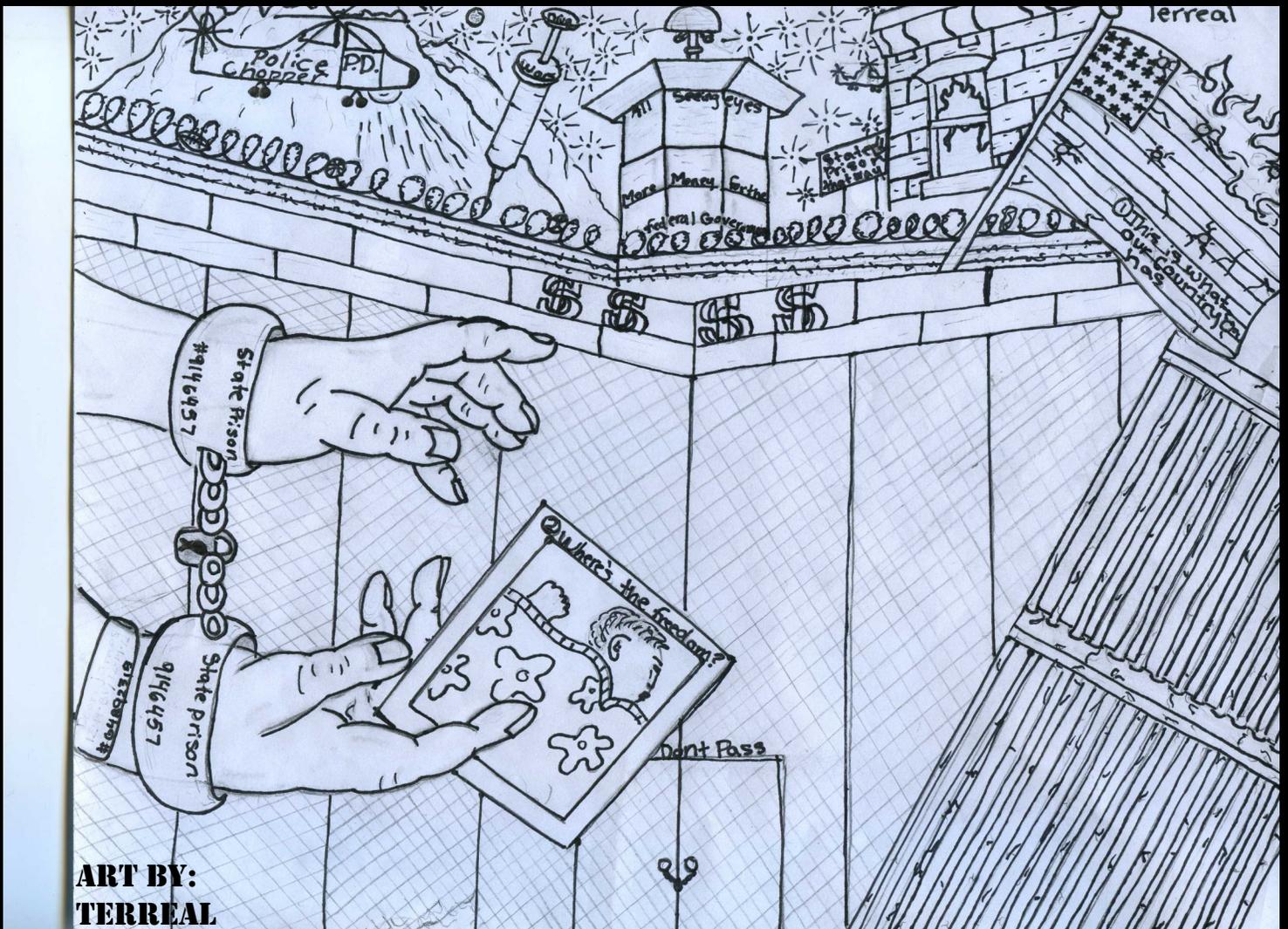


# OUR VOICES WILL BE HEARD



ART BY:  
TERREAL

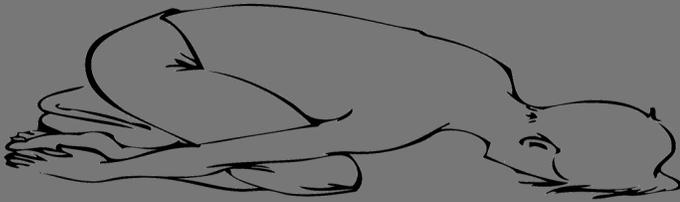
# COMING OF AGE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

# CHILDHOOD

## Growing Up

There's a 5 year old inside of me  
A 5 year old who just wants to have fun  
A 5 year old who is so innocent  
Who doesn't know that on his worst day  
That life goes on  
5 years old wishing he was a man  
Deeply distraught when he succeeds at his plan  
Because now he's a man  
On his worst day life goes on  
I am a man because I am entitled to responsibility  
Or am a man because I take care of them  
Now I want my childhood so much  
'Cause even though it's vivid  
It was normal for me or somewhat  
Life is like Russian Roulette  
Because you always try your luck  
And life goes on when most find out  
They just sit there stuck  
Life goes on.

**ANTHONY**



My neighborhood was safe but it certainly wasn't peaceful.  
Not peaceful in sense that we'd like: community and  
Life in its least fearful, no guns but the ones locked in chests.  
It is true that Santa Clarita is "Where the Good Life Takes You,"  
As it reads on the back of city buses, but also where it leaves you  
behind.  
Parks and clean sidewalks, no tags—besides chalk—and a chain  
Restaurant—Subway, Arby's you name it. And in the quiet  
Desperation, in land where nothing ever goes wrong, my orthodontist  
Drives his in-laws home and shoots them in the driveway.  
There is every peace besides peace of mind,  
and he sunkenly adds himself  
To the body count. And the sprinklers ran, as usual.

**-Joe**

I remember moving into my room  
with the south facing window  
from which I watched the rain pour down.  
I would fill my room with tacky art and read Harry Potter  
my back against the wall with a tapestry in front of me.  
My mom would walk me to school.  
Afterwards I would go to Tristan's house  
building with k'nex and fighting with foam swords.  
In the summer we would drive  
through Aberdeen to the coast,  
the sweet scent of lumber mills in the air.  
I remember once we walked along the beach  
all the way to the big black rock.  
It loomed a hundred yards from the shore  
motionless starfish clinging to it as if they were colorful  
and oddly shaped hunks of stone.  
I always felt content to gaze out at the open water,  
as I felt content to watch the rain pour down  
on the suicide capital  
and wonder why the rain could make me feel  
so full of life  
and yet so unfulfilled.

**Ben**

## That's My Story

I was five years old  
when the streets turned me cold.  
Had no dad so I learned from the hood.  
Even through all the pain I kept a good mood.  
Inside I felt like I died cause  
I went through a lot of sorrow.  
I kept people at a distance and prayed so that  
I could see tomorrow.  
All hell broke loose when my  
grandparents passed.  
I started drinking and flocking  
to make a dollar.  
My childhood taught me how to earn money,  
make drugs, and how to survive.  
To trust no one cause everybody  
almost is fake.  
To never beg or bum for nothing just take.  
It made me who I am today and that is why  
I'm glad to make it to 18.

**Gregory**

**Gregory**

## My Childhood

To whom much is given much is expected,  
Both parents at home never neglected  
Played with kids who were never my color,  
My pops wasn't either  
The looks we wouldn't get, I didn't understand them till now,  
To people it must have looked like follow the leader  
But it was much easier,  
A white dad trying to raise a black son in a white world  
Didn't have everything I wanted, always what I needed,  
I remember one time I got spanked for breaking a pencil  
The belt taught me how to think before I act,  
The bar of soap taught me to think before I speak ,  
And my parents taught me how to care for other people,  
Like my adopted sister Tanisha, my adopted brother Jerad,  
And anyone else that needs it.

**Kizz**

**My childhood taught me  
how to survive in the streets.  
My childhood taught me  
to never bow down to anyone's feet.  
My childhood taught me  
that I have many ways,  
some good some bad  
but I take it day by day.  
My childhood taught me  
to never give up.  
My childhood taught me  
to have no emotion,  
follow my dreams,  
and drink all my enemies like potion.  
My childhood taught me that the  
world is going to go around  
if I am dead or alive.  
So me being a black male I have to  
try my hardest to survive.  
My childhood taught me quitters  
never win and winners never quit.  
My childhood taught me my biggest  
fear is not to succeed.**

Growing up I had a sense of intuition  
But influences showed me a lack of fruition  
My spirits have been broken continuously  
And these demos stood by me conspicuously  
My sense of morals are more than tainted  
If beautiful angels were alive they might have fainted  
When I am old and full of wisdom  
I'll see what road I could of chosen  
and who I might be.

**DYLAN**

**TERREAL**

## My Hood

Big houses, good views, green lawns.  
The families in my hood consist of  
business men,  
house wives all blond  
Little kids riding bikes,  
families walk golden retrievers  
My hood was as suburban  
as Leave It to Beaver.  
Kids carpool in their neighborhoods'  
BMW  
Always safe behind, closed gates,  
Everyone's the same  
only one race

**George**



# my childhood

There are things I learned growing up:  
I learned that the moon followed my little sister when she stared at it.  
To watch others while they played outside while I stayed inside.  
I learned to shout "Hi" to my grandma every time I saw a plane in the sky  
because I knew that she was far away.  
To not leave caged birds outside because the cats would eat them.  
I learned that Helen always remembered if you had gotten candy already.  
To play gold fish and guess who?



**Yulissa**

Inside me I am five years old  
Happy confident, believing what I'm told  
Wanting to run and sing without care  
But this 5 year old believes that the world is fair  
And the 22 year old me knows it's not true  
People live worlds apart in places I've never walked through  
Been a lot of places, seen a lot of things  
But only lived my one life as one human being  
I know the world is cold and most people don't care  
But I'm not and I do so that 5 year old is still there  
Telling me that people are good and innocence still exists  
But I question that every day and my doubt still persists.

**Stephanie**

# growing up

I am from Los Angeles California.  
From that part of town were people run up on you.  
I am from that rich rolling' or get your life stolen.  
From that Nightmare on Elm Street,  
They taught me respect  
but I want to live a life as a G.  
Love these streets, and call myself a YG  
But in reality all I want to do is  
succeed.

**Morris**

*I am from Duarte California  
From a place where it no peace  
I am from a place where people  
die over hand signals  
From a place where  
you cannot sleep  
I am from the baddest  
part of town  
My childhood taught me  
how to survive  
My childhood made me tough  
and not afraid to die.*

**DIANTE**

**Little Big**  
growing up taught me  
to escape,  
to love when not shown love.  
horses taught me  
to trust myself,  
to let go, to stop internalizing  
what people think of me,  
to revel in the silence,  
to laugh in moments of anger,  
to close my eyes and jump,  
to roll when you fall and get up.  
to forgive

I am superwoman  
I live in a world that is more real than  
this place  
I dominate, I submit, I create  
and destroy. I rip up trees by their roots  
and build bridges

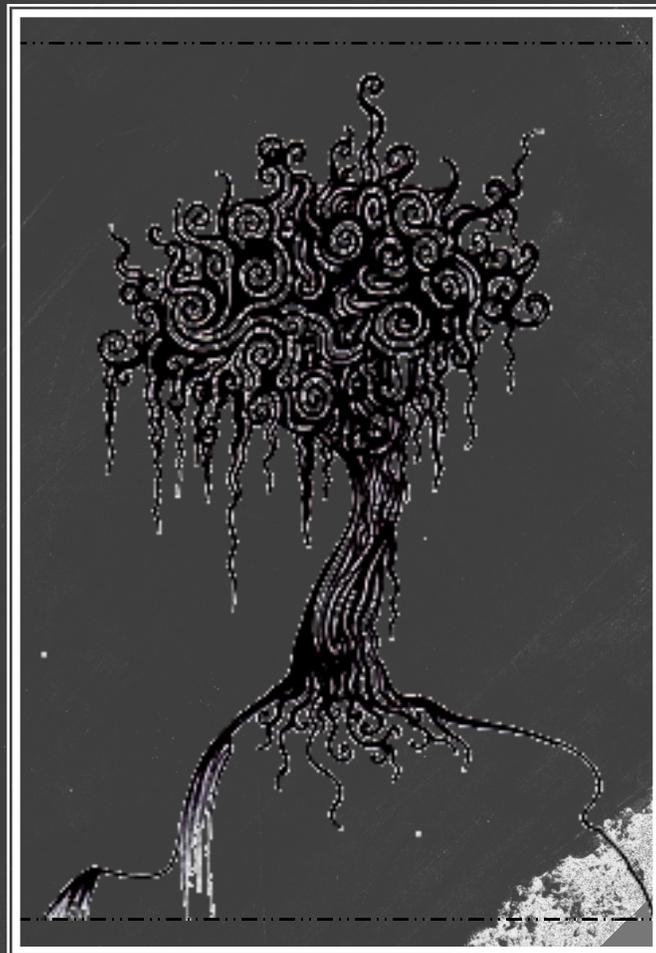
**-Laura**

## Anger

He's angry. Angry that his father left him at 2. Angry that his mother's too doped up to ever recognize him. Yet he keeps selling drugs. Angry that he's poor. Angry that he's been locked up 3 times and he's only 20. Angry that cops pull him over and arrest him even if he ain't doing nothing.

He's got a lot of anger and he has to do something with it. So what does he do? He takes it out on the one person who loves him heart and soul. Me. Because he can. Because I am the easy target. Because I am innocent. So he beats me and beats me until one day he throws me down a flight of stairs. My wrist broken all I can do is lay there in a pool of blood, blood that used to be our baby. And then he's angry at me too.

**Fallon**



## Life as a Child

### Where I Grew Up

A dog barks, the sound carries  
adamant to be heard. The sun's gleam  
casts brilliant shades of unforeseen colors among  
the beds of flowers, perfectly maintained by  
the underpaid gardener.

-Chris

I am from a nice and loving family  
From a family that would always  
be there through thick and thin  
I am from the city of hate  
From the city of palm trees  
From a city that never sleeps  
I am from a troubled childhood  
My childhood taught me how to  
survive in the streets of south east  
My childhood made me a G.

Jacob

## What I Learned Growing Up...

I learned proper manners with a British accent,  
That mistakes are lessons  
And not accidents  
I learned how to hula, surf, and eat raw fish  
And if I saw a shooting star to make a wish  
I learned how to steal,  
From friends who would deal  
And that if food stamps didn't come,  
Not to expect a meal  
I learned how to keep my chin up  
But, my eyes down  
To always show others a smile  
And never a frown  
I learned how to love from grandparents who raised me  
And to never let the little things in life  
Faze me  
I learned to fight for my rights and all that I believe in  
And that people come and go,  
Because life changes like the seasons

Sophia

# Childhood

I am from Watts Los Angeles.  
But really it is like a pit for dogs fighting over territory.  
I renamed my city, "city of death and hurt"  
because everybody around close or not close is affected.  
I am a gorgeous young citizen who loves and yearns to live and travel,  
meet new people and explore history and civilizations  
I am a down to earth kind of guy.  
My childhood has been a big misguided past of shame and disgrace  
that will only be known to me and my future love.  
My childhood has also been a big learning process for me  
because I learned a lot about the real world and the communities.  
I learned a lot about women and babies.  
My hood has been a negative influence but  
I am willing to make a positive out of it with

NICK

THIS IS ME  
THIS IS MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY A PART OF ME WANTS TO GIVE UP  
BUT I CANT GO BACK TO MY OLD WAYS  
NO NO ITS TIME FOR SUCCESS LETS ROLL ROLL.

MY MOM ABANDON ME WHEN I WAS A THE AGE OF EIGHT  
CPS CAME AROUND  
JUST TO SAVE THE DAY  
I WAS LOOKING FOR SUPPORT BUT WHAT CAN I SAY  
SHE HIT THE PCP AND LEFT ME HANGING ANYWAY  
I NEVER THOUGH THAT I WAS GONE STAND STRONG AND SAY THAT I FORGIVE MY MOM  
BUT A BLESSIN I GET EVERY DAY  
I'M DRIVEN ON THE ROAD  
LOOKING FOR A BETTER PLACE  
MY MINDS DRAWN A BLANK LIKE IM IN THE OUTER SPACE  
I STILL YEARN FOR HER LOVE  
AND I CAN'T WAIT  
TILL I SEE HER  
I FEEL I REALLY NEED HER  
I'LL GIVE HER A BIG HUG  
AND I'LL NEVA WANT TO LEAVE HER

THIS IS ME  
THIS IS MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY A PART OF ME WANTS TO GIVE UP BUT I  
CANT GO BACK TO MY OLD WAYS  
NO NO ITS TIME FOR SUCCESS LETS ROLL ROLL.

(VERSE2)

LET'S ROLL LIKE WE ON OUR WAY TO THE STORE  
CAUSE SUCCESS IS BANGIN' ON OUR DOOR  
MY MOTHER WAS ALWAYS LOOKIN'  
FOR DRUGS AND JUST ASKING FOR MORE  
SO I GUESS THAT THE REST IS JUST A BLESSIN'  
THAT I DIDN'T DIE IN THE WOMB  
BUT SORROW STILL FILLS MY EMPTY HEART  
EVEN IN A LARGE CROWDED ROOM  
MY EXPRESSION TURNS TO DEPRESSION  
AND THEN MY MOOD GOES GLOOM  
BUT I LET THE DISRESPECT LINGER  
LIKE ONES HATRED FOR A STUPID COUNTRY SINGER  
AND I NEVER EXPECTED HER TO LISTEN

I JUST WANTED HER TO LOVE ME  
BUT MY REALITY HAD TO SET IN  
AND YEA I GO AROUND  
SO WHEN THEY ASK ME WHO I AM  
THIS HOW IT GOES DOWN

THIS IS MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY A  
PART OF ME WANTS TO GIVE UP BUT  
I CAN'T GO BACK TO MY OLD WAYS  
NO NO ITS TIME FOR SUCCESS LETS  
ROLL ROLL..

Cypher

**I am from a city with no pity  
And unforgotten memories  
From a family of five who have no worries?  
Of me being in the streets  
I am from the streets that made me seek  
knowledge  
From guns to drugs that made life seem fun  
But in reality I was too young to understand  
what life was all about,  
From gangsters and thieves  
I learned how to survive and roam the streets I  
call home  
I am from a mother who tried to provide the  
life she never had  
Which was miserable, a struggle and heart-  
breaking  
My childhood taught me how to be a man with  
pride and become anything I want  
My streets made me lead through the streets  
and become so elite  
My streets made me who I am today**

**-ERICK**

## **My Childhood**

My life was good even though  
I grew up in the hood.

I was a bad little kid running around the  
neck of the woods

Never did nothing in front of my momma  
cause you know it's wrong  
when she say "I wish you would"

Thinking in the back of my head  
I wish I could

I know she did it for my best interest

But I was so hard headed and  
I still didn't listen

I was running a muck turning it up

Start smoking bud and kept rolling it up

Started robbing houses and  
getting locked up

Got back to the streets and  
the dice I was shaken them up

Drive by s sometimes happened  
so you better run or duck

I kept my hand on the clutch

Taught to never snitch by the fam or  
you gone get ....beat up

I learned the codes of the streets  
kept it in my heart beat

Because that's the only reason  
why the enemies couldn't kill me

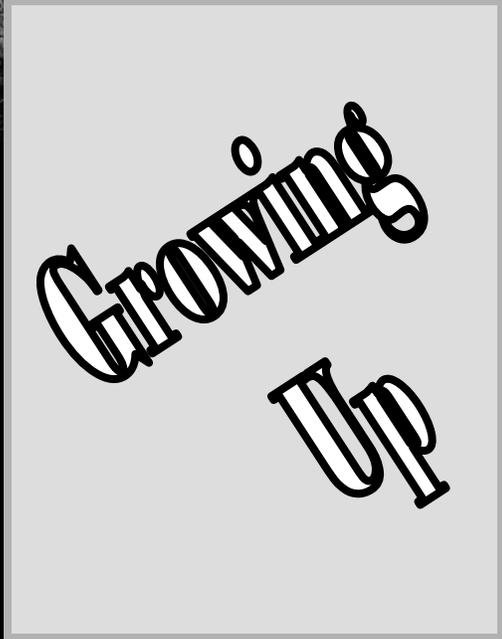
Really never had a childhood because  
it's hard if you living like me

You had to be hard and  
In these wild streets

I became a beast.



**DONTANE**



## Growing Up

My childhood neighborhood was the best!  
 I don't care what others say.  
 It feels me up with pride to say, "I'm from Pomona, and I will never be ashamed."  
 People would tell me I'm from the ghetto:  
 Place where the addicts and gangbangers reside  
 I always got so angry when peopled used to say,  
 "You'll turn out just like them, you just wait and see."

Well I didn't turn out a failure  
 I succeeded. I did all that they never thought I would do.  
 I grew up being ashamed of my people,  
 Ashamed of my school  
 Ashamed of my home.

I grew up ashamed of my home,  
 It was never the perfect home you would see in Good Housekeeping  
 Hardly the American household with parents who don't speak the language  
 Children that were said to be English Learners until the age of ten  
 And parents who always told me we were not wanted in this country  
 Why not? I go to school where they tell me that America loves everyone  
 Isn't this the melting pot?  
 Place that judges me based on my character, not my heritage

Now that I am older, I'm ashamed that I was ever  
 ashamed  
 Although Pomona is not the cookie cutter town  
 It always helps me remember where I am from and where I am  
 I never take anything for granted.

The alarm on my nightstand sounds.  
 I lay on my full sized bed amidst a tangle of soft pillows and covers.  
 Another day of high school awaits.  
 Before the reality of 6 a.m. sets in,  
 I keep my eyes closed and ears open.  
 I can hear the birds chirping,  
 And the soft suburban breeze rustling the Autumn leaves.  
 I begin to envision the day ahead of me:  
 I shower and dress as my mother gets ready for work.  
 We hop in the car, behind schedule as always,  
 And we drive through the streets of suburbia.  
 Past manicured homes that appear whole on the surface.  
 I smile and wave at the blissfully ignorant housewives walking their dogs.  
 They smile back.  
 They fool me into thinking I am accepted in their world.  
 But when I go to school with their sheltered kids,  
 I see the truth.  
 When I am told "but you're not like a real black person",  
 I see the truth.  
 When I am judged by people of color  
 And misunderstood by whites,  
 I see the truth.  
 When my mother is pulled over and questioned in front of my school,  
 I see the truth.  
 They smile thinking they've fooled me,  
 But I see the truth.  
 I open my eyes, about to embark on another day in the suburbs,  
 And I see the truth.



## WHERE WE ARE FROM

I am strong winds  
cracked pavement  
humidity of summer chocking the air.  
I'm a child of the Midwest,  
of flat land and lakes,  
of white black blue  
and more polish people than Warsaw.  
Growing up  
I learned only death lasts forever.  
We lived together  
united in the absence  
of daughters, brothers  
and friends lost to the same wind that  
picked us up and taught us to walk.  
I'm a child of my environment,  
a microcosmic shadow  
detailing my future,  
showing my past,  
that I am  
and we are  
and all that has been  
touched by the wind  
is divine.  
We carry with us what we have seen,  
but we are not what you see,  
and we move with the wind.

**MARIE**

## SHAPES THE PATHS WE TAKE

I am from neighborhoods  
with identical homes,  
tidy rooms, and a garden.  
From chaos and lots of laughs.  
I am from block parties,  
walks to the creek,  
and the scent of oranges.  
From huge slopes that were once  
covered in flames.

I am from playing outside for long hours.  
My childhood taught me how  
to adapt to new environments.

**JAYNA**

### Growing Up in East San Jose

Sitting on the bright red porch looking up and down the street. Nobody's in their houses..it's too hot at 102 in July. People sitting on their porches drinking beer and tequila trying to keep cool or get drunk enough not to care. Carts of tacos roll down the street hoping someone has money for carnitas. Gang members occupy the corners flashing their flaps and what-not while looking for trouble. Young mothers take babies out for walks while other disappear into the back to either hit up or light up.

Everyone has a flag, everyone has a loyalty. They regard one another with suspicion. We're all the same but we're all different. Low riders drive slowly passed, blaring Reggeaton. People look up then away. We hear a long bang. The music stops, cars stop, chatter dies down but the babies keep crying. The sirens start and even with the heat we all go inside.

My childhood made me compassionate and outspoken.

**Fallon**

**My childhood was like a mystery  
Everything had to be a question  
Like when they tell you right from wrong  
A lot of things was going on  
I told everybody where I was from  
They start asking questions  
And then they said you are dumb  
My childhood was like no other  
I was told to do good by my mother  
But things turned out to be worse  
I was a child that always turned up on the streets  
My big homies always told me to go home  
But I live my life as a hood kid on these streets.**

**Braxton**

### **Making My Mother Proud**

When I look back on my childhood I realize that I have a lot to be thankful for. The thing that I am most thankful for though is my mother and everything that she has done for me. She changed my diapers, bathed me, clothed me, and taught me every thing I know. Instead of honoring her thought, like the queen that she is, I have turned my back on her and betrayed her trust. She has given me everything and still I want more.

Instead of making her proud, I disappointed her every chance I had. I have made her cry tears of pain and sorrow instead of tears of joy. I have given her more pain and hurt than any mother should have to bare. It has gone on far too long though and is time for change. Time for me to change, and give back to my mother everything that she has given to me. It is time for her to cry tears of joy, and be proud of her little man.

**Richard**

My school was full of bad habits  
That led into accidents  
When you walk through them big black gates  
That's when youngsters say  
lets get it crackin'  
My school was like a warzone  
that never end  
When people die they say  
they will miss them till the end  
My school is something that  
you just put on the shelf  
and leave it alone to rot in hell  
My school got worse by the day  
Because of the violence  
that everyone displayed.

**BRAXSTON**

# School Time

My school was a baby Iraq,  
fighting, guns, drugs, and gangs  
It was like a prison yard  
separated by race and also gangs.  
Everyday was something new  
either a riot here or someone getting killed  
There it was none stop.  
My school punished people by sending them off to the halls  
where you felt trapped behind the walls  
No one seemed to care  
and if you made it through with a scratch  
that was very rare.

Gregory

My mind is complacent as the bell rings  
Thinking about how school is keeping me in from doing better things  
I walk into class as uncomfortable as can be  
Because these cameras are lurking for a what teacher can't see  
Homework is due and I haven't even begun  
Why do something pointless when I can have fun?  
I ace every test but no one even knows  
The drug life and negativity is what I chose  
You know it's bad when you've detention more than class  
Because the good times are here for the moment  
But they don't last  
The only thing I go to school for these days is to socialize  
My teachers tell me I'm so smart but far from wise  
Thank God it's Friday is what I chose to live by  
Always wanted a good life but chose to be a bad guy  
Now I look back and regret that first day  
When I chose to give in and walk the wrong way

Dylan

## Is This a School? Or a Jail?

My school is like a jail,  
full of people and hell  
School is like a dog  
that will not stop barking  
School is like a jail cell  
sitting on your bunk waiting for mail.  
School is for good people  
but in the inside there all bad people  
School teachers are like cops,  
you can run but you always get caught  
School is like a war zone  
people judge you from your  
skin tone

Morris

"School"  
When you are suspended  
you are free to do what you want to do.  
At times school was frustrating but then  
helpful.

I was lost in a fog not to be found,  
surrounded by people who want me to  
fail.

I can only stand still,  
I am only a one man army,  
that can fight many wars and win  
but lose many battles

ERICK

## Like a warzone

**What Was School Like?**

**School was like a war zone.**

**Everyone fighting for attention**

**Trying to make it to the top**

**Hoping to not get detention**

**My school was like an abusive father**

**Always there to give you a push**

**At school I learned that I should keep my mouth closed**

**When the teacher said "shush."**

**My school was like a fork road.**

**You could choose the way you want to go.**

**But with no guidance, destruction is what I reaped and failure is what I sowed.**

**-Erik**

S  
C  
H  
O  
O  
L  
-  
N  
O  
T  
E  
S

## School is like

**What is school like?**

**School is like Iraq, it is always poppin'**

**School is like an opera, always boring**

**School is like fruits and vegetables,  
because its healthy**

**School is like a prescription medication  
because it gives me a high like sedation**

**School is like Jamaica because it is a vacation  
from the hood and all of its hatred**

**School is the game winning shot,  
you only get one chance to make it.**

**Anthony**

## School Days

School was so small. Kids were literally falling out of classrooms 'cause we didn't all fit. We shared ripped up stained books. We played in a parking lot with no balls or other equipment. So we made up games called "War" and "Adventures." In these games we ran around the parking lot talking and imagining until a teacher said we were being too loud and decided recess was over. We had lunch but it was so disgusting no one ate so by 1 p.m all anyone could think about was hunger. Kids constantly fought. Tensions kept growing. The government said we were all the same, all Hispanic, but we weren't the same and it divided us. Teachers asked us what we wanted to do with our lives... lawyer, doctor, businessman our responses. The teachers looked at us and said, "Why don't you try going to beauty school or WYotech?" How can we believe in ourselves if everyone tells us not to?

**FALLON**



My school was an  
adventure  
My school showed it  
cared in a way  
My school was like  
a nightmare  
you could not wake  
up from  
My school is like a  
minister,  
it speaks  
knowledge.  
My school is like  
prison,  
it locks you in  
My school is big  
and full of wisdom

**DIANTE**

**School**

I think that schools have great intentions but  
Others just learned the bad things that were mentioned  
I learned many things in my school some were bad and some were good  
I learned how to keep my chin up and chest out to prove that I had heart  
I learned how to fight and stand my ground when things got out of bounce  
I learned that life has many roads  
But to me my road was just to be a G and protect my entire family  
I learned to be from two familias  
One was blood  
And the other were brothers from my barrio  
I learned to throw up gang signs at suspicious cars  
or people driving and walking down my hood  
I learned how to hate people I did not know  
I learned to run when you see flashing red and blue lights  
The things I learned made me feel like it was all part of life.  
I learned to retaliate when a brother from the family died  
In reality it was a game and a life for a life  
I learned not to fear seeing people die because  
My brothers told me that was part of the life you chose  
So I learned to be on my toes  
My brothers taught me all the things I learned  
They were my teachers in school because my schools was not an institution  
It was the streets that led me to locked up institutions

**ERICK**

The high school that I went to was founded some 40 years ago,  
on some land that used to be dairy farms.  
In the early days, when it rained, the manure would wash down the hillside, and school  
would get cancelled, the smell was so bad.  
When I went there, it had been long since any farms had been in the area—  
now wholly suburban –but sometimes you could still smell the bullshit.  
You could smell it every time we had a “minimum day,”  
or didn’t have class because of staff meetings.  
You could smell it whenever they put us in small room and told us that by  
filling in bubbles on a form, our intelligence would be measured.  
You could smell it when they separated the “college-bound” from the “average,”  
as if making the classes easier was ever the right solution.  
You could smell it every time a college counselor would say, perhaps believing it himself,  
that you probably weren’t going to college.  
You could always smell it with my band director. Everything he did. Everything he said.  
SAT, CAHSEE, AP, and I guess we’re doing pretty well. I passed those tests.  
Now I clear my nostrils and hope no one notices that occasionally,  
I think I smell a little, too.

**JOE**

School is like a prison.  
We all are segregated into a group or class or race  
School is like a war zone.  
You always got to watch your back,  
School is no joke in certain neighborhoods  
because all they know is to make money.  
School can be very fun and challenging  
only if you make it that way.  
School is a learning building because  
we the students make up the school.  
School can be a jungle. Only the strong survive.  
Sometimes school is a place to feel free  
because you can be yourself and not feel insecure.  
School is an adventure  
because your journey never ends.  
School can be hard and frustrating  
because you always wrapped in something  
School can be a way to meet intelligent beautiful women  
School can be a gateway to channel some energy out.

**Nick**

## **SCHOOL IS LIKE...**

**"Oh you went to art school? What did you do?"**

**Like I never did real work or learned anything new**

**Like I didn't have more classes and higher expectations**

**Like I didn't grow as a person and travel to other nations**

**Like I didn't have science or math, English or history**

**Like we just sat around pondering mysteries**

**Like I could sit back and relax and never feel stress**

**Truth is I worked hard, never did anything less**

**Long day and short nights trying to finish it all**

**Putting in work with my back against the wall**

**I made visions come alive, created them with light**

**Pushed myself and dreamed big until I reached new heights**

**With encouragement I found my artist within**

**So don't ever make me defend my education.**

**Stephanie**

# "GATED"

Winter falls hard in Chicago,  
the heartbeat of earth silenced.  
I wait for the city bus  
feel my fingertips drain blood,  
go numb.  
We, all of us, surrounded by ice  
and the animated suspension of January  
which seems to last forever.  
When the sun rises  
we are all together  
all four thousand of us  
under one roof.  
Because the world outside is dead  
we create our own pulse,  
our microcosm from 8-5  
and we reflect this world,  
no,  
we are this world.  
men live kill die  
women birth cry love,  
we fight, fall,  
smoke rises, ashes fall,  
we are spinning running crying  
laughing  
and we are lost,  
but it feels okay.

When springs sweet kiss  
finally warms the land,  
the ice melts  
and everything shifts.  
Thousands of city buses  
have come and gone past my stop.  
Like it, people have come and gone,  
Children bear children,  
take lives  
give lives  
and by the end of the year  
we learn more about ourselves  
about each other  
what makes us fail  
what makes us thrive,  
what hurts and how much.  
It's more than any book our teacher  
gave us,  
because it's life.

**-Marie**

Red bricks loomed above the massive staircase,  
cigarette smoke filled the air as I walked up to  
the big double doors.

I walked through the halls and greeted my  
friends,

I turned my eyes downwards when those other  
people walked by.

I talked in class but not too much.

I did my homework but not all of it.

I took solos in jazz band but not too many.

I talked to the people that liked me.

I ignored the people that didn't.

I liked a few professors,

I didn't care for most of them.

I took some hard classes  
and got Bs in them.

I met some people I adore.

I met more people I couldn't stand.

I hardly ever skipped class.

I skipped all the assemblies.

I started packing up my things twenty minutes  
before my last class was done.

At the end of the day I walked to Starbucks in  
the rain after school.

Scrounging some change out of my pocket

I ordered a short black coffee  
and took it to the bus stop.

I wasn't until later that I figured out why I did  
that.

**BEN**

I resolve to demonstrating great respect  
for those around me—

The general aspect of life  
has bewildered me.

I have been to the depths of failure  
but I rose to the occasion.

I have been mistreated but will never  
mistreat the people around me.

I have been beat down emotionally  
and physically

But strive to maintain great  
and high spirits.

We all fall but we fail

when we don't pick ourselves back up.

It takes a man to make known  
that he is wrong

But an immature child  
makes excuses for himself.

So I resolve to become a more structured  
individual in every situation.

I resolve to keep my intelligence  
astounding

and my maturity above age level.

I resolve to make a difference in a  
endangered child's life

More than the average Joe  
thinks he wants to.

They say the mind is  
a terrible thing to waste

but when you are going through poverty  
and living poor

you don't have school opportunities.

So I resolve to try and enable  
if I can just one more person

to have an education.

Lastly I resolve to stop articulating  
what I resolve to do

and take absolute action.

**J-CYPHER**

# EDUCATION

## School

**White.**

**White snow on ground, on the  
treetops and rooftops.**

**No violence, no cops.**

**White classrooms, white walls**

**White people fill the halls.**

**Black.**

**Here you see black suits on the  
teachers,**

**But no black students in the  
bleachers.**

**White kids drive black cars**

**No future behind bars**

**Black students? No way**

**That's not something  
you see everyday.**

**Green.**

**Green grass well kept, mowed by  
minorities while the privileged  
slept.**

**Green uniforms, green money.**

**Poor people?**

**Not here honey.**

**Green, black, and white**

**The colors of my school.**

**The people, my friends**

**They thought I was cool.**

**A black girl,**

**But not really.**

**Let's eliminate her identity**

**Do not let her speak freely.**

## Cara

**My school cared for some  
But not all cared for it.  
There were those that felt it was like home  
And those that felt trapped.**

**Trapped In the routine  
Of lectures, page flipping,  
Useless worksheets and controlling bells.**

**Bells that mark the trap and  
mark the sweetness of relief.  
Relief that came from knowing  
that it was over, finally over.**

**But finding it all bearable  
because of trust in teachers.**

**Those teachers that showed us that they cared  
And that believed that we were there  
to make our own history.**

**To demonstrate to others and ourselves**

**That we too were there**

**Because we cared and**

**Had every right to be there.**

**YULISSA**

## My School

**My school was cool if you knew how to pull  
I was skipping school to go inhale some weed fumes  
Never got caught because the teachers didn't enforce the rules  
Maybe they was just happy with less people like me in the room  
But either way I went my futures they were doomed  
Never tried to really teach me, but I'm still a smart dude  
Most of time I'd ditch school I was going across the street  
Chillin' and eating some food  
Then head to the block and find something better to get into  
Then head back to school before the bell rang  
so I could hop on the bus  
While on the ride home I'd call the weed man  
and tell him what's up  
Hop off the bus and go get the wraps ready to roll one  
Only went to school for the females numbers and  
afterwards hit them up  
Only went to school so probation wouldn't lock me up**

**DONTANE**

# MY SCHOOL... SCHOOLS

School was like an unkempt garden  
Weeds, pollution, rusty tools  
School was a place where the weeds  
Of a social hierarchy took hold of the  
Beautiful roses that were the students.  
They ended the dreams of children  
Of growing up to be firefighters, doctors,  
lawyers.

Divided between the "good" white school  
And the "Bad" "Mexican" high school,  
My parents asked me what I would do.  
I chose to stay at the unkempt garden,  
I chose to plant myself  
where the weeds could get me.  
The pollution of stereotyping my fellow class-  
mates  
And placing us in certain categories:  
Regular, college prep, AP or soon to be drop  
outs.

I was lucky that in the garden  
someone placed a small number of us  
In a section where the flowers were nurtured  
and provided for.  
I was expected to "make it."  
It was not a question of would I go to college,  
but where?

I graduated from the unkempt garden;  
I made it out  
But I always feel guilty when I see  
what happened to the other flowers.  
Their young, beautiful minds were polluted  
by the system.  
I look and ask why I was given a chance  
And the others were left behind?  
Life is so unfair and the garden continues to be  
unkempt as many others do.

## School is Like

School is plaid skirts  
And polo shirts  
And white knee-high socks,  
School is, "you better take out that  
nose ring"  
And you can't be yourself  
You have to fit the mold  
And lose yourself,  
Because Atlanta Girls' School isn't  
about individuality  
Or personality,  
It's about looking the part,  
And the moment you start  
To resist that,  
You're a "trouble maker"  
A "deifier of the rules"  
Just because I had the audacity  
To question an artificial authority  
And be true to who I am,  
Even if it doesn't fit the private  
school plan  
So, I'll keep my nose ring  
And attitude  
And revel in the thought that they  
couldn't break me -  
They couldn't make me -  
Into one of them

SOPHIA

DVICE

## MINDTRAP

I always feel like I'm in a dream -- the bad kind where you really need to do something or get somewhere, but no matter how hard you try you just can't do it. It's almost like my mind is stuck on repeat, replaying the same thoughts and worries, pounding my head but never able to get out. But life still goes on around me. So there's me -- in some kind of internal paralysis -- and there's the world -- spinning and rushing, flowing and unconcerned -- and I'm in it, but only physically. I'm just here. So I run, thinking I can shake my mind free or at least get ahead of it. Or I life, trying to feel something heavier than my thoughts., But mostly I pray. I stay quiet and still until I feel my mind open, even just a little bit. For the moment I feel the slightest bit of peace that surpasses all understanding. And I am free.

**Stephanie**

### Unbound in a Box

More people die from this,  
Than flying in airplanes,  
But it is my sanctuary  
In confinement I find freedom  
Locked in a box, moving faster than  
allowed,  
Unbound by my own hands, it is there  
Hectic and violent  
Quiet, and still and mine  
The open road echoes,  
Motion flowing effortlessly  
Control belongs to me,  
In this I find  
peace.

**KIZZ**

### My Pain

Life of being locked up  
without the possibility.  
The time I am free is when I am being me.  
Now look in my eyes and  
try to feel my pain.  
Do you know how it feels to be left out in  
the rain.  
Each and every day somebody judges me.  
Worried about my life and how I live in  
these streets.  
Now I am living on my own. I am living off  
hope.  
With nowhere to go.  
Man I just painted a vivid 3D picture for  
you.  
Now that you see what I see.  
Can you feel my pain?

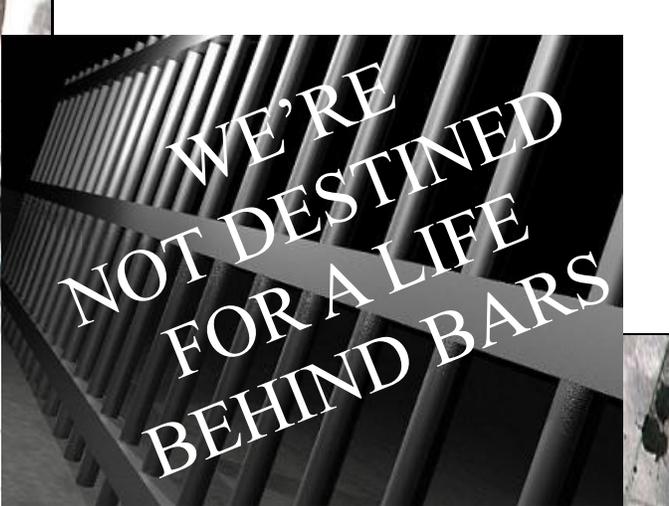
**Nick**

**F  
R  
E  
E  
D  
O  
M**

**The Heaviness in My Chest  
Silence.**

**It's painful silence that I can hear within me.  
From my mouth to the core of my chest.  
It's uncomfortable warmth I feel I can't escape.  
I don't remember it not being there.  
I don't remember not feeling its heaviness;  
It's burning burden deep in my chest.  
It becomes less heavy,  
Less painful  
When my words travel carelessly.  
When they go from inside my chest  
And escape through my lips  
Sounding so familiar  
Familiar like my mom and dad's voice.  
Familiar like when I hear my thoughts  
Not in English but in the sound of my childhood  
And in the sounds of my prayers.  
Then the heaviness in my chest becomes less heavy  
And I feel free.**

**Yulissa**



**WE'RE  
NOT DESTINED  
FOR A LIFE  
BEHIND BARS**

**The Cage of Rage**

**I reside in a cage of parasites.  
Where freedom is non-existent.  
Where I am a slave of Hench men.  
Where one has the power of ten men.  
I am looked upon as a peon.  
Therefore life is hectic as it would be for kings of Leon.  
The cage is colder than frozen Freon.  
And the guards are all donkeys without the heehaw.  
I am infuriated with the rage of a gang banging widow.  
And freedom is unattainable because it was force out the window.  
But even in knowing this I still yearn for it deeply.  
I stay up all night contemplating even though I am extremely sleepy  
Though I know I may never see light.  
Just knowing what freedom is takes my mind to new heights  
This caged I reside in has an animosity filled atmosphere.  
And the purpose of death is to keep the population clear.  
Because for every time there is death life will begin.  
And freedom fighters of the cage are held back by sin.  
I find freedom through my thoughts.  
Hallelujah Amen.**

**CYPHER**

# FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Fury inside,  
With nowhere to hide wishing I could glide,  
So that I wouldn't be lied,  
But I show my pride with all my might,  
And I don't fight my mind with what is  
right,  
But I fight my mind with petty lies,  
Because only the strong survive,  
with the right guide and the right state of  
mind

**Carlos**

## Poem

My life is like I'm closed in a box  
That you can't get out of  
The only way I find freedom  
Is when I think about different  
places  
And when I look at pictures of the  
past  
Because it brings freedom  
into my mind

**Braxton**

## WHEN I'M CAGED

Sometimes the mind is the only escape.  
You're trapped, caged, contained, held.  
The body, its own prison.  
There is nowhere to turn.  
Nowhere to hide and no one to find.  
So I create you. A partner, a friend an ally.  
A person to converse with  
when all others fail.  
My imagination becomes our getaway,  
a place to pretend we are free.  
But you faded with time,  
as all good things do.  
With age, responsibilities and maturity.  
Caged again.  
Tired, bored, angry.  
No longer is fear the driving force.  
In search of company when alone.  
In search of solitude when in company.  
How might I find you again?  
You, the only person who knew me,  
to release me from my cage  
that I have built.  
Soon, I find means of finding you again.

**Chris**



**The way I find freedom when I feel trapped in a cage**

**I read a book or write a rap or a letter**

**Or I will go and read a previous letter that I have received**

**I do have a plethora of things that help me when I feel trapped in a cage**

**And they all work in different ways**

**And help me out as well**

**I feel that you're trapped in a cage**

**When you let yourself become a caged animal**

**Or when you act like one**

**It's all in your mind**

**And that is all you have to remember**

**That it's a state of mind**

**And just like your got in that state of mind**

**You can get out of it real easy**

**So that is the way that I find freedom**

**And as you can see**

**It is a plethora of items that I use to find freedom**

**Gregory**

## **The Monster**

The Monster Within Me

The monster in me lives on my face

The monster in me has no rightful place

The monster in me thrives on killing joy

The monster in me is a hurt little boy

The monster in me feeds on disturbing peace

The monster in me promises no ones feelings are safe

The monster in me causes agony and grief

The monster in me is a likeable person contrary to belief

But the monster in me is sure to suffer defeat

**J-Cypher**

**I let the wind take me  
when my mind is stuck  
like too much sand in the river  
like rust on gears.**

**Open the vault of nostalgia  
and from it draw a fruit  
peel its skin to release juices of:  
summer wind that picks you up  
cools you off out of stagnant sun,  
laughter of a loved one  
like the peal of a church bell,  
the smells of cured olives  
and foods that tell me I'm home.  
The Buddha said all memories lie within,  
you just have to dig.**

**-MARIE**

**My cage is unlocked by the imagination of my brain  
Regardless if I'm locked up, my mind can explore anything  
Through the life of my books I can see many things  
I find peace I am peace and continue to maintain  
I can be held captive but my imagination flies away  
I can be anywhere, in the Bahamas or chillin' in the bay  
Never to worry about what the world has to say  
Because I never left where I was but let my imagination  
fly away**

**Dontane**



## **Freedom**

**I'm trapped in a room. A small room with a window so small I can't see anything out of it. Instead I'm left alone with my thoughts and my mind. My mind is a vast dark forest and not a kind place. It keeps me trapped more than any walls or cages could. It dwells on all of the bad and none of the good. The memories of everything horrible come to play and I am surrounded by this cage of unwanted bad times. My mind is so powerful that my brain can't even think anymore.**

**I long to be free. Free from my mind. Free from my thoughts. Free from all the bad. But I'm trapped and there is no way out. Every light turns to darkness. Every glimmer of hope turns to despair. But I can't let it consume me. I just can't. I will turn dark and the hole I'm trapped in will get deeper and deeper. I must pull myself out. I have to push on through. It's the only way to survive. But I can't let it consume me. I just can't. I will turn dark and the hole I'm trapped in will get deeper and deeper. I must pull myself out. I have to push on through. It's the only way to survive.**

**FALLON**

## Freedom In Mind

**My life is like I'm closed in a box  
That you can't get out of  
The only way I find freedom  
Is when I think about different places  
And when I look at pictures of the past  
Because it brings freedom into my mind**

**BRAXSTON**

## Running From My Cage

When my mother cries  
I am helpless and ensnared  
My voice silenced by her tears  
My words fall upon deaf ears  
My words of comfort ignored and unheard  
I am like a caged bird

When people close to me choose to take their lives  
Because the weight of the is upon them  
And my despair thrives  
I am like a caged bird

When I see friends use,  
Crippled and weakened,  
Bound by dependency  
Reuse and abuse,  
I am like a caged bird

When my wings have been clipped  
And into darkness I plummet  
I am like a caged bird  
But, I can break free

When my laces are tied  
And my feet strike pavement,  
Each step clears my troubled mind,  
And rids me of my worries,  
I am no longer confined,  
Trapped in a cage to rot and to wallow  
These long runs my therapy,  
That keep me from feeling hollow  
Liberate me  
And I no longer feel like a caged bird.

**Sophia**

## Waves of Peace

**Anytime I'm by the ocean I don't feel caged and I feel the most freedom. Every time I look at the ocean I feel calm and at peace. I can be present and not think so much, just enjoy my calmness.**

**If I choose to, I can have some of my best thinking by the ocean. It's not about touching the water or being in the water for me, it's simple being next to the water that soothes me. There's something about the sound of crashing waves that draws me in.**

**I think I feel the most freedom next to the ocean because the ocean is free. It looks never ending and although there are waves crashing, at a distance the water looks calm. I think of the ocean as me sometimes, always having ups and downs, but still pushing through life at a steady pace.**

**Jayna**



## Music as a Set of Wings

Music as a set of wings  
To explore a world unknown  
To create a heaven where there is Hell  
Every time I pluck a string  
To the time I stroke the wooden bow across the  
bridge  
The anxiety of my future, the sadness of my past  
evaporate like water in a pan  
Every time I am anxious, a sound of the deep  
bass instrument controls my fret  
Every time I feel lonely, my instrument is my  
companion  
Every time I lose hope, my cello puts a smile on  
my face  
Every time I have a had a heart break, I forget  
what pain is when I take into a frenzy of a beau-  
tiful melody  
For every hardship, there is strength  
For every happy event there is sadness  
For every hit, slap, sadness, struggle, pain, sick-  
ness, and melancholy  
My cello has always been there  
I can always refuge in the safety of its darkness  
The safety and comfort of what I know  
And all of my aspirations converge into one  
And it gives me wings to fly off into eternity

**Dulce**

**Absolute Constraint**  
*For Jimmy Santiago Baca*

**In conditions of absolute constraint such that nothing, not even the loudest cries may draw from your shackles, hollow out your interior, let the dripping thought echo in your blood, your bones, a pitch now set to music.**

**Joseph**

## Closed

There is a door,  
it alone stands in the vastest of whites.  
Turn the knob, slower, it creaks.  
Step into the garden. Enclosed by stone walls  
struggling  
to push back the mass of ivy,  
shadows dance in the breeze and move through  
the path. Padding along on soggy leaves  
once an arch and blink off the sun.  
Eyes streaming, a blue beam,  
a pond and hills that sway. Grasses rolling green  
and yellow. Purple pink wildflowers, white and  
yellow globes bob.  
A tree, under you sit  
singing a song from my childhood, a dream,  
I don't know. There are no words but I know what  
you say. We sing now together now alone,  
you high me low switch.  
We braid melody and harmony  
and light. You turn the sun blurs you  
smiling something cupped in your hands,  
a gift.  
Your face, wet you are crying. No, i am.  
You lean in and whisper to me  
your secret, I promise to keep it. You laughing,  
I will put it in my pocket, no one will ever look there.  
I open my hands a barn swallow.  
You gone, it is picking at my thumbs.  
It is you, it is hot it is shivering  
it is me. In my pocket it stops  
twitching. A stream slow moving loops,  
cool. Trees dangle roots that suck up life.  
I dive  
to the bottom, how did the white get here? Straining,  
stronger a vortex draws me through.  
I am whiteness I squint. Do  
I reach for my pocket, I hear  
your breath, a feather in my ear- none of this is real.

**LAURA**

### **Freedom in a Cage**

*I've never really been imprisoned in a literal sense. I think my dad sent me to my room once when I was a kid but I hardly remember it so I don't think I'm not counting that. When I feel caged its by my own thoughts. I remember freshman year of college my roommate left one weekend. After a spell of sitting on my computer I started to think about all the people I'd rather not interact with in my dorm. So I shut myself in my room for maybe a day only leaving when I had to. Sometimes I get so caught up in my relationships and how my actions are influencing others that I can't bear to do anything but isolate myself and avoid all human contact. The closest I've come to being in a cage was when I shut myself in one that I built out of fear and self-doubt.*

*Diverging a bit, I remember the first time I looked through a telescope at Jupiter and Saturn. Through even a small pair of binoculars you can make out the rings of Saturn and the Galilean moons of Jupiter. Jupiter just looks like a little dot with four other little dots around it through a small telescope. I remember the first time I realized that what I was looking at was a massive gas giant, three hundred times the mass and a thousand times the size of the earth I was standing on. You know what else? The sun is over a million times the size of the earth. Also there are about 250 billion suns in our galaxy. Also there are a couple hundred billion galaxies that can be seen through high powered telescopes from the earth. Now whenever I feel trapped by my own cyclical ways of thinking I go out and look into the night sky. I see a thousand things that are unfathomably bigger than me or my petty social problems, and I sigh in blissful relief.*

**Ben**

### **Jimmy Santiago Baca Poem**

There was always a special person to support me if need be  
He was big and fun and his name was the TV  
When I was alone and home he would always call me  
We would chill together and watch dragon ball z  
But eventually it got a little boring  
So my new friends Zelda and star fox went Nintendo 64ing  
I outgrew video games when I got to high school  
Constantly on facebook cuz that's whatt made the guys cool  
So now when I'm alone and feel like something's trapped me  
I think about the times that my TV didn't distract me  
Like the first time putting my feed in the ocean  
Cruzin on my bike and moving with the motions  
Looking at the stars so pretty like I dreamed it  
Seeing my mom smile and knowing that she means it  
My family had a cat and I would always bug it  
Not thinking about what's inside Chicken McNuggets  
So my way to escape is being reminiscent  
When I'm feeling trapped good memories are my resistance.

**Joseph**

**COMING OF AGE  
FROM THE INSIDE OUT**



**COMING OF AGE  
FROM THE INSIDE OUT**

# OUR VOICES WILL BE HEARD

## WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY:

<b>SOPHIE</b>	<b>DYLAN</b>
<b>ANTHONY</b>	<b>DULCE</b>
<b>ERICK</b>	<b>ERIK</b>
<b>STEPHANIE</b>	<b>LAURA</b>
<b>BRAXSTON</b>	<b>GREGORY</b>
<b>CARA</b>	<b>JOSEPH</b>
<b>CARLOS</b>	<b>JACOB</b>
<b>JAYNA</b>	<b>UBALDO</b>
<b>CHRISTOPHER</b>	<b>MORRIS</b>
<b>FALLON</b>	<b>CHRISTOPHER</b>
<b>DIANTE</b>	<b>RICHARD</b>
<b>MARIE</b>	<b>KIZZ</b>
<b>DONTANE</b>	<b>SHANTI</b>
<b>YULISSA</b>	<b>BEN</b>
<b>STEVEN</b>	<b>GEORGE</b>
<b>JEN</b>	<b>TERREAL</b>

## With the Support of:

San Bernardino County School District  
San Bernardino County Probation Department,  
University of Redlands' Office of Community Service Learning  
and the Race and Ethnic Studies Program.  
Will J. Reid Foundation

## Special Thanks to:

Bobbi Caldwell, Norm Cosme, Scott Wyatt, Brenda Perez,  
Michelle Scray, Chief of Probation and all the staff of Gateway.

# TRANSFORMING OUR COMMUNITIES

