

The Bent Bars Project is a letter-writing project for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, intersex, and queer prisoners in Britain

Newsletter #8

Hello everyone and welcome to the Bent Bars newsletter #8! It's been a while since our last one, and we've had lots of people asking when it will be ready. So thank you so much for your patience, and we hope it's worth the wait!

The theme for the newsletter this year is 'Celebration'. When we decided on this theme, it felt very fitting because we had just celebrated our 10 year anniversary in 2019. But of course, the world changed a lot in 2020 (and in 2021!), and when it came to finally putting together this newsletter we were worried that the theme wasn't quite right for where we are now. But once we got together as a collective to speak about it, we realised that it's now more important than ever to remember the reasons we have to celebrate. A celebration could just mean taking some time to acknowledge something that's made you happy, or proud, or made a positive difference in your life - even small things like finishing reading a book or eating your favourite food. So we've decided to stick with the theme for this newsletter, and hope you agree that being able to share all the amazing submissions people sent to us is a reason to celebrate in itself.

For us at Bent Bars, we want to celebrate the fact that even though the past two years have thrown some big challenges at us, we have still managed to keep the project going! We've continued answering letters, found people pen pals, and even managed to publish this newsletter, while having to work in a new and different way.

We also want to celebrate all the BB pen pals, the people who write to us, or read this newsletter, and the people who want to write to us but aren't able to. Over the last 10 years we have felt so much love from people who've contacted the project. We really

appreciate all of you, and Bent Bars wouldn't have lasted 10 years and counting without your support and friendship.

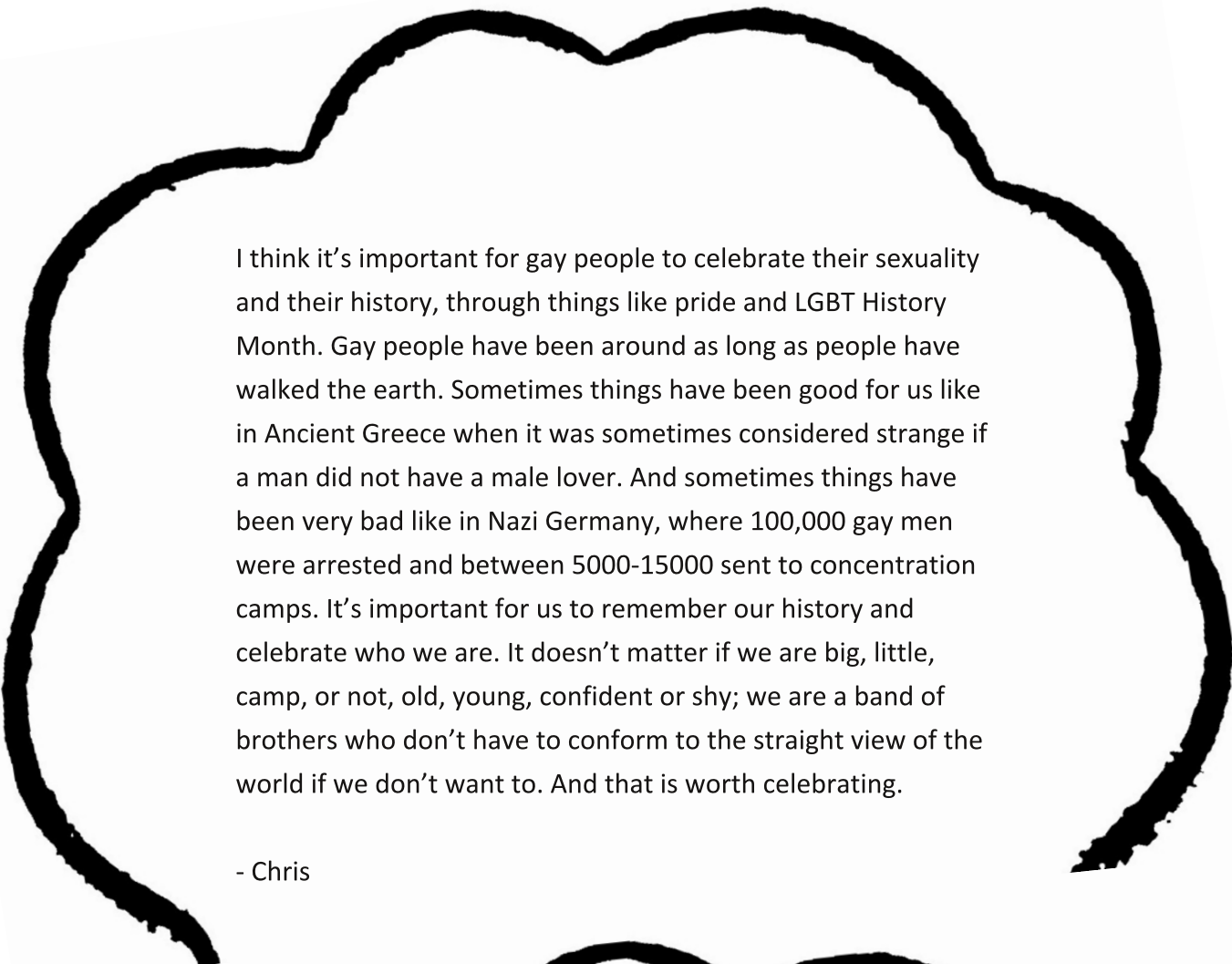
Really, this newsletter is a celebration! It celebrates everyone who took the time to share their words and experiences with us, creating something that will be shared for many years, and building connections with others who see parts of themselves reflected in its pages.

Thank you so much to everyone who contributed to this newsletter, we celebrate you! If you would like to contribute to the next issue, please take a look at the back page for more information. We would love to hear from you!

We would also like to celebrate the volunteers who helped type up all the submissions, Cherry for lending us her amazing design skills and turning all the submissions into the newsletter you're reading right now, and Queer Crosswords for donating the crossword puzzle you can find on page 14.


Please bear in mind when reading the newsletter that some of the content contains difficult subjects, such as self-harm, suicide, homophobia, transphobia and other forms of violence, so please take care of yourself.

This newsletter was printed by the Footprint Workers Co-op in Leeds (footprinters.co.uk). Bent Bars would like to thank Footprint for their ongoing generosity and support.



I think it's important for gay people to celebrate their sexuality and their history, through things like pride and LGBT History Month. Gay people have been around as long as people have walked the earth. Sometimes things have been good for us like in Ancient Greece when it was sometimes considered strange if a man did not have a male lover. And sometimes things have been very bad like in Nazi Germany, where 100,000 gay men were arrested and between 5000-15000 sent to concentration camps. It's important for us to remember our history and celebrate who we are. It doesn't matter if we are big, little, camp, or not, old, young, confident or shy; we are a band of brothers who don't have to conform to the straight view of the world if we don't want to. And that is worth celebrating.

- Chris



I celebrate with my friends on the outside for just being friends and being there for each other in the good times and bad one's. Weekends away with them hitting town and the beach watching the sun go down then going back for drinks laughs and a BBQ

Everyone sleeping where they can and waking up getting ready for a nice cafe fry up.

Eat, repeat, sleep all weekend until we do it again. I just wish I had a partner now to enjoy it with and maybe a few more friends

Any offers please reply to me.

Thank you B.B.

Baz :)

A Class Act

The Real Term is Transgender
But I have heard it all,
Poofter, Bumboy and Bender,
Gay boy and Tranny
Are just some words you call?

Born In The Wrong Body
But I am nobody's fool
Cross dressing is not a hobby
And I am not a ghoul!

You can show me all your hate
I am used to hurtful slander.
A child of this ill fate
Deserves a stiff right-hander!

Misjudge me as a deviant,
Take away all my rights.
Make me an irrelevant,
A sick noone in tights!

But I still breathe I'm here,
An unavoidable fact
I'll brave all your jeers
And remain, a Class Act!

Going for Gold

My heart soared in April 2018 when, along with the one billion television viewers from across the globe, I watched the Commonwealth Games handover event live from Victoria Square (Birmingham – my home town), complete with dancers, musicians and drag queens.

Australia and the Gold Coast did the Commonwealth Games proud, with records smashed and a real sense of celebration and community.

After winning a Gold medal in the 10m synchronized dive our own Tom Daley made a plea for Commonwealth countries to decriminalise homosexuality. His brave intervention pointed out that 37 of the 53 countries currently in the Commonwealth have anti-gay legislation, which is often a relic of the British empire, when Blighty imposed discriminatory laws in the territories they ruled. His is an important message. Tom is in a minority of Commonwealth citizens who are allowed to be themselves as openly gay, lesbian, bi or trans. Not so in the majority of countries in the Commonwealth, which currently have discriminatory laws against same sex acts, punishable in some cases with imprisonment and even the death penalty.

The situation for gay people in the Commonwealth is changing, though. In April 2018 an LGBT activist from Trinidad and Tabago won a court ruling which overturned the so called 'buggery laws' which made same-sex relations illegal and punishable.

Daley said that homophobia was "a massive thing within sport" and urged other gay athletes to share their stories in order to "change hearts" on LGBT issues. The 2022 Commonwealth Games will no doubt be great for Birmingham and the Midlands. Wouldn't it be amazing if, by the time the Games land in the region, the situation for LGBT people across the Commonwealth has changed for the better?

That really would prove the Commonwealth Games is something bigger than sport.

- Matt (previously published in *inside time*)



Celebrations!

What do I Celebrate?

As I'm in prison, I don't really celebrate much. I don't celebrate my birthday, because I only do this with family, so instead of celebrating my birthday, I celebrate and commemorate my idols birthday. Who's this you might ask – Elvis Presley! The one thing I do celebrate is Christmas! I love Christmas and it takes me back to being a kid! Bring on Christmas.

How do I celebrate Christmas?

Well being in prison I don't celebrate in the same way as I would on the outside. So in here, I decorate my cell. I put paper chains up, I put a little bit of a buffet on for the lads that I get on with. I blast the Christmas Songs out! We have fun, that's what I've done for the past two Christmases in jail, I'll do the same again this year.



What do I think is worth celebrating?

Well, my conception of celebrating is different to others. I go through phases of what I think should be celebrated. My phase at the moment, after watching The Greatest Showman, I think it should be celebrated, the amazing work that has gone in to making the film. Also the songs in the film need celebrating as they are all original they were written specifically for the film! The actors in the film portray the characters and their traits really well. If you've not seen this film, then watch it. It will have you laughing, crying and singing along.

What do you hope to celebrate in the future?

I don't think it will be anything new, I'll continue to celebrate LGBTQ rights and continue to celebrate Pride. I hope that the continuation of support/love and celebration, for the events and milestones that happen within the LGBTQ community will be forever prevalent, and hope that homophobia and stereotyping behaviour will be stamped out and if it is, this is definitely worth celebrating!

What do you wish had been celebrated in your life or in the world?

For me personally I wish that my bravery and coverage when 'coming out' had been celebrated more. I found it hard to come out to my parents, what with being brought up in a traditional Catholic household. When I told my Mum, she disowned me, when I told my Dad, he accepted me and continues to support me. It was difficult coming out at the age of 15, and growing up in and out of care. I lost a lot of friends because of my sexuality, so that's what I wish could've been celebrated. This would be the major thing, the only minor things would be my qualifications and my achievements!

Thank you!

Matt

Reaching 50 Not Out

If, like me, you were lucky enough to be raised amongst people following an alternative lifestyle where heterosexuality isn't seen as the norm, it makes a big difference. A significant part of that lifestyle was based on Euro style naturism. From day one you are used to the naked body and you see people in a variety of relationships. You absorb this before you are even old enough to be aware of or care about gender and sexuality.

At some point you do start to question the differences you see and become aware of sexuality, but if those questions are answered fully and honestly, in age-appropriate ways as you grow, it does give you a much broader mind when these things become important for your own life. For me that was quite early, being physically and mentally advanced for my age until peers caught up with me in their late teen years.

I went through what I now know to be typical exploration events with friends, both male and female, realising that I enjoyed a range of friendships and intimate activities with both. What did take longer was working out that for the full romantic long-term type of relationships I am almost exclusively drawn to females with particular personality traits, and they must be comfortable with semi-open relationships and broad sexuality.

What does it all mean over time?

Three long-term relationships with females, including one marriage and divorce. All were semi-open whereby we had liaisons with other singles, couples and groups of varied gender & sexuality across a broad range of ages. We also followed many aspects of the alternative lifestyle in which I was raised.

Several "friends with benefits" type relationships with people across the gender spectrum.

The pleasure of working for many years, and socialising to this day, in the LGBTQI community, as well as continuing connections with the alternative lifestyle through holidays and events at naturist & other alternative lifestyle venues (usually with a partner).

4 children, all now grown adults and very independent, broad-minded individuals.

The ability to enjoy the naked human form visually, rather like a work of art and not simply as an object only to be viewed in sexual situations.

I am left with one big question. Where do I actually fit in the whole LGBTQI spectrum? What label would others want to attach to me?

In my mind, because I really do not fit into a neat little box, I'd have to describe myself as "sexually fluid", and there are many others out there who do not fit these neat little labels or boxes.

I think you'd also have to say that I do not have a so-called "coming out" story in the usual sense, because I've never actually been "in". There's never been a need to make a big deal about it, because unless you are stereotypically "camp" there really is nothing to explain. The only people it's relevant to are those you might have some sort of relationship with beyond mere friendship. Being so-called "Out and Proud" is not the way everyone chooses to be.

Quite simply, I am what I am – a human being.

- Eddie

8th

May

2017

For two years, eight months
And a day
Serena cried
Serena prayed

Prayed for death
Cut open her skin
Headbutted the wall
Collapsed in a spin

She passed out from a ligature
And woke up in a pool of blood
So much madness
For two years eight months

It was two years eight months
And a day
Before she could look in the mirror
And say

It's me
It's who I am
They did not look
They didn't understand

But now they see
Through open eyes
This transgender prisoner
Who nearly died
Bent Prison Bars
Opened a way for me
To look outside and understand
There was people who wanted to be

To be a part of a life
To encourage
To show a way through

Thank you x
Serena



Dear Bent Bars

My story of being gay (openly) in prison.

As an IPP prisoner that is 10 ½ years over tariff and on recall.

What's it like being gay in prison, not that hard really, cos I'm gay (not camp). I'm proud of the person that I am, if people got a problem that's theirs not mine.

Yes other inmates have their secrets, they may be straight but oral sex does come into it. They like to use us for their benefit, but it goes both ways, don't it. Don't get me wrong but some are pushed into doing it, that's when they need to speak to other gays or if there is a gay support group in that prison. Relationships are hard to keep quiet but they do happen in shared cells or single ones. What Bent Bars have done for me is giving me support from another direction outside support via pen friends who are gay and have their own lives to live.

I'm not looking for relationships but friendships and I know that Bent Bars can give me that. Have been with you all the way, one day I might get the chance to meet you all in person.

Lots of Love

Tony

I knew since early childhood that I was in the wrong body but there was nothing I could do about it. My family punished me for wearing female clothing or playing with girls' toys. At the age of five years old my mother called the police on me for wearing a make-shift dress and they told me I'd be locked up for the rest of my life if I was caught again. I never knew about transgender people or gender dysphoria until after I came to prison in 2010.

While I was in HMP Bristol I met a transgender person who told me I could live as a female without getting into trouble from the law. In 2011 I tried to get referred to the Gender Identity Clinic but because I was in a local prison and due for a transfer I had to wait until Oct 2012 for a referral. I got my referral and two appointments, the 2nd of which was in 2014 and they didn't go well due to my being in a prison. I was told to make another appointment after my release and I told them, "I'm a lifer I may never get released." They told me to come back in 20 years and if I'd stayed in role they'd treat me then.

I left the clinic in tears and returned to the prison where I wrote a letter of complaint to the NHS and after an investigation I was told to seek another appointment. The short of it is in August 2019 I had a visit to the clinic and after arguing my case I was cleared to start my treatment. I am now waiting for a report from the clinic informing the doctor to prescribe oestrogen to me and I've been pencilled in for surgery in 2020 so I have real cause to celebrate and I would love for your readers to celebrate for me.

- Hayley



Hand *in* Hand

Holding hands is one of the most fundamental and sweet ways in which people demonstrate their affection for each other. Parents holding their children's hands to keep them safe and stop them pocketing all the chocolate in the supermarket.

It goes on to couples holding hands to demonstrate their love for each other.

Hand holding is really a beautiful thing. I am ignoring here the occasion when in a crowd at Pride I reached out behind me to grab my partner's hand but accidentally ended up pushing my way through the masses while dragging some other poor bloke along me. That was just unfortunate. I'm also forgetting T. May holding hands with D. Trump. That was beyond unfortunate.

But hand holding can be a powerful gesture. Many gay people sadly feel they have to avoid holding their partner's hand in public places because it is a physical demonstration of being in a couple and thus a demonstration of being gay.

In the Netherlands, in April 2017, two gay men were attacked on their way home from a night out by a group of thugs. They have been spotted holding hands. Tragically, homophobic attacks remain part of life. Things have improved

enormously for many gay people in terms of their safety, but attacks still do happen. What was remarkable about this Dutch attack is what happened as a result.

A campaign under the hashtag #allemandenhandinhand (all men hand in hand) was launched. It has seen male politicians, public figures and police officers photographed holding hands with one another in support not only to the couple who were attacked but also of everybody else who may fear the same happening to them.

Holding hands is a simple act, but the photos are striking and powerful. The images of suited, powerful men confidently and proudly holding hands with each other, drive home just how rarely we see that in groups of people aged older than eight.

Yet it is such a strong gesture of unity and strength that it is surprising we do not see it more often.

- Matt

~~C~~ensorship

As an incarcerated writer
to correspond with my writing mentor
I have to work through prison's ***** department.

So when ***** refuses to forward my poem
(because it contained the term "*****_*****")
my mentor never receives it.

No discussion, appeal or due process.
***** has done this to 3 different works of mine... so far.

I can't use the word *****
or write about *****_*****
or use my thesaurus to find synonyms for joy about continuing to work with my mentor.

I try to self-censor
edit
redact revolutionary and over-creative ideas.
sanitize

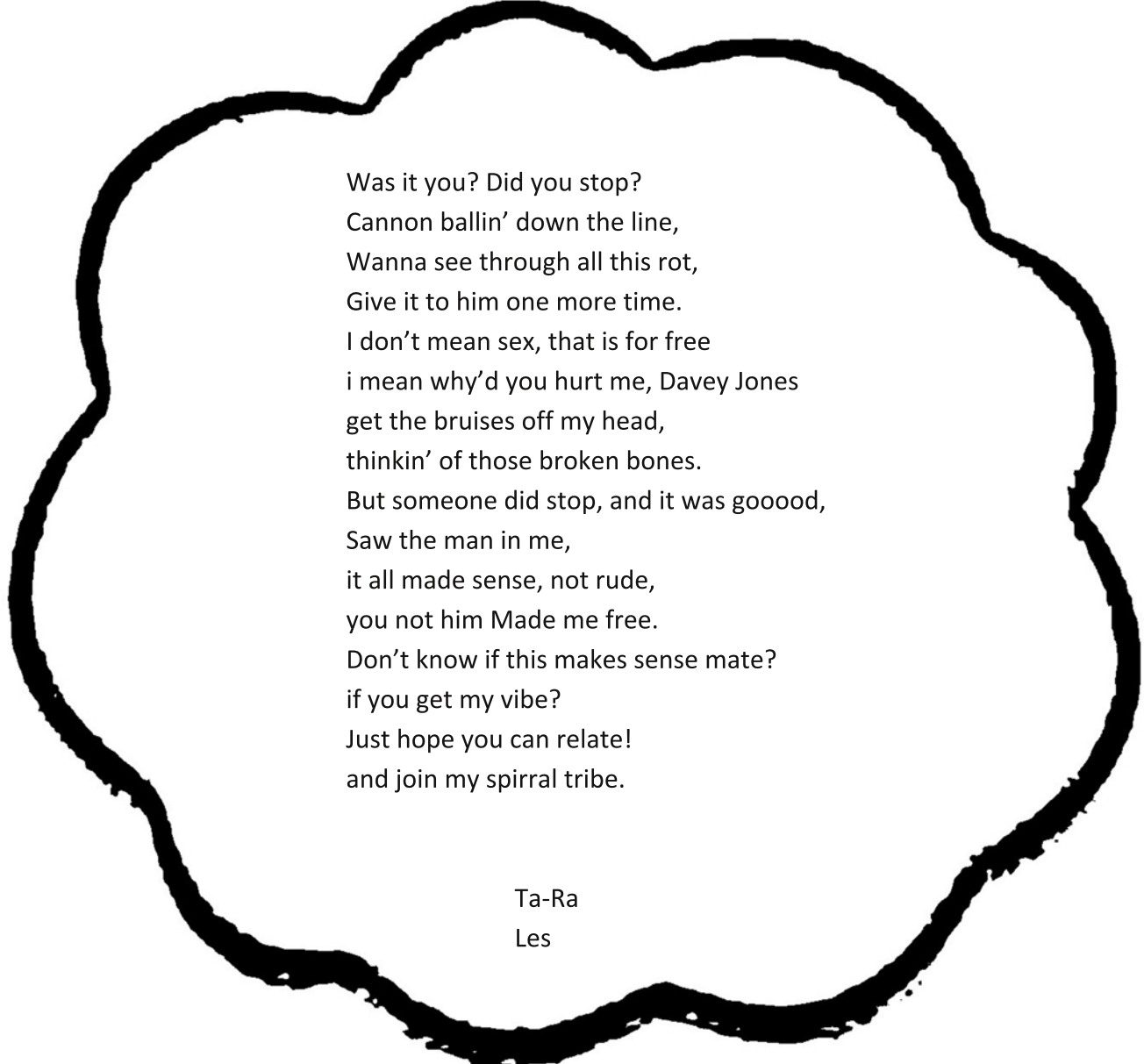
and dress-it up... hoping it makes it past *****
who thinks she is protecting the outside world from my words.

Just writing this poem could get me in trouble.

If I can't get by *****,
my writing remains nothing more than handwritten scribbles
trapped on the lines of
my notebook.

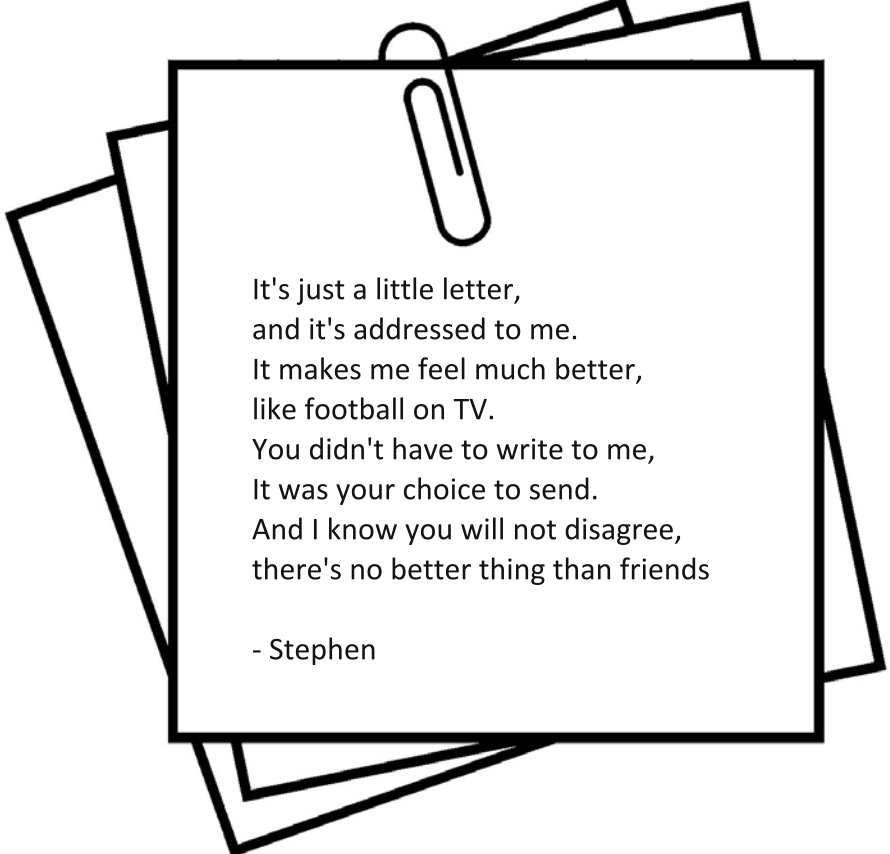
- Matthew

Originally published in *California Prison Focus*



Was it you? Did you stop?
Cannon ballin' down the line,
Wanna see through all this rot,
Give it to him one more time.
I don't mean sex, that is for free
i mean why'd you hurt me, Davey Jones
get the bruises off my head,
thinkin' of those broken bones.
But someone did stop, and it was goood,
Saw the man in me,
it all made sense, not rude,
you not him Made me free.
Don't know if this makes sense mate?
if you get my vibe?
Just hope you can relate!
and join my spirral tribe.

Ta-Ra
Les



It's just a little letter,
and it's addressed to me.
It makes me feel much better,
like football on TV.
You didn't have to write to me,
It was your choice to send.
And I know you will not disagree,
there's no better thing than friends

- Stephen

Celebration

This goes out to all the LGBTQ Reps in all prisons in the country. Thank you. I speak from experiences in the past when I came into prison aged 18 and didn't tell anyone about my sexuality until I met the LGBT Rep in my prison named "R" he told me that it's ok to be open to people about my sexuality and we kept speaking over a few weeks and we spoke to non LGBT people who were very supportive towards our community and he gave me the confidence to come out to my mum and dad and this was the conversation that we had in the visits hall.

"Mum and dad I have something that I want to tell you"

"What's that son" they replied.

"I am gay"

Their response made me so happy and loved. "We know son. We have known for ages, but please know that we love you. No matter what, we just want you to be happy and if that's how you feel and it makes you happy, then so are we".

Still to this day that will stay with me for the rest of my life. What they said that day and I have the LGBT Rep to thank for that. So this goes out to all the reps out there in prison and all the diversity and equality Reps as well. THANK YOU. I am now very openly gay in prison after recall and I hope that others reading have had other positive stories and conversations as I did with ours. Please share them and let's keep the thank you to them all for their worth that they do for us all.

When I get out soon I'd like to hear from people in the LGBTQ community about their stories and whether good or bad I'd like to support as many people with their issues if you can't talk to someone. So I hope that Bent Bars CAN do this for me, how some people would use me as another line of support? I hope this helps you as much as it did for me.

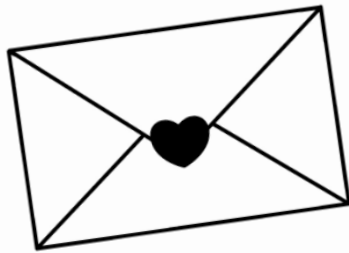
Thank you for reading.

Ryan



Why is there no support worker in prisons from LGBTQ? I know I feel isolated. Would love to come out and be myself. When you come into prison there's big signs up saying how this prison supports Diversity & Equality — it's a joke, we don't get any support. We don't get a mention.

- Andrew



These letters are responding to a letter published in our previous newsletter

Richard, I commend you for finally being able to be you!

It must be liberating, you must feel better?

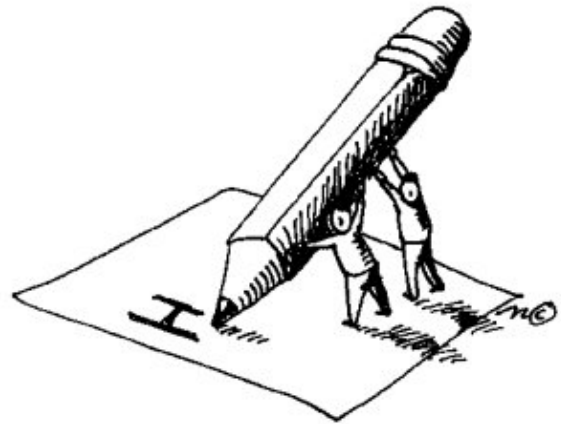
I'm a 28 year old openly bisexual male and I want to say that not all 'young' gay/bi lads just want fun, some of us are looking for the ONE!

I too look for the one. And love closeness and the feeling of being safe and secure, but am not there yet. Like you I'm caring, gentle, and loving and just want to find the same.

You'll fit in! You'll find the ONE, one day, have no fear, there is definitely someone out there for you.

Matt

Love to you always



Hi Richard,

I saw your letter in the Bent Bars Newsletter and I am totally with you. I have been there, done all the one-night-stand things when I was younger (I am 36 now) and it can be degrading but it was what I thought everybody did.

At 32 I met somebody who became my all but that didn't work out as he was still doing the one-night 'fun' behind my back, so we split.

Now I find myself in a prison cell looking forward to my future and whatever it may hold for me - fingers crossed, eh?!

I hope you are well and know that not all gay guys want 'fun'. The smartphone and apps such as Grindr etc have ruined conventional dating though. I'm hoping life can get back to the tradition of a date somewhere and get to know somebody rather than a quick fumble.

- Ruairi

Fly the flag

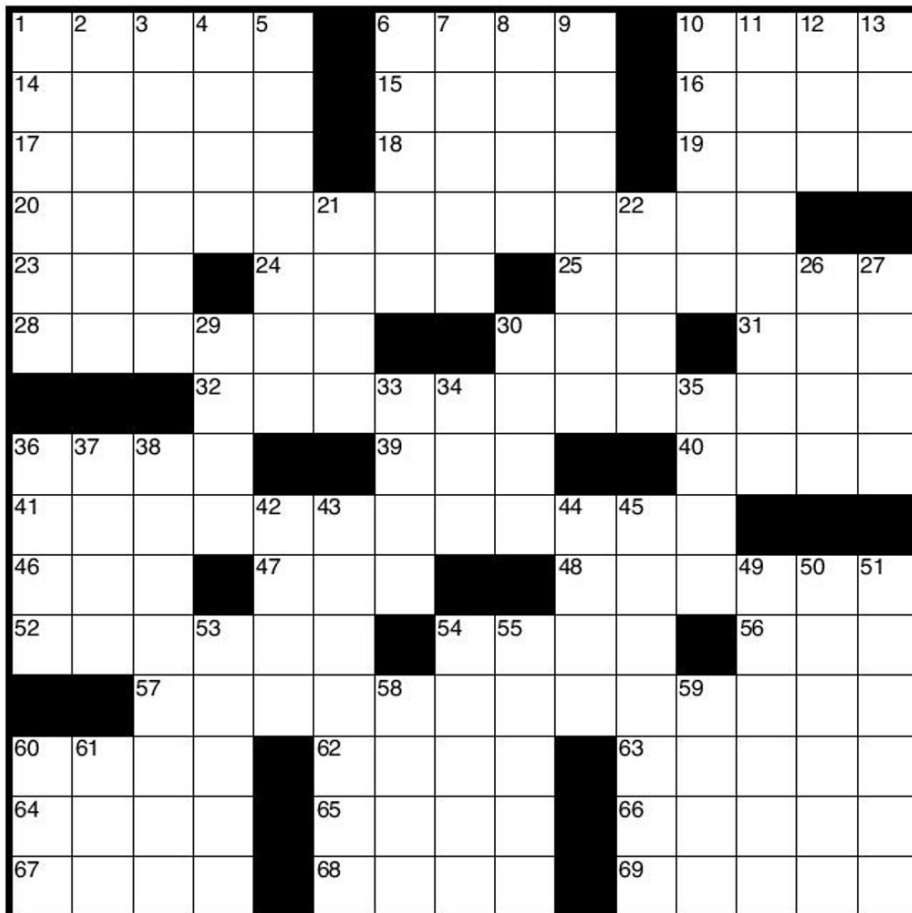
By Jack from Queer Crosswords

ACROSS

- 1 Like milk you shouldn't cry over
 6 Expel, as lava
 10 Pinnacle
 14 Ancient Anatolian area
 15 Penne ___ vodka
 16 Partner of truth
 17 Pill for emergencies
 18 Film ___
 19 Gave a look
 20 Relative of the Golden Delicious
 23 Summer on the Seine
 24 Neighbor of Breyers in frozen goods
 25 Bledel who plays a queer character on "The Handmaid's Tale"
 28 Enjoyed again, as "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda"
 30 VW Golf hatchback
 31 Travel agency?: Abbr.
- 32 Oldest awards still given to United States military members
 36 French cleric
 39 Org. that still makes road maps (good to know if you're driving somewhere with bad cell coverage)
 40 Neighbor of Vietnam
 41 Performance company seen in "Arrested Development"
 46 ___ in Charlie
 47 See 65-Across
 48 Shirts with deep cuts
 52 Least gregarious
 54 They run the numbers: Abbr.
 56 Thrice-repeated word at the beginning of a nursery rhyme
- 57 Happiness at going both ways ... or what the beginnings of 20-, 32-, and 41-Across hint at
 60 Pit
 62 Reader of tea leaves, perhaps
 63 "___, meenie, miney, moe!"
 64 One branching out?
 65 47-Across, on a bill
 66 Bug
 67 Country whose flag displayed a hammer and sickle: Abbr.
- 68 What a queer dad might go by
 69 Walks across a desert, perhaps
- 4 Hero of the "Legend of Zelda" series
 5 Striking scene, such as a picture of the Stonewall riots
 6 Like swimsuits after a beach day
 7 Schemes
 8 Director Kazan
 9 Course taken in conflict?
 10 ___ Dazeem (name mistakenly given to Idina Menzel by John Travolta at the 2014 Oscars)
 11 Get a premium membership, say
 12 Before, to Whitman
 13 Crossed (out)
 21 Postal abbr.
 22 Ballet bend
 26 Analogy words
 27 Show some attitude
 29 Fencing sword
 30 Watch or bicycle part
- 33 Sheet of glass
 34 Jet ___
 35 Mont Blanc, par exemple
 36 Kindergarten lesson
 37 Inspiring ennui
 38 Movers and shakers
 42 It might cover a dead log
 43 Asks for a hand?
 44 Ellipse, more generally
 45 Like money in a savings account
 49 Feel secondhand embarrassment
 50 Alaskan bear
 51 Brach's buys
 53 Something that can get you down?
 54 Get ready to go, as the lights and effects for a drag show
 55 "Cheesy" Italian city
 58 TV's "Warrior Princess"
 59 Stern, for a ship
 60 Original Beatles bassist Sutcliffe
 61 Ambulance destinations, briefly

DOWN

- 1 Drinking straw, informally
 2 "Be ___" (parent's warning)
 3 More ridiculous





Bent Bars Word Search

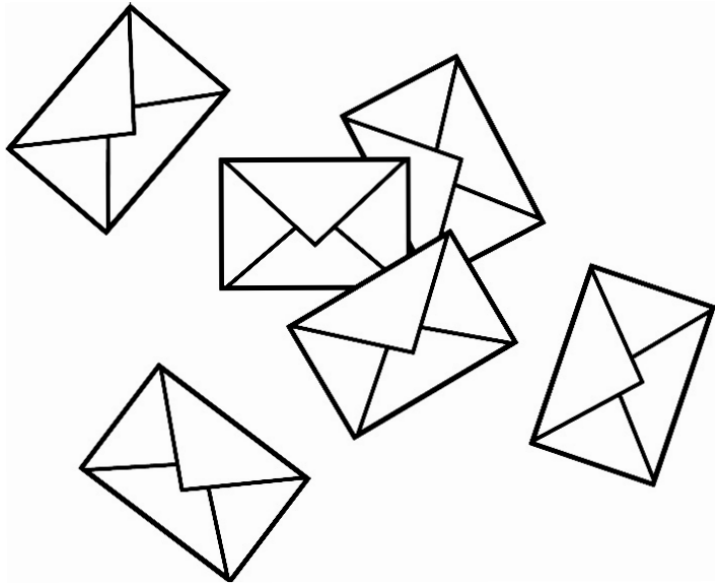
P	E	L	R	C	S	F	R	I	G	R	E	T	S
N	N	F	B	E	P	R	I	N	N	N	N	S	P
I	V	C	N	I	E	I	C	I	I	G	E	M	E
D	E	O	E	S	N	E	Q	S	H	B	W	Q	N
N	L	M	T	O	P	N	A	N	C	E	S	T	C
N	O	M	U	C	A	D	S	C	T	N	L	B	I
E	P	U	A	N	L	S	T	D	A	T	E	G	L
E	E	N	P	D	S	R	B	P	M	B	T	L	N
D	S	I	S	T	A	M	P	S	S	A	T	L	C
N	P	T	S	R	E	T	T	E	L	R	E	E	D
N	O	I	T	C	E	N	N	O	C	S	R	M	F
S	P	E	G	N	I	T	I	R	W	D	N	A	H
C	N	S	F	R	I	E	N	D	S	H	I	P	B
O	D	R	A	C	T	S	O	P	E	M	M	N	N

PENCIL
 CONNECTION
 PENPALS
 LGBTQ
 POSTCARD
 BENTBARS
 STAMPS
 NEWSLETTER
 FRIENDS
 COMMUNITIES
 ENVELOPES
 FRIENDSHIP
 HANDWRITING
 MATCHING
 LETTERS

Play this puzzle online at : <https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/1530164/>



Would you like to be part of our next newsletter? Write to us: **Bent Bars Project**
P.O. Box 66754 London WC1A 9BF (or see the back cover for other ways to get in touch)



Sudoku

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

My Stories

I would love to tell you about my life experiences to date. You may have shared the same sort of life's challenges or read about them before. To start with I was diagnosed with ADHD.

At the age of 13-14 I had my first sexual experience with a female of the same age who was a close friend. While I was 17 I was sexually abused by a man who was in his 50s. He gave me alcohol and when I was intoxicated he started touching me in a sexual manner, then progressed from there. He offered money and gifts in return for sex.

Outside we see that being homosexual is becoming more acceptable. However here in prison I have found many people do not accept people who, like me, are openly gay. Other people would come to my door and kick or knock it loudly calling me names like 'bum-boy' and 'gay c**t'. It became too much to the point I would not go out of my cell. There came a point where I was so anxious and depressed I started to self-harm by cutting my arms.

I have been inside for a year now my anxiety is starting to decrease but it is still worrying. Here there is no groups to help people like me with the way I am and how to survive and live with being gay in prison.

- Ben



Sun Shower

The sun snuck in the shower
with me this morning.
Traversing 93 million miles
for our personal rendezvous.

dancing over the razor wire
percolating through the stained
shower curtain
to paint itself firmly upon my stall wall.

Rivulets running down the gray paint
washed with shadow-water
blur away the bars.

Leaving the bright splotch of sun
and a lonely man
crying
together in the shower.

– Matthew
Originally published in *The Evening Street Review*

I
wonder...

Why

Is it

UFOs never abduct

People serving time in Prison?

I'd love to watch the special news reports

Trying to explain to the unbelievers how an inmate disappeared from a Supermax.

Interviewing excuse making guards citing ephemeral escape plots to explain a

missing person who is flying free in a Silver Saucer

far above his concrete cell.

Free at last

to be

probed.

- Matthew

New beginnings, bright future

Hi all,
Lots of us always talk about how coming to prison is the end of everything, the life we had, what we knew, careers, sometimes people we knew, quite after, or at least for a while we can't see a way forward or an end to our current situation of being where we don't want to be.

Eventually, there is an end to this stage of our lives and we start to evaluate why and how we got to where we are. This is certainly true for myself, I came to prison around 2 years ago now and for a while continued to see a way forward, but prison gives us all one major thing...time, time to think. After thinking long and hard about what I wanted for a brighter future, I sorted out where I want to live and what I will be doing for self employment, then getting qualifications to help with that.

After that I spent time reflecting on how and why I had ended up where I am, currently it becomes very clear that most of my problems in life and not coping with it very well, having

had a serious breakdown, being suicidal, alcohol misuse (which all led me to coming to prison) were due to me not addressing the major thing in my life, namely that I am transgender. This didn't happen in a flash and one lightbulb moment, but gradually over a period of time, reflecting over my life, realising that the times I was most happy were when I was living as female even if only for short periods of time per week or an hour here and there during the year. We recently had a quiz and karaoke event for LGBT history month, in the visits hall. It was good fun and reasonably well attended.

In the meantime keep up the great work, look forward to the next newsletter, and hope to make contact with a pen pal soon.

Many thanks,

Katie



Me and Ches

4 years ago, Richard, the love of my life, came back into my life when I needed him the most. He is the most caring, humble, loyal, protective partner I've ever had.

My life has been chaotic at times, and at points in my life I've felt lost and alone but over the last four years Richard has made me smile again, he has made me laugh again, but most of all he has made me love again. I could be having a pretty tough time but then whenever I saw Richard he would make the dark clouds go away. When I am with Richard I honestly feel a sense of calm and peace and whatever I am going through, in that moment I know I am safe because Richard is there. Without him here I feel a sense of loss and I feel vulnerable.

Richard is the love and light of my life and he truly does have a beautiful and generous heart. I know my future lies with Richard and he has helped me turn my life around and help me turn it back into a positive place to be. For so many years I've searched for my true love, now I've found him. I am so proud to call him my fiancé and I can't wait to go on even more extraordinary trips with him.

I have never felt so loved, so cared for and so protected. He is my guardian angel and he has helped me see how strong I can be.

He is my miracle and my future husband, he is the person who I would risk everything for. Finally I've found my missing piece. Mine and Richard's story is only just starting.

- Daniel



We all love to celebrate
The reasons five-a-dime
We drink so much our eyes dilate
A virtual pantomime

The things we like to celebrate
Well, wedding bells may chime
The times we've had since that first date
Too many for this rhyme

We struggle now to celebrate
We do so for our crime
A birthday cake on plastic plate,
I should be in my prime.

So we'll hold the chance to celebrate
We'll stop the hands of time,
And I'll meet you there outside the gate,
Then forever you'll be mine.

- Index



My Escape meal

This a meal I had with my mother about two weeks just before she passed away when I was 12 years old. It was the best meal I ever had and it was the happiest one. When I get out I like to have it.

It's lamb shank with rosemary, with good old English crunchy roast potatoes, roasted in goose fat with lovely thick gravy on top.

As well, on the side, honey roast parsnips as well.

That is my most favourite meal to have with my family and it's my mother's signature dish, that I remember her by.

It's brilliant for us to think about our favourite meals, for us to Escape with them, if only for a short time.

Luke



Gender Surrender

Intro

G | C | Dm | Dm

Verse 1

Em Am
When I put makeup upon my face
D C
It sends me floating into space
Em Am
My lips they are painted red
D Dsus4 D
I place a wig upon my head
Em Am
Wear what I wanna wear
D C
Don't give a damn if people stare
Em Am
Wear a bra or wear a vest
D Dsus4 D
We're free to choose which suits us best

Chorus

G C
Looking back, I can see
D C
I wasn't real I wasn't me
G C
All the signs they were there
D Dsus4 D
I blocked them out 'n' cut my hair
G C
From memories I do recall
D C
All my friends were girls at school

G C
To myself I could not confess
D Dsus4 D
My love for makeup and a dress
G C
All the time that I was lyin'
D C
My happiness 'n' soul were dyin'
G C
My true gender I no longer hide
D Dsus4 D
I wear a dress 'n' smile with pride
G C
You became my defender
D C
When to my gender I did surrender
Dm
Gender surrender

Verse 2

Em Am
We've all been here before
D C
At birth assigned a gender door
Em Am
Please return mine to sender
D Dsus4 D
I was born slim 'n' slender
Em Am
In a past life I coulda been
D C
A husband or a beauty queen
Em Am
Something told me inside my head
D Dsus4 D
You're not a boy but a girl instead

Chorus

Verse 3

Em Am
I was in complete denial
D C
My gender ID was on trial
Em Am
Joined the army fired a gun
D Dsus4 D
My true feelings on the run
Em Am
But they became much too strong
D C
I'd lived a lie for far too long
Em Am
So whether you're L, G, B or T
D Dsus4 D
Just live your life as it should be

Chorus

Verse 4

Em Am
My parents they were mortified
D C
My father shouted my mother cried
Em Am
That's how it could have been
D Dsus4 D
But it was only in a dream
Em Am
If they were here they'd understand
D C
Guide me through and hold my hand
Em Am
Be with me by my side
D Dsus4 D
'N' show support attending pride

Chorus 2 (outro)

G C
Looking back, I can see
D C
I wasn't real I wasn't me
G C
All the signs they were there
D Dsus4 D
I blocked them out 'n' cut my hair
G C
From memories I do recall
D C
All my friends were girls at school
G C
To myself I could not confess
D Dsus4 D
My love for makeup and a dress
G C
All the time that I was lyin'
D C
My happiness 'n' soul were dyin'
G C
My true gender I no longer hide
D Dsus4 D
I wear a dress 'n' smile with pride
G C
And now I'm who I should be
D Dsus4 D
Liberated complete and free

- Clare

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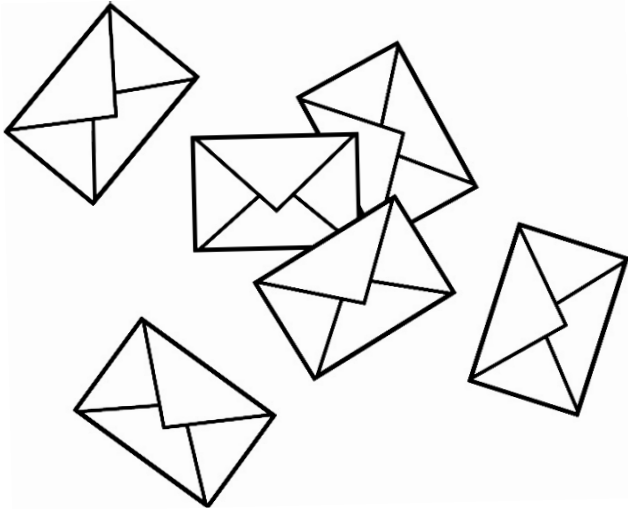
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Puzzle answers



S	P	I	L	T	S	P	E	W	A	P	E	X
I	O	N	I	A	A	L	L	A	D	A	R	E
P	L	A	N	B	N	O	I	R	E	N	O	I
P	I	N	K	L	A	D	Y	A	P	L	E	S
E	T	E	E	D	S	A	L	E	X	I	S	S
R	E	R	E	A	D	G	T	I	S	A	T	S
P	U	R	P	L	E	H	E	A	R	T	S	S
A	B	B	E	A	A	A	A	L	A	O	S	S
B	L	U	E	M	A	N	G	R	O	U	P	S
C	A	S	O	N	E	V	N	E	C	K	S	S
S	H	Y	E	S	T	C	P	A	S	R	O	W
B	I	S	E	X	U	A	L	P	R	I	D	E
S	E	E	D	S	E	E	R	E	R	E	N	I
T	R	E	E	U	N	U	M	N	A	G	A	T
U	S	S	R	P	A	P	A	T	R	E	K	S

Fly the flag

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

P	E	L	R	C	S	F	R	I	G	R	E	T	S
N	N	F	B	E	P	R	I	N	N	S	P	E	M
I	V	C	N	I	E	I	C	I	G	E	M	E	
D	E	O	E	S	N	E	Q	S	H	B	Q	N	
N	L	M	T	O	P	N	A	N	C	E	S	T	C
N	O	M	U	C	A	D	S	C	T	N	L	B	I
E	P	U	A	N	L	S	T	D	A	T	E	G	L
E	N	P	D	S	R	B	P	M	B	T	L	N	
D	S	I	S	T	A	M	P	S	A	T	L	C	
N	P	T	S	R	E	T	T	E	L	R	E	D	
N	O	I	T	C	E	N	N	O	C	S	R	M	F
S	P	E	G	N	I	T	I	R	M	D	N	A	H
C	N	S	F	R	I	E	N	D	S	H	I	P	B
O	D	R	A	C	T	S	O	P	E	M	M	N	N

The theme for the next issue is health and wellbeing. What does this mean to you? How has your wellbeing been impacted by the last two years? How does being inside make a difference to this? What do you feel brings you wellbeing?

We would love to hear from you with anything you want included in the next newsletter, even if it's on another topic. You can send us stories, letters, poetry, drawings, cartoons, anything that we can print (we can send any original artworks back to you after making a copy). Please make sure to let us know with your submission what name you would like it to be published under.

How to contact us:



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