

Open Line 2009



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Open Line

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Cover photograph of the lower yard courtesy of Phillip Carter.
Design by Andrew Kenower.

Dear Reader:

Welcome to the second issue of *OpenLine*. *OpenLine* is a collection of literary and art work from the students and graduates of Patten University at San Quentin State Prison in California.

This issue takes you deeper into the minds and lives, past and present, of the students who share with you their experiences, hopes, fears, doubts, and aspirations.

Understand the effects of imprisoning our youth by convicting juveniles as adults in “Sixteen.” Feel the emotions and overflowing love shared in “Today We Took Photos Together.” Uncover the lesson the young man learned in “Strong Mountain.” And share in the suspense and fear of a young boy as he walks the dark streets of Mexico in “Alex Saw the Devil.”

The beautifully written pieces, including the poetry and artwork, presented to you in this journal manifest the lives these men have lived and the lives they long for.

On behalf of the contributors and editors, thank you for stepping into our shoes as we walk towards a brighter future.

Sincerely,

Michael C. Gallardo
Editor

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Open Line

A Moment of Reality

BHAI HARRIS

The view from up here sparkles and
Speaks to me, but when I move
It talks in an alien tongue,
Odd, yet beautiful,
Arcane and Strange.
Surreal in comparison to the past.
Too lovely to last.
I move again,
My eyes and my mind.
To another trip and another time,
Another page to ponder,
Mystery and wonder,
Every step made clearer by the next.

For the Birds

BHAI HARRIS



Sixteen

CHARLIE SPENCE

They seemed larger than me that day, the rain drops, as they fell from an endless gray sky. They illuminated the headlights of oncoming traffic in an iridescent and blurred shine. The display of colors seemed only to intensify the fear and magnify the pain I felt inside about yet another tragedy taking place in my life. I sat there dressed in an orange jumpsuit, feet shackled together and a waist chain tightly secured around my midsection to restrict my arms firmly to my sides. The sheriff's van traveled at what felt like the speed of light, never allowing me to collect my thoughts before arriving at my next destination: life in an adult institution at the age of sixteen. The words compassionately spoken by the sheriff that day have never left the confines of my soul, "I didn't even start to get it together until I was twenty-five," he said. The sheriff will never understand the extent to which his words thrashed about my heart. Had I been tried and convicted as a juvenile, I would have been given a better chance at rehabilitation and a second chance in society at the age of 25. I feel even more strongly now than I did back then, that trying juvenile offenders as adults and sentencing them to life in prison is immoral.

In the year 2000, the people of California voted and passed Proposition 21. This allowed for juveniles as young as fourteen who are accused of a serious crime to be tried as adults at the discretion of the District Attorney trying the case. Prior to Proposition 21, juveniles accused of such crimes were given what is called a "707(b) hearing" in front of a judge, to determine if they met the criteria to be tried as an adult. Before the 707(b) hearing was introduced, only in rare and extreme cases of violence were juveniles tried as adults.

It is easy for me to understand the feelings of one who is opposed to my

position. Juveniles do commit crimes that are serious and are considered to be “adult crimes.” The juveniles that receive life sentences are certainly not receiving them for petty crimes; it is not as if the fourteen year old shoplifter is locked up and the key is then thrown away. I would agree too, that most juveniles have a sense of right and wrong from an early age. Surely children know that they are not supposed to take cookies out of the cookie jar unless given permission by their parents. On a greater scale most adolescents know it is wrong to smoke, use drugs, cheat or steal, and, therefore, know it is wrong to commit crime, period. But it seems only fair that if we are going to take into account the social development of morality within these children, then by that same token we should also consider their mental development and take into account the neuroscience and the high likelihood of rehabilitating these same children.

According to a newspaper article published in the L.A. Times, and a study conducted by the University of San Francisco’s Center for Law and Global Justice, there are 2,387 juvenile offenders that have been given life sentences here in the United States. To understand this prodigious number, and contemplate the depraved nature of this practice, consider that Israel, the *only other* country in the world to hand out such sentences, is a far and distant second with seven. According to the study, Israel has not handed out such sentences since 2004. While the populations in these two countries widely differ, these statistics seem to suggest that Israel uses such sentences in extreme cases only. It should be noted that of the juveniles sentenced to life without parole here in the United States, 51% of those sentences were issued to first-time offenders. It is alarming that we are willing to sentence, at a staggering number, our youth offenders to life with or without parole considering that juveniles have the highest capacity for rehabilitation.

Senator Leland Yee of San Francisco-San Mateo, whose background is in child psychology, states, “Children have the highest capacity for rehabilitation. The neuroscience is clear; brain maturation continues

well through adolescence and thus impulse control, planning and critical thinking skills are not fully developed” (Los Angeles Times, article by Henry Weinstein). Other studies support this same finding: The San Francisco Center for Law and Global Justice study asserts, “Psychologically and neurologically, children cannot be expected to have achieved the same level of mental development as an adult, even when they become teenagers” (*Sentencing Our Children to Die in Prison: Global Law and Practice*). A perfect example of an immature brain is a fourteen-year-old child, with whom I became acquainted in Juvenile Hall, who had been asked by a peer to beat up a homeless man for twenty-five cents. This child, having never been accepted by a peer group before, proceeded to beat up the homeless man. The subsequent and tragic outcome of the situation was the homeless man died from his injuries and the child was given life in prison, all because he acted on an impulse to be accepted by friends and lacked the critical thinking skills of a fully developed mind. Had this been a mature adult who had been asked to beat up a homeless man for twenty-five cents, I find it hard to believe that he would have done it.

Juvenile offenders should be punished for serious crimes they commit, but as juveniles in juvenile facilities. The oldest that children can be tried as minors is seventeen, an age that allows for eight years of time in which they can serve their punishment and in which we have an opportunity to rehabilitate them*. Age sixteen allows for nine years and so on. By placing our youth in adult facilities with life sentences, we are giving up on them. According to www.centeronjuvenilejustice.com, fifteen to twenty-one year olds make up 13% of our prison population and together they make up 22% of all suicide deaths in our institutions. Juveniles are 7.7 times more likely to commit suicide in adult facilities than in juvenile facilities. Whereas only 1% of juveniles reported rape in the juvenile system, that actual number is nine times higher in the adult system. It is not just about these numbers, though. At what point do we brand a person for the rest

*Editors’ note: A juvenile “life” sentence ends at age 25.

of his or her life for the worst thing they did as a child?

The lack of mental maturity and development within the minds of juveniles is what set the stage for a 2005 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in which the court determined that it is unconstitutional to execute a person under the age of eighteen. In their majority opinion, the court cited research saying that the mental capacity of juveniles was not the same as that of adults (*Roper v. Simmons*). Here, the highest court in the United States is acknowledging that juveniles lack careful and exact evaluation and judgment, as well as the ability to control sudden spontaneous inclinations or urges because of their undeveloped minds. Perhaps this is the reason why juveniles are not allowed to choose for themselves whether or not they can go watch an R rated movie until the age of seventeen. They cannot vote until age eighteen, buy a pack of cigarettes until age eighteen, or buy alcohol until the age of twenty-one. The contrast here is drastic; by one means we are suggesting that a seventeen year old teenager is only entering a mature enough mental state to choose whether he or she wishes to watch an R rated movie, yet by another we are suggesting that he or she is mature enough to understand the full consequences of a crime they may commit.

Obviously, we as a society recognize the difference between the mental capacity of juveniles and adults too, or we would not have constructed laws based on the age of an individual as a determining factor for conduct. It seems unfair that we only want to recognize the difference in mental development between adult and child up to the point when the child exercises bad judgment. I hate to think that we are so cruel as a society and a country that we would rather place our children in prison because of poor decision making with an immature brain, for a crime they are convicted of, than try to rehabilitate them while their mental capacity for reform is at its pinnacle.

STUBBORN EYES OF MINE

EDMUND JOHNSON (TALEB)

It's been a long time since I've cried!
I have kept all the pain inside
But Now, I recognize. That I must let go
So my tears can flow
Down the dark streets of my face.
One day the levee will break
And my dry eyes, And, my frown, will be evicted from this place.
My pride is a tyrant; The Master, Builder, The Ruthless Guardian of the floodgates.
Working overtime to make sure that not even one tear is released.
As a result of this—my body is weak; I am ill; and I am getting sicker
I gasp, I moan, I yell—As I shiver
My Heart speaks
“Oh how I live with this Excruciating Pain for Long days, weeks, months, and years
O' please cry Stubborn Eyes of mine, For even the Heavens shed tears!”

HARRISON MISIOKA SEUGA

September Springs

September in spring,
A swallow chirping love songs,
Sunrise glorifies.

Autumn Passing

Autumn butterflies,
Drift away at season's end,
A setting sun mourns.

Parole Plans

KENNETH R. BRYDON

I went to the Parole Board for the 18th time.
They asked how I was doing, and I said, "I'm fine."
Then they said, "But Mr. Brydon, we're really confused.
Last year, you had parole plans you could actually use.
This year, there's nothing about where you'll go.
We thought you were cooperating, and going with the flow?"

I smiled to them both and answered with head up high,
"My plans are for here, where you left me to die.
It's not what I wanted; you STILL have no reason.
And I've fought the good fight, up till this season.
30 years have passed while I held on this hope.
30 years now tell me, that I'll never be in your scope."

"Now now, Mr. Brydon," said the Chairman of the Board,
"You were, oh, so close, from gaining your reward.
Why, just last year, you had a great place to stay,
A loving family who care; a job with great pay.
It's now 25 years that you've lived trouble free.
It's now 25 years that you've been all you can be."

"With all due respect," came my curt reply,
"To me that's just rhetoric, and an out and out lie.
It was only, oh, two years ago that I can relate,
Where you said I was only trying to manipulate.
It's you Mr. Chairman, who said nobody's 'that' good.
It's you Mr. Chairman, whom I now see as rude."

"Excuse me, sir!" He spoke in a loud voice,
"You're the guilty one, who made that heinous choice!
You pulled the trigger, you committed the crime,
Look into the mirror to know why you're doing time.
I must decide who is worthy to walk out that door,
I must decide who'll walk free and never kill anymore."

"Yes, sir," I said gently, "that is a daunting task.
You must wonder who's real, and who wears a mask.
No doubt, some have made your stomach turn,
No doubt, some you wished a parole in hell to burn.
I don't envy your position; your worry must grow.
It must press very hard, seeing all you ever say is 'No.'"

Mr. Chairman's face had a nice shade of red to it,
He wanted a groveler, not someone who gave a shit.
The Deputy Commissioner sat watching with a slight grin.
He was amused, seeing my stand as one small win.
"Mr. Brydon," he said, "perhaps you're being a bit rash,
No one here has treated you as if you were trash."

I choked down the laugh that wanted to come out.
"Sir," I began, "it's actions, not words that I count.
It is not only in me whom this perspective is to be found.
A 100 worthy men come up and 100 worthy get shot down.
Meanwhile you claim each are given the same rights.
But you'd scream in anguish if you paid a ticket twice."

"We've heard enough," spoke the red-faced man,
"You're denied parole, next time bring us a plan.
This sort of thing is certainly going to trouble you,

There is good reason for you to see your hopes through."
He pointed. "You're better than what I'm seeing here,
Perhaps you'll have a better attitude in another year."

"So sorry, but no, I'm through playing this trick,
No more will I be jackass, chasing a carrot on a stick.
I've done 10 times what you need to be satisfied,
10 times beyond, what your cold heart has denied.
So, call me scum for a mistake at 19 I do admit,
But I'll sleep well tonight, for not being a hypocrite."

The guard made haste in escorting me to the door,
A smirk on his face said he knew what it was for.
"Man," he said, "don't you care about going home?
What are you going to say to family on the phone?
If you give up, whose hearts will be broken?
And what of this great faith of which you've spoken?"

"Their hearts have broken some 19 times before,
But they're very proud of who I've become behind this door.
My faith holds true, though some may think otherwise,
I try to serve others, and, no one, do I despise."
Walking back to my cell I breathed in air anew.
No fear of my future, gave me wings on which I now flew.

Strong Mountain

RICK BRANSON

If you were to leave the city of San Francisco, California and drive north on highway 101 for a few hours you would be delighted. As the cities get smaller and become towns, the trees get larger and more stoic. The highway meanders through Northern California's lush valleys filled with grape vineyards and the occasional pear orchards nestled between majestic mountain peaks.

There is a small town called Willits whose population is about four-thousand, and whose claim to fame is "Gateway to the Redwoods." This is where I spent the first twenty years of my life. I enjoyed the outdoors: hunting, fishing, hiking, and doing chores on the farm. Like all small towns everybody knew everyone else and rumors traveled far and fast. Most kids went off to college or the military after graduation, and those who stayed behind went to work in the lumber mill. Drinking and fighting became a sport on weekends along with football games and four-wheeling in the mud. The area is known for its marijuana cultivation, rowdy red-necks, and, in the old days, ornery loggers. All things considered it wasn't a bad place to grow up.

I never really fit in with any group in high school. I played football with the "jocks," rode bulls with "goat ropers," drank with the "rough crowd," and worked on cars with the "gear heads" in auto shop. It was in auto shop where I first met Jason. He worked on his little Opal car a lot, but for the most part he kept to himself. We talked a few times, and I just couldn't help but like the guy. For reasons I still cannot explain, I always felt a calm peaceful feeling whenever Jason was around. Something in his eyes and mannerisms expressed a combination of wisdom and gentleness.

Early one spring morning of my junior year, I came to school and met up with a buddy named Brad. Right away we decided it was going to be a nice day out, such a nice day in fact, that it would be a shame to spend it in school. Off we went in Brad's old Dodge Dart in search of someone old enough to purchase some beer for us. At the gas station we ran into Jason, whose plans for the day were in concordance with our own. Just about this time Jason's older brother, Jeff, (who was old enough to buy beer) happened to stop in. Oddly, meeting Jeff for the first time, I was overcome with the same calm, peaceful feeling as when Jason is near.

With the promise to Jeff that we would be careful, the three of us "amigos" were off to Jason's parentless house with our prized twelve-pack of beer. I have been all over the place in my travels on the back roads around Willits, but never before had I been to Strong Mountain. During the hour long ride over a bumpy, dirt road deep into the mountains Jason explained something to me. "I live on Strong Mountain," he said. "It's where all of my family lives, and our last name is Strong." He told me his family has lived there for many years.

When we finally arrived, I was very impressed with the family's large, country home. The trees and surrounding hills are beautiful. A small stream gurgled behind the house and the air smelled clean and sweet. I don't know what came over the three of us that spring day, maybe it was the few beers we shared. We laughed and played like young boys, rolling down grassy hills with our bodies until we were dizzy, jumping from one flagstone step to another while pretending the ground was hot lava, and shooting baskets in an old rustic barn like NBA stars. Later, as we were walking down a dirt road that skirts the property, Brad suggested to Jason that they should take me to a place called Quartz Rock. Jason hesitated and I sensed his reluctance to reveal something special to him. After further urging from Brad he finally agreed. I was excited and I knew I was about to see something wonderful.

We crossed the road and climbed a fence near an open expanse of

grassy hillside. I noticed a large rock the size of a small house near an equally huge oak tree. Jason led us to the rock's base and we then climbed to its top. I was surprised to find an opening in the top that was approximately eighteen inches in diameter. I was even more surprised when I peered inside and realized that the rock was hollow with millions of crystals hanging from its inner walls. I had never seen anything like this; it was beautiful. The amazement must have shown on my face because Brad just smiled when I looked to him for an explanation. Jason looked serious, like he had just entered a church.

There were several loose crystals near the edge of the hole, and I picked up a few to put in my pocket. Jason reached out and touched my arm to stop me. "Please don't," he said. I then asked him what the big deal was. "If everyone who comes to this place takes a piece soon the beauty will be no more," he replied. I immediately understood his logic, and I put the crystals back. Something told me there was a deeper meaning to his words, and this was somehow a major life lesson for me. We walked back to Jason's house and later returned to town ending our day of freedom.

I didn't see Jason again until school began in the fall. We would pass each other in the halls or I would see him in auto shop wrenching on his car. We talked a few times but he mostly kept to himself. One morning an ugly storm came in. Black clouds covered the sky and the wind blew fiercely. The rain pelted the earth as Mother Nature raged. I was at school early that dark morning lifting weights for football and listening to the radio. A news flash reported a tree had fallen on a car and someone was trapped inside. After class I saw Brad with tears in his eyes. He told me that Jason had been killed.

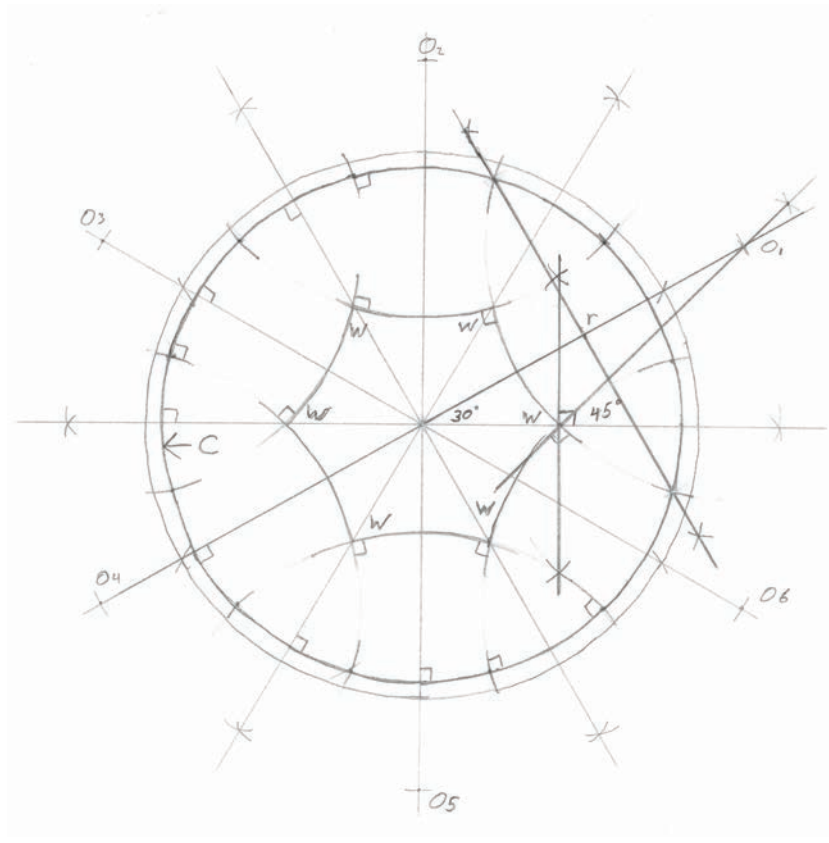
A lone cottonwood tree alongside a bare stretch of dirt road had fallen on Jason's car, killing him instantly. Rescue workers said the odds and timing were tantamount to being struck by lightning twice in the same day. Our school held an assembly the following week and Jason's parents attended. When I met them, I once again felt the same calm, peaceful

feeling come over me as when I was near their sons Jason and Jeff. Their eyes contained the same mixture of wisdom and gentleness and their posture was constantly relaxed. They both smiled easily despite their loss. They spoke to us at the assembly and explained that on the night prior to Jason's death, he had sat them down to talk. Jason expressed his love for them and thanked them for being wonderful parents. It was almost as if he knew he was going away.

I told my son this story once, I guess about the same time he was old enough to ask me why I named him Jason. Years later I went back up to Quartz Rock. It was unmistakable and easy to find. I reached the top only to find that the hole was gone and the rock was solid. I realized then that the three of us had played like boys that spring day because we felt our childhood slipping away from us. I had returned to Quartz Rock because I was feeling my teenage years slipping away from me. I then understood the lesson Jason had given me about the crystals.

Angels and Devils

BILL ROBERTS



This is the first step, so to speak, in the construction of Escher's "Angels and Devils." Eight wing tips meet at each point marked with a "W," and these points along with the center and the circumference "C" of the circle are in correct proportion to each other. The key in dividing the various segments is in the use of orthogonal arcs.

Alex Saw the Devil

FELIX FAUSTO PEREZ

When Alexandro was a young boy, nine or ten, he wasn't a bad boy or misbehaved. He liked playing soccer very much, played with his friends, did good in school, loved riding horses and when he didn't run away from home for the whole day he would help his grandparents with the chores. In fact that's what got him into trouble most of the time. He didn't curse, think about hurting others or stole from people but very often he would sneak out of the house and next thing you know, he was nowhere to be found. Every time Alex, as he was known by everyone, got home late he would get his butt whipped with whatever was available. Sometimes his mama Carmen would tell him "One of these days the devil is going to appear before you, drag you or perhaps take you because you are out so late." And that's just the way he felt late one night when he was coming home from spending all day and part of the night at his friend's house.

Alex grew up from the age of two with his grandparents in a village in Mexico of about forty-five families. It's a rural area far away from civilization. There was no phone, electricity, paved streets or potable water. Everything was done very primitively. The land was plowed with the help of horses or mules and there were only three pick-up trucks in the whole place. Some one owned a television but it wasn't Alex's grandparents. No television at his house meant that the only way to pass time was to tell stories by the fireplace, under the candlelight or fuel lantern. Sometimes scary stories. Alex's grandparents used to talk about all the unexplained things and noises that would happen in the creeks and orchards. They would talk about the black horse dragging chains through the street in the middle of the night or the big black dog with glowing red eyes that would cross people's path, circle around them in the middle of one of

the creeks and then disappear before their eyes.

Alex never thought it would happen to him but it did. It happened one summer at about eleven o'clock at night. Alex had spent all day away from home, mostly at Julio's house. They were best friends, never got tired of each other and at school, they were inseparable. They had been playing Mexican lottery under candle lights. Before Alex knew, it had gotten late. The only way to tell time was to listen to the radio or if some one had a watch but Alex didn't dare ask the time because he knew he would be sent home when Julio's parents realized how late it was.

When it got dark and Alex wasn't home he thought about all the stories he had heard told by his grandparents. He knew that to get home he would have to cross the creek where the big black dog had been seen by many people and that he'd most likely do the walking by himself. Unless someone happened to walk by and Alex could tag along and have company. But at that time of the night people in the village weren't out any more. Even though it was a weekend. It seemed like the place was haunted every time darkness sat.

Every member of the family was getting ready to go to bed except Julio because he was having fun playing with Alex. Julio's mother looked at Alex and finally told him the words he feared to hear. "Alex. It's late, we are going to bed and you need to go home. Your mama Carmen is probably worried about you." With a sad face, Alex looked at Julio then toward the door. He didn't want to go but he couldn't stay. Alex and Julio made plans to meet the next day even though Alex did not know if he would be allowed to go out the next day because he had stayed out so late and had not helped with the house chores. As soon as the boys said their goodbyes Alex walked out the door with his eyes not yet adjusted to the darkness. It was dark. First couple steps out of the front gate he stumbled and almost fell but he managed to stay on his feet and continued his way home, by himself.

Alex's house was about two blocks away but even though he walked as

fast as he could he didn't seem to gain as much distance as he would like. He didn't seem to go fast enough but nonetheless he was approaching the creek he feared to cross. The creek was about half-way down the street from his friend's house and at that time of the year it was dry. Alex continued at a fast pace without looking to the sides for fear of seeing something jumping out of the bushes or from behind the fences. All his senses sharpened and he was paying close attention to every noise he heard.

The night was silent. Suddenly he felt a gust of wind go over his head that scared the living soul out of him. At first he thought it was the devil that had missed his head but when it screeched after it passed him he knew it was just a barn owl. His heart was racing worse than when he played soccer because of the frightful moment the owl had caused and because he was almost at the creek's edge.

The crossing of the creek was covered in cement so pick-up trucks wouldn't get stuck. When Alex started to walk on the cement he felt the urge to run until he got home but decided not because of the poor visibility. He could fall, get hurt and would take longer to get home. The short distance to cross the creek seemed longer than when Alex crossed it during the day. His short legs couldn't advance while all kinds of thought crossed his mind. What would it be? The lady that howled at night for her kids ever since she drowned them in the river, the black horse dragging chains or the big black dog. Or perhaps the man who hanged himself on the mesquite tree just on the other side of the creek.

As he reached the center of the creek the hair in back of his neck stood up. He felt a chill and got goose bumps all over his body. He felt a gust of wind coming down stream the creek and as soon as the gust of wind was gone, in a blink of an eye, the big black dog was there. He couldn't believe his eyes. His whole body was trembling, his legs shaking and his voice gone. He wanted to yell for help but it was impossible because when he tried not a bit of sound was emitted. Some one had told him

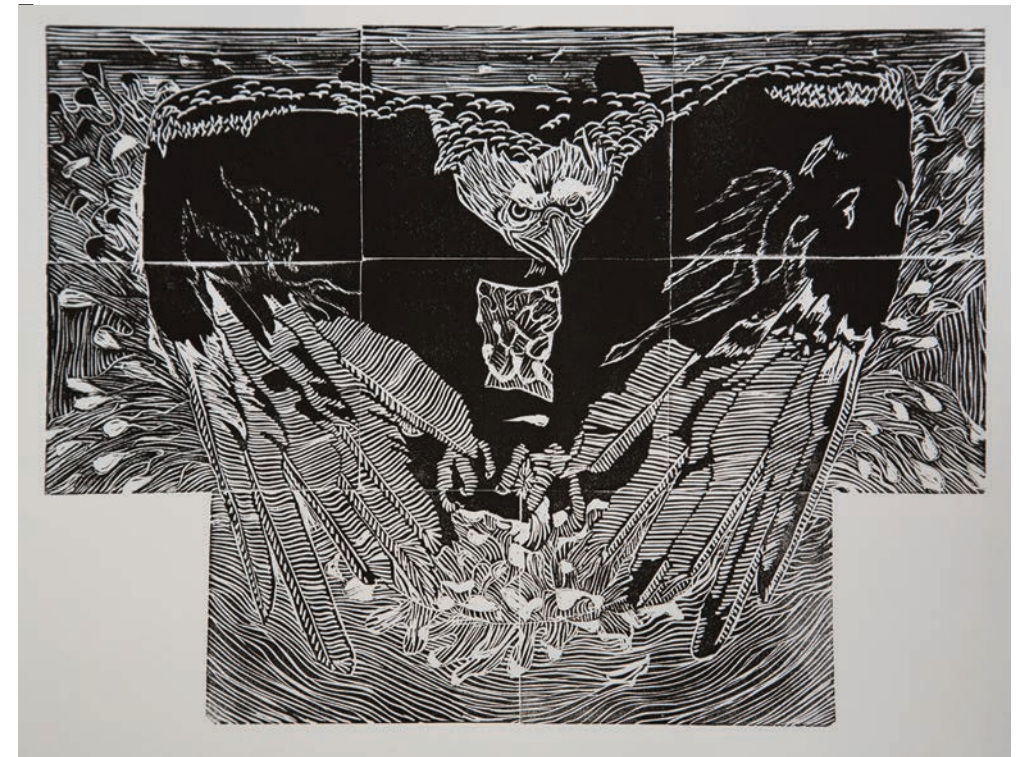
that if he ever saw the devil all he had to do was pray to God and it is gone but he could not pray. He could not keep walking because the dog was blocking his path. It was a big dog. The biggest he ever saw. Perhaps bigger than a Great Dane but nobody around the area owned that type of dog. It looked at Alex and he saw the glowing red eyes. Alex felt like he was suspended in the air. Maybe it was because he could not feel the ground under him.

The dog circled him once. Alex thought that was the end of his short life. For sure the devil was going to take him. On the second time around the dog disappeared. Just like it appeared it was gone. In a blink of an eye. Alex looked up stream, down stream, but it was nowhere to be found. He had seen it as clear as it had been in day light but now it was gone and dark again. He finally felt his feet on the ground and was able to move. Faster this time. He was almost jogging and now that he was away from the creek he did not dare look back for fear that the dog would be after him. Alex rushed home. It seemed like it took him forever but when he reached the front gate he didn't pause to open it. Instead he jumped the fence because it was faster. He just wanted to get inside the house where he could feel safe. He was not even thinking of the whipping he would be getting from his mama Carmen.

Alex walked inside the house very stealthily and went in the bedroom. Both his grandparents were asleep, had been for hours. He climbed in his bed and went to sleep but not before thinking of the black dog he had seen. He never thought it would happen to him but it did. Now every time he crosses the creek, day or night, he is reminded of the frightening night when he saw the devil.

Drive-Thru

HENRY EDWARD FRANK



Narcissus

JOHN O. NEBLETT

An ancient reaction
to the deepest hurt,
rejection,
is violence:

rejecting in turn,
withdrawing the self
to a hiding place
no one can see
when they look in your eyes,
a disguise is in place
mimicking a you
playing your part in the farce;

the face of evil turned inward,
absorbed in the pleasure of pain.

Death Becoming

ANTHONY SMITH

Death—She ponders the world's pressures
in disbelief she shakes her head
The world would be better
without her, if only she were dead.
Tears fill the white of her eyes
she rocks with knees to chest
thunder shakes the sky
and her soul desires rest.

Love—Notwithstanding her misfortune
he stands firmly by her side
the true meaning
of love that's ripe.
They have strength each
other and love for life

My Girls

FRANK VALDIVIA

I am sad because I cannot be with my girls,
I miss them all the time.
I wonder how their life unfurls,
I wish I had a sign.
I wonder how they spend their day,
Do they miss me too?
Life is not supposed to be this way,
I feel all spent and through.
But at the same time they get me through it,
They're my reason to keep on fighting,
Because if not for them I couldn't do it!
We stay a family through my writing.
No matter how bad it hurts or gets,
With them in my life there's still hope yet.

"60 Years": Ralph & Audrey Osborn

RANDALL COUNTRYMAN



Today We Took Photos Together

MICHAEL ENDRES

When I got the first letter from my daughter Samantha (Sammi), 14 years had passed since we'd last had any contact. She was four years, her sister Heather was six years and their brother Michael was 14 months. Now she was about to turn 18. When I realized who the letter was from I was very surprised, shocked. While reading it the emotions kicked into gear. I was tickled to death to know that she wanted to know me, and I was sad for her cause she didn't know how I would feel about hearing from her. She didn't know that her letter caused my heart to truly smile. She didn't know that I loved her, missed her and always thought about her. She didn't know that there had been a time when she wanted to walk on her hands like daddy, and juggle like daddy. She didn't know that there had been a time when she loved her daddy. Yes, I am to blame more than anybody, and I'm so sorry.

By the time I received her letter it was a few weeks old, and two days later she called the prison wanting to know if I had gotten her letter and was I going to answer it, or not. My counselor told me while I was at work, and then he handed me a post-it and said, "here's her phone number and she wants you to call her." Well, there went the emotions again. I was shaking and crying so much I could hardly dial the phone, but the moment I heard her voice it all stopped. We talked and it was great, even thought the 15-minute phone time seemed to go by in 30 seconds.

Since then, for the last seven years we have kept in touch through the mail (letters, cards, and photos). She's married now and they have two children, my grandson Ethan and my granddaughter Isabelle, and my son-in-law is Kyle. Also during the seven years I've been moved to a few prisons, and with their being in the Navy they have lived in a few states.

About five months ago I got a letter from Sammi saying that they were moving to California for three years and asking for me to send visiting forms. So I sent the forms and a short while later I got a letter from her saying she sent in the forms and was planning to visit as soon as approved. A few weeks later I got the approval. I sent it to her on that Monday and on that Saturday I heard my name called for a visit.

The moment I saw her, her eyes and smile said to me "we are going to be o.k." After the first little while it was so easy to talk to her, and Kyle too. Ethan said he wanted me to come home with them, and Isabelle sneaked in a hug to my side then took off real quick. There across the table from me sat this beautiful young woman, wife, mom, and still I could see my little girl. She didn't hug or even shake hands, and the kids didn't hug, shake hands or call me grandpa but that's all o.k.

Because seven years ago I got a letter, and today we took photos together.

Iron John

JOHN O. NEBLETT

flittering images
at the
edges of
sight: memories
of hopes
create anxiety –
flickering peripheral
visions nervously
earnest to
manifest in
consciousness, are beaten savagely,
forced
back
into
unbeing
with kicks, claws, fists, bites, and epithets
from an iron will set on keeping dreams in the prison
of night.

Equal Oppression

JAMES HALL

Garrison Johnson, an African-American inmate, filed a suit against the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation citing that segregation violated his Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection. The CDCR kept Johnson in more restricted custody, longer than necessary, because there were allegedly no African-American beds open. In February of 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that segregating cells by race was unconstitutional.

The CDCR has decided to interpret the law the way they see fit: force the inmate population to integrate, violating everyone’s Fourteenth Amendment rights. Housing assignments are not supposed to be determined solely by an individual’s race, yet requiring all inmates to integrate their cell would be discriminatory.

The CDCR will be putting correctional officers and inmates at risk unnecessarily if they force the entire inmate population to integrate their cells. Prison officials know that special care must be used when making housing decisions in California, as penitentiaries are dangerous places. The U.S. Supreme Court decision does not mandate that the inmate population be totally desegregated. In fact, Suzan L. Hubbard, Director of Adult Institutions, claims the CDCR will not force all of its inmate population to integrate their cells. Hubbard wrote this consoling letter to the San Francisco Chronicle, in response to letters from citizens worried about the impending desegregation of the state’s institutions.

Despite the politically correct answer Hubbard gave the S.F. Chronicle, the CDCR seems intent on forcing integration upon the incarcerated masses. The threatening memorandum was posted in North Block; said memo describes how people will be punished if they do not comply. The

CDCR wants to house noncompliant inmates in Behavior Management Units for failing to participate in the Integrated Housing Program.

The CDCR has made rule changes to punish inmates who refuse a housing assignment. The ramifications for an inmate refusing an assignment range from loss of privileges, to being housed in administrative or segregated housing units. *This* is forced segregation.

In the first week of December, I was summoned to see my correctional counselor regarding my upcoming annual review. I told her I wished to continue my present program; and, when asked about integration, I told her that, as a Caucasian lifer, I could not comply with integration without being prone to violent reprisals from other white inmates. Said hearing was going to be held in absentia, per my request. I received notification, via institutional mail, that I was to maintain my current program; however, the unit classification committee decided to code me as racially eligible*, despite my wishes. I wrote an inmate appeal (CDCR Form 602) to get the false information out of my C-File, as this type of information would make me *persona non grata* among my (white) inmate peers. During the sixteen plus years of my life sentence, I have managed to avoid conflict because my offense is not deemed unacceptable to other inmates and I have not drawn the unwanted attention of the people who make decisions among the incarcerated population. I intend to continue to look out for myself, as the CDCR is not trustworthy.

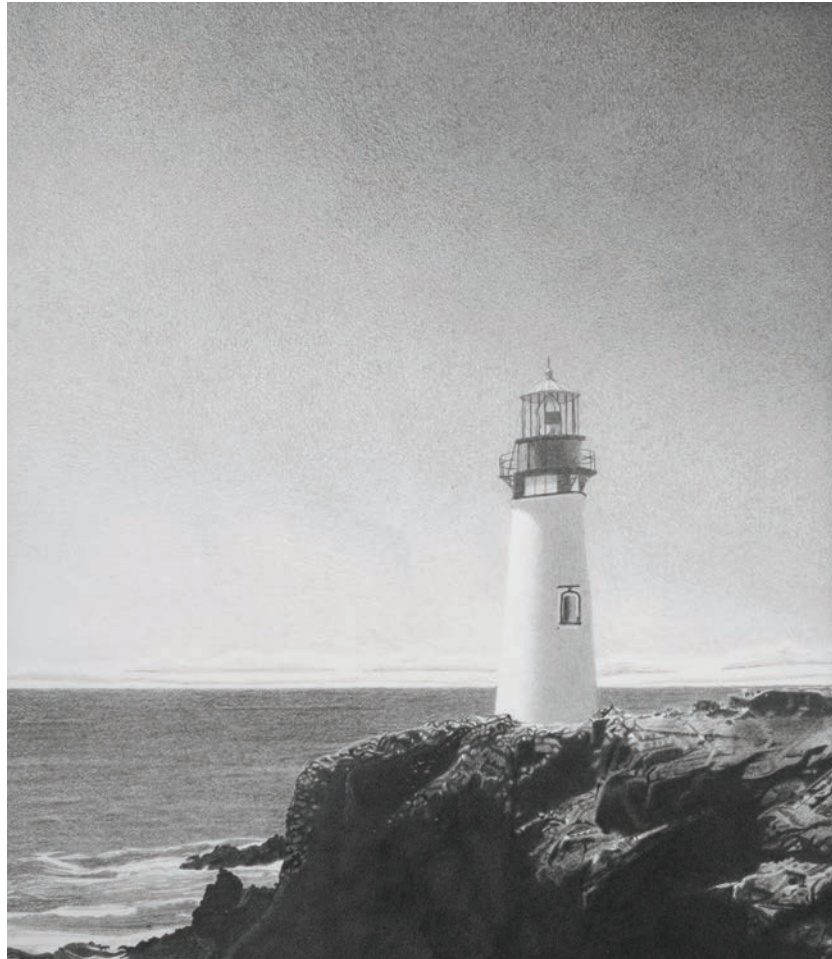
All of a sudden, the CDCR is trying to compel groups of inmates into cells, even though inmates have waged bloody race wars over the years. I have seen whole yards erupt into race riots on four different occasions—at New Folsom, at Lancaster, at New Corcoran, at Soledad. Peace is precarious in California between the diverse cultures housed within the state's prisons; therefore, it's unsafe to compel all of the state's inmates into integration.

*Editors' note: *Racially eligible* refers to an inmate who can be housed with inmates not of the same race.

Being an inmate with a life sentence, I must comply with the unwritten code of rules for inmates. With the passing of Proposition 9, which allows the Board of Parole Hearings the discretion to mete out multi-year parole denials (from three to fifteen years), I must assume that my incarceration could be permanent. That said, I will not be able to comply with forced integration. Alternatively, I cannot see how the CDCR could get away with punishing people who do not participate in the integration program. Forcing integration is not mandated in the Johnson ruling; as such, the CDCR is breaking the law by implementing a forced integration policy. The CDCR has gone from one extreme to another: forced segregation to forced integration.

Not the Lighthouse at Yaquina Head, Oregon

KEVIN O'DONNELL



The Power of Words

MARVIN MITCHELL

I remember sitting in trial for both first degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder, as the DA played my music for the jury. All of a sudden, the words that I was once so proud of and confident in had new meaning. Every curse word pierced my ears like lyrical gunfire, as I watched the jury stare at me with shock and disbelief written all over their faces. That day changed the way I heard music and the way I saw the power of words. To be the sole cause of my own demise was an experience I could never fathom, let alone forget. What I learned that day was that what you say can make you just as guilty as what you do. After fully understanding this experience, I could never in good conscience tell someone, as Joe Loya* put it, "to commit murder on the page." Don't get me wrong, I understand Loya's unconventional strategy that was born out of abnormal circumstances, such as a prison cell. However I cannot see where it would be wise to encourage a person, let alone a felon, to express him/herself in a manner that could quite possibly incriminate them.

First of all let me say that I believe in freedom of speech. I believe that a person should be able to say exactly what's on his/her mind. But to suggest that these so-called "dark journal writings" are somehow a good thing is where Joe Loya and I differ. My argument is simple: I was directly affected by words I had written for my album. Again, the DA played my album at the beginning of the trial, but I knew by the look on the faces of the jury members that I had already been convicted by them

*Editors' note: This essay responds in part to "In Defense of Dark Journal Writings" by Joe Loya, an editorial originally published in the Los Angeles Times. Loya's editorial, which defends the right to write violent or pornographic material, was prompted by the case of Brian Dalton, an Ohio man who received a 10-year prison sentence for writing a story in which children were molested and tortured.

for the songs I had written, and not the facts of the case itself. So when Loya suggests that we encourage our youth to write down their negative thoughts, it troubles me. It's important that we encourage our youth to think positive in all situations. To suggest that it's ok to be anything but is creating a lack of confidence in our young people to grow as positive thinking adults. But for the sake of argument, let's say that dark writings are a legitimate way of overcoming stress and just overall healthy way of expressing ourselves. Still, wouldn't one want to take into consideration the status of youth that you introduce this form of expression to? One's criminal history can certainly limit one's freedom of speech. Let's take a felon for instance. Would it be smart to encourage a young person who is already on parole or probation to have this kind of material lying around where the police could discover them, the way they did in Dalton's case? What about a person who has a history of mental illness? Do we encourage that person to "commit murder on the page"? How could this be responsible? Even though kids indulge in negative writings, it's often because no one is challenging them to do anything different. When we condone negativity on any level, we kill the prospect of hope. It's like saying go ahead and be negative because the world is corrupt anyway.

In my situation, my first amendment right was truly violated. It was illegal to use my album as evidence in court. But the truth stands that the things I rapped about are what I really believed in. And how can a man truly be separated from his thoughts? Our experience as human beings tells us that even our most animated, fictional thoughts lend to our character. I would bet that Stephen King was a child who had a lot of interesting thoughts, which ultimately led to the way he creates his characters and movies. Loya writes: "I hated my life behind bars, hated how I was treated, and that hate poured into letters I wrote." He proves my point here, that it's not always healthy to write down what you feel, when you are angry. Are we supposed to revisit these journals later after we have calmed down, or just throw them away? That is a question that

I would like to ask Loya. If we should revisit them, then what good can come from being reminded of such brutal negativity? And if we should throw them away, what's the use in writing them in the first place? While I think it's good to acknowledge all of our emotions, it can be dangerous to dwell in negative emotions.

In closing I would like to make clear that I do understand the intentions of these writings and I don't judge whoever chooses to write these kinds of journals. My only hope is that we recognize in our young people their need for positive affirmation and the kind of support that will motivate them to see themselves as not only master of their own lives but also people who can take negative situations and come to positive conclusions. At the end of the day, if these journals don't make us better humans, then it's really not therapy and so it's really of no good use. Again, I'm in prison for the things I wrote. And what I wrote was powerful enough for a judge and a DA to want to use it against me. With words like, "one shot from the thigh to the main vein left his blood stain with his gang name written on the wall," or "I leave 'em spineless, mindless, left hanging on the corner with his pockets on a minus, try to find this blind his folks with the chrome nine then I blow smoke out my sinus," it's no wonder why they used my album against me. Why would a sane person write something like that, entertainment or otherwise? Now do my words by themselves make me a murderer? In theory no, but what will a jury say? As you can see, my words had murder written all over them. Do I now ask a kid, already in the system, to go ahead and kill the world on paper, thus potentially killing him/herself in the process? No, because if any negative act follows, people will say the journal was a cry for help or a warning sign that nobody cared to listen to. In that case, they will even start to ask who encouraged these kinds of writings.

Ghost

MICHAEL FELL

Black, frigid cold
Breaks my hold
On reality.
Shifting of shape
To escape
This eternity.
Form changing past
Drifting fast
Out of sound and sight.
Fading away
Like the day
Into dark of night.
I call out;
No one answers.

Dear Self

GARY SCOTT

Dear Self,

I don't think that you could comprehend how much you mean to me. I yearn for you to have an early enlightenment because our future lies in your decisions. The future of others is desperately hanging on a thin line of your choices. So please meditate on these precious words I now write to you.

I really don't know how I can penetrate the force-field of stubbornness that surrounds you, but if you only knew what awaits you, that force-field would shatter into a billion pieces. You might not recognize it, but I know what you're going through. You are trying to find yourself, but you are looking in the wrong places. You're looking in places of false love being that you have never learned what true love is in a broken home. Since you're fatherless, you walk in the footsteps of the fatherless. Footsteps of some men with secret motives and selfish gain and some young men searching for love because love wasn't found at home. Peer pressure is surrounding you like an island is surrounded by water. You don't have to be that island. Only time will tell when the volcano on that island will erupt.

Think about your little sister, Comeal. Who's going to guide her? Imagine her life without you. It would be selfish not to take her into consideration. What about the sacrifices your mother made for you? Despite all the bad things you've done, she never gave up on you. So don't give up on her.

Believing that you're the product of your environment is foolish. It is just an excuse people use to justify their evil doings. A real man will take responsibility for his own actions. Therefore, you are accountable

for everything you chose to do. Only if you could feel the pain, the guilt, the regrets and the suffering going on inside of me; maybe it would spark a change within you.

One thing that you can count on is that I will never give up on you—no matter what happens. But what I do need from you is to love and respect all the men and women that share this world with you. You are not the only one that suffers inside. Everyone deserves to have a better life. There are people that are in this struggle with you.

Don't let your dreams and aspirations come to an end because of greed. Slow Down! The fast lane is too fast for you. Not to mention that your affiliations have you living close to the edge of existence. What benefit is it to represent a group of people that doesn't care if you die or spend the rest of your life in prison? It's like being a pawn in a chess game against a formidable opponent—just a sacrifice for a cause that is impossible to win. You are so much better than that. I still don't believe that you understand how much you really mean to me—chose life—be great. And always remember that love is the reason for being.

ERIN O'CONNOR

I am unapproachable
There
I stand in the far
Corner of the room;
Arms folded, perfect
Posture, eyes forward
Active; as if on guard.
A steep, craggy cliff
Standing sentinel
Over the rocks below.

You think you know me
Because of the way
I look? The way I carry
Myself? You think we're
so different? We're not. You
Judge me
Is it the haircut? Image?
You shouldn't listen
to other people.

I know you. I used
To be you; stoic
Unaccommodating, biased
I looked at others as you
look at me. Judgment
based on an image or idea.
I missed out on so

Much
Just as you are
Missing out now.

I stand in
The middle of the room;
Arms loose, still with perfect
Posture, eyes forward
Active but interested.

Like an old friend
You haven't seen lately
I stand here
unapproachable
No more.

Poison in, Poison out

RICHARD GILLIAM

Here I abide by society's desire.
For a wrong done one, deserved or not.
In your keep my consignment now lies,
with the design virtuous influences give rise.
Compassion is the aim, but contempt the norm.
Almost to a man misanthropy and disapprobation
fuel your disdain for me and those like me
who seek redemption and empathy.
Our lot is diminished, not uplifted by the pain.
But, do I profit, not from graciousness, but from enmity?
Or does it deprecate society?
When in finality we are one and the same,
and will meet as equals in the dream of Avalon,
or amidst the chastening flames.

*They Call Him Abraham:
A glimpse into a wondering warrior*

KAMAL SEFELDEEN

Baton Rouge, eclipsed by the fame of New Orleans further south. It means in French “Red Stick,” commemorating a red cypress tree that marked the boundaries between the hunting grounds of two Native American tribes. As the capital of the state of Louisiana, 50 percent African-American, 45 percent white and the remaining percentage Asian and Hispanic, time in Baton Rouge passes in a slow cycle, and the children of the slaves as well as the creoles, time has forgotten, but on the 18th day of November 1968 another concern was in the mind of the woman whose attention was on the baby boy she just gave birth to, his lungs screaming and announcing the arrival of the little Abraham. He would be raised by this African-American single mother until the age of eight, during a time when the African-American community was stricken with a social pandemic. Mothers, grandmothers and aunts left with the yoke of raising angry boys and destitute young girls who seldom complained of the deep hole left by questions they not dare ask, and no one offers to answer: where is my Dad?

At the age of five, little Abraham did not let anything stop him from putting his old shoes on, after carpeting their insides with old newspapers to make up for the holes, and running outside to catch up with the older boys who armed themselves with a .22 rifle to hunt ducks, geese, rabbits in a make believe world where role models, the spectator, the apprentice and the teacher are children. There is great doubt, Abraham and his older hunters, father-want-to-be, ever encountered the red cypress tree, “the red stick,” for it was not a child’s goal. Their goal was that smile a fowl or a fish would bring to a mother’s and aunt’s and grandmother’s face. It

is anything but a plateau; the skinny dog, the shack houses, the wetland, the woods, the .22 rifle, the homemade fishing rod, all were tools of the game. A game called the provider.

For Abraham, at the age of six-years-old, the old plateau became a distant memory as the bus took him away with his mother to a new strange world, Oakland, California.

At Oakland, the old question, the need for a father came to life. There was no old game to cover up for the missing hole, or to patch up for the answer. At eight years of age, Abraham’s question was of a different kind, persisting with a gory face nascent from a very dark cloud annulling any hope for sunrays. Abraham gives a profound account of a heart-wrenching scene of his mother dropping him with a relative to raise him, leaving him behind with a mountain of questions, although only one that sticks in his mind, what did I do wrong? Abraham’s life seems like a journey in search of the answer. That trip commenced with him climbing the hill of anger, a temporary relief from the agony of frustration, the paucity of response, self-blame and unjustified self-guilt.

Confrontational with the unknown, Abraham was ready for a head-on collision with anything or anyone that could be sensed as inducer of pain. “I remember when a bigger and older boy than me was causing chaos in the neighborhood, I found myself drawn by intimidation to challenge him,” says Abraham recollecting his adolescent years. When asked about why he would risk a beating from an older kid, he responded, “Because sooner or later my turn will come for him to pick on me, and I would rather get it over while my heart is ready.”

Abraham’s journey continued its full throttle until it landed him in prison. He finally found the time to ponder, to slow down his Don Quixotic apparition, fighting the ghoulish monster of the past in every current object or subject. “Pondering things of an in-depth nature is how I spent a great deal of my time,” says Abraham, describing the downing effect after a long battle confronting the specter of anger. Now in prison,

he has a different kind of battle, where he has to face none other than his demons.

It was during that time of pondering that Abraham's journey of self finding started. "I knew that my current situation could not be the end to all of who and what I was put on this earth to be," states Abraham, who for the first time finds himself alone. Alone from the ghost of the past, alone from the blames and the deep guilt of self-hate. "Through a series of circumstances and traumas in my life, I found myself in a place of feeling very alone," Abraham states. He was alone amidst a deafening silence in a sad valley where angels are floating over collecting and repairing what ever was left of his own wounded, angry soul. The virtual battle with the past, with the unknown, with the ghouls of betrayal, have been let go, and there is no one claiming victory or mourning the victims, the old questions that couldn't be satisfactorily answered.

"As a child, I always had thoughts concerning the Divine, who was God and how did my being here relate to him," Abraham recalls. He said that the feeling of desolation that followed, the silence, caused him to really look at himself and see the real purpose of his creation. He realized that while he was seeking all the wrong answers he had encountered the one answer that would define him now forward. "From this revelation came the realization that I had not all the answers that my situation, my positioning life, demanded. Fortunately, Allah had been planning this for me since my birth...In looking back, I can see that my life was for the service of Allah. Since my eventual conversion to Islam, the transition has been mind blowing, in as much as who I have become personally, as well as who I have become to others," says Abraham with a deep conviction.

"Although my path was one full of hurts and trauma, the end result is such a blessed thing that I would not want to change it for the world. Not only have I become a better person for myself, I have found out the why and the who I am in relation to the Creator and just what duty that places on me towards my fellow man, and that is a job I cherish," says

Abraham. "Hearing his comments and the account of his life, makes me touch my own scars," says one of Abraham's classmates.

Abraham's accomplishments are considerable, some kept for himself in the form of poems and thoughts, in a wish he shares in close proximity with a safe distance:

"I address the stage,
That was my jump for the fight
I had to change something, you see!
I mean living right.
Done thieving in broad day light
That should've been done at night
I address the stage to bliss the Mic
I show this as my jump for the light."

When he scores one for the team, a homerun, or even a hit or stealing a base, followed by a roar of his teammates and spectators, a sparkling of joy comes to his eyes with satisfaction manifested in energetic participation. In self-help classes many mistake his quietness as a lack of interest, but if asked to summarize a discussion, a surprise more than what the bargain calls for, he articulates a critique to the subject.

One would find in him an attentive listener with mordant approach; yet, his animating eyebrows are elevated when struck by curious note, and bow out when they detect tedium, screaming, "sell me the car. Don't drive it for me!"

A philosopher, he is not, but a prospector for those things that he didn't have the chance or the lead to search for and to know about, things that would enhance his mind and heal his spirit. Ebraheem, as named by his Muslim brothers, could have been a bronze bust of an African warrior, no longer seeking an answer for a question of the past, but aiming to the horizon of what is to come.

The Devil's Junk Yard

ALLEN O. WEBB

These walls won't fall, this place
I hate being in; it's been called gladiator
School and reeks of the devil's waste.
Masculinity and insanity form the generator,
In a world crowded and murky. Drowning in
A deep dark hole, where lives are lost,
And sprits are stolen,
I fight the gated beast at all cost.
I fly into the tender night I share
With my children, the night a cracked mirror
Of the day I walk. They call on me as their
Winged avenger, but they wipe away my fear,
And fracture these walls with their minds.
Truth is they're mine.

Contributors' Notes

RICK BRANSON: I have always enjoyed reading nonfiction and learning new words to expand my vocabulary. I truly believe education is not only the key to freedom, but it makes the world a more civil place. I hope to be published some day.

KENNETH R. BRYDON: The poem says it all.

RANDALL COUNTRYMAN is an amateur artist with no formal art training. He drew his first portrait in the autumn of 2001, at the age of 31. Mr. Countryman prefers to draw in pencil because it gives a sense of nostalgia and an antique quality to his artwork. He has drawn portraits and landscape scenes for clients all over the world, including Europe, China, and the United States.

MICHAEL ENDRES: I am sharing my story in hopes of helping to encourage other dads, moms, daughters, and sons to never give up. Thank you, Sammi, I love you and I am very proud of you. Thank you, JESUS CHRIST, my LORD and SAVIOR.

FELIX FAUSTO PEREZ was transferred to an out of state prison during CDCR's recent efforts to relieve overcrowding in California prisons.

MICHAEL FELL left San Quentin in 2008.

HENRY EDWARD FRANK: I began artistic expression at a young age and my latest genre is block printing. I, along with other block printers, such as Felix Lucero, have had our prints accepted in the Library of Congress Collection. I love animals and I believe it shows through my art.

RICHARD GILLIAM: I am an aspiring writer, a social commentator, and an advocate for prison reform. I believe that to change the cycle of incarceration, release, and recidivism takes education at all levels. We need to educate the offender while s/he is in prison, so s/he can obtain meaningful, self-sustaining employment upon release, and we need to educate the warders of incarcerated men and women to motivate, encourage, and assist those in their charge. "Poison in, Poison out" is a lament to the culture of contempt and subjugation that exists in our prisons today. To read more of Richard's work, look for *Brothers in Pen*, an anthology of stories produced by the creative writing group at San Quentin prison.

JAMES HALL: I am a 42-year-old incarcerated person who enjoys sports; likes reading periodicals (i.e. surfer magazine, *Dirt Rider*); has received vocational trades while imprisoned (plumbing and machine shop); and is currently striving to attain an AA degree at Patten University. I wrote my story to enlighten about how CDCR's policy will adversely affect prisoners.

BHAI HARRIS: The picture and the poem express my time here. I believe there is a reason for everything, for every step we take, for all the lessons learned. I've learned a lot at my stay here, about myself, about the world, and of course about birds.

EDMUND JOHNSON (TALEB): Even though I would like to explain why I wrote "STUBBORN EYES OF MINE," I will not because it would take a great deal of time and many pages to do so.

My name is MARVIN MITCHELL (Marv Mitch). I was born in Sacramento, California. My hobbies include football, working out, poetry and hip hop. I wrote this essay because I wanted to show people how powerful words are and the effect they have when they are being used against us.

JOHN O. NEBLETT: "Who I aspired of all things to know/ Sister of the mirage and echo..." These lines from the Robert Graves poem "White Goddess" describe how I have pursued this art after being inspired by reading John Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*. Some would say these are mutually exclusive sources of inspiration, but I never was much of a Catholic in spite of being raised as such. What "Iron John" and "Narcissus" have in common is my attempt to communicate personal truths as universal truths in forms that maximize their impact, pleasing to the mind as well as to the ear. Gracias.

ERIN O'CONNOR: I am a dad, an artist, a writer, and a fan of all genres of music. I am currently enrolled in Patten University's AA program.

KEVIN O'DONNELL: I began my career as an artist some 12 years ago, shortly after receiving my life sentence. My celly at Calipatria, who was also an artist, told me that I'd better find something to do with my time or my time would do me! The drawing included in this edition of OpenLine is the result of years of dedication and hard work.

BILL ROBERTS: I was an English teacher in Japan for 18 years, but I'm glad I have the opportunity here to study math. It's opened the door to a whole new world for me. Other hobbies include skiing, windsurfing and sailing. I also play the bass in the Catholic choir.

GARY L. SCOTT: I dedicate this letter to all the youths who are faced with difficult challenges in finding direction and vision. Mistakes will happen. How you rebound from them determines your inner strength. Love God and others!

KAMAL SEFELDEEN: A native Alexandrian of U.A.R. politically cultured as a Nasserist, attended the *Institut d'étude politique* at *Université d'Algerie*.

With a BA in Business from UA, School of Commerce, commissioned as an editor for UA's newspaper, The Dialogue "Al-Hewar," then freelanced for the oldest Egyptian magazine, *Rosa-El-Yousseff*, and other periodicals. After Camp David treaty, he attended the transitional economy seminar endowed by Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the CDU at Bonn, Germany. In the US, he acquired an Associate of Science in computer and worked as a programmer analyst for an environmental engineering firm. He is a contributing writer to SQ News. "A Glimpse into a Wondering Warrior" is an excerpt from the original profile story about Abraham Gasper.

HARRISON MISIOKA SEUGA: Fu'tiga, Samoa. To love. To life itself. To Sara's distance and nearness. Nature's living canvas...

ANTHONY SMITH: I come from the cold streets of the South Side of Chicago; I've run the streets there and various parts of California. Coming to prison helped me wake up and make necessary changes in my life. Attending Patten College taught me new things and refined my acquired knowledge. I dedicate this publication to my daughter, Kamorie, to show her the importance of receiving an education and it's also dedicated to those who told me I would never be anything of significance in my life. I earned my high school and paralegal diplomas, and am working on a college degree now.

CHARLIE SPENCE: I am currently 28 years old and serving a 26 year to life sentence. Recently I have had the opportunity, through Patten University at San Quentin, to start earning an education. This essay is a byproduct of the beginning stages of that tutoring. I plan on one day obtaining a BS degree in Sociology and Criminology. My education is not just about a higher learning for me; it is also about the deeper and more profound quest to unlock an educated, experienced, and articulate voice for thousands and possibly millions of undeveloped youth who have and will receive life sentences throughout the United States.

FRANK VALDIVIA: I lost everything I had and everyone I love when I came to prison. But the person I was didn't deserve any of it. There are people outside these walls that love you or that you love. They deserve the best so be your best. I'm finally doing my best and my daughters Kayla and Alicia deserve it.

ALLEN O. WEBB: I wrote the sonnet because I believe we all are faced with barriers we feel we can't overcome. Either we don't like the situation, or we feel we just don't measure up. But if we trust and believe in ourselves, what was a brick barrier becomes a path to enrichment.

About the Prison University Project

The mission of the Prison University Project is to provide excellent higher education programs to people incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison; to create a replicable model for such programs; and to stimulate public dialogue about the state of criminal justice and education in California and throughout the United States. The central goals of the Prison University Project are to educate and challenge students intellectually; equip them to develop productive and satisfying careers; and prepare them to become leaders for their communities and for the society at large.

The College Program at San Quentin is the central project of the Prison University Project. It provides approximately 12 college courses each semester in the humanities, social sciences, math and science, as well as intensive college preparatory courses in math and English, to over 250 students at San Quentin. All faculty in the program work as volunteers. As of Spring 2009, 74 students have graduated with the Associate of Arts degree and many others have left prison to continue their education on the outside.

More information is available at www.prisonuniversityproject.org.