

VOICES OF FORTUNE



The Fortune Society
BUILDING PEOPLE, NOT PRISONS

WINTER 2017

The Fortune Society

VOICES OF FORTUNE

An annual publication of writing and artwork from and for the Fortune community. We are artists and writers in the community and currently incarcerated who want people with justice involvement to thrive as positive, contributing members of society.

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MISSION

The Fortune Society’s mission is to support successful reentry from incarceration and promote alternatives to incarceration, thus strengthening the fabric of our communities.

We do this by:

Believing in the power of individuals to change;

Building lives through service programs shaped by the needs and experience of our participants; and

Changing minds through education and advocacy to promote the creation of a fair, humane, and truly rehabilitative correctional system.

Our Approach

Founded in 1967, The Fortune Society’s vision is to foster a world where all who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated will thrive as positive, contributing members of society. We do this through a holistic, one-stop model of service provision.

Our continuum of care, informed and implemented by professionals with cultural backgrounds and life experiences similar to those of our participants, helps ensure their success. We serve over 7,000 individuals annually via three New York City locations: our service center in Long Island City, Queens, and both the Fortune Academy (“the Castle”) and Castle Gardens in West Harlem. Our program models are recognized both nationally and internationally for their quality and innovation.

PROGRAMS & SERVICES

Prepare for Release

The Individualized Corrections Achievement Network (I-CAN) program provides skill-building and discharge preparation services to eligible individuals during their incarceration at NYC Department of Corrections (DOC) jails, and offers continuing reentry support following their release.

Health Services

The Health Services program connects individuals with justice involvement and chronic conditions to quality health care and social services. We also provide individuals living with HIV/AIDS with vital discharge planning, case management, health education, and connection to quality, community-based treatment and care.

Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI)

The ATI program reduces the prison and jail population, helps thousands of individuals receive holistic, supportive services, and saves taxpayers millions of dollars.

Benefits Application Assistance

The Benefits Application Assistance program helps participants achieve

economic mobility by coordinating access to public benefits available to individuals and families with low incomes, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Supplemental Disability Insurance, and other forms of public assistance.

Food & Nutrition

We offer healthy, hot meals, and distribute fresh, locally grown produce to participants through partnerships with local farms. The Food & Nutrition program also offers cooking demonstrations and nutrition education workshops.

Housing

The Fortune Society Housing program assists individuals with justice involvement and their families experiencing homelessness in building better futures through supportive and affordable housing. The program provides low-threshold access to emergency, transitional, supportive, and permanent housing in our congregate buildings: The Fortune Academy (“the Castle”) and Castle Gardens, along with our Scatter Site housing program.

Employment Services

The Employment Services program is designed to equip job seekers with justice involvement with the skills

necessary to obtain employment and thrive in the workplace. The program offers job readiness, transitional work, and sector-based skills trainings in Green Construction, Culinary Arts, Job Development, and Transportation (Commercial Drivers License acquirement). We also offer job placement assistance and retention services.

Education

The Education program empowers students to achieve personal and professional goals, such as acquiring basic literacy skills, earning a High School Equivalency diploma, attending college, or preparing for employment.

Family Services

The Family Services program works to unite participants with their loved ones by facilitating healthy parent-child relationships, and providing legal services for custody, visitation, and child support commitments.

Mental Health Treatment

Fortune participants have access to a full spectrum of services through our NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH)-licensed Better Living Center (BLC), which serves individuals with mental health needs and histories of justice involvement.

Substance Use Treatment

Our New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS)-licensed outpatient substance use treatment clinic empowers people with substance use histories to heal and recover from addiction or the trauma of incarceration.

Creative Arts

The Fortune Society Creative Arts program supports the educational, emotional, and cultural development of individuals impacted by the criminal justice system through creative writing, poetry, spoken word, video production, animation, visual arts, music, and theater.

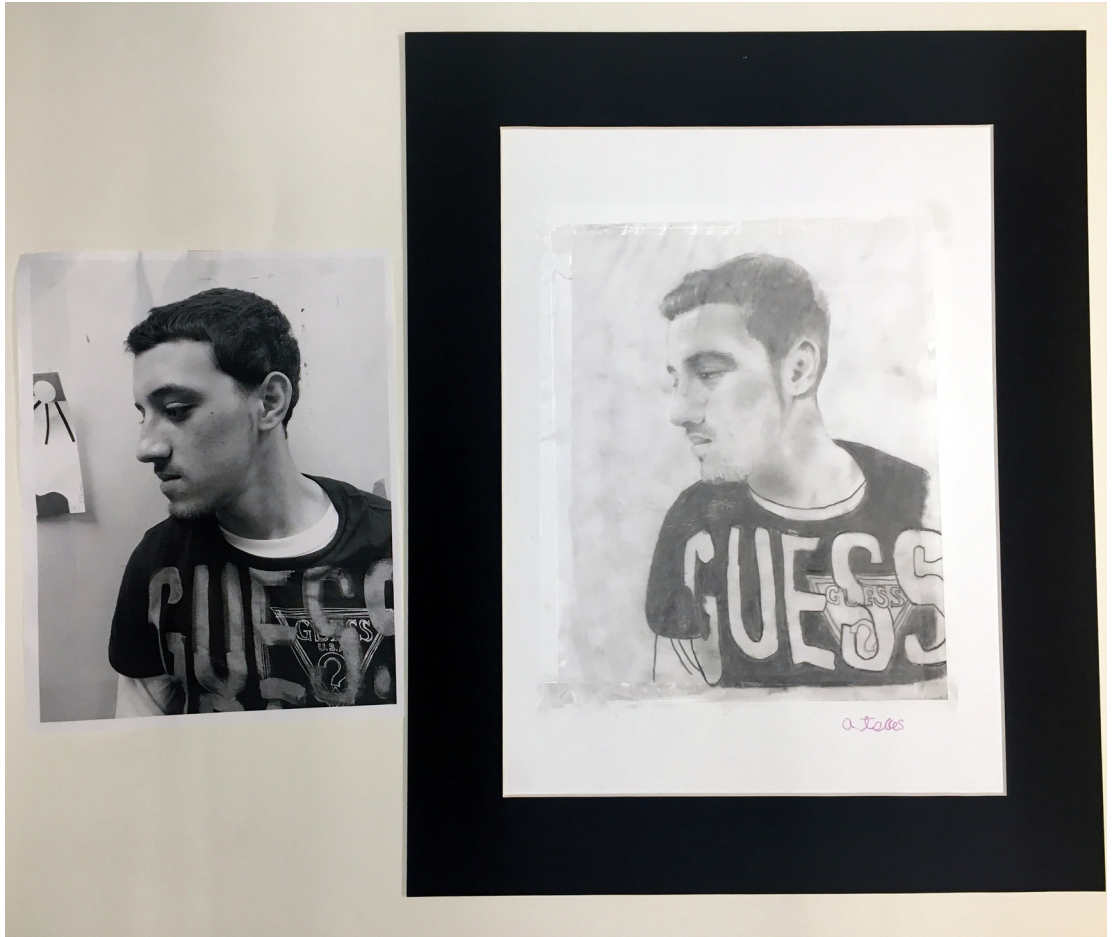
BUILDING PEOPLE, NOT PRISONS.

VOICES of FORTUNE is a publication rooted in the belief that each person's experience is a unique reservoir for strength and power.

VOICE = SURVIVAL

The poems that follow were written
on buses, crowded trains
in classrooms
on lockdown
on crumpled sheets of paper, in trusty journals
memorized on the longest of nights
found in the promise of late afternoons
on the precipice of change
while afraid
while lost and maybe not yet found
while found and absolutely ready to share
as prayer, as question
as apology, as oxygen
as escape
as reclamation
as we. are. here.
as always a way forward.

IN MEMORIAM



Andrew Torres

1996 - 2017

Rest in Peace

None of us got to where we are alone.

VOICES OF FORTUNE is grateful to the writers and artists in the community and those currently incarcerated that stared down a blank page and then had the courage to share it. Your potential is blinding. We hear you. We salute you.

Thank you to David Rothenberg and The Fortune Society for their bone-deep belief in the power of people to change.

Thank you to the previous contributors and editors of VOICES. You lit our path forward.

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Thank you to Ronald Day, the I-CAN Program, its discharge planners, liaisons and assigned correctional officers on Rikers Island and at Manhattan Detention Complex for embracing this publication.

Thank you to Regine Thomas. Without her heart and commitment, we'd be in the dark.

Thank you to Guy Woodard for sharing his magic so others can find theirs.

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Thank you to Emerson Soto for your expertise and guidance.

Thank you to Chris Campbell for always being willing.

Thank you to Jamie Maleszka and Amanda Roberts for lending VOICES your talents.

Thank you, dear reader.

— *Stay up. Stay loud.*



-Mark Gonzalez

I'm Labeled a Menace...

I'm labeled a menace, devil's
apprentice
born to rot in the system.
A spic, nigga, villain
that be selling rocks in the building.
You say you want me to testify
go ahead, ya'll the civilians.
But don't forget to mention
how I love the block and the children.
And tell the kids in the ghetto
they a target for prison.
Hope they hearing, cause when I was
young
I didn't listen
to the elderly, now I'm old
and starve for tradition.
Not tradition of religion, but I harbor
a vision
of feeling my ancestor spirit fill me
with wisdom.
Cause I'm older now,
I'm careful how I kick it with the
children
cause the kids are quick to mimic the
wicked negative image
So I show them the difference
between those that live it and spit it.

They don't mention
they way I be upliftin' the women
Tell them they beautiful
regardless of the color they skin is.
Don't let society or television
tell you what's pretty
Stop looking at yourself as bitches
but instead as princesses,
To me, we are kings
Do away with the niggas
that's just a word created
for those that be hatin' our melanin
Cause there's more to us with god's
blessing
to absorb the sun.
My beautiful complexion is my
essence
and they don't like when I manifest it
cause this right here has been passed
down from
my descendants.
The darker the skin, the deeper the
root
And like Pac, I'm teaching them the
truth.

- Miguel Alverio

Reform

Jeff Sessions says less lessons
Selling drugs get a life sentence
We just makin' profit off what life sent us.
Mass incarceration the way they extorting races,
Feel bad for my brothers who caught dem cases
Scarred marks on they faces
You feel tied up
Even the CO took ya laces
Shit can't be real
Like you caught in the matrix.

- Dale Spencer

Pick and Choose

Choose your words carefully.

I - pick - mine

If spoken in harmony, can unlock your mind

It'll open locked doors, and reveal what's behind

Because inside is where true potential lies

To gain insight, go behind enemy lines

Open your ears and eyes - you're not deaf, dumb and blind

You see me? You hear me?

I - choose - mine.

- John Rufino

I Can't Surrender

Etched in heart the lack of love giving purpose to every word written
shallow depressions on paper deeply rooted in resentment, a prison
all my own in understanding I find freedom creating lush landscapes,
apologies never going said and then some within every poem made.
I forgive myself for failing achieve the dream of being architect via ink
flourishes precipitated by fluid movement of wrist owned in conviction,
I write well because I can't do better, in my every alone poetry loved me
to health when I was homesick. Being homesick all the time is so ugly
an endeavor I pray these words soar with hell below I look above me:
“Please watch over me Lord as I rest, don't take my breath from me
at leisure ever again but forever, let me know the peace of Heaven
and all what does wholly crown and anchor an alimentary measure.
When at my most broken, I'll carry cross tighter. Nails offering healing,
the good fight is worth fighting. Being halos aren't given forth so freely,
I want not know a moment where I can't surrender to light my demons.
Bruised outward of innocence, I am of understanding pain has meaning”.

- Felix Guzman

***Just Cuz Ya Body's Locked Up,
Doesn't Mean Your Mind Has To Be Confined***

They say it's out of sight - out of mind
People forgetting about you while you locked up can drive you outta ya mind
I stay focused and have perseverance and try to utilize my time
In jail, you get what you're given - I can't say that much is mine
You try to have change in a life where your peers drop dimes
Everybody saying it'll be alright, but you know nothing is fine

You gotta have strength to endure the shit life throws you
You gotta have ya head somewhere else wit what one goes thru
Someone is supposed to be the savior but no one knows who
Although my body is in a cage - I let my mind be free
The C.O.'s include me on their count, but in my mind, they can't see me
Just cuz your body is in jail, don't mean you can't let ya thoughts just sail

- Anthony S.

The View

As I hug the block
As she oozing out the smell of burnt rubber
From sun up to sundown
I got get this cheddar
I'm like Building 35
Always hot
Eye on can get you shot
But, I ain't the kind of nigga make you hot
Paddy riding around late
You them camera talking Feds posted
But, behind all that
I got a view of the world.

- Arel Aldrich Greene

Too Much

Too much thoughts at once
Too much to bear with
Too much adults that act like children
Too much talk with very little heart
Small hearts that have no light because they'd rather have it dark
Too much hate
Never enough love
Too much taking short cuts
that actually lead you down a long path
a path so long that it'll have you exhausted
making you want to gasp
Too much competition
without realizing that I cannot be you and
you cannot be me
But, you can be the best that you can be
which is something that would never be too much

- Bryan G.

The Pieces

Your beautifully put together can I take you apart,
Piece by piece help me find peace,
I want to shatter the art that's inside of your heart,
Cause in order to get this right
I might need you naked way before it gets dark,
Flatter me with your spark,
I'm use to complications,
Can you talk to me nice
while you mistreat me cause i've been abandon,
Just talk to me nice,
I'm used to this beauty
called ugly in us it's unfair,
But let me wear your pieces,
Let me show you how to make sure that they stare,
Let me put you back together,
I swear there's beauty inside of how broken you are!

- Cinthia Candalaria

Love

Love is powerful, a wonderful feeling
It gives you such a sexual healing.

Love is wonderful and quite serene,
you'll be in such a sexy scene.

Especially when you're in love with a Black goddess
To stay in love, you'll do the hardest

Love is such a splendid thing
It will really have you doing the right thing.

When you're in love, you'll feel like you're in heaven above
You'll be seeing beautiful white doves.

You won't want no trouble
you'll want to survive
and watch your love thrive.

When you're in love, you'll feel great
To give, you won't hesitate.

- Curtis Holden

Flow-etry

Poetry is the fire and water
that flows in me
Marijuana gets me high
despite the lows in me
Slowing me down
Smiles emerge somehow
through this frown
Did some self inventory
Couldn't find my crown
I'm a king but going through a fight
like I'm in a ring
Infinite bruises
Bell never dings

- Dale Spencer



-Unknown

King

It was April Fourth
Nineteen-Sixty-Eight
It must've been God's will
that dreamed this man's fate.
He was standing on a balcony
holding love for everyone
when a bullet exploded
from a high-powered gun.
The impact of the shot
will be felt throughout the land
for the news will travel fast
about the death of this great man.
Lady Luck must not know
of the anxiety she can bring,
nor did she realize the mistake she made
by killing Dr. Martin Luther King.
Dr. King, you were a man with courage
a man with a dream
that the People unite,
that we become a team.
And although you're not with us
we will fulfill your plan...
For we as a people
will get to the promise land.

- **Darryl S.**

Yes! I was a criminal, running with the devil like a ill subliminal
Roaming streets trying to get paid, I didn't know that
Allah already had a road paved.

After trials and tribulations, I decided to forget the streets.
It steered me wrong. I thought nothing could harm me.

But, the devil, he really dogged me. Now faith is the substance of
things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.

Now my mind is clean. My body is clean.
I beat that devil down to his knees and if he don't submit to
the will of Allah, I'm gonna cut him up with my spirit sword.

It's a time to kill, a time to heal, a time to break down and a time to build.

So, pull out the Quran and study before you find yourself
walking the streets 'till your feet are muddy.

- Edward J. a.k.a. HALAL LIFE

My Love, Laura

You helped me so much throughout my life.
Knocked that chip off my shoulder.
Taught me how to believe once again in myself,
and love.
To know there is a way,
no matter how hard it is to come by.

You will never be lost to my heart, soul and mind.
Frozen in time forever in my heart
as one body and one soul.

You were and always will be that light at the end of my tunnel.

- Joseph L. Garrett, Sr.

Coming Home

How simple my life is now that you are here
How I cherish each breath
How I crave the light and laughter you have brought me
I have fallen in love without taking a step
Fallen into the sweetest of dreams
How I hope no one wakes me
The simplest gesture wraps itself around my heart where
I will hold it forever
Each time, we say goodbye, a part of me weeps though
I know it's not forever
To my aching soul, it is an eternity
I see my happiness shine in your eyes
Every time you hold my hand, my heart skips a beat
How sweet life is to be yours
How meaningless life is without you
They know nothing of loneliness before you
of the empty tears I cried day after day
How did you do it I ask myself
How did you vanish the fear, the darkness?
You've made me see that nothing is that bad
That I am strong and worthy of happiness
You have saved me from myself
Everyday, I wake up and smile
knowing you are waiting for me knowing you can't wait to see me
How would I go on if you were not here to hold me up,
to bless me with your love and light
How I am glad you have found me
My life is now complete,
I'm home.

- Estevan C.

Hearken To Hear

Voices of Victims,
a quiet moment in ponderous thought,

Voices of Victims,
unified against the morning after pill, for the sanctity of human life.

Voices of Victims,
raised against the mega media's proliferation of murder, rape and mayhem
accessed by our youth through X-Box, Nintendo and Wii video games.

Voices of Victims,
silenced as the pillage of the victor's spoils of war,

Voices of Victims,
rallying for the just cause of those missing children on the back of milk cartons
across America,

Voices of Victims,
unheard in the dungeons of prisons throughout the world, mumbling for release
from the chains of oppression,

Voices of Victims,
weeping before the caskets of lives taken too soon,

Voices of Victims,
calling out for justice, innocent bloodshed in a hail of gunfire.

Voices of Victims,
lamenting, I'm too young to die of cancer, Lord hear my prayer,

Voices of Victims,
a little girl hidden in the darkness lest the monster boogeyman touch her again.

Voices of Victims,
a little boy in a closet wishing he was a grown man so he could stop the Mr.'s
infliction of searing pain,

Voices of Victims,
a woman moaning in pain, why me, why me,

Voices of Victims,
pleading for it to stop, a woman asking the Lord to let her die, her self-worth, a
lifetime to build, shattered in a few seconds by a degrading act of violence,

Voices of Victims,
pleading for the violence to stop, to be heard,

Voices of Victims,
unheard by us, lest, we accept the truth that we are not the victims,

Voices of Victims,
shall we hearken to hear, so we may know firsthand the pain, misery and suffering we
have caused, thus holding ourselves accountable to this day.

- H. Harris

A MINOR
SET BACK
4 A
MAJOR
COME
BACK!

-I-CAN Participants

The Willing Well

Is it me
Or is she with me,
Or is he with me
Cause easily they'll both just forget me,
I no longer have much time
So I gotta make her mine,
Or do I take him...
Can I make him reach nine?
Am I outta line?
Will it all be just fine?
I gotta make up my mind,
Is she even worth the time,
Will he really help the grind
Get me out this grime,
Will she respect all of the shine
Even after I'm left without a dime,
Like my spine can she hold me up,
When I fuck up will he just hold me down,
Will she only be stuck to me for now,
Will I feel lucky that I kept him around,
Will you look at me stank girl if I sweat you,
Boy will I regret that I ever even have met you
Then just forget you,
Was it me
Or was it he,
Or was it she...

- Cinthia Candelaria

When I Was A Kid...

When I was a kid

I pictured myself as a man.

I am a man.

I pictured myself old.

I am old.

I pictured myself flying through life with
no breaks.

Now all I do is picture myself after the crash...

I am not dead yet

so, I picture myself swerving, preventing
a crash.

- Hubert C.

Daddy Loves You

Ania, Daddy loves you.
And Daddy cares...
Daddy misses you, and
everyday
I'm wishing I can be there
Not only to hold you,
but, to shower you with
kisses
of
love and joy.

My beautiful baby girl,
Ania
My sweet bundle of joy
Soon Daddy will be
there.

Love you.

- Jaime S.

Don't Play Me Like I'm Not Intelligent

I am my own projects
I am from that environment
Don't suit me to be evil
You criminalizing me for your standards
Force accusations
Lawyers testifying for me like I can't speak
Judges handing out false sentences for their popularity
Court clerk typing away like I'm state property
What is success when everything is beneficial against us?
The authority got the right to rule out the minority
The district attorney, they be on another journey
Cuffs on wrist can't get dismissed on a misdemeanor
U treat me like John Cena
I can't even be the star witness in my own trail
Railroad me,
Dragging me back to the boxes
Playing Simon Says with my case.

- Ireal K. Jacobs

Inward Implosion

Schemes so malicious and twisted, noose knotted round my neck in a twist, like the end of a spliff, death contingent on my existence, soul cancerous and malignant, maligned, maladjusted, resigned from addiction and corruption, ready to blow up, self destruction, gotta up the production, views been obstructed, that sickness creepin' in, old soul so rustic, learned myself can't be trusted, harbor secrets like a fugitive on the run that's committed abductions, harder to function, jumping off at the junction, in conjecture with a spiritual level that I'm trying to reach after escaping several devils of my own creation, don't mess with satan, more love less hating, stop hating myself, the virtue is patience earned after waiting and continuous prayers that I've been saying like restating to a stranger "hi, my name is", but I'd rather be nameless, keep the form shapeless, carried so much anger and resentment until I became shameless, obtaining grace bestowed on my face after trying to remain faceless and non-complacent, growing pains and going through changes, even though time has been wasted, retrace my steps to move forward and start gaining, love and hate are adjacent, until I put the mask on my face and become jason and start slaying I'm just saying cream rises to the top like the glaze on a danish

- John Rufino



-Siboan Cave

The Devil's Playground

Often while growing up, I was told that idle time and the Devil's Playground ran hand in hand. Two entities specifically designed to slaughter productivity.

There was once an infamous commercial circulating. It revolved around drugs and the effects they have on the brain: a frying pan cooking an egg, equipped with an ominous slogan, "This is your brain on drugs". But, although they relayed the effects, they never articulated the causes. For many some catalysts are: peer pressure, depression, curiosity, an overwhelming desire to be accepted.

Now, let's investigate the gravitational pull of idle time. Disguised under the umbrella of boredom, idle time encapsulates the mind with images that translate into actions. "We are what we think!" If not carefully monitored, we can slide into an abyss of pessimism and that can lead to a lifelong game of destruction played out, on the dark, dingy courts, of what we call the Devil's Playground... where the game time is never ending. And there is no such thing as winning.

If you're hungry, here's a little food for thought: In order to grow, you have to nourish the biggest baby you'll ever encounter: yourself. When referring to the Devil's Playground, it's not where you play the game that matters; it's about the team you choose to play for.

A mind is a terrible thing to waste. Guard it with your life.

- Jamel E.

Guess Who?

I'm gross and perverted
I'm obsessed and deranged
I've existed for years
Very little has changed
I'm the tool of the government
And industry too
For I am destined to rule
And have control over you
Have you figured me out?
Have you guessed me yet?
I'm the slime oozing out of your TV set.

- Joe N.

Openmind-ness

For all confines made
to hold the body
to punish the body,
they are only walls.
But the creator over time
Will manifest a life
to deconstruct the chains
that bind one to
the stigma
that you are less than what is true.
Let the walls hold paradise
or the truth one has to find
to understand
the genius
it takes to grow
as time too is a construct
which can be conquered by those
who create a platform for truth.

- Jonathan B.

My Love For You

Being apart from you breaks my heart
Hearing you on the phone sounding
so sad gets me mad
At that moment, I just wish I could
break these walls apart
I can't stop thinking about all of the
good times we had
and the times we laughed
It makes me cry really bad
When I fight my tears, it burns my
eyes
That's only because my soul is
fighting my pride.
When I hear you happy, it makes my
heart smile and mentally
it pushes everything away and it feels
like this time is only for a while.
My baby, my queen, my sweet flower,
my pride and joy,
my sexy butterfly, my sunshine
You are everything that's beautiful in
the world
That's why you are my girl
You are soon to be my wife,
a wife that's a wonderful mother, a
strong woman, a wonderful creation
that God blessed me with to have 'till
the day I die...

I want you to know every morning,
you are the reason for the colors in
the sky
So, don't cry, my love. Be strong.
God put us together because we
belong
I believe and have faith that he's
going to bless us because
if we are for him, nothing can be
against us
I know we ain't perfect.
We both have sin.
But, our promise to God is to never
let the Devil win.
You are the best thing that ever
happened to me besides our kids.

I wouldn't want my life any other
way...
I'm happy to have you.
So, keep being you
because I love you
and I'm in love with you
because you are you,
my one and only wife.

- Jose M.

Myself

When I was 12 years old, I dreamed of becoming a worldwide traveler.
I hoped to walk amongst the animals, and maybe visit Canada

Times have changed since then, and now my focus is based on credit
Busy saving money just to pay some bills off and eating off debit

The life I live is really not extraordinary, and to most people
scraping from the bottom of the barrel is ordinary.

Who picks and chooses who lives and who dies?
Don't get shit confused when you can't filter the truth through the lies

Most dudes can't focus; the pressure is immense which makes it hard to decide
Real niggas keep they chin up and stare a thug in his eyes.

- Justin Tolbert



-Deron Cook

Untitled

Why was I born?
Why is it that life
Has left me scorned
Scarred with humiliation
Tribulations of hatred
From officials and unofficials
With miseducation
Intervention for this introvert
That shit is incentrifcation
Fuck taking incentive
For instance in an instant
You could get incarcerated
In this insane nation
Who's to blame but only myself
Cause I'm the problem
24 years old still playing
Cops and robbers
Only this time they play for my
time
That I'm free
And I play for designer and weed

-Kareem

Be Yourself

It's funny how everybody wanna be something they not
They find something on their body that looks wrong
and so it's something to crop
Especially girls who hide behind makeup to cover a spot
But, the thing is, we are all beautiful just the way
we are
Embrace life
Live life
and love every scar.
Never be afraid to be who you are.

-Kelsey B.

I'm Done With Jail

I'm writing this to tell the people:
Don't go to jail!
Because it is not a good place to be.
I'm glad I turned my life around.
I'm going to workshops,
and after I finish,
I'm going to get a job.
I'm done with jail.

-Kevin Clark

12 Barz

I need a better way... to get to work instead of yay...
Right now, the sky's grey, but I'll see a better day...
I felt like I had to eat, but the streets, they ain't never pay,
My peeps told me it would... basically I was led astray...
Was on the block like I'm tryna get bread today... Learned the
game from my moms and pops... I was bred this way... My moms
likes keeping watch what you do cause the blocks real!
I ain't knocking what you do but the cops will... You got options,
you could move with your pops still... Or you gonna find out how being
in a box feel... I thought fast money would get me past bummy...
I started out good but it didn't last for me... I found out it was bad for me.
I got lock and couldn't afford the bail with the \$tash money...

- **Levon J.**

In life

Show respect for yourself
by respecting others*

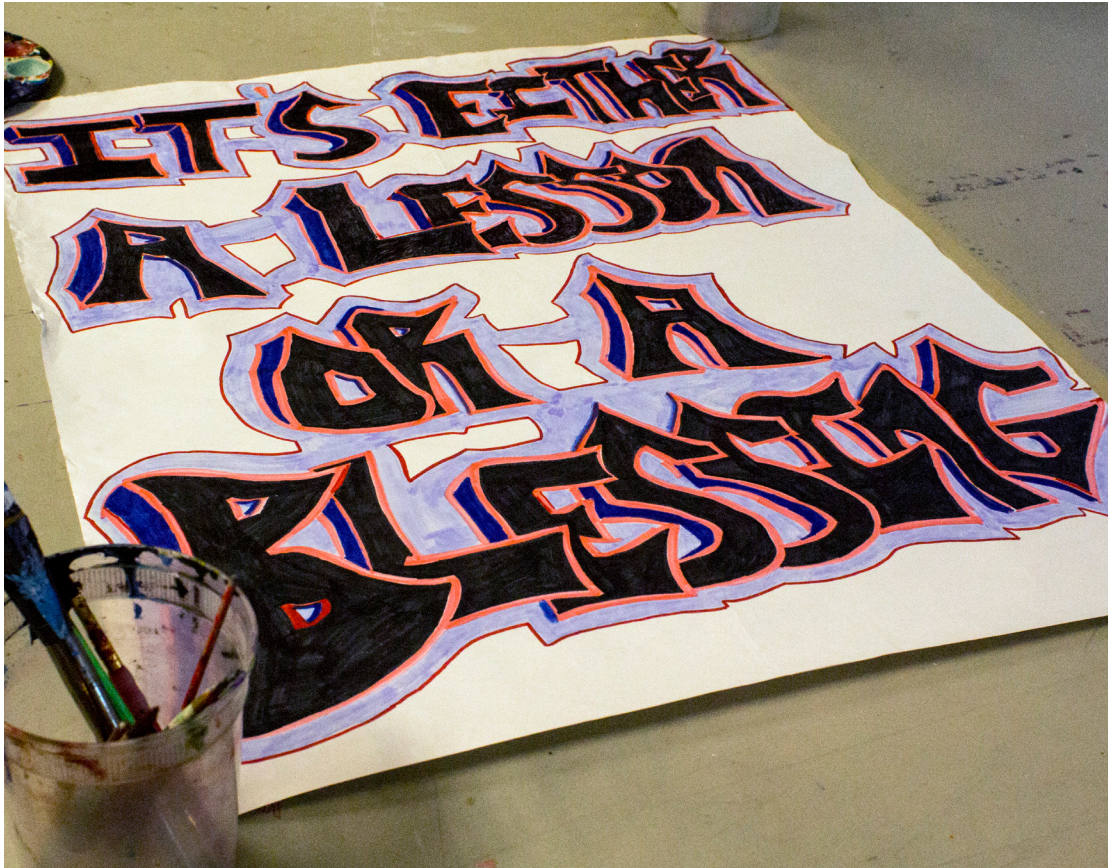
Love has different
meanings in life*

Sometimes you have to fight the positive way
for the things you want in life
because life ain't easy
and sometimes
the things you want in life are not gonna come easy to you*

Sometimes you gotta think
before doing something
and try to be open-minded to get positive results*

In life, there's two types of friends:
One that's gonna take you the positive way
and the other one, the negative way
So you've got to pay attention
who you hang around with in life*

- Mario M.



-I-CAN Participants

Untitled

Some succeed. Others fail.
Some get acquitted. Others spend 25 years in jail
Penitentiary bars leave penitentiary scars
Cemetery ain't far, that's elementary god.
My moms always said what you sow, you'll reap
Son you wanna blow... better know these streets
And you'll know your peeps by the words they speak
It's better to seek peace then to look for beef
Words of wisdom, Lord forgive, never lived them
Spent most of my teenage years in the system
First stop, Spofford Juvenile
Second stop, C-74 Rikers Isle
Third stop, Elmira reception
My fourth stop, Green Haven Correction
Protection is a 12 inch blade, stainless steel
Touch something that will make you famous for real

- Robert S.

That's Why I Love You

I remember support over the phone
You acceptin' them calls
On the front line me behind enemy
walls.
Emotions were raw you crying
Wishing I was home
Going to sleep in my shirt
Cause you could smell the cologne
Blowing up the phone and though
We got the company block
Three letters every week cause the
love don't stop
Yeah!!!

Whether I'm locked in a cell or a cube
Reminiscein' over your letters getting
high on perfume
One whiff has me intoxicated, and
even though I'm incarcerated
You obligated telling me that I'm a
make it
Contemplatin' if I should ask to bring
that weed up
I know money rough cause you
coming up
On that free bus
And though I know you familiar with
the procedure
I don't need drugs, we need love to
heal us
Cause it ain't all about that package
mama
If shit get rough with the dollars
I'm aight just remember to holler

If there's anything I can do to help
It's fucked up on how I'm locked
I'm so in tune with self
You love it
These other convicts they say I be
buggin'
Analyzing your letter so I could touch
every subject
Not for nothing though cause you
make it very productive
You just don't hear you incorporate
This shit into your life and activate it
And through your letters I could see a
change
On how you answer situations
Knowing that I would've did the same
Cause life's complications still remain
Whether I'm there or not for what it's
worth, ma
I could feel your pain
Through the eye of the storm and the
sea of debris
Focus on you helps me not to think of
the street
But of the shit we could do
And the things we could be
In other words, you just a vision of me
Minus the balls and the prison degree
That's why I love you

There could be no other woman for me
Why you wait for me to get in the
streets

That's why I love you
A dying soul with the will to compete
Giving me love whether in prison or
free
That's why I love you
And when this pain got you fittin' to
leave
You don't break, you build in the grief
That's why I love you
In other words, you just a vision of me
Minus the balls and the prison degree
That's why I love you

Paroled to your crib when I needed a
home
We fucked on the couch, got weeded
and zoned
And though I slept on the couch
Cause your seed isn't grown
He has to mentally adjust, so we
feeding him slow
But whoever would've knew
That we would be close
Apart from you, I love that child
Like a seed of my own
Why you lead me along to feel this
what I needed before
An intimate bond with a touch so
vigorous was
When you thinking I'm wrong

You throwing things and flinging your

arms
And when I'm blocking my face
You try to kick at my balls
You get love cause not once did you
pick up the phone
And dial 911 or try to scheme on
parole
What about the days I tried to hold up
this pain on my own
The noises you make, ma when we
makin' love, you moan
Got a nigga feeling like man there's
nothing like home
That's why I look upon you as a
blessing
And hope your love and affection
could me out of corrections
When I'm stressing
When I was gone you was fucking
cause I made you the freak that you are
But you smart cause you don't shit
where you eat

In other words,
You just a vision of me
Minus the balls and the prison degree.

That's why I love you.

- Miguel Alverio

Fresh Start

When I was young, I couldn't wait to make fast cash.
Breaking the law seemed cool. The drug dealers was nice.
They always looked out for the youngings.
I used to observe everything, trying to figure out my lane, what I'd be good at.
I was book smart, but even smarter on the streets.

I went into selling weed, and getting my ones up.
Moms didn't have to spoil me anymore. I'll soon get my own things.
Rolling dice was my passion though.
Seemed like I was always winning, no matter the bet or the opponent.

When I get older, things got old.
Now, those bad habits came with sirens and handcuffs.
Breaking the law wasn't cool anymore. I wanted to square up.
I find myself in jail now looking at the outside.
Wondering what moves I could've made different.
A fresh start is approaching
and a good beginning
is the objective.

- Shakial S.



-Na'Ashlie Wright

Around Me

Today was one of those days.
I think of all the things I could
and should be doing right now.
I was free for 23 years only to
end up just like the person
I hate most.
My father always told me I was
his son in every way.
But, I used to be proud cause I could
say,
“I’ve never been to jail”
But, look at me now,
a hot mess
sitting in 3 Upper waiting on
that call for the State to come get
what belongs to them.
No longer a person, only a detainee
Or a state inmate
No need to cry or lie cause you know
why you ended up here

Everywhere you go it’s a new story or
a new line
on what you should be doing

Jailhouse lawyer and jailhouse
gangster
Nobody wants to be themselves
Fake crips, fake bloods, fake this, fake
that
Everybody want to play a thug
when they heart is crying for a hug.

Around me, all there is fake people
I thought I knew all about me too
Until in here help me find the real me
Some leave to come back and some
leave to never come back again.
Life in here is different than
what I thought it really was
If I could paint a picture
Or touch a soul with my words,
I’ve done my work.

Around me, I see a lot of lost people
who came here and lost themselves.
They was something before this
but, they let this break them
and they never rebuilt.

- Shaun W.

Every Black Man

Growing up black, they wanna keep dey feet on my neck
and American X me
want me to b the next mike brown, wanna Kalief me.
Scared what they don't understand, they scared what I WILL become
Black man pure power
Knowledge is key 2 balance a mind of success,
a 'lil yoga, a 'lil Buddha to relive the stress...
and in due time it will b revealed that We R the best...
no privilege momma couldn't give it to me
shit smoking chronic she said that ain't right
not tryna hear it while I navigator thru life
with these deep thoughts I'm hearing telling me to end my life.

- Timothy Mitchell

Reverse Hypnotism

Dear America,

Less distractions, more actions
Less pollution & less excuses
More fight for a better bite
More strength to reach farther length

Social programming & conditioning
controls us all

& taking our freedoms with their
bullshit laws -

Hang tight, sit right & focus on
enjoying the rite

Reverse Hypnotism.

Use the bang of the drum
to snap out the snare
like Coelmanism.

- Joshua Janson

Loneliness

Loneliness is my most loyal friend.
She's always there...
She's so loyal that she often causes sadness and despair.
She never goes anywhere. Even in a crowd
full of people, she's always there.

I didn't know what a true genuine hug was until Loneliness came along.
I didn't know the importance of a hug or an I love you... until I had none.
And Loneliness consumed me and my heart became her home.

Now, I find myself in this cold and lonely place
surrounded by frustration, anger, deprivation and misery
Give me my freedom, and I'll get rid of my dear friend loneliness.

If money could buy my freedom... I'll show you where the money is.
However that's not realistic... So, I'll hold on to my true friend called Loneliness.

- Valentino M.

First Time In A Cell

23 Upper is the cell I'm locked in,
I'm used to being a free man, not always boxed in
Sometimes it gets so hot in the cell, it's hard to get oxygen

Going to court locked in chains and cuffs
Working for 26 bucks a week,
Come on, it's modern day slavery

Mama always told me tough times don't last forever but, tough people do

In jail, you see brothers work harder in here than they do in the street
People are not writing no more, either you getting jumped or your face cut

In jail, family and close friends forget about you
Out of sight, Out of mind
So, don't expect them to send money or answer the line

Everybody expecting us to fail as a felon,
You grew up with me, dog. I never knew you was tellin'

Take 19 or go to trial,
that's court lingo

Don't jump off the couch, straight into the streets
Ain't nobody trying to fight no more, they packing heat
You can catch a cavity on the pavement thinking things are too sweet
I'd rather flip burgers before I flip a pack
The thing about time, once you lose it,
you can't get it back.

- Teal H.

How Can I Be Fortunate

I'm unfortunate due to my incarceration
I'm now part of New York's jail population
I won't let this hinder me
There's too many resources out here you see.
For all the substances I use,
there's a drug program for this substance abuse.
If I possess healthy skills and I'm seeking work,
there's job readiness services that I know I can work.
Education is an option, achieve knowledge that empowers you
Acquiring a high school equivalency diploma is the right thing to do
Eating healthy and staying in shape
Health care is another thing put on this plate
This is all I need to be fortunate in this society.

- Landon W.



-Donald McBride

Don't Plea Bargain With The Devil...

Don't plea bargain with the Devil.

The Devil is the most beautiful image you've ever seen

- money, pretty car, pretty female or real good get-paid scheme

The deals and relationships can cost you dearly

- prison, death, multiple jail bids and

a lifetime of darkness

Be prepared to stay sucker-free and maintain your innocence,

do not fall for the deal.

The Devil is waiting for you

always.

- Hubert C.

Tranquility Haven

When the beer and the smoke was gone
and it seemed all hope was gone
She welcomed me with open arms
giving me a place
where I can feel safe
Starting off with intake
and its warm embrace
Loving a creature from the wild
like the nurturing of a child
Building my self esteem
letting me know I'm worthwhile
I return to the jungle
a bit more humble
Instead of a hate for me
I could tell myself
I love you.

- Miguel Alverio

Real Talk (Modern Day Romeo & Juliet)

Real talk:

Why art they pursuing my wife
Cuz my life ain't for thine eye, Naomi.
Why for sake our honest love?

Naomi talks:

Oh my strength, my equal
I'm silenced by thy ways,
not comfortable with your troubling
heart,
But you still my throne.

Real talk:

I'm opening my spear to you
I present my flow to increase
in thy mind my fortune.
My gifts are my audition for you.

Naomi talks:

I pledge to support you
Recycle and rebuild my kind spirit.
United we will be forever.
And peace, sharing art and passion
will be in our veins.

Real talk:

As I rest my head upon your angelic
chest,
taking in your magical warmth,
Boiling down my temper and
raising up my awareness yet again.

Naomi talks:

I am thy peach.
I am thy queen of queens.
I say this to to you cuz my life is yours
eternally, unconditionally.

Real talk:

You are my rock.
You complete my heart.
As I battle to keep you in sight
this night, at this moment, I'll give you
mine all
with no strings too loose.

Naomi talks:

My king, I heard you then, but I'm
still uncertain, not clear about the
things you've done.
Don't be alarmed - You will always be
my knight in shining armor.

Real talk:

I appreciate thy belief in me,
thy courage and understanding.
I will not walk on my queen's toe's no
more.
I will keep thy faith and fullness.
I'll love thou forever.

- Ireal K. Jacobs

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

Fortune Society's I-CAN (Individualized Corrections Achievement Network) program provides skill-building and discharge preparation services to eligible individuals during their incarceration at New York City Department of Correction jails, and continues offering reentry support following their release.

The series of posters (murals) that appear on pages 19 and 37 were created in the Rikers Island I-CAN Program AMKC QL-20 and QU-20 housing area.

Participants were asked to generate artwork that symbolized the I-CAN program to them, and its impact on their behavior, way of thinking and willingness to change.

The men developed these posters in collaboration and had to work together to come to a creative consensus - from concept to execution.

- Special thanks to Thomas Boston.

The portraits that appear on pages 12, 25, 31, 42, 49 were created in Guy Woodard's art class held at Fortune's Main Office in Long Island City, and are part of the Self-Portrait Project.

"It's magic to watch," says Woodard regarding his students. "When they initially come in [to class], they say 'I can't do it.' 'I can't draw like that.' But I tell them: yes, you can. Then, once they try, it sort of takes off by itself. And they really take to it. They draw themselves, their children, girlfriends. They find out what they really can do."

The Self-Portrait Project is on display at The Fortune Society.

**THEY TRIED TO BURY US.
THEY DIDN'T KNOW WE WERE SEEDS.**

- Proverb

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