

Cover Art by Kenneth Key, Leanne Childs, and Steven Ramirez

# FEATHER BRICKS

The Official Newsletter of North Park Theological Seminary's School of Restorative Arts

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Hello, *Feather Bricks* World!

Thanks to Covid and its million and one stipulations, our access to this issue's editors, Jami Anderson and Cayla Wheeler, has been temporarily restricted before they could complete their introduction to this June/July 2022 issue, which highlights collaboration.

As classmates and friends, I (Dee Dee) and Chica (Leanne) have been asked to step up and collaborate. One thing we have learned this past year is that we need to be flexible and versatile. We hope and pray that Jami and Cayla get back to class soon...so we don't have to continue our writing struggles.

*(LOL Just kidding!)*

On behalf of Co-editors Jami and Cayla,  
Deborah "Dee Dee" Sims and Leanne "Chica" Childs  
North Park Theological Seminary School of Restorative Arts  
Logan Correctional Center Cohort

Dear Readers, Writers, Thinkers,

It has been my pleasure to work with Cayla and Jami in our Logan tutor training class last spring, as well as in weekly study halls, to plan ways this issue might embody the theme "collaboration" by including a wider scope of material from a larger variety of contributors than ever before. Collaboration can be a messy process. We are grateful for the trust and patience invested by all involved in this issue's creation. Moreover, we look forward to more opportunities to create together.



CAYLA WHEELER



JAMI ANDERSON



## WRITE ON!

PROF MELISSA



## *Dialogue & Discuss*

### **On Correspondence Courses: Comments from the WRIT5000 Community**

#### **Prof Melissa:**

During pandemic times (January-December 2021), I taught the credit-bearing graduate-level course WRIT5000 “Writing for the Professions” three different semesters at two correctional facilities, one-hundred percent correspondence-style. The original pre-pandemic plan was to be in-person. The catalog description of this course, “A program of workshops and one-to-one instruction designed to ensure competence in writing commensurate with the demands of graduate studies that combines reading and writing activities and assignments with individualized feedback sessions with a professional coach or undergraduate tutor,” presents a lot of moving parts. I had to change the way I approached the course since I had never taught via correspondence before, and I was overwhelmed by how to do so.

Over time, I embraced the privilege to do work for the WRIT5000 class in all sorts of free-world spaces. The smell and color of the homework packet envelopes, the process of picking and dropping them off every week, even the sound and feel of ripping the envelopes open stood as monikers for a classroom of sorts. I differentiated handwriting similarly to how I was used to receiving the appearance or sound of a student in the physical classroom, and I figured out that a classroom setting can be reimagined, correspondence-style, if need be; moreover, instructors should do whatever we can to maintain connections with our students.

When all we had to rely on to know one another was our writing, the writing really mattered. What follows are three reflections by former WRIT5000 students responding to their experience taking this correspondence class.

#### **Maria Jimenez (WRIT5000 Credit Earned in May 2021)**

In carceral settings, oftentimes correspondence-style classes are the only means through which prisoners can attain an education. I admit that in the past, the idea of taking a class entirely through correspondence did not appeal much to me. That is due primarily to the difficulties that fellow prisoners have experienced with such style of learning. Among the common frustrations is the inability for students to receive immediate answers to concerns regarding assignments before the assignments are due. The complications involved with the limited interaction between student and teacher can greatly impact the student’s academic grades and may even limit their overall learning.

I registered to take this writing class in January 2021, fully intending to do it in person. When the Covid pandemic halted life as we knew it, the only option was correspondence. I went into it a bit skeptical, aware that I would encounter challenges. I was prepared to navigate through them. However, I was unprepared for the possibility that my learning could potentially be compromised. I feared receiving a mediocre level of education. The course brought about many of the inevitable challenges atypical in classroom settings. The absence of social



interaction with my professor and classmates caused me, at times, to refrain from wholeheartedly committing to the class. I also became overwhelmed with the assignments that proved extremely difficult since I was forced to answer my own questions. In my opinion, the assignments would not have required as much effort if given the ability to discuss them in-person with the professor. Despite the roadblocks that continuously tested and threatened my commitment to the class, the experience was ultimately beneficial. The quality of education I received far surpassed my expectations. I was pleasantly surprised at the amount of knowledge I obtained. Switching the class from in-person to correspondence did not compromise my learning.

For that reason, it is my opinion that, when correspondence-style teaching and learning become the only option, the concept should be given much consideration. Although not the ideal pedagogical method, correspondence is a productive vehicle for prison students who desire a meaningful education. I would not by any means advocate moving entirely to correspondence-style learning, as in-person classes have indisputable greater benefits. My goal is simply to bring awareness to the positive effects to a method of teaching and learning that some inappropriately view as ineffectual.

**Peter “Justice” Lawrence (WRIT5000 Credit Earned in December 2021)**

A real limitation is of not being able to have that in-person experience, which is seeing the person who is next to you gathering the same information from the instructor who has a style of teaching that draws you in. So, having the only option of learning through 100% correspondence, you have to rely on writing and reading. This is where creativity comes into play, with the instructor’s letters to the whole class, our feedback letters to classmates, and reading over and over again to understand what to accomplish on our next assignment. The possibilities during this correspondence are all up to the creative mind of the instructor who has a wide range of ideas to make classes fun and class assignments understandable.

From the student’s view, the first need to make correspondence classes work is the creative mind of the instructor (thank you Prof. Melissa). The instructor needs to lay out the assignment clearly, students like myself have to have patience (waiting for the response to my work was driving me nuts), and you also need someone that puts the moving pieces together (thank you Vickie Reddy). When you have people who are dedicated to bringing education inside of prisons, anything is possible to make that determined idea happen.

When doing 100% correspondence class, my perspective as an incarcerated student is you will have to get creative in the mood that you set when reading and responding to class assignments. Even though my facility was on lockdown while I took this course, I worked at the printshop. So, I would come in from work and see the homework envelope on my bed. My mind would begin to race, knowing that the response to my writing was now just a few feet away. As I opened the packet, I would sit at the desk in the cell, place my earbuds in my ear (as a noise insulator from the yelling from other guys) and begin to read. Having Prof. Melissa before and having heard her voice before, I would read her response as I believe she would

say it, in her style of communicating. I also know some of the students, so I would do the same with them. Being in prison for the last 20+ years has allowed me to develop a creative mind, so as I sat at the desk being physically in a cell, mentally, we were all in class.

What I want to present to the reader as a student who is incarcerated is that being flexible in receiving an education is my humble way of saying “by any means necessary.” That great quote from Malcom X allowed me to expand my creative mind to enjoy this class without the in-person experience. This is not to say that in-person education can be done away with. I love that in-class setting experience because information is being given at a much faster speed as well as responses and ideas from other students. But when any circumstance presents itself (pandemic), education should continue so the mind will continue to expand.

**Rickey Quezada\* (WRIT5000 Final Reflection Letter, Received February 2022)**

As I reflect on what I have learned at the completion of WRIT5000, I am amazed by the transformation that has occurred. Prior to this course, I felt I was an above-average student with sufficient reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. This course taught me how to read with a purpose and incorporate what was read with previous knowledge. Learning to write graduate-level papers was informative and beneficial. I was never given an opportunity to excel as a writer until now, and I have utilized these newly acquired skills to further my own endeavors. Furthermore, as a thinker, I now digest everything. I read and ponder its greater implications. This course has helped me continue to open the door of endless possibilities that education and a free mind can bring to an individual who seeks it. I do not have suggestions on ways to continue the conversations we have started in this class, but I have a comment: continue shedding light on those in the dark. Education has revived my spirits and opened my eyes to so many things I truly appreciate the opportunities so many other educators have provided me. I would like to thank you for allowing me to complete this course through correspondence (even after the semester ended). I know this is something that you were not obligated to do, and it shows your commitment to furthering the education of others.

\*Note: Rickey Quezada was transferred mid-semester but completed his course assignments from his new facility and earned his graduate credit.

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**A WRIT5000 Assignment by Gregory Reed (in dialogue with Jerrold Davis)**

**Thesis Statement:**

Prison education embodies a significant role in the rehabilitation process for those incarcerated, but it wouldn't have the same impact without the religious aspect.

**Response:**

All throughout my ten-plus years of incarceration, religious teachings have been a steady guide for the duration of this journey. With that in mind, any notion of secular and religious education not being complementary to one another is simply a misinterpretation. “For the first hundred years of our nation’s history, prison education was religious education. Where educating the incarcerated was a priority (and mostly it was not), chaplains were the teachers and the Bible was the

curriculum” (Atkins et al 2019, p.7). That fact alone gives insight to the influence religion has on all prison education.

As a prisoner myself, I recall taking part in numerous religious-based classes/programs long before I ever indulged in any general or secular education, and these prior experiences helped me get ready for the latter. The group activities, Bible studies, giving and getting feedback, note-taking, and reciting scripture from memory all became tools that enabled me to find success in a secular class setting. Another point to be made is in 1965 when public funding for prison education was newly secured, it wasn't just the secular organizations who endorsed this form of teaching, but also the religious. When the power of authority to move forward shifted, the religious groups were eager recipients of the cause, parading on the front line, making it known that they were equally committed as the other entities (Atkins et al 2019, p.7-8). This is another indication that the two are separate yet both invaluable.

One other thing: a few years back, a religious leader known to many as “Queen Mother” frequently traveled down to Stateville Correctional Center to speak with the masses. During her visits and lined with every spiritual message, she never failed to use her platform to motivate the prisoners to further our education outside of religion. Her encouraging words spoken with conviction were the defining reason that many of us pursued educational knowledge in its entirety, leaving a good enough argument to support the stance that these two teachings work together like pen and paper.

So, a question was posed in the midst of a discussion between me and a fellow student (Jerrold Davis), and he asked, “What is it about the religious programs and their teachings that make them so readily embraced by those of us incarcerated?” Now, a simple answer would probably suffice, but I hope I can properly speak for the multitude when I say most of us in these prisons have a personal connection and ties to religion dating as far back as our childhood years. That alone could be one of the defining factors as to why we gravitate so naturally to religious teachings, because we were exposed to them at an early age. Not to mention that spiritual and dependent reliance developed by most while trying to survive these horrific and dreadful circumstances, so faith in a higher power will always be a gateway to hope for us, for some, our only pathway to freedom; therefore, we welcome North Park, its teachings, and all the support that follows, and I couldn't be more excited for what this next semester in the third cohort will bring.

Jerrold Davis posed a second question and answered it himself: “Why is it that when it comes to religious-based programs, the powers that be seem more quickly ready to approve them rather than the secular programs?” The answer to this question has many layers, but I believe it really just boils down to two things: control and education. I'm sure that any answer you can come up with will fall under one of those words.

I say control because when you look at the basis of any religion, it is always first and foremost telling you, indoctrinating you on how to behave. One example is religion telling you how to control your sinful desires. Throughout history, religion has been used as a tool to control, even way back past the Constantinian era. It is

just a long-proven fact that religion has always been used as a tool of control by so many.

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### **Memories of Worship** By Briana Travis

A choir, a really great choir, is a picture of collaboration. Voices not only create harmony by producing the right notes, but they also blend, resonate in time with each other, and share the air space. Each voice adds something unique to the composed masterpiece, but no voice stands out unless it is her turn, his moment. Each section performs as a unit, covering each other's need to pause for a breath, refining the pitch of the members on either side. An excellent choir leaves people tingling when their efforts are truly collaborative.

Worship, in contrast, tends to be simultaneously more personal and more cacophonous. It is not something the congregation rehearses, fine-tuning phrasing and dynamics, and harmonies emerge only when a select few worshipers have that gift and are willing to add another layer. (Yes, I know there are exceptions.) Harmonizing, while adding depth and beauty, might even be perceived by some (likely less confident singers) as an attempt to showboat, to draw attention. But can we offer the benefit of grace and see the harmonies rising to meet God's ears as a precious gift? Hopefully. Hopefully, our worship spaces can be competition-free because competition thwarts the potential of pure collaboration and pure worship.

We all know the verse: "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!" (Ps. 98:4, ESV). Anyone who has attended church with any regularity at any point in life surely has at least one memory of a worship song or experience that ushered in the assurance of the presence of the Holy Spirit; you recall the goosebumps and the peace, don't you? My best worship memories were moments of perfect collaboration. Moments, or even entire songs, during which every instrument contributed in just the right way, or during which every voice fit together perfectly, AND the motivation was pure. The music seemed infinitely better, but I know it was actually the joining of our spirits in praise that made the difference. Collaborative worship will put motives, grievances, and personal roadblocks on display. The congregation, whether they can name it or not, will sense the waves of horizontal ick even as all the right notes are floating vertically in offering to GOD.

At the same time, though, collaborative worship, even in our imperfection, can inspire and lead to healing, wholeness, and thanksgiving. My memories of some beautiful, spirit-filled collaborative worship convince me fully that GOD moves both in our mess and in our masterpiece when we welcome the "intrusion." On the other hand, if you just want complex instrumentation and full harmonization, feel free to keep practicing and leave GOD for later. Or, if you only want worship to be between you and GOD, I guess you can forego fellowship and collaboration, but "with my mouth, I will give great thanks to the LORD; I will praise Him in the midst of the throng" (Ps 109:30, ESV), and maybe my collaborative worship will heal me, inspire you, or, best yet, please GOD ALMIGHTY.

By the way, I promise never to check a cell phone mid-song again. That is not pure worship!



**Post Graduation** By John E Taylor Jr. (JT)

Our graduation was the most awesome experience I've experienced in prison. I was made to feel honored, celebrated, and loved. I want to thank everyone who had a hand in making our graduation such an awesome experience. Everything went as if such an experience had happened at Stateville before. We made history by becoming the first group incarcerated to earn a Master's degree in the Department of Corrections.

Even before the graduation ceremony started, State's Attorney Kim Foxx came upstairs to shake all of our hands to personally congratulate us. Foxx's speech humanized us, contrary to what society thinks of those of us that are incarcerated. She told us, "I am you." When she told her story, she conveyed to us that it is only by the grace and mercy of God that she isn't on the same side of the bars, gates, and fences we are on.

Every one of my guests agreed with my assessment of the graduation. In fact, Attorney George said, "This was one of the best graduations I have ever attended. Not only was the ceremony awesome, but the food was awesome as well. I ate so much food, I had no room for food for the next day. Everything I ate was the best I have experienced in prison in nearly 19 years.

My graduation was my third graduation. When I graduated from high school, I was looking forward to college. When I graduated from college, I was looking forward to becoming a full-time pastor. Now that I have graduated with a Master of Arts in Christian Ministry, I'm inspired to continue my academic journey until I earn a Doctorate in Ministry. However, I must earn a Master of Divinity before I can pursue a Dr of Min.

I believe freedom one day will be restored, but those who will play a part in restoring me back into society would want to know how I have prepared myself to return to society. Even though obtaining a Master of Arts in Christian Ministry is a great accomplishment, I believe I have a calling to do more. I'm sure earning a MACM may be impressive to those who will review my accomplishments, but if the question comes up, "could you have done more?" I want to answer that question with what I continued. I want my graduation, as well as my future academic experiences, to speak volumes of my not being the man I once was. Learning is transformative.

In the "Trauma and Healing" course I took, I learned how deeply broken I am. For me to stop my academic journey by earning a MACM would be a disservice not only to me but to the community in which I live. My graduation has inspired me to continue searching for answers to heal and deliver me from those things that prevent me from being everything God has called me for.

For the men and women who are looking towards graduation, I hope you don't become complacent with earning your degree. Each of you who will graduate will have the tools to make your personal contributions to the community we live in. I believe our academic accomplishments are not for us to bathe in our accomplishments, but graduation is a symbol of what we plan to give back to the community we live in daily until God delivers us to the larger community in society to give back to. Here are countless men who will never experience what we've experienced, but we are capable to transmit what we've learned to those who may

never travel the academic road we've traveled.

I see our graduation as how Jesus went through the pain and agony for us, just to get to the resurrection for us. As a result of Jesus's resurrection, He was able to do greater works. The reason why He was able to do greater works is that a part of Him was left to abide in each one of our lives who believes in Him. Our graduation was a symbol that God has greater work for us to do. We have been empowered to share what we've learned with those who are willing to be enlightened. Our graduation has commissioned each of us to service.

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### **Call for Collaboration** By Luigi P. Adamo

The SRA graduation ceremony at the Stateville Correctional Center this past June was one of the finest moments of my entire life. I mean, to hear my name called, to walk up on that stage and receive an honest to goodness Master's Degree, and to have my family present to witness, and even celebrate with me after was amazing! Throughout the entire event, I kept wishing that everyone incarcerated could have a chance to experience something like this.

At the end of the ceremony, I made my way over to the Warden and thanked him for allowing us to have such a wonderful moment. The man shook my hand, looked me square in the eye, and said, "Wait, this is just the beginning. We hope to have a lot more events like this coming up." And I honestly believe that.

It seems like that wish I had for all incarcerated people could actually come true, but it's gonna need all of your collaboration. I'm asking everyone who can hear me (who isn't actually doing so) to do whatever they can to take full advantage of whatever positive programming your institution offers, and to put forth your best efforts into whatever you do. Doing so will not only increase your chances of experiencing something like our SRA graduation ceremony but helps to dispel the negative stereotypes incarcerated persons currently suffer from. This gives us the means to help transform the Justice System into a restorative system from the inside out.

I would also implore everyone to do their best not to let themselves be disqualified from participating in positive programs by receiving disciplinary tickets, engaging in disruptive or destructive behavior, or doing anything that would cause the administration of your facility to draw a line through your name instead of under it.

Do not for one second be deceived, just because the IDOC's stance on positive programming with the aim to restore has shifted in its favor does not mean that all opposition to such programming has vanished. There are still plenty who would have nothing more than to see our justice system transformed into a strict punitive model. Every time we fail individually, we collectively give these folks more ammunition to fight against all the positive changes that are sure to come. I say let's starve them out. That's the kind of collaboration I'm calling for. Let's collaborate in proving we're worth the effort of restoring.

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Antonio "Slim" Balderas, I want to thank you for being able to see "the depths of me." I've learned that the more you cover up or hide the past, the worse the effects are on everyday life. I also want to thank you for your encouragement and your vulnerability. Coming from poverty and becoming a by-product of mass incarceration can do two things: destroy you, or build you up. I want to applaud you for choosing that latter and allowing God to use you. Writing for me is redemptive and therapeutic. I was wondering...what brought you to writing? -Phoenixx



### **Collegiate Cross Campus Collaborative Cogitations** By Jamie Thomasson

I know this is a big sentence to take in, but what it represents is even bigger. Even though we all represent the same university, we derive from different locations. However, one thing we do have in common, is what we represent as a whole. As a community of thinkers wishing to come together and collaborate with one another, a legacy was born. This legacy is *Feather Bricks*. *Feather Bricks* is somewhere great minds (collegiate cogitations) can come together to inspire, not only each other but the world around us as well. We must keep in mind that we are some of the nation's leaders, we are the front line of academic achievements, and we must never sell ourselves short. As God is my witness I will go on to do great things, but it's not without the encouragement and motivational inspiration I have received through this collaboration of a collegiate cogitating community, which is an academic community of deep thinkers coming together to build something greater than themselves. It is because of this *Feather Bricks'* community that I have become inspired and compelled to write, and I just hope that I too will inspire and encourage someone else to achieve greatness. It is for this inspirational reason I must dedicate this piece to someone who has encouraged and inspired me to reach for a higher level of academic success. So to you, Professor Melissa Pavlik, I will say two simple words: *Write on*.

### **Northwestern Prison Education Program Graduation**

Huge CONGRATS to the undergraduates in NPEP at Stateville Correctional center who earned an associate's degree from Oakton Community College! Encourage your people to check out relevant Evanston Round Table article online by Adina Keeling.



The graduates celebrate as they throw their caps into the air. Credit: Monika A Wnuk



# Here's A Thought

with  
DeCedrick Walker



What does it mean to be educated? The answer to that question would vary depending on the person that question is posed to. For me, as someone who once sided with an antisocial side of things, being educated on a basic level means that I've developed, through learning, skills and tools which enable me to not only provide a specific service to society overall but also change how I'm characterized by society. In short, I am now pro-social. Admittedly, I sometimes wonder, could my newly acquired skill as a writer and writing as a tool which are comprised of being creative, thinking strategically, and speaking publicly, for example, chip away at that ever-present socialization of aggressive and violent individual in custody? Since many of the reasons behind imprisonment are often linked to antisocial behavior - actions that reflect a distrust of social institutions regarding their efficacy and cruelty to animals and others, I figured during one of my many internalized dialogues with the self that a desire to be educated in accordance with established societal norms in and of itself is a morally transformative agent. Let alone a desire which was a restorative justice inclination which, in theory, could substantially alter an existing socialization of who I was by pointing to who I had become as an individual through education.

Obviously, there is an oversimplification of complexed conflict I just laid out. And I am also aware that simply acquiring the skill to write by itself isn't enough to exhaust what's morally required to satisfy retributive justice. Comparatively, if the acquiring of skills and tools isn't exhaustive then I have to wonder whether society as a whole has the ability and, dare I say, the unmitigated gall to create that possibility. At this juncture, a question could be asked of whether certain influential pockets of society have now taken up an antisocial disposition toward the efficacy of education transforming how someone, chiefly an incarcerated person, gets socialized. Writer and activist James A. Baldwin placed the efficacy of education in the crosshairs of social disparity when he said, "The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated." In other words, the institutions that teach a set of values are often examined by those who are being taught. If I were to use the restorative justice lens of education that certain in institutions of society offer, like North Park University of the Evangelical Covenant Church, would I find evidence of their personal and public proclamations in their policies and practices? Or would I find rationalizations designed to devalue the efficacy of education based on the socialization of the person receiving it? If there are no traces of the offered education in operation in either of the spheres mentioned, if there are active rationalizations dissuading the efficacy of education based on the social location of the person receiving it, then a legit question could be raised as to whether education is even efficacious for anyone aside from raising a claim that societal disparity is afoot.

According to Baldwin's quote, education has the ability to operate a positive consciousness within its recipient. That consciousness, as a result, then prompts a person to act in a light that's best favorable to both proving that the education is effective and relevant by examining an institution's behavior when it's faced with a crisis its social skill or tool is supposed to mitigate. To say otherwise certainly suggests



## Here's A Thought Continued

then that an institution doesn't believe that what it teaches actually works. The Church, for example, as an institution exists as one that defines our moral realities, influences participation in experiencing those realities, and inspires an expansion of those realities into other sections of society. Part of what the church teaches through the Protestant angle of Christianity is that an individual's good works aside from personal faith in Jesus lack the moral ability to justify him, her, or them before God.

Yet the same scriptures teach that our good works are not self-justifying agents before God when referring to an individual's good works toward an animal, which the author of the text and the main point being referred to here, clarifies as an instruction from God spoken for the benefit of humans, warning that an ox should not tread grain while muzzled. If there isn't a question of whether or not the education offered by an institution of higher learning of a church is efficacious then the simple pursuit of education should be reduced into a pursuit to uphold the status quo of individuals in custody being socialized as aggressive and violent in spite of their education. If our education is indeed devalued, we are as an ox teaching the restorative justice grain while still muzzled. Such devaluing is akin to an antisocial disposition.

I seriously doubt if anyone would openly agree with the imagery that educated individuals in custody are socially paralleled with oxen treading grain while muzzled. Education whether academic, spiritual or both, provides us with a sense of hope - that we would someday use our education for the good of society and in many respects, to be defined by what we do now. Not treading the grain muzzled allows an ox to hope. If the ox is not allowed to hope, according to scripture, it is considered animal cruelty.

At the same time, not many would disagree with the idea that being educated while incarcerated evokes imagery of desperate people scrambling to get away from simply existing marginally. If education isn't self-justifying before God or doesn't satisfy retributive justice moral requirements, and if active rationalizations dissuade its efficacy--leading to the muzzle not being removed, then I would say that scrambling out of the clutches of marginalization is fundamental to an appropriate as a reason why we, or anyone else for that matter, desire to be educated. If an incarcerated person's education, which was earned while in prison, can't alter how he, she or they are socialized, then I would go so far as to say that a nurse, for example, living in an imprisoned community, after earning a doctorate in medicine, shouldn't enjoy the benefits of being seen and addressed as doctor or being able to move into an affluent community, either.

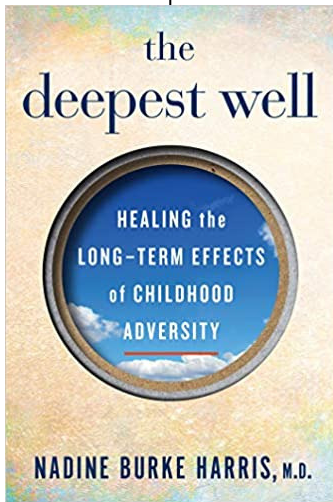
## Get to Know Your Community

Hello, my name is Deborah Sims, but friends and family call me Dee Dee. I am a second-year SRA student at Logan. I love the Lord and am so grateful for the opportunities this program offers. I am a nerd at heart and love to learn. I have a passion for teaching the Word of God and have led a Bible study on my housing unit for about 4 years. I would describe myself as quiet, loyal, strong, and confident. I am a leader and a prayer warrior. I love to read—just finished *You Are Stronger Than You Think* by Joel Osteen. An amazing read! I love music and love to dance (for the Lord and as exercise 😊). I am close to the end of my stay here and am eager to discover all that the Father has planned for my future. My favorite scripture is Psalm 46:10. Be blessed my brothers and sisters.



Hi, I'm Katie! If we've never met but you're wondering where you've heard my name, it's most certainly from my very popular FB Christmas jokes each year 😊. *You know you love them.* I'm a part of the SRA's cohort 2 at Stateville and will be starting my fourth and final year of the program in the fall. When I'm not in class, I'm working at a marketing agency as an Operations Specialist. And when I'm not working, I'm scouring the internet for fun new restaurants to eat at or making sure my dog doesn't eat all my socks. Ok, but in all seriousness, I feel really privileged to be a part of this community and to learn and grow alongside all of you!

# BOOK REVIEW



**Nadine Burke Harris' book *The Deepest Well* by Phoenixx Newson**

This book has taught me about me. What we don't realize is that although we may think we've outgrown or overcome our past and its effects, trauma wreaks havoc on our bodies that our minds still have yet to grasp. According to Nadine Burke Harris, "The body senses danger, and it sets off a firestorm of chemical reactions aimed to protect itself...the body remembers." We have a stress-response system. Several studies link childhood trauma and adversity to major illnesses such as, but not limited to asthma, heart attacks, strokes, obesity, cancer, and autoimmune diseases.

By taking an ACE questionnaire (which is provided in the appendix of the book), you can find out what your risk factors are and how to reduce that. We all need to be aware of misdiagnosis and how to receive proper treatment. Although the percentage is higher in the Black and Brown population, we are not the only ones affected by childhood trauma and adversity.

This book, coupled with *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* by Resmaa Menakem and *The Attachment Effect: Exploring the Powerful Ways Our Earliest Bond Shapes Our Relationships and Lives* by Peter Lovenheim, have changed the trajectory of my life and the path I've been traveling.

These books have required me to re-evaluate my life and dig deep. Health is a process. Until we acknowledge and face the trauma of years past, we cannot be happy, healthy, and whole. God created us to stand up and be accountable.



## WISDOM BLVD.

by Mishunda Davis-Brown, with Alonzo "Zohariel" McCorkle

Today is a bright and sunny day on the Blvd. As the sun enters my windshield I can feel its warm rays upon my skin. How comforting it is as the presence of the Lord. Many times I recall experiencing the presence of the Lord. He was as warm as the sun, comforting, welcoming, loving, peaceful, and joyous as the desires of my heart. I learned that once I set my eyes on him. He came and graced me with His presence. God is good. Remain in His presence. I wish for all to "taste and see that the Lord is good..." (Psalm 34:8). Congratulations to all the graduates of 2022. I'm so proud of you. I've just completed my first year and I'm right behind you along with my fellow classmates. I hope to hear from you on the Blvd. Whenever you feel the need, take a trip down Wisdom Blvd. with me.

*Note: Wisdom Blvd was transcribed by outside WA Acacia, who noted, "I was deeply encouraged by what Mishunda wrote."*



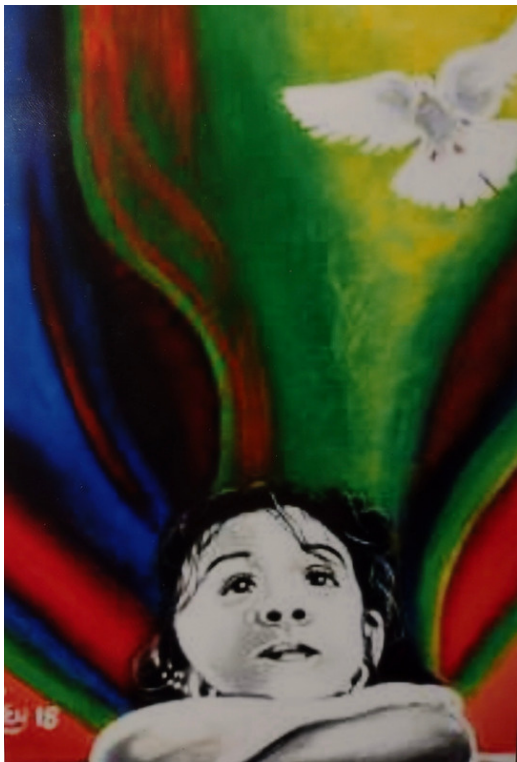


### "Soul-Saving Prayer" by Alonzo McCorkle

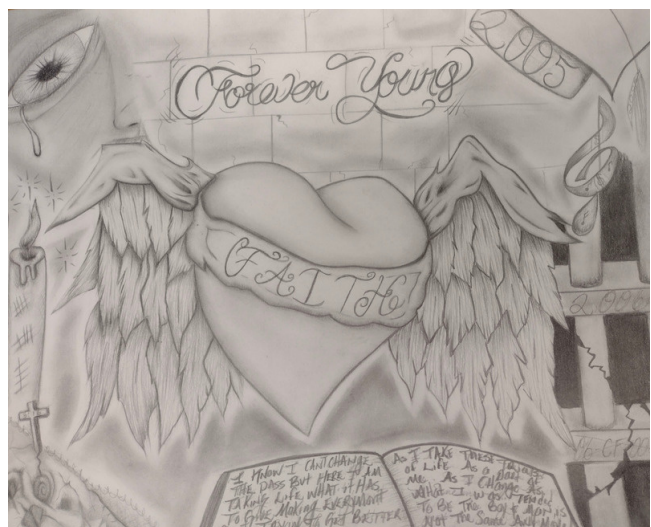
As a Hebrew Israelite, I believe that soul-saving prayer is manifested by action. Take, for example, Daniel 9:20-22. My mouh (teacher) makes his point of prayer being realized by action. The mind needs to be spiritually aligned with Yah through thought prayers that will bring about an action which is spiritually aligned with Yah (the God of Adam). That will result in the physical yet spiritual realization of the blessing/mercy prayed for.

Let me give you an example from one of my favorite movies, "Avatar," if you've seen it. The part I want to draw your attention to is when the Na'vi were trying to bring Sigourney Weaver's character's spirit over into a Na'vi body at the "Tree of Souls." If you look at what they were doing from a spiritual point of view, you will notice that the Na'vi were all joined hand in hand, "physically connected." They were chanting the name of their god, causing them to be "mentally, telepathically connected" and in communication with the creator of all things on the behalf of one another.

For us, prayer is a petition to Yah, a formal request written in thoughts and actions. All prayer begins in silence and ends in silence. to allow the mind to be focused and centered on the prayer to come. We must sactify the God of Yisrael (Israel) by naming him and recognizing him. This is like dialing his number, calling his name in the holy language of Hebrew.



Artwork by Kenneth Key



Drawing by Ernesto Valle

# Poetry Corner

## My Ministry: Self-Love

By Jami Anderson

I was asked once  
what I thought my  
ministry would be.

So I asked God  
to show me what  
He wanted me to see.

I felt a silence,  
searing heart and soul,  
burning so profound.

Yet, of God's voice  
I heard nothing  
not one sound.

Then the books arrived,  
appearing two-by-two,  
showing me my ministry.

"That is not right.  
I do not understand  
how this can be!"

A ministry of "self-love"?  
What does this mean?  
And yet...

What we ask for  
of our Heavenly Father  
isn't what we get.

He gives us only  
what He alone knows  
will see us through.

The ministry He gave  
to me is what  
I must do.

Self-love is just  
the first step forward  
to a higher good.

He's healing my insides  
first because I never  
hoped I would.



## Self-Love is What You Seek

(in response to Jami Anderson),

by Antonio "Slim" Balderas (V.O.T.P.A.I.  
"Voice of The Poor And Incarcerated")

Self-love is what You seek and God  
knows you're weak, so he sends his  
angels to assist You to Your ministry,  
As they speak  
God is calling You to service so don't be  
nervous,  
He knows just how much you can  
handle, so allow  
God to guide You to a higher plain.

Jesus doesn't change — Yesterday,  
today tomorrow,  
God's always the same Hebrews (13:8)  
You can be  
Sure that God will take care of  
everything you need (Philippians 4:19)

Do your eyes reveal the words spoken  
from your heart?  
If so that's a good place to start, so  
continue to praise  
God and you'll never fall apart.

God's grace is always enough: it's all  
You need.  
Your strength will come into its own and  
help  
You succeed.  
When you're in over your head God will  
be there caring for You along the way.  
When you're in rough waters, You will  
not go down.  
No test or temptation that comes your  
way  
Is beyond the course of what others had  
to face.  
All you need to remember is that God  
will  
Never let you down: he'll never let you  
be pushed past your limit.

## My Ministry: Selflessness

By Rayon Sampson

I have oftentimes  
thought of what my  
ministry could be

My interactions with the father  
are filled with desires for  
an existence beyond me

Frustrations abound  
whenever our earthly  
understanding fail us

Sacrificing of one's  
self can be so daunting  
In a world void of trust

Life lessons have come  
One by one, my mistakes  
revealing my ministry

Only God can create  
a past that shows  
our ultimate destiny

A ministry of "self-lessness"  
Is harder than it seems  
However...

My heart's intent has  
been known before my first breath  
be He who endureth forever

Through faith alone  
my vision is restored  
and I can walk with clarity

The ministry I am  
given calls for me to  
have love for all humanity

Reaching out to the  
youth as the first  
step towards redemption

My broken life exists  
to serve, which is  
beyond my comprehension



### “Perpetual Poetry” (Stew) by Rayon Sampson and Antonio Balderas

I am a collaboration of miseducated teenage love  
The consequence of sin, so was I ever truly innocent?  
I was unwanted at first, then wanted, unwanted, then wanted again  
So how can I not question my standing in this world?  
Who's blessing am I? Who was I placed on this earth to curse?  
The pressure to live up to either has caused a systolic and diastolic imbalance  
Conflicted confrontations are never comfortable  
How do I constructively correct the parts of me that have been deemed  
unfit... unworthy  
The enraged shadows befallen by misguidance  
The echoes of a voiceless existence  
Banished to an asylum of differed dreams  
Aborted by a society that claims to love life  
Only within certain contexts I guess  
Maybe if I only remain docile or domesticated I would matter  
How dare I have visions of anything beyond a cage  
Aspirations denote humanity  
Mistakes or shortcomings symbolize humanity  
So why don't I feel alive in this broken world?  
I am alive in this broken world so that I may assist Jesus.  
Jesus assisted God by dying for our sins.  
I must assist mankind by offering my discipleship  
For Christ.  
I have visions beyond a cage but the vision comes from my minds eye!  
I see dead people those of which died before their  
Time. Innocence lost but at whose cost, Here today  
Gone Tomorrow. In this world of constant pain  
No one has time for real sorrow.  
Society claim to love all of humanity as God's  
Children. I Love my brother as I love myself,  
And yet true love loves no one. Love is selfish,  
So why shouldn't I be selfish... Some say love  
Is a misunderstanding between those who  
Seek to control it and own it.  
I started out as a baby in a cage, now I am  
A full grown manifestation of the society  
That abandon me.

**Collaboration with Jesus by Antonio Balderas**

Jesus I come to you by way of God's holy name and ask that,  
You collaborate with me to stand up for truth equality and  
Justice. Today more than ever discipleship is needed in order  
To pierce the thick skin of evil! God we know that,  
You so loved the world that you sent your only begotten,  
So to die for our sins. Jesus I hold You up in the name,  
of God and ask that You accept my thanks to You for dying  
For our sins. First we were loved, now we love.  
He loved us first. 1st John 4:19, I've got my eye on the,  
Goal, where God is beckoning us onward – to Jesus.  
I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.  
So lets keep focused on that goal. Philippians 3:14-15,  
"Don't you think the father who conceived You in love  
Will give the holy spirit when you ask him?" Luke 11:13  
"I see what you've done, now see what I've done.  
I've opened a door before you that no one can slam shut."  
Revelations 3:8 God... got us out of the mess,  
We're in and restored us to where he always  
Wanted us to be. and he did it by means of our,  
Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Poem by Ernesto Valle

rock walls metal bars and crome stall  
Stuck in day that you did. Got me in out emotion  
Tell something new i can tell YOU something OLD .Trap feeling ill  
But still its all the same have to be sane this life that we play is no game ..so be ready to roll  
your dice and hope you dont roll snake eyes stare into my eyes watching my self never know  
what step might be someone last ..so I stand on my wall looking beyound my Shadow only  
seeing it fade away telling my time GOOD BYE reflection of the old man is some one i dont  
know .Hearing me feel me pray for me .what you know how hard and soft this place can make  
thee .rock wall and metal bars and cromes stall ..is the world lm in...from 18 to 33 sun light  
moon lights has pass me by ..so tell somthing new .  
The world you live is not yours so i let the most high do with me as HE WISHS.. so I wait  
..WAITING FOR SOMTHING NEW ...CATCHING HOPE AND KEEPING FAITH CLOSE TO ME  
..THROUGH MY PAINS AND TRAILS THAT I GO THROUGH ...BEARING THE GROW MEN  
SCREAMS ECHOS OF WHATS TO COME ...SOME HOW MORNING BIRDS SINGS ...IN THE  
CAGE IM IN ...BRINGING HARMONY TO MY WORLD ..  
SO I LAY AWAKE DREAMING TO GO THROUGH THOSE GATES .IN AND OUT FROM CELL  
TO A CAGE .IS A EVERYDAY FOR ME .  
BUT ONE DAY I WILL BE FREE THEN I CAN TELL YOU SOMETHING NEW ..ROCK WALL  
AND METAL BARS AND CROME STALL WILL BE NOMORE...SO I KNOW YOU MIGHT FEEL  
LOCKDOWN AT LEAST YOU NOT CHAIN DOWN. A EVERYDAY THING FOR ME ....  
SO BE FREE AND DONT PLAY THE GAME IF NOT READY IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN  
...AS YOU WILL BE HERE WITH ME.... :-(-...

## Freewriting by Jami Anderson with Drawings by Willie Spates



When I look at this picture I see a woman. An alien being in a land not her own. It resembles a likeness of me, almost from another dimension. She gazes out at this new “home” (for lack of a better term) and feels so out of place. So out of time. So lonely. She is trying to pick up the pieces of her life, her heart, and start anew. However, always on her mind is the love she left behind. Her ONE. Her other half. But she has to remember that they are not separated forever. Their reunion is as inevitable as the sun setting and rising again to herald a new day. A new day with her best friend, her lover, her mate. Ours. M.

## ON A LIGHTER NOTE

By Luigi Adamo

My father and I are both known as “Louie” to our friends and family. Recently, my mother had my brother Tony’s 3 young children, all under 10, over at the house for a nice day of swimming and BBQ. To my nephews and niece, my mother and father are known as Muggy and Nonno, instead of Grandma and Grandpa.

Those 3 were playing in the front yard while Nonno and Muggy grilled them up some hotdogs and burgers. An old friend of my father’s who hadn’t come around in years just happened to pull up just then and seeing those 3 and not recognizing them he asked, “Does Louie still live here?” My nephew Dino, the oldest of the 3, (bless his heart) answered, “No, not anymore. He’s locked up in a prison!” My father’s friend was quite surprised and upset to hear of his misfortune and drove off.

When the food was ready, they explained to Nonno and Muggy about the strange man. My father, not believing his ears, exclaimed, “What’s-a-matta with you three? Your uncle ain’t the only Louie around here, you know. I’m Louie too!”

Their response was priceless, “**How were we supposed to know that your name was Louie Nonno? You never told us!**”





## **(ON A LIGHTER NOTE CONTINUED)**

Also by Luigi Adamo:

**Q: What do arthritic persons in custody complain about the most?**

**A: Their joints**

**Q: What do you call it when a dog coughs and barks up a gemstone?**

**A: A diamond in the ruff.**

**"Joke": Do you want me to slow down or do you want me to stop? By Steven Feagin**

While on patrol in a quiet neighborhood, an officer observes a car driving through a school zone. As the car approaches the stop sign it slows down but then speeds up as it goes right through the four-way stop. The officer sees this, pulls him over, but lets him go with a warning.

A week passes by and the same officer observes the exact same car slowing down as it approaches the stop sign, but once again the car speeds right through the intersection without stopping. So the officer gives chase and pulls the car over about a block away. As the officer is approaching the driver's side door, the driver seemingly somewhat confused and obviously not knowing the difference between slowing down and stopping begins yelling at the officer, "What's the big deal, Sir, if I slow down or if I stop?"

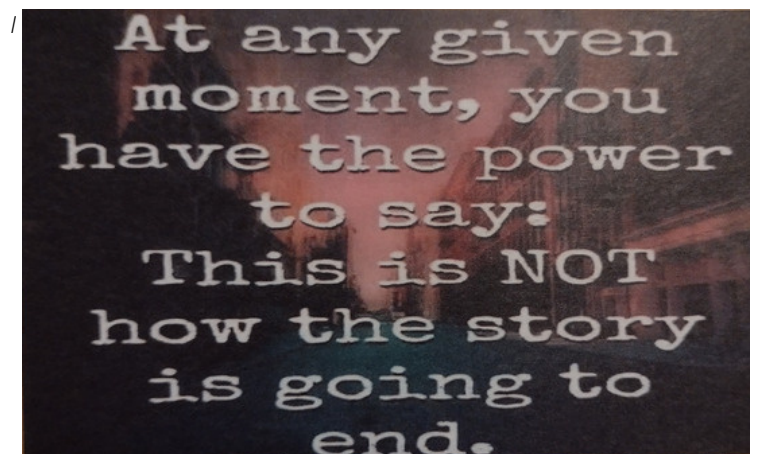
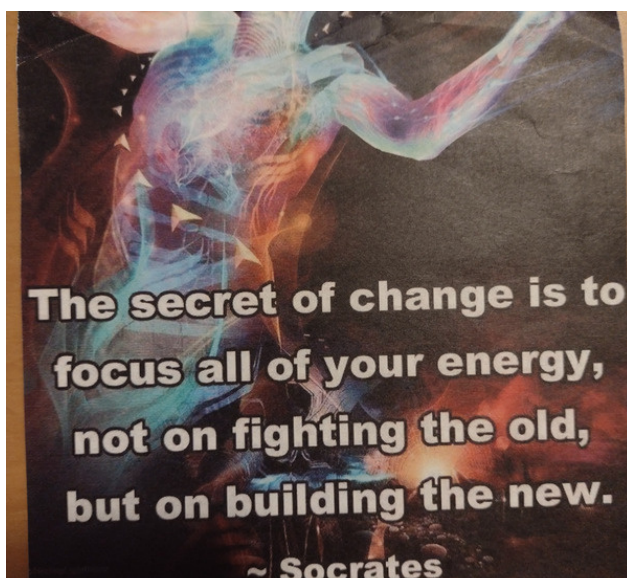
The officer, seemingly somewhat annoyed and obviously frustrated with the driver, pulls out his nightstick and commences to whaling the driver over the head with it. Screaming at the top of his lungs, the officer says to the driver, "Now, you tell me: do you want me to slow down, or do you want me to stop?"

P.S. I'm pretty sure he now knows the difference between slowing down and stopping.

**Q: How many musicians does it take to fix a flat tire in the parking lot of Stateville Correctional Center?**

**A: FOUR, as long as one of those musicians (the percussionist, to be exact) is officer Petersen, who has his tools with him and is ready to go above and beyond the call of duty.**

**Thank you, Officer Petersen & Sound Studio Musicians Anthony & Rashad for getting this violist (aka Prof Melissa) back on the road! #extramileaward**





## Spoiled Rotten with Tasha Kennedy

**Objective: To help women know their brokenness and understand how to begin to heal while learning how to exist with others and embracing their differences.**



Women will learn to...

- Communicate through difficulties and conflict
- Accept one as they are
- Work together while embracing the differences
- Help redirect thoughts
- Identify negative and positive thoughts
- Discover love
- Acknowledge and build genuine relationships
- Renew the way one thinks
- Attain self-respect
- Develop self-worth
- Secure self-validation
- Balance emotions
- Create healthy boundaries
- Recognize their capability

### **S.P.O.I.L.E.D. R.O.T.T.E.N.**

#### **Sisters Pushing On In Life Embracing Differences Revealing Our True Talents Effectively Now**

This group will be interactive and peer-led. Ladies in the North Park Theological Seminary Program are welcomed and encouraged to voluntarily participate. The focus of the group will be to help individuals with the following: conflict resolution, empathy promotion, recognizing and affirming actions and words that are positive, and how to redirect negative thoughts and actions. The goal is to provide community building and assist individuals with a safe space to heal. S.P.O.I.L.E.D. R.O.T.T.E.N. realizes people heal and think in different ways and so the group seeks to find positive ways many have found self-acceptance and understanding. The group also seeks to nurture healthy boundaries, upgrade self-worth and self-efficacy, and stability. The group is intended to be a weekly, hour-long session.

#### **Recommended agenda for sessions:**

- First 10 min: Check-In, Pray In
- Next 20 min: Led by a speaker on any topic related to objective
- Next 25 min: Open to discussion on the topic
- Last 5 min: Pray Out



*Since this is Tasha's ongoing column, she would love reader responses to any of the questions below, for possible publication in the next edition of Feather Bricks. She and her cohort are also open to answering questions about S.P.O.I.L.E.D. R.O.T.T.E.N.*

- *What do you look for in someone when they tell you they care?*
- *What is your love language when it's not a romantic relationship?*
- *Why does it seem life gets worse before it gets better?*
- *Would you rather talk with someone who has been through trials and tribulations of many sorts or someone who has not? Why or why not?*
- *If God made people think and respond differently why are we held to the same standard by the law?*



## ON THE JOURNEY WITH JOHNNY



First off, I need to express my deepest felt gratitude to all those who have witnessed, supported, and encouraged me throughout the uphill peaks and downhill valleys. Together, we have endured along the way toward

academic success and personal achievement. Your contribution has resulted in me being one of the first 28 individuals in custody ever to graduate with a master's degree inside an I.D.O.C. facility. You have been a real inspiration and a pillar to my poise. Thank you!

I get questioned all the time 'what will I do next?' or 'what does this degree mean to me?' While these are the very questions that have fueled my fire to press on, my answers are in essence the same: pay it forward. What I have learned so far is also what I have achieved. That is, formatting my ministry around restoring contexts that are susceptible to violence; helping people and communities heal while dealing in trauma; help change the 'race' relation narrative into a humanitarian, holistic liberative story; and teach and continue to learn new ways to non-violently communicate. I believe this formation of mines will transform lives for the better. I know because I am living proof.

So, my slogan for now, while inside, is "restoring communities from the inside out." Sounds good right? I mean if we have each other as supporters that keep the fire ablaze, how can we fail? Or better yet, if God is for us who can be against us?

On a personal note, regarding the context of incarceration, I have never believed or allowed these walls (no matter how high or how low confined they box us in) to stagnate my growth and achievements towards excellence. I mean I have experienced the threats that confinement can produce. As a matter of fact, I am actually experiencing this threat of my person and voice being silenced while trying to be an influential figure on the outside within my community and even dealing with my own children. You see, it starts at home, and God knows my struggle. From missing birthdays and special moments with my children that stunts our relationship from flourishing to trying to teach them the right path so when they are older, they will not depart as the old proverb teaches. Another part of my struggle while inside is trying to have a voice in my community dealing with the cycle of violence that has been passed down to the young generation.

So now after much work, we have only cracked the surface. So, I continue to invite you to embark on this journey with me as a way out for individuals and our community who are trapped or simply feel like they are. Our trap could be mentally, physically, or a tug-of-war of both in any contextual setting.

Ultimately, I have learned that people who struggle and have found a way out are the very ones who our struggling communities need the most. And I have come across hundreds of scholars inside who, when you listen to them, have turned into living solutions for our next generation and community seeking a way out. I want you to know that you are an important pillar in your community, and I want the fire ablazed under and in you as well. You have a voice, and we need you.

So, let's join you together around topics involving restoration transformation and as Rev Michelle Soderstrom terms so well: holistic liberation. The time is now! So, let's collaborate. As I have learned throughout my academic process, social injustices revolve around criminalizing individuals based on their contextual backgrounds based on the lack of privileges in society, and or simply because of their skin color.

**Now that change, redemption, and spiritual formation has taken place for you, what social injustices have you witnessed and experienced and what tools have you learned in order to help change that false narrative that the system perpetuates?**



### Response #1 by Manuel Metlock



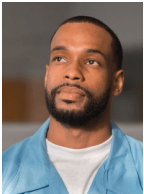
A social injustice issue that I witnessed was concerning another police officer shooting and killing an unarmed black man. The community leaders, activists and the community itself reacted by protesting and demanding for first degree murder charges to be brought against the officer. They protested outside of the court house for weeks, until the State's Attorney came out and said that the officer would be charged with First Degree Murder.

That declaration by the State's Attorney was deemed to be a victory by the people; however, it resulted in a not-guilty verdict. Once again, people felt that justice was not served.

One of the tools that I learned is that we must "gain all pertinent information" concerning an issue before demanding anything or offering up solutions. The people as a whole were not knowledgeable about the law. Due to that, the State's Attorney played on their ignorance, knowing that you cannot convict an officer on duty who is responding to a call with first-degree murder. This was not an officer who was already engaged in criminal activity, to warrant the charge of premeditation—this was someone who responded to a call. "Intent" cannot be established.

Therefore, as we become community leaders and activists, it is our duty to be educated in these matters, so that we do not mislead those who follow. If we utilize this tool "Gain All Pertinent Information" before we demand anything or suggest a solution, we will have a better chance of obtaining justice. The officer should have been charged with a plethora of lesser charges—misconduct, policy violation, fraudulent reports, etc., the charges seem like nothing, but are easy to convict and can add up to murder time. Our "reaction" to injustice must become secondary; our "counter-action" then becomes our main objective— which requires for us to use that tool, especially if we are the voices of the people.

### Response #2 by Quayshaun Bailey



The Power of Perseverance: society, especially American society, has a history of painting people in the worst light possible and then penalizing them for the shadows. All the while it is society itself that is the cause of the darkness that is cast upon the individuals. Oppression without reparations and trauma without extensive healing has created for us a nation that has injustice as one of its foundational pillars. And a

people, damaged and flawed, who at best strive to rise above their shortcomings in hopes of not only bettering themselves but also the inequitable world they were given.

In my personal journey, I currently find myself under the clouds of mass incarceration and extensive sentencing. I've been locked up for 12 years which accounts for over a third of my life, for a non-homicide offense that I committed when I was just 18 years old. I am one of many in this country who were sentenced merely to prove a punitive point, rather than to meet the ends of justice or restore harms done. Throughout my time in prison I've committed myself to change and redemption, I've educated myself and grown immensely. However, I've also back-tracked at times and found myself acting completely out of character. I guess you can say I let the darkness get the best of me.

Yet and still, my commitment remains the same. And my pursuit of it is only made possible through the use of one of the most vital skills one may develop in my circumstances: the skill of perseverance. I say this is a skill because perseverance is about more than just not giving up. It's about knowing why you should continue on, how you should continue on, and where you should continue on to.

I know I must go on because if I don't then I embrace the shadowy narrative that society has written for me, along with the abysmal existence it will create. That is unacceptable. I have to do all within my power to lead my life toward a more positive light. Thus, I can try and fail and try again, because with perseverance anything is possible.

### Response #3 by Michael Simmons



These days what stands out to me as an incarcerated black man is the pervasive sense of hopelessness that surrounds me. This sense, of course, is not limited to those who look like me and are locked in cages – at least physically. Part of the reason for this is because of what we’ve experienced growing up in schools and neighborhoods that have been neglected by the larger society: because of the things that we’ve seen, losses that we’ve suffered that haven’t been properly dealt with. These things that we’ve been through are mentally and physically damaging if we don’t address them, as we rarely do in our communities. This is one of the reasons why we see so much misguided hurt and anger – so much bloodshed in our communities. I’ve been there, in the trenches, and I want those who are still there to know that there is so much more to life. Don’t allow your imagination to be limited to what you see, what you’ve been through, or what people say about you (us). I had the opportunity to earn my Master’s degree recently here in prison. If I can turn life around, so can you. Of course it’s not easy, but it starts with not holding in our feelings as we usually do. We need to talk about them. It actually takes courage to do so.

### Response #4 by Jamal Bakr



I remember the first time my sister told me she was dating an Illinois State Trooper. My heart raced, my skin became hot, my hands started to sweat, and I immediately got defensive. In most communities of color in the city of Chicago, police presence didn’t signify safety when I was a child. Often times their presence induced fear, and at times it signaled impending violence. I learned to be hyper-aware of their presence at a very young age. See, I lived in one of the many areas of Chicago that were designated “ground zero” for the war on drugs, where police were militarized and targeted youth as “super-predators.”

As gangs warred for territory to sell drugs in my community, law enforcement had been waging a war on them and the narcotics they sold. Both these wars left many people in these communities unsure of where to turn for safety. As a 9-year-old, I recall playing a game of catch with my friends. We’d hurl a football as high as we could and everyone would leap for it. We were kids being kids, relishing in the moments we could simply live, because we were intimately aware of the violence around us. A sense of danger was almost always in the air. At the time the danger seemed so thick that the ball we threw wouldn’t seem to climb the same. There was a war on two fronts, and we were caught in the middle.

Police presence indicated a danger to us that was different from that of gang members. With the presence of law enforcement came with it the sense of an authoritative threat and a power dynamic that made my little brown body feel helpless. As their squad cars or unmarked vehicles cruised past, our little hearts would race out of our chests. They’d stop and stare, their white faces glaring at us with suspicion. Sometimes they’d roll down their window and ask us what we were doing. Often times though they’d demand us to put our little soft dirty hands on the hoods of their vehicles and tell us, “don’t move.”

We lived, as children, in fear of law enforcement. There was a perceived level of distrust on both sides. The distrust, sense of a threat, and dislike for police, in general, manifested often during my life. And as my sister shared with me that she had finally met a “good guy,” for a second, all of my childhood experiences rushed to my mind. In that second, two wars were taking place in my thoughts. One was the war against the misperception that all cops are bad. The other battle was with the idea that because I was incarcerated, he probably thought I was a bad person. My past experiences with the institutional oppression of law enforcement, and my current experience within the oppressive institution of mass incarceration, had created a false narrative that my sister’s then-boyfriend and I could never, because he is a police officer and I am an incarcerated individual, get along. Fast forward six years later. He is still a State Trooper and I am still fighting for my freedom. Yet, now our perceptions of each other are not based in false narratives perpetuated by our

experiences of injustice. Our relationship is perceived to be a possible bridge to create dialogue to combat biased policing, to fight against an oppressive justice system, and to build community and police trust/relationships. Because our relationship is built upon who we actually are and not who we perceive each other to be, it is our experiences (not our misperceptions or past negative experiences) of one another that we can use to help change the narrative that police and the communities they serve can never be allies.

### Response #5 by Martin Barnes



Black sheep is what they called me. It's a disparaging term that depicts an individual or group of people as a pariah or outcast to the social norms. Our local and national leaders use similar terms to describe the youth (inner-city) in our communities. You may be familiar with a few terms such as thug, punk, super-predator, and at worst, a terrorist. This caricature is employed when those who are in power organize to

maintain power. It creates an environment that pits brother against brother, mother against daughter, and neighbor against neighbor. The end results in a community that's suspicious of itself. Incapable of seeing the value in one another. The value of any family or community is contingent upon the relation between its members. Unfortunately, for many of us this relation has been curtailed by stories that were told about us, but not by us. The political elites would like you to believe that there are no intrinsic barriers designed to exacerbate the internalized oppression that has historically plagued marginalized communities. You see, the trick is to get you to believe the negative stories that were told about you. To get you to believe that it's no future for you, that your life, voice, and thoughts don't matter, that your hopes and dreams start and end on your block. However, I'm here to remind you that you matter, that you are the foundation of the hope and dreams of our families and communities. Our children will believe because we believe in them, they'll see because we saw what was in front of them, and they'll do because we did it. Let us remember we are the gatekeepers of our communities, so be accountable. Never let them defame or rename you. As a tool and healing process for our community, it starts with you.

### Response #6 by Elaina Huang



"Helping out with Feather Bricks, I get to read the stories other Writing Advisors share about their life experiences. Every poem, short story, and prose I transcribe stays within my heart and builds up like a collection in a library. Just through the things that our WAs write, I get a glimpse into their dreams and deepest desires. I begin to understand the injustices that have occurred against them because of how

archaic, broken, and racist our legal system is, I see that despite injustice and worst external circumstances, they create their own freedom within and keep hope alive. How often do we ask people "What's your story?" instead of creating ones ourselves that are based on assumptions and stereotypes from our own prejudices? Can we learn to listen to the stories that come directly from the other person?

Storytelling from the heart is one of the most powerful forms of awakening and redemption for those of us who have experienced injustice and systemic discrimination. We tell our own stories in many ways: through writing, creating art, playing music, or simply by piecing together our own experiences in our mind's eye. When we finally become the main author of our identity and path in life, we become empowered. Stories allow us to gather the things we have experienced in life and share them with others. It gives us a space to look inward and see what is true about ourselves. Storytelling helps us reflect on the past, to be present, and it gives us the hope needed to build a better future.

### Response #7 by Flynard Miller



I am a scholar and student in the Northwestern Prison Education Program. I have written manuscripts for novels. I have published poems on making choices, and I had an article published in the prison journalism project. I've earned an associate degree in theology from the International College of Bible Theology. At NPEP I am set to become a presidential scholar and graduate with an associate of General Studies (Oct '22) and I'll start my Bachelor of Science degree program in September '22 where I shall graduate in the summer of 2023 from the Northwestern School of Professional Studies.


I wasn't always so scholarly. I was born and raised on the westside of Chicago. My parents were in prison, and without their guidance, I got into all kinds of trouble. Hanging with the wrong crowd and making the wrong decisions, I ended up in prison wrongfully convicted of murder. In prison I made a radical transformation, going from a troubled youth on the streets to the face of Northwestern Prison Education.

Once I am freed I plan to open my car dealership and start a real estate investment firm. But I also want to give back by becoming a motivational speaker for at-risk youth. I'll share my failures and successes in hopes to motivate them to dodge my failures and take all my successes because if a young black troubled youth from the westside of Chicago can spend 21 years in prison and come out a success, then they can too. Wish me luck.

Sincerely, Flynard Miller

# THE AMPLIFIER

with Alex Negrón



This summer, I've had the privilege of being able to facilitate a Creative Writing workshop on the Stateville campus. We are spending ten weeks using *The Sentences that Create Us* as a guide to create a writing community. On page 239 of the book, it says, "Our voices become vibrations that can disrupt the impersonal representations of the value given to us on this earth. Our voices, our work, make us people again. If we don't take care of each other, or cultivate each other's talents, then who do we expect will?" While facilitating a week focusing on poetry, I gave the class the writing prompt of naming a time in which you were silenced or silenced by someone else. Out of this prompt surfaced these beautiful expressions of our writing community and their thoughts on being silenced.

—Alex Negrón

**I was silenced when the pastor  
sat the choir down.  
He said that we'd be no more.  
There was an allegation—  
This brought me to a moment of silence.**  
by Ron Steele



**A path riddled with pain and agony  
Feelings of betrayal and forgottenness.  
In this place, this condition affords no  
allowance of sound to these words  
like a dying plant screaming for attention  
So does my struggle cry to be consoled.  
You see my pain, my agony is loud and boisterous  
It grows daily and the volume doubles  
But it is not heard, lost in the ambiance  
Of those who cried and yelled and screamed  
before me.  
Or is it because you simply aren't listening  
So I ask AHHHH!!! Do you hear me now?**  
by Michael King

**I WAS SCARED TO SPEAK  
I COULD NOT MOVE MY FEET  
THE SOUNDS FROM THE HALL  
SEEM TO COME OUT OF THE WALL  
I HEARD THE RATTLE OF CHAINS  
AND THE GROANING OF THOSE IN PAIN  
THEN I HEARD BOO  
AND I KNEW IT WAS YOU.**  
by Vaughn Washington

What is quiet  
But is always present?  
You never know he's there until  
you look in the mirror.

Everyone says  
I'm not real  
But I get the blame for everything.  
When I stare into the mirror  
I don't see a reflection.

When you look into the mirror  
You can see me plain as day.  
But you're lookin' for the suit and  
fork.  
And you can see yourself plain as  
day.  
What's a matter, the cat got your  
tongue?  
by Mike Jones

## Silenced No More by Marcos Ramirez

A story untold for the misguided  
perceptions of the masses  
A voice cutthroated by the lies and  
deceptions in their actions  
The mimesis of injustice echoed  
through systems of oppression  
Trickling down through the minds of  
this prison community  
Springboarded by the Group Think of  
brainwashed followers  
Unmuzzle me! Let me speak my truth!  
Learn to think for yourselves  
Before you jump to judge your  
neighbor  
Only then can we be truly heard and  
silenced no more.

Alone by Alonzo (Zôhariel) McCorkle

**The sound was deafening.  
All I could hear was the ring, ring,  
ringing in my ear.  
Is someone there?  
Who is ringing the damn bell?  
I yell from the back of my cell!  
Then came a voice just below a yell.  
McCorkle you got mail!  
Snapping me back to my present  
reality,  
That there is no tormenting silence  
greater than solitary.**

Do I even exist  
Should I even resist  
Can I even partake in this space  
Or should I remain a hidden face  
This hidden force is within me  
How can I express this energy  
I must seize this moment  
In order to break this torment  
But as soon as I attempt to scream  
I awaken from my dream  
by Rayon Sampson

# WRITING ADVISOR CORNER

## Collaboration: In and Out of the Box by Jami Anderson



Collaboration is defined as “working jointly with others” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary and Thesaurus, p.208-209). This can be a good thing in the right circumstances. All throughout

history, good people have been collaborating for a better world, both through fictional characters who subliminally teach morality and virtue as well as those historical figures who have personified those traits through their heroic acts of honor and good deeds. Collaboration can have a deeper meaning as well. Kenneth Bruffee tells tutors that collaboration is a two-way street where both the peer tutor and the student improve in their respective skills when they consciously help each other (p.325). Collaboration is more than people just “working” together because that can be done grudgingly, especially when two people have a negative personal history or if one has work habits that are not compatible to the other. Collaboration is a way of unifying diversity for a greater good than the status quo of commonalities, fulfilling dreams conceived eons past with the ambition for humanity to reach a destination that is inclusive to all demographics. Collaboration is the only way forward to a future that elevates change our world needs, here rooted in learning and writing centers as well as the collective souls involved to achieve the utopian landscape only one imagined.

There are many types of collaboration surrounding us that the majority do not recognize as collaboration happening right in the midst of our daily activities. Team building is a collaborative effort. If you have ever been involved in an activity with multiple people, you could very well have been collaborating. Sporting activities can be collaborative as they give athletes the opportunity to assess their strengths and weaknesses as individuals as well as a group. We can collaborate at work as we put our heads together to produce the desired achievement. Likewise, there are opportunities in the educational field to incorporate collaboration the learning experience with peer tutoring. Parenting has also given me ample ways to exercise my collaborative muscles in relation to

the endless activities in and out of the home. I have come to understand that the carceral setting seems to have been established with collaboration in mind as it is us, the individuals in custody, that are responsible for orienting the “intake” individuals as well as forgetting any actual work done.

Team building can happen in a variety of social situations such as places like summer camps, girl/boy scouts, or even at the local YWCA. In instances such as these, it is imperative to build confidence in the individuals while piecing together the individuals into a collective group. One way to do this is by “brainstorming” groups. Turning individuals into a unified group often means brainstorming (Brazeau, 2016, p. 285). For me, this brainstorming allowed for group discussions, which is a type of collaboration. The group as a whole worked together to solve the task at hand, which made for a successful collaboration experience. An example would be when I was in a summer camp and we stood before a zig-zagged line of stumps and were told that we have to make it to the other end with just two 2x4s! It took several failures before we finally got it together and we made it with minimal injuries from point A to Z. When the common goal was achieved, each of us had elevated our confidence by having individual, small contributors acknowledged an integral part of the group effort. Next thing we knew, our confidence as a group, a team, was boasted by the act of purposeful collaboration.

Sports are another excellent example of flexing collaborative muscles. Sporting activities give athletes the opportunity to use the information gathered when they take the time to assess their personal weaknesses and strengths. Then as a “team”, athletes collaborate by pulling together as a cohesive unit and playing to those attributes. As a former athlete, my weakness may be offset by another of my teammate's strengths, thus, the collaboration that formed between us was for the good of the whole team. When athletes get used to collaborating in the field, it makes collaboration that much easier in everyday situations. This can also be true for



## (Writing Advisor Corner Continued)

some work environments. Although it is nice to be able to work alone, it's not always feasible. In some ways it can be better to work in pairs or in groups. As mentioned above, not all personalities are conducive to a collaborative atmosphere. However, as I have experienced, team-building exercises have been known to boost "team morale" and advocate comradery within the group of coworkers. I went to a training summit for a singing group and we had a lot of group activities that really allowed us to open ourselves, expose vulnerabilities, and learn that we are all there for each other. Doing these activities together created a bond, forming us into a cohesive unit, as such we were better equipped to check and balance each other to ensure the final product exceeded expectations. When putting this in the context of the writing center here at the Logan campus, this environment is a constant "trust fall" experience. By that, I mean that we come into prison blind to the constant collaboration within these walls. When we are in our academic classes, we form a satellite writing center anywhere we congregate to study. We have to open ourselves to each other and trust that we will hold each other up as we stumble along our academic way.

That brings me to educational environments, which provide a plethora of opportunities for both students and teachers to collaborate. Students often fail because they are afraid to ask for help, and at times are leery to accept the unsolicited help that is offered (Brufee, p.325). This lack of much-needed help more often than not leaves the students intellectually indigent when the time approaches to further their educational pursuits. Collaboration within the classroom at first seemed like an unorthodox position for educators to take. However, if pursued with the best interest of the students at the heart of it, collaborative learning is a win-win situation because of all of the benefits it creates. Collaboration teaches students how to identify problems as well as how to solve those problems with the help of group analysis. It teaches students how to divvy up the problems and resources to ensure optimal labor division. Collaboration also engages the whole student by combining reading, talking, writing, and thinking (Lunsford, p.95).

It has been my experience that collaboration in the classroom sets aside all of the differences between me and my fellow students, allowing us to really focus on the issue at hand. One of the things I like most is that we are a cohort; therefore, we are all motivated to help each other. This is similar to Natalie DeCheck's article about how the interest of peer tutor in the students' work creates motivation for the student to push further (p.337). Together we all have impromptu brainstorming sessions in entirely random places such as walking to the chow hall. These RABs (Random Acts of Brainstorming) ignite ideas for different questions to ask in order to elaborate our theories creating a more meaningful educational experience for all of us within this cohort. This is the most important thing to teach students because it has much further reaching ramifications that mere book knowledge.

Being a parent, in and of itself, was a crash course in collaboration for me. There are all kinds of parental units in existence. Here, I am going to focus on the three that I have first hand experience with. In two parent homes, the collaboration between me and my boys' fathers as well as my boys themselves was much easier to do the near constant state of interaction within the family home. In a single-parent home, I was in constant need to collaborate with a veritable village of people. There were car-pools, mine and the boys' fathers' significant others, grandparents, and sitters that all need to be updated at any given moment to ensure the best possible outcome for the events of that day and that is on top of playing the role of chauffeur, chaperone, chef, counselor and so many others within the family sphere. Most recently comes my role as an incarcerated parent. This form of parent is, for the greater part, considered (wrongly) an absentee parent. However, I have had to parent outside of the proverbial box. There is an inordinate amount of time spent writing letters to my children and grandbabies, as well as their caregivers. I email the kids and their caregivers and spend a lot of time and money on phone calls with them all as well. It is increasingly necessary, being a carceral parent, to keep open the multiple lines of communication

### **(Writing Advisor Corner Continued...)**

between myself and the “village” it takes to raise children.

There are all forms of collaboration due to the necessity of scheduling “date” to phone my kids between work, school, and various events, as well as coordinating visits, both in person and on video. All of which are yet another layer of collaborative onion of everyday life. With our children seeing these positive examples of collaboration, hopefully there will be more likely to collaborate with others in their everyday lives.

I feel that it is worth mentioning one more level for collaboration. That would be the inner workings of carceral collaborative learning. Unbeknownst to us individuals in custody, we are thrown headlong into collaboration as soon as the doors are locked behind us up upon arrival in prison. When we are brought into “intake,” it is basically a sink or swim situation. I work on the “intake” wing, so I am relieved on as a seasoned carceral veteran trying to teach new individuals “how to: jail”. This is a lot like the scaffolding techniques of peer tutoring I have found. On the “intake's” first full day, I take time to go door-to-door to let them know the routine. After that, I just go about my usual daily work schedule and allow them to ask questions but on my time, not theirs. This is to keep them from thinking it is my “job” to cater to them; also, it is a way to watch and listen to the other interactions between myself and staff, as well as the interactions between other individuals in custody and myself. It truly is a group effort. We often keep each other from falling into the wrong crowds and we teach each other not only how to obey the rules, but also how to get around the rules and regulations in order to survive within the establishment. There are rules that are “Administrative Directives” on which the director of IDOC collaborates with various administrations that are the governing rules for all IDOC. There are “Institutional Directives” that are specific to the institution the individual is housed in. Then, there are the “unspoken” rules that come from the collaborative efforts of generations of individuals in custody that are handed down for the “good” of those of us choose to dwell with resiliently within the castle setting.

DeCheck says, “Writing center sessions are described as some of the most meaningful experiences for both writers and tutors.” (p.336). I mention this because as the first SRA (school of

restorative arts) cohort at the Logan campus, it is up to us students to establish a framework for collaboration that is beneficial not only to us, but to future cohorts here. We are the trailblazers here that are endowed with the hope of establishing a high standard so that we then pass along our knowledge for the good of our program. But it will also go beyond the North Park agenda to encompass all levels of academia with a group of peer advisors willing to “pull-up” our fellow incarcerated student body as it is literally up to each individual to educate and therefore rehabilitate ourselves.

The argument stands in a resoundingly positive way for the use of collaboration. Through the many examples given above, both the conscious and even subconscious acts of collaboration, we as individuals and as a cohort exist as the proof that there are ample opportunities conducive to collaborate circling all around us. All we have to do is reach out and grab those chances that are set out before us. Collaboration is our future. The collaboration of a lifetime. It is the opening in the paradigm essential to breaking all of the cycle of the past in order to forge a better brighter future for all of the generations that will come after us.

Collab on.

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## **Restoration With Unlikely Alliances Reinforced in a Prison Writing Center by Benny Rios**



When our nation’s leaders came to accept the gravity of the impact that COVID-19 was having around the world, they began to officially declare that we were in the midst of a

deadly pandemic. In March of 2020, the state of Illinois began taking precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the virus within its prisons by initiating quarantine lockdowns. When that happened, everything ceased: our visits, our programs, and so much more were stripped away from us as we were confined to our cells twenty-four hours a day. Unfortunately, we were still plagued with the virus despite the State’s precautionary measures, and prisoners were getting sick and dying in Stateville Correctional Center at an alarming rate. The beginning of the pandemic was frightening, stressful, worrisome, and filled with uncertainty. While locked in my cell, one of the things that helped me most was

the manila envelope that I received every Friday filled with homework assignments from my school. One of those envelopes contained an encouraging note from my professor and writing mentor Prof. Melissa Pavlik asking me to consider answering one of eight prompts for possible publication. Of which I selected: **in addition to elements of the writing craft, how did the Writing Center serve as a place for you to explore your own voice, identity, imaginations, aspirations, and understanding of the world?**

I'm part of a pen-pal program called *Faith Behind Bars* with Lewis University. Every semester, a student from the university is partnered up with a prisoner to correspond via snail mail or email about faith, race, justice, and social issues in general. On one occasion, I was asked, "Have you ever experienced any discrimination in your current situation by part of the system?" Our emails are limited to only 2,000 characters per email, and I had to answer that question along with several other questions. This meant that I had to be as succinct as possible in order to give impactful answers in such a limited amount of space. The first thing that came to mind as I answered that question is that my experience within the criminal justice system instantly and completely diminished my credibility. As a Mexican-American person who grew up in a gang-infested environment, I was already in a credibility deficit. When I was led away to the slaughter of mass incarceration, my credibility, my identity, and my voice became instantly non-existent. In the eyes of society, my new identity became inmate, murderer, or offender, rendering my voice muted. Through higher education in prison and our newly formed Writing Center, I was not only able to explore my own voice, identity, imagination, aspirations, and understanding of the world, but I was also able to restore and transform those things about myself and my credibility.

Currently, I am in my final year of earning a Master's Degree in Christian Ministry and Restorative Arts through North Park University and Theological Seminary's School of Restorative Arts program in Stateville Correctional Center. (Editors' Note: At the time of *Feather Bricks* publication, Benny Rios has earned his Master's Degree.) I'm also a student

Advocacy Officer and a Writing Advisor at North Park's Stateville campus Writing Center. This program, along with other academic programs, has provided incarcerated students with a platform surrounded by a state-of-the-art sound system that has amplified our voices in a way that helps to restore our credibility and our humanity; for me, one of the ways this was possible was through the assistance and encouragement from various educators who helped get my writings published. In the spring semester of 2019, North Park offered its first course to train incarcerated students to become Writing Advisors. Fourteen students, including myself, were selected to take the Introduction to Writing Center Studies and Tutoring Writing Course, taught by prof. Melissa Pavlik, our Writing Center Director. Of the fourteen students in that class, four of us had our essays on collaborative learning published in Writing Center journals and blogs. This was a huge thing for me and our community. Our voices were published so that students and educators in the academic/writing center world could learn from us and read about our experiences!

Recently, one of my published essays, "Two Terms: The Effects of Long-term Sentencing" was assigned to a group of University of Chicago students. As part of their assignment, they had the option of writing me a reflection in response to my essay. I received eight inspiring and encouraging responses. While all of their responses validated my credibility and humanity, I want to highlight some words from a couple of students. One student named Collette stated, "I know what it is like to be separated from family and people that care about me unconditionally. I want you to know that you are a valuable part of the community, and never stop caring for yourself and others." Another student named Dayo stated, "Your story inspires me to physically do more, learn more, be more... I definitely got the sense that even when we use different labels to describe ourselves, we are more than them." These are exactly the things that I hope for when people read my pieces. I want them to see the humanity in everyone and I want them to be motivated to do something about the injustices that many people suffer. The students' responses verified that my voice was no longer muted, and

**(Writing Advisor Corner Continued...)**

that my credibility is being restored.

After reading “The Re-Education of Neisha-Anne Green: A Close Look at the Damaging Effects of ‘A Standard Approach,’ The Benefits of Code-Meshing, and the Role Allies Play in this Work,” I was intrigued by how Green broke down the complexities of identity. I was also intrigued by the role our allies play in helping to shape and maintain our identities. In a lesson she taught to some of her students, she asked them to draw a circle with the word “Me” in the center. Then she instructed them to draw overlapping circles around the center circle that included representations of the discourse communities that they belonged to. Finally, she asked them to “create one more set of branches that would explain the significance of their discourse communities to who they are as individuals.” (Green 79-80) What she did next shocked the students; she went around x-ing some of the overlapping circles that contained information about themselves and their communities. The students felt as if parts of their identities were eliminated.

That is exactly what happens when ones goes to prison. The only difference is that the criminal justice system crosses out everything, including the primary circle with the word “Me” in it, and only leaves the over-lapping circle that identifies you as a condemned inmate, criminal, monster, outcast, etc. We are left with identity traits imposed on us by the state which effectively dehumanizes us in the eyes of society. The encouragement that we get from our writing center, students, educators, friends, and family to continue to write helps to allow for our voices to be heard. Our unlikely alliances with educators and students from various universities has given us the opportunity to demonstrate our humanity and our true identities. Once again, I’m reminded of Dayo’s words when she stated that we are more than the different labels used to describe ourselves. Our true identities consist of being fathers, brothers, sons, uncles, role models, artists, writers, restorative agents, Christians, Muslims and the list goes on. We all have one commonality– we are all human.

Writing Centers, ours in particular, encourages us to “write on” as our Professor Melissa Pavlik affectionately signs off in each of her correspondences to us. Our other professors often ask us “What does that look like?” in reference to ideas such as dismantling and creating a new justice system. Such comments encourage and motivate me to expand my imagination. They cause me to assess, analyze, and picture my imagination. They cause me to assess, analyze, and picture creative solutions to various issues such as violence prevention, mass incarceration, and racism on a deeper level. As my imaginations reach the limits that I had previously set within my own mind as a result of systemic injustices, lack of resources, and believing that it was impossible to change my circumstances, I find myself realizing that my aspirations are continually growing. For instance, before I was introduced to the concept of a writing center, I have never had aspirations to become a writer. Even though I was already a published writer before I took the Writing Center/Tutoring Writing Class, I never referred to myself as a writer. However, because of the Writing Center and my role as a Writing Advisor, I now identify myself as a writer, and I aspire to write a book one day.

In my exploration of my aspirations combined with my studies in restorative practices, I find myself aspiring to be a restorative agent of change as well. I want to use the restorative practices that I’ve learned to help people in their healing from the traumatic experiences incurred to them by violence, mental illness, injustices, systemic racism, etc. For example, when North Park began to offer classes here at Stateville back in 2015, they came here with a strong sense of community– the Beloved Community influenced by Martin Luther King Jr., to be precise. This sense of community not only united unlikely allies, but it also made accomplices out of these unlikely allies in our mission to unite people from all walks of life for the purposes of healing and growth among other things. The merging of educators and inside/outside students created an environment in Stateville where some prisoners and outside guests co-



## (Writing Advisor Corner Continued...)

learn and co-teach with each other, which led to confronting our traumas and to the process of healing led to confronting our traumas and to the process of healing. While prisoners are extremely limited on how much we can contribute with regard to using restorative practices to help heal our communities, I find that writing is a powerful way to contribute. Beth E. Richie, author of *Arrested Justice*, mentioned that there is healing in sharing stories because they give “voice to pain.” by sharing our stories we can contribute to healing for the writers and the readers. North Park, our Writing Center, and other allies/accomplices have all played a major role in helping with bringing my aspiration of becoming a restorative agent of change that leads to healing into fruition.

Finally, our Writing Center has allowed for me to explore my understanding of the world because it is a place where I can share ideas with other students and educators about course content from secular, academic, and theological perspectives. Our Writing Center is far from conventional in comparison to the standard Writing Centers found in universities. In fact, a writing center in prison is almost unheard of, but we make it work. Once a week we are allowed to attend a “study hall” class in the prison’s education building for three hours. During this time Writing Advisors set up shop for conferences with other students who need help with their assignments. The conferences along with other random discussions, allow for us to pick each other’s brains about the contents of our course material. It so happens that we study a lot of social issues, particularly from our country, which allows us to explore our understanding of how our world operates. For most of my childhood, my world consisted of one street block because entering another block in either direction put my life in danger from rival gangs. I was a former gang member and as I grew into my adolescence, my world didn’t grow very much because I was forced to keep myself confined to certain neighborhoods for my safety. Chicago is sectioned off into numerous communities. I grew up in the Pilsen community and within each community there are various neighborhoods. Pilsen in particular had its

neighborhoods divided by the gangs that inhabited them, so I was only allowed to live or hang out in other neighborhoods that were branched out by my former gang. Otherwise, I’d face certain death. I never had the chance to explore and appreciate the broader Pilsen community, let alone the entire city of Chicago.

In reality, it took me coming to prison to expand my understanding of the world through my educational pursuits. I have acquired knowledge that has helped me to understand that the world is vast and that our world in the United States is complex. I’ve also come to understand that for people of color and poor people that the world could be a dangerous place. Our Writing Center has permitted us a space in which our understanding of the world could be deepened as we identify root causes such as the systemic disenfranchisement, marginalization, stigmatization, and the oppressions that lead to broken families, gang and criminal activity, alcoholism, and so much more for people of color and poor people. This space allows us to critically analyze ourselves and our communities which helps us identify and understand the root causes of the dangers and injustices that we face. By identifying these root causes, we are better able to strategically come up with creative ideas and solutions to keep certain groups of people from being confined to a certain space that minimizes their world to one street block or a prison cell. A good solution for this is education about one’s rights and knowledge about the world in a broader sense— a resource that is scarce in many communities of people of color and poor people. The space that our Writing Center provides for us to explore our understanding of the world has fueled my aspirations to educate people who are confined to certain spaces about how the world operates and about the power that we have to make our world a better place.

There’s a familiar phrase that pops into my mind as I conclude this paper: “knowledge is power.” I couldn’t tell you the source behind this phrase, but I do know that there’s a lot of truth to it. The thing is that as I now have a deeper understanding of how the world operates, I find that people/institutions who have acquired power

## (Writing Advisor Corner Continued...)

through knowledge have used it for evil or self-elevation. What I seek from knowledge is not power, but solutions to help the powerless elevate themselves from injustices, inequalities, and oppression imposed on them by those who wield the power. For me, this is what my Writing Center has allowed me to explore. One of the unique things about our Writing Center at the Stateville campus is that it's mobile. What I mean by that is that once our official once-a-week, three-hour long study hall/Writing Center concludes, we as Writing Advisors take the Writing Center with us and we are open for business from our prison cells. This allows for us

to continue to explore our voices, identities, imaginations, aspirations, and our understanding of the world beyond school hours and during lock-downs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also allows for us to unmute our voices so that we are heard through our writing, our stories, and our actions as we seek to resurrect and restore our credibility from the social graveyards where our voices and identities are buried. I have to ask, particularly students and educators in the free world, what will you do with the knowledge you acquire and how will you use the spaces created by centers of writing?

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Richie, Beth M. *Arrested Justice*. (Note: I was only assigned a chapter from this book, additional information is unknown to me).



It's Prof Melissa here...wanting to know: Where do **you** get **your** weather? I've had the ultimate privilege of receiving the full forecast from Officer Cornelius as he's been escorting me and other educators into the school building at Stateville; I even had the honor to speak with him for his new *Feather Bricks* column "Project CornCast." Here's what he said:

Officer Cornelius told me he first got really interested in the weather when he worked the night shift in the winter and needed to know about snow on the roads and if his vehicle was going to be ok to drive. He reminded me that checking up on the forecast is not just learning about temperature or precipitation but that, "you have to know the weather the whole day so you can prep." Being ready for the entire day and all of the weather changes ahead, in terms of bringing and wearing the right clothing, can really make a difference. I also learned from our conversation that weather affects mood. In an environment where long hours are involved and we have to collaborate to get things done, being aware of mood can be a game changer.

Are you wondering how Officer Cornelius got so good at forecasting the weather? He explained that he has always been a kind of outdoors person who enjoys time in the woods, and he also spent time in the military. It sounded to me like he has learned in his body to tell if it is going to rain because he says he can look at the sky, pay attention to the wind factor and notice how the clouds are moving, and the signs are all there. (Fun fact: fish tend to bite, according to the CornCast, when there is a little bit of drizzle in the mornings. This is the best time to make a catch, or, as Officer Cornelius puts it, "cast your line.")

Look forward to more predictions from our community meteorologist. In the meantime, I vouch that the CornCast has been more accurate than any news from the radio or TV, so I recommend you double-check those other weather reports with this true and reliable source. The CornCast says:

**The rest of the summer will be hot, so be ready for August and even September to stay heated up. It will start to cool down some in October. They say the days are getting shorter, but Officer Corn "can't tell – yet." So, take advantage of the light until our next issue, dear readers.**

## PROJECT CORNCAST



Hello Readers and welcome to “The Huddle” with Steven “Mr. Right” Feagin and Mr. ESPN, Lonnie “Chubbs” Smith.

“The Huddle” is an exciting and informative sports column showcasing and previewing sports topics, events, games, and stories throughout the sports world. We hope to broaden and challenge your sports knowledge while sharing our advice and our perspectives on certain issues that plague the sports world.

So, if you love sports as much as we do, tune in and grab your monthly edition of the *Feather Bricks* so you can catch us in “The Huddle.”

Did you know that Sergeant Brown is a sports fanatic? I (Prof Melissa) would go as far to say that he is an expert aficionado. Did you know that I (Prof Melissa) do not know a thing about sports? That is why I decided to ask Sarge to school me on my break in the education building at Stateville one day. He was kind enough to drop some knowledge in response to these questions:

- **How did you become a sports expert aficionado?**

Sarge said his early experiences with sports were mostly a way to do what the other kids in his neighborhood were doing. Basketball and football were something to do and a way to be with his friends. He really emphasized how his interest picked up later in life when he started doing research to learn more about what athletes’ lives were like off the court and field. He mentioned that “It’s hard to watch a game if you really don’t know the player” and stressed the similarity between a sports fan seeing more than just a guy in a helmet with a number on his back in a football game and a teacher being involved in getting to know their students.

- **What advice do you have for a person who is clueless about watching and following sports?**

Sergeant Brown gave me some sound advice here that I am going to try! He told me to pick somebody’s brain (like a friend) who is interested in sports, to speak to someone who is active and knowledgeable. Finally, he made a valid point when he emphasized that sports still “gotta intrigue you; you gotta kinda want to know” about them or the knowledge from an outside expert won’t rub off.

- **Do you have a favorite team or sport to follow?**

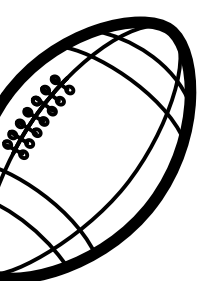
Sergeant Brown told me in football, his team is the Chicago Bears; in basketball, his team is the Chicago Bulls; in baseball, his team is the Chicago Cubs. He also explained to me that it is really difficult if not impossible to be both a Cubs fan and a Sox fan even though the two teams are both from Chicago because they are “cross-town rivals” and they play each other. They could even end up playing against one another in the World Series.

- **Do you have any predictions for future sports results?**

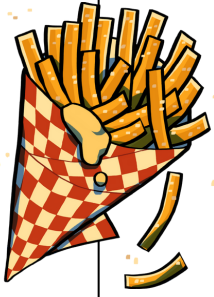
Sergeant Brown predicts that the White Sox will not make the playoffs, the Cubs will not make the playoffs, and the Bulls will make the playoffs and might make the Eastern Conference Finals.

- **If you could spend one week in the life of a professional athlete’s shoes, who would that be and why?**

Sergeant Brown would choose Michael Jordan because he is a “globally recognized figure.”



# Staff Shout Outs & Closing



First, a ton of thanks to **Officer Fry** for the many months he has spent cleaning and emptying bookshelves, cabinets, and closets in preparation for a North Park Seminary School of Restorative Arts resource room at Logan Correctional Center. We have over 200 books to date on site, and now we also have appropriate places to store them. Keep an eye out in future editions of *Feather Bricks* for this officer's upcoming column, "A Side of Fry."



Second, congratulations to **Chaplain Adamson** on his upcoming retirement (August 1st), and infinity thanks for all of his work at Stateville Correctional Center the past 19 years. Did you know that Chaplain Adamson initiated educational programming in 2010 that included a 10-page thesis writing assignment for a course that engaged Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, Death & Dying, and Critical Thinking content? In a brief end-of-July interview, Chaplain Adamson emphasized his view that educational programs are the "the master key" that bring hope for the future. He pointed out that North Park's alumni/ Teaching Fellows with their graduate degrees teaching undergrads is "the most awesome thing I have ever heard of." His message for readers is "you need to understand that you CAN do school. I have seen the victory of guys who got their GEDs and then go into the Master's degree program."



Third, special thank you to **Ms. McGrath** for her copyediting expertise on this issue. We look forward to seeing some of her GED and Pre-GED students in print next issue!

Finally, (because we save the best for last), multitudes of appreciation for **Principal Costabile and her Education Staff** especially for all of their work to prepare and carry out North Park's School of Restorative Arts graduation. And congrats to the graduates!



**Editors' Note:** Outside readers can find an electronic version of this issue (and past issues) of *Feather Bricks* on North Park University Writing Center's website: <https://www.northpark.edu/academics/undergraduate-programs/academic-assistance/writing-center/>