



THE MAGAZINE





## Editor's Note

# Matthew LaBonte

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*With special gratitude to:*

**Executive Director, DU PAI** Dr. Ashley Hamilton

Welcome back to *Reverberations*! It feels like we're picking up steam around here. Thank you to all the contributors who have made the brave move to put themselves out there. We are in the midst of changing our homebase to The Beacon, and in the process hit some bumps, unintentionally ignored others and still done our best to honor our readers, writers and artists of all varieties. You'll notice *Echoes of...* and *Artist Profile* are missing in this issue. Don't worry, they will return. In their place, we have featured some artists from the Chained Voices 2022 show. As you can see we have a new mailing address, but our mission remains the same: to feature the talent, voices and hearts of those who live and work behind the walls. We're taking steps never before taken and need each and every one of you more than ever. Onward...

**Art Credits:** pg 1-3 Jose's Theory of Evolution by Jose Cabrallopez; pg 7 untitled by Michael Severson (SCF); pg 19-21 background image Eagle Flag by Andrew Montano (FCF); pg 20 Soldier Flag by Andrew Montano (FCF); pg 22 The Green Wave by Chayce Anderson (AVCF); pg 23 Elvis by Joseph Taylor McGill (FCF); pg 23 Keith Richards by Dale Bruner (SCF); pg 24 Lil Wayne by Ajueal J. Fleeks (FCF); pg 24 Chris Tucker by Ajueal J. Fleeks (FCF); pg 25 Social Anxiety by Raymond Spencer (FCF); pg 28 Earth by Victor Gonzales (SCF); back cover Boldly by Robert Hill (SCF); All other images created by Reverberations staff.

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## With(in)



*Reverberations* is a high quality literary and visual arts magazine with engaging, thought-provoking ideas, providing a critical and creative outlet for incarcerated individuals and serving as voice for a community of writers and scholars, artists and visionaries, to grapple with big questions, stimulate minds, and spark imaginations. *Reverberations* aims to educate writers, make incarcerated creators and readers feel valued and ultimately, to deepen the conversation on who is in prison. *Reverberations* nurtures emerging writers through feedback and guidance, explores exquisite beauty even in darkness, and provides substantive literature to readers inside and outside Colorado's prisons.

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**We want to hear from you!** Tell us what you think, what you feel about our magazine, about what you find on it's pages. How has your world been affected? Write to: Letters to the Editor, *Reverberations The Magazine*, PO Box 300, Canon City, CO 81215. Your opinion matters to us, but of course we reserve the right to edit for content and length. Please include a signed submission packet.





## Jose's Theory of Evolution

*"The evolution of one's self is always as painful as the day we were born."*

C.O. Stratton CTCF CH5

life coming and life going framed together

or frozen since time's beginning

one's past leads to different paths

turning around is tiring

nothing happens by chance

there is no mistake-ing

growth happens by change

fire fills the negative space

your primitive faded self drips

no footsteps there to retrace

what's next in your evolution

sweaty blood foreshadows rebirth

you'll need a place of rest

merely a hand upon the knee

soon there will be dusk

no light only ghosts or

are you an immortal man of earth

impervious to change and becoming

fighting back to back with

the ways of what once was

there is no turning back

become full by being empty

commit to your primal being

out there free to leave your mark

unleash your wildest hope





## About Jose's Theory

by Tim Wakefield/CTCF

Jose "Triny" Cabrallopez painted the picture behind these words while he was confined behind the walls of Colorado Territorial Correctional Facility (CTCF). His painting inspired the poem "Jose's Theory of Evolution". Even though Jose is back in Juarez, Mexico, his journey on the inside continues with us. He won't even know about this until he sees this issue of *Reverberations*. I believe he will realize his voyage continues to inspire more art and more artists.

Four photographs of Jose's painting are all I have left of him while I am still here in CTCF working in the prison infirmary. He is way down south, across an international border, caught in the

middle of a cartel war. Sounds terrible and sad and scary until I tell you that Jose is fulfilling his dreams of healing his community with his art, and probably a lot of coffee and cigars. But his community is ours and it knows no borders thanks to art. I am here keeping his creation alive in Colorado's oldest prison infirmary.

I am an Offender Care Aide (OCA) III there. It feels like my calling, like a person that is me is needed in that environment. Lots of heavy human things happen down there. Trauma fills the air, but I try to see it as a citadel of healing for the southern Colorado correctional facility complex. To see it only for its trauma would proliferate a sense of hopelessness.



The crises are felt by everyone, residents, security staff, and nurses alike. It is hard to imagine a world where we don't constantly carry the burden of "others" like a ball and chain or a cumbersome and loud duty belt cinched around our minds, around our hearts, and around any other place our love and compassion could come from. That hypervigilance and trauma isn't simply unbuckled and exchanged for a chit at the end of our shift.

Thankfully we have a place in the infirmary, a table big and strong that gives us a space to gather and process our daily experiences. For every bad experience we have together in the infirmary nightmare, that space—the table—gives me an opportunity to somehow bring a balancing force that generates positive, healing energy. Usually that force looks like conversation, gratitudes, compliments and definitely a lot of humor. Sometimes just silence.

But one day instead of laughter, I decided to experiment with Jose's painting—the one you are now looking at—I showed it to the entire shift who came to rest at different times of the day. I asked each person questions that would require them to get a little vulnerable but in a safe place. "What do you see? What does the painting mean to you?" I asked them with a smile. "How do the colors make you feel?"

The words they conveyed, their body language, told a story that almost made me cry. Everyone intently focused, eyebrows furrowed, jaws clenched, heads turning sideways, squinting,

pursed lips, shoulders shrugging. I encouraged them to dig deep. "Come on, get weird. You are safe here in the infirmary with us." I could easily see the moment their fear of being vulnerable turned into happiness and strength. The discussions and analysis of Jose's art became so beautiful and rich.

It was also an exploration of each other. We got to see a different side of one another. I sat there collecting their thoughts with my pen; some of their words translated into my own. I quickly reorganized it all into the poem you have just read. Then, in a fair exchange of vulnerability, I performed the poem for them with a little magic. Sitting at that table we transformed visual art into written word with the same tool we transformed our experiences in a hard place into something that felt good: collaboration. I even think the infirmary was transformed and will continue to be when everyone who contributed relives the experience through seeing it recorded here in print. Everything is a creation of everything just like an artist's work is never finished, when it is perpetually absorbed into humanity or the collective human conscious.

Jose Cabrallopez famously said, "I came to prison to be set free." I wonder if he ever imagined healing and freeing a table full of humans when he started painting an ape. I haven't seen or heard from Jose since he left, but we are still working together through our art to make the world feel better. Deep enough? Art is as deep as life and in our shared humanity, I am because you are!



**COLORADO PRISON RADIO**

## What's playing on Inside Wire: Colorado Prison Radio?

We beam music, stories, news and entertainment into prisons across Colorado, and are the only prison radio station in the universe to stream on the internet to interested listeners around the world!

## How can you tune in?

CDOC residents and staff can listen via the closed-circuit television network in your facility. Scan for new channels if you don't already have it on your dial.

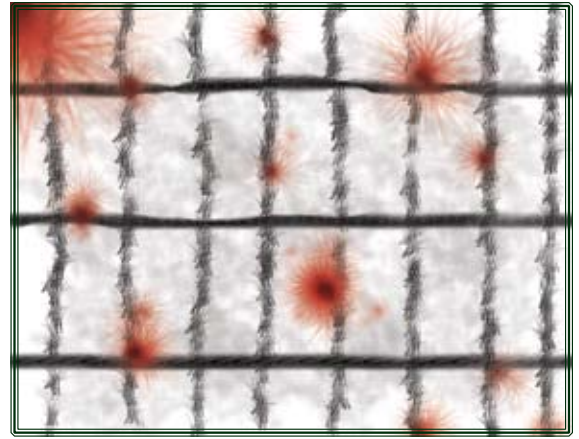
Outside listeners can find us at [coloradoprisonradio.com](http://coloradoprisonradio.com), or download the **Inside Wire** app in the App Store (iPhone users) or Google Play (Android users).





# ARTISTIC JUSTICE

Artistic Justice is a praxis (a theory and a practice) that strives to create individual and community connection and healing in and around the justice system through storytelling.



## Cages

by Matthew LaBonte

I pause with my hand hovering over the light switch as I turn and glance back into the room. This room has been the DU PAI office at Sterling for just over a year now. It seems like so much longer. Memory superimposes an image of the room as it was when we moved in. There was a cage across the center of the room dividing the space in two. The front had been a small classroom while the back half was filled with archived documents, broken furniture and equipment – sort of a catch all for stuff no one wanted to deal with.

I remember when we first got a classroom in the programs building as a dedicated DU PAI office space. We were so excited. These types of spaces are rare in the DOC. We were given a couple of desks and desktop PC's to sit on top of them and catch all of the creative ideas we were birthing. Reverberations was born in that first classroom. If Light Closed Its Eyes (our most recent and involved theatre project) took many of its first steps in that room. There were so many firsts, so many moments. We felt real, like we could put down some roots and establish.

When we were told we would be moving to the Vocational Education building, we were a bit disheartened. A general resistance to and fear of change reared its head. I remember cataloguing all the reasons why the move would put us at a disadvantage to do all the work that had grown to consume our plates. "Bad idea!" my inner self screamed to no one in particular.

One of the first things we did was cut the cage out and clear all the rubbish away. There was actually a fair amount of recoverable equipment squirreled away back there. The room felt almost too big. But we grew into it. Deeply into it. Our Programs Captain, Cris Clare, bought us a rug and some comfy chairs. We donated a coffee maker for everyone to use. Everyone began to claim

discarded desks and office chairs. We plastered the walls with art (of course!). Before we knew it we had a very special space.

We began to live into it. We made beautiful things. Lived artfully and messily in wholly human ways. We shared meals, shed tears, found the true connection in the highest highs and the lowest lows and how they can combine to forge bonds beyond understanding. And now we're leaving it behind. A tear begins to build in the corner of my eye.

We spent the day cleaning out our desks and packing up. The Inside Wire radio team will be taking over much of the space we're vacating. They've outgrown the small studio they were born in. I wondered throughout the day why we didn't just leave them to re-imagine the space in our absence. Now I understand. Something sacred is being passed.

There are new adventures on the horizon.

I stand with my hand hovering over the light switch, teetering back and forth between what it has been and what it now is. I've become a different person here, in so many ways. Some very intentional, some I don't think anyone could have foreseen. I spent a lot of time here examining the cages in my life and around my heart. Some were assembled to keep pieces of me safe, some to store away the rubbish and wreckage of my soul, others merely barbed barriers that did nothing more than tear and rend.

The feeling of rightness returns and wraps its arms around me. I've left a lot of places in my life. This is one of the best. Who would have thought? This is the work. Move in, tear down the cages, build what we can, then leave it as something beautiful for someone else. To all of you we are leaving behind, we will miss you. But I have no apologies for the way we are leaving and what we are leaving behind. May it serve you as well as it served us.

I turn the lights off and walk out.





## Terra

Terra sat high atop the ledge of the fence. Her feet swiveled back and forth in gentle flutters, un-frightened somehow by the vast distance between her and the ground. A shawl was wrapped around her delicate shoulders and drooped down in wispy folds of black thread. Poking out of the sleeves, her hands were propped against the fence feeling the grain of the wood against her open palms. It was soft going one direction, but rough going the other. She settled the weight of her wrists firmly in the soft direction as it was most comfortable to her. Tonight, her hair was brown. Against the faint light though, it was black. Her entire body was a shadow hidden by the clouds.

That was about to change. In fact, that's exactly what she had been waiting for tonight. The clouds only made it better. It was a kind of silent anticipation that she learned to value more than any gift or food or feeling. Yes, she enjoyed the company of others or the stimulation from a happy celebration, but this excitement seemed more than that. As if nightly the heavens unveiled their ultimate secret of the universe with such resounding brilliance that it should dumbfound every soul watching it until daybreak. But it didn't. And that's what made it all the more special. She felt like she kept the most amazing secret of life to herself and only she had

the ability to appreciate it. Only she could see it. It was a present meant for her alone, and she basked in its beauty every single time, like it was the first time. This was their moment together. The world spoke to her in its silky voice of starlight. *Hello child, I'm so happy to see you here again.*

The clouds parted.

And just like that, the heavens appeared. Where had they been this whole time? Hidden by a tiny cloud that happened to be prancing by? How selfish of it, to try and hold the spotlight for itself. To think it could hold the vast infinity behind its condensed fluffy curves. And what about before that? Was it all there before? Even in the middle of daytime with its endless constellations whispering on the outskirts of the blue sky?

No matter, it wasn't important now. What was important was that it was hers. The show had begun. Like a great carnival, the night exploded forth in a vibrant opening flourish. The curtains of clouds were whisked away, setting the stage for a grand performance. Starbursts of blues, purples, yellows, and pinks scattered the night canvas in their radiant powders. It was an entire novel of cosmic brail, an ocean of dots and dashes telling the story of how the universe was born.





by E.V./CTCF

And oh the stars! Those twinkling lights of distant suns. They whirred with a sense of divine passion. Here, they clustered together in familial villages chattering the night away, and there, they drifted off to be bright and spectacular like lonesome dancers in the ballroom of a galaxy. Those lonely guests longed for each other; they shined ever so luminously, trying to signal to the other that they wanted to be together. Even though they never grew closer, they connected. With a thin invisible line, they connected. First one to two, then two to three. They merged in a spider web of comet dust creating constellations of astrological elegance.

The fish swam with the twins and the lion danced with the scorpion. The ram shared dinner with the bull and the goat swapped stories with the archer. As the stellar seeds breathed the air of space, they blossomed and shimmered, moving back and forth with such vigor it was as if they were alive, like the very lights themselves were living joints in the body of the cosmos. They were a chorus of flickering crystal flutes singing their love sonata to the world and to the moon.

And oh the moon! The serene mother of night. She smiled on the stars with a tender gaze, a face filled with lunar blushing. She was an enamored adolescent and the sea of astral fireflies was her

star-crossed lover. So carefully the moon floated on that sea, as if she were a white pearl on the tongue of the night, and so carefully she kissed each passing bud of star petals like lotus flowers on a river of diamond dust. This was her time, the hours of bliss where she ruled a nocturnal paradise. She captivated the midnight audience with her dazzling ivory glow and set the world ablaze with her cool beams of moonlight.

And the world sat in awe of it. Terra sat in awe of it. The sky, the moon, the stars, the cosmos. She could do nothing more than sit and absorb their great interstellar brilliance and wish for it to stay. Wish that, if the world ever decided to stop turning, it would be here and now, to capture the night like a piece of art forever suspended in the deep sapphire blue sap of the heavens.

This was her secret. This was the gift of beauty that the creator of all things bestowed upon her, yet left as a mystery for the rest of the world. And as the great star ocean reflected its image off the mirror of her gazing pupils, she sighed knowing this moment would forever be ingrained in the eye of her mind. This would be the first thing she saw in the morning and the last thing she saw at night before closing her eyes, forever.



# Maximum Security Thought

by Matthew Thompson/SCF

Imagine yourself walking the empty aisles of the grocery store months from now. Things have gotten worse... much worse. The economy has collapsed, the virus hasn't died off, and now people are really panicking. We have transitioned into all out survival mode – Fend For Yourself! You lost your job because the furniture store that you worked at shut down. Apparently, nobody is buying swank furniture now. You only have \$10.95 left on your debit card, and you're starving. What do you buy at the grocery store? Either the last 6-pack of Corona Extra and some tortilla chips, or a bunch of dried beans and rice.

When facing uncertain times or planning for the future, we are forced to decide what are necessities, and what are luxuries. Seldom do we consider this duality in prosperous times or when it is an issue that doesn't directly affect us. Is that the type of person you would like to be? One that doesn't contemplate things until they hit us in the face? For example, it's not until we hit a massive pothole on I-70 and blow out a tire that we wonder about where and how car motor vehicle taxes are being spent, whether frivolously in nice neighborhoods or repairing decrepit roads in the inner cities.

In planning for this uncertain time we face, it would be wise for us to consider a variety of government spending issues. In order to survive the devastating blow to our economy due to our responses to the COVID-19 outbreak, we must lean toward necessity.

One issue in particular we should ponder and discuss with our friends and colleagues is incarceration. In the United States we spend an estimated \$182 Billion on criminal incarceration every year and with an estimated 2.3 million U.S. people incarcerated, you can't help but wonder: "Are there that many people in America that we absolutely need off of the streets? Living off of taxpayers?" Ask yourself: "Who is a necessity to be incarcerated and who is a luxury? Which of these incarcerated people are 'beans and rice' and which are 'chips and beer'?"

Certainly, looking at them case by case would be a massive undertaking. So do we just apply over-arching policies? What will they be based off of? Type of crime? Violent versus nonviolent? Total time served? If someone has proven rehabilitation? No longer a threat due to old age or sickness? What factors do you recommend?

I must confess, I am currently incarcerated while writing this and I am constantly blown away by some of the amazing people I come across in here! I do concede that there are some that are



definitely 'beans and rice' – violent and unreceptive to any form of treatment or therapy, absolute necessities to be incarcerated for now. From my experience, this is actually a very small amount though.

I have found many cases in which I find myself asking: "Why is this guy still locked up?" Devout Christians with life sentences that want nothing but a quiet and humble existence in or outside of prison. Buddhists that were sentenced to life as a juvenile and are now, after 20 years, one of the most kind and caring people you will ever meet. Men in wheelchairs that have been locked up for 35 years and are no longer a threat to anyone, some of which require help eating and bathing. And there are cases where people are locked up for crimes with no clear victim. These cases are definitely the 'beer and chips'.

As an economic crash becomes more and more inevitable, can we the taxpayers carry the burden of our monolithic justice system? Ask yourself: "Are we a nation that has become so prosperous that we incarcerate people as a luxury to society?" When we play that tape through to its logical end, where do we arrive? Eventually, will *you* become incarcerated for some new act that the government has deemed an inconvenience to others? As COVID-19 racks up its death toll, who are the 'beans and rice' and who are 'chips and beer'? If we continue down the path of our ostentatious philosophies of incarceration, will *you* become incarcerated for writing or reading ideas like this? Will there be such things as Maximum Security Thoughts? Or are we already incarcerated cognitively for refusing to discuss and ponder such ideas?

I encourage you to ask yourself these questions. Open a dialogue with your friends and coworkers to see what they think. I think it is important that we purge the taboos that surround simply discussing controversial ideas. What do you think?



# Passing Through an MR

by Fred Hill/FMCC

There were two older guys walking the track on an astonishing sunlit day. The conditions were picture-perfect with a gentle breeze and LA Dawn said he could smell the aroma of confidence overflowing from those two Old-Timers. Andrew said, "I could tell they were different by the way they wore their clothes."

Ismael spotted another one sitting at a table reading "The Taming of the Shrew" under the persistent yet satisfactory heat. Michael knew they were different by the "look" in their eyes.

Ray saw a guy who made an effort to look the part; however, he smelled like an ocean creature - in the same way as something that breathed through gills. John saw him too. He also saw a guy with his sleeves rolled up even though his biceps were undersized. Paul asked himself, "Why does this guy think he's so big?"

When I saw the two Old-Timers on that day, my nose was roused by the evocative whiff of chicken being baked in the kitchen. That brought me in to a dream-like state, thinking of my family. My thoughts wrestled back and forth with which family members I should keep at a distance and which ones I should embrace. Then my mind drifted to the neglected taste of B-B-Q ribs I so anxiously wait to devour. As I gradually slipped back into reality, I opened my eyes and I stood breathless as the sparkling sun smiled upon the Colorado Rocky Mountains at just the right angle to kindle an awe-inspiring view.

Those two Old-Timers were talking by the miniature tree where my friends and I feed the birds. Someone said they distantly heard parts of their conversation. He thought he heard "*the first thing we have to do is get our credit score together, because credit is way better than money right now.*"

A few moments later Lil Bookey revealed that a guy who smelled like trout got caught transporting canteen to another Unit. Sam saw that same guy, and another guy

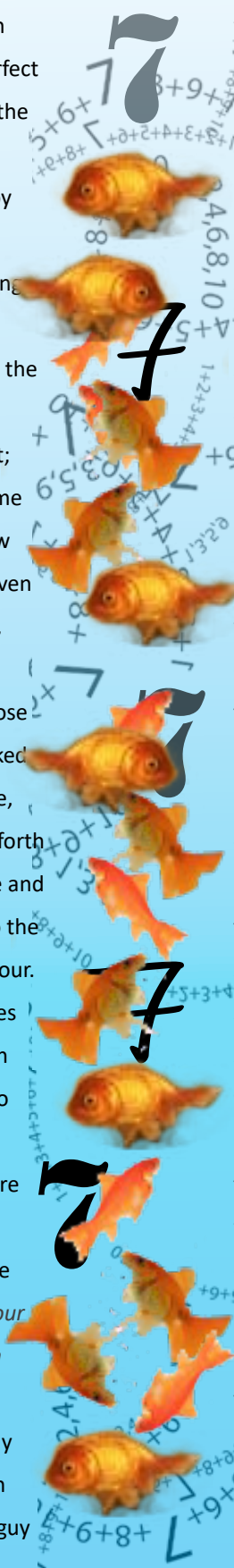
who smelled disgusting, confront this guy's wetness.

Then I faded into a trance-like state recalling of when I too was wet behind the ears at Buena Vista in the early 90's, when matters were more unforgiving than they are now. As I appeared back into reality, the sun was a little past its zenith, the grey goose opened its mouth and spewed 50 minnows into our pool it swallowed at DRDC. It was alleged, an unnamed guy saw an invisible line someone cast into the waters. Bobby saw that line snag someone but he high-tailed it out of there before he could see anything happen.

At that time, I was gathered with four friends at our daily "Ghetto-Philosopher" sessions we have on "our" bench. On a daily basis we spend hours conversing on a wide range of topics like Tucker Carlson's monologues every night. We might even "passionately" break down the Gettysburg address line by line. Or Kirk would give us a lesson on the number seven or as it's called, the *virgin*.

Seven is a "pivot" in the number sequence from one to ten rather than an actual number. If you multiply  $1*2*3*4*5*6*7$  it equals  $7*8*9*10$ . When you remove the seven you get the same result! No number lower than seven divides into seven equally. It is considered childless since it cannot produce any number in the one to ten sequence. Like two produces 4, 6, 8, 10. Three produces 6, 9. Four 8, and Five 10.

In spite of it all, those two Old-Timers pushed through the guppy infested waters and soared out of this bowl. It was reported, one of the guys was seen kissing a woman outside the gate while wearing his blue shirt and tan khakis under a gorgeous double-rainbow. A couple of months later I received a J-Pay letter and some pictures from the other one. He is doing really good, working, and making a difference in his community. I too yearn for the day when my time here will be completed. Until then, all I can do is make every effort to be a better version of myself.





# Chained Voices 2022

Chained Voices, a showcase of the artwork of incarcerated individuals in Colorado prisons took place this past summer from June 1 to August 20. There was \$14,500 in art sold online and at the live exhibit, all of which goes to the artists. The live showing was held at the McNichol's Building in downtown Denver. If you would like to view all of the art presented in past shows, including 2022, please visit [www.chainedvoices.org](http://www.chainedvoices.org).

Chad Wesley Merrill  
SCF

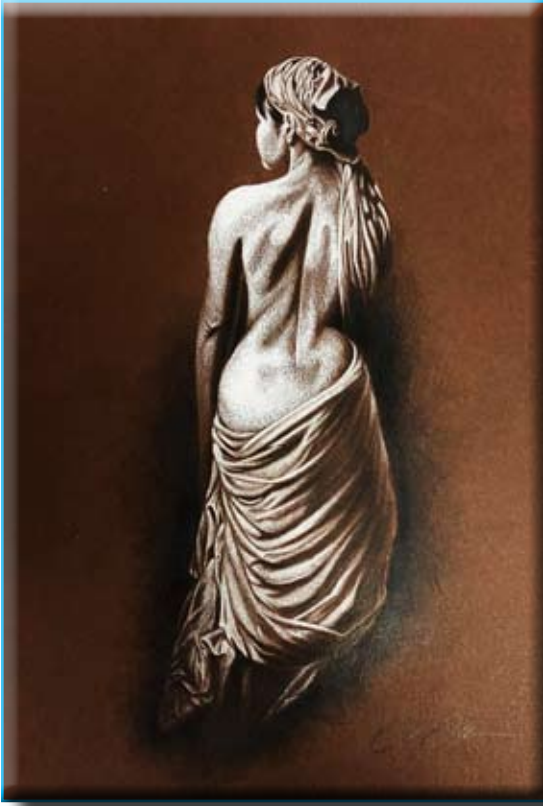


Adam Fulford  
SCCF



Dave Arledge  
FCF





Christian Garcia  
FCF



Amanda DeLeon  
DWCF



Darin Ninneman  
AVCF





James Cranfill  
RCC

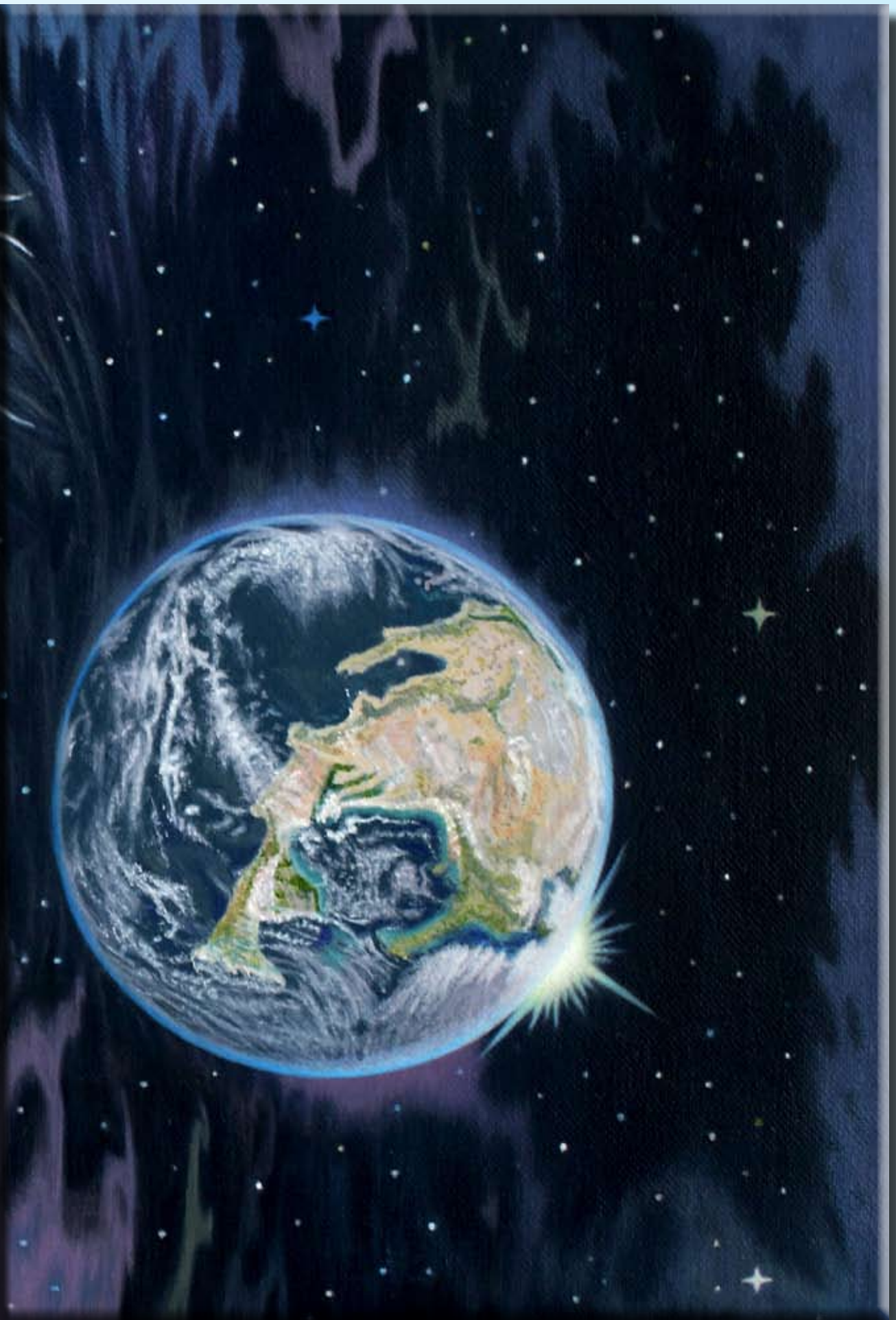


Joseph Taylor McGill  
FCF



Geordan C. Morris  
CTCF







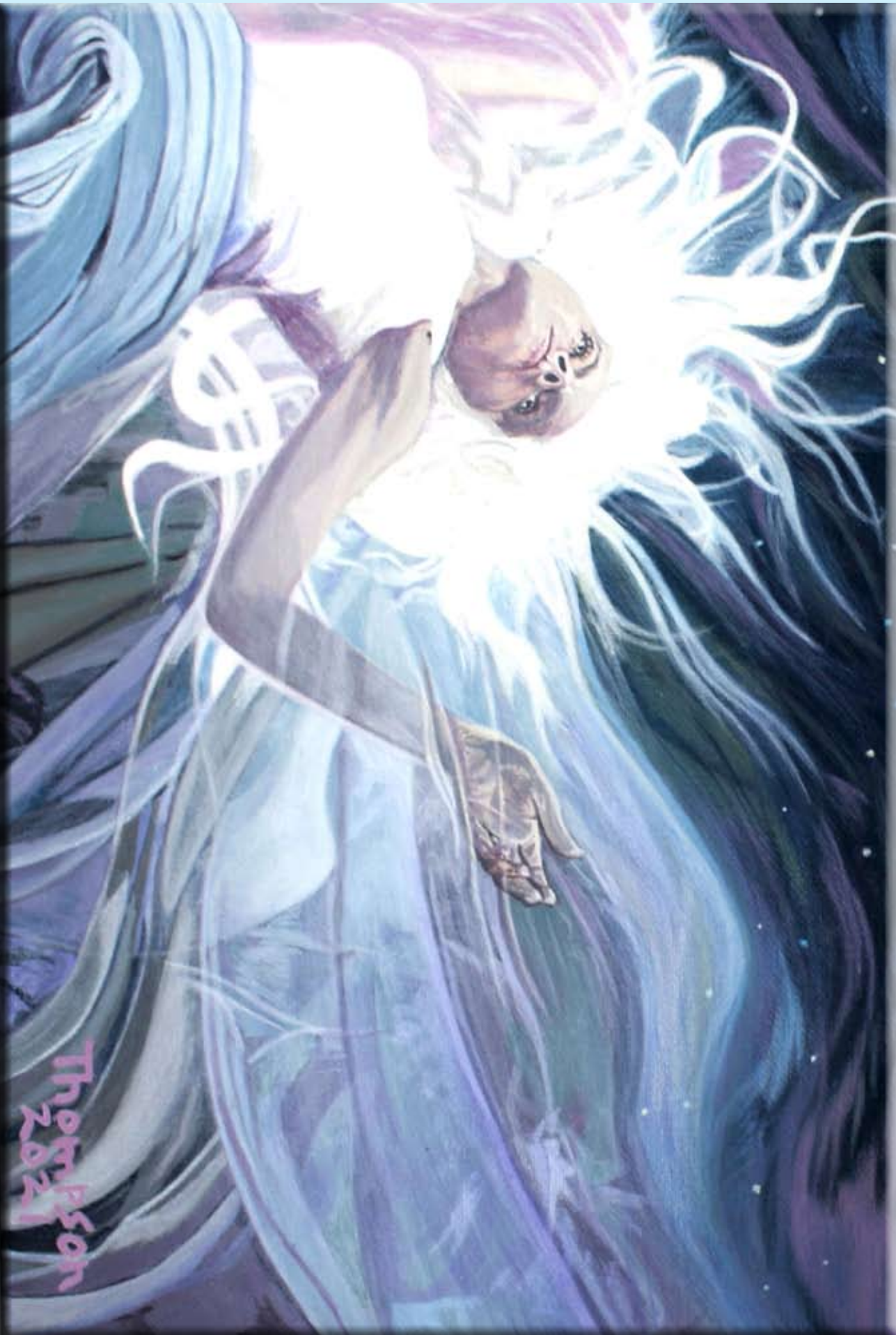


Harrison Williams  
FCF







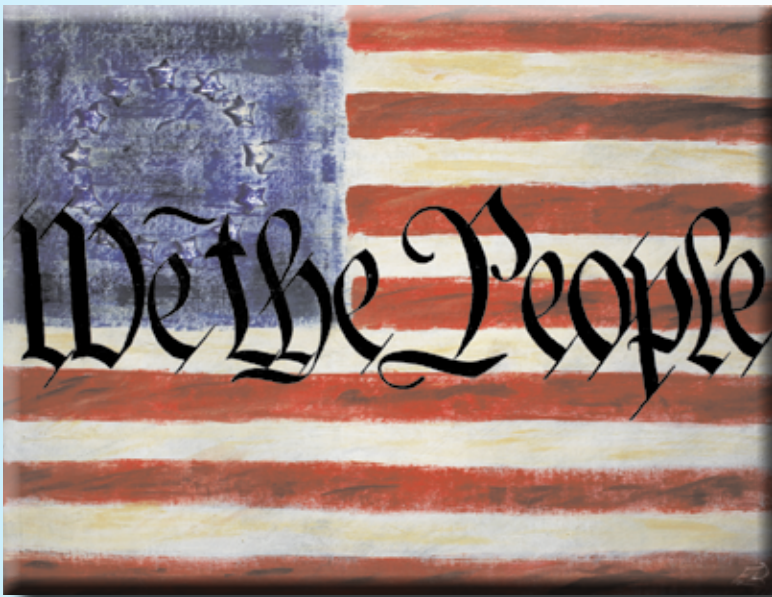


David Thompson  
AVCF





Pat Suchaiya  
FCF



Eric Barnard  
AVCF




Sam Mullikin  
DRDC





  
Jon Phillips  
FCF

  
Jeremy Moss  
BVCF







Natalie Gulyas  
DWCF

Hector Castillo  
AVCF







# CALL SIGNS

*All stations this net:*

**Welcome to Call Signs. These pages are dedicated to the creative and artistic works of Veterans and Patriots alike. Here can be found stories, poems and art works depicting both time in military service and things completely unrelated to the military, we do it all! If it's created by a Veteran or Patriot this is where it belongs. As a tribute to all of our fallen, we are asking you to come up with your very own 'Call Sign' to act as your pen name when contributing to this section.**

*Reverb-6 out.*

## Complacency Kills by Matt Haley/SCF

Coming to prison has been the most challenging adjustment I have ever made. The initial shock of my new reality was certainly jarring and kept me painfully aware of every aspect of my new life. However, over time, like most incarcerated people I found a routine within the constraints of life in prison. It consisted of much of the typical things most people behind bars find for themselves: working out, attending programs, idle time with new friends, etc.

I began to adapt to the routine of prison life without realizing that in some ways I had turned myself off. For the first several years I shuffled, almost on autopilot, from one thing to another mindlessly. I lived without any meaning or purpose and was unaware of how dark a place I was living in.

One day I received a series of photographs from my first deployment in Iraq, from a Marine friend of mine. The pictures brought me back to the most formative experiences of my life. My time as a Marine infantryman and our deployments to Iraq in the mid 2000's were a time when I felt the weight of the ultimate responsibility: taking, saving and protecting human lives. When life was simply survival. A time when there was no doubt that I had meaning and purpose. My life's mission then was clear.

One of the pictures was of a sign that was spray painted at the exit of a FOB (forward operating base) we were lucky to go back to every two months to recalibrate our weapons' sights, eat hot meals, take a shower and get more than three to four hours of sleep at a time. The sign said "Complacency Kills". It was a reminder that most things that killed U.S. forces outside the wire were things that might be detected in advance if one was situationally aware. While not every danger could be avoided, there were usually indicators that something wasn't right, like a change in the activity of locals (abandoned market places that are usually bustling with people), changes in the surface of the road or objects in it that were not previously there, etc.

The picture of the sign brought back a flood of memories and emotions that seemed to snap me out of some kind of haze and in an instant I realized that this warning posted up at the exit of so many FOBs and Ops was relevant to life in general anywhere, at any time and for anyone. I became aware that I had been living life complacently, and not just in prison, but long before in those years after I discharged from the Marines. Not wanting to face reality and myself when I came home, I drank a lot of alcohol and, looking back that day with the picture in my hand, I realized in a





way that I was committing a form of suicide every day. I drank to not feel which meant to not really be alive.

Unfortunately, and sadly, my drinking and my failure to address my problems ended up costing another man's life some years after I got out. Sitting in my cell, looking at this picture I also realized that I was still living similarly. My routine was a conscious attempt to not feel anything. I carried myself mindlessly and how I engaged life and people were little ways of numbing myself. Everything was a form of idle time in motion and for the first time in a long time, I wanted change. I wanted to live meaningfully and fully aware of everything. I began to think about what that may look like for myself in prison.

In 2015, I was admitted into an inpatient program in a VA hospital for substance abuse and PTSD. In it we were required to participate in mindfulness practices and yoga, along with many other things. At that time in treatment, I was not totally comfortable with these practices, but I did leave each session

feeling like something had shifted slightly inside me for the better. I felt a little more aware of myself, others, the world around me and I felt a little more comfortable with these realities and a sense of seeing them more accurately.

I began a personal practice in prison, learning as much as I could about yoga and meditation. My practice brought me a sense of acceptance of my new life and my role in how I got here and what I felt I needed to do with it, what I owed others and this awareness that a person can go a whole lifetime living complacently. I felt I was living life more mindfully, being present for myself and others.

After some time of personal practice, I began to experience the need to bring this to others and with the help of a few like-minded buddies inside and administration at AVCF, we began to hold small yoga and meditation classes to a few guys a couple times a week. That quickly grew into larger classes held seven days a week. Just prior to the COVID lockdown we were a community of around one hundred and thirty guys who looked forward to class for their own personal reasons. Some felt the physical benefits of yoga (pain relief, flexibility and improved gains on the weight pile) while others felt a sense of equanimity from the mindfulness practices.

For the first time since leaving the Marines I felt like part of a team, with a mission no longer as destructive as war, but one centered on personal growth and fellowship. I now see that my life has momentum, meaning and purpose from this program and these results spill over into all other aspects of my life.

I think in life, and especially in prison it is critical to notice when we start to move through our journey complacently. It is pretty awesome and inspiring to understand and feel how connected we all really are and how we can influence and impact each other's lives—for better or worse—regardless of our self-awareness. It is my hope that my brothers and sisters who are incarcerated and my brothers and sisters who returned home from combat can find this understanding and live life more meaningfully and mindfully.





## The Men In My Family Never Wept

by Anthony Lucero/FCF

Teotihuacan obsidian, Toledo steel  
forged with the sangre  
of my ancestors.

The men in my family never wept.

My grandfathers, their fathers,  
my father, brother, son, or grandsons  
have never wept.

I cannot weep.

My blood forbids it.

The women in our family wept FOR US.

My abuelas as their madres,  
my madre, hermana, esposa,  
mija, and nietas shed tears  
a sacred stream.

Their tears  
a saving grace  
to men  
who never wept.

## Metamorphosis

by Anthony Lucero/FCF

The dandelion cracks

The grey concrete.

The thin-as-a-rail-man

Whispers: gracias, arigato, merci

To the sun-drenched dandelion.

A goose stepping back observes

The man's happiness and

Stomps the dandelion.

Yellow stains, invisible cuts,

Invisible ink – the thin man

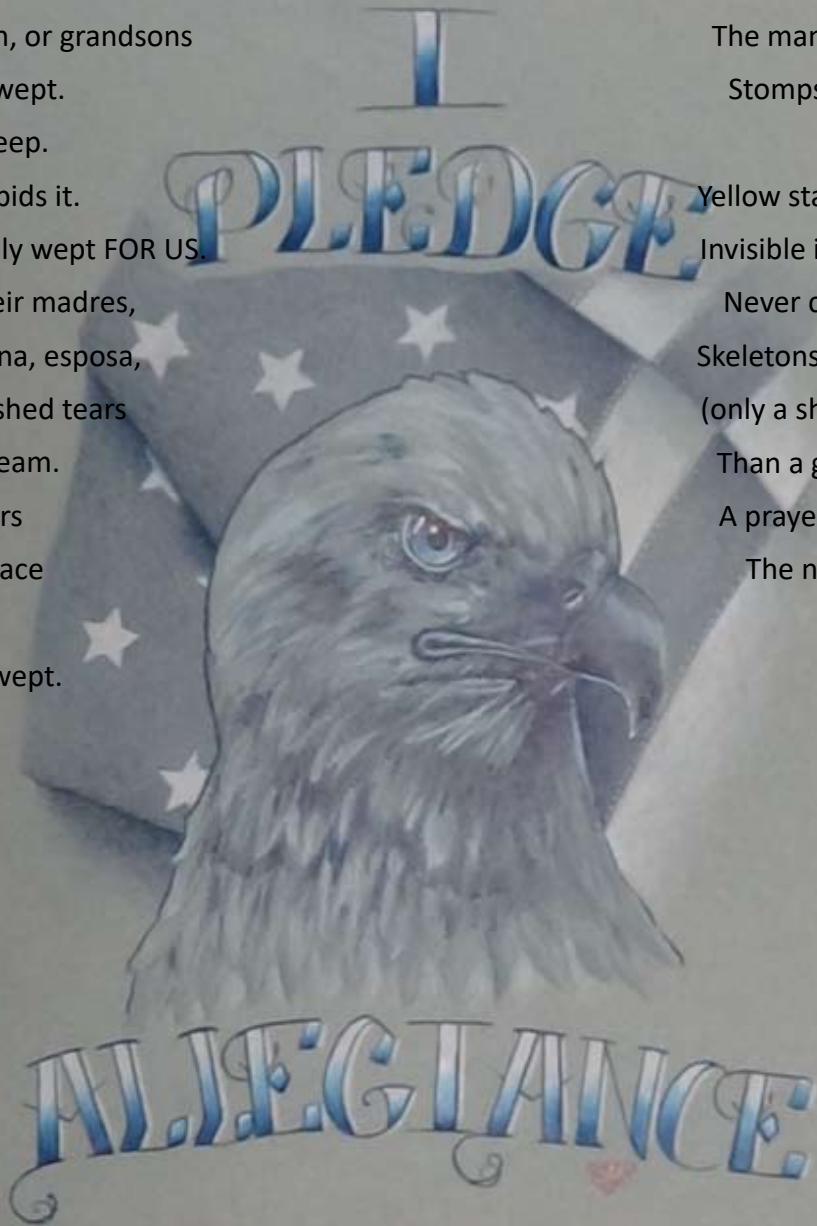
Never could outrun the

Skeletons. Solo una sombra  
(only a shadow), he's more

Than a ghost whispering

A prayer and warning to

The next dandelion.





# Is it Justice, Or Is It Just Us

by Eli Swazo/CTCF

Sweet dream of night within one soul,  
To see my love at hand in a dream,  
The life once I had in the past.  
To feel the sweetness of her warmth upon my skin,  
To feel her relish around me within her universe,  
Sweet smell of new lives coming out from heavenly ground,  
Hear her crying from the sound of thunder.  
To feel her tears from the rainfall upon my body,  
Feel her spirit within my soul as we are one,  
Feel her breath coming out from her, the sweet smell she gave off.  
I have woken from a dream to grip the devils tail.  
As I look around, I felt my love is gone.  
My freedom is taken away by devil's lies  
Within the playground of the court-room,

The injustice is given in the land of Freedom.  
I have no hope with love at hand,  
To see the door I can't go through to feel her again,  
The freedom I had once in my life.  
Looking through the window with no hope  
I will never understand.  
With sadness in my spirit with no blood on my hands,  
Still hope in my heart that cannot be taken away.  
I hope to feel her once again,  
To kiss her sweet air from her soul,  
To be free one more time before I go,  
I can feel her love again within my soul.  
With sweetness in my dream  
Have to say goodnight to the one I love.

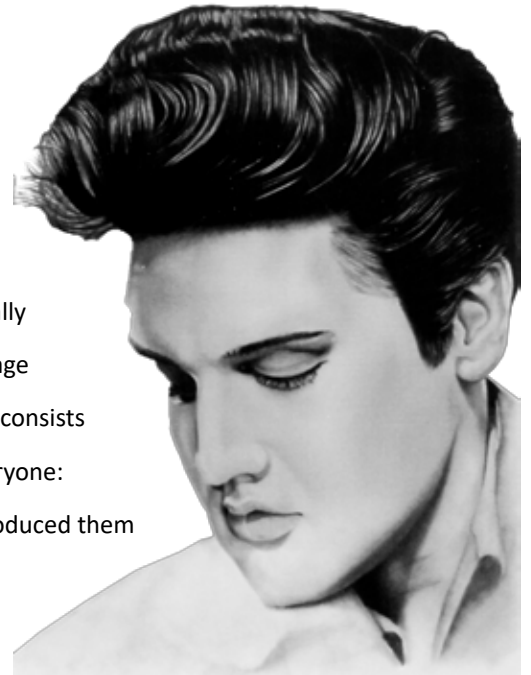




# Terminally Cool

by Jacob Carlock/CTCF

The universe is amazing to me in so many ways. I say that because recently the term “terminally cool” came up during an encounter with my peers. It instantly struck me as the illusive and misleading term that I at one time or another identified with. In the week leading up to that discussion, and my subsequent introduction to the term “terminally cool,” I was reading Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point*, where he looks closely at teenage smoking. In it he breaks down what the allure of smoking is for teens, what this epidemic consists of, and how “smoking, overwhelmingly, was associated with the same thing to nearly everyone: sophistication.” (Gladwell, M. p.3) In his book, he asked three people who it was that introduced them to smoking. This is what they said:



“When I was around nine or ten my parents got an English au pair girl, Maggie, who came and stayed with us one summer. She was maybe twenty. She was very sexy and wore a bikini at the Campbell’s pool. She was famous with the grownup men for doing handstands in her bikini. Also it was said her bikini fell off when she dove—Mr. carpenter would submerge whenever she jumped in. Maggie smoked, and I used to beg her to let me smoke too.”

“The first kid I knew who smoked was Billy G. We became friends in fifth grade, when the major distinctions in our suburban N.J. town—jocks, heads, brains—were beginning to form. Billy was incredibly cool. He was the first kid to date girls, smoke cigarettes and pot, drink hard alcohol and listen to druggy music. I even remember sitting upstairs in his sister’s bedroom—his parents were divorced (another first), and his mom was never home—separating out the seeds out of some pot on the cover of a Grateful Dead album...The draw for me was the badness of it, and the adult-ness, and the way it proved the idea that you could be more than one thing at a time.”



“The first person who I remember smoking was a girl named Pam P. I met her when we were both in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. We rode the school bus together in Great Neck, Long Island, and I remember thinking she was the coolest because she lived in an apartment (Great Neck didn’t have many apartments). Pam seemed so much older than her 15 years. We used to sit in the back of the bus and blow smoke out the window. She taught me how to inhale, how to tie a man’s tailored shirt at the waist to look cool, and how to wear lipstick. She had a leather jacket. Her father was rarely home.”



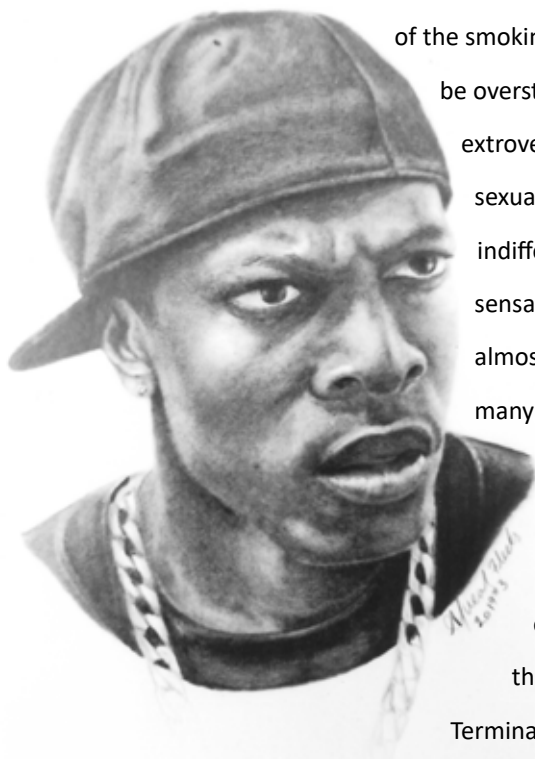
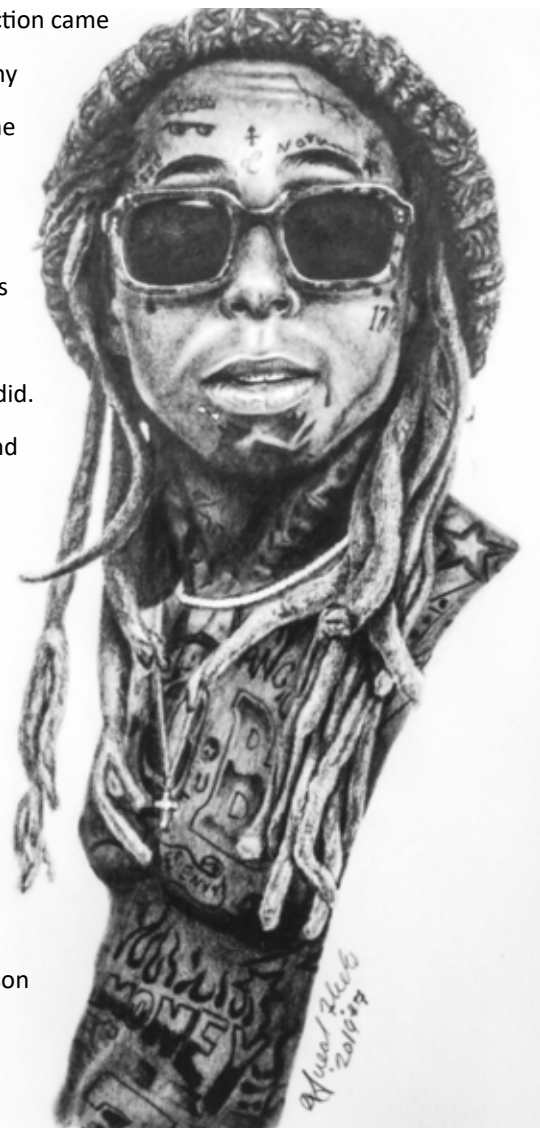
If by this point you haven't deduced this, I was also a teen smoker. My introduction came when I was 11 or 12, from my little sister's babysitter, "Stacey". In reality, she was also my babysitter, but my parents in an effort to help me feel more adult, let me believe that she was there for my sister. She was 17, and dressed like a glam rocker, listened to Poison, and Motley Crue, had as active social life, a secret boyfriend who would sneak over while she was babysitting. He was rebellious but also nice to me, probably because I was in on the secret. She was very attractive, and she smoked, and she was, in my mind, the epitome of sexy and cool. "I must start smoking immediately," I said to myself. And so I did.

All three of the people that introduced smoking to the teens in these stories and also my experience with "Stacey" shared the phenomenon that "they were all deeply cool people. But they weren't cool because they smoked. They smoked because they were cool." Gladwell goes on to say "The significance

of the smoking personality, I think, can-not be overstated. If you bundle all of these extroverts' traits together—defiance, sexual precocity, honesty, impulsiveness, indifference to the opinion of others, sensation seeking—you come up with an almost perfect definition of the kind of person many adolescents are drawn to. The very same character traits... that made them so compelling to their peers

also make it inevitable that they would also be drawn to the ultimate expression of adolescent rebellion, risk taking, impulsivity, indifference to others, and precocity: the cigarette" (Gladwell, M. p.232-33). "Smoking was never cool. *Smokers* are cool."

Terminally cool...



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# Life's Puzzle

by Brett Garrett

There was a little boy who was sitting at home bored, and wanted to play with someone. He decided to ask his father to play catch. His father had some relationship issues, burned some bridges, struggled with employment, and usually sat on the couch with remote in hand, drinking a beer, and smoking cigarette. He was throwing a pity party for himself, and looked on with a straight face at this son as he approached.

"Dad," the boy said. "Will you please come play with me?"

The father took a swig of his beer and said "Not now. I'm busy."

The boy bowed his head and left the room. As time passed, the boy again returned to his father, looked him in the eyes, and asked "Are you still busy? Or can you play with me now?"

Taking a puff of the cigarette, the father replied "Later. Can't you see I'm busy?"

With hurt in his heart, the young boy slowly turned and walked away. A while later, as the afternoon passed, the son decided to try one more time. With ball in hand, he entered the living room where his dad sat and said, "Dad, its later. Can we play now?"

With disgust, the father reached over to the end table and removed a magazine. He then took the magazine and showed his son the cover. It had a picture of the world on it. He tore the cover off, ripped it into tiny pieces, gathered it up and gave the boy the ripped up cover and also some tape. He said "There son. It's now a puzzle. Once you put it together, then I'll play with you."

As tears rolled down the son's cheeks, he took the pieces and left the room. In just a short time the boy returned with a smile stretching ear to ear and said "Look Dad. I did it!"

As the father glanced at him in total amazement, he asked "How did you do that?"

The boy took the picture and said "Easy Dad." As he flipped the picture over, he showed the reverse side to his father. It was a picture of a man praying. The boy still smiling, said, flipping the page over, "See Dad. Once you put the man together, then his whole world will come together."

Now a tear rolled down the fathers face. He sat his remote and beer down, embraced his son with a hug and said, "Let's go play ball."

You see, we all have issues. Right now you may be in prison, but many are also imprisoned in gangs, addiction, theft or whatever. There's not a man who does not only want to be free, especially free on the inside. A lot of individuals don't want to admit they hurt or are ashamed and may need help. We cover it up by glorifying the past, talking crazy, doing the gang thing, making hooch or getting tattoos; meanwhile the issues that got you to where you are in life still remain.

We talk of change but fail to take the steps to make that change. Some look in the mirror and lie to themselves. What they see is a mirage, a man saying one thing, but once the doors open, acting another way. You cannot say you're a good husband, man, partner, father, or son when most your time and energy is focused on other things and not on that. This detour, prison time, bump in the road, unwished chapter in your life is a time to look at yourself and your priorities to make the proper changes and mature into that man you are supposed to be. You're the author of your story and life. It's time to take that pen, and some courage, and write out and experience a better, more fruitful life. Just as with the boy and his father, the puzzle goes. It's time to pick up the pieces, take control your own life, quit the nonsense and put the man back together, so your whole world will come together.



There is one thing that you have 100% control of...your Life!! We want others to respect us, trust us, and love us. How can you expect and want that, when you had one thing to take care of...your Life, and look what you have done with it and where you sit. We ask so much of others. Either gut the games, or keep doing what you are doing. Prison does not discriminate and will always welcome you back. How you change or spend time in here will determine or influence what you'll do when released.

This is not my life I want or have. This is a chapter of my life or bump in the road. How the next chapter goes or is written, is entirely up to me. I hold the pen and author my own destiny.





# This is *with(in)*

**Andrew Draper is the co-creator, co-executive producer and co-host of With(in). There is no bigger fan of the podcast. His passion for this project is deeply inspiring. Here's what he had to say in a recent conversation.**

## **How was With(in) born?**

Years ago, Dr. Ashley Hamilton and myself would debate and have some of the most bizarre conversations. Debates about religion, politics, language, whatever. And one day at the conclusion of one of these conversations, we said it would be cool if other people involved in the system, incarcerated people, staff, lawyers, judges, politicians, whoever... it would be cool if all of these different voices could be heard together, equally touching on the same subjects.

## **Why do you love With(in)?**

I love With(in) because it gives a voice to people intimately involved with the criminal justice system. It provides a platform for a variety of voices to be heard. Voices that don't always agree. Voices and stories that really need to be heard.

## **What was your favorite interview/show?**

This is a hard question... but I have to say that my favorite episode so far, absolutely is The Great Divide. It highlights so much that is wrong with our country. The differences, the bigotry, the controversy, the struggles and the hope that the collected people of our country have. And as for my favorite interview, I'd have to say that my favorite interview is one that hasn't aired yet and that is with Ear Hustle (podcast) co-creator, co-host and producer Nigel Poor.

## **Tell me about the rest of the With(in) team.**

We have an excellent team on With(in). Very cohesive. Very inventive and creative. Our co-executive producer is Dr. Ashley Hamilton of course, the Executive Director of the University of Denver Prison Arts Initiative. She is probably the most creative of the whole team. Her approach to difficult subject matter is very unique and a thing of art in itself. Denise Presson, our co-host and writer out of Denver Women's Correctional Facility, in my opinion is hands down the life of the party. She continually has a smile and brings a very upbeat energy to every meeting and to every episode. Terry Mosley, our Producer is always a centering voice. He never fails to bring us back to the center of the podcast and what our mission is. Sean Marshall, our artistic genius, creates individual compelling art pieces for each one of our episodes. I honestly don't know where he finds the energy to create these unique pieces. Like Sean, our resident poet, William S. Graham creates individual poetry pieces for each interviewee of With(in). He sits and listens to each episode, each interview and goes to work. He also has a talent of making people cry after they hear the poems that

he writes for them. It amazes me how he can create a poem at the drop of a dime. Travis Barnes is our musical talent. He pretty much has created the whole soundtrack and musical feel for With(in) and I believe that the musical element, created by an incarcerated person, is one of the main things that makes With(in) special. No other prison podcast has that. And another thing about our entire team is that everyone conducts interviews. Everyone has a voice.

## **What is your creative process with the podcast?**

That's a good question. Our creative process is really us just sitting down and talking. We seek different ways to explore topics and understand different vantage points. And really, what it boils down to is the storytelling. What is the best



story and who can best provide it? That is always the question. We try to stay away from sensationalizing people or topics and really seek to find the most compelling material for our audience.

## **What is your five-year vision for the podcast?**

Really I just want to continue to create compelling and fresh content for our audience. Content that invokes new thought. But in my dream world? Man I really shoot for the stars! Interviews with a death row inmate, a sitting state governor and sitting – or former – U.S. president. A justice involved actor or actress, a previously incarcerated musician... I mean the list goes on and on.

## **If you could be interviewed by anyone in the world/history, who would it be?**

Crazy enough, I don't really like to be interviewed! But I would really like to have conversations with a few people. Steve Jobs being one of them. I would really like to sit down and just listen to him speak. I would like to learn from him. I'd like to listen to his philosophy and point of view because he is arguably the most innovative and creative mind in modern history. His vision for the future... I mean his drive and his determination was, no *is* second to none. I would love to make the attempt to understand his creativity. I mean think about it... the personal computer, the i-phone, the i-pod... these items are things that have shaped and reshaped human history as we know it. And he played a key and major role in the development of them all. A very fascinating person indeed. Oh... and a close second is Tupac. A close third is Napoleon Hill and a close fourth is Malcolm X. And before I end, a close fifth is Caesar Chavez.

## **Dream interview?**

Donald Trump. Hands down. I would ask him just one question – what is your life's goal? I'm sure he'd answer the question in the way that only he could, and then I'd let the conversation roll.





# Magic Happens

by William Davenport

It feels like being stuck in time. It's the grappling sound of the tire tread as it moves across the black tar pavement; the humming vibration always finds a way to hypnotize me and soon I pass the wheel. The great expectation of my destination is what keeps me from turning around. The trip was about three and a half hours. Although we planned to leave at a certain time, it seems like something always comes up.

No matter who you talk to, no matter where that person is from, they will always say they have the most beautiful state in the country. It's rare a person will say, "My state sucks". So with that being said, you already know; I'm from Colorado and I swear this is the most beautiful place in North America.

Ride I-70 all the way through Colorado and you'll swear you've traveled within three to four different places. The lush green sea of plains that climb the step ladder of foothills which crescendo to the peaks of mountain tops as they scrape the sky. The side winding snake-like Colorado River cuts through the rocks forming some of the wildest white water rapids people come from all over to raft upon. I've rafted before, but the thrill is a little too much for me. The sand dunes and stunning pueblos is a striking contrast to the rocky fissure on the other side. We finally arrive at our destination, a log cabin deep in the hills of Steamboat Springs. The night was by then middle-aged, and the blackness of it was heavy upon us; there are no street lights in the mountains. My girlfriend and I along with the two other couples we were with could barely stay awake. Lunch meat, bread and chips would be the meal to put us to sleep.

There is something about soaking in a sulfur hot spring that will send your soul floating over your body to bliss. The dream land no longer awaits. I am there along with the beautiful souls of the ones I'm with. My mind drifts like the melodies of a child's laughter; peace, freedom and ecstasy soothe my soul like a bowl

of mom's special homemade soup. Tickling my brain, the herbs of the earth stimulate the feeling. This moment was made for me. Deserving. I don't know but blessed I am.

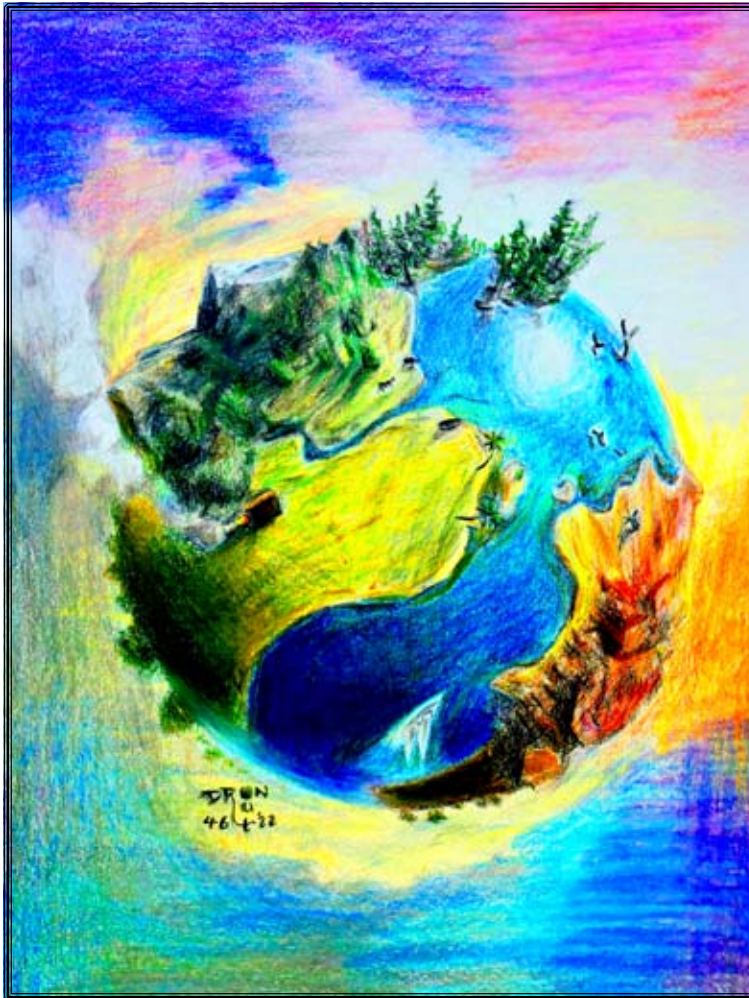
Nothing man has ever made can compare to the glory of what one experiences in the desired elements of what was naturally designed for our being. The awareness of belonging overwhelms me and I feel like I've been here before. As we walk

the mountain trail the smell of dampness combined with a lily sweet, spicy sage aroma fills my lungs. It feels so fresh I could exhale symphonies. The streams sparkle so, I think I see children standing on the edges pouring glitter inside. The bugs in the air feel no stress so they worry you not. Could the lion be laying with the lamb somewhere?

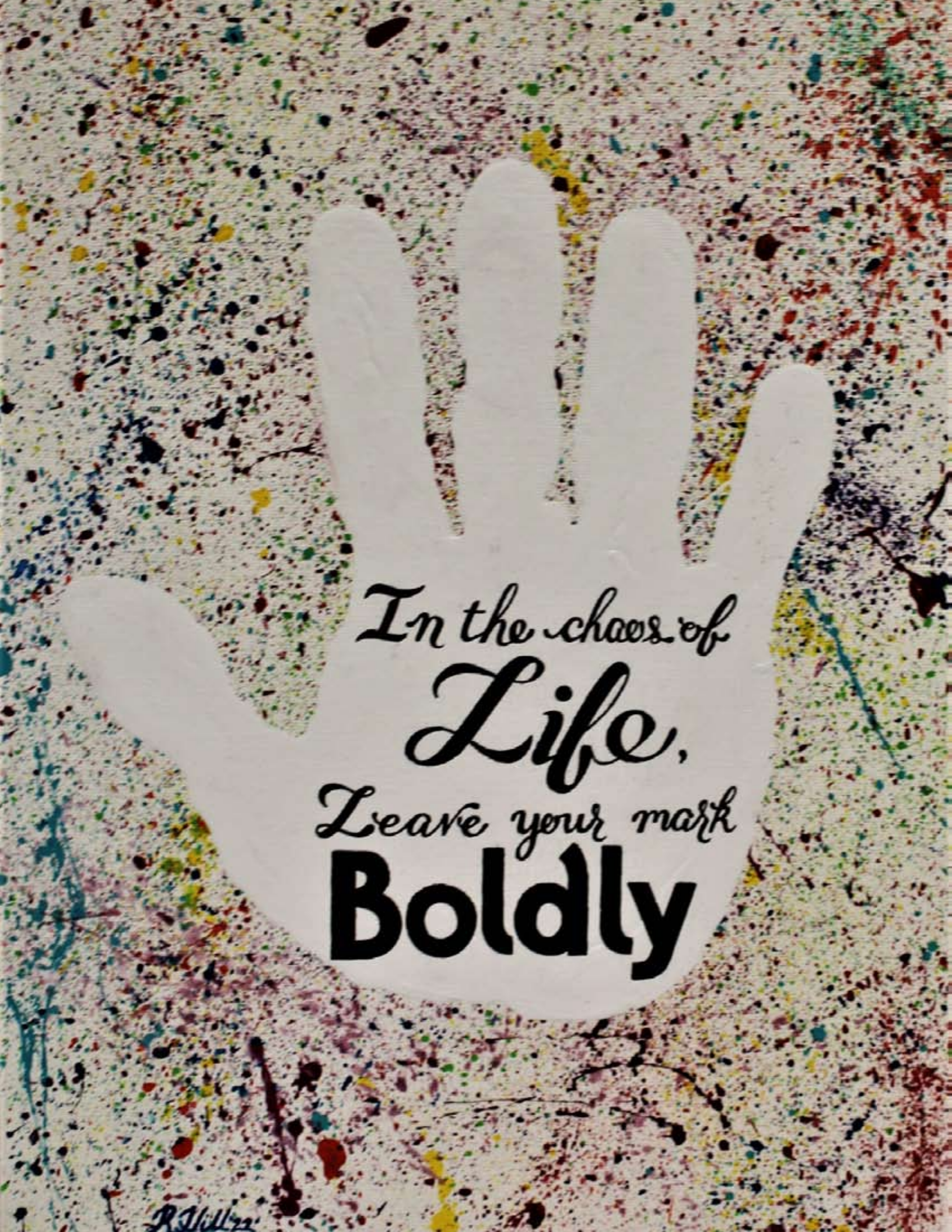
The humming vibration doesn't want me to sleep this time. It reminds me, time is endless. Yet when it's time to leave, the time comes so soon. Having nothing seems like having it all. I own nothing yet I possess the world. I yearn for the day when clothes no longer restrict me, when money is a word that has no meaning in language, when good bye is a term never used because the ones you love will never leave. The faces of the ones I'm with

shine with a golden aura. The atmosphere is filled with magic.

If nature was intended to make one feel this way, what happened? Why are we so far removed from it? We place a value on things that really don't matter. Why after feeling this freedom would I sacrifice these moments for superficial illusions? I know why. These illusions are materialistic things that we touch; they only satisfy our sensual gratification. These illusions bury the sixth sense of love we have in our hearts. Once we're removed from it all, that enchanting flower of love will blossom. These experiences can only scratch the surface of what is greater, what's in store for those who aspire to reach higher levels. It's the journey and the things we pick up along the way that matter.





A white handprint is centered on a background of colorful paint splatters. The quote is written in a mix of cursive and bold sans-serif fonts.

*In the chaos of  
Life,  
Leave your mark  
**Boldly***