

FS News – Solstice Reflection edition

Happy Solstice, Fair Shake readers!

I hope you are doing well during this emotional and transitional time of year ~

I'm excited because Winter Solstice is one of favorite days. I enjoy living in the north, but I get a little bummed out when I see the sun go down earlier and earlier each day. Today sunset was at 4:28 pm.

But when the days get longer again, I get energized. On Sunday it will set at 4:30 pm and by New Year's Day it will set at 4:37! We're getting more light! ...but there's no denying that the coldest and most treacherous days are still on the horizon. Welcome Winter! Don't forget to bring the sparkling snow ~ :) It's time to eat the frozen pumpkin, the canned pickles and the dried apples!

I found a few fun winter quotes –

“Every mile is two in winter.” ~ George Herbert

“How many lessons of faith and beauty we should lose, if there were no winter in our year!”
~ Thomas Wentworth Higginson

“I like these cold, gray winter days. Days like these let you savor a bad mood.”
~ Bill Watterson (Calvin and Hobbes)

“The color of springtime is in the flowers; the color of winter is in the imagination.”
~ Terri Guillemets

"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" - Percy Bysshe Shelley

Winter is the time we get to catch up with ourselves. After the holidays are over, we can carve out time for reflection...time to review....to take inventory...and to recalculate our course with updated information! Onward we go ~

The only reentry news I have right now is about bipartisan Kentucky:

- *The incoming Governor(D) restored voting rights for 140,000.
- * And the outgoing Governor(R) granted clemency to more than 400 people.

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

An alert reader/writer sent in the TRUST piece below. It's deep and crucial, yet I have not heard any person or organization talk about this issue in any circle in which I have found myself. I believe it is at the heart of most, if not all, of the hurdles we face...in reentry and throughout all of our lives! I hope you will share your thoughts ~

TRUST by Michael Newman

(I was recently) “thinking about how it feels to be released from prison to a world that expects you to fail. I reflected on the recidivism narrative that has captured the attention of so many people familiar with criminal justice. The narrative produces the idea that its "only a matter of time" before one reoffends, an idea that stands on a basic lack of confidence that one can redefine their future after prison. The narrative plays out like a discussion between two parties who distrust each other. It's like "I don't trust you because you think I'm still a criminal, but I'm not," and from another perspective, "I'm not sure I can trust someone who was convicted of..."

We must learn to understand both of these perspectives if we want to mend the broken trust. As a currently incarcerated person (soon to be released!) with a lengthy criminal history, I've seen how people react to not being trusted. It has illustrated to me the fact that one of the greatest predictors of human behavior is how humans are treated. And when people are treated as if they're untrustworthy, they tend to respond in kind. This is important to understand about formerly incarcerated people because while in prison, few inmates are given the benefit of the doubt.

The constant suspicion and lack of trust can even plant seeds of doubt in the minds of prisoners as to their own value as dignified and trustworthy humans. Nothing could be more detrimental to the process of personal development than self-doubt.

In my experience, most incarcerated folks genuinely want to change their reality.

There's nothing worse than someone doubting our sincerity or our motives. The doubting can be expressed subtly; for example, if a counselor or probation officer uses a condescending tone when telling someone how hard it is going to be to survive on low-wage jobs and then asks them how they're going to handle the financial stress. As if everyone doesn't have to deal with that, and due to our criminal history we're somehow less likely to endure that type of stress. This may seem like an unimportant event, but to the person who is genuinely attempting to be a productive member of society, this is a reminder that some people view them as members of a sub-class of humans who don't value hard work and perseverance.

All of this points to the reality that it's harder to trust those who we view as different. So the first step to building trust must be realizing our common humanity and the interdependence and connections that we all share. This works both ways, of course- formerly incarcerated folks must realize that people have been conditioned to respond to them in certain ways, and they must take responsibility for changing those perceptions. On the flip-side, the people who may be leery of accepting formerly incarcerated people into spaces that are necessary for successful reintegration such as jobs, social settings, church communities, etc., may need to take another look at their perceptions of formerly incarcerated folks as well. This can start by asking honest questions and taking an active role in the trust-building process by coming together in these spaces and learning about each other. Formerly incarcerated folks would greatly benefit from becoming involved in community organizations and speaking openly and honestly about their experience. Through that kind of meaningful interaction, people in the community may come to be more understanding of others who are reentering society from prison.

What do you want to know about your neighbors that might help you understand and trust them?

What kind of interactions would you want to have?

What steps are you willing to take to build trust, and what steps would you like to see other's take?"

These questions are the author's; not mine...but you know I'd love to hear your responses, too! If you'd care to share your perspective with me, I'll gather the comments together and share them with everyone so we can all benefit ~ :)

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY WRITING CONTEST

From The Columbia University Incarcerated Writers' Initiative: (We are) "extending the deadline for our 2019 writing contest. Any short fiction, poetry, or nonfiction essay mailed to our office by January 14th will be entered into our contest, and will receive a feedback letter. (sorry, I just learned about it now!) Writers may submit work by mail at no fee.

Submissions close January 14th, 2019 (postmark deadline).

We accept submissions in the following categories:

Fiction (up to 5,000 words)

Nonfiction (up to 5,000 words)

Poetry (up to 5 pages)

Your submission must include a cover sheet with:

your Name

Genre (fiction, science fiction, poetry)

the words "I would like my submission to be considered in all publications"

your primary address and

a brief introduction (bio) of yourself.

If possible, please submit all work in the same envelope on standard size 8.5 x 11" paper. All work must be previously unpublished. Please note that only one submission per genre is accepted for review. Columbia Journal cannot return manuscripts. Do not send originals.

Writers should send physical copies of their work to:

Nathaniel Berry – Coordinator
Incarcerated Writers Initiative Columbia Artists/Teachers
415 Dodge Hall Mail Code 1804
2960 Broadway
New York, NY 10027

By submitting, you give Columbia Journal and Exchange permission to publish your work in print or online. All submissions will receive a response.” Good luck!

REFLECTION CONSIDERATION #2
Three paragraphs from Joseph S, Biehl

“The greatest defeat any soul can suffer is to lose faith in its own capacity to bring about change. To believe that there is nothing you can do, that all efforts to improve your circumstances and those of your loved ones are pointless, is to fall victim to the ultimate con: that the way things are is the way things have always been and will always be. We stand to lose everything, therefore, when we begin to believe in the inevitability of the “real world” or “just how things are”.

The real world is a swindle, and we must resist it—and resist the resigned hopelessness that those who peddle it aim to induce. A certain degree of naiveté is precisely what we need, for it is only by retaining our sense of wonder—that innate human capacity to question why—that we stand any chance of escaping the actual. When we insist on asking why the world is the way it is and why people behave as they do, our questions naturally lead to others, and eventually our imaginations summon up the myriad ways that the world and its people might be different. By wondering about the actual we inevitably discover—and invent—the distinctly human space of the possible.

Being human is not a problem in need of a solution. It is an invitation to create meaningful things: meaningful individual lives, communities and societies. All three of these projects are collaborative. When someone insists that they alone know how to go about creating meaningfulness, they are attempting to exert control over what should be a collaboration. We ought to resist this—not because including a variety of perspectives will make it easier to discover the truth, but because it will create a social whole that is more representative and responsive to the needs and capabilities of its parts. We do not—and never will—know our own limits. That is what makes our lives worth living.”

I admit it: I am a Possibilitarian. Would you care to share your thoughts??

The shortest day ended hours ago... so I must now say Happy Solstice everyone! (sorry I'm late)
All the best to you...and to all of us...in 2020!!

Thank you, Donors, for making this newsletter possible!

To our successful transitions...
Ubuntu! ~ sue

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Fairshake.net
HelpYourselfTherapy.com