

Bloom Grown From a Crack in the Wall
By Beverly Jaynes

Reaching light from deceptive darkness,
Its seed mysteriously nurtured within,
Imposing walls cannot contain its growth.
Breaking free unexpectedly,
From bleak, stark surroundings,
The bloom, the more beautiful,
For its unlikely flourishing.
A surprising sign of hope,
Graced by opportunity.

The transformation of transformed individuals—the diseased, debilitated, disadvantaged, addicted, depressed, degraded, disgraced, disillusioned, discriminated against, incriminated, or the victimized—into healthy, stable, redeemed, and revitalized individuals, should be proclaimed and acclaimed. No matter how low a level they have been to, they should reach as high as they dare go. The success of the prodigal is still a valid one. How blessed they were to have overcome obstacles in their way and within themselves. In receiving support, treatments, compassion, guidance, and opportunities, they transformed, triumphing over adversity and their own demons. Injustice and its victims were exposed to the healing light of the human conscience and abusers found theirs, through personal growth and godly grace. Changes in ideas, values, attitudes, and behavior were made. Problems were solved. Reconciliations and resolutions took place.

These transformed individuals may have formerly been exploited and disenfranchised. They may have suffered diseases, afflictions, or searing abuses. They may have succumbed to addictions. They may have prostituted themselves or sold their souls to the devil. They may have been publicly disgraced for their greed or immorality. They may have committed terrible crimes. They may have been victims of theft, rape, or assault. They may have been left for dead. They may have been orphaned, widowed, or had lost loved ones. They may have been wounded or maimed in all manner of wars. They may have lost their jobs, homes, or fortunes. But some way, some how, they found the strength and courage to survive, change, and overcome the conditions and the evils that had been trying to overcome them. As in Romans 12:21, "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good," that goodness that enabled the transformation, should be honored even if it was borne out of the darkness.

The darkness was deceptive. It tried to defeat mankind by turning human beings against one another, devaluing lives. It encouraged bitterness, wrath, malice, clamor, evil speaking, hatred, and revenge. It lied about their responsibilities, capabilities, loyalties, and priorities. It interfered with communications, relations, and self-evaluations. It muddled from minds, important information and significances. It kept them ignorant of knowledge, choices, rights, alternatives, and escape routes. It deprived them of dignity and integrity. It negated trust and truths. It cheated them out of chances. Its fog of fear obscured their visions and separated them from others. It blocked from their sight and touch the ^{rich} bright colors and textures of life and the bright sun of happiness. It held them in its dank dungeon of despair, denying them hope. It endangered their health and well-being. It weakened their will to live fully.

p. 3
B. J. But the life-force was with them in the darkness. Cells of their bodies fought off invasions and flushed out toxins. Compensations were made for lost senses and body functions. Adrenaline surged for fight or flight. Reserves of energy and inner strengths were drawn upon. The will to live overpowered death wishes, shed tears and found forgiveness restored souls. Guiding messages transmitted through stultifying static of troubled minds, were finally understood. Alone, with time and space to contemplate their plights, they realized errors of their ways, delusions, and vulnerabilities. With nowhere to go but up, they were ~~now~~ ready for renewal, yearning for the peace, love, and joy the light held for them.

Then came people with help and opportunities, which they eagerly reached for and grasped. I've seen women "be transformed by the renewing of your minds," as in Romans 12:2, by taking advantage of opportunities prison offers: medical and mental health services; GED and vocational education; substance abuse programs; spiritual guidance by the Chaplain and volunteer Church groups; parenting classes and the variety of self-improvement courses; and the disciplines of work and set boundaries of behavior. Prison has saved lives from the abuses of the streets.

Prison can also be detrimental and dangerous, if abuses within it go unchecked. Diligence in advocating for one's rights and health care, are often necessary for survival in prison. In protecting myself, I've had to rely on my higher instincts, thus becoming resourceful and self-reliant (good coming out of bad).

But I came into prison with some advantages. I had support from family and friends. I was college educated with a yearning to learn more. Maturity, manners, and my intellect, kept me out of trouble as I spent free time reading, writing, and playing Scrabble. My respect for other cultures, races, and humanity in general, enabled ~~my~~ relations with others of diverse backgrounds. My innate tenacity served me well in fighting for our rights. By cooking a variety of foods, I

p. 4,
B.J.
bonded with others as we cooked and ate together (supplementing bad canteen meals). My Christian faith sustained me spiritually, keeping me connected to my home church and the enlightening seminars and church services of the Soaring Spirit Prison Ministry.

I used my teaching background in my prison tutoring jobs and my affinity for cleanliness in my dorm tending jobs. ~~At~~ home, I had volunteered in my three children's school and scouting programs and I served as secretary of the Webster Groves Historical Society. In prison, I was secretary of our NAACP chapter, one of the many service organizations serving the prison and outside communities, through restorative efforts by offenders.

The best opportunities for me in prison were the outlets of creative expression. The Prison Performing Arts theater and poetry classes stimulated me intellectually and emotionally. Acting in Shakespearean plays, studying the great poets, and writing my own poetry, gave me self-confidence and a sense of identity. The PEN prison writing program encouraged my writing of essays and in other genres. The writing course taught by the novelist, Catherine Palmer, also inspired me to write. The Anne Frank Diary prison program encouraged me in journal keeping. Other enriching courses were: Making Peace With Your Past, Rational, Emotive Therapy, Taking a Chance on Change, Keep Your Bobber Up, Master Gardner, and Nutrition.

Unfortunately, my participation in the above activities and the freedoms of watching my T.V., typing, and listening to music in my room, came to an end when I was no longer safe and sought Protective Custody status, in an isolated, segregated cell, where I've been for two years now. Although I've given up my electronics, personal clothing, canteen food and drink, and such items as my soft pink blanket and printed sheets, I still have access to books, my magazines, and writing materials. I still

p. 5.
B.J. write poetry and such essays as, "Worthy Lives and Reasons Not To Dismiss Older People as Worthless," "You might as Well Live" about suicide, "To Fight like a Man?" about abuse, and "In the Killing Chamber" about lethal injection executions (which are causing agonizing deaths since the formerly used ones the tric is no longer available due to ethics of drug companies and other countries).

Meanwhile, I'm back in the nurturing cocoon that sustains us in the darkness, with solitude and time for intensive introspection and prayer. Acutely aware of my faults and past failings, I am also aware of my strengths. In reprogramming my mind, I say such affirmations as: I'm a strong, sensible survivor, I'm a wise, worthy writer, and I'm an elder of excellence, at age 68. Now that I'm aware of how positive and negative thoughts affect emotions and actions, I can better control these. I see how I self-sabotaged, saying and doing the wrong things to substantiate an often snarky, poor self-image and low self-esteem. I would second-guess positive and intuitive thoughts, taking ineffective actions or doing nothing at all, numbing pain and self-doubt in a stupor. I turned down good opportunities, feeling unworthy of them and fearing failure. Although I was selfish, I didn't ~~really~~ know what I really wanted or needed or ~~to~~ what I should give priority. Always looking outside of myself for validation and fulfillment, I didn't realize what I had in myself and my family, not meeting our needs. Thinking that I shouldn't have to prove myself, I failed to improve myself. I would choose turmoil and stress, rather than dealing with its sources, preferring anger, self-pity, and the drama, over the serenity of resolution and problem solving. I was struggling heedlessly with myself in a quagmire, unable or unwilling to bridge to a higher plane of peace and safety.

P. 6.
B. J.

Now knowing what is important to my life and what I'm about, my values and goals, I can better fit my initiatives to meeting those goals and actualize my values. I'm more focused, organized, observant, and open-minded (although I am a political liberal, I'm respectful of the conservative views of my father and best friend, even changing my "pro-choice" position to "pro-life"). I've reset the default of my mind from insecurity to self-sufficiency. I've given the weaker side of myself permission to be stronger and competent. I now see myself as others see me, but I'm not as dependent upon their approval. I'm willing to work with what I have, grateful for small blessings. In my struggles with abuse of power over me (which I can't get away from in prison), I have no energy to waste on destructive thoughts, emotions, and actions. Taking stock from a more positive perspective, I utilize goodness wherever I can find it, even in my enemies.

As Aristotle, aptly stated, "I count braver he who controls his desires than him who conquers his enemies, for the hardest victory is victory over self." If we all achieved that, we might not have as many enemies in each other. What good does it do to defeat our foes, when we're still defeating ourselves? Harming others ends up harming ourselves in the grand scheme of things. We all struggle between the good and bad within ourselves. We should ensure the victory by that good, giving it priority to finding fault in others. We can no longer be our own worst enemies in our transformed selves.

As a young woman, I made a wall-hanging picturing a flowering plant under the saying, "Bloom where you are planted." I never imagined that many years later, I would be planted under such harsh and hostile conditions, that I'd barely survive them, nor that in many more years, I'd bloom in prison. But here I am, a strong survivor, an unlikely humanist, and a hopeful opportunist. Yes, I know who I am. By the way, who are you and are you being transformed too? Beverly Baynes