UCSP
UC SENTENCING PROJECT

FREEDOM COLLECTIVE

POEMS FROM THE UCSP CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP



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Poems By

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AIMEE GANA

AIMEE GANA

A Day Without Ducats

I wanna move away from the limelight
Without anyone thinking
I'm going down that road again.
I want one full day of not having to
Put on my big girl panties
Or forcing a brave smile
Or putting my game face on.

I want a 3-day pass to play a victim
Without anyone reminding me
That I am not the victim here.
Because all there is to this
Is that I'm mad as hell
And frustrated like crazy
With a justice system
That's everything but just.

Hell, I want a full month
Where people won't expect
Positivity from me.
A month where I don't have to show
Determination or resolve, and
Of not caring to share
A side of me you haven't seen.

I need me some fight song
For days like
When I don't want to carry on
Or bravely face this heaviness
Of a cumbersome load
Of complications and frustrations
And dangled promises
That are weighing on my mind and body
Consuming me with so much angst.

I need me some me time
A day without ducats
Just locked in my room
All by my lonesome

So I could cry my heart out
And throw myself a pity party
Attended only by my rising vexations
And JT singing Cry Me A River
While I'm doing my ugly cry
And nobody is around
To call me a drama queen.

I want to pretend I'm on top of a mountain
Where I could yell at the top of my lungs
How fucked up I really feel
Instead of pushing my thoughts
To hide in my subconscious,
Burying my emotional truth
With work and obligations.

I don't want anyone telling me
To knock it off coz
I'm not a robot nor a light switch.
There is no set timeline
For what I'm going through.
There may or may not be
In your opinion
Rhyme or reason
For my emotions.
And you can judge me all you can.

But I think I earned that right
To feel what I'm feeling.

So, let me be okay with not being okay
For now.
And trust this method to my process.
A few steps back
Is all I'm taking.

AIMEE GANA

Meta For

If I were a pickleball court
I'd be your go-to place
And you'd visit me
In a heartbeat.

You'd be pumped to see me,
Spend time and hang out with me
To enjoy what I have to offer.

I'd be a happy memory,
A source of fun,
A place where you'd unwind.
Instead, I'm a scar that reminds you
Of damage inflicted,
Indentations that run deep,
Needing more than time to heal.

I'm heavy traffic
You take a detour to avoid.
An awkward moment
You'd rather keep away from.

If I were your PS5
I'd have your undivided attention,
As well as your enthusiasm.
All eyes on me,
You'd be absorbed in me,
Not wanting to be disturbed.

Instead, I'm a card game player
Trying to score points with you.
Hopeful to win your hearts,
Betting on diamonds
That my love for you
Is greater than that of others.

I'm a lecture and a sermon
Struggling to find creative ways
To engage you in conversation.

If I were your iPhone
I'd hear your voice
At all the right moments.
I'd be with you wherever you go,
Carrying memories through selfies,
Or social media posts
I'd be the security blanket
That will make you feel safe
Protecting you from anxiety

Instead, I'm a casino player
Who ponders my chances
Of you, picking up my call
Or answering my messages.
But waiting for you is a gamble
Worth all the risks.
My patience is wider than the sky.
My love for you, deeper than the ocean.

If I were your favorite pair of Clarks
We can go on walks together
Down memory lane and
Reminisce on the good we shared.
I'd be moving with you
As we go through life's struggles
As well as its many joys.

I will go the distance with you
Make great strides together
And reach a destination called healing.

Instead, I'm one of those discarded books
I used to read to you every single night
To put you to sleep.
I'm a favorite blankie
That yearns for warm hugs from a distant past
Thrown in a dark bin
Devoid of comfort and hope.

I would love to be your sushi
And be your favorite meal.
You'd welcome me with excitement,
Invite me to your dinner table,
As I'm rolled in your concept of goodness
Garnished with bits of your love.
Dipped in your mixture
Of acceptance and unconditional love,
Prepared in the context of your forgiveness.

Scorned

I see the way you look at her
But you say I'm just tripping.
Deny it all you want
Say nothing's happening
Just me, imagining things
Leaving me thinking
If you enjoy taking me for a fool.
Coz
I sure as hell see
That burner phone you're hiding
That extra bottle of cologne
You conceal like your weapon
And I certainly didn't buy you
Those boxer shorts you're wearing

I don't enjoy going through your phone
Nor your glove compartment
Or tracking your whereabouts by the hour.
But it proves I'm not crazy
Only that you're cheating on me.

You have me screaming into pillows
Tear my hair while breaking in tears
Losing myself in the process.
You have me wandering around to find
Any ear I could ramble on
Sounding like a broken record
About your broken promise
You have me noodling around shops
For retail therapy
Whiling the time away
Gazing at absolutely nothing
Drawing a blank stare
You have me journalling like there's no tomorrow
Filling up pages
About your dirty little secret
That hurt me to my bones.

AIMEE GANA

For the record
I don't enjoy faking smiles
Or sucking it up
To put up a front
Just as I don't fancy silent dinners
Awkward movie nights
Or fake orgasms
It feels weird
Toning down tense conversations
Or censoring my words
I hate pretending it's okay
Because it's not.
Betrayal is a bitch that gives me the shivers.


Amelia

AMELIA

7,000 Days

If one only knew the everyday struggle
I wake up to
The cacophonous critic so loudly in my head
Swarming…ruminating…it should be me dead instead
The shame that lingers still, will it ever truly dissipate?
Or just creep…and crawl…like "you will never be enough"
type of bait
If one only knew the soul-stealing hell that I've been through
There'd be a shift of perception in realizing
I am human too
I'd be met with compassion instead of cynical skepticism
There'd be sparkles of empathy…joy like a child
The smell of authenticity would permeate…flutter…the sky so wild
If one only knew the depth of my sorrow for the pain I've caused others
There'd be understanding and soft pastels in their tone
We'd rise together in kindness…
in love being what we clone
If one only knew I grew up believing
I will never be enough
A VICTIM I AM NOT
Yet the way I am spoken to might soften and become less rough
If one only knew how genuine my heart is in the ways that I love
There'd be warmth…openness…
massively unheard of
Yet Gratitude Unbound for the woman I've become
These 7,000 days eliminate the need to ask, "Why?"
Remarkable Transformation
Caterpillar…Cocoon…
And Now…Butterfly

B-E-A-U-T-I-F-U-L

Beside myself in wonder,
Exactly how one steals one's thunder?
Analyzing thy restraint,
Upon using wildly, frenzied war paint.
Taught thy inner soul to believe,
In one's heart on one's own sleeve.
For there remains true beauty within,
Unforsaken and forgiving despite suffocating sin.
Lingering…lost, the remains of chaos–
I am Beautiful.

AMELIA

Tea

Ginger, Honey, Green, and Peach,
Bring sweet daydreams of the beach
Soothing Peppermint, especially Sleepy Time
Relaxing in jammies which calms the mind's rhyme
The Queen called Darjeeling, the champagne of thee
English classic Earl Grey, all the best British remain the joie-de-vivre
Adding cream and honey made from a carpenter bee
Collective with friends paired with a colorful charcuterie
Tea is a place of wild jubilee, sophisticated yet whimsy–
–to a degree
All I know is that when one drinks tea
One feels quite English like Royalty.



Dude

Spooky Spiders

Where are my spiders
They are different in sizes
Where are they crawling

Creepy crawlers I Love
Put one on your back, I'll laugh
Don't be afraid of spiders

Yellow-green spiders
I love them crawling near me
Crawl toward freedom

Closed Eyes Open to Resilience

October happened
My eyes went dark on me
I felt like Helen Keller
What do I truly see now!

The darkness I felt within
I am using my senses
Don't stay down. Climb up C!
It was very painful for me
I went on a my spiritual journey
I swam to my big ocean

I learned to be with Zen
My frustration I'm feeling
My eyes can see nothing
Can't give up! You're too strong!
Your light is shining inside

My beautiful eyes
You gave me powerful strength again
I see much brighter
Remember care for your eyes
Brighter lights are ahead of you!

Mother Crumpet Love

Thank you Mother Crumpet for giving me life
You endured lots of pain during your pregnancy
Which was emotional stress and physical
Thank you Mother Crumpet
You had a C-section to save my life
You were willing to go through all this pain
Just so I could be brought into the light
Then you were told by doctors I was
Too damn little to hold
Your world turned upside down with
More stress - more anxiety - but you
Pulled through emotionally and physically
Because you came to see me daily
While I was hospitalized
For the first 11 1/2 months of my life.
I love you Mother Crumpet
Mother Crumpet you showed me
UNCONDITIONAL LOVE
By giving me life
I'm sorry for the pain I caused you
Giving birth to me
Mother Crumpet you are my LOVE!

I Am

I am exhausted from the move
I am a thinker like Sherlock Holmes
I am confident

I am hungry for a Cuban Sandwich
I am One with Mother Nature
I am a poet

I am a person who loves making you laugh
I am a jokester
I am happy to be here in Poetry

I love being me



Elijah León

Sidewalks

I walk silently but thoughts are so loud
Cracked sidewalks, visual pain I see above ground
I walk silently…I walk vividly
I see them running in circles
Unhealthy dirt tracks, unhealthy minds
Relentlessly trying to…
Getting nowhere
Cold concrete faces, tear stained traces,
Dripping pain far goes
Down running legs with each step taken
Endless deep rooted seeds
Filled mazes of sorrow
Hoping to see a better tomorrow
Years of shame
Sealing an unseen fate
Cracked, uneven, unbalanced sidewalks
Walking broken
Hurting and lots
I catch my balance
As I trip over, unaware pain of someone's
What's broken inside
Unappreciated, unwanted, unaware steps
To feel the visibility of chaos
Is uncomfortable vibrations of
Insecurity – I know
Yet what's happening goes
Unnoticed – but … "I" see them
I wonder what happened in their life's story

Hey watch out for that crack!
I fell there before!

Broken sidewalks
Walking broken

No one sees the unseen
No one cares what's lost
I walk silently but Inside…
Inside I want to scream
This is not a dream

I see "once me"

ELIJAH LEÓN

Love of my Days

Pale radiant light green rays
Magnetic forcefield of my days
Amazing reckless beautiful ride
Volcanic flower erupting with nothing to hide
In your grasp I stay trapped willingly
Venus unravels, unmeshed, untwined
With giggles of laughter that no one else knows
Kryptonite arrow inside my heart grows
Happy moments are like beauty
Miles of seashells on the shore
Can't wait to grow old with you and years from now
To see what our next life too has in store

We Belong

Day and night its a fight
There goes ICE nothing nice
Tearing families apart, no heart
Hard working man, women and children's dreams
They belong here, the land of the free
The Constitution has been masked
Another raid, another task
Force, unnecessary force
Leave the people alone, that's my
Sister, my brother, you're taking away my friend
So much hate, faces with no names
The day leaves and the night comes
Again there's more taken from their homes
Hate's wrong, stay strong, you belong


Elsa Thompson

The Morning After

Last night, we were
    whirling gyrating dancing
    we were chanting and pumping our fists
    we were letting our rage out in disco-like rhythm
    dissing the identities they labeled us with
Last night, we were
    marching parading celebrating
    we were topless and surgery scarred
    we were kissing each other with open-mouthed abandon
    trading compliments like NASDAQ Gone Wild
Last night, we were
    sharing moments of silence and pain
    we were gripping strangers hands like life rafts
    we were fishnets and freedom and fuck the cops
    because the first Pride was a riot
Last night, we left
    hickies and flyers, phone numbers and pins
    lipstick-stained cocktail napkins and handwritten signs
    broken sunglasses and wrappers and zines
    'cause the trash cans were too full of our joy
This morning, he is
    first-car-in-the-parking-lot early
    black coffee thermos and keys-at-the-hip
    the button-down blue-collar janitor
    to sweep our solidarity away
He is
    paid to remove the detritus
    contracted to corral the debris
    appointed to restore order
    to the city's picturesque downtown
Last night we were rainbows and glitter
Last night we were kings, we were queens
Last night we were broadcast on the 8 o'clock news
    and our electric din carried to the kitchen
    where he made himself a turkey and provolone sandwich
    then leaned over the couch
    kissed his husband goodnight
    and went to bed early, honored
    to wake up to such a beautiful mess.

With credit and appreciation to José Muñoz's Disidentifications

ELSA THOMPSON

Signature

It would be cruel to say that you were
the reason I am like this
But I am interested in cruelty now
Not invested, no, but interested
in the art of mechanical separation
in the sorting of ourselves
into different piles of suffering
If I blamed you for this
If somehow you could be held accountable
For the heavy mass of torsos and flesh
I find myself at home in-
I wonder would you even flinch
Would you cast down an eye or two
Or would you sign your masterpiece
With a flourish, right down corner

Cells

Ah, I see. So this is the
Beginning of the End.
An overachiever, you've already started
Sweeping me from the baseboards
Ushering me out of the door and
On my merry way.
You do not believe in goodbyes, you say,
Or promises, or people.
I am sensing a pattern.
How can I show you that I
Am the elephant I've always claimed
That feet, not feelings, miles, not meanings,
Will mark the distance between?
I am going away, and yet
Your fingertips dented my heart
I beat an irregular rhythm
I march to an abolitionist rum
I am always alongside you,
Among you at the close
I will scream this into being
I will scream this to the sunrise
I will scream this from their rooftops
I will scream this from your dustpan
I will scream this from your broom
As you escort my errant skin
From cells
I no longer occupy.

ELSA THOMPSON

Villainy, A Draft

Step right up, step right up--
I'll strap myself to this wheel of fortune
While you practice your knife-throwing skills.
An oversized giraffe won for the kiddies,
my torture reflected in its glass-button eyes.

My own witness blindfolded, I find you by scent:
it's fear, you claim, though it's buttered-popcorn rich and sickly-sweet.

(I wonder if they can make out my expression
from the top of the ferris wheel.
I'm going for "resolute-yet-penitent.")

Alright, perhaps that's not Fair.
This is not Amusing, you remind me,
The metaphor too Big and over-the-Top.
Something more mundane, then;
a more domestic symbol for my new everyday role in your life.

I can be your fat little pincushion, perhaps,
welcoming your stings and jabs while remaining
stolidly at your side

I'll be your knife block on kitchen counter
my back slotted for your
Chef's Serrated Santoku Six perfectly aligned stabbings
of steak knives
your loathing, registered at your local department store
and paid for your husband's great-aunt/ your college best friend.

(They love the pattern you've picked out:
the one where you knew I was trouble all along.)

Again, you seem displeased with my efforts,
the fact that I have not brought my own sharpener.
I only want to carve some insight into this recipe
you've inherited and seem intent to hand down.

Okay. For you, I'll try again.

How about I'm the side of lamb
Sliced up and sold to the ticketed waiting
Measured, weighed, distributed
to those hungry for flesh and sink and tear.
Heavy and raw, I nourish you
Your conquest proven by receipt
(and purchased for a song at the club member's price.)
Feed your family on my headlines
the warning,
the easy narrative.

Sated, the lot of you tumble towards sleep
and bedtime-story my complexities away
Pausing only to floss and flick the remnants
of my life from between your teeth.

Free

Name Blame

How do we know
when we want something if we deserve it?

Do we have to take all the
Steps or do we just know them?

Funny how our names can tell
a story.

My name is Free.

I am not.

I was told I belong in a box.

I do not.

I was told to behave.

I will not.

I was encouraged to rely on faith.

I cannot.

I wish my name could tell a
Different story.

Carry the One

No one has ever fully seen
Their own face.
        Just a fact that's true.

Would we like what we saw?

Turn the page.

Close the door.

Scratch it out.

Carry the one.

        And I'm still me.

Your shoes are two sizes too big.

Was paving the road a group effort?

Swallow the pills. This time they help.

May I stop and rest along my
        Prong of the fork?

Shall I lay my head at the monster's feet?

Cherry Blow Pop mouth, duplicitous tongue.

Lofty Lord of shame.

How did we forget what's to come?

I can trace my finger along the scar
On my back to a time mismanaged.

Why do we enjoy feeling this way?

The eternally empty cup will

From the Ground Up

I am a seed traveling
Impetuously along the wind

My feet don't touch the ground

My conscience, cracked

I must rebuild or perish

Add me, subtract me
I'll find you along the way

So simple at the start
Let me finish with a howl
How many ways can you
Slice a fruit

What are you compared to a seed
Will you crush me
Will you drown me
Will you write me off as
Inconsequential, unimportant

Can you see me for what I will become?
My name says rebellion
My soul says power
My sinewy case
Turns the sun to accomplice

I beg to no one, ask for nothing

Growth is not measured but championed

There's work to be done

Let me be

Rainforest Cafe

Tracing veins on leaves
Solace underneath
As they battle each other
for sunlight.

Can I be your dark wing bat
subtracting the nectar?

An urgency of your lips
As
Though
Something could
Steal your breath
mid air.

I am the truffle hunter.
No consolation prizes.

Wet as tree bark.

We depart

How do the fragments hold?

Why do the fragments fray?



J.M.W.

J.M.W. and Mindy Jones

I Am

I am the believer of dreams
The voice that says proudly
You can be anything you choose
If you listen to your heart's call

See me as the bandaid for your hurts
The tissue for your heartbreak
Bring me all problems and fears
My shoulders are broad and waiting

I wrap myself tightly around you
To hold you close and warm
When nightmares invade
Disturbing your peaceful sleep

Know I am the nightbird
Perched on your trembling shoulder
Singing "You are my sunshine"
As sleepy eyes close to dream again

I am your protector and loudest cheerleader
After a hard game not won
The go-to hand with favorite snacks
To soothe the loss

I am Santa at every Christmas
Slyly moving the elf
Secretly wrapping special surprises
Till the wee hours of the morning

I am the arms of a comforting sweater
Enfolding you in a safe place
Unconditional love a birth right
Simply for being you

J.M.W.

Shining as light in darkest moments
The upward drive to your downward spin
The grace you don't feel you deserve
Boundless, eternal, devoted adoration

We were created to be your Mom
To see you thrive our purpose
God's greatest miracle
Placed in our arms to love

J.M.W.

Infinite Well

I am full of love for others.
But do I have love for myself?
That is a question I ask myself often.
How can one love themselves when they are here?

But then how can I love others
if I can't love myself?

Maybe, just maybe one day the
center of my being will explode
within and allow myself to truly
whole heartedly love me.
Deep at the center of my being
There is an infinite well of love.

The love for others is enough.
for now, I can survive on that.
Can I trust love from others?
Time will only tell.

Love is always.

Love and Hope

I've heard hummingbirds
symbolize love and hope.

The hope of survival during
a horrific time. Love that
will forever be in our hearts.

I find that love is the
strongest thing in the world.

Surround yourself with love
and hope everyday.



JESSICAH

Paint Me Loved

I was a painting.
the one that lost its luster
the one that gets taken down
and placed out of sight.
Forgotten.
My once bright gaze stealing colors.
dulled by years of built up dust.
hiding the beauty
that once inspired a desire for display.
The darkness I was in felt safe.
nobody could see what abandonment looked like on me.
Ashamed.
Then a paintbrush was tossed
into the same memory stealing space.
Refusing to accept being a paintbrush
without a canvas, it started to make a reason-
a reason to be.
Ambitious.
With swift but gentle strokes,
the paint brush brushed away

the dust that muted the abandoned painting.
revealing the vibrant colors
that had long been concealed.
But the paintbrush didn't stop there.
It went to work because that's what paintbrushes do.
Determined.
It started with colors only it
could see in the dark. Highlighting
the sparkles in the blues.
Picking up the beauty from the drab surroundings.
every color being added to the painting.
Each feathery stroke added both depth and vibrance.
The paintbrush unaware that it brightened
even the darkest of spaces.
Humble.
The painting now more beautiful and richer
because the paintbrush never forgot its purpose
and selflessly shared its love for color and care
even when it was forgotten
in a dark and colorless world
Worthy.
Loved.

JESSICAH

Solitary

In some of my many reflections
I see you.
Despite infuriating observations
and arduous resistance
What I didn't want to see in me is there
I see you.

I watched and listened as you silently suffered
negating and even denying the cost
seemingly oblivious to the depths of your impact
Although sensing the scales were drastically tipped
I heeded.
and now
I see you.

Resentment didn't live long. How could it?
What it is is the unconditional kind
The love that endures all and yet sits alone
I never wanted to see it, and really
I still don't.
But it's there.
I see you.

I suppose there's a beauty in that sort of love
But I don't want it. Love isn't meant to be solitary
So here I am.
Loving you
as we love alone.

You Survive Me

In the dark stillness
of the pre-dawn silence
you are the breath I need
to endure this fight
the very inhale that nurtures my being.

I can't fathom this incessant night
without your sparkle
pulling me out.

It's through your unbounded bravery.
that I find the strength
to be free.

There is nothing so beautiful
as your laughter
the way it so magically
rids my soul of strife.

Holding you in my arms
transports me from this reality
to the dream I know will come.

With every second
you are my reason
my purpose
my breath

You are my everything.


Kelly J. Sorrell

Strength and Resilience

When I am told no, and no I can't
The wellspring rises, the power of the sun
binding the cord that tethers me to will.
Durable as damage inflicted
is my ability to see through to
I will and yes I can.

When I am turned off by the weakness of another
I look to myself and examine the bloody wounds
and fading scars, reminders that I have been weak;
but no longer do I have to remain where I am susceptible
and Chose.
I like the feel of my wounds, the heat of my essence
that will not be snuffed out.

It could be better, it could be worse
is an even keel that brings boredom and complacence
blasé and oblivious.
Rather a hull yawing in the toss
inclement weather testing my mettle, forcing my hand.
I don't want to "ride out" the storm, I want to ride the storm
with its undertow all the way to shore.

A soul that is generous, believing in me
when I'm having a hard time getting there
sharing the merest of a primal need–
dig down and shore up, gives me enough to unbury myself
shed the apprehension and fear.
I am capable, it's nice to hear
and I'll remember when you told me so.

I am strong. I get tired of being strong all the time.
I lament my weariness, loosen my grip and
let that same wellspring seep dark water into my cracks.
The ease and rush of it overtaking, chokes me
DON'T PANIC!
It is okay to let go a bit, tread water.
But I can't stay here and I never forget:
my darkness will consume me if I let it
and I refuse.

There are people and people and people so many.
Then there are individuals, a particular that
affects me, or infects me; a fecundity that demands I take notice.
The individuals have added to me in some inorganic
tangible way enriching my substance, and for that
I am stronger, resilience oiling my bones

and so it will go.

My Reality

Somnambulent mind in the wake of people
tattered and taped, stabled and sewn
A rose tinted bell jar would be sufferable with ease
No glass these walls, grey melancholy grown.

No stimulation, communication, only
stagnation and restless anticipation
Opaque translation of the language of our incarceration
Leads us not into temptation but into
the hope of a better life.

Symbiotic daily lives are full of still
more and more
Seemingly friendly faces that turn
into jackals and fruitless boors
Floating in our timeless amniotic boxes
Waiting to be reborn.

Looking for the inamorata that soothes and brightens,
caresses and lightens
There are naught but different faces
with inimical social disgraces
Poured out for the ones whose fist tightens.

We must not become judgemental
in our angry disillusion
But challenge our minds to step away
from the negative atmosphere
Because we too are lost and waiting
in this sea of thieving confusion.

KELLY J. SORRELL

A Stolen Line

I hold in my mouth like contraband
the things I don't have the courage to say
because rejection does something to me
and I just can't stand it.

All the vitriol that exposes
the bruised places in my heart
sit in the back of my throat
crowding on the root of my tongue
Shy beachgoers in a crowded pier

I wish someone would push them all,
Straight into the water,
Let them sink or swim churning and grim
Up shit creek without a paddle.

I hold in my mouth like contraband
All the words you want me to say
My lips shut like a steel trap
Listening to your hurtful tongue and side eye.

I hold in my mouth like contraband
Most of what I think, want, or feel
For all in the show of safety and security
It's not safe in this neck of the words.

I long for normal everyday exchanges
Without the lurking weird
And heavy underlying feeling
That there is me, and there is them.

So for now, I hold in my
mouth like contraband
Sweet morsels that could brighten someone's day
Because I think them but forget
I should say them out loud
so imbued with the dogma that

Always for Love

It is always for love
I close my eyes seeking after
Elusive true love, passion and laughter.
        It is for love
I open my eyes and see
Your heart crossing the planes
Reaching for me.

I have waited long and lone
And pondered many a time,
If the one who'd come and gone
would return and be mine.

There is nothing so sweet,
Nothing so dear,
Knowing it is always for love
To my heart you are near.


K.g. Noordman

Resilient

Resilient is water,
ever downward, humble, yet needed by all.

Resilient is starlight,
across the void, shining, long after its
origin is dead and cold.

Resilient is the ant.
willing to overcome all obstacles, even if
They require sacrifice.

Resilient is the monarch,
knowing it will take generations to reach
its journey's end, it still sets out.

Resilient is greed,
never satisfied, once fed the hunger only grows.

Resilient is revenge,
consuming all, leaving only blind eyes and
the taste of ashes.

Resilient is the guilty,
Daily enduring the flagellation of the mind, body, and soul.

Resilient is the prisoner,

K.G. NOORDMAN

Toilet Talk[1]

I'm sorry but this new generation…
    is the reason I stand alone
~~Angel is a dumb bitch~~ [redacted] NO
OC's finest
loca
puta
oh shit!
Y'all hate me kuz
    y'all ain't me
650
805
Hub city
Whoooop! Whoop!

Jesus is King
    Free me
    home bound
    orange county
    south central
    Kern county
    half moon bay
Not!
Its Oildale fool!

Fuck off Gavin you
  fuck around with the wrong
    fuck arounds and you
      will get fucked

So much hate, not enough love but
  the new one is the one
    from the heart

have a great day
And
have fun pooping!

[1]All the language in this poem is found text from a bathroom stall in California Institution for Women.



but remember_people:

[redacted]

wipe front to back!

K.G. NOORDMAN

Me Tribble, Me Trouble

I am a toilet that won't stop running
naughty, focused, joyful–
am a fat goldfish immured in a small bowl
obsessive, flirtatious, blissful–
an avalanche of canned goods down a narrow aisle
needy, obtrusive, hectic–
I am a tribble in trouble
unreliable, spontaneous, genuine–
am a red jellybean in a bowl of candy corn
inconspicuous, enigmatic, clever–
an ill-concealed smirk
melancholy, lonely, oblivious
I am a toilet that won't stop running
No amount of reasoning can sway me.



Mindy Jones

MINDY JONES

The Thief

A cake baked with salt not sugar
A password she used to know.
The words she scrambled like eggs
All mistakes, or a sign of what's to come?

Dementia is a thief creeping slowly
hiding behind a mask of aging.
The parent becomes the child
Full circle in its cruelty.

The vacant eyes hurt my soul.
Your body still present
Your mind lives only in the past.
How do I bring you back to see me?

I call you Mom
You call me someone else's name.
I must dance between two worlds
My reality no part of yours.

Angry outbursts frightening in intensity
Finally something we can share.
I rage at what I've lost
You are just mad at the world.

There is no do-over for stolen time.
You are fading before my eyes.
As you slip away I struggle to accept
Are you a mirror of what could be?

Is this my fate as well?
Will my own daughter feel this misery?
Beating her heels against the inevitable.
Is this legacy of pain a new family tradition?

It's the Little Things

I know the things I'm yearning for
Seems trivial to other eyes.
Like a comfortable bed to snuggle in
With a loved one by my side.

My family moves on without me
It's the little things I miss.
The Christmas joy and birthdays
My grandbabies' sticky kiss.

An old friend writes, to my surprise
I thought I'd never hear.
It's their words of love and kindness
That helps ease the constant fear.

My worst day doesn't define me
Though it weighs heavy on my mind.
I miss the peace I used to have
That's now so hard to find.

I long to see the ocean
Leave our footprints in the sand
The air so fresh and clean
As we walk there hand in hand

It's the little things that lift me
An easy smile or a hug so tight.
It leaves no room for self pity
And reminds me why I fight.

Is it a wish, a desire or a dream
To see life outside these walls?
I'll keep on pushing for my freedom
So I won't miss anything at all.

MINDY JONES

Inhuman Rights

You have the right to remain silent,
So we can use that silence against you.
Wielded as a weapon to prove guilt,
Your sealed lips hiding something sinister.

Anything you say can and will be twisted
Damned if you speak, damned if you don't.
Take off your beautiful jewelry
These silver bracelets your new adornment.

You have the right to buy your own attorney,
Help him pay off that new boat.
Or we will give you a public pretender,
He's free but you will never be

You have the right to a speedy trial,
Speedy measured by geriatric standards.
Time dragging trapped in jail
Only frequent offenders slide out the door.

You have the right to a life of abuse.
Ugly clothes stiff with tears of shame.
Marking you as one of the pathetic cattle,
Herded around by their collective hopelessness.

Rest assure we will steal your dignity,
Laughing at your naked discomfort.
Slamming doors and screaming voices,
The lullaby of your dismal nights.

Tough on crime a political rallying cry,
Mass incarceration shows promises kept.
Nothing changes since they don't want change,
You have the right to be forgotten!



Victoria Martinez

VICTORIA MARTINEZ

I Still Call My MaMa

When I was young I thought pretty dope fiends
And prostitutes were the thing to be
Look at me; sitting there in the penitentiary
How could it be? I fell so far from disgrace.
Can't stand to look in the mirror cause
All I see is my MaMa's face.

I scream; I call out; and cry inside
My ribcage and intestines for you
Can you hear me?
Am I too far?
How could it be I've lead myself to
This place… I seeked.

Time has creeped
Lines have sinked
Age has reaped
What was never mines to keep

I miss you dearly MaMa

I pray in heaven your soul to keep

Demon Lover

The hungry demon inside of me;
sees what she wants to be.

Seeth, bleed, reeds growing inside of me.

Fuck I'm just so God Damned hungry
It says to my short threads of dignity

shake me. Bleed me, squeeze me just
to see if there's any human left in it yet.

Its soul still expects
to breathe, to see, to be a beautiful thing
that can speed through life.

Blink twice, breathe thrice; do
whatever you wish. You'll still be mines at
the end of the light.
Your short tempered writhing sends me so much dark delight,
Breath in.
All you do is fly a God Damned baby kite
in this smoke that curls into despair.
Out of my spilt twistedly ripped lips and spread at attention nostrils
Now go down Swirling and twirling
around my long pointed nails.
Ohh how I love to tear you from the inside.
Your mouth smiles
yet your eyes are anchored around
my fingers like chained rings.

I promise to pull on you always

Demon lover full of hunger in thee.


Zabel Joubalian

My Fate in 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.

ZABEL JOUBALIAN

Tormenting Times

Lord give me patience to
process my unfortunate circumstances
Help me heal from all the hurt and betrayal
My faith in you has always been strong
Give me the courage to go on
I shall take your commandments seriously
My beliefs are being tested
I can't stop my tears from flowing
Embattled with sleeplessness
Thankful for the numerous embraces
I am now known as the desolate one
Tormented with sadness
Let my disrupted emotions subside
Allow my enclave to become my sanctuary
My despair has made me hopeless
Lift me up with inspirations
Relieve my sanity
Help me be at peace again

Fairness

I try hard to veer away
Yet, you vigilantly hold me captive
I strive to ignore you
Yet, you appear to detect me
How will I eliminate you?
You routinely locate me
I am burdened with your desires
Ultimately, I want to be deprived of you
My mind can't obstruct you
You deflect my thoughts
You are part of my principals
An imminent part of my culture
Please uproot elsewhere
Farewell, let me be at harmony

Exquisite Corpse Poems

In these following poems, each poet from the group wrote one line, responding only to the line above it. What resulted are these two "exquisite corpse" style poems, which was a poetic technique of writing invented by the Surrealists in the 1920s.

I.

There's always room at the bottom of the page for
Strings pulled by the ones who hold our freedom in their hands
I am stronger than what weighs me down.
a burden shared among friends
frolicking whispers beyond reasoning
silence is the theme, spiders block the ears
but yet your nastiness slithers in
I can feel my pulse Quicken and thicken
my blood rising to my head
let me be at peace again
while walking in the ocean

II.

Going bald and pinkish
anguish and frustration
added to the already cold and rainy night
but the thunder belonged to my skull's cavity
brushed only by the brightening Strokes of you
somehow, the taste of cherry overpowers all
sweet and tart emotions flow
like water never still,
an ocean wave crashing
roaring seething rage
that slices from my throat into the darkness of your face–
I still walk with Grace,
not dwelling on my past mistakes.

III.

Lightning strikes, stagnant standing in the dark
I cried tears of joy at the thought of the new life to come: nephew.
Exiting laughter and crazy eyes
Twisted thoughts no one hears
Dancing marionettes dripping tears
on the wooden feet they have no control over.
Clouds crumble like metal,
Flowers hold each other's hands
while roaming in the plantain fields
engaging in mischievous desires,
Notwithstanding the future that lies ahead.

IV.

United in grief we triumph.
Walking in the shadows, we
creep and peep behind darkened corners–
It's my home, it's dark and dank
it's unkind to thee
Yet in between the empty spaces echoes our laughter
Ebbing and flowing with the rhythm of our tears
"I see you," you say, and I
Can only nod in return
Can only telegraph my gratitude
to wonder so hard the vessel's ground.
Together we eat this great big burger
made with mangos and plantains
left to moulder and ferment in the sun…
I know now, together makes the dull fun.
When the creepy creeps stalls and keeps–
It's your hand that blindly but boldly leaves.
We laughed, cried together for hours
Holding a place in each others' heart
Full of love and hope
Holding back nothing and everything.
What's the use when life is more cunning,
When all life brings is tears, shit, and bruises?
Yet we cling on, like a sticky octopus on your face–
Obscuring its only hope for salvation.
Discarded chocolate covered fruit,
Rescued flowering
from the depths of all our souls
to the bottom of my feet buried in the sand.

Author Biographies

Aimee Gana uses writing to get rid of random thoughts in her head. Random thoughts become creative words that turn into poetry that she wants to share with the world.

Amelia Carlson is an artist who loves (misses) the beach and whose biggest weakness is dark chocolate. She uses the pain from her entire life experience as a superpower to love and help others. She holds a Bachelors of Arts from CSULA and aspires to obtain her Masters in social work or art (preferably).

Dude is healing and learning through poetry and enjoying myself. He is from the wonderful east coast, missing crows and humid weather. He loves Bustelo, the Movie Arrow (series), the ocean, and Mother Earth.

Elijah León grew up in San Diego, CA. Since a very young age he has always displaced a passion in the arts. Poetry has given him the ability to communicate how he feels when he couldn't find the right things to say.

Elsa Thompson has wanted to write since she was a little girl. She's grateful for the opportunity, humbled by the guidance, and delighted at the thought of you, reading this anthology.

Free is from the best city on the planet, San Diego. She mostly loves two things: reading and her small floppy-eared dog, Taco.

Mindy Jones is a seventy year old woman currently residing in Corona but her heart remains at home in the warm sand of the beach.

Kelly J. Sorrell is only as old as she feels, and everyday is different. Today is what it is.

K. g. Noordman is the proud daughter of wonderful parents who taught her the value of persistence and to never be afraid to share her voice. She recently graduated from CSUDH (Cal State) with a Masters degree in Humanities and is an avid sci-fi fan.

J.M.W. is from SoCal and loves her son, the beach, and strong coffee.

Jessicah is a proud mother of two amazing children and striving to be free both emotionally and physically.

Victoria Martinez has an infinity of love for animals, and adores to watch old Black and White movies. Bollywood music always puts her in the best state of mind on a bad day. Even though she doesn't speak a word of punjabi, except this: Namaste!

Zabel Joubalian awaits her freedom after 18 years. Lives in LA and grew up in Boston. She enjoys traveling, museums, gardens, cultures, and learning. She was named after a famous Armenian poet.

Acknowledgments and 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:

Hanif Abdurraqib, "Poems from an Email Exchange"
James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son
Yrsa Daley-Ward, "bone"
Amanda Gorman, "The Hill We Climb"
Caits Meisner, The Sentences that Create Us
Maggie Nelson, The Argonauts
Sylvia Plath, The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath
Edgar Allan Poe, "To My Mother"
Edgar Allan Poe, "Annabel Lee"
Assata Shakur, "Love"
Warsan Shire, "Solitude"
Ocean Vuong, "Not Even"
Ocean Vuong, "My Father Writes From Prison"

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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 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.