

# the TRANSFORMER

Beginning in Green Haven Correctional Facility in the Spring of 1975, we have gone on to become a positive presence in almost every state in the USA and are currently in over 40 countries around the world. Forum Day, April 30, 2005, Commemorates

## **30 YEARS OF AVP**

as AVP facilitators from across New York state join hands to create a group AVP experience at Eastern Correctional Facility.





## Criminals' Attitudes Toward Another Criminal Unchanged Criminal Toward the Changing Criminal

*Mitchell R. Brown (Manageable Mitchell),  
Everglades Correctional Institution, Miami, FL*

This has been my experience in the thirty-one years in the penal system. Criminals not in the change process view us criminals who are in the change process with considerable skepticism. They feel that we are simply conning, and up to our usual tricks (i.e.- point-scoring for self-serving purposes).

There may be a few Unchanged Criminals who might consider that some of us in the program (AVP) for change really do want to change. Still they doubt that the desire will last long or that any of us will be successful in changing. Being well aware of their own fragmented thinking, they regard those of us in the change process as being just as fragmented. At first, the criminal not in the program AVP for change will be curious as to the nature of the game and what can be had by playing it. They may see the Changing Criminal as getting along with institutional staff and think that it would benefit them to be seen in their company.

The Unchanged Criminal may approach those in the process of change and ask them to put a good word in for them. Whatever the ploy,

*(Continued on page 3)*

criminals not in the process of change look at those of us who are, as stupid for wasting our time and at the same time, want to reap some kind of benefit by association. Eventually, those of us who stick with the change process are singled out as informers, institutionalized, etc. The Unchanging Criminals will begin to make it a point not to say anything that could incriminate them in front of those of us in the change process.

When Unchanged Criminals are exposed to criminals in the change process over a long period of time and can see that we are showing evidence of change, they adopt different attitudes towards us. Some assert that we are being brain-washed, that we have lost our manhood as a result of letting the program (AVP) run our lives, and call us spineless jellyfish. Once those not in the change process realize that we are not going to give up they express doubt, envy, and in the end usually wish us well. We know that if we continue in the change process, there will be no further friendships with criminals who are not in the change process. If we show evidence of change, but still hang out with other criminals, we will be regarded as being likely to engage in criminal activities.

In the very beginning of the change process, we criminals continue to associate with criminals not in the process of change. We are extremely fearful of burning the bridges to them just in case we want to rejoin them. We should not go out of our way to antagonize, but remain polite and courteous as we draw further and further away from them. Eventually we will refrain from criminal conversation altogether, except to take an anti-crime position. We are to keep our socializing with criminals not in the change process at a minimum. We must maintain a delicate balance when dealing with others, which means let our yea, be yea, and our nay, be nay. ☹

## **AVP ON THE INTERNET WORLDWIDE**

<http://theTransformer.us>  
<http://AVPInternational.org>  
<http://AVPUSA.org>



***Face to face,  
a victim seeks justice  
from her burglar***

*From an article by Mary Riddell, Journalist for  
The Observer, condensed and submitted by  
Doug Couch (altarlight), Lancaster, California*

The burglar was moving towards his victim's back door when a neighbour saw him in the shadows and dialled 999. As Alexi Estathiou, desperate for money to buy heroin, was overcome by two policemen in the kitchen, his intended victim, Maria Vassiliou, ran in from her sitting room, terrified and weeping.

In a capital city, in an age of fear, such a break-in would barely register on the national barometer of terror. No one was killed. Nothing was stolen. Yet small crimes damage lives. Mrs Vassiliou, a widow in her sixties, has lived in constant fear since the attempted burglary. Police sirens make her tense with anxiety and she dare not leave her house. She sleeps on her front-room sofa, a knife beside her in case Estathiou should return to her terraced cottage in south London, though she has been told he is in prison awaiting sentence.

Now Mrs Vassiliou is facing her greatest dread. Estathiou, a grey-faced man of 37, dressed in a purple T-shirt and tracksuit trousers, is staring her in the eye.

This time, though, she is on his turf. They sit in a bare classroom in Pentonville prison, north London, with a trained police facilitator, a university researcher, Mrs Vassiliou's son and daughter, Estathiou's uncle, Spiros, and me. This face-to-face encounter is a part of an experiment in restorative justice.

Many visitors have come to this locked room in Pentonville. The Attorney-General, Lord Goldsmith, appeal court judges, the Director of Public Prosecutions, Ken Macdonald, and government ministers have sat on these plastic chairs, or similar ones in other prisons...

Today's immediate aims are to give Mrs Vassiliou peace and reparation, and to make Estathiou **want to** give up drugs and crime. At first, neither looks achievable. Estathiou moans that his wife and children have left him and that his drunken father used to beat him. His uncle tells his nephew several times that he is useless.

Mrs Vassiliou shakes and cries. She had not wanted to come here. Her children stare with loathing at Estathiou. Then a different story starts to emerge, explaining why a crime that involved no loss or violence damaged the Vassiliouos so deeply. 'Think what my mum went through,' her son, Nick, shouts at Estathiou. 'She thought you would take a knife out and kill her. Our dad is dead. There is

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no one to take care of her.'

Estathiou tells...of his troubled childhood. 'You have had all the chances,' the housebreaker says. By now Mrs Vassiliou's daughter, Athena, is crying with anger. Her father, she says, was, like Estathiou's, an impoverished Greek Cypriot who drank. He collapsed with a heart attack soon after his 50th birthday. Athena, then aged 12, held her mother's hand as his body was taken away. 'I had never seen her look like that again, until the day you burgled her,' she tells Estathiou.

After her husband's death, Mrs Vassiliou was left with large debts. Her two small children helped run the cafe they owned, cooking fried meals before and after school, and studying until late into the night. Athena gave up a place to read economics at a leading university to help her mother. Her brother stayed at home to care for Mrs Vassiliou until she had learnt English and come to terms with her sorrow. He had just moved into his own flat on the day that Estathiou broke in.

As Estathiou grows mortified by the Vassiliou family's struggle against adversity, their mother looks at him with growing pity. 'I'm scared of you,' she says. 'But I am trying to be strong. You could get a job and get off drugs. If you give them up, Alexi, I will invite you for tea.' Two hours

later, all the participants sign an agreement in which Estathiou says he will apply for drugs treatment and look into getting a job in the fitness industry. His uncle says he will send him some new trainers.

... *But does this idea work?*

For victims, the answer is a fairly unequivocal yes: 75 per cent of them, rising to almost 90 per cent in the consortium study, say they are helped an immense amount. For offenders, some results are startling. One Australian study found violent criminals were 38 per cent less likely to reoffend in the year following their conference, rising to 50 per cent in the second year, compared with those who had gone straight to jail.

...leading figures in criminal justice are convinced that the idea offers a major breakthrough demanding more research and wider, careful use...

'Everyone I have spoken to - fellow judges, senior police officers and facilitators - [and] victims support this approach which must be an important, if not clinching, guide to whether it works.' ❧

*Editor's Note: Mary Riddell is the first journalist allowed to sit in on a jail experiment in restorative justice that could change the British penal system. (emphasis added) See full article at...*

<http://www.observer.co.uk>

### ***Way to Go, Hakim!***

*From an article by Mary LaVigne, submitted by Dick Nethercut (Radiant Rich), Concord, MA*



Abdul-Hakim As-Siddiq (*Adept Abdul-Hakim*) shares about AVP in a meeting on February 25 between eight people who support the move toward establishing a Department of Peace, and Senator Mark Dayton. The meeting, held in Senator Dayton's Fort Snelling office, was chronicled by Mary LaVigne, Congressional District 4 Team Leader, in an article titled "Minnesota Update: Department of Peace group meets with Senator Mark Dayton!"

Hakim: "I'm with the Alternatives to Violence Program. We teach non-violent conflict resolution skills in the community, including in correctional institutions. We really don't teach as much as re-activate conflict resolution skills. We all have them. I know this because I am a graduate of the program. I served 20

years of a life sentence for homicide. I was an angry and violent young man. When I decided to change my life, these were the other people who were there to help me. This is a volunteer driven program. We don't take any money from the Department of Corrections because they might want us to compromise the confidentiality of inmates. We get some funding from private sources. The Department of Peace would provide us more support to bring this program to those who want to participate but lack the money for the fees.' Senator Dayton asked Hakim to share his experiences in more detail at a future meeting. The Senator congratulated him on his personal courage and the way he'd transformed his life." ❧

Read the full text...

<[http://www.thepeacealliance.org/cong\\_dist/mn\\_dayton.htm](http://www.thepeacealliance.org/cong_dist/mn_dayton.htm)>

### ***In the Matter of Dennis Maher***

*Dick Nethercut (Radiant Rich), Concord, MA*

Dennis Maher, who was a keynote speaker at our 2003 national gathering in Minnesota, plays a prominent role in a new documentary film called "After Innocence." This film chronicles the experience of persons like Dennis who were wrongfully convicted and then exonerated.

The film received an award at

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the Sundance Film Festival and will either be released to theaters or aired on Showtime later in the year.

Dennis is active in AVP/New England and remains a fervent believer in the power of AVP. (In fact he has urged the producer of "After Innocence" to do another documentary just on AVP.)

Bob Beaudette, who attended last year's AVP/USA conference and had been incarcerated with Dennis, has also used every opportunity to promote AVP, outside the box so to speak—in appearances before youth groups in Florida, prison officials in New Jersey, and a national conference of mental health professionals.

The testimony of persons like Hakim, Dennis, and Bob who feel their lives have been transformed by the AVP experience has a powerful impact upon others and we can all be indebted to them for spreading the word outside of AVP. ☚

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*Editor's Note: "The Aikido Story," published in the Fall issue of the Transformer was missing part of the last paragraph. The author of this story, submitted by Steve Angell, is unknown.*

**Corrected last paragraph:**

"As the train pulled away, I sat down on a bench. What I had wanted to do with muscle had

been accomplished with kind words. I had just seen Aikido tried in combat, and the essence of it was love. I would have to practice the art with an entirely different spirit. It would be a long time before I could speak about the resolution of conflict." Doug

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***AVP in Iowa Facilities***

*Marian Klostermann (Merry Marian), Omaha, NE*

In the fall of 2003, three of us Iowans began an effort to introduce Alternatives to Violence Project workshops into correctional facilities in Iowa. We focused on the Fort Dodge Correctional Center, housing 1,200 inmates with the average age of 23, ten years younger than the average age of all incarcerated men in Iowa. In January 2004 we began workshops at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women near Des Moines. It is the primary facility for female offenders and houses about 600 women.

Governor Vilsack awarded our AVP group with the Governor's Award for Volunteering on Oct. 22nd, 2004. In the Governor's opening remarks he mentioned that a volunteer program in Iowa was involved in working with inmates to try to help make a difference in some lives.

Since then, a third facility which is in Anamosa, now has monthly AVP workshops. It is gratifying to have the DOC excited and supportive of AVP. ☚

THE ROAD TO GIKONGORO  
Sitting in an AVP Workshop

*Laura Chico, Baltimore, MD*

Rwanda has been called the "land of a thousand hills" and winding through the countryside toward the southern-most province of Gikongoro, the expression seems like an understatement. Peering out the window of a crammed mini-bus (a 14 person van carrying 20 people), and bracing myself against the potholes as the bus jerked from side to side without the advantage of shock absorbers, I occasionally would try to count the hills that stretched off into the horizon in every direction. I never was able to count them all before we would round a bend and a whole new set of hills would come into view. Rwanda is such a small piece of land (the size of Maryland, I've been told) with nearly 8 million people living here, that I shouldn't have been surprised that almost every piece of land is cultivated. The hills are terraced and quilted with small farms, and even the narrow strip of land along the side of the road has been claimed to grow small amounts of corn or beans or other crops I don't yet know.

It is quite picturesque, Rwanda is, and the tranquil pastoral scene seems remote from the country's bloody history. But I turned to my companion, Marie

Paule - a poised and warm AVP facilitator who is working with me to write a report on AVP here in Rwanda - and said several times, "It is so beautiful here!" She would respond with a neutral nod, as if only to acknowledge my comment but not to agree. At first I thought this was modesty, but when I questioned her she said, "In French there is an expression that Rwanda has a thousand hills, and a thousand problems."

And I felt the sadness seep in. Even that which is so beautiful here is inextricably intertwined with pain, and the ground itself is soaked with blood.

When we arrived at the AVP workshop the next morning, the participants were already there, sitting quietly in a semi-circle of chairs waiting for the facilitators to begin. This early arrival is unusual here in Rwanda, where time is "elastic" and the unpredictability of transportation and the lack of reliable or affordable communication often leaves people waiting patiently for an hour for everyone to arrive for a meeting. We learned later that eighteen more people had come to the workshop though they hadn't received an invitation, and had to be turned away! The others had claimed their seats, and weren't moving.

In the workshop were 11 men, 10 women (3 of whom had

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no shoes) and two babies who played quietly at the edges of the circle and only demanded their mothers' attention when they were hungry. These men and women were all judges for Gacaca - a traditional arbitration process (literally meaning "on the grass") that has been revived to handle the overwhelming numbers of genocide-related cases. Gacaca has the enormous task of seeking the truth of what happened during the genocide, documenting all information gathered, and processing lower level cases (those who looted, destroyed property, or were coerced into killing), and finally seeking that sticky balance between justice and reconciliation. It is no small task, and the judges have received trainings from various organizations to better prepare them for the challenges they face. AVP is among the trainings offered.

The AVP workshop began the way AVP begins - with an introduction from the facilitators, introductions from participants, establishing ground rules, an ice breaker that got people moving and laughing, and so on. I watched as the facilitators began to create a new culture within the room, with Adjective Names (I was Lucky Laura and Marie Paule was Peace Paule), and insisting that after someone speaks

the next person says "Murakose, Lucky Laura. Nitkwa Peace Paule" (Thank you, Lucky Laura, I'm Peace Paule).. There were some ripples of resistance to these new ways of interacting. In Rwanda, one's name is very important, and to some the giving of Adjective Names has echoes of baptism with Christian names. To make matters more challenging, Adjective Names don't work in Kinyarwanda, because of the complicated language structure, so usually the names are in English or French. In many workshops, at least one or two participants are wary of being called something new, but again and again the Rwandan facilitators would insist. I imagine that most Western facilitators would have given in quickly, figuring that the Adjective Name is simply not culturally appropriate. But the Rwandan facilitators here saw a deeper value in pushing people outside of their comfort zones, encouraging them to relate to one another across ethnic groups in a completely new way. And sure enough, I watched the magic of AVP unfold as the group began to gel and create its own safe space away from the pulls of everyday Rwandan life.

In that first morning, after participants discussed Active Listening they turned to a partner and told that person about a time when they had done something

*(See "Gikongoro" on page 10)*

*("Gikongoro" continued from page 9)*

good. This seemed to me the perfect way to begin self-disclosure, since so much of life in Rwanda is wondering what bad things the person next to you has done or will do. So the partners talked and listened, and then a few shared their stories with the large group. There were stories of saving people's lives, releasing prisoners of war from jail, taking in orphans, and so on. Stories that make the few things I could think of for myself seem small and modest. After the sharing had completed, several participants raised their hands. (Actually, they pointed their index fingers in the air, keeping their elbows close into their stomachs - but it is the US equivalent of raising one's hand).

"How can we know that what these people say is true?" they wanted to know.

"I mean," added one woman, "saving someone from a crocodile with just a stick! It's hard to believe."

The facilitators fielded the questions, but moved on quickly. I suppose they weren't surprised by how almost impossible it is to trust one another in a country where your neighbor suddenly turned on you or your husband killed your children and tried to kill you. But for me, the question landed in my stomach like lead. Perhaps I shouldn't have been

surprised either, but that question was never one that I encountered in my many workshops in the US, even with the toughest, most traumatized youth. Maybe it was because they were judges? I hopefully wondered this out loud to David Bucura, the AVP coordinator of Rwanda and one of the facilitators. Maybe it's because now they are immersed in looking for the truth? David said, "You see, here in Rwanda, because of what happened, people do not trust each other." So much for my hopeful theory.

Later on, the facilitators introduced an activity called "Serial News." They asked five participants to volunteer to leave the room, and they chose one more to stay to listen to a short, detailed story. Then one by one, the volunteers came in, listened to the story from the person who came before, and then retold it to the person who followed. Even though I didn't understand a word, I was laughing just as hard as everyone else, tears pricked into my eyes as the story changed and changed some more, to the point of becoming unrecognizable. This activity, I later learned, is one of the most valuable that AVP offers Gacaca judges. Many said that after seeing how stories can change in the retelling, they will no longer believe hearsay or rumors but they will be sure to go to the source.

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"Before AVP, do many judges just believe what someone tells them, even if that person didn't witness it?" I asked incredulously.

"Oh yes," came the answer, from judges and Gacaca coordinators alike.

It was humbling to witness how essential AVP is to the process of reconciliation here, how deeply it touches the core.

In Rwanda it has struck me that people believe, deeply, in transformation - the capacity of the human soul to repent and be renewed. Perhaps they have to believe in this possibility in order to live next door to neighbors who might turn sour without warning, but whatever the source, the openness to transformation is profound. Throughout the workshop the facilitators connected the lessons not only to Gacaca and Rwanda's violent history, but also to violence at home, against women and children. It was warming to see the two male facilitators speak out as strongly against rape and domestic violence as the women, and to promote the power of partnerships and joint decision-making. On the third day, the facilitators asked the participants how they would use the lessons they had learned so far. As we moved around the circle, we came to an elder man who gave this testimony:

"Before, I was a bad man. Even at home I was having conflict. Now I am talking softly and they at home are wondering what happened to me"

The man went on to say that he had been changed by AVP and that he would be kind to his wife and children now. The room erupted in applause for this transformation, and then testimonies continued. Not everyone, but at least several more inspired more spontaneous applause and warm congratulations on the inner change that had been affected. Later, I asked Bucura: "Why do people believe the transformation testimonies but not the earlier stories of when people had done good things?"

"Because they just volunteered this," was the answer, "no one asked them to share this."

That made sense to me - that people need the space to be real. But I also wondered, watching the previously stone-faced group laugh and smile and listen deeply, if maybe AVP had started to do the impossible: to plant a small seed of trust that might, with generations to nurture it, one day flower. ☘

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**SUBSCRIPTION SUPPORT**

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**QUESTION: What is CLARG?****ANSWER:** (Choose One)

*Ann Ward, Lemont, Pennsylvania*

- 1) The tenth planet in the solar system after Pluto?
- 2) That hairy gross thing preventing your bathroom sink from draining?
- 3) The Committee of Local and Regional Groups of AVP/USA and THE pivotal source of our organization's voice?

If you chose #3 you are right!!! CLARG, the Committee of Local and Regional Groups came into being in 1999 when AVP/USA reformed it's leadership structure. CLARG is now charged to:

- \* provide a system for local and regional networking, news gathering, and data collection
- \* communicate local AVP group needs and ideas to the AVP/USA committees
- \* help local groups to observe essentials of AVP quality control
- \* help to start new locals, near and far
- \* help newly released inmates stay connected with AVP/USA
- \* host regional meetings to promote sharing
- \* support other regional representatives
- \* support national capacity building in terms of fundraising and marketing AVP/USA
- \* share national initiatives with local AVP groups

AVP/USA is divided into eleven regions. Each region is supported by one or two regional representatives. To learn who your regional representative is, check [www.AVPUSA.org](http://www.AVPUSA.org) website under the second red button "AVP Contacts." (To log in the user ID is: "member" and the password is: "texashug" - keep them confidential!) If you need support, contacts for facilitators, information for starting new prison programs, just let your regional representative know. If you have any other questions, contact the co-chairs from CLARG:

• **Dotty Joos**      [djoos@sonic.net](mailto:djoos@sonic.net) / 707-874-2638

...OR...

• **Ann Ward**      [ajw109@psu.edu](mailto:ajw109@psu.edu) / 814 234-4978

⌘

## ***The Perfectionist***

*Luther Sanders*

Please tell me, Sir or Madam,  
 whoever you are-  
 Why are you so driven?  
 Is your work eye-service with no  
 reward except self-praise,  
 or is your work the labor  
 of regenerating love?  
 I am the perfectionist,  
 glorifying God  
 within my own body.  
 I know that God is love  
 and that love increases  
 with use.  
 Therefore, Love is within me,  
 quietly directing the course  
 of my life.  
 I strive for beauty  
 and moral excellence.  
 Yet I stay in touch  
 with reality.  
 For all that I do,  
 I do at my own expense,  
 and I have no regrets. ☞

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## ***Did you know?***

***About the AVP/USA***

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***Group Exemption?***

*Ann Ward, Lemont, Pennsylvania*

If you are a local or regional AVP organization, who requires tax exempt status for your work, consider applying to AVP/USA to be included in our 501(c)(3) Group Exemption. The process is very simple and allows your local AVP group to raise and manage funds as a tax exempt organization. The steps to take to be included in our Group Exemption include; completing the IRS form SS-4, and submitting your mission statement, by-laws, annual income/expense report and a \$50 administration fee to the AVP/USA Clerk of Finance. To maintain your coverage, you will be asked to submit an annual income/expense report, an annual accounting of your workshop hours and numbers trained and \$25 fee to AVP/USA.

For more information, contact Ann Ward, AVP/USA Clerk of Finance -

- email: **ajw109@psu.edu**
- phone: **814-234-4978**

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## Signing on to the AVP-L list

Peter Hoover (Persistent Peter)  
 Trumansburg, New York, USA

AVP-L@CORNELL.EDU is a discussion list open to certified trainers of creative conflict-resolution workshops held under the auspices of the Alternatives to Violence Project, Inc., or its approved national (U.S.) or international equivalents. It is designed to facilitate communication among these individuals, with discussions to center around facilitation techniques, workshop exercises, and other useful information pertaining to the mechanics of facilitating AVP workshops. To preserve the confidentiality of workshop participants, please make comments about such individuals generic.

To subscribe, send an e-mail message indicating where and when you obtained your AVP facilitator certification, where you currently train, and any other pertinent information you care to include to the list owner, Peter Hoover, at prh4@cornell.edu.

## Signing on to the AVP-L2 list

Richard Krouskop (Rambunctious Rick)  
 Shreveport, Louisiana, USA

Want to share your work with, or thoughts on: restorative justice, prison reform, school violence, the (.....Insert your favorite region here) conflict between (.....side A ) and (....side B), etc.? That's what the AVP-L2 E-mail discussion group is designed for.

On AVP-L2, there are no restrictions: just "anything in which you think other AVP facilitators might be interested."

Subscription to AVP-L2 is automated and done entirely through the AVP/USA website. Be certain you are using a computer with e-mail connected to the e-mail address you wish to use for the list. You will be sending an e-mail to register and your return address must be the e-mail address to which you wish to receive list traffic.

- Go to: [www.avpusa.org](http://www.avpusa.org)
  - Go to the Facilitator's page (click on the AVP/USA tab)
  - Login Name: "member"
  - Login Password: "texashug"
- Sign up for AVP-L2 (and also AVP-L) near the bottom of that page.

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Collected by Hal Brody, Ed: Gini Floyd, Martin Hattersley		
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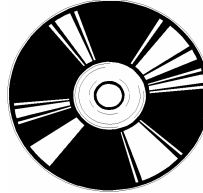
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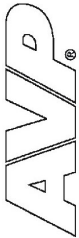
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 newsletter for facilitators and others with an interest in AVP. It is  
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