

**Community Engagement Seminar**

**The New York State Literary Center**  
<http://www.nyslc.org/>

**In Partnership with**

**Office of the Sheriff, County of Monroe**  
**Monroe Correctional Facility**

March 2016

*Untitled*

Stuck

    between dimensions  
    here  
my mind can only keep me sane for so long  
before

    I give in to the insanity.  
I grab my head  
trying desperately  
    to get out of here.  
Where is here?

Where is here?  
Where  
    am I supposed to be?  
Where?

It is loud,  
loud,  
    chaotic craziness,  
my mind can't hold anymore,  
    too many faces,  
    too many voices.

When will the doors open?

The screaming, the pounding  
    never leaves.  
My mind is out of control.

I sit and wait to see the light in the crack of the door.

My past does not define me. I am more than a drunk and a bad mother.

My  
past  
does  
not  
define

me.

"Eat now."

"Sleep later."

"Wear this."

Once you hear the click of a bracelet,  
that's it,  
it's all the same.  
274289 is my name.

"Stay to the right."

My soul is broken.  
Come get close to me,  
Feel the cold air escape.  
Light now longer shines.  
Darkness emerges.  
My mind is exhausted; my body, old, tired.  
stressed,  
strung out,  
left to dry out.  
Regret lingers, sadness strangles.

**M. T.**

*Feel Me, See Me*

S,

It's so hard to even begin to talk about the reasons I am here away from you.

The lonely days  
I am away from you  
feel like  
I am on the moon,  
stuck  
without a ride  
to get to you.

My tears  
flood the sky.  
They are the star's light  
waiting for a comet  
to fly into earth  
to be next to you again,  
to see your smile  
and to hear your laughter once again.

I want to tuck you in at night just to hold your little fingers next to mine while we walk outside.

You  
inspire me  
to keep  
moving forward.

This journey is a big lesson, one I hope you will never have.

Today in class  
hearing the stories of other inmates  
made me feel  
empathy  
knowing that our children are  
a poignant reminder  
of our actions.

All of my family went to my grandmother's for Christmas, all eight daughters and one son. All eight daughters and the one son would bring their own children. The house was full. We all ate as we came, and you would not want to be the last because you would eat the scraps. The food, *arroz con grandules, vianda and bacalao, pernil, pollo, arroz blanco, flan, biscochas, arros con dulce, pasteles, coquito, and pastelillos, and quesitos.*

All of the food was good, and we all had a little of everything on our plates. Kids ran everywhere. Jokes were told. Laughter filled the room. New additions were passed from hand to hand. Pictures were taken and the small children were angry from posing for so long.

My grandparents were so happy and love ran through their home. Now my grandparents have gone to Heaven. The tradition is no longer the same, but the food always remains the same in each of my aunts' and my uncle's homes. Now we drive to each home and pick up the food.

Alone,  
waiting for days to pass  
waiting,  
waiting  
for my dreams to begin.

I have lived in Rochester, New York ever since birth. Don't get me wrong I left about three or four times to move out of state and, also, to go to Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico is part of the United States, yet I consider myself a minority. I know first hand the poverty problem we have in Rochester, New York and also in Puerto Rico. The cost of living is rising, and jobs don't pay enough. Many mothers are single mothers and day care costs are so high that unfortunately many children are going hungry at night. Kids are growing up mostly to deal drugs and to steal. As children turn into teens, incarceration begins and families begin to deteriorate.

Children without mothers,  
mothers without children,

fathers without families

and the government laughs. Slavery is still in play after all of these years.

Breaking up families hits home runs every time a child's tear pours down a child's face.

And the government gets fatter.

Alone,  
waiting for days to pass  
waiting,  
waiting  
for my dreams to begin.

I am here now,  
lots of pain and sorrow  
an empty orbit where rubble swings by,  
meteoroids  
waiting to touch anything,  
to destroy.

This is a jigsaw puzzle,  
what will the ending image be?

I am here, a place,  
thinking how to turn all this pain into knowledge,  
into a story read by anyone who looks at me.

My eyes tell it all.

As I read my writing I see everything come together. It's amazing to see my imagination in words that describe my emotions, the unique way I unravel the images in my mind. Strength is shown by the way a person chooses her words.

Through my writing I see another side of me. I am able to show my readers writing is a powerful tool. I hope I pass that down to anyone who reads me.

I  
am  
pouring out  
myself  
to you  
in  
words.

Can you see me here in this writing? I do. I see me evolving right before your eyes.

I  
feel  
me.

I  
see  
me.

I am waiting to see the better picture after the storms pass.

**A. Q.**

*Untitled*

The magic word we  
I am here, we are here.

Is where we have been most of our lives  
where  
we will  
be going,

quiet women  
thinking  
about good times,  
lonely,  
silent  
thinking,

I am here, we are here  
thinking  
we are the same,  
coming from the same place,

scared,  
lining up for food,  
falling in and out?

We have children.  
We miss them.

I am here, we are here.

**A. R.**

*Work in Progress*

Will you judge me for my past?  
Does my past have to last.

Where  
I came from  
is not  
where  
I am going.

Some days  
My head still feels like it's going boing,  
boing, boing, boing.  
The screws are coming lose.

I  
am  
trying  
to  
keep  
it  
together,

but some days  
I am light as a feather.  
If you blow too hard, I will take flight.  
I might stay  
out of sight,  
so I am taking it slow  
for fear someone might blow me away.  
I am fragile.

I  
am  
trying  
to  
keep  
it  
together,

I was lost in a haze, numb, high, no longer feeling or living my life. Everyday I woke up abused my body, my mind, and my soul. Then I would go to sleep, awake, and repeat it all over again, day after day, week after week, month after month. Time passed by, but it never seemed to be going anywhere.

One day I woke up in a place I had been a few times before. For some reason it felt different. I was unsure why. I was chilled to the bone and pain shot through to my toes. I could not sleep. The twitching wouldn't stop. The pain was unbearable.

I  
felt  
like  
I  
was dying,

although I knew I was not. I did this to myself. I shook alone on a concrete floor. These are the symptoms of withdrawal, and I was in a cell at Monroe County Jail. I finally slept. The pain subsided. I sat up and thought and thought. I was still in a haze. I still felt lonely. I wrote.

Can I say what I mean? Do I mean what I say? Words tend to get jumbled up when they come out. All of these words in my head spinning around, I am starting to get dizzy. Is there a way out? I am slipping and falling. I wish I could take back my words and choke them down. I wish I could say what I mean and mean what I say.

**T. B.**

*Untitled*

J,  
I want you to know  
I love you  
unconditionally.

It took a lot of courage to leave you. I was fifteen years old, kicked out on the streets, alone. The day I was going to have an abortion, I was released from the Juvenile Detention Center.

J,  
there is nothing  
I wouldn't do  
for  
you.

My baby, I am hurting by my last words. I want you to know I am a warrior who will continue to fight my demons and obstacles.

J,  
your existence  
gives  
my life  
meaning.

I love you with all my heart. You are in my thoughts and prayers.

I love you.

**K. G.**