

# *I Am Beautiful*

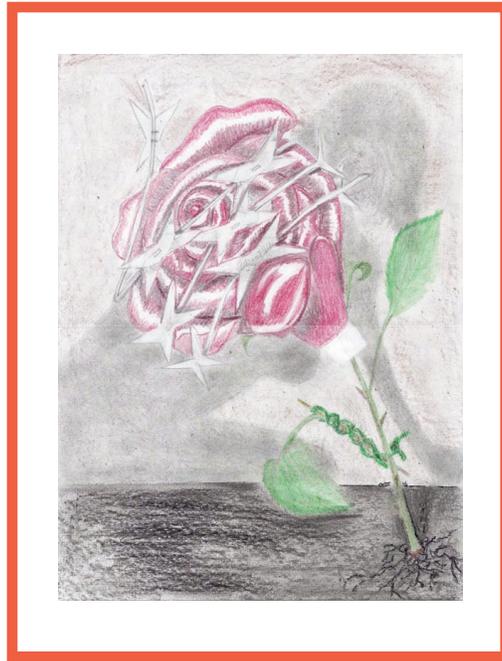


A Survival Resource  
Created by and for Women

Volume 6

*"Life is a journey and a spiritual unfolding is its purpose."*





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## *With Gratitude*

We want to express our thanks to all the women in U.S. prisons who generously shared their hearts and lives through their writings and art.

Their sharing was a true act of courage on their part because of everything they have undergone and have survived. This book is their gift to the sisters walking with them on life's journey.



## *Our Logo*

The *rose* is our logo and was inspired by the words of a woman who contributed to the very first volume of this project:

*"Life is a journey and a spiritual unfolding is its purpose."*

## *Cover Art*

We are grateful to *Donna Slaughter* for the art that she contributed.

It honors all women who have survived their own pain and have found and claimed their beauty.

## *You are beautiful...*

First of all, we want to honor the women in prison who sent us their art and writings for Volume 6 of **I Am Beautiful**. We also admire, uphold and honor everyone who has felt the effects of abuse.

Although we could publish all that you sent to us due to the book's size, we are grateful to each one who shared from their hearts, and from their own, unforgettable experiences.

Every year we are moved by your strength, your courage and your survival. You have gone through so much emotionally, mentally and physically. We honor you as survivors!

Thank you for sharing your experiences with the other women in prisons across the country. We hope that each one of you who reads this book will find encouragement and strength, and regard yourselves with the dignity and beauty that is yours.

Whatever your Higher Power, thank you to those of who shared your spiritual belief that this Power was within you during your struggles, calling you to light and freedom.

We honor all of you for your courage, honesty and strength. You are examples for all of us – women and men alike because every human being deserves dignity and respect, and happiness.

*Never forget, you are beautiful inside and out!*

With admiration and respect,  
*The Dismas Team*

## From Torture Cells to a Beautiful Survivor

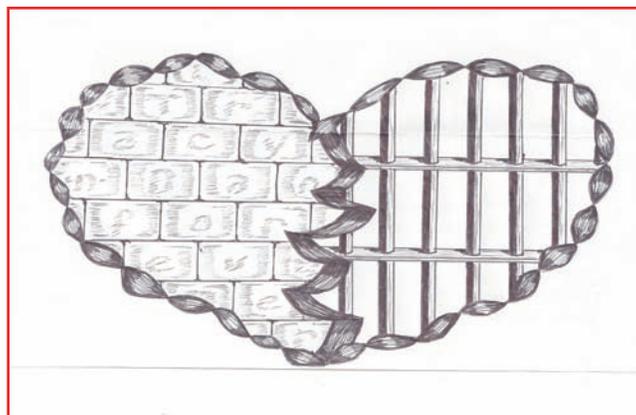
*Virginia Fencil*

Being thrown into a torture cell at a very young age damages a child forever  
Some think it doesn't hurt her, but it does in more ways than one  
It stays with her forever, even haunts her in future relationships  
Not knowing why she is being tortured, not knowing what she did to deserve it  
She is told she is not beautiful, and only good for one thing to him  
Even though her tormentor says no, she is very, very, beautiful

She then grows up and tries to move past the pain  
But once again she finds herself thrown back into another torture cell  
This time it's not of someone else's doing, but of hers in the form of a first boyfriend  
Remembering all the words of her past, she lets the second tormentor reel her in  
She's told once again that she's not beautiful, and only good for one thing  
But guess what, with two tormentors saying no, she still is very, very, beautiful

She gets away from the second tormentor, and finally out of his torture cell  
To sadly fall right back into another, this one would almost be the death of her  
From beating and verbal put downs, to forced actions, to unmentionable to speak  
Losing all three of her beautiful children, ending up in a man made hell called prison  
She struggles day to day to live, but also to be a healthy survivor  
All three monsters told her she was ugly, and only good for one thing to them  
But guess what, to all three monsters, she is very, very, beautiful and she finally knows it

She is trying so hard now to break the cycle, the cycle of monsters, tormentors, and their cells  
She has finally found someone who loves her the way she should've been loved from the start  
It's sad to say it took her losing everything to finally get away from the torture cell's chains  
She is told daily she is loved, and how beautiful she truly is  
She is a Survivor, a very, very, beautiful one



Tracy Yennie

## And Nothing

*Geneva Phillips*

I have been living in this institution  
I am weary of ceremony  
This ritual that carries on through the quiet  
Cutting of the flesh  
The body is a song  
I live with an enemy who I cannot fight free of  
Remembering children  
Explaining on paper  
With words clear and sharp, yet insufficient  
To reconstruct the entire truth  
Buried in the flotsam of blurry years  
My tears are beautiful and rare  
They give me thousands of days  
Within which to contemplate my own slow end  
I have been everything and nothing



Wild Photography

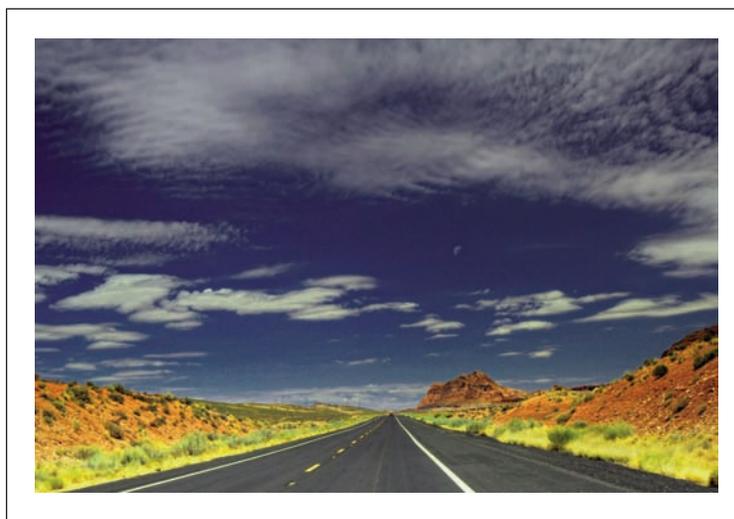
# I AM BEAUTIFUL

## My Story

*By Katie Scott*

My name is Katie Scott. I'm 23 years old, and I'm currently incarcerated at Iowa Correctional Institute for Women in Mitchellville, Iowa. I have been physically abused by my now ex-boyfriend, and here is the story from how we met to how I got here. It all began in fall of 2006. My older sister introduced me to her best friend's little brother. I was 13. It was like love at first sight. At school, we never hung out because he never paid attention to me. One day, it was like he fell off the face of the Earth. I tore his picture out of the yearbook and kept it until 2014. One day, on May 16th, 2014, I got a phone call from my sister saying "you remember Rees"? Well, that's an uncommon name, I said "yes". She then said "well, he wrote me on Facebook and told me to tell you to write him". My heart skipped a beat. I got butterflies when I received a message from him with his phone number. I called, heard his voice, and fell in love all over again. We made plans to meet up and talk and get to know each other again. We met up and it went great. We had this chemistry that I will never forget. He called me one day and told me his mom kicked him out, so he needed a place to go. I asked my grandma and she said he could stay as long as he got a job. We agreed to the terms. Everything seemed great at first, the honeymoon stage; then became the jealousy, then the arguments. One day we got into an argument, he threatened to leave, he packed his stuff and went to walk out. I stepped in front of him to stop him; he grabbed me, and threw me on the bed. Then he lifted his hand, I covered my face, he hit my hand and then in the ribs. The next day, my hand was bruised and swollen. My family asked what happened; I lied and said I fell and hit it on the night stand. I can tell in my mom's eyes she knew from experience that I was lying. Everyone told me to leave him, but I couldn't. I was in love we got kicked out of my grandmas and moved in with my cousin. We had a campfire one night where we drank and listened to music. Rees stood up and told me it was time for bed. I told him one last song, and then I'll be in. He got mad, stormed downstairs, and started packing his things. I tried once again to stop him. My cousin held me back and told me to let him go. He left, and of course, I followed. We argued, he got in my face and head butted me. I went to grab my phone; he snatched it and broke it into pieces. I left and went back home and left him there. He texted my cousin's phone over 100 times that night saying he was sorry and it wouldn't happen again, and that he loved me. I let him come back. A couple of months later, my cousin said I could stay, but Rees can't; so we both moved out. We ended up moving to North Dakota with Rees' dad. Everything was good, a different environment and a new start to life, but it didn't end that way. He started drinking heavily and doing drugs, becoming more abusive. This time I fought back and defended myself. One pay day, he looked at me and told me to pack my things so we could

leave, and I did. He robbed his dad blind, took everything, even his truck. We moved back to Iowa, and everything was ok again. He started partying more and smoking crack, snorting cocaine, and taking pills causing him to become out of control. We moved in with my uncle. Rees started stealing my uncle's booze one night and became physically abuse. My uncle stepped in and called the cops. This whole time, I'm on the run because I have a warrant for my arrest. I had to leave when the cops arrived. Rees went to jail for 6 days, so during that time I figured we broke up, and I was done. I had sex with 3 guys during those 6 days. I moved to Clinton with a good friend named Eugene, may his soul rest in peace. I got a Facebook message from Rees saying "I'm sorry, I love you, it'll never happen again". Stupid me, I went back. He went crazy and found out I "cheated". He got me in the car, made me set up my friend Eugene and do crazy things. He parked the car and told me to just be honest, so I was. I told him I had sex with 3 guys. He beat me almost to death for 4 months straight. We were homeless during those 4 months. We went from hopping from house to house to living in an abandoned house in the middle of nowhere. We went from a happy, loving couple to me living with a monster. I had black eyes, a broken nose, teeth knocked out, busted lips, and was held hostage. I was scared for my life with no one to call on for help. I had no place to go. The only way I could get away from him was to call the cops and turn myself in. I called for help every day. I begged him to stop. Now, I thank God for every day I wake up alive, happy, and healthy. Two years of beatings, put downs, and name calling. It took me to get locked up to realize that I don't need him. I deserve BETTER. I am Beautiful. If you ever experience any of these signs, leave as fast as you can. Run far away and never look back. To this day, I still have flash backs and nightmares. It's been almost a year. That was my physically abusive life.



Wild Photography

## The Fact is

Catherine Gagne

As I seek security and protection, I still tend to fail. Although I'm not so simple-minded, at times I'm without the ability to reflect. As well as many obstacles being self-inflicted, the end result is a weakness of pride.

*The fact is...*

I am still able to admit denial and defeat. Although with a hot-temper as well as an intense betrayal of self-worth, the end result is wallowing in self-pity.

*The fact is...*

Often my mind is scattered, and I indulge in my irresponsibility, and the end result is that I tend to develop some unfamiliar characteristics.

*The fact is...*

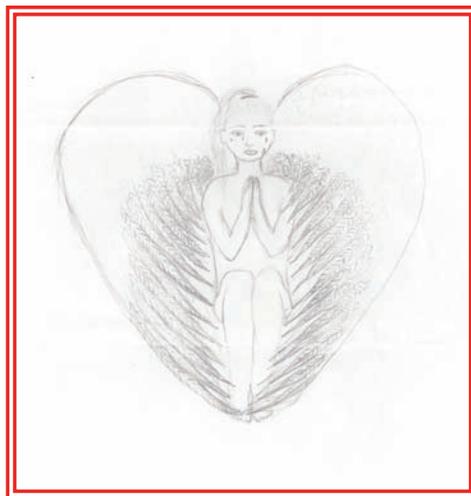
I cringe at the thought of being vulnerable to temptations. Although life can be cruel, I still take a moral inventory, and begin to evaluate my path of destruction and hostility. I realize that the end result is simply defeat and dependency.

*The fact is...*

Regardless, I have a crushed heart and spirit. So I surrender, and with a bold confidence I can begin to transform my life with general guidance and courage.

*The fact is...*

I can change.



Justina Lina Ardenia

## My Escape

*Jessica McQueen*

When I close my eyes to sleep it's my favorite time of the day. I am free. Free to go wherever I dream. No fence, or wires, or bars. I am at home again with my husband next to me. Kids lay out all over the living room watching any movie of no care I am just there. Listening to the little laughter of their voices, the warmth of my husband's arms, the random elbow or heel from kids climbing across mom or dad, and still I don't care. I am with them again where I belong. I am no longer weak or lost or ALONE. I am HOME. I can even smell the faint detangle shampoo in the girl's hair, the gel in the boy's hair, even the Axe deodorant on my husband. It is ever so sweet. Never do I want to again awake. That's why I choose to sleep, so often my dreams are my escape.



Kyara

## **I Am Beautiful**

*Nikkia Lewis*

All my life I have been hurt and abused; broken hearted, battered, and used. I cried myself to sleep many nights just by hearing my parents fuss and fight. I hated myself, because nothing ever went right. Looking in the mirror even became a scary sight. I prayed to God to shed some light on my suffering and pain. Then I realized through my misery, His word was all I needed to gain. Without it, I would have remained the same. Lies, guilt, and condemnation were all in the same lane. To make matters worse, many people didn't even call me by name. It was always plain Jane. Then one day, I met a man. He acted like he was my biggest fan. I thought he was that missing piece to my puzzle, that my life was no longer a struggle. I felt special when he told me "I love you". The open wounds and scars that life brought made me vulnerable, desperate; and naive to my own thoughts. He showed his true colors in a matter of time. He was only there for the gain; he stole my identity, even forged my name. Now I'm doing time, a conspiracy to his crimes, but through this lesson, I've found God's blessings. He gave me strength to endure this test. He told me I'm beautiful, even during my mess. He gave me a spirit of discernment to understand the rest. With Him on my side, I know I'll do my best. No matter what I go through, I've learned not to settle for less. I found it written so many times in His word. It says in Genesis 6:2, the Sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful. Abraham even told his wife Sara in Genesis 12:11 what a beautiful woman she was. So what makes me different? nothing at all. I am beautiful no matter how many times I fall. Everything I suffered in my past, abuse, low self-esteem, a broken heart, and shattered dreams, were only believable because the devil wanted me on his team. It's a part of his genes to kill, steal, and destroy, but what he stole from me I got back. Now I can say I AM BEAUTIFUL, and that's a fact.



Wild Photography

## Vow to my Recovery

*Amy Stickle*

As I sit here all alone in my dark and dreary cell  
I think about my life; my self-created hell  
Looking for the woman I knew I had within  
Today with your help, I'm letting go of all my sins  
You say I'm not a bad person  
Mistakes I did make  
Miracles can't be expected; time it will take  
Now that I have you standing by my side  
I won't turn the other way; I no longer want to hide  
Today I want to face my fears  
Looking them in the eye  
Instead of turning the other cheek; running to get high  
An addict I will always be  
For addiction has no cure  
With you beloved recovery; now I'll live that's for sure  
Faith brought us together  
Our paths were meant to cross  
Having you in my life; my heart found what it lost  
Things happen mysteriously  
Not ever knowing why  
Our journey will be filled with obstacles  
Sticking together, pushing by  
You pick me up; make me smile  
When I'm down and out  
My love for you is genuine  
That I have no doubt  
It's with you recovery I'll always be  
Forever and ever you and me



Stock Photograph

## To Love a Convict

*Leanna Millen*

Loving a convict comes with a price to pay each day. A price you will pay a little each and every day. It's watching them leave, your eyes full of tears; trying to make it alone with all your hopes and fears. Loving a convict is leaving unfilled dreams. But love is love, so stay on the team. Once and a while you can't stop the tears; weeks turn to months, months turn to years. All the love brings bitterness and pain; loneliness and sickness and no sense of gain. But patience pays off, you'll get word soon; your loving convict will be home before the summer's bloom. Loving a convict isn't any fun, but it's definitely worth the wait when the time is finally DONE!

## I Am Beautiful!

*Sheena King*

When I was 8 years old, I was molested by my father. I ran to tell my mother who questioned my father after she sent me to my room. I hid in the hall and listened to his denials. He left because they were separated and nothing more was said about it. At age 9, my mother was in a relationship with another man who moved in with us. He molested me whenever my mother was not at home. After some time, he grew bolder and would violate me while my mom was asleep in her bedroom. This continued until I was 12 years old. This changed me. When I was 18 years old, I was visiting my paternal grandmother. While I was asleep, my father tried to rape me. At that moment, I vowed that no man would take from me what I was not willing to give. Rage consumed me, but my anger was mostly directed inward. From age 9, I hated myself. School was my refuge, and I escaped in my studies and my imagination. I would try to be in my house as little as possible, so after school, I would hang in the streets of North Philadelphia. I began to drink on the weekends and overcame my shyness by becoming promiscuous. I didn't care what happened to me. I craved love, but was confused by it. I loved and hated my parents simultaneously. I had no one to talk to in order to understand what was happening to me. At age 19, I was incarcerated. It wasn't until I was 25 that I slowly began to realize that the person I had become started at age 8. I had never made that connection until I went backwards through my life in an attempt to understand why I pushed people away. I had no concept of love or friendship. But God, in His graciousness, placed people in my life who wouldn't allow me to push them away. People who didn't want anything from me except for me to see who was inside of me. I acknowledged that I needed help and requested admittance into the intensive therapeutic in-patient program for survivors of sexual abuse. That was the wisest decision I have ever made because I learned not only who I was, but to love who I am. I've learned and accepted that I'm not what happened to me, or what I've done, but I am the beautiful, talented, compassionate woman that I have become. This truly would not have been possible without the "House of Therapeutic Community" and the people God placed in my life who fought hard for and believed in me before I could believe in myself. Through writing journals and poetry, I was able to see what I hid deep inside of myself and what I needed, and they freely offered. What I've learned from this experience is: if you extend your hand and heart, God will extend the hand of another to help you.

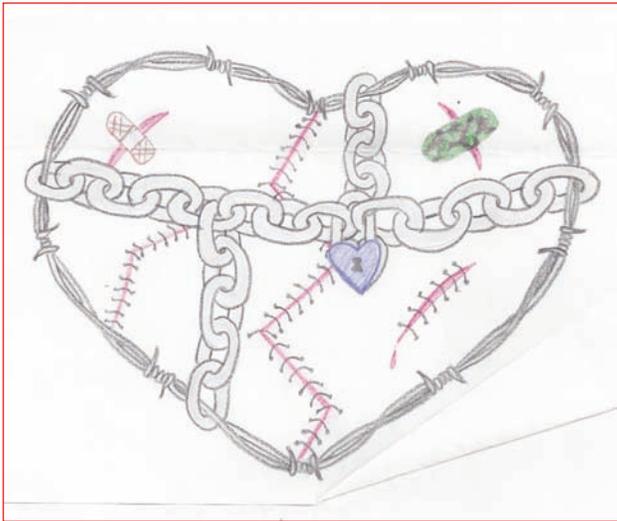


Stock Photograph

## Inmate 101

Tracy Yennie

They give me a number; I clip it on my chest  
Now what I had dreamt of, this is not a test  
Don't do this; you can't do that, go back to your cell  
You are just a number now; no tickets back from Hell  
Walk into a building, find a chair, and just sit down  
700 other sheep in this herd just look around  
They call us to the feeding trough at breakfast, lunch, and dinner  
No matter how you roll the dice in this game, you are no winner  
The badge gives them authority to tell us where to go  
Identity annihilated; if you've never been, you'll never know  
It's ironic how our freedom is shown in red, white, and blue  
The same colors that revoke it when flashing in our rearview



Tracy Yennie

## Simmering Epiphany

Lou Tompkins

Aging grants me the realization  
That I can  
And must  
Choose  
To take responsibility  
For my own happiness  
From this moment forward  
And disempower  
Those who betrayed  
Sacred trusts  
And crippled me emotionally  
But are no longer around  
To be blamed.  
Along with that choice  
Comes the right  
To say No  
As often as necessary  
A learned prerogative  
Not allowed  
In earlier years



Anonymous

## Who R U

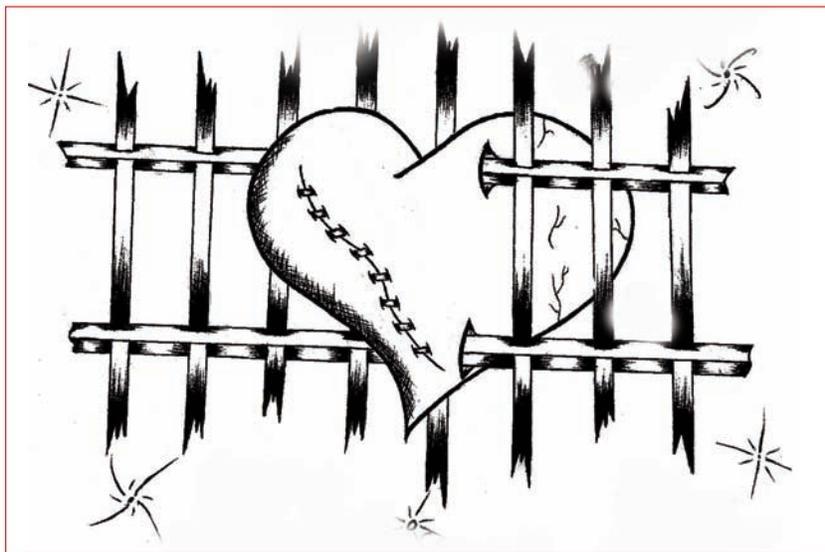
*Ruby Faye Likely*

*Who r u*, to try to run my life; I'm not your child or your wife.  
Even if I was, I deserve respect; I ain't no dog left on the steps.  
*Who r u*, to be beating on me; like a snake in the grass or your worst enemy?  
I don't deserve beatings and I don't deserve pain. I am somebody with a name.  
*Who r u*, to dog me out; call me names and toss me about?  
You ridicule me and bring me down; laugh at me like I'm a clown.  
*Who r u*, you're not a man but a beast who hurt me with your mouth and fist.  
But guess what mister, today it ends. This battle right here I'm gonna win.  
No more verbal or physical abuse. I'm so tired of you.  
I let go and I let God cure the pain with this heart.  
I want you to go and surround yourself with lots of people and get some help.  
I don't hate you I must say, just set me free to be on my way.  
*Who r u*, you bleed the same blood that I do and we both serve a God who will c us through.  
You are just lost in a world of your own. Just find faith and God will lead you home.  
Because no matter what has happened you're just like me;  
A CHILD OF GOD WHO'S TRYING TO BE FREE

## Break the Chains

*Jessica Trent*

My heart was broken in a million little pieces. I have gone through life picking up the pieces to the puzzle of my life; trying to make them fit together. Pieces of heartache, shame, fear, regret, resentments, lack of forgiveness, lies, hate, rejection, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, worthlessness, anger, rage, addiction, sexual abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse, and mental abuse. All along trying to figure out where I went wrong; carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders. I was haunted by the ghost that lived in my past. Today I'm no longer the victim of circumstances. I am free from the bondage that has kept me on the path of self-destruction. I no longer have to be the picture others painted me to be. I have been set free. Today I have a choice in this life to change the behavior that got me caught up in a tangled web of sin and darkness. My voice matters, my words matter, I matter. So I will embrace the change from within these prison walls. I am breaking the chains that had me handcuffed to a vicious cycle. I will look fear in the eyes cause all he told me was lies. I will stand up and be strong, brave, courageous, kind, gentle, friendly, happy, joyful, and peaceful. I have found acceptance, forgiveness, serenity, patience, love, hope, faith, and the willingness to change from sin. I am no longer the product of my past. My failures have been the stepping stones that have helped me build a solid foundation for my life. Through it all, I can smile at the past and know that I am beautiful.



Anonymous

## I AM

*Yolanda Howard*

Yes I am beautiful, because it is part of my name. Abuse, neglect, unhappiness, and hurt are where it all came from. If you don't know my struggle, it would be very hard for you to walk in my shoes. I am using a smile to cover up the damage and pain because my insides are bruised. I know my birth to this world was not just for me to live angry and sad, even though my uncles and my dad stole my innocence from me. That happened to me long ago, but believe it or not, it's still very clear. As a child, I never was helped with this, and of course, I always lived it fear. When it was done at a young age, I didn't know why. Then it happened again, as I got older and with a voice to speak. I felt it was not right, and I told. Now I'm much bolder. When you look my way, what image do you really see? I hope a woman with high self-esteem that soon will be free. Not only from prison, but also free in my mind. Even though odds were against me, God still blesses me with kindness. Now through all my suffering, I still see beauty. I am not to blame. My wounds run deep inside and out. I am thankful no matter what. It's not me that should be ashamed because I am beautiful.



Anonymous

## Passed Away

Diann Killian

Today my mother passed away. What else really is there to say? I'll miss her smile and her gentle touch; I'll miss everything for she means so much. Today my mother passed away. I do not know what there is to say. I'll honor her for the rest of my days by showing my children her gentle ways. By smiling the same smile that eased my pain, and showing that I love them in every way. So to my mother, who has passed away, I say *"Thank you for your gentle touch, for your loving smile that meant so much. You truly haven't passed away, for you'll live on through me each and every day."*

-For my Mom Regina Mae, I think of you every day

## In My Mind

Amanda Becker

My mind is running  
Running, running, running, away  
From me, from here, from the present  
Taking me into the past  
Into forgotten memories and things  
unknown  
I'm spinning, spinning  
Spinning out of control  
I'm trying to run away  
But can't run from myself  
Can't, won't, refuse  
To face myself  
Afraid of what I'll find  
In the harsh depths of my mind  
Things I've forgotten, hidden, buried  
Hit me like a tank  
Can I be saved?  
Or am I doomed to this uncertainty?  
I've lost myself along the way  
Scattering pieces as I go  
Don't know who I am anymore  
Can't find the girl drowning inside  
Is she lost forever?  
Or can I draw her out over time?

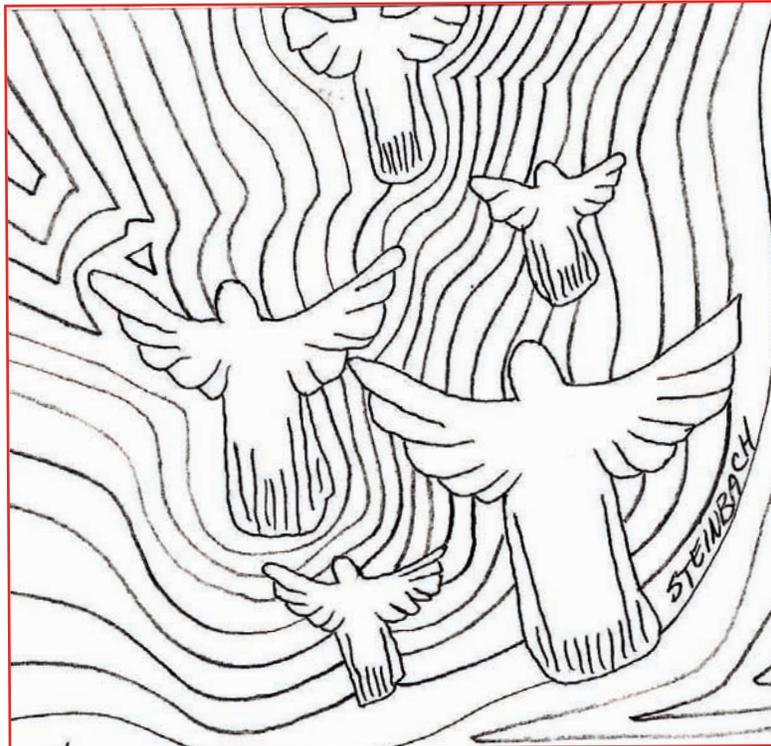


Patricia Bouch

## **I Don't Have to be Alone**

*Sheila B*

Alone; knowing I do not meet my family's expectations  
Alone; not being invited to play a game or join a gathering  
Alone; while others make fun about how I look  
Alone; in a relationship and others are more important  
Alone; on a busy sidewalk where no one looks or smiles my way  
Alone; surrounded by walls and silence  
I found God who loves me for who I am  
He will never leave me or judge me  
He wants to be a part of my life and always will  
He keeps me within sight, and will never allow any walls to separate us  
With God I will never be alone

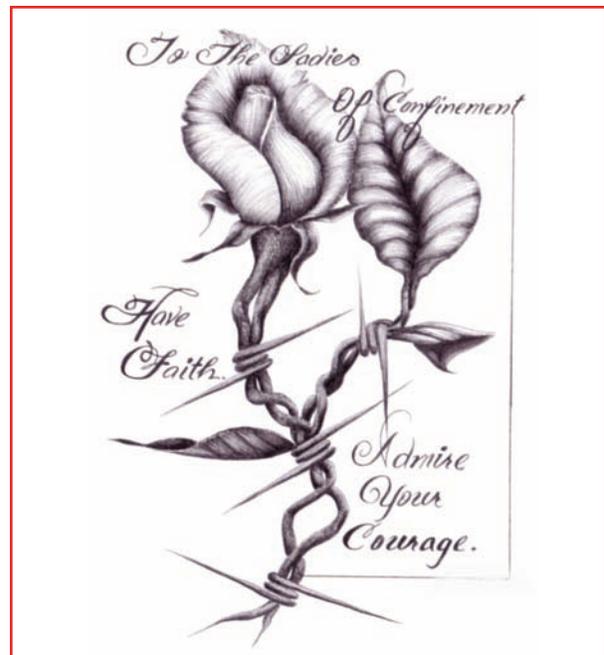


M. Steinbach

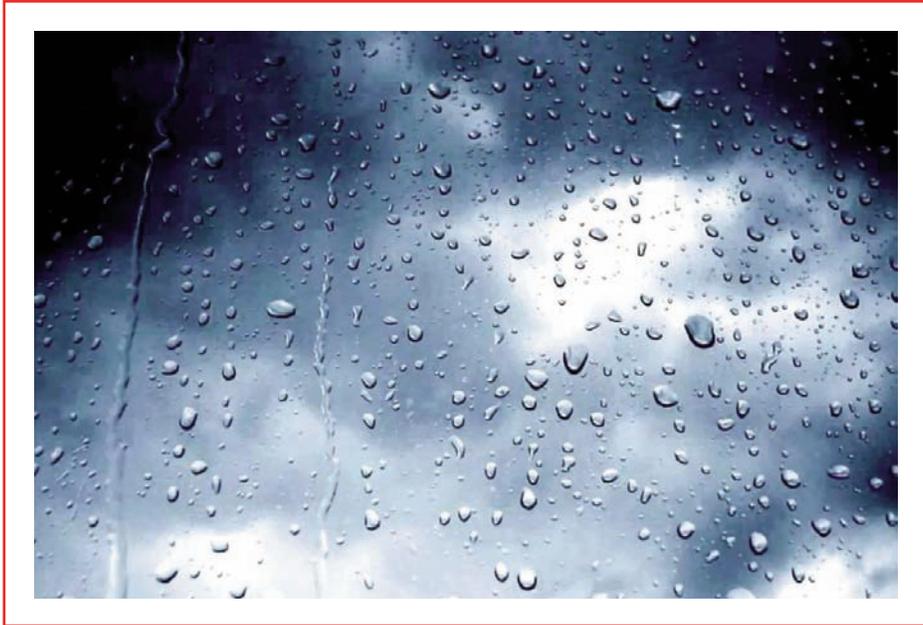
## From the Devil's Den to God's Glory

Tarlene Williams

I once lived for the devil, and now I live for God. I was a slave to drugs and alcohol, and as a result from that I got in some trouble and now I'm doing 20 to life in prison. I came to prison and gave my life to Christ. Now I let God use me, and it's for His Glory. I still have trials and temptations, but it's not the same because I'm not letting the devil use me. The life I once lived has made me who I am, but I learned from that life and now I'm letting the Lord teach me His way. It's called change. For some of us women change is hard, but if you call on God and the Lord, they will strengthen you to be able to live the life you cry for, loneliness, fear, and stronghold from Satan. When you come into a love walk those things the devil is telling you, you can see through with the Lord. He gives you power, strength, and shows you love. This place is the devil's den, but for me, now I choose to make a change in my life. Prison is hell on Earth, but God saved me even in a place like this. I have been in prison 10 years, and I have been loosed from the devil's hands. So for the ladies that read this, this is my testimony, and if you're reading this I pray these words will help you. Sometimes another woman's testimony can put something on your mind to make you want to change and find another way. Our children, grandchildren, and husbands need us, but they need us to have a clear sound mind. Lady, don't let Satan lead you into the den called prison.



D. White



Stock Photo

## **The Rain**

*Megan Briggs*

It hurts  
But why do I curse  
This pain  
If it brings me  
To where I am  
Freedom costs  
But the loss is less than the gain  
So bring on the pain  
I say...  
Because the rain  
Washes away  
The grime covered window  
Of my soul  
And I find I shall survive

## Who I Am Now

*Amy Stickle*

I've put a lot of thought into this question I've been asked  
Here is what I came up with, and it wasn't an easy task  
Before I can tell you who I am now I will start with who I was  
That good for nothing mother doing what a junkie does  
I was a lonely, broken addict; the empty shell of a daughter  
Choosing the same path of destruction; becoming a replica of my father  
My only care was my next high and all that it brought  
I would manipulate, steal, cheat, and lie more times than I can count;  
I also tried to die  
I have been beaten, broken, worn, and tattered  
Hope and dreams I once had soon were shattered  
I was a disgrace of a woman who walked with my head held down  
Looking no one in the eyes; just starring at the ground  
I was a miserable, hurt, insecure woman who always placed the blame  
Taking life for granted; full of guilt and shame  
My life's been like a roller coaster through all the twists and turns  
My choices made me who I am; from these lessons I have learned  
No longer lost or hiding; I finally found myself  
My past will not define me; I shall put it on a shelf  
With the help of a special program and others' guiding hands  
Today I am number one, and on my own feet I will stand  
Searching deep inside I've let all my secrets go  
I no longer stuff my feelings; I'd rather let them show  
Trust is coming slowly as I'm letting down my shield  
Stepping outside my comfort zone with friendships I start to build  
I say what I need to; speak what's on my mind  
With encouragement, strength, and hope my voice I did find  
When looking in the mirror I no longer hate whom I see  
Today I am proud of who I am; just happy to be me  
I suffer from addiction, a disease that has no cure  
But in recovery is where I'll live my life  
This I know for sure  
Now with all of this being said  
Here is a woman whose soul is no longer dead  
To answer the question who am I now

Hi, my name is Amy, and I'm a recovering addict.



C. Villegas

## ENOUGH

*Dezera Jackson*

Utterly amazed at the love I crave for you  
It will always be enough  
Though the love I gave was undefeated, it eventually became  
Distinct, letting me know I was never enough  
I simply became non-existent, yet our love will always be  
Relentless, never vicious  
So here I am speechless, being equivalent  
Has more meaning, will all of me be enough?  
You weren't the only one in pain  
I was crying, no screaming, in shame  
But nothing was ever enough  
I have myself to blame for my reckless actions  
I did not fold, however my heart felt bent  
Therefore I sat to vent  
To loose you once again to someone else  
Inside I'm dying because my hurt is enough  
What will I say when I can't endure anymore  
When my tears run dry, and my wounds are no longer sore  
You stumbled over my heart  
I fumbled over solitude  
Asking, begging me to give up and let go  
I stepped right into a closed door  
Nightmares of me continuing my life without you  
Still you couldn't give me what I wanted  
So I mounted up the courage and said  
Enough

## Life Happens, Just Breathe

*Catherine M Gagne*

Relax, take your time and inhale

Inhale clarity

Inhale beauty

Inhale love

Exhale

Exhale self-doubt

Exhale judgements

Exhale jealousy

Relax, take your time and inhale

Life happens, just breathe

Inhale purpose

Inhale growth

Inhale confidence

Exhale

Exhale fear

Exhale worries

Exhale hate

Relax, take your time and inhale

Inhale pride

Inhale courage

Inhale wisdom

Exhale

Exhale frustration

Exhale temptation

Exhale despair

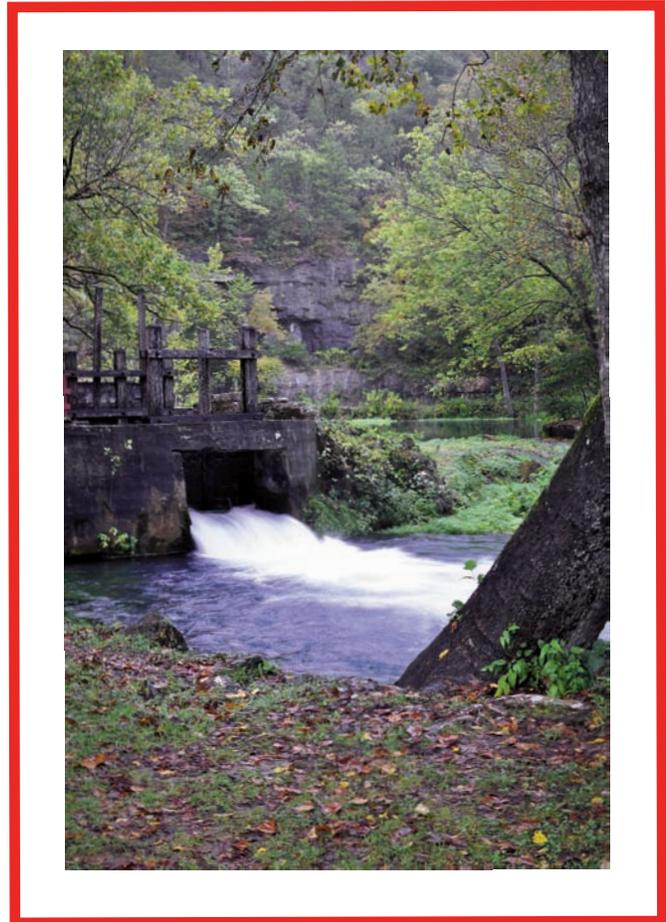
Life happens, just breathe

Relax, and take your time

Inhale peace

Inhale hope

Life happens, just breathe

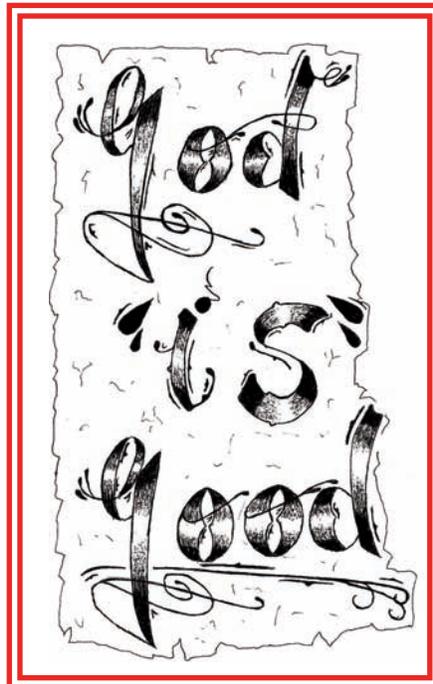


Wild Photography

## My Heart

Sharon Smith

The beads of rain fall gently on my face with ease,  
for no one knows of my hurt  
They mix gently with grace as my heart bleeds my tears,  
not knowing of today or tomorrow  
What shall it bring in my life behind these walls of wire?  
There is no escape for me from all these hurts and pain  
I try and try to be happy, and yet the frustration takes over  
As my tears form and fall with the rain,  
I ponder the thought of ending it all  
My life is at wits end, for I have nowhere to run  
As if my feet are glued to the floor, no matter what I do  
Is this how my life is to end?  
With no one to love in my heart, filled only with emptiness  
Alone and empty, drawn from within; my soul comes to a darkened heart  
And yet we seek this light  
There's one that never gives up; our Father holds us tight  
With His love we will conquer all the pains and hurts in life  
As I stand, my Father stands with me  
For my Father's love is great; I will conquer all with my Father



Anonymous

# Chaosity

*Emily Diane*

The system here is crazy and it terrifies my soul.  
Maybe someday I will see why so many are so cold.  
My prayers seem unanswered though I know God is here.  
No matter what occurs I can't be seen with tears or fear.  
Every choice I make is hard; wherever I go, I'm on guard.  
Every time you look at me, I can't guarantee what you'll see.  
There are times when I wonder and think about my life.  
How I wish I were stronger and had fought to survive.  
Though I'm sitting behind bars and am not who I want to be,  
I will work extremely hard to where God wants to send me.  
My life is far from over even though that's hard to believe.  
In chaos there is order and one day I will go free.

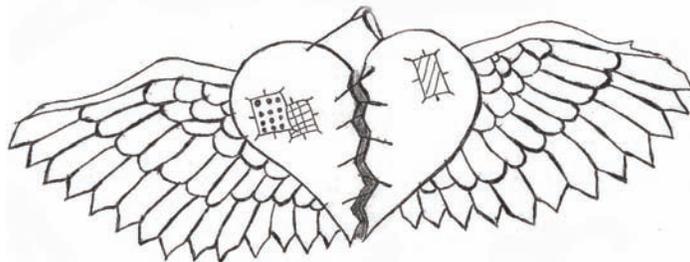


Anonymous

## Who Am I?

*Barbara Bawarsky*

I've asked myself so many times before where hearts entwine  
and life has love no more  
Where distance cries of shallow lies find their place to stay  
And shattered souls leaves batter holds from scars of yesterday  
Where tears no longer signify the pain of something clear  
And hate has taught the world to have blind eyes whenever troubles near  
Where dreams were never meant to be a fairytale unknown  
Deserted inside a sheltered soul that holds the keys to home  
I used to be that little child who'd dream of many things  
Go-go dancing, big bright pearls, love, and diamond rings  
I'd close my eyes and drift away for beyond the sky  
I love the sound of hummingbirds and wished I could fly  
We've both been lied to; we both felt pain  
It's no longer about yesterdays or past dreams  
It's about the heres and nows; no longer shattered hope  
Just a five lettered word that's dear to our soul-trust  
Dreams can come true, even the fairy tales unknown  
We both want to believe; we both hold parts to the key  
Let's die trying on our feet, not crawling on our knees  
We are who we are because God made us to try  
Do we dare? Trust to fly? To fly like the hummingbirds  
Don't take your eyes off of me, as I look into your eyes  
Just take my hand, let's learn to fly and leave our shattered dreams  
of yesterdays behind

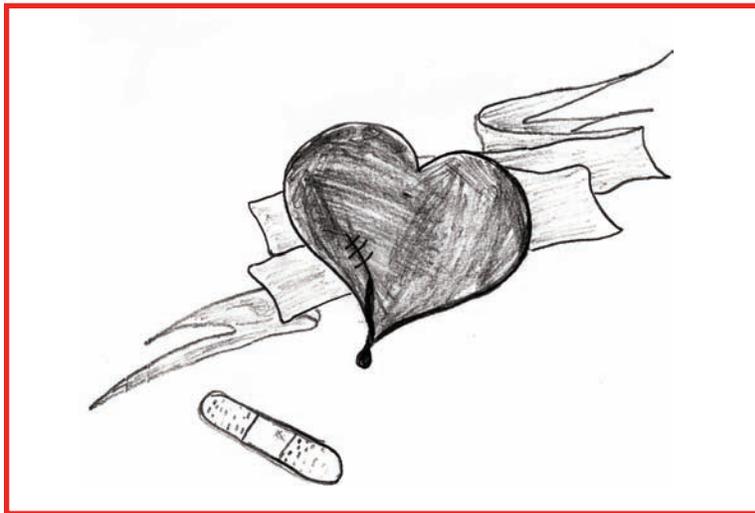


Anonymous

## Forsaken

*Beatrice Conway*

I thought you were different  
I believed I could finally really trust someone would not leave me  
No matter what, you said you would always be there  
I thought I could relax and stop putting you through the test  
But one thing goes wrong  
One time I holler back  
One time I stand my ground and don't back down  
Now just like everyone else, you slammed the door in my face  
You walked away like the rest  
Just like I knew you would  
I thought you truly cared about me  
I thought I found true family  
I thought I had a soldier to the end  
Wow, really; I let my guard down just to have my heart ripped out  
I pulled down my barriers to have my world fall apart once again  
Now I know I can't let anyone in at all  
I can't let anyone have my heart  
I know now I'll always get left behind no matter what  
I know now I can't meet other's expectations  
So of course another gives up all hope for me  
Another shatters my world  
And once again poor little I have been forsaken



D. Jones

## Completed

*Lou Tompkins*

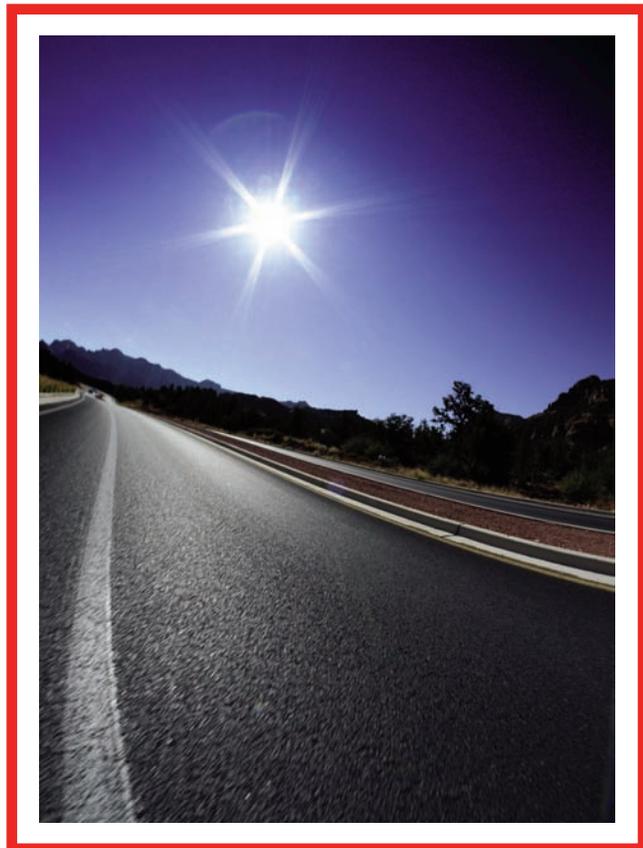
On the way to Phoenix,  
You stopped the car  
And put me out  
by the side of the road  
Then opened the trunk  
Pulled out my suitcase  
And set it beside me  
You said you were done  
We were done  
You were gone for the last time.

You had never noticed  
I was already gone  
My body (the traitor)  
Stayed with you  
Long after the rest of me  
Had packed up and left  
A small part of my heart  
Snuck back to visit you  
Sometimes

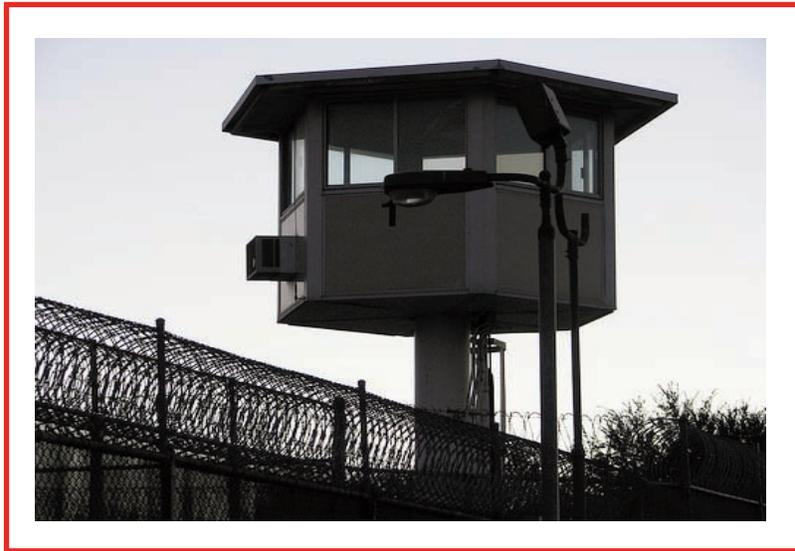
I felt pulled in opposing directions  
Like a captive with each limb  
Tied to a different horse  
When you spurred the horses  
I was torn apart.

But when you left me  
By the side of the road  
The horses returned  
And reunited me

Now I am whole  
Now that you're gone  
I am complete



Wild Photography



Stock Photograph

## Shakopee, MN

*Tracy Yennie*

Plastic ware and plastic chairs  
A population filled with rage  
Contained within these pretty, brick, glamorously styled cages  
The rain can't wash away all these broken hearts and tears  
The torture some of us endured slowly devour us for years  
Suspended in a reality awakens nightmares every night  
Until we've taken our last breath we'll never lose the will to fight  
We're seeking sympathy; we must pay the price for our mistakes  
If we've hurt you in the past, we don't expect you to trust us now  
To be the future we want to change, we'll show you anyhow  
So much hidden talent shackled and caged inside the fence  
Phenomenal women in survival mode, just trying to do their best  
If you ever really wonder what prison is like in Shakopee  
It's filled with amazing women, whose signature is not a dream

# Don't You Know

Ashley Schutt

*When I was younger what I needed was love  
Got it from family and again from above  
Still felt something was missing  
Couldn't figure out what  
Caught your eye, counted my blessings  
Chalked it all up to luck*

*Don't you know, even though you're not here?  
Don't you know that my regrets are sincere?  
Don't you know how much I still care?  
And through it all my love for you was real*

*A short time later, you were holding my hand  
Our vows were said in front of God and of man  
My heart was full; I thought my life was complete  
Gave you my all, my everything  
To have it thrown back at me*

*Don't you know, even though you're not here?  
Don't you know that my regrets are sincere?  
Don't you know how much I still care?  
And through it all my love for you was real*

*Do broken bones and shattered promises mend?  
You kept your word from the beginning to end  
I was your life, you refused to lose me  
To walk away, you kept on breathing  
Not a choice you could see*

*After years of fears and too many tears  
I screamed for help, but there was no one to hear  
In dead of night, I was forced to decide  
Push past the hurt, past the pain  
Take your life, or let you take mine*

*Don't you know how many souls torn in two?  
I don't know when this nightmare will be through  
God only knows the heartache that I feel  
And through it all my love for you is real*

*Now that I'm grown, I still need that same love  
Getting it from the family and again from above  
Something may be missing, do I really care what?  
I am alive, counting my blessings  
Facing each day with help, love, and luck*

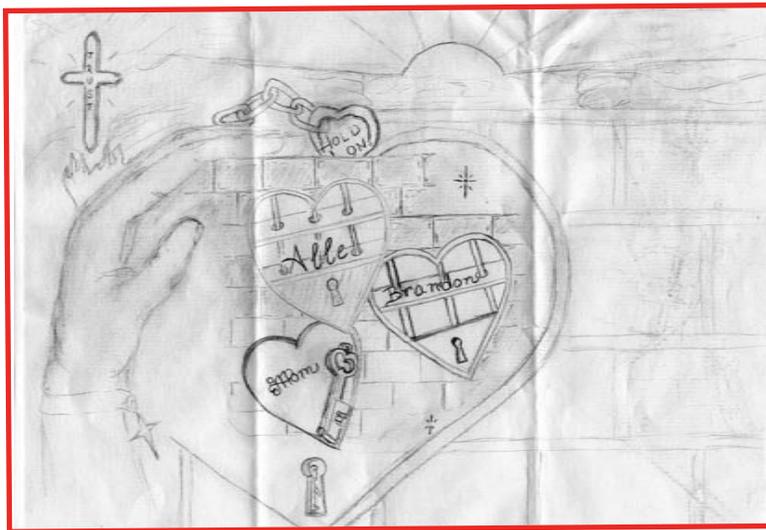


Anonymous

## Some People call it home

Selena Cox

Incarcerated in this living hell  
Some people call it home; I call it Jail  
Locked in a cage from all I know as real  
It's almost impossible to express how I feel  
You know I think I can handle one problem at a time  
But they come in thousands, clouding my mind  
The streets have caused me a lot of heartache and shame  
I find it almost impossible to give up the game  
I tried to escape reality through chasing dope  
But it always left me feeling depressed and trying to cope  
I looked for love in a man  
But all I ever got was the back of his hand  
My mama tried to tell me they was no good  
Just some dope dealing gangstas straight from the hood  
This life of sin has been no fun  
Cause everything in my world has come undone  
I asked God to ease the pain  
He tells me He cries teardrops for my heartache through the rain  
That's how I know something has got to change  
He tells me He loves me, and I'm His child  
But there are some things I must go through  
In order to get out of this wild



Melissa Olds

## Where Do I Belong?

*Tracy Yennie*

If you could read my story jus by looking at my face  
I wonder what you'd want to write, or what would be erased  
I know that I have memories that I'd much rather forget  
So many pages in this story; just dripping with regret  
You can't even imagine how lonely life has been for me  
The internal blaze that rages; will never set me free  
Time just keeps on ticking as years and decades slip away  
Pain that I have caused, I wish I could go back and change  
I beat myself up all the time for the things that I've done wrong  
Someday in this nightmare, I'll figure out where I belong



Melissa Olds

## All Around You

*Keri Killion-Schneider*

There are certain joys that no one can take away  
Joys like this that are here today  
Like dew on the grass in the morning light  
The vibrant color of a flower bursting with life  
Sounds of the cricket orchestra playing at night  
The sun as it shines, beautiful and bright  
The uniqueness of each single snowflake  
The perfection of one exquisite grape  
The satisfaction of completing a very good book  
Thoughts conveyed with only a look  
Grains of sand joining to form a beach  
The Bible you keep just within reach  
Tasting something salty, then something sweet  
The first embrace when two lovers meet  
The sound of the wind blowing through the trees  
Natural goodness of honey from bees  
The wonder and mystery of outer space  
That feeling you get when you finish a race  
The smell that the rain leaves in the air  
The majestic grace of a grizzly bear  
The persistence of a child learning to walk  
Sounds strung together as they learn to talk  
All created by God in His glory  
Earth's beauty and nature's majesty  
These are joys that are here today  
These are joys that no one can take away

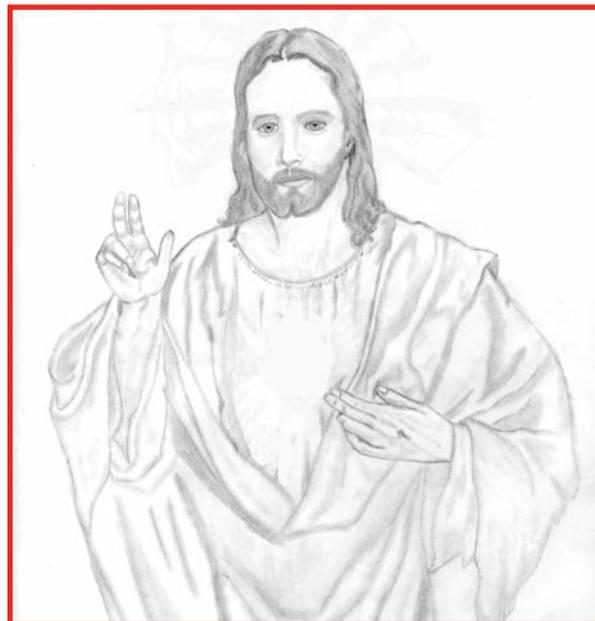


Wild Photography

## For the Addict-I Scream Jesus!

*Tammy Kvasnicka*

Broken mirrors; ungodly screams; losing my mind  
Ripping out my own hair; down the hallway; I lie in the backroom  
Pulling on cigarettes; cross around my neck;  
needles and regrets as far as the eye can see  
A slave to myself; invisible chains hold me in this place  
What was I made for? A twenty-minute whore; sinking deeper  
How do I get out of here? Clawing my fingernails into the concrete floor  
Hopelessness sets in life like a fever; body wrecked; soul spent; spirit sick!  
I'm done. I curl into a ball, weeping with no sound.  
There is no strength to be found.  
Suddenly, a name begins to form in my mind's eye.  
A whisper to a scream Jesus, Jesus  
Demons flee; in a moment quicker than light  
Jesus, the Son of God, is now sitting beside me  
Brought to my right mind, I fall on His feet and worship my King.  
A grateful junkie, now transformed into royalty  
As He wraps His robe of righteousness around me  
He sings over me; daughter, you're free



Anonymous

## Triggers

*Heather Steinhardt*

A touch can be a trigger. It brings up good and bad.  
Feelings I know that I should feel.  
When I don't it makes me mad.  
I want to stop the triggers that keep me sitting down.  
Please Lord, can you help me to keep my feet on solid ground?  
Being broken is so hard, and I know I want to heal.  
Please Lord, can you help me just learn how to feel?  
The tears just keep falling. I feel I've lost my smile.  
Please Lord, can you help me to go the extra mile?



E. Patterson

## Changed

*Nequilla R Wilkerson*

Barely hanging on; finally starting to be strong  
Time and time again the emotional abuse from you  
runs through my head  
The pain you caused from what you did  
Mentally damaged and have no edge  
The space I've let you rent in my head no longer exists  
I'm done with it; I've taken a stand, you'll no longer win  
I'm fighting back; I'll no longer allow you to attack  
I'm holding God's hand, He's walking beside me  
With God's grace I've been changed  
I've been set free; your power no longer has its hold on me

## Winds of Fiery

*Sharon Smith*



Sharon Smith

As the winds fiery blow  
The clouds of rolling thunder  
I hear my heart beating faster

With each rubble of the clouds  
My anger and hurt roll with fiery  
Tears flowing as a river

Flooding the banks of my heart  
I try and try to do right  
And yet they try to cut us apart

Piece by piece they do their deeds  
To destroy the best in us  
They act as they really care

And yet they destroy us all  
They try to make us a part of the system of prison  
My anger fills the air

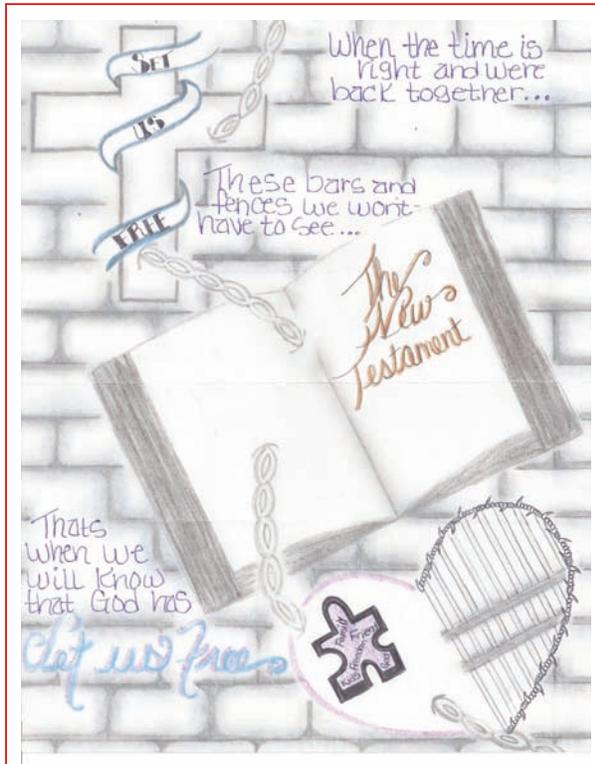
I know I'm not a number, I'm human too, and I care  
The wind of frustration and anger fills these walls of injustices  
For they take no more from me

I refuse to become a prisoner in these walls  
The hell and fiery can ring in these walls, but my soul belongs to me  
I say "no more"; I shall stand with my head held high  
And be proud of who I am

For my LORD God made me  
To love myself and others  
No one can take that away from me  
'cause my God is with me always

## The Cup

Emily Diane



Lindsey Marie Brix

I want to stand on my own two feet  
I want to one day be set free  
Some days I look at my "home"  
And struggle to find any hope  
I have heard of perfection  
And I long to be seen  
I have dreamt of someone  
Come set me free  
I believe God is with me  
But I dare not believe  
I feel like the monster  
Looking in the mirror  
Desolate and cut down  
I struggle to pick up my crown  
Reaching and grasping  
At the one who frees  
"My God, my God,  
Why have you forsaken me?"  
I lay here and cry  
Bleeding and barely alive  
Where is grace when lost?  
If there is healing, at what cost?  
Broken, I'm like Him  
Bruised, can He forgive?  
Faith I lift up  
Now, I pass my cup

## Not Just a Junkie's Game

*Sharon M Weaver*

As I lay down, I wonder, who else is awake?  
Is this an awful dream, or just a huge mistake?  
No, I put myself here. This much is true  
For all the wrong things I've done, and those I still do  
Will this be my last time here?  
This place I've come to know, away from all I hold so dear  
Feeling sad and low, I know I have it in me to change my sinful deeds  
I can break this vicious cycle, and see where life will lead  
I'm on a journey, strange and new, but exciting just the same  
My life can be my own to live, not just a junkie's game  
And so, as I make this heartfelt plea coming from my soul  
To all those who care for me, please help me reach my goal  
For I cannot do it all alone  
Regardless, I will try  
For I know the alternative is back to prison, or die



Anonymous



Wild Photography

## I Refuse

*Brittany Griffin*

You thought I was done?  
I'm comin' back like the sun  
I'm comin' back on top  
I refuse to stop  
I won't let you win  
I will live again  
You cannot keep me down  
I will not let you now  
Love, it made me blind  
It put my life on the line...  
Now sometimes I have nerves of steel  
Because the pain I refuse to feel  
I will freeze my heart  
So that I might have a head start  
In your stupid game  
So that I may stay sane  
So I won't end up back in this pen  
Why don't I listen to my woman's intuition?  
When it told me you was lyin'  
When you said you loved me  
I became the key  
To her jealousy  
Why couldn't I see?  
Such stupidity  
I allowed all this hurt  
So I'm allowed to be curt  
Why can't I accept this concept?  
That I cannot be loved  
That I will be forever shoved  
Away from your heart  
Until I fall apart  
Yeah, you get the Grammy for this insanity  
I loved you too fast and too hard  
Now I've become more scared  
Thanks to your childish games  
I may never be the same

## Finally Suspended

*Lou Tompkins*

I knew a woman who climbed  
999 steps  
She walked up the mountain  
To the temple  
Suspended in the air

She had dreamed of that flight  
All of her life  
She flew as she climbed  
999 steps  
To freedom

When she had ascended to the top  
And reached the temple suspended in air  
The priestesses welcomed her  
They placed a robe around her shoulders  
And welcomed her into their order

She was one of them  
She was free  
Finally, she was free  
She had climbed  
999 steps  
To the temple  
Suspended in the air  
At the top of the mountain



Stock Photo



Melissa Olds

## **I am a Lady**

*Britany Byington*

You can tell I'm a lady by the way that I act  
My head is held high and my shoulders are back  
I am kind and gentle to every stranger I meet  
I take care of myself from my head to my feet  
As a Lady I am respectful; I am confident and strong  
I am humble and honest; I'll admit when I'm wrong  
People stop to listen whenever I speak  
I have courage and grace; I have integrity  
I am truly concerned with the well-being of others  
I am a daughter, a sister, an aunt, and a mother  
I am a Lady right down to my core  
I am one to love, respect, and adore  
I am intelligent, serene, and polite  
I hold on to these principles by day and by night  
I am a Lady; I know where I belong  
Not in prison or on the streets, but with my family at home

*Written for all those in substance abuse programs*

## **I am Beautiful**

*Janetta Autrey*

These fences and walls are not what confine me  
Just as the sins of my past are not what define me

You can't possibly understand what it's like to walk in my shoes  
To face each day like a soldier entering battle refusing to loose

You can't imagine my pain or the hardships I've juggled  
And you don't recognize my strength for you've not witnessed my struggle

I am a true Survivor all the way to my core  
And I will forever conquer whatever life has in store

I am confident and caring, always loyal and dutiful  
I am a strong woman  
I am beautiful



Stock Photo

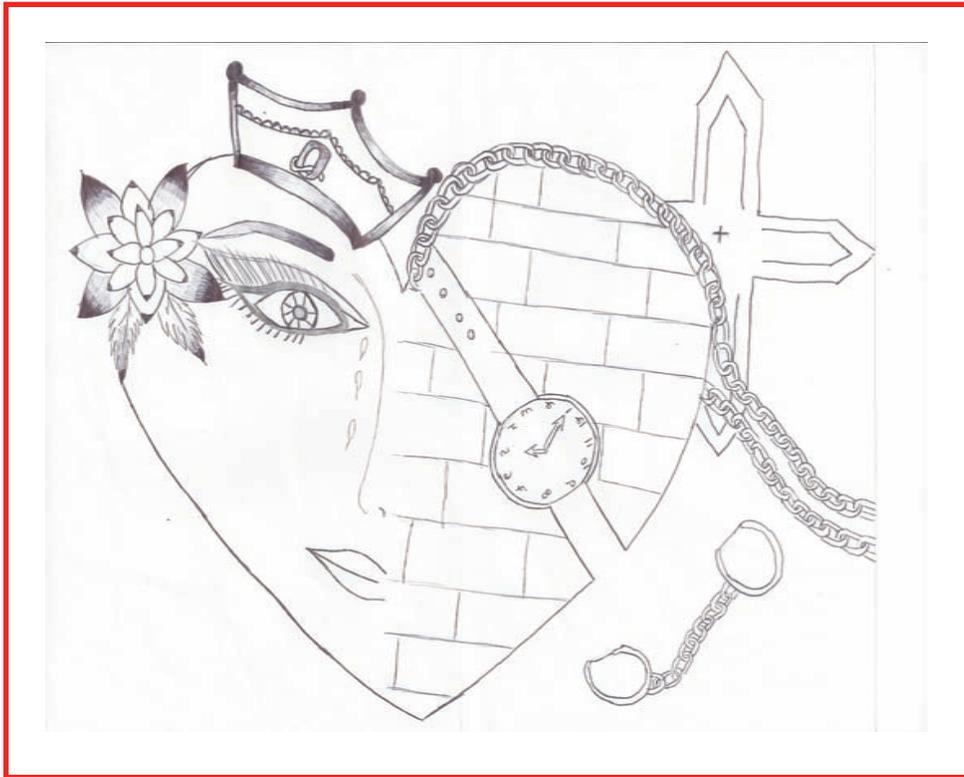
## Just the Same Person with a Different Face

*Geneva Phillips*

This morning we are making breakfast  
Coffee strong, with the raw brown sugar melting down  
Breaking glass as your hand strikes slowly  
There is never any provocation  
This love is the splintering of bones on impact  
My head mutters  
Spineless floating disconsolate  
Perhaps we are better  
Looking at the past together  
Loving apart



text



Rocio Castula

## Untitled

*Tracy Yennie*

My heart is not a trampoline, and love is not a game  
You can't just jump around on it and expect it to remain the same  
Parts tend to get broken, and other parts tend to get bruised  
Some parts may never work again, since it's been so abused  
Stitched back together so many times, there are still open wounds  
The tragedy of bad judgment from falling in love again too soon  
Cover up pain with a band-aid, tie it together with barbed wire  
and chain  
Every broken heart we endure is another battle scar that we gain

## Fight

*Sabreena Morgan*

Fight! You scream. I yell.  
You hit me across the face.  
I cry. You're sorry. I believe you.

Fight! I scream.  
You talk. You hit me, again.  
I cry. You're sorry.

Fight! You're yelling.  
I'm already crying.  
Because I know what's coming.  
You hit me, closed fist.  
I black out.  
I wake up, the next day.  
You're not sorry this time.

Fight! I scream. You talk.  
You try to hit me. I duck.  
I hit you with a vase, and run.  
I'm finally free...and not sorry.



text



S. Whirl

## **It's the Pride**

*Eddy Anderson*

I get tired of being poor  
Can't afford to get bogged down by contract  
Management strikes, listen to Jessie Jackson  
Kicking tapes about third world trade  
While in my world tennis shoes are \$110 American dollars  
Strong into the church at a very young age  
But no husband has ever come my way  
I'm against free fucking  
But like everyone, I have my problems  
Doctors give me dope when I need conversation  
I get tired of being poor  
I never could afford that big car  
I never ran through a red light  
A kilo or a gram  
Maybe my money is minted in leaves  
Printed by a living God  
Not with pictures of dead presidents



Wild Photography

## **A Love that lasts forever**

*Sharon Smith*

When we look in each other's eyes is it really true you see your soul mate? We feel the never-ending love, when we're together our hearts beat as one in rhythm with love. When your spirits live as one. Our love is strong and pure. As the years go by, we become one together and each day is a blessing. My love is great and pure, so I want you to know that even when we're apart, our souls are one. I'm with you always in spirit. I love you with all my heart. Someday we will become one again, together forever. Oh God, thank you for your love; the love that lasts forever.

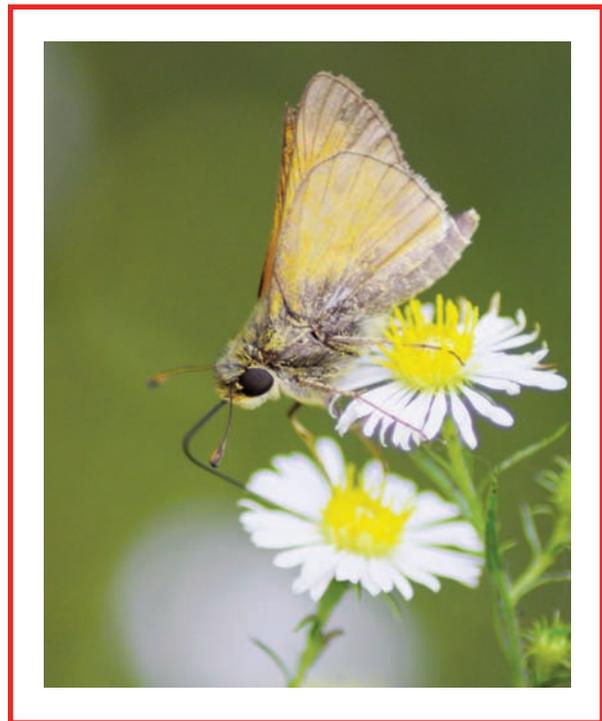
## Flower Bloom

*Sharon Smith*

As the flower blooms  
With every bloom there becomes wisdom  
With the wisdom we inherit knowledge  
What we do with that knowledge  
Is really left up to us to use  
With our knowledge we're given love

To spread and enjoy life here  
Our ability to share and give  
As we give and share our love  
The flower blooms and grows  
And becomes stronger and youthful  
With this we're showing our love  
The ability to balance our inner selves  
With the harmony and peace  
With the joy of caring for others  
We grow in our spiritual ways

And we learn to spread inner peace  
So we all should be thankful  
That we are able to love and care for others  
Bloom and bloom like a flower  
For our God holds true to us  
With Him everything is possible  
Thank you Father God for letting me  
bloom and bloom

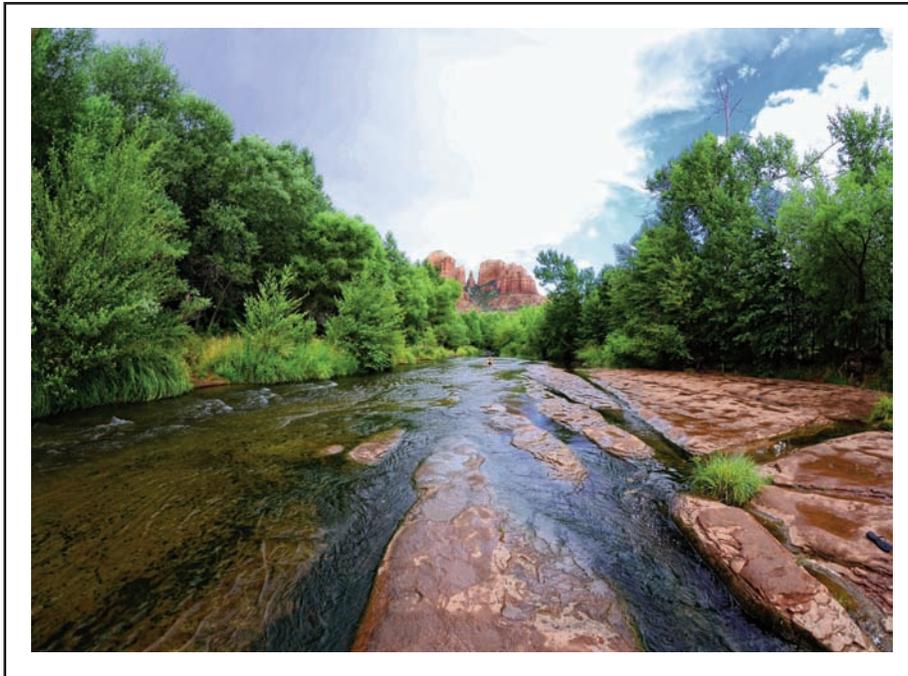


Wild Photography

## Loved

*Sharon Smith*

The breeze is blowing softly like a hand gently wiping your face  
The tears of joy and laughter; you feel it brush across your cheek  
The soft, gentle touch; the warmth of love fills your heart with joy  
Without a word, you know that feeling inside your heart  
There is no other love this great  
You grasp that feeling, and hold onto it  
For your fears and hurts fade away like a drop of water  
Your heart fills with love, and you grasp on tightly  
For you know this is true love from deep within your heart  
You hold so true, for the Father God holds you with His loving arms  
You shall be loved forever



Wild Photography



Wild Photography

## **I am beautifully made**

*Sharon Smith*

I am beautifully made  
By the hands of our Father God  
He sculpted each part of us in His image

From the first time of breath  
That's giving from our God  
We're given wisdom to love

We're given the knowledge  
We're given the grace  
With His love and mercy

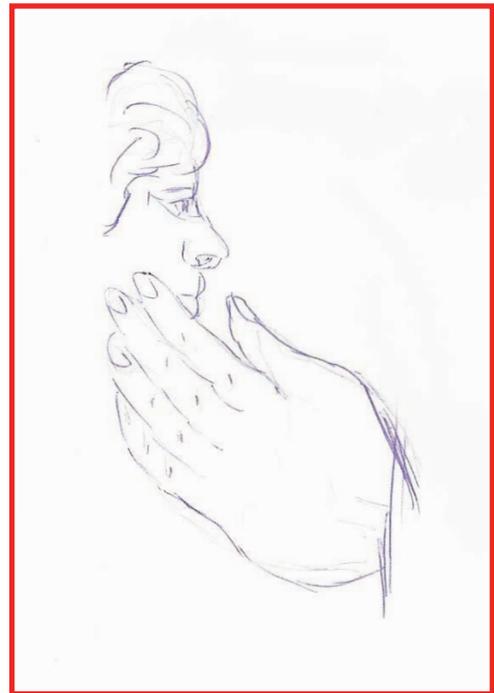
Our Father has made us  
Wonderful ladies of the world  
To spread his word and love

Oh how I'm honored  
To be sculpted in his image  
FATHER I WANT TO THANK YOU  
For giving me the love and wisdom  
For giving me life to live to the fullest  
And for being a child of God

## I've Grown to Love Me

*Yollanda Cosme*

Empty is the definition of my soul  
I've been beaten, abused, and neglected  
I'll never feel whole  
I go out my way to please you, but I can't  
Seem to get the same in return  
I've cried so many tears and begged for your love  
Above all I need your approval  
I relied on your opinions to identify me  
Instead you belittled me, persecuted me,  
and cursed me in every way  
Consistent black eyes and your steady flow on lies  
But yet still I stayed  
Praying to God to help me break away  
Not knowing myself-worth  
I allowed you to be the "boss"  
Willing to do anything for love  
Never realizing I would take a loss  
I lost my self-esteem, my friends,  
and most of all I lost my freedom  
Hating my self while I sat in prison  
Waiting for your letters to come, boy I was dumb  
You deserted me and left me with nothing  
but a broken empty shell  
Slowly I'm finding my way out dis vividly real hell  
You took everything and left me for dead  
But through this pain and misery, I prayed to get ahead  
Now 2 years later, I can look in the mirror and truly love  
what I see  
This beautiful woman I've become  
Now I can scream out I've grown to love me!



Sharon Smith



Anonymous

## Love Myself Again

*Catherine M Gagne*

I'm afraid of myself, and yet I still need and want to be loved  
As I begin to let go of despair and irritability, I'm able to reconcile  
the differences within myself  
I can stop resenting myself, and through self-discovery and a new perspective,  
I can love myself again  
I'm generous with a tenderness that's simply pure  
I practice random acts of kindness and senselessness acts of beauty  
I have designed and established a new way of life;  
with a divine image of myself,  
I'll be calm and optimistic  
I'll create inner peace and have faith, and begin to trust  
I maintain a certain simple attitude towards life without limitations  
I think positive, and act like it's impossible to fail

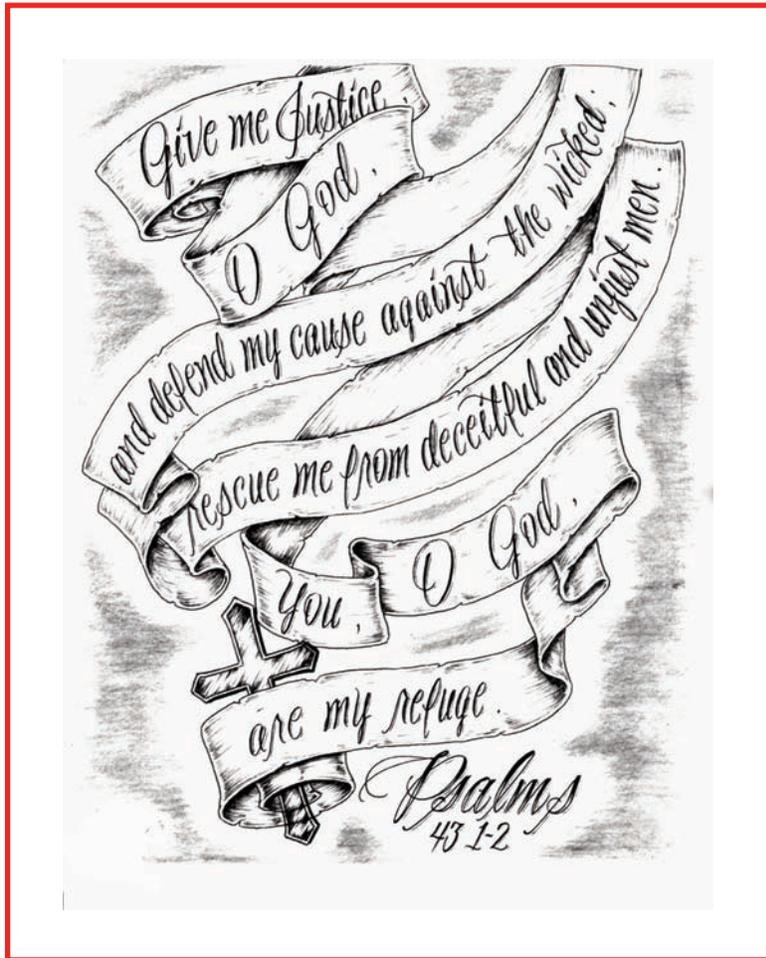
## What Happened?

*Heather Steinhardt*

When someone asks you "Where did she go"  
do you tell them the truth, or just I don't know?  
What did you tell our family when I was sent away?  
Do you talk about me at or, or out of mid do I stay?  
What happens when I come back? Will you let me in?  
Did what I did break our bond? Will you treat me now as kin?  
Will you love and help me, or will you turn me away?  
We are supposed to be family. Where will my head lay?



K. Bennett



M. Sopron

## **Solid Woman**

*Teresa Scotti*

I am strong because I have been torn down in weakness.  
I am compassionate cause I have known suffering.  
I am humble cause I have been dangerously angry and have made mistakes.  
I am wise cause I have been fooled many times.  
I can laugh cause I have known sadness, and sadness lost.  
I am alive cause I am a fighter who doesn't give up.  
I am a "solid woman".

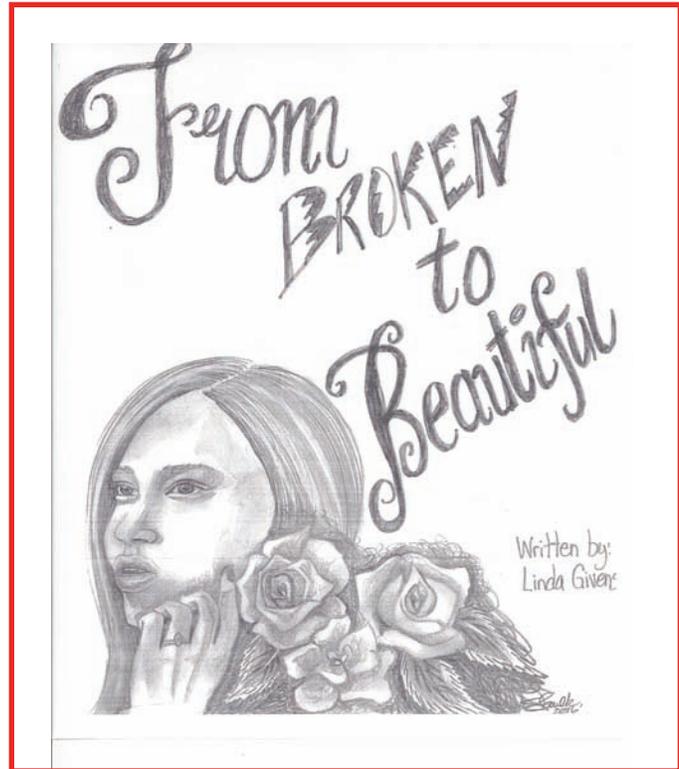
## From Broken to Beautiful

Linda Givens

This is my testimony

It may have appeared to others that we had the perfect marriage. A young beautiful couple with two kids, good stable employment, a nice home, and cars; yes, we seemed to have it all. A word to the wise: "Looks can be deceiving."

Thinking back, I can't even recall the exact day or year things began to change. The mood swings, jealous rage, outbursts of anger, physical and emotional abuse all suddenly came out of the clear blue sky. The first slap was a shock, after that, things would never be the same. We continued the façade by putting on plastic smiles, going on trips, out to dinner, and having family night as though things were normal. Normal. What is normal? The dictionary defines normal as sound in mind and body. Well that wasn't us. The slaps turned into beat downs, and the abuse worsened each and every time. The violence started and continued off and on for years. Sometimes I would think to myself "Maybe he's changing." Then suddenly, the abuse would start again. If I came home late, if he couldn't reach me, he would use anything as an excuse to abuse me. At first, he would only use his fist; then knives, objects, anything that he could get his hands on. I know you are wondering, "Did she ever call 911?" yes, not once but on several occasions. To no avail, they were absolutely no help. Eventually, the tears stopped and I started fighting back. I would not be weak any longer. However, we all know that a woman has no strength in a fight with a man. I was ashamed; I felt empty as if I had lost myself. Over 20 years later, 17 of those 20 years served consecutively in prison, I am finally free. Losing my life is how I truly found it. Hopefully, my physical freedom will come sooner than later. However, I am still free; free on the inside. I am healed; the physical scars are still there, but inside I am whole. God changed and healed me. I am no longer broken. I am beautiful. I am strong and ready to face the world. I am forgiven. God's word says so. I have a purpose and most of all; I am standing on solid ground. It is my prayer that you find peace, hope, and surrender your life to God. Make a decision to never give up, because with the strength of God, I won't.



## Canteen

*Tracy Yennie*

Canteen like a shopping spree, a trip to the prison grocery store  
Until you see the other orders; suddenly you long for more  
Envy all the people who have lots of money on their books  
Just think of all the calories, how much better you will look  
A long, shitty vacation with a courtyard full of flowers  
Rooms for 6 or 2, but twenty share the showers  
Sit inside these pretty bricks; watching people's lives whiz by  
Life feels so misunderstood; we don't change unless we try  
Season still come and go along with all the holidays  
The title of a felon comes with a hefty price we pay  
It's nothing like my childhood dreams; not what I wanted for myself  
I'm grateful to have found me though; on this long journey through Hell  
I'm not sure I'd have made the time to really get to know me  
If God had paused my life so I could set my spirit free



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## **I am Beautiful**

*Keri Killion-Schneider*

It starts as a whisper  
I'm not sure I believe it

*I am beautiful...*

The mirror reflects lines on my face,  
skin weathered with age,  
scars documenting years of abuse

And still

*I am beautiful...*

Inside I feel anxious, self-conscious and broken  
Still I know

*I am beautiful...*

Somedays I want to hide in my bed and not come out  
Somedays I want to yell, scream, and shout  
I wonder what my life is all about

But I know

*I am beautiful...*

These scars, frowns, and lines mark evidence of times  
all making me who I am today

*I am beautiful...*

Insecurities and painful memories shape me  
into who I'm meant to be

Learning from my mistakes, breaking old patterns

Slowly building self-confidence

Realizing that I am good

Despite what I've done or where I've been

*I am beautiful...*

I'm a survivor

I like who I am and where I'm going

Finally I shout

*I am beautiful!*

## I Am Beautiful

*Damita*

I am beautiful in so many ways. The beauty that's real increases my day. I continue to let God mold me. He peels layers of junk, now the beauty you can see. My heart is NO longer in danger. God's grace makes it possible for me to love a stranger. I put him first in all I do. He touches my mind, my spirit He renews. I'm not worried about nothing; depending on God, I know he'll do something. Having this peace is a place of rest; without the stress I look my best. Beauty within is a beautiful thing; an ultimate fulfillment this attitude will bring.



Melissa Simonson

## Looking Through of the Storm

*Melissa Simonson*

Abandoned Houses; Broken Homes. Starry Skies; Burning Desires;  
Spirituality and Hearts on Fire. Desperate for Love;  
Yearning for Affection; Seeking out God's Perfection;  
These Prison bars haven't got No Love for Me;  
Today I'm ok; on this Broken Road - I've found My Way;  
Into the arms of My One True Love;  
My One - My Only,  
My God Above!

## You Are Who You Are

*Barbara Bawarsky*

Sometimes it seems like you are on a rocky road,  
and I know you have a story to be told.  
Nevertheless, you are who you are;  
you are great, shining like a star.  
Willing to reach out and give a hand;  
to help someone's feet get pulled out of the sand.  
You are like a mother who is caring for her own;  
your love is always being shown.  
You are who you are.  
You are you caring so much;  
wishing others will do just such.  
Because you are who you are;  
you are always near, never too far.  
Always there to lend a hand to others  
during the good times and times of sorrow  
Thank you for being who you are:  
God's bright, shining star.

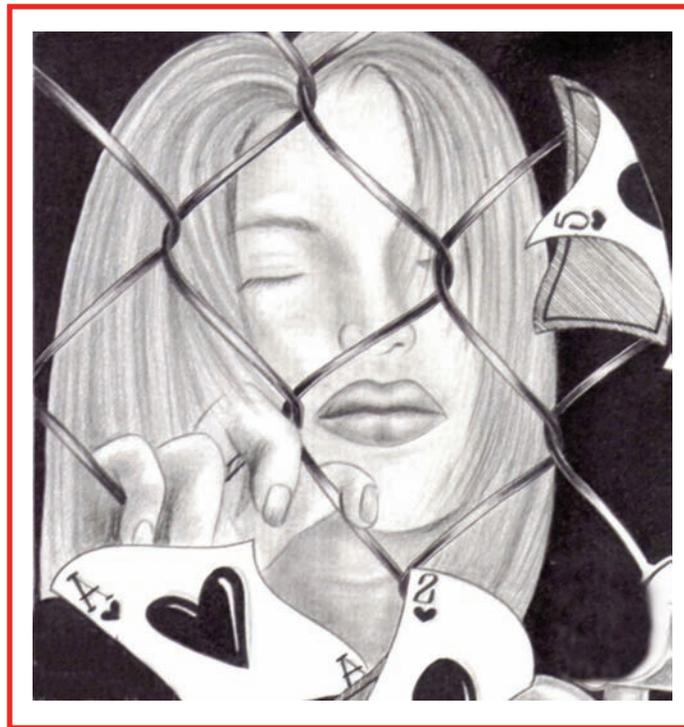


D. Miles

## Beauty of Scars

*Jessica Trent*

I look in the mirror, what do I see?  
I see my reflection looking back at me  
My scars are the beauty of my life that remind me of the pain and suffering  
One has to endure to find another ending to the story of her life  
I look in the mirror, what do I see?  
I see my beauty looking back at me  
I am beautiful!



T. Barajas

## For Orlando

Krystal Sadé Shelton

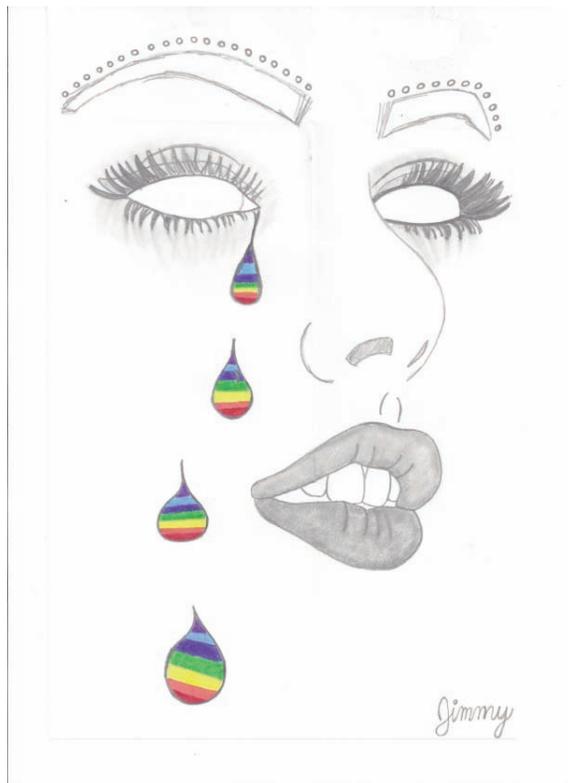
My heart is heavy and full of sorrow;  
so many loved ones, lives forever borrowed  
No one deserves to be taken away so  
swiftly just because of their sexual  
preference or vote for equality  
Shouldn't we all be free to love  
who we choose?

That's what being an American  
is all about, regardless who  
Freedom of speech, freedom of love,  
freedom to praise God above  
Freedom to have, freedom to give,  
freedom to open your heart and live  
Freedom to do, and get things done  
To live life to the fullest,  
let loose and have fun

Yet, I'm grieving, because my heart goes out to the loved ones lost  
The ones left behind and the one who is at fault  
My heart is heavy and full of sorrow  
It breaks my heart to see the world we live in today  
What are we to do when so many are lost and confused  
Backed into a corner with no one to turn to  
Misunderstood by a world filled with ignorance and hate  
How do we react when others dive into judging instead of to educate  
I myself can relate

We cannot let fear and hatred divide us  
Instead, let equality and love invite us  
May God bless those affected in Orlando

*"Death leaves a heartache no one can heal; love leaves a memory no one can steal."*



# *A Special Tribute*

To each of the courageous and strong  
women who give their art, words and hearts  
to make this book possible,  
you are amazing gifts to our world.  
We would not be the same without you.

Believe in yourself always.  
You deserve dignity, respect, and love.

*Always remember...*

*You are beautiful!*



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# *I Am Beautiful*

A Survival Resource  
Created by and for Women

*"Life is a journey and a spiritual unfolding is its purpose."*

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