

Introduction to Myself: An Inmate's Process of Self-Discovery Through Peace Education



Photo: "The Rain of Light" by [Salvo Passarello](#)

Tony Cobb, an inmate at Everglades Correctional Institution (ECI) in Miami, Florida, says that the [Peace Education Program \(PEP\)](#) workshops have become the highlight of his life. He has been a participant for almost six months and is currently attending PEP 3. Tony prepares all week long for the workshops by reflecting and writing about his experience.

As early as I can remember, I never received "I love you" hugs. You know, the ones that touch you deep within. The ones that give you a reason to dance to your own music. When I was 10, I realized that my mother would only hug me when taking pictures.

One hot summer morning, my mother, brother, and I were standing in our front yard. My sister, Helen, came out with the camera and said, "Let's take a picture."

We all went to the street and I stood on my mother's left side. My brother was on her right. I leaned in close because I never knew when this would happen again. These embraces only happened two or three times a year. Then, like a cold winter day in Miami, they would quickly be gone - no more pictures, no more hugs.

By age 16, I begin to seek love and affection from the cold, hard streets. Drugs and alcohol became my world, where emotional brutality lived, where I was unwanted and forgotten like the clothing of the dead.

My heart was the jeweler's hand, offering my love to unknown and rare places, ignorant of the dangers their grip and their emptiness would hold over me. This left me confused and devoid of any sense of my humanity. My attachment to everyone I met was built on the hope of receiving from them the love I wanted so badly from my mother.

In February of 1991, my running from *me* stopped. I was arrested and was left alone with me. No more drugs, no more alcohol, and no more so-called friends.

I had to face the abuse that shaped my landscape and the ignorance of not knowing who I was. I travelled from prison to prison, meeting various types of men who also were broken, devoid of peace and love of family, or of another soul.

For 22 years out of the 28 years that I have been imprisoned, I found joy and comfort in helping others find meaning and direction in their lives. All the while, I was hurting from receiving no love from another human soul.

My stepfather's physical, psychological, and emotional abuse became the anchor that hindered my upward view of my own humanity. I was a slave to the brutal ideas of a monster. Has anyone ever been so deeply buried?

Then I met Lucy, Jodi, Jeff, and Ted, the facilitators of the Peace Education Program. These caring human beings introduced me to Prem Rawat's inner peace process and for the first time in my life, I realized that the love that I was looking for had been within me all along. I could truly love me and hug me through my own voice, my own pen, and on my own terms.

This feeling of joy that I now experience is like the first awareness of a sunset—or the first kiss from someone that embraces your wholeness, the inner expression of true love. The lit candle that lights humanity. To this, I give you my rose. Thank you.

Tony's experience with the program has inspired him to write poetry and he would like to share this one with you.

“HOPE”



By Tony Cobb

I am a unique lamp,
lit with a purpose to reach my fullest potential and possibilities right now,
in this breath,
independent of what's moving outside.

I have a sweet, beautiful reality waiting to be discovered inside.

I now step with knowledge, with the freedom of doing things with clarity.

What a mission. The destroyer of doubt!

The understanding that Tony Cobb must make the best choice every day
to determine this moment.

I have changed my paradigm and have allowed hope to fuel my consciousness.

I now use my inner resources to write my own story.

What a master plan.

I am unique, important.

Nobody will replace my life's imprint.

What is on my screen?

What am I projecting to everyone and to the world?

I believe in what I do. I understand what I do.

Clarity has arrived. Hold on to your hat!