

vol. 01 : issue 01 : may 2009



apsc presents

letters

from the pen

thoughts from the inside

about

letters from the pen

the following is a collection of letters from Asian and Pacific Islander friends, in California State Prison - Solano, and across the nation. This zine is the first of its kind, and was compiled by the Asian Prisoner Support Committee.

about

apsc asian prisoner support committee

the Asian Prisoner Support Committee is based in the Bay Area (Northern California).

In response to the U.S.'s addiction to prisons and its status as the world's largest jailer, the Asian Prisoner Support Committee (APSC) was re-formed in 2005.

APSC works with Asian prisoners to educate the broader community about the growing number of Asians in the U.S. being imprisoned, detained, and deported. Our mission is to expose the root causes of why more and more Asians are going to prison, such as the crisis of our educational system, the lack of access to resources for low-income immigrants, war, and imperialism.

Slavery is still legalized in prisons,
as declared in the The 13th Amendment
of the U.S. Constitution:

"Neither **SLAVERY**

nor involuntary servitude, *except as a
punishment for crime whereof the party
shall have been duly convicted,*

SHALL EXIST WITHIN THE UNITED STATES."

Over recent years,
the criminal justice system and harsh
immigration policies have increasingly
criminalized Asian and Pacific Islanders
(APIs) and other communities of color.



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"I never stay in this country
as free person."

feb. 9, 2009

letter from t. shirosaki

#20924-016

Federal Correctional
Institution CMU
P. O. Box 33
Terre Haute, IN 47808

Dear Friends:
the young people of Oakland & Bay Area!

I'm T. Shirosaki, 61 years old, Japanese. I never stay in this country as free person.

I was born and grew up in central North of Japan. It is rural area and my family as peasant. But nearly all were in same poor conditions, so I did not feel so many problems when I was in middle school. When being in high school I could see real rich as well as poor and discriminated people, but did not think so much about social matters because I was busy to study for university.

When I went to university I studied social issues as well as what is capitalism, and imperialism. Thus I became an activist of a student movement. One incident forced me to stop into very radical group, I believed what they told me about incident but it was half true in reality.

By the way because of some activities in that group I was arrested in Tokyo ('71) and sentenced 10 years. But, when I was in prison, there was a hijacking of Japan Airliner over India and hijackers, a unit of Japanese Red Army, demanded ransom and release of some prisoners including me. So I was handed over to the hijackers. We

The U.S. currently imprisons over
2.1 million people, making the
U.S. the world's leading jailer.

eventually went to Lebanon, the then" State Heaven of Terrorist". Soon after we went to Lebanon, Japanese police put us in Interpol wanted list as if we did jail break.

The J. Red Army tried to persuade us to join their rank, but I did not join. You see, I could not "swallow" all their words because of past experience. So, I became a fighter of the Palestinian Revolution.

It was 1986; there were homemade bomb attacks to embassies of U.S, Japan and Canada in Indonesia. I was in Lebanon and heard it by radio news. Several weeks later they announced that they found my fingerprints and the attack was done by J. Red Army etc. That's the laughing matter! We just laughed and ignored, because we thought the status of Lebanon would not change so easily. But it changed after Saddam's invasion to Kuwait.

I left Lebanon with a forged passport (Filipino passport), although I cannot speak their language. So, I couldn't go to countries where Filipinos are existing. I went to Nepal and practiced as an acupuncturist. I knew that practice and treated many patients successfully!

By the way, once I needed to contact a JRS member, so I tried to use phone. But it was mistake. The other end, the number which they gave me a week ago, was tapped by US Agency. They knew, so they abandoned the number already. Thus I was arrested in Katmandu, Nepal and sentenced, in US court, 30 years. At that time I did not know that it is the old technique to reprint someone's fingerprints. My lawyer did not help, thus I lost even appeal.

As mentioned I have been in Japan's jail where it is so hard. Therefore the daily life in U.S. jail is, so to speak, easy. But jail is jail; our activities are very limited, especially in this small special place, Communication Management Unit (CMU). Our communications are strictly

limited, so many mails especially newsletters and magazines were returned or "evaporated". And medical service is very poor. For example my left eye is same as blind, although eye doctor recommended an operation one year ago, I'm still awaiting such operation. Needless to say so many inmates in this small unit are in similar conditions.

I would like to suggest one point to our dream youth: "Do not believe anything somebody -- especially authorities or media -- telling story / history told by European descent!"

One example with self-criticism.

You know just before invasion to Iraq, they said Saddam has weapons of mass destruction, all kinds of ABCs (Atomic, Bio & Chemical weapons). And that was one of big facial reasons of Bush-shit government to invade. Although I could not believe about A-bombs, I thought Bs & Cs were undeniable, because Saddam used these weapons to Kurds as well as Iranians in 1980s. But as it became clear there was no such weapon.

So you're clear that we must not be in mind control.

In solidarity!

T. Shiroaki

Post 9-11 anti-immigrant policies have increased rates of Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention and deportation for many API immigrant and refugee communities.

letter from remar p. solango

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Dear Child of Oakland,

My name is Remar and I have been incarcerated for 18 years now. When I was out I had never thought I would end up in the penal system. I did not listen to my dad and grandparents and told myself "I can do it my way". I was wrong

Let me tell you how I ended up in this place. I am hoping that you will not end up like me. At first I had a hard time at school I was being bullied and getting into fights which continued for quite some time. I did not know how to deal with the situation correctly and it profoundly affected me. So I dealt with it in a way I only knew how- keeping it to myself. I started cutting classes to avoid getting beat up. I never resorted to drug. I did not tell anyone what I was going through and was good at hiding my fear.

Soon after, fear took control of me. I decided to confront these other kids in my own way, not thinking of the consequences of my actions. During this time, so called "friends" came along to my aid. I was hoping that the outcome would be just like one of too many movies where the bad guys get their butt kicked by the victim and they all leave him alone after. Oh, I wish it as so. However, things went from bad to worse. I was sought after by these kids and fear was constant in my mind. Living with my grandparents at the time so it was easy for me not to show them my true emotions.

To make a long story short, I took a young man's life. An innocent bystander that did not have anything to do with this at all. He happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when I succumbed to fear and stupidity. To this day, I resent what I did to this young man; his family and friends; my family and friends; and

"Before I took matters into my own hands I felt helpless. The pressure in me was overwhelming as if the world was on my shoulders ready to crush me at anytime."

my community. I always pray that his family and friends can forgive me for taking their loved one away.

Before I took matters into my own hands I felt helpless. The pressure in me was overwhelming as if the world was on my shoulders ready to crush me at anytime. If I knew then what I know now I would have done things differently. I had a choice; choice to tell my family what I was going through and choice to inform a teacher and/ or police I was getting harassed at school. Perhaps this would not have happened if I chose the right decision.

Although so many things have changed, I have grown physically, mentally, and last but not least spiritually; the memory of that fateful day I took someone's life will always be with me. I don't know what you are going through as you are writing this letter. You might be struggling with your studies, getting bullied at school, in a gang or clique, not on good terms with your family or foster family, or whatever it may be. You might be feeling the world is against you and you have no one else. You might have been told lies that you will never amount to anything or you will end up just like your dad or mom. Please do not take matters into your own hands. Drugs, violence, or taking your own life is never the answer. You are special and you have a bright future ahead. So, don't ruin it.

I hope my letter will inspire you to make right

decision and empower you to strive for better. I know life is full of challenges and heartaches. Believe me, I've been there. Find someone you can trust to talk with - family member, teacher, school counselor, or a pastor. If I have the way to help you choose the right decision, I would be there in every way. Remember, you always have a choice, to always take the right path in life.

Sincerely,

*Remar P.
Solano*

The largest API ethnic groups in CA prisons are Vietnamese (22%), Filipinos (19.8%), and Laotians (8.5%).

letter from johnny tauga jones

#v-54521/14-ez-up

C.S.P-Solano
P.O.Box-4000
Vacaville, CA 95696-4000

Dear A.P.S.C.,

My name is Johnny Tauga Jones and I'm writing a short story of my life in hopes that I could influence at least one kid to change their life.

I was born in San Francisco, CA. Raised in Army street projects and that's where my downfall began. My father was a drug dealer and user; he also was an alcoholic that was very abusive to me, my two sisters, little brother, and my mother. My mother just came from Samoa & she did not know how to raise a young man in the projects, so I raised myself. Before I got to middle school I was smoking weed and snorting coke on a daily just because my big homies made it look like the thing to do. I started thugging it on a high tech level: fighting, shooting, robbing, selling drugs, and even lightweight pimping. All this before I made it to high school. I was known as a turf hog and had much love and respect from my folks. I moved to Richmond and got worse and a lot harder. I started thizzin and having unprotected sex with a lot of random females. My grandfather died on my 18th birthday and that sent me over the edge. I started popping more pills than normal and I wanted to die. I carjacked this person and that changed my life forever. I never been to Juvi or Y.A. (Youth Authority), because I never got caught. I got caught for the carjacking when I was 18 and for a first offender I should've got probation but I could not afford a lawyer and they gave me 7 years-to-life in prison.

I'm 24 now and the thing that really hurts me the most is that, inside I was really a good kid

"My advice to you young people is to become a leader and study hard in school so you can become a positive influence in the world. Slow money lasts longer!!!"

but I was a follower trying to do what everyone else did. I am multi-talented in sports, drawing, poetry, song-writing, dancing, and public speaking. I am very smart and have a very big family that wanted me to play football or boxing but I was blinded by gold teeth, females, and fast money. I chose this path, I hurt people, I hurt myself, and this is my karma. My advice to you young people is to become a leader and study hard in school so you can become a positive influence in the world. Slow money lasts longer!!!

Think of your family because when you get caught up they are all your going to have, your "homies" do not know you when you need help the most. I wish I had someone to guide me growing up, maybe I would not of messed up so much. That's my short story I hope you got something from it!!

Stay strong and stay positive, do not let anyone talk you into doing things you know are not right.

*Johnny Tanga
Jones*

child to a man

Growing up

I just wanted to be free!

And when I almost found freedom
look what happened to me.

They gave me 7 to life at very young age,

Put chains around my legs and wrists
and thru me in a cage.

I never thought that I could be beat,

But it's the price you pay
when you love the street.

I made a mistake
they do not know who I really am,

They look at me weird and say I'm evil man.

Am I really a bad guy?

Did I really mean to do wrong?

I knew I had to pay a price
but why did they lock me up this long.

I was confused and very upset, to the victim
and the family I meant no disrespect.

No one ever wanted to help me
that's why I did what I did,

I wish my mom could help me
but I'm no longer a kid.

I'm an adult now
I alone have to pay for my crime,

But I did not physically hurt or kill anyone
and they still gave me all this time.

Do you think if I raised differently
I would've turned out

OK, maybe if I was raised n the suburb
instead of the heart of the bay.

But I truly believe that this
is all part of god's plan,

He wants me to study the word
and grow from a

Child to a man!!!

letter from abubakar achmad

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To the young people of Oakland, the Bay and Beyond:

Before I continue to write this letter, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Abubakar Achmad. Everybody calls me Abu for short.

I am an inmate in CSP-Solano. Originally I came from Indonesia, a country located in South East Asia with 13,000 islands stretching from Sumatra, all the to Java, Bali, and west of Papua New Guinea.

All my family came from Indonesia and I grew up in Jakarta which is the capital of Indonesia. Currently I am incarcerated in the California prison system which is the most bureaucratic prison in the nation.

I am here because I did wrongful doing. I violated the law of the land. The hardest parts about being incarcerated: I miss my family. My loved ones. All my friends. And everything I do I am always being watched: sleeping. Eating. Working. Taking a shower. There is no freedom and privacy whatsoever.

Moreover, the California prison system right now is exceeding over crowding. Could you imagine that I'm living in a very small area with a lot of inmates in too. I could tell this story more and more because it is more frightening than you can ever imagine, but I am not trying to scare you or anything. This is just my reality. My life.

Between 1990 and 2000,
the API prison population grew 250%
while the overall prison population
grew by 77%.

While being in prison, I try to be strong emotionally, physically, and spiritually. These things are my tools of survival. I've learned a lot of new things in this place. I stay active, always being vigilant, patient, responsible of my actions, considerate, and I try to integrate with

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¶ The more you learn the more safe your life is because knowledge itself will guide you to the right path. The knowledge will make your judgement in life better, knowledge is happiness - and knowledge is prosperity. You can be what you want to be if you get the knowledge."

people and the things that could benefit me and other people.

My day is occasionally a good day and no matter what the circumstances, I always embrace what God gives us in life because life is beautiful. It doesn't matter where we live.

My advice to you young people, stay in school, never quit learning. The more you learn the more safe your life is because knowledge itself will guide you to the right path. The knowledge will make your judgement in life better, knowledge is happiness - and knowledge is prosperity. You can be what you want to be if you get the knowledge.

Please stay in school. Last but not least, to any of you who still have a parent, mother or father, always give the highest respects to your parents, especially your mother.

There is a story of a man who once came to the prophet (peace be upon Him). He said, "O prophet! Who among peoples is most worthy of any good companionship?" The prophet said: "Your mother." And when the man asked: "Then who?" The prophet said, "Then your mother." And when the man asked, "Then who?" The prophet said: "Then your mother." The fourth time the man asked, the prophet said: "Then your father." Does that not speak to all of us?

It's our mothers who have shown us the importance of helping others. It's our mothers who teach us proper behavior and words. Being kind to your mother is no luxury. It is not something you do on your good days, or on the occasions when you

are feeling generous with your borrowed emotions. Gentle love for your mother is your divine duty. She deserves no less. Respect your parents as well as you respect yourself and others.

Note: My mother passed away in 2004. I haven't seen her since 1981. I did not have the chance to see her again. To all of you young people, be good and take care.

Respectfully,

*Abubakar
Schmad*

In Oakland, the API conviction rate is 34.2%, higher than any other racial/ethnic community.

letter from jason v. santibanez

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Siyo Young Man or Woman,

I am a Native American prisoner in the State of California.

I am from the Yuba Sutter area in Northern California. From middle school into high school I was a part of the Native American Dance group called the Snow Goose Dancers. I have danced in Sacramento, Oakland, Davis, DQ, Chico, Stanford, Berkeley and more as a featured specialty dancer. The only real setback to that is that I am indefinitely removed from my family who would love to dance with me.

I am here because of an armed robbery and attempted murder in which I shot the victim. I was eventually convicted of conspiracy to commit murder which is why I have 25 to life. That means the corrections officials can keep me in prison for the rest of my life. The worst part is that I got locked up when I was 17 and am 2 years away from being locked up for 1/2 my life.

Since I have been locked up I have learned that ignored a lot of chances to succeed. One in particular was when a probation officer offered to put me in a group home because he knew I was not adjusting well in my home. If I would have accepted that hand out I could have gotten away from an unstable home to a home structured to help me succeed in life. My point isn't to leave home if it is bad for you, but to realize help when it is being offered to you in it's various forms, even from the people we don't trust because they have power over us. If I would have left I would have left my mother and three sisters. It may or may not have provided me the freedom from prison which was a set of choices I made, but I look back and wonder what if?

"To have a sense of peace in here you have to let go of that sense of control you have to keep on the streets. Otherwise you will drive yourself, your family, and your new prison associates away from you."

The hardest part about being in prison is waiting to hear from loved ones through the mail. I do not know from day to day who will write back, who will pass on, or even if a loved one will take the time to sit down and write. I can't blame them if they don't, although I used to in my more youthful days. I know they have lives to live, children to raise, bills to pay, it is selfish to expect a letter just because I write them and wait, hope, and wonder. To have a sense of peace in here you have to let go of that sense of control you have to keep on the streets. Otherwise you will drive yourself, your family, and your new prison associates away from you.

I work in the first watch job. It means I go to work at 10:20 p.m. and go back to my bunk at 5:15 a.m. I then sleep in a dorm with 13 other guys who may be up doing things because they have day programs. I usually wake up at 11:30, drink some fluids, then I sometimes sleep until 3:30. At 6:30 when everybody is eating dinner it is my lunch time. Then I study my college courses, and prepare from work. On Thursdays and Tuesday for the last 6 weeks I have facilitated self-help groups that deal mostly with life skills for guys in another building. Even though sometimes I was tired I kept my commitment to them because a lot of us missed opportunities to learn life skills on the streets.

What has really enabled me to do things like that is learning to control self doubt and self talk, and building my own self esteem to the point where I am comfortable meeting strangers, men like myself and say, I will help you learn some life skills if you are willing to participate in this group for six weeks.

I send my hopes and prayers that you all receive this in a good heart and hopeful mind set for insight and change.

Wado,

*Jason V.
Santibanez*

A-qua-tsi-li
Ni-ga-da- Yv-wi

letter from steve oliva

To the Young People,

My name is Steve Oliva, Im 54 years of age and I love working out, walking, playing all around sports. I'm from America Samoa. My family also. My parents died while I've been here, and I really miss them so much, but I have to stay strong and accept this because it's a part of our lives.

When I was in elementary school back in the island, I loved history and sports. I love my family and believed in family values and family bond. I have a great life when I was a kid. I always listened to my parents, grandparents, I respect everyone, and especially elders.

I was in my 20's, I think 21 when I got in trouble. I took somebody's life by accident, I didn't mean it and I was young and stupid. My family always advised me but when I was young and in my 20's I thought to myself that I know everything, and I'm right about everything, until they put me in prison. I regret everything and all the stupid things I've done. I've wasted all my life in here because of my hardheadedness, and not listening to people that love you unconditionally. Prison is not a place to be. Everything in prison is limited, everything is timed. This is the second place to HELL. The only way you can survive is through education and family support. I've put my family and my kids through hell, my community, my friends, and everyone that I love.

The food? :(Whatever they serve you got no choice. You will eat it or you will starve. I've been locked up 33 years and it's not good.

Through the help of my prayers and family I probably wouldn't make it. There is no such thing in prison as a tough guy (ZERO) your life will be

"You are special. You are the future, the beauty. You are your best friend and you are your worst enemy."

controlled by staff and everybody above.

The best advice I can tell you is to be yourself. You will see and find yourself successful and happy in life if you honor yourself and master your heart and your mind in most valuable desires that you have. I wish I could go back and use what I know now, but I can't. But I can help someone else before her or he fall into the pit of hells that I'm in it.

To all of you out there, especially you the youth of the future. Your best goal and your best weapon are pencil and paper. These are the mightiest weapons in the world and in life.

These are your life perspectives; who you are, what you are, happiness, famous, rich, sincere respect, kindness, best friends and beyond. You are special. You are the future, the beauty. You are your best friend and you are your worst enemy.

I'm closing this letter with love and respect and praying for your journey in life.

Steve Oliva

letter from aaron daria

To Anyone That Has an Ear to Listen:

I'm not writing this letter to tell you what to do. How can I tell you what to do, when at times I don't even know what to do myself. Older people who have experience and wisdom seem to always have the answers. That's not me. All I can do is give you my account of what I've been through. If you choose to listen to my confusing story you can. If you choose not, then you don't.

My name is Aaron Cornelius Manuel Daria, I'm 31 years old, I was raised in San Francisco. I got half-brothers and sisters, but I was pretty much raised on my alone. I had a roof over my head and food in my belly. Even though I had parents I felt like I didn't. I had what I needed, but my parents never paid any attention to me. Other parents hug their kids when they get an 'A' on their report cards, mine never noticed. They just argue about paying bills, and my dad being a cheater. So I never really had a great childhood. Since I never got any attention at the house, I got it out on the street where similar kids like me had the same type of problems. We all seen eye to eye, and we had no one to look up to. It was just us and the street, and we hung out on it all day and all night. I learned how to drink, smoke weed, and snort coke. By 16 years old I was looking strung out. All of us did. I was a good liar, it came in handy when I was cutting class to go get in trouble. I ran into some older guys that tried to steer me straight. But I didn't listen because I thought I knew it all. My mom was trying to say something but I didn't listen to her either. My

dad stayed drunk, all he was good for was beating my ass, which helped me get hard. At the same time, I had no respect for anyone, including myself.

I started hanging out with some older characters in the neighborhood. I looked up to these guys, they taught me how to get money, have things. Sell dope, jack dope dealers, rob houses, steal cars, the whole deal. I got good at these things and liked to impress everybody. All I cared about was filling my greed. I felt like I was finally becoming somebody, and becoming something, even if that meant becoming a monster. If one homie had beef, we all had beef, and we'd handle it. I felt like we were family. I really thought I was doing something, playing with guns and tooting on cocaine, robbing innocent people and terrorizing my won neighborhoods and every other place.

Time came when everything hit the fan, I'd made enemies and those same homeboys I thought were down with the business started falling off. I felt abandoned... just like I was a menace, there were a handful of guys worse than me. It was too late, I was buried in what I idolized. People got hurt, and some got killed. Because I thought I had a reputation to uphold. That same reputation I held onto was the reason for my downfall, or my saviour depending on how you look at it.

Prison opened my eyes to a trap that was set for me, and people just like me. One day you might see that I'm not talking crazy, but believe me, somebody wants you to fail, they want you to be a stat on their lap top, you actually satisfy its hunger. I can't tell you who it is, but trust me this person exists. I fell for his trap.

"I'd made enemies and those same homeboys I thought were down with the business started falling off. I felt abandoned... just like I was a menace, there were a handful of guys worse than me. It was too late, I was buried in what I idolized. People got hurt, and some got killed."

I was 16 years old, a young knuckle head who never had guidance, and who wouldn't listen anyways. I thought I knew it all. It turns out didn't know anything. All I know is a 17 years 9 months to life sentence. I was a kid in an adults prison. I started out in the toughest prisons, level 4 on down. This system didn't have mercy on me, just like I didn't have mercy on anyone else either. I chose the wrong path, and this is what I have to deal with: a police pointing his gun at me and telling me to get naked so he could see my booty hole. Then he tells me to get in a cage and locks me in, every day for the last 16 years. I don't even know if I'm ever going to go home. I missed graduating high school, going to my senior prom, having a wife, raising a family, and having anything to love. All the good things in life I could have had, if I chose the right route. The right route is a hard path, and it may seem like a long road, but the reward is great if you can just hang on. It beats getting naked and being trapped in cages, or worse, dead and gone. After a few calendars pass you by, all them homies is gone. That girl you thought loved you, she gone too. Probably with that homeboy you thought had love for you.

My advice to you is, if you're listening to this, is to stay away from the lies. The ones you tell and the ones you're told. All that glitters isn't golden, just like you heard before. That



khoi huynh

For those interested in
helping to raise awareness about
the Prison Industrial Complex and
supporting prisoners striving to better
themselves and their community, please contact:

Asian Prisoner Support Committee (APSC)

P.O. Box 1031

Oakland, CA 94604

or: [apscinfo\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:apscinfo@gmail.com)

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Tired of people telling you
what to do with your life?

For a change, how about reading
what incarcerated men in
California State Prison - Solano
have done with their lives.

Despite having their everyday freedoms
taken away these men still are using the
few tools they have to reach out to you;
the young people of the Bay and beyond.

Many of the authors of these letters
were minors themselves at the time when
they were convicted of their crimes.
Many are now serving LIFE SENTENCES
in the prison industrial complex.
Intertwined in the tragedy of their
stories is the hope that their words
will inspire each of you to listen to
the wisdom you already possess, and to
choose a different path than the one
they have found themselves on.