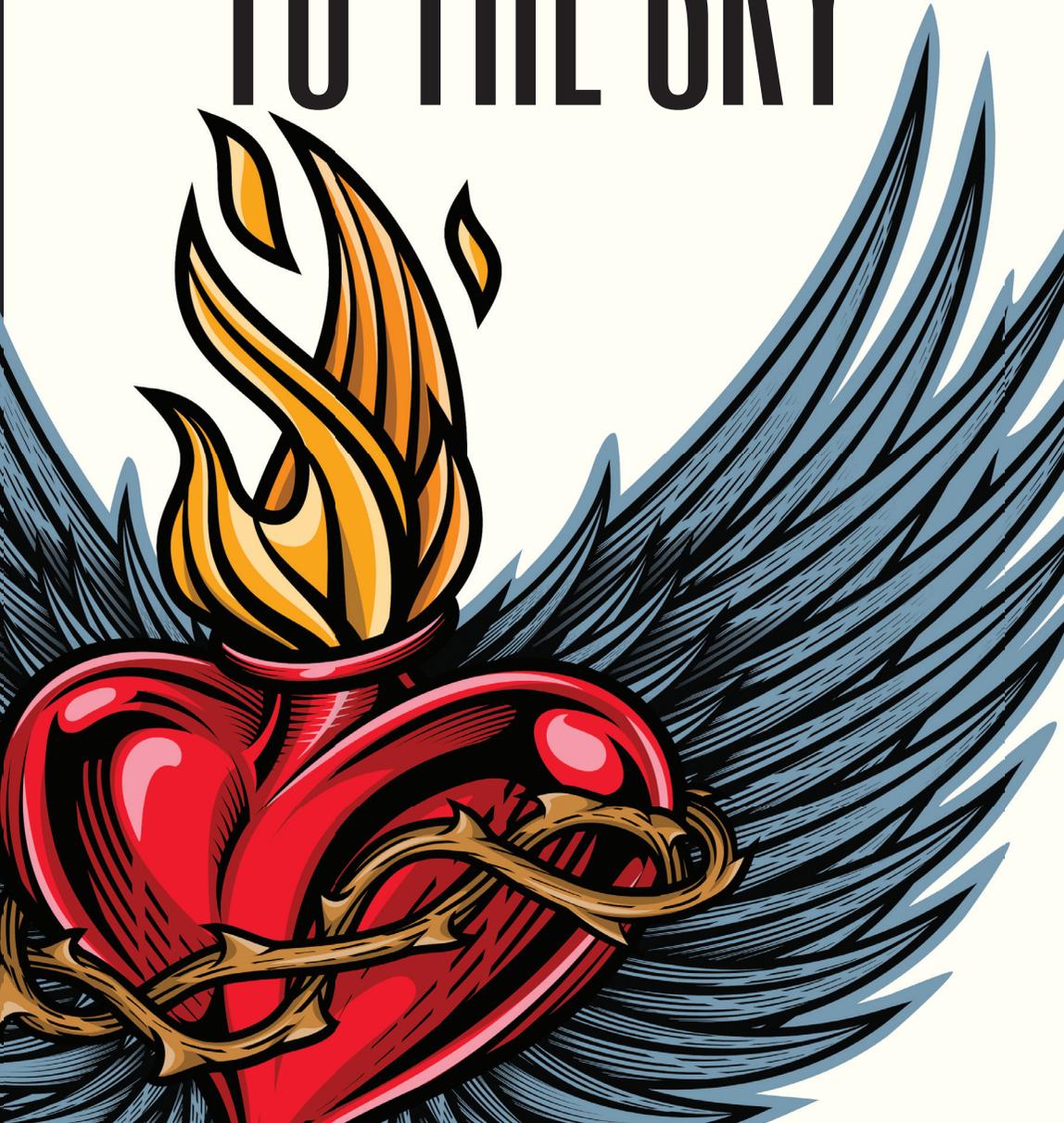


Poetry from residents of Cyndi Taylor Krier Juvenile Correctional Treatment Center  
In partnership with Gemini Ink's Writers in Communities Program  
San Antonio, Texas

# PRAYERS TO THE SKY





# **PRAYERS TO THE SKY**

## Prayers to the Sky

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Student work has been edited as lightly as possible in order to honor their original voices.

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# Foreword

In *Prayers to the Sky*, the culminating publication of Gemini Ink's eleven-week poetry workshop at Cyndi Krier Juvenile Correctional Treatment Center, each of our young poets pulls you into a world of small beige rooms, new love's intoxication, games that never end, fathers that leave, mothers that stay, and brothers that come back like old habits. Over the course of this workshop, veteran WIC writers Erica DeLaRosa and Jim LaVilla-Havelin challenged their young writers to discover the malleability of words, the unique rhythm of their voice, and the power of language to evoke image and emotion. With this collection, each student has not only met that challenge, but surpassed it.

Thank you to Bexar County for your continued collaboration with Gemini Ink and for understanding how creative writing facilitates the empowerment and rehabilitation of incarcerated youth. As always, thank you to Jim and Erica for their unending commitment to helping every student ignite, cultivate, and hone their creative voices. The skill and heart you bring to this project continues to make this workshop a success year after year. Thank you to the Bexar County team--Theresa Scheets, Jason Hill, Joslin Rice, and Jayme Lyon--for your facilitation and logistical support. Your assistance is instrumental to Gemini Ink shaping a world where all people, including the incarcerated, experience the power of creative writing.

Most importantly, thank you to the poets in this anthology. Because of you, we know what is written in your book of disappointments, who you hold in gratitude, where you're from, how you're really about a poem and not a song, and what it feels like to wait endlessly

in a “room/ [that] has no mouth, just ears.” Every poem in this collection speaks to your courage to tell the truth even when it’s searing and ugly and to dream even in small rooms and at dead ends. As you leave this workshop behind, take this courage with you and call upon it so that you may always “speak till there’s a spark,/ and sing/ in the dark.”

Florinda Flores-Brown

Writers in Communities Program Director

Gemini Ink

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RUSSELL M.

## **From the Book of Disappointments**

All I ever hoped for was to make it home,

and just what I got was pulled over.

At the beginning it looked like everything was good,

but now it's clear it's just dumb.

When I looked for away out all I ever found was dead ends.

I hoped for the best and prepared for the worst

and got ready for whatever.

Without any good reason, there is always something bad happening.

In Chapter One of The Book of Disappointments, I am expected to be  
a better person, and instead, I went back to my old ways.

Sometimes I wish for better days to come, but I know  
there is nothing but  
negativity  
around me.

At the beginning I thought I could make it out.

## Thank You

Thanks for all the love, and while I'm at it  
thanks for remembering  
to show love.

I think I'd like to thank  
my family,  
and god.

It's hard to thank my father, but  
thanks anyway.

Each day, each morning, I get up  
to thank god.

You  
might want me to thank  
myself, but  
I'd  
rather thank god.

For all she's done for me, I thank my mom.

No one deserves thanks more than god.

Thank you to my mother, I said,  
Thank you for my life.  
Thank you for the house that you  
provided me to live in.  
Thank you for the clothing on my back.  
Thank you for the discipline  
you gave me.  
Thank you for my brother and  
sister.  
Thank father for leaving our family  
and breaking us apart.  
Thank you, Mom, for staying strong  
and believing in me.  
Thank you for teaching me

not to fear anything or anyone.

Thank you brother for shaping me into a  
young man.

Thank you brother for all those fights we been in  
that only made me stronger.

Thank the lord for creating life itself  
and allowing humans on this planet.

## Soul Bleed

success means change  
    a change means my life will rearrange  
i have to change my life  
    leave this place to be a better me  
i'm gonna do it for myself  
    not for anyone else  
    you can be proud  
        if you want  
but i'll always be proud of myself

some people will be jealous of my success  
    but i won't care  
    this success will be mine  
but i am willing to share  
if what's mine is yours  
    then what's yours is mine  
we came a long way  
    from having nothing  
and turning it into something

if i see it i can achieve it  
i just gotta believe it  
    when i say something i mean it  
give me a goal  
        i'll reach it  
this is just the beginning  
        of a new me.

ANDRE R.

## **From the Book of Disappointments**

All I ever hoped for was my dad.

And just what I got was the trap.

At the beginning it looked like a game,

but now it's clear it's just pain.

When I looked for a path

all I ever found was packs.

I hoped for the best but prepared for the worst—

and got no love.

Without any good reason, there is always a way.

In Chapter One of The Book of Disappointments, I am expected to

get a dime,

and instead I accept, I did the crime.

Sometimes I wish for another chance,

but I know there is nothing but pain in my path.

At the beginning I thought it was fun,

but now I know I'm gone FR.

When I'm alone I know I can feel,

until I realize that this game is real.

What I lost was my freedom.

What's left is a kid with no dad.

## To My Son from Jail

I didn't mean to leave, but they locked me in that cell. Sorry, I couldn't be with you – now I'm going thru hell. I'm gone miss yo first Christmas. I'm gone miss yo first steps. I'm gone miss yo first words.

Now, I'm stuck here depressed. I'm sorry my boy that they took me from you so soon. I was too busy on that block, just being a goon.

But I'm here to let you know that you are in my heart. I promise my lil boy I will never leave you in the dark, no matter what they call me. I won't let no one hurt you.

I've gotta let you know that I love you the most, even tho I live life stuck inside here, there's gone be some things I miss.

I'll make it up to you. Can't hold me for long. I'll be home to you very soon.

## Thank You

Thank you to my mother, I said,

Thank you, for life.

Thank you for the house that you provided  
for me to live in.

Thank you for the clothing  
on my back.

Thank you for the discipline you gave me.

Thank you for my brothers  
and sister.

Thank you.

## Erasers

Erasers – they run away  
when they're loose.

Erasers – they just  
erased the mistake.

I wouldn't have been able  
to do  
this poetry  
without  
this eraser.

Erasers – they come in  
many  
shapes  
colors  
and  
sizes

## FactZ

I'm from Texas mane  
where we swerve lane to lane  
ridin' with the candy paint

I am from the R. family.  
I got it on me.

I came from the free, now  
I'm at Krier waiting to be released.

I'm from a place where we eat  
nun but steak 'n BarBQ. My family  
owns one of the best, most mouth-watering  
brisket, chicken, and all of the common BarBQ  
you can think of. Ask sum one.  
I'm proud to be a R.

Where I come from is Texas where  
we play with guns; ever since  
a lil one with that  
BB pump.

“Oh my soul. I ain't fearin' nun”  
'cause where I'm from you live by the  
gun. You die by the gun, so I ain't  
fearin' nun.

“To each their own.” There's no  
love where I'm from.  
People will chew you  
like sum gum 'n  
spit you out.  
like it is, huh

## **My Favorite Person**

My favorite person is my cousin –  
    he is also where I'm from.  
My favorite season is Halloween  
    when people fear some,  
but my favorite person taught me  
    not to fear nun.

## **Having Faith**

Happy and bright  
Livin' in this life  
Sunset in the morning  
Every part of the day I see her  
Very tall and annoying like them all  
Talks a lot. Always trynna plot –  
Thinks they're small, but not  
    at all. Might call the shots.  
But just because they're tall –  
    Keeps it kool, but  
    acts a fool.

Ethan asked the Lord, "Why?"  
Why did you have to take  
my brother? Ethan continues  
to wait for an answer. As  
the days go by, it get harder  
and harder for Ethan to accumulate  
all his thoughts about his brother's  
death. Ethan continues to  
wait and keeps asking, "Why?"

## I'm From

I am from strong tribes,  
From the white man's bribes.  
I was born from California's mistakes,  
From too many bad dates.  
Listening to Stevie Ray Vaughn's guitar,  
Singing to the moon, and counting the stars.  
Walking fast and riding slow down Echo Park,  
Running from the bullets in the dark.  
Losing my dad at twelve,  
And trying to escape this hell.  
My heart scream hurt,  
Planted six inches deep in thick heavy dirt,  
Trying to escape from the demons in my mind,  
Still learning good things come in time.  
It sucks always having my cheeks red,  
And always knowing that my brother's dead.  
I am from the thoughts of perfection,  
From a native tribe, Blackfoot Lakota Sioux nation.  
I wear a war bonnet and sway to a war cry,  
And sing *Pilalamaya* to my dancing brotha and sista in the sky.  
I am from motherhood at age 15,  
I'm raising him to never be hateful and mean.  
Telling him *yi te wašté*, always be good, and reminding him where  
He came from, was from a woman from the hood.

## Dying

Dying ain't much  
What such luck.  
If I were to die any day,  
It would be sometime after May.  
Don't come and shed those  
fake mascara-stained tears  
and talk about how death gives you fears.

Dying  
so much like lying –  
nobody knows where you go.  
No body knows.

Living is not knowing.  
It's two kids waking up on xmas  
morning knowing it's snowing.  
Being alive isn't being free.  
It isn't asking the white man to free me.  
Is a man  
stuck to a machine  
really living?

Is a baby born  
even going to be  
breathing?

What is after living?  
What is after dying?

## Loud Spark

*From a line from Louise Erdrich's poem "Original Fire."*

"She speaks to the spark,"  
with a loud native bark.  
I give my flaca wine,  
and she sends me sweet time.  
The clock is ticking away,  
Everyone who had left, should have stayed.  
We young ones are running from love,  
while love birds are releasing doves.  
Babies out here firing guns,  
Jokers spittin' puns.  
This heart is on fire.  
Preacher man on TV is a liar.  
My family passed down chains.  
My daddy left nothin' but pain.  
But for now, I'll speak till there's a spark,  
and sing  
                    in the dark.

## Crescent Moon

You have a beautiful smile  
One that makes life worth while.  
Your dimples are deep like a crescent moon  
Hopefully it won't fade soon  
I look for it everyday  
Just your smile alone, makes me stay,

But it is a mask  
You do it like it's a task  
Your smile makes me cry.  
'Cause in you fien to die  
You don't think nobody sees  
When you do notice  
    you change  
        and talk about  
            trees

## Darling Kris

Fighting against this heart  
    trying to put back the parts  
not knowing which way it goes –  
only the little girl buried with it knows.

Being a dark moth in this dark life  
constantly looking for the beautiful light  
looking through a faded window  
always running from a black widow.

Mind's playing tricks trying to make me see.  
Mama said, "Everything comes back times three!"  
Playing hopscotch in these heavy chains,  
while the doctor's pills are resetting my brain.

People are searching everywhere for a change  
but they continue to go about the same  
rappin' about their big booty girl, this or that,  
but did anyone stop to listen about that girl, Kris  
who killed herself because she was fat?

Things won't make sense anymore,  
so those who understand follow me to shore.  
Babies painting their faces to look much older,  
while corpses are reconstructing themselves to look  
    younger.

Three cheers for that woman, Eve.  
Darlings, follow me to sea, so we may set off to be  
    FREE!

## Maya Wonders

Maya wonders  
when the sky will thunder.  
She wonders when will the barbed wire rust,  
when her memories of bein' locked up turn 2 dust.  
She's always thinking of promises lost;  
she's reminiscing about when her brother got shot.  
Maya wonders;  
she's writing while all the words in her mind are in a clutter.  
She's counting down 27 more days,  
sculpting her future like it's clay.  
Always running from things she can't change,  
thinking about yesterday's pain.  
Damn, Maya wonders,  
she's closing the blinds and slamming the shutters.  
Maya wonders.

JASON M.

## **From the Book of Disappointments**

All I ever hoped for is love, and what I got was hate.

At the beginning it looked like Paradise, but now it's clear  
it's just the end of fate.

When I looked for heaven, all I ever found was a dead end.

I hoped for the best for us,  
and got zero trust.

Without any good reason, there is always a trip.

In Chapter One of The Book of Disappointments, I am expected to  
change –  
instead I went back to my  
same ways.

Sometimes I wish for your love, but I know there is  
nothing but zero trust.

At the beginning I thought it was cool, but now I know  
I'm not for you.

When I'm alone I know I can be on my own, until I realize that  
you're gone.

What I lost was something I never should have begun.  
What's left is our memories.



## Tired of

day and night, I was here today and  
yesterday there –  
working at school  
and playing on the field

I'm tired of Krier  
I need to be free  
you living  
me dying

you livin' blooming in the spring  
me dyin' like a rose with no water  
look at back then  
when I was blooming  
now I'm a caged up animal

I need to get air and water and feel free  
Krier

where I'm locked-up at  
people at work busy  
kids play at school  
yesterday was a long day  
today was a long day too

day after day  
night after night  
still here

there  
away from home

you and me  
two different things  
Jazzy Oh

## **Jazzy oh Jasmine**

I love you so much.  
You're my everything.

Baby girl, I miss you  
so much –

I'm locked away  
in a cage.

I don't care what  
your mother says.

I'm here for you  
I'm always gonna be  
here.

I was locked away for  
your birthday.

**Dad...**

grew up without a dad in my life  
watched my mom come back tired  
    as hell from working the whole night.  
Why did you leave me, Dad?  
You left me and my brothers so sad.  
You made my mom so mad.  
But I guess you were glad you moved on,  
but I still haven't and it's been this long.  
I want you to come back, but I know you won't  
'cause you've always been a slack.

I did the things I did  
to get your attention. But you never opened  
your ears to listen.  
Been tryin' to find love in these males  
and females, but I can't 'cause  
I don't even got love for myself.

I believed all those lies you told.  
I thought you would never fold.  
Remember that night you left me  
in the cold? Remember  
you hung up on me, when I got jumped?  
I told you I couldn't feel my face  
    'cause it was so plumped.

How come you left when things got rough?  
I'm supposed to be yo daughter  
    but you sure ain't actin'  
    like a father.

## Why

It's always been hard for me  
to find love.  
It's almost like I'm never enough.  
Every time I let my real emotions  
show, it seems  
they think  
they're allowed to take control,  
because

as soon as he knew I loved him,  
he never let me leave.  
He would hit and hit until  
he saw me bleed.  
I wasn't able to get away.  
Every time I tried he  
hit me straight in the face  
or kicked me in  
my ribcage.

I didn't know what to do.  
Most of my body was black and blue.  
My head would ache with  
nothing but pain.  
My face would throb  
My cries eventually turned to sobs.  
I never knew what I did wrong.

I couldn't understand how you switched up  
fast and forgot about  
our past – you just decided  
to switch your mask.  
I thought you loved me. Why would you  
hurt me?

After you threw me on the floor  
you would wipe my blood  
on your knuckles  
and silently walk  
out the door  
like nothing had ever  
happened before.

I knew you would hear me gasping for air  
but you told me to shut up –  
I had to breathe in and out  
quietly  
because I was so scared.

All this didn't feel real – I was in a nightmare.

I needed to be free of him  
so that's what I finally did.

Now  
it's hard to trust people  
because what he did to me was so  
unbelievable.  
I wanted to feel loved  
but I ended  
getting nothin' but a punch...  
and now my heart is numb.

## **From a Line by Tupac Shakur**

*Today is filled with anger,*  
fueled with hidden hate.  
Tomorrow I even might become  
a saint. Swear I thought my life  
would be great, but my time's  
running out. I think I'm too  
late. I can't take all this anger  
and pain, tryna swerve back into  
my lane, but I'm swervin' and  
this ride drivin' me insane.  
don't know where to go. don't  
know my way. my head's been  
spinnin' for days, but even tho  
I really don't know what  
to say, but I promise you  
I'll be okay.

## **There**

I wonder if y'all goin' to still be there  
or would you move on  
'cause you no longer care?

## **Stuck**

she's stuck between  
who she is  
who she should be  
and  
who she wants to be

## **Yesterday/Today/Tomorrow**

Yesterday was miserable.  
Today was lame. Tomorrow  
will probably be the same.

Yesterday I was hated.  
Today I still am. Tomorrow  
I will be hated, but I won't  
care – I'll be glad.

**From a picture postcard – a snow scene “Central Park”  
by photographer Joseph Albok**

I am freezing.

I can only see a strip of sun  
that is beaming.

I want some hot chocolate,  
that is hot  
steaming.

The snow crunches under  
my feet,

There are things out here  
in this forest  
I have never seen.

This is my only time  
when I can be me.

This snow is so white –  
whiter than a dove.

Man, I wish I was here with  
someone I love.

## **Thank You**

Thank you for waking me up in the morning.  
Thank you for keeping your promise.  
Thank you for always being there for me.  
Thank you for giving me advice when I need it.  
Thank you for keeping me on my toes.  
Thank you for telling me who to trust.  
Thank you for not asking much of me.  
Thank you for keeping me safe.  
Thank you for the life I have.  
Thank you, santísima for everything  
    You've done for me.

## The Room

It's a small room  
with no bed  
nothing but a cold slab.  
I go there when I'm feeling anxiety,  
anger, or just when I'm  
sad, and need time to think.  
I go there whenever I feel  
I can't take it no more, when  
Everything is just so hard.

That room  
never goes  
anywhere –  
it's always in the same spot –  
not  
like people  
people always leave  
no one ever stays  
keeps their promises  
or proves they're worth anything  
it's rare to find a person I can vent to  
tell them about my past and  
expect them to stay  
to be  
there for me.

But the room  
has no mouth, just ears.  
the room doesn't tell me  
"I'm not going anywhere, anytime soon"  
and then just leaves.

The room can't move  
I can't trust anything but  
the room.

## You

you were a dad when mine wasn't  
you were my best friend growing up.  
you taught me how to take care of myself.  
you showed me not all men are bad.  
you helped me learn to have a high  
    pain tolerance.  
I've cried in your arms over  
    their little boys.  
you were the only one who's ever been there  
    for me.  
you'd work extra hours to make sure  
    someone took me out for my birthday.  
you cleaned me up after me and my dad would fight.  
I would give up anything to pay you back  
    for everything.  
we've had our fights and arguments  
    but at the end of the day  
    it's you and me  
    against the world.

MARIO G.

## **I'm From...**

I'm from a place where  
people will always make you fall  
and people stall.

I'm from a place where  
you see people  
on the corner smoking.

I'm from the Westside where  
yo people will switch a side.

I'm from a place where  
young people end up  
in graves.

*GROUP POEMS*

**I Am Waiting**

*After Ferlinghetti*

It seems like I am always waiting to go to sleep.

This waiting is like being stuck in time.

I am waiting to hear about my son.

I've been waiting so long, but I'm still waiting for  
my family to come back for me.

I am waiting for more food, and I'm still waiting  
for people to stop being goofy.

I am waiting for the day that I see my family again.

I'm waiting to hear about my graduation.

Day after day  
I wait for  
another tray.

I haven't stopped waiting for my dad to come back.

Along with everyone else,  
I'm waiting to get realized.

It seems like I'm always waiting to be loved.

## Why Write Poetry / Why I Write Poetry

Poetry helps me to say what I want to say.

I write it because

I said so

and I write it when

I am on the go.

Poetry is the best way

to say it.

I used to write poetry so that I could read it,

but now I write it to let things out.

Poetry helps me to cope.

and sometimes there's poetry

just because

people be weird and

wanna share it

because poetry is

the best way

to express my feelings

Write it because I might be good at it

write it when I'm mad, in order to get my

anger out.

Poetry helps me to relieve stress.

Sometimes I use poetry for a way to escape.

I used to write poetry so that I could remember,

but now I write it to shake my hands loose

from sleep.

Because poetry is the best way  
to express how you feel  
to others.

I write  
to try to get  
better.

I used to write poetry so that I could get better at it  
but now I write it to get better.

Write it in order to learn. I write it to try to have  
an urge to splurge, and gaining knowledge  
ain't always it.

I used to write poetry so that I could get out of my mind.

write it  
because words are magical  
when I feel sad  
to make a better world  
to get things off my chest  
what's on my mind

because I like it  
to try to remember things

write it when I got stuff goin' on with my life & let it out

Sometimes I use poetry for writing songs.

Sometimes I use poetry for fun,

but now I write it to be happy,  
and sometimes there's poetry  
    just because  
we need  
to hear each other's experiences,

and sometimes for putting down thoughts,

and sometimes there's poetry  
just  
    because  
                    I'm bored.

And then there's poetry just because of grown folks.

I write poetry after I feel  
    sadness, anger, love, or happiness..

I write poetry after October 3rd, when this class began  
    I write poetry after I get home.

I write poetry after my day is over.



getting my treatment  
at Krier.

It was real “nothing-burger” – it tasted  
like nothing.

If you’re doing a nothing job, the least you can do  
is something.

There’s nothing left but pain.

All of this – amounts to nothing.

I’m getting nothing for Christmas, ‘cause  
I’m incarcerated.

There’s nothing left but darkness.

If I tell you nothing more than this,  
remember  
this means  
nothing.

Nothing more?

**Rattle, Wail, Sing**

Then the heavy door buzzes open  
clicks shut,  
The big gate – louder buzzer clacks  
to let me in, snaps closed.  
Chain link rattles, a pinging shiver of  
sound.  
And whorls of concertina wire sit  
perched atop the chain link  
catching glints of large lights  
which bathe the space.

I am not here to give you voice –  
you have already.

Does the rattle of the chain link rise  
above the wail?  
Do the whorls of concertina  
sing in the  
wind?

Or is that you?

JADEN A.

## **Change My Ways**

I wanna change my ways  
but it's hard to stay maintained.  
Out of all the other weather  
I really hate the rain.

I wanna change my ways  
But sometimes I don't really think.  
I just think about the slow days  
That goes throughout the week.

I wanna change my ways,  
if you know what I'm sayin'.  
These people really hatin'.  
Don't hate the player  
Hate the game.

## I'm About a Poem Not a Song

I am from da 'tone.  
Where I'm from, everything goes wrong  
I'm about a poem  
not a song.  
Where I live, yea  
It's been wild  
It's been like that  
since I was a child.  
From my mom...she raised me good,  
she finally moved me from the 'hood.  
I'm from that place that you would know  
they call that place, San Antonio.  
I'm from da West,  
I'm just 16,  
yeah, I've done and seen  
some crazy things.  
I had a dream  
but now that I'm here  
sometimes I feel that my dream  
will never be,  
come to fruition  
manifest itself  
in me.  
Where I'm from  
there are days  
I can't trust a soul.  
'cause lately  
my heart's been feelin' cold.  
Where I live,  
I'm about loyalty  
and respect  
just like my wise-mind skill

I have to accept.  
I like the food  
the spicy kind  
the cucumbers w/lucas and lime.  
When I was young,  
I was always outside,  
always breaking stuff,  
and trying to fight.  
From my mom  
And from my brothers  
I love you all  
just like no other.  
Where I'm from,  
it's home  
and I know, I'm never alone.

## Real Talk

I just keep it G  
I thought it was meant to be,  
But I didn't know that a  
person would ever change on me.  
It's just the fact  
that I put you on  
and then you leave.  
Can't understand how people change,  
I can't believe.  
Straight from the bottom to the top  
yea, it felt so amazing.  
All of a sudden people  
ride with you  
just 'cause you made it,  
but *they're not there*.  
The day you fall  
they got it,  
they take it.  
That's why  
I try my best to keep it real  
and not to fake it.  
I think about it  
every minute.  
I can't trust a soul,  
they just don't know  
about my pain.  
My heart been feelin' cold  
but I just gotta keep on moving.  
Gotta play my role regardless.  
I'm gonna keep it real.  
I gotta keep it strong.

## Remorse

Can't think about none,  
no thoughts.  
I can't think of none.  
My mind is blank.  
It's like a dream.  
I can't relate.  
I can't lie,  
I've made a few mistakes  
but that's the route  
I chose (with no doubts)  
to take.  
And now I'm stuck in this position,  
Shout out to my mom,  
she's the one I'm missin'.  
I gotta change the way I'm livin'  
'cause that's just how I'm really livin'.

## Me

Born in Florida Lakeland, raised in Texas in da West.

I am from going on each and every day

From trying to figure out,

*How am I going to make it through the day?*

And trying to numb the pain.

Surrounded by fakes.

Had too many changes

on me.

Had too many losses too.

Praying to a god in the sky

to keep me safe and sound.

Always had myself at the end of the day.

I am from my mother who makes me feel like crap

but I ain't never trip on that.

I am from my dad, who came along,

who put up and

never gave up

on me.

I am from going through struggles everyday,

and still

in the end

making sure me, my sisters and brother

made it through another day.

## **Missing**

I miss being free.  
I miss eating menudo & hot cheetos.  
I miss being home with my dad.  
I miss wearing my clothes.  
I miss wearing makeup.  
I miss playing street basketball.  
I miss being on my phone.  
I miss listening to my music.  
I miss laying on my bed.

## **Ain't Ever**

You ain't ever cared,  
why bother looking for me?  
You ain't ever come to visit me,  
while I am locked up...waiting.  
Why did you ask to put you on my list?  
You ain't ever picked up my phone call.  
Why ask me to call?  
You ain't ever showed up to my court dates.  
Why ask my P.O., when's the date?

## Hermana till the End

Smart with messy hair,  
a heart that's big and true,  
she's at times a bit too much,  
I can always tell when she's  
blue.  
She's 100,  
my best friend.  
And though we're not related through blood  
her sisterhood  
I trust  
till the end.



When I look at you,  
I see the pain in your eyes,  
that nobody else feels inside  
Just know I'll always be by your side.  
When they left,  
You stayed.  
That's the main reason  
I love you.  
All them times,  
I would cry  
You would wipe my tears off my eyes.

## **Blanca**

Beige – the walls in my cell.  
The pants that I wear...  
'manilla wafers.  
The season is fall.  
The time is night.  
My grandma,  
her house, so full  
hate it when I'm there.  
Beige – this color reminds me of juvenile.  
I feel sad.  
I feel glad.  
Smells like hell...  
Beige – like the pearls my great-grandma wears.

## **Up Above**

I wish I could take a nap on them,  
so white and bright  
they seem to collide.  
Sometimes low,  
sometimes high.  
I like to see them around sunset  
because it makes me just forget.  
Like I'm oblivious  
to this place.  
I just hope when I die,  
I will reach the sky.

## Man Up

Reckless,  
Yet so afraid of death.  
That's how it's always been.  
Eventually ceasing to care about death.  
When was I ever going to grow up?

Sixteen,  
Only cared about the money  
That was my obsession,  
All for what?  
When I can lose it all  
At any time.  
After all those nights, I risked my life... why?

Seventeen,  
Now locked up and life goes on.  
Ain't no one gonna put  
Their life on hold,  
Not even blood.  
So, I  
Grew up and changed my ways  
'Cause there's no time to waste.

I blink and I'm 30  
I got it made.  
No dirty money,  
all for my kids.  
Never gonna go  
through the struggle  
'cause all my children  
need the best!

Even to the last  
of my days,  
they're always gonna feel my  
ever-lasting love.

## **Verb Play**

Regurgitate your feelings.  
Devour the criticism.  
Don't forgive kindness  
but explore darkness.  
Stare within  
to discover your weaknesses.

## Nostalgia

The sea makes me remember...

*Mazatlán*

My childhood

The beach

My dad

The drive through *El Espinazo del Diablo*, Méjico

*curvas*,

the fog,

nausea,

and feeling like you can fall off the winding cliff.

My childhood

The beach

My dad

Windows rolled down

the sound of waves crashing against the rocks,

Lingering aromas of sea salt, carne asada y la calle

Tell me we have arrived.

My childhood

The beach

My dad

The sea makes me remember...

Me, as a young boy

My childhood with my brothers

All together

At the beach

And my dad and I... happy.

## Like Nothing You've Ever Seen

I'm from the Westside,  
so you better set aside all your drama  
from your babymama  
that lives in the Northside!  
The only people I trust are Maria and Ceferino, a.k.a my mama and  
my daddy.  
They're always ready to see who is really steady  
by my side.  
I'm from 'placement' & doing time  
sitting here,  
rhyming  
about all the tough times.  
From thinking about, *how I should have stayed home*  
instead of being out at night.  
But nah, that ain't gonna  
define me!  
When I get out,  
I'll be a role model  
to my own family.  
And be someone  
that everybody thought  
I wasn't ever gonna be!

## **Perdóname**

Perdóname, forgive me for taking flight  
and fighting my own fights  
don't let me unleash pride.

Wait.

I still might have some things  
in mind.

Embrace me for once,  
instead of taking flight  
and leaving me out of sight.

Discover me!

Then maybe

You'll find the rest of me.

## **La Casa**

I grew up in a broken home  
that threw me across the dang road  
and hit me right on my throat.

But that ain't what I'm supposed to know.

I'm supposed to say,

“I have a good home to stay in. And friends that have also seen the  
great home that I grew up in.”

I would love to grow up in a home.

That's loving and trustworthy – only about family.

And not such a troubled home.

CARLOS A.

## **Esperando**

I am waiting for my freedom.  
I yearn for a visit from my mom.  
I remain faithful & solid.  
I await my home pass.  
I look for a phone call from a familiar voice.

## **1st of the Month**

Slanging iron – it ain't the way to go.  
I chose this life  
'cause I thought there was no other way.  
Prayin' G\*D to keep me safe.  
Now  
I close my eyes to sleep –  
Keep me safe  
Keep me breathing  
but does it really gotta be this way?

## Rugged

I'm from where things get crazy  
Teens totin'  
Like they da navy but it's normal  
Where I'm from stuff's crazy  
It's not always a bad place –  
Block parties, BBQ's and U.G.'s Chicken plates  
Slabbed up  
Impalas loud music &  
Dice shootin'.  
We went from playin' basketball games  
with the kids from the other hood  
to glocks shootin'  
'cause they're not from da same hood.  
Where I'm from you gotta live by  
da gun  
'cause it's named territory you stand on.  
Even if you don't live like that,  
you gonna die like that.  
I'm from a hard workin' mother, who never gives up & smells like  
roses,  
that raised two kids on her own.  
I'm from a dad that was never home.

## The Fallen Knight

I wish I could have been there with my brother when he died.

You

went

down

like a knight.

Ain't have time

to say

goodbye.

When I got the heavy news

I said, "Hell nah! Can't be my guy."

My heart tore up into pieces

and the pain went down my eyes.

We missin' you, Jr.

I hope you made it to the sky.

Please be our guardian angel

so we make it through the night.

This life that we live –

it gets real cold.

Keep on your coat

'cause when you take it off,

you might just choke

or lose your soul.

## Tired

I'm tired of the system  
I'm tired of these chains  
I'm tired of my brothers dyin'  
When I'm in the cage  
And I'm tired of seeing my momma  
Cry with tears on her face  
Hopin' when I go to sleep  
It gets better some day.  
I'm tired of this life,  
I'm tired of being stuck in this game.  
I'm tired of doing crimes  
And gettin' stuck in this place.  
I get on my knees and ask god  
To help me,  
*I feel like I can't change.*  
Everyday I put myself down  
'Cause I'm the one to blame.  
I'm so tired of these lows  
I'm so tired of these snakes  
I'm so tired of these  
Fake people  
Acting like they're real  
When knowing they ain't.  
I'm so tired of lame  
Folks standing in the field  
Like they know the game.  
I'm tired of mobs  
Switching  
I'm tired of finger triggers  
Itching  
I'm tired of my momma saying,  
*I should have listened.*

## My Struggle

The house I grew up in  
Had boards on the windows  
For the times it got shot up.  
Struggling hard  
Momma cryin'  
Everyday,  
No money to pay  
Bills.  
Sleepin' on floors  
Had no beds  
No blankets  
No pillows.  
Seeing my uncle  
Shootin' up,  
Hittin' the bowlo,  
Crashed on the floor  
Everyday feds  
Knocking on doors.  
Now that I'm older,  
Looking back  
Over my shoulder  
Is not okay,  
It just makes life colder.  
I want something better  
For my family  
And so,  
Moving my momma and sibling  
out of poverty  
Is a dream,  
A goal  
For them  
And  
Me.

## R.I.P. E.J.L.

Wassgood lil bro? How you doin'  
in the clouds in the sky?

You followed in my footsteps,

I just don't know why?

Locked in that cell

Hearing the thunda

Momma on the phone

tellin' me

You

just

died.

I'm sorry I wasn't out to make  
sure you survived.

You

were

a trooper.

My sidekick

My brother, in this lifetime

Now, the only thing

I picture is your momma cryin'.

You lived by a flag.

You played with a gun.

You was in the field with me,

Sellin' drugs.

I'm constantly feeling like

It's

my

fault.

I miss and love you.

For you I'ma ball,

Lord, take care of my Steppa, make sure he's good.

Hope I see you soon.

Yo' name still in the hood.

R.I.P. E.J.L.

## Gratitude

I wanna thank my momma  
for raising me

&

giving me a roof above my head.

Making sure we good even  
when we had  
none

at

all.

For being my mom and my dad  
in

ONE.

## Prayers to the Sky

I'ma send some prayers to the sky –  
pray to god and ask for help to change  
my life.

So many sacrifices puttin' my life on  
that line.

I'ma send some prayers to the sky –  
Talkin' to god, "why did you take my brother?"  
I heard you give your strongest warriors the most pain  
that explains why I walked through that rain.

I'ma send some prayers to the sky –  
so many tears I wasted that  
I ain't gettin' back.

God took my brother  
the same way He took my dad  
only difference is my pops  
could come back.

I'ma send some prayers to the sky.

**Anthony**

It's been 8 years since you left us  
I still think about your laugh.  
I miss you, Dad  
you didn't  
have to go out like that.  
The man you were that night.  
I swear, it wasn't you.  
Freebird in the world  
is how I see you.  
Now,  
am I still your little girl?  
Are you with me right now?  
I gotta say that I'm scared  
'bout the life I made  
and I know you're not proud,  
of my actions.  
But sometimes  
I can feel you near  
I miss us singing Angel Baby  
& you playing Barbie with me.  
Even though you're not my real  
father,  
you loved me like your own.  
I just want to say,  
I love you  
& that I'll keep your name alive  
even though you're gone.  
I'll keep you close – Let's go Lakers!  
This poem is for you.  
I miss you, Daddy.  
And I wanted to say  
that I love you.

## The Mün

As I look up at the velvet sky  
I start to cry.  
Wondering, why  
I gave up the fight.  
He muffled my screams  
so no one could hear.  
The pain he caused  
I'll never forget.  
The way he forced himself  
It felt like a stabbing knife.  
Still I wonder, why?  
Scrub, scrub, scrub  
until I felt clean.  
But clean never came to me.  
I had no voice.  
He took that away.  
So I kept it quiet  
wondering, why?  
This poem is my power.  
I'm taking it back!  
My silence is not a hack.  
I chose to stay silent.  
But this war cry  
is untamed.  
In my silence  
lies unleashed calls of a  
Siren.  
I have survived.  
You'll never know  
the pain  
I  
feel  
inside.

## The Book

Broken pieces

Big-hearted

Reckless

Wild & free

I am very observant.

I'm overcoming my demons.

Very insecure

Mad at everything

I have scars up my legs.

I have a long gash up my right arm.

I have sticks & pokes.

I was a cheerleader & won 1st place at Nationals.

My family owns 3 barbershops & a bar.

I never had a home to call my own.

I love to skateboard.

Bright

Brilliant

Indiana Jones

Beautiful

Exotic

Big-hearted

The real me unfolds beyond the cover.

## **My Soul**

Content

Easy-going

Laid back

Happy

I go with the flow.

I sit back to observe.

I'm always content and go with the flow.

Cheerful

Goofy

Arched eyebrows with freckles.

I'm soft.

I forgive.

I care.

I'm determined.

I envision myself

Rich

Healthy

Self-made

Independent

I am

Smart

Chill

Sweet

And easy-going.

## Thoughts

Life's a bum  
I wish i can drink some coke  
to wash out my stress  
and forget who I miss.  
I wish I can see you  
to hear your voice and  
see you one more time.

All this is my dream,  
to be free  
so I can live out my thoughts  
and explore my wonders.  
Do my don'ts  
& think about my do's.  
Sneak past  
in the shadows  
& watch everything fall.  
To remember, I am the one  
who can bring it down to pieces  
and up from scratch.  
Never forget and always laugh.

## **Time is the Essence**

I am waiting to hold my niece and nephews.

My time lingers.

I remain calm.

I await for my gummy bears.

I look for the future to rush to me.

## **Just Me**

I am from Colorado

where nature is the key to happiness.

I am from Olivia and Berto – my world and sun.

I am from Krier way, I explore the steps to my freedom.

I am from chicken tenders that bring me memories of the past & present.

I am from the stars who shine bright and sing me goodnight.

I am from moon rocks & butterflies.

I am from you get what you give.

I am from the Stars, Moon and the Sun.

## HAIKUS

*About our feelings, worst & best days and life in general*

### **Jaden A.**

I got arrested  
And I had to serve my time  
Now I'm missing home

### **David A.**

One of my worst days  
Was when my bro passed away  
I didn't say "bye."

### **Jacobo C.-B.**

It was last Monday,  
they told me, I had to stay  
'cause of Chick-fil-A.

### **Carlos A.**

My worst day was my first  
time getting locked up on  
May 20 for a gun.

### **Leticia D.**

Swallow yourself,  
The water caresses my face,  
I unleash my anger.

### **Nyssa L.**

I miss the old Nyssa,  
'cause I never gave a damn  
Now, I have to.

**Faith A.**

Chorizo & egg

3 brothers & my mom

Makes me feel warm inside.

**Faith A.**

Indiana Jones

Digging dino bones

Maybe one day, I'll find gold.

## Las Mariposas

Mariposas...butterflies are symbols of  
Transformation  
Change  
Hope  
Life...  
our souls.

Mariposas vuelan a México cada año.  
Mariposas vuelven en la primavera.  
Las mariposas saben el tiempo sin reloj  
Sin calendario  
ni ayuda humana.  
Viven en ciclo.

Este año esperé a las mariposas.  
Anticipaba en verlas  
sentirlas y oirlas.  
Esperaba cuando eran orugas.  
Esperaba cuando dormían en sus capullos.  
Esperaba con paciencia para verlas volar...  
*Pero las mariposas no volaban.*

Este año las mariposas  
Me dijeron que  
a veces era difícil ser las mensajeras de  
la vida y de la esperanza  
especialmente cuando el mundo  
carece de fé y de esperanza.

Con tristeza en mi corazón,  
les rogué a las mariposas que saltaran de sus capullos.  
*Pero las mariposas no volaban.*

Esta era la primera vez  
que las mariposas se sentían diferentes.  
Siempre cuando miraba las mariposas en su primer vuelo,  
me sentía llena de esperanza al ver un nuevo ciclo.

*Pero las mariposas no volaban.*

Esta vez las mariposas estaban luchando para un cambio nuevo.  
Las mariposas estaban cansadas, confundidas y a veces tristes  
y las mariposas no volaban.

El tiempo pasó,  
y llegó el último día para las mariposas  
a ponerse en vuelo.

Les hablé y les pedí que tuvieran esperanza,  
y confiar en los cambios y tener fé en el mundo y en sus propósitos  
porque siempre el mundo no puede existir sin las mariposas.

Inhalé  
y cuando vi al cielo...  
*las mariposas estaban volando.*



ABOUT THE WRITERS IN RESIDENCE

**Erica DeLaRosa** is a co-founder of the performance troupe, Mahina Movement where she has facilitated poetry workshops, produced, and performed on over 300+stages throughout the U.S. and internationally for twelve years. Erica is the founder of & a producing partner with CEIBA Arts Cooperative. CEIBA is a holistic, arts community that focuses on utilizing the arts and well-being education for all communities to promote engagement and sustainability. She serves on the board of San Anto Cultural Arts and is a performer with Poetic People Power in NYC. Currently, she contributes her talents as a Teaching Artist with several community organizations in San Antonio & New York City.

Poet, editor and educator **Jim LaVilla-Havelin** is the Coordinator for National Poetry Month San Antonio and Poetry Editor for the San Antonio Express-News. LaVilla-Havelin's fifth book of poetry, *WEST*, was published by Wings Press in 2017.



## YOUTH POETRY

Gemini Ink provides creative writing workshops led by published writers at our offices and in diverse community settings. We also host free public readings by nationally and internationally recognized authors, open-mic nights, a mentorship program, and an annual summer writers conference, which brings together authors from all over the country to discuss issues relevant to the world of contemporary American literature. We believe in the power of the written word to transform lives and are dedicated to nurturing the imagination, building language skills and encouraging a strong sense of human connectedness in people of all ages.

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