

Who we

*Stories of People
Incarcerated in Illinois
with Life Sentences*

Are

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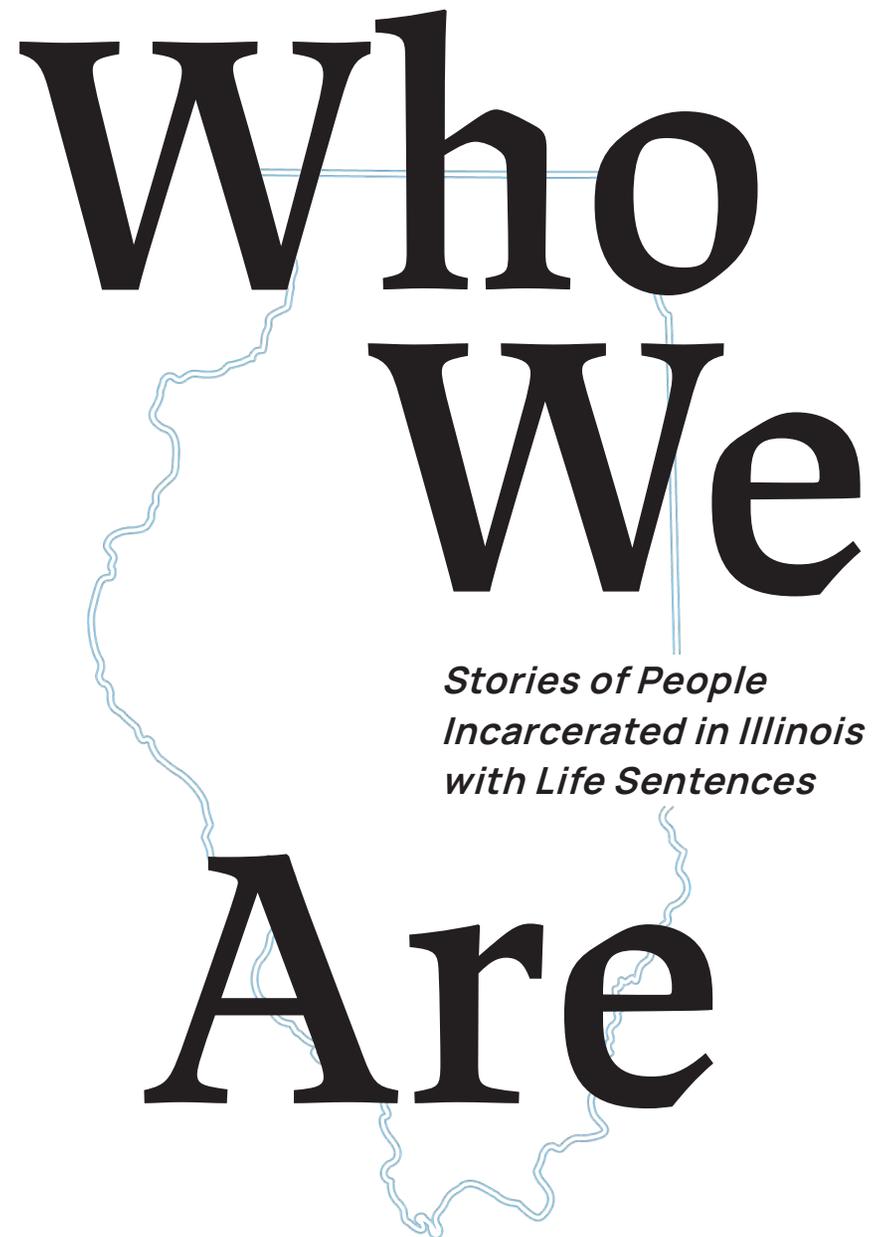
Designed by Rachel Ko.

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**You could say, yes, he did that. But just don't say that's
who I am, that's what I'm always gonna be.**

Tuyen Ngo

Preface

Shari Stone-Mediatore

Our state has taken the lives of thousands of people and doesn't even know who they are. We know that two-thirds of these people are Black people. We know, too, that a majority of them were under 25 years old when they were ordered to spend the remainder of their lives behind bars.¹ However, after sentencing these people to life-without-parole and de facto life sentences,² Illinois has no process for considering who these people are as they grow, change, and endeavor to lead human lives, behind exit doors that have been shut behind them.

When Illinois introduced life-without-parole sentences 4 decades ago, legislators made clear that such extreme punishment was intended for rare and exceptional cases. But today, following several decades of proliferating "tough-on-crime" sentencing laws, our courts hand out life-without-parole sentences to hundreds of people yearly. Hundreds more are given sentences they are unlikely to outlive. If nothing changes, thousands of our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, children, and loved ones will be forced to spend their prime years through their last breaths in prison, with no review of whether their continued incarceration serves any purpose.

Such extreme punishment has been sold to us by tales of "monster-criminals" who must be locked up indefinitely to protect the rest of us. Fueled by fear and racism, this story has turned Illinois prisons into human warehouses that are petri dishes of disease during pandemics, cost Illinois taxpayers nearly \$1.8 billion annually, and sever thousands of people from the families and communities that need them.

1 Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM), "Time for Justice: The Urgent Need for Second Changes in Illinois' Sentencing." <https://famm.org/wp-content/uploads/IL-Second-Chances-Report.pdf>.

2 According to the Illinois Supreme Court, a sentence of more than 40 years is a de facto life sentence, as most people do not outlive such sentences.

For several decades now, studies have demonstrated that harsher sentences do not deter crime,³ long sentences harm communities,⁴ and and people reliably age out of crime, so that those who have spent many years in prison are the safest to release.⁵ And yet, despite the evidence that people with serious convictions can change, grow, and have much to offer their communities, tough-on-crime myths continue to quash conversation about pathways home for people with long sentences.

As science and stereotypes butt heads on the rationality of long sentences, the people saddled with such sentences continue to endure behind steel and cement barriers, largely hidden from public view.

How might conversations about reviewing and releasing people with life sentences change, if those of us outside of prison knew more about the actual individuals who have been sentenced to lifetime confinement? How might our imaginations about justice unfold, if we were to engage the stories of some of these individuals years after they were sentenced? This booklet invites readers to do just that. The individuals whose stories are featured here are remarkable individuals but they are not unique. They are a mere sampling of the thousands of people whom the state of Illinois has incarcerated year after year, decade after decade, with no process for hearing their stories.

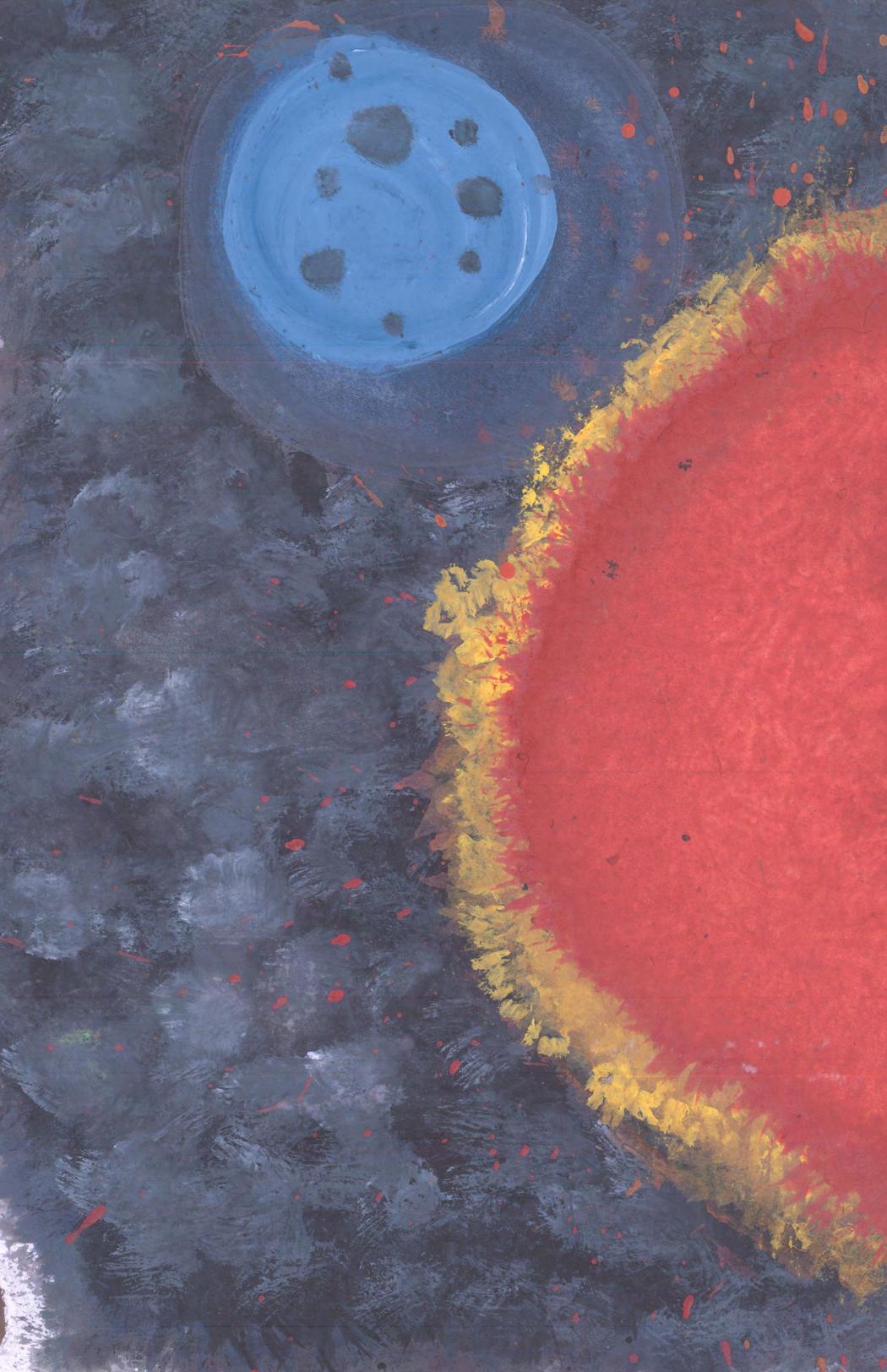
Prison walls divide us and crime categories compartmentalize us, but life stories remind us that we share common strivings; strivings to find our bearings, capture a few moments of joy, and give meaning to our lives in a world that is often painful, unpredictable, and makes being human difficult. Unlike those of us in free society, the people featured here pursue these endeavors stripped of jobs, clothes, hobbies, houses--all of the props by which many of us define ourselves. Even their names have been replaced with prison identification numbers and bureaucratic labels. Despite attempts to pare and pin them down, however, they continue to grow and express themselves.

Reading their stories, we might find that our labels are less solid than we thought. We might find that people who have been deemed disposable by our legal system and dispossessed of all human comforts can teach us a lot about the human spirit. We might find that their efforts to gain dignity, community, and purpose under the most challenging conditions can remind us of what is truly important in life. We might be inspired to think about justice in ways that do not divide us and deny change but help us connect with each other and realize our best selves.

3 Jamie Santa Cruz, "Rethinking Prison as a Deterrent to Future Crime," *JSTOR Daily* (July 18, 2022) <https://daily.jstor.org/rethinking-prison-as-a-deterrent-to-future-crime/>; and William Kelly, "Why Punishment Doesn't Deter Crime," *Psychology Today* (Apr 25, 2018) <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/crime-and-punishment/201804/why-punishment-doesnt-reduce-crime>.

4 The Vera Institute, "The Prison Paradox: More Incarceration will not Make Us Safer." <https://www.vera.org/publications/for-the-record-prison-paradox-incarceration-not-safer>

5 Amy Fetting and Stephen Zeidman, "People Age Out of Crime. Prison Sentences Should Reflect That," *Time* (Sept 9, 2022) <https://time.com/6211619/long-prison-sentences-youthful-offenders/>.



David Wales ¹⁰

Tuyen Ngo ¹²

Miguel Morales ¹⁴

Paulette Fieldler ¹⁸

Howard Keller ²⁰

Joseph Dole ²²

Erika Ray ²⁶

Ronald Young ²⁸

Keith Cook ³⁰

Valdez Jordan ³²

Devon Terrell ³⁴

Janet Jackson ³⁸



David Wales

I'm a big, tall 6 foot 3 man, but I will watch chick flicks back to back. I like the romantic comedies. Tumultuous stuff goes on and then somehow, with the weirdest circumstances, they find their way back together and live happily ever after. Generally in life, you always sort of root for the person to be happy and successful.

I was in county jail before I came to prison. They moved this guy into the cell, this really short dude, kind of quiet, he didn't want nobody to know that he couldn't read. I found out, and then I helped him learn a little bit. Then they shipped me off to prison and, about a year or so later, I ran into him there. When he seen me, he ran up to me and was like, "hey Dave, what's going on, I'm gonna give you my mom's number so you can keep in touch with her and keep in touch with me." And ever since then, him and I have been friends.

I've been here for almost 24 years. I got like my GED and my Barber's license here. I'm in college right now, Northeastern. I'm a peer educator and a civic educator down here. I want one day to be a behavior development counselor.

It's almost like personal confidence. If you don't have personal confidence about yourself, you walk around like you don't think you're worth it. Your head's down, your energy translates to all these other bad things, and your life is just miserable.

That translates culturally. A lot of genders and ethnicities always

want to dig into their heritage and know their contribution. This sense of contribution is important for hundreds of years. I'm writing a paper about how you can see the difference when people have a sense of contribution and a sense of belonging.

When I was about 10 or 11, my uncle was diagnosed with severe schizophrenia. I was a little boy, so I really didn't understand what was going on. Things weren't working right, so my grandmother like put him out. I used to have to see him in the street all the time suffering with mental illness. Like being outside playing with my friends or coming home from school and seeing him.

I snuck him into my mom's house to shower, bought him stuff with the little change that I had. I walked with him and talked with him. I did that from the age of about 10 all the way up until when I was incarcerated.

I didn't know whether he understood what I was saying. I never understood what he was saying. He was always incoherent. Then after about 10 years, him and I were at my grandmother's house, and one moment, he turned to me, and he told me, "thank you, David." Like out of the 10 years that he never even spoke a coherent word, he managed to say that to me.

It just showed me, you know, when you show some attention and care, that just goes a very long way. Sometimes you just need to stand there and let somebody else know that you're present. You just need to stand there by them. ✨

“ I'm writing a paper about how you can see the difference when people have a sense of contribution and a sense of belonging. ”

Tuyen Ngo

I really messed up the better part of my life, hanging out with the wrong group. I got home invasion and aggravated kidnapping. And they gave me, I think, 75 years at 85%.

They didn't like the fact that I took it to trial. They first told me I had to do 21 years at 50%. And when I went to trial, it went from 21 years at 50% to 75 years at 85%.

And, you know, the law doesn't look at you as an individual. It looks at this brush that's been painted on you, as if everyone who commits a crime is evil and vile and they're all the same.

My kids are my world. When I was convicted my son was 9 and my daughter was 2 years old. And now my son goes to University of Wisconsin, over there for business, which he got scholarships to. Then I got my daughter that goes to UIC. She's pre-med. And my little one, she's high school honor roll. She loves reading.

And I just miss out you know. My daughter had her first heartbreak and I couldn't be there.

When I had my kids, I was really young. I didn't really pay attention at times and it went by me. Mistake after mistake after mistake, really. But I really don't deserve those 75 years at 85 percent, you know? There's no daylight.

I'm scared that I'm gonna die in prison and that I can't bury my mom. She was diagnosed with breast cancer last spring. One thing that I really am disappointed in is that I can't take care of my kids and I can't repay my mom for

what I put her through.

Before I was quick tempered and just quick to act on certain stuff. And jail, it has humbled me and a lot of the guys in here, you know?

I was a horrible father back then. You know, I thought I could buy stuff for the kids and that'd be good. And now they tell me, "Yeah, we had everything, but you was a bad dad." And that kills me.

My growth, really, is to know who I am and what I'm capable of. That I don't have to feel violent, that I just have to talk it out. That's what I've been teaching my kids too.

My son told me, "I love you more now. I listen to you, you even give me good advice. You don't get mad."

I understand why I'm here. But you haven't never checked on me.

You could be mad at me and you could say, yes, he did that. But just don't say that's who I am, that's what I'm always gonna be.

I learned from my mistake that everybody needs a helping hand. I would give everything if I could go out there and go to work and make some money. I could help the next guy, you know, and I'd love that. ✨

Miguel Morales

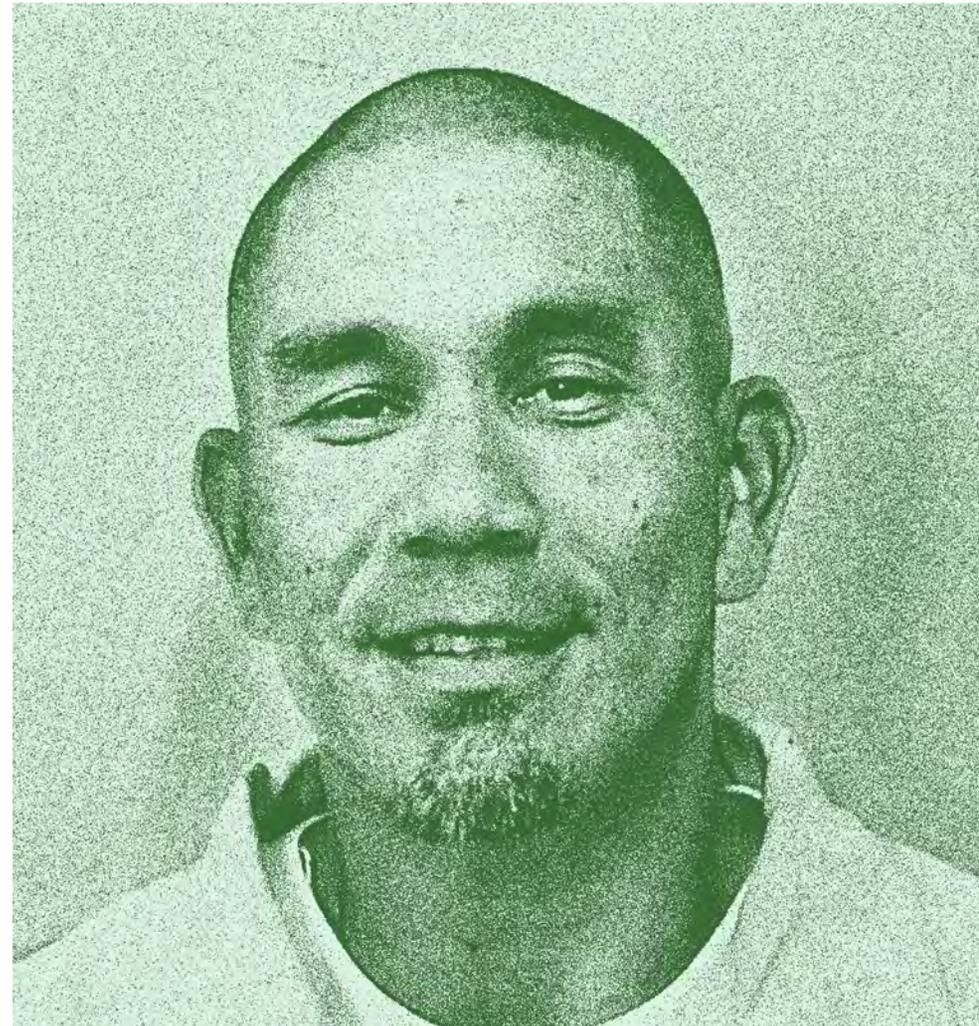
Since I've been incarcerated, 2 huge accomplishments stick out to me. The first is the discovery of my ability to paint. In 2014, a friend lent me some oil paints to try my hand at painting.

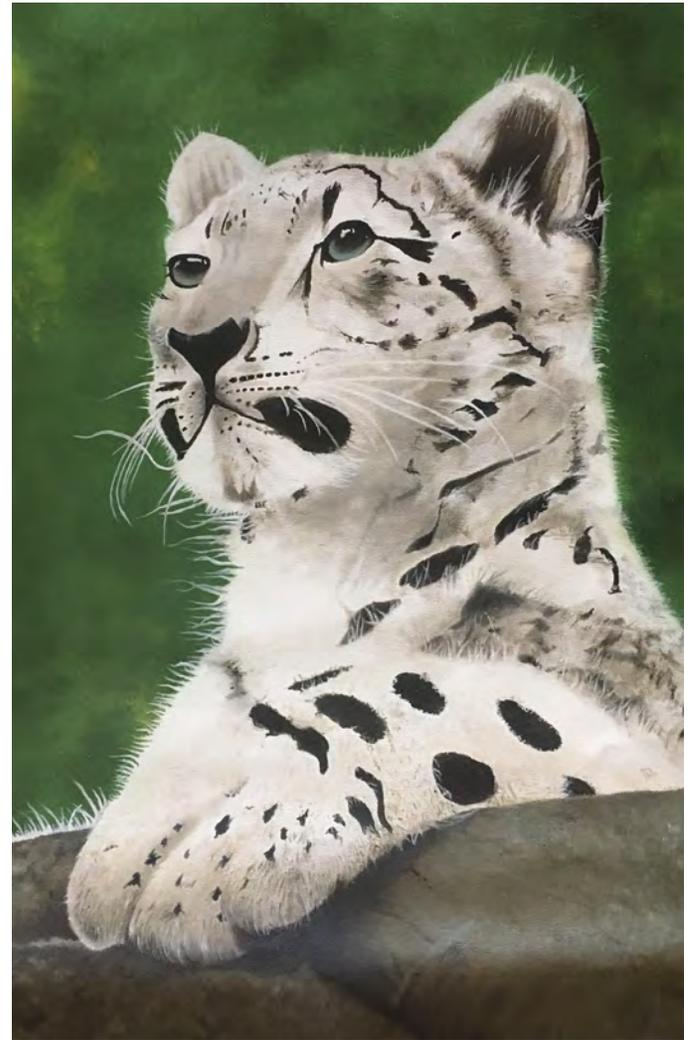
“When I discovered what I could do, I never looked back.”

With almost 10 years of self-taught painting under my belt, I now paint everything from animals, landscapes, pop culture pieces, portraits. I've painted newly weds, a man proposing on bended knee, a new born baby, families together, moms, grandmoms, kids, comics. At this point, I'll try just about anything to see what I can do.

The other huge accomplishment is my recent acceptance into Northeastern Illinois University, a college program that's offered here at Stateville Correctional Center. Now I'll be attending college for the first time in my life, come this fall semester.

I have a lot to prove to myself and hope to make my family proud of how far I've come. I'm up for this challenge and look forward to the education and the whole learning experience. ✨





Paulette Fieldler



“ ...it’s been a long haul here in prison, and I would very much like the opportunity to be a useful citizen. ”

I’m 59 years old, and I enjoy reading and watching basketball. I like the Golden State Warriors.

And I really like cats. They’re so beautiful, intelligent and playful. I had 2 cats at home, Samantha and Georgie, and they were the love of my life. They’d greet me when I come home.

If I ever get released, I would like to work at an animal shelter. I think there’s a lot of unwanted cats, and they should have humans to care about them and treat them good.

I’ve been incarcerated 31 years, and I have a life sentence. I have arthritis in both my knees and I’m confined to a wheelchair. They have refused to operate on me to let me walk again. I dream about having surgery and being able to walk again.

Before I got incarcerated, I worked in human services. It’s important to me to help people make their lives better. I know that sounds hard to believe just from my crime. But I was investigating child abuse and neglect cases for DCFS, and I became mentally ill, and I didn’t get the right kind of help that I needed. I did not ask to be mentally ill. It’s in my family. I have an uncle who’s a paranoid schizophrenic, and so am I. But I’m at the point where I’m probably not going to live much longer, and I still want to be able to do something to help people.

I always loved children. When I was in college, I took child development classes and I did whatever I could to better myself so that I could help families. I know I dropped the ball, because I was not a helper anymore, and I am so sorry about that. I guess I just feel like it’s been a long haul here in prison, and I would very much like the opportunity to be a useful citizen.

I had a daughter and she was my life. She was premature when she was born, and she was only 1 pound 10 ounces. Her heart was not good and her lungs weren’t developed. She cried a lot because they had the feeders through a tube down into her stomach because she wasn’t strong enough to suck on a bottle. I lost her when she was 5 months

I used to rock her and sing to her, and she just loved it. She would get so quiet and keep looking at me. Those were some of the happiest and saddest times. It was bittersweet. ✨

Howard Keller

“ You’re going to get to a point where you’re going to need somebody to care for you. And you still want to feel like you are part of humanity, right?”

Before I went to barber school, I was a teacher’s aide. A lot of guys in here didn’t finish school, so I found joy helping guys learn how to read and write. And then one day they told me, “you’re no longer a teacher’s aide, you’re going to the barber program.”

And I was like, “yo, I don’t want to cut hair. Cutting hair is only about vanity. As a GED tutor, I will actually change people’s lives.” They said, “well, you’ve been accepted to barber school. Would you mind being open to that?”

The very first time I went into the health-care unit to cut hair, I saw a guy who became one of my first clients as a barber student. I told him, “hey, look, man, I’m just learning how to cut hair. I don’t know what I’m

doing. But I promise you, if I get good, I’ll remember you for giving me this chance.” He said, “no problem, it’s just hair.”

Fast forward several months, I go into the room and he’s in bed. So I say, “hey, man what’s up,” and he don’t respond. The nurse tells me that he had a stroke and he’s bedridden, so I should just cut his hair, and I don’t have to say anything to him. And he’s trying to not look me in the eye, right? And I realized at that moment that he’s embarrassed to be seen in this way.

So I said, “hey look I’m going to take care of you, cut your hair up real nice, a nice shave.” And I don’t know how appropriate this is as far as the story goes, but as I was shaving, he



kind of vomited. And I said, “don’t worry about it.” I wiped it off his face. He defecated on himself, too. I know he’s super embarrassed. So I calmly signaled for the nurse to come, who helped clean him up. And then I went right back into cutting his hair.

I told him, “man, listen. No matter what you see right now, I don’t see an incapable person.” I said, “if you can hear me, man, just know that I remember when you gave me a chance when I was learning to cut hair. Every time I come back here, I will be your barber.”

And so from that point forward, I made sure that when I go back to the health-care unit to cut hair, I seek out the individuals who we tend to overlook. And you know, the haircuts

are not the most enjoyable because sometimes many things happen. We can just do the best we can to maintain our health, and sometimes things happen, right?

We all expect to live long and full lives. And the reality is that the older we get, the likelier it is that we will experience some kind of health decline. You’re going to get to a point where you’re going to need somebody to care for you. And you still want to feel like you are part of humanity, right?

So when I go to cut their hair, I do it with joy. I cut their hair and put that mirror in front of them. They see a nice haircut, and even though they might not be able to move, they smile. ✨

I'm a writer, artist, and activist, and constantly doing legal work, which I hate.

I never used to like to write. In high school, they'd be like here, read this book and write a report, and I'd hardly ever do it. I was ADD, I think, and so I never really used to read much.

When I got incarcerated, I had to force myself to learn how to articulate myself through writing just to file grievances and work on my case. And in TAMMS [supermax prison], there was no phone calls. So the only way you can even communicate with your family and friends is if you can write well.

People say, "oh, he got incarcerated for murder, he's a murderer." But when you label people like that, you're ignoring who they were as kids, you're ignoring the trauma they might have went through, the violence they might have went through, a million factors from the denial of an adequate education to mental health issues. And after they get incarcerated and fight to overcome all the hindrances people in prison face to try to rehabilitate themselves, when they do still rehabilitate themselves, you ignore that aspect of it too.

To me, people are not the crime they committed. At one point, they may have aided and abetted killing someone or they may have killed someone. But that doesn't mean that that defines who that person is 10 years later.

In here, just to be human to each other, we have to break a ton of rules. It's against the rules for me to give, lend, loan, borrow or anything. So, if my neighbor's destitute and has no

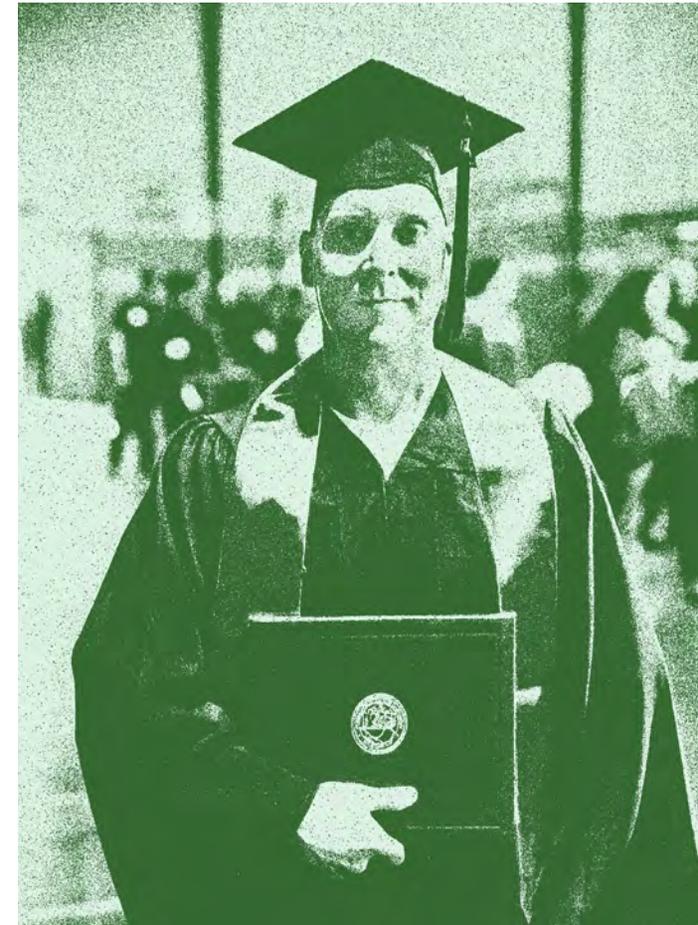
soap, I'm breaking the rule by giving him a bar of soap so he can wash. If somebody goes to the hospital and I have to use somebody else's pin number to call their family to inform them that their son was rushed to the emergency room, that's breaking rules. Those are small resistances that a lot of people do, not only to maintain individuality in the face of overwhelming oppression, but also to maintain humanity.

I remember when I was in second grade and I was going to school in Saginaw, Michigan for the advanced. I was really happy to be in that school. It was harder, but for me it was fun. And then when I came to Illinois, halfway through the school year, I went from having spelling words like automobile and transportation to words like cat, dog. So I was super bored.

I love my daughters more than anything in the world. But when my oldest daughter was born, there's a picture of us. I fell asleep with my daughter, but I moved the coffee table towards the couch and laid on the coffee table because I was so scared my daughter would roll off the couch while we were sleeping. It was never like, Oh, this is great being a father. I was terrified 24 hours a day. ✨

Joseph Dole

“ In here, just to be human to each other, we have to break a ton of rules. ”







Erika Ray

I'm a Chicago native, mother, and activist for women's rights. I'm currently a student in the Northwestern prison Education program.

I have wanted to be a poet since I was in the third grade. The first poem I heard was Maya Angelo, "Still I Rise." That poem made me feel like it's okay to be a Brown girl.

When I write, I'm always hoping to speak for the women that fought for women's rights and for young girls and women who are system-impacted.

Ntozake Shange is one of my favorite writers. Her poems have taught me that I don't have to sum up my Blackness or femininity in one poem or essay. Her writings have taught me that my Blackness and the way I love can all be acts of evolution and revolution.

Another writer who inspires me is Angela Davis. When she points out how those in positions of power deem females in prison as fallen women, with no possibility of salvation, her words have helped me better understand mine and my daughter's experience with the carceral system. She helps me understand how the courage to write and speak must be practiced everyday, if we want to see change.

I'm always encouraging my daughter to use her voice for change, whether that means with pen and paper or speaking at events.

I write because I want to leave a legacy for my grandson and daughter. My dream is to make them proud. ✨

“ When I write, I’m always hoping to speak for the women that fought for women’s rights and for young girls and women who are system-impacted.”

Ronald Young



“ I like to lose myself in books and really express myself in writing. ”

My mother and I are close. Our birthdays are 20 years and 2 days apart. We would spend our birthday week together before this case happened. For the past 20 years, every year, she has sent a birthday card to me every day for a week.

My mother is on a set income. She would make sure I could call home (back then calls was \$10.00 a call), that I had money to spend at commissary, and she came to visit me when she could.

One time I lost a lot of property in an orange crush shake down. I vented to her about the loss, and without me knowing, she sent enough money for me to buy the missing things. I later found out that she went without paying some bills and some other things. I still feel bad about that.

I have 2 kids, 27 and 28. I enjoy trying to help them from where I'm at, even though I'm limited in what I can do for them.

I like to lose myself in books and really express myself in writing. I like James Baldwin's essays because of the impact he had on the world around him. He wanted the world better for the next person, and I relate to that. Baldwin also shared about what he went through with his father. I didn't know my father growing up, and reading what Baldwin went through helps me understand what I was dealing with.

I wrote a thank you letter to Parole Illinois and Shirley wrote me back, thanking me about how I was expressing myself. We grew a friendship, and mostly every day I speak with her through email.

Running, that's another thing that helped me. When I'm running, it's like I'm not here anymore. I'm not inside these gates. ✨

Keith Cook

What brings me the most joy in here are visits with my wife. We never take for granted the time we have with each other, whether that means having a “date” with vending machine food and chatting through plexiglass, or 20 minute phone calls and “video dates.”

For some reason, guys in here are drawn to me to talk about things. They’ll mention their kids, that they’re having trouble with their teenage son, and I’ve gone through that, so I try to tell them what I have learned. I’ve also been a peer educator. I get asked questions like, how do they get into college? How do they get a job? I try to guide people in the right direction, so they don’t end up back in prison after release.

Before prison, I was irresponsible with jobs. There were times I spent unemployed. I messed up a lot of good jobs. But since I’ve been in prison, almost 25 years, I have worked pretty much the entire time. I have held a variety of positions, including hospital worker and peer mentor.

Shortly after becoming incarcerated, I went back to my Christian roots, due to the influence of my grandmother. Reading The Word daily for almost 25 years gives me strength to stand on my faith within these walls. When my surroundings tend to press in on me to think selfishly, verses and phrases come to mind that keep me grounded and on a good path.

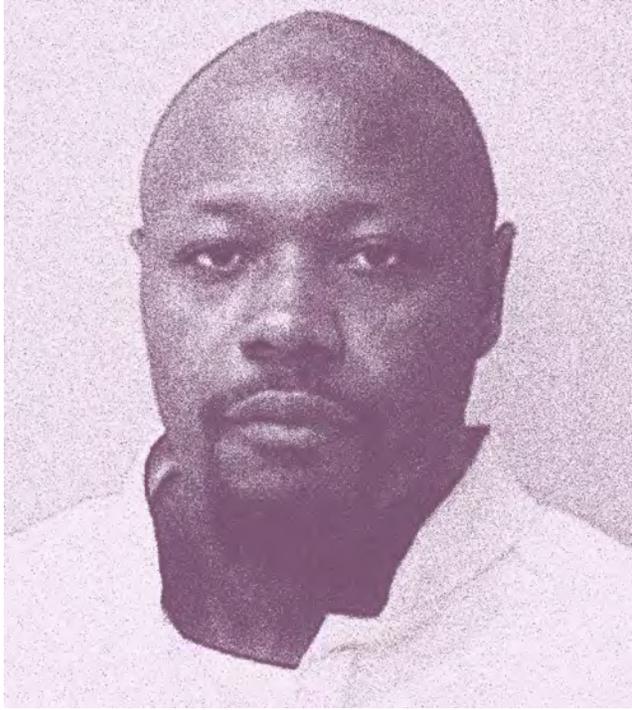
The possibility of spending the rest of my life in prison is a heavy load to carry. Having the hope that one day I might receive the blessing of being released from prison helps to lighten that load.

I am a grandfather of 6, and I would love one day to be able to take them fishing. ✨

“ I am a grandfather of 6, and I would love one day to be able to take them fishing.”



Valdez Jordan



“ I have a picture of my mom, a picture of my wife, and my brothers’ obituary, which I look at every day, and that’s how I start my day.”

Well, I’ve been locked up for 23 years now. I got locked up October 3rd, 1999 on my birthday. I went to the police department myself to clear my name, and they arrested me, and I’ve been in custody since.

I am the oldest of 4 boys and 1 sister raised by a single parent, my mom. I saw her on my birthday in 2019, for the first time in almost 5 years. That was also the last time I saw my mom before she passed. The staff member responsible for taking pictures that day didn’t do his job, and we were robbed of the opportunity to have that memory frozen in time.

In the beginning, pictures used to come all the time of my brothers, sisters, mom, cousins, and family. But I don’t have any recent pictures of them.

I got married a couple years ago to my beautiful wife, Jamie. We have 2 daughters. They’re my stepdaughters, but they mean the world to me. I try to talk to my wife at least once a day. That is the highlight of my day.

The first 15 years of my time I spent in the Menard Correctional Center. We were locked down, for the most part, 23 hours a day, 5 days a week. Two days a week, you can come out for yard for 2 ½ hours; after 10 days, you get a 10 minute shower. But it was full lockdown, probably half of the time that I was there, 7 days a week in that cell.

I developed chronic kidney disease from being warehoused inside the cell for years, not having access to exercise, not getting the proper vitamins and minerals.

There was no educational opportunities in Menard, for the most part. So I educated myself in criminal law and civil law, so I can help a lot of the people around here.

Since arriving at Lawrence in 2017, I have completed the custodial maintenance vocational program. I’ve got a certificate in hospice care. And I’ve got certified to run Inner Circle. I made the Dean’s List and President’s List at Lakeland College. I am also the creator of a peace initiative called Peace Inside/Peace Outside.

I have a picture of my mom, a picture of my wife, and my brothers’ obituary, which I look at every day, and that’s how I start my day. ✨

I'm from Chicago, born and raised on the south side. I grew up in hip hop culture. I enjoy creative writing and poetry. It allows me to express who I dream to be or who I work towards being.

And with art, it allows me to use color or allows me to use body language and eye contact. And I think all these elements are important to maintain a healthy human being for me.

On the exterior I may look like a tough guy. Sometimes the outside appearance is a shield to prevent negative impacts. But on the inside, I learned to love myself. I'm just a guy. I want to have fun, I want to laugh, I want to love, I want to build community. And I want to contribute to other people's happiness as well. I like to create beautiful things.

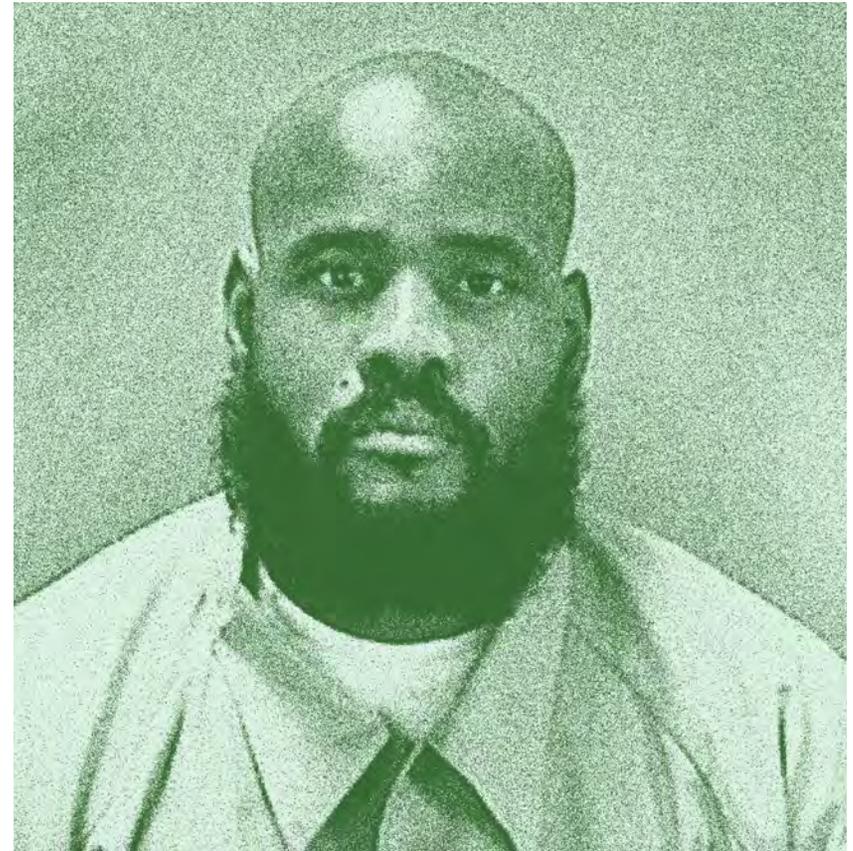
As far as being incarcerated goes, it has been a community without the environment being like communal. I have another brother that's been in Stateville, Craig B. Harvey, one of my best friends that pulled me out of a dark space when I was down. And others that just gave me what I needed at the time to help me be who I am today.

I'm fortunate because I had a supportive family. That was one thing that I had to lean on and get inspiration, to hold on to in tough times.

In Stateville, a lot of us have natural life sentences. And it's sad that so many people are just moving along through the system without hope. And the system has nothing for them to kick their light switch on. ✨

Devon Terrell

“ Sometimes the outside appearance is a shield to prevent negative impacts.
But on the inside,
I learned to love myself.”





“ If I was released this year,
I would build up my little
Social Security, and then
I would buy myself an RV
and I would travel.”

Janet Jackson

I'm 68 years old to date. I've been incarcerated 36 years this year, convicted on murder by accountability. I do my best to keep active. Since I've been incarcerated, I earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, a master's in divinity, a PhD in theology and a PhD in Christian counseling, and I'm a licensed, ordained minister. How's that?

I walk with a cane, and sometimes it's really hard for me to go out in the bad weather.

I'm on the Americans with Disabilities Act unit with a lot of older people. We're a little bit quieter than the younger ones, and I read a lot.

If I was released this year, I would build up my little Social Security, and then I would buy myself an RV and I would travel.

Tomorrow's commissary day. You've got 160 women that want to shop, first come first serve. I am not going to chow [lunch] because chow is absolutely nasty, but I am going to dinner because dinner is spaghetti without meat, which means there will be no soy in my spaghetti, which makes me really happy.

My mother was determined that I would either be a writer or a lawyer, which is kind of a bit of a giggle because I am a writer, and I do have my paralegal and I act as a lawyer here for other women. My grandfather, he wanted me to be a minister. So I fulfilled his end of it too.

What I really wanted as a child, I wanted to sing, and that's never going to happen. I cannot sing at all.

My best friend and I wrote the postpartum bill. It allows postpartum depression or psychosis to be used as a mitigating factor in sentencing. My friend Bill got the bill passed. If I could get out this year, Bill could take me around and show me the ropes. That's one of my little goals.

And this is from somebody who has a life-without-parole sentence, so I'm really fantasizing here. But hey, what else is life? You know, you've gotta have hopes, right? ✨



To date, nearly 5,000 individuals are in Illinois prisons with life-without-parole and de facto life sentences. Unlike most other states, Illinois currently has no regular mechanism to review these people for release.

Glossary

ACCOUNTABILITY	A theory of sentencing by which a court holds fully accountable for a crime a person who was only indirectly involved in the crime; for instance, someone who lent a car that was used in a crime, someone who served as the look-out person, or someone who knew about the crime but did not inform authorities. When a court sentences someone according to this theory, the person who was indirectly involved is sentenced as if they were the main agent. Illinois courts regularly convict people for murder under this theory without any designation in their record that their conviction was under the theory of accountability.
CHOW	A meal provided by the state.
COMMISSARY	A prison store where people who are incarcerated can purchase a limited number of food items, sanitary items, and basic supplies.
DE FACTO LIFE SENTENCE	The Illinois Supreme Court has said that any sentence of more than 40 years is a de facto life sentence. Studies estimate that every year spent in prison shortens a person's life expectancy by 2 years, so that few people survive a sentence of more than 40 years.
LOCKDOWN	When prison programs, visits, showers, yard, and other activities are canceled and all residents remain locked in their cells. Lockdown can occur with various levels of restrictions.
ORANGE CRUSH	This is the informal name for militarized tactical teams that periodically execute mass shake downs in Illinois prisons. They wear body armor, riot helmets, and weighted knuckle gloves; often carry large clubs, shields, and canisters of pepper spray; and often yell threatening and dehumanizing commands and hit their batons on the bars as they run through the prison. A recent lawsuit charges the teams with appalling sexual and physical abuse of people in prison.
SHAKE DOWN	When guards enter a cell to search for illegal items. The process can involve the guards tearing apart, throwing around, and destroying personal property in the cell.
SUPERMAX	A maximum security prison designed for the long-term physical and social isolation of its residents. Residents are regularly confined to solitary cells 23 to 24 hours a day, are handcuffed and shackled whenever they leave the cells, have no access to programs, and have no physical contact with other human beings (other than guards when they are being shackled and searched).
YARD	An outdoor space on the prison grounds where people in prison are able to exercise. The time for exercise is also called "yard".

Joseph Dole's painting, "A Room with a View," was created for a Prison + Neighborhood Arts /Education Project (PNAP) class taught by Cean Gamalinda and Fred Sasaki.

Devon Terrell's artwork was created for a Prison + Neighborhood Arts/ Education Project (PNAP) class taught by Sarah Ross, Annam Martine Whitehead, Damon Locks, and Aaron Hughes.

P. 16, 17 Artwork by Miguel Morales

P. 24, 25 Artwork by Joseph Dole

P. 8, 36, 37, 40 Artwork by Devon Terrell

For more glimpses into the lives of people with long sentences, please view the artwork and words on the Art Galleries page of ParoleIllinois.org, created by Emily Bruell for Parole Illinois.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are immensely grateful to the individuals who so graciously and honestly shared their stories with us. We also want to thank the family members and loved ones who facilitated our communication with these individuals and helped to make the prison walls a little more penetrable.

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**Envisioning
Justice**



Parole Illinois is an organization of people inside and outside of prison working to transform our state's excessively punitive criminal-legal system. We pursue this work by bringing the voices of currently incarcerated people into prison-policy discussions, training people impacted by the system to share their stories and lead mobilization efforts, and educating the public and policymakers about the need for a justice system that focuses more on healing and the healthy return of currently incarcerated people to their communities.

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