

Adopt an Inmate

Spring 2016



Art by CA inmate M. Garcia



Hey, Boo

The world lost a treasure in February when literary giant Harper Lee left this world at the age of 89. Previous issues of our newsletter included no title for this, the front page column.

The new title is inspired by a touching scene in the movie, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. From CNN: "Those two words, 'Hey, Boo,' come at the moment in the movie when Scout (Mary Badham) coaxes the frightened neighborhood recluse Boo Radley (Robert Duvall) from the shadows. That moment, even more than the racial context of the story, conveys the essence of Lee's simple story: The open-hearted encounter of people we find odd or frightening." Our work at AI can be summed up in that same way.

Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning *To Kill a Mockingbird* remains a best seller nearly 60 years after its first publication. She deftly weaves a tale portraying what it truly means to walk in somebody else's shoes. You will notice nods to Harper Lee and her masterpiece throughout this issue, in honor of her life and work, and for all those inspired by it.

We continue to be graced by angels. Dr. Nancee Bloom, Managing Director of the Bloom Business Center in New York City, has generously volunteered her time and efforts to bring attention to our work in her part of the world. To that end, she and her team have developed this [flyer](#), which will be used to reach out to volunteer adopters. We encourage our readers to post the flyer on public bulletin boards at churches, schools, and offices, and to distribute to community and charity organizations.

I am also pleased to welcome Leah, a new contributor to both our newsletter and blog. Leah has been a part of my extended family for many years, and we couldn't be happier to have her on board the AI family.

The generosity of inmates, their loved ones, and advocates remains steady. This month we've received stamps and handmade cards, along with some beautiful artwork, poems and stories for our blog. Watch for news about an online store we're stocking with items made by inmates to help raise funds for postage, printing, and other basic operating costs. The beautiful handmade afghan seen below was donated by [Charles Farrar in Colorado](#).



Since our last issue, we have teamed up with [Inmates Matter, Too](#) founder Jennifer Rundall, to match up our wait-listed Texas inmates with volunteers from [Watermark Community Church](#). Thanks to Jen's work, twenty-six inmates are getting new friends next week!

Another project in the works is an art exhibit to showcase the talents of inmates. If you know an inmate who would like to submit art or writing for our site, or for an exhibit, please see our [Submission Guidelines](#).

Good News: Adopt an Inmate is now a registered domestic non-profit in the state of Oregon. Great News: That means all donations are tax-deductible ☺.

We've added a new feature, our Wish List (see page 5). If you can't help with any of the current items, maybe you know someone who can ☺.

As always, much love and peace,

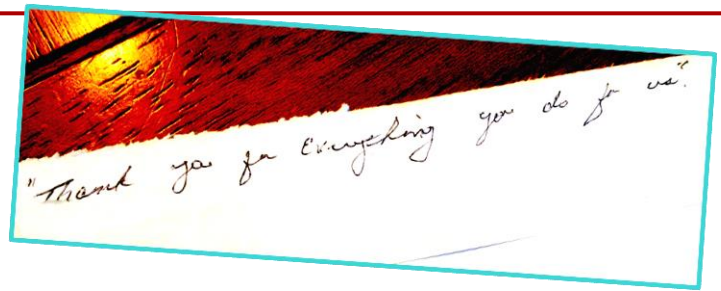
She-EO, Adopt an Inmate
melissabee@adoptaninmat.org

I have seen and met angels wearing the disguise of ordinary people leading ordinary lives. - Tracy Chapman



Ripples

by Leah Patterson



Greetings one and all!

How lucky am I to have been given some space to talk about my experience with AI? Although my path crossed Missy's (aka Melissa) over two decades ago, I actually heard about Adopt an Inmate from my daughter. When we talked, she would share with me how much she was enjoying writing her adoptees.

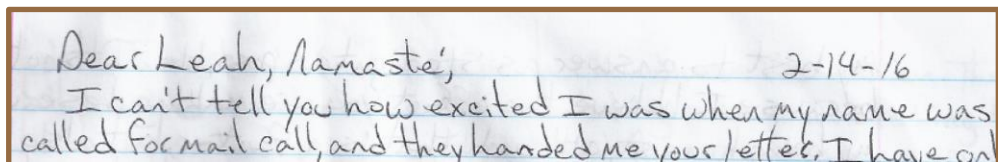
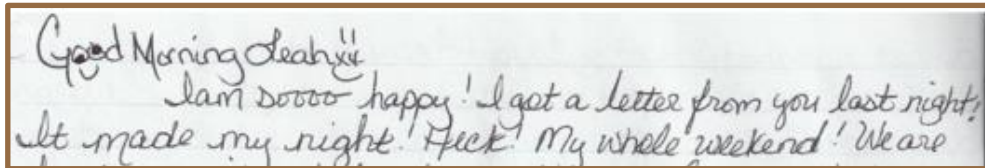
I have always loved volunteering and being of service to others, but I had been through several major life changes and hadn't been involved anywhere for some time. I had recently been feeling the urge to give back in some way and so when my daughter suggested I send an email to AI, I thought to myself, "what the heck, I can do some service right here in the comfort of my own home." The side of me that is a hermit really liked the idea of not having to leave the house, so I sent off an email to the address my daughter gave me. Little did I know Missy was on the other end of that email address!

I started with adopting two inmates and a couple months later added a third. Those first letters were a bit difficult to write; letter writing is a lost art - I don't think I had written an actual letter since I had a pen pal when I was in school. I have always been fascinated by stories of letters between lovers during wartime and I've read books of letters by many of the greats of our times. Ok, so my letters won't be winning any literary awards, but they make a difference to someone and I believe that difference creates ripples that spread out into the world.

I believe the ripples we send out are oh-so-important, but on a personal level, nothing compares to the simple thrill of going to the mailbox and seeing a letter for me amongst the stack of bills, 'occupant' advertisements, and other junk mail.

The joy I feel in bringing light to someone's day is indescribable.

I find that I don't have to know what to say; the words pour forth once I sit my butt in the chair and start writing. When I read words like the ones below, I am filled with joy.



I believe at the core of our being, we are love and if we aren't working every day to lift another we are not fulfilling our divine life's purpose. It's not enough to 'be' good and/or think holy thoughts; we are here to serve others.

While Missy did her magic to find my wonderful new friends, she and I exchanged several emails. Later we talked, and discovered I had some skills the organization could use. We continued to keep in touch and she started assigning me tasks I could help with, even though I live in another state.

I feel so blessed to have been able to help with the AI business filing, as well as the business plan and several other tasks. And now, low and behold, Missy has asked me to be a guest on the AI blog, so you'll be hearing from me more in the future.

My first post will be about one of my favorite tasks for AI, what Missy calls *Leah's List*; be sure to keep an eye on the blog to learn more about this. I welcome your feedback and contributions. "What contributions," you ask? You'll have to tune into the [blog](#) to find out! (Click Follow on the right sidebar of the site to receive notifications of new posts.)

Leah

Art in Prison

Art is like an expression of life. We've studied artists like Van Gogh -- he had a lot of turmoil but he didn't let it overwhelm him. He had that something in him, he wanted to reflect whatever his passion was. In painting, like in Zen, you can lose yourself in the details, and, by that, you find yourself. You discover who you really are. You're willing to accept criticism and be judged. You build confidence that way. When enough people give you positive encouragement, you think, 'Hey, I'm not such a bad person after all.' - CA inmate Ben Ballard



Ronrico Williams - Texas



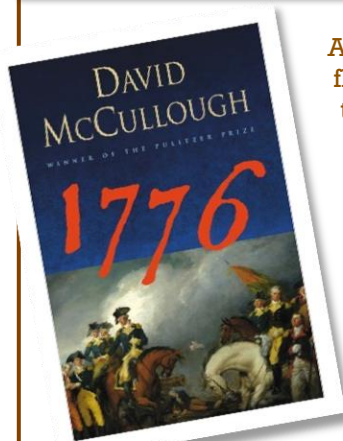
Christopher Avitea, CA



Emmanuel Suarez, Texas

Books

Most facilities require that books for inmates be sent directly from the bookseller (Amazon is always safe). If you're thinking of sending a book this month, consider one of the following:



All men are flawed and make mistakes. Character is that quality in a man that transcends his flaws and propels him to success. In reading [David McCullough's 1776](#), one will become intimate with George Washington's flaws and mistakes, flaws which might have been glossed over by historians more inclined to fuel legend than deeper understanding. Yet, because McCullough reveals so much of Washington's error, the accomplishments and character of America's first Commander in Chief are all the more astonishing than any legend.

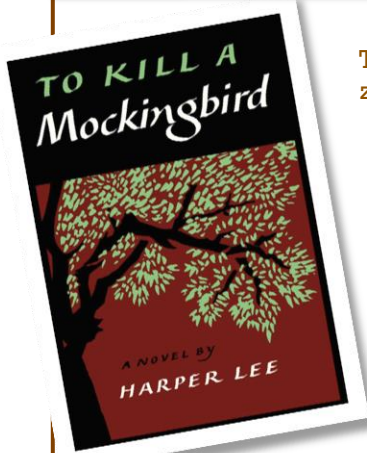
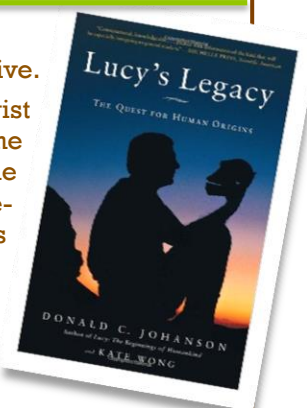
History has been kind to Washington. In bringing Washington's flaws to light, McCullough does us a tremendous favor, and in beautiful prose no less, showing the complete person. I came to the end of the book convinced that history had been kind, but rightly so. Five stars.

See the [full review](#) by Rick Fisk, TDCJ, Dalhart, TX, on our March 27th blog post.

[Lucy's Legacy: The Quest for Human Origins](#) by Donald C. Johanson - Fascinating. Riveting. Provocative.

The list of superlatives to describe this book could go on for pages. Johanson - the famed archeologist who discovered the 3.2 million-year-old hominid (human ancestry) fossil - has written a book for the ages with this one. This book chronicles his expeditions into the ancient sites of Eastern Africa for the discovery of hominid bones in a vivid and relatable way. He speaks candidly about his discouragement and discontentment with findings (and the lack thereof) and allows his readers to feel as though they are right alongside him as he traverses these historic sites where he luckily "stumbles" across the most important fossils to mankind to date.

See the [full review](#) by Martin Lockett, OSCI, Salem, OR, on our April 1st blog post.



TIME's first review of [To Kill a Mockingbird](#) appeared in an Aug. 1, 1960 edition of the magazine, under the headline, "About Life & Little Girls." Below is an excerpt:

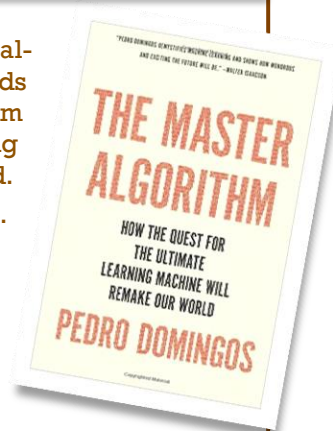
Author Lee, 34, an Alabaman, has written her first novel with all of the tactile brilliance and none of the preciousness generally supposed to be standard swamp-warfare issue for Southern writers. The novel is an account of an awakening to good and evil, and a faint catechistic flavor may have been inevitable. But it is faint indeed; Novelist Lee's prose has an edge that cuts through cant, and she teaches the reader an astonishing number of useful truths about little girls and about Southern life. (A notable one: "Naming people after Confederate generals makes slow steady drinkers.") All in all, Scout Finch is fiction's most appealing child since Carson McCullers' Frankie got left behind at the wedding.

In [The Master Algorithm](#), Pedro Domingos describes current developments in computer algorithms (procedures) that learn on their own. Professor Domingos clearly explains basic methods of computer learning, which will soon (about 5 years) make computers as smart as a child. From there, computers will quickly become much smarter than us and a billion times faster. Everything will be changed.

This is one of the best books I've ever read. It ends with a good list of suggested further readings. Some of this book is somewhat difficult, college level material, but Domingos has been careful to make those parts skipable without undue disruption to the following chapters.

Profound warning quote: "[...] humans quite easily fall into obeying others, and [for them] any sufficiently advanced Artificial Intelligence is indistinguishable from God.

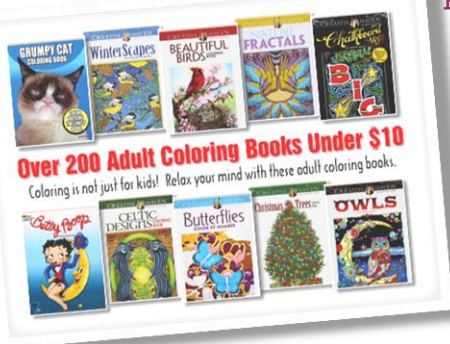
- Review by an inmate in Sing Sing Correctional Facility, New York



Inmate Recommendations

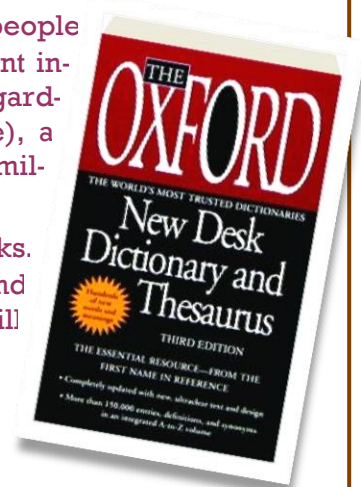
For ordering books, I've found for years that [Hamilton Books](#) is a very reliable source for prisoners. All their books are way far discounted, and their "no questions asked" return policy is for real. One oddity: hardcover books are often less expensive than paperback, so do verify if the facility

permits hardcovers before placing an order. Hamilton publishes a very nice, large catalog, which they send [free on request](#). The catalog can be a nice way to find books for those in facilities that offer interlibrary loans (sorry Mr. Hamilton). Their inventory is vast and includes over 200 adult coloring books for under \$10 each.



A thesaurus is more useful in prison than people might think. To cut down on limited book count in cell (each facility sets their own maximum regarding the number of books allowed per inmate at one time), a combined dictionary/thesaurus is a good idea. Click [here](#) for one from the Hamilton Books catalog, offered for \$5.95, shown at right.

To anyone that will listen: Prison libraries all need donations of non-fiction books. They're usually too pricey to buy. Fortunately, years-out-of-date is practically brand new in prison. An old textbook is a lot better than none. Most prison libraries will accept donations, but find out their rules for donating before you send anything.



We are looking for volunteer help with the following:

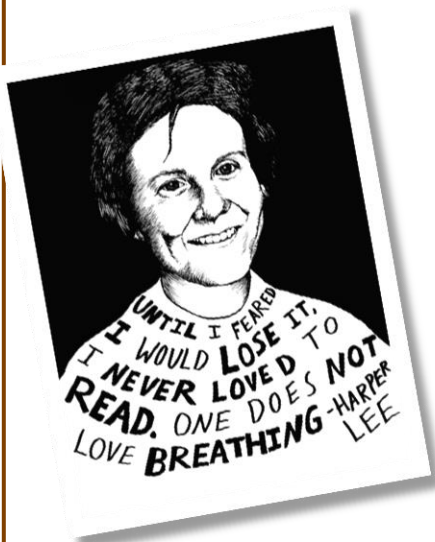
- Translating our inmate survey into Spanish (Word format)
- Adopters who speak and write Spanish
- Adopters of all faiths (Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, etc.)
- Service men and women to write to inmate veterans
- Handmade items by inmates for our online store
- Artwork, poetry, stories for our "Letters From Prison" blog series*
- Local (Eugene, OR area) volunteers to help process the mail
- *We always need stamps!*

Send submissions and donations (including stamps) to:

PO Box 1543
Veneta, OR 97487

Or email: submit@adoptaininmate.org

* See [submission guidelines](#) here



TEXAS PRISON BOOKSTORE

			
Gifted Us	Facebook	Map	About Us
			
Shop Now	Catalogue	TSA	McCombs Street
			
Account Search	Book History	Self-Inventory	TSA Facebook
			
Private Talk	Giftcards menu	Mobile Phone	Private History

You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view

- To Kill a Mockingbird
Harper Lee

**★ KNOW ★
— YOUR —
RIGHTS**

Adopt an Inmate Stat:
Incoming Mail YTD: 2788 Pcs



My Side of the Wall

by Connie Bergstrom

Preparing for parole review: **THE SUPPORT LETTER**

Parole letters are written by an incarcerated person and/or his or her supporters. A parole letter attests to the inmate's character, rehabilitation, and plans to improve

his or her life and contribute to society after release. A well-written letter can make the difference between release and denial.

The Board needs to know the facts, or the basics - who, where, how, what and where. It is best to keep it simple, respectful, and short.

WHO. Introduce yourself and describe your relationship to the inmate. The parole board wants to know that you yourself are a responsible citizen. Things to include might be your education, occupation and length of time in your field, if you attend church, and any organizations you belong to that demonstrate your standing in the community. Include positive facts about the inmate prior to being incarcerated.

WHERE your loved one would be paroled.

WHY. The Parole Board wants to know that the inmate has used his or her time while incarcerated to better himself, that he understands any harm he caused, has taken advantage of every opportunity provided, has demonstrated positive changes, and has a plan for his life outside of prison. Explain the advantages to having him or her return to the family and how he will contribute.

HOW & WHAT. If the inmate has job offers make sure to state that in your letter, and include documentation from prospective employers (they can even write their own letter). Research AA, NA, and other possible support group meeting in the area, as this may be a condition for parole. If you plan on attending counseling together after release, state that (remember to keep it positive).

Close your letter with *Sincerely* or *Respectfully*, and sign your full name.

Consider writing an outline of your letter first with the key points above before writing your first draft. Then collect any additional letters to support your request.

This is a stressful busy time, keep upbeat and take care of yourself no matter the outcome.



(Your State) Board of Parole
Mailing Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Honorable Members of the Parole Board:

My name is (your name), and I am writing on behalf of my (son/husband/friend), (inmate's name and number). I am familiar with the facts and circumstances of the crime for which (name) has served (length of time served).

I have lived in (City, State) for (#) years, and have been employed at (company) for (#) years. I am a member of (list church and/or community organizations).

I have followed (name)'s progress throughout his/her incarceration, and have seen his/her progress and devotion to (educational opportunities, community service, etc.). My (daughter/wife/friend) is a very kind, compassionate, and responsible person who (has become a strong advocate of victim's rights, etc.) and is looking forward to the opportunity to be present for his/her family, and to serve his community after his release. He/she has received (job offer) (see enclosed letter).

Upon release (name) will live in (location) with (family member[s]), where a loving and supportive environment awaits him/her.

(Name) has reformed and rehabilitated and poses no threat to the outside world. He/she has accepted full responsibility for his/her actions, has reflected on past mistakes and expressed deep and sincere remorse.

I believe that (Name) will be a productive and responsible citizen if given the opportunity, and has my full support.

Sincerely,

(Full name)

