

# BRIDGES

#5 Spring 2024

Presented by:

**Bklyn**  
Public Library

Justice  
Initiatives



February is Black History Month

Prose

Poetry

News

BPL's Justice Initiatives' Bridges Zine is supported by the Robert M. Schiffman Foundation

and more!



Childrens' poetry reading by Sandra (S. Pearl) Sharp near Brooklyn Public Library's Central Library. 1974

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# Letter from the Editors

## How to Submit Writing and Art

The Justice Initiatives team at Brooklyn Public Library is pleased to bring you issue five of our *Bridges* zine. In this issue you'll find poetry, stories and art from incarcerated writers and artists as well as news about the recently enacted *Clean Slate Act*, a list of resources you can access from inside and, as always, a great crossword puzzle. We're also very pleased to let you know about our new Welcome Home program.

Welcome Home was launched in 2023 and is available to anyone coming home from jail or prison to New York City. Our two reentry navigators, Donald and Paul, are the heart of the program. They both have firsthand experience of the reentry process and are available to meet one-on-one in person or by phone or video call to help you navigate all the barriers and bureaucracies you will encounter when you come home. In addition to navigation support, we are holding monthly dinners for formerly incarcerated folks. These dinners are our way of building up a community of support for our formerly incarcerated patrons. Finally, we are also partnering with community-based organizations to bring reentry-focused programming into local branch libraries.

So, enjoy this issue and we hope to see you back home at one of our events.

As always, we are happy to hear from you. You can contact us at:

Justice Initiatives  
c/o Outreach Services  
Brooklyn Public Library  
10 Grand Army Plaza  
Brooklyn, NY 11238

- » Poems, stories and essays can be typed or handwritten.
- » Please be careful to keep a copy of your work and please provide a return address where we can reach you, including your legal name and ID number, and your pen name, if you'd like to use one. We will make every effort to return your submission, either to you, or to an outside contact if you provide us with an address.
- » If you don't want us to return your work, we will archive it at the library.
- » You may submit up to six poems, up to two essays or stories, or up to four pieces of visual art.
- » Submission deadlines are rolling, but we anticipate publishing a total of two more issues in 2024.
- » If selected, we will write to you to let you know and to set up payment. We are able to offer a \$100 honorarium for each published poem, story, essay or artwork.

Thank you so much in advance, we can't wait to see your submissions.

Send submissions to:

Justice Initiatives-Bridges Zine  
Brooklyn Public Library, Outreach Services  
10 Grand Army Plaza  
Brooklyn, NY 11238

# Welcome Home

## Meet the Navigators

Brooklyn Public Library launched the Welcome Home program in July 2023. Welcome Home aims to make the library a more welcoming space for people coming home from jail or prison and to connect them to a community of support, as well as a range of services at the library and in the community. Unlike many support programs that focus on one aspect of the reentry process (like job readiness or education), Welcome Home supports the *whole* person, their family and their community. Through our program, formerly incarcerated people are empowered to set their *own* goals for their reentry process—and then provided guidance and support towards meeting those goals.

At the heart of the program are our Reentry Navigators, Paul Rivera and Donald Washington. Paul and Donald have both been through the reentry process and bring their own knowledge and experience to the program. A native Brooklynite and a lifelong Library supporter, Donald has been involved in reentry support and journalism around the issues facing formerly incarcerated people since coming home. Paul has strong ties to the reentry community and has worked to build networks from the time he was incarcerated. Born in New York City, Paul grew up in California, returning to the city in the 1980s. Since coming home, Paul has dedicated himself to amplifying the voices of the formerly incarcerated.

Asked to describe the program, Donald says:

"Welcome Home supports people returning from a carceral setting by teaming them

with a navigator, someone who has [already] successfully made it through the reentry process. In addition, the program provides guidance on housing, health, reconnecting with loved ones; monthly dinners where they can join a community of peers; and connections to free library services, local groups and more."

For formerly incarcerated New Yorkers, Welcome Home is not only "a main support program but a way to restore their humanity and bring them back into society," says Paul. "It helps by making individuals understand that they are not alone in the process and to give them a one-on-one personal approach to help navigate the system that has separated them for so long."

"We help individuals navigate the systems and the bureaucracies they will face, moving forward," says Paul. "We teach participants how to make meetings, we attend meetings with them to show that they have a support system. This is what the Welcome Home program is about. What they learn from us are things that will continue to guide them and keep them on the path they seek for themselves. It is not something we do that is one and done, we make sure it is something that is continuous throughout." "What makes Welcome Home special," Donald adds, "is our focus on supporting patrons to achieve their goals. This is our primary focus. Our hope is that patrons walk away feeling empowered and capable."

In addition to navigation support provided by Donald and Paul, Welcome Home also has monthly dinners at the library where a community of formerly incarcerated patrons, some well-established in their journey and some fresh home, meet to break bread and share their stories and resources.

"We are all committed to the work that we do," says Paul, "in our culture, in our policies and procedures. It's about giving community to one another, helping people join together in unity, I think there is strength in the way we work with each other within our team. We work with a sense of camaraderie, friendship and a common understanding that we are committed to the same cause, knowing that we are all working as one mind and one body as we help individuals not only restore their body but their minds upon returning to society. We hope to continue to expand the community one individual at a time."

Call 929.561.9789 for more information about Welcome Home or write to us at:

Welcome Home  
C/o Outreach Services  
Brooklyn Public Library  
10 Grand Army Plaza  
Brooklyn, NY 11238

welcome  
home

## T.I.M.E

This is me evolving

By: Jahfare Ford

They say time is on essence! / I wish I would've known this as an adolescent! / Abusing my blessings, not learning from my lessons caused a deterioration on my progression! / steady stressin,' hidden gems undiscovered I was blinded by the message! / life was showin' me! day in day out I felt TIME was slowing ME!.. / Down!.. Not realizing it was my selfish ways, that kept me in a daze!, Trapped inside a maze! / while going thru' a phase of doubts & uncertainty! / Wasting TIME by the minute was severely hurting me!

T.I.M.E

Somethin' we can't get back! / you gotta do somethin' instead of sit back! / When life knock you down, you gotta hit back!

T.I.M.E

Every minute of it is precious! so treat it like your mother, obey and respect it!

T.I.M.E

Utilize it to your advantage / Before mentally you become castrated from your spirit, and your soul becomes damaged!

T.I.M.E

This is somethin' that I'm doing! / Day in, day out to myself I'm steady provin'! / I can overcome the statistics sadistic linguistics / Learning to be open minded, fade away from simplistic... choosing!... TIME to stop losing! / My Destiny & arbitration who I'm pursuing!

T.I.M.E

One day YOUR time will expire! / So within this period we should conspire! / overcome barriers & inspire!

T.I.M.E

Waits for No - ONE! Your freedom is valuable,  
Albany you have to show them!

T.I.M.E

To evolve, expand your mind, open your spirit,  
cleanse your soul! / TIME! / somethin' you  
can't control! / Good or bad karma, over TIME  
you get exposed! / This is the life I chose!  
learning to do better! / Day by Day discovering  
life's hidden treasures!

T.I.M.E

Somethin' you can't measure! / Always stay  
sharp, quick with problem solving!

T.I.M.E

This is me Evolving

Jahfare Ford

JaH LiFE

# Comeback Queen

By: Lovette Rosshill

Haven't you realized it yet?  
Your negativity can't keep you down  
I'm no new kid on the block.  
I know my way I've been around

Aware of the score very well  
Am able to play the game  
A pro at putting the pieces back together  
Resilient is my middle name!

I've learned a hell of a lot  
Surviving all that I've been through  
Many choose to be beaten down victims  
That's definitely not what I choose to do!

Using every experience  
As a valuable teaching tool  
The world had been my classroom  
Plus, all its elements the best school.

I've been downer than down  
More times than none  
Recalling many a night  
When I didn't want to see the sun!

Faith, Courage and Hope helped me to hang in  
I'm thankfully still a contender in the game  
Ever changing, progressing and growing  
My life will never be the same!

By Lovette "da HoLYhuSTLa" Rosshill 1/17

# Rooster's Feathered Friend

by Ricky Wassenaar

We heard something unusual out in the pod and hurried to our cell fronts to investigate. A young sparrow, apparently a yearling, had somehow found his way into this maximum-security cell block. He was fluttering exhaustedly from one end to the other, desperately seeking to escape the confines of this large tomb.

'It's a bird!' one inmate exclaimed.

"There's a bird flying around out in the pod!" another inmate announced excitedly, as if that fact wasn't readily apparent to all.

After a few minutes (which were interlaced with equally profound commentary and pitiful attempts at bird calls), the little sparrow landed on the floor at the base of the staircase, which was directly across from my cell, and only about twelve feet away.

Each of the six pods that comprise Dog Wing have ten cells, five on each tier, and all face the dull grey wall opposite, which separates this pod from the next. For ventilation purposes, the dividing walls are not continuously connected to the ceiling, which also allows for sound - and apparently birds - to flow between the pods. The cells are windowless, contain only concrete and metal fixtures, and are lighted 24/7, though the lights are dimmed during the night. Murky colored skylights run the length of the pod, but I cannot see them from where I reside, which is in the middle cell on the lower tier. Unlike the cell fronts that one may see in the movies, which contain bars, the cell fronts in this facility consists entirely of perforated steel, the

holes of which are slightly smaller than a dime and are in a honeycomb pattern.

"That Bird's probably trying to get out of the heat," Spike suggested. He is my neighbor to the right. "The Arizona desert is a killer. It's 112° out there again today," he added.

"It feels like it's 100° in here," Jake griped. He is Spike's neighbor and resides in the end cell next to the recreation pen. As I began to unwrap some bread, intending to offer it to the hapless critter, Jake called to the inmate who resides in the cell to my left. "Hey, Goggles. That thing probably has lice and ticks. Kill that little bastard," he directed. A few inmates chuckled, while others concurred and attempted to goad Goggles into action. The little bird seemed to understand that he was the topic of discussion, and his head shot from side to side as he looked around the pod nervously.

"Man, that's too much work bro" Goggles replied. He wears eyeglasses that have very thick lenses, hence his nickname. "Besides, Jerry Springer is on right now, and I'd rather watch these freaks than murder that bird," he added. The little sparrow may not have realized it, but he was grateful that we were allowed to purchase televisions and pocket radios, which are often referred to as "babysitters." Otherwise, the little fella surely would have become the target of the convict's death-lust entertainment.

I had wetted a few small pieces of bread and molded them into torpedo-shapes, then went to my hands and knees near my cell door. "Here you go, little buddy," I said it in a falsetto voice, and flicked one of the torpedoes through a hole. The wet, sticky bread barely cleared the ledge of my door frame, but surprisingly, the little bird began hopping towards it immediately. When he

halted a few inches from his target and eyed me suspiciously, I reassured him as I backed away. "It's okay, little fella. I'm not going to hurt you." Appearing to understand, he attacked the bread as if he were starving, pecking it into bits and devouring every crumb. He then retreated a couple of hops and watched as I reloaded the hole with another tiny torpedo, and when I flicked it out to him, he did not hesitate before attacking it.

I enjoy watching nature shows on tv, and in one such program, the host advised to wet the bread before giving it to birds, unless they had an immediate water source available, as dry bread could kill them. Well after he had polished off that second piece, I could tell by the look in his beady little eyes that he was mighty appreciative of the wet bread. I assumed it had probably been more food than he had ever eaten in a single setting, but I shot the third torpedo out to him, nonetheless. He looked at it briefly, let out a barely audible peep which may have been a burp, that flew over to perch on the second to last step on the staircase. He remained there for several minutes, ignoring the comments from the inmates as he fluffed and pruned his feathers; he then flew upwards and out of my line of vision, as the walkway for the upper tier blocks my view of the ceiling.

"There he goes. that bird just crossed over into pod one," Big Bruce announced. he lives in the cell directly above me." Hey spider!" he shouted to his friend in part 1.

"What's up, Big Bruce?" Spider answered.

"Just flew over into your pod. Do you see it?"

"Yes, it was over here earlier. After the porters finished cleaning a few hours ago, the dumbass guard left the rec pen door open, and that bird flew in here," Spider advised." Psycho's

crazy ass was trying to figure out a way to catch it!" he added laughingly.

"I want to train it to fly to my bro's house and pick up some heroin!" Psycho shouted in explanation, and laughter erupted in the surrounding pods.

"If you could do that, you'd be a rich man!" Jake interjected. He enjoyed the sound of his own voice and would holler several times a day to inmates in the other pods.

As they continued to shout back and forth, I inserted my well used earplugs, pushing them in deeper than I should." I hope you find your way out of this madhouse, little buddy," I whispered, then went back to the novel I have been reading before the birds welcomed distraction.

About five hours later, as I was pacing my cell, lost in thought, the little sparrow returned. He landed on the second step of the staircase and eyed the piece of bread that he had rejected earlier. Concerned that it may have dried out, I put a little water in my cup and slung it out under my door, soaking the bread. The bird noticed and flew towards it, but landed short of his goal, eying me warily. "You know I'm not going to hurt you," I stated, holding my ground, and he hopped forward and attacked the bread. I was disappointed that he hadn't found his way out of the cellblock, but I was glad to see him again.

I have been incarcerated for several years, and as a showing of respect from the prisoners, was bestowed with a nickname "Rooster" years ago. Despite this, I have never truly adapted to this demented, inside society: I do not belong. This is especially true as of late, and not simply because I have matured. Allegations that I have violated "Convict Code" have resulted in my

ostracism, and I am now shunned by most inmates. So, while others have friends and associates, I do not and though there are many others who have been banished like me, none reside in the pod with me. I've never really minded being alone, as I have wits enough to entertain myself, but I've been in this facility for over a year, and in such isolation, one can surely get lonely, as well as depressed. I needed a friend, desperately.

"I'm going to give you something special," I told the bird, and went to my store box. I took out a small bag of trail mix and removed four sunflower seeds, then knelt near my door. "You're going to like these," I promised, and flicked them out to him. He picked up the one nearest to him, and ravaged it. He then took the next nearest seed and flew over to the base of the staircase, broke it into bits, and made a show of eating it, as is to show the other inmates that he had a food source in the pod. He remained there for several minutes afterwards, seeming to evaluate his predicament as he eyed the figure standing behind the honeycombed steel, conversing about him.

He returned to my cell front a short time later to eat the remaining seeds, and I sat on the floor near my door. "My name is Rooster and I'm grateful for your company. What's your name, little fella?" I asked, and he looked me right in the eye and chirped, which made me chuckle. "I don't speak any bird languages, so we'll have to give you a proper name" In the movie, *The Shawshank Redemption*, the old man had a pet bird, and I suddenly recalled that he had named it Jake. "I can't give you that name. The guy that lives in the last cell down there is named Jake, and he is a narcissistic jerk," I told the sparrow. There was only one other bird that I could recall at the moment. "Woodstock," I said aloud, and the

bird chirped again. "All right then, it's settled. Your name is Woodstock," I informed him, and amazingly, he hopped so close that the feathers on his chest were nearly touching the door frame. "I would like to invite you in, but there's no way you'll fit under the door. Maybe when the guard delivers my tray, you can shoot down and swoop in through the food hatch" I suggested, but the look in his eyes told me he didn't like that idea at all.

The guards conducted security checks every hour, and each time one entered the pod, Woodstock would fly around to maintain maximum distance between himself and the guard. After that first day, however, he learned that it was easier to simply sit atop the dividing wall when there was activity in the pod, and that was also where he could roost at night. Each morning when the pod lights were turned on, he would swoop down and hang out on the floor immediately in front of my cell door, knowing that I would produce food and water for him. As far as I could tell, no one else was trying to feed him, and he had no other food source. Apparently, I was his only friend in the concrete and steel world, and he was definitely my only friend. He would disappear for several hours each day, presumably in search of an escape, and though I wished him to be free, I was always relieved when he would return to my cell door.

By day four, he would leave my cell front only when there was activity in the pod and at night, after the light was dimmed. "You can't give up on finding a way out of here, Woodstock. When the rec pen door opens, swoop out of here," I told him. Each pod had access to a single recreation pen, which was literally a concrete box. It measured

20 feet long by 10 feet wide, and its walls were 20 feet high and topped with fencing. The pens were completely barren, save for a single handball, but we were isolated, and congregate rec was not permitted. The guards would apply manacles via the hatchway in the cell door prior to escorting the Prisoner to the rec pen and would sometimes inadvertently leave the hatchway open on the rec door after escorting a prisoner back to his cell. Other than that, inmate porters (from a lower security facility) would clean the pod once a week and sweep out the rec pen, so unless Woodstock was willing to fly towards them and out the door, or through a narrow hatchway if left open, his chances of escape were nil.

On day six of Woodstock's unconstitutional imprisonment, upon my request, the guard's purposely left the hatchway open on the rec pen door, but when I gestured towards it and told Woodstock to git, he didn't comprehend. I even flicked his food out in the direction of the open hatchway, but he was oblivious. "I love you Woodstock, but you can't stay with me in this house of pain this is the land of misfits and misery, and you don't belong here anymore than I do. it's too late for me, but you've got to live free and happy, little buddy, I said, and again pointed the way to freedom "Now get your little feathered butt out of here," I ordered, but he simply puffed up his feathers and eyed me quizzically.

On day seven, Woodstock hopped up onto the front door frame and took the soggy bread from my fingers before I could flick it out to him, and since the steel cell front is only a quarter inch thick, he was literally eating out of my hand. "I'm a bad influence on you, little dude you shouldn't be so trusting of humans. We're not a very kind species, generally speaking" I

told him, but he hopped right back up onto the door frame, expecting more food, and he received it. He had previously watched intently as I had chased down and vigorously evicted two flies from my cell, and though my actions had been harsh, Woodstock knew that I literally would not kill a fly.

Because of the excessive heat, I would pace my cell and exercise in the nude, but Woodstock didn't seem to mind, and would watch my every move with interest. I was his only entertainment, and he especially liked it when I spoke directly to him. Each day I will place my television on the floor near my door, and we would watch the news together. During the commercials, I would flip through the scant channels, hoping to find a program featuring birds or any animals for that matter. We never saw any, but he didn't seem to mind

One day then, the guards left the hatchway open on the rec pen door again, and again I pointed the way and told Woodstock to scam, but he hopped up onto my door frame instead, expecting his 4:00 p.m. feeding. "You can't stay in here forever, little bro" I said as I fed him small pieces of peanuts, which he loved. About two hours later, as Woodstock was watching me pace this cell, the chirp of a sparrow sounded from out in the rec pen, and he whipped his head around to look in that direction. "There you go - that's your family out there looking for you. Go to them, little buddy." When another chirp flowed in through the open hatchway seconds later, he began to hop in that direction, looking directly at the aperture in the rec pen door. "Goto your family, little bro," I said encouragingly, and pressed the side of my face against the steel of the door, which was necessary in order to see a sliver of the

open hatchway. As I watched, I held my breath and listened intently, hoping to hear either Spike or Jake comment on Woodstock's escape, as they both had a much better view of the hatch way than I, but neither made a sound. They were either napping or preoccupied.

I did not see Woodstock exit this cell block, but I must assume that he flew the coop, because he never returned to my cell front again. I am of course happy for him, yet I feel the loss of a dear friend - my only friend.

I have mentioned Woodstock in my prayers, and I look for him every day as I pace this lonely cell, though I hope never to see him again.

Live happily and free, my feathered friend.

The end.

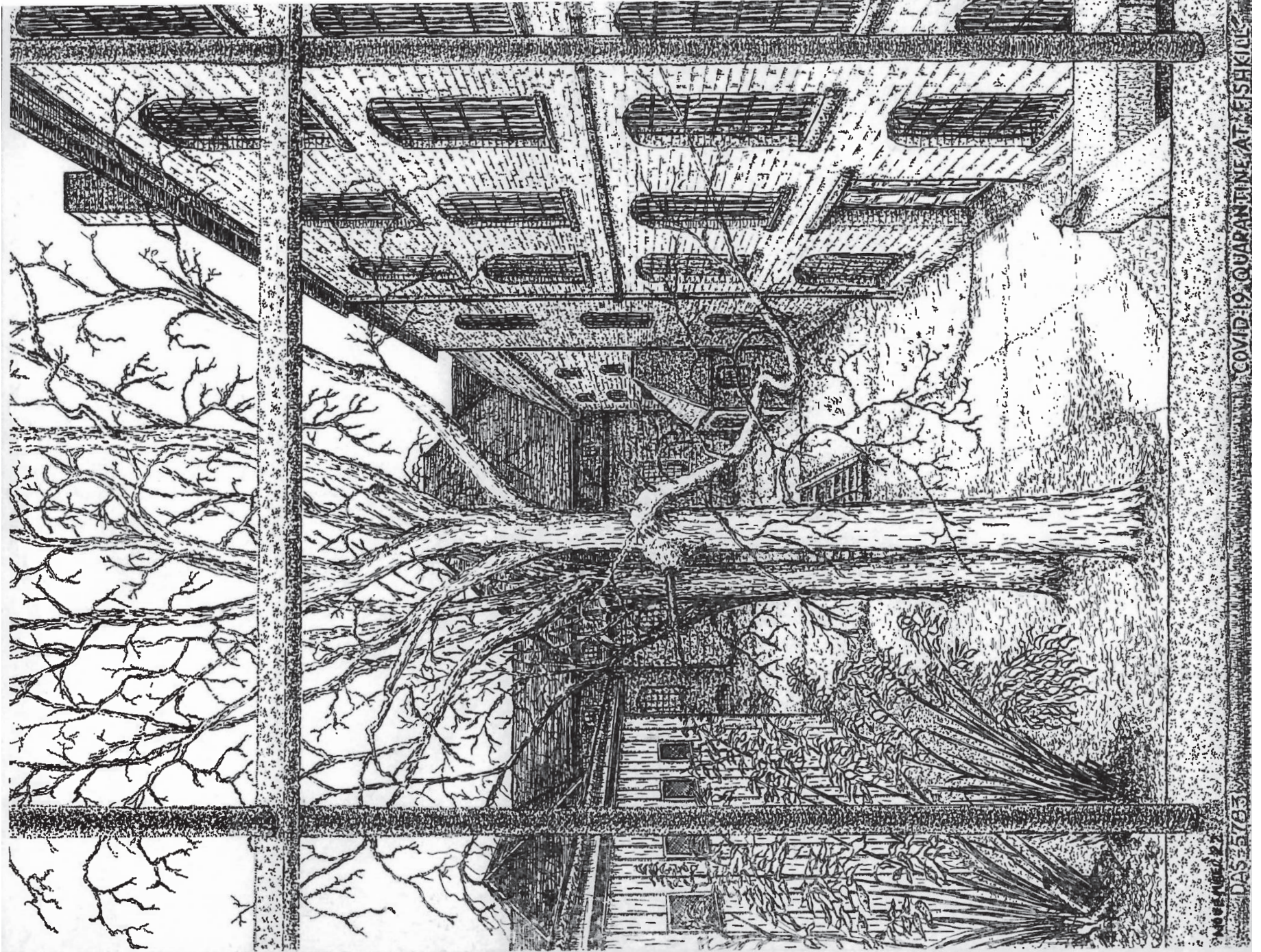
# Nomad

by Lori McLuckie

"Nomad" was originally  
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By Lori McLuckie, Copyright 2021

You, my brother poet, are  
a diamond among men,  
a surprising rarity, a  
radiant treasure; and you  
have been snared, stashed  
away, trapped in this Vault too long,  
by the hoary scions of  
so-called Justice and  
so-claimed uprightness.  
They have presumed,  
oh, they have tried,  
to own your exquisite life.  
But they are not worthy  
of your life.

God forgive them, for  
they know not what they do  
to a real-life Warrior  
of the heart,  
as you fight to breathe  
each day, as you fight  
Intrepidly  
to hold fire  
in your blood, year by year,  
with the valor  
of a rocked-ribbed man of spirit.  
I have taken some



COVID-19 Quarantine by David Storch, November 2022

NOVEMBER 22 DAS 25763 COVID-19 QUARANTINE AT FISH KILL

# My Mama Don't Take (Smell) No Crap!!!

Raymond Wallace

From time to time, if I am paying attention, I will catch a glimpse of my mother revealing some of these circumstances of how she left her job as kindergarten teacher in the beautiful Garden Parish of Saint Anns, Jamaica to come to the United States. Mom once told me that, mixed in with her youthful naive expectations of coming to this country was the belief that she would be entering into a "bed of roses."

My mother arrived in this country on February 19, 1969. That day is forever etched in the recesses of her mind because it was the first time she had ever encountered snow. While it is true that people living in country Hillside of Saint Ann's may have to occasionally endure the torrential down pours of cool tropical rains, snow on the other hand, is a phenomenon they are spared. My mother was 21 years old at the time of her arrival in New York. And after disembarking from a plane at Kennedy Airport she was greeted by her paternal uncle Easton. My mother recalls that Uncle Easton was standing in the baggage retrieval area awaiting the arrival of his niece Christina while holding a white piece of cardboard which bore her maiden name sloppily written on it. Easton recognized his niece due to her statuesque figure and mirrored resemblance of his sister-in-law, my grandmother.

Mom tells of how my great-uncle Easton was "a man's man." He stood at a towering height, with broad shoulders, and a profound baritone voice

which seemed to emanate from his core. Whenever my mother mimics her uncle, I can tell that Barry White had nothing on him. I have concurred with my mother's claims that despite my father being six feet in height, I and my two younger brothers inherited our 6'3, 6'5, and 6'6 physics from my mother's father's side of the family.

As though she hadn't said it a million times before, on more than one occasion my mother has reminded me by reminiscing about how Uncle Easton once complimented her commitment to family. Easton told her, "Your basket will never be empty," because she had selflessly taken \$20 of the first \$35 she earned in this country and sent it back home to her mother in Jamaica.

Back in the 1960s, when people wanted to migrate to the United States, they would sometimes utilize a U.S citizen as sponsor. My Aunt Charlene (or Wawa as she was affectionately dubbed by my cousins, siblings and I, because as a toddler the oldest of us could not pronounce her name) had come to this country before my mother. Auntie Charlene worked as a Manny and maid to the affluent residing in parts of Westchester. After Wawa settled herself in New York, and was able to pay for a plane ticket, she sought out someone to sponsor her little sister Christina's migration from Jamaica to "Foreign," (the colloquial Jamaican reference to the United States).

The Morgans, who were a Caucasian family residing in Bayside Queens, served as my mother's endorsers for her trek to the frigid sidewalks of New York from her picturesque Caribbean Island home, which in 1969 was then just seven years in emancipated from the Crown across the pond. Mrs. Morgan was a young wife and mother of two with another child on the way.

As such she was in much need of assistance with the management of her home. So, because a fair exchange of agreed upon terms has never been a robbery, the Morgans were willing candidates to be my mother's sponsors. And my young energetic mother was a suitable source of domestic help. I sometimes wonder if it was humiliating for my auntie Wawa—and thousands of other immigrants—to have go to the families like the Morgans and ask them to sponsor their beloved children, and little sisters and brothers, in order to facilitate their move to the States. How indebted did they feel towards these families? Or did those relentlessly ambitious Caribbean migrants just consider themselves fortunate and deem the sponsoring families as a means to a greater end—The American dream?

My mother has expressed how while working for the Morgan Family she took great pride in fulfilling her duties of cooking, cleaning and watching over the Morgan home and children. Mom also tells of a humiliating experience that occurred in the Morgan's home, and how she was only paid \$35.00 a week for upholding her laborious duties. In my mind, I cannot help but to think that even back in 1969, a century removed from chattel servitude in this country, the salary my mother was being paid was tantamount to the same: Slavery.

One day while my mother was about her task of bathing the Morgan children, their precious five-year-old daughter Molly, did something that would cause my mother to abandon her first job in the Land of Milk and Honey. Molly, in her childish mind conjured the brilliant idea to stick her finger in the area of her own butt and then rubbed her finger on my mother's nose, while instructing mom to, "smell it." My mother was morbidly appalled by the little girl's audacious

actions and complained to Mrs. Morgan about Molly's behavior. In turn, Mrs. Morgan spanked Molly for offending the help.

In the sixties and seventies, society was not as critical of the use of corporal punishment, nor did we frown upon it as we do today. It was readily acceptable that a parent would resort to the use of a paddle or belt in an attempt to modify a child's lack of manners, infractions of insubordination, or what often was age-appropriate behavior that violated and unreasonable cultural expectation placed on a child. It was natural for a parent who may be used as corporal punishment to experience guilt and hindsight. However, we ought to find parents who spank their children blaming the same child with the indictments of, "if you hadn't done that I would not have had to... "or" Look what you made me do."

In contrast, instead of blaming Molly, Mrs. Morgan, who was unable to deal with her own guilt, found a more suitable scapegoat to project the remorse of her deed upon. She blamed my mother. For the young Christine to have Mrs. Morgan telling her through tears, "you made me spanked molly, along with not wanting to smell anyone's crap laden finger, that was all she could bear. When Mr. Morgan came home that evening my mom announced her resignation. Through his own tears Mr. Morgan pleaded with my mother asking her not to leave his family. But his petitions fell on deaf ears. You see, my mother knew her worth and refused to take crap off of anyone. In my mind, Mr. Morgan, whom my mother describes as a nice person, must have realized that in my mother's absence his family would be left to fend for themselves with the upkeep of their household: unless they could find adequate \$35.00 a week help to assist them.

Shortly after announcing her resignation my mother left the Morgan's residence. It was after the midnight hour when she walked out of their house. However, Mr. Morgan convinced mom to allow him to take her to the train station. My mother then boarded a train en route to the then burning borough of the Bronx. It was there that my father, his siblings and his mother lived. At some point during the ordeal mom called my father, who she had known from her childhood in Jamaica, and requested for him to meet her at the train station. When she reached her destination, my father was there - I assume with open arms.

I sometimes ponder about what trajectory my mother's life would have taken had she not had the courage to quit her job at the Morgans. I wonder, would there have been five children between my parents? Still, I know The Creator is in control. My mother's next job in this country paid her a salary of \$275.00 a week: That was almost 700% increase in comparison to what Morgan were paying her - minus the crap.

My Rhombus is cold  
 Chilled as Winter's Bones  
 Walls glossed eggshell white  
 Yuck! I hate that color  
 Closing...  
 Me alone in blue doors  
 Scribbled, "MAD"  
 Not me  
 Hard to believe  
 Such truths are foreseen  
 "Ahem" Collections Begin:  
 Mildew Smells. Ahead  
 Sliver surfers, left  
 300 watts, Above  
 Scrambled signals, Below  
 Honestly, frying my brain  
 Never could get used to, one's place  
 Within my Rhombus  
 Called my own  
 I think upon uncomfortably  
 Steel bolted to, floors  
 Wooden top towards  
 Windows that don't see  
 Disappearing within  
 My own words defined by others  
 Exhale, hear my call  
 Clearings Do not see  
 My Future's cold  
 Cold inside my Rhombus  
 "Mad, Mad, Mad"  
 See blue eyes closing  
 Upon my escape  
 Covered beneath racks  
 Never Right by Me

of your pain now, did you know?  
 have you sensed it?  
 I have taken it into my own spirit,  
 and my god, it is immense, it  
 is excruciating, it is  
 frightening as hell. How  
 have you carried this,  
 all this time? I myself  
 wake in the night with it,  
 Trembling.  
 You are so strong.

I will hold on to this  
 for a time, my friend,  
 so that you can have a respite.  
 Just breathe. I got you.  
 And though I sense  
 that I should shatter from this,  
 in truth I am not  
 going to shatter; I promise.  
 I am a warrior, too.

I will embrace this  
 agony in your stead,  
 for stretch.  
 I will carry it proudly  
 for you; I will carry it  
 with grace from you, my dear one.  
 And while I carry it  
 I will clamor  
 for you to be heard;  
 I will charge portals  
 and claw my way  
 into inner sanctums,  
 for you, and I will be  
 a bitch Warrior, for you.  
 So help me God.

## News & Current Events

A selection of news updates from New York,  
 Spring / Summer 2024

### Clean Slate Act

In November of 2023, the New York State Clean Slate Act was signed into law. The Clean Slate Act was designed to address some of the harshest barriers to reentry by automatically sealing certain conviction records after a set period, so long as an individual is not convicted of another crime during that time. While New York State has long permitted the sealing of criminal records, previous laws made sealing so difficult that only 0.2% of those eligible to have their conviction sealed successfully completed the process. Now, under the Clean Slate Act, certain conviction records are automatically sealed, helping more people gain access to stable housing, education and work without fear of discrimination. Given a clean slate, formerly incarcerated New Yorkers will see fewer of the obstacles that have deprived them of their civil rights and made reentry even harder. If asked whether they were ever convicted of a crime, these folks can confidently answer "No," as if the crime had never occurred.

The Clean Slate Act provides for the automatic sealing of criminal convictions, so long as they meet the following requirements:

- » Three years have passed since an individual's release from incarceration for a misdemeanor offense

- » Eight years have passed since an individual's release from incarceration for a felony offense
- » An individual does not have a criminal charge pending in New York State
- » An individual does not have a felony charge pending out of state\*
- » An individual is not currently under the supervision of any probation or parole department

If, during the waiting period, an individual is convicted of a crime or is reincarcerated for a parole violation, the waiting period to seal the original conviction will start over, beginning on the same day as the waiting period for the new conviction.

Note that there are exceptions to this automatic seal. Both non-drug-related Class A felonies AND convictions requiring contact with the sex offender registry are not covered by the bill, nor will the law invalidate any active order of protection, allow for the destruction of DNA submitted to the statewide DNA database as part of a conviction, or require that the DMV destroy or seal their records. Further, federal felonies and out-of-state felonies will not be sealed.\* The law will also allow for the release of records to authorized people and agencies, such as:

- » Courts and prosecutors, if the individual is a party in a civil case
- » Law enforcement officers acting within the scope of their law enforcement duties
- » Any entity that is required or authorized by law to conduct a fingerprint-based background check
- » Any potential employer requiring the applicant to work with children, the elderly or vulnerable adults; as a peace

or police officer; or for a private transportation company, like commercial trucking

- » A licensing officer processing a firearm license application
- » Immigration officials

### *Things to keep in mind*

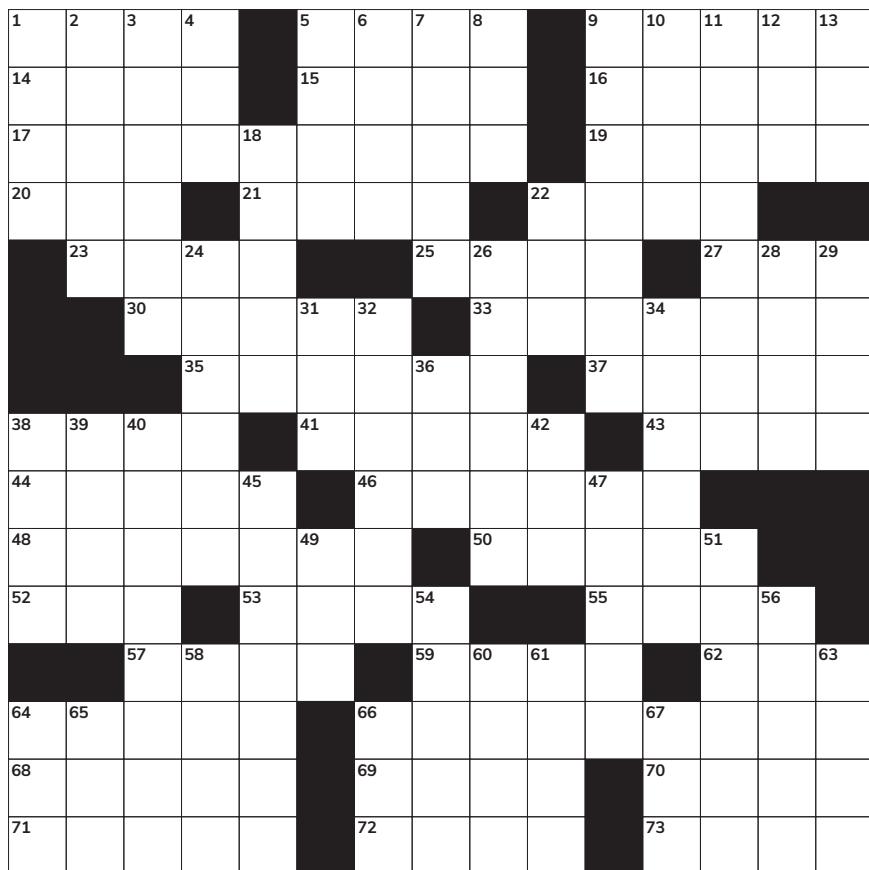
- » Because the state is working to seal a backlog of eligible convictions, your conviction may not be sealed until November 2027, even if three or eight years have passed since your release.
- » Out-of-state felonies are not provided for under this law, unless they involve marijuana offenses that would not be a felony in New York State, or are felonies related to gender-affirming or reproductive care.

## Crossword Puzzle

BB-8

by Alex Boisvert

Bridges



### Across

- 1 Male swans or ears of corn
- 5 \_\_\_ the waters
- 9 Secret group, like the club of puzzlers that makes all the world's crosswords, for all you know (bwa ha ha)
- 14 Sports org. that everyone hates (other than FIFA)
- 15 Fruit that's not nearly as grotesque as it sounds
- 16 Pal, in Puerto Vallarta
- 17 Iconic cartoon flapper
- 19 Gives a few jabs to
- 20 Taxi
- 21 Grub
- 22 Feint, in hockey lingo
- 23 Not any
- 25 Animal that lost to the tortoise
- 27 Took part in a marathon
- 30 Mario's dinosaur pal
- 33 Electronics chain store with a blue-and-yellow color scheme
- 35 Cinnamon stick?
- 37 "\_\_\_ I win, tails you lose"
- 38 "Waterloo" and "Dancing Queen" quartet
- 41 Things that critics "split"
- 43 Pennsylvania town dubbed "The Lake City" after the Great Lake that shares its name
- 44 Acquire some knowledge
- 46 Labels that show people who you really are?
- 48 Predators that feed on blood at night
- 50 Work hard to get clean
- 52 "I need all available units to the intersection of 4th and Main, right away!", e.g.
- 53 Sticks used to play pool
- 55 Majorly large-scale
- 57 Internet addresses
- 59 Alliance of oil-producing nations: Abbr.
- 62 Hurdle for an aspiring Ph.D.
- 64 "It's the Hard Knock Life" musical
- 66 Vote here!
- 68 Religion that includes the Vedanta tradition

69 "Planet of the \_\_\_" (film franchise)

70 Collect, as crops

71 Stax Records figure Isaac who wrote the "Theme from Shaft"

72 *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. \_\_\_* (Robert Louis Stevenson novel)

73 Opposite of "out of"

### Down

1 Channel akin to Fox Business and Bloomberg Television

2 Huge body of water

3 Little helper at the ballpark

4 Took one's place at the table

5 Common instrument in Dixieland ensembles

6 Entertainment achievement I am 0/4 of the way toward

7 Splash around

8 Gratuity of 15-20%, generally

9 "Get it?", in old-timey mobster slang

10 Run \_\_\_ (go hog wild)

11 Place for hogs and grogs

12 Get older

13 Word preceding Gatos or Angeles

18 "I am dismayed by what just occurred"

22 Musician born An\_\_\_ Romell Young

24 Like keto or the Atkins diet

26 Calls off

28 Car manufacturer with rings in its logo

29 Big Apple landmark with a famous trading floor: Abbr.

31 "Well whaddaya know?"

32 "Let's make this a little more interesting"

34 Prepares to drive, in golf

36 The "R" in Calvin & Hobbes' "G.R.O.S.S."

38 Actress Jessica who founded The Honest Company

39 *To \_\_\_ or Not to \_\_\_* (Merrie Melodies short film starring the Road Runner)

40 Singer whose website is [nadiesabeloquevaapa.sarmanana.com](http://nadiesabeloquevaapa.sarmanana.com)

42 Cul-de-\_\_\_ (literally, "ass of bag")

45 Central part of a cell or an atom

47 El \_\_\_ (Artist of the Spanish Renaissance, whose name means "the Greek")

49 "Hop on the bus, \_\_\_ / You don't need to discuss much"

51 Famous clock tower of London, familiarly

54 Covered in suds

56 Person from Zagreb or Dubrovnik

58 What you do on a roller coaster

60 Argued in court

61 "Nothing \_\_\_ Matters" (Metallica power ballad)

63 Former Montreal baseballer (author note: )

64 "I see!"

65 Actress Long of "Boyz n the Hood, or actress Vardalos of "My Big Fat Greek Wedding"

66 "\_\_\_ humbug!" (Scrooge catchphrase)

67 Race with three disciplines, for short

Games

# Resources

## TELESTORY



### *Video calls through the Library*

If you are in one of the following facilities and you have family in New York City, you may be eligible to join Brooklyn Public Library's TeleStory program:

- » Altona
- » Cayuga
- » Elmira
- » Franklin
- » Mid-State
- » Riverview
- » Ulster
- » Washington
- » Wende

TeleStory allows families to make FREE video calls to incarcerated loved ones from the comfort and convenience of a Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) branch. The program is made available as a supplement to in-person visits.

#### PLEASE NOTE:

Video calls are for 60 minutes  
Up to 4 family members can participate  
Family members must be approved by DOCCS  
Video calls are by appointment only  
Family members must show identification  
Video calls are a supplement to, not a replacement for, in-person visits.

Please contact your Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator (ORC) for more information.  
To apply, request an application from your ORC or call BPL at 718.916.9408.

## General Resources

### **Prisoner Rights Project**

199 Water Street, 6th floor  
New York, NY 10038

PRP advocates for constitutional and humane conditions of confinement for prisoners in the New York City and State correctional systems, with an almost-exclusive focus on class action litigation. PRP does not deal with prisoners' criminal cases or sentences or matters related to parole but instead works to stop unlawful practices and improve conditions with respect to matters such as medical and mental health care, staff violence, dangerous or unsanitary physical conditions, and denial of education to young people. PRP also provides prisoners with informational materials on their legal rights, including how to bring their own lawsuits in federal and state courts.

### **Women's Prison Association**

347 East 10th Street  
New York, NY 10009

The Women's Prison Association is an advocacy and direct service organization working directly with women involved in the criminal legal system. An incorporated nonprofit agency, the WPA offers a broad array of institution- and community-based services to women in prisons and jails, women on probation and parole, and ex-offenders. Its programs include individualized case management to help women offenders set and achieve goals; skills-development workshops and exercises; peer support and development of peer networks; formal recognition of participant achievement; and ongoing attention to building community support.

# Resources for LGBTQ+ Inmates

## Prisoner Correspondence Project

QPIRG Concordia c/o Concordia University,  
1455 de Maisonneuve Ouest,  
Montreal QC H3G 1M8, CANADA

The Women's Prison Association is an advocacy and direct service organization working directly with women involved in the criminal legal system. An incorporated nonprofit agency, the WPA offers a broad array of institution- and community-based services to women in prisons and jails, women on probation and parole, and ex-offenders. Its programs include individualized case management to help women offenders set and achieve goals; skills-development workshops and exercises; peer support and development of peer networks; formal recognition of participant achievement; and ongoing attention to building community support.

## Prisoner Justice Project

147 W 24th St, 5th Floor,  
New York, NY 10011

The Prisoner Justice Project provides free legal service to prisoners who are transgender, intersex, gender nonconforming people who are low-income, and/or POC. Among other advocacy work, they provide support for incarcerated individuals seeking to make name changes, obtain hormones and/or gender appropriate garments, and pursue recourse for sexual violence and violations of the Prison Rape Elimination Act.

## F2L Relief Fund

P.O. 143, New York, NY 10034

F2L provides commissary support to Black, Indigenous, and people of color who are queer, trans and/or two-spirit and incarcerated in New York State, enabling institutional purchase of food, toiletries, gender affirming clothes, certain electronics, and other items only available through commissary.

## Black and Pink

P.O. Box 1741, New York, NY 10013

Works toward prison abolition through pen-pal matching, mail processing/letter-writing, reentry support, sending solidarity packages and commissary to our inside members, and organizing with community partners in advocacy campaigns such as the opposition of 4 new jails in the boroughs.

# Resources for Incarcerated Parents

## Incarcerated Mothers Law Project

40 Worth Street, Suite 829  
New York, NY 10013

IMLP helps incarcerated mothers locate or re-establish contact with children; understand foster-care placement; understand pending proceedings, including adoption and termination of parental rights; improve communication with assigned family

court attorneys; participate in family court proceedings; and plan for post-incarceration, including reunification. They provide language access to mothers with Limited English Proficiency that they cannot get elsewhere, translating and interpreting custody orders and rights.

## Resources for Book Requests

Note: These are all the mainstream Books through Bars organizations that serve incarcerated people in New York state. The organizations below serve incarcerated readers throughout New York State. To request books, please include your name, ID number, institution address, and some information about what kinds of books you enjoy.

### **NYC Books through Bars**

c/o Bluestockings Bookstore  
116 Suffolk Street  
New York, NY 10002

### **Philadelphia Books through Bars**

4722 Baltimore Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19143

### **Prison Books Project**

P.O. Box 132  
Beacon, NY 12508

### **Books to Prisoners**

c/o Left Bank Books  
92 Pike Street, Box A  
Seattle, WA 98101

### **Great Falls Books Through Bars**

P.O. Box 391  
Greenfield, MA 01302

### **LGBTQ Books to Prisoners**

c/o Social Justice Center Incubator  
1202 Williamson St, Suite 1  
Madison, WI 53703

### **Prison Book Program**

c/o Lucy Parsons Bookstore  
1306 Hancock Street, Suite 100  
Quincy, MA 02169

### **Prison Library Project**

915-C W. Foothill Blvd, PMB 128  
Claremont, CA 91711

### **Prisoners Literature Project**

c/o Bound Together Books  
1369 Haight Street  
San Francisco, CA 94117

### **Providence Books through Bars**

65 University Avenue  
Providence, RI 02906

### **Women's Prison Book Project**

3751 17th Ave S  
Minneapolis, MN 55407



