

# Untold Stories Utah

## 2015

*"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."*

*Maya Angelou*



A book of student narratives and artwork  
created by Utah Youth in Care



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Thank you for respecting the stories of these writers.

Untold Stories Utah 2015

## About Untold Stories Utah 2015

The Untold Stories Utah writing competition was initiated under the direction of the Utah State Office of Education. This writing initiative was created to encourage Youth In Custody teachers to provide an opportunity for students to tell their untold stories, perhaps become published authors, and maybe even win a prize. On a practical level, this writing competition provided incentive for YIC teachers to focus their efforts on providing basic writing instruction to students in YIC programs, including detention centers and even when the stay was only a few days.

Many of these stories are like letters to the world scribbled on scraps of paper as the writers sat in a train station waiting to be transported to their next destination. And, it is often in that liminal space, on the threshold between yesterday's traumas, mistakes, regrets and tomorrow's hopes, dreams and dangers, that creativity and clarity can flame bright for a brief moment. Sometimes when nothing much is happening, creativity has the space to emerge. So it was for these students.

As for the contest, 112 students submitted entries from YIC sites across Utah. We recruited four fabulous judges: Jeffrey Galli, Jacqueline Leedy-Chamberlain, Susan Stevens, and Steve McFarland. Brief bios of our judges are included in this publication. The judges read and read and read, and then each selected a top-ten list of stories. Out of a tabulation of points earned by each top-ten story, the winners were declared: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and seven Honorable Mentions, eighteen Finalists, and six Editor's Choices. All of those stories are published here.

Some have questioned the whole idea of our having a contest: Where there are winners, will there of necessity also be losers? Well, maybe, but it was not my experience as I helped students tell their tales that they were so set on winning that they could not go on without a prize. What I did observe over and over again were students pleased to share their untold stories with their teachers, facility staff, other students, and even with themselves. Every story competed and submitted was a cause for celebration. If weeks or months later, the writer won a prize, it was time to celebrate again.

To the reader, especially readers outside of YIC settings, we hope these stories will help you know the thoughts, feelings and experiences of young people who have passed through Utah's secure facilities, detention centers, O&As, treatment centers, and alternative high schools during the fall of 2014. These "troubled" and in-trouble youth are a puzzle to many: Why do those kids do those things? Rarely do these young people have an opportunity to tell their stories, but often others make up fantastical stories about them, about why they run away, do drugs, commit crimes, and even make the six o'clock news. Now, if you read on, you can know their truth.

Thanks to the Center for Excellence in Education in Alternative Settings' 2013 Untold Stories writing initiative that greatly inspired our project. We stole some of our best ideas from you. We beg you to please bring back the national version of Untold Stories.

A special thanks to Travis Cook, Steve Kaelin, Stephanie Preston, and Laurieann Thorpe at USOE for their help and support in the production of this publication. Thanks to our judges for their many hours of careful reading. Thanks to all the teachers who helped their students write. And, a big thanks to all 112 students who submitted stories. I hope that all of you had fun participating in this writing initiative.

Bonnie Shaw, PhD, YIC Humanities Specialist

# Through Walking Through

*By Jackie Chamberlain*

Nearly 250 students in residential treatment centers and detention facilities competed in the statewide art competition “Walking Through,” which was unveiled February 6, 2015, at the Fairview Museum of History and Art.

North Sanpete School District art teacher, Abe Kimball, was inspired to create an iconic arch of shoes – modeled after the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. After reading the [Division of Juvenile Justice Services 2013 Annual Report](#), Kimball said he was struck by the symmetric number of detention admissions – 8,484 – and decided along with the [Youth in Care Art \(YICART\) Council](#) to create something to represent those who “walk through” the system.

Last year, [Bob Barker Company](#), donated all 8,484 shoes to the YICART Council. Two hundred shoes were painted by students in residential treatment centers and detention facilities. The remaining unpainted shoes will be donated to the national [Emanuel Project](#) for other students.

“As you’ll notice when you walk around the arch, it reads ‘Through Walking Through’ and I hope that the youth can see the symbolism here,” Kimball said. “By the end of this experience, they will be passing through to a new life and hopefully, through walking, they will be free.”

In addition to the arch, almost 30 students participated in two-dimensional pencil on paper drawings, and several of the artists who contributed attended the unveiling. One student, J.M., who won an honorable mention, was proud to artistically and verbally share his struggle with addiction and triumph with recovery. “The path represents the baby steps I’ve taken through addiction and what I’ve had to go through to get here,” J.M. said. “Art helps me relax and put my emotions down on paper so I don’t have to use drugs. Art is my new addiction!”

The first and second place winners were also present. B.V., who is in the care of the Division of Child and Family Services, was excited that his artistic expression that focused on “the mess in his mind” was both well received and won first place.

“The decision of life as a teenager is a big mess – it’s complicated and stressful,” said B.V. “I basically raised myself, and my art is the one thing that I kept with me my whole life.”

Second place winner, M.A., was happy to represent his country of origin – Kenya – and said that he feels that art is one of the best ways to express one’s feelings.

“I chose Mama Africa out of my respect for my mother country,” said M.A. “If you want to send a message, then you do it through art. I wanted to bring my struggle out through the closed eyes in the picture.”

*The Youth in Care Art Council is a statewide program sponsored by the [Utah State Office of Education](#), with a goal of providing students in care and custody an opportunity to express themselves through two- and three-dimensional art. There will be more exhibits forthcoming.*

Jackie Chamberlain

Education Liaison

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# Roadblocks

by *M.T.*

There he lay – staring at the plain white ceiling inside his cell, feeling the cold cement under the tips of his fingers as he clawed at the stone bed beneath him. He couldn't sleep, the undying light and the thoughts that had tunneled their way into his head, tearing away at him. Wondering why, why he was trapped in this box of steel and concrete. Every second felt like an eternity. Time, that's all you had in this place, this place where the young were sent to be punished.

He could feel a pain in his back from being on the bed, which was only made up of a gym mat on a concrete slab. His throat became dry, dry as a once wet paper bag in the sun. He got out of his bed and walked over to the sink, pressing the tiny metal button to activate the fountain of water. After taking a refreshing drink, he stood straight looking in the metallic mirror that had been so badly scratched by the dozens of previous occupants of the cell that there was almost no reflection at all. At first he couldn't make out the figure in the small rectangle before him. The person he saw couldn't possibly be him, but it was. His long hair brushed over his face like vines creeping down a brick wall. Those blue eyes stared back at him with defeat branded in them, an almost invisible scar that would remain there forever. As he walked back to his bed, the thoughts had once again entered his mind.

The only reason he was here was because one of his own friends had narced on him, one of the only people he had trusted in life. He couldn't believe it, but he knew that it was true. How could his own friend call the cops on him, and why? What reason could they possibly have for doing such a thing? He wondered why they hadn't just driven him home.

These thoughts were drowning him, as if ocean waves were pushing him deeper and deeper into the black abyss below. There was only one way to escape from the current that was dragging him down, only one way he could beat the system. He had to serve his time, complete the tasks set before him. The only way he would ever be truly free again. He would flee from the city that was standing in his way as soon as he was free. No one would ever hold him back again. And only then, when he was set free, would he truly be happy?

*I would truly be happy.*



**M.T. wrote this story while in Split Mountain Youth Center, Vernal, Utah.**



# Just a Typical Day

*by K.L.*

As a 17-year-old girl, you wake up in the morning and you tell yourself that today is going to be a good day. You have the power to make this day a good day. You have complete control over your own emotions and your own thoughts. You go to the bathroom and get ready fast so you don't have to look in the mirror for that long because you're scared of what you are going to see.

You go through some of your classes learning the things you learn. You soon realize that lunch is next on your agenda. You start to have a little panic attack. Then – pop! – There goes a negative thought about you, and another one. The next thing you know it's like dominoes; the thoughts just continue to come and come, and you don't know what to do. You think of some coping methods you learned the previous year. You start to settle down and realize that eating food isn't so bad.

At lunch you get those thoughts again. With everything you put in your mouth, it's like a brick going down your throat. You can feel it as it makes its way down to your stomach. All you know is that the food is just sitting there, taking up space. Those negative thoughts about you continue to creep in the back of your mind, feelings of insecurity and disappointment. The thought, "I have to get this out of my system," comes, and this time it won't go away.

Next thing you know you're making your way to the bathroom, saying, "Hello," to your friends as you walk past them with a smile on your face as if nothing is wrong. You go to the furthest bathroom in the school, hoping that no one can hear as the "true you" comes out.

You bend over the toilet and tell yourself, "This is the last time, I promise," or "I can't do this to myself again." You start to contemplate. You wonder if this is a good idea or a bad idea, already knowing the correct answer to the question. You finally start to cry and shake. The food you put in your body comes up. You feel the heat as it rushes up to your face as if there's a blow dryer aiming right on you. You feel a burning in your head, your hands shake and smell. All those negative thoughts consumed your mind, and you just can't get yourself to pull your finger away from your own throat.

You finally spit one last time and stand up. You fix the wrinkles on your shirt. You can feel the air fume up in disappointment. You work your way towards the mirror, wipe away the tears, fix yourself up, and continue your day as if nothing had just happened – until the next day.



**K.L. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Observation & Assessment,  
Salt Lake City, Utah.**





# Could It Be an Addiction?

*by C.L.*

In fourth grade I had started an addiction without even realizing that it would make a huge impact on not only my life, but also would affect the ones I cared for the most. I admit I enjoyed this. It calmed me down. It was the only coping skill I knew at that time. It was my security blanket for five years.

Some people may struggle with drug addiction, a drinking problem, or possibly be a sex addict. But, have you ever heard of a person who had an addiction to hurting herself or being addicted to the pain of a razor slicing her skin, the smell of burning flesh when she had a flame to her wrist, the urge to pull out chunks of hair from her skull, or banging her head on a hard surface until her forehead was swollen and bruised? I was that girl.

Some people may say I was crazy, but maybe I was just craving to feel something, to be able to feel anything instead of feeling empty and hopeless. I just wanted to feel. I wanted to feel the adrenaline rush through my body when I would steal the keys to the get a razor out of the bathroom cabinet, or a knife from the kitchen cupboard, when the one I had been using was starting to get dull. The feeling of excitement when I found a new way to harm myself was the excitement and endorphins rushing through my body. It was like a high to me.

It wasn't until a couple of months ago when I was admitted into a treatment center that I realized how harmful and unhealthy the things I was doing actually were and how they were affecting my family. When I was first admitted, I would not accept the fact that I had a problem and that I needed help. I thought it's not a big deal. I'm not addicted. I could stop whenever I want to. I just didn't want to stop. It wasn't a big deal to me.

The real challenge came when I started to realize how big of an impact this small thing had on not only me, but also on my sisters. I could have had a whole different life. I could have been a better role model for my little sisters. I could have been focusing on my future and my success if I hadn't always been thinking about self-harming and finding new ways to hurt myself.

I must admit it has been the hardest thing I have done for myself. I do think about how much easier it would be to just fall back into old habits. I have been clean for about two and a half months. It has been a struggle, and I know it will always be a struggle for me, but I am determined to overcome my addiction.



**C.L. wrote this story while in Granite YESS Program, Salt Lake City, Utah.**



# First Trouble with the Law

## by L.P.

When she was just a youngster at the age of 14, Lucy was the type of female that did whatever she wanted to do without permission. Her parents were not ever around to tell her what not to do. That got her into trouble. Even though she knew what was right from wrong, she did them anyway because she felt like: Why she should care if no one else does?

During her first trouble with the law, she felt thrilled, troubled, and courageous because she did not know what was going to happen to her. She ended up getting incarcerated for a month, having to go in front a judge, and being put on probation for drug use for the first time. She thought her experiences while being incarcerated at Split Mountain Detention Center were going to be intimidating, but as she got to know the place, she felt at ease and did not mind being incarcerated.

It was her first time being away from home. While she was incarcerated, all she thought about was being home with her family. She knew that being incarcerated was not what she wanted throughout her life. She did not want to get comfortable where she was. If she got comfortable where she was, she knew that it would not be that intimidating and it would not be a problem going back there.

While incarcerated the cells were white brick walls, two beds and a metal sink. The food was bland. The teenagers complained that they did not get enough food and that it was only snack to them. The youth wished they could get hot food, but instead they were given bitter cereal, milk, juice, and fruit. She quit complaining though. As long as we get something to eat, that's all she worried about. Other than that, she could not care less.

It's terrifying when you're in here and don't know when you're going to get out. You see people come and go and you're still here. It's terrifying to watch them go because you wish you could be the one going out those green doors, but instead it's the wrong one that you see going.

They can't keep you forever. That's the way I see it. All you have to do is hope for the best and expect the worst. You're not alone. There are other kids out there going through the same situation as we are. Just remember you're not only hurting yourself, you're hurting the ones that love and care about you.

**L.P. wrote this story while in Split Mountain Youth Center, Vernal, Utah.**

*Finalist*



# The Story of How My Parents Met

*by S.S.*

“Mama, can you tell me the story of how you met Daddy?” I asked my mother. My mom’s face was so relieved.

“Haven’t I told you this story millions of times?”

I replied, “But it is so romantic.”

“Okay. Well, I was sixteen years old, and my friends wanted to go to the country-dance in the middle of summer in 1987. My friends and I were at a punch line getting a few drinks, and a good-looking man came to ask me to dance. I had noticed him a few times that day staring at me. I said, ‘Yeah’ because he was such a hunk. He was five-foot nine, muscular with broad shoulders. It was a slow dance, and it was so romantic. I looked into his eyes and fell in love.”

“So, Mama, it was love at first sight?” I asked.

“I didn’t fall in love with him, but I fell in love with his eyes.”

“That is so romantic, Mama.”

“I know. Now let me finish this story. So after the dance he had to leave, and he gave me a kiss on the cheek. I thought to myself, ‘I probably won’t see him again.’ But a few weeks later I decided to go to the dance again, and I saw him there. I was so happy. He noticed me, and I pretended I didn’t see him. ‘Hey! You probably don’t remember me?’ he asked me. I stared into his eyes again and said, ‘Oh yeah. Of course I remember you.’”

“‘Who wouldn’t remember you?’ We stared blankly at each other and it was becoming really awkward. So I asked him ‘How old are you?’ He replied back, ‘I am twenty-one.’ I thought to myself, ‘Hey, he isn’t that old.’ We walked together to the dance floor and danced to “Monie, Monie.” The dance was pretty crazy. If I did that dance now, I’ll break my back. After that we switched numbers. He called a couple days after that day and asked me if I wanted to go to dinner with him. I answered him and said, ‘Yeah.’ He picked me up in his hog. If you do not know what a hog is, it is a type of motorcycle.”

“After dinner we looked blankly at each other again, and he leaned over and kissed me. It was so nice. About a year later we talked about marriage. I found out I was pregnant. A couple months later we got married at the courthouse. I just barely turned eighteen. His mother was our witness; my parents didn’t know I got married until the day after. My mother told me once I got married, I had to move in with the husband. So I moved in with him. On March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1989 I had a healthy baby girl named Missy.”

“Oh, Mama, I wish I can meet a guy like Daddy,” I told my Mama.

“Someday you will.”

**S.S. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Valley Detention Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Finalist*

# Innocent or Not

*by A.C.*

In the end no one turns out innocent. On March 17, 2014 my life had changed. I was on probation at 15 years old for running away from home too much. The only thing is that no one knew why. I didn't even know why. My mom thought probation would be helpful for me.

My dad just laughed saying, "You'll never make it in life, at all."

That day I was really depressed. I woke up like that. I didn't even know why. We went to church. When I was at church, I felt really good. Then I came back home, and I felt really depressed again. Two days before that I told my mom that my dad was touching me inappropriately.

My mom got mad and yelled, "Don't lie to me!"

So I told my bishop about my dad. He just sent me home. I felt like no one believed me. I still feel like that.

Sunday afternoon my mom asked my brothers and my sister if they saw anything. They said, "No."

I asked if I could talk to my mom. My mom said, "Yes".

Previously I heard my mom talking to my dad and saying, "If you did do it, just say the truth. I will love you no matter what."

As you can guess, my dad yelled, "I didn't do anything to her!"

I asked my mom if she believed me, and she didn't say anything. Also, I told her he did it to my 15-year-old sister.

She yelled, "There is nothing going on. She said that he has done nothing!"

I got so mad because an hour before I had this talk. My sister took me into the sheet closet in our house and whispered, "Dad has been touching my boobs."

So I stopped the conversation with my mom, opened the bedroom door, and confronted my sister by asking, "You lied to mom for what?"

My mom cut me off and whispered, "Not in front of the boys".

Then my sister yelled, "I didn't say that!"

This got me frustrated even more so I screamed to her, "I HATE YOU. I never want to see you again!" Then I ran out the door.

Hours later I came back. There were cops at my door. I told them what happened. They took me to their office. I got McDonald's and watched TV till I was taken to JRC. They did my intake, and I was placed in State's custody.

Now I know why I ran and sluffed school almost every day. I was scared to get hit and abused. Now, I have no family that is there for me. I cannot save my sister from getting hurt. Every day I wake up and ask myself, "Was it right to tell?" I say to myself, "Yes!" even if it means never seeing my family again. Now I know there is no innocence in this world today.

**A.C. wrote this story while in Granite YESS Program, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Honorable Mention*





# Me vs. Foster Care: a Sad Story

*by J.P.*

When I was nine years old, my family wasn't a normal family. There was a lot of fighting and screaming, and I was stuck in the violence. One day I was walking in from school, and my mom said, "Jay, we need to talk." We sat and she said, "DCFS is coming to ask some really important questions, and I need you to be very honest with them." After she said that, she still loved me very much no matter what happened.

The very next day I woke up to a knock on the door, and there was this lady standing there. She said she needed to talk to my mom, so I went and got her.

The lady said, "Hi, my name is Christine from Child Protective Services. Can we talk alone?"

My mom looked down at me and said, "Yes." My mom and the lady from CPS went outside. The next thing I remember was they both came back inside, and my mom was crying.

The lady from CPS said to me, "Hey, youngster, it's your turn. Would it be okay if I asked you a few questions outside?"

I shook my head no and grabbed my mom's arm. The lady said, "We need to talk alone. I promise you'll be okay."

I went outside, and the lady asked me, "How is life in your family?"

I told her how it was and what was going on. After that my dad was called outside.

A few days later we were driving to the hospital. My mom looked back and said, "They are just going to take a little bit of your hair, and we will be done with the drug test."

Later we had arrived at the hospital and went in. We sat for what felt like hours. Finally, they called my parents back into the back, and then we went home.

A few days later, the lady from CPS came back. This time my mom, dad, and grandma were crying, and they said, "Okay, kids, it is time." They then took my brother, sister, and me out to their vehicle, and I started to fight. My brother jumped up and started screaming at my grandma saying, "This would have never happened without you. I hate you. If only you didn't call DCFS."

We were forced into the car and taken away. A few hours later, we arrived at the Christmas Box House, the place we would stay. After a few weeks, they pulled my brother, my sister and me aside, and they said, "It's time you meet your new family." Two people came in and said, "We are the ones who are taking you home for a visit dinner tonight." That night we went and lived with this family, but it did not make things better. In fact, things were made much worse.

**J.P. wrote this story while in Farmington Bay Youth Center, Farmington, Utah.**

*Finalist*



## Warning:

The choice you  
make today will  
usually affect  
tomorrow

# Drowning

*by A.S.*

My brother and I had been the best of friends since the day I could remember. We were a team! We did absolutely everything together even if that meant to drown with one another.

One hot summer afternoon, when I was seven and Nick was six, Grams and Pops took my siblings and me to the West Valley City Recreation Center. My brother, Nick, and I jumped in excitement. We were so happy to go there for the first time this summer. Jessica, my younger sister, was also excited. However, back then, my brother and I didn't let her hang with us because, well, we were just "too cool." Nick and I were planning our jumps and dives into that cool, deep pool that awaited us ahead, and screaming on about who was going to go down the slide first. I always got my way. My way or the highway, right?

We entered the outside Centennial Swimming Pool yard and ran straight for the water. No way were we going to waste a single breathing second standing around. This place was meant for kids, crazy like us, to go swimming. Nick and I left our family behind as we raced for the water, one behind the other. For a while, we swam, dived, and even went down the big blue slide. But, then came a moment I never thought would happen.

We decided to go to the four-foot deep end of the pool. We didn't think twice about what may lie ahead. We ran and jumped right in. Who knew we'd sink instead of swim? I saw my brother bob his head up as he was gasping for air and kicking his feet, as was I. We were drowning! Both of us could not reach the bottom of the pool, so we kicked and paddled, panicking for our lives. I had to save my brother's life. I don't know what ran through my head, but I could not watch him die. He was my best bud, my partner, and my brother. So I swam under him, holding my last bit of breath, held his legs, and pushed him up. My lungs were burning, hot and full of air soon to be released. Kicking and panicking was no help. Then, right as I was about to let go of my breath and fill my lungs with water, something amazing happened.

A woman pulled my brother out of the pool, and I kicked to the top. She grabbed my hand and saved my brother and me. She pulled us to the shallow end and left us. She asked if we were all right. "Oh, yes!" we answered. We were more than all right, we were alive. I'll never forget that summer day. It was about 12 years ago, but I can remember it just like it was yesterday. I am so glad I saved my brother and managed to live myself as well.

**A.S. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Valley Detention Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Finalist*



# A Big Mess I Call My Life

*by A.R.*

My life was like a map, but I just needed some help. My head was not straight, my mind is an incomplete puzzle, and my life was scattered like trash in a junkyard.

I grew up going from house to house. I never knew who my parents even were. So as the years went by, and I got older, time meant nothing to me. I found out why I never knew my very own parents. They were too busy wasting their time on getting high and drunk and then paying their consequences behind walls. And behind those walls is a gate that is hard to escape from.

As years went by as if flying, I still questioned who my parents were. Then one day, I saw a guy who was tall, with tan skin and Latino like me. I was only like five or six years old. My aunt told me, "This is your father." I had no clue what to do because I hadn't seen him in my life. The only thing I knew to do was to run and hug him, just to be in his arms, to cover those years I hadn't seen him.

Then more and more years went by. He cleaned up. Now he is sober and has been for quite a little bit of time, even years. The same thing happened with my mom except for the fact I was a little older and a little bit wiser when I met my mom again. I knew what to say and what to do. We became closer and closer by every day. Now they were both in the picture and sober.

Now, I have been shooting up, smoking those bowls, sniffing on those lines to take me to a different universe to find a great destiny, taking sips of alcohol and getting crazy drunk. All of it is to take my mind off depressing thoughts. Now I see myself behind these walls doing what my parents did and making mistakes that take me nowhere. I have been running from cops and dropping out of school. It has taken me over the hills and down the mountain. It brought me to being behind these walls.

Now I have these thoughts I need to replace because I made some mistakes, and I sit behind these walls thinking about it. Before I was locked up, I would look in the mirror and cry because I didn't look the way I wanted to. I was overweight. I was going through some tough times that no one was going through but me. People would make fun of me because my race. All of that piled up with why my freedom was taken away. Now my dad and my mom are both trying to love me, but I'm just not accepting their love. I'm pushing them away. They are trying to help me find a better path, but I'm not listening. That's my story.

**A.R. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Observation & Assessment, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Finalist*

# Heart of a Broken Boy

*by P.T.*

It was early Monday morning in the heart of the ghetto where little boys sell their souls to the streets, and women sell their bodies to feed fatherless babies. A ten-year-old boy and his cousin were at a bus stop just down the street from their apartment ready to go to school, when a car pulled up, mistook these boys for opposition gang members, and sprayed the bus stop with hot lead. The shots sounded like thunder, and everything felt like an earthquake. Both boys were still on the ground when the shots subsided. The ten-year-old boy reached out to his cousin and said, "Get up! They are gone. We have to get home!"

No response came from the boy's cousin. The ten-year-old boy shed tears and felt broken when he saw blood pouring from under his cousin's armpit. It was then the boy realized that his cousin was never going to get back up. The boy knelt beside his cousin, who was like a big brother to him, and gripped him in his small little arms until the police and paramedics arrived three hours later.

Six years later, the boy was in and out of gangs in search of his cousin's killer. The boy grew fearless, ruthless, deadly, and unable to show love: "Trust no SOUL!"

The boy took a call late in the afternoon on a Saturday. The voice on the other end spoke saying, "I understand you are looking for your cousin's killer. Meet with me in an hour and you will avenge the death you have longed for."

The boy hung up without a word and made his way to the address that was given to him. As the boy approached the abandoned warehouse, he felt a cold but sharp breeze creeping up his spine. The boy reached in the pocket of his hoodie and clutched on his PK380, preparing himself for any danger yet to come.

As the boy predicted, shots were fired towards his direction as he entered the warehouse. Miraculously, the boy did not get hit and still had time to defend himself. The boy whipped out his weapon and return fire as he ran out of the building. The boy was breathing, and running hard in fear of losing his own life. The boy got away and out of sight. He got home and realized that he had been traumatized and had restless days and restless nights. It was then; the boy realized that whatever he did and whoever he caused pain; his cousin would never return.

The boy got to his knees and prayed. He prayed for comfort, love, patience, forgiveness, and karma. Through the struggles and tribulations, the boy grew to realize that some things are better left alone, no matter how painful it is to let go. No matter what he did, his loved one will never come back. I am that boy.

**P.T. wrote this story while in Wasatch Youth Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Honorable Mention*



# Just Another Day

*by A.M.*

I woke up to my mom and dad fighting as usual. I slipped out of bed, turned my radio on full blast, and then got into the shower. I walked out with a towel wrapped around me and started searching through my drawers to find some clothes. I ended up picking out a pair of blue jeans and a white T-shirt. I walked to my closet and pulled out my black vans. I texted my mom and told her I was leaving. She immediately texted me back and said, “No.”

I grabbed my skateboard, rushed out the window, jumped on the garage roof, and slid down the side. My friend Jake called me while I was walking down the street. He asked if I was going to the skate park. I didn’t answer because he already knew. I hung up and stopped at 7-Eleven to get Arizona Iced Tea Lemonade. I started walking again when my friend Max pulled up on the side of the road and said, “Get in.” I casually walked to the passenger seat and got in.

He was listening to 96.3 when I turned to pull my phone out of my back pocket. He asked if I had a date or something. I laughed and asked, “When have I ever had a date?” He laughed and lit a cigarette. A few moments later we pulled in the back of the skate park. I hopped out and so did he. I went between two bars of the fence and dropped my skateboard. I skated to a bench and put my stuff down. Max followed.

Before I could turn around, Jake was there next to me. I jumped and slightly moved away. I bumped Max, and he told me to watch where I was going. I quickly responded and told him, “Shut up.” I went off in my own direction when I was rudely interrupted, trying to kick flip in a game of skate. I fell, hitting my arm on the cement as soon as I looked up to see who called me. There was two redheads standing there waving to me to come over. I got up and walked towards them. I spoke firmly and asked them, “What do you want?”

They giggled and asked, “Do you know a boy named Colton?”

I crinkled my eyebrows to say, “No.”

They looked at each other, and I looked back at Max and Jake, staring in confusion. I looked back at them, and the redheads gave me a note. I asked, “What is this for?”

They told me, “It is from Colton.” After, they walked away.

I unfolded the paper. I looked at it with embarrassment. I smirked as I looked to see if anyone was watching me. No one was. I crumbled up the note and threw it away. I felt uncomfortable. Nobody has ever given me a compliment before but he did. He called me “beautiful.”

**A.M. wrote this story while in Granite YESS Program, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Honorable Mention*



# White Brick Walls

*by C.L.*

I see a face looking back at me through a mirror that has the names of those before me scratched on. I know deep inside that the image I see is me, but I can't help but think that I am looking at a stranger.

I may be the same on the outside, but inside is a torrent of emotions that don't belong to me. I am surrounded by white walls that seem to close in on me at every moment. I have no view of the outside world that I had come to know so well during my childhood.

I am locked behind numerous steel doors that no one can get past. I am alone in a world that is cruel and vile. I am here because of my own selfish decisions and thoughts. I am now a convicted felon.

I keep waking up through the night with tears in my eyes expecting to be in my own home and hoping that the terror I am facing is just a dream. During the day, I catch a glimpse of razor-lined fences meant to keep me here in this nightmarish place and taunt me with visions of the outside world. The only joy that I can find in this place is in the moment of release. But even then, I know I am being sent even farther away from my family and the environment I have come to know.

I have now spent over four years in this world of constant torment, and my experiences here are now coming to a close. I have now been to three different programs and have completed over four hundred community-service hours. I now have the chance to live my life and be with my family.

But deep inside, I know I will always be a convicted felon, and I know that at the slightest mishap I could be yet again surrounded by the white brick walls.

**C.L. wrote this story while in Genesis Youth Center, Draper, Utah.**

*Editor's Choice*



# Still Looking Forward

*by K.S.*

When I was three years old, I went to visit my father who often drank too much. It was late, and he told me to come lay with him. He was slurring his words. I went to lay next to him when he started cuddling with me funny. I didn't know what was happening at that moment. I didn't know why my dad would ever do anything bad to me. I was confused so I didn't speak a word of it to anyone.

Then a few years later when I was thirteen, I went out with some older friends to a random house party. I was offered a drug. I did it. It was a strange orange pill. Next I drank a lot of alcohol and blacked out.

When I woke up, I remember blurry faces all around me. I knew I was in a bathroom, and I heard guys' voices for some reason. I couldn't move. Someone was holding me down on the bathroom floor. I went in and out of consciousness, hearing, "Keep her still." Then I blacked out again. I woke up the next day in my own bed, not knowing how I got there or why I was in so much pain. I went to take a shower and saw all the bruises on my wrists, hips, and neck.

Remembering came in bits and pieces. With each bruise, I remembered something more. All I could do was cry and think, "Why me?" I felt alone and lost, yet I still didn't speak a word to anyone. I felt I couldn't. No one would believe me.

Well, that's what I thought until one night I secretly drank at a family party. On the way home, I told my mom everything. I just let it all out. She believed every word. It was so hard for me to speak up, but I knew it needed to come out. It was like a monster in a cage. I needed to let it go.

It gets harder before it gets easier. It's been years since I let it all out, and I struggle every day with what happened, but I have hope that I can make it through and accomplish all my goals and dreams. What happened to me wasn't my fault, and it has taken years for me to be able to say that. I finally have the strength to speak out about it all and even speak to detectives. My story deserves to be told. I have hidden behind many fake smiles and much hollow laughter, but I will no longer let this define me. It's my time to be happy.

**K.S. wrote this story while in Farmington Bay Youth Center, Farmington, Utah.**

*Finalist*

# My First Christmas

*by C.M.*

I was put in foster care on January 14, 2012 when I was 13 years old. Growing up I was neglected and abused by my mom. Holidays and birthdays never existed in my mom's house. Never once did I wake up to presents on Christmas morning, big Thanksgiving dinners, birthday cakes, or costumes for Halloween. When I went into foster care, I never stayed in one place for long, because I always ran away. Eventually I'd get caught and started spending holidays in D.T. I liked being at D.T. because I felt safe and cared for. I knew that I was going to be around people who I felt safe being around and wouldn't hurt me.

My caseworker thought if I was away from Salt Lake City, I would stop running from my foster homes, so she moved me to Logan, Utah. Two weeks before Christmas in 2013, my caseworker and I made the long drive to Logan. On the way there I was scared and nervous about being in a place where I didn't know anyone once again. When I walked through the door of the new foster home, my foster family was welcoming and seemed excited to meet me. They were a very nice family.

It was weird to me because they started asking me what I wanted for Christmas. No one has ever asked me that before. I told them I didn't want anything because I felt I didn't deserve it. Christmas morning came. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. I wanted to stay in my room, but they pulled me out into the living room. When I walked into the living room and saw a bunch of presents on the couch, they told me the presents were for me. I felt overwhelmed with emotion. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. I didn't know how to react so at first I was angry. I sat down and felt like it was too good to be true. They told me I was just as deserving as everyone else to have a good Christmas so they insisted that I open my presents.

Then there was a knock at the door. It was my foster family's friends, an older couple who were very nice. In their arms they had quite a few presents that they started passing out. I started crying when I found out half of them were for me! How could these people I didn't know be so nice to me?

The greatest gift that Christmas was learning that I was worthy of love and affection and that there are amazing, caring, and thoughtful people in the world. I have carried that gift through all my not-so-good Christmases.

**C.M. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Valley Detention Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Honorable Mention*

# Journey to 50

*by K.H.*

When I was thirteen years old, I was asked if I would like to participate in a 50-mile bike ride for Boy Scouts. I was also told that if I wanted to complete this bike ride, I would have to train extremely hard in order to be in shape for it. I had to complete two five-mile bike rides, three ten-mile bike rides, two fifteen-mile bike rides and two twenty-five-mile bike rides. I agreed upon the rules, and the next day I went to ride my bike.

I went to Sugar House Park to start my first five-mile bike ride. I started to ride slowly at first because I was not in shape, and I did not want to crash. I finished the bike ride and went home. The next couple of months I rode countless miles around Salt Lake City. I rode all the way from Cottonwood Heights to Hogle Zoo at the mouth of Emigration Canyon. I finally completed all nine rides and was congratulated on all my hard work and training. I was told that the fifty-mile bike ride would be at Bear Lake, Utah.

I went to the lake and was nervous that I would not make it, but I realized that I had the guts to do all that training and would not back down. I started riding from the starting point, and at midday I was halfway done. It was a beautiful day. I liked the road because it was not bumpy, and it did not have any hills. I had a hard time riding, but I finished the ride in four hours. I was so proud of myself that I had come so far and achieved such a great challenge. This experience helped me to achieve even more bike rides, like in the Grand Canyon and in Zion's National Park. I also began hiking and completed 50 miles of hiking all over Utah.

I know this has helped me have self-confidence and the courage to do things I thought I would never achieve. I think that this life experience can link to being in court programs because it is hard to stay in these programs and be away from family. I know it has and will change me for the better.

This is one of many great memories I will cherish in my life. It has helped me from one goal to another. I feel that with positive experiences I can achieve almost anything in life. This experience turned into countless experiences. I personally think that if you don't try, you will not have the experience to achieve. I know that if you set a goal so that it is just out of your reach, but not extremely unreasonable, then put your mind to it, you can achieve what many others can't. If we do not try hard things, we will never succeed in the future.

**K.H. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Observation & Assessment, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Editor's Choice*



# Kristie

## *by S.B.*

As a young child, I seemed to always be the lonely one. I was different from the other children because I would rather be alone than with people who were always bullying others. From fourth grade on, I was put into the gifted class because of my intelligence level. Students outside of my class would tease me for being a nerd while the kids in my class left me out of activities because I was different. I will never forget or understand all the mean things they used to say to me.

In sixth grade, a new girl, Kristie, started attending the gifted class I was a part of. She had the opportunity to join the popular group but instead chose to talk to me. I was sitting alone at lunch that day when she sat by me. We started to become best friends. She talked to nearly everyone, saying that I was just like they were. It seemed that nearly our whole grade would try to sit next to us on this tiny table. I remember feeling so overwhelmed.

When we would hang out after school, Kristie would talk to me about how different people were starting to be kinder to others because they felt more understood ever since Kristie started including them. She would tell me that people looked up to how I've always treated others with respect even when they didn't treat me the same way. As time went on, she introduced me to her other friends; we all were so happy together!

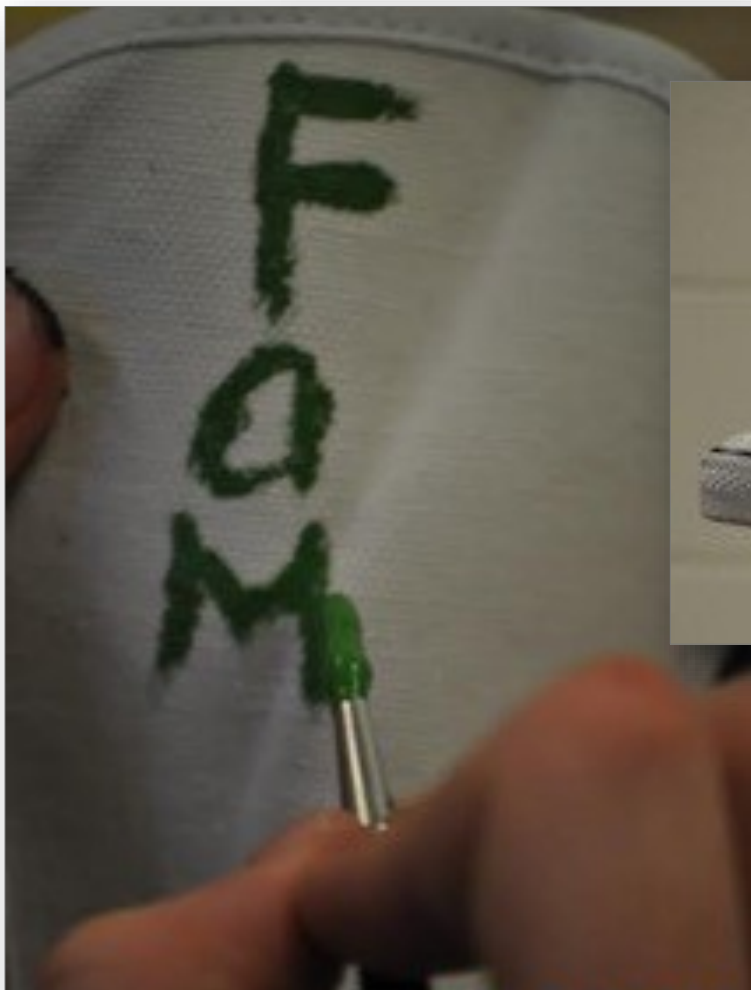
One day, I showed up to school and ran up to Kristie wanting to tell her about my new dog. As soon as she saw me, she walked away. It was obvious she had to be mad at me, so I gave her some space for the day. When I got home I tried to call her, but she wouldn't answer. At this point, I was concerned about what I had done to make her so angry with me. I called again and again until finally she answered. I could tell that she had been crying, and I asked her what was wrong. When she refused to tell me, I asked if we could see each other. She said she was grounded but did want to talk. We made plans to sneak out that night and meet at the train tracks in between our houses.

I regret not pushing her to talk to me that day at school. When I showed up that night, she wasn't there.

She had left a recorded message for me, blaming me for her decision to commit suicide. I stomped on the camcorder and threw away the pieces. It has taken me nearly two years to tell anybody what had happened, and I still don't know exactly why she made that decision. Today, I swear to be a Kristie in others' lives. I will always be there to stand by anyone who may feel alone.

**S.B. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Valley Detention Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Finalist*





# Why?

by K.E.

Usually people have that one thing, that one memory that they just remember everything about like it was yesterday. That's what my story is like. I remember it was nighttime. I was four years old. It was my sister, my mom, and me. We were watching *The Simpsons* and eating New England clam chowder. There was a knock on the door, a loud one, not like a usual person would knock.

My mom knew right away who it was, and she looked scared. She went to the door and answered it. There was a police officer and a woman in a suit. All the sudden my mom started crying and screaming, "No! You can't take my kids! They're mine. I'm a good mom."

My sister was crying, and I was just lost. I didn't know what was going on so I went up to my mom and asked, "Mommy, what's wrong? Why are they taking us?"

She just said, "I can't tell you right now, baby, but don't worry. Everything will be all right."

I believed my mom. Then I went up to this lady who was at my door, and I asked, "Who are you? Why are you here?"

She said, "I'm here to take you to a safer place."

I was confused because I felt like the safest place was with my mom. I didn't understand. Why would these people think that my mom is such a bad lady? She always took care of me. She was a good mom. Why?

Why was a good question, and sometimes you don't always want the answer. The reason why I was taken away from my mom that day started to make sense the more I grew up. I remembered this crystal stuff my mom would always put in this weird-looking tube with a ball at the end and light it with a lighter. Then there would be a lot of smoke and a nasty smell. I always thought that was just my mom's medicine because it always looked like it would make her feel better. But, that stuff that she was smoking, that stuff was one of the worst drugs known to man. That drug took my mom and did horrible things to her. That drug is called crystal meth.

Now I'm sixteen years old and have learned a lot from this experience. I have lost a lot, but, all in all, this was one of the most memorable times in my life. I just use this experience as a reminder that I never want this to happen to my kids and will make sure that I never give up.

**K.E. wrote this story while in Decker Lake Youth Center, West Valley City, Utah.**

*Finalist*

# Unforgettable Friend

*by J.H.*

I've grown up with my best friend for as long as I can remember. We went to the same school, lived in the same neighborhood, and were always into the same things. We did not always get along, but that's just how friends are.

I remember playing football with him all the time. There was this field behind my grandma's house that we would go to and play one-on-one tackle football. We were always out there playing, even in the rain and snow

We were good kids at one time. As we got older, we started to get into trouble. We started to use drugs and steal from people. He was older than me, so he had a big influence on me and could get me to steal and use drugs because I trusted him.

I remember the first time I used drugs was with him, he had asked me, "Do you want try some marijuana with me?"

"Yeah! Why not?" I said back to him.

After that we would use all the time. I liked it because I felt that we would become better friends if I did use. He started having me do more, like break into places and steal. This is how I got my first felony. He had me break into our school and steal some of the teacher's candy.

I started to not like it when he got me to steal from my grandma. I hated it because I was a grandma's boy. I lived with my grandma my whole life. After I started stealing from her, I got used to stealing from her. I would always have money and my friend liked that I could buy the drugs.

I know that I will always know this friend. I know I will always know him because he's my brother. I knew that I could just say, "No," to my friends if they asked me to do things that could get me in trouble. When it came to family, it was a different story because you have to see them every day. I still look up to him to this day, but he can't control me anymore. That is my story about my unforgettable friend.

**J.H. wrote this story while in Mill Creek Youth Center, Ogden, Utah.**

*Finalist*

# My Shadow

*by C.K.*

There's always a shadow that's being cast down upon us. Something we want to outrun and hide from. Many still suffer from this shadow. Many feel pain, others feel regret, and others are too young to understand why it happens. This horrible shadow, when brought out into the light, reveals the truth about child abuse. This is my story, which I have cowered to share for fourteen-years.

I lived in the city of Chicago, Illinois, where nobody can be trusted. I was placed into foster care after losing my momma because she ended up choosing heroin and meth over her precious baby. I will never forget it. I went to a foster home at the age of three. Even today, the internal scars and burns within my memory will never be forgotten. I remember it as though it just happened.

I went to live with a really abusive family. They were African-American. I lived among the shadow for my survival. They considered me not a child of God. I experienced several agonizing beatings from fists, and kicks, and chokings, and isolation. I had nobody to run to or someone to protect such an innocent angel. I looked this family in the eyes as they would beat me. I screamed for their pleasure. Shedding my tears and blood were the only thing they loved to see. They made me feel like I wasn't human, but a scared, defenseless animal. This was all a sick game in this corrupted family.

My only protection was being locked in a closet for hours on end. I spent roughly five hours a day in there. Despite the feeling of hunger or thirst, I had to wait it out. I got to the point of critical condition due to starvation and physical trauma. I kept letting this demon family plunge me down to hell.

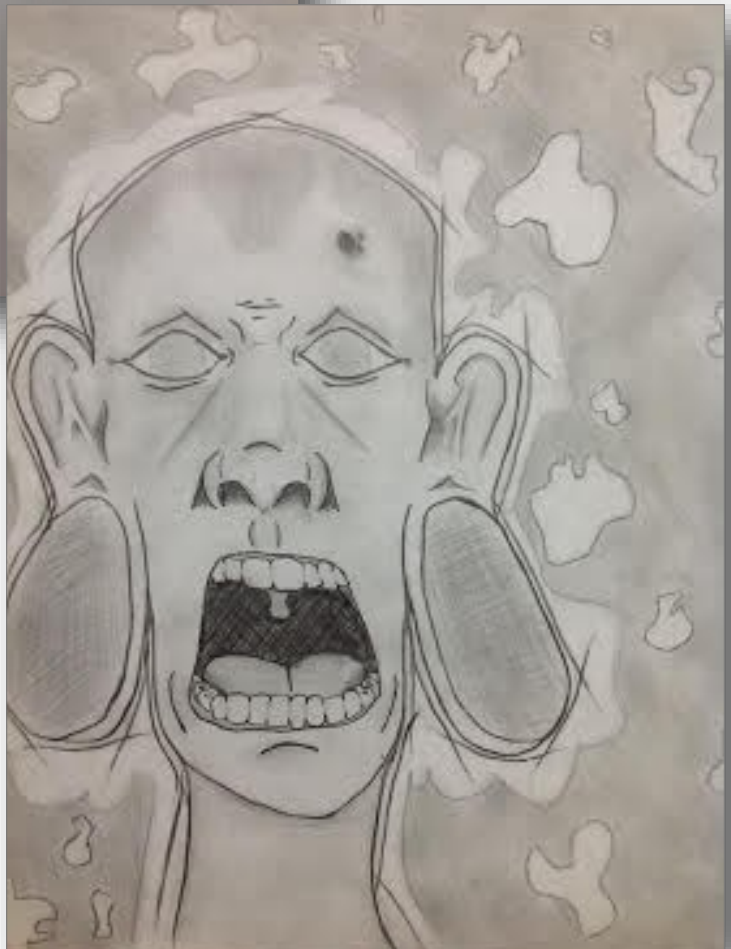
The worst of it was being hanged by a belt to a door frame. I felt like a piñata, getting hit all over while the air was being ripped from my lungs and being tossed into the cold, snowy winter nights only in my diaper. I had lost the will to live. I anticipated the moment the "mother" would finish me off.

I felt forever trapped in this prison until the exact day of December 24, 2000. Just a day before Christmas. It was a miracle. Exactly at 6:24 p.m. my rescue finally came. A DCFS worker took me away to go be with my grandma. I didn't even share or cry to her. I was too traumatized to let the innocent child within me come out and cry for love I hadn't received for four months.

Now, I look back at this shadow today knowing it will affect my fears. This shadow continues to grow inside of me beyond recognition. I continue to relive this memory in my nightmares while asleep. I look down upon myself being seventeen years old now, wishing I could have saved my three-year-old self.

**C.K. wrote this story while in Wasatch Youth Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Finalist*



# My House In Yellow Tape

*by C.N.*

When I was a young kid, about 15 years old, I lived in West Valley City, Utah, just my mother and me. I had never lived with my dad. I loved that place so much. Why wouldn't I? It was my hometown. I was in ninth grade, and I had a bunch of friends at my school. Jeremy, another ninth grader, kid in one of my classes, had always been there for me in the time of need.

It was a hot summer day, and Jeremy and I were walking home. Jeremy came to my house every day to study with me. As we were studying, we heard a loud bang right outside my window. We looked outside to find a van full of people jumping out with guns. I had no idea who the people were or why they were there. As I saw them aim their guns right at my house, I yelled and told Jeremy to get down. He was just as confused as I was.

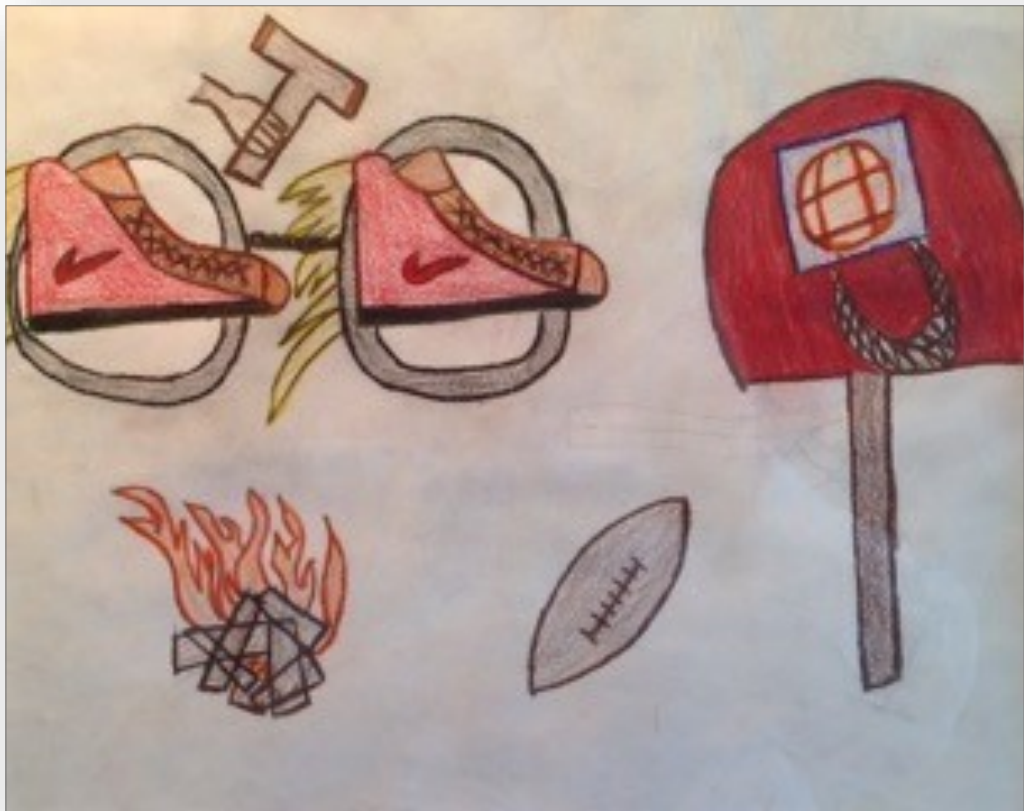
The neighborhood I grew up in wasn't exactly for the rich. Some days we could look out our window and see people getting arrested or selling drugs. I told my mother I wanted to get out of these streets before they took me under. Anyway, as Jeremy and I hit the ground, the bullets came through the walls and shattered windows, and we ran into the basement. We waited and waited for what seemed like two hours, but it was only about four minutes until they left. As soon as I knew it was clear to get up, I grabbed my phone and called 911 immediately. Jeremy called his mother to come get him right away.

The cops came and crossed out my house in yellow tape. My mother and I didn't have anywhere else to go except my grandmother's house. The police escorted us there in a hurry. As soon as I was in my room, I took a deep breath, suddenly realizing that my house was caught in a drive-by. My mother came into my room later that night to explain who the people were. She told me they were people my dad knew and who were looking for him.

My mom told me my dad always brought trouble around and that was why I had never met him. Our house was repaired, and we were able to move back in just a couple of months later. I couldn't sleep the first night we moved back. I was scared that this would happen again. My mother tried to calm me when I couldn't sleep by telling me everything was okay and the people who did it were now caught and locked up. A week later my mother put our house on the market, sold it, and we moved far, far away.

**C.N. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Valley Detention Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Finalist*



# Behind These Walls

*by A.I.*

Behind these walls, it all starts over, new rules, new people, new stresses, new food, and a new environment. There is time to think, think about things I didn't before: things I hate, things I need, and the reasons I am here. I'm here for the decisions I and others made, and I am taking the fall for most, doing more time that I ever have, being put down further than I already am, taking disrespect, and feeling as if I don't belong. With all the stress building up, it's hard not to explode and just give up on everything.

After being here for so long, I barely know myself, putting on a mask, hiding my emotions, feeling nothing but alone. All I know is my daddy is in my heart. Feeling unappreciated and unrecognized sometimes I feel like I am becoming a society soldier. I am being formed into someone I don't know. Waking up every morning feeling like crap and seeing the lights never turn off, I live with white brick walls, a metal toilet, a door of one of my favorite colors, and sleeping on a concrete slab. I guess it's not all that bad; I'm no stranger to moving. I have slept, eaten, and been through worse. I have been to the point of no return, but there's just one thought that keeps me pushing ahead: my family and friends.

I am glad it has pushed me, because without it I might not be here today. With all that I have learned and continue to learn, I am starting to see a future. I am starting to plan, to take control, and to form my life. With all the time I have had in here to relax, I find it hard with everything on my mind: my mom, my dad, my future, and my failures. Now I'm going to change to create myself. One of the hardest things is being away from EVERYTHING.

I have worked for myself and my family, friends, and future. Behind these walls some just don't understand what some of us go through. Some say we are just reckless kids, or we should have never been born. What they don't know is that we are just lost in an ever-growing world, always changing, and because of one decision it can change our lives. My message to you is to think before every decision because your time and freedom are the most important things in your life. Do not waste your time behind any walls besides the ones you build.

**A.I. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Observation & Assessment, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Finalist*





## **Big Fear** *by L.T.*

Have you ever been scared to put yourself out there because you didn't know how people would react? The beginning of my sophomore year that was the problem I was facing. I had had a couple of boy-friends, but something always seemed off. Then, at the skate park I met someone different. I had seen her before, but never talked to her. She was alone, so I talked to her. After spending twenty minutes with Heidi, I felt like I had always known her. We began to hangout daily and grew close. I had introduced her to a lot of guy friends, and they all liked her, no surprise. She was fun, and gorgeous. I noticed I was jealous of the boys, and I wasn't sure why. I made a vow to keep my feelings to myself. I was scared to lose my friends. I started using substances and dating boys, to avoid thinking about it.

One day Heidi kissed me. I didn't know what to think. The next day she acted like nothing had happened. I was heartbroken. I decided that if I was going to be okay with myself and my sexuality, then I needed to tell someone. One day at the park, I told my friends, "I'm gay." Everyone was very quiet and shocked. After an eternity of seconds, everyone talked at once, saying supportive things. Most people were accepting. As long as people I loved were okay with it, then I was happy. I did avoid telling my parents, however. They believed being gay was a sin. I found myself using drugs to hide my pain. If they weren't okay with it, I didn't want to be either.

I tried giving them hints. I'd hang "Gay is Okay" posters in my room. Every time it was brought up, they would change the subject. My drug usage increased. Even though my friends accepted it, my parents didn't. One day, I told my mom I was gay. After dead silence, she said, "It's a stupid phase you're going through. You'll get over. End of discussion." I couldn't believe it. It felt like a stab wound to the chest. Suddenly, I didn't feel sure of myself anymore. Drugs came into play more than they ever had. She's supposed to love me no matter what, right? My biggest fear had come true.

Months later I was taken away because of my drug usage. I decided to write my mom a letter and tell her how hurt I was. She didn't write me back. Later, I was able to visit her. I was nervous as hell. Luckily, it went well. She hugged me and apologized. A weight was lifted. The days after my biggest fear became reality. I let it get the best of me. Fear can only take a toll on your life if you allow it to. You are much stronger than you think, and sometimes it takes dealing with our biggest fears to come to terms with ourselves.

**L.T. wrote this story while in Canyonlands Youth Center, Blanding, Utah.**

*Editor's Choice*

# The Long Walk

*by G.S.*

On a dark, lonely highway between Heber and Park City two brothers born of struggle, Dakota and I, were winding down a three-day-long party that had spanned four cities, five house parties, a pontoon boat ride on the reservoir, hours spent in the hot tub or in the pool, countless beers, a gallon of cheap whiskey, and two ounces of marijuana.

I was riding shotgun, keeping a look out for cops, and making sure Dakota was driving okay. I might need to take over, but I wasn't in any shape to drive either. Desperate times call for reckless actions; that was part of the code Dakota and I lived by. I saw the cop posted up on the side of the road. There was nowhere to go but right past him. Dakota's plates were expired. He lit up the reds and blues, and we knew we were good -and-truly screwed. I was a wanted man. I had run away from my drug treatment program, and I was sure that I had other warrants.

They asked Dakota to step out of the car, and my legs started to shake. I wasn't just cold. I was dead scared. Dakota never got back into the car. It turned out that he had a warrant, and I didn't. The cop told me that they were taking him to jail and impounding the car. The party was really over now. I pleaded with them not to take my friend, no, *my brother*. They said that their hands were tied. I was on my own and stuck half-way between Salt Lake City and Park City. I might as well have flipped a coin as to where I should go and what I should do. I headed back the way we had come, on foot.

Cold, drunk, dope sick, and more tired than I had ever been, I kept moving on that dark highway to stay warm and awake. "I should have just gone to jail. At least it would be warm and I could sleep," I said to myself. I was also feeling guilty that I had gotten away, and Dakota hadn't. I would have just stopped and made a fire, but I had forgotten my lighter in the car. I couldn't even have a cigarette to calm my nerves. I walked and walked and walked.

I woke up in an alley next to the Wal-Mart in Park City with a burnt-down Marlboro in my hand and a trash can full of puke, that I assumed was mine, next to me. I was curled up in the fetal position, wearing a bunch of shirts that I had taken on the run and my Utah hoodie. The sun was just peaking over the horizon, and the town was waking up. I called my friend Roman to tell him about Dakota, and then I called my case-worker and turned myself in. There's nothing left for me in that life.

**G.S. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Valley Detention Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Honorable Mention*

# Momma

*by D.T.*

At the age of seventeen I laid my momma to rest. I will never forget that date: February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. That day will be forever ingrained in my mind. I was locked up.

The day of February 2<sup>nd</sup> started out normally. I got up, ate breakfast, went to the gym, showered, and got ready to for church. The first shift passed, and the staff took us to the gym again. The supervisor came to the gym and told me I had a visit. He looked sad. I asked him if he was all right. He would not tell me what was wrong. I walked through the front door to the visiting rooms and saw my whole family.

My heart sank immediately. They all looked sad, and a couple of them were crying. My therapist brought them in and led my whole family and me back to the conference room. There my sister proceeded to tell me that my mother had passed away. I felt my body go weak, and my knees buckled.

I remember talking about how she had passed. She was taking pain pills due to her broken shoulder, and she accidently overdosed. I am so certain she didn't mean to overdose. At first I thought that she had overdosed because of me, because I kept disappointing her and staying locked up. Then I got this feeling like she was holding me. I knew then, it was an accident and not my fault. My family had to leave so they could go talk to my stepdad. He was the one who found her, and they needed to make sure he was okay.

I remember being searched for contraband once the visit was over. They brought me back down to the gym, and I couldn't sit or stand still. So I ran. I ran forever it seemed. After an hour of my running in the gym, the staff took me back to the unit. I got in the shower. Now, I don't normally break down, but I could not help myself. It felt like I was letting out more tears than the shower was streaming down water.

The last thing I remember about that day was drifting to sleep finally at 12:30 A.M. I had a dream that I'll never forget. In my dream my momma came to me and was telling me how sorry she was for dying and leaving me. I told her, "It's okay, Momma. I know you love me. I am sad that you had to leave me, but I am glad that you are no longer in physical pain."

She told me, "I love you. I'll never leave you, Son."

I know she'll always be with me no matter what. Still to this day, I can feel her watching over me and holding me when I feel down. I know that even when I feel lonely, she is with me.

**D.T. wrote this story while in Wasatch Youth Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Honorable Mention*



# Big Trouble

*by I.R.*

The trouble all started when I got into the front seat of that white Nissan Pathfinder that Joey and Denver and I were driving around in. The car just happened not to be licensed, so we were all on edge. We went to Joey's house, and then we decided to call a "bro night." We all had the idea to go climb around the newly built elementary school, and then our mischievous behavior began.

It was roughly ten o'clock, and we were all sitting outside of Joey's camper. We had already decided to go to the elementary, but we had to finish our smokes. Once we were done, we started our quarter-mile walk to the elementary. I noticed it was a bit chilly underneath the clear sky, but I kept my rapid pace as we all closed in on the elementary.

We arrived at the front gate. There were lights on, and we thought we saw shadows in the building. So we, acting like kids, came up with hand signals. That meant me being me, I was the leader, and so we tiptoed our way into the elementary. Once we were in, we realized that there was no one in there, so we killed the power to the whole place. The view was different than before. The darkness brought out the eerie, empty feeling. It made me feel like I was being hunted and that I was being stalked, like a helpless deer cornered by a mountain lion.

I was relieved when we climbed to the second floor. The place finally looked like an elementary and moonlight lit the whole second floor up so we could see. We came on to this vent that we thought was above the gym. We decided to throw a couple lit matches down it to see, and it was the gym. What I saw when the matches bounced fully lit sent a chill down my spine. It was the shadow of someone walking by the matches as they sat there burning themselves out. I had told them that I had seen someone down there, but they would not believe me. They said that I was just tripping on what I was on.

We were cornered on the second floor at the end of the hallway; we heard the person climbing his way to the second floor. The walls were made of metal beams. Joey and Denver climbed them pretty easily, but I struggled to climb them. I did not have enough arm strength to pull myself up. I slipped, fell, tweaked my ankle and could not climb. I tried with one last effort. I jumped and at the same time I saw the light on the wall right next to me. All I heard was, "Duchesne police," and I froze. I didn't know what to think!

**I.R. wrote this story while in Split Mountain Youth Center, Vernal Utah.**

*Finalist*



# Street Soldier

*by B.I.*

I remember my first time here in SLVDT! It was a weird experience. I've been to about four other detention centers, this one the most. I've graduated through all sections I can be in. To me, this is nothing new. My dad, older brother, and sister have been here, jail and/or prison. I look at myself as my older brother, just younger. I look up to my brother. People look at me as him.

I know what I'm doing is going to give me a long prison sentence one day. But for some reason I like what I'm doing. I think it is real fun. I guess I've accepted the fact of how I live and how I'm going to live. It's the way I grew up around my neighborhood. Almost all my brother's friends were gang members. Whenever I was around them, I'd pick some new things up. I started with wearing the same color to school, sagging my pants, and taking bandanas to school. I stopped hanging around my old friends because they got too boring for me. Then I became a soldier, not of the United States, but of a set.

I stopped going to school because I didn't want to. It got real boring and lame. I'd rather drink some beer and smoke with my homies, so I just stopped going to school and started putting in work. I'd go looking for enemies or promote my hood's name on the walls of West Valley City and Taylorsville. I started to do more and more things so I could go up in my rank and be known. I couldn't stop and I wouldn't stop! I then really started doing stupid things, like stealing cars and robbing houses. I usually did it for money and electronics so if I didn't get any money, I'd sell the electronics to get the money. I usually did this so I could buy more weed, beer or alcohol. I loved to kick back, and when I'm around my homies it's even better.

What I can say is though I'm locked up, I have reached my goal of letting my name be known. At this point I've been to D.T. eight times and have been shipped to numerous programs, some of them twice! Now I'm chilling in here waiting for Decker Lake or Wasatch to come pick me up so I can do my time and get home. It isn't so bad. All I have to do is six-to-nine months. Maybe I'll learn something and come out with a different state of mind and stop stealing stuff so I'm not even here in the first place. But, hey, talk is cheap.

**B.I. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Valley Detention Center, Salt Lake City Utah.**

*Honorable Mention*

# The REAL Me

by T.M.

*"I remember my own childhood vividly . . .*

*I knew terrible things. But I knew I mustn't let adults know I knew.*

*It would scare them." ~Maurice Sendak*

I grew up in Los Angeles, California in the ghetto part. I was moved out to Utah about three years ago because I was a runaway, and the court system wanted it to stop. But I guess the trick didn't work because I'm locked up now. I can't tell you the cities I really grew up in California because I was shipped around like a lab rat stuck in a pinball machine: WHOA!

The day I was born I was immediately put into DCFS for four years, all because my hebetudinous (stupid) mother wanted to do hard drugs when she was having me. I really loved my first foster home because I felt I was treated as a kid, not a target. My foster parents took me in because my other "family members" didn't want to.

After four years of living in paradise, my auntie took me out of the foster home I was living in and took me in. I did really good for about four years until I turned eight; then things went downhill from there. I was able to visit with my mother for the weekends or on the holidays, which was good, but it was only under the radar, in other words, when DCFS wasn't checking in.

When DCFS wasn't checking in, I was molested at the age of nine by a neighbor three times, and no one did anything about it, even though I told every time. I did not get any Christmas or birthday presents except from school or DCFS workers.

My mother continued to do drugs, and every time I went to go visit her, she wanted to kill me, and I mean kill, she told me if I ever told anyone I would regret it. One time, she stuffed me into the oven and turned it on, but some guy there pushed her out of the way, took me out, and told me to run back home. She burned me with her lighters, beat me bad, made me sleep in the rain, and tried to suffocate me, etc. However, my auntie was just the same. I was hated in my family, and I had to put up with it until DCFS moved me out at the age of 14.

Now that I'm 20 years old, I've learned a lot from my mistakes and being in so many placements. I would like to say to the ones who might relate to situations like mine to keep your head up, look at the future, and be full of confidence. I want you to know there are people out there who care and want to help. It might take time for them to reach you, but one day you will get your wish.

**T.M. wrote this story while in Slate Canyon Youth Center, Provo, Utah.**

*Editor's Choice*





# The Only One

*by A.S.*

In my twelfth year of living I noticed I was depressed. Not the kind where I get depressed because of a break up, but the kind where I wasn't happy with myself because, well, I really didn't know the reason. I had little contact with the outside world, and the only kind I did have was through social media. Maybe online wasn't the safest place for me to be when I was in this state of mind, but to me it was like a home.

It was a simple day when I met him, and our story isn't crazy. He was like a mystery to me, this big tough fifteen year old. He told me I was different, and I wasn't one of those people who would leave. At first I pushed him away, only talking to him maybe two times a week. After knowing him for a month, I skyped him. I wasn't much of a talker, but he made me light up. Our conversations weren't anything crazy. Most of the time we joked around, talked about our future, and flirted awkwardly. After a while we would talk all the time – in school, out of school. I started not going to things I went to before just to stay with him.

Then I finally decided to meet him. Nothing crazy happened that day, just a kiss here and there. Everyone told me he was trouble and that he would leave me sooner or later. I heard whispers every time I walked down the hall at school just because of him. After a while I got annoyed with what was going on. I started pushing him away, not because I hated him but because I was scared of getting hurt. He told me no matter how far I pushed him away he would keep coming back because I had a way with people.

Then he met another girl. She was different from everyone else. She wasn't like me. She was visible and had friends. I looked like a normal girl, but there were always cuts at my wrist. She left him after a month, and that's when he came back to me. He became this mess, and I put myself down so he would be happy. I couldn't just leave him because I fell in love with him. I know love is a big word, and I shouldn't be in love. But, with this kid I was.

Then he left me. It was a simple day when it happened. I got the call. It was like monsters climbing up my throat. It became hard to breathe, and I broke. I remember the last thing he said: "I said you weren't one of those people. The only reason I left was because I was one of those people. I won't let you slip away." Those words turned into everything. But he left for good because he said life wasn't worth living, and because I didn't care.

**A.S. wrote this story while in Granite YESS Program, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Finalist*

**Monday, May 2nd, 2010**

**by G.C.W.**

When I woke up that morning, I had not expected it to flip my whole world on its head. I couldn't imagine what was about to happen to us. I was twelve, taking care of my mother, an alcoholic, and my two younger siblings, Jack who was four and my sister Lily who was seven.

We lived in the home of my grandparent's, who had passed away. It was yellow and green and in major disrepair. Normally I would have walked Lily to her school and then gone back home to clean while working with Jack on his letters, shapes, and colors. But Lily had been feeling ill the night before, so I called in to the school to excuse her absence. The house was filthy; my grandparents, bless their souls, were hoarders. They had anything and everything stuffed into tight corners. It was simply a struggle to just keep all of us from getting sick. I had just fixed us breakfast, after trying to wake my mother; there was a knock on our front door.

I thought it was strange. Almost no one approached the old house anymore. It just was a ghost of once pleasant summers. Occasionally my friend from down the street would come up to the door and urge me to go to school. But with my siblings needing to be taken care of, I couldn't be selfish and leave them all alone. Opening the door without checking who it was first was my biggest mistake. On the other side were two female social workers flanked by large police officers. My heart sank; I knew something like this would happen.

"Hello. Are you Mrs. Smith?" one of the women asked.

"No. I'm her daughter Gloria. What can I do to help you?" I tried to keep my cool.

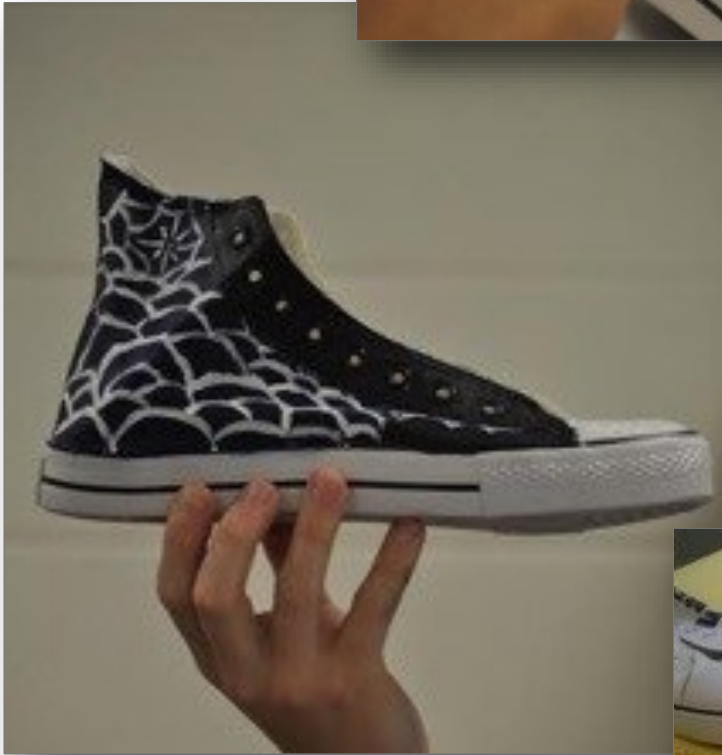
"May we come inside?" They didn't wait for an answer, but pushed their way inside.

I went to my siblings and held them close to me. Within the next twenty minutes the police and social workers had searched the entire home; saw the state that the house and my mother were in; and they made the immediate decision to remove all three of us from the home. I posed no argument; how could I? They looked at me like I was some simple child. The social worker had us get into the cramped space of her car together. My mother did nothing to stop them from taking us. She just stared cold and deadpan as we pulled away from the curb.

I had turned in my seat to look back at the yellow and green house. For that split second I felt happy to be leaving that place, to have my sibling's safe at my side again because I knew that everything would be all right in the end. Looking back at that time, I'm grateful for what happened to me. Now I'm a successful student in school, and I've become more than anyone had ever thought I could become.

**G.C.W. wrote this story while in Snow Canyon High School, St. George, Utah.**

*Editor's Choice*



## **R.I.P. Sunny** *by M.O.*

It started like any other day going to the lake.

We woke up really early in the morning, made hot cocoa in our thermos, laughing, preparing to have a great day and got ready to leave. Then we got in our car and drove fifty minutes to Baker Reservoir that looked amazing.

My parents fished for a while. I myself never enjoyed fishing because I had absolutely no patience for sitting there for fifteen minutes hoping to at least get a bite. So I walked around with my older sister who was visiting from California, collecting rocks, hiking, and just enjoying the time I had to spend with her.

As it got later and warmer in the day, we all went swimming except my stepdad and my little brother. They blew up an air mattress and floated farther out to fish. Before my mom, my sisters and I went swimming, we tied my dog to a BBQ that was away from the water and very heavy so that she wouldn't follow us out that far. We were all having fun laughing and what not.

Then, SPLASH!! We all looked over. The BBQ was nowhere to be found. Wanting to be with us so bad, my dog had dragged the BBQ at least twenty-five feet; then it fell off a cliff and dragged her under. I instantly broke down and started screaming, crying, and swimming to the shore as fast as I could go. My stepdad, after he found someone to hold my little brother, dove in after our dog. He wasn't able to reach her the first time he tried because it was twenty feet down.

Finally, after three or four dives down, he finally came back up with her. But it was already too late; it has been a good ten minutes since she went under. After we went home, we buried her in our back yard. We wrapped her in my favorite blanket and included a stuffed animal dog so that a part of me was always with her. R.I.P. Sunny.

**M.O. wrote this story while in Dixie Area Detention, Hurricane, UT**

*Finalist*

# Changing the Past

*by M.M.*

I was born at home in Yemen. My family never let me outside when I was young. They did not think I was safe. When I was seven, I tried to go outside. I went out and played with a bunch of kids. We were playing hide and seek. Suddenly a group of men with A-K's came into the village and started shooting everyone, but I did not know why. It was loud!!

Then everyone started running. But I just stood there. I had no fear because I did know what it was. I had not been outside. Then – Bam! I got shot in the side right above my hip. I fell down on the ground, crying and bleeding like water. I stayed still on the ground. I felt I was being sucked out of my body. I thought I was dying. I passed out.

I woke up in my dad's arms as he carried me home. He laid me down on a bed and pushed on my side to stop the bleeding. I still thought I was going to die. I passed out again.

I woke up three days later. I was lying on a new bed, taped up. I was not dead, but I had to stay in bed for another week. I could not stand up. I was taped up with lots of gauze and white adhesive tape wrapped around my stomach and back. I think a doctor must have come and taped me up.

After a week I started getting up and walking. It hurt a little bit. My family was very happy that I was able to walk and talk again. It took about two months to get better.

Later when I was eleven and my family was preparing to send my mom, my two older brothers and me to America, I realized that my whole family was in a gang and that one of my seven brothers had gotten into a fight with another gang. And, that is the reason the men had attacked us, and I was shot.

Now that I am 17, I think my family sent me here to the U.S. so I wouldn't get too involved in the gang and have a successful life. But when I was thirteen and living in Salt Lake City, I started hanging out with gang members at school. I started seeing what they were doing, and I wanted to get involved. And, I did. By the time I was fourteen, I was doing work for the gang, jacking cars and robbing people. Now I am in lock up and trying to become a new person, the person my mother wanted me to be when we escaped Yemen.

**M.M. wrote this story while in Wasatch Youth Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Finalist*

FORREVER  
STRONG  
KIA-KAIA

# Started from the Border: Now I'm here!

*By H.D.*

When I was 15, I was abandoned by my parents, along with my older sixteen year-old brother in Mexico without any papers or money. To survive, we had to go to my uncle for help. The reason we got abandoned in Mexico was the fault of my mother. I guess she was tired of us arguing all the time. She left us in my hometown Morelia, Michoacán.

We had to figure how we were going to make some quick money to get back to the United States. My brother and I had to get jobs so we could find a way to get back to Utah. We had to wait a period of two months until we had enough money to cross over the border. By the time we were ready, I was very nervous and scared, but I knew it was going to be for the best. Then my uncle had a friend who was a human smuggler, or coyote, who helped us go back to the other side of the border by putting my brother and me in a small place in a truck. It was hot and humid; and I thought I was going die in there. The heat was unbearable.

By the time we got to the border, I could hear the people talking and patrol dogs walking around the truck. I got a very uncomfortable feeling in my stomach. By the fourth minute of their searching the car, I actually thought it was going to work, but then I heard the dogs barking. And I got a shiver down my spine when I heard the immigration people yell, "Get out of the car!" I finally realized that the cops were talking to the people next to us. I felt the car moving and realized we were leaving Mexico. My uncle was waiting for us on the other side. We finally made it to his house.

All this time later, I keep thinking how fortunate it was that we didn't get caught that day and how very fortune that I won't have to do that again, seeing how my people sacrificed everything. They have suffered just to get to this country.

**H.D. wrote this story while in Salt Lake Observation & Assessment, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

*Finalist*





# My Untold Story: TROUBLE

*by B.H.*

The first time I got in trouble with the law I was eleven years old. Things at home were really bad, and one night I snuck out of my house and went and hung out with friends. We were smoking weed and other things like that. We were out past curfew, and we were walking along the street and saw headlights coming at us. We all just kinda stood there to see if it was a cop or not. It was.

He pulled over, got out and started talking to us. We automatically started lying to him saying we were out looking for my friend's dog. He asked for our parents' information and all that, and we all just lied, saying we didn't know any of it. In the end we all got searched, and the cop found the weed, smokes and lighters. We got tickets.

My dad wouldn't pick up the phone so the cop had to bring me to my house at three in the morning. He banged on the door, and finally my dad woke up and opened it. Man, he was really mad at me.

The next night I snuck out again, and I forgot something so I went back home and my dad started yelling at me. We got in a huge fight, and I just left again. He told me that if I left he would call the cops on me, and I did it anyway.

I ran and hid in a big pasture across the street from my house. It was about midnight so it was dark enough that the cop wouldn't see me. The cop never found me, but my dad did and snitched me out. They searched my backpack and found drugs inside. He called the judge asking what he should do with me, and he said to send me to DT so that's where I went. The officer handcuffed me and put me in the car then as we were driving off I flipped my dad off.

I was in detention for almost a week. It was my first time, and I was too mad to be scared. It was really lonely in that cell, nothing to do but just sit there and stare at the white brick walls.

I had to go before a judge, and I got put on house arrest and probation. I followed house arrest for a little bit, but then my birthday came around and I had a small party at my house and got caught. I had to go straight back to DT. From then on I kept screwing up and getting into more and more trouble.

Now I regret everything that I have done. I wish that I could go back and change the choices I made. But at the same time I'm very glad that I was able to experience some of those things. I am glad that I was also able to learn from them.

**B.H wrote this story while in Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, Utah.**

*Editor's Choice*

# The Revolving Circle

*by C.C.D*

People are a story that will touch you like the wind, leaving you thinking in your own life storm. The revolving circle is like a tornado. It starts out with a little problem combining into more problems. You think it's all good. You feel great, but the storm you're building is destructive. You get picked up in a mess of life's problems. You then build habits that later turn into addictions. You think it's all good because you're hiding from the fact of the unknown. Today, this is known as the struggles of human beings.

I am 18 years old and currently locked up in secure care. I have had some very hard life challenges. My mom left me when I was two years old, lost in addiction. My dad raised my sisters and me on his own. He was a carpenter and was not home a lot of the time, so my older sisters were like the mom of the house. We were very poor, making it difficult to fit in at school. I was known as the outcast. My mom would call sometimes and tell us she was going to come pick us up. We would get excited and pack our bags, but she would never show.

I began to build habits that caused a lot of harm in my life. I started getting into trouble, doing things I wish I had never done. I grew up way too quickly, throwing my childhood away. I blamed my problems on what I had been through. All I wanted was to be part of something. This led to a lifestyle of drugs that started when I was ten, and then hanging out with older crowds that made me feel a part of something. I did things for these people that the devil would fear. My dad couldn't handle me, causing me to move out at fourteen. I went to rehab two times, got out, and went back to the same thing, fearing the fact of being a nobody. I had created a storm I couldn't get out of.

Now, I am thankful to be alive. Being locked up for three years of my life, I've done some soul searching, recognizing things within myself, and understanding what really was causing me to create such a storm. This was weakness. I did things to make me look tough and feel worthy. I was not able to identify the cause for so long; it kept me in a vicious circle. All it took was being able to admit, accept, and change.

I hope you know that you are the one creating your future; you're worthy of anything you put your mind to. Don't get down on life. Make it bright by recognizing what you can do to calm the storm. You can be forgiven if you break the circle, and understand that people go through the bad to get to the good.

**C.C.D. wrote this story while in Slate Canyon Youth Center, Provo, Utah.**

*Editor's Choice*

## About Our Judges

**Jacqueline Leedy-Chamberlain** is currently the Education Liaison at the Utah Department of Human Services. Previously, Jackie worked in the Virgin Islands as a photo journalist and for the newspaper the V.I. Source 9 (2010-2012); was a lead reporter and editor writing and editing classified reports for the Utah Counterdrug Program (2004-2010); served as Adjunct Faculty for the Utah National Guard and NSA teaching English (2007-2008); taught ESL to refugees (2007-2008); taught and continues to teach adults literacy. Jackie received a BA in English with an emphasis in creative writing from the University of Utah in 2003 and is working on completing a M.Ed. at Weber State University (2013 to present).

**Susan Stevens** received a BFA in speech pathology and audiology from BYU and worked as a speech pathologist in Temple City School District, CA while her husband attended USC Dental School. Moving to Salt Lake City in 1975, Susan had four children and is the proud grandmother of seven grandchildren. While raising her children, Susan served in numerous leadership positions overseeing youth programs and community events, including three years as a sorority advisor at the University of Utah. Susan returned to teaching in 1996 and developed a visual arts program for the students at Decker Lake and Wasatch Youth Center and Salt Lake Valley Detention Center. Susan taught in YIC programs for 16 years before retiring in 2013. Currently she is serving as a docent at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts on the University of Utah campus.

**Steve “Dr. Mac” McFarland**, a sixty-one-year-old father of four and grandfather of 10.3 originally from Logan, Utah, graduated from Utah State University with a BA in psychology. He went on to earn a MS in justice studies from Arizona State University and a teaching endorsement from the University of Utah. Steve taught literature, biology, theatre, and social studies for 30 years in the Granite YESS Program at Decker Lake and Wasatch Youth Centers, Salt Lake O&A, and ARTEC. Dr. Mac was known for extreme creativity and over-the-top sense of humor that he shared daily with this students and colleagues and in numerous student theatrical productions, most notably, “Twilight Zone – the Musical.” Steve listed his hobbies as: literature, gardening, grandchildren, family history, discovering and distributing weird YouTube videos, spur-of-the moment travel to Europe, amateur theatre, and rural fantasies of I-de-ho.

**Jeffrey Galli** earned a M.Ed. from the University of Utah. Now retired, he served as a Warden of the Utah State Prison and a Corrections Education Specialist at the Utah State Office of Education. An accomplished fiction writer, Jeffrey is the author of six novels, including *Thin Ice*, *Dead Right*, *Drifters*, *Red Star*, and his 2014 *Damage Control* – all currently available on Amazon.com.

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