



# COLLEGE GUILD

Spring 2017 Newsletter

*RESPECT  
REDUCES  
RECIDIVISM*

## **BALLAD OF THE ROBBER POET**

**BY DAN G.**

I'm not very good at robbing banks. I wasn't all that great of a father and, for numerous reasons, a failure as a husband, son, friend and brother. I would have no problem filling volumes with my faults, shortcomings and mistakes, but turns out getting locked up was something I had a knack for.

February, 2013. I'm estranged from a wife who hates me, two young boys who will learn to. I'm homeless, I'm desperate and it's getting cold in Chicago. The drugs, the alcohol and the will to live are all gone. I want to die, so I figure robbing a bank is a sure way to either score enough money to drink myself to death or provide the catalyst to a "suicide by cop". I walk into a bank just outside Chicago with not much more than a hastily penned hold-up note and lots of questions about why my life turned out the way it did.

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Fast forward to October, 2016, early afternoon in a Maximum Security Federal Penitentiary somewhere in the northwest corner of Pennsylvania. They've just brought a stack of mail to my cell and in that stack I find three different letters from three different literary journals informing me that my poetry is going to be published in upcoming issues. Though happy, I still find myself puzzled about my life. Being in prison has given me plenty of time to dwell on everything that went wrong. It would have been so easy for me to say the hell with it, to just give up and spend my time learning how to be a better criminal. But I won't. I can't. I have a College Guild assignment to complete, a thank you letter to write, and a few revisions to a short story that will be appearing in a literary journal this fall.

You see, College Guild has given me a purpose and the keys to a car-load of talent I'd never have developed on my own. I can't remember exactly when or how I found them, I'm just glad I did. As to why I initially enrolled, that's easy – there was nothing else to do! There are not many free correspondence courses for prison inmates out there. I figured at worst, whatever it was CG had to offer might give me something to do with an hour or

two of the many I'd been sentenced to. I enrolled in the Creative Language course and from day one was met with nothing but honesty and encouragement from each and every one of the College Guild readers I was lucky enough to have.

Slowly but surely, the folks at CG started convincing me that beneath the addictions, the poor choices and the resultant criminal record was a person

with some talent. With the guidance and reassurance of my readers, I went from Creative Language to Short Story Club to Poetry. Each course opened a new door, each unit uncovered a shred of ability.

The amount of time and encouragement that a College Guild reader provides amazes me. I have been truly blessed by my readers and thanks to their input and critique, I have been pushed to keep bettering myself. I still remember how good it made me feel when one of the volunteers called me a "poet". Hearing that word used to describe me made me think that maybe, with some hard work on my part, I could be more than what I currently am.

cont'd on page 2

**Robber Poet** cont'd from page 1

I wish I could explain exactly how it felt when I got my first poem published around eleven months after I started with CG. That poem started out as a CG assignment, as has most everything else I've published. I wish I could describe how it felt to start believing I have talent and getting back some of the self-esteem I'd given away over the past forty years. What I can tell you is this – without College Guild, none of this happens. It was with CG's help I picked up a pen to try and make sense of everything, to try and find an answer to why life sometimes takes the turns it does. Truth be told, I'm no closer to figuring it out, but I'm no longer willing to give up either. In each short story, every stanza of every poem I write, I find something new. Apparently others do too and I'm proud of that. Some time back, CG asked if I'd be interested in being on their Thank You Committee and I couldn't say yes fast enough. If I could, I'd put pen to paper to personally thank each and every person who has ever donated time or money to College Guild. It's the least I can do for an organization that's done so much for me. I've discovered the power of words. I've toiled over my own and I've greedily read those of others. And I'm not alone. Men and women just like me have benefitted from College Guild and scores more will benefit from them in the future. It is an honor and a privilege to be able to thank everyone who makes that possible.

### CG Welcomes 3<sup>rd</sup> College Club

In addition to Bowdoin and Bates Colleges, College Guild now is privileged to have students from **Young Harris College** in Georgia organize an on campus CG Club. YHC is working on much needed fund-raising. Students from Bowdoin and Bates serve on the Board of Directors. In addition, both Maine colleges host at least two events per year to help educate their classmates and members of the community about criminal justice issues.

In October, 2016, the Bowdoin club invited a former warden to discuss the Prison Industrial Complex. Tekla Miller, author of *The Warden Wore Pink*, was the first female warden of a men's maximum security prison in Michigan. Bowdoin is hosting a film on racism and the justice system this spring, and is already planning next fall's lecture. With the College Guild office so close to their campus, Bowdoin students also help out in the office.

College Guild was invited to Martin Luther King Day on the Bates campus, where CG's Administrator spoke and students had a display table and answered questions about the organization. In March, 2017, Bates presented the film, *First Degree*, which was followed by remarks from CG Club volunteers. Community members from the Lewiston area were invited.

This year will be the 3<sup>rd</sup> for a summer intern, each from a different college, whose role is to either review and improve courses or write a new course. College students have brought ideas and enthusiasm to the organization. They are already teachers for their communities. College Guild and its students are lucky to be recipients of their generosity.

### This Addiction

by Dan G.

Ten years ago,  
I'd have told you  
that it would never  
happen to me.

What a difference  
a decade makes.  
It all started  
so innocent,  
so harmless.

A dirty limerick or  
two when out with  
friends, maybe a  
line or two of

Blake, Bukowski or  
Ruefel, just to feel  
cultured, hell, I'd  
go to a reading  
or two, but I'd

never keep that shit  
around the house.

Then, before I ever knew  
what was happening, it  
was a haiku at night,  
just a little something

to help me take  
the edge off.

In no time, I'm  
up to a half-dozen  
lines of free verse and  
a ballad or two just  
to start my day.

Every morning staring  
at my reflection, kidding  
myself – What's the harm  
in a stanza or two? I'm  
just reading it, not  
writing it. Not yet.

And so the day came,  
I found myself alone,  
pen and paper and  
a racing mind.

"Just this one time,"  
that's what I told myself,  
I just wanna see how  
it feels, just need to  
see for myself what  
the big deal is...

You know, it's true  
what they say about  
the first high,  
that you spend each day,  
you write each word  
chasing that first rush

pawning thoughts for  
metaphor, ideas for rhyme  
and feelings for meter,  
whoring yourself for  
iambic pentameter.

"I can quit anytime I want!"  
Just one more sonnet, one  
more villanelle, a few more lines  
of feeling and it'll all  
make so much sense,  
just a little more,  
one more for the road,  
something to take the edge off,  
something to write my wrongs.

*Around the country, several prisoners are taking on the admirable job of forming study groups using College Guild courses. After receiving their course choice from CG, members distribute assignments and their answers to others in the group. Study group members are learning to be both thoughtful students and supportive teachers.*

### WAVERLY, VIRGINIA

*The "Each One Teach One" study group in Virginia reaches out beyond their own members, copying essays for distribution to the entire compound! Excerpts from essays inspired by the Philosophy and Art of the Masters courses follow.*

I would like to thank all of you at College Guild for your educational program. Everyone in our study group, Each One Teach One, join me in sending you our admiration and thanks. The theme of this essay is "Getting Even". This topic was birthed from the collective sayings of Confucius and ideas out of Unit 5, "Eastern Philosophers". We live in a world where everyone wants to get even. Individuals nurse their grudges, nations pursue their historical claims and grievances. Even in our justice system it's more about retribution than reform. I'm currently housed in a prison that holds death row inmates, taking a life to compensate for the one that was taken. Revenge does not heal wounds, it only inflicts new ones. I am confined in a place where the culture of getting even is alive and well. It is seen as the only path to respect. In a place where all want forgiveness and a second chance in society, few want to give it. Forgiveness and compassion is the only way to find closure. It is harder to do and takes much more courage than getting even. Confucius said, "He who opts for revenge should dig two graves." Martin Luther King Jr. said, "An eye for an eye leaves everyone blind." It's important for our survival that we keep searching, keep learning, keep growing, keep living. Life is a beautiful thing, and the more we understand about ourselves and the universe, the more we will appreciate, respect and enjoy life. Huayna A.

*The following essay is based on a question from the Art of the Masters course: "Do you believe that suffering can sometime bring about something good?"*

As I ponder upon the question, the answer came to me. We are in prison being punished for the actions we did or didn't do. We need to understand that the place we are now living is a place for potential reconnection and a place for emotional and psychological reinvention. We can become reacquainted with the part of our inner selves that we may have lost contact with, the part of ourselves too often left behind. Why is it that some people make the most out of their prison experience and others "choose" to foster anger, hate, resentment, depression and anxiety. This does not have to be. The choice is ours and there always is one. When we ignore those inner emotions raging within us, or struggle with an addiction, it will eventually manifest itself in a public outburst, affecting humanity as well as ourselves.

This is the reason we must renew our minds on a daily basis with positive and stimulating information that can breathe life into our existence. We hold the future within our hands simply by the way we think about suffering and struggles. I truly believe that the things we suffer can sometimes bring about something significant or consequential. Our thinking could be the antidote towards making our home, school and most of all our community a safe place to raise our children.

Author F.

### BESSEMER, ALABAMA

*The Bessemer, Alabama study group is working together on the Creative Language course, and recently finished a unit on fiction. Some assignments require writing in the first person, encouraging students to be able to speak in a variety of voices. Clearly, their imagination and humor know no bounds!*

The radio was playing slow country Western tunes and the rocker was moving to the rhythm. I was whistling and letting off a little steam. I heard a key slide in the lock and tooted a warning. The rocker froze in motion, the radio turned its volume down and I sat hissing on the stove as the lady of the house came in with groceries, set them on the counter, reached over and turned my gas off.

It sure was a pretty day for a tea party. I had such a delightful time, but for the life of me, some of the guests were so strange. That funny man with the top hat and a rabbit for goodness sake, running around talking about being late for some place. And whoever brought that scary, grinning cat will never be invited back again. I bet it was that wretched girl, Alice.

Last night was nuts. I mean, what was that? Me and Cumulus are just floating around. Then Cuma floats off away and before you know it, all hell breaks loose! The creatures on the big ball below us start shooting objects at us that explode like thunder and spray bright colored sparks in all directions. Cuma's freaking out, screaming and threatening to flood the place. Man, it was so crazy. That's a day I'll never forget. July 4<sup>th</sup> is etched on my mind. I just wish I knew what was wrong with them.

I hate stake outs. Just watching a stupid building. These doughnuts are good though. Man, I still can't believe Elvis is dead! You think it's true? See, that's what stake outs do, sit around and think too much.

*Because of CG's long waiting list, our courses are free to any prisoners who want to encourage group dialog.*

October, 2016

I am writing to let you know that I will be glad to help with the TY Committee, and I will write as many thank you letters as you may need for me to write. I am hoping that you will allow me to write more than one, because I would love to tell as many people as I can how the College Guild has changed my life for the better. I have received advice and encouragement and words of wisdom and knowledge from all my readers! So yes! Please add my name to your list and please allow me to write to more than one donor! And as you can see I do not have a tendency to procrastinate anymore and that is all because of the College Guild!

February, 2017

I want to take this time to thank you for believing in me by giving me the opportunity to write letters for the board and for fund-raising events. You really don't know how much this opportunity meant to me. I couldn't believe that you trusted me with such a specific and important task. I know that these thank you letters are taken very serious, because these are the men and women that keep the College Guild in business. You put forth your trust in me three times to write thank you letters and you held me accountable to get the letters back to you on time and all written in a respectful manner. Your trust in me has shown that I once again can be responsible and capable of keeping my word. It all started with you first giving me a task to complete and then trusting in me to follow through with that task two more times! You have given me the opportunity to take a good look at the man in the mirror and to recognize that I can be a success as long as I believe in myself as well as others! Thank you for putting your trust in me when so many others had refused to! I want you to know that I will never let you down. Whenever you need my help, I will be but a letter away!

**Andre A. - Thank-you Committee Member**

## OUR MISSION

*To stimulate in prisoners  
an interest in life long learning  
by providing a selection of free  
correspondence courses.*



Artist: Matt Matteo

*Frontiers of Justice, Vol. 3: The Crime Zone ©2000*

## PLEASE HELP US!

\_\_\_ My donation of \$100 enables one prisoner to participate in College Guild courses for one year.

\_\_\_ My donation of \$49 buys 100 first class stamps.

\_\_\_ My donation of \$20 provides free dictionaries to two prisoners.

\_\_\_ My additional donation of \$ \_\_\_ helps us to continue offering the respect that can change prisoners' lives.

**Donors will receive a personal letter of thanks (via CG) from one of our students.**

contact us at [collegeguild@gmail.com](mailto:collegeguild@gmail.com)

College Guild can now accept donations via PayPal. Just go to our web page and choose the donate button.

\_\_\_ Please send me more information.

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*Many thanks on behalf of College Guild volunteers and student-prisoners for your generosity!*

Your donation is tax-deductible.

For more information go to [www.collegeguild.org](http://www.collegeguild.org)