

## CASPER

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There is a house outside of the large wall of the New Jersey State prison, a quaint little Tudor house with an attic window. I can see its upper portion from my housing unit and while walking in the prison yard.

Back in high school years a good friend of mine lived in the attic of a similar house in Long Island. His room faced west and from the attic window the sunsets were epic. Sometimes we would climb out the window to sit on the roof, that hung over his drive-way, watching girls from our high school playing basketball on the court across the street. All these years later, here in this alien swath of land, the presence of that little house gave me some solace, as it reminded me of a happier time:

In prison, being melancholy is not a 'feeling' but a 'state of being' - in perpetuity. So, a few fleeting moments of joy feel like gasps of air for a drowning soul.

The attic window had pink curtains and I guessed that a young girl lived there. – Stop! I am well aware of the “optics” of a scary prisoner peering into a little girl's room so please don't judge me by rolling your eyes or biting your fingertips in angst. It was an obvious conjecture.

I do not know who lived there but that attic window was a breath of fresh air. In this sea of despair, that attic window became an island of hope. In that humanity was alive and well. I am Muslim and holidays such as Christmas and New Years don't mean as much. Yet, during Christmas a pink placard sign would appear in that attic window, wishing all a 'Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year'.

Through falling snow flurries I could see that pink message of love. The humanity of that simple act touched me to my core. It caused me to smile in my despondency and for that I am forever grateful.

In my mind, I often place myself in that attic thinking how the view looked from that window. Surely, looking at the wide expanse of prison it probably looked as foreign and revenant, the apparitions within as ghoulish.

Over some years the window was first shut, curtains draped, and then finally it was boarded up. The view blocked, the hope crushed, and the well-wisher silenced.



I didn't like it. But, I did understand. I am pragmatic after all. As I said, from their perspective the prison must have been a frightening place full of ghosts. In a way, they were right – partly. As is with all things, there is good and bad in everything. Because in prison there are the misplaced as well, but that's a conversation for another day.

I am mournful only because I never had a chance to show my appreciation. Among the evil wraiths, I believe, I am the friendly one. So by chance if this composition reaches the one in the attic, I just want you to know, from the bottom of his translucent heart, Casper says: *Thank you.*