

The **A**WORD



The 'key to forgiveness' by MR J from 'the Ville'

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ANNE PEAKER CENTRE
FOR ARTS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE
ADVOCACY • TRAINING • RESEARCH

The Art of Forgiveness

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Welcome to the first edition of THE A WORD: an arts magazine compiled by and written for ex-prisoners.

The theme of the first edition is the art of forgiveness. What the contributions to this magazine reveal is that the gift of forgiveness means something different to everyone. Yet everyone senses that forgiveness is vital to the human soul, to our ability to renew, to believe, to hope and to aspire to change. It helps us to heal pain, to face the past, and to move forward to learn. So the theme of forgiveness is perfect for artistic expression.

There is an account which really captures this art of forgiveness, recorded during the apartheid regime in South Africa of a woman whose husband was kidnapped, burned and murdered for being black. After the fall of apartheid the police officer who carried out the offence was brought to court and the women asked what she would like to see done to him. She requested 3 things:

1. That he tell her where he left her husband so she could give him a decent burial.
2. That he spend every Saturday afternoon for two hours at her house since these were the times she most missed her husband and desired company.
3. That she walk over to him hold him and tell him that she forgave him. At the last request the officer fainted and the public gallery began to sing 'Amazing Grace'

Another way of looking at the art of forgiveness is think of your abuser as a camel who is stepping on your foot. You stand there screaming in pain and raging at the camel. Why not lift the camel's leg up and take it off your foot? In that way your foot can begin to heal and you can let the camel move away from you.

Forgiveness the healer

Anger, resent, hate, abhor,
Filled with malice, bruised and sore
Hurt deeply, pain and sorrow
Insomnia, sleepless, dreams of vengeance

Cage, trapped, rage – an impasse
Hours on end – reminiscent, indignant
Disdain, a stain, a permanent blemish
a permanent marker that blackens the heart

But wait, behold, a solace, an egress
Forgiveness – a weakness? Never a virtue
Shackles of hate dissolve – healing
Rage dislodged, serenity, liberty

Free at last, a burden unloaded
A novel sensation negates the former
Soul at peace, heart at ease
Hope, light, bright– the future.

This poem was written by Ozzie Evbuomwen, Arts Researcher at Anne Peaker Centre.

Thank you all the staff and trustees at Lloyds TSB Foundation and Anne Peaker Centre for all your hard work and kindness in funding this magazine.

Special thanks to everyone that has had the courage and strength to share the gift of forgiveness.

“Not to forgive is like drinking a glass of poison and waiting for your enemies to die” Nelson Mandela

Does forgiveness have any part to play in the criminal justice system?

This question was asked to a panel invited to discuss and share their experiences of restorative justice.

The seminar was organised by the Forgiveness Project, which is an organisation that explores forgiveness and restorative justice through hearing real people's narratives. One member of the panel was Marian Partington, whose sister Lucy had been one of the victims of the serial killers Fred and Rosemary West.

Lucy Partington, a 21 year old art student at Exeter University, had gone missing in 1973, and when the murders at the West's house in Gloucester were revealed in 1994 Lucy's was among the bodies uncovered.

Marian found herself drawn to working in the field of restorative justice. In Bristol prison she became involved in a project to raise victim awareness with staff and among some prisoners. This usually involved explaining her story, including her experiences of extremely destructive emotion, then listening to their stories and trying to help them open their hearts to themselves.

There was a young man in prison for burglary who was very moved by her story and her likening what happened to Lucy to the ultimate burglary. He suddenly saw that his crimes had affected other's lives. So he asked to be taken back to his flat where he showed police all the other items he'd stolen. He was driven around pointing out the houses he had burgled and asked the police to return the goods and express his apologies. Marian and this young man went

on to correspond for 3 years, and as a result of this experience he has written beautiful poems.

“ I'd never written a poem in my life before I met you, and the only way I can let go of the pain and express myself- speak from the heart is poetry. I never knew Lucy used to write poems. I would like to dedicate all my poems to Lucy because in a strange way if it wasn't what happened to her we would never have met and I would still be in that dark lonely place. I know my poems don't mean anything to most people. But to me they mean the world. I have over 40 poems now. They have a little story to tell. They are part of me. They are like a window into my heart. Every time I write or read one of my poems I will remember how you and Lucy pulled me from the dark lonely pit which would have destroyed me. Thank you”

Time to heal

A time to heal, a time to dance
and be free
Forgiveness for every soul
We hold the key

The sun dial and peace inside
We all need
Anger and resentments will never
succeed
Solitude- heights of the mountains
The loneliness of the desert
Time to reflect
Let all your pain go
As you bathe in the gracious blue
fountains

The void within the soul
The gardens of peace we can feed
The lushes of yellow and green flowers
From seeds to beauty
We watch them grow

The sound of the rivers
Rushing waters to a steady flow
In all this beauty will we find
To hear the sweet songs
From the singing birds

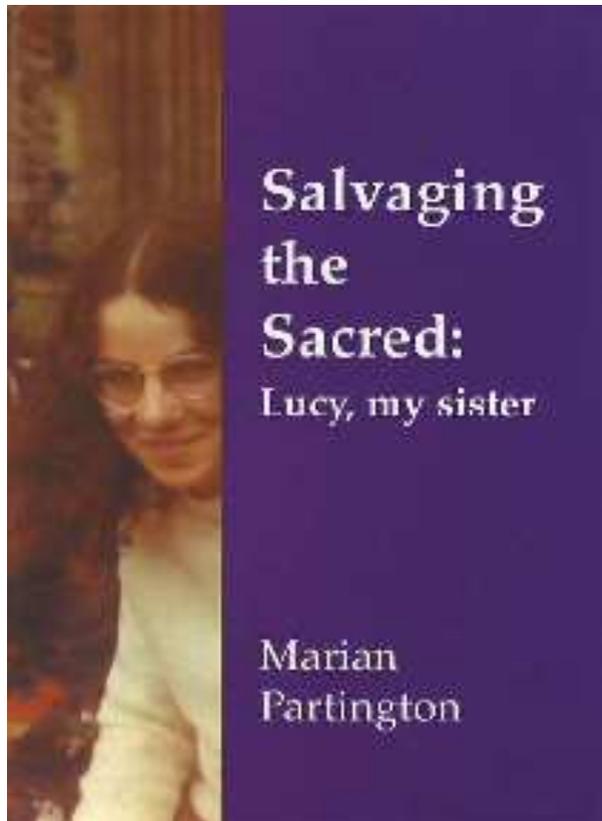
The heart and soul becomes combined
The flowers, the roses row in row
We are no different
We are how they grow

The light, the rain, the sun
Is what they have
We have all this and more
So why be sad?

By Mark Fernley

In her book 'Salvaging the Sacred: Lucy, my sister', published by Quaker books, Marian quotes the Dalai Lama: "I will learn to cherish beings of bad nature. And those pressed by strong sins and suffering as if I had found a precious treasure very difficult to find". She goes on to say, 'I know Lucy would have understood their meaning - "love thine enemy". This path offers a way to break the cycle of violence and hatred, to find in danger the opportunity to change. To reach the experience of the deepest compassion (empathy with suffering) and humility (from the latin word "humus" meaning ground or earth). The earth is common to all forms of life. It is that which connects us and feeds the following generations'.

Following on from the Forgiveness Project's discussion was Shelagh Stephenson's play 'The Long Road', which was produced by Synergy Theatre.



In the programme notes Shelagh explains that much of her background understanding of the play's content came from visits to prisons, where notions of forgiveness and restorative justice were discussed.

"I came to realise that almost all the people I met inside had been profoundly damaged. Long before they ended up in jail. None of the prisoners I met came from an even vaguely stable background they were all bred from a chaotic and toxic mixture of familial neglect, criminality and varying degrees of violence. Many of them had spent large portions of their adult lives in jail and many of them moved me as they struggled to acknowledge and understand the effects of their crimes. They also made me laugh, and being the sort of playwright I am, this was something of a relief. I dedicate the play to all those prisoners taking their first faltering footsteps towards redemption and understanding and all those victims who choose to meet them on the road".

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth and the whole world will be blind and toothless" Mahatma Gandhi

The art of forgiving



‘At peace or in pieces’ by Sue Hanish

Another person who has been involved in the Forgiveness Project was Sue Hanish. Here she outlines her experience of the art of forgiving to THE A WORD.

“There are times in all of our lives, when the music stops, doesn't it? And there is little or nothing we can do on our own to get it going again. For me the music stopped at Victoria Station, London, on a Monday morning, 18th February 1991...it was 10 to 8, just time for “Thought for the Day” and I was a 31 year old, happily married Occupational Therapist, living in Holland and planning to move over to work in South Africa within the month. I was only in London for the weekend.

There is nothing quite like an IRA bomb, hidden in a cast iron litter bin to turn the safety of your world into a living hell and change all your plans for ever.

I had no legs to stand on and I was on my knees literally and metaphorically, the trauma and isolation which followed engulfed me and held me in a trapped state of terror for 10 years, little or no relief was gained from any source.

All trust and belief in my world, my ability and my safety had been blown away, as far as the east is from the west. My confidence was left at the scene of the crime and I became more withdrawn as there was no-one around with whom to share my loss, my grief, my broken heart and my shattered life. The sense of being stuck in silence is what lead me to a terror beyond terrors.....the loneliness, the fear, the panic that this would last forever..... The hard, brittle casing which then developed was a direct response to the hurt experienced, and in silence I slipped

away into a place I did not know and where it was too painful to feel or understand the state I was in. But I carried on as “usual”. Crippled and missing legs, disabled thinking and frozen emotions encased me, but my soul was missing, so where was I? The sense of immobility and lack of feeling is truly disabling, in body, mind and spirit....no wonder so many “survivors” find survival an impossible option in the aftermath and take their lives.

Dying would have been easier; surviving is the hard bit, not least because it goes on and on and on.....

My silent wilderness lasted for 10 years, not intentionally, I was merely being washed down stream by things around me, confused and “absent without soul.” Blocked in and locked in, in every direction.

During this time little morsels of healing came in various art forms. Michael Leunig's cartoons offered an incredible insight to me, which helped me realise other people had noticed the irony of our profanity and our divinity.

Artworks in mental health exhibitions put into pictures other peoples' vulnerability when they had been exposed to themselves and the world....these revelations of other peoples' inner worlds were enlightening and humbling and so comforting, appreciating that there are fellow inmates within the silence, all around.

Writing and drawing, colouring and doodling offered alternative modes of expression as I tried to create some sense out of nonsense. I used puppetry with my nephews and nieces and developed happy, silly characters who

The art of forgiving

by Sue Hanish

wanted to play, have fun, be silly and express their ability and courage to LIVE.

Music such as Bach's "Bist Du bei Mir" held me and comforted me in my isolation. Drumming with Aboriginal people in Australia created a situation where my soul started to feel it could begin its return to my body...and I created the term "Jetlag of the soul" as I began to feel reconnected with my inner life and that I was on the journey home.

Maddy Prior's circular dancing and music offered some restoration at a cellular level, slowly and gradually healing started finding its way to find me, in conjunction with my healing from the inside out.

Being "found out" and having to face myself in my naked humanity I resisted and delayed and truly wanted to avoid this 'rendez-vous' with myself. And yet this is where the real art of forgiveness took place, when I found a place to forgive myself for living. The survival guilt had been too painful to address, how could I have dared to live when the man next to me had been killed and saved my life?

Once I had accepted forgiveness for myself from myself, there was nothing else to fear and nothing else to forgive. What a miracle that this happens surreptitiously over time within us. It creeps up on us in many forms and guises.....and what a release when it comes and one realises that this is where the true healing and restoration lies, and it has been happening in silence all along!

And all along I was known, loved and forgiven intimately, but I had been rejecting my own forgiveness.

What a blessing now to share healthy times with myself and with others, once again at home in my

body, accepting, loving and trusting all that is, knowing that there is now no resistance to the love which surrounds me and dwells within me. The pain and trauma can be honoured along with equal amounts of fun and friendship, and my personal experiences now enable me to engage in Trauma work with other individuals of all ages for our mutual benefit in a profound knowledge that we are sharing the journey."

Sue has written a book about her experience which will be published in 2009. We will be reviewing this next year in THE A WORD.

The Forgiveness Project is a UK-based charitable organisation which explores forgiveness, reconciliation and conflict resolution through real-life human experience. To read more about Marian and Sue and other inspiring stories check out www.theforgivenessproject.com

Photo of Sue Hanisch by The Forgiveness Project



The art of forgiving yourself

The Koestler Trust is the national charity that awards exhibits and sells art works by UK prisoners, offenders and high security patients. 'Prose and Cons' was a collection of short plays written by serving prisoners and ex-prisoners submitted to the Koestler Trust for their annual competition's 'Writing for the Stage' category. One of the writers from 'Prose and Cons' wrote this piece on forgiveness.

"Forgiveness: the act of letting go, to pardon an offence, how appropriate that a life sentenced prisoner should write about that, something they will never experience again in the hearts of many.

Perhaps as I don't forgive myself that makes it impossible to believe one of my victims could forgive me. They are obviously better than me and perhaps in some ways they have let go of their anger and resentment, but to truly forgive someone like me is difficult and something only they will ever know and not something given easily. Why should they forgive me? Why should any victim forgive their persecutors and yet some do?

I stare at the bars every day and accept what I did was wrong. Release will not diminish that guilt, but it may allow me to try and redress the balance of my life and give something positive back. I may never be allowed to do so but it is my goal to try, to achieve it wherever I am, that is despite prison not because of it. This makes prison difficult because you are not in a forgiving environment. Perhaps it is simply a lack of self esteem that makes me feel unworthy of forgiveness and unable to let go of my shame and move on, but if I never hurt anyone again that's a price worth paying isn't it?"

By Anonymous writer.

This years Koestler Exhibition has been curated by young people who have offended. They have helped shape the design and hang the works, and some of their comments will be included in the displays.

One of the young curators commented, "I learnt that don't just look at art. You have to think what it's really about".

The 2008 Koestler Exhibition takes place at Southbank Centre, Spirit level, Royal Festival Hall, Belvedere Road London SE1 8XX 27th Sept– 8 th Nov 2008 . For more info go to www.koestlertrust.org.uk/exhibitions Tel: 0208 740 0333 E: info@koestlertrust.org.uk



Self portrait in Cell, Paul Higgins
HMP Hewell, Worcestershire
Kalyx Outstanding Award for
Portraiture (£100 prize)
Koestler Awards 2008

Stolen Time: One Woman's Inspiring Story As An Innocent Condemned To Death by Sunny Jacobs

In 1976 Sonia “Sunny” Jacobs, and Jesse Tafero, her common-law husband of three years accepted a lift from a man called Walter Rhodes, not knowing that he had a criminal record and had broken his parole conditions. Together with their 10 month old daughter Christina, and Eric, Jacobs’ nine year old son from a previous relationship, the couple were travelling to the coast to look for casual work. Pulled over at a rest stop on the interstate route, Jacobs was breast-feeding Christina when a routine police patrol pulled up beside the vehicle. With two officers approaching the vehicle, Jacobs still didn't think anything was amiss until Rhodes panicked and shot both men dead. He then kidnapped the occupants of his car and tore down the freeway. Within a few miles they encountered an armed barricade across the road. But instead of the police rescuing Jacobs and Tafero, they arrested them on suspicion of murder. Rhodes, who was used to dealing with the criminal courts, struck a plea bargain. In exchange for three life sentences, he testified that Jacobs and Tafero were solely responsible for the killings.

“My whole world seemed to dissolve”, Sunny says, “Anger and disbelief, that’s what I remember feeling most.”

When she was sentenced to death, “They tell you exactly how they’re gonna do it. They’re gonna send 2,200 volts of electricity through your body until you’re dead. And then they ask you if you have anything to say to that and, really, its kind of dumbfounding”

Sunny spent five years on death row in solitary confinement, in a cell the width of her arm-span. Her only lifeline was the stream of impassioned, life affirming letters

between herself and Jesse, offering love and strength, each echoing the other’s conviction that the truth would soon be revealed. She refused to lose hope, even though the state had falsified testimonies and inconclusive polygraph test to condemn her and Jesse, disregarding hidden evidence and the true murderer’s confession. Locked into a 9ft by 6ft windowless and permanently lit cell on death row, only the delivery of meals gave her a sense of time, and guards were not allowed to talk to her.

“It feels as if you are starting to dry up and die. Your head is gone, the head will do you in, make you angry, make you scared, makes you self-pity and confused. The answer is not there. In your heart there’s pain and sorrow and suffering, but the answer is not there. You have to go deeper than that and then you connect with what I guess you would call your spirit and it’s there that you can find the way to open up into that other dimension of life. It’s something very basic. Either you find it or you keep spinning in circles until you crash and burn.



The cover of 'Stolen Time'

Stolen Time: One Woman's Inspiring Story As An Innocent Condemned To Death by Sunny Jacobs

In 1981 Sunny's sentence was reduced to Life and she revelled in the freedom of eating in the company of other prisoners, teaching yoga and forging new relationships. Yet Jesse remained on death row and Sunny lived under the constant shadow of his impending execution and the loss of contact with her children.

"It had a terrible effect on my kids and I worried so much for them when I was there Eric my son was also put into detention for two months when I was arrested. How could you do that to a child? He developed a terrible stutter and had an awful, awful time of it. eventually my parents got custody of the two kids which was some relief"

But when Sunny's parents were killed in a plane crash in 1982, Christina was put into foster care and Eric, then in his middle teens, went out alone and supported himself as a pizza delivery boy. Her parents death was the lowest moment in prison, along with the moment she heard Tefaro had been executed. Until that point the couple had continued to nurture their relationship through letters. "We carried on a fairly full life in our letters, actually including our sex life." In one of the last letters Jesse wrote "We're so lucky, I love you so much, you're my woman, as close as my breath, you're the strongest female I've ever known. Hand and glove you know?"

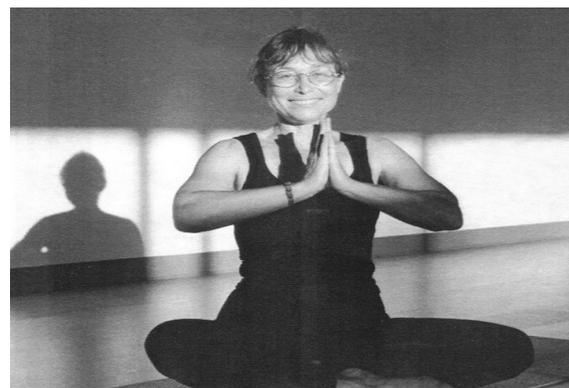
He suffered a brutal death. The electric chair malfunctioned and his executioners had to pull the switch three times. It took three bolts of electricity which lasted 55 seconds each and 13 minutes for him to die. Flames eventually shot from his head and smoke came out of his ears. Jesse died in a horrible botched execution that caused outrage the world over.

Finally in late 1992 after a campaign led by a childhood friend of hers, the court of appeal overturned her conviction. Without compensation Sunny Jacobs walked out of jail as a 45 year old grandmother, her son Eric having married and fathered a child while she was incarcerated.

Stolen Time; One Woman's Inspiring Story As An Innocent Condemned To Death. By Sunny Jacobs ISBN 0385611404

"Sunny Jacobs is an inspirational woman, opposing the death penalty is not about theory, it's about real-life tragedies such as her own - condemned for a crime she did not commit, and her partner, Jesse Tafero, who died so horribly. Stolen Time is a moving memorial to him, as well as an extraordinary account of her own suffering. Shot through with forgiveness and written with surprising humour and a wonderful joie de vivre, it is a book you must read" **Clive Stafford Smith, Legal Director of Reprieve.**

"An Extraordinary and inspirational story. Sunny Jacobs is a remarkable woman" **Susan Sarandon**



Sunny sharing the joy of yoga

FORGIVENESS AS AN ART FORM

By Sunny Jacobs

Since her release from prison Sunny Jacobs has spent much of her time campaigning for the abolition of the death penalty. It was on such a speaking tour for Amnesty International in Cork that she met her husband Peter Pringle, a former fisherman “I was speaking and I was aware of this man in the audience listening to me and he was crying. After my talk he came up to me and told me his story he was wrongly imprisoned for 15 years” He survived through yoga and meditation until he was able to learn enough about the law to secure his release.

“When we met, Peter and I had a discussion about forgiveness. Maybe I’m entitled to feelings of negativity, but they don’t serve me. I’ve come to terms with myself. I’ve forgiven myself for being such a stupid girl. We have the whole gamut of feelings. I’m not going to live in this area where there’s resentment and anger and looking to be repaid for what was taken from me, and I’m not going to live where everything is beautiful and there’s nothing bad in the whole world. Somewhere in between is where I chose to live.”

Soon after meeting Peter they married and now live in a beautiful part of Western Ireland where Jacobs rears chickens, grows vegetables and teaches yoga. “We are very happy together and so lucky to live the life we do. People might think I’m mad but I feel blessed. When I came out of prison I made a choice. To be bitter and twisted or to fill my life with joy and celebration. It was the same choice I made in prison. I wasn’t going to be defeated. Forgiveness is a selfish act. If I hadn’t forgiven the people who put me in jail. I would not have had the marvellous life I have now. No matter how awful your circumstances may be, you always have a

chance to make them better.

Sunny has shared this gift of ‘forgiveness as an art form’ with THE A WORD:

“Art” suggests the use of tools, the creation of a representation of one’s inner process, the expression of feelings to be shared with and interpreted by others. Art requires skill in the choice and use of the tools and basic raw materials. And it depends on creativity – inspiration, insight, emotion – and the courage to externalize it, expose it, and become vulnerable, in a sense. But it is through that very willingness to become vulnerable that we find the greatest strength and freedom.

If forgiveness is an art, then we should be able to talk about the tools, the skills, and the raw materials with which the artist must become acquainted.



Photo by Kate Carey Peters

FORGIVENESS AS AN ART FORM

By Sunny Jacobs

The Tools

For me, the most important tools were yoga and meditation because they helped me to clear away the debris of the past in order to have a clear slate on which to begin. Both of these practices are based on the breath, which is a physical manifestation of the spirit, the breath of Life that connects us all.

The Raw Materials

But before one can begin, there are some decisions to be made. The basic colours of one's palette must be chosen. With what would you fill your Life's canvas? Do you prefer happy or sad? Joyousness or depression? Hope or hopelessness? Love or hatred and self-pity? Those were the choices I faced. I would have been perfectly justified in choosing to hold on to my pain and resentments. After all, I had paid dearly for them. But, if I didn't clear them they would have muddied and eventually eaten away at anything I might try to cover them with, corrupting and undermining my best efforts. My choices would have been severely limited and my palette restricted.

I chose happiness, healing, joy and gladness. I chose gratitude over resentment – because I had been given the chance to have a beautiful life and share it with others.

The Skill

Once I had chosen my palette and my theme, I set about using them to clear and then to fill my life's canvas. Forgiveness meant being willing to let go of hatred, resentment, anger, self-pity, clearing the slate, then filling the newly opened space with broad strokes of colour and letting the details dictate themselves as the universe unfolded and revealed them to me.

The thing about forgiveness is that it is a living creation and so has no end. It is never complete because each day, and sometimes each hour, has its own shape and tone. No two people's creation of forgiveness can be alike. You have your own choices to make. But knowing how to find the tools and raw materials is a big help.

I have no regrets over my decision to choose forgiveness. It has brought me in contact with many others seeking to heal and move on, and filled my life with love!

And so, I highly recommend giving forgiveness a try. It is worth the effort!

Peace and Love Sunny Jacobs



membership

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THE A WORD is compiled by and written for ex-prisoners. It is produced by Anne Peaker Centre, the umbrella organisation that campaigns for the use of the arts in criminal justice settings.

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The views and opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of Anne Peaker Centre.