

# Walk In Those Shoes

Spring 2026 Newsletter – ISSUE 15



## Good Enough

By Jeffery Shockley

There I was, 9-years-old and sitting at the dining room table, Grandmom baking in the kitchen. Her baked rolls and pies filled my heart with something that has since been lost. Hope.

On the table in front of me was our old fashioned typewriter, the kind you had to feed paper by pressing the shiny lever and the bell would ring indicating the margin. The blackened keys with their grey lettering are much different than the ones I press today, sitting in a cell and serving a life sentence. From that early age, I enjoyed writing and reading. I would sit at that table and type notes or make cards for Grandmom to boast about and share with her church friends. I think she'd be a bit disappointed to know that later in life I wound up sitting in crack houses and writing rhymes to get high.

Life has its ups and downs, 'things happen for a reason'. Still, at 60+ years of age, I'm not yet sure what that means. Did things happen so I would have something to write about? Has another suffered in order that I would later mature and share writing from prison that would change mine and the lives of others?

Twenty-six years into this life sentence, writing has catapulted me through my time here, opening doors I didn't pursue. Yet, seeing how others write intimidates me, causing me to question my true ability. It was easy to write in a crack house, because addled minds are easily amused.

As a boy, it was fun to write, and I looked forward to pulling that heavy machine out and going to town, amused by the bells and sounds my fingers elicited from the machinery. There was a distinct sound when the keys hit the paper, and yet another when I pulled the sheet out and read it. Then I grew up and things didn't come so easy. I had to go to work and later the military. Creativity dwindled as life began living, drinks began drinking and history began to be written.

*standing at the fence*

*I ask which side really holds*

*the true prisoners*

- Geoffrey Martin

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or for inclusion in upcoming newsletters, please submit only unpublished work to:

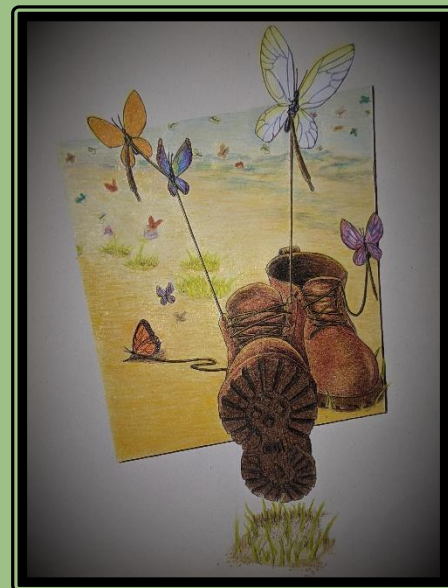
**Walk In Those Shoes**

**P.O. Box 70092**

**Henrico, VA 23255**

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

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[www.walkinthoseshoes.com](http://www.walkinthoseshoes.com)  
or P.O. Box 70092, Henrico, Virginia 23255



Artist, Cerron T. Hooks

**(continued from page 1)** Here in prison, the activities department sponsors various themed writing contests. I usually submit something and often win. However, I rationalize the win by telling myself there are few writers, improving my odds, and I don't win because I am good.

My history of addiction is like an anchor that holds me down. I masked my life for so long through drugs and alcohol, not knowing who I fully was. Writing provided a sparkle, a reason to do or to be. It was a diamond in the rough, something others could see and provide me validation. Yet, just like that drug or drink, the elation fades and I again hear... *I am not that good. What if they don't like it? Other people are far better writers.*

When I write something and feel that it is good, I ask 100 people and share it around the unit. Even when asked to be the motivational speaker regarding writing, doubt and uncertainty found their way into my thoughts and buried me before the ink could dry on my thoughts.

I was once asked if I liked what I do, writing. Emphatically, the response was yes. Because, I might have added, writing is the one good thing about me. To have the ability to express feelings or moments in my life keeps me connected to me. Writing grounds me in my truth and is not outwardly judged because of my being in prison. Yes, I keep on writing. It is my solace at 2 and 3 in the morning. I can grab my tablet and write a thought or an idea, a title for a future piece. Writing is the ability to make sense of my world when reality does not make sense to me.

I can care about words and paint pictures that brighten another's day, a poem for a neighbor's wife or girlfriend, a legal document to get me back in Court, and my words even sometimes make their way into a magazine for publication. And yet, the question remains, am I good enough to write? Is my writing good enough?

## RESOURCE ALERT

**Free Bible Study.** KNOW YOUR BIBLE (KYB) offers a free Bible study correspondence course. Participants receive a paper-based lesson that concludes with one page of questions related to the material. Once completed and returned, the submission is graded and returned with the next lesson. A certificate is awarded at the completion of the course, and participants are invited to then continue with the next course.

**To sign up, go to:** <https://www.knowyourbible.com/biblestudyrequest>

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### SPRING, 2026 WRITING CONTEST

PROMPT: DESCRIBE AN  
EXPERIENCE IN WHICH  
YOU FELT SUPPORTED  
BY A FELLOW RESIDENT  
OR STAFF MEMBER.

**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, even if your submission does not place.

**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:** June 30, 2026. Decisions will be posted to the WITS website by approximately August 15, 2026.

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

## NC DEATH ROW - Fast Break Book Club Review

We're back - here once again to share our latest review. The Fast Break Book Club recently read *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins, a story of immigration so compelling the pages practically turned themselves. This novel was selected by Jeremy Murrell, a historian in his own right who wanted to explore the trials of immigration. And *American Dirt* did not disappoint. The story kicked off with a family's unfathomable tragedy, setting into motion high stakes intensity that was maintained throughout the book. This depiction of immigration is the stuff of shaping public opinion, influencing laws and raising the question - when sheer desperation causes immigrants to flee their country, should political insensitivity send them back?

***"I wanted something on history and immigration, so my sister recommended American Dirt. It fulfilled my immigration journey and adventure. I hoped there'd be an American Dirt part two. I found the character Marta to be the most impactful because her name and story showed how such a small person can have great influence and contribute to justice."*** - Jeremy Murrell

***"This book was emotional, and it had depth of story. I had to check to make sure it was nonfiction. Little Luca was my man because he was nice when he needed to be, smart when he had to be, and little dude had to grow up fast."*** - Darrell Maness

***"I also liked that American Dirt had depth. The details kept me reading page after page. The story showed that our good is sometimes not... without consequences. I liked Beto the best because he was so lovable."*** - Resolute

***"Great read, American Dirt. The best we've had in the book club thus far in my opinion. The depictions fulfilled my imaginative expectations. I liked Soledad the best. She knew her beauty would cause her many problems, but throughout it all, she was determined to protect her sister. American Dirt is a classic, and I cheered for the protagonist every step of the way. I even read the author's acknowledgments."*** - Marcus Mitchell

***"American Dirt is a timely read. For all our country's issues on immigration today, I never imagined what the actual journey entailed. This story was more than about violence and disaster, but the justification to fulfill dreams. It was educational, dismissing the longstanding stigma that only culprits cross our borders. Praise to the author, Cummins, for her depiction of the antagonist Javier, a villain caught up in a culturally vicious web who still showed some semblance of humanity."*** - Chanton, aka Terry Robinson

American Dirt can inform immigration perspectives and policies, calling readers to consider what it means to live in the Land of the Free when freedom is often synonymous to safety. Kudos to Jeanine Cummins for an excellent read. The Fast Break Book Club salutes you. Next up, we'll venture into the horror genre with *The Vanishing*, by Bentley Little.

## WRITING CONTEST ALERT

**Sixth annual Keeley Schenwar Memorial Essay** for currently and formerly incarcerated writers. Two prizes will be awarded. The prize for a winning essay is \$3,000. Submit original essay of 1,500 words or less based on prison, policing or a related subject. Essays can be first person or personal narratives, but do not have to be. Deadline for submission is May 29, 2026. Send submissions to: Keeley Schenwar Memorial Essay Prize, c/o Truthout, PO Box 276414, Sacramento, CA, 95827.

**For more details & previous winners, go to:** <https://truthout.org/articles/keeley-schenwar-memorial-essay-prize/>

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# OLD HEADS: A Message of Serving Others

By Terry Robinson

The other day someone asked me a question: Would I ever wash another man's feet? It was asked during a religious service, and I waited for the punchline, but it was church and he wasn't joking. He was referring to a scene in *The Chosen* when the character of Jesus gathered his disciples together to wash their feet. When questioned, Jesus replied, *"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet."*

The message was one of humility, communion, love, and good works through acts of service. "I won't ever wash another man's feet," the guy said to me. For a moment I thought, *neither would I.*

I'd long failed to acknowledge the geriatric prisoner, someone whose health was succumbing to old age. In here people have such high regard for titles like 'old head', 'pops', and 'unc' that I figured recognizing a person's enfeeblement was demeaning. It wasn't a matter of respecting my elders; I'd learned that lesson long ago at the stony-eyed insistence of my mother. I just hadn't gone out of my way to assist the geriatric population, choosing instead to mind my business.

Every adult prison in the nation has geriatric prisoners, which these days is the gist of justice. Rehabilitation is commercial but the industry that is prison seeks to get as much time out of a prisoner as it can. Therefore, there are many 'pops' ailing behind bars and 'uncs' aging out. Life in prison can claim the moxie of a prisoner long before they've taken their last breath. And as it pertains to the 'old heads', NC Death Row is essentially the geriatric ward. The average age here is well over 50, a number that increases each year. Many of us have served over 25 years and now battle physical challenges. Gray and receding hairlines are the alternative to bald heads and walking canes and wheelchairs a staple. I, myself, came to death row when I was 26 and hyperactive; now I'm 52 with achy joints. I've watched others grow old, sickly, and dependent, as disease claimed what little life they had left. In all that time, I was hardly concerned for the 'old heads', thinking it best to give a dying man his space. But there were some who jumped into action, tending to their stricken comrades. These are the caretakers.

Prison caretakers are those duty-bound to assist the needs of the elders, not bound by incentive but by morals and compassion. From writing letters for those with rheumatoid arthritis to monitoring medication intake, the prison caregivers are dedicated to making prison life more manageable for the geriatric population. We have caregivers here in NC Death Row who exhibit acts of humanity every day, like Slim, who comes over once a month from another dorm to clean an old head's cell. Resolute totes around a chair for an elder prisoner to keep the man from straining his back, while Jeff is the assigned wheelchair pusher of a guy who can barely walk. Moss is the caregiver of one of the oldest death row prisoners who relies on daily medications to live. Mumin groomed his dying Muslim brother which, in part, entailed tending a colonoscopy bag. And Puff assumed care over a man suffering from mental illness, having gone as far as washing his charge's feet. These are not deeds of degradation, but righteous acts of service. Concerned convicts showing up for one another is humility at its core. The geriatric prisoner is a pivotal figure in the dynamic of any prison community, and the caregivers help maintain their dignity and respect by their exemplary show of humanity.

Our lives are not meant to serve ourselves, a lesson every prisoner would do good to know. A self-serving life is a lonely one, while helping others is spiritually fulfilling. Shout out to all the prison caregivers around the nation, not only doing their time but prioritizing the needs of others. These efforts are not without civil merit and moral recognition. And yes, I would wash another man's feet. Given the right circumstances, I'd clean another's room. I'd scribe letters for someone with carpal tunnel, or simply because their eyesight ain't what it used to be. I'd do all I could, without pride or reservation, to help a fellow prisoner in need. And should the day come that I find myself to be a geriatric prisoner, I pray someone will do the same for me.

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>