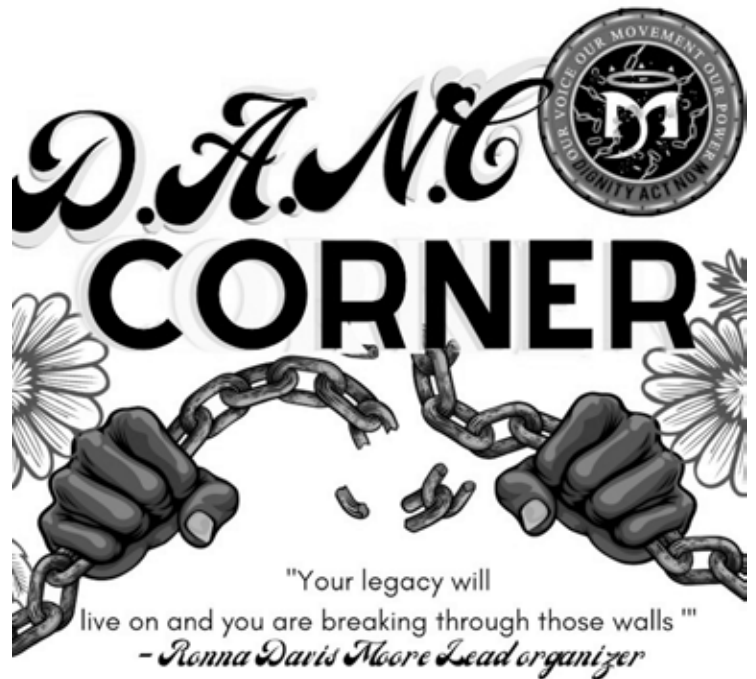


# Free The Vulnerable Rally

**HARRISBURG** - Cynthia Alvarado gave an impassioned speech on Tuesday, April 6 on the Capitol steps as a part of a rally imploring Governor Wolf to “Release Our Loved Ones” and “Free the Vulnerable.” Bobby Harris was a part of the organizing committee along with Dignity and Power Now. There were 118 small wooden caskets displayed on the steps, each with a rose on top, each representing people in prison who died from COVID.

Cynthia spoke:

*“I never realized how horrible our system was until I was impacted. I was sentenced to die in prison by Philadelphia. I was wrongfully convicted, they denied all of my appeals. I decided to fight. My environment told me I was nothing but I became a jailhouse lawyer. It wasn’t the psychologists or therapists in prison that helped me. It was my comrades that are doing life, like my friend Rose Dinkins, who has served 50 years and she is in her 70s now. I’m here for her because people can change. We are not perfect. I am asking that the elders at SCI Muncy are released. On the days I wanted to kill myself because the system casted me out, it was them who told me to love myself.”*



Marys Daughter for the Formerly Incarcerated (MDFI) is an advocacy based initiative, led by directly impacted black mothers, caregivers trans and non-binary people. It serves a multidisciplinary and intersectional platform for currently/formerly incarcerated Black women ,trans and non-binary people . MDFI works to advocate for the lives of impacted individuals, while uplifting their experiences through activism(activist art)

## Join our Mobilizer Boot Camp

Facilitation of workshops that will enable returning citizens to ReEnter their natural communities with the tools necessary to ensure a successful transition, reducing recidivism. The workshops are created for the people, by the people. A living testimony of what worked. Independent Living, Healing From Our Trauma, Reproduction Justice, and The Art of Storytelling are the four pillars used as a platform for liberation, justice, and healing.

## Contact Us

**412 437 1796**

## Manifestation Activity

Take a piece of paper and meditate and envision your spirit's physical form. What shape , size , color would you be if you were released from your human form? While still holding the piece of paper Think about something you want to release from your mind, body or Spirit. ( This can be an insecurity or you may have or even a traumatic event that you feel still effects you). Imagine that the piece of paper is the thing you want to release ball it up or tear it up and throw it way.

*When we heal together. We can Build together*

# Re-Entry Revelations

by Avis Lee

**F**RIDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2021 was by far the happiest day of my adult life. I left prison after serving 40 years, 6 months, and 12 days of a Life Without Parole sentence.

As I traveled down the interstate I felt ecstatic, elated, overjoyed, jubilant and relieved. It was happening. I was on my way home... to Pittsburgh. The ride was smooth but I got a little queasy about halfway through; it took about 2.5 hours to get here.

I'm currently at Pittsburgh CCC (Community Correction Center). The day I arrived, I did intake, met the center director and my counselor, was given a new mask, gave a urine sample, and went to quarantine to await my Covid-19 test results.

I'm supposed to be here for one year. I'm allowed out Monday-Friday for work and also for two 4-hour segments of free time. (Update: free time is now 6 hours, twice a week). I work part time for Let's Get Free: The Women and Trans Prisoner Defense Committee. Due to Covid-19 restrictions I had to go in quarantine until my lab results came back. I was able to go shopping the day after I got out of quarantine Note: that was one of my 4-hour free times.

The general rules at the CCC are:

- Fill out a weekly schedule for free time, work, community service, and outpatient treatment.
- Get a job (**TIP:** Local fast food restaurants hire you on the spot or within one or two days!!!).
- Due to Covid you must wear a mask when out of your room and stay in your cohort.
- You buy and cook your own food but you can cook and share with your roommates. The CCC does have a pantry that we use until we're able to buy groceries and NO food is allowed upstairs ever.
- There are coin-operated washers and dryers for \$1 each (you must use quarters only; they will give them to you one time if you're new but you have to ask for them).
- You'll be given three combination locks; one for your closet, one for your refrigerated food bin, and one for your dry foods locker. You'll also get a bin (like the gray bin on commissary) for clothes, papers etc.
- You have total control over your cash. You can have cash, credit cards, debit cards, and bank accounts.
- You do not pay rent at CCC. You can have and you need a cell phone because you have to call downstairs before you can leave to go anywhere.
- You can get food stamps and a medical card because within days of your arrival you will have to choose a Primary Care Physician (which is a doctor) and a health plan.



*Sightseeing in downtown Pittsburgh*

- You can have bus passes.
- There are "real" mattresses with built-in box springs, carpeted rooms, and air conditioners but there aren't any TVs and you cannot bring yours. You can have your tablet and headphones. There are no kiosks.
- No visitors are permitted right now because of Covid but friends and family can drop off a cell phone, groceries, clothing, and cosmetics (**TIP:** Dollar Tree, *not* Dollar General, sells everything for \$1).
- If you ask you'll be given a voucher for \$14 for the thrift store.
- You cannot wear any prison clothing including brown sweats. If you arrive in them, you will either be given clothing or sent to the thrift store to get clothing. The Red White and Blue thrift store has great deals. I bought Tommy Hilfinger sandals for \$4.99 and Coach slip-ons for \$14.

Overall the CCC is nice, the staff are very helpful. Secretary Wetzel and Dr. Conti came to see me just to check in with me and see how I was doing.

It's been about 65 days now since I've been released. I saw a parole agent on Thursday. She came from New Castle, PA to talk to me about preparing to see the Parole Board in October. She gave me a parole booklet to read and told me to call her once a week so she could get to know me better because she will not be my field agent (aka P.O.), but she will be putting in a recommendation to the Parole Board prior to my interview with them in October. If you're wondering why I have to see the parole board if my sentence was commuted, it's because as long as we're at the CCC, we are considered furlough status. Once you actually see the Parole Board, are paroled and assigned a permanent P.O., you're able to move out of the center and live at your own place on parole.

Basically she asked me a lot of questions about how my re-entry is going and what my goals are moving forward. I told her that I work for Let's Get Free part-time and that I am currently in a six-week pre-apprenticeship program with Reimagine Re-Entry. This program prepares you for jobs in the construction trades. Some of you may remember that SCI-Muncy offered a construction & maintenance program with Mr. Lou Capaldi. That's where I learned carpentry. I told her that my short term goal was to get my learner's permit (received it on 4-13-21), and my long term goal (by fall), is to get my PA driver's license and possibly enroll in a four-year carpentry apprenticeship. One of the apprenticeship's requirements is that I have a driver's license and reliable transportation to get to the various job sites.

**Housing Tip:** In addition to going to a Center, if you can find a home/furlough plan with family or friends I would do that because finding "affordable" housing in the city is difficult. All of the waiting lists are 12- 18 months long at least! Most of the housing applications that you'll fill out ask if you have been convicted of a felony in the past seven years, which for many of us is no. I still tell them up front no, but I have a conviction stemming from a crime committed in 1979, have received executive clemency from the PA governor, and I am 60 years old and on parole for the rest of my life. I do this because I believe it's just best to be honest and if you live in an apartment building that has a security intercom system your P.O. has to have the access code, so your landlord would find out you are on parole anyway. Also, if a landlord would refuse to rent to you because you're on parole, would you want to live somewhere where you're not wanted anyway? That's how I see it. I'm happy to be associated and spend my hard earned money with people who believe in giving people second chances.

All in all, re-entry is a beautiful thing. I highly recommend it. Please continue to fight everyone. We are out here supporting your efforts in many ways. You are definitely not alone. I know sometimes it feels like that, but trust me when I say this: **YOU ARE NOT ALONE.** It's a lot of work. I've had a lot of victories and a lot of frustrations; mostly with wanting things to happen quickly. For example, I wanted to start looking for and purchase a car on Friday after only having my learner's permit

for four days. I figured I could just park it and once I had my license it would already be there. Reality check: a title can't be transferred to someone who only has a learner's permit and not an actual PA driver's license without a cosigner and tons of paperwork.

LOL Rookie Mistakes:

- Putting the lid upside down on takeout coffee is not a good idea or a good look.
- Freezing pre-cut, bagged salad and then running warm water over the bag = soggy salad.
- Buying a monthly bus pass at Giant Eagle for \$97.50 and finding out from your roommate the following day that you could've gotten it for \$30 elsewhere.
- Beautifully colored slushies at Primanti's are alcoholic; they're adults-only slushies. Who would have thought? Always ask what's in anything you're thinking about ordering as a beverage. Good thing I asked!



*Avis & Etta dining out at Primanti's*



*Getting the COVID-19 vaccine*



# Now Accepting Art Show Submissions!

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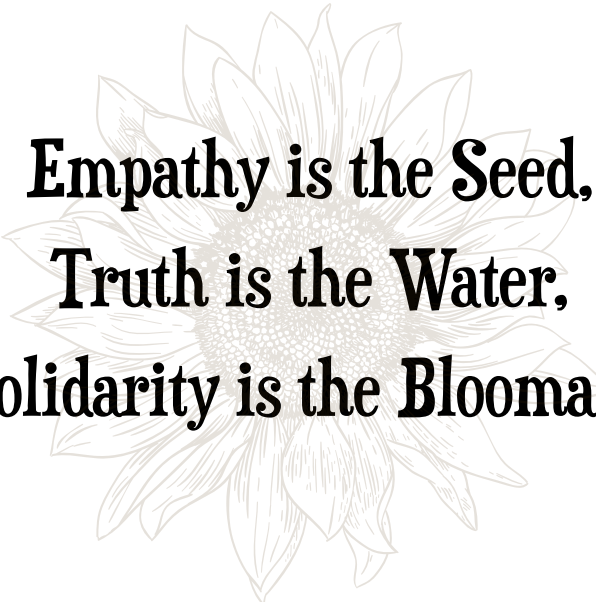


We're planning and ready for our 5th Annual Art Show! The show is open to artists either currently in prison or on the outside. This year's show will have both online and in-person elements. Select pieces will be shown in the physical gallery. All entries will be entered into the contest.

## THE THEME:

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**Empathy is the Seed,  
Truth is the Water,  
Solidarity is the Bloomage.**

This is a recipe we think is crucial to shifting our world from the paradigm of punishment to that of healing.

- **Empathy:** the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.
- **Truth:** the quality or state of being in accordance with fact or reality
- **Solidarity:** unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group.

## SUBMISSIONS:

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We love receiving artwork connected to the theme.

- **Visual Art:** All mediums welcome, no size restrictions. Illustrations, collage, paintings, sculpture, charcoal, textiles, cross stitch, sculpture, blankets...
- **Poetry:** We're adding poetry to our art show this year! This is a new addition to our annual art show so our process is unfolding. We welcome your poems.

**The deadline to submit art is August 30, 2021.**

The show will open on October 1. Feel free to reach out if you can't make the deadline.

Send art and poems to:

**Let's Get Free**

**460 Melwood Ave #300**

**Pittsburgh, PA, 15213**

Please include: title, medium and an artist's statement.

**Digital-only pieces will not be accepted this year.** If you are an outside digital artist, please send us a physical copy of your art to be considered in the contest.

Let's Get Free's 5th Annual Art Show is a fundraiser. By submitting art or poems to the show you are consenting for your art to be auctioned and sold to raise money to support Let's Get Free.

This is a contest. Like last year, there will be two contest categories: **Artists on the Inside** and **Artists on the Outside**. If you participated in last year's show, the contest categories and prizes will be a little different this year:

## PRIZES FOR ARTISTS/POETS ON THE OUTSIDE:

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### Visual Artists in Solidarity Prizes:

- Piece that best ties the theme all together: \$100
- People's Choice Award: \$100

### Poets in Solidarity Prizes:

- Poem that best ties the theme all together: \$100
- People's Choice Award: \$100

## PRIZES FOR ARTISTS/POETS ON THE INSIDE:

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### Visual Art Prizes:

- Piece that best expresses **empathy**: \$100
- Piece that best expresses **solidarity**: \$100
- Piece that best expresses **truth**: \$100
- Piece that best ties the theme all together: \$100
- Best use of materials: \$100
- Best textile: \$100
- People's Choice Award: \$100

### Poetry Prizes:

- Poem that best ties the theme all together: \$100
- People's Choice Award: \$100

## SCHOLARSHIPS FOR ART SUPPLIES:

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If you are incarcerated and participated in our contest last year or any of our previous art shows, you are eligible for an art supply scholarship if you are planning to participate in this year's show. Please write for more details. There is a limited number of scholarships. Priority is given to women and trans prisoners.



Submission from last year's show by Em Atropa

# Untitled (poem)

by Angela Hellman

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*The solitude around me  
As fast as time and space  
The time won't rewind  
I'm just running in place  
My Fate  
Holds me clad in these gates  
Bounding me still  
But my mind still escapes...  
The seclusion  
Leaves me in a state of delusion  
Each thought in my mind  
Infused with confusion  
Brushed and missed used from the  
Life that I've chosen...*

*Countless hours spent on borrowed time  
Trapped inside  
A world in my mind  
It's there that I find  
Solace, and hide  
Because, reality is  
...my hands are tied...  
or cuffed,  
If you must  
Broken trust  
Like speckles of dust*

*Scattered shards & broken seams  
A nightmare bound and broken dreams  
In fairytales I don't believe  
Here & now is all I see...*

*Just a painted picture of a distant past  
The mask in which I am wearing  
Cracked...  
A train upon a broken track  
Heading down a narrow path...*

*Banished...  
Delegated into vacance  
Stolen from our worldly life  
And locked inside a basement...*

*To cry & rely  
On the ones that we love  
To stick by our sides  
... As time...  
Passes us by  
Seconds, hours, moments fly.  
But why?  
Must I be sentence to die  
For a life is life  
... I've done my time*

## Call for Submissions: In The Belly Journal

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Hey Family!

This is Stevie from *In The Belly*, an abolitionist journal committed to centering the voices of the currently incarcerated. And that includes you. We need to hear from women, cis and trans, GNC people and queer folks behind the walls. We know that while all of us are experiencing imprisonment, we experience it differently. *In The Belly* strives to bring as many voices to the table as possible. So let us know what's going on where you are.

We would love to hear from you whether it's an essay, poetry, artwork, book review, interview, etc.. You can submit and/or subscribe by writing to us at:

**In The Belly**  
**PO Box 671**  
**Ithaca, NY 14851**

Besides our regular editions, we publish special editions that center on specific populations behind the walls. We are currently looking for materials for our next special edition on Women, Gender and the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). So drop us a line and join the conversation.





*The Evans brothers, free! With Kris and Sean from Amistad Law Center*



*Regina "Kitten" Pearson!*



*Francisco Mojica, free! With Nikki from Amistad Law Center*



*Pam Africa & Cynthia Alvarado*



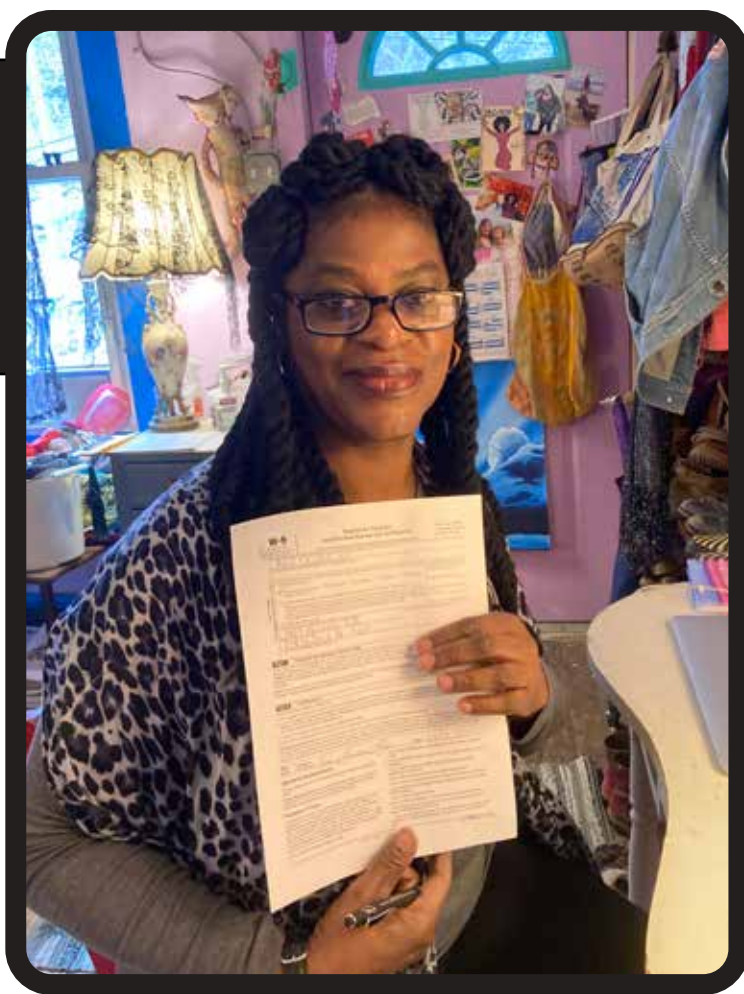
*Another example of yarn bombing*



**Let's Get Free**  
**460 Melwood Ave #300**  
**Pittsburgh, PA 15213**

## **AVIS LEE IS FREE!**

Read her re-entry  
revelations on page 14.



## **REJOICING IN FREEDOM!**

Mildred Strickland on the piano. See more photos of  
our people who've recently come home, inside.