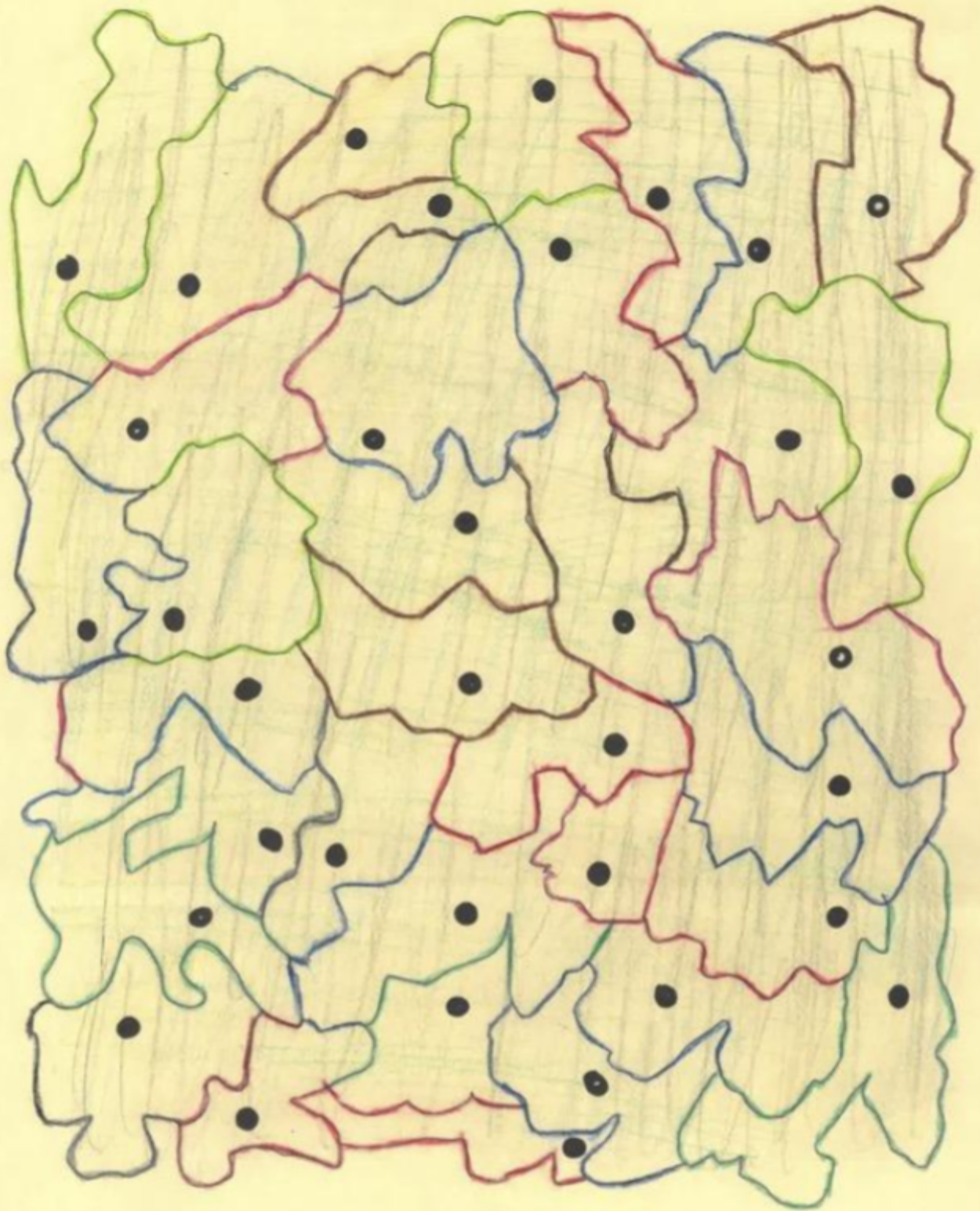


# Prisoner Express



**Poetry Anthology**  
**Volume 28**

# A Note to the Reader

Dear friends,

Poetry Anthology #28 is finally here! Thank you for submitting your pieces to Prisoner Express. This is the third anthology I've had the privilege of working on and I'm grateful I've had the chance to read so many thoughtfully crafted poems.

Each poem in this collection is unique and each author has a voice of their own, yet I was struck by the amount of commonality I saw across these works. Feelings of isolation and nostalgia are palpable in many of the poems. I've tried to place them into sections based on these shared ideas, but as always, some defy categories and the lines between themes are pretty fuzzy. If you experience the anxiety of isolation, this collection shows that you are not alone. These feelings are intensified by the restrictions of prison life.

Let us know what you think of the poems in this anthology. If we get enough replies, we will be able to publish responses as their own packet, creating a dialogue surrounding these works, an idea suggested by frequent Prisoner Express poet Marino K. Leyba. Also feel free to write to me or to any member of the team here at Prisoner Express. Poetry Anthology Volume 29 is now accepting submissions in both English and Spanish. If you are so inclined, I encourage you to try your hand at submitting visual art for PP29, too. We hope to pair some art and poems by the same authors together.

It's always a pleasure to read these poems and to interact with many of you through the mail. Thank you once again for your submissions. I wish you all the best.

Take care,  
Elinor  
Prisoner Express Poetry

# Table of Contents

Cover Art: *Amoeba Man Family Portrait* by Paul Bero

## **Isolation (p. 3)**

“My Written Words” by Scott A. Madoulet

“The Invisible ‘Man’” by Felippie Jones

“Horrors of Isolation” by Robert Viveiros Jr.

“The Hole” by Chad Frank

Art: *Untitled* by Richard Hasselberg

## **Injustice (p. 4)**

“Money Won’t Save You” by Greg Fonseca

“Untitled” by Arnold Barnes III

“Senseless Loss, For a Powerful Gain / Hand on the Cross, But We Still Feel the Pain” by Eglama

“Fed Exed” by James E. Newman

“As I Watched a Juror Sleep During My Trial” by Robert Viveiros Jr.

Art: *Untitled* by Aleksei Smirnov

## **Prison Life (p. 6)**

“Prison Time” by Alexander Bebris

“Ode to the Food Slot” by Jerry Metcalf

“Comfortable Confined Convict by Scott A. Madoulet

“Prison Given Blues” by Michael Espinoza

Art: *Untitled I* by Travis Magash

## **A Letter Home (p. 7)**

“A Son’s Goodbye” by Steven P. Arthur

“Til We Meet Again” by Jose Gutierrez

“A Son’s Letter to Mom” by Juan Wagner

“Poem 3” by Jason Conley

“A Father’s Letter” by Juan Wagner

“Daughter Do You Know” by Jeremy Lowery

Art: *On the Farm* and *You Can Find Faith in the Most Unlikely Places* by Gary Farlow

## **Memory (p. 10)**

“Oleander” by Eric Bederson

“House of Cards” by Gary Farlow

“A Trickle of Time” by Eric Bederson

“Nothing Comes Easily” by Chris Davidson

“Infinity” by Travis Austin

“Where I Don’t Have Eyes” by SPIN

“An Ode to Justine” by Reginald

Holland-Houston III

Art: *Connect the Dots* and *Stepping Into Sunset* by Paul Bero

## **Out There (p. 13)**

“Out There” by Melissa Germain

“I’m Up” by James W. B. Jackson

“A Simple Daydream” by Jared Eisinger

## **Storytelling (p. 14)**

“The Tomato” by Rolf Rathmann

“Bettis” by Jon Albert Kaspar

“Fact or Fiction” by Donald J. Degner

“Surprise” by Al Newberry

“Woke Up to This” by Robert Riedl

“I Didn’t Wake Up One Day” by Rolf Rathmann

“No Longer Thoughts” by Robert Roginsky

“K2” by Chad Frank

“Life of Fly” by Bryan Harrold

“Reasonable” by Rickey Bright

Art: *Untitled II* by Travis Magash and *Untitled* by Jerome Washington

## **Self-Reflection (p. 18)**

“Jackson Pike Jail Mirror” by Heather Tapia

“Who Am I?” by Gary Farlow

“A Moment of Clarity” by SPIN

“Paredolia (A Trick of the Eye)” by Jon Albert Kaspar

“Bird Song” by Howard B. Brown

“Tree” by Joseph E. Johnson

“Finding Me” by Melissa Germain

Art: *Alone With My Thoughts* by Richard Hasselberg

Final Page Art: *Untitled* by Sean Riker

# Isolation

## **My Written Words by Scott A. Madoulet**

I reach out with my written words  
Anxious to capture the heart of another  
Hoping to be recognized, accepted  
Longing for a response to my emotions

Poetry and letters, creations set free to roam  
Raised from thoughtful imagination  
Born out of a desire to connect with  
Someone, anyone, I'm so alone here.

## **The Invisible "Man" by Felippie Jones**

The most amazing thing happened to me  
today.

An invisible mailman came my way.  
He brought me something really rare, An  
invisible  
letter that wasn't quite there.

The scent upon it was sweet, I can recall.  
So sweet in fact, I smelled nothing at all.  
The "Penmanship" was very neat and very  
clean.  
So clean in fact, it couldn't be seen!

So now I'm writing you back, with love you  
can bet.



Untitled by Richard Hasselberg

Thanks for these letters I never did get.  
I sit behind these walls for now, but  
remember...  
things have a way of turning around.

I will be out there one day, where life will be  
much better.  
And you could be sitting here, reading an  
"Invisible letter."

## **Horrors of Isolation by Robert Viveiros Jr.**

Darkness. Winter.  
A night of frost and no moon.  
The macabre was not in anything embodied,  
but in my mind.  
I wanted Darkness.

I stood there completely still,  
barely breathing...  
listening to the sound of my own pulse.  
closed off to the world.  
I wanted Darkness

Trusting no one but,  
The ghosts that roam the land.  
Everything else  
makes me nervous.  
I wanted darkness.

Where no one hears me,  
where no one sees me.  
The dark wraps about me.  
The darkness is absolute.  
I wanted Darkness.

## **The Hole by Chad Frank**

Here in the Hole,  
we are locked in a 10x12 cell  
24/7.  
We have few privileges:  
an hour in a dog cage,  
the book cart is the highlight of the week,  
but has little to offer-

mostly westerns, romance, and pulp fiction.  
cellies are forced to eat, shift, and shower  
together.

Neighbors bang and holler incessantly.

Lights switch on at dawn  
and don't go off til well after midnight.

Even then,  
guards some flashlights  
in windows constantly.

No clocks,  
days stretch into infinity.

A stay here is indefinite  
since the powers that be  
don't care.

Torture.

## Injustice

### **Money Won't Save You by Greg Fonseca**

Like witches they gather and worship at  
the

Altar of the almighty dollar, and it  
apparently

Doesn't matter that they and their ilk are  
At par with the world's dictators for the  
Number of poor people they execute and  
incarcerate (as if competing for such a  
Dubious distinction were a game)

Hate disguised as "patriotism" is what you  
espouse and spew

But the little brains have not a clue  
What they call a "democracy" is what  
Is known to use by its other name

"Kleptocracy"

Where the rich get richer

The poor, poorer

A wise man once said, "A house divided  
Cannot stand" and you will be the  
"architect"

Of your own demise because just like



*Untitled by Aleksei Smirnov*

The frog in the heating water you won't  
Know what hit you until it's too late  
And all the money in the world will not  
Save you or your "wretched" soul

### **Untitled by Arnold Barnes III**

A nation, like a pirate  
that plunders the whole  
world, taking the booty  
back to his ship, weighed  
heavily with greed  
sinks to the bottom

### **Senseless Loss, For a Powerful Gain / Hand on the Cross, But We Still Feel the Pain by Eglama**

To Tyre Nichols

This is far from simple

When your own kind drill you

Professionals

With credentials?

Nah they criminals

Abusing fundamentals  
Now the whole world is hurting and  
nervous  
Because it's digital  
We all see the visual  
More injustice  
Disgusted  
This is custom  
From mass incarceration  
To killing us out in public  
When I spit, with so much substance  
Oppressors they get flustered  
The tension, in Memphis, it's malicious  
It's unproductive  
Scenes of subjection  
Where is the police protection?  
Question  
Only brutality a blatant disconnection  
Rest in power Tyre

**Fed Exed by James E. Newman**

Woah now, let me get this straight  
The scales of Justice were used to weigh  
My sins; oh that's just great  
That stern, ol' Judge proclaimed me  
STATE-SUBHUMAN-FREIGHT  
Then he shelved me in a forgotten  
Warehouse, tightly packed in an  
OBSCENE-CONCRETE-CRATE  
An unwanted consignment long past my  
EXPIRATION-DATE  
The bill of lading read  
NEWMAN-E-SIX-SEVEN  
FOUR-SEVEN-frEIGHT

**As I Watched a Juror Sleep During My  
Trial by Robert Viveiros Jr.**

Sleep, juror in the first seat, it's surely fair

if you can't in your bed, that you should in  
your chair.

Full of amazement as I watched you  
drool,  
how your ignorance made you look like a  
fool.

Sleep, juror in the first seat, as slumber  
lies,

it was a horrible sight to my eyes.  
With a made-up story, my life they were  
taking away,  
So sleep juror in the first seat while you  
may.

Sleep, juror in the first seat, with head  
down and eyes closed,  
how principles fade and the truth slowly  
decompose.

I was the one with sleepless nights  
as they move to abolish my civil rights.

Sleep, juror in the first seat, and dream of  
a time  
when you needed evidence to prove a  
crime.

When law enforcement was on stand  
lying  
My innocent soul inside was dying.

Sleep, juror in the first seat, it will all be  
over soon

How could you be tired, it was only  
afternoon?

Questioned by the judge, "I was not," was  
your plea  
at the end, without thought, you found me  
guilty.



# Prison Life

## Prison Time by Alexander Bebris

Prison Time is the baker of sweet dough,  
teasing –

you cannot share, only smell that  
ambrosia, not

to savor the taste on the tongue;  
Prison Time is a cannibal that eats your  
soul, slowly

devouring all from inside out,  
leaving an empty

hole in the center of essence.  
I am a donut and nothing more.

## Ode to the Food Slot by Jerry Metcalf

Large enough to pass  
a tray of prison slop  
yet narrow enough to keep  
my head from squeezing through.

O' Great Giver of Life.  
Three times a day  
without fail  
my food slot crashes  
open and blesses me  
with a meal.

Never a tasty meal  
but a meal nonetheless.

Mail arrives through  
this mighty iron slot  
my link to the outside  
free world  
letting me know mom  
and dad are okay  
that my six brothers  
still suck wind  
and that my beloved  
Detroit Lions still suck period.

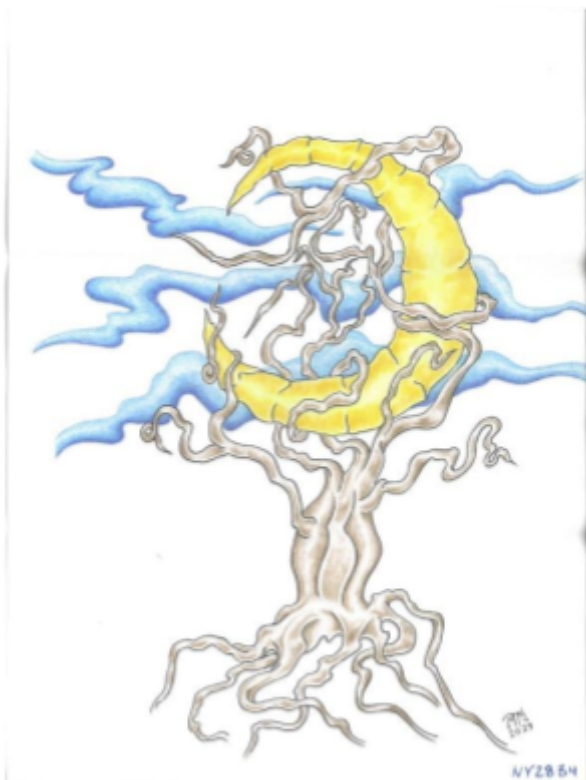
I meet new friends  
and lose old friends  
through this tin can-type  
telephone minus the string.

The nurse checks my temp  
and hands me my meds  
through the gaping hole  
in my reality.

She smiles and tells me  
everything will be okay.

Only it won't.

Being in Solitary Confinement  
is mentally backbreaking.



Untitled I by Travis Magash

It's like climbing  
a tree infested with red ants  
while a swarm of killer bees kicked  
up by the honey-guzzling grizzly lurking  
below  
stings you. And stings you.  
And stings you.

Yet, with the help  
of that damn food slot  
I (you) hold on.  
Grasping, afraid of  
that slavering grizzly.

Waiting to eat you (me)  
if we slip and tumble  
earthward.

Thank you, Food Slot.  
O' Great Giver of Life.  
You've kept us (me/you)  
and so many others  
alive (and sane) over  
the Iron Decades.

**Comfortable Confined Convict by Scott A. Madoulet**

I wouldn't say my cell is cozy  
But I might say this "house" is snug  
And I can't say this life is easy  
My neighbors are convicted thugs

I can say that this life is restful  
I sleep the best I've ever slept  
And the pace of life here is peaceful  
Inside these fences where I'm kept

I want to say I'm ready for home  
That I've grown and learned my lesson

But I'm afraid of life, on my own  
And all of life's trials to stress on

For now I like my comfortableness  
Removed from the world as I am  
From my cell I'll smile and say "Love  
you!"  
To all of my family and friends.

**Prison Given Blues by Michael Espinoza**

Rain ran down, building two's roof.  
Rain coats weren't issued out just yet,  
Winter was early, the rain rampant.  
I was given a priority ducat to see,  
My mental health clinician.  
She's cold and a flake, snowflake,  
Canceling my one on one, once again,  
The reason behind my shivers.  
And to compete with her carelessness,  
The C.O. running the building,  
Won't open the door, to let me inside.  
Waiting in the rain, temporary warmth,  
From feeling anger, seen as steaming  
ears.

The something every day,  
Maneuvering through bitter staff.  
A lot like avoiding this rain,  
Sometimes I can, sometimes I can't.  
I choose to be different, my attitude won't  
change,  
When they bring their clouds, all gray  
I'll give 'em, sunny days.  
Watching the rain run down, building  
two's roof,  
My prison given blues, are soaking wet,  
Barely Monday, but somehow, it's all ok.



# A Letter Home

## A Son's Goodbye by Steven P. Arthur

Disbelief your time has come  
existence in a world  
where you don't  
To miss things I dislike  
about you  
To be surprised  
again

How the world continues  
when you go  
Don't take your laughter  
let me hear it  
from your grandchildren  
Stupid fucking cancer  
killing you both

What I really mean  
I'm sorry, for my  
ignorance of time's attributes  
until I got here  
measured in weight



On the Farm by Gary Farlow

wait, wait, wait  
before you go

let me give back  
the birth you gave  
a lifetime  
take it back  
like you  
more days seem wrong

## Til We Meet Again by Jose Gutierrez

Dear mom,  
after a decade of winters and summers  
I finally get to see you again.  
You look so beautiful  
just as I like to remember you.  
And of course that smile that never fails  
to  
light my spirit and bring warmth to my  
heart.  
I have so much to tell you.  
Forgive me for crying but I have missed  
you.  
I've called your phone but it's  
disconnected  
and it seems you haven't been getting my  
mail.  
No worries  
here we are back in the old apartment  
apartment and  
all looks the same.  
If you must know,  
my appeal is still pending.  
No change in my life sentence,  
but my faith remains strong.  
I'll be free before we know it.  
Well it's almost time for breakfast,  
remember I love you with all my heart  
and that

you are my one true love.  
If you don't mind I'd like to hold you.  
Hold you until  
well  
I wake up.  
take care  
Til we meet again...

**A Son's Letter to Mom by Juan Wagner**

Mom, when "I'm sorry" isn't good enough  
and "please forgive me" just won't do  
then it's far past time to change my ways  
and try to make things up to you  
I know you've grown tired of the excuses  
after doing about all that you can do  
well, all those times I didn't listen, mom,  
there's no fingers that can point at you  
mom, through all my life I've never met  
another person who's as good as you  
you're living proof that there's a heaven  
and that it's missing an angel, too  
No, I'm not writing to say I'm sorry  
or ask you for forgiveness one more time  
there just comes a time in every man's life  
to put childish things behind  
So mom, I pray you haven't given up on  
me  
because I'm gonna do my very best  
to be that son you've always needed  
and trust God to do the rest  
Mom, before I close, please know that I  
miss you  
more than these words could ever say  
"I love you mom with all my heart."  
For still being the mother you are today.

**Poem 3 by Jason Conley**

To be the father you want to be.  
But not allowed to see or communicate

With your kids at all.  
It tears out your heart.  
Feels like you have lost your purpose.  
Being in a jail cell behind locked doors.  
Even though you are in the same town.  
Still seems like you are on the other side  
of the planet.  
The system does not help in any way.  
To give your kids a way to talk to you.  
Even if they can write you.  
you wonder if they would want to.  
All you can think about is if the time  
You spent with them was enough to last.  
You wonder what was said to them when  
you basically fell off the face of the Earth.  
As a father you want to tell them how  
proud of them you are.  
How much you love and miss them.  
Yet somehow you know you can never  
get back the time you have lost and  
someone else is filling your role.  
The worst thing for a father to find out!  
I want to fight for them that way if  
they ask at least I can say I didn't  
abandon them.

**A Father's Letter by Juan Wagner**

Son, I'd like to say I'm sorry  
and to ask forgiveness from you  
for all this time. I've been away  
and any shame I've cause you too  
for any time. You may have stumbled  
and your daddy wasn't there  
to help you back up to your feet  
and to show you that I care.  
Son, not being there as your father  
doesn't mean I love you any less  
so I'm still trying to reach out to you  
and trusting God to do the rest.  
I know you're growing older

so I can understand how you may feel  
and can imagine some of the things you  
say  
Yeah, the pain of truth is real  
No, I can't undo the things I've done  
or go back in time to try again  
but I'm still praying for maybe another  
chance  
not only as a father but as a friend.  
Son, I'll always have respect for you  
for all the good things that you do  
You're someone whose footsteps I'd follow  
and I'll always look up to you  
I know it hurts the way I've done you  
and you may wish for a better dad.  
So many failures as your father  
is the part that's really sad.  
I'll continue to pray you don't give up on  
me  
and that one day you may let me in  
Son, saying I'm sorry may not heal your  
pain  
but hopefully... it's a good place to begin.



*You Can Find Faith in the Most Unlikely Places* by Gary Farlow

## **Daughter Do You Know by Jeremy Lowery**

Does she know I love her  
Does she know I care  
Does she know how much I hurt  
Because I can't be there  
She used to call me Daddy  
Now she doesn't even call  
Does she know I love her  
Does she know me at all

## **Memory**

### **Oleander by Eric Bederson**

we were in London on holiday 2005  
after Lola came my transfer to  
Birmingham

London is a distant haze in her memory  
two years removed her nursery school

appears smaller than my reflections and  
the tree she would climb to wave adieu

had been cut down these yesterdays were  
in reach for my wife and i we could still

touch and taste and smell the oleander  
at the front door Lola laughed at a  
photograph

she had been digging out raised flower  
beds  
along the fence from the few things Lola  
remembers

being stung by a bee and a night  
we spent combing nits from her hair.

**House of Cards by Gary Farlow**

I dwell with a yearning heart  
to go back, to recapture a past  
forever lost to me now,  
Is the backyard swing still lopsided?  
The cement slab with Pop's initials,  
is it, are they, still visible?  
Is the backyard grill still used?  
The site of so many al fresco meals;  
Is the shop window still cracked?  
Will the cellar ever house wine again,  
or a model railroad layout?  
The persimmons always came every  
October,  
and the little pear tree offered her gifts;  
In Spring, Mama's flowers exuded  
a sweet fragrance unmatched by Chanel;  
The winter snows lay thick then,  
in drifts around the black walnut tree  
as we made snowcream – a Southern  
treat!  
But these are things that  
can never be the same again;  
I guess it's true Mr. Wolfe:  
you can't go home again.

**A Trickle of Time by Eric Bederson**

Time is a trickle of a  
moment I count in the  
darkness.

Lying on my back on my  
bed with my eyes wide  
awake and my mind a  
boiling pot. My memories  
swim around bubbling and  
jumping into steam rising  
in the air evaporating into  
temporary failure. My life

condensates into what I  
have become.

Time is but a drop of a  
moment I count in the  
darkness.

**Nothing Comes Easily by Chris Davidson**

Working hard to not repeat the mistakes  
of my past,  
I pour my soul out, lay it bare, trying to  
make changes that will last  
Spending each day building a better man  
can often be hard,



*Connect the Dots by Paul Bero*

But nothing worth having will come  
easily, you need to shoot for the stars.  
I've failed you all so many times that I've  
lost count, this much is true,

At some point the failures eat you alive,  
leaving you hollow and blue.  
If you don't make the changes now while  
you still have a chance,  
You'll repeat those failures over and over,  
so it's time to take your stance.  
I can't come home as the same broken  
man that I was before,  
It's time to step up and be a better man,  
change all the way to my core.  
I can't wait to get out and show you just  
how much I've grown,  
To hold you in my arms, to see those  
smiles and be welcomed home.  
This is the last chance that I'll have to  
show you who I can be,  
I can't afford to let you down and fail you  
all again once I'm free.  
I hope you all know just how much I love  
you and miss you every day,  
You're in my every dream and every  
waking moment, and every time I pray.

### **Infinity by Travis Austin**

Your love is like an Oyster Perpetual  
Rolex  
it never stops, but hovers through time  
Brighter than any diamond  
that no light can outshine  
It is sweeter than any honey  
from the sweetest honeycomb  
Just think of it as E.T.  
because I wish to phone home  
Your love is like my legs  
without them I can't stand  
But like the little engine that could  
I think I can! I think I can!  
If your love had a nickname  
I'd call it purgatory

because it never goes away  
The epitome of infinity  
a reprobate state

### **Where I don't have eyes by SPIN**

I never could hide anything from her.  
"Where I don't have eyes, I have spies,  
that sing."  
My grandma's words in rhyme and rhyme,  
spur.  
To keep me from going astray, they ring.  
Like every beer I drink or whiskey shoot,  
Gambling, cursing, smoking, lying, and  
such;  
A nubile breast – all are forbidden fruit.  
"Look but don't touch, or you will suffer  
much."  
Just having a little fun while I can  
Granny. She's planting trees for me to  
scram.  
"Righteous crowns can't be paid, with a  
card scan  
Or money laid. Life's not Walmart, my  
lamb."  
Revelation, like a river-turned card:  
Living up to expectations, is hard!  
Time passes. The playground of my  
childhood  
has become a violet spired sanctum  
the likes of which superman would envy.  
"Who left all these lights on?" What? Who  
said that?  
Gamma, when did you get here? But she's  
not.  
Fifteen years gone, and yet, her words  
still sing.  
"Tis my inheritance, and legacy.  
The scrutinize sap of our family tree.  
"Oh Hell NO!" I gotta fix this and fast.



My sons won't be prisoners of imposed  
hopes and fears. Mine or anyone else's.  
Their freedom will be their inheritance.  
And again, like a ghost, the thought  
haunts me:  
Living up to expectations, is hard.

**An Ode to Justine (Long Live Justine) by  
Reginald Holland-Houston III**

San Diego living, isn't always sunny,  
Mom and Pops using drugs  
    No food – a little love.  
Power outages were so constant  
    I became comfortable & safe  
        In the dark.  
Showering at friends' houses  
    Helped me see things with a  
        Heavy heart.  
Limited shoes & clothing as a youth  
    Made receiving designer digs  
        That much more lovely!  
Love seeing people happy  
    Love seeing folks smile,  
Causing an eruption of laughter  
    Can make my whole night.



*Stepping Into Sunset* by Paul Bero

Quiet at times, I may be  
    But cheerful & compassionate  
        I am always.  
Non-judgemental,  
    Everybody has their own demons  
        That they have to fight.  
Heroin and fentanyl.  
    Were the 2 evils of my life.  
Helped my mom get clean  
    But continued to use – to ride that  
dragon alone.  
All the yelling & cussing & screaming  
    from my pops.  
Didn't matter when I was high  
    I was able to escape  
        And had no worries,  
            No thoughts.  
When I start to come down  
    I would think about my favorite –  
        Person in the world.  
My grandma.  
    Her cooking, her loving &  
        Her comfortable bed.  
She accepted me for me  
    And gave me strength  
        When I felt weak.  
When I needed food  
    She was there.  
When I needed shelter  
    She gave me care.  
I'm frightened when I'm not with her.  
She's my angel on earth...  
Why is it so bright?  
Is that Kalan.FrFr..  
I love me some Kalan.FrFr..  
I'm sleepy...  
    Good night.

## Out There

### Out There by Melissa Germain

I'm standing in a line  
I stand in all the time  
Day in day out  
I disregard the ugly  
All around me

I close my eyes  
And still I know  
The beauty of a scene  
Lilies nodding in the breeze  
Robins in the sky  
I will not let  
This barb wire  
And fences hold me in  
For I am free in spirit  
If beyond I don't forget

### I'm Up by James W. B. Jackson

Melancholy mind state  
Even with the weird noise coming from  
the toilet  
Prospects and ideas for the possible  
future  
Is valiantly overriding the voices  
Pictures from a friend allow me to see  
Belgium  
Through her eyes  
A pleasant distraction from the fanciful  
lies  
Told by people standing too close to me  
Trespassing by even allowing their  
glances to be  
In my proximity  
Sweet, sweet visions of Pacific Coast  
Highway

### Restaurants

Imagine me walking in and the Lady says  
You want the usual  
Yes!  
She knows what I want  
But she can only give me surf & turf  
As I watch the shoreline  
Soup & salad first  
I better lie down with this imagery  
Before someone breaks the reverie  
With count time and flashlights on me.

### A Simple Daydream by Jared Eisinger

Above the clouds, there's a hint of bliss  
the chasing of dreams, the hearts a miss  
lush forests of aspen, cedar, and fir  
I become a man again, not a number or  
sir  
Away from civilization, people and all  
the only sound that's made, is a meadow  
lark's call  
With nowhere to go who cares about time  
mountain fresh air with a hint of pine  
Water as cold as an old glacier's touch  
It's days like today I don't worry too much  
Fields of wildflowers gently a breeze  
This is my life so I'll do as I please  
I dream and imagine, I'll talk if you listen  
But at this moment I'm stuck in prison  
Waiting for the day that I can walk away  
Praying I see this place before I'm old and  
gray

## Storytelling

### The Tomato by Rolf Rathmann

Softly punctured  
its skin  
ripened, ready



red  
sweetly acidic juices  
bathe my tongue  
squishiness  
meeting the roof of my  
mouth;  
teeth now slobbered in  
creamy  
ranch dressing for  
dipping – so long it's been  
since knowing this  
pleasure.  
Clandestinely I eat  
this tomato  
stolen, as I  
turn my back –  
invisibility –  
as I close my  
lids, eyes rolling up  
into their sockets.

mm mmm mmmmm

**Bettis by Jon Albert Kaspar**

I caught what I thought  
Was a firefly in a jar  
Turns out  
It was the Magical School Bus  
On a magical field trip  
They  
All suffocated from  
Lack of oxygen while  
Trapped inside the glass jar  
I  
Found all this out when  
The bus transformed back in  
A fantastical earth shaking  
Explosion  
Out of the jar & into my living room

Wrecking the bus & the room  
Surprising me with the bodies  
Of 17 children & the teacher.

**Fact or Fiction by Donald J. Degner**

Are we an experiment  
That's gone horribly wrong?  
Or is there something greater  
To which we belong?

Some speculate there's life  
Beyond our planet Earth,  
Or are mothers the only ones  
Who are giving birth?

Some say there are Aliens  
From deep in outer space  
Who come to us in UFOs  
With much style and grace.

Still others say the creature  
Bigfoot walks among us.  
Why has no one found remains –  
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust?

Let's not forget the monster  
Who swims in Lochness. Is he just a  
mythical being  
Like all the rest?

**Surprise by Al Newberry**

Neighbors emerged from the shadows,  
applauding.  
Shari shrieked in delight, throwing her  
hands around Marcus.  
“May I have this dance, baby?” Marcus  
winked.  
“Oh, honey,” Shari wiped tears of joy from  
her eyes, “You may.”

They danced. And danced. A couple on  
the brink of marriage  
failure. Beginning anew. Soon Shari  
motioned their neighbors to  
join them. The street was now filled with  
dancing couples.

“Happy anniversary, baby,” Marcus said.  
“Happy anniversary,” Shari confirmed,  
“the best yet.”

Snuggled there on the couch, Marcus and  
Shari basked in the joy  
of the day. For the first time in a couple  
years, they knew their  
marriage would last. Never again would  
they take it for granted.

**Woke up to this by Robert Riedl**

Your lipstick's on the windshield,  
the smell of coffee is missin'.  
My heart dives into a frigid lake,  
Somewhere a cicada's hiss in'.

This day is too new,  
My mind, sleep numb.  
I snag a camel and squint,  
I'm struck f\*\*\*ing dumb.

I blame myself,  
but of course it's just you.  
I take a drag 'n' close my eyes.  
F\*\*\*, already miss you.

My wild little stallion  
Where off did you go?  
What was it this time?  
Did you run out of blow?

You've torn up my heart,  
much too many times.  
I search the ground for answers

and try to read between the lines

The reason I love you,  
is also why I Hate.

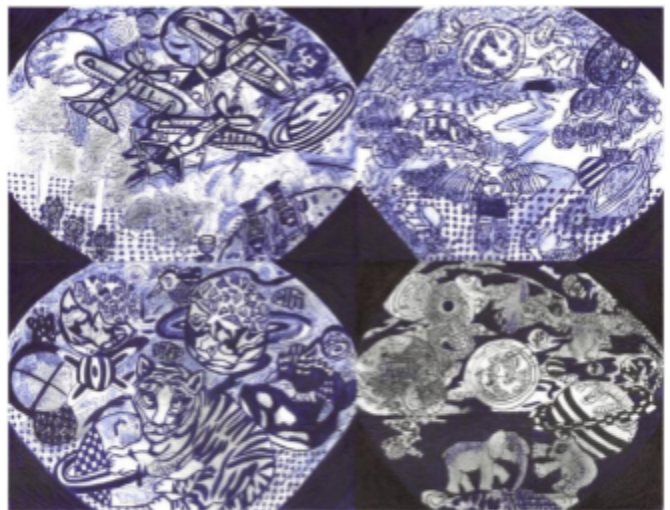
What is this? Nine times?  
What happened to “It's Fate?”

A storm is on the horizon,  
I head on back inside.  
There's a note on the “fridge.”  
(sigh) I hope it isn't snide.

“Hey babe, we ran out  
of coffee and a few other things  
If you want something special  
just give me a ring” XOXO

**I didn't wake up one day by Rolf  
Rathmann**

– deciding I was gay  
as preachers preach  
apocalyptic ends for each  
in their difference:  
lesbian, trans, bi,  
queer, homo, d\*\*\*,  
even non-binary, and all the



Untitled by Jerome Washington

alphabet in between. F\*\*.

For you should know  
Mr. Preacher Man –  
or am I, too,  
guilty of stereotyping –  
that you're some old,  
White, Southern, backwoods –  
ohh, the overripe divisiveness  
of names I could spit on and on –  
a continuous eight-track loop

that I didn't wake up  
one day deciding – gee  
I want to...and want to...  
and want to...  
It doesn't work that way.  
My way, and decide to be party  
to greater rates of suicide  
or prone to assault;  
and without protection, fired  
for just being me.

Your sales pitch Mr. Preacher  
Man  
ain't that good.  
Who'd want that?  
Mine was no more a choice  
nor curse  
than for you to have  
been born hetero. When did you  
decide? To harm, hurt, or  
foul in the name of God,  
your flock?

Or do you awake one day tinged  
by God's prick of existence  
challenging your persistence –  
nay, dare I say, even climb above

your fear of difference  
or your ceded power?  
Ahh, that's the base of your tower  
to no longer look down upon but  
up, clouded by obsolescence.  
Wake up. Wake up. Wake up.  
I didn't just decide I was gay.

### **No Longer Thoughts by Robert Roginsky**

My thoughts are like mud, soiled and  
thick.

They lay there unspoken like  
someone who's sick.  
Rattling around like sparks from a fire.

Little points of light that dance and  
expire.

Sometimes a stray will echo and jump.

It'll pour onto paper like water  
from a pump.

For it is alive and won't want to sit.

And if you are lucky you may just  
see it.

### **K2 by Chad Frank**

At first,  
it's weekends, holidays, special occasions.  
Before you know it,  
you're chasing paper little squares,  
spending all your money,  
selling your prized possessions,  
lying, cheating and stealing,  
putting yourself in danger  
for the next high.

How to describe it?

Fruity pebble, pixie stix, Saturday  
morning cartoons.

A cute little boy smiling at you.

The summit of Mount Everest;

Walking on the moon.  
Problem is,  
it doesn't last long.  
Like a stone-hearted lover,  
no matter how much you give,  
it'll always leave you  
broke and yearning for more.

**Life of Fly by Bryan Harrold**

Battered bruised abused & confused  
Neglected rejected left unprotected  
Orphaned by my mother of birth,



*Untitled II* by Travis Magash

Taken in by great mother earth  
Misfit beatnik vagabond waif  
Nothing is shocking nowhere is safe  
Earning my wings learning to fly  
From the Iron City to a city a mile high  
Out on the road bohemian tramp  
Rainbow family taught me to camp  
Chopping wood carrying water

Sweat equity learning to barter  
Dead-head hippie tie-dyed biker  
Inter-galactic cosmic hitch-hiker  
Samurai ninja student of ZEN  
Everything is everything if you KEN  
Savaging ravaging battling the rich  
Radical fanatical hillbilly witch  
Finally came down tripper in court  
Joining the army a last resort  
Forty eight months spent in hell  
Left without my soul to sell  
Bound by a mistress commanded to kneel  
Crack of her whip taught me to feel  
Chasing a dragon unsure what's real  
Trapped in the game you know "the deal"  
Now from the bunk of this cold prison  
cell  
My spirit dives deep in the psychic well  
Day after day they work to conceal me  
I know for certain someone must feel me!

**Reasonable by Rickey Bright**

I am but a dream upon the Earth,  
The product of a wrongful birth.  
A life spent on a slippery slope,  
Dying on a mountain of hope.

I am but a song in a whirlwind;  
Unruly child, undisciplined.  
A discordant note upon one's ear,  
A sound one prays will disappear.

I am neither thunder nor the rain,  
Nor lightning in the hurricane.  
Turn, turn, turn, it's the turning season,  
A dark season without reason.  
I am but the painful ghost of shame,  
A soul without his father's name.  
Blame it on lust, or blame it on love,

But please don't blame the Lord above.

Go, aim high at that mountain of hope;  
Beware of the slippery slope,  
But do not pray for your own stillbirth,  
And die as a dream here on Earth.

## Self-Reflection

### Jackson Pike Jail Mirror by Heather Tapia

The reflective surface,  
A 12-inch across blurry rectangle.  
Twelve inches down and two feet above  
my head.  
I rise up onto my tippy toes,  
"Oh, look – it's my forehead.  
Maybe I should use a state-issued razor  
and make bangs?"  
I jump up.  
For half a second I see my whole face –  
Forehead to chin,  
for the first time since my arrest.  
It's red and flushed from my exertion.  
Oh, great – was that a zit?  
I jump up, again.  
Nope – not a zit, just a resistant blotch.  
Dry skin?  
I jump.  
My forehead is sweaty now,  
I'm struggling to catch my breath.  
Sigh – why is this "mirror" so high up?  
They don't want me to see myself any  
more.  
I'm just a case on a docket now.  
I'm fading away.  
I can't see my eyes.  
What color are they now?  
They always mirror my mood.

What color is defeated?  
What color is hopeless?  
What color is imprisoned?  
What color is jaded?  
Do I still exist if I can't see my face?  
Is this on purpose?  
Did they build this space with this  
goal in the planning?  
The windows line the upper walls.  
They don't face outside – no,  
They face the inside hall between the  
pods.  
On display in the zoo.  
Oh look, another tour –  
That smiling old man, tall enough to look  
through the window at me.  
Oh great! I'm on the toilet.  
Eye contact.  
Just another zoo animal on display.  
Another reflection I cannot see,  
It certainly sticks an image on my soul.  
Sad, captive cat  
– trapped –  
– fading –  
– non-existent –  
I jump.  
I flush,  
Red blotches.

### Who Am I? by Gary Farlow

Who am I?  
With this beard, itchy, unnatural  
because I am denied a razor  
arrayed in orange and white stripes  
looking like Garfield  
Who am I?  
Confined to this cinderblock room  
a window my only connection  
to a world I once knew, once loved

rain washing the barbed wire clean

Who am I?

Staring at my watch  
as minutes slowly tick by  
Is it meal time yet?  
I hope there are cookies

Who am I?

My cellmate snores  
as I stare into the darkness  
wondering, fearing  
Is this how it feels in a coffin?

### **A Moment of Clarity by SPIN**

I am comfortable in my curse.  
Happy to feel this way.  
To despise myself, and everything about  
me.  
I must be. Because I keep going back and  
asking –  
begging – to be cursed some more.

It's easy to fail. To blame my parents,  
my ex, my neighborhood, or  
circumstances.  
How could ANYONE overcome that?  
How can you expect ME to? You just don't  
understand what it's like to live in this  
skin.

I fear change, challenges to my miserable  
little world.  
I have a routine, I know what to expect  
when I smoke that strip, hit that pipe,  
snort a line.  
When I reach for my album of porn  
photos –

the “kill shots” that are one by one, killing  
me.

I can feel my endorphin and serotonin  
levels  
rise as I pull out, and load up, my rig.  
My body knows what's coming and reacts  
before I can even break the skin. My mind  
welcomes  
the escape, from a reality that has  
become too damn much.



*Alone With My Thoughts* by Richard  
Hasselberg

But it's never enough. No matter how big  
a hit  
I load up, how many pills I take, or shots I  
pour –  
it never equals the high of that first time.  
The reality  
I am so desperately trying to evade,  
comes creeping

back in, like a cancer, to kill my buzz.

It doesn't matter that this is costing me everything else I love in my life.

My family, my friends –  
the REAL friends and not my “get high”  
friends that make  
themselves scarce when the drugs run  
out. My health,  
memories, self-esteem, and who knows  
how much money. Or brain cells.

There's a reason it's called dope.

I know there are a hundred MEs  
bouncing around in my  
head. Past ME, present, ME of the future.  
I was an artist  
once. A musician. Computer geek ME. A  
brainiac, go-getter,  
responsible, reliable, friendly,  
compassionate, generous ME.  
I could be any of them – or all. If I wanted  
to.

But I have chosen the addict. Because in  
doing so,  
I don't have to be accountable for my  
actions. I don't  
have to face the truth, or who I have  
become, or any of that  
shit anymore. I don't have to acknowledge  
all the lives  
I've destroyed, or the ones crumbling to  
pieces in the mirror.

I am comfortable in my curse. I have  
found solace in

emptiness and loneliness. Excuses and  
lies have become my  
mantra. After an exhaustive search, I  
have found and embraced  
failure – and call him friend. I have  
forsaken the light  
and chosen darkness, for only here can I  
hide.

And I am happy in my misery. I must be,  
right?

To keep going back and begging for more  
of this:

“Curse me. Please, curse me – again!” For  
only a fool  
or a MADMAN, would choose to live this  
way. Would pick  
this ME, to be the one the world  
remembers, when so quickly

I am gone.

**Paredolia (A trick of the eye) by Jon  
Albert Kaspar**

We swim towards our desires  
Or are pushed and pulled around  
By the wake and current made  
From those swimming fastest  
I propel myself around in a  
Dizzying circle trying to numb myself  
To the noise of all the splashing around  
I dog paddle in a moment of clarity  
and contemplate  
Should I swim towards something?  
Or  
Stop being scared and  
Find out what's under the water.



**Bird Song by Howard B. Brown**

Bird, I did something wrong nigh five  
decade ago,  
so I'm stuck behind concrete walls.  
Daily I look out this heavily barred  
window,  
fancying I see you doing your calls.

You're a brown bird perched on a branch,  
singing a song you learned when young.  
Your serenade gives me hope for a  
chance,  
saying "After your time is done you'll be  
sprung."

I find myself welcoming you day after day,  
as the sky holds a pinkish sunset.  
My heart feels young as my hair grows  
gray,  
yet, I still have a past that I must regret.

Your birdsong freely floats over the walls,  
telling me "Things will be alright my  
friend."  
My mind clears responding to your  
bird-calls,  
knowing you'll be singing until the very  
end.

**Tree by Joseph E. Johnson**

Here I stand where I began.  
I have grown taller and stronger yet I  
remain,

The older I grow the more my bark  
changes.  
Even though I shed my leaves, here I  
remain.  
Although I grow I cannot go.

Here I stand where I began.  
Will this be where I am at the end?  
Will I remain until they chop me down  
and burn me to ash?  
Perhaps when I have shed all the leaves I  
have to shed, it will end!

Until then, here I stand where I began!

**Finding Me by Melissa Germain**

These visible scars make me sorry  
That they'll see my past and dub me  
unworthy.  
Please give me a chance; let me explain  
How all this was vital to the woman I  
became.  
For and throughout all these lost year  
I must have shed thousands of tears.  
To finally learn I AM worthwhile  
To actually know a genuine smile.  
Because I had lost ME along the way  
I myself – didn't know how to think, feel,  
or say.  
I was kept in the dark, rose-colored sight  
Even during the day, it felt like night.  
And when life fell apart before my eyes  
They were forced open – determined –  
intensified.  
So I had to trip, stumble, and fall  
To get a grip, become humble, walk tall.  
I've said goodbye to where and who I've  
been  
And allowed my heart to now beat again.  
And though many lessons have come at  
great cost  
I'm living proof – that all is not lost. ☒

CTA/Durland Alternatives Library  
PO Box 6556  
Ithaca, New York 14851  
[www.prisonerexpress.org](http://www.prisonerexpress.org)

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Permit 448  
Ithaca, NY 14850

Change Service Requested

# Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology Vol. 28

## Fall 2023

Prisoner Express promotes rehabilitation by providing information, education, and opportunities for creative self-expression to incarcerated individuals throughout the United States.

*Subscriptions are free to prisoners.*

Prisoner Express is funded by the Durland Alternatives Library, a project partner of the Center for Transformative Action. Additional support comes from the Cornell Public Service Center and the Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives. A grant from the Sonya Staff Foundation has enabled Prisoner Express to expand the size of this newsletter.

Publication Direct from Publisher



*Untitled by Sean Riker*