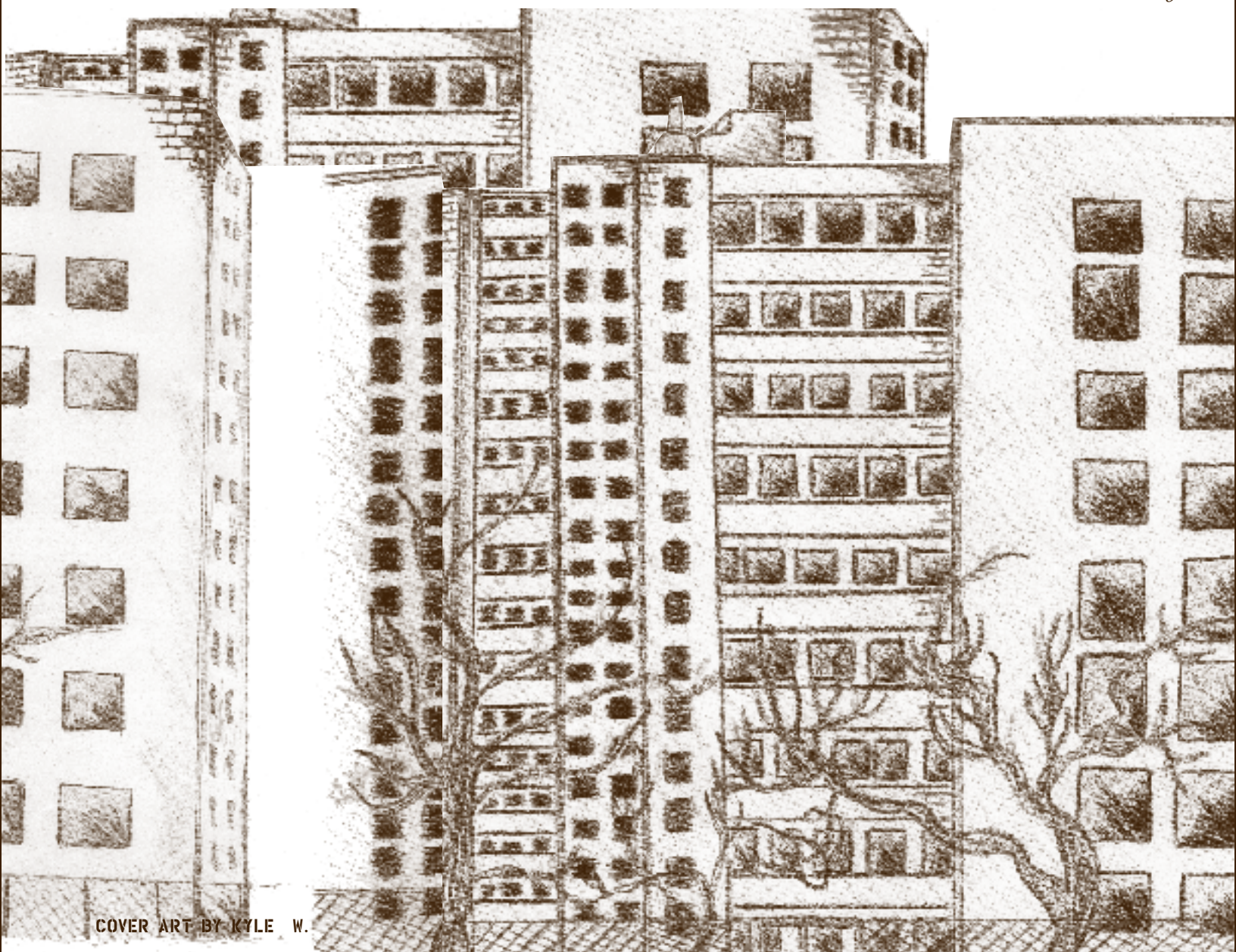


# TIME TO GO.

A COLLECTION OF NANCY B. JEFFERSON ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

*student art and creative writing.*



COVER ART BY KYLE W.

# MISSION STATEMENT

The Thread of Development Literacy and Creative Media Program provides deeply personalized print literacy tutoring, as well as opportunities for creative expression through writing, visual art, and music production to youth incarcerated in the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center. We produce this annual anthology of student writings and a number of other publications throughout the year. We serve as a resource to the Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School, housed in the C.C.J.T.D.C. Your support can help us provide this critical programming inside the jail. Please consider making a contribution.

To support our work, you can make a donation to:

Thread of Development Literacy and Creative Media Program  
c/o Chicago Lights  
126 E. Chestnut  
Chicago, IL 60611

Or contact us at [prisonpoetry@gmail.com](mailto:prisonpoetry@gmail.com)

Thanks!

# INTRODUCTION

"They can turn the lights out/But it'll still shine in you."  
- Sanova D.

The Thread of Development Literacy and Creative Media Program at the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center serves Illinois' most vulnerable children. Our students are between the ages of 10 and 19 years and are awaiting trial, awaiting sentencing, or serving time in jail.

Each student has a unique and powerful story to tell. They can become the narrators of their own stories and authors of their own futures. Literacy, self-expression, an understanding of themselves and their surroundings are key to overcoming the weighty obstacles each of these young people face.

Publishing our students' work helps our students to take their own stories seriously. In our writing workshops, student critique one another's writing and analyze the writing of famous poets and writers. Seeing their work in print changes the way these incarcerated students view themselves, and reading their work may alter the way they are regarded by their families and friends.

This is the fourth anthology our program has published. The demand for the anthology among youth incarcerated at the Detention Center has risen immensely in the past year.

Students, staff and teachers ask us every day for copies of the anthology to read in their rooms and to use in their classrooms. By distributing this collection of writings by youth, we hope that we are creating a dialogue within the Cook County Juvenile Court System, helping to build a sense of community among the youth and adults in their lives.

We hope that teachers will use this book in their classes, that it will become part of the curriculum at Nancy B. Jefferson, that staff members will encourage youth to read it and discuss it on their units, and that it will inform our views of the young people who have been entrusted to our care. We hope that Judges, Public Defenders and others who work within the court system will read this collection and reconsider the young people they have encountered: Did you know the youth in your care are capable writers and artists?

Too often, our students have been defined by the worst thing they (may) have ever done. Our justice system

is set up to define the young people we work with as "criminals," "gangbangers," and "thugs." Often we see our students based entirely upon their deficits, the skills they lack, rather than by their talents and gifts.

In fact, we rarely know anything of the histories of the students who come before us. Rather, their assets are buried under a history of trauma and violence, the stories of which are difficult to access.

We recently hosted a reading at Nancy B. Jefferson School, by the writer Luis J. Rodriguez. In his recent book, *Hearts and Hands: Creating Community in Violent Times*, Rodriguez spoke of respect, and how important that word is to everyone inside the criminal justice system. Young people want to be respected, and so do the adults who work with them. Frequently, however, no one feels respected, and thus, we all feed into a cycle of degradation and violence. Rodriguez says "At its root this is what the word respect means, from the Latin, *respectus*: 'to look back at, to reconsider, to see again.'"

Readers will see that some of our authors use the medium of poetry to reveal themselves, their secrets, wounds, and dreams.

When we asked our girls' poetry group what they want adults in the court system to know about them, they came up with the following statement; "We want to be seen as more than the crime we are here for. Many of us are good singers, great authors, and smart. We have stories to tell. Many of us could be future artists, doctors and lawyers. We want a chance to become those things."

We hope that in some small way this literacy program can help our young people transform their identities and lives. So please, read their stories and poems. See them as they are, as complex and growing, talented and sophisticated, brilliant and struggling for identity and meaning, our own children. Look again.

With respect,

Amanda Klonsky and Ryan Keesling  
Thread of Development Literacy and Creative Media Program  
Nancy B. Jefferson School

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

AM I BEAUTIFUL?: WRITINGS ON IDENTITY	What Would Life Be?	Hopelessness	Sometimes These Walls Can Close In On You	Untitled
The Spirit of my Life	Sanova D. aka Kadafi.....p. 11	Jennifer W.....p. 15	Close In On You	Joseph B.....p. 24
Tyreece J.....p. 7	Circle	Dear World	Julius F.....p. 20	My Head is Spinnin' Da Dre.....p. 24
Parts of Me	John Lillig – NBJ Teacher...p. 11	Keutea M.....p. 15	Today	This Thug Philosophy Da Dre.....p. 24
Kimberly M.....p. 7	Family Circle	Life	Deneka L.....p. 20	All Alone
This Free Stuff	John Lillig – NBJ Teacher...p. 11	Demarcus C.....p. 15	One Month	Maurice F.....p. 24
Tarius W.....p. 7	For You, Loneliness	Expressions	Jomar L.....p. 20	Time to Go
Beautiful	Martha J.....p. 12	Joseph B. ....p. 16	Nobody Knows	Roxanne S.....p. 25
George R.....p. 7	Life Goes On	Future	Anthony B.....p. 20	Pain
There Was a Fool	Joseph B.....p. 12	Orlando E.....p. 16	Today Wasn't My Day	Guiliano B.....p. 25
Corey W.....p. 8	Freezing	The Black Panther	Deneka L.....p. 21	I Lost
I Am	Levelle N.....p. 12	Black P aka David B.....p. 16	Locked Up In a Place	Michael Q.....p. 25
Keith M. G.....p. 8	The Future	Soul	Tarius W.....p. 21	Coward's Way
Who Am I?	Sanova D. aka Kadafi.....p. 12	Shawn D.....p. 16	The School	Danielle S.....p. 25
(essence poem)	When I Get Out	Illness	Joseph B.....p. 21	This Poem About Being Locked Up
Jasmine H.....p. 8	Renika R.....p. 13	Joann M.....p. 16	A Review of The Secret Life of Bees from Danielle S.....p. 22	Lavell B.....p. 26
Who I Am	Doesn't Matter	Sadness and Pain	Long Time No See	How It Is In J.T.D.C.
Orlando E.....p. 8	Levelle N.....p. 14	Steven G.....p. 17	Angelo S.....p. 22	Rudy C.....p. 26
MIXED EMOTIONS	Sunflower	I Thought but I Didn't Think	Grown Man's Life	Reflection on Jail
My Pain	Stephen O.....p. 14	Guiliano B.....p. 17	Jomar L.....p. 22	Sheri P.....p. 26
Jomar L.....p. 10	Greens and Strawberry Patch	Eyes of the Dying Public	Change	26th and Cal
Young Black Boy	Tyrell P.....p. 14	Peter G.....p. 17	Tiffany H.....p. 23	D.O.Dillon –NBJ Teacher p. 26
Guiliano B. ....p. 10	Flower: An Acrostic Poem	FIRE IN THE COMMUNITY: BEING IN JAIL	When It Comes Down To It	DREAMING AND REMEMBERING
Why	Keutea M.....p. 14	Burning On the Inside	Joseph B.....p. 23	My Imagination
Keith M. G.....p. 10	To Unexplainable Joy	Nicholas S.....p. 19	How I'm Feeling	Martha J.....p. 28
Five Minutes: How I Feel (ex- cerpt)	Patricia C.....p. 14	JTDC	Tashera V.....p. 23	Restaurant Window
Jessica W.....p. 10	Mixed Emotions	Levelle N.....p. 19	I F***ed Up	Noel R.....p. 28
What's Wrong With Me?	Nicholas S.....p. 15	Untitled	Nicholas S.....p. 23	Days on the Block
Tarius W.....p. 11	How I Feel	Joseph B.....p. 19	In My Room At Night	Juan R.....p. 28
	Joseph B.....p. 15	Being Locked Up	Joseph B.....p. 24	
	Untitled	Lashay H.....p. 19	Emotions from the Heart!	
	Dorian S.....p. 15	The Real Picture	Kenya P.....p. 24	
		Guiliano B.....p. 19		

Hit With a Stick Charles F.....p. 28	I Wonder Daphne S.....p. 32	REDEMPTION Lights Out Sanova D. aka Kadafi.....p. 38	Edwin S.....p. 61
I'm Swimming Corey W.....p. 28	A DEDICATED HEART: WRITINGS ON LOVE	Not Giving Up Clyde H.....p. 38	Confusion Samantha S.....p. 60
I Wish Barbara T.....p. 28	My Baby Brandy D.....p. 34	Remember Me Tyreece J.....p. 38	The Disturbance In My Life Anthony B.....p. 62
I Wish Michelle S.....p. 28	So Seductive Sanova D. aka Kadafi..p. 34	The Last Day of School in JTDC Marquita P.....p. 38	Today Tondalia D.....p. 62
I Wish Marquitta P.....p. 29	Like a Knot in a Rope Tarius W.....p. 34	Struggles Harold B.....p. 39	Not Too Long Ago Jose L.....p. 61
I Wish Tiara H.....p. 29	Sweat Karla B.....p. 34	Untitled Lashonna H.....p. 39	Remorseful Christopher P.....p. 58
A Dream? Anonymous.....p. 29	A Dedicated Heart Nicholas S.....p. 34	My Blessing Guiliano B.....p. 39	My Life Story Orlando S.....p. 63
Family Teenage Mother Bianca M.....p. 31	Things You Can Do For a Good Woman Jonathan P. a-k-a Low...p. 34	A Prayer Laquita B.....p. 39	One Summer Night Jeffrey R.....p. 65
Picking Petals Johnathan D.....p. 31	The Things I Will Do Tarius W.....p. 35	My Destiny Kalifa .....p. 40	The Transformation Over Time: A True Story Jomar L.....p. 56
My Daughter Makala Anonymous.....p. 31	Missing You Molly.....p. 35	As I Sit in the County Bullpen Tarius W. ....p. 40	
Late at Night Amanda.....p. 31	When I Hear Your Voice Tarius W.....p. 35	We Guiliano B. ....p. 40	
Dear Grandma Robert.....p. 31	Caring For Plants Tyreece J.....p. 35	What is Change Anthony C. ....p. 40	
I Miss My Daughter Nereida C.....p. 31	My Love Lashay H.....p. 35	Past Orlando E. ....p. 41	
My Baby Joann M.....p. 31	What is Love? Tarius W.....p. 35	United We Stand Travis W. ....p. 41	
Mom I Will Always Love You , I Will Always Care	Love Expressed Sanova D aka Kadafi.....p. 36	I Stand Keith M. G. ....p. 41	
Gabriella R.....p. 32	If Only You Could Let Me In Jose L.....p. 36	Someone Lead Me Levelle N. ....p. 41	
Dedicated to My Grandmother Anonymous.....p. 32	From Your Admirer Sean L.....p. 36	We're coming Kenya P. ....p. 41	
Grandma, Grandma Jasmine H. ....p. 32	Love is Freedom David Walker – County Staff .....p. 35	Pride Guiliano B. ....p. 41	
Mom Davanise A.....p. 32	Untitled Keenan R.....p. 36	Hate Guiliano B. ....p. 42	
Mr. Collins Isiah J.....p. 32			
How I Feel Josslyn T.....p. 32			

COVER ART BY KYLE W.



# *the Right to be* BEAUTIFUL WRITINGS ON IDENTITY



THE RIGHT TO BE BEAUTIFUL

PAINTING BY MARTHA J.

## THE SPIRIT OF MY LIFE

TYREECE J.

I am a building  
In Chicago.  
I am raspberry  
In my mother's room.  
I am my mother's dreams.  
I am putting my mother  
through so much pain.  
I am joyful like my grandma's life.  
I am the thunder in the night.  
I am the Sears Tower,  
when the wind blows I am still standing.  
I am a hurricane destroying homes.  
I am Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. giving a speech.  
I am my mother's soul, soft and beautiful.  
I am a pit bull  
with no fears.  
I am the night  
when it rains.  
I am the baby blue of  
the sky in the morning.  
I am my brother's, sister's,  
niece's, nephew's imagination.  
I am Tyreece, still strong and prayerful.

I am a changed person  
with a new life.

## PARTS OF ME

KIMBERLY M.

It is the passion in my heart.  
It is the swiftness in my walk.  
It is the kindness in my mouth.  
It is the gentleness in my touch.  
It is the sweetness in my breath.  
It is the fullness of my body.  
It is the wetness on my tongue.  
It is the warmth in my arms.  
It is the brightness in my brain.  
It is the consciousness in my attitude.  
It is the fun in my laughter.

It is all the parts that make up ME  
and the wisdom and understanding in my life,  
that makes people enjoy being around me.

## THIS FREE STUFF

TARIUS W.

I was told I'm a slave  
With no chain  
And no fieldwork  
But in the brain  
That I hope still work  
To set me free  
But from what? Myself and my people?  
What does it mean to be free?  
Would I wake up with no feeling?  
Would I have to worry about money and a place to stay?  
Would sunshine still take away the rainy days?  
Who would I pray to? What will I pray about?  
This free stuff is stressing me out  
'Cause I feel I won't be free until I'm dead  
and out of this world

## BEAUTIFUL

GEORGE R.

Beautiful, am I beautiful or am I something that people  
look at and say damn you are f\*\*\*ed up? Do you have  
the right to say that someone is ugly? Do you have the  
right to tell me that it is not right for me to love a boy?  
Do you have to tell me that I can't see my kids? Do you  
have the right to tell me that I can't keep my nephew  
with me in my house? Do you have the right let my  
foster family rape me up to the age of 15? Do you have  
the right to put your hands on me when I am in jail? Do  
you have the right to tell me that you want me dead?  
Do you have the right to pull me along on one of your  
sex games? Do you have the right to tell me that you  
look better than me? Do you have the right to say that I  
haven't been raped in my life for 15 years? Do I have the  
right to be beautiful? I do.

## **THERE WAS A FOOL**

COREY W.

There was a fool  
Who knew my name  
Who knew my thoughts  
Who knew my game.  
There was a fool  
Who knew my kid  
Who knew what I would do before I did.  
There was a fool  
In this world  
Who knew my mom  
Who knew my girl.  
There was a fool  
Would roam the streets all day  
Stuck in a gang  
Who had no father and just wanted to hang.  
There was a fool  
Who would stuff his feeling in a box.  
There was a fool  
Stuck in a cell  
Who got a second chance out of his cell.  
There was a fool  
I could not see  
And it turned out that this fool was me.

## **I AM**

BY KEITH M. G.

See, I'm like a Viking,  
With a fierce entitle.  
Or should I say a Neanderthal, who founded fire?  
I'm like a knight in shiny armor,  
Or is it that I just feel like a U.S. soldier?  
I'm like an Indian, who hunts for prey.  
Or should I be the buffalo  
who is the prey?  
I'm like an Eagle, which flies so high.  
Or should I be a Space Shuttle,  
which goes past the Earth's sky?  
I'm like a Cheetah, running so swiftly.  
Or should I be a turtle  
that walks so slowly?  
I'm like a slave, picking cotton with no freedom.  
Because I'm in jail  
Behind a locked cell for a reason.  
I am

## **WHO AM I?**

(ESSENCE POEM)

JASMINE H.

Funny  
girl  
sister  
shy  
sweet  
black.

## **WHO I AM**

ORLANDO E.

I could tell you if I wanted  
What makes me what I am.  
But I don't really want to  
Because you don't give a damn.

*mixed*

# EMOTIONS



MIXED EMOTIONS

## MY PAIN

JOMAR L.

My pain  
is my life.  
with out  
no pain  
there will be  
no life to live.

## YOUNG BLACK BOY

GUILIANO B.

Young black boy so angry and high strung  
because he's used to people saying and telling him  
that he's dumb.  
He wants a chance in life like you and me  
but with these walls in the way of his eyes it's hard  
for him to see.  
So being where he lives hood rich is the plan  
with a gun in his hand this is the way he's taught to  
handle things like a man.  
He's misguided, not encouraged, with a lot of things  
going on in his head,  
thinking he learned right,  
truth is he's being mislead.  
With lack of love and not knowing how to feel safe,  
he feels he's always going to be last  
in this never-ending race.  
Young black boy locked down in a cage, another way  
to seal this growing rage.  
He is being denied this privilege to be free.  
He felt a lot of pain but this is pain  
to a different degree.  
Spending most of his adolescent life in jail,  
wishing he can bond out of life, but it has no bail.  
He no longer cries. His hurt is no surprise.  
The place where he is allows no emotion in his eyes.  
Any more bad news he feels he will go insane  
with hurt and confusion building in side like a  
clogged drain.  
This young black boy is just trying to  
hold on to his sanity  
but he feel's he would rather die than  
live in this calamity.

## WHY

KEITH M. G.

Why did they have to die?  
They left so many families there to cry  
When the Twin Towers fell down  
They left New York with a Secret Memorial Ground  
A ground where nearly 5,000 bodies were found  
Now our soldiers are in Iraq  
Because President Bush sent them there  
He solemnly swore to protect the U.S.  
He lied  
Because thousands of U.S. soldiers died with Pride  
While their families in America can't do nothing but cry  
When Bush became President it was the worst that  
could happen  
He started a war  
That was never suppose to happen  
Soldiers die  
While we cry  
Because George Bush the President  
ain't what's happening.  
WHY

## FIVE MINUTES: HOW I FEEL

(excerpt)

JESSICA W.

I want to go home. My birthday was on July 27th and  
no one came to see me. I wasn't expecting them to,  
anyway, since my family doesn't care about me. My  
court date is in 5 days and I probably will come right  
back here. That will suck. I can't stop thining about my  
little cousin and I miss both of my cousins so much.  
I'm hungry and I want to eat some Kentucky Fried  
Chicken. I can't wait to make my phone call on Sunday,  
because we didn't get them last week. I want to go  
shopping for clothes.

I am cold, hungry and I miss my boyfriend. . . . When  
will all of this be over? When will I be free?

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?

TARIUS W.

What's wrong with me?  
My mind is set on sex and money  
And I know that's not right  
I try fighting but against what? Myself?  
Brothers and Sisters I need some help  
At understanding what's going on  
What can I do to help me be strong?  
And get rid of these evil thoughts

I been holding on to for so long  
Is it something I seen that made this happen?  
Is it something I was taught that got me shorter than a  
midget in my mind?  
Somebody please listen and pay attention  
As I spill out my feelings  
I' m in need of a healing  
God's close around I can feel him

## WHAT WOULD LIFE BE?

SANOVA D. AKA KADAFI

What would life be?  
Without smiles, to keep you warm?  
Without strength, to hear the storm?  
Without eyes, to see the skies?  
Without ears, to hear the wise?  
Without change, to help you grow?  
Without tears, so pain could show?  
Without fear, too scared to see?  
Without life, what would it be?

## CIRCLE

JOHN LILLIG – NBJ TEACHER

Circle of ability and talent  
Circle of words, stories, poetry  
Circle of pain, hurt  
Circle of doubt, question  
Circle of beauty – soul-beauty, heart-beauty  
Circle of strength, power  
Circle of regret, sorrow  
Circle of hope, inspiration  
Circle of desperation  
Circle of applause, appreciation  
Circle of love  
Circle of growth  
Circle of self-actualization  
Circle that unites us  
Circle of inclusion  
Circle of realization

Circle that separates us  
Circle that no one wants to be in

## FAMILY CIRCLE

JOHN LILLIG – NBJ TEACHER

My great-great-great grandfather was enslaved in chains.  
My great-great grandfather was enslaved by whips.  
My great grandfather was enslaved by prejudicial laws.  
My grandfather was enslaved by prejudicial people.  
My father was enslaved by drugs.  
My father's son is enslaved by gangs.  
My father's grandson is enslaved by my inability to  
-- break the circle.

These thoughts came to me when I listened to the poems and stories that some Nancy B. Jefferson students/ Cook County Juvenile Detention Center residents shared in a poetry/story reading circle in Spring, 2006.

## FOR YOU, LONELINESS

MARTHA J.

Havin' to walk down a dark road,  
Tryin' to tear my heart down.  
I refuse to let it happen.  
I wonder how you take things I cherish away:  
my family, my friends.

I suggest that you stop cause this will be the last time  
it should be a crime  
I decided to replace you but with what?

Something more wonderful,  
something I would like to have more of.....  
tears of joy, smiles, happiness, and love .

## LIFE GOES ON

JOSEPH B.

Life goes on,  
Faster moves the clock,  
Up to you to remain on the block.  
Life goes on,  
Bullets fly past as you hit the floor,  
Keep it up, remember your last walk through your door.  
Life goes on,  
Remember it only takes one mistake,  
Mess up once, your life they'll take.  
Life goes on,  
Time to get out of the game,  
'Cause if you die, who's the one to blame?  
Life goes on.

## FREEZING

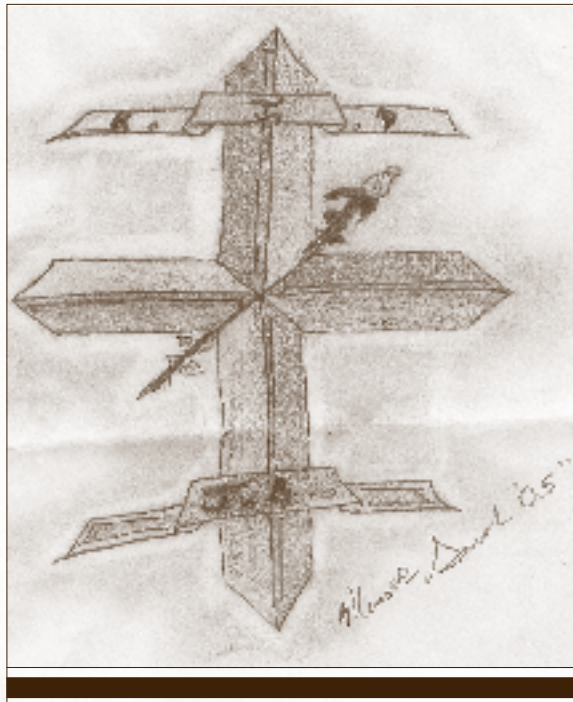
LEVELLE N.

On a cold day  
everybody shivering  
While one man homeless  
and one guy pimping  
Pimps are lames  
Lames are people  
Who likes 2 play games  
I think it's a shame  
U can't spell your own name  
It's a freezing day  
Look at the snowflakes  
While u shiver and shake  
U are homeless on  
A freezing day

## THE FUTURE

SANOVA D. AKA KADAFI

The future  
Is never seen  
Darkness felt  
Hatred heard  
Long seconds  
Passing by  
One by one  
I count them all  
Infinite pain  
Joyous grief  
Such as life  
Afraid to change  
Waiting on death  
Pondering wealth  
Too close to reach  
Too far to taste  
Distant soul  
Lonely self  
Regretful years  
Sinful tears  
Distilled heart  
Rebellious eyes  
Forbidden truth



DRAWING BY MARCUS S.



PAINTING BY KAWANA B.

### WHEN I GET OUT

RENIKA R.

when I get out of here the first thing I am going to do is go to the movies and out to eat and then I am going to buy me some shoes and some more new clothes and then I am going to get my hair done and go to the food store and buy every thing I eat get everything I like and then I am going to get my own crib and then think about going to school and have some kids and love my family just like they love me treat every one the same

## DOESN'T MATTER

LEVELLE N.

Doesn't matter what race  
You are just as long  
As your blood is red  
Doesn't matter if your  
Bed is hard just  
As long as you have a bed  
Doesn't matter if you make  
A mistake just as long as  
You don't make it again  
Doesn't matter if you failed  
A test just as long as you  
tried your best  
doesn't matter if you're  
mad at yourself just  
as long as you don't take it  
out on nobody else  
doesn't matter if you're good or  
bad, mean or nice, rich or poor  
doesn't matter if you're scary  
or emotional just as long as you  
don't cry over spilled milk  
doesn't matter what brand of  
shoes you have just as long as  
you have some shoes  
IT DOESN'T MATTER

## SUNFLOWER

STEPHEN O.

Sitting outside in the shade enjoying the weather,  
Understanding that every day won't be like this.  
Never knowing when a winter storm is coming,  
Feeling like the summer breeze, while drinking lemonade.  
Living a life with many days to come,  
Overflowing with joy and laughter.  
Watching the sun set in the beautiful sky,  
Expressing the way I feel through painting pictures.  
Reminiscing on the days I used to have fun with my friends.

## FLOWER: AN ACROSTIC POEM

KEUTEA M.

Find beauty in all the smallest places;  
Locations are small and unique, with varying capabilities  
Organic materials grow from the smallest places  
Window sills are where they sit, getting a summer fresh-air  
breeze warm and stuffy  
Ever more, will they continue to grow?  
River banks are where the prettiest ones  
sit in their last resting place...  
Some small, yet some big, some are unique,  
yet some are bold,  
some are long, some are short, some are ugly,  
yet still hold beauty.

## GREENS AND STRAWBERRY PATCH

TYRELL P.

I remember when I was about ten years old, my aunt  
had a strawberry patch in her back yard. I remember  
the days when strawberries were big and juicy, that the  
moment you picked them, they burst. I remember pick-  
ing around five to ten strawberries, taking them into the  
kitchen. I washed them, and then I sat on the front porch  
enjoying every single bite, hoping that the moment  
would never end.

I remember when my aunt grew some greens. Those  
greens were so good, especially with some hot sauce.  
They grew about two feet tall, towering over most of the  
other plants. The greens were delicious when seasoned,  
bursting with flavor as fresh as a new pair of shoes.

## TO UNEXPLAINABLE JOY

PATRICIA C.

I see you  
looking into a mirror  
You overcome all the sadness and terror  
You are in him just as he is in me  
I can talk to you honestly  
Why do you leave for so long?  
Time flies by  
So many right things made wrong  
You promised me you'd stay this time  
And never leave again  
You promised you'd be forever, my private friend

You speak to me so loud and calm that I could never  
forget  
When you left I turned into the thing I most regret  
So easily you flow in me                      like blood in veins,  
So easily you slip away like                thoughts in my brain  
I'm keeping you                                      you'll never leave  
I'll throw away the key  
If you go I'll hate you and don't know who I'll be  
So hear me loud and clear  
I love you very much

## MIXED EMOTIONS

NICHOLAS S.

I feel like losing control, but grab hold of my heart  
Right when I feel it's over, that's when the pain starts  
I feel like hurting someone but I'm a kind man  
I see the light, so why do I feel like I'm a blind man  
I try to keep a steady pace but my mind's moving fast  
I wish my life would last for what I've done in my past  
The spirit is so strong, but the flesh is so weak  
When I say I'm doing fine, s\*\*\*, I'm lying through my teeth  
I know what I need but it ends up in confusion  
I guess it's just reality portraying my illusion  
I feel peace in my heart but war in my soul  
As a baby I was sweet, as a man I am cold  
I claim I'm doing right but my actions prove me wrong  
I really need to talk when I say leave me alone  
My nigga's always told me tribulations happen often  
But I don't wanna trade places with that man in the coffin  
I'm serious at times, when I speak people laugh  
They don't take me for a joke, you see them people do the math  
People sleeping on corners without shoes on their toes  
And we steady make big issues about hundred dollar clothes  
See a man with no hand feels much pain but stays focused  
I just pray I maintain, sorting out my mixed emotions

## HOW I FEEL

JOSEPH B.

I got much anger,  
Trying to hold it in before I hit a stranger,  
I'm in one bad mood,  
Feels like soon, people are gonna think I'm rude,  
I know I know how to act,  
My anger wants to explode and that's a fact,  
It seems like too many days to go,  
My bad side I don't want to show,  
Faster and faster moves my heart,  
This is the end but it feels like just a start.

## UNTITLED

DORIAN S.

People think the world is a joke.

## HOPELESSNESS

JENNIFER W.

Hopelessness is a sick bird,  
unable to lift its head.  
It can no longer fly,  
no longer lift its wings.  
It can do nothing but lie on the pavement,  
watching the world pass by,  
knowing its world is over.

## DEAR WORLD

KEUTEA M.

Dear World,

I been confused from the beginning...  
Choosing not to lose cause I like winning...  
Some say you are a riddle, others a mystery...  
You a great story, and still here through history...  
I don't get how can you be so cold...  
But other times you are warm like lovers'  
stories untold...  
You gave me so much pain and grief...  
But you also gave me a good time underneath...  
You are like a maze that's so complicated...  
No exit, no escape, no one knows what lies for me...  
You was there, my first kiss, my Margie...  
You was there, my long life drifts like a  
worthless carriage...  
You were here from the end to the start...  
Now it's time for us to say goodbye, it's our  
time to part...

## LIFE

DEMARCUS C.

Bullet-riddled cars with young Blackman inside.  
How can another person survive when he always getting  
high?  
Not knowing when he going to die.  
You live life to reach the sky  
your goal is your high.  
My life is crazy, can't nobody save me  
It feel like I was Brenda's baby.  
I got a short temper so I explode like an M80.  
I don't know where to start, that's why I'm heartless  
feel like I been left out in the cold or in the dark, s\*\*\*.  
And the way my life was going I was a gun already  
cocked  
then I became the bullet, and now I hit the wall and rot.  
Now my life stop.  
Why do the good die young like God's only son?  
My life is like a pit bull put in a dog fight.  
Why is the sky blue, because it reflect the ocean, right?  
My sister got a little girl  
Blood is thicker than water.  
This how the story begins.

## EXPRESSIONS

JOSEPH B.

Through a poem I express how I feel,  
Other than that I close my feelings with an imaginary seal,  
My feelings I don't want people to see,  
In here paper is my best friend, trust me.  
If it was up to me I'd stay in my room and write,  
Every time I walk out my room it's the same old sight.  
But this is my fault,  
I put my own life to a halt.  
I can't wait to get out,  
I'll be free, free without a doubt.

## FUTURE

ORLANDO E.

I have dreams to be someone  
Everyone have dreams  
Everyone have a past  
But if you try to destroy my dreams  
I'll beat your a\*\*

## SOUL

SHAWN D.

Life may seem cold  
When you look into the  
Eyes of the soul,

Look back at the lessons  
That were told and everything  
Will unfold.

Life can be cold when  
You look into the windows  
Of the soul.

## ILLNESS

JOANN M.

Is a big sloppy pinkish  
waste traveling through my little body  
making its way up through my intestines  
and coming out my mouth smelling like two  
day old stew entering the oval  
toilet like running water turning it on  
and off like a child playing under the  
faucet leaving me unmoveable and miserable.

## THE BLACK PANTHER

BLACK P AKA DAVID B.

I'm that Black Panther that roars loud,  
I'm black and I'm proud.  
I was that little cub that hid behind my fears  
Rippin' up my enemies,  
watched them disappear.  
Rippin' off their soul  
Like bullets shoot through bodies.

I flow. I grow older.  
I survive through the winter,  
watch my brother and sister die from the blizzard  
all together like ice cubes in trays.  
Hurts so bad. The street enters an ice age.  
Flip over the book,  
now you got a new rampage until the end of my days.  
My claw cuts through the darkness like a switchblade.

Feel my rage and anger.  
My skin turns colors but I'm still the Black Panther.  
Got to stand up for my rights.  
We all together, not going nowhere without a fight.

Like Jet Li, leave teeth marks on an apple tree.  
I disappear from the rainbow  
Now you see me  
I sting like an arrow inside a Roman's body,  
hit you like a tsunami.

I'm black with my pride.  
My words so true it make an ogre cry.  
Beautiful, from the rainbow in the sky,  
I walk past the crowd like an angel that fly  
The gold glow on me like 18k jewelry.

No, I'm not a cartoon or a Christian movie.  
I'm the Black Panther from the jungle  
that came to the street.  
Hold on, I got a couple of words that I cannot speak...

That's the end of the rap,  
turn off the beat.

## SADNESS AND PAIN

STEVEN G.

Sadness and pain is the name of the game. Disturbing thoughts flowing through my brain. You laugh when you hear my name, that's why it's anger in my veins. Stress from not seeing my father. I used to want to see him, but why bother.

Sadness and pain is the name of the game. People think you're lame because you don't act insane. Niggaz get fame when they inflict pain on someone. But not me, because I'm trying to maintain and stay in my place. Trying to keep these niggaz from jumping in my face.

Sadness and pain is the name of the game. When you cry yourself to sleep watching the days turn into weeks, and the weeks into months. But you front and act like you're not bothered that you can't get free. Court dates months apart. Causing stress on my mind and heart; not to mention my mother, and thank God I don't have any sisters or brothers. I know you've heard that old saying; that sadness and pain is the name of the game.

## I THOUGHT BUT I DIDN'T THINK

GUILIANO B.

I thought chilling with the guys was cool.  
Didn't think I would be labeled as a fool.  
I thought that they all cared.  
I didn't think they would turn their back after  
All the things we shared.  
I thought the police would never catch me.  
I didn't think I would have an x on my back,  
I didn't think about all the time they could give me.  
I thought I would only be here a couple of months  
Didn't think I would last 16, I can't even stunt.  
I thought God had left me and was gone for good.  
Didn't think he would be here 24/7.  
I thought my mom was fed up.  
Didn't think that through it all she would stand tall and  
Never give up.  
I thought this experience would make me worse and I  
Would never change.  
Didn't think that God would use me, and open eyes  
To never look at things the same.

## EYES OF THE DYING PUBLIC

PETER G.

All the pain I been through you don't see me cry  
I'm a living witness that society's a trap,  
the world going through hell. Bush ain't doing s\*\*\*  
about it.  
Hate

Plenty blood shed, people say it's love. I say its hate  
The world may never understand. 16 years old being  
charged as grown men  
spending half of our lives in the state pen.  
Destruction.

Judging peoples by what you see.  
Falling victim to society's street  
another soul lost to the ground  
A baby on the way but daddy's not around  
In a wooden box six feet under ground.  
whistling sirens shots fired man down.  
Judgment.

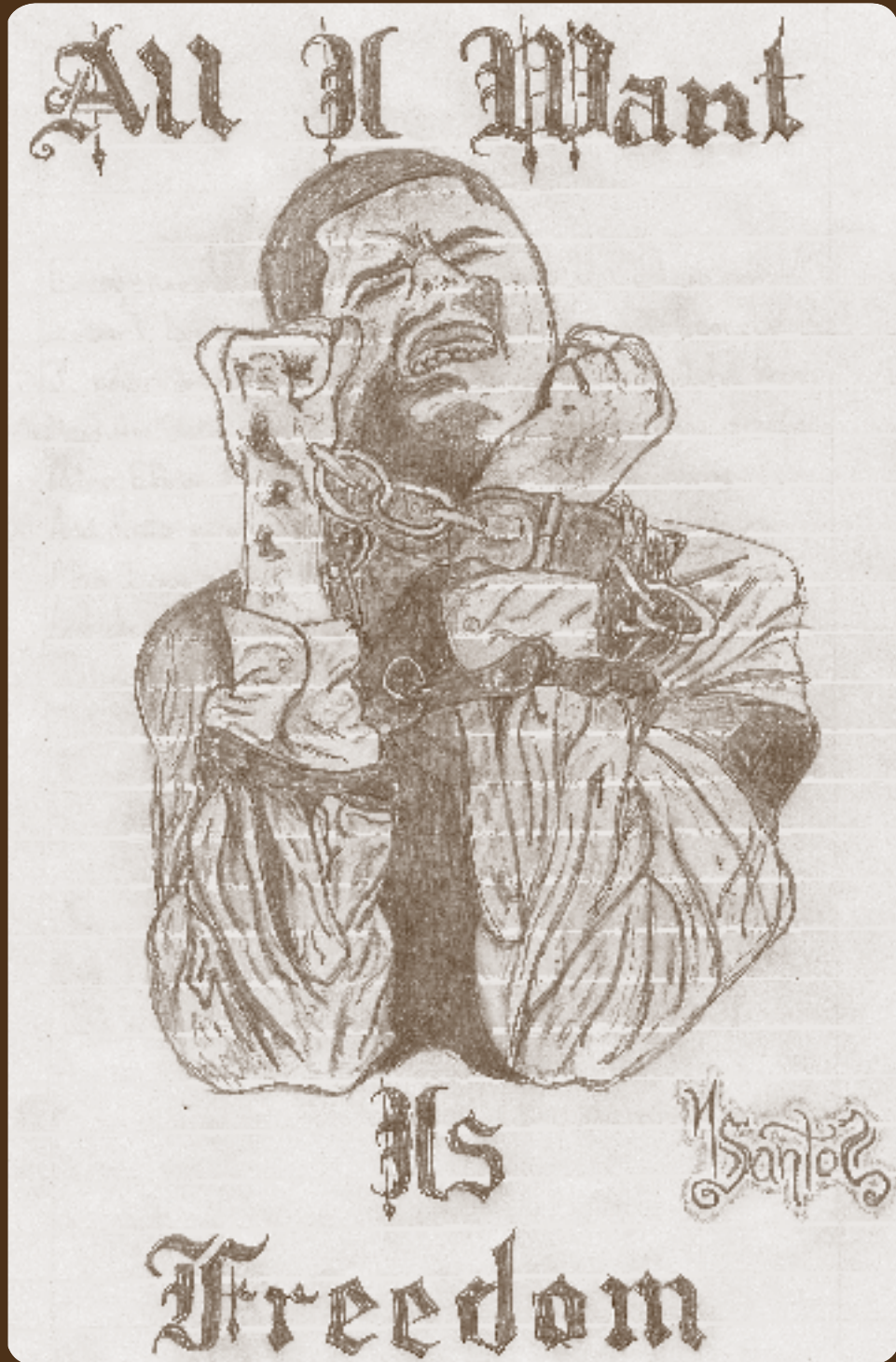
This is the cry of the dying public, black on black crimes  
Bush loves it, constantly distributing  
weapons of mass destruction  
while John Stroger fighting with a brain concussion  
Bush chilling popping Robitussin.  
God Bless America.

Not writing what I hear but what I know  
these are the days of our lives and  
we live them to the fullest  
There ain't no telling what tomorrow holds  
but I know what's coming  
I'm In the middle of a war, I'm alive and lovely.  
I Do This S\*\*\*.

Loss hurts like bullets.  
I'm about to start bleeding  
Throw me down some comfort  
because my heart need it.  
Problem.

# FIRE IN THE COMMUNITY:

## BEING IN JAIL



DRAWING BY NICK S.

FIRE IN THE COMMUNITY BEING IN JAIL

## **BURNING ON THE INSIDE**

NICHOLAS S.

There are some things that I love,  
there are some things that I hate.  
There are some things that I dishonor,  
there are some things that I appreciate.  
There are some things that I just don't give a f\*\*\* about.  
I just want to get out of here and that's a fact without a doubt.

There's no patience in my system, I don't have any left  
All this agony and pain is causing me to go through stress  
And they say stress can cause you an early death  
Well, if this is true, I'm on my last breath.

Impatiently waiting 'til I get out of this place  
Going to court every other month, all this time that I waste  
It went from minutes to hours to days to weeks  
To how many months I sit here, how many years I seek  
25 to life if I'm guilty is what I face  
On an attempt and a murder and it's only my first case  
Out of all the s\*\*\* that  
I've done I got locked up for the worst one  
I should have got locked up when I bought my first gun.

I wonder what would have happened if that man didn't die  
Would I still be here in jail burning on the inside?  
Hot, sweating, feeling like hell, feeling like I'm deceased  
Waiting for that day when I'll be released.  
Laying in my bed at night, tossing and turning  
Living in this man-made hell, on the inside I'm burning.

## **JTDC**

LEVELLE N.

JTDC is not a place 2 be  
It's like fire in the community

## **UNTITLED**

JOSEPH B.

Decisions I make,  
lives I take,  
just one big mistake.

This whole situation is weird and strange,  
sentences vary in a wide range.  
Just give me one more chance,  
play the music, let me dance.

Just let me be me,  
'cause the rest of my life I want to see.

## **BEING LOCKED UP**

LASHAY H.

Being in here, I'm not myself. I'm so stressed out.  
I feel ugly. My hair is coming out. My face is breaking out.  
My eyebrows need to be arched.  
I need to be home so I can be myself.  
I feel as if I'm on my last breath.  
Being in this place is a headache,  
Put in that room, surrounded by bricks.  
Your room is a tiny rectangle,  
With a little silver toilet and sink in the corner.

It's hard to be told when to eat, sleep,  
use the bathroom and even shower.  
This place is like hell you're held in for days,  
waiting on your court date.  
You have no freedom at all. You can't breathe fresh air.  
Everytime you leave section, you have to be searched. Your  
room gets searched and they throw your stuff all over the  
place. You have no freedom at all. All you have is the man  
upstairs. Pray and Stay Strong.

## **THE REAL PICTURE**

GUILIANO B.

I now see what's really going on  
and how people feel.  
I also now know who's fake  
and who in my life is real.  
I used to have a lot of friends  
and they always used to be there.  
Locked up in a box in jail they send no boxers, no mail  
I know they don't care.  
My mama, so strong  
she never gave up on me through it all.  
No matter what I did  
she was there having my back standing tall.  
A lot of people gave up on me when I got locked up  
I been locked up for a year now  
I don't know how I held up.  
So goodbye to the drugs,  
the block I will not miss ya.  
Because locked up ain't where I wanna be, I can see the  
Real picture.

## **SOMETIMES THESE WALLS CAN CLOSE IN ON YOU**

JULIUS F.

Sometimes these walls can close in on you  
Your mind becoming twisted, you no longer know what's true.  
The light of day slowly fading away.  
The voices in your head,  
Starting to speak to you everyday.  
Your darkest illusions begin to cloud your mind.  
Your vision becomes cloudy from  
all the tears you been crying.  
There is nothing but fear and rage  
pumping strongly through your veins.  
You want to hold on, but you no longer can maintain. You  
want to believe that it is all just a bad dream.  
That you will wake up any moment,  
jolted by your own screams.  
But it is all real and there is no escaping this reality.  
You will suffer through the pain and become its casualty.  
What you feel can't be described  
in words or acts of aggression.  
It is deeper than loneliness, fear or depression.  
It rules your soul from deep down inside,  
You've lost your will and all your pride.  
To walk in my shoes, I would never want to do.  
Know what I mean when I say that  
sometimes these walls can close in on you?

## **TODAY**

DENEKA L.

Today was a pretty good day,  
but I couldn't wipe the tears away.  
I'm not crying on the outside,  
so nobody here can see me cry.  
My heart is aching, my knees are shaking,  
I don't understand why I sit here alone to cry.  
I am alone, to myself and I am no one else.

I am being torn apart painfully,  
and yet my tears remain inside of me.

I am hurting and my life inside out is turning,  
The sun is outside blaring,  
I find myself not caring.  
My family and friends are nowhere to be found  
My eyes are covered in grief,  
so nobody is around.  
But today was still a good day.  
Maybe tomorrow I will wipe the tears away.

## **ONE MONTH**

JOMAR L.

One month to you may mean nothing  
but to me it means a lot.  
Every month that goes by  
is another month of my juvenile life  
gone down the drain.  
It's been hard for me to control myself in a facility like this.  
Every month that goes by I learn something new,  
whether it's reading a book,  
finding new words, or writing poems.  
Every month that goes by is taking a part of my life away.  
You take every day like a joke while I'm wishing to go home  
You are out there living your life like nothing is happening.

## **NOBODY KNOWS**

ANTHONY B.

Nobody knows until they're in jail,  
It all starts when the judge declares your bail,  
Straight to your cell without saying goodbye,  
Waving to your loved ones as they cry, cry, cry,  
Worrying about your girl or a letter from home,  
Not to mention residents of all sorts  
wanting to bust your dome,  
Stress so high you can feel the growing rage,  
Like a wild blue-eyed wolf locked in a cage,  
The pain of stress is a reminder I'm still alive,  
But I can do without all this f\*\*\*ing jive,  
They say stress can cause you an early death,  
If this is true then I'm on my last breath.

## **TODAY WASN'T MY DAY**

DENEKA L.

Today wasn't a good day at all  
Sittin' here looking at these four walls  
At my one window that won't open and all these bricks  
They all make me sick and if I had one wish  
I would only want to feel the air,  
But there is no way I can be out there.  
My fiancé isn't here to give me the strength and love I need.

Everybody has a different attitude  
but wears the exact same gray.  
People talking all that s@#! But aint gone bust a grape!  
Who are you to judge me and to say the things you always say,  
when you don't know anything about me, not even my name.  
He-say/she-say s@#! Is all you know to be the truth.  
You sit here and talk about me  
to people who turn around and talk about you.

Don't come to me asking me questions  
like what happened and what's wrong  
Because you're too naive and childish  
to know what's really going on.

How dare you childless mothers tell me how to raise a child?!  
If you were mature enough to have one,  
you wouldn't be out here runnin' wild.  
How dare you try to tell me what to do with my kids?  
You can go to hell because you aint worth a thing.  
Yeah I tell it like it is!  
And you staff aint nothing either  
for making me open Pandora's box.  
If it was meant to be re-opened  
do you think it would have so many locks?

Now, don't make me come over there  
and straight knock your block away  
If I've told you once I've said it twice.  
Today was not my day.

## **LOCKED UP IN A PLACE**

TARIUS W.

Locked up in a place  
Where I'm acknowledged by numbers  
I humble myself to keep from going off  
Knowing that I'm doing time for breaking the law  
That I think is unfair  
Only if I payed attention and acted like I cared  
About my life  
The things I did  
The people I hurt  
Thinking my situation can't get any worse  
I was cursed by a demon  
At least that's what I thought  
Truth is I was unaware  
Of the knowledge that was being taught  
To help strengthen my mind  
To be the greatest like Ali in his prime  
So I take one day at a time  
God gave the light to me  
So I'm going to let it shine

## **THE SCHOOL**

JOSEPH B.

These things seem strange,  
Here's the things in the school I would change,  
Sitting in the hall,  
Staff screaming, "Back on the Wall!"  
Screaming "Quiet!" without saying please,  
Getting wrote up with ease,  
Can't refuse or say no,  
If we do, up to section we go,  
Keeping our hands behind our back,  
Being treated like hoodlums who don't know how to act,  
These are things I would change,  
All these rules we need to rearrange.

## **GROWN MAN'S LIFE**

JOMAR L.

Started living a grown man's life getting a grown man's  
Consequences  
Americans lately  
All wanna live like they grown  
They are not  
They don't know what it means  
To be a man  
That's why they want to be a man

That's what happened to me.

I'm locked up but I try  
My best to make the best  
Out of my predicament.  
I tell those who don't know  
What it is to be a man.  
It's not easy and it's not hard  
It's what you make it.

I had to learn the hard way  
What it is to be a man. I just want you to know that you don't  
have to learn the hard way.

It's been so hard and devastating for me in my life to find out  
what it means to be a man.

Family,  
Peer pressures,  
Self esteem,  
Anger,  
Feelings,  
Gangs,  
Conflicts,  
Goals,  
Death,  
Love.  
Thoughts lead to feelings,  
Feelings lead to action  
Actions lead to results.

## **A REVIEW OF THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES**

AUTHORED BY SUE MONK KIDD  
FROM DANIELLE S.

If you are looking for something that is fast paced and  
hard to put down this is the winner!!

This book was an inspiring story of a girl longing for love.  
I learned all the different places love can be found. Sue  
Monk Kidd did a wonderful job of incorporating the racial  
issues that still exist today as well as back in the day in this  
book.

My outlook on life is completely different than it was  
before I read this book. I don't judge people by the color of  
their skin, or their economic status. That doesn't matter to  
me anymore, what matters to me is what is inside. I've also  
learned to open my eyes to the world around me and to not  
be afraid to lend a hand to others who might need it.

While being incarcerated in the Cook County Juvenile  
Detention Center I felt so lonely and hopeless, but once  
I finished this novel the characters stuck with me. I felt  
inspired and motivated.

If you are looking for something that is fast paced and  
hard to put down this is the winner!!

## **LONG TIME NO SEE**

ANGELO S.

Long time no see, my brother.  
I really missed you, man.  
How you been?  
Ms. Freedom says hi. She says to keep your head up.  
Last time I saw you was at the mistake I made.  
Do you and I still exist?  
I do, so can I get you back in life?  
My incarceration got me losing you,

My mind.

## CHANGE

TIFFANY H.

It's like knives going down my back  
When I think about my past  
With the things I should have done and the things I didn't do  
With all the hurt I caused and the pain I put my mom through  
She always told me she'd have no say in things anymore  
That day finally came when they cuffed me at my door  
Coming in past curfew, I had no explaining  
It's hard to admit but things started changing  
My parents were always there but I never felt love  
I always pushed away from there kisses and hugs  
The outside felt more important and I was  
obsessed with my drugs  
It became an every day thing  
Running away just to be smoking and drinking  
I think my parents knew this whole time but they were in denial  
All of these problems lasted awhile  
The weed was my escape out of reality  
I had it stuck in my head I was made up of bad quality  
Even though I had everything made perfectly for me  
No one can believe these things go on with me  
But that's why they say looks can be deceiving  
I'd never get my grades because I would always ditch school  
Disrespecting my parents and always acting a fool  
Forgetting about softball and basketball  
Trading them in for drugs and alcohol  
Stealing money from the bank with my mom's debit card  
Getting 400 dollars every Friday, it was bad but it wasn't hard  
I never thought it'd get so bad but it became my habit  
The drugs made my mind run like a speed racing rabbit  
I was always smoking and made money by stealing and selling  
When I was out getting high Bethany was telling  
The police were at my house almost every day  
So much I even ran out of things to say  
They got tired of coming, they finally had enough  
I had to go to court and the judge locked me up  
It's hard being away from my family  
It's been awhile but I know they love me  
I have to set an example for my little brothers as they grow up  
Teaching them to do right even though life is tough  
Because it sure isn't easy  
Be a better person so they won't be how I used to be  
I know when I get out things are going to change  
I never thought I'd be in this position  
it seems kind of strange  
But everything happens for a reason  
well that's what I believe

## WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO IT

JOSEPH B.

Today I wanted to hear my girl's voice,  
We didn't get our phone calls, I had no choice.  
I guess they're all lies being told,  
Same old s\*\*\* just never gets old.  
They tell us things that bring up our hope,  
Then they leave us hanging and  
they wonder why we mope.  
We're told one thing and they do another,  
Today was the day, I didn't even get to talk to my mother.  
If I had say-so, I'd let them know how I feel,  
I can't even do that, let's be real.  
I wish they would keep one promise, that I do,  
I wish a person with a higher voice would give them a clue.  
I know I'm young but I'm still a person,  
They need to do what they say or I'm gonna end up cursin'  
As I wrote this I said no name,  
Deep down inside, I'm the one to blame.

## HOW I'M FEELING

TASHERA V.

I am very mad and ready to go home. I had my phone call last night. I talked to my boyfriend- well, he's not a boy so I'm going to say "my man." He told me to keep my head up and relax. He told me everything that's happening and that my best friend misses me. My best friend's house got raided, but he told me to be cool. I'm actually tired of this place. These girls are extra crazy, they don't know who they want to be with. That's why I'm going to keep my distance. My mind is set on going home and seeing my family, kicking it with my best friend. I'm not planning on coming back after this. It will be my first time and my last time in JTDC.

## I F\*\*\*ED UP

NICHOLAS S.

You told me I would go to jail  
and that I would get caught  
I f\*\*\*ed up my life and it's all my fault  
I'm in jail now and there ain't s\*\*\* I can do  
But say I love my family and I love you  
I should have listened or saw it coming  
but I was deaf and blind  
And I regret leaving my friends and family behind  
I know you worry about me, but don't worry, I'm fine  
Knowing that I can't see you  
gives me a chill down my spine  
I hope I'm found innocent or else 25 to life  
And I really do want you to be my smart and beautiful wife  
I dream about you every day and think  
about you all the time  
And I hope I get out, I never should've  
committed this crime  
You and I both really know what's true  
So wipe your tears and dry your eyes because I love you

## IN MY ROOM AT NIGHT

JOSEPH B.

Locked in my room at night,  
Walls close and tight,  
Can't sleep because the bed's too hard,  
Can't swallow my food, it tastes like lard,  
Big white building, cold and weary,  
Some thoughts I think make me sad and teary.  
This place seems like another hell,  
What's messed up is this ain't even county jail.  
When I get out I'm out for good,  
Never again to return to the hood.

## EMOTIONS FROM THE HEART!

KENYA P.

The way I feel is hard to explain  
When I wake up it feels like I have nothing to gain

Why does it feel like the world is against me?  
I'm locked down in this place wanting to be set free

I'm a strong black woman when I want to be  
But right now I feel sad can't you see

You can tell how I feel by the expression on my face  
Thinking in my mind only about my case

I just want to be happy and to be loved  
I want to feel this way until god take me up above...

## UNTITLED

JOSEPH B.

As my anger and emotions build up inside,  
It's one of those times I wish I could disappear or hide,  
I feel like a time bomb with time that's about to run out,  
I wish like anybody for a different route,  
I have many thoughts and mixed feelings,  
All I see when I look up isn't heaven, but pale white ceilings,  
The only option I have is to put up a fight,  
But at the same time I want to do what's right,  
I thought I would feel better after a talk on the phone,  
But guess what, when the door locks, I'm still alone.

## MY HEAD IS SPINNIN'

DA DRE

My head is spinin,  
Yours should be too,  
A nigga telling what to eat what to wear  
and when to go to school,  
I ain't no fool,  
I know to go to school,  
I know not to rob,  
or steal,  
or kill for a bill,  
My life is crazy,  
You can't believe what I do daily,  
So I'ma change the subject,  
Before I reminisce,  
And get out and do the same thang,  
So I know what I'ma do,  
Walk a straight line,  
And never get out of line again

## THIS THUG PHILOSOPHY

DA DRE

I'm sittin' in my cell,  
mad as hell,  
thinking like why my dumb self come to jail,  
well this ain't jail,  
it's more like day care,  
I dat you can't leave with your moms,  
it feel like I been gone for so long,  
with all actuality it's only been 6 weeks and some days,  
with 3 weeks left, just counting the days left,  
how much can a thug endure,  
how long must I stay caged like an animal at the zoo,  
but fa' sho' all I know is that I'm goin' home 1 day,  
and the first thing I'ma do is get laid,  
what's next getting paid,  
man that's my thug thang.

## ALL ALONE

MAURICE F.

In this place, I see many faces  
Different varieties of people who have caught many cases  
But in the court's mind we're all the same  
Just trying to play the system's game  
And then the courts try to play us like we're disabled  
Lames in this place, we have no names  
Nothing we can call our own  
Just many people in this place who are all alone.

## TIME TO GO

BY ROXANNE S.

I got into the bullpen,  
ready to take off my band.  
I knew that the judge  
would tell me that he understands.

He'd let me go home today  
and he wouldn't keep me locked.  
But that all changed,  
I had no good luck.

I prayed for the time that I waited,  
watching the girls go one by one.  
I told myself that I was next,  
that today I'd have some fun.

I walk into court,  
no expression on my face,  
Thinking in my head  
that today would be the day.

I stood in a tall stance,  
my dad stands behind me.  
I gave an awkward smile  
because I knew I'd soon be free.

But they sent me back in the bullpen,  
My eyes were all a blur.  
What did I say that was wrong?  
I know I said yes sir.

## PAIN

GUILIANO B.

I been through so much through these years,  
hurt so bad sometimes I had to shed tears.  
I did a lot of things that I learned from,  
but always will regret.  
I hold my pain inside,  
never let them see me sweat.  
There's so much pain that if I let it out,  
you wouldn't want to come near.  
This comes from different types of pain  
like guilt, feeling alone, being fed up, and fear.  
I see pain in the eyes of people that love me,  
I can see!  
And sometimes I want to ask God  
why all this had to happen to me.  
I know that he sees that I learned my lesson,  
and how I've been very patient.  
He knows how much I can bear, so I'll be here  
Just waiting.  
I need all ya'll to pray for me,  
ask God to give Guiliano strength to maintain.  
Give his heart strength to endure all this pain.

## I LOST

MICHAEL Q.

I lost my freedom  
I lost my block  
I lost my girl  
I lost my best friend  
I lost my life  
I lost my grandma  
I lost my grandpa  
I lost my touch to society  
I lost my cousin for twenty years  
I lost a lot of material things  
I lost the beat  
I lost the word  
I lost the war  
I lost my family  
I lost sleep  
I lost the game  
I lost my hearing  
I lost my sight  
I lost my legs  
I lost my freedom

When you are locked up this is what you lose in life.

## COWARD'S WAY

BY DANIELLE S.

I can't stand myself  
I can't stand this place

Constantly reminded of disgust and disgrace

Christmas is approaching  
The snow is on the ground  
All I can do all day long is frown

I can't talk to no one  
Cause of this frog in my throat  
I wish everything would just go away  
Cause it's all one big joke

Nobody cares and neither do I  
But if I don't then why do I cry

I feel so pointless and lost with no purpose  
I'm dragged with each breath into a life which is  
worthless

I'm just waiting for the moment  
When it's my time to go  
So nobody can say "she took the coward's way out  
...ya know?"

## **THIS POEM ABOUT BEING LOCKED UP**

LAVELL B.

Every time I look out the window  
I drop tears from my eyes  
I think about my family  
I want to be with them  
And I wish I was with them to share my love  
When you locked up  
All you can think about is  
Your family  
Because you want to be with them  
When you behind glass doors  
You frustrated  
And you want to be with them  
When I did the crime  
I asked myself what was going to happen?  
When I went to court, I caught a blessing  
They gave me house arrest  
In my room I pray to God that nothing bad don't happen  
Outside in the neighborhood there is trouble anywhere  
I could get killed, hurt, arrested again,  
I could be back in the wrong place at the wrong time  
At the corner of Jackson and Campbell

## **HOW IT IS IN J.T.D.C.**

RUDY C.

You wanna know how it is in J.T.D.C.?

There are a lot of fights  
Most of the people are Hispanic, Black,  
but not many Whites.  
We get phone calls once a week  
There is s\*\*\*ty toilets and nasty sinks and da cells stink.  
The rooms are cold.  
The whole place is full of mold.  
The clothes is old.

J.T.D.C. ain't cool  
So stop acting a fool.

## **REFLECTION ON JAIL**

SHERI P.

Sitting here in this bitter world, it seems like everyone is against me. Sometimes I feel as though I don't have anyone on my side. Negativity and criticism surround me. It might sound petty, but sometimes all I want is for somebody, anybody, to tell me "I love you!" I wish I had a shoulder to cry on, but it seems like I've turned everyone against me. I hate my life and I sometimes hate myself for causing my life to be this way. I used to not take responsibility for my actions, but now it seems as if I'm devoting all of my time to blaming myself and keeping myself down. If I had one wish it would be for at least one person to tell me "everything is going to be alright."

## **26TH AND CAL**

D.O.DILLON — NBJ TEACHER

Driving past 26th and Cal  
If you listen you hear the prison walls wail.

Knowing it's here you must stay  
Yesterdays  
So far away.

Nobody knows why?  
Your life turned into a lie.  
Sometimes I just want to cry.

Time passes so slow  
When you have no other place to go.

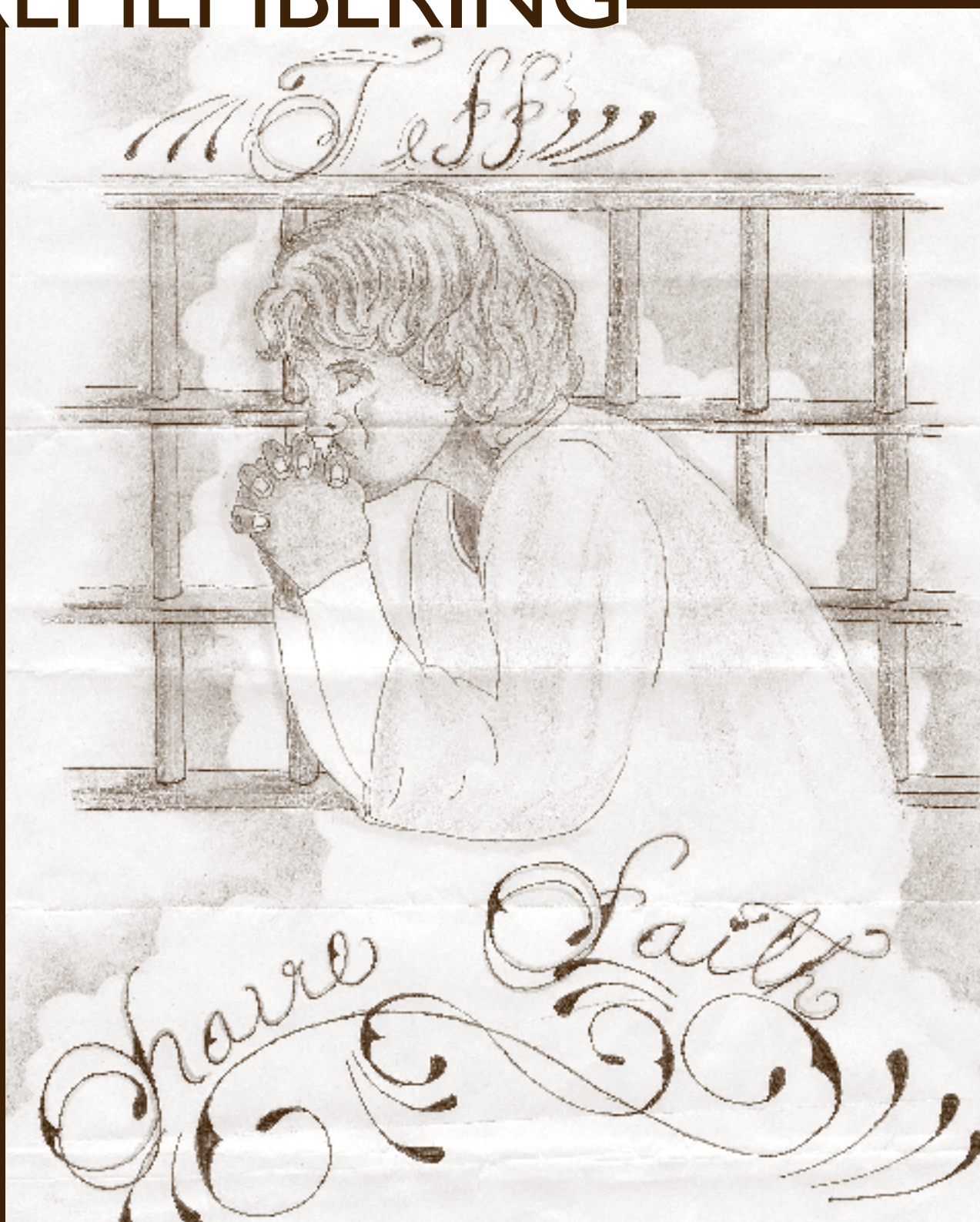
You dream of life on the bricks.  
With promises of no more tricks.

Oh Lord let me know that you hear  
The prayers I offer for those I hold dear.  
Let them sense my spirit so near.  
And please Lord release my fear.

Hope is what I preach  
Freedom within my reach.

*Dreaming* AND

REMEMBERING



DRAWING BY JEFFREY R.

DREAMING AND REMEMBERING

## MY IMAGINATION

BY MARTHA J.

\*Wakin' up to the beautiful sunny day  
\*the cool breeze blowin' through the window  
\* looking over the ocean  
\*Watchin' the waves hit the shore  
\*I slipped on my shoes  
\*walked down stairs  
\*turned the radio on  
\*headed for the showers  
\*then it all turned blank  
\*tryin to figure out what happen  
\*but I guess it was all just my imagination  
\*playin' tricks on me again

## RESTAURANT WINDOW

NOEL R.

Walking down the broken bottle streets of Armitage + Hot  
Dogg Restaurant down the street + cars riding by x lots  
of people on the corners = me in the restaurant eating  
– looking out the window + fries sizzling in the restaurant  
kitchen x my cell phone ringing + ketchup spilling on my  
pants = me with an angry face.

## DAYS ON THE BLOCK

JUAN R.

Walking down the block Main Street + a blunt in my  
mouth x my boys with me walking = me chilling, being  
happy.

Me chillin' on the block + someone starting to talk stuff  
– my shirt = me and him fighting.

Me + my boys on the block – all the drama on the streets  
x all the females that show up = me being happy as hell.

Me on the block early in the morning + a blunt on my side  
– all my boys x all the morning fresh air = me all alone,  
posted up, happy.

## HIT WITH A STICK

CHARLES F.

Me standing on the block + the police = being put on the  
car, hit with a stick, and going to jail.

## I'M SWIMMING

COREY W.

I'm swimming in a river and I don't want to drown,  
I try to keep my head above water but it keep going down.  
What scares me to death is there is no one around,  
But I made it that way. I don't want to be found.  
I stay in the river without making a sound  
My feet soaking wet, longing for the ground  
A couple of seconds later I started to sink  
My brain is frozen which means I can't think  
So I started to swim, my face turning pink  
'til I saw a man with six chains and a golden link.  
I'm swimming in a river as fast as I can  
To get where I'm going, heading straight for that man  
The one carrying the chains and the gold band  
At first he got big and then he got small  
Until it hit me, I'm about to fall  
So I took a breath and tried to stand tall.  
I'm swimming in a river, as far as I can see,  
And then I wake up with water in front of me.

## I WISH

BARBARA T.

I wish I could start my whole life over. I wish that I could be  
with my family. I wish I knew my biological mother. I wish  
I could spend more time with Darlene and Linda. I wish  
I was rich. I wish that I could meet my dad. I wish I could  
visit Bow Wow, Omarion, Ciara and other R and B singers.

I remember when I was 5, I was a good person, but now I  
am bad.

## I WISH

MICHELLE S.

I wish that I had a different Judge.  
I wish I could go home.  
I wish that I could be free.  
I wish that I didn't have to go to Gateway.  
I wish I could see my mom.  
I wish everybody could go home.  
I wish that we could eat outside food.  
I wish people wouldn't talk about each other.  
I wish that I didn't have a miscarriage.  
I wish I was the only child.  
I wish I had friends in here.  
I wish I could see my family every day.  
I wish that I could smoke a square.  
I wish that I could walk home right now.  
I wish I could have money.  
I wish I could wear my clothes.  
I wish for a lot of things.

## I WISH

MARQUITTA P.

I wish that I was at home, going to my own school and programs. I wish that I was with my family or at least around them, seeing their faces and feeling their touch. I wish I had followed the instructions at home, so I would not be in this system. Now I pray to the heavens above to forgive me and release me back to my freedom on the outside world. I hope that since this is my second time back here that it will be a lesson learned.

## I WISH

TIARA H.

I wish I wasn't in jail. I wish I was at home with my family and that I could graduate from high school on time in 2006. I wish for my baby to be very healthy, smart and intelligent. I wish all my cases would just get dropped and I could start my life over. I also wish I didn't have to be here.

## A DREAM?

ANONYMOUS

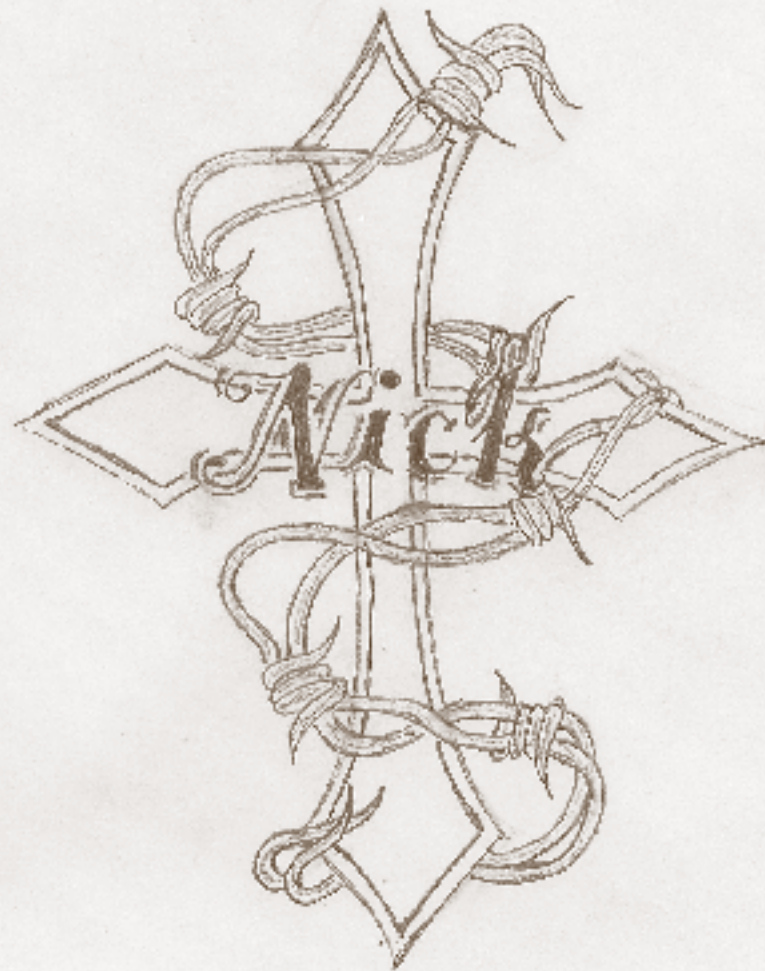
Shots rang out, just 'cause somebody ran they mouth  
Where I'm from, and that's down south,  
Can't be doing that, or we'll come to where you're at.

But that's just the old life  
People defend their stripes.  
See, nowadays young boys like me  
getting killed over a block  
For being seen with the cops and not in handcuffs.  
Call it being a bird and singing.

This is just a thought from the block,  
I can say I rose through the ranks,  
But my testimonial is what you should learn from.  
Been away from home for almost three years,  
Ain't seen or heard from none of them so-called Goodfellas.

Remember them days, stunting and balling.  
I did that.  
My message to you is not to follow in my footsteps  
In no way, shape, or form.

It was a dream.



I have  
Mercy  
On My  
Soul

DRAWING BY NICK S.



DRAWING BY JOSEPH R,

## TEENAGE MOTHER

BIANCA M.

I was fifteen years old when I got pregnant. It was the hardest thing I ever had to go through, especially at a young age. I really had to think of what my parents were going to say to me. When I told my mom, she was calm. The hardest part was telling my father. It took us a while. When I told him I thought he was going to kill me, but he was calm, too.

My mom's side of the family helped me with things I needed, like pampers and wipes. I had a baby shower and my family and friends were there. It was a good day. Two months later, I had my baby girl at St. James hospital. I had a c-section and I had to stay in the hospital for a week and a half. When I finally went home, I was happy to see what a beautiful person I created!

## PICKING PETALS

JOHNATHAN D.

I remember once a long time ago when I was about five or six. My aunt had four or five plants in our house. Every time she would be in the back yard, I would snatch a petal or leaf off. She would come ask me if I snatched anything off her plant and I would say no. She was thinking that her plants were dying, but the whole time I was picking the leaves and petals off.

## MY DAUGHTER MAKALA

ANONYMOUS

I miss my daughter. She just made seven months on Thursday. I might go crazy being in this place they call a jail. I think about Makala every day and night. When things get rough like this my baby girl is the only thing that keeps me sane. I don't really talk to people in here because I don't think anybody really knows or understands what I'm going through. That's my first child and to have her taken away from me really hurts. I feel like they have taken a part of my soul. She's gone, so I know that I have to be strong just for her.

## LATE AT NIGHT

AMANDA

Late at night I am still awake, wondering and thinking about my mom. I wish she would understand and give me another chance. Then again, I know why she doesn't want to visit me, or even talk on the phone. Yeah, I messed up, but I'm a changed person. My intentions are not to hurt her anymore, but it's already too late. That's all I've ever done. I hate myself for it. During all this I am crying and all this anger and frustration has started getting the best of me. That's when I make another mistake and punch the brick wall. Now I am also hurting, but not as much as my mom.

## DEAR GRANDMA

Dear Grandma,  
Even though I put you through hell  
You still stuck by my side, all the  
Stress you went through with me and  
My older brother, you still kept  
Food on the table, clothes on our backs,  
Shoes on our feet, and a roof over  
Our head. You took us in when our  
Mother and father wasn't there. You were  
The one who provided for us, and  
That's why I love you so much.

Love Always,  
ROBERT

## I MISS MY DAUGHTER

NEREIDA C.

I want to go home already, to be with my daughter. I love and miss her so much. My dad came to visit me and he told me she is straight and very happy. Oh, God, what did I get myself into this time? I want to change, I really do. If they will just give me one more chance to prove myself. I still haven't got my period yet. I hope I am pregnant. I can't stand being in here. I'm so stressed out but I'm trying not to be, in case I have a baby on the way.

## MY BABY

JOANN M.

I can't wait until the day that my baby is born. We're going to travel and do all sorts of things. We're going to meet many different people, we'll go to the park and every day on his or her birthday we are going to do fun things like playing with toys, family, eating great amounts of food and sleeping over our friends houses, having all sorts of clothes and shoes to rock with them and chains and earrings. I wonder if they will throw me a baby shower? I have all sorts of dreams about my baby and what it's going to be like.

**MOM I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU.  
I WILL ALWAYS CARE**

GABRIELLA R.

Dedicated to my mother Angela

Mom I will always love you, I will always care.  
I want to let you know that when I see your face  
it feels good to know that you are there.  
It hurts to know that I'm away from you  
and to know that I left you in despair.  
I miss your hugs, your kisses and beautiful shiny long hair.  
You scream and you yell  
I know you think that I am not listening, but I hear well.  
You have been trying to keep me on a positive road,  
but all I do is turn away like I don't care.  
Mom, deep down inside me  
I will always love you, I will always care.  
You stick with me through thick and thin.  
You hold me tight when I finish having a fight.  
You tell me that you will never leave me.  
You tell me that you will never disappear.

Mom this is just to let you know I thank you  
for being the mother that was always there.

**DEDICATED TO MY GRANDMOTHER**

ANONYMOUS

Just when I was a tiny boy  
still playing with a toy  
she used to sing,  
as I chewed on a teething ring.

**GRANDMA, GRANDMA**

JASMINE H.  
(FOR JOYCE H.)

Grandma, I think of you day and night.  
I can't feel my heart beating because I'm in a lot of pain  
without you.  
I just want to be happy again.  
I want to be a fun and loving person,  
not a person who is always mad at the world.  
I miss you a lot.

**MOM**

DAVANISE A.

My mom is great but when it comes down to do stuff  
she does it late.  
I still love my mom, I just wish I could be at home with  
her for Thanksgiving.  
I want to get out more with her and get more in com-  
mon with her.  
Mom I just wish you were here because when I was at  
home you took away all my fear. Mom I just wish I could  
be like you...laid back, quiet, simple and calm.  
Man I just miss my mom. You don't know how I feel,  
because almost every night I am thinking to myself "is  
this real?" Sometimes it feels like a dream that isn't  
true but mom I just wish I was at home with you.

**MR. COLLINS**

ISIAH J.

I know this man named Mr. Collins,  
when he's mad he don't get to hollerin'.  
He'll tell you one time and one time only.  
If you don't listen, then you are on your own, homie.  
He's a nice guy inside and out,  
he ain't the type who is jabbering off at the mouth.  
He'll listen to your problems,  
then he'll try to solve them.  
He'll let you know the good and the bad,  
sometimes I wish he was my dad.

This is dedicated to a special person named Mr. Collins,  
County Staff

**HOW I FEEL**

JOSSLYN T.

I can't wait till I go home, so I can lie in my own bed, eat  
my own food and use my own dishes, talk on my phone  
and be around the people I love. I'm very upset because  
I'm not going to have my sister and cousin to be around,  
but it's not forever. I just plan to keep doing good when  
I get out so we can all be together.

**I WONDER**

DAPHNE S.

I wonder what the rest of my day is going to be like. I  
cry. I want to go home. I miss my mother. I wonder did  
she get my letter? I wonder who is going to be our staff  
for the rest of the day. I hope we got to step out. I am  
bored. I want to go back to real school. This school is  
boring. I hope I can finish filling out my job application.  
I need a job so I can stop hustling. I wonder what my  
mother is doing.

# A DEDICATED

writings on



Cuendo El Corazon Llora

A DEDICATED HEART: WRITINGS ON LOVE

DRAWING BY JORGE H.

## **MY BABY**

BRANDY D.

This girl is so good to me  
She red like apple  
She so bright like the sun  
come down She like a new born  
baby so nice and innocent  
When she say something  
it like fresh water in the sea  
When I with her it feels like  
I'm in outer space When I  
see her there is no time or  
day everything stop and I  
feel so safe When it come down  
to it, she has my back  
It's like a fiend hooked on crack

## **SO SEDUCTIVE**

SANOVA D. AKA KADAFI

So seductive, your presence obstructive,  
Lacking self-control, lustful juices flow,  
Stimulate my soul, hesitant to resist,  
Seductively persistent, my conscience can't exist,  
Knowing that it's wrong, mesmerized for too long,  
Seduction too strong, seducing my strength,  
Abusing my sense, seductively immense,  
So seductive!.....

## **LIKE A KNOT IN A ROPE**

TARIUS W.

Like a knot in a rope that hold us together  
From the beginning to now and hopefully forever  
You the medicine that heal my pain  
You the umbrella that protect me from the rain  
With you it's real, no being fake, or playing games  
I shout cause the joy from within  
tell me you are a good lover and friend  
One I can depend on  
Lay my Head or Chin on your shoulder  
And no matter how soft I seem to get  
I still remain your soldier

## **SWEAT**

KARLA B.

as likely to sweat as easy you can shake the  
bed, like fast black power not repulsive  
but essential and urged  
her knife in those  
parts of me.

## **A DEDICATED HEART**

NICHOLAS S.

A dedicated heart is strong and content  
It shows no boundaries, with passion it represents  
It's all about the truth and can't even be considered fake  
It gives off something powerful,  
and it's not supposed to ache.  
A dedicated heart is not to be rejected  
The love that it contains should always be protected  
It's not to be demolished or torn into tiny pieces  
It could be valued as a pearl,  
it depends on how you treat it  
A dedicated heart can warm you up in the winter  
It can fulfill your wildest dreams  
with something to remember  
Don't treat it like it's nothing  
because it's more than you would expect.  
It's our source of survival, that you shouldn't forget  
A dedicated heart will pull you through tough times  
And help you stay at peace without losing your mind  
It sees us through the rain if only you believe  
How powerful the heart is,  
there's nothing you can't achieve  
A dedicated heart is so priceless it can't be bought  
All the money in the world isn't worthy,  
it doesn't have any faults.

A dedicated heart is so precious and true  
It's food for the soul and it's dedicated to you

## **THINGS YOU CAN DO FOR A GOOD WOMAN**

JONATHAN P. A-K-A LOW

Men.

You don't have to hit that woman to make her listen  
Don't be so lazy  
Get up yourself and wash the dishes

Instead of making her cook and clean  
Be nice  
Don't be so mean

Put a beautiful woman somewhere in your dreams  
Without her in your house  
There will be no family team.

## THE THINGS I WILL DO

TARIUS W.

The things I will do for you  
First I give you my life  
Then I give you my love  
Last I treat you like a Queen  
That mean back rub  
Wash your feet  
Feed you food that I cook  
Take you shopping  
Long walk in the park  
Sat at the beach and watch the sun set  
Then take you home  
And let you hold me like a pillow  
When you wake from your dream  
I start all over again

## MISSING YOU

MOLLY

Have you ever bothered to realize  
how much you mean to me?  
I care so much for you inside and miss you so deeply.  
My mind is always curious  
about the way things might have been.  
As days and time goes by, I look back again.  
All the time I held you in my arms,  
I had the whole world right there.  
There you were, comforting me, with all of your charms.  
Every little kiss from you was like a dream come true.  
This love that I have inside my heart, it all belongs to you.  
It's funny, all those little things I never thought I'd miss, like  
all those conversations we had, and the first time we kissed.  
I guess that what I'm trying to say is that I miss and love you  
more each day. It hurts me not to see you,  
not to know if you're okay.  
I want you to understand that I loved you from the start. I  
want you to know, no matter how many miles we may be  
apart, you'll always hold a special place in my heart.

## WHEN I HEAR YOUR VOICE

TARIUS W.

When I hear your voice  
It sound like music to my ears  
No more butterflies in my stomach  
When I'm around you  
I don't know if it's love  
But whatever it is, it's something  
I want more of  
Ain't no more you or I, it's all about us?  
Forget about my fellas and your girlfriends  
You're my girl and I'm your man  
I hope you understand where I'm coming from  
I'm not just talking cause I got lips and a tongue  
What I say come from somewhere deep inside me  
And it's telling me I will remain happy with you beside me

## CARING FOR PLANTS

TYREECE J.

Caring for something in life means to love it with all your  
heart and soul.

A person who is taking care of a plant needs the right  
ingredient: Rain, sun, plant food, oxygen, soil.

Every plant needs to have every person taking care of  
them; they need all the love that they can get.

Throughout life, people take care of plants like their  
children. A plant has so many different ways of making  
people feel good.

Keep the plant somewhere there's light and air.  
Each plant has a beautiful smell to them.

## MY LOVE

LASHAY H.

The love of my life, it was love at first sight.  
God put us together because we belong together, be-  
cause we understand each other.  
It's been 4 years, tough years, but we are still together.  
He is more than a boyfriend to me,  
he is my love and my integrity.  
He is my soul mate from above.  
He is my best friend to the end.  
After our first kiss I knew it was true.  
I love everything about him from his head to his shoes. At  
night I pray that we will be together until death do us part.  
Have a future have some kids and never should be apart.  
He is like my right hand man. He is always there for me  
through thick and thin.  
Forever we will be  
SHAY AND MUNCHIE

## WHAT IS LOVE?

TARIUS W.

What is love?  
How does it sound?  
Do you have to retrieve it from the lost and found  
Can it be purchased at Walgreen's or the Grocery store?  
Or is love priceless and have to grow  
Is it green like the grass?  
Do it shine like the sun  
Or is love painful  
If that's the case I don't want none

## LOVE EXPRESSED

SANOVA D. AKA KADAFI

How can I express this feeling  
It's something I never felt  
You are my strength  
Stronger than life itself  
Like a love found  
That was never possessed  
I want to kiss your body  
'Til I reach the right spot  
Smaller than a lemon drop  
But has the power to make your heart crackle  
And your body pop  
I want to caress those parts  
That no one ever gave the time  
After I finish  
We'll be more than valentines  
I wrote this poem  
To explain how I feel about you  
Whether it's "te amo"  
"Je' t'aime beacoup"  
Or just plain  
I love you

## IF ONLY YOU COULD LET ME IN

JOSE L.

If only you could let me in  
I know that love, it could begin  
don't you worry, looking back to the time we met  
I got plans for you and me!  
I know I done wrong in life  
but I'm a' take pride in my achievements  
what you want is what I'll give to you  
my love, to me for you  
I know you got secrets just like I have secrets  
I just want to know the truth of how you feel about me!  
I put the bulls\*\*\* to the back and live with joy in my heart.  
Like I said, my love for you will always stay close!  
I got a lot to tell you, my queen.  
You're everything I want in life  
so think about me and you!

## FROM YOUR ADMIRER

SEAN L.

The way the sun hits your body  
shows everyone you're a hottie.  
And your luscious full lips only assist  
in making me wish you were in between my hips.  
Me wishing I was kissing everything that I am missing  
from your head to your toes.  
I know that you know.  
If only you could see the look in my eye  
If only If only If only  
you were my guy.

Dedicated to ????????

## LOVE IS FREEDOM

DAVID WALKER – COUNTY STAFF

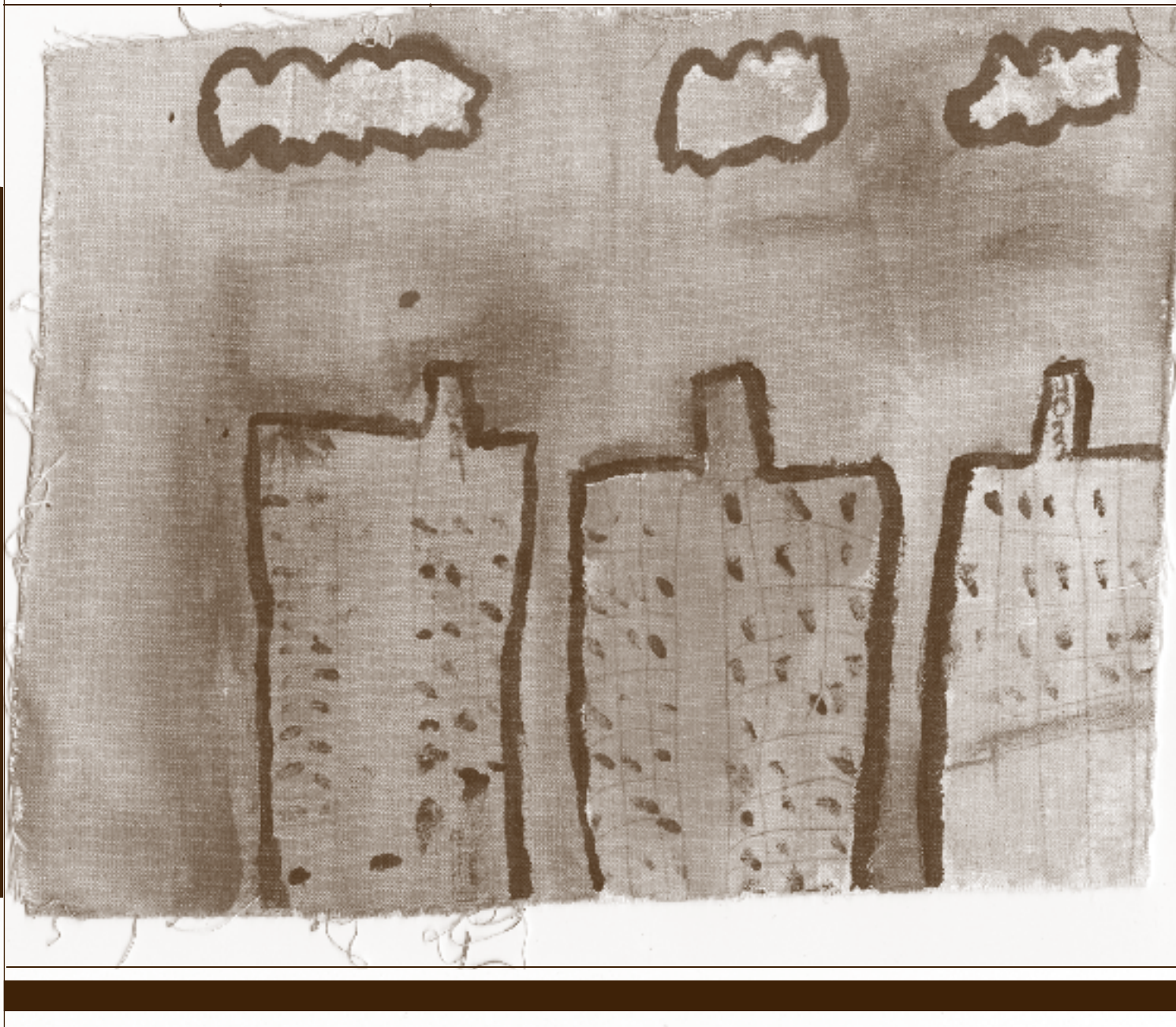
If a millionaire is restricted by his money  
and loneliness is his best friend  
Love is freedom  
If you have been raised by an adult  
who was able to love you  
even though they did not birth you  
Love is freedom  
If you loose your way and a complete stranger  
helps you find your way back  
Love is freedom  
If you have been locked up most of your life  
but you are touched by the Creator's love  
and are no longer alone  
Love is freedom  
If a family member who was not supportive of you  
starts to come around to see you  
Love is freedom  
If you go out of your way to help someone in need  
even if it jeopardizes your own schedule  
Love is freedom  
If you share a part of yourself with another  
even if they do not receive you  
Love is freedom  
If you go out of your way to communicate to someone  
you have not been getting along with  
Love is freedom  
We all think we know what our freedom is  
I believe freedom is only obtained  
through the love of Christ  
All else is bound to this world.

## UNTITLED

KEENAN R.

It's been a long time  
And now I see, feel  
Like 40 years, but  
Only three, me, being  
In this world of inconsideration,  
You the only person  
That I kept a relation,  
My thoughts could not  
Fill up a hundred sheets  
Of paper, but I just  
Want to let you know  
This love is not yet vapor.

# REDEMPTION



REDEMPTION

## **LIGHTS OUT**

SANOVA D. AKA KADAFI

Truth is bliss  
Painful reminisce  
Life's trial  
And sorrow's song  
Whispers death  
Through the dark  
But darkness  
Seems lighter than ever  
When there's truth left untold  
Infiltrated future  
Enemy so bold  
They know  
The brightest light  
Will grow  
Eventually overflow  
Illuminating so  
They can run  
From reality  
But they can't  
Hide from the truth  
They can turn  
The lights out  
But it'll still  
Shine in you

## **NOT GIVING UP**

CLYDE H.

When I was 5  
I learned my A B C's.  
It wasn't easy.  
My teacher recited  
my A B C's to me  
every day.  
I felt like quitting  
every day.  
When I was 6,  
I could say my A B C's.

## **REMEMBER ME**

TYREECE J.

Remember me when flowers bloom  
Early in the spring.  
Remember me in the fall  
As you walk through the leaves  
Of gold.  
And in the wintertime remember me  
In stories that are told.  
But most of all remember me  
Each day right from the start  
I will remember you forever  
For I will always live in your  
Heart  
Remember me as a loving person.

Remember me as the person that  
God Bless me to be.

## **THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL IN JTDC**

MARQUITA P.

Today I'm thinking about my faith and how I can start trying to obey the word of God through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Next, about how I can change my bad habits, so I won't have to be locked up in nobody's jail. Then about my family, my Aunt, my mother, my grandmothers, sisters, brother and cousins. I am also thinking of my boyfriend and friends. School is a major issue because it's something I have to complete in order to get where I'm trying to be in life. Today is the last day of school in JTDC. I hope the days go by fast, so I can go to court and find out when I'm going to my new house.

It's a shame, these girls wanting to be grown but still immature. I'm gonna let them be themselves, and I'm gonna stay to myself as much as I can.

## STRUGGLES

HAROLD B.

Locked up, mentally confused  
Being in this cell  
I feel physically abused  
Freedom of mind and God is the key I use  
I struggle to be positive  
respectful and humble  
Sort of like a football  
trying to catch it but I fumble  
My pathway is crooked  
bumpy, so I sometimes stumble  
I am not a quitter  
because I am bright as glitter  
so I struggle not to be bitter  
I struggle to stay on my square  
because I know I got loved ones who care  
And because it keeps the enemy with a sad stare  
I struggle to get out the system's files  
Because it is full of liars  
I'm going to continue to pray  
to become better and overcome my trials.

May God bless you!

## UNTITLED

LASHONNA H

I wish I could get a book and read.  
I wish my mom was in my room with me.  
I used to cry all the time in my room,  
But I don't cry no more.  
I don't have a mom in my room with me  
I talk to god in my room at times,  
when I go in there.  
My court day is next weekend  
My Judge let me go home to my mom.  
I miss my mom and my TV  
and my dad and buying my own food.  
When I get home I will not come back here.  
God is good. Amen.

## MY BLESSING

GUILIANO B.

When is my blessing gonna come, who knows.  
Sometimes I feel like I'm a piece of tissue  
when the wind blows.  
I can land anywhere and anything can happen to me.  
I wish I could have been thinking of this when I was free.  
I pray and pray that one day  
that blessing would come my way,  
I know you can't get away with everything,  
but whatever happened to second chances  
is what I got to say.  
I've had dreams that I was free,  
and they say dreams come true,  
I been waiting for a long time for my dreams to come true  
and I get so confused I don't know what to do.  
It feels like my world is coming to an end.  
Sometimes I cry. I can't lie.  
Sometimes I even ask God why.  
So God I'm not questioning your will,  
but I've really learned my lesson.  
As you can see I'm being patient,  
so can I have a blessing?

## A PRAYER

LAQUITA B.

Yesterday I was in confinement for some old stuff they  
found in my room. If only I could just forgive myself. I  
know I lost my level and I am really angry about it. It's so  
bad because I have a real bad cold, a headache, knowing  
I have to stay in here until July. Please God, I ask for your  
help and guidance to look over me and my brother. No  
matter what happens in this place, I know you are going  
to protect us and let us understand that you are putting  
us in here for a reason. Please God, just watch over my  
husband, God and don't let him get in any trouble. You  
gave him a chance to do what's right. Please just protect  
him because you would only know what I would do if  
something happened to him. In your Son's name, Amen.

## MY DESTINY

KALIFA

I believe my destiny is to be a kalifa,  
That means a messenger,  
a leader and of the highest state of mind,  
Therefore, I start by not doing wrong  
and stop smoking reefer,  
I got to stay focused and not let the devil have me blind,  
My destiny is to help resurrect those who  
are spiritually and mentally dead,  
I am not your enemy,  
I'm here to put wisdom and knowledge in your head,  
For you brothers that is full of infamy,  
I'm here to make you become better  
and find happiness in life,  
This world is cruel and filled with depression and pain,  
Worse than the stabbing of a knife,  
But I'm here to guide you in the right lane,  
Help you overcome your trials and tribulation everyday,  
So in my final say,  
I tell you this, I was once told,  
"Almighty God is the best knower".

## AS I SIT IN THE COUNTY BULLPEN

TARIUS W.

As I sat in the County Bullpen  
And listen to the inmates around me  
Sisters talking about how they miss their kids  
Brothers talking about how they miss their friends  
One person talking what's real  
How we all as one nation need to change  
The things we do  
How we think and treat each other  
First thing we need to do is free our minds  
And get in tune with self  
And then we will find out ways to take  
care of everything else  
Because you will start to see things different  
Sisters will become Queens  
Brothers will become Kings  
No more N\*\*\*ers, Dogs, Bi\*\*es, and H\*\*s  
No longer will the enemy have hold  
Of our Mind, Body, and Soul  
The Chain is cut off  
The Door is pushed open  
Brothers and Sisters  
We can make it through, just stay focused

## WE

GUILIANO B.

We as young black men need to wake up,  
and as we would say these days get our weight up.  
We are now an endangered species in the U.S.A,  
can't you see how many of us die every day?  
We think selling crack, blows, wack, and weed  
is something we should be ignoring,  
but what we don't think about  
to our own people we are selling poison.  
We don't see how much of us are locked down  
some young and doing hard time,  
they are getting us where they want us  
people, read between the lines.  
We hurt each other and don't think about what we are do-  
ing to ourselves,  
and if you doing something that's not positive, don't do it.  
You're setting yourself up to fail.  
There's no smart way to do something stupid, and if you  
think the system is a game  
go ahead and play. You will always be the one losing.  
We are considering ourselves blind like we can't see.  
I know were not. So look, listen, and learn.  
Only people that can fix this is We.

## WHAT IS CHANGE

ANTHONY C.

Change is not switching from lane to lane.  
Change is not flipping from one game to another.  
Change is not going from selling rocks to selling blows.  
Change is not going from stealing to killing.  
Change is not switching up your cars or clothes.  
Change is moving on with your life  
and doing positive things  
putting all the bad behind

## **PAST**

ORLANDO E.

The past has been a mess  
Of blood and sorrow  
That must not be true  
Of tomorrow.

## **UNITED WE STAND**

TRAVIS W.

United we stand, divided we fall.  
We're tighter than panty hose two times small.

We're courageous and powerful over the universe.  
We secure our neighborhood better  
than our neighborhood police force.

We have the education and strength  
to change our generation.  
We possess more knowledge  
than Johnnie Cochran in college

Wise choices we make and wrong turns we take, but in the  
end we come out on top like frosting on cake.

United we stand, divided we fall. We're the Bad Boyz.  
You can never beat us all.

## **I STAND**

KEITH M. G.

I stand to a flag  
With my hand on my heart  
They say the flag stands for freedom  
But I think not  
The flag holds an American Eagle  
That stands on top  
We aren't free  
So I know the Eagles are not  
The flag has 13 stripes, and 50 stars  
I know the American flag isn't more powerful than we are  
They hold it up high for a victory  
They fold it in a triangle for death  
We give 3 shots in the air  
To give our respects to the people who really cared  
We say them few words  
With Liberty and Justice for all  
we trying to stand tall  
While the U.S.A is trying not to fall  
So I Stand.

## **SOMEONE LEAD ME**

LEVELLE N.

Someone lead me to strive  
Someone lead me to survive  
Someone lead me to reach my goal  
Someone lead me to play my role  
Someone lead me in peace  
Someone lead me to reach  
Someone lead me to write a poem  
While I was talking on the phone  
Someone told me to forget about my past  
Because I have my whole future to last  
Someone told me do my best  
Someone laid me down to rest  
Someone taught me to read  
Someone told me to achieve  
Someone taught me to interact  
Someone taught me not to react  
Someone taught me to create  
Someone told me to never be late  
Some lead me

## **WE'RE COMING**

KENYA P.

They call us generation X,  
but me I call us the best.

Try to put us down,  
soon we will be wearing the crown.

Let's prove them wrong.  
Let's stand together and be strong.

We can be whatever we want to be,  
open your eyes, can't you see?

This isn't the end, just the beginning,  
So get up, let's start winning!

## **PRIDE**

GUILIANO B.

Some say pride can kill you. I believe that's true for some.  
Some people think pride  
can only hurt people that are dumb.  
But pride can hurt you and others that surround you.  
Pride can even make your best friends clown you.  
Pride can also be used as a powerful tool.  
Don't get caught trying to protect your pride and be a fool.  
'Cause when you get that reputation  
what makes you keep it is pride.  
And you would be surprised  
how this word ruins so many lives.  
So if your trying to change your life,  
there's one thing you gotta know.  
I've experienced this myself through tribulation:  
That pride, you got to let it go.

## HATE

GUILIANO B.

As I sit and look in different faces  
what I see in all eyes is hate.  
People trying to defend or win something that's not  
really on none of our plates.  
But wait, it's something or somebody  
that's feeding this fire.  
Somebody that's making all the time were facing  
Just waiting for us to cut the wrong wire.  
They're putting something around that's making us  
Hurt ourselves and others.  
They're making our friends phony, they can even  
Make brothers and sisters hate each other.  
Me, I've seen and experienced this rage.  
It makes you physically and mentally  
go on a different page.  
Your sense of thought and action  
is no longer controlled by you.  
Because before some people react  
they don't think about what they're going to do.  
I'm just so surprised how so many lives are ruined and  
Taken by these little four letters.  
But I can't blame everyone,  
'cause if they knew they would do better.  
So if you don't realize this problem,  
I hope you know your fate.  
Analyze, recognize, and realize that our problem is hate.

## BLIND AS A BAT

CORDARRYL S.

Stealing and killing for blocks that you do not even own  
Selling drugs to young people,  
letting them kill themselves  
Just so you can make a quick buck, then you go get a girl  
so you can get a quick f\*\*\* letting little kids skip school  
'cause they think it's cool, but you don't know  
that you are leading them to a quick death  
or in a bed behind bars  
and you, you think everybody loves you because you sell  
drugs and have a lot of money  
but in real life everybody hates you  
hate is a strong word but that is the best way I can put it

picture yourself on a cliff and you look down  
and see billons of kids dead

I mean billons of them just dead,  
moms standing over their kids crying

and you say that you won't sell the drugs to your family  
every person who sell drugs say that  
but they sell it to other kids and adults that might be  
your brother or sister  
your mom and dad

now picture yourself standing in front of  
every jail cell in the world

in each cell are two to three kids in there for life  
they are looking sick.  
now look to the right, you see your family,  
then turn to your left you see your friends.  
now, if you don't wake up then  
it's not that you are asleep, it's that you are  
Blind as a bat.

---

## YOUNG GHETTO GIRL

ATTINIV D.

Foolish young ghetto girl, mesmerized by the material, was never taught how to be strong, to be independent and make it on your own. So at the tender age of 13 you stumbled upon a dope scene. Lord the attraction of cars, jewelry, and creams attracted to drugs, sex, and designer jeans. Too young for a job, too young to sell drugs, you decided to get yourself one of them old thugs. He showered you with gifts and fatherly love. You seriously thought that he was from up above. Young ghetto girl, you sold your soul to the devil, allowed him to elevate you and place you on a higher level. You weren't ready for the things he introduced you to, but for the love of money those things you went through. He told you smoke a little, drink a little, sniff a little coke, inject it, snort it girl, try some of this dope. By age 16 your dreams didn't mean a thing, you past 13 no longer a queen but a young drug fiend. You heart, your mind, your soul was all stolen. So were TVs, VCRs, to keep your high rolling, hitting the pipe while your belly was all swollen. You didn't care about you or that innocent life, all you desired was a rock and a pipe. As for your old thug, he got killed over a bag of crack and a bad drug deal. Nowhere to go and your soul were lost, you slept on park benches rent-free at no cost. Your body was cold but the baby in your womb. We know girl you didn't plan for this, so stop asking why like you're Jadakiss. When you hot like fire your doom is to melt. Don't trip now this is the life you chose for yourself. As rain turned to snow, you got tired of having sex for a single blow, and thought of your body and mind and it need to grow.

## **SHE'S A KILLER**

DAVID WALKER – COUNTY STAFF

Birtherd by a crack baby's mama's mama,

Raised by her Uncle a 3-time winner,  
with a childhood filled with drama,

Not being able to really fit in, the life  
of a Gangster sucked her in,

Money, b\*\*\*\*es, and cars is what caught her eye,  
serving concrete evidence to mothers, fathers  
sisters, and brothers and believing his lies.

One New Year's Eve Uncle 3 times show  
her his Glock. It felt good in her hand  
a new friend on the block.

It was the 15th of January while standing  
on her spot, a young fool ran up said "gimme  
all you got!"

She upped her Uncle's Glock and that fool  
got popped, ketchup ran out the bottom of his socks.

She became a killa that day, no turning back.  
Her bed's been made, a lot of niggas on their backs.

She started making dough, 200,000 stacks,

Her spot blew up, money ain't a thing  
She bought her uncle a 2-carat ear-ring,

Uncle 3 times was picked up on a  
minor case, Federal Surveillance all up  
in his face,

They had him on DVD and was building  
their case. If he gave up his niece with  
the Feds to save face.

Needless to say they raided her spot  
just when the shipment arrived they had what  
she got. Money, Keys, Guns, Cars, and Cribs  
was a part of the lot, nice take for the  
Feds for the auction block.

You see she was a killa, she killed  
Herself, social and emotional suicide is her  
sentence for bad health. Murder, Drugs, Money, Cars  
is a trap set up by Satan to kill and destroy.  
Follow the road less traveled (the narrow path)  
It's hard work, stay in school, finish your education,  
help out at home, whoever you live with. Take on  
responsibilities, homework, chores, cut grass, shovel snow,  
pick up in front of your house. Help your moms raise  
your little brothers and sisters. Show each other love  
wherever and whoever you find.

It's time to shine, children, it's time!

## **ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER**

SAMANTHA S.

Rollin through the hood in my Chevy Impala, lookin so  
good that the boys want to holla. I got my girl on my  
right and my niggas in back, .64 yeah I'm gonna pop that  
cap. But then I think to myself, and then I say, "This is my  
game? That's not the way to play." Gangs and drugs, is  
this the solution? All that stuff in your body is just pollu-  
tion. Sneezing, wheezing, gasping for breath. This is the  
right path, where you can catch your death. Here's a little  
lesson that you should learn, listen, pay attention and  
knowledge you will earn.

Let's talk about beer and other alcohol. Now we've done  
this before, at home or outside, it doesn't matter where,  
you always hear a cry, a scream, a yell for help, a car crash,  
when you think about yourself. Cops here, cops there,  
askin all these questions. Now we know they're on our  
backs, but this is their selection. Investigating, searching,  
trying to find out, wondering, asking, there was no doubt.  
Liquor is in the vehicle, liquor on your breath, just found  
out that you're the cause of your friend's death. Smoking  
is next and so are drugs. Don't roll your eyes at me, don't  
give me no shrugs. Now and then, takin a puff. Doing this  
will just mess your body up. Puffin, shootin, sniffin, mess-  
es with your brain. And I guarantee that you will go insane.  
It won't just mess with you brain, but it will also mess with  
you. It will make you do some things that you don't want to  
do. Hangin with the kings, chillin with the Fo's, spending  
all your cash so you can get some "dro." What do you do in  
this situation? Stop and think or get a bad reputation. Do  
the right thing and stay in school, don't be a drop out and  
think it's all cool.

You'll never get a job, a career, a home, you'll be livin on  
the streets by yourself all alone. Is this what you want? To  
be livin on the street? Lookin through the garbage cans,  
just so you can eat? Uh uh, not me, no way, no how. But  
lemme tell you this right now. Listen, every child of God  
was blessed with a voice. So encourage each other and  
ake the right choice!

## IN THE HOOD

ANTHONY C.

In the hood we was told to carry the chrome  
Not knowing that it was wrong  
We thought it was a joke because we had dope  
Everyone had a team but I had my dream  
It was to get money and I always thought it was funny  
Standing on the corner, posted like a mummy  
Scared of the police, shaking in my tummy  
While crack heads running up looking bummy

I remember bad times where we  
had to carry nines in the hood  
There's a lot of stuff I want to do  
But I just need to succeed  
And switch up my crew  
Even though we was told to do what we do  
We was hustling to impress  
But when it's war time  
Everyone grab a vest  
When it is time to go to war  
Everyone break their neck to grab a tek  
But take their time to grab a book  
and when the police come everyone get shook  
With their scared look  
The street is not a game  
And if you try to play one  
You will always feel pain  
So switch up your game  
Or the system will  
Because they will take you away for a while  
and you won't be able to see your child  
Instead of doing what you should  
you stayed making love to the hood.

## PEACE

SANOVA D.

Peace, is in the skies  
Where the birds fly high  
Peace, is in the eyes  
That didn't have to cry  
Peace, is in the sea  
Where the fish swim free  
Peace, is in the tree  
When it is providing shade for me  
Peace, is in the wind  
When it blows through your hair  
Peace, is in the end  
When you lived in despair  
Peace, is in the child  
Not a worry in mind  
Peace, is in the wild  
New life you will find  
Peace, is in yourself  
When you practice self-control  
Peace, is in your death  
When you lived to be old. PEACE!

## A CHANGE OF HEART

KAWANA B.

People make choices.  
People like to stand out their voices.  
People like to do whatever.  
Do I think I'll go home?  
Never.  
Sometimes I feel like nothing's changed.  
It's like my mind just fades away.  
It feels like I can't do anything right.  
At the same time I just want to fight.

What should I do?  
Am I hurting you?  
Do I care?

Yes I do!

What about love?  
Should I put no other before you!  
I know you love me and I love you too!

Do you even care about me?  
The truth is inside can't you see?

What is trust?

Should I tell you everything I know?

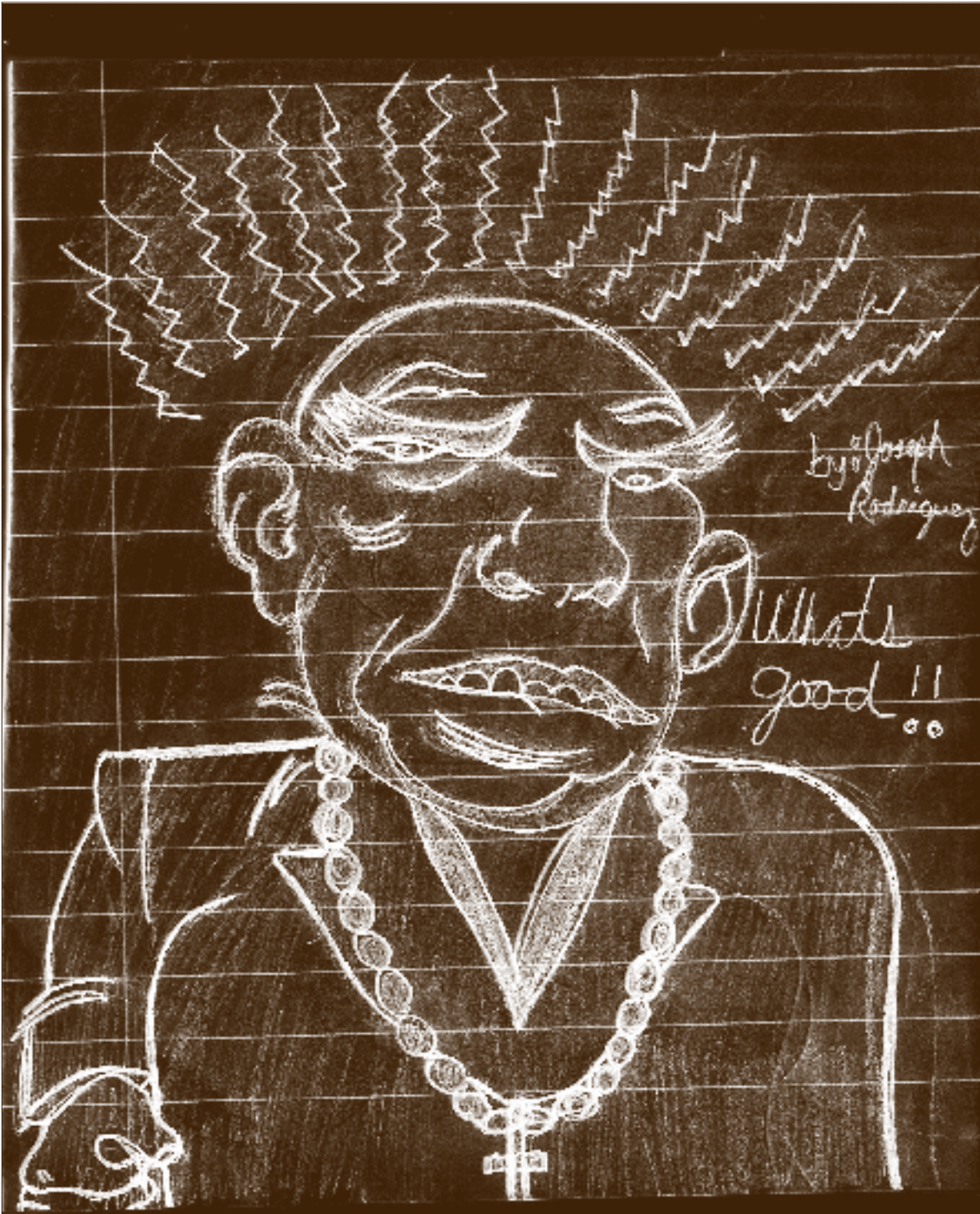
But you already know so there's nothing to show!  
Can't trust friends they will just turn their back!  
But it's cool I already know they like that.  
Nobody to talk to.  
Nobody I could tell how I feel!  
What about you?  
What do you know?  
Now I know right from wrong,  
and that's why I am singing this song.

## OVER

DEMARCUS C.

It's going to be over before I start if I don't find my own heart.

# I THINK YOU SHOULD KNOW: AUTOBIOGRAPHIES



DRAWING BY JOSEPH R.

## FAMILY LIFE

BURUNDI M.

There's a lot about my life I think you should know. It started off when I was ten and my father died. Before he died, I felt good because I had a father, someone to be there for me, to tell me to do some things. When he was around I knew that joining the gang was not the right thing to do because he was always telling me that he did not want me to join a gang.

My father was in a gang and he did a lot of things that he did not want me to do, like shooting at people and selling drugs. My first memory was when my father was in the hallway and people would come up to him and get something from him. I really did not know what he was doing, but somehow I found out what it was he was doing. My father was a good man too and he finished school but he sell and hang out with the gang. My father was the one who did a lot for his friends but never got anything from his friends. My father always told me that he was going to stop doing the things he was doing, but he never stopped. He used to tell me that he did not want me to do the thing that he did. He'd say that it would hurt him if he lost me. One of my father's dreams was that I should finish school. Before my dad died I wanted to finish school too, but it did not work that way. Instead, my dad died and my whole life changed. I did the stuff he did not want me to do. Now I know what it was he wanted me to do: He wanted me not to put myself in the stuff he was in. That is why he always told me that he did not want me to join a gang. Now I am going to finish school. That way I can make my dad proud.

The day he died, I was outside playing around and he was supposed to come pick me up. He never came. I thought it was because he didn't get up or something. My mother got a phone call. It was my grandma. She told my mom that my dad got shot. I was like, "Damn, so what's going to happen?" He died in the hospital. I was shocked. I would have thought that it would never happen to my father. But it did.

Before he died I was doing good in school. When he died I just fell off completely. I started bringing knives and guns to school, fighting, not doing work. Then one day I was walking

home from school. Some guys jumped on me and I knew what gang they was in. I said, "Man, why you all jumping on me?" They said because I was hanging out with the Mexicans. I got mad and I said, "Y'all going to jump on me because I'm hanging out with the Mexicans?" That's when I really started hanging out with the Mexicans.

Then I did something I never thought I'd do. I joined a Mexican gang. When I joined the gang everything that my father was doing for me came back to me, having someone there to tell me things. I only listened to my gang.

My mother was telling me things but I didn't really listen to her because she would talk bad about my dad in front of her friends. That made me feel bad because she would tell me things and tell them something else, so I never got to really know what it was my mom thought about my dad. If she told me something good about my dad I would not believe what she told me.

During the time I was really into gangbanging and would come home late at night. My mom had her boyfriends over to the house and her boyfriends would always ask me why am I in the Mexican gang? I would tell them that it is because of the guys that hang out over here near my mom's house. My mom always ask me to hang out with the guys who jumped on me because they was black but I did not want to be with the guys who jumped on me.

At that time, I always did what she did not want me to do so I could get her mad. I love my mom, but I just don't like the things she do or say sometimes. My mom has this boyfriend now and he drinks a lot. When that happens he hits her a lot. One day I watched him hit her. I got my gun and told him if he put his hands on my mom again I would kill him. She got mad and told me to get out of her house. I got out of there before I did something that I did not want to do. My mom always take his side before her family's side. That was why I did not listen to her. I think she loved her boyfriends more than her family and, most of all, me.

DRAWING BY JAMEST.



DRAWING BY MARCUS S.



## GANG LIFE

The gang was telling me, "This ain't a joke. If you're going to be out here, you can get locked up, you can die, you never know. Somebody might walk up on you and shoot you. You never know." They were also telling me how I should go to school because they wanted me to get an education. They did not want me to end up selling drugs on the block for the rest of my life. They used to beat me up if I didn't go to school, so I went to school.

When I did go to school, part of me wanted to try and part of me didn't want to try. I used to get jumped on in school because of my gang. When I found out it was over my gang I started bringing guns. When I brought guns to school people got scared. They didn't want me to shoot so they left me alone when I was going to and from school. Nobody would bother me when I had a gun. Then rival gangs got tired of me bringing a gun to school so they started telling the teachers and the principal. One day I had my gun in my locker. They went by and searched the lockers. They found the gun and I got locked up for my first gun case.

When I got caught with that gun I was MAD. I was mad because I got locked up. But then I wasn't mad because I had the gun to protect me, but the police, the principal, and teachers thought that I was using it to kill or hurt someone. But I knew what it was for. It was just so I could be safe. I was thinking like, "How can I get locked up when I was just protecting myself? What is going to happen to me? How will my mother feel? What will people say about me? Will they say that I'm a bad kid? If my little sisters and brothers see me being locked up, who am I to say to them, 'Don't get locked up.'"

I was in a classroom and the police said, "Can we see Burundi?" I said, "What's going on?" They said, "We found a weapon in your locker." I said, "That wasn't my locker." They took me down the stairs and we went outside and they put me in the car. We went to the station and they started asking me about my background. They saw that it was my first gun case so they said, "We are just going to take him to the juvenile detention center." I never knew nothing about a juvenile detention center until that day. I went to court and the judge told me, "How old are you young man?" "I'm 12 years old sir." "You shouldn't be in this predicament. You are too young and have your whole life ahead of you." He gave me probation. He said he was going to give me another chance to do right. "How?" I thought. I said, "Alright, whatever," and I started doing the same thing.

When I started back hanging out in the hood, not going to school, doing me, I knew I wasn't going to be able to finish the probation because I was young and stupid. I knew that the way I was going I would get myself in too much trouble. I just started gangbangng harder and harder. I thought that was the only way to live my life. I stopped listening to everybody. Every time I listened to someone, I ended up in the same thing. Like

people would tell me to go to school. I would go to school, but I'd just get in trouble there. Everywhere I went was the same thing, trouble.

When I started coming to the juvenile detention center, so many times the judge got tired of me and sentenced me to D.O.C. My first time going to D.O.C. I was scared. I was crying every night because I missed my family and I didn't know what I was putting them through until I got there. In D.O.C. there were alcohol and drug groups. We talked about everything in those groups, our lives and stuff. I was the one that never said nothing for a while because I was afraid of what people might say. But I met this drug counselor and he was a real cool guy. I started talking to him about my life and about how I was feeling. He told me to talk to him because he saw something in me. So I told him about my father dying. He told me I should just let that go because that is what is bringing me down right now, it's putting me in the situation I'm in right now. I was holding things in and not letting them come out.

The groups got good and I started expressing my feelings about my life. I thought life was a game. But I went on through and found out that I can die and won't never come back. The things that I was doing was messed up. I talked about how being around the wrong crowd got me doing the wrong thing. That's how I felt. They used to tell me about bringing out the inner child, or something like that. How I should start playing and get in the habit of showing that I'm happy instead of being mad all day. I used to be walking around with a messed up face saying to myself, "I ain't doing that s\*\*\*. Forget you." They didn't like that at all.

One day I talked to my mother on the phone. I started telling her how I felt. I never sat down and talked to her and told her how I feel. She was like, "Why didn't you tell me how you felt while you were out?" I thought, "Because I didn't really have a chance to think about what was going on in my life." She liked what I was saying. She said, "You should stay that way." But I was thinking, "This isn't me. This is just the group talking." I was really still into gangbangng. I sat down with the groups, but my mind was on what I was going to do when I get out, how I was not going to get locked up again. I thought I could still do all the same stuff that got me locked up in the first place, but do it smart.

Somehow, I got more involved with the groups. I started understanding what I needed to do. It wasn't to be out there gangbangng. It was to try to do something better with my life. I knew deep down inside that I could change. And I looked back on some of the good things that I had done before getting locked up.

## DOING GOOD

One day I was walking out my house and some lady asked me to help her take some groceries out her car. I said, "I don't even know you." My mother said, "You better help that lady." I helped her take the groceries in. My mother told me, "God is going to do something good for you because you helped that lady." She was pretty old, but I didn't know her and I wasn't going to pay any attention to her. But when it comes down to it, when you help someone it makes you feel good.

Another time, a lady left her keys in the house. She seen me and, since I'm known on the street, said, "Come here young man. I'll give you five dollars to go in through the window and get my keys." I had learned how to climb in windows because one time I got locked out of my house and I needed to get in or I was going to be sleeping outside. I climbed through the window and opened up the door. She got her keys and I got my five dollars. That was a good thing because I used my skills of being able to get in windows to help someone. Looking back on this, I realized that I have skills and I can use them for good.

Another thing, my friend has a mom who is pretty old. She got two kids, my friend and his little sister. Some guys kept on coming by their house, kicking out the windows and stuff like that. But her son knew me and I'd go over to their house sometimes. I had a gun. His little sister was on the front porch and these guys approach his little sister. They had their guns out and asked, "Where your brother at?" and he was kinda scared because this ain't never happened to them before. So I went out there with my gun and I told them, "You know what? I'm a ..... And this is my nigga's crib. Ya'll better leave this house alone." But they were gangbangers too. So I said, "When it comes down to it, I'm going to have to shoot you over this house because sometimes I'm here too. I lay my head here and if something happens I might get hit." I never saw them guys no more. This is a positive thing because his mother was scared and she did not know what to do. She knew she could not call the police because of her son being in the gang and there are guns and drugs in the house. His little sister was afraid. When they approach his little sister, they crossed the line. This made me feel good because I was helping out my friend and his family. His family is my family, so I stood up against the people who were messing with them. I used my ability to talk it through with those guys, and they don't mess with the house any more. I can use my words and my brain instead of a bullet.

After remembering these good things, I realized that I know how to do good things and I don't have to keep doing bad things.

## THE MESSAGE

Joining a gang was the worst mistake of my life. I never sat down and thought about what I was doing and how things were hurting my family, how what I was doing can really hurt me. I used to think I was unstoppable, no one

could touch me. Until I got shot. The stuff that's hurting me right now. I could have stopped it a long time ago. It's like I'm in too deep. When I try to get out of gangbanging it just keeps coming back. I'm thinking, "How can I stop when I keep on doing the same thing?"

When I found out my little brother was in a gang, the same gang I'm in, it hurt me. I know the things I've done I don't want him to do. The things that I went through I don't want him to go through. I don't want nobody to go through those things. That's why I'm writing right now to let you all know how it is. Y'all might not want to hear this but it's going to help you in the long run. And I know that just writing this is not going to change my brother's mind about gangs. I know I must be with him, not locked up, to help him see the right way to live.

I've seen people shot. I watched people die in front of me. My friend died right in my arms. Do you really want this to happen to you? Join the gang. You can't get out unless you are dead or in jail.

We got to start thinking right now. It took me getting this new case and going to court and hearing that they are giving me six to thirty years. Now I got all the time in the world to think because I never know what that judge might do or say. I don't know nothing about what that judge is going to do. But I know every time I come back from court and I get bad news, I be mad. But once I'm playing cards with the other residents, I realize that I am getting used to how the court works. I let it go. But I don't want to get comfortable with this court process. I don't want to get used to being in jail.

When I was out there I did not see any future. I didn't care if I lived or died. All I cared about was hanging out with the guys and trying to get their respect. I thought they respected me. They gave me money, clothes, anything I asked for. They also encouraged me to be crazy and keep doing the things I was doing, like shooting people. They said that if I want to stay alive I had to keep doing those things. What I found out is that these guys were not friends at all because they wanted me outside with them. They wanted me there to take care of stuff that they did not want to take care of, so they'd send me off. I didn't know what a send-off was at the time. I thought it was just that they wanted to be friends. What made me realize that they weren't my friends was when one of the guys got locked up and told the police that I did everything. He wrote an eight-page statement on me. When I found that out, all I thought about doing was crying because I thought they were my friends. He was always talking about how you shouldn't snitch on nobody and I used to be like, "Alright, fo' sho'." Come to find out, he was the snitch.

That's why I started looking at life in a different way. Telling my friends my age how they should live their life and how these guys just want us to be their send-offs. My friend Jose didn't believe me until people who had spots, the people who were on top of the game and had everything, started getting locked up around our house. Once he saw that, he opened up his eyes. He don't come outside no more. He stays with his family trying to live a better life. And I want to travel the straight road too.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JESSICA U.

On January 15, 2004, my dad passed away. I was 12 years when he passed. I was in my kitchen when my mom got a phone call. My mom said, "Hello." It was my sister Ashley telling my mom that my dad had died. At that moment I knew that my life was over.

We were in the kitchen when we got the call. The kitchen smelled like fresh flowers. The clock was ticking number after number. The sun was setting. When I found out, I burst out in tears. Mom said it was going to be ok. I told her that it wasn't going to be ok. I have nobody else to talk to now. When I try to talk to my mom she pushes me away like I'm nothing in the world.

A year later I was thirteen years old. I was in eighth grade. The school I was in was called, "Prarie View Middle School." I had a lot of friends. Some of my teachers I liked and some of them I hated. At Prarie view, I was talking to a counselor. Her name was Mrs. Sidler. She was a very nice woman. One day she called me into her office. Her office was so pretty. Big, beautiful pictures on the wall, colors bursting out on her game shelf. Beautiful pictures on her desk of her family. She walked in and said "Good afternoon Jessica. How are you doing today?" I told her I was fine. She asked me, "Jessica, how is your family doing today?" I told her it was fine. "How is your dad doing?" I looked at her and then looked at the ground. Tears started to run down my cheeks. She asked me why I was crying. I said, "I don't have a dad anymore."

Mrs. Sidler came behind me and started to rub my shoulders and tell me that it's going to be ok. Ms. Sidler said, "Jessica I'm sorry to hear this!" I looked up at her with my eyes still wet, and my nose all red, and said "Thanks." Mrs. Sidler told me it was time to go back to class. I dried my eyes and went to class. When I got home, my mom asked "How was school today?" I told her it was ok. I went to my room and turned on the radio. My room is big with a lot of bright colors sticking out on my armoire. Pictures going around my mirror. My bed has a baby blue cover on it. The radio was on 107.5 WGCI. My favorite song was on, "RayRay, Me and You." I started to turn it up and sing to it. After that song there was another one I didn't like, so I turned it off.

I went downstairs and went to the kitchen. My mom was making my favorite dinner, spaghetti! As I was walking down the hall, I could smell the wonderful garlic and tomato paste.

It smelled so good. When I got into the kitchen I asked her if she needed help. She said no. I went back upstairs, hopped on my comfortable bed and closed my eyes until my mom called me; "Jessica, it's dinner time!" My mom gave me a big plate of spaghetti. When I put the noodles on my tongue, I could taste the magnificent garlic and softness of the noodle. After dinner I helped my mom with the dishes and told her it was a great dinner.

A year passed and I was 14 years old. I got into trouble a lot with the police. I was sitting in the Audy Home for the first time, scared to death. When I first walked in and I had all of these eyes staring at me. One of the staff told me to go in the back and give a strip search. They told me to take my shirt and pants off. They said "pop your bra, then pull down your panties and cough three times."

After that they had me go into a nasty room with a bed and a toilet. That room smelled so bad. I had to change into their clothes. Three days had passed and I went to court. A couple of weeks later, I went there again. This time I was only there for a day and then I got transferred to Neon Girls for three months. When I was first there, I thought it was a bad place to go. They asked me a lot of questions like, "Are you pregnant?"

A couple of months later, I got locked up again. This time I had a warrant out for my arrest. I went back to the same place. This time I wasn't scared, because I knew where everything was and where to go. This time when I went there, it smelled clean. You can smell the Windex and Pine Sol and the air freshener. I stayed there for about two weeks. I went to court and then they sent me home.

That was my last chance. Months later, I got locked up again and my Judge (Judge Studley) told me "Jessica, I gave you too many chances, this time you are getting locked up for five weeks. I will see you May 10th!"

Well, five weeks have passed and it's the day before court. I'm so nervous. All my friends have left and new girls came in. It made me mad that all my friends left, because now I have no other girls to talk to. I can't wait to go home. I have butterflies in my stomach. If I don't go home then it will be okay because I deserve it. We'll just have to wait and see what happens tomorrow.

# THINK YOU SHOULD KNOW

## JUKIN' ON A FRIDAY

STEPHEN C.

One Friday, I was on da block selling weed with my cousin on Jackson and Springfield. Earlier that day, somebody got killed down the street from the block. When I came on the block it was shut down. Ain't nobody wanted to work because old boy got killed and me and my cousin didn't know no better so we figure everybody gone and this the best time to make some money. I already knew the best time to make some money probably your last time to make some money.

Da block was jukeing I was work non-stop without using the bathroom. At the same time, I was tired but my cousin had left. Soon as he left, two dudes walk across the field talking about, "Who got weed?" I said "I do." Right before my eyes a big shining thing was pointing at me. He began shooting. I couldn't move, den I run like I never run before to my cousin crib.

When I got there my shirt was on fire. I had four holes in my shirt and they was some big holes by my stomach and

chest. My cousin told me to take my shirt off and check and see did I get hit. But at the same time I didn't get hit. I was lucky I didn't get shot that Friday. I smoke a square and went to a party on Jackson and Springfield.

Everybody at the party say, "Damn you lucky!" They let me in free. I paid my other guys' way because they wasn't letting them in free. I still had my money from juking. During the party we was getting drunk off a 1/5th of Remy. Five minutes later we heard some more gun shots. But the party was still going because the gun shots were outside. Later on that night me and my cousin left the party and went on his porch and get even more drunk. Burgundy Grand Marquis was riding slow up on Adams. That burgundy Marquis was the same car they was in when they came shooting earlier. They just kept going though. Me and my cousin took it in to get some sleep for tomorrow when we were going to juke for ourselves again.



---

## LESSON LEARNED

STEVEN G.

All niggaz want to be that nigga. It takes a special type of man to be in that position. He has to be hardworking, know the streets, and have power. I knew people that either had power but didn't know the streets, or knew the streets but wasn't hard working. Charles a.k.a Chills had all of the above. He knew these streets, and was hardworking. Now he might not have had the power right away, but later on in life...

It all started on September 14, 1986. That's when this little stud popped out of his mother. They say that even back then he was a pain; because it took his little a\*\* ten hours to come into this world. To make matters worse his mother died right after she gave birth. Some people say that it was because she was a dope head; others say she died from AIDS because she was a prostitute. No one ever knew who his father was. So now, here's another young black man without any parents and forced to the streets.

Since he didn't have a mother or father, they sent him to an orphanage called H.A.K.T( Helping All Kids Together). It was run by a middle aged woman named Ms. Drake. Now Ms. Drake was a fair woman. She was cool but not too cool; she was firm but not too firm. She was cool and accepted all of her foster children as though they were her own.

Chills was a smart child growing up. By 18 months he already knew how to pee standing up. At the age of ten, that's when his reign of terror started. He went to a school named Good Boys and Girls Elementary. He was only there for two weeks before he got kicked out for stealing out of the teacher's purse. When Ms. Drake found out he got kicked out, she was angry. " You little so-and-so. You just gonna be messed up all your life ain't you?"

WACK

"You just gonna steal from this woman, huh?"

WACK

"You bad little-" WACK,WACK,WACK.

The ten-year-old boy managed to escape his foster mother's lobster-like grip around his wrist. He ran out of the house down the block to his friend Jacob's house. Jacob was also 10 years old, and was just as bad as Chills, which is why the clicked up so well.

"Damn man, what happened to you? She really messed you up. What you do?" Jacob asked while laughing at Chills. When Chills lifted his head Jacob stopped laughing immediately. He saw something in the little boys eyes that he had never seen before.

"I'm tired of this!!" Chills said with more force than he meant to. "She always beating me for everything I do. She think I'm some type of punk or something." Chills spoke as if he were a grown man. Like his soul was old, just in a young body.

"We'll show her you ain't no punk. I say we should beat her, I mean she old. It ain't like she could beat both of us," Jacob said sounding as serious his best friend looked. "Yeah you right, but I'm going to get her by myself. That will show her that I ain't no punk."

Latter on that night Chills snuck in the house through his bedroom window; careful not to wake his foster brother and sisters. He's done this countless times before, when he would sneak out to smoke cigarettes he used to steal from people. He tiptoed past his foster brother and sisters, and past Ms. Drake. He made it to the coat closet where Ms. Drake keeps her .38 revolver. "This should show her I ain't no punk. I bet she ain't gone whoop me no more," Chills said to himself with more confidence than he felt. He walked into her room and turned on the lights. That's all it took to wake her up. "Boy what's yo problem? Can't you see--..." She stopped dead in her sentence with a look of horror on her face when she saw the gun in the little boy's hand. Stumbling over her words, "What's wrong baby? Come talk to me. Just put the gun down."

" Naw. You be treating me like a punk all the time. Always whooping every time I do something." She started easing out of her bed toward him slowly. "Come on baby. Please give the gun."

"Get away from me. I ain't playin with you." Underestimating Chills she dove toward him in hopes of retrieving the gun from him. Chills didn't know how to react toward the fast movement. He followed his instincts. BOOM!!! The cannon he was holding in his hands went off. He stood there in shock looking at Ms. Drake with fear in eyes. She had been shot in her chest the blow had took a huge chunk outta her chest. She's dead...

Now this the kind of poison our black people like to read. This is the kind of poison we like because this is the poison we have been programmed to like. When you are not in tune with self, and do not know who you are it is hard not to feed into stories, TV shows, and books of this nature. We believe that if it's not negative then it is not good reading material, and if it's not good reading mate-

rial then it's not worth reading. I think that's why some of the black men and women I've been with in my life can't read: They don't have any interest in anything that will help them learn. But if every book started off like mine, to capture their attention, then black children would pick up a book. They would read that book until it gets to the part where the book tries to teach them something, then they would put it down. They would say the book is boring.

But society has taught the black man/woman that school isn't necessary. They taught us that if by age 15 we don't have at least 1,000 dollars in our pockets, or we're not riding a Cadillac on "24's" then we are living wrong. They tell our black woman that if the 15, 16, and 17 year old black male does not have these things that they are not worthy men. So, the black man who does not have all of these things is stuck between a rock and a hard place.

It's all psychological, here's how it works. Say you're in the "lower class" of society. You're a black male between the ages of 16-17, and you don't have any money. All of your clothes are old and worn out. You watch videos and listen to music that tell you that you have to be flashy and have money, sell drugs, or kill someone in order to be somebody. On top of that there's some girl that you like that's one of those girls that only like men with money. Now the black man thinks he's forced to make a decision where he has to stop going to school, educating himself, learning about himself, and trying to be successful in the hells of northern america. He starts to sell drugs to fit in.

Now, the drug game is useless for the simple fact that you're going to get caught. There's no way you can get around it. Personally I think people who sell drugs are stupid because 1) you're going to get caught and 2) they try to make a career out of drug dealing. Now you may have heard this before, but the drug game leads to only three things - addiction, jail, and death. The spiritually and mentally deaf, dumb, and blind black man thinks he isn't going to get caught. "My uncle was selling drugs for five years before he got caught" a lot of black men used to say, but they don't realize the key words in this sentence is "before he got caught". It's sad what society has implanted into our minds.

Now, I'm going to tell you what you need to do, and it's not stay black and die. You need to WAKE UP BLACK MAN!!!!

Now, I'm not perfect nor have I've always had this degree of wisdom about our race and myself. I've certainly done my dirt. I've been locked up, stolen so much it's ridiculous, lied, cheated, committed armed robbery, barely went to school, and was very disrespectful toward everybody. I was the type of person that blamed all of my problems on the world. I never took responsibility for my own actions, and was never remorseful for my actions. So you see, I've never been perfect or "on my square" all of my life. It took for me to be locked-up for a while to understand the things that I understand now. It was not just being locked-up that opened my eyes to this new light. After my sixth month of being locked up I was placed on unit 4-F in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. It was a good unit because it gave you certain freedoms that allowed you to grow. But it was one reason in particular that I liked this unit so much, and that was because Good Brother a.k.a Brother Frazier was on this unit. Good Brother was a very spiritual, wise, and humble man. He was also brought up in the nation of Islam. He is the man that taught me everything that I know as far as giving wisdom. He worked with me one on one, gave me information, and taught me how to humble myself and stay peaceful. While Good Brother was working with me it was like a parent teaching their child how to ride a bike. The child keeps falling off of the bike, but the parent doesn't give up. But once you try one more time, to see if they're ready, and you let go of the back of the bike so that they can ride on their own; you see that they know what they are doing and you know that you taught them well. That's how it was with Good Brother and the information he gave me.

I haven't always been perfect. I'll never be perfect. It took for me to be locked up that I learned everything that I learned. I don't know everything, and I still have some things in myself I must work on. Like cursing, I have a problem with cursing a lot, but not because of my lack of vocabulary. But because I'm rarely in an environment where I need to use it. No, that's an excuse. I'm scared to use it because of what my peers will think of me. But like I said, I still have some things to work on, and I'm still young; I'm only 16 years old.



DRAWING BY KYLE W.

## MY LIFE

JASMINE W.

I think that I've had my fair share of joy and pain, but it seems like more pain. I know that a lot of it is my fault. Sometimes I blame others or I act like nobody goes through what I go through or they can't relate to me. Well, this is a little bit of my life story.

When I was a little girl I was very happy. I had everything that I wanted. I lived with my mother and father and my two older brothers. We all lived in a house in a town called Dolton. The first thing that happened to me that changed my life was when my brother, the second oldest, got a real steady girlfriend. He married her and moved away. I felt like he left me and it really hurt me. I never ever told him that. I have been nasty to him these past few years and Greg if you ever read this I am very sorry I never knew how to tell you so I acted out.

I saw my father do drugs for the first time in my life in my own house, when I was 12. I told my mother what I saw and she tried talk to me about it. About a year later my mother finally told me the truth about my father. They were arguing so much about his problem, because it began to mess the family up. I think that I was hurt the worst by it because I was the youngest and we always spent a lot of time together. I really looked up to my daddy. Then he just up and left me without any explanation. That really hurt me. After he left me, I was really a mess. Then he started getting worse. Without my mother to keep him on his toes, he ended up losing his job and strung out on drugs worse than before.

I think at that point I gave up on life. I really started acting out and not caring about what I did anymore. That's when I started smoking weed a lot and not going to school or just leaving as soon as I got there. Then my mother and I started fighting, and that always lead to her calling the police on me and me sitting in jail. I started staying out all night stealing from stores and from my mother. I was really breaking my mother's heart.

One day I get caught stealing at a major department store at the mall. I got my first case. I think that I got out of it because my dad lied for me and had a male friend of mine come get me from the station saying he was my uncle. I never went home. You can say that I ran away, but at the time I was thinking that my mom didn't want me home. So my mom went to the local police station and said that I ran away, and of course they caught me. I got to the station and saw the juvenile officer. He told me that he was going to see if I could see the juvenile judge that day. I ended up coming to the Audy Home for the first the time. I did not know what to expect. I was kind of scared. I stayed for about 3 weeks, then I came and they put me in this program were I had to stay in the house for 30 days and go to an after school program. I missed that, then I had a warrant and then got caught again and had to come back to the Audy Home for 3 months. After that, I went home on house arrest. I think I came back about two or three more times after that.

I am now 17 years old and looking back on life there's so much I wish I would have done differently. I can only learn and grow as a person. I still have time to change my life around and go back to being that happy girl I used to be.

To my daddy: I still respect you, but I am upset about what you did, because I lost that attention I greatly needed from you when you left me. I hope that you will learn from experiences and get your life tighter.

From your daughter Jazz.

To all the females in here:  
Please keep your head up and stay strong. You've got to. Especially to my girl BiBi: stay strong girl. I am praying for you.

I hope you enjoyed my life story but this is only the beginning of my life, certainly not the end.



## THE DUNGEON MY LIFE STORY

LUTHER G.

It all began in 1988 when Luther G. was born at Ravenswood hospital. When I was a baby, I was good. I never really knew my father like I wanted to. I know a little about my childhood. Half of my life I was raised up on the Westside of Chicago. The other half in the West Suburbs. I know I was born a drug baby but that really didn't bother me because my Grandmother would always tell me I'm her special baby. Also, I believed her all the time. I was the type of child who got whatever I wanted. Say my mom told me no, I'd go to my grandmother and she would give it to me and then tell me she loves me. My granddaddy was the type of person that if a grown-up tried to whoop me he would tell them not to touch me.

I don't know what it feels like to have a father in my life. For some reason when I was little my grandma took me to Stateville prison to see my dad. I was thinking to myself that my dad loves me. When I get there he tells me he hates me and he don't want me to come and see him no more. After I left, I felt a different way and have ever since. As I got older, I realized my mom was on drugs and she really couldn't do anything for me.

I have seen a lot of things in my life, from drug deals to rapes to people getting killed. When I was 7 years old, I walked in my grandma house. I was coming from school. I walked in, looked into my mom's old room and saw her shooting up some drugs in her arm. I won't ever forget that. When I was a little kid, I remember some of the big kids would chase me from school. If they caught me they would beat me up bad. I felt so bad about it that I would go home and try to kill myself. I have had a lot of suicide thoughts when I was little because I thought I had nothing to live for. I thought everybody hated me. My dad, that day he told me he hated me, he had me feeling like I wasn't s\*\*\*. I felt useless in the world because I'm thinking, "Why my dad doesn't love me like he loves my other brothers and sisters?" I don't think a father is supposed to have his son feeling like he's not s\*\*\*. A father is suppose to comfort the child, not leave the child in the cold. That's not right, that's not human.

When I got in school with the big boys I began wanting to be like everybody else. Smoking, drinking, staying out late. I did all that just to have friends. When I found out they were just using me for my big size and my money, I went back to having suicidal thoughts.

At one point in my life my mom stopped using drugs. She said she had stopped and she was sorry for hurting me. But three months later, she was back on drugs doing the same stuff. In 1998, I was living with my grandparents.

This was when my mom was on drugs. One night, me my grandma, granddad, and little brother was in the house. My little brother said, "Did ya'll just here a big bang?" We said we didn't, but something told my little brother to go see what it was. I thank God he did. When he went to see what it was he yelled, "The house is on fire!" My granddad hopped up like, "What the f\*\*\*?!" Everybody ran out the house. Now we are outside yelling, "Help! Please! Help! Please!" All of our neighbors came out crying, "Call the police!" I looking at our house go up in flames. I'm crying, my brother's crying, my whole family is crying. When it came down to what happened, somebody threw a cherry bomb in my grandma's house trying to kill my drug addict mom because she had stolen something from somebody. That's why I'm f\*\*\*ed up in the head. We could have died over some bulls\*\*\*.

After that, I moved in with my great grandma. Things changed a lot because I got an older girl pregnant. I'm thinking, "I don't know what to do," but my great grandma said, "Everything is going to be okay." Two months later, my great grandmother died. That was the most devastating part of my life. My mom had got her life together for good so I had somewhere to go, but when I went to my great grandma's funeral I was hurt in my heart because she took good care of me and loved me with all of her heart. When my girl told me she pregnant, I was like surprised. The whole process with her was a living hell because I had not been through any girl being pregnant. Also, I was kind of upset at my mom because when I told her my girl was pregnant she told me that she hated me and she was not happy with me. I thought, "You're not my mom because you didn't raise me so why should I care about what you say? I hate you." But I was just thinking that s\*\*\*.

My girl, she has been there for me ever since we got together but everything is not gravy all the time. Half of the time we would fight or I would bring some bullsh\*\* up just to be talking but I think that came from my childhood, people not loving me the way I'm supposed to be loved. That's why I think I sometimes treat my babymom the way I do. But I know I love her with all my heart and I'll do anything for her. I told myself when she had my baby I would be the best dad to my daughter that I can be. I don't want her to tell her friends the way I told my friends that my daddy ain't s\*\*\*. I want her to say, "My daddy, he's a teacher," or something besides a bomb or a drug addict. I learned all about bombs, drug addicts, and being locked up from my family. I will put my mind to taking a different path.

## THE TRANSFORMATION OVER TIME: A TRUE STORY

JOMAR L.

I was about 8 years old when I had my first experience with death. I got hit by a car and fell into a coma. I survived it. I didn't really know what happened. All I know I had woke up in the hospital. I even remember what hospital St. Mary's located on Division and Oakley.

I remembered playing ball in front of my crib. The ball rolled across the street and I went to go get it and BOOM a car hit me. When I woke up I seen my mom and my sisters and I had asked my mom what happened. I had scars all over my head and messed up my wrist.

I was about 10 years old when I had my second experience with death. My house had burned down on Fullerton and Drake. It was about 2:30am and my mom had woke me up telling me there was a fire. But I was still half asleep. Then I opened my eyes one more time and there was smoke everywhere.

I saw my mom running toward the back door. So then I went to go look for my shoes and I heard my mom screaming as loud as she could. "Hurry up Jomar! Hurry up!!" At that point I see my mom running down the stairs and I was trying to run after her, but it was too late because the back stairs started falling. I seen one of the steps fall past my mom's face. I started crying. I didn't know where to go. So I ran to the front door and opened it. A whole bunch of smoke went in my face. So I ran back to my room and opened my window, took a couple of breathers and I tried for the front door a second time.

This time I put my head down and started running as fast as I could down the stairs. I seen fire everywhere but I kept running and I never stopped. Then I got to the bottom of the stairs and ran outside. I seen my mom crying saying, "My son is still up there! If my son dies I'm going to kill myself!" Then I seen my mom trying to run back up the stairs, but the firemen did not let her pass.

I ran to her and she was crying even more. She hugged me and squeezed me so tight and she did not want to let go. She asked me how did I get out the front stairs if it was full of fire. I told her, "I ran down the stairs and I never stopped running." She told me, "It was impossible to run down the fiery stairs. You better thank God you are alive." I gave her a hug and told her how much I loved her. We lost everything in the fire. We were homeless for about six months. Me and my brothers and sisters were staying at my grandma's house on Hirsch and Springfield.

Eventually, my mom had found an apartment on 4258 W. Hirsch. I lived there for about two years. In those two years I picked up so many bad habits. Smoking, selling drugs, not going to school, robbing people, drinking, and not listening to my mom.

When I first moved there I didn't know nothing about the gangs, drugs, or drinking. I think what lead me to do all the things I did was seeing people doing it as an everyday thing. So I was young and I thought it was cool what they was doing, so I wanted to do it. I started chilling with the gang around my house.

They introduced me to the drug game. I started selling weed and I started smoking weed. I caught my first case when I was 13 years old. It was a drug case; I got caught with 9-dime bags of crack cocaine. Here's how it went down.

I was at the spot on Hirsch- Kildare and I had the 9 bags on

me and I was going to put them away but right before I was about to put them away I seen the cops. So I started running as fast as I can but they were still behind my back. As I ran past the corner I tried to run into this abandoned building that I was familiar with, because it wasn't the first time I ran from the cops.

I ran into the building and the cops ran in after me, but I had forgot the building was getting remodeled, so it didn't have any back stairs. So the police was already behind me, so that's how they caught me for my first case. They put me on probation for one year for that drug case. After that I was caught for a robbery case, so they extend my probation to 18 months.

I remember the first time I smoked weed. It was with my friend Papo. At that time he was in a gang called the Spanish Cobras. Then smoking became an everyday thing for me, and then I started drinking every day. This one time I was drinking almost all day then I felt like doing something stupid, so I started throwing bottles at cars when they drive by.

Then I seen a car coming toward where I was and as soon as he pass by I threw bottle at the car and hit it. That car crashed, and I was scared. I didn't know what to do, so I ran to go see what happen to that person. He was ok so I left as soon as I could because I didn't want nobody to see my face. Smoking, drinking, and selling drugs became a habit in my life.

Then I got to know everybody in the neighborhood and mostly everybody knew me, like I was famous or something. I wasn't going to school at the time, and if I did go to school I was flirting with the girls or smoking with the guys or chilling in the hood.

But no matter what, I always tried to do some positive things like take my little brother to the park or take him shopping with me. I will buy him some shoes when I went to get my shoes. I felt I had to be a role model for my little brother because at the time my older brothers was in jail. I felt that I had to be there for my little brother because I was the only one there to show him what to do. But I barely knew about life at the time either so I really didn't know what advice to give to him. So I stayed away from my crib when I used to want smoke or something like that because I didn't want my little brother to do the things I was doing. I got kicked out of school, so they put me in an alternative school called Infinity Alternative. It was ok. Then 3 months later they put me back in regular school. I really didn't do anything in school. All I did was go to gym and mess around with the girls, but I always had a good relationship with some of the teacher in every school I went to.

The school that I liked the most was Ames Middle School located on Armitage and Hamlin. I even graduated from Ames. That school really liked me because I was their best basketball player. I would like to thank my favorite teacher Mr. Trejo. If it wasn't for him I would have never graduated 8th grade. I'm going to tell you why I thank Mr. Trejo.

One day it was a normal day at Ames. I'm in the gym shooting around, then I was on my way to go eat lunch. Right before I made it to the lunch room I seen this teacher that I never really got along with and he was looking at

me in a way I didn't like. So I told him, "What the f\*\*ck are you looking at?" He said, "What the f\*\*ck did you just say to me? Do you want to get suspended?" I said, "I don't give a f\*\*ck. Do what you got to do."

After that argument he went to the office and called the police saying I verbally assaulted him. I didn't know he called the police until my favorite teacher Mr. Trejo told me that they called the police, and then I got real nervous when I found he called the police. So I walk out of school and ran home.

I was at my house and the school called my crib telling my mom that they want me to come back to school because the police are waiting for me. I told my mom, "Are they crazy? I can't catch a new case. I'm on probation." I got on the phone and my teacher told me, "Don't worry about it. I got your back. Ain't nothing going to happen as long as I'm here." He told me that he'd call me back in an hour.

So I waited for him to call. When he did he told me to come to school. He told me that he was going to take care of it. He did take care of it. He told the other teacher, "Jomar is my case. He's one of my students. I'll take care of him."

Before I get to my life as it is today, let me tell you about what lead me to jail. Robbing people became a habit in my every day life. I rember my mom always telling me, "Go to school and stay away from the streets. The streets are no good for you, son. Listen to your mom." But I always ignored her, like she didn't know what she was talking about.

Ocbter 1st was when my life made a turn for the worse. I was supposed to be in school, but I didn't go. I was chilling with my brother, cousin, and my brother-in-law. We was smoking. We decided to go rob somebody, so we all got in my brothers-in-law's car and drove to the far north side of Chicago.

We were riding down a couple of alleys and we spotted a guy in his garage all by himself counting money, so we decided to rob him. My brother-in-law was on the next block waiting for us to come back from robbing that guy. So my brother, cousin, and me ran up to the guy and asked him did he have any money on him? He said, "No, I don't have any money." So my brother was like, "Let me check it out." The guy tried to fight my brother so my cousin ran up and hit the guy in the face several times. Then the guy tried to kick my cousin, so my cousin grabbed his leg and flipped the guy over and the guy hit his head on the concrete. He started shaking. Then he stopped shaking so then I grabbed his wallet and ran to the car where my brother-in-law was waiting for me to come.

A week later, we found out that the guy died. I was in shock. I didn't know what to do, so I was on the run from the police for a week, but they caught me at a friend's house.

I'm going to tell you what's my life like today.

My name is Jomar Lopez. I'm 16 and I grew up in the north-west side of Chicago and I been incarcerated for over a year. Before I came here I wasn't going to school and wasn't listening to my family. I think those are two of the main reasons that I'm in here.

I am going to tell you a little bit about myself. You know one of the biggest factors in my life was not having my brothers there. Cause it's like one of them was out of jail, then one goes in...the other comes out then the other goes in. I really didn't have that brother bond that I needed in my life.

I was looking for that brother bond with people who were not my brothers. That's how I started chillin' with the gangs. They

were there for me when I needed them. That brother thing, you chill and go places with them, chill with females, if you get in a fight they are there. But there were things that these guys could not fulfill that brothers really could. Like taking me out to the movies or playing baseball or basketball or giving me that big brother advice that I need.

The gang, say you ditch school, they be like, "Ok, come chill." So now your brother will tell you like a bribe, "You go to school, come back at 2:30 and I'll take you to the beach," or something like that. The gangs are not really family to you so they're like f\*\*ck it they don't really care. Brothers are family and they are there when you really need them. But I didn't take advantage of my brothers when they were there because I felt that it was too late. I was already chillin' with the gang for a long period of time and I felt comfortable doing what I was doing.

When I first came in here I was blaming everybody for my mistakes, but now that I look at it I see that I made several big mistakes. When I first came in I really wasn't talking to nobody. I stayed to myself. I thought I was going to leave fast. I didn't know how serious my case was. I was blaming my brothers for not being there when I really needed them. I was pissed off at life period because I was locked up for one of the biggest cases there is. Then they charged me as an AT, Automatic Transfer, which means that as soon as I turn 17 I go to the County Jail. I thought my life was over.

At that point, I started thinking that just because I was in jail I don't have to stop living my life and stop trying to learn. Then I started being cool with staff and they gave me input on how my stay was going to be. They told me, "You are going to be here for a minute so try to do your time and get out. Don't get used to being incarcerated and institutionalized." Since then, I've been trying to help myself by finding new words, reading books, writing in journals (I've filled up five of them), and finding a few people to help me out the way I wanted my brothers to help me.

I feel that I'm ready to let people know that just because you're locked up, don't stop yourself from growing emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually. The reformation in my life has been so astonishing to others and me. I would like to single out a couple of people who played a big role in my reformation. Ms. Jordan, the best teacher I ever had, Mr. Ryan, a great tutor, and Mr. Carr, the best school social worker ever. I am going to tell you about my experience at Cook County Juvenile Detention center located on 1100 South Hamilton in Chicago Illinois. I have learned how to relieve myself from stress in different ways. Like writing in a journal when I feel that I can't talk to nobody. Writing in a journal feels like you talked to somebody real close to you. I also get different peoples' input on how to handle a situation that I am unsure with. The thing that bugs me the most is not having that interaction with my family like I used to.

But like they say, everything is done for a reason. I think my reasons are the things that I learned since I been here. Like how to control myself in a positive way when I'm in an unfamiliar situation. I see my mom often and when I do see her I give her a big hug and tell her how much I miss her and my family. I also tell her that I am so sorry for not being that good son that she wanted.

I am going to share a poem that my sister wrote to me. The

poem is called "What If"

*What if life wasn't so harsh?  
What if people wouldn't talk about others?  
What if money didn't control the human mind?  
What if your brothers were needed  
but nowhere to be found?  
What if you thought,  
"damn, how can you do this to your family?"  
What if no matter what you are still my hero?*

One of the reasons that I wrote this book is that I am thinking about copping out for 20 years and I want to let people know that just because you are locked up you don't have to stop learning or growing mentally. I know I put my family through a lot of sh\*\* and I want them to know that their son is still trying to do his best in life. I am at the point of my life where I feel that I have to help others not do the same mistakes that I did. I think I accomplished a very important goal in my life by writing this autobiography to help others.

I'm at the point where I need to make a big decision about my case and I don't know what to do. Because either way I go I have to do some time. I don't want to do no time, but it's not up to me. They want me to cop out for 20 years and if I want to cop out I have to do it within the next 3 or 4 months. My family thinks I should cop out for the 20 years but I don't agree with them at all. They say I should cop out because either way they are going to find me guilty which is true, but I think I should take my chances and trust in faith, but then again I feel that I should cop out and do my time and get it all over with. But I don't want to spend the next 20 years of my life always watching my back and not knowing who to trust.

Every time I write something it comes from the inside of me because I don't really show people my emotions. I hold all my feelings and thoughts in until I get a pen and paper and write my feelings and thoughts and turn it into a book. Other people may think good of me and others may think badly of me, but I doesn't matter what they think as long as I know I am doing the right thing.

I'm reading this book called Bodega Dreams. I like that book because the characters are so positive about there community. No matter what people say about their community they still try to make the best out of it. I think the meaning of that book is it don't matter where you live it's what you make out of it. You can live in the richest neighborhood and still get in a lot of negative things. I think I can relate to the characters because I'm locked up and I still do so much positive things. I wish I would of known all the things I know; I probably would have been on my way to college looking forward to the future. I wonder what if I would of never came to section 5f? I think would have never written this book about myself and I would have never known half of the stuff I know now. I would like to thank Mr. Walker, Mr. Booker, Mr. Bruce, Mr. Grayer, and last but not least Mr. Merrite for being the best staff they can be and always trying to show somebody the right way of doing things.

The whole point of me writing this autobiography is that one person gets something out of this and really takes life serious. I wish everybody good luck with their cases and life period.

## REMORSEFUL CHRISTOPHER P.

I was sitting in my room. I have lots to say. Where do I start? I have nothing else but time so I will start here. My name is Christopher Pittmon. All of my life I have struggled and had to eat the best way I was taught, how not to do it illegally but legally, and the way my father showed me. Cleaning gutters, cutting grass, raking leaves, shoveling snow, painting, building, basically however it came. Mom never really wanted to show us her struggles. Us, yes, three others and me. But me being the baby boy and very observant, no matter how she tried to hide her pain with her bright smile I saw it even more. Being very mature for my age, I saw it. So I set out and set my pride with my goals high, promising to succeed in life and make mom proud and us rich, so that one day I could take care of her, as she had always did for me, no matter what.

During this time, late eighth grade year – early ninth, I was still with that same determination not to fail her in life. I asked Mama what I could do to help ease this burden. She said, "Nothing now, son." I remember like it was yesterday. "Just go to school and get a good education like I didn't get a chance to." So what I did, I got up and got out and headed to school every day faithfully.

But at the same time me being so wise, so athletic, so cute, so gosh darn popular, it drew me to a lot of friends. Well, so-called friends...company. Some good friends, lots bad, even more of them, no, all of them, just some misguided children looking for love and help. Which yes even I tried to help one, specifically when a child brought a gun to school Proviso East High. With a little persuasion I got the gun. While trying to turn it in I was arrested for unlawful use of a weapon. I tried to explain my case but in their eyes it was just my story. I told them if they don't believe me check the cameras and they did. They immediately arrested the other boy but soon they released him because they had a better case against me because they caught me with the gun. I would look better with the gun in my possession. At the school preliminary hearing, come to find out he stole the gun from his foster mother. It's all on record. He walked, No trial, no nothing. Me four months incarcerated and thirty months probation and the start of my destruction.

That's not all, it gets worse. A mother at home. My mother at home loosing hope but not her faith, thank God. "Lets keep it truthful, Chris," is what's in my head right now. "You're doing fine releasing stress and pain, oh so much pain." But still I write and try to keep a smile. "Baby boy your killin' your Mom." Although I know she's still holding strong trying to smile, cause besides that's who I got it from, like mother like son right?

After my four months was complete I had missed my family so much I copped out for thirty months of probation, considering I couldn't win no matter how innocent I was, and I wouldn't dream of asking mom for some fancy lawyer. Well, I'll probably dream. So I took the two years six months praying for some loophole around it. But the devil had a plan for that to. With an adult felony charge at fifteen, a seven o'clock curfew and a probation officer with two hun-

dred more clients to check on, he could care less about my achievements or goals in life. He was more concerned about waiting on me to make the littlest mistake just to violate me, when none of us is even close to perfect. These are not only statements, they are facts. His exact words were, "You not ready to change, so I'm going to keep violating you till you turn seventeen. Off to the county you go." That man don't know what I been through.

What kind of help, support is that? Or is it his job to just keep count of my mistakes? I pray for God's sake I still need help, I still need guidance. If I can't get it from the one who has full control of my life, who made me an adult so fast, where else, will I get it? Nowhere. Just another African American male, a menace to society. And I can't let that happen. My mom raised me way better than that and worked to hard for that. That's when the real destruction started. I was still going to church faithfully every Sunday trying to find a job to take on some of the load with mom, and trying to get in a school. But you know what? No jobs called back, which I really wasn't surprised with a felony like mine at sixteen. No school wanted me. I felt disowned. In my head I thought, "Only if they know my heart, know my mind, things would be different."

People in my neighborhood started looking at me differently. I think not just in shame but also more as a failure, a drop-out hanging out with the corner boys, a drug dealer when I was nothing of that sort. I still can't blame them cause that's what it looked like. Like mom always said, birds of a feather flock together, and she was right.

Although I was still trying to do well, my surrounding environment starts changing toward me. There was hardly any grass to cut when it was obvious that the grass needed it. No gutters to clean when it was clearly visible gutters needed cleaning. Now I understand there are no justifications or reasons to take what don't belong to me at all.

For one second put your feet in my shoes, no please for one minute actually put yourself in my whole life position. Feel the burden, the pain I feel through this pencil. You would have done the same.

The reality check, the turn around in my life was on October 9th 2005. I gave my life for the first time; I gave my life to the lord. All my life I was church active and raised, so to think about some of the wrong I've doing I should have been dead. It may not have been a lot to most real criminals but for me it was the last straw. I was ready to come home to the only place that could give me back hope and rekindle my heart and mind for another chance at a free life. I was home and it felt so good when the rest of my life felt so wrong. And mom saw a new glow in me, a new chance of survival when I was so close to death, mentally, physically, and emotionally. I was thankful for that 'cause the one person that mattered to me the most was still on my side and had never left. Thanks mom. That's when the phone rang, someone telling mom on her cell phone that I may have been involved in car burglary from the night before, true enough I knew it was me. The person who I was with got caught with the CD-player, but he said my name as if it would cover him. Now he

is mad at me, as if I care, and for what reason? The only reason I was with him was to help him get his girlfriend a CD player considering we took hers without her permission. So she said replace it and that was the only way possible at the time.

Not saying it was right 'cause it was wrong taking something someone worked so hard for, but I'm letting you know I'm sincere and very knowing of my actions. I know with Christ on my side I will take full responsibility. I just want you all to know whatever the outcome I am not a menace to our society or badly raised by mom. I was just becoming that misguided child still looking for help.

Over eight months of my life was spent, wasted locked up not all together but bit by bit. I went even longer with out going to school. I know it may not seem long to your average crook but I'm not your average crook. That's a long time without schooling or just plain old regular child association. My whole childhood, basketball games, football games, dances, birthdays, holidays, prom and even more my education, my dreams to become a veterinarian or a famous ball player are about to be thrown away. Someone, anyone please take a stand fight with me so my life, a good life, wouldn't be thrown away. I still believe, believe with me. I get deep because I care what happens with my life unlike most. I care 'cause I have people who care for me. My mind is very strong for the young age of sixteen and is hungry for more knowledge and maturity. Please don't let this great mind that I know was put here for a purpose go to waste, help keep me on the right track. I never dreamed in a million years I would see the inside of juvenile detention, let alone the county or, worst, the penitentiary. Surrounded by murders, rapist, convicts even here, help me not to become of them.

In closing, I say no one told me, or asked me to do this letter of apology, of remorse, of pain. But still I write to let the police, my community, my mom, my judges, my teachers, my family, to let you all know I'm sorry for failing you, sorry for shaming you and myself. So take this and know that it isn't your fault. Know my life and know me and some things I been through before you judge me. Greater is he that is in man than he that is of the world. That has been instilled in me since birth. Now don't get me confused I'm not saying I haven't done a little wrong and shouldn't be held accountable for my actions, 'cause I should, but in a fair and equal way based only off nothing less than what I've been through. And acknowledge that I've acknowledged my wrongs and confessed my sins and have been forgiven by a greater power. What about you all? So take my apology from the bottom of my heart. Sorry, and help me to keep straight after I get through this so I won't be a lost cause to my family and all the others who expect lots more from me. 'Cause what matters is I expect more from myself, like many people don't. That I learned the hard way and if I had to do my life over I wouldn't change a thing cause that's the path God set for me and I will walk it, I made my bed know ill sleep. To be continued

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY

KLASSY N.

My name is Klassy. I was born on May 31, 1990 at 6:00 A.M at Bethany Hospital to Jerome N. and Mary W. I came out 7 pounds and 9 ounces. I am the baby of 5 kids. I have a sister named Sparkle and I have 3 brothers named Sala, Jovonni, and Jerome.

My younger years were very exciting. I learned how to crawl when I was 8 months and learned to walk at 1. I started my first day of school at Depriest Elementary school. I stayed at Depriest from pre-school until 5th grade. When I was 7 years old my Grandmother died of Lung Cancer. I was devastated. I didn't know what to do. She was 56 years old. From there I went to Michelle Clark Middle School from 6th to 8th grade. When I was 13, I met this boy named Dwayne. We went to school together. We have been dating for 3 years and 6 months. Our relationship is very good. When I turned 15 yrs old I became pregnant by Dwayne but my parents said I was too young for kids so I got an abortion. I was upset because I really didn't want to do it, but I knew that we wasn't ready for kids.

In September I went to jail. It was my first time. I didn't know what to do. I stayed in jail for 1 week and 4 days and then I went home on home confinement. I didn't do so good. I violated, so I went back to jail, this time for 2 weeks. Then I went home on house arrest and I completed that and then my Judge put me back on home confinement. I think that was a bad idea. I violated again and then my judge put me on probation and I couldn't stay at home. I went to stay with Dwayne because I felt that my mother and father didn't treat me fair. I finally came back home and found out that I had a warrant out for my arrest, so I went back to jail. This time my judge and my parents were tired of me. My judge sent me to the Department Of Corrections. I was very upset.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY

YVONNE H.

I was born and shipped off to my Grandma at six months. My mother couldn't take care of me financially. Three or maybe five years went by, a woman named June came to my house claiming to be my mother. From time to time, I'd see this woman, but rarely. How dare she demand that I call her mother? As far as I was concerned, my Grandma was my mother. As you grow up, though, you start to become aware of the special things about having a mom. Don't get me wrong, I love my grandma. It's just that I saw all my peers getting picked up by their moms and getting kisses. Now tell me you didn't want that?! I did, and I wanted for my friends to know I had one. As time went on, I started to realize that I really wanted her love, attention and to be her everything.

My mother's name is June and I love that name. It's very unique, nothing like my name, Yvonne. I never could bring myself to call her mom. I call her June.

What hurt me was the fact that she took care of my two younger brothers, but couldn't take care of me. I feel a lot of pain.

## WHAT'S YOUR LIFE LIKE? MINE IS REAL. EVERYTHING ABOUT IT FOR REAL! (CHAPTER 1)

MARTHA J.

If you know who Mizz.Trina (TBB) is, den you know where Fort Pierce City is located. Well if you don't, it's right by her home town. Peep dis out, dis is my life. 1980s before I was even born, my mom was 18 and married to my dad. He was in his twenties. Dey were the happiest couple, til one special day, she was all alone in da house. Den it hit her as she was layin on da couch it would be fun to have a baby around, her & my daddy had been together from da 1st time dey seen each other. She waited for my dad to come home a long day from work, dey were runnin low on groceries, so while dey got ready to go shoppin she started sayin how she was think about havin a baby. While my mom was talking away, my dad was riten down a list of food dey needed to buy. He told my mom dat he had been thinking about da samethin & dat he could be able to support da family if he had two jobs. Dey worked on havin da baby. So he started his own business. She was all curious because her body was actin funny. Dat's when she found out she was pregnant. A couple of months passed by, dey went to da doctor. Day went to dere own doctor. Dat's when the doctor told dem dat she was goin to have a baby. She had to take care of herself cause she was already a month and a half!

## CONFUSION

SAMANTHA S.

I am so confused. I went to court yesterday, expecting to get a continuance in September, but instead I got something else. I stood in the court room staring at the judge, with my blue jeans and my 3X JTDC sweatshirt on, not knowing what was going on. My P.D. says one thing, my P.O. says another, the State's Attorney either agrees or disagrees, or makes a statement. I'm just standing there, freezing my behind off, wishing time would go by faster.

At 11:30 AM and they told me to come back in a few minutes because of a misunderstanding. I walked down the hallway and into the "bull pen." The other girl I was with got released to her grandmother. The other two girls were still in court. One girl comes back and tells me Alicia AKA "Twinkie" went home. Five minutes later, the girl gets taken back to section, but I'm still waiting to be seen.

Finally, they come to get me around 1 o'clock, and yet again I'm standing in front of the Judge. Time went by too fast at that moment. The only words that I understood were "D.O.C. ...placement...five years probabtion..." and "if they won't then I will." I have no idea what just happened. All I know is I go back to court on August 22nd. Today is my 15th birthday and I'm not really feeling happy. I don't know what's going to happen to me and I'm really starting to get irritated. I'm really cold, and I'm getting yet another cold, but I just recovered from one. I've been here for five months and four days. Man, does it seem longer. I can't wait to be released, but I know it won't be until around the year 2006.

## DREAMS BIGGER THAN DREAMS

EDWIN S.

The first point of life I can actually remember was when I was 5 years old. My mother worked in a meat market in Muscatine, Iowa. I had 2 sisters and 1 brother. We moved from Muscatine, Iowa to Chicago, Illinois because of my abusive father and the death of my grandmother. We moved in the city and it was nothing like the environment I was used to living in. We moved in the Lathrop Holmes Projects A.K.A. the Diversey Projects. I heard gunshots all night and the sounds of police cars. My mother was now collecting a monthly income and I was going to be starting kindergarten next year. My oldest sister Celia and my big brother Joshua had already began school and they both were getting good grades and already made new friends.

A whole year went by and I was now going to start school. I just turned 6 years old and started school. I remember me in the classroom playing with toy robots and learning my alphabet. I was on honor roll all 4 quarters of kindergarten. I also was student of the month twice that year. I also started to attend the after-school program to learn how to read better and write neater. After the after-school program I'll stay an extra 30 minutes to finish my homework and clean the chalkboards. My mother will then pick me up from school and take me over my aunt's house to play with my cousins. My cousins were older than me and used to try to pick on me because I was the baby of the family. I didn't let them get to me. I just ignored them and would go sit by my mom.

I then finally graduated from kindergarten. It was a tough thing to do, but my teacher was the best teacher you can possibly have. When the summer time hit I was now out of school and started making more friends and learned my way around the projects. I also learned how to tie my shoes from my brother. As a kid, I always wanted to be a judge. But I know to become a judge you have to stay in school and obtain good grades. I was a big thinker at the age of 6.

The summer finally came to an end. I was 7 years old in the 2nd grade and I remember bundling up because of the cold winter. I was the smallest kid in my classroom. Our class had class pets. We raised two hamsters. My teacher was kind of strict. She was very into her job and didn't take a wrong answer from any of us. I thought she was cool because she'll type a whole paragraph on the computer without taking her eyes off me.

Everybody had to do a science project to get a science grade. I was interested in how the rain evaporates. After a day or two, where does it go. I found out that after the rain evaporates it starts a whole new process all over. I went to another science fair at another school because I won 1st place in my school. My mom was proud of me and my principal took my mom and me to the other school. It was many people and some kids had some nice projects. I was the youngest one there and I remember one kid's project was based on electricity. I didn't win 1st place but I won 3rd place. I was happy and my mom and stepdad took me out.

My mom went years without a job, but she still took care of us. I began to understand more about life. I then knew right from wrong. 2nd grade was now coming to an end. I couldn't wait for summer vacation because that whole winter was cold. This summer vacation I knew I was going to start going to the swimming pool across the street from my school. I was taking swimming lessons at the pool for the summer. I was scared to go in 4 feet because I was only 3 feet tall but after the swimming lessons I wasn't. I learned how to dive. I was now a great swimmer and loved to show off in front of the girls.

## NOT TO LONG AGO

JOSE L.

Not to long ago this kid was born, a very different child. A boy, he was raised on the near west side on Pulaski and Flournoy. He and his twin were on the honor roll at Webster elementary. They were doing great, but for so long he didn't have a father to learn from. So he did things that got him expelled from school and evicted from their apartment. He and his family moved out south, 63rd and his granny relocated to the Englewood area. He was the new kid on the block. The best student again in his class. But this time he was introduced to this drug called weed, and syrup. Started not to show up to school, ditching. At 12 years old he was stealing cars and robbing. Got to a point in his life that he didn't care who he stuck up.

At 13 he met this young Hispanic girl who's brother sold weight, and the rest is history. He was spending money on things that would not matter if he died that night. I won't tell how much weight he and his associate was moving in a day. At 14, had his own whip. A 1964 Buick Rivera, clean but hood clean. Soon enough, they had a situation that landed them jail time. After two and a half years he and his partner had not been seen on the block. So now he is sitting in here doing what you are reading. How could he have made it this far? By the grace of god and the love from his family. What was this kid's name?

## THE DISTURBANCE IN MY LIFE

ANTHONY B.

My name is Anthony B. I'm trying to reach out to those who are looking for advice about how it feels to lose your freedom and to be incarcerated for a long time. I been locked up for 13 months so far at J.T.D.C., also known as the Audy Home. My experience being here was unstable. Not because of the staff or my peers or other people, but because I'm not at home with my loved ones.

What hurt me was when I lost my grandfather and I couldn't go to his funeral. I felt very disconcerted. I didn't know what to do. All I was thinking about was my family. The Sunday after he died, my mother came to see me. It was the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me, to let my mother come and see me in jail. The next day I wanted to do something that I will regret later on. So the staff on my section came to me and started giving me advice about my situation. After that counseling I felt much better. I kept my peace. I just pray and ask the Lord will he put his loving hands around my family and me.

After I lost my grandfather, I didn't give up. I was staying out of trouble, and staying strong for my family. I was getting A's in the Audy Home. Some people just give up faith when they come in here. They figure that since they are locked up there are no reasons for them to study or do classroom work.

On the following Wednesday, I received an unexpected visit by my sister. I knew something had happened. The first thing came to mind was my brother. So she came and sat down after she signed in. She said, "I got something to tell you." Right there at that moment I felt astonished. I knew it was some bad news when I saw tears falling from her face. At first she was not going to tell me. She wanted my mother to tell me so she could be there to talk to me. But she finally said, "If I tell you what happened would you be strong?" I was so anxious to hear what was going on. She told me that

our brother just died. That news took my whole focus off what I was thinking about. I didn't want to talk to anybody. I wanted to get out of this place. I was thinking about hurting somebody very bad. The only thing I could think about is my mother and the last moment I had with my brother. We were at the table having a talk about when I get out. Man, it hurt me deep down inside to hear about my brother's death. I also knew I couldn't go to his funeral, because I was charged as an adult and I was facing a serious charge. I had not been allowed to go to my granddaddy's funeral.

But I want you to know that, even after all that, I still didn't give up faith. It don't matter what your situation may be. Always remember there's somebody out there with a problem a whole lot worse than yours. I think if I had stayed in school and not hanging out with the wrong crowd who I thought was my friends, I would be a better person. But I can't blame nobody but myself. I make my own decisions. It's a whole lot of peer pressure out there in them streets. Your friends telling you that they going to ride or die with you. But when you get behind these walls everything changes. I know. I saw it. I did a lot of research to find out who are my friend and who are not. They pretend that money is the world and that the gangs are everything.

I saw a lot of things in the Audy Home. I witnessed how different gangs can come together. I learned how to deal with different types of situations. Not by getting physical, rather by being the biggest person and showing respect to each other. I want to give thanks for the support that I got from the staff my teachers and my tutors Ryan and Mia and Mr. Johnson from the B.U.I.L.D program for them keeping me focused.

I wrote this to let the youth know that someone wants to tell them something that can get them somewhere.

---

## TODAY

TONDALIA D.

Today is another depressing day. I wish I could trade lives with someone who is free, just until my case is over. These couple of days I've been here feel like months. This is a real lesson to learn, because I'm 18 years old and I'm around 13, 14 and 15 year olds. There is nothing really wrong with that, but I am supposed to be leading the way for them, letting them know this is not a place you want to be. Here you are locked down and told when to sleep or eat. It's a lot of things out in the real world that us guys could be doing instead of being in a place like this. We should be in control of ourselves, and our actions, so we don't have to be in a place like this.

I went to court Monday, August 1. My Public Defender came to tell me what her and the State agreed on. She said

they wanted to give me two years of probation and one year on intensive probation. I did not want to go through with it, so she left and came back and said "OK, the state said since you are 18 and have not picked up any new cases that if you do 13 days upstairs they will close both of your cases and you are off Juvenile Probation." I said "OK," but when we got in the court room the Judge ordered four more days, so that made me have to do 17 days. This is still a blessing. Now I have 12 more days left and I'm on straight release August 17th. That really made me know that there is a god and I do have a chance in life.

## MY LIFE STORY

ORLANDO S.

It all starts on February 8, 1988, the day I was born. I don't really remember too much about when I was young but I'll try my best to tell you about my life story.

When I was born, my mom and dad had a divorce. My dad told me they really didn't get along very well, but I was too young to understand what was going on. I only have one brother on my mother's side of the family. On my daddy's side I have three sisters. One of my sisters was living with their mother at the time and the others were grown and starting their life with kids. Me, my mom, and my brother were living on 57th and LaSalle in a black and white house. My mom's cousin had lent it to us, at least that's what I heard. I didn't really know her so I can't really tell you too much about her.

My brother is ten years older than me. One day when I was three years old I was on the front porch with my brother playing with a basketball and the ball was going to bounce over the banister. I tried to catch it, but I went over with it and landed on the concrete face first. After that, all I remember was waking up at the hospital in the emergency room with my mom. She was always there for my brother and me. After waiting for about two hours, the doctor came and said he couldn't do anything about it. I rinsed my mouth out and my mom said my teeth were pushed in my gums and they were crooked. That is the only thing I remember up until I was five.

Next thing I remember was when my granddaddy died. He used to come by and open his truck and in it would be all type of candy, chips, and pickles. I loved pickles and I still do. One day I was upstairs watching TV in my mom's room and she called me downstairs in a sad voice. When I got down there she was crying. I asked what had happened and she said that my granddaddy went to sleep that night and didn't wake up the next morning. I cried and kept crying all day. I really loved my granddaddy. I had gone to his funeral and his burial. I cried 'til I couldn't cry any more.

Things went on and I turned six years old. My mom really started showing that she was using drugs. Her cousin had started to realize that my mom was using drugs so she put us out of the house. I was living with my dad at the time. My mom called me and said she had got an apartment on 58th and Prairie. I had started going to school around my dad's house but I didn't really listen to the teachers. I refused to do anything they told me to do. So one day when I had come home from school my dad had got tired of me. He was so mad he when I came in the door he grabbed me and started yelling and I was crying. I know I done something wrong. He pulled out a thick leather belt and started swinging it. I started running around the room. He grabbed my feet and held me in the air with one hand and the other hand was swinging the belt. I was screaming loud as I could, thinking someone would come, but nobody came. After about 15 minutes he stopped. I was still crying and screaming. He was still yelling, telling me to do better in school and stop messing around and do my work.

The next day I went to school and was quiet the whole day. I did all my work for the first time since I enrolled in the school. That night I didn't say anything to my dad. I sat in my room quietly watching TV. It was about 7:00pm that night. I got my school clothes ready. As I was getting ready, I realized I had a mark on my leg. I thought it was dirt so I thought I just needed a bath. I took a long bath and I realized that it wasn't coming out and it wasn't dirt. It was a bruise from when my dad had whooped me. My mom would come visit me on the weekend, so I was planning to tell her and I knew she would yell at him. The next day she had come and did exactly what I had thought. She called the police. My mom was not scared of anything. She would express her mind to anybody. They were arguing and I was thinking, "Why did I tell her?" I was thinking it was all my fault because I was the one being bad, not listening to what I was being told to do. Nor did I know that he was only trying to teach me a lesson. He didn't mean to bruise me. That was an accident. He didn't know he had done that.

The police said I should go with my mom, not knowing she was on drugs. My mom was staying in a one-bedroom apartment. It was like four other people in one big apartment and my mom and me had to share a room. I think my brother stayed with the next-door neighbor. His best friend Jason lived there. My mom had been staying at this apartment for about a month already. We stayed there for two more months. She was still on drugs and she wasn't paying the rent, so they put us out. We had nowhere to go.

We had gone to a hotel on 39th and King drive and got put out for not paying rent in a couple of days. Then we went to a shelter in the 100's and stayed there for two weeks because that's as long as you can stay there. I was only seven years old when I first experienced the shelter. I didn't really know what was going on.

After we got out the shelter my mom wanted to change her life around, so she took me to a social worker and told them her problem and that she wanted me to live with my uncle Ricky. My uncle Ricky is a Minister in a church in the 100's. He has a wife and three kids, two boys and a daughter. My mom had gone to treatment. In addition, I was with my uncle. He was telling me that they go to church every day and I would have to get used to it. I was young so I really didn't know what was going on. I just sat back and waited on my mom to come back. I really love my uncle and my cousins. They cared for me and did everything they could possibly do for me. I had gone to school down the street and was doing well. I was in second grade.

A couple of months went by and I had turned eight years old. My mom, my grandmother, and my brother surprised me with a birthday party. I had cake and ice cream. That was my first birthday party that I can remember having. I was so excited to see them. I was especially excited to see my grandmother. When I saw her I gave her a hug and a kiss. I do that every time I see her because I'm grateful to have her. Most people don't have a grandmother. I love my family with all my heart, even though we been through a

lot. My cake had a picture of Batman and it had my name on it. My mom took pictures of my cake and me. I was loving every minute of it. My brother was playing wrestling with my cousin I joined in with the fun. That was the best birthday I ever had.

A couple of weeks later my mom had completed her program and had got out of rehab and was doing well. The social worker said she could come and get me. She came and got from my uncle's house, but I was still going to church with them every Sunday. My mom had found another one of my uncles, Darryl. He lived on 65th and Blackstone. My mom's uncle Steve owned the building. He also owned several other buildings, including the one he and my great-grandmother live in. He was a police officer at the Third District police station on 71st and Cottage Grove. He had let my uncle Darryl and my mom get an apartment in the basement. My brother was living with us for a while and after a couple of weeks he went to Job Corp. My uncle Darryl was the janitor of the building. It had about sixteen other apartments and he kept everything clean.

One night my brother was returning back home after a fight in Job Corp. He had started selling drugs at the time. I didn't really know what it was but I was going to find out in the future. My mom had a job at the rehab center where she had gone. I went to Walworth grammar school. I was in third grade. They tried to fail me because I was off by two points on my Iowa test. So my mom had paid for me to go to a Catholic school, the name of it was Holy Angels. When I entered the school I had to take a test and they thought I should start at 3rd grade all over again. I really didn't know the difference between a public school and a Catholic school, but I found out quickly. I was trying to be a class clown but my teacher wasn't having it. After a couple

of days I got my first paddle (a wooden stick that they would hit you with on your butt). It really hurt but, like they say, a hard head makes a soft ass.

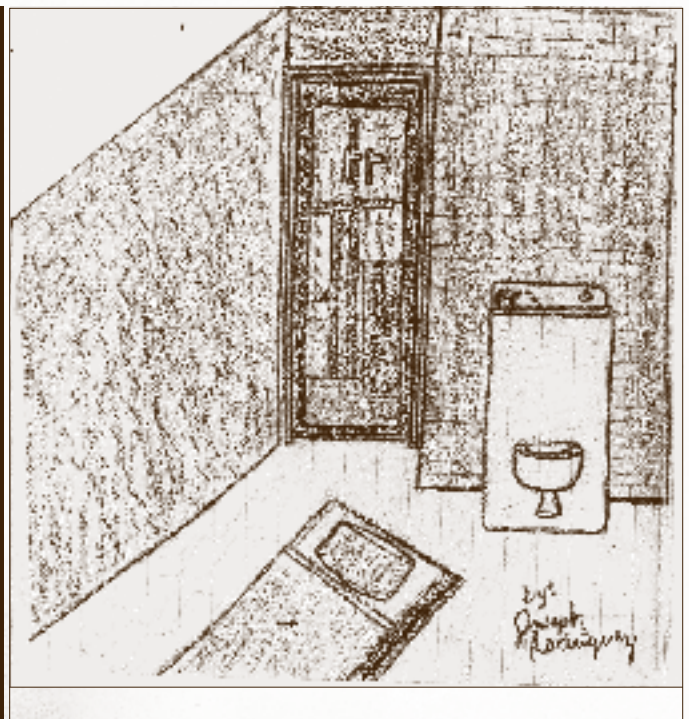
I didn't learn the first time. I started trying to be slick with it and most of the time I got caught. However, I always did my work. My favorite subject was math. I was the best in my grade. I like math and science. I liked science because we always were learning different projects on how to make stuff. I wasn't doing well on the other subjects. On my report card I was getting D's and C's and my mom was so mad. In fact, I got a whooping. She was mad because she was paying for me to go to this school and I was getting D's. Therefore, I started paying attention and the D's and the C's started turning to B's, C's, and A's. I made my mom proud of me. She was paying me money for a good report card and my grandmother was too.

After living in the basement for a couple of months my mom got us an apartment on the first floor in the same building. About this time I was going outside in the neighborhood and found friends. My brother was still staying with us, but would come in late at night and my mom would get mad. My brother and I have different fathers. My brother's cousin lived down the street from us. I was over at his house all the time. I also had a friend named Surge. He lived in my building. Us three did a lot together. I was very creative. I loved to build clubhouses. That was my favorite thing to do. We would look all over the neighborhood for stuff to build with. We didn't have no hammer, we had bricks. I would get nails from my uncle. Every time we had built one it would stay up for about five days and the garbage man would come and tear it down. We would wait a couple of days and build it again. I loved doing that.

DRAWING BY JEFFREY R.



DRAWING BY JOSEPH R.



## ONE SUMMER NIGHT

JEFFREY R.

Danger is not a good thing. The reason why danger is not a good thing is that people suffer and get hurt in dangerous situations. Like, for example, I was in danger one day. The reason why I was in danger was that I was walking in a rival gang's neighborhood. They started shooting at me. I didn't shoot back because I didn't have a gun. I started running. I hit an alley, then I hit a gangway. I saw them run past the alley looking for me. They didn't see me. At that point in time I thought they were going to kill me. I stayed in the gangway for about an hour and a half. Then I left the gangway and ran to my house, which was about ten blocks away. This whole incident started about 5:30 p.m. and ended about 7:00. I was walking in the rival neighborhood because I was going to visit my girl who lives in a rival neighborhood. So if I want to see my girl, I have her come over to my house.

One day I was walking down 26th street. I was with my boys. We were going to eat at the pizza place. We got to the pizza restaurant and I saw this car full shiesty niggas. I knew that they were looking for some of us. I said, "Look at that car." My guys said, "What car?" I said, "That black van." Then they hit the alley. So then I told my boy's that they are going to yack at us. But my boys thought that I was joking. So we got the pizza and starting walking down the street. We didn't even get a block away when I started to get the feeling that something was about to happen. When we got to Central Park I seen the car roll past, the same car that I seen at the store. I told my boys, "There is the car that I was talking about." They said, "Stop being paranoid." I told them, "F\*\*ck you nigga. I'm telling the truth. Watch them yak at us. So about 5 minutes later, a nigga came out a gangway, said, "What's up nigga" and pull out a gun and started yaking at us. I ran though a gangway. One of my boys got shot in the leg. I ran back to him and pick him up and carried him in the alley and called 911. He was OK, but I still didn't learn my lesson.

One night December 11th of 2004, it was about 2 in the morning. I was at a party. I went outside for a minute to smoke a cigarette. Next thing I know I walk back inside the party and the party was a disaster, everybody was fighting. I started fighting with a rival gang member. As I was fighting my girl came back inside the party and said "Get out! Get out!" and I said, "I'm not going to go because I ain't going to leave my niggas in here." I grabbed her and pushed her outside the party.

After I pushed her out and turned around that's when I got shot. The next thing I know I flew into the air. I hit the floor. I tried to pick myself back up. I wasn't able to. I pulled my shirt down. I saw a .45 hollow tip bullet stuck in my chest. I looked around the party. I seen everybody fighting still. I thought I was going to die. I was calling help to my friends, but everybody couldn't hear me because the music was so loud. Just then I see my friend pick up the radio and slam it on someone's head. I looked to my left. I seen the chief of the gang run outside with a gun in his hand. I heard a couple shots. I looked around. I seen my friend, he was bleeding from his head. He ran up to me and told me to get up. I said "I can't get up. I'm shot." I seen the girls I went to school with run inside the party. They told me, "Jeffrey, get up." I tell them "I can't. I'm shot." Then one of the girls started yelling

"Jeffrey's shot." She tried to pick me up. I told her "Don't move me. that hurts." My girl comes back inside the party and asks if I'm OK. I told her "I'm shot." She started crying, "My baby's shot. Help me my baby's shot." Then I blanked out for a minute.

I opened my eyes again. Somebody picked me up and started running with me to the car. They threw me on my girl's lap in the back seat. I was telling her, "I'm going to die. I'm going to die." She said, "Relax baby. Relax. You're going to make it. You're going to make it through it."

Next thing I know I hear a bunch of gun shots. I was crying to myself thinking I was going to die. As the car started driving off, the ambulance and the cops came. They told the car to stop. They opened the back door and started talking to us. They didn't know I was shot. I started telling them, "I'm shot!" They said, "What do you mean your shot?" "I'm shot in the back." They started asking me for my identification. I yelled at them, "Quit f\*\*king asking me all these questions. I'm going to die. I got to get to the hospital." They kept asking me questions. They asked for a phone number so they could call my mom. I gave it to them but I accidentally gave them the wrong address.

They got me in the ambulance. The guy in the ambulance saw that I was starting to fall asleep. He would see my eyes close and say "Jeffrey, Jeffrey don't fall asleep. You're going to make it." I said, "I'm not going to make it. I'm going to die." I wasn't really feeling any pain in my chest, but in my legs every time we hit a bump it would jump real hard, like there were needles stuck in my legs like torture. Trust me, it was something you wouldn't like to feel. I started saying a prayer asking God to forgive me for all the sins that I committed. Then I started thinking about my mom and my family. I was thinking how my mom would feel without me around. I was also thinking if I was going to heaven or hell.

I made it to the hospital. It was a miracle because the doctors told me before they put me to sleep that they weren't sure if I was going to make it through the surgery. They told my mom to prepare for the worst because they didn't think I was going to make it through the first surgery. The first surgery lasted about 4.5 hours. My mom told me that during that surgery they called the preacher from our church. She said that as I was resting after the first surgery that there was so much prayer in the room and they felt that God was there. I lost so much blood because of internal bleeding that they had to give me more. One thing the doctors told me was that it was good that I didn't panic. If I would have panicked, I would not be here today to tell you this story.

After my three surgeries, I woke up. I had a tracheotomy. I opened my eyes and see my aunt there. The way the tracheotomy was, I didn't have a voice so people I was talking to had to read my lips. When she saw me wake up, she started screaming "He's up! Baby, how you feeling?" She called my mom, who just left the hospital to take a shower. She had been at the hospital for three days straight. I couldn't talk and I started to feel pain. The doctors gave me a notebook to write on and I wrote what I was feeling and where I was having pain. That is how I communicated with them, on paper. I noticed that I could not move my

legs. My body was swollen. I did not know that I went into surgery so I did not know about the staples in my chest. I asked the doctors why was my body so swollen and they told me that it was because of the surgeries and it would be going down little by little. I ask then how long it will be before I start walking and talking again and they said, "That depends on you." My body was now ready to deal with things consciously instead of unconsciously.

About two days later, they took the tracheotomy out. After that for about a day, I had to press on my throat with my fingers in order for me to talk. The same day, my father and mom came to visit me. I heard the doctors tell my mom, "We got a surprise for you." The doctors told me, "Go ahead Jeffery, show them the surprise." I said, "I love you mom and dad," in a squeaky voice. After I said it my dad said, "You gotta be f\*\*ckin kidding me." My mom was so shocked that she didn't know how to express herself.

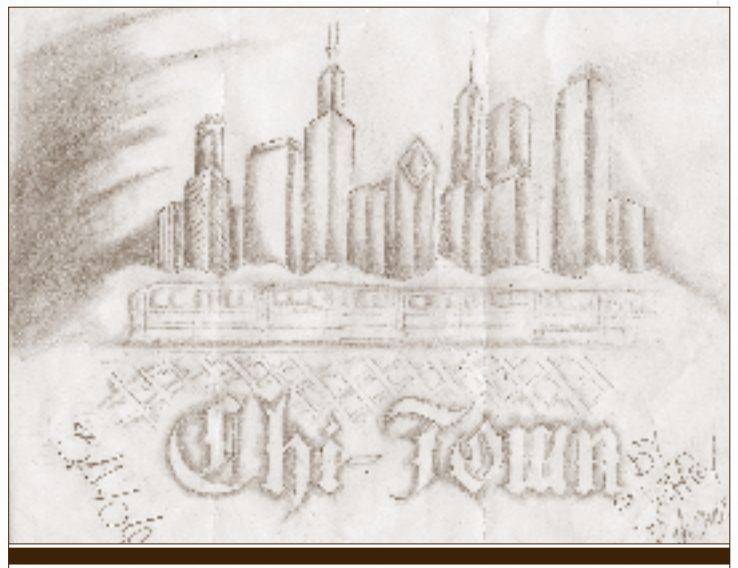
The reason I'm on this earth right now is because of God. I'm here for a reason that I'm trying to discover what it is. At the hospital the doctors used to call me the miracle baby and I wondered why. But then I sat down and thought, I am a miracle, not really a miracle though, it's just that I was touched by God. Then I realized that being in a gang is nothing to be proud of. The only ones that are really there is your family, not the gang members that used to tell me that I was their homey and they'll always be there for me. Now I'm locked up in the Juvenile Detention center. I'm thinking that my guys are at least going to help me out with my lawyer, but like my mom says there ain't nobody there but your family and the ones that truly love you.

I called my friends the first time I got my phone call asking them what they're doing. Then I asked myself why I should think about them if they are not thinking about me. If they were so-called friends they would help me get out of this place I'm in. The reason I'm here is because of them trying to cover up for an old cat. The good thing about it is I'm walking again. When I was in the hospital they told me that I was never going to be able to walk again. For three weeks after I got shot I could not walk. It was hard because I would see people walking around then I would think how there is a chance that I won't be able to walk again. Then one night I sat up on the edge of my bed and said "I have to walk. I can't spend the rest of my life in a wheelchair." So I grabbed the walker, I stood up, I took my first step. I stumbled, but I didn't fall. Then I started walking toward the door. I was losing my balance. I couldn't stand up straight. But then little by little I started to walk.

After I started walking I still had that mentality of gang-banging. I guess God put me in jail to teach me a lesson about freedom. Before I got shot I thought that violence could solve anything. But after I got shot my attitude changed. In some ways it changed, but in other ways it didn't. I was thinking about revenge. That's why I think God put me in jail so I wouldn't get in more trouble. But then I think that I'm in trouble as it is. But then I said that I would probably be dead or paralyzed. Then I thank God for giving me another chance in life to walk, talk, and even see. When I was in the hospital I thought I was not going to walk again because I couldn't move my feet. Also the ladies that came to give me therapy told me that if I didn't start moving my

feet that I was not going to be walking anytime soon. But I couldn't see me not walking again. To see people running, playing basketball or even baseball, the things that I wanted to do for my father. For my whole family, I can take care of them, especially the ones that were there for me. They all help me with my lawyer so much and have always helped me, even before I got shot. I can pay everybody back by doing right for them.

Right now my aunt is not doing good. She is in the hospital and my baby cousin is not doing good because he misses his mom. When I talked to him he told me, "My mommy's dead." That broke my heart for my baby cousin to say that his mom was dead. I told him that she is not dead, she is just sick. She is going to be OK. Then he started crying to me. He told me, "Is my mommy going to be OK?" I told him, "Yes baby. Don't worry about that. I will be home soon." He asked me when would I be home. I told him in December. He said, "When is December?" I told him, "Very soon." He told me, "I hope that comes fast." Then I started talking to my mom. She told me that my family is not the same since I been gone. She asked me, "Are you ready for court?" I told her, "I am always ready for court. I'm just waiting for the day that they let me out. And I know that that's going to be very soon, trust me." She said, "I know." Then she asked me, "What are you going to do when you get out? I told her that I was going to do a lot of stuff different. She said, "Like what?" I told her that I wasn't gangbanging know more because that don't leave me nowhere. She said, "You finally found that out. I said, "Yes mom. She said, "It's about time that you see that your friends are like a dollar in your pocket." I said, "Yes mom, you were right about everything. I am sorry for all the thing I put you through. Especially when I got shot. I know that it must have been the worst thing to see. Your baby boy laying in that bed all full of blood. I am so sorry for that. But when I get out I am going to show you that I have changed."



DRAWING BY JEFFREY R.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication made possible through the generous support of the Illinois Humanities Council.

Thread of Development Literacy and Creative Media Program is administered by Chicago Lights. Special thanks to Beth Truett and Stacy Jackson for their support.

Special Thanks to the faculty and staff of Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School, and to the staff at the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center, some of whom submitted writing for this anthology. We are grateful to our Principal Judith Adams for her support, to Yvette Spencer for hosting Amanda in her classroom, and to all of the teachers who hosted visiting writers. Thank you especially to Liz Tapp for the design and layout of this anthology. Thank you to Shinae Yoon and the entire staff of Young Chicago Authors, for acting as partners to us and for helping us grow.

Thank you to our teaching artists and writers: avery r. young, Krista Franklin, and Misty Deberry and to Terry Jo Smith at National Louis University for bringing them to us.

Finally, we owe huge thanks to the members of our advisory committee: Krista Franklin, Pat Zamora, Luis J. Rodriguez, Dr. William Ayers, Cheryl Graves, Margaret Hughes, Susan Klonsky, and Dr. Carl Bell.

A program of  
**CHICAGO  
LIGHTS** | **Thread of  
Development**  
at the Nancy B. Jefferson School

Illinois Humanities Council

