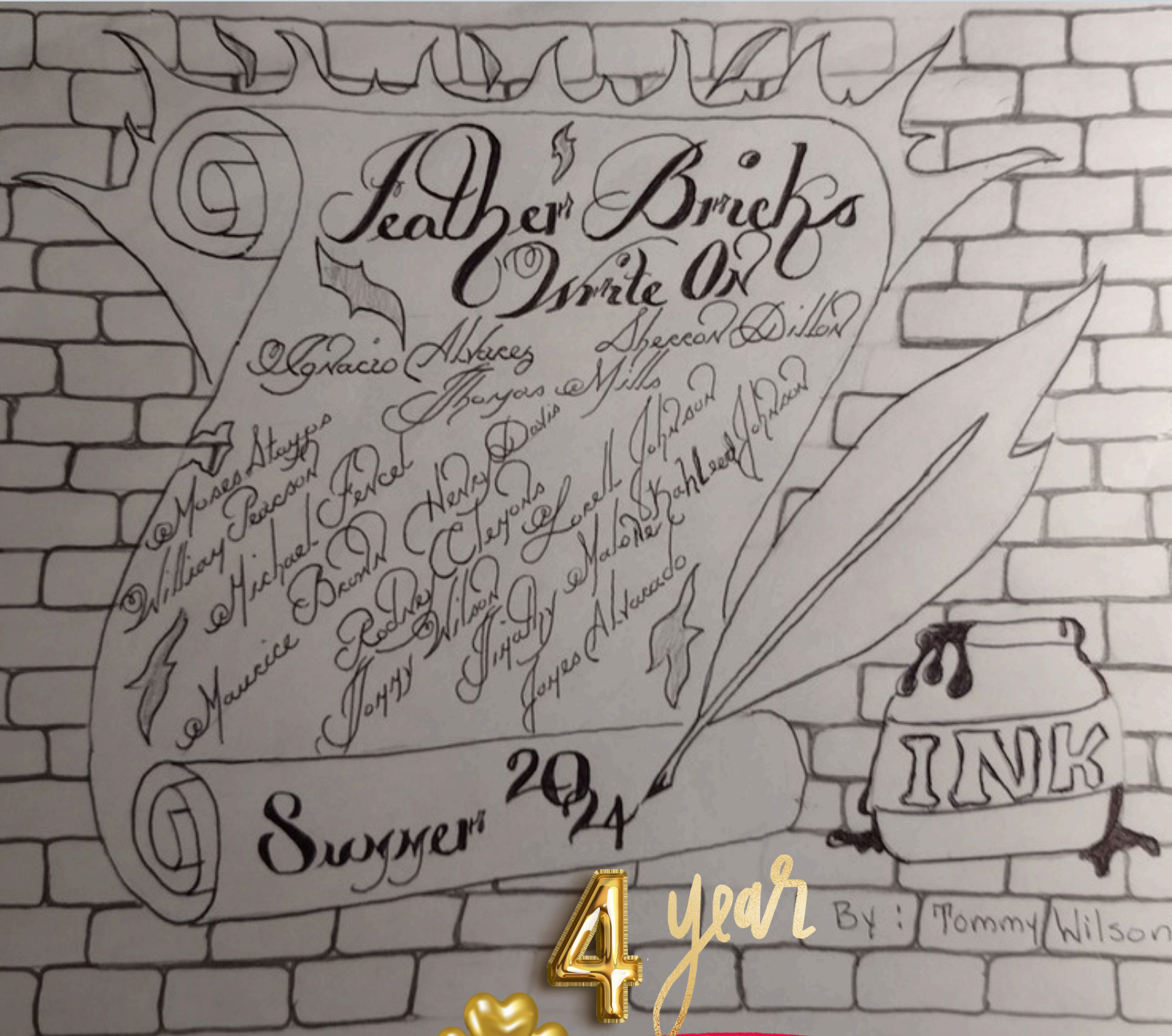


Feather Bricks Mission Statement: We provide brave spaces to celebrate creative, encouraging, and instructive expressions.



Cover Art by Tommy Wilson

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Letter from the Editors</b> .....	3
<b>Letters to the Editor</b>	
Ignacio “Nacho” Alvarez.....	4
Sherron “Sosa” Dillon.....	4
Thomas Mills.....	5
Moses Stamps .....	5
James Alvarado .....	6
Lorell Johnson.....	7
Tommy Wilson.....	7
“It Takes A Village To Raise A Child” by Rodney Clemons.....	9
“Maturity: How Do We Define it?” by William Pearson.....	10
By Henry “June” Davis.....	10
“Trauma” by Maurice Brown.....	11
“To Be Human” by Timothy Malone.....	12
“What I’ve Learned” by James Alvarado.....	13
By Dwayne McCoy (Spree’s Son).....	13
<b>Poetry (and Art) Corner</b>	
Michael Fencel.....	14
Lorell Johnson.....	15
Yillie.....	15
Ernesto Valle.....	18
Eva Morris-Ferrell.....	19
Rayon Sampson.....	20
David “Nazeeh” Bailey.....	21
<b>The Amplifier</b> with Alex Negrón and Francisco Martinez.....	22
“Social Issue Analysis” by Anthony Smith.....	23
“My Journey: From School To Prison” by Tony Grganto.....	25
“Walking through Winter” by D.C. Crite.....	27
“The Doorway” by Biiig Ron Jackson.....	27
<b>From the Brothers In Christ at Sheridan</b>	
Jimmy Pitsonbarger and Bart Allen.....	28
<b>Law Librarian “Summer Reading”</b> with Ms. Elmore.....	29
“Hope” by Jesse B. Martinez.....	33
<b>Interview</b> with Kewanee Horizons Editors.....	35
“Halfway Home” by William T. Jones.....	36
“An Opinion from Me” by Kaleed Johnson.....	37
“Celebrating Rebirth of Sound” by Benny Rios.....	38
<b>Shout Outs</b> .....	39

# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Thank you for opening this edition of *Feather Bricks*. The class that put this issue together was about the process of basic writing. Melissa the master instructor and the gracious TAs made the class a smooth transitional approach to writing. The goal is to keep writing, to build confidence in my writings. That is one of the reasons why I wanted to be in this class: to work on a skill that's not my strong suit. I hope you find one thing in this issue of *Feather Bricks* that inspires you to write.

-William Pearson

What's up, everybody? If you ever get a chance to read *The Artist's Way*, do it. Thanks to the new writing class I just experienced directed by Melissa, Nacho, Dillon, and Thomas, I was able to hear my and the class's opinions on every topic we spoke about. This was the first time I ever tapped into my creativity and challenged my inner self. I learned that taking time out and writing to yourself about the good and the bad helps a person get better at writing and understanding why we do certain things. Even your spiritual path grows. The class was a hit; the feedback from each person changed my thinking on several topics. Also, if you ever need to learn how to write the perfect essay, contact Melissa and her TAs; they will teach you step by step. You can't lose with the writing they use. Have you ever shared your fears? This class was so trustworthy and honest it felt like a relief to share. I never knew I carried so much baggage. Thank God for writing; it's a good way to clean house.

What's Good my people? I'm Maurice Lil D Brown and I'm excited to be a co-editor for *Feather Bricks* Volume 24 2024. I was hesitant and diffident about accepting this responsibility; however, Melissa, the TAs, and my fellow classmates had great confidence in me. So it was only right for me to prove them right. I had a beautiful experience in this Basic Writing class, but honestly, there was nothing basic about it. It has too many rules. lol. I'm really thankful for it though, and everyone who was a part of it. I'd like to give a shout out to my brother D.D. who gets on my nerves but keeps me humble, real, and motivated to succeed in life. Because of him, fortunate moments such as this one have been consistent, and I would like to thank you a million times, brother. Thank you. I hope this volume filled with unique writers and artists will be of educational conveyance and joy to your time. It's Lit, so let's get to it!

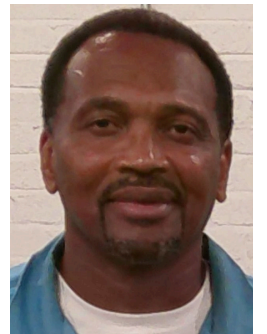
Metta/Peace.

To the Readers,

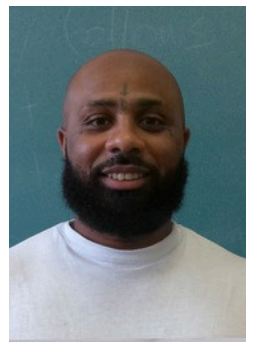
My name is Moses O'ba Stamps. I want to thank everyone who's reading these powerful letters. As the door is being opened for us to write, let's inspire each other to become even greater! Yes freedom, justice, and mental health are a struggle we must tackle. However, together we can win. We must work together so our communities can look like the orchid we are. Remember we are the solution. As Ever, Moses O'ba Stamps



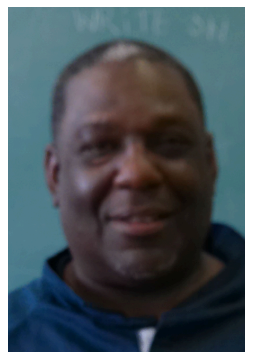
**William Pearson**



**Rodney Clemons**



**Maurice Brown**



**Moses Stamps**



Note: These letters were written with the Editor of the *Chicago Tribune* in mind, in response to the Op-Ed published there by Michael Simmons titled, “Great Stories about Transformation in Prison Distract from Greater Truths.”

### Exceptionally Blinded by Ignacio “Nacho” Alvarez

Michael Simmons’ op-ed hinged on one word: exceptionalism. To say that Bernard McKinley’s story is exceptional is to say that his story alone is uncommon, that it deviates from the “norm” within carceral spaces. To say that his journey was an anomaly, a curiosity, an oddity, is to dismiss the myriad of incarcerated scholars doing similar work. That’s not to say that Bernard’s work, worth, or story should be diminished. If anything, Bernard’s successful resilience amidst a hostile environment should be applauded, not looked at as a singularity in time and space. Nonetheless, I do not place the onus on Bernard, but rather on the media, whose main objective was to sell a “rags-to-riches” story. The media, understandably, creates spaces for specific content; it appears that Bernard’s story fell into “the feel good” moment slot, not the investigative space. We must also realize that media corporations are never neutral; they are driven by stakeholders’ ideological beliefs. Plus, when money and ratings are involved, distortion is at play. To see exceptionalism and exclusivity rear their ugly heads via the media then is not uncommon, but natural. Bernard’s story was connected to Northwestern University, an institutional giant with an image to uphold — one rooted in exceptionalism and exclusivity, which leads me to believe that, though Bernard was the face of that GMA special, it really wasn’t about him but about the image and idea of Northwestern! In disconnecting Bernard from his origin community of incarcerated scholars, one is able to connect him to the exceptional and exclusive image of aforesaid institution. Interestingly, after I read Mr. Simmons’ article for the fifth time, myopic vision came to mind. Society, unfortunately, doesn’t want to see that Bernard is not an exception. Society also doesn’t want to believe the harsh reality of the criminal “justice” system, namely that it’s flawed, broken, and draconian in its thinking. Mr. Simmons, therefore, rightly declared that “when we restrict our vision to the single and unique good story, we ignore acknowledging and engaging systems and structures of injustice throughout the vast American prison system.” At the end of the day, Bernard McKinley is not a singular deviation, nor is he the sole proprietor of success. He is one of many given the opportunity to come out of the “cave of shadows.” He is one thread among many in a singular garment.



### Hidden Gems by Sherron “Sosa” Dillon

Michael Simmons points out how GMA showcased Bernard McKinley earning his degree in prison, coming home, and getting accepted into law school “as a miracle, an impossible triumph, a lesson of possibility of turning one singular life around through hard work and discipline,” which seems off considering the many transformations I’ve witnessed in over two decades of incarceration. When I think about miraculous educational stories, David Bailey and Michael Jones come to mind. These men entered prison thrust into an extremely violent environment, forced to cope with the realities of prison life, realities which include the struggles of being fathers, losing family, and legal disappointments. For those of us living in prison’s violent environments, death in the air is a real feeling that will have anyone develop a hyper-vigilant trauma response, which is another mental weight that makes getting an education a heavy task. Mr. Bailey has been in prison for over 40 years, has earned two degrees, earned other college-level certificates, taught criminal law, and is a year away from earning a Master’s degree. When I came to prison, Michael Jones was one of the first older people I met because of his legal knowledge. He has a similar story to Mr. Bailey in that, despite the surrounding chaos, he was able to make a transformation through education. Imagine three kids (myself and two co-defendants) coming into prison with life sentences and not having a clue about the law. Mr. Jones, being knowledgeable and willing to help, gave a younger me the tools I needed to fight for my life. Many years later, Mr. Jones’ willingness continues to show up; he’s now an MA grad tutoring in a GED program. Higher education should be extended to all in prison. Knowledge has cleansed my mind of the filth I accumulated from the environment I grew up in. I developed an appetite for learning. I like to tell my peers to keep a shovel in their minds for digging. Many of us go through life or into prison programs digging for a specific thing, but along the way we find other valuables. My valuables have been expression through writing, Barbering, and uncovering effects of historical ills that cause trauma. My own transformation shows when people call me Professor Dillon, Imam, Dillon the Barber, and when I walked across the stage last May to receive a Master’s degree.





## Another Appetizer, Anyone? By **Thomas Mills**

I enjoy the chance to try different things but never understood the purpose of appetizers. Now, an appetizer is a small portion of a tasty food to stimulate the appetite. I believe that stories like the one GMA did on Bernard McKinley are appetizers, not the full story that leaves the reader informed and motivated. Every so often, some local news outlet runs a story about a Brotha or Sista overcoming great obstacles to make something of themselves. Please, make no mistake. I'm glad that someone I know got a few minutes of coverage for something positive. Much like Michael Simmons' statement in his Chicago Tribune Op-Ed, I can testify that Bernard's growth in spite of the many obstacles is an exceptional story. I hope that his story encourages many more to keep fighting to improve themselves physically, mentally, and spiritually. Nonetheless, I feel that the spotlight given to these kinds of stories only produces a feel-good moment; rightly so, but with no real circumstantial change that breaks the cycle.

I can understand why the circumstances seem so exceptional to an audience that is indifferent to the daily struggles of the marginalized. Such individuals that don't battle systemic oppression and neglect should be amazed by what, in Bernard's case, a 16 year old made of himself. What the GMA story didn't address is how in the world did a 16 year old end up in prison with a hundred-year sentence to begin with. I'm not talking about what he did! I'll tell you why many avoid that can of worms, because they would have to address the criminal justice system being about economic income and vengeance, not justice. Justice means restoration for all party members (the victim, perpetrator, and the community that was harmed).

I also believe that Michael Simmons makes a great point that GMA missed the greater conversation piece, which is, "Why do American prisons contain thousands of men and women with transformed lives?" I have endured 27 years of incarceration. In my opinion, what Bernard overcame is not a miraculous occurrence; unfortunately, around here it's the requirement. An individual in custody must shine extra bright just to get noticed, to be given a portion of their God-given humanity.

I love the efforts of GMA, Channel 11, and Michael Simmons to expand the conversation, but we have to move beyond the low hanging fruit. How can we increase the exposure to produce meaningful change?

## By **Moses Stamps**

Reviewing Michael Simmons' op-ed, we see someone trying to highlight the reality that there is more than one great story. Michael Simmons, being a part of the prison system, has seen and experienced firsthand all the other Bernard McKinleys whose stories have not been told. Simmons in his op-ed expressed that idea of similar stories like McKinley's that have yet to be told. Simmons believes that focusing on one great story distracts from the greater educational investment happening within the incarcerated community.



If you love great transformational stories, try viewing some of the other incarcerated scholars who also excelled in similar programming. You would be amazed at the beautiful minds that exist within. As I look at Simmons' article, it has brought me to the realization that being in prison shows you firsthand the truth in what he is saying: greater stories like Bernard McKinley's exist, and unfortunately are not being told. These are stories like that of Jamal Bakr who received a master of arts degree during his self-transformation in prison, Sherron "Sosa" Dillon who went from Advanced Basic Education to a G.E.D., to now having a master's degree in Restorative Justice Ministries, along with doing TA work and being a barber college supervisor; or how about Mr. Benny Rios and Mr. Ignacio Alvarez who have received their master's degrees along with being published writers, who have not yet had their full stories told?

Being in prison for over 20 years has shown me the educational desert that prison once was. So, to see women and men excel in this type of environment is amazing! We see firsthand the hundreds of McKinley's in the American Prison System, but no GMA, Dateline, or CNN to put the spotlight on these other great stories. Simmons stated that by focusing on the exceptional, GMA missed the larger story. This is true because special stories are still not told. These are women and men whose stories society needs. These are stories that will be beneficial to our community. Once you are free, it's good to have your story told; however, the obstacles and barriers women and men have to overcome in order to receive their G.E.D.s, Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's degrees while in prison need to be heard. Let's hope these amazing women and men who have self-transformed and have become positive and productive people in our carceral communities have their chance to tell their stories as well.

As ever, Moses O'ba Stamps



## Everyone Deserves to Succeed in Making an Honorable Place in Life

By **James Alvarado**

An impressive news story by *Good Morning America* obscures dauntless realities for Michael Simmons (author of “Great Stories about Self-transformation in Prison Distract from Greater Truths”). Bernard McKinley transformed his life through education, earning a bachelor’s degree from Northwestern University during his twenty-three year prison stay. A true miracle, he is now actively enrolled in their graduate program, pursuing his dreams of becoming a civil rights attorney. According to Simmons, a former classmate of Mr. McKinley who earned a degree in a similar program, GMA missed the bigger story because they focused on the exceptional. Simmons notes how thousands of incarcerated individuals would duplicate the heading if more opportunities were accessible to them. Old laws, lack of funding and abrasive (Illinois Department of Corrections) policies also contribute resistance, preventing many from participation in programs which would produce safer candidates for reentry that this nation needs, said Michael Simmons. Michael Simmons is correct in part; the bigger picture should have been told that highlights various issues which prevent transformation, but only in passing, where too much coverage would have stolen from Bernard McKinley’s great achievements.

Meritorious issues, like those mentioned in the article, need to be told. I completely agree that change is needed and telling the bigger story might have helped raise awareness. But an obvious problem appears, one that cannot simply be ignored, and the complaints are voluminous. A conversation to discuss the very structure and injustice of American prisons alone may take hours; possibly bringing to light serious failures which might include the daily release of men and women from prisons with little or no preparation for safe reentry, even before introducing any fixes. Simmons only touched on said issues at their surface; nothing was discussed in detail. Two, possibly three, segments by *Good Morning America* would need to be aired in order to completely break down, for the public to understand, the complicated topics mentioned by Simmons. Attractive, concrete solutions for change in segments two and three would be needed for response to the complaints previously presented. Said solutions may include eliminating and replacing harsh overreaching laws and policies known to fail that are dangerous to society with smarter, safer policies. Trauma awareness, healing and higher education are new ideas that also created a smart new purpose for imprisoned men and women, possibly replacing their old one.

Viewers would have been better informed and benefitted more from both stories, but at what cost? Airing closely related stories in separate segments is a much better fit because of the time required, for all connected agencies and departments to also deliver their thoughts and opinions, which could have possibly created support for the cause but most importantly, they take nothing from the primary story. They would simply introduce a new explanation or argument for a wish and perhaps few if any mirrored stories like Bernard’s would happen any time soon.

Inspiring stories are rare, so those who have walked the walk should completely benefit from their own coverage. Peripheral issues, even when valid, should only be mentioned in passing. Mr. Bernard McKinley for twenty-three years focused on transformation; when an opportunity arose he grabbed it, focusing to the end. He deserves to succeed and make an honorable place in life; that is his story.



## Not seeing the whole Picture/Obstructing the View

By **Lorell Johnson**



This is a response to the article by Michael Simmons, called “Great Stories about Self-Transformation in Prison Distract from Greater Truths.”

This article is pushback about how one person in prison distracts from greater truths getting all the spotlight for being rehabilitated when there are others who are rehabilitated and don’t receive the same spotlight. When you look at it, they say we are prisoners deprived, locked up in prison and within ourselves. Furthermore, I agree with Michael Simmons because I saw with my own eyes a lot of rehabilitated people while in prison.

For instance, when Simmons said, “By focusing on the exceptional, GMA missed the larger story,” I agree because the individuals that tutor me have master’s degrees and are exceptional as well, for example, Ignacio “Nacho” Alvarez, Sherron “Sosa” Dillon, and Thomas Mills. Nacho has an MA in Christian Ministry degree, is a writing advisor, and is a pastoral care counselor. Sosa holds a master’s degree in restorative Justice ministries from North Park Theological Seminary and is a writing center teaching fellow. And old man Thomas Mills the III earned a Master of Arts in restorative justice ministries in 2023 from North Park Theological Seminary with high honors.

Also, when Simmons said, “America’s prisons have thousands of men and women like Benard,” he was again correct. I witness hundreds of individuals walking to school with the effort of rehabilitating themselves. The involvement that they are in is not the involvement that they want to be in right now. But they still get up so they can go to school. You have individuals that want their G.E.D and would love to have their master’s degrees, and a lot of them do.

Lastly, I’ve been in the cell with individuals who were model prisoners and college graduates from prison. These men were overlooked and don’t have that spotlight that Benard did, but they work hard as well. But we still love Benard’s great achievement because he was and is one of us.

For the above reasons, Simmons’ article was needed to highlight the blind spots of incarcerated individuals presenting these great achievements as the exception and not the norm.



## HARD WORK AND SELF-DISCIPLINE

By: **Tommy Wilson**

On June 6, 2024 the Chicago Tribune Company published an article by Michael Simmons on educational academics while in prison. Simmons wrote about the academic journey through a prison educational program at Stateville Correctional Center that highlights the accomplishment of an exceptional individual (Bernard McKinley), whose story made it to the morning news program on Good Morning America.

Simmons made great points in his Op Ed “Great Stories About Self-Transformation in Prison Distract From Greater Truths,” but I personally feel he didn’t go far enough in highlighting the determination of IDOC policies for the eligibility of the academic programs. The bigger picture of



the academic journey is being ignored by the powers that be, because the policy of IDOC makes it hard to excel academically. IDOC has so many roadblocks a person has to make it around just to rehabilitate themselves. Simmons touched on these obstacles when he mentioned that the promise of rehabilitative programs remain just that – a prospect for most of America’s imprisoned generations, with so few programs and with so many restrictions of eligibility. That should make a person wonder why the prison system is called, “The Department of Corrections,” when there are so many roadblocks and obstacles for a prisoner in a maximum security prison.

Individuals who were given forever and a day (A LIFE SENTENCE) are unable to get a BASIC EDUCATION because of their sentence. Their names will remain at the bottom of the school list, so an individual in custody has to file a grievance or a lawsuit just to get in school and get some rehabilitation.

It’s my opinion that education is one of the main tools that helps people excel in life on so many levels, which brings me back to my point of the academic journey that’s being ignored. There are many more exceptional people in The Department of Corrections who have life sentences. The judicial system says those individuals are beyond rehabilitation, but through self-discipline and hard work, these exceptional LIFERS have the determination to rehabilitate themselves in order to show society that the judicial system was wrong, especially when the judges said that LIFERS are beyond rehabilitation. There are individuals like Michael Jones, David Bailey and William Peeples, who embody self-transformation whole-heartedly. Even though there were a lot of restrictions in place by IDOC, they did not allow those restrictions to stop them from earning college degrees, all while serving a LIFE sentence.

In my humble opinion, along with the likes of Mr. Bernard McKinley there are several more individuals that deserve to be recognized for their hard work, achievements, and determination that show them as pillars of the academic journey, even with all the roadblocks and obstacles that they had to endure just to excel in higher education. These individuals’ sentence alone says that they can’t be rehabilitated, but through their hard work, determination, and self-transformation, their stories are powerful and they shouldn’t be ignored. Society needs to hear about the determination of Ignacio Alvarez who earned his MA and is part of the pastoral care team, Benny Rios who earned his Master’s degree, Thomas Mills III, who earned his Master’s with high honors, Michael Sullivan who earned his Master’s, Sherron Dillon who holds a Master’s plus is a Basic Education TA and a barber college supervisor, Alonzo McCorkle who earned a Bachelor’s degree and is working toward a Master’s, Demetrice Crite who earned his Bachelor’s degree and is working toward a Master’s, and brother Michael A. Broadway who earned a Bachelor’s degree and was working towards his Master’s before he departed this world (June 19, 2024).

These guys and many more like them should not be overlooked because they have accomplished so much and are still striving academically to reach higher education in their journey, so that one day upon their release from prison (WELL-ARMED WITH DEGREES AND KNOWLEDGE), they will be the pillars needed to uplift their families, communities, and society as a whole. As we remember the words of Michael Simmons, “sometimes, seeing one truth can distract from seeing greater and more painful truths, as we all benefit from a good story, but some stories are more productive than others. If we stop at the great story, we may miss the greater story.”

The reason for me concluding with Simmons’ quotation is to back up the points that I made in this response to the Op Ed by him, that there are more people who deserve to be recognized, exceptional individuals like William Peeples, David Bailey, Michael Jones, Alonzo McCorkle, Ignacio Alvarez, Benny Rios, Michael A. Broadway, Demetrice Crite, Thomas Mills III, Michael Sullivan, Sherron Dillon, and even Michael Simmons himself. These individuals’ hard work and achievements should be highlighted because of the hardships that they have endured throughout their incarceration. They still turned their lives around in this jungle that society calls The Illinois Department of Corrections and earned college degrees. They are still striving academically to reach higher education and while on their journey, and they are setting a pathway for other inmates to follow and get on the right path.



By **Rodney Clemons**



The quest continues thanks to our leaders: Prof. Melissa Pavlik our writing director, EFA Laura Costabile our principal, Educator Ms. McGrath our Pre-GED and GED teacher, Educators Ms. Baez and Ms. Johnson our ABE teachers, the PNAP and all the university and college instructors and TAs. Thanks for all of your help in creating the village of people who serve and help educate the IDOC. Professor Melissa Pavlik, I would like to thank you once again for opening the door for people who don't have an ABE or GED education; you are the educator

who produces and trains the prison writers you call Writing Advisors and TAs. Your new and improved class is the best writing class I ever attended. You introduced me to the Artist in me though the very village of those you call TAs we will continue the quest. This wonderful educational experience you, Nacho, Sosa, and Thomas performed brought a new experience to writing essays. My Language Arts score went from 137 to 145. All I have to do now is what this class brought out of me. I can do anything I put my mind to. This class gave me a better spiritual path to higher creativity just like the book *The Artist's Way* promised. And you and the TAs have trained me to do an excellent topic sentence, summary, thesis, and proper paragraphs that end with the perfect conclusion. Thank all of you for strengthening and educating this prison village. The writing class is one of the reasons the quest continues.

EFA Costabile, thank you for your time and dedication to making sure thousands of men like myself learn how to read and write. I have witnessed you personally fight to bring all students from ABE to college to school every day and on time, no matter what. The only thing I haven't witnessed is you receiving the credit you truly deserve. I wish I could give you an award for being the best principal in the world, even though you just so happen to be my first. I remember when you let me do fractions for class on the board. I remember when I passed the 8th grade; even though you were helping people get master's degrees, you made me feel just as important. Then you watched me go through pre-GED. Even though learning seemed to get harder for me and some students passed me up, you continued to stand beside me. It's funny every time you gave me a GED test on the computer I managed to erase the whole test by mistake, but you never called me the name I used to hear when I was a kid; you just reset the whole test over then continued to stand by me. Thank you, Principal Costabile. My time is almost up. I really appreciate the village you helped build to support me as the quest continues.

Ms. McGrath, words cannot explain the kind of teacher you are. Unfortunately, neither can the Board of Education, but I can give the world a good idea. Every time I look around, I see somebody from your class teaching in the prison. Your work has traveled to several institutions. People all over IDOC know about Ms. McGrath's GED class. I want to be the first to say thank you for your time and devotion to the prison educational system. It has brought me a long way. When I came to this class I was good at Law but not science, social studies, language arts, or math. You have raised my educational levels to a place I have never been. After leaving your pre-GED and going over to GED on the computer, it was a whole new ball game. I remember my first GED test. Ms. Costabile told you I had the words so big you could see them from a mile away. That's when you figured out I was traumatized and was having anxiety attacks when I took timed tests on the computer, but you didn't give up on me. You trained me to relax and breathe until I started passing tests. Time is getting short, Ms. McGrath. Thanks for your dedication and hard work. I will always remember your contribution to Stateville's educational system as another reason why the quest continues.

Ms. Johnson and Ms. Baez, I would like to thank you for the hard work and dedication you put in the village of Stateville. ABE is the first step to a higher education in IDOC, and it's because of teachers like you that GEDs and Master's degrees exist. I sit next to a student that came from both of your classes, and they are a living testimony of your work, which is why the quest continues.

A special shout out to all the universities, colleges, and TAs who contributed to Stateville educational programs. Thank you North Park University, Northeastern Illinois University, Northwestern University, DePaul University, University of Illinois, and all the TAs such as Edwin Martinez, Howard Keller, Jamal Bakr, Alex Negrón, RóDerick Zavala, Michael Simmons, Rayon Sampson, Michael Sullivan, Benny Rios, Tim Giles, Davis, Mike Jones, Manuel Metlock, Nacho Alvarez, Sherron Dillon, and Thomas Mills. Thanks for all the support and being part of the village that educates prisoners. Remember, it's not over. I am still on a quest and constantly evolving, and because of you the quest continues.

In conclusion, it's true it takes a village to raise a child. Look at all the professors, doctors, principals, teachers, TAs, and universities it's taking to raise me. And the quest continues.



Reaching maturity for humanity is the constant practice of a refined conduct. As one applies wisdom to everyday situations and relationships, maturity is gradually developed. With the understanding of what maturity is, I posed a question in order to see how others view this idea of maturity. The question was: can you define the difference between a grown man and an adult?

**Michael Green:** For me, it's simple. An adult is one who has reached full maturity physically, whereas a grown man or woman has reached mental maturity.

**Peter "Justice" Lawrence:** In my opinion the difference between a grown man and an adult is that the grown man is only identified as a chronologically aged adult male. However, an adult is a responsible individual who handles their business on all levels.

**Zeeshan Rashid:** In my opinion the difference between a grown man and an adult is one is a non-binary social construct enforced by government to establish how you will be held to this standard of an adult in almost all aspects from here on. The other, a grown man, is more of a learned perception of what is expected of you if you view yourself as this. And the expectations vary from culture to culture and family to family.

**Anonymous:** For me an adult only signifies you in terms of age. A grown man, emphasis on *man*, means I take care of my responsibilities: hold down a job, take care of my children, and so on and so forth. I think of the consequences of my actions and the ripple effect it would have on my loved ones.

**Robert Curry:** I personally believe a grown man is a constant occurrence within man's evolution and the elevation of the self. I believe a man is grown through self knowledge, self awareness, conscious awareness, discipline of spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of self which provide him with unconscious awareness that results in mental fortitude.

I believe an adult differs from a grown man in the manner of knowledge realized according to one passion and purpose of the self and collective. An adult develops before the age of 18 if he is nurtured with a purpose by his community. Being an adult simply is the acknowledgment of responsibility and accountability to oneself and others of his world.

#### Conclusion

Defining the difference between a grown man and an adult is not age, skill set, number of children you have, how much money you possess, or being able to do what you want. The difference is cultural perception.

By **Henry Davis** (aka **June**)

Why isn't saving souls enough, unless it's all souls being saved? God wants and uses all people to spread his words and get his message out to everyone. Even though it may take longer to get through to some people, the goal is to get through to all people.

It may be times when people say, when speaking God's words, that if I get through to one person, then I feel like I did my job. At times that may be good, but that's playing it safe. God's words need to get through to everyone, and it doesn't matter what religion they are. God is everything, and everywhere.

The Book of Acts tells stories of ordinary people being compelled by the Holy Spirit to go places and do things they wouldn't do on their own. God used Saul, who used to murder Christians, to spread his words. It's not just the good, it's people we call bad that God also uses to reach the people.

After trying other ways to get through in life, such as criminal activities, or whatever, some people realize that they tried everything in life except for God. That's when they finally realize they have to let go, and let God. It may not happen easily like that for some people. But we can't give up on those individuals. We all go through things in life, but we handle them differently.

Some people feel like you can't teach an old dog new tricks, so they assume that by some people already doing the same things in life, they don't want to change. We have to stay strong and not give up.

In conclusion, all souls being saved is the goal. No one left behind, as the true soldiers would say. No matter good or bad, God uses all people to get his words out. And even though it may take longer for some, the goal is to get through to all people.



Trauma  
By: Maurice Lil'D Brown



African Americans suffer from the traumatic events of the past in America and continue to suffer from the racial discrimination the system upholds in contemporary days. We are more likely to experience police brutality, housing discrimination, and a high rate of incarceration. Police brutality is self-explanatory. Anyone would be traumatized if they had been beaten by police who are supposed to protect and serve the citizens of their community. Parents and siblings who have lost a loved one to the police's lethal force will no doubt be traumatized. Michael Brown's loved ones went and are still going through pain from his death by police officer Darren Wilson. Eric Garner was just standing on the corner, Rekia Boyd was in the park with friends, Trayvon Martin was minding his own business eating a pack of Skittles, Sean Bell was leaving a bachelor party, anticipating to be married the following day. All these individuals who were African American were murdered by police officers. The Black Lives Matter echo goes all the way back to the communities stemming from a system that thrives on oppressing and dominating African Americans. Trauma is inevitable and inescapable for us as long as white America continues to put its feet on our necks.

In order for African Americans to heal mentally, physically, and spiritually, white America has to want to change for the purpose of first respecting human life and second in seeing Blacks as equals. Life can't be good or halfway good if white America continues with the mind set of being superior over Blacks, believing that we're less than because of the color of our skin. Finally, white America would have to heal their trauma in order to feel comfortable with people of color in general. In the book *Unsettling Truths*, by Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, they wrote, "White America could not perpetrate five hundred years of dehumanizing injustice without traumatizing itself." There will always be trauma on both sides. Generations of trauma could be avoided simply by love and compassion for one another. "Hate is not overcome by hate; by love alone is hate appeased. This is an eternal law," Dhammapada (verse 5).



Basic Writing Class Discussion



Michael Sullivan Explains the "ABC"s of Writing

To be human is to have a heart that is merciful toward humankind. So I ask, how We celebrate this man as a hero when he home invader, and just a hateful

To be human is to be John Brown: Brown Connecticut. Brown was a hero, an By early 1859, Brown was leading raids to where forced labor was still in practice. At and Frederick Douglass, activists and important people in Brown's life, reinforcing much of his ideology. John Brown lived and died for blacks' freedom. Brown was hanged on December 2, 1859, at the age of 59, by future Confederate General Robert E. Lee! Six years after Brown's death, slavery would ultimately come to an end in the U.S.A. May I add that he was a white man, a human!



caring, compassionate, empathetic, and can Christopher Columbus be a hero? was a rapist, killer, kidnapping coward, slaveowner of a man! was born on May 9, 1800, in Torrington, ordained minister, and an abolitionist. free enslaved black people in areas this time, he also met Harriet Tubman abolitionists both, and they became

How does a whole group of people say they are human when they lack empathy: the KKK, AmeriKKKa: and its government, plus the invading European countries? They have traded humans and enslaved us (Blacks), defrauded and degraded us, utilized systematic racism towards Black and Brown people - it's a total disregard for minority human life! To be human is to be Harriet Tubman: Tubman was born into slavery in 1822 and late escaped from Dorchester County, Maryland to Philadelphia, where she lived as a free woman. Once free, Tubman dedicated her life to abolition of slavery as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. She brought approximately 70 enslaved African Americans to freedom in the north. Tubman remained a philanthropist well into her later years, founding "the Home for Aged & Indigent Negroes" and supporting women's rights.

Born Araminta Ross (and was called Minty) in March of 1822, a slave, Tubman had narcolepsy. It is important to note that narcolepsy was a prominent part of both her identity and story. Vivid visions of freedom came to her while experiencing these seizures. As a result of her vision, her disability is often associated with religiosity, Tubman's dedication to her faith. Both elements were key in her determination to seek liberation for the enslaved. The Moses of her people, she conducted the Underground Railroad. With the help of abolitionists along the way, Tubman's journey began as the conductor on the Underground Railroad. Often misunderstood as a railroad with tracks and trains, the Underground Railroad actually refers to various safe houses in which abolitionists provided sanctuary for freedom. After Tubman's successful first trip in which she brought both family and friends to freedom, she became a conductor on the UGRR. Tubman spoke proudly of her accomplishments and famously stated, "I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger." Tubman brought approximately 70 individuals including her parents to freedom. Now that's human!

How can AmeriKKKa officially and openly practice bias and prejudice towards minority people? Young Rice, Young Martin, Mr. King, Mr. McDonald, Ms. Sonya Massey, Mr. Garner, and Mr. Floyd - they never had a chance in this AmeriKKKan justice system. How can this be humanity, when they all die for being black in their community? Scarface said it best: "I never seen a man cry until I seen a man die." Now I see why Jay-Z asks, "Can I live?" - I get it now.

To be human is to be Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. On August 28, 1963, famed civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. shared his dream of a better world on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial: "I have a Dream." Mr. King was the conscience of his generation. A southerner, a black man, he gazed on the great wall of segregation and saw that the power of love could bring it down from the pain and exhaustion of his fight to free all people from the bondage of separation and injustice, he wrote his eloquent statement of his dream of what America could be. He helped us overcome our ignorance of one another. He spoke out against laws that were unfair. He made our nation stronger because he made it better. Honored by Kings, he continued to his last days to strive for a world where the poorest and humblest among us could enjoy the fulfillment of the promises of our founding fathers. His life informed us; his dreams sustain us yet.

Remember love will always overpower that by two. That's human!

## What I've Learned by James Alvarado

Last month's assignment in our writing class was based on a summary/response. This type of writing, though not easy, made me really think of comparing writing to conversation. For example, if someone approached you and then stated, "the death penalty costs too much, it never works and is a waste of time," you may be confused. But if an introduction or summary is first noted, like: "an innocent person I personally know is on death row. Studies have proven the death penalty kills innocent people, many times because of over zealous prosecutors who refuse to test DNA," the confusion is eliminated. Now that you have an introduction, the thesis statement follows. This basic writing course furnished the mandatory tools needed not only to write properly, but also to instill confidence to draft eloquent papers for future college level classes.

TA Sosa, in week two, assisted in teaching different types of writing for different effects, such as expository, narrative, persuasive, and descriptive. Although Sosa liked the expository paper I wrote, he encouraged me to introduce more of my own thoughts, which I immediately logged into my plan of correction and have incorporated that advice in all future papers.

Week 3 was directed in part by TA Nacho, highlighting the importance structuring a thesis sentence gives the reader. One day during class, he asked us to draft a thesis sentence. Then, we were told to write a paper around it. That was kinda sneaky because if I would have known his end game, my thesis would have been based towards diesel engines. TA Alvarez mentioned several positive things about my writing but also advised me to stay on point and to read out loud to test for sound.

Melissa, our instructor, introduced the third writing assignment, which had a specific purpose. It required a summary/response on an op-ed piece of writing. This was not an easy paper to write, but I know these are the types of papers college students are required to submit weekly, so I put forth much effort. When the paper was returned, there were many smiley faces with a few corrections written in green ink. The corrections were made and the paper resubmitted. I have not seen that paper since; maybe it was published somewhere? (*Editor's note: that paper can be found on page 6 of this edition of Feather Bricks.*)

TA Mills provided insight on the introduction or "hook," which is at least two sentences long and used to inform readers about what is going on. He also talked about topic sentences and how they tie in with writing. Thomas was very positive in his comments, advising me not to assume the reader knows the meaning of pledges, such as God's Mandate. Although you and I might know what it means, the reader may not. "State it clearly at least once for those who don't," TA Mills said.

The benefits and confidence afforded to me from completing this writing course will last a lifetime. Even though I wrote only about the education bit, the group conversation opened my eyes as to the different positions others hold, put there by the footprint or the journey they traveled or experienced through their own lives. I have come to respect their positions, so thank you all. I truly enjoyed everyone's company and this basic writing course. I strongly recommend it to others.



### By Dwayne McCoy (Spree's Son) Westcare

been don't hoping for that good news, they're hoping for good news. When that appeal you're just hoping & praying for finally comes through and gets shot down & anger & disappointment sets in, the same thing happens to them, but these are the things we don't take need to. I really didn't see anything wrong with me being incarcerated with my dad because I always wanted to be like him. I actually remember crying because I wanted to go home with him, which at that time I didn't know was a jail cell. So, I look back at me going to Stateville to visit him with my mom. Now we're both in Sheridan, & my son who was the same age I was is coming to visit both his dad & granddad, eating the same bioengineered hot wings I was eating 20 years ago, young and innocent, blind to the harsh realities of the world, asking my dad: "When are you coming home?" So, when my son asked me the same thing, I realized I have to break the cycle!



## Poetry Corner

Think about art, music, beauty! But you can only pick ONE to write about.

By **Michael Fencel**

For me, I listen to country music more than any other kind of music that is out there these days. I like these country singers and their songs: Jelly Roll; "Save Me" (Feat. Lainey Wilson), "Church," "Need A Favor" = Elvie Shane; "My Boy," "My Boy (My Girl Version)" = Hardy; (Feat. Lainey Wilson) "Wait in the Truck" = Morgan Wallen; "You PROOF" = Lainey Wilson; "Heart Like a Truck" = Cody Johnson; "Till You Can't."

These songs represent my past & present, but they do not predict my future. I can change my future, but all of these songs are different in the message that they send to each person! To me this is who I was before I put a cage around my heart. Because I'm like the song from Cody Johnson ("Till You Can't")!!! I only give my WORD to people that I know that I'm going to be able to keep it with. Because tomorrow is NOT a for sure thing, so whatever you can do today do it, don't put it off until tomorrow. If I had someone to love me the way that I know I can love someone back that would be nice!

I have people calling me a yes man cause I give my word to people that know I'm a hard worker, but I do it because I know that NO one else is going to keep their word...I also do just like the song says:

"You can always put a rain check in their hands, but if you got a chance take it,  
take it while you got a chance,  
if you have a dream chase it cause a dream won't chase you back,  
if you are gonna love somebody hold them as long and as close and as strong as you can 'til you can't,  
so take that phone call from your momma, and just talk away  
cause you'll never know how bad you wanna 'til you can't someday  
don't wait on tomorrow cause tomorrow may not show,  
say your sorry's, your I love you's, cause man you'll never know!"

I call my mother at least (4) times a week and I tell her that I'm sorry for being a screw up in life & that I will always love her, no matter what the outcome may be! My mother taught me how to drive a stick shift car at a young age out on the country roads and how to fix a broken down car. Also, she taught me how to fish, fight, work hard in life, with the help of my best friend's family, because my mother was a single mother with (3) kids and I was the youngest. I told my mother I would always be just a phone call away if she ever needed me. I broke my word on that cause she can't call me; ONLY I can call her.

I also gave my word to my big sister and when she needed my help because her husband was mentally and physically abusing her, she could not call me for help. She was in so much pain from being abused and also from going through cancer treatments, I could NOT help her because I had NO money on my debit card at that time. I wish my sister would've just waited one more day, then I would've had money on my debit card because I know I could have talked her out of taking her own life!!! I broke my word to my sister when I told her she could call me or could count on me to have her back in life or in general!

Life is precious and family is more important than anything else, so don't put your family on the back seat for anyone or anything because tomorrow is not a for sure thing. Just like the song says ("Til You Can't), I can't call my sister up anymore and just say, "Hey, what's up with you today?" I wish I could, but I can't! She's GONE!!!

For me in each song there's a message for life. I don't listen to a song just for the mellow tones or the soft rhythms. Like this song that I picked out by Cody Johnson ("Til You Can't). It fits me almost to a "T"!!! But for everyone else it's different when it comes to picking out their music. Plus, this is one of my favorite songs by Cody Johnson ("Til You Can't).

# Poetry Corner

## A BROTHER'S LOVE!!

I LOVE YOU,  
MORE THEN EVER,  
MORE THEN TIME AND MORE THAN LOVE.  
I LOVE YOU MORE THEN MONEY,  
AND MORE THEN THE STARS ABOVE.

I LOVE YOU MORE THAN ALL THESE THING'S,  
AND WITH A LOVE THAT DOESN'T BEND.  
PLUS IF THERE IS AN ETERNITY,  
I'D LOVE YOU THERE ALL OVER AGAIN!

PLEASE DO NOT HOLD ON BECAUSE,  
YOU DON'T THINK THAT THERE IS NO ONE ELSE OUT THERE.  
THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOMEONE ELSE FOR YOU,  
YOU HAVE GOT TO BELIEVE ME THAT YOU ARE WORTH MORE,  
THEN BEING REPEATEDLY HURT BY SOMEONE,  
WHO DOES NOT REALLY CARE ABOUT YOU...

AND BELIEVE ME THAT SOMEONE,  
WILL SEE THAT YOU ARE REALLY WORTHY.  
AND WILL TREAT YOU THE WAY THAT,  
YOU SHOULD BE TREATED!

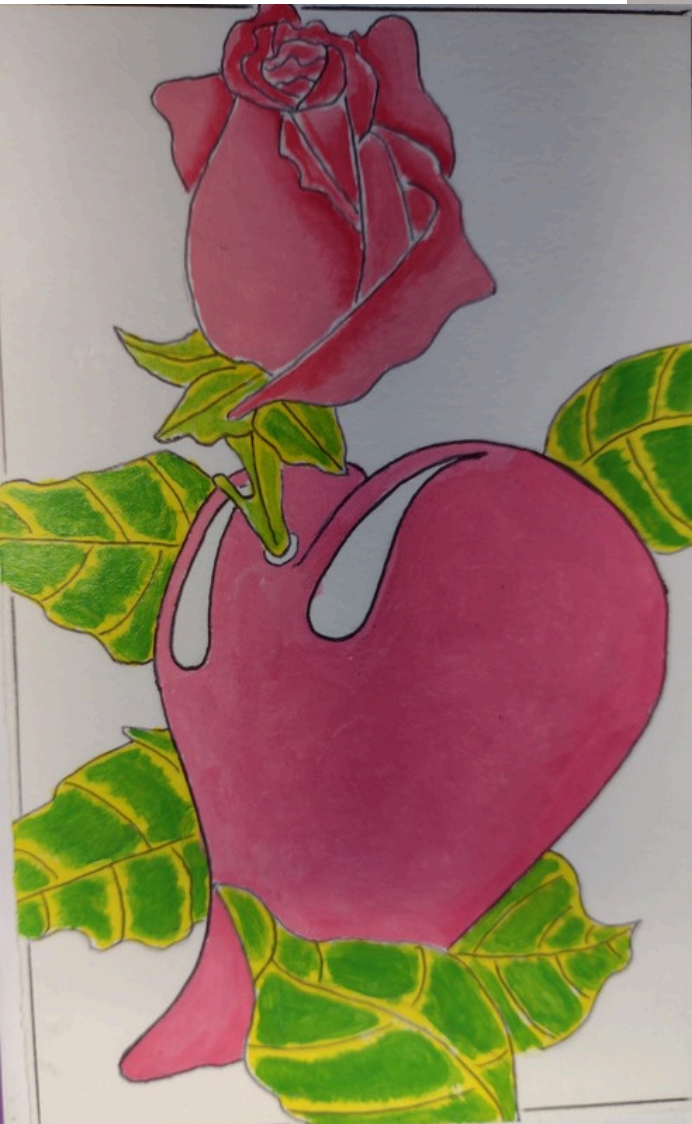
I LOVE & MISS YOU!!!

By: Michael Fencel  
#B-86752  
Started on, May of 2017  
Finished on July 15, 2023



## Poetry Corner

# This is An Expression of My Love For You



Love is, patient and kind.

Love is, not jealous, or  
boastful, or proud, or rude..

It is not irritable, and it keeps no record  
of wrongs.

It does not rejoice about injustice  
but rejoices whenever the truth wins through.

Love never gives up on a Friend, it Always Cares,  
it never loses Faith, is always Hopeful, and  
endures through every kind of circumstance,

It's Always There.

This is an expression of my Love for you,  
and I pray that Someday Soon you will  
Grasp it, Cherrish it, and Hold it Dear,  
Because it is the truth..

By  
Michael Fencel



# Poetry Corner

Do you Believe in me Chicago By: **Lorell Johnson**

Do you Believe in me Chicago  
Chicago Sky Line  
Chicago Bulls  
Chicago Public School  
Prison in Chicago  
Games in Chicago  
Prostitution, Drugs, Gambling, Chicago  
Al Capone, Chicago  
Gun-vline, Hate Killing Chicago

Chicago you get 50-lines  
Chicago Each Line  
Chicago Get 2-4 Words  
Chicago if you neglected  
Chicago I will Break  
Chicago words in HALF  
Chicago I will say  
Chicago 35-times  
Do Chicago desire me  
Envy, far, inspired Chicago  
Why are you Chicago  
Obsess neglected overwhelmed Chicago

I am Ashamed Chicago  
Shock surprise worry Chicago  
No I am not Chicago  
I see you Chicago  
For you Chicago

The cold breeze Mr, Chicago  
Whip slice through  
Chicago youth like  
Chicago did my ancestors  
Old Chicago  
Do you believe Chicago  
Believe in me Chicago  
What about  
The good old Chicago  
B,B,Q,  
Navy Pier  
4 July  
Chicago  
No I see you  
Do you  
Believe in the youth  
Do you  
Believe in me

Do you  
See me  
Do no wafe me  
Or hate me  
Do not at all  
Chicago  
Good old CHICAGO



## Women by YILLIE

What do I see  
when it comes to thee  
Strength, Courage, Tolerance  
Patience, More than the  
average could be.

Standing firm in her  
conviction. Always wants  
to listen.

Never enough time for  
All she must do!

Pushing through all the  
Frustrations too

With the outside view  
She it true  
Woman - Your Secret is  
No More!  
Yet all of you I will  
Adore!  
You are admired for  
All the above.  
You're the actions  
OF LOVE!!

## Poetry Corner

You Are All! By: **Ernesto Valle**

Sunshine through my window I see you  
Brought your Golden Reflection of you Beauty  
Harmony of Morning Songs Chirp Chirp

Into the wind of the world awaking the  
Life you Brought To Me. Thank You.

You Are all awesome is what you Are  
The air I Breathe As I am the  
Dust that Lay on the foundation that  
you Make.  
Giving Me More everyday to take  
all that is yours

I am yours! Breathing Life Back into Me  
planting Seeds Bearing Good fruit.  
Seeing your family Grow  
Expanding in & out of Spaces  
where the Heavens Stays



**Art by Ernesto Valle**



**Art by Ernesto Valle**

# Poetry Corner

## death of a dream

I'm sitting here trying to figure it out, and everything I think makes me want to shout!  
 Shout at the top of my lungs how this is isn't fair  
 After all I've invested after how much I care  
 The devil took me on a vicious path  
 I fear I allowed this, and I've encouraged his wrath  
 I was chasing the devil in circles I swear  
 I was running and running and getting nowhere  
 So I realize the devil was using my man  
 And that was all of his master plan  
 It's a soul sickness for real unhealthy soul tie  
 I never ever want to say goodbye  
 I'm learning about myself a little each day  
 It's too much to hear I have so much to say  
 But nobody listens they can't understand  
 They don't see it's part of the devil's grandstand  
 No matter what I do, no matter what I plan  
 Everything falls through and nobody can see this was part of a plan to destroy me  
 To bring me down  
 To kill me I fear  
 Make me look like a clown  
 So I said a prayer  
 and I begged God to help  
 I said this time I mean it, I can't do it myself  
 I didn't ever want to know what he wanted  
 If it involves separation of me and my husband

I didn't want to hear it  
 I kept trying and trying and I had a fit  
 I didn't understand I didn't want to quit  
 Satan has isolated me  
 From all my friends, just let me be!  
 But they were always there waiting in the background for me  
 I didn't know this, I was lost but now I'm found  
 They were waiting for me and praying each day  
 For me to stand up and for me to pray  
 Pray to the Lord with all my might  
 And that I would find some insight  
 I never realized anyone cared  
 These are the things the devil uses, because these are the things I feared  
 So the prayer that I prayed I envisioned my man, my husband, my soulmate my love of my life  
 the man I vowed to be with for my whole life  
 I can't carry him no more I'm blocking his path instead of bringing him to God  
 He's at an impasse  
 So when I envisioned this picture of him  
 God gave me a vision of my sin  
 I balled and screamed and cried  
 I said Satan why have you lied?  
 So I took him to a place in Jesus hands  
 I pictured him grown, arms and legs hanging slack, in the arms of Jesus, and he carried him  
 away just like a baby, and at me looking back  
 Saying I got them now and I'm his daddy!  
 Say don't worry my dear I have a plan  
 I'm going to fix it if I can!

It's not your job you need to let go  
 You need to let go and let my healing flow  
 This was the hardest thing I ever had to do,  
 next to my kids, baby I love you  
 I am an empath and I feel your pain  
 And doing this fills me with guilt and shame  
 Like why wasn't I enough  
 Why couldn't I fix this?  
 But this is a lie of the devil and I'm about to call his bluff

*Enough is enough*  
 Eva Morris - Farrell



## Illusion by Eva Morris-Farrell

It was all an illusion, all designed to lure me in  
 Make me crumble  
 Make me sin  
 All the hope I held inside, was used to hurt me,  
 make me hide  
 The hope of love and safety/protection from pain  
 That was what I hoped to gain  
 A bond with someone finally!  
 But it was not meant to be  
 I tried and tried to make it work  
 But it was to broken, always in the background it  
 would lurk  
 The fantasy I put on him  
 Was the illusion that lured me in  
 Love of my life/my soul mate? I had never ever  
 felt this way  
 It was the illusion that made me stay  
 And tried and tried so hard to make me sway  
 The illusion that you belong to me  
 I will now try and set you free  
 I am shaking and I cannot breathe  
 My chest it does begin to heave  
 This illusion I would have stayed blind  
 And led me to the path of death I find  
 I'm letting go I'm giving up  
 Now my father, please fill my cup  
 With grace and mercy, loving kindness too  
 What I've done I can't undo  
 I have come to the end of me  
 So dear Jesus let me renew and be set free

Celebration of Others by **Rayon Sampson**



I relish the thought of good people having upward mobility  
seeing the people we love win in life  
perform to their optimum  
and experience the fruits of their labor

I enjoy hearing from a person who lived to tell it  
a survival story, a redemption story, a redemption song  
When legends inspire legacies  
and a torch is sparked to be the next

I love the thought of that one  
or a love story that ends well...for both  
Where we vicariously encounter both sides of the moon  
or a twilight in which our fantasies are illuminated

There is nothing more heartwarming than when loyalty & love engage  
and their offspring is pure innocence  
Witnessing the beautiful look in the eyes of appreciative parents embracing their bundle of Joy

What's more powerful than when faith works  
or observing a work of faith  
When hope is fulfilled for those filled with hope  
and when the hands of compassion reaches to quell another's hardships

The battle is won when peace is the calumet  
There is celebration of each other's success  
and there are collaborative plans for new heights  
or when positive vibrations shake the foundations of institutions that diminish lives

By **Rayon Sampson**

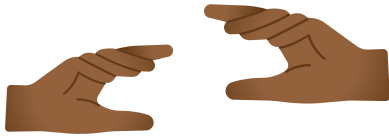
The recent prisoner exchange that brought American journalists Evan Gershkovich and Paul Warhol home from Russian prisons prompted me as an incarcerated writer to think about the varied levels of restrictions faced by incarcerated writers across the world. I can only imagine the possible challenges in countries like Russia to have their voices heard, and in doing so I felt a sense of appreciation for the writing platforms that have developed in IDOC over the past few years.

Many of these writing platforms have emerged alongside the educational programs implemented within IDOC. As a result, it has given writers like myself an opportunity to showcase our talents, express our thoughts, share our experiences, and to exercise agency in the shaping of our narratives, even though we do face levels of censorship ourselves. I have thoroughly enjoyed and have been inspired by the men and women who have contributed to Kewanee Horizons, Two Roads, Northwestern's Insider, and Building Bridges publications.

For the past four years I have had the privilege of being in close proximity with Feather Bricks. I remember its inception within the early months of Covid lockdown in Stateville. It was a dark time where anxieties were high and morals were low. Feather Bricks served to uplift us, and it motivated us to express ourselves through our writings. I was honored to have the opportunity of co-editing an issue (Jan-Feb 2021) with the theme of hope, as Feather Bricks represented hope for me at the time. Since then, I have seen Feather Bricks cultivate themes and feature meaningful writings while continuing to open its pages to all writers, "providing brave spaces to celebrate creative, encouraging, and instructive expression."

Today we as incarcerated writers celebrate four years of Feather Bricks: a fulfilling journey and space in which incarcerated voices are not restricted, but celebrated.

## Poetry Corner



### I Saw You on the News by David "Nazeeh" Bailey

Fate would have it that she would die (be killed), a year later, on the exact same date, in the exact same place, in the exact same tragic way: hit by a car moving at a fast pace.

No strange happenings, as all things, whether good or bad, are ordained by the divine Creator and written down long before its full manifestation.

It was the fate of her little brother first; he was reaching back for the big sister's hand, asking her to come and join him in a place of peace, joy, and happiness. Home is paradise, where there exist much peace, happiness, and tranquility. Where there are no more judgments of our sins, since we are innocent children not having reached puberty; free from life's toil, struggles, sufferings, pain and most of all the choices and decisions that life brings to and before us.

Her little brother's call to join him in paradise was now warmly and joyfully accepted, as she now would meet the exact same fate, in the exact same place, on the exact same date.

So, these words which follow were a true manifestation of the hearts and souls connecting on this tragic day, written in heaven/paradise long before this painful tragic fateful day.

"Come and play with me like you used to. Here there are no disputes, mistrust, crimes, deaths, murders, or fast moving cars. There is no gun violence, no corruption political or otherwise. There is no racism or racial rancor, just pure love, peace, affection, happiness, and lots of fun.

I miss how we used to play, run, and have lots of fun. I've been waiting on you for this day. This day of ours, having met our demise, being victims in the exact same place, in the exact same way, by two different cars, moving at a very fast moving pace.

Traffic lights will ultimately stand in this place as a true reminder of our tragic fate on this terrible day, which should have been here in the first ----- place.

As I was captured by your face on the Channel 7 Evening News, a beautiful little child I never even knew. You were killed in the prime of your precious youth, by a killer who never even had one thought about you.

How could it be, that you died so very young, killed by a car in a hit and run? Isn't it a shame that you and your little Brother died this senseless way, different years but the same exact place, on the same exact date.

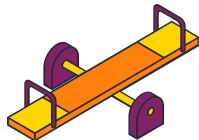
Believe me you, I found myself just crying away. I didn't even know you, and I can't explain why. Maybe because I knew that was a shameful way to die. Perhaps you were so beautiful to the human eyes that tears ran from my eyes.

I will always have you in my own personal thoughts, as though you were my own special child whose life was wiped out by a fast-moving car.

Ain't it a shame that you had to die so very young? Not being able to have children of your own. I can't say what all of this really means. I just wished that you could have fulfilled all of your precious dreams. And as I end this poem, I just want to say I loved you too, so dearly in my own special way. Believe me you, can no one ever take that away, cause you were a friend, a daughter, a sister, and no one could ever take your place.

I know you're in heaven above, playing, running, having a lot of fun, sometimes looking down on this earth, wondering why God-Allah made it so you'd be now gone, having accepted your little brother's small precious hand like you used to; so you both can forever have lots of fun, after both victims in hit and runs.

Always remember that I loved you too, a man that didn't even know on single thing about you, but only saw you on the ABC Channel 7 Nightly News.





# THE AMPLIFIER

with Alex Negrón



This past spring, Lewis University's "Squad One" participated in a sociological course titled, "Socio 29000 Diversity and Social Justice." in this course, the class learned about the features and faces of oppression, the cycles of oppression marginalized people face, different liberation movements, the root causes of poverty, and the systemic injustices within the criminal courts.

Francisco Martinez, A.K.A "Panch the Great," used his telling a different story to address the narrative constantly told to justify motives for forcibly cutting incarcerated individuals' hair. His conclusion captures the dangers that come with single stories – when the complete narrative is not told to keep groups marginalized to justify the dominant group's agenda to control the narrative.

I felt it was important to not only learn about the systems that keep us oppressed and marginalized, but to also showcase the work done in the classroom. Social Justice is not only theoretical, but it is also practical. It has to be mobilized and lived out. In this edition of *Feather Bricks*, I wanted to share with our readers the wonderful work done in the classroom.



Telling A Different Story, What is the Reward to Look Different in Prison?

By: Francisco Martinez (PANCH THE GREAT)

Walking into the belly of the beast of Stateville's NRC, I'm on the new, dwarfed by the size of this colossal Greco-Roman style building, built to house some of the state's most dangerous criminals in the Department of Corrections. This place from the inside has bars of painted steel everywhere you look, with the barbed wire crowning the top of these bars to eliminate any thought of escape without being cut to shreds. The sounds of thundering voices stormed into our ears, as Correctional Officers rushed us into formation in front of a yellow line. Each one of our faces brushed with different expressions: anger, fear, confusion, tirelessness, defeat and sadness.

Aside from all the adrenaline rush from being told what to do, and how to do it, names and numbers were being given to each one of us. There also was a separate roster of individuals in custody being called to step forward and line up in front of a door. Beyond this doorway, you could hear buzzing clipper machines in multitude, echoes of yelling back and forth from individuals in custody, and Correctional Officers.

At some point between the yelling, the rumbling sound of bodies and shoes scrambling on the waxed shiny floors could be heard. Once the scrambling was done, a young black male was being carried out like a prized animal that was just shot down by tasers, mace, and physical blows. Handcuffed from behind and shackled from his feet, his eyes were closed shut from swelling, with tears rolling down his cheeks while unconscious, voices of others in custody yelling at the officers, "Y'all bogus man, y'all bogus."

This young black male was tortured by one of the five faces of oppression, "POWERLESSNESS," and with this powerlessness you can tell by the bogus buzz cut that not only revealed blood spots, bumps of bruising, and uneven patches of hair that said this wasn't a haircut that was taken at an agreeable approach to this young black male. Hence, another one of the faces of oppression "VIOLENCE," caused by the oppressor.

I could only imagine where this individual's next destination was going to land him while being carried away. Three officers were holding him in sections, one by the feet, one by the waist, and one by his arms. One thing is for certain was the names of people back at the yellow line where I was still waiting that were being called were not prejudice to color but prejudice to identity stereotypes: young black males with dreadlocks, young brown males with bald fades and shags or bald fades with tails, and young white males with mohawks and mullets. Some had looks of terror on their faces after seeing the last warrior stripped of his human dignity, but others had their fists balled up ready to face the consequences of rebelling against these officers of the system.

# THE AMPLIFIER

Stories like this don't end in Stateville (NRC), they continue on in other facilities all over the state. Southern prisons in Illinois are those facilities behind the majority of these acts. These young males and their hairstyles are only followed by trends of life in the free world, historical hairstyles of their ancestors, or just the culture indicating where they come from.

They are now being labeled by the administration as a Security Threat Group (STG) with a disciplinary report and segregation time until you decide to comply by cutting the rebellious look. If you still refuse to cut your look a "SORT" team will be sent in to extract you from the holding cell and cut your hair by force.

To what is the reward for being punished only because of a look? I began to question it. What is the reason behind such force to marginalization? Yet another face of oppression, is it done to put a humiliated look to let staff know that these are the targets that will be black-balled? If that young black male from NRC was asked this question he would probably say "yes" due to his own humiliated result.

Novelist William Faulkner's idea that "the past is never dead. It's not even past" conveys this sense of the continuity of history and why we must dig deep into the past if we are to build a better future (34). I say this so that Faulkner's point can fall on to the ears of the oppressor to understand that we the oppressed are only following historical cultures of Africans, Rastafarians, Aztecs, Mayans, Navajos, Lakota, Arawaks, Celtics, and Vikings etc. When it comes to hairstyles that may give us a look to feel free, give us a proud voice, and strong presence, this will open doors to increase knowledge and awareness, and will decrease chaos in the prison facilities, just enough to let free transformed minds that will contribute to society with encouragement that will push for them to choose the right tools, and resources to meet the needs of community standards, family, expectations, take on obligations without anxiety, prove to be responsible, and shine on demand. In conclusion, this story I'm writing while incarcerated is to tell people that this is one of many truths that the eyes see only to prepare the mind to comprehend and reveal that we cannot unsee the truth.

**"The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they aren't true, but they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."**

**-Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie**

Social Issue Analysis by **Anthony Smith**

After reading the January 22, 2003 letter "Strangers No Longer, Together on the Journey of Hope" published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops," I understood how and why the Bishops' letter came into fruition. The Church noticed the increasing number of migrants fleeing Mexico and South America for the U.S.. Since the creation of this letter, the number of migrants has increased dramatically, causing havoc all along the border. The smaller pockets of migrants were easier to process because of the policies and communications between Mexico and the U.S. As their numbers grew, there was a need to remind the U.S. and other entities that the eyes of the Church were paying attention to the treatment of Catholics and others during the migration.

It is my belief that the position at the Bishops has been severely over-shadowed by the politics of the U.S.. With them having the knowledge of civil unrest and discord happening throughout Mexico and the Latin Americas, the U.S. isn't doing their absolute best to help resolve some of the waves that are playing those areas. Politics have overridden the moral fabric of the Church and humanity. (But, that's a longer story for a longer day.) The Bishops' letter is filled with optimism of what should be done to aide the migrants during and at the end of their migration, which comes from their moral obligations and Christ-like morality that is just and sincerely thought out. But, I don't think the Bishops could've foreseen the issues and the

impact of this mass migration of today. The virtues, principles, and values the letter encourages are evident. This encouragement coincides with one of God's great commandments: "Love thy neighbor." I can see all these characteristics being utilized by people of all religious and ethnic backgrounds by the way people in the U.S. are helping house, clothe, and feed as many migrants as they reasonably can. My question is, how long can this last?

All the suggested treatments by the Bishops are humanizing and virtuous, but there are too many bad actions involved. Even though the Church recognizes the rights of sovereign countries and states to have control over their borders for utilitarian purposes, aid and assistance should still be a viable expectation for asylum seekers and refugees alike. Hospitality, respect and accommodation are attributes of Christ. Expecting the political element within the U.S. to follow these guidelines suggested by the Church is ambitious at best. Especially with the amount of migrants arriving daily, not to mention the economic toll the U.S. is under from it.

Hundreds of millions and billions of dollars are being allocated to shelter, clothe, feed and one day house migrants. All to the chagrin of hundreds and thousands of Americans, former migrants and exiles alike. The financial out-pouring for the health and safety of these new migrants has caused tensions within the U.S..

Many communities within the cities of the U.S. were unaware of the seizure of properties in their neighborhoods, that would be transformed to appointees playing roles in this issue. Places that were supposed to be used for the uplifting of the youth were defunded and used to house the migrants. Some neighborhoods had to take legal action to fight against unjust legal action. Places to be thought of as abandoned were refurbished to house migrants, which brought on the ire of the homeless and their advocates, not to mention the disenfranchised Black people. They became disgruntled when they learned the land that once held low-income housing for them, but got torn down, would be used to build tents for the migrants. Most of the people within the U.S. are disheartened at how quickly finances and land became available for the migrants. They felt that when they were in need of assistance from their government, they were ignored. I am empathetic, too. The homeless, poverty stricken and aggrieved are not without compassion for the migrants, for they understand more than most how to be looked down upon, discarded and unseen by society.

Nevertheless, seeing the sense of urgency in sheltering, feeding and clothing others whilst they are condemned to the darkest corners of society doesn't sit well with them. God's Grace is supposed to extend to all, isn't it?

Knowing that people are fleeing poverty, tyranny and dictatorships, the right thing to do is open the borders. Allow those seeking safety and a better way of life to enter. Do the due diligence required to detect false claims and suspicious activity and do it in accordance with Article 33 of the U.S. Constitution, which is logical given the unknown. That's the enforcement aspect.

Within the realm of the Church, the reception at the borders and through processing should consist of making sure that means of support are available to ensure a peaceful, safe and secure entrance is allowed for the individuals and families seeking refuge. Entering and transitioning into another country is somewhat overwhelming, I'm sure. Being received by someone with a kind spirit to assist with the transition is helpful. It's a sign of common decency that can be conformed as grace and God's Goodness, which the Church encourages.

I can see how the bishop's letter could shape the city's response, but it would be through the eyes of a real optimist. There are a lot of virtuous deeds being done to help the migrants during their migration and once they reach their destinations. After somewhat adjusting to the frequent bus-loads and a few arrivals in airplanes, Chicago has followed initiatives directly from the mayor's office to create programs with focus on helping to aid and assist all the new arrivals. All the help entails shelter, clothing, and food, along with the city's initiatives, churches and other social justice and humanitarian effort. Chicago's doing the best it can, especially given that this migration erupted right after the mayoral election concluded.

The spotlight should be shined on the governor of Texas and the politicians throughout the U.S. who have empowered him to use the migrants' situation as a weapon on Democratic cities that hold sanctuary status, knowingly and purposely overloading cities such as Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. to intensify political rhetoric as well as inciting hostile attitudes towards the migrants and certain political parties. This action all encouraged the former G.O.P Presidential



hopeful Nikki Haley to make a statement, saying, “If I’m elected President, I will defend sanctuary cities.” How asinine is that?

Over the past couple of years of watching the news and hearing the pundits speak contemptuously about the migrants and the handling of their migration, I can see the Christ-like Goodness shining through when I see the impromptu shelters being founded, the finances being allocated for their care, the programs being created for their help and adjustments, the attention given to the need for education and health, and the plan to allow work permits, so new arrivals can fend for themselves. What’s resounding all over all is the outpouring of genuine love and support from multiple religious and ethnic factions that supercedes all the negative rhetoric.

What I don’t see or hear about is the U.S. or the Church trying to go through Mexico, Central and South America, to find out the driving force of this massive migration. Why are these people leaving their homeland at such a dramatic rate? Is it poverty or the fear of the governments they have? None of the photos of the borders or the shelters have shown anyone over 50 or 60 years old. Where are all the elders from those migrating countries? There are a lot of unknowns to this migration.

Being that the letter the Bishops wrote is over 20 years old, from what they’ve seen and heard about this current migration, I wonder if they believe this letter helped. Or, do they feel a need to write another?



### My Journey: From School To Prison by **Tony Gganto**

*Editor’s Note: This essay was submitted as a partial requirement for Lewis University’s Summer 2024 ENG103 “The Essay” course taught at Kewanee Life Skills Re-entry Center.)*

Dear Society,

When you are a child, you are forced to take part in a ritualistic pedagogical hell; society decided that was the way all children must learn. This hell robs children of their innocence and sense of wonder. Sometimes children who view school this way will reject education and societal norms, and when they become adults, end up in prison.

I don’t know how many people this is true for, and it doesn’t matter because it is true for me. The only way I could craft a writer’s, or a learner’s, life, is in prison. The only way I can explain this statement is to take you on a journey through my learning life: my early education, education through work, and education through prison. But, first I should probably introduce myself. My name is Tony. I was born in Chicago and raised in the southwest suburbs. I have a brother, and our mother raised us with the help of her parents. I reside in prison at the K.L.S.R.C. (Kewanee Life Skills Re-entry Center).

I started my educational career at a head-start program (pre-school). Incidentally, that was also the last year I remember liking school. After traditions set in, the fun was over and I was held to strict guidelines. Third year is when I really started to hate school and view school like it was prison. I was forced to be there against my will.

My behavior progressively got worse, and in sixth grade I was placed in special education because I was a “trouble maker.” They said because of my education I couldn’t learn. So, they gave me a spiffy new label: “Behavioral Disorder.” I wasn’t stupid; I just didn’t want to learn anything their way, and I wasn’t going to. I learned quickly that the label they gave me meant I had an excuse to do absolutely nothing because, according to the rules, I could get straight Fs and they would still push me through. So, knowing I didn’t have to try anymore, between sixth and tenth grad, I actively sought to fail.

In tenth grade I finally got in enough trouble to be placed in juvenile probation, which did nothing to change my behavior. After continuously getting in trouble in school, on my sixteenth birthday, the judge allowed m to drop out and ordered me to attend GED classes. I still didn’t take that seriously; nevertheless, one year later I earned my GED. Eleven years is it, as long as my somewhat traditional education lasted.

So, my hell was over and I am not going to lie; there is not one ounce of my being that misses that torture. Between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three, I worked multiple jobs: construction, to warehouse and everything in between. I learned more in this seven-year span than I did in the first eleven years of my educational life. Finally I learned why certain practical knowledge was important (I wish my “traditional teachers” had known why).

When I was twenty-three, my life changed. I helped bring a beautiful baby girl into the world; two years later another baby girl would be brought home. This completely changed my perception of education and knowledge. I found not a job, but a career. Normally, the career path I was on required a college degree of some sort. I was led to becoming a “technical sales manager” by a person who believed in me, a mentor. My mentor taught me more than any other teacher did, through hands on learning and by sending me to manufacturers who specialized in highly engineered products; they taught me why these concepts worked and why what they did was important. Unfortunately, the education wouldn’t last.

I left a part of my education out of my previous two. I also participated in a school called the streets. The streets taught me how to survive there. It also taught me about drugs and other terrible things. This stream of education was always in my life and created a situation where I lived what seems like a double life: one where people saw a kid going to school, having a hard time, and growing up into a productive member of society with a good job and a family of four. Second, where most people didn’t see: I was an addict, addicted to the fast life, money, drugs, and violence, at any cost. The second stream of education won.

I was arrested because I violently took a friend’s sense of security by knocking her down to steal her drugs. The education I was now forced into was real and ugly. I had to learn a whole new set of cultural norms. I had to learn law. I had to learn who I was and what I truly wanted.

Prison is a cruel teacher. One thing prison is good for is giving you time to think. You don’t have many choices: you can continue the fast life, or you can try and learn something. The first prison I went to was Illinois River Correctional Center. I arrived in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant all education opportunities were shut down. This is when I developed a love of reading. I rediscovered my Buddhist faith and I realized I had a love of learning.

After three and a half long years of teaching myself through reading, I was presented an opportunity: a transfer from Illinois River to Kewanee. Kewanee is unique; here the goal is to get you out of prison and to never come back. They do this by providing an atmosphere of learning. Kewanee encourages you to pursue education, but they don’t force you. They offer several opportunities from life skills to university.

Kewanee is where I developed a writer’s life. It’s where I found a desire to obtain a bachelor’s degree. Kewanee is where I enrolled in Lewis University. Prior to enrolling, I did not care, at all, about writing, until I started writing for this class. As of this writing, I am still at the beginning of my educational experience. The experience of choosing to learn in prison is freeing compared with being forced to learn as a child.

There is a comparison made in Jamal Bakr’s essay, “Prison: The New Frontier of Collaborative Learning,” between traditional education and collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is equated to freedom and traditional to a lack of freedom. I agree with his assessment, but I want to add choice as a requisite for any type of pedagogy to be effective. I read in Steven Pinker’s *Rationality* a quote by Carl Sagan that “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence” (159). That I had to come to prison to craft a writer’s life is an extraordinary claim, and I just presented the extraordinary evidence.

#### Works Cited

Bakr, Jamal. “Prison: The New Frontier of Collaborative Learning.” *Writing Center Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2023, pp.127-132.

Pinker, Steven. *Rationality*. Penguin Random House, 2021.

## Walking through Winter by Demetrice “D.C.” Crite

On Jun 19, 2024 - the day before the beginning of summer - my best friend, Michael Broadway, died. My winter also began.

I will concede that winter is a demanding season, but it's not for naught. In my friend's preventable death, I came to the realization that the rigors of winter are accompanied by amazing gifts.

When my “season of life” changed, I immediately developed a frozen heart; flurries of tears fell from my eyes and my soul became iced over with anger, hatred, resentment, and many other negative reactive attitudes. However, I found that the coldness that seemed to chill me to my core was a gift as well. I began to understand that my hurt and pain were also allowing me to go underground, to renew myself, and prepare for the spring that will come in my life.

Michael Broadway was more than a good man, and the days following his death were a long, hard winter for me. But in the midst of that ice and loss, I came into a clarity that I lacked when he was alive. I saw something that had been concealed when the luxuriance of his love and friendship surrounded me - saw

how I relied on him to help me cushion some of life's harsher blows. However, as I began life without him, I also saw a deeper truth: it was never my brother, Michael, helping me to absorb the blows, but a larger and deeper being that he taught me to rely on - me.

Learning that winter clears the landscape, however brutally, to give us a chance to see ourselves move clearly, to see the very ground of our being is tough, but a life-changing gift we must all accept.

In closing, I've gained. I've learned to accept that winters take many forms - failure, betrayal, depression, death. However, every one reminds me of the words from my grandmother, Lula B. Palmer, that: “ ‘Em winters gon' drive you crazy 'til you learn to get into 'em.” I know now that she meant that until we can walk into our pain, it will dominate us. Walking directly in it - protected from frostbite by the warm grab of friendship or our own inner discipline - we can learn what our pain has to teach us. We also discover that the cycle of the seasons of our life are life-giving, even in the most dismaying season of all - winter.



### The Doorway by **Biiig Ron Jackson**



While standing in the doorway, I began to view life differently. I'm no longer accustomed to unhealthy social norms, or should I say I'm no longer involved in unhealthy social norms. While focusing on this view, the doorway turned into a walkway. I was no longer in the same place, platonically I was walking down this walkway. Life is beautiful and as I watched my love walk towards me, I became aroused. As she jumped in my arms I thought about life and squeezed her tight, releasing 13 years of stress. As I kissed her juicy lips I tasted freedom, mental

freedom, emotional freedom, and physical freedom. I walked her to the room and released the last of my 13 years of stress that I had in me. The feeling was amazing. I sat in my bed and began to text my daughter, to no avail, no response. I called but didn't get an answer, I faced time but still nothing. This couldn't be real. I couldn't be free. I no longer tasted freedom. I couldn't smell it. Where was I, was I even free? I looked over my shoulder and she was sound asleep. As I tried getting out of bed, I felt someone tapping my left shoulder and heard the words, “You good.” when I looked to see who it was, I realized that it was my neighbor and that I was still in that doorway. I replied, “Shit went left I just can't get right...”

# Sheridan CC: Chat from the Chapel

## From The Brothers In Christ At Sheridan

To Our Fellow Believers Who Are Incarcerated...

I would like to encourage each of you to take a few moments out of your day to praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus. Get alone with Him somewhere and just rejoice in Him for all that He has done for you. Let's face it, no matter how tough things can get, there's still so much for which we have to be thankful. First and foremost, the Lord Jesus loves us so much that He suffered and died for our sins, so that all who believe in Him would have everlasting life. He washed us clean of our sins in His precious blood and clothed us in His righteousness, to present us blameless and holy before God, and to reconcile us with our heavenly Father. What a priceless gift! Alleluia!

Secondly, He has blessed us in Christ Jesus with every spiritual blessing. And even in our current circumstances we are blessed to be in a country where— even inside of prison— we have food to eat and fresh water to drink; all our basic needs are being met. There are so many people throughout the world who are not in prison (billions, in fact), who are so much less fortunate. How blessed we are! God in His goodness and mercy has set forth to supply all our needs. And furthermore, our wonderful Father has promised that He has a plan for us beyond these prison walls, to bless us with a future (JEREMIAH 29:11). Praise God!

So, my friends... "Rejoice in the Lord always. And again I will say, rejoice!" (PHILIPPIANS 4:4). For when you lift up your voice to the Lord, praising and rejoicing in Him, you will find that you also are being lifted up with Him. You will find there is peace and joy and strength in His presence to face all the challenges of life. For "the joy of the Lord is your strength," after all (NEHEMIAH 8:10). So get alone with God today, and just rejoice in Him. Give praise and glory to His name. It will truly transform your whole attitude and outlook. Amen.  
— Your brother in the Lord Jesus and editor of our Sheridan Christian Newsletter, Jimmy Pittsburger (JP)

### "The Way To True Peace"

When I made the decision to surrender my life and follow Christ with my whole heart and mind, everything changed. I believe the Holy Bible is the absolute truth — THE LIVING WORD OF GOD! While I repent of sin through faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit teaches me, comforts me, and heals me. In the past, my thoughts tortured me... for far too long. I was living and believing in the lies of the world. But praise God, through Jesus I am now free.

In chapters 3 and 4 of Philippians, Paul speaks of forgetting those things in the past and reaching forward to what is ahead. He encourages us by telling us of our citizenship in heaven. He also says to REJOICE! The Lord is near. Be gentle. Be anxious for nothing. Pray and give thanks in every situation... "and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (PHIL 4:6,7). Then in verse 8 he says, "Whatever things are true, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things." Think and meditate on GOD'S WORD!

When I made the truth of God's Word my focus, the Lord of all peace changed me completely. I went from darkness to light; from tortured soul to life of peace. Turn to the Lord Jesus, my friends, and focus on His Word... and you too will find true peace.

— Love... Your brother in Christ, Bart Allen

# It's That Time of Year Again at Your Local Library



by Janis Elmore, Stateville Law Librarian



The summer reading programs began in the 1890s to encourage school children, particularly those in urban areas and those kids not needed for farm work, to read during their summer vacation. These children used their local library to help develop the habit of reading. Some of the benefits to readers in a summer reading program include the following:



The more you read usually encourages you to want to read more, which in turn creates a lifelong habit.

It helps reluctant readers to gather with their friends who are drawn in by the activities available at the library.

Summer reading can help children keep up their skills.

Summer programs at the library can generate further interest in the library and the books they provide. And, it being summer, the programs can provide opportunities for family time.

Our Summer Reading Program has begun. Our theme this year “Library, Where the Adventure Begins.” Last month, we did our first “One Book, One Read” and our One Book was “WICKED” by Gregory Maguire. Attached is a list of those who participated and their reviews. I hope their reviews will inspire you to pick and read WICKED.

## "WICKED" BOOK REVIEW

By Sherron Dillon



Influenced by the famous tale, *Wizard of Oz*, in *Wicked* is a book where the author Gregory Maguire sets out to tell the Wicked Witch’s side of the story. The story seems to be set in the 1600’s, where conflict existed between good and evil, privileged and underprivileged, which eventually led to political strife.

Early in the book, we meet a list of characters. These characters begin with the wicked witch’s mother, Melena, who comes from a wealthy family (The Throppes), her father, Frett, a religious fanatic, a grandmother, and her mother’s lover, Turtle Heart. Other characters include talking animals, dwarves, and the famous wizard.

As the story goes on, an interesting question in regard to the witch’s wickedness comes to the surface. From the *Wizard of Oz*, we the audience come in with built up assumptions that say the witch is evil. Traveling through the book we learn the witch, whose name is Elphaba, is smart and intelligent enough to be accepted into a prestigious college. She’s witty, resilient, and has a burning desire to stand up for those she feels are victims. Also, we see how the witch cares for her only sister in their youth, and shows loving concern for her younger brother.

At the story’s end, the witch’s life is surrounded by war and death of a prominent character. The book does a really good job of showing how the witch was shaped throughout her life. I think many people would be surprised by the different interactions the witch has with family, friends, and a beloved companion where it’s hinted she bore a child. Anyone who has read the book, I bet their view would change of the “so-called” “Wicked Witch of the West.”



## THE WICKED WITCH OF THE WEST BOOK "POEM"

By Daniel Vesterfelt

Darkened clouds billowed ominously  
as she flew in a determined fury;  
Eyes focused on her prey who walked  
oblivious to her hatred.

Her envy of those magic slippers  
made her greedy enough to shed blood;  
The dark powers she possessed  
transformed monkeys into a flying brood.  
The hills were shadowed by their numbers  
loud screeches echoed through the land;  
They obey the command of the one who made them,  
She leads her army to destroy her nemesis  
who wore those ruby slippers.

### WICKED BOOK REVIEW BY MICHAEL A. JOHNSON

Reading Wicked was an enigmatic experience. To follow the life of a person who suffered through hate and discrimination was heartwarming. I was able to immediately connect with Elphaba as I not only live through racism but also a physical deformity. The parallels between the book and the current canal culture in America are definitive. Reading about the struggles that the Animals faced as they fought for basic civil rights brought me to tears. I connected with the same thoughts thinking of my life in prison living through the same oppression. but not just my life but also the world today.

I loved this book for many reasons. One of them was the author's ability to show Elphie's embracing nature in accepting new cultures and lifestyles of different races. How her inquisitive nature helped her learn from different people and grow into a stronger person.



### WICKED BOOK REVIEW BY DION COLEMAN



This is a tale about a confused and frightened innocent woman named Elphaba betrayed by the structure of reality itself. A reality where sorcery is the order of the day, and in her vulnerability and at times her naivete becomes cold and wicked. But cold and wicked in the sense that her approach to standing for what's right is uncompromising. And in the end, that same vulnerability and naivete cost her life. Extravagant read!



## WICKED BOOK REVIEW BY ALEJANDRO SOTELO

Hello, let me begin by saying that I was very apprehensive about picking the book "WICKED" because of what I had heard on the News about the "Musical" being very diverse.

As I began to read the prologue, I continued to the next chapters now intrigued to continue reading to find out what will happen next!

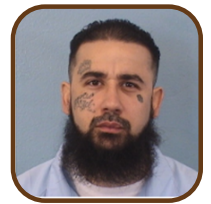
There was a baby born, very different than others. The Baby was Green and named ELPHABA. She grows up to become the wicked Witch of the West.

From Elphaba's perspective, she just made the most out of her situation and circumstances. Elphaba is very sharp and clever in her way of thinking.

In my opinion, I recommend that you give wicked a try. This book will capture your imagination and some just might have you relate as to how Elphaba became so WICKED!

## WICKED BOOK REVIEW BY MATTHEW ROSARIO

I was first introduced to the book by an individual-in-custody by the name of Sotelo. He had said the book "Wicked" was a very good book and that he had gotten a little emotional when he found out that Elphaba ended up the way she did. I want to thank him for referring me to the book. I do agree that it is a good read, but what I don't understand is why he got emotional. In the land of Oz, where mythical beings and humans co-exists, the wicked witch of the west emerged. Elphaba, was her name. The book "Wicked" is a tale that takes readers through Elphaba's journey and her quest in pursuit of happiness. "Wicked" breaks down what it's like to feel marginalized.



Extraordinary book!



Would've loved to see the play! "Wicked"

Many of us are familiar with the movie "Wizard of Oz" (you know the one with Dorothy and Toto) great story also!

"Wicked" is a gripping back story of the wicked witch of the west in a magical land.

"Wicked" the birth of the witch that became wicked because of the life issues she had to face in society of her magical land. . . . losing her sister made her on determined to pursue to revenge though it was a child name Dorothy.

"Wicked" I'd recommend as a requirement for grade school kids (8th graders), it's so good anyone will reminisce about a similar situation upon reading this book that's happening in today's society.



Review by DEREK SWEET

I wasn't really impressed by the book at first. There was way too much skipping around, and I was sort of confused about some of the book, especially the parts that I don't condone. It kind of kept me from wanting to finish the book.

As I'm a member of the Book Club, my fellow Book Club members were talking about bits and pieces of the book and what they thought were their best parts; it inspired me to finish reading *Wicked*.

My favorite part of the book was on page 19: 2nd paragraph and page 21 where they were talking about the birth of baby Elphaba. "Beneath the spit of the mother's fluids the infant glistened a scandalous shade of pale emerald." The baby is not crying and when given a finger to nurse on, bit the finger off. I was like yeah; this baby is going to be a handful.

NO, I wouldn't recommend this book to just ANYONE. IT WOULD HAVE TO BE AN ADULT AUDIENCE.



ARYULES "YILLIE" BIVENS

What happens when a child grows up surrounded by dislike, fear verbal abuse or even insincere love? This is the back story of Elphaba, the wicked Witch of the West.

From the start, Baby Elphaba came into the world under very odd and suspicious circumstances. You see, Baby Elphaba was born with unusual physical conditions. However, they were not the forms that would have prevented her from doing almost every thing any other human is able to do. But more of a difference was in Elphaba's skin color. This wasn't "her" disability; her skin color was others' (Animals' and animals') disability. Racial hatred. But much like the real world's hatred and discriminations based on people's skin color, it is very clear in the story of Elphaba, which played a large part in how she became a wicked witch.

Elphaba was born into this or her world of sin and worship of unknown Gods. People and animals around her immediately started mistreating her. Some refused to see her as a normal child who needs the love and affections of parents and friends. Her own mother refused to even look at Elphaba or pick Elphaba up. She was a mother who was a promiscuous woman herself. Elphaba's Dad was so ashamed of Elphaba, of her green skin and having teeth at birth. So very bothered by her, he never showed his own child love that a female child needs from her dad to grow as a normal human being.

It was a story of struggle for Elphaba, yet a story of triumph as well because she accepted who she was and grew into the power of being a woman and witch. Like in today's society, children growing up without the nurture of mothers and fathers causes them to hate & hurt others. For hurt people hurt people, but healed people heal people. Elphaba's attempts at friendships, or giving love and being loved, were mostly rejected. This no doubt damaged her very deeply.

This book should be read with an open mind and with a joy of a fantasy world. I think people will find other very interesting themes and theories combined in this intriguing novel about Elphaba. This book is easily relatable because of parallels to real world society, class, race and even mental health issues.

I encourage people to read this book for enjoyment and thrills, for the colorful language and indirect descriptive promiscuity.



# Hope by Jesse B. Martinez



**Dr. Billups, State Rep Hernandez, Provost Sindt and President Livingston, Lewis University**

Lewis University had the privilege and honor to host State Representative Barbara Hernandez on 4-25-24 in Professor Dr. Billups' "Practicing Faithful Justice" class. In this class each outside student is paired up with an individual in custody to learn more about the criminal justice system and who it all affects, as well as the effects from serving time, as we know we're not the only ones doing this bid. Our loved ones are subjected to it as well.

Outside students and inside class members of "Faith Behind Bars" are encouraged to have a dialogue on a variety of topics. These exchanges have been some of the most enriching, enlightening, and invigorating ones I've ever had. To bare witness to the transformations occurring right before your eyes could only be described as gratifying and rewarding, and experience I truly appreciate and am very grateful for in this opportunity.

Some outside students start the class with limited knowledge of the criminal punishment system and within months they begin to sound like scholars on the history of prison, especially on issues that disproportionately affect marginalized people and the obstacles we may face coming from high risk environments such as poverty, intergenerational trauma, community violence and substance abuse, to name a few factors that can shape the experiences of individuals growing up in these circumstances. I had the unique privilege of being paired up with an impressive



**State Rep  
Hernandez**

student from day one. As each message came in, I was just in awe of the in depth research and intellect. This student taught me so much, and I am forever grateful for their eagerness to learn with an open mind about the societal ills and injustices. Each student is asked to pick an issue that resonates with them in order to advocate through writing letters, emails, and phone calls to their legislators. On issue in particular that has caught my attention lately was a bill introduced on 2-8-24 by State Representative Barbara Hernandez, named HB5219. If passed, this bill would "eliminate provisions that a person must serve various percentages for particular offenses. Provides that the rules and regulations of the Department of Corrections shall provide that

the individual in custody shall receive on day of sentence credit for each day of service in prison other than when a natural life imprisonment has been imposed." In other words, day for day for everyone with numbers.

My partner and I decided to extend an invitation to State Representative Hernandez since this was a topic w were already researching and discussing. Dr. Billups usually already has a very impressive line of gust speakers, so it wasn't anything new to extend an invitation, but it was a beautiful moment and a very big deal. The president of Lewis University was in attendance among several faculty members, non-profit organizations like Restore Justice, Illinois Prison Project, and a few others. Before she took front and center in a room full of people, we thought it would be appropriate to properly introduce Senator Hernandez, so I asked Dr. Billups and my partner to read some facts on "Truth in Sentencing," as well as the harmful effects and those disproportionately affected. Also, a spoken word dedicated to Senator Hernandez was performed

for her courage and commitment to public service. My partner did an amazing job in delivering the spoken word portion through his performance and passion.

It seemed like a long shot to some, on extending this invitation to State Rep. Barbara Hernandez, and we are grateful for her gracious acceptance, but I didn't doubt that she would accept. I share this story of "Hope" because her bill HB5219 is of "Hope" and may seem like a long shot to some, but if we don't even try we'll never know. I encourage each and every one of you to give it all you've got. There's people out there we've never met writing letters for us; the least we can do is write letters for ourselves and ask our loved ones to fill out the Witness slips in support of HB5219. May we all support day for day for everyone. Thank you to Dr. Billups for the amazing and selfless work she does in pursuit of a more just system and for educating the next generation.

In order to get this Bill passed, we need to continue showing up in numbers. Rep. Hernandez shared how she was very impressed with the 1600 witness slips generated by family and friends of the incarcerated.

To demonstrate support for HB5219, you can contact

Rep. Barbara Hernandez  
1 E. Benton St. Suite 101  
Aurora, IL 60505

Peace and Solidarity,  
Jesse B. Martinez  
Mud Theatre Project member



**Melvin King**

## **Interview with *Kewanee Horizons* Editors**



**Malcolm Russell**

Greetings to all *Feather Bricks* readers. My name is Melvin King, and I am the Editor in Chief of *Kewanee Horizons*. I have been incarcerated for the past 24 and a half years, and I never saw myself as an Editor in Chief of any magazines, newsletters, etc... I became part of *Kewanee Horizons* just this past December (2023), and in such a short amount of time, everything I needed to know was drilled in me by the team of Editors that were on their way out. But let's rewind. I started my time in Stateville (8 years), Pickneyville (5 years), Pontiac Farm MSU (8 and a half years), and now I'm here in Kewanee. I arrived here May 24th, 2023. It's a blessing to be here and doing the things I've been doing. It's been a rough ride for me, as you can see. I will say this: I made the best of all my time in these other facilities, especially Pontiac Farm, where I got to meet and work with some amazing people. I was the Substance Abuse Instructor's Aid for 7 years of the 8 and a half years I was there. I have been a Peer Health Educator over 12 years. I graduated from DEFY Venture's Entrepreneur program, I've finished numerous programs and classes, and I have also facilitated classes. Right now I'm working on getting my Bachelor's degree in Lewis University while here in Kewanee; I've also completed a number of classes that Kewanee has to offer, and by me doing everything I am supposed to be doing, I am now part of the Day Release Program that Kewanee has. I can't give you the scoop on that here, but you will be reading about it in an upcoming issue of *Kewanee Horizons* :-).

# Interview with *Kewanee Horizons* Editors

FB: How do you craft the wide range of submissions in a theme?

**Melvin:** Having content is a must, and as you see, most of the content that we publish has nothing to do with the theme of the issues. We just want to shine a light on those who are being productive during their incarceration. We are all about Restorative Justice. That's how it's been since the start of the publication.

**Malcolm:** We pick submissions that go with the theme. We try to hold the pieces that have themes that are off topic and save the for a future issue when they might match the theme better.

FB: Can you describe your writing selection process?

**Melvin:** There is no (major) writing selection process here. If a submission is positive, it will be in an upcoming issue of *Kewanee Horizons*, and if it is not positive then it will not be published.

**Malcolm:** I do put stories in not just based on theme. We don't want writers that push their own narratives or agendas (on religion, politics, sports)...I'm looking for mindful, thoughtful pieces giving a person a look inside your life. Be it your children, your studies, your family, we want good vibes and to give some other people hope.

FB: How does it feel to give people in custody a platform to inform, inspire, and liberate others with their voices?

**Melvin:** It makes me feel good to be able to help others' voices be heard. Everyone has a story, and for those who I had a hand in helping get their stories out, I hope I made them proud. I am one for helping others no matter how I do it, and having this platform is just one of the many ways I get to help people. I will say this: being part of *Kewanee Horizons* has helped me in such a big way because can be heard also.

**Malcolm:** It's amazing because I have this platform. Someone might be going through what you're going through and, through their writing, be able to help someone else.

FB: How important is it to offer diverse voices?

**Melvin:** It is very important to have diverse voices because we all learn from each other. We can't just focus on one group and forget about all the others. Hearing from different ethnic groups draws more people into the others' world. No matter who you are, you are welcome to write to us. If you have something to share, I'm sure you will inspire someone you don't even know to do something productive.

**Malcolm:** It's very important. Everybody needs a voice. Everybody has something to say, even when they don't want to say it."

FB: What would you like to do next with this platform?

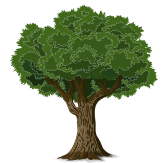
**Melvin:** The sky is the limit for *Kewanee Horizons*. This publication has come a long way since its first issue, and here we are with 73 issues published and 74 and 75 done and ready to go, along with 76 more than halfway done. It's more about what we would like to do with this platform because I have a team who puts in countless hours to help get these issues together: Brandon Wildes, Jermaine Brown, Malcolm Russell, and Edwin Neil. All of us have ideas as to what we want to do with this platform, and we all agree that we want to continue to let everyone's voices be heard. If you do notice some changes to *Kewanee Horizons*, just know it was a collective of Editors who agreed to the change, and we hope that our readers like what we do.

**Malcolm:** I'd like to get some of our videos out.

FB: Do you think it's important to increase *Horizons* viewership beyond the IDOC and IDOC adjacent audience to help expand individual and communal stances of transformation?

**Melvin:** Yes, I think it's important to increase *Horizons* viewership beyond the IDOC and IDOC adjacent audience. As a matter of fact, that has already happened. We are on the internet, and anyone can Google "Kewanee Horizons" and read all our previous issues. How do we reach those who know nothing about *Kewanee Horizons*? Word of mouth: readers have to share this information with others. That would be the most obvious way to expand so that more can be informed about positive changes that individuals are making for themselves.

**Malcolm:** Yeah, but the only way that can happen is if outside viewers also get a platform and give us a platform. At this time I don't see our viewership expanding in a huge way outside of IDOC.



## **Halfway Home by William T. Jones**



I couldn't believe after 42 years of wrongful imprisonment, I would be leaving Stateville prison alive. In 1982, I was ordered by a judge to be taken to Stateville prison and be electrocuted. I sat on Death Row for 22 years fighting to prove my innocence. While there, I watched 13 other men take that walk with the executioner. Stateville prison was supposed to be my last stop, but I turned it into my launching pad.

While on death row, I took daily walks around the yard, which was mad of hard concrete. The walls of the prison were so high, I couldn't see any trees. I could look out my small window and see the beautiful green grass, but I couldn't walk on it. I could smell the sweet aroma of flowers, but I couldn't see any. The only view I had was that of gun towers.

I sat in a dark and gray-painted cell 22 hours a day for 21 long years. It was so rare to see someone other than the prison guards walking the galleries. One day in 1996 while I was working out, I heard women's voices on the gallery. I stopped working out and stuck my plastic mirror through the bars. To my surprise, there were two elderly women on the gallery passing out reading material. I waited until they made it to my cell and introduced myself. These ladies were Queen Mother Helen Sinclair, head chaplain at Stateville, and Dr. Margaret T.G. Burroughs, the founder of the DuSable museum, the largest black museum in the world, a world-acclaimed artist, poet, and playwright. These ladies would soon become my mentors. I started writing poems and short stories. I took up painting and other types of art work. My skills got better as time went on. I soon was having people buy my work.

In 2003, the governor commuted all the death sentences in Illinois. I, along with 161 other death row inmates, was taken off of death row and placed into Stateville's general prison population. Queen Mother Helen Sinclair quickly gave me a job. I was able to walk around the prison with an escort. That freedom made me feel as if I was halfway home. The job working in the chaplain department allowed me to meet new people and take art classes with Dr. Burroughs. Because of her tutelage, I soon had art exhibitions around the world, places like London, England, Rome, Italy, Cape Town, and Leiden, The Netherlands. Her help allowed me to write a few books. I enrolled in over 20 different programs and completed them all. I was invited by then Deputy Director Roberta Fewes to go outside the walls of Stateville prison and do motivational speeches to the young inmates. I, along with Edward Brown, was given the distinguished title pastoral peer mentor. We occupied an office in the chaplaincy department. We were able to call individuals in custody to our office and discuss their problems. This title couldn't have been possible without the recommendation of Chaplain Gleason and Asst. Warden Osborne. In 2018 Stateville prison became the first in the US to allow 40 of its residents to enroll in a Master's degree program through North Park University. I graduated with high honors. Walking across that stage with my diploma in my hands made me feel as though I was halfway home. So, leaving Stateville, I had so many mixed emotions.

Getting out of the van after reaching Sheridan prison, I was told to go to my housing unit which was about two blocks away, by myself. I stood there in complete shock because it had been 42 years

since I was able to walk by myself. While on death row, I was handcuffed and shackled at the feet and led with a lead chain. In Stateville prison, I was escorted by three officers. Now I was being told to just walk by myself. As I started my long walk to the housing unit, I felt as though I was halfway home. As I walked, I noticed the beautiful green grass, and there were big trees with snow on their limbs. I walked over to a tree and felt its bark. I hope that the people who saw me didn't think I was crazy. But this was the first time I had touched a tree in 42 years. I saw them when I went to the outside hospital, but I could never touch them. I stood under the tree and smiled. I was halfway home.

The next day I was told to go over to the school building where Lewis University classes were held. Walking into the classroom and seeing so many familiar faces brought so much joy and happiness into my heart. My plan for what I want to do when I am released is being a counselor. That's why I chose North Park University and its School of Restorative Arts. Well, all my hard work may come to fruition here at Sheridan. I'm currently enrolled in a program named "Certificate Associate Addiction Profession" (CAAP). This program teaches individuals in custody the skills needed to be a licensed drug or alcohol counselor. I look forward to exhibiting some of the knowledge I learned at North Park University. When I complete this course I can go to other units throughout the prison and help who I can.

Stateville prison was my launching pad to the educational platform I needed to become a master's degree holder. It brought out my hidden artistic talents. I do believe Sheridan is also my launching pad. I hope to learn about healing the mind and giving comfort to the soul. I also hope to learn more about God and his Love for all people. Being in Sheridan prison, I feel halfway home.

I've been through much hurt and pain for a crime I didn't commit. Walking in the grass and looking at the farmers planting their fields through the fence gives me some kind of hope. Yes, I'm halfway home, but I also got to keep in mind that I'm 68 years of age. If by chance I don't make it all the way, I did get the chance to touch a tree.

#### An Opinion from Me by **Kahleed Johnson** The Serenity Prayer:

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference..."

There are two parts to this prayer. I'm going to focus mainly on the first part. I understand the meaning and depth inside this prayer, and I don't know if anybody who's familiar with it understands it the way I do. In my opinion, this prayer is correct because it gives us a proper understanding on how to approach life. At least this is how I view it.

The first line states:

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change..."

For me, the only thing you cannot change in this world are human beings. People are going to think how they please. We all live separate lives and have different but similar dreams. We try to change them by telling ourselves how they ought to fit, but it only causes conflict. We put stipulations and rules on others, but individuals are going to do what they are led and comfortable in doing. When individuals do change, it's because they want to.

The second line declares:

"The courage to change the things I can..."

I understand this to mean that you should first have the courage to change yourself. Lots of people focus on changing others but not changing their self, and that's a downfall. Individuals, like I stated before, are going to be who they want to be. Are you? Do you dwell or dread change? Are challenges too hard for you to battle? Or are you just that sick that you can't accept who you are? We must understand that change demands courage, and courage enables us to know who we are and accept oneself. Once we are able to do this, then we will begin to see and understand that we create our own problems and nobody else. This perspective will cause us to take steps in bettering oneself.

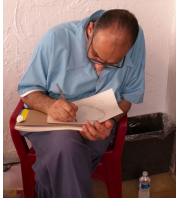
Last of all we have:

"And the wisdom to know the difference..."

This line reveals that everybody has a different view of life. Just because something worked for somebody else doesn't mean that it will work for you. You have to create a pace and balance that fits your lifestyle. But first you have to understand that you have to adapt to new ways of moving. Once you enter into this adaptive phase and clarity of mind is realized, then conditions will be better. You will realize there are different phases in life in dealing with self, other people, family, partners, jobs, etc.



## Celebrating Rebirth of Sound by Benny Rios



It is hard for me to think of prison as being a place of celebration, but celebration does indeed happen in this space. Four years ago, we began the *Feather Bricks* newsletter here at Stateville C.C., and together, we celebrate the success of this platform that amplifies our

voices. Still though, there's more that we celebrate: we celebrate every time one of our brothers or sisters is released way before their original release dates; we celebrate our loved ones on their birthdays, for their accomplishments, and even on the dates that some of our loved ones went on to eternity; and we celebrate our own accomplishments such as the upcoming University Without Walls Northeastern Illinois University graduation at Stateville. There's so much to celebrate, including the Rebirth of Sound Studio concerts that have been taking place in the month of August at Stateville; these celebrations are worthy of being the highlight of this essay.

Rebirth of Sound began in October, 2021 just as the prison's COVID-19 restrictions were being relaxed. With much gratitude to attorney Ari Williams, musician Antony Ablan, award-winning actor/rapper Common, and IDOC, we are grateful for the music studio that they brought to us. If anyone knows the conditions of Stateville, it would be difficult to imagine a space suitable for a music studio, but a space was found indeed. A location in the prison was remodeled, painted, carpeted, and filled with state-of-the-art music making equipment, couches, tables, laptops, and more. It's certainly a place that allows for creativity, community, and retreat from the prison itself.

I was fortunate enough to be in the first cohort, which consisted of ten prisoners and our music instructor Antony. Our group became known as "Hopeful Voices." Together, we co-produced a song called "Bring it Back." It's a song meant to bring awareness to the public about Illinois' lack of a comprehensive parole system. That song advocates for a parole system that gives everyone incarcerated in IDOC an opportunity for parole eligibility. Our cohort managed to get Common and Chance the Rapper to publicly support the passage of the Earned Re-entry Bill (SB2129/HB3373). The bill hasn't been passed, but we're still pushing forward until it does get passed.

Rebirth of Sound gave us a space not only for music, but for written works, spoken word, and advocacy. Four cohorts have participated in this program and have produced amazing beats, lyrics, spoken word, and cultivated their skills with musical instruments. Additionally, participants developed skills utilizing music engineering software such as Protools, Luna, and Ableton. Thanks to the addition of another music instructor, Rashad, brothers gained a lot of knowledge using the engineering software. Over the past few years, the four cohorts from Rebirth of Sound created music and spoken word worthy of performance for the world to enjoy.

While it may take a little while for the world to see live performances of our music, we have started by having a series of concerts for the incarcerated population at Stateville. For the month of August, Rebirth of Sound was approved to host five concerts with all members from the four cohorts eligible to participate. A compilation of its works has been put together for performance which consists of rap, inspirational songs, Spanish songs, and spoken word. Four of the scheduled concerts are for each cellhouse so that every prisoner at Stateville has an opportunity to see the concert. The fifth concert, which is yet to happen as I write this, is for our friends, family, and other invited guests. The final concert will be a big celebration with good food from the world and mingling with loved ones, volunteers, legislators, shareholders, and hopefully Common.

So far we've had two concerts and let me tell you -- the brothers from the two cellhouses who came to see it loved it! Our brothers are so talented and it was amazing to see them working together and lifting each other up. The energy in the theater building was contagious. After the performances, we held open mic performances so that audience members could showcase their talents. Honestly, the experiences of these concerts felt like a relief from the realities of incarceration; they inspired hope, community, transformation, and vision for a better future.

In closing, I must make clear that I do not promote the celebration of prisons. However, I do celebrate the power that we have in transforming ourselves and prison spaces. Common's organization "Imagine Justice" allows us to imagine what justice should look like in prisons and then move forward in making our imaginations into realities. We need to advocate for programs like Rebirth of Sound, degree programs, and more to be available in all Illinois prisons for all prisoners. A group of prisoners hosting a series of concerts in prison is cause for celebration, but we can do more. I encourage you to celebrate with us but also to create more instances of celebrations wherever you may be incarcerated, by accomplishing the unimaginable in all prisons.

# Shout Outs

**Much Gratitude** to EFA Costabile, Sgt. Brown, Ms. Calimee, Ms. Baez, Lt. Zemaitis, Officer Lucas, Officer Montgomery, and all other staff in the Education Building at Stateville CC for your dedicated work and support of educational opportunities for all, and for 4 years of collaborating on 24 issues of *Feather Bricks!*

**Thank You,  
Ms. Costabile!**



2024 "Basic Writing" Class  
with EFA Costabile

**Huge Thanks** to Educator Ms. McGrath for 4 years of copyediting. Gratitude for Ms. McGrath, Ms. Baez, and Ms. Johnson for being open to working with Teaching Fellows, and for sharing some of their ABE, Pre-GED, and GED students with the Basic Writing Class.



GED and Pre-GED Students with Educator Ms. McGrath  
and Teaching Fellows Benny Rios and Michael Sullivan

**Thank You,  
Ms.  
McGrath,  
Ms. Baez,  
and Ms.  
Johnson!**

**Congrats** to the writers in the "WRIT-112 Spiritual Writing Class" for their weekly, year-long commitment to the group, and cheers to their upcoming anthology publication *Writing from Both Sides of the Moon*. Appreciation goes out to all the Chaplains who have provided support for this project!



**Thank You,  
Chaplain Gleason  
and  
Chaplain Miller!**

Spiritual Writing Class with Chaplain Gleason and Chaplain Miller

# Shout Outs

**Congrats** to all of the UWW Students who have successfully passed their review boards and are steps away from graduation and receiving their bachelor's degrees; (good luck to anyone still getting ready to go before the board!) Students on track for fall graduation include Benny Rios Donjuan, Chester "CMac" McKinney, Michael "Tall Mike" Sullivan, Jerel Matthews, Robert Curry, Tylon Hudson, Miguel Morales, Johnny Taylor, Joseph Ward-El, and David Wales.

**Kudos** to Wendy Denzler, Karen M, Michael Simmons, and RóDerick Zavala for their recent publication, "What Incarcerated Ministry Leaders Want the Church to Know" in *Christianity Today* (July 2024)!

**Nice Work, Lewis University Squad 1**, completing "College Writing 2" and crafting complex multi-source scholarly argument papers in the short and steamy summer session! Special thanks to Lewis Writing Center Mentors Tom and Stephanie, Lewis Faculty Head Librarian of Research and Instruction Kelley Plass, and Teaching Fellows Alex Negrón, Michael Simmons, and Devon Terrell for their tremendous support. (**Squad 2, get ready; you're next...**)

Thomas Mills writes, "**Congratulations to my Brothas for completing the 2024 [basic] writing class.** I thank you for being open to the process and allowing us to share the experience. The collaborative learning environment allowed us to share our gifts and talents, while learning from each of you. For that, I am grateful. I pray that the tools and methods you were able to pick up aid you in future endeavors.

2024 Basic Writing Class Instructor and Assistants:  
Sherron "Sosa" Dillon, Ignacio "Nacho" Alvarez,  
Prof. Melissa Pavlik, Thomas Mills



I also want to send a special thank you to Edmund Buck and Augie Torres from "Reading Between the Lines" for sharing their time and experience to inspire and encourage brothas behind the wall. Both Edmund and Augie are system-impacted individuals using their experience to help reduce recidivism by offering information and resources to better prepare people for re-entry." -Thomas Mills, MA

"We are grateful for the work and continued presence of **Augie** and **Edmund**. They could have easily chosen to stay away from these oppressive spaces that they were at one time hurled into at such a young age, but they chose not to. They chose to educate themselves with the objective of returning back in order to help and support a community they were once a part of. This speaks volumes to their character and vision." -Ignacio "Nacho" Alvarez

"I'd like to thank Augie and Edmund for continuing to show up for people who've come from troubled backgrounds. I appreciate that they were willing to share their experience, which is inspiring, because it gives us in prison the idea that what they've accomplished is possible."

-Sherron "Sosa" Dillon



2024 Basic Writing Class with Edmund Buck from *Reading Between the Lines*

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/>