

My Koestler Story: Mark

From Koestler Awards entrant to published poet

I've met prisoners from many backgrounds and many who have gone through their whole lives with no one ever really taking an interest in anything they've said or thought. And so for them to see something that they have written - the material result of their thought and opinions - in print in a book can be something of a revelation. Such a grain of encouragement can be all that is needed to kick-start a lifelong interest in writing and it's that 'interest' that everyone needs in some form.

Encouragement is even more important to someone serving a prison sentence where dull routine and an absence of things to look forward to can easily combine to create a sense of pointlessness. I know that if that feeling sets in, it's difficult to shake off. When I was at my lowest in prison everything looked bleak and pessimism ruled. All that I could focus on were things that I no longer had access to.

This is where Koestler Arts stepped in. I was persuaded to have a go at writing poetry by a lady called Rose. At first I was totally reluctant because after all 'only poets write poetry don't they?'. Nevertheless, I had recently watched an old 1950's movie set in the south of France, so I decided to try and imagine that I was there surrounded by the rich and famous. A bit of escapism. This resulted in my first ever poem. I've now written close to 200. I'd never suggest that my poems are important but this one is important to me.

After writing this one I immediately set about writing another one. I was hooked. When I'd written a few I put them into a collection and entered them into the Koestler Awards. Later I was amazed to discover that I'd won a Gold Award. From then on I haven't stopped writing. And finding out that one of my poems was being published in Koestler Voices was another huge boost for me. What a sense of pride and achievement to see something that I'd written actually in print.

More than anything Koestler Arts provided me with hope and encouragement at the darkest point in my life. They are totally non-judgmental. To them I was, and am, a person and not a prisoner or an ex-prisoner.