

I Come From A Teardrop

Poetry & Artwork by Youth at
Gardner Betts Juvenile Justice Center

Edited by
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&
Rene Valdez



Red Salmon Arts Mission Statement

Red Salmon Arts is dedicated to the development of emerging writers and the promotion of indigenous, Chicana/o, Latina/o literature, providing outlets and mechanisms for cultural exchange and sharing the retrieval of a people's history with a commitment to social justice.

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Save Our Youth, a project of RSA, gives voice and empowers “at risk” youth, redirecting self-destructive patterns into positive and creative outlets through participation in writing workshops that focus on culture, arts, and literacy. Workshops help participants build self-esteem and develop verbal/written communication and conflict resolution skills. Previously facilitated by raúlsalinas, SOY has conducted extensive writing clinics in high schools, middle schools, and juvenile justice facilities. Save Our Youth is directed, facilitated, and organized by a mostly volunteer crew of educators, students, artists, activists, and visionaries.

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Hecho en Aztlán

c/s

DEDICATORIA

To the legacy and memory of Xicanindio elder
raúlsalinas
whose spirit lives and breathes
in the work of Save Our Youth
and all the voices of young people
caught in the jail machine.

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Introduction

There's an urgency in the voices you are going to hear coming out of these pages. The young women and men's utterances require our attention – they demand engagement, they demand analysis, they demand change.

The fact that these young people are incarcerated makes them not exceptions. Rather, their experiences reveal a troubling trend in the United States, and increasingly in other parts of the world. Incarceration, as it has in the last thirty years or so, is quickly becoming the preferred solution to social problems. It is more acceptable to put people in cages than to address poverty; it is more acceptable to lock them away than to take a hard look at the ways in which schools and teachers and curricula collaborate to the school-to-prison pipeline; it is more acceptable to incarcerate young, bright men and women than to address their struggles as they transition from childhood to adulthood, than to listen to their anguish, than to offer genuine solidarity and comfort to them, than to learn from them.

Let us not fool ourselves. If these trends to incarcerate continue, what kind of society are we going to inhabit and be an accomplice of in a few years' time? It is well known that, if the incarceration trends recorded in the 1990s continue, by 2020, 2 in every 3 young Black men will be behind bars. We are within a decade of this apocalyptic scenario! I'm reminded of Black Brazilian writer Machado de Assis's 1882 fiction book, *O Alienista*. In it, Dr Simão Bacamarte, a reputed psychiatrist in Spain and Portugal, decides to set up practice in a small Brazilian town, where he ends up confining most of the local population. Dr Bacamarte claimed those under his custody – at one point, 4 out of every 5 persons in the city – were either mentally ill or about to develop an illness. The population eventually revolts, only to later restate Dr Bacamarte in his prominent position.

We live a troubling similar scenario. Yet, when we look at incarceration numbers, as appalling as they are, we hardly get a sense of the day-to-day experience of those incarcerated, of their loved ones, their families, and the communities from which they come. These numbers are unable to grasp the

complex reality that Black and Brown young people have to negotiate simply by virtue of where they are born. The racial segregation they find themselves in is mirrored in the racial composition of the youth “facilities.” There, you will find an overwhelming majority of Brown and Black young women and men, just like you’ll find them overrepresented in the Eastern geographies of Austin — where the worst jobs (and unemployment rates), schools, hospitals, air quality, policing, groceries, and jobs — where the worst quality of life indicators are concentrated. It’s no coincidence. Neighborhood spaces are defined by race; jails, prisons, and “facilities” are defined by race. The geographies of U.S. apartheid are consistent.

As a process that sweeps across generations, genders, and families, mass incarceration accompanies — thus expresses, and thus energizes — a plethora of other related processes that disproportionately affect Black and Brown communities. Young people in “facilities” speak of fathers, mothers, grandparents, lovers, friends, and neighbors who are, were, or will be incarcerated. Often doubting their capacity to not be imprisoned again, they realize the odds are against them, the alternatives too attractive. Too attractive in relation to what? To economic difficulties, to unemployment, to disregard, to discrimination, to the varied types of violence that characterize their lives. So it’s not so much that incarcerated youths choose mindlessly one path of action over the other; rather, their choices are made in contexts where “doing the right thing” is not a viable or attractive option. For example, to study hard and to be a good student and to find a job are difficult to carry out in schools where the teacher are badly trained, the resources are lacking, and whose “education” seldom lifts anyone out of badly paid work or joblessness. And in times of economic depression (that are historically more pronounced in Black and Brown areas), the prospects of work in the formal economy are dim.

The youths’ voices make further connections. They speak of sexually transmitted diseases, of early death by violence and preventable medical causes. Their condition as incarcerated young people allow them to express that imprisonment, as ubiquitous as it is in their lives and in their communities’ lives, is part of a broader constellation of phenomena that affect them disproportionately. Those who are incarcerated are also the ones more vulnerable to AIDS/HIV infection, less likely to have access to adequate medical services, and more likely to die prematurely.

When I listen to the young women and men, several questions to mind. Questions that burn with urgency, questions that require analysis and action. What does it mean to incarcerate teenagers, adolescents? What does it mean to incarcerate young men and women in their teens who often have children of their own? What does it mean that a considerable proportion of the very newest generation in our society is already born to parents who are incarcer-

ated (and whose siblings, friends, parents, grandparents, and relatives are also detained)? Imprisonment as a social policy is a reality that defines not only the historical stage we are at, but also makes an indelible statement about our future. The dystopia of prisons, jails, juvenile facilities, immigrant detention centers – this dystopia defines our current and future realities.

As we sit quietly and watch the rounding up going on, as a group of people we are saying that we acquiesce to it. It's ok as long as it's someone in your neighborhood; it's alright if it's the person next door. What will happen when it's one of your own, in your household, in your family? Here's what Martin Niemöller vividly evoked, at the apogee of the Nazi regime in Germany:

*They came first for the Communists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.*

*Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.*

*Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.*

*Then they came for me
and by that time no one was left to speak up.*

What are we saying, as a collective, as a polity, when we say nothing about the massive rounding up? What are we stating when we naturalize, even by rendering silent, unknown, the over 2.5 million people behind bars in the United States today? If anything, we are affirming, through our inaction, via our silence, that what we consider our good society has no place for “them”; it means that our happiness depends on these young people’s misery. As long as they are locked up, in their detention uniforms, supervised, we are alright.

Of course, when we naturalize the warehousing of people, most of whom are not white, we also refuse to see and overstand beyond what we are presented with. We are constantly presented with the so-called evidence that these youths are in need of control and restraint. We are constantly presented with the argument that our safety and well-being depend on their confinement. Our inaction, our lack of analysis, reaffirm that argument.

The inescapable fact is that those who are rendered the other – the other that is violent, criminal, in need of control, unable to function in society – is just like me and you. Even if our common humanity is challenged by the multi-generational imprisonment that many Brown and Black families experience, the sheer ubiquity of the criminal justice system in the lives of those communities segregated by race makes it so that someone who is close to us, or our own

selves, will become incarcerated. In Washington D.C., for example, if you are a Black male, there is an eighty percent-plus chance that you will be incarcerated at least once in your lifetime.

Dehumanizing the incarcerated is therefore a way of dehumanizing ourselves. The young people whose voice you will hear know it. Their urgent re-claiming of their humanity emerges laced with a necessary utopia. Amid the stories of their neighborhoods, loved ones, daughters and sons to be, parents, grandparents and elders gone but whose spirits live in their wisdom and courage, together with the pain and the struggles, these young people conjure up a better world because they have no other choice but to find that better world. They want to do good, but know full well that the conditions they will be thrown in need to change. (That is why, for those who lost hope, and are unable to conjure up a utopia, the return to the institution is a sure thing.) Just as simply, we, yet-to-be-locked-up, have no other choice but hear them out, engage them, and search, with them, for this better world. There is no other choice.

~ João Costa Vargas

Ed. Note: The youths' initials have been used as per regulations. All other names appearing within poems have been changed.

THE PROCESS / gratitude

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Despite Hard Times

I come from the ghetto. I come
from how do I put it . . .

Struggles.

Hard work,

loyalty,

money. I was

Never a child. I was

Never dumb. I was

Always in trouble,

Always gone.

I stayed in school:

Education is important.

I come from LBJ.

Making the wrong decisions:

Mama On the run,

Daddy In jail.

I had No choice.

Gone for 6 months to a

Place that I hate

So I stole just to

Be happy &

Keep lil' bro home safe.

But if I could do it again

I would change nothing at all,

b/c through my downfalls

I overcome it all.

It's messed up, I know.

But if I keep my head up and

just stay strong,

I'll make it through this world

independent and strong.

ima always take care of mine

despite hard times.

– D.F.

Dear Mama!

Never liked your boyfriend.
But you did,
so I was there.
Supported you through everything,
Even if it wasn't fair.

I even kept the lights on,¹
Illegal and all.
I kept you food on the table
Even if it's my downfall.

Your kids are my kids:
That's what I was taught.
Even though it f****'d up my head,
I still won't say you're
My downfall.

I love my mommy forever
And I'ma always be there
Even with gray hair &
Wheelchair.

LOVE ALWAYS,
YOUR DAUGHTER

— D.F.

¹Note: When parents haven't been able to pay the electricity bills, some of the youth at Gardner Betts (when they were children) found ways to keep the lights on. Often this was their first brush with "crime."

We dance

First the piano,
Then the bass,
 the trumpet,
 and my favorite, the sax.

We dance:
I'm shy.
You lead,
I follow.
People are watching
But
we're having
fun!

it's time to go now
'cuz I'm Cinderella.
Maybe
 one day
 we'll find
 each other.

— D.F.

Down

Im by your side,
even through the nite
Down forever
until it gets better.

Im by your side
through struggles and trials.
Down and always
standing my ground.

Im by your side
even when you're not,
Keeping you up
when you're down.

Down forever,
until the end of time.
Ya' girl! D-- will always

Be

Down.

– D.F.

Bird

The bird is free,
And so is my mind.
As the clock is ticking,
I run out of time.

The bird has wings
But I haven't grown mines.
The clock is ticking--
I'm running out of time.

The bird is free,
But I am not.
I'm stuck in a rut,
Stuck straight out of luck.

They're starting to sprout
Out of my back.
My knowledge is growing...
I caught my slack.

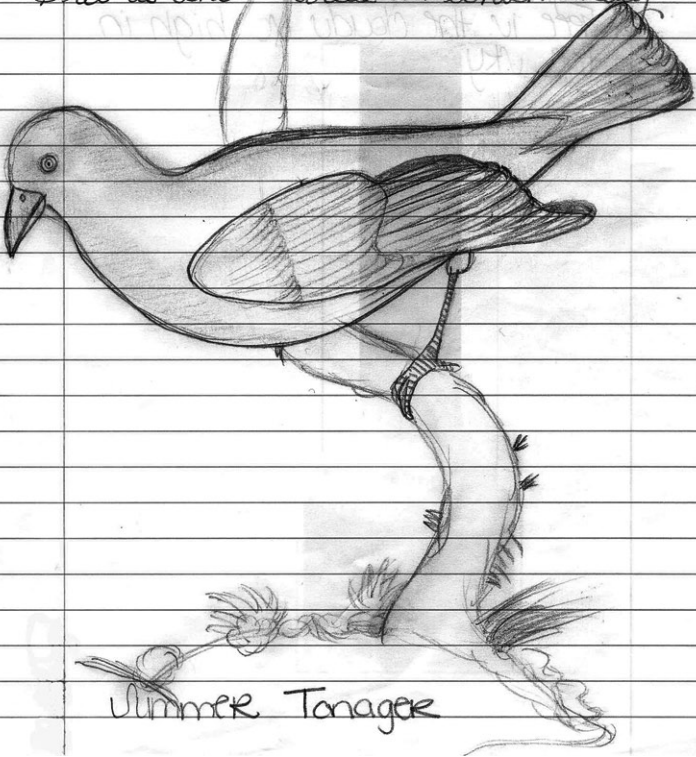
— D.F.

I Free

Free as a bird in the big
blue sky

Free as clouds way up high

Free as the trees in which I lay



Summer Tanager

L.M.

Where I Come From

I come from the south of Mexico.

I grew up with both parents.

I have wasted
 half my life
running the streets
smoking
drinking
and snorting cocaine.

I've gone in
 and out
of jail.

Raped many
 different
 times.

Pregnant twice.

I've been in abusive relationships
 from time to time.

– L.M.

The Real You

I hate you Lorenzo²
4 all the BS you put me through.

It's like I could
never
make you happy.

You always
hit me
when I did something wrong.

You always
put me down.

I fell for all the pretty words you told me.

I was too blind to see
the real you --
the abusive you,
the real Lorenzo.

Not the nice one
who bought me
roses and
candy
every night.

– L.M.

²Name has been changed.



S.M.

LSI (Low Self-Image)

She's young
pretty
and has LSI.

People put her down –
That explains why.

She has a beautiful heart
and a beautiful face.

It hurts my heart
that she in disgrace . . .

I pray at night
that her faith will grow.

It's a shame 2 me that
she has no hope.

Young
Black and
pretty
with LSI.

– S.M.

The Streets Are Calling You Home

Growing up in the streets,
Trying to make you a home.
Never knowing what's your next move,
Being there all alone.

You think you have friends,
But who are they to judge you?
You're broke and struggling,
Not knowing what to do.

You use sex and drugs
To ease your pain.
You have guys who say they love you,
But they're all lies --
Lies you listen to
Because that's what you love to hear.

You say the streets is where you come from
But you say these words with fear.
Your parents try to help you,
But you say, "I'm grown."
Your mom says, "Get out—
This is not your home!"

You're all alone on the streets,
And now you're pregnant with a baby.
You do so many things
To raise yourself like a lady.

It's too late:
The streets are calling you home.
When you're misled, the cops catch you
And you're all alone.

So before you make that mistake,
Change your life around
Or else you'll fall
And bring yourself down.

— S.M.

Mama

Mom, I apologize
for everything . . .

For hurting you,
Stressing you,
And doing wrong towards you.

I know we had our ups and downs,
But I'm ready!
Ready to be the daughter you once had . . .

Mom, you have been there for me
More than anyone else.
I want to thank you
For everything you've done for me

Without you,
I would not be here on this earth
Breathing today . . .

It's hard to imagine.
I thought it would be easy,
But it's not.
And I'm writing you
an apology letter.

— S.M.

Sometimes I Cry

When I'm by myself,
I cry
because I'm all alone.

The tears I cry
are wet
and warm.

They roll down
my cheek
with life,
but take no form.

I cry when my heart is torn.

I cry because I'm on my own.

It's painful and sad,
and sometimes
I cry.

But who
do you know
that stops
to help another
carry on?

Sometimes
I cry
when I'm all alone.

I cry
when I miss my baby boy
in my arms
smiling and laughing
and enjoying me

Sometimes
I cry.

— S.M.



April 9, 10

Street Life

Growing up
 on the streets
in Dallas, Texas
without money
or food to eat.

It was hard
 selling your body
for drugs and food.

Mama was looking for me.
She was hurt and lonely.

And my baby wanted his mama.
But I was so much
 in my addiction,
I was not worried about anything.

Growing up
 on the streets --
Getting raped
 and beat
was hard

But I
 am strong.

I made it through.

— S.M.

V.V.

Singing Them Love Songs

Thinking of the song "I really miss my dawg" by Z-ro ...

Makes me feel sad
when I think of being away
and my brother singing this song to me.

Makes me feel happy
when I think of riding
with my sister and brother
& I think of my nephew saying
"I really miss V--." [ed: baby's nickname for her]

Makes me feel happy
& motivates me
thinking about hard times.

Thinking of the song "I can't live with out you" by Lil Susie ...

Makes me get through hard times, when I'm sad.
I think of my boyfriend
singing that to me.
Makes me feel happy.

When we argue,
He plays that song.
All Latin hip hop songs
Make me happy
And get through hard times.

I think of when I was little:
All the good times
with my mom and dad.

I think of just good moments
with my brother
singing them love songs.

It just makes me feel better.

– V.V.

In My Hands

I come from the South of Austin, Texas.
Living on South First Street,
having family that cares about me.

Having struggles in my life.
Having the light turned off
from time to time.

Guys that are loyal to me.
I've been in pain
from time to time.

Got hurt,
heartbroken.
People that don't care about me.
Sometimes I've let people
take that power.

But now I realize
I have the power in my hands
and I want to get my education

And not worry about those people
that hurt me.
Move on,
forward in life.
Worry about myself,
not other people.
Just me and my family.

Having my nephew in my life
motivates me.
Having my Mom, Dad, and brother
always there for me.

Having a lot of things on my mind,
I lost my child time.

It hurt.
I feel like it's my fault.
But it's not.

– V.V.

All I Need

I imagine:

me,
my little nephew,
and my brother
outside
feeling the breeze.

The trees swaying
back and forth,
seeing the cars
go by.

My little nephew throws
a colorful ball around.

Seeing the leaves fall down,
Watching my mom and dad going
back and forth
on the rocking chair,
laughing at my brother's jokes.

Seeing the beautiful sun
in my eyes.
Hearing my little nephew
say, "I love you."

Seeing my boyfriend,
light-complected,
wearing black
and white
with his gold chain,
smiling with his
white teeth.

Gabriel³ and my family is
All I need.

— V.V.

³Name has been changed.

Today I Was Angry

Today I was angry
about this nurse
who hurt my feelings.

I wanted to hit her.

But I thought
before I acted.

Because I have two weeks.

I'm trying to go to the half-way house
And I know I changed.

I changed my ways.

I'm trying not to be the way I was.
I didn't care about life.

— V.V.

J.V.

Always Together

You ain't stopping me
from being with my mother.
 We are always together
 in my heart.

It's a struggle
seeing my Big Brotha
 in the pen
 for committing a lot of sin.

He told me in his cage
his struggle
 with rage
 of going crazy.

He told me he ain't goin' to be in population
for a long time
 and f*** the nation

 while he's sinking.

— J.V.

My Power

My Power
 comes from within me
 and outside of me.

Money
 Power
 family

My qualities and values are more important.

Coming from the street
 u got to slang
 and fight for colors.

I rather take care of my mother.

I got the power.
 It's like knocking
 down a tower.

With money
 u can't be lonely.
 Hopefully it tell the holy.

— J.V.

Rene Valdez

Praying for Freedom⁴

Sliding past first line of personnel,
We are lead down a hall.
Us – a ragtag army carrying bent pens, torn paper,
& an upright bass.

Thick steel doors with small rectangular windows
Separate us from locked-up Black & Brown youth.

With a simple turn of their skeleton key,
We enter a chamber
Where they do their time.

-Are you locked up or locked down? Jonathan asks
Eyes light up.
We feel the buzz –
the anticipation & excitement
ritualizing the elements of humanity thru sound
and vibration.

Scratching symbols on paper,
praying for freedom –
freedom from this madness,
letting go of this sadness.

we tell them who we are and why we are there –
-to learn how to be human again- . . .

-are we not human? one youth asks.

-if they thought you was human would you really be here?-
is what I want to tell him but “staff” sits there --

Just Watching.

Watching every move, listening to every word
& note.

-That's my rhythm- a young Mexica says enraptured,
Smiling as fingers thump a sick Coltrane bass line:

A Love Supreme. A Love Supreme.

Breaks thru this thick smoke of violence & abuse

of *yes-Sir's* and *no-Sir's* and *can-I-get-up-to-get-my-notebook-Sir* and *can-I-get-up-to-go-to-the-john-Sir* and DO WHAT I SAY AS SOON AS I SAY OR GO TO STRAIGHT TO SOLITARY.

raw bass sounds disturb this physical and spiritual brutality,
awakening consciousness—
shakin'em up outta bondage.

Time is suspended getting at the cut of eternity.
Rhythms - wordsnotes - chants — prayers, for a moment,

Breathe . . .

We Shape-shift into spiritual vessels:

Spitting their slang about surviving the streets,
Hustling for a quick dime
Busting into homes on the run.

In there they don't get to feel the sun on their skin.

Our circle is broken by random searches --
rummaging thru their personal belongings,
looking between mattresses,
pulling up the sheets,
even thumbing thru notebooks
and underwear.

We tell them to focus
on words
and rhythm.

They can't corrupt our circle of strength— I tell them.

They find nothing — no weapons,
no drugs,

no contraband.

Just family photos
and letters folded in books.

One of the Chicanitos reflects, *-for some strange reason,*
the music "goes" with the searches,
like in a movie . . . -

keep goin'

and the cipher continues

like Black improvisational music.

what is it?

A Coltrane solo as a form of freestylin'.

Uninterrupted laughter.

a young brother tell us the music calms him.

— Rene Valdez

⁴A work-in-progress from the perspective of facilitator, Fall 2009,

K.C.

A Thousand Apologies

A thousand apologies
I could give.
But would it make up
for the life I've lived?

I put so much pain
in the ones I love
and began to turn my back
on the ONE above.

Day after day
I've asked the Lord, Why?
Why must I be here?
Why must I be me?

My thoughts tell me,
"Say a prayer & get on my knees."
That's the time
my prayers are received.

— K.C.

Holding “My” Twins

I was there at the hospital
When “my” twins were born.

As one of them
P U S H E D
out of my brother’s girlfriend,
I cried
happy tears
and said, “I’m an uncle!”

As the last one pushed out,
the nurse took them
and cleaned them off.

I was the second one
to hold them
and I was happy to be there.

– K.C.

Freedom Is...

Freedom is
Being You
without no one telling you
how to be you.

Freedom is
Being There
for your family and
being with your friends.

Freedom is
Love and responsibilities
that you have to handle
in order to be a free person.

– K.C.

I Feel Good

I feel good 'cause
I get to go home next month
and play with my niece and nephews
All Day
and chill with my brothers.

Also, I get to wear
my own clothes
and shoes
and eat a lot of good food.

– K.C.

D.J.

Let It Slide By (A Whole Lot Of Struggle)

I come from Providence, Rhode Island.

Running the streets was all I knew.

Lights were cut off
when my Mama couldn't afford the money.

I started to run the streets even harder than before.

I started to sell my body at 15
for money.
And I knew I wanted more.

Hustling with my brother
was my way of getting money.

I've seen my sister get molested
when I was five,
not knowing
what to do.
So I just let it slide by..

I used drugs to take away the pain.
I thought I was going insane.

I am a strong Black woman
with a whole lot of struggle.
I let people run over me.
Because in the past,
I let people take advantage of me.

But today I am free
From all the struggles and pain

That got me to be me.

– D.J.

Trapped Inside

I'm afraid to go to sleep at night.
I talk back to staff, knowing it ain't right.
I stuff my feelings inside my head.
It's kind of weird: I'm afraid to go to bed.
I'm tired of being tired, I'm fed
Up and I wish it was over 'cause

I'm tired of going through what
I'm going through.

I'm a Phase 2 and I don't do what
I'm supposed to do. People are here
to help me, not hurt me,
so I'm tired and confused.
I'm sick of being
this person that is trapped inside,
that I don't know how to get out.

– D.J.

Fortune Cookie

You're my power
that lifts me up.
You're my life
that keeps me moving forward.
You're my strength
that opens my eyes.

I lost you
when I was two.

That was a big surprise.

You're the one
who helped bring me
into this world.
I can't believe you left me
for another family.
I cried so many nights
when you weren't here.

I called your name,
but all I got
was a blank stare.
You turned
into one of them.

So why bother
to come home.

I open the wrapper
and read the message:
"You are strong,
but never give in.
Keep on moving.
Don't let anyone stop you
from being you!"

Fortune Cookie.

– D.J.

Young Female

You're still young
and you have a lot ahead of you.
Let me tell you what I've been through.

I went through the same thing
when I was your age,
being incarcerated and wearing beige.

It's not fun, it's not a game
but you might laugh
and think that it's lame.

When I heard about you, I knew right then and there
you were another version of me
when I went there.

I got molested and it makes me angry
when I hear you're out there,
doing it big.

If you catch an STD, that's you.
But I'm trying to tell you
before you go down that road.

It's not fun, young female.
Don't let anybody bring you down.

Young Female.

– D.J.

Dear Brother

Why do you have to get incarcerated?
I hear you're not doing so good in there.
Don't give up 'cuz I'm here.
You can change your life around
Instead of hustling and hitting the ground.
Instead of getting money in a negative way,
You can get a job and work every day.

Don't be like Lil Wayne:
A flip flop.
And when you get out, don't be stupid
And run from the cops.
Don't be what you call a gang member.
Just get out on your birthday
In September.

I'm telling you this for a reason
'Cause I wish to spend time
With you in the season.

So dear Brother,
I am like your twin
Please don't commit any more sins.
So get rid of that street life.
Suck it up and begin a new life.

Dear Brother,
I didn't want the opportunity
To listen to anyone.
But I went out to the club to have fun.
And I thank you for being there for me.
I want you to open your eyes
and see there is a new D. --
there is a brand new me.

When I get out this time,
For sure I want you
to stop that street stuff.
Dear Brother.

– D.J.



C.P.

Hands in Diamond Shape

Doin' time in a place
where you can't wear your own clothes.

When you count through the doors,
you got to have your hands in diamond shape.

If you see things in my perspective
You'll see it as a joke.

They get you for little stuff
and they teach you thangs you already know.

And in here you can't even get out there with nobody
cause the staff will just break it up.

But I know in my last placement
You'll get you're a** beat up

No kickin', no grabbin' just straight up boxin'
2 minutes in the room while the staff watchin'.

— C.P.

All They Mess

People talk all they mess
But they ain't 'bout what they say.

People play too many games
When I ain't in the mood to play.

People like to bump too
But that's what's up.

I ain't like them other people --
I knuck when I buck.

Wear something, shoot something.
If you gonna bump yo' guns
You might as well do something.

– C.P.

Put On This Earth

The reason I'm on this earth is because . . .
Well I ain't gonna lie.

I was probably put on this earth
To do God's will
But really I've been just doing my own thing.

My talents R negative!
But I'm good at sports too.

– C.P.

L.H.

New Beginning

Daddy,
I want to let you know
I'm sorry
for what I put you through.

We had more laughs than cries.
Daddy,
I know I hurt you:
A hurt that I shouldn't give.
I didn't mean to --
It's just the things I went through.

Daddy,
Let me tell you
The past is the past:
and we have a
NEW BEGINNING.

now I'm looking forward
feeling
my baby kick.

my heart skips a beat.

My baby boy makes me think.

TICK
TOCK
Time's almost here.

Getting ready for a new beginning!

Baby boy,
Our change
is like a Butterfly.

Being here
makes me sigh.
Can't wait to see you
Open your eyes.

May 20
will be the day.

— L.H.

Somewhere scary

Where I come from
is somewhere scary.

Scary to me because I got hurt
too many times.

Those many times in my life were
happy, sad, lonely, depressed,
and angry.

As you can see,
I have a lot on my mind.
But I never really talk about it.

Where I come from is
somewhere I don't want
my son to be around:

The same people who hurt me.

Even when you're not here,
it reminds me of the first times
we ever spent.

You have caused me too much pain.

So now

I'm letting go.

– L.H.

My Power

Power was something I needed.
I have been through a lot
where I do have power.

But my power is something
I don't use a lot.

Mostly because
I want to do what I want to do,
Not what anyone else says.
Power is something
I come from,
Something that helps me.

It even helps me
Get out of things that
I'm not so sure
I want to be around.

– L.H.



April 8, 2010

You were the one

You

were the one

who said

I did everything.

But No,

you

were wrong.

– L.H.

Tired

I want to go home.

I'm tired of being in this place.

This place is somewhere

I didn't want

my li'l brother

to see me:

in this ugly

-looking

khaki.

I'm sorry

you had to see me like this.

Paco , I promise you,

I ain't ever coming back here.

— L.H.

Early Morning

I imagine...

seeing me back home in the

early morning,

waking up

to see my baby boy

SMILE,

Knowing

he can smell

Grandma's food.

– L.H.



I Come From A Teardrop

I come from the 'hood
Where everything's not all good.

I come from the streets
Where sometimes my heart skips a beat.

I go through the struggle
Where you get money, flip it,
And make double.

I come from the night
Where sometimes
There is no sunlight.

I come from a teardrop
'Cause when I cry,
A piece of my body dies.

I come from love
'Cause I love Love more than
Love loves me.

And when evil tries to provoke me
I run away,
but I can't leave.

I'm stuck hiding
beneath these sheets.
I don't peek
because I'm scared.

I can't talk
'cause I can't breathe.

I come from fear.

– L.H.

Blue

I feel blue, sad — kinda depressed.
But imma keep pushin' and make the best.
I wanna give up — go all or nothing,
Do something.

I hear the music in the background
But my heart and mind ain't sayin' nothin'.

I still feel sad.
I wanna put everything I ever had,
Burn it and throw it in the trash.

I'm shakin', trippin',
My mind is flippin'.
Tossing and turning I couldn't sleep.
I had a nightmare last night —
It scared the hell out of me.

Man, I'm trippin', right?
Eyes are blurry even with my glasses on.
Is it my body?
What is it?

I been feeling weird ever since yesterday.
I wanna cry
But I can't let it come out.

*It hurts 2 see her cry
and them cry.
But we gotta keep pushing.
Imma pray 4 you,
4 all of y'all.*

Y'all beautiful young women.
I hate 2 see y'all feeling like this.

All the stress. All the tears.
The heartbreaks feel
Like broken glass.

*Don't go on me, 4 real.
Just chill, smile, be happy.*

Big Brother

He locked up
Fixing to go to county.

Stepping in my shoes,
Screamin' loudly.

No one can hear --
No matter how LOUD
You scream.

I've gotta stay strong
No matter how bad the drama
Goes on in the team.

Give up? Can't do that.
Locked up for a few
100 stacks.

Pray 2 god he's okay,
Hope the family sees a
Brighter day.

I keep getting locked up --
I'm so ashamed.
I set a bad example
For my Big Bro.

I love him 2 death.
First time in my life
I heard him cry
On the phone.

My momma's stressing
and so am I.
She said she wish
She die.

– L.H.

Living in a better creation

My son, my mom...
I imagine us living in a better creation.

Beauty..
Piece of my heart
who's not with me.

Now do you feel me?

I imagine playing pillow fights and
hide-and-go-seek,
telling scary stories under the sheets.

Him and I
kickin' it like father like son.

I love him more than anything.

My mom is beautiful,
my soul.

I imagine holding her legs
when I'm sad.

I imagine my son
doing the same.

I imagine teaching him
2 ride a bike
and eating candy
on Halloween night

and telling him not to kiss girls
'cause they got cooties.

I imagine all of us
2gether
Being a happy family.

(eye) imagine.

– L.H.

About the Facilitators and Guest Artist

CZARINA AGGABAO THELEN (Facilitator, Editor)

Czarina is a Pinay dancer who writes about indigenous peoples' cultural activism and organizing for ancestral land recovery. She previously was senior community organizer at Mothers on the Move and Youth on the Move in the South Bronx and was featured in Celina Su's "Streetwise for Book Smarts" (2009). She facilitates theater and writing workshops to uproot internalized oppressions and create social change.

JOÃO COSTA VARGAS (Facilitator, Preface)

João teaches Black Studies at the University of Texas at Austin and is a jazz musician.

TAÑIA RIVERA (Guest Speaker)

Tañia Rivera is an ex-pinta, who is a seventh-generation Tejana raised in East Austin. She began volunteering at Red Salmon Arts in the fall of 2009, and now is a staff member for RSA. Tañia is the founder of Red Salmon Arts' new project, Ex-Pinta Support Alliance (ESA), which organizes for social change by working collectively as a support network with formerly incarcerated women.

RENE VALDEZ (Facilitator, Editor)

Hailing from East El Paso, Texas, Rene is a working-class Chicano cultural worker, community organizer, and media activist, who migrated to Austin in the late 1990s. He began as a volunteer for both RSA, and the community-based Resistencia Bookstore. Since 2000, he has worked closely as a student, political comrade, and caring son of Xicanindio elder poet/human rights activist Raúl Salinas who founded RSA and Resistencia Bookstore. Presently, Rene is the Executive Director of Red Salmon Arts and one of the many caretakers of Resistencia Bookstore. For the past few years, he has facilitated the intensive writing workshops of Save Our Youth, a RSA project, and edited several SOY collections of poetry and writing.

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