



The Pharos Gazette™

Volume II, Issue IV

March-April 2021

"Bible Boy: Second Chance Miracles"

Interview excerpt with Matt Feldmeth, Eden Ministries

We're excited to share Matt Feldmeth's remarkable story of redemption & second chances. What follows is drawn from our audio interview with Matt, available by scanning the QR code below, or going to www.ATouchofLight.Org/bibleboy

ATOL: "Give us some of your background Matt—how did you start out in life?"

Matt: "I'm 62 years old. I was raised in a Christian household. Stay at home mom, blue collar dad, and I didn't go without anything. We were hard-working, I went to public schools. And then when I was 15, I started smoking pot, and from there it just went downhill for me, I quit doing sports, I quit doing everything. The pot just took all the motivation from me. Once I started smoking pot, then it was alcohol and going to parties after the football games on Friday nights. And soon, I was selling weed to support my habit and graduated to hallucinogens. This was the late seventies, so cocaine as well, and soon I was working and then I would blow my whole paycheck snorting coke on a Friday night and the guy would credit me for my next paycheck. I would have done it too, and never had money because it all went for drugs and after that, I had various attempts at sobriety, but it never seemed to work. I tried the twelve steps and once I got a year, but every day that I was sober on that program, I wanted to get loaded. Even working the steps with a sponsor and I still was a cokehead with that obsession to use, and it bothered me that I never had any money and that the people that I grew up with were successful, getting married, buying houses families and that I was the drug addict in and out of rehab. And so, my late 20s, I went up to Monterey in Los Angeles, to a long-term program. Got sober and I met somebody that was a college girl, wealthy family and she was going to



college at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. I moved back to Morro Bay California and we ended up getting married and I tried really hard to be sober, but she used and drank with me and so we would both try to sober up."

ATOL: "Where did things go from there? How did you get involved with Reverend Jim?"

Matt: "We would stay sober for periods of time, but then just fall back. After our son was born, I was working a lot of extra overtime hours, and I was getting resentful and started using again, became homeless, and started breaking into houses to support my habit. I ended up with three strikes in the California system, which amounted to three life sentences. I went to prison, lost my family, lost everything. Basically, it was just my parents behind me at that point. I had an appeal going, but I wasn't really focused on it—I was reading my Bible a lot, and then finally, I just had my come-to-Jesus moment in the cell where I cried out to God. And I got to the point where I was at peace, even figuring that if I did forty or fifty years, but had a good relationship with God, then it would be okay."

"After two years they call me back at court. The judge said, 'You don't look the same.' I said, 'I'm not the same.' He said, 'The Appellate Court told me, I could do whatever I wanted with your case,' and so we just went back and forth a few times and he took the life sentences off of me..."

"When I got out, I had a hard time adjusting at first—I'd never talked on a cell phone, etc. I went into a faith-based sober living program with Eden Ministries, run by Rev. Jim Cliffe. He was always quizzing me—after a while he started calling me 'Bible Boy'—that was his nickname for me. So about eight months after I got out, I went to San Diego with the Rev and to this ministry and they ordained me. And right after that, I got offered a chaplaincy with Hollywood Impact Studios. We go into LA County Jail, we make Christian movies, things like that. We have honor dorms in there where our guys are, and they do the camera, the lights, everything, to train them for jobs in the industry..."

"You know there's a million things to be grateful for so I try to focus on that and gratefulness. And for me I'm grateful for all the things. Yeah, it's a miracle that I'm sober. It's a miracle that I got out of prison. I was supposed to die in there..."



Matt & the ministry group at Hollywood Impact Studios

SCAN ME

"The Noblest Art, Part I"

What follows here is a series of interviews, artist statements, and observations collected by Dr. Max Frieder and his colleagues at Artolution, in their ongoing work with Rohingya refugee artists in Bangladesh. These excerpts are presented in their original form, to maintain the clarity & narrative voice of the original contributors. We are deeply privileged to present these stories, and look forward to including more in future editions of The Pharos Gazette.



Dr. Max Frieder, Exec. Director
Artolution.org

Day 7: December 27, 2017

Today was the muddiest day of my life. As we entered the camp the day was rainy and had rained all night. The van we were driving in wasn't able to make it more than 500 ft. before getting stuck. We had to get out and push and it was apparent we were going nowhere with all of our supplies. The only option was a tom tom. As we hauled down a tom tom, we loaded it up with all of the paint and gear. It got relatively far, but to no surprise, also got stuck on the first major uphill of the landscape. Thus, we got out and put all of the paint, brushes and containers in our backpacks and started to hike in.



The mud was endless as far as the eye could see. Every inch of ground was saturated with a deep and unending messiness that covered all of our shoes and pants. As we hiked, we had to climb up the mountains, and step-by-step the treachery was imminent. Every person stared at us (as happens every day) and people laughed constantly as we trucked buckets and buckets of paint and slowly grew a crowd around us as we walked. Step after step was an almost fall, and finally after managing to slip slide our way down these steep mountains, we each finally took a spill. Completely covered in mud, the center was close. To get to the final area of the center, you had to go down a very steep hill. One of the children that were helping us carry all of the paint went after Adam, and slipped and slammed down directly on top of the can of paint. The can exploded and white paint went up in the air and covered the entire side of the cut out steps of the mountain. White and pink paint oozed down the side of the mud. We did all we could to scoop it back up into the container, with many of the children's small hands covered in paint in scooping mode.

Upon arrival we had gained a huge crowd that needed to be entertained. All staring at the two completely mud covered people who were bringing out all the colors. I brought out my "magical drum" And the whole crowd gathered around in

awe. This drum had become the symbol of tranquility in a sea of stress. We got the whole group around and explained how we were going to paint calmly, and blend the colors from one to another along the corrugated sheet metal structure. The excitement was palpable. They got into two lines.



And handed out brushes to everyone. Holding the brushes up in the air became a way for the children to be quiet and be a part of the larger workshop. When they began to paint, you could feel the concentration and joy emanating from each of the kids. Unlike the children in the last workshop, the children here were remarkably engaged, excited, and made strong eye contact. They understood the concept of making the background fade from one color to another over the entirety of the space. The local Rohingya artist Korimula understood how to implement this, and he was encouraging the children how to be able to paint to make the whole piece cohesive. Additionally, when the painting started to get really wild, some of the children went to go paint the nearby water tank. This had a great value to be used as a place to free paint, scratch and let out energy without harming the much larger mural.

As we were departing, the group erupted into a dance party, largely started by the younger adolescent boys. This was a remarkable end, and made many of the people want to stay and not want this special day to end and the color to be put away. The walk back was quite a bit easier, and we garnered a large group of followers as we who encircled us spontaneously.



It felt like it was a change, even a small chance for these teenagers and children to be part of a dream, of something from far, far away.

"The noblest art, is that of making other people happy."
—P.T. Barnum

"Path Choice"

by John "Ji"

For as far back as I can remember I was blessed to see things thru an artistic view. I was always able to redraw and revision things I see. Even though people and family members around me saw the potential in my talent, I only saw it as something recreational and fun to do here and there. When I was younger we spent some time in poverty and I wasn't able to see art as being a way to solve the problems we were faced with. It took a lot of years to finally come to the understanding that art was my calling. And by then I knew that if you followed your calling, it would not only work out for yourself but it would somehow help others too.

I was in a dark place when I came to that realization so I began searching to figure out how I could live my life in a way that was bringing something better into the world instead of causing more pain in it. I didn't really even have art in the forefront of my mind but I just happen to see someone else doing drawings and being paid for it. I knew I had the basic skills to do what the other guy was doing, but I didn't want to just do it for money, I wanted to make sure whatever I did spoke loudly and brought inspiration, awareness, or joy. So after I did a couple of pieces that caused an emotional response for people, I knew it was what I was supposed to be doing and it was also what I wanted to be doing. Because of that realization, I've had the opportunity to learn and experience so much more of life, and in doing so I've been able to help educate and lift others up in ways I hadn't even expected.



Now that I know the possibilities, which are endless, I constantly do my part to put people in a better position, which is a slow road most of the time but it always seems worth it when you get to see that any of the work has made a difference. I hope to share the understanding that no matter where a person stands in the world, they can be a difference maker, if they choose to do so.



"Thoughts on Getting Out, Part IV"

by Reverend James Cliffe, Eden Ministries

We're grateful and privileged to bring you a multi-part article by Reverend James Cliffe, whose personal experiences with incarceration, and his work to create Second Chances for others in the same shoes have given him a wealth of insight into the challenges faced by those returning home. Look forward to more words of wisdom in future editions!

Things to remember when the prisoner comes home:

- g) His/her interests may have changed completely! Be aware, but not alarmed.
- h) He/she may have medical/dental problems that require attention.
- i) He/she may have difficulty being intimate initially. Don't take this personally, time and understanding will remedy the situation
- j) Many released prisoners report the feeling that everyone knows that they are ex-cons, as if it were stamped on their foreheads. Of course, this isn't true, but until the feeling goes away, he/she may feel uncomfortable in public places.
- k) The adjustment may take some time, but it is a temporary situation calling for patience and understanding.
- l) Driving, especially in heavy traffic, may be difficult. Crossing busy streets and intersections may be troublesome due to lack of recent experience in judging speed and distance.
- m) Communication in the free world will be different than the strained communication in a visiting room or monitored phone call. Some spontaneous dialogue can lead to misunderstanding, hurt feelings and conflict if response is without forethought.

Having been spiritually bankrupt and in the dredges of alcohol and drugs himself, Rev. Jim came to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and his life was transformed. He began daily studies in the Word of God, was mentored by pastors, and later sought the training to become a minister himself. He went back to school and became a board-certified drug & alcohol counselor and has dedicated his energies towards helping men find the Lord through the outreach of Eden Ministries. Today the ministry owns eight homes which house men seeking help and a better way of life.



Interested in Contributing?

Justice-involved stories, articles, poems, drawings, art, music, you name it, we want to publish it!

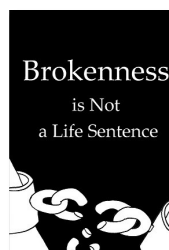
- Single column: 400-450 words (perfect for showcase & discussion of a single art piece)
- Full page: 900-1,000 words (good for stories & articles with an accompanying illustration/art piece)
- Letters to the Editor: 100-250 words

The best way to send us submissions is via Jpay.com, using our publishing email pharos@atouchoflight.org. Every contributor will receive a physical copy of the issue in which they are published—due to our international reach, we ask that submitted articles primarily focus on the value & impact of practicing art in the incarcerated context.

"Noteworthy Music Man, Part II"

by Carole Cliffe

During Music Man's college years, he majored and graduated in electronics. He worked in that field for several years, assisting with music recording and technical operations for setting up for concerts. He also worked at menial jobs and became good at painting houses. He was Mr. T, the painter. In the evening, he would return to his friend, the guitar, for release and relief. That soon led to jamming with guys in rock bands. This "noteworthy" Music Man played at different venues. Soon he met a girl that he hung out with. She soon became pregnant. Music Man convinced her to have an abortion, which she did. Later she became pregnant again and again he tried to convince her to have another abortion, which she refused. He's so grateful to God for the birth of his daughter. Now he was a full-fledged dad, and he decided to get married. He was doing good and became a real estate tycoon, fixing up houses, and painting. He bought a few houses. One of them had a huge basement. It was there that his rock band buddies would come and practice and hang out, drink and do drugs. Music Man became addicted to the booze and drugs. Often, he would leave the house to party and not come home at night. His wife was not pleased with that arrangement of not knowing where he was or when he'd come home. She threatened to take the baby, pack up and leave if this continued. One morning after a spree with the guys, he came home, only to find that his wife and daughter were gone. Music Man thought oh well, I have the house to myself and continued on a path of irresponsible acts. He can remember when he was younger hanging out with, what he thought, were his friends and vandalizing houses, cars, smashing glass. He thought it was a sense of release. The drugs brought release and calmed him or gave him the courage to accomplish many things. Music Man got involved with broadcasting field electronics. He was so skilled in his profession that he even did the set up for a Times Square event for Fox News. Music Man led a double life, active in his profession with electronics during the day and playing in the band at night. Steadily he became so addicted to drugs that he had to do something to support his habit. He pawned his recording equipment, sold his guitar, the proceeds totaled \$3,000. This amount was soon depleted due to the cost of supporting his addiction. The progression of his addiction to alcohol and drugs led to his demise.



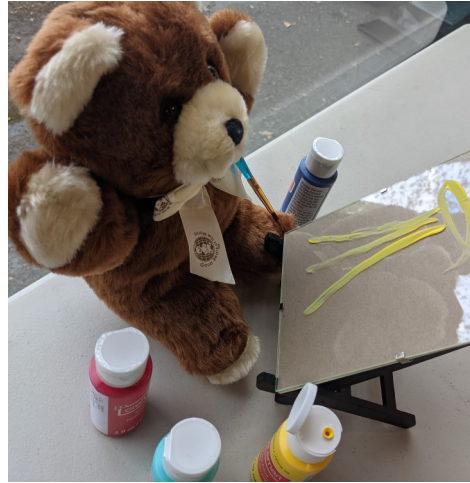
Carole Cliffe graduated from California State University Northridge with a teaching credential and degree in psychology. For over 30 years, she has worked in Los Angeles County schools as a teacher, mentor, BTSA trainer, language development specialist, and character consultant, as well as consulting internationally. Carole authored and implemented T.R.A.I.N., the program which integrates character education and state standards for the language arts. As an educator and mother, she has written about strategies to integrate character values in her two books, *Building Character in the King's Kids*, and *Character Quilting*. Carole's personal spiritual journey can be found in her book, *Go, Glow and Grow*. In 2020, Carole interviewed six former prisoners and wrote up their testimonies in *Brokenness is Not a Life Sentence*. Learn more at www.characterbuildingconcepts.com

“Good Bears...”

by Gideon Hopper, Managing Editor

We're tremendously grateful to the good folks at Good Bears of the World for their generous donation of teddy bears to our affiliate program in Kampala, Uganda.

Thank You!!



Upcoming Exhibitions

For all you Captive Artists™ out there, we've got some exciting exhibition opportunities coming up!

Restorative Community Coalition, early 2021

The theme of this exhibit is Family & Community. As this is a broad category, we look to exhibit the very finest pieces that will embody what it means to build strong families and develop long-term value for one's the community.

Seattle Center, October 2020

The theme of this exhibit will be Theatre, in all its forms. Shakespeare, Phantom of the Opera, lights, staging, backdrop, costumes, scripting—any element of theatrical production will be accepted for inclusion in this exhibition.



"Ling Ling"

*contributed by KSA Hong Kong**

很多()在面對困難或是遇上事情的停滯期時，便會埋怨上帝或是問上帝你到底在那裏。這個可能是你又可能是我。對，這個是曾經的我，但後來我想通了，便開始轉移跟上帝說，我很想聽見你的聲音，行走在你的正路當中。一段日子後，我終於釐清了上帝很喜歡透過畫像跟我說話，這便成了我畫和諧粉彩的起始點。

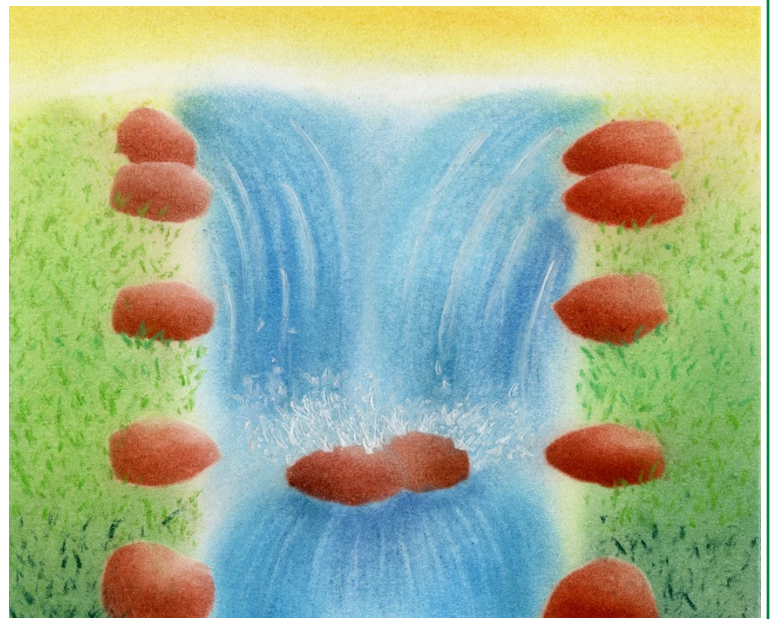
其實畫畫並沒有分好與醜，因為在乎的是上帝帶給我的訊息。

Many people will complain about God or ask God where He is when they are facing difficulties or encountering a period of stagnation. We all go through times like this. Yes, this was who I used to be, but then I had a revelation and I started to change and communicate with God directly and tell Him 'I really want to hear your voice and walk in your paths.' After some time, It became clear to me that God likes to talk to me through portraits. This became the starting point for me to paint in pastels. In fact, drawings do not distinguish between the good and the ugly, but what I care about more is the message that God gives me.



畫一：貝殼中的傾訴是神再一次提醒我，祂會珍惜我們落下的每一滴淚，讓淚水化為珍珠，成為我們最珍貴的見證。

The heart to heart sharing in the shell is God reminding me again that He will cherish every tear we shed, and turn our tears into pearls, and this will become our most precious testimony.



畫二：瀑布是在述說上主大能的創造，讓流出的水成為我們心裡邊的活水江河，滋潤我們的每一天！

The waterfall is about the mighty power of God's creation, the flowing water becomes a river of living water into our hearts, nourishing us every day!



畫三：這為一個剛過身的姊妹所畫的，神說她的離去只是復活的開始，她會在那天繼續綻放著耀眼的光芒！

This was painted for a sister who had recently passed away. God says her departure is only the beginning of the resurrection, and she will shine even more brilliantly on that day!

**Ling Ling formerly served time as a juvenile prisoner*

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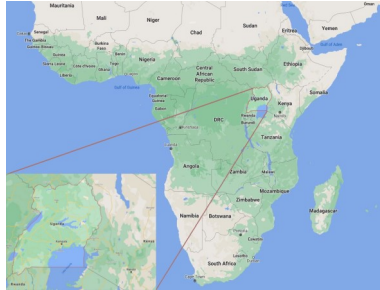
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School for the Arts: Kampala, Uganda

Since 2017, it's been our privilege to work toward the development of a School for the Arts in Kampala, Uganda, to create educational and artistic opportunities for children who have been left orphaned and/or homeless by the incarceration of their parents. Recently, the welfare of these children has been strongly impacted by two factors; the current global health crisis, and severe outbreaks of locust, which pose a very substantial threat to immediate and long-term food security throughout East Africa. We're reaching out to our community of readers around the globe to ask for help in providing donation funds & critical supplies to meet the needs of these young people.

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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.

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