

*CAPTURED WORDS*  
*FREE THOUGHTS*  
#1 (Summer 2006)

Writings from The Poetry Workshop  
at The Champaign County Jail

Including works by Makaiah Grant,  
Austin Harris, Phillip Harris,  
Jeremy Koeneke, Dennis Mansker,  
Richard McNally, and Fatmir Sedjin

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With Special Thanks to:

- Sarah Franseen and Katie Healey, Workshop Volunteers, and Ellen Satterthwaite-Phillips, artist.
- Nancy Griffith, Coordinator of Programs at the Jail.
- And Poetry Workshop participants Joe Hill, Kevin Severado, and Jack Carter (who were transferred out before their work could be included in this collection).

Another Day in The Champaign County Jail  
Dennis Mansker

Another day another tray  
That's how my world begins  
6:30 every morning  
The speaker bellows *Trays! Trays!*  
And you can rest assured  
It will be like all the other days  
A carton of milk  
A cup of instant coffee  
The usual oats grits or farina  
Maybe a hard boiled egg

Then it's back to my cell for quiet time  
Read a book maybe write a poem or letter

At 11:30 it all starts over again  
*Trays! Trays!* Here they come full of  
Turkey bologna turkey ham turkey burger  
Two slices of bread  
Dehydrated potatoes  
Some soggy salad  
And for desert, lime Jell-O

Now it's back to my cement cage again  
A few more hours of clanging and banging

Until at 4:30 it begins again  
*Trays! Trays!* I hope you like beans  
'cause it's been beans all week  
Baked beans brown beans black-eyed beans  
Have you ever spent time with 25 men  
Who have lived on beans for a week?

It's evening now  
Everybody's back in the pod

Playing cards, watching TV  
Everyone is talking so loudly you can't hear the TV  
The TV is so loud you can't hear what anyone is saying  
And so it goes, loud and louder  
And now somebody's mad over a game of spades  
The words and cards are flying

Lockdown at 10:30  
The doors are shut and the locks secured  
The guards rattle the doors just to make sure  
Time for that final five minute chat with your celly  
You lie down on that two inch mat on top of a slab of steel  
Knowing in the morning your back will hurt so bad  
You can barely walk

And now all the heartache and sadness  
Can no longer be ignored, *As you think about*  
The wife you cannot kiss goodnight  
The children you cannot tell you love them  
The friends you probably won't see again  
It all seems a million miles away

You want to cry but it won't do any good  
So you hold back the tears  
Trying to keep what little pride you have left  
Say a little prayer  
And hope to drift off to sleep

And so end  
Another day  
in the Champaign County Jail

## If I Ruled the World

Austin Harris

Midgets blanket the land as fruit punch rivers flow  
Cascading red water falls over huge lemon slices  
No amount of thirst can put an end to this supply of heaven  
Living high upon a hill, soaring above everyone else

The yard is lush with John Deere green grass  
Protected by blonde guardians in bikini armor  
I own a mine where my beauties harvest  
Diamond jewelry

The kitchen is open 24/7 serving raw chocolate chip cookie dough  
Day or night kegs of beer spill out of the walk-in cooler

My trusty pet, the hookah-smoking caterpillar  
From *Alice in Wonderland* sits by my side  
As I watch over my planet  
My spiky blonde mullet blows in the wind  
My handle-bar mustache rests on my upper lip

I am loved  
I am wanted  
I am a god

I pull into my Hooters  
On my fiery Harley  
All the beauties flock to me  
As we eat hot wings

Oh yes, If I ruled the world  
It would be fucked up

## Tired of a Broken Heart

Phillip Harris

I don't know where to start  
I'm so tired of this broken heart  
It was our happiness  
Where I used to confide  
And your love was like a law  
In which I used to abide

But now things are different  
You tore my heart away  
And I mourn it  
Hour to hour  
Day to day

What confuses me is that after this ordeal  
You cried and cried and cried  
But the night before  
You called me on the phone  
And you lied and lied and lied

Damn you! I hate you and I love you  
And the reason I'm torn in two  
Is 'cause you committed this awful crime

So now that our love is torn apart  
I think I'll go back  
To the start  
So I can go  
And so you can know  
That I'm so tired  
of this broken heart



### Three Point Turn-A-Bout

Fatmir Sejдини

Life is an emotional roller coaster  
Filled with highs and lows  
Happy days along with brutal days  
But thanks to my large and loving family  
I can turn bad days into good

I have four older sisters  
With ten nieces and nephews,  
My most precious and beautiful diamonds

Also two great parents  
Who give me support, unconditional love,  
And will never turn their backs  
No matter what road I'm on

The road I'm on will make a 180 degree turn  
But it's hard to turn around with no power steering  
I'm tired of driving down this road  
Which leads to pain and suffering  
For everyone who cares for me

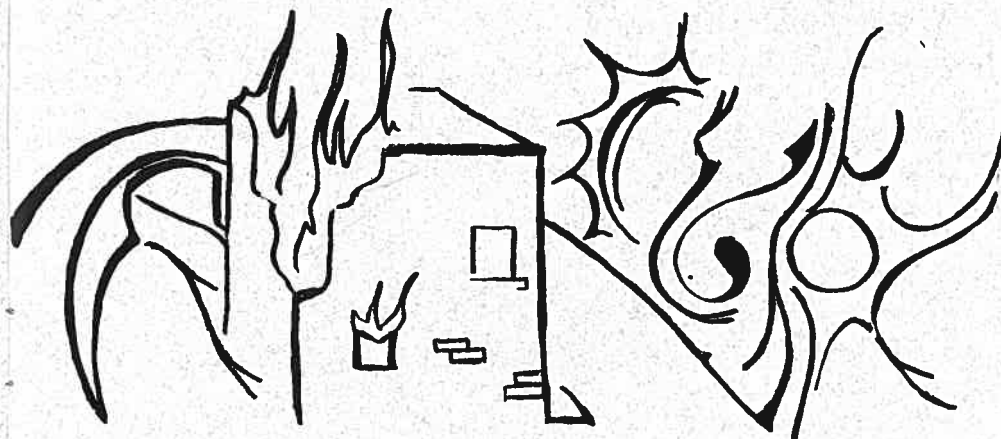
I'm the only son in my family  
With great burden on my shoulders  
I must carry on my family name  
My mom's only wish before she dies  
Is to be grandma to my children  
She had four girls before getting to me  
I'm like her prize of all prizes  
Now I'm here breaking her heart

What do you do when your mother tells you  
Your purpose in life  
Is that you must marry and have kids  
No matter what happens?

It scares the shit out of me  
I have been running from it for a long time  
And I realized something  
While on my vacation here in Champaign

That I must make that u-turn  
And haul ass back  
to the front, to my family

I would burn this town down  
For the crap I'm going through  
But when I get out  
I'll probably just burn half of it



Captain Trips  
Richard McNally

“There is nothing like a Grateful Dead concert.”  
A contention made by and scoffed at by just as many.  
It’s also a bumper sticker and tee-shirt. But for me, it’s  
A vibe which seethes with beauty, bliss, joy and rapture.  
This vibe is a product of each integral part  
moving in rhythmic harmony as it bursts forth  
with the energy of a new born star.

See, my best friend, in my humble opinion  
Someday soon will be everyone’s best friend.  
To paraphrase “Scarlet Begonias,”  
strangers will stop strangers just to shake their hand,  
when everyone is playing in the Heart-of-Gold band

With song titles like “From the Heart of Me,”  
“If I had the World to Give” and  
“Eyes of the World,”  
Even a new friend could sense  
That the music played the band  
And we all were the band.

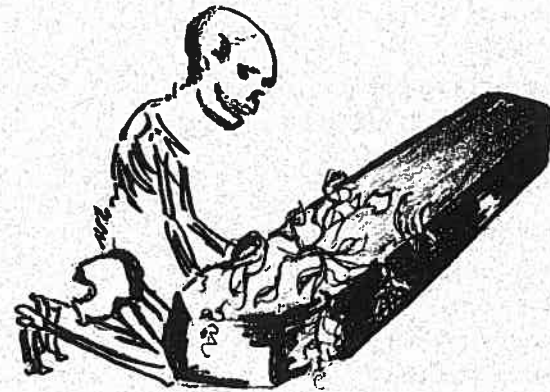
The feelings and vibes a great many of us deadheads experienced  
Can be attributed to the time spent with a good friend  
of great heart and wondrous virtue.

Our friend has your mother saying things like  
“Stay at the shows”  
and then get yourself to San Diego  
And fly home to Chicago  
For your father’s funeral.

She understood how much I loved my friend  
And my father as well.  
She knew how vital my Dead family was to me,  
Like breathing is to all living things.

Here I am, 11 years after Jerry Garcia died,  
Searching for our friend yet  
Finding myself addicted to bad drugs,  
Worse people,  
And further from a friend  
Then I’ve ever been.  
Still I hope someday soon  
I’ll “Wake up to find once again  
I am the eyes of the world.”

My friend is more an entity than a being,  
And our pilot is none other than Captain Trips,  
Jerry Garcia, who most profoundly taught me  
That my best friend is YOU!



What Hurts  
Phillip Harris

I tell you what hurts:  
Loneliness, sadness, pain, and death,  
To be alone on the streets searching  
For that friend or brother  
And almost finding them  
Only to be swept away by the darkness

What hurts is seeing that man or woman  
Begging and asking for food and change,  
They are cold and hungry and have no place to sleep  
Except the cold ground we walk on  
And dirty dumpsters we throw our trash in

What hurts is looking back on the life I had  
And then turning to the one I have  
The former seems nothing but a memory  
Old flashes and dreams  
Happiness and smiling faces

But then I wake up  
And see the four walls  
Where the smiling faces and love  
Have been replaced by what hurts

Still I depend on those eyes  
That smile and laugh  
To get me through the day  
Only to know that soon  
That too will recede from my life  
And then I will truly be alone.

What hurts is someone wishing you the best of luck  
Only to know that the worst is yet to come.

And who is there with you  
To ride along by your side  
Through the long journey?

No One.

I know what hurts:  
The corrupt foundation of our society  
Teaching lies, saying things  
Like giving hope to dreams  
Then smashing them to pieces  
Before the dreamer's face.

I know what hurts.

A Peaceful Silence  
Austin Harris

Silence is the low hum of the cars passing by on Old Route 150  
Silence is the sound of the drier singing me a lullaby  
as it dries the day's laundry  
Silence is the buzz of my Power Ranger night light  
Silence is laying your legs straight  
knowing Grandma and Grandpa are close by  
Silence is the crickets chirping out in the yard  
Silence is the soft glow of my Garfield clock  
Silence is the soft snores from the room next door  
Silence is the corn stalks blowing in the night breeze



## Emotional Rollercoaster

Jeremy Koeneke

From the time you are conceived in your mother's soft, warm womb you start dealing with emotions. You get aggravated when you're hungry, happy when you're content. It is a life of bliss if you have someone who loves you as much as your mom can. Everything you do in life, *the outcome of everything* depends on how you control your emotions. The emotional values that are bestowed upon you as a child tend to follow you throughout your life. That is why it is imperative that parents take some kind of parenting class. The trial and error method is used more often than not—that is playing Russian roulette with your child's life. Don't get me wrong, there is a chance your child may get everything he or she needs. This all depends on how the child's parents were raised and if they sought help or not. But most of us let our egos and or pride hinder us in so many ways.

My emotions are a planted seed of hostility, resentment, frustration, and anger. I have sought professional help but find myself rationalizing against what I know is right and what is expected of me. This continued battle within myself will eventually lead to my destruction or downfall. The messed up thing is because of the lack of emotions put into me I have come to accept that I am corrupt and against whatever society tries to dictate. The bubonic plague of destruction is embedded within me. Is it good or is it bad? Only God knows, if you believe in that sort of thing, but I do know that only you can decide to control this roller coaster of emotions; if you don't, then there are no certainties.

All you can do is try to better understand yourself and your feelings. If you're content with that, then I say fuck everybody else. Because honestly, do you think ninety-five percent of the people you come across in life actually give a shit about you?

## Finally

Richard McNally

Have you ever been so angry that you've blacked out at the movie theater?

You might need lithium.

How about growing up in a house full of people who did their best to avoid one another

because of the mood each of them might be in?

Mmm mmmm sure could go for some lithium.

There's nothing wrong with me!

Why, what's wrong with you?

Ahh! How's about some lithium?

You know what I've found?

Street drugs ain't got nuthin' on lithium.

There is however a drawback

It's called anxiety.

I describe anxiety like this:

Suppose you're going to prison for 50 years

Or on vacation to Guadalajara, Mexico

In either case you're not sleeping the night before

But you're equally as thrilled about both.

This is anxiety at work

Well, the doctor has a pill for that.

Finally, licit or illicit, many of us seek to suppress our emotions

I won't lie, I've sought since my early teens

To be the world's first non-emotional human being.

Ahhh. Lithium is as close as I think I'll ever get.

Finally, my own lithium

**Midnight Dream**

**Dennis Mansker**

Let me give you some comfort  
As you lie down to sleep  
Let me confer a message  
Deep in your heart you shall keep

Imagine I'm laying there with you  
And squeezing you tight  
Together we will share  
A midnight dream tonight

**My Sobriety, Lost But Found**

**Makaiah Grant**

I've lost 'em!  
I've lost 'em all!  
I've lost the most important things!  
I've lost my girlfriend and our baby!  
I've lost my family!  
I've lost my friends!  
I've lost my dignity!  
I've lost my freedom!

But then I worked the steps each day  
struggling for a better me

I've found 'em!  
I've found 'em all!  
I've found the most important things!  
I've found the way to keep my Girlfriend and our baby!  
I've found the way to keep my family!  
I've found the way to my dignity!  
I've found the way to keep my freedom!

**Live Another Day**

**Austin Harris**

White brick walls concrete floors bathroom of stainless steel  
Two identical book shelves rest on one wall  
The other is home to two beds  
A stainless steel breakfast nook completes my 8 x 8 home

Every morning I wake up to a stiff back and artificial sun  
That warms my face with its fluorescent bulbs  
The clean smell of a hospital mixed with  
The mustiness of middle-aged men fills my nostrils  
And a sickness fills my stomach

Dressed like zebras  
We go on day in and day out  
Knowing nothing  
Living in total darkness

The more days that go by  
The more guilty I feel

This time—seven months!—  
Can never be made up

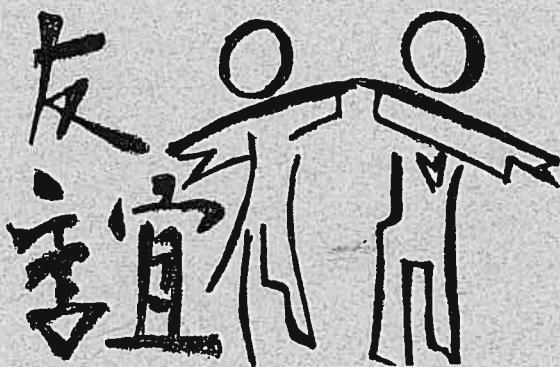
It's enough to drive you crazy  
But the strong will survive  
And they can't hold me forever

So I look up at my makeshift sun  
And smile  
For I will live another day.



## My Best Friend Jeremy Koeneke

The qualities of a best friend are immeasurable. He will be a person who shows trust, compassion, shared interest, and loyalty. He will be a person who is there whether you're on top or on the bottom. A true friend will be there through it all. I've come to discover that we go through life calling people friends, but in reality they are nothing but mere *associates*. You only get one-to-three true friends through life. Nowadays, somebody is always trying to use you instead of uplift you. But my friend, my confidant, my brother has all of these qualities and much more—he brings out the good in me. Now that he's been sentenced to 45 years I feel incomplete, I feel an emptiness that cannot be filled. The only thing I can think of doing is drowning the pain with my second best friend, Hennessy. If not, I cannot imagine the turmoil and corruption that will be unleashed upon this pathetic town. If you take away the only thing that brings good out of a person, then you have evil. That is why we all need a friend.



This is an occasional publication, made possible by the love and sweat of our volunteers and the hard work of imprisoned men who have found dignity and solace in the power of Captured Words and Free Thoughts.

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