



SPECIAL

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OUR SIGNATURE DISH. PURE COMFORT FOOD SIMMERED IN ITS OWN NATURAL JUICES WITH A MELODY OF SECRET INGREDIENTS. SERVED WITH A SIDE OF COLOR AND GARNISHED WITH A DASH OF PIZAZZ. A HEARTY SELECTION THAT WILL DELIGHT THE SENSES AND EXPAND THE MIND.

The Prison Poems

A Group Poetry Collaboration by OSU Marion and Members of the Poetry Community at Marion Correctional Institution

Pablo Tanguay: For the past several months, I met once a week, for two hours, with a group of poets from Marion Correctional. We studied Shakespeare and Juan Felipe Herrera, Natasha Tretheway and Dylan Thomas. And everyone in between, at least everyone we had time for. Grandmaster Flash and Elizabeth Bishop. Marge Piercy. Maya Angelou had a pretty profound effect on at least a few of us. We studied the major forms, and then we wrote poems in them: sonnets, villanelles, sestinas, ballads, haikus, ghazals. And on and on. I was surprised most not by their talent as writers—I sort of expected that, to be honest—but by their talent as readers. I was blown away by their perceptions of the poems we studied. I myself am one who reads poems over and over, who *needs* to read poems over and over, in order to get a grip on them. And when I teach poetry classes with traditional college students, and ask them to read aloud, and ask them to comment on the spot, I can feel in the room the nervous tension. But the Marion poets read smartly and empathetically, on the spot. They were lively and engaged. They were most definitely opinionated. In those regards, they were a pleasure to work with. And let me say also that while they sometimes complained good naturedly about having to write in traditional forms—many of the poets come from a slam or spoken word background—they turned out to be, once they sat down and began to work, remarkably proficient at writing in them. I could go on and on about these guys, for real. But let just finish by saying they were all, to a one, remarkably kind to me. They allowed me into their world, into their home, really, and made me feel welcome. I look forward to continuing the journey.

Stuart Lishan: At OSU-Marion we had gotten a small grant to bring in bring in some theater people from New York (playwright Stephen Cedars, and Julia Hansen, the Artistic Director of Theater Masters, an important support, outreach, development, and engagement organization in the dramatic arts). They were coming to my spring semester English 2267 class (Intro to Creative Writing) to conduct a residency in the writing of ten-minute one-act plays with my students, plays that would be centered on the social-justice theme of prison reform. In preparation for the class, last fall I had a phone conversation with Stephen and Julia, in which Julia suggested that I try to find a way to take my students to the Marion Correctional Institution (MCI), so that they might have a taste of what they might be writing about. Around that time, I ran into Pablo Tanquay, a good friend and great-hearted fellow who is the Undergraduate Studies Program Manager in the Department of English. He told me he was teaching a poetry class at MCI every Wednesday morning.

It didn't take long for an idea to be hatched between us: That we try to arrange a meeting between my students and Pablo's in the spring.

And so we started working on that, enlisting the help of Kendra Hovey, a wonderfully generous woman who works for Healing Broken Circles, an organization dedicated to working works with people touched by the prison system, and who coordinates classes like Pablo's at MCI. Eventually, in March, we got together, my OSU students and Pablo's MCI students, for a poetry-writing session in the prison. First, to break the ice, we did some introductions – a short “alien writing” exercise, to tune up our ears, where we tried to convey an emotion in an “alien” language that each of made up on the spot. And then we started to write. Our assignment was called “A Reason for Everything”: Each of us wrote a line, and then we passed our piece of paper to the left, and the next person would write the next line, and then we'd do it again, and so on, round-robin fashion, each of us following a short prompt for each of our lines. The result was nineteen poems, written by all of us, OSU and MCI students alike, our lines indistinguishable as to who wrote what, for we were truly writing together that morning, as one class, as one poet. Here is some of what we wrote.

OSU Marion Contributors: Armani Borden, Laneysa Johnson, Dathan Lyon, Alli Morrow, Scotty Power, Paige Riebel, Ethan Rose, Daniel Schirtzinger, and Rea Swain

Members of the poetry community at Marion Correctional Institution

Because your love had faded like summer does fall
When the Winds command the hairs on my skin to crawl
When the image in the Puddle blurs
Because the rippled move more than the world
There was that freshness in the air that broke me.

And when you looked into my eyes stars exploded.
Because you saw what no one else could
Because you chose to see the good, the non-existent good in me
When my beard grew thick and burly
There was an image that was visibly — invisible.

And Because you stand with me always
When Oceans vied, like titans, waging war on us
Because only you can soothe the monster in my soul
When the night shadows surround my weakened being
There was a light that guided me out of the shadows.

And that is why I will follow that beacon, out of the shadow
and mist and veil.

Because the day began before day break
When we met in the no man's land of our bed
When the sheets were pulled up to our chins
Because the chill from the window called my name
There was a sound so soothing it calmed my soul.

And when our toes stuck out from under those sheets
Because my socks fell off and my feet got cold
We made love in the winters fold
When The night was deep and The stars so bright
There was the moon, glistening like a pearl in the vast shadow.

And Because there was nothing but your warmth
When the chill of the day before that covered us
Because of the love between us like a blanket that wrapped us
When we sat alone together cozy,
There was a strong pull that I didn't want to leave.

And that is why I will Always be with you,
to soothe your nightmares and place halos
around the kernels of your dreams.

Because You had light
When the rain caressed your already tear-dampened cheeks
When my throat closed up and it was hard to speak
Because in Essence, You're Right
There was no sound, my ears were dull.

And when the ring screams louder, like a murder
Because nothing stings worse than your own regret
Because it is brought about by The seed you sow
When you noticed what you have done
There was not much you could do, not much to be done.

And Because you ran out of options now
When your algebra homework was eaten by A dog
Because his hunger surpassed your own,
When morning becomes afternoon and it changes to evening
There was a silent show playing on the back of your lids.

And that is why the fire rings conquering your stage will
never seem to fade.

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Because the floor was softer than I imagined
When I step upon it I dreamed and
When I Put my foot down
Because I was finished with the way you treated me
There was blood on the carpet and all over the walls.

And when the stain matched the stain in my heart
Because it was wounded, my soul seeping out
Because my heart whimpered for something better, anything
When you smashed my heart like glass on the floor
There was a sound of shattering at an innocent heart.

And Because you hurt me in ways I couldn't imagine
When we split, we broke apart
Because I couldn't handle this type of pain
When I filed away my tears with faraway memories of kisses lost
There was the distant sounds of doors closing

And that is why I'm feed up with your past. I can't
take your baggage and we are through.

Because the green bud breaks through the blanket of snow
When the early sun rose from the earthen field
When I peaked through the foggy window
Because the television is broke and we had nothing to do
There was a child sitting on a log.

And when The Seasons Called out to You that They All Had passed,
Because what is emotion without a muse
Because sound vibrates and makes me feel cool
When love is the maestro
There was a congregation of puppies.

And Because the snow snuffs out the green bud
When the cold wind turns your head around
Because you, too, had seen those things
When all of a sudden spring is knocking at the door
There were flowers in bloom beyond your wildest dreams.

And that is why you must take time for the
simple, and see the extravagance within.