

Editor's Note:

Thank you all for sharing your wonderful poetry with us! Unfortunately, some pieces of writing had no names written on them, so we did not know who to credit. These poems will be marked with asterisks. If you are the author of one of these poems, please write to us and let us know so that we can include your name when we publish the anthology on our website. Thanks!

"The River Of Life" by Carl Branson

A hand on the tiller, steady and sure
 Navigating the tranquil channel twixt
 Granite walls of contentious beliefs
 Cannot foretell rapids 'round the next bend

Rocky shoals forcing, a hopeless choice,
 Disaster looms to the right and left.
 The decalogue lights the moral stream,
 Law swirls away to prisoner's hell.
 Choose one, by the other be damned

"Fist Impressions" by Johnny E. Mahaffey

Well, students, we're here another Friday -
 we made it past the guards and through
 the fences
 to find ourselves once again in the Education
 Building
 --attempting to master creative writing,
 so maybe we can buy some coffee,
 instant, to spoon into our cup
 (we suck it down in place of hope, filling no
 one's void).

Write, write - that's what the goal is
 another monthly Sun assignment;
 "Fist Impressions," was the erroneous typing -
 now here we are, hoping,
 that no one wrote of it.
 a typo opening doors better left closed:
 listen -- more footsteps,
 a student with papers in hand.

"Stop and Go with the Ebb and Flow" by Jesse Bartosiewicz

I woke up as they fell asleep,
 Swimming the shallows and walking the
 deep...
 Quickly the dark was slowly now light,

As always the day is never the night...
 Looking down at the sky and up at the
 ground,
 Closed ears to the sight and open eyes to the
 sound...
 When this blind girl sees that boy,
 None of my sadness is all of your joy...
 Quietly give yet loudly take,
 Pushing what's real and pulling what's fake...
 Lost ones laugh while found ones cry,
 For death is wet as life is dry...
 Grand yet bland
 Mild yet wild,
 Mad yet glad...

"Heaven or Hell" by Daryl Sal Jackson

Did you know that God above created me
 for you to love, he plucked you out of all the
 rest, because he knew I love you the best, I
 had a heart and it was true, but now it's gone
 from me to you, so take care of it, like I have
 done, because now you have two and I have
 none.

If I get to Heaven and you're not there, I'll
 carve your name on a golden chair, for all the
 angels there to see, just what your love
 means to me, and if I do not see you on
 judgement day, I'll know you've went the other
 way, I'll give the angels back their wings,
 golden harps and all those things, and just to
 show you what I'll do, I'll even go to Hell for
 you.

"Glass Box" by Amanda Hancock

This glass box is closing in on me
 Outside of it I can see my potential &
 capabilities
 flowing, flying free and growing
 In here I'll have no chance of knowing
 how high I can reach
 or how strong I can be
 I push back
 The glass cracks
 and I can hear the freedom ring
 I continue to push
 The glass turns to mush
 and my soul begins to sing
 Now the challenge is to go on
 to continue to strive along
 Find my calling

Answer without falling
 And learn that I am
 without being blocked by a dam
 Learning all the lessons
 teaching all that I know
 However I want it
 that's how my story will go

"My Incarcerated Blues" by Nick Highsmith

6:30 wake up to the news
 Pancakes and Cheerios for chow
 Flick the roaches off my spoon
 I daydream while they scream
 Of a familiar kiss, heart racing
 She can bait a hook, fillet a snook
 And drop a thousand jaws if 1000 looked
 Work call, work call, she fades from view.
 I return to my Cheerios and incarcerated
 blues.

"Night and Day..." by Teresa A. Rutter

You're always with me
 "Night and Day,"
 You're in my heart and
 mind to stay.

Your gentle touch and
 gentle ways,
 Linger with me when
 you're away.

I'm writing this for
 you today,
 A little reminder to
 tuck away.

You're always with me
 "Night and Day,"
 You're in my heart and
 mind to stay.

Written in memory of: Cheryl Rae Wickerham

"An Epic Tale of my Mother's Love" by Adam Bowers

An epic tale of my mother's love,
 It's an unbreakable bond sent from above.
 There is only one thing I can guarantee,
 And that's my mother's love for me.

My first line of defense when I am down and out,
 She showed me what love is all about.
 Her loyalty just will never subside,
 Our love is strong and many nights we've cried.
 She answers the phone every time that I call,
 And without a shadow of a doubt rescues me every time I fall.
 From my absent father, which was my achilles heel,
 Her love alone alleviates the pain I feel.
 Hurting her is my one and only regret,
 But she loves me still, so this I won't fret.
 Our Creator worked it all out in His great mind,
 He gave me her, and she is truly one of a kind.
 Through the broken hearts and my unseen scars,
 And prison visits through the glass and these bars.
 She overlooks my many flaws and derelictions,
 And battles beside me, with me through my addictions.
 Most would give up and most would almost certainly leave,
 But still she soldiers on still right here and that's all I need.
 She was truly sent from the Heavens above,
 And this is the epic tale of my mother's love.

"Prison Walls" by Wesley Plater

You can't imagine
 what has happened
 behind these prison walls
 life ends when gavel falls
 you try to stay mundane
 in a world insane
 they say
 it's for rehabilitation
 only to make
 monsters of the nation
 you do not rehabilitate
 you only incriminate
 put in our minds
 nothing but hate
 in these prison walls
 barb wire and gate

we try our best
 to fight oppress
 but in the end
 we break and bend
 families dying
 inside you're crying
 your time is done
 but still no sun
 you're still in a cage
 locked in a rage
 because they're not done with you
 they wanna still have fun with you
 laugh at your despair
 none of them care
 the anger builds
 and hatred fills
 inside your soul
 black as coal
 what once was bright
 with piercing light
 you try to fight it
 but fires ignited
 your defenses have fallen
 the demons are calling
 and behind these walls
 another angel falls

"Casualties In My Mind" by Capt. Harold D. Johnson, Sr. (USMC-Ret.)

Adrenaline surges through my body, as fear grips the soul.
 Vision stained with blood; curdling screams from young and old.
 Witnessing the horror and murders as they unfold; this story of one must be told.

Smoke fills the air, explosions shake the earth; body left trembling, human life has no worth.

The smell of death scents the air, bones and flesh everywhere.

This has to be the place Satan chose as his lair.

Toddlers and young children cut down without haste.

Women strapped with bombs; at no time are we safe.

Life being thrown away, and for what? Such a waste.

The murder, mayhem, and blood I still taste.
 Lord save me from this terrible fate.

In time it becomes natural; the explosions seem serene.

You're numb inside from all the death and blood you've seen;
 you are now nothing but a death machine.
 Living for the kill, the hunt, the ability to cut throats clean.

Forever stuck in this dream.

You've just seen the mind of this United States Marine.

"Wasted Life" by Lester E. Bowser

The time I waste goes by so fast,
 Never to be recaptured. It is the past.
 I ponder the memories that I've created.
 Most are bad and I cannot debate it.

Now I sit alone with smothering fear.
 Where will you be when I leave here?
 Will you want me around?
 Or just wish me away into the ground.

I'm ruined right now, heart and soul.
 Being a new, better person is my goal,
 But try, try, try as I might,
 I have again lost that fight.

My body is so tired of this race.
 I am ready to let go of this place,
 To release myself from guilt and shame,
 To accept every ounce of blame.

I wish I could live like you,
 Knowing all the right things to say and do,
 And there may come a day
 That I will find my way.

But for now, I must sit and wait,
 Praying to GOD it isn't too late.

"I'ma Make the Poem Cry!" by Ohio Spice

Tell me what's going on in the world today?
 I just got a letter from my best friend and found out he a girl today
 My mom told me "I wouldn't be able to tell the difference"
 See that's what's wrong with the world today

People worried about the next person's
decisions
It's a free world right? So why ain't nothing
free
We even getting charged for the air we
breathe
The president said he was going to build a
wall
When honestly he made us build his crutch so
he couldn't fall
I'm so sick and tired of all the racist blacks
and whites
When will we learn that the government
makes more money as long as we fight?
Think about it; if we fighting over here, how
can we watch them?
It's all a throw off so we won't watch him
They get 40,000 a piece off every inmate
Everything we had and owned they find a way
To take then put us back on the street with
nothing but laws to break
Give us the drugs. Give us the guns
Send us to jail again get another 40,000 so
tell me who worried
Look at the little girls these days with their
hands on their hips
And look at the little boys in pictures with their
hands on a clip
So tell me what's more insane than 1
person... TWO (ha)
That's why we gotta start now and teach the
kids
And I hope after this poem,
I don't get killed for exposing the REAL like
TUPAC DID

"Giving In" by Sarah F. Love

My wings were built with moonbeams
I was a creature of the night
But the darkness I came dripping with
Hid the torment in my eyes

The shadows have all held me
So unholy
So unholy
In the lost and lonely
Where the alleys
Fast and quiet
Surrender to the silence
Of the nitty gritty city streets

That only know of secrets
And of heavy, painful dreams

But once I gave that darkness
To the sorrow of my heart,
I lost you in the labyrinth
Of the distant, glittered stars.

"Institutionally Contaminated" by Jack E. Dyson

Clink, clink, clink,
They've chained my feet,
It's supposed to make me think,
About what I'm missing on the street,
Transform me into a better man,
It was a stupid plan,
Because as I continue to collect dust,
In this closet of discarded moth eaten clothes,
With no one to trust,
I go through the throes,
Alone; My life postponed,
Then when there is nothing left,
And I don't want to breathe,
I am brought back; re-animated,
And forced to leave, after my life
And soul has been contaminated,
The clink, clink, clink,
Permanently etched for the world to see.

"Rainy Night In Daytona" by Jeffery L. Spurgeon, Jr.

In Memory with Love of Kyle Connoyer AKA
PineApple

It was about one thirty in the morning,
Street lights were glowing, and it was pouring.
It was a rainy night in Daytona,
The kids were drunk and on the road,
Jealousy took a toll ... on the driver,
And he mashed the gas to the floor.
He hit the tracks and the S.U.V. went into the
air,
It didn't stop until it hit that tree just over there.
Two kids ain't gonna make it through the
night,
No one to blame but that doesn't make it right.
One was eighteen, the other won't get to see
her first dance,
She was barely sixteen, she deserved
another chance.

There were seven all together, the night God
stole my best friend,
That jealous driver didn't have a scratch, why
didn't He take him?
There were two brothers, lucky to be alive,
Them two brothers were little brothers of
mine.

That night claims two lives, one a son, one a
daught, don't that make you mad?
All the others blessed to still be here, some
broken bones are all they had.
I look up at heaven and wonder what she
could've done wrong,
Now all I have is a short life of memories and
this sad song
... She looks up at him with tears in her eyes
... and she says,
James, will you walk with me to heaven?
Will you put your hand in my hand?
Because I'm too scared to walk there alone.
So will you please walk with me ... at least to
the door?
Right then he couldn't hold back the tears
anymore.
He just let 'em flow, and grabbed her hand as
she received it in hers.
The last thing he remembers that night are
her last words ...
"I love you guys."

Then she closed her eyes for the very last
time.
All we have left are short lived memories and
this sad song.
Tell me now what could she have done wrong
... ?
To deserve to go to heaven at just sixteen ...

"I am" by Anthony Zarro

I am
I am the pain of heartbreak
I am the last breath you take
I am the terror in the night
I am the lust you try to fight
I keep you awake, tossing and turning
I make your heart speed up with yearning
I am the stuff of nightmares
I am the voice that's not there
slowly straining your fragile sanity
I am the bane of all humanity
I make mothers scream and rip their clothes

I make sons fatherless and all alone
I spare no one and touch all
I make the strong stand and the weak fall
My lust for destruction will never be sated
I am the monster you created
I am death ... but also life
I am peace ... but also strife
I am obsession, passion like no other
I am the stone used to kill the first brother
I am deceit, adultery, and power left
unchecked
I am the tears of homeless children you
neglect
I am hate ... but also love
I am weak ... but also tough
I am the anger directed to the one above
I am the chains of the imprisoned
I am the courage to rise up and keep on living
I am the voice of comfort to the alone
I am selfless sacrifice and love forever strong
I am the voice of the voiceless
I am the protector of the weak
I am the kingdom inherited by the meek
I am the hope for something pure and true
I am the holy man kneeling in the front pew
I am ... you

“Independence Day” by Chris Williams

There's food to eat
and a band to play.
It's all part of the celebration
for our Independence Day.

We gather together
we laugh and we talk,
when we oughta give thanks
to the people who fought!

All the wars and battles
that made and kept us free,
for the soldiers who died
for you and for me.

They fought with honor
and they fought with pride.
All with the thought of freedom
kept unselfishly inside.

Some lost their lives
did they die in vain?

Before you say no
can you remember some names?

It seems this country
over a period of time.
Has placed our priorities
at the end of the line.

We are burning our flags
and condemning God's word
a conversation of Jesus
now that's seldom heard.

This world needs a change
so you lead the way!
For a soul who's lost
maybe you can help save!

Keep this in mind
as you celebrate Independence Day.
Now in Jesus' name,
forever let us pray.

“The Light Within” by Everett McCoy

God is all I have,
and God is all I need;
there's power in Faith
the size of a seed.

From a prisoner of man,
to a prisoner of hope;
what was meant to hang me,
became my saving rope.

In the darkness there's a light,
that sets the captive free;
and when I look within my heart,
I find that light in me.

“On The Edge” by Jason Morris

Sometimes I sit on the porch and wonder,
about the future and the past,
The thoughts that never leave and the
moments that never last.
The pictures right in your face, the vision
harder to grasp,
The way I've been feeling, I'm wishing you
never asked.
My pain is on the surface, when memories
resurface

My purpose for the verses is just to overcome
a worthless sin
I'm hurting when I'm feeling like I'm cursed
again
Like die and be reborn, just to live up on this
earth again.
Maybe I don't deserve to win, or maybe that's
just in my head
Perhaps I lack the confidence to live until I'm
dead
Probably ungrateful and unfocused, because
I'm feeling dread
I'm fed up with everything I'm going through,
“I think I'm on the edge.”

“A Little While” by Robert Andrew Bartlett, Sr.

Let me not drift quietly,
Unnoticed and forgot.
Abide for just a little while,
As grass reclaims this spot.

I'll never taste your lips again
Or feel my fingers in your hair,
Or hold you in a warm embrace
As others, jealous, stare.

You can't hold me in this place.
The light won't let me stay,
But hold me in your heart a while;
Remember yesterday.

Soon enough the shovel, dented, scratched,
Will erase the glistening spade's design.
I'll thank God for all the joy
I had when you were mine.

So cry for just a little while.
Then go, and find romance.
This body will return to dust;
Then burn your veil, and dance.

“Romeo in Prison” by Anthony Zarro

I step outside and can tell the day will be
beautiful
birds chirping, sun shining, you know...the
usual.
I dressed up real nice for this special occasion
polo shirt, khaki shorts, hell I even got my hair
faded.

She's standing by the front of the house,
 smiling
 long hair, storm grey eyes with streaks of blue
 lightning.
 Small white teeth, dimples, and a cute button
 nose
 a curvy figure you can see even in C.O.
 clothes.
 I strut by - chest out, head high, cuz I'm that
 dude
 don't want to seem too eager, don't want her
 to get things confused.
 But I know as well as she that the attraction is
 mutual
 so I turn around, smile, and start to shoot at
 her.
 She's diggin' me and over the weeks our
 relationship grows
 but I start to notice a lot of animosity from
 male C.O.'s.
 That's when I knew our love was destined to
 fail from the start
 she's a cop, I'm an inmate, be she still has my
 heart.
 I know that she loves me and don't care what
 everyone else says
 we'll be together forever, from now 'till we're
 dead.
 Next thing you know I'm being cuffed up and
 led to the hole
 where a fat sergeant tells me "she's fired and
 good riddance to the ho."
 I'm devastated but I know she'll definitely
 write me soon
 still, I can't sleep, can't eat, I pace all day in
 my 8x12 room.
 Now it's been over a month and a friend of
 mine yells to me
 "What happened to your girl, I thought it was
 meant to be?"
 I just smile and shake my head cuz I know
 something that they don't
 she's forever my Juliet and I'm forever her
 Romeo!

"I Told You I Was" by Grayling T. Smith-EI

I am wrong!
 I am darkness!
 I am right!
 I am light!

I am strong!
 I am reserved!
 I am daytime!
 I am for peace!
 I am hyped!
 I am off the chain!
 I may be lost!
 I can't WAIT for this moment to become a part
 of the past! Yet I hate the fact that time simply
 moves entirely too fast!
 I am ordinary!
 I've seen many lows
 I've been he who knows!
 I'm always there!
 I always demonstrate
 I have instances of total
 I get things done!
 Except for those times when
 She won't choose me!
 How could she NOT choose me!
 I went from accomplishing the most complex
 of tasks!
 I once drank, gambled, and cursed clean
 through the night!
 Then spent the next few days
 feeling stupid and contrite!

I am weak!
 Yet have a wild streak!
 I am the night!
 I also will fight!
 I am also laid back!
 I am still on track!
 I'll find my way back!
 I am extremely unique!
 I've enjoyed a few peaks!
 Yet seldom speaks!
 I may go unseen for weeks!
 Extreme diligence
 Ambivalence!
 Without hesitation!
 I'm prone to procrastination!
 I'm at the bottom of the list!
 I'm IMPOSSIBLE to resist!

Awoke in the cool darkness of my basement
 once at home! Pockets stuffed with money!
 But hungry, tired and alone! For breakfast I
 drank a warm bottle of Sprite, and ate a cold
 calzone on the side of a take out bag. I later
 wrote this descriptive poem! Somewhat of a
 journal or chronicle or whatever the
 equivalent! I guess it's obvious on this
 particular day, I was feeling quite different!

Although I am quite receptive, I can give off
 static!
 Metaphorically speaking. I am dichromatic!
 Not a black and white situation if you know
 what I mean. If this were literal, my primary
 color scheme, I'd have to say, would
 undoubtedly be green, with multiple shades of
 gray.

I am sometimes simple!
 Yet I am hard to understand!
 I am always dependable!
 Yet inconstant! Will ruin a plan.

I am a living dichotomy!
 I am..... Duality in man!

"Untitled" by Taurus Devault
 The first thing I did when I woke up, was kiss
 my wife on the cheek,
 went to the bathroom washed my face, took a
 shower and brushed my teeth.
 Got the kids ready, ate breakfast, dropped
 them off at school.
 I been out of jail now making \$20 an hour.
 What a changed dude.

I never thought I could change, until I
 changed the ones around me.
 Thought life was over until Free Minds found
 me.
 I got a nice car, go to church, and sing.
 I even saved up enough money to surprise
 my fiancé with a ring.
 I just drove down my old block looking at all
 my old friends turn up their nose,
 All because I changed and the new lifestyle I
 chose.
 I heard a knock at the door and different men
 screaming.

Confused, we arrive to the land of the
speechless.
She begins to grow cold, in time.
We cry. I cry. They cry.
For whom?
Her separation of the two, devastating.
I made her choose, blood or exoneration.
Now she drowns in a lake of hatred.
Slithering beneath, Monster breathes and
holds on.
Hovering above, I remain lost in travel.
Dark worlds and their lonely roads.
Endless is our powerful destiny and the
continuing cycle.
Had she only told me something,
Anything.
Our horrific Monster would never have had
moments to haunt.
Destroyed we are.

“Mail” by George Wilder

Darkness and loneliness fill my cell,
With pain and fear too great to tell.

I wait for the mailman to deliver to me,
As I wipe away tears that no one will see.

I pray so sincere with head raised above,
Please, God, soon send a letter of love.

I long to gaze upon pages so dear,
With riches to bring my loved ones near.

Words of diamonds on pages of gold,
A message from Heaven as their story is told.

“We love you! Miss you! Pray you’ll be free”
A treasure-filled envelope just for me.

Please bring memories of joys I once knew,
Family, friends, and things I would do.

The darkness and pain of my cell will prevail,
As my name, again, was not called for mail.

“I Miss You” by Gary Farlow

“Miss you, miss you miss you;
Everything I do,
Echoes with the laughter
And the voice of you.

You’re on every corner,
Every old familiar spot,
Every turn and twist
Whisper how you’re missed.

Miss you, miss you miss you;
Everywhere I go,
There are poignant memories
Dancing in the gentle snow.
Silhouette and shadow
Of your form and face;
Substance and reality
Everywhere displace.

Oh, I miss you, miss you,
Miss you, love of mine;
There’s a strange, sad silence
‘Mid the busy sands of time.
Just as tho’ the ordinary
Daily things I do,
Wait with me, expectantly,
For just a word from you.

Miss you, miss you, miss you;
Nothing now seems true,
Only that ‘twas heaven,
When I was with you.
Miss you, miss you miss you;
With every passing hour.
I will never again know love,
That was as pure as ours...”

“A Poem of Injustice” by R.W. McBride

All kinds of disease, plagues by degrees,
await behind the bars.
No justice, no peace, racism increased, in the
land of the movie stars.
Constitutional values, have never been
hallowed, by those who create the laws.
Their prejudices and bias, written in silence, in
the darkness of their halls.
So diabolical a station, has ever been
sanctioned, from a historical point of view.
Unless one considers, the horror that Hitler,
unleashed upon the Jews.
In every state, across this country great,
internment camps have arisen.
The United States can boast, it has the most,
of its own people locked up in prison.

Most of them which, when it comes down to it,
are guilty of just being poor.
They can’t pay for their freedom, so
blindfolded justice can’t see them, and they’re
locked behind the door.
I’m an innocent man, taking a stand, against a
huge, nightmarish beast.
Like David before Goliath, I stand up to the
giant, pen and paper my rock & sheathe.
What needs to be done, somewhere
someone, has to have the gall
to scream out loud, and tell the world about,
what happens behind these walls.
The food is dyspeptic, the health care is
hectic, prisons are built on toxic soil,
We’re test dummies for drugs, crash dummies
for thugs, cheap labor for those who toil.
We’re being separated by races, being
crammed 3 deep in spaces, fit for only one
person.
I’ve been in for ten years, and it simply
appears, the system has only worsened.
Even though we’re not saints, animals we
ain’t, there are stories here to tell.
If going beneath, means being deceased,
then we’re living just north of Hell.
This country should be ashamed...

“Captain’s Lady” by Brandon Rushing

Weap, weap yourself to ‘morrrows shore.
With tallow candles, wax and ‘swain.
Bent backs broken every one,
From thy pull along the starboard beam!
Keep the lanyards, yards and sails!
Knotted ropes of every size!
Aye, aye! For me it ‘tis the helm!
And to the deeps with gale I ride!
And to the deeps upon the tide.

By Patricia Rhodes

-To my handsome son who just turned sixteen
-So much I missed with you, because of the
drugs, I’m sorry I couldn’t stay clean.

-All these years I keep fighting for you
-You are always in my mind and my heart too
-I know it’s my fault your daddy took you away
-I still remember the last time I saw you, back
in 2011 the month of May.

-You were only eleven, still a lil boy
-The day I lost shared custody, the judge took away all my joy.

-I constantly did drugs to numb the pain
-It just made things worse, I still went insane.

-When your daddy handed me that letter from you
-I couldn't believe what I was reading, this can't be from my lil Lou.

-So many things have happened since then
-One of them, you becoming a handsome young man.

-I can't believe I let the monster of drugs suck me in for so long.
-I never claimed to be perfect, all these years I have done you wrong.

-The day I lost you, I had no will to live
-If I could change things now, there isn't anything I wouldn't give.

-I pray that someday you will forgive me
-I will prove myself to you, just give me a chance, you will see.

-I will never give up, I will never let you go
-Every day the tears constantly flow.

-I will always love you, I want to hug you and hold you so tight.
-I promise to stay clean, I am battling this addiction, I will continue to fight.

-These demons are done destroying me
-I have the will to live, I want to be free

-I can't make up for all the years that are gone
-But I know deep down, we will once again have our mother and son bond

"Kiss the Sky" by Paul Baber

Another day in this bag of bones,
Dreaming of prior times of skipping stones.
Waking up from the nightmare of the past,
How long will this torment last?

Another day, another dollar,
Just like a dog fitted with a collar.
Told, "don't do this, don't do that,"
Ordered to move at the drop of a hat.

The insanity of humanity you can't dispute,
Murder, mayhem, and war to boot.
Finding heaven and truth inside one's being,
Opening one's third eye and really seeing.

Seeking to find the answer to "who am I?"
Will I know before I die?
No hope at all, do ask me why,
The endgame is the same: we all must die.

If you want to get through a crisis, cry your heart out,
Crying is not a sign of weakness, it's a viable route.
Tears can be the means for a transformation,
Perhaps it could lead to a better nation.

Born into a hospice on the planet called Earth,
Life is a terminal condition, for all it's worth.
Excuse me while I take time to cry,
Then I'll raise my head and kiss the sky.

"How Far Down" by Jacob Baladez

How long, how long must I feel this way? How long,
Tell me just how long must I die this way...
little by little each day...
How long, how long? How long will I go with nothing to say ...
little by little each day...
I look over the edge, DARK and faded. I wonder if 6 feet isn't too far down...
little by little each day ... I get closer ...
inch by inch, no longer do I wonder...
6 feet ain't that far down...

"Rain" by Tamora Angelique

The rain falls down,
Pitter-patter, music to my ears.
God's tears, healing the world
from the pillage she's suffered through the years.

Like a soft spoken whisper,
A mother's warm embrace

Rain falls down
And tears run down my face

Memories sweet,
Gone away are my fears
Yesterday's sweet bells still ringing
My heart holding on to raptures so dear

O, rain, sweet embrace
Wash away my pain
Leave my joy inside my heart
away thoughts so vain

Yesterday's troubles
are so far away
Today's peace
Is here to stay
Rain...

"My Message" by Heather D'Aoust

Prison
Reform
Is needed
So intensely
Only the strong survive
New methods of rehabilitation for
Each and every individual
Really is necessary

Rights
Inside the walls
Go violated
Head no more
Told only as tales
So I beg for your help

My name is Heather D'Aoust and I was arrested at 14 years old and given a life sentence. I write today to bring awareness to juvenile and lifer circumstances behind prison walls. We may be locked away but are still human. I have seen much death and abuse in the system and know that anyone else who has done a significant amount of time behind bars has as well. It is time to remember the incarcerated as human, just like those who have retained their freedom. We are all

entitled to life and dignity as part of the human race. Remember today and every day those who have been stripped of their respect as individuals. We deserve to be loved too!

“Forgotten” by Lazaro Vazquez

We laughed together, shared special moments I took to heart
Many I defended and saluted when called to arms.

What was mine was theirs like it was theirs in the first place
Celebrated your life like it was ‘my’ birthday.

Promises were made over liquor and stars
As if homage would be paid, brothers and sisters we are.

The word love was used like a prayer to the Lord
Nowadays I feel like only I heard the words.

My father once told me: Go to jail or your deathbed
And you'll see clearly who is your friend then.

I guess I went to both, the truth unveiled
When life-long friends can't even send you some mail.

I've defeated death for nearly fifteen years
Still not out of the woods, I can still see bears.

They must think cell phones are issued; the only time I hear their voices
As soon as I don't have one, they all become voiceless.

I've made excuses for too many, for far too long
See myself in the mirror like - aren't you strong.

While marriages and children and a dozen other excuses
Are held up whenever you remind them that you live.

Maybe they wish I were dead and it's taking too long

This nigga's in the abyss and he still makes songs
When will he give it a rest? We've all moved on.

He probably wants some money, it's all used - gone!

As if all the countless hours we've spent together meant nothing
They cheered when I went to war and saw my enemies running.

I held your precious baby boy in my arms
I carried your little sister over grass too long.

How many were welcomed into my home?
How could you not be counting the days until I come home?

Who amongst you can stand and pronounce my release date?

I used to not have one, in the tomb for three days.

I still see their faces, still hear their words
Still pack their memories inside of a verse.
The rearview mirror inside of a hearse
The music turned up all the way 'til it hurts.

And all along I've planned for victory and to take you along
I'm this close to victory and everyone's gone.

Very few people will even answer a phone
Everyone asks for a visitation form!

But how many of them show up at the door?
How many pictures show up at my dorm?

Too busy to drop me a line
Or words of encouragement to help me unwind.

And then these females talk about “When I get out”
Like I won't remember you were part of the drought.
Where were you when my poems got left out

And every single word got closed in my mouth?

Time and time again, as I write stanzas in blood
And retards write about straw-men 'cause they're dumb,
Murderers like Malcolm-X get praised for what they've done,
While my father's last wish was he wouldn't die behind the wheel of his truck!

A conscious decision to strap that tractor-trailer to my back
My father got his wish: at home for his heart attack.

I vow to pull it until my ligaments unwrap
My bones splinter and shard, every song I spit a wrap.

I haven't seen an example that can hold a pen to mine
They can't understand the ink quill tatted to my forearm's inside
Dipped in an open slit, my veins coated in rhymes
The blood blue in its purest form 'til I die.

It's only fitting I stand alone when it's lonely at the top
Omitted, ostracised, left out in the dark
Discarded, disposed of, forgotten altogether
A feast before my enemies; they'll eat every letter...

“The Power of Silence” by CL Nobles

Four walls closing in, they call it solitary
Cold and gloomy, I'm physically secluded.
And the power of silence causes my thoughts to come unrooted.
Sent here to be punished, but yet it stimulated growth.

Here in this quietness, I can hear myself think then reason, then counsel, I'm my own shrink.

6 by 9, 24 hours a day for weeks on out
Ain't no telling the things you'll hear your inner-self shout!

You aren't tired until you're tired
You haven't had enough until you're done.

If not for this silence,
from my feelings I'd run! run! run!

Be still! Set down! Give your life some thought
Are you truly remorseful? Or is it just that
you've been caught?

Questions, answers these problems promote
change
And if not, the silence remains.

By Len Whitman

Judam, (Bear Spirit)
I saw you in the sky
of my soul.
Laughing, dancing, and
singing your song...
I thought you went away.
Or, I thought I went away...
Judam (Bear Spirit)
My brother
singing in the sky of my soul.

"For Want of a Key" by Brandon Rushing

Unbind me, love!
Take back your chains
Their cold iron hands
drag heavy on my heart.
Their fire forged shackles
old and forgotten, remain.
And the memory
of their striking
Not even time has changed.

"Afraid of the Dark" by Chuck Jordan

The blood that flows through my veins does
not know that I'm black, but you do and you
hate me for it. Is it fear that motivates you to
hate or hate that motivates you to fear? The
blood that flows through my veins is being
poisoned by anger and I'm a stranger to the
healing that is born of love and I'm in danger
or becoming the monster that you fear I am.
There are times when I feel that being black in
America - is a burden - to America. So much
so that sometimes I even hate myself for
being hated so much.

When I see myself strollin' alone at night
through Philly's Fairmont Park, I too suddenly
became afraid of the dark, the "hood" is full of
men who suffer the same fate; sun tanned
hearts, polarized by hate. Confined to Ghettos
that you fear we'll escape from, trying to
insure we fail, with impossible obstacles to
overcome.

Shoot first, ask questions later, is the order of
the day. You murder my babies - and simply -
walk away. "I was in fear for my life" are the
words you always state. But your fear of the
dark is always fueled by your hate. I'm strong
and beautiful and God built me to last. The
promised pursuit of happiness is all that I ask.
I love my children and my country too. But
you insist that we're worthless, villains without
value.

Why of the dark are you so afraid? Why do
you blame for the mistakes that you made?
Yeah, I know, I've done much damage to my
own brothers but that doesn't change the fact
that you hate me more than any other - race
or people - who were here from the start, who
are literally dying to understand why - you are
so afraid of the dark.

I'd leave if I could, but where else would I go?
This is my home, my land, it's all that I know.
Honor? Respect? Dignity? Pride? Are no
match - no match! For this social genocide.
I'm an enemy in my own country with a
warrior's heart, because I continue to fight for
light despite your fear of the dark. Thousands
have died campaigning for civil rights. In the
blink of an eye they were stolen overnight.
Jim Crow laws have returned, colorblindness
is in; but colorblindness prevents you from
seeing the tint of my skin. Colorblindness.
Colorblindness!?! Colorblindness is not what
you say it is. What you're really saying is that
you're blind to my history, my heritage. Blind
to my struggles and the tragedy of slavery
and the separate but unequal policies you
gave me, blind to the fact that not even you
can understand America's irrational fear - fear
of a black man.

My daughters are angry, my sons are lost, my
life is rerun within prison walls. I laugh, but
you want me to cry. I live, but you rather I die.
You burned off my wings yet I continue to fly.
The color of my skin is what makes me a
criminal, exploited by the news but the "dog
whistle" is subliminal. I'm suffocating here in
the land of my birth because you show me
every day that my life's without worth. For
we've always been - the most hated race on
earth. From coast to coast, my color is the
spark that ignites America's fear of the dark.
The blood that flows through my veins is
being poured out in city streets, trampled on
by police feet, contaminated by pain, washed
down sewer drains. We know not how our
story ends, but we know how it starts.
America's uncivilized fear of the dark.

"For The Sake" by Johnny E. Mahaffey

My cell tightens, reality spins,
I'm grasping for sanity; while
A slim hope at things
Degrades this life I wear.

A chance of survival to be:
My acclimation to die, while
Walls of dirt constrict--
Sucking air from the sky.

So I must battle each day
To make it through,
From one to another, just
To be there for that chance.

Shall I not then be stifled in the vault...
- Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet

Without air, it is hard
To say: Of which way I will
Reach that breath, the last
breath... for breath's sake.

<http://betweenthebars.org/blogs/316>

"Love is Great" by Chance N. Stewart

Verse I:
Somebody please tell me what's the price to
pay for freedom, whatever it is I need it. I'm
feeling like I've been cheated/ Scourged,

scorn, forlorn, and torn from the shores of Eden, arrested, chained, and taken before the Court of the Demon/ They've stolen my golden verses, cursed me, and left me beaten, but deep in my soul I know that everything is for a reason cause even the Christ Jesus was bruised and accused of treason/ The seasons change and many souls are lost and hearts are broken, as fallen angels walk across the Earth in search of hope/ I've seen it all and remarkably risen over my foes, and I hope to live to see the day that hate is overthrown/ The Lord has prepared a place inside his home for all the chosen and the only way for us to make a change is to raise the focus/ Of all I've spoken of I know that love's the dopest so just open up your heart and feel the beat before the reaper rolls in.

Hook (R&B):

Tell me why the youth are made to suffer/
and why they never seem to get no break/
all they really want's someone to love them/
and somebody they can love the same/
'cause I know/
that love/ really can make a change/ 'cause I
once/
was lost/ and finally found a way/ love is
great.

"Catenary Replica" by Michael Autrey

In a dream I walked
a corridor in the autumn
cluttered with periwinkles,
foofalls came back like laughter,
lush and tactile where moths aspired in gifts
of simplicity;

I have been looking for
my father, dark figure against
the honeysuckle in graceful levitation,
glassed away in worlds of
summer green
gougued from the brick colored earth.

In a dream I walked
a corridor in the autumn
like a storybook,
this crazed austerity

rank with the mutes of
stained sepia;

I have been looking for
my father, dark figure against
the curdled heavens' deep cyanic blue;
In the drift of voices
I don't want to hear
the music flared and died.
In a dream I walked
a corridor in the autumn,
the fanned light of a streetlamp
a brass moon hung with kitestring
in the rifted works beyond
the world below;

I have been looking for
my father, dark figure against
the starblown sky,
and one hand stretched out,
the knife he held severed
an echo of routed multitudes.

I remember
in my father's last letter
how all things false fall,
the seething of sand in glass
across the constellations:
dark's total restitution.

I have been looking for
my father, he marches darkly
a corridor in the autumn
incandesced by the dying light.

Soon, I'll follow him into
elsewhere for all time.

"I Know It Isn't Love" by Brandon Michael Pierce

I know it isn't love,
But I feel it anyway.
Waking up every morning,
Wishing to taste the lips upon your face.
I know it isn't love,
But I'm feeling kinda lonely.
Spending my nights in bed alone,
Wishing you too would feel this for me.
The light within your eyes is euphoric,
Your smile has me overly inebriated.

The radiance in your heart holds me,
Within your beauty I am captivated.
I know it isn't love,
But I love imagining your strong embrace.
Your arms wrapped tightly around me,
Standing before you looking into your face.
I know it isn't love,
But in a way it truly is.
Because I love who you are,
And being near you is hell within bliss.
It's hard to think that we'll never be more,
That I can never move out of the friend stage.
I know it isn't love,
But it is and it acts like a cage.
I think you know how I feel,
I think you see it in my heart.
I wish that I could say that we are in love,
Maybe I am, but I know you aren't.

By Jeffrey Burt

As dark becomes light, your fingers trace
across borders of the map that is my skin.
I feel the heat from your parted lips,
as my heart thumps a melody only two lovers
hear.
A bossanova that beats through my veins,
and echoes in the curve of your chest against
my back.
Your gentle breath on my neck
like a butterfly lightly dipping to sip morning
dew.
Now your lips against mine,
breathing your love into me,
filling my heart with the sadness,
that too soon I must leave your warm
embrace.
When the sun rising over the horizon comes
too soon,
bringing with it the knowing that you'll soon be
gone.
Until then I breathe you in,
and savor the safety of your arms wrapped
around me.
I breathe, I sigh, I close my eyes, I wait.

"A Prisoner's Hug" by Jeff Wager

I look at bars around my soul
wondering, "How did I get here?"
There are many things locked up with me:
each memory, each pain, each tear.

I think of days I never had.
I think of what I had some days -
the caring things people said to me,
and the vulgar things I'd say.

My children all looked up to me.
I had a wife who I made cry.
I can still recall their shattered dreams,
through all the teardrops in my eyes.

I get letters from my mama.
I see stains from her fallen tears.
I remember in my younger days
back when Mama held me near.

Dad's upset. He won't talk to me.
He won't visit behind these walls.
"If I want to go to prison, son,"
he said, "then I'll just break the law."

Twenty years gone... my kids are grown.
Divorce papers came from my wife.
Letters still come with my mama's tears.
Dad never came, not once in his life.

I've spent my time with God above.
We've been talking for many years.
He has been working inside of me -
helping me with sadness and fears.

He knows I struggle deep inside,
He knows I'm old and getting ill;
So he sent his spirit here with me
- and he gives blessings to me still.

My grand-daughter came to visit,
and she brought her two sons along -
my only visit in forty years...
To me, it was the sweetest song.

Now I have some new memories,
I have blessings to carry on.
There are many pains God took away,
but there's one in my heart not gone.

I have the letters mama sent.
I have the one before she died -
"I am writing my last hug to you,"
and I saw the last tear she cried.

"Other Worlds" by Michael Reichert

I lay for a nap on the soft riverbed.
Cool comfort for covers,
Smooth rock for a pillow.
Surfacing toes make a dragonfly's perch.

The gargling murmur soon lulls me to sleep.
The birdsong surrounds me,
The breeze on my face.
Floating beneath the mountain fed stream.
Adrift in my dreaming, I'm floating in space.
Amid a vast void
Of star-scattered darkness.
Buoyant and free from gravity's grasp.

A shooting star rockets by, light years away.
Glittering gemstones.
Black velvet embrace.
Spirit suspended, calm, and serene.

Dream-shift carries me to the bottomless blue
Abyss of the sea.
The ebb and the flow.
Gliding in currents fathoms below.

An alien landscape unfolds in my sight;
A chittering dolphin,
The wail of a whale.
A huge coral reef thick with colorful schools.

I emerge from the river awake and refreshed.
The birds are still chirping,
The water still cool,
But my eyes have been opened. Perceptions
are new.

We live in a world full of wonder and awe.
So many realms to see,
Worlds within worlds.
Waiting in slumber upon riverbeds.

"The Storm Approaches" by Renard T. Polk

1. Morning dew whispers of a night's fulfillment; effortlessly drunk from childish bewilderment.
2. The mind is but silent not; when the hand and will take flight to a pen to adopt.

3. Morning dew whispers of a night's shed tears; a heart betrays itself by indulging in fears.
4. Clouds mourn to give their life's essence; sacrificial dew drops to create a rainbow, iridescent.
5. Then anon to be admired by many; for that brief moment in lovers' epitome.
6. Morning dew whispers of a night's unfaithfulness; virtue prone to be spent on the altar of lust nonetheless.
7. Captivating beauty crushed with irony; masterfully life's chaotic refinery.
8. Morning dew whispers of a night's fate; deeply drank waters to satisfy the day.
9. Filched for survival particularly degrading; the sun its magnificence is fading.
10. Quiet consent as the sun reproaches; bespeaks of nightfall the storm approaches.

"Sins on Display" by Dorian Lee

You should be ashamed of yourself
And anyone else
Who thinks it's okay
To treat women this way
So as of today
Reflect on the things you do and say
That're out of the way
'Cause there may come a day
(God forbid)
When it's someone you love
Saying they were given a date rape drug
Or grabbed by a worthless thug
On their way home
So now their innocence's gone
It's wrong!
And shameful!
Downright disrespectful!
So check yourself
And anyone else
Who thinks it's a man's right
To grope a woman's ass
When she pass
Because her clothes are tight

Or to brag and laugh
 'Cause you grabbed her crotch
 Simply because you think she's hot
 Stop!
 'Cause there's nothing cool
 About a locker room full of fools
 Forgetting the women in their lives
 Like their mothers and sisters
 And their daughters and wives
 Look into their eyes
 And see the hurt they hide inside
 Please men give ear
 'Cause I too grew in fear
 With no clue
 As to what to do
 About being violated
 Inside I hated
 And causing others pain
 Made me feel sedated
 I should've cried for help
 But I waited
 Too long and did wrong
 Plus two wrongs
 Don't heal right
 I'm trying to shed some light
 And lead you the right way
 First things first
 I'm putting my sins on display
 To help you change the way
 You think today
 To improve the way
 You speak and act
 Because the fall from grace is long
 And even longer to climb back

“The Voices” by Albert Grayer

In the dead of night the voices call,
 trying like a siren to entice and enthrall.

Flee as I may, hide as I might,
 I cannot escape until it's daylight.

They whisper, they plead to my reluctant ear,
 trying to convince I should not fear.

If I were to listen, what pain they impart.
 Spreading their poison straight to my heart.

Narrating my past where once I was sad,
 focusing on the love that I never had.

The message they bring resounds in my
 head:
 “You'll never be worthy, you're better off
 dead.”

I sought relief with razor, pill and rope.
 Then there was bottle, relationships, and
 dope.

But the void inside me I could not fill.
 When it came to living, I had lost my will.

It didn't even matter when to the bottom I fell,
 thrown into an isolation cell.

One thing for sure I've always known
 in this hell hole we are not alone.

All around I hear the cries of fright.
 I see the voices are busy tonight.

“Snowfall” by Duane West

Winter snow is falling
 On the outside world today
 Through the window it is calling
 For me to come out and play

There was a time I would have gone
 Bundled for warmth and care-free
 To join the snow upon the lawn
 At the place it beckoned me

But the snow is different now
 Because I've been locked away
 Its majesty has gone the way of the plow
 And it melts, deciding not to stay

“Rain Pouring” by Roger Vasquez

I walk through the wicked forest of
 the forgotten. Rain pouring, wind blowing, the
 tree branches are breaking and falling. I keep
 my head up and keep walking. I hear trees
 crying, lightning roaring and the wickedness is
 watching, waiting for the right time to
 intervene, when I'm too fragile and too weak,
 but I keep walking. Rain is pouring. It sounds
 like the beat of a drum, just pounding and
 pounding. But I keep my head up and my
 chest out and show no fear.

It's too dark and difficult to see, I
 hear the wind picking up and the lightning is
 striking like the sound of a volcano erupting
 but instead of lava it's rain and wind
 destroying everything in its path. I'm
 beginning to feel the pain, it's been a long
 time, and I see no change. Not only my body
 but my mind is feeling deranged. I don't see
 no light at the end of the forest. No one in
 sight, I've been lost and forgotten.
 Hopelessness is all I know, the wickedness is
 very close, I hear it breathing, its presence is
 malevolence, I can't feel my body and mind,
 my soul is getting ripped way... rain is
 pouring... I'm giving in... rain is pouring... rain
 is pouring...

“Wasted Time” By Barry L. Taylor

Has my life been wasted?
 Where have gone the years-
 Many summer fruits I've tasted, I've cried a
 sea of winter tears
 Of knowledge there was little pursuit,
 Drugs and sex-my only masters.
 I've been kicked down by life's black boot,
 Suffered a plethora of disasters.
 My little girl has disowned me,
 I can't get her mom to write,
 Rampant disrespect is all I see,
 I'm too damn old to fight,
 My hair is gone, as are my teeth
 My eyesight's becoming bad.
 I've been a lover, a liar, a saint, a thief,
 And in the end I'm simply mad.
 Many lives are better than mine
 Yet I harbor few regrets.
 For, having you, even only in my mind
 Is the best thing I could ask for-and get.

“The Zoo” by Robert Andrew Bartlett, Sr.

Green fields, summer sun,
 Deer and turkeys roaming free,
 Old men in a cage.

“Evil Nevermore” by James Benley

President Obama has declared
 As he shed a lonely tear
 For the precious little children
 The world loved so dear

This alarming senseless tragedy
Was too chilling to believe
We bonded together as a nation
Yet our souls forever grieve

Millions of wretched hearts cried
A reservoir of endless pain
Too many unanswered questions
And memories remain the same

We The People as a Nation
Have an obligation to implore
For the good of all mankind
Regardless of the battle lore

The deadly assault weapons
That we claim as our rights
Are seventeenth century statutes
And constitutional oversights

We must confiscate these weapons
And high capacity magazines
Seize them from societies clutch
Forget the long black limousines

These weapons of mass destruction
Are military devices for war
Perhaps we forge them into monuments
And then decry evil nevermore

P.S. In memory of senseless Sandy Hook
tragedy - God help the families, and God
Bless America

"By Far" by Aluntongi Doe

I was incarcerated once again
And by far I was innocent
Nothing they said or did would make me
plead guilty
I was no longer a naive young man
Nor was I old
I was no one's fool by far
Why is it that everyone else had rights
The animals
There were women's rights
Gay rights
Child rights
But for me
For us
The guilt of being a black man

Born to parents from West Africa
Monrovia Liberia
My name means town rise up again
All my life I have lived up to my name
By far
I've been prosecuted
A victim of modern day slavery
They enslave my body
But never will they control my mind
By far my intelligence was relevant in my case
They use my surroundings to discourage me
To test my patience
Never will I give in

"Rejected Refuge" by Robert Cooper

This world's moral
compass is broken;

The only safe place is
heaven;

And the pathway to peace,
is birth, it's imagination.

Islam is peddled a
menace;

But religion is not a
criminal,

just because one chooses
to paint it sinister.

Black dust and ashes,
allow politicians to set fire,

and act as activists,
who promise solutions, and happiness.

But we the people,
Must challenge our peers' intentions,
and not be quick to follow man,
who sees us less than, and half agenda;

Or dirty immigrants,
scars and scratches,

dividing legal and illegal,

leaving both sides clashing.

Demanding birth rights,
and plots in the sand,

believing hope made flesh,
on this earth filled with sin.

From sea to sea, our open
arms are cross;

and our resolve,
is stiffer penalties and building a Wall.

What of the children,
and love lost in these waters?

Not even these waters
measure up to a mother's teardrop.

We shouldn't opt, to idly
watch dreams rot;

And not reach out to the "have-nots,"
the world over, the whole lot.

What if America was in an uproar,
facing hellion hell;

Filled with millennium militants.
and bombs falling from the air?
Would "she" want a wall,
or a boat to the "free-world?"

Pitch this question to your conscience,
and see if it cares...

"Fodder" By Everett Mccoy

My people are fodder for the beast.
They give us ghettos, and predispose us to
crime; then give prisons, where they profit
from time.
My soul means nothing to them
I'm a number and a paycheck; I'm something
to mock and scoff at;
I'm fodder for sanctimony
Rarely and strategically do they free their
chattel;
But typically do they herd and transport their
cattle.

My soul is nothing to them.
The beast is bloated with the flesh of my
people;
Unable to keep it all down he vomits parolees;
Secretly hoping, like a dog, to lap his vomit.
Our souls are nothing to him;
Our flesh even less;
Just a legal caper
Of cheap labor
My people are fodder for the beast.

**“Looking Past What I See” by Gabriel
Rene Ramirez**

Looking at the mirror wondering, who am I
supposed to be?
Locked down for a while. Baby Boy growing,
asking questions, wanting me.
Visits come by, he’s shy, like he doesn’t even
know me.
This isn’t how it’s supposed to be,
Struggling to portray a strong man, because
weakness doesn’t rock in the penitentiary.
Looking up at the sky asking God for the
strength.
Sometimes I get to doubting,
But what am I to think.
I was so used to blowin’ blunts, poppin’ pills,
sippin’ drunk
But look where it got me looking stupid,
Toilets connected to a sink.
Now I’m looking in the mirror, dressed in all
white
Devils drug, a kilo...
I’m not my son’s hero...
But as I look in this scratched up metal mirror,
And look past what I see...
I know who I’m supposed to be.
I love you son!

“Lost” by Robert Downs

Midway through the journey of my life
I found myself in a forest ever-dark,
for the forward path had been lost.
Every direction I turned looked the same,
the night ever-imposing its stygianess.
Eyes upon me from all angles, hands,
hands reaching from within the Cimmerian
dark.
Running through this sylvan acre, all hopes
and dreams lost.

My pernicious past coming down upon me full
force, no remorse, no pity.
Doomed to a life lost, empty, alone.

“ROBOT” by Raymond Roop
In my mind I can see, and
remember, humanity. Yet,
in the blink of an eye,
my soul as riven, not
mine. I was changed
forever, by the ones I
loved most! It was all a
lie. The realization and
understanding that my
world would never be the
same. Everyone I loved
and knew cared about me
were suddenly gone
forever, leaving me all
alone. I want to have a
huge healthy heart, a
great mind. If only I
could travel through
time. It was game over
for my emotions. There
is no way to restart, at
least as far as I know,
but I’m just a rusty,
dented little robot,
doing my best to
survive, wishing and
hoping I can find the one
to bring me back to
life.

“Galaxy” by Liam Foster

Laying under a blanket of stars,
Staring into the maw of the universe.
I find peace in that expansive void,
that calls to my soul.
Wishing that you could be here,
sharing in this experience with me.
I feel sympathy for yonder suns,
for they too share this loneliness;
But we feel and see the beauty of your
radiance,
As if you were right beside us.
Yet the distance that separates,
leaves a longing that pulls at us like gravity.
But inertia is tearing against us,
pulling us away from each other.
You’re as elusive as dark matter,
But yet as outgoing as a supernova.
If I can’t have you near,
then I’d settle to be just a star in your galaxy.

“Ode to The Mrs.”

Your red fur and brown eyes
Were such a disguise

You’ve been mistook for a fox
You loved to dive for rocks
More than a partner
More than a friend
I always thought
I’d see you again
But as the years went by
5,6,7 plus you had to die
That’s my longest cry
More than a pet
I will always regret
Never seeing you again
I’ll always remember when
You barked at strangers
Or pointed out hidden dangers
Chased my laser light
Watched shadows move
Or turned up your nose
At smelly clothes
Or our cantankerous cat
More than a partner
More than a friend
I pray
God’ll let us see each other again

“Wee Ditty” by Mark P. Sandfox

An Irishman and Englishman, sittin’ in a ditch,
one called the other one a dirty son of a...
Peter Murphy had a dog, a very fine dog was
he,
he gave him to a lady to keep her company.
She fed him, she fed him, she taught him how
to jump,
he jumped right up her pantyhose and bit her
in...
A country boy from Germany was sittin’ on a
rock,
along came a bumblebee and stung him on
the...
Cocktails, ginger ale, twenty cents a glass,
if you like my story, kiss my little...
Ask me no more questions, tell me no more
lies,
If you ever get hit with a bag of shit be sure to
close both eyes.

**“On the Road Trip to Hell” by Julie
Spencer**

On the road trip to Hell,
Chained at the ankles, I fell,

Below, to the concrete floor,
I was sure I was not loved anymore.

On the road trip to Hell,
I loved people I never knew,
Before that, you could not tell,
If I was in love with you.

On the road trip to Hell,
I became transparent.
For it became quite apparent,
I began to ring the bell.

Arriving to Hell, I finally discovered,
Though in Hell, I had partly recovered,
For even in darkness, we shed a bit of light,
For in Hell I learned, I learned how to fight.

On the road trip to Hell...

“Concrete and Steel” by Richard Weine

Imprisoned behind concrete and steel,
surrounded by deceit,
I am trapped by silence, loneliness, and
defeat.
I stand alone fighting demons that I must slay,
They taunt my mind and sanity, every night
and day.
It's a never-ending battle, that constantly
rages within,
And with every new day, the same old fight
begins again.
Now I must struggle hard to keep my dreams
alive,
In this living nightmare, where only the strong
survive.

I cherish the past, and the ones that I've
loved,
And every night I send my prayers to the Lord
above.
Asking that he will protect them while I'm in
here,
And to give them strength, and calm all their
fears.

I took my revenge for my own selfish need,
And I didn't slow down long enough to read.
The signs of danger that was heading my
way,

And as a result, I've been given this long
unwanted stay.

I was young and reckless and went on a
rampage,
So now I pay with the years, trapped in a steel
cage.
Now time is my enemy, and it goes always
against me,
And I'll have to beat all the odds to one day
be free.

So this is a story of one man's mistake,
To give you an idea of the path you should
not take.
So listen to my words, and live honest and
true,
Or sadly this could one day, be a story about
you.

“Never Far Away” by Brian Fuller

Hate me if you need to,
Love me if you can.
But I hope you don't expect too much.
After all, I'm just a man.
I used to know just what to say,
Or even what to do,
But I know I'm not forgotten,
Because I remember you.
Time can play some evil tricks,
And make things hard to find.
Am I really going crazy?
Or did I just lose my mind?
I never meant to hurt you,
And I did not want to go,
So no matter how I say it,
I think you already know.
Hope tells me there will come a day,
When I see you again.
For now I just don't have a clue,
About how, or where, or when.
Within the moon come find me.
It's in your dreams I stay.
It doesn't matter what you think.
I'm never far away.

**“Just to Show I Love You” by Antwan
Wilson**

My darkest days turn into sunshine
When I think of you,

I would travel across the world to find you
Just to show I love you,
Our color makes us one, our chemistry is
getting better
When you read what I write, you'll smile, and
be expecting every letter,
The way you smile, and the way you talk
Sends chills down my spine,
If I could meet you for the first time every day
I would gladly press rewind,
When I fall, you're there to catch me
When I talk, you lend an ear,
When I'm lonely, like now, you encourage me
That our time is almost near,
My love for you is unconditional, my love for
you is true
I would do anything you ask of me, just to
show I love you

“Among the Living” by Chad Frank

An abandoned prison
decays in a bustling city.
Ghosts remain behind bars,
while the living tour
the grounds.
I was once a tourist.
Now that I'm a ghost myself,
I wonder
why anyone would willingly
visit a prison.

“Spring Has Come” by Rickey Pearson

From the porch swing the world is a paradise
Of new-green leaves and blooming hybrid
rosebuds,
Insatiably curious bugs, and falling

Rain, falling upon the meadowlark - and all
Is touched by life's reawakening moment;

A moment to remember for all of time.
Insects zip, zag, buzz, flit and fly through the
air,
Unaware and worried, living for now-

This twinkling of life when all is born anew,
And promises of fresh air and free time are

Renewed in the way time basks in Sol's bright
rays,

And new beauty is beheld when rainbowed hues
Manifest themselves in arcs above the earth,
And earth comes to life once more: wiping
dewdrops
From it's sleepy eyes as it stretches arms out,

And arm's fingers play in heather as soft breeze
Weaves its way through fields of green grass gently bent
In reverence to forces that move and mold;

Sighs of contentment molding mouth into smile,
Reflecting awe at beauty contained within

The beautiful garden with enchanting view
That is caught within time's tempestuous touch;
Spaciousness that is reverently beheld,

That's viewed in the paradisiacal space
During spring from the comfort of a porch swing.

"Above The Law" by Luther Garner

We make them and we break them,
We make the problems, then we solve them,
We make you fight against each other
We allow the guns and drugs to flow
Even the blind can see how cruel we can be

The picture looks closer, more realist
It hits home, the empty bank accounts,
emotionally broken
Now you call it an epidemic, a war on the flow
of opiates and heroin
The "I would never" has turned into "I have"
Now you see how much we are alike from the
problems you created
We, no you said this is the land of the free
and the home of the brave
Well when will you change your laws and
actions that divide and conquer?
The U.S. needs love, unity, and GOD!

"Risks" by Eiad Barghouti

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool,
to weep is to risk appearing sentimental,

to reach out for one another is to risk involvement.
To expose feelings is to risk exposing your real self.
To place your ideas, your dreams before a crowd, is to risk their loss.
To live is to risk dying.
To hope is to risk despair.
To try is to risk failure.
But risks must be taken;
The greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.
The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.
They may avoid suffering and sorrow but cannot learn, feel, change, grow, live, and love;
They are as a slave, chained by fear.
They have forfeited their freedom.
Only a person who risks is free.

"Bird" by Abraham Luis Sandoval

Wings strapped to my back, no more triple beams & smokin crack, makin money & running with my pack, now I'm standing on the edge & pulling on the slack.

24-7 Pacing & Dreaming with them felons, dug my own ditch & accidentally fell in, can't get the voices out my melon, convicted killers & hustlers in the belly of the beast is where we dwelling.

Cut the feathers from my wings, this bird ain't ever going to sing, she a pretty lil thing, & happiness she brings, to a puppet on a string.

This bird will fly free, you a kind and loving person who has planted her seed, flawed and misunderstood I know I can be, I watch as this bird takes to the wind, why can't it be me?

"Use By Date" by Robert Andrew Bartlett, Sr.

Don't ask how long my love for you will last.
When I was just my father's little boy
I closed my eyes and held your image fast.
To fight despair, that image I'd employ.

Your voice was music to my longing ear,
The longed-for source of one unspoken word.

My heart would pound whenever you came near,
A thunder that I hoped you never heard.

You said you'd gladly come and go with me.
My pressure rose, I scarce could catch my breath.
I searched for words and hoped someday you'd see
I'd not forsake you prior to my death.

Satan's hoard may try our bands to sever;
Yet my love abides with you forever.

"Dreams" by Hannif L. Hines

You scare me,
Give me chills, cold sweats,
Bring tears to my eyes,
Constant torment;
That's what you are,
No joy,
Nor the happiness I seek,
I find no relief,
Wish I could be done with you,
But I can't
For you are a part of me,
I hate you,
My thoughts when I sleep,
The darkness I run from,
The light I cannot find,
Where my guilt, wishes, and regrets meet,
There I find no peace
Dreams

"Manger Sign" by Jonnie Morgan

A sign for living
the baby in a trough
The Bread of Life to earth.

A Son is given
from heaven by True Love
born of a virgin birth.

A Man is risen
for death is cost enough
and life of lasting worth.

"Ecstasy" by Barry L. Taylor

O' puissant spring - robust, verdant, sanguine,
How we revel in its promise of hope

Of renewal; the sun itself seems to
 Celebrate as its rays rain down upon
 We blest creatures whose winter-laden souls
 Grasp beseechingly for such freedom
 As can be bestow'd, as tho' their very lives
 Depend on this God-sent change of season...
 Indeed mayhaps they do, so bleak, so dark
 Has been their glacial demeanor, the raw,
 Blust'ry, marrow-chilling existence which
 Hath been their lot this interminable
 Past foreverness of miserable darkness.
 Now- the sweet melodic strains of birdsong
 Grace our melifluous-bereft spirits,
 Bent in times of lyrical aplomb
 As the essential balm of the sun's golden rays
 Ensoothe and enrapture our gladsome hearts-
 And we know, once more, high spirits.

"Life Road" by Brandon H. Williams

Wake up! Walk around! Go somewhere
 you've never been
 Speak up! Talk loud! Tell'em what you really
 mean
 Be reserved, be obscene
 Give the world a gift ~ pursue your dreams
 You can do it; you can be it,
 Think it, believe it, attack it, achieve it
 Run wild; proceed with caution
 Listen closely, yet leave them talking
 Fall in love... be transfixed by its vibrant
 glowing
 Experience a broken heart then write a dark
 poem
 Pull yourself up. Dust yourself off
 Remain open minded. Let trust evolve
 Formulate unique ideas and opinions
 Lead the way, but don't treat people like
 minions
 Seriously! That's not nice, it really isn't
 You'll never know when you'll need
 someone's assistance
 It's going to happen ~ a stretch where there'll
 be more crying
 Than laughing
 Moreover, what matters is your reaction
 But you'll be okay ~ I got a feel about you
 You'll be successful someday ~ and I'll be
 glad I didn't doubt you
 Just hold on, hold tight
 It's a bumpy road ahead called life.

"The Alt-Left" by Chad Frank

Belittle women, cripples, and gays!
 Institute law & order!
 Cut funding to the Arts!
 demands the Supreme Tangerine.
 An army of clowns pledge their allegiance.
 Those who don't are viewed as enemies
 and harrassed on Twitter.
 A gay prison poet,
 I'm obviously not one of his followers.
 So what does that make me?

"Battlefield" by Derek LeCompte

The troops gather
 behind the leader
 Revolutionary
 to fight systematic dehumanization
 for justice
 Supreme

Words are weapons
 No safeties
 No limit of bullets
 to pierce flesh
 and take promise
 Future

The clash of swords
 Gong of shields
 leaves the folk
 Unprotected
 to dwell in a place
 fists fly, feet kick
 Pressed upon the backs
 Necks

The prayers ring
 soaring to heaven
 bringing angels
 Guardians
 to fight on our behalf
 anti-oppression
 Righteousness

Even in loss
 God will Judge
 for whatever cannot be done
 on this earth
 He can do worse
 In His realm

"Keeping Calm" by Robert Andrew Bartlett, Sr.

Should e'r I fear the rising tides,
 When salty waves make sport of mighty
 ships.
 And ev'ry deep abyss a monster hides,
 When mainsails luff and topsail canvas rips?

Or should I rather fear the mountain's height,
 Or stony canyon's steep unstable side?
 Should thunder clouds give me a fright?
 The Ferris wheel or roller coaster ride?

These things and many more gave me a
 fright.
 I contemplated life and death as one;
 And then you turned my darkness into light
 And all I had to do I counted done.

The nighttime terrors yield to morning's dew,
 And when I die I'll still be loving you.

"Deathly Hollow" by Nahbeel Richardson

There was a time when I was normal
 Hunh, not so long ago
 Which, if I didn't tell you this story
 You would never know.

That inside me is a killer
 one not to be tamed
 But if I continue to fight it
 could I remain the same?

It is not who I am
 But what I'm capable of
 And it scares me half to death
 That it can't be swept under the rug

I face it each and everyday
 and on more than one occasion
 It strips me of my humanity
 of what is human nature, basic.

Love makes us who we are
 but with this a part of me
 I never thought I could find
 unconditional, but one agreed.

Could I truly have a heart
 Given I introduced one to death's door

or is my chest simply hollow
and not care anymore.

It's like, I presented him with the scenario
And I respect and honor his decision
but how can I live with myself
when I am killing him with precision?

"Laws of our Land" by Chris Williams

To one nation under God
For liberty and justice to all.
These are words we all know.
These same words we seldom recall.

Innocent 'til proven guilty,
At least this is what they say.
Yet each night before we sleep,
These very words we often pray.

Although we live in the land of the free,
And it's known as the home of the brave,
Justice is supposed to be guaranteed,
So why is it something we all crave?

Has our judicial system changed so much
That justice debates on what's right and
wrong?

Have the laws of the land been twisted and
turned,

To where officials are confused to which side
they belong?

These are questions and statements
That I don't understand,
As I wait to be shown
The so-called laws of our land!!!

"Untitled" by Robert Downs

This conflagration sweeping over my mind,
consuming everything in its path, leaving pain
and confusion in its wake.

Lost among the necropolis of my failed
attempts
at happiness, of finding love. Wanting to
be lost among the shadows forever.

As I wait on the Stone, please take me away.

"How & Why" by Moses Valdez

1. How can you make a promise you
never plan to keep
2. How can you break a heart and not
in turn weep

3. How can you lose but never seek
4. How can you be physically strong
but mentally weak
5. How can you choose oppression
over breaking free
6. How can you follow when you have
the choice to lead
7. How can you turn a blind eye when
you have the choice to lead
8. How can you bring misery when the
other option is glee
9. Why destroy instead of planting
seed
10. Why kill a plant before it's a tree
11. Why depend on man when he's as
fragile as a leaf
12. Why jump but not reach
13. Why settle for less instead of
striving for the peak
14. Why swim in a pool when you have
the sea
15. Why focus on a blemish before
beauty
16. Why cry alone when there's a
shoulder to lean

"When You Look at Me" by Bernard Wroblewski

When you look at me, do you really see me,
Or do you see the person your prejudice tells
you to see?

When you look at me, can you look without
judgement in your heart,
Or do you insist on the hatred that keeps us
so far apart?

When you look at me, do you see another
prisoner in white,
Or can you see a beautiful soul waiting to take
flight?

When you look at me, are you looking at a
lost cause,

Or do you dare to look deeper, beyond my
flaws?

When you look at me, will you look with scorn
and rejection,

Or will you accept that I'm a human, with
many imperfections?

When you look at me, can you see the sinner
embracing the light,

Can you see me trying to make amends and
striving to live upright?

When you look at me, you should not see a
man who's lost.

With blood, Jesus paid for my sins at a heavy
cost.

When you look at me, you should see a spirit
that's proud.

Even while behind bars, I can light up a
dreary crowd.

When you look at me, you should see the new
creature God created.

Don't you know, in His eyes we are all
related?

"Meaning" by Derek LeCompte

I wish for my words to be kind

To inspire the minds

Show the rich deepness of life

Like baker's chocolate

To prove that no matter what you lose

No strife is worth submission

Yet

I make this admission

I was there

Once

I was snatched, kidnapped, and dragged

Thrown into a pit

As deep as you can get

A hopeless hole of despair

Without a care or compassion

Where light does not penetrate

Only soul shattering silence

Full of violence towards one's self

But through the torture

I managed to nurture

A sense of self worth

Because

I realised the lie of bottomless pits

None are that in actuality

It's a fact that all have ground

I found the floor

A sure place to dig in my feet

And climb

Emerge

That glimmer of guidance at the top
Lets me see the verge of ascent
So there I prayed and repented
Leaving my grime there
In the mud and waste
I pulled and pushed
Rose and realised more

A lesson

It's difficult and sometimes frigidly cold
But be bold
Courageous
See the signs not simply visual
Also inside yourself
Don't hide
Let your personal angel be your guide

An illuminated path to perfection

Now I shine and stand firm
I learned
That the spirit is something never stolen
Or broken
It's a token of sound faith
A melody that sways the trees
Makes life a dance

Tuned by God

A heavenly song
Sung by angels with voices
That bring tears of beauty stunning
Calling the chosen running
Cushioned by soft wings so beautiful
The sleep it brings
Slate cleaning
Invigorated.....Destiny.

"Flying" by Giles Belcher

Soaring through the sky,
wind whipping past you,
faster than imagined.

Seeing everything speeding past,
I'm not afraid of this flight,
will I soar or crash?

Faster than sound, slower
that light, the hurt is
going away, pain ceases.

Joy is euphoric, happiness
is more than I can express,
sorrow has ceased, peace abounds.

Soaring in peace, joy, and
harmony. No pain, hurt,
or disappointment, no more.
Forever to fly is all
I want to do.

"An Inmate's Lament" by Gary K. Farlow

Life in prison is terrible
The noise level can be unbearable
Our sentences seem unendurable
The rules are all unbendable

This experience is incredible
The chow hall food is inedible
C.O.'s think we're detestable
But what we eat is indigestible

Programmers feel we're incorrigible
And look at us like we're horrible
The public says we're unlovable
But as taxpayers they're being gullible

The health care is deplorable
Our grievances treated as ignorable
The parole board says we're unreformable
And never will be "normal-able"

The shrinks think we're unreachable
While attitudes are impeachable
The rec equipment is unusable
And staff think we're abusable

Policies are unbelievable
While change is inconceivable
Shakedown are uncontrollable
Our pain is inconsolable

This mess is unforgivable
Let's face it, life in prison is unlivable!

"Hardtimes" by Hannif L. Hines

I know you're going through,

Hardtimes.

Feeling like you're on that boat alone,
sometimes.

I know that sorrow can be thick, and
surround you like fog.

But we have a God that carries and
sustains us through it all.

We know there will be valleys of darkness
in our path of life.

But we have the promise, that he'll guide us
as we follow his light.

His words are a lamp on our feet,
so never in a time of gloom do we have
to face defeat.

Always our help in times of need,
rejoiceful, I thank him for saving me.

He'll wipe away all our sorrow.

In Heaven there are no tears.

Lord Jesus goes before me; whom shall I
fear?

"Cattle Riddle" by John Barton

If you're ever on a horse,
among cows,
then stumble upon an old rattle,

and then you tell a riddle to the cattle in the
middle of a saddle with a rattle rather brittle
and the cattle rather little,
they call this a rather brittle rattle middle
saddle rather little cattle riddle.

"Change" by Darcelle Banks

Times change, but we can never change time
Define change

and maybe it can save lives

My mind frame is absolute, but at the same
time there was a point in which I wanted to
remain blind.

Now that I see, I feel the need to share my
vision

and express my opinion

to the future which is our children

If the thought survives, the idea lives on
nurture the seeds, and many plants will grow

Times change, but we can never change time
define change, and save many at the same
time.

Lets share our views and decide not to remain
blind
let's grow as individuals
And a nation at the same time.

"These are the breaks on the job" ***

- Think Break
- Snack Break
- Tea Break
- Coffee Break
- Juice Break
- Water Break
- Bathroom Break
- Waiting on you Break
- Just feel like a Break
- Bull-crap Break
- Looking at you Break
- On Break
- Stretch your legs Break
- Scratch your back Break
- Can't remember Break
- Putting it down Break
- Messing up Break
- Dizzy Break
- Fart Break
- Radio station change Break
- Talk back Break
- Denial Break
- Regular Break
- Break just to Break
- Panic Break
- Panting Break
- Sneeze Break
- Yarn Break
- Cough Break
- Scratch Break
- Fuss Break
- See the boss Break
- Gazing in twilight Break
- Insane Break
- Laugh Break
- Mind your business Break
- Get out of my face Break
- Leave me alone break
- Write this down Break
- Overworked Break
- Unappreciated Break
- (for women) Sexy walk Break
- Move your ass out the way Break
- Early Break

- In pain Break
- Don't worry about what I'm doing
Break
- Gone postal Break
- I need a medication Break
- Do what you do Break
- I'm tired Break
- Sitting around Break
- Invisible Break
- Blowing me Break
- You got mail Break ?OX+
- Headache Break
- Everybody Break}
- Indignant Break

*Now Break yourself { FOOL }

"My Reality" by Scott Solovic

As the days go by,
Time appears to stand still,
Am I awake or dreaming,
Can you tell me what's real?
All I feel is despair,
As I hear their lonely cries,
Darkness has surrounded me,
I'm almost afraid to close my eyes...
I hear whispers in the dark,
As shadows become my friends,
Welcome to my nightmare,
Where horror knows no end...
These walls contain secrets,
That no man truly knows,
The darkness of these cells,
Will penetrate the brightest of souls...
With voices in my head,
I'm lost within my thoughts,
I contemplate destruction,
As peace is no longer sought...
There's people all around me,
With a lock that has no key,
Time passes slowly,
Yet there is no ticking clock,
There is only me,
The coldness of these steel beds,
And concrete...

"When Worlds Collide" by James Brown

Some friends become your enemies in a
flash. Because they always have something
hidden behind their mask. They don't want to

hear the truth- they always think they're being
put on blast. Some friends throw your
friendship behind glass. One heated
argument took our friendship so fast.

"Waiting" by Carl Branson

Through curtainless windows
Pink fringed clouds tell the time
No coffee with sugar
To help me awake
Flipping the switch
No lights come on
Quite expected
Since bills go unpaid

Yesterday's mail scattered
Below the slot in the door
Coupon and credit offers
Hold no interest
While I go unpaid

Trembling hands slowly unfold
Letterhead embossed with gold
A desirable job offer it holds
As yellow sun
Brightens blue skies
Worry and woe go unpaid

"I Cry" by Jeffery L. Spurgeon

They say that I'm stubborn. I'm just like my
father,
And I can't give up I've gotta push farther,
But there's no one here wakin' up next to me,
Except for this heartache and these broken
dreams,
I had visions for my life that were lost in the
streets,
Now here I am doing this sentence alone and
nobody can relate to the obstacles I face,
It's like you can't know the memories I shun
and the hope I chase,
Don't pretend to understand what I'm going
through until you walk in my shoes,
There's no way you can know about
loneliness until you put on my blues,
I'm here bangin' my bleeding thoughts against
the denial of every appeal,
Dropping to my knees asking God if he knows
how it feels...
To feel...

This disappointment and fear that I have to face every day,
 Hopin' and prayin', beggin' and pleadin' I don't die in this place...and...
 Asking the grim reaper to stay away,
 The concrete of this empty cell on a winter day isn't colder than the people of authority in my life,
 I constantly get stabbed in the back but when I look there's no knife,
 Just the people I trusted to be a friend and stick by my side,
 So, I cry, if only you could visualize the things I have to hide,
 Then you would sympathize and be the one with tears dropping from your chin,
 You just don't understand what it's like or where I've been...

“Untitled” by David Irons

Looking down upon these words
 I see my hand enscribe
 But is it me who writes?

“The Void” by Everett McCoy

I am breathing, but that is all, there is no use, and no gift given, I live to occupy space, to breathe the exhalations of others, and to add my own.
 My living is unpleasant, unsatisfying, and full of death.
 I walk to see something beautiful, to be beautiful, but find my journey disappointing.
 The world seems to live, while I seem not to, my path circular, meeting the same face with new creases. What have I gained but crow's feet, and thought-lines, and pains that youth thought would never come?
 I stand like Samson between pillars of hope and despair, praying to crash them both for oblivion.
 I have taken lots of information over the years, and have mulled many ideas, and see that I know nothing, and never knew.
 I see only charades everywhere, people, institutions, systems, movements, lies, lies, lies.
 Everyone pretending, defending, acting, exaggerating, omitting, embellishing,

abstracting, crafting, everyone, everyone, everyone.
 What is real... I ask. What can be rested on... truly.
 Is nothing sound enough to bear my weight, my hope, my desire, - my humanity.
 I suppose I will walk until I can walk no more.

“A Mother’s Love” by Juicy Queen Bee

A mother's love
 is sweeter than cream
 you put in Coffee

A mother's love
 is sweeter than
 a candy bar
 it never tastes bitter

A mother's love
 will move mountains
 to reach you

A mother's love
 is real, it never
 leaves you empty
 it keeps you happy
 ready for more

A mother's love
 is just like
 God's love for us

“Untitled” by Ashley Burrell

Who is scared of nothing and scared of everything
 Who is shy and lacks confidence yet is also extremely confident
 Who has low self esteem but is also cocky and conceited
 Who is smart and foolish
 Who is arrogant and humble
 Who is selfish and selfless
 Who is emotional yet shows no emotions
 Who has many regrets and no regrets at all
 Who wants success but is afraid of failure
 Who wants to be loved but is afraid to love
 Who is his best friend and worst enemy
 Who loves himself and hates himself
 Who is open minded but stuck in his ways
 Who is easily influenced

Who is careful and careless
 Who is thoughtful and kind hearted
 Who is vengeful and vindictive
 Who is silly and adventurous
 Who is all these things and some all wrapped into one...

Me

“A Hopeless Romantic” by Bobby Bostic

In my heart the need for love is so gigantic
 I guess you can call me a hopeless romantic
 I have always been this way
 Looking for the perfect love forever even back in the day

When it comes to love I believe in fairytales
 Stuck in a daydream caught under it's spells
 Searching for that needle in the haystack
 Trying to catch it before it falls between the crack

I'll never lose my hope of finding true romance
 If one relationship fails I'll just take another chance
 Yeah my heart has been broke a time or two
 For true love there's nothing I wouldn't do

Heaven knows of my yearning so one day real love will come to me
 I will find true romance eventually
 No matter how much I've been through I believe in love and always will
 Any other hopeless romantic understands exactly what I feel

The hope of romance makes me like a child all over again
 So innocent with love because it can be fragile and thin
 This is a truth that I have never recanted
 Until my last breath I will be a hopeless romantic

“Shoot to Kill” by George Luther Wilder

Sniper on the roof, students dying,
 Kent State University, hundreds crying,
 Abraham Lincoln's assassination,
 John, Martin, and Robert's tears in this nation,
 Murdered! Walking across the street,
 St. Valentine's Day, 2018 was a disaster,

The great spirit is my lord and master,
Law enforcements shoot to kill,
Doctors pushing deadly opiate pills,
United States used to be free,
Columbine, Sandy Hook, and Aurora, reminds
me of Pearl Harbor, Tora, Tora, Tora,
Whatever happened to the American Pie?
9-11, three thousand perished.
Wounded Knee, Las Vegas, and Parkland,
All three locations of bloody sand, Gatlin
guns, to AR-15s, to assault weapons you see,
Only cause the old and young to bleed.
From churches to schools,
Are being shot up by fools,
I felt their suffering, pain, and tears,
For all that ran and died in fear
From cops to all the gangs,
All I can say-please don't hate,
Be strong, have the faith,
Say no to rifles and guns,
Let's get this job done.

"Tears" by J. Davis

The happiness and sorrow, that's hidden
inside,
Touch of his heart, which makes us all cry,
Of the goodness and mercy, deeply instilled,
God shows compassion, in all that we feel,
Is it not love, that makes life go 'round,
Marked by a smile, or even a frown,
By all that we do, and all that we share
Tears have a way, of showing we care!

"Fathomless" by Daniel Vaughn

Under the sunless skies of remorse
spins a whirlpool of acute anguish.
Misty clouds of misery amass
a raft on a sea of delusions.

Swelled with the scars of forlorn events
seethes a surf of dismal despair.
Waves awash with streaming sorrow
heave the haunted tides of silence.

Lost in the ocean's hidden chasms
currents swirl the eddies of fate.
Riptides of ruin rigged to restrain
stranded seclusions desire detained.

Sunk beneath the horizon's mirage

a nymph's glimpse stirs fractured affections.
Storms from the depths of the mind's abyss
flood with the torment of remembrance.

Castawayed treasures buried by chance
reasons abandoned marooned in the past.
Precious pearls destiny discarded
fancies foundered a maelstrom of madness.

The lighthouse is dark laden with night
buoyed moorless the moon prevails.
Drifting in circles direction unfound
obscured by shadows the stars nil shine.

Solace is sought from the surging squalls
in the foggy harbor of regret.
Anchored a wreck no shore in sight
dreams tossed like froth a siren wails.

Alone at the helm blue eyes a stare
fleeting fairytale fantasies set sail.
Yearning a mate companion and friend
his mermaid of myth the mariner awaits...

"Dear Daddy" ***

Words don't quite say
The feeling that even the dopest thespian
couldn't display
Love interjected
Today, I recognize you
I honor you
Because there simply would be no me
Or the latter three
Had you not seen fit to birth, love, and
discipline to reel us in.
"The board of education" became our best
friend
Not even Future could beat your best
J.O.H.N.S.O.N.
I remember sitting on the front steps waiting
for you to come home.
Back then, there were pagers
There were no cell phones
I'd beep you 911
Just to say "all the butter pecan was done"
Knowing that you'd stop just to make sure
baby girl had some
And remember when you'd come home and I
had sunflower seeds all over the front

All you did was give me a look and shortly my
mess was gone

Daddy, remember when we'd sit out front
Summer time, watching the sun go to bed,
You'd tell us all sorts of stories
Pictures and sayings filled our heads
I think that's what I love the most about you,
dad.

There are no memories that I wish I never had
So I wrote this poem as a story out front and
share with you.

Reminiscent of memories of just us two.

"You're Losing Your Best America" ***

Mass incarceration is wiping out a
generation...
America's best and brightest are behind bars
waiting...
Potential doctors, engineers, lawyers, and
scientists,
So many... forgotten, neglected, abused and
left...
Businessmen, entrepreneurs, stock brokers
all sidelined,
America has locked up some of its most
talented minds...
Managers, merchants, executives, and
C.E.O.s,
Instead of running Fortune 500 companies,
they're behind
Prison doors...

Writers, poets, artists, creators, and
innovators,
Teachers, helpers, coaches, and educators...
Thrown away, abandoned, disregarded and
left behind...
Disproportionate sentences have us doing too
much time...

Many ready to give back to their community
and society,
But somewhere in an American prison is
where you'll find me...
We're your neighbors, co-workers, family
members, and friends,
Your spouses, your uncles, your boyfriends,
and husbands

A cure for cancer, a cure for AIDS, a cure for
H.I.V.,
America, you've locked up your 'cures' you
should let them free...
So many cures, solutions, and treatments,
undiscovered and hidden
To many of America's 'cures' are in Folsom
and San Quentin...

Many of us aren't the same as how we came
in,
We've changed our mindsets and changed
our thinking...
Billions are being spent on propaganda and
fear,
You MUST do better...

"You're Losing Your Best, America"

"The Butterfly" by Barry L. Taylor

Wandering aloft she flies about-
Here a petal, there a petal,
O' the flowers have such clout
And we humans are designed to settle for but
a glimpse as she passes on,
To this bud, that clover, a blade of grass on
the verdant lawn,
Then off into a bit of shade.
I recall in my youth- the net could bring a
specimen near
But one could all but bet,
Her wings, so pretty, so clear,
Would be her undoing, as she shed that
"fairy" dust which seemed so sheer,
Rubbing off then suddenly she'd be dead.
But o' such glory whilst yet alive,
As the colorful avian graced my eyes
Even as I strained as one flew high
Then gone, on the gentle wind from sight.

**"Expanding My Horizon" by Marino K.
Leyba**

A mist, a soft breeze comes over me,
unexpectedly.

I'm alone, and so far from home.
I'm left open, I'm vulnerable to the elements.

The skylight, the twilight.
I made a vow that night.

I made a vow to continue my search.
I made a vow from the sea to emerge.

Brilliant flashes of light, illuminate me,
A living legend. Who can it be?

I've become distracted by their spectacle.
I reflect, and so...

I call it, "expanding my horizon."
My dreams go far beyond, where the sky
ends.

I feel the universe cannot contain me.
There's thunder, lightning, it's raining, but this
is all just a part of my painting.
I can see the sea almost changing.

Bluebirds and red robins. I gave her my heart,
so I'm all in.
At this moment in time, I'm fallen.

What this means, pictures and themes.
I'll paint a million pictures with dreams.
Spark imaginations with scenes, because
everything is not as it seems.
Vivid colors, flowers, and trees.
I've got powers to freeze.

Suspended in time, I've been befriended with
rhymes.
I've been befriended with lines. I'm clever at
times, but I'm barely alive.

Is it because of humanity? I'm glad you see,
because this worldwide tragedy has caused
me to become above average. Averagely, I
still need help from a girl, who can manage
me.

Intriguing, I'm leaving the forest glade.
Ultimately, there's nothing more to say.

Hours and minutes, my powers diminish...

Brilliant flashes of light, illuminate me,
A living legend. Who can it be?

I've become distracted by their spectacle.
I reflect, and so...

I call it, "expanding my horizon."
My dreams go far beyond, where the sky
ends.

The universe cannot contain me.
There's thunder, lightning, it's raining, but this
is all just a part of my painting.

"Untitled" by Lionel Armstrong

No canteen or no food, they won't let me out
Stuck behind these walls, I'm so stressed out
Thinking about all the things I did
Could've been chillin with the family & all my
kids
But I gotta hold on
It's not so long
Militant mind, I gotta be strong
Sitting here at central prison, boy it's gonna
get better
Waiting on the mailman, can't get a letter
Looking out the door reminiscing on the past
Thinking about all the fly stuff I had
Now I ain't got nothing
Man this is so sad...

"Untitled" by Cesar Hernandez

Winter winds bemoan my fate
Feeling bad and I'm losing weight
My temperature must be one hundred and
five
Just barely alive

I'm kicked to get on my feet
My body filled with heat

If they'd do something to ease the pain
I wouldn't mind the cold and rain

It wouldn't serve them right
If I died for spite

"You are Africa" by John Bell

Blackman waking up in the morning light
Stretching your hands to the heavens
You breathe in God's precious gift of air
Looking in the mirror, notice the brown face
staring out at you
A face not unlike your father's father's father.
You are Africa.

Blackman with your proud stately walk moving
to the beat of the drums that only your soul
hears
Remember your forefathers who lived and
died to see you walk with with freedom in your
step.
They smile down on you from the heavens.
You are Africa.

Blackman, you speak with a timbre that
demands attention, your growl like the lion of
the plains commanding authority, your smooth
chocolate caramel voices majestic, instantly
recognizable apart from all others, in your
veins flows the blood of kings.
You are Africa.

Blackman, Africa the cradle of civilization, the
land of gold, the land of old speaks through
you, the motherland, land of flowing milk and
honey, is exemplified in the melongene of
your skin, realize the potential you have and
who you truly are and when they ask who you
are, proudly proclaim:
I am Africa.

“Overcast!” by James Chin

Complex angry cloud,
A thun'dring of it's EGO!
Saturated Mind.

“Castles” by Stori Richardson

My castle started shrinking,
something's gotta give.
Ended up being the smallest place
that I have ever lived.
One of the reasons I would do away
with haters, to say the least,
I don't know who these people are,
their names ain't even on the lease.
It's a different typa monster
that greed, yea itsa beast.
We was supposed to eat together,
but I became the main feast.
If you preying on my kindness,
takin' advantage of my cool,
I'd have to ask you then,
what's your definition of Soul Food?
I sweat my ass off my whole life
& worked hard for my profit,

but envy, I know, cuts like a knife,
so you'll probably try hard to stop it.
If you know me like you claim,
how can you disregard my logic?
You know I cut my arm short
and put my heart in my pocket.
A pretty good judge of character
maybe mistaked a few;
cut some people off, had no choice,
it's what they made me do.
Why would you take advantage
when it's something I gave to you?
Cause in the long run
it doesn't take from me, only you.
You'll probably tell me I'm a fucked up bitch
Nah, you got it wrong
Just won't be fucked up wit you.
No longer enable you
No longer favorable
But pride is on your sleeve,
so you'll act like nothing phases you.
Which could only equal good, in fact,
Then no love can be lost 'cause
I'll know exactly where I put it at.

“Entitlement” by Nahbeel Richardson

Could you blame me, for having direction
A sense of purpose, goals
And not just a criminal history
That, over my head, you hold

Am I the one to blame
For those sick and twisted lies
Equating blacks and crime
A stereotype, to promote, you try

Truth as it is
Albeit, what it may
Accepting the responsibilities of my actions
So that tomorrow, will not be as today

But let's continue speaking truth
Will tomorrow be any different
I'll still be black
And you'll still have white privilege
So in the end, it doesn't matter
My hard work, work ethic, and morale
Watching you move up the ladder
As I round the carousel

You see, but that only gives me strength
And the courage to go further
Exercising my brain for ways
To break down this socio-economic barrier

That you fail to acknowledge exists
Possibly out of fear
That slavery, in some fashion,
Is still here

If I am incorrect
I implore you, show me reason
As my future is left to chance
Like a leaf through the seasons.

“His Grace Towards Me” by Benny Ballandly

Put behind walls of concrete and fences made
of wire,
So many sneered and called me a liar.
Locked up and trapped like an animal in a
cage,
So very hard at times to control all this rage,
The system is crooked, corrupt, and bent,
Never a day in trouble, yet to prison I was
sent.
I served proudly in the military with loyalty and
zeal,
Cannot fathom or believe this is even real,
As my life clicks off one day at a time,
Some may murmur I am just trash or even
slime.
“Take my hand,” I clearly hear him say,
Lord, please forgive me, I tearfully pray.
Trembling, I kneel at his throne, all dressed in
white,
I shall stand washed clean and perfect in his
sight.
Many have turned their backs, disgusted in
me,
On that day all is forgiven, they shall see.
A hard journey I sure did choose,
His mercy meant I would never lose.
Finally, when my life is all done and finished.
Realizing His grace towards me never
diminished
Come to rest, my child I so love,
Living with my king, so very high above.

“My Hiding Place” by Christopher Grygiel

The sun is coming up outside,
So I must find a place to hide.
I'll crawl into the dark, so no one else can see,
I wish someone would tell me, what is wrong
with me?

I see them walking around like it's all fine,
But I'm a prisoner inside my own mind.
I don't like the thoughts that are inside my
head,
I can't help but think I'm dead.

I wonder if anyone would even miss me,
I don't think my life is quite what it should be.
I hate being stuck in the dark by myself,
Like an old broken toy way up high on a shelf.

I wish someone would tell me it'll all be ok,
And someday I can come out and live in the
day.
Until that day comes I'll just hide in the dark,
Fighting these thoughts inside my head,
nursing a broken heart.

“Sweet Bella” by Samantha Pullin

Your heart beating in rhythm with mine
Was the first sweet sound you ever made

8 months later, hearing you cry was the
Sweetest announcement that you were here
to say!

Your laughter is as sweet as your kisses,
hugs
Sweeter than Mountain Dew.

The first time you said “mama” will always be
the sweetest word I ever knew.

So proud of the kind & caring person you've
become
the sweetest soul I know.

Your sweet influence will unite those around
you
throughout the years you grow.
You're my sweet Bella, full of spunk and
energy

you bring my world into perfect balance, such
delightful harmony.

Your momma loves you more than words can
say.

A pure love that grows stronger each and
every day.

“My Life” by Michael Love

As I lie on my bunk in this concrete cell,
I look back on my life that's been through hell
And I wonder why I never wanted to live,
When I have everything to offer but nothing to
give

Now I sit here and look at my life that's gone
by
With so much regret and so much lost time

Is there any way I can change and make a
new start

From the beginning this time with a brand new
heart?

From all the years I've wasted and all the
tears I've cried

That have torn up my soul and left me empty
inside.

Dear Lord can you help me to ease all this
pain?

Take away all my sadness and help me
maintain,

to look at the good and not only the bad,
to see what I've got and not just what I had,
to live for the future and not the past,
for a new life for me and my family
of happiness at last!

**“They don't want us to recite our poems”
by Arzell Gulley**

They don't want us to recite our poems, don't
want the people to behold any signs or see
any symbols, and they damn sure don't want
us to know that the ancestors are with us.

They don't want us to recite our poems. They
fear the foreign sounds of our secret
language: Hope. They thought it long dead.
They are afraid of the spread of our fever,
how it creeps along the senses - our hearing
and seeing, our awakening perception, our
ability to sniff out what's false.

The willingness to feel our most painful
wound, the taste of blood on our lips.

They don't want us to recite our poems. They
are afraid of our spring, the way mother earth
blushes green for us, hiding her gift in full
view of both the strong and weak alike. She
has shown us fine stones in a babbling brook:
love, faith, courage, tenacity, and
understanding. They fear the inevitable fall of
their rampaging giants. They don't want us to
recite our poems. They want us to die with our
songs unsung. They want to bury our
burnt-out husks, perfectly preserved shells,
with sightless eyes if bitter black smoke and a
mouthful of tightly clenched pearl-white teeth
trapping inside for all eternity the music that
they desperately fear.

They don't want us to recite our poems.

**“A Day of Wondering Why” by Spencer
Butler**

An angel gave up today and tightened two
sets of strings

The heart strings of my soul and the shoe
strings around her neck.

Who gave death the power to take away an
angel that this world needed so much?

Another ray of sunlight extinguished
by their own hand to leave the world a little
darker.

Why couldn't this angel see her own
beauty? Why were her wings cut? Why did
this angel not remain in the heavens? Why
was this angel given to us to love, but left
alone to suffer?

Why am I having to write this
through tears on a day of no comfort; on a
day of wondering why?

02/14/1982 - 07/05/2018

In memory of Teresa Butler, who left this
world cold and took the sun with her.

“I've Been Around” by Geff LaFleur

What is the meaning of this life journey?
Because I've been around.

See I've been in love and been out of love.
I don't know what you're thinking of... I've
been around.

I have navigated through some tears since my
undying years.

I have climbed over all the mountains of despair and faced some true fears, but those same fears gave me the courage to be stronger than the average

I have been through the heights of real hunger and that same hunger led me with the knowledge to think before I act like a savage.

If you wonder about pain? True pain for me was when I watched the only woman I have ever loved... choose to love someone else and to see that I'm stuck at the bottom of the pyramid, trying my best to reach for it all, but then I've wondered "What if the sky just falls?" Could I carry the burden of all that pressure? And if you wonder about pleasure? Like Adam, I was deceived by the Eve of my desires to eat from the rotten apple of envy and wasn't the same after.

I have seen the true course of nature, but that same course that turns men to animals gave me the purpose to know my worth. Now if you ever wonder about laughter? I have laughed with fake friends that turn to true enemies. I have laughed at my own downfall as teardrops fall like when it rains in Niagara Falls.

Take a minute and take just a good look in the mirror. Have you ever seen the sun rise in the eyes of a soldier? Now I have been through some fights and lost so many battles, but then I had to learn that as there is life there will always be struggles. And that is what turns a simple into a warrior. My desire is to evolve, to move forward never backward. Now I have been without a sight, until I saw the light that endured my sight to cherish the treasures of life. I have taken and given directions in life while searching for my soul.

Searching for diamonds in the sky, while walking amongst lost jewels on this earth. Searching for gold in the bottom of the ocean, while losing my devotion on what I'm worth. Searching from the ground of science to the path of my own conscience to find the real equation of life's mathematics. I have even searched through some erratic religions, but then I wonder "what is the definition of an adventure?" I have yearned to see the Statue of Liberty, but will they bring me freedom?

I have wished to walk along the Great Wall of China or to conquer the world, but what will I do when my purpose calls?

I have not seen it all, but I've seen enough. I have seen how a diamond remains flawless, even when it's in the rough. I have seen how you can't ever stop the sun from shining.

I have seen how some of those who were weakened by their own defeats pretended to be so tough and those who were so short wished to be so tall.

But

Don't we all wish for a little bit more, not knowing that those wishes are our flaws?

I don't know what you're thinking of at all, I have seen enough and I have done enough.

I've been around.

"Miracle" by Leon Benson

Revolution
is so necessary,
in this cold-cold world
where our July feels like January,
yeah the coldest winter ever
with a sistah Souljah,
but with a
Sisyphus' boulder,
that keeps
rolling down on me,
Oops! I meant to say WE,
Which is my
collective perspective,
while knowing damn well
that Me-Me mentality
is so selective,
Often times
leaving me on the outside
or better yet
on the inside looking out,
Through a keyhole
As small as a needle's eye
but I thread my vision through
To see brighter tomorrows,
So I'm not mad at Jesus
for walking on water
because our miracle
is walking on sorrows.

"Imagination" by Jeffery L. Spurgeon, Jr.

I'm the fire of a dragon's breath,
I'm the magic to someone on meth,
I'm the shape of a unicorn's horn,
I'm that moment when a baby's born,
I'm a knight in a fairytale,
I'm the loud bang of a church bell,
I'm one of a kind, to all of my kind,
I'm the treasure a pirate can't find,
I'm the peak of the tallest tree,
I'm the freest of free,
I'm a prince in a far away land,
I'm the voice of a pop band,
I'm lost and I'm found,
I'm my father's crown,
I'm the sparkle in your eye,
I'm a piece of cherry pie,
I'm bound to give advice,
I'm the grand wizard's vice,
I'm with a little boy in a church pew,
I'm the portal to walk through,
I'm a butterfly in a summer breeze,
I'm the honeycomb of a thousand bees
I'm the last of my breed,
I'm a planted seed,
I'm the smile on your face,
I'm the speed in a race,
I'm the magical moment of an answered prayer,
I'm the lips kissing away a tear,
I'm sunshine after a long day of rain,
I'm a thought that can't be tamed...
I'm just an imagination,
I'm far away from my destination.

Closing notes:

Thank you to everyone who shared your poetry with us. It is truly a pleasure to read your work and see such intricate, creative, elegant uses of language. There is such a range of styles within this writing community, and I always enjoy getting to hear each poet's unique voice, whether comedic, melancholy, romantic, or otherwise. I wish we had space to publish every poem we receive, and the high quality of writing always makes the decision of which poems to include very difficult. If you were not published in this volume, don't be discouraged. We'd love for you to submit your work for future volumes!

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