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This is my essay for  
prisonerexpress.org's June 2017  
word-theme "Accomplishments"

**"Against All Odds" by Nate A. Lindell**

It amazes me, what I've achieved, given my few resources and the massive resources of the system that sentenced me to a life as only three-fifths of a human being.

When I arrived in prison in 1998, I couldn't draw a good-looking stick figure, didn't even try.

Then, several years into solitary confinement, barred from litigation by the three-strikes rule and large debts, I decided to master drawing. First, I did self-portraits, looking at myself in my mirror—they came out looking crude, misshapen, scary, of use only to a psychologist wondering how I saw myself.

For a couple years I plinked away at drawing, in between studying, writing, poetry, etc.

When I entered the WI prison system, my writing ability was scored at the 12.9 grade level on the TABE. But I despised writing and would have scowled at anyone who suggested I write anything beyond personal letters.

After a good 1,000 pages of legal writing, I realized that I needed to master our language to be a skilled litigator. And poetry is the heart of any language.

There was a story I recalled, about Sylvester Stallone having recited Edgar Allan Poe's poems to help him overcome his speech impediment. I did as Stallone did, recited Poe's

poems, which I found intriguing. I ended up reading everything I could get of Poe's.

Thus began...three, five years of liberal-arts self-education, made possible by free books sent to me by stores that sent books to prisoners at no cost.

I studied the origin and history of English poetry, classic lit., essay writing, rhetorical principles. E.g., I wrote out copies of *On Writing Well*, *Creating Short Fiction*, and took extensive notes and quotes from books on mathematics, anthropology, psychology, etc.

Writing the material out, I found, made it stick to my noodle better, and made the info available when the book was gone.

I had no visitors (other than a soul-severing Jehovah's witness, who was effectively an anti-visitor), no T.V., and usually no one around me to socialize with. It was hard time, hurt me emotionally, psychologically; but I fought it by educating myself.

It was obvious to anyone with eyes that the rural folk running this place (the WI Secure Program Facility, W-S.P.F) were intent on making us miserable, degrading us, so they'd feel better about their own sorry lots in life—turning keys, looking at prisoner's buttocks for contraband, writing misspelled tickets because a prisoner had a ketchup packet isn't something you want to be lauded for at your funeral.

Their ill will fueled my effort at developing my artistic and intellectual abilities.

There came a point when psychology staff didn't want to talk with me. One once said, "Why are you asking me? You know more than me!"—and she said it sadly, not sarcastically.

I persuaded the head psychologist here—Dr. Scott Rubin-Asch—to do an I.Q. test on me, figuring if it was high enough, maybe mensa'd let me join and I could find some intellectual companionship. Dr. Rubin-Asch did four sub-tests for the WAIS-4, through the glass, in a visiting booth. Afterwards, he said he'd do the remaining subtests the next day.

It was a year before he again saw me, at which time he did the full he did the full WAIS-3, not the WAIS-4.

He dragged out telling me the results for another several months.

When he eventually told me the results of the WAIS-4 sub-tests ("all scores were in the exceptionally high range") and that my full-scale I.Q. score on the WAIS-3 was 144, I realized why he'd waited a year to finish testing and used the WAIS-3, not the WAIS-4.

From studying statistics, I knew that my score was one-point shy of being two standard deviations above the high-end of average. You only need one standard deviation above average (i.e. 130 points) to be eligible for Mensa. It's like that my score was higher than Dr. Rubin-Asch's, which—given that I'm only three-fifths of a human—likely offended his comforting delusion of superiority.

With my I.Q. tests done, I implemented my behavior-modification program—the "High-Risk Officer Program".

Apparently, they disliked my program, because they shipped me off to federal custody...

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My art, which I continue practicing, drastically improved. You can see samples of it on <https://www.prisoninmates.com/NateLindell303724>. Two collections of my poems and songs, and the start of a volume of creepy stories are also there.

My writing and my art/drawings impress everyone who reads or sees them.

With no familial support, with no money, with a life sentence, with over 14 years of solitary confinement eating at me, with a few friends and many hates/enemies, it seems to me that a person may still accomplish a lot.

Maybe—although I hold little hope of it—American society will come to respect my struggle against all odds, respect me as a human being, and permit me to join in a society that's worth me being a part of. My talent, I think, could be put to better use than suing and writing about prison staff's crimes against humanity