

# Keep on Imagining



REV. SUZELLE LYNCH &  
BRAD THE DAD

*Suzelle and Brad are  
have been CLF pen pals  
for years. They wrote this  
exploration of imagination together.*

**SUZELLE:** Imagination is human magic. It gives us the power to make mental pictures and feel feelings beyond the input of our senses. It helps us believe, remember, reason, fantasize and solve problems! Imagination misused fuels our fears, but more often it beckons us toward a better life.

I always thought I had a good imagination. I'm a writer, an artist, and a songwriter... But I never imagined I could have a rich, beautiful, loving friendship with somebody like Brad the Dad, a young incarcerated Black man who grew up on the streets in poverty, fear, and violence.

**BRAD THE DAD:** Imagine a child born to a single mother addicted to crack cocaine and alcohol. She has utter disregard for this child; his basic needs are at war with the merciless enemy, crack, and only one desire can be fulfilled. The child loses every time...

There is no father. Often, there are no lights, heat, or hot water; no food or rules; no love, attention, or affection. There's only crack smoke, empty beer cans, and strange men coming and going day and night. And if the child cries from hunger, he's fed punches to the face to shut him up.

Imagine a child who wanted to be Superman; who dreamed of being a lawyer or policeman; who dreamed of his mother loving him and his daddy being home. Feel the bite of cold, hard steel around his tiny wrists; the loneliness, fear and sadness of being locked in jail for trying to protect and earn the love of a mother who cursed the day he was born. Honestly, would it surprise anyone if this child answered the call of self-preservation and took to the streets?

Now imagine the surprise of this child grown to adulthood, in a prison cell, watching TV as a crowd of black and white people march through the streets, professing "Black Lives Matter!" I thought it was some kind of a hoax. Frustrated and angry, I asked myself, "Who are these Black Lives everyone claims to matter...?"

**SUZELLE:** It was my congregation and me that Brad saw on the TV news. We were marching to fight the dismissal of charges against the police officer who murdered Jay Anderson, Jr., a young black man from our neighborhood.

Brad wrote to me. He asked. "Does my black life matter? Does my son's black life matter? Or is it just the black lives who are dead that matter?" His question hit my face like a dash of cold water. We began writing back and forth.

*Keep on Imagining, continued on page 5*

# Quest

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*"Without leaps  
of imagination or  
dreaming, we lose  
the excitement  
of possibilities.  
Dreaming, after  
all is a form  
of planning."*

GLORIA STEINEM

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# IMAGINATION

## *What role does imagination play in your life?*

MICHAEL

*CLF Member, incarcerated TX*

Imagination has had a major role in my life ever since I was a little boy. My imagination started and grew, from my shoe box full of G.I. Joe vs. Cobra action figures. I'd create story lines, and they'd be my actors for my imaginative movie. To be honest, that carried on until I was 17 years old. At that time, I gave my action figures to my oldest nephew.

Then, I started writing short stories, getting critique and advice from my Reading and English teachers in high school. By 20, I went online to find out how a screenplay is properly written and formatted. After reading a couple of screenplays online, like *Die Hard* and *The Sixth Sense*, I started writing my own screenplays.

MICHAEL

*CLF Member, incarcerated WI*

Your mind controls whether you live in a paradise, or hell. Imagination give us the power to believe, and push the limits. My imagination has granted me ideas, innovation; the natural outcome of creative thinking. The proper use of imagination is to give beauty to the world. ■

Every day, I have new ideas and imaginative plots for stories, screenplays, and novels. Being able to go into my world of imagination really helps me to be able to cope and manage a cool mind and time while in prison. Of course, movies, commercials, TV shows, classic literature and novels,

really help to spark an idea and let my imagination fly and take me into a place of wonderful, awesome, and potential possibilities. I'd be one lost and crazy individual without my imagination. I'm very thankful for the imagination I have and hope one day, I can use it to help and bless others. ■



PHOTO BY NONG V ON UNSPLASH

## TALIB

*CLF Member, incarcerated FL*

When we're incarcerated we lose a lot, but one of the main things we lose is our ability to connect to the world. We become very isolated, and we start to forget the world outside this one — our dreams even start to become defined by the parameters of prison. Our interpretation can become distorted through the prism that is prison.

Our imagination plays the vital role of keeping us connected to the outside world.

We use our imagination in a variety of ways: we tell stories about our life before incarceration, or imagine what we'll be doing upon release. We imagine playing games with our kids, of having intimate moments with loved ones; we use artistic mediums to remember the world as we once saw it, or re-imagine it in a way that renews our connection to it. There is no shortage of inventive ways that those of us in prison use our imagination as a means to feel connected to a world that some of us haven't seen in decades.

I will tell you the three main ways I use my imagination as a means of connection. First, I am a constant student. I enjoy learning; I love to study philosophy, sociology, and politics. I strive to understand reasons. My love of studying started with myself: I was 20 years old, facing down the rest of my life in prison, and did not understand why. I needed to figure it

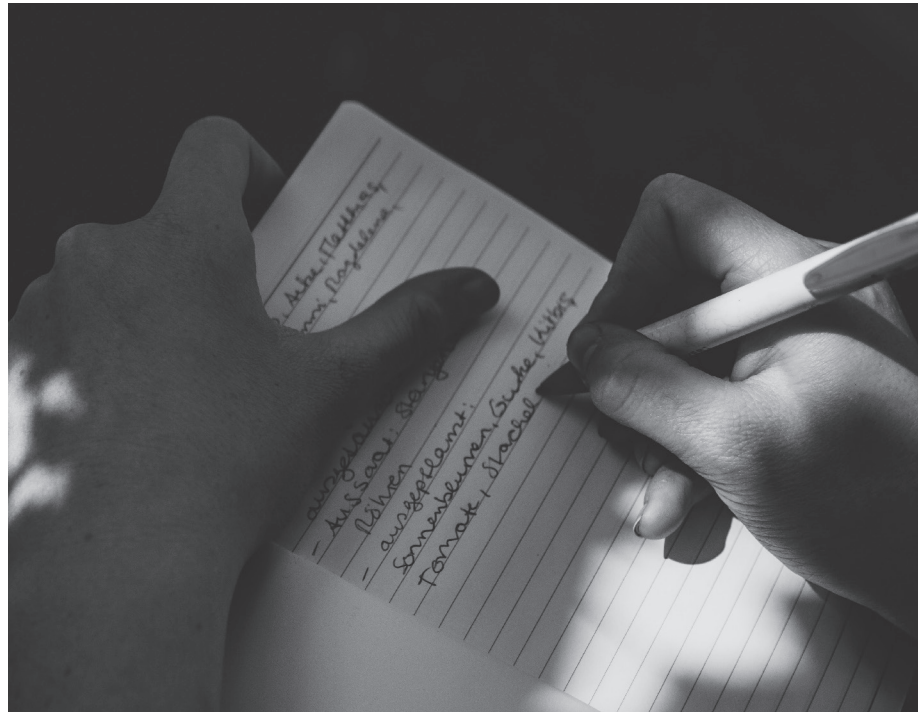


PHOTO BY JONATHAN KEMPER ON UNSPLASH

out. I wanted to know what happened to me that caused me to want to be someone who inflicted pain. This led me down a rabbit hole in which I found some of those answers, and also led to me finding myself, and being able to imagine how I fit in the world.

Next, I am a writer. I write a variety of things, but my passion lies with poetry and short-fiction: this is where I can play with ideas of identity and emotion. Writing helps me to imagine the world in new ways, the type of people that exist in it, and how we're all connected to it. It allows me to imagine an existence beyond the walls. When I write, I am in a different world — connected to it, not in a prison cell.

Lastly, I use imagination with the people I correspond with. I have been

told that I can be quite an inquisitive person, it is only because I desire to know. I've spent my entire 20s and almost all of my 30s in prison, and the experiences that people normally have at that age — things that helped them discover themselves — are things I didn't get. I live somewhat vicariously through others' stories. I rely on their information when discussing an array of topics, to hypothesize my own likes/dislikes and desires/needs. The more detail, the better I can imagine. It is through those interactions that I can see the world.

My imagination for me, and for others in my position, is about maintaining a connection to other people and the world. It is a necessary component to staying a person, instead of becoming a prisoner. ■

# IMAGINATION



PHOTO BY SIGMUND ON UNSPLASH

## GEORGE

*CLF Member, incarcerated FL*

Imagination has always played a big role in my life. As kids we often imagine ourselves as superheroes or any other type of fictional hero. As we grow up, so does our imagination. As a teenager, I used to imagine myself as a firefighter or, a police officer (still heroes, but more reality based). Now as an incarcerated man, I truly un-

derstand the power of a good, strong imagination.

Relaxed thinking is the key to your imagination, and imagination is the key to your power and talent. As an incarcerated man, I have time to think clearly. Once activated, it's easy to find and focus on your power and talent. For some it's drawing, and for others it may be writing or story

telling. For me it's all of the above. I tell stories in graphic novel form, so my imagination is always going, even while I sleep. For all people in the free-world or who are incarcerated, if you want to be successful or just happy in life, my advice is to slow down. Close your eyes and let your imagination guide you to your true calling. Blessed be. ■

## RUSSELL

*CLF Member, incarcerated MD*

I have discovered that the most powerful super power in the Universe is the imagination.

Imagination dictates every single thing I do. Many people may be unaware how our imagination creates everything around us. As a lifelong artist I know this to be true. Before I draw, I imagine. Before I sleep, I imagine. Before I awake, I imagine. It is a

fact that dreams are mere imagination run wild.

What I do is allow my imagination to combine with the actions that will lead to my revealing the imagined thing simply by not interfering. In Buddhism, this is said to be what Zen is: the mind and actions moving effortlessly in unison.

My imagination gives me inspiration to contribute to a future world

where everyone loves one another and shares all of earth's resources for the good of the whole planet. Those that are using their imagination in the same way will quicken this imagining into physical reality.

If I never learned to just let my imagination live free I would be one of the most miserable people alive. I believe I only exist simply because I imagine it! ■



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*Keep on Imagining, continued from page 1*

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**BRAD THE DAD:** Throughout the 20 years I've been incarcerated, I've always imagined myself as something greater than the six-digit number the prison system assigned me. I HAD to imagine in order to survive. I've spent more than ten years in solitary confinement, with one stint lasting almost four years straight. Having a vivid imagination and hope is the ONLY way to survive the hole for such a duration. You must be able to live in your mind and work towards something greater for tomorrow. I imagined myself as the most loving and understanding father the world has ever seen, and the most supportive, loving, and loyal husband a wife could ask for. I imagined I was smart; a scholar even, so I studied and read a lot of books. I imagined myself as a Freedom Fighter. Despite the barriers

the prison administration placed in front of me, I never ceased to imagine. To believe. To hope.

**SUZELLE:** I didn't understand Brad at first. I thought he wanted help from me. I asked a committee of my congregation to assist, but they returned only fear and suspicion. But Brad had imagined something far more powerful than help: he imagined honest conversations, a sharing of laughs and lives, caring support for his son. In a word, he imagined kinship. And that is what we now have — Brad and me, my partner, Brad's wife, his son, and Lynn and Marc — a wonderful couple from my former congregation who wrote to Brad when I could not. We are a circle of kin, companions on life's path. We love each other; we listen and learn from each other.

**BRAD THE DAD:** I never knew exactly how I would bring my imaginings

to fruition, but I always believed I would. Now I can proudly profess to you that I stand here today as a loving husband of an amazing wife, who has enriched my life beyond anything I could have ever imagined; a supportive father of a wonderful son and step daughter. I am a college scholar with a 3.8 grade point average, and I am a staunch defender of the freedoms and liberties of all people, regardless of age, race, gender identity, or sexual orientation. So much love is reciprocated between my great friends Suzelle and Lynn and me, and their partners, whose friendship and support has helped me turn my imagination into reality. We have all dared to hope, believe, and imagine something beyond the boxes of each of our cultural or social demographics. I encourage you to have the courage to do the same. ■



PHOTO BY NICOLE BASTER ON UNSPLASH

IN PASSING

BY: ULTRA VYLET

I'D Like To USE  
 SOME ALLEGORICAL ALLUSIONS here  
 A MYTHICAL METHODOLOGICAL METAPHORIC  
 AND SYNERGISTIC SYSTEMATIC RENDITION REAR  
 BUT NEED I TELL Thee, ANNOUNCE  
 OF MY ENDEAVOR IN ENIGMAS ENGINEERED  
 A THOUGHT OUT-LOUD, ADMISSION  
 PARDON THIS PARABLES PROMPT  
 POMP PROPOSITION

IN PASSING

SO I SAY TO THE WAYWARD WAYFARER  
 LODGE IN YOUR INN UNTIL THE STORM PASSES  
 AND I PLACE 7 GOLD COINS IN HIS PALM  
 WHICH RIGHT-WAY CATCH FIRE AND BURN TO ASHES

AS IF I HAD GIVEN HIM NOTHING IN FORM  
 AND THE FIRE HAD NEVER FLARED FIZZED  
 FLOTTED AN EVANESCENT EXISTENCE  
 HE LOOKS AT ME AND SAYS: "WHAT STORM?"  
 AS THE THUNDER ROLLS AND A CRACK OF LIGHTNING  
 BEARS HIS FALSE WITNESS

BUT HE UTTERS NOT A LIE  
 AND NEITHER DO THE TORRENTS OF RAIN  
 THE SHUTTERS ON HIS EYES  
 FRAME DISTORTED WINDOW PANES  
 SET WITH A STARK FATE; FIXED  
 SEALED IN HORRID DISDAIN

ON THE HIGHWAY TO HELL, HE SAYS  
 HIS MOTHER IS DEAD  
 HE'S CHASING DEATH (HALF-HEARTEDLY)  
 'CAUSE THE OTHER HALF WAS RIPPED OUT HIS CHEST  
 SAYS HE'S ANGRY, BITTER, AND BRIMS WITH RAGE  
 LIVES IN SORROW AND SWIMS IN HATE  
 SAYS HOW HE CAN'T TAKE LIFE AND SULKS  
 SCREAMING KOMAKOZY AND HOW HE NO LONGER CARES  
 ON THE VERY GROUND HIS CALLOUSED FEET WALK  
 HE CASTS CURSES AND SINISTER SNARES

FOR WHAT ITS WORTH,  
 EVEN THO I PERCEIVE HIS UNPERCEPTIVE PROMISE  
 IN TURNING; I LOOK INTO HIS EYES AND PLANT THE SEEDS  
 A SPIRITUAL DEPOSIT; DETERGENT  
 IN SOIL EL D'SOUL, FOR HIS SOILED SOUL IT BURNETH

I SAY:

I'VE BEEN BY THAT WAY  
 DOWN THAT ROAD, YOU SEE  
 THRU THEM ALLEYS  
 UP THAT STREET  
 ON THAT BOULEVARD  
 VENTURE THOSE AVENUES  
 DROVE THAT DRIVE  
 TOOK THAT ROUTE  
 JOURNEYED THAT LANE  
 TRAVERSED THOSE HIGHWAYS  
 I KNOW THY PAIN  
 REVERSE AND SIDEWAYS

I'VE BEEN ON FOOT, IN A CAR, SUV  
 VAN, TRUCK, BUS AND LIMOUSINE  
 IN A TANK, HOVER CRAFT, PLANE, BLIMP  
 ON A MOTORCYCLE, JET SKI, UFO, AND BROOMSTICK  
 I'VE HAD A HANDGLIDER, JET PACK, HOT AIR BALLOON  
 MAGIC CARPET, UNICYCLE, CHARIOT, AND CANOE  
 I'VE BEEN ON TRAINS, ICE SKATES  
 HORSE BACK, PO-GO STICKS  
 SKATE BOARDS, SNOW BOARDS  
 SURF BOARDS, AND SPACE SHIPS  
 I'VE USED STILTS, ROLLER BLADES, ROLLER SKATES  
 4 WHEELERS, 3 WHEELERS, GO-CARTS, AND SLEIGHS  
 A HELICOPTER, CRUISE LINER, RAFT, MOPED  
 BICYCLE, TRICYCLE, STAGE COACH, AND BOB SLED

SO I SAID TO THE WEARY WONDERER  
 AND LEFT HIM TO HIS PERDITION  
 PARCHED HORSE TONGUES BLEED BLOOD  
 I MUST INFER INDIFFERENCE  
 BLOODY BITS AND BRIDLES  
 BEGET BLOODY REIGNS  
 ADHERENCE; GRIP IS VITAL  
 BUT SHALL NOT BE OBTAINED

SOMETIMES I WONDER  
 BECAUSE I RECOGNIZE THE STRANGERS HEART  
 BECAUSE THE SPIRITS WITHIN THEM  
 TELL ME, WHAT MANNER OF MEN THEY ARE  
 I POWDER IF ALL PATHS DON'T POUR INTO THE SAME PARK  
 WHAT IF,  
 THERE ISN'T EVEN ANYWHERE TO STAY.. OR GO  
 WHERE ALL LINES BLUR AND VANISH, ABOLISHED IN A HALO

NOTHING AWAKENS VIA ENLIGHTENMENT, EXCEPT  
 FOR YOUR AWARENESS OF WHAT HAS ALWAYS BEEN  
 ALREADY IS AND SHALL ALWAYS BE  
 THIS ANCIENT PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGICAL  
 SCHOOL OF THOUGHT, IS A SLEIGHT TO ME

IF I AM SO DIVINE; MODE: SINLESS  
 IF MY ESSENCE IS PURE DIVINITY  
 HOW WAS CONSCIOUSNESS LOST TO BEGIN WITH  
 HOW COULD MERE SECULAR OBSTRUCTIONS, OBSCURE  
 BRAZEN  
 SUCH A POTENT SOLVENT CELESTIAL ENERGY  
 I WILL NOT BE A MARTYR OF MY OWN IMAGINED NATIONS  
 LIFE IS FULL OF MYSTERY  
 THO I DO IMAGINE; WONDERFULLY  
 FALLING SHORT A PROCLAMATION OF TRUTH  
 SIMPLY HELD IN CONSIDERATION  
 LO, NO OBDURATIONS, OBEISANCE MAKING  
 OR FURTHER ADO.

Vylet



## UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY PITTSBURGH • JUNE 21 - 25, 2023

**Would you like to represent the Church of the Larger Fellowship at General Assembly (GA) this summer?**

The CLF is entitled to 22 delegates at the UUA's General Assembly, which will be held both online and in-person in Pittsburgh, PA from June 21-25, 2023. You will be able to attend online or in-person workshops, programs, and worship services. Proof of vaccination for COVID-19 is required to attend in person. As a delegate you will vote on association business during General Sessions. General Sessions will be held from 2:30-5:30pm ET on 6/22-6/24 and

2:00-4:00pm PT on 6/25. Delegates should be able to be online or in person to attend the majority of these General Sessions. CLF delegates vote their conscience on matters related to the denomination of Unitarian Universalism, and are responsible for their own expenses. There is no set registration fee for delegates who are attending only for business virtually at General Sessions.

If you'd like to participate in GA 2023 in this role, please fill out the online application at [clfu.org/delegate-application](https://clfu.org/delegate-application). Visit the UUA's GA website at [www.uua.org/ga](https://www.uua.org/ga) for details.

## FOR YOUR REFLECTION

*In this section, we offer questions for reflection based on ideas explored in this issue. You may wish to explore it individually or as part of a group discussion. To submit your reflection for possible inclusion in a future issue of Quest, tear off your answer and mail it back to us using the envelope included in the middle of this issue, or mail a longer reflection separately.*

**Do you believe that imagination is human magic, as Rev. Suzelle Lynch wrote?  
What has imagination made possible in your life?**

*If you would like us to be able to publish or share your writing in the future, remember to include "You have permission to edit and publish my words" somewhere on your submission.*



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