

Walk In Those Shoes

Summer 2025 Newsletter – ISSUE 13

What's His Secret?

By Jeffery A. Shockley

"I never thought I would one day be able to compare myself to the sitting President of the United States," a bystander said as we watched the television during the 47th President's swearing in ceremony. "Now people will see how we get treated in this system," a gentleman in the front row announced. The 'common criminal' hoped America would see how the 'system' operates. *Perspectives would change* became a unified thought.

The President had been convicted of over thirty charges in a trial overseen by a jury of his 'peers', a point of contention as the average offender does not get a jury of his or her peers. Who would be a 'peer' to the President or a peer to a common criminal on trial for an alleged crime? Typically, a jury is comprised of registered voters, taxpayers, law abiding citizens. The criminal element is not always boasting one of these qualities, certainly not all, although there are rare cases when a law-abiding citizen turns criminal.

This time free citizens were observing how the system worked or didn't work. That could be why the population remained drawn to the story as it unfolded, silently hoping for an outcome favorable for them some day. "He's guilty, but he won't go to prison," someone predicted. Another said, "Now there is someone in position who will be more understanding, empathetic, to the plight of the accused."

Men and women, historically Black and Brown citizens, do not have the resources or support to prove or gain their innocence or freedom. As the events unfolded, the question reemerged - how fair is the system, especially when one cannot afford a good attorney? "If you do not have or cannot afford an attorney, the state will provide one for you." In reality, someone will ultimately suggest taking a plea bargain rather than going to trial. Most take pleas, gambling for less time to be served.



"...it is with love that I try to reach others who are about to go home on parole, sharing what it is like to be here for the duration of my life..."

-Cover Writer, Jeffery A. Shockley

If you would like to submit your writing for consideration on our website at www.walkinthoseshoes.com or for inclusion in upcoming newsletters, please submit only unpublished work to:

Walk In Those Shoes

P.O. Box 70092

Henrico, VA 23255

Writers whose essays are chosen for Page 1 of the monthly newsletter will receive \$25 upon publication.



Artist, Cerron T. Hooks

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or P.O. Box 70092, Henrico, Virginia 23255

Here this man had a fleet of attorneys, was ultimately convicted, did not spend a day in prison and is now the 47th President of the United States. How exactly can a system claim to be just and fair while before all watching, someone was convicted of crimes, processed through booking, mug-shot photographed, did no time and then is able to go on to pardon and excuse the actions of similarly convicted individuals, no matter any positive transformation or rehabilitation?

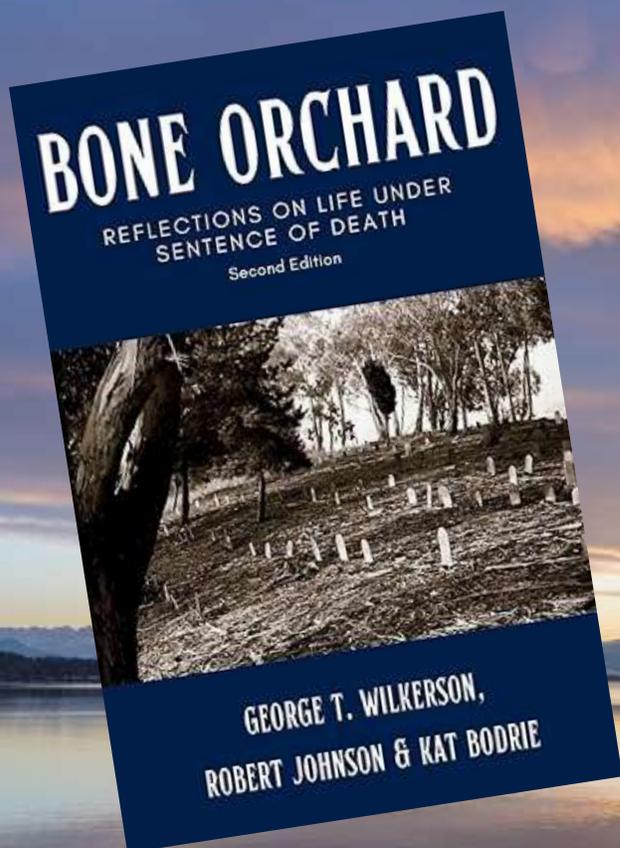
A convicted felon became the 47th President while others suffer restrictions from a criminal record and remain a blight on society, required to report to parole agents who inspect their home before deciding if a felon can even live there. Imagine if 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue was part of a home plan, and the same rules applied as those for the average Joe or Joan, including no weapons, drugs or alcohol and no interaction with other offenders or previously incarcerated? Never setting foot inside a prison cell does not negate the fact that there was a conviction.

As society watched the outcome of the trial, did the result clearly say that an individual, particularly this individual, is above the law, the very law this country was founded on and by which all others must comply?

Many changed men and women have complied with society's correctional plans, however they remain inside for acts committed while young, under the influence, or resulting from trauma related to victimization in their lives. Even with the support of family and community, they continue to pray for a chance to be heard in some way. Some would say these reformed individuals are far less of a threat to society than others in this crazy, mixed-up world. Real eyes realize real lies.

In four years, an individual who some people hate and others champion went from one extreme to another, sending many on an emotional social roller coaster. Yet he stands atop the mountain looking down into the valley of the damned, those he now rules over.

What's his secret? Justice? Or just us.



New Release

"The tragic human costs of the death penalty are on full display in Bone Orchard, a masterwork of poetry and prose." – Sister Helen Prejean

"...this somberly magnificent book both tells us things beyond our previous imaginings and makes us see familiar things in a different way... The oppressions of life we all share, and which condemned prisoners bear with a special intensity are transmuted into rare beauty through the vivid poetry and prose of these pages." – Anthony G. Amsterdam, capital defense litigator

"...a collection of vividly jolting and commanding poetics... a deliverance and reflection that we are all fragile, vulnerable, and tremendously beautiful in all our ugliness." – Jaki Shelton Green, N.C. Poet Laureate

Available on Amazon at: <https://a.co/d/70EakSD>. George Wilkerson, a frequent WITS contributor, lives on DR in NC.

SUMMER WRITING CONTEST

DESCRIBE A TIME
WHEN YOU CHOSE TO
BE YOUR AUTHENTIC
SELF WHEN IT TOOK
COURAGE TO DO SO.

ENTRY DETAILS: Only those who live in prison are eligible to participate & we don't accept anything that has been previously published. Submission is also permission to edit & post in future WITS projects. **Submission is free.**

Entries should be 1,000 words or less. Poetry is considered if it is inspired by the prompt.

Submissions **can** be handwritten.

PRIZES: First Place: \$75 | Second Place: \$50 | Third Place: \$25

DEADLINE: September 30, 2025. Decisions will be posted to the WITS website by approximately November 30, 2025.

MAILING ADDRESS: Walk In Those Shoes, Writing Contest Entry, P.O. Box 70092, Henrico, Virginia 23255

PRAISE FOR 'WE ARE ALL DOING TIME', by DAN R. GROTE

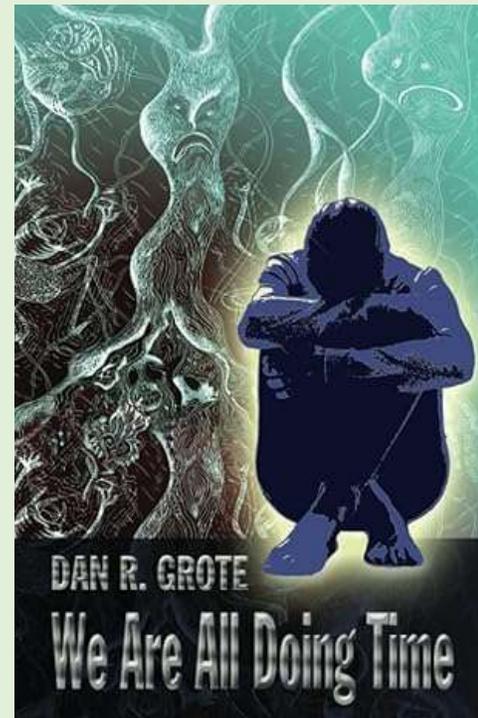
"Having been incarcerated for many years I have experienced the emotions in these poems. The way Dan R. Grote articulates his work is quite unique. He expresses himself as few prisoners can." - James Jaynes

"Some poetry resonates with other poets only; some poems appeal to everyone. Dan R. Grote's *We Are All Doing Time* is a reality check - we all know what it's like in the dark." - Terry Robinson

"Today I had the opportunity to swim in the ocean of the creative thoughts of Dan R. Grote." "...carries the readers of his poetry to realms deep within his soul, where kindred spirits feel at home. *Addicted, Death & I, and Notebook* are masterworks of a wordsmith who truly owns his craft." - Resolute

Dan Grote's *We Are All Doing Time* was recently reviewed by residents of NC's Central Prison and upon their recommendation, *We Are All Doing Time* has been added to the WITS Library at: <https://walkinthoseshoes.com/the-library/>

The book can also be found on [Amazon](#).



If you have written a book from within a prison and would like it reviewed by peers for possible consideration for the WITS library, you can contact us at: P.O. Box 70092, Henrico, Virginia 23255

WITS published its first Newsletter in 2023, eight years after it first began sharing writing and news from inside prisons, and four years after being established as a 501c3 in 2019.

We recognize the need to not only keep costs minimal, but also compensate contributors, when possible, through writing contests as well as front page essay fees. Because of that, WITS Newsletters are offered for free download at: <https://walkinthoseshoes.com/newsletter/>

We encourage supporters to print and distribute copies, at no cost.

Should you like to receive the newsletter directly from WITS, please send a check or money order in the amount of \$2.00 per desired issues to cover printing and mailing costs, made out to **Walk In Those Shoes**, at **P.O. Box 70092, Henrico, VA 23255**. Be sure to include mailing instructions and complete address for your facility.

To Be Me

-Jose Rodriguez-Basquez

Tried not being different,
Dead to me,
Being the expected,
Set in line, breathing another's breath.

Tried to fit in,
Have the scars to prove it,
My actions labeled a sin,
Living in a pit constructed of expectations.

Tried making everyone happy,
Only made me sad
Being a sellout,
Makes everyone mad.

We're all stuck behind walls,
Sticks and stones, words that hurt.
Is freedom not having to fight
To be yourself--without people tossing you to the falls?

Is it okay to be me,
Make proud the people I see,
To be emotional in a prison,
To be kind, without reason?

It set me free,
Being me.
And so I write, for those like me.
Be you, be free.

As Daylight Dies

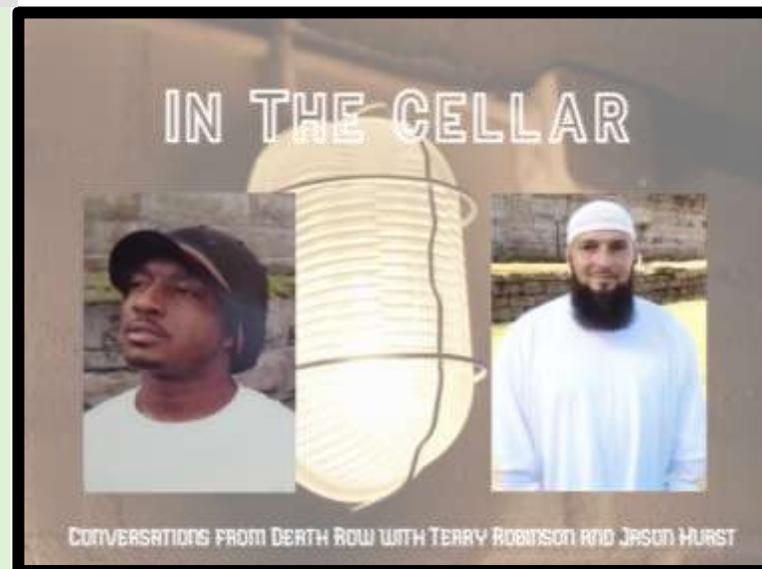
- Dan Grote

*It all grows dim and
the only things I have
left are these words,
falling apart at the seams
even as I stitch these
sentences together, using
a pen to paint the
literary version of an
Edward Hopper, odd
man out, starring in
my own version of
Nighthawks, staring
down a café counter
at a perfect couple
while I sit single,
little more than an
outsider cast in a
bigger picture, sipping
black coffee and watching
as much more than just
another day goes slipping
into darkness*

THE FIRST AND SECOND SEASON OF ***IN THE CELLAR*** IS
AVAILABLE ON SPOTIFY.

IN THE CELLAR WAS CREATED BY TWO WITS WRITERS,
TERRY ROBINSON AND JASON HURST, WHO LIVE ON
DEATH ROW AND HOPE TO BRING GREATER INSIGHT INTO
PRISON AND ALSO BEING SENTENCED TO DEATH.

[HTTPS://OPEN.SPOTIFY.COM/SHOW/0AJMNWNLMLWzV1P6PKTTM5](https://open.spotify.com/show/0AJMNWNLMLWzV1P6PKTTM5)



FastBreak-ing Report

The FastBreak Book Club of NC Death Row recently read *The Professor And The Madman* by Simon Winchester; a historical account of how mental illness and murder played extraordinary roles in the making of the Oxford dictionary. The book met some resistance at first because of its genre – nonfiction. But ultimately, *The Professor And The Madman* proved to be a treasure, even exposing some disheartening truths about the American Civil War while weaving facts into a storyline that made history intriguing and relevant. The FastBreak members met to discuss their views on *The Professor And The Madman*...

"I liked the book... the story was an experience for sure. It proved that for some who can't find purpose, their mind will deteriorate. I found it enlightening and motivational." - **Jeremy Murrell**

"I was bored at first... but I don't really read nonfiction like that. In the end I thought it was amusing to learn someone in an insane asylum contributed to the dictionary. Still not big on nonfiction..." - **Darrell Maness**

"I wasn't crazy about the use of definitions as the lead-ins to each chapter. The story though, of mental illness, is one we should all know - it's the knowing where we'll learn to effectively treat it. Overall, a great read that proves we should never judge a book by its cover." - **Resolute**

*"I loved reading *The Professor And The Madman* - it was relatable. Being in prison, we know what it's like to experience strenuous living and have our lives dictated by institutional policy. The story is about someone who found purpose while in the madhouse - for us it don't get no madder than Death Row. Sometimes we're left to treat our own traumas; this man's work on the dictionary was his medicine."* - **Rodney Taylor**

"I thought I'd struggle, but from the beginning I was pulled into an incredibly suspenseful story. So up close to the dissonance that is mental illness and the spectrum on which operates PTSD. The facts were insightful but convoluted, making it difficult to retain all the historical content. But the complexity in which Oxford dictionary was created makes me value its words and definitions more." - **Chanton, aka Terry Robinson**

Being Your Authentic Self

Studies have found a connection between authenticity and a person's well-being (Sutton, 2019).

Being genuinely you and aligning your actions to your values can act as a buffer between you and the stress that is associated with life's challenges & conflict (Sutton, 2019).

Authenticity has also been linked with increased engagement (Sutton, 2019).

UNBURDENED: Changing The Scope of Death Row with Clemency

By Terry Robinson

NC Death Row recently lightened its load of bodies to execute. The number of us facing lethal injection was reduced from 133 men to 118. Death penalty supporters are almost certain to predict the failure of those given a reprieve, while abolitionists will claim a small but moral victory. Either way, good or bad, the voters take their ideals to the polls giving politicians the final say, and for NC Death Row that decision came down to Governor Roy Cooper approving 15 cases for clemency.

On December 31st, 2024, the governor had just hours remaining in his final term, and before his decision was made, the anticipation here on death row was unlike any other in all my 25 years here. In the months prior, appellate attorneys had filed for clemency on behalf of their death row clients, but with the end of the 2024 year fast approaching, no news was the same as a rejection. Then, out of the nothingness of our daily routine, the P/A system erupted, spewing summons after summons for legal visits. Vincent Wooten. Lawrence Peterson. Cerron Hooks. The call filled many with eagerness, giving others a sense they had a fighting chance. Isiah Barton. Chris Roseboro. Elrico Fowler. With each name came an emotional stir. No one spoke a word, but we could all feel it... Death Row was about to change. Word circulated on the lips of those with no qualms whatsoever of propagating prison gossip, furthering the commotion with their suspicions. The confirmation came with the return of the summoned individuals all bearing a lighter step, their mannerisms having undergone a boost that propelled them beyond their time on Death Row.

I'd been housed on the same cellblock as one of the recipients for over 5 years when he was given the news of his clemency. Tim White returned from visiting with his attorney that day with a look of perplexity riding hard on his bearded face. He had been on Death Row for more than two decades, enough time to establish a sense of comfort and now he was being uprooted from his state of complacency and cast off into the prison general population. Tim was one of our resident dungeon masters in the process of hosting his own role-playing game, and now he'd come to reveal to us that his scripted storyline was ending in place of a new one. My reaction to the news was a stagnant one - I was excited for Tim though concerned. True, the idea of no longer facing execution was liberating, but G-Pop posed an even greater danger. The transfer of custody for the 15 clemency recipients meant discarding their routine behaviors and readjusting to a whole new set of prison rules, vital lessons in the efficiency of their remaining incarceration - minus their death sentence. On a typical day Tim was quite reserved with his words, but the clemency had made him chatty. He talked about the expectations of his new prison life, the joy of possibilities, and his disappointment to leave friends behind. Within the hour Tim and the other 14 clemency recipients were dressed out in brown trousers and white tees, their infamous red jumpsuits having suffered an execution in itself, made naught by their chance to live.

Those 15 cases granted clemency by the governor changed the scope of NC Death Row. It was more than a publicity stunt by a wilting politician, it was a declaration of the value of humanity. The removal of those clemency recipients left a hole in the Death Row community that has since been replaced with our conscientious morale. A life sentence served in prison wasn't as gratifying as their being set free, but neither was it lethal injection. The absence of those 15 fellow men will take some getting used to, but their journey will inspire change as they are now the model of redemption made possible when our imperfect lives are spared. And though there were only 15 cases selected for clemency, the decision was beneficial to us all, granting the push to abolish the death penalty in our nation the opportunity to succeed.

MORE WRITING BY TERRY ROBINSON, AKA CHANTON, can be found at: <https://walkinthoseshoes.com/author/chanton/>

TO HEAR TERRY'S PODCAST *IN THE CELLAR*, CO-HOSTED BY JASON HURST, go to Spotify at: <https://open.spotify.com/show/0ajmnWnlMIWzv1p6pKTtm5>