



# ***THE SWAY***

***Redeemed  
Voices from  
Inside Iowa's  
Prisons***

***Winter 2023***

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## **Another Man's Misery:**

*by Jeffrey Smith, winner of Anamosa State Penitentiary Poetry Contest 2022*

If Love is my oxygen, why am I drowning in another man's misery?

Waking up in the same hell-hole, forced to show his demons sympathy because if I was to hog tie and drag him along with his demons I'll be sent to lockup and labeled the enemy.

So I must humble myself and hold my breath as I tip toe a tight rope while surrounded by negative energy.

But if Love is my oxygen and I'm forced to hold my breath how can I breathe? I reach for the administration while I'm dying from suffocation, lost my father to cancer and I never had time to grieve.

While drowning in another man's misery, I'm forced to wear the pain upon my sleeve, his facial expression is now mimicking me, but how did he become me or me become he, is the question I ask as I stare at the sky beyond these prison walls saying this life is not meant for me.

We have so much ambition, bigger dreams and visions, not barbwire fences or dying in prison. Yes, we had head on collisions with wrongful decisions that left us in awkward positions, but as we strive to do right with precision, tell us why are you blocking our road to redemption?

How can you give us treatment, if you won't even listen? In six weeks there were two suicides, how are we stronger together if you're choosing sides. When this is done by a mom and a dad it's the kids that suffer inside. If you're the parents and we're the suffering kids, in who do we confide?

If Love is my oxygen, and Love is supposed to be priceless, tell me why is it even colder on the other side? Is the value of Love attached to the inflation, because it's so much hatred with mass shootings, and Ukrainian genocide, Democrats and Republicans won't even swallow their pride, so they failed at protecting Uvalde students and wishing death upon Vladimir Putin, for it's innocent children, women, and men that he's bombing and shooting.

In search of happiness as if it's erased from memory. The guy with the huge handsome face is how they remember me, But if Love is priceless and oxygen is free, and Love is my oxygen, Please tell me, why am I drowning in another man's misery?

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## UNAPOLOGETIC:

*by Robert Nash, winner of Anamosa State Penitentiary Poetry Contest 2022*

I'm Unapologetic, I'm a King.  
Why'd it take so long to call the medics to the scene.  
Why I gotta still feel the pressure, I can't breathe.  
Why they try to say it's different when you take a knee.  
Colin Kaepernick can't get a place up in the league,  
But the police can get paid on Administrative Leave.  
Peaceful protest when MY PEOPLE take to the street,  
But Trump's Riot on the 6th, they got the nerve to say it's peace.  
No Apologies just politics with promises for policies.  
Still slavery in States after talking about abolishing.  
I find it crazy how they claim the system's gotta be,  
Probation for a cop, then they hang me up with a tree.  
Willie Lynch Letter at its finest.  
Times changed but the change that we want we can't find it.  
Not like we ain't trying, MY PEOPLE stay fighting.  
We're fed up, Hell NO, we can't remain silent.  
Deeply rooted with my roots so I ain't blinded.  
I know the truth they do too that's why they hide it.  
They don't want it in the schools so they hate Biden.  
United States false statement why we stay divided.  
I'm just a young BLACK MAN doing everything that I can to provide for MY PEOPLE.  
Trying to fly high like an Eagle or the flag but the stats still say we're not equal.  
They've been doing bad to MY PEOPLE and ain't no Flags going half mast for MY PEOPLE.  
Just another #hashtag of MY PEOPLE, Black Lives Matter too but they still don't want to sympathize.  
I just want to live in life and never worry about a cop who has the power if I live or die.  
UNAPOLOGETIC.



# Justice for Juvenile Lifers

*by James Curtis*

My name is James Curtis #1137816. I am currently doing a life without parole sentence in Iowa. I was only 18 when my crime happened and I now have 24 years in the Iowa prison system. We have been fighting hard since 2012, when the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional to give life without parole sentences to juveniles "under" the age of 18, to raise that age to at least 21. I need to get our word out there that this is a problem in our state that needs to be looked at seriously. It seems like other states have been making progress on this issue. Given that there were just 2 cases recently that had some merit, but once again got handed down harsh sentences, we need the legislation to be revisited again.

Opposing counsel in the Dorsey vs State oral argument stated that the decision to raise the age should not lie with the Supreme Court, but instead the decision should be held solely in the hands of the legislature. So my question to you is, in whose hands is this issue of raising the juvenile age? Is there a plan of action on how this is going to progress, and if so, what is that plan?

It seems absurd that we live in a world where we would not allow persons under the age of 21 to consume alcohol, smoke tobacco, gamble, buy assault rifles, or not buy canned whip cream because we simply do not trust their decision-making processes with regard to these issues. We essentially say they are not old enough to make choices as adults, yet we do not apply the same criteria to much more complex circumstances within the justice system.

There also seems to be a double standard in relation to how the justice system uses and relies on science. For a long time now, the justice system has placed its trust in science in order to prove innocence or guilt. Courts rely on evidence in relation to fingerprinting, polygraphs and an untold number of DNA-related processes and procedures to build airtight cases and either exclude suspects or make prosecutions. In recent years these processes have evolved at an exponential rate, and the techniques continue to develop, which in my humble opinion, can only be a good thing.

Science is infallible, it is perhaps the only part of the justice system that is completely impartial. Its examination and the conclusion it delivers are based on nothing other than factual scientific evidence-based research and findings. Science doesn't lie or choose a side, it is a vessel for truth in all its findings. Everyone accepts that, from the judges and the prosecutors at the top, to the lawyers and counsel, law enforcement, the scientific community itself and most importantly, we, the people. We have faith in science to give us the answers and provide truth in cases where the waters are often muddled. We use it as a basis to make judgments about guilt or innocence and to separate lies from truth, and we should, as it is something that can always be relied upon. So why then does it feel that with all the recent advances and developments within the scientific community with regards to brain development, that we are not taking heed of this specific science?

The justice system must be just that - Just. It must be fair. It cannot pick and choose which areas or scientific fields it will accept and which it will reject merely because it may mean acknowledging that things should have or could have been done differently.

Now is the time to take heed of the scientific findings in relation to brain development and make the justice system match accordingly. We as a society are always learning, always moving forward, and we will continue to do so in the years ahead. As science progresses and unlocks new knowledge, it is the duty of lawmakers within that society to apply the theory into practice and make new judgments accordingly to ensure the justice system is just.

My point is that I am no longer the same person I once was at 18 or 19 or 20 or 21. My decision-making skills and thinking processes are that of an adult now. If I made a bad choice today that cost someone their life or brought harm to anyone, then I would pay the price and rightly so, as I am an adult, and I should know better. But there are men and women out there who have lost their lives to sentences of life without parole, based on choices they didn't make as adults, regardless of what age they were on paper at the time. Men and women who have grown up within the prison systems are now adults, adults forever penalized with no second chance to rehabilitate based on choices they made as juveniles. Science shows us that people change with time and age, when will the law reflect this too?

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## **My Journey as a Juvenile Lifer**

*by Michael Cargill Jr.*

When I was sixteen, I was convicted of first degree murder, first degree kidnapping, and first degree robbery in 2004, along with two others. One of the others was my best friend at the time. The victim in my case was a man named Mark Willis. I found out that this man had been sexually abusing my best friend for many years, and Chris, my best friend, told me that he wanted to "get him." You can look up the details regarding all that happened.

While I have been in prison, I have accomplished some things that I am proud of. I earned a GED and went on to get my AA degree in accounting. I am a Braille transcriber and have been certified with the Library of Congress. I have volunteered for hospice care and have been trained in ADL. I was also a mental health mentor for ten years, and I continue to mentor as a volunteer here at Fort Dodge Correctional Facility. I have also completed all the testing required for a carpentry and cabinet maker apprenticeship. I still have some hours to log before completing them. I also facilitated a group for many years called the Alternatives to Violence Project (or AVP) while I was in Fort Madison.

I have tried to file for a reduction of my restitution so I won't have a huge burden to pay when I get out, however, I was denied. I still have \$123,000 to pay of the \$198,000 I was ordered. I also have been denied by the board of parole the last seven years despite having the support of my victim's family for a release. I have repeatedly been told by this institution that I must do at least twenty years before I can move on to Rockwell City (a lower security prison) although I was not given a mandatory sentence. I have completed all recommended treatment and have been doing "dead time" for 4 years or so. Whenever I have tried to get this invisible or silent mandatory documented I have been refused.

The way things have been working with movement to lower security and working our way out of prison through a gradual release have now changed. Or so I have been told. It has been the "practice" that the institution would wait for the board of parole to issue a "code" for gradual release. Most everyone would be in this institution for two years or so. In fact, I was told that I would only be here for two years when I first got here. I have, however, been here for 5 and 1/2 years now.

I was just informed that they board of parole is no longer going to be given the "code" for gradual release. They are instead going to allow the institutions to make the decision regarding out readiness to move on to lower security. I don't know if this is the case. I was informed that I would not be given the recommendation to transfer to lower security until May of 2025 at the



earliest. I have been incarcerated since Feb. of 2004. This would give me over 21 years in by the time I could go to minimum security, meaning a minimum of 23 years in prison before getting out.

On top of this there is at least one juvenile lifer that was only in prison for fifteen years and was released to ICE from Newton. I don't know if this has something to do with that institution specifically, but it seems odd to me that I am supposed to be looked at as an individual, but in terms of how much time I have to complete before given a chance to be released, I am being measure against all the other juvenile lifers. The only reason I have been given as to why I have to do more time is because the "average" of all the rest of the juvenile lifers is around 23 years before they went to minimum. So I am an individual when it is convenient for this place to make me one, but in terms of my time in prison, I am not. It would seem that the message that is being given is that it does not matter how the time is done, only that it is done.

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Art by "Skid"

## A Collection of Poetry

by James Williams

### THE MAN IN THE MIRROR:

The man in the mirror, can you see him with a clear view? Is he the greatest man, is he even the greatest You? Can you see his strength that's shown through the storyline of his eyes? Can you better understand the answers to the who, what, when, where, and why's? Who is the man that stands abreast and comfortable in his own skin? What is the tactic direly needed to guarantee in life a win? When is the time now or never cause the chances continue to fade? Where do you look for strength when you see your shine begin to jade? Why is time of an essence even though time is forever? Is it because time don't stand still, and life's mission is to be better? Question after question fluster rapidly through the mind, Because life's purpose is the answer, as the solution we journey to find... First we must learn to recognize the truths that's blind to our eyes, Because illusions look so much better we embrace the colorful lies... Blurred is the vision, as life take a drastic turn, We look in the eyes we don't recognize missing what's there to learn... But is the face that stare back at you appalled by what it see, Is the question of your life, "Is this the best that I can be?" Is your highs really lows, in a world where dreams do die? Because you embraced the wrong dream and accepted the dirtiest lie... In this world our eyes see a lot, but we have to recognize the truths, Because life is so full of deception we get entangled as if a noose... Yet, life is lived and with understanding its purpose become clearer, Everything in life is possible, it all starts with the man in the mirror!

## THE MESSAGE:

With every thought that run through my mind I gain a sense of understanding, Every confusion brings about challenge, but I'm hellbent on Greatness, so when its all said and done I'll manage... That'z the beauty of life, it's my book to write, And only I can convey the intricate chapters that portray Me, the wrong and right... I see with these eyes the misunderstanding of living to die, I see so many people that'z keeping it real, but living the greatest lie... Confused as to the mission and purpose of the journey, Lost and turned out on the illusion of easy, the same illusion that stole Me... The same illusions that had me swallowed up in the pit of despair, Now I sit at a distance from everyone, and no one to reach in that pit to show concern or care... The reality of all realities is you better care three times as much for You, Because hell on Earth is real, and the exact destination the easy route lead to... It's my understanding that education is a must, but without utilizing the knowledge we still lose, Work hard now so we can play harder later is the solution we better choose... For this is the difference between a life of joy and a life of pain, Because we can be the Greatest, but it starts with minimizing the rain... Life is life, but its contents is the revelation of what we put out, Therefore life is lived to its fullest potential when we weed out negativity and let the goodness sprout... These are the thoughts that run through my mind giving me an understanding of Life, So I sit at a distance trying to elicit thinking, and that's the purpose in The Message that I write!

## LIFE:

Time waits for no man, and I'm no exception to that rule, Although I tried constantly to better myself, in the end I played the fool... Losing ground mile by precious mile I tried to make it all back to quick, Only to run head first into a wall, finding myself deeper in the thick of shit... So often did I confuse knowledge with what the world commonly calls "common sense", Which is not all that common, because the eyes of the mind's indifference... Every eye that'z closed is not sleep, but what about the eyes that are opened wide, Missing all the things that seem so evident, because the things they're trying to hide... Yet, what don't come out in the wash will come out in the rinse, it's true, The rain will cause the paint to disappear, leaving exposed the hidden You... These hardened eyes have seen a lot, and many times I envied the blind, With eyes wide open I absorbed the struggles of my habitat and made them mine... For my perception gave way to illusions and I saw glitter in everything but gold, They say hell is a pitfall of burning fire, but here on Earth that hell is cold... Believe in none of what I hear and only half of what I see, A little advice that I was given to decrease the deception that'z so free... My life by its very existence is old, but its transformation is new, Because I only embrace one thought of contingency, I enhance my chance in life by two... Misbegotten is America by forefathers whose faces show no shame, Self-preservation; Deception; and fake love conspired, and by their hands many heartz were slain... Many promises have been heard, but only one is guaranteed after your first breath, It's never been love, respect, freedom, or life, the only fulfilled promise to us is death... I found myself seeking answers and chasing the all so elusive hands of time, Now I sit here with a clear understanding that I lost partz of Me... chasing something that was already Mine!

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## ANGEL:

I ran into this Angel so beautiful in every way, I was intrigued to the utmost and at a lost for words to say... She spoke with a heavenly voice, but the words I didn't hear, But as I looked into her eyes, those tender eyes unleashed a tear... I was weighed down with this sorrow for this celestial and precious soul, How could a simple man like myself give, when I too am less than whole? I guess she read my mind, as she touched me with the softest of hands, "James it's okay to admit when you're weak, for true understanding is found in Man... Knowing when and where you're weak helps you transform that weakness into strength, It helps you to focus on what's ahead, with a determination that's hellbent... My mission is to expose the light that shines so deep within, The light that you forget is there because your actions done made it dim... I've watched you as you smiled with a heart full to capacity with utter hurt, I've even watched you give of your genuine heart, only to be forced to question your worth... I know these times challenge love when you seem to watch that emotion visually fade, Because you feel alone in your time of need that very emotion in you gradually jade... Leaving you to question what love mean because what you receive don't comfort or ease, But you can't let tribulation steal your joy and make love the forbidden disease... I see into your heart and I know the depth of your pain runs deep, I know life robbed you of its greatest joys, and left you with the why's to seek... I can't say I'm your Guardian Angel because I couldn't guard you from this time, But I can tell you I'm with you when the light is none, and when it brightly shine"... I smiled looking into the eyes that revealed a caring and genuine soul, This is my world being touched by that Angel whom looks to make me whole...

## STAINED GLASS:

Ignited by the manipulations of life is the dimness and jaded glare, That harbors an unsettled heart that's cold as the briskest air... Nothing seen before is as somber as a desolate soul, Imagine a sun with no shine, or a moon without its glow... That reflection is the perfected vision of a hurt that's unclaimed, Weakening at its core without the ability to sustain... As the mental conditioning elevates, the mind grows complacent, And it's no smell stronger than the "I accept all" fragrance... Watching with observant eyes I see the viciousness of the streets, I see the deep pain of love, I see the taste of hate is sweet... Within, the mind contort to block out the illicit touch that roam, Under the guise of love a life is stolen like the lyrics of a song... The tears represent pain, and the heartz beat represent strength, But the crack in the soul overwhelms, and the tortures don't relent... So prematurely a rose is forced to bloom in the grasp of life's fears, Is there redemption for that soul that's been soaked by the sky's tears? With dreams of that rainbow end, and that brighter future that follows, Is there any reason for hope when bereft is the daily pill being swallowed? The world is a shallow reflection of love in the way it marvels in hate, The coldest promise in life is a reality swallowed by the sunrise of Hell's fate... And reality is the only thing real in a world where illusions control all, Strength is gained in the getting up, and not lost in the stumble or fall... Victory's never been sweeter than one after the hardships of troubled times, For the showers give way to sprinkles, and the sprinkles give way to sunshine... Today erase yesterday, and with self love the ineptitude shall pass, And the rays of the sunlight will shine bright on the previously Stained Glass!

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## **IF I COULD PLANT THE SEED OF LOVE:**

If I could plant the seed of love in the garden of your heart, I would water it daily with my love to manifest this work of art... I would sprinkle it with dedication and trust, would that help it grow? And since I'm trying to plant it deep, will it help to have a hoe? Tending to you will be my pleasure, caressing my rose as it bloom, Plucking out the weeds of doubt so love will prosper soon... Keeping you under sunlight so it can appreciate your precious glow, Or create you a waterfall so you can bathe in its beautiful flow... Being in the midst of something real, I will help you reap what I have sown, So I will wrap you in the greatest promise one soul has ever known... Speaking things your ears miss, and only your heart can feel, I see your lips move, but no need for words, so my kiss is the perfect seal... You smile your radiant smile and not even the sun can compare, I tell you how special you are, for in my world you're just like air... I'm committed to you for you and you're everything I want and need, I'm like a blind man whom sees nothing, but you're all I want to read... I can feel you when I rest because you live in my spirit so deep, My life is in your love, and I hear forever when your heart beat... That connection of the mind, body, spirit, and soul is the beauty life is made of, For two halves become a whole, if I can't plant in your heart my seed of Love!

## **NO ORDINARY LOVE:**

We are at a distance my love  
But apart we could never be  
For two halves have combined to make one  
That's the Divine connection of you and me  
Nothing can keep us away  
For life is on our side  
Time is of an essence  
And even it's down for our ride  
The joy is there waiting  
For the bumps along that begin to bruise  
The sun will come out swinging  
And the rain will reluctantly lose  
No mountain is high enough  
Nor is there a sea deep enough  
To scare me from the struggles  
Or make me fold when times are rough  
In each other we have the answers  
When tribulations of love do test  
Our souls are eternal mates  
And without each other they cannot rest  
Our "Us" represents life  
Your life blessed B-Dub  
Our Divine connection spells out clearly  
"No Ordinary Love"

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## 2ND TO NONE:

Nobody can compare, you're in a league of your own, Top of the charts, number one, just you, alone... You know your strengths, and your weaknesses are your strengths core, You move with that aura of confidence, something that the world implore... I look and I admit I get lost in the excitement of my very stare, Mesmerized by the essence of your womanhood, you own my eyes, and their glare... How could I not appreciate the aroma that beauty entails? Every movement is with such class, and all my attentions it compels... Unlike any other you walk through my mind with that slow and seductive pace, One glimpse of you is exquisite to my buds and I crave to have a taste... Without the use of your hands you touch me, and I'm lost in the realm of your control, Excited about the beauty that engulfs, then captivate me through the windows of your soul... Your eyes have the power to entrance as if Aphrodite, suspending me in time, As my imagination swim through your thoughts, I'm enchanted by your power in mind... For only from within comes beauty, and I swear you possess it all, The perfect swag, aura, and walk of confidence, come together and enthrall... Every ounce of you speak volumes, I'm compelled to stare and listen, Enjoying every detail of your essence, and not a detail am I missing... For even from a distance your radiant glow overwhelms and astound, And I'm paralyzed with anticipation to hear the sweetest sound... You awaken all of my heartfelt dreams because your warmth is of the sun, The best of the best you are, and always Second To None...

## THE FEEL OF LOVE:

The beauty of all things in life begins with the essence of love, That precious thing that comfort's, warms', and soothingly hugs'... It's the initiator of smiles, and the death of saddened moments, It's the picture perfect vision of the times that are golden... It's the promise of life's good gift-wrapped in unique beauty, It's the desire to overwhelm with happiness as a pleasure, rather than a duty... It's that something that's everything, even in the midst of nothing at all, It's that beat of happy surrender vibrating the heart's wall... It's that smile that overpower the frowns, even when the sun don't shine, It's that feeling of extreme bliss that has you tryna freeze the hands of time... So that moment would never end, and that smile would never leave, The beauty of true love overwhelms with the strongest passion to thoroughly please... It has the perfect hands for caressing fears away with its gentle touch, Leaving you childishly giddy and yearning for its overwhelmingly rapturous rush... It's that invisible presence that has you floating on clouds and mingling with stars, That feeling of warmth that embrace and comforts the soul even from afar... It has no particular look, yet you see it clearly when it's real, It's that nothing that metamorphosed into something... that is love that you feel!

## DAY DREAMING:

I wanna give you the Moon, and explore the countless stars with you from now until the end, I wanna wrap you in a love that your soul feel, a small gift from a friend... Together forever me and you is the only way my heart can continue to beat, Can life be sustained if there is no water, and no food to eat? Every night I dream about you, but to my disappointment I wake up to a lonely cell, Feeling the beauty of what Heaven must be, although my days are a living Hell... The promise that this feeling give is like the exhilaration after working out, For what is Love that's blind, other than a mystery that depreciates' doubt? That's like the rainbow after the rain, Love is strengthened in the grips of despair, So I entered your life to take your breath away, and to be your air...

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## ONCE IN A LIFETIME:

Today I saw it with my own eyes and I must admit I like, My heart tweaked a bit, and I stared at the heavenly sight... Right out of heaven gates you walked, and into my world you came, Angel was so perfect, but it was more than just a name... You walked with grace, and your mind was ahead of this time, I lost myself in Us, and had fun in the warmth of your shine... Those eyes of yours spoke to me in a language of their very own, Yet all I could do was smile, because my mind was already blown... No words were yet spoken, but forever was loud and clear, I was ready to live in your heart with your precious soul so very near... Excuse me my tomorrow can I share with you my desire to love, I've mingled with lonesome times, and even sent prayers to the heaven's above... I dreamed of a perfect beauty, yearning for that day to come, Because raindrops become hard when life is missing life's fun... I ran from hurt and jumped right in the arms of pain, Wishing upon the wrong star, because my heart always felt the same... Now look into your hands, but please be careful because the heart that you hold is mind, I give you the most precious part of Me, to save this heart from dying... It was the greatest feeling I've felt, for your love makes me feel so alive, I'm so high on life I can reach out and give the stars a high five... So God please don't be mad, for this angel I had to claim as mine, And I truly thank you for caressing my soul... with my "Once In A Lifetime"!

## ELEGANT:

When I see you my mind runs as if water in a waterfall, My lips spread in its effort to smile as my heart calls... Could this be love that has my mind pondering forever and a day? For my eyes are captivated and enchanted by the way your hips sway... Your movements hold my every thought and yearning in its very capture, And I drift without restraint, as my soul enjoys this rapture... The look in your eyes speak a language that Me, Myself, and I yearn to learn, My heartbeat quickens its pace, this desire lovingly burn... I'm a hopeless romantic unwrapped by your aura's feel, Understanding this language of love, while my rushing emotions heal... Where have though been all my life, without answers I do wonder, For my soul has been without its mate, but I found its missing sunder... In my mind's eye I conceive this image of the perfect womanly figure, Yet this vision of imperfected perfection engage my everything, and no image could be bigger... The magnetic appeal of your walk is intensified in every step of your stride, Your perfume of confidence is evident, the most intriguing scent of pride... Fascination has taken over, I'm enthralled by the makings of You, Marvelling at the curve of your lips, yes, they accentuate your beauty too... And the very sound that they make is melodic to my needy ears, Your look is so Angelic, would giving you my heart help with alleviating all its fears? The very essence of your being is all woman, could it be Heavensent? For I am suspended in awe and captivated by every immeasurable ounce of your Elegance...

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## **KISMET:**

I walk alone looking for my eyes candy and my heart's meal, I thirst for love, but I'll settle for something real... I know not much, but I'll search for my heart's answer, For my soul need to be cured of this lonely and loveless cancer... I never knew how much I needed that something that's something to me, Void of everything that's anything, alone with I, in need of We... I lose myself in a hope and find comfort in my dreams, Because I have the power to make an Us, erasing loneliness from the scenes... It's such a beauty to watch fate's reward, prematurely embracing its feel, I'm being touched by an Angels precious hands, so with joy I can heal... I awake with a smile, for a vision of your loveliness astound, I see you and stare with awe, hearing so much in the silence of your sound... Now I no longer need to look for my eye's candy, I'm entranced by the beauty that is You, Even a blind man told me he can see what I speak, and every bit of it is true... I found that something that's something to me, only this truth you know not yet, But I look into the eyes of life, thankful that it's you... Kismet!

## **TEAR OF LOVE:**

The sun refused to shine, and even the raindrops recused to fall, Joy went on vacation, only sadness gave me its all... My heart finally felt love's warmth, but now it only feel its frost, For what is life when my everything is everything I lost? Yesterday is dead, and dying slowly with it is my soul, I'm merely half a man. because my yesterdays made me whole... Now I have nothing, in a world that took my all, My battered heart relishes in the watered memories that fall... Bitter visions of joy that leave my heart to feel its shame, Permanently torturing me with only the burning of hurt's flame... I stared into the eyes that once held its deepest love, But the soul returned its coldest stare, and I saw what never was... Now I watch a world move, but my pace is but a thought, I captured the greatest dream, only to pay the greatest cost... Lessons of life and love, the two go hand in hand, With the creation of woman being the greatest gift God gave to man... Some things are for a lifetime, and some just for a season, Love is life's journey of mysteries with serenity the greatest reason... Yet, it is no more, and my world is void and dark, I'm in need of that fire, but this match is void of spark... I smile that winners smile, and maybe it covers up my hurt, I guess I thought if I looked happy, happiness would find time to flirt... I'm so out of cries, I accept this punishment from the heaven's above, My greatest lost in life is permanently shown in the saddest Tear Of Love!

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## SELF-CONTROL:

I was once lost to myself, unconcerned about the Truths of the unknown, As a child it was my ignorance, but it was my lack of effort when I got grown. My mind held the greatest power, but with fear it never peeked, Strength is the courage to do, while timidity clothes the weak. To have knowledge of a thing brings about understanding, but wisdom is in the act, I let my emotions override my intellect, so can you see what it was I lacked? Needless to say I suffered pains due to the misapplication of life's tools, Because a man whom is unable to grasp the whole of its understanding, will fall victim to its rules. But first we have to recognize there is a problem, and fear not what we learn, So how do I change the dynamics of this thing of utter concern? How do I stop my anger from running rampant causing me exhaustion when I give chase? Can remembering the situation don't make or break me cause the storms that swirl to displace? The understanding of Self is the most vital tool, so I had to invest time in Me, For the most damaging storm was perpetuated from within, only I was too blind to see. Closed off to even myself, I became an expert in deflection, But life was getting bigger than me, and my life needed thorough correction. I had to let go several degrees of pride, so in the essence of manhood I stand, Since anger stemmed from my need to be understood, I first had to understand... Struggles are part of life, they seem to never end but they do, I have calm in the midst of chaos, not because different circumstance, but different view. Which makes life a lot easier to live, as the stresses began to decrease, Can you understand knowledge inside a man whose arrogance refuse to cease? So I learned to humble myself within myself, as I purposed myself for life, Now I seek other's perspectives of living to tip the scale of constant strife. The rationale of life just happens to be in the confused state of what molds, For what makes a Man is his understanding, and in that he finds his Self-Control...

## MENTAL SURVIVAL...

I dwell within myself, weakened by a broken world, and broken by my weakness, Lusting for the resurrection of strength, but in fear and failure I regress... In my heart I felt a pang, and awakened with thoughts of suicide, The joys of Life greets me no more, the Spirit within me died... So what is it I do when nothing I do has any meaning? I gave in to my "nothingness", and my Self-Loathing does all my screaming... I rose up with intent, but fell to my knees with an aching pain, How do I find my heart? How do I get off this Devil's train? The tears began to fall, and I rose with determination to beat the odds, I'm not the dealer of my life's happenings, but I do have to play my cards... I let my weakness control me, as I was dying in a loser's hell, The pain became my motivation, and as collateral became my bail... So now it has no hold, the surge of Life pumps thru my veins, God has never forsaken Me, for He's a faithful God that sustains... I began digging deeper into Self, gaining knowledge that illumines Self-Respect, I no longer live for others acceptance, so I get stronger when they reject... A strong mind is a necessity, so in the challenges that comes with life I adhere, I look now thru the eyes of understanding, and walk in courage rather than fear... My heart once abused, now rejoice in the power and strength of growth, My Self-Loathing ways were transformed to Self-Love, for there's no way I can harbor them both... So in retrospect, for the betterment of Self and Life, I had to make for Self an investment of Time, Self-Knowledge was the key to all understanding, but it was God that made all sublime...

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# The True Reality of Unreality

*by Michael Kelly*

It's laughable as I recall the first day. The ride was long and tiresome, and the sheriff? Well, he was laid back for the most part, and how could I blame him, after all, he was my ride to the correctional intake facility in Coralville, Iowa sixteen plus years ago. How does the old saying go? "Don't add fuel to the fire"? Damn this shit's messed up! As the door opened up to my new, yet temporary, home, my first reaction was not one of fear, but one of repulsion from the putrid smell; fear would never come. My reality turned quickly into unreality as I observed and studied the mindset of the incarcerated. Many are incarcerated for violent crimes, some not so violent, some have no violence, and then there will be the case of innocence. However, this nonfiction tale will not cover guilt or innocence, but the unreality of behavior, character and identity of the incarcerated.

The reality of an incarcerated individual's behavior will determine if their newfound reality becomes unreality. How the incarcerated deals with institutional reality will ultimately affect that individual's future of incarceration for years. For example, if the individual chooses to participate in gang activity from the moment that individual enters the department of corrections, the chances are their time will be dictated and influenced by other gang members and rival gangs. The incarcerated individual will have to be on what's called "count," meaning they will have to participate in any illegal or violent activity that other fellow members are involved in. Right or wrong, you're stuck! This reality has now become unreality because a large majority of Iowa prisoners can use their incarceration as a means to break free from living such a lifestyle. Contrary to popular belief, Iowa prisoners are not strongly recruiting new prisoners as gang members, and neither are individuals forced to partake. The reality? Negative behavior will affect every aspect of your day to day life and livelihood while incarcerated, so maintain and keep in check your behavior when dealing with others.

The reality of an incarcerated individual's character will determine if their newfound reality becomes unreality. What comes out of your mouth better be true; in prison, your word is your bond! If your word means little to you, then it's best you not share it with others, so keep quiet! For example, if you tell a fellow inmate, staff member, or ground squirrel that you're going to do something, return something, or never repeat something, and then you go against your word, you have now fallen victim to the unreality of prison. "You can say and do whatever you want." Remember, your word is your bond, and that word is golden...until that shit turns to copper. The reality? By showing others that you care about your character and protect it by keeping your word with others, you will not only be accepted, but you will earn their respect.

The reality of an incarcerated individual's identity will determine if their newfound reality becomes unreality. Who are you? The typical unreality response is that the individual will run off a host of charges and crimes committed without answering the simple question, "Who are you?" Their identity becomes not who they are, but what they have done. This misconception of reality stems out of wanting to be accepted by other fellow inmates, thinking "I need to make sure that my street cred matches up, or I will be looked at as vulnerable." Wrong! The reality is that your identity is not what you've done to end up in prison, but who you are as an individual. So focus on the person you are and the person whom you can become. The reality of facing the real world becomes difficult for many who are incarcerated. Individuals create their own "reality" in order to survive the mental stress of prison "reality," which then evolves into "unreality," an imaginary world that leaves behind unresolved real life issues such as mental health, drug addiction, spousal abuse, family abuse, and a lack of education. That is the true reality of being incarcerated in Iowa.

# RIGHT TO BE HUMAN:

*by James Williams*

In this world overwhelmed by 'False' narratives of Equality, and closed eyes to Truth, We stand erect in the malfunction, but the essence of Equality from us stands aloof... Thou shall not covet a man's possessions, nor covet his actual Self, But manipulation knows no boundaries, so broken is man's spirit, fractured is his Mental Health... What is it our eyes capture other than lies perpetuated in all forms of light? We call it "Hope", dwelling in wrong, and forced to ask the wrongdoers for our Rights... Looking through the lense of Truth, confusion is enhanced, as discrimination this world sustain, The birthright of our Self is Freedom, so how then are our Rights as Humans entwined in bondage and chains? Do we have the right to think, given our minds store up the treasures of Life? Or do we remain prisoners of oppression, shackled by Equality's plight?

We live in this world of Anti-Woke protagonism, "leave well enough alone" semantics, But our Rights as Humans is to question the foundational facts for Truth, in spite of the risks and challenges... Freedom of Expression is a Right, right? or is that dependent on the vox? We assemble screaming for Equality and become criminals, Political manipulation or not? The Declaration declare that Human Rights cannot be taken away, so why is there so much discourse? Why is there such a plight for education, when the Educational Rights has been set forth? No one is to be held in slavery or servitude, so how are we stored in jails seeking to be "Free", And no one shall be subjected to torture and inhumane treatment, confused, we ask, "Who are We?" Life is a fundamental Right, and against all odds we choose to live... and have Life, We choose to journey for True Liberation, though we can't breathe, we fight... The Rights of all members of the human family is founded on Freedom, Justice, and Peace, But Human Rights are chosen for a select people, so are Human Rights even Free? Yet, it is "understood" that these are the Rights of this Land, but for the people it's a wedge, Denial of these Rights and Freedoms are forbidden, yet exalted, so again, what is this Nation's pledge?

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Art by "Skid"

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**All pieces in this zine were written/created by individuals incarcerated in Iowa. If you would like to contribute to the next issue, please submit writing and artwork to the following address:**

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