

**Four Chapbooks**  
**by Participants in The New York State Literary Center's 2019 Community Engagement Seminar**

**THE BARRIERS NEED TO FALL**  
**By Kentrell Burks**

When you enter the doors of Monroe Correctional Facility, you are no longer a citizen, part of the community, or a voice. Your identity is taken, and you are now just an inmate number. There is no freedom or hope in a system that is designed for you to get out and keep returning to jail or prison. There is no education or rehabilitation in that system. Who serves and protects?

Entering Monroe Correctional Facility what should you expect, rehabilitation, trade programs, work opportunities? Incarceration instead hardens our society from overcoming poverty.

Rochester's poverty rates are worse in new census data:

- The overall poverty rate rose from 31.6 percent to 33.1 percent;
- The percentage of children living in poverty rose from 46.9 percent to 51.9 percent;
- The percentage of people living in extreme poverty, or half the poverty line, rose from 15.6 percent to 16.1 percent.

*Democrat and Chronicle*, December 31, 2018.

<https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2018/12/31/rochesters-poverty-rates-worsen-new-census-data/2449077002/>

The barriers need to fall. We should be lifting each other up and leaving no one behind. This is America, land of opportunity, land of the free.

The U.S. incarcerates more people than [any nation in the world](#), including China. And the U.S. is also the leader in [the prison population rate](#).

Brennan Center for Justice, 2018.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/blog/history-mass-incarceration>

The American criminal justice system holds almost 2.3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 109 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories.

"Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019." Prison Policy Initiative. 2019

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2019.html>

Rehabilitation centers and educational centers need to be opened up. We need more people who came up from poverty to be in public office. When I enter Monroe Correctional Facility, I am an inmate, a number, and a menace to society. When leaving I should be entering my community as a member of society with a testimony for all that I am now a positive statistic reformed.

## **Dad, Why Are You Not A Father?**

Dad, why are you not a father?  
Dad, teach me something? Why didn't you bother?  
Dad, you are my dad.  
You are here physically, but not mentally or emotionally.  
Why do I feel all alone?

You left me all alone when I was nine years old.  
I grew up with a mother and no father.  
I shake my head. It is a lot to swallow.  
You made me feel hollow. All the motherly love and no male to follow.  
You abandoned me with no disregard.

Mother taught me well. You left me to fail.  
I found myself looking for guidance and love, and it led me to jail.  
Can only a man teach a man to be a man?  
I searched high and low for acceptance,  
high as the clouds and low as the rocks.

You heard me knocking, but you did not answer or let me in.  
So, I turned to the streets, self-medication, alcohol.  
All roads led to incarceration.  
I find myself in the Monroe County Jail system.  
So why am I here?

I lost my dad and my freedom.  
One thing dad before I write you off.  
You taught me what not to do.  
This will make me a better son, father, and husband.  
Sarcastically I thank you. Thank you. Really thank you.

I know now not to abandon Ja'Myer.  
I know not to push him into the streets,  
alcohol, self-medication, incarceration.  
Do Monroe County jails rehabilitate criminals  
or do they send subliminal messages to a revolving door?

We need programs. We need hope.

## **I Imagine**

I imagine that one day there will be no jails.  
I imagine that all crime will terminate.  
I imagine, oh yes I imagine, that one day we will all be equal.  
I imagine that we will all do business together.  
I believe that I can fly.  
I believe that one can think outside the box without being high.

I, I, I  
imagine, think, have faith.  
Who will be the ones to designate thoughts into realization,  
a fact that will be the ultimate celebration?  
Mind and body may grow old but soul, soul will never go cold.  
It will continue to reach beyond the stars.

I lived a life without imagination. Life is stagnated thoughts until you appreciate it.  
Death cannot be resuscitated.

## **The Community Engagement Seminar**

In this county and state we have a need for The New York State Literary Center with Dale Davis. We need this organization not only for inmates, but also for our society and for communities across the state. The Community Engagement Seminar with Dale Davis has been the only rehabilitation I have had since being here at Monroe Correctional Facility.

We learn about current events, political issues, international news and much more. Not only myself but also the other individuals who participate think about having a positive impact in the community. We talk about real life issues from all corners of the world. Without the Community Engagement Seminar we would still be blinded, inmates set up for the revolving doors of prison and jail.

In jail and prisons we need to be educated and not deterred from education and rehabilitation. We need to be given all of the resources to get back to the world on a positive side. This is where community engagement begins. I have changed because of the Community Engagement Seminar with Dale Davis.

**DADDY WITHOUT YOU**  
**By Matthew Courtright**

**For My Son**

Daddy, without you I am sad.  
I have Grandma and Grandpa,  
but Daddy why did you have to go?  
I started a new school. We moved to a new house.  
You being gone and not seeing you is so hard.  
I don't know when I will see you again.  
I don't hear people talk about you Daddy.  
I know you are hurting, and so am I.  
Daddy, come home. We miss you.  
I don't have a mommy. I really need you.  
I love you Daddy.

## **Credo**

I believe in family.

I believe in love.

I believe family and love can help you on any journey.

I believe in humankind

and that every one of us has a purpose

and a meaningful role in a day-to-day life.

I believe in major change,

and I believe people who are incarcerated have a future.

I believe that people who are incarcerated need a hand,

someone to help us find a better way to live our lives

add raise our families.

## **Someone Help Me**

Tired and weak,  
breaking at the seams,  
scared,  
someone help me.  
I want to be seen as more than as just some numerical sequence.

My life has yet to come.  
My life has yet to begin.  
As I sit here twiddling my thumbs  
all I feel is this immeasurable fog  
and distant screams trying to distract me from me.

I try to find meaning in any little thing,  
but come up empty.  
My question to the universe is  
may you help me find my way not just home  
but my way to happiness.  
Help me surrender my bad habits.

Might you find pity  
and allow me to take this hell I put myself in  
and help me use this time  
to find a new beginning  
and create a beautiful blue print for my future.

**I MUST STAY STRONG**  
**By James Nelson**

The two days I like in here are Tuesdays and Fridays when I get to see my better half, my best friend, my soul mate, my wife.

Time goes by  
fast  
on visits  
and hurt and pain come  
when she walks out the door.

I must stay strong.



## **Food For Thought**

To try in life is to fail.

To do in life is to succeed.

Do: College, parenting, work.

To do in life is to succeed.

## **Why Should I Write?**

Why should I write?

Do the words I write even matter to people?

Why should I write?

Do people care what happens in here?

Why should I write?

Do my letters even get read at night?

Why do write?

I write because something put in my own words matters to me.

I write to bring peace to my soul at night.

## **The Community Engagement Seminar**

The Community Engagement Seminar is very helpful. It gives us something to think about, giving something to our families so that we can bond together as families once we are released. It shows us places to go with our families to spend time with our wives, our children, and our grandchildren. It is a great learning experience for us going back home after incarceration.

## **MOMENTO MORI**

By David Daniel Ramos

### **I Need My Life To Matter**

My heart sings and bleeds  
with so much anticipation  
to embrace the world,  
to be a part of beautiful story that is life.

My story is part of that whole.  
It is my identity, my soul,  
my heart.

My being soars on wings  
longing for freedom.  
I need my voice to be heard,  
my life to be loved.

I need my life to matter.

## **My Landscape**

My landscape is prison, not college,  
not reaching for the stars.  
Instead I find myself locked behind steel bars.

The streets were my classroom,  
so much information,  
but so little education

I paid no attention, and I learned  
a lot about struggle,  
and a lot about strength.

My landscape,  
more problems than solutions,  
the truth whatever they say that is,  
more like it's fabricated,  
personal agenda oriented,  
propaganda and twisted,  
spun and spun lies.  
"NO THANK YOU,"  
the realization of this mass induced  
indoctrination process of intentionally causing confusion,  
chaos, resentment, anger,  
humiliation, unrest, separation,  
inequality and economic instability.  
"NEED TO CHANGE,"  
this mass state of mental slavery and corrupt conformity.

To be free one must think free.  
The American Dream seems more like an illusion at times  
when you are part of the have nots.  
It beats ravages and roars,  
it takes and consumes  
as it subdues in chains broken dreams and dead promises.

Hearts that have grown cold  
and unspoken tongues  
crush hopes and innocence,  
foster ignorance  
and like a dysfunctional relationship,  
I love you, I hate you,  
foster ignorance, drugs, abuse,  
hunger, poverty, and oppression.

My landscape destroys.

## **Faded**

This heartfelt poem, if you will, is dedicated to all of the men, the women, the mothers and children, the fractured families out there within our community who are, as I write this, suffering on a daily basis, who are affected by and who struggle with depression, anxiety, and PTSD, just a few of the many afflictions that are the by-products of living in poverty.

Will I be remembered  
by someone out there, somewhere,  
in some way, some day or  
will I fade away?  
Will someone shed a tear for me,  
or hear my cries, or hear my pleas,  
or say a word or two of kindness  
to take away my pain just for today  
or . . . will I fade away?

Will I miss the rain, the contrast of colors,  
my emotions on life's canvas,  
while looking out my window from afar, lying in my bed,  
tangled in my sheets,  
listening to sad songs playing in my head,  
tasting salt within my tears feeding my fears,  
thinking to myself  
will I fade away?

## **Only For Lions**

Dream big and go big  
or go home.

Think successful, act successful  
and you will be successful.

Stay motivated, stay hungry,  
the wolf that's there is already at the top.

Be humble, be great,  
be a leader and treat people like you want to be treated.

Your body is the vehicle for your mind  
Strengthen both by working out physically and mentally,  
past your comfort zones  
until you feel uncomfortable

because this is when change takes place  
and how progress and champions are made.

Set the bar for yourself high  
because anything worth having is worth working hard for.

Outwork everyone and maintain that work effort twenty-four hours a day.

You get what you put into it.

Go all in and never give up.

Overcome life's obstacles  
by adapting, evolving, and growing stronger,.  
Positive energy attracts positive energy.

This is my credo.