

THE JOURNAL OF WOMEN AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Third Edition
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(Anne Boardmore, Grand Valley, Ontario)
By Ron Levine

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Elected Women Leaders in the State of New Jersey 2022-2023

Thank you to the strong and powerful women, who serve in the United States Congress and in New Jersey State Government, for your compassionate and valuable advocacy on behalf of imprisoned women, reentering women, and those suffering from addiction, sexual violence, and domestic violence. This report provides a road map to begin addressing the necessary changes required to improve the historic deficiencies in the care and treatment of incarcerated women and those returning to society.

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Women Advocates for Reform and Reentry Services

As we grapple with the systemic challenges of women in prison and those returning home, we need to call upon the expertise, resources, and skills of leaders in the fields of addiction treatment, medicine (particularly obstetrician-gynecologist), mental health care (anxiety, depression, trauma, sexual abuse, etc.), domestic violence, criminal justice system, housing, training and employment, and family reunification.

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Dr. Su Wang

The following art and written submissions reflect the perspectives, views, and research of the individual artists and authors. These submissions do not necessarily reflect the view of New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC) or the New Jersey Women's Reentry Commission as entities.

Foreword

In June of 2021, the New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC), in conjunction with New Jersey's Commission on Reentry Services for Women, launched *The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice*. Inspired by the leadership of Women's Reentry Commission Chairs Dr. Tanya Pagán Raggio-Ashley and Linda Baraka, as well as Women's Reentry Commission members Dr. Gloria Bachmann (who also serves as NJRC's Medical Director) and Heather Turock, *The Journal* provides a platform for justice-involved persons and advocates.

The first edition grappled with the medical and behavioral health care challenges justice-involved women face before, during, and after incarceration, and engaged policymakers, public health experts, and physicians to brainstorm innovative solutions.

The recommendations formed by Commission members have been critical to justice-involved women. This year, through a new partnership with the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC), a team of NJRC Health Navigators worked with women incarcerated at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women to coordinate reentry health care services.

Additionally, NJRC opened the Francine A. LeFrak Wellness Center at The Governor's Reentry Training and Employment Center to facilitate medical, behavioral, and dental diagnostic screenings, referrals, as well as nutrition and healthy lifestyle support to program participants. To address the specific health care needs of justice-involved women, NJRC prepared the [Women's Health Handbook](#), which covers topics including, but not limited to, internal anatomy, family planning and prevention, and doctor's appointments.

The Women's Commission has continuously advocated for incarcerated women. "At Women's Reentry Commission meetings," Director Tom Eicher of the New Jersey Attorney General's Office of Public Integrity and Accountability provided regular updates on the investigation into conditions at Edna Mahan. By providing a supportive environment, the Commission created a safe space for justice-involved women to share their experiences and process the horrific abuse which occurred at the facility.

For the Winter 2021 edition of *The Journal*, we asked artists and writers across the country to explore the broad, overarching issue of mass incarceration. What does it look like? How does it feel, both to justice-involved and to justice-impacted people? What are the causes and effects of mass incarceration, as demonstrated by research and lived experience?

The response was so fantastic that we decided to distribute the submissions across multiple editions. This edition is the second installment. Please note that the submissions may be difficult for some readers, as they are often sensitive in nature, dealing with issues such as sexual assault, mental illness, and domestic violence. We hope that you are as moved by the pieces as we are.

Radical Change: Letting Court-Involved Women Lead the Way

By Jean Stanfield, 8th Legislative District Senator

Harrowing stories of widespread sexual and physical abuse at the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility bubbled to the surface, last year, in a moment of public awareness that was a long time coming.

Once we were made aware of the truly terrible experiences of many women in the prison, a lot of prominent women stepped up to the plate to make sure there would be institutional change. It's impossible to hear a story of a female prisoner being handcuffed and punched in the head 28 times by a guard and another allegedly being told sex was the only way she was getting toilet paper, without being sick to your stomach.

Thankfully, after the noise was too loud to ignore, Governor Phil Murphy replaced the Department of Corrections Commissioner and set plans in motion to shut down the Edna Mahan facility. I'm glad to have met the new commissioner, Victoria Kuhn, on many occasions and believe she is incredibly qualified to move New Jersey's correctional facilities forward.

I spent the better part of the year calling for radical change, attending hearings on the issue and listening to women. It was eye opening and necessary.

What we don't understand about many of these women is the history of abuse they grew up with before landing in prison. Many of them are even locked up for crimes they commit against their abusers. Then they get to a facility like Edna Mahan and experience the same abuse.

This is all to say that a certain level of understanding, education and empathy needs to exist when forming policies for women prisoners. We need to take their history into account during sentencing and opt for diversion programs in instances where women commit crimes against their abusers.

According to the ACLU, although women are targeted more frequently in cases of domestic violence, they are more likely to face longer prison sentences when acting in self-defense than a man who is found guilty of committing violence against their partner.

If we polled people in this country, Republican and Democrat, from the most tough on crime to a criminal justice advocate, I'm sure there would be a consensus that domestic abuse retaliation should not come with a harsher penalty than the actual abuse. Some might opine that long prison sentences aren't appropriate at all when dealing with domestic abuse survivors.

I'm proud to serve on two working groups - Governor Jim McGreevey's New Jersey Reentry Corporation and the NJ Supreme Court's committee on creating career pipelines from Recovery Court to the outside world. I've also worked with diversion programs for juveniles becoming involved with the court system. Those experiences have taught me how important it is to tailor corrections to the lived experience of offenders if we want recidivism to drop from its around 30-percent level.

Whether it's focusing on drug treatment or creating state partnerships with private corporations to provide careers for people who complete their sentences, more and more of the public is coming around to the necessity of making changes to how we've always pictured the prison system.

Although change is slowly happening in New Jersey's correctional facilities, and a new leader brings signs of hope, there's still much more to be done. A recent report conducted by Corrections Ombudsperson Terry Schuster detailed the unbearable heat in New Jersey's prisons during the summer, creating a torturous environment.

We can't let reports like these come and go without solutions. The neglect leads to situations like Edna Mahan, which haunted the entire state.

Creating better prison conditions, directing more inmates to drug programs, and creating career pipelines will not only reform our prison system, but help create a safer environment for the neighborhoods you and I live in.

We can't and should not expect any woman to go through what the women went through in Edna Mahan and make it out without a dangerous and jaded view of the world. If we want our women inmates to be upstanding members of society when they're released, we must create a realistic path for them to get there.

Joyce Ann Brown

Centurion

Ms. Brown was wrongfully convicted of a murder that she did not commit in 1989. She spent a decade in prison before her conviction was overturned and her record was cleared in 1993. Ms. Brown passed away in 2015; she spent her post-release life as a prisoners' rights advocate and a powerful voice for those who could not fight for themselves. You can read more about Ms. Brown's story [here](#).





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Commissioner

EMPOWERING THE WOMEN OF EDNA: REINTEGRATION AND HEALTH CARE

The process of empowerment and reintegration begins long before a person leaves prison. For our women at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility, empowering them -- having their voices heard and their needs met -- and ensuring successful reintegration begins from the moment they enter the doors of the facility and continues throughout their stay and beyond. This occurs through important programming, educational and vocational opportunities, trauma and gender-informed care, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, medical treatment, and reunification efforts. As they approach release, it happens through intensive reintegration efforts with community partners, like our dedicated partners at the New Jersey Reentry Corporation.

To engage in successful reintegration, it takes a "community" dedicated to understanding the unique needs of women and embracing their overall wellbeing. It begins with making a commitment to our incarcerated women and raising awareness of their distinctive needs, and continues by connecting them to essential services. The New Jersey Reentry Corporation, and our community partners, provides the vital link between the women at EMCF and the wrap-around services they need, at the critical time that they prepare to re-enter their communities. We value this community partnership, and are grateful for their time, talent and resources, as they assist in the empowerment and successful reintegration of our female population.

The medical needs of women are special and unique, and ensuring a smooth transition between incarceration and release via a continuum of medical services in the community is essential to the health and wellbeing of our female population. Through the extraordinary partnership between the New Jersey Reentry Corporation and the New Jersey Department of Corrections, and the adoption of the Medical Navigator program, the women of EMCF are connected with critical medical resources prior to their release, with the appropriate and necessary follow up post-release.

Through the remarkable efforts of NJRC and Governor McGreevey, NJRC Medical Director Dr. Gloria Bachmann of Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, and psychiatric nurse practitioner Constance Kusi, the women are prepared to leave EMCF connected to essential healthcare services in the community. At six months prior to release, the women are connected with Dr. Bachmann and Ms. Kusi, and the variety of Medical Navigator services. These include health and behavioral care, substance use recovery, and preventive care, all provided in a trauma-informed, confidential setting,

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along with a continuum of services including doctor's appointments, referrals for specialized services, necessary follow up and a real connection to their communities.

The women of EMCF have embraced the Medical Navigator program. Since partnering with the NJRC, over 300 women have been engaged with the medical navigator program. Each has met with Dr. Bachmann and Ms. Kusi, and has received personalized attention to her individual medical needs.

The NJRC provides quantifiable data that demonstrates the success of the initiative. Insights provided by the women participating in the Medical Navigator program show that the efforts are bearing fruit. For example, one of the participants has reported that the counseling she has received, and the connections made through the Medical Navigator program have encouraged her to maintain her sobriety for over a year post-release. Another advised, "Since I met those two wonderful people, Ms. Constance and Dr. Bachmann, my life has turned around in such a positive way. Meeting them has changed my outlook on life and has tremendously helped me to grow in a positive direction." These are just a few examples of what we know are hundreds of similar positive stories.

We deeply appreciate our partnership with Governor McGreevey and the NJRC, through which we are connecting those leaving EMCF with important healthcare services, through a recognition of the distinct medical needs of women. We are looking forward to the future successes of our incarcerated women, whom we are committed to serving as they fashion new lives for themselves in the community.

With gratitude,



Victoria L. Kuhn, Esq.
Commissioner
NJ Department of Corrections

Mass Incarceration, Recidivism, and Second Chances

By Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, New Jersey's 12th Congressional District

As we reform state and federal criminal justice policies, it is imperative that we enact legislation addressing the root causes of mass incarceration.

This past December, I voted to pass an omnibus funding bill that kept the federal government funded through the end of fiscal year 2023. The bill provided for the largest-ever increase in maternal health block grants; increased funding to support the Violence Against Women Act, which provides for responses to domestic and sexual violence; funded hate crime prevention programs at community and social justice organizations and the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division; and dedicated \$125 million in grants to support the Second Chance Act, which facilitates programs to reduce recidivism by helping previously incarcerated Americans re-enter society.

Such programs are crucial to eliminating barriers faced by women, and particularly justice-involved women. We must consider who we are incarcerating, why, and what programs might help divert them from the criminal justice system.

An important example of such critical re-examination is federal drug policy. The United States has not simply failed in how we carried out the War on Drugs - the War on Drugs stands as a stain on our national conscience since its very inception. Begun in 1972 as a cynical political tactic of the Nixon Administration, the War on Drugs has destroyed the lives of countless Americans and their families.

As we work to solve this issue, it is essential that we change tactics in how we address drug use away from the failed punitive approach and towards a health-based and evidence-based approach.

On June 17, 2021, the 50th anniversary of President Nixon's declaration of the "War on Drugs," Congresswoman Cori Bush and I introduced the Drug Policy Reform Act, which would end criminal penalties for drug possession at the federal level, shift the regulatory authority from the Attorney General to the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), expunge records and provide for resentencing, and reinvest in alternative health-centered approaches. The bill also eliminates many of the life-long consequences associated with drug arrests and convictions, including the denial of employment, public benefits, immigration status, drivers' licenses, and voting rights.

These types of reforms are imperative for healing the harm caused by punitive drug policies and developing a health- and evidence-based approach to drug policy moving forward.

Yet, jails and prisons across the nation continue to incarcerate nonviolent, low-risk offenders. During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, the State of New Jersey facilitated the early release of over 6,000 incarcerated persons to reduce crowding in correctional facilities. We saw by this situation that there were people in prison who were not a threat to anybody and who could be productive individuals in a community to reconnect with their families. We knew this even before the pandemic, but the pandemic required us to act in a different way.

One of the results of the pandemic was to try to de-incarcerate those individuals who were not a harm to society, who were low-level offenders and to get them out of the prison system because of the threat of the pandemic.

The criminal justice system is ripe for this kind of review, which emphasizes rehabilitation and

second chances. To this end, the New Pathways Act, which I introduced to Congress with Congressman Kweisi Mfume in November of 2022, would help formerly incarcerated Americans re-enter society by requiring the Bureau of Prisons to help these individuals obtain government-issued identification.

Our criminal justice system as it exists now seemingly encourages recidivism. When incarcerated people are released, they are left on their own to create new lives for themselves while simultaneously facing obstacles that are almost insurmountable. Without the resources necessary to overcome these obstacles, many newly released Americans remain stuck in a cycle of recidivism.

The federal government must do more to support recently released individuals, and assisting them in the process of obtaining identification is a crucial first step. By passing the New Pathways Act, we can reduce the number of repeat offenders and bring us one step closer to ending mass incarceration. I'm proud to have introduced this legislation and urge my colleagues in Congress to support it.

When developing correctional policies, we must consider the needs and experiences of specific minority subgroups of the prison population. We've known for some time that our country has a prison problem, and the classic image of who is behind bars is men. But women are the fastest-growing segment of the prison population. The percentage of women in prison is now eight times higher than in 1980, and we are failing when it comes to giving them the support, treatment, education, and training that they need. This reality is especially true for Black women who are disproportionately affected by the mass incarceration epidemic. Black women are significantly overrepresented in criminal justice and overly exposed to trauma within these systems like sexual and physical violence. More must be done to dismantle the systemic inequities that drive women of color into the criminal justice system and address the unique experiences they encounter as justice-involved individuals.

More than half of the women in prison at Edna Mahan have experienced two or more types of abuse prior to incarceration, emotional, physical, or sexual, while nearly a third report having experienced all three. Two-thirds of the women in prison have been diagnosed with a chronic health condition, such as asthma, diabetes, hepatitis, and AIDS, and more than one-third of women in prison have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder. More than two-thirds of the women in prison have abused substances prior to incarceration.

These women are coming to us with unresolved and undiagnosed trauma. The justice system shouldn't be how we deal with these issues, but once they've been identified, we need to ensure we help them: not just send them back into the world.

Formerly incarcerated women are more likely to experience homelessness than their male counterparts. More than 30 percent of women being released are reported not having anyone to rely upon in post-release planning.

These women face hurdle after hurdle when they leave prison: health care, addiction treatment, behavioral health, housing, employment, and community support are all suddenly up to them to find. We cannot allow that to happen and we cannot expect these women to rejoin society without the resources to be successful.

Programs like The Women's Project at NJRC will provide the direct support that women need to transition to civilian life. We need to make this work. We need to demonstrate that it's possible to have a new beginning. We need to give these women the chance that they deserve.

Mass Incarceration: The Importance of Legislation

By Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter, New Jersey Assembly District 35

When facing a problem as deep-rooted and systemic as mass incarceration, it can be difficult to envision and enact concrete, comprehensive responses. As an Assemblywoman representing New Jersey's 35th District, I understand that it is my great honor and responsibility to do so.

In my capacity as a legislator, I have sponsored bills which sought to reduce mass incarceration by expanding programming for court-involved women, increasing the public transparency and accountability of police officers, and broadening treatment for persons with substance use disorders.

For instance, A520 would establish a public awareness campaign about the Pregnant Women and Women with Dependent Children initiative. This provides a coordinated network of specialized, gender-specific and family-centered substance use treatment services targeted to pregnant women and women with dependent children including, but not limited to: methadone maintenance; residential or outpatient substance use treatment services; primary medical and pediatric care; prenatal care referrals; transportation and child care services; therapeutic interventions for women and children; and linkages to housing assistance and recovery management services. The bill would also establish a public awareness campaign for the Maternal Wrap Around program, which provides intensive case management and recovery support services for opioid dependent pregnant and postpartum women throughout the State. The goal of the program is to promote maternal health, improved birth outcomes, the reduction of risk and adverse consequences of prenatal substance exposure, and alleviate barriers to services for pregnant women and mothers suffering from opioid addiction.

A 2022 study of prison reception data from ten countries found that 20 percent of women

had alcohol use disorders and 51 percent had drug use disorders.¹ In order for justice-involved women with substance use disorders to receive improved care, it is important that we increase public consciousness of their needs and expand relevant services.

Another bill I have sponsored that would address the healthcare needs of justice-involved women is A656, which would require state and county correctional facilities to offer inmates hepatitis B and hepatitis C testing. New Jersey's Commission on Reentry Services for Women found that there is a great need for such testing among incarcerated women, and by requiring correctional facilities to facilitate testing we would meet that need.

The Commission has also found that many women are not connected with critical reentry planning services prior to their release. Should A666 become law, the superintendent of each county correctional facility would be required to provide inmates who have been sentenced to a term of incarceration and who have been denied bail pursuant to the provisions of recently enacted bail reform law with information, documents, and other assistance to facilitate their reentry into the community at least 10 days prior to their release.

These reentry planning packages would include a copy of the inmate's criminal history record and written information on the right to have criminal records expunged; general written information on their right to vote; general written information on the availability of programs, including faith-based and secular programs, that would assist in removing barriers to their employment or participation in vocational or educational rehabilitative programs; a detailed written record of their participation in educational, training, employment, and medical or other treatment programs while

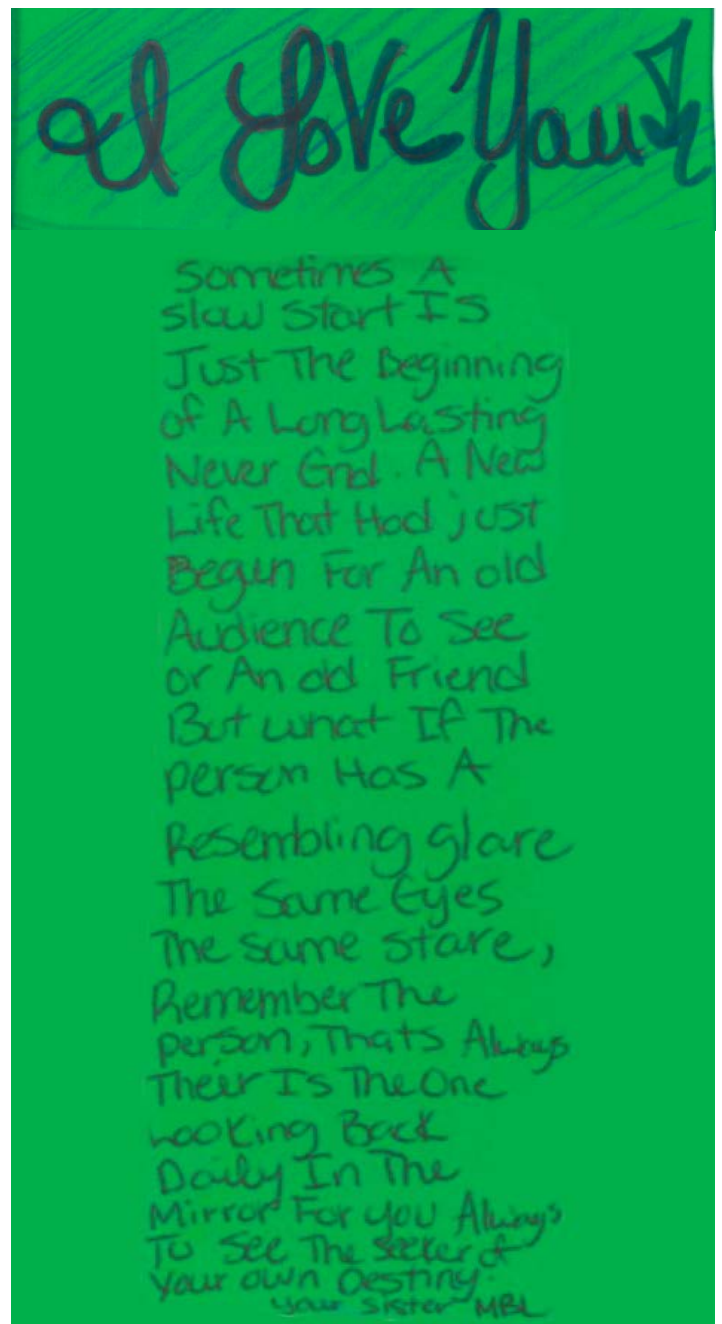
incarcerated; a written accounting of the fines, assessments, surcharges, restitution, penalties, child support arrearages, and any other obligations due and payable upon their release; a non-driver identification card; a copy of the their birth certificate; assistance in obtaining a Social Security card; general written information concerning child support, including child support payments they owe, information on how to obtain child support payments, and information on where to seek services regarding child support, child custody, and establishing parentage; and a copy of their full medical record.

It is imperative that justice-involved women are equipped with the necessary resources to reintegrate upon their return to society. This legislation would be extremely beneficial in easing that transition.

Other legislation I have sponsored aims to increase police accountability and transparency such as A866 which establishes requirements for use of deadly force, A996 which requires access to law enforcement disciplinary records as government records; requires such records to be retained for certain period of time, A1002 which requires Police Training Commission to establish police officer licensure program, and A1515 which authorizes the creation of local civilian review boards to review police operations and conduct; appropriates \$800,000 and better meet the needs of justice-involved persons, particularly those with substance use disorders. Also, A939 expands municipal court conditional dismissal program to include defendants charged with certain drug offenses; requires defendant's participation in various programs and services; allows dismissal of charges after one-year probationary period, A1239 requires DCA to establish standards for prisoner reentry transitional housing, A1963 revises eligibility for convicted drug offenders to receive general assistance benefits under Work First New Jersey program, A2036 establishes Statewide behavioral health crisis system of care, lastly A3787 bars the denial of expungement application in certain instances.

In order to work toward a future without mass incarceration, we must implement public policies to advance equity in law and public safety and ensure that justice-involved people receive the resources and services they need to successfully reintegrate into society. As an Assemblywoman, I advocate for legislation to further these goals, and I hope you will join me in this collective effort.

I Love You!
By Mary b. LaVallie



The Criminalization of Women: Policy Interventions

By Linda R. Greenstein, Assistant Majority Leader, District 14

Dear Readers,

It is an honor to introduce this issue of *The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice*, which will focus on mass incarceration and highlight various issues related to justice-involved women. As a long-time activist on these issues, I am deeply troubled by the fact that since 1980, men's arrest rates have fallen by 30%, while women's arrest rates have barely budged. This highlights the need to understand and address the policies and practices that lead to the criminalization of women, and to work towards ending mass incarceration without leaving women behind.

As Chair of the State Senate Law and Public Safety Committee, I have been dedicated to advocating on behalf of justice-involved women and working to pass legislation that aims to improve the criminal justice system and support the successful reintegration of formerly-incarcerated women into society. For example, a bill I sponsored - called the Dignity for Incarcerated Primary Caretaker Parents Act - was signed into law in 2020. This law aims to improve conditions for incarcerated primary caretaker parents and provide support for their children while they are separated from their parent/s. I have also worked to restrict the use of isolated confinement in correctional facilities, which can have a particularly negative impact on mental health and wellbeing, and have passed legislation requiring correctional staff to receive training on the prevention of sexual misconduct, non-fraternization, and manipulation.

I have also dedicated time to addressing the issue of cross gender strip searches in state correctional facilities. My legislation successfully limited these searches and ensured that they were conducted in a respectful and dignified manner. In addition, I have advocated for sen-

tencing reform that prioritizes rehabilitation over punishment, clearing hurdles for court-involved women making efforts to manage day to day life after time served.

Furthermore, in the last few years, I've been deeply engaged in the issue of abuse at the State's only women's correctional facility, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women. Along with my colleagues in the Legislature, I have written and passed legislation aimed at improving conditions at Edna Mahan. However, after the January 2021 forced cell extractions, I became convinced that the facility should be closed. As the state works towards building a replacement facility, I have remained engaged with the new Corrections Commissioner, Victoria Kuhn, to ensure that the new facility will be properly equipped to prioritize the safety and well-being of the women who will reside there.

As we continue to work towards ending mass incarceration and addressing the disproportionately negative impact it has on women, it will be important to consider a range of policy interventions. This includes providing access to resources such as housing, employment, and medical and behavioral health care. I hope that this issue of *The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice* will bring attention to these important issues and encourage others to join me in advocating for policy reforms that address the root causes of criminalization and promote the successful reintegration of women into society.

Sincerely,

Senator Linda Greenstein

Mass Incarceration and Women – A Better System Needed

By Leila Mulla



With the proliferation of mass incarceration and the increasing number of women behind bars, communities, family units, and children are destroyed. Women, the backbone of families, face a unique challenge in trying to be mothers and caregivers from prison. Women who are incarcerated must have someone else take their role as caregivers, not only for their children, but also for elderly parents and other family members. The other people who have taken the parental role may or may not want the responsibility to raise children or be the caregiver for elderly parents.

Additionally, through the incarceration process, many women lose all contact with their

children and family members due to the failing justice system's rules, regulations, and sentences. Families fall apart; thus, communities collapse when mom and dad are gone for all practical purposes. Politicians then wonder why crime continues and rally for tougher laws as a platform that does not help communities, but hinders them. Still, for the politician, life is based on votes and sounding like a better life is on the way for the people. Crimes are being committed by "free people," not those already behind bars. Furthermore, crime continues no matter who the politician is because they are part of the problem of mass incarceration.

The entire process dealing with the criminal justice system is skewed from the start with the

media coverage that only reports half-truths. The situation and circumstances of what occurred are not shared with the public, only what sells and puts a negative perspective in the public's mind. The police shows on television depict a society of "us against them." Yet, often in life we find that the police and those in power are more corrupt than the so-called "perpetrator." Of course, what is shown in the media is intended to produce a shock factor and not to show the corruption and injustice that occurs.

Then, the backroom deals being made are to make money and not take into account people's lives. A person just needs to take a look at the money made in J-Pay, Securus, Prison Enterprises, and the militarization of the police to see how much money certain areas of society are earning. An interesting case study would be to follow the money trail and see exactly whose pockets are being filled.

However, the general public is taxed to keep a person housed. For women at the Louisiana Correctional Institute, the cost is \$106/day. The families of those incarcerated are in a way being double taxed. The families of the women incarcerated also send money for the offenders to pay for soap, shampoo, shoes, food, etc. The paradox is that often these are the same people and families that need the state's assistance and financial help. Overall, the state loses money by not investing in people's lives and continuing the cycle of poverty, crime, and oppression.

Sentences in the United States are supposedly standardized and reflect the changing of society. However, Louisiana's laws are excessively harsh, being the incarceration capital of not only the United States, but of the world. Why are sentences so out of line with most of the other states and other countries? People make mistakes no matter where they reside. To stop some of the corruption, maybe people should be sentenced outside of the state in which the crime was committed. By doing that, people will not be sentenced based on nepotism. Even better, the federal government should streamline laws in all the states so sentencing disparities do not exist.

When a person is convicted, he or she is classified as either "violent" or "non-violent" based upon his or her crime. Yet, one violent act does not constitute a person classified as violent. Those who are classified as violent are sentenced to unrealistic terms of imprisonment to destroy any hope of going home.

Realistically, having prison sentences over twenty years makes no logical corrective sense, especially if reform is an influencing factor for release. Also, those who are considered "non-violent" and "habitual" seem to get all the breaks, but they return time and time again. Those who are deemed "violent" do not get the opportunities to prove their rehabilitation, since retribution as well as victims' rights are always on the forefront regardless of how the person has changed. People who commit crimes are not their crimes.

A better way to pay a debt to society is to utilize the European and Netherland scheme, one that incorporates social justice. First, have a meeting that includes the judge, district attorney, lawyers, victim's family, offender, and the offender's family to attend and discuss what prison sentence would serve justice and what stipulations to put in place.

After a reasonable sentence is determined and the female offender comes to prison, have a psychologist meet with her. Through a multisystem and pragmatic approach utilizing drug counselors, psychologists, and other trained professionals, make a specified plan catered to the individual so that the woman who has been convicted can transform her life. As part of the rehabilitative process, have the offender attend both group classes as well as individual counseling sessions. In addition, include physical fitness and spiritual wellbeing. Therefore, the time the woman spends in prison will rehabilitate her and affect her mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually - a holistic approach.

Having family visits is extremely important for the offender. Another aspect of restoration is to bring the offender's family members to family counseling sessions with the offender. Likewise,

Jane Dorotik

By Ron Levine

Ron Levine is a commercial and fine arts photographer based in Montreal. He has worked on assignments around the world, photographing for ad campaigns, annual reports, and corporate clients. His documentary projects have earned him extensive international acclaim, resulting in solo exhibitions globally. He often gives talks on the subject of his 20-year project, Prisoners of Age, a series of photographs, video interviews, and installations on the subject of elderly inmates in the prison system. Clients have included American Express, Verizon Wireless, CN Rail, and Deloitte-Touche. Between commercial assignments, Levine teaches photography classes at Dawson College in Montreal and Five Keys Charter Schools in Los Angeles.

Jane Dorotik, 66
Murder

Being in prison is horrifying, really. It's horrifying to see how women are treated in prison. Prisons have become the mental health setting for many mentally ill people.

We lock people up for all kinds of reasons and we don't even have a pretense of providing them any kind of health care. And then we put them out on the streets again with \$200 and say "Have at it! Make life work for you."

Aging in prison is really difficult. Fighting to not have to be placed in an upper bunk. Younger more aggressive inmates trying to push you aside to get in front of you in line for all kinds of things. There have been instances of women coming back from canteen, having their things stolen. Because they really can't protect themselves. There have been lots of difficulties. But I think the greatest difficulty is the lack of respect. Being treated as a human being. From the guards. I don't mean to characterize. There certainly are some very decent guards who go out of their way.

Women don't come into the prison system because they think it's a good idea to go to prison for a few years. Especially for women, a lot of their crimes are crimes of survival. Drugs, Prostitution and so forth. We make



no effort to help them. No effort to help them with their children. In terms of parenting skills or anything else. We need to provide something in the front end. Things like, knowing that half of all high school dropouts end up in the criminal justice system. Why are we not spending the 9 billion that we're spending on the prison system, on the front end and preventing more of that? There's a lot of things that need to change within the system if we truly are interested in rehabilitating people.

CDCR said that, of the 10,000 women in the California prison system, probably 5,000 could be released into the community on an ankle bracelet. And yet, statewide, we've probably released around 200.

What I would propose is taking the elderly in prison, put them on ankle bracelets. An elderly like myself costs an average of \$130,000 a year to maintain in prison and we have the lowest recidivism rate. Less than 1 percent. It makes no sense at all to keep people with walkers and canes and wheelchairs in the prison system. And it's taking away directly from the education system in our state. Why not put these people in the community?"

make counseling mandatory for victims of crimes and their families, especially since they have a say as to the offender's future. In time, have the offender meet with the victim's family to bring healing. Forgiveness may or may not occur. However, by meeting and discussing what occurred and the life struggles both sides have experienced, the two sides can be brought together and maybe find some type of reconciliation and rebuilding of their lives.

After an offender has taken classes, counseling, and has spent between five to ten years in prison, allow the offender to go to a work-release program for a minimum of three years. By using work-release, an offender can save money for release and she can be monitored to see if she is ready to be released into the public on parole.

Another idea that pertains to work-release is to have those incarcerated enroll in a non-combatative military service job. The military has an abundance of jobs, from maintenance to computer science. The women will live in dorms as they do now, but will learn new trades and/or do jobs that are needed. The time a woman works for the United States government in the military, time will be deducted from her sentence. This is a win-win situation because the women will learn new trades, and be rehabilitated while the government saves money and has workers who are willing and eager to work and do an effective job. In addition, the women will save money for the future and be employable.

Sometimes the convicted offender does not need rehabilitation. We have women imprisoned who were defending their lives. Also, some have gone through extensive psychological and/or drug treatment programs after the commission of the crime. Thus, the people who fit in this category should just pay their debt to society, but not by a disproportionate prison sentence.

In my case, I was sentenced to 30 years. My son had just moved to start college and my daughter was with her father. I worked two jobs as a registered nurse supporting my son and daughter as well as saving money for my children's college fund. My crime was a "cold case" that had occurred 30 years earlier, 1984, when I was at the young age of 19. I unfortunately became involved with a man who was almost 20 years my senior. I was released from jail in the beginning of 1985 due to insufficient evidence. I consented to receive psychological help, being tremendously mentally ill. I needed the help and saw psychiatrists for years. Eventually, I got married, had children, went to school, and became a productive citizen. I loved my job as a registered nurse and worked hard.

In 2012, the police came to my apartment and arrested me based on new evidence. Then, I had to figure out what to do about my children, their living circumstances, finances, and all my belongings that were ultimately given away. The

justice system decided that conviction and retribution was more important than the rehabilitation process I had gone through for numerous years.

Additionally, I know that various doctors and nurses who have been in trouble with the law have the opportunity to continue to work for the penal system instead of being incarcerated. However, since I was deemed a “violent offender,” that opportunity was not ever mentioned or considered even though my offense happened at a young age. I had changed my life since the crime occurred and never got in trouble again. I pursued higher education and was a respected, reliable, and trustworthy registered nurse.

Likewise, other women who are incarcerated were gainfully employed, but became ensnared in bad situations. They are in the same predicament as I am. These women should be given the opportunity to live in a halfway house environment, attend classes, and work to pay their debt back to society, or live at home with an ankle bracelet while working and attending group classes.

As a result of my situation, my daughter is living overseas and my son is living with my sister. I have lost contact with my four brothers, and my mother passed while I was incarcerated. I do not get any incentive wages because I have “good time;” a law Louisiana passed in 2008. Even though I work every day in prison, money is always an issue. Yet, I cannot go to work-release to support myself or my children.

Fostering Opportunity: Entrepreneurship and Employment for Justice-Involved Women

By Francine A. LeFrak, President of the Francine A. LeFrak Foundation and the Same Sky Foundation Fund, Member of the New Jersey Reentry Corporation's Board of Directors

At the Francine A. LeFrak Foundation, we believe that “Talent is Everywhere BUT Opportunity is Not,” and that if everyone used their personal talents to help others find opportunity, the world would be a better place.

We believe in being true partners with our grant recipients. We are working side by side, removing barriers, tracking progress, and changing lives.

Founded in 2009, our work has focused on the marginalized, including those living in extreme poverty, who survived the Rwandan genocide, and those who have been in the justice system. Today, we impact thousands of women on an annual basis.

The programs we invest in provide skill building including financial literacy, business, computers and technology, and artisanal skills. We also provide emergency micro-grants to remove barriers to each woman's success.

A study of formerly incarcerated people in 2008 found that the unemployment rate was 27 percent, compared to approximately five percent for the general population.² Disparities were even more staggering for women, especially women of color. The unemployment rate was 23 percent among formerly incarcerated white women and 43 percent among formerly incarcerated Black women (compared to four and six percent respectively of their counterparts who had never been incarcerated).³

In New Jersey, the Francine A. LeFrak Foundation and Same Sky Foundation have worked with the New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC) for many years to provide training for women, secure job opportunities, and provide women with the necessary tools to live healthy

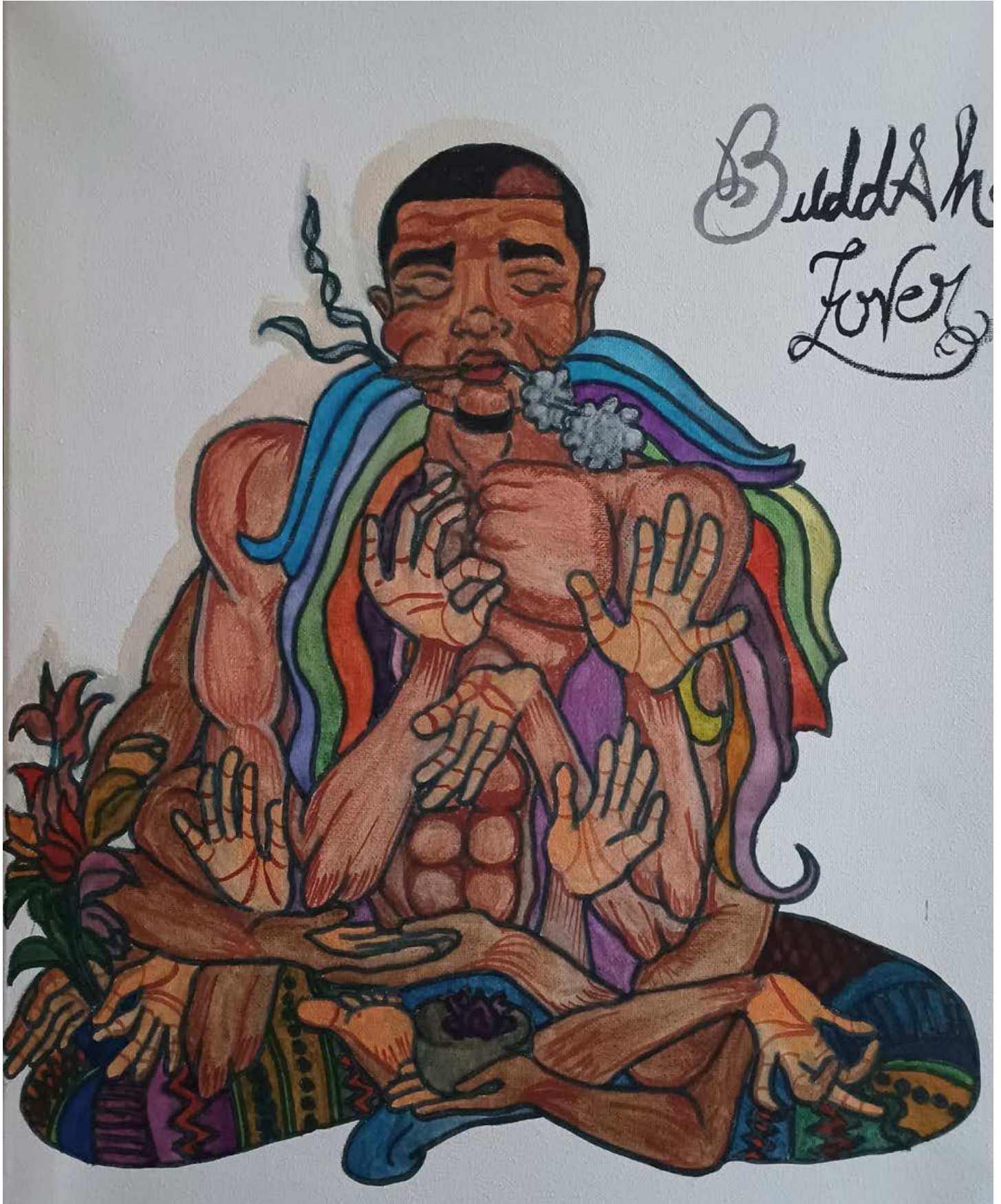
lives. Of particular pride, the NJRC women, with whom we designed a unique employment partnership, who have been housed at the “Most Excellent Way” had among the lowest recidivism rates in the nation. The foundations have facilitated programs to develop justice-involved women's business, entrepreneurial, and financial literacy skills. These programs empower formerly incarcerated women to become financially independent, active members of our modern workforce.

We recognize that, in order for justice-involved women to successfully reintegrate into society, *all* of their basic needs must be met. The Francine A. LeFrak Wellness Center at NJRC's Governor's Reentry Training and Employment Center in Kearny provides justice-involved women critically-needed medical, behavioral, and dental health care services.

As a firm believer in second chances, I am committed to assisting court-involved women in their reentry. In partnership with NJRC and our other community partners, the Francine A. LeFrak and Same Sky Foundations will continue to invest in programs which support and uplift court-involved women in their journeys of growth and empowerment.

Buddha Lover

By Billie Milas



From a Young Age

By Sheih Moore

From a very young age, I've known how it feels to be locked away.
What some would call home, it's where I was alone.
My first recollection of a cage.

When I should have been playing like normal kids do,
I was already wishing my life would be through.
But I couldn't escape the cage.

As time went by, I learned how to scheme, how to lie.
I wanted love and attention, to be rid of the depression.
So I run.
From one cage to the next.

Eventually, quickly I found love.
A syringe full of death.
One too many, but a thousand never enough.
I was comfortable in this cage.

Until I woke up ears ringing, no memory, eyes opening, eyes closing
The fifth time that week, almost dying from overdosing
The cage is closing in on me.

In a cell so sick, wishing God would make it quit.
So to my knees I went "God Forgive me, I Repent"
I found the key to this lonely cage.

Today I feel much better, today I feel more sane.
I love who I see, who I am, my mind more clear
And no more pain.

Most of all, today I am free.
I am safe and no longer trapped in that cage!

Whispers from the Dark: Mass Incarceration and Rehabilitation

By Tammy Wilson-Morgan



If I could pass along any advice from my thirty-one plus (31+) years of incarceration I would say, "Live life each day as your last." So many women around me daydream of what they will do upon release. When I get home I'll write, paint, exercise and get healthy or go back to school, wasting away the present. Each day is precious, stay busy, be kind, leave a place better than how you found it and never give up! Remember our horrific past and mistakes define our past and that we can never change. However, through Education, Rehabilitation and Spiritual guidance you can have control over your tomorrow. I was blessed also to have a Mother that forgave me of my sins before I even asked.

The below article was written based on my first-hand experience of being institutionalized for over thirty-one years. I was able to prepare this article in our Education Department, which also took part in editing.

I remember my initial fears about the destination that would in all essence lead me to my final home. I was to embark on a journey that Halloween of 1991. Due to a sentence decided upon by my peers, I would remain in the state of West Virginia's care until my very last breath. This was over thirty-one years ago, and the changes I've experienced as an incarcerated woman are phenomenal. Everyone sees through the media or has their own first-hand interpretation of the miasmic atmosphere in the prison system. There are many circumstances and environmental conditions inside institutions that occur daily that would shock the average citizen. The staff and residents alike of the different state's institutions start to become emotionally numb to certain conditions and accept intolerable occurrences as normal; we don't even seem to notice anymore. Women, being the incarcerated minority, seem to be affected most when it comes to monetary cut-backs and gender discrepancies. Staff and inmates alike see the areas of concern, just like the wrongs in society. People look away, pretending not to see, as if doing so will allow the problem to just go away.

Women do their "time" in a different way than men. We are first and foremost mothers, daughters, grandmothers, and sisters that society has acclimated to nurture. We pass down the basic human needs, morals, and societal values to the younger generation. This being said, why is our society placing women into institutions created for rehabilitation, yet some of these institutions are emotionally sterile and have daily practices that tend to strip them of their humanity? The gender discrepancies between the male and female institutions are evident in many areas of the prison setting. When we question these concerns, the response is lack of funds, building space, and room availability due to the women's institutions being the minority population for monetary allotment. Currently, there seems to be no resolve.

The incarcerated woman tends to adapt to living situations and environmental conditions more readily than the incarcerated male. We have a tendency to not cause disruption, and we learn early on that making waves or bringing

attention to institutional concerns involving authority, housing problems, and health issues, verbally or on paper, in many cases leads to being labeled a "problem" inmate. This could result in your stay being much harder and even disciplinary infractions. I learned early in my sentence: it is easier to be the one that keeps their mouth shut or takes medication to sleep the pain away.

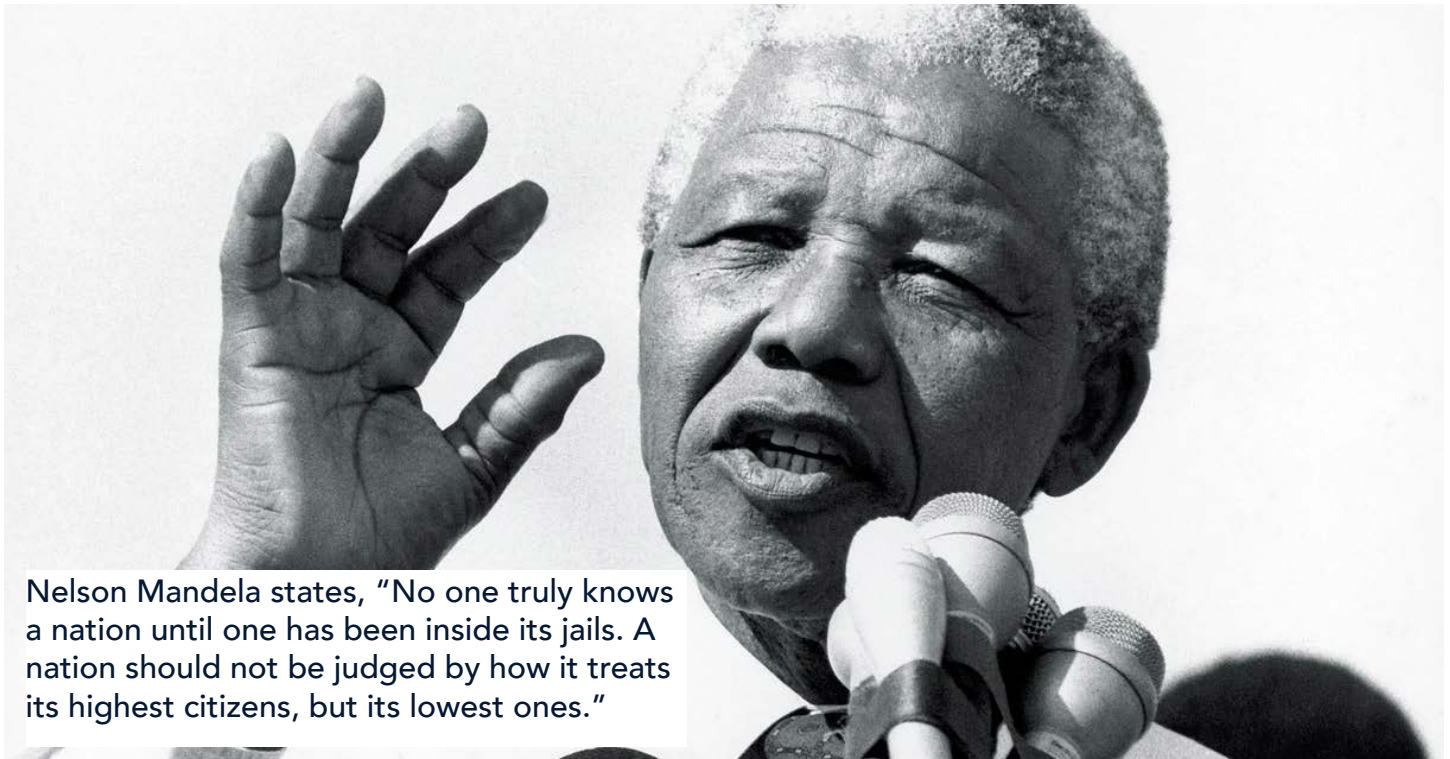
I myself am ashamed to say I was guilty of remaining quiet for years and choosing to be medicated. I waited for a change, for things to get better. In a sense, I was waiting for my knight in shining armor to rush in to save me. Needless to say, he still hasn't arrived.

The topic of mass incarceration has now begun to directly affect all social levels of society. Mass incarceration has become a community-interest topic for many reasons. It is not uncommon for the average law-abiding citizens, corporate leaders, police officers, honorable judges, and senate members just to name a few, to have a family member incarcerated. It seems public awareness of incarceration discrepancies between different state correctional institutions and the mass incarceration of our women is finally reaching the outside world. All levels of society are now being directly affected by the incarceration/rehabilitation processes of United States prisons and correctional institutions. It seems that a majority of the populace in our great country has a loved one or knows someone who is incarcerated. This familiarity factor has at last forced society to take notice of how many individuals are being warehoused in some states and/or hidden away on the other side of the razor wire. We, the incarcerated women, are no longer just a number. The communication via texting, phone calls, and video chats preserves relationships with the outside world. The whispers from the dark are starting to be heard.

Mass incarceration in the state of West Virginia started to become a reality to me when the long timers' cells that were set up for single occupancy began to be double-bunked. The small living area and privacy issues are of course

a concern, but my emotional break was when the bathroom accommodations changed. I had been blessed to go over twenty years without having to use the restroom in front of another person. This one act of dehumanization and degradation involving one of a person's basic human needs causes me stress and trauma still today. A society

consolation, the very personality traits that put the human race higher on the moral evolution scale, are being denied to the female population, but not enforced in this manner at some of the male institutions. What is the reasoning behind gender and state-to-state discrepancies in the penal/correctional system?



Nelson Mandela states, "No one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones."

that supports rehabilitation, the actions accepted as social skills, and acts of humanity needs to avoid accustoming individuals to a lower standard of living when they are about to reenter society.

I am housed in an institution where any type of human contact could be a rule infraction, meaning you could be disciplined if not authorized to touch another. Just imagine for a moment a world without friendly hugs or the compassionate closeness of your friend when you've lost a loved one. Having someone wipe your tears or hold your hand is completely prohibited here. What type of rehabilitation could support the fact a handshake or high-five could affect one's programming, housing, and even parole availability? What type of rehabilitation can justify the exemption of the human factor? The very gifts of human compassion, instinctive emotions, and

How do we end mass incarceration? Education is of course a major factor that could help end mass incarceration. The education that deals with addiction and accountability and academic education through higher learning are two separate, but related, entities. I feel from my experience seeing the same individuals returning, one major factor consistent with the repeat offenders is their attitude toward education and programming. It is statically proven that the education and educational opportunities an individual engages in while incarcerated such as, TASC (GED), vocational classes, and higher learning such as college-level classes, make a dramatic impact on recidivism.

Society needs to be aware that these individuals shortly after incarceration are clean from drugs and alcohol, sometimes for the first time in their adult life. These women are now forced to feel emotions that were kept hidden or

dulled by addictions. One of my greatest concerns in the last ten years was the lack of guidance these young women had from a role model before incarceration. When I speak of my childhood fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and morals passed down by grandmothers, the blank stare makes me realize they have no idea what I am talking about. Prison might be the first time some of these women have felt a sense of security. They now want rehabilitation and crave learning to gain the skills and tools to deserve a second chance.

Vocational classes can also allow an individual the opportunity to learn a skill that will then become a worthy skill/trade in the job market. Then, upon release, they are not only a productive tax payer, but a valuable member of society.

Lakin Correctional Center in West Virginia was blessed with being one of the pilot institutions to be allowed to use the Pell Grant when it was signed off by the Obama Administration. This allowed residents to obtain an Associate Degree and, if they so wished, they could continue and complete their Bachelor's Degree. Education, without a doubt, is a major deciding factor in relation to recidivism and ending mass incarceration. What better gift or tools can you give an individual than a craft/skill, self-worth, confidence, and the knowledge they need to succeed? Just as the old saying goes, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." Mathew 4:19

Education and addiction treatment are very important, but what about our social skills and morals? I feel there is a need to restore the work-release program for long-term individuals that now are just getting thrown back into society. The recidivism rate is overwhelming in our country, and I have personally watched an offender get in trouble at the institution, make parole the next week, go home, and return to the system before the month's end. Why? One explanation could be due to the fact that, on paper, these individuals are labeled non-violent and they can be granted good time credit,

provided early release incentives, sent to work release programs, and even offered furloughs. These individuals have asked for or proven numerous times they need additional help with aggression, addictions, and skills to integrate productively into our communities. It is just politically accepted to release a non-violent offender as soon as possible to provide room for the next busload of women.

The "violent offenders," while they were involved in one of the most horrifically-labeled crimes, have in many cases no prior prison record. I have noticed, if allowed, they will voluntarily ask for rehabilitation classes, educational classes, and voluntary counseling. West Virginia is one of the few states that does not have a work-release program for violent offenders. A horrific incident occurred in 1990, leading to the denial of individuals with violent crimes being accepted as candidates for the work-release programs. The incarcerated individuals that make parole after 15, 20, 30 years and in some cases longer, would benefit from being monitored and released gradually. Society could be assured the individual has become a success story in relation to the rehabilitation process if done this way.

Why would you want to release someone into society or have someone move in next door to you that has gone over a decade without human contact?

Just pushing these individuals out into society — after decades — into an unknown and technologically challenging world does not even seem plausible. What better way to see if someone is ready to be released than to process them slowly through a work-release center and monitor the challenges they face? This would enable society to not only monitor the incarcerated individual about to be released, but assure people this individual is ready to be a productive member of society.

I am a strong believer in education and I know without a doubt that the education department at Pruntytown Correctional Center and Lakin Correctional Center made a

This is what female "violent" offenders look like

By Caitlynn Acoff

This is what female "violent" offenders look like:

Hello! 😊 My name is Caitlynn Acoff, I'm 29 years old and am currently incarcerated at Albion Correctional Facility in New York. I was sentenced to 7 years and 5 post for 2nd degree Arson. My alcohol use led to a horrible decision one night while I was locked out of my apartment building. And while I had no intention of starting a fire, one unfortunately resulted in my reckless behavior. I tried to put it out, I called 911, and I helped people out of the building. I am now labeled "violent," which couldn't be farther than the truth.

I've also met a ton of wonderful, caring, gentle women who are also "violent" offenders because of a terrible mistake they immediately regretted and had remorse for.

Being that we're "violent," we have

little to no opportunities of going home early. Most of us maintain employment & clean disciplinary's, and also attend college and other volunteer programs. None of us are accepted for work release.

I am now 3 years sober, and am the happiest, most hopeful, most grateful I've ever been in my life. I facilitate "Phase 3" (going home), and am also a Peer Counselor with Transitional Services. I'm on the ministry team as an elder, choir member, and Praise Dance leader. I'm in my fourth semester of college, and will graduate next summer with an Associates in Liberal Arts.

I have 2 more years of incarceration.



This
is
What

Female
"VIOLENT"
Offenders

Look
Like

tremendous impact on where I am today. The recidivism rate, not only in the state of West Virginia but across the nation, statistically shows that success in returning to society productively is greatly affected by educational and rehabilitation programs. Finally, our voices from the dark are being heard, through prison reform committees, awareness groups, compassionate concerned administration/staff, and organizations in our society like yours that encourage us to speak out.

Society is starting to become aware of the "forgotten" in the prison system. I have seen current changes in our correctional institution under the new administration. The administration, however, is regulated by higher authorities and even if they wanted to change certain areas, they are not allowed.

There are some positive changes in the system, with one example being the softening of prison terminology. The Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation has changed "prison guard" to "correctional officer," "Warden" to "Superintendent," and even "prison" to "correctional center," but this changing of labels and titles does not change the conditions.

This is not the life I would have chosen, nor a cause I ever thought I would be advocating for. However, destiny is a product of our actions and choices. I needed to be incarcerated and accept responsibility for my unlawful actions. I was blessed to have some very influential educators, counselors, and correctional staff that believed in second chances and encouraged me to take education classes and positive programming.

The change we all need to see in our institutions will not just happen. So, based upon my hope that the majority of humanity is forgiving and believes in second chances, I have found inspiration to face each day as a new beginning and realize sometimes my knight in shining armor might just be a woman.

Freedom Song

By Gina Richie



My name is Gina Richie and I have been in and out of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections for 20 years. Addiction to crack cocaine led me into the criminal justice system in 1996. I had never even had a traffic ticket when I was arrested for uttering a forged instrument and sent to prison on my first felony conviction. Never having dealt with the court system, I didn't realize that by signing that plea bargain I would be classified as a "felon" and my life would never be the same.

I have never felt so humiliated as when I was released. Every door I walked through denied me the job because of my classification as a "Felon." My educational credits, professional certifications, and job experience were no longer accepted. The criminal justice system had blackballed me from my own life because of my mistakes.

In 2014, as I headed to prison for the fifth time, I began to listen to two of my mother's favorite gospel songs and God began to transform me. The first song, "I'm Still Holding On"⁴ helped me realize that if I just trust and hold on to God's hand, He would guide me to rebuild my life. The second song, "I Won't Go Back,"⁵ reassured me that He had set me free

from the addiction that had kept me bound and that I would never again have to wear the label of "Felon" that the criminal justice system attached to my name.

I wrote the poem below from some of the lyrics of these two songs. It became my mantra, my song of freedom, as I began rebuilding my life after leaving prison for the last time on December 8, 2016.

*They said I wouldn't make it.
They said I wouldn't be free today.
They said I would never amount to anything.
But I'm glad to say that I'm on my way and
growing more and more each day.
You see, when I was in the Oklahoma County
Jail, I gave God my hand.
And I asked Him to lead the way.
Though the road has been rough and the going
gets mighty tough,
I'm not going back because my past mistakes
don't define me today.*

You see, I've been Changed,

Healed,

F R E E D,

Delivered

I've found Joy,

Peace,

Grace and

Favor.

*And I won't go back to the way the Criminal
Justice System defined me.*

Today, God uses my life and my story to help others coming out of incarceration. I am currently an intern for Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform and I also work for The Education and Employment Ministry (TEEM), where we provide services, through our different programs, to give justice-involved individuals a new beginning and a new future. I am also an Oklahoma Department of Corrections Badged Volunteer, where I have the opportunity to go back inside and help others to become FREE.

The Crucifixion

By Billie Milas



Is Change Possible?

By Stephanie King



Stephanie King is a 60-year-old inmate who has served 25 years of a 60-year sentence. She has become an avid student while incarcerated, earning diplomas in Office Systems Technology, Culinary Arts, and Blackstone Paralegal Correspondence Course. She has received a Bachelor's degree in Christian Ministry from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and is currently enrolled in Tulane University through the Operation Restoration program at the Louisiana Correctional Institution for Women.

How much is required for society to believe a person has changed? When someone commits a crime and is sentenced to time behind bars, what must happen for the person to be given a second chance? I am not discounting the damage done to victims, families, or the community by the crime committed by the incarcerated person. But at what point have they paid the price required for the wrongs they did in the past? Please understand that especially in those cases where a person lost their life, I would never feel as if that life has a time or a price tag on it; however, I do believe that over time people change and they are not the person they were at the time they made a bad decision and committed a crime.

In Louisiana, the Parole and Pardon Board has historically been very hard-nosed and given very few chances for release to inmates serving time for violent crimes. At one time, the boards used the nature of the crime as a reason for denial. The nature of the crime will never change, no matter how long a person serves or how many programs they participate in. On the other hand, over time, the inmate may change and become a completely different person than the one who committed the crime. So at what point do they deserve an opportunity to be given a second chance?

I am currently serving a 60-year sentence for sitting in the car while my husband robbed and murdered a man. That single unexpected moment changed my life forever. I did not know, nor had I been told in advance, would I have believed what took place could occur. Never in a million years would I have been sitting in that car, had I been given a choice.

Flashback, one summer morning when my sick mother called out for help, the then 15-year-old me — asleep — ran to her side and tried repeatedly to call an ambulance. Remember, this was 1976 and 911 did not exist yet. I dialed number after number; the police, the hospital, and who knows what other numbers, all the while watching my mother take her last breaths. A troubled overweight teen, already looking for acceptance in all the wrong places, this failure to

save my dying mother filled me with an overwhelming guilt and sent me down a road that has not really ended yet. In some twisted ways, I am still paying the price for that wrongly, yet self-imposed, guilt. Seeing her die left me with issues I still deal with today.

So it is not a far stretch to imagine that I would never willingly be a part of taking a life. I turned to drugs to help quiet the guilt demons screaming inside my head. I made wrong choice after wrong choice, was arrested and placed on probation as a juvenile for running away from home, fighting, and breaking and entering. When I was released from supervision at 17, I left home and became pregnant within two weeks. I married an extremely abusive man, and continued down the road to destruction.

I always worked hard and took care of my children, but many things seen or heard by my oldest daughter certainly place me in the bad mother category. I always believed I was only hurting myself. This is a huge and hurtful lie that addicts tell themselves to justify their behavior. Oh, but if I could only return to my youth knowing what I know now. How incredibly different my life would be.

Fast forward to the now 30-year old me, serving four years of a 12-year sentence for drugs. I was a trustee and worked really hard, always going the extra mile to help others or to learn how to be a better person. Once again my past insecurities reared their ugly head. Codependency, the weakness of women prisoners across America, contributed to me developing a relationship with a man also serving time in the small parish jail where I was housed. As fate would have it, my first husband filed for divorce shortly before I was to be released, which led me to choose to stay in the town where my newly-formed relationship continued. I slowly began rebuilding my life, and 11 months later married the man I fell in love with while behind bars.

Three months later, I woke up in jail facing a first-degree murder charge. Talk about a huge wake-up call. I began to look at everything I

Fall Mums

By Mary Kathleen Tyler



born Dec 6, 1935, at Creston Iowa hospital
raised on an Iowa farm, all 9 years, including ~~the~~ kindergarten at a one room country school house; then high school at small town, Lenox; and then business

school, court reporting degree; employed as court reporter to Iowa District Court Judge Geo Van Allen, following other judges in layers then ending in District Court in Des Moines immediately before my crime

My ex husband whom I killed, and I were married in 1958; he went to Pharmacy school, then medical school, and then surgical.

rendering and 5 years of medical practice at the time of my crime. We had shortly been ~~divorced~~ divorced. Daughter: Lannette Tyler

Prior Activities

Work: Transcribed Hearings
Services hearings for appellate ~~and~~ jurisdiction for 26 years

Prior Education: Bachelor's, Indiana University; Bachelor's, Iowa University; Masters in Administration, California State University, Associates Degree

Des Moines Area Community College
Faith: Endeavor to be a devout Roman Catholic, play for mass for all services since 1983; church on hold by reason of virus

Teach piano when assigned

Passions

Education (just finished a delightful Jazz course taught by Grinnell College professor; will take two more in fall)

About 15 years ago an Iowa artist, Mary Muller, sponsored an art class here. Mary is nationally recognized; Portrait Society of America many awards and recognitions and brought her shells and students to this. I have exhibited in many fairs under her 'avante ~~and~~ notes' series.

~~Shakespeare's~~ Romeo: "I defy thee, Star" and Dylan Thomas, 'Do not go gently into the good night' over

night: Rage, rage against the dying light."

Convicted 1978, life sentence 1st degree murder; currently in my 45th year of incarceration



knew, believed, and did to figure out how I ended up where I was and how to never return to that place again. Less than a year later, newly-wedded husband pled guilty, receiving the death penalty. After two years of court hearings, I was sentenced to 60 years. I also received a very eye-opening look at the justice system and some of its flaws.

I learned that poor people, no matter what color they are, have a lower chance of receiving justice than rich people. I learned that many people talk about wanting to help those who need it, but few actually mean what they say. I learned that court-appointed lawyers are overworked and underpaid. Their idea of justice is a good plea bargain, not a fair trial. Most of them are really unprepared for some of the types of cases they are assigned. The most significant lesson of all is that while it may be relatively easy to become an inmate, becoming a released and former inmate is much harder.

I learned early on that prison is what you decide to make of it. Fortunately, the one good thing that came out of my co-dependency issues was that the desire to see my husband for inter-institutional visits had rules to follow. At the prison where I am housed, you had to have a certain custody status to participate in the visiting program, and that was my initial reason for staying out of trouble, during a time when I was not sure what I wanted to do with this sucky hand of cards life dealt me because of my really horrible choices.

I also knew immediately that the same Jesus I had been raised to know and believe in when I was a child would be the only help I had to complete this sentence in good health and with a sane mind. In addition, I have always been a hard working person, so I kept busy and passed the time by doing anything that would address issues that contributed to my incarceration and would in some way give back to the community, even if it was the one I now lived in.

By Louisiana law, certain inmates with sentences of 30 years or more could be eligible for parole after serving 20 years and being over

45 years of age. Since my sentence fell into that category I was eligible for parole after 20 years. Now, mind you, after being an inmate in prison for 20 years, you pick up on the fact that chances of you being granted parole at one of these hearings are very small. Add the fact you are absolutely certain there will be victim objections, which in Louisiana pretty much determines the outcome of the hearing, and know that initially I did not even want to go to the hearing. But as the time approached for the actual hearing, many people encouraged me about what I had done with my time and how I was no longer anything like the person who had been sent to prison to do time over 20 years ago.

Well... let me just say that the hearing was nothing like I had ever imagined or envisioned. I don't blame the board, the Assistant District Attorney, the victims, or anyone present. But I can honestly say that the hearing was my absolute worst nightmare come to life. What happened the day of the crime was bad, what happened the day I was sentenced was bad, but the hearing was every worst day rolled into one in a way that cannot be described with words. Sometimes I actually looked around the room to see if there was someone else present because there was no way that the District Attorney was talking about me and my case. It did not matter that there was some truth and some untruth to what was being said. No one ever cared to ask or look at the things I had done or how I tried to become a different person than the one arrested all those years ago. No one asked anyone at the institution who actually knew me now what I was like. They listened to the victim's family and the District Attorney and denied me.

Now I know that God had a plan that day that unfortunately differed a bit from the one I had built in my mind and that is ok. I knew deep in my heart going into the hearing, realistically in this state with the political climate that exists, chances of me going home at that time were small, but still I had hoped.

Then came the time when after swearing I would never attempt anything so foolish again, I

felt God prompting me to reapply. I watched miracle after miracle happen and doors open with help coming from every side. I felt so confident, I began giving away things I had held on to or literally hoarded over the years. Then, after one of the victims honestly, yet cruelly, stated how he felt, the one board member's "no" meant no release again... leaving me devastated and wondering: why had all these doors opened to be once again slammed in my face?

I still had to trust that there was a greater picture I could not understand. It took me a minute this last time to recover and get my bearings back. I know from watching those around me who are waiting on the Governor's signature on their clemency recommendation, some as long as four years, that waiting is harder than no. At least with no, you know what you are dealing with and begin to move on. However, sometimes the no can knock the wind out of you temporarily and just as hard. The one thing I held on to was that none of the good things I have done were to look good before a board. They were always to help me be better than the person who was at one point headed down a road that led straight to hell.

I will tell you that I have suffered bumps and bruises along the way of figuring out who I am. I have received a few minor reports, and the only one I ever had imposed in 23 years sent me to lockdown, but again, it was a lesson that God used to teach me something I could not have gotten any other way. Stupid choices have cost me all I earned several times, but I never repeat the same mistake twice. Fortunately, several administrations have believed in second chances and I have been able to show them that I am not the person I used to be.

So what does an inmate have to do to show society that they deserve a second chance? Thankfully, the political climate has changed a little bit since my hearings. The pardon board actually made a few recommendations to commute sentences of some lifers, making them eligible for release or parole. Some, or should I say a few, of those have finally been signed, but for the most part those recommendations are

still just recommendations and those who have received them still sit ... waiting. The Governor must sign the recommendations in order to make them a reality and he has not signed very many yet, at least not for the women. Most of those who have received favor served a significant portion of time and had little if no victim objections and the recommendations were for parole eligibility, but still better than life behind bars. They were also mostly active and highly respected members of the inmate community. Several others with a long sentence for a violent offense were granted parole hearings early and released. These days the Warden sits in and weighs in on their current character, as do several other employees who are associated with the inmate population, like chaplains, assistant wardens, and social workers.

Still, even with these changes, very few offenders receive a second chance, especially those with life. In Louisiana, life means life. There is no parole eligibility after a certain amount of years served. The pardon process cannot even begin until after 15 years with the chance to apply again only after five-year waiting periods after the initial application. Then, if you have particularly adamant victim opposition, the likelihood of you having any possibility for release is little to none. I do not hold ill will toward people who lost a beloved family member and want justice. I understand the need for justice as much as the next person. I hope that keeping a person incarcerated indefinitely gives them the peace they need to put the crime behind them as much as possible and move forward with their lives. I want each of them to have the best life possible in spite of the tragedy they suffered.

Does keeping the person incarcerated for long periods of time or forever make sense if the person has changed? I am not talking about just changing, but oftentimes we inmates are so drastically changed that people who once knew us barely recognize who we are. I don't mean our looks, but our actions. Our families, our old friends, people (like security and administration) who knew us when we first came to prison, these people can tell you that we are certainly different

and we could and would do well outside. We are capable of being productive, hard working, tax-paying citizens. **Why, at this point, would you want to keep a person behind bars when it only adds to the already overburdened correctional system?**

So, having asked and thought about these questions, what are some possible solutions? In Louisiana and in other states as well, women tend to be overlooked and forgotten because, let's be honest, corrections were designed for male inmates. Historically, we have been offered male programming, male clothing, male-oriented rules and mostly male prison or work-release centers. One change that needs to be looked into is giving women inmates equal attention. Women who spend at least 10 years behind bars are less likely to recidivate than men. Here at the prison where I have served my nearly 25 years, I can count on one hand the number of women who returned to jail after serving 10 or more years. Once that amount of time passes, either you get your priorities straight or honestly there is little hope for you. Women also tend to be serving life for one of two reasons: defending themselves during a domestic violence dispute or being a co-defendant of a man during a violent crime.

Don't misinterpret me, there are certainly women who have done things that they are fully responsible for and they may or may not have tried to change during their incarceration. But, in Louisiana, women tend to get harsher sentences for killing their spouse during an altercation than men who seek out their separated spouses to kill them. It is just how justice seems to be served. There is no self-defense law and it is hard to prove the crime was a result of being a battered woman. Then there is the other group of women who are codependent and usually victims themselves of low self-esteem, or battered women simply following along to avoid a beating. These women have some culpability, but rarely as much as the main male perpetrator. However, they often suffer the exact same consequences or even better yet, sometimes harsher, due to the old game of the first one to talk on the other gets the better deal.

Realistically, there are just as many male inmates who have changed and deserve a second chance as the women. However, being a woman makes me a bit biased to our particular cause. Nevertheless, the fight is for all inmates, not just one or a few. Louisiana has long suffered from the "Lock them up and throw away the key" mentality. The legislature has attempted to change this a bit, but only for the non-violent offenders. The few reforms they were able to pass were met with staunch opposition from many government officials, and every inmate who went home and committed another crime was plastered across the papers and news channels as proof that everyone should continue to be harsh on crime.

The saddest part of this portion of the picture is that the hundreds or thousands who left prison and did well, are tarred and feathered with the same brush as the few idiots who might never get it right. This is very discouraging to those who can and will never do anything else against the law for the rest of their natural lives. These inmates only want one opportunity to prove that they can and will be good citizens if just given the chance.

It would make sense to me that the boards investigate what these inmates participated in or accomplished during their time behind bars. I realize that some inmates can do anything to make themselves look good. Nonetheless, there are well-trained security officers and administrative workers who should be able to distinguish who is really changed and who is just going through the motions. If you spend lots of time around someone, you know who they really are.

I believe that the victims deserve a voice, but that the board should be able to make decisions based on all the evidence at hand, not just the voice of one side of the story. I pray that one day we can all look at each other and believe that we are redeemable and loved by God. Most of all, I pray for those harmed by crime and ask that God grant them peace and forgiveness despite the tragedies of their lives.

I believe that change is possible. I have watched my sisters and I grow and change into beautiful women who would never return to prison if just given one opportunity to prove we are different. I hope that, one day, the justice system understands that some of their money could be better spent in other ways than just locking us up and throwing away the key. Mostly, I pray for change and the belief in redemption that I know, seeing every day happening with my own eyes.

Rehabilitation! Who decides who's reformed?

By Monique Houston

My name is Monique Houston. I am 35 years old and born in Southwest Louisiana. I am currently incarcerated and have been for 15 years. Since being incarcerated I have done everything to keep a proactive mindset as I aim to obtain my freedom. I have obtained my AA in general studies and BA in Mass Communication. My dream is to mentor the youth and inspire them to be GREAT. For I am a firm believer that your purpose goes further than just you.

We can all agree that social justice is a broad subject. We can all agree that there's a need of social change in our country. In fact, social justice and the need for change is ongoing. It's kind of like politics. It's one of those subjects that is never ending. You know the kind with absolutely no period because there's always a change to be made.

Today, I would like to speak on the topic of the injustice that goes unnoticed in the prison system. Hopefully, a message is conveyed in a way that it brings about social change. The purpose is not to bring only awareness, but action to bring about change.

"Start by doing what's necessary, Then what's possible and suddenly

you're doing the impossible."
Quote: St. Francis of Assisi

Mass Incarceration continues to grow rapidly in our world today. We passively listen to the uproar of the need of a social change in the prison system. Somehow, each year the prisons rate is going up and up.

For example: Louisiana holds the same legislation in hopes of bringing a change to the excessive sentencing in the state. Sadly, each year laws are proposed and the vast majority are shot down before even passing to the House, which speaks volumes to the above quote. You must start somewhere, if you want some positive results.

We are constantly told prison are for rehabilitation and brings about the reforming of each individual.

Which I find very confusing, who decides who reform? What does Rehabilitation look like?

Some men and women has taken advantage of every self help program the prison offers. Yes, being able to go to college while in prison is a plus because our end goal is home. Returning home to our love one gives us the zeal to become the best version of ourselves. Sadly, this is sometimes shot down after legislations or parole and clemency hearings.

James Baldwin once stated: Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced-

What a brilliant and much needed statement. How can we bring a change to the Mass Incarceration if we refuse to change it? How can

we bring a change in Mass Incarceration if we use the prisons like warehouses?

There's another inspiring quote: Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are - Benjamin

My Father use to say, a blind man - went into a dark room, looking for a black cat that's not even there. Let's not be that person, who acts blindly towards the justice system. The need is there. There's strength in numbers. If we all stand together, we can bring an end to Mass Incarceration and we will see REFORM in prisons. Be the LIGHT that shines in all surrounding

Written By:
Monique Houston

Rehabilitation!
Who decides who's reformed?

5 of Wands

By Andrea Morris

I am incarcerated at Iowa Correctional Institution for Women. My artistic journey started here in 2007 when I learned to paint from some wonderful volunteers. We had an amazing art program then that really gave me a place to land when I first came here. I now teach art to inmates here and hope it will continue to be a way that I can give back to my community after I leave here.

Title of Work: 5 of Wands

Watercolor on Paper (130lb Cold Press)



Cosmic Synergy

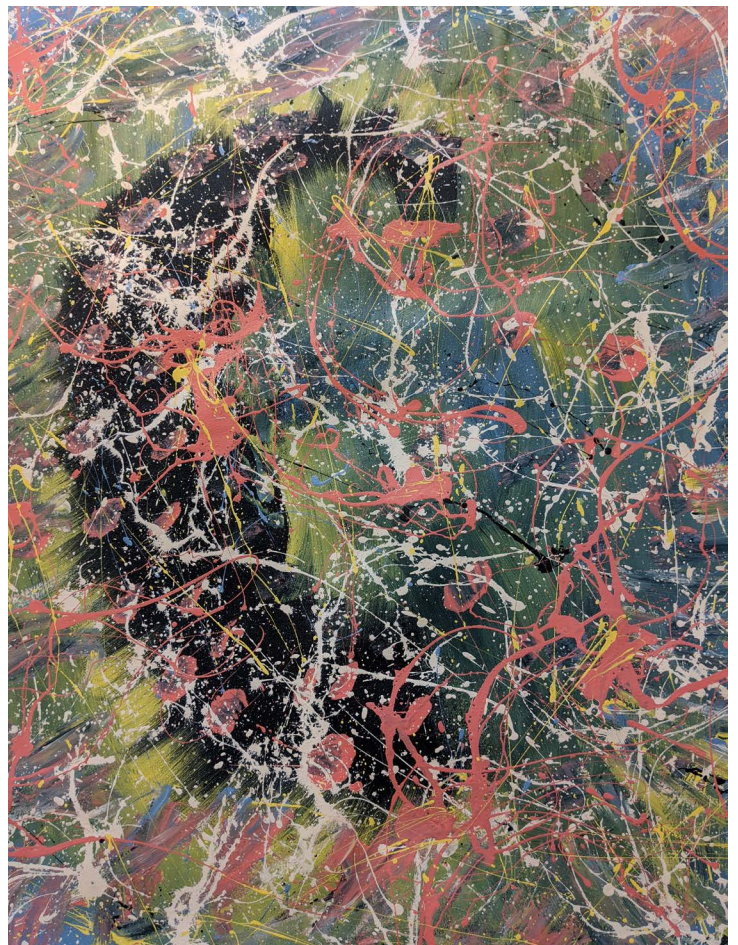
By Jerry Metcalf

Jerry Metcalf is a self-taught writer and artist who has spent the past 26 years behind bars in Michigan. At the age of 20, he shot and killed a man. For that deplorable act of violence, he is truly and deeply sorry. He is now a pacifist who has devoted his life to making the world a better place. He trains service dogs for Paws With a Cause (pawswithacause.com), and donates his time to helping those who suffer from mental illness.

During his time in prison, he's learned several trades, earned a degree, read thousands of books, and has grown more in touch with the Universe. He loves animals, nature, and people. He also can't wait to transition back into society, where he believes he can help make a difference.

In his spare time, he meditates, paints abstract art, and exercises vigorously to maintain his health.

If you wish to read some of his writing (fiction, poetry, nonfiction), view his art, buy one of his books, or purchase some of his art, you may do so by visiting him at Facebook.com/Jerryametcalf.jr or Twitter [@JerryMetcalfJr1](https://Twitter.com/JerryMetcalfJr1). or Instagram. [com/jerryametcalf_artist.writer](https://Instagram.com/jerryametcalf_artist.writer)



I'm in this prison all alone

By Rose Love "Veach"

Will I ever get to leave?
Deep inside I do believe.
Even though I have no home,
Nothing but the streets I roam.

I have no sight,
There is no light,
But people tell me,
The future is bright.

Today I give up dope,
So I know there can be hope.
I thank God for holding my hand,
And believing in me when I was dead.

A few years have passed,
I have been clean,
All because of Jesus,
When I was on my knees.

Nurse Navigation for Court-Involved Women

By Assemblywoman *Eliana Pintor Marin*, District 29

To properly serve court-involved women, we must invest in comprehensive health care programs and services. As Assembly Budget Chair, I have helped allocate funds to the New Jersey Reentry Corporation, specifically toward The Women's Project's Nurse Navigator position.

NJRC's Nurse Navigation Program ensures formerly incarcerated women have access to critically-needed medical and behavioral (addiction treatment and mental health) services. NJRC Medical Director Dr. Gloria Bachmann, Professor of Obstetrics & Gynecology and Medicine, Associate Dean for Women's Health, Co-Director of Women's Health Institute (WHI), and Constance Kusi, Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, MSN, PMHNP, meet with women at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility on a monthly basis to assist with the transition to community-based health care services.

In compliance with HIPPA, women complete a comprehensive, 14-page assessment form which enables them to provide their medical histories as well as individual mental health, addiction, and medical concerns in a confidential manner. Services commence upon release and reentry into the community. In partnership with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers (CCBHC), addiction treatment facilities, and medical providers, NJRC ensures the continuity of care and services for these women as they reenter society.

New Jersey Reentry Corporation offers group-based discussions, activities, and support through our "Circle of Care" initiative. This important component of the Nurse Navigation program provides a platform that serves as a support group for women by empowering them to make better informed

medical, behavioral, financial, and relational decisions, be better able to provide for self-care, and to access necessary licensed medical and behavioral services. Through this initiative, women are provided with information on available resources and how to navigate the complexities of the healthcare system. As part of the preventive care provided, health education and health promotion are achieved through Circle of Care support group meetings.

With the inception of the Francine LeFrak Wellness Center, NJRC provides medical services to all reentry individuals regardless of their healthcare status. This state-of-the-art Wellness Center allows both male and female clients to receive medical, behavioral health, dental, and nutritional support at no cost. Services for women included screenings for preventative health (e.g., hypertension, hyperlipidemia, diabetes, breast and cervical cancers), dental care, nutritional/dietary consultation, and mental health services.

In 2022, 3,215 NJRC program participants

were enrolled in The Women's Project. In the third quarter of 2022, 139 court-involved women were provided with health-related services ranging from medical, psychiatry, behavioral health, obstetrics and gynecology, dental, and other health specialty services. 54 women enrolled in the third cohort of Circle of Care support groups. These Circle of Care meetings are conducted in collaboration with clinicians and experts from Robert Wood Johnson Medical Center (RWJBH), YWCA, Rutgers University Hospital, and Jersey Shore Medical Center team members, such as Dr. Gloria Bachmann, Dr. Phillips, Dr. Noelle Aikman, and Dr. Dawn Norman.

I am proud to support NJRC's women program participants through The Women's Project. My experience working with New Jersey's Commission on Reentry Services for Women has demonstrated that when advocates from a wide array of sectors — including policymakers — combine their expertise to conceptualize innovative programs, justice-involved women reap the benefits.

Success Story from a Beneficiary

I am glad I found New Jersey Reentry. I want to thank them for all their support. I would also like to thank reentry for introducing me to Ms. Constance who provided the help I have been searching for and needed. She was an eye-opener. She first helped me see the importance of paying attention to my health and helped me see a psychiatric doctor in less than a week. She also introduced me to the women's very educative support group. I'm grateful!

- Yalanda Thompson, Elizabeth



A Tale of a Lifelong Friendship and of Shoddy, Callous Medical Treatment in a Florida Prison

By John Lantigua

John Lantigua is a writer and editor for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Florida.





This picture was taken in 2015 during a visit by Chrissie to Lowell. Paula Spiegel on left; Chrissie Deaton on right.



Paula on left, Chrissie on right as kids.

Chrissie Deaton, 54, met Paula Spiegel when they were both nine years old, living in the same neighborhood in Seffner, Florida. They became best friends and have remained best friends, even though their lives took drastically different turns.

Chrissie graduated high school, but Paula dropped out. Her mother was an alcoholic and her home life was not easy. Paula eventually ended up in a relationship that involved heavy drug use.

Today, Chrissie lives in Indiana, where she is a certified personal trainer and instructor. Paula is serving 30 years in prison for dealing amphetamines. She entered Lowell Correctional Institution for Women, in Ocala, Florida in 2005 and is due for release, at the earliest, in 2031.

Chrissie says Paula has turned her life around since entering prison. She joined the Faith Based Program in her first year. She then worked 13 years for Prison Rehabilitative Industries and Diversified Enterprises (PRIDE), rising up to an administrative position where she was responsible for purchasing and other office

duties. She has also worked in the commissary and groundskeeping.

"We were like sisters as children and I love her like she is a sister to this day," Chrissie says.

In April, Paula was diagnosed with melanoma. Email messages Chrissie received over the past year have left her extremely worried for her life-long friend. She has had to intercede with prison officials various times to try to get her friend adequate care. She has done so, in part, by contacting the office of State Rep. Susan Valdes, Democrat of Tampa, and getting Valdes' staff to run interference.

Here are excerpts of emails Chrissie received from Paula in the past year. They contain not only an account of shoddy medical care but an unnecessary, callous failure to communicate with Paula about her condition, which caused her severe anxiety.

Email exchanges between Paula and Chrissie

April 8

Today I had my first skin biopsy on my right arm. He used a scalpel and just cut a piece off... nonumbing nothing! Hurt like hell but it had to be done. Next month he'll do another one on my face. He said that one's most likely (to) be fine.

April 27

Today I was called to medical. They had the results (of) my biopsy on my arm. it is malignant melanoma! So, I have had it for a few years which isn't good. I will keep you informed but... I feel confident everything will be just fine. Would you send me some info on it? just so I can be aware.

Hope you are doing well! I love you bunches.

May 2

I put in a request for records Wednesday morning, so I am waiting for that. Things move pretty slow here in medical even more so since most of the nurses left to go give Covid vaccinations in the free world for better money! They even closed down an infirmary here since I was in there in December.

I have a list of things to request from the outside specialist when I get there: sunscreen, straw hat pass, long sleeve shirt pass, lower bunk pass, permission to be removed from outside squads, and pain medication if needed. I am practicing to remember all the items on the list so I will remember to ask.

NO worries. OK? Take care, my best friend. GOD is Good all the time!

May 15

I tried calling you again today. You didn't answer... so I know you were just busy. Oh, I didn't get either of your emails from the 7th until today. Sometimes it makes me so mad!

I went to the provider Monday for a follow up. I say provider because he's a nurse not a doctor. it didn't go well. He refused all my requests—sunscreen, straw hat, etc.—and I left mad. Actually. he spoke to me like I was a bother and was whining! He said I don't need a hat or long sleeves and that the melanoma was contained! What a joke. Apparently he doesn't know much about melanoma. Well life goes on. right? I should be going out for surgery either this week or next. I'll write as soon as I am back and fill you in. Please don't worry about me. I am confident I am fine!

Love you bunches!

May 24

Nothing new here. I am still waiting on surgery. I don't understand how an urgent request could take so long. but it's in God's hands! I have to believe I'll be just fine.

June 13

Wow! Another week gone so quickly! Can you believe half of this year is already over? Life is going so fast... too fast really. One part of me is glad because I want to go free...but another part of me doesn't want to rush my life. You know!

I should go out for care this week sometime. Medical had me go down there Friday to tell me they "overlooked my file" and that I will go out asap. We'll see!

June 30

There are three names blacked out for outside medical trips this morning. Maybe I will be one of them. We don't know until the last minute, because of security reasons. Keep your fingers crossed!

Here he comes now with the list. Yes! I am going out today!

I will write you when I get back.

July 1

Hey there,

I will make this quick, because I want to go back to sleep, but I had my surgery today. They put me under, and I am still feeling the effects of the anesthesia. My arm is very sore, but the cancer has been removed. I will have a PET scan soon. The oncologist said this will tell them if my cancer has spread or not. All is well and thank you for your prayers. The surgeon ordered me Lortabs (a pain medication) but the Lowell nurse told me I probably won't get them and there isn't any ibuprofen available in the dorm. So that's my issue as of now. No medication available.

I love you bunches!

Pinwheel

By Kenneth Darr



July 4

I am feeling better. I am still in some pain but a marked improvement. Thursday, Friday and Saturday were rough going. I had a visitor tonight. The warden came to check up on me. I'm thinking you might have had something to do with that. Thanks for caring about me! I love you too. I let him know I was feeling better as of today! Who did you contact?

July 6

I was called down to medical today to sign a release of information for you and State Representative Susan Valdez. When you get my info, i.e. pathology reports and such, would you please mail me copies? I would like to know what's up too. Thank you for your efforts.

Would you look up an address for me? I want to purchase a wedding band. I have permission from the chaplain because I am married. The name of the company that sells inexpensive ones is 'Jewelry Gift Depot,' and I need a catalog and order form. The women in here say they are as low as \$20. So, please and thank you for checking on it.

July 14

The surgeon said he'd see me in two weeks and that's tomorrow. If I am not scheduled for my stitches to be removed by Friday I will go to triage and insist they take them out there. I am supposed to go out for the PET scan soon. They don't tell me anything really. When I was at our medical unit on the 9th I asked about the pathology report and was told I would have to wait for oncology. Could you find out for me?

July 15

(Paula was recently transferred to another area of the prison)

I was thinking maybe you could send that email about my stitches. Two stitches are growing skin over them and if they stay much longer it will be even more skin. I am not

scheduled for medical tomorrow, and I was going to just go down there. I don't know this compound well enough to be confident. I'll just go and see and, if I get turned away, I'll write you. Okay? I am going to try to sleep now.

Love you bunches!

July 21

I'm doing fine. I would have called you last night, but our one and only working phone (in the dorm) is NOT working! I Had my PET scan yesterday and got in late in the day. I found out more information about the lack of pain meds. My surgery was July 1 and the order was written July 4, which was the same day Warden Rossiter came to see me. But the prescription was never filled probably because by that time I had given up and stopped asking for them.

NOW, my stitches are the new issue. It's been three weeks and no one will take responsibility and remove them. July 1 the surgeon wrote instructions for me to return in two weeks. When that did NOT happen, last Thursday I went to triage wound care and asked for them to be removed. The nurse said I would see the provider and he would remove them. Friday I saw Dr Benoit (the gynecologist), but he referred me to the surgeon. So, I went to triage wound care again over the weekend. They are annoying.

No luck. Won't remove stitches. And there is not an appointment scheduled with the surgeon!

If they have NOT been removed by Friday night I will have to remove them myself. It can't be that hard to do! I shouldn't have to worry about my stitches being removed! What's that all about?

July 22

I have good news to report! My PET scan was all clear and my biopsy from surgery has clean borders. Therefore, I am cancer free. I will go to see oncology for immunotherapy for probably five years just to help keep it away. Just wanted

you to share in my celebration!

Love you bunches!

July 27

Dear Chrissie,

How are you doing? I am doing well all things considered. My only real issue is when will they take my stitches out. It's now going on four weeks, which is way to long for stitches to be in someone's body. Today my arm has actual little blisters on the wound and is becoming quite painful. I went to medical at least two times last week and in total I have asked at least 8 times to 8 different people for them to be removed. I hear the same story They have to come out from the surgeon. BUT WHAT IF THEY NEVER SCHEDULE ME TO SEE THE SURGEON? He said follow up in two weeks and that was four weeks ago!

July 28

I am headed to medical. I have NO appointment but here's what it looks like. They keep putting me off and I think it's gotten infected. We'll see.

July 28

It didn't work out for me! Medical said they can't find my file and all providers are busy with intake at the main unit. Come back tomorrow They are just driving me crazy!



July 29

Do you see the white string like thing hanging out of the wound? I believe it is gauze that got sewn into the wound. I have been telling medical every time I see them, and they don't seem to either care or think it's important. but I believe it's the root cause of my infection.

Have you heard anything? Do you think I need to go back down there today? I tell you these things in case things go bad. I am going to have you put down as my emergency contact. just in case something happens.

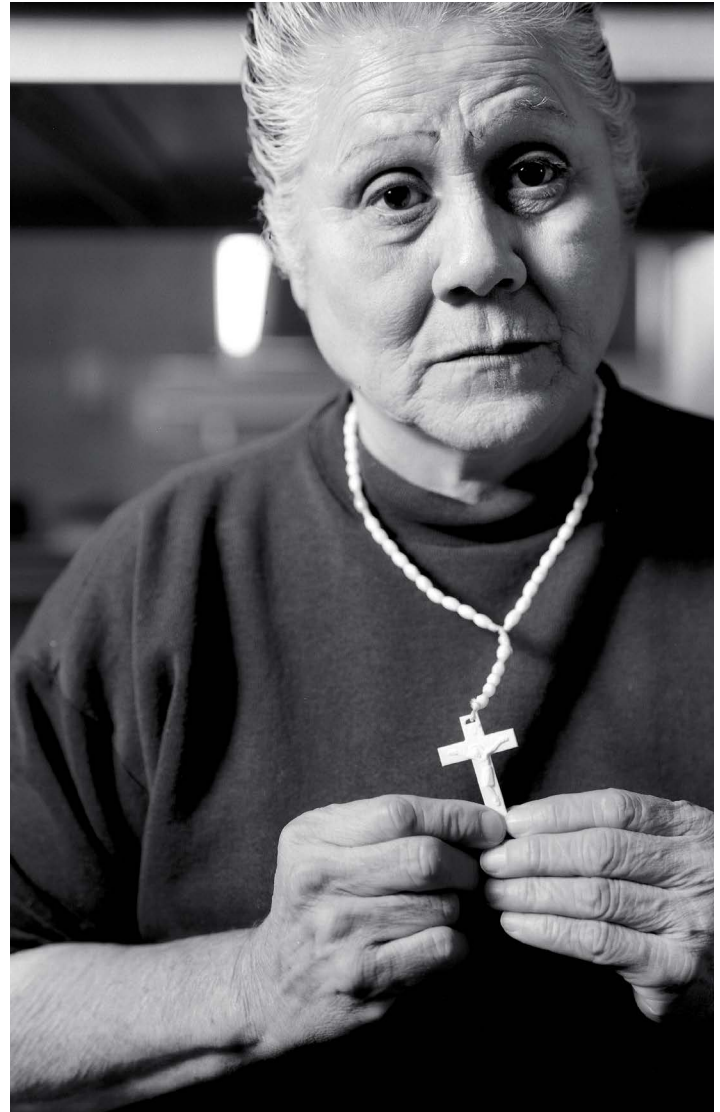
Let me know your thoughts when you have time!

Aug. 1

Good morning!

I am so much better this morning. Thank you, Jehovah! The surgeon said the loose string were internal stitches that made their way up and out. When he removed them (believe me when I say it stung like a -----!) I had a sense of relief immediately. He said the tumor was bigger than the original biopsy report, so he recommends a lymph node (be) removed in my right armpit for testing as a precaution. So, I said of course whatever you think is best.

I absolutely believe you are the reason I was added to the (medical) trip ticket. I was added last minute. Why else? We left here at 5 am and didn't return to my dorm until 1 am. I love you bunches!



Consuelo Muñoz

By Ron Levine

Consuelo Muñoz, 63
Spousal Abuse

I'm an alcoholic, my husband is an alcoholic and we fight all the time. He used to like to go out drinking with other women and I found out about it and, like, I'm a very jealous woman

If God permits for me to go home I'm gonna change my life, but I need God's help to make it with my addiction. And I know that God is very merciful and powerful, that there's nothing that Jesus Christ cannot do. I just have to seek him and he will take me wherever I want to go. If God allows me, I plan to be a good mother and a good wife and some day I will make it.

Aug. 5

Hey there,

I don't feel so strong at this minute. I am having a hard time keeping positive and my faith that I am healed. Why am I having another biopsy? Lymph node?

I never told you about medical call last Friday. My group of inmates were done with treatment by 11 am, but one of us was taken to the Jacksonville hospital because she required immediate care that was beyond the scope of where we were.

We were lined up in the hallway and this man on a stretcher laid still staring blankly into the air. He was dead. An inmate was unhooking the man's breathing line and there were paramedics standing around talking and laughing. The inmate that was unhooking the air hose was told to move the dead man out of our way so we could go. It was the saddest thing I had seen. No one cared that this man was dead! The people were not at all sad. They were just fine. Let me tell you I cried pretty much off and on for the entire trip back.

Aug. 10

I was taken to (an) outside medical call today to consult with my new surgeon. I am very tired so I will keep this short.

He is going to remove the scar and clean out the infection. Then shoot the radioactive dye in where the tumor was and watch for changes. Then he will test the nodes and if they are cancerous he will go back in and remove all nodes under that arm. He said that this should have been done when my initial surgery was done. But try not to worry because this doesn't mean I have more cancer. It's to make sure that I don't. Please keep me in your prayers and know I love you!

Paula

Aug. 14

Good morning!

My visit to medical was a little unnerving. He said that the surgeon ordered my next procedure urgent and he would process it urgent as well. So, why is it urgent if I am OK? That's the big question! I mean I have an infection in it. It's green now... maybe that's it. I'll send you a picture to see what I mean.

(For the next ten weeks, Paula did not discuss her medical challenges. Then the worrisome emails resumed.)

Oct. 25

Goodness, life was very hard for a few days. I haven't been seen and it's been over a week since I requested medical help.

Would you inquire about my surgery? I have no idea what's happening, and every time I ask, I get nowhere.

Nov. 17

Hello there,

I just want to let you know I had surgery Monday. They did the nuclear test on my incision and ended up removing, I believe, six lymph nodes and taking more from my first incision. So, I am cut under my armpit from side to side, held together with glue. My new incision is just a little bit bigger than the last one. I will inform you of more as soon as I know the results. Probably in two weeks. No worries! They kept me in isolation for a couple of days. Probably for the best so I could deal with my feelings! I will write again in a day or so.

Nov. 29

Hey there,

I need my stitches out. Tomorrow, I am going to go to medical. If they give me a hard time, will you help me?

Nov. 30

I went to medical today and was told that I have to wait for my follow up appointment with the surgeon. I told her that was supposed to have been 10 days to 14 days and it was 16 days now. I also asked her to check my incision under my arm because it's even more sore now. She said it looked fine. I know I see a pus pocket and it's swollen. Oh Chrissie, why me? I will go back again tomorrow and try to get help! if no go, then yes please help me!

Thanks so much!

Dec. 3

I still have my stitches and I feel I am doing a repeat of the last time. I can't get them to take them out once again. My armpit is feeling better with no help from medical. But maybe you could help me get my stitches out. Coming this next Monday, which would be the soonest they could be removed, it will be 22 days. Stitches are supposed to be in 10 - 14 days max. Can you help me find out if my lymph nodes were or not cancerous? No one will tell me anything!

Dec. 5

Thank you for inquiring about my health. I am going to finally tell you what happened with my last surgery. I was going to spare you, but people's awareness (of) these medical issues might help us on the inside.

I went out to Jacksonville two weeks ago last Monday. When I arrived, there was a wing or area set up for Department of Corrections patients. They took me for a nuclear dye test. The technician injected four small canisters of nuclear dye directly into the center of the incision site. Yes, it hurt terribly. No numbing or anything. Then I had to keep laying as still as I could with my arms over my head. The technician would not discuss what she was marking for the surgeon. I did know that if there were any molecular changes he would remove them but I wasn't told anything else.

From there they took me to prep for surgery. The surgeon came in and marked my initial incision where he was going to operate. At some point I woke up. I believe I was still in surgery because it was very bright and I was in incredible pain. I tried to cry out and couldn't. Then I went back to sleep. When I came to, I was in a lot of pain. I couldn't move my arm at all and was scared. They gave me medication through my IV to help, but instead it made me sick to my stomach. I was asking: what did he find and do? One nurse said she could not read his writing, but it appeared that it might have been six lymph nodes removed as well as (some of) my outer arm.

The trip back to prison was awful. I was sick most of the way. I rode by myself in the back of the van. When I arrived back at Lowell I was met with a wheelchair and taken to medical. I wasn't told anything, and no questions were answered. I was placed in an isolation cell where it was freezing cold. An isolation cell is a negative pressure cell so the air flows constantly into the room. It's usually used for things like Covid 19, not after surgery. I remained isolated wearing the same clothes until Wednesday afternoon. if it wasn't for the inmate workers I wouldn't have even been able to brush my teeth. They found me a t-shirt, toothbrush, toothpaste and hand soap. I was only given an ibuprofen when I could get someone's attention. I wasn't allowed out of the cell by the day shift at all and my questions were ignored. I asked for other pain medication and was told none were ordered.

Finally on Wednesday I was released from isolation and before I left the nurse changed my bandages for the first time. I was to report back to medical that coming Sunday. The sticky stuff that holds the bandages on was making my skin raw. By that Sunday I had places where my skin was actually gone.

That leads me to last Monday, the two week mark. I went to medical call and I could visibly see pus under my arm. I wanted my stitches out but was told I will have to go back out for the surgeon to remove them. God help me! Please not again like last time! I went back yesterday

to try again and was told the same thing. Thank God my underarm is doing better. No thanks to our medical staff though. I can't even find out if the lymph nodes were cancerous! Nothing. No information is being given to me! None!!

Today is day 19 after surgery and I still have my stitches and have no idea what was found!

Eventually, Paula reported back that she was free of cancer.

"According to them," Chrissie says.

Medical care in Florida prisons has been critically poor for many years. After lawmakers decided in 2011 to save money by outsourcing prison medical services to private companies, the care became even worse as companies cut corners to increase profits. State spending per individual person fell to one of the lowest levels in the nation.

But that move ended up costing the state tens of millions of dollars beyond the contract terms because of successful class-action lawsuits brought against the Florida Department of Corrections for scandalously poor care. The courts ruled that the state had failed to provide

adequate treatment for mental health issues, Hepatitis C, hernia care, and other afflictions.

Loss of medical workers, who have left the Florida Department of Corrections for better paying work during the COVID-19 pandemic, has only caused greater staffing shortages. Failure to address the health concerns of the incarcerated has added to the tensions inside prisons. In 2021, then Florida Secretary of Corrections Mark Inch said low staffing levels of guards and other personnel had brought the prisons dangerously near a breaking point.

"If we can't find nurses to work in our hospitals, it's 10 times worse to work in our prisons," Florida Republican State Senator Jeff Brandes told ABC News. "We have a huge shortage of nursing staff, of physicians, and that is creating problems throughout the entire system. Especially when the state has a responsibility to provide healthcare for these individuals."

Voters all across the country should hold the legislators accountable and ensure that people who are currently incarcerated receive the medical care they need. Imprisonment should not be a death sentence.

The Women's Project: Developing Best Practices for Court-Involved Women

By Dr. Gloria Bachmann, New Jersey Reentry Corporation Medical Director, Commission on Reentry Services for Women Medical Committee Chair

The New Jersey Reentry Corporation is committed to developing and implementing best health care practices for court-involved women.

In 2022, in addition to the direct health care service provision facilitated by The Women's Project, the Women's Reentry Commission spearheaded over a dozen presentations,

publications, and informational videos.

By leading presentations at state and national conferences, the Commission increases awareness of the health care needs of justice-involved women. This past year, we led the following state and national presentations:

- AlShowaikh K, Hutchinson-Colas J,

McGreevey J, Bachmann G. Incarcerated Women: Need to Address Sexual Health. ISSWSH annual meeting. 3/2022

- Fang J, Hutchinson-Colas J, McGreevey JE, Bachmann G. Hypertensive Disorders in Pregnant Incarcerated Women: A Review of the Current Literature. Rutgers Women's Health Institute. NJ OGS annual meeting. 5/2022
- Perkiss E, Schach E, Al-Showaikh K, Hutchinson-Colas J, McGreevey J, Bachmann G.
- Animated Educational Videos on Cancer Screening: Resource to Educate Post-Menopausal Incarcerated. Annual 2022 NAMS meeting 9/2022
- Sarich T, Karcnik D, Patel N, Wilson A, and the NJ Reentry Team of Bachmann G, Hutchinson-Colas, McGreevey J. Mental health profiles of dishonorably discharged women. Annual 2022 NAMS meeting 9/2022
- Schach E, Katz, A. Hutchinson-Colas J, McGreevey J, Bachmann G. Using Trauma Informed Care to Improve Women's Health Outcomes after Reentry. National Commission on Correctional Health Care annual meeting. (selected for plenary oral presentation) 10/2022
- Bachmann G, McGreevey J, Phillips N. Trauma Informed Care for Court Involved Women. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists annual Junior Fellows meeting (invited plenary oral presentation) 10/2022

It is my hope that these presentations are used to inform policies, practices, and procedures regarding the care of court-involved women, both within New Jersey and beyond.

The Women's Reentry Commission also wrote several peer-reviewed publications for the health care team in order to deepen their consciousness of the health care barriers court-involved women face and the ways to eliminate them. Our research can be utilized to inform both templates of care in the health care sector and policy in the public sector. Recent professional publications

in 2022 to emerge from the Commission include the following:

- Nair S, McGreevey J, Hutchinson-Colas J, Turock H, Chervenak F, Bachmann G and Commission on Women's Reentry-Health Subcommittee. Pregnancy in incarcerated women: need for national legislation to standardize care. Journal of Perinatal Medicine <https://doi.org/10.1515/jpm-2021-0145>
- Schach E, Kothari J, Perkiss E, Hutchinson-Colas J, Turock H, McGreevey J, Bachmann G and the NJ Commission on Women's Reentry Health Committee. Symptomatic menopause: Additional challenges for incarcerated women. Maturitas. 8/2021 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2021.05.009>
- Hessami K, Hutchinson-Colas J, Chervenak F, Shamshirsaz A, Zargarzadeh N, Norooznezhad A, Grunebaum A, Bachmann G. J Perinatal Medicine. Prenatal care disparity and pregnancy outcome among incarcerated pregnant individuals in the United States: A systematic review and meta-analysis. 2022
- Hutchinson-Colas J, McGreevey J, Bachmann G. Structural Racism and the Impact on Incarcerated Midlife Women. Women's Midlife Health. 8(1):12 2022 DOI:10.1186/s40695-022-00081-y

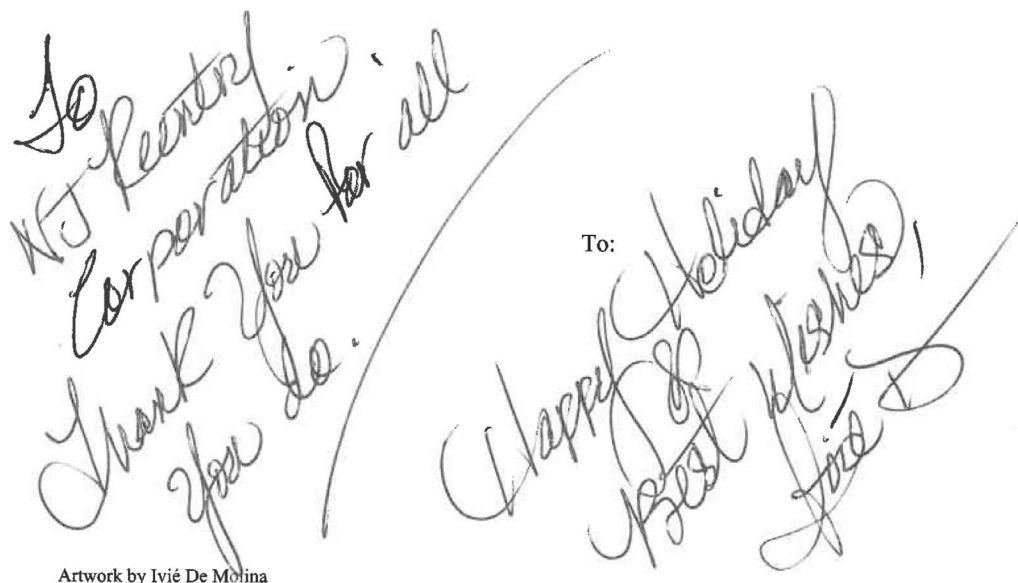
It is critical that the Commission's educational resources reach justice-involved women. The Commission has created resources such as the [Health Resource Guide](#) and [Health Handbook](#), which court-involved women can reference to better understand their health needs and identify nearby providers. Additionally, we have produced Powtoon videos, which educate court-involved women on health care topics such as [COVID-19](#), [colon cancer](#), [lung cancer](#), and [breast cancer screening](#) in an engaging, accessible manner.

I am honored to lead NJRC's health care initiatives for women and I look forward to commencing many more projects in 2023 that will enhance the care of not only justice-involved individuals, but also their families and loved ones.

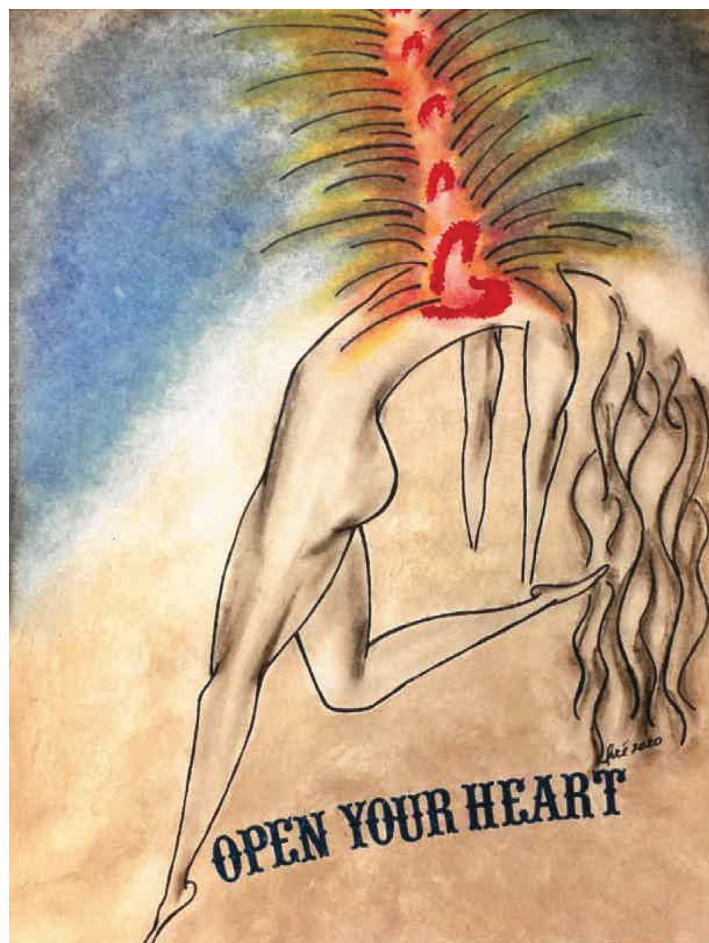
Open Your Heart

By Ivié DeMolina

artist, writer, and criminalized survivor in NYS. All proceeds are for Ivié's legal fund. To learn more and join us visit <https://bit.ly/ForgiveandFreeHer>



Artwork by Ivié De Molina



Read Between the Lines

By Rasheeda Bagwell

I am the coordinator for the Philadelphia Mural Arts Restorative Justice Women's Reentry Program. I am a formerly incarcerated individual. December 18th, 2022 will mark four years since my release. I was incarcerated at Montgomery County Correctional Facility.

The daughter, the sister, the caretaker, my children call me Mommy, but to the Department of Corrections I am only a commodity! Making a decision, a bad choice, has forever scarred me, There are too many like me...The numbers are alarming. Stop for one moment and ask yourself: are you as bad as your worst decision? Well, neither are we... The innocent, the juveniles, the men, the women: most aren't locked away for the actual crime, but more so for modern day slavery. I mean, is Mass Incarceration much different from the capture and enslave ideation? Please do not get this misconstrued, it is not solely about one color other than green. How much can the prisons profit off convicting them or me....

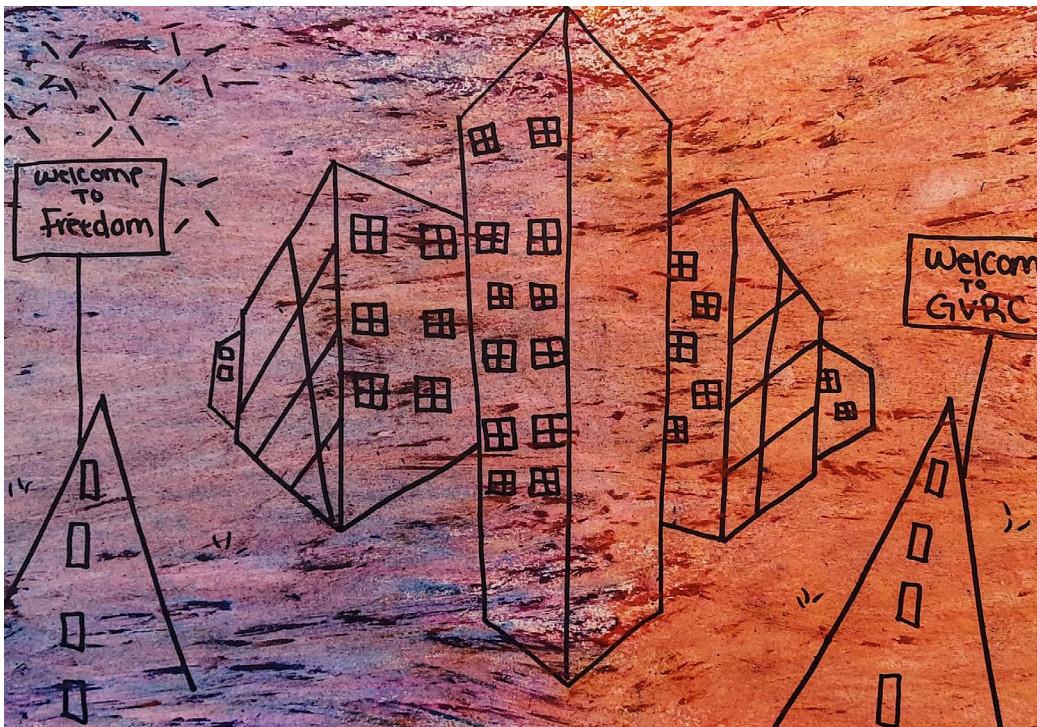
Inside

By Melisha Nunn

lockdowns, phone calls, limited
only can eat certain times day
watch tv for certain limits
worry bout get kill bullied other inmates
to crack assaulting
feeling alone lifestyles jurisdictions
prisonments freedom to be urself cus
u following someone else's rules depressions
not seeing family friends
not receive ph calls u dont have emotion
on my back
sex trafficking in prisonments
life impacts living in real life
cause you just hope freedom difference
change in society
probation no mistakes make some
choices that got me there in first
place

Welcome to GVRC

By A.M.



Youth Arts: Unlocked (YAU) is a non-profit organization based in Genesee County, Michigan, whose mission is to bring the arts and humanities to incarcerated and justice-impacted youth, and their work to the public.

The girls and young women who created these pieces come from Flint, Michigan, and surrounding localities and were residents of the Genesee County Juvenile Justice Center (GCJJC, formerly known as GVRC), a short-term detention facility in Flint.

While incarcerated, they have the opportunity to participate in YAU's HERSTORY: UNLOCKED program of gender-responsive dance and spoken word poetry workshops as well as visual arts workshops.

For the Record

By Elizabeth Hawes



Elizabeth M. Hawes

Those who wanted COVID shots got them on March 22, 2021: the Johnson & Johnson version. There were five injection sites set up in the gym — meaning a chair & small table behind five folding cubicle-like screens. I got my shot from the prison dentist. This was comforting because she is competent and nice. She is from another country that may or may not be India. I was surprised that the injection did not hurt. After our inoculation, we were given a sticker & a 3.5 oz. bag of coffee. Most people liked these parting gifts. I don't drink coffee. I have sticker-indifference.

SIDE EFFECT FACTS:

1. As the day wore on, my arm felt like someone had punched me in the shoulder.
2. That night I slept poorly, as I'm a side-sleeper with a low tolerance for pain.
3. I walked around with a dime-sized bruise on my upper left arm for three weeks
4. I wore a band aid over the aforementioned bruise for five days.
5. I'm not blaming anyone. I bruise easy.

People started getting COVID again about a week later; several staff plus at least nine positive cases. Three of seven living units went on quarantine-lockdown. My unit was locked from March 28 to April 8. We were in our cells but for 75 minutes a day.

THINGS WE DID IN 75 MINUTES:

1. Laundry
2. Phone calls
3. Shower
4. Use the kiosk
5. Use the microwave
6. Sharpen pencils
7. Clean our cells
8. Sit outside the unit at a green-painted picnic table

It felt all too familiar. Late March 2020, visiting & activities were canceled. For months, we weren't allowed to walk in the courtyard. We had two breaks — 55 minutes & 25 minutes — out of our cells. We took our meals in our cells & got our mail slid under our doors. There were many days when we weren't allowed to use the phones or shower. As of April 6, 2020, I had no work assignment until October (October 3, 2020).

For a brief period in September & early October (2020), we had three breaks out of our rooms, but with more positive cases we had six more weeks of lockdown between October 20 and December 9.

It's now the middle of April 2021. I moved to a new cell today. The room's window faces

North. My old wing is now a quarantine for people infected with COVID.

In my previous room, my window faced East.

MY VIEW TO THE EAST:

1. Three sort-of-dying trees with lichen-pasted branches
2. The wigwam frame of a structure used for Native sweats
3. The prison's service road
4. Beyond the service road runs an unpopular (quiet) street named 10th Avenue
5. Beyond 10th Avenue sleeps a cemetery where people often walk their dogs.

The East is the direction of new beginnings.

What helped me the most to get through the pandemic was making a daily to-do list. By giving myself goals every day I plowed through a lot of writing. I had a prolific summer.

THINGS I WROTE:

1. 9 essays for my ethics correspondence class
2. A series of poems about things wild and hidden
3. Or just hidden
4. Or just wild
5. An essay on voting rights
6. And another on the rights of children of the incarcerated
7. All summer & fall & winter I worked on a piece called "American Songbook." It contains 12 months of journal entries of the pandemic in prison. After a year of tallying daily American death tolls & the daily dysfunction of the institution I live in, I am done writing about it

Almost done.

8. In the fall, I took two more correspondence classes — American Government & Epidemiology.

I have a typewriter, but the small "n" no longer prints. I've been trying to order a new

daisy wheel since August 2020. I have no computer lab access.

When I started my new job in October — as a mentor to new arrivals — I was able to type into my home folder using a work computer, but I was not allowed to print anything. In order to print, I'd write to the Office Support teacher & ask if she would print pieces for me. This was a one-to-two-week process. The writing did not frustrate me, the process to get anything typed & printed was hair-pulling.

I look out my window with the new view — it faces the front of the living unit and the courtyard — which is not a courtyard at all, but an axis of sidewalks leading from all the units with a round 15-foot garden/weed patch in the middle.

I've always felt North was superior to South. It might be residue from reading about the Civil War, but more likely a result of the North American Atlas of Mammals. Long before I could read, I scoured this large, oversized coffee table book. It had colored pictures. I learned most poisonous wildlife lived in warm climates. When I discovered most snakes could not live in Minnesota, I was relieved. I don't know why I assumed I would be tramping around the forests of Minnesota in my future, but poisonous snakes were a major concern of mine when I was four. And five, six, seven, and eight.

THINGS I ASSOCIATE WITH THE SOUTH:

1. Snakes
2. Spiders
3. Slavery
4. Humidity
5. Slow speech
6. Nascar
7. Football

GIFTS OF THE NORTH:

1. Elders
2. Great hospitals
3. Crunchy leaves
4. The capacity to finish what we begin

5. Puffins
6. Intuition made conscious
7. Sense of how to live a balanced life
8. Snow

My new cell comes with a new roommate. She arrived at the institution about a month ago. Now, when people first get here, they are quarantined for two weeks. After quarantine, they have a day of R&O, which is about five hours of a prison orientation PowerPoint presentation. As I said, I'm an R&O mentor — one of four.

TOPICS I COVER IN MY POWERPOINT:

1. Forms
2. Canteen
3. Mailroom
4. Unit rules
5. Visiting
6. Minncor — a business that subcontracts textile work, balloon folding, & rubber work.

As an R&O mentor, I answer people's questions 24/7. I wear a purple t-shirt.

My roommate is named Rainy. After two weeks of quarantine, Rainy went to her first R&O class. The next day, the whole unit is quarantined with a new outbreak, so she's locked in for another 12 days. Now she is waiting to get her schedule. She will be in school. She needs to get her GED.

RAINY IS:

1. Six feet tall
2. Big-boned
3. Has shoulder-length, wavy, Lutheran-colored hair
4. Has the ability to grow a beard and needs medication to prevent this from happening. Her condition is called "Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome," (PCOS), a hormone imbalance. Aside from facial hair, she is 7-10 times more likely to have a heart attack or stroke and has fertility troubles.

5. Has 10 siblings
6. Has a fiancé 21 years her senior.
7. They are getting married when she gets out in August

THINGS I AM DOING RIGHT NOW:

1. Listening
2. Looking out the window. There is a clump of daffodils dressed in pale yellow gazing North like the elders they are. They seem content.

A Literature Review of Colorectal Cancer Screening in Incarcerated Individuals

By Evan Perkiss



Evan Perkiss is an intern at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School Women's Health Institute. He graduated from Kent State University with a Bachelor of Science in public health with a concentration in health promotion in May 2021. Evan started an MPH program at Florida International University in August 2022. His interest in health disparities and related issues still fuels his interest in public health.

Introduction: Colorectal cancer is the third-most common cancer and third-leading cause of cancer-related mortality.⁶ Individuals aged 55 or older have the highest risk for developing cancer. Researchers predict that the number of incarcerated individuals in this age

range in the United States will reach 400,000 by 2030. Furthermore, prisoners have an increased risk of developing colorectal cancer.⁷ For these reasons, providing access to colorectal cancer screening in prison could help reduce disparities in mortality rates.⁸

Objective: To review the literature on colorectal cancer screening during incarceration.

Methods: All articles were found via searching "'colorectal cancer screening' AND 'incarceration'" and "'colorectal cancer screening' AND 'prison'" on PubMed. This literature review screened eight articles and included seven that met the criteria, which included being written in English, discussing colorectal cancer, and addressing screening. Articles that discussed incarcerated hernias or did not address colorectal cancer screening were excluded.

Results: Few prisoners were screened for colorectal cancer in prison, but most wanted to get screened.^{9,10} Most prisoners were diagnosed with colorectal cancers at later stages, which likely stems from the fact that few prisoners receive screening.¹¹ One study found that 77.1% of prisoners were 1.5 times more likely to be overdue for screening compared to 50.5% of the general population. Three years after the study's completion, 62.6% of prisoners were still overdue compared to 33.6% of the general population.

Barriers to colorectal cancer screening in prison can stem from either the prison system itself or from the prisoners. Barriers related to the prison system include limited resources and prioritizing safety over other issues.^{13, 14} Some researchers hypothesize that systemic injustice against prisoners also creates a barrier.¹⁵

Barriers related to the prisoners include lack of knowledge about screening, negative perceptions of the healthcare system, and avoiding medical treatment.^{16, 17, 18} Other barriers in this category include fear of cancer, fear of colonoscopies, fear of stigma, and lacking privacy to collect stool samples.^{19, 20}

Discussion: Colorectal cancer is a significant public health issue for the incarcerated. Few prisoners are screened for the disease, as a result, most incarcerated individuals are diagnosed with colorectal cancer at a much later stage.²¹ Addressing the barriers in the prison

system and those stemming from the prisoners themselves is necessary to solve this problem. The New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC) is currently developing animated health promotional materials and infographics to educate prisoners. Health education can help correct prisoners' perceptions of the healthcare system.²² Therefore, NJRC's efforts could prove effective.

Chah Master

By Pure Justice



Solid Ground

By Anna Marie

Anna Marie

* Traped and Caged like
a dam animal -
Pipe sick, scared tired and
want to die -
Ask my self why
standing on the fact I
know I deserve better
I will take everyday
and grow and make a
better person - Im going
to tell my story of drugs
and thugs ~~and~~ ~~and~~ ~~and~~
fighting and survival
How God lifted me up
and set my feet on solid
ground -

the lonlieness the pain
sunshine and rain



Women's Reentry Pilot Project graduation ceremony at the Municipal Services Building, September 24, 2021. Photo by Akell Robertson.

"It's kind of a weird thing to say, but you do stand alone in a crowd when you're a justice-impacted person. Being with other women that know that feeling really makes you feel safe and accepted. It's something I haven't found until this program. When I see this [mural], I know that I was a part of it, I helped paint it, I helped put it up on the wall. It's part of the community that I hope everyone can see."

- Rachel, Women's Reentry Pilot Program participant



muralarts.org/donate

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is an alternative to traditional means of rehabilitation and punishment that brings together justice-impacted community members, focusing on humanity, relationships, conversation, and understanding as the first steps on the path to healing.

Art education, paired with personal and professional development, and hands-on assistance on mural projects forge the growth of strong, positive bonds between returning citizens and justice-impacted communities. We place a strong emphasis on work readiness within our Guild program and give creative voice to people who have been disconnected from society.



Restorative Justice participants feel empowered by their accomplishments and emerge with a newfound sense of pride in their own abilities and enhanced employment readiness skills. The Restorative Justice program cultivates resilience in individuals as they transition from incarceration back into civilian life.

Through programs like our inaugural District Attorney's Artist in Residency and our Reimagining Reentry Fellowship, we combine art with criminal justice reform advocacy including Art for Justice and Fair and Justice Prosecution. Mural Arts' Restorative Justice department has received significant Anti-Violence Community grants from the City of Philadelphia and State of Pennsylvania to support the impact of our Guild program.

The Guild

The Guild is a paid apprenticeship program through Mural Arts Philadelphia that offers justice-impacted individuals the opportunity to develop job skills through work on creative projects like mural-making and carpentry.

PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Daily workshops on topics like communication, teamwork, critical thinking, conflict resolution and problem solving, paired with guest speakers and field trips, create an environment that supports our Guild members' growth. Incorporating technology training - email and video conference etiquette - and résumé-building and interview preparation helps participants secure future employment through our job pipeline of partner companies.

PEER NETWORKING & SUPPORT:

Accountability is a big part of the program; Guild coordinators play important roles as mentors, building relationships with Guild members that help to push them past the challenges of reentry alone. When they join Mural Arts, they gain a support network that remains past the program.

restorativejustice@muralarts.org | 215.685.0750

NEW Women's Guild program

In 2021, we launched a Women's cohort of The Guild, which aims to serve the unique needs of returning women and their families, including both personal and professional development, supportive services, resource-sharing, mentorship, relationship-building, and entrepreneurship - all with a focus on job readiness. In partnership with Able World, this program is led by justice-impacted women in order to create a holistic and safe environment for program participants. Our next cohort runs from January through May of 2022.

15
percent

Since 2009, we have consistently maintained a one-year recidivism rate below 15%. Philadelphia's one-year unified recidivism rate is 35%.



We serve 100 participants per year. We pay our Guild participants a living wage, more than 150% above of the federal minimum wage.

85
percent

of Guild graduates are employed or enrolled in education programs or vocational training one year after graduation.

Quotes from our Guild Graduates

"To me the Guild program isn't just a program, it's also a big support system and a Teacher. This program has taught me new trades and things that will additionally help me in life. Each day in the Guild program is a new journey to a more competent me."

"With the skills I've learned from Mural Arts – painting and construction, stuff like that - I've been able to fix up little stuff around the house. I've also been using those skills that I've learned to apply... for jobs."

"[The Guild] helped me keep a one-track mind, stay focused on everything I needed to do."

FUNDERS & PARTNERS

Anonymous

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The Giant Company

The Lenfest Foundation

Wells Fargo

Support and Compassion: Advocating for Court-Involved Women

By Linda J. Baraka, Vice Chair, New Jersey's Commission on Reentry Services for Women

As Vice Chair of New Jersey's Commission on Reentry Services for Women and First Lady of the great city of Newark, I work to ensure that court-involved women receive the support and compassion they need.

In order for court-involved women's needs to be met, service providers and other community leaders must take the time to genuinely listen to them, and respond accordingly. I know from my own experience that having health care providers whom you trust is of the utmost importance.

I want to ensure that all women, and particularly marginalized women such as Black and brown women and court-involved women who face implicit bias in health care, feel comfortable speaking to their providers. For that reason, I became an ambassador for the HEAR HER Campaign, a project supported through a partnership with the CDC Foundation and funding from Merck through its Merck for Mothers Program. This program raises awareness of urgent maternal warning signs, so that pregnant people are able to identify potential health concerns and receive appropriate treatment.

As a mother and an advocate, this project is very important to me. Black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women are.²³ Additionally, women coming into jail are frequently navigating high-risk pregnancies.²⁴ It is our responsibility as advocates for marginalized pregnant persons to demand improved policies and care.

Through my positions as First Lady and Vice Chair of the Women's Reentry Commission, I have led several initiatives to meet court-involved women's needs, including collecting toiletries for women and children in transition and local area shelter. I plan to continue this activism, serving as a supportive voice for

marginalized women everywhere — including during incarceration and reentry.

Not Alone

By Noelle Faye

I first wrote this while incarcerated at the Minnesota State Prison for Women in Shakopee, Minnesota. I wrote it with the intention of bringing my shame to the light, in order to destroy it. Brené Brown says that shame cannot flourish in the light. So does the Bible. This is not a blog for people who think that they don't have shameful secrets. This is not a blog for people who think that their lives are perfect. This is a blog for people who, like myself, are seeking answers. And spoiler alert, I don't have the answers. All I have is experience, and I wish to share with you. With that, please enjoy the first writing I've ever done, or the first shameful secret that I've ever exposed.

Written Originally at MCF Shakopee in 2018.

As I walked through the courtyard, arriving late in the evening to Broker, I was certain every person could see it. How could they not? I had labels written all over my face. Deeply inscribed on my soul was The Shame of the crimes never brought to light. The inner chaos, the battle between my heart and mind, the disgust and self-loathing I had not yet mastered putting up a front to hide, was shown simply by stepping, one foot at a time, past dissecting eyes through the concrete slab of yard that would be my supposed place of Rehabilitation for the next few years. I was nothing and everything all at once. I thought, "Can they see me?"

Two years ago, I killed someone. I fell asleep in the car, going almost 60 miles an hour, and slammed into another car. The loss of my victim's

life was devastating for the family and community. I could not stomach what I had done. I felt like a terrible person, disgusted with myself for taking her life. Thoughts swam around in my head day after day, hour after hour.

Children lost a mother. A husband lost his wife. A mother lost her daughter. A sister lost her sister. What did I do? My victim's family called me a menace to society. The court said I had no regard for human life. I labeled myself a terrible mother, a waste of life, a killer, and an embarrassment to my friends and family... unworthy. I accepted those labels, and many others that I had already carried around for years.

Many of us have heard these lies and far more. Our hearts are scabbed over, picked away at, and scarred with the falsehoods that we accept as true about ourselves... And the ones that others have the audacity to speak to our faces. The heartbreak adds to the oppression that our own shame has brought down upon us.

In my first year of incarceration, I assumed every person I met knew why I was there. How could they not? I believed they could see the self-deprecating labels I personally seared on my face. I thought life would be a lot easier in prison instead of jail, because most of the women that I encountered in jail just didn't get it. They knew nothing past the fact that my Victim died. I was either a killer, or someone to pity. I was lonely and uncomfortable.

Once in, I was still alone, trapped in my own prison of self-hatred. I'd built a wall holding my heart captive and closed off to healing. I was walking a fine line between healthy and unhealthy. Medicated, and distracted enough to hold myself together in public after a while, but breaking down in the privacy of my shower and bed. It had a terrible effect on my psyche. I was pretending to be someone who is okay when really I wasn't at all. How could I get out of this prison?

After a relapse into self-harm, I was forced to sit down in segregation. While there, I reflected on my mental and physical well-being,

and realized that I needed more than what I'd already chosen to do with my time. I knew I needed help coping with the accident and the trauma that I'd been through as well. I realized that I had access to mentors and staff who truly cared about my well-being and I just needed to utilize the support system around me. I had a boss who had been my mentor, but could only help if I allowed him into my personal bubble. I had a mental health care provider that was willing to meet with me, but only when I requested to meet with him and let him know that the struggle I was having was greater than my need for privacy. I had program coaches who suggested that I take the initiative to use Prison Fellowship Academy as a resource to get the tools necessary to begin healing from the pain, anger, shame, and unforgiveness I carried around with me for almost an entire lifetime. I also had a spiritual leader who met with me and spoke life into me. I had a case manager who gave me life-saving advice, as well as affirmations because she recognized the effort I was making to change. The support system didn't just fall into my lap. I wasn't just lucky. I worked for it, asked questions, stepped out of my comfort zone, and told people that I was in need. I learned that I could not play into the labels placed on traumatized women who, society says, will never heal or have no hope.

The question remains: how do you know what to do, especially when it is hard to trust those who have authority over you? How do you know where to turn? What happens when you aren't able to advocate for yourself? I asked these same questions to others when I first arrived. I wanted to know who I could talk to about the heavy burden of my shame that I'd worn like a badge of honor since my crime happened. With healing, my purpose shifted, and now my questions are different. I want to know: how will we begin to change our community for the future women who struggle with shame, abuse, addiction, and mental health disorders? Who will speak out about the need for more support for the women who enter prison facilities with these feelings and don't know what to do? Who will tell them that they aren't alone, that there are women — maybe sitting right next to them at

lunch, or in the courtyard, or running on the treadmill, in their own rooms, and even in the community — who feel the exact same way as them? That the crime or lifestyle may be different, but the shame is colored the same icky shade of black?

In conversation, someone told me that change must begin somewhere, with someone.

I can begin by telling this little part of my story with this message. You are not alone. Can you pass it on? Tell someone that the labels placed on us are all lies.

We must break the lies.

Jesus

By Billie Milas



Justice-Involved Women: The Need for Trauma-Informed Care

By Senator Sandra B. Cunningham, Legislative District 31

Trauma is clearly the defining phenomenon for women in prison. A growing body of research has brought the deep and lasting effects of trauma to light. In particular, a number of experts have identified how potentially traumatic experiences — such as being the victim of or

bearing witness to abuse, violence, and instability — can generate a kind of toxic stress that increases the risk of several health conditions.

When such traumatic experiences occur during childhood, they are often referred to as adverse childhood events (ACEs) and have been shown to adversely affect brain development. Such results in ACEs having the ability to hamper attention, decision-making, learning, and responses to stress. Protracted exposure to such toxic stress has been linked to an individual's increased risk of physical and mental health conditions, with researchers estimating that nearly two million cases of heart disease and 21 million cases of depression can be attributed to ACE exposure. ACEs have also been linked to the development of substance use disorders and an increased risk of more frequent negative life experiences such as homelessness, incarceration, and unemployment.

Women and children, particularly from communities of color, have been found to be at particularly high risk of experiencing such trauma. The effects of ACE-related trauma appear to be intergenerational, with researchers having found that the experience of having a parent who is homeless, incarcerated, and/or unemployed is the kind of ACE that increases one's own risks of becoming homeless, incarcerated, or unemployed.

With more than half of the women incarcerated at Edna Mahan identifying themselves as having been the victim of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse, these women are anecdotally likely to have experienced some form of childhood trauma, including ACEs. Compounding these issues are findings of sexual abuse of incarcerated women at a national level, but more particularly at Edna Mahan. The unconscionable behavior has become pervasive within Edna Mahan such that the United States Department of Justice issued a report that extensively documents historic cases of abuse within the facility. This report supports conducting a comprehensive review, identifying victims and those who bore witness to victimization, screening women for the physical and mental harmful effects of their assault, and providing victims and their witnesses with ongoing treatment.

The effects of sexual assault are well-established. Women who experience or witness sexual assault are likely to develop and/or experience exacerbated mental health and substance use disorders. Such victimization and revictimization, as occurs at Edna Mahan, often aggravates earlier trauma, compounding distress in ways that undermine rehabilitation. Victims of sexual assault are at a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and having unwanted pregnancies. Sexually abused inmates are also at risk of suffering from unwanted pregnancies and infection or reinfection with sexually transmitted disease.

Our charge as women, as women legislators, and as advocates is to ensure that those women, who have been disproportionately impacted by chaos, violence, and addiction, are not profoundly worsened by a prison experience. Research has indicated that the implementation of trauma-informed practices at correctional facilities can have positive impacts. At the Framingham facility in Massachusetts, for instance, inmate assaults on staff members decreased by 62 percent and inmate-on-inmate assaults decreased by 54 percent after such policies were implemented. There were also significant decreases in the number of suicide attempts, the need for one-on-one mental health watches, and petitions for psychiatric services.²⁵

The women who have written in this journal have lifted their voices, described their pain, and shared their aspirations in the hope that life may be better, prison may be safer, and the criminal justice system may be more compassionate. I am most grateful for their words, their courage, and their resolve. It is now up to us as to whether we act upon these voices.

Scars

By Jesse Mocha Scroggins

My name is Jesse Mocha Scroggins. I'm from Dallas, Texas my friends called me Mocha K. I was born to Christian Loving, devoted parents. I'm currently working toward receiving my Master Degree. A Former Army militunt on Honorable discharge after serving 4 years. I love reading, writting poetry, and drawing to past time here in prison. I'm very Compassionate, Loyal, & Caring person. I look forward to getting release back out to society to help others and to be a motivated speaker to young adults to not go down the same road I went. I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to show you guys my work.

X *Jesse Mocha Scroggins*



Scars remind us that the past is real, and in those scars are embedded memories. Weather good or bad they never leave and secrets are hidden within. So never be ashamed of your scars; embrace them because they are the stepping stones of your life. There is more than one kind as well. You have mental scars, Physical scars, emotional scars, psychological scars, spiritual scars... Scars are like stars; they are everywhere. Don't be disgraced by life's hardships appreciate them because they are lessons that are needed for this life.

Drawing and written by:
Jesse Mocha Scroggins



Meth Induced

By Michelle Medina

As I sat in the locked down unit, all I kept on thinking was this was not the plan. The "plan" was for me to have as much fun as I can without dying or getting caught.

Yes I'm an addict. Crystal-Meth has taken my soul, and landed me into prison for 48 months. I came in on Oct 4, 2021 after doing 90 days in County, and my release date is Aug. 21, 2025. I kept telling myself I didn't have a problem. Everyone else had a problem with me, and was just out to get me cause they couldn't get what I had. I wasn't an addict like them they where the crazy ones I could manage my use unlike them.

First thought wrong. Crystal-Meth was burying me alive. My family wasn't the problem, the world wasn't the problem, meth wasn't the problem. I myself was the problem.

Today I have a choice, I can work on my recovery just as hard as I worked on getting my next high, or I can just let the meth take over my life again. I don't think so, meth will never again take me to the places it took me before. I'm gonna to fight for my life and no one can

get in the way of me becoming the person I know I can be which is a loving, caring, mom, wife, daughter, and grandmother.

There is no doubt in my mind that I was a addict. I tried everything to limit my use of meth and have repeatedly failed. Today, I sit here behind these 4 walls wondering what the hell is wrong with me and why couldn't I stop while I was a nead (oh ya I'm an addict)

my everyday ~~life~~ life on the cuts was a race for me. There wasn't a day that went by that I didn't want to improve, on getting higher, and I'm not talked about a little more loaded, I mean loaded to the very highest extreme.

They say it's pure, they say it's powerful. But what I have learned was it was far from that. Its name is meth, it makes you feel like superwoman. But let me tell you my friend it has proceeded to destroy my life.

Such a powerful thing can make you feel on top of the world 4 hours. The question is can you handle it when you start to come down. You will say things you don't mean, do

things you never thought you would do, and will never speak of. You will start to lose your family and friends, and wonder what is life for.

Not me anymore my friend, you see. I got so tired of hurting the people I loved I just wanted to die. I wanted to give up so bad I drank bleach, to try to clean my soul, and burn all the demons out of me. When that didn't work I thought to myself there was no hope for me. So I went and did what ever I wanted not caring who I hurt.

Today I see I have caused so much pain, and damage I don't know if its even fixable. But, I'm not going to give up. I will fight to fix my marriage, relationships with my kids, and family, just like I was fighting for my next high.

My happiness is worth it, and I deserve to be happy, and my family deserves ~~to~~ to have me at the best I can be. As of today I choose to fight for my family and recovery. I really do want to try, but I also remember when I did try ("I always failed.")

You always have to remember not to speak too much, too soon, dont speak when

Beverly Ballinger

By Ron Levine



Beverly Ballinger, 60
Forgery, possession, grand theft, burglary
22nd offense, since 1964

I came here for petty theft with a prior. I do it cause I use drugs and I got to make the money so I can buy the drugs so I go out and commit different little crimes. Go into the store, fill up their shopping cart and just take off. Stuff like expensive cigarettes, liquor, stuff like that.

Sin is unavoidable, the one that controls there lips is wise.

I hope this doesn't paint my mom in a bad way, because as you can see, she was an Angel and saved my life many, many times no matter if I was right or in the wrong.

I could always depend on my mom no matter time or day she ~~was~~ ~~at~~ there for me.

I never seen that way till now. Now that I sit back behind this metal door, and have nothing but time to think of my past and how people partook in it.

Sad to say now that I'm here behind these 4 walls not one person there for me that I bent over backwards for. The only ones here for me are the ones I hurt the most, my kids, husband, mom, and grandbaby's.

I'm not going to worry about anyone or anything all I'm going to worry about is cleaning my side of the street, and to continue to keep my side of the street clean.

Today I'm in recovery from having to use Meth. I was that addict that wanted nothing more but to be a good person to everyone, but I found myself to be the problem. I couldn't understand why there was so much pain in my life, but at the

Same time I couldn't see my life any other way. I would fight with my loved ones and myself over my own fucked up behavior.

Eventually my husband, my kids, my mom, and family didn't want to be around me. They couldn't stand the sight of me because once again breaking a promise that I would never use again.

My willingness and wanting to change is what's different today. I will always be a meth-addict, and I know that but I have a choice to let it take over my life again, or not let it. I have decided not to let it have control of me. I'm going to fight that addict in me locked away everyday to stay clean, because I have what a lot of addicts don't have and that is a loving, caring family, and they don't deserve the hurt and pain I have caused them. I'm going to take the time while behind these 4 walls and fix me, so that I can come out and be a better me, not only for myself, but also for my family, cause it's time for me to grow the fuck up and for once in my life put my family first.

As of today, my disease is locked away behind bars, within my brain, unable to die,

and unable to escape. My disease is a very skinny, crazy, girl with unbrushed curly hair, sunken eyes like a raccoon. Her face, and skin is covered in soars, mostly self-inflicted, and she is usually wearing a wife beater and shorts to short with lots of makeup. Her teeth are all missing, she speaks in circles, lies, and often even confuses herself. She wants only one thing from me, and that is to get high and slowly kill me.

Meth destroyed everything in my life in a wave of self seeking escapism. I became Meths-Slave. I thought God hated me but come to find out he sent his Angels to help me. I finally realized that once I grew the fuck up, and be the mother, wife, grandma, and daughter I should of been a long ass time ago.

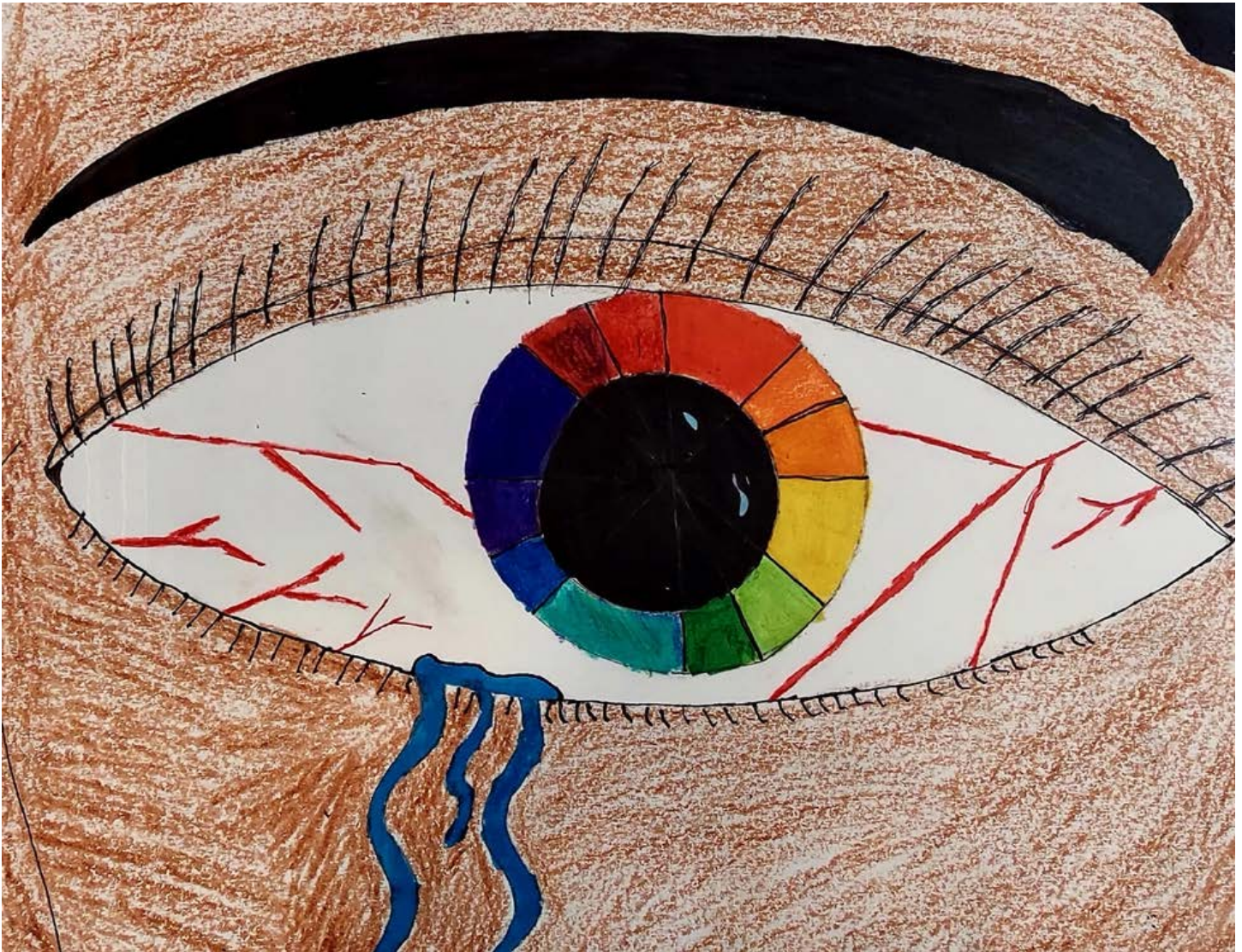
I hate those who hang on to my past, my eyes grow weak with sorrow along with my body and soul.

Father as I face another day behind these 4 walls, which I will be called upon to use my words wisely. May they encourage those who listen. May I speak only the truth but also be said in Love. May I pause before I speak. May I be bold

enough to speak when I would rather run.
Lord, I give my mouth to you today. May
what comes out of it be sweet and not
bitter. May the journey each word taken
from my mind, to my heart, to my lips, be
guided by your hand. May what comes out
be life-giving rather than causing death.
May my words make you proud of me, and
bring you glory.
In Jesus name Amen.

Color Wheel Eye

By T.R., Youth Arts: Unlocked



Road to Sobriety

By Shannon Miller

I'm afraid I won't find the road of sobriety.
Where life will be full of happiness.
I have fear of seeming dependent on
drugs, I'm so scared I will fail again.
Like I do so much, I give up before I
get my chance to live a peaceful life.
Terrified that history will repeat itself
That I will use life's events as an
excuse to justify my going out to
use again.
Now I turn to God, my last hope of
the road to sobriety. As long as

I walk with him, he will let me
stand strong.
Here I am 90 days in on this
road of recovery and standing strong.
Willing to change everything to stay
clean.
Here goes my journey on the road to
sobriety leading to Recovery lane.

MY WHY

By Stacy Burleson

Stacy Burleson is a co-founder and the Executive Director of Women In Leadership, WIL. She has been a Returned Citizen for 5 years, during which she started a non-profit for any woman impacted by the criminal justice system directly or indirectly, became a certified mental health first aid instructor for both adults and youth, a certified peer support worker trainer, Narcan trainer, and certified community health worker. Stacy serves as the Secretary on the Board of Directors for the NM Black Mental Health Coalition.

During her incarceration, Stacy became a peer educator with Project ECHO, which helped her develop the leadership and advocacy skills she would need for society after incarceration. Stacy is a mother and a grandmother who is dedicated to inspiring women to believe in their abilities and is providing support to women through their trying transition back into society by creating a safe space and small community.



My why started October 27, 2010, the day I arrived at the Department of Corrections in Grants, NM to do 50% of a 12 year sentence. The day I arrived, I remember the most important thing to me was to write my oldest child Christian a letter to convince him to go live with his father in New Orleans. I was worried about my son because of the lifestyle he was living, which I unintentionally introduced him to.

I wrote my son a letter and told him that he is my first-born son and if anything happened to him, I couldn't go on with life. I wrote this letter and put it in the mail to go out the next morning.

Well, that night I had a dream that someone died. I really didn't think too much because my mom had cancer and I just blew it off as a nightmare. Early that morning, around 6 am, I got a call on the intercom to come down to the podium. I was like "For what? What I do?" I heard the officers talking and asking for the Chaplain. Instantly, I turned to the other women, and they tried to calm me down and said "Let's make a call." So, I was like "Call my son. No, call my mom." They called my mom, and she told me "Stacy, I hate to have to tell you, but Christian was murdered last night."

I was devastated and at that point no longer wanted to live. I asked for mental health and was denied by the unit manager. She told me my situation was situational and that I did not need mental health. I was angry at everyone, even God, and felt like I didn't need anyone because I had my mother. Eight months later, my mother died of cancer. This was my first day and within my first eight months I lost my son and my mother.

As I watched the women come back and forth, I couldn't really understand why until I was released. The system is set up for us to fail, and

I felt like I had to create something for myself and my sisters that are left behind the wall. That's how Women in Leadership was born.

–

Mission: Our mission is to uplift, empower, and inspire women to develop self-advocacy skills in order to become leaders through personal and professional growth by providing access to leadership development and educational opportunities.

Goal: Women in Leadership (WIL)'s goal is to improve behavioral health services in the community by providing meaningful methods to reduce recidivism, homelessness, domestic violence and sexual assault for women who are at risk through peer case management, family peer case management, outreach, awareness, peer education, and housing stability. This will help stabilize individuals, prevent crises, and reduce crime.

Target Population: Women in Leadership's target population is incarcerated/formerly incarcerated at-risk women and youth. This can consist of women and youth serving time in any correctional facility, detention, or jail; any female on probation and/or parole; and any female that is at-risk for incarceration, sexual assault, domestic violence, homelessness, and school suspension.

WIL programs help women understand that the quality of their lives is a direct reflection in the personal belief each woman has in herself. WIL is a program that is about empowering women to make healthy decisions by first accepting that each woman is in control of her life and that also means each woman is responsible for her life: the good, the bad, and the potential.

Services Delivery: Our goal is to empower the most marginalized women in our community by holding bi-weekly teleECHO sessions every first and third Monday of each month, focused on mental health, SUD, domestic violence, and sexual assault. These bi-weekly teleECHO sessions provide women with the tools, skills,

and motivation to be the best versions of themselves possible. WIL educates the women on how to advocate for themselves and their family, inspire the women to believe in their abilities, and support the women through their trying transition in society by creating a safe space and small community of kindred spirits. We will achieve these things by providing consistent mentorship, warm hand-off referrals, housing stability/education, and educational opportunities to boost financial independence. W.I.L. trains in mental health first aid, adult and youth, and offers Naloxone training, overdose prevention and response. Please check out our website at www.wilecho.org

Partnerships Matter

By Leslie Franks McRae

In 2020, I had the privilege of meeting the youthful founder of The Golden Lotus Project. Founded in 2017, the Project has aggressively been addressing "period poverty" by annually collecting hundreds of sanitary napkins, tampons, soaps, wipes and under-garments for women and girls in need. Period poverty is a particularly pressing issue among court-involved women. Only 13 states require prisons and jails to provide free menstrual products to incarcerated people.²⁶

In 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Project Director, Moriah Akrong, partnered with the New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC) and donated more than 500 sanitary products for women abruptly released (due to the pandemic) from state prisons, county jails and addiction treatment centers.

While the complexity of women's reentry needs can be daunting, the reality for so many incarcerated individuals (men and women) is that when they are released, they reenter society with very little. Consider how it would be for a woman, however, to reenter society on the first day of her menstrual cycle without housing, food, her prescribed meds, or pocket money. Given the dramatic growth of women's incarceration in recent years, it is concerning how little attention

and how few resources have been directed to meeting the reentry needs of women.

It is common practice for women to continue to receive the same services that were originally designed to serve men being released from prison. Basic care necessities – menstrual supplies, under-garments, toothbrushes, soap, etc. – for the first week in society are needed welcome home gifts. The reality, however, is that women, because of their gender and distinct needs, require gender-responsive reentry policies and funded programs and services to reduce the likelihood of re-incarceration.

In 2021 and 2022, the NJRC partnered with the New Jersey Conference Women's Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Ebenezer AME Church, the Lesniak Institute, the Federal Reentry Court Program (ReNew), the New Jersey Coalition of Latino Pastors and Ministers, and the National Action Network to ensure more than 3,000 returning men and women (again, abruptly released because of the pandemic) had reentry survival packages. 490,000 sanitizer dispensers were distributed throughout NJRC and the community, and over 2,500 toys have been collected for children of reentry program participants through December 2022. Partnerships matter, but are not meant to replace the needed policies and programs that should be in place to provide services to our returning citizens.

Amplifying Women's Voices

By Jeannine LaRue, Founder of the LaRuelist Report and Senior Vice President of The Zita Group (TZG)

In 1993, like many Americans, I watched the Senate hearings for then-Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. Observing the daily grilling of Dr. Hill day after day infuriated me. I was emboldened to organize a group of women to hold the first-ever NJ Women's Summit, where I was President from 1993 to 95. Gov. Christine Whitman memorialized that event as the New Jersey Governor's Conference for Women, which

was held for two decades and attended by more than 2,000 people.

My advocacy for women didn't stop there. I am the former Chair of both Women Advocating for Good Government (WAGG) and Women's Political Caucus-NJ's (WPC-NJ) Political Action Committee. I currently serve on WPC-NJ's Executive Board. I am also a founding board member and former chair of the Wynona's House Child Advocacy Center in Newark. During the '80s, I became the first African American woman to serve as President of the very prestigious Executive Women of New Jersey (EWNJ), the region's leading not-for-profit organization promoting women's executive leadership in business and on corporate boards.

From my years of leadership on behalf of women, I know that when women's voices are not just heard, but amplified, we can advance gender equity initiatives. Through my work with New Jersey's Commission on Reentry Services for Women, I help empower justice-involved women. Their voices are important and valuable and, like non-justice-involved women's voices, they should be amplified.

WRITING INSIDE VT: Empowering Voice as Mirror, Model, and Mentor to Vermont's Incarcerated Women

By Sarah W. Bartlett, AM, MPH, ScD

A life-long writer, Sarah believes deeply in the power of putting experience into words as a transformative and healing practice – a belief only strengthened by her journey writing through and beyond an abusive relationship. Years later, she learned about the life-altering power of telling stories within a mirroring community of women – Women Writing for (a) Change™ (WWf(c)C)– a feminist-leaning conscious community of women writing for self-discovery and social change. Ever since, she has created

opportunities to write with (often vulnerable) populations of women and girls for whom she discerned unaddressed need and potential benefit. She has offered writing workshops and retreats for survivors of domestic abuse and cancer; the elderly, their health care workers; community health and mental health educators; incarcerated women; psychiatric residents in medical school; professional women; middle-school girls exploring the trades; and more.

Licensed by WWf(a)C to start her own program in Vermont in 2004, Sarah underwent extensive training in self-knowledge, energy and voice work; feminist theory, history and eco-feminism; leadership practices and community-building; and small business models including start-up, finance and marketing. She spent multiple weeks in residence over a six-month period, producing two in-depth writing projects, a month-long series of practice circles and her first public poetry reading. Following licensure, she mentored new licensees, as well as co-planning and running subsequent licensure programs, retreats and multiple WWf(a)C community of practice projects. She was re-licensed at three-year intervals. All practices of writing inside VT are those of WWf(a)CTM and are always attributed thus. The writing inside VT program itself was her creation.

She designed and co-edited *"LIFELINES: Re-Writing Lives from Inside Out"* (Green Writers Press, 2019 and 2022); and co-edited *"HEAR ME, SEE ME: Incarcerated Women Write"* (Orbis Books, 2013). Her professional and personal publications comprise contributions to respected academic and literary journals, as well as to highly-acclaimed anthologies; and three chapbooks of poetry. www.sarahwbartlett.com

INTRODUCTION

It's 6:30 on a Thursday evening. Inmates have been called from their units, chow, laundry; and begin shuffling through the door, the strong odor of bleach clinging to them. After signing in, 15 to 18 women aged 20-something to 70 search for

last week's transcribed writing. One finds a typo; another asks for her fourth-week certificate of attendance. We sit around two long tables pushed together, blue cloth in the middle under a circular basket. Kleenex awaits. At the first chime, chatter ceases, all ears tuned to the poem's opening line. Silence reigns in this windowless room despite clanging metal doors and yelling voices beyond...

In January 2010, when we first began writing inside with women incarcerated at Northwest State Correctional Facility in Swanton, Vermont, we received feedback that struck us to the core: "I came to this group and learned my words affect everyone. I never knew what it was like to really be heard, to be listened to;" and "today I forgot I was an inmate and was heard by others for the real person behind the rap sheet."

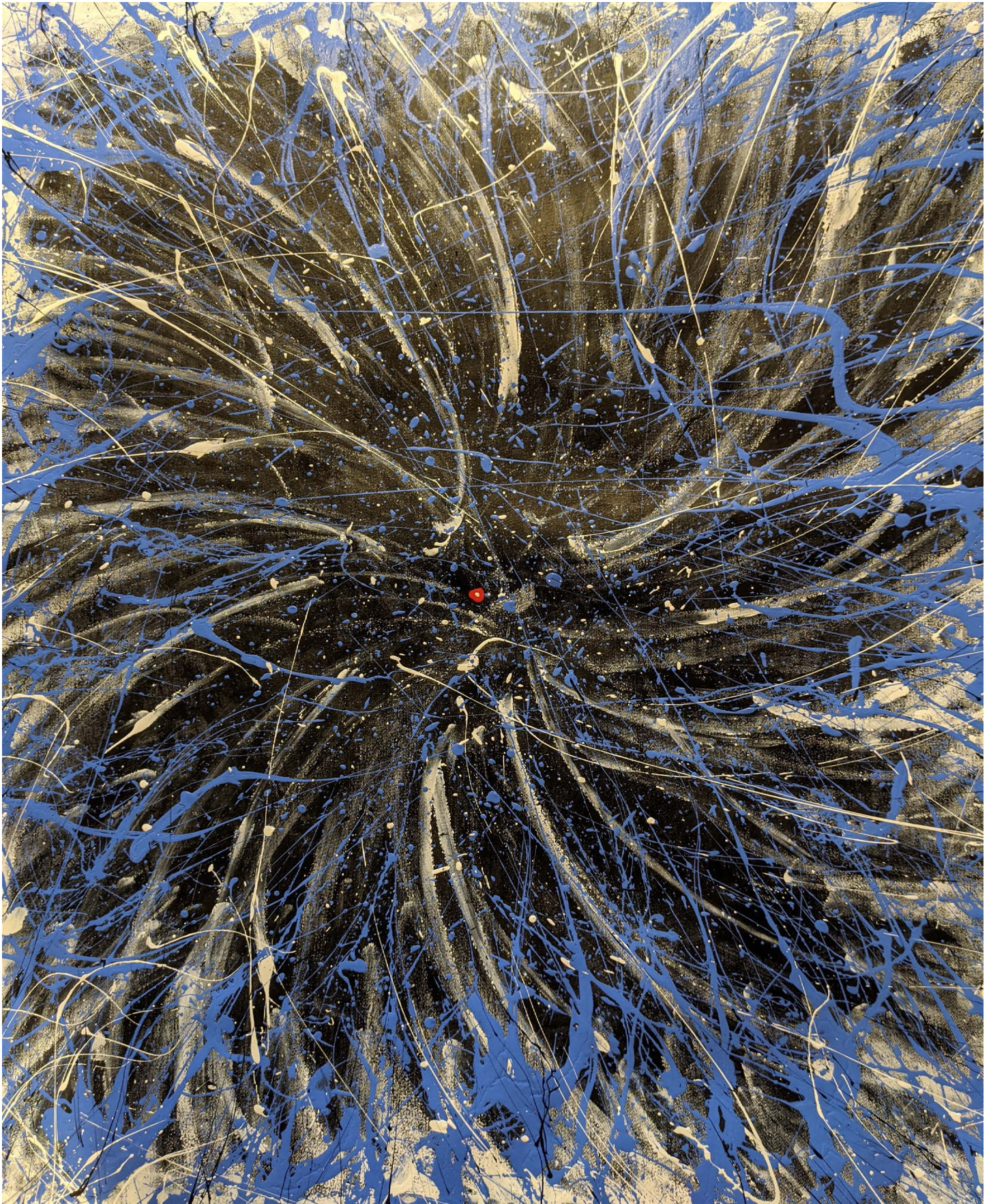
All of us have known moments of invisibility when we've been ignored, misunderstood or rejected outright. But what of a lifetime of essential invisibility to an entire society that distances us with labels such as *other*, *without value*, *irredeemable*? This kind of marginalization describes the recurring experience of many offenders as a result of arrest, conviction, imprisonment, release back into communities – and, for far too many, return to prison. It's not difficult to envision the soul-crushing implications of ensnarement within such a system.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

From January 2010 through early 2020, we offered a weekly year-round writing group for Vermont's incarcerated women. Our intention was to use writing as a tool for self-reflection and change, while building a supportive community of trust. In the process, we also provided external platforms for these women's voices to be heard: through weekly posts on our dedicated blog; quarterly printed anthologies of writing agreed to by participants; and semi-annual public readings inside attended by legislators, leaders of community non-profits working in criminal

Winter Abyss

By Jerry Metcalf



justice, interested lay people. The publication of two collections of writing from inside – “Hear Me, See Me: Incarcerated Women Write” (Orbis Books, 2013) and “LifeLines: Re-Writing Lives from Inside Out” (Green Writers Press, 2019 and 2022) – provided further opportunities for the women’s voices to be heard publicly, and for their listeners to engage more intimately in a little-seen-by-them world.

My vision for writing ‘inside’ was based on research showing that expressive creativity stimulates positive self-esteem, focus and healing; and hearing that programs for Vermont’s incarcerated women lacked creative opportunity. Six years into operating my own independent creative writing program for women, I felt well prepared in the nuts-and-bolts of how to proceed. I invited Marybeth Redmond, at that time one of my ‘outside’ writers working on a book about her work with an incarcerated man, to join me in this venture. We entered Northwest State Correctional Facility as trained volunteers with modest financial support from the Vermont Arts Council and National Endowment for the Arts. We provided weekly groups in monthly themes culminating in an art workshop. There we experienced the many challenges associated with creating sustained programs inside. Chaos, reverberating slamming metal doors, unpredictability of space and attendance, and prison protocols aside – ! – we learned that there is no neat way to gather, predict or process an inside group; no way to overtly address one set of requests without alienating another.

Gradually, through trial, consistency and perseverance, we built a trusted presence with nearly 100 women in our first 18 months. When the women were moved from this rural location – where they built modular houses, repaired motorcycles, and tended a vast productive vegetable garden – to South Burlington’s in-town Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility in August of 2011, we followed. Continuously since, the [writing inside VT](#) team has written with hundreds more and achieved the stature of a well-respected program. In town, we became immediately involved in advocacy efforts to correct serious facility deficiencies through an

inter-agency white paper for local legislators. Marybeth authored this initial paper; and soon went on from writing inside VT to become involved in housing and re-entry programs; and then, to the state legislature. Her advocacy on behalf of this under-represented population has been tireless over the years.

WHY *writing inside VT*

Inside, so much works against memory – or present reality – of individual identity. The role we play through writing inside VT – as mirror, model, mentor – provides a consistent and safe place to remember self, to build broken pieces back into function. The groups provide a chance for women to reflect, express, see themselves and their choices differently. By naming their deepest feelings and being truly seen and heard as individuals, they come to voice. They learn to stand up for themselves in a system that encourages the opposite.

As a supportive community, we strive to mirror that best self, to encourage its emergence and development. By focusing on them as women, the groups teach them they are not alone; they learn to connect, gather strength and courage from one another. We focus on writing not as craft, but as vehicle for growth, change and membership in a community. This requires accountability to the group and the give-and-take of deep-seated respect. In the process, we receive in at least equal measure – wisdom, humility, street education, compassion, toughness, development of strong boundaries.

In addition to writing as a tool for self-exploration and growth, the program models much-needed pro-social behavior through the closely structured way we run the weekly groups. The repeated weekly experience creates a community of trust as a model for positive relationship going forward. The specific practices for this work come from *Women Writing for (a) Change™ (WWf(a)C)*. I have been an active member of this feminist-leaning creative writing community since 1993, and was licensed in 2004 to bring WWf(a)C to Vermont. *writing inside VT* is an independent offshoot,

with funding awarded us through association with a local fiscal agent with whom we share similar goals and values for justice-involved women of Vermont.

Incarcerated women are among the most vilified of groups. When men end up in jail, women take care of the children. But when women are jailed? They are blamed and castigated for abandoning their children, who often become wards of the state when grandparents or other family members are unable, unwilling or unavailable to help out. By the time these women enter prison, they already carry the weight of years of abuse, poverty, addiction – and now, the loss of their most cherished achievement, their children. Most were silent before they got to prison, silence being the only apparent way to survive the horrors of their lives. Within our ‘inside’ circle, their silence begins to fall away. They ‘hear one another into speech’ as Nelle Morton says. They learn they are not alone. In supporting their personal truths through writing, we encourage self-understanding so that future choices may be made with awareness; so that they may return to their communities as assets, not burdens; so that they may walk out heads held high and voices tuned to change.

In our groups, we write our way through loss, healing, self-discovery, deepening consciousness as women in the world. We learn to name, listen, help one another stay healthy around our boundaries. We become a community of journeying women, soul seekers, peacemakers. By modeling non-competitiveness, equality of voice, and trust, we soon let go of unfavorable self-image. We welcome raw, truth-slicing, skin-shedding words, the silent unborn things of the heart. We do not turn away, but hold all words with deep respect. Every time we write together is authentic and revelatory – for us as much as for them. We dig, we strip, we learn. This is why I do this work: to mirror, model and mentor women’s voices to rise to the page and beyond. Through writing, we become.

WHAT MAKES SPACE ‘SAFE’ for truthful speaking and receptive listening

Holding space is energy work. We facilitators become the lightning rod for all the energies in the group, and need to know how to ground them. This requires clear boundaries; predictable and consistent routine; and structure to establish trust, expectations, a sense of safety. The facilitator’s grounding practices include the hard work of understanding our own shadow selves so that we do not project them onto others - shadows that can include blame, presumed motivation or other assumptions. We have learned to hold disparate energies around the circle, to stay present, to address with transparency the greater health of the whole without empowering a disruptive individual. The circle is a container that needs to be held in its entirety. As leaders, we need to keep an additional private agreement: to care well for ourselves to avoid burn-out; or worse, becoming cynical or ineffective. Nothing remains hidden; unaddressed, everything comes out in unexpected and unfortunate ways.

In addition to **transparent and conscious facilitation, accountability** is critical: for facilitators, doing what has been promised reliably, honestly and forthrightly. For participants, signing up, showing up, participating fully, honoring agreements, sharing writing, ideas, leadership; taking responsibility for behavior in the group. And our **circle practices/shared agreements** are critical. Given the chaos inside, familiar routine gives meaning to the group, along with agreements that have been co-created with participants and are agreed to by all, with natural consequences for not honoring them.

Holding space inside has its own unique challenges. From the perspective of the facility, we have a *constantly changing population*. This being Vermont’s sole facility for women, our groups mix short- and long-term inmates at all stages of incarceration. *Additional unpredictability* includes constant inmate reassignments among units; random searches and property seizures; lockdowns, quarantines,

fire drills; inconsistent enforcement of rules; last-minute meeting room changes. And among the women arise endless *daily stresses*: work-related challenges, illness, interpersonal conflicts; bad news from home, bad news from court; challenging interactions on the unit; changes in meds; the all-pervasive depression, even the occasional bout of mania ... you never know quite what you will be holding space for from week to week.

And yet, while I have been leading women's writing groups for over 20 years, these inside circles are among the most rewarding and humbling. I often feel that I sit at the forge, watching gold emerge from ash and pain. And the women! They hold tight to the sanctity of the circle with deep understanding and fierce protectiveness. In a setting where duplicity is the norm, the circle shines as the single place that honors truth-telling and vulnerability. Hungers for affirmation, for opportunity, for expression are fed by being deeply acknowledged in a well-woven container of safety and encouragement.

WHAT DOES A WRITING SESSION LOOK LIKE?

A facilitator/assistant pair arrives early to arrange the room, put on welcoming music, place agendas, pens and pads of paper around the makeshift 'circle' of tables. Using the weekly sign-up sheet posted outside chow, we scan participant names and unit #'s to call them by groups. Each session is customized to participant issues, group needs, and time of year. We spend our 90 minutes together writing to suggested prompts, sharing and offering constructive feedback, and discussing what arises from the writing. Each session opens with a published poem; and concludes with written feedback about our time together as well as a 'found poem' created each week from lines written the previous week by participants. This is one of the women's favorite parts of group: when they hear their own words woven into a new work that speaks to and from their collective experience. After each session, the facilitator transcribes each woman's writing, returning both the original and a copy of the transcribed version the next week. We do not edit these writings: only occasionally

will someone ask us to correct inventive spelling. The facilitator also creates the 'found poem.'

In addition to writing – until all such activities were banned –we brought materials to create collage; touch drawing; mandalas; string and ink paintings; papier maché bowls; improvisational games and more. By keeping up-to-date with weekly transcriptions, as well as scanning artwork, we were able to create weekly posts on our blog and assemble quarterly anthologies. Through the accumulation of personal writing, as well as our semi-annual inside readings and outside book-related readings, the program has helped build both self-esteem and a personal portfolio for participants.

OUR PRACTICES

In the weekly circle, we do not inquire what brought a woman to prison. Nor do we judge her choices or her writing. Instead, we lift up what is strong and powerful with respect for each woman's experience. Within the circle we are equals. The facilitator shares the same depth of emotion as felons. We make ourselves equally vulnerable and as a result, generate deep trust. By showing up consistently, even when conflicts keep writers from the group, we have proven our Reliability.

Each week we read through a set of roughly a dozen 'circle agreements' forged over the years. These combine best circle practices (e.g. '*what is shared in the circle stays in the circle*,' and '*we neither compete nor compare*') with guidelines around issues that arise from 160 women living together in close quarters (e.g. '*check your issues with one another at the door*'). These are essentially the same agreements shared within WWf(a)C groups on the outside. What is striking, however, is the degree of honor and integrity with which these agreements are manifest and maintained inside. In effect, the group ends up self-policing members who stray from the safety of defined parameters. Routine is very important inside. We follow the same structure week after week. What changes is the theme and related prompts, group interactions and composition.

We run each group the same as the previous one. We never falter in our unflinching respect for each writer, from the most illiterate to the most presumptive of publication.

Each *writing inside VT* circle ends with an anonymously-written response to a question about the evening's experience. Typically these are in a both/and format; for instance, *'what were the gifts and challenges for you of this evening's group?'* Or *'what did you give and what receive tonight?'* Over the years, we have gathered hundreds of these comments – from weekly participants as well as from those attending our readings, both inside and out. Not only do they help us keep a finger on the 'pulse' of the group. They also function as a kind of informal evaluation of how the program is impacting the women and what they yearn to express. We have written about trust, love, mothers/mothering, intention, fear, hope. We have written about our lives before; about things we carry and want to put down; about dreams and lack of support and ways to make better choices.

Sadly, many of our writers have cycled through the facility over and over. Yet, upon return to prison, they know they had a receptive space in which to retreat, and to focus more fully on their behavior and choices. Never judged, but always shown that change is an option. For others, release has ultimately taken a more permanent form as their confidence builds, and their lives begin to take on a shape recognizable as healthy and productive. In some cases, their families reunite with them, giving them the support and consideration they so desperately need. In still others, it is often a greater sign of growth for them to cut ties with the family that brought them to this life of pain and poor choices.

One of our key practices, as a woman reads her just-written words, is to jot down lines that resonate with us. A brief chimed silence between readers allows us to fully take in each woman's words. After all who wish to have read, we open the circle to 'readback lines,' in which those resonant phrases are 'read back' into the circle. We use this as a powerful feedback experience of validation and appreciation, letting each

writer know her words have 'found good ears.' These readback lines become the basis for creating each week's 'found poem.' Both practices are similarly key to my 'outside' work, weaving individuals' words from around the circle into a unified whole. It is truly an experience of the whole being greater than its parts. The women love hearing their words come back to them in new form each week. Heads nod approval as murmurs of recognition and delight often accompany the reading of these found poems. Hope comes alive before our eyes. Belief in self manifests.

During the ten years of our active program, we were the only non-Department of Corrections program with our level of commitment to and personal knowledge about our writers. Our group of dedicated writers – despite all they go through from day to day inside, from shifting residence, medical restrictions, not seeing their kids, insufficient food, lack of physical and emotional comforts, to lack of helpful services – shows up open-minded and open-hearted. They share willingly, they go deep, they leave having touched something that moves and speaks to them. They are appreciative of our efforts to work with them on a consistent basis. They are gifts, each and every one.

In addition to weekly writing groups for general population, for a few years we offered monthly writing groups inside for mentors trained by Mercy Connections/VT Works for Women and their mentees. We partnered with a coalition of community providers seeking solutions to issues specific to incarcerated women, including the earlier-referenced white paper; and with Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform to provide stories from inside for community education. Our final fiscal home was with South Burlington Community Justice Center, where we offered ongoing writing groups for those released into the local community.

BENEFITS of writing inside VT

Our inside writers uniformly report that our writing/creative circles provide them a space in which to reflect, think, write through, share and

Diesel Diet

By Kristi Arias



Born and raised in Muskegon, MI, Kristi knows what it means to overcome stereotypical labels society deems appropriate when uneducated about children raised in homes with abuse. Living with an alcoholic father and an enabling mother, Kristi took on many roles to find her place in similar environments as hers, with an emotionally absent parent. Her father eventually quit drinking, but she continued her erratic lifestyle, eventually being charged with felony operating while intoxicated (OWI), resulting in a four-month confinement in Muskegon County Jail. Today, Kristi is married, a mother of three daughters, and maintains a life in recovery with support from mentors gained through voluntary programming participation at Fresh Coast Alliance and The 490 Bakery. Kristi is now employed as the Housing & Program Director with Fresh Coast Alliance and is interested in pursuing a Master's degree in Art Therapy.

#267915. No name; just a color and number used to signify separation, one from the other.

Diesel Diet portrays mass incarcerated persons, who are all too often tossed into facilities to run a sometimes-never-ending cycle in the criminal justice system. If a person moves too fast, too slow, or doesn't stay focused on goals, they may fall off track, possibly even having to start over at a different level security unit.

Diesel Diet's colored cards depict different prisons around the country and their varying uniform color codes. Colors range from red for "high risk", maximum security, to khaki typically used for general population. Low-risk inmates, usually charged with a misdemeanor and other nonviolent crimes, are often dressed in green or blue.

express themselves in ways that promote growth and change. In learning they are not alone, inside writers become more confident, develop opinions, and give one another courage through sharing their stories.

Far beyond a diversionary activity, our circles become an anchor for many, a staple of their week to look forward to and learn from. Commitment to the circle and its value also show up in the number of friends brought into the circle by ongoing participants. Over time, it became the norm for one to three women to stay beyond group time to discuss personal issues, bounce ideas off us, and seek feedback for their insights.

For our part, we saw program value and efficacy through such qualitative measures as individual attendance, participation and personal accountability; improved writing and its application to plans for release; self-reported improved engagement with others; group





consistency, bonding, responsibility for practices; and public response to shared readings.

At provider and caseworker meetings we attended within the prison, we would hear story after story of inconsistent attendance; of overt rudeness to program leaders; of disrespect to one another, name-calling and open hostility. I can only say such reports are foreign to our *writing inside VT experience*. Perhaps the practices of shared vulnerability and mutual respect do elicit the best in each of the women, as we choose to believe. Perhaps our clarity around boundaries creates genuine safety, making writing therapeutic even as it avoids being therapy. Or perhaps the chance to write/speak without criticism, judgment or negative consequence emboldens them to envision a different, more effective way to function.

According to the women themselves, their mentors, families, other program providers and

caseworkers, our program has enhanced their ability to articulate, address and alter their understanding and priorities; and in the process, give us insight into our own lives. To paraphrase writer Louise deSalvo, *'what they write is less important than who they become as they write.'* The chance to be celebrated for who they are is empowering in an otherwise punitive, restrictive environment geared to stripping away individuality rather than acknowledging it.

It is humbling to hear from those who manage to remain on the outside after release and continue on to school, jobs and recovery. Yet perhaps the most poignant feedback comes from readers who would otherwise never meet this invisible population of women. Women whose lives, but for a circumstance here, a decision there, could as well be our own. Through readings, outreach, advocacy and book discussions, the general public moves closer to understanding the realities of the incarcerated and becomes motivated to act – from helping



individual women upon release to working toward system reform.

CONCLUSION

I believe our program is unique for a number of reasons, including its origins, structure, focus and frequency; as well as its explicit ties to local legislators, change agents, educators and Community Justice Centers. In addition, our published writings and public readings gave us community visibility and credibility, allowing us to be advocates for greater system change. Both book launches – as well as the 2015 Tenth Annual Burlington Book Festival, where we were featured after the publication of “Hear Me, See Me: Incarcerated Women Write” – brought similar responses from attendees. “I am who I was, but so much more ...” after hearing the women read their own raw, unedited words aloud in a public venue. These words speak to the power of the written word to change lives – those of writer and listener alike. Barriers dissolved; understanding increased; generosity flowed and gratitude was mutual.

Despite the facility’s tightened and narrowed policies, *writing inside VT* remains a vital framework for stability and success. Support and enthusiasm - from the women themselves to prison administrators to community organizations

- has only continued all these years later. For inclusion; for the experience of mutual trust and compassion. For inviting a sense of wonder, and supporting investigations in growth and confidence to be carried with pride ... These remain. Each time a woman cycles through, she takes in more of one element or another, deepening her understanding of the impact of her choices and behavior; and above all, owning the behavior/choice as something over which she has control in her life: dreams, regrets, determination to learn and grow beyond her current situation. I will always remember the women’s fierce loyalty to our writing evenings, our practices and the shared need for a lifeline that writing provided to so many over the years.

Indeed, *writing inside VT* has been called a lifeline by a number of our writers. This legacy is apparent in those whose words appear in the compilation “LifeLines: Re-Writing Lives from Inside Out.” It is my fondest hope that it will be read and discussed by educators, policy makers, criminal and social justice advocates and reformers of all kinds. That it will provide significant input to meaningful discussion and policy-making. That the women whose struggles are openly shared within those pages will live to know their words mattered - not only to them, and to us, but to the wider world as well.

With the re-release of "LifeLines" our program is also in transition. *writinginsideVT*, like many programs, has changed due to the pandemic, staffing changes, and prison policy. As a result, our work has moved, under the able leadership of Kassie Tibbott, Esq. to a more external focus on advocacy and legislative reform. What we know from our years inside is that the same issues of poverty, lack of education and abuse of all kinds bring women inside - again and again - and that changes on the outside are needed to solve these problems at the source.

The stories are heartbreakingly similar year to year. In this way, "LifeLines: Re-Writing Lives from Inside Out" remains as relevant today as when the writings were first penned. What must NOT remain the same is the system that perpetuates the need for such writings. And so we continue to collect and to share stories of our dedicated writers; to make the case for reform; and to urge all of us to work tirelessly toward the changes we know are long overdue.

In Memoriam

NoraJean was in our very first group at Northwest State Correctional Facility and continued writing with us for nearly the entire ten years. She was a grandmother with a wonderful spirit, writing tales of tootling around town on her wheelchair with her dog in her lap. She fought a lifetime of addiction, and was moved from state to state over the years following her release, first living alone, then with relatives. She died this year back in Vermont.

Her work appears in both books; and notably, in "Hear Me, See Me," along with several of her beautiful string-and-ink with soft pastel color paintings. When the book came out, our first comment was from someone who wanted to hang her artwork on their living room wall.

The following is perhaps the first piece she wrote with us, and speaks so eloquently of the deep silence of the wounded.

Reading Scars

*Those of us who survive here
by reading scars,
finding faults
before they open up and swallow us*

*talk gingerly. We learned early
to whisper, tiptoe, skirt
our way around.*

*We live by losing
love by letting go
enduring the random uprooting.
We drown in downpours.*

*Because we find ourselves so often
unable to speak
endings without stories,
scattered notes instead of songs,
what will it take?*

*Will my children tell whole stories?
Will they dance?
Will they be able to push down
beyond the scars and faults?
Oh, how I pray they be filled
with a sense of their own
belonging, to be fruit
undamaged.*

Expanding Mental Health Treatment

By Kevin Berry

My name is Kevin Carson Berry and am currently incarcerated within the Michigan Department of Corrections. I was arrested in 2014 at the age of 21 and in 2015 was sentenced to life in prison for 2nd degree murder. It is a life sentence with the possibility of parole.

What is mass incarceration to me? It seems like a very cruel way to give up on people, especially those with life sentences and/or long indeterminate sentences (LIDS). It seems that there have been laws in place to make it easy for the judicial system to abuse their power and lock people in prison and leave them.

A big part of the contribution to the mass incarceration is the inability to provide mental health or neglecting signs of instability. We can use the recent Oxford school shooting that happened in Michigan as an example. The child had drawings of people being shot¹ and writing, "...the thoughts won't stop..."² and "...help me..."³ which all went unattended. And, knowing the Michigan Department of Corrections, he will receive minimal counseling. They will give him some medication and find that to be suitable.

Having proper mental health treatment can be a way to help prevent individuals from coming to prison but also help those inside from coming back.

When we don't have proper treatment, things like this

happen and contribute to mass incarceration. I know this is an extreme example but if anyone would have taken those drawings and sayings seriously, this never would have happened. I remember having lyrics to a song written on one of my folders and was taken to the principals office, all of things searched, and was suspended for 5 days because of the content of the lyrics.

Why did this go this far? Negligence.

We need proper mental health treatment.
And I believe this can solve, and prevent, the growth of mass incarceration.

Thank You,
Steven
Berry

First Degree Felony Sickness

By Anne Bocchini Kirsch

Anne Bocchini Kirsch began her advocacy work during her incarceration at Maryland Correctional Institution - Women (MCIW), Maryland's only women's prison. She is a co-founder of PREPARE, a non-profit with the mission of empowering people to make their best case for parole and succeed at reentry. The day after she was released, she took on her current role as Director of Advocacy, where she works collaboratively with incarcerated people, families, state agencies, and community partners to restore people to the community while improving public safety outcomes. She spends her free time volunteering with Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR), a non-partisan advocacy group dedicated to ending unnecessary incarceration while building stronger, safer communities.

Three years before the smell of decomposition led police to the bodies of J.H.'s two children decaying in her apartment, J.H. built a shrine of family photos in her house, then set it on fire. Initially reported missing, she was eventually found at a hospital with her children in tow, clearly psychotic and just an elevator ride from the doctors who could help her. Sadly, she was neither evaluated nor admitted. Instead, she was arrested, charged with arson, and sent to prison.

Although Maryland's Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services boldly advertises robust mental health treatment, that promise is a mere decal covering an empty shell of job vacancies, many of which are not even posted for applicants. While incarcerated for arson, J.H. was faced with the reality of two psychiatrists attempting to use a restrictive, outdated formulary to treat a population of 800 women. This means quarterly medication check-ins are the status quo while self-reports of serious mental health crises are successfully deterred by the threat of Mental Health Unit (MHU) housing, where women are placed nearly naked in a cold, empty room

without access to a phone or pen and paper to ask for outside help.

But why would J.H. have needed to report her crisis? She literally set her house on fire—a cry for help that could have ended in tragedy and initially resulted in child endangerment charges. So why, when presented with an opportunity to help a mentally ill mother of two in her mid-20's, did Maryland instead toss her into the traumatic environment of prison for a year with no meaningful access to mental health care, then send her home sicker than even to care for two young children?

How is it possible that while Maryland pats itself on the back for excellent mental health care in its correctional facilities, licensed professionals at both the local jail and the prison missed the severity of J.H.'s illness? Why would a Baltimore City Circuit Court judge send her to prison instead of a hospital? How could the family court allow her children to be returned to her care with so little oversight that their disappearance wasn't noticed until the smell was so powerful the neighbors called the police? Where was Child Protective Services? Why wasn't mental health treatment a condition of J.H.'s probation? And where was her probation officer anyway?

Is it possible that with all the resources at Maryland's disposal, the state was unable to protect these two children? Is there a judge, doctor or social worker who is responsible for failing them? Or are incidents like these unavoidable tragedies, results of the unpredictability of mental illness? There are women serving double digit sentences right now — for crimes everyone knows they didn't commit — who need answers.

As J.H. sits at Clifton T. Perkins Hospital, where Maryland finally sent her for mental health treatment, and all the officials involved in her case get up and go to work as if nothing

happened, there are women incarcerated at MCI-W because they couldn't protect their child from a mentally ill father. They don't have the money or resources of a state government or the force of the police behind them. Many were victims themselves of abuse. None had more than a high school diploma, hardly a level of education that would enable someone to diagnose a mental illness, accurately predict a threat, or navigate the complex legalities of an

emergency petition. But all are being held to a standard so high that Maryland couldn't meet it for J.H. and her children.

S.W. was only 21 when her schizophrenic husband became psychotic and killed one of their children. Most people with schizophrenia are able to live full, healthy lives that include marriage and children. Even psychiatrists are unable to predict which few will become violent.

Donna Jelenic

By Ron Levine



Donna Jelenic, 68
Murder

It was a time when nothing about this was really known. It wasn't out in the open. And we hid that for years and years and years and when it came out, people said, "Oh, come on Donna, you had a happy marriage." We were all good actresses. We did what we had to do.

If I knew what I know now and I knew that the help was out there, yes, things would have been a lot different. I would have gone to a shelter. I would have gone somewhere that would've helped me or my kids. But that wasn't available

at that time. And all I knew is that he pointed a gun at my kids almost every night and he said, "Leave. Go ahead and try to leave." I couldn't do that. I had to protect my children. Most of us don't care about ourselves. But when they attack children. And when he molested my little five year old. And I heard, "Daddy why are you touching my bottom like that?" That did it. I did not care any more. I just had to get them out of that situation.

Unfortunately murder is the worst of the worst. People don't know us as we are here. They're just thinking that we need to keep them in prison. And they don't want to hear. That's why

this organization that's helping women in prison now, they're bringing it to light. That women are different than men. Finally the word is getting out there. And there's a little sympathy, but not much. When you're talking about a crime like murder — and just about all the ladies you've interviewed except for one, are in for murder — women are different than men. They commit crimes for different reasons.

My children were my life. They still are. Being away from them all these years, I can see what it's done to them. And I've got grandchildren that come up and see me. And it's the same thing. "Nana Donna, when are you coming home? You're not bad. You're good. I love you. Are you ever gonna come home?"

And you deal with this. All. The. Time.

Certainly this tiny, Catholic mother of two could not have imagined the tragedy that would result from her husband's illness. She was just doing her best to honor her vow to care for him in sickness and in health.

As S.W. was shocked and devastated by the loss of her child and the horror of her husband's illness, Maryland added insult to injury by charging her with child abuse resulting in death. The state's theory was that somehow the failure to prevent her husband's crime was abuse in itself, and the ensuing legal negotiation robbed her of over a decade of her life and left this incomprehensibly stoic and friendly woman who never raised a hand to anyone with an inflammatory, violent conviction that will haunt her forever.

The irony is inescapable. As Maryland pardons itself for failing to predict and prevent J.H.'s actions with one hand, it utterly destroys S.W.'s life for failing to predict and prevent her husband's identical actions with the other. This is not fairness. This is not justice. It's a double standard.

So please, Maryland, before you ruin the lives of any more women, take the plank out of your own eye.

With These Hands

By Renei

With these hands
...I fought out my anger...cross me??
I start flashing danger.
...no one around to make fall??
For sure these hands was hitting a wall.

With these hands
...I've had to say goodbye.
Dropping flowers in a casket, wiping tears from my eye.

With these hands
...I've tried to take my life.
Not with no gun... not even a knife.
...Picked up a stem, put a piece in.
While the devil sat back with a triumphant grin.

With these hands
...I've held on to so much pain.
Reachin out for peace, under the rain.
Cuz only Lord knows I'm going insane.
But.....

With these hands
...I've grasped back my life, that's been nothing but rough.
Man these hands is tough.

With these hands
...I've built my life from scratch.
Healing up the holes with a patch.
...Taking it one step at a time.
Hoping one day my life will be mine.

With these hands
...I pray.
Night after night, day after day.
...Holding them together I say.
Thank you Lord for never going away.

With these hands
...I now again can brush my daughter's hair.
As she laughs and wiggles in her chair.
...I'm no longer in despair.
God held me close, yup right there.

The Hard Road and Getting to the Solution

By Tiffany Atkinson



I am a person with lived experience within the justice system, and I am a recovering addict. I currently live and work with justice-involved people in Jackson County, OR, where I have been incarcerated in the past. I am a mother, a wife, a friend, and a passionate advocate for system-impacted people. I have been doing this work since 2018.

The Beginning

Ambitious, Spunky, Courageous, Light, Creative, Determined, Caring, Compassionate —

Those were some of the words used to describe me as a little girl. I always felt special growing up. I felt cared for, noticed, unstoppable. As a little girl, I had dreams to conquer, to be and do something greater than anyone in my family had ever done.

Trauma

I became a mother at the age of 16. I was in an abusive, controlling relationship. I was sexually abused by a family member. My mother was struggling with substance abuse. I lost my little brother to an overdose at the age of 17. I lost family and a sense of belonging after my parents divorced. My mother was in an abusive relationship. I was the oldest out of four and felt the responsibility to help my mom. I took on the mother role to my younger brothers.

Effect

Sitting in jail for the first time as an adult after my house was ransacked and raided, my two-year-old son was removed from my care, after I had been violated, interrogated, and belittled. I felt defeated. I had failed as a mother, as a significant other, as a daughter and a sister. This would not be the last time I was in a cell, but it was the most uncomfortable one. I had a drug problem, a man problem, a trauma problem. I was booked for six hours and released back into my old chaotic world, only now with more barriers and obstacles. I was given minimal information on the resources available to me. I was not given a choice. I was given directives, ultimatums, and threats to have the privilege to be a mother removed.

I would continue on my path through the justice system alone, scared and all along the way more traumatic events and incidents both from living in the “drug world” along with everybody I came in contact with throughout the criminal justice system.

Resistant, non-compliant, “junkie,” absent mother, abusive, manipulative —

Those are some of the words used to describe me as an adult. How did I end up here? Where do I go from here? How do I ask for help? Why would they want to help me? Will my family ever forgive me? From 2012 to 2015, I was arrested over 20 times. Each time, I was released back into the same environment I came from. I was so miserable on the streets, there came a time when being in jail was a blessing. I had structure, shelter, the drugs were removed and I could laugh again. I started to feel like a human being, sharing experience and hopes with other women who I was pretty frequently incarcerated with. I knew this couldn't be the only safe place to go, but how could I learn to live on the outside like a normal human being again? I needed help. I needed love, and compassion, someone to believe I could and to walk alongside me.

The Solution

I believe that our actions have consequences, both good and bad. It takes some time to learn what types of actions produce the consequences that we want. When we get in the pattern of living in survival mode, our rationale is not the same as someone who is not system-impacted's rationale. We are thinking of how we can stay out of jail, how we can manage to stay in contact with the child we haven't been able to see in three months, but every once in a while we get to have phone contact. We are thinking of all the disappointment we have already caused our family and how to prevent more. We are thinking of all the times we told our probation officer or the judge “this will be the last time,” or “I am going to do something differently this time.” Women need support while incarcerated, women

need support, and someone to walk alongside them while they make mistakes, who isn't going to belittle them or put them down. These things need to be addressed.

Women need to be empowered, by empowered women. Women need a safe space to be honest, and to be heard... actually heard. If you want to know how to support a woman... ASK THEM! We will tell you. Help us find our voice by listening and understanding. How do we bridge the gap?

Today

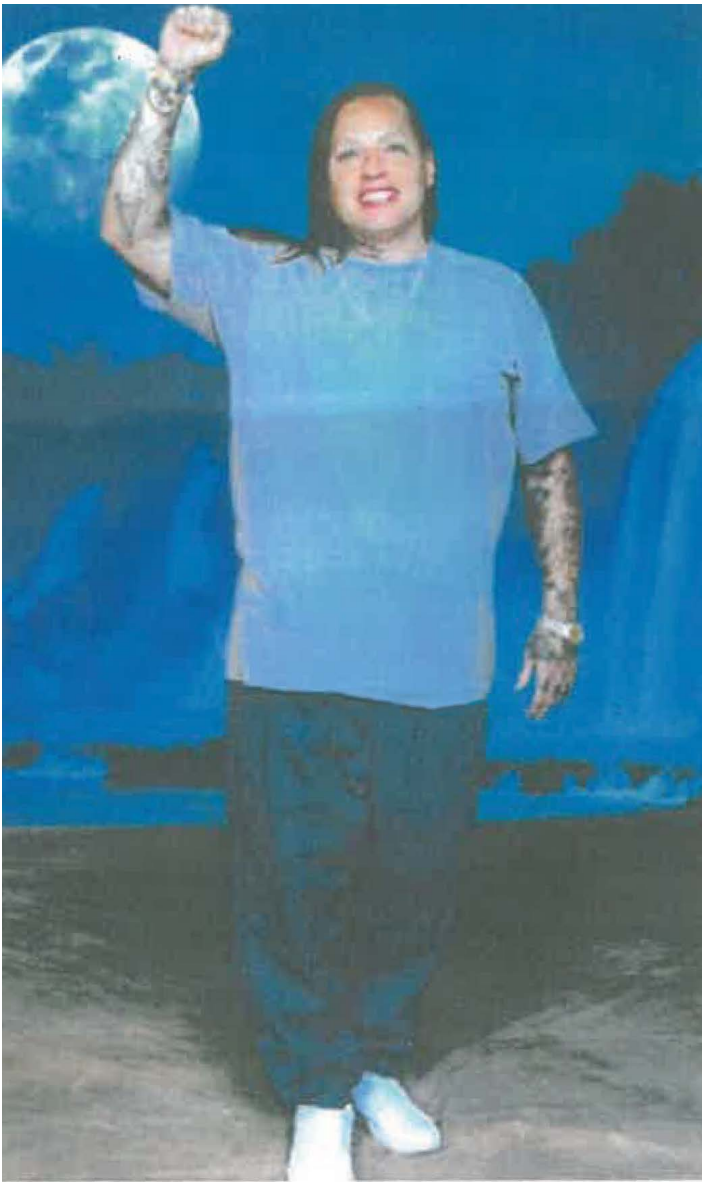
I have been clean from all drugs and alcohol since May 11th, 2015. I have not been incarcerated since April 17th, 2015. I have successfully completed community supervision. I have had my first-born son in my care since June 2015. I have two more children. I am in a healthy relationship and have been married for two years. I have a career working with justice-impacted women in the same probation office I was once supervised by along with my last supervising officer. I have relationships with other women who empower me, motivate me, and love me.

Ambitious, Spunky, Courageous, Light, Creative, Determined, Caring, Compassionate —

Those are some of the words I use to describe me today. I am grateful to be alive and to have the opportunity to work with amazing women every day.

The Goddess

By Jennifer Rose



The Goddess — by Jennifer Rose

The Goddess of All,
supreme and divine
Our great Mother Earth,
the cosmic sun-shine.

The Goddess of Life,
the Mistress of Death;
She gives us birth,
She is our breath.

The Goddess of Love,
the Mistress of Hate,
She spins our thread,
She weaves our fate.

The Goddess within,
the Goddess without;
rid us of trouble,
remove all our doubt.

The Living Goddess,
i bow to her feet,
i worship her image
in each woman i meet.

Bio: Jennifer Rose is a 52 years old incarcerated trans woman, student, and writer at Salinas Valley State Prison in California where she works as a Transgender Rep on the Inmate Advisory Council. She's co-founder of Fire Ant: Anarchist Prisoner Solidarity and Inside Organizer for Initiate Justice & TGT Justice Project and Jailhouse Lawyers for National Lawyers Guild.

Culture, Cultivation, Occult

By Lewis Waters

My name is Lewis Waters. I was born in Washington, D.C. in 1982. My journey with art began as soon as I could pick up a crayon. My ability for recreating images exactly as I saw them led me to win art contests throughout my childhood. However, the full extent of my artistic endeavors occurred at the age of 22, when I was incarcerated.

Incarceration has challenged me physically, mentally, and artistically to realize my full potential. My career as an artist began in earnest, with drawing portraits of cellmates and their loved ones using materials foraged from around the prison. Though I never received formal training, I expanded my knowledge by

drawing people, animals, book covers, logos, album covers, tattoo patterns, and murals within the prison.

As an incarcerated descendant of American slavery, my journey to discovery has been especially difficult. I am a student of history, and my work reflects my personal journey to self-discovery. Through my art I wish to speak to the spirit of people's ancestral memory. My work is heavily influenced by Black culture and the Black experience. I intend to portray dream-like images stored deep within the psyche of viewers.

My work primarily consists of cultural pieces done in oil paints.





Goodbye All

By Hope

To Whom it May Concern,

Or, should I say, all my addictions that are listening. I'm sure you know my name. You have been a part of my life for some time now. I want you to know I have "madd" respect for you. Anything that can bring me to my knee in many ways in broad daylight gets respect from me.

I'm writing to say goodbye. You were my friend in the beginning and, as usual, when I got to my lowest point, you only brought me down lower. I woke up every day depending on you. That's if and when I even went to sleep. I woke up sad, but once I had you in my body, nothing bothered me. It was when I had no more, or came down off my high, is when my original issues become a problem once again.

You were running and malicious and took all my strength at times. The more I used you, the more I believed. It wasn't hard for you to track me down and vice versa. I became a victim and helpless. I could not be protected from you or myself.

You damaged my reputation and it will never be the same. I believe you were down with the government. You even wrecked my marriage. I was nobody's friend. My real and true friends abandoned me due to my addiction. They didn't know how to take me from my disease. Again, she is too many and a thousand is never enough.

You made me tough on the outside and mushy on the inside. Things became confusing, because you also made me laugh with my mouth wide open and head thrown back.

No more confusion. I know now that I no longer want to be your friend.

ADIÓS

"I Am a Slave"

By Scott Smith

I have spent over forty (40) years in prison for being poor, a minority & refusing to plead guilty by maintaining my innocence of particular crimes. I am a convicted multiple murderer. I was NOT the shooter, however, I was present & a participant in the robbery. I never possessed a gun. I am a Japanese-American from the Kikuchi clan. The shooter was ~~was~~ white and received less \neq prison time than I. The victims were white. The detective was white. The Judge was white. The prosecutor was white. The appointed defense counsel was white.

② the 'jury ~~the~~ was white. I was the only non-white in the entire process. I received more prison time than the white shooter.

Now forty-plus years later when I try to obtain legal counsel for resentencing, hoping to raise the race issue, no one will help me. I find this glaringly typical of the white supremacist regime known as the criminal justice system. What is not surprising is that, under the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, anyone convicted of a crime is considered a slave. What is surprising is that most prisoners & free-citizens do NOT know slavery is alive and well in the USA. Read the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution — it is clear and unequivocal. I am a slave.

③ The ironic portion of being a slave is that I ~~fit~~ live in Washington State. The only state in the USA named after a Slave owner, a Slave trader, a slave hunter & a Slave killer. George Washington's face is on the State flag & State Seal. His wife owned slaves also.

I know I will never be released from prison. I will die as a slave in prison. The land of young despondent individuals who have been lost, broken, abused & abandoned. The souls of children, who represent the future of society, are caught in the quagmire of the inhumane cesspool of irrelevance. Those who claim ~~of~~ perfection have adjudged the children as uncivilized to deposit them behind concrete walls, barbed wire & lethal gun towers. The rejected

1) Youth are banished to survive amongst the human beings who have been judged as savages, evil & uncivilized.

Society, the Community, the Church & the parents have given-up on their children, their future. These children are sent to me to instill a viable value system to create something considered civilized to be released on some arbitrary date.

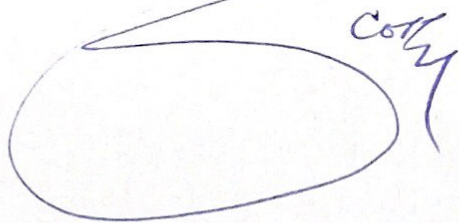
You give me no resources to protect, help or educate your children before they are released. They suffer from the unmitigated rejection, which is never addressed in prison. They must suffer the cold lonely nights crying in loneliness, and destroyed dreams, and complete hopelessness. This mishmash of raw emotion turns with a sharp twist into a scorching bitterness that transcends ~~at~~ any glimpse of happiness.

⑤ We will never reconcile these deep-seated emotional scars by becoming a good neighbor. We can only assuage the cataclysmic devastation of our internal pain threshold by the realization that the searing pain experienced is true evidence that we still exist. Pain becomes our pleasure because ~~ext~~ evidence exists of our existence. When will you ~~st~~ cease sending your children into slavery for me to educate? These young individuals only want one thing for you — for you to listen and hear them. Not to minimize them, but understand them. They have a story to tell about their journey — listen + hear it. Otherwise, they seek other forms of expression to get your attention.

If you are not listening to your youth,
then I will. Please help your children
so I am not overwhelmed with your
mindless rejections of human souls.

If I can help them with no resources,
then you can do great things with them
as the world is at your fingertips.

Grace, Mercy & Peace—

 O^{copy}

Liberty Awakes

By Bridget "BridgeMix" McDermott

As an incarcerated veteran, I've had time to ponder the nature of freedom. I think a lot about how a patriot can love the idea of American Freedom, yet loathe the system of government "justice." This led me to deeper revelations about the nature of Liberty - what it is and how it is lost, and what Freedom looks like in 'the Shadowlands' where we now reside. No one appreciates freedom more than those who have none... but True Freedom lives in the heart.

Text from "Liberty Awakes":

I may not be free, but I am Free.

Neither government nor man can grant my Freedom - it is an endowment from my Creator; my birthright which I will fight and bleed to preserve.

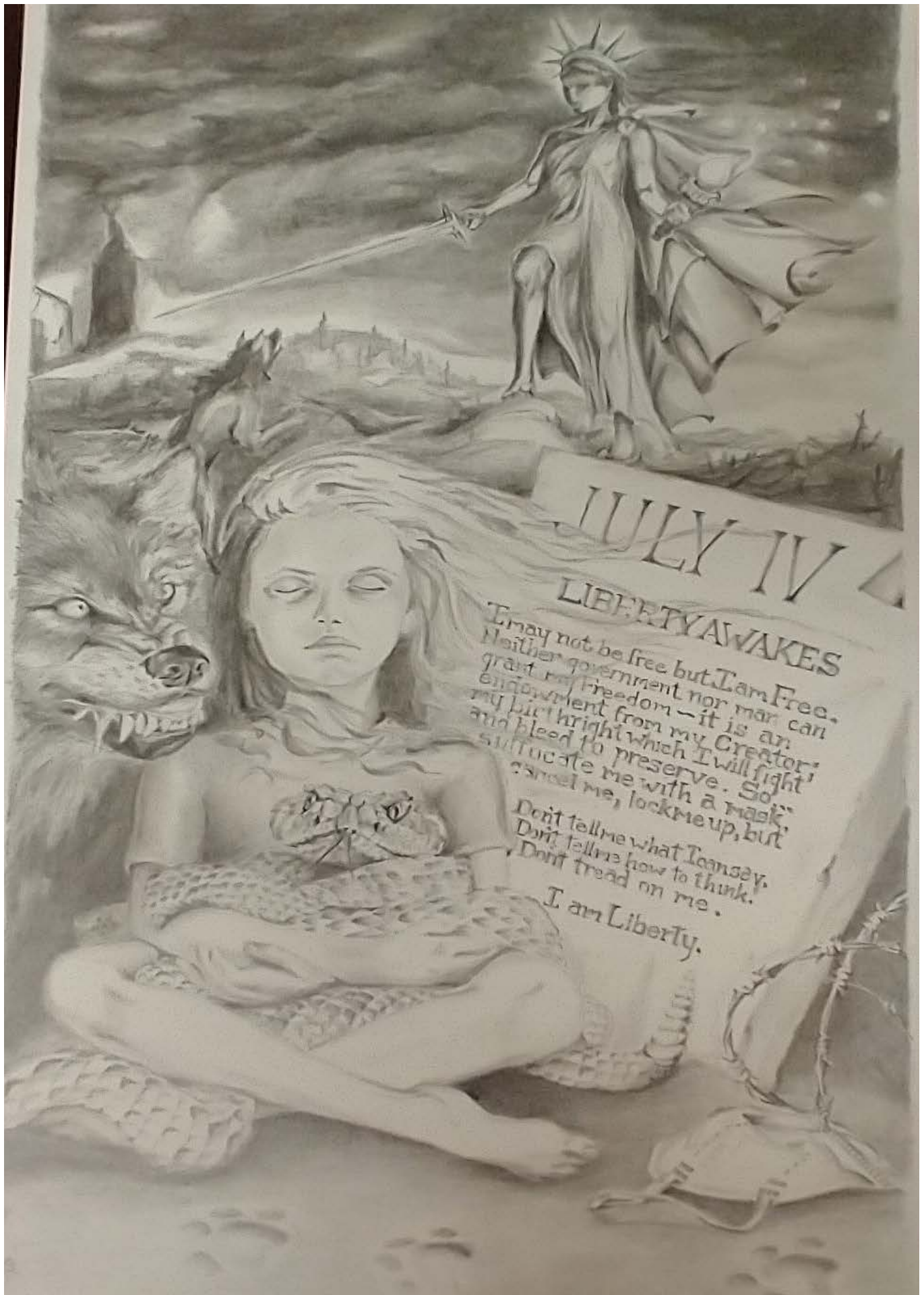
So ... suffocate me with a mask, cancel me, lock me up, but

Don't tell me what I can say.

Don't tell me how to think.

Don't tread on me.

I am Liberty.



Surviving the Jungle

By Anthony "Fancy" Lipsey

My name is Fancy B. Lipsey
CDER#: WB1128

I'm originally from Inglewood, Ca
and I was arrested at the age of
17 years old.

I have been incarcerated for almost 15
years now.

I'm a transsexual woman and I'm
currently housed in CWF (Chowchilla).
I enjoy reading and writing.
And I am open to working with
any organizations that fight for the
rights of the LGBTQ population inside/out
alike.

"Surviving the jungle" by. Fanny♥Lipsey

My journey began at the age of 17. I set foot off the porch of my home and began a trip that I knew would be long, life threatening, emotionally charged, and full of sorrows and agony. A man lost his life during this journey, a loss I can honestly share my upmost apologies and regrets for this loss. But in the end it was all apart of my journey and the way our universe works is all one huge mystery so it all came together to go like this....

March 30th, 2007 was the last day I was free. It was the day I walked into the Inglewood, Ca police department in cuffs and walked back out in a white jumpsuit headed for "Central Juvenile hall" Charged with murder & armed robbery all as a kid who barely even knew what

life meant. I remember sleeping for like 3 days because I was so depressed and all of the stress from running the streets and ~~the~~ the drugs leaving my system kicked me down into the dirt. I was taken to court but not the one I was used to. No, it was to "Inglewood Superior", an adult court meant for people who were 18 and older not for kids like me. Someone who made a serious mistake, who didn't think it through, who never understood the seriousness of my actions or the severity of the outcome and the impact I would have on not only my life and my families lives but the victims life and his families life as well. I damn near fainted when they set a bail for me at 2 million dollars. Fast forward to August 10th, 2010 and im sitting in^a Reception Center for CDJR with a Life Without Parole Sentence at the age of 20 years old and im come out as being a transsexual woman

Christine White

By Ron Levine



Christine White, 53
Robbery

I am a trans-gender person. I have spent about 3 years and 7 months in segregated custody. Cells you wouldn't put dogs into for longer than a day.

When I went through the change, I basically hid out for a few years. The satirical part is that I get ostracized by society and then by my family and I guess, in retrospect, I should have probably sought the post-gender surgery counseling to deal with these issues.

So I now have a huge target on my back both being scouted by inmates and officers alike. I'm constantly being sexually harassed by the inmates and it's hard for me to find a comfortable place to live in cause every man I live with only expects me to have sex with him and be his girl. And the officers all know about my issues but care less about it cause they see trans women as problems and not as the vulnerable women we are in a place full of men who can easily over power us. It was very difficult and I felt nothing but fear on a constant basis that I would be a victim of any sort of abuse whether it be physical or sexual. Well, my fears came true some time down the line. I was

in a relationship in Donovan State
prison here in California with a man
for almost 4 years from 2015 to 2019
and it began on a smooth level. He
portrayed himself to be a quiet guy
who could be the supporter that
every woman dreams of having
but ended up as a monster who
still haunts my life to this day.
I say that cause it effects my
insecurities and I feel that every
person I get with are all the
same, Cheaters, people who are only
in it to take advantage of my body,
and habitual liars. He also beat me
senseless and would choke me to
control me if I tried to leave.
It was hell for almost 4 years!
I finally was set free when I requested
to be transferred to another
institution and it was granted.
But my problems didn't end there.
I continued to get harassed by
officers and inmates alike in
Ingle Creek State Prison and even

Freedom from Bondage

By Jessica Capron



Painting was done on 12 x 12 canvas using acrylic paint and sharpie

I am an international MPH candidate at Rutgers University School of Public Health. I found out about The Journal of Women and Criminal Justice through Rutgers RWJ Medical School Women's Health Institute (WHI), where I am an intern. I have had family members who worked in prison as well as some who have been incarcerated. Incarceration doesn't just affect the ones who are incarcerated, but is a web that can trap and affects many.

It is a depiction of a formerly incarcerated woman who is contemplating her life. Many inmates may feel that their lives are over once they go to prison, and if they get out, there can be a sense of loss and feeling of uncertainty. But with the help of the community and family, there is healing, love, and peace. Their lives are not defined by their mistakes, but can begin anew.

Almost lost my life when one of my cell mates wanted me out of his cell cause I wouldn't have sex with him but the officers wouldn't give me a cell move, then after I told them I feared for my safety and he ~~then~~ told them he would "get me out of there his-self" and threatened to fuck me up. He ended up knocking me unconscious in front of the officers and jumping on top of me, stabbing me in my face and back of my head. He tried to kill me and the officers allowed it cause the C/O who was standing there watching him beat on me had gotten in trouble before cause he failed to properly handle a previous incident where another one of my cell mates had beaten me up in the cell.

He felt that I "Switched" on him and said I had nothing coming. Then ~~Case~~ came along the bill SB132. SB132 is a bill that allows trans inmates to choose their preference of having amongst the sex they identify as. I took place in a conference with the senator who sponsored the bill and helped get it passed by the state senate. The conference was held to explain its language to the Governor of California and the organizations that sponsored it as well gave their opinion on why it should be signed into law. My role was to give opinion from an inmates aspect and how I felt it would benefit us trans women and men alike. I was so proud when it was signed into law!! So now, here I am. A transsexual woman sitting in CCWF (Central California Women's Facility) and im as comfortable as administration allows me to be. The harassment has not ended!

I have been placed in ASU (Ad-seg) for "Conspiring to impregnate the female population". I have been on my hormone replacement therapy for over 10 years now and can't get anyone pregnant even if I wanted to, but I'm safe and can say I am where I feel I need to be as I am to soon be approved for my gender reassignment surgery, in a Women's prison. I have a chance to go home soon due to me being a juvenile at the time of my arrest so I'm happy about that. It's been hell the last 15 years but hey, I'm alive and well. I've been in the jungle and survived it. Many times have I almost been consumed by its elements but I was always able to adapt and overcome them. I'm a true survivalist.

Pheasants in the Snow

By Karen Thomas

My name is Karen Thomas. I am currently living in New York City.

In 1982, I committed a domestic violence homicide, killing my ex-husband after years of physical and emotional abuse. In 1983, I was sentenced to life with a minimum of 25 years. With that sentence, there was a possibility that I would never be released from prison at all. Ever. I had five appearance interviews before the parole board, five denials of release, two more years of time added with each denial. Finally, in 2017, I convinced the board that I was not a danger to society.

When I was released from prison after doing 34 ½ years, I was 69 years old and disabled. I didn't know what I would be coming home to. My parents both passed away while I was in prison. The rest of my family had all moved out of New York State. I had never used the internet, an ATM or a metro card. I had never seen a cell phone. However, I have strong faith, and I had a strong belief that I would be successful. I was blessed to come home to a job working as a paralegal for an attorney I have known for over 20 years. I also work for the Women's Prison Association, as a residential aide in the shelter, working with women who have just come home from prison.

I joined Trinity church and was blessed to be embraced by the clergy and parishioners. My support network of friends has grown with the addition of my Trinity family. I am a lay reader in the church, and I am an active member in the Trinity Art program, painting candles that are used in the services.

Art is something that helped me cope with my time in prison. I realized early on in my sentence that I needed beauty around me. I began hand sewing appliqued wall hangings, using pieces of cloth that I repurposed. Eventually, the Bedford Hills Superintendent issued me a permit for scissors, cloth, quilt batting, sewing needles and thread that I needed to make the wall hangings. I call them Yearnsapes, because each one depicts a scene that I yearn to have as my reality. These pictures evoke memories of times from my youth that sustained me and gave me hope during the long years of my incarceration. Since my release, I have exhibited my quilted art at Escaping Time, and at various venues in New York City.

Daily I am blessed to be free. Even though I face challenges because of my age, my disability, and my felony record, I continue to move forward, not letting any of those things hold me back. I can never change the fact that I committed a crime, but I am not my crime. I am much more than the worst thing I've ever done.

Many people have asked me what I am afraid of. I always tell them that when the judge sentenced me to life in prison, there was nothing left to fear.



“Pheasants in the Snow”

Fabric wall hanging hand-sewn by Karen L. Thomas

This was the moonlit scene in the woods behind my grandmother’s house when I was a child. It was magical.

Karen Hanging Show at WOW CAFE

By Sara Bennett

After 18 years as a public defender, SARA BENNETT turned her attention to photographing women with life sentences, both inside and outside prison. Her work has been widely exhibited in solo shows, including at the Blue Sky Gallery in Portland, OR and Photoville in

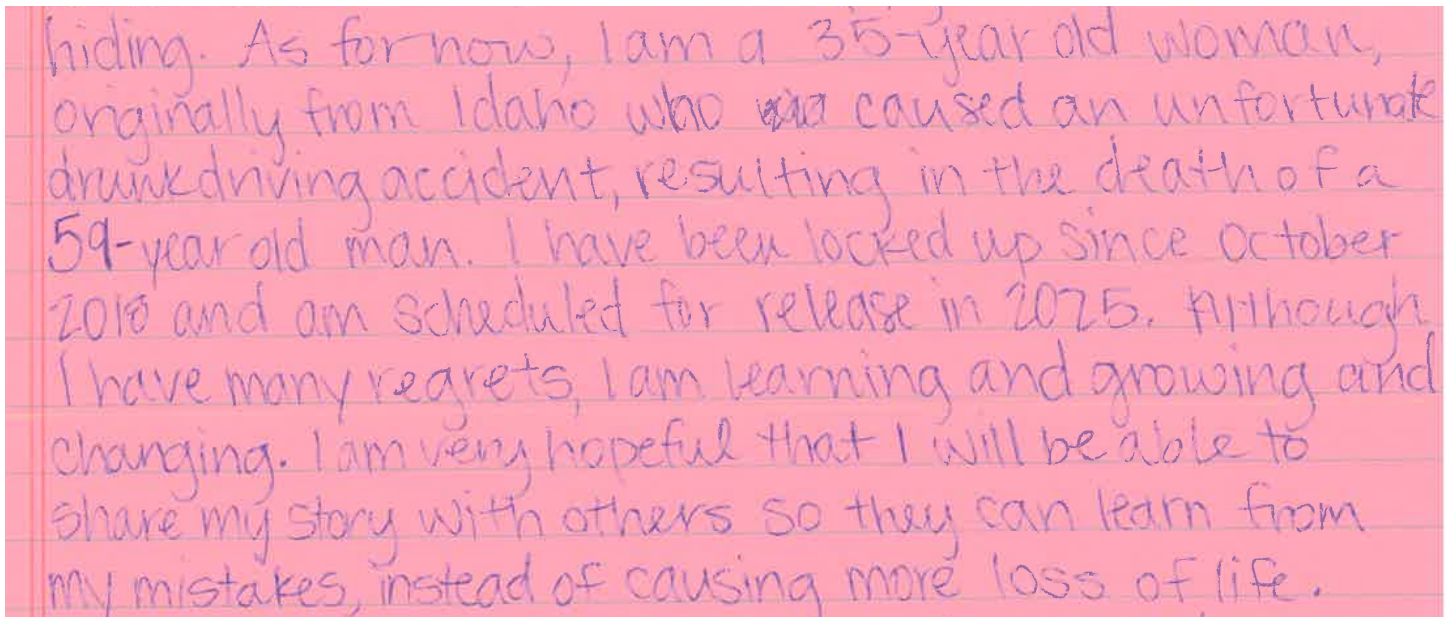
Brooklyn, NY, and in group shows, including MoMA PS1's Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration. Her work has been featured in such publications as The New York Times, The New Yorker Photo Booth, and Variety & Rolling Stone's American (In)Justice.



KAREN setting up her one-woman art exhibit at WOW Cafe. New York, NY (November 2019)

The Evacuation

Anonymous in Oregon

A photograph of a piece of lined paper with handwritten text in purple ink. The text is written in a cursive, slightly slanted script. The paper has horizontal lines and a vertical margin line on the left. The handwriting is somewhat shaky and expressive. The text reads: "hiding. As for now, I am a 35-year old woman, originally from Idaho who ~~was~~ caused an unfortunate drunk driving accident, resulting in the death of a 59-year old man. I have been locked up since October 2018 and am scheduled for release in 2025. Although I have many regrets, I am learning and growing and changing. I am very hopeful that I will be able to share my story with others so they can learn from my mistakes, instead of causing more loss of life."

This story was told to the best of my knowledge. I apologize for any discrepancies.

It started out as a regular day. Well, not exactly regular, since I woke up in a prison cell, but regular enough. However, as soon as I left my cell and looked outside, I noticed the sky was apocalypse orange and so much smoke had made its way into the building that our blankets smelled like we had been camping for weeks. Camping would have been way more fun, but anyways, things were weird.

It was September of 2020 and COVID-19 had been in full swing for about six months. However, there was another disaster occurring in the United States as well. There were about one hundred large wildfires burning over 4.5 million acres across a dozen western states, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. Nearly ten percent of Oregon's population had been ordered to evacuate. On Thursday, September 10th, the Office of Emergency Management reported that there were 37 fires burning simultaneously in Oregon. Governor Kate Brown added that more than 1,400 square miles had burned in Oregon over the past three days,

nearly double the land that burns in a typical year in the state and an area greater than the size of Rhode Island. Between COVID-19 and the catastrophic fire season in 2020, it seemed apparent we were nearing the end of the world.

Anyways, there we were, in the middle of a natural disaster and everyone was just going about their day. I went to work in the computer lab that morning with the eerie orange sky fresh on my mind. The whole atmosphere of Coffee Creek, the prison I was incarcerated in, had an ominous vibe, almost like the feeling you get when you drive up close to a volcano. The computer lab I worked in had no windows to the outside, but as the morning minutes ticked by I could smell the smoke getting stronger. My boss, Mr. Y, was soft-spoken and a no-nonsense type of guy. I kept glancing his way to see if he was noticing how bad the smoke was getting, but he just kept typing away. I figured things must be fine since surely he would cancel class if the building was on fire. Right?

Turns out, Coffee Creek wouldn't be likely to burn down because of the natural fire line of the facility and the fact that it is almost

completely made of concrete. But, the smoke was another matter and it had made its way in. On my way back home from work, I passed all the dogs lined up and being taken out of our unit. The fires were getting too close for comfort and there were rumors flying that we might also have to evacuate. Seeing the dogs taken out pretty much confirmed the rumor must be true. Earlier in the week, the officers had actually cleared out an entire unit of ours in anticipation of male AICs from a neighboring prison being evacuated here. That plan was about to go out the window, because as soon as lunch was over, we were told not to return to work. The first direction we were given was to pack one bag of toiletries and one bag of bedding. They said to only bring the essentials and medications. No radios or TVs or food or anything that makes you happy. Immediately, there was a flood of questions from everyone. There were approximately six hundred AICs housed in the Coffee Creek medium custody women's facility and one hundred of us were living on J-unit. J-unit was an incentive unit with a lot of old-timers and many of the women had not left the facility in years or even decades. Naturally, there were gonna be some questions.

- Where are we going? How long is the drive?
- Why is this happening?
- Can I bring my pillow? My oxygen? What about my wheelchair?
- Is the building going to burn down?
- Are we going to be able to go to the bathroom?
- Can I just stay here?
- Will there be WiFi on the bus?

Ok, nobody asked about Wifi, but they did ask about pretty much everything else. The problem was the officers didn't have any answers. It was complete pandemonium, as we all ran around trying to decide what we should take. Tablets were passed door-to-door so we could notify our families of what was happening, even though I'm sure the DOC would have preferred them not know about our upcoming road trip. I decided that I was going to bring whatever I needed to be somewhat

comfortable. As long as I could carry it, it was coming. I figured there was no way they would be able to take the time to search through every bag if they actually wanted us evacuated within the next decade. Luckily, I guessed right and made it through "customs" with all the goods: coffee, creamer, makeup, my radio (mostly because they specifically asked us not to bring one), extra clothes, two books, lotion, and even floss. Just because we were evacuating, didn't mean I was about to start slacking on my personal hygiene.

As we watched the other incentive unit slowly file out the door, it started to sink in that this was really happening. There was a sense of impending doom, almost like we were on the Titanic and there was pressure to be first in line for a lifeboat. We were second in line, so that would have to do. There wouldn't be enough handcuffs for the over 1,300 AICs being relocated, so we got to use the buddy system. I had one arm cuffed to my friend Miranda and the other arm full of bedding and contraband. As we were waiting to get on whatever run-down vehicle look alike they had rustled up for us, I remembered something. I remembered that I have been known to get motion sickness if I'm not the driver and that the last time I was a passenger in a DOC transportation situation, I had thrown up all over the stairwell step. Since I was fairly certain they weren't going to let me drive, I asked for a plastic bag just in case. Miranda teased me about this, but in the end it would be her making use of the puke bag.

The next sequence of events had me thinking there must be some truth to the idea of fate or serendipity or whatever you wanna call it. For starters, Miranda and I barely missed the cut-off for getting on a large bus and were instead being squeezed into the back of a much smaller handicapped van. There were only six seats available in the back, with the rest of the space taken up by wheelchairs. We watched as they wheeled Big Mama up and a couple other wheelchair-bound AICs. I immediately panicked, my anxiety starting to get the best of me. Big Mama wasn't exactly known for her quiet, calm demeanor, so I was expecting a full-blown meltdown or at least a decently loud car ride that

may or may not add to my motion sickness/panic attack. Yay. However, it turned out that she was in a similar state of shock and awe as we were and remained quiet most of the drive with a contemplative look on her face. There were four of us piled into the back area, with two open spots. This is when fate intervened for a second time. I looked out the window and saw her. Her name was EJ and she was beautiful and mysterious and took my breath away. She was also my ex-girlfriend and a huge asshole. She hadn't lasted ten minutes on a new unit before hooking up with someone else. I hated her. I loved her. I hated that I still loved her. Either way, it looked like we were about to spend the next few hours two feet apart in a tiny squished van and with a small audience. This day was really turning out to be a doozy.

It should have been awkward, but somehow the entire drive felt like a movie. EJ apologized profusely and (re)pronounced her love for me, which of course I totally fell for. Since everyone was handcuffed to someone else, we all had to rearrange just so EJ and I could sit next to each other. The girl she was cuffed to, our friend Sam, had to sit on the floor in order to make this work, but luckily she was a good sport about it. As I sat cuddled up with my ex/future girlfriend (as far as we knew, the camera situation wasn't quite up to par), I looked around at the other women in the van. Miranda had tears in her eyes as we passed by familiar freeway exits and shopping centers. She had not left Coffee Creek, or even been in a car, for over ten years. Another woman in the van had been down for fifteen years. It was a powerful moment watching them take in the sights around us. Normally it wouldn't be all that exciting to see a Starbucks or Target, but when it's been decades, it brought out emotions and memories that none of us were prepared for. While I had been excited for our little field trip up until now, I realized not everyone was enjoying this experience. It was stressful and emotional and we were mostly quiet for the whole drive, taking it all in. The towns we drove through were essentially ghost towns, with most people evacuated. The heavy smoke still hung in the air and the road we were on would actually be closed the next day. It hit me that our

evacuation was more than just a precaution; at this point it became a necessity for survival.

The drive took about four hours and when we arrived in Madras, Oregon, we piled out like cattle and slowly made our way into a large cafeteria. While our ride had been relatively uneventful, some of the other buses had supposedly pulled over for the AICs to go to the bathroom. The transport officers had spotted a port-a-potty being used at a construction site and they were actually thoughtful enough (or annoyed enough) to walk right up there and carry it back down to the bus for the women to use! Much to our surprise, the Deer Ridge staff had all stayed late to make our dinner and pizza night commenced. As we approached the dish pit to drop our dirty trays off, I heard a man's voice saying, "Well, how's about that? I musta died and gone ta heaven!" He was a Deer Ridge AIC, quite possibly the luckiest Deer Ridge AIC that night, and he was repeating this line to each and every woman who dropped their tray off. Not all the male AICs were thrilled about our stay, however. In order to accommodate our medium custody level AICs, the men had to be temporarily relocated to a minimum housing area of the prison that had not been used for years. There were rumors of poor ventilation, mice, cockroaches, black mold, dirty cells, and no access to phones. Basically, all of us were given the master bedroom, while the boys were sent to the basement, metaphorically. The men even staged a few protests, refusing to return to their housing units and requiring the DOC to deploy their Crisis Negotiation Team. This probably sounds way more interesting than it actually was...

After our pizza, we all hung out in the cafeteria for hours, while the staff tried to sort out our housing. Although we were a room of incarcerated adults and experiencing a traumatic experience, you wouldn't know it by our behavior. There were old friends reuniting who had not seen one another in months or even years. There were hugs, smiles, laughter, and happiness. Nobody was fighting or yelling or upset. It was almost like this disaster had brought us closer together. I believe this would be similar

in a group of non-incarcerated people. We are not all that different.

Once they finally assigned us to our rooms around 11 pm or so, they asked for volunteers to help sort and deliver everyone's property. I jumped at the opportunity to help out, mostly so I could explore more of this new environment. Unfortunately, EJ had already been sent to her room and was unable to join me. It took us until about 5 am to get everyone's things organized. Madras is located in Central Oregon, kind of in the middle of nowhere. At one point my friend Jackie and I were waiting for the empty carts to return and we looked over and saw a few deer mingling about by the fence. It was dark, chilly, and the moon was bright. For just a few moments, we felt free and immersed in nature with the starry sky above and the majestic deer aware of us, but at ease. It didn't last long, but was a peaceful and humbling experience.

The mass incarceration occurring in the United States does not seem to be beneficial to anyone. At least not at the overwhelmingly high rate we see. However, during this crisis on top of a crisis, I did not witness hatred, fighting, or disconnection. I saw love and teamwork among the AICs during the entire week we spent at Deer Ridge. The first morning after we arrived, they asked for volunteers to work in the kitchen. Many of the women stepped up right away with no questions asked. There were level three incentives working in the dish pit, wiping tables, and doing multiple jobs they had been opted out of for years. As we were waiting hours upon hours for our first meal of the day, we realized nobody else was going to take care of us. We were in a state of emergency and if we wanted to eat, we would have to step up and make it happen ourselves. That's exactly what we did.

The next few days, I felt like I was in a different world, walking on clouds with EJ, spending lots of time pretending to be in medline so that I could catch up with old friends, and simply enjoying a new facility that happened to have lots of grass and sidewalks. I was so happy to be back with EJ because we were in love and everything was going to be okay now.

We fell in love in a hopeless place, but we were gonna get our happy ending one way or another. There is nothing like a natural disaster to bring people together. Plus, we weren't like all those other prison couples. We were different (eye roll). And special (double eye roll). And meant to be. Only, we weren't and less than a year later I would see her true colors and experience the kind of ruthless heartbreak only a woman can deliver. But, that is a story for another time.

While we were enjoying our getaway in Madras, our facility remained standing in Wilsonville and was not destroyed by the merging fires, much to our slight disappointment. One of the scariest officers (let's just call her Alice) took it upon herself to ransack our cells while we were gone in search of contraband. That was really nice of her! Kick us while we're down, why dontcha? Anyone with interesting enough contraband likely brought it with them to Madras, so joke's on her. This officer had such an evil reputation with rumors that she could even make a full-grown gangster cry over not having a receipt for a peach-colored pencil. In reality, she was more like a glorified bully with some serious mental health issues, but what do I know? Anyways, our trip back to Coffee Creek went much smoother and quicker than the way there. I never thought I would be looking forward to returning to prison, but it was nice to get back to a familiar room, showers with curtains, and my own TV. We were exhausted, but glad to be back. In total, we were only gone for six days, but it felt like a lot more time had gone by.

There were lots of mistakes made during our evacuation to Madras and the scariest thing in the world is having no control over your own life and safety. However, we did learn a lot about our own resiliency and strength. We are strong women (and men) and can handle a lot more than we get credit for. Of course, none of us are perfect, but this experience gave me a tiny bit of hope for humanity.

The state of Oregon lost over 1,400 square miles of land, multiple human lives, and hundreds of structures during the fires of 2020. Entire towns were demolished and thousands

of people were displaced. The DOC ended up being forced to evacuate at least four prisons at some point in September of that year. On September 10th, they relocated 1,303 AICs across the state from Wilsonville to Madras. To my best knowledge, this type of evacuation had never occurred before and likely won't happen again anytime in the near future. Nobody was prepared and it was a mess, but we all came out on the other side relatively unharmed.

There was a lot of backlash for the decisions the DOC made, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, if I have learned anything being incarcerated, it is that we are always moving and adapting to new places and people. We are not in control of everything or hardly anything really, so sometimes you gotta know when to go with the flow and try to make the best of a crappy situation. I believe this goes for anything in life, incarcerated or not.

I don't have the answers on why our country has such a high rate of people incarcerated. I do know that a majority of the AICs I know have great potential to become productive members of society if given the chance. In the meantime, we will continue to fight the good fight and adapt to the inconsistent and ever-changing rules, laws, and living conditions of the Oregon Department of Corrections.

Memoir

By Dawn Jackson



Note: In the original version of this piece, Ms. Jackson describes the molestation she experienced at the hands of her stepfather, her mother's boyfriend, her cousin, her brother's father, her step-grandfather, and her biological father.

My name is Dawn Jackson. I am the mother of 11 children (two deceased). My son Michael Wilson recently passed away (January 3, 2022) at age 32; my daughter Ambrie Walker passed away October 27, 1997 at four months, one day old. I am the grandmother of 20 (thus far). Presently, I am incarcerated at the only female prison in the state of New Jersey (Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women). I was sentenced to a mandatory minimum of 30 years for defending myself.

At age 27, I was arrested for defending myself — unintentionally causing the demise of my step-grandfather.

I was represented by a Public Defender (Regina Sauter), who worked for the Middlesex

County Public Defender's Office in New Brunswick, New Jersey. It is my opinion that Ms. Sauter's representation was ineffective. This opinion is based on Ms. Sauter's failure to investigate the facts of my case; her failure to provide the Court with evidence of my mental, physical, emotional and sexual abuse; her failure to adequately represent my best interest. Ms. Sauter stated on Court record, and I quote, "Your Honor, I'm certainly not going to express on the record all the problems that defendant has experienced in her life. The pre-sentence report itself is replete with references to that, and I don't think it would serve any purpose to have them placed on the court record... However, I think all the references to the problems she's experienced pretty much from the age of five or seven and the fact that they have compounded each other by the fact that these problems were never properly addressed by defendant herself, knowing that she was in trouble with those problems... It's not justification for what she did. It's not a defense for what she did... she has led a law-abiding life. This is her first conviction..."

Ms. Sauter's representation was greatly ineffective. In my opinion, I never had an attorney who was for me, but instead completely against me. Ms. Sauter did not raise defenses on my behalf. Instead of representing me, she spoke against me.

That early morning of March 24, 1999, I had gone to my step-grandfather's house to see if he'd give me money to catch a cab home. He opened the door that morning and let me in. I smelled the alcohol as soon as I walked in. My uncle/step-grandfather's son was upstairs asleep at the time. He (step-grandfather) had obviously already been up drinking. He was quite drunk. He sat down in his chair, but soon got up. He came around to the other side of the table where I was sitting. He said to me, "You know, I ain't been wit' a woman in 'bout four years." He leaned in to kiss me... just like old times. I pushed him away from me - only for him to insist, coming back towards me. Though I asked him to stop, he wouldn't. Drunk, he asked what I needed money for. Again I told him, "to catch a

cab home." He told me to come on in the room and get it (cab fare). I followed him, but stopped in the middle of the hallway by the bathroom. I refused to go into his bedroom to get the money from him. He turned around and walked back towards me. He grabbed at me - pulling on me. I pulled away. He came at me, grabbing and fondling all over my body, pulling me towards his bedroom. I yelled - screamed, begging him to stop. I yelled for my uncle - again and again. That very moment resurfaced old memories I had long ago suppressed and buried, sexual abuse that emotionally and mentally took my life away from me. I just wanted to go home, wanted my step-grandfather to stop, but he wouldn't. I tried to leave, but he continued to aggressively pull and grab all over me. He was rough. He was drunk. He just kept grabbing at me, insisting, "Come on and suck on me a little..." We tussled back and forth. Again, I called out for my uncle, but he never came downstairs. It was the fear I dreaded in my life the most: the fear of being raped again. Between me trying to get away from my step-grandfather and him roughhousing me, I just wanted to get out of the house. With a small knife, I swung. In the midst of my fear and déjà vu, I didn't realize I was stabbing my step-grandfather. I didn't realize I was causing his demise. I honestly didn't realize anything in the moment. But I do know that in that moment, I was fearing what this man was trying to do to me.

The State made me out to be some kind of cold-blooded criminal; something I am not, nor have I ever been. Despite everything I had been and had gone through with my step-grandfather, I actually loved him. I had forgiven him and all the rest for everything I had to endure and suffer as a child.

In no way will I ever try to undermine the death of my step-grandfather. With all due respect, I was once a victim myself, a victim of sexual abuse, at his hands and many others. I survived everything that was, and had been inflicted upon me as a child, teenager, and woman. Though I take accountability for my actions, I did not in any way mean to intentionally hurt and cause my

step-grandfather's demise. That kind of behavior was just never in my character. I was never, nor am I that person. I would never hurt, nor harm anyone. In that unfortunate and frightening moment, I snapped. Again, I never meant to take the life of my step-grandfather. As a little girl, I was powerless when it came to my abusers.

The public defender (Sauter) in my case was completely for the State. She did not fight for me. She was only adamant – "... just take the plea. I got the best deal I could for you. If you go through with trial, you'll spend the rest of your life in prison..." Naively, I believed her. Ms. Sauter did not raise any kind of defenses on my behalf, except to say that I had a terrible past/history of being sexually abused, a history not worthy enough of being raised and spoken of on Court record.

From the outset, it is important to note that Ms. Sauter was provided with information regarding my unfortunate history, especially between myself and the victim. She was aware of the constant involvement of the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) in my family household. She was also aware that evidence was available which indicated a pattern of sexual, physical, emotional, mental, and verbal abuse. I suffered from not only the victim (step-grandfather), but also my mother and various paternal/male figures in the family/household. It was never stressed to the Court who my abusers were, nor that I had been sexually abused by my step-grandfather for many years. In addition, the Court should have been apprised that I suffered from aggressive incest, battered child syndrome, battered woman's syndrome, sexual trauma, PTSD, and dissociative social disorder, coupled with a severe substance addiction to cover the scars of a traumatic childhood.

Furthermore, the Court should have been advised that the victim, my step-grandfather, was a chronic alcoholic who had a history of "touching" me.

As once a constant victim of sexual abuse, I became mentally and emotionally detached – feeling oppressed and ashamed. In the midst

(even after) of all my traumas, I feared speaking up for myself, a fear that shook me to my

This is Hell

By Leilani Drennan



This piece contains an artistic interpretation of sexual assault women victims and how it feels to carry that burden in a society that ignores, perpetuates, and even sometimes encourages sexual assault – meanwhile many incarcerated women have experienced sexual abuse that contributed to the actions that lead them to be incarcerated. The main theme is represented by the nine circles of hell inspired by Dante's Inferno, each containing various symbolic representations of various different aspects of the social issue of sexual assault and specifically patriarchal oppression. On both sides of the painting, there is a white woman holding up a floor and then a black woman holding up a boulder. This is to convey the difference in burdens that white women and women of color share; women of color have a heavier burden due to intersectionality. They not only face issues for being a woman, but also face specific

hardships because of their race, both from white women and men, and also men of their same race. The painting overall is supposed to represent the themes of hopelessness, dehumanization, power imbalance, and misery.

Society has many systems and norms within it that allow for sexual assault to continue without repercussions against the perpetrators, as well as abandoning the traumatized women. This leads to adverse behaviors in victims as a trauma response; they are dealing with their trauma the only ways they know how and oftentimes not as a conscious choice, but as an instinctive response formed from the combination of their unique

situation and DNA. From drug use to prostitution, and even violent crimes – in many cases of incarcerated women, their crimes can be explained by peeking into their trauma, specifically sexual trauma and especially childhood trauma. It has been proven through the perpetuation of mass incarceration how content a lot of people seem to be with ignoring the issue of sexual assault and moving on, while they walk about in a system that's breaking underneath their feet. This is to show that we as a society are betraying ourselves and women when we fail to listen to them, make accommodations, and enact change.



inner-core. To the extreme, I felt paralyzed with shame – with guilt. Trusting people wasn't a part of my life. Although I was told to tell if anyone ever touched me – the words – the intimidation – the threats from those who had hands in sexually violating me – seemingly, their voices spoke much louder. Unfortunate for my ears to hear, a male family member verbally interrogated and berated me with harsh words, barking to me, " ... sexual abuse... – all that shit was your fault – 'cause you ain't open your mouth and tell nobody... !" Thank God for thick skin. Hearing such words troubled me for a second – but reminded me of what I needed to continue doing for the sake of my healing, as well as others who have lived in my shoes -- those who come from where I've been. I survived. I overcame. And as long as God gives me breath, I will continue to speak up.

For many years, I suppressed what I endured in my life. Gradually, I then began to live the results from a grooming I knew all too well – a dark past that led me down a dead-end road. Despite all my abuse, I learned to forgive. For years, I buried my dreadful past as deep as I could. Subconsciously, I lived abuse; I felt it — I endured it — cried— agonized, believing that it was somehow normal. I even embraced my abuse.

I always do my best to remain positive and be an inspiring example for my children, as well as my peers, especially those who have lived, but have overcome and conquered sexual and physical abuse.

Since my incarceration, I have successfully completed 60+ Institutional programs. I have obtained both my High School Diploma (GED) and Associates Degree (AA). On February 23, 2018, I submitted my Clemency application to the Governor (Philip D. Murphy) of New Jersey, requesting mercy – for the remainder (six years, four months) of my sentence to be commuted. I have kept a great Institutional record (no disciplinary write-ups and/or sanctions). I have also completed academic programs geared towards obtaining and maintaining employment. I have facilitated multiple NA groups.

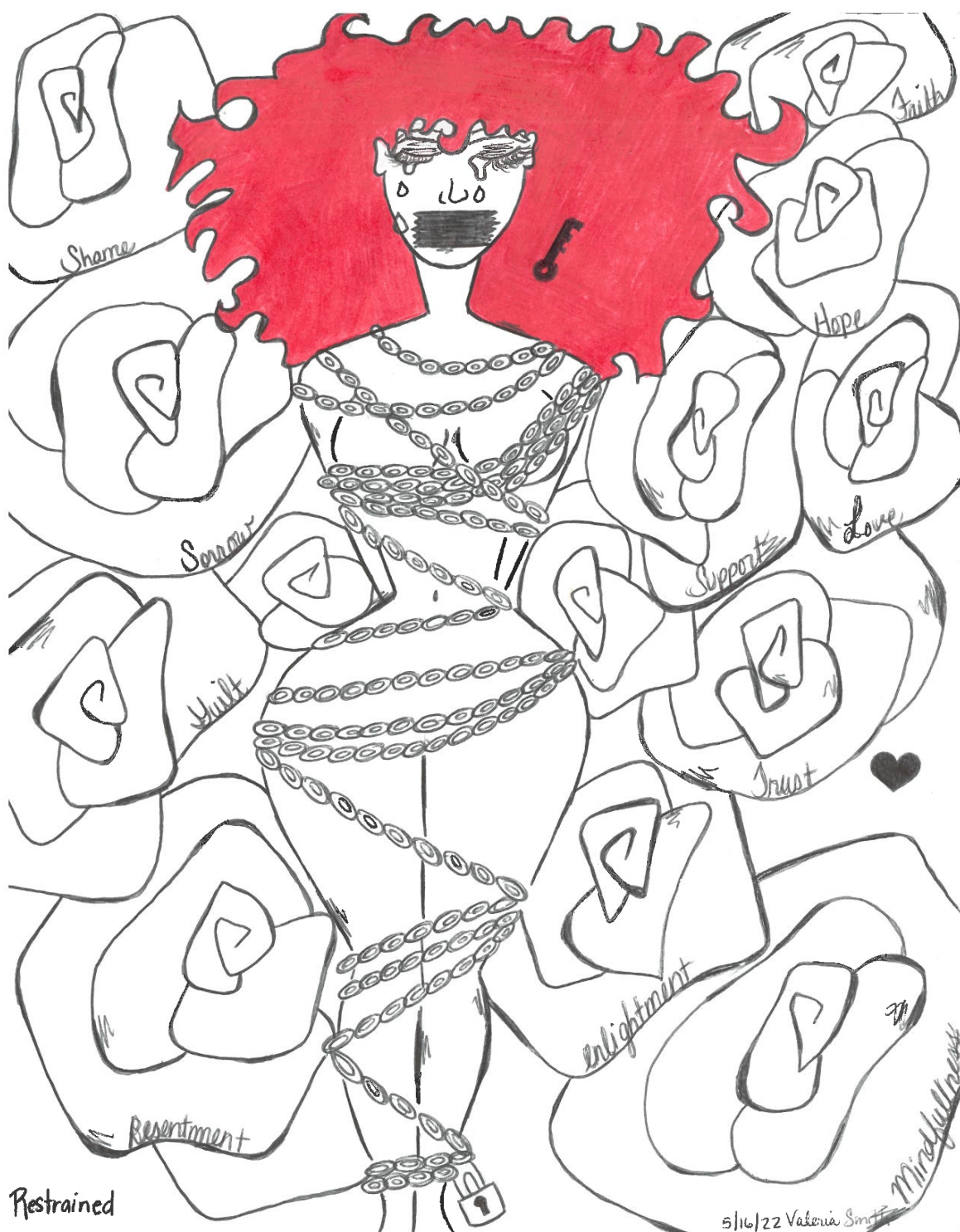
Despite everything I endured in my own life, I have never been an aggressive or violent person, but instead, a very loving, compassionate, and humble human being. I was defending myself the day of my offense - from once again being that timid little girl who was forced into incest - having sex, and performing degrading sexual acts beginning at the age of five.

I am a woman - a survivor who is in great hopes of one day advocating for "all" who have endured traumatic trials relative to mine, as well as the oppressions of abuse itself. My story continues. Sexual abuse goes on in this world every day.

I kindly ask that you please look into my story/case. I am in great need of your support/ assistance – asking if you would, on my behalf, help to advocate and shed great light, bringing great awareness to my story. Sexual abuse continues to go on in this world... every single day. In need of your help. Thank you for all your time.

Restrained

By Valeria Smith



"Restrained" is my way of expressing that even though my body is locked up & stripped^{ed} naked of all my worldly possessions my spirit & mind are free. & still I rise.

A Line That Must Be Drawn by Catherine Schaper

It is a line in the sand that must be drawn
evil cannot stand, it is always wrong
God's children struggle to do right.
failure happens, try though we might
Voices stay silent too many times
speak up, speak out when justice is on the line

It is a line in the sand that must be drawn
we look away too easily when others are used as pawns
It is convictions that they seek
heaven forbid, the truth it may leak.
Standing on the least their careers they did make
truth and justice in this system are all too fake.

It is a line in the sand that must be drawn
Only seeking after truth will produce a new dawn
truth matters in the utmost of ways
without it, we as a people will be wrongly swayed
We must continue the good fight
it is our character to want what is right

It is a line in the sand that must be drawn
for heaven is watching this path we are on
Beware if we do not take the right stand
and sit idly by while He removes His hand
Stand now, speak now, raise your voice
His truth and His justice are always the right choice
This is the line in the sand that must be drawn.

A Changed Mind

By Carmenetta Holt

Yes, for most people, life is better than my life, but everything I've been through makes me... Me!

Being myself makes me stronger than ever, and the love and message I have to share makes me even more loveable.

I used to be afraid, but I know now that I didn't have a chance because I was afraid of blessing myself. I was afraid of rejection. Now I believe there's no stopping me now.

I have come to realize that if I don't do better for myself now, how can I do better with others? I know if I were to disappear from the earth, people would notice. I used to feel worthless and useless, but that's because I didn't love myself. I used to think I wouldn't amount to anything, but God and his footwork showed me differently. I used to think because of my mental illness I was dumb. Now I know I was smart.

I AM smart! I want to be, and I'm willing to learn and I'm teachable.

So, this is all to say... a changed mind will get you a changed life. Amen!

Pretrial Needs

Prepared by Bria Higgs, M.A. Bauman Consulting Group

Overview

Over the past several years, the pretrial period has become an increasingly significant area of interest for practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders in the criminal justice system.²⁷ Extant research shows that measuring needs during the pretrial period presents an opportunity to provide services to clients.²⁸ Programs and interventions targeted at meeting clients' needs during the pretrial period can help more clients complete pretrial successfully.²⁹ Assessing and addressing needs

early in the adjudication process, also known as the "pre-entry" period, can divert individuals from the system or stop them from entering further into the justice system.³⁰ The Gender Informed Needs Assessment (GINA) is a particularly useful tool to use during the pre-entry period because, unlike other risk assessments, it focuses on the clients' needs as well as their risks. The GINA aims to minimize pretrial failures and can be used to guide decision-making on the types and intensity of programs that would be best suited to the clients' needs. Findings from the GINA can be used to facilitate case management while clients are preparing to return to the community, for individuals who cannot afford bail, and for women on community supervision.

Pretrial

Pretrial service agencies were established in the 1960s and 1970s to facilitate pretrial release as an alternative to bail.³¹ Contemporaneously, mass deinstitutionalization of mentally ill individuals and the lack of funding for community health care organizations resulted in a sweeping majority of severely mentally ill people being diverted to the criminal justice system.³² Changes in these sociopolitical dynamics account for why pretrial service agencies, researchers, and other stakeholders have identified these themes as common concerns for justice-involved people, especially justice-involved women. In general, pretrial agencies focus on defendants' risk of committing new offenses or failing to appear (FTA) for court appearances. Risk is often determined by evaluating static characteristics related to the nature of the client's current offense and their prior criminal behavior.³³

Pretrial risk assessments

Pretrial risk assessment instruments are used to identify the likelihood of defendants' failing to appear for a scheduled court appearance or posing a danger to the community if released on their own recognizance.³⁴ The items included in pretrial risk assessment instruments reflect the characteristics that determine risk, therefore the items in most risk assessments are

static, offense-related factors. Many studies have also found strong correlations between failing to appear in court and substance abuse, mental health, and homelessness.³⁵ While these items reliably classify clients according to risk, they do not help those who use the tool determine what can be done to lower a defendant's risk of failing to appear, being rearrested or other kinds of pretrial failure.³⁶

Risk assessments were created to address a predominantly male population of justice-involved individuals.³⁷ Furthermore, most of the research has been done on samples that are comprised primarily or entirely of men.^{38,39} While gender neutral risk factors such as criminal history, substance abuse, and prior FTAs are relevant for both male and female populations, many have observed that

“gender neutral tools may miss critical gender specific risk factors that, if addressed, can achieve more successful outcomes with justice involved women. For example, we know from recidivism and assessment validation studies for sentenced female populations that many assessments over classify women... current assessments, while valid, ignore needs specific to women.”⁴⁰

Additionally, some feminist scholars propose that women pose a minimal risk to community safety. Therefore, assessing factors that are predictive of men's dangerousness such as criminal history, may produce skewed results when assessing risk in populations of women. Relying on items used in current pretrial risk assessments may not show the unique needs of female pretrial defendants.

Over the past few decades, there have been advancements in research on gender-informed approaches to manage and case plan for justice-involved women.⁴¹ Throughout the same period, the population and rate of population growth for justice-involved women has increased rapidly. Thus “gender informed strategies are more necessary than ever to effectively address the needs of this growing population.”⁴² These advances inform the development of gender re-

sponsive guiding principles, policies, and practices. According to the National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, “the concept of gender responsiveness acknowledges the realities of women's lives and how they differ from men's.”⁴³ Gender-responsive policies and practices are designed to take social and cultural factors in women's lives into account at each stage of the justice system. Some of these factors are histories of violence, abuse, family relationships, substance abuse, trauma, parenting, intimate relationships, poverty, and mental health. Gender-responsive practices emerge from a multi-disciplinary consortium of literature including but not limited to psychology, substance abuse, mental health, family violence, health, trauma, employment, and education.

Evaluating gender-responsive needs at this stage of the criminal justice system may prove beneficial for female pretrial defendants. Gehring & Van Voorhis show that many of the needs that are commonly seen in justice involved populations are risk factors for pretrial failure.⁴⁴ The authors argue “once a need elevates to the point of being a predictor of an adverse outcome, there is a stronger policy imperative for intervention.”⁴⁵ Additionally, there are gender differences in the composition of several of these needs, and gender-responsive pretrial needs are important to predicting pretrial outcomes.⁴⁶ Studies of gender responsive tools such as the Women's Risk/Needs Assessment (WRNA) have been found to be more valid for female populations than gender neutral assessments.⁴⁷

The Inventory of Needs (ION)

One such example of a gender-responsive pretrial assessment, the Inventory of Needs (ION), is a 70-item assessment instrument designed to gather information about defendants' risk, needs, and strengths.⁴⁸ The items gauge client needs by addressing issues such as residential stability, homeless status, parenthood, education, employment, and financial status. Prior experiences with trauma, child abuse, adult abuse, mental illness, and substance abuse are covered in the ION as

well.⁴⁹The assessment also measures strengths by gauging the client's relationships with their family of origin and significant other(s). Information about the clients' demographic information like their name, their current offense, date of birth, and marital status is also collected to help generate a clear profile of the population of women receiving pretrial interventions.⁵⁰

The ION was designed to encourage a collaborative relationship between clients, probation officers/case managers, and service providers.⁵¹ It was a top priority for staff members to ensure that their clients played a collaborative role in the implementation process. Staff also noted their appreciation for the lack of constraint around case planning, which helped staff focus on the individual needs of their clients rather than creating identical case plans. Implementing the ION requires users to regularly ensure that fidelity to the instructions for using the tool are maintained. For example, when Dutchess County, NY implemented the ION they devised strategies to maintain fidelity early on in the implementation process.⁵⁰

"A later empirical test of the ION showed important differences between male and female defendants. Women were far less likely than men to incur any pretrial failures (10% vs. 27%, respectively) and were less likely to incur new arrests (6% vs. 18%) in the 6 months following arrest. Women were also significantly more likely to be assessed as low risk (51%) than men (33%). This study also gave further insight into the types of needs that predispose women to adverse outcomes while on pretrial supervision."⁵²

Gender Informed Needs Assessment (GINA)

The GINA was developed by building on the Inventory of Need (ION).⁵³ Similarly, the GINA addresses prior criminal justice involvement, residential stability, social and familial support, educational strengths, educational needs, employment, and financial status. The tool also assesses prior experiences of trauma during childhood and adulthood, prior history of anger and hostility issues, prior history of mental

illness and prior history of substance abuse. There are also domains on the clients' medical history, parenting, sources of support and barriers to success for case management purposes.

The GINA has also been implemented in Salt Lake City, Utah in partnership with Bauman Consulting Group. Validation of the tool in this population is pending, but anecdotal evidence from those who have used the tool as well as clients who have experienced using the GINA is positive. Additionally, many highlight the relevance of the domains to experiences reported by the clients. There are many advantages of using the GINA, including decreased pretrial misconduct, guidance for choosing the dosage and type of intervention programming, and guidance for whether the client should receive more comprehensive assessments. Additionally, the GINA can help case managers determine whether there is a need for long-term support from community health partners post-release. It can be used by judges and in specialty courts to help provide information to facilitate release from confinement for individuals who cannot afford bail, informs judges of meaningful pretrial release options, can be used to assess and case plan for specialty courts and/or pretrial supervision, and it can be useful with diversion candidates. All in all, using the GINA can be used by agencies in multiple different phases of the adjudication process to contribute to positive sentencing outcomes.

Agencies who are interested in implementing more gender-informed practices at the pretrial stage will find the GINA particularly useful. Additionally, practitioners/agencies that have observed client populations with needs that are not being addressed, but have no way of systematically identifying those needs, as well as agencies who have or who would like to develop more community partnerships for client referrals, will also find the GINA useful. The GINA can be used by pretrial supervision agencies, diversion programs, specialty courts, and social service agencies. For further information and guidance on implementing the GINA, please feel free to contact us at info@baumanconsultinggroup.com.

good girls on lock down Lakisha

for help
no one came for 2, 4, 6 hours
my body gone numb. numb to the
pain of being ~~to be~~ hurt
by the ones that post to help
+ the one's that took a Oak
they for got about me left for
died in a cold cell can't
move my life is leaving my body
the light ~~not~~ in the sky
was shining they spoke to me
your name your name can't move
not knowing the angles ~~like~~
look like people the people
that help help save my life
to see freedom again
to get help to put the
Bad cops away only to
know your life is limiting
+ limiting the process of
the injustice Shoots
fired one dead for talking
speaking on the injustice I'm
numb no one will know the
dark truths of the cell
and unjust that cops get
away with.

Arms
was broken
by the one's
that was
put to help
save a life

Aflame

By Sandra Libby



Sandra Libby 36 yrs old
Windham ME.

My name is Sandra Libby. I've struggled with addiction for a very long time. The reason I returned to Maine Correctional Center (MCC) was because I was stealing from stores and displaying aggressive, threatening behaviors to those who confronted me or tried to intervene.

I stole to support my substance use, primarily to feed my addiction to smoking crack, and that became the focus of every moment of every day.

Moving back to the Lewiston/Auburn area after the loss of my best friend, Vanessa Vermette, and reassociating myself with a toxic relationship, was the beginning of the relapse that would lead me back down the wrong road. Revisiting my unhealthy relationship with Chris, my ex-boyfriend, surfaced a lot of negative cycles in my life:

I satisfied myself with letting him use me for my money or drugs, ignoring me, and getting high. At the time, I didn't understand why I couldn't let him go or move on. Breaking away from the impulse to hold on to something seemed impossible and I felt like it would destroy me.

Instead of making choices that would help me find peace, I did more stupid and reckless things to try to please him. I hoped that maybe he would love and want to be with me. I surrendered my self-worth and better judgment in favor of self-destruction and kept the regret as the consequences caught up with me.

I grew up in the foster system and on the streets. I learned early to take what I needed whether it was right or not because I thought I had to in order to survive. I didn't have anyone to take care of me and no one to teach me to care for myself, so I learned how to do so in the wrong ways.

My battle with addiction didn't really begin until my son Scotty died. I use drugs to mask my trauma because I couldn't bring myself to face the pain and disappointment in my life; sometimes it felt like pain and disappointment were all I would ever have. Ultimately, my substance use has cost me everything. I'm not the only one who has suffered from my addiction, my remaining children have suffered without me because I am no longer there to care for them. My inability to heal hurt them in a way that I hoped it never would.

To address my challenges with finding healthy coping mechanisms for my emotions, trauma, and substance use disorder, I have engaged in a lot of programming provided on the facility tablets. I also have requested and continue to work on Rational Emotive Therapy with my Mental Health worker Jen Goan so that I can learn to strengthen my self-regulation skills.

This isn't my first time at MCC, but I am hoping for it to be my last. When I arrived this time, I felt like I was finally ready to try, to decide, and to make my life different. Since being here, I believe my ability to ask for and accept help

and to communicate my needs is a lot stronger than it ever was. I have learned to identify what type of help I need and am more persistent about seeking support. I try to find people I can trust who I can talk to when I feel myself getting triggered so they can help me get grounded and

I can reflect on the situation that caused me to feel reactive. My studies and support contacts have helped me become a more insightful person to better understand what hasn't worked in the past and what ultimately isn't going to help me in the future.



RestoreHER US.America

RestoreHER's leadership team is entirely made up of directly-impacted women: Katrina Butler, Abigail Cook, and the founder and executive director, Pamela Winn. The piece was a collaborative effort by our team, and we hope to open the door for more women to work with us.

RestoreHER US.America (RestoreHER) is a nonprofit, policy advocacy reentry organization founded and led by and for directly impacted women. Our mission is to provide dignity and safety to women involved with and impacted by the criminal legal system to end prison birth and mass incarceration of women in the south.

RestoreHER was initiated by Pamela Winn in 2018. Winn is a formerly incarcerated woman who lost her baby due to inhumane policies and conditions as well as inadequate care present at a correctional facility in which she was confined.

Rather than allow her loss to diminish her spirit, Pamela Winn started RestoreHER US.America, making it her mission to ensure that no woman, unborn child, or family will ever experience the heartbreak she encountered in the system. RestoreHER was created out of strength.

Since 2018, RestoreHER has been making waves across the country. To highlight a few, RestoreHER has:

- Started a petition with almost 200,000 signatures
- Engaged former presidential candidates and current U.S. Senators Cory Booker, Elizabeth Warren and now, Vice President Kamala Harris to draft and sponsor federal legislation to provide dignity for incarcerated pregnant women.
- Passed the Dignity Bill at the state level in 19 states.
- Started a Soros Justice awarded leadership fellowship called Renew, Rebuild, RestoreHER LeadHERship that partners with formerly incarcerated women that promotes healing

wellness, helps them rebuild their lives through financial literacy and advocacy skills.

- Partnered with a regional organization to advocate for the end of the use of solitary confinement in correctional facilities.
- Founded T.R.A.S.H. (Traumatic Realities American Society Hides) to bring awareness to the harm perpetuated by penal institutions through highlighting the stories of women impacted by the criminal legal system.

Amongst these achievements, Winn has been able to position two system-impacted women in positions of leadership. Katrina Butler, Director of Projects, was recently released and now connects with community stakeholders and organizations to conduct the RRR Leadership Cohort and complete significant projects on behalf of the organization. She was also RestoreHER's first Woman of the Month!

Abigail Cook, Director of Communications, first encountered Pamela Winn unknowingly while in jail when she was shackled and sitting next to a woman with no shackles. When Cook asked why she was allowed to sit freely, she said there was a new law that prohibited the use of shackles on pregnant women. This was in 2020, one year after Winn's Dignity Bill took effect in Georgia.

Since beginning with RestoreHER, Winn has given her the opportunity to direct the RRR Leadership Cohort, start and manage RestoreHER's first monthly newsletter, meet and engage with dozens of community leaders, and so much more.

Winn also mentors young women interested in advocacy and leadership through RestoreHER. Our organization was honored to bring on Spelman graduate Sophia Howard as a policy intern. Howard has been instrumental in legislative policy and coalition meetings, community events, and promotional materials among many more valuable contributions.

Currently, RestoreHER is working on two more

pieces of legislation for the upcoming session. First, the Women's CARE Act, is being sponsored bipartisanly in Georgia. This bill seeks to give women deferred sentencing of six weeks postpartum to spend bonding with their child outside of a correctional facility after they have given birth.

The second piece of legislation is the Dignity For Incarcerated Women Bill in Alabama — the only state left in the American South that has not passed legislation preventing the shackling of incarcerated pregnant women.

RestoreHER intends to continue to pass legislation, offer direct services, and advocate for the women that society has left behind. We have not forgotten about you.

If you want to get involved, we would be grateful to have you. Visit our website at <https://www.restoreher.us/> or email info@restoreHER.us.

Ensuring that Pregnant People Are Not Forced to Give Birth Alone in Florida's Jails and Prisons

By Kara Gross

Kara Gross is the legislative director and senior policy counsel for the ACLU of Florida



Erica Thompson was six months pregnant when she was arrested and taken into custody at the Alachua County Jail in North Florida. It was August 2021. She could feel something was wrong. She could feel herself going into labor.⁵⁴

She told jail staff that she was having contractions. She pleaded desperately with them, as she later recounted in an interview with CBS4 News Gainesville, saying, "I'm screaming. I'm going to have my baby, please get me out of here. I feel like I'm going to have my baby. When I said that, I felt like all bets were off, everybody needs to be coming in here trying to check on me and see what's going on. I've had kids before, so I know exactly how it feels. I'm about to have my baby, I'm not just talking."⁵⁵

Twelve hours after her labor began, and despite Erica's cries for help, she gave birth to a baby girl—Ava—in her cell.

Alone.

It wasn't until after she gave birth that she received attention, but it was too late. Erica already had her baby girl by the time a nurse

appeared and had jail staff cut the umbilical cord. Baby Ava was transported to the University of Florida Health Shands Hospital, but Erica said the doctors simply wrapped Ava in a blanket, placed her in a crib, and told Erica there wasn't much else they could do. The doctors didn't even place Ava in an incubator, as is the norm for prematurely born children.

Baby Ava died a few hours later.

Erica rightfully criticized the jail and hospital staff for their inadequate care. A Florida law was supposed to protect her and her newborn from having to endure labor and delivery locked in a jail cell alone.

This was not the first time a woman has been forced to give birth alone in a jail in Florida. Nor the second.

In 2019, two years prior to Erica's traumatic birth story, a pregnant woman named Tammy Jackson gave birth to a baby in a Broward County jail.⁵⁶ Like Erica, Tammy was forced to give birth in her cell all by herself. According to an incident report obtained by WPLG Local 10 News, a Broward County Sheriff's Office deputy saw Tammy "screaming in pain." Still, Tammy wasn't given attention or medical care until after the deputy heard the baby, a girl Tammy named Miranda, crying.

Tammy's traumatic experience giving birth alone in her cell inspired activist organizations like Dignity Power to pursue the Tammy Jackson Act, which was signed into law with bipartisan support in 2020.^{57, 58} Currently found under Florida statute §944.241, the Act was intended to prevent what happened to Tammy Jackson—being forced to go into labor alone in a jail cell without any medical assistance—from ever happening again.⁵⁹ Yet, less than three months after the Tammy Jackson Act went into effect, another pregnant incarcerated woman, Stephanie Bretas, was similarly forced to give birth alone in the same Broward County Jail under similar horrific circumstances.⁶⁰

Florida has one of the highest incarceration

rates both in the country and throughout the world. According to Prison Policy Initiative's 2021 annual report, approximately 53,000 people are warehoused in Florida jails daily, most of whom have not been convicted of anything and are only being detained pretrial because they can't afford to pay the bail amount.⁶¹ An average of 6,306 women and 12 girls are warehoused in Florida jails daily.⁶²

Because law enforcement tends to make incarceration statistics extremely difficult to obtain, the exact number of incarcerated pregnant people is unknown, but it is estimated that three percent of people admitted to jails nationwide are pregnant. General trends over the decades, however, show the growth of female incarceration rates are twice as high as the growth of male incarceration rates.⁶³ In addition to the extremely callous mistreatment and medical neglect of pregnant people in jail, the difficulty in obtaining these statistics also contributes to the unique medical challenges that pregnant people who are incarcerated face.^{64, 65}

Public Health Reports, the bimonthly journal published by the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General and the U.S. Public Health Service, has acknowledged that far too little is known or researched about pregnant people who are incarcerated, especially in jails.⁶⁶ This makes it hard to proactively assess systemic needs for pregnant people in facilities—the kinds of needs that could have prevented Erica, Stephanie, and Tammy's traumatic experience giving birth as well as baby Ava's death. That it took these cruel and inhumane birth stories, and the death of a child, to be covered in the media to even introduce bills intended to ensure safe conditions and access to medical professionals for pregnant people giving birth in jail is an indictment of the widespread failure of our criminal legal system to provide incarcerated people with meaningful care.

But the lack of statistics is still no excuse for the inhumane treatment and complete disregard for the safety and life of parents and their newborns. Where the Tammy Jackson Act

should have protected Erica and Stephanie, their guards' inhumane treatment and complete disregard for their safety was a stark reminder that Florida is still failing to meet the basic human needs and dignity of pregnant people who are incarcerated.⁶⁷

During the 2022 Florida legislative session, Dignity Power and fellow activists took to the state capitol once again to demand dignity for incarcerated pregnant people with Ava's Law.⁶⁸ Ava's Law would require jails to inform people who are incarcerated of their right to take a pregnancy test within 72 hours of their arrest. Pregnant people would also be given the opportunity to defer sentencing up to 12 weeks following the labor and delivery of their newborn children. New parents would also receive access to postpartum services including lactation and mental health support. This would ensure that no pregnant person would be forced to give birth alone in prison and that no baby would ever have to be born in prison.⁶⁹

The Senate version of Ava's Law passed, but its House counterpart was stalled due to House leadership's refusal to give the bill a hearing. The failure to pass this important legislation speaks to the heart of Gov. DeSantis and his allies' priorities. Instead of protecting maternal health and access to medical care for all pregnant people by passing Ava's law, the state legislature chose to push through a 15-week abortion ban. If the Governor and his allies actually care about the health and safety of babies, and not just regulating women's bodies, they need to pass legislation that once and for all ensures that pregnant people will not be unnecessarily detained in Florida's jails and prisons.

Our prisons and jails have repeatedly shown that they are dangerously ill-equipped to provide adequate medical care to pregnant people, especially during labor and delivery. For this reason, it is critical that pregnant people not be detained pretrial unless their incarceration is necessary to protect the community from physical harm.

While pregnant people in Florida's jails and

prisons wait for basic dignity and access to medical care, and bills like Ava's Law to be codified into state law, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists encourages OBGYNs and other health providers to work inside facilities, advise wardens and law enforcement, and support efforts to expand access to adequate care behind bars.^{70, 71}

Q101R

By Sandra Fish



Sandra Fish is a writer/actor/advocate for prison reform and is a co-founder of Humane Prison Hospice Project. Over 30 years ago, Sandra was in the play "Getting Out" about the extreme challenges of reentry, where she and the cast did extensive research, which opened her eyes so that she could never shut them ever again to the inhumanity in our prisons. She has taught in Rikers, helped get ex-inmates work, sat in on classrooms and parole hearings in SingSing, Folsom, San Quentin, as well as assisted training in end of life care and crisis counseling in San Quentin. Currently among other duties with the Humane Prison Hospice Project, Sandra communicates with a condemned prisoner, dying of a terminal disease in San Quentin.

We crowd the sidewalk in Queens, mostly young mamas and their toddlers and infants. The

mid-October chill is blowing in our ears and I'm fighting a fever. The subway rusty red is screeching non-stop above us...the steady clamor drowns out any of the infants' whimpers or mothers' groans over the long wait. We're not waiting for the subway...we're waiting for a frigging bus, under the freeway, which is under the subway under the chilly October day giving up a little more daylight every ten minutes as more mamas holding toddlers' hands walk toward us to gather at this stop.

A gaunt gray-skinned man is selling belts and underwear, socks, and batteries on a folding table next to us. Some of the women inspect the men's belts, pick them up with a serious consideration, but struck by some remembered reality quickly put them down.

The babies all look dressed in clothing just pulled from plastic packages, inexpensive but first worn; new pastel stocking caps protecting ears from the autumn evening racing towards us; blue jeans with manufacturer's creases; stiff shirts and shiny jackets; many of the mothers look like they have at least one article of new clothing; tight new jeans; inexpensive but hip short ski jackets; young women looking like they might be going to a football game to meet a boyfriend—toting babies though.

Finally the bus pulls up:Q101R... our own special bus. The Rikers Bus... going straight to Rikers Island, the city prison (jail!).

There is a surge towards the narrow bus door as nearly 50 women, children and strollers, and bags try unreasonably to board at the same time. I move back to let the mothers and children go first and am slightly dismayed at the scene. *Fine, act like animals, you'll live like animals, I carelessly think...*

It's my fever whining, because as I observe them I see not animals at all, but women with a shared goal and a desperate jagged knowledge of the way time flies when you so want to hold it snug and still.

There's one man. In his forties, not looking

desperate for the world to stand still, but for it to move ahead and give him space. He somehow finds it, a seat in the back of the bus. He even finds a way to squeeze his briefcase by his leg.

Finally the door closes. The woman in front of me is miraculously clinging to a heavy baby carriage as she sits, trying to make the carriage inobtrusive to fellow travelers in the aisle.

Like me. I'm in the aisle, standing with a handful of others. The women with babies, so many and so quietly, settle into seats. I can only be glad I don't have to watch one balancing an infant on a hip while the bus is lurching to stops and swinging around corners.

Best of all, I have a bird's eye view of all the little ones. One next to me is laying across his mother's lap taking a bottle and swinging his leg to tap me now and then. I look and smile into his solemn brown eyes as he taps me again and again with his foot. I smile at the mother's apologetic young face, high cheek boned doe eyed girl, youthful unlined skin and yet such an aura of age, aging before my eyes as the ticking sun's light fades on her through the bus windows.

Towards the front of the bus, another young mother has her small baby boy laying across her lap. He is sound asleep. His brother kneels on the seat next to the mother, whispering in her ear and looking out the window. She laughs and talks to him in a way that puts a wry smile on my face.

The Traveler

By Orion

I'm 30 years old and incarcerated in the Maine Department of Corrections. I love music and art, my family, and being active. Growing up, I always had a passion for art. My grandfather was a lot of my inspiration, he used to draw me these Disney characters and ever since I've had a pencil on paper, and my fiancé, mom, and grandmother have always taken an interest in my work. I would have never come as far without them. I look into the world for ideas and I love different styles, from neotraditionalism to realism.



A woman with a traveler's cloak. Her eyes are vacant. She is the outsider, the addict, the very darkness represented in the past.

She speaks to him, this boy, no more than four years old, as if he were ageless. He is the "little man" her eyes say, her knowing smile she

shares with only him, because she is his mother, and for now her every touch and tap and smile says he is the only man in her life.

Except for in the upcoming hour, which is being eaten up by the traffic, the bus's maddening delay. But in that delicious hour, he will be the son, the eldest son. She looks down at the baby on her lap, studies him, then carefully evens the cuff on his tiny pant leg.

The twin girls in the pastel stocking caps sit with straight backs side-by-side. They look straight ahead. Now and then they smile nervously at each other, quiet in their anticipation of something almost mysterious they've been preparing for all day.

As we get closer to the prison, the already charged air amps up: some in quiet intensity expressed in a fussing at the children's hair and clothing and some in bubbly chatter that makes me feel like I'm in a restroom at a highschool dance.

There is one elderly woman sitting in the very front seat, facing sideways. Her hair is steely gray and shaggy; her chin juts out in a habitual sense of perseverance. Her eyes look far away as if at some curious puzzling scene she can't quite understand. She sits there as if she will be there always, as if she has always sat there without understanding why.

We reach the first turn to the first gate, the huge billboard announcing that we are about to enter a facility which boasts, "The Boldest Correction Officers In The World." I ponder what that means, or what they want it to mean, and am not quite sure.

We stop at the first gate, where there are an impossible number of people waiting to get on the bus. These are people who have cars, who have to leave them in this lot and be bussed onto the island.

The Island: why on this trip I always feel somehow like Pinocchio and we are going to Playland Island, all the bad children who will turn into donkeys and slaves. In this perverse little daydream, all the babies and toddlers and young children on the bus capture my focus, draw my

thoughts to them in a worry.

The bus driver seems slightly careless or reckless and I worry, worry not that we'll have an accident, no — I worry that he drives recklessly because somehow he has decided to not take the normal amount of care for these women and children that he might for others. And then I wonder when the punishing stops... or where.. or how. Where does the battling stop, I wonder.

Not with last week's four-year-old passenger, who stood up and in the voice of a 15-year-old cocked his head and declared, "No way Jose, no way Jose... If they make me take my earring out, that ain't gonna happen, no wayyyyyy." There was a huddled response of girlish giggles.

Over the bridge hugging close to the water, the skyline of New York City surprises me out the left window. The darker side of twilight is sneaking noiselessly but steadily upon us. The girls are now standing, ready to launch out the door, though we have not even rolled to a stop.

But when we do, out they shoot. I head to the left to the control building to be checked in for the class I will teach. The women and children go to the right. I don't even look to see them go. I know where they're going: the visiting room, a place I haven't seen yet, only heard talk of in envious tones.

When I take roll in my class and someone doesn't answer their name, another student will say "He has a visit." A few more will pipe up "Yeah, he has a visit."

A visit. I write it plainly next to their name. "Visit." I write it with a somewhat encouraged kind of a wonder, curiously attaching a sudden fondness to the Rikers Bus.

The Q101R will be making its way now, needing headlights as there is not a bit of light left. The day has been captured swiftly completely in darkness.

Beyond Bars

By Sarah Decedue



Sarah Decedue is a student at Rutgers, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Dance and her Bachelor of Science in Biology from the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina in May of 2021. Whatever specialty she decides to pursue after medical school, she plans to continue to advocate for women's health and reproductive justice throughout her career. When she isn't in student-mode, you can find her collecting plants and candles or hanging out with her partner, Dan, and her cat, Mr. Beans.

The incarceration of pregnant women and mothers is stressful to more individuals than just those who are imprisoned. For the children of women who are incarcerated, they face a period of limited contact with a parent when a parent is needed the most. Some prisons, such as Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW) outside of Seattle, allow select numbers of incarcerated women to stay with their newborns and children while serving a sentence of less than 30 months. Programs like these allow

mothers to bond with their children rather than separating them shortly after birth.

When considering programs like this, it's important to keep in mind the effects of having a secure bond with a parent that go beyond childhood development. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention stresses the importance of screening patients for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).⁷² These experiences, though they may not be prolonged or last into adulthood, have impacts on health for the rest of one's life. The CDC predicts that, if ACEs are addressed properly when they happen, negative health outcomes in later life can be greatly reduced. These outcomes go beyond lowering the risk of developing conditions such as depression or heart disease, and extend even to developing better health behaviors and reducing socioeconomic challenges.

What further complicates this need for improving the experience of children with incarcerated mothers in order to improve their future health are pre-existing health disparities, incarceration notwithstanding. With ACEs alone, the CDC states that females and members of minority groups are at a greater risk of experiencing a significant number of adverse events than white male children. According to a publication by The Sentencing Project, in 2019, African American women were imprisoned 1.7 times more than white women, and Latinx women were imprisoned 1.3 times more than white women.⁷³ African American and Latinx children already, as the CDC reported, experience more childhood adversity that stacks against their health in later years. This is further compounded by the fact that these children are statistically more likely to be born to a mother who is incarcerated.

The immediate health of the mother and her children are not the only reasons to establish programs that allow incarcerated pregnant women and mothers to remain with their kids. Programs like these can radically change the health of all parties involved for years to come.

Empathic Soul

By Ashley Burris

I completed this project for a class I recently took in the Spring called Women and Crime at Emporia State University, in Emporia Kansas. It was an open-ended project and we could choose whatever medium and topic (as long as it related to the class) that we wanted. While mine is not directly about mass incarceration, it is one of the pieces that make up the many as to why a woman could be imprisoned, be a victim, be an advocate, among so many other things. I am very passionate about the subject of Women and Criminal Justice. I am currently working on my Bachelor's degree in Psychology with a Minor in Crime and Delinquency. I have plans to continue on with my Master's in Clinical Psychology and am interested in the field of victim advocacy and counseling.

My piece is titled "Empathic Soul." I created it with acrylic on canvas, collage material, thread, and construction paper. It tells my story, like others, about the emotional abuse I experienced when I was married in my early twenties. Our relationship started out amazingly and it did not start to go downhill until after we got married. I came to find out that he was a narcissist and what I was experiencing was love-bombing. I chose to divide my artwork in two halves, the left being the dark side or during the marriage and abuse, and the right being after I escaped and was free. The tree is stitched through the middle to represent trying to put yourself back together after abuse and find yourself, no matter how hard you try you will not necessarily ever be the same person. In the piece I also included direct quotes that he said to me during our marriage, different pictures that resemble things such as love-bombing and gaslighting. The brain unraveling is what I chose to symbolize gaslighting. The right side is not completely positive either because a victim will still have to deal with the after-effects, which for me included PTSD, that is where the word freeze comes in, I use that to symbolize flight or fight and how I often have shut down if I have been triggered. The butterflies to me represent

freedom and the flowers, the multi colors of the petals symbolize the pieces you lose, the pieces you find, the pieces you create and recreate, just making it to the other side.

Again, while I know my piece is not directly about mass incarceration, it gives you a visualization of one of the factors that might contribute to a woman being incarcerated. I personally have never been but in the classes I have taken I have learned so much of what leads to those scenarios. I am in the position I am in now because I want to fight for other women, protect them, help them make it out, know that there is hope, and know there are people there for you.





Selfish

By Thomas Spikes



Everybody call me Bam a nickname my grandmother gave me as a child. Im from Detroit I been locked up now going on 18yrs straight. Its been hard but through God and my family in programs like the journal of women I been able to cope. Im thankful for my ability to read and write that alone help me escape this harsh place, I think if If I couldnt read nor write I would've died in prison. Through program like prison creative arts project enables us to reach beyond prison walls. Which is key to our balance, our health and sanity. So when I read the Journal of Women/Criminal Justice Call for submissions. I had to be apart in that very moment of me writing my raw thoughts I became free. I believe thats what life is about being free in thoughts it helps ease daily pains we may face.

Selfish

Im rolling n da deep/

pacing my cell, thoughts/

my momma cant sleep.

This woman has no understanding nor feeling,

of mass incarceration/

but she she peep through her son eyes/

when I cry she cries/

she free but locked through me..dats deep/

tired of bargd time but Im free through momma/euphoria visualize with me/

Selfish

never though my troubles would have such a impact on other/

such as my mother/

what about my seeds?

did I stunt their growht with my absence?

a fatherless home/

my thoughts was in those streetz/

how selfish could we be/

being blind but free/

now caged her son see's/

but why did I leave?!/

left them alone those streets are the wrong turn/

LOVE DONT NEVER LEAVE HOME!

physical bondage/

mind must remain strong!

one day one wake up from going home.

Selfish



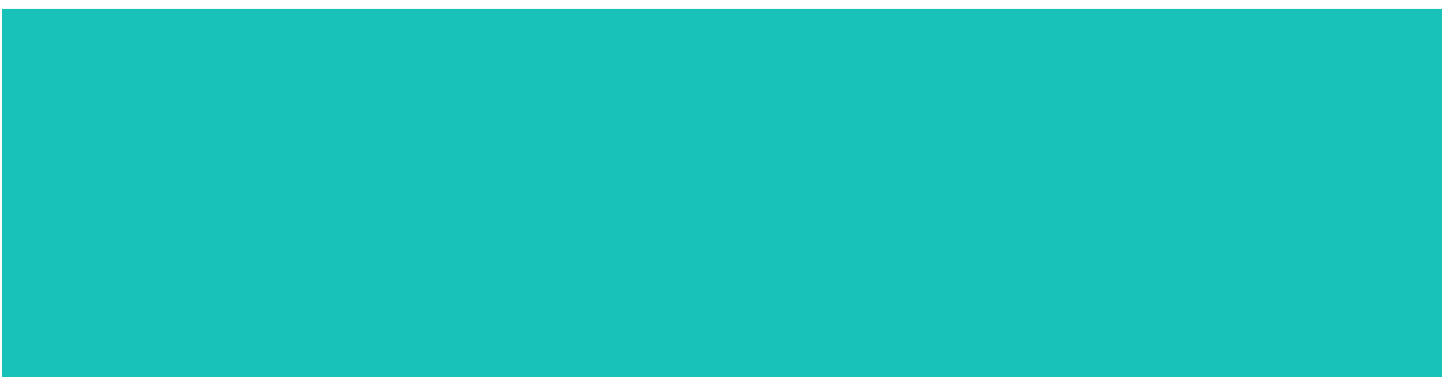
A Mother's Loss: System & Violence

By L.E.O. (Letting. Everything. Out.)

My name is Carlee Hines #616965. My artist name is L.E.O. meaning, Letting. Everything. Out. I'm 39 and have been incarcerated for almost 17 years. I have 5 years left and I'm currently at the Lakeland corr. fac. in Michigan. I spend most of my time working as a Geriatric Aide and I also facilitate classes for an org. called Chance For Life (ChanceForLifeOnline.org) My hobbies include playing the guitar and sports. I have submitted pieces to the PCAP program at the Michigan University and I mainly use pencil and/or color pencils.

"A Mother's Loss: system & violence"

When I was sentence one of my victims family members made a statement and said, "not one son, but two sons have been lost." That has always stayed with me through the years and I felt like this was the perfect opportunity to do something for that. Bringing that to light far as not one Mother/family going through a loss but both. The loss everyone feel when a tragedy hits, Especially the mothers that are involved. I made this piece not so much to focus on the art of it but more so on the message of what women go through when their sons/brothers/husbands, etc... are incarcerated. Thank you for this opportunity to express myself.



Health Care, Reunification, and Employment: Building a More Equitable Criminal Justice System Through Policy Reform

By Assemblywoman Yvonne Lopez, New Jersey Assembly District 19

If you are not court-involved, when you think about criminal justice reform you might not consider healthcare, family reunification, and employment. But, once you take a closer look, it becomes extremely obvious that, in order to build a more just criminal justice system, we must codify healthcare, familial, and employment protections for incarcerated persons. In the Assembly, I have sponsored multiple bills to this end.

In many instances, when law enforcement respond to a call, they will interact with someone who suffers from a mental health condition or substance use disorder and is in crisis. A998 would establish the Crisis Response Support Program in the Department of Health to offer a mental health service provider support system to police departments or forces responding to certain emergencies and appropriate \$2,000,000. If passed, this legislation would be critical to ensuring that both officers and members of the public remain safe during emergencies.

A notable example of health care reform efforts within correctional facilities is hepatitis B and hepatitis C testing. A656 would require State and county correctional facilities to offer inmates this testing, which would be crucial to detection and treatment.

Mental and behavioral health care prison policy reforms are also critical. A1356, which establishes the "Female Inmates' Rights Protection Act," A1973, which prohibits retaliation against inmates in State correctional facilities who report sexual abuse and criminalizes retaliation and failure to report abuse, and A3538, which requires DOC and county correctional facilities to provide certain inmates with medication-assisted treatment, all

seek to enshrine incarcerated persons' right to mental and behavioral health care, especially after the immense trauma of sexual violence.

Oftentimes, during the extremely arduous period of imprisonment, maintaining contact with family is imperative to court-involved people. A4100 imposes requirements on video visitation service contracts for inmates in certain correctional facilities and requires correctional facilities to allow contact visits. This policy would be vital to preserving those familial relationships and preventing senseless profit on the part of correctional facilities. A4191 recognizes the immense pain and tension that often accompany reentry, and requires DOC to provide reunification therapy to inmates and immediate family members prior to the inmate's release.

On the topic of employment, too often court-involved persons are not prepared to re-enter the workforce while in prison and, to make matters worse, are discriminated against by employers after their release. A1355 would require the Commissioner of Corrections to appoint a workforce skills training development officer to administer, enhance, and supplement inmate workforce skills training programming. The bill provides that the workforce skills training development officer is required, on a regular basis but not less than once per year, to meet with a representative of the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, the New Jersey State Building and Construction Trades Council, and the New Jersey Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools in order to administer, enhance, and supplement the workforce skills training programming available at a State correctional facility.

A1449 would supplement this mandatory workforce preparation by requiring that professional and occupational boards in the Division of Consumer Affairs, when determining whether a person is disqualified from certification, registration, or licensure because of a prior conviction of a crime, consider whether the crime directly relates to the profession or occupation regulated by the board. This legislation is essential in that it regulates arbitrary discrimination, helping to level the playing field for formerly incarcerated people as they re-enter the workforce.

As we continue to build public consciousness of the many barriers to prisoner reentry, we must remain committed to structural reform within our state's correctional facilities. I hope these efforts, in tandem, will help reduce mass incarceration and restore our communities.

The Valley of Ashes & The Rise of the Phoenix

By Samantha Bidwell

My name is Samantha Bidwell, I'm 33 years old. I am a mother, daughter, sister, aunt and friend. Unfortunately, I haven't been a very good one the past few years. I've had a very long battle with addiction. After a soccer injury in high school left me addicted to painkillers, my life has been a rollercoaster ever since. Due to my addiction, I hurt the people who love me the most. I always thought the only person I was hurting was myself. I was wrong. I compromised every relationship I've ever had, every bridge I crossed. I was standing on the other side with a gas can and matches. I had no idea what a healthy relationship was or how to create one. I had no coping skills, no tools, no rehabilitation. In and out of court/jail, it was like a sick game of catch and release. I was never offered a chance to change and let's be honest, I was using drugs. Making the right decision wasn't exactly my thing. Not once did I get the opportunity to clean my life up. I'm currently serving a 8-20 on drug charges. I feel could have been avoided if I had someone hold me accountable long ago. I had no idea that I deserved a better life at that point in my life. The only thing I knew how to do was survive and survival to me meant, me, myself and I. I'm not a bad person. I would give the shirt off my back if you needed it. I've just made some bad choices. I have been sober for three years now and I haven't felt this good in a long time. I wake up in the morning, look in the mirror and actually love the person looking back at me. I have re-created myself. I am happy to say that my name and integrity can be used in the same sentence. I have taken advantage of every opportunity that has been offered to me. I received my Hi-Set Completed three in-house portions of ^{the} drug programs that were ~~not~~ available.

(Grafton) (Valley)
those were the firm, Program, SATCO, Focus. The C-tech Classes offered at the prison I've Completed over half of them in a year and a half I have many Certificates and I work 7 days a week I have drive and motivation that I've never felt before. When I found about the IF Project/Pathways I showed an interest immediately I knew it would be good for me to keep moving in the right direction. I am a mentor and help other women who have similar Struggles I have had, this Program is helping mold me into a ^{Productive} ~~productive~~ member of Society who lives their days with loyalty, integrity, Commitment and pride I walk with my head held high. The re-entry part of this program will help others ^{to} not be just another Statistic, after being in Prison for as long as some of these women it's extremely hard to transition. I want to set an Example and show others that your Crime, ~~and~~ ~~or~~ past does NOT define who you are I fell down hard, thought my life was over, however I got up stopped feeling sorry for myself worked hard setting tangible goals to get where I need to be not only in here but when I'm released as well.

Ode to Louisiana

By Patricia Meadows



Patricia Meadows
NOBTS Graduation 2021

My name is Patricia Meadows. I am 62 years old and I am currently serving a 25-year sentence at the state prison in Louisiana.

I was born into a very dysfunctional family. My mother was a drug addict and alcoholic suffering also with a mental illness. My father was an alcoholic who was hardly ever home and had two other wives and children in different states. Childhood for me does not hold any special memories, but only hurt. I was raped by a family member at five years old and inducted

into sex trafficking at 12. At 14, I had my first forced abortion and my second shortly after. During that time, I turned to shooting up heroin as a way of relief from the pain. I did not want to feel; therefore, I continued to use, which eventually led to a gorilla on my back. I was released from trafficking as I grew older and considered too used up for any profit to be made.

At 18 years old, I had a baby girl and shortly after a boy. I tried to work regular jobs, but the

gorilla on my back wouldn't allow me to stray too long. Long story short, my children were split up between the grandparents. My daughter would eventually follow my footsteps, prostituting to support her habit, and my son did the same. During this time, I was in and out of prison for prostitution-related issues and drug charges, always receiving prison terms in lieu of substance abuse help.

On February 13, 2012, my daughter died from a heroin overdose, leaving four children behind, all separated from each other. The guilt that I felt from her death made my habit only worsen and thoughts of suicide prevailed. One day, in a moment of being dope sick, I robbed a store with a kitchen knife for a few hundred dollars. The three minutes that I took to rob the store altered my future forever. My intentions were to buy a lot of heroin and intentionally overdose. Well God had other plans. Although I died, I came back within 15 minutes knowing what awaited me..... prison time. I was sentenced within six months, having several different attorneys in the process. All my attorney (turned district attorney) wanted was a conviction.

I remain incarcerated in prison, however I have made my time work for me. I have received a Bachelor's degree in seminary and am a Peer Minister on the compound. I have an impeccable disciplinary record and have done every program the prison has to offer. I am not, nor have I ever been, a violent person. I suffer from Opioid disorder and I feel, had I been given help in the past, my past would not be as it is now. My son is also incarcerated within the Louisiana prison system as well.

The State of Louisiana incarcerates more people per capita than any other state in the United States, in fact, more than most other countries. In Louisiana, a life sentence is a sentence that requires one's life and death in order to deem time served.

My name is Patricia and I am a part of mass incarceration. I was sentenced to twenty-five years for an armed robbery in which no one was hurt. In no way am I minimizing the seriousness

of my crime. However, the justice system in Louisiana has proven to be very unpredictable and disproportionate with regards to sentencing. For instance, armed robbery carries up to 99 years for intimidation, while manslaughter sentences are between ten and forty years. Then, a woman who has killed her husband in self-defense during a domestic violence dispute will receive a life sentence, as Louisiana does not have a self-defense clause in the law. However, another person may kill one or several people while under the influence and receive ten years under the non-violent vehicular homicide statute. Most vehicular homicides are committed by white people, many having political pull, or politicians themselves. Therefore, grace and mercy are given.

Mass incarceration begins with the sheriffs and district attorneys who now wield most of the power. Society today is not a forgiving one, even in the so-called "Bible Belt," where forgiveness is preached on Sunday mornings. An unforgiving society leads the prosecutor to try each case with the maximum penalty in mind. Discriminatory practices within the court proceedings continue allowing the accused to bond out if he or she has money, while the indigent accused sits in a jail cell awaiting trial with an overworked indigent attorney, resulting in an ineffective counsel.

Louisiana officials continue to maintain the "Good Ole Boy" attitude, which is connected to the Jim Crow era. For decades, the state of Louisiana has found people guilty with a split jury vote of 10-2. Over 1,500 incarcerated individuals fall into this category. While the United States Supreme Court found that this practice was unconstitutional, they did not include retroactivity of the decision rendered. That would have given many offenders a second chance at life. The U.S. Supreme Court left the decision of retroactivity to the individual Louisiana courts. Orleans Parish District Attorney, Jason Williams has been the only D.A. to step up and grant relief to many petitioners. Other parish courts continue to deny relief to petitioners in their courts. I ask you, "How can this unconstitutional ruling apply to some, but not all?"

Another question to ponder is, “When is enough, enough?” In the state of Louisiana, there was a time when lifers were ineligible for any type of parole or pardon. If seeking access to the pardon board, the application would be denied due to the “Nature of the Crime!” The nature of the crime never changes. Therefore, the application would be denied over and over again.

Though the process has changed over the years, the system has a long way to go before we see any hint of decrease in mass incarceration. While some changes are taking place, they are slow. The pardon board hears many cases each year. While few offenders find favor with the board, the ultimate and final decision is left to the governor. His signature and gold seal is sought after by those who were granted a pardon by the clemency board, but this does not come instantaneously. The process may take years, and sometimes not at all, leaving many offenders to ask, “What is the point?!”

Mass incarceration in Louisiana can be traced back to January 1997, when President Clinton enacted the, “Tough on Crime Bill.” This bill enabled any state that increased a violent offender’s crime to Act 1099 to receive a federal grant. Louisiana jumped on board and changed Act 138, which allowed all offenders to serve half of their time and the other half on parole, to Act 1099. Good Time Act 1099 compels offenders convicted of violent crimes to serve 85% of their actual sentence. Most violent crimes in Louisiana are served without the benefit of probation, parole, or suspension of sentence, and are some of the longest terms in the nation. In 1999, the program was relinquished and federal funding was no longer available. This left violent offenders more time with no federal funds in place, leaving both the offenders and the Department of Corrections in dire straits. Act 1099 remains in place today, crowding an already overcrowded system.

Overall, mass incarceration has become a very profitable business in Louisiana. Privately-owned prisons and work-release facilities are popping up all over. From

overpriced canteen items, to pricy local telephone calls, everyone gets a piece of the pie at the expense of the offenders’ families. Money orders are no longer accepted at state facilities; therefore, in order for families to send loved ones money, they must go through a private company that charges a hefty fee to place money on the offenders’ accounts. As offenders, we make it possible for the state and others to make money.

While days turn into months, and months into years, this is part of our existence – the monotony of a slow death. Having to be away from our families, children, and grandchildren for decades is undeserved for most. Until the laws are changed and society learns how to forgive and heal, we will continue to live and die alone. Let’s end the mass incarceration machine as it affects everyone.

Helping Grandma

By Karen Thomas



“Helping Grandma”

Fabric wall hanging hand-sewn by Karen L. Thomas

My grandmother had an old-fashioned wringer washing machine, and no dryer. She hung the clothes out to dry on the line. It was my job to hand her the clothespins. I enjoyed running through the hanging laundry, despite being told over and over again not to do it. I thought it was fun. But, I know now that I was kicking up dust on the clean white sheets.

Karen at Moth

By Sara Bennett



KAREN at the Grand Slam Championship of The Moth at the Music Hall of Williamsburg, almost a year after her release. Brooklyn, NY (March 2018)

Just Like My Mother

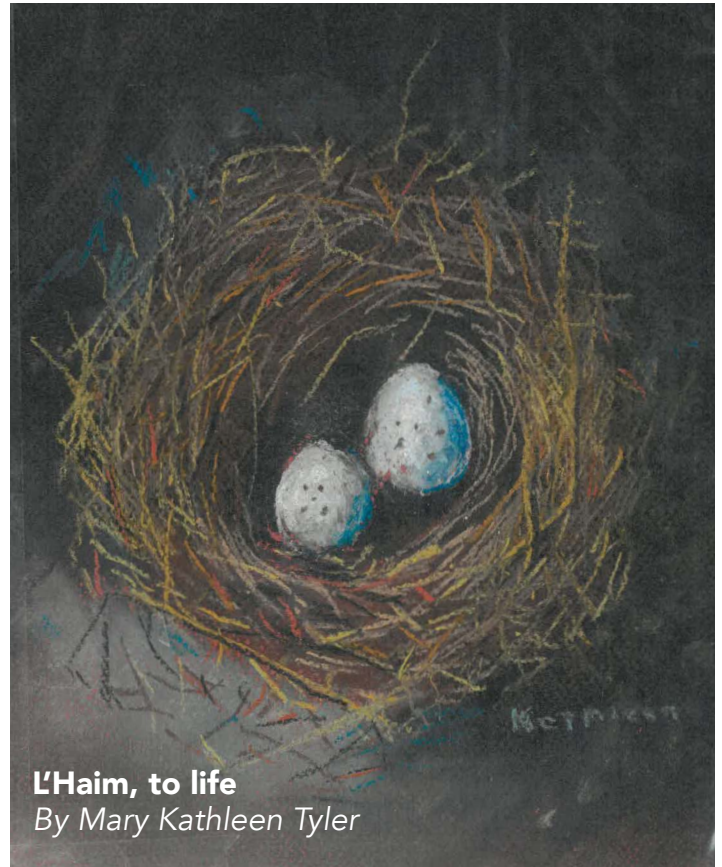
By Charnal Chaney

"You ain't shit. You gone be just like your mother and end up just like her."

I was three years old when my mom went to prison. I was 21 when she came home. She lived a life immersed in crime. The worst part of having her incarcerated was the negative impact it had on me. When I would visit her, I would cry, kick, and scream when it was time to go. It was traumatizing for me every time I had to leave. I couldn't handle being away from her. The visits were too triggering for me so, as I got older, I visited less and less.

Family members would constantly tell me I was just like her and would wind up just like her. Every time someone teased me about my mom being in prison, I would get into fights. When I would get into fights, my mom's sister would justify it by saying I was my mother's daughter and was being just like her, instead of getting me the therapy I needed to cope with the trauma I was dealing with. A lot of people I interacted with weren't used to seeing a woman in prison. They judged me more harshly as a result. They deemed me ruined before I was old enough to process where my mother was.

At one point, my father cut off all communication between our family and my mother while she was in prison. This lasted for years. I would miss her terribly during holidays, especially Mother's Day, and at school stuff. My mother tried her best to stay in my life. She would contact the school to speak to me and she would send people up to the school to take pics of me and tell me she loves me. She always wanted me to know she loved me. When my mom came home, people would still say that I was "just like her." I would say "No, I'm not." I tried to distance myself from her. At the age of 18, I realized that I was trying to live up to the idea of me that people had. I was trying to be the toxic version of my mother they had always told me I would become.



My mother has been home for nine years now. She started one of the first non-profits that is by reentry women for reentry women called the W.I.R.E. (Women involved in Reentry efforts). She has her bachelor's degree from Trinity University, and she is the co-chief violence interrupter of Washington, DC in the Office of the Attorney General. So now when people tell me I'm just like my mother, I say proudly, "Yea, I am just like her."

I have dedicated my life to healing myself so I wouldn't pass this same trauma on to my children. I am the primary parent of five beautiful children, and I choose to pass down healing instead of the trauma that has plagued my family for decades. I'm a trauma-informed yoga instructor and CEO of Bold Yoga, which is an organization that promotes passing on the healing I have learned to other people in my community.

My Mom Is My Hero

By Bekka Hess

My name is Bekka Hess, but my married name is Shellhammer. I intend to lose his name as soon as possible. The name is a constant reminder of the broken girl that he created.

I'm currently serving a quarter of my life (20-25) for Second Degree Murder. I was 19 when I was arrested. I sat in jail (Onslow County) for 731 days until pleading out. Forced to make the harsh decision of pleading guilty in order to secure a release date rather than risk Life Without Parole, I tucked my proverbial tail between my legs and took the plea. I tried to find solace in the fact that I'd be out at age 39, but where is the justice in that? The husband abused me until I was broken. I was so broken I hadn't even attempted to fight the charge, when I knew I didn't do it. I pay that price and face that decision every day.

I'm currently trying to seek out some options available to me. Whenever I'm finally free, I want to help those who

the (in)justice system fails. There are far too many who have similar stories to mine. I want them to know they aren't forgotten.

BEKKA HESS



My Mom Is My HERO... (Charcoal Portrait)

Ying/Yang

By Rebecca Cromwell and Allison Flanigan

Good vs Bad
 Mother Nature vs Mankind
 Sinner vs Saint
 Life with Love Life with hate
 We are the masters of our fate
 Trying to demolish this place
 Slowly we integrate
 Back into society
 Our appearances we make
 Learning love from hate
 and addiction from being sane

Iranian Feminist's Book Documents Torture of Solitary Confinement

Narges Mohammadi. *White Torture: Dialogues with Twelve Women Political Prisoners*. Sweden: Baran Press, 2020.*

By Frieda Afary

Frieda Afary is an Iranian American public librarian, writer and translator in Los Angeles. She is the author of [Socialist Feminism: A New Approach](#) (Pluto Press, 2022) and the producer of [Iranian Progressives in Translation](#).

Narges Mohammadi is an Iranian feminist human rights activist and vice president of the Defenders of Human Rights Center headed by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi. She is currently imprisoned and has been imprisoned several times since 2000 for her activities in defense of women's rights, human rights, children's rights and her opposition to the death penalty. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021 and received the Olof Palme Prize in January 2023.

Her commitment to social justice, and her opposition to misogyny, violence and the inhumanity of incarceration have made her a symbol of the current woman-led uprising in Iran which is challenging religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism, gender and state violence.

The collection under review consists of a moving account of her prison experiences as well as her interviews with 12 other women political prisoners in Iran. It was published in 2020 while she was in prison. Since then, she has published a second volume as well. This review will focus on the first volume only.

Iran has an official prison population of 189,000 of which thousands are political prisoners, who have protested poverty, discrimination, militarism, and authoritarianism. Many are members of oppressed national and religious minorities such as Kurds, Arabs, and Baha'is. Iran has the world's highest rate of executions after China.

In October 2020, after contracting COVID-19, following eight and a half years in prison, Mohammadi was released, only to be re-incarcerated in November 2021. She was returned to prison for speaking out against the death penalty, and for expressing solidarity with those killed by the state during a popular uprising in 2019. Prior to her latest arrest and imprisonment, she had organized a women's picket line against the Taliban's misogyny outside the Afghan consulate in Tehran. She is currently serving a sentence of thirty months and eighty lashes on charges of "endangering national security." The uprising which started in Iran in September 2022, following the police arrest and murder of a young Kurdish woman for her "improper" hijab, only made her more determined to continue organizing protests and issuing statements from inside prison walls. [Her latest open letter from prison](#) is about the rape and sexual violence to which arrested and imprisoned women are subjected on a systematic basis.

The title of her book, *White Torture*, refers to the torture that solitary confinement inflicts on prisoners. Both Mohammadi's account of her own imprisonment and her interviews with other women political prisoners, powerfully demonstrate the long-lasting physical and psychological effects of solitary confinement and the ways in which women prisoners have sought to resist this form of torture.

Mohammadi writes that solitary confinement

"is not just a place and a physical-geographical location but the application of various precise mental, psychological, and human factors which give a particular meaning to the cell and guarantee its [harmful] effects. For



instance the lifeless and brusque voice of the prison guard, the presence of dead roaches on the dusty tile floors, dirty and opaque curtains, eye masks for the prisoners, oversized slippers, uncovered feet, oversized and low quality clothing, small outlets called windows covered by perforated metal sheets, sitting and facing the wall for lengthy periods of time during interrogations, not facing humans face to face, hearing loud and violent noises whose distance it is difficult to surmise, seeing the indifference of doctors to the prisoners' physical conditions, the loud banging voice of closing cell doors, having to wear an eye mask even inside the control unit and in the hallway on the way to the bathroom. . . ."

Mohammadi and the women prisoners she interviews also describe other forms of torture, such as being subjected to questions about their sex lives, being falsely told that a loved one is ill or has been arrested or has died, being given addictive sedatives and unknown drugs, being forced to wait for hours to have access to a toilet, suffering intense cold in Winter and intense heat in Summer, not getting out for fresh air or not seeing the sun for long periods of time, thereby losing a sense of time and place, and being denied all sorts of basic necessities.

Under these circumstances, prisoners become completely dependent on their interrogators for any improvements. Some prisoners are forced to "confess" on camera to fabricated charges in scenes set up to give the impression that they have been living in comfort in prison and eating elaborate meals.

Mahvash Shahriari, a teacher and leader of the persecuted Baha'i religious minority, was imprisoned from 2007 to 2017 for helping to organize an institute of higher education for discriminated-against Baha'i youth. She describes the particular harm of solitary confinement, which "disables our senses and takes away our mental balance." Nevertheless, Shahriari has "contradictory feelings" about prison, which on the one hand, caused a "sense of loneliness and separation" from family, but

also offered "the joy of finding valuable friends in prison and gaining unique experiences which could not have been possible without all this pain."

Hengameh Shahidi, a women's rights activist imprisoned for her participation in the reformist Green Movement, addresses the sexual harassment and violence that women experience at the hands of their interrogators and the ways in which prison cameras, especially in bathrooms and showers, are a form of psychological torture.

Shahidi says that access to books saved her from losing her mental balance and gave her something to look forward to. But most of the political prisoners interviewed by Mohammadi, experienced prolonged periods of solitary confinement without access to any books or newspapers. Fatemeh Mohammadi, imprisoned for having converted to Christianity, relates how in solitary confinement and without access to any reading materials "one felt that time was not moving forward." Sadigheh Moradi and others note that poetry etched on walls by former prisoners was their only reading material.

Mohammadi and most of the women she interviewed share another experience. They are mothers who have been painfully separated from their children and often denied even phone calls or visits with them. Sadigheh Moradi wonders why her eight-year-old daughter could not lift her head to face her during their first visit. Later, her daughter told her that she was trying to hide her tears from her. Mohammadi herself was arrested when her toddler daughter had just had surgery and cried out for her mother not to leave her. Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, an Iranian-British reporter for Reuters who was visiting her mother in 2016 and was arrested with her infant daughter at the Iranian airport, was separated from her child who had to be cared for by her parents. She was released in 2021 after six years of imprisonment but faced new fabricated charges and was not allowed to leave the country, until she was finally released in March 2022 after the British government made a deal with Iranian authorities.

Two Sufi women activists imprisoned for their religious beliefs speak about the unbearable conditions of the notorious Gharchak women's prison on the outskirts of Tehran, where the drinking water is salty and filthy and the stench of raw sewage is constant.

Such are the conditions of Iranian women prisoners. Mohammadi's powerful book, however, shows not only the daily torture and the repression but also the resistance and the contemplation.

Although Iran and the U.S. are different in many ways, the issues of mass incarceration, solitary confinement, and the mental, physical, and sexual abuse of prisoners are common in both countries. We need solidarity between women prisoners and abolitionists in the U.S. and those in Iran. The woman-led uprising in Iran which has emerged in opposition to gender and state violence can learn much from abolitionists in the U.S.

*I am using the original Persian edition. An [English Translation of this volume](#) was published by One World Publications in 2022.

Rays

By Izuo-Ere "Mimi" Digifa

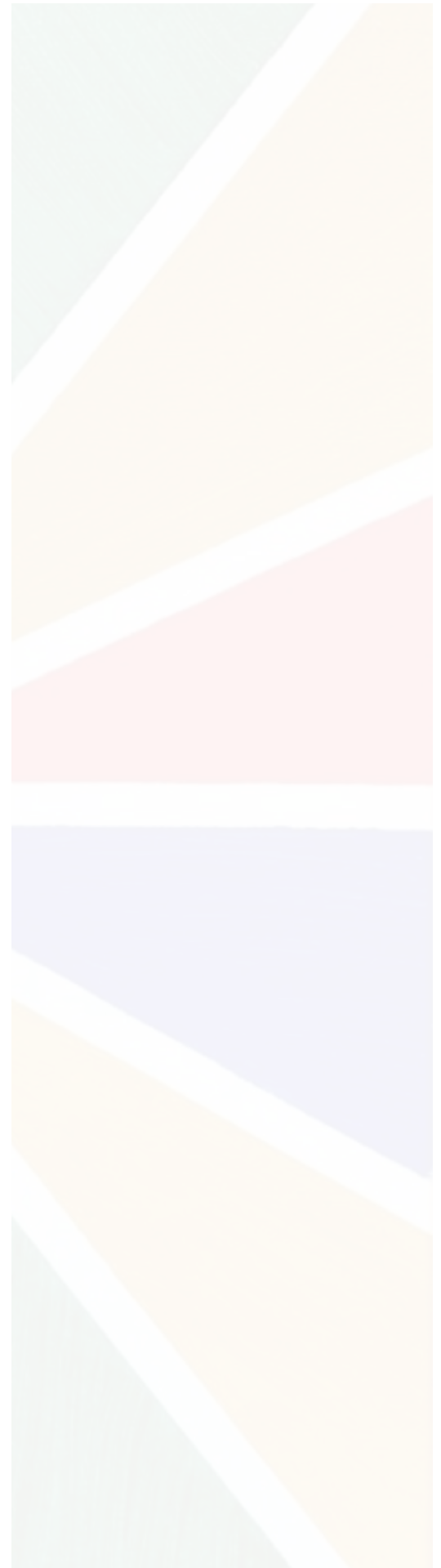


The woman/female inmate

By Cassandra Pressley
Senior Employment Specialist at Garrett House

Camden, NJ

She is a daughter, a mother an aunt, grandmother
I saw her looking for strength, love, hope and faith.
I hear her crying within, hidden behind that smile.
In our conversation, I hope she found a caring presence.
So, I ask those who pray heartily to pray for her.
Tomorrow her wounds will help another.



Geometries

By Brian Fuller



Freedom is Challenging

By Soolee Small

Four days after my crime I was scheduled to start my first day of school. I have been incarcerated since 2007 and I am transitioning back into society the summer of 2022. I aspire to do everything I can to improve my life to be better each day. I am the most ambitious woman I know. In 2017, doctors ^{and I} discovered a lump on my right breast, stage 2. I underwent surgery for a lumpectomy. Chemotherapy was for one year followed by radiation for two months. My education was on hold during this time. In 2018 my middle sister passed away and her death nearly crushed my spirit. With God and family I was able to carry on. I recovered from stage 2 breast cancer and was able to continue my education. I am currently undergoing chemotherapy following radiation for the

STAGE 3 BREAST CANCER. I CONTINUE TO WORK, ATTEND CHURCH SERVICES AND PURSUE MY ASSOCIATES OF ARTS DEGREE AND AM ONE SEMESTER SHY OF RECEIVING MY DEGREE IN FULL.

MY FAITH HAS CARRIED ME THROUGH.

I CONTINUE TO REACH FOR ALL THE GOOD I CAN ADD TO MY LIFE, WHAT WILL DEAR GOOD FRUIT AND HELP ME GROW AND PROSPER. I AM GRATEFUL FOR MY CHRISTIAN FAITH AND I PULL FROM THAT FAITH AND SOURCE OF LIFE GIVING PORTIONS TO STRENGTHEN AND DEVELOP MY CHARACTER EVEN MORE. IT IS THROUGH MY EXPERIENCES IN LIFE IN GENERAL AND HAVING HAD CANCER SIX TIMES IN MY LIFE THAT HAS FILLED MY HEART WITH SUCH GRATITUDE AND PASSION FOR LIFE.



Mass incarceration is a topic of discussion in my experience and opinion ^{that} can not be ignored and will continue to be brought up in conversations throughout the ages. It will never be completely eradicated from current generations and generations to come. I do however, believe there are ways to slow down the mass incarceration recidivism numbers.

For current prisoners who are transitioning from imprisonment to having their freedom is challenging in and of itself. While every experience and individual story may be slightly different, there are similar experiences incarcerated men and women have upon entering back into society. These experiences include but are not limited to finding long-term employment where these formerly incarcerated men and women can be useful, as well as having accessibility to being able to rent from commercial properties without being discriminated against due to their criminal background.

These obstacles prevent people with

Criminal backgrounds from moving ahead in their life. Without a decent paying job, there is a low chance that formerly incarcerated people will remain charge free. They will eventually give up, return to old habits to provide for themselves and ultimately end up in prison; hence mass incarceration. Without the same rights as those who have never committed a crime, having access to renting from commercial rental properties, they are denied because of their criminal background. There is a real possibility that the recidivism rate will continue to be a major issue within the mass incarceration system.

Rehabilitation is a personal choice. Not every man and woman has a real desire to change for good: change their behaviors, thought processes, actions and habits. There are those that do desire real change. Prisoners ^{have to} constantly prove themselves in order to gain back their rights to be citizens again. Within the realm of rehabilitation, there should be an evaluation process to show progress. There should be a system within the system

that is structured to assist and set them up for success long-term. Housing units can be used to place inmates who show promising progress in order for them to receive more freedoms as opposed to removing all of the ~~prison~~ privileges from all inmates. Give inmates who are about ^{(handle their} ~~business~~ their business and are successful within the penal system incentives they can work for and feel good about receiving.

When these men and women spend a substantial amount of time in prison and are in the process of transitioning back to society, there is no clear path for them to be up-to-date with current events that are in the world, such as the use of a computer, how to type, basic usage of a computer and how to navigate the website (minus internet access)

Mass incarceration is timeless in that each day feels like it is the same day and in most cases circumstances are the same as well. It feels like the journey will never end due to the fact that there is the matter of NERA parole beyond the sentence. I am a firm believer that there are those who strongly

desire to walk a straight path and work hard toward improving their lives and having their lives moving in the right direction. There are those that choose to not live a civilized structured and disciplined lifestyle post imprisonment. Regardless of one doing the right thing or the wrong thing, people will do what they choose with or without parole. Clearly, rehabilitation is about choices, making the right ones that will produce positive results for their future.

Mass incarceration feels like constant stagnation, a constant struggle to be heard, accepted, included and given the chance to prove that real change is possible and long lasting if the individual so desires. Mass incarceration feels like a lifetime of punishment post imprisonment. Once a person has done all of their time including parole, there are still the residual pushbacks from communities within the society who shun people with criminal backgrounds. They are conditioned to believe 'once a criminal always a criminal'. I am convinced that upon doing every

single day of one's sentence, the punishment of having a criminal background never goes away. It continues on throughout their life.

People with these backgrounds will always feel that they are still doing time whenever they are rejected because of their background. They are unable to find employment, housing without being rejected. Rental properties and ~~jobs~~ companies discriminate people with criminal backgrounds. The cycle continues and there is no end to the return of imprisonment because formerly incarcerated men and women can not get ahead if they are continuously rejected because of their criminal background.

My sincere hope is that by having a clear understanding as to what it will take for incarcerated men and women to be successful in society, that mass incarceration, along with injustices with lengthy and substantial sentences without professional evaluations, including but not limited to ~~nera~~ parole post sentence, that I have shed light on the issues that

need to be addressed. Every individual's situation, story, and personal growth and progress will never be exactly the same. The NERA parole term should reflect upon one's individual growth and progress or lack thereof. The NERA should be added or removed from an individual's stipulations should their behavior and progress change either way.

I believe that not every individual incarcerated man or woman needs parole. Parole, in my opinion should be for those who need that kind of supervision and can not live a normal life without parole or strict supervision post imprisonment. May I also add that should parole be re-structured to not necessarily be assigned to everyone in prison with a first or second degree charge, that it be at the behest of parole departments to re-instate or remove parole at anytime in the event the formerly incarcerated individual resort back to criminal activity. This is what reform is all about, finding what works and then work it.

Thank you for opening up the MASS incarceration topic and giving me the freedoms to SPEAK, Advocate, and STAND UP for matters that not only concern me, yet concern my fellow peers here at EMCf. I am also grateful to be part of this conversation. My goal is to include all people of all backgrounds and disrupt the conversation to pave the way for more ways to improve the lives of those who have committed crimes in their past yet have strong desires to live a normal, civilized, and productive life. There's life after prison, yet how do we get people with sketchy backgrounds to a position in their lives without making necessary changes in a system that is clearly antiquated and is designed to keep formerly incarcerated men and women from progressing and never fully reaching their potential because the system that is in place fails those with criminal backgrounds.

Thank you and God bless

I Am Free

By Jana Bergman



I am stepping out
in an act of
courage. I am
hoping my voice
will be heard.

Thank you
for this opportunity.
Jana Bergman
#123776
Den. Women's

I Am Free

Woe to you who are a slave to time.

Woe to The timekeepers.

who dictate and measure,

Their judgement spewing forth,

with a belly full of contempt.

Peering down a long and pointed finger

to carve an arrow to be held in the bow of
Justice.

Woe to you who are a slave to time.

Woe to The time keepers.

May their rulers be used against Them,

Their measurements doled out in reverse.

May They know the sounds only heard in

The pit of The beast,

The cries deep in The night.

Woe to you who are a slave to time.

Woe to The timekeepers.

I have set my watch upon eagles wings.

I have left my fate to The Creator

of eternity.

No mere mortal shall enslave me to time,

No mere mortal shall be my time keeper.

By: Jana Bergman 123716

Denver Womens Correctional Facility

2014 orig. sentence 208 years

2021 current sentence 96 years and dropping.

Prison Programs as Means for Rehabilitation

By Yalines

I had an idyllic childhood. My parents loved me, I was supported and encouraged and never once in my life did I doubt whether my sister and I were treated right. Destiny chose to make life a little less blissful on the day of my 12th birthday, when my father unexpectedly died of a brain aneurysm. It was hard, it was different, but my mom continued to take care of us and make the best out of a difficult situation. We still had great lives... we were just missing him.

At 16, I met "the love of my life," or so I thought. I married young, and at 20 I quit college to follow him when he left Puerto Rico to go to Massachusetts. We moved around a bit, but nothing worked out the way I expected then. My marriage was strained, he was unfaithful, and I realized I struggled with depression. If not for the blessing of my two wonderful kids, I would have come to regret all those choices. Life was now hard, I felt totally insecure and inadequate. But I kept on trying my best to make it work.

At 25, the worst moment of my life occurred and irrevocably changed my future. I won't go into details, but suffice to say that at the age of 38 I still have nightmares. I served 13 years in prison, seven months in a halfway house and still have six more months of parole and five years' Probation.

Prison was an entire new world for me. I had to learn how to function and understand the different ways of life... including speech. I eventually learned how to lead a decent and somewhat productive life while incarcerated; it was, however, only thanks to getting the right job and meeting the right people while in there.

I joined several programs that allowed me to use my time wisely, started going to college again, joined the hospice volunteer program, the retired greyhound dog training program, and several performing arts programs. A few of these programs were geared towards helping me strengthen my bond with my kids, which they

did. I was blessed with the ability to continue to see my children all through my incarceration, thanks to my amazing mother who sacrificed everything to ensure it. I got my Associates Degree and an assorted collection of college credits. I made good use of my time and made many contacts that would help change and better my life.

Once out, I made use of my network of contacts and became involved in a few programs out here too. It was thanks to programs like GOOD-Works Inc. that I have been able to feel supported and understood during this difficult transition from prisoner to free and functioning citizen.

It has not been easy living in this society with a record. I was blessed to find a decent job and save the money I needed in order to move out of the halfway house. But, having money was not enough to find safe housing. Practically no one wants to rent to someone with no credit history, no renter's history, and with a felony on record. Everywhere I searched, I got the same response... NO.

It was thanks to a recommendation that I finally found a landlord willing to give me the chance and with my savings and some help from others like GOODWorks, I was able to get everything I needed in my new home. Now I am able to move more freely and sleep more peacefully in my own home. I can have my children visit and I can visit them. I am FREE!!!

The "system" does not work "as is." We need good people to continue to bring good programming into the prisons in order to give us the chance to prosper. But, with these programs, and a willingness to go out—and get out—of your way, anyone could grow and become a better person.

beyond what she sees

By Erica Olivencia



Sentence: 13 years

Year of Incarceration: 2007, at age 20

Correctional Facility: Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (participated in the Puppies Behind Bars program and took college classes)

Current Occupation: Parent Advocate

The time given to me served as two things: a catalyst for anger that fueled my isolation from the world, then later it became an opportunity for growth. I used to wake up emotionless on some days feeling so far removed from what I thought of as real life. Forcing all thoughts of loved ones or future dreams into that black hole that exists in our minds where we make thoughts attached to pain disappear to. I feel that those that have not experienced incarceration can't

connect to that idea of a disappeared entity... I won't call it human because there are moments when I have felt so far from human. Honestly it is a forced situation of mind over matter. Once you allow your logic to lead your emotions in a place like prison, you learn to navigate a way to use the system as much as it's using you via education and programming. When you watch the inequities and injustices that take place, it gives some perspective like "Yeah I want to be able to fight against that... I need to make some changes... I need to become someone that can advocate for change." Use your experience, people, is what I say. Use that power within you that you may have not realized was there.

Beyond the trees
Beyond their leaves
Beyond what she sees...
Lives a dream
A hope
A vision
Of a life worth living
A life full of love, she touches the hair of her children.
Harnesses their dreams, their calls...
"mom delight in me"
She smiles with her eyes
In her heart there's a void, a longing that is deep
A doubt that creeps
In a future that seems so far
To the sky she's a falling star
And how can she rectify what's lost?
The guilt cuts so deep the pain seers her veins...
With longing she walks, dreaming of a life worth living
With smiles to collect, the unity and care
But most of all the feel of their hair
A dream
A vision
A hope
To the future beyond
What she sees...

Listening to Women with Marxist-Humanist "Ears"

By Urszula Wislanka, Oakland, California

Urszula Wislanka grew up in Poland and as a youth was active in the 1968 student movement. She and her family were exiled in the 1969-71 anti-semitic campaign. Through her feminist activities, she discovered Marxist-Humanism, which led her to study Marxism and Hegelian philosophy under Raya Dunayevskaya. In the mid-1970s, she translated many of the documents emerging from Poland's new workers' movement (which became Solidarity in 1980). She published many articles, including on Polish women, which were re-printed widely. She is currently a Marxist lecturer/writer/activist with News & Letters and a co-editor of The Fire Inside, the newsletter of California Coalition for Women Prisoners.

Dostoevsky's adage, "the degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons," is by now a truism. The most brutal environment in today's society is a prison. Further, race as a huge factor in who is sent to prison, for how long, and into what conditions, is well documented.

But gender affords another insight into the ills, not just of the prison system, but the whole society. Women prisoners' experience, and their reflection on it, offers a unique perspective on the critical questions we are all facing.

I have had the privilege of speaking directly with prisoners during the last several decades, and now for over 25 years with women prisoners. I heard them articulate the most profound, philosophical concepts, as they spoke concretely of their experience. The injustices dealt specifically to women are legions: survivors of domestic abuse are notoriously treated as criminals for daring to defend themselves and their children; victims of the "war on drugs," with its "snitch" laws, mean in practice the man caught with drugs can get a lighter sentence by snitching on others, while women who might know nothing about the drugs and get the full brunt of "the law"; women who seek medical assistance for a miscarriage are more and more often charged and convicted of murder.... And that's just the tip of an iceberg.

A common thread in my conversations has been the question "what does it mean to be

human?" It is not an academic debate for them, but an urgent, practical matter. In the very first issue of the publication of California Coalition for Women Prisoners, *The Fire Inside* (FI, June 1996), Charisse "Happy" Shumate asked "have they forgot we are human?" For her, being human meant becoming a "we" person, focused not so much on getting herself ("I") out of prison, but fighting so no one ("we") would have to suffer what she went through. Shumate became the lead plaintiff and the face of a class action lawsuit that put California's women's prisons on trial for medical neglect and abuse (*Shumate v. Wilson*). After viewing depositions from various women prisoners, the prison bureaucracy settled for a few reforms rather than face an open public judgment of the depth of their barbarous inhumanity, which would have come out in court proceedings.

Again, in my one-on-one conversations, the concern was not only with the criminal/legal issues, but we repeatedly discussed what it means to be human. Prisons, and the whole legal realm, are predicated on the false idea of an isolated individual. A crime is prosecuted in the name of an abstraction, namely "the society," in ways that are plainly unjust. "Removal from society" is supposed to be the punishment. Setting aside the fact that many guards view their job as administering punishments, the very fact of isolation, of having one's social ties broken, compels many prisoners to consciously re-create social connections with others, beginning with other prisoners. Shumate's "we" was

not opposed to the individual, but a conscious re-assertion of a social individual who recognizes themselves as such.

This new sense of “we” comes from an opposition to the prisons’ attempts to break you, to destroy your sense of self. Women re-create themselves through their relations with other prisoners. Some of the most transformative moments I witnessed were of women prisoners, who got feedback on their stories after they were published in FI. Linda Fields told, in that first issue of FI, about her friend Anna, who died of medical abuse/neglect in prison. The feedback from that story helped transform her from a defeated, mourning person, to an advocate for others. Charisse Shumate discovered, in a domestic violence self-help group, that she was not alone. Hearing others’ stories so similar to her own transformed her: from an individual isolated by her abuser, to a fighter for all prisoners.

This process of redefining ourselves is crucial for the whole society. It means questioning the very essence of who we are as human beings. The struggle for recognition of that essence never ends. Solidarity is one expression of the opposition to that myth of an isolated individual. “No one gets free alone” is the theme of the latest, 25th anniversary issue of FI, with a memorial to Charisse Shumate. Our celebration of that anniversary underscores the persistence of the recreation of our relationships with others as the path to redefining our essence and overcoming existing barriers to freedom.

As women prisoners have demonstrated over the years, their conscious re-creation of their connections to others was at the heart of their own transformation as human beings, a discovery of the human essence. That search for what is human essence is not limited to prisoners, but an insight for all. Entering prisons, as Dostoevsky advised, along with the added dimension of gender, provides a new perspective on how to gauge a society. As Marx said in 1844, in a piece called “Private Property and Communism”:

The direct, natural, and necessary relation of person to person is the relation of man to woman. ... In this relationship, therefore, is sensuously manifested, reduced to an observable fact, the extent to which the human essence has become nature to [humankind], or to which nature to [them] has become the human essence **From this relationship one can therefore judge [humanity]’s whole level of development.**

Marx poses this measure to warn against perspectives on the future that limit the fight against alienation, that defines capitalist society, to achieving collective property or communism. The human essence for Marx is the multidimensional drive for human beings to freely determine their life activity and mutually recognize each others’ freedom to do so. That freedom idea is the absolute opposite to the alienated activity of isolated individuals as they sell their ability to labor, their life activity, to the capitalist.

Marxist-Humanists begin from a concept of human essence as free life activity. That perspective, in all its dimensions, needs to come fully forward. This humanism is the unifying thread in various movements. The concept of human essence, not as fixed, or given, but as a self-developing, self-creating idea, not only captures the meaning of women prisoners’ experience (or any movement’s participants), but, to paraphrase Franz Fanon, for us to be able to finally create a society fit for human beings.

Judy Zimmer

By Ron Levine



Judy Zimmer, 57
Trafficking

BEHIND THESE WALLS

By Carolyn Flores

Behind these walls
My duty still calls, but I am unable to provide

The worries I have are:
Are they ok?
Is she still alive?
And will he stay for the ride?

Finally I feel and,
Oh my God it's so real,
I'm thankful he's right by my side.

Don't get me wrong believe me,
I'm strong, I know this is
best for me and my family,
but when I was young this
is not how I planned it to be.
So as time goes on my days get
much brighter, my bit gets much
lighter. You know where I'm going
with this
Yes, you got it, at home once again
This place I WILL NOT MISS

Advice from Inside

Anonymous

When you come to prison as a woman, the first question you're asked is: "What size shoes and pants do you wear, in men's sizes?" Then you get stripped of anything that defines you as a woman. You're given generously used underwear, socks, a basic cotton sports bra, oversized jeans, and a shirt. Now the feminine figure is good and lost under thick, baggy fabric. It's clearly a system built by and for men, with only one women's prison in a state with 13 men's facilities.

The second thing I realized as a ward of the State of Oregon is that there are really only three categories of inmates: 1) People addicted to drugs, who have done drug-related crimes to get

more or for selling them, 2) People with significant mental health issues, and 3) People who got briefly wrapped up in a bad situation, a small mistake that led them to major consequences. By separating the three categories into better living accommodations, we can all focus on our own time and support each other's self-defense.

The first group is typically in for possession, burglary, or assault. The second did something drastic, stabbed their abuser, or committed sex-related crimes. Even a murder will fall into this category. The third is someone who's never been in trouble for anything significant, appears clean-cut, may be educated, and seems lost. We're typically in for white-collar crimes, fraud, identity theft, and accidents that result in major injuries or death.

There is something besides our uniforms that unifies us. We have someone at home who loves us, and we've probably lived through some form of abuse and/or major trauma, and haven't figured out a way to fully heal. Many of us here have not been fully heard, respected, or cared for, so to bring us to a place where we continue to be screamed at, shut out with loudly slammed doors, and ignored when we cry for medical help, is hardly showing us what we deserve when we leave. In fact, it's conditioning us to further submit to a toxic environment.

Herein lies what a difference it makes when a kind officer takes over the room. They treat us with respect and I never see fights on their time, because we're so much more at ease and feel safer. This is the kind of vibe we need to be nurturing in women's prisons, which reflects to everyone else in our lives and ripples into future generations. Again, by example we can be better too. I'm reminded of an experiment carried out where university students played the role of prison guards and inmates. Things got so intense the experiment had to be stopped.

The root causes of our addictions: making money, living somewhat recklessly, numbing the memories. Spending the cash and being "big

winners” and otherwise doing anything that makes us forget and makes us feel good.

This quickly becomes a habit, which leads to addiction, so let’s please address the vast majority of inmates: the abused and addicted. The statistics are out there. If they’re fully acknowledged contributing factors, then we can have a conversation about reformation, with the main focus being rehab/prevention and mental health treatment, which starts to create the shift from “we’re all just bad people that only know punishment and are oppressed,” to hope and healing, which is what stops the repeat offenses and gets us back to the ones that need us, our children and families, elderly parents, and to being productive members of our communities.

There is an intensive six-month drug program that takes a significant amount off a sentence, but is only available to those that were eligible at time of sentencing. Many times those that really need the help weren’t approved and the courts are unwilling to add them on at later dates. We also have some counselors, but they can only provide talk therapy with no feedback or treatment and are spread so thin that we only have access to them every few months, so we’re put on anti-depressants and strong sleep/sedative medication after confirming we’re not suicidal.

Those of us with small children have to qualify for help from programs like Early Head Start, with rules like the child must live within an hour of the prison and remain under two years old for the duration of our sentence.

This hardly fosters family bonds or gives us the tools needed when we return to our children. Recently, I had a long-awaited video visit with my partner and 1 ½ year old. I logged in and waited for ten minutes while my screen stayed black. My partner tries never to keep me waiting, so when I phoned him, he explained they could see me and my baby were kissing the screen, but I was clueless and getting more upset as the minutes wore on.

Our jobs here are to maintain the facility through 10-hour kitchen shifts and hazardous waste crew, or sewing programs to sell hair bands back to us at inflated prices. We need to reform these methods. This COVID stage is a time we could join the rest of society in sitting back for a moment and reassessing the old way of doing things and make meaningful changes on a big scale.

The answer to mass incarceration as mass rehabilitation is overdue. Start by assessing and comparing our crimes to our need for mental and physical healthcare and drug treatment, find our biggest needs and meet them. By treating our immediate concerns, we can move on to secondary treatment like therapy, while we start to focus on the strengths that would be an asset to our individual communities, helping us to find jobs there and determine if there might be further education needed. Many degrees are available online now, and it’s hands-on experience we need. We could incorporate a trade campus, or in-person training at the job site. Show us a better way through example. Serve food that nourishes us by letting us cook from a sustainable garden we tend. Set up fitness training so we can show each other the importance of exercise. Let us give back to our communities by donating whatever excess our gardens produce to local soup kitchens. Help us to feel that we can be positive influences in the community.

It would be truly honorable if America was the first to flip old concepts of incarceration on their head and try something new instead. Invest the cost of keeping us in cages into enabling us to make impactful differences we can be proud of, for us and everyone.

An Ounce of Correction, a Pound of Punishment

By Regina McKay

Regina McKay thought she did everything right. She was a “good kid” who didn’t get in trouble, always did her homework, and defended the underdog ... every time. Her big mistakes were believing her mother when she said Regina was destined to be depressed and need antidepressants for life and later believing a doctor who handed her a prescription and a coupon.

The medication changed her personality and caused her to develop SSRI-Induced Bipolar Disorder, severe anxiety, and OCD. A jail cell, her rock bottom, saved her life. A slow taper and years of horrific withdrawal helped her see what the medications had done to her body, mind, and life. Now she shares her story for others who may be having the same negative side effects.

Regina loves Hallmark movies, her pink bathroom, all things mid-century modern, and deviled eggs. She wasn’t depressed before the medications; she was stressed. She’s now taking a simplified approach to life and plans on publishing books in 2023.

If gray had a smell, it would be the inside of a jail cell. I’ll never forget that smell. It’s a mixture of bleach, urine, body odors, and despair. There were sounds in the jail too: the jangling of keys hooked to the belts of the jailers, the screams and yelling coming down the corridors from the inmates, the static and mumbled conversations over the dispatch radio. I could see the trustees mopping the floors, the jailers eating their dinner in the office, the bars in the holding area. I was shocked at being arrested, dizzy enough I had to ask for a chair. All of my senses were on high alert, but I’ll never forget that smell. The smell sticks with me.

I’ve seen shows and images of prisons and jails. They all seem to look the same. I imagine they all smell the same. Like kennels for people. Bars on doors. Bars as walls. Gray concrete or cinder block walls. Even the furniture is made of gray blocks. They put people in these places, treating them like animals. Thinking that giving them the very basics required for human survival will change them. It rarely does. I knew I never wanted to go back, clinging and clawing at the life I had outside of those gray walls. But I already knew why I was there by the time they funneled me through. I didn’t need the Department of Corrections to tell me what was wrong.

I grew up like a lot of us do, believing that jails were for the “bad guys,” members of society who were so evil they had to be locked up for our safety. My opinion has changed. Public awareness of the situation is changing too. We’re all starting to realize that we’re using jails and prisons in the wrong way, locking up people we’re disappointed in or mad at instead of those who are truly dangerous.

I’d never been arrested before and had no idea how “the system” really worked. Lawyers were people I’d never had to deal with. I asked for recommendations, but nobody I closely knew could offer any suggestions for a criminal defense lawyer. That wasn’t a service they’d ever needed. Reaching outside my inner circle, I asked someone I knew in high school, a civil case lawyer himself. He recommended a lawyer he went to law school with. We only talked to a few, knowing now we should have looked for more. The ones we ended up hiring put on a great dog and pony show, talking about how I’d become as close to them as their own sisters, promising that “we’d beat this.” I believed it all. I wrote them very large checks.

By then, I’d already figured out what needed correcting in my life.

When I was sixteen years old, my mother told me that I was destined to be depressed like she was and would probably need meds like she took for the rest of my life. She said she could just tell. I put that information away until years later, when I was losing my job to a company merger, had nine-month-old twins, and my mother was unloading her personal problems on me. A visit to a clinic for a sinus infection left me walking out with prescriptions for antibiotics and Paxil, an SSRI antidepressant, along with a coupon for a free thirty-day supply.

At first I thought they were great. The constant worry in my head seemed to be quieter. I wasn't stressed all the time. But, over time, not caring about basically anything made me an unfeeling shell of a person looking for happiness in the wrong places. I tried to buy happiness, racking up thousands of dollars in credit card bills and filling cabinets in our house with every kind of nail polish, candle, shampoo, etc. that I could find.

I became aggressive, trying to force people to like me. I thought I had to be friends with everyone and would basically stalk people when they tried to ignore me. I was convinced I knew everything about everything and would offer advice on any subject, especially when it wasn't asked for. All conversations had to be about me and if they weren't I'd steer them in that direction. I was a high school teacher who seriously thought I had to be friends with the students. I thought I had to be friends with everyone.

I'd developed SSRI-Induced Bipolar and didn't even know it. The depressive episodes left me barely going through the motions of life for days. The manic phases had me acting dangerously, slowly destroying everything I'd built. A Google search of "Paxil side effects" after I was arrested (and released on bond) directed me to an online forum of people who were dealing with antidepressant-related negative side effects of their own.

They helped me figure out a tapering schedule and how to navigate the horrific withdrawal issues. I slowly tapered off the

medication and transformed back into the real me. I'll probably never fully recover my memory, but with time things are healing.

A year and a half after my arrest, I took a plea deal, wrongly convinced by one of my lawyers that the case was not winnable and I wouldn't even get to tell my husband or children bye if the jury found me guilty. Years later, we discovered that both of my lawyers, partners in a law practice, had been charged with bribing a police officer, something we were never told by them.

I'm considered lucky by some that my plea deal didn't involve prison time, but most of the time I don't feel lucky about any of it. I knew soon after my arrest what the cause of my issues was, but my lawyers didn't want to listen. I relied on them to help me, but they didn't listen to what I wanted and often told me how "the system" worked. I'd been arrested for an incident I didn't remember and was never even questioned by the police. My lawyers ignored both of those things.

I did my own research and every single case I've found of a 30-40 year old female teacher being accused of the same type of crime I was, she was taking psychotropic medications. EVERY SINGLE ONE. I've shared this with lawyers and those in charge of teacher training. Their response was "we've changed policies." I know policies mean nothing when a person is out of their mind on prescription medications or street drugs. The rules don't matter to someone who's manic. But looking for the real cause doesn't get votes or win elections. Even though they know the tough-on-crime approach doesn't work, it keeps them in office.

I know that medication issues like mine are the cause of out-of-character behavior in others, but nobody seems to be looking for a cause ... and every crime has a cause. Why aren't those of us who know what caused our downfall and made our own corrections given a seat at the table? Why are we relying on "experts," who've never experienced being incarcerated, to change the system?

We all know the Benjamin Franklin quote about an ounce of prevention. Wouldn't we save money, energy, and heartache if we devoted our efforts to prevention instead of punishment? If we moved towards the Department of Corrections really being a place of correction and change, wouldn't we need less punishment?

By doing away with gray, concrete walls, wouldn't we be able to give people "in the system" hope and motivation to change?

Start listening to those of us who've made the mistakes. We can tell you what needs correcting. We've lived the pound of punishment. We wish we'd had an ounce of real correction instead.

The Focus Forward Project, Inc.

By Pamela T. Miller, Esq.

The Focus Forward Project, Inc. provides critical life skills training to individuals who are charged with federal crimes and who are awaiting trial or sentencing. This time of their lives can be overwhelming and stressful as these women and men look towards an uncertain future while trying to raise children, work or attend school, and be active members of their families, houses of worship and their communities.

The Focus Forward Project, Inc. delivers training during 12 weekly two hour sessions, lead by trained volunteer facilitators. Participants are given reading assignments, homework and must give class presentations on topics such as goal setting, conflict resolution, self advocacy, handling difficult interview questions and making positive choices.

At the end of the 12 week period, participants who have successfully completed all assignments and who have attended class regularly, graduate during a formal ceremony. Certificates of completion and graduation are provided and letters of support are written for each participant's pre-sentencing file. Additional services are provided to participants upon request, such as free virtual counseling services.

FFP serves both men and women. However, women participants often come with added concerns of being single mothers or caregivers of family members. We provide additional guidance, emotional support and appropriate referrals for needed services.

Addressing the needs of women who are in the criminal justice system is a critical component of eradicating poverty, educational and employment disparities, combating domestic violence and supporting families so they thrive. It's very important social justice work.

Falling Through the Cracks

By Xochtil Larios

Hello, my name is Xochtil Larios. I am the Youth Justice Program Associate for Communities United For Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ). I am 22 years old and am formerly incarcerated. I am also a foster youth and am taking care of my two teenage sisters because my mom is homeless.

I just want to say thank you for giving me this opportunity to submit something I am really passionate about. I have been out for four years now, and giving us a platform to express ourselves as formerly incarcerated women has been essential for me to stay afloat in my studies. I am currently also a full-time college student trying to get an Associates in sociology.

My purpose in this article is to shine a light on how women are being misunderstood and overlooked when it comes to policy changes aimed at reforming systems of incarceration and probation. Why do we often forget about women?

Alameda County young women stay in juvie for a really long time or they serve long periods of time in placements. Research suggests that a nurturing placement, coupled with holistic support — resources that support the youth's environment and immediate and long-term needs — are exactly what young people need to thrive, particularly those that have been subject to numerous traumas. Given that young people have about a 70% recidivism rate, and an even higher high school drop-out rate, it is clear that the services and programs they receive are far from successful. Additionally, these vulnerable youth end up with much greater rates of unemployment, arrest, unplanned pregnancy, substance abuse, homelessness, lack of education, social marginalization, and other tribulations, despite Probation, Social Services, and Police Department's enormous budgets and available resources.

For example, in California, a lot of reforms are happening around the incarceration of young people, like California Senate Bill 823, which has opened up a big reform conversation about what we do with youth committing 707(B) offenses. According to California WIC code, 707(b) offenses are the worst crimes a youth can commit.⁷⁴ However, through my experience sitting on Alameda's committee to implement SB 823, justice-impacted women transitioning to adulthood are being misunderstood and overlooked when it comes to developing transition plans, which among other things, would provide resources the women legally qualify for. One way to prevent the young women from falling through the cracks is providing a woman a soft landing back home. Then maybe they would not have trouble finding a place back in their community.

Young women in Alameda County who are sexually exploited or charged with a crime stay in Juvenile Hall until an appropriate placement is established. As a youth commissioner, I have noticed low rates in women's incarceration vs men's. As of December 2021, Juvenile Hall has 55 youth and, out of those 55, only six are young women. Because there are so few, reforms tend to ignore the needs of young women. Yet,

women also represent the fastest growing population in prisons. However, even if it's just six young women, the county should still be able to meet their unique needs. When young women's needs are not met, let's keep it in the back of our heads that these are the mothers of our future. When our mothers raise children on their own, the children will suffer from intergenerational trauma that never got healed and the cycle continues.

The county has mentioned that young women's incarceration rates are linked to the population of "CSEC," which stands for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children. The county does not want to charge these young people, who are mostly women. However, the county is still figuring out what we are going to do for this population if we are not going to charge them. The problem is not charging them keeps them out of jail, yet it makes them ineligible for additional resources and most of the time they are crossed over to Social Services. My experience with social services as a former crossover youth from probation to social services is that social services or probation are not here to set up a young person for success in the long run. It is a public servant program that provides some type of services, but never peer-to-peer mentoring where this mentor will go with you wherever you go in your future. With that being said, most CSEC young women are coming in and out of an assessment center, which is there for women to take a shower, eat, sleep, and leave as they wish. It is not enough to support the young women, since it is like a station versus a sustained environment. These young women cannot live at the assessment center, nor do they receive ongoing mental or emotional healing. Unfortunately, this is the extent of what we currently offer young women who are CSEC. As we are currently working to reimagine alternatives to incarcerating young people, we cannot continue to let young women fall through the cracks.

Senate Bill 823 has been a bill I have seen from start to finish. It requires all 58 counties in California to reimagine what we do with juvenile offenders that commit the most serious crimes.

However, this opens up an opportunity to talk about how the county lacks services for young women. Instead of sending this young person to the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), they will now stay in their home county and be served by their local juvenile hall. One of the problems with this is that there is no realignment plan for young women. When we talk about women, we have to target the juvenile population first because, according to the research, women are forgotten in reforms and legislation. This is true because it's the same here, as young women do not get incorporated in county plans like the SB823. If there is no alternative solution for young women, they will likely fall through the cracks and end up in a women's prison.

Opsal's 2014 study provides some useful ways of thinking about different alternatives for young women. If, after being released from custody, a woman has a soft landing like an equitable job where they can move up in their positions, a safe roof over their head, money in their pockets for food, and trauma-informed programs, maybe they would not be troubled finding their identity. In other words, finding their place in life and seeing a real career-based future for themselves. According to Opsal, women who get out of prison can fall into different patterns, but the most successful were those women who became "sustainers," meaning that they were able to sustain a job which provided a sense of agency and independence.⁷⁵ A sustainer was the most successful group of women because their jobs gave them something to focus on and provided opportunities to move up. This kept them from falling back into old patterns. Even if the job was not a great one, being in the zone of appreciating a job and where one was at gave these women self-agency and the power to make positive changes even if those choices felt shitty at the time.

What Opsal's sustainers show us is the power of having a soft landing back home like a solid job that creates real life avenues for women at any age to see themselves as a real citizen in society and move away from old patterns. Women should not be incarcerated or treated like animals. It is important to think about where

system-impacted young women are heading when we address policy reforms or realignment plans. We are aware of the consequences when we do not address gaps in the Juvenile system at early stages. Recidivism is real, and if these young women do not receive the resources, intervention, and direct services they really need, they will likely end up in the prison system as adults. One way to think about reducing recidivism and gaps in supporting women is by providing what I refer to as a "softer landing" upon release, or when young women come into contact with the system yet are clearly victims of exploitation or at-risk. In the future, we must think of formerly incarcerated women who have been through the system like myself and are now in a better position to support other women coming back to the community. I stand by this quote "The closer to the pain, the closer to the solution."

My Broken Home

By Cordelia Ryan

Welcome to my broken home
There's nobody here, I'm all alone.

The walls they scream of things once said,
they constantly echo in my head.

The door in the front never closes, as people never
stay; the hatred and guilt always drives them away.

So welcome to my broken home, I don't have
anything to offer you; No Love, No face, I'm out of
place and there's not much I can do.

I sit in here and do nothing at all,
but stare at these empty walls.

It portrays the life of hurt and hate;
my destiny, my anguish, my solitaire fate.

It's like a projection screen playing a
never-ending loop; it's like it's in slow motion, so painfully slow.

So run now from my broken home,
keep the door open as you leave, because being
trapped in here I still need air to breathe.

Tell now about my broken home of all
things heard and said, because even as a
woman, that house still lives in my head.

That little girl trapped inside; well that
little girl is me; even though I'm older
now, the HORRIBLE thoughts won't leave
me be!

Mask

By Johanna Mills



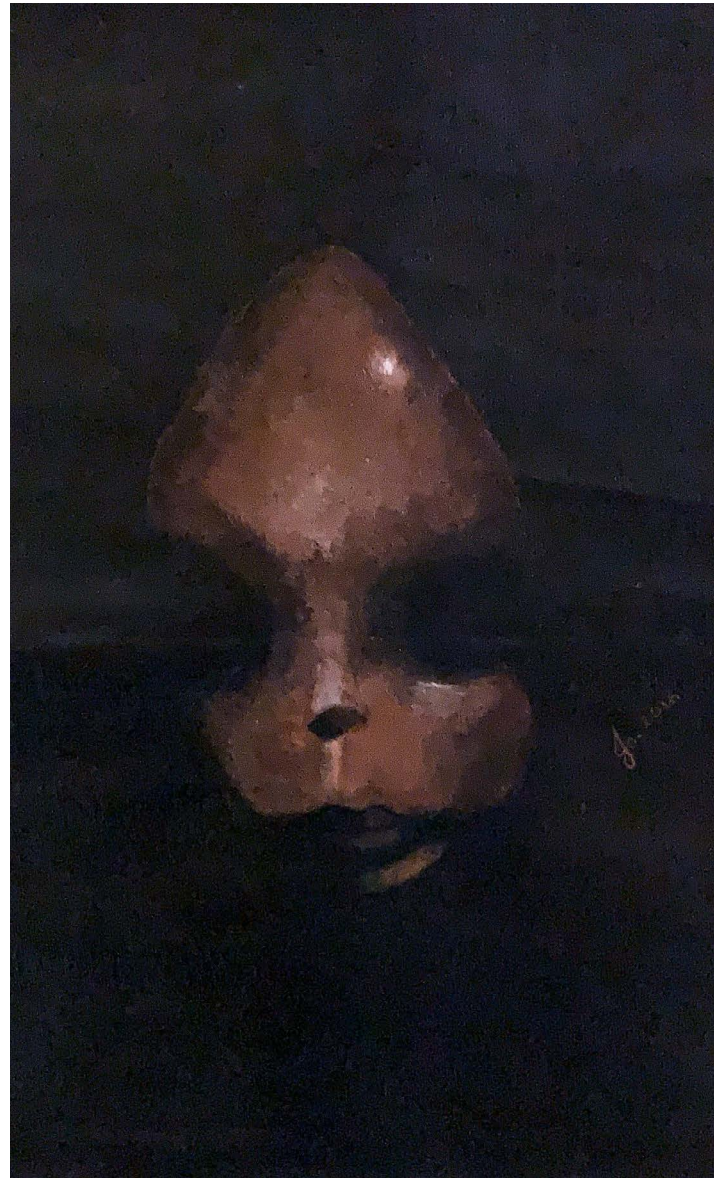
My name is Johanna Mills and I am a formerly incarcerated woman.

I was a teenage runaway at age 15; my home life was very abusive. I grew up addicted to drugs. That created a path straight to prison. In 1997, while incarcerated, I was brutally raped by a staff member. He was my boss in a state assigned job.

I was never given any help, nor was I listened to, I was placed into segregation. Someone gave me the name and address for Just Detention International, formerly Stop Prisoner Rape. I wrote to them and my life was forever changed.

I was believed, listened to, and never again left alone to deal with all of the things that being raped and incarcerated causes you.

Many years later, I now work at JDI. I am the Program Assistant. In this role, I provide administrative support to JDI's domestic program and survivor outreach teams. I also help give information, referrals, and support to incarcerated survivors and their loved ones. As a longtime member of JDI's Survivor Council, I have been at the forefront of the fight to ensure the dignity of incarcerated people. While I was incarcerated, I worked closely with JDI on pushing for many key initiatives, including the Prison Rape Elimination Act. I was released from prison in 2019.



Do They Serve Breakfast in Heaven?

By Nyia Mercado

Nyia Mercado is my given name, but for the past 10 plus years I have been known as 11-G-0894. This is due to my current incarceration at Taconic Correctional Facility. As this phase of my life comes to an end, I have looked deep within myself for answers to questions that eluded me in the past. Hopefully a little piece of my life can help someone else.

Things are not all they seem to be in one's life. The mask that I wear is just a comfort that I have allowed myself to get acquainted with. What is behind this mask of mine is not something that is for everyone to see. Therefore, barely anyone gets to see.

Maybe it's due to years of just stuffing and ignoring the bullshit. As a child of addicted parents, I have learned how to sugarcoat shit and make even the dulllest coin sparkle. My upbringing is not for the faint of heart. As a child, many nights I went to sleep hungry, afraid, and not knowing what the night would bring. Is this the night when my father's fist will end my mother's life? Or will the rats that own the night finally give me an infectious bite? Or will the police raid us once again without thought or concern of children there, waving guns and slamming innocents on the floor? Or will the hunger of nothing to eat be the cause of my demise? Do they serve breakfast in heaven? These are the concerns that my younger self once had on a nightly basis. This is just a glimpse of what it is like being raised by a crackhead father and a crack-addicted mother.

There is a big difference between a crackhead and an addict. A lot of people don't realize what separates the two. A crackhead is the one who will steal their children's toys from under the cardboard Christmas tree at night. They will steal and sell anything that they feel is of value just to get to that next high. They will beat the mother of their child for hiding money that is supposed to be used on groceries or a household bill. They don't have the capacity

to care for a child crying from hunger pains or using a candle to light the way to the bathroom or plucking roaches out of the crumbs of a cereal box. Now a person that is just addicted, can in some ways be "normal." They are able to save money to pay a bill or at least make sure there is something viable to eat in the house. These are differences that are significant to a child that is in the eye of the storm, but may not have any validity to one who doesn't understand this struggle.

As an adult, I wonder if the mishaps of my childhood played a role in the person I have become, the choices that I have made, and the ferocity of my attitude. I am not a person that is able to trust or look at the glass half full, as some would say. It seems that I am incapable of truly being happy or accepting that happiness is a true possibility. In a lot of ways, my growth has been stunted due to the upbringing that I endured. Being able to identify my flaws is a way to move beyond the stagnation that they bring.

Turning these things into a positive attribute is also a challenge. Life as I thought it should be is not the overall experience that I have had. There have been many events in my life that have led me to believe I am destined to exist in a perpetual state of anger and distrust. I have always second guessed the kind acts of others or wondered what their motive is. Intentions are something I have analyzed in the offerings of people. Being so analytical of everything and everyone can at times be exhausting, mentally and physically. The growth that I strive for has been a hard task, and it requires me to be honest with myself.

People have a hard time being honest with themselves. I am the best liar to myself and am readily able to believe what I place in my mind, no matter how fictitious the story might be. No good comes out of this perplexing ability. The truth finds its way into your life and soul. Dealing with something that you are not ready for or

willing to deal with will inevitably bite you in the ass.

I have firsthand experience with this. I lived in my own world, which I mistakenly assumed was safe from the reality that I was escaping. "It doesn't exist" was a motto and mantra that I lived by. But allowing only pieces of me to truly come forth stopped any development that I thought I had achieved. This is something that I was not able to acknowledge at first. It has taken many years of shadow work to be able to honestly accept the truth of my deepest traumas. Although I am able to identify the who and what of certain instances in my life, the how and why of these situations still elude me. By affirming the misconception that "it doesn't exist," I erased parts of myself that I have had difficulty finding again.

I would not want to change or erase portions of my life. Everything that I have endured has made me the warrior woman that I am today. The strength that I possess is rare and unique. Not many people have this within themselves and people don't know how to attain it either. This is a blessing and curse of my trials and tribulations of life. At times, looking in the mirror has been challenging. Not completely knowing the person that reflects my face can be petrifying. Growing into who I am today has been a path of hardship, heartbreak and revelation. The truth of self is there as long as you are willing to look for it.

"GET DRESSED!"

By Candance J. Wesson

Candance J. Wesson is an entrepreneur and the Founder/CEO of a nonprofit organization. She is passionate about criminal justice reform issues, particularly eliminating and/or reducing sentences for non-violent offenders and reentry support for women. Her goal is to create a strong support system for women who are reclaiming their citizenship; addressing any systemic problems that can lead to recidivism.

In 2012, Candance founded The Help in Kansas City (The HelpKC), a reentry support group exclusively for women. As a justice-involved individual herself, she intimately understands the many challenges and traumatic experiences of being incarcerated and the barriers that affect women who have been touched by the criminal justice system. She has worked with national organizations, other non-profit organizations, small businesses, the community, and faith-based organizations and has become a passionate advocate for second chances for justice-involved women.

Candance is the recipient of the 2019 Champion of Justice Award for the work she has done for women in reentry. She is the Dignity Ambassador of Missouri for Dream Corps Justice, where her work for #DignityForIncarceratedWomen was signed into Missouri Law July 2021. All Missouri jails and prisons will now provide free quality feminine hygiene products to women who are in custody. She serves as a Federal Advisory Council Member also with Dream Corps Justice in efforts to reform the criminal justice system. She also serves as a board member with Community Safety Partnership (CSP), where the board's mission is to make communities safer in Kansas City.

She is the co-owner of Get Dressed Co., an online fashion boutique.

She is a wife and mother of three children. She enjoys her family time. She loves football, fashion, and home décor.

Candance will continue to advocate for criminal justice reform, social change and policies that impact justice-involved individuals.



“Try this on!” “This will look great on you!” From boutiques, to retail stores, to shopping malls, dressing had become my finding core ever since winning “best dressed” in high school. It was normal for me to walk into a room and for people to just stop and stare at what I was wearing. No matter where I was going, grocery store, gas station, movie theater, or just hanging out with friends, I always dressed.

Imagine the transition: from shopping in a free world, wearing whatever I wanted whenever I wanted, to being told what to wear, when to wear it, and how to wear it.

September 2012: a prison guard handed me undergarments that looked as if they had been worn over one thousand times, a hideous pair of green khakis, and a discolored, outstretched brown t-shirt. Never had I ever worn another woman’s panties. It was a little insane to me that the prison guard freely handed over this disgusting underwear without hesitation or without repulsion from how dirty they were. After refusing to wear the undergarments, I was threatened with being sent to the SHU (special housing unit) or, in other words, “the hole.” Ultimately, I chose to wear the disgusting underwear.

It was at that moment when I realized that I’d reached an all time low. Eating packaged foods, wearing previously-worn underwear and clothing, no designer fragrances, no mirrors, and no clear picture of who I was externally, only a distorted view. I remember having my family send pictures of me wearing nice clothing and pretty fashion pieces. I needed to constantly look at those pictures as a reminder of who I was and that where I was, was only temporarily. Prison literally robbed me of my dignity. It took away my choices and liberties to be who I really am, so I had to recreate a new version of me centered around where I was.

Once I was able to order from the commissary, the first item on my list was brand new underwear, and I didn’t waste any time changing into them either! I also ordered “grays” which are gray sweatpants or shorts

and gray t-shirts. My “grays” had now become my depiction of “getting dressed!” It was the only clothing I was able to purchase, and they made me feel somewhat normal. I would make sure they were clean (even if that meant washing them by hand), they would be nicely pressed and ironed and, for eleven months, they had become my “dress-up” clothing.

When my prison sentence was over and it was time for me to return the institution’s clothing, I made a promise to myself that I would never get that low ever again, I would “get dressed” every day, no matter what. Even if I didn’t leave the house, I would still be dressed. I wrestled with the decision of keeping my grays and taking them home or giving them away to one of the indigent women that was being left behind. I ultimately decided to keep them and to this very day, I find myself wearing them when I’m jogging and working out. On a positive note, I pay homage to my prison experience, as it did give me the vision for my now online dress boutique: Get Dressed.

I want every woman who has experienced incarceration to take pride and take full advantage of the liberties in having our dignity restored, being able to “get dressed” and wear what we want, especially nice underwear! Having the luxury of looking in the mirror and seeing someone worth looking at. Getting dressed enhances self-esteem and is a confidence builder. When you look good, you feel good. Since we’re no longer bound by prison rules, let’s “get dressed!”

Dignity LeadHERship Alliance



Dignity LeadHERship Alliance (DLA) is dedicated to building a more equal and inclusive criminal justice reform by driving urgently-needed policy for women currently and formerly incarcerated. DLA is comprised of the collective leadHERship from justice-impacted women who are successfully informing policies and advocating legislation throughout the country based on the expertise of their lived experience with the criminal legal system. DLA works to mobilize and engage those directly impacted by the criminal legal system, through transformative leadership advocacy to develop underrepresented women policy leaders who have survived personal experiences within the justice system.

The criminal justice system and the reform movement have not traditionally considered the needs of women. Pregnant women present unique challenges for correctional systems that are inadequately addressed. Intersectionality and criminalization systematically block women of color from various rights and opportunities, putting them at high risk for incarceration and revocation. Although the population of incarcerated women has increased 800%, there is sparse data or studies of gender difference in incarceration. More than 80% of incarcerated women are primary caretakers, disproportionately women of color, low income, have mental health issues, lack education, and suffer trauma.

The current practices of the criminal legal system have serious lasting dignity, safety, and health implications, resulting in women returning to their communities in far worse

condition than when they entered the system. We seek an end to prison birth and carceral control of women through strategic development of robust public policy led by the collective, transformative leadHERship of justice-involved women, for currently and formerly incarcerated women. In addition, DLA consults with non-impacted organizations on how to effectively ally and work with justice-involved individuals and/or organizations without perpetuating harm or exploitation.

Our diverse team is led by formerly incarcerated, women policy leaders, who successfully advocate through the collective leadHERship of our personal lived experiences.

Dr. Zaria Davis is a mentor, educator, and advocate. She serves as a coach and consultant for nonprofits servicing and businesses hiring directly impacted communities through New Direction Coaching & Consulting, LLC. Dr. Davis also is an experienced grant writer and reviewer.

Charlotte Garnes received her undergraduate degree in Criminal Justice from Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, GA and her Master of Arts in Counseling from Webster University in Columbia, SC. An advocate, mentor, social change agent, and educator, Charlotte's most recent endeavor is establishing and presenting her customized trainings and workshops focused on workforce development and successful reintegration for those who are justice-involved.

Kristie Puckett-Williams is an activist and the Smart Justice Manager for American Civil Liberties Union North Carolina. She's a working scholar in mass incarceration with a focus on the treatment of women in carceral facilities. Puckett-Williams actively led the passing of Dignity For Incarcerated Women North Carolina. Additionally, she serves as the Chair of Woman of an Incarceration Workgroup for the State Reentry Council Collaborative.

Lastly, Pamela Winn, known as “The Face of Dignity For Incarcerated Women” is an activist of Atlanta, Georgia. She is a national leader in anti-shackling legislation. Her story created a movement leading to the ban of shackling and solitary confinement of incarcerated pregnant women in 19 states throughout the country. She has been invited to the White House to speak on “Women’s Issues” and authored language for women that was instrumental in the historic passing of *HR5682, First Step Act*. She was requested by the US Commission on Civil Rights Briefing: Women In Prison; Seeking Justice Behind Bars to provide oral and written testimony. Winn is the founder of RestoreHER US.America, informing policy throughout the South, including the unanimous passing of *HB345, DIGNITY GA*, and the overwhelming passing of *SB105, Probation Reform GA*.

Collectively we have professional experience in drafting legislation, social work, advocacy campaigns, politics, law, workforce, reproductive justice, substance abuse, medical, mental, and public health. We are recognized by Forbes 50 over 50 Impact, Essence, International Society of Professional Females, JustLeadership USA Fellows, Soros Justice Fellow, Justice Policy Network Fellow, and Women Transcending Collective Leadership Fellows. We have passed city, state, and federal legislation, including historical legislation such as First Step Act, Pell Grant, and Dignity For Incarcerated Women Act in numerous states throughout the country.

DLA has a vision of a world where women of color impacted by mass criminalization and incarceration receive gender-based education, healthcare, rehabilitation, alternative sentencing, and full restoration of their rights, so that they can move forward with hope, dignity, and opportunities to make important contributions in their communities.

Women’s Reentry Pilot Program Graduation Speech

By Doreen Cuffie

On April 26, 2021, I embarked on my journey with The Women’s Reentry Pilot Program, facilitated by the Mural Arts Program. I wasn’t sure what to expect because it was a program from Mural Arts, to my knowledge I have not an artistic talent in me at all. Upon my first day in orientation, I realized the difference in the title WRPP was a Women’s Reentry program. I knew by this I had to get out of my own way in order to learn intellectually in growth, inspiration and motivation to withstand challenges along with my peers.

I am so proud to say I was one of the first members/founding clients of the Women’s Reentry Pilot Program. It has given me a sense of direction, a purpose to succeed in all that I do and learn. I have gained and learned so much from so many. One thing I learned was that I control my own narrative. I can’t change my past, but I can hold the keys to my future. I also had the opportunity to learn setting boundaries, speaking up, and picking and choosing my battles. I Understand my flexibilities, my humbleness, I also learned daily life skills to evaluate my strengths as well as my weaknesses and to improve my accountability, my time management and my focus in order to be responsible for my self-care and giving space to my trauma and triggers.

I now see myself moving into a facilitator and peer support role, giving other women a safe space, an open ear and open mind—a place where women can feel confident to expose the traumas and triggers that need to be healed. Women have to know that our tools are inside of us; we don’t have to feel powerless.

For, We are more than impacted women and parolees. We are beautiful, resilient, strong, powerful, worthy, fearless and full of strength more than the storm we survived. We are women with

a purpose and passion to succeed in life. I did not get to the front of this room by myself. These women pushed and challenged me. We are the women of the WRPP 2021. I am she, her, and them.

Women's Reentry Pilot Program Graduation Ceremony

By Akeil Robertson-Jowers



Turkey

By Tanya Campbell

This past Thanksgiving, I watched another New York State Governor televise the importance of freeing a turkey.

"Quite newsworthy," I thought sarcastically.

I have submitted my petition to the Clemency Board and was informed that once a lawyer picked up my case, then they would try to work with me to assemble a strong clemency packet.

Two years have passed and, still, I have neither lawyer nor any other communication with the Clemency Board. This omission prompted me to advocate for myself. I inquired about the application and if there is any follow-up from the Board. I promptly received jargon that I interpreted as "You nor your application is important."

So, I started to wonder after seeing Governor Hochul with the turkey:

- When was this turkey selected as the recipient of a pardon?
- How much preparation went into this turkey's logistic and status review?
- Was this turkey imprisoned in a cage and for human reason afforded freedom as it should live cage-free?

So, now I can ask: when will I and others be afforded this same privilege?

Clemency is Racial Justice.

The National Council

ClemencyWorks is The National Council's national state and federal clemency campaign. The campaign works to encourage the President

and state governors to commute the sentences of incarcerated women who are:

- Elderly
- Seriously/Terminally Ill
- Survived and Punished
- Long-Timers in need of a second chance

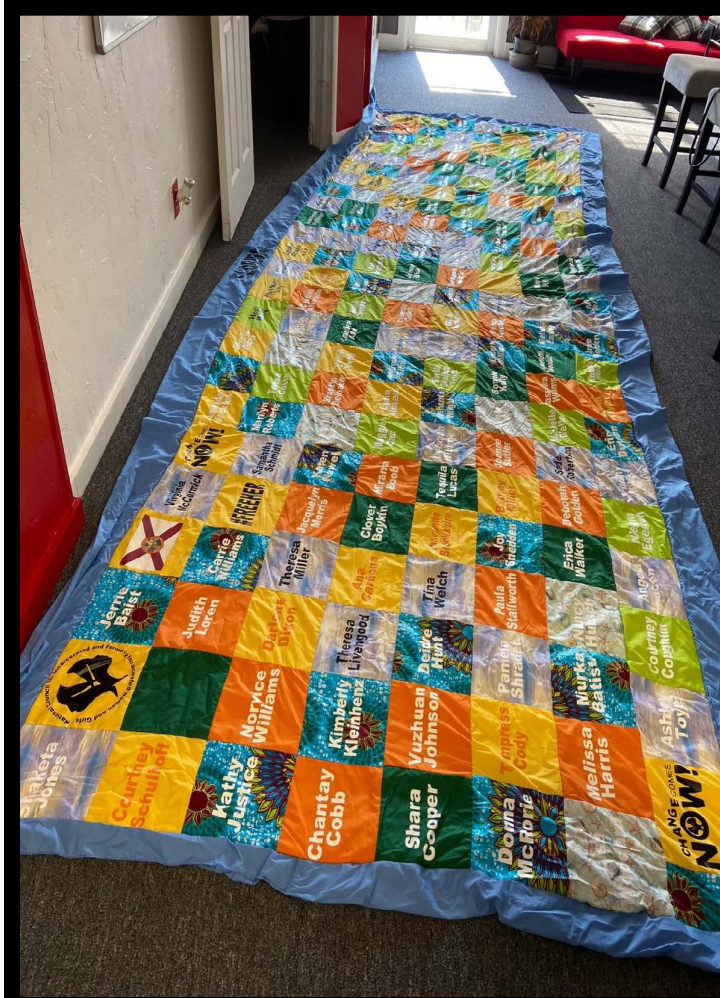
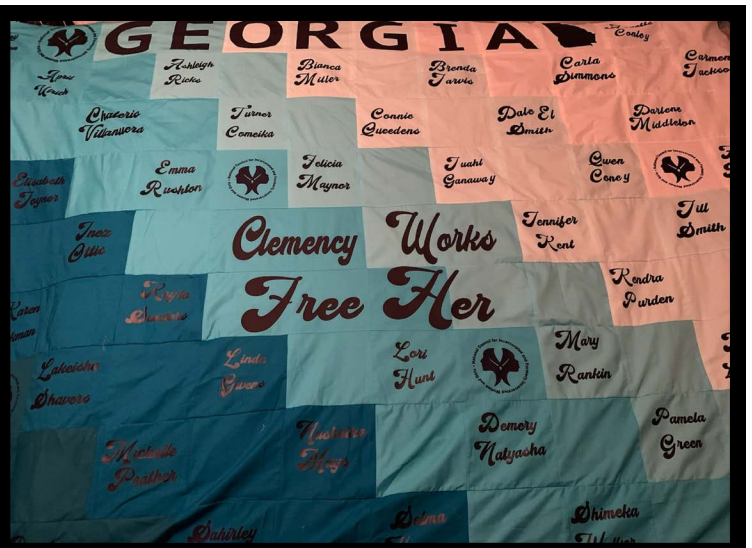
A significant component of this campaign is the hand-sewn quilts that display the names of women who follow under the list above in both state and federal prisons. Each quilt consists of individual patches made by incarcerated individuals, volunteers, and staff of The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls and represents a state, even states that do not have clemency.

One quilt holds an interesting back story. When word began to spread about the clemency quilts, a group of incarcerated men serving life at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola, in solidarity, took it upon themselves to make a quilt representing the women sentenced to life in that state. However, it was challenging to get it outside the prison after completing the quilt because of policies.

Without disclosing too much information, let's say they found away with the assistance of allies of The National Council. Now that quilt is one of many traveling the country, raising awareness of the importance of clemency.

The National Council is an abolitionist organization; our goal is to end the incarceration of women and girls. Not to reform a system designed to keep them going from pre-school to prison. Instead, The National Council is a hyperlocal grassroots organizer and works on introducing communities hardest hit by poverty and incarceration to what different looks like.

For more information on the work of The National Council, please visit www.nationalcouncil.us.



BREAK THE CYCLE

By Tiffany Woods

I am a mother of four young adult children. I have been incarcerated most of their lives. When a parent becomes incarcerated, the entire family becomes incarcerated. The system focuses on the crime and not the person or their families. What about the children? We have outlets to assist our families, but there are so many children and families in need of help. How can the outlet effectively help when the numbers are extremely high? Our children and loved ones are paying the price for our selfishness. If the system does not help them, our children will continue to ride on the cycle of mass incarceration and negative behaviors. Our families can only do so much to protect and shield them from harm.

Millions of people today are suffering from mental illness or depression. Our children are acting out on social media, at school, home and the hopelessness that surrounds them is real. We all need to focus on the needs of the children and not the crime of their parents. Our children are our future. Please help them and those who are working in the fields to assist them. Please take their pleas and cries seriously. Our children have issues because of an incarcerated parent. They need help. Our children need to soar and not sit in a shadowed cave looking at their reflections on the wall. Please look within and ask yourself if you are doing enough. If not, I implore you to get involved. One person can make a difference and that one person could be you.

Harlem Art Poem

By Izuo-Ere "Mimi" Digifa

I have seen time
Big and small, old and new, good and bad
I have seen the absolute of time in its rawness
In the originality of beauty and pain
Time, before my innocence was concealed with desolateness
I waited for peace to encompass my being
To reside in the corners of my heart
But trouble came
A raging storm of iniquity
Broke my bones, overtook my kindness, dark circled
And circled through the sanctuary of my blackness
Unfolded and folded my flesh in one accord till my days withered
Joy departed
Left me with stillness
Not the tranquil, peaceful kind
The kind that leaves you as dried leaves
Eye bags to eye bags
Living in the fear of a foreseen death that may or may not come
Since my life is no longer my own
Since my color is the most evil the world has ever known
Since nothing about me matters
Unless these hands bleed and bruise in the fields for my owner's sake
Allow Thy kingdom come

Let the generations from this suffering enjoy the agony of my wrinkled skin

Let their children's children live freely without fear

I have foreseen time

Through the visibility of these veins that flow through a different kind of blood

From the ones they have

This skin is grace; it is love

I live in it

It is the only way the universe possesses its authenticity and soul

Through the same skin, they have condemned

Let Thy kingdom come before time passes into dust



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Protecting Justice-Involved Women's Reproductive Rights
By New Jersey Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver

Reproductive health and the ability for women to make medical decisions about their own bodies are fundamental rights that should never be taken away.

Last year, alongside Governor Phil Murphy, former Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg, Senate President Nicholas Scutari, former Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttie, Alexis McGill Johnson, President of the Planned Parenthood Action Fund, and many other legislative sponsors and advocates, I had the privilege of signing the historic Freedom of Reproductive Choice Act (S49/A6260), which codified the constitutional right to freedom of reproductive choice in New Jersey. Governor Murphy also signed S413/A4698, which expanded the contraception coverage required under private insurance and Medicaid from a 6-month supply to a 12-month supply.

These laws expanded and protected reproductive freedom in New Jersey just months before the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision, which overturned *Roe v. Wade* and jeopardized reproductive rights in many states. Governor Murphy's administration is committed to preserving reproductive rights for all New Jersey residents — including incarcerated people.

Although the 1976 Supreme Court case *Estelle v. Gamble* mandated prisons and jails to facilitate health care services, state and institutional policies often limit access to reproductive and family planning services.⁷⁶ For example, a recent study published in *Obstetrics & Gynecology* of 22 state prison systems, all Federal Bureau of Prison sites, and six county jails found that just half of the state prisons permitted abortion in both the first and second trimesters. 14% did not allow abortion at all. Of the 19 state prison systems that allowed abortion, two thirds required incarcerated women to pay for the procedures.⁷⁷ These policies all imposed considerable barriers to incarcerated people's access to abortions.

In New Jersey, which was not included in the study, correctional facilities are required by law to offer prenatal medical evaluation and care; nutritional supplements and diets, as required by the attending physician; non-directive counseling regarding family planning, birth control, termination of pregnancy, child placement services, and religious counseling (if desired by the inmate); obstetrical services, abortion services, unless the treating physician and/or gynecologist determines that the pregnancy cannot be terminated; and appropriate postpartum and follow-up medical care.⁷⁸

However, there is always more to be done. Through presentations and articles such as "Incarcerated Women: Need to Address Sexual Health," "Pregnancy in incarcerated women: need for national legislation to standardize care," "Prenatal care disparity and pregnancy outcome among incarcerated pregnant individuals in the United States: A systematic review and meta-analysis," and "Structural Racism and the Impact on Incarcerated Midlife Women," New Jersey's Commission on Reentry Services for Women has provided recommendations as to best practices for the reproductive care of incarcerated women. Using the Commission's research as a guide, the Murphy Administration is committed to enacting policies which enshrine incarcerated women's access to free and comprehensive reproductive health care.

Acceptance

By Jasmine B, NJRC Program Participant

ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance, A word we don't put into action. Everybody wants respect but don't give it, we constantly judge and put down each other. We steady blame things on a devil, but never sit back and check ourselves and analyze our actions. Things come to us as tests for our growth, but take it as an error. If we practice acceptance for one another we will realize the beauty we can bring in each others lives. Acceptance brings peace, love, balance, happiness, purity. By not using acceptance we tear down relationships we want to establish for ourselves and towards others. That's the reason behind wars, confusion and problems we don't want. People are how they are due to experiences. If we take the time and discuss our differences with acceptance we create healing for each other. The world will become better with acceptance. Religions speak on acceptance, but we forget that message and use other examples, but all teachers in those religions that we practice or follow, main ingredient was acceptance. It's time to stop focusing on the bad parts of humanity and come together and express love. With love comes acceptance, you can't have one without the other.

by: JASMINER

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A.B.O. Comix
<https://www.abocomix.com>

Abolition Apostles
<https://www.abolitionapostles.com>

ACLU of Arizona
<https://www.acluaz.org>

ACLU of Florida
<https://www.aclufl.org>

ACLU of Minnesota
<https://www.aclu-mn.org>

Adirondack Center for Writing - Prison Writing Program
<https://adirondackcenterforwriting.org/prison-writing-program/>

Aid to Inmate Mothers
<https://inmatemoms.org>

Alabama Appleseed Center for Law & Justice
<https://www.alabamaappleseed.org>

Alliance for California Traditional Arts
<https://www.actaonline.org/>

All of Us or None- Northern NJ
<https://www.allofusornone-northernnj.com>

All of Us or None - South Jersey
Ronald Pierce, (732) 608-4752, rpierce@njisj.org

A Long Walk Home
<https://www.alongwalkhome.org/>

American Prison Writing Archive
<https://people.hamilton.edu/documents/AP-WAPQ2019.pdf>

Anchorage Reentry Coalition
<https://www.anchoragereentry.org/who-we-are>

Appalachian Prison Book Project
<https://appalachianprisonbookproject.org>

Artistic Noise
<https://www.artisticnoise.org/>

because I said I would
<https://becauseisaidiwould.org/>

Benedict Center
<https://www.benedictcenter.org>

Black & Pink National
<https://www.blackandpink.org>

Books to Prisoners
<https://www.bookstoprisoners.net>

Breaking Free
<https://breakingfree.net>

Bridges to Hope
<https://www.bridgestohopene.org>

Bridges To Life
<https://www.bridgestolife.org>

California Institution for Women
<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/ciw/>

Career Resources, Inc.
<https://careerresources.org>

Center for Prison Education at Wesleyan University
<https://www.wesleyan.edu/cpe/>

Centre, Inc.
<https://www.centreinc.org>

Centurion
<https://centurion.org/>

Citizens for Prison Reform
<https://www.micpr.org>

Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) National
<https://www.curenational.org/>

Coastal Horizons Center, Inc.
<https://coastalhorizons.org>

Coffee Creek Correctional Facility
<https://www.oregon.gov/doc/about/pages/prison-locations.aspx>

College & Community Fellowship
<https://www.collegeandcommunity.org>

Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice
<https://curyj.org>

Community Family Life Services
<https://www.cflsdc.org>

Compassion Prison Project
<https://compassionprisonproject.org>

Crossroads Connection
<https://crossroads-connection.org/champions.html>

CT Reentry Collaborative
<http://ctreentry.org/ct-reentry-collaborative>

Dream.Org
<https://www.thedreamcorps.org>

Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women
NJDOC LAUNCHES HEALTH-FOCUSED REENTRY SERVICES FOR WOMEN
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drvT16ELN-kE>

Escaping Time
<https://www.escapingtime.org>

Federal Correctional Complex Tucson
<https://www.bop.gov/locations/institutions/tcn/>

Florida Department of Corrections
<http://www.dc.state.fl.us/>

Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop
<https://freemindsbookclub.org/>

Fresh Coast Alliance
<https://www.freshcoastalliance.org>

Friends of Restorative Justice
<https://friendsofrestorativejustice.org/>
Fulton Community Supervision Center
https://doc.mo.gov/programs/fulton_CSC

Georgia Justice Project
<https://www.gjp.org>

Girls Embracing Mothers
<https://girlsembracingmothers.org>

GOODWorks
<https://www.goodworksct.org>

Greater Gwinnett Reentry Alliance
<https://www.gwinnettreaty.org>

Healing Broken Circles
<https://www.healingbrokencircles.org>

Her Time
<https://www.hangtimerealtalk.com/hertime>

Hour Children
<https://hourchildren.org>

Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison
<https://hudsonlink.org>

Human Kindness Foundation
<https://humankindness.org>

I Am Why
<https://iamwhy.org>

ID13 Prison Literacy Project
<https://www.id13project.com>

Illinois Department of Corrections
<https://www2.illinois.gov/idoc/Pages/default.aspx>

Incarcerated Writers Initiative
<http://columbiajournal.org/iwi/>

Indiana CURE
<https://www.indianacure.org/>

Indiana Voices
<http://indianarsol.com/>

Inside Books Project
<https://insidebooksproject.org/>

InsideOUT Writers

<https://www.insideoutwriters.org>

Insight Prison Project

<http://www.insightprisonproject.org>

Institute for Justice Research and Development

<https://ijrd.csw.fsu.edu/>

Iowa Correctional Institution for Women

<https://doc.iowa.gov/about-us/about-institutions/iowa-correctional-institution-women>

Iron City Magazine

<http://ironcity-magazine.squarespace.com/>

John Howard Association of Illinois

<https://www.thejha.org>

Journey of Hope Utah

<https://journeyofhopeutah.org>

Justice Arts Coalition

<https://thejusticeartscoalition.org>

Just Detention International

<https://justdetention.org/>

JustLeadershipUSA

<https://jlusa.org>

Kansas Appleseed

<https://www.kansasappleseed.org>

Kentucky Department of Corrections

<https://corrections.ky.gov/Pages/index.aspx>

Keyway Center for Diversion and Reentry

<https://www.cwitstl.org/store/c1/Home>

Lakin Correctional Center and Jail

<https://dcr.wv.gov/facilities/Pages/prisons-and-jails/lccj.aspx>

Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the
Cumberlands

<https://las.org/>

Lewisburg Prison Project

<https://www.lewisburgprisonproject.org>

Liberty County Re-Entry Coalition, Inc.

<https://www.libertyreentry.org/>

Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections

<https://doc.louisiana.gov>

Maine Correctional Center Women's Center

<https://www.maine.gov/corrections/womenscenter>

Michigan Center for Youth Justice

<https://www.miyouthjustice.org>

Mississippi Center for Re-Entry

<https://msreentry.org>

Mural Arts Philadelphia Restorative Justice

<https://www.muralarts.org/program/restorative-justice/>

National Commission on Correctional Health Care

<https://www.ncchc.org>

National Endowment for the Arts

<https://www.arts.gov>

NC Women's Prison Book Project

<https://ncwpb.org/>

NeighborCorps Re-Entry Services

<http://neighborcorpsreentry.org>

Nevada Department of Corrections

<https://doc.nv.gov/>

New Hampshire Correctional Facility for Women

<https://www.nh.gov/nhd/doc/facilities/goffstown.html>

New Jersey Department of Corrections

<https://www.state.nj.us/corrections/pages/index.shtml>

New Leaf New Life

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Nonprofit-organization/New-Leaf-New-Life-92085766899/>

News and Letters Committees
<https://newsandletters.org>

New Yorkers United for Justice
<https://nyuj.org>

New York State Department of Corrections and
Community Supervision
<https://doccs.ny.gov/>

North Carolina Department of Public Safety
<https://www.ncdps.gov/>

NYC Criminal Justice Agency
<https://www.nycja.org>

Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform
<https://okjusticereform.org>

Operation Restoration
<https://www.or-nola.org>

Oregon CURE
<https://oregoncure.org>

Oregon Department of Corrections
<https://www.oregon.gov/doc/pages/default.aspx>

Paroled2Pride
<https://www.paroled2pride.org>

Parole Preparation Project
<https://www.paroleprepny.org/>

Partners for Progress
<https://www.partnersforprogressak.org>

Pennsylvania Prison Society
<https://www.prisonssociety.org>

PEN Prison Writing Program
<https://pen.org/prison-writing/>

PREPARE (Prepare for Parole and Reentry)
<https://prepare-parole.org>

Prison Abolition Initiative
<https://www.prisonabolitioninitiative.org>

Prison Activist Resource Center
<https://www.prisonactivist.org>

Prison Books Collective
<https://prisonbooks.info>

Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP)
<https://lsa.umich.edu/pcap>

Prison Fellowship
<https://www.prisonfellowship.org>

Prison Performing Arts
<https://www.prisonperformingarts.org/>

Prison Policy Initiative
<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/>

Prison Teaching Initiative
<https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/PTI>

Prison Writes
www.prisonwrites.org

Progeny
<https://www.progenyks.com>

Project PAINT
<https://www.projectpaint.org>

Pure Justice
<https://purejustice.org>

Reentry Alliance of Nebraska
<http://re-entrynebraska.org>

Reentry Campus Program
<https://www.reentrycampusprogram.org>

Rehabilitation Through the Arts
<https://www.rta-arts.org>

Religious Coalition for a Nonviolent Durham
<https://nonviolentdurham.org>

RestoreHER US.America
<https://www.restoreher.us>

Sinister Wisdom
<http://sinisterwisdom.org>

Social Action Linking Together (SALT)
<https://www.s-a-l-t.org/>

Solitary Watch
<https://solitarywatch.org>

Southern Center for Human Rights
<https://www.schr.org/>

Southern Coalition for Social Justice
<https://southerncoalition.org>

Survived and Punished NY
<https://www.survivedandpunishedny.org>

TASC's Center for Health and Justice
https://www.centerforhealthandjustice.org/ch-jweb/home_chj.aspx

Texas Center for Justice and Equity
<https://texascje.org>

Texas Justice Initiative
<https://texasjusticeinitiative.org>

TGI Justice Project
<http://www.tgijp.org>

The Bail Project
<https://bailproject.org>

The Fortune Society
<https://fortunesociety.org>

The Help in Kansas City
<https://www.thehelpkc.org>

The Humanization Project
<http://thehumanizationproject.org/>

The Marshall Project
<https://www.themarshallproject.org>

The National Council for Incarcerated & Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls
<https://www.nationalcouncil.us/>

The Petey Greene Program
<https://www.peteygreene.org>

The Promise of Justice Initiative
<https://promiseofjustice.org>

The Real Cost of Prisons Project
<http://www.realcostofprisons.org>

Underground Writing
<https://undergroundwriting.org>

University of Iowa Prison Writing Project
<https://writinguniversity.org/teaching-research/prison-writing-project>

UnPrison Project
<https://www.unprisonproject.org>

Until We Are All Free
<https://uwaaf.org>

Utah Prisoner Advocate Network
<https://utahprisoneradvocate.org>

Vermont Department of Corrections
<https://doc.vermont.gov>

Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice and Equality
<https://defendersfje.blogspot.com>

VOTE | Voice of the Experienced
<https://www.voiceoftheexperienced.org/>

Welcome Home Reentry Housing
<https://www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/welcome-home/>

Western Kentucky Correctional Complex
<https://corrections.ky.gov/Facilities/AI/wkcc/Pages/default.aspx>

Western New Mexico Correctional Facility
<https://www.cd.nm.gov/divisions/adult-prison/nmcd-prison-facilities/western-new-mexico-correctional-facility/>

Wisconsin Department of Corrections
<https://doc.wi.gov/Pages/Home.aspx>

Women In Leadership
<https://www.wilecho.org>

Women's Prison Association
<https://www.wpaonline.org>

Writers' Block
<https://www.newriters.org/other-programs>

writing inside VT
<https://writinginsidevt.com/>

Youth Arts: Unlocked
<https://www.youth-arts-unlocked.org/>

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