

# **Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology Study Guide**

## **Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology by Bell Gale Chevigny**

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# Plot Summary

"Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology" was a collection from prison contest winners. PEN (Poets, Playwrights, Essayists, Editors, and Novelists) American Center sponsored a yearly literary competition for prisoners. The anthology spanned twenty-five years from 1973 to 1998. There were 51 writers that wrote a variety of literature including short stories, poems, testimonies, memoirs, and essays.

The contests enabled the prisoners to express themselves in creative ways. Some were inexperienced writers. Others were used to writers' workshops and were able to polish their writing skills, especially with mentoring. Self-expression was seen as a therapeutic step. The contest provided a listening audience. The PEN website ([www.pen.org/prisonwriting](http://www.pen.org/prisonwriting)) published selections from the current year's contest, along with interviews from previous year's contests.

The writers varied in their subjects and themes, such as freedom, remorse, self-pity, denial, and hope. Some of the writing was serious with violence, humiliation, and sexual tension exposed. For example, "Chronicling Sing Sing Prison," "Coming into Language," and "Death of a Duke" all contained tragic information on the prisons and what occurred there. In "Ignorance Is No Excuse for the Law" written by Alejo Dao'ud Rodriguez, one inmate listened to another on death row telling him heartbreaking and distressing stories from his childhood. The inmate's father had abused him physically, verbally, and sexually.

On the other hand, some showed a sense of humor, like "Dog Star Desperado" and "Black Flag to the Rescue." Hope could be seen in Judith Clark's poem "To Vladimir Mayakovsky" about choosing life, her offspring, poems, and dreams over death, despite all of her hardships. Robert M. Rutan's short story "The Break" ironically told of an old convict painfully climbing the prison wall to reach his cellblock, a place where he felt comfortable and free even though it was prison.

One of the writings was unsettling, disturbing, and based on historical events. Jon Schillaci wrote the poem "For Sam Manzie" who at the age of 15, raped and murdered 11-year-old Eddie Warner. Warner had been out selling candy for his school's fundraiser. The crimes were complicated by Manzie's past of being sexually involved with 43-year-old convicted pedophile Stephen Simmons. Manzie had met Simmons over the Internet.

Prisons were not always safe. There were many problems and riots involving racial tension and conflicts with administration. Racial and moral conflicts occurred in "Lee's Time" by Susan Rosenberg. Paul Mulryan's story called "Eleven Days Under Siege: An Insider's Account of the Lucasville Riot" told about how the news falsely called the siege a racial war when it really was a war against the management. In prisons, inmates faced difficulties in their relationships with each other. Charles P. Norman's short story called

"Pearl Got Stabbed!" dealt with an inmate who got jealous over his boyfriend's wanderings. Kilgore plotted and killed his lover Pearl because Pearl strayed.

The prisoners longed for relationships with their families. Judee Norton became despondent in "Norton #59900" upon hearing that her son could not visit her in the prison anymore. She had to put on a tough exterior, while inside she was fearful and disappointed. Anthony La Barca Falcone dreamed of a normal relationship with his estranged daughter in "A Stranger." Kathy Boudin yearned to be in the car with her son as he traveled west from Davenport, Iowa to California. Her almost 18-year-old son was starting a new adventure in his life.



# Foreward, Introduction, Initiations, and Time and Its Terms

## Foreward, Introduction, Initiations, and Time and Its Terms Summary and Analysis

### Foreward

"Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology" is a collection from prison contest winners. Sister Helen Prejean, who also wrote the book "Dead Man Walking", wrote the foreword. She gained first hand knowledge about prison life by visiting prisoners for fourteen years.

### Introduction

Bell Gale Chevigny wrote that much can be gained from learning about what takes place behind prison bars. She covered an informative account of inmate statistics and historical views in the past 50 years. Some prisons went through reform after the prisoners protested and lives were lost. Due to increased drug charges from the war on drugs, more prisons were built.

The inmates benefited from the writing program as it was restorative in supporting the convicts to find their voice. The writing competition provided not only an outlet to the inmates by enabling them to express their feelings and emotions, but also provided an audience so that they could be heard. They were able to continue the healing process through their writing. "Then the revelations of Attica made a prison writing program (PWP) seem a moral imperative to some PEN members. Convinced that writing is inherently rehabilitative, they persuaded other writers to read, teach, and mentor behind bars and publishers to send materials (xvii)."

### Initiations

The editor wrote about what it is like to step inside a prison and how it feels to be a prisoner. It was foreign to most inmates. They experienced a range of emotions, but mostly fear and disorientation with the loss of freedom. Sometimes there were older prisoners that took the new inmates under his or her arm.

"Prison letter" was a poem by M.A. Jones who served time in Arizona. The poem dealt with fear and not being able to describe the emotions that floods upon entering a prison sentence. The prisoner daydreamed about having hope, but it escaped him.

William Aberg wrote "Siempre," a poem where an older male convict tried to comfort a young woman prisoner as she goes to the "pinta," the penitentiary. The editor noted that



it took place in an uncommon jail that accommodated both sexes. The woman was able to leave her recent supporter a note that simply said "I love you forever" in Spanish.

#### Time and Its Terms

The editor discussed that prisoners do not have anything else but time on their hands. They were scheduled to spend some of their time locked behind bars in their cells.

"Reductions" was a poem by William Aberg that took place in Arizona during the hot afternoon. The caretaker watered the dirt so it will not blow in the wind. The inmates chatted and thought about escaping while the mountains and the sky provided a rotating stage set. This poem won first prize in 1982 in the PEN Prison Writing contest. (327)

Jackie Ruzas wrote "Where or When," a poem that contrasted his childhood memories with being in the prison yard, which became a lonely twisting road. The seasons passed in his disjointed fantasy.

Another fantasy poem, "An Overture" by M.A. Jones compared night and day along with seasons. The author wanted to be home with children and has hope for a different life. An overture was the musical introduction to the opera. The same author wrote "Vivaldi on the Far Side of the Bars." This poem was stating that nothing and nobody could rescue nor change them. Not even violence or death could release them. The only remainder was the static radio or outside music. He could not recognize the church bells. Vivaldi was a Baroque composer.

Chuck Culhane wrote two poems "After Almost Twenty Years" and "There Isn't Enough Bread." Culhane faced hardship and was searching in the first poem that had had a bird theme with jailbirds and a nest. The second poem started out peacefully with petite birds, but then was disrupted when the gulls came. According to the editor, it was about the collapse of the state's resources.

"The Manipulation Game" by Diane Hamill Metzger associated the prison system with a game. Having enough hope and desire were the rules. The author wrote about a broken justice system where one can be convicted of a crime simply because a cop said it was done. The loss of privileges was juxtaposed with hope in early release. The author questioned playing the game of political roulette.



# Routines and Ruptures, Work, and Reading and Writing

## Routines and Ruptures, Work, and Reading and Writing Summary and Analysis

### Routines and Ruptures

There was a lot to learn and do in prison, such as dreaming about being released early, fighting the system with lawsuits, and finding religion. The day was scheduled with the tally, work jobs, eating, and outside time.

"Spring" was a poem written by Michael Hogan where winter is melting and birds are returning for scraps of bread. The old convicts know how many laps they can do before going back inside. The guard daydreams of trout fishing. In 1975, this poem won first place in the PEN Prisoner Writing Contest. (337)

Chuck Culhane wrote the poem "Autumn Yard." The setting was outside where the sun is warming the author. They were able to observe what was happening beyond the prison, such as seeing the sailboats. Some inmates walked and lifted weights. One prisoner, George, was saddened by the death of his younger brother.

Lori Lynn McLuckie wrote the poem "Trina Marie" where she creatively compared an outside glowing and happy woman to the gloomy inside of the prison. The woman tried to figure out whom she can trust while imaging a different life. This poem won first prize in 1992's PEN Prison Writing Contest.

In "poem for the conguero in D yard," the author Raymond Ringo Fernandez mixed Spanish words and had a musical rhythm with drums and beats. He dreamed of hanging out in Central Park with a beer and a joint. He wanted to be home and he put down the guards because they were ethnically disadvantaged.

Reginald S. Lewis described what happens in a prison yard in "In the Big Yard." Rumors had spread and they had taken bets that the snitcher would be dead soon. A new inmate postured while all kinds of different groups were hanging out. At the end, they betted on an old man "Pops" who wanted to escape. This poem received first prize in the PEN Prison Writing Contest. (341)

Patrick Nolan wrote the poem "Old Man Motown" where he described the old inmate who kept to his exercising routine while the new convicts did nothing. The old man had found the key to surviving in prison.

### Work



The editor contrasted prison work with slavery. An example was given that the prisoners built the prison Sing Sing. The prisoners sang songs while they labored, which were similar to the songs sung by the slaves. Most inmates were appointed repair jobs.

Easy Waters wrote "Chronicling Sing Sing Prison" about the history of the prison, located on the Hudson River. The land was bought from the Algonquians in 1685 and the name meant, "stone upon stone." Sing Sing marble was cut from the area for various cities. The inmates were punished by cutting the granite stone. The author noted the change from the prison stonewalls to barbed wire over time. Tourists and locals enjoyed the Hudson River. However, there were 614 prisoners buried there after being sent to the electric chair.

Michael E. Saucier wrote the poem "Cut Partner" in which the inmates were looking for work partners. They were doing outdoor yard work cutting weeds, grass, and trees. If a prisoner broke a tool, he had to pay \$8 or serve isolated time for 10 days. The author regretted his work and saw it as futile slave labor. His other poem called "Gun Guard" bemoaned the prison work too. The guards watched while the prisoners chopped and both groups wanted to be somewhere else. The author carelessly broke the boundary and the guard held his gun ready to shoot him. Fortunately his work partner pulled him back and settled it down.

#### Reading & Writing

The prisons were filled with uneducated and learning disabled convicts. The editor gave a high number, 70 percent, of the state prisoners have not finished a secondary education. Education was helpful in reducing crime. "Education lowers recidivism more effectively than any other program, and the more education received, the less likely an individual is to be rearrested or reimprisoned." (97) Creative writing had transformative power to enable the criminal to become empathetic, respectful, and cease violence.

The Bedford Hills Writing Workshop wrote the poem "Tetrina." There were 6 women in a writing workshop, which rescues them. They shared what has happened to them and talk about their dreams. Writing has changed their lives for the better. The same group wrote "Sestina: Reflections on Writing" in an interview style that explains what the workshop has meant to them. They had writing assignments and exercises that they have worked on for the past 9 years together. Bonded for varied reasons, they didn't think they could do it originally. Through the workshops, they examined and expressed themselves. It was a calming effect, which helped to get rid of pain, especially since they were separated from their children. Real learning was taking place. The women published 2 books, which enabled them to speak to an audience.

Paul St. John wrote the cynical short story called "Behind the Mirror's Face." Another inmate, Charlie, encouraged the author to write. However, the author did not think it was going to help, as he is condescending and negative. He was a system analyst before he went to prison. The author wrote of prison violence with stabbing, rape, and suicide. At the end, the author felt free as he stated, "... tonight I'm riding with the wind." (125)





# Players and Games and Race, Chance, Change

## Players and Games and Race, Chance, Change Summary and Analysis

Both inmates and guards were referred to as players. The prison culture fostered complex games. There was much plotting, conniving, and manipulating in the prisons. Sometimes, morality and ethics played a role.

Vera Montgomery wrote the poem "solidarity with cataracts." The author was questioning the unity of her fellow inmates. She desired cohesion when one inmate was painfully screaming, she screamed. When another inmate wept, she wept. She robbed the snitch-box notes so that the inmates could be in the same boat.

"Clandestine Kisses" was a fantasy poem written by Marilyn Buck. The poem dealt with secret and rebellious love.

### Race, Chance, Change

The editor stated that racism, racial tension, and fear were prevalent with convicts, guards, and administration. At times, there has been intermingling and forced celling together of different races. Prisons have had to deal with prejudices, race riots, gangs, and moral dilemmas.

Henry Johnson wrote about the training of a new guard in "First Day on the Job." The old guard, Wild Bill, was abusive to the African-Americans in a special soundproof room that could not be used anymore. He changed them by having Caucasian inmates beat them and caused them to fear the guards. Having hot coffee thrown in his face scalded the author. His wife left him and others took care of his daughter who is now a nurse.



# Family and The World

## Family and The World Summary and Analysis

### Family

This section dealt with writing about blood relatives. Some writers had compassionate, loving, and loyal mothers and grandmothers that did not give up on the inmates. Some prisons had parenting classes for the inmates where they learned to break offensive and illegal behaviors.

Jimmy Santiago Baca adored his gypsy father in the poem "Ancestors." Although his dad was a wanderer, Jimmy and his brother and sister loved him. Their dad did not fix their collapsing house, but dreamed instead of becoming rich.

"Uncle Adam" was a poem written by Diane Hamill Metzger about her great uncle. He was not a good cook, but took her to restaurants, the stock exchange, and private beaches. Diane visited him each Easter and received money from him when she left. Although she did not understand him, she did not want to disappoint him. He disappeared, like his twang.

Barbara Saunders wrote the poem "The Red Dress." The author remembered her past and compared a young girl with a Toni doll. Both had a red dress, but the doll was the only one that closed her eyes.

"Ignorance Is No Excuse for the Law" was a poem written by Alejo Dao'ud Rodriguez where he described another inmate's fascinating childhood stories. The inmate waited for his death on death row, but was not going to get emotional about it. His father tried to make him grow up before his time, by making him drink beer and fighting bigger boys. When they went camping, they shared a sleeping bag together. As a result of his father's sexual abuse, the prisoner thoroughly cleaned his cell three times daily. When it came time for him to be put to death, he told the narrator "I died when I was born" meaning that he never fulfilled his life or his purpose. (224)

Kathy Boudin wrote the poem "Our Skirt" about a skirt that her mother had given to her when she was 14 years old. The author wore the skirt for many years and accidentally scorched it when she tried to iron it. Her mother came to visit her in prison and the author reflects on her mother's loyalty and love.

Judee Norton wrote the short story called "Norton #59900" about being called into the captain's office to address her son's poor attitude. Norton tried to act dismissive and apathetic on the outside, while on the inside she was anxious and fearful. After seeing the sergeant, she was directed to the captain's office. He addressed her about her son's disrespectful and rude behavior when he visited. Norton tried to explain that her son had to wait 3.5 hours in the blazing sun and missed most of his visit with her because the incompetent guards thought he was breaking the "no blue jean" rule. The captain



prohibited her son from visiting, which broke her heart. After she regained her composure, she told a joke about the captain to her inquisitive acquaintances that made them all laugh.

"A Stranger" was a poem written by Anthony La Barca Falcone where he described being at a circus and seeing his daughter that he loves. She did not know him, but he dreams of a normal relationship with her.

Judith Clark wrote the poem "After My Arrest" about her memories of nursing her baby while wearing a vivid cherry Indian cotton top. Her friend bought the shirt at a sale and wore it when she visited Judith in prison. After playing with her baby, she watched her friend and baby leave. She also wrote the poem "To Vladimir Mayakovsky" about the idealistic Russian poet who gave up. Judith longed for real history books that included poetry and belittled a middle school teacher for briefly summing up Communism. She harshly judged herself as her child looking at the eyes of her flawed mother. At the end of the poem, despite all of her hardships, Judith still desired existence, her offspring, poems, and dreams over death.

## The World

The actual world was different than the prisoners' world. Some writers wrote about characters that were confined and punished in their own way, but not institutionalized. Allison Blake wrote about her non-incarcerated neighbors. "Melody" was not able to be carefree because she was afraid and had nightmares. Others wrote about what happens in the real world, like the drug trade.

Allison Blake wrote the poem called "Prisons of Our World" where the author shared secrets about her neighbors. Mrs. Hennessy was indulged, but her husband does not love her anymore. Sarah lived with regrets while Harry was out of control and alcohol dependent. Little Mary wanted to run away from her abusive father.

"Pilots in the War on Drugs" was a short story written by Robert J. Moriarty about a pilot and his assistant who were transporting drugs. The author gave a glimpse into the lives of drug smugglers. The two men were flying a plane from the Caribbean and they were hoping to take off and land safely. The author gave a brief history of the profitable drug trade. He mentioned different methods of transportation: cargo plane, tractor-trailers, and oceangoing freighters. The author stated the various inflation prices for an ounce of marijuana, ranging from \$5 in 1970 to \$150 in 1988. The author flew in Vietnam for 2 years from 1968 to 1970.

J.L Wise Jr. wrote the urban poem "No Brownstones, Just Alleyways & Corner Pockets Full" about the ghetto life on a summer night. He mentioned a lot of people of all ages and professions, along with their actions.

"Americans" was a poem written by Jon Schillaci about a multicultural Texan high school, including an attractive Vietnamese girl named Ann Nguyen. The teacher's name was Mr. Srinivasan, but no one can say his name correctly. He also wrote the disturbing poem called "For Sam Manzie." The NY Times,



<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/08/nyregion/eddie-was-murdered-sam-s-doing-70-years-but-who-is-to-blame.html> reported that Samuel Manzie at the age of 15 raped and murdered an 11-year-old boy named Eddie Warner. Warner was out selling goods for his school's fundraiser. The year before the murder, Manzie had gotten sexually involved with 43-year-old convicted pedophile Stephen Simmons whom he had met over the Internet. Manzie was in the middle of helping prosecutor's gather evidence to prosecute Simmons when Warner entered into the picture. Schillaci wrote of Manzie's favorite band, The Smashing Pumpkins and the candy (wrappers) that Warner was selling. Manzie was serving a 70-year prison sentence from April 1999.

David Taber wrote the poem "Diner at Midnight" where the author was having eggs, toast, and coffee. He recognized the waitress from their high school years together. The author had no compassion and was apathetic toward Anna who had an abortion the week before. The author also wrote the insincere poem called "The Film" about driving from Connecticut to New York City during the night. The passing of time is mentioned, from 10:30 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. and the author had ordered food from a waitress he ignored. He was living a movie-clichéd life where the convict was the champion.

"The 5-Spot Café" was a poem written by Henry Johnson about an ex-lover who cheated. The narrator was irritated, lonely, and tried to win her lover back.

J.C. Amberchele wrote the short story called "Melody" about a 19-year-old girl that witnessed her father's murder in their house the previous year. The intruder had also shot Mel, but he did not kill her. The robber was looking for the safe, but they did not have one. The story flipped from past memories to the present as Mel returned to the house to see if she wanted anything before the house was sold. It was filled with antiques, which excited the real estate agent.

Mel had lived the past year with her brother Paul, a dentist, in his Omaha home. She tried to recover from the trauma by imaging that she could see into the future. During her visit, she predicted that the new owners would chop down the beautiful sycamore tree in the yard. She wanted to run away and disappear at the end of the story. Ironically, she wanted to kill someone.

The sequel to "Melody" was titled "Mel." Mel drove for 3 hours to visit Alex Pitts, the intruder who had murdered her father, shot her, and left her for dead. The crime happened 13 years ago. In the prison, Mel met Angie who was visiting her father. Angie had not forgiven him because he molested her for 13 years, impregnated her, and then tried to molest her daughter. Angie called the cops and he had served 3 years so far.

Alex was a no-show for the first half hour, but then he finally came over to her. During the attack, he had been wearing a mask so this was the first time she was able to look him in the eyes since it happened. She was not there for revenge nor could she erase her memory, but she questioned him as to why he did it. Alex did not answer, he had not spoken since a childhood trauma. Mel got paper and a pencil from a guard, but Alex did not write on it until Mel left to freshen up in the rest room. He handed her the folded

paper when she left. Mel sensed his pale blue light/aura. Angie waited for Mel outside, like she requested. Mel started to read Alex's apology note.



# Getting Out and Death Row

## Getting Out and Death Row Summary and Analysis

### Getting Out

The inmates were released either through imaginative dreams of escapes or physically done with serving their time. Prisons provided structure to the inmates' lives and oddly for some convicts they provided comfort and security.

"Dreams of Escape" was a poem written by Henry Johnson in second person style. The author was fearfully fleeing from a city to the woods. There a wood spirit briefly tempted the reader.

Ajamu C.B. Haki wrote the poem "After All Those Years" where he questioned leaving the comfortable and protective prison walls. The inmates worked at up keeping the prison with cleaning and painting. The author mentioned undesirable food. The inmate was able to exit the prison but the prison and experiences there will not depart.

"Stepping Away from My Father" was a poem written by William Aberg. The author did not want to interrupt his father's communication with a Russian man to request a cash advance for his illegal habits.

M.A. Jones wrote the poem "To Those Still Waiting." The author was reminiscing about the men in prison that he knew and called brother. He contrasted his inmate friends and the prison with a woman who is in the next room and not in prison. He was used to daydreaming from his prison days.

"The Break" was an ironic short story written by Robert M. Rutan. The tired, stubborn old man crawled along the wall and thought this time would be different. He had two good things: a rope and a hook. When he tried to escape prison with two other guys, he did not have those things and their attempt was foiled. Unfortunately, thoughts of his grandson disappointed him, as they both disliked each other. The old con had been in and out of prisons serving a life sentence and allowed out on parole. He enjoyed telling stories, not just his but others' as well. After the painful trip over the prison wall, the old man walked into his old cellblock, back to a place he felt comfortable and paradoxically free.

### Death Row

Capital punishment has been a controversial political topic. Abolition committees have formed to end it. All prisoners were affected by it, not just the ones sentenced for execution. Unfortunately, capital punishment was discriminatory against the poor and non-Caucasian.



Kathy Boudin wrote the inquiring poem "For Mumia: I Wonder." She wanted to know about how he dealt with fear, hope, and existing on death row. The editor wrote, " The case of Mumia Abu-Jamal and his writings have many drawn to it. Co-founder of Philadelphia's Black Panther Party and a popular radio journalist very critical of police brutality, he was convicted of murder and in 1982 sentenced to death." (301)

Another inquisitive poem, "Easy to Kill" by Jackie Ruzas dealt with impending execution. The author asked the dazed visiting prison priest, "'Is it just that I'm so easy to kill, Father?'"(304) He wanted to retract his past and find out where it went wrong.

Jarvis Masters wrote the poem "Recipe for Prison Pruno." The author contrasted a recipe for making pruno, an alcoholic beverage that is produced easily, and his court sentencing for execution. Prisoners were not allowed to have alcoholic beverages, but this poem gave directions needed to make it.

"Conversations with the Dead" was an evoking poem by Stephen Wayne Anderson. The author visited the graveyard where the executed convicts were buried and he wanted to finding meaning for his life. He remembered the people he killed. He felt remorse for the children of his victims who had to go up faster because of his actions.

Anthony Ross wrote the short story called "Walker's Requiem" a narrative by Nathan Cole Walker who was living his last day before his death sentence. He had a nightmare where his friends and family were eating him instead of simply attending his funeral. Nathan was 24 years old, killed a cop, and had been on death row for 6 years. He did not want to talk to anyone, and was disrespectful and sarcastic to the prison shrink, Dr. Cohen. His exhausted lawyer visited him at noon and he did not order anything for his last meal. He wrote a poem and it was going to be mailed to his lawyer the next day. Walker tried to crack a joke when they came to get him to take him to the gas chamber. He chest was painful and he died.

"Write a poem that makes no sense" was an eerie poem by Judith Clark. An irate Marlene jumped off the hospital roof and landed in the mattresses placed by her fellow inmates. It was under construction to build death row. It was ironic because on the third floor there was a nursery filled with babies and kids. Marlene was still angry and she will jump again without the mattresses. She does not want benevolence.



# About the Authors and Afterword: More about the Authors, What the Lives and Deaths of People in Prison Tell Us

## About the Authors and Afterword: More about the Authors, What the Lives and Deaths of People in Prison Tell Us Summary and Analysis

### About the Authors

It was moving to read more background information in the "About the Authors" section in the back of the book. Some of the authors had successfully turned their lives around and gave back to their communities. Jimmy Santiago Baca was an example of this. "In 2004 he launched Cedar Tree, a nonprofit literary organization designed to provide writing workshops, training, and outreach programs for at-risk youth, prisoners and ex-prisoners, and disadvantaged communities." (329)

Victor Hassine was a lawyer that was charged with committing murder. He used his attorney skills to greatly improve the prisons where he served. "Along with other plaintiffs, he filed and won a conditions of confinement lawsuit, which resulted ultimately in \$50 million in improvements to Grateford. Transferred to Western Penitentiary, which had just undergone a brutal prison riot, he joined another lawsuit, resulting in \$75 million in improvements to Western." (336)

Michael Hogan wrote that writing invigoratingly provided strength and it created a positive energy flow. "As a reader I know that poetry gave me sustenance in the dark night of the soul. As a writer I hope to give some of that vital energy back." (337)

Prison life changed the inmates. Some were able to obtain their GED degree, while others like Diane Hamill Metzger earned multiple degrees including a Master's degree in Humanities/History.

The lives and deaths of the prisoners have varied. Unfortunately, some gave up hope and committed suicide, like Victor Hassine. Others, like Reginald Sinclair Lewis were sentenced to death. Unexpected death came to William Orlando after being released from prison. Patrick Nolan contracted hepatitis C and died while still serving time.

The background information on the authors was informative in understanding the prisoners' perspectives. Patrick Nolan had been in prison at 16 years old for 3 years and then returned after he was liberated for two years. William Orlando wrote, "'I had a criminal record before a mustache.'" (347)



Afterword: More about the Authors, What the Lives and Deaths of People in Prison Tell Us

The editor corresponded with most of the writers and at times accompanied them to readings of their work. This section expanded the "About the Authors" sections and was divided into 4 parts: Inside, Outside, Loss, and Writing.



# Characters

## Prison guards

"Dog Star Desperado" was the beginning to a novel by William Orlando. He recalled the degrading journey from a federal prison in Leavenworth, Kansas, to another federal prison in Lompoc, California. After they traveled by bus, he described his new guards and his prideful feelings. "These guards all matched: boots, mirrored sunglasses, guns. They were many, and they deployed themselves around us. Such overkill made you feel at once hopeless and proud at being considered so fierce a beast. For the nonce you weren't some tame and humble inmate. Hell, no. You were a barbarian being whipped to the imperial gates, straining your bonds and snarling defiance at your captors." (8) The prisoners made jokes with each other until they were being processed and received new drawers, which were not the type they were used to having. The drawers presented a dilemma in which superior guards were called in to handle. The author added humor to the ending by commenting on their clothes. "They were eight strong, and not a corn-fed one of them was under six feet or two hundred pounds. They were military - real paratroopers in jumpsuits and jump boots. They were riot-garbed and ax-handled armed. They were dressed to dance." (13)

## Victor Hassine

Victor Hassine in Gateford State Prison wrote, "How I Became a Convict". He is serving a life-without-parole sentence in where the most violent criminals are housed. Hassine shared his impressions of the other prisoners and described the process of getting prison clothes, being searched, fingerprinted, and photographed. He spent two days getting shots and having a medical exam. Idle time was spent before and after he underwent psychological and literacy tests. Going through the classification process was a waste of time, according to him, because all that mattered was your ethnicity, homeland, and an unoccupied cell. Hassine obtained a clerical job, but began sleeping too much. A friend warned him to stop sleeping so much, so he began to collect and read many books, along with painting. His helpful friend again warned him that he had too much junk in his cell and it could easily burn, just like another cell had done. The author got rid of his things and began fighting for his security and good sense.

## John Caine

"The Tower Pig" written by Scott A. Antworth described John Caine's interactions with a prison guard, Strazinski. John's beloved grandma had passed away while he was in prison serving a ten-year sentence. He was estranged from his disappointed family, but his grandma still believed in him. At the time of her death, he had served more than eight years. John was called into the SOC, Security Operations Center, and told of her



death. He was allowed to go to her funeral, but had to wear full equipment, which would have been upsetting to his family.

A month before the funeral, John had gotten himself into trouble after he did not get to work one day. When the guard, Stazinski, told him to get going, John mouthed off to him because he was high from smoking a joint. John proceeded to moon the guard who he nicknamed "Tower Pig" because he was sent to isolation for ten days. Ironically, it was the "Tower Pig" that escorted him to the funeral. John's perception of Staz started to change as he apologized for the death and opened up about his mother's recent death. Staz continued to astonish John at the funeral where Staz unlocked him and allowed him to sit anywhere in the church. Humbled, John chose to sit next to Staz instead of with his family.

"The Tower Pig" won first prize in the PEN Prisoner Writing Contest in 1999. (328)

## Kerry

Robert Kelsey wrote a short story about a prisoner named Kerry and his gratifying job. The main character's nickname is also the name of the story, "Suicide," because he kept the other prisoners from committing suicide. His nightshift job was from 10pm to 6am in the mental observation unit. In the beginning of the story, Kerry was getting ready to go to court because he killed a kid while he had driven drunk. He ironed his pants and washed the thrift store suit jacket he was received from his sister.

His fireman friend, Fitzgerald gave him ironing tips. Fitzgerald shot his wife and was not remorseful as he stated he would do it again. He was serving 15 years to life and was also getting ready for a court appearance. Kerry was serving 5 to 15 years maximum and was going to his third court appearance. He did not feel present when he was in court, which was postponed and set to resume in 6 weeks. His attorney Tom tried to be helpful.

Back in the prison dayroom, Kerry chatted with Ernesto. Ernesto believed that he was better than the other inmates. He had robbed cabbies while high on crack and once tried to slit his wrists.

Following his job's manual, Kerry checked on the mental observation inmates. He came across Stymie would have been hit by a car when he was younger, which lead to having one unbendable leg. Stymie was plagued by grand-mal epilepsy, had sold crack and was heading to upstate because it was his third time in prison. Kerry helped Stymie one time when Stymie had a seizure. Kerry put a baseball cap in his mouth, held his head, and took him upstairs in a wheelchair. In the next cell was Lemar, who had strangled his wife and suffered from Parkinson's disease. He stuttered when he spoke. One time he got \$50 in the mail.

Kerry had been in prison for 10 months. He was a helpful character that responded to the needs of the inmates in the mental observation unit. As part of his job, he helped a young Arab prisoner who tried to hang himself. The inmate ended up knocking his head



on the sink after he passed out from having his shirt tied too tightly around his neck. Kerry let other inmates borrow his suit when they went to court.

Kerry's court case had been postponed once again. Lemar and another inmate, Checkers, were playing checkers. Checkers was given his nickname because he put the checker pieces in his mouth. Kerry showed his sense of humor and copied Checkers by putting the white knight in his mouth when the other inmates expressed concern about him leaving.

## Roger Jaco

"Killing Time" was a poem by Roger Jaco that contrasted what was happening in the prison to his memories of the outside world. Jaco remembered being at home with his parents starting with Memorial Day. He missed his good memories. By going to prison, he felt isolated, tried to deal with the consequences of his actions, and waited, ironically after Independence Day. Labor Day brought quiet time and memories of Kathy. After Thanksgiving resulted in prison life becoming a certainty. The author saw an inmate going to the electric chair. By Easter, he regretted what had happened and wanted another chance.

## Larry Bratt

Larry Bratt wrote a short story called "Giving Me a Second Chance." Bratt is disappointed in Maryland governor Parris Glendening's decision not to allow parole for violent offenders who received life sentences. Bratt believed the decision drained all hope for lifers and provided statistics that former inmates are rarely rearrested. Prisoned for 14 years already, parole was supposed to be a possibility in 10 more years. The author tried to be a positive role model and mentor who also enjoyed doing yoga and meditation. "By doing all of this, lifers have effectively challenged younger prisoners to become the kind of men who command rather than demand respect. We help the younger men pursue their education, resist negative peer pressure, and gain self-awareness and understanding." (40)

## The Toledo Madman

"Myths of Darkness: The Toledo Madman and the Ultimate Freedom" was a short story where the author and others threw pebbles at the fence. His friend, Toledo Madman foolishly wanted to escape using sparrows. Unsuccessful, he was thrown into solitary for his attempt. His pet mouse was smuggled into his friend Burnout's cell. Burnout also had crazy ideas of breaking free, too, and threw himself on the electric fence. The authorities medicated Burnout, but he would gag it up later. Toledo helped him by giving him Dexedrine, a medication used to aid with increasing focus ability. Unfortunately, Burnout grabbed the fence again and the guards fired at him. The author and Toledo saw it unfold. Toledo was able to get the mouse back and felt free and empowered. He



was beaten for two weeks and then transferred. The author flushed the mouse since he was too endearing for incarcerated life.

## Big Bird

Richard Stratton wrote the short story called "Skyline Turkey" about an odd prisoner who perched upon a catwalk in the middle of the complex. The prisoners nicknamed him Big Bird because he was large and wore a trench coat even when it was not cold outside. Big Bird was not going to commit suicide by jumping, but he was not going to come down without his desires being met. He stayed there during the 4:00pm count time. Two other prisoners, Old Con and Red chatted about memories of other prisons that had turkeys nearby.

Old Con found out that Big Bird had a list of demands. Big Bird wanted a job at UNICOR and had been told that his name was on the list, but he never was able to get the job. Old Con had predicted that the guards would get Big Bird down by nightfall, even if they had to shoot him. The prediction turned out to be true. Big Bird had eaten all of his food that he had taken up on the catwalk in 12 hours. He traded his ideal job at UNICOR for a Big Mac from McDonald's. Unfortunately, he was never given his wish and was sent to another prison in North Carolina shortly after being in the Federal Correctional Institution in Petersburg, Virginia.

Before he was transferred, Big Bird became friends with another prisoner named Dirt Man or the Janitor, who sneaked eating dirt, dust balls, and pieces of trash. They both wore heavy clothes even in the summer and were cellmates for a while. They enjoyed playing chess with each other. Dirt Man disappeared shortly after the other inmates told on him because of his unhealthy habits of eating old mop strings and cigarette butts.

## Kenneth

David Wood wrote the eerie short story called "Feathers on the Solar Wind" about inmates living their last days in the AIDS Dormitory. The setting was during an intense winter downpour at 2 A.M. and mid-forties South Philly and 50 year-old Willie could not sleep so they were playing cards. An inmate named Daniel Martin Pinkston had died and was being taken out. Another inmate had died previously that same night. The two characters betted about how another inmate would probably die that night, too, as they usually die in threes. Deathrow was cleaning up the mess left behind from Pinkston's death. Deathrow was a very helpful younger worker who modestly worked beyond his job description.

Jimmie, aged 25, got into his wheelchair and watched the game. He had been Pinkston's cellmate and he did not want to die. Two other characters, Wyman Reed and Carl "Smokey" Dukes joined the group. They predicted and betted that one of them in the group was going to die. They were playing one last game with Death. Smokey chose Willie, Willie chose Wyman, Wyman chose Philly, and Philly chose Jimmie. Smokey was the only one not chosen.



Disturbed Jimmie went to the shower room and took Pinkston's pain pills. Someone taking a steaming shower startled him. Smokey went to check on Jimmie. Jimmie thought he was hallucinating when he saw his dead cellmate's younger muscular body taking a shower. Jimmie asked him for forgiveness because he gave Daniel the virus. Daniel responded by saying that Jimmie needed to forgive himself. Smokey was shocked by what was going on. Jimmie told the group what had happened. Deathrow informed them that Smokey had cut his throat with a razor blade and died. According to Willie, Smokey committed suicide because Smokey gave false evidence that caused his brother to face the electric chair. It was actually Smokey who had committed murder and he saw his brother's ghost in the shower. He was not able to forgive himself for his actions.

## Earl

"Death of a Duke" was a violent short story written by Dax Xenos. The narrator Fox vaguely remembered Earl from the Dexter unit. Earl had lost 70 pounds and looked different. Earl's eyes were filled with hate and he was angry. Fox tried to tell him to be cool and calm. A job opened for Fox to be the Major's bookkeeper and Fox eagerly filled the position. There were not a lot of changes that took place in the prison, but Earl was able to get his favorite sexual partner and friend Johnny Boy Randall to room with him.

Earl had successfully conducted a lot of trade business in the prison. An opponent, Bumblebee, found out that Earl had been taking away some of his business. Bumblebee sent his handyman Highside to entice Johnny Boy into a business proposition without Earl, who was in the infirmary after getting his 6th toenail removed. Bumblebee had Johnny test some weed, which Johnny thought he could handle but Bumblebee had laced it. After Johnny became stoned, Bumblebee assaulted, raped, and dropped him 5 stories to his death. A screaming Earl sought revenge and drove a spear through Bumblebee's mouth and head. Bumblebee drove a shank under Earl's ribcage before Earl threw him over the railing. Before Earl collapsed and died, he cut off Bumblebee's head.

## Paul

"Eleven Days Under Siege: An Insider's Account of Lucasville Riot" was written by Paul Mulryan. The author was warned to keep his eyes open from his friend, his road dog. The guards called lockup and told the inmates to get in their cells. There were yells, screams, loud noises, and the inmates were told to get out of their cells. The block had been under siege and the author first thought it was a racial war.

To the author's relief, the inmates were working together against the administration. He spotted a friend, Val, and they stuck together in seeking a way out to the rec yard. Unfortunately, all exits were barricaded so they armed themselves with pipes. Some of the guards were beaten and 7 were taken hostage. One guard was killed. There were about 400 prisoners under the leadership of some of the masked inmates.



On the 2nd day, the electricity and water was shut off. All food was gathered and distributed. It was impossible for the author to sleep. The state highway patrolmen, security guards, FBI agents, and the National Guard surrounded them. A negotiator phone line was set up, but it did not start well. A special advisor from Georgia came and improved communication and respect. The inmates demanded that the talks be covered by news media. Unfortunately, the state released false information that it was a racial war. Helicopters drowned out the inmates' demands from a rigged up PA system. Painted messages posted in the windows made the front-page newspaper headlines.

The situation became intense when the dead bodies were disposed of in the rec yard. Some were thought to be dead and were carried out, but ran to safety when they could. The inmates asked for food and water, which was granted hours later. In exchange for one hostage, the prisoners asked for a live TV interview. When their demands were not met, one hostage was killed. A misunderstanding occurred and the National Guard sent 30 men into the rec yard. The inmates told the guards to leave and they did. Two hostages were freed in exchange for adept legal counsel who hammered out an agreement.

Sadly, the prisoners damaged and destroyed the prison block before prison negotiators enlisted the convicts that were willing to transfer to another prison. The author and Val signed up. Hypocrisy was blatant when the prisoners and the lawyers settled to the 21-point agreement. The surrender process went well. The author and Val daydreamed of home and family after they were put on a bus headed to Mansfield.

## Pearl

Charles P. Norman wrote the gruesome short story called "Pearl Got Stabbed!" The author needed a request to do his laundry, but the guards were sleeping and he did not want to disturb them. Jerome's screams that Pearl was stabbed woke them up. Pearl's lover walked out of the building with blood on his hands, unseen. Norman did not want to see Pearl's dead body. He knew him from "The Rock" Raiford Prison and Pearl's real name was Emerson Jackson. Coupled with Pearl's petite, thin body, he was timid and reserved about talking in his prison group. However, Norman and Pearl shared reciprocal respect.

Etiquette barriers dictated that African-American Pearl not be too friendly with Caucasian Norman. Pearl was a runner who got lost in his thoughts when he ran. Once when Pearl passed Norman walking, Norman called out his name in a nonthreatening way. The two developed a friendship where Pearl was considerate, cordial, and respectful. They chatted and recalled their past experiences and acquaintances.

Unfortunately, Pearl was unfaithful to Kilgore even after Kilgore warned him that he would kill him if he strayed again. Kilgore planned his attack, obtained a knife and paint thinner. After Kilgore stabbed him, he tried to burn him with the paint thinner and a match. An autopsy confirmed that Pearl was murdered. Norman mourned for his friend and wondered if anyone would do the same when he died.





## Sam

Michael Wayne Hunter wrote a heartbreaking story called "Sam." A new guard named Sam messed up on the yard recall and got the author, Michael, into trouble inadvertently. Sam tried to explain that he panicked and it was not a racial issue because Michael was Caucasian and Sam was African-American. Sam was willing to owe one to the author if they let the mistake slide. Michael was shocked by Sam's admission of the truth and agreed to tell Anderson to let it slide as he had also gotten into trouble by mistake.

A year later, Michael was attacked by a Mexican hit man, which made him wary of his non-protective friends. He started playing more basketball with the African-Americans. After another player teased Mook for not guarding Michael more closely, Michael felt eerie when no one was meeting his eyes. Michael played a little too aggressively, and took Mook down. Mook punch him in his neck. Michael thought that Mook's friend J.T. was coming after him, but he snatched up Mook and took him away instead.

Relieved, Michael saw that Sam was on the catwalk with his gun pointed at the yard. Mook and Michael were sent to their cells because according to Sam, they were playing too rough. Sam repaid Michael for his earlier mistake. When making his statement, Michael was cool and collected while Mook was angry and defiant. Michael was found not guilty of being involved in a physical altercation, but Mook was in trouble for being disrespectful.

Sam came by Michael's cell often and they became friends. Sam was loyal to his family, friends, and church in inner city Oakland and showed Michael pictures of them. Sam questioned Michael about being on death row and did not want another inmate, Bobby, to be executed. The next day, Michael found out that Sam had been killed when shots were fired after Sam asked some uninvited drug guys to leave his house. Ironically, Sam's story was on TV for a brief 30 seconds, while Bobby's pending execution aired for 5 minutes.

## Lee McMann

Susan Rosenberg wrote "Lee's Time" where an inmate dealt with a moral quandary. The main character Lee, a Caucasian, overheard her neighbor Jane, also a Caucasian, being intimate with an Africa-American guard named Wilson. It happened two nights in a row and a few times more that week. Was it rape or a consensual sexual relationship? That is what the outside investigators want to know.

Lee's first reaction was to shut it out and not get involved. Her friends Keisha, Louise, and Cakes support her and her thoughts. Lee did not associate much with Jane, nor Maria, a Hispanic inmate on the other side of Jane who was a snitch. But Lee and Keisha saw Jane laughing with Wilson at his station a week after it all happened. His hand was on hers. Both Maria and Lee's cells were inspected. Maria's wrists were swollen after she talked with the investigators for more than three hours. She underwent





a lie detector test and was threatened with having a new perjury case, a grand jury, and segregation.

Lee realized that she was racist when she was working as a nurse, prior to being in prison, and she had to touch an African-American for the first time. Keisha reminded Lee of Tina, her nursing friend who helped Lee understand that she was bigoted. Before Lee went to talk with the investigators, Keisha came to her cell and told her that it was all about racial conflict and they were going to lynch Wilson. Lee opened up to Keisha as to why she was serving time in prison. She had pulled the life support on an elderly gentleman who was in a lot of pain, thereby committing murder. Instead of going to prison, she was fired from her job and turned to selling drugs. She was busted and was barely managing to live her own life in prison. This moral dilemma had consequences that she was not prepared to face.

After Keisha left, Lee continued to cry, but then she felt calm and was able to take a deep breath. She was ready to be scrutinized. Lee was sent to segregation for a whole year where she was able to go outside each day for 60 minutes. Even though there was snow on the ground, Keisha and Cakes were able to talk with her through the fence. They told her that Jane was transferred and Maria got parole. Wilson had to serve 20 years while his wife and kids were left crying at the courthouse. Lee told Keisha and Cakes that she was all right with being in segregation.



# Objects/Places

## Chains

"Arrival" was a poem written by Judee Norton, who served time in Arizona. She felt free mentally even if she had shiny restraints on, which she referred to as charms.

## Taft, Oklahoma

"After Lights Out" was a poem written by Barbara Saunders. The author wrote about the flitting eyes of the devious prisoners that are scampering around. Some were performing heinous and shocking acts. This poem states that prisons are dangerous places. The poem was written in the Eddie Warrior Correctional Center in Taft, Oklahoma.

## Letters

"Letters Come to Prison" was a poem written by Jimmy Santiago Baca. The author compared letters to white doves that warmed their hearts and enabled them to fly like free birds.

## Snow owl

"The Night the Owl Interrupted" was a short story by Daniel Roseboom telling of how the monotonous prison life was broken up. It was winter and the inmates were working out with weights outside. The author's friend Dixon wanted to go inside. The big snow owl that flew by and landed on the prison windows startled them. It then perched on the officer's watch booth. The guards looked nervous as all the inmates were watching the bird. There was an announcement that informed the inmates to return to their blocks. The author wondered about what would happen if they kept watching the owl and did not go inside. After another announcement, the prisoners bonded and felt strong together. There were no divisions by racial groups. However, they filed back inside while the owl was free outside. Reality set back in and they felt restricted again. However, feelings of hope prevailed as their hearts were internally strengthening.

## Cockroaches

Michael E. Saucier wrote the humorous short story called "Black Flag to the Rescue." The author stated that there are cockroaches living in his old battery-run typewriter. He was trying to write a novel, but the roaches are disturbing him. He powered through very quickly. His remedy was Black Flag bug spray, but it was something they did not have in prison. The story won first place in the PEN Prisoner Writing Contest in 1993. (352)



## Pell Grants

Jon Marc Taylor wrote "Pell Grants for Prisoners." A brief history of the college programs for prisoners was given. It started with the University of Southern Illinois in 1953. Due to a lack in funding, Congress passed Title IV in 1965 that helped with finances. Educational programs had a calming effect on the inmates and some became positive role models. Other positive effects were drops in recidivism rates and success stories of graduates that included a physician, a VP, personnel directors, and teachers.

The author argued against the 1991 Helms Amendment 938 by stating that the inmates received a very small proportion of the Pell Grants and that they were not well off before their incarceration. He further disputed more false statistics that formed the 1992 Coleman-Gordon Amendment. The author listed several disturbed groups that supported funding, such as Educators for Social Responsibility and Literacy Volunteers, along with inmate students. Congress was lobbied for funding by these many organizations.

"His essay, 'Pell Grants for Prisoners,' won the National/I.F.Stone and Robert F. Kennedy Student Journalism Awards in 1993." (355)

## Food

"I See Your Work" was a short story written by Joseph E. Sissler. The main character, Willis, was serving a one year and one day sentence for his destructive actions of hammering on an Air Force jet. His cohorts deserted him and only served one night in prison. His knowledge and experience from pretending to be a homeless man enabled Willis to design a simulated computer game. Thoughts of designing a prison game ran through his head throughout the story. Another character that was involved was Russ, the legal librarian, who helped inmates in exchange for food and had served time in Leavenworth prison. Another inmate, Hollis, sought legal advice from Russ. Russ gave Willis a job selling food, such as cheese and chicken, to the inmates.

Willis was tentative, but he made the rounds of the prison trying to sell the food. He went to the gym, rec area, and outside. Games such as ping pong, chess, poker, and dominoes were played in the rec area. In the hallway, Willis spotted 2 girls playing a card game. Later he overheard their conversation about the Mac game being over. Willis found out that it was about prostitution. Russ warned him to stay away from the several gay men serving time. Willis was able to sell chicken and cheese to Half & Half.

## Handball

Jack Ruzas wrote the short story called "Ryan's Ruse." It began with a very hot and humid August day in the Sing Sing prison yard. Nothing was going on, except for an active handball game between 51 year-old Jimmy Ryan and younger Carlos. They were playing best out of 3 games and Carlos won the first game. Jimmy thrived on playing



and it had kept him going strong for the past 22 years. His friend Hap cheered him on. The 2nd game was close and it drew a crowd. There was 15 minutes until the yard was closed and Hap started heckling the Hispanic crowd who were cheering for Carlos. He placed a bet with Papo before the announcement came. Jimmy decided to finish the game in the morning and Carlos agreed. The score was 19 to 16 with Carlos in the lead. After taking a shower, Jimmy analyzed and reflected on the game. He predicted what would happen the next morning and a somewhat larger crowd showed up. Carlos and Jimmy volleyed and then Jimmy was able to serve and tied the game. Jimmy went on to win 2 more points to win the game. The third game was going to be scheduled later. Hap and Jimmy chatted about what they would do with their money earnings.

## The Ball Park

"The Ball Park" was a poem written by Henry Johnson about glowingly watching his 8-year-old nephew play baseball. Standing in line reminded him of when he was six years old and went to the circus. His brother had a good arm that could dunk the attractive lady in the dunk tank. The author watched his big brother sneak out of the house and destroy the circus with gasoline and a match. His brother did the same thing in Vietnam as a Marine. The author's brother died in Vietnam, but the author thought he saw him in a crowd in midtown Manhattan. His eyes were playing tricks on him. However, the author was brought back into reality when his nephew scored an exciting home run.

## Route 80

"A Trilogy of Journeys" was a poem by Kathy Boudin where she marveled and remembered when her son was born. The middle of the poem described the son growing and developing, but not yet ready to leave on his own. The last part of the poem depicted a treasured atlas where Route 80 was marked with a red thin line. It started in the middle of the country in Davenport, Iowa and traveled west to California as the author and her husband had traveled the same path years prior. Kathy yearned to be in the car with him as a passenger rather than being in prison.



# Themes

## Death

Death was a theme in the book. David Wood wrote about inmates dying from diseases such as AIDS in "Feathers on the Solar Wind." All of the AIDS inmates were living their last days in the AIDS dormitory in the Hardee Correctional Facility in Bowling Green, Florida. Most of them were frail and thin. They wore blankets around their shoulders to keep them warm, except if they had fevers. The night the story took place, three inmates died. Two of them died from their disease, but one committed suicide.

In "Death of a Duke" by Dax Xenos, a prisoner killed another prisoner over business competition. Bumblebee was jealous of Earl's success, so he plotted to kill Earl's favorite sexual partner, cellmate, and friend Johnny Boy. After Bumblebee got Johnny Boy stoned, he assaulted, raped, and threw him over the railing to his death. A screaming Earl sought revenge and drove a spear through Bumblebee's mouth and head. Bumblebee drove a shank under Earl's ribcage before Earl threw him over the railing. Before Earl collapsed and died, he cut off Bumblebee's head.

Paul Mulryan recounted the Lucasville riot where several people died. The editor writes, "Of the several hundred riots in the U.S. prisons since 1970, Lucasville was one of the most catastrophic: prisoners killed one guard and nine prisoners." One of the snitches was thought to be dead and had a guard's badge pinned to his skin. However, when his body was taken out to the rec yard, he unbelievably ran to safety.

His jealous boyfriend in "Pearl Got Stabbed" by Charles P. Norman murdered Pearl. Kilgore knifed him, and tried to burn his body with paint thinner and a match. Sam was innocently killed after shots were fired at his house in "Sam" by Michael Wayne Hunter.

There was a small section devoted to Death Row, where inmates shared experiences and thoughts about death row. "Recipe for Prison Pruno" by Jarvis Masters gave directions to make cheap and easy alcohol. He contrasted the recipe for the judge's words about his execution. Anthony Ross wrote about the gas chamber details that Nathan Cole Walker faced. Stephen Wayne Anderson felt remorse in "Conversations with the Dead."

## Families

The prisoners longed for relationships with their families. Judee Norton became despondent in "Norton #59900" upon hearing that her son could not visit her in the prison anymore. She had to put on a tough exterior, while inside she was fearful and disappointed. Barbara

Anthony La Barca Falcone dreamed of a normal relationship with his estranged daughter in "A Stranger."



In "A Trilogy of Journeys," Kathy Boudin yearned to be in the car with her son as he traveled west from Davenport, Iowa to California. Her almost 18-year-old son was starting a new adventure in his life. Boudin also wrote a charming ode to her mother in "Our Skirt" where she borrowed her mother's skirt for many years. Her mother came to visit her in prison and the author reflects on her mother's loyalty and love.

J.C. Amberchele wrote two short stories that dealt with families. Unfortunately, Mel's mother had died when Mel was born. Her father raised her and she was a tomboy who did not wear dresses. Her brother, Paul, was 10 years old than she was and left the house as soon as he could. He became her caretaker after the intruder murdered their father, shot Mel, and left her to die. While in prison to meet Alex, Mel met Angie who was visiting her father. Angie's home life was a nightmare and dysfunctional. Her father molested her for 13 years, from the young age of 5 to 18 years old. Fortunately she called the cops when he started molesting his granddaughter.

## Tragedy

Many of the prisoners faced tragedy in their lives. The writings revealed their heartache, hurts and pains. Sam Manzie tried to help police prosecute Stephen Simmons, the 43-year-old pedophile that had sexual relations with him. Sam's allegiance to Simmons was strong and he destroyed the evidence against Simmons shortly before he molested and killed 11-year-old Eddie Warner who was out in the neighborhood selling candy. Jon Schillaci captured the historical events in his poem "For Sam Manzie."

Allison Blake's poem "Prisons of Our World" portrayed four different people that were not incarcerated but were living in an internal prison. Mrs. Hennessy was indulged, but her husband did not love her anymore. Sarah lived with regrets while Harry was out of control and alcohol dependent. Little Mary wanted to run away from her abusive father. The poem's last sentence summed it up with "We stand alone in the prison of our space." (247)

Generational violence and lack of education kept the inmates from being joyful, happy, and productive members in society. Even after his wife begged the author not to rob again, he ended up in prison in the poem "Killing Time" by Roger Jaco. Being isolated from their families and support systems was overwhelming to some of the prisoners. Judith Clark watched with sadness when her friend, who was wearing one of the author's favorite blouses, took her child away after their brief visit. The author longed to be reunited with her child. Unfortunately, the convicts' actions also had consequences for the innocent victims. Mel from J.C. Amberchele's short stories was not able to have stable and supportive friends, moved place to place, and had nightmares after she saw her father murdered right next to her.

# Style

## Perspective

The prisoners' writings provided an intriguing and largely unknown perspective of how one is treated as an inmate, dealing with consequences of their actions, and understanding their role apart from society. While perhaps a third of the manuscripts received treat experiences outside prison (represented here in Family and The World), this anthology reflects the findings of contest jurors: that some of the most powerful work reveals what no other writers can offer - the unknown life of this nation hidden in our midst.

Most of the short stories were written in the first person narrative, by these authors: Orlando, Hassine, Hamill Metzger, Bratt, Grindlay, Antworth, Roseboom, Kelsey, Baca, St. John, Saucier, Xenos, Johnson, Mulryan, Norman, Hunter, Rosenberg, Norton, and Ross. The remaining short story authors wrote in third person perspective: Stratton, Taylor, Sissler, Ruzas, Wood, Moriarty, Amberchele, and Rutan. There were many poems in the anthology throughout each section.

Several of the writers were trying to find a way to articulate and express themselves. "'It's all about having a voice,' said Lori Lyn McLuckie. (342) Robert Rutan wrote about an old convict that ironically returned to prison in "The Break." The old man found comfort and freedom in his old cell, rather than deal with his disappointed daughter and grandson. In "Lee's Time" Susan Rosenberg wrote about a woman who served solitary time because she wanted to keep her opinion to herself about what happened to the inmate in the next cell. Was the inmate in the next cell raped or was she having consensual sex with the guard?

It was moving to read more background information in the "About the Authors" and the "Afterword: More About the Authors" sections in the back of the book. Information was specified, such as where each author was from, how long they were serving, their crime, and which prize they won from their writing was incorporated.

## Tone

Various tones are found through the book. Some of the prison writing was remorseful, such as Larry Bratt in "Giving Me a Second Chance." Bratt was convicted of a double homicide. "But having been incarcerated now for fourteen years, I can say unequivocally that I want to change my life. I have remorse not only for the wasted years of my youth (I'm now fifty-four) but for the deaths of the two people I was convicted of killing. And as a result of these feeling, I have made a commitment to never again repeat a malicious act." (39)

Others provided information as to how the prison writing programs have changed their lives. The six women that worked in a writer's workshop provided details as to how the



women felt being apart from their children. It was the Bedford Hills Writing Workshop located in the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Bedford, New York. They benefited from getting together to share and express themselves, along with changing their lives. Publishing 2 books gave the women an audience who was willing to read about their plights.

Unfortunately some of the horrible truths and realities of the harshness in the prisons was recorded, such as the guards instructing inmates to beat other inmates in "First Day on the Job" by Henry Johnson. The author wrote, "Wild Bill, your squad commander, shackled nigger convicts to the wall and we beat hell out of them with rubber hoses 'n such. Lord, the screams in that place, the heat and smell of blood." (178)

## Structure

Sister Helen Prejean, who also wrote the book "Dead Man Walking", wrote the foreword. She shared her experiences of visiting prisons and encouraged the reader to safely step inside a prisoner's world. The introduction recounted historical changes in attitudes toward inmates through several decades and included informative statistics.

The winning entries to the PEN writing contests over 25 years were published in the book. There were 51 writers that wrote a variety of literature including short stories, poems, testimonies, memoirs, and essays.

The editor separated each section by topics. "These experiential categories evoke the many aspects of doing time and cover the life-span of imprisonment, from its multiple beginnings to its several ends. They are: entry, coming to terms with expanded and emptied time; deadening routines and ways they are ruptured; work; education, from literacy to creative writing; games (con games, hustles, sports) and their players; race relations; interactions, past and present, with family; the recall and evocation of the outside world; ways of getting out; and death row (xxi)." She wrote an introduction to each section that gave a preview of the poems and short stories.

At the end of the book, the editor wrote about each author and included information that she had gathered. Information such as where each author was from, how long they were serving, their crime, and which prize they won from their writing was incorporated. Additional information such as current situation was given, too. An updated version was recorded in the "Afterword: More about the Authors, What the Lives and Deaths of People in Prison Tell Us."





## Quotes

"To be able to say what you mean, to put in words what you perceive as truth, to impose form on the formless - this is a way to reconstruct a life, to restore one's sense of meaning, of responsibility to oneself and to others,' PWP chair Katherine Perutz wrote. 'But the others - at least some others - must be listening.'" Introduction, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page xvii

"By doing all this, lifers have effectively challenged younger prisoners to become the kind of men who command rather than demand respect. We help the younger men pursue their education, resist negative peer pressure, and gain self-awareness and understanding." Time and Its Terms, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page 40

"Suddenly, through language, through writing, my grief and my joy could be shared with anyone who would listen. And I could do this all alone; I could do it anywhere. I was no longer a captive of demons eating away at me, no longer a victim of other people's mockery and loathing, that had made me clench my fist white with rage and grit my teeth to silence. Words now pleaded back with the bleak lucidity of hurt. They were wrong, those others, and now I could say it." Reading and Writing, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page 103

"These success stories give added emphasis to the words of former Chief Justice Warren Burger: 'We must accept the reality that to confine offenders behind walls without trying to change them is an expensive folly with short-term benefits - winning battles while losing the war.'" Reading and Writing, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page 109

"Judy: 'My poetry has also been a way for me to express feelings of loss and shame and hope as a mother in prison, and my growing sense of remorse for the terrible losses I have caused others by my crime. I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that the workshop has played a role in my reclaiming myself and my humanity.'" Reading and Writing, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page 117

"One day after one of our many conversations, I found to my surprise that I didn't think of him as a cop or as a black man anymore, just as Sam. Sam once asked me, "What are you doing in here? You don't seem to belong on death row. Real uncomfortable with the question, I finally answered, slowly, softly, "Guess no one was ever there to reach down and pull me out, Sam." Race, Chance, Change, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page 204

"Back then I never really understood his last words to me when he said, 'I died when I was born.' But now, I'm next. Family, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page 224



"Still, I crave life, Mayakovsky, child, poems, dreams." Family, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page 240

"We stand alone in the prison of our space." The World, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page 247

"The authorities in Bimini created a mountain of the wreckage, which serves as a constant reminder of mortality. It's like walking into someone's house and seeing a casket used as a dinner table." The World, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page 254

"He was an old man, but a determined one: He was going over and that was that. He had been a bull of a man once; now, wintered and weakened, he cursed his decrepitude and longed for his former strength. But he had two things in his favor - a good rope and a good hook." Getting Out, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page 292

"Writing, he claims, enabled him 'to rise from a victim of a barbarous colonization to a man in control of his life.' Baca once said, 'All of us who went to prison were lied to, and poetry is the only thing that didn't lie. Everything that is not a lie is poetry. In order to bring order to our world, we were forced to write. Writing was the only thing that could relieve the pain of betrayal, the only thing that filled the void of abandonment.'" About the Authors, Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing-a PEN American Center Prize Anthology, page 329



## Topics for Discussion

What role does education play in the prison system? Should prison-writing programs be funded by the government? What are the costs of educating prisoners to become high school graduates? What about higher level learning? What is your opinion of Pell Grants made available to prisoners?

How can you apply what the prisoners wrote about to your daily life? Can you relate to their situations? How has reading this book changed your thoughts and opinions about prisoners, prison-writing programs, prisons, and education?

Have you visited a person in prison? Would you encourage or discourage an inmate to get involved in a prison writing-program?

What are the pros and cons to prison-writing programs? What supplies are necessary? What personnel needs are required to operate such a program, if any?

Are you able to forgive others? What about if you were falsely accused, could you still forgive your accusers? What happens if you do not forgive others? How do you deal with your anger or conflict?

Have you been a target of prejudice? How have you dealt with it? What is the difference between prejudice and stereotyping?

Discuss the writing style of the book. What appealed to you? What would you change if you edited the book?