

## 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."