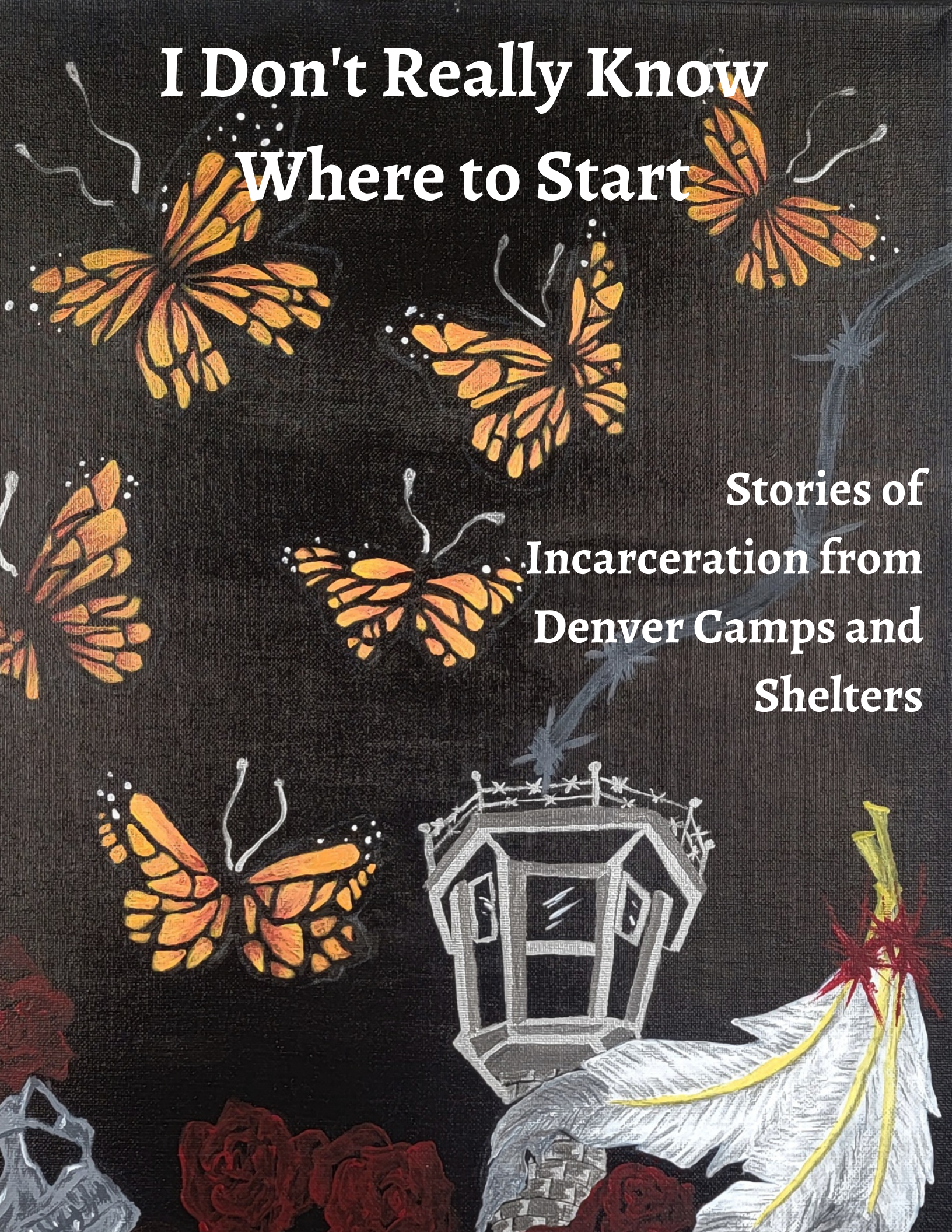


I Don't Really Know Where to Start

Stories of
Incarceration from
Denver Camps and
Shelters



This 'zine collects 25 memories about incarceration shared by people experiencing homelessness. Pieces were written in the summer of 2022 by members at The Gathering Place (TGP), a day center and overnight shelter serving women and trans folx, and residents at three Safe Outdoor Space (SOS) sites across Denver, Colorado.

With support from Humanities New York (HNY) and the Herstory Writers Network, TGP members and SOS residents were invited to a 3-hour memoir-writing workshop to contribute to Herstory's efforts to "change hearts, minds, and policies" about incarceration. Participants gave consent to share their work with the public as part of this effort.

Illustrations were contributed by TGP members, and printing support comes from Lighthouse Writers Workshop.

This zine was compiled and arranged by Katie Crow and Alison Turner. To learn more or request a copy of this zine, email Katie: katie@tgpdenver.org or Alison: alison.nmn.turner@gmail.com.

Contents

Cover art, "Hope from Darkness" by Devonie Williams · **no beginning** · art, detail from "True Sentence" by Habel Harney · Trust and Believe by Sherri 2 · Untitled by Anonymous 3 · The Plate by Wanda 5 · Standing On My Head by Anonymous 7 · The Misunderstanding by Abby 9 · It Happens to Anyone! By Melinda Dawn Abruzzo 11 · What Are We Posed to Do With or About Corruption? By Knono 12 · **no middle** · art, "Stop Hurting Me!" by Pamela Walters: *ArtistPamelaWalters@gmail.com* · Just a Simple Phone Call by Cassandra Ramona Faircloth-Carmouche 14 · The Window of Truth by Jacqueline Jovi Trujillo 16 · Close Relationships by Gia S. 17 · The Hot Seat by Truman Sanchez 19 · A Target on My Back by Anonymous 21 · It's a Dog Eat Dog World by Queene Jersey-New York 22 · Things Get Real in the Field by Dwight Seay aka Blessed 24 · Lucky Muffins by Justin Sager aka Lucky 25 · Fingerprints by Starlet 27 · Addiction and Feelings the Blues of Helplessness by Damon B. Montoya 29 · Life-Less by Norvelle N. White 31 · The Factors by Anonymous 33 · **no end** · art, detail from "True Sentence" by Habel Harney · My Story by Qween 36 · Untitled by Niki 38 · The Struggle is Real by Kat 40 · Recidivism: The Ambiguity of Flawed Policies by Tone-Lo 41 · My Testimony/About My Only Son by Anonymous 43 · Here We Go Again! By Lanise Redwine 44 · art, detail from "True Sentence" by Habel Harney

no beginning



Trust and Believe, Amen

By Sherri

It came again. That very first horrifying night terror that started the whole ball rolling. Darkness, me running for my life from something so evil it could make my heart stop, turning as I fall, looking up into a pair of extremely menacing eyes, waking up instantly, realizing I am back in my own special cell, tied down again. I must have been swinging and kicking yet again, 30 cc cocktail must have been injected again, left side of my neck pretty sore and tender.

Jail. Nut section.

Crazy enough to commit a terrible crime and admit it proudly in the name of justice made up in your mind. 1st year of a 3-year sentence.

1st month. Oh my god. Age, 21 years, 3 months, 5 days.

Dream inside a dream.

Jerked back into present day.

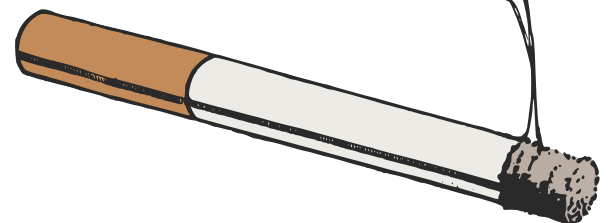
Hot as hell, adjusting mind and eyes as I slowly realize that I am free, that I escaped a marriage of pure hell, and I am still alive and kicking, thank the good lord, Amen.

Untitled

By Anonymous

As I walked outside IHOP to light a cigarette, I remember laughing and thinking to myself what a beautiful morning. Unbeknownst to myself in just a few minutes my life and my friends' lives would be changed forever.

Now I understand drug use is wrong and is damaging not only to myself but it changes the landscape around me, usually not for the better, and I also understand violence is detrimental to my neighbors and myself, but we are products of our environment. And in my home, carrying a weapon is just a measure of security. It's ingrained into the society it's as regular as carrying a lighter or a pack of gum. So when myself and my 2 friends departed IHOP that morning, having a pocket full of dope and multiple firearms in the vehicle was a part of our everyday life.



I remember the sick feeling I had when we were about to hop on the freeway and the red and blue lights were upon us before we had a chance to process what was happening and getting pulled over no less on the way to drop me off at school.

As the two officers approached the vehicle obviously they were aware of the situation because both already had their weapons drawn and before we knew it we were being dragged out of the car and put face down on the concrete. As all of this is unfolding, I can only remember thinking “I can’t believe this is how I threw my life away” and “What is my mother gonna think?” After all, I still lived in my mother’s basement, when would she get the call? I couldn’t bear the thought of how disappointed she would be and how upset she would be. I was making the same mistakes again.

I knew it was only a matter of minutes before the officers found what they were looking for, and this would be the beginning of the next 5 years of my life.

The Plate by Wanda

She had me pinned to the floor and I could not breathe. I knew at that point I was going to die. I could not breathe at all. I was worried about what she might do to my five-year-old son. All of a sudden there was a rush of air into my lungs. My son had been trying to call 911. He was afraid and did not know what to do. He got his baseball bat and hit my daughter in the head. When I got up, she had grabbed him and tried to slam him against the wall. I jumped on her.

I grabbed my son and went outside to wait on the police. I sat on the wall angry, neck hurting, feeling selfish because I felt I had been cheated out of a lot of things. Buying a prom dress for her, her first date, her first kiss. Wondering what I did wrong. Psychiatrists and specialists had told me nothing was wrong with her, that she was a 16-year-old just doing what she wanted to do. I still blamed myself.

I had come home after a long day working at Cracker Barrel. I came home to a dispute between my mother and daughter. When I intervened, my daughter turned violent. She had been gone for three days and had taken the phone out of my mother's room. My mother was very angry because I had already caught her stealing my mother's car. Everyone in town already knew how bad my daughter was. No one could control her.

My five-year-old would beg her, “Sister please don’t take off.” People would tell me let her go, she’s not worth the damage she was doing to the whole family. How could I give up on her she was my only daughter. It was like an out of body experience. I couldn’t believe what was happening.

My son was playing in the grass next to me, he wasn't upset about what had transpired because he was used to her behavior. That’s sad to say that a 5-year-old is used to violence.

The cops finally arrived. Because she had a knot on her head, the cop decides I am going to jail. I was in disbelief when I heard him say that. The cops were called so they could remove her from the home so my mother, my son, and myself would be safe.

All the deputies at the jail knew me because of my daughter and working at Cracker Barrel. He did not try to handcuff me. I got in the car myself. I cussed this man all the way to the jail.

It was so degrading going through this process. Washing your hair and body with lice medicine. Wearing clothes that were way too big. Nothing to brush your hair with.

The charges were dismissed.

I ended up having to have a plate put in my neck. It still bothers me.

Standing On My Head by Anonymous

My experiences with incarceration began soon after I married my husband. Only having known him for a couple of weeks and just being excited at the idea of someone offering to take care of me for the rest of my life, I was in for a surprise. I thought his stories sounded exciting -- but I should have been afraid. Drugs, assaults, kidnapping, federal prison; he had been through it all and had no problem reflecting on it with me.

He and I were both alcoholics who were constantly on and off the wagon. After being pretty happily married for a couple of years, he got tired of my relapses and informed me that he would call the police and have me arrested if he caught me drinking again. Not long after the warning, I was watching my husband pour my bottle of vodka down the sink. As I start to get up off the couch to approach him, he came and held me down. I grabbed his plastic spit-cup and tried to smack him with it to get him off of me. There was chewed up tobacco all over the wall -- that is all it took for me to spend 11 days in county jail and get a domestic violence charge on my record.



A year later, after a strictly verbal argument, I got DV number two. He told the police I splashed vodka on his face, which was a lie. Less than a year later, we were out at night downtown yelling at each other, and I got #3. We were both drunk and I wouldn't stop yelling at him when the cop asked me to.

I had never been to jail before these incidents. To my husband, jail was no big deal, but it was to me! The ladies told me I could do those 11 days "standing on my head." At the time, I didn't think about how much of an effect it would have on my life being labeled as a "violent offender." I just wanted to get the 11 days over with and get back home.

It's been over 7 years, so this can no longer be seen on my record. I became homeless as a result of all this happening. I am finally in the process of getting housing. I haven't had any more problems with the law, because I haven't been around my husband. The last police officer I talked to told me that I could end up in prison if my husband called them on me again. They said he knew exactly what to say, "Like he was reading a script."

We have a lifetime restraining order but are still married. I am angry with him for hurting me and sad that he left me the way he did. I never imagined that crime, jail, incarceration would be a part of my life.

The Misunderstanding by Abby

I was trembling and nervous before I saw the judge. He was there while the deputies held the phone for conference court.

I was charged with a misdemeanor and three felonies. I was so embarrassed and vulnerable. I was at the judge's mercy. I could barely remember the scene of the crimes charged against me.

The night I was thrown into jail I was blacked out completely. I remembered being beaten up by a female deputy at the local grocery store. I was shopping for a few items to share with my community members. I had no money and I was off my mental health medicine. I was very manic and unarmed. I had a small knife tied up around my neck which I used for opening cans. Colorado survival includes a knife in a pocket usually.

As I sit in court I think about how I never imagined I would be mauled by a officer and thrown to the ground. Having PTSD I was in consciousness and out of consciousness.

I came to in the general hospital. They were doing x-rays of my neck and back.

Clearly to me they were broken and I think that the department covered this up. Next I was given 5mg of Haldol. Lights out again.

I woke up while they threw me into a jail cell. I was in so much pain I couldn't even eat anymore barely.

The officers were cruel. There were other women in cells. The lockdown was 23 hours and we would get out if we were lucky. I didn't get to shower for 2 weeks. I started getting an infection from poor hygiene. When the officers came and said I could shower I, being in psychosis, shoved the officer and they charged me another felony. I was so scared and needed medical help. I finally started taking my medical medicine. As days moved forward I improved and became more aware and less scared of what was going on around me.

I still had no idea of how long I would be locked away. I reacted by writing my feelings out and reading materials the jail had given us. My hair was very long and had been ratted from not brushing it. The jail offered us hair clippers so I decided to shave it all. I looked at it in the mirror. I looked like a boy. How funny. My best friend called me while I was in jail. He looked very worried over our video. My family sent me very little money for commissary. It's not good to be indigent when you are in jail.

It Happens to Anyone!

By Melinda Dawn Abruzzo

Shit. A while ago I was an officer in prison, and here I am an inmate. I'm on probation for bringing drugs into a prison. And now I'm in lockdown. Being an officer, they thought I would get beat up. They told me not to tell the inmates I was an officer. They didn't want me saying anything to other inmates.

You're in a room with one other person. For me, I never went to the bathroom around anyone, or took a shower. Being secluded as a kid didn't help. I was embarrassed. When all these women took showers, it made me feel so uncomfortable. So I would do it during mealtimes. What am I doing here? I was thinking about my kids, my boyfriend, my apartment. And how I was gonna pay the bills. What doesn't help is my boyfriend was cheating on me. They withdrew all my money.

I got called into work that day. And I knew it was gonna be problems. And I shouldn't have done it.

I brought it in my bra. When they pat us down as officers they never would pat our top because that would be considered fondling. And that's how I brought it in. And then when I read the "discovery," it was an ounce and two-eighths.

I was working out in the baseball field when I saw a warden and two officers coming for me. I put it in the gym and someone was supposed to pick it up. When the guy goes "What's this stuff?" I go, "I don't know, something green?"

What Are We Posed to Do With or About Corruption?

By Knono

I don't really know where to start.

The day that changed my life was July 1st, 2013. I had been out with my friends the night before. Drinking, having a good assed time, living it up. Then I loaded up my 3 daughters, Armani, Audrina, and Cadance. My dad gave the girls a big hug and kiss. I don't think that he knew that it would be the last time that he saw them

Fatigue is the number one cause of auto death. The trip from Austin, Texas to Thornton, Colorado is something like 26 hours one way.

When I woke up in the hospital, the doctor that broke the bad news to me got his jaw broke. Then I was arrested and taken to jail.

no middle



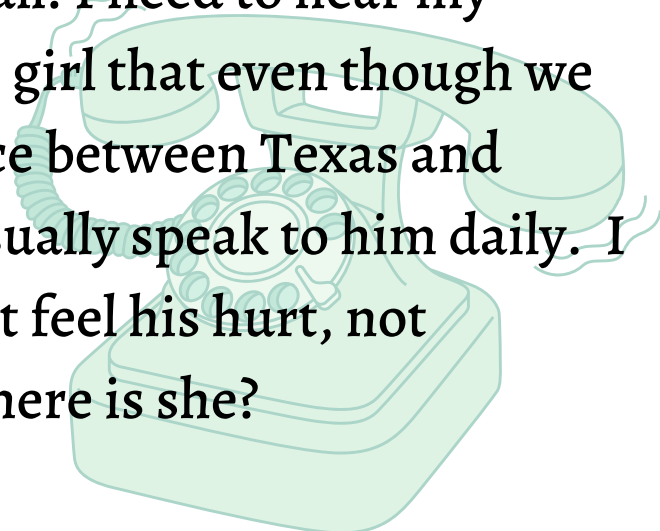
Just a Simple Phone Call

By Cassandra Ramona Faircloth-Carmouche

That one and only phone call that could have been made, that should have been made wasn't made. Why? The guilt, shame, and embarrassment from where I was actually located kept me from making that phone call. The caller ID would read Van Cise-Simonet Detention Center. How could I make a collect call to my father saying I was in custody and going to jail.

Now that I'm transferred upstairs to a cell and reality has truly hit me, I long to hear my daddy's voice. Just to hear a loving comfort tone to my ears of the nightmare that I was going to begin for the next two months. I was now surrounded by nothing but cold, hard steel and one filthy glass window to see others' cells just like mine two stories high. There was no knowledge of the outside world. Even the air that I breathed was cold and harsh.

My thoughts kept rambling around in my head. I need to call. I just need to make one phone call. I need to hear my daddy's voice. I'm so much a daddy's girl that even though we live 1022 miles apart now, the distance between Texas and Denver seems even further now. I usually speak to him daily. I wonder what he is thinking. I can just feel his hurt, not receiving that call and wondering Where is she?



Our closeness is beyond spoken words. I remember him driving that 1022 miles just to pick me up and take me back to Texas for a reunion with all of my siblings. The joy I felt and the smile not only on my face, but the smile on my heart when I saw him driving up.

Something so simple. Something that I've taken for granted so many times before in my life without even thinking. A phone call.

Finally at 6:30 pm it's my turn. After day seven I'm able to call my daddy collect. Only he doesn't understand that it's not like the good old days when you simply push #6 to receive a call from an inmate in Denver Detention Center. Instead he has to search for a credit card and try his best to input the information before the timer cuts him off. In the meantime I'm listening to the recording saying the person is inputting card information to receive this call. As I hold my breath waiting to hear his voice, the recording says the caller did not accept. It wasn't because he wasn't trying, but at 80 years old he has never had to accept a call from jail from his kids until ME.

Well, there goes my 30 minutes, and I didn't even get to shower. I feel that I'm a forgotten hostage. So back to my new cold, made of steel apartment feeling drained, disappointed and dirty!

The Window of Truth

by Jacqueline Jovi Trujillo

I woke up to banging and yelling my eyes are still trying to adjusting to where I am at she at the cell door banging and yelling HELP ME HELP ME, GUARD, HELP ME, please. She has this fearful look on her face I ask what's wrong she's holding her stomach she is pregnant so I start yelling help as well for hours no body.

I am terrified what may happen. The sound of urgencies pouring out of my voice help please help her please as the pain got worse for her the deeper my fear came out my voice come please help her in my mind I start to think is she dying is the baby coming do I say to her sit down here then I continue to bang on the door, my mind is staying on do I have to witness death again?

In between the yelling and banging I'm praying for her to have strength for me to as well trying my best to soothe her through the pain I am holding myself together trying not to freak her out anymore than she already is.

As the time passed and the pain increased in her body and the yelling turned into screams the intensity in my mind and heart got so fearful of what was about to happen.

She put her blood on the window of the cell door then the guard came.

Close Relationships by Gia S.

I remember walking into that pod in prison. My first day I was so scared and felt so alone. The faces, the smell, the ugly hard concrete columns and floors. But then I was approached by a man with a bright smile and in his hand he had a cup of coffee. He spoke and said, you thirsty? I felt like I could take a breath.

That was the beginning of what I thought would be a solid friendship. We played cards, ate together, laughed together. Time passed and we became like brothers.

One day, I was coming back from kitchen duty and my coffee buddy, my only friend in prison, approaches me. But he doesn't look the same. He's very upset and says he needs to talk to me right now in his cell room.

He pushed me up the stairs with his aggressive tone and crossed arms. I went up the cold hard stairs, even though my heart rate was feeling like it was going to bust out of my chest, my palms were sweating, and I felt like I was in a trance. The next thing I knew, I was ushered into his room by him.

Before I know it, he says, You know, we have been hanging out a lot and I've been helping you, so you're either going to suck my dick or let me fuck you.

I could see the anger and seriousness in him. I wanted to run but I fell into fight mode and grabbed the closest thing to protect myself, which was his lamp plugged in the wall. As soon as I pulled it from the wall, I hear footsteps and keys jangling towards the cell. The next you know, the door is flung open, there are three guards yelling and screaming and putting us in handcuffs.

The shame I felt being handcuffed and escorted out of the pod was unbearable. I felt like such a fool but for some reason, I kept blaming myself.

I was taken to the captain's office, where I thought I was going to give a statement. It turned into an interrogation session. I was blamed and told I had brought this on myself.

After 30 minutes of the blame game, a female officer walked in who believed me about the threats. The next thing I know, her and the captain are talking in the hallway. They come back in and he says, You're being moved to a segregation pod, but we're not filing charges on him. I felt so outraged that I was being moved and there were no consequences for his actions.

Close relationships are a dime a dozen in the real world, but in prison, predators are a dime a dozen. I was looking for just one close friend out of thousands of men in that dark place we call prison.

The Hot Seat

By Truman Sanchez

Tears come to my eyes when I think about a 10x8 cell surrounded by bars, a metal bed, a desk, a toilet, and a sink, squeezed all in one cell in Buena Vista State Penitentiary. A program called Therapeutic Community. I call it forced sobriety, a reprogramming community to tell the truth. Writing a story about my life in this program showed myself how I felt so far behind in life. How I didn't know any better or I basically lacked education to defend myself. My people die for lack of knowledge.

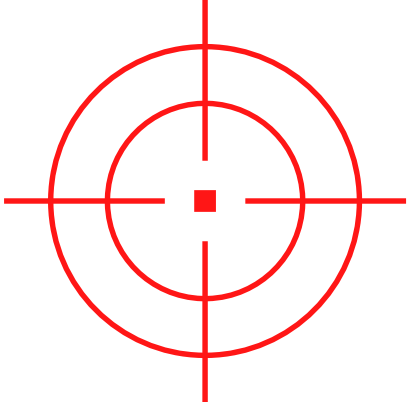
I hated myself and began to cry. The night after I wrote my story, I looked at myself in the little mirror I got off commissary. I began telling myself "I hate you, Truman, look what you did to us. Look at where you put us." For some reason I began to punch myself repeatedly as I cried. Abandonment, abuse, confusion, uneducated, poor, drug, violence, PTSD really played a role in my 2-year 7-month stint with a 9-month parole chaining me to the state.

It was only a three-year sentence! Why did I do more than three years? How come I did not receive the one-month pre-sentence confinement? I had so many questions while writing this story of myself. Train up a child in the way they should go and they will not depart from it.

Ms. Bolton, the lady leading the TC program, screams while I am in the hot seat. People ask questions about who are they? I won't snitch. Who are regular people? I reply "Regular people go to a doctor when they are depressed." They don't go to the liquor store or a street pharmacist to forget. I had no therapist. Why does no one hear me.

I believe you can be around millions of people and still feel alone. Maybe that \$100,000 that it cost to keep me in prison could have fixed me?

I hate to draw because it reminds me of incarceration. I should of told them what I really wanted but it's a little too late now. Who am I?



A Target On My Back

by Anonymous

I'm sitting in my room watching TV, when an officer calls me in room. He states that I'm wanted in the office.

So, I go to the office where I'm asked by an officer why I was in CDOC. I looked at him crazy because he can look it up. It took me by surprise, but I told him why. (Mind you, I had a target on my back.) So then he stated to me that he could take me to the closet to beat me up.

I was nervous and scared because I didn't know if he or any other officer was going to beat me up.

I was young when this happened. But now I have an issue with people telling me things and with people in power (bosses, or anyone else in power).

I went to CDOC at a really young age and I had to grow up fast.

I know that there are other women in CDOC that feel like they have a target on their backs. Because of what they look like, what they did to get in CDOC or what they are doing in CDOC.

It's been hard knowing that it doesn't matter that we all have something to lose.

It's a Dog Eat Dog World

by Queene Jersey-New York

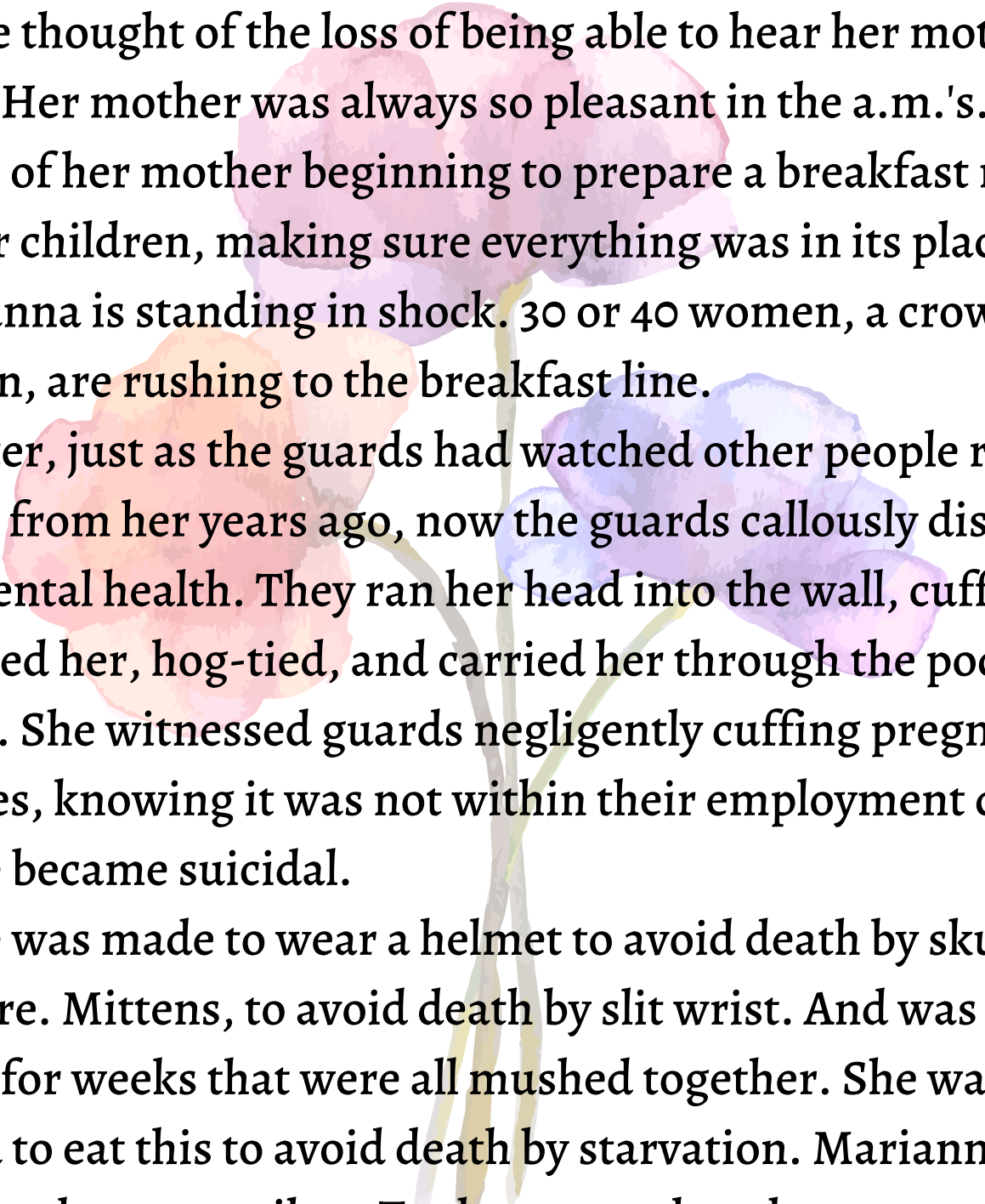
Open pod, 4 am before breakfast, Denver County Jail. Approximately 70 bunk beds, filled with sleeping inmates. A first timer in jail awakens. Her footing in the judicial system, surreally -- to her -- was slipping. This would be Marianna's first phone call during her incarceration. She was choosing to call her mother.

Out of nowhere, a fellow resident ran to the phone and picked it up before Marianna got there. Guards watched. They did nothing. They acted like this was a normal and dignified thing to do to another human being. Then, as Marianna moved to another phone, another inmate moved in out of nowhere and grabbed that phone.

“Chow!”

Everyone who got to the phones before Marianna gave her a smug look.

When they call chow, that means a meal is ready. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, whatever. All inmates eating must line up and get off the phones. So Marianna missed her chance. She had been in jail three days now. That would have been her first phone call. The guards had never fully explained to her how to use the phones. That was needed. Rather, she was yelled at, cursed, and ordered around.



She thought of the loss of being able to hear her mother's voice. Her mother was always so pleasant in the a.m.'s. She thinks of her mother beginning to prepare a breakfast meal for her children, making sure everything was in its place.

Marianna is standing in shock. 30 or 40 women, a crowd of women, are rushing to the breakfast line.

Later, just as the guards had watched other people rip the phone from her years ago, now the guards callously disregard her mental health. They ran her head into the wall, cuffed and shackled her, hog-tied, and carried her through the pod naked. She witnessed guards negligently cuffing pregnant females, knowing it was not within their employment duties.

She became suicidal.

She was made to wear a helmet to avoid death by skull fracture. Mittens, to avoid death by slit wrist. And was given meals for weeks that were all mushed together. She was forced to eat this to avoid death by starvation. Marianna took on many hunger strikes. To the extent that she was constantly looked at by the guards as one to incite a riot, when she was merely conducting petitions for this mal-treatment that did not solely befall her.

The cell doors clanging. The guards' keys clinking with the cuffs. The boots pounding on the jailhouse floors. These are the only sounds you hear. Boom boom boom, keys jingling on cuffs, boots on the ground.

Things Get Real in the Field

By Dwight Seay aka Blessed

First of all, let me give praise to the most high!

Jail to me was a hard lesson to learn. Back in my days 80s 90s we had rules now there is no rules... Back there you had to have permission to rumble now they just free fall. Jail taught me structure respect and not to judge a man.

The most scariest time was when I was in this prison they treated me like an animal...got a blank spell...laying on my mat & I hear a window open it's the guards coming to check on me...I thought I would die in that place. Since I am mental health they put me in a paper gown. You move the wrong way it rips show all your belongings. Not cool.

It's so cold in there I wrapped myself in tissue paper.

Lucky Muffins

By Justin Sager aka Lucky

It was my first time and first day in the old county. They wake me up to work in the kitchen. Man, I had so much fun even though it was 3AM we was just happy to be out the pod. This is where I made a big mistake. I was making the kosher meals when I saw them chocolate muffins. It was love at first sight. I had to have them, I ate about 20 of them when I said I need these in the pod. So I wrap about 10 muffins in clear wrapping and put them in my tighty whities.

It was going well. Till I found out we had to wait for another guard to come get us. He took about 20 minutes and by then the muffins had shifted.

That's when he said line up on the wall. I said fuck me. How can I ditch these muffins. But we were moving so fast I couldn't think. I was scared shitless I didn't know if it was the muffins or if I was shitting down my leg.

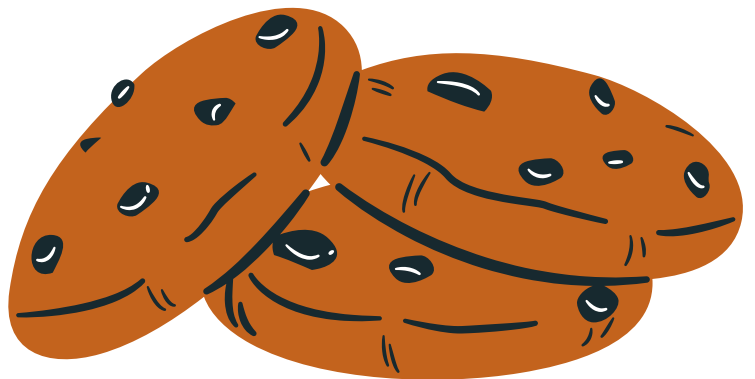
But I knew from the smell it was only muffins down there. I wonder what name he would have gave me if I did shit.

As soon as I put my hands on the wall the muffin started to slide more and more and I can't take my hands off the wall I knew I was so fucked. I hope this is a soft pat down (nope) he was patting the shit out of me each pat moved me left to right he wasn't even by my butt yet when the muffins started droppin then he felt them and squeezed them and asked me wtf is this. I softly said muffins. By then most of it was down my leg. They smelled great.

He gave me a shake and they all came out. It was like a muffin slide, and everyone was laughing.

He tell me to pull them all out and change so I do. After that the COs called me the muffin man.

I didn't mind because he never found the cookies in my sox.



Fingerprints by Starlel

As I lay in bed, a crisp chill is around the windowsill and I'm looking at the snow falling in large beautiful flakes. Each flake has its own design, and I'm thinking that like everything else in creation, so do fingerprints.

Because the bed I'm lying on is not my own. It is my bunk, in a large dorm of about 40 other women. And I somehow feel lucky, even locked up, that I have a bed right next to the window, where as the seasons change I get a certain show of beauty from mother nature.

I try to close my eyes so as not to remember where I actually am. Knowing that later on in late evening when I get off of work (my prison job) I will be allowed to shower in a relatively clean stall in privacy.

Privacy is kind of important. In jail there are no shower curtains and when you use the restroom there is no bathroom door. Everyone sees everything. So to be able to shower and use the bathroom in private can be a luxury. Not everyone in jail has that option. I had no other recourse. I had been victimized again.

I say privacy because in my mind I must tell myself it is. It's not!

You see, I have been groomed by a certain prison guard since the day I got booked in.

The day I got to jail, I did not know that a family member (first cousin) would be one of the hall staff members responsible for strip searching and making sure that the new arrivals got showers, itchy blankets, uniforms, and used tennis shoes. My cousin gracefully but firmly declined the job of strip-searching me.

As children, we grew up together and I hadn't seen her in a while. So in that moment I felt embarrassed. Our lives had taken totally different paths. Like a fork in the road, which had brought us to this moment in time. Different paths had reunited us in a certain solidarity. My feelings had been transformed into survival.

The next officer who stepped up did not have a problem with it. I came to realize that a few of them actually enjoyed the embarrassment and the demeaning way you already felt. I came to find out that one particular guard had actually singled me out for exploitation. I really did not notice anything for quite some time, then the extra perks started coming my way. At first it was very subtle. Then one night after my "job" I was very tired and just wanted to take a quiet shower and go to my bunk. It was during my shower that I had noticed officer X standing in the shadows with an insidious smile on her face. She had been watching me.

I tried to tell myself that it was my imagination or that I was overreacting. I was not.

Addiction and Feeling the Blues of Helplessness

By Damon B. Montoya



Sitting in visiting, I am looking so lost. At the sounds of a child playing and laugh sounds so strange and foreign to me. Then I look to my father. He has tears in his eyes, looks at me and ask me if I ever give him a grandchild. It never happen that I did give him a child. Right after, all I wanted was to get high. I was so lost and wonder what happened. I just sat in my cell and pulled out my fix (drugs). Ten minutes later all my pain was gone and I felt free of my pain and my addiction to drugs. Damn it.

Being in prison talking and it brings one quick memory. My mom tell me she only feel safe for me when I am lock up. I am out now, so will she feel safe for me again.

Going back to when I first remember all my troubles began. My family was good until the 6 grade. The family splits up and I become involved in drugs.

That started my long life in crime and the use of drugs. I am still at it today. I am married now, god I love her but I can't help her I am crying so much on the inside I never felt so helpless I want to explode or die because I love her so much. You see there is a drug called Blues and my wife has left me for them. Blues I wake up and she gone what do I do where do I go who do I call she be back I wait I am still waiting she never come back. I can't call her she has no phone I do call her dad he knows nothing. But tell please help my little girl you're the man help fix it I can't do I don't know where she is addiction has taken over damn it I can't let her die. But I must get clean to 50 how can you imagine not be able to help the one you love so much because ADDICTION is stronger than you all I do is pray and know my addiction is a strong for my life to help my self stay out of prison and isolation. I will no longer be a follower. I am a leader now. Please my lord bring my love back to me!

Life-Less By Norvelle N. White

So many proudfelt moments in everyone's life and one of the best joys that make it so great are being able to share the moments with those that truly care, that understand and feel its importance to you and see the joy in your accomplishment. You spent your life living disappointment, where your only accomplishment was being part of the conversation.

Point is there is/was someone there.

Well to so many that joy, that pride and happiness, that excitement, motivation to keep going or being able to experience through hope or positive feeling in regards to your future and your life from that very second moving forward is short lived because of the sudden overflow of your heart breaking and just like the cracks in the pieces of broken glass that allowed it to break in pieces and make it whole and strong become something that has lost its meaning and purpose. Your accomplishment and joyful moment becomes heartache and pain, tearful instead of joyful, cries instead of laughs and a moment that hurts you because you've come to the realization that there's no one you can call.

You know those moments in prison or jail because they are part of everyone's routine. You see it and watch it every single day.

And even though you are all doing the same scheduled routine the same time every single day, the only difference is how you go about doing them. This part of the life and schedule you've never been able to experience or like so so so so many you lived with it in your sentence in the beginning but now at this moment you are alone, and on the phone with no one to call.

It's so painful to watch and see and most importantly hear all the good news and happy moments in everyone's lives around you because of the love of family and friends that others have. It hurts when commissary is called every week and you have not yet to feel or experience in prison and locked away from all those you know hearing a familiar voice that's important and allows you to feel the love and that the care and concern is there. Every day without that feeling of being missed or thought about is avoided and brings the joy everyone you're around gets to feel and know every day. To know someone is there waiting and caring makes your sentence one that is bearable and you are not alone.

There used to be someone there but now you are not only holding a phone with no one to talk to but you are also holding in and onto a broken heart or loneliness realizing no one is there and the reality there won't be or never was.

The Factors by Anonymous

Shackled walking down this hallway still shackled thinking could I really be getting out of here no one knew I was here. I had been here 143 days now I'm finally being unchained and led into this giant cage in the middle of a room surrounded by empty office chairs and desks. I had dressed out of the green county corrections uniform and the orange and white Velcro shoes and back into my own slightly snugger pants and top.

Trying to hear what's going on with the officers that brought me in and the fat officer behind the counter. I lean over not so much that I draw either of their attention but to see if it may be me they're talking about. Maybe the judge messed up. I wasn't supposed to get out. I hear voices coming from down the hall from the same direction I just came from maybe it's one of the other guards coming to get me and...on no, they're just bringing someone else in who's getting out.

I watch this scene play out over and over and over. I watch the clock as minutes tick by then hours. I begin to think they forgot about me.



Finally it's my turn I am released from my cage and provided with the few belongings I brought in my pockets.

At this point I'm walking down the hallway to another big metal door with a tiny window above my line of vision. The guard is searching for the keys for the door finally finds the key and shuffles through the keys, with amazing slowness.

Finally he finds the keys as he puts it in the lock and turns I'm doing everything short of jumping up and down and doing a little boogie dance.

I finally hear it turn and the officer starts to push the door open...I want to shout over him I held myself in check when the door slides open and he steps out of the way to let me past and says have a good night I mumble something like you too, I think.

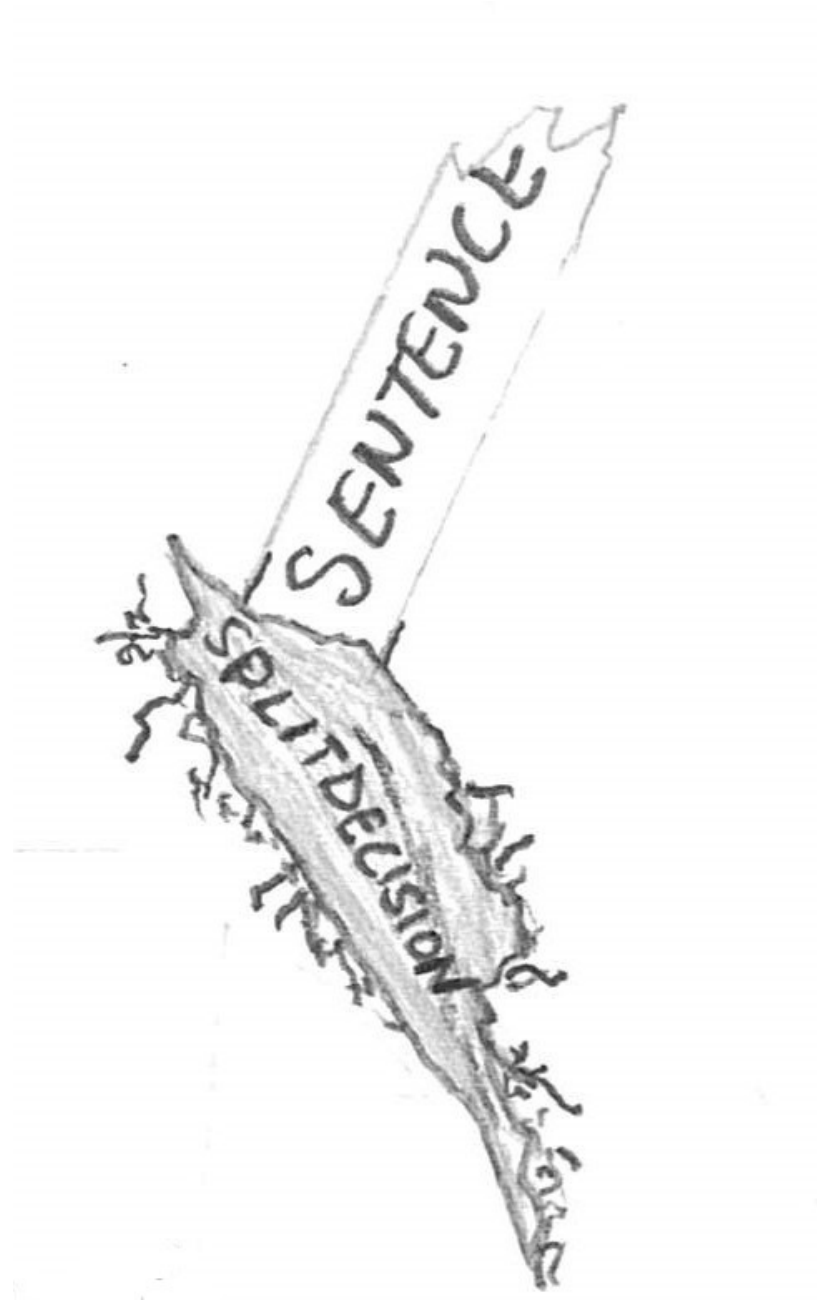
I hear the door close behind me I look around me and I realize how do I get back from here in the middle of the night there were no lights coming from either direction no sounds no tires on gravel no no music nothing except every few minute there's a light from inside of the corrections facility.

I take one more look around...

Bust out the boogie dance.

I'm out bitches.





no end

My Story by Qween

After my daddy died when I was at the age of eight I went to live in Minnesota with my sister and she began to raise me but not really wanting the chore she sent me to stay with her best friend who I called aunt Anna Lee. Now Auntie Anna Lee had two sons in Prison they had been in and out since their early teens, and at this point I believe one was in for life. But finally getting a chance to go and see her sons was a big deal to her.

So we all got dressed up my cousin Kysha and I wore new mini skirts turtlenecks and clogs and I even got to wear a half Afro (still the 70s). And my cousin he wore basically our boys parochial school uniform black slacks and black tie and a white shirt, and aunt Ann with her pretty dark chocolate colored skin resembled the portraits of Cleopatra's embroidered in black velvet on her living room wall. With long eyelashes, thick full lips, and a figure that could kill, as usual she always looked BEAUTIFUL...

Well we left our home in the projects early that Sunday morning. I can't remember who drove but I remember that it was a very long ride maybe over two hours we were going to the Stillwater prison and us kids fell asleep on the way. I remember walking into Stillwater cold cement walls dark grayish brown corridors the pissy death stench old park buildings have & the loud sound of our shoes on the floors as we walked slowly into the visiting room.

One of aunt Ann's sons sat with his back to her elbow on the table leaning in a cool kind of posture but he didn't turn around maybe he glanced over his left shoulder, but the other son immediately became Furious and begin whisper yelling at her saying "Why did you come here and why did you bring them here you don't know what they will do they will use you guys to try to hurt us or threaten to hurt you guys to get us to do whatever they want us to do y'all need to go."

Aunt Ann looked like she wanted to cry but held her composure and tried to explain her side. I turned away but as I was looking across the room I saw my brother Sonny's son, Butch, (from what I know he was the first of the third generation of Jordan men to be incarcerated And he would have two or three more brothers to follow him). I had never met him I only saw pictures once or twice but I somehow knew that was him he look just like my brother (tall broad and very comely) so I walked over and asked him his name and told him who I was. He asked a few questions about the family and asked me what I was doing there and then said OK go away and you shouldn't come back here. but if you do next time act like you don't know me!

Five or 10 minutes later when I got back by my aunt we had to go and when we got back in the car Aunt Ann Did cry! I think we all did a little just to see her so brokenhearted.

Untitled

By Niki

There was a chill in the air as I walked to my cab. I had been waiting for this moment for 3 years. As I got in and we pulled away from the place I called home, my stomach got queasy and I felt nauseous. As we went down the mountain side, I watched the world go by. When we made a turn, the contents that were in my stomach ended up on the floorboard and a wave of heat hit my face from embarrassment. I got this fear of dread because of the unknown that lay ahead.

We pulled into a tiny town where I sat and waited for hours. I couldn't understand why I kept getting these looks from people like I had some type of plague. For 3 years I played in my mind what it would be like making my entrance into the world, and in reality it wasn't anything I could have imagined.



As I sat at Applebee's super excited to eat my delicious meal, all I could think about was the golden fries, creamy ranch dressing, and the gooey cheesy saucy tortilla burger. These ladies kept staring, making me feel uncomfortable, grouping me into the people who are always coming and going from the prison. Not realizing that they were judging me because I was sitting in greys holding a bag that was red and pink of homemade gifts. That day I realized that my life would never be the same and that people will always judge me.

As I headed to the halfway house in a place I have never been, I was asked "you just got out?" like I was wearing a big banner saying "Look at me, I am fresh out" constantly. I was exhausted by the time I hit Colorado. Plus it was a strange feeling that I was free but yet didn't want to make any moves because people were watching.

What people don't understand is that no matter how long you're away, from the day you reenter society the world starts stereotyping you no matter what you try to do.

The Struggle Is Real by Kat

It's 2AM on a Monday morning. I hear "Robbins get your stuff, you're out." I'm half asleep when the guard tells me this, so I wasn't sure if I was dreaming or not. Then she yells at me a second time to hurry up. I jumped out of my bunk, grabbed my blanket, pillow and bag with all the standard issued jail items they gave me at booking & I was out the door.

After going down one elevator, one long hallway & through a set of doors, I was in the belongings room, where I traded in the orange jumpsuit and other jail issued items. I was only in county jail for 3 ½ nights and 3 days, but it was the longest 3 ½ nights and 3 days of my life. I walked outside and I see my dad there waiting for me. I gave him a hug, got in the car, plugged my phone in, and then my dad asks me "now what?"

Now what? Well I had a list of things that I had to do, like get to probation within 24 hours of release, call in for random UAs, and pretrial... but I still had to get my (at the time) boyfriend out. My boyfriend had taken all of the charges for me. He very easily could have thrown all the blame on me, but he didn't. I have never thought anyone would do something like that for me especially when it meant facing a possible 75 years in prison. There was an immediate weight of stress dropped on my shoulders at that moment.

I had never bonded anyone out of jail before. I had never been out on bond before, never had my car taken away by the police, had never taken public transportation, never gone

to court or taken any kind of drug test... To say I was stressed out would be an understatement. I honest to god think I lost all sanity in the weeks that followed. My mind was literally, for the first time, incapable of completing a complete thought.

I remember calling bondsman after bondsman, begging & pleading “Please I need him, I’ll be homeless soon all by myself if he doesn’t get out soon....” And all I kept hearing back was “Sure, if you have a house for collateral” or “If you have 10K to put up or” or just flat up “Nope.”

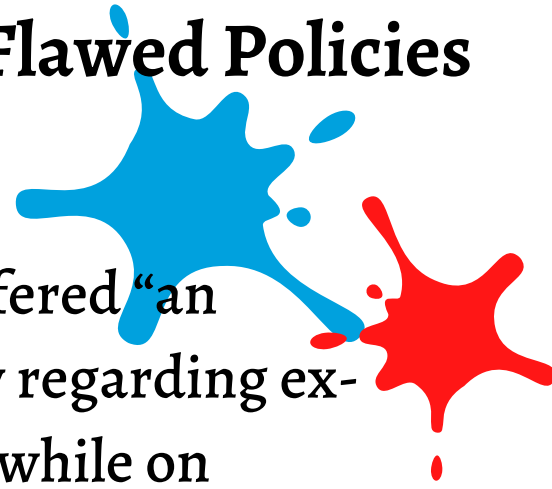
For two weeks straight, I could hardly eat, I couldn’t sit still. I could not function properly due to the anxiety and stress and the pressure of “I need to get him out.”

I was at the point of giving up hope. Until the day I had court and got my first offer. I remember thinking to myself that day as I took the deal, that something had to give, and maybe by taking the offer that would be the thing to set the rest in motion. Four hours later, I got a call from a bondsman, and he told me “Get this much money to put down, and I’ll get him out.”

That bondsman had me in tears of relief and joy. That one person taking a second look past what was on paper and listening to my story and my boyfriend’s story was enough to give me hope again but also light the fire in me again and two days later, he was out. I’m forever grateful. He said yes when everyone said no, and it changed my life and my boyfriend’s life for the better.

Recidivism: The Ambiguity of Flawed Policies

By Tone-Lo



A very near and dear friend of mine suffered “an injustice...!” due to an ambiguous policy regarding ex-felonies/prisoners possessing firearms while on probation or parole supervision.

My friend, Reuben R., was violated and sent back to prison for having a “paintball” gun in his car trunk, after being pulled over and searched by the officer on what was supposed to be a routine traffic stop.

Because he -- Reuben -- didn't know what the word assimilation meant in the policy governing an ex-felon/prisoner possessing a firearm upon release from incarceration, he went to a facility that for recreational purposes allowed him to let off some pent-up stress by playing a game of paintball.

I witness -- firsthand -- sitting in the front, passenger side, the surprise on Reuben's face when the officer asked him to step out of his vehicle and placed him in handcuffs.

The second officer found the paintball rifle in the trunk of Reuben's car.

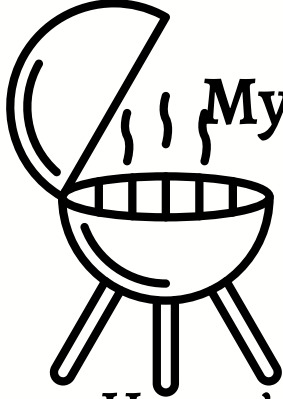
At that very moment, when the second officer asked Reuben if the rifle he was holding up for everyone to see was in fact his...? Reuben answered, confidently: "YES"...at which point, Reuben was taken into custody and carted off to the local jail for booking and fingerprinting.

I was horrified by the actions taken against my beloved friend, Reuben. Because of the officer's loose interpretation of the policy regarding ex-felons possessing guns, Reuben had to go back to lockup for the next 60 months.

And I couldn't stop shaking while thinking to myself, how different my treatment by those same officers, had it been me instead of my Hispanic brother, Reuben R.

It's so weird how things can turn on a dime in a nano-second.

Prior to the incident, we were just happy to be gracing each other's company, with good humor and cheer...then, the "unthinkable" happened...Reuben was gone...back behind bars, and never afforded the opportunity to experience freedom ever again...WHY...because my friend was stabbed to death while doing those 5 extra years, over an apparent debt of a bag of coffee.



My Testimony/About My Only Son

By Anonymous

Haven't heard from my son in days. I am worried. I have a bad feeling something's wrong. Can't eat or sleep.

I was at work, hard not to be upset. Today I found out he is facing charges that could send him to prison for the first time. I just thank God he did not get hurt or worse. And also that no one else did either. He received 18 months and it just broke my heart. I write him every day and send cards. I make sure he has everything he needs. In prison they call him the "Momma's Boy."

I am here in Colorado. And he is in the Bay Area, in Northern California. Can't afford to go and visit. So I hope and pray he appreciates his freedom when he comes home. Still can't enjoy a meal until we have one together. The other day my family had a BBQ and I can't even eat all my favorite foods or have a good time. Incarceration affects the whole family.

Now, my son is a professional artist, barber, tattoo artist, construction contractor, and a mister-mom.

Here We Go Again!

By Lanise Redwine

I am so tired of hearing the word nigger coming out of a white mouth when speaking about me. You would think that being one of the only black female officers in a prison would earn you a little respect. Oh how I was wrong. Today is my 1st shift of work after graduation and I am welcomed with the word nigger as a welcoming gift.

3 months of training from 8:00 am- 4 pm and a state board test of 180 questions. I tested at the top of my class getting 84%. I wasn't going to let that word stop me from doing the best I could at this job. Especially when I had carried this word through life. Being one of 11 black kids in school growing up and now one of the only female black officers.



I started with a shack-down. That takes about 30 minutes looking through the inmate's bunk from top to bottom. I am excited to start. I won't let anything get me out of the excitement of starting a new job. Look at all of this stuff he has. Weed. A homemade lighter. All of it hidden under his bunk. Damn this is a pretty good find. These were the words going through my mind at the same time I heard a man's voice say dumb nigger bitch. I looked up and there stands a bald-headed white inmate.

I caught eyes with the inmate and he was waiting for my reaction. I did nothing but on the inside I was red hot like the inmate's face. Damn! I was thinking. Here we go again. I'm having to just eat being called a nigger. I thought that things would of changed by now but who am I kidding this shit will always be. So. I wrote the inmate up for his statement and for the items found inside of his cell. I from that point remembered who I was and kept my head up knowing always I am black + hated but I always loved being me. Not many can do this job but nothing is stopping me.

