THE SAME DUST

A collection of poetry and prose by participants in the Michigan Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative (MPRI) creative writing workshops.

Spring 2012

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MPRI CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM

The MPRI (Michigan Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative) Creative Writing Project began in the spring of 2010 as a service-learning collaboration between the Michigan Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative, Underwood Stryker Institute for Service-Learning at Kalamazoo College, Michigan Department of Corrections, KPEP, Center for Service Learning/Lewis Walker Institute at Western Michigan University, Interfaith Strategy for Advocacy and Action in the Community (ISAAC), Fire Historical & Cultural Arts Collaborative, and Kalamazoo Valley Community College. The Program has developed into a weekly workshop at KPEP, facilitated by students from the Mary Jane Underwood Stryker Institute for Service-Learning at Kalamazoo College, and provides a platform for ex-offenders to share their voice. The workshop aims to empower individuals by developing confidence through creative writing and spoken word.

AKNOWLEDGMENTS

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DRUNKS STAGGER LIKE CRIPPLED FLIES
   After Etheridge Knight
Edward Jackson

As I go down to the store at the end of the block
what do I see? Drunks staggering,

too crippled to know
what a straight line is. Crippled
to where there is no balance.
Judgment is short,
thoughts are distorted.
Breath hot
like hot lava
as his pores seep out
this loud smell
of bad flesh.

Something like a fly
when its trapped on a windowsill.
It tries to get up over
and over
but to no avail. It is
cripple and stagger.
Trying to find the right

way, just like the drunks
at the end of my block.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY
Alysa Davis

Staying in my lane.
Responsible at all times
for my own actions.
I AM SOMEBODY
Latina Jakes

As I look in this mirror
all I see is terror,
but I am not afraid.
In fact I have a lot to gain
— I am somebody.

I have self-control.
I am on this path towards fulfilling my goals.
But does that mean I am on the right path?
Who knows?
— I am somebody.

I keep my head tilted towards the sky
because one of these days I’m afraid I might die.
But I’m not going down without a fight
to know that I’ve done right.
Until then I’m going to move along
until the lord calls me home.
But when I do go
I will know that
— I am somebody.

N-WORD
Justin Sprague

The n-word means so much more than you think. All the while it rolls off your
tongue with hate. I hate it when I am called by this term. It hurts my insides to even
indulge in a conversation in which such ignorance takes place.

I am not a boy
or any such word
that you care to call me.

I am a man. A man with self-pride and self-integrity. So call me what you wish, but I
wish you would call me Justin.
LOVE
Sean Slain

Love is to devote and to serve for that one.
Love is to have, hold, and protect that one.
Love is to always be there no matter what.
Love is to love when it feels like there is no love to give.

THIS IS HOW
Nathan Barker

This is how someone passes time. This is how you say you’re paying attention but really you’re not. This is how coffee is made when half asleep. This is how a shower goes good after coffee. This is how shaving sucks. This is how my kids wake me up when I go back to bed and pretend I’m sleeping. This is how to dress two-year-old twins. This is how you’re supposed to feed your two year old twins breakfast before dressing them. This is how you dress two-year-old twins again. This is how we go for walks to find woks. This is how to be tired quickly. This is how to learn to love starbucks. This is how to chase down twin two year olds for bath time. This is how to change into dry clothes. This how to go to bed at 9:00pm. This is how to do it all over again.

FIRST MEETING AFTER PRISON
Laron Braxton

It was a long time coming.
I made it to this morning
to get to this moment.
Hearing your voice on the phone
let’s me know that I’m finally home.
Face to face,
we meet in the place
to speak on things during that empty space.
As my heart beat race
a breath taking case,
words flow back and forth.
Taking them in as an open door,
A meeting well needed
to find out the answers we’ve been asking.
SWEAT AND STAMINA
Nicholas Mazur

My space is smokey, dark, very hot. It's being able to play my drums on stage with my band. There is nothing quite like it (with the exception of things like falling in love, or seeing your kids for the first time). I love the adrenaline rush, being drenched in sweat, and using every ounce of sweat and stamina. Trying to make people dance and have a good time. It is like a drug in itself.

PAPA’S PLACE
Justin Heflin

“Justin, time to get up. Breakfast is almost done. Time to get up now,” my Papa yelled up the stairs to my room.

“Uhh,” I was real slow getting up, still extremely tired because my cousins Allen and Chad had stayed the night. I couldn’t get them to be quiet.

I finally rolled out of my bed, stumbled towards the bathroom not realizing my sheets were wrapped around me. I fell right on my face. Well this morning isn’t starting off well. I even bet my cousins are being annoying already. I made it to the bathroom and finally did my morning thing, got dressed, headed down stairs.

I opened the door and when the smell of bacon and eggs frying hit my stomach it immediately started grumbling. My papa is the best breakfast cook in the world, I knew it and so did my stomach. I entered the dining room and heard Bob Barker on the T.V. explaining one of the games on his show. Even though I knew every morning my papa watched this I still had my mind set on watching some country music videos. I noticed my two cousins already smashing their breakfast like they hadn’t ate in days, and of course (as good as my papa is to me) he just sat my plate on the table, hot and freshly cooked with a cup of O.J. and a cup of coffee with a couple of pinches of sugar. I have the best papa in the world, I thought, the best, not to mention the best cook in the world too. I sat down and immediately dug in, sipping my coffee in between mouthfuls of toast with grape jelly dipped in yoke and bacon fitting in somehow.

Chad said, “Justin you know what, I bet he cooks the best eggs in the world.”

“I bet he could become famous all over the world if we could get everyone to try it,” I said.

Then Allen said, “Yeah, lets open a restaurant. A breakfast diner only serving breakfast and he can be our cook.”
I laughed but I really thought about it. With him cooking we would have so much business we would have to open several restaurants.

So I said, “Yes, let’s do it someday soon.”

Papa was just sitting back, smiling and laughing. Chad and Alan immediately agreed that we would name it “Papa’s Place.” We swore up and down we were going to make it happen. That was 12 years ago and me and my cousins still talk about that morning, that dream of Papa’s place.
UNTITLED
Blue Wolf

The path of destruction shows no light,
the darkness only gets darker.
For all I have to lose is all I have to gain.
Walk as tall as the trees,
be as warm as the sun,
and as strong as the wind.

SOPHIA
Latisha Merritte

Her name is Sophia. She’s from a faraway place. Who knows where, who knows why. Her greatest fear is being alone, not being wanted. Sophia’s weakness is herself giving in to anything and anybody that comes her way. Just look at her, so sad, try to hide it but can’t. Her goal is to leave this place, to go somewhere so she can be normal. To be somebody. To be loved, respected, and wanted.

THIS IS HOW TO LOVE YOUR MOM
Alyssa Goerther

This is how to love you mom, show her forever all around. This is how to fight cancer, live your life like you can’t ever. This is how to hoola-hoop, swing it around and loopy-doo, hippity-hop to the barbershop to get a stick of candy. One for me and one for you and one for sister Ashley.

NEEDLE
Nancy Cardella

i.
I was feeling confused, alone, sad, hurt, and not myself. I was feeling disrespected, used, hated, and ugly. I don’t remember what caused it. I don’t remember why I needed it. All I can remember is that it was all the answers at the time. When I was done I didn’t feel all those negative thoughts anymore. It made me feel amazing. All my friends started hating me. What did I do? It was just a different way then them. They needed me back. They tried to help. It didn’t work. It’s too late. I’m gone.
ii.
You're a junkie.
You need help.
We love you but we can't watch this.
Turn yourself in.
I'm not buying anything else from you till you go to rehab.
Time to move out we've had enough.
Can't believe you turned into this person.
It isn't you.
What's wrong with you?
Please get clean for yourself.
I'm taking all your needles and dope and throwing them away you don't need them.
It's a trap.
Those other junkies don't love you.
They are playing you.
Wake up and become Nancy again.
Stop being a piece of shit junkie.

iii.
Melt me down. Let me enter you. You think you don't want me but I'll show you that you really do. I'm the only one that makes you better. No one can do the things I can. See, your heart races when you're with me. I help you get stuff done. You love me. You married me ten years ago. You'll never leave. You can't because you're scared. And in the end I'll still be the one right here by your side. So just melt me down and put me inside you baby. Everyone knows you love me best.

HAPPINESS
Sean Slain

What is happiness? Is happiness when you talk yourself into putting on a smile or is it when you feel it in the pit of your soul? When you wake up and smile, not because you have to but because you are just happy that the lord had the grace to bless you with another day. What is happiness? Is Happiness when you're in a great relationship? When you know that no other fleshly being can get between the two of you. Or is it when you have all the earthly things at your side, money, expensive clothes, and all the grey goose you can imagine. Or is it when you know that when you get back home from work you have a family waiting on your arrival. What is happiness?
UNTITLED
Cynthia Lowder

Life can be insane.
Something never change.
The most important things can be labeled as lame.
Why you? You may say.
Or why me? Touché.
When we have the chance do we make a way?
A way to progress and not care about the rest who tries to judge
in defeat and likes the taste of raw meat. Feeds on the human flesh
but breaths the same air in their chests. Bleeds red just like us,
sneezes from the same dust, but looks at us in disgust.
We all have a debt to pay
whether who pays in whatever way.
We are all blessed to see tomorrow, today, and yesterday.

DADDY COLORED GLASSES
Nathan Barker

The debt of my youth I’m gonna pay.
August twenty fourth was the day
I held twin newborns with pride.
Not even smiles I could hide.

Learning to crawl, then the walking.
Couldn’t wait, now they are talking!
Megan pulls toys, Lucas turns dials,
double the diapers and the smiles.

Each their own personalities,
soon it will be the bird and the bees.
My eyes closed, longing for the past.
They are growing way to fast.

They are why I get up each day.
To see life a different way
through daddy colored glasses.
Thanking god as each day passes.
SCAR
Kathryn Schep

My parents divorced when I was 2 years old. My mother raised my sister and me to be loving, compassionate, and caring women. We spent weekends with my dad growing up. Some of my fondest memories are being at Barron Lake in Nile, Michigan; boating, skiing, and tubing with my dad and cousins. We would be there from sun up to sun down playing all day.

One afternoon my father went to drop me and a friend up to shore from water skiing. I was on the right so I went forward toward shore and let of the rope. One I was close I tipped my ski up and went underwater. As I was coming back up for air my friend came in and hit my face with her skis. The runner blade hit my face and completely smashed my nose open.

I almost blacked out due to the force, but saw lots of blood in the water and knew I had to get out. I was only 13 years old. Once out of the water and on shore they laid me down and began to cover my up so that I wouldn’t go into shock. My dad saw me

"Is it bad dad," I asked.

"No kid, it just a scratch."

But I knew he was just trying to keep me calm.

Once my mother arrived at the hospital and she looked at t I knew it must have been pretty serious because they transferred me to another hospital. I over heard my mother in the hallway saying she wanted the best surgeon available to operate.

When it came time after an entire summer of being housebound and healing, I had all the packing and bandaging removed.

The doctor told me, "You are a lucky young girl. If that blade would have hit ¼ of an inch higher it could have taken an eye out or struck your temple and killed you instantly."

At first I was shocked at the scar on my nose but it became a part of me, part of my character. My peers accepted me as they always had and at the ripe age of 13 that was the most important thing.
BEHIND THESE EYES
Shannon M. Andrews

I was not prepared for you;
Not aware that my soul would be altered by your unexpected emergence into my life. Like a beautiful rainstorm,
Kissing a drought-ridden land,
You nourished my thirst,
Maybe silently, I prayed for you.
Maybe just as silently, you longed for me too.
Only the heavens truly know the depth and intensity of our implicit desires.
You spoke to me without words,
Communicating to the innermost parts of my soul.
Even when apart, your words reverberated within me.
At times the sound was deafening.
I saw through your dark eyes
To the deepest parts of your soul,
Places unshared and unknown by any other.
Able to read you like an ancient and sacred book.
I’m the only one you allowed beyond your cover.
I turned the pages, read, and reread, memorizing you entirely.
Your scent is like the permanent ink of the protective shield of my heart.
Intense, memorable, craved and unforgettable.
Your skin magnificent, as if it had been kissed by the gods.
Your hair gorgeous and dark,
Tempting natures breeze to run through it smoothly
And with the most gentle touch.
The first kiss captured my heart;
Preserving it in the moment,
Forever changed
Craving another second, another minute, another day.
Your very hand upon my hand sent undeniable shivers down my spine
And brought immense solace to my mind, to my heart, to me.
You entered and exited my stage in a whirlwind, promising endless devotion.
Our hearts intertwined underneath the innocence of the sky.
You left me breathless, creating question and unanswered question.
You love melted the strongest part of me;
Destiny beckons your name.
The longing I feel for you is tantric.
You are heat lightening across my most beautiful sky,
Captivating me, leaving me speechless.
A shooting star with every wish I have ever wished attached to it.
I see you in every raindrop, smell you on every breeze.
I feel you in every rumble of thunder, and hear you every time the sparrow sings.
You, my love, are the fruit from the forbidden tree
I will never taste.
THIS IS HOW TO GET ADDICTED
Robin Adams

This is how to get addicted. This is how to throw your life away. This is how to give the dope boy all your money. This is how to have regrets. This is how to go to prison. This is how to waste 20 years of your life. This is how you abandon your children. This is how you steal from your family. This is how you sell your soul. This how you take your life back.

ZEBRA CAKES
Wesley Swannen

My brother and I were at my father’s house, doing what kids should be doing on a hot summer day. Running, laughing, playing basketball. We walked past an old looking lady. It was like when we saw her and her rough dry skin, nappy unbrushed hair, and toothless smile that the sun disappeared behind a thousand dark grey clouds. Cold immediately, not hot like before. She turned towards us boy, look at you two zebra cakes. I felt like she was racist and I wanted to use it against her because she was white. Then I thought of my mother.

UNTITLED
Stephanie Looper

Chi-chi-oh-so
No!
Stop pulling!

A scar is born. The scar always showing movement, always reminding me of the river flowing next to toles. The drugs flowing through my veins, the commands to my bups flowing from my lips.

My boyfriend.
My best friend.

We continued on.

Bursting through, vicious. And I arrive next to the river, and I let him loose. I let myself loose. I run with him. You’re in my veins. Laughter from my lips as my favorite friend and I attack one another. I’m a heap. We kiss. We send our love down the river.