CAPTURED WORDS
FREE THOUGHTS
#1 (Summer 2006)

Writings from The Poetry Workshop at The Champaign County Jail

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

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Another Day in The Champaign County Jail
Dennis Mansker

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And so end
Another day
in the Champaign County Jail
If I Ruled the World
Austin Harris

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

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

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

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

I am loved
I am wanted
I am a god

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

Oh yes, If I ruled the world
It would be f*cked up

Tired of a Broken Heart
Phillip Harris

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

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

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

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

So now that our love is torn apart
I think I'll go back
To the start
So I can go
And so you can know
That I'm so tired
Of this broken heart
Three Point Turn-A-Bout
Fatmir Sejdini

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No One.

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

I know what hurts.

A Peaceful Silence
Austin Harris

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

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

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

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

Finally
Richard McNally

Have you ever been so angry that you’ve blacked out at the movie theater?
You might need lithium.
How about growing up in a house full of people who did their best to avoid one another because of the mood each of them might be in?
Mmm mmmm sure could go for some lithium.

There’s nothing wrong with me!
Why, what’s wrong with you?
Ahh! How’s about some lithium?
You know what I’ve found?
Street drugs ain’t got nuthin’ on lithium.

There is however a drawback
It’s called anxiety.
I describe anxiety like this:
Suppose you’re going to prison for 50 years
Or on vacation to Guadalajara, Mexico
In either case you’re not sleeping the night before
But you’re equally as thrilled about both.
This is anxiety at work
Well, the doctor has a pill for that.

Finally, licit or illicit, many of us seek to suppress our emotions
I wont lie, I’ve sought since my early teens
To be the world’s first non-emotional human being.
Ahhh. Lithium is as close as I think I’ll ever get.
Finally, my own lithium
Midnight Dream
Dennis Mansker

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

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

My Sobriety. Lost But Found
Makaiah Grant

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

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

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

Live Another Day
Austin Harris

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

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

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

The more days that go by
The more guilty I feel

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

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

So I look up at my makeshift sun
And smile
For I will live another day.
My Best Friend
Jeremy Koeneke

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

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

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Stephen Hartnett, Associate Professor of Speech Communication
University of Illinois, 244 Lincoln Hall, 702 South Wright Street
Urbana, Illinois 61801; (217) 333-1593; Hartnett@uiuc.edu