

Letter to the Editor

Dear Pharos,

I have been incarcerated since 2003 with a long sentence in front of me. However, that doesn't get me down. I take the approach of one day at a time. This approach allows me to continually discover new passions. That being said, I was always that person who declared "I am not an artist. I can only do stick figures - and I'm not very good at those!". Last year, at 46 years young, I picked up a colored pencil and discovered my "inner artist". It has opened up a whole new world to me.

I started out in coloring books, proudly working on colors and shading with a buddy. I practiced more and more, eventually moving out of coloring books into landscape art. That made me study perspectives and lighting angles. I love nature, castles, sculptures, the water, etc. Honestly, I get lost in the worlds my art creates. It helps tremendously with my military-related PTSD, anxiety and depression.

Now I tell anyone who thinks they don't have the skill to be an artist, art is about what makes you feel. Sometimes it is easy to go numb. Art has allowed me to awaken something inside me that was missing. So pick up a pencil. Take the risk and let art awaken something in you.

By G.M. (Submitted 03-10-20)

Editor's Note


To all of our talented artists and writers out there, we want to say how tremendously grateful we are for the wealth of articles and art you all have submitted for this publication.

THANK YOU!!

Our goal is to publish the Pharos Gazette every month, and we need all the help we can get. Justice-involved stories, articles, poems, drawings, art, music, you name it, we want to publish it! Given our current size & format limitations, we ask that all of our contributors follow our publishing guide-lines below—this helps us tremendously in getting each new issue of the Gazette out accurately and on time.

- Single column: 400-450 words (this is ideal for showcasing a single art piece, along with a short description of your artistic process/inspiration for the piece/etc.)
- Full page: 900-1,000 words (good for stories & articles with an accompanying illustration/photo/art piece)
- Letters to the Editor: 100-250 words (if we can fit more than one per issue, we will!)

The best way to send us submissions is via Jpay.com, using our publishing email pharos@atouchoflight.org. Due to the volume of submissions we receive, we are unable to reply to Jpay emails—however, every contributor will receive a copy of the issue in which they are published. Art submitted for publication will be considered a donation, unless you are one of our contracted artists, or return postage is included and you specifically request we return it.



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For fifteen hundred years, the Lighthouse of Alexandria (named Pharos, after the island it was built on), guided travelers safely to port. Borrowed from the Egyptian Coptic ‘phareh’ (guardian), in Greek, the word ‘pharos’ means lighthouse.

Whether this publication lasts for five years or fifty, it is our aim to keep watch over the Captive Arts™, and to be a guarding and guiding light home for all those artistic sailors currently adrift on stormy seas.

Recipient Address

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The Pharos Gazette

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March 2020

“The Art of Public Speaking”

By Aaron H., Contributor (Submitted 03-01-20)

While it's true that a picture is worth a thousand words it is equally true that a few carefully crafted words can paint a beautiful picture. People use art as a way to heal, inspire, motivate, have a voice, tell a story, and change lives. For me, the pencil is my brush and notebook paper my canvas. My medium is speech itself.

When I was younger, I was terrified of speaking in front of crowds. I had a lisp and was afraid of being ridiculed. This fear grew stronger as I grew older. My lack of communication skills made it difficult for me to be successful in/my relationships and in my life. It is one of the reasons I became incarcerated.

I eventually came to realize that proper communication is a key to healthy living. This brought me to Toastmasters. At first, I didn't know what I was doing was good. I still hated speaking in front of crowds and was very afraid. None the less, I was determined to overcome my fears and give myself a better future.

My first speech was a mess. My hands shook, my mouth was dry, I stumbled over my words. People laughed and I wasn't trying to be funny. But I wasn't going to let that stop me this time.

Things got easier with my second speech. When the awards were handed out that night my name was called not once but twice! I received both the "Most Improved Speaker" and "Word of the Day" awards. It wasn't all the goals I had set for myself, but it motivated me to keep going. After my fourth speech I won "Best Speaker of the Night" award. I still have a long way to go, but it is an exciting journey.

Through my speeches I am able to tell the compelling story of how I was affected by my father's death. We all have a story to tell. Artfully told, they can be powerful tools that heal broken hearts and motivate others to make positive changes in their lives. I have humbly seen my words become an inspiration to others. That, in turn, motivates me to keep getting better. I try to inspire others to reach outside their comfort zones to find their voice and tell their story.

Being able to communicate clearly has healed many of my broken relationships. I now talk freely with people I haven't spoken with in years. I tell my story in hopes of inspiring change not only in others but in myself as well. Having a voice has inspired me to make change that goes beyond these walls into the world. I realize now just how powerful a voice can be.

It has changed my life. I feel like I can talk to anyone. I can achieve my goals. Having a voice has given me the confidence to bring life to my dreams. And isn't that what art is all about?



“Reaching Out to Family”

By Paul T., Contributor (Submitted 03-25-20)

Before I came to prison the thought that I would have anything to do with art besides looking at the occasional comic book would be a pretty far-fetched idea. Yet here I am several years into a prison sentence with several art folios filled with drawings and at least the same quantity sent out to my children.

My children are very much the reason for my original inquiry into anything artistic. It was extremely difficult to find a way for me to connect with my children when I first arrived in prison. Of my three children, my son was the oldest at six and his ability to read at the time was just getting started. I had written several letters already that had arose little interest with my kids. Even my nightly phone call proved to be little more than a distraction. Let's be honest. In the age of virtual reality, video games, and several cable channels devoted entirely to cartoons, a phone call or letter from Dad did very little to grab their attention.

(Continued on page 2)

(continued from page 1) It was a few months into my sentence that I noticed a friend I had made included a little cartoon character with each letter he sent to his spouse. I thought it was a cute touch and decided to try it out with one of the letters to my kids.

I started with a popular cartoon from the Cartoon Network I had noticed my children mention in the past. It took many hours and several erasers to complete an image I was happy with. At first, I wasn't sure the work would be worth it, expecting my children to garner the same amount of dis-interest my previous letters had created. I was so very wrong!

The phone call following that letter's arrival created a full-scale battle amongst my children in their attempt to receive some sort of confirmation as to whom the drawing was intended. They each enjoyed it so much that an answer to this conundrum was all but required. Not only that, but the letter itself had created a substantial amount of additional buzz. They had their Mom read it over and over several times. The only reason for this that I could imagine was that the drawing helped them create an emotional connection to the letters themselves. Before my letters were just words that held little value to such young children. Now though, they each contained a little bit of magic that wasn't there before.

Immediately following that first drawing, each of my kids had very specific requests that followed. My oldest wanted me to draw a very specific character from his video games. His younger sister wanted anything with a princess. My youngest daughter wanted nothing but unicorns.

Those first few months of drawing them images for their letters was really magical! I found I was able to connect with them in a way I hadn't even before coming to prison. These experiences offered a way for me to create a buzz and joy



Image credit: Freepik.com

from each letter they received from me. It made me feel like I was doing right by them somehow making a positive difference in spite of my current situation. It wasn't long before I was rewarded with my own letters from them, filled with their own artwork created just for me. It is, to this day, the greatest gift I have ever received.

Now here I am, with just over a year left on my sentence. I have a real connection with each of my children. I don't believe it would have been possible without those first art-filled letters. We truly bonded over them. They helped me build a father/son and father/daughter relationship that has us all counting the days until I will be home and we can draw together.

“The Art of Communication”

By Otter, Contributing Artist (Submitted 03-21-20)

If art is communication, as my sole art instructor repeatedly stated, then what are we as artists trying to convey? And as a Toastmaster I must consider if the reverse is true; is communication art?

When putting paint to canvas (a generic phrase I am using to incorporate all artistic mediums) we consider composition, color, line, perspective, subject, etc., all the things that make our artwork speak to the viewing public.

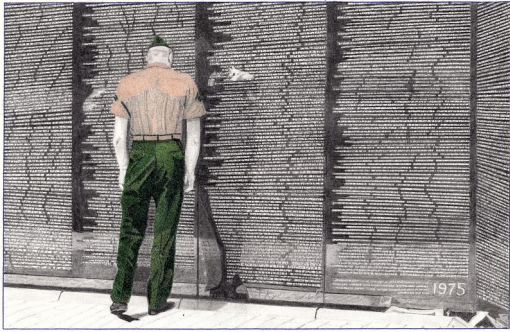
Similarly, there is a direct relationship to this process when forming speeches for the spoken word. We take into consideration our subject matter, the perspective from which we wish to convey our thoughts, then line by line we shape our composition, coloring it with words to form a cohesive picture.

For example, some of my work may seem to be an expression of color, nostalgia, memories. These may make people feel good about what they observe, or they may dislike what I present, but my art is communicating those emotions.

And to tell the truth, most of my subject matter and choice of medium are simply to challenge myself to see if I can do it.

Conversely, when speaking, one ought to be aware of their audience. It would be difficult to speak to a group of ASPCA members about hunting and trapping techniques and the need for keeping game animals at healthy populations. However, such a speech could be seen in many different lights. To some they could hear information to strengthen their beliefs, others may still hold firm to their beliefs but understand the reasoning presented, while still others may get angry and pick out all the negatives. But that is communication, my friends, and it is a two-way street between somebody conveying a thought, idea, or point of view, and a person or persons receiving that information and processing it according to their own life experiences.

Both art and speech are open to interpretation based on the views and experiences of the viewing and listening audience. What one person sees or hears or feels may be totally different than others. And that's okay, even though the way they interpret our work may be far from our thought processes when we created our work. In art we create with every stroke of the brush, and with speech, we equally create a picture with every word we weave. To answer my own question stated above, the only possible conclusion I can come to is that yes, communication is definitely an art. So next time you are at a gallery or listening to a speech, take a look around and observe what these two different yet similar forms of art are communicating to those around you.



“The Fallen” by Otter

“Quality Telephone Calls”

By Yankee Éireannach an Chósta Thoir, Assistant Editor

I have been watching inmates on telephone calls for two decades. I've seen some get off a twenty-minute phone call with a powerful smile on their faces – a good call! Yet sadly, I've seen & heard too many who are a bit “beaten down” by their calls – not good! So, I thought I'd put pen to paper on this subject.

Many people in the “free world” don't have a point of reference of what the environment is like for an inmate to make a phone call. Nor do they take a moment to think about the words they use and the tone of their voices. You see, every word spoken on a telephone to an inmate has either life-giving power in it, or pure darkness. An inmate can be lifted up, to move through another day, or be filled with thoughts of giving up on life. *Words are powerful!* A person's tone & demeanor on the phone – *Powerful!*

In most cases, when an inmate makes a telephone call, he/she is surrounded by other inmates, just a foot or two away from them, trying to have their own telephone call. Other inmates are talking loudly, some even shouting, while others are moving around the phones for various reasons. In a typical pod, you will have phones located on the main floor, with 150-300 inmates moving about making noise – very loudly! As you use the phone, you have to pay attention to your surroundings – it's a prison! There are many things happening to cause one to be distracted on the phone – and, there may be times when an inmate has to talk softly, to avoid being overheard while sharing news with the party on the phone. There can be high levels of stress, loud noises, and dynamic personalities, all bunched together in close proximity on various phones.

If you are in the free world, and receive calls from an inmate, let me make mention of a few items – Please, stop whatever you're doing: watching TV, listening to the radio, looking at the computer screen, cleaning, etc. and focus on the call. Understand that your words and the tone of your voice have a powerful impact on that inmate. This is not just “another call.” Your words may be the only kindness that inmate will hear all day, all week, or all month. Wrap them in your words of “love & encouragement.” And, always try to end a call with the simple phrase – “I LOVE YOU!” There's supernatural healing power in those words!

Lastly, if you've not had a call from your son, daughter, grandchild, niece, nephew or friend who is in prison or jail, think about setting one up with them. Those 15-20 minutes could breath life into their soul. And always remember,

FAMILY
MATTERS!



“One Stitch at a Time”

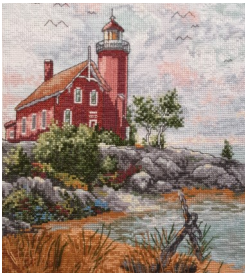
By Gideon Hopper, Managing Editor

In times of great struggle, it can often be very difficult to stay focused on WHY we are pushing through, when the HOW may seem so daunting & impossible. More than once, while struggling with this question myself, I have been drawn to deeply contemplate the work of Jay, one of our Veteran artists who works primarily in cross-stitching. Jay spends 150-200+ hours on each of his exquisite “needlepoint paintings”—a truly remarkable level of dedication and commitment to his craft! In describing his process to us, Jay says that he keeps a visual reference handy while working; in essence, he constantly reminds himself of *what the finished work will be*. Through daunting hours of labor, re-threading needles or pulling & re-working a stitch that does not meet his exacting standards of craftsmanship, the thing that propels him forward is his VISION of the goal—a two-fold purpose of not only creating a magnificent piece of art, but supporting & strengthening his family as well.

“Those who have a WHY...can bear almost any HOW.”
- Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*



“Fall Farming”
by Jay



“Lighthouse”
by Jay

www.ATouchofLight.org/jays-cross-stitching

News Flash

Quarantine got you down? Well, chin up, and look for something productive to do! Our awesome Advisory Board Chair is stuck at home, but she's not twiddling her thumbs! Linda & her daughter have the sewing machine fired up, and are cranking out fun & functional surgical masks for our brave first responders, which will be donated to Summit Pacific Medical Center, the Grays Harbor Community Hospital, and local police & fire stations in western Washington State.

Thanks Linda & Jessie!

