

Title of Essay: "A Brand New Beginning Awaits us All"
The windows here at the MCT Norfolk Prison-Security Housing Unit extend from Floor to Ceiling, about eight feet high. They're only five inches wide-impossible for anyone to escape through, and the glass is clear. That surprised me. Most segregation units like I've landed in have cell windows that are completely frosted over from the outside, making it impossible to look through them. But here at MCT Norfolk we have lots of beautiful trees and woods. I see the occasional raven looking for a bite to eat, or the occasional white prison pickup truck driving slowly outside the perimeter fence, because here at MCT Norfolk we've got a view. This morning I got in a good workout. Then I took a bird path out of my cell's sink. As I hung my wet laundry on the clothesline beside my bed, a golden stream of sunshine poured into my cell. Drawn to its warmth and glow, I sat down cross legged in a yoga position at the base of my window and I looked out at the nearby gravel and moss. As I peered through the glass, I noticed a small little insect climbing up the window's sheer face. An ant was on the inside of my pane, a rare visitor to my cold prison cell. I gave him a much closer look, aided by the sunlight outside that illuminated his semi-transparent body. He was red in color, as I thought to myself "should I crush him? I'd hate to lose track of him and later awake to find him gnawing on a piece of my leg like it was food. Plus, he's likely a scout! What if he finds some crumbs, and then rushes back to the colony to tell his army of ants there's lots of food for the eating here? Twice, I held my finger poised above his fragile body frame, and twice I aborted the assault. The longer I stared at him, the more I was impressed by his tiny, intricate design. He was truly quite impressive.

Surely in a thousand years, I could never create ^{page} ~~#2~~
something so amazing. So why should I crush him?
It's not like cutting down a tree and knowing
I could just plant another one in its place. So
I decided to let him live, and this ant continued
his journey up the window pane.

"A stupid little bug"
About halfway up the window, he slipped and fell,
dropping a few hundred of his own body lengths and
smacking his tiny self against the window sill. It's
impossible, but I swear I heard the impact. Yet
within a matter of seconds, he was back up
and remounted on the glass bottom again. The
fall didn't even daunt him, though it would
certainly have bruis'd the life out of me. Extremely
interested now, I sat watching him again scale
the glass - even cheering for him as each and
every attempt ended in disaster for the ant. He
climbed, slipped, and then endured a full-speed
plunge onto the cell's old stone floor. I couldn't
help but smile at how stupid this little bug was.
But as I watched him try yet again, my vision
refocused onto a white pickup truck driving by
past the electric barbed-wire fence, a perimeter
round driven by a prison guard making good
money for driving in circles all day. Maybe we're
not so much better than that ant? or at
least he keeps trying. At least he moves forward.
Quitting isn't a part of this ant's D.N.A., I now
realized as I watched the white pickup truck
disappear from view. The idea of giving up
wouldn't make sense to the ant. He is pre-
programmed to always keep going, keep trying in
life - but what about us? How come we -
humans don't shove the ant's drive to conquer
the hurdles in our own lives? Now the ant -
made his way up about two thirds of the way
up the window, and I decided to not let him
fall again. So I grabbed a yellow legal envelope

~~pages~~ And held it flush to the window a few inches

below him, like a safety net. My arm got tired just holding the envelope. The ant fell twice—once about a foot from the top, and again a few inches further up. If he had chosen to explore the yellow envelope rather than remounting the window, I would have simply blown him out under my cell door and sent him on his way. But both times when he hit the paper, he was back on the glass before I could even get a good look at him. His enthusiasm made me happy. I was intrigued now to see what would happen when he reached the top of the window sill.

And he did finally reach the top of the window. I held my face within inches of him as his antennae touched the black sealant around the window pane. He examined it briefly, then he turned and scurried off toward the left side of the window. When he reached the sealant, he turned around and headed for the right side. This went on for about 10 minutes. Finally I told the ant he was on his own. I pulled the envelope away from the window. Of course, once the safety net was gone, he slipped off of the glass and plummeted to the bottom. I leaned down to see what shape the fall had left him in, and found him crumpled up in a groove of sealant. He was still moving, but only a little. I left the ant and decided to go eat my lunch. There wasn't much to the lunch. ~~Getting~~ time gets even harder when you're living on state food as I am. As I finished off my cookie I looked over to see if my visitor the ant was healthy enough to enjoy a sliver of a chocolate chip. But wait! The ant was back on the window pane. I couldn't believe it: four inches up from the bottom and moving along like it was the thing to do! I examined the ant very

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Closely and noticed that all of his parts seemed to

be working just fine. Since I was by myself - with no books or a cell to help pass the time - I had nothing better to do than watch this little God's given creature climb the window for about a good hour. In between, I also did other things. I drank some water, sat down at my cell desk/table to write a little. All the while, I intermittently watched the ant do his thing. It didn't really make sense. This ant had fallen about a dozen times and reached the top twice since I had my lunch. But he still kept on climbing. Shouldn't he have figured out that there's nothing up there for him already? "Why does he keep climbing?" I wondered. Once again I stood there looking at the ant, my face just inches from him. At one point, he stopped moving and twiddled his long antennae at me. It was almost as if he was saying, "I just like to climb, man! It's all about the climb." It was at that very moment I came to see that we will all, at one point or another, fall down in life. But like my friend the red ant, we must never stop fighting, never stop climbing. Because regardless of the life's destination, the climb is what it's all about. And when we are unwilling to give up on our own life quest, a new beginning awaits us all.