

**Mitchellville: Voices from the Inside\***  
**Simpson Urban Studies Institute**  
**Prison Education Initiative**  
**Simpson College**  
**Indianola, Iowa**  
**Fall 2008**

<i>Table of Content</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction to the Simpson Prison Education Initiative	1
Program Philosophy	1
Program Design	1
The Voices	
Christine Weiershauser “Untitled”	2
Crystal Woellert “Untitled”	3
Felicia Clark “The Perfect Storm”	5
Jamie Borushaski “Today”	11
Jamie Borushaski “The Trial”	11
Shalonda Green “Untitled”	12
Yvette M. Louisell “The Bird Man of Van Zee”	13
Yvette M. Louisell “Prison Loyalty”	18
Donnetta Rae Akers “The Hump on My Grandmother’s Back”	19
Donnetta Rae Akers “Flyin High	20
Kendra Swift “Sarah’s Story”	21

\* Special thanks to Julie Jones and Rachel Bandy who provided limited editorial support for “Mitchellville: Voices from the Inside”. Students, Josh Dohmen, Lynda Mathre, Michelle Purvis, and Brandon Hommer led the way for SUSI’ first venture into prison education. Your 10 week commitment to your students at Mitchellville is appreciated. Finally thank you to the women who participated in the classes. Hopefully you will enjoy the following product of you labors.

## **MITCHELLVILLE: VOICES FROM THE INSIDE**

### **Introduction to the Simpson Prison Education Initiative**

U.S. Department of Justice research statistics informs us that 95% of those incarcerated will eventually be released from prison. Of those released, two thirds will recidivate costing states millions of dollars that diminish funds available for addressing other important social needs. Steurer, Smith and Tracey's "Three State Recidivism Study" sponsored by the Correctional Education Association found that attending classes while incarcerated reduced recidivism by 29 percent.<sup>[1]</sup>

The U.S. Department of Corrections Strategic Plan as well as the U.S. Department of Education note a favorable relationship between the availability of academic and vocational study and a reduction in recidivism. Despite the acknowledged benefits of education, the state money available for educational programming in prisons has decreased. In "Education as Crime Prevention: The Case for Reinstating Pell Grant Eligibility for the Incarcerated" Daniel Karpowitz and Mark Kenner argue forcibly that prison education programs are a very cost effective methodology for reducing prison recidivism.<sup>[2]</sup> The Simpson Prison Education Initiative was founded in 2008 and is modeled after the successful program operated by Grinnell College at the Newton, Iowa Correctional Facility. With the goal of reducing criminal recidivism, the Simpson College Prison Education Initiative provides courses to inmates at no cost to the State of Iowa.

### **Program Philosophy**

Restorative justice values are those on which the Simpson College Prison Education Initiative is based. Restorative justice adherents believe that crime creates an obligation to heal relationships among those affected by crime. Corrective actions involve the victim, offender and community. The Prison Education Program is a community effort to address issues of personal growth and responsibility that will enhance the probability of success for offenders upon their release, thereby reducing future victimizations.

### **Program Design**

Our program provides benefits to those incarcerated, our students, and the State of Iowa. Simpson College students travel to Mitchellville to lead classes for the inmates. Semester long classes are designed to facilitate development of skills that enhance the likelihood of successful adjustment upon release. Verbal and written communication skills are emphasized in all classes in order to improve the ability to relate more

effectively in employment interviews, on the job, in daily contacts within the larger community, and in familial relationships. In turn, Simpson students benefit as they have the opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom as well as to engage in social and civic issues.

Courses from across the curriculum at Simpson are available for presentation and can be delivered based upon interest at Mitchellville and student availability for course delivery. Among the possible areas of study are ESL, art, theater, literature, communications studies, sociology, criminal justice, music, philosophy, religion, history,

environmental studies, psychology, political science, foreign language, management, and physical education.

## THE VOICES

The following stories, poems, and plays were written by women in the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women at Mitchellville, Iowa. In the fall of 2008 four Simpson College students instructed classes titled “Discovering Theater”, and “Creative Writing”. Michelle Purvis and Brandon Hommer with assistance from Professor Jennifer Nostrala instructed women in the Discovering Theater class. Joshua Dohmen and Lynda Mathre assisted by Professor Nancy St. Clair instructed students in Creative Writing. Not all students submitted items for inclusion in this publication. The following are selected submissions from the women of the Iowa Correctional Facility for Women at Mitchellville.

Creative Writing, Fall 2008

Instructors: Joshua Dohmen and Lynda Mathre

Assignment: The final project for the class is to include two writing projects to be reviewed by the instructors.

Inmate: Christine Weiershauser

### “Untitled”

Each one of us chose a rose from the seven that stood before us like blushing exquisite ladies. Each rose represented Mom’s children who were left behind with their sadness and tears. I chose first. I was her oldest child. I chose the bright pink one. She always loved the color pink, especially roses. My siblings each took their turn choosing a rose and laying it upon the place that soon would cover her ashes. My mother had chosen to be cremated long years ago. Before she went to meet the Lord she struggled. In her last few days before they moved her to the “this is the way she wanted it” place, she had problems with breathing, eating, and infections. You name it and she experienced it. She chose not to go through anymore pain. Then she quietly slipped into a coma. When we moved her, “the plug” was pulled. All seven children were present as well as her priest, some grandchildren and a sprinkling of nieces and nephews. As I sat to her right side, hand in hand, I listened to her final breathing, deep and raspy, long, sad. Her face was pale white and her lips had already turned a bluish color. Her hair hadn’t been combed but it didn’t matter because it was soft as silk and looked like she had just come in from a windy day. It was like she always wore it. She took one long agonizing deep and breath and no more! She was gone forever. My mom of fifty-five years was at peace. As I looked at her face, a single tear slid down her cheek. She was saying goodbye to me.

So many memories flood me. Going shopping together and trying on expensive, funky hats trimmed with feathers, bows, flowers and veils that sported prices of over \$250. Both of us knew we weren’t going to buy one but so what!

On my fiftieth birthday she bought me a bottle of “White Diamond” perfume, because “every woman deserves white diamonds.” Her lesson to me was not to wear navy or black any more. “Wear fun colors, Linda. Life is fun. Enjoy life.” When we went to restaurants together and the waitress would ask, “May I help you?” my mother

would say, "Yes, my 'older' sister would like a Shirley Temple please." I was around thirty-five then!

She never told me in so many words that she disapproved of my dates, but boy could she give me those looks! The stare downs or the knitted eyebrows, pursed lips and teeth clenched.

My mom was pregnant with me when she got married so she didn't get her high school diploma. But this didn't stop her desire. After all of us kids were able to "fight for ourselves" she worked a full-time job and still was able to obtain her GED. I was extremely proud of her! Onward to community college studying late into the night obtaining A's on all her tests. She was on the honor roll! We framed her diploma and hung it on the kitchen wall. She wore a gift from us, a sweatshirt from the college with the colors purple and gold, with her red corduroy jeans on so many occasions.

She lost Dad to cancer after forty-five years of marriage, rearing seven children, fourteen grandchildren with more on the way. Her gifts to us were numerous quilts - hand-made clothes and other labors of love. Trips to Hawaii, Washington State and Montana were her memories. Many hours of smiles, giggles, laughter, bandaged knees and love filled my heart.

I will always remember the day I chose the pink rose to say goodbye to you mom, because pink always meant I love you.

Inmate: Crystal Woellert

#### "Untitled"

I had anticipated my visit all day long. My grandma, mom, brother, and his girlfriend were coming. They routinely try to visit the prison once a month. I had a lot to say to my brother and his girlfriend.

My brother, James and I have always been really close. I had talked to my grandma on the phone. She said James's dad had put out a missing person's report on him. It actually scared me because my brother is known for being a loner. He was also on meds at a young age because he'd been diagnosed with depression. I have three half-brothers, but James is the only one with whom I have a relationship. He always talked to me about anything he was going through. I was shocked when I found out he had a girlfriend because he'd never shown any interest in females. He claims he's in love and it worries me, because he's never had a stable mother or father figure. I feel he's looking for a mother, and substituting his girlfriend for one. He seems to have no ambition and wants to do nothing but spend time with his girlfriend.

I wrote his girlfriend because I assumed she would know where he was staying. I told her to call my mom and let her know if he was o.k. I had no idea that she was missing too. When I had talked to my grandma on the phone, she had only told me my brother was missing. After I mailed my letter out, I received a letter from Amy (James's girlfriend). She told me they had both been kicked out of her mom's house. She also said that they had gotten in a big fight and the lady they were staying with had beaten her up.

At my visit, I got the chance to pull both of them aside and was told their sides of the story. Amy said, "Everyone was drinking and I thought it would be a good night."

I said, "All I want to know is did my brother put his hands on you?"

"Yeah," she said, "but I was screaming at him and I bit him."

I said, "From having been through an abusive relationship myself, I don't recommend you put yourself through that."

"He was drunk," she stated, "and it was the first time he ever hit me."

Then she showed me where he had hit her in the nose. She had tried to cover it up with make-up. I told her that I know she loves him but if he did it again, she needed to leave him.

"I will," she said, "I have never been abused and will not put up with that type of behavior." She told me that she'd never had a sister and was glad she had one now. I told her that I will always be there for her and she can write me and talk to me about anything. She also explained that the lady they were staying with was her mom's best friend. She had gotten drunk because she was in love with Amy's mom and Amy's mom only wanted to be her friend. The lady, Macie, started ranting and raving to Amy about her mom, so Amy punched her. In the end, Amy ended up getting beaten up really bad by Macie. She went to the police station to press charges and the state picked up the charges for what she said about James.

I pulled my brother aside and he admitted to slapping Amy across the face.

I said, "So is that how we treat someone we love? You know better James Lee!"

He said, "She was throwing a fucking hissy fit."

I told him, "That's fucked up James. You could've walked away. And why didn't you protect her from Macie?"

He said, "Well, she was bigger than me."

I told him he could have gotten the neighbors or the cops. He just hung his head and said, "I know!"

I think it was the most eventful visit I've had so far. I felt like I was their relationship counselor and mentor. I can't wait to see what my visit is like next time. I believe I will have to take Amy off my visiting list. Since the visit, my brother has been arrested and a no-contact order was placed on both of them. I'll stay connected to Amy through letters. My brother has court on December 4th, so I will wait to see what his punishment is.

Inmate: Felicia Clark

### "The Perfect Storm"

Chapter 1: Disturbing the Peace

Chapter 2: The Calm Before the Storm

Chapter 3: The Storm's a'Brewin'

Chapter 4: The Tsunami Arrives

## Chapter 5: The Aftermath

### Introduction:

I would like to say that I am a good-hearted person, but often times I find myself being taken advantage of. I was told by men and women who are a bit wiser than me to never bite the hand that feeds you, because you never know when you'll need that person. I guess some people don't stand by that rule.

It never fails. Every time I have tried to help someone in my husband's family they have created a tremendous amount of chaos between my husband Robert and me.

### Chapter 1: Disturbing the Peace

It was a cool summer night when Robert's cousin, Shirley, showed up at my front door with her brown Louis Vutton suitcase in hand, ready to impose on my living arrangements. She stood motionless, sandwiched between her children. I reckoned she needed a place to stay. I wanted to slam the door in her face because the last time I helped her out she evoked arguments between me and my husband. God knows I wanted to tell her no, but my conscience kicked in so I let her stay. I knew I would regret it, I just didn't know when.

Shirley was married. Her husband Shawn was a low-life and he always cheated on her. The love she had for this man was beyond any love I had ever seen. I always thought he was the cause of her struggles, but she loved him.

When she walked through the door I began my interrogation. I wanted to know how long I was going to have to deal with her.

"How long do you plan on stayin'?" I asked.

"Not very long. Just until I can find a place," Shirley responded.

"Well, I know that. Is it going to be two months or three months," I said, irritated.

Shirley smacked her big full lips together and said, "Damn I don't like this no more than you. Don't worry, I won't be here too long."

Rolling my eyes, I said, "I hope not because I don't have the room and I want to keep my marriage."

"Look, I didn't come here to argue with you. I just need a place to stay until I can find a place of my own," Shirley said in disbelief.

"I'm sorry, you know how things were the last time. I just don't want the drama. I'll start helping you out tomorrow," I stated.

"Damn, you want me out your house bad," Shirley stated.

I said sarcastically, "The sooner the better."

If you already couldn't tell, I wanted this process to be over before I got burned. I looked to the sky for a prayer to be found. I needed God's help and patience on this one.

### Chapter 2: The Calm Before the Storm

A couple of months went by and Shirley still hadn't found a place for herself. Before I knew it, I was letting my defenses down. I was starting to trust her. I was enjoying her companionship. We could cook food, drink beer and gossip about folks. We had us some good times. Sometimes Shirley invited her husband's niece Shawna over and we kicked it.

Shirley's husband's niece was sixteen years old with two kids. She was dark brown and had almond shaped eyes. Although she was young, she had a body like a grown woman. Rita was young and loose. She was the wild type. It was too bad that someone her age had slept with so many men. I felt sorry for her. Shirley tried to look after Rita. I thought she was an alright girl. She just needed some direction in her life.

Three months later, Shirley found an apartment a block down from my place. When she moved, Rita moved in with her. I had given Shirley furniture to get started. I didn't want her to go without. As soon as Shirley got her place, Robert was spending considerable time at Shirley's house. I was getting upset. We'd argue and fight all the time about this. I wanted his time. I didn't understand why he had to be at her house all the time.

Robert isn't an ugly man. In fact, he is so handsome that I have trouble keeping a hold of him. He has smooth coffee skin. His face is always clean shaved. He wears thick braids that hang past his neck. His mane is unlike any black man's I've ever seen.

Robert has cheated on me before. I eventually forgave him and tried to move on, but it was happening again. There had been several incidents that raised my suspicion, two of which I can recall. The first time, I had Robert watching the kids while I went to school. I came home to find my children in bed sleeping and Robert's ass was nowhere to be found. Of course, I had an idea where he was - over at Shirley's. I cursed him out because when it comes to my children, I don't mess around. Another time, I came home from school, checked my phone, and redialed the last number that was called. Of course I got a woman's voice. That voice was Rita's. When she answered the phone, I asked why Robert was calling her.

She began to say, "Um," like she forgot the lie she was to tell. "What do you mean, um, why is he calling you?" Rita said nervously, "He called to speak to Shirley." "Alright, whatever."

When I got off the phone, I couldn't wait to blow the horn on this one. I always felt Robert was paying attention to this girl. Robert didn't look at Rita's age or her life as a young girl. All he was lookin' at was her big ass that belonged on a grown woman. I always said things to him about the behavior he displayed toward Rita. He said, "You be trippin'."

I said, with a stern voice, "What, you didn't think I'd find out you were talkin' to her?"

"Uh, what are you talkin' about? Talkin' to whom?" Robert said startled by my question. He jumped out of the bed.

"What, you forgot who you just talked to? You know who I am talkin' about, Rita. You can thank redial for this one," I said with a disgusted look on my face.

I started to walk away. Robert followed behind me trying to plead his damn case. Robert said with a promising voice, "It's not like that, Nicole. I called her to speak with Shirley. I am not messing around with her. You're just trippin'."

"You always say that I'm trippin'. You act like this is your first time sneaking out on me," I said with disbelief.

Tears were forming, but I refused to let them fall. I didn't want him to know how hurt I was. Robert said, "I told you that I wouldn't cheat again and that I will remain faithful."

I wanted to believe what he was saying could be trusted. I also knew I'd gone through this before. I guess I really didn't have any strong evidence to convict him on such nonsense. I tried to believe it was an innocent conversation. At least that is what I hoped.

### Chapter 3: The Storm's a 'Brewin'

It had been a year since I'd let Shirley stay in my house. I remained cool with Shirley. Even though I didn't fully trust Shirley, I had some liking for her. Despite all the things we'd been through I'd managed to care for her.

Rita eventually moved out of Shirley's apartment. She had been living at her first baby's daddy's family's house. Rita wasn't stable and she was pregnant for the third time. My baby sister Andrea was a good friend of Rita's baby daddy's sister, Tay. Rita shared a lot of things with Tay, including who she was pregnant by. I thought it was a shame that Rita was unstable and unable to provide a place for herself and her children. One night, Andrea wanted to use my car to go out. I gave her permission to drive my vehicle. I had no plans of going anywhere. I was exhausted. I was six months into my pregnancy. I was getting lazier as the time went by. I told Andrea to be back as soon as she was done partying.

Andrea called her friend to see if she was ready. "Hey girl, are you almost ready Tay? I have my sister's car so be ready when I come through," Andrea said excitedly.

Tay was panting heavily when she was speaking to Andrea as she had been struggling to pull her apple bottom jeans over her hips. "Girl, jus' come on. I'll be ready when you get here. Come on up when you get here," Tay said, still breathing heavily.

"Okay," Andrea said.

"Remind me to tell you something. It's going to trip you out," Tay said with eagerness.

Andrea couldn't wait to get to Tay's house to find out what she had to tell her. Andrea got to Tay's place and sat waiting in silence while her friend was finishing getting ready.

"Girl, I knew there was a reason why you wanted me to come up," Andrea said.

"Why?" Tay replied.

"Yo' ass wasn't ready. You knew you weren't going to be," Andrea said.

"You know I just can't help myself. I must be fresh-ta-def when I step out!" Tay exclaimed.

"I know, right. These 'hos' do be hatin'," Andrea said with a smile.

Tay says, all ghetto, "Forrealdo."

"Come on, you ready?"

"Let me put these earrings on, grab my purse, and we can roll out," Tay said while rushing to the door. Andrea and Tay hopped in the car heading for the party.

On the way to the party, they pumped lil' Wayne "It's Me" in the car stereo. After a while, Andrea turned the volume down. She turned to face Tay and said, "Didn't you have something to tell me? You can't leave nothing out."

"When have I ever left anything out? I tell you everything," Tay said.

"Alright, you're right. You do tell me everything. So what's the gossip?"

"It's about your sister's husband."

"What about him?"

“He’s been pickin’ Rita up on the weekends.”

“Aha, are you for real?” Andrea said.

“Yes, I am for real and I haven’t even gotten to the juicy part.”

“How long has this been going on? My sister is going to be trippin.”

“Listen Andrea, Rita has been sayin she’s pregnant by Robert.”

“No she isn’t. You’re lying.”

“Okay, say what you want. They been fuckin’ around for a while. They were messing around over a year. Rita says that your sister don’t even know and Robert was tryin’ to keep it a secret from her.”

“Well, I hope you don’t think I’m going to keep something like this from my sister.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to, that’s why I told you.”

“I hate telling things like this to her, but she needs to know that Robert done got Rita pregnant. She’s pregnant, too, and this is going to get her worked up.”

“It’s crazy, huh?” Tay said.

“Hell yeah I wish I could beat his ass. He is constantly taking my sister through some changes. She probably won’t leave him.”

“I don’t know. If a man had cheated on me and had a baby I’d leave his black-ass no matter how fine he is,” Tay said.

“I know but, my sister loves him,” Andrea said.

“Are you going to tell her?”

“Yeah, will you ride to her house with me? I can’t tell her on my own. She might not believe me. With you being there, she’ll know that I am telling the truth.”

“Yeah, I’ll go with you. I don’t like Rita’s ass anyway.”

Andrea and Tay rode in silence pumping Lil’ Wayne to tell me that my husband had been cheating and that he possibly had a baby on the way. They pulled up in my driveway and parked the blue Delta ’88 Oldsmobile. They hopped out of the car as if someone had been murdered. Andrea hated to tell me things such as this because I react off of my emotions. I can’t think rationally when I get upset.

I woke up to the door being slammed. I sat straight up in my bed listening attentively at the hurried steps. I was worried and maybe a little scared. No one had a key to my house but Robert, and I hadn’t seen him since I put him out. Andrea and Tay pushed open my bedroom door, trying to speak but out of breath. They practically sounded like they had run a marathon. I looked at both of them like they had lost their minds. I was awakened by fear as if someone was coming to harm me. I had forgotten that I had given Andrea permission to drive my car. That’s how she got in the house: she had the house key.

“This better be good. Y’all runnin’ up in here like someone was hurt,” I said with a curious look.

Andrea said, “What I am about to tell you, it might make you mad.”

“Well, what is it? Did you wreck my car? Damn it, Andrea, I knew I shouldn’t...”

“No,” she interrupted, “It’s a little more difficult and complicated than that.”

“What is it?” I asked impatiently. This better be good, I thought.

Andrea stood on her tall lanky legs and took a deep breath to prepare herself and me for what was about to unfold. I glanced over to her friend Tay, who appeared to have

a serious look on her face. I turned my focus back on my sister, waiting for her to tell me.

“I don’t know how to tell you. You’re pregnant and I don’t want to have you upset – Robert got Rita pregnant. There, I said it.” She seemed relieved from the pressure. Andrea stood staring at me with her light brown eyes, looking for a response.

“What? You’re lying,” I said skeptically.

“No, that’s why I brought Tay. She can tell you.”

Tay chimed in and started to spill the beans: how Rita moved into her family’s house, how she was spending time at Robert’s house on weekends, how they had been messing around for over a year and how she claims to be pregnant by Robert.

“You got to be fuckin’ kiddin’ me,” I said in disbelief. “I knew it. This motherfucka done got this girl pregnant. I can’t believe this shit.”

I hopped out of the bed ready to strangle his ass. If he had been present I’d probably have spit in his face. “Where did you say Rita’s been staying, Tay?”

“At my house,” Tay responded.

I was ranting and raving. Nothing was going to calm me down. I was in for the kill. Who would I get my hands on first? I was disgusted and called Rita every name in the book. I thought out loud, “That little nasty tramp done slept with my husband, and on top of that she’s pregnant. I bet any amount of money, Shirley hooked her and Robert up. This little girl done been in my house, eating my food, and sleeping with my husband.” I felt disrespected.

Tay commented, “I can’t stand her ass. I wish she didn’t live with us. She’s no good.”

“That bitch is going to wish she didn’t cross me. Tomorrow, I am going over there to find out what’s been goin’ on with them two,” I said, furious.

I tried to call Robert’s cell phone five times in a row before he answered the phone.

“Hello,” Robert said, unaware.

“Yeah, nigga you done got that bitch Rita pregnant.”

“Uh-uh. What are you talkin’ about.”

“What? You thought you could keep it a secret? I knew I wasn’t trippin’ back then when I thought you were messing around with her. You told me that you wouldn’t cheat on me. You promised me. If that’s what you want, you can be with that nasty, triflin’ bitch. I am so done with your ass!” I said with force. I slammed the phone down and thought about my next move. My sister and her friend tried to keep me calm, otherwise I might have started having contractions.

#### Chapter 4: The Tsunami Arrives

The next morning, Andrea, Tay and I packed up the kids and headed over to Tay’s house where Rita had been staying. The apartment complex was painted blue. The apartment building wasn’t an elegant place. It was a bit run down. It had easy access to the living units. When we pulled up at the apartment, I parked in the back. Tay, Andrea and the kids stayed in the car while I went inside. I asked Tay what the apartment number was. She told me, then I got out of the car and walked up the wooden steps to

accomplish what I had come to do. As I walked down the hallway of the third floor, candy wrappers and cans were lying on the floor. I looked at the filth and shook my head, proceeding to my destination. I arrived at a wide open door. I was going to knock on the door when I spotted Rita sitting on the couch holding her baby. I tried to stay calm so I could question her. I stood in the doorway and asked Rita if I could speak with her.

She looked up at me and began to move her heavy body off of the couch. She was still holding her son in her hand. I politely told her to put her baby down. She put her son on the couch and walked out the door. Rita and I walked through the hallway in complete silence. When we hit the outdoors we walked down the wooden steps. I was in front and she a step or two behind me. As we got to the bottom of the stairs I started my questioning. I asked her if she was pregnant by Robert. As soon as I asked the questions, she tried to dart up the stairs to get away from me as if she had seen red in my eyes. I snatched her by her hair and began punching her in the face. I dragged her back into the apartment complex. Somehow, we ended up in the laundry area. I kept punching her until I saw blood. She was pleading for me to get off her. I wasn't going to stop. I wanted her to feel the pain I was feeling. I wanted her to know what she had done. For real, my mind wasn't right. I wanted her to lose her baby. I hated her. I hated everything about her. As I continued to beat her face in, I spoke. I wanted her to know why I was doing what I was doing to her. By the time I got done with her, she was huddled into a ball trying to protect her baby.

A man that she was staying with pulled me off of her. He said, "She's pregnant."  
I said, "I don't give a damn. I'm pregnant, too."

I got off of her and told the bitch I bet you think twice before you get pregnant by someone else's man again."

Andrea said, "Come on Nikki, she's not worth it."

I walked off mad as hell and the baby inside of me was stressed out and moving around in my belly non-stop. When I got in the car, I dialed Robert's cell phone and cussed his ass out. I told him I beat his bitch's ass. "You can have her cause I don't want your nasty ass. I am so tired of you disrespecting me. I can't deal with this shit no more." I politely spoke my piece and hung up the phone.

Although the problem wasn't solved, I felt I got my point across.

## Chapter 5: The Aftermath

There were days I laid in my bed crying. I got depressed to the point that I wasn't functioning. I was drinking a twelve-pack of beer a day. Robert tried calling the house. Every time I recognized his number on the caller ID I wouldn't answer the phone. He even had the nerve to show up at my house to try and make amends. He even went to the length to say he didn't know if he was the baby's daddy. I got so pissed off I told the nigga to get away from my window before I called the police.

Robert walked away with his back slumped over and his head hanging low. I wanted his ass to hurt, because I was good to him and his cousin. But I guess that is what I get when I put my heart out there. I can't say that my goodness won't be taken for granted, but next time I just won't let my guard down.

Inmate: Jamie Borushaski

"Today"

“Today is not my day,” Alice sighs as she looks down at the remnants of breakfast left on her fuzzy pink robe.

With the school bus pulling away from the curb, her two daughters safely aboard, she can finally turn her attention towards herself and the grand opening of her shoe store, Heels.

She feels the anxiety creeping up once again. It’s hard enough being a thirty-year old, single, black woman with two young children, but adding on to that the opening of her own business, is almost too much to bear.

Alice looks herself over in the full-length mirror that sits in the corner of her bedroom. Her dark brown, medium length hair is pulled back in a French roll, and her make-up is so subtle it appears flawless.

She begins to feel tension that she felt just an hour ago start to dissolve.

Her black pinstriped skirt with matching jacket reveals slim, beautifully toned legs attained by years of dance. Although the outfit is tailored to perfection it only adds emphasis to the heart and soul of her ensemble, the shoes. The pair she chose is a 3 ½ inch stiletto, classic black with a hand painted red sole.

Standing there in her Christein Louboutin’s, Alice knows that today is her day after all.

Inmate: Jamie Borushaski

#### “The Trial”

I had been waiting, impatiently at times, for four and a half days when the matron came to my door. I knew immediately what words were about to leave her lips. “The verdict is in, James. They’re calling for you.” Although the declaration was expected, it still elicited surreal feelings of disbelief that this was actually happening to me. I wasn’t sure I even wanted to know the decision.

As I was led into the courtroom, a hush fell over the spectators. The crowd that had assembled was made up of family, friends, court staff, and reporters. The trial, which had lasted three weeks, had been like a continuous roller coaster ride. No one had any idea what the outcome would be. The lawyers were on the edge of their seats, filled with anticipation. This was the moment in which careers were made.

I took my place in between my two lawyers. Gill, the lead attorney, bent over and whispered words that I do not remember in my ear. I was pretty sure that they were words of assurance. Instead, my focus was directed elsewhere. The nicely dressed, elderly woman in the front row captivated my attention. Her words of encouragement and support had a mellifluous effect throughout the whole proceeding.

My grama, Peggy, was an amazing woman. Throughout my life she had been the cornerstone of our family. At one point or another she had been my mother, friend, confidante, and accomplice. She had proven herself to be a soldier. She had been there for my entire trial enduring the horrible, and sometimes humiliating, stories that the prosecution had used to paint me as a cold-hearted monster. After everything she had heard, she still looked at me with loving eyes and said, “I love you.” As the clerk called the courtroom to attention, I gave my gramma a smile filled with both love and fear. Turning to face the judge, I drew strength from this marvelous woman as I prepared myself for the worst.

Un-fucking-believable. What I thought had been a nightmare turned out to be just a prelude. The verdict was handed down. "Guilty on all counts" reverberated off the courtroom walls. I had been looking directly into the eyes of the judge. With tears beginning to form in the corners of my eyes, I abruptly turned to the only person who I knew shared my anguish.

Even with a twenty foot distance between us, I felt as though she was right beside me. "No tears, James," she said. As the deputies began to place the handcuffs on my wrists, I felt the panic begin to surface. "How could you do this to us," my grandma yelled at the prosecutors. "Baby, I'll see you in just a minute," she said lovingly as I was being led by an officer on each side to the jail. A new waiting game had just begun.

Inmate: Shalonda Green

#### "Untitled"

I have a lot on my mind, yet I can't quite articulate everything. I've been trying to figure out how to rewrite the event I wrote about, which is hard, but I'm going to do it. This assignment will be turned in to be critiqued by our teachers so I'm going to apply myself as best as I can. I thought about rewriting my character sketch, but considering my sketch is about Tamia, I'd probably get offended if it was criticized strongly. In any event, I guess we all know about what took place with me in August. Actually, August was a very difficult month. It began with me having a heart attack. Go figure. Hell, I'm thirty-three years of age, in otherwise good health yet I sustained a heart attack. I had two stints placed in my arteries because of blockage and was diagnosed with coronary artery disease, which sucks. Then a couple weeks after this my new "ex-girlfriend" beat me in the head with a padlock. Now that was messed up. Hell, it's not like she could've killed me after all. It's quite sad considering the fact that we had actually broken up prior to this taking place and because she could've done damage to me by using her hands just as well. Her reason behind this assault was she felt like I was playing with her emotions. And if you knew Gabriel, you'd be inclined to think that if anybody deserved to be beat in the head, it should've been me beating her. After all, I dealt with her cheating, lying, manipulating, controlling, and all the other adjectives to describe an abusive person, for over eight months. Yet, in the end, I was the one who was beaten. What's more upsetting about this event is the fact that I had never been in an abusive relationship before. Then to find myself in one hurt me terribly, because I knew first hand why people stay in such relationships. It's sad, just sad. To make matters worse was the fact that I had been telling people, staff and inmates alike, that I felt something was going to happen, yet no one listened to me until August 22, 2008, when at approximately 6:50 pm Gabriel walked up to me and, after I refused to speak with her, beat me in the head with a padlock. Now, if that is what "they" define as love, they can keep it. I don't want it. How would you feel if someone who professes to love you all of a sudden walked up to you and after you refused to speak with them began to beat you in the head with a padlock? No question about it, you'd be pissed off as I was, but nonetheless it happened. Now Gabriel had the misfortune of spending one-hundred eighty days in administrative segregation on top of facing new charges. She's been charged with willful injury, so I'm not sure how all this will pan out but it scares me. To be completely honest, it scares me to think about what she will do once she gets out of administrative segregation. I've gotten messages from her here and there, I had a run-in with her a couple of weeks ago in

medical which had me asking administration about being sent to another institution in Iowa. Although, I've yet to hear back from them I can and will assume that they are considering this possibility.

Inmate: Yvette M. Louisell

“The Bird Man of Van Zee”

For as long as I can remember, I've had a secret life. It started not with make-believe fairy princesses and talking animals, who sat with me for tea, but with real stuff- adult stuff. For example, when I was nine, I used to meet Tom Cady every day after school. Tom was in the seventh grade, while I was only in fourth. Still, he was basically my boyfriend. We'd made out hidden in the brightly painted cement-block tubes that lined our school's playground. I'd let him kiss and grope on me until I had to get on the city bus and go home, mostly because he seemed so excited about it.

I also shoplifted from the corner market whenever I wanted candy, since it wasn't allowed in my house. That is, until I got caught and was banned from the store for life in exchange for the owner not telling my dad. I was fingerprinted and had to write down my full name and address on a form like any other criminal, but I convinced the store owner that my father would beat me if he found out. I wasn't lying, but I have to admit that I made myself cry extra hard for effect.

At home, I spent hours in the basement inhaling the musty aroma of my Uncle Jim's marijuana plants, their rich green stems stretching lazily under purple grow lights. I liked the way my arms looked under the dusky glow, and sometimes I'd take a small mirror with me to see how my face looked with the purple reflecting off of it. When I tired of that, I'd try to roll some of the still-green leaves into joints. Everyone else in the house smoked pot, but I somehow knew that it wouldn't be good if I got caught.

After I started sixth grade, my dad and I moved into our own house and I started at a new school. These changes didn't keep me from having a hidden life or from roaming my old neighborhood. There were only about five blocks between the new house and the one we'd shared with my Uncle Jim, so I'd walk back to my old neighborhood whenever I felt like it.

Usually, I'd take the train tracks instead of the sidewalk, even though I'd been told to stay away from them. I'd visit Jim and Sally, my uncle's long-time girlfriend who wouldn't marry him but ended up tying the knot with my Uncle Ken. If they weren't home, I'd let myself in and hang out with Hezekiah, their geriatric, slobbery Great Dane. Hezekiah and I would recline on oversized pillows in the alcove, listening to my favorites from Uncle Jim's two-thousand album collection. Everything sounded better once it hit the alcove's six walls and ricocheted back into your ears. My favorite was Pink Floyd, especially the "money" song.

Sometimes I'd still sneak into the basement and check out Uncle Jim's pot plants, but I had to be careful about that now that I was getting a little bit older. Uncle Jim probably wouldn't suspect me of being a closet pothead at age ten, but he was very protective over his indoor garden. He was also protective of me, making sure that my dad, my other uncles, and their friends didn't give me alcohol or weed so they could laugh at my reactions or get me unconscious. Uncle Jim had sent me up to my room plenty of times when my dad would have let me stay in the middle of their nightly parties.

But after my dad and I moved, there wasn't any company at all. None of my uncles visited our house because Uncle Jim's house was already established as the party spot, and because they all liked Uncle Jim better than my dad, anyway. The new house was quiet, and the new neighborhood boring. There weren't any kids my age on my entire block, not that I would have much in common with them.

Overcome by boredom, I visited Uncle Jim and Sally at least once a day. Sometimes, I walked over to their place right after school, had a snack, went home to do my homework, and then went back to Jim and Sally's for dinner later in the evening. My dad didn't seem to care since he was trying to make the mortgage; the more I ate at Uncle Jim's house, the less he had to spend on food. As long as I got my homework done and got home before the street lights came on, I was okay.

It is on one of my normal after-school walks to Uncle Jim's house that I met Mr. Ferguson. The kids on his street called him the Bird Man of Van Zee, but I didn't know that yet. All I knew was that a slight, silver-haired old man was sitting in his yard feeding a bird out of his hands, and I wanted to do it, too. I stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, watching in awe, careful not to make any sounds that would scare the birds away. I was amazed at the number and variety of birds that take turns flying in and out of the yard. Time stood still as bird after bird hopped across the shaded grass to eat from the man's hands. Finally, after the last bird flew away satisfied, the old man looked up at me and smiled.

"You like that, eh?"

"Yes," I exclaim. "How do you get them to do that? Could I do that, too? I want the birds to eat out of my hands, too."

"Well, first, tell me your name. Do you live around here?"

"I'm Amanda, but everybody calls me Mandy. I used to live two blocks over that way, but now I live three blocks that way," I pointed as I rocked excitedly back and forth, convinced that the nice old man was going to teach me how to feed birds from my very own hands.

"Well, Amanda, my name's Mr. Ferguson, but all the kids call me 'The Bird Man of VanZee,' or just 'The Bird Man' for short. I'd sure be happy to teach you how to make friends with the birds, but do your parents know where you are?"

"I only have a dad," I explain, "and he doesn't care where I am until the street lights come on." As I say this, I looked a little over and past the Bird Man's eyes, not because I'm lying, but because I'm afraid he'd figure out the whole truth.

The Bird Man looked at me carefully, like he's deciding whether I have potential by the look in my eyes.

"Well, Mandy, then come sit on the grass with me. Not too close, 'cause too many people are sure to scare the birds away. Sit under that old walnut tree just there. Yep, sit just like me and wait."

I start going over to the Bird Man's house almost every day. I made lots of excuses to go to Uncle Jim's house, which wasn't that hard since all the kids in my class still lived in my uncle's neighborhood. I hated being at home. It wasn't so bad when we all lived together: me, Uncle Jim, and my dad. Now that we lived alone, there's nothing to stop my dad from doing whatever he wants-and what he wants didn't have anything to do with ten-year-old girls. But everything seemed okay when I was with the Bird Man. And no matter what time I walked over to Van Zee Street and knocked on his door, he came

out ready with his tin can of unsalted peanuts for the birds and squirrels and a candy bar for me. Sometimes he wore a fishing hat, sometimes a wore baseball cap. Always, he was silent, passing me what I needed and nodding in the direction he wanted me to sit. Easing to our special spots on the ground, we extended our peanut-covered hands in complete synchronicity, listening, waiting, for our friends to arrive. We sat quietly. We sat in peace. We sat in prayer.

After the fifth or sixth try, I started to get discouraged. The birds didn't flyaway from me, but they didn't come close, either. They seemed to ignore me as they made their way over to the Bird Man. Sensing that I'm ready to give up, the Bird Man invited me into his house for a candy bar and some encouragement. I'm happy to finally see the inside of the Bird Man's house. It did not, as I suspected, look like the inside of a birdhouse. Instead, it looked just like the inside of my grandparents' house and my friends' grandparents' houses. I sat on a stool at the kitchen counter, chewing my king-sized Three Musketeers bar and listening to the Bird Man. "Mandy, it's time for me to tell you a secret," the Bird Man began. "I've only told one other person my secret, and that's my daughter, Laura. It was always our secret, but she's too grown and too busy for birds now. I asked her permission, and she said I could share our special secret with you. But you have to promise that you won't tell anyone else."

"I promise," meaning it with all my being.

"Mandy, I don't just sit and wait for the birds and squirrels to come to me; I talk to them in my head. I say, 'I'm your friend. I want to help you. I have good food. Come to me.'"

"I can do that," I answer between bites. "I can send friend thoughts to the squirrels and birds." I smiled brightly, knowing that the Bird Man's secret was going to work. I concentrated on eating all the chocolate off my candy bar first, thinking to myself that this was going to be an excellent day. As soon as we went back outside, I tell myself, a bird is going to eat out of my hands for the first time.

A moment later, I realized that the Bird Man and I were not alone. A petite, gray-haired woman had walked into the room and was leaning against the kitchen counter silently watching. The Bird Man looks up, realizing that the woman was waiting for him to speak.

"Mandy, this is my wife, Mrs. Evelyn Ferguson."

"Nice to meet you," I said between bites of nougat. Mrs. Ferguson didn't look happy. She kept staring at the Bird Man, giving him the kind of look my teacher sometimes uses when the class gets too noisy.

"Yes?" the Bird Man asked, standing to meet Mrs. Ferguson's eyes.

"I'd like to talk with you for a minute," she answered, walking into the living room. I couldn't hear all of the conversation that follows, but I heard enough.

"I don't think it's a good idea for her to be in the house. You know how people are - You don't even know if her father knows she's here."

"Evie, she's a good girl. She needs someone to care about her. There's no harm in her coming over here, or even in the house. For goodness sakes, you're here all day long. It's not as though I brought her in the house alone." The Bird Man's words were quiet, yet certain. He finished his conversation with his wife, then walked into the kitchen and handed me more peanuts as though nothing had changed. I feel a little sad that the Bird

Man's wife didn't seem to like me as much as he did, but I tell myself that she just doesn't know me like he does.

"Ready?" the Bird Man asked me, unlatching the front door.

"Right behind you," I answered. Remembering the secret, I instantly forget all about Mrs. Ferguson and being sad. The Bird Man smiles, too, as we went back outside to keep our silent vigil in the yard.

Even with the secret, it took a long time before the first bird ate out of my hands. Yet I knew that I would succeed if only I believed, if only I kept sending good, kind thoughts to my would-be friends. When it finally happened, it's a sparrow, the smallest bird I'd ever seen up close. I'm so excited that my heart beats faster than the little bird's wings, but I kept every other part of my body steady. It was like the birds being in my life had given me magical power over who I was and what I could do.

After the first bird ate from my hands, more and more came to the feast. Every day, the little sparrow came first, as though she was my special bird, or I was her special human. Then a cluster of robins, a yellow-winged blackbird, and even a cardinal came to feed. When the birds were done, the squirrels knew that it is their turn to feed. After all of the birds and squirrels we knew had fed out of our motionless hands, we scattered our leftover peanuts on the ground, hoping to attract some new bright-winged friend to sing to us, some injured squirrel in need of temporary aid. This went on for weeks, months, this silent ballet between the Bird Man and me. I even got brave and express my new found fascination with birds to my dad. When he bought me an illustrated bird encyclopedia for Christmas, I passed it on to the Bird Man, who treated it as a treasure.

Without warning everything changed. Sitting in the Bird Man's yard one misty October evening, I knew that something was wrong even before I heard or saw the car. Looking up, I found myself locked into my father's eyes. Instinctively, I knew that the Bird Man and I were over not because we'd done anything wrong, but because my dad had to, must, destroy anything I had that was separate from him. I stood up slowly, like a captured robber trying not to get shot by the police.

Without lowering my hands or letting go of my peanuts, I walked to the car. In a moment of clarity, I realized that with my arms in front of me and my fingers spread wide, I looked like I was sleepwalking. I turned to look at the Bird Man and saw that he, like me, had not changed positions. From his seated lotus position, he spread his fingers wider as if to say, "Come, come."

My father called the police, who ran a check on the Bird Man. It turned out that Mr. Ferguson was convicted of raping a sixteen-year-old girl in 1948. I'm taken to DHS, and they take me to the hospital. I'm poked and prodded and questioned. The social worker and doctor decided that I've been sexually abused previously, but not on that particular day. There was no semen, no blood, no skin cells, no hair just old rips and tears that had permanently scarred over. The police search the Bird Man's house, but there was nothing there except the bird encyclopedia. He moved away.

A year later when I start junior high, I am finally able to get away long enough to ride my bike by the Bird Man's house. He's gone. There's a new, yellow convertible in the driveway, and all but one of the bird feeders were gone. I ride by the house every day for a week and the yellow convertible was in the driveway every time.

Finally, on the second week, a tall, reed like blonde walked out of the Bird Man's house and unlocked the convertible. I rode closer and stopped directly in front of the driveway putting my feet down on either side of my bike.

"Miss," I began, "Do you live here?" She pivoted the top half of her body slowly, methodically, but kept her bottom half poised to enter the car.

"You must be Mandy," she says, looking down at her open-toed shoes and painted toenails instead of at me. Something about the way she moved her head, as though its position could direct traffic or change the world, made me realize who she was.

"Are you the Bird Man's daughter?" I asked. "Is he okay?"

Turning the rest of her body to face me, Laura lowered her keys and walked two small steps closer to me.

"Mandy," she started, again tilting her head to the ground, "He knew. My father knew all along. He isn't upset with you. It isn't your fault."

"But..." I start, then hesitate. This time, it was my turn to look down.

"I don't understand. What the police said, how can it be true?"

Laura shifted, leaning on the side of her car for support, or maybe just to move farther away from the bad memories.

"Yes, Mandy, it's true, but that was a long, long time ago."

"She was sixteen," I asked, my voice faltering.

"Yes, she was sixteen, and he was nineteen."

"Who... who was she?"

Laura swings around and opened her car door, then changes her mind and turned back to me.

"She was my mother, Mandy. She's my mother, and her father was just like yours."

This was the end of our conversation, I knew. I moved my bike away from the driveway, watching Laura as she stepped into her car, backed down the driveway, and turned at the end of the street. I knew I would never again see the Bird Man and that I would never visit this street again. But just this once, just this one last time, I moved across the yard to my spot under the walnut tree. Folding my legs under my body, I sat with my arms out and my palms up, just like I had with the Bird Man. And I cried. And I smiled. And I cried.

Inmate: Yvette Louisell

#### "Prison Loyalty"

Although I had known Cindy the entire twenty years I had been incarcerated, I did not attend her memorial. Somehow the Chapel did not seem the right place to remember her, with her obscene cursing and rolling shit balls that were always targeted at the worst, meanest guards. Even Cindy's humorous side had an impulsive, angry strain, like when Julie made fun of her wobbly walk and Cindy retaliated by telling us in explicit detail how she had seen Julie pull a five dollar trick with a cop in a dirty Sioux City bar bathroom. We all knew the story was factual because Cindy was the most honest and the most observant person we had ever met. Despite the fact that Cindy spent most of her sentence locked in the segregation unit, she knew more about what was happening in the prison's General Population Units than the women who lived there every day of their lives. In fact, Cindy even knew details of the guards' lives-sometimes humiliatingly

intimate details that no one could possibly have told her. I never understood how Cindy saw what the rest of us could not, but I knew that her perceptions were always accurate.

I have to admit that I was frightened the first time I met Cindy. Her scabbed-over bulbous nose, her roseate cheeks marked by pock scars, her overgrown, wild eyebrows, and her thick, slightly wavy more than slightly grimy dishwater blonde hair made her appear more like a denizen of a mental hospital than a convict. In reality, Cindy had been in several placements before committing the robbery that brought her to the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women at Mitchellville, Iowa, but she never fit in with the other women who were labeled mentally ill or developmentally disabled. No, Cindy was too bright, too astute, and too street-smart to be stuck with a bunch of "losers" who could not even keep up with Bingo. When Cindy was out of the segregation unit long enough to play holiday bingo with us, she would not only win her own prize, but would also convince two or three of us that we owed her our prizes for all the things she had done for us. Cindy was a staunch believer in the importance of loyalty, but she also believed that loyalty should be repaid. Throughout the years, Cindy taught me both of these lessons.

My friendship with Cindy began on October 24, 1988, the day I was transported from the Iowa Medical and Classification Center at Oakdale, Iowa's central prison reception center, to Mitchellville. I had turned eighteen just 9 months before being sent to Oakdale, as we called the prison, but I was already on my way to the Big House for life. Yet, because I was a young eighteen and had been terrified of the male prisoners in Oakdale's dining hall, the guards had chosen Cindy to be my seatmate for the bus ride. Bryan, my favorite officer, chained Cindy and I together and started giving orders.

"Davis, you're sitting by the window. Cindy, you're on the outside," Bryan barked. "Cindy, you know what to do to look out for this kid, right," he asked.

"Yeah," Cindy nodded. "If any of those assholes try to wave their pricks at her, I'll bite 'em off," she growled. "And if they even so much as say something lewd to her, I'll hit 'em in the face with one of my world-famous loogies. Don't worry, Bryan," Cindy promised, "I'll take care of this baby girl." In court, I had been a grown woman, a legal adult at seventeen, but in the world of prison, everyone recognized that I was still a child.

My next encounter with Cindy came years later, after I had been fully indoctrinated in the ways of prison life. It was early December in 1995, and my girlfriend, who I thought I loved, had gone to segregation for sneaking into my living unit. Since I did not want her to be alone in segregation for Christmas, I refused to go into my room for headcount to follow her there. As expected, I was immediately cuffed and walked down the center sidewalk to Unit 6A, Cindy's home.

As soon as I walked into the building, I heard Cindy's voice. Even before the officers had time to uncuff me and lock me in my cell, she started calling my girlfriend's name.

"Dusty. Duussttyy. Duuusstttyyy!" she called out. "Wren is here. Hey, Dusty, she must love you to follow you down here. Dusty, get up and talk to your girl."

Dusty for her part, was noticeably silent. She did not get up to look out the three inch window in her door. She did not call my name. She did not even respond to Cindy's repeated calls. But Cindy was not about to give up easily.

"You know what Dusty? You know what I'm about to say, don't you? Yeah, I think you know. It's too bad Wren had to come all the way down here to segregation to find out this information, but sometimes it has to be that way. Do you want to tell her

yourself, Dusty, or do you want me to tell her? You know that Wren is my baby girl, right? I looked out for her when she first came to prison, and I'm never gonna stop looking out for her. Ain't that right, Wren?"

I was afraid of the secret Cindy was about to reveal, but I was more afraid of being on Cindy's bad side.

"Yes, Cindy, that's right. You kept all those gross men from bothering me, didn't you?"

"Well, Baby Girl," Cindy sighed, "I'm about to get you away from a gross woman next. Dusty isn't what you think she is, and you should never have lowered yourself to mess with the likes of her anyway. She's been messing around on you since the first day she convinced you to be her girl. First, it was her roommate in Unit 3, and now it's her roommate in her seg cell. You gotta remember that you're worth more than what's going on in prison, okay?"

For a few moments, the noisy segregation unit was silent. After I pulled myself together, I answered, "Thank you, Cindy. I'm glad you told me. Thank you for reminding me that I'm better than that. I'm gonna go to sleep now, okay?"

"Okay, Wren, but now you gotta promise me one thing. When I get out of seg next month, you've gotta sign up for Bingo at the same time as me, and I get your prize."

"Cindy, you've got it," I answered with a laugh and a smile.

Inmate: Donnetta Rae Akers

“The Hump on My Grandmother’s Back”  
Dedicated to my grandmother, Lena Mae Hendred

Grandma Hendred was a great spiritual soul,  
Who trusted in God and had going to heaven her main goal.  
She was short and plump  
And she carried a hump.  
As children we often made fun of the  
Way she looked,

But once we learned what she was  
All about, we were definitely hooked.  
You see, looks can be and are often deceiving.  
Through my grandmother's life story  
I now am believing.  
The hump on my grandmother's back  
Was full of love and hate was all it lacked.  
How I wish I could tell my Grandma  
What I have finally realized today,  
That going to heaven is what she yearned  
And I miss her every day.  
I love you Grandma!

Inmate: Donnetta Rae Akers

### Flyin' High

Flying high above the smoke  
Life is such a big fat joke.  
Lessons taught to do what's right  
Turn the other cheek, it's wrong to fight.  
Babies born unwanted and tossed aside  
Out in the cold and left to die.  
Why why why can't they see  
That one of these babies happened to be me.  
I've grown up hard, torn between love and hate  
One more minute longer would have been too late.  
Life in the fast lane and livin' on the edge  
Kept me wishing more and more that I could be dead.  
Flying higher above the smoke  
Finally taking that lethal toke  
Flying high above the clouds  
Looking down on the sad crowd  
As they lay me deep in my grave,  
Now I'm settled down, now I'll behave.

Discovering Theater, Fall 2008

Instructors: Michelle Purvis and Brandon Hommer

Assignment: There were three options for final projects for the Discovering Theater class. One of the three options provided the possibility of a product for inclusion in this document. Students could submit a 3 to 5 page play that addresses a topic approved by the instructor.

Inmate: Kendra Swift

### Sarah's Story

#### CHARACTERS:

Sarah-A beautiful, frightened 17-year-old who is a shy but a quietly confident pregnant girl.

Dr.-An older, reserved, disapproving, busy Doctor.

DC- A 17-year-old loser boyfriend, trouble maker, wannabe gang member, father of Sarah's baby.

Narrator-Mother of Sarah, prisoner of the State of Iowa, currently incarcerated at Mitchellville for drugs

#### SCENE ONE:

*A very busy Doctor's office, after waiting all morning Sarah is finally being seen.*

**Dr:** Have you figured out yet what you're going to do?

**Sarah:** *(quietly)* About what?

**Dr:** Sarah, I'm not *sure* you realize how serious this is. There's a lot to be considered here.

**Sarah:** Yes, I do realize, but I am not ready to make any decisions right now.

*Sarah leaves the doctor's office-she exits through a waiting room where her boyfriend DC is waiting for her.*

**D.C.:** So what's up Sarah?

**Sarah:** *(crying softly, shakes her head)*

**D.C.:** *(grabs her and pulls her around)* Sarah, what's going on?

**Sarah:** I'm pregnant, D.C. Don't you get it?! Now what am I going to do!!?

**D.C.:** Don't you mean "us", Sarah? Don't you mean what are *we* going to do?

**Sarah:** *(scoffs)* Yeah, D.C., that's what I mean *(sarcastically)* Yeah, sure, in between your friends, your drinking, your going to jail, and your not having a job-year, that's what I mean.

**D.C.:** Sarah, why do you always have to start bitching? I'll get a job, I swear. I'll stay out of jail, and I'll even quit drinking. I want to help you-really I do.

**Narrator:**

This is how I imagine this event took place. I don't know for sure because I wasn't there. I was and am locked up in prison.

When I did find out I had so many feelings I was overwhelmed. The most severe feeling I felt was helplessness and bewilderment. I really felt as though I had been punched in the gut. It took me quite a few weeks to get used to the idea that my baby girl was pregnant and that I would not be there for her pregnancy or the birth of this child.

It was all about me-what I'm going through, what I would be missing, what an inconvenient time for me.

It took me awhile before I realized how selfish and self-centered I was being over this whole issue. What about her? Her plans? Her dreams?

Sarah and I talked and cried and laughed, and I think each of us was starting to accept this in our own way, when a tragic thing happened.

SCENE TWO:

*Doctor's office. Sarah is being seen by the Dr. for her 3 month check up and it's obvious that there are problems.*

*Sarah is getting up on the table as the Doctor comes in the room.*

**Dr:** So, Sarah, how are you feeling?

**Sarah:** Well, I feel tired a lot and I have had some bad stomach cramps. Do you think that's normal?

**Dr:** It sound normal Sarah, but let's have a look and listen to the baby's heartbeat and see what's going on.

*The Doctor hooks up the fetal monitor machine and places it on Sarah's stomach. The Doctor gets a concerned look on his face and moves the monitor to a different position. After repeatedly trying to find the heartbeat, the Doctor admits to Sarah that there is something wrong.*

**Dr:** Sarah, I can't detect a heartbeat. I need to do an exam, take some blood and do an ultrasound.

**Sarah:** OK, but I'm not really sure I understand.

**Dr:** *(shakes head)* Sarah, the baby's heart may have stopped. If that's the case, we need to remove the baby.

**Sarah:** Are you saying my baby is dead? Is that what you're saying?

**Dr:** Well, Sarah, we need to do the tests and then do an ultrasound and then we will talk some more.

**Sarah:** Okay, Doctor, thank you.

*The Doctor sends the nurse in to draw blood and set her up for the ultrasound. Sarah is cold and uncomfortable-she is very shy and she realizes now that something is very wrong.*

*The Doctor comes back and puts the jelly on Sarah's belly in order to see what's going on inside. You can clearly see the baby and there is no movement at all, and its confirmed there is no heartbeat.*

**Sarah:** Why is the baby not moving? Is my baby dead?

**Dr:** I'm sorry, Sarah, but the baby is no longer living. In fact, I am surprised that you haven't aborted it already. Your body should have after the baby died. If you don't abort it by yourself, we will have to do it for you.

*Sarah starts to cry quietly, and the Doctor leaves the room. Sarah gets dressed and exits also.*

### SCENE THREE

*Sarah is sitting alone at the cemetery by a newly dug grave-she has tears running down her face, but she's not hysterical.*

*Sarah look up to the sky and says:* Is this your will? I've always been told that everything happens for a reason, and nothing happens by mistake, but I am not so sure I believe that anymore. What if these are just convenient clichés to explain away things that aren't really explainable? What about the questions that burn inside of me? What

went wrong? Did I do something? Or maybe not do something, or was it just “life”? Will it happen again? Was it a fluke? What would my baby have been? A boy, a girl, doctor, lawyer, criminal, or maybe it would have been president? (*cut away*)

**Narrator:**

Sometimes when I look back, I wonder what the actual tragedy is, the pregnancy, the loss, or was it a tragedy at all?

*The End*

---

[1] U.S. Department of Education, “The Three State Recidivism Study”. Steurer, Smith and Tracy, 1997.

[2] Daniel Karpowitz and Max Kenner  
Bard Prison Initiative  
Bard College  
P.O. Box 5000  
Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504-5000