

# STITCHING OUR WINGS

*Poetry & Artwork  
by  
Young Women  
at  
Gardner Betts Juvenile Justice Center*



Red Salmon Press  
Save Our Youth Chapbook Series  
2012

Stitching Our Wings: Poetry & Artwork by Young Women  
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CZARINA

POEMS BY  
VICKY H.  
ISABEL A.  
MICHELLE G.  
BRIDGETT L.  
DIANA L.  
NATASHA T.  
JESSICA S.  
TEMPEST S.

## PREFACE

This chapbook is the product of SOY's first experience working with a group of all young women. With Rene and Czarina as co-facilitators and Joao on bass, SOY was assigned to the young women's Drug Addiction Unit. Here we felt we were confronted with the brutality of our society, the society we all create and participate in, the brunt of which has been unfairly and disproportionately inflicted on these young women, who fall at the bottom of society's cares, being young, women, Black / Latino / Indian / Asian (all but one non-white), and poor. From their experiences of rape; domestic violence; and the economies, solaces, addictions, and socialities of the streets for survival in a harsh capitalist society that has no afterthought for those left out of its cutthroat profit equations, we literally witnessed the convergence of white supremacy, racism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism: how their horrors that may be "invisible" to mainstream society are fully unleashed and inflicted on these young women.

Here I would like to pay tribute to the spirits of these young women, as we came to know them in the SOY Poetry Workshops - a temporary liberated zone -- as we came to experience the brightness of their selves that they have been battered back from expressing in the rest of the incarcerated and so-called "free world:"

Vicki, one of the sweetest young women we've worked with, who first approached us with a hard exterior but afterwards greeted each workshop with her sweet brightness. Low Rider culture lives and breathes through her being: she memorializes the old ways, Xicano style, through her love of and being this pivotal historic-political subculture of Xicano Pride and resistance to assimilation from the aesthetic core.

Isabel was released earlier than the rest, so she has no bio here... At first, she struggled to write, having blocks from rape and sexual abuse, but as you can see from her poems, in the moments that she came back to the mundane, present moment or the movements of her body, her words became transcendent, piercing, glorious.

Michelle was the philosopher of the group, most at home in another dimension that this world fails to respect enough. With her seeing eye open, she can travel worlds with her vision and imagination... She was an artist through and through, from her hair and style to her dreaminess and impulse against dominant societal norms and towards freedom. When she got lost writing the worlds she dreamt up through her long poems, we hated to interrupt her and could have let her go on and on... What

you see here are excerpts of her work, for trying to give each poet an equal amount of chapbook space.

Bridgett was a natural poet: She dreamt worlds in her eyes and when she laughed, she was taken to another space of freedom where she wouldn't be punished for being her full sensual self. When she got that dreamy look in her eyes, we knew she was onto something: her "Small Neighborhood Church" poem says it all. She too was fiercely about her freedom, in a woman's way – the spirit of the night!

Diana joined near the end of our ten-week session, but she jumped right in. Out of the few poems she had time to write with us, a couple were haunted by her mourning the murder of her young friend... All the young women appreciated her direct honesty and straightforward style of her poems. It spoke to all their common experiences.

Natasha was the oldest, most mature – most defiant and aloof at first, secure in her intelligence and needing us to step up to her level. My favorite memory of her is seeing her concentrated, with her pen in hand and swinging her legs before she committed a word to paper. Whereas my style and that of others is to free-write the emotions as they come to us, the poems Natasha delivered were well-thought and right on, precise and with no extra words. Her truth can be brutal, towards others and herself, like her life has been.

Jessica was a leader in staying true to her own self-development and staying on track for getting released, expressing determination to steer a course independent of peer pressures. She had an optimism in herself and a brightness that turned back the hands of time and made us remember that these young women are, after all, still youth, even if they are living in an adult world and have had to adapt accordingly.

Tempest released so much of her pain, from rape and abuse, through her poems. Some of her more personal poems could not be published, but this is harsh, harsh context out of which her later sweet, dreamy poems emerged: her process of healing, the survival of her dreams. Through our collective poetry writing and our discussions, she was truly finding ways to "stitch her wings."

**VICKI H.**

*My name be Vicki H. I am 16, born and raised in Austin, Texas. I'm the real deal baby. I like Oldies songs and dressing Low Rider style. One of my songs is "Try Me" by James Brown. I'm also loyal and very unique.*

## OLD DAYS!!!

“Try Me,” “Oh Donna!” --  
That’s what I hear as I remember the times  
Back then.

Black and white jumpsuits, Stacys on my feet  
-- it’s what I wear nowadays.  
My aunt’s old-days shiny ‘Lacs passing  
by tha house to pick her up  
with a loud bang.

It’s all fun memories,  
which leads me to  
my difficult ways. I say I want  
to be just like that.

Red roses I smell and see in my  
grandmother’s garden as I pass by.  
Being there it’s like time  
flies by with her loud laughter.  
We get along and we sing those  
Oldies songs.

Glaring in the Air

I imagine me as a  
Beautiful star,  
flying by  
with a nice bright  
light.

All you can see is white  
tingles in the dark.

As you see me, I glare  
in the  
Air,

Shining my way through  
like I always do.

As I see it comin' my way,  
I sit there and glare,

Dazing off

In my head.

– Vicki H.



## LA CHAVA

“Niña, what’s going on with you?”  
We sat there and talked.  
She told me I haven’t been the same,  
so she wanted to see  
what was up with  
me.

I told her I wasn’t feelin’ well, that I was  
just having flashbacks.  
And for her to leave me alone.

Pero no, there she was!  
komo chikle pegado right behind me  
as she got me in the shower  
and fed me.

She told me that I needed to stop using drugs and that  
she wanted the best for me.

I was laughing on that point, but then she started  
crying. She asked me, what had happened to the  
Old me? She missed the real  
Me.

So that stuck  
in my head.

She told me to turn myself in, that everything will be okay.  
That she will be there for me no matter what.  
And there she is,  
still writing me  
and giving me good feedback that’s making me  
Realize things  
I didn’t  
before.

– Vicki H.

## I DON'T GET IT

Why do I feel this way?

I'm mad.

Why couldn't I stand up for myself?

I'm sad.

Why did everything go that way?

I'm embarrassed.

What is the real deal?

I'm confused.

Is it just me

or was that

Meant to be?

Can they even see tha Real Me,

hiding behind all the nonsense,

asking myself, Why am I so

Tense?

Is that the future I want for

Me?

I have to learn to step up.

I know I can make it through

without a crew

always telling me what to do.

I can follow ma own

Rules

if I use ma own tools.

– Vicki H.

## WHAT DID WE DO TO GET THIS ROUGH LIFE?

Miro la raza as they go down in places,  
as they fight, gamble, and do drugs.

We see prostitutes in the streets,  
we see pandilleros stealing.

What is this all? Why can't they see  
This ain't the way it's supposed to  
Be?

We can't even walk down da 'hood  
feeling free  
because of all da nonsense going on.

Y it even feels like I can't even be da real me  
-- sweet, kind,  
giving, and  
friendly -

as they look me  
Up and  
Down.

I turn around with a FROWN.  
There it goes again!  
That violence, fear and  
Rage I have -  
for my own raza!

So Guacha lo k pasa!  
I say no one was born  
This way.

What did we do to get this rough life?

- Vicki H.

## WORLDWIDE WE RIDE

Dazing off  
in a big maze thinkin' 'bout  
that day: anger, hate!

Cruizin' around tha Northside with my old crowd,  
All proud with no doubt.

Stealing, fighting,  
Worldwide we ride!  
I say, "Just get out my way!"  
All I see is him  
Fly.

Now I sit there and scream and cry.

Now I'm in the TCLA just trying  
to maintain  
and trying to make  
my way through these days  
of sadness and pain.

Dazing off in a big  
Maze thinking 'bout that  
Stupid day: anger, hate!

Cruising around tha Northside  
with my old crowd, all proud  
with no doubt: stealing, fighting.

Worldwide we ride!  
Now there's no one  
by my side.

-- Vicki H.

ISABEL A.

## WE STRUGGLE IN THIS WORLD

Austin South Side --  
Born and raised.

Violence everywhere.

Mom screaming.

Sirens going off.

Jumping in a gang.

Stop and  
Think because

There's no going back.

Throwing parties to celebrate.

Getting drunk  
Until you black out.

Being beat to death.

Seeing my mom cry.

The pain i see in her eyes.

We struggle in this world.

– Isabel A.

## BEING LOCKED UP

The feeling of being locked up...  
Chales, we are always sitting down,  
listening to the staff  
as the day  
goes by.

They're always there to  
see what we got.

Being locked up  
is no fun.  
We didn't think about that with  
the crime we did.  
We always thought  
we could get away with it.

I want a better life  
than what I got  
right now.  
I want to be able to see my family  
at any time.  
I just have to

sit here

until my time is done.

– *Isabel A.*

## RESPECT

How could others respect me  
if they don't know how  
respect is a wonderful feeling?

I believe in respect.  
But I struggle with violence.

I struggle with violence  
because in I'm in a gang.

I struggle to get the respect  
I want.  
Because of drugs,  
I ended up behind a wall  
with 6 other females.

I wonder if I will ever  
get out.  
I am about to go to my visit.

... I don't know  
          what else  
                  to write...

... My mind is plain.  
... I can't think of what to write.

I sit  
in this chair  
with a pen  
in my hand.

I look at my peers.

I see myself.

– *Isabel A.*



## HONORING MI GENTE

Mi Mami:

Even though she cries at night,

Every day she puts up a fight.

Mi carnal:

How he suffers in this world.

It took his life so fast.

– *Isabel A.*

## MY PEOPLE

People,  
My Mexican people:  
the struggle they have.  
They cross the river to come to  
this land.  
They work real hard.

La raza unida.  
La pobreza.  
How many people suffer to come to  
this land?

Dancing cumbia when we celebrate.  
It's fun when I see my people smile!

The way they talk,  
the way they dress.  
The way my mom dressed  
when she came to the United States:  
Like a nun!  
It was different.  
She was all into  
that Catholic thing.

La raza unida.  
I was down for my brown skin.  
I went to the street  
to find my real family.  
They were there for me when I needed them.  
They gave me what I needed.

I thought it was cool.  
I had a lot of respect.  
I thought I had power,  
that I had everything  
I needed.

## OUT IN THE FREE

I got 9 days left until I get out.

I am going to be a free bird  
and fly out!

I am scared  
of what I'll do.

I am going to have my  
space!

Nine months I been locked  
up.  
It's now my time to be out.

All the food and freedom I am going to have!  
It's like starting  
a new  
life!

But staying sober  
is not that easy.

Now I just got to keep it up.

I'm going to have lots of temptations  
for drinking.

Its going to be  
hard for me  
when i am out.

I'll try.

– Isabel A.

## REFLECTION AFTER A BODY MOVEMENT EXERCISE

The beauty.  
The beauty of dancing.  
When my feet  
hear the music,  
they start dancing.

The way they move,  
the way I move...  
The beauty of seeing  
my feet move.

The beauty of  
my hips  
when they start to move  
left to  
right.

They move  
when they hear the music.

My body.  
My body, the beauty of my body.  
The way it moves  
up,  
down,  
left and right.

The way my body  
moves.

– Isabel A.

**MICHELLE G.**

*Hello.*

*Hi.*

*How ya doin? :)*

*My name is Michelle G.*

*from Austin, Texas and Destination: Hollywood.*

*Just playin' :)*

*I'm an artist and musician  
and I look like a scene chick.*

*I'm Italian and Hispanic, a recovering addict,  
and a dreamer.*

*I love big sexy scene hair and skinny jeans.*

*I like to mosh and hard core dance to  
"I Declare War" and "As I Lay Dying"*

*I'm a little tiny chick who's just trying to  
Be free! :)*

*I'm trying to make video games as my  
Life's career  
and sit back and read Marvel Comics.*

## IT'S THA RITZ

I ain't endin' up dead  
But stop and think  
You will never know, am I some sort of show?  
The way I think is survival.

I am good.  
No person should be thrown out because they're  
From the 'hood.  
I am not trouble.  
I am human, true, strong, woman.

Me, I'm me:  
Not a fiend.  
I may be locked up.  
But listen, you critique, your thinking's abrupt.  
No living person or soul should be looked at as  
Unwhole.  
They live.  
We breathed.  
Us human beings!  
Just live my life and you'll see.

– Michelle G.

## PERCEPTION IN DEPTH

Through the looking glass  
What do I see?  
Another person's view of me.

Turn on the music, turn it to a blast:  
Pumping, flowing. Always  
Touching myself to feel reality.  
It's my shape.

Let spirits wither away:  
Reincarnation is around the corner.  
Shhh, speak softly:  
Sensitivity is all you see.

Picking and flicking, just stop that!  
All around the world, gestures flow,  
Plants grow. Don't die away, stay  
Alive tonight.  
For I am me, and Michelle is no  
Other.

Peace, love and the original  
Happiness --  
Together forever no more.

See, young flower: the moon, it shines!  
Soak in the water, to reach the  
Glowing sky.

– Michelle G.

## FACES OF HATE

Names, they call me names:  
Put-downs, let-downs, and  
shame.

I'm locked down: all around,  
quiet, silent sound.

Bits of bites burst --  
Imagination flows.  
You know what I'm going through?  
Can you honestly say you do?  
To twine and bind unseparated minds --  
Impossible, as night turns to day.

Away... I am Mechelle, not in front of them I dwell,  
Never,  
<shout> NEVER,  
Forever in mind prison hell.

They own me, I let them have control.  
They consume me whole and  
Spit the bits of bone.

My dreams --  
Flown, grown, and intershown:  
I tune them out,  
Turn my radio loud  
So they can hear all around aloud:  
My cries are laughter.  
Those pity fools, haven't they got nothing better to do?

Night and day,  
My mind opens and flies away:  
Free,  
Liberated,  
Belated happiness in play.

– Michelle G.



## LIFE AS WE KNOW IT (FAMILY)

What to do, what to say...  
I love you too: Don't go away!

He betrayed.  
Restrained.  
"Let her go,  
freaking let her go!"  
Shoo, fly, go away!  
He never came back,  
Not another day.

My Mom, they don't belong.  
Too strong of a woman, yes we abandoned.  
Glamorous.  
Dust to dust, and a horse is a horse.  
Let me be, let us be family of three:  
M---  
Mechelle  
N---.

Miracles of dancing in the wind,  
Country's sin.  
We live, so no choice but to let them happen.

White to black:  
The scene plays, happy days turn  
Misty haze.  
I smoke and roll.  
I can't take it, I'm not over it.  
Please, come back.  
Daddy, I miss you!  
Just don't hurt us!

I'm scared, by far the worst. My heart thrust.  
Please, just be you, do you know how this  
Show is supposed to go?  
Damn it, these drugs ruined the family,  
Apart more...  
Is like living with the Lochness. A mess.

We're supposed to be happy:  
Us four, not three!  
We're a family, a part of me  
Where'd it all go?

Blank, soundless, a nothing fest.  
Because I'm in a dream, a Gladys fiend.  
Nothing is real  
Because this is my life,  
he left,  
we wept.

Dead and gone out of our lives.  
This poet, just don't know it.  
She's outta her mind trying to find the one  
Who don't pound the blood of the giving tree.

Just please go, because  
I don't know what I want.  
    This is life as we know it.  
    Embrace it and show it.

– *Michelle G.*

## OUT THERE WITHOUT OUR CARE

The way I am living,  
my soul is shivering.

Ring ring ring...  
Every morning it's a reality call.  
Can't even go to tha mall!  
I'll trip and fall, get shot and dead before I can  
Fight back.

...  
My heart races:  
Runs FAST - s l o w -- Stop.  
Too much on my hands!  
I hold our world,  
    He passes it.  
Together, us forever?

...  
The streets are growin', and knowin' our  
Brothas and sistas are out there without our  
Care  
makes me wonder  
and scared.

We need to work together so the children  
Can forever be safe,  
not raped, nor killed, nor  
In danger of any sort.

So the discrimination is like irritation  
That shreds the nation, segregation,  
Abomination, all not cool.

So let's step up,  
Make a difference.  
Change, reminisce all around.

– Michelle G.

## RAGE 'N' FATE

"My place of rage" is now  
like so far, but yet so near...

Spittin' and sprayin'.  
As the moon rises,  
the sky dies, and I know how it feels.

With I undone,  
it's "my place of rage" --  
nowhere near cloud 9,  
it's rage on reality, not just actuality.  
Just so real --  
too real for me to handle.

Stuck on this damn planet.  
I get on my spaceship  
And  
Soon  
Fly away...

I'm high about the clouds  
Until, that is, gravity pulls me down.  
I'll look around and I hate it.  
I am just ungrateful and hateful sometimes,  
Never appreciating anything.  
Except when I'm above, like on a ladder.  
I can see for wonders.  
And Skyscraper will ask me what I see.  
I dare not tell them, for its my place,  
Not theirs.

I laugh in the Tower's face.  
Because, well, that's just the way I am.

One day, they pinned me  
Down, straight to the ground.  
I look below me:  
All I see is fire, hate, rage, and fear  
In what was once so kind to me.

But ashes are what's left:  
So what now?

I fly around and miss the traps.  
Claws try to pull me towards the plants,  
But I say No!  
Don't you dare!  
I'm in my own world,  
So let me be!

Free as a bird and  
Happy as a clam.  
All of a sudden  
BOOM!  
I awake.  
I've crashed to that deep thing called the  
World  
and know  
it's just a dream.

– Michelle G.

## DINOSAURS ROAR & NOW HEAR ME

Liberation of Mind:

Because I am not free does not mean  
I can be pleased as accepting the truth,  
can still soothe the rushing blood within me.  
I am alive:  
Hear me breathe.

I see the need of letting loose --  
It's like calling a truce  
with an enemy called stress.

A river is like  
an adrenalin rush,  
as a woman can brush the malleable  
Silk soft lust with caress.

She's so beautiful --  
Mother Nature, that is.  
Just let her be and you'll be one with her:  
Calm like the gentle touch  
of palm.

Earth:  
Like I'm gonna be here forever!  
My planet is way better.

I like planets that are "down-to-Mars."  
Mines is kinda far and  
we fly high in cars

'cause too low  
is too close to real. Ya feel me?

I want my planet to be proud of me and  
Promise me my people will be down for me.

– Michelle G.

**BRIDGETT L.**

*Hey itz me . . . Bridgett L. I am from East Austin, a place known as the Shack.*

*I'm a very entertaining person. I'm very considerate of others. I'm grumpy in the mornings. I don't tolerate disrespect. I'm very loyal as some people that know me can tell. My life was once hell but I've rose up from that to tell the tale.*

*I like to party and have fun. I don't really have girl friends to hang with. . . . But yeah I gotta stay fly to the sky till I die. I also love tattoos and piercing.*

*Forever me, Bre.*

## SMALL NEIGHBORHOOD CHURCH

Struggle and pain run through my veins!

I wake in the early morning to  
smokers knocking on my  
door and windows . . .

Are they so insane  
they can't see me in pain?

I hear music with  
lots of BASS.

I smell my grandmother cooking "breakfast tacos"  
and, honey, . . . oh how  
the sky is so sunny!

The sun seems to set  
right above the small  
neighborhood church.

I step inside.  
I see older Black women  
with Big hats  
and young Black boys sitting in the  
Way back,  
Laughing and Playing.

I feel the presence of the Lord  
calling my name!

Butterflies and stars  
fill my body.

– Bridgett L.



## REAL BEAUTY

Beauty defines how  
your face Shines...

Even at night  
like the moonLight,  
you cast a shadow  
so bright.

Your hair is  
Jet black, it hangs down  
to the middle of your  
Back.

No one will hurt  
You because of your  
Glory!

So you shall never  
have worries and that's  
A very true story.  
Your beauty lightens the  
Whole safree like the  
Street light does to the  
buildings and houses of  
the city night.

But here I am to tell you:  
Your beauty  
is forever and never  
shall it be taken . . . without  
any doubt about that.

(Your beauty is forever.  
Never give up the honey  
for no sort of money.)

– Bridgett L.

## AS TIME FLIES BY

Time goes by...  
All I want to do is shine. But to shine,  
I have to grind, to earn  
each dime . . .

Money on my Mind -- that's how Ima Shine,  
every minute of my Time . . .

I sit in here and just watch  
the minutes  
and hours  
go past,  
my Eyes too quick for sight.

I can't wait for my return:  
All the leaves have Fallen. The sun has Come out.  
And in all this time,  
No sunshine! -- Only in my mind!

My Freedom is an essential . . .  
My favorite musical instrument.

I feel like a dead Pedal that has fallen  
Out the sky.  
I was just On top,  
now I'm below the low.

I feel as if I'm sitting in hell!  
Should I sell my soul to make me  
feel whole?

My heart feels tart.  
My mind is feeling corrupt.  
No one can tell  
that I am in hell.

– Bridgett L.

## ESCAPING THIS PLACE / HELL I'VE FALLEN INTO

Escaping this place . . .  
Maybe go to Mars  
and visit the stars!

"Space Is the Place" when you need space to erase,  
Give your mind time . . . to shine.  
The minutes go by,  
Seconds . . .

Pink bows and  
rainbows.  
Sitting on a floating sheet  
under Weezy and breezy's feet as  
we meet on the Moon  
at half past noon.

Dreams come to reality,  
with a melody in my head.  
I feel as if the World was dead,  
while I grind as I commit sins.

...Rest in peace mamacita!  
Free my big brothers.  
Man, this all makes my  
Time even harder . . .

Hell I fell in.  
I've fallin' out of heaven...

I want to go to war to get really far.  
. . . Far to the stars ...

There's no light in the night!

– Bridgett L.

## LIFE ON HOLD, LET THE TRUTH BE TOLD

Life feels as if it has been  
Put on hold.

I have no Control!  
I can barely  
Call home...

My mind just roams around.  
If I would have only dwelled on my life,  
then I would not feel  
as if I were burning  
In hell.

I get no mail.  
I don't know who to tell...

Mommy's long gone . . .  
Daddy's nowhere in  
Sight . . .  
so I fight to Survive.  
my life is far from tight.

My Head is spinning as the  
Earth goes around. But  
Now here I am thinking  
I've found that happy  
Place I've wanted for  
So long.

but I was Wrong. the white girl  
Was trouble.  
She left me feeling  
    empty,  
with lots of pain  
running through my veins.

– Bridgett L.

**DIANA L.**

*My name is Diana. I was born in Immokalee, Florida, and I am 15 years old. I grew up in Austin, Texas. My favorite type of music is rock and rap. I'm an easy person to get along with. I like hanging around with friends watching t.v., eating junk food, and really just having fun.*

## I IMAGINE

I imagine the smiles and laughter  
of children,

The sounds of cars passing by.

For a moment,  
Maybe I'm free!

Free to run the streets.

I awake  
with the prompts  
of staff.

Everything goes green.

I'm back to reality.

– *Diana L.*

## STAND BY ME

Stand by me.

Hold my hand.

Lift me up,

Never let me fall.

– *Diana L.*

**“A YOUNG MAN IN HIS LATE TEENS WAS SHOT DEAD.”**

No, it can't be true! you can't be dead! you're only 17!

I ran outside.

I discovered his  
house  
surrounded by cars.

I feel trapped.

My breath kept  
getting

shorter.

I felt as if

the whole world

Surrounded me.

I'm feeling really scared.

oh how I wish I  
could hold you, oh how  
I wish  
I could say

I love  
You

and

goodbye.

– Diana L.



## NATASHA T.

*My name's Natasha. I'm 17 years old. I was born in Austin, Texas, but I've lived in Toledo, Ohio and Shanghai, China. I love my family. I'm a musician, an athlete, a crystal-meth addict, and a writer. I am beautiful, strong, and unique. I am an Aquarius. I believe in God. I am me.*

## WARM RUSH

First that warm rush then  
I'm on top of the world.

I love myself  
Maybe for the first time.

In the end, though,  
The needle brought me to my knees:  
Nothing but chaos and destruction.

I thought it brought respect and dignity  
But it was a curse.

– *Natasha T.*

## FREEDOM

Hands handcuffed  
In front of me.  
Shackles clanking,  
Biting my ankles.

Still I got my swagger  
With my proud head  
Held high.

No one could ever see  
That insecure little girl  
Crying inside of me.

I'm behind Locked,  
Steel doors.  
But internally,  
I've been set free.

– *Natasha T.*

## WHO AM I?

Some days I just don't know  
Who I am anymore.

But I do know  
I ain't that junkie chick  
With a needle in her arm.

I'm not that ignorant girl  
Who dropped out of school  
And ran away from home,  
Believing she could make it on her own.

I'm not that raging monster  
Who tore apart a cheap motel room  
In a meth-fueled fury.

I'm no longer the notorious "tweaky"  
Who cooked meth and forged checks,  
Who was a whore that kicked down doors.

I'm no longer me.

– *Natasha T.*

## TRANSFORMATION (NOT COLD AND NUMB)

I am not cold and numb.  
Not simply dumb.

I am human  
because there's a fire  
burning inside of me.

I am locked up  
for many reasons  
throughout the seasons.

I stole,  
lied,  
manipulated,  
used  
every person  
who truly cared for me.

Now I've learned my lesson.

Now I truly see  
the joke I lived  
all landed on me.

Yet still I wonder  
why I miss so dearly  
that old life

which left me so weary?

– *Natasha T.*

## TOLEDO, OHIO

Toledo, Ohio.  
Rock music blasting:  
Sublime, Rush, Nirvana.  
Driving through town in Papa's Suburban.

Gray faces and  
grayer places:  
A city drained of color.  
A town bleak and dreary.

Snowdrifts piling  
over my young head.  
A perfect day for sledding  
on a dull green trashcan lid.  
Warm mittens and earmuffs  
my mama forces me to wear.

Dirty needles and shattered glass  
mixed among the gravel of my playground:  
I see it  
but don't see it.

Mama's crying  
and Papa's yelling.  
The lights go off  
and it's so cold.

Smoky incense  
burns my eyes:  
The sweet smell of jasmine  
lifts me to my grandmother's  
warm embrace.

Everything will be OK.  
I am a survivor.

– *Natasha T.*

## EVERYDAY AS A CHILD

Everyday as a child,  
on my way home from school,  
I'd pass the prostitutes  
lined up on Rundberg Lane.  
I felt such sorrow for these  
women with sad lost eyes  
and hollow faces.

Everyday as a child,  
on my way home from school,  
grown men would honk and whistle at me.

I was only 10 years old.

It got so bad that  
I would wear hoodies and  
baggy pants  
just so I wouldn't feel so attacked...  
So the creeps wouldn't  
slowly  
pull up  
by my side,  
Ask where I'm going -  
Offer me a ride.

I'd just keep walking  
quickly,  
quickly:

Head down.  
Don't say a word.  
Try to not to shake.  
Never show your fear.

– *Natasha T.*

## CALL IT HEAVEN OR CALL IT HOME

I imagine a magical place up in the sky  
Way beyond the clouds  
Where nobody ever feels the need to get high.

Call it heaven or call it home:  
Once you get there you're no longer alone.

There you will meet your ancestors  
And be united with lost love ones.

– *Natasha T.*



**JESSICA S.**

*My name is Jessica. I'm 16 years old. I'm very outgoing and real cheesy when it comes to writing love poems. But when it comes to writing the real deal, it's true. I love playing volleyball and I don't know, I just like to be entertained and never bored 'cause then I get in trouble. : ) I'm sweet, nice, and easy to get along with, shy at first, but I'll come around. All I want in life is to be sober and successful.*

## I BELIEVE -- BUT STRUGGLE

I've sailed the waters  
and explored the sea.

I've met many fish  
and discovered many plants.

I went through storms  
and enormous waves  
to get where I am today.

My boat has had damages  
I've had to repair,  
just to say  
life's struggle  
isn't fair.

I believe in sobriety,  
but struggled with drugs.  
What brings me back home  
is my family's love.

I believe in freedom,  
but struggle with the law.

What will bring me back home  
are my goals and dreams.

– *Jessica S.*

## IT WAS WRONG

I was with him. It was wrong.

He said he loved me. It was wrong.

He was 32, I was 15.

It was wrong.

There was another, and it bothers me.

It was wrong.

When I first came in, I wanted to protect him.

But now I see that it wasn't meant to be.

It was wrong!!

Today I stopped the cycle.

Today it stopped.

It felt wrong,

but then it felt so right.

When we "were" together, it was an everlasting love.

But now I see that it can never be.

See, if I didn't say anything,

he would have done it to others.

He messed around with me

and with my mother.

But I had to stop

and let you know

That I was that girl.

But not no more.

– Jessica S.

## WE DON'T SEE IT

We don't see beautiful  
but others do.  
People tell me I'm beautiful,  
but I say it's not true.

If my body could talk to me,  
it would say a million things  
like, "You have a wonderful smile,  
and a great personality."  
So why go crazy  
'cause you think you're ugly?  
Just be positive and say you're somebody.

So why think you're ugly  
and say, "Forget me, forget the  
world, they don't know nothing"?

... when really I am beautiful,  
and grateful  
for who I am today.

I am someone who people cannot judge.

I don't care what people say.  
I am someone,  
and I love who I am.

I see beautiful when I look in the mirror.  
I see beautiful when I am myself.

They say people are beautiful,  
but have very ugly attitudes.

But I've changed my ways.  
I know I'm beautiful  
everyday.

I wanna say that all women are beautiful.  
Just look inside yourself and

be grateful.

\* \* \*

“We Don’t See It,” Re-mixed

If my body could talk,  
it would say . . .

Beauty is pain.

When I roll my shoulders,  
I get chills down my spine.

If my shoulders could speak,  
they would say to others:  
“You can’t move like mine.”

— Jessica S.

## WHO DO YOU CALL ON?

Who do you call on  
when you've fallen down deep?

Who do you call on  
when you can't wake from your sleep?

Who do you call on  
when something goes wrong?

Who do you call on? Your Dad,  
or your mom?

Who do you call on  
when you're down in a ditch?

Who do you call on  
when someone  
snitched?

Who do you call on  
when times are bad?

Who do you call on  
when you're feeling sad?

Who do you call on  
when you want to change?

Who do you call on  
when you're already  
rearranged?

I call on  
the ones who love me  
and the ones  
who care.

## TEMPEST S.

*I'm 16 years old, not pregnant, and not dead. Can you believe it? That's what everyone else says! I was born in Fort Worth, Texas and raised in Austin. The only white girl in the 'hood but don't take advantage! I love to write and I miss my freedom. I'm a sweet angel but I have a demon. I've been there, done that, and I've run from my shadows. But now, I'm changing my ways and that's all that matters.*

## DOUBTS

They call me ugly  
and I am not in doubt!

All my life I've been made to believe  
that I'm a no-good nothing.

That I'm just a liar, cheater, and thief.  
But I want to be something.

They call me these names.  
I am starting to accept them.

Should I have to?  
Can I really be someone?

Is what they say really true?  
I do what I do because I want to have fun!

They call me unworthy,  
and I am starting to cut.

I now have scars on my wrist.  
I wish I was too vain,  
But the demons inside me insist  
I just want to be sane.

They call me ugly,  
and I am not in doubt.  
Mama and Daddy told me.  
Why would they lie about that?

So quit staring, let me be!  
What they say is not an opinion –  
It's a fact.

– *Tempest S.*



## THA' HOOD

As I walk down the corner,  
"Hey lil' mama, waz yo name?  
Lemme holla at ya a minute.  
You lookin' for some game?"

As I lay in bed there's knocks  
at my door.  
It's the neighborhood babies.  
They ask for some bread as  
their tummies roar.

I get off the bus  
and turn on Springdale.  
There's a woman passed out:  
She's bloody and pale.

As the phone rings I press  
"Talk" and say Hello:  
"Ey baby I'm locked up.  
Come bail me out."  
But I don't got the money,  
So he screams and shouts.

I go to the store to buy  
Some diapers and milk:  
"That will be \$13.60."  
But I only have \$13.59.  
The owner kicks me out of his store  
And my baby screams and cries.

What more can I get  
in this cold hard place?

I wake up to gunshots and  
hold my breath hoping it  
wasn't someone I know,  
going face to face.

I'm tired of the needles

on our back porch.

Always hustling to pay the bills.  
I'm tired of having to sell these damn  
pills.

I'm tired of smoke filling  
my lungs.  
I'm tired of sleeping on top  
of guns.

This isn't where I was meant  
to be.  
The projects wasn't made  
for us --  
Why can't you see?

There's so much more  
places where we don't have  
to hide . . .  
But then again, the grass  
is always greener on the other  
side.

– *Tempest S.*

## WHERE'S THA' BEAUTY?

"Beauty within me..." -- What does that even mean?  
There's no beauty within me,  
at least from what I've seen . . .

My body contains all this negative heat.  
I'm so angry and tense  
in my muscles, bones,  
brain, teeth,  
hands, and feet.

I want to let the ugly go --  
see what's behind the hate.  
If I'm lucky, maybe some beauty will show!

Until then,  
I will dance, sing,  
write, laugh,  
and cry.  
Hopefully when I'm done,  
I'll feel safe  
in my own skin.

That's what I want --  
just to be happy and  
feel beauty and warmth  
within myself.

But I don't feel it.  
So I put up a front.

"Beauty within me..." -- What does that even mean?  
There's no beauty in me --  
at least from what I've seen...

## SURVIVING

I am a fairy with beautiful wings!  
But I cannot fly.  
What has happened to me?

My once beautiful wings are now  
tattered  
and torn,  
tired and out-worn.

I want to move  
but the wings  
are too heavy for me  
to even  
walk.

I've been scratched and beaten.  
I can't do anything, much less talk.

I'm angry,  
so angry that I feel  
a swarm of wasps and  
stampedes of elephants  
within me.

I feel like I'm in a throbbing mosh pit.  
What now can I be?

Months go by and I stay  
the same.  
I don't know what to do --  
I'm going insane!

Then I have a dream that  
enlightens me.  
It's like I was blind and  
now I can  
see.

My wings  
I hold  
with gentle  
care.  
I stitch  
and I fix  
every single hole  
and tear.

My once beautiful wings  
are now beautiful again.  
I have changed within –  
I am a new me.

I spread my wings  
and cross my fingers.

The rage once within me  
is now a tingly sensation.

I fly up into the sky,  
looking back at what I  
shed behind.

Then I gently  
wave  
good-bye.

– *Tempest S.*

## MY UNCLE

Week by week, he drives miles and miles --  
a truck driver on the go.

He's produced so many smiles --  
the Best Man in my life.

He stayed so strong  
even though he lost his kids and wife.

He would crack jokes  
and show you unconditional love

He lost all family and depended on  
his kinfolks.

Yes, he was an alcoholic and  
drug user.

Every night he would abuse it:  
Laying on the bathroom floor throwing up.  
I'd bring him a rag and glass of water.

I loved him so much; I'd never give up.  
He watched me grow.  
Good and bad,  
he taught me all I know.

Then one day I went on the run.  
I regret it so bad.

Now I'm locked up and  
he blew his head off with a gun!

– *Tempest S.*

## IN MY BRICK CELL DANCING

I'm in my brick cell dancing.  
I imagine your hands on my hips:  
We're spinning in circles, laughing and  
dancing.

I'm crying and feel so alone.  
I imagine your lips brushing me,  
and suddenly I'm home and all is fine.

I'm in bed, shivering, tossing, and turning:  
I imagine you wrapped around  
me.

Now I'm dreaming:  
I'm in class, done with this equation.  
I imagine you writing me  
and I get this tingly sensation.

I'm in court for the last time:  
I imagine you sitting next to me,  
cheering me on.  
Then again, you're all mine.

My time is up and I'm all free.  
I don't have to imagine you anymore,  
because you're right in front of me.

– *Tempest S.*

## OUR WORLD

Meet me in outer space --  
I will hold you close.  
If you're afraid of heights,  
I need you to see this place.  
It may be the only way I can  
Show you how it feels  
to be inside of you.

We can lay for hours – there is no  
Time...  
Or float for hours listening to  
babies come up with rhymes.

We can taste the root beer  
in the clouds.  
It's never silent, just a perfect  
Sound . . .

We can ride the shooting stars  
all the way from Uranus to Mars.

We can slide down the rainbows,  
We don't need cars!  
We can sleep on roses  
and swim in chocolate.

Baby, let's go -- it will be perfect!  
We can run around with hachten man  
and ICP  
'cuz he's our biggest fan.  
We're rock stars and this is  
Our land.

We can go on forever!  
There's no time, so  
it won't ever end!

– *Tempest S.*  
*Inspired by the poem "In My Place of Rage" by Lariza Dugan-Cuadra.*