

01/06/11

Dear Friends,

I am so undeserving of the joy that now enfolds me.

And I wonder as I lay on my bottom bunk—why me?

But thankfully (i.e. full of gratitude) I now feel I must write and share this feeling immediately.

Today in the mail I received 5 letters: Arnal Kennedy, Grace Morningstar Hill-Speed, Daniel Omondi (brother), Diane Omondi (mother), and Joanna Shenk—read in that order. No-Grace's before Arnal's, because after Arnal's I stopped to write a poem, fulfilling his request of sharing "where [my] mind is at."

And then two more, unexpected, brought tears and spontaneous laughter. My brother Daniel is simply a spectacular human being—his words were an unbelievable balm and blessing—sharing a personal testimony and giving reassurance to me, his elder brother, of God's active presence in all we are pursuing. And the loving words of a mother who's gentle, serving spirit has always been my most pertinent example of how to live. Both containing updates and reporting God's goodness in current events and in future opportunities—happenings that are pulling me homeward with ever-increasing force. So many ways and places to serve.

And then Joanna Shenk—a beautiful letter giving further testimony to God's active presence in the interweaving of lives and stories—asking me to write my own testimonial on the influence of my Mennonite heritage (in the context of overall Christianity in the U.S.). I pray for the right words, and the focus to be able to do this well.

I am currently enjoying the solitude of being the single occupant of a two-person cell—a situation that will hold at least for one night (tonight), and quite possibly through the approaching weekend. Chris Mathuriu, my most recent "ex-celly" was moved today—he said as he was leaving, "You were right, they came when I had let go and was least expecting it." Though it required patience on my part, we had a very positive eight-day relationship—sharing most everything, partaking in spectacular food creations (miracles out of scraps), welcoming the New Year with gratitude, prayer and commemoration of those less fortunate. I had the pleasure of

sharing last night's mail with him—an amazing assemblage of pictures from Kenya (prepared by my sister), some of which I am including here, and news clippings from home—Chris read every single one between a serving of one of my prison casseroles (made from leftovers) and a dessert whipped together from some extra bread, apples, my breakfast milk, and our lunch time sponge cakes. He loved all of it—food, pictures, and news clippings—a fitting send off as it turned out to be.

I spent much of the day yesterday in prayer for Bob, Chris, and Nancy. Still no word on the outcome—I know I'll hear soon. And I am continuing to pray for Chris and Nancy as they begin their terms.

I am now in my fourth week at Atlanta USP, where I actually feel quite settled and comfortable with the routine. Some more opportunity for interaction with others, communication, and exercise would be very nice—perhaps too nice for “prison”. But still I have made some acquaintances/friends beyond three former cellmates, two of whom are also designated to McRae. No telling when they're coming for us—likely soon. Though it's not a 100% certainty that's where I am actually going to end up, I am looking forward to the experience of being at an INS facility with lots of internationals. And if plans are indeed being made to have me deported somehow, I am looking forward to that experience as well, whatever the outcome.

All this is to say simply that I am well, grateful for the outpouring of support I continue to experience through the mail/e-mail/phone calls with family and community. Grateful for each relationship with other inmates and encounters with the “pigs” that are both dynamic and revelatory (of human-ness mostly). Grateful for my quiet, clean, organized cell containing a massive stack of mail, warm clothing, and other comforts (e.g. a chair), and excellent books. Looking forward to the leftover chicken and rice I'm going to fix up with some carrots and wheat bread. Thankful that I have just enough stamps remaining to send this out.

Peace, Love, and Blessings

Michael David

(Untitled) For Grace and Arnal:

ANGELS ALL AROUND ME
IN THE DUNGEONS OF ATLANTA USP
GUIDING LIGHT, THE TRUTH OF LOVE
AND DAILY LEARNED HUMILITY
LISTEN, STILL, PRAY, STILL—
SILENCE CLAMOURS THROUGH THE NIGHT
WATCH, PATIENT, PRAY STILL SILENT—
QUIETLY DESIRES FLEE.

FOR BLESSINGS COME WHEN
LEAST EXPECTED

THOUGH MIND AND FLESH
IN CONSTANCY MAY SEEK
REPRIEVE THROUGH MATERIAL
THE SPIRIT BECKONS
THROUGH THE DIN
TO PEACE
SO SUBTLE
AND ETHEREAL
YET CONGRUENT, TANGIBLE
SIMPLE AND SIMPLY INFINITESIMAL
THE FREEDOM OF CAPTIVITY
ANGELS WHISPER...
...IN A PENITENTIARY