

4 P.M. COUNT

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for the Arts Writer-in-Residence /
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And thanks to all of my new students. You guys are a talented bunch of writers—don't ever forget that.

Dr. Jim Reese

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INTRODUCTION

I am glad you have in your hands the eighth edition of *4 P.M. Count*. This book along with the previous seven editions is the product of a lot of hard work. When I use the word ‘work’ I am not simply referring to the labor involved in the writing, editing, designing, and publishing, but the emotional, mental, and often healing work required for the writers to create what you will find inside these pages. Whether this is your first copy of *4 P.M. Count*, or you have had the privilege of building a library of the publication, I want to welcome you to this year’s edition. You are going to read some heart-wrenching stories, some humorous ones, and other pieces that will shed some light on the men who were willing to share. You will also find that the men who wrote these stories have developed their writing and in some cases exposed themselves in very personal ways. That takes a lot of courage and a desire to grow as a person.

Dr. Jim Reese is our writer-in-residence who facilitates this publication. Sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Dr. Reese has dedicated himself to this project over the last eight years. His approach to these men, while being able to tap into their hidden talents as writers, also assists them with coming to terms with reasons that may have contributed to their incarceration. Using the theory of “transformative justice,” Dr. Reese assists these men in transforming their experiences into written word that is as effective as a therapeutic tool as it is as a formal language arts learning opportunity.

We are also excited to include other forms of art and programming that took place during this last year. You will find some very talented artists using a number of different media to express their talents. This year we wanted to have some focus pieces that show what talents, besides writing, can be found on the compound. I do not want to spoil the surprise, so I will not tell you what to expect. I just want

to express that these activities are vital to programming within the prison systems. As important as we know it is to provide vocational and educational programming to assist offenders in successful reentry, we also have a responsibility to provide constructive ways to manage their leisure time for both mental and physical health reasons.

Each year the publication gets better and that is largely due to the pride and hard work put into its publication by Dr. Reese and the featured writers. Also involved and deserving of some recognition and thanks are the other departments and staff within the prison who have assisted with the programming and logistics that make everything we do in education possible, from the staff who screen visitors to the institution, to the staff who volunteer for job fairs and assist with supervising those visiting groups. It is truly a team effort to make this publication possible. Then there is you, the reader; without your taking an interest in what we do within the prison to assist offenders in becoming better citizens, it is likely we would not benefit from the generosity of The National Endowment for the Arts in providing the funds that make *4 P.M. Count* possible.

Now, please find a comfortable spot and sit back and enjoy this year's edition. It is our pleasure to share it with you!

Sincerely,

Kyle Roberson
Supervisor of Education
Federal Prison Camp Yankton
Federal Bureau of Prisons

2015 NEA Writer-in-Residence



Photo by Jamie Ridgway

Jim Reese is an Associate Professor of English; Director of the Great Plains Writers' Tour at Mount Marty College in Yankton, South Dakota; and Editor-in-Chief of *4 P.M. Count*.

Reese's poetry and prose have been widely published, most recently in *New York Quarterly*, *Poetry East*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Louisiana*

Literature Review, and elsewhere.

In 2015, Reese received an Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award and in 2012 a Distinguished Public Service Award in recognition of his exemplary dedication and contributions to the Education Department at the Yankton Federal Prison Camp.

Since 2008, Reese has been one of six artists-in-residence throughout the country who are part of the National Endowment for the Arts' interagency initiative with the Department of Justice's Federal Bureau of Prisons. His book *Really Happy* was published by New York Quarterly Books in 2014.

Reese and his family live in southern South Dakota, near John Wesley Powell's one hundredth meridian—better than most determinants for where the American West begins.

PREFACE

As an Associate Professor of English at Mount Marty College in Yankton, South Dakota, I was asked to become the National Endowment for the Arts writer-in-residence at Federal Prison Camp Yankton eight years ago. I had been publishing and editing books for twelve years. This unique program for inmates was offered to five other locations throughout the country. For months I studied what other sites offered and developed a program that included visiting writers and a yearly perfect-bound journal of art and writing that no other program had accomplished. I paid for the extra expenditures of publishing the book and compensating award-winning guest authors with the money I was allocated. I knew it was a blessing and honor to be part of such a unique venture and I wanted to make the biggest impact I could.

First, I had to forget I was teaching at a prison, forget any fears that kept me up at night. These are people who made misdirected decisions and are interested enough to come to a class for a year to learn. There is no credit given. Their reward is the chance to tell their stories and become published authors.

I over-prepared for the year-long course, accounting for every hour of the syllabus. Then the first day, a student asked, “What’s the difference between poetry and prose?” and I knew I had to re-figure everything.

I told the students to forget grammar rules for the present. We’ll learn those soon enough. What is brewing inside you? Let your voice out—let it ride. The men all want to be published, but they have to earn it. They have to create something from the heart. We discover how powerful words can be, how voice transcends. Their stories enable them to come to terms with the emotional instabilities that brought them to prison. Their voice helps them reconnect with families and victims. For those stripped of everything, each unique voice still remains. Every year, I have to earn

the respect of twenty-five strangers. I show them how love and knowledge of writing and of one's education can change them. I try to take a room full of men with little writing experience and give them the courage to discover and write their deepest and most personal stories and then release those into the world.

For eight years I have read as much as I could on arts and education in corrections and traveled to San Quentin and New Folsom to see how art and writing programs work in maximum security prisons. I meet and discuss transformative ideas with policy makers, foundation members and correctional staff to truly understand both sides of the fence. I'm not a victim of crime. I know that 48.6% of federal inmates are incarcerated because of drug offenses. I've worked with these men for eight years. What I have learned is that they most often go to prison because of a lack of education and addiction problems, not heinous crimes.

I give public presentations at venues throughout the country and host inmate readings in the community. I ask a lot of questions. Education is key to turning our justice system around. The United States is the worldwide leader in incarceration. A 2013 RAND Corporation report found strong evidence that correctional education plays a role in reducing recidivism. The study concluded that every dollar spent on prison education translated into four dollars of savings during the first three years post-release.

I believe my greatest strengths are deeply held beliefs about learning and human growth. I can't imagine a day without lifelong learning—without being able to create, to dream and then implement such dreams. Our lives should be thought of as stages for creativity and exploration and places where seeking and implementing ideas come alive. We must discover the connections between ourselves and our "local worlds." We must try to understand any tensions we encounter rather than seek to be instantaneously understood. Then we must get to work. I believe all people want to do the right thing—to live healthy, productive

lives—to give to their communities, even if they’ve failed at such endeavors before.

My weakness was discovering that most of these men were very talented and had important stories to tell. I needed to get off my Ph.D. soapbox and realize they wanted and needed a place to share their stories, a safe place and platform to reveal their secrets and agonies. All I had to do was really listen and encourage them. My first supervisor of education at the prison told me that any of us could have wound up in a place like this after a few misdirected decisions. She was right.

I have learned that people can be locked up and released after so long. Maybe during their incarceration they can learn a trade—that’s great. But they also must be helped to tap into the emotional instabilities that brought them to prison in the first place. Writing, art, and more importantly, education helps open that door. I believe that prisoners who never come to terms with themselves will simply re-enter society as the same angry persons first sentenced to prison.

Rudyard Kipling said, “Words are the most powerful drug used by mankind.” He was right there.

I am honored and grateful for being the National Endowment for the Arts Writer-in-Residence here for the past eight years. I’ve come to understand what the word empathy really means. I do hope these educational programs continue throughout the country. Enjoy the book.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Reese
National Endowment for the Arts Writer-in-Residence
Federal Prison Camp Yankton
Yankton, South Dakota
2015



Photo by Kyle Roberson

Borden Barrows



Borden Barrows, a husband and father, spent his childhood along the New England shore, and as an adult lived in New York, Florida and California. He is currently involved in the Residential Drug Abuse Program and works as a tutor in the education department at FPC Yankton.

METUCHIN

I'm from a boardwalk with penny candy stores
and an arcade where you play Skee-ball.
Where you can go to Mr. Carluci's Italian Ice Stand,
and in exchange for a brain-freeze,
gorge yourself on the sweetest substance known to man.

The land of weather-beaten captains' houses,
buildings that have endured the brunt of so many
nor'easters,
salt bleeding from the crevices of every shingle.

Where razor-sharp scrub grass grows between the dunes
and washed-up seaweed reeks on the beach
as it bakes dry in the summer's sun.

And the vast, steely grey ocean is a friend,
yours to use, enjoy, even love;
but above all else, must always be respected.

I'm from a world where tipping your laser is a point of
pride,
but jibing through the final turn in a race,
wholly unsportsmanlike.

A culture where religion was long ago considered passé,
but table manners nearly canonized,
except on lobster nights,
when all bets were off.

I'm from Metuchin on the New England shore,
where we're all descendants of whaling captains,
even when we really aren't.

A place where childhood's mile markers are swimming out
to the raft,
diving off the jetty,
and your first night under the boardwalk.

The world of surf breaking onto the beach,
where a glimpse of a sand dollar makes you feel lucky,
a horseshoe crab brings up gooseflesh,
and a warm summer breeze is your God-given birthright.

MONUMENTS

Monuments don't do much for me. I would say I'm as patriotic as the next guy, maybe more than most in my situation. But there is one memorial in Washington D.C. that floors me every time: full-on knees wobbling, questioning whether I am even worthy to walk in the same realm as the people being honored. I first visited the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in the summer of 1984. It had opened two years earlier, and the wounds the nation sustained in that conflict were still sensitive to the touch. The very idea of the monument created a national debate, and when it opened, the nation breathed a collective sigh of relief. Finally, we had prepared ourselves to recognize the service of the hundreds of thousands who served, and of course, those who gave what the man memorialized a scant few hundred yards away called, "The Last Full Measure of Devotion."

I was in D.C. one Sunday night. I had business there the next day, and opted to go walking in lieu of dinner with business associates. I set out from my hotel up by Embassy Row. Khaki shorts, an un-tucked polo shirt and sandals seemed appropriate for D.C.'s swampy, oppressive August heat. I started walking, and the layout of the city funneled me down to the National Mall. I got there as the summer's night approached, and in the twilight, saw the minor commotion that marked the Vietnam Memorial in those days. Back then, one could count on groups of veterans to be standing around the walkway leading to the memorial's wall. Men, and the occasional woman, who obviously shared the bond of serving in the war – having been "in country" as they called it – wearing random pieces of old uniforms, camouflage pants or jackets, much of which looked like it saw the worst of the war right along with them.

Particularly in the 1980s, the scene could leave you with the discomfiture of walking into – almost intruding

on—somewhere you had in no way earned the right to be. I certainly felt that way. The veterans standing there, mostly in their forties and fifties, acted as self-posted sentries. Their duty: to help guide visitors and assist them in finding loved ones along the wall. For me, those soldiers helped put the scene, and the memorial itself, in context. Their aura wasn't bitterness exactly, but it certainly veered towards animosity. Given the way the war ended, the homecoming many of them received, and the nation's conflicted views about the war, I have never found it difficult to justify the conflicted feelings of our Vietnam veterans.

I had been walking behind an African-American family for a couple of blocks. At first I thought they were a husband and wife with their three kids, and perhaps one of their fathers. I reassessed my assumption after noticing their body language and resemblance, and it became obvious they were brother and sister. From the family's hesitation as we approached the memorial, I became nervous for them, sensing an apprehension, a concern about what they might find, what their reaction to the wall might be.

The war left a friend of mine half-orphaned. Her father, a helicopter pilot, was shot down in the early days of the conflict. I knew she'd never been to the memorial. I thought I should see him, tell him what a wonderful woman his daughter had grown into. So I looked up his name. The idea touched me as a little silly, as if he could hear me through the wall; he certainly knew about the child he left behind. It felt like the right thing to do all the same.

From the street, Constitution Avenue, there isn't much to see of the memorial, a couple of the brown, nondescript signs that mark all the sights in our nation's capital, and a few brass lecterns holding something akin to phonebooks, the memorial's directory. While I studied the directory and found the name of my friend's father, I overheard the grandfather of the family I'd been walking behind speaking to his granddaughter, the eldest of the three kids. He carried himself with the demeanor and dignity black men and women of that generation rightly possess. Those who fought

through their own all too seldom acknowledged war; who withstood the indignities of sitting at forbidden lunch counters; who willingly walked across that bridge in Selma, only to be subjected to physical abuse that should rightly be called torture. Men and women who asked for nothing more than the inalienable rights spoken of in the nation's founding document, to be held self-evident for them as well.

He looked to be in his sixties, but still physically solid and obviously strong, with hair graying in streaks. He pointed to a white man wearing a camouflage jacket covered with insignias standing by one of the directories. "Go over and tell that man your uncle's name, and ask him which panel he's on," I heard him tell his granddaughter in the softened tone from a rich and full voice. His accent bore the distinctive tone and rhythm of a well-read southerner, certainly from the city. Immediately she froze, not wanting to walk up and speak to a stranger, I suspected. He continued in an even gentler tenor, "It's all right, Babygirl. It's all right, just this one time. Tell him we're looking for your uncle." And with a gentle shove in the small of her back, she hesitatingly walked toward the man.

The girl, maybe twelve years old, wore a bright yellow dress with flowers and hair done in four tight braids. She walked towards the man, looking over her shoulder twice hoping for a reprieve, only to be met by his waving hand urging her forward. As she got closer, she hesitated again; it was becoming noticeable that the man's clothes weren't very clean and he hadn't shaved in several days.

"My grandfather," she stammered, pointing back toward her family, "he said I should ask you where my uncle is."

"Come over here," the man said, walking with a slight hitch in his step up to the podium beside mine. He placed his right hand on the directory of the fallen soldiers in what appeared to be a moment of reverence, the way some pastors do before opening the Bible, then he continued. "Now, what's your uncle's name?" he asked.

"Samuel T. Jenkins Jr.," she told him with a nervous

crackle in her voice.

I saw him thumb through the pages; stop and read. He held his eyes tight for a moment, a new pain cutting through his heart, as if he felt a fresh wound carved from his heart. “Here he is,” he said, looking down at the girl, his blue eyes suddenly growing as kind as any I’d ever seen. “What’s your name, little girl?”

“Clarissa, but all my friends call me Sis.”

“Well, Sis, here’s his name, Sergeant Samuel T. Jenkins Jr.,” he said, showing her the lines in the directory. Each soldier’s entry has only three lines. The first, regarding their service; the second, where and when they’d died; and the final line, where on the wall they are laid to rest. “Now, I didn’t know your uncle, but it says here he was with Echo Company, Echo 2-7 and that he died on August 7, 1968. Like I said, I didn’t know your uncle. What I can tell you is that if he was with Echo Company in ’68, he must’ve been a very brave man. His name’s on West 39.”

She thanked him, and as she walked back to her family, the veteran gave a somber nod to the grandfather. I then looked down at the spot I’d been holding while entering a daze overhearing their conversation, and saw my friend’s father’s listing—West 43.

It is the stark simplicity of the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial that takes one’s breath away. Designed by Maya Ying Lin, and divisive from the day of its proposal, it opened on Veterans’ Day in 1982. The country never knew how to honor the men and women who fought in a conflict our great statesmen would rather we simply forgot. For many Americans, however, the memorial acts as a signpost marking a fork in the road between The Greatest Generation and where we are today—fighting wars against abstract concepts. A bridge of sorts, between our war against terrorism, and a time when we went to war against proper nouns: Secessionists, the Kaiser’s Army, Nazis.

At the entrance, there are no statues, no words or profound quotes attempting to put whatever the war’s accomplishments were into historical perspective. Only

names, as far as the eye can see – 58,120 names in all, 58,120 lives lost with no justification, not even an attempt to explain for what great purpose they fought. The fallen are not grouped by name, where they came from, or their branch of service. Not by how they died and certainly not by rank; all are equals on the wall. They are simply listed by the date their lives were extinguished from this earth.

The polished, black granite slabs are even across their tops, sinking lower and rising above and engulfing anyone who descends into the memorial. The monument is a symmetrical, slightly angled V, with the names of the last to die on knee-high blocks at the entrance and exit. The names of those killed in the early years, the men our leaders told us went as advisors, are at the center, carved into polished black blocks standing nearly seven feet tall. From there, fading out in either direction, are those who died in the middle years of the war, a time when several thousand steel coffins arrived home every month. Looking in either direction, all one sees are names, with no explanation or reasoning. A silent statement that becomes ever more fitting as the years go by and we glean more from the thinking of our leaders who sent those soldiers to war.

Hesitatingly, I began walking toward the panel memorializing my friend's father and the others who died that same day, that week; passing people there to mourn. People trying to grasp hold of an attachment to the father they'd never known, a child taken, the young husband who promised his bride he'd come home. As dusk settled in, I witnessed an outpouring of emotion the likes of which I'd never seen: people leaving flowers, pictures, a favorite article of clothing. I saw one man talking to the wall, placing a well-worn baseball glove at its base. Eerily quiet, with almost no sounds leaching in from the surrounding city. The only things to be heard were murmuring voices and soft, muffled sobs.

I passed column after column of names, finally coming across that of my friend's father. I didn't know what to tell the wall, yet somehow I knew it was listening, absorbing

all I knew of one of its many decedents. After saying my peace, thanking the wall, thanking this one inhabitant I had a connection to for all the love his daughter brought me, I walked on. Several panels down I saw the family I'd seen before. The grandfather had bent down and with one arm around his Babygirl's hips, picked her up; bringing her eye level with the letters of her uncle's name. He held her there as together they ran their fingers, hers a child's, and his, nicked and scarred from a lifetime hard fought, over the letters. Slowly, softly, I heard the girl saying the name as she touched the chiseled letters.

Samuel T. Jenkins Jr.

Passing behind the family, not wanting to get between them and the wall, I heard the woman and her brother, each of them holding one of the younger children, boys of five or six. They whispered back and forth, memories, I assumed. Passing remembrances of family dinners, and of giggling in church pews as children, perhaps how their big brother watched protectively over them as they swam in a summer pond—memories of time's long-lost ghosts. I walked on; leaving them with the wall, knowing it would listen, absorb their pain, and return a strongly deserved comfort.

As I walked out of the memorial and into the wooded area surrounding it, shell-shocked people stood at the exit, watched over by the statue of three young soldiers in battle. The lone acknowledgement of why the names of 58,120 Americans were carved onto the wall below. The placement of the memorial's exit always struck me as a great irony of Washington's urban planning. As a visitor walks out of the memorial for a war where an unconscionable percentage of those who lost their lives were young black men, he stands on what should rightly be considered hallowed ground for those same men—the site where in the summer of 1963, Dr. King gave his greatest speech, telling the people of this country of a dream.

Looking across the street, I saw the Lincoln Memorial

and thought I'd take a walk around it before heading back. Rarely have I gone to Washington without visiting the memorial to our sixteenth president. For most people it is an image, something they've seen on a penny, a five-dollar bill, or a backdrop when the media wants to symbolize Washington D.C. In actuality, however, the marble edifice is simply massive. It is encircled by thirty-six fluted Doric columns, one for every state of the union at the time of Lincoln's death, that are as broad and towering as an oak; the statue of Mr. Lincoln, would he be standing, is taller than a three-story house. I walked to the back of the memorial, which overlooks the Potomac River, to check out one of my favorite aspects of the memorial, although I've never known how intentionally planned. From the rear portico, across the river, is Robert E. Lee's plantation house at the center of Arlington National Cemetery. The proximity of Lee's plantation to the capital instantly clarifies a person's perspective of the expression "brothers divided."

When I entered the great hall of the memorial, I went to the left chamber, where the Gettysburg Address is carved into the white marble wall. As I stared at the words, I noticed the only other people present were the older gentleman I had seen at the Vietnam Memorial and his granddaughter. She began reading the words under her breath. Then, kneeling beside her; he started in a deep, rich preacher's voice. "Four score and seven years ago..." I let the words seep into me from a voice I suddenly equated with compassion and wisdom. My eyes came off the words, realizing as I looked, the man wasn't reading, he was simply reciting the speech from memory. "...shall not perish from this earth." He held the last words as they resonated through the cavernous hall for the longest time, and as the faint echo of his words faded, he asked his granddaughter what she thought it meant.

"Well, I guess he'd be surprised to see all this, since he said he even didn't think people would remember his speech," she said, giving many a child's first response. "And I don't think everything's been patched back together the way

he'd hoped it would."

"No one understood at the time how important what he said was, much less how we'd feel 120 years later," he said, standing up again. "And the man who spoke after him went on for over two hours, and said a bunch of nothing."

As his granddaughter ran off towards the rest of her family, I approached the man. His voice, the way he recited that simple speech, moved me in ways I couldn't understand. He'd driven home the message in a way the hundred other times I'd read it never had. "I'm not sure why it's important to me that I say this," I said, reaching out and shaking his strong hand, "but I've read that speech countless times, and I don't think I ever really understood what it means to our country until now."

"Thank you, young man," he said, placing his hand on my shoulder.

We stood together for a moment, looking up at the words carved into a wall twenty feet high. Words originally scratched out on a train ride to the dedication of a battle of such horror as has rarely been seen again. "Well, I just wanted to thank you," I said, and started off, knowing anything else would bring me close to an emotional precipice it didn't seem appropriate to fall over.

"What'd that guy want, Dad?" I heard the man's son ask as he walked back to his family.

"Nothing much; he said he liked the way I read the Gettysburg Address to our Babygirl, that's all."

I NEVER TELL PEOPLE

There are memories I've never let see the light of day,
images of such shame I feel the need to hide them,
often even from myself.

As the years go by, this flotsam, the debris from my life,
piles up like the crap in a kitchen's junk drawer.
Life's events aren't a household's discarded items though,
they can't simply be thrown out, forgotten without a trace.
Rape isn't exactly a broken flashlight or a forgotten ring of keys,
nor is my own moral depravity a dried-out bottle of glue.

Long ago my world became a sea of secrets,
awash in half-truths and distortions.
Even my secrets which everyone believes they understand,
are only half the truth at best.
A life hidden inside a fortress of denial,
a façade I barely have the strength to keep holding,
or the courage to let fall to the ground.

The only way to clear out this drawer of secrets
would be to share my indignities;
transfer them to a more public space.
But how can I allow people to see the slices of my life
I cannot bear to view myself?
Why reveal the horrors I endured above the rectory,
or what I did to survive after being scraped from my father's palate?
The unwanted teenage son he saw unfit
for his newest rendering of the perfect family portrait.

So for today, I'll keep my junk drawer private,
pretending my life is neat and tidy.
And when someone comes poking around,
searching for a rubber band, a train schedule,
or wanting to know why the smoke from a thurible makes me
flinch,
I'll hold my drawer closed tight,
protecting the place so dark, even I can't fully see.

THE LAST TIME I SAW MY FATHER

I was taken aback walking in;
you were so much feebler than I thought you'd be,
struggling to stand, balancing on a four-footed, old man's cane.
It took forty-five years, and you to be hunched with age,
but I was finally taller than you.

Your mind was still there though,
just not quite as sharp as it had once been.
Mostly it was the small facts you misaligned.
Your recollections like the pieces of a puzzle,
spread out before you on a folding card table.
You could get them close to where they belonged,
then insisted on hammering each into place with the butt of your
hand.

We met at a cheap restaurant, on a busy football Sunday,
the rowdy fans a perfect distraction so I could slip in unnoticed.
You'd come under the guise of seeing beloved granddaughters,
the children of my sister; mine you've barely known.

I came in late, taking my appointed seat,
the one intentionally left empty beside you.
We worked our way through a platter of "What ifs,"
using coulda, woulda and shoulda like dipping sauces.
And while I wish our apologies had stayed spicy like hot wings,
in time my mind has turned them bland as celery stalks.

When we both believed we'd made our peace, I stole out alone,
blending in with a crowd of raucous strangers
so prying eyes wouldn't notice me,
slipping around the corner to a waiting car, and very relieved driver,
ready to be swept back to the world to which I'd assigned myself.

And now, we can only know of each other,
facts without feelings,
stories without characters,
details with no texture.

Not to worry though; in my mind the memories are different.
We'll be sailing off the beach,
the waves will be big,
I'll be scared and you'll make me feel safe.
You'll still be tall and I'll be small;
that way you'll be my dad forever.

Ivan Brooks



change his life if he chooses to.

Ivan Brooks is from Water Valley, MS. He's in prison for selling ice, cocaine, crack cocaine, weed, and living a sinful life. He believes if it wasn't for prison he might not be here today. He might be in a grave. Instead God placed him in prison to give him another chance at life. He knows it's a blessing from God, and that prison has changed his life for the best. He believes anybody can

WATER VALLEY, MS

I'm from where black and white people see one another differently, just like in the movie "Rosewood."

I'm from where the people say if you are a black male or female the only way you will succeed in your life is by playing sports just like Mike Oher.

I'm from where killings go unsolved unless you are white and important, just think about Dr. Martin Luther King.

I'm from where Walter Payton made a name for himself by becoming the best running back to ever play in the NFL.

I'm from where black people walked cotton fields all day just to earn a living, just like you see in the movie "Roots" if you have ever seen it, where if you did not work you were beaten.

I'm from where if you did not give up your seat for a white person and move to the back of the bus, you were arrested, just like Rosa Parks was.

I'm from where you were taught to say "Yes sir" or "No sir," to your elders; if you didn't you were slapped in the mouth.

I'm from where blacks and whites used different bathrooms back in the days that are recognized by signs just like you see at all the museums that say "White Only" today.

I'm from where the fans still wave Rebel flags and chant "Hottie, Tottie" at the school sporting events.

I'm from where church starts at 7:00 a.m and might go until 7:00 a.m. the next morning, with the sounds of drums beating, people shouting, and were food is served so that you want have to leave service and say you are coming back to service but never return to service.

I'm from where the government still believes in the chain gang were the inmates hoe potatoes, corn, and other things that are grown that they can survive on, just like in the movie "Life."

I'm from where they wear white sheets over their head and body, burn crosses, hang nooses, and still call black people the N word like we are still in slavery.

I'm from the south known as the dirty south, Water Valley, MS, actually. My name is Ivan Brooks and it is 2015; still nothing has changed yet. When will change come?

THIS IS A SHOUT OUT

Damn, man, you have come a long way. I can't believe it; you have actually made it this far. I recall when you first started this federal prison sentence.

It was all about folks, g-ball, fam, and everything was on Larry. You were still on the hustling stuff, still drinking and getting high. I didn't see you making it out alive for real; everything was a joke to you. You didn't care about who lost or who had to suffer for you to win. You didn't even care about your own life; that was crazy and sad to me. You were willing to lose your own life over the organization, over a stamp, and respect.

Until one day you had an intervention with yourself about the organization and hustling. Thank God you had that intervention. You asked yourself what was the organization and hustling doing for you? Not a damn thing, making this bid harder on you by going to the hole, having confrontation with the opposition, and people that owed you money.

I was proud to see you tell the organization that you want no part of it anymore and to give up the hustling; that made my day. I know things became harder on you by being on your own but that's what a real man is all about, standing on what is right, and what is best for him, right? It made your odds better. I could actually see you going home now.

You know what really made me proud of you? You started listening to your elders doing time with you that were never going home. They were trying to help and teach you how to become a man. You also had started listening to your mom.

The best decision you made was picking up the Bible and letting God be the head of your life. You had given everything else a chance like the organization and the dope game. Both of them failed you, right? Why not give God a chance? You had started believing what your mom used

to preach to you, that God wouldn't fail you. She was right, wasn't she? Some of us need to learn the hard way. Don't get down on yourself. You were one of them. You see that now and understand that God does everything for a reason. Just like your mom always used to tell you. She was right once again.

I will never forget that Sunday night you went to church for the first time since you entered prison. God touched your heart and soul. You had tears running down your face. Something I never saw you do in public or anywhere else. You always thought you were too hard to cry, and believed that gangsters never cried. I knew you were ready to change, and were changing when I saw that.

Ever since that day, I have to admit you became someone I didn't know, and that scared me. I didn't know if it was a game or not. I have to admit to you: it wasn't a game. You proved me wrong.

You have walked this bid down from the medium to the camp. I know it hasn't been easy. You had some minor setbacks but you bounced back from them. You kept faith in God when things became hard. That made me proud of you as well. It also scared me. I didn't know if you were going to go backward or what after that. You didn't. Thank God you didn't.

Look at you now. You are sharing your testimony with people for the best, praying that they will change their lives, so that they will not have to go to the trials and tribulations you went through to find yourself.

I had to give this shout out to you. I thought you would be dead by now or have a life sentence. You proved me wrong, bro. If you can make it through all the trials and tribulations, and you have made it through all the years, you will be just fine when you are released as long as you keep God head of your life. You take care of yourself, God bless you, and I love you, bro.

Love always, your brother
Ivan Brooks

***IF I COULD TELL HER
SOMETHING
THIS IS WHAT I WOULD SAY***

Beth, I'm totally and truly sorry for hurting you, and changing from the man you knew when we first met. I have to admit I changed like the weather. I went from sunny days filled with smiles and laughter to cloudy days filled with frowns and anger.

I remember you being by my bedside while I dealt with alcohol problems like the shakes, and vomiting from withdraws. You held me in your arms to let me know everything was going to be all right. You were going to be there through this fight.

I let you down after I completed the short stay at the treatment center. I stopped going to AA meetings, thinking I could do it on my own. I couldn't, but I had to find out the hard way. I kept walking into the stores looking at the Hennessy, Grey Goose, Budweiser, and Bud Light, knowing I shouldn't be in this section of the store. It was a trigger. I pulled that trigger one day.

I was home alone and started drinking again, thinking I could hide it from you, until one day you came home and found a beer top of my favorite beer, Miller High Life. You knew I was the only one that was at the house. We had talked right before you were off work.

You should have seen your face when you found it. It was like you had seen a ghost. You thought I was doing better. You still didn't leave my side. You gave me another chance. Things became worse.

I went to skipping work, drinking, hanging out with my homeboys at the trap (dope house), back to hustling cocaine and getting high. I played it off so cool like everything was good until the beast came out. I grabbed you which I feel so bad about until this day.

That wasn't who I am. You were telling me what you were going to do. I didn't agree with it. I recalled you calling my friend to come to your rescue. Thank God he was there and got my attention. I was in my own little world that night. You still didn't leave. I promised to do better. I did for a while.

One day you went on vacation to your sister in California. It gave you some time to think, to do what was best for you. I recall receiving a phone call from you, telling me you weren't coming back, you couldn't do it anymore. That day, I cried like a little boy and begged like a son wanting a toy from the store that his mom wouldn't let him have, begging for you to give me another chance. You had given me the last chance.

The day you came and picked up your things with your mother and sister I knew it was over. We said our good-byes after spending the night together, reminding me of the great times we had together when we first met. I knew I was on my own now. I had to get myself together.

I did; I thought I just found a way to balance everything out. I started back hustling and staying full of drugs to ease the pain of losing you. I had you fooled like I had my life back on track. You were thinking about giving us a chance again. I could tell by the way you talked on the phone. I had changed in your eyes. You thought I had a real job and was doing right, unlike anything you have ever heard or seen.

The truth is had my own business; I was the vice president of a drug ring where people barely saw me. Everybody thought I was working long hours, staying sober and clean. I was in my house staying full of drugs, alcohol, and counting my money. Only a few people knew I was still the same person. I thought I was at peace with myself, but it was just an illusion. I had everything I want in my life, except you.

On Christmas my last year free you called. You and I laughed and joked. After getting off the phone with you, I fixed a drink, snorted a couple of lines, and told myself this would be the last run I made in the dope game forever.

When New Year's came I was done.

I was going to give my all to us being a couple again. I had been gambling with the last chance I had with you for far too long. My luck was bound to come to an end. Four days after Christmas, I rolled snake eyes and lost everything.

It took one of your friends to tell you I had been picked up by the feds. I recall calling you; you told me my voice made you sick to your stomach and you haven't answered the phone since.

I want you to know I deserve all that and more. You were everything a real man could ask for in a woman, but I wasn't a real man back then. I didn't see you loved me until it was too late.

Since being in prison, I think about you often. I see all the things I could have done better in life. The things you tried to help me accomplish as well. Dang, it takes some of us to fall flat on our face to see clearly. I had to.

I pray that you are with a man that has brought the best out of you, and loves you like a man should love a woman of your standard.

"Pain is love." Until you allowed me to feel a dose of the pain you felt because of me, I didn't honestly care. I was a selfish jerk; no one knows that more than I do.

I want you to know if you need me for anything, I'm a letter away. I'm not hard to find; just go to the Federal Bureau of Prison and type in my name. It'll give you where I am or you can reach out to one of my friends. I don't have that many now. The ones you said were my real friends like Bobbi and Nuk are my real friends. So you can reach out to either one of them.

I also want you to know you will always have a special place in my heart and life. You take care of yourself; I pray life brings you the best it has to offer and I love you, Booboo!!

I REMEMBER MOMMA

Momma, I remember you always sitting up in your bed until whenever I made it home past my curfew, as always. You would be reading the Bible and praying that I would change my life for the best.

The door would open, you would call my name, "Ivan," to make sure it was I and say, "I see you are still coming home when you feel like it, and if you can't come home before midnight don't come home at all." I knew you were upset and stressed out because of me. I cared but I did a bad job of showing I cared.

You would turn off your light and go to sleep knowing I was home safe. As soon as I woke up in the morning I would try to dodge you. I knew you were going to preach the word of God to me about being a disobedient child, and what happens to disobedient children.

You know I would listen for a minute or two, try to do as you say, forget about everything you said once I went out the door. The next morning I would see I had done the same thing you preached to me about, doing it all over again, staying out past my curfew, drinking and smoking weed with the so-called thugs (that's what you called my so called friends who were gang members and petty hustlers.)

I wish I would have listened to you; you were right the whole entire time. I'm sorry for not listening. Please find it in your heart to forgive me. I LOVE YOU, MOMMA!!!

HOW LONG SHOULD I MOURN

I ask myself every day, if I wasn't doing time for being a so-called nickel-and-dime hustler, if we could have been together on March 26, 2006, could things have been different that day?

I still recall the last time I saw you right before I was busted. I had called you to let you know I would be leaving Chadron and heading to Denver to pick up my friend who didn't have a ride back to school from spring break, which was a lie. You knew it.

You knew the truth, why I was headed that way: to re-up with drugs; you hated that I had taken them up again. I chose to move away from Mississippi to attend college at Chadron State in Nebraska, to better myself and to put that lifestyle behind me. I told you that was the reason I chose Chadron out of all other colleges.

You agreed to see me, hoping it wasn't true, hoping that I was going straight since we broke up because of my lifestyle.

My friend and I stopped in Fort Collins, CO, where you attended grad school. You met me at a burger joint right across the street from the college. When you saw me, you had a smile on your face until we were face to face, and you smelled the beer on my breath and saw the look in my eyes of being higher than a bird with cocaine.

I saw the look of, "Why did I even bother to meet him?" in your eyes; your smile went to a frown as you thought to yourself, "He hasn't grown up or changed one bit. He is still living on the edge like life is a game: drinking, snorting powder, still carrying a pistol and watching his surroundings to make sure nobody is following him, like the police." You knew me too well.

You didn't say too much to me. I knew I had made the wrong decision by calling and asking you to meet me. I should at least have been sober that day, which would

have been respectful to you. As always, I was only thinking about myself and what made me feel good. I wasn't happy knowing this made you mad, pushed you farther away from me, and made any chance of ever having you back as my woman slimmer and slimmer.

I said, "I think it's time for me to be on my way. You take care of yourself, and I love you." I was angry, sad, and disappointed with myself that I had messed up your day, as I had done several times when we were together with these same decisions.

It was on March 29, a few days later, that I made parole. I was looking forward to hearing your beautiful voice again, and hoping to see you, to show you I had changed.

I was celebrating with some friends and co-workers. I called my old roommate from college to let her know I was granted parole.

She said, "I am proud that you made parole; now you just have to do right."

I told her I was going to do everything in my power to do that.

She also said, "I see you are having a party."

I told her I was—just a small one, not the ones I used to have.

She said, "Can you go to a bedroom or outside where it is quiet so we can talk?"

I said yes. I stepped outside onto the balcony and closed the glass door to tune out Young Jeezy's song "Dreamin'" blasting through the speaker.

I asked "What do you have to talk to me about that's so important it can't wait till later?" I heard her voice starting to crack up like she was about to cry. I asked, "What's going on?" Are you all right?

She said, "It isn't me, Ivan."

I ask, "Who is it then?"

She said, "It's Jill."

I asked, "What is wrong with her?"

She took a deep breath, before telling me that you had a car accident a few days ago, and you didn't survive. I

couldn't say anything. I heard my phone hit the concrete and fall apart.

I thought what I had heard couldn't be true, that it was a nightmare. I called back. She confirmed what she had said was true. My celebration of freedom came to an end. I asked everybody to leave.

I found myself sitting on the couch crying until I couldn't cry any more, listening to the first song both of us agreed we liked and had sung together, "I Can't Stand The Rain" by Missy Elliot. Why did God have to take the one woman that I loved with all my heart (beside my mom)? I couldn't come up with an answer and still haven't. Would I ever love a woman like I loved you, ever again? I think that's impossible.

You were the most beautiful woman, inside and outside, I have ever known or been in a relationship with. You had a heart bigger than Earth that would do anything for anyone, and there wasn't a limit to that. There wasn't anything a person couldn't love about you. Anyone would be either insane or from another planet not to love you.

You taught and showed me so much about life and what a normal lifestyle was, something I didn't know anything about back then. All I knew was how to live a life as a so-called thug; that's what a normal life was to me.

All that night and the days after, all I could do was sit and think about the good times we had together, like when you took me to see Mt. Rushmore which I found so cool. I had only seen it on television. When we used to go four-wheeling through the mountain in your backyard and get so muddy which I hated, because I was a pretty boy who didn't like to get his hands or clothes dirty. You found it so funny.

I recalled the time we went tubing with your family. I said I had done this before, which was a lie, but I played it off so smooth; that was until your dad threw me off the tube into the dirtiest water I have ever been in. I was so mad. He said he wasn't going to go fast, but he did. I thought I was going to get bitten by some foreign creature while waiting for you and your family to come pick me up on the boat.

You all thought it was the funniest sight ever to see me in that filthy, murky, dirty water.

My funniest memory was when we stayed at your family's house one weekend. I slept in the guest bedroom. When you came to wake me up the next morning, you found the door locked. You knocked on it, and I finally opened it. You asked me, "Why it was locked?"

I said I never stayed at a white woman's house with her family before. You laughed and told me, "We are not going to lynch you or anything, Ivan. You are not in Mississippi any more, and our family doesn't judge a person by color. You should know that by now."

I said, "You are right."

You said, "Just relax babe, and be yourself."

I said, "Cool, I will."

I sat there on the couch that week, thinking about how you had made me smile, laugh, and enjoy life to the fullest for the first time. What bothered me was how I never got the chance to thank you for helping me see the world differently, or to say good-bye the right way.

God had taken my better half away from me, and I didn't feel like going on anymore in life, knowing you were gone.

I found myself depressed, so that I didn't want to eat or do anything else. All I could do was try to drink the pain and anger away until I found myself in the hospital from alcohol poison, on the verge of overdosing on cocaine, and having a heart attack.

My friends came to my side and said, "You have to get it together; Jill wouldn't want you to commit suicide over her. She would want you to live the life she showed you and be the man she always knew you could be, deep down in her heart."

I agree; they were right. I got myself back together and knew you were my angel that would be by my side forever, no matter what.

I didn't attend your funeral; that was sort of by choice. I didn't want to see you like that. I chose to remember the past when we were both so happy with one another, when

we had smiles bigger than the United States on our faces, and laughed so hard and loud like we were at a Kat Williams comedy show.

I called your family a few weeks after your funeral. I could still feel the pain your mother had in her heart from losing her firstborn.

She told me, “You know Jill loved you, Ivan. She doesn’t want you back in prison ever again.”

I told her I knew, that I was done living that lifestyle.

I lied to your mom. I also feel like I have let you down, as well. I am back in prison again, this time federal prison for living the life you wanted me to put behind me.

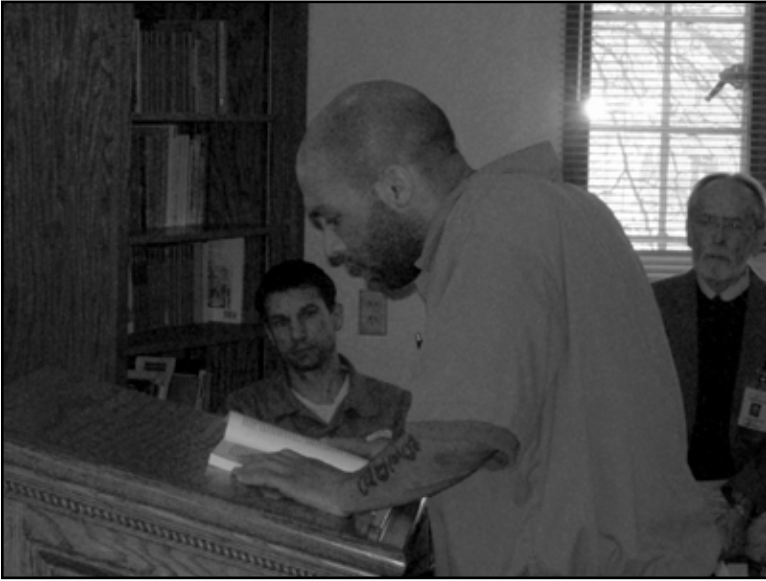
I also haven’t called your parents in six years, though I used to call them on the holidays. I think it’s time for me to call or write a letter to them, to inform them I’m finally ready to live the life Jill wanted me to, for myself and for her.

To this day I still have pain and anger toward myself for not changing my lifestyle for the better once you showed me, but that shall change when I am free again, which will be soon. I PROMISE! I am also looking for the answer to the question that has been bothering me the most for over nine years now: how long should I mourn you, Jill? Damn, will I ever receive an answer to that?

2014 CLASS READING



Donald Hynes reading



Isaac Kimber reading



Flint Red Feather reading

Chad Sloat



Chad Sloat is an aspiring writer who was born and raised in Kansas City, MO. The eldest of four children, his early foray into the creative writing world outlines many of his real life experiences both inside and outside of prison. While currently serving his sentence in Yankton, SD, Mr. Sloat is furthering his college education by pursuing his Master's in Business

Administration. Upon his release, he plans to rebuild his entrepreneurial empire while also endeavoring to write his first book.

MY FATHER COULD FEEL THE WIND OF UNCERTAINTY ON THE BACK OF HIS NECK

My father could feel the wind of uncertainty on the back of his neck as he stood in front of the judge. He was uncertain of many things at that exact moment. I can't exactly blame him. I mean, the reason he was even in this courtroom was yet another one of my risky business adventures gone bad.

This time it was a hedge fund gone belly up. None of my ventures had ever ended like this though. They never ended with innocent people losing money. They never ended with me drudging my way into a courtroom wearing an orange jumper and linked ankle bracelets. They usually just ended with me ambling shamefully up my father's sidewalk, hoping that the back bedroom was still unoccupied.

The wind of uncertainty stems from his being diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia about four years ago. Ever since I can remember he has always been healthy. In fact, before this diagnosis I can't recall one moment that I have ever seen him less than one-hundred percent. The doctors gave him a medication that regulates his white blood cells and while they tell us he will live a fairly normal life, I don't believe them. I started noticing the changes even before he finally broke the news to us kids. I could see it in his puffy, inflamed face, his visible weight loss and his bloodshot eyes. He is but a shell of his former greatness that is being harrowed piece by piece like a carcass in the desert. Is this failure of mine going to be the thing that pushes him over the edge?

The wind of uncertainty stems from my sentencing on this fateful day. My father's carefully worded statement

was tossed aside about five words in and replaced with a weeping “I can’t fix this, I can’t fix this, I can’t fix....” His pain spread virally throughout the courtroom like a yawn in statistics class. Before I knew it, I was crying. To think this setting is what it took to see my father cry for the very first time. This is what it took to see that he was human and I meant more to him than what he let on all those years. This is what it took to see that all my failures didn’t matter to him. It only took the fate of my freedom; maybe I should have given up my freedom long ago.

The wind of uncertainty stems from not knowing if he will ever see me free again. He knows that my max sentence is only six years, but will he make it that long? Will he live long enough to have one more whisky and water with me on the back patio? One more conversation with me about how I really need to stop taking such big risks in life? One more “See, I told you so.”? One more hug and reassurance that if I need anything, just call? Or is this the end for us? Are all of my failures culminating to one huge, over-reaching punishment that robs me not only of my freedom, but of the closure I need with my father?

JUST JUMP

I awake to the sight of your uncovered long stems sauntering across the room. Your blonde locks restrained by the towel, a would-be turban on top of your head. Your beautifully freckled face is reflecting back at me in the brass colored vanity as you take a seat and set in motion your daily ritual involving dabs and brushes. I always loved how little make-up you needed to outshine everyone else in the room. You finish your routine and we hurry for the door as if the few seconds we may have shaved will matter when we arrive.

I have always been attracted to you from the very first moment I called "dibs." My friend, Claudie, growled at me after I planted my stake. I can still see your first crooked smile whenever I close my eyes. I can see you ruefully hesitating to succumb to my charms and take the offered seat at our table. A couple of drinks later, you finally relented and gave me your number. Then you were gone.

The wind is a little brisk on this early October morning. Your still damp hair is being restrained by a slim black band. Your piercing green eyes are wide with anticipation and hardly blinking as we turn onto the gravel road that leads across a set of worn train tracks to a small airport. The airport is surrounded by soy fields that have recently been harvested. A faded-out sign reading "Noah's Ark" is set amidst the open, white tin-roofed hangars in the background. Behind the hangars, off in the distance, a festive row of trees line the muddy Missouri River. You have always wanted to skydive, but now that the moment has arrived, your nerves have you involuntarily shaking like a shiver gone viral.

No texts, no calls, no writing. You just disappeared. You were gone from the present, but still lingering in my memories. The touching of our hands kept replaying over and over in my mind. I was being tortured knowing that I had just landed "the one" and you snapped my line. I couldn't shake

the thought of you so I kept re-baiting. For the first time in my life I never wished for anything more than to get a chance to properly woo you. I wanted to win you over, because deep down you had me feeling things I never had before. Your “Well, hello there” had put all the color inside of my world, even if it was just for one night at a bar.

As we exit the Jeep, we are greeted by my mother, along with our new tandem jumping partners. Both of us, thankfully, opted for hooded sweatshirts on this unseasonably chilly late morning. Your Pitt State logo bests my plain red number because yours is accompanied with a smile. I am agitated and my attempts at masking my discomfort are clearly not working. I know that one day this is all going to come to an end; that coming up soon is my judgment day and all of my freedoms will be relegated to mere memories. We are standing outside of an old white, run-down single-wide that is anchored to the property for use of the skydiving team. The rickety stairs leading up into the trailer remind me of a well-seasoned pallet at an outdoor lumber yard. It looks as if the steps will buckle at any moment, so we race to the top. Inside are a couple of brown folding metal chairs, a table with our releases, and a small retro TV/VCR combo with a matching safety video on loop.

My persistence paid off and you finally gave me a chance. You never actually fully conceded though. We dated on and off and I always asked for more, but you would never commit. I wish I knew why. Part of me wants to believe that you are just afraid. The other part of me wonders if maybe I am just not good enough for you. I mean, it has to be one or the other, right?

After watching the mandatory twenty-minute safety video, we start to gear up for the dive and both take turns checking each other's straps. The plane is a white single engine Cessna 207. Everything has been stripped out of the rear to make room for us jumpers. The four of us squeeze in the back, having to sit in specific spots with our legs buried in our chests. My partner's back is against the

pilot's seat, your partner's is reversed toward the tail and we are each wedged in between their legs like a primed log splitter. The propeller starts to spin and conversation becomes a challenge. Any attempts to talk are overwhelmed by the plane's engine working overtime to ascend to 12,000 feet. Your eyes are wide with anticipation and your palms clammy. My partner Bob's efforts to calm you down with a mixture of jokes and advancements are working about as well as water on a grease fire. You give your sympathetic nervous laugh at his corny jokes because you are way too nice to tell him what we are both thinking: "Shut the hell up".

I remember our first date at Sullivan's Steak House. We entered the lobby to a little live jazz music being played on the piano. We opted for the patio because the weather was beautiful on this particular July evening. Something about your smile on that first date made me feel like I had just finished getting a massage. I was calm, relaxed and rejuvenated, just seeing you and enjoying your company. We sat for hours and shared as many drinks as stories. Never have I ever experienced a night out like that one. I doubt I ever will again. Your infectious laughter and cheerful disposition had me stirring up dirty in the back of my mind.

As the side door to the plane slides open we are reminded that we have reached our destined altitude. The cold air begins rushing into the cargo area like the crowd through Wal-Mart's doors on Black Friday. The goggles that were hanging around our necks are now being tightened around our faces. I place both of my hands on the opposite sides of the door and Bob screams, "Three, two, one, jump." Out I go into the beautiful sea of blue that quickly turns into a fall-themed mosaic. The trees and sectioned-off acreage look liked a pixelated Atari game. I had always thought the biggest fear of skydiving was going to be seeing the ground, but oddly I don't even think about the ground. It is almost as if all the things that I feared most about the whole jump fade away and my senses are short-circuited by being in the moment and enjoying the ride. I wonder why I was

ever afraid to jump in the first place. The only real evidence of gravity during the free fall was the pixel definition and clarity improvement accompanied with twenty to thirty seconds of involuntary facial contortions. I scan around frantically to find you and catch a glimpse just before we have to deploy our chutes. Your face has the biggest smile I have ever seen. I am sure the hundred mile an hour wind should be given some credit for the assist, but that memory is priceless and one I will never ever forget.

Now as I lie here in my eighteen square feet of real estate, I replay thoughts of you over and over in my mind. The memory and imagination of what we had and could have had keeps my attention away from the lonely nights, over-saturation with virility, and the lack of freedom. There is not a lot of joy in my new life filled with institutionalized routines and 4:00 p.m. counts, but the joy I do have can be traced back to little moments with you. From the “I didn’t even know you had a bed,” to your complications of starting my car, to the great gas station escape, to the nerdy Halloween adventures, and the clinking glasses under clear starry nights. In another two and a half years I will have used up all of these memories and it will be time for us to create more. I hope one day to catch that glimpse again, except this time I won’t be dragged away in chains. This time you won’t have to settle for less. All you’ll have to do is just jump.

Dallas Rusk



Dallas Rusk was born in 1986 and raised in the a small industrial city of Commerce City, CO, home of the Adam City Eagles. A high school graduate, class of '03, he dedicates most of his poetry to his grandmother Theresa Scruby (R.I.P) and Robin Rusk, his mother and also a grandmother. Both are inspiration for all work written. All pieces are true-life experiences. He thanks

both women. Once released, he is going to continue his education in the writing field. He will use his history to help kids, parents, siblings, and others who may be struggling with having a loved one who is gay or lesbian. In addition, he will help kids to talk freely to their parents about how they feel about this sensitive topic through the art of writing. "My life is my book of poetry."

BRIDGE THE GAP

Of the two years I have been in prison, six or seven years have been missing from my life and the gap of unspoken words between my mom and me. In all honesty, the thing is all that comes into my thoughts, are the times we would be doing drugs and laughing from all the pot we smoked or the other drugs we would do, and it was the only thing, which brought us together. Yeah it was fun, but nothing came from it, only a future of failure or hiding from what's truly wrong with me. Was I doing all these drugs to hide the pain of our relationship never growing or was it because I just didn't care, due to you not caring about what I did, because I was given consent by you. You were someone who was supposed to keep me away from that scene, but you were stuck in it yourself. Then there are the unspoken conversations, like, "I can still hit a double like when I was in little league. In addition, to while being here in prison I have started drawing again and I'm actually good at it, like when I was younger when I called to get that drawing test from the commercial on TV. I notice grown men watching 'Oprah' or 'The Young and the Restless,' a flashback remembering you'd watch that show like it was church; maybe it was because it was on the TV guide channel."

All my hatred is based on her faults; like the time she took money I was saving, for a plane ticket to go to California, when I was trying to get into culinary school, and she spent it on drugs. At the same time, she just gave up at helping me try to get funding to get into Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Institution. Another time, I had to fix an incident with our drug dealer and I had to pay for the nonsense, she caused. A parent's mess, a child has to clean up. What a shame it had to come to that? Many times I have caused problems, like the time I would get caught smoking marijuana in middle school and being suspended because of it. Like when I was younger and I ran away to my grandmother's house, and both times the police were

involved.

The thought of being so afraid, so terrified, by the communication that might transpire from a phone call or a simple letter, in why I don't apologize for any of the past. A letter seems so easy, but the thought of where to start is only the beginning of apologizing for what I have done as a child. Would it really matter to build something that was never there? A mom and son. Love, however, never shown between us. Was she shown the love she gave to my sister by my grandmother? Why can't she show me this type of love? The resentment for the jealousy I felt for the love showed and how much my mom cared for my sister. I must think about the meaning behind the letter is it, I am taking that leap to rebuild a family that was once shattered by my anger and hatred as a child or was it because I'm in prison and I don't have contact with my family, I see so many here have. I notice the jealousy I have towards the names I hear called on Friday's to Sunday's when its time for visits, but at the same time I'm happy to see that people have someone other than an email or a phone call. This I feel deep down, I think back to a song, "it's my own damn fault," to why I'm here with no family and no visits.

From me throwing tantrums; by me being drunk or high. Or the time, when my mom wanted to get high, when she said, "she was trying to quit," because she was feigning for marijuana or cocaine, to just not wanting to deal with her at any given time. This only causing drama at damn near every family gathering we had which were supposed to be the most memorable events like Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter. These days only came once a year and should have been a time to sit, share, and be with one another. These times of the year are not a time to be bickering and fighting all because of the hatred I have towards my mom for all the things, she hasn't done for me, but when I should be thankful for the things she has provided in my upbringing. The push to continue playing sports, to keep drawing and perfect it as I move forward with it, but no, I used my mom as the excuse to not do

something to better myself.

From dealing with the police, while standing by my side in courtrooms when I was a minor, and the few times I was in a cell, she was there. That showed she did care, but was that really an act of love or was it only because it was her job as a mother to do things like that, to be there when a child truly needs their parent? That bridge has always been there, but I choose not to explore it. Almost ten years have passed and I finally put a pen to paper, I write. One page turns to two, as I write to my mom. All the time I have spent dwelling on the past for what she did wrong. When I should be pointing the finger at me? After working on a piece, from our life story, I realize that I must step up and take that chance to rekindle the relationship of a mother and son. I mailed the letter, now only waiting for a response. Hoping to bridge a gap, it's well worth the wait, especially if it is between a mom and son. Maybe the day comes; I can send my mom the piece that inspired me to write the letter to her. Therefore, as I bridge a gap in my life, I must remember, "My mom's life story is also mine."

I NEVER TELL PEOPLE

I never tell people the way I grew up,
What I had to deal with day to day.
I never tell people why I do not have a dad.
I do not want people to know the truth:
That my mom was raped and that is how I was conceived.
Some guess that I have a dad but
I do not agree or disagree.
I have two moms and I am OK with that.
I think too, how judgmental people are,
And I keep these things to myself;
I never tell people to stop saying certain words,
Like *faggot*, *homo*, *dyke*, and *queer*,
I never tell people how I really feel.
Some people can see it as a weakness.
If I say something to anyone,
Will they be open and accepting?
Will they hate?
Will they shun me and cast me out?
There are things I have told some,
But not to others.
I never tell people my hardships growing up,
Because I know people would use it against me
Some way, somehow.
I believe some things are to stay a secret.
I have felt it's best I am left alone and to myself;
So, I treat people like crap to help push them away
So I do not have to deal with them.
I question you as a person.
Can I openly talk to you about who I am?
Where I came from and how I was raised?
It is odd I can talk to complete strangers
Yet not to someone I call a close friend or someone I love.
I never tell people my fears,
Of how I fear being alone because of my history,
Of not fitting in with people or that crowd.

Therefore, I act like others to be part of the group,
Again, afraid of what people would think of me
If I acted as myself and not as one of them.
I realize it is about my life's history.
I should tell people about myself
By not being afraid of what they think.
I should only care about what I think.

Because I am the one who is being judgmental.

LAST TIME I SAW MY GRANDMOTHER

The last time I saw you was more than five years ago, before I went to Texas, when I worked with the pipeline. I remember you were strong and you were doing things on your own. You fought, you yelled, you got upset with me. You were always calling me “a little bastard or an S.O.B.,” then I’d reply, “Ha, you just called your daughter a b****.” You’d get madder and storm off, leaving a trail of smoke that followed; then later, we made up for the fight we had earlier. I remember you trying to quit smoking, though we both shared cigarettes, but both chose to continue. I would help you in the yard, uprooting weeds like dandelions so they didn’t get out of control, making it so you can plant more four o’clocks, tulips, and pansies. The ones I know you loved. I’d keep the grass short so you can walk around barefoot. I remember seeing you in pain, from hanging wash to folding towels and sheets after a day drying in the sun, always doing things you wouldn’t let me do. Later in the night while you to sat in the blue chair with your feet kicked high and your eyes almost closed tight, I’d ask if it was your shoulders, and you’d reply with a sore sigh. I’d get the lotion and you’d lean to one side, shoulder exposed, and you let me know when I pressed too hard in that tender spot. That was the last time I saw you, grandma.

Until my girlfriend made me call. Oh, I dreaded that call; it rang and rang. I almost hung up, but as soon as you answered, I heard the happiness in your voice, hearing that “I’m fine and I’m safe,” though knowing you were sad and worried about me because you didn’t know where I was. No contact for a year or more; I call collect, no acceptance of charges. I’d write and no word in response. But, eight days before my birthday, a letter to me reads that my tough-ass grandmother beat cancer, yet lost a fight to pneumonia. How could that be—you were so strong? Last time I heard

she was doing good and feeling great. Maybe she was scared to tell me the truth; maybe it was a truth that would kill me. She was my grandma, my nana. Most of all she was my best friend. I can say I'm sorry for what I've done, but I can never say goodbye. I found out in a letter that my memories would be the last time I saw my grandmother.

UNSpoken FROM A CHILD

Mom, you know I was picked on, degraded, and made fun of for many years when I was in school. I was being called names like *faggot*, *homo*, *queer*, and being told, “You’re going to end up like your mom and be just like her” (gay). You may have never understood how growing up in a house full of women affected my self-esteem and who I am today, through the choices you made years ago.

So I thought that it would be smart to say, “It’s better to have two moms than two dads,” but that still opened doors for humiliation; still, it was not as bad if I didn’t say anything. If you knew where I was coming from we may be closer. I never told you the truth, so you never had to feel what I felt. Kids looked at me as if I was different because of how I was raised with two moms.

Two women as parents, one as a father, so I could learn to do things I would’ve never known without that guidance. Then there’s my mom, teaching me to treat the women I dated as ladies by not taking advantage of them or using them in any way. You never understood that I was labeled something I wasn’t. I was cast away, out of place like a piece of glass in a sand pit, thrown to the side, discarded; but many accepted my sister with open arms.

Being around the gay and lesbian movement could’ve steered me the wrong way, but it never did. I never spoke of the gay and lesbian community, but went to the pride events to stand up for what I felt was right. Men and women standing side by side with their partners, along with the women I called my parents.

As a child in school, I noticed that other kids had a normal family. I can feel them looking at my family and me especially during the parent-teacher conferences, a feeling you may never feel. I never knew you had been through this, though not in exactly the same way. You never let me know that you had the same hardships because you had to come clean to so many people. I can only imagine how hard

that was for you. I didn't want to understand the ugly truth, but it was my life knowing what my mom had to go through in the past.

Some onlookers called me names, judging me because of who my parents are. Truth may set you free, but to me, I accept who you are. You both are my mom, no matter what.

I will stand up and say what I believe no matter the consequences that follow. At the same time, I didn't know what the Pride-fest was and what the rainbow flag stood for, but now I understand. It represents that we all want to be equal. I believe that you were right, to be you.

You both called me son; I never knew what love really was, but it was what you shared. Being around you two my whole life, I never knew any different. I never knew how childish people were in their youth. Later in life, I saw people growing up becoming who they are and that became the normal and people came clean with what they hid from. The life of being with the one they loved, just as you did when I was young.

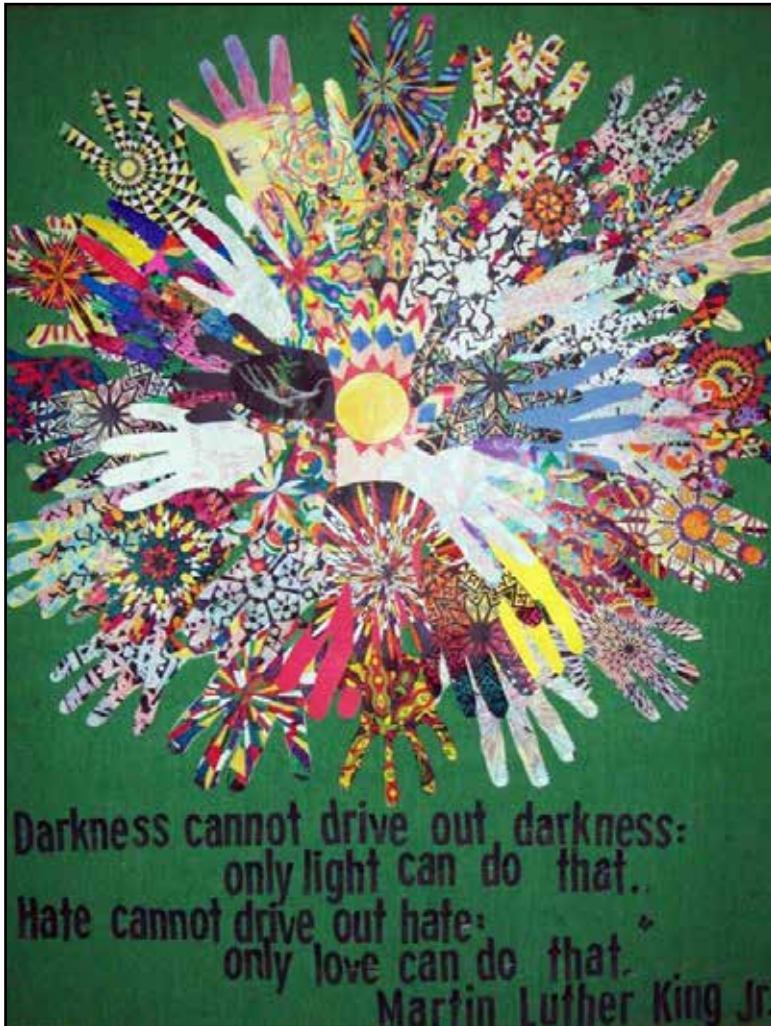
I never gave up on the love I had for the two of you. Mom, to this day, I never told you how I dealt with these issues and the ways I would sweep them up under a rug, putting my feelings somewhere until the day I have to look. I didn't know when the day would come and it came sooner than I expected and I thank God for that.

I didn't know how you would react by my telling you how I really felt about growing up and being around the gay and lesbian community. I thought that telling you would ruin the relationship, but my being quiet has had a huge impact on the resentment I held towards you. It has helped, but also caused problems. You never knew or you never asked how this has actually affected me. However, more importantly, I never told you how just being in a house full of women meant that I wasn't taught how to deal with emotions; this is the thing that really hurts me, but I thank you for the life lessons on how to treat women and how not to judge people for who they are.

For all the years, I haven't said anything, but only

showed hatred towards my moms. You both have been there when I needed you the most. You both were there at my baseball games, my high school graduation, and when I was in the hospital. This was what I overlooked because of how judgmental I was to the people I called parents. Especially when the true-life lesson was not to judge anyone for who you are or who your life partner is, but as long as you're happy, that's the most important thing. It took so many years for me to actually see what you were teaching me.

Mom, I am sorry for being so judgmental about your lifestyle and the choices you've made. It made me a better person because of how open-minded I am to the thought of the same sex being in love and wanting a life together, whatever the circumstances. Whether two moms or two dads, I am happy that I had someone there when I truly needed them. Your life story is also mine, so I must embrace it and use my voice to let others in. Most of all my voice is here to help others who are also going through what I went through and where I've been. Again, thank you Mom, for my life story.



David Lee



David Lee was raised in Post, TX (southeast of Lubbock, northeast of Lamesa—think hot, dry and flat), a background he has never completely escaped, despite his varied experiences as a seminary student, a boxer, and semi-pro baseball player (the only white player to ever play for the Negro League Post Texas Blue Stars) known for his knuckleball, a hog farmer, and a decorated

Army veteran. Along the way he earned a Ph.D., taught at various universities, and recently retired as the Chairman of the Department of Language and Literature at Southern Utah University.

After 30 years in Utah, Lee and his wife Jan took to the road to become more-or-less full-time wanderers. Passing through Bandera, TX, Lee says, “We just fell in love. We noticed nine bars and two churches and thought this is where God lives.” They settled in Bandera, but still spend half of the year traveling, mostly on the backroads of the western U.S.

Lee was named Utah’s first Poet Laureate in 1997, and has received both the Mountains & Plains Booksellers Award in Poetry and the Western States Book Award in Poetry. Lee received the Utah Governor’s Award for lifetime achievement and was listed among Utah’s top twelve writers of all time by the Utah Endowment for the Humanities. He is the author of fifteen books of poetry. In 2004, *So Quietly the Earth* was selected for the New York Public Library’s annual “Books to Remember” list.

A LETTER FROM DAVID LEE



Photo by Kyle Roberson

Hey guys,

I've been through the tightest period of my life in many ways: on the road for the better part of three months, and that included a selling of our home and move to Nevada, our new digs. This week I got my first mail drop in three months and it included your letters.

My friends, your letters bowled me over and virtually knocked me to my knees. You cannot know how much I was touched, actually whacked by your kind remarks. I want you to know this: the three month period was time wadded into a tight fist—it went by in a flash like an incoming left hook. And like the effects of a splendid punch, it left me in a daze and I remember very little of the physical happenings of those

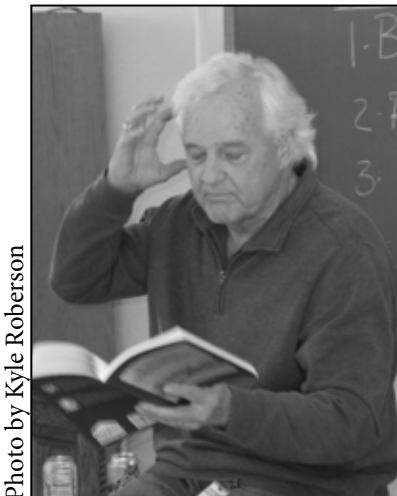


Photo by Kyle Roberson

three months. A major exception to the preceding language is the three hours Gailmarie and I spent with you. I remember that time in vivid detail, as if it were yesterday, and I will call that time holy ground and will keep it etched in memory. I want you to know this: I gained far more than I gave. Thank you.

I would like to give

you a gift in return. Many of you mentioned my poem “What They Say” and you have to be careful praising a poet’s work—so few people do that—and the poet may well remember and attempt to indulge you in work of the same ilk. That’s what I’m going to do for you. The antagonist of that poem is Larry Joe Williams, and his character is based on a kid I went to high school with over fifty years ago. He’s the kind of person we create terms like “jerk” for. Here’s another piece—a new one—that features him and allows a woman to directly address him.

The Longest Public Speech (of a lifetime)

What I don’t like, Rita Jean Ledbitter said to Larry Joe Williams,
is people who come to the Dew Drop Inn
just to hold court and change every subject
to something about himself
and what I really don’t like is people
who think they know more than God
about anything that comes up
in spite of the fact that the hardest
three years of their life was fifth grade
and what I really really don’t like
is people who look around the room
when they walk in to see who’s not there
so they’ll know who they’re going to talk about
and repeat a conversation
that never on this earth actually happened but
He with a capital H meaning you with an actual little y
happened to be just exactly right about it all anyway
and what I don’t like most, very most of all,
is people who piss me off to where I first have to swear
and then have to make a speech about it
when I’m more afraid of talking in a crowded room
than I am of going to Wednesday night prayer meeting
after eating purple speckled butter beans for supper
so I’ll be able to lay awake

thinking about what I wish I'd said
which I now won't have to do on this night
so I want to thank you from my heart's bottom
for being the kind of precisely rotten sonofabitch
who can provoke a decent night's sleep for the likes of me
and for that I wish you a most wonderful eternity in Hell
in a room all by yourself with only a mirror to talk to
so you will surely think you wound up in Heaven
and that I will therefore feel no guilt whatsoever
for persuading whatever gods are listening
as to the situation and terms of your final
secure and permanent encapsulation
good night and sleep tight, little boy
don't worry about bedtime prayers
they done been all said for you
and that's all I have to say
Clovis, I'm ready
to go home
Now

You all take care of yourselves. Good luck, *buena suerte*.
When we next meet let's have it be in a good coffee shop
and I'll buy. *Vaya con dioses, mi amigos*,

Very best wishes,
David Lee

Jay Nolan



Jay Nolan is a fifth-generation Chicago resident and father of five. He was a member of the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOE, CBOT) from 1974 to 2009, including fifteen years spent as the exclusive trader for Salomon Brothers in Treasury-bond futures. Nolan was a Director of the CBOT from 1987 to 1989. He is a graduate of Northwestern University.

I WANT TO BELIEVE

There are days that I want to believe so badly

That I can still have a fulfilling life,
provide for my family,
leave something memorable,

that America will still be recognizable in thirty years,
that St. Peter's will still stand tall,
that Western Europe will not be merely a museum,

that God really does give a rip,
that the good guys really can win,
that my ancestors are in heaven.

I want to believe
that tonight's prison meatloaf won't
have sawdust in it and
that they'll have some
leftover chocolate chip cookies.

There are days that I want to believe so badly

That my children will always be siblings first,
even after they're married
That CD and I will sail away into the sunset and
live happily ever after.

ROGERS AVENUE BEACH

(Friday 12 Noon)

The *Surfer*, still at anchor, is ablaze when I arrive.
Orange flames and greasy black plumes of smoke rise up,
The smell of burning fuel and fiberglass.
Seems that Dolan put gasoline in the wrong hatch.
He narrowly escaped the explosion.

Lifeguard Dolan—they call him Dildo,
Socially awkward and with two left feet.
Heard he'd never been laid.
Heard he eventually committed suicide.

The Chicago Lifeguard Service is minus one speedy patrol
boat.
It burned clean down to the waterline,
Then just hissed.
Only the charred bottom remained, a bizarre sight indeed.

The show's over
I punch in for work and walk 'the line' northbound,
past Reisler's corner drugstore at Chase and Sheridan
where Peter and other lifeguards are dining
on High Life and sack lunches from home. *(I'm still best
friends with Peter, forty years on).*

The alley begins at Sherwin Avenue and I follow it north:
past the apartment building with the kosher food smells,
past the apartment building with the constantly-bickering
couple,
past the building with the girl who sometimes undresses
near the window *(she's not there today)*
past Birchwood Avenue with its huge seawall,
past the ledge at Fargo with Truth Man lifeguarding and
daily guests, the Swiss Family Loch:

Smiling parents, sandwiches, lemonade, and six blonde,
blue-eyed children. (*We're still close friends after forty years*).

Now it begins—I'm in the north sector,
farther from help, farther from my mates.

Eastlake Terrace:

The gangways where you could smoke a doob,
chug an Old Style, or cop a feel.

Howard Street Beach:

Tony is on duty here as always,
blonde hair, champion swimmer, high school chum. (*We're
still best friends, forty years hence*).

Tony gives me half a sandwich and eats the other half.

He tells me how it feels in the neighborhood today
and what I might expect tonight.

I bid him farewell and walk farther north,
into the twilight zone.

Rogers Avenue Beach:

My post, extreme north—out of sight, out of mind.

Mecca for freaks, weirdos, trouble.

Guess they trust my seventeen-year-old judgment,
or maybe, no one else will do it.

The abandoned apartments are already alive
with Hare Krishnas chanting and tambourines jangling.

That foxy blonde mom is smiling at me again. (*What's
THAT about?*)

The eight-year old black boys daring each other to enter the
water.

The hippie heroin girls with their long hair and flowing
dresses

pirouetting on the jetty, tempting fate—theirs AND mine.

No use telling them to get down,
they won't.

Just be ready to go into the water
and bring them out—again.

Guess they like being saved from the water (*doubt they'll be*

saved from themselves).

Melvin being his usual weirdo self,
concealing that double-edged GI knife,
brandishing his Doberman.
He's former Army Intel; interrogated Viet Cong captives;
A bunch died—his career ended.
He's a bitter man; "just following orders, y'know".
If this place erupts, is Melvin a friend or foe?
Don't know that,
But I do know
where the Doberman is
at all times.

Fang waking up in the old Pontiac where he lives,
ready for another Friday night at Rogers Avenue Beach.
Timmy, lifeguard on the daytime shift, smells like liquor and
can't wait to leave.
He grabs his stuff out of the lifeboat, rolls his eyes, and
grunts, "see ya."
Enough said.
It feels edgy here this late afternoon (*Did Timmy piss off the
locals again?*)
and could be a zoo tonight.

I'm alone now.

Chicago police response time is quick here,
but Rogers Avenue Beach is quicker.
The direct phone is forty paces away—my lifeline.
Might as well be forty miles
on Rogers Avenue Beach,
after dark.

THE RED LINE

It's part of me,
Who I am, where I go,
How I get there,
The North Side's main vein:
The Red Line L.

It tells me what's going on
How they feel
What they're thinking:
Bears rock; Cubs stink,
Wait 'till next year,
The Red Line L.

On 9-12, the day after,
Confused, disoriented, pissed,
No airliners in the sky,
News outlets babbling,
I needed to get centered,
Needed to ride the Red Line L.

People of all ages going to work
Some confused, some disoriented,
some frightened, some pissed,
some vengeful, "Time for talking's over."
Got the story, got the vibe
From the Red Line L.

Look, there's Northwestern!
There's Loyola U!
Then Wrigley Field!
Now DePaul, Roosevelt, and UIC!
Want learning *and* sports?
Ride the Red Line L.

Now it's Fullerton, then down into the tube;
next stop: Lincoln Park Zoo, the Historical Society,
Division Street, downtown and the Loop,
State Street that Great Street,
Board of Trade, Art Institute,
Mind the gap—on the Red Line L.

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT PRISON

Jay Nolan: What you don't know about prison: ear plugs can be your most valuable possession.

Chad Sloat: What you don't know about being in prison is that no one's dream ever began with this in mind.

Dallas Rusk: What you don't know about being in prison is that if you've never been in a higher classified institution anything you do can send you to a place miles and miles away from your family because you choose to break a rule, e.g. fighting, contraband, or just too many incident reports can cause this to happen.

Warren Mckeithen, Sr. : What you don't know about being in prison is: when you are chained up to be moved from one place to another, there is a very good chance that the same chains used to bind you for several hours also create an extreme sense of freedom when they are removed.

Marquise Bowie: What you don't know about being in prison: to all the youngsters who don't want to listen to their parents—you will listen to the officers and do what they say or you will face the consequences. You will be held accountable!

John Christian: What you do not know about being in prison: it does not matter if your mom, dad, aunts, uncles, siblings or children, or all of them, die in some horrific accident, if it is your first year in prison, you will not get a furlough to the funeral; you will not say your goodbyes in person, you will mourn alone.

Mark Yost: What you don't know about being in prison is that you have all the time you always claimed you didn't have when free.

EAR PLUGS
DREAM
CONTRABAND
CHAINS
ACCOUNTABLE
GOODBYES
MOURN ALONE
ALL THE TIME
MILES AND MILES AWAY
FIGHTING

UPON SEEING THE ST. JOHN'S BIBLE IN PRISON



John Christian: It awed an atheist. An ineffable, modern marvel, representing the faith and devotion of all Christians; it was a privilege and honor to look upon some of mankind's' greatest work.

Ivan Brooks: It was wonderful to see how God made everything so beautiful in the St. John's Bible just like he did on Earth when he first made it.

Mark Yost: Upon listening to the presentation on the St. John's Bible, I was impressed with how brilliant the idea was to create a Bible for the twenty-first century, reflecting a thorough updating of history (including the twin towers), a recognition of technology used to inform our world views (specifically, the use of the Hubble Telescope to portray our Milky Way galaxy), and the fashions that are shown among the characters depicted (for example, a person wearing sunglasses). This Bible relates to twenty-first century citizens in a way that traditional Bibles do not. I was most impressed.

Marquise Bowie: Upon seeing the St. John's Bible here at Yankton Prison Camp, I felt like I was on a field trip to a Bible museum. The Bibles were beautiful. The art that went into making these Bibles brought out something that words can't express. The colors and pictures just jump off of the pages. The gold representing God was magnificent, because it was for everybody. It didn't portray God as white or black. The gold reflected his light and majesty. Since I am a Christian, this brought complete joy to me. Seeing the hard

word that went into this project took complete dedication on the part of those involved. I really appreciated seeing this great work of art. Another reason to be proud of my home state of Minnesota.

Joseph Fulgenzi: Upon viewing the St. John's Bible: One should take a deep breath every so often in order to make it through the viewing of each page, as it will leave you breathless! It's art and literature all in one, and a wonderful depiction of life today as well as the life when the Bible was originally written. It will bring tears to one's eye as it did to me.

Jay Nolan: I was agog while watching the video regarding the making of the St. John's Bible and dumbstruck by the actual sight of it. Thank you for including FPC Yankton's wayward boys in your tour and explanation of the books. Mount Marty College has been responsible for most of the bright spots in my forty-five month incarceration here and I am grateful for that.

Chad Sloat: Upon viewing the St. John's Bible I am inspired to revisit the greatest story ever told and reminded that with God anything is possible, no matter how daunting the task may seem.

Borden Barrows: The inclusive nature of the work, tying together imagery from a world of faiths, truly illuminated the message of the Christ. The boldness to step outside of mainstream Christianity's usual constraints by using iconography from ancient to modern, and East to West, drove home what a faith for the twenty-first century must be.

Robert Johnston: Wow, it's huge! The artwork amazing, the presenters very knowledgeable, easy to follow. I couldn't wait for the turn of those pages to see what was to come. I was truly spellbound. Never seen anything like it. The

writing so good, looked like it was done by a machine. One thing I thought was very cool was the way the presenters ran their hands down the pages, caressing each page as they talked. Up close and personal; thank you for the trust in us, that we were allowed such an intimate viewing.

Warren Mckeithen: Upon seeing the St. John's Bible I love the world of God. To see the St. John's Bible and view the time and effort that went into the extraordinary Bible was breathtaking. Truly a trip into a spiritual atmosphere far above this time and place. God bless the hands of such a glorious labor, because he blessed us with the results.

Dallas Rusk: I was amazed at the artistic quality of the paintings, the realism of the creatures, and the power of the text. This is true art that will be seen throughout the world, and for ages to come. These artists should feel remarkably satisfied with how these books turn out, and I have a new found respect for calligraphy.

Justin Dashner: I stood in front of the red leather bound, lithographed copy of the St. John's Bible. Dr. Tice opened the cover and on the page therein was a magnum opus—art illustrating the lineage of Jesus Christ. I felt momentarily illuminated like the colors of gold on the page that seemed to shift and dance with rays of light—touched by brilliant magnificence from a higher place. I stood concentrated on the image before me, feeling the kind of epiphany James Joyce strived to bring to life in his literary characters, a moment of realization, a spiritual awakening. Being a humble subject standing before a piece of tangible genius more magnificent in image and word than anything I have ever seen before literally moved me to the point of wanting to weep at the beauty of it. Thank you, Dr. Lafferty and Dr. Tice. Thank you Mount Marty for this priceless experience.



Students viewing the St. John's Bible



MMC professor Kenneth Tice presents the St. John's Bible



Students viewing the St. John's Bible



Students and MMC professors Andy Henrickson and Terry Lafferty with the St. John's Bible



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MARVEL

PRIVILEGE

BEAUTIFUL

EXTRAORDINARY PRICELESS EPIPHANY

GLORIOUS

LABOR

MAJESTY BRILLIANT

RESPECT

MAGNIFICENT

SPELLBOUND

BREATHLESS

HISTORY

AWAKENING

TERRY LAFFERTY

REFLECTION

Today I went to prison. I admit I anticipated the experience with a bit of trepidation and no little anxiety. It is an all male population, after all, and I am, well, not. But I was going with two volumes of the St. John's Heritage Edition Bible volumes. I was going with two men who teach at the prison. I was going as a guest and as a "lover of all things Bible." Jokes were made back at the MMC campus about whether or not they'd let me out. They did. Because here I am writing about the experience.

For the first hour and a half we showed the volumes to the prison staff. This was no different from any of our previous experiences. People are awed by the artwork. They see the Bible with fresh eyes when various features are pointed out to them. They are delighted in the project and want others to see it too. As a professional biblical scholar, I have to admit, this makes me happy.

Then we headed over to the prison classroom. My stomach performed some magic flip-flops to let me know this was an experience I had never had before. These men were prisoners! Bad guys. People to fear. How was I going to behave professionally and not embarrass myself or the men I was going to see? To increase the intensity of my foreboding, God sent us rain today. It hasn't rained since October! But this day, the day I first step foot in front of a classroom of prisoners, it has to rain.

So we go up to the classroom on the slowest elevator in the world. There's nothing like suspense to make a girl nervous. When we arrived on the classroom level, we couldn't go in because the class was watching the thirty-minute movie about the making of the Bible. However, I could see into the room and see all the men sitting there. They looked pretty normal to me. Maybe this wouldn't be so bad after all. After a ten minute wait we went into

the room and I just went into autopilot. We looked for the best place to put the books, under the brightest lighting in the room. We set them up while the men sat quietly and patiently waiting for us. When we were ready, the men split themselves between the two volumes we brought. And we were off and running. My captive audience was captivated! They were interested, engaged, asked questions, moved around so they could better see the features I was pointing out. Wow! What the heck was I so afraid of? They were as attentive and respectful as any group to whom I have shown the volumes. And when that first group was done, they switched to the other side of the room and I had a whole new audience to go through the volume again.

So, what did I learn? Well, basically, the same kind of lesson I have been taught most of my life. In racially diverse southwest Philadelphia, where I grew up and went to school, I was taught to be colorblind. And people of other races are just like me. And because my grade school had children from sixty-eight countries and spoke more than one hundred different languages, I learned to be patient and hospitable to people who may have difficulty understanding me. Because people from other cultures are just like me. When I moved to South Dakota three years ago, I went on a mission trip to a Native American reservation. Again, I was reminded that people are people. If I treat them respectfully, I can pretty much be assured they will do likewise. And Native American people are just like me. I suppose my fear upon learning of this event was ill conceived. I suppose that prisoners are just people and want to learn more about themselves and God, just like me.

Today I went to prison. I'd go back in a heartbeat!

Terry Lafferty, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Religious Studies
Mount Marty College

John Christian



John Christian completed his Associate Degree in Business Administration and Accounting from Mount Marty College in 2015 while serving his prison sentence at FPC Yankton. He has two stories published in the 2013 edition of *4 P.M. Count*. While in prison, he has realized the value of an education and has become a life-long learner. Once released from prison, he

plans to return to Kansas City, MO, rebuild his life, and continue his education.

AFTERNOON MAINLINE

Around 11:00 a.m., like every other day, upon announcement of afternoon mainline—our lunch call—my starving inmate brethren and I stampede to the cafeteria, hoping to beat the inevitable bottleneck of inmates. Unless it is a Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday, which are mandatory burger, chicken something, and fish days, I never seek to know what the meal is prior to going. I do this to give my day some element of surprise and to prevent myself from skipping out on what is guaranteed to be something healthy that I do not want to eat, or something unhealthy that I do want to eat.

Any table permitting me to sit alone works, or if possible, I like to find people who are conscious of the volume in their voices, by being aware of their conversations traveling to the next section. I toy with my ignorance of engineering, by wondering if the dining hall's structure was erected solely to amplify all acoustics, like how the game room amplifies the sound of dominoes or cards being slammed onto the table. I reject all conclusions placing blame on the building, when someone enthusiastically shouts his excitement to the entire cafeteria over last night's episode of *Locked Up*, *Party Down South*, or *Ax Men*. Yes, dude in prison, who likes watching what other dudes in prison are doing, the inmate does look like a lady; yes, the drunk girl is promiscuous; and yes, the chainsaw broke down, OMG, how will the loggers every cut down that tree on time! Thanks for filling me in, dude in prison sitting across the room.

While standing in line to get water, I listen to the colorful language blossom in the room and try to grasp just how many understandable ways expletives can supplement or modify the correct word that would/should express the idea. I ask around to trade my garbage for someone else's garbage and usually strike a deal because in here, one man's trash is a glutton's treasure. Then I sit. I try to eat quickly,

not because the food tastes horrible, but because I am ready to leave the table prior to sitting to avoid catching stupidity; it is a contagious disease found in many prisons, and there are several pathogens found in the cafeteria. Avoiding and being conscious of them is the soul's remedy.

I repeat this general scene twice a day, fourteen times a week, fifty-six times a month, 672 times a year—only because I skip breakfast—now cycling over 2688 times, and nothing changes except the seasons. And the reality shows being discussed. But this is prison, and I'm part of the incarcerated, so I just go with the flow and deal with whatever comes my way.

I mean, who really wants to be keeping up with the Kardashians and Bruce's sex change at lunch, and gossip like teenage girls, like some guys do on *Big Brother*, and in here, but nothing exciting happens in prison. Besides, many people here are "philogossipers" and do not want to have intellectual conversations. I guess because focusing on others' problematic lives and what they do with their time in the free world is more interesting than introspection and self-improvement. People prefer to ignore their own faults and thus fail to fix them now, even though we are rich in time versus being free and burdened with obligations and distractions. Therefore, we should use our time wisely while there is still an abundance of it and focus on the things that "should" matter more, like fixing our faults, finding purpose and tuning our moral compasses to point north.

FRANK: THE LOST MAN'S VITA

Frank feels the wind of uncertainty blow on the back of his neck and it frightens him. The wind feels cold on his skin but his blood keeps him warm, as courage and fear overwhelm his rational senses. His heart begins beating hard. Frank is a big old biker who always tells people, "Defend your friends and don't take shit from anyone." He lacks polish and grace, but his ferociousness and fearlessness project a flagitious persona that compares only to the minds of the criminally insane. On this summer morning, however, Frank recognizes something unusually abhorrent and awkwardly terrifying about the wind; it carries a familiar lachrymose voice, one Frank has heard before. He firmly presses his lips together as his eyebrows tighten, like he's desperately trying to see an enemy in the mist encroaching upon him, triggering memories of war. He deeply inhales and sighs; he knows the messenger breathing on the back of his neck, right under his ear, whispering admonitions of sufferings to come, if he fails again. He takes a shot of liquid courage and lights a Marlboro, remembering why he failed the last time, and his shoulders and head droop as he smokes and walks into the meadow alone.

Frank is certain about life, but uncertain about death. He is certain that living is suffering; he is uncertain that dying will end his suffering. His rapid pulse and heavy breath synchronize as he takes drag after drag off his cigarette, and swig after swig from the bottle. He is thinking about how all his maleficent oaths and sinister actions have gone unpunished in this life, as if man's impiousness can elude God's omniscient view, allowing man to sin at will without any concern for repercussions, like Jesus died for nothing; and this thought deeply troubles Frank. How can he of all people get away with every single evil deed he has ever done, without there being some grand cosmic

consequence for all the hell he inflicted? Surely, if evil deeds go unpunished in this life, then there has to be something after this life to hold him accountable. What should the meaning in one's life be if there is no meaning of life at all? He takes another shot and flicks his cigarette into the brush, then smashes the near-empty bottle on a rock. He feels so angry at not knowing the answer, but he doesn't really care anymore either, because he's going to learn it the hard way like every other lesson he's learned in life. He walks deeper into the meadow until he sees a suitable spot and decides this is where he will rest. He smells the aroma of nature and it disgusts him; it is nothing like the smell of burnt rubber and exhaust smoke—the nostalgic smell of his Harley-Davidson.

Maybe a higher conscience manifests when all meaning in life is lost and the meaning of life is still a wonder of the world; maybe, having an epiphany over immoral actions provokes self-loathing for those whose decadent souls have been tainted by drugs, destruction, and death; maybe Frank's sudden enlightenment was appalling when he saw his true self in the mirror, deviously smiling back at him; or maybe blue stainless steel just doesn't mix very well with whisky and tobacco, and the taste of that unique cocktail finally drove him mad, mad enough to give up all hope and raise his middle finger high in the sky. Nobody knows his reasons; nobody knows why he actually squeezed the trigger and blew his brains out of his skull all over the meadow, but everybody knows his supine corpse was completely decayed when that poor little boy found it.

Mark Yost



Mark Yost is a father of five who lives in Colorado. After earning degrees in economics, finance and policy studies, he spent twenty-five years in the financial services industry. He loves reading biographies, historical and contemporary literature (particularly twentieth Century English and Russian), and regularly devours articles in *The New Yorker* magazine. He finds the challenge of writing extremely invigorating, and hopes to continue his love of reading and writing, re-awakened through Dr. Reese's NEA-funded Creating Writing class, in the years ahead.

A LAST EMBRACE

The last time I saw my father was in June, 2011, outside the Hallmark card store in Boulder, CO. He was eighty-four then, frail, failing but still wearing a smile on his face. A smile I came to know throughout my life as a smile of hope, belief and optimism, and a sign that things would all somehow work out all right if we just kept after it. His hair was thin, like mine, and I can remember driving away that day thinking of that wonderful song by Neil Young: “Old Man take a look at yourself, I’m a lot like you.” How true this was; I was a whole lot like him. I always admired this man, my father, for the clarity he created for himself and for others in a world that was anything but clear. He could clear the fog like no one I have ever known. “Would it be the last time we would ever see each other?” I wondered that day, as I drove over to meet him. I hoped this wouldn’t be the case, but I feared it might be. This thought raced through my mind as I stood there, embracing him outside that Hallmark store, seeing only a physical fraction of the man I loved more than anyone, but whose stature in my mind would never, ever be diminished. You see, my father had always been there for me, notwithstanding any disagreements we might have had or the length of time it had been since we had last talked. He knew his place in life as my father, alongside his many other responsibilities, and he knew that I needed a father even when I acted as though I didn’t and would even sometimes push him away. Yes, he knew that I needed him and, occasionally (and this is the best part) he would even admit that he needed me.

Death, marriage, graduation, moves, remarriage, kids, job changes and life’s other experiences came and went, and yet when dad and I were together, none of these things ever got in the way of our fondness for each other. Nothing could ever lessen the bond between us. This bond between us became less like father and son and more like best friends over time. Our circumstances, after mom’s death, required

that we work together, as partners, to make it through each day, even though our styles were very different. Well, the truth is he “had style” and I was still looking for mine. Sadly, on this day in June, 2011, the last day I would see my father, I was going away for “some time,” away from him, the man who had indisputably become my best friend. All I could think about as we embraced was how much I didn’t want to let him go. And so I held on. The man who had been my rock, my supporter and my biggest fan, the man who I clearly had disappointed in ways that neither of us could possibly ever imagine, but who never let this disappointment get in the way of his love for me, was about to slip away. Indeed, at that very moment, outside of the Hallmark store in the parking lot, leaning against his old blue Ford Explorer that I was now driving, I struggled to find the words to express all that I wanted to say him. The thoughts were there—there were plenty of thoughts—but the words just didn’t flow. They couldn’t flow. I was overwhelmed at this moment by the power of this man’s unconditional love.

The last time I saw my father I knew, deep down, that it would be the last time I would ever see him, but I just couldn’t admit it. And yet, I knew it was true. This moment reminds me now of the many times that he and I would stand on the banks of the Big Horn River casting away, trying to land a beautiful brown or rainbow trout. Or the many hours we sat in silence, in the duck blind at “O Dark Hundred,” waiting for the ducks to fly overhead. Or even the hours we spent in his Piper Twin Comanche, I as navigator with map in hand, pointing out the landmarks on the earth below us as we flew along. Of course, it was never about the trout or the ducks or the flying. These were just great excuses to get together. No, it was simply about spending time together as men, father and son and then, best friends, who were connected by both blood and life experience, never wanting these moments to end and each of us planning, in his own mind, to find a way to get back to that river bank, duck blind or airplane, or anywhere really, where we could just be together, just the two of us. The last time I saw my father, I didn’t want to let him go.

DAD ON THE BIGHORN

I can remember June of 2002 just like it was yesterday: the nearly week-long fishing trip I arranged to Montana with dad, Kirk and Chip, my two best friends. All fly-fishers, we each couldn't wait to get to the river, the Big Horn River, and the thirteen-mile stretch that was home to monster brown and rainbow trout.

The scene, etched into my mind, shows my dad fishing from the north bank, casting a dry fly into the current, carefully mending his line with the precision of the surgeon he once was, and the three of us watching him from afar, settled into our own spots, as he pulled in one trout after another. That day in June 2002, my father was in the middle of fishing heaven, effortlessly casting, mending and reeling in one big one after another. We could only watch in amazement.

"Your dad is really doing well," Kirk remarked, "for a seventy-six year old guy."

"He doesn't look seventy-six! Where the hell did he learn to fish like that?" added Chip, who was technically the most experienced fisher among us, despite his mono-vision. "He caught five fish for every one I caught; what the hell?"

We were all amazed. Dad was seemingly thriving on his own special home-brew of 12-hour Energy (caffeine and nicotine). He was unstoppable. Dad was in his moment; none of us could keep up with him on this day.

Later that evening, back at the Big Horn River Country Lodge, dad was all smiles, with drink and cigarette in hand. I had never seen him so relaxed. He had won the fishing tournament that day by a margin that didn't even need calculating. The drinks flowed that evening, as did the stories, of trout spotted, hunted, hooked, and worshipped. This was always the best part of the trip—telling the fishing tales later in the evening. But for dad, these tales happened to be true. We had seen it all happen. Now dad is in heaven, staring down on us. Dad, I miss you. Did you leave us any fish?

MY KIND OF TOWN

Chicago is “My Kind of Town.” The legend of Mrs. O’Leary’s cow lives on, the cow that tipped over the lantern that set the City of Chicago ablaze back in 1865, or so the legend says. But this is not the only legend that lives on in “My Kind of Town.” Don’t forget that it was in Chicago where Eliot Ness, crime stopper extraordinaire, finally nailed Al Capone for, of all things, tax evasion. And, of course, John Dillinger was shot dead by a rival in the alley leaving the Biograph Theatre with his girlfriend on his arm, after a Saturday afternoon matinee. Chicago, the City of Legends, is everyman’s city. And, we love our legends. Long before “Be like Mike” became a national saying, Phil Jackson was creating a dynasty that would go on to win six, yes six, NBA Championships. And let’s not forget about Ditka’s Bears dancing the Super Bowl Shuffle down State Street. From the Checkerboard Lounge on the south side where the Rolling Stones once played to a stunned and packed neighborhood crowd to BB King’s legendary surprise performances at his favorite club, The Kingston Mines up north, the legendary stories of Chicago abound.

If you cannot have fun in Chicago, then you just can’t have fun anywhere. Yes, every Chicagooan claims the Bulls and the Bears, but what really matters deep down inside, buried deep within your DNA is: are you a Sox fan or Cubs fan? That is, are you a South-sider or North-sider? There is a difference, you know, in how you talk and how you think. Really, it is true. The answer will tell someone all he needs to know about you. If you fly out of Midway and drink Old Style, you are a Sox fan. And, if you fly out of O’Hare and drink Budweiser? Well, you are definitely a long-suffering Cubs fan. Hey, any team can have a bad century! Who knew? But when it comes to painting the river green and celebrating St. Patrick’s Day, we are all Irish in Chicago on March 17 each year, regardless of where we live, how we talk, the baseball team we claim to be our own or where we

live—North Side or South Side. On St. Patrick’s Day each year, we are all Irish, we are all Chicago, and we embrace every legend Chicago has. Chicago is “My Kind of Town.”

THE FIRST SLICE

I will never forget my first slice of Chicago deep-dish pan pizza, at Eduardo's in Evanston, IL in July of 1985. I had just arrived at Northwestern's SAE house to begin summer term late one July evening, had my new tennis racket stolen from one of my bags as I checked in to the house – Welcome back to Chicago! – and was soon asked by a friendly guy named Ethan, passing through the entryway, if I wanted to join him and a few other SAEs for some pizza downtown.

“Sure,” I said. “Let me lock my car, and I'll be right back.” After a short walk to downtown, just a few “long blocks” away, we arrived in what I know now to be “Pizza Heaven”: Eduardo's of Evanston. The moment we walked in, I could smell the aroma of melting cheese, garlic, oregano and basil. Up until then, the best pizza I had had was a Pizza Hut Supreme or a Godfather's Special back home. What I was about to experience this night would change everything I thought I knew about good pizza and my life plans.

You see, there is really nothing more important than a good piece of pizza. Well, actually there is, but this night was all about pizza, deep-dish, Chicago-style pan pizza. It is something that makes my mouth water, even now, when I think about it.

Once inside the restaurant, we sat down at a large table with a red and white checkered tablecloth, under the signature green lampshade, and before my butt could hit the chair, two large, cold pitchers of Bud Light were slammed down on the table by a very attractive-looking blonde waitress named Brandi. I could see Bill slip her a twenty dollar bill as she planted a quick kiss on his cheek. I smiled. I had made the right choice to accept this random invitation, and I could tell I was exactly where I needed to be after my nearly nine-hour drive from Omaha. Two quick beers later, the deepest, biggest and most appetizing pizza I had ever seen arrived on my end of the table,

followed by two more just like it – one in the center of the table and the third on the other end. My four new best friends, whose names other than Ethan's I can't quite recall, were armed with forks and knives, ready to dig in. There was silence, prayer-like gazes over the pizza, as I stared around, glimpsing the historic scenes of downtown Chicago from the turn of the century. I would soon find out about the legend of deep-dish pizza in the Windy City. Once again, Brandi appeared out of nowhere to cut each pizza using a very sharp and dangerous-looking knife, a machete, actually. She was quite skilled. What else can she do, I thought? Next, she handed us three pie knives, for scooping up slices of these piping hot, deep-dish pizzas that must have been at least three inches thick and weighed a pound a slice. I remember clearly how one was spinach and mushroom, the other onion and Canadian bacon, and the third one, the one placed in front of me, sausage and pepperoni.

One bite later, I realized I had just tasted the best piece of pizza I had ever had. My slice, the sausage and pepperoni, was layered between tomato sauce, cheese, and the garlic, oregano and basil I smelled when we first walked in. I just couldn't believe what I was tasting. Each slice seemed to be the equivalent of a meal in itself, but of course, I was twenty-one then and very, very hungry. I could handle this. The nine-hour road trip on Interstate 80 had left me famished. Upon finishing the sausage and pepperoni, I was offered a piece of the spinach and mushroom. Why not, I thought. I couldn't believe how easily these slices were going down. I had found "Pizza Heaven" at Eduardo's in downtown Evanston on this July evening in 1985. There was no doubt about that. Each slice was at least four times thicker than any piece of pizza I had ever seen, let alone eaten. A few more beers and a few more bites, and I was ready to try the onion and Canadian bacon. Simply unbelievable. Each bite was seemingly better than the last. Brandi floated by at least twice picking up empty pitchers in one hand and effortlessly dropping off two, ice-cold pitchers

of Bud Light with the other. I handed her a twenty for her efforts, and she planted a big one on my forehead. Before I could focus on what had just happened, Brandi was off with a smile and, before I could lift up my glass to savor the moment, she had returned with garlic bread and fried cheese sticks. “Does it get any better than this?” I thought. “I don’t think so!”

About 3:00 a.m. that next morning, I awoke from a deep sleep and found myself momentarily disoriented, not remembering at first where I was but realizing that I was quite full. After a quick trip to the men’s room, I returned to bed to dream of my next trip to Eduardo’s, to savor the world’s best deep-dish pan pizza—the best pizza I had ever tasted. I knew I would be going back, and in fact, it happened the very next evening. Why would I go anywhere else? And when I arrived, there was Brandi.

Thirty years later, I am married to Brandi. We have three snot-nosed kids, two dogs, a Prius, a Honda minivan and one very large mortgage. That first night at Eduardo’s in Evanston in July 1985 seems like a lifetime away.

“Hey Babe, I think we need to order some pizza tonight. What do you think?” I say as I awake from reminiscing, planted firmly on the family room couch in front of the big-screen watching ESPN.

“No, Hon,” says Brandi. “I just ordered tofu, edamame and rice on my phone from the Asian restaurant down the street. They are expecting you in about ten minutes. Oh, and on your way there, can you fill up the car, and pick up some baby formula and wipes at Walgreens. Thanks Babe, I love you,” she says, leaving me absolutely no chance to respond.

I miss that first slice of pizza back in 1985. Life was a lot simpler back then.

THE TUTOR

I work as a tutor here in the Education Department of FPC Yankton—a Federal Prison Camp. I have college and graduate degrees but have never officially taught school. I wish I had; I enjoy it. My job here is to teach, guide and encourage others who never quite managed to finish high school or who cannot find their diploma to get their GED—their General Education Development certificate which, according to the US Education Department, is “roughly” equivalent to a high school diploma. Either the ex-wife threw it (the diploma) out or it is buried somewhere in a box in mom’s attic. “If only I were there, I could find it myself,” I often hear. Whatever the reason, many guys here are faced with the task of sitting down and opening up a series of books that they haven’t thought about, and in many cases, didn’t want to think about, for the past ten, fifteen, twenty and, in some cases, thirty-plus years.

Who can blame them? The overall program requires successfully passing tests covering five key subject areas: English (or reading), Social Studies, Science, Math and Writing. There are days I’d rather drive a spike through my hand than return to high school English!

The guys here at Yankton FPC are part of 800,000 students nationwide who annually take the GED Test and, I am proud to say that their final pass rate is close to ninety percent, far exceeding the seventy percent national average (Source: Steck-Vaughn GED Series, 2012). Can you imagine sitting down and having to apply the Pythagorean Theorem at your age? You remember $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$? Or, trying to remember the difference between complementary angles and supplementary angles? (The first total 90 degrees; the second total 180 degrees. Brother!) “If this stuff was truly important, wouldn’t we all be using it in everyday life?” I am often asked. I find it hard to disagree.

These questions often remind me of Lucy’s question to Charlie Brown. “Charlie Brown, do you know the difference

between an A student and an F student?”

“Uh, um, no I don’t,” replies Charlie Brown.

Lucy barks back, “An F student is someone who forgets the material thirty minutes before the test, and an A student is someone who forgets the material thirty minutes after the test!”

In remembering this quip, I think to myself, no wonder so many students drop out of high school. It is hard to see the relevance for a lot of this stuff.

And what is the point if it is not relevant to our lives? It’s a wonder I ever finished. Cars, girls and sports were a hell of a lot more relevant to my life during those “learning” years in high school than memorizing the periodic table or knowing the MLA literary standard, you remember, for proper footnote attribution and formatting when writing a term paper. There is no mystery to me that so many of us drop out of high school to go to work where we can almost immediately earn far more than our high school teachers by selling cars, selling computers or selling whatever. Like my GED students today, I often failed to see the relevance of what I was “asked to learn” when I was sixteen and seventeen years old. “Just learn it; the test will be in two weeks,” I remember being told by Mr. McMullen, as he returned to reading a magazine while chomping a potato chip. But why? Figuring out how to get a date with Elyn for Saturday night seemed a lot more relevant (and certainly a lot more fun) in those days and, I must admit, even now. After all, she was a long-legged cheerleader!

Every guy here has his own story as to why he never finished high school. And some stories have nothing to do with getting a date with a cheerleader rather than studying math. Some of the stories would turn your stomach inside out. They involve abuse, broken homes, needing to quit school to find work to support a broken family and, in some cases, running for one’s life in gang- infested inner cities because it was safer on the streets than in school

And this brings me to why we do this work. Why here, why now? Why do we “make” our guys get their GED after

so many years? Well, it is a Bureau of Prisons' policy to do so. That's one answer. But when we look a bit deeper, we can see that the goals of the GED program are really "relevant life goals," intended to allow each of us to read and process information, solve problems and communicate effectively. Sounds easy, doesn't it? Well, the reality is even among the seventy percent of high school students today who do manage to slip through the cracks and graduate, many are still not proficient in these skills let alone "college ready." In January of this year, *Time* magazine reported that fifty percent of high school graduates are not academically qualified to join the military. What happens if we ever bring back the draft?

The list of excuses by society and each of us individually for why we don't value education like we know we should is long. The reasons we need these skills, however, are well known. And, our society is paying the price for underinvesting in public education. We can't fill many skilled jobs in this country from our unemployment ranks. The skills just aren't there. The unemployment rate among young black men is nearly quadruple the rate for white men. For each of us, a job is important to provide for oneself and one's family. And, if we are honest with ourselves, I think we have each experienced at some level that in order to function successfully as a person in society, we need to be able to read and process information, solve problems and communicate effectively with one other. If we cannot do these things, there really can be no progress and, for an incarcerated inmate, no transformation.

But there is hope. Let me tell you what it looks like and why it is so important. Progress is my student Mike who ran me down last week in the hall and said, "I found an error in the Steck-Vaughn GED practice book. And, I know I am right!"

"Sure, you are right" I think to myself, "You haven't gotten a passing grade on any test you have taken." There is something about his enthusiasm that is different this time from the indifference he has shown before, different from

those times when I handed back his failing tests to him. So I take a look at the test question. It is one of those word problems we all like so much, and lo and behold, the guy is right. One hundred percent right and the Steck-Vaughn GED answer key one hundred percent wrong. You see, Mike read the question several times and worked out his answer on his own, in his own way. Mike is a smart guy. Very smart. His mind works as fast as anyone I have known. One should never assume someone is dumb just because he doesn't have a GED. Intelligence is not knowledge, as any IQ tester will tell you. It is the ability to problem solve. Mike has done it! The problem in question involved salaries, salary increase and time periods: important stuff. Real world stuff. Each of us could relate to this type of question. It is the type of question or problem that we each need to solve in our lives and it is important to "get it right." Mike showed me his work; his math was right. His reading of the word problem was right and his conclusion was right. In this one problem, he had accomplished exactly what the GED sets out to promote—reading and understanding, problem solving and effective communication. Again, Mike's no dummy. He is smart, damn smart. He just never saw the value in graduating from high school. He probably had a teacher who didn't care enough, one who told him when the test was but failed to convince him why the material was relevant or important in life.

Well, as it turns out, the Steck-Vaughn GED folks left out a key word, the word "each" in the practice test that, by its omission, completely changed the answer to the question. I have never seen a happier look on Mike's face. Score: Mike 1. Steck-Vaughn GED Test Service: 0. Now that is success. That is progress. And this is the point. When we create relevance in our teaching, we connect, we inspire and we promote a desire to learn within our students. We ignite a passion for someone to figure something out and get to it right. We all learn.

I learned something very valuable and important today that I will never forget. I learned that we don't tutor or teach

to share what we already know. We tutor and teach to ignite a passion to re-learn what we may have forgotten and, along the way, help stoke the flame in others. Occasionally, we get schooled. Mike schooled us today—the Steck-Vaughn GED practice test folks and me. He nailed it. He saw the relevance and importance of this question to his life. He figured it out; he nailed it. I can see the change in Mike; the transformation has occurred before my very eyes. Mike is on a path to succeed.

Epilogue: Mike passed the GED test with flying colors, on his first attempt, one month later. Change is possible when can see relevance in our learning and allow ourselves to think differently, when we see the value in the challenge. But don't take it from me, just go ask Mike!

***HOBBY CRAFT/
ART PROGRAM/
VOCATIONAL TRADES***

The Hobby Craft/Art program offers a variety of activities that are structured toward the constructive use of leisure time. The courses offered are: Leather Craft, Fly Tying, Knitting, Yarn/Bead Work, and Art Work. Courses are available through the year and the Recreation Department provides all materials and supplies during structured classes. The students may continue to participate on their own and can special order authorized materials to continue working on Hobby Craft items.



Painting by Cris Sandoval



Cris Sandoval



Inmate mural, property of FPC Yankton



Inmate mural, property of FPC Yankton



Painting by Joseph Doll



Painting by Richard Mellor



Vocational Trade Horticulture



Vocational Trade Carpentry

Top image, page 112: The hillside design has been a horticulture student project since the early 1990s. Each year the Landscape Design students submit their design ideas for selection by the warden. The number of plants in each year's design has ranged from 6000 to 16,000 plants that are grown from seed in our own greenhouse. This year's design commemorates the coyote, our state animal, and "SD" for South Dakota. Each year the community anticipates the design, which usually comes into full color about the time of the Riverboat Days parade, which travels right past the design each year on Douglas Ave.

Bottom image, page 112: Inmates assigned to the wood shop worked together to build the above rocking jeep, dubbed the "Rockin' Army Jeep." The project is part of the FPC Yankton's Community Service Project (CSP) program in which organizations can request the assistance of the institution to help with projects that benefit the community. This project will assist Post 186 in raising funds to be awarded as scholarships to local graduating seniors in their community. This is the second year this CSP project has been approved. Post 186 once again donated all the materials and relayed that they were very happy with last year's project and hope to continue the relationship if it is providing meaningful work for the inmate population. Dr. Thompson stated, "It's a "win-win" for everyone involved." The inmates involved stated they enjoyed the challenge of the project and felt good knowing their efforts were making a difference in the community. At the time this book went to print, Post 186 had already generated over \$1200 in raffle ticket sales.



Inmate mural, property of FPC Yankton



Milo Sanchez with completed leather craft project

Marquise Bowie



Marquise Bowie is the proud father of two young bright beautiful girls who are his pride and joy. He was born and raised on the Southside of Minneapolis, MN. He grew up as a single child to a young mother who tried her best to provide a stable home for him despite her own struggles growing up. His life resembles the prodigal son's, a sinner saved by grace. The streets held him captive, but in prison he was set free by the saving grace of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who gets all the praise, honor and glory for anything that Marquise will ever achieve or become.

CRAZY MIXED UP STORY

Marquise wasn't loud enough, but Mad-dog could bark with the best of them. Identical in appearance, but different in everything else. They shared a body and depending on what time of day it was, you never knew which one you'd get.

Marquise was a good kid. He loved to laugh and bring life to the party or situation. He was a good student, but lacked that male role model in his life that would push him to go further than he thought that he could go. Unfortunately, at the tender age of thirteen, Marquise started to fade off, and in the process Mad-dog was created.

Mad-dog was born from the struggle and neglect of the home. A rebel without a cause. Short in stature, but with the heart of a lion. He was known by the big Carlos Rossi bottles that he drank from. But soon he graduated to that Mad-dog 20-20 which he changed to Mad-dog 30-30 which was stronger and seemed more venomous. He took on that moniker because of the wild neighborhood that he grew up in.

Where Marquise was laid back and reserved, Mad-dog was bold and afraid of nothing, mainly due to the liquid courage that he often drank. It was almost to the degree of David Banner and the Hulk. Marquise liked watching TV, playing video games and playing basketball, and was a momma's boy to the fullest.

Mad-dog was a wild pup ready for whatever, raised in and by the streets by pimps, players and hustlers. Not really considered a trouble-maker, but definitely a trouble finisher. Either you were on his side or against him. If the beef was on, he was the one doing the serving and not the one being served. He was all in and down for the cause.

The problem in the whole crazy mixed-up situation was due to Mad-dog's affiliation with the streets and the local neighborhood gang. Just like with a set of twins, most people on the outside can't tell the difference between the

two. So Mad-dog's actions started to affect Marquise's day-to-day life, to the point where Marquise existed only in school, and that was minimal at best.

Mad-dog had started to get the best of both worlds, so to speak, so much so that even Marquise had forgotten who he really was. He lived in a state of confusion, a double life. He wanted to do well, but lacked the willpower to execute it because of all the negativity around him. And as with most things, if one kills the head, then the body will soon follow.

So as Mad-dog thrived and grew in street fame and credibility as a rider, Marquise slowly faded more into the background and shadows, to the point of nonexistence, a mere shell of himself. Mad-dog would even get mad when people often mistook one for the other. The only exceptions were if it was his mom, or in the courts where Mad-dog seemed to often dwell, or when there were beautiful women around. Times or places like these were not suited or fit for the Dog, which made him jealous because Marquise was needed. It was like an internal battle over the body they shared; Mad-dog seemed to be getting fed more, which was why he was winning the battle.

They were basically using each other, depending on the setting and circumstances. But at some point one of them would have to go. And when, was the big question. Because Mad-dog was raised by the outcasts in the streets, he took on the persona of one or many of them. He was like a chameleon; he could adapt to his environment well, a man of many faces. He had played the player role before, and when the time called for it, he would do it again.

The bachelor pad, the many women, and hanging at the strip clubs were right up his alley. That is, until tragedy hit close to home, as in Marquise's stepdad passing away. That in turn affected his mom, the number one woman in his life, the only constant and stable woman he had ever known. Neither Marquise nor Mad-dog had ever known anything about love and the emotions that come with it. Mad-dog lived for the streets where there is no love, and as an only child Marquise was often alone and didn't receive

the proper love because he had no positive male in his life, and his mom had a troubled upbringing herself.

Something had to give. The police didn't like Mad-dog and tried to dismantle him and his dawgs at all costs. So he had to fall back some, and the fact that he liked money made it more interesting. Because in the streets, it's hard to get money and live a reckless life at the same time. It won't work—conflict of interest. But money won the debate unanimously.

Marquise, on the other hand, had started to really develop feelings for a certain female he was seeing, and had to make a decision as to how to get rid of his negative other side, the evil twin he didn't want to interfere with, or risk hampering the relation that he created with his lady friend. Decisions, decisions. The loss of the stepdad for Marquise required him to be the bread-winner and provider of the house for him and his mom.

A little property was left to them when his stepdad passed. A duplex dispute ensued with the stepsister when she tried fraudulently to take over the duplex. This tension forced Marquise to move in with his then-girlfriend to avoid the nasty conflict brewing between his mom and stepsister. That led him to play a role that he never intended to, nor really knew how to play: a live-in boyfriend.

First, he had never lived with any other woman besides his mom, and he had never been in a committed relationship. Besides that, he was in the uncomfortable position of being in the middle of his mother's loss of her fifteen-year mate, and the stepdaughter losing her father. She was also trying to take away the duplex, cars, his clothes and everything else that her dad and his mom had accumulated throughout the years they spent together. The situation was raw and fragile and too much for him to handle. He didn't want to offend either. So he did the Casper and got ghost (invisible).

In the process Marquise felt like he was starting to grow as a man and take back control of his former body, which was far from the truth. Mad-dog, on the other hand, tried

to pop his ugly head into the mix whenever he could. It was when Marquise drank and smoked weed that glimpses of Mad-dog would appear most often (Mad-dog strengths), which had become Marquise's kryptonite (Marquise's weaknesses). So after months of Marquise and his then-girlfriend living together and getting comfortable and familiar with each other, the girlfriend discovered that she was pregnant. Marquise was overjoyed but really didn't fully understand or comprehend the changes that this new reality would bring.

Times have changed. Mad-dog will do everything that he can to sabotage Marquise's happiness. So he poisons Marquise's mind to go hard in the streets to get that money for his unborn child, which seems to make sense to Marquise, but that mindset also keeps Marquise from being at doctor's appointments and parenting classes, and clouds his thinking so that he can't be involved with his girlfriend emotionally, not understanding or realizing that she is changing also: mood swings, belly growing, and menstrual challenges. Basically he is not there and just checks out, like a coward, unbeknownst to his girlfriend. With the entire role playing that's going on, the mother-to-be is wondering who this new person is. And where is the person that she met. He's there, he's just being held hostage by his own mad creation, AKA Mad-dog.

This caused conflict between Marquise and his pregnant girlfriend, which wasn't good, nor healthy for their unborn seed. But it's hard to put a muzzle on a wild dog, which was in many ways stronger and bigger than its owner. After all, he had been fed more than Marquise. The only way to get rid of Mad-dog would be to kill him, and quite frankly, he was not ready to die, and wouldn't go without a fight.

Money, alcohol and everything of the streets were Mad-dog's fuel and passion; which were also some of Marquise's vices as well. This was a very crucial time in Marquise's life, but he knew it not. He lacked the strength, he lacked the know-how to completely get rid of Mad-dog. They made a deal that suited them both, at least for the moment. They

came to an agreement that they would both give up some of themselves for the greater good of the operation. So they shared the body under a new title disguised as this player-type persona, who really wasn't new, but was tucked away in the background, waiting to re-emerge.

He resembled Marquise in most areas, but with the façade of Mad-dog in toughness and aggression. He was Player-Quise, AKA the Coordinator, because of his suave dress and smooth style, and of course his way with the ladies. So the story twisted and went from a party of two to three; at least that's how it looked on the surface of things. But in reality there were many different people or faces hiding or sharing this one body.

There was the gambler, the party (drinker) guy, the womanizer player guy, the lost little boy, the professional gangbanger and many more, not including the main characters Marquise and Mad-dog. At some point the juggling act had to come to an end, because as Abraham Lincoln once said, "You can fool everybody sometimes, and you can even fool most people most of the time, but you can't fool everybody every time." The most important thing is this: you can't hide from yourself, because everywhere you go, there you are.

There comes a time in life when one has to face reality and be himself. No more pretending. And that time had come for Marquise, realizing that most of his troubles were due to Mad-dog and his reckless lifestyle. He held onto the baggage of the other people as long as he could, until it weighed him down. He had to get rid of all that dead weight he was carrying. He was loyal to a fault. But those other sides of him didn't have his best interest in mind. They really didn't care about him at all, and in all honesty, he didn't seem to care about himself. It was all about survival and living for the day or moment. He was sick and tired of being sick and tired.

He finally came to the realization that in order for him to live—I mean really live and not just go through the motions of life—but to live, then he had to let the old self

or selves and their baggage die. That happened when he had an epiphany and saw where his life was headed. Prison was staring him in the face and death was right around the corner. Either way he had to make some serious changes. So he decided to follow Jesus and accepted Christ's offer of salvation. He had to leave everything else at the foot of the cross. When he came to the understanding that Christ bought him, as is, with his blood, and he had come to the end of himself and was in need of a savior. That's when the change process happened.

As he reflected on his youth, seeing countless friends die and go to prison for long periods of time, he didn't want that to be his fate as well. The final straw was when his grandmother on his dad's side of the family died. She had been trying to get him go to church with her and change his life before she passed. Now the only way that he would see her again was to go where she was going. And that was to Heaven. At that moment he wasn't sure he was going there, even though he said that he believed in God. So even if he claimed that he was saved before, his actions said otherwise, and the two must go hand-in-hand.

From that day forth he has rededicated his life to the Lord in actions, words, deeds, and has put his trust and faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ and let him change him from the inside out. And that's what he is doing. A work in progress. The last that was heard from him, he was doing fine and well. All praise honor and glory due to Jesus Christ his Lord and Savior.

GAME CHANGER

I grew up sipping on that liquid courage, and when you have seen as many brothers die young as I have, it's easy to get discouraged.

I come from a place where you've gone to more funerals than graduations, hope that you make it through today, and if you do, tomorrow don't have no expectations. Drink that Maddog 30-30 to try to drown out the pain, see the same people, same hood, same trials and tribulations, but the game done changed.

We don't play checkers no more, we play chess, the playing field looks the same, control the middle of the board, and get your pawn game up, cause if you get checkmated in life, there ain't no next.

These young players don't care nothing about no rules and regulations, they ain't trying to hear you talk about no loyalty, they play all the games at once, give a clue, so they can stay out of trouble, because they're sorry, play the block like Monopoly, then get out of jail free.

In Mrs. Pac-man the goal is to avoid the ghosts (police) and gobble the pellets (money) in order to get the high score (fame and glory). The Feds ain't playing no games and they will give you a high number (years in jail) that you can't remove by unplugging the game or pressing reset.

So get serious and give up the games and quit playing with your life. Real life is no game. Because the new game is played with hidden microphones(wire-taps), and cameras. And it ain't about what you are doing, it's all about what they are saying! When that cell door locks, or if that casket drops.

It's game over.

MY FATHER'S DAY CARD BLUES

Where art thou, father? I don't know where you have been. Father's day rolls around every year, but for a father I have no card to send. I have been on the planet Earth for thirty-nine short years, and have only once bought a Father's Day Card. The reason is that I felt like I never had a father to send one to. I had a dad and I don't think they make Happy Dad's Day cards. So after that first time that I bought a Father's Day Card and sent it, something in me just didn't feel right. So I decided not to send one the next year.

Let me put it this way: there is a big difference between being a father and a dad. Example: My birthday was on September 15, but my dad didn't send me a birthday card until January of the following year. Who does that? Any man can be a dad, but it takes a special man with courage to be a father. Being a father is a special privilege that takes hard work, dedication, patience, perseverance, and willingness. A father doesn't let the failed relationship with the child's mother dictate the relationship that he has with the child.

There is no such thing as a perfect parent, and I must admit that I too struggled at being a father. I made many poor choices and mistakes. It was the most challenging experience that I have endured, with little to no preparation or training. I was learning on the fly. But knowing that someone I helped create was depending on me, and the joy that it brought me to see my child smile, made it all worthwhile.

As long as there is breath in my body I will never quit trying or just give up. Never. My love for my children won't let me. This comes from God's love for me. He will never leave me nor forsake me, so how could I forsake or leave my own?

The good thing is, as long as one's children are alive, it's never too late to start being a father; one just has to try. Broken relationships can be mended and repaired. Communication, sincerity and action are the keys. It has to be something that a man wants to do.

If you have to start somewhere why not here? And if you've got to start sometime, why not now? All it takes is time and effort. Be a man of courage and take the challenge, men; the reward is worth the risk. There is nothing to lose and everything to gain.

PERFECT STRANGER

Sept 26, 2007, was a beautiful day for me; I became the proud father of a healthy baby girl. My second daughter. I had ridden the Greyhound bus for the first time from Minneapolis to Duluth, MN. It is a crazy sight to see another human being brought into this world, and I think that the power that God gave us to create life is a blessing in itself.

I was the first person other than the doctors to hold my new bundle of joy. This was love at first sight. The celebration was short-lived though. I had to go back to Minneapolis to attend a treatment class due to my poor choice to drink and drive. This was nothing compared to the storm that was headed my way. I got the chance on the weekend to go and bond with my beautiful baby girl and her mother. I couldn't put her down. She is the flesh of my flesh and the blood of my blood. I wanted to be the first man to show her the unconditional love that I felt she deserved. A love which I didn't receive from my father.

Yet again, I had to go back to Minneapolis to fulfill my obligations. A week or so later my baby and her mom made the trip down to Minneapolis so that my relatives could see the new addition to the family. Things went well, but could have been better. There was a little tension from my other daughter's mom. (She was going on about how she needed some money for my daughter's school tuition; to me it sounded like whoomp, whoomp, whoomp, whoomp, whoomp.) But we made it through. This would be the last time that I would see my baby for a while. The next day they headed back to Duluth.

There was a warrant issued for my arrest. I was thinking it was something petty or a misunderstanding of some kind. I talked to my probation officer and he advised me to turn myself in. So I did, later that day; after turning myself in, the Feds came in to talk to me. But where I am from, we just don't talk to the police. You have to be some big-shot

when it comes to the Feds, something that I was clearly not. I admittedly sold drugs in the past, but was at the time working at White Castle. All this occurred around October 22, 2007, a little shy of my daughter's first month of birth.

I got sentenced to 175 months for drug conspiracy, which would be the equivalent of fourteen and a half years of birthdays of my not being there for my daughter. It would be a missed opportunity for many first experiences or milestone moments in my daughter's life. This was like an earthquake over a storm that I didn't see coming. I did get a chance to visit with my baby while in custody at the county jail, through a TV monitor, thanks to my oldest daughter's mom, which was a blessing.

The next time that I saw my daughter was four years later, on a visit at Sandstone (Federal Correctional Institute) in Minnesota. In this four-year absence, we officially became strangers. When I saw her again, my baby wouldn't let me touch her at first. I can't explain how that made me feel, to be slightly rejected by one whom you love so much, and helped come into this world. I had never felt pain so bad in my life at that point. I literally broke down and cried right there. It wasn't until later in that same visit that she opened up to me, and only after my older daughter, who she was familiar with, became the mediator. Ice cream and candy always help, too. But it was still "Ugh," like meeting someone for the first time. I'm sure that I cried some more later that day. Actually, I know that I did, but when I thought about it, a sense of joy came over me, to know that my baby is trained not to interact with strangers. She really didn't know me. She was only a month old when I left. So I can understand.

Over time, through constantly calling, sending pictures, and just trying to get to know her, love has overcome our separation. It helps now that she has visited me here at Yankton a few times with my mom and a few cousins. We have grown fond of each other and she has gotten comfortable with me and being around my family. Two Christmases ago, through a program called Angel Tree, I got

the chance to send her a DVD of me reading her a book that I picked out, so that she can have a visual of me whenever she wants. So the quote “Love at first sight” sounds good. I want to believe that “Like comes first.” Separated by turmoil, brought back together by love.

THE SCENARIO

Some people just refuse to grow up. A healthy grown man, fully capable of working, living at home in the basement with his parents playing video games all day. Always broke, but trying to live the lifestyle of a baller or hustler. Stuck on stupid. Get up and do something with yourself. Check yourself before you wreck yourself.

A beautiful woman with three kids, by three different men. Always on the go and at the club. Looking like a million bucks, but the apartment has no furniture and the kids eat wish-meat sandwiches. They wish that they had some meat for their sandwiches. Kids can't get the proper nutrition they need on syrup sandwiches, cereal and water—are you serious? If your looks could feed, they'd be full.

A brother doing an eight and a half year bid in the Fed for conspiracy. He refuses to change his behavior. Always pointing the finger and blaming others for his actions. He can see everybody else's wrongs, but not his own. Instead of redeeming the time and making the necessary changes to improve his situation and life, he continues to do the same types and patterns of things that got him in prison in the first place.

Quit hanging around the smokers, jokers, gamblers, risk takers and big groups, not realizing that prison is a state of mind. You can be physically free and still be in prison—trapped in an unhealthy relationship, addicted to drugs, or stuck in a certain life-style that has no positive future in it. Walking around with your pants hanging down, butt sticking out, thinking that your stuff doesn't stink. Nobody wants to see your dirty drawers. Come on fellas. Let's get it together. Don't let these opportunities pass you by. Educate yourself. We can't continue to go about with a careless and carefree attitude. Our families need us. Get out of the arrested development mind-set. If you knew better then you'd do better. Don't leave here the same as when you came in. Free your heart and mind and the body will follow.

Joseph Fulgenzi



Joseph Fulgenzi grew up in the Pacific Northwest and enjoys outdoor sports. He currently occupies his time by reading to the blind through the Talking Book Program and achieved his apprenticeship. He also has been active with the Community Service Program (CSP), working with Habitat for Humanity, Chamber of Commerce, Heartland Humane Society, Mount

Marty College, and landscaping at the Cramer-Kenyon House in Yankton, SD.

A SUNDAY MORNING STROLL, BEHIND THE FENCE

Early this Sunday morning,
The clock reads 8:00 a.m.,
Laden in thought about my life, how did I get to this point?
Behind the fence!

It's up to me where I will go from here,
Back to my real life,
Life I yearn for beyond this fence.
Free from the boundaries I've placed myself in.

As I walk along this quarter mile track,
Mondays right, Tuesdays left,
Every Sunday—the same direction!

Freshly misted from the morning rain,
The sun rises as it welcomes the day.
Colors of a rainbow filter through the clouds above.
Pleasures of tranquility,
And joys of life's past, present and future,
Until 10:00 a.m. count,
Church is in session, at least for me,
On this Sunday morning stroll.

I can't wait to go home; to the church I once graced.
For those who share in this Sunday morning stroll,
This has become our church for now.

Listening to the choir of the ringed-neck doves,
Singing their morning song,
White-chested squirrels with tails of fluff,
Frolicking throughout the perfectly manicured lawn,

As I take in the morning's glory,
Walking amid some of the blooms of spring,
Iris of deep blue, tulips so pink and daffodils ablaze like the
radiant morning sun,
This is what graces me here, behind the fence.

Who would have thought that even here
I too could find solace and peace?
On this Sunday morning stroll.

A WALK WITH YOU, DAD

Just one more walk with you, Dad,
at the end of the day,
in the low June sun;
I'd feel the stride in your stroll,
and find it calming.

Weary from exertion,
your errands yet to be done,
your pleasures were never important to me,
they seemed so worthless;
a child never understands.

Yet, as I reach back through our days,
our memories set me free.
Our flowers, the gardens you tilled,
from hardened clay you gave them life;
The birds, their wings,
God's flock in flight.

We spoke so slight,
shared even less.
Just one last walk with you, Dad,
my heart could then admit
I never understood your anger,
your successes, your pain.
But as perplexed as they made me,
I have grown from them.

You forced me to look inward,
to explore and to discover
the meaning of life, of love,
and of courage I have yet to find.

You taught me without instruction
gave to me from within.

You were my hero,
my loving teacher untold,
from your heart and your hard-worked hands,
You created my spirit.

Justin Dashner



Justin Dashner is from Sioux City, IA. He is soon to be released from prison after having served thirteen years. Justin has earned a dual Associate's Degree in Accounting and Business Administration. His mission is being a life-long learner who studies the human element as it reveals itself in behavior and psychological motivations for purposes of helping others to find positive meaning in life, to improve interpersonal relationships, and to expand the depth of people's vision of humankind through creative writing.

ENDURANCE

Almost there. The climb, both arduous and exhausting, is proving every bit the challenge the man seeks. Fingers bleeding, muscles tensing, thoughts racing, the man pushes on. His goal in life is simple, but also complex. The man's only desire is to scale the mountain face of his design, nothing else. Inch by inch, crevice by crevice, the man climbs. Alone with his thoughts, pulled by his ambition, the man searches the smooth rock for a hold. Up he continues in a nearly impossible feat towards the heavens. Nearing success, the man's vision begins to blur. His life is only as important as completing the climb and he now becomes aware that his life may end in forfeiture without attaining the gift of glory. As though trying to discern details underwater without goggles, the man realizes his eyesight is failing him. Closing his eyes, he becomes one with the mountain—locked in an intimate battle of wills. Finally, the man's hands follow the weathered surface of a boulder extending outward, not upward, and as he frantically jerks forward—eager to measure how far the flat precipice extends—he finds he has attained the top of the mount. Blind victory!

OVERDOSE

My cousin Nick, I remember your face when we knew the comfort of childhood. We sat basking in golden rays of sun at Suzy and Patty's (your beautiful mothers' home) in Cedar Rapids, IA. I can see you with orange floaties cuffed around your slim brown arms, running across the bleached wood deck, and jumping into the pool. I remember your face in those blessed days of youth so long ago, but never too far away. Your eyes were big and brown and shone with a lighted intensity as though the whole world and everything in it awed you, inspired you, filled you with wonder. Boy, you sure had character! I can still clearly see the lively facial expressions you would make. Your mothers would look at you, their soft, glowing features telling their proud thoughts, "We have been graced by a lovely miracle, Nicholas Kyne Pressley."

I remember the last time we talked. We walked along railroad tracks that cut their way into downtown Iowa City. That was the last I saw you. As you walked away, I remember thinking how much different your life was going to be from mine, you, with so much opportunity, and me, having already lost my direction. A year or so after that day, I went to prison and have been here ever since. During the twelve-and-a-half years I've been gone, you struggled. You came to know addiction intimately. It would prove that our paths were one and the same. But, dear cousin, you had a tougher fight. You were addicted to the big one—Big H (heroin)—a drug I never contended with. I do know it's the hardest. It's the roughest to beat. It turns your body upon itself, exerts physical demands that the very best fighters give in to. You stayed a long battle. I am proud of you for that. I know you tried, old friend; many would not understand. I know you did not intend for things to be this way. If you could give any words now, I know you would say, "I love you all. I am sorry." I know you would tell those still suffering, "Let my loss give you strength to keep

fighting, let me be one of the sacrifices it takes to save you.”
My dear cousin, I will never forget you. I will speak of your
fight. I will share with others what I know you would want
me to share with them. I look forward to embracing you in
the next life.

I love you, Nicolas Kyne Pressley. Your cousin, Justin
Kyne Dashner. 2015.

THE LAST TIME I SAW YOU

Our last conversation was at your honey-colored, wood-grained kitchen table. I look down in front of me at the off-blue hexagonal cut linoleum placemat with little single-file dot designs punched into each one of its corners. I place my palm on the mat's surface, moving it right then left. The mat's surface feels cool, soft, and slightly sticky. I had never thought until this moment how many times before I sat in this spot, running my hand across this same placemat, deep in thought, or listening to you fire out your brusque, staccato comments while grandmother's melodious voice chimed in here and there, rising in pitch as it did when she pronounced the last word of her sentence, and me feeling the comfort of youth, protected within the womb created by you and grandmother's love.

This day is different. You, like me, sense the urgency of being out of time. We feel cold lead weights in our loins, knowing our time has run out—passed, already spent fast and well on road-hunting and pulling flatheads out of the Big Muddy. You look at me, knowing this is our last visit together.

You say, "You're in trouble."

"Yes grandpa, I'm in trouble."

"Where are you going?" you query.

"Florida, to see the ocean before I have to go."

As you chew on my last comment, I carefully observe you had grown much older since the last time I saw you. Your eyes, like two large marbles peeping out from cocoons of layered delicate flesh, seem to defy gravity by not rolling back into the dark cavernous sockets that somehow hold them. Your prominent forehead looks taut, the skin pulled over it too tightly like fragile crepe paper stretching across your skull. You are much smaller inside your flannel shirt you once filled out so nicely, and your skin is mottled here and there with dark purple and blue splotches from broken blood vessels. I wish I had not left you for as long as I did.

I didn't want to stay away all this time. It broke you to tell me I had to, that is evident. I told you back then that I understood to make you feel better. You saw my lie.

You look at me, and I at you. No words have to be spoken for you and me to confirm that we will always be pals. You look at my girlfriend. She's a fast one and she knows it. She avoids your gaze. Addressing her you say, "Take care of him, will you?"

She lies, "I will."

You look at me like it has been a long, good one. You offer me your hand. I grasp it tightly, not wanting to let go. I grip the hand that's always been open to me. I feel your oversized, deformed stump of a thumb press powerfully against my smooth skin for the last time.

"Goodbye J.K.," you choke on the magnitude of finality and can only get out, "old friend."

"Goodbye, grandpa."

VISITING ROOM

Donna Dashner, my lovely grandmother. You are here, content, happy in front of me, wrapping me in layers of love from where you sit two feet away—joy you have brought, ambient fresh air, filling me with life, life you have always so freely shared with me. We sit together, you and I, in a prison visiting room. This room is easier for you to visit than the others. There's just an outside door, some steps, and another regular door. No metal detectors, no dull grey fences topped with spools of razor-wire, no gun-towers. It's easier for you to visit me here, but by no means (I know) is it easy for you to see me in prison.

You have dedicated much time and effort in coming to see me, painstakingly traveling long hours to see my face, to hear my words, to let me know I am not alone serving this unforgiving sentence of seventeen years and seven months. I know it is difficult for you, you told me once. You said your brother John was incarcerated—the only one on your side of the family who went to prison. You said it was much too painful to see him behind bars; you could not bear to go back and visit him a second time. You have, however, been back to see me many times, no matter how it makes your tender heart weep.

Here we sit together, you and I, in a prison visiting room. Your soft, white hands are crossed peacefully on your lap. I look at your hands; they speak loudly to me. I know your hands have before been balled like alabaster fists, knuckles smooth white mountain peaks, shaking in the air at having lost your son—an exceptional, gifted, magnificent, rare special one, Douglas Dashner. You have continuously wrung the grief of your heart from this sorrowful loss. But, you refused to let it turn you bitter, refused to let it shatter you. Instead, it kindled a permanent, glowing ember within you that gives you the ability to feel more compassion for others. With your delicate hands you have tirelessly continued to weave goodness into the blanket of

the world—a world that is a far better place for having been graced by your presence. I want my hands one day to appear to another person as your proud, precious hands appear to me.

I look at you. Your hair is more white than I recall, streaked with so many soft shades of grey. Gentle curls border your merry, knowing features. Brilliant, sparkling gems—your eyes—stare back at me, eyes full of intelligence, vigor, hope, depth—eyes that inspire me to be everything good that I am and work diligently to be. You sit across from me in a prison visiting room. I know you see greatness in me, though it is a different kind of greatness than what you have known in your other children. The greatness you see in me is different because it is born from your hope. You willed strength to take root in me so that I would strangle my tribulation. What you see in me comes out of failure, the will to overpower so many demons. You know I am special because I've made myself become that which you knew I could be, against all odds of doing so.

It is of course true, however, that you see a signature uniqueness in all whom you love. But knowing you see me in a white light momentarily burns—shame, fiery hot. I feel shame when looking into those emerald green pools of bottomless depth, the light you see in me a reflection swimming there, sparkling, my shame burning from knowing I have not accomplished the lofty educational pursuits and careers your other children have so effortlessly attained—their accomplishments, giant shade trees overshadowing my uncertain direction. I will humbly work to follow, as best as I am able, in their grand footsteps. You believe in me. You willed me to climb so many mountains since I pulled myself out of the mire that once held me fast. I know you see something in me I am not yet able to see. Your sight gives me the strength and endurance to reshape the impossible into the possible. Your eyes don't lie, I know. And as we sit, you and I, in a prison visiting room, I thank you for believing in me. Looking into your eyes, I can begin to see greatness in myself.

Fraser Harrison



Fraser Harrison is a British writer with a long-standing interest in South Dakota, its history and culture, which dates from his first visit to the state in 1992. His latest book is *Infinite West: Travels in South Dakota*, published in 2012 by the South Dakota State Historical Society Press.

He has published nine other books and has written for many national newspapers and magazines

in the UK, including the travel section of *The Sunday Times*, to which he was a regular contributor in the 1990s.

His interest in American frontier history led him to make many journeys to the Midwest, which resulted in several radio features for the BBC and a radio play based on the Lewis and Clark expedition.

During June and July, 2013, he stayed in Yankton, SD, gathering material for a profile of the city. His 'Portrait of Yankton' has recently been published as a single issue of *South Dakota History*.

A LETTER FROM FRASER HARRISON

Dear Students,

Thank you for your letters, and thank you as well to those of you who also sent me essays.

I am touched by the kindness of your letters, just as I was impressed by the stamina you showed during our marathon session together in March.

In your letters some of you have picked up on the remarks I made about my father and his annoyance that I chose writing in favour of practising law. His advice, in itself, was not unfair, and his predictions about my likely poverty, when compared with potential earnings in the law, proved to be all too accurate. I would probably have listened to him with more respect if I had felt that there was any chance of winning his approval, but such was the sad dynamic of our relationship that he was bound to withhold his approval, whatever I did.

I said that as a stimulus to get you writing there was nothing like an unimpressable father. Perhaps the same is true of women and their mothers. I should have added that trying to prove your filial worth by writing is not likely to be a successful strategy. By definition the unimpressable father is not going to be impressed, even if you sit down and write a story like *Metamorphosis* (1912) or a novel like *The Trial* (1914), as Franz Kafka did. He could never win his father's approval, though he tried very hard, and even wrote a letter pleading for his father's understanding that ran to a hundred fruitless pages – *Letter to My Father* (1919).

Of course, you can't arrange to have a suitably stimulating father for literary purposes, and if instead you happen to have a loving father, or even one who simply wishes you well, you can count yourself lucky. When it comes to happiness and peace of mind, a loving father is

worth a dozen novels.

By way of consolation I should add that not all writer/father relationships are disastrous; nor is it necessary to have had a grim childhood in order to write well. For instance, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, who won the Nobel Prize, appears to have had a pleasurable childhood and he wrote touching tributes to both his mother and father. (See 'Clearances' from *The Haw Lantern*, 1987, and 'Digging' from *Death of a Naturalist*, 1966.) When we met I mentioned Philip Roth's *Patrimony* (1991), which is an account of his father as he was dying of a brain tumor. Its tenderness might be unexpected in a writer of Roth's ferocity, but the fact is that although Roth was an embattled figure, especially after the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint* in 1969, his parents were unfailingly loyal to him, and he repaid them with gratitude.

I told you about my own (mostly ignominious) experiences as a prisoner visitor, and I also mentioned the fact that I had visited the Federal Prison Camp on an earlier occasion, in 2013, when I interviewed Warden Willis. I hope that my essay about Yankton (*South Dakota History*, Vol. 44, No 1, Spring 2014, pages 33-46) is available to you in your library. I don't know how much you are told about the origins of the prison and the previous history of the campus and its buildings as Yankton College. They are briefly described in my essay.

I think it is important that you learn about the Camp's relationship with the city since 1988, not least because you can be proud of taking part in a remarkable penal experiment. Among its remarkable features are your own writing classes with Professor Reese and Professor Sullivan. I believe that you are collaborating in the creation of a model that deserves to be more widely imitated, both in the US and elsewhere. As I have already discovered, we can all learn from Yankton.

Best wishes,
Fraser Harrison

Gerardo Vergara



Gerardo Vergara was recently released from FPC Yankton.

THE TEDDY BEAR AND WOW

There she is, WOW!
Smiling and laughing at my big,
huge, huggable teddy bear.
It's as tall as she, probably even bigger too.
I look at her, face worry free.
Kisses go around. Laughter, hugs, smooches.

She screams, "Yes, yes and yes!"
Reminding me of a shampoo commercial.
"Yes to what?!" I ask.
"To your same old question, every year, same day, silly.
For being such an intelligent man, you're not that smart,"
She says.
Everybody laughs at me.

Yes. She just said yes to my fifteenth marriage proposal.
One per year, every Valentine's Day.
I had forgotten this time, but she didn't know it.

We start talking about our honeymoon.
Eight days, seven nights. Caribbean cruise.
"Wow," she says, real loud. "Always dreamed of a cruise."
"Miracles happen," I tell her.
But I was lying; she just didn't know it either.

My flowers and chocolates come in a bit later.
"WOW!" again.
Everything starts all over again.
Kisses, photos, hugs.

I look at her smile, like sunshine,
illuminating everything and everybody.
No one has dry eyes. Everybody full of emotions.

She starts laughing, spreading her sunshine with that smile.
We all begin to laugh, smile and joke again, totally carefree.

It's getting late and the room empties.
I keep looking at her smile.

Finally, we are alone. I say, "Honey, how are you?"
"Fine, never better."
"In peace?" I ask.
"Of course," she answers.
"With GOD?"
"Of course, silly."
"Love you." I say.
We keep on talking silly things.

The kids come and go.
It's 10:15 p.m. and she feels sleepy.
Everybody knew, but she never did.
I never told her.

"Bye Chatita, see you upstairs. Tell Peter I'll see him soon.
I'll take the teddy bear with me." I promise.
She had slipped into her final sleep and never woke up.

***PENCIL PORTRAIT
DRAWINGS***

DRAW YOUR FUTURE

Life has a funny way of serving up several heaping loads of unusual circumstances to munch on. Depending on how we approach those unknown situations will determine how to proceed. The ultimate choice, which we and only we have, is the ability to filter through the pile and pick those servings that can benefit us, make us happy, and provide us a path for personal growth. For simplicity, learning how to draw portraits covered all three for me.

People come from all different walks of life: social, political, economic, religious, geographical, and ethnic combined here at FPC Yankton. Where can everyone be put together and get something out of it from those different combinations? The thing I found which was all inclusive, regardless of background, was the Pencil Portrait Class that was offered through the education department. With everyone having a different situation and circumstance for being here, there was a common bond for learning and discovering how to successfully draw a portrait (one that was actually recognizable). The education department has several options for people to benefit from by learning an artistic skill. The Pencil Portrait Class to me was the one with the best chance of teaching a skill I could start and continue to get better at even after the class was finished. In addition, I enrolled as a student to find out what I could learn and to have something to help me pass the time.

I discovered that drawing life-like circles, cylinders, and egg shapes was fun. My teacher, who had been drawing for over five years, was very patient and could tell that I was very interested in learning (since I keep asking questions). After progressing through the ten-week course, each week we learned new shapes of the face and eventually started adding them all together. I quickly discovered that I really enjoyed drawing and was amazed at how much I picked up on the technique taught in the class. Sure, I could draw simple shapes prior to taking the class, but I never knew

how to shade and make things look life-like as we were being taught. Anyone with a little patience and practice could eventually pick up this skill of drawing portraits from taking this class.

After my class was completed, I had finished three portraits that I was proud of and that I got to display in the education department with other students' portraits. I could see most of the other students had picked up the process and did very well, too. This was a class that benefited everyone that took it. Not only did everyone learn how to draw portraits, but now they could use that skill to show their kids what they have accomplished. Now that they had a skill for a lifetime, they could share it when they get home. It wouldn't have been possible without the class being offered here at Yankton.

After my class, my instructor couldn't teach any longer, being he was leaving, and he recommended my taking over teaching. Even though I was still new, I couldn't turn down the opportunity. I did take over teaching and continued to improve my own skills during my stay at Yankton through teaching five classes. I truly enjoyed watching students just like me go from not drawing before to completing a portrait that they were truly proud of. I too, am now leaving, but passing on the torch to former students. I highly recommend to those coming after me to take the class. Yes, you are here at Yankton, but now you get to choose how best to use your time. When in your life or where else could you take the time to learn a skill that you'll never forget, and one that you will only get better at? You are here, so start, and it will make you happy like it did me, and no one can take the skill from you. You have the choice of how to sail through your own circumstance, so create and discover drawing. Here is the pencil, now draw your future.

Jeff Lamkins



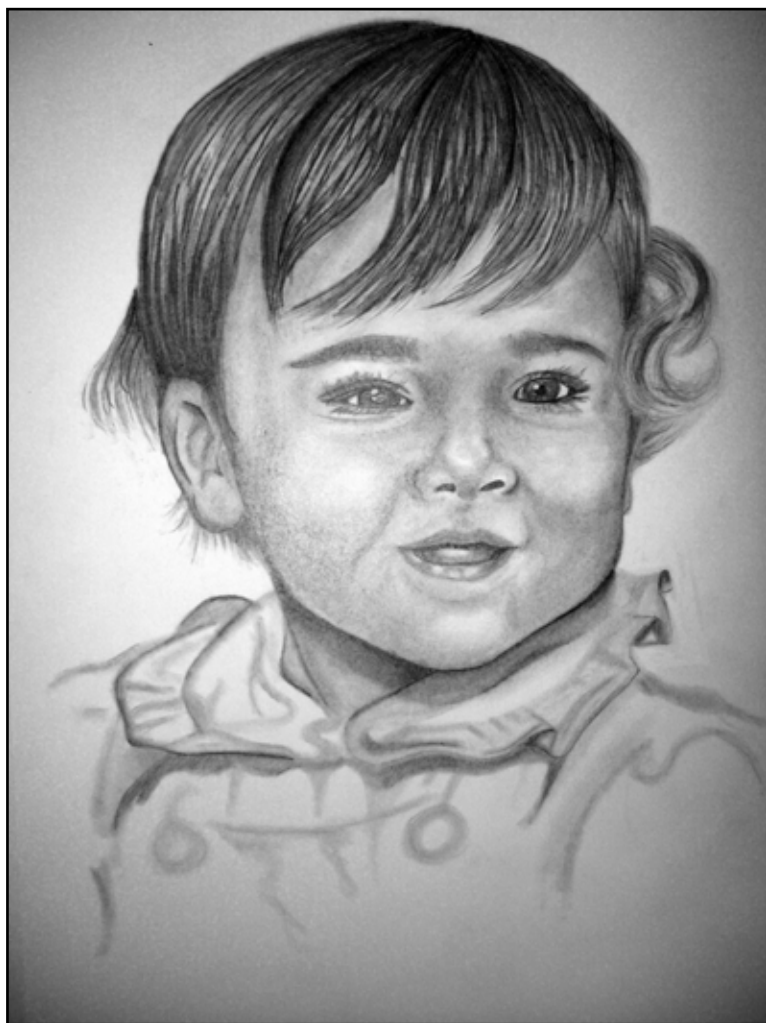
Drawing by Anthony Robinson



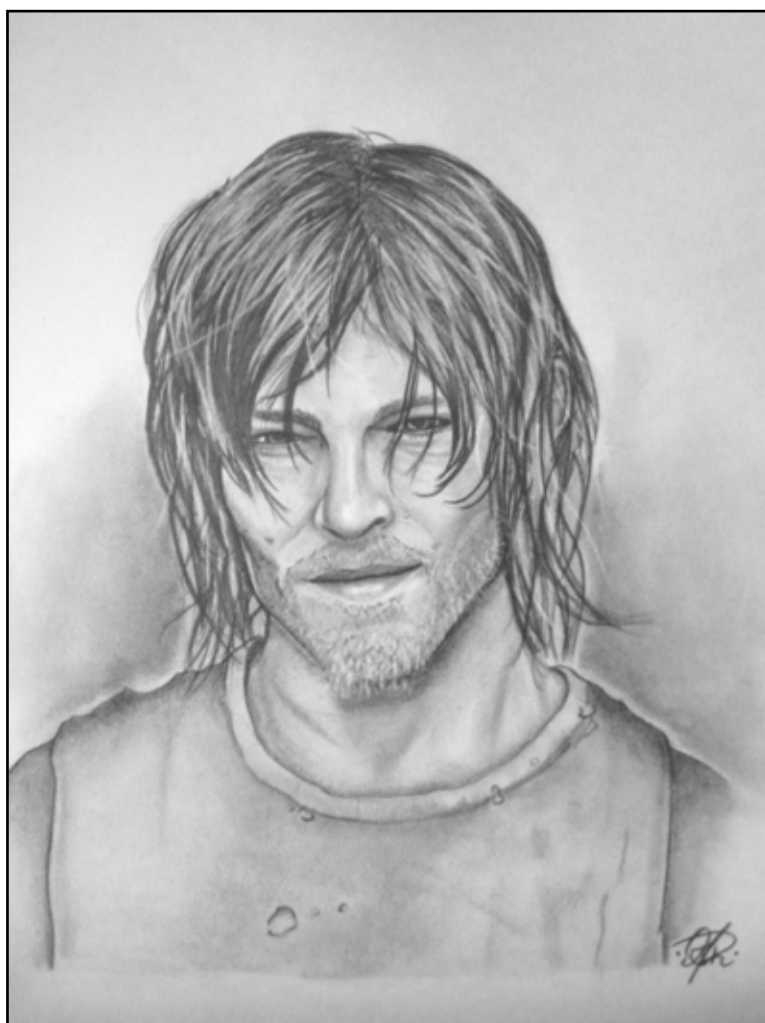
Drawing by Markell Brewer



Drawing by Bruce Fuller



Drawing by Bruce Fuller



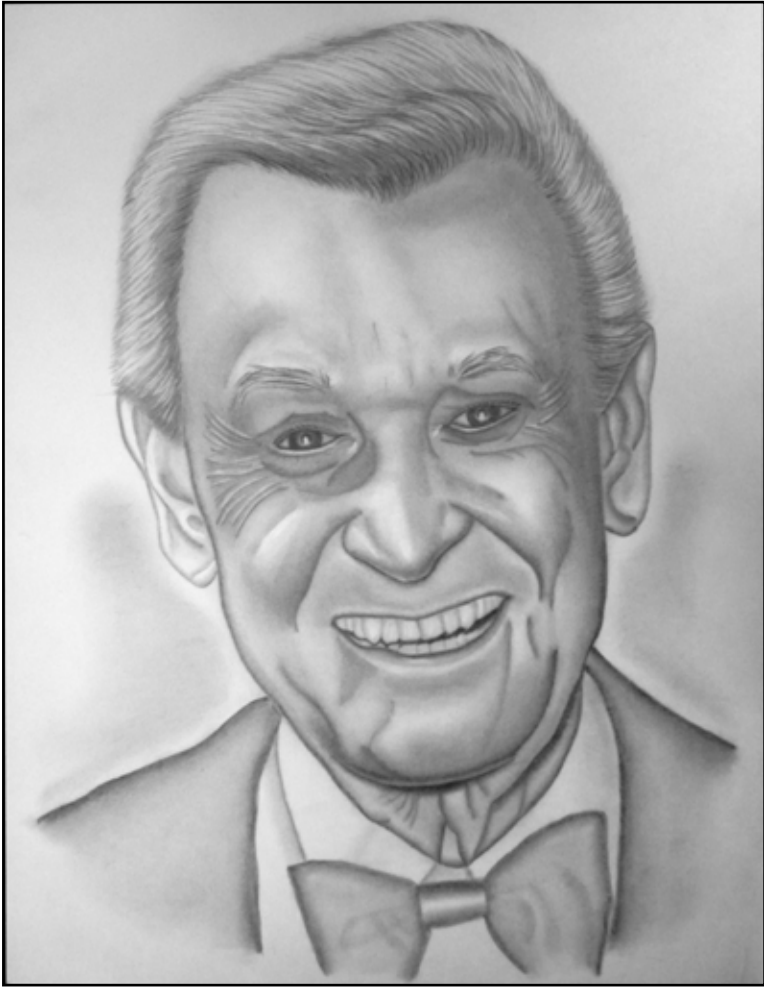
Drawing by Dallas Rusk



Drawing by Dallas Rusk



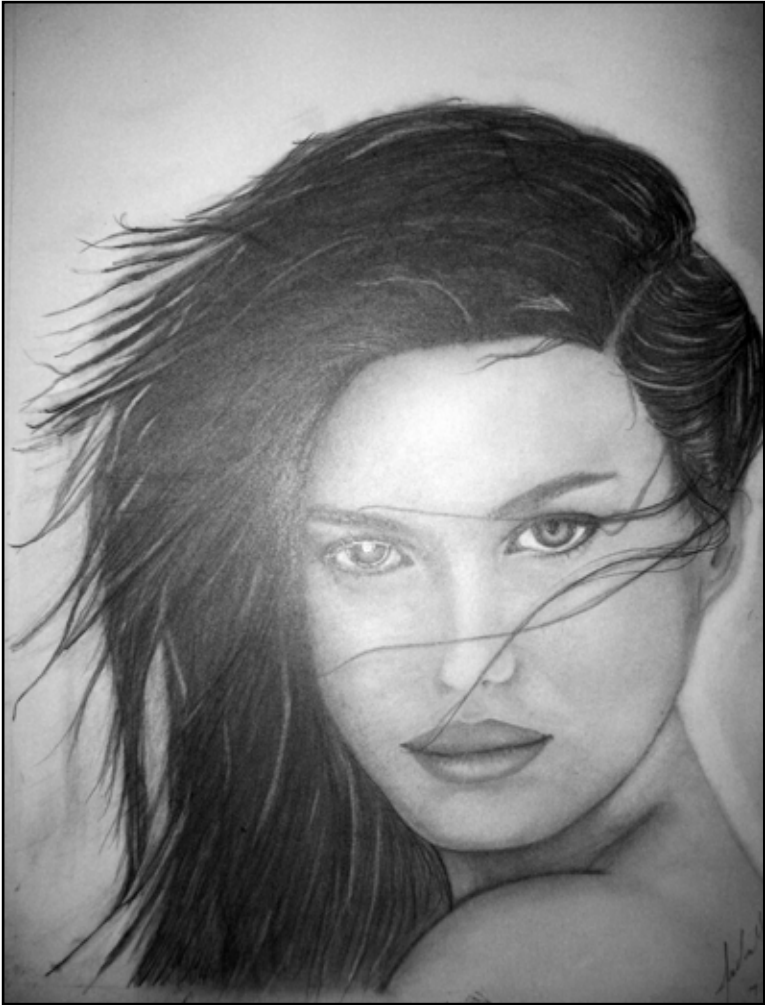
Drawing by Edward Picardi



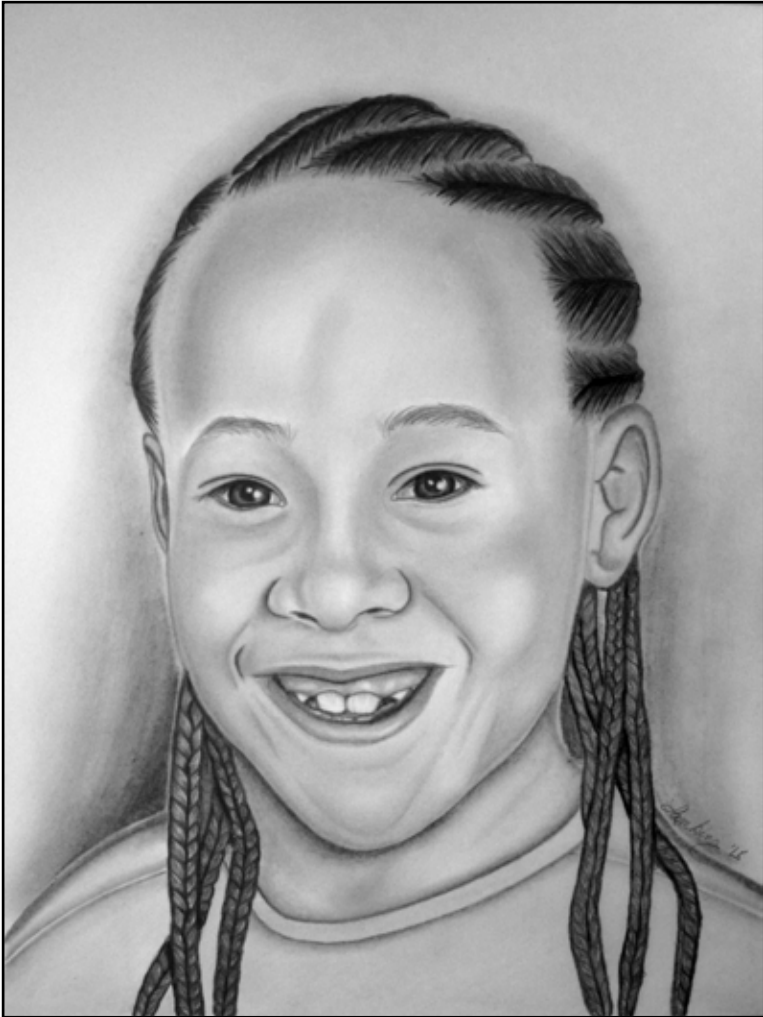
Drawing by Edward Picardi



Drawing by Estaban Curiel



Drawing by Isidoro Gonzalez



Drawing by Jeff Lamkins



Drawing by Jeff Lamkins

PENCIL PORTRAIT

After nearly two years here, I have drawn mostly for personal interest, but nothing more than a card or two and a coloring book for my little princess' birthday. Never did I think I had the creativeness to draw portraits. I saw there was a posting for the class on the bulletin board on Trulinks. It stated "advanced pencil portrait drawing class;" the catch was, it was only for the people that have taken the basic portrait class.

Every time I was going to sign up, I was too late and the education staff had already made their choice. This time I went and asked a staff member and mentioned joining but I hadn't signed up for it, adding, "but I can draw really well."

The staff member told me to sit in on the class and do what was asked for the first class then to talk to her after, and I agreed.

In class, the teacher said we would be drawing three people: a famous person, a person from the show *The Walking Dead*, and an education staff member. "First you have to draw an eye."

"An eye," I thought.

So I freehanded an eye; some used this method and others used circle charts to make sure the pupil and iris were perfectly round. I find that a little bit easy in my mind because doing things by freehand is much more interesting to do. I finished this single eye and it was perfect to my mind, yet there was something missing. To this day I have not touched it because I do not know what to add to it. The thought of a human eye is so beautiful yet so complex in ways that drawing something as such needs another beautiful piece of work next to it like a butterfly or something else. It is like the saying, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Yet, what goes with it?

The teacher says before the class ends, "Pick a picture from what I offer or you can find a famous person on your own."

I see that there is a picture from the show *The Walking Dead*: the actor, Norman Reedus, a main character named “Daryl.” I chose the picture and got it blown up so I could draw it.

The next day I started and about eight hours later, I finished, but just needed to do a few things like blending and making the hair look layered. Blending is a technique in which a person forms cheekbones, giving the face depth and a realistic look. For this, I thank the teacher. I did not know how to blend correctly the spots I shaded so there were no lines visible.

This was the beginning to something I can be proud to do productively and yet another way to stay out of trouble while here in prison.

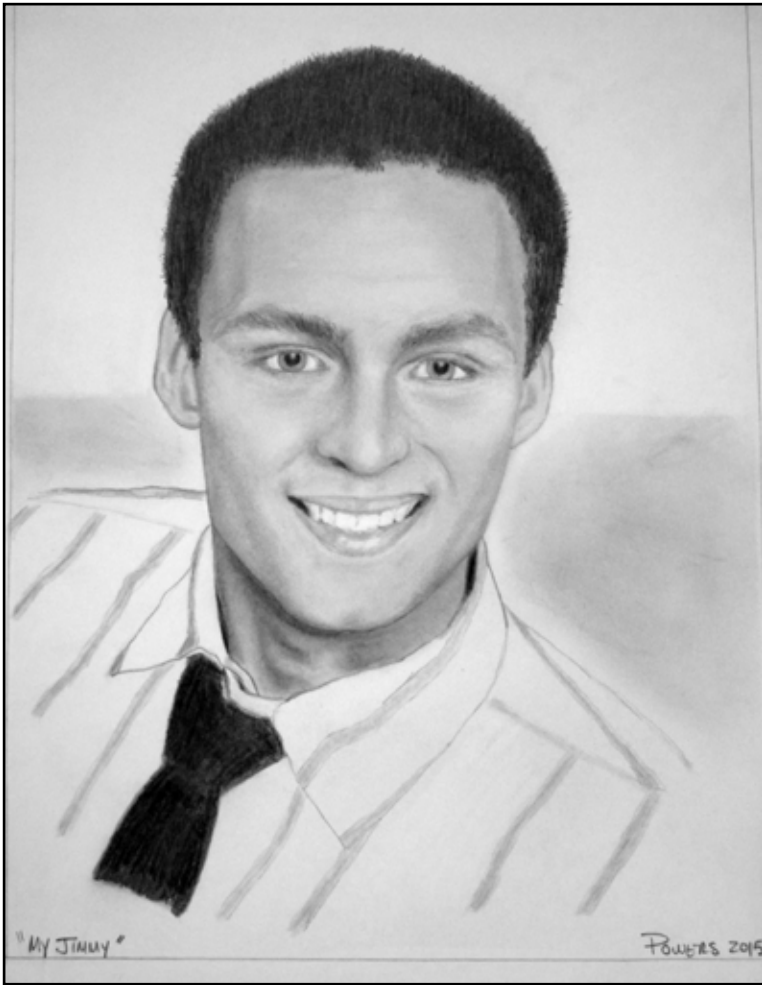
I dedicate this portrait of Mr. Reedus to a person very close to me and that has been here since I have been in prison.

A week later, I choose a great actor, Mr. Kevin Spacey, to draw and about seven hours later, I needed the teachers help again in the blending process to form the contour of his face to get the correct features. Out came another fine piece of art that I am proud to have drawn.

This class has taught me patience and control of a pencil; use a light hand and everything will go fine. Rush and I don’t get the art I’m looking for and therefore it takes more time to correct what could have been avoided in the beginning. If I am in a calm frame of mind with music playing and no one around to bother me, this is what can be created, just like all the works of art in this book. Whether it is a painting, a poem, prose, a short story or something personal, I want others to be able to relate to it, and that is my work of art. I am proud to have worked with the men whose works are in this book and I thank them sincerely for letting me in on their lives.

I also thank Dr. Reese for allowing me this opportunity to get my voice heard in *4 P.M. Count*.

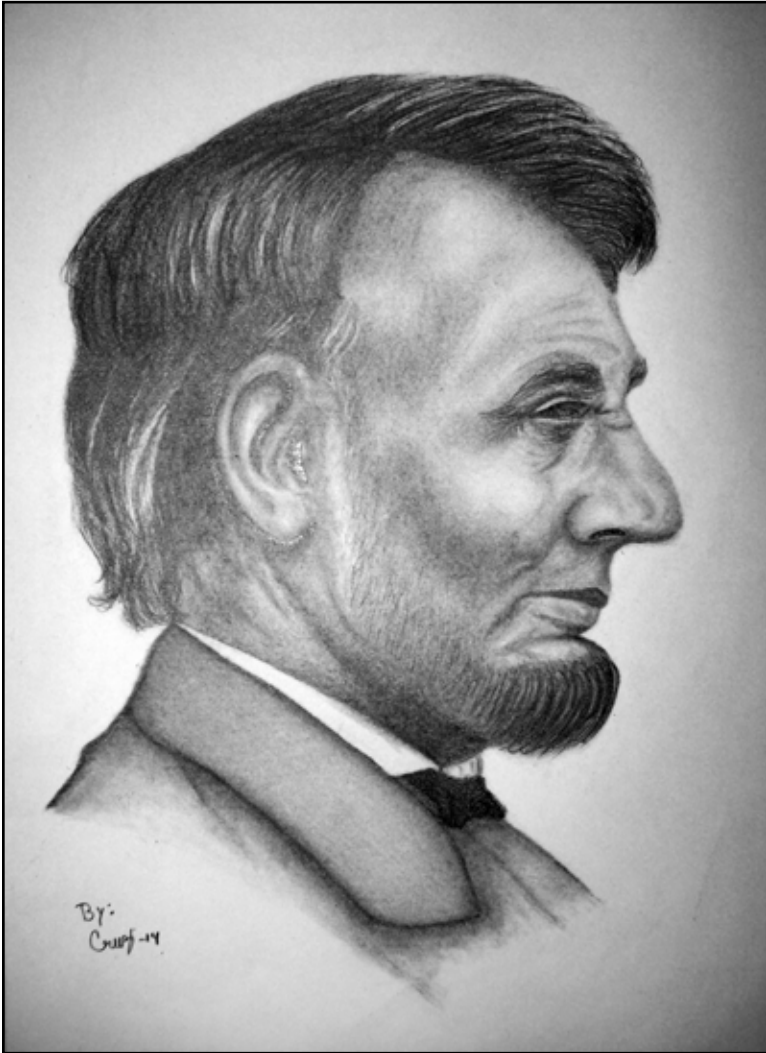
Dallas Rusk



Drawing by Jeff Lamkins



Drawing by Jose Gallardo



Drawing by Luis Cruz



Drawing by Michael Powers



Drawing by Michael Powers



Drawing by Ruri Escalera



Drawing by Shawn McCardell



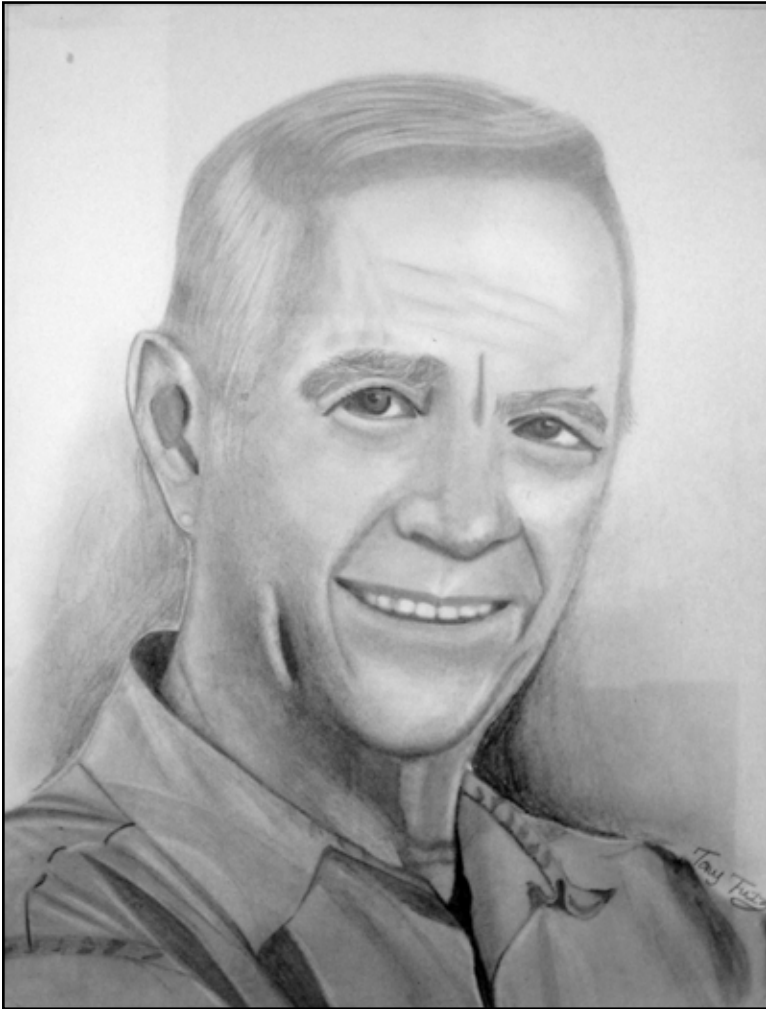
Drawing by Steven Pelz



Drawing by Tony Fuzz



Drawing by Tony Fuzz



Drawing by Tony Fuzz

SHARING CREATIVE WRITING ON BOTH SIDES OF THE FENCE

Dr. Jim Reese:

College students and convicts critique each other's work. This call and response workshop was an opportunity for Mount Marty College creative writing students to visit the prison and workshop their creative writing with FPC Yankton 4 P.M. *Count* students. It was a great day of learning and engaging all students on both sides of the fence.

Marquise Bowie:

It was a good experience to be able to mix and mingle with the students from Mount Marty College. An educational class in a prison setting could be an intimidating thing. I am sure that they felt the same. When one thinks of prison, especially from what we see on TV, one could have the perception of barbed-wire fences and cells with bars and hard core criminals. That is not always the case. To be able to share what we have been working on in our creative writing class with them, and them with us, in an open discussion was great. It could be helpful for all parties involved. For them, it could change their perception about prison and the people inside, helping them overcome their fears and getting comfortable with others from different backgrounds; for us, getting the classroom feel and reading aloud in front of an audience. Receiving feedback and being critiqued to help a person learn, grow and expand out of our certain comfort zones is also helpful. For us in prison, it grants an opportunity to show people that not all prisoners are bad people. We just made a mistake; a single wrong decision could land anyone in prison, from the taxpayer to the overall general population. We have made

mistakes in the past, but we are trying to better ourselves through programs so we can be productive members of society again. All we need is a chance.

Ivan Brooks:

I think it was great to have the students from Mount Marty College in class with us. It was a great experience, as I'm from down south and the student I was partnered with from a little small town in rural Nebraska.

Both of us wanted to know how life was for one another, since we were raised in different regions of the United States. What both of us did figure out was that racism exists all over the United States, no matter where you are from. I was amazed at how we opened up to each other about that topic. Neither of us looks at color; we judge a person by what is down inside in the soul and heart.

I shared with him about how to do the right things in life. This is not the place you want to be, being told when to eat, sleep, and shower. You never know what might happen, who you might lose in life, like your mother or father, without having the chance to say goodbye.

John Christian:

Meeting the college students and workshopping with them was a great experience, one that I am not only appreciative of, but am thankful for. I'm grateful towards the people who orchestrated the event, Mr. Roberson and Dr. Reese. For a brief moment, everyone united under one principle: we are here because we like to write (even if the meeting was mandatory, we are all in the class for similar reasons). I think the gathering was beneficial through everyone sharing personal experiences. People can learn and grow vicariously from others' mishaps or successes, happiness or sadness, trials and tribulations; this was an opportunity for all students to step outside of their own comfort zones and peer into the reality of someone else's world. The students could see the perspective of the incarcerated, and we were reminded that we go through the

same things in life, no matter where we are or what we face. Personally, I had a terrific time conversing with Sahara and reading her writings. The experience is vivid in my mind, and I hope future creative writing classes can join at the prison to share experiences and help on another become better writers.

Justin Dashner:

I was quite happy for the opportunity to interact with the students who attend school on campus at Mount Marty College. I found it rewarding to workshop with the student I was assigned to. What is so unique is the fact that everyone has different backgrounds. When people from diverse histories meet and discuss creative ideas, priceless experience is gained. For example, my work partner told me she is going to school to be a prosecuting attorney. I, however, was given almost eighteen years by the vigorous persuasion of a prosecuting attorney. Right off we have the perspective of a unique social dynamic—prisoner and prosecuting attorney! From opposite sides of the spectrum, we met in the middle and shared some good ideas with one another. I was indeed happy for the opportunity to display good manners to a person outside this prison, while at the same time brainstorming with her to achieve loftier literary finery. And certainly, I must include that my partner was the nicest up-and-coming prosecuting attorney that I had ever encountered.

Robert Johnson:

I saw some nervousness; I wanted to let them know that we're good people here, not to worry. It's not like you see on TV; not here anyway. It was beneficial to hear feedback and also interesting to hear what they had written. I saw that the MMC students are similar in what they write about; they write about other people and how those people affected their lives. I hope the creative writing program continues to bring the MMC students and maybe one day some of the people here could go to the MMC campus and read their

stories to the students there. I want to thank Professor Reese and Mr. Roberson for bringing the students here to meet with us.

Warren Mckeithen:

I would like to note that writing is a full-time art, gift and expression of thought. That being said, I'm not very good at it for several reasons. Be that as it may, still it was just my luck to be in the seat assigned to Lauren. Now, she is a very talented writer in my humble opinion. I think she is going to do very well as an editor for some fortunate firm that is smart enough to recognize talent. She was kind enough to allow me to read two of her masterpieces and gracious enough to read and edit four of mine. Lauren shared her gifts of patience, kindness, and social grace that will eventually place her at the top of her industry. I believe that every student who takes the time to travel and labor in this system is worthy of tremendous praise. Mr. Reese just happens to be a wonderful instructor with a fresh and innovative style for poetry and other kinds of writing. Great thanks and you are truly appreciated.

Jullie Weiland:

Our Writing and Publishing class with Dr. Reese went to the Yankton Federal Prison Camp to workshop with the inmates who were in his Creative Writing class on the prison campus. Some of the student inmates read their pieces at the end of the class. While I was impressed by the writing and the feedback the other inmates offered the authors, there was one piece by a young man in his twenties that took my breath away. He wrote about the first time he saw his father cry. The first time he saw his father cry was in court the day he was sentenced. I remembered the day I stood in a court room with my son and he was sentenced to mandatory residential treatment which ended up lasting for two years. The pain that day was intense. It felt like an accumulation of all the pain in all the previous days we had endured before sentencing day. Defiance, deceit,

anger, disappointments, hurts, and even the false hopes and moments we laughed together were rolled into the fifteen minutes we stood in front of the judge that day. I wondered if the young man standing in the front of the room reading his story of his father's small tears understood what his actions had put his father through. I wondered if he knew the daily pain with which his father must have lived. With the memories of my son from the time he was born through sentencing day, his on-going work at changing his life and this young inmate's story, I was compelled to write this about my son.

My Son

He's charming, handsome and persuasive, smooth, hurtful and manipulative. He's also very smart and talented. Watching him play hockey is like watching poetry in motion. But I can't trust my son. If he has the choice, truth or lie, he chooses lie. If he has to choose fair consequences versus manipulation, he chooses manipulation.

I have tried to teach him empathy and responsibility, but it is hard for him to make the right choice. It seems he doesn't care who he hurts, even me, his mother. Have you ever asked your mother or even your father what it feels like when you lie to them, betray them? Do you know why it is so easy to do? To deceive and manipulate them? Do you know why the scams and cons worked with your parents?

It is the memories of him toddling around the living room, his first baseball game, crawling into bed with me after a nightmare, the way his face lit up when he scored that soccer goal and made that amazing save playing goalie in hockey, the look in his eyes when he rode his two-wheeled bike down the street for the first time and everyone commented on how little he was, going for walks when he was

three years old and he helped me see the world through new eyes, his chubby two-year-old arms wrapping themselves around my side and saying “I wuv you, mommy.”

This is why I looked at him twice when he lied to me. If it were anyone else, I would have looked away. But my hope over-powered all the hurt, the history, the betrayals and lies. I hoped, “This time, this time, this time, he may be telling the truth. This time I might be wrong. Every kid needs a mom who believes in him. This time he could have chosen the right and good over hurt and pain.”

I cannot recall the number of times I have said, “Son, I want to believe you but... Son, someday, I won't be able to help you anymore and it will be out of my hands.”

And that day finally arrived. He was angry, called me a betrayer. I cried and remembered the times he had betrayed me. It hurt me to see my son feeling the same pain he had inflicted on me. This time the lies, the manipulations, the pleas wouldn't work. This time, it wasn't time out, to your room, no TV, no computer. This time it was serious. This time I must turn around and walk away and this time I'm grateful for the tears in my eyes because they blur the image of my son in handcuffs and leg shackles. My handsome, beautiful boy. My baby. My son.

What mother is not devastated to lose her son into the criminal justice system? What mother should ever have to face this agony? But, maybe the hardest was the absolute relief of not having to worry about what lies he might have told me tomorrow. The lies I would have agonized over, wondering if this time, this time, maybe he had chosen not to lie to me. I would have taken the worst truth imaginable over the lies.

This is not how I expected the story, my life, to go when I was handed my son on the day of his

birth. Facing the dichotomy of sadness and relief that he was gone was devastating. The “What did I do wrong? Maybe if I had... What ifs...” and the “He won’t be able to” spun in my head.

Maybe you (in the criminal justice system) feel thrown away, abandoned, forgotten. It’s not that we forgot, no, in fact it’s because we remember. Please, if there is any way possible for you, change our memories of you. Then there is true hope. This hope would be different; this hope wouldn’t be born of birthday recollections, toddling feet and sweet memories. This hope would be the kind of hope you have to rebuild piece by piece, day by day, week by week, month by month and even year by year. This is the kind of hope your mother needs.

The end of this story hasn’t been lived yet but the next two years my son spent in treatment for juvenile offenders. He returned home at the age of sixteen. He has learned empathy, why he chose, and sometimes still chooses, lies over truth, how to speak truth, how to face his past and has apologized for his past behaviors. He is forging a new future, but changing behaviors is difficult work. It takes time, commitment, personal resolve and being able to speak about feelings and consequences. What sixteen-year-old boy wants to talk about his feelings, thoughts and actions? I don’t know how this story will play out, but now, at least, I have hope for his future.

He is still smart, talented and fun. He and I are both grateful he has another chance to go to his prom, make friends, play hockey and learn to drive, but we can never take it for granted. If he doesn’t do the work, make the good decisions, every hockey game could be his last game and that prom date will never happen. Every meal we eat together could be the last one. The best, and the worst part, is that it is totally up to him. He gets to make the decisions about where his life is going and that is a relief, but

it is also scary. It's difficult to live with the uncertainty, but we go on living.

Mary Hackett:

For our Writing and Publishing class we had the opportunity to visit the prison in town to workshop our writing with the inmates. I was very hesitant at first to even sign up to visit, but I'm glad I did. I was overwhelmingly anxious as anyone would be to sit side by side with an inmate, with no walls, not barriers, no cuffs, and barely any protection.

Upon arriving, I noticed that the prison grounds and buildings are much like Mount Marty. The building where the classrooms are held oddly resembled Bede Hall by the architecture and even the smell. My heart was pounding out of my chest when we reached the classroom where we'd be locked in for the next two hours. Intimidation can't come close to describing how it felt to walk into that room, seeing ten inmates slouched in their chairs examining us in our entirety.

After several minutes sitting with my assigned inmate, my heart stopped pounding so hard and I got to relax to take in the experience. Although I didn't get much feedback from my partner over my writing, I hope I was able to give him some nice input.

Workshopping in our college class versus at the prison was entirely different. The prisoners had ideas and perspectives that we lack. But also we have perspectives that they lack. My partner had written a poem from the perspective of a woman, about her relationship with men and the battle within herself. In prison, he doesn't have female perspective and can only ask for male advice. He told me that Dr. Reese and others gave him some advice about going into detail, which he did to the best of his ability. But his original writing was spot on how any woman thinks. I'm hoping I gave him insight on that aspect.

I had only brought that one piece and a poem that touches on some personal aspects of my past. While he

was reading my poem, I'd glance over at him to analyze his expressions. He was awed at my writing; he said that it's amazing that a young girl like me can write something this strong. At that point, I didn't see his tan jumpsuit, his scribbled tattoos tracing his arm. At that point, he wasn't an inmate anymore, he was an admiring writer.

I did have the opportunity to share a short non-fiction piece about my grandfather in front of the diverse class. Of course I was nervous to present but I'm happy I did. The inmates were able to give me helpful advice on how and where to add details that'll add to my story. Students here at Mount Marty in my class didn't do so.

When it was time to leave, I shook my inmate partner's hand and told him it was a pleasure to work with him. I didn't know what else to say—have a good day? He's still in prison, how good of a day can you have? He wished me the best of luck with writing, school and soccer. While the rest of the class was gathered shyly at the door I was held back in conversation, leaving me isolated from the pack by male prisoners. Everything they had to say, I've heard before from other students. But it was so different; it actually set in my mind that people actually appreciate my writing,

Zach Telles:

Going to the prison was one of the most influential things I could have done for my writing. Many of the things that influence me are watching class videos of authors influencing others with their writing. This was the same except many people wouldn't give these authors the time of day.

The inmate I worked with was named Robert. He was very genuine and excited from the moment I sat down with him, as was I. The two hours that I spent workshopping with him and talking to him gave me such an experience that I won't be able to get anywhere else, or ever again. The way he wrote and wasn't afraid to say anything about where he came from or how his life was really gave me courage. It was very moving to see how he wrote and how he felt about

his writing. He handed me three papers and with each paper I could tell they meant the world to him. They were unique; from comedy to his life in Iowa, the writings were his life. It made me realize that everything I write I should love and care for, no matter what others think about it.

Robert was phenomenal to workshop with because of the perspective he gave me with my writing. Many people think it would be the perspective of someone that is locked up, but it wasn't. His perspective was one with passion for writing. Robert had passion not for just writing, but also passion to learn anything to better himself. He had written a poem based on his life, inspired by a song by Bob Seger. In my opinion it should be published in *4 P.M. Count* and it would mean the world to him if it was published. However, he had told me that he hadn't let anybody read that yet except for me, but it meant the world to him because it was about his life before.

Robert taught me to not be afraid of what I write and to be able to express myself in my writing without being scared or shy. He said he was and still is the same way. However, when we were reading our work to the class and asking for more advice and feedback something happened. Robert got up and decided to read his piece in front of the class and it was great to see him get out of his comfort zone a little bit and read his great work. It showed me that even I can do what I don't think I can if I have someone help me and show me a different perspective, which Robert gave me. He helped me with so much more than just my work but with life. I don't think he realized how much he impacted me with everything he told me and I could never repay him for that.

If I could, I would visit the prison again without a doubt in my mind. It really put me in touch with reality. I realized that every person in prison is not someone who is crazy, mean, or insane. Many of them are just like you or me, someone that made one bad decision that took them to a place that is worse than many other decisions would take some people. Those people have a genuinely great

personality and are looking for any way to better themselves for the now and the future. They were some of the most influential people I have met because they showed me that nothing in my life is as bad as it may seem. This visit was meant for an English aspect for school, and it was. Besides that, it was a life lesson for all of my classmates as well as me because we all learned more than what could come from a classroom.

When reality hits you, you want to do something about it. My visit with Robert and to the prison has made me want to do many more things with my writing and my life. It was one of the best decisions I have made. I wish that

the inmates have the same feelings that I still feel about them. The prison gave me hope and inspiration and that is some place I never would have thought I could find that. My sentence was a day but it was worth it.

Dallas Rusk: Strangers are Common

One's free, allowed to walk the street
 No count, no bed check, no last call for chow
 The Other can't leave
 Locked up physically but not the mind's eye
Many things separate strangers
 But writing is not one
Writing and working with a stranger must scare One
 But finding a good laugh and being free to unwind
 Strangers are common
 They meet, they share, they relate in some way
Sighs of relief when One lets the other read
 But so similar they are
 They both fear what others think
 Even if they say they don't care, deep down they do
Loud whispers allow others to look and to shush
 They look and laugh at each other
 Both thinking isn't this why we're here
 An ode to grandpa explaining the feeling of missing him
 While watching their last snowfall together
A prose for grandma knowing the memory was the last thing the

Other would see of her
 Strangers are common
 Both losing someone close to their hearts
Sharing personal things that brought them together
Through the art of writing
 One might have thought bad about the Other until
both
 realize
 The only difference is One's free and the
Other isn't

Mark Yost:

The workshop with the students from Mount Marty College was a useful exercise, and one that I enjoyed. I took a seat next to a young man with pink and blue hair. "This will be interesting," I thought to myself. And I can only imagine what he was thinking as I sat down, something perhaps like "Great, a middle-aged, balding guy who probably won't even care to understand my piece." After our brief introductions, we read each other's work. I enjoyed his piece very much. The story was about a secret that he had been keeping, and the difficulty in finding the right moment to tell his parents, which he desperately wanted to do, but only in the right circumstances. I could relate, both as a parent of children nearly this young man's age, and as a young man, the man I once was, holding secrets, ones that I wanted those close to me to know, so they could truly understand me. This young man's secret was personal and unique to him, just as mine was for me when I was his age. Neither of our secrets was illegal, immoral or improper, as one might guess they could have been. No, these were simply thoughts and experiences that were important to us at the time as we sought to develop a deeper understanding of the world, and of ourselves, at a formative stage in life. Of course, I read his piece with a particular bias in mind, a bias that was no doubt influenced by my perception of a young, twenty year-old man who had pink and blue hair. But I was wrong, quite wrong.

This young man is a clever writer. He took the reader to the point of nearly revealing the secret and then he stopped. This is a brilliant technique because everyone who reads this piece, I believe, will immediately be able to relate to the dilemma this young man faced in attempting to reveal the secret to his parents. It really didn't matter what the secret was. What mattered was the angst or apprehension that he faced, and the extreme care he took to find the right moment to reveal the secret. We have all faced similar circumstances in finding the best way to tell someone we love and respect, and whose respect we want to retain, our secrets. This young man's piece was well done. It was educational for me as I was reminded of the power of suspense in writing that effectively keeps the reader engaged while at the same time reminding the reader how much is at stake when we finally let go of a secret.

While I sat there and listened to his comments on my work, I could hear a lively buzz of energy in the conversations, the workshopping that was going on all around us. It was at this very moment that I realized what this moment was all about. Not only do we want to share our thoughts and secrets with others in ways that will liberate us and enlighten others, but we also want to hear what others think about us, about our thoughts, even our secrets, and about our work that reflects who we are in our most vulnerable moments. I can see how workshopping can be very valuable for both presenter and reviewer. There is nothing more important than getting good, honest, candid feedback. Workshopping does this. A wise man once told me that the "purpose of conversation is to expand the mind." Today's workshop reminded me just how true this saying is.

***UPON SEEING THE
NATIONAL PLAYERS
IN PRISON***



Marquise Bowie: I was very impressed. I hadn't seen a live play since, maybe junior high school, but none as an adult. To see good acting up and close in person gave me a new perspective on actors. The skill and discipline to memorize almost two hours of lines in front of a live audience, in a prison setting has to be real intimidating and nerve wracking. Doing a play like this while speaking in a difficult tongue or language, I'm sure, was also challenging. I really enjoyed the play. It was humorous and entertaining, and I look forward to seeing more in the future. I'm grateful that I got an opportunity to see such hard work. I am also thankful that I got the chance to meet them and tell them personally what a good job they did.

Borden Barrows: I was surprised by their willingness to come here, impressed by the simplicity of their sets.

Joseph Fulgenzi: Being swept away on this sunny Monday morning into one of Shakespeare's plays. Who would have thought that while doing my time here at the camp that I would be enjoying the theatrics of the National Players touring group. I had the pleasure of seeing them last year and I must say this year's production was much better. It could have been because the presentation was much more interesting to me and I loved the way they were so playful

in their antics and how their facial expressions seem to tell you so much of what they were trying to convey without saying a word. Or could it have been that we were given a summary of the story line prior to the production. Either way I was in awe and felt privileged and honored to have them here performing not only for me, but for my fellow inmates. Standing ovations are hard to come by with this group but the performance put forth by the actors seem to have been enjoyed by most of us; thus we awarded them this honor from all of us here at the camp.

Dallas Rusk: This gave me a good insight for when I return home. I can open my horizon to the theatre arts. I can now say I wouldn't mind seeing one, and I even admitted this in front of grown men.

Ivan Brooks: I think it is one of the best performances I have ever seen. It was on the same level as one of the Tyler Perry plays that I have watched.

Chad Sloat: I was momentarily transported to a place where Shakespeare takes precedence, where love is expressed in person, and where every word has ambiguous meaning. There was no "love and hip hop," no email or telephone, no distractions. There was me and my imagination free, at last free at last.

SKILL AND DISCIPLINE
SIMPLICITY
SWEEP AWAY
PLAYFUL
WITHOUT SAYING A WORD
LOVE IS EXPRESSED
EVERY WORD
MOMENTARILY TRANSPORTED
STANDING OVATIONS
BEST PERFORMANCE
MEANING
IMAGINATION
FREE AT LAST



All photos by Dana Jodozi



All photos by Dana Jodozi



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All photos by Dana Jodozi

OPERATION REENTRY

The Reentry Program at the Yankton Federal Prison Camp has been in operation since the institution opened in 1988. The staff members at FPC Yankton have been conducting release preparation classes in an effort to prepare inmates for reintegration back into society. Reentry programs provide the means to address barriers that offenders may face when released from a correctional setting. Some of the barriers offenders may face when releasing from a correctional setting are a lack of housing, lack of employment skills, lack of transportation, unresolved tax issues, or other financial obligations such as child support. Offenders may also experience difficulty if they have not obtained critical items like a social security card or birth certificate. In addition, they may not have sufficient health insurance or any health insurance at all. In an effort to reduce these barriers, various programs are provided to educate offenders while they are incarcerated and prepare them for challenges they will face when returning to their own communities. The goal of reentry is to reduce recidivism and decrease potential for future victimization. While working toward these goals, emphasis is placed upon utilizing taxpayer money in an efficient, yet effective way.

One of the first barriers an offender may face is finding employment. Finding adequate employment can be more challenging for offenders simply because of having a felony conviction or having gaps in employment. Finding a job can be further complicated because of a lack of job skills, lack of knowledge regarding how to complete a job application or prepare a resume, and a lack of experience preparing for job interviews. Simply finding appropriate clothing to wear during a job interview can also be a barrier. In an effort to reduce these barriers to employment, offenders are able to sign up for the Job Search Assistance Program, Offender Employment training, and attend mock job fairs. The

mock job fair at FPC Yankton provides offenders with the opportunity to be interviewed by outside agencies, service providers, and employers. They also receive feedback from the interviewer, which helps them to better prepare for future interviews. The mock job fairs, as well as courses on how to develop a resume and prepare for job interviews, have been a vital aspect of reentry efforts coordinated by the Education Department for years.

The second barrier offenders may face is obtaining affordable housing due to their criminal background. Felonies may restrict them from utilizing public housing programs. In addition to their criminal background checks, some landlords also conduct credit checks. A poor credit score can also decrease an offender's chances of finding housing. Having stable and affordable housing along with employment can assist in reducing the rates of recidivism. In an effort to reduce this barrier, representatives from housing agencies educate offenders about ways to prepare themselves for overcoming this obstacle. Inmates are also offered the opportunity to take courses designed to teach them about basic money management skills and setting budgets.

Having proper proof of identification like a social security card and birth certificate is a vital aspect of reentry. Without having the proper identification documents, an offender will have increased difficulty finding both employment and housing. In addition, not having these documents makes it more difficult to access other vital services and resources. Members of the Unit Team work with offenders to get birth certificates and social security cards prior to reintegrating back into their respective communities. In an effort to show the importance of having proper identification when leaving prison, multiple staff members emphasize these points during admission and orientation; Unit Team meetings; and various reentry classes. Staff members at FPC Yankton have also taken part in birth certificate drives to assist offenders by having them take the steps to obtain this important document.

Financial issues pose an additional barrier to successful reentry. Offenders often need to meet financial obligations such as child support, unpaid taxes through the IRS, and restitution. Ignoring these obligations while incarcerated can lead to situations that feel overwhelming upon release. In addition, failing to resolve these concerns can also prevent someone from obtaining a driver's license. Numerous programs are tailored to address these concerns. First and foremost, it is important to understand exactly how failing to address these concerns may negatively impact an offender's chances for success. If an offender does not address his child support obligations, he will leave prison owing large amounts of money. Falling behind in child support payments without communicating with those overseeing the child support creates a difficult situation that can prevent someone from obtaining a driver's license, which in turn can make it difficult to find adequate employment. To help address this concern, representatives from offices overseeing child support hold seminars that provide information to offenders regarding both child support modification and instructions regarding how to communicate effectively with these departments. Similarly, in an effort to educate inmates about tax obligations, a representative from the IRS conducts a class outlining the importance of filling out tax forms properly, information related to taking care of financial concerns, and the importance of paying taxes.

Reentry efforts for incarcerated veterans have improved. Multiple agencies work together to help keep incarcerated veterans from falling through the cracks. The Veterans' Justice Programs Coordinator is an employee of the Veterans' Administration. This person works closely with both staff at correctional environments and offenders in an effort to obtain services and utilizes resources for veterans, which can greatly assist the transition back into society. In addition to the Veterans' Justice Programs Coordinator, representatives from the American Legion, Veteran County Service Office, and the Veterans' Employment Office of

the Department of Labor work closely in educating and assisting veterans. This helps released veterans better understand the process of obtaining both services and benefits from the VA when reintegrating into society. FPC Yankton has also held DD214 drives for incarcerated Veterans. A DD214 is a document showing such items as character discharge, military training, and awards received while in the military.

Prior to an offender's release into the community, it is important for him to gain an understanding of the Affordable Care Act. An Outreach and Enrollment Specialist for the Affordable Care Act (Navigator) gives a presentation to the offenders about what to expect and the steps needed to obtain health insurance. This may increase an offender's chances of obtaining health insurance which, in turn, can help ensure that those returning to society are able to afford adequate health care. This can make it easier to hold employment and meet other obligations.

FPC Yankton staff members have also been able to use video conferences with U.S. Probation, Residential Reentry Centers (RRC), and family members. Through these video conferences, staff and offenders have been able to communicate with U.S. Probation Staff from as far away as Guam or Hawaii. This has led to valuable discussions where inmates are informed of expectations of RRC, probation, and other aspects in a way that allows them to better prepare for release prior to their transition date. This technology has been used with various U.S. Probation districts: Washington, Montana, Wyoming, Missouri, Kansas, Wisconsin, and Iowa. Its use will continue to expand, since it has offered a cost effective way to improve many aspects of reentry.

In conclusion, the goal of reentry is to reduce both recidivism and an offender's potential to further victimize others. One of the main ways that this is done is by working in concert with offenders, various agencies, multiple departments at FPC Yankton, and family members to identify and address barriers to a successful transition back

into society. In addition, this multi-disciplinary approach benefits from incorporating new technology to facilitate better communication and further increase chances for success. Even though Reentry was not given a formal title in the Federal Bureau of Prisons until 2011, staff members at FPC Yankton have been using a variety of resources to conduct this type of programming since 1988. Staff members will continue to work to further refine reentry programs to provide an increased chance for success to offenders.

Brett Keller
Reentry Coordinator
Federal Prison Camp Yankton
Federal Bureau of Prisons

REENTRY SIMULATION

FPC Yankton hosted a reentry simulation using staff and volunteers from the community. Each participant was assigned a “life card” that included information (financial and employment status, educational history, housing circumstances) outlining his path as a newly released offender.

During four fifteen-minute sessions, each representing one week of the month, the inmates performed various tasks to experience firsthand the challenges they must overcome to successfully transition back to the community. Some of the stations they navigated during their “week” included going to work, banking, checking in with probation, providing a drug test, acquiring food and shelter, obtaining clothing, visiting a career center, acquiring a driver’s license, visiting a grocery store, and seeking additional education/vocational training.

All photos by Brett Keller.





Robert Johnston



Robert F. Johnston Jr. was born in 1961 and raised with his five brothers in the small farming community of Eddyville, IA. He has four children and six grandchildren. He spent his youth fishing, hunting, and playing school sports; he served in the Air Force while being stationed in Japan, Philippines and South Korea. He worked as a journeyman electrician prior to being incarcerated, and while in prison, he has earned his Associate of Science Degree in Horticulture from Mount Marty College, Class of 2013. He enjoys writing and plans to write stories about the people of Eddyville. Upon his release, he is going to resume his electrical career and spend time with his family.

MY MUSIC, MY LIFE

Turn the Page, Bob Seger, 1972

This timeless classic brings me home wherever I am. If you have ever ridden on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle you know what I mean, if not then I hope after reading this you will have some idea of what it's like not only to ride a Harley, but to embrace the lifestyle that goes along with it.

“On a long and lonesome highway East of Omaha,” that's Iowa, that's home.

Your one note song becomes a symphony, Willie G's 5th when there's a hundred Harleys running down the highway all playing in concert.

The wife, the girlfriend, or the one night stand, you can't even remember her name. Just smile to yourself, “Man, I love them redheads.”

The tempo of the dotted lines flashing by is hypnotic. Your thoughts are wandering everywhere, got a song stuck in your head that keeps playing over and over again. Was it the one the redhead was dancing to, or the last one the band played?

You're riding side by side at seventy miles an hour just inches away from your wing man. You look at each other and smile, he's got bug splattered on his glasses, you say to yourself, “Man, Wild Bill sure loves them blonds.”

Home is still six hours away, you haven't had a shower in three days, you're hung over, and then it begins to rain.

Turn the Page

You walk into the restaurant cold, hungry, and wet. People shift in their chairs, heads turn, and the men sit up and take notice. Some make eye contact; others don't. You feel like a cowboy in a John Wayne western, no cowboy hats or cattle, just a herd of bikers in black leather.

Some have the look of disgust. You see it all the time,

you know the look: eyes staring at you, then a squint with a slight shaking of the head, silently saying, “We don’t want you here.”

Others have the look of envy. You know that look too. They look at you until they make eye contact then bow their heads and stare at the floor.

The local men talk just loud enough for their friends to hear and boost their egos. Then self-preservation kicks in and deep down inside they hope with all their hearts you didn’t hear them. An old farmer wearing a grimy Pioneer seed corn hat and bib overalls spouts off, “Hey Martha, doesn’t that one have pretty hair? Must use Valvoline 40 weight to get it that greasy.”

It’s always the same story, one or two of the locals wants to build a reputation. “Who do we have here, kind early for Halloween, ain’t it boys ?”

Most times, you don’t respond, because by now the local police are parked outside the restaurant looking over the bikes and checking license plates.

Turn the Page

When you’re out there on the highway you are a million miles away. You are away from work, from your bills, and away from the daily grind. Freedom, freedom of the open road.

After waiting all year, you’re stoked to have finally arrived at the rally. The camaraderie strikes the heart like the rumble of an old Panhead. There’s a helping hand for anyone who needs it. Everyone is smiling and greeting old friends with a genuine, heartfelt hug, with a slap on the back and a “How you doing, brother?” or “Where did you ride in from?”

The music you play comes from the sound of your motorcycle with the two-inch drag pipes you can hear coming from a mile away. Loud pipes save lives!

The motorcycle you worked on yourself, leaving skinned knuckles, aching back, and fingers rubbed raw from

wrenching on it just to make it there and back.

Turn the Page

Friends call each other late into the night, giving updates and making sure everyone made it home. Jewels give the reports out like a sportscaster.

“Crazy Charlie is broke down north of town on sixty-three and needs a trailer.”

“Wild Bill snapped a chain after doing a burnout, Ed took him a new one.”

“Howdy’s sporty wouldn’t start, points fried, Bones has a new set in his saddlebags.”

The final update is that everyone made it home safe, this time.

As you lie awake in bed and reflect on the weekend, you still have the sounds of a hundred screaming Harleys ringing in your ears. Loud pipes save lives!

Right before you close your eyes you remember what the redhead said, “Hope to see you next year. Here’s my number, handsome.”

Turn the Page

A LINEMAN'S STORY

TAap-tap-tap, that's the sound, that unforgettable rhythm that lets people know, "Hey! The old lineman is coming." Tap, tap, tap, it's getting closer. There he is, swinging his white cane back and forth as he walks. Left-right- left. One tap, one-step in military marching style, head up, feet straight. Once you hear it, it stays with you like a song stuck in your head playing over and over. It wasn't always like this for the lineman. Fate had dealt him a hand that to some would have devastating effects but to the old lineman, well, he wasn't going to let fate stand in his way. No sir-eee. This is his story, but I cannot tell his story without including some of my own along with my mother's and five brothers', because the old lineman is my father.

Robert Fredrick Johnston Sr. was born June 6, 1934, one of five siblings, three sisters and one brother. Times were hard back in those days, but his parents always managed to keep the family fed and a roof over their heads. His father Fred worked as a dragline operator and owned a tavern called "The Welcome Inn" that he and his mother Edna ran. His Grandfather, Fred Sr., was the local gravedigger and town marshal in the small southeastern Iowa town of Eddyville. History has noted Eddyville as being the beginning of the Oregon Trail. The last place west of the Mississippi River; one could be outfitted for the Oregon Trail in that part of the country. The town celebrates this honor every year with Oregon Trail Days parade.

The Des Moines River runs through Eddyville, giving the area the colorful history of an old river town. Jack London even wrote of it once when he passed by while floating down the river back in the 1800s.

Just like Dad, my brothers and I spent our youths swimming, fishing, and hunting along the banks of that river. I remember Dad telling us the story about the infamous "Dead Man's Rock." The rock is located right in the middle of the main channel. The actual account on how

it got its name varies according to whom you talk to. Dad's version is this: Back in the early 1900s a boat with several African-American coal miners were out on the river at night and hit this huge rock and all hands were lost. What makes this story unique to the area is the fact there were no African-Americans living there except a few coal miners and they lived in their own corporation town several miles away. I've told the legend to my children and can only assume they will tell my version of it to theirs.

Dad had a standard set of rules for us every time we were about to embark on one of our river adventures. "You boys be careful out there on that river. Watch that undertow in the current and stay away from Dead Man's Rock. Be home before dark, I don't want you boys out there on that river at night," he'd say.

Of course one of our first adventures was visiting Dead Man's Rock. Dad enjoys reminiscing about his youth on the river and the first job he landed at the age of thirteen, delivering ice around the end of WWII.

"I had the coolest job in town," he says. The icehouse was good place to hang out during those hot Midwestern summers. As much as he liked to hang out in the locker on those hot days he still had a job to do, making the deliveries. The deliveries had to be made as fast as possible and he made his rounds like nobody's business. His hard work didn't go unnoticed because Francis' Grocery Store also hired him to stock shelves and make their deliveries. As the war ended, the country was full of promises as troops coming home after years of war were dreaming of a better future. Dad worked hard because he had big dreams—dreams of owning his own business someday.

He bought his first car when he was fifteen. It was a 1928 Chevy coupe with a rumble seat. He was a very handsome young man, with dark wavy hair and bright blue eyes. He could be seen wearing a black leather jacket, blue jeans with the cuffs rolled up, and his hair combed back like James Dean. "I was a real cool cat in those days," he says.

I dressed much the same in high school: black leather

jacket, bell-bottom blue jeans, and long curly black hair. The only thing different was the cuffs, which were out of style by then.

Dad continued to work for Francis' grocery store until he graduated from high school in 1952. After graduation, he became the manager of the local creamery. Not bad for a young man getting started in life. His dreams of owning his own business seemed to be within reach, his hard work paying off with plenty of opportunities coming his way. Then came the opportunity of a lifetime, the "Rural Electrification of America Project." This was to be the defining moment in his life. The project was simple; build high voltage power lines across America and connect to a grid system so all Americans whether living in the large cities, small towns or rural communities, could have electrical power available to them.

In the fall of 1952, he started what was to be his lifelong vocation, and went to work as an electrical lineman. In December of 1953, he married Audrey Burke, a beautiful Irish-American woman with green eyes and auburn hair. In May of 1954, he became the father of Danny, the first of six sons. His life was moving along like an American dream, but like all dreams, his life did not follow a script. In 1958 he was drafted into the United States Army, and his second son Gregg was born. Soon after his enlistment, he received orders for deployment to Frankfurt, Germany.

Back in those days, enlisted men were transported on troop ships when deploying to Europe. On board with him was a young man from Memphis, TN. They had orders to report to the same unit—the Third Armored Division, Hell on Wheels.

Dad said he saw his traveling companion only a few times after reporting to his unit. Everybody wanted the boy from Memphis in their unit. I guess I should mention the young man's name, for it was no other than the King: Elvis Presley. Dad sent Mom a picture of their son Danny, autographed by Elvis. "Best wishes to Danny Boy." When asked about his time with the King, he says the young girls,

whether German, Italian, French, or any other European nationality he encountered, would come running up to him as soon as they saw the Third Armored Division patch on his shoulder.

“Hey, GI. Where is Elvis? I want to see Elvis.”

“Hey, Yank! Get me a date with Elvis,” they’d scream.

“What’s wrong with me?” he’d say.

“You’re not Elvis Presley,” was their reply.

After reporting for duty, he resumed his first job as a deliveryman, but he wasn’t delivering ice or groceries to little old ladies anymore. He was delivering secret messages. The young man from the little river town was going on missions all across Europe with a briefcase and his own personal bodyguard, packing heat: a sub-machine gun and a Colt model 1911 .45 automatic pistol. Dad was a courier for the Third Armored Division. The cold war was going strong at this time. Berlin was on the verge of being severed by the infamous Berlin wall. Those missions were vital to the Allies’ efforts to keep the peace in war-torn Europe.

When his two year enlistment ended in 1960, he returned to his family and went back to work as a lineman. His life was finally back to normal after his long absence from his wife and two sons until February 1961. He got reactivated back into the Army. This time, he was in the famous First Infantry Division also known as “The Big Red One.” He was stationed at Fort Riley, KS. This time his family went with him and in September of 1961, I was born, his third son and namesake, Robert Fredrick Jr. I share his dark complexion and wavy hair with brown eyes instead of blue. Mom says said I resemble dad’s side of the family and had my grandma Edna’s hair. This is unique because all the rest of the boys look more like mom’s side with the traditional Irish traits.

By 1962, he completed his second enlistment, returning to Iowa and his American dream. In September of 1962, Mom gave birth to her fourth son, John, named after dad’s brother. In October 1963, Mom gave him another son, number five: David.

As the 1960s passed, He was rising up through the ranks of his company. He went from climbing poles to eventually becoming a superintendent. In October of 1966, he would become a father for the sixth and final time: Jeffery.

Dad worked for L.E. Meyers for over thirty years. The L. E. Meyers Company is one of the largest union contractors of high voltage power lines. His job kept him away from home most of the time. The family knew if there was a tornado or a big ice storm anywhere in the Midwest, he would be called to work. "See you boys later, got a big storm job to do," he would say.

If our power didn't go out we would be glued to the TV watching the news reporting on the storm damage, especially when mentioning downed power lines, in hopes of catching a glimpse of him in action. We did see him on the news a few times and when we did, the whole house would erupt with six boys going crazy with excitement.

"There he is!" I'd shout.

"There's Dad," screams David.

"Yep that's his truck." John yells

"You boys quiet down now, I'm trying to listen," Mom would say.

Mom was just as excited but what she really wanted to know was the extent of the damage because that would give her some indication as to when dad would be home. Would it be one week, two weeks, maybe longer? I might add that Dad's brother John and mom's stepfather John were also linemen. As soon as the news reports were over, mom would spend the rest of the night on the phone if it was still working, getting updates and waiting for Dad to call. There were no cell phones in those days. Sometimes we would have power and no phone. Other times the phone would work but no power. We all knew better than to even think about answering the phone after a storm. It might be dad, grandma Lena or my aunt Peggy with an update.

With all those long hours together with his advancement in the company, Dad purchased a small acreage five miles outside of town in 1970. Right after

moving in he installed a huge sign above the driveway with everyone's name on it. Big letters across the middle read Oleo Acres, The Poor Man's Spread.

He put that sign up letting the world know, "Hey! This is the Johnston's, we're here, and we have the finest five acres around." He was a proud man, with a proud family.

Soon after buying the farm, the dream of owning his own business finally came true. He and his brother John started Johnston Electric. He continued working for L.E. Meyers and Johnston Electric seven days a week, twelve to fourteen hours a day.

Eventually, as my brothers and I got old enough to climb a ladder or dig a trench we worked for Johnston Electric. I started my own lifelong vocation as an electrician working for Johnston Electric as a young teenager, crawling through attics and under houses. The attics were not bad but the crawl spaces under those old houses were nasty, if not a little scary, to a young boy. Dad would dish out orders to us as he did to his men at work. "Crawl in there and take that wire to the kitchen," he'd say.

"I can't see. I need a flashlight," I'd tell him.

"You don't need a flashlight to see. Just look for the light coming through the hole in the floor and poke the end of the wire to me." I'd grab the end of that wire and go like hell, shouting out a curse word after I banged my head on a floor joist. "Keep your head down now," he'd say. I could tell by his voice that he was smiling when he said it.

He was right. I didn't need a light. I learned how to get around in the dark. How ironic those words are now, "I can't see" and "You don't need to see."

"You don't need to see." Did he know something then? Was he trying to teach me something about life? I did learn some things. I learned to keep my head down when crawling through those basements, and I learned I can find my way in the dark. After many hours spent in those dark basements and attics I did the same thing that Dad did. I learned how to get around.

I could navigate through those old houses without a

flashlight. Matter of fact, a flashlight would have only gotten in my way because I wouldn't have been able to see the light shining through the hole on the other side. I just had to look for the little beam of light shining through. We have spent a lot of time reminiscing with dad about working on those old houses. Dad can explain in minute detail exactly how he wired each one. It reminds one of those old airport movies when the pilot dies and someone else has to land the plane by listening to the instructions from someone on the ground.

Dad was not all work and no play. He and Mom rode around on their motorcycles together. It wasn't long until several others around town were riding with them. We boys always managed to go on the rides, one with Dad, one with Mom and the rest were split up amongst the others. I used to like to ride with my uncle Ray. We would line up like kids getting picked for a team in school. Husbands, wives, and kids, I mean everybody went on those rides. As the family members got old enough to ride they would help haul the younger ones. Eventually we were riding our own bikes.

Dad also liked to fish. He built a cabin about seven miles downriver from town where we could spend our summers. Even though Dad did not get much time to enjoy the cabin, Mom made sure he fixed it up nice for her and the boys. Dad may have called the shots at work, but at home, Mom was the C.E.O. of Johnston Family Incorporated.

Those days at the cabin are some of our fondest memories. We all thought Dad had the biggest and fastest boat on that part of the river. It was a sixteen-foot Johnboat with a seventy-five horse Johnson outboard. However, it wasn't some fancy ski boat; it was a fishing boat and that's what the Johnstons used it for.

We knew that all of us couldn't go at once, so Dad took us in turns. The four younger ones, including me, would go first. Then the two older ones would go. Or sometimes the other way around. That's how we did things in our family. We were accustomed to it. There was no fighting or arguing amongst us about whose turn it was.

“Robbie, John, David and Jeffery, get over here,” we’d hear Mom say.

“Get your lifejackets on, boys, we’re running trout lines and ditty poles,” Dad would say.

It was like calling battle stations in the navy. We had learned how to put our own life jackets on quickly at an early age and be ready when Dad gave us the OK to come aboard. Mom would line us up like a jumpmaster. She would inspect all our lifejackets then send us down the steps to the dock one by one. We would assume our positions, the four of us lying side by side across the bow hanging on the front. I always had the honor of untying from the dock and casting us off.

My brothers and I would be on the lookout every Friday night for the orange Chevy pickup with an orange light on top. Mom had her very own surveillance team. She would just go about her business until she heard her sons screaming with excitement.

“Dad’s home! Mom, here comes Dad,” we’d yell.

As the orange truck rolled down the lane, we would continue surveillance with our eyes peeled looking to see what he had in the back of the truck. Sometimes it was a new motorcycle, maybe some bicycles or new fishing poles for everyone. One time he came rolling in with a barber’s chair for Mom. It was a bona fide barber’s chair complete with adjustable head and footrest. It swiveled and even had a pedal to pump it up and down. It looked just like Floyd’s on Mayberry R.F.D. Dad put it up right on the edge of the bank under a cottonwood tree. That way Mom could sit and keep an eye on us while we were fishing, swimming or just hanging out on the dock in Dad’s boat. We had a lot of fun in that chair, pumping it up and spinning it around. We did get our hair cut in that chair. My brothers all got butches but mine was so curly mom didn’t have the heart to cut it too short.

Dad, in his infinite wisdom, knew that we boys would be on the boat and on the river most of the time when he was gone. He built a huge dock, shaped like a U, so he could

pull his boat in the middle. We could play safely on the dock or in the boat. My brothers and I learned how to swim near that dock. Mom would insist we put on life jackets and tie a rope around us so the current wouldn't carry us away. There she sat in that barber's chair like a lifeguard. The neighbors laughed at first, but before you knew it, Mom and that barber's chair became quite famous on that part of the river. I don't know if it was the chair or the beautiful Irish woman sitting in it that got all the attention.

Dad's American dream was coming along nicely, but as we already know, dreams do not follow a script. As the '70s came so would heartache and tragedy. Mom and Dad divorced in 1975, and in November of 1978, we lost Danny in an automobile accident just outside of town.

Danny had just gotten married in September and had child on the way. His American dream was starting. I'll never forget the last time I saw him. it was on a Friday night. My brothers John, David, and I, along with some friends, were at the city park just hanging out. Danny went by in his Chevy van with music jamming. He waved, and we all waved back. We were excited that night because he was moving back to the farm that weekend with his new bride and opening day of pheasant season was that Saturday, and we were all going hunting together. Not long after he went by, we heard sirens and watched as the ambulance went flying past the park in the same direction. We didn't put two and two together until my cousin Bobby came running up to us, white as a sheet.

He could hardly speak; all I remember is him saying, "D.J. has been in a wreck, and it's bad. Come on, were going to the hospital," he said.

Bobby already knew that our big brother, the oldest, the one we all looked up to, didn't make it; we found out later.

"I just didn't have the heart to tell you boys," he said many years later.

It was a nine-mile drive to the hospital and all the way there, somehow I knew he was gone. When we pulled into the hospital emergency entrance my uncle Mike and older

brother Gregg were standing in the entrance. As we went running up, my uncle Mike came running to us with tears in his eyes. "We lost him, he's gone" he said.

"I want to see him!" I screamed over and over.

"It's not him. They got him mixed up with someone else," said one of my brothers.

When I saw Dad's orange truck, I knew right then, without a doubt, he was gone. The orange truck that brought so much happiness whenever I saw it was now filled with sorrow as the remaining sons rode back to the farm packed together in it. We could have gone in different cars but this time we wouldn't take turns. We stayed together. We have been like that ever since. Even after we all grew up and moved on with our lives, when one needs help we drop what we're doing and go. No questions asked. Most of the time we act before the one in need asks for help. We have been there for each other no matter what.

"Danny was called on to be your guardian angel." That's what the preacher said at his funeral. I think this is true because throughout my life, and my brothers will say the same, anytime we've been in a life-threatening situation, be it at work or the many car accidents that we have been involved in, none of us has been seriously hurt.

This next chapter in Dad's life is not about reaching his dreams or getting remarried to his beloved wife and lifelong companion. This part of his life is about being able to accept the inevitable. Dad was slowly going blind. His vision was fading away like a summer dream. He had macular degeneration, and this disease was slowly robbing him of his vision. Around 1982, he retired from his life's work, and his world started turning grey.

He did not let that stand in his way; he simply changed the script and started a new life. Mom and Dad remarried in 1980. He knew then he had a lot to do before the disease took its full course. Dad and Mom, his lifelong companion, started buying antiques and hauling them to California for resale. Mom was the pilot and Dad the copilot. After many years on the road, he had memorized the roads and exits all

the way to California.

“Be careful on that exit off of I-35, and make sure you turn on the one for I -70 West when you get to Kansas City,” he’d say while driving Mom nuts.

“Robert! We’ve been on I -70 west for an hour,” she’d say.

“Oh ! I didn’t see the sign,” he’d say with a smile.

Dad eventually went to a school for the blind in Tacoma, WA. He was getting himself prepared so he could do things on his own. He would be doing things on his own because, in 1993, Mom and Dad were divorced for the second time.

He has never slowed down and does not look like he ever will retire completely. Even though he retired from L.E. Meyers back in 1982, he can still work with most of the young kids he hires to do odd jobs for him. Dad likes to hire the kids around the neighborhood to do little jobs for him; that way he can still call the shots, and it teaches the kids that hard work pays off because for he’s known to be quite generous.

He is the commander of American Legion Post 418 and has been for over 30 years. He also runs the weekly bingo game at the Legion. You can see him up at Highland Cemetery every May helping place flags on the veterans’ graves—Danny being one of them. Dad spends a lot of time making sure the cemetery always looks good.

In the early 1990s, the state decided to build a highway past the cemetery. Dad decided that the cemetery needed a monument, so he called on the U.S. Army. After all, they called on him on two separate occasions. He wanted a big artillery gun at the entrance to the cemetery even though he cannot see. He did not want the motorists driving by a plain old cemetery. Now, when you drive by the Highland Cemetery, located on a hill just outside of town, setting there aimed toward the East, at exactly forty-five degrees, also known as “parade rest,” is a 155mm Howitzer in all its glory.

Today, dad buys and sells automobiles, tractors, trailers, or whatever else tickles his fancy. He also works on the cars

and trucks that he buys. He loves going to auctions, and he can be seen holding his white cane and bidding on items that he cannot even see.

Dad lives by himself now, and Mom lives just a few minutes away. They are forever bonded together. Mom takes him home-cooked meals and checks on him every day. Rarely a day goes by that one of Dad's many friends and family members do not stop by to visit. He is always busy or going somewhere. For Dad, there is no quitting or giving up, it's just TAP-TAP-TAP business as usual for the old lineman, my Dad, Robert Johnston Sr.

TWO WING BEATS AND GONE

There's an old farm house down a dead end road, about a mile outside of town.
Hasn't seen a coat of paint in years 'cause no one lives there now.
Two Schwinn bikes and an old Ford truck are setting in the yard.
Weeds growing up around the house make it hard to find the door.
A sign reads, "No trespassing, violators will be shot on sight."
Birds fly through broken windows, raccoons hide inside.
The front door hangs off broken hinges, the steps aren't much more.
Standing in the kitchen, you can feel the spirits of those who lived before.
Tom passed on in '69 and Betty in '74.
Out back is a bright red barn, with two Harleys parked inside.
The bikes were new back in '68, but they have never had a ride.
You see, the boys had gone to Vietnam, and there they lost their lives.
Their message written in the dust on the tanks by the finger of some unknown Vet:
Semper Fi, I will never forget.
Now the Harleys sit inside that barn; with a friend, they share their home.
A Great Horned Owl greets them every night, with two wing beats and gone.
There's an old red barn down a dead end road, about a mile outside of town.

S. Marielle Frigge



Marielle Frigge, OSB, holds an MA in biblical theology from Washington Theological Union and a PhD in theology and education from Boston College. She retired as Professor of Religious Studies after 33 years at Mount Marty College in Yankton in May 2012. Since then she continues to teach and speak in various venues, including her own and other religious

communities, the Avera Health System, and various local and regional communities and ecumenical adult education contexts. Sr. Marielle authored *Beginning Biblical Studies* (Anselm Academic, 2009) and a second, revised edition of her book was published in September 2013. Sr. Marielle also writes biblical commentaries for Liturgy Training Publications in Chicago, and serves as associate editor and book reviewer for *The American Benedictine Review*, a national scholarly journal dealing with topics of Benedictine and monastic interest.

A LETTER FROM S. MARIELLE FRIGGE

To the members of the Creative Writing class of 2014-15:

Thank you, gentlemen, for letting me work with you on “What happens after I’ve found my voice and started to actually write.” That is called: editing. Every writer, no matter how experienced or well-published, knows that revising and editing one’s work is an integral part of the thinking process and of communicating what one truly has to say to one’s chosen audience. I was happy to see so many good submissions in draft form, and at least for me, our one-on-one sessions seem helpful as you hone the pieces you plan to publish in this journal.

If anyone were to ask me, “What most impressed you with this year’s writing class?” I would have to say that it’s hard to decide on just one thing. But one striking factor was this: quite a few of you allowed some deep, even hidden parts of yourself to emerge in the writing process. I suspect that some of the experiences that surfaced (and their effects on you) may have been previously unknown even to yourselves.

You caused me to reflect on many years of working with high school and college students, who often had similar experiences in the writing process. So I have chosen to share with you a poem that these young people evoked; perhaps it will seem familiar:

go away

go away.

you’ve touched my skin

now

go away.

that's enough,
don't you think?
why should you want
to go deeper
under my skin?

what's the matter
with you?
there is nothing
there
under the skin
to find.

i will tell you
you don't have to
find out yourself
(neither do i)

i will tell you
myself
there is nothing
under the skin
nothing
except
fire and ice

and maybe
if you go away
fire and ice
will shred the skin
so
you can't touch
even that.

and then fire and ice
will stand uncovered
if you go away
don't

go away
don't
touch my skin

but behold
fire and ice.

Thank you again for your willingness and openness in the
work of revising and editing your writing.

Marielle Frigge, OSB

Steve Coyne



Stephen Coyne's collection of stories, *It Turns Out Like This*, will be published in the fall of 2016 by New Rivers Press. His short stories have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The New England Review*, *The North American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and others. He has won a *Playboy Magazine* College Fiction prize, a Robert's Writing Award, a Heartland Fiction

Prize, and a *Prairie Schooner* Reader's Choice Award. His story, "Hunting Country," was chosen by Ann Tyler as one of the best stories published about the South from 1996 to 2006 and is republished in *Best of the South II* from Algonquin Books. His story "Iceboy" won the 2013 New Millennium Prize for Fiction. Coyne teaches American literature and creative writing at Morningside College in Sioux City, IA.

A LETTER FROM STEVE COYNE

Dear Creative Writing Students:

I want to thank all of you for your encouraging and thoughtful comments about my visit with you in June. I have a number of specific things I want to get to, but first let me encourage you to keep working at your writing. The more control of language you gain the better. And there is no more effective way to gain such control than to practice doing difficult things with words. Telling stories is not easy. How many of us have been frustrated by telling a story that is misunderstood? Often it's because we did not tell it well. When we tell a story about ourselves well, we can see what happened more clearly, and others can see it better, too.

Writing for yourself alone can be very useful. But writing for others and giving them an experience through words is extra fine. Putting experiences into a language package that the reader can unwrap and enjoy is not only fun but essential to being human. The more we write the more we contribute to what other people can read, and the broader society's sense of what life is like becomes. Through literature, we can live so many more lives than just our own. It gets us out of our selfish concerns and into the concerns of others.

My former student, Bethany, who wrote the memoir about her father being in prison, did that. Talking about the prison experience from the perspective of the family gave some of you a new view of the situation. Stories, well told, take us out of ourselves and give us glimpses of other lives.

Marquise says that it was a confidence builder for me to ask for your feedback on the story I read. I'm glad. But really, it makes perfect sense. All of you are human beings with some of the dirt of life under your fingernails. What better audience could I find to test the humanity of a piece

of literature? Dallas notes that he missed some of the early information in the story and got the wrong idea of how old the characters were. This often happens with audiences. Different people grab on to different aspects of the story. How to use the feedback one gets from an audience is the question. It may just have been that there were enough interruptions that some of you missed certain parts of the story. It may have been that if you were reading it on the page you would have been able to pause and go back to re-read and get that aspect of the story figured out, or it may have been that I did not do a good enough job of making the two men seem to be the age I want them to be. As I continue to work on the story, I'll watch out for that possibility.

John asks if there's ever a time in the development of a writer when making artistic sentences becomes automatic. I think yes. We can learn the habit of active, vivid sentences. The trouble comes when you try to string two such sentences together. And then three. Issues of repetition, clarity, rhythm, and voice become very tangled in longer pieces. These challenges occupy the whole mind. It's one of the most difficult things people can do.

Chad says he finds the "fermentation time" for his writing frustrating, but after our conversation he is less impatient with that. I'm glad. For one thing, the stories we tell aren't usually facing a deadline, so why rush? They grow the way they grow. For that reason, a person who wants to complete a writing project needs to have more than one going on at a time. That way when you get sick of one project, you can put it down and pick up another project that you feel more optimistic about. Never work on a piece that makes you despair.

Mark believes there may be a large audience for the story I read to you, and he may be right. Such a mob of baby-boomers are becoming geezers every day that end-of-life-stories may become more popular.

Finally, Borden says that my story took him back to some of the places of his childhood. I'm sure a lot of you

spend time imagining other places than where you are. Hell, I do too. In fact, writing has been a way for me to visit those places I love most. When I write a story set in some place from my past, I can hear the sounds and smell the smells again. I listen to the accents in the way people talk. I can revisit the things I used to think and feel. And the best part is that I see me then, but I know what I know now.

My sincere thanks to all of you, again, and best of luck.

Yours,
Steve Coyne

Warren Mckeithen, Sr.



Mr. Warren Mckeithen Sr. is a glass smooth, no jive turkey, rite on, groovy, chi-town found, shut your mouth, sho-nuff get down, solid, home grown, product of the Shaft in Africa version in the Good Times gone Heavenly episode of Life with a Pen. May GOD B-4-Ya.

BROKEN GLASS

I woke up late this morning and heard screaming. Our day could start that way no matter what was going on. I left for school on time because my breakfast managed to be on strike while negotiating a cost of living increase. My age is seventeen, and my worth is of no value today. That's what I've been told for as long as I could remember. Our town is small with the bulk of the population working in the mines. Town people travel very far to work in the mines.

My dad went to hell when I was seven years of age. Well that's what I've been told and constantly reminded of since I was five years old. Mom said that I looked just like him. She said I have his eyes. My teacher thinks I can go to college despite my reflection. Ten years ago while visiting, I told my dad Sterling Johnson punched me in the face. He confronted Sterling's dad and things got out of hand. My dad drove his car into the office of their family's mine company. He loved me, and always told me so.

Standing on the curb looking at the explosion, hearing people yelling and crying wasn't only devastating, it was life destroying. Half the town worked at that mine and was there picking up paychecks. "Sterling's done whatever he pleased. He is fourteen years old," my dad said. "And he better keep his damn hands to himself." Sterling's dad looked at him then blinked at two huge men in his crowded office. They picked up my dad by his collar and threw him out of there into the mud. The employees laughed and said that's the only way to dirty up mud. Throw trash in it. His eyes met mine for the last time. He then got into his car and drove through the front office window. The new plastic explosives on the boss's desk worked fine, and everyone in town lost someone that day. No one was ever kind to me after that. Dad never saw that coming. I enjoyed my stepmom and her son, my two year-old brother; they treated me like family.

Well, I can't afford to go to college anyway. I'm sitting at

my desk when the principal calls me to the office. He tells me, "If you get beat up, take it like a man. Life isn't fair. Keep your shirt clean, take a bath because you stink, no one is going to ever marry you, your stepmom is a whore, your little brother is a bastard, your dad cheated on your mom with his new wife when you were young, and she was smart enough to leave him. You need to regret every day what you done and the problems you caused; if you were not born my brother would be alive, still have his mining company, and people in this town could work closer to home. I'm sorry but I wish you never existed." I reply by saying that the thought of life not being fair is compelling.

A DIFFERENT LOVER

Not used to you washing and ironing my clothes.
Not used to you cooking my breakfast each morning
without fail.
Not used to you kissing me before I go to work every day.
Not used to you getting down on your knees to remove my
boots when I come home.
Not used to my dinner being prepared and my drink iced to
perfection, served as I view TV.
Not used to getting into a warm bathtub and bathed like a
newborn child, each day.
Not used to lotion being massaged onto my skin from my
head to my toes every night.
Not used to the love you shared so freely in abundance
every night.
Not used to being alone, after finding a heroin addict's love
can surpass all disguise.
Not used to "a different lover."

A CHI-TOWN LUNCH IN THE PARK

A true view of Chicago is like an airplane on O'Hare's runway. Although the destination has been determined the weather often predicts the plane's serenity. In our city, the parks forecast weather. Chi-town can be very cold. These parks are unforgiving: Rodgers Park, Lincoln Park, Columbus Park, and Hyde Park to name a few of the Lakeshore Drive culprits that span about fifteen miles. That's the Chi-town dirt I'll attempt to pave.

In a city where so many shots are fired but no one lies down, you need to know some facts about the Chi-life. They are: food is better up north when it costs more; when driving on the West Side and the area doesn't look safe, stay in the damn car; the reason why there is so very little traffic on the far East Side is because there is very little to do; and last but not least, the downtown loop is where the South Side starts and the south lake has the best fishing on the South Side.

It was northern thinking that forgave the 1979 snow storm but not the Mayor of Chicago. They elected a Plain Jane and allowed Chicago to Byrne. I'm pushing 65 mph north on Lakeshore Drive only to return back to the place I just left. No matter how tough the day turned out I always felt God's spirit relieving me when I hit this stretch of town. Still, if you spent time in the Chi-style, you'd find the windiest part of town is in our ability to remain true to our differences. I mean we are just not going to agree about the political direction of our city.

Now the Cubs won the North Side's pride and almost won, if it weren't for the glove of a North Sider's son. Our Bears won the super bowl, then the Bulls and Black Hawks also prevailed. The Sox somehow made our differences dimmer and allowed the World Series to calm the weather and galvanize the parks. With so many celebrated

Chicagoans making contributions to the world's stance, It
makes one wonder, will we as a town make yet another?
"Yes We Can."

STOP WATCH

Stop the change is wrinkled. Someone bent the nickel and
the silver has faded into grey.

Don't tell me I'm looking younger just let me know I look
healthy.

Darkness, feels kind, and sometimes warm when your
vision becomes your hearing.

If your hearing is not the best, then just ask to beg their
pardon to repeat the statement.

If the grown men start crying, what are the babies going to
do?

Watch how this nickel isn't worth five cents and grey is the
color of the new late thirties.

I'm sitting with my dad whose blindness creates light, but
still reveals an oxymoron of sorts.

Seeing his coffee-stained bed and handing him his new spill
proof cup.

Once a man, twice a child, he requests until he demands
mindful, necessities which secure us.

He said "Son, turn my TV to my channel so I can hear my
wrestling match, or it's going to be hell to tell the captain."

I would wake him up an hour later with dinner and a cold
glass of Coke and the time passed.

WRITING IN PROGRESS



The first time Pulitzer Prize winner and two-time United States Poet Laureate, Ted Kooser, visited one of my college classes he had us write down five things we noticed that day. It's an exercise I continue to incorporate into my classes. At the prison we walk the track and write down new things we discover—things that we never realized were right in front of us. - Jim Reese

All photos by Jim Reese.





