

WINTER 2026

OUR OWN DEVICES



the INSIDE SCOOP

STORIES
POEMS
ART

created by those
who are or have
been incarcerated

the INSIDE scoop

WINTER 2026

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The John Howard Society of Manitoba operates on Treaty 1 Territory, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Ojibwe, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation.

We acknowledge that the ongoing effects of colonization have resulted in the criminalization and over-incarceration of the Indigenous community. As an organization, we recognize that understanding this connection is essential to our work as we move towards reconciliation.

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letter from the editor

Dear reader,

In recent years, digital technology has played an increasingly central role in our lives: for finding and sharing information, navigating the world, and connecting with one another. But when Manitobans enter into custody, that relationship and access to digital tools and devices changes dramatically. Inmates are not allowed to have cellphones or personal devices, and access to computers is limited to a few PCs that often still use floppy discs. While digital tablets are being introduced into institutions – as many learners in our program have told me – going to jail is like stepping back in time 20 or 30 years technology-wise.

Some people who've experienced this say that the disconnect from digital devices and the demands they make on our attention can be welcome: some find they begin to read more, or have deeper conversations. But the question remains: as the role of digital technology becomes more central in our lives, what will access to these tools look like for incarcerated folks? And, on the other side, how does technology play a unique role in the lives of people in custody?

That's what this issue—Our Own Devices—is all about. In it, contributors ponder the role of technology in the lives of justice-involved people, whether on the inside or on the outs. Students at the Remand Centre share their dreams for content and apps on the newly-introduced institution tablets; poet Michael S writes some snappy stanzas about cameras; Raymond pens a sci-fi tale about potential future uses of virtual reality in prison; Four Healing Roads Lodge students share their recommendations on technology and education in federal prison; and, we offer a guide to the new provincial ankle monitor rules—a technology that is transforming how bail works in Manitoba.

At the heart of this issue is the question of how technology mediates access to information, to safety, to connection, and whether it might one day be a medium for transformation, too! Thanks for joining us, and happy new year.

In literacy and in solidarity,

Anna Sigrithur



Editor, *the Inside Scoop*

Opposite page: Taylor submitted this Postcard from the Inside— and you can, too! Look at the inside back cover for a place to draw and send in your own. We might just print it in the next issue.

My Return Home

BY MICHAEL S.

In this place I call my own
I always play the starring role
I'll work until my hands are bone
Then hang my hat at what I believe is home

They surveil me with a rusting drone
And look down on me from their digital throne
They scoff and laugh—rarely thrown a bone,
We are spoken to in a sarcastic tone

These are the days when no one cares
Climb along our concrete stairs
Our eyes are blue and hearts are bare.

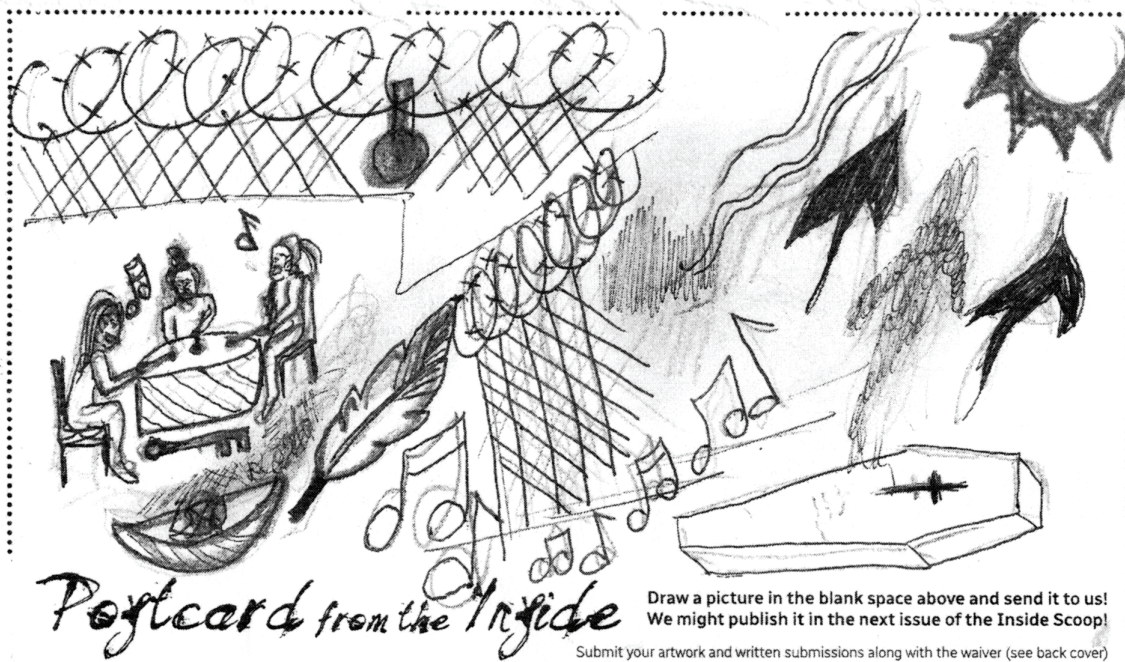
The warden hisses a daunting tune
It seems to satisfy his broken mood
Mental storms rage in these rooms
Blood shed too soon
We live on blindly marching to our doom.



ART BY ABBY GAIL R.

I hear a voice, a voice echo through the wall
The messenger only three feet tall
“Don’t stop now daddy, you’ll get through this fall,
you’ll make it home; we can again throw this ball”

Up-reaching hands, watching him grow tall
Life’s worth living after all.
So, I grit and bear, endure it all.
Soon, my life returns beyond these walls.



"SONGS FOR THE DEAD (A LIFER'S SONG)" BY TAYLOR B.

FOOTNOTES: MANITOBA'S NEW AN

There's a list of rules you must follow if you agree to wear an ankle monitor/elec



COMMUNICATION

- Check your phone, e-mail, texts and voicemail regularly.
- Allow phone calls between you and Manitoba Justice to possibly be recorded. You need to take calls activated by the ankle monitor.
- If the monitoring centre for your ankle monitor instructs you to be somewhere at a specific time, you have to show up.
- Personal information about you will be shared with law enforcement, Manitoba Justice, and possibly people named as victims in your court order. Manitoba Justice promises any information shared will be the least amount necessary, and related to your court order.



UPDATING YOUR INFORMATION

- Tell agents if your contact info changes.
- Tell agents if you're leaving Manitoba or leaving a coverage area, including for activities like hunting or fishing, in advance—even if it's allowed in your court order.



PREVENTING DAMAGE TO THE ANKLE MONITOR

- Don't remove or tamper with the ankle monitor.
- You can't paint, add stickers to, tape, or otherwise decorate the ankle monitor.
- Accidental damage has to be reported immediately.
- If the ankle monitor is damaged or breached, a lot of people are informed, including law enforcement and any victims named in the court order.

CHARGING THE DEVICE



- Charge the monitor for two hours daily, but never while sleeping.
- Repeatedly failing to keep the device charged can be considered breaching your court order.
- Take care of the device, only use the provided charger, plug it into wall outlets only, and return it after.



ANKLE MONITOR RULES *DEMYSTIFIED*

Electric monitoring device in Manitoba. You must stick to these rules at all times.

WATER RESTRICTIONS



- The ankle monitor can't be submerged in water.
- This means no baths, only showers; and no hot tubs, saunas, steam rooms or swimming pools.
- This also means you may not use boats, kayaks, canoes or other watercraft.

COURT ORDER CONDITIONS



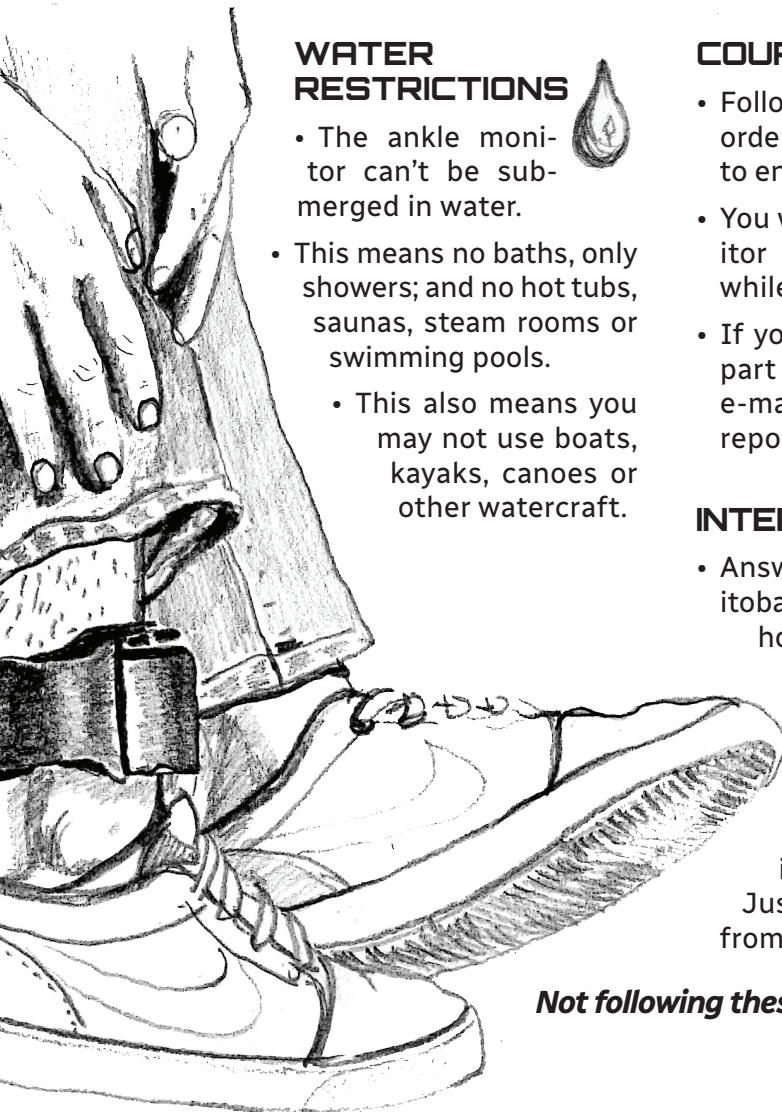
- Follow the conditions of your court order and agree to being monitored to ensure that you are doing so.
- You will get your photo taken after the monitor is installed and possibly other times while you are a part of the program.
- If you have anything you have to report as part of your court order, it must be sent by e-mail at least a day in advance. That includes reports for outings and curfew changes.

INTERACTING WITH AGENTS



- Answer the door and allow Manitoba Justice staff into your home, with or without notice, including police if they're with them.
- Provide agents a copy of your court order and other forms of ID when requested.
- Making threats or otherwise mistreating the monitoring centre or Manitoba Justice staff could result in getting pulled from the program.

Not following these rules could result in getting arrested.



THE YEASTY RISE OF TOASTER MAN

PART 3: TOASTER MAN'S REVENGE

BY CHEESE

Editor's note: Join us for this final and exciting installment of the short story by Cheese, *The Yeasty Rise of Toaster Man*! Parts 1 and 2 can be read in the Fall and Summer 2025 issues of *The Inside Scoop*. In the meantime, dear reader, please note: this story discusses depression, suicide and substance use, so if you think these topics may be too heavy or triggering for you right now, please take care, or skip this story if needed. See the end for resources.

All he remembers is waking up feeling cold, his head pounding. Coming back to consciousness, Jimmy Crumb realizes he is sitting naked in a hotel bathtub, empty now except for a blackened toaster, an empty beer can and a stained cigarette butt. He rubs his eyes in an attempt to relieve some of the pressure in his head, but it doesn't help.

"A drink," he croaks, "I need a drink." He crawls out of the tub and grabs the counter for support as he rises slowly and painfully to his feet. Gasping, he holds his head under the tap and takes in as much water as he can. Feeling slightly better, Jimmy stumbles into the main room, feeling his way in the dark. At that moment the lights come back on. Someone must have fixed the fuse, he thinks to himself.

In front of him, Jimmy sees the greasy pizza box and opens it, grasping a cold, stale slice, he lifts it to his mouth – but suddenly stops. His hands are filled with a strange sensation, they tingle and grow warm, suddenly the slice in his hand begins to sizzle.

"What the heck," Jimmy mutters in awe. He looks up into the mirror and stares at his reflection, except it's not him: the image staring back at him is a titan of rip-

pling muscles dressed in a spandex suit and cape, with the image of a toaster emblazoned on his chest.

"What. The. Heck!!!!" Jimmy screams into the mirror and the room shakes. Jimmy stands, turning, flexing and examining the body that is reflected back at him clothed in a black, blue and yellow suit.

Suddenly, he remembers flying through the cosmos and a great divine voice, now that same voice hits him like a semi-truck and fills his ears with power beyond measure, the voice speaks the words:

"Toaster man!" And it echoes in his head.

Jimmy replies, "but I should be dead" Once he collects himself, Jimmy's first thought is, I'm dead, and this is hell. His second thought is, I cannot go out like this! He tries peeling the spandex suit off, only to find he can't even get a finger between it and his skin. Feeling frustrated, Jimmy takes a calming breath and the suit begins to fade and disappear, leaving him standing naked in the mirror.

He gasps in astonishment, and just as suddenly, he's back in black, with the toaster on his chest and cape flowing behind him. Maybe, Jimmy thinks to himself, it has something to do with my heart rate? He tests his theory.

Jimmy calms his mind, and suddenly he's naked again. He dresses quickly, pulling on an overcoat

and sliding a baseball cap over his hair, hoping that even if the toaster suit reappears, his clothes will conceal it. The last thing I need is people seeing me in spandex, Jimmy thinks as he slips on his boots and heads for the door.

Jimmy embarks out into the rain with no particular destination in mind, just a plan to clear his mind and unpack everything that's happened to him. He finds himself walking past office buildings that tower over him in the fog. He can't help but stare at one specific towering monstrosity, the grey brick reminding him of medieval castles, a bronze plaque lists the offices inside. His eyes fall on the listing for the top floor, announcing it as the offices of "Nosferatu, Collins and Smith." Jimmy's mind fills with images of letter after letter stamped with the letterhead from these parasites, whose goal was to drain him of everything and leave him as nothing but an empty husk during his divorce.

Jimmy finds himself filled with a sudden insatiable rage; he opens the doors and slips into a lobby furnished with modern armchairs and potted plants. He walks through the lobby toward the elevator with one thing on his mind: warm, toasty revenge on the divorce lawyer who drained him of everything he spent his life working for. Jimmy mashes the elevator button with purpose as an overweight security guard looks up from his phone for the first time, jumping up and rushing over to Jimmy.

"Excuse me, sir, office hours are over, the building's closed." Jimmy ignores him and continues waiting for the elevator.

"Hey, man!" the guard shouts, and Jimmy finally turns to look at him.

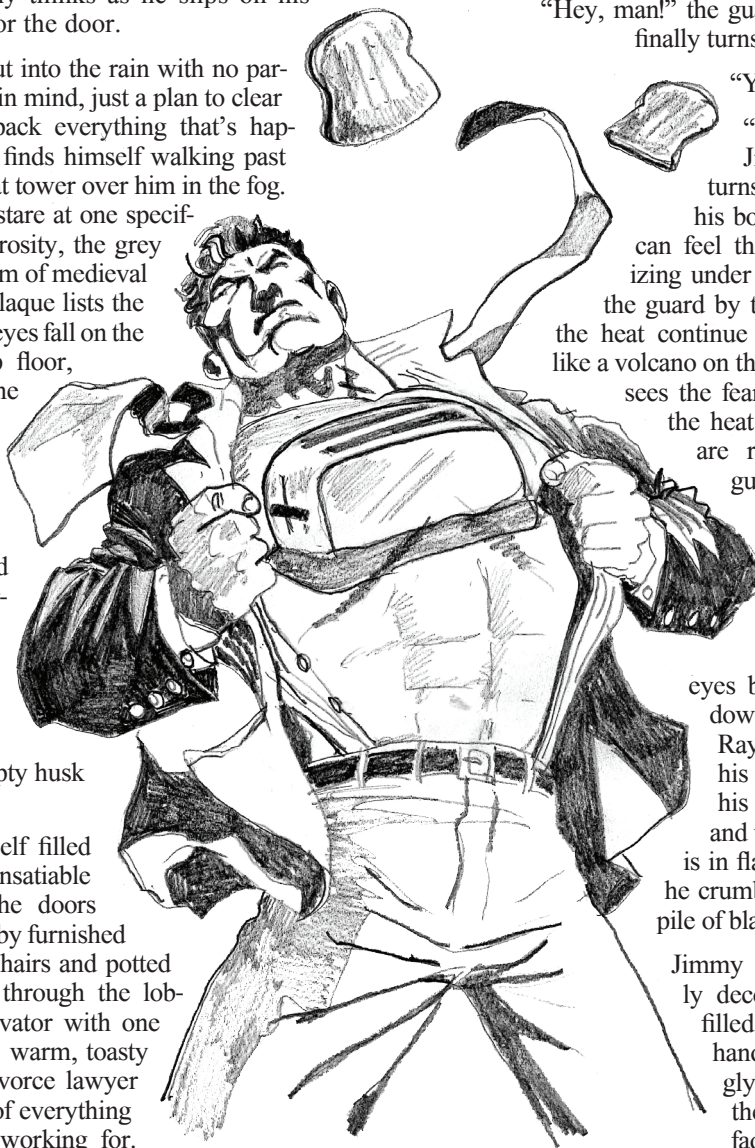
"You can't be here."

"I don't give a crap!"

Jimmy snorts as he turns toward the rent-a-cop, his body growing warm. He can feel the toaster suit materializing under his clothing. He grabs the guard by the shoulders and feels the heat continue to rise inside himself, like a volcano on the verge of eruption. He sees the fear in the man's eyes as the heat builds until his hands are red hot. The security guard's shirt begins to burn as black smoke rises. The heat in his hands reaches a climax, as it spreads through the bodies of both men. The guard's eyes boil and melt, running down his face in a hot ooze. Rays of light escape from his empty eye sockets as his body begins to char and turn black. His uniform is in flames, and in an instant, he crumbles before Jimmy in a pile of blackened soot and ash.

Jimmy stands in the tastefully decorated lobby, his fists filled with ashes. He lifts his hands and sees red squiggly lines on his palms like the elements of a toaster fading from red to orange as the heat slowly dissipates.

Jimmy catches his reflection in the silver doors of the elevator, noticing a fiery crimson flare where his eyes should be. He feels the bitter rage that tore through him



like a wildfire, leaving him empty enough to drop a toaster in a bathtub.

Ding.

The elevator doors open, and Jimmy is torn away from his thoughts. He steps in and hits the button for the top floor. As he rises through the levels of the building, the heat, anger, and hate rise inside of him, replacing the emptiness he once felt.

Ding.

The doors open into the dark law office. Expensive leather chairs and mahogany furniture make up the expensive waiting room where broke men are forced to pay for expensive divorces. Ahead of Jimmy is the office of the blood-sucking wretch known as Vlad Dracula Smith.

Despite the late hour, Jimmy has a feeling that the lawyer who had drained him of his life was here in this office tonight. After all, Jimmy had received calls from Smith at all hours of the night. He'd asked Smith about it once, to which the lawyer had cryptically replied that he did his best work after the sun had gone down. Jimmy threw open the office door and stopped suddenly, because instead of the finely furnished office he had expected, he walked into a room that was empty except for a stone coffin and a mini fridge. An air of dread and doom filled the air. A white iMac charger cable ran from an outlet in the wall and into the sarcophagus.

Suddenly, the lid of the coffin slowly lifted and slid off, hitting the floor with a thunderous sound as the rotting odor of dust and decay filled the room. A dark figure with a face chiseled from white marble rose from the depths of the evil box. In the gnarled hands of this horror was a laptop, and the blue glow from the screen illuminated its face as it uttered these words, in a voice as cold as the grave:

"Who dares to enter the room of my tomb while I'm in a meeting on Zoom preparing for my litigation tomorrow at noon?"

"It's me, you blood-sucker— Jimmy mutha-effing Crummb!" Jimmy shouted defiantly, "And I'm here to rip you a new one!" In an instant, Jimmy felt his whole body become engulfed in flames and his clothing turned to ash. Jimmy stood before the abomination, trying not to think about the fact that he was now only wearing spandex.

The lawyer moved with a flourish as he stepped out of the coffin. A black cape with a crimson lining flowed behind him. He set the laptop down and leveled his gaze with Jimmy, his eyes cold. Smith opened his mouth to reveal long, pointed teeth and said:

"Do you know what I am, Mr. Crummb?"

"You're the blood-sucking parasite that leached off me until I was an empty husk," Jimmy shouted back.

"That process is still a long way from complete, Mr. Crummb, but the end is near for you," the lawyer growled, "Before it is to continue, I must hear you say exactly what you think I am."

"You're a lawyer!" Jimmy spoke through gritted teeth into the dark office.

"WRONG!" Smith roared, moving with blinding speed he seemed to disappear. Suddenly, Smith was behind Jimmy.

"I am ancient," Smith whispered, his breath cold on the back of Jimmy's neck like a blast of arctic air. The lawyer was somewhere in the shadows as he continued to speak in his icy voice, "I am immortal." Now standing by the coffin, illuminated by the glow of the laptop once again, he continued, "I have no beginning, I have no end, I was there when Pilate washed his hands, and I witnessed the death of Christ, I walked with Alexander the Great, and I watched as Rome burned." Suddenly, Smith was directly in front of Jimmy, and his nostrils burned with the smell of sulfur as the creature whispered, "I am a vampire."

Then, before Jimmy could react, the abomination lunged and began slashing at him with great talons.

***Suddenly,
the lid of the
coffin slowly lifted
and slid off, hitting the
floor with a thunderous
sound as the rotting
odor of dust and
decay filled the
room.***

Jimmy caught a blow to the chest that tore his flesh and sent him flying backwards through a wall. Just as quickly, Jimmy was back on his feet, leaping through the hole in the wall and launching himself at the vampire. His hands were glowing white hot, and fire trailed from his eyes like exploding stars. The smell of burnt toast filled the air.

He caught the creature with both hands, searing the unholy flesh. Smith let out a blood-curdling cry of anguish and raked Jimmy with razor-sharp claws. Blood spilled from Jimmy's chest like a faucet, and Jimmy pressed both hands to his chest, cauterizing the wound with a sharp cry of pain. Jimmy stood panting and turned back to glare at the monster, his cape flowing majestically behind him in the air from the A/C.

"What are you?" the vile wretch demanded.

With a dark smile Jimmy replied, "I'm Toaster Man, dude!"

For emphasis, he blasted toast from both index fingers as he made finger guns at Smith. Smith ducked behind the cold stone sarcophagus to escape the barrage of toasted bread from Jimmy's fingers, at the same time making an arcane gesture with his hands. Summoned from the shadows, a legion of stone gargoyles emerged and flanked Jimmy, grabbing at his hands and feet, restraining him. The lawyer approached Jimmy and spoke with a sneer,

"I have seen greater men put up lesser fights, Crummb. You should be proud of yourself."

Jimmy snarled in reply, struggling against the gargoyles, at the undead specter before him. "It's Toaster Man, you bloodsucker!"

"I'm sure it is," the vampire replied coolly before continuing. "Now I shall finish this? Wait – you have something in your teeth, is that garlic? You must have had Santa Lucia pizza, it's all about the sauce!"

At that moment, Jimmy spat in the monster's pale face. Smith screamed and stumbled back, clutching his face and throat.

"I need my EpiPen!" the creature yelled, clawing at its face. The gargoyles immediately released Jimmy and began scurrying around the office in search of the EpiPen. The Vampire continued to stumble backwards

blindly. He hit the wall – except it wasn't the wall, it was the window, a 22nd floor plate-glass window. Which, with a sickening crunch, smashed.

As Vlad Dracula Smith plummeted down in a shower of broken glass, he called into the night,

"I have a really serious allergy to Garliiiiic!"

His cry was followed by a wet-sounding thud.

The gargoyles looked at each other, then one spoke up. "If anyone asks, we were never here," it said. And with that, the stone automatons were gone.

Jimmy rushed to the open window and peered over the edge. Looking down, he could see the body of the once undead lawyer skewered through the heart on the decorative wooden stakes in front of the building. In the distance, red and blue lights lit up the foggy city streets, as the sound of sirens filled the air.

Jimmy left the office and rode the elevator down to the ground floor, adrenaline pumping through his veins as he inspected the scratches and burns that covered his body. He stepped onto the street to find a squadron of police cars and SWAT trucks. Men with guns and body armour began to surround him. But after all this, Jimmy Crummb, aka Toaster Man, was not to be captured that easily! With a sizzling focus, Jimmy crouched down to the pavement, summoned all the energy in his muscles, and, like a piece of toast popping out of the toaster, sprung up, up, and away, into the night sky, never to be seen again. THE END

Editor's note: Remember, if anything in story brought up difficult feelings, there are resources that can help. **If you or someone you know needs help, it can be found at:**

Suicide Crisis Helpline – 9-8-8. Free 24-hour crisis support. This number is a central intake for many other crisis lines and organizations. When you call, you will be directed accordingly, however you may still call individual crisis lines.

Hope for Wellness Helpline – 1-855-242-3310. Free mental health supports for Indigenous people. Request support in Cree, Ojibway (Anishinaabemowin), and Inuktitut, however the language supports are not available 24/7, so you may need to call in to find out the next time that a language-speaker will be available.

DREAM CANT

Tablet

"I wish my tablet
had time travel."

—SAMSON L.

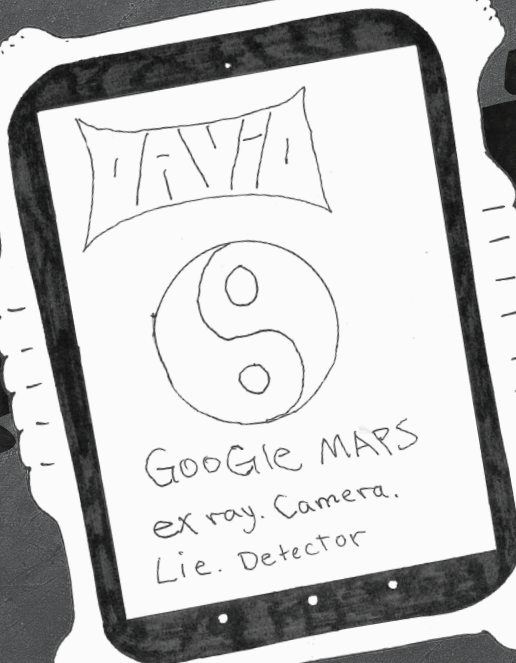
At some correctional institutions in Manitoba, inmates are given digital tablets that offer secure text messaging, educational materials, and content streaming. This month, we asked inmates what they would put on the tablets if they could choose.

"MORE WAYS TO
CONTACT MY LOVES"
BY CAROLIN C.



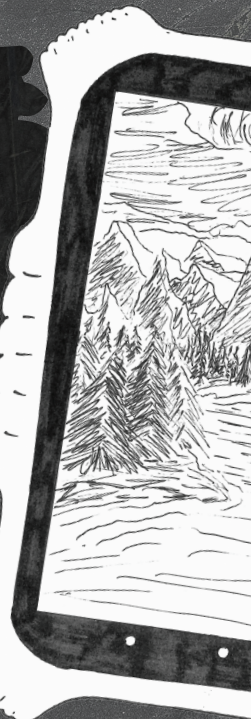
"Cognitive
behavioural
programs, Thinking
awareness groups,
End to Aggression
programs, The AA
Meeting Guide, 24-7
Counselling Advice,
and Guitar Hero."

—KELVIN L.



"GED Courses, Post-
secondary courses,
Information on
business loans and
local government
grants. But I would
rather do things
on paper than
digitally."

—STEFAN B.



"TOOLS FOR AN INTERNATIONAL
MAN OF MYSTERY" BY DAVID G.

"NATURE IN HD"
BY JERAL P.

CAM-TEEN Tablet Edition

Manitoba, incarcerated people can now access messaging with approved contacts, education. This month, we asked students what else they would like to have. Here are some of their responses:

"Free email access to contact family, lawyers and stuff on the outs." —GRACIE M.



"SELF ESTEEM RESOURCES"
BY NINA N.



"Facetime for loved ones, access to online banking, workout routines."

—NATHANIEL M.



"ESSENTIALS FOR A SPORTS FAN"
BY JESSIE C.

"Lessons on Native languages, spiritual teachings and Natural medicine, positive quotes, and facial exercises to beat old aging."

—LORNA S.

Dream Canteen is a recurring segment in which learners in John Howard literacy classes share lists of items they wish they could buy at the prison canteen, ranging from the practical to the fantastical. For the Our Own Devices issue, we put a technological spin on the prompt.

The page features several large, hand-drawn spirals. At the top left is a spiral by Alfied, which is partially obscured by a series of black scribbles. To its right is a very dense, dark spiral by Joel B. Below the Alfied spiral is a large, detailed spiral by Craig T. At the bottom left is a spiral by Chris E, and at the bottom right is a spiral by Lee M. The text is centered in the middle of the page, flanked by the Alfied and Joel B. spirals.

BY ALFIED.

BY JOEL B.

A drawing exercise for reclaiming your attention span

Critics of devices like smartphones point out they are designed to grab our attention and hold onto it for as long as possible, even making us addicted to them. If you use a smartphone, maybe you know how this feels. If you are trying to battle phone addiction, here is an easy drawing exercise that can quickly begin to help you take back your attention! All you need is a pencil and a scrap of paper.

Try it yourself! Starting from the centre and drawing outwards, begin drawing a spiral. Try to keep the tip of the pencil on the page the entire time. See how tightly you can draw your spiral, and how big you can make it! The exercise focuses your mind, which can be calming.

The results can also be beautiful! Check out a few different ones, drawn by the Four Healing Roads Lodge guys.

BY CRAIG T.

BY LEE M.

BY CHRIS E.

Listen Up!

Recommendations from the Office of the Correctional Investigator's Report

BY THE FOUR HEALING ROADS LODGE LITERACY CLASS

How educational technology can help incarcerated folks transform their lives for the better

In a 2019-2020 report by the Office of the Correctional Investigator (OCI), which keeps track of conditions inside Canadian federal prisons, it found that even though education was proven to improve inmates' lives outside of prison, less than three per cent of Canada's corrections budget is spent on learning tools.

While the way people learn new things online has changed dramatically in even the last few years, incarcerated people are often stuck using outdated technology. Even USB sticks and CDs are not allowed in prisons; instead, floppy disks, which are unreliable and no longer widely made, are used. Access to the Internet is mostly restricted, meaning many high school and post-secondary courses are impossible to take from prison.

In 2011-2012, the OCI called on Canada to lift its ban on personal computers for inmates and expand computer use in prisons. Canada refused. The OCI's report says that this leaves incarcerated people unprepared to enter the work force when they are released.

The OCI also called on Canada to expand its computer access, and allow inmates to use a restricted version of e-mail and internet, improve computer skills training, improve work-training programs and add more apprenticeship opportunities, modernize CORCAN (federal prisons' employment and employability program), and improve opportunities for inmates to receive a post-secondary education.

What do we recommend?

Learners in the John Howard literacy class at the Four Healing Roads Lodge – a federal halfway house – conducted a critical analysis of the OCI report and added their own recommendations for improving educational technology in prison, based on their experiences in federal custody.

- 1. Provide access to digital devices** such as tablets or computers with a digital library of multi-media learning resources.
- 2. Make these resources free to use.**
- 3. Provide access to online post-secondary courses** for those who can pay, and a reduced fee for those who cannot.
- 4. Allow limited but reasonable access to the internet** in order to build news and media literacy – especially necessary given the rise of AI.
- 5. Increase budgets for educational programming in prisons**, including more supports to learners and creating learning plans designed to improve job prospects once released.
- 6. Provide training for skill development** in digital tools and computer coding.
- 7. Provide opportunities for work-release programs** that provide relevant on-the-job experience for the modern job market.

Continued on page 14

Continued from page 13

Why do we recommend this?

In federal prisons, inmates are serving real time—longer than 2 years. This means that when they get out, they face a steeper climb when it comes to catching up on the latest technological skills and trends.

Therefore, our recommendations aim to reduce the gap between job skills needed today and skills learned in prison, meaning that when people leave prison, they are able to reintegrate more readily. The

result of this is that individuals with criminal records can overcome the associated stigma, as well as the extremely limited job market and low paying jobs, which keep people in poverty and more likely to reoffend.

Now, with AI's disruption to the labour market, we see digital skills and education as more important than ever.



ART BY GILBERT K.

Overall, we see these recommendations reducing recidivism by boosting individuals' motivation to change their lives around and seek a better future.

ART BY SHAMUS J.

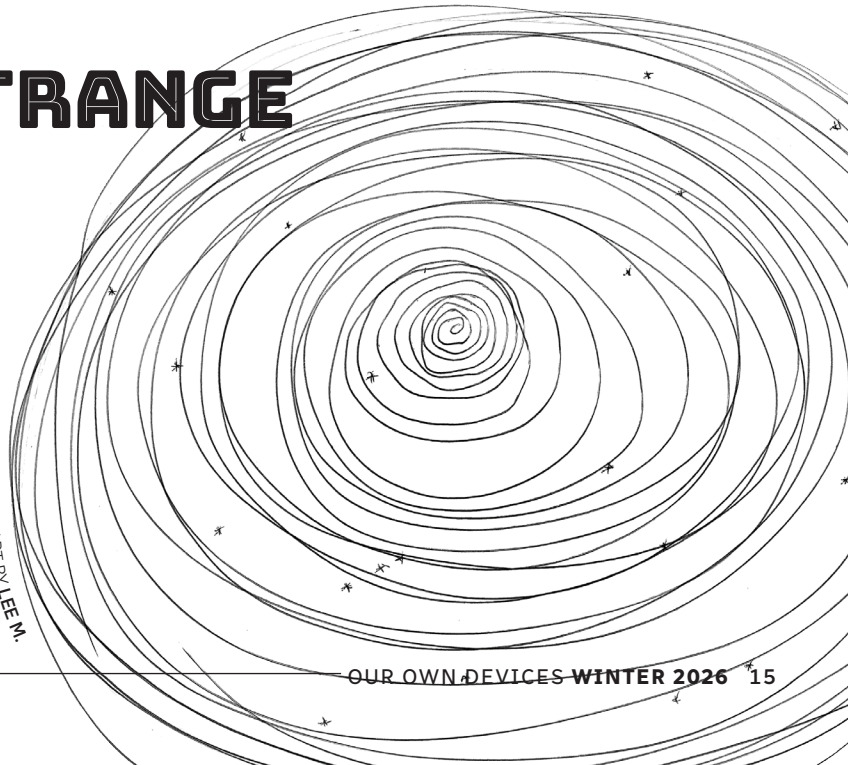


LIFE IS STRANGE

BY GHOSTRIDER

Life is Strange
 We cannot change the past
 We can only change the future
 So, is life really strange?
 Think for a moment on how you
 can change the future
 You cannot change your past
 So move on with your future.

ART BY LEE W.



QUOTES & QUOTIENTS

"Mr. Watson, come here—I want to see you"

Alexander Graham Bell making the first-ever phone call on March 10, 1876

\$165 is the estimated, pre-tax monthly cost for a Manitoba inmate to make three calls per day.

"I'm calling you from a cellphone"

Motorola executive Martin Cooper making the first-ever cellphone call to his competitors at Bell Labs on Apr. 3, 1973

\$0.13 is the cost per minute to use a tablet in Manitoba jails (except when accessing limited free content)

"Hey Jony. This never freezes up, so you guys haven't turned off all your Wi-Fi"

Apple founder Steve Jobs on the first-ever public FaceTime call, made to iPhone designer Jony Ive on June 24, 2010

80% is the share of the Canadian inmate telephone communications market controlled by Texas-based Synergy Inmate Phone Solutions Inc.

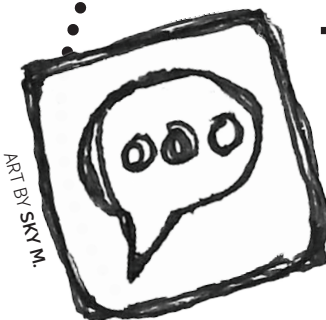
Plains Cree
Word of the Day

Itwêhiwêw

ΔU."Δ▽.°

She sends a message to people; she sends word.

Source: Itwêwina the Plains Cree Dictionary.



The Travel Agent

BY RAYMOND M.

Who would've guessed that I would've ended up being a virtual travel agent for federal inmates? Now, it seems normal. Things are pretty good, all things considered. Most don't remember the old days, back in the 2020s and 30s before virtual reality saved us. Let me explain.

Some say it all started way back in 2025 with the investigative work of Valerie Phillips, the Director of the Office of the Correctional Investigator whose mandate was to "help shape a more humane, accountable correctional system."

That was following the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which had put a psychological condition on the radar of mental health experts. That condition was known as "touch starvation". Public awareness about touch starvation grew with the pandemics that followed. But the worst pandemics had restrictions that lasted, what, two years? Three? Give me a three-year sentence, I'll do it standing on my head! Most prisoners in the early pandemic days had absolutely no contact with anyone. Calling what was happening to regular people on the outside Touch Starvation, compared to what we were experiencing, was a joke.

Anyway, Phillips saw the connection and hypothesized that a lot of the mental health breakdown

occurring in prisons could be solved with... well, conjugal visits. But due to the ongoing pandemics, the risk of transmission from human visitors was just too high. Then came her idea: bring virtual reality into the fold.

The idea was brilliant. She went about it smartly, too. It began with a program of virtual reality "vacations", complete with AI "companions". Honestly, we loved the program: it gave total accessibility to whomever needed help. And CSC liked it because it worked and it was cheap. I won't go into detail. If you know, you know, if you don't you don't. It's become something of a myth, and everyone likes their own version of it anyway. My two cents aren't nearly as titillating as the next guy's anyway.

But what the program provided was undeniable: we were getting better.

So now I'm a, well, shall we say, a "travel agent" for new inmates just learning to navigate the world of virtual vacations. We've come a long way. Prison still rots, but it isn't as hopeless anymore. There is a reprieve. It may be virtual reality, but hey—virtual is only an adjective.

Editor's note: This is a sci-fi take, based on some real-world events. Read this issue's "Listen Up" section for some non-fictional engagement with the OCI report!

Give me a three-year sentence, I'll do it standing on my head! Most prisoners in the early pandemic days had absolutely no contact with anyone.

There's More Fo-Sho

BY CHRIS "PAZ" P.

There's more to you than meets the eye
There's more to you than just a tough guy

There's more to you than glizzys and slizzys
There's more to you than bustin' wit dat blicky

There's more to you than throwin' it down
There's more to you than doing down downtown

There's more to you than even you know
There's more to you than just guards and COs
There's more to you than NOT rolling out to steal the show

There's more to you than being down to ride
There's more to you, so just swallow your pride

There's more to you than life on these streets
There's more to you, don't end up six feet deep

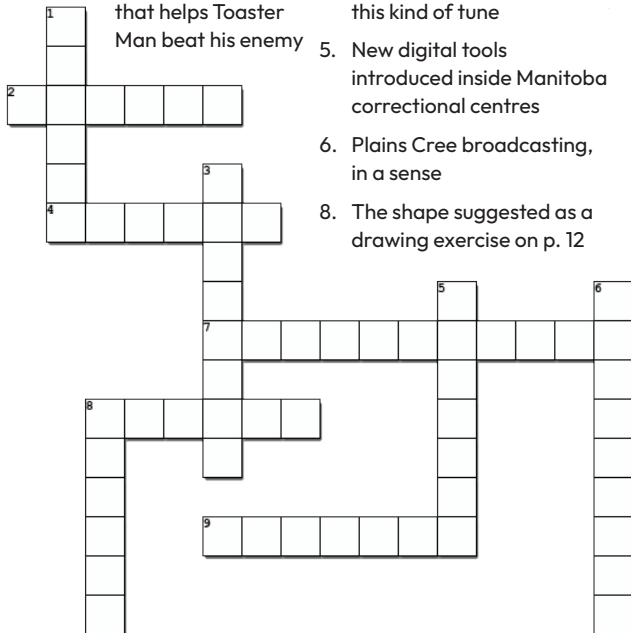
There's more to you than meeting the plug
There's more to you than pounding that jug

There's more to you than smacking her out
There's more to you, so just let her shout

There's more to you than the eye can see
And there's even more to look at in the mirror between you and me.

DOWN

1. The pungent food that helps Toaster Man beat his enemy
3. Michael S's warden hisses this kind of tune
5. New digital tools introduced inside Manitoba correctional centres
6. Plains Cree broadcasting, in a sense
8. The shape suggested as a drawing exercise on p. 12



ART BY GRACIE M.

ACROSS

2. The thematically appropriate last name of Cheese's hero
4. The federal prisons' employment and employability program
7. The job title in Raymond's story
8. One of the wet places you shouldn't enter with an ankle monitor
9. Chris P. Says there is more than these and slizzys

Postcard from the Inside

Draw a picture in the blank space above and send it to us!
We might publish it in the next issue of the Inside Scoop!

Submit your artwork and written submissions along with the waiver (see back cover)

Call for Submissions



ART BY RON P.

the INSIDE SCOOP

WINTER 2026

We welcome your submissions of writing and artwork! **The themes for the rest of our 2026 issues will be: Food (Spring), Friendship (Summer), and Cryptids (Fall).** Submissions not based on themes are always welcome.

Send submissions and a signed waiver (below) to:

Anna Sigrithur
John Howard Society of Manitoba
583 Ellice Ave, Winnipeg, MB, R3B 1Z7

Or, email them to
asigrithur@johnhoward.mb.ca

Did you know? If you are incarcerated in Manitoba, calling John Howard is a free phone call. So give us a shout if you have any questions. Not incarcerated? You're still welcome to call with questions, of course!

(204) 775-1514
 ext. 112 (Anna) or ext. 113 (John or Chanelle)

The Inside Scoop Waiver

Please attach this to any artwork or writing you submit to The Inside Scoop.
 Mail to: Anna Sigrithur, John Howard Society of MB, 583 Ellice Ave. Winnipeg, MB, R3B 1Z7

Name: _____

Title of piece: _____

I am open to discussing edits to my work (circle one): Yes No

I give permission for my work to be printed in *The Inside Scoop* and confirm that I am submitting my own authentic original work. I understand that my work may also be used in other John Howard Society publications such as workbooks and facilitation materials, as a handout in group classes, or for future promotional or fundraising projects. I understand that all rights to my work remain with me.

Signature

Date

Mailing address: _____

Where would you like
 edits and/or copies of The
 Inside Scoop mailed to?

Note: We reserve the right to edit submissions, and may contact you about edits to your work. We will not print anything containing sexism, racism, homophobia or transphobia, gang symbols, or that glorifies violence, drug use, or gang involvement.