





## Editor's Note

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When I was a kid growing up in Oklahoma, we had this thing we did every December morning that gave us joy. Warm in our beds, groggy from a long sleep, we would wake with a start and hurriedly dress so we wouldn't be the last one there. If one of us was lagging behind, we would "gently" rush the others because the rule was everyone had to be at the wall at the bottom of the stairs for us to begin. This was our tradition.

My mom made a felt Christmas tree that hung on the wall. All around it were pockets numbered 1 to 24. Inside each pocket were three tiny ornaments and every morning my brother, sister and I would come charging down the stairs to choose our ornaments so we could pin them to the little tree, counting down the days until Christmas. To make it fair, my mom would rotate who got to choose first. But *on* the 1st, I always got my choice because I was the oldest. There were different kinds of ornaments, some just thin metallic snowflakes, some were little tinging bells, some plastic candy canes and some were tiny plastic figurines like jolly St. Nick holding a sack of goodies. Of course with siblings there were squabbles about someone changing the pockets out so they could get the best ones—and to be fair I'm sure we all did that at least once. But here's the thing. It was something we did every morning, together. Something simple and yet it still sits with me today. I sit and reminisce about those days, the feeling of belonging to something, of knowing no matter what, *this* was going to happen because, well, it's our thing. There are many other times I recall that stir up feelings of peace and happiness and safety, things we did as a family. But that felt Christmas tree was my favorite. I have a silly grin on my face right now just thinking about it.

Traditions are important. They create anticipatory joy in our lives and give us an anchoring spot in this topsy-turvy world. But the most important thing tradition creates are memories. So let's go, you and I, down memory lane and think about the traditions that have made us who we are and give us a little smile.

**Art Credits:** *If Light Closed Its Eyes* photos by Drummond West; *Scream the Scream, Outrageous Rates and Zoophobia* (l to r) by Christopher Leary; *untitled* by Lynell Hill; *untitled Halloween centerfold* by Ryan Johnson; *Red Maple Leaf* by Homaidan Al-Turki; *untitled* by Lynell Hill; background image *Eagle Flag* by Andrew Montano; *Soldier Flag* by Andrew Montano; *untitled* by Sean Marshall; *Sentinel* by Sam Mullikin; *Blissful Kaos* (moon on the horizon) by Joshua Baldwin; *untitled* by Steven Lee; 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.



# A Color and Red Maple Tree Leaf's Journey into a Human Soul

by Homaidan Al-Turki

Colors are a blessing to be appreciated and reflected upon. Looking at colors otherwise is a bad habit and I pray for that to change in people. The opportunity to learn color theory and do color study is enhancing my appreciation and understanding of them. I chose with no hesitation to draw and study a red maple tree leaf. It presented a challenge that produced a seeing and unconsciously smooth, therapeutic feeling within me.

The challenge of this study stemmed from pseudo-fear. First, I never learned how to draw a leaf. My mind wanted to reflect exactness of what I saw into my drawing sheet, which also fed this fear, an ordeal of its own. I was able to resolve both of these internal clashes by starting to draw while maintaining a fun, experimentation attitude with no mental pressure. This attitude helped me to be in the "zone". In addition, the planning that went into this class, making it easy, has helped a starter like me to develop eagerness to explore and learn without pressure. I appreciate that.

The resulting "seeing" experience of this study was amazing. Nature's colors unfold in front of your eyes throughout the seasons in Colorado. Watching leaves change from one color to another is a passion of my life, even in a prison environment, behind walls. The life and decay cycles of leaves are a vivid reflection of our life and death. However, this study of the redness of a Maple Tree leaf introduced another dimension of understanding of the depth and detail of color. Rather than seeing leaves in transition from one color to another, now I can see transition within one single color in one single leaf. The different saturation of redness in this maple tree leaf was most beautiful. The redness of maple tree leaves is one of the first signs of the decay process. The creep of the decay is evident. The changes in color are breathtaking. Mixing colors and drawing all of that was a transcendent experience. Literally, I had to force myself to stop mixing and start drawing myself more into this study.

Finally, this study served as unconscious therapy. Colors and maple tree leaves are a persistent story in my life. The whole experience of drawing, studying and reflecting upon this red Maple Leaf brought a story of my past front and center. One day

I was walking in an outside yard in a federal penitentiary during the Fall season. The fences were collecting leaves blown by winds from the surrounding mountains. Suddenly, my long time passion of seasonal color changes erupted. Unconsciously I pulled out a small bread bag that I had saved from breakfast and I started to collect every leaf color I could find. There was no plan yet what to do with them. I took them back to my cell and spread them out on my cell floor. The purpose at that stage was to see the pattern of color changes in each type of leaf. Out of all the leaves, the maple tree leaves emerged with a large spectrum of colors: green life to dry, earthly colored leaves. I ended up making an art display out of them on my cell's wall by the end of the day. For months, I enjoyed reflecting on the life and decay cycle of the leaves posted on my wall. Visitors to my cell, both inmates and officials alike, enjoyed the exhibition. My family and children in Saudi Arabia were extremely pleased with this art work and the creativity in it. This part of the story was shared with passion. However, another part of the story was never shared. The experience of this recent study has made me more comfortable to share the remaining part of the story. This part has to do with humans and color discrimination.

I am a Muslim Arab from Saudi Arabia. That by itself invites the ignorant to manifest some of their conscious, as well as unconscious biases. A pattern of harassment and intimidation has

been a part of my prison experience. However, my resilience, my nature, my religion, my personality and the support of my loved ones have helped me to pay no mind to this ignorance. One day my above-mentioned cell was raided by the highest officials of my facility. Upside down describes how the cell looked after they left. My artwork, which had been sanctioned by the facility was violently destroyed. My leaves were wiped out in totality. Seeing this sentimental work

shattered all over my cell was a very emotional experience; little things count greatly behind the walls. I accepted the loss, moved on, held my head high and felt pity for the lack of humanity shown.


Seeing a red maple tree leaf during this class revived this specific memory. Drawing and studying it brought some type of closure. That is strange, yet amazing.





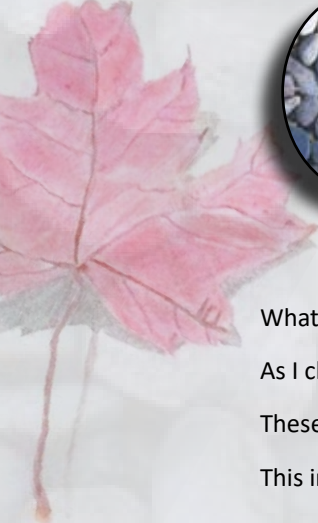
# ROCKS

by Kevin Hurley




I find it difficult to swim with all these rocks that I hold,  
All my life I collected these rocks and did what I was told.  
My pack is filled and I'm goin' down; the water is deep,  
Rational thought would be...to let go, but all I want to keep.  
Cherished memories encapsule these rocks that are very dear,

Can't keep my head above water, yet it is very clear





What I hold onto will kill me if I give it a chance,  
As I close my eyes, I wonder who called these dead to dance.  
These rocks torment me, yet I cannot let go,  
This insanity causes my mind to dance to and fro.



Release my grip one by one, and to  
the top I'll rise,  
What I am truly holding onto are all my lies;  
Everything I've been telling myself is far from real,  
I'm not unique, but I think no one knows how I feel.

Not sure why letting go of these rocks is so tough,  
I gasp for air saying, "Have I had enough?"  
Choice seems like an elusive preponderance pulling me down,  
Slowly going deeper, if I hold on, eventually I'll drown.  
I create my fate as I see the surface far above,



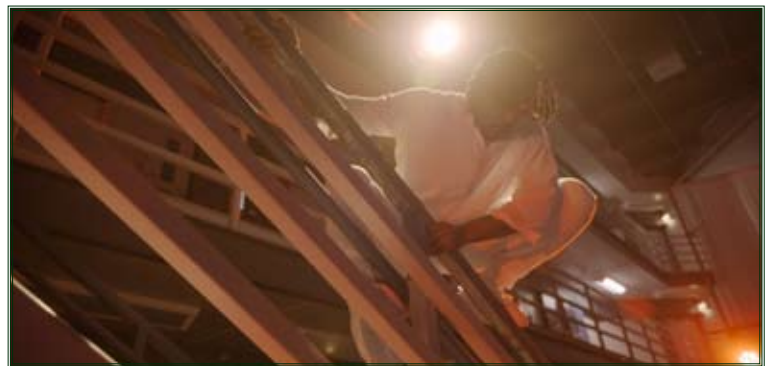
My fear is that I will lose all that I Love.  
Memories are all I have left and don't want them to disappear,  
I need to let go of these rocks and face my deepest fear.



# Resilience In Light

by Ryan J. Krueger

“We had to know that the universe wasn’t going to let us tell this story without first making sure we truly believe in it.” Even now, months later, gazing down at the swirling shades of whites, blues and purples that was once our stage, those words haunt me. Swatches of bare concrete, scraps of neon spike tape, and strikingly straight paint lines are but ghostly reminders of where seating platforms, lighting trees, and pipe and drape once defined our...seeing place. I need only close my eyes and I am transported back to the warm glow of multicolored paras as they bathed our ensemble during pre-show ritual, the nervous energy was so palpable it was as if the air itself carried a charge. It’s a comfort to know I can so easily conjure the sights, sounds, and feelings of the truly amazing experience which was “If Light Closed Its Eyes.” Then, as if on cue, the intercom sounds, chow is called, the spell is broken, my reverie ends, and I open my eyes to the stark reality that is Unit 4C. A place once transformed into something more than it was, something better than it was ever meant to be. A place still fighting to remain so.



When setting out to tell a tale of tragedy and triumph, most would be hard pressed to imagine trials and tribulations such as those overcome by the men and women who willed “If Light...” into existence, conceived of mere months before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, nurtured through the dark days of endless quarantines, lock downs, cohorts, and all that was left in their wake, and finally born during the abbreviated summer days of staff shortages and graveyard minimum lock downs. Through it all we persevered. Covid shut the world down? That’s o.k. Interviews can be done over Googlemeets. Another round of cohorting? No problem. Half the cast and crew in one room, the other half in another and we’ll have our meeting anyway. Quarantine lock downs? No big deal. We’ll postpone the show until summer. That just gives us more time to rehearse. Staff shortages shut the yards down? We got this. Just move the whole cast and crew into the same pod. The pod is our theatre anyway. Graveyard minimums at 6 o’clock every night? Why not. Rehearsals at 9:00 am and shows at 2:00 in the afternoon.





Of course there were the typical prison issues: personality conflicts, guys getting into trouble, cast and crew leaving the facility or just throwing in the towel. And there were theatre issues such as: recasting roles to fill vacancies, tour dates cancelled, set design complications, sound equipment pitfalls, lighting design issues, dance team problems, multiple script revisions, blocking a play in



a unit where guys actually live... I could go on and on. It was not easy. In fact, at times it was downright daunting. We had some tough meetings, hard conversations, arguments, and there was no shortage of tears. There was also laughter, joy, camaraderie, and love. We picked one another up, shouldered burdens together when they were too heavy to carry alone, and held space for all of the messiness that comes from just being...us. Over the course of 2 ½ years, through all this and so much more, it was only because of the unconquerable resilience of our ensemble that "If Light..." was finally manifest.

Resilience – the ability to rebound or spring back. A simple definition for a trait with such huge implications for how we manage adversity and conflict in our lives. It's not about getting back up when you get knocked down. No, true resilience is about what you do after you've gotten up. It's about holding your head up, and taking the next step forward knowing you just might get knocked down again. Some may confuse this with stubbornness, but it's really about resolve, dedication. A friend of mine once said that it's easy to be a part of something when things are going good and it's fun; but you really find out who people are when times are tough, when being there is hard, when it isn't fun and easy. To me this is when you find out who has heart. Who is still standing next to you in those moments? Our ensemble was tested so many times, and sure we lost some along the way, but for those who saw it through to the end, who were still standing there in our circle-up when the dust had settled, I choose to believe it was resilience in the hearts of individuals which lent our group the strength necessary to hold our heads up and keep moving forward.

Leaving for work in the early morning hours one day this past July, I had an opportunity to steal a moment to stand in the center of the pod, in an eerie silence with no one else about, and just relish what we'd managed to turn a prison pod into. As I looked around at what we'd created I was surrounded by lighting rigs, scaffolding for sound and light booths, bright white curtains enclosing the space, and empty chairs where an audience would sit just hours later. For that one minute I wasn't standing in the middle of a pod but rather in a theatre. For that briefest moment I almost, *almost* felt free. I will be forever grateful for that momentary escape from this reality.

What I didn't know at the time, what I couldn't have known, was that just a few days later this world we'd so carefully crafted would come crashing down around us all. I suppose we shouldn't have been surprised, given all we'd endured. But the news that one of our cast had tested positive for Covid shook us all. Had that been it, if we'd just had to try to frantically replace a key cast member the day before our final weekend of shows, we might have been able to press on. Of course there was more. News quickly followed that the entire cast would be required to wear masks, on stage and off, for those final performances...or we could

cancel the last of our shows. It wasn't an easy decision to say the least but in the end it was the right one. "If Light..." ironically enough, ended in much the same way it began, in the throes of a pandemic that just wouldn't relent. It was heartbreaking to tear down and load-out the following day when we should have been readying for a public show that afternoon. In true DU

PAI fashion though, in the end when the truck was loaded and 2 ½ years of hard work was over, we came together one last time to pick each other up and celebrated all that we had accomplished.

Not surprisingly many of the "If Light..." ensemble have gone their separate ways in the last month or so, with some moving on to the next big thing, others leaving the facility and still more just moving back to other units. It's a strange thing to have spent so much time together working on something so monumental and then in the blink of an eye have it all disappear. For the cast and crew of "If Light..." our story will live on forever. I'm not talented enough to do that story justice here. I'll leave that for someone else to write. But if you weren't fortunate enough to see it in person, don't worry. The movie will be out soon.

On that last day of "If Light..." a question was asked: was the experience worth the pain and sadness of how the show ended? It's a question that has been posed countless times in any number of ways in as many myriad circumstances. Looking down once more on what was our "seeing place," I can tell you without doubt for me the answer is yes.

It's been said that you mourn a thing as hard as you loved it, and if that's the case I've got some mourning still to do. I don't lament the way the show ended and the loss of our last few performances. No, I mourn the truly amazing experiences, both good and bad, that ultimately shed "If Light..." onto the world. If you've never been involved with DU PAI, or if perhaps you're someone who has dipped your toe in the waters but walked away, I challenge you to make us a part of your life. I won't promise you it will be all roses and lollipops. I will promise you, if you open yourself to the possibilities it will change your life and you will be better for it. We lucky few who were part of it are all certainly better because of "If Light..."

"We had to know that the universe wasn't going to let us tell this story without first making sure we truly believe in it." These words were spoken during one of the more difficult days our ensemble faced not long before we opened. Reflecting back on all that led to the 8 days of "If Light Closed Its Eyes," I'd say we had a common cause: we were resilient in the face of seemingly overwhelming obstacles, we came together as a family, and we absolutely proved we believed in the story we had to tell.





# 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.



I am mad. My thoughts are muddled as I try to calm myself, walking fast laps around the track at Territorial. Pulling in deep breaths, I walk past people, around people; if I could, I'd walk through people.

I am mad. Red in my eyes, I can't see anything other than my own indignation over being stood up—for the *second* week in a row. I've got other things I could be doing. Doesn't he know my time is valuable? I don't have a lot of free time, so to schedule something like this and be forgotten or blown off, or whatever happened...it's just too much for me. Too much.

And then something amazing happens. I see the mountains. Through the angry haze in my mind, deep, rich greens and grays and russet dappling the shadowed crevices of those stunning mountains burns a hole in my frustrations. The texture of them, how you could see individual trees from miles away, spotting a circling hawk under that wide open blue sky; it is like a postcard from heaven, a message from the universe. Beautiful.

When I finally drop my gaze back to my here and now, everything feels...transformed. It is like the sun has just come up and the madman that was scraping his claws against my window in the darkness of night, keeping me on the edge of hysteria, showed himself to be a rosebush, swaying in the cool morning breeze. An easy smile creeps across my face and I remember this story a friend of mine told me almost a year ago. I know in my heart I need to share it.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the summer of 2021, six of my colleagues and I did a workshop tour, travelling across the state of Colorado to share the tenets of what we now call Artistic Justice (AJ). Some of you may have heard of it, or even participated. It was an incredible experience. Not because we got to travel around to different facilities, and not because we got to open new pathways of dialogue between residents and staff. Those things are great, yes, but what happened on our journey, the stories that we heard and shared really opened us up to the idea that we are all the same. We as humans all want the same things. We may call them different names, but deep down, the human condition translates across all boundaries, all of the barriers we create and use to separate us from the person who is sitting right in front of us. One of those stories happened in Buena Vista Correctional Facility, to a friend of mine. His name is David.

In Buena Vista's incentive unit, there is a little haven that the residents have built, with the support of the staff and management team there. This haven is in the form of a little yard, only accessible by incentive residents. There is a picturesque

## Care is a Sympathy Radish

by Brett Phillips

swath of grass with picnic tables, a running/walking path and a large concrete pad where they have sandbag weights, jungle gym workout stations and a basketball half-court. At the end of the yard there is a little place with large corrugated tubs full of all

sorts of growing things, a garden. This garden is an oasis within the haven, allowing the guys there to grow many different things, edible things that they get to consume when the "fruits" of their labor mature. One of the things many of the guys there grow are radishes.

Now, I've never grown radishes, but I hear they are kind of easy to cultivate, so my friend David was growing a little patch of radishes in the area that was assigned to him. He explained to me how excited he was to see something he planted flourish and could not wait until they were ready to harvest so he could sample the wares of all his work and dedication. When the long-awaited day to reap the tubers arrived, he went to his patch of soil and started unearthing the plants by their stalks. He quickly realized something was wrong. The radishes were worm-ridden. His whole crop was decimated by these little creatures just trying to survive. He was disheartened to say the least. All that work wasted. All that pride in accomplishing something he had never done before crushed. All the hope involved with doing something that is "not prison" gone within moments of his discovery.

Fortunately the story does not end there. As he told it, some of the other gardeners saw his distress and heard his plight involving his beloved radishes. Feeling bad for their fellow farmer, they all got together with the limited bounties they had harvested, and gave David some radishes to eat. He said it was amazing to see that amount of care in prison, a place where scarcity abounds and thoughtfulness is often an afterthought. I agreed.

The moral to this story, if there needs to be one, is clear to me, and I hope it is to you as well. Artistic Justice (AJ) is not just a theory or a practice. It is both and it is also a way of life. It encompasses so many of the attributes that make us what we are, human. It involves empathy, compassion, forgiveness, grace and mountains and mountains of care. While you, the reader may not have been trained yet in the tenets of AJ, and may not fully comprehend how much it can do for you and all those your life touches, one thing I hope you take away from this is that the attitudes and mindsets of AJ can be practiced in your everyday life. It isn't any harder than making a decision to do the right and caring thing in the moment, no matter who is looking, no matter who is in front of you, needing that care. Care can actually a very simple thing. You know, it can even be as simple as a sympathy radish.



# Planes and Edges

by Samuel Mullikin

I once saw an advertisement for square watermelons. The growers slip the budding fruit into boxy glass bottles while they are still on the vine. Carefully tended, the watermelons grow into the space, filling the bottle. When it has finally pushed itself flat along the transparent walls, the bottle is broken, and the melon is sold as a novelty. It's an image that resonated with me.

I learned early on that it's important to consider the face you present to the world, that we are never free to just *be*. For example, you would probably never guess that I'm silly at heart. I've always done a good job bottling that up. That's a lesson I was taught when I was young, and green, and still on the vine.

When I was young, I quickly came to an understanding that children are meant to be seen, not heard. I was told repeatedly that my manners reflected my home. The rules started out easy enough: don't speak unless spoken to, be still, say please and thank you, address others as sir or ma'am. At first, I remember feeling constricted, not understanding that they were trying to mold me. Nothing I did felt right. I was corrected in how I talked, how I walked, how I ate, how I dressed, even in how I played. In the house, I was being trained so when I was in front of others I could be on display. I learned to orient my attention on my stepfather the way some plants turn to track the sun. I could interpret his cues by the way he looked at me—a sideways glance, a slight frown, a clearing of his throat—each an increasing level of correction.

It was only when I was alone in my room with my door shut that I had a sense of who I might actually be. In hushed tones I could say whatever I wanted, even if it was just to laugh at my own jokes. With soft steps I would dance and twirl, finally free to open up. I marvel sometimes at the sweetness of my whimsy, the crispness of that laughter, and at how I guarded them like secrets, roots hidden in the stony soil of who I was supposed to be.

The façade felt as thin and as flat as our family portrait, all staged and smiling, pinned beneath glass. The message was clear: seeming was more important than being. My function in the family was ornamental. So long as I gave the right impression, my stepfather was likely to leave me alone. Like a map engraved upon my heart, I sensed the space I was meant to fill and I stretched to fill it.

When I was old enough to understand the smell of whiskey and the heavy-handed lessons found halfway into the bottle, I began to doubt the illusion. I would stand on the stairs, staring at our family portrait, listening to my parents fight. Looking into my own eyes reflected in the glass, I would hear a rotten-hollow thump and wonder if it had come from downstairs or within me. In the silence that followed the only thing that I could feel were the hairline fractures working their way in from the edges.

I have long felt the influence of those early boundaries. I can feel how the planes have been set, the edges creased. I still call everyone sir or ma'am. I can't help myself. And, if I'm being honest, I'm grateful for the manners my stepfather gave me. They have served me well my whole life. It wasn't until I moved out that I was able to heal and grow. But I'm also still quiet, unable to break that shell, the boy within worried he will upset someone.

My own children are grown now; though when they were young I also wanted them to have good manners. I made sure they knew to say yes sir and no sir, yes ma'am and no ma'am, please and thank you. I also made sure they knew they were loved, and that their whimsy and laughter were things to be celebrated.

I feel like one of those square watermelons at times. Like the shape of who I am is pressed up beneath the shape of who I seem. The glass is gone and yet I still feel those planes and edges. The ad said the watermelons were just as crisp, just as sweet, but I have my doubts. The novelty just reminds me that they didn't have a chance to grow wild and free. The round ones, unconstrained, tasted the open air and were allowed to just *be*.







# Two Turkeys

by Matthew Plake

When it comes to traditions, my family has all of the same ones every other family has: tree in the house during the Yule season, decorate the yard for Trick or Treaters and even setting off illegal fireworks for the Fourth of July. But the one tradition that has always stuck out to me is that my pop has always bought two turkeys for Thanksgiving. Not for some altruistic reason like donating it to charity, but because somehow or some way he always finds a way to ruin the first one.

One year he didn't thaw it enough before dropping it in the deep fryer. After the fireball died down, the turkey was just different-sized pieces floating in the grease. The very next year he made sure to completely thaw the bird and got it in the hot oil without any incident. Naturally he went into the garage to get a celebratory beverage. The dog, overly excited, pulled his leash out of the ground and proceeded to take off after my pop into the garage. The end of the leash was flinging around wildly and

it caught on one of the three legs on the deep fryer, pulling the bottom over the top, dumping it all down the driveway and into the gutter. After that, pop always put the dog in the house.

One year the whole family piled into the truck and we all went down to San Diego, CA to spend the Thanksgiving holiday with our grandparents. They lived just a couple of blocks from Mission Beach. They were close enough we were able to smell the salt from the ocean. My pop of course tells my grandparents he will cook the turkey because he's "got it down to a science." They all go out and buy the biggest turkey they can find and my grandfather pulls out the deep fryer from the garage, filling it with brand new oil. The entire afternoon, everything goes perfectly. My pop pulled the turkey right on time; it's crispy, it's moist, it's perfect. Pop laid the turkey on the patio table to cool while we all went inside to wash up and get the rest of the food. It's not even ten minutes before we all go back out there with our

hands full of all the fixings. We found the table covered with seagulls. They had torn the bread that was cooling alongside the turkey, and the prized bird is of course obliterated. They made a mess of everything. It was as if they knew the turkey was perfect because they wouldn't leave it until my grandmother got the hose out and sprayed them until they finally flew away. The entire table was ruined. We ended up scraping the whole idea, and going out to eat. The next night we gave it another shot, but this time we brought the turkey inside to cool.

That is how the tradition of two turkeys came about. Now, when everyone is at the table, and they are saying what they are thankful for, I'm always thankful for what I have, even more so when I need extra.





# The Tradition of Family

by Jamie Blickenderfer

My family has always been close. That especially shows with our Thanksgiving traditions. My mom would cover the house with fall decorations, from cardboard pinups of turkeys to colorful centerpieces showing the changing of the leaves: reds, yellows and oranges. She had a small duck statue that had different outfits for each month. November's outfit was a turkey—of course.

Thanksgiving was a time we would spend together with our extended family. My aunt, uncle and cousins lived just a few houses from us. My uncle and my dad watched television, or at least they would start to. Within minutes you couldn't hear the T.V. over their snoring. My mom and aunt would split up the cooking duties, each beginning in their own kitchen. My aunt would bring her dishes over and add them to the piles of food that seemed to just keep growing. Pies were placed on a table and vegetables and other sides were placed in the oven to keep them warm. The turkey was slowly cooked in an electric roaster and was constantly being basted.

Finally, everything was prepared and ready to go. Vegetables and sides were transferred to serving dishes. The turkey was placed on a platter. The house smelled so good, we couldn't help but gather at the tables and take our seats. The adults were at the main table. This was one of the few times our formal dining room was used. My cousins, my brother and I sat at the kid's table. My dad said grace over the food and my brother who has Down's syndrome said a prayer of his own. After grace, food was passed around and plates were filled. Conversation erupted, filling the gaps between bites.

Some years, other family would join us. My sisters would come with their families, or other cousins used Thanksgiving as an excuse to visit Disney World or any number of the other amusement parks in Florida. Whatever the excuse, it was nice to have family come to visit.

Christmas also carried many fond traditions. Christmas is special to us because it revolves around our celebration of the birth of Jesus. Just like Thanksgiving, it all started with decorations. Like many families we would hang lights around the outside of the house. My mom put a home-made wreath on the front door and a light-up nativity scene was centered in front of the house. The duck was dressed as Santa, naturally. Inside, Christmas exploded. There were more decorations than I could ever describe.

At the center of it all was the Christmas tree. We started by laying a 4x8 foot sheet of plywood on the floor. As a family, we put ornaments on the tree once it was centered on the plywood. Next, a blanket of white cotton was spread out. My mom created villages under the tree. Miniature houses, cars, people and even a frozen lake were all strategically placed on the cotton "snow." My dad ran lights to the houses and around the villages.

Then my dad set up the trains. Two ovals circled the tree. In the center ring was an old German train that my dad picked up while he was stationed overseas. The more conventional "American" train ran around the outside track. Finally a blanket of plastic snowflakes was sprinkled over the entire display. When the lights in our house were off and the tree and little villages were lit up, it felt magical.

These traditions were celebrated every year, and continue on; I've shared these customs with my children. They've helped cook massive amounts of food for Thanksgiving. We've expanded our guest list from just family, and now we include friends. I've also shared my Christmas village routine with my kids. My hope is that they continue these traditions as they also incorporate their own traditions for these special times with family.



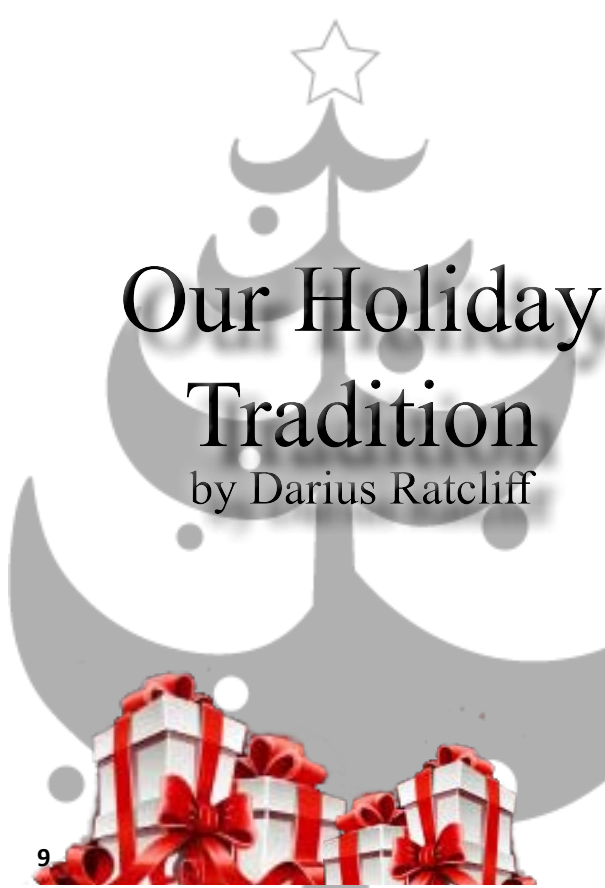
## Holiday Tradition by Travis Bland

One of my favorite holiday traditions is hanging Christmas cards. Since my brother and I were infants, my mom would collect or keep every Christmas card anyone would send to our family. Being the baby of the family, I wasn't able to help but as I got older I was asked to help fill my brother's role as the card hanger. Then my brother went to live with my grandmother in Kentucky. So, it became a holiday tradition for me and my mom.

She would reread cards she'd seen thousands of times. Some would make her laugh because it reminded her of something funny. Other cards would bring her to tears reopening old wounds not yet healed. Year after year we would get more cards, adding more memories for our family, while listening to whatever cheesy Christmas songs were playing on the radio.

Hanging cards was more fun than hanging the Christmas tree itself. In those moments life was simple, loving, just a joyful time of the year. I call home when my mom is hanging cards and it feels like a part of me is there.

Thank you for letting the Blands share a little holiday tradition with you. Happy holidays.



## Our Holiday Tradition by Darius Ratcliff

I remember a tradition with my family growing up, on the date of December 23<sup>rd</sup>. Every year we would wait until midnight for Christmas Eve. There would be no presents under the tree this whole month. So when my brothers and I would come out of our room at midnight Christmas Eve, we would run to the living room and see all these presents under the tree, seemingly coming out of nowhere. We would then race to my mom's room to wake her up, banging on the door because it was locked. Her door is usually unlocked but around Thanksgiving her door would suddenly be locked. We eventually caught on to this suspicious behavior but she would still try to claim all the presents were from Santa.

After we rattled her door, she would open it, acting surprised by all this talk about presents under the tree. We would pull her to the living room to show her what we were saying was true. Then she would always say, "Well, open one and only one. It's not Christmas yet." We would open up our presents and play with them all day.

That night we would stay up to midnight again for Christmas, and this time when we went to my mom's room the door would be unlocked. We would beg her to get up to open our presents and when we would enter the living room there would be even more packages with our names on them. She would set out milk and cookies on Christmas Eve and the cookies would be half eaten and the milk would be gone. Mom would say, "See? Santa came again. Look at the cookies and milk."

The trick never got old and I loved that I got to experience it. I can't wait to do it with my kids.





# St. Nicolas' Belt

by Jeremy Moss

With me the holidays are rough. I'm sure I'm not alone in this. Usually around the holidays people are playing the game of gift exchange. Not like birthdays where people come together to celebrate one's life. Nope. Society has this underlying norm that says when someone gives you a gift during the holidays, one best have a gift to give back. Two separate and contrasting traditions.

She may not know it, but my baby sister is my hero. This poor girl decided to be born on St. Nicolas Day, a pre-Yule day and night my family celebrated. This day usually gauged how Yule would go, depending on if I'd been good or not. Until baby sis came along.

Grandma would of course make a fantastic meal that I drool at the thought of even now. Then the kids would go down to the family room, build a fire and watch a movie. Well, we'd act like we were watching a movie. We'd really be listening for a ringing bell coming from upstairs. Ring-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling went St. Nicolas' bell-laden belt and we'd all sprint back upstairs to try and catch him before he left. We never did: the old bugger's quick.

By some miracle, the living room would be transformed. A live Yule tree with real white candles the only illumination. Places would be set at the dinner table with small gifts for all of us—if we had been good.

Grandmother gets up early in the morning. Sitting in her bed with a joy in her heart. Looking at her husband with delight in her thoughts, with his mouth open and sound asleep in his bed. The old woman shake her head, goes to work for the day to come. With her eyes looking out of the window, with coffee on the stove dancing away. Sun coming up with rainbow in the sky, So many beautiful colors, she thought to herself.

Ground full of white with the snow from up above in the heaven that sent it down to us. Old man put on his heavy jacket, kiss his wife with a smile on his face. He dash out of the house with shovel in his hand. He came back with meat in his arms, sets the meat on dining room table. Brown, red and hot from ground where he cook it. Ran upstairs to put on clean clothes. Looking out the window, he cried out Here they come.

Grandchildren run in the house, looking around for presents and all. Mothers and fathers carrying cakes and pies; lots of goodies, things to eat. Mothers helping out with food and things, with wine in their glasses chatting away about news that day. Fathers watching football and

It was as if Kris Kringel and Jack Frost cast a spell. We were so excited we never noticed the exhaustion on my grandparent's faces, or the stout drinks they settled into their chairs with.

We would each take turns extinguishing a candle, making a wish and then we'd go back to our designated spot. We would each in turn open what St. Nic brought, usually some divine German chocolate treat sent from my great aunt.

As my sister got older, this day—her birthday—in a small way made her a saint. She loved how her day was so huge, so different from everyone else's. We'd always have a separate cake and gifts for her during the day. That night though, she was transformed into St. Nicolas' main elf #1. Her birthday became everyone's. It was her gift to pass out the chocolates and treats. She, early in her life, learned the selflessness my grandmother exuded and found true joy in the act of giving.

As I get older, and as the years in here roll on, I realize how incredibly kind, gracious, strong and compassionate my sweet baby sister became. How much I look up to her for those things. How much I respect her and how much to this very moment, I try to be like her. Every day.

# Christmas Day

by Eli Swazo

games on T.V., drinking away, enjoying themselves. Children running around playing and all.

Time to eat!! has been called. Mothers carrying food with happy hearts, giving children plates full of food and goodies for delight. How happy children are.

Come on. Come on!! Let's open presents under this tree. Blue, red, green and pink wrap, nice with candy cane on top. Christmas tree light's hanging from Christmas tree. So many decorations on tree one can see. Many boxes and new toys laying around. You can't walk along the floor.

Time came to the end, to say goodbye and all; with kisses and hugs one by one all went home. Old man takes out a bouquet of flowers; he give them to his wife. In his heart he sees her, young and beautiful woman the first time they meet. She hold the flowers close to her heart as she's looking. By her surprise she place her hand on her lips. With tears in her eyes, she seen the ring on white rose leaf. Old man give her a kiss, and said, Thank you my love, giving me children. Merry Christmas from my heart to my love.

# Leon Cheese

by Mark Rosen

I have many fond memories from my childhood. So many, I really thought it would be easy to write down a few examples of them that revolved around holiday family traditions. However, when I actually started to put pen to paper, none of the beautiful family holiday moments stood out. What did immediately come to mind were two of my favorite Christmas Traditions. I guess I can't really call them *family* traditions because they were really only the favorite customs of my big brother and I. My older brother was full of cool ideas when I was a kid.

These rituals were my mom's least favorite, but classics nonetheless.

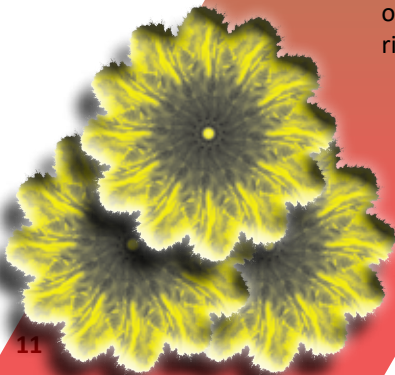
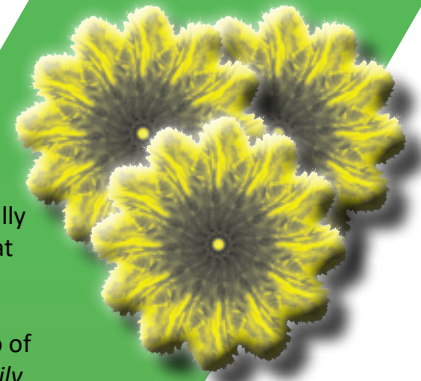
In my parent's home, where I grew up there was a big open pass-through in the wall that separated the living room from the kitchen. Every holiday or new season my mom loved to decorate the shelves of the pass-through with holiday-related items. When people entered our home that would always be the very first thing they noticed, and she would proudly inform them of the significance of each item.

Around November first every year, she would go all out to decorate the shelves for Christmas. She would wrap fake holly vines and a string of Christmas lights around each shelf and on the outside frame of the opening. She would set up a manger scene on one shelf, angels on another, and a little ceramic Santa and his sleigh on his own sill. She always saved the big center ledge for her favorite seasonal decoration of all: oversized individual ceramic letters that spelled out NOEL.

The tradition started when I was about 5 or 6 and my brother was a teenager. My brother had figured out that when mom was out of the room we could rearrange the NOEL letters to spell out funny stuff like LONE, ELON, or our favorite LEON. We would cautiously wait, bubbling over with anticipation for her to discover our little gag. Or even better if we had company over before she noticed, they would immediately ask, "Who is Leon?" She would then give us the mom look and put the letters back in the lame but correct order.

The other Christmas classic mischievous stunt we would pull was to take the seat next to our dad—never mom—on the pew in church on Christmas Sunday. We would sit there very nicely and quietly trying our best to behave and not let on that we were up to anything. My brother would look through the program, which had the particular scriptures the preacher was going to teach on that day, and also a list of hymns we would be singing. I could barely contain my excitement right before the entire congregation joined together in fellowship to sing the Christmas hymn, "Bringing in the Sheaves." My brother and I would sing the verse and bridge lyrics at a normal tone and volume. However, when it was time to sing the chorus and with our dad unknowingly providing cover from mom, we would sing loudly and proudly, "Bringing in the Cheese" at the top of our lungs. We would erupt into laughter as we dodged smacks and snarls from our mom!

Yep, we had some good times back then!





# How Do I Get Involved?

**The Inside Report's** mission is to provide an intellectually challenging forum for information, entertainment, and inspiration, written by and for the people who live and work within the Colorado Department of Corrections. We strive to be good stewards of the truth, while recording history and news that affects us all.

**The Inside Report** is looking for journalists and individuals with voices who are participating in their communities. Tell us what's happening in your world!

Please request a LuxLit media release packet or seek further information from your facility Bureau Chief or other DU PAI Group Leader!



**Reverberations** is the literary and creative arts magazine for DU PAI and is distributed with the **Inside Report Newspaper**.

Our mission is to create a community of connected artists and writers who impact the world in beautiful ways. We like to encourage collaborative artistic experiences and projects. If



you are a writer, find a friend to paint what you have written; if you are an artist of any ilk, find a friend to reflect on your latest creation!

Please request a LuxLit media release packet or seek further information from your facility Submission Rep or other DU PAI Group Leader!



**Inside Wire: Colorado Prison Radio** broadcasts from studios at Limon, Sterling, Denver Women's, and our newest satellite station, Buena Vista! It is the first statewide prison radio station in U.S. history, and the first to

be streamed around the world via the internet! You can tune in right on your TV.

Listen to **Hotlines** every day at 9am, noon & 5pm and talk to your DU PAI Group Leaders about what programs, events, and opportunities are coming up at your facility that we can amplify on Inside Wire Hotlines!

## OUR MISSION

The DU Prison Arts Initiative generates creative and collaborative learning experiences that enrich the lives of incarcerated people and shift the conversation about prison. We create high-quality therapeutic arts programming across Colorado. Our work empowers individuals to improve the quality of their lives and prepare to make positive changes in their communities.

## OUR VISION

DU PAI partners with every prison facility across the Colorado Department of Corrections to imagine, develop and implement ways for incarcerated people to express themselves and transform their communities. From arts-based workshops and educational courses to media outlets and public performances, these collaborations are shifting whose perspectives are included in conversations about incarceration.











victims

Show remorse

with

the offended should forgive

change of heart

degree of forgiveness

wrongdoers

should forgive

have

forgiveness

forgiveness

Forgiving

behavior

forgiving a murderer

forgive someone

God's willingness to

forgive us is a good example. He hates sin, but forgives

us.

"You can

forgive the person without forgiving or condoning his

actions or behavior."

Forgiveness

forgave

giveness

for

ling

Forgiv-

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting

# Forgiveness

by Jana Bergman

...a recent piece of work I created while my writing group and I continued to meet during Covid. We've been messing around with redacted poetry and this one spoke to the group's entire heart.

## REDACTED!!!

This is a form of poetry called Concrete Poetry. It is as much a visual piece of art as it is a written piece. One of the other forms takes is creating pictures or silhouettes from the outlines the words make on the page. *Reverberations* encourages you to experiment with different forms such as this.

"Forgiving is easy, but forgetting takes a long

time." Forgiving

forgiven

healing

Forgiveness

mercy

forgave

mercy

mercy.

forgiveness should be unconditional

forgive the offender

Remember

forgive

forgiveness

confess

repent

forgiv

FORGIVING IS SO EASY AS THE SAYING OF THE WORDS...





# Fellowship of Incarceration

by Lisa Leyshen

We are lost people with lost stories who have been rendered invisible. As the people who are forgotten we must ask the questions that no one else asks in order to tell the stories still untold. But do we want to tell the stories when we know that speaking these stories will bring other people sorrow? Is it better in the end to just be silent?

No, we can no longer be silent. We need to say the unsayable, to speak the unspeakable, to tell the untellable. Our eyes are wide open and we do not like much of what we see around us. We must all tell our stories because there is always danger in hearing only a single side of the story.

This place is invested in our suffering and our society leans more towards punishment rather than forgiveness, so we must lift up our voices and tell our stories. Most people have decided that we are no longer of value and this world would somehow be a better place without us. We must choose the pursuit of truth no matter what the cost. We can no longer be a disinterested bystander and sit idly by.

It is always harder to hate someone when you know their story.

Let the story-telling begin.



# ARTIST PROFILE

## MATTHEW MANN

Picture a blank canvas...

“The ability to start over is overwhelming. All I see is tornadoes and cyclones with bright light. I see my family and kids. The beach is nice and the waves are calm. It goes dark to light so fast I can’t keep up. Running so fast, getting nowhere. It’s dark and cold... lonely, surrounded by my closest friends.”

This is what runs through Matthew Mann’s head when he stands in front of a blank canvas, paints unopened, brushes laying on the table in front of him, preparing himself for his next painting. His artistic journey started just a few short years ago.

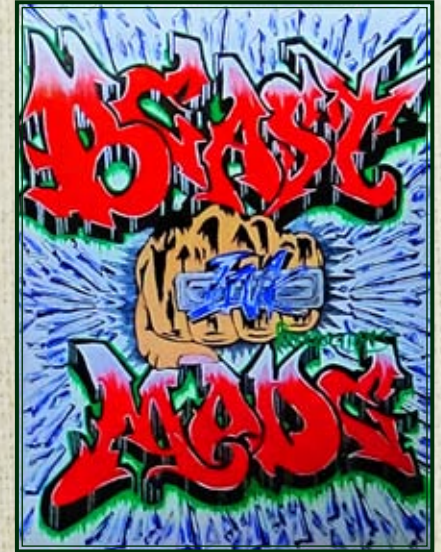
“I picked up a pencil during 2020 Covid. At first it was just a big graphite mess. My cellie was an artist and he gave me this tattoo coloring book. I found I could draw what I could see. I sent stuff to my kids. They were like, ‘No way, dad can draw!’ Then I started working with all these other mediums.”

The art of genius is in making the complex seem simple. We often look at artists and think only about how gifted and talented they are. We forget about the hundreds upon hundreds of hours



artists put into honing their skills and their craft. Not to mention the mentorship of those around them...

“A couple of guys really helped me. Two of my friends taught me to paint with acrylics. It was like cohorting colors. He and I did the big mural in the gym, he taught me to shade with paint. Another friend taught me how to do letters, to draw it on paper first. Jose Cabrallopez taught me pour methods, mixing in a couple drops of silicone oil to keep the paint from mixing with other paints – so it comes



out black & white, not gray. One time Jose taped 4 canvases 24”x36” to the wall for a month. He would start painting, paint over it, put in used paper or plastic, a trash bag, sand, rocks, little wood chips...he varnished it into the painting. He taught me that there’s no limits, not a right way or a wrong way, where the paint goes, we work with that. You know what I like doing – I’ll get gloves and splash it.”



Art and design have techniques and principles that are taught by colleges, universities and masters of the methods. Sometimes we forget these have been developed over time by those who were brave enough to find new ways to do something, a new way to define “beautiful.” Our understanding is evolving all the time, but only if revolutionary artists find the courage to “break” the rules and defy the norms. At the end of the day “beauty is defined between us...”



“The first thing I painted was some flowers for my mom. I took a little 8”x8” canvas board, it was not





enough room to do what I wanted. I got an 11"x14" canvas...still not enough room. So I got a 16"x20", then a 30"x40". That's the one I did *Beast Mode Ink* on. *Beast Mode* was the nickname I got from working on the oil rigs. That's my fist with my ring, so people wouldn't forget about me. I wanted to express who I am. Mom said put it on a shirt, so those are t-shirt patterns. I take a pattern, like the *Dame Mas*, and I put my *Beast Mode Ink* on there to match. *Beast Mode* is trademarked, it's legit. Without her I'd be a starving artist. 'Out of sight, out of mind.' That's how I feel in here. everyone forgot about me except for my immediate family.... I'm grateful for my family – my mom, son and daughters, my dad – but especially my mom."

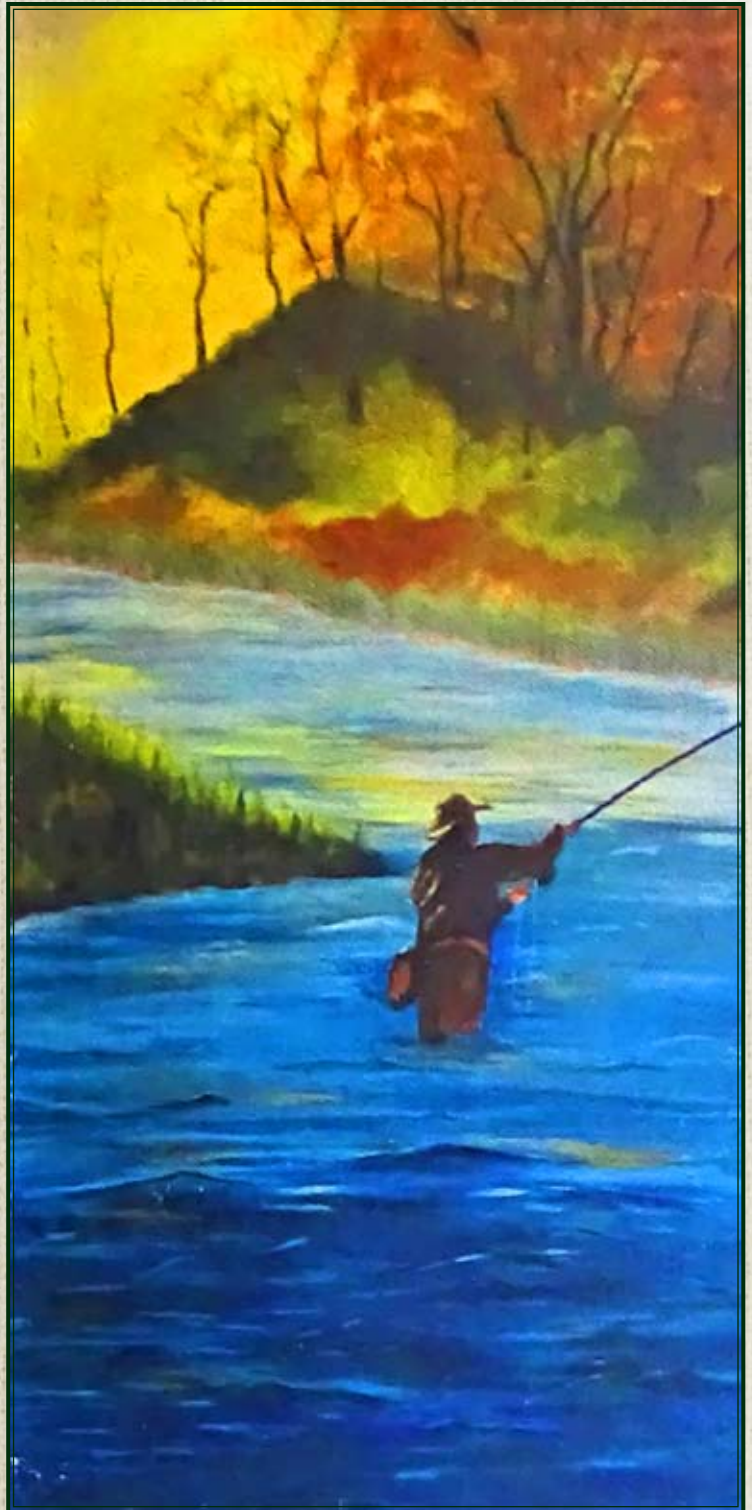
It's hard to discern where those who support us most deeply reside in the art. They are there nonetheless, in between brush strokes and melded into the color palettes we create. The shapes of their spirits guide the lines and contours our pencils scribe. They live in every moment we spend in creation, from conception to realization.

"I'm a rec worker, so I spend a lot of time in the leisure room... The leisure room is a place where we get away. You can't go in the room unless you have a card. Get away from basically prison. You can draw, paint, bead, crochet, listen to the radio, have fun and relax. When I'm painting I get an escape for however long I'm in there. I'm not in here. I feel blessed to have a canvas and paints. It's open and I'm free to express myself. No one telling me what to do, how to do it... Art makes me really com- being around more people doing these things makes me more comfortable."



Art is about more than pretty pictures and wasted time. It's been said before and it's worth saying again – those who genuinely engage with art, in creation or enjoyment, engage with their inner selves. These journeys are their own meaningful successes and they lead us on into our next existential trip.

"Every time I assert myself it seems like I exceed. Picked up the bass and now I don't want to put it down. I guess maybe you could say I've got



a lot of other hidden talents I never knew. You never know your potential until you're pushed to use it or given an opportunity. Dabble and something will grab you and just go to town. Every piece I do gets better. The canvas...it's been an experience."

I look forward to seeing what Matthew Mann creates next. Whenever I see him he is all smiles, already dreaming about the next piece, the next blank canvas and what he wants to say to the world with it:

"I just want to thank my mom for always supporting her starving artist and to my 3 kids – Satero, Alexis and Angeline – don't ever be afraid to try new things because you will never be able to unlock your full potential!"





# 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

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.

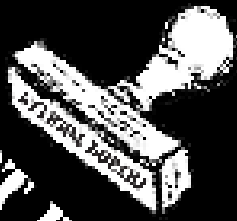
After some time of personal practice, I began to experience the need to bring this to others and with the help of a few like-minded buddies inside and administration at AVCF, we began to hold small yoga and meditation classes to a few guys a couple times a week. That quickly grew into larger classes 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.

ADJUTANCE





# The Men In My Family Never Wept

by Anthony Lucero

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

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.



[Editor's Note: We would like to apologize for last issue's error in the **Call Signs** section. There was an oversight in the layout of this section that made these pieces very difficult to read. In order to honor these writer's, we are reprinting these pieces so all may enjoy their work as much as we have.]





This is  
*with(in)*

# A Conversation with Terry W. Mosley Jr.

Terry is the producer and sometimes segment host for the With(in) podcast. He is one of the founding team members, although he tried unsuccessfully to be a wallflower in those first few episodes. He has a bloodhound heart, searching out the meaningful in the hidden corners of the human soul, including his own.

## Why do you love With (In)?

There are things in life that make us feel great, and guess what? We cling to those things, and eventually we realize that there is love. Eureka! We found something, or better yet, did this something find us? I love With(in) because everything I just described did not happen for me when I first experienced With(in). At first I was just there to be a liaison to the *Reverberations* team, and everything I was experiencing didn't really feel good. Everything was challenging me, and my human condition was being revealed through the stories the With(in) team was capturing. I sat in the back of the room; I listened, I felt, I cried, and I broke. I love With(in) because it challenges me to not only see other people, but to also see myself, and because honestly it found me.

## What was your favorite interview/show?

Whew! I am torn between "The Broken Gavel" and "The Stone Catcher". Shoot! There is also "The Arts in Prison". It's hard to pick one, but I guess it would be "The Broken Gavel". Hearing John Sherman speak as a free man, and hearing his message was awakening, and again challenging us who are incarcerated to never give up, and in his words "Knock the Rust off". Then Kristen Nelson shares with us a heart that sees us past our greatest mistakes.

## What do you hope listeners walk away with?

I hope all listeners walk away with the emotions that call us to be better versions of ourselves, and help show us that we can heal. I want incarcerated listeners to know they are represented, and I want every one else to know we sound the same no matter where we are in the world.

## What is your creative process with the podcast?

It began, like I said earlier, sitting in the back of the room and watching our former producer, Caroline Sheehan ask the questions to the team that helped her put together

an overarching theme that turned into the steps it took to create the storyboard. It was about holding somebody's story and then threading it together to create an enjoyable listening experience while honoring the story they shared. One of the greatest things she told us is that "passion translates." So, my passion for creating these storyboards that honored people's stories grew. And then it evolved over time. You have to find a universal topic and you have to find a universal subject. And you got to know your

team. You put it all together and try to weave a beginning, middle and end and trust your team to do the rest. My creative process is about trying to find that gold that invokes responses that aid us in creating these really universal stories, and amazing episodes.

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

Award winning always! Of course I want us to stand out as the amazing podcast that we are. I want to be able to provide a larger inclusion of our voices, and talent behind these walls. I can see incarcerated residents learning all about sound engineering, storyboarding, producing, hosting, interview

training and all the steps it takes to create.

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

This is a tough one for me, because I really don't like to be interviewed. I remember as a child the way I struggled to even speak, and I really cannot feel a part of me that wants to be interviewed. If I had to pick one, then it has to be Barbara Walters. She gets the gold for sure.

## Dream interview to conduct?

I would like to interview my mom Karen who passed away years ago. As the man I am today, I would love to interview her. I want to show her the man I am, and that no matter what, through it all, I love her.







This is  
*with(in)*

# Gun Violence

By Elest Marquez

I woke up this morning and turned on the news. It flashed that a vigil in Greeley, Colorado was taking place for a young Latina woman who had been kidnapped and murdered as she was locking up at her place of work. Her body was found a few blocks away in her car. The suspect was also found nearby.

I watched a little longer and I saw a young Latina teenager talking about how her leg was shattered by a bullet while at a house party in Denver. She got into a beef with some local gang members and they began shooting at her. Her friend, a male rival gang member, returned fire while trying to protect her and was murdered on site. The suspect is still on the run.

I stayed tuned and yet another murder was reported on. This time it was an elderly Asian female, who was a popular advocate for the Asian community. She was shot and killed in her front yard in east Denver. Five teenage males were arrested.

I can't help being disturbed by the constant gun violence in our beautiful state. There is a sense of fear in the Mile-High City. I see no help coming from any of our leaders who have the ability to influence change in the current culture. In fact, I only hear divisive and assumptive rhetoric from our private sector, business community and political leaders in this state as well as the U.S. Capital, and the White House. We are a people that hold our freedoms sacred and any rhetoric from either of our progressive or conservative thinkers can cause our citizens to take sides and draw lines. Given the aforementioned local bloodshed, it is clear that some of our citizens will kill for very little. How far off is it that we could kill one another over political ideologies?

I no longer recognize our state. I recall growing up that everywhere I went, from the 16<sup>th</sup> St. Mall to Estes Park, I was greeted with warm smiles and kind hellos from all the locals as well as people visiting. I walked around with a sense of community and safety. They would often sit me down and share stories of how the area was established and built up by a culture of personality.

Yes, we had pockets of unsafe neighborhoods but even in those areas, there was a culture that safeguarded the neighborhood and its people. Today it would seem that we no longer have any regard for our beautiful and friendly state's culture of personality, civility or awareness of celebrating diversity. Even more, we seem to be becoming more divided

not only by class and race but also extreme politics that seem to drive some to be violent. These problems are affecting our streets, neighborhoods and communities throughout the state, with no regard to social or economic status. Currently it's hard to love one another but easy to hate.

Can it be that apathy is the new virus that is plaguing us? It would behoove us to take courage, to think and dare to care for those who have a difference in opinion or views than the popular culture, before it's too late and we can no longer slow the killing. Only by stopping to see each other as one people can we begin to return to civility. We are all connected and when we stop to deeply look at our neighbor as ourselves, we can begin to feel a connection and grow in respect and empathy for humanity, slowing the violence and increasing our appreciation of humankind as we begin to protect one another from harm.

I challenge you to start with loving the reflection in the mirror and then pass that love on to your neighbor, neighborhood, community and state. After all, we are the beautiful state of Colorado.

## (in)sights

So, you listene to our podcast *With(in)* and it stirred up some thoughts, but you don't necessarily fancy yourself a writer? *(in)sights* is for you. Tell us what you think, how it made you feel...let's further the conversation.

## Letter to editor regarding *With(in)* podcast episode "Still a Citizen":

I applaud Andrew Draper's voice, his questions, and his honesty with Senator Pete Lee. He was willing to ask things that the rest of the Incarcerated Population doesn't often have the opportunity to examine.

It's encouraging to actually hear that these conversations are being held. The *Within* Podcast has given all of us a voice. I believe every interviewer has us in mind when they seek answers to important, even tough, questions that might never be asked without this forum. It is exciting, hopeful and inspiring to know our voice is beginning to be heard by people who haven't traveled this path.

We must come together if we are going to erase the stigmas and stereotypes attached to incarceration. So many of us are committed to change and truly remorseful; it is important that people know we are willing to make amends in an effort to become part of the solution.

- Jared Bonicelli





# Art by Sean Marshall

Sean Marshall creates a unique piece of visual art in response to each episode of With(in). These are posted on the website for the podcast, [thisiswithin.com](http://thisiswithin.com). In order to give the entire community access to as much of the whole With(in) experience, we would like to share some of this work with you in each issue.

Restorative Justice Episode



## Adaption

I am not a door that closes  
Behind a soul that can't smell the roses  
Unpacking my emotions  
like a seashell to an ocean  
I sail beyond my past  
You see it happens so fast  
~~we~~ we adapt  
to what ~~we~~ we want or what ~~we~~ we have  
Trying to grab, ~~any~~ any thing that makes  
sense  
with faith deep in my heart  
I'm completely convinced  
My mind has ~~evolved~~ evolved  
Beyond the fear, Beyond the pain  
Beyond ~~the trauma~~ the trauma  
Called Adaption

During the course of each interview that is conducted, Will crafts a poem, in real-time for the person who is interviewed. These poems are gifted to the interview subject and posted at [thisiswithin.com](http://thisiswithin.com).

Mental Health Episode

# Poetry by William S. Graham





# My Credible Artistic Experience

by Janos Toevs

I am five years old. I am sitting on Dad and Mom's bed. Dad has a script in his hand. He's running lines with Mom in preparation for an upcoming performance. Mom fumbles a line. Before Dad can prompt her I say, "No Mom. You're supposed to say 'Good evening Mr. Garrison.' Then Dad says, 'Good evening to you madam.' Then you say..."

No one is stopping me. I go on, doing the dialogue for both parts in "You say...Then Dad says..." fashion. I reach the end of the scene. Only now do I notice the slacked jaws of my parents. "What?" I ask self-consciously. They shoot each other disconcerted looks.

It's Dad who asks. "How did you do that?"

*Am I in trouble?* "Do what?"

"Memorize all those lines," Mom clarifies with what sounds like anxiety.

"You've said them to each other like a hundred times."

"And when did you know them all?" Dad prods.

I shrug. "I dunno. Probably the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> time."

I'm 7. Mom is working on her Master's Degree in Theater with a specialty in Directing. My 9-year-old sister can do accents. She gets to be in an undergrad production. She's playing a girl who speaks Cockney, like Eliza Doolittle. I'm jealous. My 4-year-old brother can hold still. Like dead still. He's playing a dead kid. Everyone is praising how still he holds. I'm more jealous. There never seem to be any parts for me. Still, just from watching rehearsals, I have everyone else's lines memorized before they do.

I'm 10. This is my big break. I'm Wally Webb in a production of *Our Town*. The college sophomore playing Emily is sweet and so cute. I'm smitten. Smitten but memorized. Everyone in the cast is impressed. I've got all their lines memorized too.

It's Opening Night, after the Final Curtain. I'm being called out from backstage. There's a fan in the lobby waiting to see me. It's my fifth grade teacher. She has flowers for me. I'm a star.

I'm 52 years old. I'm 33 years into a life sentence. But even in prison, even having done years, and years, and years in solitary confinement I still manage to find spotlights and microphones. I still memorize everyone else's graduation speeches and presentations before they do. I'm in DU PAI's Right to Speak class taught by Luciann Lajoie. Luci's my kind of people. Theater people. Short and intense and bigger than every room she ever enters. She is describing an audition she did. She clocks me catching that it was the female lead in *Titus Andronicus*. She loves Shakespeare the way I love Shakespeare. I am home.

It's Week 2 of class. Luci is saying we will have up to 3 minutes in the final presentation. Pick a piece. Something we wrote.

Something someone else wrote. Something that expresses our truth. I know exactly what to do. A mash up of three of my favorite writers. Luci is saying we don't have to worry about memorization at first. Just find the piece that enables us to speak our truth in our voice.

It's Week 3 of class. Of course I'm memorized and polished. I'm a DU PAI Group Leader so I'm patiently waiting to be called on. I'm enjoying watching Luci instruct, direct. She's doing exercises, techniques she learned from Patsy Rodenberg. I'm seeing some of the students feeling uncomfortable. "Walk it out," Luci suggests. "Look at the text. Walk in one direction, speaking until you come to a comma, then take a quarter turn. When you reach a period, hop." They do. After walking it out, they do their recitations again. They are all much better. It is magic.

"Push the wall." The first guy is trying, placing his hands flat and pushing. He's doing it half-heartedly. "Really push," Luci encourages. She gets up to show us all. "Feed me the first line." My stomach warms. My heart is glowing. I'm feeding lines to a wonderful actor. I missed this so much it aches. I can't believe this is happening in a prison classroom. Luci pushes as she recites the line. She pushes like she's trying to knock the wall over. I can hear the energy. I can feel it. This is commitment. I am amazed. I am inspired. I am invigorated. I am also memorized. And polished. And waiting to be called on. I am waiting to be the best.

I'm on the way out of class Week 4. Luci pulls me to the side. "I'm not ignoring you."

*Ignoring me?* She's been shooting Shakespeare references my way in class whenever she can. This is the greatest experience of my prison life. "I don't feel the least bit ignored."

"I'm going to call on you last." I am smug. Clearly Luci and I



agree. I am a hard act to follow.

It is Week 6. Luci sees me on the way in. We are down to the last 6 people to be called on. "Are you ready to work?" she asks energetically. I know there's no real work to be done. I have been memorized and polished for weeks. I nod anyway.

Class is starting. Luci is reminding us all to be sure we aren't falling back on our normal affectations as a substitute for our true voices. She's telling us once more to be careful about our habits. As Rodenberg stresses, "Habit only *feels* like truth."

Week 6 class is over. Luci didn't get to me. But we are down to the final two so I am definitely going next week. I am hanging back, making sure everything is put back in place and nothing is left behind.

"You have your piece." It's a statement not a question.

"Of course."

"You're off book?" Again, statement, not question.

"Since Week 3."

Luci nods. Her face is hesitant. Her voice is hopeful. "Is it Shakespeare?"

"It's got Shakespeare in it." I wonder aloud a question I think I know the answer to. "Why? Do you want me to do Shakespeare?"

"You should do what speaks your truth."

"I've been speaking my truth since I could talk." My bravado is genuine. "You're my director. I'm your performer. Do you want me to do Shakespeare?"

"Yes."

"Is there a particular piece you'd like me to do?"

With childlike vulnerability that could get a samurai to disarm she asks, "Would you do 'To Be or Not To Be'?"

"Sure," I agree with way more ease than I feel. I am sad to be letting my old piece go. I am thrilled that such an impressive director has asked me to be Hamlet.

I am walking back to the Unit. I have the collected works of Shakespeare in my cell. I have heard "To Be" scores of times. It's two and half minutes, two minutes forty-five seconds tops. I should have it memorized in five hours at most. I am confident. I am secure. I am looking forward to showing up the whole class with only one week's preparation.

I am in my cell. It is Monday afternoon at 1:22 p.m., nearly 72 full hours after Luci's "To Be" request. I am finally memorized. I am horrible. I am breaking the rules. I do not have confidence in my audience. I do not respect my audience the way Luci has been instructing us all since the start. I had to use my Webster's Unabridged Dictionary to discover that a "fardel" is a heavy pack and a "bodkin" is a needle. If I didn't know what those words meant how will my audience? I am more than a little frustrated and disenchanting with Luci. Why Hamlet? Why this agonizing douchebag? Give me Lear. Give me Othello. Hell, give me his nemesis Iago. Give me the jealous, bitter, manipulative villain Cassius drawing Brutus into the plot to kill his friend Caesar. Give me Lady Macbeth; men used to play her back in the day when women couldn't go on stage. Anyone but Hamlet.

It is Friday. It is class time. I am not nervous. I may not be great but I am damn sure memorized. I step to the center of the circle. 20

of my fellow students surround me. I am fine. I am confident. This is just one more time in the spotlight.

But it isn't.

I am speaking. All I am getting are blank stares. There is no energy coming back to me. I am not connecting with my audience at all. I feel myself getting smaller. I am falling. I am drowning. I am dying up here. I am blank. For the first time in my life, I drop a line. I am frozen. I am deafened by my heart pounding in my ears. I am speechless. I cannot think of a single line from Shakespeare. I can't call for the line. I am such an arrogant ass that I didn't bother to give anyone my text before I got up here.

Anna Nalick's words are pushing out Shakespeare's. *And I feel like I'm naked in front of the crowd, 'cause the words are my diary screaming out loud, and I know that you'll use them however you want to.* I'm supposed to be reciting Shakespeare. I'm thinking pop songs and how I first heard them on Gray's Anatomy. I have been silent for an eternity. I have to admit, "I forget the line."

"Just keep going," Luci's voice says from somewhere far away.

*Keep going? I'm supposed to ad lib Shakespeare?* I manage to stumble a few lines ahead. I finish. I am done. I want to run out of the class. I desperately want to flee from my epic failure. I won't. I don't. But man do I want to. I stand steadier than I feel. I brace to take my feedback like a pro. My only real competition in the class is Chauncey. He is clearly disappointed in me. He's saying I move through prison with a cool casualness that showed up in my performance. He's pointing out that this isn't a casual speech. He is right. I suck. I failed. I am a failure. And not a failure at just anything. I am a failure at the thing I expect of myself, pride myself on being the best at.

It's dress rehearsal in the classroom. Thanks to a great director, a wonderful Mom acting coach over the phone, a spectacular scene partner, help from my friends and classmates, I got my Hamlet down. It is a team accomplishment. As much to everyone else's credit as mine, it's clicking. It is more than working. It is hitting. Luci calls it delicious. That will probably bring tears to my eyes for the rest of my life.

It is after dress rehearsal. I arranged an escort for Luci to tour the visiting room where we will do our final performance four days from now. She likes the space. We are discussing techie theater stuff like we're getting ready for a real production. I am home again.

I gotta ask. "Why Hamlet?"

Luci is giving me her best innocent look. "Why not?"

"Because Hamlet sucks. Of all Shakespeare's characters, he's the worst."

"Why?"

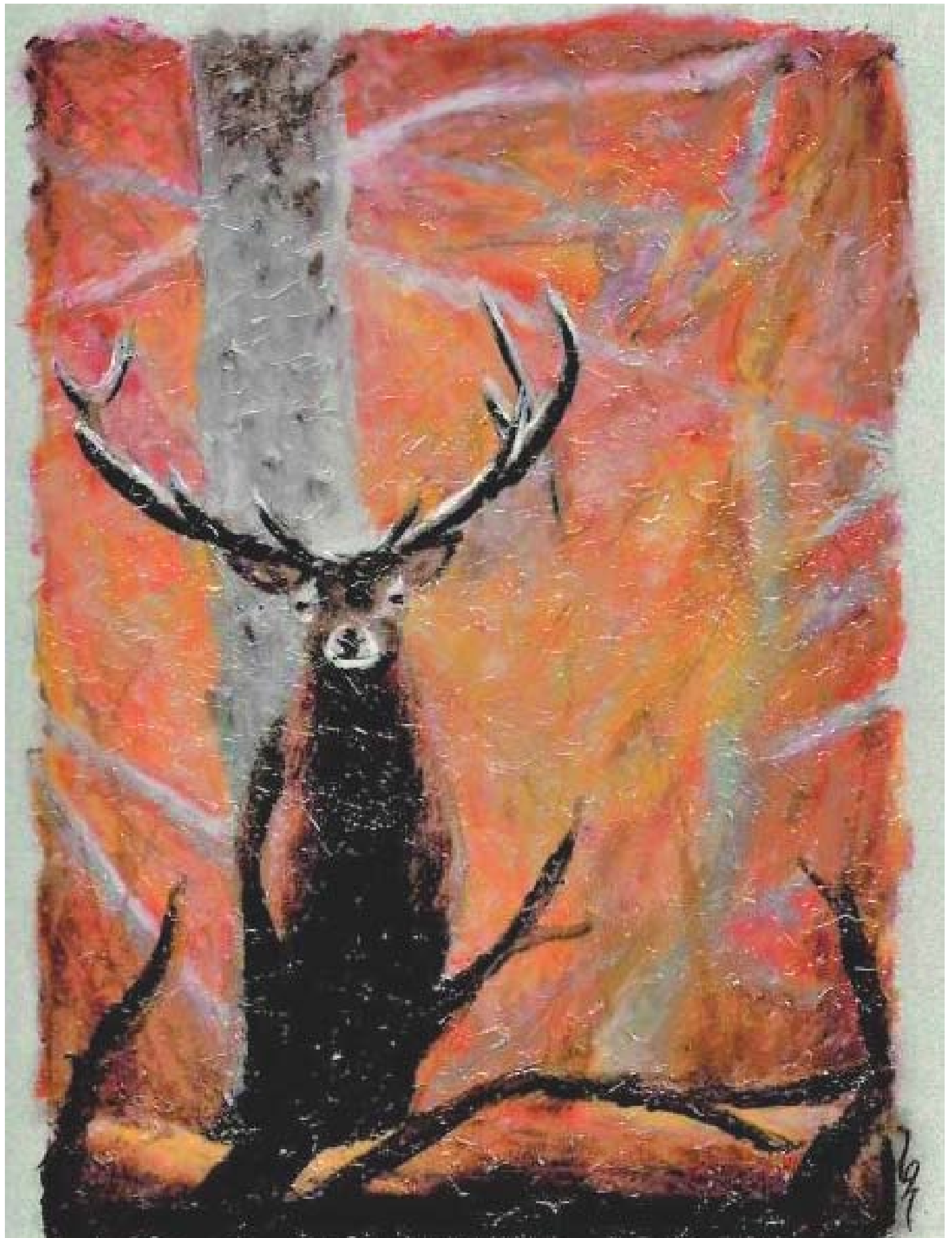
"Why?" *Is she kidding?* "Because he's an indecisive punk who won't act and can't handle his responsibility."

"So the opposite of the cool, casual convict who always acted decisively in my class."

"Damn right."

She gives me the most gracious, warm, understanding smile. The best smile ever turns into a wry grin. "And I bet that habit feels like truth."









# Old Wingtips

By Eric Floodeen

I went to see my Grandpa  
As he laid in the hospice bed  
So I could hear the words he said  
He said, "My dear young grandson  
I have a gift for you"  
He motioned underneath the bed  
Where I found some old worn shoes  
I fetched the shoes of which he spoke  
My face clearly looked confused  
I held the dull black wingtips up  
They were ugly, worn and very used  
His grin grew wide at my reaction  
He said, "Boy if these shoes could talk  
They would tell you an epic tale  
Of my younger days when I could walk  
I bought these back in '42  
For the Marine Corps formal ball  
They shined and danced the night away  
Up and down that great dance hall  
Those shoes again were on my feet  
At church the very next Sunday  
Where I first met your dear Grandma  
And she carried my heart away  
Those shoes were there the day we wed  
When our two hearts turned to one  
They followed me around the world  
As I fought in the Pacific sun  
Too often these shoes caught my tears  
Beside coffins draped red, white and blue

As the wives were given the folded flags  
And the rifles thundered loud and true  
These shoes were there that special day  
I baptized your mother and her twin sister Jane  
The next month these shoes would with me grieve  
As we sent Jane's little soul home again  
As your mother stood on my toes  
At the daddy-daughter dance at school  
And after to get ice cream cones  
I wore them on that happy day  
I walked her down the aisle so proud  
To give her away to her new love  
In front of a tear-filled crowd  
Countless times these shoes were there  
For recitals, concerts or formal affairs  
Now they often sit on the floor  
As I sleep in my favorite chair  
The last time they were on my feet  
I was nearly as worn out as these shoes  
When we laid your Grandma down to rest  
57 years after we said 'I do'"  
I listened as my Grandpa spoke  
Then I looked again at the pair  
They now looked very different to me  
As Grandpa's life story appeared  
The next month we all gathered close  
To lay Grandpa down by his bride  
My suit new, crisp and freshly pressed  
Old wingtips with my feet inside



**We hope you enjoyed this Traditions  
themed issue of *Reverberations!***

If you would like to contribute to future issues, speak to your facility's **Submission Representative** for a media release packet. We are always in need of visual art, pieces for our veteran's themed Call Signs section, and Reverberations from With(in), the section centered around our podcast. In addition, our upcoming themes are:

New Beginnings - Deadline January 23rd  
Music - Deadline April 24th

**Be Well and Seek Purpose!**

*Eric Floodeen*



