

Our Lives

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A collection of works, lightly edited and arranged by a correction institution's creative writing teacher, where incarcerated men share a paragraph worth of words about a memorable event in their lives...



Curated by: Andrew Miller

When I turned 13, I was allowed to join a city league team with other guys from my neighborhood. Now, I could play inside gymnasiums, under bright lights, and on hardwood floors without worrying about the weather. The times that my family were financially able to come to the games made me happy. I wanted to perform well in front of my mom, brothers, and sisters to make them proud. (SJ)

I faced my mom and grandma and whispered, "I guess this is it." I embraced them both while trying to secure the fragile dam that blocked tears from spilling down my cheeks. With one last "I love you!" I watched them disappear over the hill. I made my way to the quad and found my orientation group full of other awkward and eager freshmen desperate to make friends. I stared at the people around me, trying to decide who I could burden with shallow conversation. I searched for the most approachable, but before I could choose, a voice came from my right: "Hi, I'm Cassidy!" I turned to see a smiling curly-haired girl. I returned her smile and greeting: "Hi, I'm Adrian!" (AR)

The moon was a sliver of a fingernail from God's finger; He scattered stars across the southern sky. The awesome wonder and beauty of creation left me breathless: WE ARE NO ACCIDENT. (AC)

As I stepped out of the patrol car at the Reception and Medical Center in Lake Butler, Florida, shackled and handcuffed, I had no clue what awaited me. At just 18 years old, I was alone and frightened. In just a few minutes, I was standing nude in a sea of naked men, being gawked at and ridiculed. Aggravation and anger blossomed into a headache that pounded like a jackhammer. I was herded into a shower area, dosed with a white powder as if I were a dog being defleaded, handed a double-edged razor, and told to shave — which was ludicrous since I had no facial hair. The thought of my 125-year sentence frightened me. After passing their inspection, I was given a pair of dingy boxer shorts and socks, a lone pair of prison blues and slate blue Brogans. My life was shattered, but once dressed, my humanity began to return.

Survival became my goal. (CC)

Coming up with ideas, transferring them to paper, thinking about cadence, proofreading, writing the final version in ink, and then reading aloud to the public — for me, that's what poetry is all about. (CC)

In the summer of my senior year in high school, I went to basketball camp at Florida Southern. My junior year was successful, but I still needed to improve my game. I brought with me a travelling bag that held my gym shorts, compression shoes, socks, headband, shooting sleeve, basketball shoes, cooling towel, ankle braces, and mouth guard. I was here to boost my stock before my senior year. (LW)

It was 12:00 a.m. A man on a motorcycle pulled up beside me. As we waited for the light to change, we revved our bikes. Then: 5,4,3,2,1 — our heads snapped back like whips as our bikes stood up on their hind legs like lions defending their pride. We raced down I-4 like cheetahs weaving in and out of trees, breaking the sound barrier and leaving a trail of hurricane-force winds behind. (BJ)

Had a great time at the Jaguar game with my wife and kids. Wife wanted to bring too much stuff and expected me to carry it all. Baby bag with pampers, blanket, wipes and bottles, plus a cooler with sandwiches: drinks, chips, and candy. Now you gotta know, she had to break it all down. (TW)

Andrew Miller retired in 2013 from a career that included research in aquatic systems and university teaching. His fiction and nonfiction have appeared in Front Porch Review, Blue Lake Review, The Meadow, The River, Northern New England Review, Pithead Chapel, Maine Homes, The Evergreen Review, Toastmasters Magazine, and Fatherly. He lives in north-central Florida, volunteers in prisons, restores antique stained-glass windows and writes. He is the Creative Nonfiction Editor of Mud Season Review. His website is <http://www.andrewcmiller.com/>.