

# Alētheia

Volume 13

The Newsletter of

Summer 2008

*N.Y. Theological Seminary Students and Alumni and Rye Presbyterian Church*

## COMING TOGETHER— ON THE OUTSIDE

*By Bob Steed*

To the best of our knowledge, more than 130 graduates of New York Theological Seminary have been released and are living positive, productive lives on the “outside.” On January 13, 2008, over 50 of them gathered at Rye Presbyterian Church for its annual Church and Justice Service. This gathering, dinners sponsored by Sean Pica and Hudson Link, and the participation of many NYTS graduates in workshops and conferences on criminal justice issues throughout the country are all powerful testimony to the positive contributions these formerly incarcerated people are making to society.

The 50 graduates, plus their families, friends, and other special guests, packed RPC’s large sanctuary. They were treated to a glorious service, featuring a powerful sermon by Merv Otero on “Life’s Instructions.” Merv, who was released less than a year earlier, took the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 22:34-40, and drove it into heads and hearts in a most meaningful way. Taking nothing away from Merv, though, the highlight of the service was a reading of a poem by Ja’Far Abbas, who had been released only a couple of months earlier. The poem was titled “I Never Meant”— and was written for Ja’Far’s late mother as a plea for her forgiveness. It drew a standing ovation — an unheard of event among RPC’s “frozen chosen.” Other NYTS graduates participating in the service included Mark Wallace, Stephen Fraley, Rory Anderson, Anthony Simpson, Ray Rios, Hector Rivera, Tom Popowich, Renaldo Brown, and Paul Satterfield.

After the service, over 100 guests gathered for a luncheon, straining the capacity of the church’s assembly room—but not straining the joy, hope, and belief in the future that inspires this annual event. As is our tradition, each person at the lunch introduced him/herself and talked briefly about the positive, life-affirming work they are doing in their communities. And, we all know, they are not alone. NYTS graduates who could not be with us, plus many thousands of other men and women who have been freed from prison, are working daily to give back to their communities, as they “seek the welfare of the City to which they have been sent.”

After lunch there was time for more networking as the men sought to help one another, or connect with people they had not seen on the outside before. It was also a time for three very recently released men to go down to RPC’s Clothes Closet to get outfitted in suits, dress shirts, and ties, to be able to present themselves properly in the world of work. At the end of the day, everyone felt a deeper connection with one another and with their God, by whatever name that deity is called — and with a promise to meet again for an even bigger celebration in 2009.

## WHAT GOES ON BEHIND PRISON WALLS?

*By Patrick A. Campbell*

Prison is a place where you feel rejected, powerless, helpless, and ostracized by society. You become disgusted because people on the outside still have the same prejudices about incarcerated people that you used to have. It is a place where incarcerated people face daily threats, harassment, humiliation, physical & psychological abuse from some prison officials. It is an unpredictable place where you do not have to do anything wrong to receive a misbehavior report or get a new charge. It is a place where you find innocent and guilty, good and bad, intelligent and foolish people.

Prison is a place where you find gray hairs on your head, or where you find your hair starting to disappear. It is a place where you get false teeth, wear stronger glasses, and feel aches and pains you never felt before. It’s a place where you grow old and worry about it, while watching your children, nieces, and nephews grow into adulthood. Prison is a place where you hate with clenched teeth, where you want to beat, kick, and scratch, and you wonder if the psychologists know what they are talking about when they say you actually hate yourself. To me, prison is a place where incarcerated people transform, forgive, and show remorse to victims and to society.

Prison is a place where you learn that nobody needs you, that the outside world goes on without you. Prison is a place where you can go for years without feeling the touch of a human hand, getting a kiss from a woman, or hearing a kind word from anyone in society. It is a place where families and friends place blocks on their telephones. Why? Because taking collect calls from their loved ones in prison cost them six times more than making a regular telephone call in the “free world.”

*(Continued on Page 5)*



C&J Sunday 2008 with Sister Marion

**Table of Contents**

**Articles**

**C&J Sunday 2007 ..... p.1**  
 By Bob Steed

**What Goes on Behind Prison Walls .... p.1**  
 By Patrick A. Campbell

**NYTS Graduations ..... p.2**

**Open Letter to Young People ..... p.3**  
 By Rashan Smalls

**Proceed with Caution ..... p.4**  
 By Jacques (A-Z) Edwards

**The Forgotten Man/Woman ..... p.5**  
 By Don Mason

**The Call ..... p.6**  
 By Michael J. McLean

**Sober Awakenings ..... p.7**  
 By Todd Young

**Rising Hope Graduation at Green Haven.....p.8**

**Poetry**

**Solitude ..... p.3**  
 By Eddie Cuadrado

**Who? Not Me .....p.5**  
 By Theo Harris

**Family .....p.5**  
 By David "Dāwūd" Wheeler

**Invictus ..... p.7**  
 By William Ernest Henley

**Above Average ..... p.8**  
 By Jerry Lowe

**Geese Fly Together ..... p.9**  
 By Martha Louise M. Harkness

**Oh God ..... p.9**  
 By David Santana

***Lead me in Your truth  
 and teach me..."***

***Psalms 25:5***

*Aletheia* is published as collaboration between New York Theological Seminary prison program students and alumni, and the Rye Presbyterian Church. *Aletheia* is the Greek word for truth, the truth that first appears when something is seen or revealed

**Staff:**

Trudi Bunke Jackie Labatt-Simon  
 Dwight Kellogg Bob Steed  
 Ralph Krainin (photos)

Past issues of *Aletheia* are posted on the RPC website [www.ryepc.com](http://www.ryepc.com),

Please send correspondence, changes of address, materials to submit for publication, comments, and letters to the editor to:

*Aletheia*  
 Rye Presbyterian Church  
 882 Boston Post Road  
 Rye, NY 10580

**From the Editor:**

It's been a long time since the last issue, and I know you have all been asking when the next issue is coming. Well, here it is. In addition to pieces from NYTS graduates, this issue includes some articles and poems from men enrolled in the Certificate in Ministry Program, Hudson Link College Program, and others who have seen and been inspired by *Aletheia*. Keep sending your articles, poems and drawings so that there will be enough for many issues to come.

**NYTS Graduations**

Two NYTS graduations have taken place since the last issue. The 2007 graduates were:

**2007**

Raynaldo E. Brown	James Mobley, Jr.
Larry Costa	Taharqua Rameses
Hector Custodio	Charles Russell
Jacques Edwards	Anthony Small
Angelo Hunt, II	Jules Stanley
Carlo Huston	Emmanuel Uzoma
Dāwūd Ziyād Imān	Richard E. Winkler
Anthony Isaacs	Robert Wooley
Kenny Jean-Baptiste	

The highlight was New York Commissioner of Corrections, Brian Fischer, the former Superintendent of Sing Sing, as the keynote speaker, Reflections by two graduates selected by their classmates -- Robert Wooley and Larry Costa, and a solo by Ms. Cinceno Taylor of The Riverside Church. It was, indeed, a joyful occasion.

**2008**

Daniel T. Callahan	Robert Rose, III
Jae O. Choi	John P. Royster, Sr.
Gregorio Cruz	Warren K. Streeter
Theodore Harris	Nixholas Tellone
Gaston Jones	John Whitfield
Joseph Mazzaferro	Juan Williams

An additional more man graduated in 2008: Commissioner Brian Fischer, who spoke to the graduates about "sharing a common brotherhood," and of their great achievement and future responsibilities. Superintendent Luis Marshall told the graduates to, "Take these bricks and add to the mortars you have earned."

The keynote speaker was Jim Wallis, of The Sojourners, a noted author, public theologian, speaker, international commentator, and editor-in-chief of *Sojourners Magazine*. His subject was *The Soul of Politics*. He spoke of a commencement address he gave last year at Georgetown University where he told the audience about his first time at Sing Sing. An inmate invited him, and when he asked, "When can I come?" the response was "We're free most nights." Coincidentally, I was at Chautauqua, N.Y. when he was the visiting minister for the coming week. As he began his sermon, he spoke of being with NYTS men at Sing Sing. I was blown away. At graduation I mentioned it to him, and he remembered me as the only person, among the thousands there, who could relate to what he was saying. He has worked with gangs, and likened churches to gangs. He truly believes in the power of education and change, "Hope means believing in spite of the evidence and watching the evidence change." In closing, Theo Harris, a class member, spoke of education as a "journey, not a destination." Theo and his wife sang a song they wrote when they had a group, The Anointed Two.

At the end of the ceremony, the highest award given by NYTS, The Sower Award, was bestowed upon Jim Wallis. Another joyous occasion.

(Photos in next issue)

## OPEN LETTER TO YOUNG PEOPLE

*By Rashan Smalls*

Peace to my brothers and sisters. Fourteen years ago, at the age of 17, I made a split-second decision, altering the course of my life and the 16-year-old boy I murdered. I destroyed his life and mine as well. Two lives were ruined by a decision I made. He remains dead underground, and I live buried beneath the bars of incarceration. I say buried because, since my arrest and conviction for murder, I have served nearly 15 years of a 25 year sentence. Over the years, I have felt that my prison sentence is a virtual death sentence. The distressing weight of imprisonment is not only of stones and metal bars, but also of broken dreams, misguided decisions, lack of self-esteem, soul-less politics, and misplaced values that have led to my incarceration, and through which many prisoners continue to wallow.

In retrospect, my life demonstrates many of the prevailing conditions and circumstances that are causes of incarceration. Like many of you, I have witnessed many things, while growing up in my "hood," that negatively shaped my early years and teenage experiences. Family influences seemed to affect me most. In my home, I watched helplessly as my mother struggled with a "crack" addiction and domestic violence abuse. Her pain and suffering became my badge of shame. It became a festering sore for me that just would not heal. It seemed that, when she lost her fight with drugs, she also lost her love for me. And, in turn, I seemed to have lost my love for her. I allowed the pain I felt to fuel my anger. Feeling disconnected from her love, I began to perform poorly in school and eventually dropped out. I then hit the streets hard.

My destructive love affair with the streets led me to a life of crime. Smoking weed, drinking alcohol, robbing and stealing became my way of life. Murder marked my point of no return. I did not even know the name of the young Black boy I murdered. I have never even seen his face. I made a decision to take his life because I valued neither his life nor mine. Not having an image of his face in my mind, so that my soul can issue forth an apology, adds to the pain and remorse I feel for the terrible consequences of my actions. Not knowing what he looked like is part of that festering sore that will not heal, and a regret I face daily. It will forever live as the saddest regret of my life!

I wish I could start all over again. However, I have learned the hard way that some wishes cannot come true. I have spent my entire adult life behind bars in prison -- far removed from my family, loved ones, and simple things I took for granted. I face the daily reality that I could die behind these bars. When I look around this prison, I see mostly young Black and Latino men. Every year, the faces appear younger, and the length of their sentences gets longer. What links most of us, besides skin color, is the way we tragically and misguidedly viewed and thought about ourselves. We failed to see the value of our lives.

I wonder now how things might have been different had I valued life, mine and that of the young man whose life I took, more. I want to pose some questions to you, the reader, so that you can reflect on some serious thoughts. Is there

someone or something that gives you value? What do you think about yourself? Do you love yourself?

Today, I love my mother and myself more than ever! This remains the reason I now thrive and continue to prepare myself for the day when I earn my release from prison. To me, self-love and value carry far more importance in my life than the negative opinions or attitudes others may have about me, and that I used to have about myself. My self-esteem motivates me to achieve excellence. Presently, I am a college student working hard towards a bachelor's degree in Behavioral Science. My goals, especially the educational ones, have helped me put my life in order. We do not have to experience prison to realize self-value. More importantly, you have to see your potential and give love and value to yourself and others, and lastly, believe that anything is possible! Peace!

## SOLITUDE

*By Eddie Cuadrado*

Loneliness can be found  
In the presence of others;  
A psychological assault  
From all sides.

Like a thief in the night  
It knocks me off my feet,  
Robbing me of tranquility,  
Despair in my heart resides.

I experience heaviness  
Very close to despondency,  
Embraced by moodiness  
Deep within my soul.  
A dark cloud hovers  
Overwhelming me,  
Wanting to be left alone  
Restlessness untold.

Longing for something  
To fill the void.  
Saddened and disappointed  
By promises not kept.  
Wholeness eludes me,  
Alive and yet not.  
I'm in a terrible state.  
Lost count of times wept.

Tired of being tired  
An emotional wreck  
Longing to evade  
The misery of every day.  
Unable to break free  
From the prison walls.  
Slowly deteriorating  
From keeping solace at bay.

## PROCEED WITH CAUTION

By Jacques (A-Z) Edwards

With the advent of a major accomplishment such as a graduate degree or release from prison, many have the tendency to zoom along in the joy of the moment. I declare: proceed with caution. You *should* celebrate accomplishments as important as a graduate degree or a newly released inmate. Yet, despite the celebration of the moment, you need to recognize that the struggle has only just begun.

Let us examine the graduate. Surely, earning a graduate level degree is a major deed. It demonstrates your competence at a high level. However, it should not include a snobbish attitude towards others. Moreover, with such a degree in hand, it is expected that you can effectively communicate the lessons learned within that university of experience. Yet, often you are faced with the envious; they will attempt to drag you down so that you are more in line with their expectations of where you ought to be. Proceed with caution.

In actuality, war has been declared, and many blindly respond to the war bugle. The true call is to prove that you are worthy of a graduate degree, and humbly show your intelligence without engaging the combatants. I have felt and seen this battle played out often in my daily travails. It was often said to me: many will earn a degree but most do not embody the degree in their actions. Proceed with caution.

Similarly, when you are released from incarceration, the burden shifts tremendously to the freed individual. Society did not release you, but, collectively, society will be the victim of any further misdeeds. Proceed with caution.

Many folks, who are in society, will expect you to return to your former ways. They will vigilantly place increased scrutiny upon the ex-offender. They want to validate their perception of the nature of your classification. Expect no mercy, but plenty of snares, to cause you to recidivate. Proceed with caution.

Generally, folks hate to be proved wrong. So, while fulfilling their yearnings, please remember that you are, also, subject to their influences. Often, in resentment to the 'pettiness' you endure, the response is akin to cursing. However, as soon as you curse, there is an implicit, if not explicit, sigh that in effect says: "Aha, I knew it." Proceed with caution.

Do be aware of these expectations. Never succumb to them if they do not position you where you want to be. False Expectations Alter Reality (FEAR) only when you succeed in the struggle to reach your goals. Life is filled with struggle to maintain equilibrium against all the forces life creates.

Just PROCEED WITH CAUTION.

### BEHIND THESE PRISON WALLS *(Continued)*

Prison is a place where you hear about a friend's divorce, and you didn't know he was married. It is a place where you hear about your neighbor's kid graduating from school, and you did not even know they had started school. Is a place where you feel sorry for yourself. Then you get disgusted with yourself for feeling sorry for yourself; then you get mad for feeling disgusted; and then you try to mentally change the subject.

Prison is a place where you lose respect for the law because you see it raw and naked, twisted and bent, and ignored and blown out of proportion to suit the people who enforce it. Prison is a place where you find millionaires, but they will never get out of prison alive to spend their money. On the other hand, prison is a place where you learn to respect the law, and hope to be released to become a law abiding citizen. You know that three strikes and you will be in for the rest of your life.

Prison is a place where you are smarter than the parole board because you know which guys will go straight and which ones will not. You are wrong just as often as the board members are, but you never admit, it and neither do they. Prison is a place where you wait for a promised visit. When it does not come, you worry about a car accident. When you find out the reason your visitors did not come, you are glad because it was not serious, and disappointed because such a little thing could keep them from coming to see you.

Prison is a place where you see people get stabbed, cut, burned, raped, blinded, paralyzed, or even killed for saying or doing the wrong thing. It is a place where you do not steal, extort, disrespect or inform on a fellow incarcerated person. Prison is a place where you sleep with one eye open; and want to give someone a piece of your mind, but you have to bite your tongue. Prison is a place where you live among people you do not like or get along with. It is a place where everyone thinks his burden is the heaviest.

Prison is a place where a letter from home or from a lawyer can be like a telegram from the War Department. When you see it lying on your bed, you are afraid to open it. But you do anyway and usually end up disappointed or angry. On the other hand, prison is a place where getting a piece of mail from anyone in society is like getting a visit from your loved ones. Prison is a place where, if you are married, you watch your marriage die. It is a place where your significant other may tell you that she loves you with all her heart, body and soul, but love cannot pay bills. It's a place where you learn that absence does not make the heart grow fonder, and you stop blaming your wife for wanting to live with a real man instead of a fading memory and promises. Prison is a place where you go to bed before you are tired, and pull the blankets over your head when you are not cold. It is a place where you escape by reading, playing cards, watching television, exercising, getting high, talking foolishness, going crazy or committing suicide. You are the only one to decide how you plan to use your time (wisely or foolishly).

Finally, prison is a place where you fool yourself; where you promise yourself you'll live a better life when you leave. Sometimes you do; sometimes you don't. Prison is a place which some of us will get out someday. Then, you wonder how everyone else can be so calm and cool while you are so excited. Your bus driver does twenty-five miles an hour, and you want to tell him or her to slow down, but you do not because you know it is foolish. It's a place where almost everyone longs for the day when he/she will be released into society. No matter what you had thought or heard about prison, prison is not a bed of roses. Prison is hell on earth! Any incarcerated or formerly incarcerated person who glorifies doing time in prison should be in a mental asylum. To be in prison is not cool!!!

## The Forgotten Man/Woman

By Don Mason

In 1884, William Graham Sumner wrote two essays: "The Case of a Certain Man Who is Never Thought Of" and "The Case of the Forgotten Man." He wrote of the common man, and woman, who were good examples of people who assume responsibility for themselves, work hard, pay taxes, and rarely, if ever, need government services. Despite this, they have no voice in their government's spending decisions and, in essence, become forgotten. Franklin D. Roosevelt used the metaphor, "The Forgotten Man," in several speeches, in reference to the man who was then unemployed and desperate. Roosevelt sold the New Deal by using "The Forgotten Man" to tug at the heart-strings.

There are at least two instances today where there are forgotten men. The first pertains to prisoners, the second to the parole board.

First, some prisoners never stop to think of the financial burden that our arrest, trial, county time, and state incarceration places on the average taxpayer (including our own family members). We have become part of the reason that New York State spends more each year for the Department of Corrections than the State University of New York (SUNY). Each time we go to the mess hall, doctor, dentist, or the state shop, the forgotten man (taxpayers) that get up each morning and go to work are paying for all of this.

Second, the Parole Board commissioners, too, are culpable. They ignore New York State Penal Code, having no set criteria anymore, and place too much emphasis on penalizes the original crime. They give almost no recognition to the burdens they contribute to the forgotten man. Every two years we are hit by the Parole Board costs the taxpayers at least \$70,000.

Let us begin to ask, as Sumner did, "Who will pay for it?"

## Who? Not Me!

By: Jose Martinez

Mistakes	- made many
Regrets	- have plenty
Remorse	- live out each day
Hurt	- those I love
Shame	- wear like glove
Loser	- so they say
Learned	- without a doubt
Changed	- inside out
Care	- in every way
Feel	- for all I've wronged
Vision	- must stay strong
Loser	- no, I pray
Love	- I have my share
Friend	- God always care
Thoughts	- positive they'll stay
Children	- in me they trust
Unity	- indeed a must
Loser	- Oh no, no way!

## Family

By: Dāwūd Ziyād Imān (David Wheeler)

A History of reflections  
a blood and soul connection a Tree  
whose branches are firmly in the earth

A Sense of direction and a source of protection that establishes  
and determines  
our human worth  
Family

A genetic code  
a most excellent mould  
a resemblance in one's nature and face  
A similar posture or smile in culture and style  
an inheritance  
of our  
human race  
Family

An over whelming urge that seeks to emerge  
all other feelings in the heart  
a will to give  
so that others might live and after error be given a new start  
Family

A sensitive side that we can't seem to hide from souls of  
familiar tone  
A sound so clear  
even the deaf could hear  
and the blind can find their way Home  
Family

Shared expressions of Life's Impressions  
which shapes and forms the spirit  
Wherein a silent stress is still addressed by souls whose hearts  
can hear it!  
Family

Related by Nature our Humanity stands  
always in need of each other  
Though our paths become diverse remember this Verse:  
That Creation Itself is our Mother!



Tom Popowich, John McAndris and wife

## The Call

By Michael J. McLean

R.I.P., June 8th 2005

*It got me, I got it ...* "The Call." I can officially say I've been there and done *that*, and add "The Call" experience to my repertoire of prison memories. I'm referring to the call to go to the Chaplain's office, to be told ... a family member has died.

Sometimes you're in the midst of doing whatever it is you do to get past another day in this caged community you exist in, survive in. Perhaps you are at your program assignment where you fold laundry, or where you pick up trash and cigarette butts. When *it* happens -- you get "The Call." The officer instructs you to report back to your housing unit, or to go directly to the Chaplain's office. If the officer knows that Death has knocked at your family's door, then merely a glance at his eyes reveals it is *bad* news. Your intuitive powers are heightened, and your soul testifies that sadness is around the corner.

You zombie-walk to the Chaplain's office. "The Call" cuts into your prison world life with the force of an armored tank crushing a straw hut. Reality reels back and punches you in your face. "Hey, you! Yeah, you in the green State pants, this is the Universe speaking, and ... well, you'll find out when you reach the Chaplain's office." You walk the walk, like the proverbial mouse stuck in the maze. Except cheese is not your reward at the end ... it's "The Call."

"Sit down, please," comes the invitation, and you know what the news is: the news no inmate wishes to hear, to face, to accept. The news you always push to the far corners of your mind when even a hunch pops into your head. Your Mom, Wife, Brother, Sister, Son, or in my case, "Your father passed away." "Oh, my Father passed away. You mean my Dad, my hero, the man who showed me more love than any other person in the world. My Dad, whose picture is in the dictionary where unconditional love is defined. My Dad, who I am indebted to from a son's position that mere words could never explain. My Father, whose love, care, time, discipline, wisdom, and sacrifice have impacted me to the point where I can hold my head high wherever life takes me. My father, whose creed to me was: "You have never been, nor will you ever be, without my Love." The moment of truth comes, the Chaplain, Priest, Pastor, or Imam, tells you about "The Call." There is no easy way to say it, but it has to be said ... "Your Father passed away early this morning."

My dad always tried to prepare me for this day. He would say to me: "We can't live forever, you can't get out of this life alive. That's the way it's supposed to be, the parents going first. It would be one of the worst things for me to bear, to have to bury one of my children." Burying you, Dad, is no parade either. But, I understand, Dad. You're right, once again you are right, Daddy-O. I Love you, Dad. Don't worry Dad, I'll take heed to your love-advice in here, and outside as a free man. I'll "Watch-a-you-ass!" I will also do the best that I can, do what is right, what you would want me to do. Dad, you have never been, nor will you ever be, without my Love.

Love,

Your Son Michael / Mikey

## Invictus

By William Ernest Henley

OUT OF THE NIGHT that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

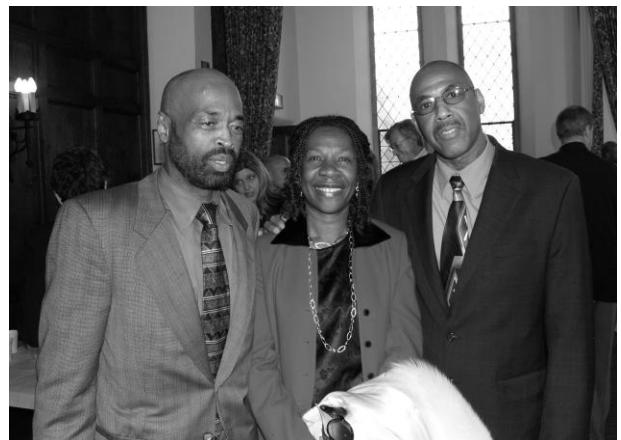
In the fell clutch of circumstances  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeoning of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.



Nancy and Trudi serving lunch



## Sober Awakenings By Todd Young

Twenty years ago I did something that changed my entire life, a something that resulted in the death of someone very close to me, and in my being sentenced to twenty-five years to life in prison for second-degree murder. After a sober awakening, (over two years on Riker's Island will do that to you) and facing many years in prison, I knew there was nothing I could do to undo my crime or change the results of what I had done. But, I realized, I could change what I had allowed myself to become. I could change me. That became my purpose for existing.

Let me give you some background. As I grew into my teens, I became the original angry young man. Not that I want to place blame on my parents, or the people in my early life, that ought to have been nurturers, protectors, teachers and examples -- but only to explain my experience and struggles as a boy. At an early age, I had enormous responsibility placed on me. Hurt by constant disinterest and rejection from my father, confused by my parent's divorce, feeling abandoned through my mother's need to become employed full-time to support us kids, and deeply wounded by my father's attentiveness to his "new family" when he remarried, I was told at age eleven that I was now the "man of the family." I tried to look out for my eight year old brother and newborn sister. I tried to be the son my mother needed. I tried to be the man that might win my father's love and approval. It did not last long. I felt the burden of the impossible task and the crush of my imagined failure. I sought companionship, and I sadly hooked up with kids that were not the best influences. Violence and angry outbursts grew worse and worse. I added to this volatile combination by becoming addicted to cocaine. Any slight, real or imagined, could send me into a rage. The music I listened to did not help either: hardcore punk rock, heavy metal, slam dancing, and mosh pits all served to fuel the rage within. From an early age, I learned that there was no such thing as a fair fight, only fights you won or lost. Therefore, I used any method I could think of to make most of mine the winning kind. The culmination of all of this was committing a senseless and unconscionable murder on that 1987 Super Bowl Sunday.

After sentencing in 1989, I was shipped upstate to Comstock. It was there, after a few months in population, I became a Christian. That was my second most sobering awakening. From that point on, I have purposed to grow in my knowledge and commitment to living my faith. Faith carried me through some tough years and hard life lessons. In 1996, after coming to Sing Sing, I was blessed to meet a wonderful woman named Lauren, my third awakening. I gathered the courage to ask her to marry me in 1997, and she was crazy enough to say yes. We will celebrate our tenth wedding anniversary this year. Lauren is the most compassionate, intelligent and intuitive person I have ever known. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology, and has used her ability to counsel to help me examine the reasons behind who I was and what I had done. With Lauren's never-ending love and support, I have changed from that angry young pretense of a man to an older, wiser, and, what I can only hope, a more rational, compassionate, godly, real man. I owe her more than I can ever repay and give her all my undying love and loyalty.

My fourth real awakening came when I took the leap into the life of a student. I had never thought I had school smarts, (my early years did not indicate much promise), but through my wife's encouragement, I successfully completed the Certificate in Ministry and Human Services Program (CMP), graduated in 2003, and then entered Hudson Link/Mercy College. I will obtain my Associate's Degree this June. I now work for the CMP program as a clerk, and do all I can to assist and tutor the students. It is a galvanizing and life-changing experience, and I enthusiastically recommend it to anyone wishing to expand their horizons.

My experience with furthering my education here at Sing Sing has helped my life turn a major corner. There is nothing more empowering and able to help a man discover his inner strength, value, capability, potential, and hope for a promising future. Education is definitely a key to changing from hopeless to amazing! I hope to continue my schooling by completing both my bachelor's and master's degrees here, God willing. Meanwhile I just keep doing what I can to help others with whatever I am able to do while here.

I volunteer my time gladly to produce *The Sing Sing Chronicle*, a job I enjoy immensely. When Ernest Henry, our first editor and founder, proposed the idea of a positive, focused newsletter published by and for prisoners, I did not think it would fly. However, our progressive administration approved it, and over these last five years *The Chronicle* has continued to grow and flourish. I remain its last founding member and hope to pass the torch on soon.

My story is probably not very unique, and there may be some of you that can relate. I would like to leave you with these sentiments. Just because you have been a certain way for many years, it does not mean that you have to stay that way. Change is possible for anyone, from anything. Do not believe anyone who tells you that you are hopeless or that you cannot change. Change is a decision and one that is entirely up to you. You need not be defined by what you did, but instead, by what you did about it.

I look forward to my fifth awakening, and can only hope it comes with my release, freedom, and what I am able to do with the man I am blessed to have become. I am driven to make my life matter through the purpose of helping others fulfill their potentials. It is what I believe I can do to try to bring something of honor to the life that I ended before it should have been over. God Bless.



## Rising Hope 2008 Graduation at Green Haven

*By Martha Shortlidge*

June is the season for graduation ceremonies celebrating an important milestone with family and friends. Gail Pease and I were among several from local churches who were host volunteers for a unique graduation ceremony held recently at Green Haven Correctional Facility for fifteen inmates who had completed a Certificate in Ministry & Human Services Program. This program is a college-level course of study designed to prepare men in prison for ministry or work in the helping professions while in prison and after release.

The assignment began by responding to an invitation from Barbara Jones-Hagedorn and John Hagedorn who serve as instructors for the Rising Hope program at Green Haven, to meet family members of the graduates at the Beacon train station and provide transportation to Holmes Presbyterian Center and then to accompany them to the prison the following day to attend the graduation ceremony.

The afternoon that Gail and I met our family at the train station was hot and overcast. We greeted our assigned guests, an inmate's mother and teenage daughter, and drove to Holmes Presbyterian Center nearby where the guests were welcomed by conference center staff and joined family members of other inmates including babies, children, parents, aunts and other family. The atmosphere initially was somewhat formal as might be expected in an unfamiliar setting, but this changed over the next few hours as cautious observers were transformed into enthusiastic participants by sharing a meal, singing and playing games. The evening ended with s'mores cooked in a woodstove due to the pouring rainstorm outdoors.

The next morning, we picked up the family and headed off to the prison for one of the most memorable experiences I've had as a volunteer. Green Haven prison has a forbidding presence. Visitors approach the prison on a winding country road where a concrete fortress rises out of rolling green pastures. This graduation had many of the same elements of other ceremonies that I have attended -- the joy expressed by graduates greeting family, a procession of graduates wearing gowns, remarks by honored graduates, a keynote address by a prominent member of the community, and a reception with food and fellowship. But in many respects, this graduation was like no other I had experienced: rigorous security procedures including passing through a metal detector to be admitted to the site, and the clothing worn to clearly define each person's role as visitor, corrections officer or prisoner.

The mutual respect between students and faculty was evident. We learned that the certificate was the culmination of nearly a year of studying and classes five nights a week. One inmate thanked his mother for being present with him in court, during his sentencing and at today's graduation. He said that her tears today were new since for the first time she was crying because she was proud of him. What a privilege it was to share these moments with the inmates and their families.

The Rising Hope program is well named. I came away with a profound admiration for the work of these men and filled with hope that the program will have a lasting impact. At the

end of the day, the inmates returned to their cells and the monotonous and often brutal reality of prison life. The visitors returned home with a deeper appreciation for the freedom that we enjoy to eat what and when we choose, work and sleep according to our own schedules and most of all to spend time with those we love.



Graduation 2007 - Celebrating



Commissioner Brian Fischer  
Giving the Keynote Address

## **Geese Fly Together** *By Martha Louise Marvin Harkness*

Geese fly together through a gray mist  
and beautiful shadows of trees.  
The ones in the lead flicker with  
grace and light, certain of their way.

There was no one in the lead in his life.  
No certainty of his way.  
No one saw his beauty,  
the flickering promise of his youth,  
interrupted by that one moment.  
He is reminded of it every day,  
he dreams of his family every night.  
Bullets ring through his thoughts,  
pierce his soul like sudden staccato notes  
in a somber melody; there will be no lullaby for him.

He struggles toward the light,  
to know the lingering black trees amidst  
the gathered fog, to see the faces of his family  
there, like welcoming trees. Instead, he sees bars,

He hears the clanging of doors, the rattling of keys.  
He sees men in gray suits carrying wooden clubs;  
he eats gray food, although he has little appetite.  
He longs for the brightness of former days,  
like the memory of his mother holding his hand,  
calling his name as they cross a busy street;  
safe, an umbrella protected them from the rain,  
kept him from his fears.

He grasps for life before the bullets –  
before the one day that changed his life,  
that one moment no one will ever let him forget.  
We have defined him by that moment  
and he has accepted it, against his will for  
he can't remember his true self.

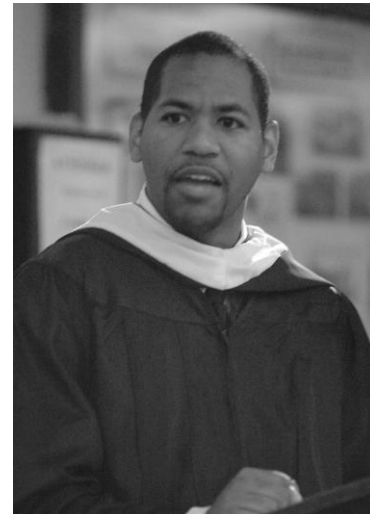
He is alone.

Briefly the light comes near and he feels it within him,  
like a star glowing through the haze.  
He looks beyond the bars  
and sees geese making their way. He hears a human  
voice gently speaking his name, and these simple,  
loving words: "One day, you will, too."

(A former Sing Sing volunteer and a founding member of  
the Board of Exodus Transactional Community)

## **Oh God** *By David Santana*

You turned me around from a world of evil  
and gave me a land of positive people  
I was blind and cold, plus had evil thoughts  
but now I think of the Heavens I sought.  
Your transforming touch at every hour  
is really reaching those that need that poser  
It's not the liquor that fives you that swill  
because the Holy Ghost is the only thing that will  
I was physically blind from attacks and ills  
but the Holy Ghost is the doctor that never bills  
He wants you to come, just as you are  
never mind that others are dressed up to par  
He wants your heart, not your clothes,  
with Him by your side, you'll never get cold.  
So sit down with Jesus for eternity  
and see how good God can really be  
Receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit  
when you work your ministry, God will seal it!



Larry Costa  
Speaking for the Class of 2007



Graduates and Community 2007

## **Above Average**

*By Jerry Lowe*

What do you see when you look at me?  
Is it just charm, good looks, and a great personality?  
Do you see another brother just like any other?  
Just out to get what he can get nothing serious,  
Just a quick lover?  
Is that all you see when you see me?  
Then, take this opportunity to get to know me.

On a scale from one to ten,  
I'm twelve and a half.  
I'm unlike the brothers you have encountered.  
I'm unlike any man in your past.

I'm not your average brother,  
I don't play games.  
I know you've heard that before,  
But please – allow me to explain.

I don't run from commitment,  
I face it.  
I don't look for love,  
But if it comes – I'll embrace it.

I'm not perfect, I'm no saint,  
But an average ordinary brother.  
No, my sista, I sure ain't.

Aletheia needs your contributions. We always need material. Send us your writings, poems, artwork, etc.

*Rye Presbyterian Church  
882 Boston Post Road  
Rye NY 10580-2700*

**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**