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out the usual rage of a male's point of view. Not that she doesn't vent her anger. She does! Her anger is tempered, though, and often one can even sympathize with the poor staff member, who, in truth, is also a victim of the system.

Her thesis is summed up thusly: "No one functions fully in prison. No one is required to or even allowed to. Quite the contrary, one is quickly swallowed up by the tiresome, the useless, and the absurd. To function fully is a constant battle between you and the system. To speak the truth is considered arrogance. To speak logic is to be considered a fool or at best a misfit." And therein lies the crux of the problem: to function fully—normally—in prison. Harris seems to have achieved this and written an excellent book in the process.

## **The Soul Knows No Bars: Inmates Reflect on Life, Death, and Hope**

Drew Leder, et al. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000. Paperback \$22.95. Hardcover \$23.95.

**Phyllis Hastings, Saginaw Valley State University, Michigan**

**T**he *Soul Knows No Bars*, written by a philosophy professor and a group of inmates at the Maryland Penitentiary, is a book that works on a multitude of levels. If you want to understand what happens in the lives of inmates in a men's maximum-security prison, you are offered the wisdom of its resident sages. If you want to witness effective teaching and engaged learning, connecting profound ideas with deeply personal realities, just read. If you are interested in how service can work without demeaning the "recipients," you can observe it happening on the farthest fringes of social control and neglect. If you want to understand how to make writing lively and stimulating and evocative, Drew Leder's saga of philosophy professor meeting murderers, drug dealers and rapists, can help with that too.

Leder's interactive teaching is rooted in the soil of his eclectic religious perspective and his academic training in philosophy, specifically in phenomenology. Religiously, he says, "I'm a Jewish Quaker with Hindu beliefs in karma and reincarnation; I dabble in Buddhist meditation and teach at Loyola College, a Catholic school. It makes perfect sense to me . . . a believer in utilizing all avenues to the sacred" (4). Phenomenology, he explains, "seeks not so much to explain as to *describe*. . . . We discover the structure of experience when we don't presume to know it in advance" (9). The refusal to be mentally imprisoned is central to Leder's approach.

Beneath and beyond Leder's self-conscious spiritual and intellectual stance are his personal stance and style. Most notable are his willingness to deal open-

ly with his students, neither accusing nor excusing, and to incorporate his own spirit journey in the common search for knowledge. He rethinks his own story of losing a mother to young death and a father and brother to suicide because of his growing understanding of his incarcerated students. "I discovered that the men were not as alien to me as I had thought. I, too, knew of rage and violence; of death upon death, and the guilt and remorse that follow. At a certain point, I was no longer doing it just for or about *them*. This was my story too, my prison memoir, and I had to get it out no matter what the cost" (10).

The co-authors, inmates in the class whose prison past and future are extensive, play an equally important role in the insightfulness of both the class discussions and the book itself. Their mind-and-spirit journeys have gone further and deeper than those of typical prison inmates or typical folks anywhere.

The heart of the book is a series of dialogues, taped, transcribed and edited from actual class discussions. Each of these is introduced by a passage from a well-known philosopher, on such subjects as time, space, power (including "kind power"), heroes and gangsters, guns and violence, sex and race. Each discussion is followed by Leder's own reflections and extensions.

If we were to create from this text a formula for effective teaching (though of course no formula for teaching is possible), it would look something like this: Find some students willing to engage deeply in a search for self- and world-understanding. Enter their world physically and imaginatively, putting yourself into their shoes, allowing their lives and struggles to speak to yours. For each class session, present a nugget of wisdom from one of the most profound thinkers in your field. Make it accessible to the class and raise a relevant question growing out of it. Then get out of the way and let the conversation take its course. (You may have to establish ground rules, as Leder did, to keep some students from dominating or to keep the conversation from becoming personal ax-grinding.) Add your own insights and steer the discussion in new directions only when the developing dialogue or your initial plan suggests it is needed. Finally, tie things together, bringing in some of the comments from the discussion and relating it to your emerging understanding of the subject.

To show the process in action, here are some pieces of the dialogue based on Martin Heidegger's exploration of the concept of space. (Keep in mind that what we see here is done on a closed course with a professional driver, not on the open road of a real consumer-oriented, grade-conscious college classroom.) Leder focuses on the term "de-severing," which Heidegger says "amounts to making the farness vanish" (71) and Leder describes as "making the experienced remoteness of something disappear, bringing it close" (71). The inmates respond by considering their relationship to the world they can see just beyond the walls—"so close, but *so far away*" (72). They talk of visits and phone calls from loved ones and the lingering closeness of these persons that cause them

either hope or pain (73). Several delve further into the prison experience by discussing how one can expand one's space within the confines of a prison. Tray, for example, doesn't feel his space is restricted; he imagines himself on an odyssey. "I believe I'm here because I lost my road. That's what I'm searching around for, the road to the larger society. In the meanwhile I'm supposed to be restricted but my ideas don't have to be, and that's where I find all my freedom" (75). He goes on to say, "When I was on the street, I had less space than I do in prison. I would only associate with the criminal elements... Since I've been in prison, I've met people with sophistication, people from different races...My horizons have expanded (75).

Building on his students' comments, Leder notes, "Our Heidegger text suggests that we live in a world proportionate to our concern" (80), suggesting that too often we keep at a distance that which we want to avoid. "I remember when Rwanda hit the front pages, and then Bosnia, and I decided *I just don't want to know*. Why open myself to suffering that I can do so little to fix? But entering prison, I realized that the sphere of pain seemed more limited, the possibilities of helping clearer. And I found my heart opening up to the men" (81).

*The Soul Knows no Bars* invites us to see prisons and their residents and to see teaching itself in new ways. I am grateful for what Leder and his student-colleagues have allowed me to see.

## **Couldn't Keep It to Myself: Testimonies from Our Imprisoned Sisters**

Wally Lamb and the Women of York Correctional Institution. HarperCollins, 2003.  
Hardback, \$24.95, Paper \$13.95

### **Gretchen Schumacher, Oregon**

The book *Couldn't Keep It to Myself: Testimonies from Our Imprisoned Sisters* by Wally Lamb and his writers group of women at a New York Maximum Security Correctional Facility would be an enjoyable read for anyone wishing to learn more about the prison experience. It is a book of autobiographical short stories written by the women in the writing group and edited by Wally Lamb. What Wally Lamb discovered was that women in prison have a lot to say. I was fascinated to learn that this book even existed. It is not only educational, but touching and emotional as well.

What the Sisters in this book are telling the readers about is their personal experiences and their lives. They convey to the reading public what it is that might be different about those of us in prison from those of us outside. It was been said, "We write to expose the unexposed...." One thing I have found to be true in my life is that because I am a "convict," I cannot be a victim. Yet statis-