

CAPTURED WORDS **FREE** **THOUGHTS**



OPENINGS & THANKS

Working under the assumption that reducing crime and reclaiming our neighborhoods depends in part on enabling a generation of abandoned Americans to experience different modes of citizenship, self-reflection, and personal expression, *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* aspires to empower its contributors and enlighten its readers.

To fulfil these goals, *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* offers testimony from America's prisons and prison-impacted communities. This issue includes poems, stories, letters, essays, and art made by men and women incarcerated or formerly incarcerated in Colorado, Arizona, Illinois, and Texas. To expand the scope of our project, we also include works made by folks on the "free" side of the prison walls (in Colorado, Florida, Oregon, and Texas) who have been impacted by crime, violence, and the prison industrial-complex.

Volume 11 was compiled and edited by Stephen John Hartnett, Misty Saribal, Ian Dawe, and Nicole Palidwor; special kudos to Misty, who took the lead on collecting the art that adorns our pages.

- Thanks to Dr. Kristin B. Valentine for her artistic and financial support of this magazine.
- Thanks to the UC Denver College of Liberal Arts and Science's Dean's Fund for Excellence for institutional support.
- Thanks to Ian Dawe and Benjamin Swales for running the Social Justice Project website (formerly the Prison Justice Project, now at <http://prisonjusticeproject.org/>), where readers can find a world of information, videos, hyperlinks, and other resources.
- Thanks to all of the colleagues who contribute to the community known as PCARE (which stands for Prison Communication Activism Research and Education) and who drive PCARE's rocking

website (<http://p-care.org/>). Some of the pieces in this magazine were contributed by and through PCARE contacts, whom we thank for their support.

- Thanks to Nathan Ybanez and our friends at Concrete Echoes, a Colorado-based website (<http://www.concreteechoes.com/>) for allowing us to reprint some of their materials.
- For the sweet layout, thanks to Mike Tallman and our friends at Mark Mock Design Associates.

CONTRIBUTORS AND SUBSCRIBERS

Contributors: If you would like to contribute work to forthcoming issues of this magazine, please send your poems, stories, testimonials, or art to Stephen John Hartnett, Professor and Chair, Department of Communication, UC Denver, P.O. Box 173364, Mail Code 176, Denver, CO 80217; stephen.hartnett@ucdenver.edu; 303.556.2778.

Subscribers: If you would like to receive either hard-copies or e-versions of the magazine (please specify your preference), then please sign up as a subscriber by writing to the address listed above; subscriptions are free.

BACK ISSUES AND ACCESS

For those of you who would like to use *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* in your classes or for other political purposes, you can access free PDFs of volumes 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 by logging on to the Academia.edu webpage of Stephen Hartnett (<http://ucdenver.academia.edu/StephenHartnett>). Additional materials related to the topics considered herein are available on the Social Justice Project website (<http://prisonjusticeproject.org/>) and the PCARE website (<http://p-care.org/>).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>You are Not Alone</i> by Susannah Bannon	2	<i>Son</i> by Jessica Muniz J.	16
<i>Friends</i> by Will Longoria	3	<i>Octo-Artist</i> by Justin Austin	17
<i>Blink</i> by Bryan Grove	3	<i>The Power of Many: Women Standing Up Against Rape Culture</i> by Sarah Shoulak	18
<i>Gnarly Tree</i> by Gisselle Gutierrez Ruiz	4	<i>Wise Woman</i> by Nathan Ybanez	21
<i>My Encounter with the Prison-Industrial Complex</i> by Alex Landau	5	<i>Shoes</i> by James Anderson	22
<i>Bring Noise to Da Hood</i> by Roderick Finley	6	<i>The Pencil</i> by Twila Davis	23
<i>Time</i> by James A.	7	<i>Yesterday</i> by Joey	24
<i>65 Years</i> by Jesse Swift	8	<i>Captured Words/Free Thoughts Partners with Creative Community Interventions</i>	25
<i>Decarceration</i> by Emily Plec	10	<i>Through the Eyes of a Victim</i> by Dena Hankerson	26
<i>Fade to Black</i> by Christian Garcia	11	<i>The Indictment</i> by Loralee "Raven" Boyd	27
<i>Puzzled Amphibian</i> by Justin Austin	12	<i>Child's Pose</i> by Nathan Ybanez	28
<i>I Was/I Am</i> by Amber Garvey	13		
<i>Colorado Juvenile Life Without Parole</i> by Alexander Pogosyan	14		

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

By Susannah Bannon

When I reflect on everything that has happened in the last three years of my life, I struggle to believe it isn't a dream—because it sounds too good to be true.

When I tell my colleagues and professors in the Texas State University, San Marcos, graduate program what my life was like before I caught my last charge, they can't believe it either—because it sounds too horrifying to be true.

But my journey from prison to graduate school is true, and so I pledge to never forget the catastrophes and miracles that have led me to where I am now.

I will never forget the night that Officer S. came to my bunk and told me I was going home in four days. That night, I wrote myself a letter; it arrived two days after I got home. The gist of the letter was "don't ever forget where you've been and don't ever forget the girls who are still locked up, because they need you."

While I was imprisoned, I tutored GED and adult literacy students, something I initially volunteered for because I heard we got to sit in an air-conditioned building while we tutored. July is a good time to have air conditioning in Texas. I didn't expect to feel much more than just cool air, but I did. When one student looked up at me during a study session and said "That never made sense to me until you explained it just now," I felt . . . good. For the first time in my life, I felt like I had made a positive contribution to the world, and it was amazing.

Now, don't get me wrong, prison wasn't all sunshine and rainbows for me; it was hell. The way I see it, if you're reading this on the inside, you already know this; so why would I make you listen to how bad it was for me? That is not the point of this story.

When I decided to go back to school for my bachelor's degree, it wasn't because I had found my calling and everything just fell into place when I got home. No. I decided to go back to school because if I didn't find something positive to do with my time, then I was going to violate parole before finishing my second month out. I did not expect a professor to encourage me to apply to graduate school, especially when a paper I wrote about prison in which I spoke candidly of my experience prompted the encouragement.

I will never forget how important that encouragement was, and so I want to thank every teacher who has ever believed in the power of second chances.

Because I had pledged to never forget, I wrote about prison in my application essay to the graduate school I now attend. In that essay, I wrote how, while imprisoned, I had made the decision that when I got out, I would use my experience for good, including helping those still on the inside.

I am now in the second year of my master's degree program and one focus of my research is the prison system and those who are stuck in it. I just completed a study examining the significance of the relationships between correctional educators and their students. My project calls attention to the under-served and much-deserving population of enthusiastic and dedicated students within the prison system. My hope is to use my education to convey this simple message: *If you are on the inside, and feel like it will never get better or that no one is on your side, I am here. My colleagues and allies are here. This magazine is here. You are not alone, it will get better.*

FRIENDS

By Will Longoria

I sat in the lotus position for a long time, calmly moving my fingers over the meditation beads, my eyes barely opened, focusing on my breathing.

Then from nowhere the decaying sadness, that dreadful feeling of emptiness, crept upon me, filling me with thoughts of people and times long gone.

When I contemplate life's brevity and the impermanence of friendships and love, when I recall the times spent with those who are cherished, when I sense that the times have passed and now all that remain are but glimpses into consciousness—I reach out to grab them, but they cannot be touched.

Suddenly, I feel as if am standing at the edge. The awareness of loss and pain is too real, the now is so vivid that I want to run through the hills.

But there are no hills for me to run through; when I release my fingers from the beds, I'm looking at four walls.

BLINK

By Bryan Grove

I open my eyes
Stars stare back at me
Blink

I open my eyes
The rising yellow-red globe greets me
A cool breeze of salty sea splashes me
Blink

I open my eyes
Laughter surrounds me
Beautiful genuine mirth
I join in the symphonic joy
Blink

I open my eyes
Hello gorgeous home
Made from hard work and propped by a family
A few tikes raising hell
What heavenly children of mine
Blink

I open my eyes
I see a casket
It's been a long time coming
He was good to us kids
And great to his wife
My father
Blink

I open my eyes

GNARLY TREE

By Gisselle Gutierrez Ruiz



MY ENCOUNTER WITH THE PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

By Alex Landau

In the early hours of January 15, 2009, at the corner of 16th and Emerson, here in the Mile High City, I suffered a modern day Jim Crow beating.

When I was stopped, I was profiled by Officer Ricky Nixon, who saw a Black youth in an '84 Lincoln Town Car out after midnight. Officer Nixon claimed I had made an illegal left turn and told me to step from my vehicle, patted me down, and instructed me to wait by his squad car. Officer Nixon then found some weed on my passenger and placed him in hand cuffs. I had left my wallet at home by mistake, and so did not have my license on me, so Officer Nixon radioed for help. An additional police cruiser arrived, bringing Officers Murr and Middleton to the scene. This is when Officer Nixon announced he was going to search my trunk; in response, I took a couple of steps toward the group of Officers in an attempt to calmly communicate the need for a warrant before they continued their search. As a response, I was grabbed by Officers Murr and Middleton; as the two of them shouted "Get Back," Officer Nixon punched me in the face.

Officer Nixon hit me so hard that I and Officers Murr and Middleton all fell backwards, tumbling over the curb, bringing us all down in a sloppy pile. As I lay sandwiched between Officers Murr and Middleton, the latter began striking me in the face with her radio; Officers Nixon and Murr were striking me with fists from

behind. By now my face was covered in blood; I could barely see. That's when one of the Officers shouted "he's reaching for her gun." Apparently the Officers thought I was going to try to steal Officer Middleton's gun. That's when I was grabbed around the neck, hoisted backwards, and struck multiple times in the head with a mag flashlight and then thrown back to the ground. The Officers then pushed me face down into the gutter while pounding me. That's when I heard one of the Officers say "if he doesn't calm down, shoot him." That's when I passed out.

I was awakened by an Officer grabbing me at the ankles and dragging me from the gutter, where I lay face down, to a patch of grass to await paramedics. As I lay there, covered in blood, barely conscious, one of the Officers said "you don't know how close you were to getting your fucking head blown off." Another Officer sneered "where's that warrant now, you fucking nigger."

After spending 30 minutes or so handcuffed to a hospital bed in the emergency room, an officer came in and tried to get a statement from me. I cut him off mid-sentence and said that I had no comment until I was allowed to speak with an attorney. It took 45 stitches to close my facial lacerations. I had a broken nose and a concussion. After receiving the stitches and enduring a CAT scan, I was taken to the city jail, only to find that I had been falsely charged with criminal intent to disarm a peace officer.

Editor's Note: Following the incidents described herein, Alex Landau sued the officers involved; prior to going to trial, the Denver City Council awarded Landau \$795,000 in damages. For details of what happened, see the Denver Post's coverage of Landau's case at http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_17978835.

BRING NOISE TO DA HOOD

By Roderick Finley

Editor's Note: In his play, "Bring Noise to Da Hood," Roderick Finley offers readers an encounter between Lil' Homie and Big Homie, two symbolic characters representing different generations of the African American experience. The dialogue is long and fiery and deserves staging in a good local theatre. To give readers a taste of this piece, we print here the closing comments of Big Homie:

Ghetto child with hood duties, your eyes are young and clouded by this materialistic world—you're still asleep, not aware of the responsibilities of maintaining peace in your community.

But it's time now to commit to the struggle of improvement, to seeking wisdom and knowledge to help create a better future for our sisters and brothers. Da hood must stand strong, even when the Big Homies are gone, so prepare for the day when you will lead us along.

So put away the guns and start studying to get your morals and vocabulary straight. Set your mind to a new purpose—nothing that's fake. It's time now to concentrate on producing your skills and talents through motivation and solid faith, knowing the Good Lord is there and the sun shines for brighter days.

Lil Homie, you gotta keep learning your history and philosophy to help overpower illiteracy. Become a well-known voice, debating on opinions of poverty and democracy; show you have grown a solid concept and vision of empowerment. Most of all, hold on at all costs, so you and Da Hood don't get lost.

TIME

By James A.

I looked at my watch today, half expecting to understand what time really means and how it corresponds with the five-thousand, one-hundred and thirty-seven days that I've been imprisoned.

That's one-hundred and twenty-three-thousand, two-hundred and eighty-eight hours spent wondering what amount of time will ever truly make-up for my wrongs and how I can make amends.

I have spent seven million, three-hundred and ninety-seven thousand, and two-hundred and eighty minutes alone in regretful personal reflection. This time has led me to believe that remorse never fades, never forgets, and never frees me from regret.

In fact, I have spent the past Four-hundred and forty-three million, eight-hundred and thirty-six thousand, and eight-hundred seconds wishing I could go back and change a mere sixty minutes of my youth.

When I looked at my watch today, I desperately hoped that in those tiny, melodic, integral hands of seconds, minutes, and hours, I might see a glimpse of light at the end of this tunnel. But what I saw instead, and what made me lower my head in sadness, was the realization that time, like prison, is only there to remind you of where you're at in that exact moment.

With time, there are no excuses.

With time, there's no going back, no possibility of offering the heartbroken and humble apology that I've ached to give since I was seventeen years old.

I see now that time is not only my prison, it's also the measurement of life's mountainous mistakes, which eventually pile up and overcome us in landslides of regret and remorse.

My watch blinds me with its crushing truth, yet tomorrow I'll surely look again.

65 YEARS

By Jesse Swift

What are the goals of criminal punishment? Ideally, they should encompass reasonable retribution, likely deterrence, and credible rehabilitation. But, with the rise of the tough-on-crime mentality, rehabilitation as a goal has fallen by the wayside, dwindling to the brink of non-existence. Retribution has taken center-stage, becoming the sole aim of criminal punishment.

This is an unfortunate trend, for despite public perception, prisoners are some of the most in-need members of this country's population when it comes to education. The majority of prisoners have neither a high school diploma nor a G.E.D. Because of this lack of schooling among prisoners, 19% of adult inmates are illiterate while 40% are functionally illiterate (meaning they can read at a low level but cannot understand complicated documents, like legal findings, court documents, or financial statements) (see Hagiler, 1994). Many prisoners also have to deal with educational impediments such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, and other learning disabilities, as well as mental health illnesses (see Latham). I believe this stark combination of lack-of-education and lack-of-health care is one of the main reasons why many of my fellow prisoners end up behind bars: we are society's forgotten class.

Here in Illinois, the goal of "corrections," as stated by the Illinois State Constitution and statutory law, is supposed to be to punish an offender for his crime while also preparing him for a return to "useful citizenship." This is why the system is not called the Department of Punishment, but the Department of Corrections. Rehabilitation would seem to be a necessary factor in a convicted criminal becoming a useful citizen. However, the public's thirst to become tougher on crime, enflamed by politicians and the mass media,

has led to harsher prisoner conditions and less rehabilitation. Out-of-cell activities, especially rehabilitative programs such as educational and vocational training for prisoners, have been seriously neglected or outright abolished. With nothing productive to take part in, little or no encouragement, and lacking the comprehensive skills to do anything on their own, prisoners are left to spend the majority of their time in their cells wasting away, or perhaps dwelling on their own criminality. "Corrections" thus evolves into "warehousing."

This trend will have dangerous consequences. As stated in a John Howard Association report, entitled "Cuts in Prison Education Put Illinois at Risk":

Illinois college-based prison education programs are diminishing, a trend certain to raise correctional costs and foster crime. For much of the past decade, Illinois has allowed its prison vocational and academic programs to wither away. . . . This trend is significant. . . [because] education protects the public from crime. Now the pace of neglect is accelerating. When education reduces recidivism, it minimizes the financial and social costs of crime. Education does not cost the public money; it saves money . . . [B]ut unless state government finds money to finance community colleges, prison educational programs are certain to continue shrinking, and the public will be the victim." (Manor 2010)

My situation illustrates many of these points. I am currently incarcerated by the Illinois Department of Corrections, and am in the fourteenth year of a 65-year sentence. I was sentenced under so-called truth-in-sentencing guidelines, which leave judges little leeway in the amount of time they hand

down to men like me. For example, although I was originally incarcerated at the age of 18, for a crime I committed as a juvenile, I will not be eligible for release until I am at least 81 years old. Does the fact that I was convicted of the crime of murder mean that I have no redeemable qualities? Do I not have in me the potential to become a productive member of society?

My experience in prison thus far suggests that without any type of rehabilitation being pursued, and with tougher sentencing guidelines keeping prisoners inside for longer times—like my 65-year bid—prisons have become nothing more than warehouses for the convicted, serving only the purpose of retribution. But you need to know that over 90% of all the individuals who have been convicted of criminal acts will return to civilization after they've served their time. You can pretend that we don't exist, but we do, and we will soon be back among you.

In short, denying prisoners any reasonable access to educational programs means that former prisoners return to the free world stripped of dignity and lacking skills, making it highly likely that they will slide right back into the same situation that landed them in prison in the first place. This makes absolutely no sense.

Sources Cited

Hagiler, K.O., Harlow, C., O'Conner, D., and Campbell, A. (1994). Literacy Behind Prison Walls: Profile of the Prison Population From the National Adult Literacy Survey (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics).

Illinois State Constitution (Article I, Section II) and Illinois Law (730 ILCS 5/1-1-2(d)).

Latham, Patria H., et. al. "The Criminal Justice System and Individuals with Attention Deficit Disorder and Learning Disabilities." Available at: www.add.org/articles/cjadded.html.

Manor, R. and Maki, J. (2010). "Cuts in Prison Education Put Illinois at Risk." (Chicago, Illinois: John Howard Association).

DECARCERATION

By Emily Plec

The problem is that he is trying to take down the wall
But it defines us
 you are the evil one
 the deadly one
 the guilty one
So we must be good and free and innocent

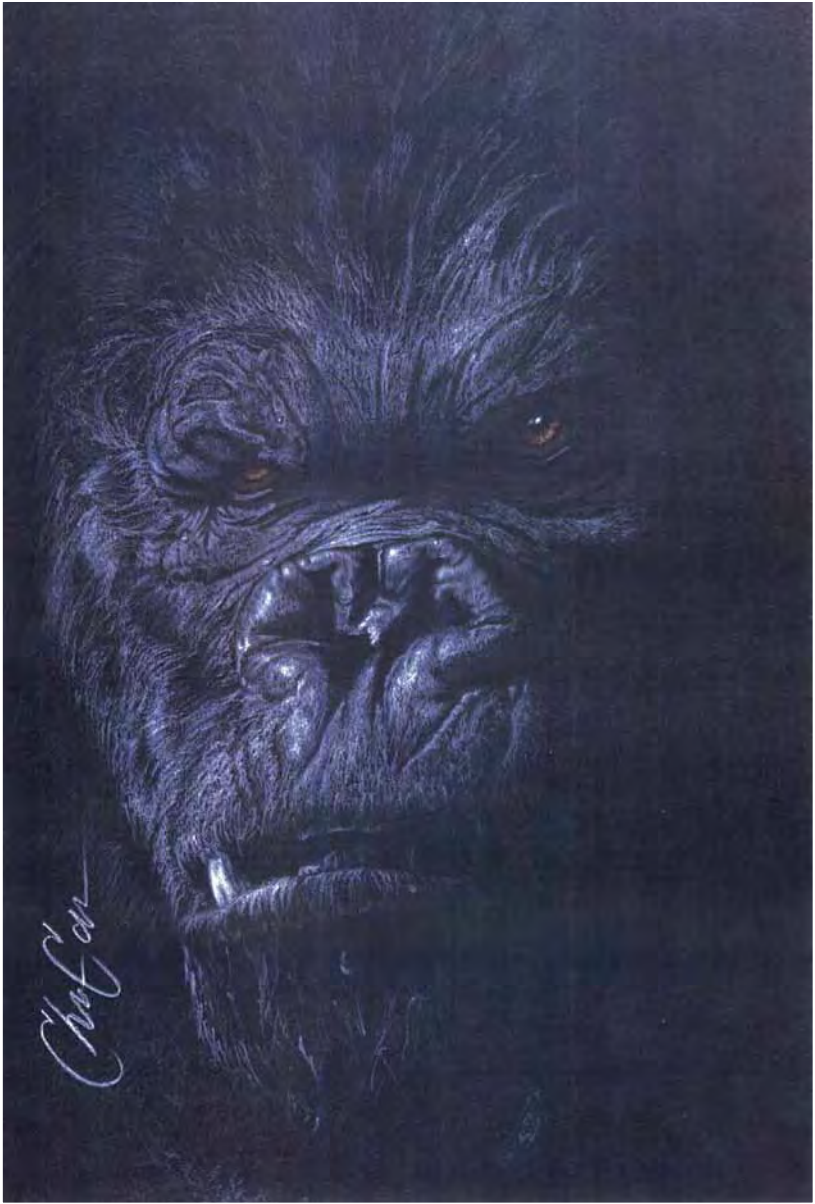
His cage defines our freedom
Everything else
But there is evil
 deadly
 guilty
 out here, too
A lot of suffering, so
 More beds?
 More cages?

Like the psychiatrist in that story by Machado de Assis
I read on the beach in Mexico
Where the whole village ends up inside
And must be pronounced sane
For the wall to right itself again
If the wall comes down and
We see ourselves in the killer
Then we might see
A man whose violence was like a thread
Wound tight inside and around him, snapping

If the wall stays intact,
 We'll need
 More beds,
 More cages.

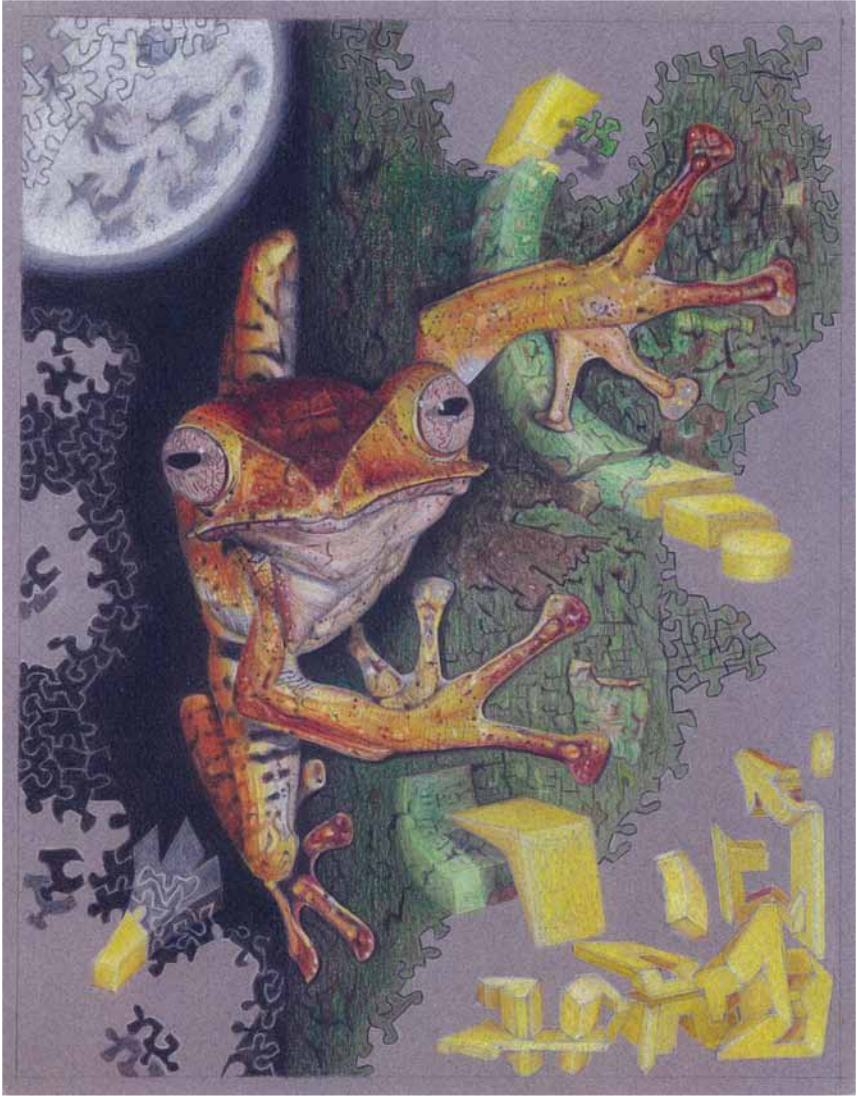
FADE TO BLACK

By Christian Garcia



PUZZLED AMPHIBIAN

By Justin Austin



I WAS/I AM

By Amber Garvey

I was a tortured soul
with a broken heart.
I was a crushed spirit
with mangled wings.
I was a defeated mortal
with a tired mind.
I was a rejected life
without a breath.

What was I?
A domestic violence victim.

I am a healed essence
with mended scars.
I am a bright glowing energy
without darkness around.
I am a joyful presence
with smiles to share.
I am a fearless creature,
with courageous strength.

What am I?
A domestic violence Survivor.



(next page)

**COLORADO JUVENILE LIFE
WITHOUT PAROLE**

By Alexander Pogosyan

SON

By Jessica Muniz J

When I think of you,
I think of your eyes,
How they are sparkling pools of blue,
That always calm me when I see you.

When I think of you,
I think to myself how much strength you give me,
You are my pot of gold at the end of the rainbow,
Just knowing that you are waiting for me
To be home,
Helps me to carry on.

Ever since that day you left,
Loneliness had taken its toll.

You are a very special part of my life,
A life that has had its twists and turns,
I know I have missed out on a lot,
But somehow I know that I will be given another chance,
To prove that I really am a wonderful mom.

When I think of you, Son,
You lift up my spirits.
So many of my smiles depend on you.
You bring me so much happiness,
I hope you will never forget,
Not even for a single day,
How wonderful you are to me.

When I think of you, Julian,
I am sorry that I hurt you,
It's something I must live with every day.

I never meant to do those things to you.
I want to show you a side of me you do not know.
Julian, my Son, you are my reason for all that I do.

OCTO-ARTIST

By Justin Austin



THE POWER OF MANY: WOMEN STANDING UP AGAINST RAPE CULTURE

By Sarah Shoulak

Editor's Note: This piece was originally performed in Ian Dawe's UC Denver COMM 4040 course, "Communication, Prisons, and Social Justice." To feel the full force of this mighty call to action, readers are encouraged to log-on to the Social Justice Project website, where a recording of Sarah rapping out the piece is accessible at <http://prisonjusticeproject.org/2013/06/20/student-recording/>.

She spent hours in front of the mirror with her social microscope
With a fear of rejection she'd found a way to cope
She smeared around the war-paint to cover her scars
The red blotchy remnants of adolescent wars

The boys all called her "cake face" and the girls mocked her clothes
In the bathroom with tears she wiped powder from her nose
She had a slight limp, so she waddled when she walked
She knew she was the subject when other people talked

But the perpetuation of the segregation
She faced from the cool kid nation
Only made her despise it
As much as she yearned for it

She worked as a waitress with a sweet disposition
She trusted strangers without much suspicion
One of her co-workers said he'd done some time
As they shared nicotine gasps, he talked 'bout his crime

One night after work, he asked for a ride
Making her stop at bar after bar, he took her inside
His house was dirty and he smelled like a drunk
She wanted to go but then her heart sunk

What happened next was a blur
Of colors and feelings
Emotions and terrors
Screamings and squeelings
She just kept shouting
NO IT HURTS PLEASE STOP

He left her broken and walked away un-phased
With such a lack of emotion one should be amazed

As she grew older she learned to quietly accept
She buried all the emotions and secrets she kept
But then her stress had reached such an unhealthy level
She didn't care what would help her, even the devil

The drugs weren't bad, she'd seen her brother use before
She'd justify, "sex is natural, I'm not a whore!"
But then she wept as another stranger shut her bedroom door
And left her curled up, a naked mess broken on the floor

A sexy kleptomaniac just trying to steal love
Taking out her daddy issues on the father up above
Disregarding God after feeling she was abandoned
She squandered every opportunity she had been handed

But you see, that she was me, that her was I
And it took a damn long time to admit that
To be prouder of being intelligent
Than hearing "I'd hit that"

We live in a world where a tight waist and a nice rack
Will make anyone love you for a night
But I'm tired of having my ass slapped and passed like it's a Bop-It
A game to chuckle at and then toss out when the batteries die

*We devalue victims
We ask what she did wrong*

All around the globe women are killed
Forced to have sex against their will
Sold into modern-day slavery trade
All for the profit their mothers have made
Prostitute mothers teach their daughters the same
Like it's some sort of sick coming of age
I can only imagine my pain and my fight
Multiplied by six customers a night

This horror takes some guts to ignore it
Allow me to illicit the explicit:
If you're not against it, then you're for it.

Women who thought they were going to help their families
Ended up beaten and hooked on methamphetamines
Even if they do somehow run away
The cops take them back to their pimps the same day

Oh, I'm sorry, these countries don't have oil
The United States can't be burdened with their toil
However when it came to Iran and Iraq?
The US had "no choice" but to help them fight back

I look at the sad eyes on acid-burned faces
Women captured and locked in these cold forgotten places
Who are not there because of their own choices
These women are prisoners with absent voices

Violence against women knows no boundaries
Indian, African, Cambodian, Chinese
The victims are not just her and she, they are you and me
We are all affected, don't you see?

No one can argue that more must be done
But I'm tired of preaching "the power of one"
Fuck standing alone, try giving a penny
Imagine what we can do with the power of many

Sarah's Resources

Because this poem is a call to action and empowerment, Sarah hopes readers will take the next step to get involved in campaigns against sexual violence. Here are possible places to begin that voyage:

RAINN (The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network), <http://www.rainn.org/>, is one of America's largest anti-sexual violence organizations supporting women and children.

PAVE (Promoting Awareness and Victim Empowerment), <http://www.pavingtheway.net/wordpress/>, promotes empowerment against sexual violence by hosting social events, offering educational workshops, and promoting legislation.

Women Empowered, <http://women-empowered.com/>, supports women by arranging volunteer and work opportunities, networking events, and mentoring for young and at-risk girls.

Men Can Stop Rape, <http://www.mencanstoprape.org/Resources/us-mens-anti-violence-organizations.html>, teaches men how to prevent sexual assault against women and men.

The National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence, http://www.ncdsv.org/ncd_about.html, is a clearing house of information on these topics, including an extensive research database and links to activist organizations.

WISE WOMAN

By Nathan Ybanez



SHOES

By James Anderson

I've always heard that "if the shoe fits, you wear it." But for whatever reason, I still can't get used to the fact that after five-thousand and eighty-eight days in prison, the shoes I'll forever wear are those of a convicted criminal. It's a piece of a wardrobe that I've never gotten used to. It screams failure, yells out to myself, and to those around me, that I was incapable of adhering to the simplest of society's rules, and for that I am ashamed.

I'm constantly tortured with thoughts telling me that not only were my cowardly actions wrong, but also that my life was meant for something more than that of a prisoner, something more than a life of co-existing with barbed wire fences and walls of stone. But what that life is, or what it was supposed to be, I'll probably never know.

And if I'm honest, brutally honest, a mix of personal reflection and wondering what could have been is an affliction that will forever torment me. I re-live my mistakes, my choices that were knee-deep in immaturity and juvenile delinquency, and I drop my head with shame. I cringe at the pain I've caused, the horrible and permanent memories that I've forced others to have because of my actions, and I end up hating myself for the path I've led.

Now-a-days it's difficult to recognize myself when I glance in the mirror. I'm starting my fifteenth year in prison this week, and so I worry what the next fifteen will bring. I mean, it's not like I know when I'm going home, or for that matter, if I ever will. I'm 31 years old, and although I understand that many readers would laugh at such a modest age, I feel infinitely older after having spent nearly half my life behind cold prison bars with even colder prison shoes upon my feet.

I came here as a boy, a youth with spatters of acne and awkwardness. I didn't understand time. I didn't understand the gravity and permanence of my actions. I didn't know who I was. Now, after a decade-and-a-half in prison, I see grey hair and crow's feet, wrinkles of prison wisdom and the aches of creaky bones that have never experienced a good night's sleep. I see a middle-aged man who can't forgive himself, can't move beyond the destructive elements of his past, and can't seem to grasp that a future is still possible. Not when it's mired with so much regret, so much shame.

I look in the mirror each morning with the intention of combing my hair, but in the reflection staring back at me, I get lost in the thoughts of what could have been. What could my life have been like if the shoes of criminality had failed to fit so tightly around my teenage toes?

Five-thousand and eighty-eight days in a place I will never call my home, but nonetheless a place where hundreds of miles have been walked in shoes that I never thought would be my own; shoes that I would return immediately if given an opportunity. But even as guilt and remorse consume me, and as it becomes the topic of a story I never intended to write, I feel compelled to warn you that it is hard to fill the shoes you sometimes choose without clarity and reason in mind. Trust me, I know.

I fill these shoes as a guilt-ridden, remorseful felon who'd give anything to erase the pains I've caused. And though I wear these shoes, these prison-issued shoes, I hope that one day the reflection in my mirror will reveal that of forgiveness for what I have done.

THE PENCIL

By Twila Davis

A tall tree stands proud in the dense, rugged forest, its roots planted firmly in rich Alaskan soil. Having lived for nearly 100 years, it is tired, and like all living things ultimately will, it has grown old and is ready to succumb to its destiny.

A timber-faller approaches the tree. With a swift practiced movement his chainsaw comes to life with an intense and powerful roar. The noise is startling and all the forest creatures take flight. The logger yells "TIMBER" and the tree falls hard.

Wind blows southeast, carrying with it the sweet pungent smell of cedar sawdust. A log-scaler measures the size of the tree, thick with sap like blood from an open wound. With skill and precision a cable is wrapped around the massive trunk. The fallen tree is pulled from the woods, loaded onto a truck, then hauled to a dock and lowered into the water where it becomes a small part of a large log raft. The trees are connected to a tugboat and towed to a lumber yard where they are processed, and the lumber is sent to factories and mills throughout the world.

The lumber produced from our red cedar tree finds its way to a factory where it becomes a vital part of #2 firm, yellow pencils. The pencils are shipped to a store in Phoenix, Arizona. Then, in an odd twist of fate, the Government-owned Unicor orders a shipment of #2 pencils to be delivered to their warehouse at the Women's Federal Prison Camp, where an inmate clerk is issued one of these pencils.

Back in the forest, all that remains of the tree are its roots and stump. When these are pulled, decay has already been eating away at the roots. Had this heroic cedar not been harvested, it would surely have died and rotted in the ground. But, instead, it provided hundreds of jobs to men and women through the United States; and, literally, supplied thousands of pencils to people throughout the world.

After the loggers finish logging an area, the Forest Service sends in a crew of planters who clear the area of all debris, spread grass seed, and plant new sapling trees.

And the cycle begins all over again.

YESTERDAY

By Joey

I stare into the mirror, looking past the graffiti etched into the eyes of a man who has weathered many years of cold steel and tempting fences.

As I endure his hard glare, I become aware of the static in the air, fascinated as his blue eyes change in spectrum—then ripple into twin ponds of crystal clear. I'm held spellbound by the sense that another time is playing like a movie being rewound inside these eyes.

I watch as bullet holes close and gun smoke flows backward into the Bereta's chamber.

I see the tears that your family cried reversing into sockets that are dry, I watch as roses and condolences—never dropped, never spoken—disappear into a gentle mist of bullets never spent.

The scene switches, and now I stand in the courtroom's play, where blood stains disappear from the clothes of the slain. The gun, the testimony, the tape—it all fades away.

The night that you died reverses in time and becomes the morning before the crime, when you were kissed by your mother, before you walked out the front door.

Going back further, and further still, the cell around me changes. I watch the paint disappear from the walls, those walls built for these cages, and they vanish before the foundations were poured, before the plans were formed. Shanties appear from nowhere, revealing pawn shops, hotels, and liquor stores. . .

Surrounded by the hauntings and delusions of yesterday, the whole nightmare fades back into the sad eyes staring back at me, into a mirror filled with pain and regret.

There is nowhere to run, nowhere to turn to avoid the truth of yesterday.

CAPTURED WORDS/FREE THOUGHTS PARTNERS WITH CREATIVE COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS



In the Mile High City of Denver, Brenda Cleary and the Creative Community Interventions team launched the great idea of decorating freeway underpasses with art and poetry, thus bringing beauty and enlightenment to forgotten public spaces. UCD student, local activist, and *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* editor Misty Saribal worked with the group to include some words from our magazine in the project pictured here, at the Park Avenue West and I-25 underpass. The lines of poetry painted on the wall were Dayle Garfield's contribution to "One Voice," a collaborative poem that appeared in volume 11 of our magazine (from Fall 2012). "I am the melody of the meadowlark," Dayle wrote, "a new season emerging from the dark." Thanks to A. Wall and Misty for painting the images and poems, thanks to Dayle for embodying the sense of hope and rebirth that make art so vital, and thanks to Creative Community Interventions for leading this wonderful project.

THROUGH THE EYES OF A VICTIM

By Dena Hankerson

“Those eyes were so pretty, but so damn serious.”

They looked up
Her head hung in shame
They cried mommy
She knew she was to blame

They welled up
Her eyes were not dry
Child protection took you
But it wasn't that she didn't try.

“Those eyes were so pretty, but so damn serious.”

The iris a greenish grey
Given to both you and your brother
Truth is they rescued you
From a dope-fiend mother

The iris a grayish green
Reflections of sorrow and hope
You cried at night because
She chose men and dope

“Those eyes were so pretty, but so damn serious.”

How big and dreamy they were
Pleading for answers to their “why?”
It was too late to answer
For she over-dosed and died

How swollen and sad they were
You found her in vomit and blood
Now you hold memories
No child ever should

“Those eyes were so pretty, but so damn serious.”

THE INDICTMENT

By Loralie “Raven” Boyd

Tears spill out onto sofas that do not matter anymore
How many more times will tears fall
Thanks to the insanity of choices made under the influence?

The influence of a drug,
Of a man,
Of a warped perception,
Of a cheap lie

Picked up and paid for like a hooker on Colfax?

Why cry? Why waste the body's hydration?
Choices and consequences—only myself to blame.

No self-esteem, self-hatred, self-doubt, fear –
These are the true “mob bosses” of the playground of the criminal mind.

So tears? Why cry?
There's no one who will help,
No real help to be had.

I choose instead to rejoice in being alive.
Don't cry for what's gone but prepare for what's to come.
Relinquish fear, insecurity, self-doubt, self-hatred.
Indict the mob that runs the criminal mind
And rebuild a new empire.

CHILD'S POSE

By Nathan Ybanez



LEARN WITH PURPOSE

At the University of Colorado Denver, we believe solving real-world problems goes hand in hand with pursuing personal passions. Want to see proof? Just look around the Mile High City. No other university offers our combination of respected faculty, rigorous academics, research and creative work, and deep connections to businesses and communities in the hear of Denver.

See more at:

www.learnwithpurpose.org

