



Cover Art by Kenneth Key

Feather Bricks Mission Statement: We provide brave spaces to celebrate creative, encouraging, and instructive expressions.



Cover Art by Eric Watkins

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

This edition kind of hit home for me because of the theme "children and parenting," and it being the holiday season. For me, holidays like Christmas and New Years are times to be spent with family, from traditions like getting to open up one gift at midnight to going over to grandma's house to eat with the extended family, and football games on the T.V. Though these memories are cherished, the days and years spent away from family can make the holidays seem dull, especially now that I have 4 children. I appreciate this edition because what means the most to me is being assured that my children are alive and growing well, and those of us who have this same passion at least get to express this. So, please, enjoy.

-Johnny Marizetts, Senior Editor

Bri: Tina! You always have a lovely sparkle when you talk about your parents. Have you always felt close to them, or have things changed much since you went away? I can admit that I have not always had sparkly feelings about my parents, but it is also true that my years away have given me some more understanding and, as a result, a softer feeling in spite of the ways I have experienced conflict with my parents.

Tina: Oh, Bri, you do not know the half of it! When I was a kid from age 8-15, my parents were not my primary caretakers, so once I started living with them when I turned 16, the relationship wasn't the same anymore. My brother and I were close but I kept my parents at arm's length because it's like I didn't really know them. My parents went into super-parent mode, all work and no play. Our relationship got better after I had a few emotional moments with them about how we all do not have a relationship but a boot camp. We started having fun and living lives to the fullest. But what completely changed between all four of us was when I went to prison and saw how concerned they were for me. My parents, who never let me alter from the life plans they had set for me, started to uplift me and encourage me to stay positive and consistently remind me of God's faithfulness and how He will never abandon His children. My mother frequently sends me cards with Bible verses and uplifting messages; my family calls, visits me whenever possible, and video visits me at least once a week. I have seen a genuine love and compassion from them that reminds me of how much more our Father in Heaven loves and cares for us.

I know how much I love my parents, but I cannot imagine the unconditional love they have for me, especially when I was the brattiest. Bri, can you share how your relationship has been with your daughter? Do you think you have grown closer or further apart (her being an adolescent and all!) since you came to Logan?

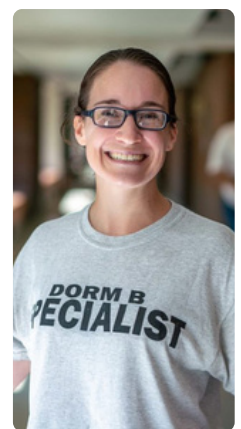
Bri: My daughter has been my sidekick since the beginning. I took her to her first staff meeting (at the church where I was Music Minister) at 3 days old, and things carried on in that way until I went to jail. That year was hard on me; she aged from 3 to 4 and hated talking on the phone. I can admit that I felt rejected then, but the truth is that my daughter is my biggest fan and my best inspiration. You'll read later about the grand plans she has for us to accomplish together, but I recognize that my commitment to honesty and openness with her has helped to foster a connection between us that hugely contrasts with my childhood (and adult) relationships with my parents. I truly thank God for equipping us both for that. She is an incredible, compassionate, and insightful girl, wise beyond her years and always has been; Tina, my Giselle brings out the best in me, and I'm glad that the person you know me to be has been influenced so strongly by this girl. **Readers, as you digest this issue about parents and children, what can you share with those around you about your family experience?**



Johnny Marizetts



Tina Jones



Briana Travis



Dialogue & Discuss

Into the Unknown by Giselle and Briana Travis

Meet my daughter! She introduces herself only as "Giselle Travis, daughter of Briana Travis," but I would go on and on...In fact, those who know me know that I usually do when it comes to Giselle.

When I presented my various ideas for a collaborative piece to Giselle, she had no hesitation in suggesting that we should share our future plans with readers.

[Giselle]: I want to tell people about our goals to inspire others to see that there is always hope. Even for the people not getting out soon, they might be inspired to think of how they can help people to make the best of life in there.

[Briana]: Giselle is in fifth grade this year, 10 years old, but is already sending out ripples of good in the world and has been for years. Her favorite impactful activity is called, "Access," and, in it, she is paired with other kids with special needs of all kinds. She entertains and monitors the kids so that their parents can spend church services in worship and devotion or even so they can go out and run errands or have a date! This is a natural fit for Giselle, who oozes compassion and welcome for kids of any variety.

[Giselle]: We hope to have a lot of impact on others in the future, once we can be together and save up enough money. Even if we can only accomplish a part of our goals, we can still have a lot of impact.

[Briana]: Giselle wants to create a home that has room for all of our mutual loves: music, dance, games, and animals of all kinds (you would balk at the list of animals and their accommodations on our dream list!!!), lots of color and homemade decorations to make people feel welcome, a greenhouse, and lots more.

[Giselle]: We don't have to have a bunch of animals at first. I want to start with a couple, maybe five...and then we can get one or two more each time one dies. We can add different species as we go.

[Briana]: Gigi and I are both animal and nature lovers. We even rescue spiders. But Giselle has visions of a menagerie that will make any visitor feel like a kid again...or run away terrified when they see our snakes, lizards, and spiders...My excitement peaks with the greenhouse we intend to build. We want to be able to feed ourselves and others while also contributing to environmental efforts. We believe that God gave us responsibilities over this earth and that what we do here matters both now and into eternity.

[Giselle]: The most important room, though, of the whole dream house is our bedroom.

[Briana]: I have been away since Giselle was 3 1/2 years old. We have always been very close, but Giselle really misses the closeness in proximity that we would share if I had never gone away. The bottom line is that we want to build a home filled with love, welcome, and joy. This home could be a beacon for others who long for a welcoming space and most certainly a place for Giselle and I to make up for lost time. Our shared passions will be visible throughout, seasonal decorations and themed rooms will abound, but I really foresee Giselle's magnetic spirit and my joy at being back with her as the prominent elements of our vision.

[Giselle]: Yeah, even if we can't get a mansion to have all of the themed rooms, we will still be together and be able to accomplish a lot of our plans to help people.

[Briana]: That's my girl! Always hopeful, always inspiring me to press on. That is a gift that I would never exchange for anything. I genuinely hope that you have sensed the excitement she holds for the future and that some of it has inspired you. That, after all, was why she wanted to share these plans with you. Giselle wants you to envision your future no matter what today looks like. That is the blessing of every call and visit I share with her.





Dialogue & Discuss

Editor's note: The following excerpts are reprinted from the June 10, 2019 article "Father and Son, Next Door Neighbors in Prison," an interview as told to Alysia Santo by Kenneth Key and Michael Key.

For almost 20 years, Michael and Kenneth Key were incarcerated at Stateville Correctional center. Father and son talked to The Marshall Project about rekindling their relationship behind bars. At that time, they were living in cells next to one another.

[Michael]: A lot of the officers here know that's my father, and I'm his son. So, if I say something crazy or we are going back and forth, they always threatening, 'I'm gonna tell Daddy on you!' And I say, 'Tell him! I'm grown.' (Laugh.) I love my daddy, and I got plenty of respect for him. But I'm Michael, and that's Kenneth. When our cells were next door, if I got something going on in my mind, we could just have a conversation. I could just yell his name, stick my mirror out the bars and see into his cell.

[Kenneth]: We would take turns holding the mirror to see each other. I'd hold it awhile, and then he would. And we'd talk for a couple of hours sometimes. When I really broke down and cried and expressed my regret was in a meeting in the bible class. My son, we was in a circle and we was talking about different things. And I was telling him how this whole scenario, this nightmare, that took place happened. We both ended up with life. What was all this for? What was the message that was trying to be given to us? Cause this was the definition of a generational curse, to the core. I apologized because I couldn't save him.

[Michael]: We doing everything we can as a father and son to grow. But it's like, because I never had a father, I can't really say what it means to be a son. Or to act like a son. So we learning as we go. You have to understand something about us: we're not really get-in-touch-with-your-feelings kind of people. I can see it in his face and in his demeanor and sometimes his voice that he got a lot of regrets as far as not being out there with me and helping to raise me. So, I think it's real hard for him. I think it's harder for him than it is for me.

[Kenneth]: We had this conversation a long time ago. He said, "A lot of guys, hate their fathers. But I don't hate you. I love you." And that hit me. Mike is my only son. I don't have any other kids. That's all I got. And it hurts that he's here. That's my mistake.

Mothers and Children From Behind Bars by Amie Thornton

My name is Amie Thornton. I am writing from Logan Correctional Institution. I'm a mother of one son, 13, and 3 daughters, 16, 17, and 25 years old. I always thought of my relationship with my children as close, but in some ways, I was very wrong. I have made so many bad choices and mistakes in my time that it has wrecked everything I had. The drug addiction I had has messed up my relationship with my children, caused trust issues, ruined my life, my future, my reputation, and most of all, it has landed me in prison leaving me here to be a mother having a relationship with my children from behind bars. As hurtful and hard as it is and as sad and depressed as I am, I force myself every day to hold back my tears and keep pushing, and every time I get close to feeling like I'm going to cry, I find something positive to do with my time. I sometimes think that prison saved my life because being in here has not only got me sober, but I can see things very clear now. And I have a positive plan when I leave. Things will be different in a very good way. My mistakes have made me a stronger person and the life changing experience that has come from it all has made a huge impact on my life. I know I can't change my past, but I promise to show my children that I can and will give a much better and positive future for not only them but myself as well. I hate the fact that I had to hit rock bottom to finally wake up or that it took me so long in life to see what was happening, but being a mother to my children from behind bars has shown me exactly how extremely hard and depressing it really is. Every day in here is very tough, and there are several days that I just want to give up, but then I think about my children and I somehow regain my strength to keep working and pushing forward to getting home. My children are my world and they are my motivation. They are my positive thinking. I know I can do this and get home to my kids even though the struggle in here is very real. From the love of a mother to her children, it can be done even from behind bars.

This story is in dedication to my children: Kayla, Karli, Kelsey, and Michael. I love you guys to the moon and back. See you soon. Love, Mom!

P.S. And a special thanks to Wendy Denzler. I'll never forget you.



Dialogue & Discuss

The Collective Experience of Parent and Child by Mishunda Davis-Brown

My name is Mishunda and I have 2 children that I've been separated from for a while now due to my poor choices. I've learned that my poor choices not only affected me but many, including my kids. Kids are God's gift to us and should be cherished as such. With that being said and moving forward, I've chosen always to consider my children before acting and reacting.

Although I've been absent in my kids' lives, we have an amazing bond due to my consistent role as their mother in their life in spite of my incarceration. I refused to allow anything to keep me from being a mom. There was never any length of distance, time, or separation that could come in between our love for one another. Love can't be confined or restricted. I love my kids and am grateful for our bond.

I've taught my children many things but to be in particular, I'll let you hear it from them... Melvin states, "Ma, you taught me to be grateful for everything you have because it could be worse, to respect others, work before play, to keep my priorities straight, that everyone isn't my friend so call them associates until they show you different, and to be aware is to be alive." Melvina states, "You taught me to never give up and I can do whatever I put my mind to. I'm sure you taught me a lot of other stuff, but I can't think of everything off back." The Bible says in Proverbs 22:6 "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

Peer Mental Health and Self-Care Information by Edward "Eddie" Brown

This article will discuss anger. For those of you who know me, you may be thinking that I should either be an expert on the topic, or that I have no business leading a discussion on anger. While both may be true, yet as always, our gracious God continues to surprise us. So, let's see what the Lord has to teach us on the topic of anger.

We have all experienced anger at one time or another--either being angry or being on the receiving end of someone's anger. Anger is an emotion that comes from God. It is a secondary emotion of the human heart that slumbers in silence until it is kindled and flames up in the presence of any perceived wrong.

What is important to understand is that no passion that God has placed in the human heart can be in itself evil. All the emotions God places in us are good and righteous until taken to excess, then truly, our best affections and emotions are injurious and sinful. This becomes evident when we consider righteous anger. Righteous anger is natural, proper, and even praise worthy. It is a quick instrument designed to protect life and life's interests against whatever would destroy or injure them. Righteous anger first appears in Scripture in Exodus 32:12 where Moses pleads for God to "Turn from the fierce wrath and repent of this evil against thy people," concerning Israel's sin with the golden calf. We may be more familiar with the example of righteous anger displayed by Jesus when He chased the money changers from the temple (John 2:13-17) in fulfillment of Psalm 69:9 "Zeal for Your house will consume me."

There is an anger so different from righteous anger, and this anger is in danger of the judgment (Matt. 5:21). This type of anger is in excess, unrestrained, and put to evil ends. Unrighteous anger also slumbers in silence until it feels it isn't getting something it is entitled to. This is the type of anger I usually display--ungodly, selfish and destructive, an emotional reaction instead of rational thought. An example of this type of anger is the prophet Jonah's entire attitude toward Nineveh being ungodly, selfish, and destructive. Sampson is a better example when--out of anger for losing a bet--he killed 30 men to pay off his losses; outraged that his Philistine wife was given to another in marriage, he tied the tails of 300 foxes together in pairs and set fire to the Philistines' crops; when his wife and her family were burned to death in retaliation, he became furious again, killing a great number of Philistines.

We need to think before we act. Some say count to ten; others suggest taking deep breaths; others say ask yourself questions. These suggestions provide the time needed for the rational part of the brain (prefrontal cortex) to rule over our raw emotions (reptilian brain). Lord, my prayer is that you will help me and those who struggle with anger issues to operate in righteous anger. We also pray for those who find themselves on the receiving end of such anger. It is one thing to know that expressing anger detoxifies it, but another to be on the receiving end. Thus we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Further discussion: questions and comments, are welcome. Be Blessed in the Lord my brothers and sisters in Christ.





Dialogue & Discuss

Editor's note: The following work was produced in consultation with Teaching Fellow/Super Sub Jason Muñoz

Historia by Edgar Sánchez

Yo crecí con mis padres muy pobres apenas teníamos dinero para comer. Por falta de dinero ellos no pudieron mandarme a la escuela. Ya de ocho años me pusieron a trabajar porque éramos dos mi hermana y yo. Yo y mi hermana de esa edad comenzamos a trabajar, junto con mi papá.

El trabajo que hacíamos era limpiar milpa, arroz, cortar café y hacer leña. Y así crecimos yo y mi hermana. Crecimos sin zapatos, no teníamos ropa. La ropa que teníamos mi mamá la tenía que remendar por la pobreza ingrata.

Yo me vine a México a la edad de catorce años con una persona grande, pero cuando llegué a México tuve problemas por motivo de que era menor de edad. No me daban trabajo, hasta que me dieron trabajo en una gasolinera. Pos así llegué a los diecisiete años. Después me regrese a Guatemala.

Ya estando en mi país, yo me junte con la mamá de mis hijos. Mi esposa y yo tuvimos cinco hijos. Después me volví a regresar a México, porque allí era donde yo ganaba suficiente dinero para mantener a mis hijos. Así pase el tiempo trabajando porque quería que mis hijos estudiaran, que no quedaran como yo. Después encontré un amigo y me dice "Sánchez, vamos para Estados Unidos". Yo ya tenía cuarenta años cuando llegué a Estados Unidos.

Yo nada más venia por cinco años porque quiera terminar mi casita y comprarme un carito para poder trabajar en él, pero desgraciadamente caí preso. Ahora no puedo hacer nada por mi familia, ahora que estoy preso ya tengo diez años que no hablo con mi familia, con nadie porque no tengo dinero. Yo he mandado muchas cartas, pero no llegan, no sé qué este pasando en mi país, que mis cartas no llegan. Ahora no me queda más que confiar en Dios, porque él es el único que sabe cómo se encuentra mi familia en Guatemala.

Story by Edgar Sanchez (translated to English by a Holiday Elf)

I grew up with parents so poor that we barely had money to eat. Due to lack of money, my parents could not send me to school. When I was eight years old, they put me to work because there were two of us: me and my sister. So, at that age my sister and I started working, along with my dad.

For work, we cleaned cornfields, rice, cut coffee, and made firewood. And that's how my sister and I grew up. We grew up without shoes; we didn't really have clothes. My mother had to mend the poor-quality clothes that we did have because we were so poor.

I went to live in Mexico when I was fourteen. I entered the country with an older person, but when I arrived in Mexico, I had problems because I was a minor. I couldn't find me work until, eventually, I was given a job at a gas station. Well, that's how I lived until I turned seventeen. Then I returned to Guatemala.

Once I was back in my country, I joined the mother of my children. My wife and I had five children. Later I returned to Mexico again because that was where I could earn enough money to support my children. I spent my time working in Mexico because I wanted my children to study so that they wouldn't end up like me. After that, I met a friend who told me "Sánchez, let's go to the United States." I was already forty years old when I came to the United States.

I only planned to stay in the United States for five years because I wanted to finish building my little house in Guatemala and to be able to buy a little car to be able to work on; unfortunately, I became a prisoner here. Now I can't do anything for my family. Since I have been in prison, I haven't talked to my family or anyone back home for ten years because I don't have money. I have sent many letters, but they do not arrive at their intended destinations. I do not know what is happening in my country that is so terrible that my letters do not arrive. Now I have no choice but to trust God because he is the only one who knows how my family is doing in Guatemala.



ON THE JOURNEY WITH JOHNNY



For the past 2 and a half months on Wednesdays, in the Education Building here at Stateville, about half a dozen men have gathered together faithfully. Slowly but surely we have discovered one passion we all have in common: the task of parenting while in prison.

This unique group, known as "The Dads' Club," was and still is an unprecedented development organized by Steven Feagin and myself (Johnny Marizetts). We hold discussions from topics of how our children are growing up in our footsteps, to how smart and talented they are, and how the typical early and late adolescents' struggles start to unfold. Steven Feagin and I both hold the same passion to engage in our children's lives, and, despite our obstacles of parenting while incarcerated, we soon realized that most people with children in our shared spaces hold this same passion.

Sooner or later, we found ourselves amongst the most caring parents in our circle, praying and discovering ways to "love" our children while inside. For me, in those crucial moments of parenting while inside (and I'm sure for those who are parenting on the outside, too) one of the hardest things we can do to love our children is to let them grow up. Sometimes this feels like we are abandoning, them, right! Here's what I mean. Sometimes love involves letting your son know he needs to move out of the house because his rebellion has overshadowed who the parent is and who the child is. Sometimes loving our child could also mean taking your daughter's phone after too many late night phone calls from boys. So many, that they have interfered with her grades. You see, our children may not see these parenting acts as love but the truth, is as a parent, we can't continue to spoil our dearest children who we once viewed as infants. For instance, how many see our 18 and 25 year old kids as "my baby"? (Up to this day my mother says I will always be her baby, and I'm 37!! LoL). For those of us inside, one of the most common fears we have when it comes to parenting while in prison is our kids will not love us because of our absence. This is where the real passion to engage and be in our children's lives at all costs gets real. At the same time we press on in our children's lives, they grow older. The only tools we have to use while trying to engage in our children's lives are phone calls (however frequent they may be), occasional video and in-person visits, letters, and e-mails. However, this does not make up for the daily life we miss, like tucking our children into bed at night, coaching our kids through life, rewarding and/or disciplining them when necessary. It hurts!! As a member of the Dads' club here at Stateville, I do get to discover certain tactics in order to maintain a relationship with my 4 beautiful children. For example, in the Dads' club I've learned that I can't keep playing the friend role with my children instead of the father who instills the discipline my children need at times. I've learned if I continue to be the friend and entertain the fear that my children will hate me because I'm too hard on them and not present in crucial moments, there will be no bottom for them to hit. There will not be a bottom to fall on because I'm always the cushion to soften their fall. I have robbed them from real life experiences by "babying" them and "befriending" them. This is what I've learned in the Dads' club. I want to introduce you, as we continue our "Journey with Johnny," to the members of the Dads' club and their brilliant insights on parenting while in prison.

Dear Jonaire,

Hello, and I pray that this letter finds you in good spirits. My name is Steven and I am one of your father's Christian brothers. I just wanted to drop you a few words of encouragement after your father and I shared with one another about our children. I hope you know how much he loves you and just how proud he is of you. He is a good man who has made mistakes in his life and doesn't want you to make the same mistakes he did. You've got your whole life ahead of you to be

ON THE JOURNEY WITH JOHNNY

whoever or whatever you want to be! My young brother, if there is one thing I would say to you it is this. You are a strong, young black man in the making and that comes from your father and our black ancestors. Life is gonna throw all sorts of things in your direction just because of the color of your skin.

Just breathe and trust that you can and will survive. Trust that your struggle is part of the process of becoming who God has called you to be. And trust that as long as you don't give up and push forward no matter what, you will make it.

Your dad has got your back and you can trust me on that. Until next time, may God's blessings be upon you always!

Sincerely, Steven



Hey Jonaire-

My name is Ryan and I'm a good friend of your father. We're both in the North Park college program and have been through a lot together to say the least. I'm writing because your dad has often mentioned how much he loves and cares for you, but as of late he has expressed some concern about some issues you are going through. Obviously, I don't know all of the specifics, but we've been praying for you. I can relate to how it feels to be a teenager who is struggling with the concepts of identity and purpose, wondering, "Who am I?" and "What do I want to do or be?" while trying to navigate through regular life with all of its difficulties. Sometimes this can become so overwhelming that the idea of future success seems impossible. The pressure can cause us to rebel, act out, and want to give up...

Jonaire, you are on the precipice of the most pivotal stage of life (especially for young men); 18-25 are the most critical years for us. Our brains are not yet fully developed and we tend to wrestle immensely with anger, immaturity, and impulse control. As I'm sure you are aware, our reckless actions and behaviors can bring devastatingly serious consequences. I'm not trying to preach to you, I just don't want you to end up here or worse. It is my hope and prayer that you can discover what your purpose is--to understand your true identity in Christ and who he has created and called you to be. If you put all of your energy, frustration, anxiety, etc into that and use it as fuel, you'll be virtually unstoppable. You don't want to be one of those guys who says, "If I only knew then what I know now" or "I wish I would've..."

Jonaire, today is the day. Tomorrow is not promised. I hope this letter encourages you and I hear a good report from your father. We're praying for you!

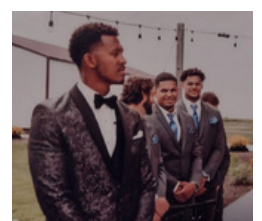
May He bless you and keep you always--Ryan

Dear Jordan, Kyle, and Kaden,

Words will never be able to describe the feelings my heart has for you, but I want to start this letter by reminding each of you of one thing: I love you forever and a day! The love I feel for you, my sons, is elemental: the DNA of the planet. Being your father is a privilege that God has given to me and only me, and for that I am grateful.

As you were being knit together in your mother's womb, I was already proud of you and I knew that each of you would be extraordinary additions to our beautiful but broken world. I could see your greatness, each of you with his own gifts and talents, which you have cultivated into skills and qualities that continue to be woven into your character.

I leave you with this lesson: life is about learning and growing. Why do we think our relationships are beyond life's classroom? Every relationship that we have, be it family, friendship, love, or marriage, is all about growth and development. There are certain skills that will be needed; you have them. Certain strengths you must develop, you possess them. Relationships are the perfect framework where we come together to share, learn, and grow. We must learn to forgive, empathize, and to love all of humanity as we love ourselves. In doing so, your relationships become a true reflection of you. Love Ya, Dad- Steven Feagin



ON THE JOURNEY WITH JOHNNY



By Scott Moore

Being a parent isn't easy under the best of circumstance. Trying to be a parent from the inside of a prison cell is darn-near impossible. That said, I've been fortunate enough to foster a relatively close relationship with each of my children during the past fourteen years of incarceration.

I think the biggest reason for this closeness has been my ability to understand that, as the parent, it is incumbent upon me to lovingly meet the needs of my children in whatever form they may take, given the distance between us. In other words, how I feel about being away from my kids isn't important. What's important is how my kids have been individually made to feel since their dad's been gone.

Knowing this, I've always encouraged my children--who are now in their 20s and parents themselves--to openly share any anxiety or pain they've experienced over the years from our ruptured connections, regardless of how it's made me feel. I've found that in assuring a safe place where my children can vent any anger and frustration without my getting defensive, I've unwittingly provided them a healing space where they can feel comfortable sharing their hopes and dreams as well.

Sure, it's felt impossible at times, but a loving approach of being open and honest allows my shortcomings as a father while simultaneously giving my kids the freedom and opportunity to share their feelings--good, bad, or indifferent--has made life a little easier for us all.

Lessons in Parenting by Celeste Cecchi

I remember the guilt I carried through some of my earliest days as the single-parent of a toddler. Navigating three jobs on top of raising a little man was overwhelming at best. I wondered how I would teach him all the things he needed to know to be a healthy, whole human by the time he was grown when my jobs often prohibited me from spending time with him.

What I didn't realize at that time was that I, too, was in the process of figuring out what it meant to be a healthy, whole human, and I was learning this from a multitude of voices and experiences that were far different than my own. Without these voices, I had a one-dimensional perspective on life.

On a chilly morning in December of 2019, I was invited into Stateville. Within very little time in the classroom in December 2022, I connected with Johnny over the challenges of raising a son through critical pre-teen years. Although Johnny's experiences were far different than my own, he offered insights I hadn't considered for my pre-teen, and he shared some tactics he was using on his own son. I walked away with new ideas on how to approach some things with my son that I had been stuck on!

Over the years, I have learned to feel less guilty and more grateful when my work pulls me away from my son. Had I been with him 24/7, he would not have had the opportunity to be taught or led by the assortment of voices and life experiences as he has. With only my voice guiding him, he would be stuck with a two-dimensional perspective of humanity (his and mine). Instead, he is growing into a richer, fuller adult because of the many people fueling his development, and for that I give thanks!



Devotionals

Like Mother, Like Son by Briana Travis

We learn much of our style of interaction from our parents. Sometimes, when I am on the phone with my sister and say certain things, she will reply, "Okay, MOM." Darn it!, I say each time, but it is undeniable: the people who raised us influence our patterns for better or...

Take a look at the first chapter of Luke. Young, single, virgin Mary is visited by an angel and her whole world turned upside down in a way that would surely set people talking and may well cost her her marriage and her future. She was troubled (Luke 1:29), no surprise, and she questioned the validity of Gabriel's message (Luke 1:34), but then she accepted her fate, saying, "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Some thirty-three years later, Mary's first-born son is faced with his own life-rendering proclamations (Luke 9:22, 44-45, 18:31-33). His closest companions didn't get it, so, like Mary was in her conversation with Gabriel, Jesus had to shoulder the reality of His fate alone. He prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Mary was a great example for Jesus.

We have been adopted into God's family, so take the opportunity to observe and model the behavior of our adopted Father and Brother: spend time in the Word. Get to know your Family; they will be a good influence even if your earthly parents did a great job.

First Christmas (to be read like "The Night Before Christmas") by Rita Jo Brookmyer

'Twas a day like no other, throughout all the land

People were rushing about, because of the man.

Caesar Augustus had ordered, a census take place

Everyone must be counted, by name and by face.

The soldiers gave orders, "Folks get on the move,

To the place of your origin, your heritage to prove!"

So they packed up each family: man, woman, and child

For fear the next order, may not be so mild.

All this caused great grumbling, except with one man

A carpenter named Joseph, knew this was God's plan.

An angel had told him, "Take virgin Mary as wife,

For she is God's chosen, to bring the world life."

So Joseph and Mary, were just newly wed

But Joseph never touched her, for so God had said.

Now Joseph took Mary, to be counted with him

In the City of David, which is called Bethlehm.

Mary was pregnant, as anyone could see

Though Joseph her husband, was not father to be.

The rumors spread quickly, Mary accused of sin

For a man with an adultress, there's no room at the inn.

Yet Joseph kept pleading, for all he was worth

"Have mercy on us, she's about to give birth!"

The innkeeper answered, with no compassion at all

"Go out to the stables, there's one empty stall."

Shepherds were tending, their flocks for the night

When there suddenly appeared, a star of great light.

It seemed to be shining, on a particular spot,

Then an angel stood before them, and said, "Fear not!"

Tonight I bring you, a message of joy.

Your savior has come, it's a new baby boy!"

They followed that star, and angels singing with mirth,

"Glory to God, there'll be peace on the earth."

For God's own son Jesus, in a manger was born,

And the world awakened, to the first Christmas morn.





with
DeCedrick Walker

Here's A Thought



A concern I have of late, especially as an incarcerated person, is whether results from experiencing psychological trauma, which developed from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), would re-focus how at-risk youth of today are being depicted. If you grew up in the city of Chicago, as I had, particularly in both the Back of the Yards and West Englewood communities, psychological trauma was something that you would experience or likely cause. Psychological trauma is a result of bearing witness to a horrible event; in part, it is bearing witness to the capacity for evil in human nature. Judith Herman, MD, author of the book *Trauma and Recovery*, conveys that "those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator...the bystander is forced to take sides" (7). I definitively stated that psychological trauma was something you would experience or likely cause because of the fact of my direct experiences with trauma: experiences which include me bearing witness to the trauma of others and a decision to take sides.

Arguably, anecdotal perspectives as mine are often understood as one-sided; they don't tell the whole story. However, the narrative of my childhood, which is largely dependent on my upbringing within the independent structures of the Back of the Yards and West Englewood communities, is generally relatable because those environmental conditions elicited similar psychological reactions in people living under their domain. This reflection, in part, will break down the development of my psychological trauma under the risk conditions of parental neglect, violence, and poverty. Afterwards, I will reflect on a path toward refocusing how at-risk youth should be depicted.

"...various environmental risk conditions such as poverty, parental mental illness or adolescent parenthood are experienced by young children through their primary caregiving relationships."

--Zeanah, Boris, Larrieu

The first 9 months of my life was experienced under my now-deceased mom who was a teenager and who had a mental illness diagnosed as an acute psychotic disorder when she gave birth to me. During one of her psychotic episodes, she tried to stuff me in a trash can when I was 5 months old. Supposedly, a neighbor saw a suspicious girl carrying a baby toward some trash cans and called the police. Nothing was specifically said about what the police did or didn't do when they showed up, except that, when they left, I was still in my mother's custody. Four months later the police was called after a bystander observed an underdressed girl carrying an underdressed baby through inclement weather. When the police showed up this time, my mom and I were taken to the hospital; I was hospitalized. After the doctor examined me, signs of extreme neglect were determined because I was malnourished. My mom was arrested and charged with neglect. I was taken into DCFS custody, and later I was placed into foster care.

"For infants, having a primary adult who is caring for them in sensitive ways, one who perceives, makes sense, of, and responds to their needs, gives them a feeling of safety."

In addition to experiencing neglect and being malnourished, my cognitive development had been delayed. DCFS officials, acting on the recommendations of a child psychiatrist, arrived to a consensus that my development would improve through pairing me with a motherly figure to create a maternal bond. Nadine Burke Harris, MD, author of the book *The Deepest Well*, wrote, "The prenatal and early childhood periods offer special windows of opportunity because they represent 'critical and



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sensitive periods' of development" (145). Though I had suffered significantly, I was still in the sensitive period of development; my brain would still be responsive to a stimulus in a caring environment.

People "...are exquisitely social: our brains are structured to be in relationship with other people in a way that shapes how the brain functions and develops...attachment experiences are a central factor in shaping our development." Thus, when I was 15 months old, my paternal aunt became my primary caregiver. Through painstaking efforts on behalf of my aunt's ex-husband--now deceased--my aunt, her siblings, and her children, I was able to gain some ground on the developmental milestones I had missed. In other words, I was able to start kindergarten at 5 years old. That said, when I grew aware of self, the different dynamics of family, and my surroundings and while my family and surroundings unconsciously coaxed me into the predetermined socialization of being at risk, my community provided the space for it.

Growing up in the Back of the Yards first and later on in the West Englewood community, I had no awareness of the trauma I had experienced as an infant, and my paternal aunt registered to my brain as my mom though she told me she wasn't. I also wasn't aware of trauma, violence, or poverty as abnormal things; seeing unboarded abandoned buildings, filthy vacant lots, and menacing looking drug addicts using those spaces was normal in my community. Pooja L. Amaytya and Drew H. Barzman, authors of the article, "The Missing Link between Juvenile Delinquency and Pediatric Post-traumatic Stress Disorder," described trauma in children as "a profound experience of the loss of security and welfare evoking feelings of fear..." (1). I remember nights laying on my bed, on the verge of falling asleep, and gun shots followed by police sirens would suddenly pierce the silence in my room and shake me out of my near unconscious state. On a few occasions the thought passed through my mind that someone was killed, and sometimes I found it difficult to return to sleep.

Other times, I heard gun shots that seemed far away--the shots didn't feel close to home, However, the following day, after hearing the streets talk, I would learn someone I knew was murdered. Perhaps a week or two later, I would learn that I likely knew the person who allegedly did the murder. Oddly enough, my young mind would struggle with the legitimacy of that consequence, seeing that I likely knew the individuals.

At the age of 13, I knew what to do when I heard shots fired, followed by police sirens. At that time my conceptual framework was "based on life experiences that," according to Amatya And Barzman, helped me "organize information and interpret and adapt to the environment" (2). Depending on where I was in our apartment, I rushed to take cover on the floor and avoided peeking out of windows when and after gun shots were heard. The floor allowed the bricks of our building to shield me and members of my family from being hit by a potential stray bullet; not peeking out of a window shielded us from becoming a potential witness to a crime and from being harassed by overzealous policing.

By the time I was 15, a legitimate question could be asked of whether or not I provoked being a target of rival gang members seeing that, by then, I fit the description of being at risk; it was certainly a suspicion police generally raised whenever they stopped and frisked me. Due to several encounters in my community, it was always best to avoid the police if and when they were called. I was finding expression through much of the negative aspects of the Back of the Yards.



with
DeCedrick Walker

Here's A Thought



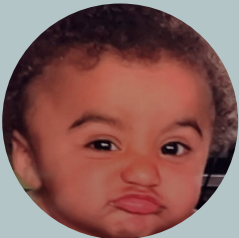
Joseph P. Ryan and Mark F. Testa, authors of the article "Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Delinquency," said that the "broader ecological perspective...highlights the way that community and cultural conditions insinuate themselves in the development of the child, both inside the family and later on as the child moves into school, forms peer relationships..." (228). Ironically, the communal and cultural experiences which shook me out of my sleep and forced me to the floor for cover were the experiences that began describing me.

Parental neglect, gun violence, and police sirens weren't the only experiences I had become adjusted to. Poverty, though I wasn't aware of its impact, influenced the relationship dynamics of my family deeply. It was the reason why my aunt had to work so much and why I took to the streets. Conventional thinking follows that, in communities where the poverty rate hovers above the national average, a spike in crime occurs followed by a need for a strong police presence. In the Back of the Yards community at that time, the poverty rate was at 16% and the average yearly income for black families was \$16,000. I find it odd, oxymoronic even, that increased police activity gains full expression in communities stricken by poverty. Shouldn't an increased police presence amount to value being added to a neighborhood? Or, does an increased police presence maintain the structure of poverty by criminalizing a neighborhood's residents?

Watching my aunt scrape together different and often insufficient streams of income in order for our household to not feel the full weight of poverty is an image I don't believe I could forget. What's equally important is that the amount of time she invested in fighting against financial poverty was at the expense of time spent with her children. In this sense, poverty has an effect on emotional development as well. My mom would leave our abode between 6 and 7 am on most days and would not return until after 5pm. Where I would be within those hours, specifically during school breaks and holidays, from the age of 8 to 15 varied, but I often found myself in precarious situations. Oftentimes when she returned home, she would be too tired to tend to all of our needs. So, in a way of dealing with her guilt of not having the time to be fully present as a parent, she would sometimes check whether I did my homework or not. I responded as a kid, who had unknowingly experienced parental neglect and as a consequence missed significant cognitive milestones, who was also experiencing psychological traumas due to the violent and impoverished community we lived in, would. I felt singled out because I didn't know asking whether I did my homework was her way of being parentally involved.

At risk youth of today seem to be the focus of many restorative justice conversations among the incarcerated students in much of our academic spaces. In these spaces, there exists a deep passion not to see young people make some of the same mistakes we've made, whether the mistakes manifest themselves as ignoring our gut feelings not to go somewhere too late at night or impulsively acting over a comment that we later learned to overlook as we matured. In these and other split-second decision making instances, I feel like it is our inherent responsibility to narrate to our youth how to navigate the complexing challenges of the self.

At the same time, we are also indebted to a higher task of holding our



community leaders accountable for not capitalizing off of our absence. Most of the men and women in these academic spaces have been incarcerated for a generation: 20 to 25 years; some more than a generation; others a few months or years off. Whatever the case, our incarceration was sold to our communities as the answer to the violence problem. Presently, we're hearing the same narrative: "Lock 'em up!" "Throw away the key!" "We need tougher gun laws!" What's not being said is that in the Back of the Yards community the poverty rate is nearly 5 percentage points down from 30 years ago, at 11.3%. Add that number to the backdrop of inflation and what seems to be an inevitable recession, and we're possibly looking at some difficult times ahead.

Most who are at risk today share one or all of the risk conditions I revealed in this reflection. While these conditions are specified to my experiences, they all exist dependently within the broader structure of a community stricken by poverty. If I'm being honest, sometimes it sounds as if we're saying, "being at-risk is a choice made by persons at-risk." Even if a person acted independently of their specific at-riskness per se, how would that look? How does that person, as an infant, convince his or her mentally ill mother not to put him or her in a trash can? How does he or she not abruptly awake out of sleep when the gun shots that are fired sound as if they are a few feet away? How can he or she vie for his or her caregiver's time when said caregiver is too exhausted to parent?

The bottom line is at-risk youth are psychologically traumatized, and in order to bring about restoration in their lives there has to be a concerted effort on our part to demand more of our community leaders. It is time to invest our gifts and talents into our communities.

Go King Kong! by Mishunda Davis-Brown

This column is so inspired by my husband Ty Brown who I call King Kong because he's always beating his chest. lol! We'll be sharing and looking to hear a moment in your life that's funny now but wasn't funny then. Enjoy.

1. When you go to your music to find that your playlists are hasta la vista baby. Go King Kong!
2. When you type a whole email, press send, and the tablet kicks your message out. Go King Kong!
3. When you're looking for your car keys and you discover you locked them in the car. Go King Kong!
4. When your stomach is growling at church (hangry) and the pastor won't close out the sermon fast enough. Go King Kong!
5. When you go to chow to get chili cheese fries and end up with 8 unfried limp baked fries and a heap of chili. Go King Kong!
6. When a holiday or the weekend interferes with your commissary date and you have to wait even longer to get your groceries. Go King Kong!
7. When you're trying to be a good listener but the person talking seems to have no end. Go King Kong!
8. When your Koss CL20 headphones break in 5 places and you have to wait a century to get them back from repairs. Go King Kong!
9. When you think you're about to put on your skinny jeans after the holidays to find they don't fit the same. Go King Kong!
10. When you accidentally overcook your popcorn so that even the unburnt popcorn tastes like smoke. Go King Kong!

Response to "Here's a Thought" and Wisdom Blvd.

By Mishunda Davis-Brown



DeCedrick,

This is Mishunda Davis-Brown in response to questions in your previous column of 1. If your readers remember a time when you were enlightened to where it penetrated their impenitent way of thinking? and 2. whether readers agree that openly accepting culpability for our insensitive misappropriation could help mend the emotional features in our community?

Response 1: To be honest, as children of God, The Holy Spirit is always working to enlighten us. Jesus promised to not leave us as orphans and to leave us with a counselor who is the Spirit of Truth/Holy Spirit to be with us forever and live with and in us once Jesus left this earth (John 14:16-18). And so through this enlightenment from the Holy Spirit it will lead us to righteousness "if" we "choose" to listen to him because "He who is in us is greater than he (the enemy) who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). With that being said, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..." (Hebrews 3:7-8), which leads me to the story of Cain and Abel. God tried to "enlighten" Cain before he killed his brother Abel as he's tried so many times to enlighten us "before" we chose to make a poor choice. The thing is that we have to choose whether or not we want to be enlightened by the Spirit of Truth. The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it (Gen 4:6-7). In this small scripture God gives Cain enlightenment. 1. He lets him know that he is loved and welcome to be accepted just as his brother Abel if he "chooses" to do right. 2. He warns Cain in love by enlightening him to watch out for sin which is always close by, waiting to trip us up and take over us and 3. He further enlightens Cain by giving him wise advice as any father would, letting Cain know that he has power over sin and so can master it, but it's by our choice. Cain later chooses to dismiss all 3 enlightenments and kill his brother Abel. So again, I believe as Children of God, He's always giving us enlightenment to help us make better choices. So, I commend you for "choosing" to be enlightened by allowing the Spirit of Truth to dawn on you and convict and correct you. Jesus says that the Spirit of truth/counselor/Holy Spirit will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:7-8). You could have chose to remain in the state you were in if not lovingly speaking truth to others as Christ would have you, but you instead chose to listen to the spirit within you, choosing to love and restore within your community, which A-gave you the victory over the enemy, B-set an example for believers and unbelievers that we may fall down but we can get back up as children of God, which is an inspiration to so many because we all sin and fall short of the glory of God daily, even if just in thought. No one wants to admit their flaws or shortcomings, and so it must've been difficult to share in thought that people may judge or condemn you. You say you wrestled with whether to confess or not but it's in your best interest that you did. We get further when we correct our wrong. Confessing released the burden of guilt and opened the door to repentance, healing individually and collectively and restoration within self and the community. So, you did the right thing. I also get the wishing you were giving to others in truth. However, (2 Tim. 4:2) says that we should correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. Sometimes it's not what you say but in the manner you say them, which will determine the response you'll receive because with every action comes a reaction. The Bible says, "a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." We must not provoke our brothers. We'll connect better and get through to people in patience and love. Now with that being said, never regret speaking the Truth if it's for the right reason, but be mindful as to how Christ would respond and others' feelings. Paul didn't regret what he said to the Church of Corinth and all the Saints throughout Achaia when he hurt and made them feel sorrowful by his words because it was out of love. What he saw to them wasn't to judge or condemn but to correct

Response to "Here's a Thought" and Wisdom Blvd.

By Mishunda Davis-Brown



them and their Godly sorrow led them to repentance that leads to salvation (2 Cor.7:8-10). And Paul was glad of this. So, thanks for keeping it real, but do it in love. With that being said, know that you're not alone in this walk. We all fall short at times. I had an enlightenment myself recently that made me want to do better. God convicted and corrected me and not only did I accept responsibility for my actions, but I also apologized. I asked for forgiveness, which is important in mending a relationship and working on doing better. My issue was that something my husband said to me didn't make sense, so I accused him of lying, labeling him a liar, which I'm sure hurt his feelings. Due to past embedded trauma, I go into defense mode if I feel something is a lie, which could be far from the truth. It's a trigger for me and I began to build an imaginary case. In my mind, I had circumstantial evidence, probably cause, exhibits, and was ready to indict. I go hard for whatever I believe in, but God saved him by enlightening me. The Spirit of Truth said, "You're wrong. Just because something doesn't make sense to you doesn't mean that it's a lie." I instantly felt bad, accepted my wrong, asked God and my husband for forgiveness, and made a sincere change starting in my heart to help heal from my past trauma and mend my relationship so that it's healthy for a brighter future. I thank God for my husband's patience with me because I'm 2 handfulls. So see DeCedrick, you're not the only one confessing around here.

And Response 2: I agree that openly accepting responsibility can surely help mend our community by healing us as a whole where we all can make a better community to live in.

Back to Wisdom Blvd.

Good Old Proverbs! I'm choosing Proverbs 12:4 and Proverbs 26:11. Proverbs 12:4 reads, "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones." With that being said, each party (husband and wife/boyfriend and girlfriend/partner and partner also) reflects and affects the other. So, think twice before disrespecting your partner because it will not only reflect and affect your partner, but also yourself. You both are one, not one minus or divided by one. To respect your partner is to respect yourself.

Proverbs 26:11 reads, "As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly." So, to continue to repeat an offense expecting a different result is insanity. This will keep you at a standstill in life, and if you're standing still, you can't move forward.

Thanks for taking a ride on the Blvd. If you have a "good old Proverb" you'd like to elaborate on and feel the need, take a trip down Wisdom Blvd. with me.



Editor's Note: Prof. Melissa was voluntold by Prof. Ken to share resources that address the topics below, so she has taken over this column. Tasha will return next issue.

Tips for Overcoming Seasonal Depression (adapted from Dignity Health's website)

People may joke about getting the winter blues, but the phenomenon of feeling sad, anxious, or tired during the winter months has a medically recognized name: Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Some of the most common symptoms include:

- Low energy
- Excessive sleeping
- Feeling anxious, sluggish, or depressed
- Overeating
- Weight gain
- Craving carbohydrates



Luckily, there are some steps you can take to manage your symptoms and find the mental relief you need to make it through the dreary winter months. Here are a few proven methods for combating SAD.

1. **Light Therapy.** The absence of light is one of the reasons people feel more depressed in the winter months, so light therapy is one of the most common and effective treatment methods. This could mean purposefully taking walks during daylight hours, especially when it's sunny outside.

2. **Vitamin D.** You can consume Vitamin D through your diet (dairy, egg yolks, oily fish).

3. **Healthy Diet.** Maintaining a healthy diet is critical for both physical and mental health. There's nothing wrong with indulging in comfort foods, but those items don't have to be packed with sugar or unhealthy fats.

4. **Aerobic Exercise.** When you're depressed, the last thing you may want to engage in is physical activity. But aerobic workouts -- particularly done outside in the sunshine-- can have a positive impact on your mood, releasing endorphins to balance out the sadness and anxiety.

5. **Talking it out.** Sometimes, discussing your feelings and experiences can help you get through these darker days. Talking with a mental health professional may also teach you to recognize triggers and adopt coping skills for anxiety and depression.

Hand Stretches for Carpal Tunnel from Alberta Health's Website

Start each exercise slowly. Ease off the exercises if you start to have pain. When you no longer have pain or numbness, you can do exercises to help prevent carpal tunnel syndrome from coming back. Do not do any stretch or movement that is uncomfortable or painful.

Warm up stretch, 1. Rotate your wrist up, down, and from side to side. Repeat 4 times.

2. Stretch your fingers far apart. Relax them, and then stretch them again. Repeat 4 times.

3. Stretch your thumb by pulling it back gently, holding it, and then releasing it. Repeat 4 times.

Prayer stretch, 1. Start with your palms together in front of your chest just below your chin.

2. Slowly lower your hands toward your waistline, keeping your hands close to your stomach and your palms together until you feel a mild to moderate stretch under your forearms.

3. Hold for at least 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 2 to 4 times.

Wrist flexor stretch, 1. Extend your arm in front of you with your palm up.

2. Bend your wrist, pointing your hand toward the floor.

3. With your other hand, gently bend your wrist farther until you feel a mild to moderate stretch in your forearm.

4. Hold for at least 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 2 to 4 times.

Poetry and Art Corner

"Our Picture"
by
Demetrice "DC" Crite



FEATHER BRICKS POETRY CONTEST WINNER !

Fall semester, North Park School of Restorative Arts Cohort 2 student Antonio Balderas spearheaded a *Feather Bricks* poetry contest, collecting 18 submissions and securing 4 judges to evaluate these submissions. Inside judges included Antonio Balderas himself, Stateville Campus Writing Center Asst Director Rayon Sampson; outside judges included two North Park University English Professors. Each judge received anonymized submissions and was asked to select their top 5, providing feedback to justify their choices. Only one poem showed up on all 4 judges' "top 5" lists. Thank you to ALL who have participated; we enjoyed reading, digesting, and discussing your work. Runners up will be published in future editions.

The judges chose "Our Picture" by Demetrice "DC" Crite for the following reasons:

"I truly enjoyed reading this sad depiction of so many people's truth."

"This poem had a connectable storyline and history attached to it."

"This poem won me over with its combination of everyday slang and refined, carefully-placed language. The poem presents a complex idea (the nature of black history in the US) through the extended metaphor of an artwork. A rich and thought-provoking poem."

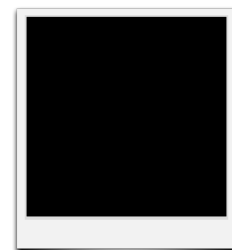
Our Picture by Demetrice "DC" Crite

Our picture ain't
No picasso,
painted with bright attractiveness.
Nah, it's a gloomy
Socially uneven landscape
of rapidly fading
Black and Brown hues
Brushstrokes
All that remains
Are perpetually highlighted
White spaces
Depicting steadfast brilliance

Our picture has no beauty
In the present.
It once was beautiful.
Its beauty flowed from
The past.
The allure was hidden
In our struggle--
Marches, dogs, firehoses, up from slavery.
Its enchantment
was the melody of a Negro Spiritual being
Sadly and softly sang by sharecroppers
working for nothing
but a better life.

Our picture ain't
No world of opportunity
Speckled
with vibrant choices
like some Jackson Pollack
Masterpiece.
Nah, it's a waxy crayon-scribbled
Black, monotoned,
Chaotic, infinite
Circle of nothingness.

Our picture, is
One painted with
Humbleness,
Forgiveness and unrequited love
For a land that has never loved
Us.
A country that continues to
wash its streets
with Black blood
And wipe its ass
with Black legacies-scarring our canvasses- our history.
We had no choice in
The framing, but
Regrettably,
This is
Our picture.



Born and Raised

By Jamie Lee Thomasson

North Park Writing Advisor

U.S.N.V. Co-founder of V.V.O.S (Veteran Voices of Stateville)

I'm from big hills, cliffs small, bluffs, trees filled with hilly lands, St. Louis
Missouri was a great place to raise this little man

With hills so steep they look like mountains with boulders playing Peek-a-boo
with the wooded terrain, man I love this place

Parents singing while playing Gee-tars (guitars) me watching from the floor,
nostrils filled with lemon pine form our pine-sol smellin ranch
and a slight hint of furniture polish, Mom must have been bored again, she is
bringing hand crafted furniture to a mirror like shine.

The aroma of meat-loaf coming from the oven, Grandma's recipe on full
display for the occupants in the house to smell, Potatoes boiling on the stove
they must have been bad because they are about to get whipped into a
butter-filled perfection.

fire pits, barbecues, fireworks filling the air, boats are gassed up
and ready to dance across the lake. Women telling stories, laughing and
singing along, while the men played instruments singing their favorite songs.

Cousin's running to and fro sparklers in each hand, older kids sneaking
beers from the cooler filling their oversized pants

A brightly lit moon glimmering off the water, moon lit lakes are a good
place to make out with someone's daughter.

Whose daughter is she? Who cares as she gently whispers, "are you going to
kiss me?" Lips taste like beer made from St. Louis Missouri and cheap rum,
"oh look at the wild horses," she says, "Run shadow run." Nights by the
lakeside, oh how much fun did we have making out by that lake

Reunions with the fam, firepits and barbecues, gee-tars being strummed, lots
of laughter five generations all here, is where I am from. "born and raised"



Art by James Degorski



The black Samaritan by Prof. Eugenio Restrepo
"The parable of the Good Samaritan 2022"
Luke 10:25-37

O Lord open my eyes, purify my heart
For I am Flawed, uncleansed,
Hurtful, & diabolical, show me
another way, The way to true
long lasting glory, For my eyes
has flowed tears of Fire,
That Burn my soul to
Ashes, O Lord Forgive
me, nothing or No one else
can protect my thoughts
but you, no longer could
Satan control me, if you protect me
Pull me back, To sit on top of
your wings, man can't see me,
its only you whom built me.

--Lester Griffin

My Skin by Mishunda Davis-Brown

Aaaah! My skin screams to be vindicated, but tell me this...do you hear it?
It groans from bearing the pain and anguish of countless years of injustices,
From embedded past traumas of my ancestors and present traumatic incidents,
Shhhhhh...can you hear it?
My skin yearns to be consoled, wrapped all around in love, peace, and equality.
Only a dead man can't speak, so I know you hear my skin's shout for liberty.
Why does it feel like I'm always on trial,
Even when I've done nothing wrong charges are filed?
First there was slavery then Jim Crow laws that kept indigenous people oppressed,
Now it's disenfranchisement and incarceration this new Jim Crow needs to be addressed.
My skin, my skin, Lord will it ever end?
Huh? What you say Anglo-Saxon? Is there really an unmixed race?
Didn't we all come from Adam and Eve and God made one human race?
How did we end up in different parts of the world? Well, take a look at Bablylon.
Men tried to build a tower to heaven and God mixed their languages and scattered them as far as London.
The difference of skin tone, language, and culture doesn't make one a savage,
But it is in fact the vicious, barbarous, monstrous, acts that the so called "civilized" civilians used and use
to gain leverage,
What? My skin looks aggressive, tough, and angry all the time,
Well, I wonder what yours would look like if it had to defend itself like mines,
The Doctrine of Discovery allowed slavery and genocide to be an act of holiness and justifiable,
Corrupting the true word of God creating "just wars" against indigenous people they claimed to be
savages and less valuable,
But how can one say I'm less valuable when God said that EVERYTHING he made was good?
To interpret, it means my black a-s-s is excellent although I come from the hood,
My covering is misjudged and misinterpreted to be associated with contents of darkness,
But clearly this isn't true due to ALL people being created in God's image and likeness,
Please tell me this...Is my skin's request for equality in any way unreasonable?
I can guarantee if your skin felt the pain of mine the request would be irrefutable,
But you know something funny, in the end skin, land, property, or superiority won't even matter,
only our everlasting soul that'll be held accountable for our actions will matter, which should encourage
people to take a look at how they treat others and do better.
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream that we could all come together one day in love from every nation
and tongue,
And Rodney King, beaten by racist police, had a similar request...can't we all just get along?
Now I know God is releasing me soon from this corrupt judicial system once the judge rules, and when he
do, can someone tell me where I can get my 40 acres and a mule?

by Jami Anderson

I am a survivor of
a birth gone wrong.
That didn't stop me from
raising my voice in song.

I am a survivor of
locked closets and neglect
when asking for food
being told not yet.

I am a survivor of
terrors that make hearts race,
and a ruthless rapist
with a preacher's face.

I am a survivor of
a variety of spousal abuse
and an unbelieving family
treating me as if I am obtuse.

Of the daily rigors of prison
I am a survivor.
Past the abuse, neglect, and self-harm,
I am a THRIVER.



Art by Jami Anderson

Animal by Marlon Coleman

A night of terror is to be expected.
 For this is the jungle of the rejected.
 He is said to be full of anger.
 So enter at your own risk.
 Into a place primed with danger.
 Back drop forest green.
 Facial expression hair raising and mean!
 Looking;
 For pray.
 Claws long sharp;
 Nocturnal;
 Rarely seen in day;
 Light; from the moon;
 Eyes reflect;
 Stealthy approach;
 Quick dash;
 Bone crushing;
 Teeth piercing flesh.
 The sound of death;
 Coursing through the night air.
 All of whom that hear;
 Scamper in fear;
 Across the jungle.
 Up a tree;
 Into a hole;
 Underground; just to escape.
 The cunning and viciousness of the animal.



Living to Die
 and
 Dying to Live
 by
 Steven Ramirez



Art by
 Marshall Stewart

I Should've been your hero! by Jody Montague

I should've been your hero.
 I should've told you I love you mo'
 I should've show'd you how I could sore
 I should've been your hero!

I should've been there when you fell down
 always been there to help you and
 show'd you what being a man's about
 I should've been your hero!

I should've been there to dry your eye
 comfort you every time you cry
 encourage you to have the strength to try
 I should've been your hero!

I should've been there to make you smile
 have the patience to teach you how to
 be the type of man that makes you proud
 I should've been your hero!

I should've been there to show you love
 Been your strength when times go tuff
 show how your just enough
 I should've been your hero!

Poetry and Art Corner

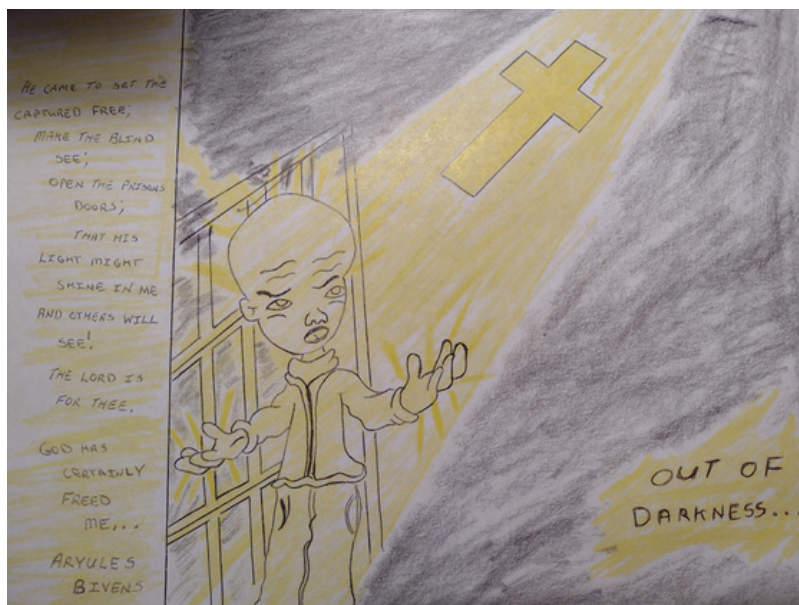
When Love is Abound!

God is love when love is abound!
I searched the deepest depths of the universe
For Love, but none was to be found,
OH, "how," a tender heart flutters when Love
Is abound!

-Antonio Slim Balderas, Voice of the Poor
and Incarcerated and North Park Poet
Laureate, NPTS Cohort 2



Art by Ernesto Valle



Art by Aryules Bivens

Time by Ernie Valle

360 degrees

Keep Me In Line from Day & Night
You Can find I whenever you like
Use me.

Waste me.

Wishing you had More of Me.
Spaces it Self Can't pass me By, As I Come
around paying no Mind As you Keep a eye
telling you the time. So Does Really Matter
knowing all is matter.

Even tho my 3 Lil Hands Go around I
Never Miss you Saying Good Bye.

So Here I am Any where Every where
Use me.

Waste me.

wishing you Had More of Me!



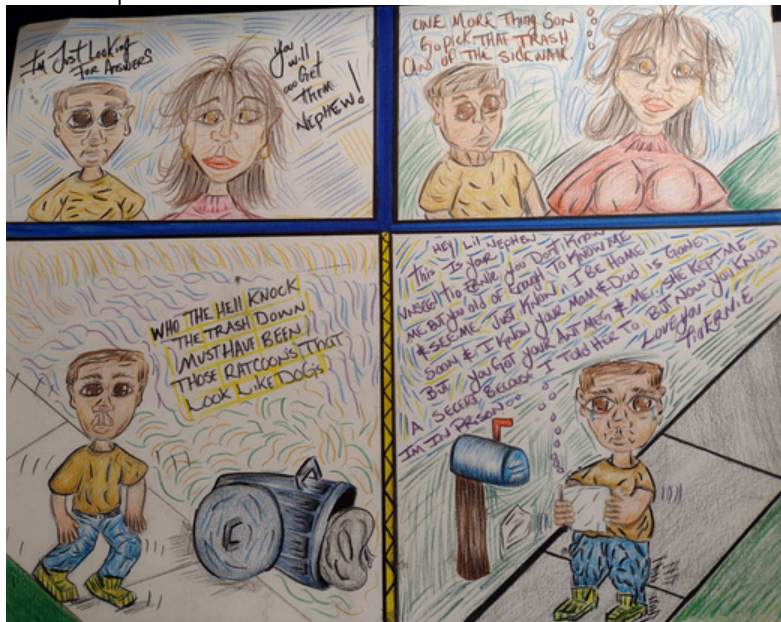
For a Better Future

Art by Sherron Dillon

The dark cloud on the bottom represents the foolishness of the life I used to live. The light shining through the cell represents myself acknowledging the foolishness for what it is and was. The sun represents someone who's been renewed and ready to walk in the shoes God made for me and loving how that fit. I'm also day dreaming of a new, better future and wanting to be a part of that growth. The dark clouds are pain, destruction, and all what's wrong in our world.

FAILURE

Do not fear failure. We all fail at times. Failure is a natural result of trying. Never let failure keep you from going on. The fact is, there are seeds of success in every failure. You only really fail when you stop trying.



Graphic by Ernesto Valle



Art by Ernesto Valle

Into the Fire by Ernie Valle

In the Fire I Stand!

True Pain is what I Breathe!
See Me Shine Like the Golden Sun, Giving you Hope!

Into the Hollow World where no one cares. So light up your flame that Burns. Inside of you.

This fuel that Burns Inside of Me. Is More I can take.
So pour your self a Cup & Light up your flame.

Spaces & Time does not matter to me. As I am Matter walking Dust that Breathes, As I am there or here. As long as I have This Sword with me. I am Everywhere!

This word that fill Me True Pain! Light my way this path I Take is Long. I Say no short cuts Any More.

O Lord you bless me with more pain!

As Birth pains comes my way.

My brothers & sisters lost there way.

You broke me.

You brought me in to bring me out!

To show them the way seeking you

Truth Love Everlasting Kingdom

Forevermore

As I walk in faith!



BUSHA'S STORIES by Luigi Adamo (Part 1)

You know how some kids grow up as mama's boys or daddy's girls? Well, I grew up as something of a grandma's boy. My mother's mother was from the highlands of southern Poland, so I called my grandma 'Busha', and boy oh boy did she ever fit the 'Busha' stereotype. For those of you who have never been to any Midwestern town's Pierogi fest, let me enlighten you as to what the Busha stereotype consists of. Every Busha has a few things in common. They are usually larger women of a certain age, who are warmhearted, nurturing, but also very stern. A Busha will not hesitate to administer a swift spanking on their (or anyone else's) grandchildren with an ever ready wooden spoon if caught misbehaving. They've been known to tell fabulous bedtime stories, dispatch wondrous (if unsolicited) pearls of wisdom at the drop of a hat, and are absolute sorceresses in the kitchen. Their fashion sense however, is only limited to having their hair in curlers wrapped in babushkas, wearing a variety of colorful Mumus, and of course fuzzy house slippers. If a Busha has to go out in public to Church, the bank, or grocery store, she might also don a face of clownish makeup. A Busha is not found without her legendary purse from which she could produce anything from a monkey wrench to a deli sandwich as the situation demands. Anyone who is referred to as 'Busha' will insist that these items act as an almost unofficial uniform to the office of Busha.

My Busha came to live with us right after my grandfather died when I was still too young to speak. I was the baby of the house, and spent a lot of time with her growing up, so naturally we became very close. As warm and loving as Busha was, she was also tough as nails, and could be more than a little severe at times. She had the uncanny ability to make you feel safer than if you were protected by a choir of Archangels, and scare the living hell out of you at the very same time.

Keep in mind, this woman cut her teeth in a time and place that would have made the most rugged colonial pioneers tap out, and she had a faded serial number tattooed on her arm to prove it. Though she would never speak of it, I heard whispered rumors that Busha was something of a terror to the Wehrmacht when she was active in the Polish resistance during the war. So much so that the Red Army, afraid that she might inflict the same terrors on them, kicked her out of

Poland after the war was over. So you could imagine how intimidating this woman could be even in a Mumu and house slippers.

Busha was very superstitious, and had a morbid cautionary tale ready about practically anything. We've all heard the standard superstitious warnings about breaking mirrors, and stepping on cracks growing up, but were you ever warned not to chew bubblegum past midnight because it might magically transform into human flesh, and give you, the unsuspecting chewer, an appetite for cannibalism? Or were you ever taught to spit on any broom that happens to accidentally sweep your feet so that you won't die alone and uncared for in a cold house? How many times were you yanked by your ears to avoid walking under a ladder for fear of being snatched away to hell by a waiting demon? Were you ever chastised for whistling outside because doing so would attract a pack of wild dogs that would then certainly devour you? I bet not, but not a day would go by where my Busha wouldn't admonish me for doing something seemingly mundane that to her would somehow trigger a disastrous supernatural consequence.

Those warnings would often come with a fable like horror story, usually from the village where Busha grew up. I figured that if even a small fraction of those stories were based on actual fact, then my poor Busha must have had a real nightmare of a childhood. She told me these stories to warn me. "To be forewarned is to be forearmed," she used to say after each one, because she didn't want the bad things that happened to her to happen to me.

I remember this one time, I made the mistake of asking Busha if I could eat dinner over at a friend from school's house. I didn't really care about the food, I only wanted to go because he had been bragging how he had just gotten all of the latest action figures for his birthday, and I wanted to play with them. The only problem was that this was a friend that Busha never met before, and whose family Busha didn't know. To Busha a stranger always meant danger.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT, DEAR READERS? TALK AMONGST YOURSELVES. AND CHECK OUT THE REST OF THE STORY ABOUT BUSHA AND STRANGER DANGER IN OUR NEXT ISSUE...

FEATURED VOICES: HOW TO GET WRITE CLASS

Essay by Marcial Guerrero

Author's note: Before reading this essay, it must be known that I am in no way of the belief that any religion is without fault. All religions, including Islam, have committed acts that were and should be viewed as dishonorable and against the Law of God (Allah). The "Christians" I reference in this work are those that our history has already condemned, and are those that claimed the title, but failed to adhere to its true message of acceptance and equality and instead have used it to cause pain and suffering based upon the color of one's skin.

If you took away my voice, I would write my activism. If you took away my hands, I would blink my activism. If you stole my eyes, I would toe tap and tap dance my activism. And if you laid me low, I would hope that my sacrifice inspired another to take my place. Being a religious activist requires strong sacrifice and conviction, but race has always been a factor in deciding just how far one's sacrifice will go, and to whom. Sacrifices come in many forms, from picketing, to writing, to setting oneself on fire, but if we are to truly be "Children of God advocates," then we must embrace one another and accept all the different skin tones our God has blessed this world with. Unfortunately, American-Christian history, as it pertains to race, is live with examples that prove religious conviction does not always make one a better person. Islam lacks the racial profiling, which is ubiquitous in American society, and therefore makes it more desirable than Christianity from a moral point of view, as it relates to moving beyond those racial barriers.

America was built on the subjugation of entire peoples through death, and the elimination of their free will in respect to spiritual and physical being, all in the name of Allah through Christ. Those that lived existed without any way to connect to the religion of their ancestors and only had Christianity as a way to salvation. The disease started the moment Christopher Columbus placed his foot onto the pure soil of this part of the world. When he saw the peaceful ways in which the natives lived, did he think to himself, "I will leave this beautiful land and people untouched by hate?" No, he wrote a letter to his financiers King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, who had spent years murdering and

expelling Muslims and Jews alike, saying, "They would be good servants, and of good disposition, for I see that they repeat very quickly everything which is said to them. And I believe they could easily be made Christians, for it seems to me they have no belief." Disturbing words. The first thing on Columbus' mind was not saving the souls of the natives, it was the prospect of profit through enslavement. He saw a people who were incapable of defending themselves against the weapons of the "civilized" world and made the decision to become an oppressor instead of an equal. The idea of Allah comes to him merely as an afterthought. But the natives weren't going down without a fight, and they gave a valiant effort in trying to expel the invaders from their land. It was because of their audacity to refuse the "gift of knowing" that the natives were labelled as savages, and the next few centuries were spent, by those claiming to be of God, murdering them almost to extinction. Those that survived were pushed into small pockets of land across the New World and allowed to govern themselves without interference from the rest of the population. At least for a while.

Early settlers were not satisfied with the loss of so many potential slaves, for who was going to work their fields and clean their homes? And so they decided to loot Africa to fill their coffers. Africans were in the same position as the Native Americans were in that they were unable to defend themselves against the weapons of the white man. They too were labelled as "savage" and without belief even though many of the slaves taken were Muslims, and those that were not had a belief in the Earth Goddess and numerous other deities and ancestral spirits, striking similarities to the Native Americans' beliefs.

To make themselves feel better about the atrocious acts they were committing, or to justify them against the Africans, slavers deluded themselves into believing that it was "The White Man's Burden" to bring God to a Godless people. They believed that in fact they were saving the Africans' souls by helping them to share in all the spiritual goodness God granted the American Christians. So, they stripped the slaves of their personal and religious identities, gave them Christian names along with the Bible, and made sure they led Christian lives. Eventually the majority of the slaves did convert and did their best to live as good Christians. God knows

FEATURED VOICES: HOW TO GET WRITE CLASS

they were real good at being forced to turn the other cheek, but as James Baldwin so eloquently points out, “Neither civilized reason or Christian love would cause any one of those people to treat you as they presumably wanted to be treated...” Baldwin may have been writing in and of a different time, but that statement can just as well be applied to any point in American history, in regards to slavery and religion.

The scars of racism inflicted in the name of Christianity’s past can still be seen in today’s “civilized” society, because the lashes one got as a slave hundreds of years ago have been passed down through birth. Each child born from that blood has an echo of that pain. When a 13-year-old child black walks down the same street as a white woman she may clutch her purse or if she is in her car, you may hear the locks engage. James Baldwin writes, “A child cannot, thank Heaven, know how vast and merciless the nature of power is, with what unbelievable credulity people treat each other.” Power, in the hands of a racist who believes they are chosen of God because of the lightness of their skin, is a cancer upon our society that must be cut out before it can become terminal to our ability to affect change. We must have the heart of a child in order to feel for others as Allah intended, regardless of the color of our skin. Without knowing of God (Allah) it is foolish to think or assume that anyone has the ability or answers that will allow them to bridge the gap of racism. It is only the scripture – be it the Quran or Bible – that can serve as a compass to proper morality. In the case of Islam, racial profiling is not a component of the faith nor is it practiced by most. Wars have never been fought with another people because their skin was different. That isn’t to say that many despicable acts were not committed in the name of Islam, but that race was never an issue. When a Muslim walks into a mosque (prayer and learning building) or performs Hajj (Pilgrimage), he is embraced as an equal.

Social class, age, and race are not a factor. You are considered a Muslim until you tell otherwise, and that is enough. When we meet fellow Muslims, we extend the greeting “As salaamu alaikum,” which loosely translates to “peace be upon you.” Peace: that is a prayer from me to Allah for you. I am praying for the well-being of another instead of for myself. To want for another is what God intended. It is what will shape our love and acceptance for humanity.

Muslims are also taught that Iblis (Satan before he was kicked out of Heaven) is mankind’s worst enemy and that he is the first racist. “It is we who created you and gave you shape; then we said to the angels bow down to Adam, and they bowed down, not so Iblis; he refused to be of those who bow down. (Allah) said: “What prevented you from bowing down when I commanded you? He said, “I am better than he: you created me from fire, and him from clay.” It is for that reason – Allah showing his displeasure for racism – that Muslims are against it.

American culture has painted Christianity as a religion promoting racial barriers and racial profiling. It is Islam’s moral view that does not desire to alienate its believers, no matter the color of their skin. Therefore, as a Muslim, I believe that Islam leans more toward the intercultural needs of a faith believing society.

Just a Thought by Abdula Jimerson

Father Time woes Mother Nature, and they decide to do something to make the world a better place. Mother Nature being true to her calling said let’s make the seasons. Since she had the idea, Father Time chose to name them. He came up with Winter Time, a time to allow the world to be covered in beautiful white snow; Spring Time, a time when everything grows new; Summer Time, a time for the sun to shine and the heat to rise. As Summer ended, he noticed that the last season everything was dying: the leaves were falling and the sky was gloomy and he wanted to call it Fall to match what was happening, Mother Nature declined this name and opted for Autumn, and, since he was being a typical male, she didn’t put time on the birth certificate. So Fall/Autumn is the only season with two names that lack time on the end. Ever wonder why?

Vertically Connected by Darrell Fair

The blood from the slaughtered natives colored the rivers water a crimson red; it also belied the fact that religious activism required conviction. James Baldwin wrote, “The spreading of the Gospel, regardless of the motives or the integrity or the heroism of some of the missionaries, was an absolutely indispensable justification for the planting of the flag” (James Baldwin 1962, pg 46). Knowing that one’s connection with God is vertical means there is no affiliation required to embrace and uplift humanity beyond racial barriers.

FEATURED VOICES: HOW TO GET WRITE CLASS

This connection is evident in things visible and invisible. It was evident in the spring of 2020 as the world stood still, frozen in place by the invisible grip of a virus that wrapped its fingers around the globe, forcing all humanity by August to witness the senseless acts of police violence against Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. It was evident in the transformative, global movement that followed, which galvanized a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, diverse, generational, collective movement that gave voice in opposition to police violence, systemic racism, and racial injustices: a unified movement against injustice that transcended race, religion, and divisive language barriers.

This was a vertical conversation and acknowledgement of a visible human rights violation, of a universal injustice.

History is littered with such examples of multi-ethnic, culturally diverse, public display of unity in opposition to injustice and for the sake of racial justice. The sacrifice of John Brown and his family at Harper's Ferry, and the many lives lost during the Civil Rights Movement are but two examples. "One can give nothing whatever without giving oneself – that is to say, risking oneself. If one cannot risk oneself, then one is simply incapable of giving." (James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 1962, pg. 86).

Of course, there are some who still cling to the notion that righteousness and justification are dependent upon religion, flags, or race. This is a notion dating back to the crusades and beyond, as Godfrey under the Christian banner; and Saladin – a hundred years later – under the Muslim banner, fought to liberate Jerusalem. But activism should not be conflated with conviction. The former sheds innocent blood, while the latter strives to preserve it. "Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our own lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations, in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have." (James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 1962, pg. 91).

It's through our own vertical connection with God that laws are written across our hearts. This is a connection which empowers us, and moves us to give and risk of ourselves for the benefit and upliftment of others.

Sankofa by Jody Montague

The word Sankofa: is translated to mean, "go back to the past and bring forward that which is useful." This poem is dedicated to the North Park community staff, students, classmates, and particularly those who graduated and now are coming back to bring us new class members forward, and saying that we are useful!

Let's grow together, that way we'll get ahead
Our ideas are only valuable when they're shared
Out of this concrete we've been deeply rooted, and "Rose"
Beautifully we grew, into a community
Like wild fires we spread across the plains, and
showed our worth and authenticity.
Intently we listened to every lesson, and soaked it up like
rays of sunlight
Absorbing into our pores, into every molecule, and we
gained the power of knowledge
Now with the clarity of a sage, we dart out onto this stage
"Masters" of our own universe
With that big bright glow of confidence
I feel brilliant, like a transcended mind
With the world before me in the palms of my hands
I grasp, gently yet firm in my clutches my future, my
destiny
Not yet fulfilled but "Insight" has enlightened me to be
to achieve better.
to pave the way for those that come after me
stay on this path and do not stray from it.
I now lead and do not follow
I am free, at peace, my horizons are clear, and my heart is
open
My back is bare and free from burden
It was not easy, My God, it was not easy
It was hard, but ask yourself, What diamond isn't?"
And we are diamond! We are stars!
And the stars in the solar system of our universe will align
if you choose to "Plan it"
Changes in our life is what the soul demanded
We removed the slights in our life and charted a different
Path
Don't have the same enthusiasm for folly we use to have
But that doesn't subtract substance from our life if you do
the math
It "Adds" "Degrees" multiplies and repeats
Grateful that this call was answered
Truthful that this seed was planted
Nurtured they grew into light, guiding those lost vessels
from the hard ships of life
I wrote this in total gratitude
Humbled, but I feel no pressure, even as others now
gravitate towards me.
Now eagerly I teach
In the hopes that you too
One day become "We"!

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**Reflection on “Cultivating the Prose Garden” by
Elaine P. Maimon
by Ron Henderson**

As I read “Cultivating the Prose Garden” by Elaine P. Maimon I said to myself, “I wish that they knew about these teaching techniques when I was in school.” I even fantasized about my young self being gently nurtured as a fragile plant would be as I was taught the intricacies of the writing process in grade school, instead of dreading the due date, and eventual day of papers written for assignments being returned to me with the teacher’s red markings being more prominent than my own words on the paper and the feelings of inadequacy that came with them. Imagine my chagrin when I got to the short article on page 736 “The stages of the Writing process” by Lucy McCormick Calkins and noticed that it was published in 1986, when I was in the 1st grade. This made me go back to see when Maimon’s article was published and when I saw that it was 1988, I felt robbed.

Though the topics were simple, I still remember the anxiety that came with knowing that I was about to embark on a journey of draft after draft with my thoughts all alone and then turning them in once they become an actual paper. Only to feel rebuked when it was returned with the teacher’s remarks. I started procrastinating and missing assignments because of the trepidation I felt. My teacher would chasten me and say that as much as I talked writing should come easily. This did not help me to get the words that would roll off my tongue like flowing streams to do the same through my fingers and pen on to the paper.

I even notice that I still carry some of that fear today. Though I have noticed that Ró, Scott, and Melissa employed the methods of helping the seeds from that “shitty” first draft develop into a beautiful plant. I still feel a reflection of “Cultivating the Prose Garden” by Elaine P. Maimon like that adolescent version of myself when given assignments. I am forced to wonder why it is that Maimon’s teaching insights were not adopted more readily by more of the teaching community all of those years ago? It possibly could have helped countless children grow to enjoy writing and its processes, at least it would have likely done so for me.

**Transformation
by Tyresse Crawford**

I never thought that spending 13 months in segregation would benefit me in ways that I would never have imagined. In 2014 I was sent to seg for a cellphone ticket which carried 1 year. Within that year was the most critical time of my life. I had no T.V, no radio, no magazines... nothing. I was given a Bible from a guy that was next door to me, and he told me to read a chapter a day until I read the entire Bible. When I made it to the chapter “Proverbs,” I had seen a lot of myself within those scriptures. It made me sit back and reflect on myself for 9 months. I came to the realization that I was my own enemy. Why? Because I understood that I was in control of my decision making. My decision making is what brought so much unnecessary drama into my life. From conversing with the wrong guys, to entertaining negative thoughts, to having a I don’t care attitude, it was all nonsense. I chose to seek God on a more deeper and profound level, and when I tell you that He helped me to see my own flaws and helped me to think with a clear mind, only then I took my life back. The transformation was so real. The spirit of God told me that I had to let things go in order for doors to open. I knew that this was my time to prove to myself and my family that I could be a better man. I walked away from the drugs, the gangs, the criminal mentality, and guys who entertained these things. I got out of segregation with a new mind and walked the walk of all positivity. I prayed for God to help me out of prison, to help me get educated and to bring me a beautiful wife. I enrolled in school, achieved my G.E.D, achieved certificates in different classes, altogether (31) certificates. I am currently married now. I completed my “Structured Writing in Theory and Practice” class and, ultimately, I got accepted in the North Park Master’s Degree Program. Guys who watched me grow up here in Stateville these past 11 years always acknowledge my growth. With this said, we all are in control of our lives, but only through the grace of God. Believe and take control, Gents. I did!



ON A LIGHTER NOTE with Luigi Adamo

Did you ever wonder where on Earth we get all those holiday traditions we practice each and every year without ever really understanding why? Well, here's what I know.

You all have probably left milk and cookies out for Santa before, but did you ever wonder where that tradition came from? In Medieval Germany people would leave milk out on Christmas Eve as an offering for the Baby Christ and his mother, so perhaps that's where we borrowed this tradition from. That, or perhaps we got it from the old Scandinavian belief that the dead would come back to visit their family on the night of Christmas Eve. All throughout the Middle Ages, Northern Europeans would set out a whole Christmas feast for their dead. Some would even draw hot bath water and have fresh clothes at the ready just in case their beloved deceased wanted to wash up before partaking of the feast. Spooky stuff sure, but I personally wouldn't mind being able to see my departed grandparents every night before Christmas. I'd much rather have a visit from them than Chris Cringle. That's for sure.

Now that I think about it, did you ever wonder about the whole coal in the stocking shstick as gifts for naughty children? Well as it turns out, that comes from Northern Europe as well. In Medieval Germany, Santa was known as Ascher or Ashes Klas. Someone portraying Ashes Klas would come door to door into people's homes to gather up the ashes from their burnt Yule logs to scatter them about the property to bless the coming year with prosperity. If there were children in the home, Ashes Klas would quiz them on their prayers, or about the Scriptures.

If they passed, he would give them a piece of gingerbread or an orange. But if they failed, he would make them eat a handful of ashes instead. I know that seems a little harsh, but I'd bet those ashes were still tastier than a whole lot of fruit cakes I was forced to choke down without having to fail any kind of quiz first.



Ring the Bells by Rita Jo Brookmyer

RING THE BELLS (sang to Jingle Bells)

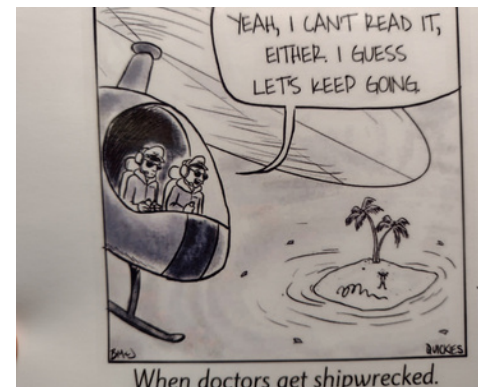
CHORUS: Ring the bells, ring the bells
Heaven and earth shall sing
Jesus Christ was born this day
As Savior, Lord and King
Ring the bells, ring the bells
Heaven and earth shall sing
Jesus Christ was born this day
As Savior, Lord and King

VERSE 1: A star was shining bright, to light the shepherds way
As they tended their flocks, they heard an angel say
Messiah now is here, why don't you come and see
This newborn babe, the Son of God,
On Virgin Mary's knee

VERSE 2: The magi from the east, beheld the heavenly light
And knew the prophecy had been fulfilled that night
They packaged up their gifts, Gold, frankincense and myrrh
To give unto the King of Kings, that came from heaven to earth

VERSE 3: May there be peace on earth, good will to every man
Let every gift we give, share God's love through our hands
So now we celebrate, for each in our own way
That Jesus Christ, the Son of God was born on Christmas day

CHORUS sang twice to rising end



Benefits of a Good Vocabulary

I RECENTLY CALLED AN OLD ENGINEERING BUDDY OF MINE AND ASKED WHAT HE WAS WORKING ON THESE DAYS. HE REPLIED THAT HE WAS WORKING ON "AQUA-THERMAL TREATMENT OF CERAMICS, ALUMINUM AND STEEL UNDER A CONSTRAINED ENVIRONMENT." I WAS IMPRESSED UNTIL, UPON FURTHER INQUIRY, I LEARNED THAT HE WAS WASHING DISHES WITH HOT WATER UNDER HIS WIFE'S SUPERVISION.

Submitted by Lonnie Smith

THE AMPLIFIER

with Alex Negrón



We offer Alex Negrón a holiday and joyously await his return to host this column in our next issue. In the meantime, let's welcome **Leo Cardez**, an award-winning inmate writer. He is a multi-category PEN America award winner, and his creative nonfiction has been shortlisted for a Pushcart Press Prize. His drama was published in the anthology *Visiting the Prison Blues* (Haymarket Books, 2021). His play, *At The Zoo*, has been produced or awaiting production in NYC in collaboration with PEN and the Brooklyn Public Library. His nonfiction has been or is scheduled for publication in *Harbinger* (NYU Review of Law and Social Change), *The Abolitionist*, *Crime Report*, *Evening Review*, *Under the Sun*, among others. He is also a founding member of the Dixon CC Writing Society.



CONVICT CHRONICLES: the rapping at the door by Leo Cardez

Join me as we attempt to navigate a prison known as Savageville--a massive concrete and iron human warehouse surrounded by electrified fences and forty foot concrete walls. As you enter notice the despair and fear floating in the sad dead eyes of row after row of caged young black men.

Cell: A grey, concrete, right angled rectangle with no outlets.

Cellmate (aka Celly): Kin-Kin, short, chiseled, and hard with a shaved head and an air of the streets--impossible to either teach or fake.

Now you walk among them as a convicted felon unready to serve a lengthy sentence with two thousand others--many who will never breathe free air again. You don't yet comprehend the gang-controlled hierarchy or convict code of the concrete jungle. you have no real connection or similarities to the majority of your fellow convicts beyond sharing the same basic DNA.

Fast forward a month. You know every inch of your tomb every scratch of your steel door. You have paced your 4 feet of walkable space like a tiger in the zoo...just like the thousands before you. You have suffered indignities perpetrated by the people tasked with your protection. You have fought against the mind games of the apex predators seeking easy prey. You have choked down 3 insipid meals a day shoved through a hole in your cell door like an animal during the "feeds." You have endured freezing 5 minute showers in rust-stained, mold-infested, cages once a week. You have talked with the few remaining loved ones who've stood by your side throughout this ordeal on your allotted 10 minutes a week--they have so many questions, you have so few answers. As night comes, you feel yourself falling deeper into the well with every passing day--the light becoming dimmer. You ponder the easy way out, the coward's solution--you know--but even a rock will turn to dust with enough pressure.

Cut to Day 107. It's hours after "lights out." You lay on your bunk in the darkness and hear someone rapping a deep lyrical rhythm. Have you unmoored--floating off into the abyss? You squint as you search for the source. You cannot see him, but sense your celly sitting on the floor next to your iron door looking out through the sliver of a window, "You don't mind if I spit some beats?" he asks. You're happy for the distraction. You listen to his stories of the drug game, hustle, the pain and the dreams. You see yourself on the wings of his narrative stages. You realize everyone has wounds and scars. You let your anxiety ridden exhaustion overtake you and slip off.

The "count lights" flicker on, the clickety clack of the food cart returns, you open your eyes only to realize the music has stopped and your nightmares succumb to your reality.

THE AMPLIFIER



CONVICT CHRONICLES: the rapping at the door by Leo Cardez (continued...)

Prison, a fever dream, has a lot to teach us. To survive in the shadows on the fringes of society you have to learn a new code for living; you have to learn to humble yourself (while still fighting the stigmas trying to label you as subhuman); you have to learn to see in the shadows.

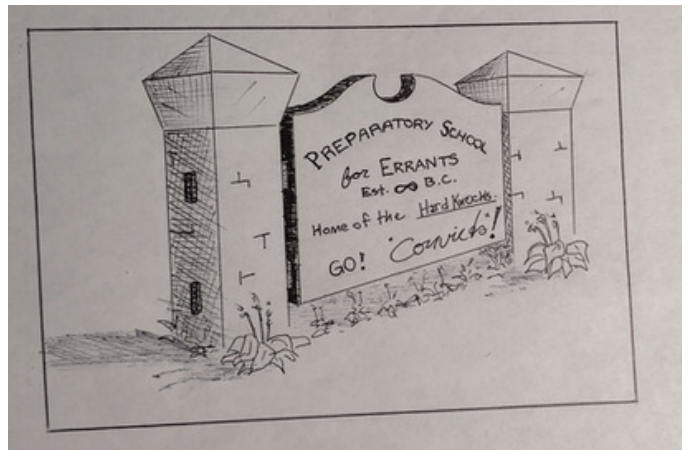
My celly's late night rap sessions intrigued me. It took me days, and Kin Kin's help, to decipher the lyrics (Do you know what "getting small" and "cutting off someone's water" means?) and weeks to understand their deeper meaning. Prison raps, their version of current history and a reflection of their truths, is how they carry and pass along their culture. I became aware of how different cultures coexist so closely and yet, worlds apart.

We all grow up with music and rap is main-stream now, but do we ever think about its historical and cultural importance? Do we consider its ability to bridge gaps or about how it connects us? Inmates, dead but not yet buried, can spend whole lifetimes in grey crossbar hotels; yet these raps (passed from generation of prisoners to another) are carried with as much care as any precious memory we hold dear. Prison raps, more than just music, embody the soul, prayers, and a history of a marginalized people struggling to be seen.

Can you see them? Will you hear them?

-L.C.-

*No real names were used.

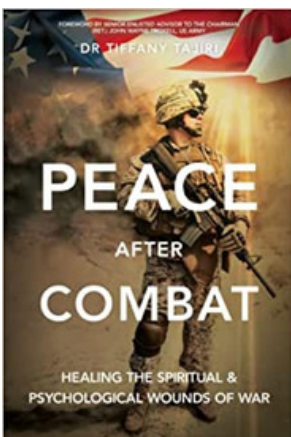


BOOK REVIEW

By Wendy Denzler

Peace after Combat: Healing the Spiritual and Psychological Wounds of War by Tiffany Tajiri, 2021

ISBN# 978-0-8307-8195-9



This book is mind-blowing! It's real talk about PTSD and the traumas of war by a psychologist (who is also a veteran) who treats veterans at Fort Bliss, Texas. She explains her way of healing those whose minds are still in the sandbox through fictional case studies that mirror experiences had by her real clients. She brings God's love and forgiveness into the bubble of psychology in a way that heals. Warning: the first story will hit you hard, so be prepared. Just a thoroughly kick-a** book!



Combat Corner The Veteran Voices of Stateville



Our community of Veterans in the Stateville program would like to send a call-out for membership submissions. If you are interested in joining our group, retain a copy of your DD214s, DD215s, or equivalent and send them to the Chaplain Davis' office requesting membership into the Veterans' Program.

*We can help you get your discharge upgraded (if necessary).

*We can help you obtain Veteran benefits you qualify for, both while incarcerated and post-release.

*Our community supports one another and helps our fellow Brothers of Arms with anything we can. We will cultivate leadership-building and build a better community for us all. Sincerely, Your fellow Veteran Jamie L. Thomasson USNV, Writing Advisor, 2nd Cohort North Park University, Warrant Officer, Co-founder of VVOS Veteran Voices of Stateville



From the Crow's Nest By Charles Ludwig Bickerstaff

Queen Elizabeth's casket, resting on a gun carriage, was drawn through London by one-hundred sailors of the Royal Navy. I asked a friend from Scotland why that was. He replied that in the United Kingdom the Navy is considered the premier branch of the military. After all, they were first a seafaring nation.

Navies of the world are fraught with customs, traditions, and, yes, jargon. Here are more examples:

***forecastle** or **fo'cs'le** (pronounced folk-sell): The upper deck located forward at the bow (rhymes with cow) of a ship.

***boatswain** (also spelled **bo's'n**, **bos'n**, or **bosun** and pronounced like the latter, with a long o): A warrent or petty officer in charge of the ship's rigging, anchors, cables, and deck crew.



References are from *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5th Edition*.



By Officer Montgomery

I really appreciate the responses I got to my previous column. One response (from Alex Negron) was pertaining to understanding the differences between what the Bible says and how some people misuse what the Bible says. Another response (from Michael Simmons) was about finding what is useful in the scriptures and leaving the rest. Although I know those responses were well thought out and heart felt, I do have issues with both.

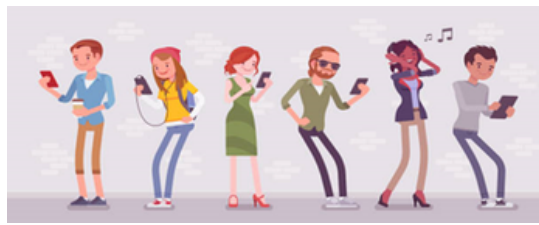
One of the main issues I and many others have with any super natural belief systems is unclear instructions and the ability of misinterpretation. If there was a real super natural consciousness, you would expect that consciousness to make clear, to everyone seeking to know it, the exact message. Instead, all of humankind has to rely on trusting ancient man-made texts that contradict modern, testable, demonstrable discoveries.

As far as the method of looking through scripture to find nuggets of truth, I say, if it is not all true, it is all man made and not true until demonstrated sufficiently.

My world view gets confused by many people often. I don't exclude unknowns. I just don't include anything that cannot be objectively tested, measured, or demonstrated. My world view also holds a high level of skepticism. This way, you protect yourself from cons, cults, bad politics, and pseudo-science. You are not supposed to be so open minded that your brain falls out.

View of a Non-believer





How Has Music Affected your Life? By Janis Elmore, Stateville Law Librarian

You're listening to your favorite playlist when "that" song comes on. You know, the one that makes you cry every time. And it's not even a sad song. Maybe it's a song that makes you smile and there you go, singing along as people watch you dancing and swaying to the music.

As the music begins, you start to wonder how listening to music has changed how you feel about yourself and the world around you. There is a reason for that. It's your brain reacting to the music and releasing dopamine, a neurotransmitter that affects your body and your mood. And those seemingly awkward tears are a response to being moved by the music and a way of helping you balance feelings of intense emotion.

So, how does music affect our lives? Music could deeply affect our mental state and raise our mood. When we need it, music gives us energy and motivation. When we're worried, it can soothe us; when we're weary, it can encourage us; and when we're feeling deflated, it can re-inspire us. It even functions to improve our physical health, like playing high tempo music when we are working out. Pace, rhythm, and motivation are things music makes a whole lot easier. In the past, music was used to help synchronize and motivate groups of people through physical tasks like carrying massive loads, or through times of struggle, like the miners or field workers, war cries, or soldiers in trenches. The music was lyrical and repetitive, with a regular beat appropriate to get the work done. The same thing applies when you are in the gym working out.

Music can also generate friendships. People usually choose music to find connections with others to express themselves or find a sense of understanding among their peers. We connect with our favorite band or performers through music. We recite the lyrics, dance to the melodies, which forms a sense of connection.

Remember these songs: "September" by Earth Wind & Fire, "Sail On" by the Commodores, "Ain't No Woman (Like the One I've Got)" by the Four Tops or "Play that Funky Music White Boy" by Wild Cherry?

Songs and melodies have the power to inspire people, guide their actions, and aid in the formation of identities. Music can unite people, capture your imagination, and boost creativity. A person who has been affected by music is not alone. They are among the masses trying to find their role in society and form connections with others.

Play that funky music

Editors' Note: Huge thanks to Ms. Elmore for getting the conversation started on *Feather Bricks'* Feb/March theme: MUSIC. We look forward to receiving your submissions on this theme and publishing them soon. Send submissions to Stateville EFA Ms. Baez in care of Prof. Melissa, to co-editors Todd Smith and Luigi Adamo, or to senior editor Johnny Marizetts. **Deadline:** February 15.



Sympathies & Shout Outs

WITH LOVE
& SYMPATHY



Feather Bricks welcomes short submissions of sympathy (prayer requests, naming losses, condolences...) for future publication in this column. This issue, editors send special thoughts and prayers to Carlvosier Smith and others in the community who have recently lost family members and loved ones. We also send a hope for speedy recovery to those who have had to put a pause on their studies due to health issues, specifically Otha Anderson, James Edwards, Ray Ferguson, and George Ross.

Congrats to Wendell E. Weaver, Rodney Clemons, Timothy Malone, Johnny Tipton, and Kijel Grant for completing the 8-week GED Math workshop facilitated by Teaching Fellow Luigi Adamo and NP Cohort 2 students Tim Giles and Elton Williams.

Super shout out to EVERYONE involved in the *Kewanee Horizons* publication. We **love** your expressions of holiday spirit, especially in Vol. 21. We also agree with Mr. Warnsing's "Quick Thought for the Holidays" Vol. 20 article about the best version of "Little Drummer Boy" being by Sean Quigley.

The Writing Center sends special shout outs to all Writing Advisors who have been turning in drop-in slips. Congrats to Benny Rios (Stateville campus) and Karin Hargrave (Logan campus) for submitting the highest number of drop-in slips in 2022!

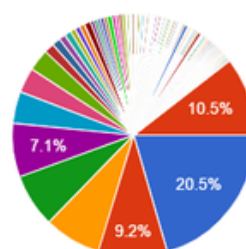
The final Extra-Mile Awards of 2022 go to (1) Writing Advisor Thomas Mills (assistant to Rayon & pretty much everyone during North Park study halls), (2) Terrance Woods for using the Writing Center drop-in Writing Advisors more than any other SRA student this past semester, and (3) Prof Will Andrews for having his Old Testament students use the writing center for drop-in conferences more than *any* other class in 2022.



Top 5 Courses whose Students used the Writing Center in 2022

Course name
448 responses
Old Testament
WRIT 1000
Core 1000
Health and Behavior
How to Get Write

Assignment type
448 responses



● Research Paper
● Analysis
● Creative
● Summary
● Reflection
● Comparison
● Exegesis
● Essay
▲ 1/12 ▼

Most popular assignment types worked on in the Writing Center in 2022



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/>