



**Captured Words / Free Thoughts**

**Writings & Art From  
America's Prisons**

**Volume 18  
Winter 2022**

**CAPTURED WORDS/FREE THOUGHTS**  
**Volume 18, Winter 2022**  
**—Writing and Art from America’s Prisons—**

*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, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, Texas, and Washington. To expand the scope of our project, we also include works 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 18 was compiled and edited by Benjamin Boyce, Tyrone Braxton, Meghan Cosgrove, Stephen Hartnett, and Julia Beverly. Layout and design were handled by Julia Beverly, with cover art by Taylor “Kat” Goodman.

**MISSION STATEMENT**

We believe 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* therefore aspires to empower its contributors, to enlighten its readers, and 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**

- Our work inside Colorado prisons has been funded for the past year by a generous grant from the University of Colorado, with great thanks to President Todd Saliman and Vice President for Academic Affairs Mike Lightner. CU Regent Sue Sharkey has been a tireless advocate. At CU Denver, thanks to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Pam Jansma, and the Director of Continuing Education, Laurel Dodds. Kristen Salsbury has been a relentless trouble-shooter.
- Thanks to the CU Denver Department of Communication Chair, Dr. Lisa Keranen, for her support for this project, and thanks to the Department’s awesome Program Assistant, Michelle Medal, for all of her support on this and so many other projects.
- Thanks to the Colorado Department of Corrections (DOC) for supporting our project, with special thanks to everyone at the Education Department, especially Melissa Smith and Leigh Burrows. At Faith and Citizen Programs, thanks to the Program Coordinator, Kerri Delarosa.
- At the Denver Women’s Correctional Facility (DWCF), thanks to Officer Jason Smith for his support.

- At the Sterling Correctional Facility, thanks to our education liaisons, Stacy Fernandez, Nicole Armstrong, and Kelley Harms.
- At the Territorial Correctional Facility, thanks to our education liaison Emily Bellujan.
- Our workshops and classes in Colorado facilities have been run during the past year by Kaitlyn Beekman, Benjamin Boyce, Tyrone Braxton, Cassidy Camp, Alyssa Katherine Canepa, Meghan Cosgrove, and Abigail Meyers. And we are pleased to welcome to our team two new teachers, Grace Fobes and Rob Hatcher.
- Thanks to Dr. Kamran Afary at California State University, Los Angeles, for his work inside California prisons and for sharing his students' work with us.
- We are especially grateful to the Justice Arts Coalition (JAC), where we send our thanks and solidarity to Wendy Jason, Joslyn Lapinski, and their team. Despite the complications of COVID, the JAC has continued its remarkable work for social justice and has shared with us materials gathered from its nation-wide network of artists and allies.
- For their leadership in emerging conversations about education and arts in prisons, and for supporting this project in particular, thanks to Allan Wachendorfer of the Vera Institute for Justice, and Mary Gould of the Alliance for Higher Education in Prisons.
- From the emerging network of Colorado educators working to build better futures, great thanks to Jim Bullington (Adams State University), Samantha Kalinowski (Colorado Community College System), and Carol Neal (Colorado College).
- For generous financial assistance, thanks to the Max and Anna Levinson Foundation (<https://www.levinsonfoundation.org>), where they bring a joyous energy to working for social justice.

### **CONTRIBUTORS & SUBSCRIBERS**


If you would like to contribute work to forthcoming issues of this magazine, please send your poems, stories, testimonials, or art to our Correspondence Editor, Benjamin Boyce, c/o the Department of Communication, CU Denver, 1201 Larimer St., Denver, CO 80204. If you want to email questions or comments, please write to our Founding Editor, Stephen J. Hartnett, at [stephen.hartnett@ucdenver.edu](mailto:stephen.hartnett@ucdenver.edu).

### **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 18 by logging on to the Acedemia.edu webpage of Stephen Hartnett: <http://ucdenver.academia.edu/StephenHartnett>  
Once there, you can download free PDFs of the magazine.

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## Mom

by Robert McCracken

When I was little, my mother  
couldn't afford Christmas presents, so she  
would make us scrap books with multi-colored  
construction paper, pictures she'd clipped  
from magazines, and little doodles she'd drawn.  
I was too young to understand or to  
appreciate the love. When we'd gotten  
a bit older, we would get presents from  
the Marlboro catalog: beach towels, dart  
boards and the like. One Christmas, for reasons  
I can't recall, she chased me out of the  
house trying to hit me. I ran around  
the entire block, crying, and when I  
finally stopped to catch my breath and  
turned around, she was right there, out of breath  
and crying too. She couldn't speak. She just  
hugged me. At thirteen, on my way to court,  
I'd noticed the bandages on her wrists,  
But I didn't know . . . I was still too young.  
In a group home at fifteen, a few weeks  
before Christmas, my cottage parents told  
me that she was in a coma: she tried  
to kill herself. I sat up in the dark  
the whole night, pulling thread from my blanket.  
I don't know why. That was her second or  
third coma, and her fourth or fifth suicide  
attempt (at least that I can remember). Even  
though that was several lifetimes ago,  
the memories still hurt. She lives in a  
small apartment now, scraping by on disability.  
We no longer speak. About once a year,  
she sends me a letter full of scattered  
thoughts as if nothing has changed. But it has . . .  
everything has changed, and it hurts too  
much to pretend otherwise. I'm sorry.



Photo: Tamalee Youngblood

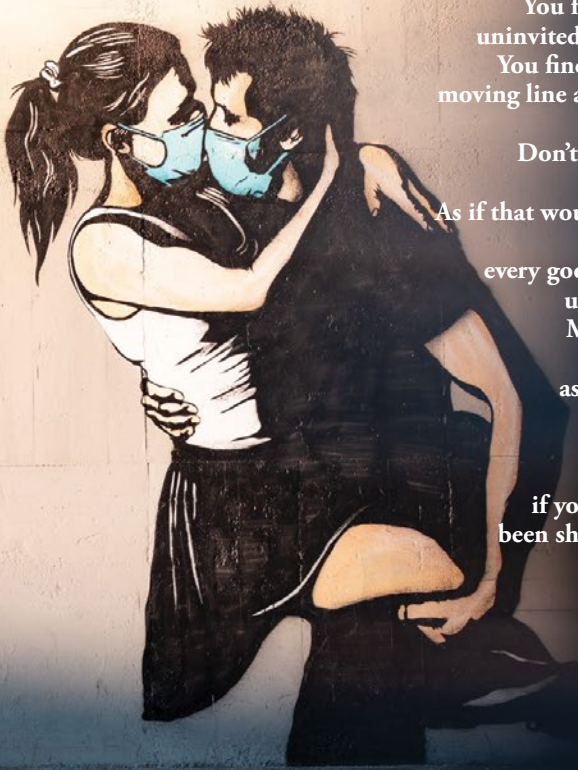
## Ode to Pandemic by Gary Farlow

You find me at the coffee shop  
having your daily latte  
at the movies where you meet  
up with friends for popcorn  
At the grocery store, strolling  
the aisles, buying canned tomatoes  
You find me on dates which are sad  
because on dates I really try to appear  
You find me at Disney World, Carowinds  
in line for Space Mountain or Thunder Road  
You find me at parties, showing up  
uninvited so often you stop celebrating  
You find me on an airplane, in a slow  
moving line at check-in and baggage claim

Don't worry, some told you it's all a  
hoax as millions fell  
As if that would forestall me, to know I am  
the enemy, your stalker  
every good artist makes their audience  
uncomfortable; my art is death  
My birthday is your doomsday  
so go on, believe in a hoax  
as I watch you try to catch your  
breath, gripped in sweat

Easy to believe,  
if you've never lost the gift of taste  
been shaken in chills as if you are the  
pulse button on a blender  
Don't worry, I'll find you  
for I linger on the air  
evolving, mutating, seeking  
you out—my purpose  
“Here I am, world,” I shout  
to make you think it's safe  
as if removing your mask is a  
crime you can't get busted for

So let's party like its 1999  
invite friends over  
Share a hug, a little red cup  
and toast to no tomorrow



## In the Land of the Free by Ben Boyce

In the Land of the free  
You might ask someone like me  
“How many are locked up for drugs?”

It's worse than you think  
a tough potion to drink  
countless neighbors referred to as thugs

At the federal level  
Drugs bring nearly half of all inmates  
Almost one-in-two

At the state level  
It's 15%  
who are drug users  
like me, and probably like you

Next cell over  
17% of state cons  
like me, do time for theft

“Property Crimes”  
we stole and hustled  
to get high—it was all we had left

“Public Order Offenses”  
Are responsible for landing  
12% of us in jail

Another 13% do time for robbery  
some just trying to stay high  
and escape detox, which is hell

Some quick math will show  
that these crimes total  
fifty-seven percent

of all incarcerated people  
at the state level  
more than two-million “citizens”

Invisible casualties  
of the war on drugs  
often hidden by our “crimes”

They call it a disease  
but treat it like a sin  
and *they* say *we* have warped minds



\*Statistics from “Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2020,” *The Prison Policy Initiative*.  
[prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2020.html](https://prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2020.html)





**One Nation Under God**  
by Robert McCracken

Double concertina wire  
in rows of three stacked four high  
electrified fences topped with razor wire

My celly got four years  
for stealing thirty dollars  
worth of cologne

God forbid he escape

An armory  
and a shooting range  
sit atop the hill

My neighbor got two years  
for stealing crab legs  
from the local grocer

God have mercy on his soul

Batons and shock shields  
grade-seven OC spray  
concussion grenades and pellet guns

The guy in the kitchen  
got a year and a half  
for selling bootleg DVDs

God forgive him

A K-9 kennel full  
of German Shepherds  
and snipers in the towers

Mumia Abu-Jamal  
was sentenced to die  
for a crime he didn't commit

God's only begotten son  
isn't the only one  
He's forsaken

**Lonesome**  
by Robert McCracken

I pace the study  
of my mind  
spurning the unfamiliar  
companionship  
of my books

I am drawn  
to the welcoming warmth  
the bodily comfort  
of the fireplace

The playful tendrils of flame  
so lovingly alive  
as they leap and pirouette  
amongst one another

I brood on my loneliness

It is the flesh of another  
I yearn for  
soft and hot

In a fit of despair  
I tear volumes  
from the shelves  
feeding them to the  
dancing lovers

One book  
one page at a time  
devoured  
in a passionate inferno

With ceremonial mournfulness  
I stare into the heart  
of my past  
as it turns to ash



## Alien

by Madison Gabriel

What does it mean to be separate?

To be part of a whole  
that isn't whole—

Can you be human?

No.

You can't be.

You mustn't be.

They said so.

You love.

You sing and dance.

You eat, sleep, and breathe.

You think and understand; you touch, see, and listen.

With unrelenting fervor, with every  
fiber of your individuality, you . . .  
feel.

NO.

They said you can't.

There is no space for it.

You are an

alien,

and everyone knows

Aliens are calloused, unimpassioned, putrid,  
inhuman creatures.

Aliens must be removed,  
discarded,

separated from humans.

To let you be human,

is to let you be understood, loved,  
and cared for.

They will not have that.

Squeezed by cold,

unforgiving hands  
into the smallest box they can find,  
gasping for air.

Your lungs crushed under the weight  
of an inevitable existence.

You don't understand.

You know you're human.

You scream

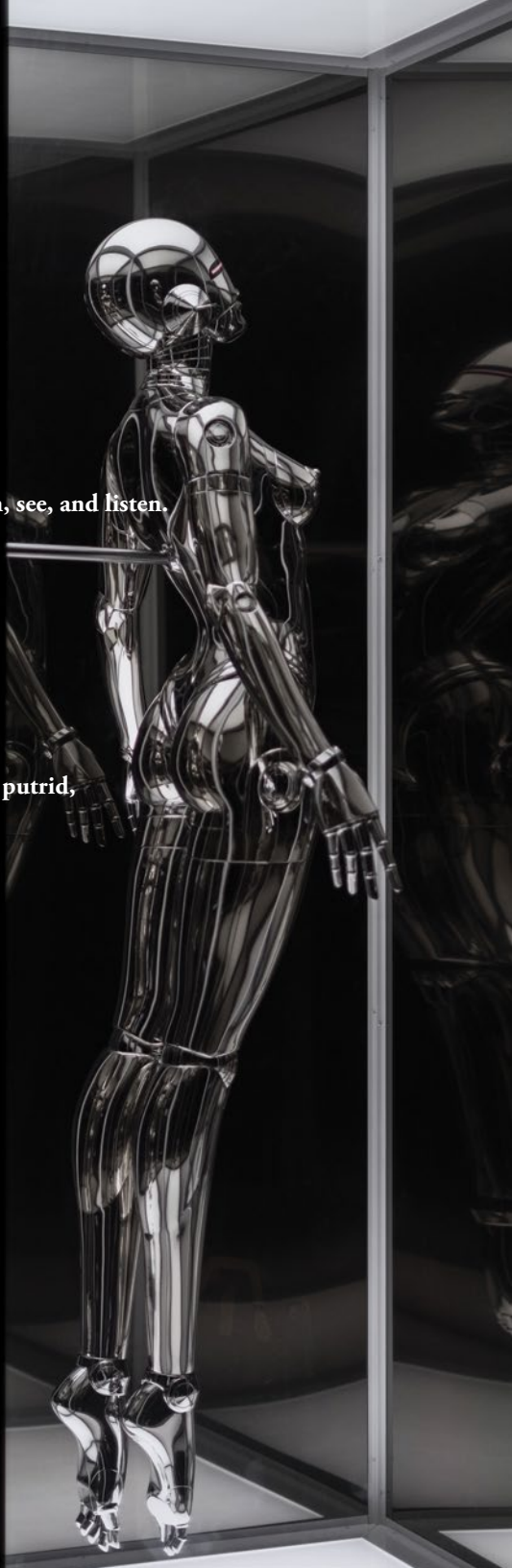
with visceral anguish

that you are human

that you can't fit into this box

that they are hurting you.

But nothing comes out  
as your open mouth searches in vain  
for the voice they took from you.



**Special Section Celebrating Roderick Finley**  
Compiled by Julia Beverly

Over the past two decades, as *Captured Words/Free Thoughts* has evolved, Roderick Finley has been one of our tireless companions. We have published his work in many of our issues, but that work represents only a fraction of the torrent of poems, letters, philosophical treatises, and drawings he has shared with our team. We are deeply grateful for Roderick's contributions and so, in the following pages, share with our readers some of his recent work.

**Da Darker Brother**  
by Roderick Finley

A stiff cup of courage and motivation, so get you a dose . . .

To the outcast-elect in the struggle  
If you faint in the days of adversity and changes, your strength is small  
God gave you the ability, the heart  
He increased your strengths

For greatness is always built on the blueprint of inner self  
The ability to speak, act, and execute your mission is within you  
Even when things are dark and darker, brother or sister  
you can still see the power of the stars to shine  
You may weep for a night, but joy comes in the morning

Coffee black, coffee black, please tell me why you all that  
The descendent of the outcast-elect  
Still strong as the darker brother  
Who lasts in the struggle, successful and unique  
Humble essence, natural intelligence  
Putting God first, staying on bended knee  
Adult character of a conscious mind  
Leader of my destiny  
Learning not to block my blessings  
Studying the laws of life as a shield of my aspiration and protection  
Survival is a daily necessity and we must accept its worth  
Paying attention in order to shine, releasing our true reflection

Coffee black, coffee black, please tell me why you all that?  
The descendent of the outcast-elect  
Still strong as the darker brother  
Who lasts in the struggle, successful and unique  
Is it because I honor my mother and father's commands?  
Impossible is nothing, just do the best you can  
With boldness and integrity you can stand and last as a whole man  
Success eventually will come as planned  
We look past the destruction, a democracy of no-man's-land

Our devoted house built on solid principles  
Not the broken promises of hollow sand  
Never forget where you came from  
This sacred vow to hold in the heart  
Keep the community growing and proud

Coffee black, coffee black, please tell me why you all that?  
The descendent of the outcast-elect  
Still strong as the darker brother  
Who lasts in the struggle, successful and unique  
Is it because I have been last for so long?  
A seeker, a scholar of reality  
A king of education, wisdom, knowledge and understanding  
Accompanying me on my journey of growth  
With a crown of grace through the test of my faith  
For the Lord said, "Come, my child"  
For by faith things are accomplished in the struggle  
This has earned me my true dignity, honor, and pride

### **Incarceration Nation by Roderick Finley**

Being in the state of incarceration doesn't mean one has nothing to give or nothing to teach. Experience helps us learn knowledge and wisdom, motivation, and inspiration. On the contrary, much is given and taught from these jewels of survival released from the souls of the minority, of the streets.

We once walked the street ways, followed the gang rules, hustling and hoping our poverty would change, hoping our families could upgrade our status in the game. Now we sit in concrete and steel, built to house the miscreants of society, or those who are misunderstood. Lack of education, getting it on our own was the only possible avenue. But still, despite our circumstances, we rest in the truth and knowledge that life is beautiful.

We have traveled the hallways of AdSeg (administrative segregation, a.k.a. the hole) and the Supermax cell blocks; we are not dead as long as we have a mind to receive a glimpse of reality. We breathe deeply and slowly, despite the lack of free-world oxygen, exhaling our fears into self-improvement, inhaling our goals and dreams. We breathe for the peace of the future, for pretty days, because the soul cannot strive and can hardly survive without a glimpse of reality.

We embrace our friends, partners, and family in our mind's eye, while they evade our physical grasp, yearning for change, progress, and survival. We accept our mistakes, we heal, and then begin working on our next attempt to embrace the jewel of freedom as a better person, hoping for a reprieve from the reality of concrete and steel in Incarceration Nation.

## Real Strong Voices by Roderick Finley

Did I hear a call, a voice of choice?  
Within a leader, the faith and integrity of an activist or preacher  
Or is it the challenge of life  
A message that it's time to be stronger believers  
Role models as we act and speak  
So the young can grow old as the righteous  
Endure and not be weak  
As the great ones of history teach

Did I hear a call, a voice of choice?  
Within a world that is hungry for new ideas  
Answers at the worldwide dinner table  
We await with bowed heads, gracefully for the divine  
Humble people who are consistent, willing and able  
Leaning on the everlasting arm  
Understanding to heal the mental strife  
A doctrine to close the wounds of the soul, cut deep with a knife

Did I hear a call, a voice of choice?  
Stand tall like a candle of humble faith  
Burning the wick of reality, waiting for the world to awake  
Putting out the darkness, lasting past the struggles of the mind  
Symbolizing this little light of mine  
I'm determined to let it shine  
Surviving for a new tomorrow  
Strengthen with the voices of leaders to borrow

Did I hear a call, a voice of choice?  
From leaders of the past and present, strong perfection of beauty  
A colorful essence, devoted saints convicted in heavenly duties and peace  
Solutions with intelligent philosophy, changes in the economy  
Living off dignity, a land pursuing liberty  
The bold pride of an eagle flying towards freedom  
We unite, conquering poverty to overcome  
For we have choices  
Expressed with the courage of real strong voices

## Life Questions in Today's Nation by Roderick Finley

Unjustified devastation, mass shooting deaths across the nation  
How do we respond to these heartless actions?  
This self-hatred that turns a man into such bondage?  
Can God and our nation's leaders deliver a solution?

The losses are overwhelming, the mind of destruction tries to destroy  
The innocence of our schools, our churches, and our homes  
Is self-discipline lost in our nation?  
Are we lacking the values, the understanding of the principle of cause and effect?

In a lifetime of battling spiritual warfare  
Books of knowledge and wisdom in the schools and the churches  
Have not harmed anyone  
Yet they are being attacked

Can we gather the youth and see past the violence and destruction?  
Can we challenge it with our voices to make changes for the better?  
Can we grow in our knowledge and progress?  
Or will destruction rule and ruin our nation?

### Who by Olivia Strozier

As I glance into the mirror, I see both our reflections  
I ask myself in silence—the only important question  
“Right or left, right or wrong—tell me today's direction!”  
I decipher myself quickly, looking past the confused infection  
She's filled with personalities—impressive imperfections  
Who will she decide to be today? Be careful with your selection  
Don't get too close—she'll push you away—I call that skilled neglect  
One minute she's beautiful, sweet, almost filled with pure gold  
Some days, geez, hateful, weak—a forgotten last line sold  
The type to love you, embrace you, she's the one you'd wanna hold  
Oh, but then she'll bite you, cut you throw you deep into a hole  
“Escape her, hurry! No wait—just stay...” Do what you are told  
‘Cause if she notices you noticing, she'll shift from hot to cold  
A Volcano!  
No wait, an avalanche coming straight for your heart  
She hasn't decided who to be yet again  
And I don't think she will ever start



## Trapped

by Kenji Jones

Trapped within a world of hate  
Can anyone save me or is it too late?  
Emotions are hard to suppress at times  
Lost, trapped within the limits of my mind  
Seeking to free myself—but how?

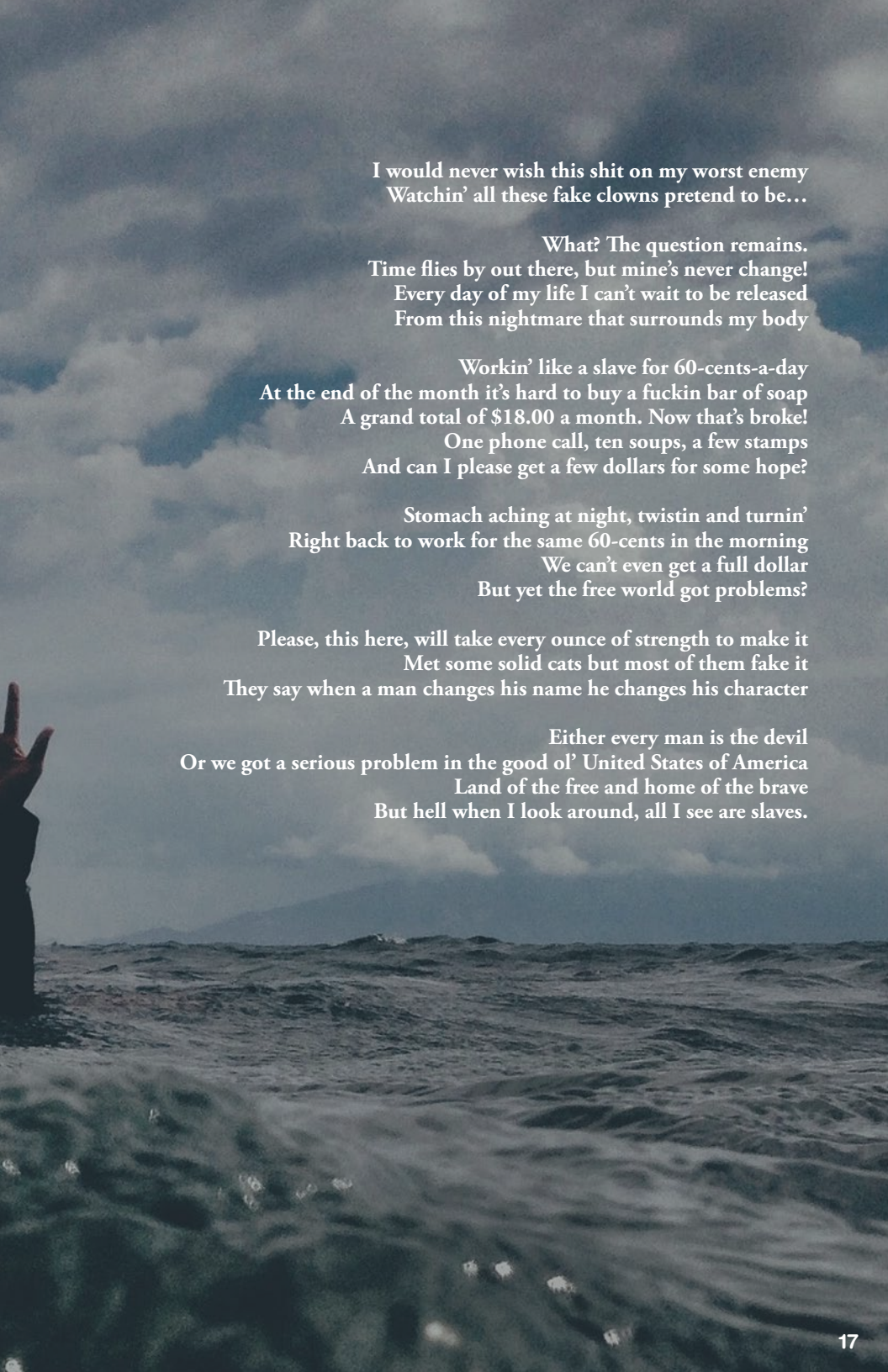
I pray to the Lord for strength and hope  
Thinking to myself “how much longer do I have to cope?  
Will I be next to hang myself from a rope?”  
Most likely not!  
Family problems in the free world  
Found out my lil nephew got shot

Baby mama strung out turning tricks  
Bags around her eyes, dirty cloths, busted lips  
Mom can't pay the rent so she's about to get evicted  
Thought I was the one, the problem solver; thought I was the ticket

Mom's struggling everyday trying to put food on the table  
At age 83, her body's no longer able  
Niece left the state; says she's leaving her problems behind  
Hell, any day of the week I'd switch her problems with mine

I'm supposed to be a positive  
Inmate #137874 to the fullest  
Yet every day is a test to remain a man  
To strip and tear a man of all respect and dignity  
When I act like a fool, it's my fault...but look what you did to me





I would never wish this shit on my worst enemy  
Watchin' all these fake clowns pretend to be...

What? The question remains.  
Time flies by out there, but mine's never change!  
Every day of my life I can't wait to be released  
From this nightmare that surrounds my body

Workin' like a slave for 60-cents-a-day  
At the end of the month it's hard to buy a fuckin bar of soap  
A grand total of \$18.00 a month. Now that's broke!  
One phone call, ten soups, a few stamps  
And can I please get a few dollars for some hope?

Stomach aching at night, twistin and turnin'  
Right back to work for the same 60-cents in the morning  
We can't even get a full dollar  
But yet the free world got problems?

Please, this here, will take every ounce of strength to make it  
Met some solid cats but most of them fake it  
They say when a man changes his name he changes his character

Either every man is the devil  
Or we got a serious problem in the good ol' United States of America  
Land of the free and home of the brave  
But hell when I look around, all I see are slaves.

## I Free My Mind by Ojore McKinnin

I pick up my pen  
to escape between the lines  
I scribble freely, like tears down a cheek  
expressing my joy and pain  
releasing pent up emotions  
that emerge liberated  
no longer bound to the confines of my mind

I pick up my pen  
and let it bleed on blank paper  
staining it with my thoughts  
to cleanse my soul of apathy  
and welcome what will come tomorrow  
be it the seeds of friendship or forsaking

I pick up my pen  
to touch minds and souls  
the windows to the world  
minds free of restraints  
souls receptive to humanity  
willing to provide the keys  
to my mind remaining free

I pick up my pen  
to console my loneliness



## Lemons by Reed Walters

When life gives you lemons  
Go ahead and squeeze them in your eyes  
Or you could always juggle them  
while riding a unicycle down main street

But that is all  
There is no other use for lemons  
You cannot paint them  
You cannot zest their peels  
You cannot squeeze them on your lightly seared salmon

Only in your eyes  
Or juggling . . . you could always juggle them  
while riding a unicycle down main street  
But I don't know why I'm telling you this  
You already know this  
You always have

The things you know might surprise you  
They might surprise me  
Then again, they may surprise no one at all  
They may read like an informative pamphlet on HPV

Not that I could read it  
Even if I wanted to  
I've got lemon juice in my eyes  
I never did learn how to juggle

## Many Goodbyes by Michael Owens

Friends are hard to come by  
harder still to find in prison  
Today, I walked another across the yard  
To the gate which separates us from the rest of the prison  
and the rest of the world

We knew this day was coming  
I work in the program office where all transfer orders get processed  
This morning, I saw his name—  
Ramirez, C., Building 11, Cell 229  
The little brother who has for years walked the concrete with me  
Lap after lap around the prison track

I got up from my desk and went outside  
Found him, told him what he already knew  
We had time to walk two laps  
made plans to stay in touch  
He will parole this September, or next  
Or some September soon enough

I am serving life without (parole)  
We both know what our parting means  
We will never see each other again in the flesh  
Like good brothers do, silently aware that we are  
Dusting off old inside jokes for the last time  
They call his name over the loudspeaker

It's time  
We pull a beat-up, orange plastic cart between us  
It's full of his boxed belongings  
And things that don't need to be said, It's okay  
Our evasion speaks to the silence  
It's all part of serving life, part of my cosmic debt

At the gate  
A fist bump, a quick hug, no eye contact  
Surrender, helplessness, accepted sorrow  
"You take care, man"  
"I will. You too."  
He walks off to the officers who will escort him  
And I head back to the solitude of my office  
At my desk, I weep, as quickly and quietly as I can  
and write a poem about having to say goodbye

## **OVER/exposed Fiction & UNDER/exposed Reality** by Javan Bair

Images of violence and excitement create perceptions  
Of reality light-years away from the truth  
These formulaic narratives and stories  
Have become the building blocks for our existence  
And atop these blocks, we continue building  
Higher and higher  
Higher and higher

Until the blurred lines of reality come to press the limits of shock value  
Shock Value and Reality  
Shock value is more appealing than reality  
Shock value feels more passionate than reality  
Shock value is more lucrative than reality

The television screen has become a lens of perspective  
It is inanimate, yet emulates life  
As tangible an experience as life itself  
Algorithmic adherence and discipline helps us  
Curate “our own” ideas and perspectives  
The justice in poetic expression is liberating  
To those who can relate in the representation of the truth  
However

Poetic justice has lost its sense of liberation and has become weaponized  
So long as our televisions remain fixed before our eyes  
Our lenses will remain tarnished by the invested interests of those who pay  
To keep us entertained, docile, conforming  
No matter the direction in which one looks  
We are all subjected to the same elements of deceit  
We have the same building blocks  
We have constructed them into designs and formats  
That are far less different than we pretend





**Teach Me Grace**  
by Cedar Annenkovna Mortenson

Color, creed, religion, sex  
Measures not the depth of intellect  
And can never correlate one heartbeat's strength against the next  
I am my brother's keeper; I cannot want if he has less

If I am rich and he is not  
This cannot be deemed progress  
To eradicate the classes  
Then eliminate the disparity between rich and poor—the masses

Education and healthcare became accessible commodities  
Centralize a workforce to address  
Single use plastic, synthetics, Styrofoam products . . .  
Things that will never turn back into dirt or part of any natural process

These items that for a moment's use are snatched up quick for cheap  
Packaged prettily—flashy, bright, colorful and sweet  
Discarded now, how quickly they are forgotten  
The contents gone but left behind the remnants  
Of what can only be someone else's problem—and never ours

Skirted away in trash bags to already full landfills  
Dumped into oceans then found in “third world” country streets  
Then we label those places “dirty, unclean”  
While it is we, keepers of free trade and wonderful democracy  
Who mass-produce what the Earth cannot keep

Biodegradable/compostable items remain a novelty  
Available to the yuppie  
To Hollywood, to suburbia, but not the barrio  
Or the prisons, even poor country folk  
To those of us who need it most  
Minimum wage workers of the nine-to-five  
Who dream of Cadillacs versus trees  
Or flowers and plants that produce the air we breathe  
And you call me a robber?

Call me crazy  
Call me a communist  
I dream not of luxury; I just want to be free

So I might return to the mountains and streams  
And scheme of ways to save the earth  
From people, from me, from you, from each other

Yes, I am an animal  
But you . . . you are my brother

They do not appreciate a sense of humor in jail  
So I just smile politely until they walk away  
Waiting to tear their linens into strips for wrapping my feet  
To protect against the stairway's iron teeth  
To run them up and down until I cannot breathe

My life is not of more value than a beetle's  
A mountain lion offers no apologies for being a beast  
WAKE UP! WAKE UP! From this nightmare  
But I am not speaking just to me  
Change the way we think,  
The Earth being ripped from beneath our feet  
Suffocated with every ounce of plastic packaging  
Of foods we eat and drink

Thinking of the consecutive die-off of the species as a result: Darwin  
Here within my cell walls panic closes in

Yes, I am a communist  
But how shall I begin?  
Society, the pharmacy medicates and segregates  
Prescribes desensitization, isolation, desolation  
To those who act in desperation

In my next life, may I just be star light  
To shine gently on a loved-one's face . . .  
And then be gone, without a trace  
How does one really live a life of grace?

## **Prison Work** by Reynold Bean

Several times each day  
I offer greetings  
to men  
who have murdered  
“Hello, how are ya doing?”  
and think little of it

So far as I know  
I have not murdered  
a person although  
maybe I killed a dream  
or a hope someone  
I loved once had

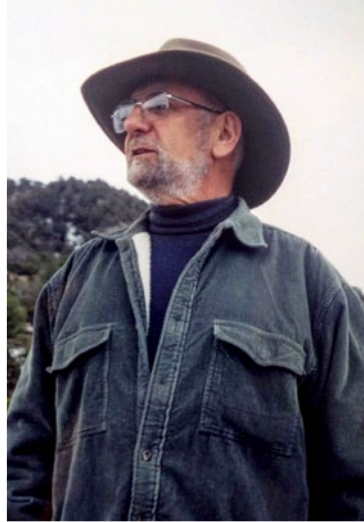
How did he feel, that man  
when he knew the  
other was dead?  
...by his hand or knife  
or by gun held with  
intent or maybe with none

And how did that  
dream that I, perhaps  
killed one day feel  
when it knew, beyond  
doubt that I  
caused it to die?

Does one who murdered  
think often of  
the person he killed?  
Is he haunted by  
an empty place  
where the dead man stood?

Dead dreams don't die  
They live in limbo  
but remain close up against  
the one who births them  
and the one who kills them  
Dead dreams cry out to be reborn

One day, when I greet  
those who have murdered  
I will ask  
“Have we thought today  
of our hopes and dreams  
that died under our hand?”



### **In Celebration of a Life Well-Lived**

*Reynold Bean (1935-2020) was a writer, educator, and poet. In the 1990s, he served as Director of Education for multiple institutions in the New Mexico Corrections Department. The poem included here was written in 1995, while he was fulfilling this role. Reynold devoted the last nine years of his life to monastic practice at the Crestone Mountain Zen Center in Colorado. More information about his life and work is available at the website, “The Writings of Reynold Bean,” <https://reynoldbean.wordpress.com/>. For permission to use the poem and photo, thanks to our dear friend, prison education supporter, and rock star colleague, Dr. Hamilton Bean.*





**You Can't Break Me**  
by Tammy Englerth

I once was weak  
Not me  
I am strong  
You can't break me

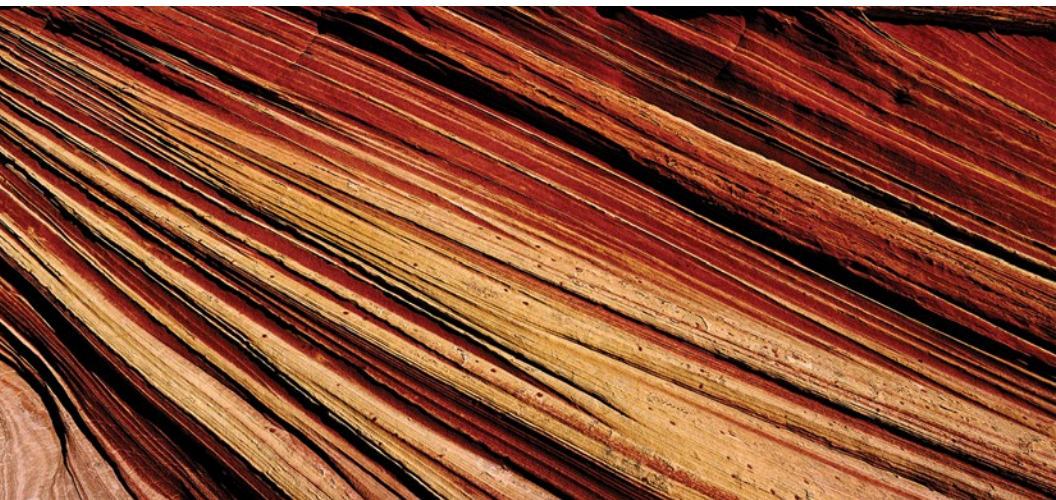
In prison-life  
I carry this knife . . . in my back  
It doesn't ever move  
It actually protects me  
So you see, when I turn my back  
And you want to stab in the back  
Not me  
That's why the knife stays in place  
To protect me from people like you  
You're the coward

You can't break me



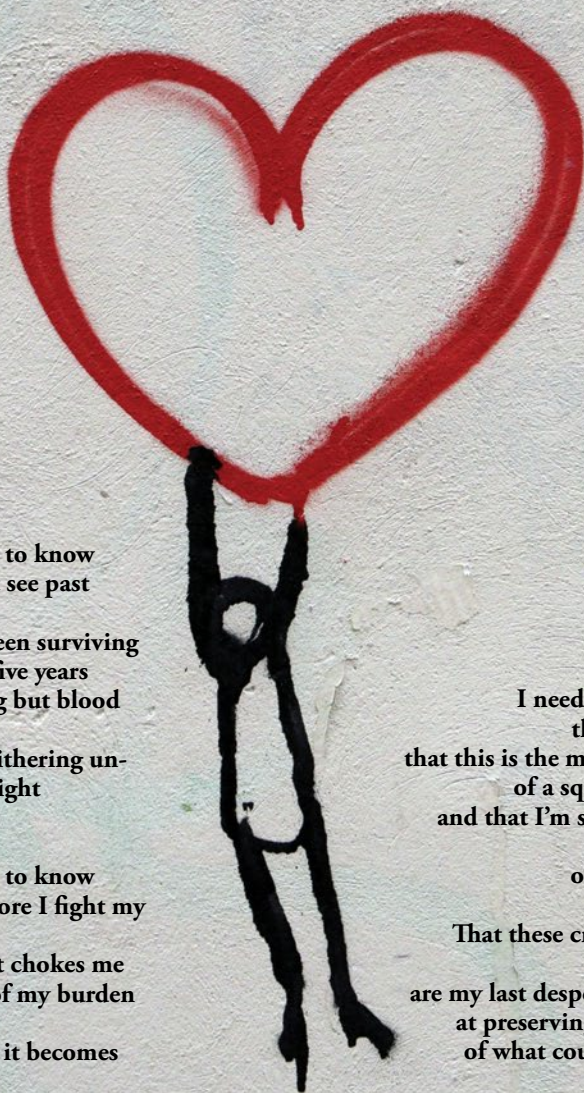
The Wave, a rock formation located in northern Arizona near the Utah border, is such a popular hiking destination that authorities have put restrictions in place to protect its fragile sandstone walls. Hundreds of people enter The Wave lottery every day for the chance to win one of 20 permits. Since one of our photographers got lucky, we thought you'd enjoy some photos of this beautiful place.

Photo: Julia Beverly



**I Need You to Know**  
by Robert McCracken

Photo: Nick Fewings



I need you to know  
that I can't see past  
tomorrow  
that I've been surviving  
these last five years  
on nothing but blood  
and tears  
that I'm withering un-  
der the weight  
of me

I need you to know  
that the more I fight my  
yoke  
the more it chokes me  
the more of my burden  
I share  
the harder it becomes  
to bear  
but my pen rebels—  
**STOP!**

I need you to know  
that I'm dying  
that this is the midnight hour  
of a squandered life  
and that I'm struggling for  
recognition  
of my struggle

That these crudely woven  
words  
are my last desperate attempt  
at preserving a tiny piece  
of what could have been

I need you to know  
That I'm sorry

## Prison Tour by Dorothy Maraglino

Please, allow me to give you a tour of my prison. I call this my prison because the court papers say I am to live and die here. So, technically, this is my home until I die. You are my guest, so I will meet you at the staff entrance door, the one on the main yard.

The building you passed through is cut up into mini-functional areas. The watch commander, ISU, Central Control, and “Board of Parole Hearing Room.” The watch is responsible for having enough cops to run the prison and minimize any events on paper, so we don’t look bad to Sacramento or the public. ISU is the internal police unit, and they are supposed to be security, but mostly they just play favorites, making shady deals, covering up, setting up, and, in general, being the worst criminals in the prison. Control monitors traffic and announcements but has no authority and is therefore neutral. BPH is the hope of freedom for a large percentage of the prison population, that’s the Board of Parole Hearing room. It is as solemn as a court room and as sacred as a church. It is sought after, feared, and prayed to.

The main yard has ball fields that are not played on and open ground no one sits on. There is a strip mall that holds the library, gym, IT Services, and the Chapel. The library is smaller than that found in a typical high school. The law library side is stocked with out-of-date resources to help inmates fight for their rights and freedom. The gym is only accessible to the few who can fit it into their program hours. Of course, right now, all of main yard is shut down due to COVID, except for the priority users at the law library. It was once home of the hobby craft program, which did not reopen. The Chapel is used to serve those of all religions, from Christianity to Wicca and Santa Muerte and everything in between.

Each of the yards has access to the main yard. But you can’t get into the yards if you aren’t allowed there. A guard will check your ID before you are permitted to enter.

There is a chow hall with two dining rooms, a laundry window, a canteen window, and a clinic, along with the four housing units. The classroom trailer is empty due to COVID. All AA/NA and substance abuse classes are closed. The only rehabilitation access we have is via correspondence. The dining room has no real HVAC, so we cook in the summer and freeze in the winter. The poor girls in the scullery have it worse. The sanitation is questionable at best. The meals are cooked and prepped days before they are eaten. They are reheated the day we get the food. No meals are fresh. The laundry is exchanged one day a week in the units, and we use the window to get our 6-month issue of underclothes. The canteen has a selection of junk food and salty preserved food at campground canteen

Photo: Carles Rabada





prices. The prison refuses to be a direct vendor, so cost reflects the fact the prison pays retail prices, not wholesale, and must sell to us at a profit. The clinic facility was upgraded last year, and the building is nice. We have several doctors who are not fit to practice on cadavers who are allowed to “practice” medicine with tragic results. The civil suites drag on for years while they hope the injured inmate finishes dying or is paroled before a civil jury ever hears the case.

The housing units have 32 cells and were designed to hold 128 inmates total (4 per room), but are now housing as much as 8 per room: 256 total. In the age of COVID, it is impossible to social distance. The cop-shack in the center of the day room is so old and out of date that it is a health hazard to the officers. A few years ago, the computer panel caught fire in one of the buildings. There is no way for the cops to sit 6 feet apart. The computer panel cannot open a single door, only one half of a hallway. An officer must physically open single doors, which increases contact between officer and inmates. The ventilation in the cop-shack is non-existent. Summers are miserable for them. Remember, an officer’s mood greatly impacts the daily lives of inmates. The building’s plumbing is falling apart. The HVAC is a swamp cooler to battle the desert heat. The door frames to the bathroom and showers are rusting. The vents are filled with decades of pollution. The beds are a metal slab with a camp style mat to lay on. For those of us expected to sleep on it for 50 years, back and hip problems are assured.

Exiting the yard through work exchange is like going through TSA at the airport, except instead of anything dangerous, the officers are looking for extra snacks, notes, contraband, and any violation that can be found, including the wrong lipstick color. “Behind work exchange” refers to the work area beyond the housing yards. There is PIA fabric, optical, HFM (health facility maintenance) and dental. There are manufacturing centers that work like sweatshops. Once the inmates are assigned to the PIA, it is almost an act of congress to get out, even for educational pursuits. The work conditions can border on dangerous between temperatures, old equipment, and chemical fumes. One girl got a finger cut off and was given 3-week lay-in. This was recovery time (UNPAID), and she was given no compensation. Plant Operations handles the maintenance of the facility. With the buildings being 40 years old, they are falling down into disrepair. Plant ops can barely take care of all the busted windows from disruptive inmates due to budget issues. It is easy to see why modern HVAC units, or bathroom and shower vents that actually work, or replacing rusty door jams, are not a high priority.

Vocational training and central kitchen are in this area too. Central Kitchen preps and cooks the meals in advance and then ships to smaller kitchens on the yards. The vocational train-

ing is limited to a very small selection of fields. It is also hard to keep committed instructors who will actually show up for work. At the beginning of each day, control reads out the list of class-closers for the day.

We are ending our tour, but let's stop by a building in the reception yard. This building is used for COVID quarantine. Sitting in one cell, you can look into the vent beside the toilet and see into the cell next door. Being placed in quarantine is putting yourself in more risk than in your own cell.

COVID comes in via staff and officers. Every contact with them is a risk. When staff test positive, they look to see if they came into physical contact with inmates.

There are rarely enough officers on duty to staff the prison's normal functions. They need to have 3 officers per housing unit during 2nd and 3rd watch, but the budget doesn't allow that. We are lucky if we have two. On days we only have one staff, access to dayroom, laundry, and phones are limited or shut down. They need 3 yard staff on each shift, but the budget doesn't allow it. CDCR has become adept at using a skeleton crew as normal staff. This means if any officer is unable to come to work, some part of the prison is shut down. If there is not enough staff on the weekends, then there is no one to escort inmates to pick up their quarterly boxes. If there is not enough staff, the warehouse gets backed up, so we get no packages, mail, books, or supplies. When staffing is low, CDCR spends obscene amounts of money on overtime. If you investigate the amount spent on overtime yearly, they could have hired the necessary staff year around.

Budget is the excuse for substandard meals, unprofessional and incompetent medical staff, no

programs, low quality supplies, not addressing housing decay, etc. DAs inflames the public into a lock 'em all up forever attitude. Laws are passed to exclude groups and release habitual crimes with high recidivism. The DAs then use this recidivism as proof that all criminals are hopeless and deserve life in prison. Enhancements are 4-to-10 times their actual crime's time. Dog piling charges took one girl from 25 to life to 350 years to life. They took another from 4 years to 25 years.

As inmates try to adapt, they must deal with all the above: the physical issues, prison violence, prison environment, no visiting or family contact, etc. They must deal with officers who might have COVID patting them down in the hopes of catching them smuggling a ½-pint of milk from the chow hall. My prison, where I am expected to live and die in, could be a place to help those with hopes of leaving "rehabilitated," but all it does is force us into survival mode, which does not bring out the best in people.

Prisoners are made, not born.

If the state wants to prevent crime, they should invest in the foster system and schools. Our kids are being trained now to be the next generation of criminals. Our kids are being abused, neglected, tormented, seduced, groomed by adults who get away with it. The people who are here are usually victims as well as perpetrators. They have a moment to choose to break the cycle, but why confront and exercise demons when you have no hope of freedom. Doling out sentences 3 and 4 times that of a natural life span serves no conceivable public good. It does nothing but prove to damaged people that life is not worth saving. Lesson learned . . . believe that, the lesson is learned.

Hope you enjoyed your tour. Be thankful that you are allowed to exit on the left.



## **Why We Can't Breathe** by Michael Smith (edited by Anthony Penton)

The voices of protest are raised across America. Voices of Men, women and children; voices of rage, frustration, and then hope; and finally, voices of discontent after all hope has been lost. These voices, anguished as they are insistent, are the hope of a generation.

These voices have been amplified through our Poets and Rappers, but even then, commercial interests have changed righteous rage into clever rhymes made suitable for the masses.

Art, not imitating life, but sending itself down a street it had not intended to go. Now the awful truth emerges out of the sweet mouths of the youth:

*"We Can't Breathe," "Our Black Lives Matter" they shout.*

But who is listening? And why not? Because in the richest country on the face of the planet, wealth pitches pennies on the street corner. Because today's inner-city schools are tomorrow's prisons, a breeding ground to sustain the status quo of the prison-industrial complex.

For far too many black children, childhood is but an illusion, denied by the potent reality of discontent harnessed by those sworn to protect and serve. Tamir Rice is but one such example, a 12-year-old boy doing what children do, alone, playing with a toy gun became his death sentence.

For the Tamir Rices of America, "Why we can't breathe" provokes the greatest moral reckoning of this era—the acknowledgment that all lives matter.



# EVERYONE LOVES ART

BY JANIE PAUL

Photo: Julia Beverly





“Everyone loves art—the most violent gang banger, the hustler, the strictest guard, everyone, because it’s a human expression. They admire it and most want it.” - Daniel Valentine, PCAP artist





**“Each Step Takes Us Home,” by Susan Brown, Beads, 2017 (PCAP Artist)**

Susan Brown is an incarcerated artist in Michigan who supports herself in prison by selling beaded jewelry and two and three-dimensional art made out of beads. She sells bracelets for as low as \$1.50 and for as much as \$125.00. Highly respected by other women, she can count on sales to pay for her basic necessities. This is how she describes her tightly organized budget:

*If I keep to my budget, I can eat as I want and save my money for phone calls and beads. I don't go to chow. I spend \$2 a day for food at the store. A month's worth of food is \$60 so I have to make that much from my jewelry or other bead work. For breakfast I have a cereal bar and coffee. For lunch I have Raman noodles with cheese and beans. For dinner I have mackerel. If I want to splurge, I don't eat for one day and save \$4. Then I have bacon on a tortilla sheet with rice.*

Incarcerated people have to buy their own toiletries, stationary, stamps, coffee, snacks, television and

assorted other items from the prison store, which, in Michigan, is only open every two weeks. But prison jobs pay very little. Most jobs pay anywhere from seventy cents a day for a porter or sweeper to eighty dollars a month for a law librarian. At some facilities, there aren't enough jobs for everyone, so people are placed on a waiting list. Many incarcerated people are indigent and without any source of income. One of the few sanctioned ways to generate income is by making art and craft objects which are sold to or bartered with other prisoners. These are most often given as gifts to family members or friends. The traditional kinds of commercial work in prisons in Michigan, and around the country, are greeting cards, portrait drawings or paintings, and handicrafts such as piggy banks, jewelry boxes, and crocheted and knitted crafts - mostly bought or commissioned to send out to loved ones. An artist can get three to five dollars for a personalized greeting card, sometimes even ten; the average portrait costs about seventy dollars and as much as a few hundred if made

by an experienced artist. In contrast to prison jobs, this is labor that is compensated fairly and appreciated with respect for the artist/worker. Almost everyone wants to buy something handmade they can send home. For people who feel badly about ending up in prison, giving unique hand-made gifts is a way to have value and to be generous with family and friends.

Tattooing, though officially illegal, is another good way to make money. Beginners start by studying other artists' patterns, and then develop their own. Tattoo artists make their own tattoo guns and ink out of found materials including motors from a tape player, dental floss, guitar strings, pens and either store bought ink or soot. Though it is illegal, prices range from ten dollars for a tattoo by a beginner to four hundred dollars for a back

piece by someone who is experienced, with the average tattoo costing fifty to seventy dollars.

With the income from sales, artists can purchase new materials from approved vendors. At most facilities, non-toxic drawing and painting materials are allowed, depending on the security level. Fewer supplies are allowed at the higher levels – at the highest level only a piece of paper and a pen. At a lower level, someone who sells their first black and white portrait can then buy colored pencils, and perhaps paint. But many works at all levels are made with found materials. Sculptures are made from toilet paper, soap and water. Floor wax can be used as a primer for a painting on cardboard, or to finish off a painting or a soap sculpture.

Because the market competi-



**“Mother’s Love,” by Danny Valentine, Colored pencil, 1998 (PCAP Artist)**

tion in the traditional genres of prison art is intense, individual artists are motivated to become highly skilled and make their work stand out, often with feats of virtuosity, whether with store bought or found materials. When I asked artist Robert Fitzner why there is such a high skill level among the artists, he said: "There's so many artists and hustlers in here--all at different levels and the one distinction is their quality of work. The one true currency we have in here is what we can do best, whatever that may be, and what we do better than others is what gives us that competitive advantage."

While many incarcerated people start making art to support themselves, the satisfying experience of handling sensuous materials and creating form can lead to something deeper. Beyond the commercial art market in prison, and within each artist is the need to express and symbolize; to find an inner world of the imagination.

Artists since pre-history, have made art to give shape to meaning. When we were two or three and drew our first circles that became a person or a sun, we made an image that had meaning to us. A circle with rays was a sun; a circle with two dots inside was a person. Like language, these images were our first communications. Visual art is an extension of this early miracle. Most of us don't continue to draw throughout adulthood; but in prison, the urge to create meaning, to have a sense of order and form, to exert control and to discover new parts of oneself, drives people to create a momentary yet solid world of the imagination. Fitting together marks, colors, forms, stories and images offers a sense of understanding, of worth and value, of things being right, which is of course rare in prison. Artists may

use carefully honed techniques and rituals, or they may work in a flash of intuition. For all of them, it is the single experience they have of being fully themselves.

Making a work of art is a process that has a satisfying beginning, middle and end, even if there are difficulties and frustrations along the way. Artist Wynn Satterlee explains this feeling: "Art was the first thing I would find in my life that had upon completion an instant satisfaction. When I sign the canvas, I can feel satisfaction. I can feel a form of a journey coming to an end. Very few encounters in life ever gave me that. Art did." In his book *Art as Experience*, John Dewey explains that we have an experience when we feel it run its course, when it has a beginning, middle and end.<sup>1</sup> A good conversation, a good meal, a good walk through the woods is remembered as meaningful and whole. It has a shape. When activities are done mindlessly, when experiences are disjointed and lack specificity and texture, life can go by with little satisfaction. In prison, time and space have no meaningful shape because order is imposed by rules and restrictions, not by personal choice. Art provides the wholeness of an experience that is missing in prison life.

Incarcerated people get sustenance from the smallest things: a leaf that blows into the yard, birds, squirrels, pet mice. But they must also shore up inner resources. They have to look inside themselves for experiences that have shape and meaning. One man told me, "There is no middle ground here. You are either moving forward or going back." Becoming an artist is one of the best ways to find a path forward, because it is a way to create an internal, private space for

John Dewey, *Art as Experience*. (New York, New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 1934.) See the chapter, "Having an Experience."



**“Self Correction,” by Alan Compo, Acrylic on canvas, 2014 (PCAP Artist)**

growth and freedom. It is the freedom to choose, to control, to let go of control, to ponder, to be absorbed, to be attached, to make mistakes, to destroy and recreate.

Incarcerated people make their art in small, crowded rooms often with other people around. They must learn to cultivate an intense relationship with their work in order to sustain the feeling of being in intimate relationship to something that matters. This closeness is intensified because many of the materials artists use come from their immediate environment.

Once an artist makes the first mark or makes the first move on a piece of wood or soap or plaster, they engage in an ongoing interaction with the art object. They can respond to the physical result of these interactions with a myriad of emotions including joy, anger, boredom, curiosity, frus-

tration, or contentment. This process affords a continuous range of emotional states that are entirely private, sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious, flowing in and around the artist. This is intensely satisfying.

The art object begins as the recipient of the artist's actions and gradually takes on a separate identity that eventually says, “I am done.” This vital back and forth of action and response is a way of being in true and intimate relationship – something that is rare among humans living in prison. This precious process and relationship to the art object is directly opposite from the ways in which incarcerated people are treated as objects to be moved around – literally held in cages when they are transferred between prisons and in innumerable other ways. In contrast, the artist is the creator making a precious object that is



**“Life Means Death,” by Yusef “Q” Qualls-El, Acrylic on canvas, 2020 (PCAP Artist)**

imbued with personal meaning.

In Michigan, this deep journey into an art practice has been supported for twenty-six years by the Annual Exhibitions of Art by Michigan Prisoners, which is a pedagogical as well as a curatorial project of the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) at the University of Michigan. Each year a growing number of artists participate – this year eight hundred and twenty-one; the first year it was fifty. The Annual Exhibitions, founded by PCAP founder Buzz Alexander and me in 1996, are based on unconditional kindness toward the artists. We take this stance in opposition to the criminal justice system and the correctional system. While these systems generally assume the worst of each individual, we assume the best. We deliberately extend generosity,

curiosity, validation and support to people living in prisons. Whether or not they “deserve” to be treated with kindness is irrelevant. We don’t ask why they are in prison; unless they want to tell us, we don’t want to know. With visits to each of the twenty-eight Michigan prisons yearly, and other ways of staying in regular touch, we have become embedded in the lives of the artists and given shape to an otherwise meaningless flow of months. We meet with the artists at each prison, curator/artist to artist to talk and give feedback, to recognize what is best in each other. This human exchange, which is repeated at various points during the year, is a crucial intervention into the inhumane world of prison and a crucial bridge to the world. Artists gain recognition and sell their work, many of them participat-



**“Do You See Me?,” by Gerard Brown, Acrylic on canvas, 2015 (PCAP Artist)**

ing in the exhibits yearly, some now for twenty-six years. Many of the artworks reproduced in this essay are from one of these exhibitions.


Our goals are not only to provide validation for the artists but also for the viewing public to experience the incredible talent and humanity of incarcerated people, a first step in ending mass incarceration. Each year, thousands of people view the exhibition. Over twenty-six years, thousands of artists have participated. The art culture in the Michigan prison system has grown, with increasingly more people becoming artists. As a whole, the Michigan Department of Corrections has come to appreciate the value of art making inside prisons.

If the project of being a

person is to evolve into more humanness, to open up increasingly more inner resources, more knowledge, more experience, then it is to look toward the future. In John Berger’s novel *A Painter for Our Time*, Janos, the painter, says, “There is something even more fundamental than sex or work...The great universal, human need to look forward. Take the future away from a man and you have done something worse than killing him.”<sup>2</sup> To see only more and more of the same institutionalized life as you head into the future is agonizing.

This is the ultimate punishment for prisoners, particularly those serving long or life sentences. And so, they embody deep unmet human needs and longings in the form and

2 - John Berger, *A Painter for Our Time* (London: New York, Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1958) 18



content of their work: They resist displacement with images of home and community. They resist anonymity with images of themselves and their identity; they resist apathy with images that critique our society; they resist coldness with images of love; they resist their environment by transforming everyday materials into art. They resist loneliness by creating informal art communities. They develop a practice in which one work of art leads to another, pointing them toward a path of endlessly unfolding possibilities and an enduring, if momentary, feeling of being grounded in the world.

Like incarcerated people who resist immediate domination, many of us in the outside world are called to resist the more invisible global financial markets, tech platforms, and innumerable surveillance systems that dominate so much of our lives. Like prisoners, we are also in danger of becoming objects in someone else's world rather than subjects creating our own world. We can learn from them about resilience, ingenuity, and the tremendous strength art can bring to our lives.

**To learn more about the Prison Creative Arts Project, please go to <https://lsa.umich.edu/pcap>, or call us at 734.647.6771.**

**To learn more about the exhibitions discussed herein, visit: <https://dcc.carceralstateproject.lsa.umich.edu/s/pcapexhibition25/page/about>**

**Parts of this essay are excerpted from Janie Paul's forthcoming book, *Making Art in Prison: Survival and Resistance*, to be published by Hat and Beard Press.**



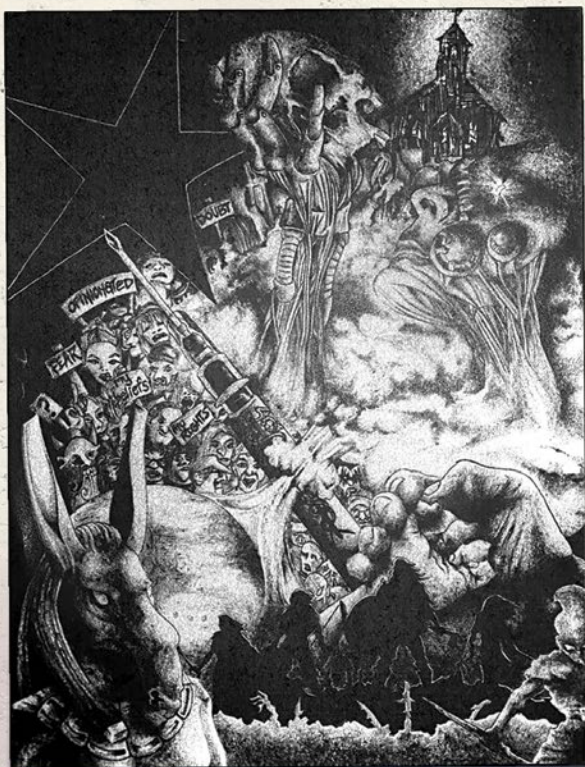
# >>> MORE ART



**“All my Relations,” by Jimmy Gutierrez, Acrylic on Canvas**

*This is a poetic revealing toward connections on Earth. I express my emotions through my brush strokes, strong and soft edges which represent relatives lost.*

To inquire about Jimmy’s work write to:  
Jimmy Gutierrez # 118128  
Sterling Correctional Facility  
PO Box 6000 Sterling, CO 80751



“Dark Art,”  
TommyLee  
Jones



“Bonnie & Clyde” by Christopher Sullivan, pencil sketch



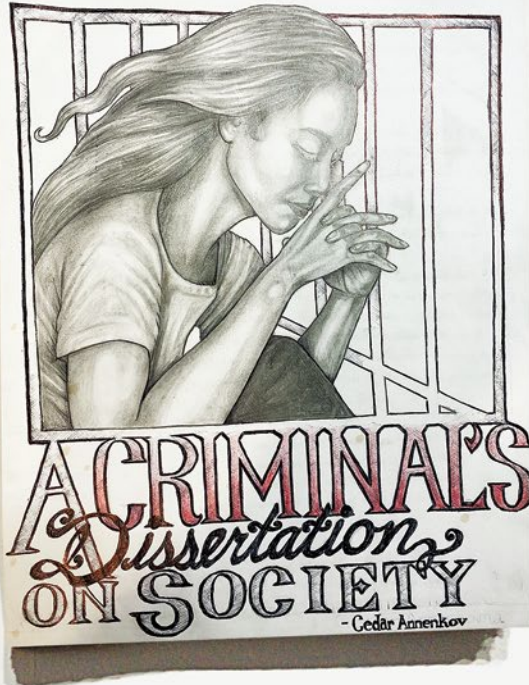
(Above left)  
“The Miracle Worker” by Joshua Earls

(Above right)  
“Lady in Hat,”  
by Joseph Marrero

(Left)  
“Bleeding COVID Heart,” by  
Joseph Marrero, pencil drawing



(Above) “Taking a bite  
out of COVID-19,” by  
Tammy Englerth, pencil  
drawing



(Left)  
“A Criminal’s  
Dissertation on  
Society,” by Cedar  
Annenkov

## **A Reflection on CRT, Wokeness & Prison Education**

by Donald Warner

It has happened a couple times now. It happened again yesterday. I mentioned my Strategic Communication class through CU-Denver and the employee I was talking to said, “Oh, I’m sorry. You are one of those being indoctrinated...being taught to feel bad for being white.” I was stunned. She continued, “I mean, come on. Can’t you all just get over it already?”

In his article, “Racist Compared to What? The Myth of White Wokeness,” Benjamin Boyce states, “there is a stubborn resistance on the part of white citizens to acknowledge the ongoing political franchise that is white supremacy.” I don’t know why I was so stunned. Those in her role have repeated *ad nauseum* the purpose of Corrections, the system that pays their rent. “The purpose,” they say, “first and foremost is to keep society safe.” This time she added, “not to indoctrinate offenders—not in that way.” Being in prison means putting up with a nonstop espousing of the system and how “the way things are is the way things should be.” Boyce later says, “far more dangerous than the disease is the denial of the condition.” And so a question arises in me: am I woke? Woke to what? Woke to these recurring characters as they play out their white supremacist narrative in front of me? Do these white people view me as an ally, even though I give them no indication that I am... other than being a middle-aged white male? In “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” Nakayama & Krizek say, “it is perhaps when whites use whiteness in communicating with other whites that the lines of power are particularly occluded, yet resilient as ever.”

Does my silence in this nightmare make me appear asleep? Do they believe I am cosigning their narrative? In order to be woke, do I need to speak? What might I possibly accomplish? These diatribes suggest that there is nothing I can do or say to alter their consciousness. Given the power dynamics at play, I only stand to lose. I am, after all, the thing they are protecting society from; they are the powerful in this scenario, tempting me to speak truth to their power, but at what cost?

What indoctrination do they feel I should find objectionable? What is it they fear? In his speech at the July 3, 2020, Mt. Rushmore Fireworks Show, Donald Trump said, “our nation is witnessing a merciless campaign to wipe out our national history, defame our heroes, erase our values and indoctrinate our children





(or inmates?).” He was talking about the specter of Critical Race Theory (CRT). As Boyce describes it, “Critical Race Theory begins with the axiom that power is everywhere and always working, inescapable so long as one remains enmeshed in the social and cultural networks of life.” Critical Race Theory attackers, like Trump and those who tell me I am being indoctrinated, they flip the script. They claim that those working to shed light on the history of anti-black racism (those teaching CRT) create division. They say CRT is racist toward white people. Trump goes on to say, “our children (inmates) are being taught in schools to hate their own country, and to believe that the men and women who built it were not heroes, but that they were villains.” Is this the indoctrination she tried to shame me for?

Little does she know, I’ve been ashamed of my country, not my whiteness, for a very long time. Unfortunately, there is little I can do about either. They are inherited. My country begins the indoctrination of its children to its political agenda with the brainwashing of its youth in schools. We are taught to recite the words, “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America...one nation, under God...” long before any of us have a clue what we are swearing loyalty to. We are taught to swear it anyway.

There was a point in the 10th grade where I refused to stand for the pledge. I sat silently in protest. Was I woke in my silence back then? Woke to the fact that I couldn’t...I wouldn’t pledge my loyalty to the nation as it stood, in 1983. I couldn’t pledge loyalty to the institutions it built itself upon or the imperialist future they sought.

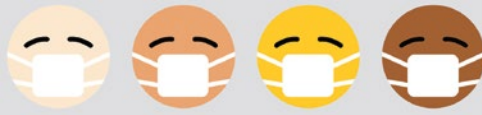
As I reflect on my most recent moment of silence and my inability to say anything to make a difference, Boyce sums it up: “there is so much to do and so little that has been done that the job seems insurmountable if we were to admit its girth.” I know that my speaking up won’t change a thing; in fact, it would probably only solidify her distorted beliefs.

In my silence, am I woke, or merely sleep walking?

#### References:

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## Reflections on COVID and Incarceration from Colorado

*COVID has made life in prison even more complicated, confusing, and sometimes scary. As instructors for CU Denver's College-in-Prison program at two Colorado State Prisons (Territorial and Sterling), we wanted to create space for students to reflect on their experiences with COVID, and for us to learn how to best support them, so we asked our students to write about how COVID has impacted their incarceration. In the pages that follow, we are honored to share some of these reflections with you. The pieces featured in this publication offer a glimpse into the harsh reality of incarcerated life during a global pandemic, yet they also showcase the hope of each student that tomorrow will bring something brighter, both inside and outside of prison.*

*Humbly,*

*Meghan Cosgrove, Tyrone Braxton and Benjamin Boyce (Fall 2021 Instructors)*

### **Taking the Leap** by Andrew McClay

Although COVID-19 certainly brought about a lot of negative changes, I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge that the pandemic led to some positive transformations in my life. Due to everything being put on hold regarding all classes and programs, my job as an academic clerk became obsolete during the facility's operation restrictions. Through this, I was able to leave a job that I no longer enjoyed and begin a new job that has brought a lot of meaning and purpose into my life. In February of 2021, I started working as an Offender Care Aide (OCA) in the infirmary, where I became certified in Hospice Care. I found a job that was challenging in a multitude of ways but also overwhelmingly rewarding. I am much happier now, and I know that it is very unlikely that I would have been able to make this transition if it weren't for the restrictions that were put in place because of COVID.

There were a few other positive changes as well. Due to a lack of in-person visits, the facility started allowing video visits for the first time. This has given us an opportunity to have visits with our loved ones while they are in the comfort of their homes, and it allows us to see them there. I was granted the opportunity of a full tour of my loved one's homes, as well as being able to see their pets. I would not have had that opportunity for many years without the implementation of video visits. I also stepped out of my comfort zone with a few things that I may not have otherwise done. I signed up for WriteaPrisoner.com and developed some awesome correspondences with people from all over the world. I also started a new hobby of seed beading, and it quickly developed into a new passion. I am now able to make gifts for my loved ones.

Another thing that I can attribute to the lockdowns is that I finally made the leap to begin my college education, which is something I've thought of for many years, but kept putting off. Now I am not only a student at CU Denver, but Adams State as well. There were obviously a lot of stressful and negative things associated with COVID, but I believe that I am in an overall better place in my life with all the changes that came with it. I feel that I was able to grow as a person during COVID because I spent a lot of time on introspection and self-discovery.

## The Never-Ending Story of Lockdown by Donald Stookey

COVID-19 and my prison experience? Well, to be honest, the COVID thing at first was really scary for me and my family. In March of 2020, the facility was locked down and we had little to no contact with anyone. We were locked in a pod in a cell house with about 120 people/inmates/family. We were brought our meals on Styrofoam trays and the food was cold. I mean really cold, not just the kind of cold food that you may get in the hole or in administrative segregation, but like so fucking cold that we knew the food sat outside in the winter weather. No meal was ever at the same time for months and this lasted over a year. Sometimes breakfast was served at 5:30am, sometimes at 9:30am, but either way the food had been cooked by 5:00am and was sitting someplace going to mush and getting cold. Some days we were locked in our cells for days at a time with no chance to shower, clean, or call our families. Just straight locked down, isolated from everyone—like institutions all across America, COVID left the prison scrambling, so those first few months were really hard on all of us.

In April of 2020, my grandma passed away from COVID-19 and that was really hard. Having a family member die while you are locked up is extremely difficult to deal with. Death is hard to handle at any time but when you factor in being in prison and on top of that being locked down with no contact it makes it harder. When you do get to call home and your family tells you this kind of news and it being a result of COVID, wow what a shit show.

The days and months passed and yes, we were locked down. In all fairness, we got to go to the gym and out to the recreation yard in later months, which was such a life saver. The mental aspect of getting to just go outside was so good for myself and everyone that was around me. So COVID was terrible for sure, but we were all learning to cope—we worked on building resilience. I could go on for hours about all the bullshit situations that we were put through and it would make you sick to your stomach. But more than that, the thing that I gathered from this last year is that life is so very precious and I have done nothing to really solidify my mark on my family or my legacy. That is one of the many reasons I joined this class, to expand my horizons and to try new shit because the things I have been doing are not the person I am and want to be.



## Who's Neighbor am I? by Daniel Gamboa

This COVID pandemic is relentless. It continues to take countless lives as its reach knows no bounds. The pandemic is not only taking lives, but it is also ending livelihoods at a rapid rate, as tenant after tenant are evicted. People from all walks of life are falling victim to this era of mass eviction. Human beings are having their very livelihoods taken from them by other human beings. And for what?

Over money that landlords need from tenants who are unable to work due to the pandemic. No human being is exempt. This affects all, be they working class, middle class, wealthy or penniless. Being faced with homelessness, perhaps for the first time in their lives—can you imagine how that must feel?

Now think of those who were already homeless to begin with. Being homeless is not an easy pill to swallow, especially with a family. Those faced with no other choice but to fall into that category and experience it for themselves will know what it feels like to live in real poverty, to feel less than. I imagine that is an unexplainable feeling—to live in real poverty.

One must remember what led to this in the first place: a new human-erasing virus. Just how long will this virus allow those new to real poverty to live, to succeed, before they, too, are evicted? Only this time for good.

Who knows who will be your neighbor next week, next month, or tomorrow?  
Who's neighbor am I?

*I wrote this piece to let all those out in the real world know that they are not alone during these hectic times. There are some inmates (like myself) who not only sit here and watch it all play out on the news, but are also affected by this pandemic. We have friends, family, and loved ones who we have to worry about, and as we know, anybody's life can be taken at any given moment.*

*I had Covid for five weeks. Thankfully, I was one of the lucky ones who had absolutely no symptoms. Was I worried and scared? Of course. Did I tell my family? Of course not. I did not want them to worry. All I could do was hope and pray that, one, my family would survive this pandemic, and two, that I would as well. All I kept thinking was, "Man I've been gone for so long and I'm so close to my parole date and then the world hits me with this . . . I just want to make it home to my family." Yes, even inmates in prisons all over the world have hearts, family, and feelings. We're affected just like you.*

*Stay safe, healthy, and mask up. I'm glad the vaccine is here. I only hope that means the end of this pandemic is near.*



## Who this Outbreak will Take by Jake Pilsbury

Who this outbreak will take has no reason or rhyme  
Mask are advised but some defiantly declined  
So many filled with worry and fear  
We wonder if loved ones will be here next year  
The pain and the hurt as the death toll will rise  
So many lost in a short amount of time  
When COVID hit the nation cried  
Watching as our people are dying inside  
The days are hard and don't seem real  
The nation is scarred—how will we heal?  
We sit and we worry, and we wait on a test  
Stay planted at the TV to listen for what's next  
Socially distanced has us all depressed  
And these financial strains cause a constant stress  
Is this the new norm or will we ever find peace?  
I pray to the lord this virus will cease

## Twist of Fate! by David Meade

Being incarcerated has really been a twist of fate. I have spent years dealing with heartbreaks, losing loved ones, and being oppressed by cynical racists, but throughout it all I have developed patience and gained wisdom from the words of the serenity prayer: God give me the ability and strength to deal with the things that I can, and the courage to accept the things which I cannot.

Incarceration has been a ride on a matrix roller coaster, but traveling through this road of life, I am able to look back and say, "I survived." I'm still here standing tall like City Hall, like a grounded statue of one of the greats.

One of the most devastating twists of fate occurred when COVID hit my prison. The chow hall was closed. Visitations were taken. Classes and programs were closed. And all inmates received 45 minutes each day out of our one-man caves to shower, use the phone, and plug up our tablets to the Kiosk. Then it was back to our cells.

To top it all off, everyone was mandated to wear masks. Throughout my prison sentence, COVID became like a game of tag: if you touch it or it touches you, then you are it. Tragically, four inmates have passed away in my facility due to this deadly wildfire virus. It has killed over half-a-million people in the US alone, and still counting.

I was one of the lucky dodgers of this tragic game of tag. I am truly blessed to be in a cell with a younger cellmate who contracted COVID and lost his taste of smell, while I never caught it. During this time, I have been perhaps the most paranoid and schizophrenic of my life. All I could do was wash my hands 80 times each day and pray to not catch it, especially with my pre-existing conditions.

But despite my fears, I continue to read, write and meditate every day. Music helps. And recently we got vaccinated: Johnson & Johnson.

The Department of Corrections can lock up my body, but they can't lock up my mind. Take that to the bank. I survived.



## The Last Beat

by Valentine Sitchler

COVID-19 has affected my prison experience in a lot of different ways. COVID was a tough time on all of us. It was mentally draining for over a year and really still is. I got locked up when I was 19 years old, and I am now 22. Since I have been incarcerated, I have found physical fitness to be my passion. Most guys work out a little when they get locked up just to pass time and look tough, but I work out because I love it. I educated myself with many books and indulged in cross fit, proper diet, and self-control. This has been a big coping mechanism for me and I have done well with it. I struggled through a shoulder injury and have come back (for the most part) from that, but recently I have been having some trouble breathing and chest pain. I wasn't worried at first because I was beating my cross fit times and it was when I was at rest. About 2 months ago, they finally diagnosed me with what is called Left Ventricular Hypertrophy. They told me I might need open heart surgery and can't work out like I have been or really at all because I might have a heart attack. I can't explain how devastating this was to me. I have had everything taken from me and this was the one thing I always had through the depression, violence, and

abandonment. The one thing that was always mine was working out, and I loved it—working on my fitness gave me hope. I was taking it seriously, but was still working out light weight, maintaining and being cautious.

One night about two weeks after they diagnosed me, I woke up about at 3:30 or so in the morning. My cell mate had made some weird noises a little earlier in the night. I got up to use the bathroom and when I came back I felt something weird. I could see his paleness though the dark and his TV was still on. He never fell asleep with it on and he had his Xbox he plays on as well. I was half asleep and turned the game off and laid down. As I laid there, I was slowly putting things together. I got down off my bunk and looked to see if his chest was moving. He was on his back with his mouth open and it wasn't moving. I turned the light on and found him dead. The COs came and I watched them give him CPR for 30 minutes, but he had been dead for hours. They say it was a complication of COVID. I slept next to a dead man for who knows how many hours.

The creepiest part? When I came in the room at 3:30 or so, on the screen of the game he was playing it said "You're Dead."



## Happy Holidays in the Era of COVID: It's all about Perspective by Dortell Williams

As the holidays creep up on us, and loneliness, along with the other anxiety-ridden feelings emerge and linger, I've proposed in my mind to be festive. After all, things could be so much worse.

For me, it's all about perspective, how I choose to view life's adversities. I think Viktor Frankl said it best, "The last of human freedoms is the ability to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances." Of course, I had to learn this philosophy the hard way.

In my stupid youth, I embraced a fatalistic perspective. My fate was either prison or death as a result of the choices I made, poor choices that promised me nothing other than negative results. In order for me to reach that level of low, I had to ignore all of the good, all of the right, and all of the positive in my life. I took a lot for granted. That was then. Now you can't pay me to call it a bad day. Rain? Clouds? It's still a beautiful day, my glass is half full, even rose colored.

In addition to harnessing my perspective, what I had to learn was resilience. I had to learn how to bounce back from the inevitable adversities of life. I call them challenges. We all have our challenges, and we're all capable of conquering them.

The truth is, there are a lot of problems in the world. But there's definitely more right than wrong;

more fixed than broken, more love than hate. Otherwise, life would have swallowed us up by now. And at the end of the day, you can't have a testimony without a trial, right? So, I have learned to welcome the challenges. Like a pugilist in the ring, I am willing and ready.

As an incarcerated person, I miss my family every day. Now that the holidays are here, there's not a minute that goes by where I don't fervently wish to be with kin. And with "The Rona" (COVID-19), I can't even enjoy them through a glass visit. Unfortunately, neither can you, free people. Health experts won't allow it. Now we're truly all in this together. We're all discouraged from visiting family during this holiday season. It's sad, really sad. Yet that is the reality of things. Looking at it from a healthy perspective doesn't mean ignoring that reality. The perspective I now choose to employ is this: by refraining from visiting those I love, I am actually saving their lives, and they are saving mine. The bigger picture is to live another day, the day we're all COVID-free, healthy and safe.

So happy holidays, on the phone, on Skype, through the mail, whatever it takes. The way I see it, with all the rain checks I'm owed for hugs, by the time we're safe again, I'll be one warm, beloved, and happy man. It's a choice, 'cause it's all about perspective.



## How Prison Works by John Carey

The most challenging aspect of this course for me was not on the syllabus. I was unexpectedly moved from one prison to another halfway through the semester. When we applied for the UC-Denver college prison program months ago, we signed paperwork agreeing to stay-put until we completed the class—no transfers. We also waved any half-way eligibility for parole or requests for transfer to lower-level prisons, and a “facility hold” was placed on our DOC file, making it virtually impossible to move to a new prison during the class.

Here’s how prison works. Once I signed those papers, I believed I wouldn’t be riding out (moving facilities) for months, at least. With that in mind, I spent some money to make my stay here more enjoyable. I invested in programs and special activities. I bought some food to keep myself comfortable. And I dumped some money into prison programs which I wanted to support.

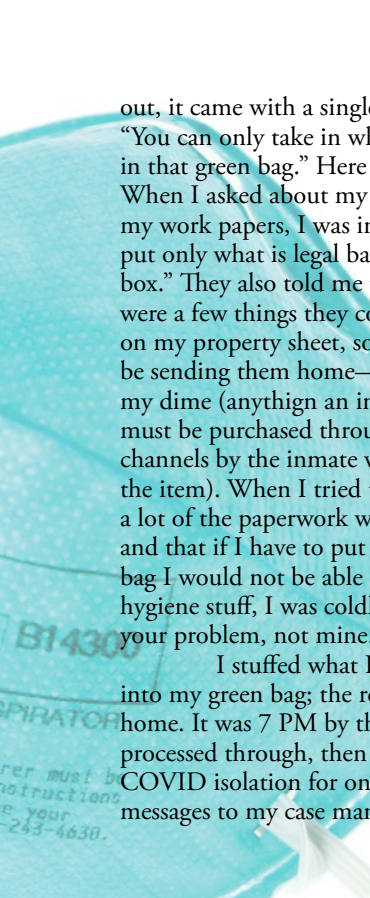
Last month I got a lesson in managing emotions when the DOC broke the contract without an explanation. Whenever we move from one prison to another, we can only take a small amount of personal property with us. The rest is thrown out. As I sat in my cell looking at \$120.00 worth of food and \$100.00 worth of special access canteen, I just kept thinking, “this won’t fit in my bag!” Anger growing...deep breaths...calm down. I had everything to lose. So, I put my focus back on my goal: getting out.

I turned to my cellie and said, “Happy Holidays bro,” then told him to pass it around. And with that, I started to feel good. I learned this trick in a DOC class called Managing Emotions. Since it worked, I kept

going. I gave my XBOX 360 gaming system and DVD player to a lifer who could not afford one (another purchase I justified with the agreement that I wasn’t leaving). That’s how the incentive program works—you can’t keep anything you buy once you leave the facility. You only get to use it until you get transferred. The items would remain at the facility, just like the money I donated to our spiritual group for firewood and a drum. They took that \$300.00 off my books the day before they moved me, go figure. The most painful hit was the \$1,500.00 I just invested in art supplies as the facility mural artist—I was painting in the leisure room.

Our agreement only went one way. I was given one hour to pack my things. The CO’s body language told me there was no reasoning with them. I had to hope I could get some answers once I got to where I was going. Before I left, they informed me that five boxes of my property had to be shipped home; it would cost me another \$150.

I was placed in what we call a dog cage for transport, a steel box where we are shackled and cuffed. There is no room to move about, and no window to look out. Five hours later I found myself as far away from my family as the state could move me: Sterling Correctional Facility in Canon City, CO. I was pulled out of the box, dumped into an empty cell, and then left for the next five hours with no answers as to what was happening. Eventually the half-dozen of us who had made the trip together were processed through medical intake, pushed through mental health, assigned new photo I.D.s, and then put back in a cell. Another two hours passed before a property officer took me to another cell with a cart containing all of my property. Disarranged and dumped



out, it came with a single statement: “You can only take in whatever fits in that green bag.” Here we go again. When I asked about my legal box and my work papers, I was informed “I put only what is legal back in your box.” They also told me that there were a few things they could not find on my property sheet, so they would be sending them home—again, on my dime (anything an inmate “owns” must be purchased through official channels by the inmate who possess the item). When I tried to explain that a lot of the paperwork was in fact legal, and that if I have to put it in the green bag I would not be able to keep my hygiene stuff, I was coldly told, “that is your problem, not mine.”

I stuffed what I could into my green bag; the rest was sent home. It was 7 PM by the time I was processed through, then placed in COVID isolation for one week. I sent messages to my case manager to no

avail. When I was able to call family, I asked them to try and find out what happened. My attorney was told only that I was moved for “security reasons.” I have been report-free for more than seven years. I was a mentor at my last prison, a pod representative, and a faith leader...what changed? We were told nothing else.

I had to use every communication skill I had learned in this course. First, I sent a request to get back into school. Since I hadn't broken my end of the contract, I was moved to a different unit and told to show up at the next class, a different day of the week but, luckily, the same teacher. The only problem was I no longer have any of the work to reflect upon—they threw it all away during the move because it wasn't “legal mail.”

## Confined for “Safety” by Jacob Carlock

The COVID pandemic is a complex and fluid situation that has both provided and withheld opportunities. One example would be that prior to COVID, the Department of Corrections was moving into a new model of operation where control was less prevalent, we as residents were given more latitude to move around and exist more freely in our environment. There are a body of administrators and staff who believe that this is a positive and necessary change that is contributing to the benefit of our betterment and helping us “normalize.” On the other hand, there are a separate body of administrators and staff who believe that we should be confined and constrained as much as possible, that we will take advantage of any “freedoms” we have and exploit them. These changes were gaining positive momentum and even affecting those who were on the fence about it, people were starting to see the benefits. But COVID has reinstated all of the “old” control measures, and even created new ones. The power-hungry are filling their cups, and we are suffering, taking significant steps backwards, possibly even further than when we started. It is frustrating, and in some cases downright disgusting. I can personally tell you that power is being abused again, and under the guise of “we are just keeping you safe.”



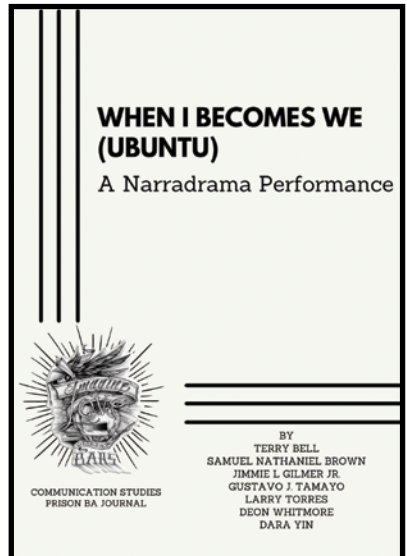
## When I Becomes We (UBUNTU)

### Reflections on the California State University-LA Prison Bachelors Program Graduation

#### Preface, by Kamran Afary

When I Becomes We (Ubuntu), a 12-minute live performance, premiered on October 5, 2021 during a historic graduation ceremony at the A-Yard of the California State Prison in Lancaster. The students received their Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication Studies from California State University Los Angeles. The students wrote, choreographed, relentlessly rehearsed, and collaboratively produced this work over a six-week period in the midst of the continuing restrictions imposed due to the pandemic. The themes they chose were testimony, tribute, proclamation, movement, and legacy, inspired by a narradrama approach to working with traumatizing experiences in ways that honor the values, relationships, and principles that motivated them to overcome the challenges they faced in completing their BA degree program. The graduation event was covered extensively by several national and local media outlets, including in an important feature-length article, on Public Radio, and on local television news. Links to some of this media coverage are provided at the end of this publication. We hope this work will not only be read by many, but that it also helps to facilitate opportunities to perform and discuss pathways to abolish the systemic traumas created by mass incarceration and carceral policies.

To see the full version of the original performance, please go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2dJzFtH-gH0&t=113s>.



Cover art by Justin Hong, Design by Cassandra Rivera

What follows is an abbreviated version of the longer performance. . .

### **Jimmie L. Gilmer:**

Good morning my name is Jimmie L. Gilmer Jr. I am a Cal State LA graduate with honors.

Briefly I will give a quick history on how this all came to be.

I should know because I have been there from the beginning.

In November 2013, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, a professor of English Arts and Letters, came to Lancaster State Prison to adopt a dog.

*[Chorus: A dog?]*

And on his tour of the facility, he became aware of the high number of men who had obtained associate degrees.

This piqued his interest.

After talking with several men, he realized something had to be done.

Equipped with this knowledge he returned to Cal State LA.

Seeking help for men who, in his eyes, were starving for knowledge.

After teaming up with Dr. Taffany Lim, from Cal State LA, and instructor Ronald Underwood, of Lancaster state prison, a new direction was born.

*[Chorus: A new direction?]*

Yes, a new direction towards rehabilitation through higher education.

### **Deon Whitmore:**

Who would've thought?

*[Chorus: Who would've thought!]*

That one day we would be standing here today

when college professors would make a collaborative effort

with a desire to bring higher education into an institutional setting.

What you see happening here today

is the direct result of what happens when you place emphasis on rehabilitation I am...

*[Chorus: I am!]*

...a representation of every individual who has been on this journey with me,

and we can agree our transformation is largely in part

due to the opportunities, we have been afforded through education

Cal State LA wasn't just a bunch of professors with endless lectures.

To all of our professors, this is dedicated to you,

y'all were mentors, teachers, and counselors who helped restore humanity into a place...

... that some of us thought could never be.

### **Larry L. Torres:**

When Covid hit, it was like a horror movie inside of a nightmare.

Watching, terrified as friends and neighbors died.

Life in prison was already a struggle,

with the pandemic, adversity was amplified.

News said those with high-risk medical issues would be released.

Unfortunately, some people weren't released before they were deceased.

### **Samuel N. Brown:**

The coronavirus has indeed been unprecedented;

And during the initial stages no one knew neither

what to expect nor how to prevent it

but one thing we all knew for sure-



Mass incarceration is volatile when mixed with a pandemic.  
 And until you have been inside of a cell...  
 You can't begin to understand how terrifying it is when you are a prisoner  
 in a carceral bachelor's degree program that you wish to continue.  
 Yet every time you hear a sneeze or a cough and you inhale...  
*[All inhale]*  
 ... You're afraid this deadly virus is going to get in you.  
 Let that feeling sink into your heart...  
 For all the daily, faculty and friends that fought faithfully and fearlessly for us to  
 get here  
 And everyone that earned a degree:  
 Salute  
*[Chorus: Salute-- making salute gesture]*  
 We commend you and I recommend you  
 Never forget this journey with Cal State LA and all of the transformative lessons  
 it instilled.

I will never forget how it made me feel when  
 I took a break from my studies to turn on the TV and saw a man with a knee on  
 his neck saying:  
*[Chorus: "I can't breathe!"]*  
 And now I can't read,  
 because my eyes are glued to the screen...  
 and I can't leave, because I can't believe...  
 - the inhumanity;  
 I am shocked but not shocked so I can't grieve  
 For a second, I was compelled to give up on my studies  
 to give up on the world...  
 Until I heard my professor's voice in my head  
 reminding me:  
 I can achieve...  
 And make a difference...  
 And I can because we are  
*[Chorus: Ubuntu! (all lock arms)]*  
 Ubuntu!



### **Larry L. Torres:**

We want to pay tribute to Terry Don Evans, our friend and fellow Golden Eagle, who passed away during the pandemic. Terry once co-wrote a performative piece titled "Teacup: Rituals of Grief". The following words are his lines:

*Almost every culture on this planet has a tradition in which they acknowledge members of their culture that have "given up the ghost" ... the Buddhists of Tibet are taught to prepare for death during every moment of life. They think of death, though not in a morbid way, all the time. This in turn gives greater richness to every moment of life.*

Please join us in a moment of silence to honor the life and memory of Terry Don Evans.

### **Terry Bell:**

It wasn't easy getting here  
grinding for four years while experiencing the everyday struggles of incarceration.  
There were times we were told we couldn't do it  
but we knew it wasn't true.

We became determined to prove it.

Negative labels on top of life sentences, like that wasn't enough.

The pandemic took lives, innocent and limitless.

At the same time witnessing the lives of citizens  
being taken by those who are positioned to protect.

Yet we remained focused, through the pain that us and our peers endured.

We never gave up.

We're achievers discrediting all non-believers.

We are sons, fathers, husbands, humans, college grads,

Rising above the status quo.

Forget what statistics say.

We're communication scholars of Cal State LA!

### **Deon Whitmore:**

Change is possible when you believe in it.

It can start with one thought, one voice, or one university,  
that has the courage to take a chance on it.

College professors finding common ground

to help change the perspective of how society views incarceration.

Education is not only important to rehabilitation,

it is NECESSARY.

Everyone who helped support this program should be proud today,

You've changed lives

and made history, you helped pave the way.

### **Gustavo Tamayo:**

Wow!... It's a trip how time works.

Many people say "time flies", by the time you look up...

... years have passed and millions of moments have gone by.

So, what have you done during the flow of time

that will carry on to define your legacy?

How are you piloting the time you have left in this life

before it disappears into the end?

You see, we all want to leave something behind we are proud of.

A lifetime legacy.

Time is the rarest form of valuables...

Because you can find money...  
... friends...  
... careers...  
... and even love..

But time can never be replaced.  
Time can never be unwound...

We brought hard times to our communities and to those we hurt.  
We brought hard times to our families and our loved ones.  
But for those of us that choose to become stewards of change,  
we hope to leave a legacy of accountability  
and help change the circumstances from which we came  
and decisions we have made.

So, no more delays because the time is now,  
and we choose to fly with the time...

*[Gustavo spreads arms like wings and flies across stage giving fives to all]*  
elevating towards the light of the divine.

### **Samuel N. Brown:**

Straight up!

To be trained is to be taught to execute the task you were given,  
to be educated is to be prepared to change the world you live in.  
The proof of any education, is in its application  
'cause therein lies posterity,  
and the potential for leaving a legacy.

As for me...

I'm proud to be the founder of the cutting edge program that is  
changing lives,  
known as P10,  
and the original author of an Amendment to the California Consti-  
tution

to end involuntary servitude

that is now backed by four state senators, three state Assembly mem-  
bers.

Now known as, "ACA3-T - the California Abolition Act".

... And after 24 years, five appearances, and four and half hour long  
hearings,

I earned a finding of suitability, and I'm scheduled to be set free...

*[Chorus: cheering]*

Mama I'm coming home and it's on.

And when you asked me what I want my legacy to be...

That's easy: social change.

Terry Bell, what do you want your legacy to be?

### **Terry Bell:**

I want my legacy to be: persistence is key.

Larry Torres, what do you want your legacy to be?

### **Larry L. Torres:**

I want my legacy to be: higher learning.

Dion Whitmore, what do you want your legacy to be?

Photo: Grant Durr



### Deon Whitmore:

I want my legacy to be: my past will not define the person that I strive to be.

Gustavo Tamayo, what do you want your legacy to be?

### Gustavo Tamayo:

I want my legacy to be: calling love and camaraderie.

Jimmie Gilmer, what do you want your legacy to be?

### Jimmie L. Gilmer:

I want my legacy to be: change for all.

And with that, we would like to thank God, our families, professors, the administration, and all of you who played a part in making this dream come true.

I have one more thing I'd like to ask:

What do you want your legacy to be?

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## Dog-Gone COVID by Sean Mueller

I'm a dog trainer, so before COVID I got to be outside several hours each day training and experiencing fresh air. But after the disease hit, there were several months we were not allowed dogs and had very limited outdoor time. There were no visits or religious services. The only time we were allowed to leave our pod was for an hour in the yard about three times a week. Colors never looked so bright and the air was so fresh! Meals were brought to our pod as well. This was a welcome change because you could add your own food to it and even heat it in a microwave. Normally you are thankful food is served warm in the chow hall, let alone hot.

During this time you really had to focus on taking care of yourself emotionally, physically, and spiritually. There are always people quick to com-

plain or justify self-sabotage. Since they had even more to whine about, it took greater energy to rise above the negativity. Thankfully, the dogs are back and we have more access to the yard. Visits have returned but are only two hours at a time. Religious services have also returned. Despite this, each day we worry (on varying scales) another lockdown is coming. This could be from the Delta variant, or because of Omicron, or because of COVID-caused staff shortage. The inmate population has been over 80% vaccinated for several months but the staff is at 50%. The state has mandated staff have the vaccine or face losing their job. In that case we will be on a severe lockdown because of staff shortage.

Throughout the pandemic, this communication class has been a huge blessing! I am very thankful for that.

## COVID, You Have Lost by Jordan Earls

You have lost  
Devourer of the ordinary

In slowing the spinning of this world  
You have fanned the flames of the extraordinary

Now watch in vain  
As your power fails  
To steal what matters the most

For though man remains idle  
The Spirit of Man  
Continues its ever-defiant march forward

You have lost  
Devourer of the ordinary

You have lost



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We hope you enjoyed Volume 18 of our magazine. For those of you who are submitting work to be considered for publication in our next issue, please complete this form and return it with your submission. Please send your submissions to the address that appears on the inside jacket of this magazine.

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## SHOUT-OUTS TO FRIENDS AND ALLIES

Over the years we have thanked our friends, colleagues, and allies at the Shakespeare Prison Project in Wisconsin; the Prison Creative Arts Project in Michigan; Voices UnBroken in New York; Each One Reach One in California; the nation-wide alliance known as PCARE, which stands for Prison Communication, Activism, Research, and Education; the team driving the remarkable newspaper, Prison Legal News; the California-based but now nationally recognized activists at Critical Resistance; the Criminal Justice Reform Coalition in Colorado; The Sentencing Project; the Justice Arts Coalition; the Denver Pen Pal Collaborative in Colorado; Mt. Tamalpais College in California, and many others. For this issue, we want to offer shout-outs to new and old friends in the hope that our readers will make contact with these amazing organizations.

## MOURNING OUR LOSSES IS SEEKING MEMORIALS, WRITING, AND ARTWORK

**Mourning Our Losses (MOL)** was launched by a volunteer group of educators, artists, and organizers committed to the release of those incarcerated nationwide. We continue to grow this platform for sharing our grief and healing, building community, and reflecting on all those affected by the death of a loved one in prison.

We are a team driven by our own prison experiences. Our crowd-sourced memorial site and all that we do depends upon our ties to you: our friends, neighbors, and family members still inside. Our goal is to inform national conversations about the dangers of mass incarceration by sharing the stories of those lost. In doing this, we let the public know that we are all people – not numbers, criminals, or “inmates.” We do not use dehumanizing language in the memorials we post. We do not speak negatively about anyone or talk about the crime for which they were convicted.

You can help. You may send us a memorial for a loved one who died, and please include any related creative writing, photos, and/or artwork (which we may not be able to return safely). When you send it in, be sure to include the name the person went by and your name as you would like it to appear on the memorial (or let us know if you'd like to remain anonymous). Let us know whether or not you give us permission to edit spelling errors, and whether we can contact you via electronic mail (JPay, Securus, GTL, etc.) to follow up. Write to us at:

Mourning Our Losses  
c/o Texas After Violence Project  
P.O. Box 15005  
Austin, TX 78761

We encourage you to share our website, [mourningourlosses.org](http://mourningourlosses.org), with your friends and family on the outside. Memorials can be submitted on the site using the “Submit” button. We can be reached via email at [mourningourlosses@gmail.com](mailto:mourningourlosses@gmail.com)

Mourning  
Our  
Losses

Photo: Sushil Nash



# Remerg

▶ RESTART HERE

At **Remerg**, we believe in the human potential of everyone. Remerg.com, our statewide re-entry focused website for Colorado, helps people released from prison and jail succeed upon release. By fostering connections with over 1,200 resources, and empowering people with advice and examples on navigating and accessing help, Remerg.com supports the needs, goals, and dreams of our target audience. To learn more, read our blog posts on Remerg.org, subscribe to our YouTube and TikTok channels, and follow our Facebook account. Please write to us at [info@remerg.com](mailto:info@remerg.com), or call us at 303-993-3551.

## the Reentry INITIATIVE

**The Reentry Initiative's (TRI)** mission is “to provide comprehensive services inside and outside prison walls that empower adults to achieve fulfilling and crime-free lives in their communities.”

Recognized for its unique, evidence-based process, TRI supports individuals who are reentering the community from incarceration. TRI was established in 2016, and has evolved into a full-service organization offering a six-month pre-release course inside Denver Women's Correctional Facility along with trauma and addiction treatment, mental health counseling, case management, and transition planning. At our Welcome Back Center in Longmont, TRI supports both men and women by offering post-release wraparound services.

For more information, visit [reentryinitiative.org](http://reentryinitiative.org), or call us at 720-640-9513.

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