

The **A**WORD



A picture of hope by Terry Lambert

The Art Of Hope

By Charlie Ryder

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Welcome to the second edition of THE AWORD. Thank you so much for the wonderful feedback we received for the Art Of Forgiveness Issue. The theme of this edition is the Art of hope which comes in the form of letters, books, poetry and wonderful pictures from the US and UK prisoners.

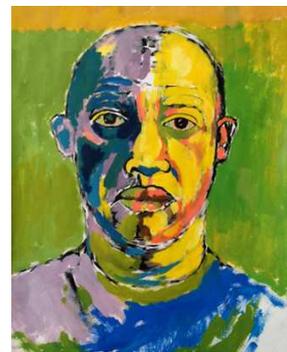
Thanks very much to the funders and to all the contributors I hope you enjoy the magazine. The next theme is the art of happiness

If you are an ex-prisoner that has lost hope then I would suggest you check out the UNLOCK Forum. The UNLOCK Forum is an internet-based community which gives reformed offenders a voice. It is for people with previous convictions to share their experiences of the criminal justice system, ask questions, provide support to people who are going through difficulties, and discuss the latest news in the criminal justice system. It is available 24/7, free to join and is administered by a reformed offender. Visit www.unlock.org.uk to view the Forum and to join the community, or email chris.stacey@unlock.org.uk for more information

The Koestler Awards are the UK'S best known prison arts charity who award exhibit and sell artworks by offenders, detainees and high security patients

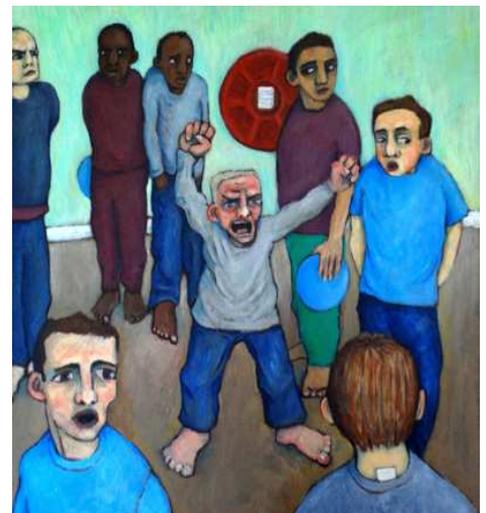
Last years exhibition was curated for the first time by young people, I read these comments next to two winning pictures.

"I thought this whole project would be simple none of this imagine this or imagine that. But then when we saw the art with the amount of levels in one Piece. You see art is mad, not mad but its strange. I never thought one Piece could mean something a lot. That's it"



Self portrait by Anon

"Fed up stressed out sick of it. He's had enough. And they're shook"



Kvetch by Micheal Lester

For more information about the Koestler Trust go to www.koestlertrust.org.uk T:0208 740 0333
E:info@koestlertrust.org.uk

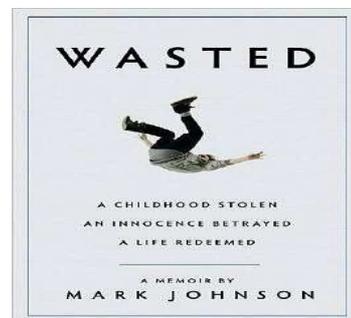
A Childhood Stolen.
An Innocence Betrayed.
A Life Redeemed.

How a book gave me hope



By Matty Cartwright

"The book was called "wasted" by Mark Johnson, it gripped me the minute I began reading it".



I started to read a story that would horrify me, shock me to the core and leave me with no illusions about my own life and my addiction. The story disturbingly mirrored my own life in many ways. **A life of fear, crime, desperation, hopelessness and drug addiction.** I too had ended up on the streets alone scared lost and isolated. My addiction to drugs especially heroine and crack had took me to the same places and still was. My addiction had bought me to my knees on many occasions close to death. I had done the same things he had and I felt the same things he felt. I was constantly in and out of prison all the time pushing the people I cared and loved the most away. All because I couldn't deal with how I felt about life and myself.

A 1mm needle filled with heroine and a crack pipe became my escape so I thought, soon drink and drugs became all I knew. They became, up until this point the only answer and the early answer. But as I read through the book the most amazing thing began to happen. I started to read about how Mark had turned his life around. The book detailed for me something that had never felt or seemed possible to me, it shared the story of recovery and the 12 steps of Narcotics Anonymous. His story showed me that it is possible to recover from the disease of addiction, it is possible to for me to deal with life and all the feelings this entailed. **Mark's book showed me that there is hope,** something I had not felt or experienced for a long time.

Mark's book began to give me the answers to some questions that had so far eluded me. **"could I ever escape?" "can I ever turn my life around?" or "could I ever recover?"** Within a few days I had signed up for the Rapt programme and as soon as I left the block I joined the Rapt community where I learnt about the 12 steps of Narcotics Anonymous and recovery. The answer to the questions I had been asking were **"yes I can recover"** and **"yes I can turn my life around"**

As yet another day passed without the use of drink or drugs, they also passed with **the now usual feeling of hope.** It hasn't been easy and I've made mistakes but I don't need to give up or hide. **Now I will always have that hope and answer as I know it will work if I work it.** With the help of the 12 steps of Narcotics Anonymous **hope is now a powerful driving force in my life** and "Wasted" by Mark Johnson showed me the way. No matter what happens, or how hard it gets, or if I mess up and make mistakes, I no longer have to run away and submit to my addiction. **Deep down hope will always be there.**

A BOOK OF HOPE

While serving a life sentence Erwin James began to write a column for the *Guardian* about his experience of prison life. The column, entitled a *Life Inside*, was the first of its kind in the history of British journalism. Two collections of the columns were later developed into 2 best selling books: *A Life Inside* and *The Home Stretch* - two classic portraits of modern prison life which Erwin James paints with great humanity and honesty.

Erwin James is still a *Guardian* columnist and also writes features, interviews and blogs for the paper and website - all of which usually provoke much thought and debate. It was while reading Erwin's blog for the *Guardian* that I read with great interest about how the *Grass Arena* by John Healey had given him great hope. Erwin writes:

'Healy's visceral account of his decade and a half as a wino vagrant among London's feral underclass in the 60s and 70s - and his redemption through chess and writing - **brought me hope in dark times**. I had lived a life not so dissimilar to Healy's in many ways until I was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1984. I was six years into the sentence and struggling with the weight of it when a probation officer sent me his book. "It is possible to fix a broken life," she wrote in the accompanying note. "Read what this man has achieved and be inspired. For me, the impact of the book was instant. From the gentle but ominous first line, "**My father didn't look like he would harm anyone**", to the wistful and poignant last, not a breath was wasted, not a drama overstated. His unique voice, at times angry and vicious, at others tender and funny, took me into a world whose inhabitants were as grotesque as they were wanting. Prison life could be base; life in the grass arena was baser.

I read it greedily in one sitting, **Healy's beautiful prose sweetening the unpalatable, disguising the monstrous**. I gasped at the sheer resilience that had enabled him not only to live through

what men of lesser mettle would have found unsurvivable, but to come out the other end a notable figure in tournament chess and a world-class author. The *Grass Arena* even won the prestigious JR Ackerley prize for autobiography.

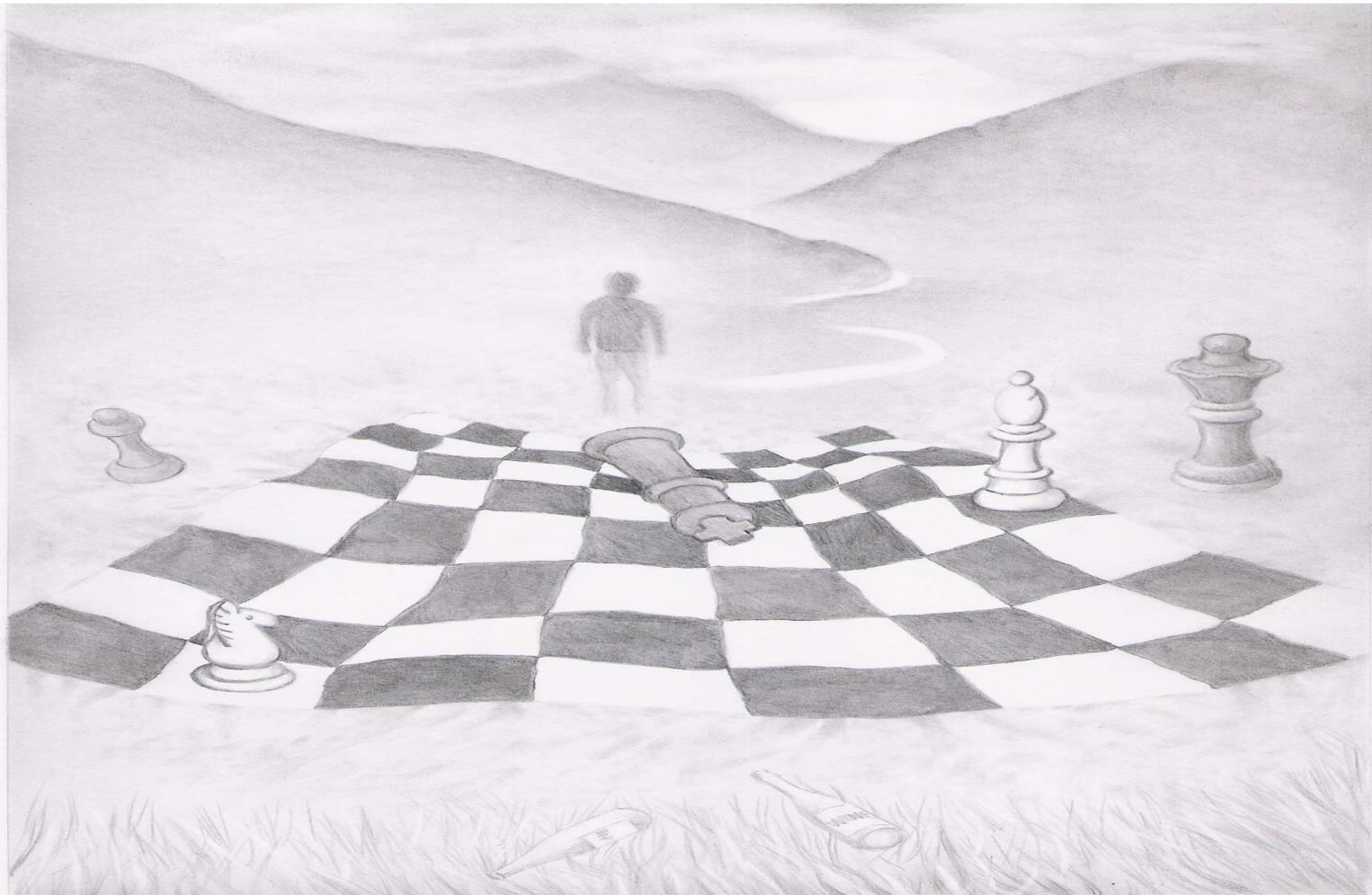
For a long time, Healy's book featured in the small collection that I held dear to my heart and that accompanied me as I was transferred during the course of my sentence from cell to cell and from prison to prison up and down the country. **Over the years I shared it many times with neighbours who had lost hope**, become discouraged, or just needed a good read to get them through another night. Eventually it disappeared - unreturned after a lending, most likely. But I never forgot it, or its message that no matter how dire circumstances might get, there were always possibilities of a better time ahead."

Erwin James's personal blog can be found at erwinjames.co.uk



"John sleeping on a bench (in the grass arena). Two monsters are ready to **BITE** him - other Monsters are on the right of the picture, the monsters represent the "horrors" he gets due to the drinking". **By Andrew Robinson**

ART OF HOPE



"John leaving behind his drinking days. He has just conquered yet another game of chess and he stands—perfectly still looking at the light over the mountains, wondering if he has reached his goal. A road shows the way through to the light -the light represents **HOPE**—without it, John feels nothing". By Andrew Robinson

[Grass Arena An Autobiography \(Penguin Modern Classic\) by John Healy](http://www.grassarena.net) www.grassarena.net

HOPE By Andrew Robinson

My future is in darkness, my past a dimming light.
So many things are changing, it's not a pretty sight!
I'm stuck in this position, unsure of where to turn.
I used to have the answers now I need to learn.
I took so much for granted, and never thought I'd fail.
I overlooked the needy, ignoring what was real.
A damning situation, through choices I have made.
But now I've noticed something to help my troubles fade.
I've crossed a bridge to somewhere, I've never been before.
Where everything is different, better that's for sure.
Everything is positive, much easier to cope.
Perhaps my new-found energy, could be the Art of hope.

A LETTER OF HOPE

Sister Helen Prejean is best known for having turned her experiences as a spiritual adviser to Patrick Sonnier a convicted killer of two teenagers into a Pulitzer prize nominated book 'Dead Man Walking'. This is an extract from a talk she gave at the Life Lines 20th anniversary. LifeLines supports prisoners on death row in the United States through letter writing.

"Can I just take a little moment to say what a letter means. When we get a letter especially if its from someone we love we know what that letter means. **When you're sitting in a cell and you get a 1,000 signals day that you are nothing but disposable human waste.** You get it the way other prisoners talk to you. You get it in the uniform you wear with the number on. You get it when you walk out of death row and you read the words 'death row' on the portion of the prison that you live in.

Then one day the guard says "Hey, you've got a letter", and you look at it. **A letter means that someone recognises that you're a human being and that you exist and they have sent you a letter from very far away.** The very distance adds to the dignity of the letter. That somebody in England would write to me. How in the world? Who in the world is this and just imagine when you open the envelope and you look at it. You look at the stamp you look at everything - somebody cares about you and writes to you. The dignity is so precious when it comes that they will read the letter 10 times and then when they begin to sense that behind that letter is not just the one shot deal but they keep writing. I write and they write back and **its like a steady little lighthouse sending a beam to that floundering ship in the waves and it knows where to go. It's a lifeline because its touched by you and the person on the other end gets a spark of humanness in them".**



Picture by William J Moore

ART OF HOPE

In 1976 Sunny Jacobs and her partner Jesse Tafero were wrongly accused of the double murder of two policemen. Both were sentenced to death and Jesse was executed and Sunny spent nearly 17 years in prison. After a campaign led by a childhood friend of hers, the court of appeal overturned her conviction. In her talk at Life Lines 20th Anniversary Sunny shares the art of hope.

"At first I was overcome by despair and fear. I felt that **things were hopeless** but it's the little things that people did. There was one guard and they weren't supposed to speak to me at all in case they had to take me to my death. One guard gave me extra coffee. There was another one who gave me a newspaper. That was a huge thing. I cut out a picture of food and I kept it hidden and would use my toothpaste and stick it on the back of the door and I would make believe that was what I was eating. **It was the kindness that nourished me.**

There was a time when my tray was pushed through the door there was a napkin and it was folded beautifully. To me that was a message from someone. **Better than words it was a message that I was entitled to dignity as a human being.** That renewed my faith in humanity. You're locked in a cage, nobody cares if you're dead or alive. You need to express yourself or it will eat you up inside and so I decided I would tear paper in strips and weave and make myself a mat it was great so I covered the toilet. I changed my world, I empowered myself and made another mat and when they brought my tray of food I looked at my picture of food. Now I was improving my little world. One day they brought a tray it had beetroot in it and I thought what did the cave people do? They got vegetable dye. My hair had grown long so I cut it made a paint brush and I did painting and then put it on my lips.

After my release the fact that I could go outside and look at the stars was overwhelming to me. I cried because I never wanna get to where I can't cry because I can feel. Give me the pain I can handle it. **That's hope. If you can fill yourself with joy and love then you are part of the solution."**

Lifelines is an organisation that supports and befriends prisoners on Death Row in the United States. It is not a religious, political or campaigning organisation,

Lifelines website www.lifelines-uk.org
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WD25 7QP UK
[email kcolt@ntlworld.com](mailto:kcolt@ntlworld.com)

Subscription £20 a year waged and £10 a year unwaged
Cheques/ postal orders
Payable to lifelines, please send to Carole
Butcher, High Ivah, Lowgil, Lancaster LA2 8QZ



Helen Keeler is a writer. She first became a member of LifeLines in 1993 and has edited the organisation's quarterly journal for the last two years.

I've never learned more about hope than I did in February 2006. Mike Morales, my friend of 13 years, had been on death row in San Quentin Prison, California for a quarter of a century. He had an execution date of 21st February. His appeals were exhausted and clemency was denied. He admitted and regretted the murder for which he was convicted. The man I had come to know as honest and thoughtful, remorseful and caring was to be torn from me. The path was set. **Hope was all I had left.**

Tales of hope go back a long way. Mythology, religious literature and personal stories related throughout history have often been interwoven with the notion of hope. It is not new and it does not date.

When Pandora opened her box and let out everything but hope, she soon realised that it was not evil but rather the antidote to what she had already unleashed. She returned and set it free. Hope is neither dangerous nor futile and it needn't be foolish or blind. There is always hope because hope does not depend on a likely outcome, but rather goes hand in hand with uncertainty. **When the situation is desperate, hope burns like a furnace inside; when the outlook is grim, it shines like a searchlight in the darkness.**

While I waited each day for news of Mike or letters from him, hope gave me something to work with. His lawyers asked me to talk to the press so that Mike's family were not harassed. I focused on my task, channelling everything I had into positive action. **In quiet times, I realised that hope cradled each moment and did not clock-watch.**

I can remember coming across the poem by Emily Dickinson which has the first verse:

***Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all.***



By Donald Palmer



By Mike Morales

It made me smile because while it summed up the sentiment of hope perfectly, at the same time it reminded me that **ultimately hope cannot be expressed in words. It is quite simply a feeling that carries us onwards.**

Mike's scheduled execution time of one minute past midnight came and went. The execution was rescheduled for 1am. But when 1am came, the decision was made to postpone until the following evening. For a whole day I sat at my computer screen, constantly refreshing news pages. When the screen became blurred due to fatigue and tears I closed my eyes tightly and hoped with all my might. Finally, a last minute legal challenge by Mike's lawyers meant the execution was stayed indefinitely. Mike and I have now enjoyed an extra 3 years of friendship we never thought we would have. There are 677 death row inmates in California alone. Ongoing problems with the legality of the methods of execution has led to reports suggesting that there are unlikely to be any executions in this state during 2009.

Mike's future remains uncertain, but one thing I know for sure is that amazing things can happen when we dare to hope.

51 Men in a cage HMP The Dana Shrewsbury

This is a poem taken from 'Deep Inside', a book of poetry by Mike Willmott about his experience of prison.

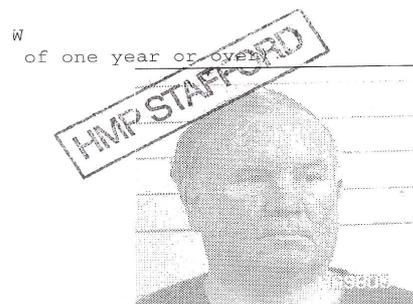
Warm summer sunshine, peace in the cage,
apart from the early match cheering from the gay Meadow
51 cons take their afternoon exercise:
a clockwise perambulation round the 100 metre circuit

One screw stands languidly watching each side;
no action likely - an hour's tedium for them,
Outside the tall fence - no contact, lonesome-
imprisoned in their head - time to contemplate
their mental imprisonment; their lives, their wives.
Overhead, the fishing-net strung over the octagon
fence
to prevent incoming projectiles, hurled from outside,
Over the wall from Castlefields-
half-tennis-balls, loaded with crack.

But shame is not the whole story.
Even encaged, there are common decencies,
Common courtesies, and hail-well mets,
well-wishing for next court appearance,
gentle askings after health, partners, kids;
laughter and stories, experiences and tales:
in the cage the raconteur thrives.
Also, there's the hum of learning,
where random expertise is shared in short hand:
drugs, crime, alcohol, punishment, the outside-
the inevitable, infiltrated with the unusual, or the
deep.
The cage encourages souls to express themselves
and hidden learnings to be exposed;
Immigration; what happened to the Gold Coast?
Funerals in Ghana; Charles Bronson and the Governor,
Zimbabweans in Hamburg, spreckening Deutsch;
Organic farming; Gangland Telford; Nutrition.

**Its not really a cage -
its not a den of iniquity.
It's a Pandora's box,
producing something rich
and strange.**

To order a copy of Mike Willmott's book 'Deep Inside':
Mike Willmott wylycopywriter, 83a Wylecop, Shrewsbury, SY1 1UT
Or mikewillmot@btconnect.com



Michael Willmott
HMP Stafford 2005-6



From 'Our Book' by Anon.
Group Koestler Award winner 2008

A POEM OF HOPE

Please Hear What I'm Not Saying by Brendan

Don't be fooled by the face I wear,
for **I wear a thousand masks,**
And none of them are me.
Don't be fooled, for God's sake don't be fooled.

I give you the impression that I'm secure,
That confidence is my name and coolness my game,
And that I need no one, But don't believe me.

Beneath dwells the real me , in confusion, fear, in aloneness.
That's why I create a mask to hide behind,
To shield me from the glance that knows.
But such a glance is precisely my salvation.

That is, if it's followed by acceptance, if it's followed by love
It's the only thing that can liberate me
From my own built prison walls.

I'm afraid that deep down I'm nothing that I'm just no good,
And that you will see this and reject me
And so begins the parade of masks.

I idly chatter to you I tell you everything that's really nothing
And nothing of what's everything, of what's crying within me.

Please listen carefully to hear what I'm not saying.
I'd really like to be genuine and spontaneous and me,
But you have got to help me. You've got to hold out your hand.

Each time you're kind and gentle, and encouraging,
Each time you try to understand because you really care,
My heart begins to grow wings - very feeble wings, but wings.

With your sensitivity and empathy, your power of understanding
You alone can release me from my shadow world of uncertainty from my lonely prison

It will not be easy for you, the nearer you approach me the blinder I may strike back.

But I am told that love is stronger than strong walls and **in this lies my hope my only hope.**
Please try to beat down these walls with firm hands but gentle hands for a child is sensitive.

"Who am I?", you may wonder. I am someone you know very well,
For I am every man you meet, I am also every woman you meet and **I am also you.**



Facing life by Paul Higgins
Koestler Award winner 2008

A BOOK OF HOPE

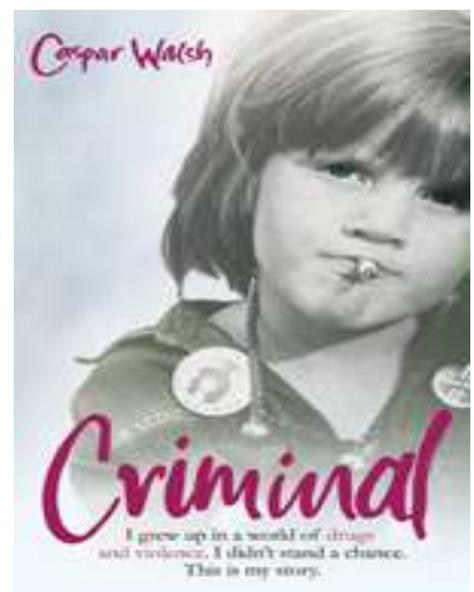


Ozzie Evbuomwen, Arts Researcher at Anne Peaker Centre reviews a book of hope.

"Criminal is an autobiography by Caspar Walsh detailing effectively, a life that was riddled with hardship from the offset. **Caspar from a young age was plunged into a chasm with violence, drugs, crime, neglect, abuse and rejection as its foundation.** His mother, who was supposed to love and support him unconditionally, rejected him during his early age. The one man who was supposed to have his best interest at heart - his misguided father, introduced him into drug addiction and a criminal lifestyle. His relationship with his father was complex and sometimes contrasting. His father was his friend, a bad influence, his mentor and accomplice. He schooled Caspar on how to acquire the finer things in life by stealing, cheating, lying and manipulating others. The 'battering rams' of police forcing their way into their family house, prison firstly as a visitor to his father and then as an occupant, was a way of life for Caspar. By the age of twenty, he was a fully-fledged and well-experienced addict with a constant cocktail of heroin, crack, cannabis and alcohol in his system. Whilst his father was away on one of his stints in prison, young Caspar dared to trust another man, his janitor and chose to confide in him whilst he was emotionally unstable and was rewarded with sexual abuse.

When reading Criminal which I thought **was beautifully written in a brutally honest and unpretentious manner**, I could not help but feel that had Caspar chosen self destruction, (which he attempted literally) given his traumatic past, he would have been to some degree justified. However, realising the impending dangers that came with a criminal lifestyle and drug addiction from both personal experience and watching his father - galvanised by his suicide, Caspar decided to turn his life around and despite having all the odds stacked against him, managed to overcome immense adversity. Caspar is now an accomplished writer and although he has returned to prison on numerous occasions and still continues to do so, it is as a visitor running creative writing workshops. He is currently running the Write To Freedom project which focuses on teaching young offenders the art of creative writing.

Criminal is indeed a compelling read that re-enforces the proverbial statement that anything, with enough belief and determination, is possible. In the words of Caspar himself, **'it is about hope in the darkest, most desperate situation'**.





Casper Walsh and Marcel Celtel co-facilitator of Write to Freedom talk about their project which is giving hope to young people in prison.

'Criminal' has opened doors I never imagined possible, including local and national media coverage and plenty of new teaching work in prisons. On the back of this I've been piloting Write to Freedom (Juvenile) at Ashfield YOI just outside Bristol. **This is a groundbreaking pre and post release mentoring project that's gone from strength to strength since it started last year.** Our first YO has just been released and we're now into the next exciting and slightly scary stage of post release support. We've no idea if this'll work long term but our lad's been in regular contact so far and we're upbeat. We're commissioning him to write a blog for The Guardian and he'll be featured (anonymously) in a BBC mini doc on the 4th of March BBC1 At 7:30. To find out more, there's a regular blog with The Guardian, which you can find by typing 'Write to Freedom' into their website's search engine. Onwards! www.casparwalsh.co.uk

Write to Freedom, has experienced some changes since its inception at Ashfield YOI. We were looking for the right balance between student commitment, staff involvement and suitable writing tasks. I knew we'd got the right combination when I was sat with a group of 'Write to Freedomers' in one of the prison's IT rooms. I was writing my first blog for our website and they were all deep into their stories. **Silence in the room was marred only by the rhythmic clicks of pc keyboards as pasts took shape and futures were planned.** It was an emotive moment. From this we were able to fashion the beginnings of a three month programme of self-reflection and memoir writing which we plan to

roll out to other prisons. Most things, however, come at a price and existing funding for the project is now thinning. In order for us to take the programme to the next level we need further funding; without which, the programme will only have a limited time to run. **If you can help, we'd love to hear from you.**

www.writetofreedom.co.uk



Write to freedom

The Aword is compiled by and written for ex-prisoners. It is produced by Anne Peaker Centre, the umbrella organisation that campaigns for the use of arts in criminal justice settings. This magazine is funded and supported by Lloyds TSB

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