




# FREEDOM COLLECTIVE

POEMS FROM THE UCSP CREATIVE  
WRITING WORKSHOP



Fall 2024

## POEMS BY

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# **Collective Statement on the UCSP Poetry Workshop**

California Institution for Women, Fall 2024

Stimulating our brain, releasing our stories, and letting it rain. A puddle of words aligned into a rhyme in just a matter of time. We have written great things we never would have thought possible. We expressed our emotions straight from the heart. A creative mind gets to tinker with lots of ideas. In writing, there is intense relief from shame. A release of emotion. Calm forgiveness for ourselves. One of the most important lessons in life. Releasing resentment and pain. An amazing way to express ourselves without acting out. Like a fish out of water and thrown back in. An aloe plant ripped open. Oozing healing for us. And then healing itself. Poetry is music to express our mind's power.

Through this class we learned ways to express experiences and feelings that we don't talk about. Writing poetry is a way to release emotions and stress. Creative writing gives us a voice and allows us an outlet for thoughts. Together, we have learned to heal ourselves of all the emotional, physical, mental trauma and abuse. We gave life to poetry in any form, whether about love, politics, the controversial, or the general sentiment, where even the traumatic is beautiful simply because it is raw and honest. In our writing we raged against injustices, remembered some violent, happy, and extreme experiences. This class allowed us to express ourselves without judgement in ways that we otherwise could not have imagined. Through examples, new techniques, and prompts we allowed our minds and thoughts to venture to our inner sanctum, and boldly write about our personal experience that may have been dormant for God knows how long. This group provided inspiration and fostered enthusiasm to surpass our own expectations of ourselves. By sharing our writing with this circle,

we received feedback and positive criticism that allowed us creatively to soar to even greater heights. We discovered more avenues to reflect on how we view ourselves and our situations.

We see poetry is everywhere. Listening to music, we understand why they sing their songs the way they do, because it's poetry. Writing opened our eyes, our minds, and our hearts. There is no wrong way to write. Expressing oneself is a beautiful practice. Through the wonderful energy from this group we feel free. The willingness to share our inner thoughts and emotions has allowed us to embrace a true feeling of unity. We have become a community of creative minds with a common goal of becoming better writers and poets. It brought peace within us to share with others in our commonality.





**JESSICAH COHEN**

## Untanged Nothingness

Searching years for what I couldn't see  
something I couldn't describe  
not a feeling or a thought  
but a perception they conceived.

My thoughts, my dreams, my actions, my fears,  
all for something someone else suggested it to be.  
Empty. Unworthy. Defective. And wrong.  
A familiarity that devoured and blurred the unbounded haze,  
a consumption that annihilated my directionless path.  
Alone in my own compartmentalized darkness.

Conceited. Selfish. Arrogant. Vain.  
Yet now, illuminated by what they never said,  
exposing this mislabeled taboo gave birth to contradictory thoughts,  
the unraveling of my entangled nothingness revealed  
my outward search for love begins within.

## 8¢ Rehabilitation

Proposition 6 expands voluntary prison programs and  
Ensures dignity, choice, and rehabilitation.

Welcome to CDCR where Rehabilitation is our  
Systemic constructions of your "safe neighbor"!

Imagine a job that builds the foundation of their  
Idealistic self image whereas...

Empowerment is derived from a Voice Stifled by  
a demand to conform.

Confidence is derived from Sexual Harassment in the  
form of compliments by those with stars, stripes, and bars

Success is derived from a title that identifies ones  
Master

Value is derived from being selected to receive the  
8¢ payslot with the  
absence of Ageism

Dignity is derived from graciously eating their discarded  
leftovers in the form of their offering of trust.

Integrity is derived from forced secrecy kept only  
Through fear of retaliation.

*8¢ Rehabilitation cont.*

Rehabilitation! Whereas using the tools that  
Broke them is our semantical way to rebuild them

Vote yes on Prop 6

Or vote no on Prop 6

Whereas neither truly promotes dignity

## Unconfined

If love is an end, let me not start  
My battle is mine, and in every sense endless.  
A constant compromise that begins to suffocate  
The walls of my own prison get taller blocking the light  
The thought that love would set me free  
Only separated who I am within.  
If love is what they say it should be  
Let me stop fighting to reach this perceptive fallacy  
Leave me to draw my own invisible lines  
I say what it is  
It's mine to behold.

## Ode to the Top Bunk

Growing up I guess it was coveted  
but now it carries a badge of shame  
A pain that is remembered with an incoming  
Storm or even every time I write by what  
looks like a fossilized millipede.  
I am an adult on the top bunk... yeah.  
Maybe this is their way of circumventing the  
one person to every 100 sq ft rule – 'the other doesn't  
count if they're on top of one another.'  
I try to tell myself it's safer up here solely  
because it's harder to hit my head. Or maybe it  
just feels roomier up here. Neither is true of course  
after all, without a step, without a ladder  
this top bunk is to blame for my fall.  
Up. down. Up. down. Up. down.  
Am I old because the thought of going to  
the bathroom in the middle of the night  
stops me from drinking after 6pm, or can I  
convince myself "I'm just trying to be safe"?  
Perhaps both are true or maybe neither one.  
I hug the wall as much as possible  
the mid sleep full body twitch that  
springs me 5 feet to the ground which  
has already proved to be unforgiving  
is the nightmare that haunts my daily  
climb. The involuntary descension that

*Ode to the Top Bunk cont.*

will no doubt leave me broken – maybe  
even dead. Despite the fear  
Despite the reality  
Despite the shame  
Despite the life long pain  
The top bunk is where I plan to stay  
Until I'm blessed with a bed for two







**AIMEE GANA**

## **TWISTED LOVE**

Fear mirrored in my eyes  
Not even I could rationalize  
Intoxicated by excessive drip  
Ruminating thoughts took a wild trip  
Drowned by fear for you, and not of you  
Obsessed with thoughts to protect you, because I love you  
Slowly, then quickly, all lights went off  
The unthinkable no one thought I was capable of  
Love, in its most twisted sense  
There lies my honest defense  
For robbing you of all things visible and invisible, I am solely to blame  
Until death, I will carry this heavy shame  
A single, despicable, sinful act  
I'll always be sorry, I can't bring you back

## California Prison Moneyfesto

Involuntary servitude  
Throw them big words  
Like we threw away the key  
For their crimes, they need to pay  
Make them work against their will  
And add it to their bill  
Let's make a profit, out of their misery  
Coz its not enough  
To lock them up in a cell  
Banished from society  
Make them all suffer  
While we fatten the coffer  
And tell them when to eat, sleep, and shower  
Feed them slop for their meal  
Nobody'll think it's a big deal  
Cage them, don't care for them

We build more factories  
Inside these fences  
Make them pay for their offenses  
They are raw materials  
Exploit them as much as we can  
Rob them of their dignity  
Just like when we strip them out  
Harass them, humiliate the shit out of them  
Because we can

*California Prison Moneyfesto cont.*

Let them work all kinds of jobs  
Remind them that we own them  
Coerce them, take full advantage of them  
But tell them we're preparing them  
Dangle false promises of early releases  
To string them along  
Like a never ending melody of a song

Farm them out to big companies  
Make sure they'd come cheaper, dollars to pennies  
Than outsourcing to China, Philippines, or India  
We're such geniuses to come up with this idea!  
Windfall profits from slave labor  
Guised as promoting safety of thy neighbor  
No to maquiladoras  
They're bound to work with us  
We'll hide them like a sweatshop  
Society's not gonna know what's up

Punish them with more time if they refuse  
Work them until they drop  
They should be thanking us, instead of crying ABUSE.

## Loving Thyself

If love is a maze  
    of complications and confusion  
Leave me be  
    to find my own way

Then maybe I can  
    Untangle my own mystery  
    Unearth my deepest, darkest fears  
    Unlock the beauty you see in me  
        while facing the source of my contention

So I can  
    discover who I truly am  
    affirm my own worth  
    decide who I want to be  
    create my own boundaries  
        while fighting my own battles

Then I will be able to  
    free myself from judgment, and  
    assert who I want to be  
    without you telling me who I should be

I will find my way  
I will be comfortable  
    with who I am

## **An Ode**

You are made to be used once  
Meant to be discarded  
Never a hand-me-down  
One owner, and one owner only

Like a seasonal friend,  
I called on you  
Every 28 days or so  
And you never let me down

You were there for me  
When I needed you most  
Absorbing my bodily fluids  
My blood, or other secretions

I had said goodbye to you  
A decade and a half ago  
Wrongly believing  
I didn't need you anymore

But boy, you came in handy  
In ways I could not have imagined

You give my chair  
My table, my mirror  
My shoes, and everything else  
A good clean

*An Ode cont.*

You prevent my door  
From swinging wide open  
Even upsizing my boobs  
To the size I was hopin'

Thanks to you  
Floors look good as new  
Scratched floors are prevented  
Bunkie fights averted

You are great for my therapy  
To blot, to spread  
For my artwork  
I use you as a remedy  
But unlike me, you are free

## **Where I'm From**

I am from world-famous chicken pork adobo,  
pancit, lumpia, duck eggs, and so much more.  
Like fried fish with eyes that stare at you,  
Laid out generously at our dinner table,  
as we feast like there's no tomorrow.  
Holding reunions as often as we could  
just finding excuses to come together.

I come from warmth  
exuding from our generous hospitality  
as we welcome strangers to our land,  
who'd get used to the constant smell of fish sauce,  
or of durian that tastes like heaven but smells like hell,  
and the feel of sandy beaches surrounding 7000 islands.

I am from hearing  
two different intonations.  
One raising its level to talk casually,  
another falling in pitch to show respect to the elders,  
our gratitude for their sacrifices running deep.

I am from Filipino parents,  
an overprotective, hardworking mother,  
and a father who is only with me in spirit.  
Doting grandparents I sorely miss,  
and an ever-supportive brother who doubles as a friend.  
I am from a country,



*Where I'm From cont.*

that's either rainy or sunny.  
No other seasons,  
doesn't that sound crazy?

I am from Virgin  
and not so Virgin beaches,  
of black and white sand  
symbolizing the diversity of our land.

I am from coupd'états, Spanish rule,  
American Rule, and Japanese invasion,  
not to mention our globally famous,  
People Power Revolution.

I am from earthquakes, volcanic eruptions,  
typhoon and flood  
making resilience spread in my veins,  
and live in my blood.





**MINDY JONES**

## **Smoke and Mirrors**

Smoke and mirrors all around  
Hiding secrets underground  
Deep and dark, ignore that mound  
Just keep those inmates pounded down  
OPPRESSION

Men in shiny suits know nothing of the truth  
Bloated with power their mission to devour  
The fabric of my reality full of holes and futility  
Expect no honesty or humility  
CORRUPTION

False tongues and trickery spewing  
Screwing with my mind  
Saying I don't see what I know to be  
Someday you might be free, if you listen to me  
POWER

Deception streaming, lies are screaming  
No drugs here, overdoses hidden  
Grab the narcan, death forbidden  
Felons with no voice to shout, no way out  
HOPELESSNESS

*Smoke and Mirrors cont.*

Keep them high the cops supply  
No help coming so keep on numbing  
We'll bring you phones so you won't go home  
No humanity, its pure insanity.  
PUNISHMENT

Cameras snapping, fake smiles flashing  
Don't look too deep, how God must weep  
It's all a lie, but I can't cry  
I must reply  
WITH ANGER!

## **Empty Arms**

If love is a warm hug  
Let me mourn death's theft of that embrace  
Vivid memories a cold reminder  
Of a dimpled smile that is no more

The echo of lost voices and laughter  
Felt in my grieving heart  
Time does NOT heal all wounds  
The pain of what was too deep to soothe

The biblical promise of united life beyond.  
Small comfort to those struggling to accept  
Empty arms is my punishment  
For continuing to breathe.

## Forever Innocent

I belong where the weather is warm  
and happy people vacation. Cheap sandals  
slap on sandy feet surrounded by the  
music of crashing waves and screaming  
seagulls swooping down to steal unguarded  
treats. Where neighborhoods of cookie  
cutter houses spill laughing children into  
blinding rays of morning sun bouncing off  
The inviting surface of sparkling pools.  
Watchers resting in the shade of orange  
trees bursting with ripe fruit waiting  
to be plucked from backyard branches.

Cheers ring out for sweaty players  
scrambling in the tall grass hiding  
the dirty baseball in center field. I belong  
in the joy of stiff playing cards clothes-  
pinned to the spokes of my shiny new  
Schwinn on Christmas Day. Memories of  
young love proudly gifting rings turning  
small fingers green but more treasured  
than diamonds. I belong there forever  
innocent.

## **My Tapestry**

The many names I am  
Create a tapestry of my life  
Weaving threads effortlessly  
The picture of me emerging

"Malinda Jean Meadows"  
Bellowed by an abusive mother  
Signals a need to run and hide  
Fears ingrained forever

Daddy's home! My hero  
Memories of man sweat and cigars  
Quietly softens my childhood  
I am his "Lynnie"

My teenage friends know "Mindy"  
Rebelling against my Mother's "Malinda"  
My choice, My change  
A part of me I can reclaim

Crowded candle lit church  
White dress skimming the shag carpet  
My future waiting at the altar  
Shedding "Miss Meadows" for "Mrs. Jones"



*My Tapestry cont.*

I am "Malinda," "Mindy," "Wife," "Mom," "Felon,"  
All imperfect pieces of the whole  
My identity defined by others  
Until the day I breathe no more

## **Never Forget**

9/11 no longer just numbers  
Forever tied to an unspeakable crime  
The ripple effect of the horror  
Echoing forever in our hearts

I remember

Black smoke, bright flames, haunting screams  
Chilling background for our nightmares  
Falling bodies, collapsing buildings  
A bad movie playing loudly year after year

I remember

The aftertaste reeks of hatred  
Innocent people viciously blamed  
To share a culture, a race, a religion  
Enough to make them guilty

Families of loss physically survive  
But no peace or healing found  
Fear of attack the new normal  
America never feeling safe again

We remember



**CHANEL MARIE KOI**

## **On Days You May Find It Difficult to Stand**

My strong savage warrior Queen running by the beat of your own  
steady drum

On days it is most difficult to witness the sun's radiance playing hide  
and seek between the trees

The tangerine colored skies colliding with gray matter of clouds  
transitioning to day, to night

Oh days that you feel you are waiting and cannot rise you must water  
your feet so that you may unapologetically stand.

Stand baldly in murky waters and like the lotus flower you will bloom  
Wild curls not to be tamed

Honey drenched skin not to be devoured

Adorned with emerald eyes and pure cocaine coated teeth to heart  
Long toned leg to carry your shoulders of strength carry the weight of  
a thousand fallen warriors on your back

Alexander, you are not the first nor the last man to be gracefully  
conquered by a hurricane

Of a woman mesmerizingly obliterating everything in your path  
A pretty mouth pouring out enticing words laced with persuasion as a  
way to pay homage to your sister Cleopatra

You are the Captain, the King, the Lord, the Goddess of your Life  
You are the bullet wounds for every gun that tried to shoot you down  
Those on bended knees before you to pray at your heavenly temple  
may sometimes

Come to prey upon your body yet some are present to wholehearted  
worship your feet

Find the balance to steady your crown queen

*On Days You May Find It Difficult to Stand cont.*

Never mistake sugar for salt because things are not always what they  
may seem  
Command them to move mountains and part seas in pursuit of your  
love  
Because your love is king and it deserves to come second to none  
Rise my strong savage warrior Queen and run from anything that may  
not set you free  
You represent strength, you are the embodiment of impeccable  
beauty  
You have set life to this earth and you have frolicked in the flames  
There is no weakness in your fire, you burn with absolute fierceness  
There is no fault in your stars, you vividly illuminate the darkness night  
sky  
Chanel  
My queen  
Bow to no one but God  
Love not a soul more than your own

## #PrettyPoliticalPropaganda

I think it's quite beautiful how the sun dies every day so that the moon  
could  
breathe everything #prettytothinkso  
God-given life taken by man, throw the rock, hide the hand, and  
somehow you  
Believe this was a part of God's plan?  
Historically rebellious slaves, that racially charged phrase exists,  
We could not produce greater irony than this.  
How dare they resist enslavement? Modern day slavery, incarcerated  
persons?  
How dare they demand payment?  
John, your slave must be broken, it appears to resist oppression,  
There is proof it can be trained, the reassurance is revealed in its  
complexion.  
Minorities are the greatest marginalized group throughout history  
Why minorities support society's status quo of incarcerated people  
is truly a mystery.  
#Alllivesmatter excluding the lives of those enslaved by a judicial  
System support by an America in full support of recidivism.  
Do not be too quick to form an opinion, wait...just listen  
Undying poverty, structured knowledge distribution, perpetuation of  
hate,  
social distortion within media, conflicting ideology represented in  
society, and  
white supremacy supports recidivism! #MakeAmericaGreatAgain  
A felon, a dark mark symbolizing a tainted heart, a tortured soul

*On Days You May Find It Difficult to Stand cont.*

blemished by a crime society has deemed the cause to be seen as less than whole

A Jew, a Star of David symbolizing a tainted bloodline destined to be a tortured soul blemished by more blood coursing through God-given veins

asked not to live up to their highest potential, to live life in vain, not grab life by the reins.

They want you to do better but never better than them. Do you see the mentality? Perhaps we should breach the subject of police brutality.

You saw you were abused, exploited, and victimized by those who were put in

authority to protect and serve? #metoo. I want a god star signifying CIW observance smiling at every single corrupt thing they do.

I am not angry about white privilege, I am perturbed by those who empower it

#monstersyoumake next time a cop pulls you over don't show fear for my future son's sake

And the next time you smile make it genuine

because one day i dream to be proud of the world we are living in

## Metaphor

I am the lotus flower in full bloom in the murkiest waters  
I belong to the lost swamps and forbidden bayou of Louisiana  
I am from a place of hunger rattling my bones  
I made a home out of a human being and I became homeless  
I know that I know nothing at all for the truth is  
that I only exist in a season of my life at a time  
I peek out from mascara painted lashes  
I smile from painted in lips  
I exist solely on passion  
I am born of stardust and sun rays  
I illuminate the darkest night's sky  
I glisten from art unfinished but deeply abandoned  
I speak from the soul of internment camp refugees  
I possess a heart that shouts tribal songs  
of redemption, of hope, of peace.



## **My Aria, My Earth Angel, My Heartbeat**

To pour my whole heart, my boundless energy,  
and the dusty parts of my ancient soul into you

To receive a love without conditions  
every star meant for wishing  
willing to sacrifice it all just to see your dreams come to fruition

You are a reflection of myself  
to be loved by your sweet soul is the greatest wealth

Strong enough to carry the weight of you on my back  
I will always compensate for qualities you believe you lack

I would betray the entire world for you  
light the city on fire, let it go up in flames in your name.  
Giving birth to an earth angel left me astounded  
nothing was ever the same

## For Her

Memories that once haunted me bring clarity to my once bewildered mind  
I have you a crown that never fit atop your head  
I forced roses at your feet yet they dried before you walked upon them  
The birds would not sing for you  
The daisies would not bow to you  
The kingdom would never submit to your will  
I carry the seas of the wars waged against you  
Woman became beast at your hands  
The tears ran dry and cleaned the land  
The land of milk and honey neither dropped nor poured for you  
How could I not see all the meaning behind the way  
The universe rejected you  
My universe saw no need for you yet my heart  
The deceitful thing, oh how it brought great confusion  
To my mind. As full as the Nile overflowing  
In abundance, oh how you caused the rivers  
To evaporate, the flowers to wilt, and the  
Sun to hide behind the trees. Oh, how you  
emptied me



**JEN LITTLE**

## Heal

Stay distracted, ignore this world, busy yourself  
so time flies by. Peek out and see if the world's  
problems have gone by. Oh yes! But no!  
What do you mean?

Look out, there's another one. Fire consumes  
14k of luxurious homes on hill tops. Families flee,  
in a spark, memories of life gone by. Yet we do  
a group hug, pat the dog. Everyone says THANK GOD  
we are alive. The anguish is so enormous. Too  
hard to absorb the thought if one of us died. We'd swore  
we'd never heal. But today we got options to flee and to  
pray for others, help plant new trees.  
5 years from today the black hill top will  
turn over to full and life and green.  
This seems an extreme way to heal.

## Felt Love

Love, let me burn it if it means  
you will always be by my side,  
keeping me warm, flames run through  
our bones. My pumping blood hot  
flowing like lava. Red hissing steam  
of passion that would take  
ice followed by a winter storm  
just to subside the fire from our bones and bodies.  
Melting together as molted twine, twisted  
as a statue of love, rock hard just sex dark  
or dangerous, even deranged.  
With no limit, no barriers, just as  
white knight amorous plunges and the threat  
of his love, rare, rich, so brilliant  
just flawless, never to be divvied as  
we embrace endlessly. In caves or valleys,  
over the sea of love, higher than a Redwood tree,  
incomparable, inseparable, even in our death-  
alone to never die

## Ode

I'm rooted and grounded  
I'm AA, left and right  
Toes curled so tight  
Always swirling  
Needing to forget  
Ready to fight  
Feeling noble  
Rumble roll  
Seeing stars  
I'm sure I've been hit, isn't that something  
I should have felt it  
I remember nothing  
I felt dizzy, tongue full of red ink, tasting  
of copper like bad red wine  
I rolled down the alley  
Coughing up teeth  
Last count of 26 now, they skip like  
I did on Missisissper river banks  
I thought of fun  
yet my tummy turns upside down  
Flipped over the back seat trying to start  
They say I gotta disease  
Alcoholic don't you see  
Over where life is free yet  
I am alone don't you see  
yes every day a beer please

*Ode cont.*

Born with scotch on my gums  
Drink heavily happy or sad, when it's are good or bad  
Celebrating or depressed  
Why so me make the, take guns in hand  
and puts bullet in their brain

## My Name

My name sounds French when I say it  
In the trees blowing in a breeze  
My mother's from Tennessee  
and my Daddy, Germany  
So why Genevee?  
Their soul floats over me as I  
go through this world of catastrophe.  
Feeling, also knowing, that there is  
oo one else like me.

My name has left no shame while  
I've been alive. I pray none up until  
I die. Know my eye weep  
My blood seep,  
the name can write as a heartbeat  
shift up and down Jennifer Yvette Falla  
Healthy squiggly lines in between  
J through Z, see I breathe

My name is fun to write like a  
roller coaster in the sky with lots of  
loops and a few swirls in between.  
Bumping hills, the trees are tall  
and to crash - it even has the  
little eye to dot

Jennifer Yvette Falla



## Heal My Wounds

Heal my wounds I can't feel  
Completely absorbed by this pain  
The anguish so enormous  
Can't deal, just feel

He smothers me with such ease  
He breathes life into me as well  
Leaves me breathless to look into his eyes.  
I just die with such pride. Can't utter a word  
from all that flutters inside  
Just how he makes me melt like  
A cube of butter on a hot rod iron pan  
Sizzling from a stare so intense his pupils sparked  
Fuel of fireworks his brow bone touches his  
Strong nose perfectly flared down  
To the cupid bow of his luscious lips he leaves me  
Full and fresh of color. Fiery, yet sure under his  
Upsetting sam stalked that immaculate  
Touch of silver hair holding the scent of sweet  
Tobacco and hint of booze. His teeth  
Scrape the mustache perfectly tripped that  
Mouth that makes me heart takes me to the river of blink  
Sex eyes on a beach left breathless my eyes  
Tear up my body tenses my insides moan  
I shine and shake my heart stops it's love that  
Forever yet gone. yes he's dead took me

## JEN LITTLE

*Heal My Wounds cont.*

With him but I grieve alone miss him yet  
he is here in special moments  
when I get a smell or sitting alone it comes  
In strong with every detail chiseled in my mind's eye  
can't forget the love that's gone



**L. MAZZ**

## Zero Radius

Venus fly trap grip  
Heart throb pulverized pulp  
Putrid of compulsiveness aura  
Trudging parasites  
A bloodthirsty blood sucker  
Heart turnt thrashing Arrhythmia  
Toxic tolerance quick sand  
Wastefully extravagant  
Inflict alcohol tapeworm malaria  
Nuclear atomic family atmosphere  
Quantum hot lava rush through my veins  
Ebb and flow of self destruction  
Nail scratching on a chalkboard high pitch  
Red waves  
Machete thumping arteries  
Tick sucks till filled fat with blood  
I purged before the blood puss exploded  
Before tarnished gravel  
Muddled through the thunderhead  
Teflon tremendous transformer  
Lack luster to diamond luster  
Fragrant triumph  
Exile of the cypher

## Sand in an Hourglass I

The days drain away  
like sand in an hourglass.  
From the inside of a cell  
one sees just how long an hour lasts.  
All of my days spent in loneliness,  
the environment rotten.  
I live through the phone  
with the fear I am forgotten.  
But a hug from your loved ones  
or a meal cooked from home  
unfortunately are things I can't get from a phone.  
Week after week, nobody comes to visit.  
If they miss me, I don't feel it  
Honestly I don't get it.  
Years have now passed since I started this journey of knowing  
going through it all these hard  
years of growing alone.

## **Sand in an Hourglass II**

Sand pouring through the hourglass, like a cloud pouring rain  
Influenced and taught I was a human stain  
Accident prone, no impulse control  
Ignoring my inner child self took its toll.  
Fried egg for a brain  
Tornadoing down the drain  
Waterfalls of memories from lives past  
Sounds of lawn mower, the sweet smell of cut grass  
G6 of time flying by faster  
Move and move quicker hour after hour  
All the precious years I've missed  
My kids know I still exist  
I feel as though I don't know them anymore  
So fast, they're grown mature  
Memories, children's laughter - makes my heart swell  
Heartache, heartbreaks haunt me, Oh how hard I fell  
Yearns for love and future memories  
Time a slow inching centipede  
I emerge through a whole new shell  
All this time of rehabilitation work will tell  
Came from dysfunction alcoholism's pain, I was crippled  
My vibration waves through the ocean's glittering ripples  
Somewhere in my vast mind  
I knew I'd be better, the sober kind.  
Climbed out of raging hell, rock bottom before  
Ripped the light of hope from my core

*Sand in an Hourglass II cont.*

Perseverance and resilience  
My vision now only brilliance  
Those mental trauma images racing thoughts, shame and abuse  
Will motivate me to tell my truth  
To help change our youth, uplift others  
For all my sisters, fathers, mothers, brothers  
I am now whole  
Mind, body, and soul  
Rose out of the addiction dead sea  
Now a new me  
The true person that god intended me to be

## **I came from**

I came from inventions of homemade potato guns  
and water slides.

I am hyper or hyper focused.

I came from a family of lies.

Alcoholics dysfunctions  
the whole town making assumptions.

Strawberry rhubarb pie

My ancestors Italian and Sicilian

They are pretty much the same

My last name is Mazzarella

Not mozzarella, the cheese, they claim

Backyard 10 pallet high bonfires  
creating lawn fires.

Once I took a 9 hour road trip to Maine.

I come from crisp autumn air, visiting the fall fairs

Seeing nature's painting of crunchy leaves

Lots of drunken parties

The cops showed up to scene

Blueberry fingers stained and pricked,  
till mouth pucker sour.

Nani's stuffed fried squash flower

Lightning fireflies

Mom's spare rib with garlic fries



## Ode to Paperwork

I really can't stand paperwork.  
It is such a waste of beautiful trees and nature  
when we are in a digital day in time!  
This bothers me, I say it everytime  
I get a cop at my door to give me mail  
and it's every day for 5 days, so that's  
5 pieces of wasted precious paper, only to  
tell me that my blood levels are  
good! This is just insane to me how  
much we waste paper here in prison.  
I also have piles of paperwork  
everywhere, assignments, mail from CIW  
tiny pieces of paper with Cash Apps,  
phone numbers, things ripped out of  
magazines and ducats galore! And  
I clean and just put all the papers in  
the pile I just keep on adding to just to  
shove it somewhere else and add  
more to it again and again and procrastinate.  
When will I ever get to this paperwork pile?  
I have a folder from each group.

## **Lead by Example**

Injustices still from generations past  
We need healing, our country desperately needs this fast  
A history of evil toward human kind,  
Where is love  
Where is transparency  
Where is the equality?

Everyone needs to be respected  
Different perspective accepted  
Can this ever be in our sights?  
Equality shouldn't have to fight.

We all need acceptance  
We all need truth and honesty  
If we loved unconditionally, our hearts could bind  
At times this evil world haunts my mind,

For only if we could love another and compromise  
The rest of the world would fall in line



**RCP**

## **A Prisoner's Perspective: "Transpositions"**

Let the clergy, politicians and rich  
experience the dungeon and moments of despair.  
Allow them short glimpses into uncertain futures;  
the bittersweetness of the sun's glow on their faces.  
Live in millennia of desperation and  
hopelessness. Raging against unbridled  
pain. Pain manifested in loss of  
youth, freedom, family, offspring, justice.  
Seek redemption from eyes and hearts  
who judge. Sensing sparks of happiness;  
broken in shards of a wasted life

## Ruby

The unimaginative love of lineage,  
a way to hold ownership  
an homage to death,  
Captured by a beautiful gem to be cherished.

Memory of a beloved sister,  
Ties which bind you to a mother  
a child who grows into a fiery force  
Feeling devalued, detached, untethered.

Hair the color of flowing wheat and burnished copper,  
solid and smooth as a blood moon  
with the strength of a mythical warrior,  
Compassion in a smile.

Family short on loyalty,  
An unlikely hero fallen from grace  
tarnished as if brass,  
A name - outdated.

## Ode to the Fan

Five molded blades of cheap plastic,  
What relief it offers in the sweltering summer.  
Cells 8'x12' sealed as tombs.  
Temperatures increasing; sweat  
pours down your body.

No personal ice allowed.  
Indigent incarcerated seeking reprieve.  
No spray bottles allowed.  
Soaking sheets in tap water to lie  
atop you.

Animals valued over humans,  
Let's issue the dog a loaner.  
Administration and brass; cold.  
Further destroying self-esteem.

Custody and personnel in their  
air conditioned offices.  
Picking and choosing who is deserving.  
Even death cannot bring the indigent dignity.  
Two fans for the rich, still none  
for the poor.

*Ode to the Fan cont.*

The same tired excuses from voices in control.  
Push back; holding feet to the fire.  
Our lead advisors and the animals align.  
Self-serving; community service disappeared.

If indigent had a nickel for every lie,  
The purchase of a fan ensured.  
Those molded blades of cheap plastic,  
Saving grace in the midst of a new heat wave.

## Ponds

In the community I grew up; I was blessed to be surrounded by so many ponds.

The Clawson Dairy Farm was no more than a mile from our home. This pond offered a luxury to the weighed down cows in the heat of a summer's day.

There was Padgett's Pond which as a young girl I saw as vast and beautiful. It had an ancient grist mill attached on the left hand side. It was not a place we swam but as the water flowed over the dam it was a cooling experience on the hot, dirty feet of us children. The water that flowed over the dam into a creek went on for miles. I often crossed that creek to a lush green meadow in my travels through those comforting woods.

My father drove us to a deserted pond. One end was choked with cattails and reeds. Some Sunday afternoons we would take our rods and fish.

Another dairy farm sold chocolate milk in clear glass bottles. This was a favorite treat. We'd enjoy that cold chocolate milk while our feet dangled over the pond and we fished till the sun met the horizon in a beautiful orange glow.

In my late teens I would go to a smaller pond in a neighbor's pasture to catch bass and bream. My mother would clean and fry them; make hushpuppies and coleslaw. A meal we felt fit for kings.



*Ponds cont.*

Lastly the pond I enjoyed most in my teen years had a curved type inlet that a huge, flat rock lay itself into. Groups of us teens would gather in the hot afternoon. In bikinis and shorts we'd lie in the summer sun, loving the flow of the cool water on our backs, a beer, a joint, or a smoke.

Those carefree days are what I often long for from my ponds.

## Where I'm From

I am from wheat fields,  
from horses and green pastures.  
I am from red clay in the hills,  
dust so deep it saturates the soul.  
I am from hydrangeas,  
sweet gums and water oaks.  
Down country roads with white steeple  
churches.  
I am from violence and fear,  
from Daniel and alcohol.  
Guns thundering loud, cigarette  
smoke and Sanka coffee.  
I am from deacons with blindness,  
from rage and resentment.  
Carolyn who is filled with love and hate.  
I am from purple irises,  
vegetable gardens and black tulips.  
I am from hope and resilience,  
a tattered being,  
stomped and ground,  
yet seeking survival.

## Love and Justice

If love is an open flame, let me burn as a meteor  
that plummets to earth, to be absorbed by the atmosphere.

If love is equality and fairness, leave me to the true scales of justice,  
that I not be judged less than by a bank account.

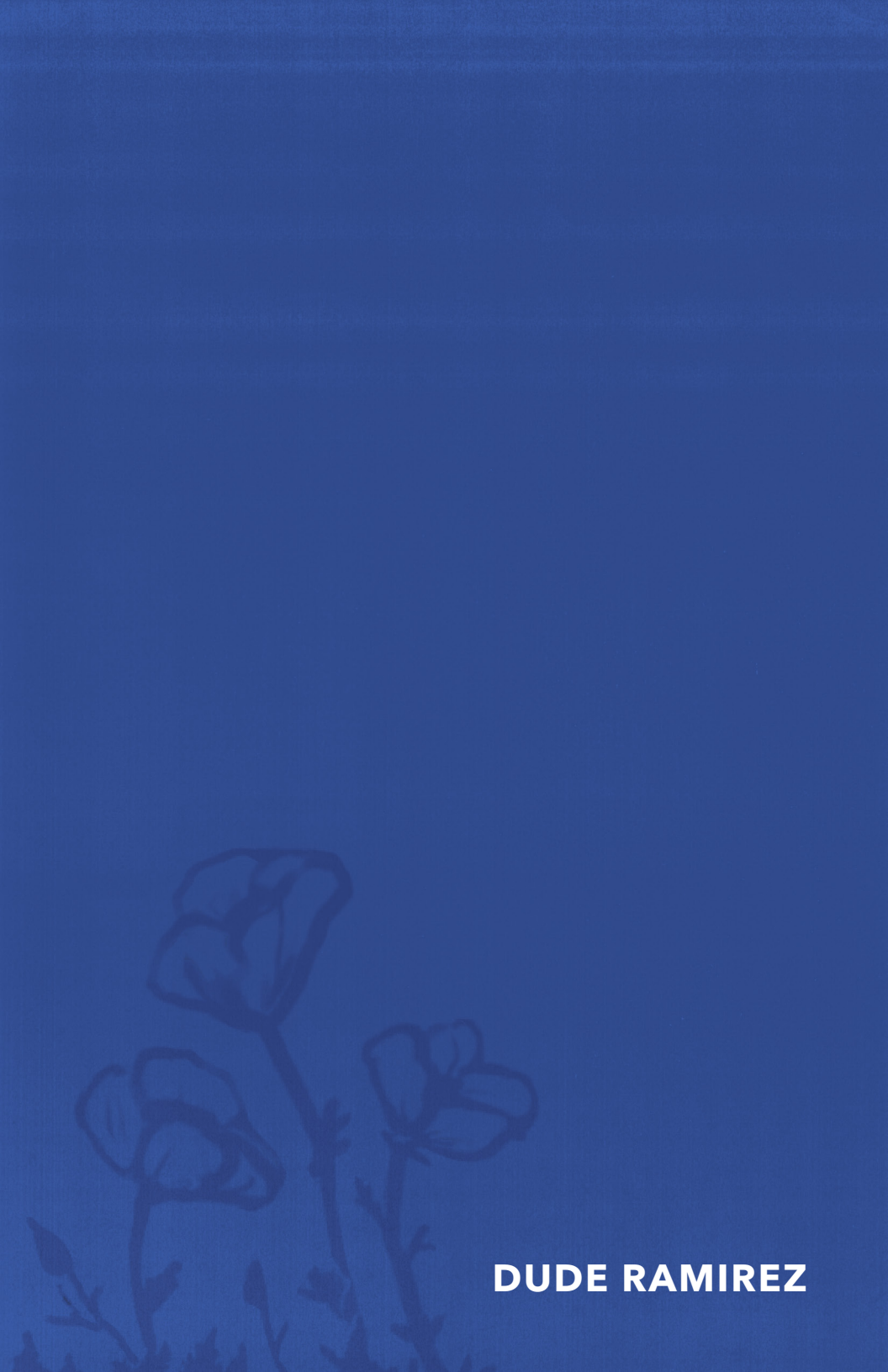
Let my heart be consumed by honesty, so my true nature  
of compassion and empathy shine bright as the moonlight reflects off  
the water.

Allow me the voice to be heard  
for the silent masses who feel abandoned.

Love if it be true, let us utilize its power,  
to encompass the world within our arms, for goodness.

If love is a dying light, we must resurrect it,  
wield its power to restoratively heal.





**DUDE RAMIREZ**

## **I Belong There...**

I belong there with the hurricanes.  
I belong there even in the snow,  
in the summer high humidity,  
and with the hail balls in the spring.  
I do belong there!!!

I belong eating tostones with black beans on my plate  
enjoying with a smile.  
I belong drinking fresh coconut water  
from the coconut trees near the  
ocean, gathered today.  
I belong there sitting with my Abuela's food on the table,  
Lots of food to be thankful for.  
I belong there...

I belong there at the ocean  
freely running through the waves  
coming out the water to dry off  
walking up to the big maple trees  
and stopping to hug the oak trees.  
I belong in Mother Nature.  
I belong there!

## **My Senses**

I know joy is having a reflexologist on a weekly basis

I know joy tastes like a cup of Cuban Cafe Bustelo

I know joy feels like the ocean

I know pain feels like colon cancer

I know pain smells like wildfire!

I know pain sounds like my cries

I know pain tastes like alcohol that doesn't help me

Nor heal my inner pain or my outer pain

I know love feels like my Abuela's hugs

I know love sounds like reggaeton music

I know love is dancing in the rain

I know love tastes like gelato

I know love smells like carnation flowers

## **Confused of True Love**

If love is a puzzle, why can't I fit in  
Love shouldn't hurt, but it did  
Love is like the air, you get sucked in  
I got confused  
I got emotionally and physically hurt  
But they said it was love  
The love I want is within  
Mother Nature  
This is why I feel  
Where I do fit in  
I don't want love to be painful  
I want to feel love like the open air  
Of Mother Nature





O.T.

## White Knight

*Look at that girl,  
I'm gonna marry her anyways.  
That song replays in my head.*

I'm that father that won't  
Accept the man proposing marriage.

Me licking my broken heart and wounds  
Remember all the let downs  
From my past experience.

My secret White Knight battling  
World War II on a mission to  
Win over my heart and yearning for my trust.

He's the medicine coating my wounds

Mission impossible maneuvering,  
Manipulating, getting me to be  
Convinced that he is my soul mate.

He got my mind imagining to  
Say some corny shit about love  
For example:

If love is a climax, leave me  
to ladder my way to the endless

*White Knight cont.*

I said endless, so I want  
My white knight  
In the beginning, middle, and end  
Of my life.

As in sharing  
As in together  
As in one

Wow mission impossible  
Accomplished. You have won  
My heart, mind and soul

I do, my white knight.

## **Middle Name**

I am my mother's first child. I really don't know why in her reasoning she gave me that name.

Just that it's the fact that it's my grandparents name. So I like to think it was to honor the grandparents and not to leave anybody out.

The thought I have, why my mother named me T.E.M.O. I really don't know where or what my name means, or where it comes from, just that my first and middle names are named after both my grandmothers and my both last names are named after my grandfathers.

I remember in school getting teased for my first name and my mother telling me she should have put my middle as my first name because it fits me so well. She said I'm just like my grandmother from my father's side, Elodia. El means He. Odia means hate. So she would say my grandmother is such a hateful person that she hates everyone and everything.

So I'm just like that. What I love about my middle name is that my mom failed to realize she made me like this.

My mother taught me how to cut off my emotions, to be motionless. Show no faces or reactions, to take what is coming without flinching.

I smile now that I'm an adult, it has strengthened me from people that did or tried to hurt me.

*Middle Name cont.*

So yes, let everyone think I am hateful, it keeps people away but those are people that are ignorant, judge the book by its cover.

In the long run it helps me with less headaches from people that really don't need to be in my life. To be honest, I'm the opposite. I have too big of a heart that sometimes I blind myself from seeing the truth.

I would give you my shirt off my back, the last of my money, but I don't have to tell people that. So go ahead and call me Elodia.

## Failure

Failure.

How is it failure when you  
Didn't have the means to help  
Yourself?

Aren't people are supposed to love, help,  
And guide you to success?  
But greediness clouds, they're  
Judgment ends up hurting you.  
They plotted for your failure.

Computer information is misguiding  
You, but humans manipulating the software.  
You do things because the  
Information is wrong.

Books are printed by humans  
Libraries are controlled by humans  
So it's a misprint happens, how  
Is it our fault making mistakes?

Failure  
My understanding is  
What we have control in,  
Is to separate what is  
In our control and

*Failure cont.*

What is not in our control.  
To understand our  
Mistakes.  
Knowing the difference  
And then make a difference.

## Unseen Love

Instead of running towards  
you by fear of love,  
I would evade you because  
of love. I realize what's  
in front of my has never  
been in front of me. Knowing  
the love is real, not in my  
denial of imagery.  
The evidence is smacking my  
face with internal pleasure,  
concluding the embarrassing emotion  
of not understanding that what I'm  
feeling was completely true love.  
My love of life, soon you'll come to me



## Freedom

What to do time time time  
Time is of the essence  
People rushing to CRM, Education  
Or work  
Need more RAC Credits  
RAC RAC RAC  
OHH Education, for sure a milestone  
How about work, I can get a milestone  
Need time off. Need time off.  
Work work, need more credits  
Wake up, take a shower, get  
Ready, go eat, come back, go to  
Work, come back, get ready, go  
To CRM, comeback, get ready,  
Go to education.  
A month later, put in for a 22.  
Get a rehabilitative achievement  
Credit. Yes got some points.  
Closer to home.  
Closer to freedom. Need more.  
Do it over.  
This is my life here in CIW  
Need to be free. Want to be  
Free.  
In the end, all this work paid  
Off.

## O.T.

*Freedom cont.*

Wake up, shower, get ready, go  
Eat, comeback, lay down,  
Take a nap.  
JANE DOE  
Report to the front.  
I go to the front office  
Officer of the day tell me  
Time to go. Get ready to go  
To R&R  
Go to my room.  
Get my things together.  
Go to R&R  
Turn in my things.  
Go to the gate.  
Home sweet home.  
All that work.  
Go to the gate. At the gate  
Open the gate. Walk out the gate.  
Freedom.  
Oh sweet sweet freedom.  
I'm free.

## Strong Women

Everything go fast?  
Go go go  
They're too fast for you  
You start up innocent sometime  
Insecure or confident, knowing or  
not knowing, knowing blood is  
family but people that are not  
family are more family  
than your own family

Is it a concept or  
is it a literal sense  
of woman being knowledgeable  
and single, women must  
be buried or married  
Is it a threat? Or  
is it for our safety from predators

What is it with power  
tripping men wanting I Love  
Lucy wives but then forcing  
our heads down as if we  
we were slaves, servants, or a  
submissive person, husbands  
like Ike Turner use us for their  
own gain

**O.T.**

*Strong Women cont.*

How about those friends that  
are friends  
How about those friends  
that plot against you  
How about those friends playing  
diversions in a devious  
way to make you their boo?  
Aight let me boo you  
In the end of all this  
We are all superior  
and we are all strong  
women



**FREE VARGAS**

## **The Name Poem**

Where I come from is a place of wooden porch swings  
nag champa incense  
creaky floor boards  
rides in red wagons  
of hand-picked wild flowers  
government peanut butter  
my own indoor city skyline  
made from lit candles  
of endless shelves of books  
my favorite animals at the zoo  
of mudpies and muddy puddles  
scolding for muppies and puddles  
who I come from us a family of  
renaissance birthdays  
catholic mass every sunday  
picnics in the grassy park fields  
mom's warm cheesy fideo and  
freshly cooked beans de olla  
of the music from my dad's guitar  
dress up with my mothers jewelry  
and dresses  
scrapes on my knees, falls caught with my and  
of goodnight kisses and good luck tears  
of old concert tees and thrashed  
chucks on my feet  
cat fur on my bed

*The Name Poem cont.*

of destroyed toys by my brother cuz  
Fixed and repaired toys by nana

Where I come from is a place  
that is home

Who I come from is a  
family of love

## **Jobs at the Front / Where As**

Whereas a buttoned up man rolls  
His chair back tossing back  
Snacks whose wrappers are mine to toss

Whereas workplace banter produces  
Forced laughter forging camaraderie

Whereas stale conversation stuffs  
The already stale air. I breathe  
In second hand emissions.

Whereas I swallow my pride  
and ask if I can get to my  
knees to scrub

Whereas the clean fragrant  
people look to me with either  
pity or mild disgust

Whereas my dignity soars when  
I sense a genuine exchange

Whereas they make weekend  
plans and rejoice when eight hours  
means time served. A promise of  
home from one day to the next.



*Jobs at the Front / Where As cont.*

Whereas I joke and laugh  
with an expression of desperately  
eking out, "hey its not so bad!"

Whereas I steal away to a corridor  
to wipe my sweat and feel  
gratitude for having a way to  
pass the time, prove myself useful.

Whereas I know this will soon  
but not too soon be over and  
I too will look out of the window  
of a moving landscape towards  
my home.

## **Dinner Affair**

Are you drunk off me?  
Squeeze the cast of my silky saccharine  
Sweet from the once bright fruit now  
Riddled with rot.

Will you sing with me?  
A duet for lovers bursts through  
Your fingers grip, a melody of  
Wheezes and air catching.

Will you eat for me?  
The acres within betray me.  
Utensils are obsolete. Summon your legion  
Of spice & seasoning to mask a  
Once familiar flavored feast.

The blood has been spilled.  
Plates- cracked.

The table is set for two.

## Offering a Vow

The way I love is not an exact  
shape but a closed connection  
of struggling lines – cowardice,  
rigidity, repeatedly trying for  
pleasing malleability.

The way I love sinks  
deeper and deeper through the veins  
and into the bone. The last uncertain  
drops from retreating fangs? Tongue-  
tingling and tart let me leave  
a taste in your mouth.

The way I love is thrashing &  
clawing its way to a life  
outside survival. My feet are bare  
so that I may walk in your shoes,  
my hair pulled out until unrecognizable.

The way I love shamelessly begs  
to be bought. A “Puppies for Sale” sign.  
Bargaining until free of charge.  
Do my eyes plead for enough affection?

The way I love howls with  
juvenile strength. Let me see you  
lose your cool. Feel my push I feel  
your shove.

## FREE VARGAS

*Offering a View cont.*

I promise myself to you  
outside the limits  
of an embrace to retrieve a fall  
I am here but where to you?  
The way I love is me existing to you.



**JESS M.W.**

## **I Am From...**

I am from bathing suits and flip flops,  
from June gloom and salty air.

I am from sun kissed skin  
and sandy toes.

I am from fire pits and hoodies.

I am from Hawain tropics and Aloe Vera.

I am from Splash Cafe and Moondoggies

I am from this magical, beautiful safe place

Always.

## Ode to Coffee

Strong and dark. Hot or cold.  
Day or night. You are what gets me  
up and out of bed these days.  
The smell of the dark, strong  
delicious aroma puts a small smile  
on my face.

I question people who don't like  
coffee. Its like people who hate  
chocolate. Can you really trust  
those kinds of people?

I'm a simple coffee drinker.  
I don't need all those fancy coffee  
drinks. Coffee should taste  
like coffee.

Just give me a 5 shot  
espresso and I'm a happy  
caffeinated girl

## **To my one and only. My son.**

The past 497 days without  
holding you, reading to you, watching  
you grow, has broken me down  
to the lowest possible point  
I have ever been.

I am afraid that you  
will forget me. That my  
absence from "real life" will  
hinder our relationship. I  
pray every night that you  
feel my hugs, feel my  
undying love I have for you.

At 10 years old you are so bright and kind.  
You tell me that since you  
grew in my belly, our hearts  
are always connected as one. You tell  
me to Believe, to have Faith,  
to have Hope.

You, my beautiful son are  
what keeps my head above water,  
surviving. We will be together again.  
This is not forever, our adventures will continue my love.



## **We are humans!**

To all the C.O's.  
Hear Me...

We are humans! We are  
not the number that follows  
our last name. We are not  
what is written on paper. We are  
humans, hear me!

We have hearts, we have feelings  
We are mothers, sisters, wives, aunties, friends.  
We are humans! Hear me.

Would you treat your own  
Mother the way you treat us?  
What about your daughter?

We are all humans, we all  
make mistakes. Hear me!

Remember we are all  
humans, remember this the next  
time you scream in our faces,  
destroy our rooms or  
get annoyed by a question we ask.  
See us a humans, treat us  
like humans.

**JESS M.W.**

*We are humans! cont.*

Ask yourself, are you so above  
compassion and empathy?

## Sugarpuss

You

Bring out the glitter mermaid in me.

The Hawaian tropics, sun  
kissed skin in me.

The ditching work driving  
down the 5 to track parties  
in me.

The unlimited mimosa at  
Tower 13 on Sunday morning in me.

You bring out the 3 day music  
festivals in vintage Ts in me.

The red wine drinking by the  
campfire laughing till tears run  
down my face in me.

The flying to Ireland and  
standing on the cliffs of Moher  
in me.

You bring out the Glitter Mermaid  
in me.

The bungee jumping off the Bridge to Know  
Where, 1000s memes in me.

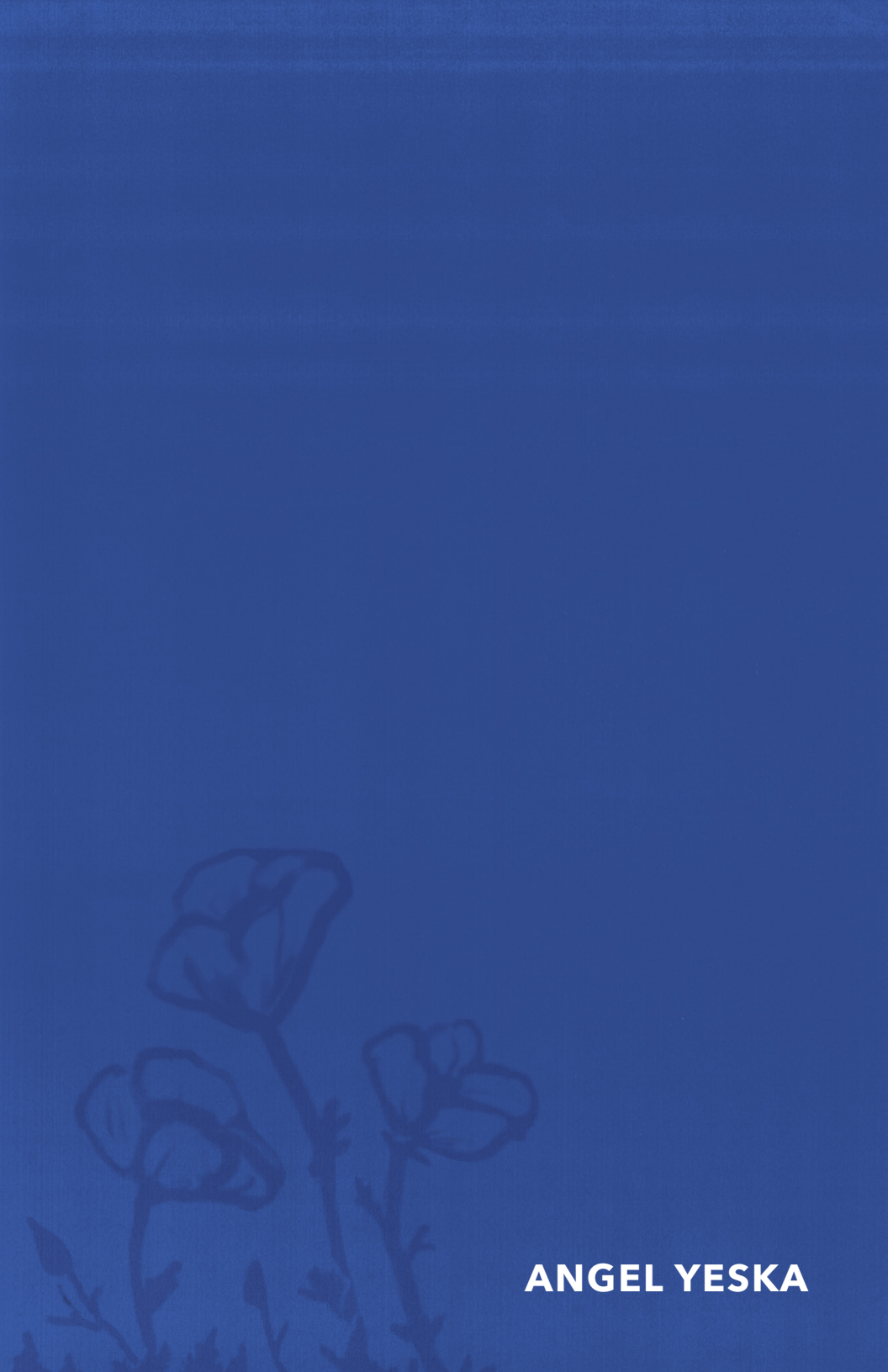
The baby chicks and feisty humming  
birds in me.

You bring out the resting bitch  
face and Oregon Ducks games  
in me.

**JESS M.W.**

*Sugarpuss cont.*

You bring out the  
Glitter Mermaid in me



**ANGEL YESKA**

## **My City**

The city that created this Angel  
Such a lovely city, the City of Angels  
Many dreams and achievements, as well as struggles and  
grievances. My city full of memories,  
both good and bad, happy and sad.  
Starting as a child walking to Mark Twain,  
I read all about Huckleberry Finn and got into G.A.T.E.  
Moving along to my Hosler Days-  
Oh how fun was my Pre-Teen age,  
Riding around on the Jolly Trolley. Oh how I love  
my city, the city I grew up in.  
Jumping off at the skatepark, let's walk past  
St. Francis where I had my first child  
Have a snack at Bobo's, the pastrami chili cheese  
fries are irresistible in my juvenile trials.  
Arrive at the marketplace, now called Plaza Mexico-  
regardless let's go scope out all the new kicks,  
my preference are Jordans.  
Now I'm in High School, I go to both the  
old and the new which is the 4th biggest in Cali.  
How I love my city and its huge crowd.  
I graduate top of my class straight A's  
A social butterfly the queen of da crowd  
Lynwood My City  
Forever Young Crowd!!!

## Jordan

If love is a drug let me shoot you up  
Straight into my bloodstream  
Instant gratification wow! What a wonderful sensation  
The rush, the high traveling throughout my body  
Till it reaches my feet, my visions has blurred  
I'm flying high in the sky, suddenly floating on  
Cloud 96 with my king by my side  
Mentally disturbed but not a care in the world  
My mind is in a twirl, spinning in a swirl  
Total euphoria, pleasure and pain, love or lust?  
I must need a map cause I'm completely lost  
You gave me no direction yet you are my only desired  
Destination. I travel and travel overcoming all  
Barriers, detours, and road blocks, steady switching lanes  
Cheating and beating, always mistreating why are you so  
Selfish and deceiving gosh I just want to be  
Back in your arms floating on cloud 96 you loving me  
Let me know was that really my last fix? Have I lost my king?  
I do all in my power to please you satisfy you and  
Understand you, so why can't I find you?  
So determined to cater to you, chasing that dream to  
Be Ms. Perfect and becoming your queen but silly of  
Me cause perfect there is no such thing  
Happily ever after will that ever be me? Does that even exist?  
Love is blind this I now know and believe for you  
Connivingly dismissed all that I did! Took me for

*Jordan cont.*

Granted and mislead me dragging me to my demise  
For before I met you I was indeed wearing a  
Crown forever young and resilient on top of da world  
On my throne queen of da crowd! Take this blind  
Fold off and let go of the hold you have on me. I'm  
Tired of being lost, disrespected, accepting you  
Demeaning of me, out of character that ain't even  
Me, nothing like the great queen that use to be me  
Now demoralized sticking by you side just to get that high  
Who am I kidding it's  
Loyalty that I ride but your love is  
Poison you can't deny toxic fumes I  
Must depart, looking ghastly I hear  
Your plea telling me not to leave but  
I now am realizing you are by biggest  
Disease! Slowly but surely killing me softly  
Wow I finally found you outside looking  
For me down the road but what is all that  
I see, such beautiful flowers, roses  
All over the greatest decor I've ever  
seen, how lovely, can it all be for me?  
But wait a minute I've finally arrived  
I found you but there's a tombstone  
at your site. What's it say? OMG  
This has to be a mistake its engraved  
With my name indeed I found



*Jordan cont.*

Your love, it led me to my grave!  
But I guess I opened my eyes and realized  
It was a little bit too late!

## Dear Caballo

Dear Anger,  
You tear away at the best of me  
Cloud my eyes and you are all I see  
Nothing else in front of me registers  
You are the demon inside of me  
Ruining the love I found  
Shoving him to the ground  
I yell, I scream, but for what reason?  
How can it be that I can't see him?  
The Jordan I 1st met  
You wrap yourself around my heart  
You come back with memories  
Triggers I forgot I had  
You find my fears and turn them into you  
And I'm losing me as I fight against you  
Because how can I understand?  
That you are just a manifestation  
A creation made by my depression  
So go away and leave us be  
Don't do it just for me  
Do it for the man who loves me  
Despite the effect you have on me  
I plead that you uncoil from my heart  
Stop tearing my life my love my world apart  
Retreat from my life and set me free  
Only then can I truly be

## Da Cucui's (The Boogie Man)

To serve and protect is their duty they say  
Not once I can stay they have served or protected me  
Al contrary stereo type and harass is what I get  
Never will I call them not even in times of need  
For they are the boogie men to me  
Yes, Da Cucui's indeed  
When I see blue and red flashing flights  
my stomach drops to my thighs  
just like a roller coaster ride.  
How sad and krazy it is to me that the  
one's that are said to serve and protect me  
are really the only ones I truly fear.  
No matter what, they'll always be da cucui's to me  
Fuck da police! Sheriff forever scary  
The boogie man they will alway be to me

## **Jessca**

A beautiful new baby girl  
Entering this horrible sinful world  
What name can we give to such an  
Amazing blessing into our own world  
"Yeska" says mom  
Are you crazy!!! Yells Dad  
Yeska means marijuana in spanish  
Is that what you smoked?  
Let's name her Mitchell you silly ole girl  
No way am I naming my daughter  
An old hags name like Mitchell  
Jessica how about that  
I like the sound of that says Dad  
Now so beautiful like a blue skie  
Green and so fresh like mother nature  
Healing like good herbs  
Sweeter than any pastry in this world  
Smiles so big at this lovely resilient  
Wonderful amazingly made baby girl  
But wait her birth certificate  
Says Jessca, Mom said my Angel  
That god has created is so pure  
And natural that is her name  
Heavenly made to put smile on  
Everyone's face leaving out  
The "l" was never a mistake!



**ZABEL JOUBALIAN**

## **Language of Love**

If love is a devotion, let me be without restraints  
If love is an opposition, leave me to counter  
If love is a caress, let me be spontaneous  
If love is caring, let me be lavish  
If love is regard, let me be without tanglement  
If love is concern, let me mirror  
If love is presumptuous, let me be unconfined  
If love is combat, let me surrender  
If love is commitment, let me be generous with time  
If love is toxic, let me be free  
If love is a paper, let me be the ink  
If love is a serenade, let me be your singsong  
If love is a beautiful thing, let me be your fragrant rose  
If love is constraint, let me be autonomous.

## Where I am From II

I am from church bells ringing on the hour  
I am from using the subway  
I am from being multilingual  
I am from hockey as a religion  
I am from Lillies of Valley  
I am from hula hoops for gym  
I am from tiny milk delivery doors  
I am from fashion shows  
I am from enjoying the Monalisa  
I am from admiring the Sistine Chapel  
I am from warm yogurt soup  
I am from sewing clothes with a foot pedal  
I am from Home Economics classes  
I am from shoveling the winter snow  
I am from St. Patty's Day Parade  
I am from fishing for flounders  
I am from dancing in cultural Centers  
I am from Anais and Artemis neighbors  
I am from the infamous yellow brick road  
I am from historical tea Party  
I am from being a minority in a foreign country  
I am from the descendents of the first Christian Nation.

## **Prison Life**

Considering us as rejects of society  
Creating portraits to escape reality  
Getting threaded to elevate our self-esteem  
Favorable response being "not right now"  
Perspiring in the fabric sweatshop  
Majority of our grievances are refused  
Answering yes sir when disappointed  
Often getting punished for our creativity  
Serving us miserable meals  
Gardening without tools  
We get rehabilitated in losing our dignity



## **Celebrating my Accomplishments**

I began the day getting ready to tackle my long list of things to do. Call a new attorney, Write to a senator, do my homework, attend two self-help groups, cook food, change my sheets, rearrange two shelves in my locker, answer my emails, cut my bangs, water the dayroom plants, plant fava beans in the backyard.

I began the day at 4:15am woken up by first draw officer to get ready to make a day trip to the hospital. I emptied out my walker from all of its attachments. I put away my watch. I made coffee and placed it in a water bottle to transport with me. I swallowed all of my 13 medications. I lubricated my eyes. At 5:00am I went to CTC to wait for my transportation bus. At 6:30 the two transportation officers arrived with the bus. We arrived to Riverside University Hospital at 7:55 am, my Dr.s' appointment was for 8:00am. I am shackled at my hands and feet. It was very difficult to walk with chains sliding behind my feet. So embarrassed to walk through the Drs waiting room with shackles.

I began the day contemplating as to why I am still holding on to resentments from the past. I believe my dream of my past aroused this feeling within me. I started contemplating if I have healed from my past traumas. What is my missing link to recover from my calamities? Perhaps I have not connected the final dot yet. I am opinionated towards strengthening my faith in God.

I began the day deciding to do all the things that make me content. First, I spent one hour gardening. Then I had a cup of coffee in the backyard listening to birds chirping and admiring God's gift of

*Celebrating my Accomplishments cont.*

nature. Then I attended an Art Class and watercolored a portrait of my daughter. Upon returning to my domain I made plain yogurt. Making jewelry brings out my endorphins since I worked alongside my father in the summers in his jewelry store in Downtown Boston. Henceforth, I make jewelry for the next two and a half hours. I ended my joyous day crocheting while watching comedy sitcoms. I celebrated my daily accomplishments and thanked God in a prayer.

I began the day thinking of my weekly to do list. After preparing for the day and having two cups of coffee, I rearranged my weekly to do list in order of priority. I sequenced them in a fashion as to which will help me the most toward my path to freedom. I prayed that I had the physical and mental health to accomplish my elaborate weekly schedule. I know visualizing my future free life tremendously assists me in completing my weekly tasks.

## Ode to my New Glasses

I am so fortunate to have my new eyeglasses  
I wake and see the world clearly  
Her burgundy color makes me look chic  
Pleasant remarks from others make me content  
I am pleased with the omission of the line in her  
Everyone tells me that it is very fitting for me  
She has produced much attention towards me  
I can now see my world clearly  
My vibrant daughter chose her for me  
Sometimes I don't recognize myself in them  
I am blessed to have her in my life.





## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Jessicah Cowan** is a Southern Cali Poet, audio engineer, web developer, and college graduate whose heart is home with her two amazing children who make her proud every single day.

**Aimee Gana** is a mother to two wonderful sons, a life coach, a web developer/designer, an audio engineer, and a published author who holds a college degree in Communication Arts. She loves writing and uses her lived experience to flow through her literary projects. Aimee has a fun side though, that is known to those who know her best.

**Mindy Jones** is a 70 years old woman currently living in Corona California but her heart will always be tied to the beach. As a certified drug and alcohol counselor she provides hope and healing to all who are ready to change their lives.

**Chanel Marie Koi** is a free spirit possessing a poetic heart and an ancient soul. A lover that fell in love with a taker and consequently became a giver. A living and breathing enigma craving empirical truths. A magical being withholding power unseen weirdled by a mere pen/ A fallen earth angel that learned how to fly again.

### **Jen Little**

**L. Mazz** is a certified chef who likes to write poems, be creative, and loves advocating for others. She is from the east coast and has three children. She wants to start a non profit to help create change in the court systems, fighting the biased racism of today. She believes we need change in the judicial system.

**RCP** is originally from down south. She has a unique sense of humor that comes from life's experiences.

**Dude Ramirez** is 5'9 feeling fine, like aged wine. Poetry is rewarding and his coping go to.

**O.T.** is from Lynwood California. Her habit is reading, but who would ever know that she could actually be good at writing. She is just a beginner on her way to the big time. LOL who knows but she can tell you at least she is trying.

**Free Vargas** loves her hometown of San Diego. She also loves her one cat, Happy, and her dog, Taco.

**Jess M.W.** is from the sunny sandy beaches of CALifornia. A loving mother to her amazing 10 year old son. A daughter, sister, auntie, and friend to all. She is an active coffee drinker and dog lover.

**Angel Yeska** is a happily divorced mother of 4 beautiful precious souls. Devoted to them to change her life for the better, she has learned to release a lot of her demons on paper. She is from the wonderful city of Lynwood but dreams of exploring as much of this world as God permits. Living my best life, she is still forever young and queen of da crowd.

**Zabel Joubalian** lives by the quote "If you want something done ask a busy person." Zabel enjoys traveling, languages, culture, art, poetry, museums, gardening, jewelry making, dancings, cats, crocheting, walking on the beach, and sunsets.

# About the UC Sentencing Project, California Coalition for Women Prisoners, and UCLA Center for the Study of Women|Barbra Streisand Center

The **University of California Sentencing Project** (UCSP) mobilizes interdisciplinary and multi-genre modes of research and dissemination to address the needs of people who have faced long-term sentences in California's prisons designated for women.

To find out more information or get involved in UCSP, contact us at [ucsentencingproject@women.ucla.edu](mailto:ucsentencingproject@women.ucla.edu) or see our website: <https://csw.ucla.edu/ucsp>

The **California Coalition for Women Prisoners** (CCWP) is a statewide organization of people inside and outside prison walls that monitors and challenges abusive conditions inside California prisons designated for women and advocates for the release of incarcerated people through legal advocacy, campaign organizing, policy advocacy, grassroots media production, and mutual aid efforts. CCWP sees the struggle for racial and gender justice as central to dismantling the prison-industrial complex and prioritizes the leadership of the people, families, and communities most impacted in building this movement.

The **UCLA Center for the Study of Women|Streisand Center** works towards a world in which education and scholarship are tools for social justice feminism, improving the lives of people of all genders. The UCLA Center for the Study of Women is an internationally recognized center for research on gender, sexuality, and women's issues and the first organized research unit of its kind in the University of California system.



## Acknowledgments + Sources

During the course of this Creative Writing Workshop, we read many poems and pieces of creative writing, and created writing exercises responding to their work. Below are some of the poems we read and wrote alongside:

Maya Angelou, "Woman Work"

Frank Bidart, "Guilty Of Dust"

Anna Blaedel, "Making Love Powerful"

Karen Brodine, "Woman Sitting at the Machine, Thinking"

Sandra Cisneros, "My Name" excerpted from *The House on Mango Street*

Wanda Coleman, "Sonnet no. 18"

Mahmoud Darwish, "I Belong There"

Diane Di Prima, "April Fool Birthday Poem for Grandpa"

Renee Gladman, from *Calamities*

Choman Hardi, "We will not be bystanders"

Benji Hart, "Layleen's Bill (With Revisions)"

Harmony Holiday, "Somebody who loves me"

Harmony Holiday, "Then I Found Harmony Brown"

June Jordan, "Financial Planning"

June Jordan, "sunflower sonnet / number two"

George Ella Lyon, "Where I'm From"

Bernadette Mayer, "Everyone makes love to their bereft and go" (with revisions)

Bernadette Mayer, '[Sonnet] You jerk you didn't call me up'

Valzhyna Mort, "An Attempt at Genealogy"

Pablo Neruda, "Ode to things"

Kinzie Noordman, "Ode to the Eugenic Practices of CDCr"

Marge Piercy, "The Secretary Chant"

Sylvia Plath, "Song For A Revolutionary Love"

William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 130: My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"

Warsan Shire, "The Birth Name"

Danez Smith, "Bare"

Layli Long Soldier, "WHEREAS"

Diane Seuss, "Love Letter"

Tanaya Winder, excerpt from "Words as Seeds"

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