

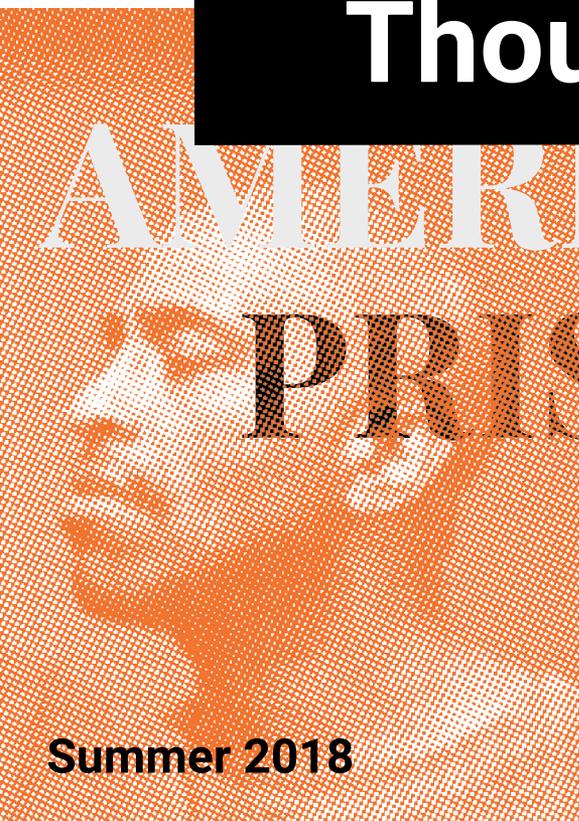


WRITINGS

FROM



Captured
Words / Free
Thoughts



AMERICA'S

PRISONS

Volume 15

Summer 2018

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 in California, Colorado, New Jersey, Texas, and Wisconsin. To expand the scope of our project, we also include pieces made by folks on the free side of the prison walls whose lives have been impacted by crime, violence, and the prison industrial-complex.

Volume 15 was compiled and edited by Stephen John Hartnett, Claire Shannon, and Arditia Dervishi-Anderson at the University of Colorado Denver. Layout and design by Jack Brownson.

MISSION STATEMENT

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. Indeed, the mission of Captured Words/Free Thoughts is to shift societal perception so that prisoners are viewed as talented, valuable members of society, not persons to be feared. We believe in the humanity, creativity, and indomitable spirit of each and every one of our collaborators, meaning our magazine is a celebration of the power of turning tragedy into art, of using our communication skills to work collectively for social justice.

THANKS

Thanks to the CU Denver Department of Communication Chair, Dr. Lisa Keranen, for her support for this project.

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The Democratic Communication Workshops hosted at the facilities mentioned above were staffed in the Fall of 2017 and Spring/Summer of 2018 by Ashley Anaya, Ariel Sena-Calvillo, Patrycja Humienik, Rachel Larson, Adam Lauver, Gillian Nogeire, Katy Parr, Jessica Rangel, Heidi Roberts, Andi W. D. Savage, Claire Shannon, Megan Thompson, and Todd Matuszewicz.

Thanks to all of the colleagues who contribute to 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.

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BACK ISSUES & ACCESS

For those of you who would like to use Captured Words/Free Thoughts in your classes or for other purposes, you can access volumes 7 through 14 by logging on to the Acedemia.edu webpage of Stephen Hartnett (<http://ucdenver.academia.edu/StephenHartnett>). Additional materials related to the topics considered herein are available on the PCARE website (<http://p-care.org>).

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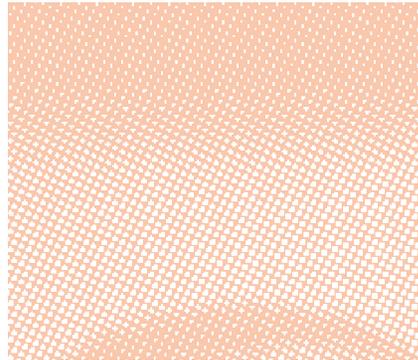
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The cover image is from Jonathan Shailor and The Shakespeare Prison Project's production of Julius Caesar. Anthony (facing right) is played by Megale Taylor; Caesar (center) is played by Arthur Boose; Cassius (facing left) is played by Danny Thomas.

Keeper of the Spoons

By Gordon Melvin

I am the keeper of the spoons. There's a Hard Times mug in my locker. It's packed full of them. This started a couple of years ago as friends who were lifers started to receive parole dates. Nearing their release they'd begun to give away their worldly goods. I'd be asked, "So what do you need?" (Being a minimalist who keeps it simple, there isn't much I need.) Keeping in the spirit of it, I'd say "just give me your favorite spoon." That's how it started. The Hard Times mug in my locker is loaded with these plastic spoons — all types of them.

The other day I was rummaging and pulled that mug out. In the bright light it struck me: damn, there's a lot of spoons in this mug. The thought crept in, "I've been here too long." All these spoons later, I'm still here. Being a self-possessed Stoic, I don't have much time for self pity either, so I quickly dismissed the thought and considered the spoons.

Looking at the mug, I evaluated the space it was occupying. It occurred to me that this space could be better used. After all, all I need is one spoon, two at the most. Plus, I'm supposed to be short on sentimentality — most Stoics are. I'd decided to give the spoons away when another thought intruded: Every one of these spoons represents untold hours of pain. Attached to each spoon is a memory of the man it belonged to. Each of these men who had caused the death of one, two, or more people. Every one of these spoons is a memorial to all the agony these deaths brought. As the caretaker of these spoons, it's clear that I can't just give them away.

When it's my turn to be released, I will choose the next keeper. Before I leave, I will pass the mug on to him. Till then, I am the keeper of the spoons.

What Prison Feels Like

By Dortell Williams

hands tied behind my back
swinging loose
but purposeless

my foot falls like a hamster's wheel
same treaded ground
around and around

nowhere

like Hades
no trees
only bare bones and screams
no roses
no moon or sun

solitary

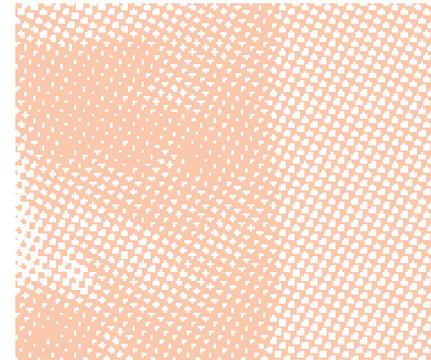
my soul—detached from humanity
it turns
it burns
like Viktor Frankl, no meaning
without substance there is no purpose

totally abstract
darkness pervades
save for the gray walls and steel

Life is a blur
no dates
no meaningful moments
bland
like bread, like red rivulets
burning a hole in the soul

mind-numbing monotony
malnourished thinking
recycled air
suffocating

is what prison feels like



I Wish By Amanda Rose

I never said yes to him
I never finished college
I moved to California that summer
I went to that audition
I took that job downtown
I could remember why I said yes to him



Secrets By Lizard

You wanna hear a secret? I've got five
They've been inside me for so long
I'm surprised I'm still alive

The first one is from when I was seven years old
By someone that I love, my virginity was sold
They're doin' hard time at the same place I'm in now
If I could look them in the face, the only thing I'd say is
"How?"

As a bad kid, I deserved everything that came my way

That's why secret number two is about the life I tried to take away
Bad things wouldn't keep happening
If I wasn't such a bad person
So I'd try to do the world a favor
And in turn, stop my own hurtin'
For some reason, the chain broke
And I fell to the ground
I can't even kill myself right because
The chain couldn't hold these pounds

That brings me to secret number three
And how I'd throw up every single thing I'd eat
I wasn't ever skinny enough
My dad wouldn't fail to tell me so
But I promise that's not the worst thing he did to me, though

Secret number four is the worst of them all
The one I'm most ashamed of
The one that makes my skin crawl
I was fifteen years old when my dad introduced me to meth
And in the tattoo shop one night is the first time we had sex
He is to blame, just as much as I
Because we continued long after we stopped getting high

When I couldn't stand it anymore
And I'd finally had enough

Words
Words
Words
Words

I endured one last beating
And left with a trash bag full of stuff
The worst part of it all is I left my little sister
Now I sit here and wonder
If he's touchin' and kissin' her

Secret number five has to do with all of the above
It's something I learned from someone
Who's shown me unconditional love
I didn't deserve everything bad
That came my way as a child
But I'll get the same ol' shit
If I keep acting so wild
It's that I'm a blessing on everyone's life
And if I take myself out I'll only cause strife
It's that I'll never be perfect
But I must be confident in who I am
I have to understand that I'm worth it
And go forth with the knowledge that I can
If I don't, then the ones I love will fall harder than I
And the only thing they'll say
When they think of me is "Why?"

I'm no longer an idle puppet
Waiting for someone to control my strings
And cause me to go backwards
to be ashamed of all these things

Now that I've told you my secrets
They're not my secrets anymore
I don't think they were mine to begin with
They belong to those walls and closed doors

My secrets have had their impact on my life
As the used became a user
I thought I was set up to fail
As my innocence dissolved with my future
My secrets have had their impact on my life
I used them as excuses to just lose control
But now I accept the cards I've been dealt
And never again will I fold
It's time I stop making excuses
And get my life back on track
Start building on what I do have
Instead of focusing on what I lack
Now that I've got this pain off my chest
I'll be able to put in my very best

You should tell me a secret or two,
because Secret number six is yours to choose

Resources for those who have experienced
or are currently experiencing sexual abuse:

National Sexual Assault Hotline:
(808) 656-4673
National Sexual Assault Online Chat:
Online.rainn.org
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
(800) 656-4673
To find support in your local community:
RAINN
rainn.org

The Prediction

By Omar Austin

My poetry holds me down
I'm the rose that never grows
Predicted to lose before my birth
Guess I was supposed to be in a hole
All decisions leading to prison

I was supposed to be on that road
Momma was addicted,
Daddy up in prison
Same prison where his son would die
One day
Same son that let bullets recklessly fly
While on missions

Education was slept on, it was
Supposed to not be kool
Discrimination spit in my face
I was supposed to keep my kool

Handcuffed face down in the mud
Needing to know my place
Supposed to know the rules
And when I didn't
They took me to court

Using sign language
To disguise the gimmicks
Every time I thought I achieved the goal
They changed the line of scrimmage
Make me wanna holla
Give back all of this time

Gang war to gang war
Equals no peace of mind
As if I deserve it
As if these gang wars
Aren't a piece of mine . . .

Now that's a piece of the soul
For every life that got stolen
Redemption on the other line
I got him on hold

I'll listen, maybe salvation
Or maybe an intermission
Is all I really need
To prevent what's left of my life
From fulfilling the prediction

Proximity

By Selim Ready

Proximity
The large space between
Bigotry
Burning like kerosene
History
Unspoken and unseen
Look at me
Tell me what you see
Do you see a criminal?
Or a young man
working toward a college degree?

Proximity
Dividing lines etched in time
Segregation
Supposedly ended in our schools
Restaurants, and public places
But our country's metropolitan areas
Were shaped by policies that were racist
Hesitation
You can try to forget the history
But you can never erase it

Proximity
You don't know me

Proximity
I don't know you

Proximity
I'm a Muslim
But doesn't the Bible say love thy neighbor?

Proximity
We are not neighbors
But you don't need to be a hater

Proximity
We live two worlds apart

Proximity
I wish this nation could just hit restart

Death Hear My Plea By Alexandria Delisi

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray to you, my soul I keep

Day by day, time ticks on
Minute by minute, till the day I'm gone

As imperfect as I may be
Just listen to my plea

Conviction of my sins I face
My veins run deep with destructive habits
I've created this place

I once used a needle and pipe to drown my fears
Now the memory of that life
Fills my eyes with tears

When she was only 2 years old, I left her heart cold
That's not the action of a mother
So give me the chance to show her
I will never replace her with another

I hear you knocking at my heart, but it's not my time
I'll continue to fight every morning, day, and night

This burning smell never fades
Is this a piece of hell?
I will soon come to face

All the judgment I placed, now I see
My reflection judging my own face

Too many wrongs to make a right
Too many dreams still in sight

So much love to give, to redeem
All my hate and sins

I was sick and I was twisted
But this is my conviction

Although death will one day find me
First let me put all of this behind me

I'll Be Back in Style By William Owens III

Do you hide me
In the closet
With the old shirts
You used to love?

So much fun
In the beginning
But now you feel
Embarrassment at the thought
You think about giving it away
Or tossing it out
But you can't bear
For anyone to have it

Because you still
Love it a little
Deep down
You like to look at
Pictures of you
Wearing it, looking happy
All the fun you had
Back in the day wearing it

Don't worry
Keep me around
I'll be back
In style one day

Web of Humanity

By Dortell Williams

Picture, if you will, the splendor of a shiny spider's web. As a whole, it is a miraculous work of the finest charm and design. Each singular cord is also generous in its own right. Yet each knit connects together an entire complex, an independent system of individual ties that construct, support, and maintain the whole. Analogous to this extraordinary mesh and melodic maze is us: peace-loving humanity.

Divine.

Then comes yours truly. Jaded and detached by a violent and disconcerting upbringing, like a traitorous child that rips at the web for no good reason. I have bloodied my hands.

The choice sat neatly, patiently in my innocent bosom: on the left of the web was an inglorious, anger-laced cynicism that I chose to embrace. Self-imprisoned before I was actually caged: selfishness, greed, and ignorance drove this impish mutt.

Twenty eight years later, walled from the web of humanity, that garden of paradise still beckons me. Victim sensitivity, conflict resolution, and life skills courses have ordered a new path. A path toward pro-social thinking: mentoring youth and making amends. Though physically disjoined from the web, empathy and compassion eternally connect me to its slightest vibration. When other ignorant mutts taste innocent blood, I feel the bite, just like the rest of the community.

Remorse and regret anchor me to a sea of concrete and steel as far as the eye can see. I've been told this is a sign of the return of my internal humanity. Still, I am blinded by constant tears and everlasting sorrow for the devastating harm I've caused to you, and you, and you: my community and all of the web of humanity.

Time and Education

By Willie Tanner

I've seen men sentenced to life in prison
Who eventually walked out the front door
That's the reason I keep on believing
My freedom is worth fighting for

How about yours?

If so, you and I must unify
Set our bygones on pause
And use our minds to evolve
It's time to intertwine
Our purpose with a cause

The time is now!
Late is too late because life can be lost

And our loved ones are too scared

Too much opportunity
For growth is being wasted

It's time to exile self doubt and denial
It's up to us
The journey is what we make it

You see
Prison is the matrix in real time
Therefore, this is work on our appeals time

This is awareness time
This is stop being careless time
This is open your eyes time
This is stop acting blind time

This is wake up
Or you can remain here
For the rest of your life time

This is a time to readjust
And education is the ammunition for us
It's the recipe for longevity
A necessity
A must
This is not a theory
It's a fact that has been proven more
Than once

Over the past 172 months
I've met men who write screenplays
Authors who've published books
Electricians and plumbers
Painters, paralegals, and welders
College go-getters, diligent in their
Pursuit of a degree

To the bound and locked down:
Education is the Key

It's the seed that once planted,
Will rise from below
And if properly nurtured,
Will strengthen and grow
Till freedom whispers

*Hello
Welcome Home
Let's go*

The Shakespeare Prison Project

Jonathan Shailor, Director, Shakespeare Prison Project
Professor of Communication, University of Wisconsin - Parkside

The Shakespeare Prison Project is honored to be represented in this issue of Captured Words/Free Thoughts, both on the cover photo, and in the contributions by Foist Johnson, Jr., and Christopher LaCourciere.

The Shakespeare Prison Project is a partnership between Racine Correctional Institution (Sturtevant, WI) and the University of Wisconsin-Parkside (Kenosha, WI). Established in 2004, the program engages incarcerated men in the study and performance of Shakespeare's plays. The mission of the program is to cultivate self-awareness and pro-social skills through a focused exploration of Shakespeare's stories, language, and characters. To date, we have involved over 1,000 prisoners as actors and audience members. Our productions include King Lear, Othello, The Tempest, Julius Caesar, Shakespeare Scenes and Soliloquies, Hamlet, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice, and Cymbeline. Participants in the program reflect on their work with the plays in their journals, where they explore the relevance of the play's themes and characters to their own lives. These writings are the source material for original plays that express the men's personal responses to their work with Shakespeare. We call these plays Shakespeare's Mirror.

Our successes have been shown in the dramatically lower rates of conduct reports issued to our participants, and in the stories of our alumni. Upon their release, several of our graduates have made public presentations at international conferences, including The Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference, and Chicago Shakespeare Theatre's panel on Shakespeare in the criminal justice system. Our accomplishments have also been documented in media coverage (including The New York Times), and in published research, including the book *Performing New Lives: Prison Theatre* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2010).

Personally, I see how our work with Shakespeare helps the participants to connect with and more fully express their inner emotional life, to connect with others, and to discover a greater sense of possibility. We are all basically good, basically wise, basically kind, and basically strong. Through Shakespeare's language, our writings, and the art of the theatre, we develop those inherent capacities further.

Persons wishing to learn more about The Shakespeare Prison Project are invited to visit the website – shakespeareprisonproject.com – and/or to contact Jonathan at shailor@uwp.edu.

Father from Another Planet

 A Short Play By Foist Johnson

CALEB: My daughter JADA was born on May 17, 1995. I was so excited that I wanted to record every moment of the experience. I went out and bought a new video recorder just for this occasion...

He crosses to the far right of the stage to speak to a clerk at an electronics store. On the opposite side of the stage, we see Jessica (the mother) in labor, with a nurse, doctor, and mother's sister in attendance. During the following exchange between Caleb and the store clerk, we hear Jessica occasionally crying out in pain, as well as the soothing, supportive voices of her sister, the nurse, and the doctor. Once or twice, Jessica calls out for Caleb (not knowing - or forgetting - that he is on the other side of town).

CLERK: Well, here's Sony's most recent action cam, the FDR-X1000V. It shoots true 4K video at 30 fps. This baby has a few other features that set it apart from the pack, such as a Zeiss branded lens, outstanding audio quality, Sony's SteadyShot stabilization, and a splash-proof body. All this for a very reasonable price of \$499. For an additional \$100 you can also pick it up with a live-view, wrist worn remote that allows you to see what you're recording and control multiple cameras.

CALEB: That sounds good... but what else have you got?

CLERK: Well, if you want to go high end, here's the Panasonic HC-X1000. It's got an incredible amount of power, combining dual Venus processing engines, a 1/2.3-inch MOS sensor, and a 20x Leica-branded lens all designed to provide excellent video at resolutions up to 4K/60p. The X1000 includes all of this with a full suite of pro-ready controls at a very reasonable price: \$3,499.00.

CALEB: I'll take it.

When I finally got back to the hospital, Jessica was midway to giving birth. Then, in the midst of the screaming and pain, I came face to face, eye to eye, with my adorable baby girl. In that instant she brought calm into the room. As I gazed into her unfocused eyes, I made a silent promise to her. I would change my life to make her's better. That change never happened for me while free. BUT, the day I made that promise, I began my change, and through phone calls, letters, and visits, I tried to guide and influence my children to be the best they could be.

My influence only went so far. JADA was at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. Doing well. In her junior year. But she was distant from me. I wanted to know more about her life, and how things were going. So I got on the phone.

CALEB: Hey, could you please call my daughter for me?

JESSICA: Which one?

CALEB: JADA.

JESSICA: Why? What's going on?

CALEB: The other day when she came to visit on Father's Day, she seemed quiet.

JESSICA: She's a young lady, you know.

CALEB: I realize that, but still I can sense there was more going on than what she was saying.

JESSICA: Okay. Hold up a minute. JADA! It's your dad.

JADA: Hey, Dad.

CALEB: What are you doing, JADA?

JADA: Nothing.

CALEB: *(Aside)* Nothing? Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.

CALEB: So what's going on with you? Why were you so quiet yesterday?

JADA: I don't know. We do have to talk.

CALEB: That's why I'm calling. What do you want to talk about?

JADA: You already know.

(Aside) Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave my heart into my mouth.

CALEB: What do I know?

JADA: You already said it once before.

CALEB: Once before, or today? When?

(Aside) She's talking in code.

A code we never rehearsed. I'm lost.

JADA: You know, Dad.

CALEB: No, I don't. Why don't you do all of us a favor and spill it?

JESSICA: Why don't you relax? She'll tell you when she's ready.

CALEB: She said that she wanted to talk. Now TALK! And don't tell me what I know.

(Pause) Are you still there?

(Pause) So, are you dropping out of school or something? You know I've requested to see your grades and you never send them to me. What's up with that?

(Pause) So, you're leaving school, huh?

JADA: *(Pause)* Yeah ... I guess.

CALEB: You don't know?! Why, JADA? Why now?

JADA: Because I'm pregnant.

(Pause) I promise you I'll return as soon as I have the baby.

CALEB: For REAL?! You can't be serious! *(Pause)* I know you didn't do something as stupid as that. You're pregnant, JADA? What are you thinking about? Returning to school is the least of your problems. You have a child to raise!

JADA: Why do you think it's a problem?

CALEB: Your age. Your life experience. You don't have any money, or a job. Hell, you don't have your life together.

JADA: What are you saying? I'm not asking you for help.

CALEB: Even if I wanted to, I can't.

(Pause) Hello?

JADA hands the phone to her mom.

JESSICA: Listen. You have to get out of that child's business. She's a young lady now.

CALEB: Do you think I'm wrong for feeling like this?

JESSICA: No, just your expression of how you feel. Sometime we have to hold back our feelings - unless they are asking you for your opinion.

CALEB: I guess you're right. Call her back.

JESSICA: Why? Didn't you hear what I said?

CALEB: I just want to apologize.

JESSICA: Okay, I warned you.

JESSICA holds the phone out to JADA. JADA stares at it, and shakes her head.

CALEB: *(Aside)* I just want to tell her that I love her. That I want her to be safe, to be happy. To have a good life. That it breaks my heart that I can't be there for her. That I'm scared to death that she'll never share her heart with me.

The sound of a dial tone. CALEB closes his eyes.

Shakespeare and the Evolution of Self By Christopher LaCourciere

It is implausible that a person should pass through the crucible of incarceration and remain unchanged. A multitude of factors may help determine whether this change is positive or negative.

In my experience, I've discovered that in a prisoner who is warehoused and abandoned, a derelict gone to seed and left to molder, the change is, unsurprisingly, almost universally detrimental. Without a link to the outside world, without praise, without fellowship—without love—he grows savage-hearted and feral. His capacity for empathy atrophies.

Occasionally, the prisoner bares himself to the luminescence of hope, truth, beauty, love, and acceptance, and if he is able to give himself over to them completely, the outcome can only ever be exceptional. Some men find their inspiration in religion. Others seek their redemption in the unconditional love of another. There are a lucky few, though, the truly fortunate among us, who are saved through art.

Whenever I'm engaged in a conversation about our Shakespeare Project, I'm inevitably asked why I take part in it. I will usually offer some banal response like, "because it's fun" or "because I enjoy the challenge." I'm too guarded or lack the courage to tell them the truth: I have done this to feel.

I am proud to belong to a troop of broken men. I seek the light in darkness, an escape from this well of discontent. Cymbeline is my poultice; in performance I am healed.

Long ago, after spending a number of years in isolation, I was seized by deep insight. I realized everyone I had ever loved or cared about either despised or was indifferent toward me. I had realized I wasn't an easy person to be around. Over the years, as a result of the cruelty, misery, and loss of human dignity I'd witnessed, I had hardened my heart. I had grown to become a thing unlike that which I used to be. I had gone feral.

It was through this period of introspection and the dawning of self awareness that I resolved to change. I vowed to let go of all my anger and all my resentment, all my sadness and all of my regret. I was determined to live a life of gratitude and integrity.

I wasn't sure how to do this myself and I had too much pride to ask. I recognized, though, that I had to cast off my affectations and be true to myself.

Here I Am By Stephanie Roberts

Oh here
 I am
Waiting on line waiting on a line
 Do I know that you choose me?
Here I go calling home
 With a purpose of love
Hoping I'd been here
 Once, you're gone
So ethereal, so in tune
 Saving for another day
I put my cards
 In the window
Hoping you'd see them
There's nothing else to do

You say you're coming
 In the summertime
Driving to a paradise
 I know it's the
Garden of the Gods
I hope we'll see it

I'm waiting to find my place
But where will she put it?
Where is her home?
I say it's where your heart
 Is and God protectively
Watches over me
 So in tune I care to see you
Just in between
 Something I can't forget

My heart is open
 So easy to trust
Then, I won't forget it

A Dreamer's Passion By Shelly Pinnt Boyer

When I was a young girl, all I dreamed about was having one special horse. A horse who had spirit, who had the heart and passion I did when it came to winning.

I would go out every morning and brush, ride, and love all the horses. The peace and love I felt for them was a part of my inner peace.

My dad was an outfitter, so we had all sorts of horses, but I just wanted the "one" special one. A barrel horse. I just wanted, I prayed, for just one to win it all.

One day my parents said they would buy me a barrel horse. *Finally*, I thought, my own special horse, just for me, just for barrel racing.

So my search began. I went through all the papers. I was on the phone. I had videos sent of horses, and went and looked at horses. There were two horses I had an appointment to see. One was a seasoned barrel horse, the other was a 3-year-old mare off the track and she had a colt on her side. I was excited, I had a plan — the black gelding, he ran at the NFR and was a proven winner. As the mare was finished, I agreed to look at her, since she was there.

It finally was the day to ride 'em and try 'em out. I rode the gelding and he was nice, fully automatic. Buy my parents were focused on this young mare. She was a baby, her mane was long, down to her shoulder. Her tail hit the ground. She was beautiful. My parents loved her, but all I could think about was that she wasn't trained, and it was my only chance to finally have a trained barrel horse.

My mom pulled me over to this mare and said "look at her eyes." I was young and a horse eye was just an eye. My mom said "Shelly, her eye is full of passion, heart; she is the one for you."

At the end of the day I had my new horse, her name was Dreamer.

Dreamer taught me as I taught her. My mom was right. She had heart, spirit, passion, and she would do anything for me . . . In fact, Dreamer's passion for greatness was lived. She won the world pro with me in 1992-1993, over 300 buckles, and 15 saddles. I loved her more than any other horse.

We went through so much. I loved her and she was part of my family. Still today, her bloodlines run through her colts and grand colts. We put her asleep when she was 27 years old.

Her passion taught me so much in life, I lived my dreams and I will always hold Dreamer in my heart.

If You Show, You Show

By Nina Mathieu

Physical fitness, in one form or another, has always been a significant part of my life. It has saved me in many ways.

Growing up, things were chaotic to say the least. My only escape from it all was football. I played tackle football for two years through Colorado Parks and Recreation. Although food got me out of the havoc at home for at least a few hours a day, it didn't stop the anger and resentment from growing deep inside of me.

At age 12, my anger got the best of me and I wound up doing six years in the Department of Youth Corrections. I was diagnosed with a bunch of nothing and put on an assortment of meds. My behavior never improved with the medication. I was always fighting and acting up. I started gaining weight and my depression grew worse.

The last year and a half of my time, I was transferred to ROP (bootcamp). Exercise is a mandatory part of the program. I loved it. I participated in every sport: track, cross-country, volleyball, basketball. I started lifting weights. I was strong—and not just physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. I got off of all my meds and was truly happy for the first time in my life.

In January of 2011, I went to the Dale House (a juvenile halfway house). I continued running and lifting weights every day. I made parole in October and decided to celebrate. I started drinking frequently and going out to the few clubs I could get into at 18. I gradually quit working out and started getting into legal trouble again. After one of many trips to El Paso County Jail, I decided it was time to piece my life back together. I started going to Intellitec Medical Institute for a degree in Personal Fitness Training. About halfway through getting my Associates degree, I was arrested for assault and went back to using drugs.

One day after my Grandma bailed me out, I ran into my cousin. We're catching up and she tells me about a semi-pro women's football team, The Rocky Mountain Thunderkatz. I was super excited, because football had always been my favorite sport and my passion. However, tryouts weren't for another few months. I stayed sober and exercised daily for ten weeks. But yet again, I fell back into drugs and my addiction got the best of me.

Football tryouts came and went—I was too strung out to show up. The following week, the head coach messaged me on Facebook and asked why I didn't show. I responded

"I've been slamming dope everyday for a year and a half, but if you give me a couple weeks to clean up, I'll come try out."

He sends me his number and tells me to call him. I read the message over and over again, just to make sure it was true. Ten minutes later, I call. He tells me that he's never reached out to anyone like this before. But with me, he knew he had to.

"If you show, you show," he said. For some reason, he knew I needed this. *"If you show up in two weeks, there's no trying out. You're on the team."*

A few days later, I came home to my beautiful Grandma. Once again, I got clean. My Grandma was very supportive of me. She even bought all of my football equipment.

I slipped up. Again. I'm doing five years in prison. But I would be so far gone—if not dead—if it weren't for my brief time playing for The Thunderkatz. For that, I am grateful. While just about everyone around me gets trashed at med-line, getting their hands on any medication they can, I don't need that anymore. My love and passion for exercise is what has kept me sane and off of any meds.

Efflorescence By Jennifer D. Harris

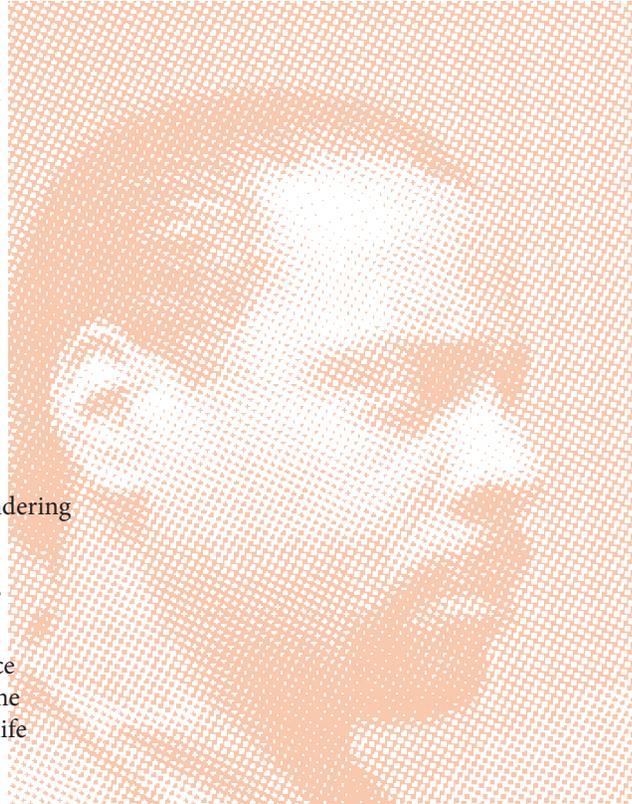
There's a time and a place
For everything under the sun

As I sit behind concrete walls
A normal human wouldn't want to own
I wonder,
When will my time come?

As I stay in my thoughts
I vision myself being in a cocoon
A safe
Private
Comfortable
Retreat
Again, I think
My time will come

I realize that it's a waste of my time wondering
"When will my time come?"
And
"When will my place of refuge appear?"
Because
Of the equalization of timing and chance
I'll never be able to completely determine
And understand my exact steps in this life

As I write
I realize
I'm in a state of efflorescence—Imagine that!



Believing By Twisted Angel

I believe the Father is all around me
I believe I could see the colors of my world
I believe I could become part of the wind
I believe in life
I believe I could have faith in humankind

28 years ago, life was a bit kinder
Now we are sick
Now all we see is murder on the TV
Rapes in the alleys
Beatings in the playgrounds
Small links of chain to keep the bullets out
Just to say *hi* or *how are you?*
Is like pulling teeth

But I believe we can be kind
I believe we can change
They say steps of a baby can take you a mile
I believe we can change
I still believe in the spectrum of a rainbow
If a rose can grow in a crack in concrete
Then I can believe in life
I believe we can love humanity twistedly

I still believe

Daybreak By Amanda Rose

Blinded by the dawn's early light
Eyes open, yet still I lie
Alone and lost in thought

I force myself to face the day
Going through the motions of this mundane reality
I'm no "frequent flyer"
But I am overcome with
 Nostalgia
Which I credit to the air
That must be carrying
Memories of my past

What was it?
When was it?
 That I turned down this path to destruction
 Wide and littered with broken bottles
 alternative medication
 and empty promises
 the stench of sex, guilt, shame
 sorrow and pain
 Fueled the trainwreck of my existence

Was there another direction I could have gone?
Or would every step have taken me to this?

I blink as my sight returns
And already the day is gone
As the sun sinks in the western sky
 The sky darkens, yet something inside of me
 sparks
 burns
 slowly getting brighter

I wonder how and why I let things get this far
I'm deflated by the last battle, but not yet the war
I kneel beside the bed, like a child, I bow my head

As I close my eyes to rest
God knows I've done my best
To stay within His will
Learning how to be still
And wait for the break of day
Another chance to walk His way

I SURRENDER

And now these days go by fast and slow
The memory of them fleeting
As I look back and know
I won't be getting back this time
So I better not waste it

Eyes closed

I sleep
I wake
I rise

With determination, focus, and diligence
To follow through
To follow the Truth
Through the narrow gate

AMERICA'S

Listen, Children of Ambition By Roderick Finley

Listen, children, listen. Ambition gives us that extra energy and vision, that grows us from boys and girls to men and women with intelligent, emerging spirits that penetrate the cracks of the struggle with strong education.

Listen, children, listen. You must break the shackles of the mind, letting Knowledge, Education, and Experience all combine. Do not give in to be a slave of ignorance.

Listen, children, listen. We know there is a struggle to keep growing into Freedom with each new day; to not be a “statistic” in the back of a police seat, nor be shot down in the streets; to not be a fatal memory, while protesters gather with their hands up in the street saying “I CAN’T BREATHE.”

Listen, children, listen. You must stand for something with a spine of steel, it’s time for progress as a nation working to heal. Strive with a steady heart, eliminate fear, give faith of the future to hang over the world, and be one in a million heroes from the struggles you have overcome. Keep ambition in your mission.

PRISONS

Priceless and Majestic Sight By Dortell Williams

Pillowly clouds float across the celestial blue sheet above
Tranquil birds fly below, maneuvering, agile, soaring doves

They view from atop the bald mountains, hairless but substantive
The air clean, refreshing across the bend of their beak, sharp as a shiv

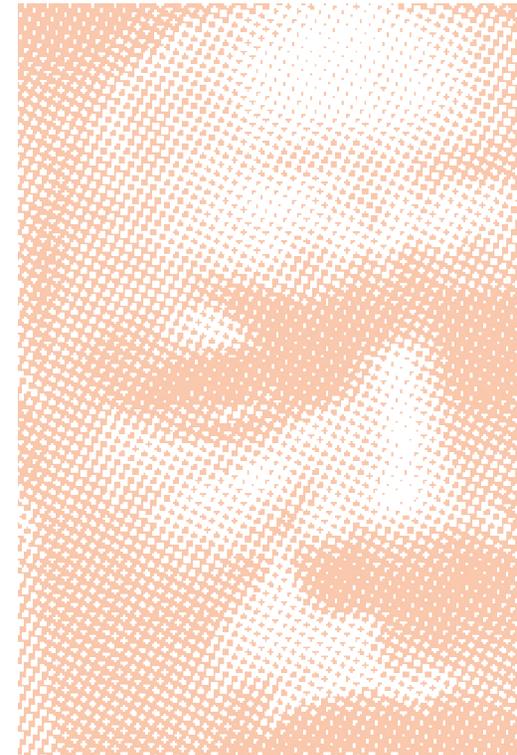
The valley below, like curvaceous cleavage, sexy and alluring in its own rite
Sun rays bounce obediently off running water below, until night

Where the stars blink and wink and twinkle their lights
Dreamlike, an atmospheric paradise, priceless from ground or flight

Azure blue to the East, steel blue West, soft blue North & metallic South
Mesmerizing, inspiring, inviting drop dead gorgeous, agape mouth

You can’t make it, you can’t buy it, but it’s totally free
From a high rise tower, a one-story mansion, and in the sliver of my prison window

So I, too, can see



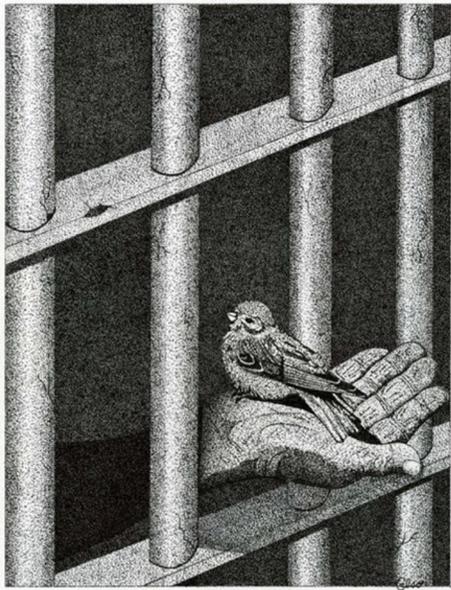


Dances for Solidarity, Denver

Dances for Solidarity-Denver is the Denver chapter of a national initiative sharing dance through letter writing with people in solitary confinement. We share a 10-step movement sequence through which our pen pals and collaborators on the inside and outside can dance in solidarity. Our penpals add movements to the growing list; together we collaborate on performance works.

Most recently, the Denver chapter put on a night of activism at the Mercury Cafe called Solidarity Dance: Transcend Punishment (pictured above) in collaboration with penpals on the inside, Queenz of Hip Hop, Above Waters Project, Denver Justice Project, Dance to be Free, and Creative Strategies for Change. The evening included performances and conversation with formerly incarcerated artists and activists about overcoming our reliance on mass incarceration. We are planning future collaborative events, as is the New York chapter (where the project began). Feel free to contact us with ideas, to be set up with a pen, or for a copy of the movement list.

For more information, please email Patrycja Humienik at humienik@gmail.com. Or write to the Denver Chapter at Dances for Solidarity-Denver, P.O. Box 300562, Denver, CO. 80218



Prison Arts: Rehabilitation and Creation

A discussion with Artists, Activists and Academics
about the power and the use of arts in our prison systems.

In conjunction with the UCCS Theatre and Dance Program's
production of *Our Country's Good*
ENT Center for the Arts,
Osborne Theatre Feb 23-25 Mar 1-4

Thursday, March 1, 2018
4:00-5:30pm
UCCS Kraemer Family Library
3rd Floor Apse
Open to the Public

justtalk UCCS THEATRE&DANCE

Thanks to Dr. Max Shulman and our colleagues at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs Theatre and Dance Program for their efforts to bring prison education and arts to the public! Along with Dr. Stephen Hartnett, the event featured presentations by Dr. Carole Neel from Colorado College and Lucy Wallace, the director and founder of Dance to be Free.



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