

Tony Vick

#276187

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And that is how change happens. One gesture.  
One person. One moment at a time.

Dark Contemplations

by

Tony Vick

A Collection of Poems  
from inside the razor wire

~

About the Author:

Tony Vick was born in 1962, in Clarksville, Tennessee, into a home of Southern Baptist parents and an older brother. His father was a barber and gospel singer, and his mother was a stay-at-home mom. Tony's parents and brother have all died during Tony's incarceration.

Tony entered prison twenty years ago after living thirty-four years in Freedomville as a closeted gay man. He is currently serving two life sentences for murder. While in prison, Tony has worked as a GED teaching assistant, clerk, and prison newspaper editor. He has been involved with Inside-Out prison programs where free-world college students travel to prisons and join incarcerated students as classmates in post-secondary courses built around dialogue, collaboration and experiential learning. Between 2010 and 2014, Tony completed five semesters in Vanderbilt University's Divinity School Inside-Out program.

In 2013, Tony's essay, "Look at Me," was published in a book, *Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education*, by Simone Weil Davis and Barbara Sherr Roswell. In 2016, Tony's thoughts on forgiveness were included in Michael McRay's book, *Where the River Bends: Considering Forgiveness in the Lives of Prisoners*. Tony continues to write essays and poetry that challenge readers to address prison reform as one of the most important social issues of this generation. A collection of Tony's essays and poems, called *Secrets from a Prison Cell: A Convict's Eyewitness Accounts of the Dehumanizing Drama of Life Behind Bars*, (Foreword by Fr. Richard Rohr, O.F.M.) will be published by Cascade books and available in 2017.

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There are a few seconds each morning where I find myself in complete peace. The moments, just as I am waking up – before I succumb to the realization of my existence. It's the time of the day before the look, the feel, the taste of prison envelopes me. In these moments, I am free, and equal to all of humanity.

*My Tony Wick*

Once a Slave . . . Always a Slave?

I've been marked today  
Branded as a slave to the state  
Right there, on my right wrist  
A plastic band clamped with metal clasps

*Itchy*  
*Sweaty*  
*Pulling at my arm hairs*

A constant reminder that: I'M PROPERTY

Send me where you wish, Master  
I'll avert my eyes from yours as you walk by – as you directed  
Cause eye contact will make you remember  
Remember that you are my slave master  
Will you recollect these eyes when I am your neighbor?  
Will you then greet me – acknowledge my presence?  
Or will you still avert your eyes – so as not to remember  
Remember that you were my slave master

I've been marked today  
Branded as a slave to the state  
Will this harsh treatment keep me from returning to this HELL?  
Or will it break my ability to ever TRUST or INTEGRATE into the world?  
You have the power – given by whom?  
Is your ego stroked when you put me on the block for display?

“Look at my obedient slave – I've broken him from wrong doin.”

Will you recollect these wounds when you see me at Walmart?  
Will you greet me – acknowledge my presence?  
Or will you still announce to the passersby:

“Look at my obedient slave – look at his wrists – the imprint is still there.”

“HE'S NOTHING”  
“HE'S WORTHLESS”

*by*  
*Jimmy Vicks*

## It Is All I Know

If these moments are no more  
How will my earthy seconds  
weigh out  
Have I given more than taken  
Loved more than hated  
Laughed more than cried

Does it all matter  
Is this place a mere  
stepping stone to another  
world -- a heaven

How does one get there  
Will the moments loved decide  
Will a covering of blood be needed  
Certain prayers, tasks, verses

There are words -- so many words  
to consider  
which ones and from who  
This vessel not created with  
a script to follow  
no embedded words

If I am to believe that  
I was created by God  
I must also believe that  
she created me with her  
best product

Everything I need to fulfill  
my potential  
I was not created with  
memories of heaven or death  
Apparently I should not  
concern myself with such things

This moment  
This moment  
I can barely comprehend  
I cannot see it fully  
But this is actually happening  
to me  
right now

The universe that formed  
my cells -- will hear  
Hear my prayers  
Senses created for this world

Let me touch and be touched  
Play the music -- the glorious sounds  
The aroma of  
cinnamon rolls  
fresh from the oven  
I smell them -- I taste them

How marvelous this moment is  
It is -- all I know

✓

**You Left a Map**  
**2-20-15**

The sun does not bring its  
usual refreshing enthusiasm  
about starting the day.  
thump thump  
thump thump

It's still beating  
not rushing forward like an energetic child  
but like a stubborn mule being pulled against its will.

This day, like yesterday  
Lonely  
Bored  
Heavy  
thump thump  
thump thump

What keeps it charged  
blood trickling now  
not racing  
pushed through by blood thinners  
and cholesterol meds

This day, like yesterday  
Miserable  
Isolated  
Cold

You left a map for my soul  
it follows blindly, yet faithfully  
it follows love  
it follows God.  
Keep beating my weary heart  
for there are things ahead you have not imagined.

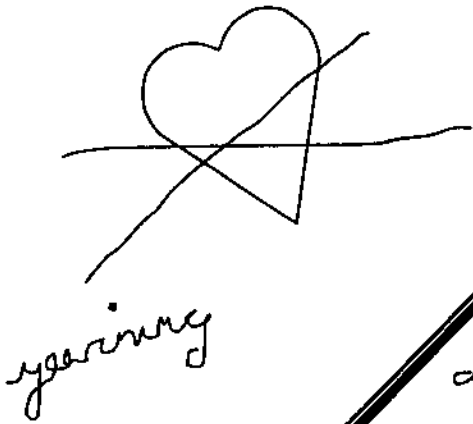
*by Tony Vick*

✓

**The Room**  
**(The Prison Within Prison)**

<p>It's locked at least for now The room – blacked out from seeing in or seeing out chaos blood violence uncertainty fear spiteful solitude That's what is in there I know we know No map to get there random vindictive retributive...maybe Once out you don't want to go back Whatever it takes say what do what forget about who Whatever it takes It should be told what happens there But who wants to remember Who wants to be linked</p>	<p>Who wants to be at risk to return – or go – that is I don't you don't The story must be told from within the room nothing to loose Write it in blood-on tissue to remember – that is That's the only way I know we know Once out of the room we forget we lose touch we run away Intense indoctrination and determined desensitization They create living ghosts That's what they hope for The fear will win The mystery will linger Lost in longing Close the door the light hurts my eyes Darkness doesn't hide the eyes of God.</p>
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Tony Vick



TRUTH

pain

Sins

desires

tears

Your heart will not be denied.  
 Your heart will wait patiently for you to catch up.  
 Your heart will not be denied.  
 Your heart will yearn for its desire.  
 Your heart will not be denied.  
 Your heart will cry out when it is in pain.  
 Your heart will not be denied.  
 Your heart will take control of your thoughts if left unattended.  
 Your heart will not be denied.  
 Your heart will bleed with the sins of your past.  
 Your heart will not be denied.  
 Your heart will change your life if you submit to its pleasure.  
 Your heart will not be denied.  
 Your heart will beat strong with the truth if you march to its rhythm.  
 Your heart will not be denied.

(1999)

Stop

heart

by Tony Vick



it's not what i imagined

this day i woke up in a steel cage  
surrounded by a bunch of strange people  
have i been shipwrecked on an island  
or am i still dreaming in my sleep  
should i get out of this bunk  
and face whatever awaits  
or should i turn over, close my eyes  
and pray for more sleep

sleep won't come

moving about on new territory  
trying to get my sea legs  
on this rocky boat

I must be steady  
cause sharks are looming  
waiting, watching for vulnerability

i'll survive  
i always do  
at least i have a history

but must it always start out  
so difficult

it's not what i imagined my life would be

*by Tony Vick*

## It's Been Too Long

I've lost the sound of your tender melodic voice  
amongst the screaming of foul-tongued men spewing profanity.

I've lost the touch of your hand and your delicate fingers  
amongst the feel of steel and shackles cutting at my skin.

I've lost the rose-petaled smell of your silky skin  
amongst the stench of sweat and shit.

I've lost the softness and wisdom of your eyes  
amongst the cold grey stares from strangers and oppressors.

My sensations numbed  
from deliberate removal from life – real life.

I've been banded like a homing pigeon

bound to its owner –

always marked:

“If found return to . . . ”

How long is too long?

How long before I don't want to remember,

can't remember?

**I'M HERE**

**WHERE ARE YOU?**

**DON'T FORGET ME**

*by TonyLee*

## Reality Monster

Reality is a peculiar monster  
it must be faced  
whatever the fear may be

The monster can be avoided  
for a time . . . maybe

Different paths may skirt the monster  
for a time . . . maybe

IGNORING  
for a time  
the ugliness that awaits

But It Does Await

More time may be needed  
to prepare your brain  
for the fight

But the fight is your fight  
a one-man army

The monster is devious and manipulative  
Years of maneuvers and practice  
It knows all your weaknesses  
all your insecurities

His arrow is sharply aimed at your  
Achilles heel

When ready  
TURN  
WALK boldly toward the monster  
DON'T BLINK  
DROP your veil and say

"Hello monster  
Kiss my Ass"

Then surrender to his embrace

*by Tony Vick*

Walk On

It is never what it seems  
There is always more to the story  
We render immediate judgments  
But we really don't know

What is his story  
That is the real question  
But it takes too much time to uncover  
So we really don't know

He just wasn't born so "whatever"  
What were the paths he chose  
This is part of his story  
Too little time to know

So walk on my friend  
If you stop, you will unveil  
The mystery of his person  
The fact that he is human

Don't ask any questions  
You may discover his torment  
The tragedy and sorrows of his life  
The fact that he is human

Walk on dear friend  
Once you see, hear, understand  
You will no longer be able to deny  
The fact that he is human

*by Tony Vicks*

My hands touched God's hands today

He was tired, sick, discouraged

Helpless, he was, and hot with fever

But he was God, and I knew it

Did others not see the glow of

angels' wings all around?

I placed ice cubes on his lips

and fed him chicken broth

Could others not feel his holiness?

I realized the only reason I recognized

God was my closeness to him,

unafraid and thankful to be at his feet.

*My Tony White*

## In Those Moments

It happens occasionally  
Someone just extends her hand  
It catches you off guard  
It is not a normal occurrence  
But it happens  
When you least expect it  
A smile, a letter, a card, a kind word  
Just when you need it  
God presenting himself to us  
Through his beloved creatures  
In those moments  
Those very special moments  
We touch the hand of God  
And feel his love, compassion and forgiveness  
In those moments  
Everything is okay  
The strength to go on exists  
A miracle  
That is what it is  
God loving us  
That is what it is  
And even though we recognize it only occasionally  
I'm sure it happens often  
Miracle moments

*By Tony White*

I Shall Not Die Alone

If today becomes my last moment on earth,

I shall not die alone.

I will not hear the whispers of hope

muttered from a stranger.

I will not seek comfort from a preacher

whom I've never met.

But I will remember the eyes that have looked into

mine with love and inspiration.

Drifting through my mind will be words that

have uplifted me—the real me.

The one not bridled with deception and fear.

I will feel the touches of those who

were not afraid to reach out to an

outcast of the world.

If today is my last day, I don't need

medical folk simply doing their job.

I just need to remember.

Remember the words of my God.

Remember the love of my friends.

I shall not die alone.

*by Tony Jack*

## Maybe Tonight

It's hard to watch the sun go down knowing that another  
day has come and gone.

Maybe tonight will be the one where I slip into the arms  
of God—comforted, loved and secure.

Maybe tonight I'll trade this old body in for the soul that  
lingers beneath.

Maybe tonight I'll cry my last tear for the sins of my past.

Maybe tonight the memories that haunt me will become  
a forgotten past.

Maybe tonight I'll bow before my king and embrace the  
majesty of a future undeserved but given by grace.

Maybe tonight.

*by Tony Vick*



## The Perfect House

It looks good from a distance.  
But secrets are held inside.  
The ground is shaky.  
The house was built on lies.  
The dwellers seem all American,  
until you open the hidden door.  
It shakes the foundation.  
The truth must be released—even if  
the perfect house is demolished.  
Sometimes, it's better to tear it down and  
start from scratch.  
*Some things can't be repaired.*

*Jay Tony Clark*

I See a Home

I see a home for me

Whittled amongst the weathered wood

A crevice to rest my worn body

A place of solace to smell the sweet scents of freedom

A place for me to exist

One that you envisioned long before I did

There it is—just beyond the horizon

A cozy warmth from the mud brick fireplace

The one you made, brick by brick, drying in the sun

A pot of stew smelling of pearled onions and rosemary

The one you made, cutting each piece of beef precisely even

A chair by the window draped with a beautiful quilt

The one you made, stitch by stitch, just for me

A door that swings both ways, no locks

The one you hung for me—never to be confined again

I see a home

Just for me

The one you made

*by Tony Clark*

Stay With Me

DEATH why do you  
torment me so  
the tease of you looms  
over me with great expectation  
fear of your occurrence is  
being replaced with  
excited anxiousness  
you have grown closer to me  
I feel your breath on my neck  
it brings me comfort  
stay with me  
you keep leaving  
will you wait until the  
darkness blends the land and sky  
how do I make you  
feel welcomed  
I pray to see the blackness  
of the space you inhabit  
don't leave  
stay with me

I feel your breath on my neck

*by Tony Rich*

## When You Smell a Flower

When you smell a flower

Do you pluck it from the ground  
and bring it to your nose?

Are you in a green field dotted with  
spots of wild, vibrant colors?

Are you receiving a bouquet of  
fragrant roses from a lover?

Are you standing at a coffin where  
tribute blooms blanket the sleeping box?

When you smell a flower

When you smell a flower

you are amidst life, love,  
excitement, sadness.

When you smell a flower

When I smell a flower

It's a phantom of a memory needed to  
conjure up a feeling of good, hope, love,  
but it's a mirage in the field of stone.

When I smell a flower

By Tony Vick

Let me hold lightly things of this earth  
Transient treasures, what are they worth?  
Moths can corrupt them, rust can decay  
All their bright beauty fades in a day.

Let me leave a love that abounds  
To all my dear friends still around  
Let them remember the love in my heart  
Cause until I knew them my life didn't start.

They taught me to love and opened my mind  
To live out my truth and how to be kind  
I learned how to smile and laugh out loud  
How to walk in the rain and not fear the cloud

For the sun will appear just over the way  
And it really doesn't matter what others may say  
Just live out my dream no matter the place  
Cause love has no boundaries, it cannot be incased.

So yes, my dear friends, I owe you my life  
Without you I would still walk in strife  
Wherever you are, my love will be sent  
My devotion to you will never be bent.

The branches reach out for new life to appear. A budding  
hope for a new season. It waits – unsure if its roots can  
produce another green leaf. It waits, it hopes.

My arms are extended for new purpose to appear. A  
fleeting desire for a new passion. I wait – unsure if my  
veins can sustain any new life. I wait, I hope.

#### The Perfect House

It looks good from a distance. But secrets  
are held inside. The ground is shaky. The  
house was built on lies. The dwellers  
seem all American, until you open the  
hidden door. It shakes the foundation.  
The truth must be released – Even if the  
perfect house is demolished. Sometimes,  
it's best to tear it down and start from  
scratch. Some things can't be repaired.

Remember me for the laughter we shared  
Not for the sins that I bared  
Remember me for the love in my eyes  
Not for the tears that I cried  
Remember me for my quick wit  
Not for the hearts that I split  
Remember me for my gentle touch  
Not for the dollars that I clutched  
Remember me for the lives that I filled  
Not for the lives that I killed  
Remember me for coming to terms  
Not for the bridges that I burned  
Remember me for being a friend  
Not for a heart that wouldn't bend  
But most of all...just remember me.

*A life not remembered is  
a  
life not worth  
living.*

#### To Get You Must Give

This world has not found me happiness  
nor has it willed its nature for me a peaceful heart.  
The skies have not shown me clear blue skies  
nor have they shined a path for me to start.  
The oceans have not calmed  
nor have they parted a way.  
The winds have not ceased to blow  
nor have they cooled my day.  
The grass has not been green  
nor has it eased my fall.  
The stones have not been smooth  
nor have they been easy when I crawl.

But as I ponder my fate to this day  
I must be honest so let me say:

I have not given this world any valuable gift  
nor have I walked a decent path.  
I have not sought the truth or the light  
nor have I refrained from showing my wrath.  
I have not studied to make a change  
nor have I played in the symphony's band  
I have not conserved the earth's beauty  
nor have I planted one tree on the land.  
I have not preserved the life or the blood  
nor have I remained a favorite son.  
I have not ignored temptation of the flesh  
nor have I rejected the flight or the run.

So let my amazement and tears so depressed  
Fall on death ears to those who've been blessed.

For they probably learned more quickly than me  
To get you must give was their earnest plea.  
So as long as I have breath and there is blood in my veins  
I will work to diminish the tragedy and the pain.  
To get I must give will be my final thought  
In order to repair the damage that I sought.

Tony Vick -2008-

If today becomes my last moment on earth, I shall not die alone. I will not hear the whispers of hope muttered from a stranger. I will not seek comfort from a preacher whom I've never met. But I will remember the eyes that have looked into mine with love and inspiration. Drifting through my mind will be faces of souls that have embraced me -- the real me. The one not bridled with deception and fear. I will feel the touches of those who were not afraid to reach out to an outcast of the world. If today is my last day, I don't need medical folk simply doing their job. I just need to remember. Remember the words of my God. Remember the love of my friends. I shall not die alone.

Your heart will not be denied.  
Your heart will wait patiently for you to catch up.  
Your heart will not be denied.  
Your heart will yearn for its desire  
Your heart will not be denied.  
Your heart will cry out when it is in pain.  
Your heart will not be denied.  
Your heart will take control of your thoughts if left unattended.  
Your heart will not be denied.  
Your heart will bleed with the sins of your past.  
Your heart will not be denied.  
Your heart will change your life if you submit to its pleasure  
Your heart will not be denied.  
Your heart will beat strong with the truth if you march to its rhythm.  
Your heart will not be denied.

There are a few seconds each morning where I find myself in complete peace. The moments, just as I am waking up -- before I succumb to the realization of my existence. It's the time of the day before the look, the feel, the taste, of prison envelopes me. In these moments, I am free, and equal to all humanity.

Flow river flow  
Let me wade my feet in your clear mist  
Flow river flow  
Let me feel the wet, cool silk caress my skin  
Flow river flow  
Let me gaze upon the beauty of the forest that you  
breath life into  
Flow river flow  
Let me wash away the guilt and shame of the world,  
into the stream of your forgiveness  
Flow river flow  
Let me drown my sorrows in your deep, dark pool of  
redemption  
Flow river flow  
Let me swim into the depths of your unknown and  
discover the secrets not yet discovered.  
Flow river flow  
Let me fall deep enough that I have no choice but to suck  
in the water to try and capture a bubble of hope  
Flow river flow  
Let me surrender to your power and take my limp body  
to the place you wash unwanted objects  
Flow river flow  
Let me go river, let me close my eyes forever, let my  
mind rest for my heart aches to stop beating  
Flow river flow

Farewell, my dear one. Rest your weary eyes from the struggles you've endured. Soon these clouds will pass before me, and we will meet on the other side of the mountain. There, we will reminisce of happy times together, and see our mistakes from a new perspective. And we will realize how trivial they all seem, now that our souls gather for a new day ahead -- just over the mountain.

It's hard to watch the sun go down knowing that another day has come and gone. Maybe tonight will be the one where I slip into the arms of God -- comforted, loved and secure. Maybe tonight I'll trade this old body in for the soul that lingers beneath. Maybe tonight I'll cry my last tear for the sins of my past. Maybe tonight the memories that haunt me will become a forgotten past. Maybe tonight I'll bow before my King and embrace the majesty of a future undeserved but given by grace. Maybe tonight.

Water falls into the awaiting pool unaware of its past or future. It's simply an element of the universe...evaporated into magnificent purpose for us to enjoy.

The touch to sooth our souls  
The taste to quench our thirst  
A reminder that absent of these droplets of water, all life would cease to be.

Oh God, can you hear me still when I plea,  
Or have my failures covered your ability to see?

My agony and despair over my struggle with life  
And my sins still harboring the grief and the strife.

I pray I can hear your voice if it calls,

To me in my sleep or before I fall.

The truth and the lies have mixed for so long  
That I sometimes don't know the right from the wrong.

I struggle to find a purpose or cause  
To keep living this life to stop and take pause

Will my life find the road and take the right way  
That you have planned out for each of my days?

I don't have the answers and can't bear to think through,  
All the sins of my past for I know they are not few.

Hold onto me Lord cause I have not a clue,  
What tomorrow may hold or what I must do.

my friend  
heart ache

### **My Friend Left Today**

Emotions of happiness and sadness fill my heart.  
I'm so proud of his endurance, accomplishments and patience.  
But my heart already aches for the absence of my best friend.  
I'm excited that he will be reunited with his family,  
But I'm worried that he, my family, will be gone forever.  
The new experiences he will have will be exciting,  
But we will not share them together anymore.  
My friends have left before.  
I guess that is why it is so scary.  
I know that today begins a new chapter for my friend and I.  
Tomorrow the sun will rise, and people will go about their day.  
Life goes on.  
But my friend left a trace of his heart, his spirit, his life.  
And those things will comfort me until I learn to accept  
that he will not be back.  
And Thank God For That!  
Be free my friend,  
**Be free.**

Tony Dick

(2005)

you are really gone

would I....could I

at what point does the body's instinct  
to live surrender to  
its desire to die

If I swam out into the sea until  
my limbs were exhausted  
unable to return to shore

would I fight to stay afloat  
or melt into the waves until blackness  
caught my eyes

would I struggle for one more breath  
or suck the water into my lungs  
stopping air from feeding me

would I float on my back while the  
sharks feed on my skin or dive into the depths  
to see the sea bottom as my last sight

would I pray to God to help me  
or ask Him to meet me  
at the gate

would I....could I

*by  
Tony Vick*



death is inevitable  
as it seems I am in human form  
that moment of darkness doesn't  
seem near—at least not today  
the thought of it doesn't bring fear  
it seems rather like a prize we get  
for our endurance  
the fear, it seems, is not in death  
but in the waiting for it  
my heart beats fast each time  
a new pain fills my chest  
is this the beginning of the end  
the time of waiting is the ordeal  
we can fight against death  
but it will eventually win  
its prize is the dust from our  
bodies decomposed  
our prize is the endless sleep  
the rest, the peace — God  
death is inevitable

*tony vick 2013*

Remember me for the laughter we shared  
Not for the sins that I bared  
Remember me for the love in my eyes  
Not for the tears that I cried  
Remember me for my quick wit  
Not for the hearts that I split  
Remember me for my gentle touch  
Not for the dollars that I clutched  
Remember me for the lives that I filled  
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Remember me for coming to terms  
Not for the bridges that I burned  
Remember me for being a friend  
Not for a heart that wouldn't bend  
But most of all—just remember me

A life not remembered is a life not worth  
living.

(2011)

*just  
remember*