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Australia's National Prison Newspaper

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'The Last Watercolour', from the recent exhibition 'Artists with Conviction' – Martin draws from a prison in TAS

NEWS AND INVESTIGATIONS

AI Used in Parole Decision

It was recently revealed that the Tasmanian Parole Board cited a fake case generated by AI to justify a controversial and unlawful parole condition.

The case has amplified existing concerns about a lack of transparency with the parole process around the country.

By Denham Sadler

Denham is the Chief Reporter at *About Time*.

Continued on page 5.

NEWS AND INVESTIGATIONS

The Real Number of People in Prison Working

While Corrections departments around the country report that more than 80 per cent of people in prison are working, in reality only about half actually have employment while in custody.

By Damien Linnane
Damien Linnane is the editor of Paper Chained, a quarterly journal for art and writing which is made available to all people in NSW prisons.

When I was incarcerated, I got offered the job as the new education sweeper.

Despite the low pay, the other prisoners explained how lucky it was for me to have a job. You see, there were around 30 prisoners in the main wing, and alongside the person who washed the floors, I was only the second one to be employed.

So imagine my surprise when I read the Corrective Services NSW 2024-25 annual report as part of my PhD research. The 'Work and Education' page includes that 85.7 per cent of 'eligible inmates in custody' were working. I did a double take. More than 8 in 10 prisoners working?

I thought there was no way that was correct. Then I noticed the keyword: eligible.

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Letters

Medication Saved My Life After I Lost Custody of My Son



By Bec

Bec writes from a prison in QLD.

Hey, my name is Bec, but my friends call me Ruby.

This is my 2nd time on remand. I was granted bail after 38 days in prison in Victoria and moved back to the Gold Coast where there were unfortunately some old charges to answer for, so I'm now on remand 48 days in, all because of a mental episode that stole almost 12 months of my life.

What's your experience with mental health/illness?

It was a relief to receive a formal diagnosis this year, after a tumultuous time, and medication saved my life and has helped me feel more stable emotionally than I've ever felt.

After losing custody of my 8-year-old son late last year my world collapsed – I couldn't bring myself out of the depression I'd sunk into.

It was both mentally and financially crushing, I didn't see it coming and it's like grieving the loss of a loved one — but they're still alive.

It hurts to have people gossip behind your back too, saying drugs are the reason for this and that. Truthfully I provided a clean hair test and it made zero difference to the outcome so far. I'm not saying drugs are to blame or not, but I hope more people question why someone turned to them in the first place – what actions caused that reaction?

Thanks for reading.



Human Rights and Sleeping on Cell Floors



By Anonymous

The author writes from a prison in QLD.

To the Australian national prison newspaper.

Just wanted to check and make sure that anyone who is sleeping on the floor in jail or who has previously put a complaint into the GM and human rights to have the situation fixed.

Please boys don't forget about your human rights about sleeping on the floor, because we are not scum.

'Family Is More Important': A Promise to Leave Drugs Behind



By Ebony

Ebony writes from a prison in WA.

Hi *About Time*,

My name is Ebony my cell mate Vanessa showed me this newspaper so I thought I'd give it a go to write to people out there.

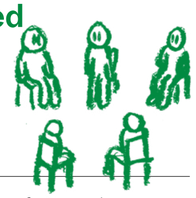
I will be in the women's prison till next year. September 2027 is my parole and I hope for it to go fast so I can be back out there with my kids.

I am just writing in so I can leave a message for other women who think it's okay to do drugs: think again coz me being in here has made me realise that drugs are not worth it, family is more important. When I get out on parole, I can promise my kids that I will not touch drugs ever again.

Thanks for reading.

Love to all my family and friends, From Ebony

Support Group Needed



By Steven

Steven writes from a prison in WA.

Being an older gay man myself, I have noticed a lot of younger guys in here are maybe a little confused about their sexuality.

In this prison, they have many clubs or organisations to help people, such as AA and NA, drug groups, church groups, and many others.

I feel something for gays might be worth thinking about. I floated it here but it never was taken up.

And why are there so many older men in prison? Why not an ankle bracelet and home detention?

So many of us struggle to walk and we get sick more often. Yes we did wrong, very wrong in some cases. Some of our crimes go back years.

Some of our guys – 75, 83, 95 years old – most, if not all, are beyond hurting anyone anymore.

Our prisons are over-flowing, yet us old men still linger on.

From Lockdowns to Student of the Year



By Julian

Julian writes from a prison in WA.

My name is Julian,

To all my brothers and sisters, this is my 6th time in prison in 5 years.

I spent the last 3 months in 23 hour lockdowns, 3-out in a cell built for one person. Thankfully I am now in a 2-out and got my job at the prison bakery.

Over the past 5 years I have completed numerous courses and obtained tickets for forklift – working at heights, confined space, first aid, and test and tag.

I recommend to all prisoners to apply for education short courses. I was never good at school, but with the help of the prison education and employment coordination I was chosen as student of the year in 2024, which was a complete shock as I never achieved anything in my younger years.

So this time I get out I will get a full time job and will stay drug-free into the future.

My best advice is to take 1 day at a time and walk tall – better days are ahead.

Write to Us

Your contributions are the centerpiece of the paper. If you would like to contribute to *About Time*, please send your letters to the below postal address (it's free!):

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We Need More Support When We Leave Prison



By Briar

Briar writes from a prison in WA.

Hello *About Time* newspaper!

My name is Briar, I am currently incarcerated in WA.

I'm currently in limbo awaiting sentencing so finding ways to pass time.

I'm a good friend of Rocket Bretherton and would love to shout out to her!

Her book 'She Is Me' is still doing the rounds here and is a massive hit. I'm a very big fan of the paper since I came across it last time. You guys are doing an amazing job at not only lifting spirits but also keeping us connected with others in the same predicaments.

The only thing I could add is perhaps looking at adding more supportive services/places/people we can go to once we are released. I know personally this was a huge problem for me and at least 10 other girls I was released with within a 4-5 week period, we all came back to jail.

Homelessness, addiction, no family, turned right back to what got us here in the first place. I think this is a huge problem for especially young vulnerable women to have more support on release!

I was literally shown the door, given $20 and booted to a bus stop with the clothes on my back. Alone. So yeah that's what I reckon. Thanks guys and great job.



Prison Q&A



We'd love to hear what's been happening at your prison, what you've been reading or watching and anything else you'd like to share. If you'd like to answer the same questions as below, send them to us and we'll publish your Q&A too!

Justin



Justin writes from a prison in NSW.

What's been happening at your prison at the moment?

Lots of lock ins, new supply chain operations, Course Cert 2 starting soon, BBQ meat packs available $11.70, recently had a NAIDOC Week BBQ.

If you could start a program inside prison what would it be and why?

Definitely a poetry program so we can express ourselves, our emotions, thoughts, feelings and share with others who are interested. We can support and encourage each other.

What is something people on the outside don't understand about prison life?

It would be all the lock ins – it's like you're trapped and there's no escape, it's mentally draining like being held hostage against your will. It's inhumane as we don't get access to the basics like sun or fresh air.

Also the amount of time it takes to see a doctor or nurse: forever.

And the mind games that go on in here – jail politics etc. Physically, being here does not bother you much unless you have a wife and kids etc then it becomes taxing on you. It drains you not to be there on special occasions like anniversaries and kids' birthdays.

I find the psychological games and pressure can be very draining, so 3pm lock in is "me" time to escape the immature bored individuals.

But change is possible for everyone, it's up to the person. Are they willing to turn their life around? It's worth it in the long run not just for yourself but others who care most about us – our family, sons, daughters, wives, friends.

They are doing it hard too without us – it's like they are doing jail time.

They feel mixed emotions like a rollercoaster of ups and downs.

What helps you get through hard days that you'd like to share with others?

Remaining positive despite toxic distractions, trying to overtake your thoughts and mind, focus your energy on things that take your mind to a calm place like reading, poetry.

Making calls to family and friends can definitely get your mind in a better position, it's good for mental health.

Think about the future – better days await with family and friends. I say each day is another step closer to release, you're always moving forward even if it feels slow remember the officers can't stop time ticking forward.

I also say our mistakes do not define us, they teach us we are only human. Nobody's perfect, we made poor choices or a bad decision but it does not reflect our true character.

Exercise is a thing that will lift your mood increase serotonin, joy

or exercise and also share a yarn and have a laugh.

If you could interview a famous person who would it be, why them and what would you ask?

Kylie Minogue. I've actually met Kylie – I won tickets in the Sunday Telegraph years ago to meet her backstage at Capital Theatre with free Lemon Ruski beverages, had my photo taken.

She is a true Aussie icon who most Aussies love and adore due to her performances on *Neighbours*.

I'd ask what was her biggest highlight whilst on the set of *Neighbours* and what is something most people didn't know about Michael Hutchence as she spent time with him and got to hang out with Michael, a true music icon.

If you could give advice to your younger self, what would it be?

Never give up your goals and dreams, try to fulfil your ambitions and don't let anybody hold you back.

Also think before you act as there are consequences for our actions.

Love your mum, treat her kind, make the most of time spent with parents as you never know when they will leave you and go to heaven like my mum in 2017 of a stroke brain aneurysm, tragically gone at 70.

Tell us about a day in your life that you'll never forget.

A pinch myself moment was working at Home nightclub in Darling Harbour from 1998 to 2000.

It was a dream job as I got to meet the world's best DJs like Carl Cox, Judge Jules, Paul Oakenfold, Pete Tong, and to top it off I was there working during the official Olympic Games afterparty for all the Australian athletes: Cathy Freeman, Andrew Gaze, Evander Holyfield was there too.

It was a once in a lifetime thing. Home was the official afterparty venue for athletes to let their hair down – awesome.

What's your favourite TV show right now and why do you like it?

The Voice, as people have amazing skill and talent. They underestimate themselves, doubting their talent and when a judge turns around they are blown away. It's very inspirational and shows we are capable of achieving anything deep, we all have it, just gotta have belief in ourself.

What song or musical artist always lifts your mood? Why?

Jelly Roll. He speaks from the heart, been through struggles but still remains strong. A lot of people can relate to him – powerful words and very meaningful. Also when I hear John Denver it reminds me of mum.

What book has stayed with you after reading it?

Any *Jack Reacher* book by Lee Child, as well as Robert G Barrett's *Mud Crab Boogie*.

Marley



Marley writes from a prison in QLD.

What's been happening at your prison lately?

Not much, just trying to find a way through each day and night with Jesus's guidance, support and advice.

I recently got considered for relevant programs in the coming months, just awaiting an answer from parole to see what my personal rehabilitation is going to look like. Also, not really taken notice of foods because I went on a 'no meat' diet from the start of 2026.

If you could start a new program in your prison, what would it be?

If I could start a program it would be safety awareness and breaking a pattern of drug use and mitigating violence and/or work prep courses.

What's something people on the outside don't understand about prison?

How a single letter/envelope, visit and money order can actually mean a lot to a person, especially if someone may have been sentenced to a long amount of time in custody.

What helps you get through the hard days?

I always tend to rely on guidance and advice from Jesus as the Holy Bible has answers for all of my problems period.

If you could interview someone famous, who would it be?

It would be Eazy-E. Eazy's got trippy music.

What do you like watching on TV?

Cars. I like to watch cars or houses being rebuilt, restoration shows where an American takes vintage items and takes it apart, cleans it then restores it/repairs it.

What music always lifts your mood? Why?

Ben Folds – because it's smooth, sort of like watching waves roll in. A$AP – when I need inspiration. Post Malone – when I need to vent.

Female artists are therapeutic as I can't help but be harmonised by women's voices – MIA for starters and Florence & the Machine, Amy Shark too.

The book that has stayed with me on a deep personal, spiritual level is The Holy Bible because it continues to guide me.

Share Your Q&A

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News and Investigations

AI Used in Parole Decision

By Denham Sadler

Continued from page 1.

It was recently revealed that the Tasmanian Parole Board had cited a fake case generated by AI to justify a controversial and unlawful parole condition. The condition, placed on Susan Neill Fraser, prevented her from speaking publicly or to the media about her claims of innocence.

The Tasmanian Supreme Court ruled that the condition was unlawful as it was uncertain, ambiguous and legally unreasonable and that she was denied procedural fairness.

The court also heard that the Tasmanian Parole Board had relied on a case that had been generated by AI and did not actually exist, known as a "hallucination".

The case has amplified existing concerns about a lack of transparency with the parole process around the country, and the use of AI in important decision-making processes.

The Human Rights Law Centre represented Neill-Fraser, and its legal director Sarah Schwartz said that the use of AI in the parole process was "really concerning".

"Do we want people's fundamental human rights to be mediated by AI?" Schwartz told *About Time*. "There are reasons why parole boards are set up in the way they are, with community decision-makers. If they're relying on AI to justify decisions as opposed to human reason, that's pretty concerning."

Tasmanian Greens Justice spokesperson Cassy O'Connor said the reliance on AI by the parole board was "deeply disturbing", while Attorney-General Guy Barnett said it was "unacceptable".

The Tasmanian Justice Department is reviewing past parole decisions in Tasmania to determine if artificial intelligence (AI) was used, and Prisoners' Legal Service Tasmania is also sifting through past parole decisions to see if there were other uses of AI.

About Time asked the parole boards in each state and territory whether AI was being used at all in the parole process.

The Victoria, Western Australian and ACT parole boards said that AI was not used for researching or writing parole decisions or reasons.

In the ACT, parole board members have limited access to ACT Government AI, in accordance with the territory's AI policy.

The use of AI in Tasmania would have gone undetected if Neill-Fraser hadn't challenged her parole condition at the Supreme Court, Schwartz said.

"Most people on parole don't bring judicial review proceedings challenging parole decisions – that's costly, lengthy and onerous," she said.

"We don't know the extent of malpractice amongst parole boards in Tasmania and around the country."

This is illustrative of the need for more transparency and accountability in the parole process around Australia, she said.

"This speaks to a much broader issue about the extent to which administrative decision-makers in these sorts of quasi-legal environments that have such a huge impact on people's human rights are using AI to justify their decisions," Schwartz said.

"There's a need for proper transparency in those places. There's the broader issue of the black box that is parole-decision-making in this country. There needs to be greater transparency and accountability. We need proper human rights safeguards and access to legal representatives."

In Victoria the adult and youth parole boards are expressly exempt from the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, and the rules of natural justice, which include the right to a fair hearing and to appeal a decision.

The parole boards in Queensland and the ACT are subject to human rights charters.

South Australia, the ACT and the NT are the only jurisdictions where you are entitled to representation from a lawyer or can make a submission from a legal representative.

Decisions are published publicly in some states and territories, and not all require full reasons to be given to the individual impacted by the parole decision.

The faulty use of AI in Tasmania would have been picked up far earlier if the woman had access to legal representation before the Supreme Court challenge, Schwartz said.

"If our client had a legal representative in this matter, and they had been given reasons and had access to make their own submissions, this is something that could have been picked up a lot earlier, rather than two years down the track," she said.

"This document would have gone completely unnoticed if we hadn't brought this legal case to the Supreme Court.



Sick of being sick? Have you been forced to wait months or even years to see a doctor in a Qld prison?

We know that many prisoners in Queensland are suffering because of long wait times to see a doctor, a nurse or a dentist, while others have been diagnosed with serious conditions – including Hep C, Cancer, and HIV – for which they have received no treatment.

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LEVITT ROBINSON

Though Levitt Robinson Solicitors is located in Sydney it advocates for the rights of adult prisoners nationwide.

The Victorian Election



What are the major parties offering?

People in prison serving a sentence of less than five years are required to vote in the state election, if they are Australian citizens and have lived in Victoria for more than a month.

At the election, the 88 seats in the Legislative Assembly (lower house) and 40 seats in the Legislative Council (lower house) will be decided.

The party that has the most seats in the lower house will form the state government.

State governments are responsible for things like prisons, hospitals, crime prevention policies, education and training, transport and road safety.

The candidates you will be voting for will depend on where you live in the community.

You will place two separate votes on the day: one for the person you want to represent the area that you live in the community (your district), and another for the five people you want to represent your area in the upper house (your region).

The Victorian Election Commission will have run mobile enrolment outreach during October and there will be mobile polling booths at your prison during the early voting period, which is 18 November to 27 November.

There will be 18 mobile voting sessions across the state's 15 adult prisons and three youth justice precincts.

How To Vote

The Victorian election uses preferential voting.

This means that if the person you most want to win can't get enough votes to win, your vote will then go towards your next preferred person.

For the lower house, you will need to write a '1' in the box of the person you most want to represent your area, and then number **all** of the other boxes in order.

For the upper house, you **don't have to fill in all the boxes**, and you can choose to vote above or below the thick black line.

If you vote above the line, you need to fill in a '1' in the box of your top choice, then at least '2, 3, 4 and 5' in your next top choices.

If you want to vote below the line, you will be choosing from the individual candidates running for each party, and you have to pick **at least five** that you want to vote for, in order.

The Policies

The major parties in Victoria have all announced a number of policies as they try to get your vote. These are known as "election promises", and each party is saying they will introduce these policies if they win the election.

Labor

The Labor Party is currently in government in Victoria, and is led by Premier Ben Carroll.

Its criminal justice-related election policies include:

- The introduction this year of Adult Time For Violent Crime laws, which see young offenders who commit certain crimes facing adult courts
- New penalties for gangs and adults who get youths to commit crimes for them
- Increased penalties for ram raids, assaults on retail and hospitality workers and repeat violent offenders
- Planned expansion of stop and search powers to search people on the street for weapons
- The Violence Reduction Unit, which aims to identify at-risk youths early and coordinate mentoring and sport and community programs
- An independent review of Victoria's sentencing laws

Other Labor policies include:

- Opening more than 100 new schools
- Free early learning for children aged 3 and 4
- Opening 12 new hospitals
- Free public transport for under 18 year olds, and half price public transport for adults until next year

Liberal National Coalition

The Liberal-National Coalition is the Opposition party in Victoria, and is led by Jess Wilson.

Its criminal justice-related policies include:

- Scrapping emergency management days for people in prison
- Recruiting 3000 extra police officers
- Recruiting 200 more Protective Services Officers
- Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time laws to include arson and car theft
- A new Court of Criminal Appeal
- Investment in "proven early intervention and rehabilitation programs"

Other LNP policies include:

- A $1.27 billion plan to divert thousands of public hospital patients to private hospitals and day surgeries for free
- Scrapping infrastructure projects including the Suburban Rail Loop
- Capping weekly tolls at $50 for motorists
- Lifting the land tax threshold to $300,000 over five years

The Greens

The Victorian Greens is led by Ellen Sandell.

Criminal justice-related policies include:

- Increased funding for youth crime prevention programs such as the Venny playground in Kensington, which is staffed by youth workers, and homework and basketball clubs
- Doubling the amount of public housing
- Increased funding for frontline and prevention family violence services

Other policies include:

- Capping rent increases
- Cutting stamp duty tax
- Free public transport
- Making dental care free
- Banning gas drilling in the state's oceans, closing the remaining coal-fired power stations earlier and banning fossil fuel donations to politicians

One Nation

One Nation is led in Victoria by Warren Pickering.

Criminal justice-related policies include:

- Increasing the number of police officers by recruiting Australian Defence Force veterans
- Increased penalties for violent youth offenders
- Reducing the age of criminal responsibility to 10 years old
- Holding parents liable for fines and property damage caused by their children
- Increasing the number of magistrates and funding a 24-hour bail court

Other policies include:

- Legalising the personal use of pepper spray
- Abolishing the state's Treaty with First Peoples
- Scrapping payroll tax in regional Victoria

Victorian Electoral Commission

Victorian state election

If you are currently serving a sentence of less than 5 years, you are eligible to vote in the upcoming Victorian state election.

The VEC will be visiting prisons to support enrolment and voting in the lead up to the election.

Every vote counts this state election, **Saturday 28 November**.

State election
Saturday 28 November

Authorised by S Bluemmel, Electoral Commissioner, 530 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria.

SA

New Strategy to Reduce Recidivism

The South Australian government has released a new strategy aiming to reduce the number of people returning to prison after being released by one-third over the next four years.

The strategy places retraining programs at its centre.

This includes vocational training in prison, with an aim for people to be leaving prison with industry-ready skills and employment opportunities.

VIC

Opposition Vows to Scrap Emergency Management Days

The Victorian Opposition has promised to get rid of emergency management days if it wins the upcoming state election.

Emergency management days allow people in prison to receive time off their sentence if they are impacted by certain evens, such as lockdowns due to strikes.

Prison Sentence Lengths Increase Over Last Decade

The length of prison sentences in Victoria has increased over the past decade, thanks in part to the introduction of standard sentences in 2018, a new report has found.

The Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council recently released a report looking at the impact of changes which required the courts to take the standard sentence into account when deciding the sentence for certain offences.

It found that the imprisonment lengths for nearly all of these standard sentence offences has increased in the last decade.

The median prison sentence for murder has increased from 21 to 24 years, while for trafficking it has jumped from seven to 11 years.

Despite this, 85 per cent of sentences for all but two standard sentence offences were shorter than the standard sentence.

QLD

Proposed Mandatory Sentencing for Certain Breaches of Bail

By Prisoners' Legal Service

The Queensland Government has introduced the *Break Bail go to Jail and Other Amendments Bill 2026*. The Bill introduces a new offence for committing particular offences while on bail, unlawfully at large or failing to appear.

If the Bill is passed and made into law, then youths and adults who are found guilty of committing a serious offence while on bail will face a mandatory minimum sentence of 1 year imprisonment, with a maximum sentence of 3 years' imprisonment.

The Bill is currently being considered by a Parliamentary Committee, which has held public hearings around Queensland in September. The Parliamentary Committee was due to report back to the State Parliament on in mid-October.

NSW

Transfers to Junee Completed

About 90 inmates have been transported from Goulburn prison to Junee Correctional Centre.

The NSW government recently announced that people being held at four wings at the Goulburn prison would be transported to other prisons in the state.

The four wings are the maximum security facility at Goulburn, with the High Risk Management Correctional Centre to continue operating.

State Government Announces Nearly 1000 New Prison Beds

Nearly 1000 new prison beds will come online soon as the NSW government looks to deal with a fast-growing prison population.

The 515-bed Dawn de Loas Correctional Centre at the Silverwater Correctional Complex will be reopened, at a cost of more than $47 million.

The construction of more than 360 new beds at Parklea Correctional Centre will also be fast-tracked by the state government.

There are a record number of people in prison on remand in NSW, now accounting for 46 per cent of all people in custody.

NT

Education Milestone

More than 2000 people in prison in the Northern Territory have now taken part in education and skills training through Charles Darwin University.

There have been more than 500 people enrolled in NT White Card training, which covers essential workplace health and safety practices that are needed for working on construction sites.

Food handling courses, forklift licences and construction pathways are also on offer.

Northern Territory Corrections and the Charles Darwin University signed a deal on prison education in early 2024.

ACT

Government Consults on Transitional Release Program

The ACT government is reviewing the transitional release program at Alexander Maconochie Centre, and recently consulted with victims of crime.

This program allows people with up to two years left on their non-parole period to apply for leave for activities that will help them prepare for life in the community.

These activities include going to the bank, sorting future accommodation, visiting the shopping centre and recreational physical activities.

Participants in this program are escorted by ACT Corrective Services staff.

WA

Body-Worn Cameras Coming to Max-Security Prison

Officers at maximum-security prisons in Western Australia are now wearing body-worn cameras.

The cameras will capture video and audio of incidents in the men's and women's prisons.

More than 500 cameras have now been distributed to officers at Casuarina, Hakea, Bandyup, Melaleuca and Albany prisons.

"The cameras' use will make interactions between officers and prisoners more transparent and enable more effective reviews of incidents," Corrective Services Minister Dr Tony Buti said.

"The evidence collected by these devices is expected to reduce assaults on staff. It's one more tool available to help make our prisons more secure and allow staff to focus on rehabilitation prisoners to enhance community safety."



People in Prison to Be Paid $1 Per Hour to Fix Victoria's Roads



By Denham Sadler

A Corrections Victoria pilot program will see supervised, minimum-security incarcerated people performing roadside maintenance.

This work will include lawn mowing, controlling weeds, removing graffiti and picking up rubbish, and the state government said it will free up "skilled roadside maintenance crews" to focus on repairing potholes.

In the United States, similar schemes allow people in prison to get time cut from their sentence for performing this work.

But *About Time* understands Victoria's plan does not include a provision for reduced sentences, and will see incarcerated people paid under the current wage schemes in prisons.

These wages range from $7.15 to $9.80 per day, far below the minimum wage in the community.

This means that incarcerated people working on Victoria's roads will be paid as little as 90c per hour.

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) CEO Nerita Waight said that people in prison should be paid comparably to members of the general public for this work.

"Having people who are incarcerated working to fix Victorian roads is a reasonable idea, as long as they receive recognition of work undertaken and are equitably paid – this is why we have a national minimum wage which should be implemented across all Corrections facilities," Waight told *About Time*.

Tina McPhee is the Lived Experience Advocacy Coordinator at the Justice Reform Initiative. She said that time outside of the prison is important, but poor wages and conditions have a lasting impact.

McPhee worked on a scenic bikeway when she was incarcerated, which involved eight hour days for a wage of $50 per week, around $1.25 per hour. Workers also did not have the same protections as someone in the community working on the same project would have, and were not paid superannuation.

"Labouring on a scenic bike track taught me that finding value in the opportunity does not mean the working conditions were fair, or that the program was ethical," McPhee said.

That's why McPhee said she has mixed feelings about the Victorian government's recently announced plan to get people in prison to work on the state's road.

"Getting outside the prison can be enormously positive – I know how much those hours away meant to me," she said.

"But the value I found in leaving the prison shouldn't be conflated with the value placed on our labour."



New Police Powers: Extradition Warrants

Police can now enter anywhere they believe a wanted person is located for extradition. What questions does this raise?



Willy Pleasance

By Benjamin Aitken

Benjamin Aitken is a multidisciplinary artist whose work is deeply influenced by personal experience in prison and a commitment to social change. Aitken is a five-time finalist in the Archibald Prize, and has also been honoured with the Tony Fini Foundation Prize at the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

An arrest warrant gives police authority to arrest a person. But what happens when that person is believed to be inside somebody else's home? This is what new changes to extradition warrants were trying to address. An extradition warrant is an arrest warrant for the purpose of returning someone to a different country for criminal prosecution.

Since August this year, police executing certain extradition warrants can enter premises where they reasonably believe the wanted person is located, using necessary and reasonable force. A premises might be a house, hotel room or vehicle. It does not have to belong to the person named on the warrant.

The change closes a fairly obvious gap in the law. The Australian Federal Police told a Senate inquiry that, unlike ordinary federal arrest law, the *Extradition Act* gave officers no express power to enter premises and use reasonable force. Police could have authority to arrest someone, know where they are, and still find themselves standing outside the door, unable to enter.

Giving them power to open it makes sense. The more difficult question is whose door it might be.

A magistrate does not separately approve entry to a particular address. A police officer instead needs reasonable grounds to believe the wanted person is there. That might be their own home. It might also be their girlfriend's apartment, their parents' house or a mate's hotel room. And because this is extradition law, the person police are looking for may be facing prosecution overseas and have no conviction at all.

Police ordinarily have to announce themselves and give occupants an opportunity to let them in. Force must be necessary and reasonable, but police can enter immediately in certain circumstances involving safety or the risk of frustrating the arrest. Night entry also has exceptions.

The government acknowledged that these powers engage the right to privacy. Its position is that the restrictions make the interference reasonable and proportionate. Perhaps they do. The problem is that 'reasonable' will often be much easier to assess after the event. An officer can have perfectly reasonable grounds to believe someone is behind a door and still be wrong.

Parliament has at least left itself an opportunity to find out the answers to some of these questions.

A Senate committee must begin reviewing the extradition amendments within two years, including their unintended consequences. It should ask how often police entered homes belonging to people who were not the subject of the warrant, how often force was used, and how often the person they were looking for wasn't actually there.

Police needed a workable way to execute these extradition warrants.

But the inconvenience in the old law fell on police. Some of the risk in the new law falls on everyone else.

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The Real Number of People in Prison Working

By Damien Linnane
Continued from page 1.

I waited in line at reception after entering custody in 2015, and listened to the guard asking the standard 20-odd questions for new arrivals with the men in front of me. When it came time for me to answer, one of my responses took him by surprise.

"What's your highest level of education?" he asked in a bored tone.

"Bachelor's Degree," I replied.

He stopped typing, actually looked at me, and eyed me for a few seconds. When he figured out I was telling the truth, I got offered the job as the new education sweeper almost immediately.

In exchange for working in the education department, my prison 'pay' was increased from the base rate of $15 a week to $23, about an extra 40 cents an hour. Despite the low pay, the other prisoners explained how lucky it was for me to have a job. You see, there were around 30 prisoners in the main wing, and alongside the person who washed the floors, I was only the second one to be employed.

So imagine my surprise when I read the Corrective Services NSW 2024-25 annual report as part of my PhD research. The 'Work and Education' page notes their 'key highlights', which includes that 85.7 per cent of 'eligible inmates in custody' were working. I did a double take. More than 8 in 10 prisoners working? I thought there was no way that was correct. Then I noticed the keyword: eligible.

But the report didn't clarify who was eligible and who wasn't.

Thankfully, the Productivity Commission (PC) did. The PC is an independent government research body. Each year they release a Report on Government Services, covering all government services, including health and education.

A section on Corrective Services includes data on many things, including operating costs, education rates and employment. The PC clarified that there are 11 criteria that make a prisoner ineligible for work. Some of these, such as "ill health" and "hospital patients", are understandable. Others less so. Prisoners who are deemed ineligible include those "at centres where the jurisdiction's policy is not to provide work or where work is not available".

Yes, you read that correctly. You can be deemed ineligible for work, even if you want to work, if the prison does not provide work opportunities for you. The PC clarified that Corrections departments only provide them with data on what percentage of prisoners they have deemed eligible to work, using criteria that Corrections have chosen themselves.

This data gives no indication of how many prisoners were actually deemed eligible to work. Realising this incomplete data is not helpful in understanding true prison employment rates, I began seeking out the full information myself.

Corrections in most jurisdictions agreed to release the relevant data to me, though South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory refused and was instead applied for through Freedom of Information. The Northern Territory is yet to respond to the request. The following table shows the percentage of eligible prisoners working – the data which Corrections provides to the PC – and the percentage of prisoners who are actually working.

Among the Corrections departments that were transparent enough to share the data, it shows that on average the actual number of prisoners working is more than 25 per cent lower than the figure reported to the PC.

Associate Professor Benjamin Spivak is an expert in statistics at Swinburne University, and he shares my concerns about how Corrections choose to report employment data.

"The way [the data is reported] tells you how many people were able to take a job that was offered but tells you nothing about how many prisoners were offered a job in the first place," Spivak told *About Time*.

"This is a problem because it means that if a person is held somewhere work is not available they are not counted in the rate. This would be the equivalent of reporting unemployment rates for Australia and not including people who could not find work.

"An easy fix is for reporting to include how many people are in custody, how many are working and how many were classed as ineligible and why."

After telling them my concerns, the PC has told me that they will take my feedback on board for how data is collected for the 2028 Report on Government Services, as it is too late in the data collection process to change how data is reported for 2027.

	Percentage of eligible prisoners working	Actual percentage of prisoners working
NSW	85.7%	52.6%
VIC	91.5%	61.2%
QLD	65.9%	39.5%
TAS	85.5%	53.0%
ACT	90.1%	57.6%
WA	81.4%	73.3%
SA	77.6%	50.0%
NT	78.5%	Refused



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Inspector's Corner

Your monthly review of prison oversight



TASMANIA

Report Released Into Youth Education

The Tasmanian Custodial Inspector has released a report on the educational programs and training opportunities offered at the Ashley Youth Detention Centre.

The inspector found that this school is performing "to a very high standard" but is facing some challenges around staffing and lockdowns at the centre.

Regular lockdowns at the youth justice facility mean that children are often unable to attend school, the report found. Last year, classes were cancelled about a quarter of the time.

"Operational factors within Ashley Youth Detention Centre remain the greatest barrier to children and young people's regular and uninterrupted access to education," the Custodial Inspector said.

"It is no longer tenable to accept the status quo of children and young people in detention missing school for operational reasons."

VICTORIA

Police Apologise For Death of Man in Watch House

The Victoria Police Chief Commissioner has apologised for the death of a man who was held for hours in a watch house with a brain injury while waiting for medical assistance.

The coronial inquest into the death of John Makai in September 2023 was recently held in Victoria.

The inquest was shown CCTV video of police officers carrying Makai's limb body into a holding cell in Broadmeadows, after they were called following an altercation at his house.

Body-worn camera footage from the officers showed the man standing up, then losing balance and falling back into a bookcase, hitting his head.

The coronial inquest heard that "it appears...a developing brain injury was impeding his ability to walk".

Officers at the time thought he was in a "deep drunken sleep", but the inquest heard this "may have actually been a traumatic injury and bleeding into the brain".

The man remained basically motionless in the cell for four hours overnight, with no police officers entering the cell during this period.

It wasn't until a new watch house sergeant arrived at 6am that an ambulance was called, and it was discovered that Makai had a traumatic brain injury. He later died in hospital.

A lawyer for the Chief Commissioner admitted that the custody officers had not completed a medical checklist or risk assessment at the police station, and apologised over the death.

"It's a situation which we work tirelessly to avoid," the lawyer told the inquest. "In this case, however, my client acknowledges at the outside of this inquest that the standards of care in custody fell short of expected standards."

Review Into Transfer of Children to Adult Prisons

A 16-year-old boy was held in a maximum-security adult prison in conditions that "bordered on solitary confinement" for more than 22 hours per day after he was transferred from a youth justice facility, an investigation has found.

The Victorian Ombudsman found that the boy's human rights were breached by the Department of Justice and Corrective Services' (DJCS) decision to move him from Parkville Youth Justice Precinct to Melbourne Assessment Prison.

At the adult prison, the teenager was kept in his cell for more than 22 hours each day, and was often handcuffed when he was let out.

He had little access to the outside, no in-person visits and just three hours of education time across six weeks, the Ombudsman found.

The human rights assessment completed as part of this transfer was written in just one day, the Ombudsman found, and was done in consultation with the staff who were managing the child and without all the relevant information.

The findings come as reforms to how child transfers to adult prisons have just come into effect, with the grounds to do so being broadened and made more subjective.

This has led to concerns that more children will be placed in adult prisons due to the changes. The Ombudsman has called on DJCS to ensure it conducts proper human rights assessments before this takes place.

Under Victorian law, a child who is 16 years or older can be moved to an adult prison under certain circumstances, as a last resort.

To do this, DJCS must make an application to the Youth Parole Board, and the department is required to act in a way that is compatible with the state's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

Under reforms that came into effect from September, existing safeguards around the transfer of children to adult prisons have been removed.

There is now a more subjective test in place, meaning that issues such as operational or resourcing pressure could lead to children being transferred, the Ombudsman said.

"It is imperative that the Department undertake meaningful human rights assessments to ensure that decisions are proportionate, lawful and consistent with the Charter, and that transfers remain a last resort," the Ombudsman said.

"Children are not adults. They are developmentally distinct. Even those who have made poor decisions and caused harm to others need humane treatment that will promote their rehabilitation and eventual reintegration into society."

The Ombudsman recommended that the Victorian government make it illegal to hold a child in an adult prison, and for the Youth Parole Board to be made subject to the human rights charter. These recommendations were rejected by the state government.

HANNAY
CRIMINAL DEFENCE

R v Thrupp; R v Taiao; R v Walker; R v Daniels [2024] QCA 134

At Hannay Criminal Defence, we are proud of the results we have achieved for our clients in some of Australia's most serious and complex criminal matters. From trial advocacy to appellate litigation, our solicitors regularly take on difficult cases where the stakes could not be higher.

Our client whilst represented by a different firm had previously been convicted of two (2) counts of *manslaughter* and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment on each count, to be served concurrently. These deaths were known as the '**Toolbox Murders**'.

Hannay Criminal Defence acted for an appellate in his appeal to the Queensland Court of Appeal, challenging the convictions on the basis that the verdicts were unreasonable and could not be supported having regard to the evidence, together with issues concerning the legal directions and the prosecution's case concerning criminal responsibility.

The Court of Appeal carefully considered the evidence and the principles governing criminal responsibility under the Queensland Criminal Code, including the requirements concerning knowledge, intention and participation in an offence. The Court emphasised that, where a person is alleged to have aided another offender, the prosecution must establish the relevant state of knowledge required to attract criminal responsibility.

On 16 July 2024, after being incarcerated for approximately seven (7) years, the Queensland Court of Appeal allowed our clients appeal. His two manslaughter convictions were set aside, and, critically, the Court ordered that judgments and verdicts of acquittal be entered on both counts.

This outcome demonstrates the importance of thorough appellate advocacy and careful scrutiny of the evidence and legal principles underlying a criminal conviction.

At Hannay Criminal Defence, we are committed to defending our clients' rights at every stage of the criminal justice process, including appeals where a conviction warrants further judicial scrutiny.

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• Experiences

‘Every Day Done Is Another Day Gone’: A First-Timer on Remand



Harrison Doust

By Landon

Landon writes from a prison in NSW.

Ice was my crutch, my friend, my demon. But after 11 months, the mental call for ice has diminished greatly, and as it fades away, the times when it taps me on the shoulder are only in those moments of darkness, the times when those flashes of realisation, that gap between why I’m here and how long it’s been since I’ve seen my pets, my family and my friends, and the place I once called home, has grown.

The faint upside is that the light at the end of the tunnel gets brighter every day! Every day done is another day gone.

The eye-opening part of this is just how many decent blokes have been separated from their family, their homes, their jobs and their friends, and how biased the “justice” system is towards incarceration as seemingly the only option.

The extra emotional damage that has been done, is being done, and will continue to be done, is incalculable.

Sadly, it seems that public outrages sway too heavily on public opinion and therefore the expectations of the justice system are to enforce penalties which are over exaggerated in the context of the crime and the people involved.

Surely there must be alternatives – better and more efficient alternatives – to incarceration. But our governments continue to cut funding to mental health support services, an absurdity in the light of so many studies calling for an increase in funding.

The identification of triggers, causes, the unearthing of long suppressed problems will continue to have too many people, being jailed instead of being given better ways and methods of atoning for their momentary lapse of reason, or their excessive punishment by a system biased and broken.

Being jailed fosters a lack of faith and of trust in those that, in many cases, were once seen as fair and just, as doing the right thing by society. It also makes us more apprehensive of the lawmakers and wary of those we once trusted to “do the right thing”.

By being locked up and forced to live in a community filled with bitterness, and in some cases bitterness bordering on outright hatred, emotional osmosis occurs and even the most sane and rational cannot help but be ‘infected’ with that bitterness and feel that what they sensed was once right is no longer.

There’s a reinforcement, not reduction, of the lack of self-worth and self-esteem.

Time happens to all living creatures. It is only we humans who believe time away from others with nothing to change behaviour, time away from society, will make us better in society. It’s a belief that is wrong and outdated and, sadly, highly unlikely to evolve as society has evolved.

That’s my five cents and GST.

• Write to Us

Your contributions are the centerpiece of the paper. If you would like to contribute to *About Time*, please send your letters to the below postal address (it’s free!):

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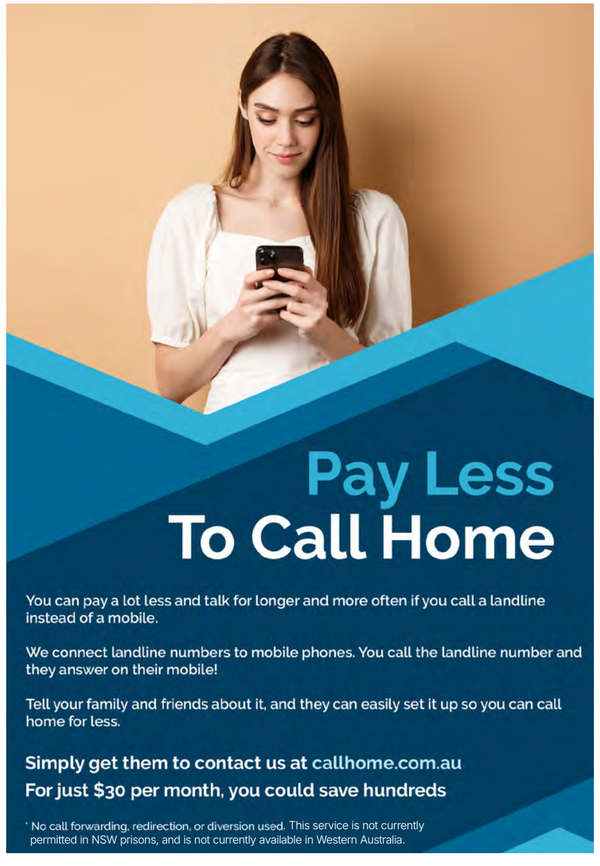

The Five Senses

We invited formerly incarcerated folk to write about an object from prison life and describe it using the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.



The use of the senses is an important writing skill. We invite you to have a go. Pick an object or place. What can you see, how does it look? What is the feeling on your skin? Does it make a sound even if it’s quiet? Does it have a particular smell? What memories does it hold?

Water’s Extraordinary Beauty



By Stephen Rothwell

I went to Leicester Prison in 1987, where people had once been hanged. It was a 19th-century dungeon in every sense of the word.

One of the extraordinary experiences for me was going into what they called the slop-out room, where we emptied our potties. There were taps there – ordinary taps with fresh water.

The sheer beauty of that water expressed itself across all five senses.

It was cold. Silky. Life-giving. Clean. To me, it became the essence of freedom.

It was hydration piped in from the free world. Cool, refreshing, familiar. The experience of it was exactly the same as turning on a tap back home, and because of that I found myself savouring it.

I revelled in how it flowed and eddied around my hands, thrillingly animated to the touch.

There would be people queuing behind me, waiting their turn, so my time with the water was brief. In those few compressed moments, I would linger as long as I could.

Even the faint taste of fluoride was reassuring. It told me the water was clean. It cut through the smell of the buckets and the waste. The sound of it splashing into the sink became beautiful too. It drowned out the clanking of prison buckets, gates and heavy doors.

The light sparkled through the water as it swirled towards the plughole. It shimmered with a kind of quiet invitation.

Then I’d turn on the hot tap. Even that had its own smell. A warm, comforting smell that reminded me of having a shower at home.

For those few moments, while filling my freshwater jug, I felt connected to the outside world. I was, quite literally, being supplied by it.

It didn’t necessarily give me hope. What it gave me was a reprieve.

It was a brief escape from spending 23 hours a day in a cell without running water. All I had there was a water jug and a potty. Nobody ever used the potty for anything more than urinating. The smell of faeces in a locked cell would have been unbearable, so everyone waited until morning.

Looking back, I don’t think many of us realised quite how captivated we were by that water.

There was so little beauty around us. So little freshness. So little life.

And so we formed a relationship with it. It wasn’t merely water.

For a few precious moments each day, it was freedom flowing from a tap.

Playing Cards



By Rafael Rodrigo

SHMACK

SHMACK

I jump up off the cold steel stool and race to the window to see who’s cracking on, only to realise it’s just the card table.

My cellie had just gotten into a scrap and my mind had been trying to rewire itself so quickly that it’d forgotten there were other ways to make such sounds. It was my third day in. I let my gaze linger, watching the blokes slap cards down with such speed and precision that it made me shudder. I’d seen such empty stares, such tension, that it was oddly refreshing to see people enjoying something as simple as cards. A buy up slip slid under the door later, and I ordered me some cards.

That fresh deck smell, like a new car, clean and crisp and untainted. That smoothness as you shuffle them, not a bend or blemish. No mileage. My first actual possession. Then, with my own deck and some of the more patient fellas, I learnt how to play Chop.

It marked a means of killing time and getting out of the monotony: something to look forward to, something involving luck, something to get better at. Invaluable in a place that cares so little for entertainment, progression, and joy. It also brought a sense of nostalgia, of memories of being a little kid, playing cards with my family on camping trips.

The stakes were a lot higher in here though, and my family had never punched up over getting chopped for two red twos, but still. I practised in my cell, shuffling for hours, learning how to play solitaire and other solo card games.

I gradually improved, though there will forever be that gap between a first-timer and someone who has done long stretches; people actually wanted to play with me.

It brought a small sense of community, of getting to know people at the table. I even became a sort of disciple to an older Indigenous fella; he could flick the cards like bullets, always landing bang on in the middle of the table, always with a saying.

There’s a certain level of speed, skill and smarts that you won’t find anywhere else. Those times of laughin' round the table will forever stick with me.

In a time so boring, so draining, it’s just good to have a laugh. Something as simple as a deck of cards can make the time just that little bit easier. I wish everyone good luck, and I hope yous get out of the hole. Can’t win with your party in the hole. All love.



The Guitar



By Carly Smith

The object I chose is the guitar. I first saw her leaning silently against the wall in Miss Patterson's office. The off-white small box shaped room held only a slim vertical tinted window on one side of the building.

This restricted most of the natural light, which kept the room feeling bland and suffocating...until I saw her.

My eyes were instantly drawn to the warmth in the room. She was calling my name like a fresh blank canvas, something I could draw a beautiful picture on. I felt it rush through me as I recognised her, a sudden surge of energy and power. A smile from the inside spread to my face. She was familiar and to me she represented home.

I walked over and picked up the petite wooden instrument, the scent of heartache, loneliness and deep regret linger on the fret, the nylon strings cold, stiff and greatly out of tune, still resonated a feeling of freedom, one that instantaneously took me back to childhood memories of playing guitar with my father.

A time where anything was possible, everything was an adventure and life was almost always happy.

People might not always understand different languages from different cultures and countries, but we all understand the universal language of the soul: music.

Knowing this instrument and its capabilities, I somehow managed to convince the officers to allow me to take it back to my pod and keep it in my cell, which was a win on its own.

A friend who also played guitar got on board and we began to write songs together. For the first time inside these silencing walls of prison, I had a voice – one that no one could touch or take away. One that was freeing and unique to say the least. It became an outlet, one I could focus my energy toward and create something beautiful opposed to sinking in sadness and negativity.

This was sound healing at its finest, and it was contagious. Before we knew it, half of the compound was singing our music, which seemed to generate a special kind of energy. It was communication on another level and somehow it seemed to bring us all together.

The guitar, the music, much like the gold used in the Japanese art of Kintsugi (putting broken pieces together with gold) embraced our flaws and turned what was once broken into something spectacular.

The Prison Jumpsuit



By Gary Griffiths

I don't know if it's different in other states but when you go for a visit in WA you come out of your prison greens and you get put in a grey jumpsuit and they zip it up at the back with a cable tie.

I'll start with the smell. It smelled like unwashed dirt and energy. It was horrible. It was everybody else's emotion from their previous visits – all the crying and the laughter; all the hope and the failure; and it was all trapped in this suit.

Those jump suits smelt different to other jail clothes – it really caught me off guard. The suits smelt like visits, and they smelt like anxiety. The visit room is always buzzing with anxiety. When you're in there, you don't know if the person is coming so you go to the visit room and wait and 90 per cent of the time, there are three to four guys whose visitor doesn't show up for whatever reason and you can see it on their faces after a certain point they know it. The mood was very tense and anxious, and these feelings also get stuck in the visit suits.

They cut the back of the cable tie so you can't fiddle with it or the person who's visiting can't do anything to it. I felt like I was in an asylum. I felt like a mental patient and I couldn't focus. During the visit, I completely lost everything I wanted to say to my parents.

Looking back, mum was heartbroken. She was asking me, "How are you? How have you been?". And I just couldn't talk to her properly because I was so taken back by the fact I got cable tied like an animal. I felt like my power had been taken away from me, made to feel like a mentally unstable person in front of my mum when I wasn't.

I feel like the energy of the person wearing it comes out into the water when they get washed, so they're all continuously washed in this big tidal wave of energy that you do and don't want to feel. You could be sitting in the visit room talking to your partner saying, "Oh my god, baby, I'm gonna get out in three days". And the person in a jumpsuit next to you or after you could literally be being told that their loved one or their dad has died in the same visit room – it's crazy.

It's like all the feelings are just like compiled into this massive ball of energy, and then it's almost like when they get washed the cycle just goes on and on and on. I hated going through the whole ordeal of getting into the suit, getting it zipped up and then clipped. It was impossible to get an hour of some form of normality in that suit.

Another way to describe it is like a herd of sheep being grabbed and cable tied at the feet to be sheered. We're expected to let our emotions out and see your loved ones, only to be herded back an hour later to life of muster and prison foods.

People don't talk about it much, but the time after a visit can be a horrible time to be a prisoner, especially for the ones who have young kids.

I hope this has given people some insight into how hard it can be at certain points in your sentence. So stay free and if you're reading this from inside and it has hit a nerve, use it as motivation to see those loved ones out of prison for the rest of your days when you do eventually get out.

The Fence



By Renee McNab

The prison fence is something you can never ignore. There were so many of them, but the one surrounding the yard where I was housed stayed with me the most.

No matter where I stood, it was always there. At times it made me feel like a caged animal, but other times I'd find myself sitting against it after muster, staring through the metal grills and wondering what was happening in the outside world.

I'd sit there wondering what my kids were doing at that exact moment.

Did they remember me?

Were they disappointed in me?

I wondered how my mum was coping and whether she was disappointed in me too. Life was still moving on without me, and all I could do was imagine it.

Looking back, I found myself behind those fences more than once because of the choices I made through addiction. But during my final incarceration, sitting against that fence, I finally admitted enough was enough.

For the first time in my life, I stopped making excuses and accepted that if I wanted to stay free, I had to get clean and change my life.

Prison has its own sounds.

Officers calling out people by their last name, gates opening and slamming shut, keys rattling, people lining up for muster, and voices echoing across the yard through the speakers.

Those sounds became part of everyday life, but they were never the sounds I wanted to wake up to.

I missed hearing birds chirping outside my bedroom window, my kids' voices, my mum, and my dog's paws running across the ground.

I missed the little things like lighting my favourite coconut and lime candle and the flavours of proper home-cooked meals shared around the dinner table. Especially my mum's signature fettuccine bosciola, instead of eating bland prison food from an aluminium tray.

One memory I came back to often was Bondi Beach. It was one of the last places I visited before I was incarcerated.

I remembered myself walking along the sand, feeling the warmth of it beneath my feet, smelling the salty air and listening to the waves crashing around me.

More than anything, I missed hugging the people I loved for longer than the few minutes visits allowed.

That fence reminded me every day of what I had lost, but it also reminded me of what I still wanted and what I was capable of.

People often think rehabilitation starts when the prison gates open.

Mine didn't.

It started while I was still standing in that yard, looking beyond that fence and making a promise to myself that when I served my time, I wouldn't waste it.

Every day I looked beyond that fence, I imagined the life I wanted to build. Not a perfect life, just an honest one.

One where I could sit with my family, make amends over time and never again take them or my freedom for granted.

Of course the fence never moved.

But I walked out of those gates for good and have never looked back all these years later.

And I wish that for as many people as possible, especially the amazing women I did time with.

Watching Rust



By Ashleigh Chapman

I was standing by a glass window surrounded by metal and concrete, inside and out. The same view for two years. Only one thing changed over the years, the metal. The metal on this stationary bike I had only used once. I spent two years watching rust.

Rust was growing on the stationary bike, taking over it. It started off on one small spot then over the years spread to the pedals and the handles. The sound it produced when you would try to move the bike was loud, metal on metal, when you had your time in the airing yard. A screech, like nails on a blackboard.

And this very distinctive smell when it would rain. If you were close enough you could smell the rust, you could see the leaking of the rust dropping down onto the fake grass. A light brown liquid.

I would try to turn the pedal with my hand, and the residue that would end up on my hand was brown and yellow. A stain that was hard to remove. It is a place built on a mask, fake and pretentious and lies that it rehabilitates. You live there, you see the rust, you watch it. Not just this stationary bike but the entire place. Rust waiting to crack. Sometimes I think the rust has been absorbed in me. That this place has taken over and all that is left is brown, yellow rust.

Cracking, slight imperfections made up by a smile and a happy demeanour just as fake as the prison portrays.

But I think back on looking out the window of my solitary confinement cell and think of the rust.

Why was something that was not waterproof kept outside? How much money did this stationary bike cost? Who designed it to rust when water hits it?

Over the two years I spent in solitary confinement, how can this rust on this one stationary bike be linked to how I see the system and how I see myself. Is my autism spectrum disorder responsible for my sensory experience of the rust or is it a metaphor for how my incarceration could be summed up? I now find myself doing research on rust, like who first discovered it, why it is named rust, the makeup of the chemical compounds and how to get rid of it. Reflection research in all its forms. A psychological exercise to free my mind from this hypothetical rust. In 1788, rust was first observed by a British scientist. That is 239 years ago. There are many ways to come up with something to stop rust from forming. This is like the system - there are many alternatives to incarceration, but are these alternatives used? In some forms, in some ways, yes.

Why place a metal item that is not waterproof outside in the rain?

Why place a human being inside solitary confinement?

Two very different questions, same silly reasoning.

Is placing this non-waterproof stationary bike outside in the solitary confinement yards an illusion? Everyone knows physical health is very important for mental health and therefore positive behaviour. Is this illusion to show the world that we are adjusting to improve mental health outcomes for people incarcerated? Show rehabilitation in its smallest form? There is no other reason that I can think of that taxpayer money meant to be used to improve health outcomes and aid rehabilitation is used to purchase a stationary bike. A stationary bike that is rusting as it is not waterproof. I spent two years watching rust.

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The High Court Just Rewrote the Rules.

Your Claim May Be Worth Far More Than You Were Told.

A 2026 decision has overturned 20 years of law and reopened the door for thousands of survivors of institutional abuse across Australia. Here is everything you need to know.

If you were abused as a child by someone connected to a church, school, sporting club, youth group or any other institution — and you were told your claim was weak, unlikely to succeed, or was put on hold — the law has just changed significantly in your favour.

Not slightly changed. Completely changed. The High Court of Australia — our nation's highest court — has overturned a rule that had been protecting institutions from accountability for over 20 years.

THE STORY BEHIND THE CASE

The case is called AA v Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, decided in February 2026. AA (his name is protected by the court) was sexually abused by a Catholic priest when there were just 13 years old in 1969. The priest met AA through scripture classes and then abused AA in private.

Decades later, AA took the Diocese – the Catholic organisation responsible for the Catholic priest – to court. The Diocese argued it should not be held responsible for a crime committed by an individual. The High Court rejected that argument completely.

HOW THE LAW GOT HERE — A SHORT HISTORY

To understand why this decision is so significant, you need to know what came before it.

2003 — State of NSW v Lepore
The High Court rules institutions cannot be held liable for deliberate criminal acts under a non-delegable duty. Institutions exploit this for 20+ years to defend abuse claims.

2024 — Bird v DP
Vicarious liability is limited to true employment relationships. Priests and volunteers aren't employees — institutions walk free, and settlement offers crater.

2026 — AA v Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
The High Court overturns Lepore. Institutions now owe a non-delegable duty to protect children — full stop. Employment status is irrelevant. The game has changed.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A "NON-DELEGABLE DUTY OF CARE"?

In plain language: it is a legal responsibility you cannot hand off to someone else.

When a church, school, or scout troop places someone in authority over children, the organisation takes on a duty to protect those children — full stop. It cannot outsource that responsibility.

Crucially, intentional or criminal abuse by that person automatically constitutes a breach of that duty. The institution is liable, no matter what.

WHY THE 2024 BIRD V DP DECISION HURT SURVIVORS

A 2024 High Court ruling held that institutions could only be liable if the abuser was a paid employee. Since priests, coaches, and volunteers rarely are, institutions used this to escape accountability — mediations stalled, offers collapsed.

The 2026 AA decision doesn't reverse Bird v DP, but it opens a separate, powerful path to justice that bypasses the employment question entirely.

WHAT KINDS OF INSTITUTIONS DOES THIS NOW COVER?

Any institution that placed a person in authority over you as a child — including:

- **Catholic and Other Religious Organisations** (Churches, Dioceses, Orders)
- **Schools** (Government or Private)
- **Sporting Clubs and Associations**
- **Scouts, Youth Groups, Community Centres**
- **Foster Care and Out-of-Home Care Providers**
- **Government Bodies and Detention Facilities**
- **Other Institutions** (That placed a person in a position of authority over you as a child)

CRITICAL WARNING — NATIONAL REDRESS SCHEME
If you have been offered or are considering a payment from the National Redress Scheme, do NOT sign or accept anything before getting legal advice. Once you accept a Redress award, you are permanently banned from taking further legal action against the institution. A court claim is typically worth many times what Redress pays. This is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. Ensure you contact our team at Wyatts Lawyers to ensure you are aware of all your best options.

COULD THIS AFFECT YOUR CASE?

Speak to us if any of these apply to you:

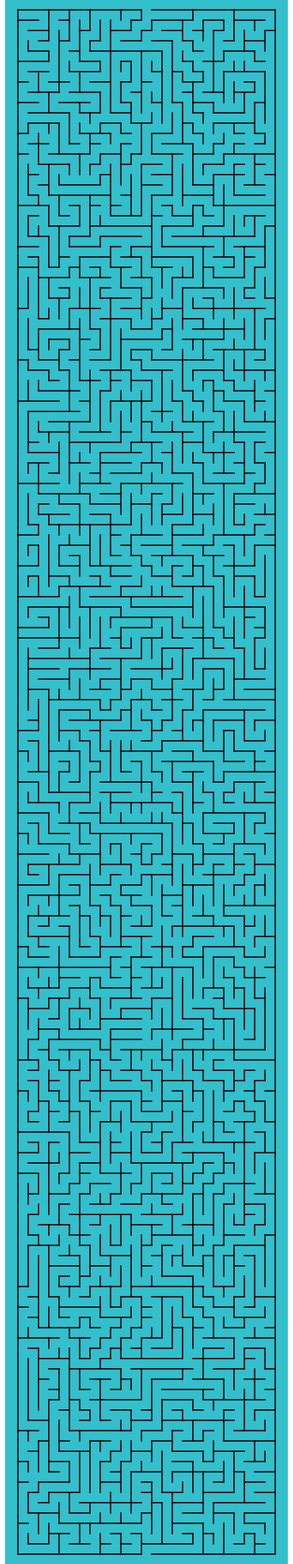
- You were abused as a child by someone connected to an institution
- You made an inquiry or started a claim that was put on hold or went cold
- You were told your claim was weak because the abuser was not technically an employee
- You received a low offer or had mediation stall after the 2024 Bird v DP decision
- You are currently considering or have been offered a Redress Scheme payment
- You have not yet taken any steps to enquire about making a claim, but have been thinking about it

HOW TO GET ADVICE FROM INSIDE

You do not need to navigate this alone, and you do not need money upfront. Our lawyers work on a no win, no fee* basis for institutional abuse claims. Everything you tell us is completely confidential. You can have a trusted person on the outside contact us on your behalf, or write to us directly. We will listen to what happened, explain clearly whether this decision opens up new possibilities for your situation, and tell you honestly what we think your options are. There is no pressure and no obligation.

*Conditions Apply.
This article is general legal information only and is not legal advice. Every person's circumstances are different. Time limits may apply to your claim – seek advice as soon as possible before accepting any offer or signing any agreement. Wyatts Lawyers is a specialist Australian compensation firm.

START



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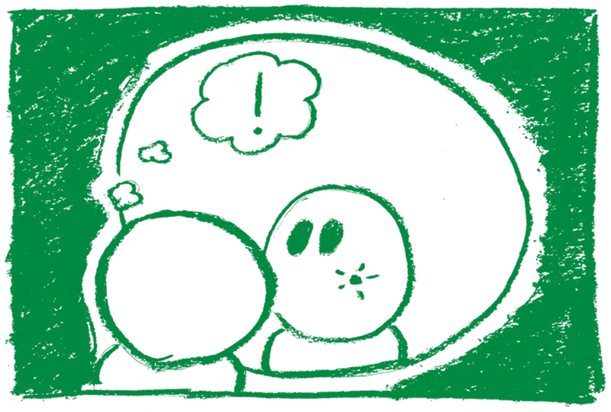
• Health

Ask the Doctor: Acne (Pimples)



By Harley Stiebel

Harley Stiebel is a Resident Medical Officer at The Royal Children's Hospital and Founder of Scrublets.

Hello! I'm Harley, a doctor working in Victoria. Welcome back to Ask the Doctor!

Today, we're talking about skin, in particular, acne – the annoying pimples you thought would cease once you left the clutches of puberty, and yet, here you are as a 20, 30, 40-year-old still wondering why your skin hates you so much.

Well, you're not alone. About 60 per cent of people in their 20s still experience acne, and at least 40 per cent of those in their 30s.

So What Exactly is Acne?

Basically, all over your body you have little pores (see image). These pores have three main components:

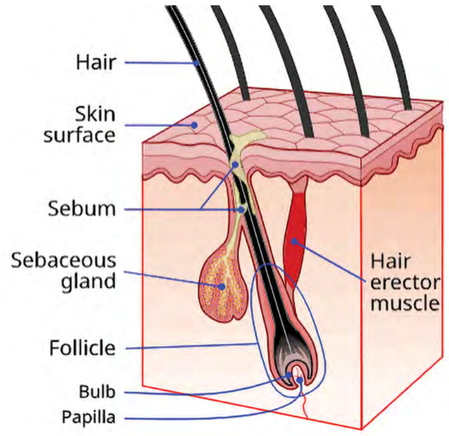
1. A hair follicle, which hairs grow from
2. A sebaceous gland, which produces oils to prevent your skin from becoming too dry
3. A little muscle, which is what lifts your hairs up when you have 'goosebumps'.

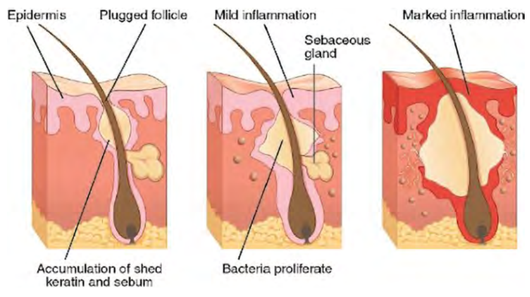
Acne is what happens when these pores get blocked. They can become blocked by dead skin cells or excess oils. These pores can trap bacteria, causing the immune system to activate and come to the rescue – unfortunately, this just increases the redness and pain of the pimples (see image).

So Why Am I Getting Acne?

The million dollar question!

1. Genetics: Having parents or siblings with acne makes you three times more likely to have issues with acne.





2. Hormones: This is classically why many of us get pimples during puberty – hormones are to blame, driven by our genes. Menstrual cycles and hormone conditions like PCOS can also lead to pimples.

3. Diet: There is often a suggestion that diet is related to the development of acne, particularly dairy products and high sugar diets. There is some evidence to support this and it's worth a shot cutting something out of your diet for a few weeks.

Other factors include: obesity, smoking, stress, cosmetics, medications.

What Can I Do to Prevent Acne?

1. Wash your face daily with a gentle skin cleanser.
2. Wear sunscreen if you're going to be in the sun.
3. Try to reduce the amount of sugar in your diet.
4. Speak to your doctor... see the following tips.

Oh No, I Have a Pimple! What Should I Do?

1. Do your best not to pop it! Popping pimples may be satisfying, but you'll regret it later. Popped acne can also lead to skin infections, and create bad scars.
2. Continue to use a facial cleanser daily.
3. Benzoyl Peroxide is a topical ointment that can be used as a 'spot treatment' for pimples.

I Have Really Bad Acne, is There Something My Doctor Could Do About This?

Yes! Treatment for acne is not perfect but it is certainly getting better. Treatment may include: topical retinoids, short term antibiotics, oral contraceptive pills, or oral isotretinoin. It's important to note that all of these treatments have side effects, so you should speak to your doctor about what options might work for you.

Thanks for Reading This Month's Article!

Please write to *About Time* with any questions you have or suggestions for future topics. Trust me, nothing is off limits – most of my day is spent asking whether people have opened their bowels or farted.

Connect your loved one with support while you're inside

While you're inside, the people who care about you are carrying a weight most people will never understand.

Kairos Outside offers a free weekend retreat for the women in your life — your mum, grandmother, partner, sister, daughter, friend or other women in your life.

A no-judgment space for her to rest, be cared for, and spend time with other women who truly get it.

It costs her nothing, but it could mean everything.

Past guest Rachel says, *"I was fortunate enough to be invited with my mum as a guest to a Kairos Outside weekend.*

It was there that I heard the stories of other women just like me; women whose husbands, fathers, sons, daughters, and friends were imprisoned. I heard how they'd felt, how they'd survived, and I cried a flood of tears.

I couldn't believe that there were other women...who actually knew what I was living through. I found the 'hope to carry on' through the Kairos Outside family."



Tell someone you love about Kairos Outside
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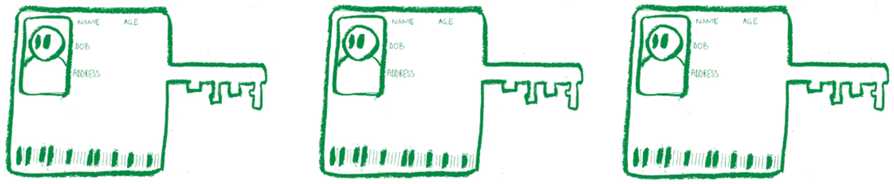
• Mob

Getting Your ID While You're in Prison

A new report has shone a light on the importance of having identification before you leave prison.

By Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network (ICAN)





ICAN is an Indigenous organisation committed to a future of empowered consumers, strong communities and fair economies. It supports First Nations people to build financial wellbeing, strengthen capability and create lasting change.

Something as simple as having a photo ID can have a profound impact.

It can be the difference between being locked out of essential services and having a genuine opportunity to reconnect with family, find work, secure housing and rebuild after leaving prison.

ICAN is on a mission to improve financial inclusion and reduce barriers to successful reintegration for First Nations people leaving prison.

We have just released the landmark Prison ID Project Research Report based on our work at Lotus Glen Correctional Centre, exploring the significant challenges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men face in getting identification, such as a drivers licence or birth certificate.

A lack of ID can have far-reaching impacts on housing, employment, banking, transport, healthcare and community participation.

The report is based on the lived experience of First Nations men in custody in Queensland.

It found that ID is far more than just an administrative document. It is the key that unlocks access to everyday life.

The report found that:

- 81 per cent of participants did not have a current Transport and Main Roads-issued photo ID
- 94 per cent did not have a birth certificate
- 78 per cent did not have a Medicare card
- Access to banking was listed as the service most impacted by a lack of ID
- Barriers to getting an ID included cost, lack of services, literacy barriers and the "no ID to get ID" cycle

It also found that there is a big emotional impact that comes with living without an ID, with participants describing feelings of shame, helplessness and invisibility while having to rely heavily on family members just to access basic services.

ICAN Prison Project Coordinator Sharon Edwards said the research grew directly from years of listening to the stories of First Nations men during financial counselling sessions inside correctional centres.

"Over the years we've learned that conversations about money almost always lead to conversations about identity, opportunity and belonging," Edwards said.

"Men repeatedly told us they couldn't access banking, housing, employment or even a mobile phone because they didn't have identification. We knew these weren't isolated stories – they pointed to a much larger systemic issue."

ICAN has also created a pilot project to help men in Lotus Glen Correctional Centre get a Queensland government-issued photo ID before they are released from prison.

The Prison ID Project has already supported more than 600 people to get an ID. The aim of the project and the research is to highlight the need for funding of ID for all people leaving prison.

Edwards said that this work and the report is only possible with the collaboration with people in prison.

"This report belongs to the men who generously shared their experiences, the Queensland Corrective Services staff who supported the research, and our partners who believed this issue deserved national attention," she said.

"We hope these findings will lead to practical reforms that give people the tools they need to successfully rebuild their lives."

If you or a family member has experienced challenges with not having ID when you leave prison, and you are happy to share your experience with ICAN as part of its advocacy on this issue, please contact them via:

Email:
info@ican.org.au

Post:
ICAN
PO Box 946
Bungalow QLD 4870



Watch *Facing the Numbers* on NITV at 8pm on Sunday 15 November.

Facing the Numbers is a new film that explores the injustices First Nations people face in Australia's legal system.

Grounded in truth-telling, the film showcases the remarkable strength and resilience of First Nations people who are still here protecting Country, culture and community, despite what the numbers may say.

Write in and tell us what you think of the film!

AMC Artwork on Display in Canberra

A new exhibition in Canberra is showcasing the artwork by First Nations people incarcerated at Alexander Maconochie Centre.

By About Time

A number of pieces of art by First Nations who are incarcerated in Canberra, or have previously been, are on display for the public as part of a new exhibition.

The Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Exhibition opened in mid-September, and features 40 artworks by current and former First Nations people in prison.

The art explores culture, Country, family, identity, totems and Dreaming stories, and the show provides an opportunity for the artists to sell their work.

AMC's Cultural Arts Program, which has run for 15 years, operates in six-week blocks and accommodates up to eight people in each two-hour class.

Yuin artist Garry said that art gave him something positive to focus on when he was in custody.

"I could think about what I wanted to paint and how I could bring that vision to life," Garry said.

"Painting helps me to connect to Country and focus on culture. I paint what is important to me and my children so I can pass those stories on.

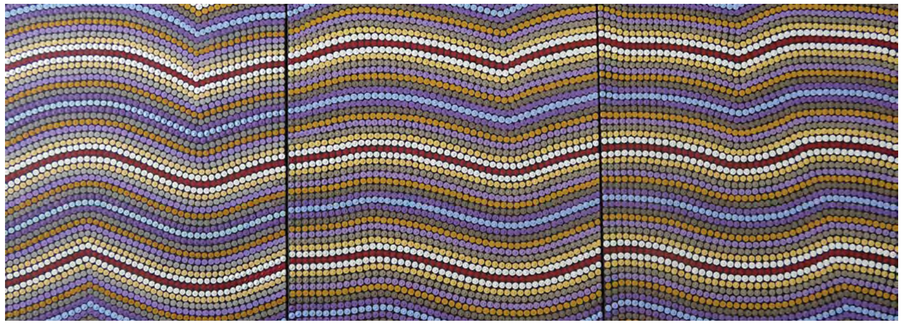
"Having my artwork displayed publicly is an honour and makes me proud. It encourages me to continue and gives me hope that I can become an established artist in the future."



Younger Generation

"The Elders teaching the younger generation how to hunt and teaching them the way of the land and how animals move."

Acrylic paint on rolled canvas
1300mm x 550mm



Aura of a Rainbow Serpent-Purple

"This artwork shows how the Rainbow Serpent slithers and glides across the land creating the rivers which feed the plants and animals that sustain us."

Acrylic paint on stretched canvas
600mm x 900mm



Blue Tongue Dragon

"The Australian landscape with a blue tongue lizard, its food the witchety grub and some camp sites surrounding it."

Acrylic paint on stretched canvas
600mm x 900mm

● Legal Corner

What the Magistrate Sees Before You Speak

How your behaviour and appearance in court and the information you give your lawyer can help the court understand your story.



By Anthony Burke

Walk into a busy Magistrates' Court and, for a moment, imagine you are the magistrate.

There may be many cases to deal with that day. Every case is different. Every person is different. The magistrate has to work out what happened, what the law says, and what should happen next.

The magistrate does not know your life just by looking at you. A case should not be decided because someone wears a suit, speaks well or has family sitting behind them. What matters is the law and the information put before the court.

But magistrates are people too. They notice things.

Before your lawyer starts speaking, the magistrate may already have seen you come into court. They may notice whether you are paying attention, whether you stand when you are asked to, and how you react while your case is being discussed.

That does not mean the magistrate should guess what you are thinking from the way you look. People act differently when they are scared or under stress. Some people avoid eye contact. Some have a disability or health problem. Some have never been in court before and simply do not know what to do.

Still, you can make things easier for yourself by being calm, listening and treating the court with respect.

Many years ago I did a presentation skills course with a company then called rogenSi. One lesson stayed with me: communication is not only about words. People also notice your voice, your pace, your face, your body language and even your silence.

That applies in court.

Suppose you have pleaded guilty and your lawyer is telling the magistrate about you. While your lawyer is speaking, you have not disappeared. The magistrate can still see you.

If the prosecutor says something you do not like, what do you do? Do you shake your head, whisper angrily to the person next to you or roll your eyes? Or do you listen and let your lawyer deal with it?

Do not put on an act. There is no need to pretend to be someone you are not. Just remember that what you do in court will be noticed.

The people who support you may also matter. Having family or friends sitting behind you does not prove anything by itself. But real support can be important. Perhaps you have somewhere stable to live. Perhaps someone is helping you stay away from drugs or alcohol. Perhaps you have work, counselling, treatment or family members helping you get your life back on track.

Make sure your lawyer knows about those things. If there are letters or other documents that prove them, ask your lawyer whether they should be shown to the court.

The magistrate may be trying to understand two stories at the same time.

The first is the story of the offence. What happened? How serious was it? Was anyone hurt? What part did you play?

The second is your story. Who are you? What was happening in your life? What have you done since the offence? What help do you have? What are you doing to make sure you do not come back to court?

Your lawyer cannot tell that second story properly if you have not given them the information.

So help your lawyer. Tell them about your work, housing, family, treatment, health or other important parts of your life. Tell them about the people who are helping you. If you have done something positive since the offence, tell them and, where possible, provide proof.

Do not assume the magistrate already knows. They may have known your name for only a short time.

There is another simple lesson from presentation training: listen. If the magistrate asks you a question, listen carefully. If your lawyer is speaking for you, let the lawyer speak. If you do not understand something, tell your lawyer.

Sometimes saying less is better than saying more.

You do not need an expensive suit. You do not need fancy words. You do not need to pretend to be someone else.

Turn up. Be on time. Pay attention. Listen. Be respectful. Give your lawyer the information they need to explain your situation.

And remember: even when you are not saying anything, you may still be communicating.



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Applications for the National Redress Scheme Are Open Until 30 June 2027



By Department of Social Services

The National Redress Scheme is for people who experienced sexual abuse as a child at an institution. An institution could be an orphanage, children's home, school, church, sports club, hospital, foster care, or other organisation responsible for caring for children. The abuse may have happened at the institution, or during an activity run by the institution, like a swimming lesson.

People who are found eligible may receive:

- a redress payment
- counselling and psychological care
- a direct personal response from the institution, such as an apology.

You can apply for the Scheme if you:

- experienced institutional child sexual abuse before 1 July 2018
- are already 18, or will turn 18 before 30 June 2028
- are an Australian citizen or permanent resident. Exceptions to citizenship and permanent residency requirements may apply for certain former child migrants from the United Kingdom or Malta.

Applying to the Scheme is a personal decision. Some survivors have shared that applying helped them feel heard.

You can still apply if you have a sentence of five or more years for a single offence. Some applications may need to go through a special assessment.

If you are in prison and would like to apply for redress, you can ask the Scheme to send you an application form. You can:

- call the Scheme using the Common Auto Dial List number in your prison or correctional centre, Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm
- write to the Scheme at:
  NRS
  Reply Paid 7750
  Canberra BC ACT 2610
  Australia

Mail from the Scheme will not be opened by corrections staff. The information you provide in your application is protected by law.

The Scheme can connect you with Redress Support Services to support you to apply, get emotional support and help if you don't have identity documents or bank account information.

You may want to choose a person or organisation you trust to be the point of contact with the Scheme.

Applications are open until 30 June 2027.

Find out more at:
nationalredress.gov.au

Australian Government

National Redress Scheme

Are You Facing Court? Or Time?

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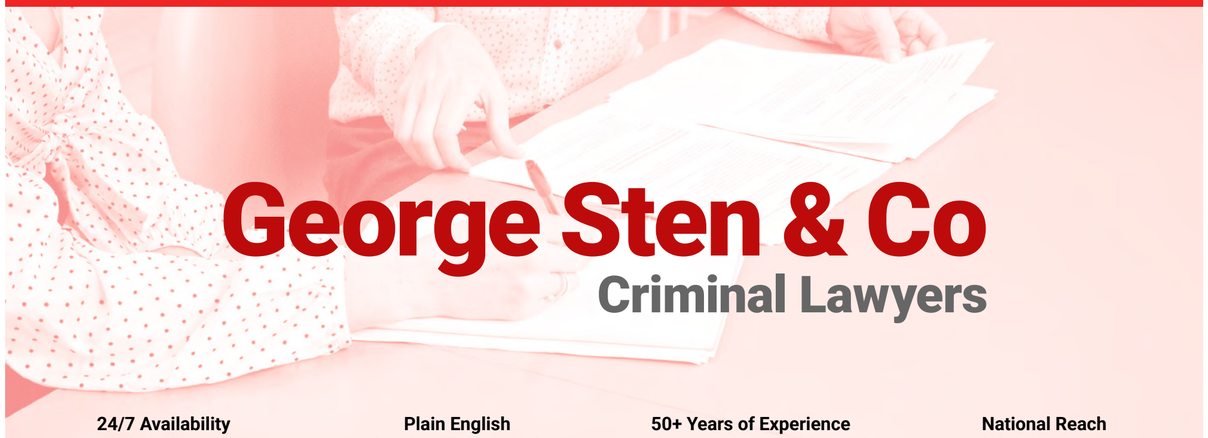

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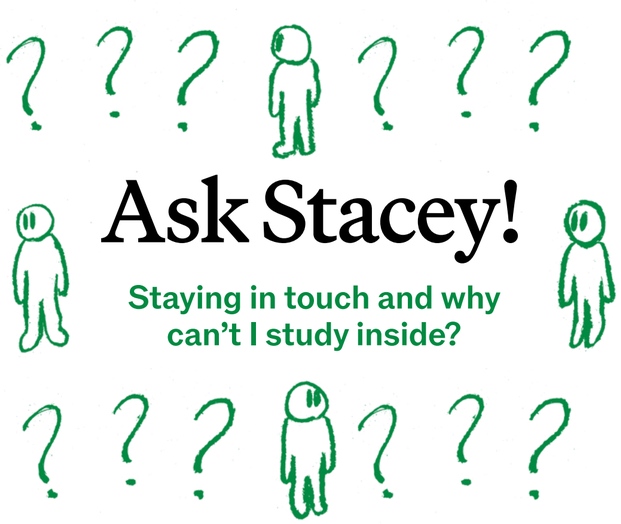


Ask Stacey!

Staying in touch and why can't I study inside?



By Stacey Stokes

Stacey Stokes is a transgender girl who had a 10 and a half year sentence in a men's prison. She has an undergraduate in creative writing and has recently been published extensively, most notably, "Nothing to hide, tales of trans and gender diverse Australia", which was published and distributed internationally by Allen & Unwin. Stacey was a recipient of the 2025 Varuna Trans and Gender Diverse Fellowship to develop her manuscript, *My World*.

Welcome to another exciting instalment of Ask Stacey!

I have lots of friends in jail, should I stay in contact with them when I'm released?

If they're good for you, then the short answer is yes.

About half my friends have done time. They are very loyal and kind people who I trust entirely. They are off the drugs and have jobs and stable housing. And we are all getting on with life together. I'm not sure we could have done it alone.

When we are released, many of us face persecution and are forever stuck in the justice system. So, we really need to stick together, because the system is not on our side.

How do I stay in touch? I like the email system that some of the Victorian prisons use. They send an email and I get it that day and can email back right away. Some systems are clunky and take much longer. But I always liked to send emails more.

There are phone calls of course. I've visited in person and had Zoom calls as well .You need to get on the person's phone list. Just remember to ask them to put you on their list before you leave and get on top of it straight away to save time. It's faster to ask when you live in the jail than when you have moved out and are put on hold, or the letter is lost in the mail room.

I will stress this: it is all recorded and read. Everything you say can and will be used against you. Obviously, don't say anything illegal and don't say anything that could be used against you (or others) in a court.

Be smart and very mindful.

I am gay, but no one knows. I am scared to tell people in jail, but I want to engage with the services in jail. What should I do?

My experience is there are a lotttt of LGBTQI people in jail – and many that don't feel safe to come out.

In the community, you can just be queer or gay or whatever. Some people even identify as cats and dogs out here. I went to this festival near the Collingwood police station, and it had a puppy pen for humans who identified as dogs. I patted a few.

In jail though, it's like being on Grindr, but the app is frozen with unsolicited pictures and propositions propping up. What do you do?

My best advice is: community can be very important for surviving jail and beyond. If you miss community and belonging I'd say reach out to some people who you trust in the community.

Jail is isolating, and being released from prison is as well. Look to the future. Who is supportive, what helps, what happens when you get out.

I had a lovely group of LGBTQI friends in jail, we would meet at my cottage and have unofficial pride meetings. And I still socialise with them now we are all released.

Why can't I study in jail? Either the waitlist is massive, or I'm only allowed to do traffic management. Why can't I do something useful?

Capitalism. The government awards exclusive contracts to education providers. They, in turn, offer contracts to teachers. So, the University of Chocky Mouses offers advanced interpretive dance. But if they don't have a dance teacher contracted, you don't get to learn interpretive dance.

And I understand that can be upsetting. As you had big dreams of being a dancer when you got out. But traffic management has a lollypop...so..there's that, I guess.

But wait! The university actually does have a dance teacher now! But it's a Bachelor's Degree in dance done by RayGun. So, the staff limits do not kick in. Only one education office! Darn it. That means they have very limited time to assist with online research and tests and can't take on more inmates studying at this time. Back to traffic management.

A new year comes around and people graduate! There's room now available! But my favourite roadblock now pops up: the safety and security of the prison. Interpretive dance has now been flagged as a form of martial arts and been banned... I guess it was never meant to be.

I do understand the frustration.

I was told I wasn't allowed to study a foreign language because they couldn't read the book and that meant it could have hidden codes in it. I was also told I wasn't allowed to do psychology due to me possibly using it to take over the prison...

I get it, when you're looking for threats, you see them everywhere. But hidden codes can be written in English, and if I'm confident that I could use psychology to take over a prison, then I could have used it to not go to jail in the first place like a Jedi or something.

I am not the criminal you're looking for.

Learn



Learn Origami!

By Michael Clonaris

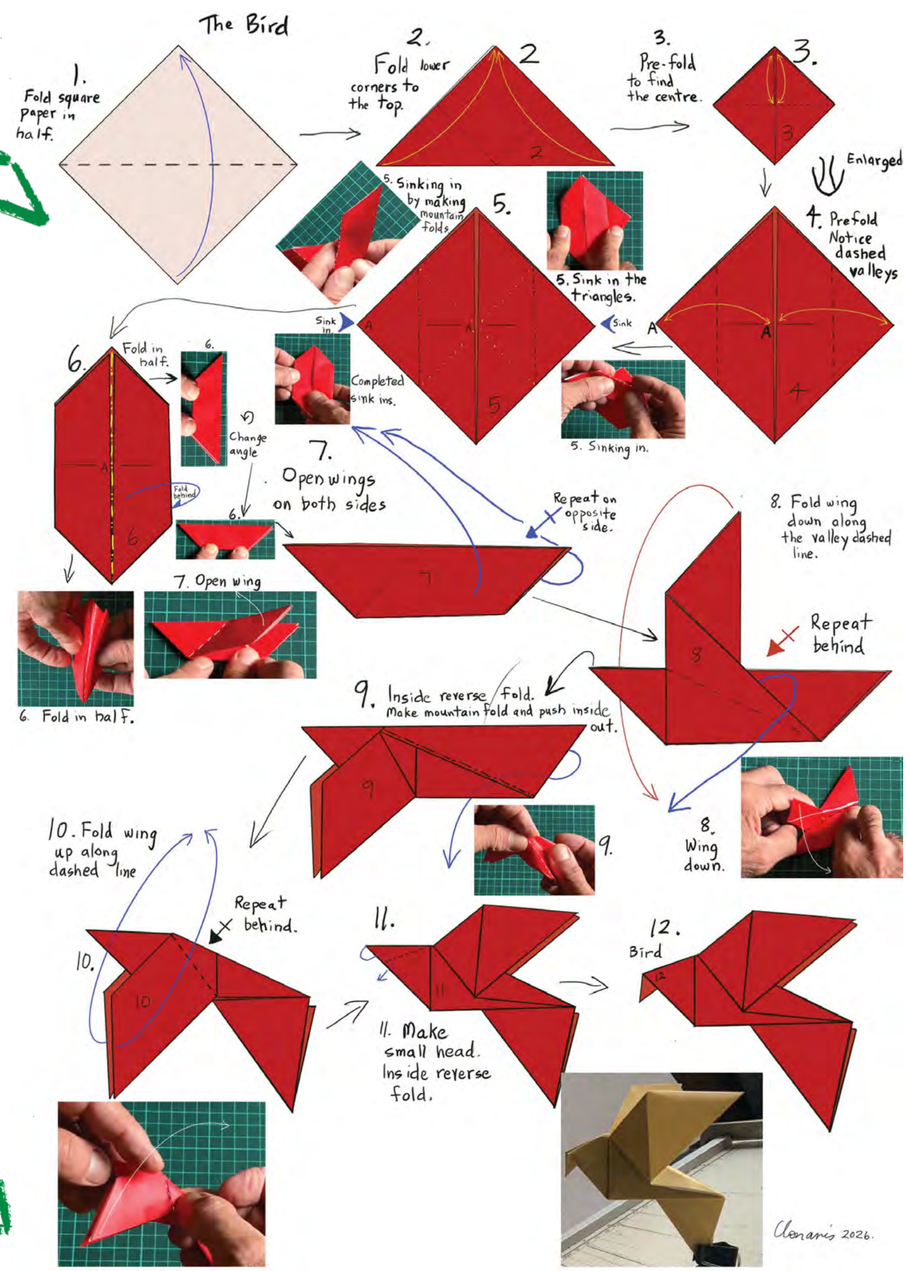
Michael is an origami artist based in Sydney. He has been practicing the art since 1984, when his sister brought him some origami paper from Japan.

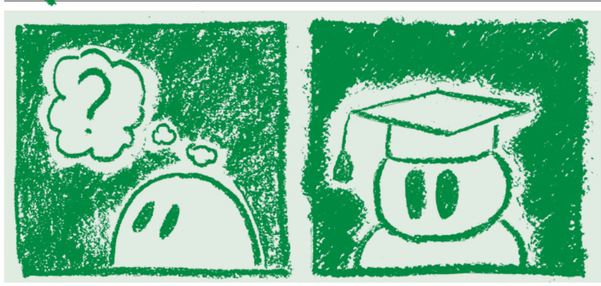
Origami is the Japanese art of paper folding. It allows you to turn a flat piece of paper into nearly anything you can think of, like an animal, flower or a hat. All you need to start learning origami is a piece of paper – you can even use a page of this newspaper once you've finished reading it!

Here are two beginner origami projects to get you going, thanks to Sydney-based origami artist Michael Clonaris. Michael has been doing origami for more than 40 years and is the co-founder of The Origami People with his wife, Etsuko.

First up, some origami terms and basics. You'll often need a square, so to make this out of a rectangle, such as this page, you'll need to fold a corner across to make a square with a rectangle at the bottom, and then carefully cut or rip along this line to make a square.







Want to Learn About a Specific Topic?

Want to learn more about a certain topic?

The Learn section is for articles and practical how-to-dos on a variety of topics. If there's anything you want to learn about, please write to us!

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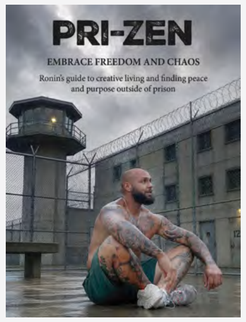
Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:
contribute@abouttime.org.au

Culture



From Prison to *Pri-zen*: Book Launch

By Ronin Cruise

I've read books about people inside before – but it's always somebody doing a life sentence or an educated person being locked up for one stint. I've never seen a book about the most common type of prisoner: the ones caught up in that constant in and out cycle, the revolving door that makes prison feel more like coming home than it does waiting to come out. Over my last year inside, I decided to put a book together and now the book is finally here. It's a long and costly process costing thousands of dollars that I don't have, but with the help of friends and some 'GoFundMe' online fundraising, things are finally taking shape. I met with a local publisher who prints everything in house and paid the deposit to get things moving.

The book is about learning how to use your time, not do your time. It is a biography of my journey in and out of prison, how I found true freedom inside and now, in the music festival community, trading my artwork and my story. It's touching on the basis of love, pain, addiction, suicide, spiritual growth, developing the body and mind.

We often forget that most people don't get a chance to be alone, stripped of their families, job titles and friends. Stripped of what brand of clothes they wear and what car they drive. It's actually such a privilege to be removed from these things and build on our true selves without these attachments. What you build when all these things are stripped from you can be taken with you no matter where you are in this world. Not possessions, not status but true growth from within if you make the choice to use it right.

After talking to the team at Earth Frequency, a big music festival which is held in Woodford each year, they organised with me to do the book release at the festival. I never imagined all those years ago when I'd done my first lag, that this would be my life. Even after my last stint, I would've never have thought I would find a way to exist out of prison long enough to be able to achieve any of this. But with purpose and community, it is possible.

There is something about sharing with others. There is something about connection. There is the training and development of yourself. It is to enjoy your time, even doing nothing. And one main aspect is to find a way to do the things that you love doing.

Pri-zen is available to buy online.

Share Your Work

Your contributions are the centerpiece of the paper. If you would like to contribute to *About Time*, please send your letters to the below postal address (it's free!):

About Time
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If you're able to use a blank envelope or an A4 folder, you can send this for free using the Reply Paid address. You don't need to buy a prepaid envelope or a stamp.



A Tribute to Mark

We first received a letter from Mark in October 2024, soon after we had launched the newspaper. He quickly became one of our favourite contributors, and we always looked forward to his letters and emails. We were saddened to hear that Mark passed away in custody on 13 September 2026.

Mark was a prolific writer and reader, and wrote to us regularly about the people he would meet in prison, the books he'd been reading and the new perspectives he had gained. Mark was incarcerated at an acute care unit in a Victorian prison, and was confined to a wheelchair, but this limited mobility meant he sought comfort in the people around him and got to know people down to their layers.

He was deeply dedicated to justice, and highlighting the humanity of people inside through the written word. While in prison, Mark would write "poetic portraits" of his fellow inmates, and capture the beauty of day to day moments in prison. While on bail, Mark started a blog aimed at highlighting the voices of the incarcerated where he published his musings.

It was clear Mark had a real curiosity, kindness towards others and cheeky wit, and was a very smart man.

"It is an honour and a privilege to receive these heartfelt gifts from the bag because when you look at it, all that we really own is the one thing that can never be taken away from us... our story," he wrote.

Despite his health struggles, Mark also regularly wrote about his perspective and how other people were worse off.

"I can't really complain about how I've been treated... or the food," Mark wrote to us. "There are far worse places for a crook to get crook."

He also wrote that soon after entering prison, he made a choice to try to make the most of a nearly impossibly difficult situation.

"I opened myself up to make the most of what this experience has to offer," he wrote. "Prison has freed me from the slavery of money, or the expectations of friends and family. My only obligation now is to serve time itself. I choose not to waste time feeling depressed, lonely or in the past...dwelling on what might have been."

We'll miss hearing from Mark, and we're thinking of his family and friends, on the inside and outside.

We recently received a book review from Mark, and we've published it on the next page.



A Message From Mark's Legal Team:
Mark's legal team were shocked and saddened to learn that he had died unexpectedly in custody on 13 September 2026.

As his team, we had the privilege of working with Mark during an incredibly difficult time in his life.

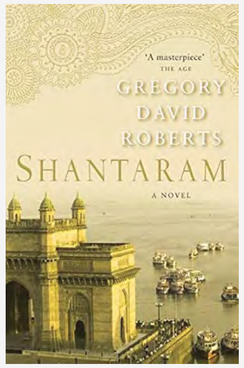
Not only did he have to deal with his legal proceedings, he was also managing a serious medical condition that caused him constant, chronic pain.

Before his diagnosis, Mark had been a fit and active person. When we met him, he used a motorised wheelchair to get around.

In the moments when he was overwhelmed with physical pain, Mark would grimace through a smile and just keep to himself. When his pain was manageable, he was warm, insightful, and unfailingly philosophical about his life. His positivity was a testament to an enormous strength of character.

During the time we knew him, Mark impressed us all with his intelligence, courage, and good humour. Somehow – in utterly unimaginable circumstances – we would end up leaning on Mark. Even though we were meant to support him, Mark was often the brightest in the room, breaking the tension with a joke and a cheeky smile.

That's how we will remember him.
Vale Mark.



Shantaram: To Hell and Back

By Mark Mi Words

Mark wites from a prison in VIC.

Although a prison sentence has taken time away from the life I once had, it has also given me time to read hundreds of books. Usually I have three going at the same time; a fiction (action/adventure or thriller), a non-fiction (memoir or legal) and a spiritual or self help guide (everything from Anthony Robbins to Zen Buddhism).

One for entertainment, one to learn from, and one to ponder on. In 50 years of reading, I have never come across a book that transverses these categories...until I read Shantaram.

To Hell and Back

Gregory David Roberts broke the mould when he released his masterpiece in 2003. Weighing in at 933 pages, Shantaram is the super-heavyweight champion of the literary world. Roberts has created an epic story that stands tall on its merits, pulling from a pool of knowledge that can only be gained from first-hand experiences of being a drug addict, armed robber, prisoner, escapee, fugitive, fighter, lover, drug trafficker, slum doctor, father, philanthropist and most of all, survivor.

Roberts has gone to hell and come back with anecdotes to share like this one:

"The only victory that really counts in prison, an old timer in an Australian jail once said to me, is survival. But survival means more than simply being alive. It's not just the body that must survive a jail term: the spirit, and the will, and the heart have to make it through as well."

Hollywood in Bollywood

One of the 'truths' of the book is the story surrounding being given the name 'Shantaram' by his best friend's mother (roughly translated it means 'Man of God's Peace') in a journey to India's heartland. He is far too humble to call himself that name, instead using it for his book, screenplay he created from the book and the mini-series that resulted from the wave of worldwide success of Shantaram.

I'm yet to see any type of film that I've enjoyed more than the book it's based on, so I'm looking forward to being disappointed by watching Shantaram when I get out of prison. Beat the best book ever! Yeah, nah.

An 80s Time Capsule

Roberts would have been collecting stories, visualising or even writing Shantaram in the decade that the story is set: the 80s. A glorious era before social media, mobile phones and political correctness.

In Shantaram, Lindsay (Lin or Linbaba) is a loveable rogue that's intelligent, kind-hearted, generous, thoughtful and unbreakable. Roberts has made it easy for us to fall in love with his main character, by writing Lindsay from his heart, using lived experiences from the time capsule of the 80s.

Roberts' marriage broke down and he lost custody of his daughter. Spiralling into depression and a heroin addiction, he resorted to crime to fund his drug use, namely robbing banks – with class.

Wearing a three piece suit, speaking politely and stealing from institutions with insurance, Roberts became known as the 'Gentleman Bandit' before being sent to Pentridge Prison for armed robbery in the late 70s. In 1980 he escaped and ran away to India.

Roberts' run as a fugitive ended in 1990. He was captured in Frankfurt and extradited to Melbourne where he spent another six years in prison – two of those were in solitary. Legend has it that he escaped again, but it dawned on him that life on the run wasn't conducive to his desire to retire as a criminal, so he found a way to smuggle himself back in.

The Story Gets Screwed

It was this second stint in a Melbourne prison where Roberts began writing Shantaram, with early manuscripts being destroyed – twice. Thankfully he persisted and the novel was first printed in 2003.

Rave reviews and good publicity helped it to become a best seller that required two reprints that year. I was in my early 30s around that time, and remember watching a 60 Minutes story on Roberts. It featured news reports and footage of him robbing banks, with dramatised accounts of him escaping Pentridge Prison, finding his way to India, and becoming a triage doctor in the slums of Bombay.

At the time I was too caught up in life to read anything other than bills and invoices, but I pledged to myself that one day, I'm going to read that book.

A Close Call

How on Earth could I have possibly predicted that 23 years later, I would be stuck in a wheelchair facing the rest of my days in prison for a crime that I can't remember committing, listening to a mate (Dan) asking if there is anything he can bring in for me.

"Actually, there is something," I said as I watched the seconds get closer to cut off the call.

"A book. Don't go buy anything... just something collecting dust that you think I might enjoy!" Tick tock, I watched the clock count down as Dan's cogs turned. "Maaate, have I got the book for you! My next door neighbour handed it on to me about 10 years ago, he reckoned it was the best thing he'd read."

The 30 second warning rudely cut through our conversation, but one word stood clear: "Shantaram."

"Hey, if that's the one written by a bloke that busted out of Pentridge... then I'm in!"

Big and Hard

During the visit I told Dan how fate made me wait for more than two decades to read Shantaram.

"That makes sense. I couldn't imagine a better time to receive what the book has to give you. Let's change the subject, I don't wanna spoil it for you."

I've been trying to do the same here, but I've already spoilt the surprise about the book's size. The officer that delivered my hardback copy faked getting a crook back from handing it on.

"It's a big ass book bro, in some prisons they don't let 'em in" said the big Kiwi.

I got Dan to email details about the author and the book for this review, and softcover copies are available if being big and hard is an issue. Fortunately it's not a hard read, but it's a very rich story that is written in five parts, and I recommend using the space between them for a break.

I powered through and when it ended I was left disappointed as it just didn't land for me. A good steak needs to rest after grilling, a good wine needs to breathe upon opening, and a good read should be paused between parts.

Fortunately, Roberts released a sequel in 2014, so I'm really looking forward to once again spending time with his beloved characters, without rushing it!



Creative

Forty Years of Prison Plumbing

By Emily

Emily writes from a prison in WA.

Shout out to all you maintenance workers, from painting to plumbing, youse know you're the reasons these places don't collapse in on us!

Forty Years of Prison Plumbing
Shower drain, oh shower drain
why do you not seep?
Water around my feet you keep.

Overflooding the landing
all of the time...
why do you not drain,
Oh drain of mine

Puddles of water...
is all that we know
puddles of water...
why do you not go?

Shower drain, oh shower drain
why do you not work?
Shower drain, oh shower drain
clogged with hair, filth and dirt.

Snails With Sails

By Minh

Minh writes from a prison in VIC.

No mail
No bail
Just jail
Hail and rain
Rain and suffering
Silently ingrained
Nothing to gain
Just the in chasing the sane
As one they are the same
Welcome to hell
Act up
Get locked up in the cell
Sun down sun up
Commeth a new day
Can you hear and tell
With the ringing of the bell
This is a new hell
The cycle of life
Why can't you break
Out of your shell
Set sail
Like walking trees
Dressed in green and white
Throw a seed
Beyond the wall
Repeat after me
In three
Thrice
Once and twice
Twice and once
Thrice

I've become a tree

Tree of life
Seed a new breed
Got mail
Time to bail
I will not fail
Outside these walls
Again!

A Place to Be Free

By Gema

Gema writes from a prison in WA.

A girl trying to find her soul
an escape with rope and toe
up a tree
a knot a swing
A place to be free
she harnesses all her confidence within
and pushes off with and against the wind
her laughter heard by passers-by's' ears
to bring a smile from ear to ear
forever in my heart
the child I was that year.

I miss faces, I miss time
I want to fall back into my flow
of when I'd meet back with people
from the streets of Perth.

I wonder if anyone misses me
but probably only my face
I think I hold on with strength
and passion
and I don't know how to go on
being in jail,
I need a hug but I'm fussy
I need to see where there is a smile
and why does the rain not bother me
nor the cold.
I'll wait.
But some say it will be
the death of me.
My heart weeps
My ribs shattered
The knife cuts
as my tears fill a cup
Emotions overtake
I'm blinded now
It seals my fate
Locked up my heart's caged
I have escaped death's deal
and now I only dream of people
in the world I have seen
To be wait in time inside
as they do not want
a reminder of time
near the control
of man-made crimes.

Poem For B

By Nic

Nic writes from a prison in WA.

Alone in my cell, 3 metres long
and 2 metres wide,
The ceiling above, as low as
the tide,
The tide I'll never see for so
many years.
Alone in my cell, it used to be
so many tears,
Until I found love, the love of
my life,
She's in another jail but someday
she'll be my wife.
Alone in my cell, I no longer cry,
Every morning I wake up all I want
to do is try,
Strive to be the best and push past
the rest.
It's not so far away with God
on our side,
If I look hard enough I can almost
see that tide.
The end of the road where you hold
a light,
Girl, our future is starting to look
so bright.
Alone in my cell, 3 metres long and
2 metres wide,
I write these letters to my girl who
in I confide,
I tell her my troubles, I tell her my
sorrow,
Before she came along, I couldn't
even see tomorrow
Girl you remind me of the stars in
the sky,
The rare nights I get to see them, I
think of you
And cry,
Alone in my cell, I wait like a stone
Until one day we can finally be
alone.

See Me

By Elijah

Elijah writes from a prison
in NSW.

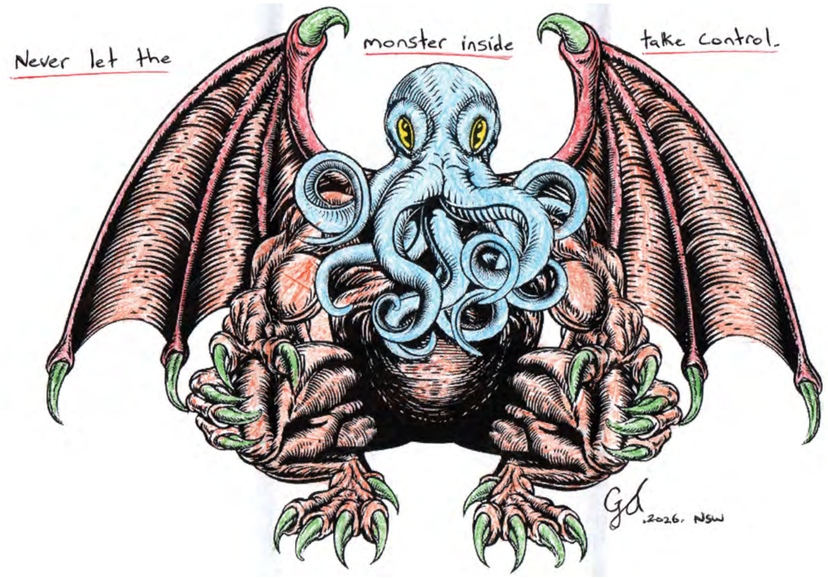
These "emotions" that carry me
It's from these that you see me
Let not what you see, be all I can be
I'm so much more, this isn't all
I've shown how much I offer
A thought for a single offer
Let not today be a day to waste
away
"See me" I'll say
Please don't look away, notice me
I'm so much more.



Never Let the Monster Inside Take Control

By G

G draws from a prison in NSW.



Doing Time

By Janali

Janali writes from a prison
in QLD.

Cold blows the wind tonight,
sweetheart,
Cold are the drops of rain,
Cold are the four walls of my cell,
So cold I shall remain.
I sit behind these lonely walls,
My life goes on, without me.
Inside this prison, grey and stark,
Forgotten, by all who loved me.
My heart aches for only freedom,
It cries out for love, in vain.
It screams to hold my family,
It whimpers here in pain.
My mind, it knows I have to go,
To find some hope, some light.
To find the me I should have been,
To learn, I can shine bright.
So as I watch suns rise and fall,
Mark the passing of each day.
I tell myself I must be strong,
for in here, I must stay
So though I've never known
for sure,
I know somewhere, deep inside.
lies a Queen, made of strongest
stone,
And I know, she will survive.



About Time

Australia's National Prison Newspaper

We are the new national newspaper for people in prison across Australia. We want this to be a paper for people who are incarcerated, by people who are incarcerated.

This is our 28th edition, distributed to all prisons in every state and territory in Australia.

Our team is made of a group of passionate individuals from around Australia, some of whom have been incarcerated, and others who have worked and volunteered in criminal justice, law and journalism for many years. We are always looking for others to join us.

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Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

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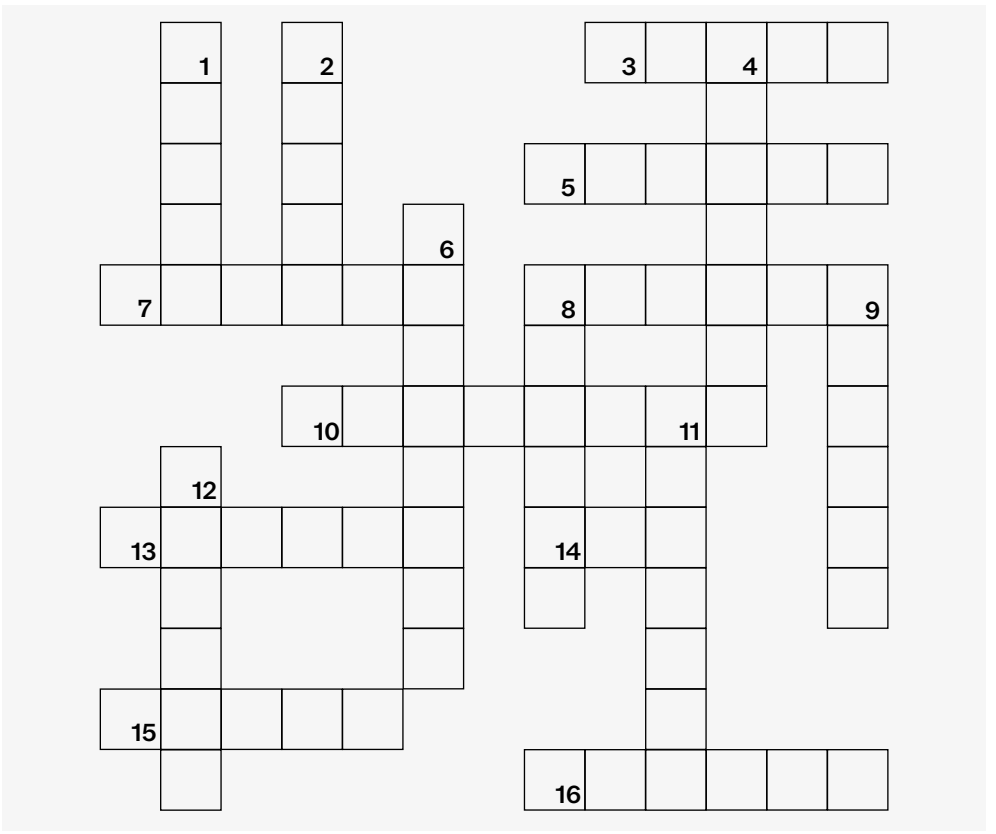
Play

Crossword



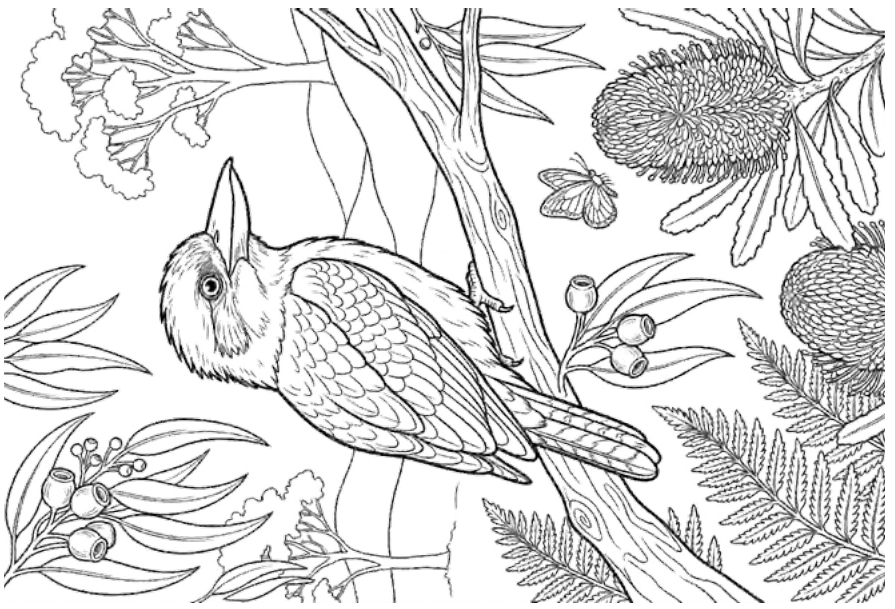
ACROSS

3. Songs and tunes (5)
5. A fruit that is also a colour (6)
7. Long, curved yellow fruit (6)
8. Season that comes after winter (6)
10. Salty black Australian spread (8)
13. Person you see when you are sick (6)
14. Large Australian bird that cannot fly (3)
15. Sandy place beside the sea (5)
16. Place where flowers and vegetables grow (6)

DOWN

1. Italian dish with a cheese and tomato topping (5)
2. Australian animal that lives in trees and eats gum leaves (5)
4. When the sun comes up in the morning (7)
6. Australian animal that hops and carries its baby in a pouch (8)
8. The hottest season of the year (6)
9. Musical instrument with six strings (6)
11. Loud rumble heard during a storm (7)
12. Hot morning drink made from roasted beans (6)

Colouring In



Crossword Answers (ACROSS)

3. Music
5. Orange
7. Banana
8. Spring
10. Vegemite
13. Doctor
14. Emu
15. Beach
16. Garden

Crossword Answers (DOWN)

1. Pizza
2. Koala
4. Sunrise
6. Kangaroo
8. Summer
9. Guitar
11. Thunder
12. Coffee

Meme of the Month

By Meicho Meicho writes from a prison in QLD.

The unit after someone weighs in:



Quiz

Test your general knowledge on our monthly quiz!

1. What is the tallest animal in the world?
2. Besides being something you wear on your feet, what is a gumboot: a dance, a bird or a type of bread?
3. Which singer was known as the “King of Rock and Roll”?
4. What kind of animal is a bow tie-shaped “pasta” called farfalle named after?
5. In cricket, what is the term for a batter getting out without scoring a run?
6. Which fictional bear is known for wearing a blue coat and enjoying marmalade sandwiches?
7. Which planet in our solar system is famous for its prominent rings?
8. What is the name of the traditional Scottish garment that resembles a pleated skirt?
9. Which Australian animal has fingerprints similar to those of humans?
10. If someone tells you to “hold your horses”, are they asking you to hurry up, wait or change direction?

Quiz Answers

1. Giraffe
2. A dance
3. Elvis Presley
4. A butterfly
5. A duck
6. Paddington Bear
7. Saturn
8. A kilt
9. A koala
10. Wait

Bad Jokes

By Tai

Tai writes from a prison in TAS.

What do you do if you get bird flu?
Seek Tweetment.

What happened to the Italian chef when he died?
He pastaway.

What has five toes and is not your foot?
My foot.

Do you know what’s odd?
Every second number.

Sudoku

Fill the grid so every row, column and box contains the numbers 1-9 once.

1	7	5		9		4		
					5		1	6
6	8		3		1	5		
						7		
	6			5	9			
	1	3	8	2				
8					2			
5	3				8	2	6	4
		6		3	4			1