

The Inlook-Outlook Letter
Of the Prison Ministry of the St. Lawrence Valley Friends Meeting
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Potsdam, NY (October, 2012)

This 'Inlook-Outlook Letter' is for you, to let you know you are in our hearts and prayers. When we *look into* our hearts we see God and this benefits our *outlook*.

“What Killed Me Saved My Ass” -- KF

A contest is sponsored by a soft-drink company for “six-word memoirs” for printing on the inside of their bottle-caps. KF was recently asked what her six-word memoir would be, and she answered “What killed me saved my ass”. In a car accident involving alcohol, KF was thrown from the vehicle and severely injured. Her heart and breathing stopped (“what killed me”). Her companions administered CPR until medical help could arrive. KF was in a coma for over a month. On the day she left the hospital, she attended her first AA meeting (“saved my ass”). For the past twenty years she has been sober, successfully coping with traumatic brain injury and very aware of the blessings in her life that occurred as a result of her injury. She has a great sense of humor as can be seen from her 6-word memoir, “What killed me saved my ass”.

Her spontaneous response shows that she has found light in the darkness of something terrible that happened to her. Often times my very faults drive me to a state of despair, in which I am finally willing to listen in order to “save my ass”. The old way is “killed” for me, and I begin to live a life in which I am “saved”, meaning living the life that God truly meant for me to live.

An Assignment:

Write your own “6-word memoir” and send it to the Inlook-Outlook Letter, and, if you wish, any comment about your “memoir” you would like to share with the readership. They will be printed in the Letter.

“There’s an a__hole around every corner”-*Anonymous*

Speaking of “saving my ass” and a sense of humor, KF’s six-word memoir reminded me of a six-word remark I heard recently that made me laugh (above). How true it is! The question is, what am I going to do about it? This problem has been around for a long time, as a matter of fact ever since the human race got “smart”. This event is portrayed in Judeo-Christian scripture when the couple ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge (Genesis 2 & 3). They were suddenly able to discern “bad” from “good”. This is the moment in evolution that the human race got “intelligence”, were able to think and, in the words of Genesis 3.11, to *tell ourselves things*. What *we tell ourselves* is important because it will govern our response to any situation with which we are confronted.

Notice that the other animal species don't have this problem. Instead they have instinct to tell them what to do in any given situation. Humans also have instinct but in addition have intelligence, language, and culture that give us an advantage, but it comes at a price.

Religious sages from all of the world's great religious traditions notice that when people are left to their own devices, they will almost always chose "bad" over "good", because it is less work. "Bad" is to follow our natural inclinations without consideration of community (the effect of what we do on our fellow humans and our earth home). This is why a testimony of community is so important in the Quaker faith.

What is "good"? "Good" is to take into consideration the effects of our actions on community, and choose to act in a way that allows us to achieve our personal goals without damage. To do "good" requires us to discipline our "flesh" so to speak, our ego-demands that become acute especially under stress, and be thoughtful in everything we say and do. It is hard work.

In our lives we will be confronted by a __holes, in prison or not. It is best to approach such confrontations in a "good" way: 1) Don't take it personally. When we take things as a personal affront, we panic like the a __hole. All a __holes operate in a constant state of anxiety, otherwise they wouldn't do what they do. 2) Prepare yourself ahead of time by always having *a way to calm down* when confronted in an unpleasant way; go to the Lord. One Quaker theologian recently wrote that most days he says two prayers "Thanks!" and "Help!". "Help!" is a good brief prayer to go to in such situations. Sometimes images help: Picture yourself being surrounded by a protective barrier of light. If all else fails, walk away. Your safety is foremost, every life is sacred and important, especially yours. 3) Remember to have compassion for this person and be thankful you do not have to act in this way. "Thanks!"

This newsletter goes to inmates from 5 different correctional facilities in NY. If you would like a inmate friend to receive it, write us at the address below, and tell us his/her first and last name. That way we can locate the facility and DIN number. Likewise if there is an "outmate" you would like to have receive this letter, send his/her name and address. We will see that it gets to them. There is no charge.

May God bless you. Anybody who wishes to receive the 'Inlook-Outlook Letter' may request a subscription by writing to the address below. Be sure to let us know your complete address. You will be put on our mailing list and receive a monthly copy at no cost. Also, please feel free to write us with your comments, suggestions and contributions to the Letter: St. Lawrence Valley Friends Meeting, P.O. Box 292, Canton, NY 13617. This newsletter is not copyrighted and may be reproduced.