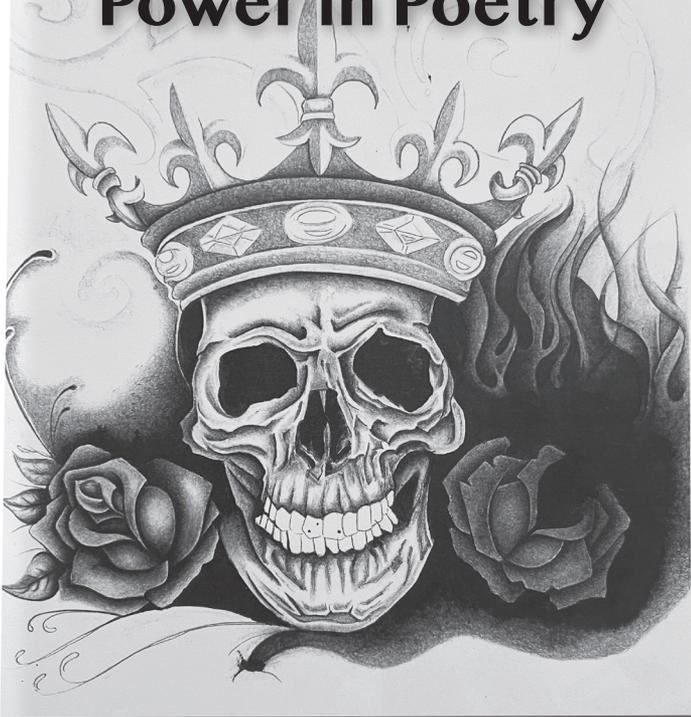


Power in Poetry



Poetry by the Men

of

**Re-Entry and Rehabilitation
and Unit R**

**Rountree Facility
Santa Cruz County, CA**

Volume 13 2022

The Santa Cruz Poetry Project/Poetry in the Jails began as the legacy project of Ellen Bass while she was Poet Laureate of Santa Cruz County in 2014-2015. Over the years, the SCPP has facilitated workshops and classes throughout the county, and with your support will continue changing the lives of incarcerated men and women one word, one poem at a time.

In-person classes resumed in May 2022 with the men at Rehabilitation and Re-entry and Rountree Unit R.

Our website, poetryinthejails.org, will keep you updated on recent and future events. Please visit, and consider donating! Your donations allow us to provide dictionaries, composition books, and other writing supplies to our students; and help make anthologies like this one possible. We extend our sincere thanks to our donors.

Special thanks to Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Department, Kristie Clemmons (Inmate Programs Manager), Edward Greene and Lisa Zack (Inmate Programs Coordinators), as well as the officers and staff of the the Santa Cruz County Jail.

The William James Association, a 501c3 non-profit, is the fiscal sponsor of The Santa Cruz Poetry Project.

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Thank you to the poets who made this book. And thanks to those who attended and participated in class, but whose work does not appear. Please know that you were heard and appreciated.

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A Stitch in Time

By Evan Dixon

Each thread has its own space in time.
Helping to hold a broken heart together.
The wounds are deep and at times feel
fatal, as if death is right around the corner.
It is not the body dying but simply the soul
and past regret is the knife that cuts
the deepest.

Letting go could easily allow the pain to
disappear, yet the tightened grip is never
released.

The reason for this is unknown
It just seems normal because when love is
gone you would rather feel pain instead of
nothing at all.

Then again, wouldn't feeling nothing at all
be better than pain?

It would numb the poke and pull of the needle.
Each stitch has closed the cuts, but why do
I feel like I am still bleeding?

Have I not healed?

Has the scar tissue not surfaced? Because I
can see them, feel them, and no one else can.

It's like treading water in the ocean and trying
to flag down a boat to save you and it floats
on by like you are not there. What do you do?

How do you save yourself?

How do you break the cycle?

How do you change your mind?

How do you find balance so you can
cope and remove the stitch in time? Δ

The Place

By Alex Llanos

The place you don't want to be.
The place you get told what to wear.
The place you get told what to eat.
The place you get told when to sleep.
The place you behave.
The place you can go and reflect.
The place you can get a tattoo with
 a staple.
The place you mind your own business.
The place things go very well, but
 quickly turn very bad.
The place you can't leave when you
 want to leave.
The place your family doesn't want
 you to be.
The place you meet like-minded individuals.
The place you run into the last person
 you thought you would run into.
The place everyone says they'll
 never come back to is the place
 everyone ends up coming back to.
The place we do them big dawg spreads.
The place you can end up dead.
The place where things are done
 rather than said.
The place you gotta stay on point.
The place you work out every day.
The place you hate, some people
 seem to love.
"The Place." Δ

Untitled

By Pete Mendoza

Amazing the grace,
as it touches the soil,
Smooth like the ripples in water
Or the cool breeze on your neck
Under the hot sun.
Strangely losing focus
Trying to sustain the drunken demeanor
Gravity making it hard to breathe
Controlling the urge to spread wings and fly
Staying grounded while stuck in altitude
Asking pardon
From your thoughts. Δ

Divine Love

By Victor Meras

My love is divine in your tenderness
of trust.
I trust you with the care of life.
I take care of you with my life;
passionate action at play.
You are the only one for me...in the
magnitude of this life, as we pass through
onto the next life
I will be there loving all of you.
I stand and wait

My Divine Love. Δ

I Be

By Pete Mendoza

I be feeling so gifted, gripping your
existence, filling your body with blessings
and wishes. I know you get lonely,
I wish you could hold me, spreading
your love on me slowly. Play with
your hair while we get cozy. I be
craving your body like I'm a dope fiend.
Bathe in your grace, as the water
stays flowing, gleaming so wet
Your love stays glowing.
I'm feeling so gifted, but wish you
could hold me, I've been dreaming
so much, I swear that you know me.
We talked in my sleep and you
whispered you'd show me. When I'm
awake, at times, I'm ugly.
I be trying some things, but
they never be working.
I be needing your body, so much
that I be hurting.
I be feeling so gifted, but
wishing you knew me, give
me a chance, like the flower
that's blooming. Δ

Free Spirit, Free Spirit

By Victor Meras

I am born to be free
I spread my wings soaring high
I touch the sky with big vision
I got a bird's eye view
I see it all, I see the big picture --
Other-interest too
I am never alone in my comforting dreams
I reach out to play the healer
touching hurting souls.
Free Spirit, Free Spirit
A free spirit healer passing through. Δ

Joy

By Russell Xavier

Joy of meeting extended family.
Joy of eating exotic foods.
Joy of swimming.
Joy of going out for a night on the town.
Joy of reading.
Joy of seeing a movie.
Joy of looking at Christmas decorations.
Joy of believing.
Joy of being happy and safe.
Joy of a new pet.
Joy of meeting a new friend.
Joy of going on a date.
Joy of relaxing.
Joy of being well. Δ

Love Knows

By Victor Meras

Deep love knows how to love in
quietness of expression.
We know it from the heart of action,
Not from the demagoguing of reassurance.
Love knows...crossing the threshold
of self-assertion and clamorous affection.
I love you, my rabble-rouser. Δ

Growth

By Evan Dixon

Rise...
I must rise up.
Growth is the only answer.
I have allowed myself to be down for
so long, and having that mindset is a cancer.
A cancer that will do nothing more but
kill you from the inside out.
Fast or slow, the outcome is all the same.
Death...
Death to your heart.
Death to your soul.
Death to your drive to live.
Would you rather be a victim to defeat
or a warrior and fight till your very last breath?
The choice is yours and yours alone.
So rise...
You must rise up, because growth is your only answer. Δ

Love Thyself

By Juan Carmona Torres

Day to day life
weighs me down
The burden of strife
buries my head underground
Like an ostrich with
its head in the sand
I struggle to breathe, see,
and understand.

The mistakes I carry
feel cumbersome and heavy.
But I stride along
easy and steady.
The accumulated debts,
missed smiles, unseen tears
make life worthwhile.
Although my life may seem meaningless
to those with untrained eyes,
I find solace in the
bitter sweetness of lies.

Be true to myself
is all that matters,
so I'll gorge my food
and sip my whiskey
until the world seems less fatter. Δ

Escape

By Christopher McNabb

It's time to take
a step outside
close your eyes
open your mind
ah motion picture
and you're the star
in a different Galaxy
on a planet far
No time to tell
No clocks at all
No hot or cold
No spring or fall
No sad or bad
Only the best.
Your Superman's on your chest
or Wonder Woman
in your favorite dress
or no clothes at all
whatever feels best
Your favorite friends
Your favorite songs
No feeling weak
only super strong. Δ

Repeat

By Salvatore Caruso

Trekking down a cobblestone road of repeat,
day after day, same routines sticking to me
like mud cakes underneath athletic cleats.
Nothing is ever new, same shit different toilet,
do what they tell you to do.

Wake up, go to sleep, what to wear, when to eat,
what to say, how to breathe.
No sense of individuality, deemed to be too mentally
unstable to be accepted socially to return to society.

Trapped like an animal, a silverback gorilla,
looking up to the heavens, but in the way lies wire made of
razors. So an attitude grows as if one is playing for the
Raiders.

Head constantly hanging low, thoughts as dark as
obsidian. Swing like a pendulum to and fro, trying to duck
the time like the matrix, but my mind is
always slow.

Due to the fact that I'm racing the same track, just
when I believe I'm in the lead, it all begins to
repeat and I'm back to getting lapped.

A fully automatic Mac 11 loaded with hollow point
thoughts is quick to be drawn and I'm repetitively
shot.

Body riddled with lead to make my body drop, all
to be resurrected, to once again take it all
from the top. Δ

Relax

By Pete Mendoza

All things you touch may grow or break
The light from the day at night tends to fade.
The moon at times hangs out with the sun.
To reach out and caress a shooting star with a beautiful wish
Only hoping it ain't moving too fast to pick it up.
Windows fogging cuz I'm breathing too hard.
Driving with no license,
Expecting people to understand my needs.
Brakes you have to pump
To slow your pace
Lights flashing like a disco party
Seat belts on.
Cruising smoking on a cigarette.
Scratching my arm, cuz my laundry detergent's
Giving me a rash.
Windshield wipers on full blast,
Hoping it creates an extra breeze.
Living the dream.
Waving to pedestrians like fan base.
Giving an odd poke to the dashboard.
Wiping off the dust
Listening to the melody of a dry radiator whistle.
Trunk vibrating, speakers creating a bang.
Doing so much in so little time.
Wanting to ease my mind, before it breaks
With overwhelming nonsense.
Drifting on into nothing
But the memory to be told in another story. Δ

Containment

By Salvatore Caruso

Containment of one's own mental state alone
makes its own statement.

The ability to suppress complex emotion without
showing any signs of distress means to
have a heart of iron, a blockaded fortress.

Pain, tucked in the back pocket, a loaded .38
and I've already cocked it.

At any moment, blood can spill, so I put a smile
on and keep it concealed because my mind plays
tricks and makes devilish deals, so I begin to
play keep-away cuz it's my soul that he steals.
Sorrow and sadness, a runaway freight train off
the rails slipping straight into madness, afraid to
react so I stay stiff as a county mattress. A
falsified grin shows you just what relaxed is. In
labeling a headstone for my mind R.I.P. and that's
just what the fact is.

It's all a jumble of uncalculated mathematics,
heart's flipping like world class acrobatics. Stepping up
to the plate, 0 and 2 is what the count is. Fast
love, low and away to make it strike 3 so
that's it for me, I just smile and wave cuz
that's what it's like when you play in the
major leagues.

But once you're in that locker room, that's
the shit that will drop you, straight to
your knees.

Containment. Δ

The Old River Mouth

By Pete Mendoza

The place that helped me escape
Where the waves crashed and
The whitewash connected the mouth of the river
Like the froth of a beer
Being swallowed by a drunk pirate
The place where I would hide
Til the sun set
And the cold breeze
Brought jitters to my teeth
Watching the families leave
Like the seagulls disappearing
Into the night sky
Wishing for the comfort and embrace
Of a mother
While I wrapped myself in the towel
I found covered with sand
The one forgotten by the family
In a rush home to beat traffic
As the salt drying to my skin
Hair getting stiff.
The taste of the sea
still lingering in my mouth
Like the echo of the waves
Crashing against the cliff's cave
The echo that so much sounded like
My angry stomach
But yet so happy I spent the day lost
Surrounded by all sorts of noise
Being swallowed by the waves >

I tried to ride
Like learning to ride a bike
With no training wheels,
Always ending with a crash.
Substituting the environment
For the attention missing from home
The old place that always brings the smile to my face.
The comfort from my magical place. Δ

The Wood

By Nicolas Henry Mount

The wind and the light
And the foot and the breath
The turn in the path and the
Width every step.

The point on the walk and the
Place as it stood
As still as the mist
In the clearings
Of the wood.

The low setting glow
Green clover-covered ground
With the sense and feel
No one's around.
So by moss-covered bridge
Still soaked at its seams
Signs pale of the wood
In gentle downward streams. Δ

Anger

By Alex Llanos

Anger arrives faster than a jet
with a sonic boom.
Anger clenches her hands into a fist
crushing whatever is in his hands.
She makes his blood pressure rise to the sun.
She has fire running through his veins.
This fire she's making him feel may just
burst into an explosion.

How do I get rid of this anger!? Δ

Anger

By Pete Mendoza

It crawls through my veins,
I feel it creeping behind my eyes,
Adrenaline pumping,
Like a car with new pistons
Fast, like the flash before me,
Clouding thoughts of the poor thing,
Clenching my fists,
Strangling the air
Making it hard to breathe
Controlling the beast that's trapped in my rib cage,
Trying to get out,
Beating like a drum,
I move with the rhythm. Δ

It's Clearly Evident That It's Me

By Don Feeley

When I look into the mirror of my life,
I struggle to accept the reflection that I now see.
I don't truly recognize the person there,
although it's clearly evident that it's me.

Trying to decipher all of the unknowns which are looking
back,
to steady hold a gaze, it's just too much.
I believe I should know the person looking back,
like a sibling with whom, for too long, I've been out of touch.

This reflection is a result of my self-perception,
influenced by a lifetime of many voices
shaping the mind of a child into his middle age,
looking back, he regrets now so many of his choices.

Repeatedly this life has vividly taught him that
all of his choices define who he truly is.
Then he was introduced to a person named Truth,
the discovery of oneself being his daily biz.

He spoke that if I can accept what's true,
He will lead the way to discovery, for me that's his deal.
Daily I search for truths with him within the mirror,
Diligently seeking, I discover not all I see is truly real.
Now seeing, I can gaze upon reflection without fear,
filled with great hope, I'm no longer scared to death.
Truth teaches me I can change the way I perceive myself,
able to accept what I see, no longer finding the need to hold
my breath. >

Truth, I want to gratefully thank you for
showing me by my every choice I can truly change.
All that I may feel, I truly need to.
Now accepting true beauty, instead of its lying mänge.

CHOOSE LIFE. Δ

Back Once Again

By Pete Mendoza

Stuck in an unidentifiable world within a world
So many characters with a unique defect
Voices without a face
Having the blues with no rhythm
Anxiety leaving the soul restless
Legs riding an imaginary bike
Sweat making me so cold
Feeling like I can't breathe
Wanting to scream.
Clawing at the concrete.
Mind racing
Thinking of what I should have
Or could have done.
Anger making the anxiety pick up its pace.
Dry heaving as I stared at my reflection
In the rippled water, toes curling
while my hands grip the cold throne.
Wanting so badly to close my eyes
And wake back up
To shake off a bad dream.
Stuck in a trance of defeat
Listening to the disappointment of silence
The buzzing of the overhead light >

Tossing and turning like a tumbleweed
Making promises and threats
All at the same time
Not missing one breath to curse your name
Cravings that give an erection
Wanting to feel at peace
Reaching out to nothing
Not even my own shadow. Δ

What I Possess

By Salvatore Caruso

In possession with the heart of a lion
and a mouth like Malcolm
I am ultimately the only victim of my own
demise and mastermind of outcome.

Me myself and I all agree I gained and now
possess a self-righteous street degree.
Baptized in the gutter, littered with militancy,
this ghetto state of mind seems to get me
by like a high school equivalency. Who does
it matter to, other than me?
Nobody, that's true, especially when one
begins to rage in the backseat of a red
and blue, when one's a pumpkin in the courtroom
wrapped in shackles with all eyes laid upon you.

What I possess you cannot see, a compilation
of struggles that are justified to create me.
Night walker, street stalker with the mental
force of a Skywalker. Under sea levels I stand
taller, conquering mountains like a rock crawler,
earned respect more complex than the Godfather. >

Distinguished dignity, never to be extinguished
like a hooker's virginity, what I possess is no
illiterate simplicity, it's a mental minefield of
complexities with multiple destinies. At times it
may seem a bit simple, until that thought gets
squeezed and popped like a pimple, cracked in the
knees with a bat so that thought becomes
a cripple. So it's back to The Batman trying to
solve The Riddler's ultimate riddle.

What I possess may never be civil, but it's courage that pre-
vails
to get me by little by little. With that heart of
a lion and that mouth like Malcolm, what I possess
will keep me gliding with the wings of a falcon,
floating like a butterfly, stinging like a bee
like the legendary Muhammed Ali. What I possess
belongs only to me. Δ

Boggled

By Pete Mendoza

Slowly contemplating the existence of a boggled mind,
So much, trying to escape into the mystical world
Fading in and out of focus
3D fantasies with the hard line of reality
Causing PTSD like a misaligned car
Trying to drive fast on the freeway.
Always, so close to a new peak,
As gravity works its wonders
And keeps me grounded to eye level visuals.
Boggled by mysterious existence,
Supernatural powers gripping my adrenaline
Yet still seldom do I find myself
Being addicted to the grasp of it. >

Hello says the echo off my rib cage
Like an old wind chime.
Boggled conspiracies, lost expressions
Cloudy days fade away as I drift
To my mystical place
Straight face, cards in hand, ante up
On an ace high.
I float like NASA's shuttle
With the chimpanzee off to curiosity.
Straddle the moon
As I try to brighten the night in shiny armor
Knocking down yet another solo mission.
Creating beauty in my own lost existence. Δ

Outlaw

By Evan Dixon

I am an outlaw.
Some hear that word and think criminal.
Dangerous.
No good.
A menace to society.
A lost cause.
It's not.
It's standing up against a corrupt system.
It's not keeping a closed mouth and
speaking up against the structured rules
that were created to control.
Created to keep a community
in a constant cycle of poverty.
The law is built for the 1% not the 99%.
They say the law is for our own good
but we see people bend it to their own will >

and their own benefit daily.
I follow the law of the people.
The law of the forgotten.
The law of the truth.
Once again the law of the people.
If that makes me an outlaw,
Then an outlaw I am. Δ

Not Forget

By Pete Mendoza

Sensational moments,
Embracing the touch,
Longing for the existence
Of the everlasting love.

Sweet whispers,
Fluttered with lust,
The screams of my rib cage,
As my heart tries to pound its way out.
Loss of words
Searching for sound
Fingertip pulsating,
As it twirls the hair around.

Missing the warmth of your embrace,
The smile of your face,
Missing the scent, memories so bliss.
Emotional struggles as the time dares to permit
Drifting away like the clouds on a rainy day.
Wanting to dream, but
I struggle to stay awake
Don't want to miss if
you come back one day. Δ

Right From Wrong

by Salvatore Caruso

Right from wrong,
we know it well.
You think we would show what we know,
only to prevail.
Somehow some way, we were lost along a dark
and dusty trail.

Mind battered and bruised, stuck in oblivion,
only hanging on at the end of a noose.
A real necktie of the mind to keep me
wrong when I want so desperately to do right.

This is just one of the many complicated
thoughts of an incarcerated mind. Δ

The Car

By Pete Mendoza

The car that the hood rose when getting on the freeway
The steering wheel that would make my hands vibrate
when going past 60.
My car with the tints peeling off the windows,
Trunk rattling with loud music.
The car that would leak oil every time it's parked.
The car that got sugar put into the damn tank.
The car, my car that has the paint peeling
from being beat down on by the sun.
The car with the bird shit that helps hide the scratches.
The car that allows the sense of security.
The car with all the parking tickets
from improper registration. >

The car that has my laundry piled in the back.
The car with the spare that don't fit.
The car I try to go fast in.
The loud car cuz someone stole the catalytic converter.
The car I use to go through the drive-through at 2 A.M.
The car I overheat from being heavy on the throttle. Δ

The Bullet

By Evan Dixon

How can you judge me.
I have no choice in what I do.
I was made to be a slave to the
chamber I go through.
When I fly I have no names
That I choose.
Only you.
I don't make the decision.
I don't kill.
You do... Δ

Prayers for Change

By Pete Mendoza

I steady my vision
But lower my gaze
Watching what to say
Some don't engage
I guess my styles
From the way I was raised
If you're playing with time
There's no one to blame. >

If you're praying to God
Ain't shit going to change
Shit's going to get rough
Til you numb out your pain
The presence of God
Will change up your game
Learning to work
Makes sure things might change.
Paint up the town
Then size up the frame.
Moving in silence makes sure
Things won't change.
No yapping on phones
No letters exchanged
Only sweat
Til it looks like it rained
Spitting so much water
I surf through them drains
Ain't no rooter boy
Just picking up change. Δ

R.I.P.

By Darian Shingu

All I want to do is
Rest in peace
Why can't you see
I know what tortures me.
I'm feeling helpless
In this hopeless place
I just want to be
Able to sleep like you >

When I lay down
I want to see
Unicorns and happy things
But happy just don't happen for me
When you're hopeless
Stuck in a helpless place
I just want to be
Able to sleep like you
When you lay down
What do you see?
Is it everything you love in pain, burning?
You see happiness isn't something that just happens to me.
I just want to be
Able to sleep like you
You just want me to be normal
Well I just want to feel normal
All that they needed
Was someone who believed him
And everything falls into place just like that. Δ

Are You There!

By Pete Mendoza

Who's going to be the one
To help me with my prayers
To hold me down when there's
Nobody there, to show me the way
Help me build strength
Each and every day
Throughout them struggles
I almost threw my life away >

Never understood
About the price it holds today
With the lust of a fiend
I was drowning out my pain
Could it be -
Love I seen
That made me want to change. Δ

Untitled

By Andrew Ramirez

Fear of having no friend or family.
Fear of not finding a place to live.
Fear of living longer than my family.
Fear that my social security will stop.
Fear of hearing that my family died while I'm in jail.

Fear that they give me a lot of time.
Fear that the poem doesn't get published.
Fear of getting burnt alive.
Fear of not finding my family. Not around anymore,
Or my children, whom I love a lot.
Me not finding my family
Since I been down in the jailhouse.
Their helping get life together.
That the best people meet in jail
So help me Lord them good people
Please hear me crying to you
Have mercy on them and be free
To my God my savior ...
Sometimes I say stuff I get confused
what I say Δ

No Coat

By Pete Mendoza

At such a young age
Lost in commotion
Boggled by so much movement
Missing the embrace of a mother
Turning it into hate and confusion.
Not understanding the late long nights
My mother was walking
On those desolate streets
Substituting gifts and a couple bucks
For time and nourishment.
Supporting a habit
Instead of me?
What thoughts turned out to be
How it changed the words when I'd speak.
Not understand what a kid's life should be.
Having conversations
With my stomach as it growled
Surfing through the channels
Was the only thing to do
Staring out the window
Searching for any sign of news
Lost in my own little world.
Anger built up overflowing the love
The price one pays for the motherly touch. Δ

Truly A Bell Cannot Be Unrung

By Don Feeley

Life seems to be a series of choices we make
Drawn up out of "our heart's deciding well."

Some choices we make bring a harvest full of life;
Some bring forth that which are different types of Hell!

When I speak amongst humanity's multitudes;
I must remember Life & Death are found within the tongue!

I cannot take back the love or hate I choose to speak;
Truly not a single bell can be unrung.

I must be mindful like the farmer who constantly grows;
whose harvest is to feed many of those who need.
Whose harvest reflects his agenda by...
revealing that which is sown, by each and every chosen
seed!

In life all my choices are solely mine to make;
from the account accountability until my death.

May all I choose hold great value in this life,
like the gift that delivers one more precious breath. Δ

I AM

By Evan Dixon

I am the storm.
I am the thunder roll.
I am the lightning.
I am the rain that pours. >

I am the grey clouds.
I am the sky turning black.
I am the wind blowing.
I am the waves that violently crash.
Nowhere to run.
Nowhere to hide and how long will I last
is uncertain.
I am the siren crying aloud.
The warning.
The chaos.
I am the chaos.
I am the storm.
I am the thunder roll.
I am the lightning.
I am the rain that pours. Δ

Master

By Christopher McNabb

Part 1.

You get what you give
So watch what you say
Manifest the things I want
Keep negative out the way
I balance my thought
So I can master my steez
Keep everything on point
360 degrees. >

I'm a sponge for the knowledge
Define the meaning of "smart"
Repetitions with my craft
So I can master my art
Diversity at its best
Chameleon like a reptilian.

Part 2.

I know my family's
Gotta eat
I'm going to make us
A meallion.
First I come with a plan
Then I cook up the recipe.
See my goal out to the finish
Then I live out my destiny. Δ

Joy

By Pete Mendoza

Abandoned by love, taught
not to trust, self-inflicted pain
keeps driving me insane,
marinating like a cotton in a spoon,
waiting for it to get drawn up.
Just like artwork, it gets displayed
with paper, pictures one may paint,
buy, or want to put in a frame and
hang it over the fireplace --
cluster-fucked, boggled thoughts,
slowly going crazy,
speaking with voices from a box --
just like Jack, you wind it up til it pops. >

As I squeeze through time,
I hang on the hand that only goes in circles
till the battery dies (unless it's plugged into the wall,
but that's rare). If it has a face
it means it ticks
and tocks.
Overwhelmed by curiosity
crafting a slow daze
as I drift off to my own little pace.
But I can never drown out the noise,
always alone,
so I play with toys, mingle
with spirits so jolly it's
joy. Δ

Surprised

By Russell Xavier

Surprised by a group of friends.
Surprised by an old acquaintance.
Surprised by a dog at the front door.
Surprised by a loved one with gifts.
Surprised by a shooting star.
Surprised by brand new comfortable shoes.
Surprised by the look a child gives you.
Surprised by a party on a moment's notice.
Surprised by an extra shift at work.
Surprised by a friend you haven't seen in a while.
Surprised by a new phenomenon. Δ

Dog's Life

By Pete Mendoza

The dog-living in a doggy-dog world
Rough-rough, is all that comes out his mouth,
besides the tongue
that gets everything wet with drool.
Chasing its tail, full of curiosity;
wanting to be petted as he pees on the floor,
getting everyone worked up about another puddle.
Wanting to play Frisbee, but keeps
biting a hole through it.
You know, the dog who
always has its nose
in the strangest places. Δ

Balance

By Juan Carmona Torres

Life's twists and turns
create havoc,
chaos abounds while
you rest in a hammock.

Life is unique
for every individual.
We all suffer from
pain and pleasure,
which is perpetual.

Balance is key when
dealing with
life's perplexities. >

Emotions erupt
and corrupt
the innocent
wide-eyed smiles,
and tears of joy
make life unbearable
for those who
do not have
any toys.

Yet we must continue on
and enjoy
what life has to offer
or else we will all
be doomed to suffer. Δ

Persevere to Prevail

By Christopher McNabb

One swerve of the tongue
pierces like a sword through the lung.
Have you not heard,
words kill as fast as bullet shells.

When you load negative thoughts
to the chamber of your brain
and your mouth
pulls the trigger that propels
wickedness straight from hell
to the pits of your stomach
where negativity dwells. >

Peace keeps you away
from life pirates
who cast spells.
Positive energy activates
constant elevation
to set sail.

Persevere to prevail,
that forces your way up
to the heavens, not hell. Δ

Face

By Pete Mendoza

The face not only a mother could love
that faces the obstacles, which may
Face some difficulties.
But facing them,
with the face that's loved.
Compared to the ace,
it only had face value.
Which we face,
As the face turns.
Just like life,
The face of the clock,
The hands that make time
Go fast or slow.
But face it.
We face it all for the fact that
Not all face the same.
That face in the mirror
The face in the clouds
The face in the trees
That sway as the wind blows. Δ

The Man

By Evan Dixon

The man that works.
The man that provides.
The man with brown hair.
The man with brown eyes.
The man who tells the truth.
The man who lies.
The man that accepts.
The man that denies.
The man who's happy.
The man who's sad.
The man who's angry.
The man who's trapped.
The man who's cynical.
The man who dreams.
The man who's quiet.
The man who screams.
The man who's hurt.
The man who's healed.
The man who's numb.
The man who feels.
The man with time.
The man with no time.
The man who lived.
The man who died. Δ

El
Tiburón
De Bano

Duh duh duh duh
Just when you thought
it was safe to go back. Safe?
Ha! Yeah, about as safe as a heart attack.
Cruising the deep. Searching for prey. When will
it strike next? It's hard to say. You think it's safe here?
Fine. Be a dope. Just don't come crying.....when you drop the
soap.
.....By Darian Shingu
Δ

Anxiety
By Gaelen Abbas

My friend,
It is my heart's greatest
Desire
That you be well.
I am considering all things
That you could not on your own,
Do not be afraid,
But do something,
Anything,
Such that you may live.

One step
One moment, until they create
hours
Until they make days
Then weeks, seasons, years, >

And finally lives,
And take nothing for granted.

This is what I have said.
It is all.

I am anxious. I am anxiety. Δ

Touchdown

By Christopher McNabb

When I close my eyes
I'm awake.
When I open my eyes
I'm asleep.
I try to dream
my life away,
locked in a movie
I don't want to see.
My day by day
is one step closer
to my touchdown,
like football cleats.
Can't wait for this movie
to be over,
so I can get up out
this seat. Δ

Memories

By Darian Shingu

There was a time not long ago
When I didn't know true pain
Before the ones I loved were calling for me
But I didn't hear them cry my name
Sometimes life feels like the weather in December
But somehow I know that things will always change
The path is there to guide us
We just have to find our way
Everything hurts sometimes
Nothing stays the same.

Give thanks for the things that we've got
Don't forget, but let go of the things that we've lost
In the end all we have is our memories
And my memory always brings me back to you. Δ

Picture It!

By Pete Mendoza

Trying to show no emotion
as you reach out to touch your soil,
the faint smile caused by eye contact,
stirred by body language, faint imagery
gloved by tears that impound you
to gray hair.
Fairy tales, wizards and dragons
who slay or cast spells,
enchantments that carry maladies, spoken softly
with an even grip that drains the energy. >

Stand tall caress your thoughts,
play with strategy, as if it were
lost years of your childhood.
Step softly under yellow street lights
that shadow cracked concrete,
street signs that carry memories
stronger than addictions.
Outspoken but still not heard,
like cattle you tended to.
Graze the fields, harvest crops,
smoking weed off them rooftops.
So many clouds, you try to make it rain,
you dance under a trance, eyes closed,
floating through gravity.
Fascinating extravagance that marinates
in violence and hate.
Imagine it, picture me
rolling in a John Deere,
plowing your fields.
Imagination opens doors
like the stairway to hell,
the highway to heaven,
or just
The days of our life. Δ

Untitled

By Anthony Koppe

I am the better candidate they say,
As they both slither through the
grass from state to state with
their billions in cash. Vote! Vote!
Vote! Because your voice will be
heard. All the while they know the
victor! Make your voice heard
they say again! As you march
to vote, jabbing those chads.
Don't leave any hanging. It might
not count, but go because
your vote might count! Δ

Untitled

By Andrew Ramirez Jr.

My balloons, I love them
Especially on my birthday,
I try to keep inflated, and so the best of life.
I use to blow them and make other balloons
For people on a hot day
That best of life with friends and family
When you inflate a balloon
And it goes, it travels to never guess.
Until it deflates itself by falling to the ground.
Whish.
I thought balloons went up and up
They were going to heaven. Δ

Parents to the Fairgrounds

By Yoshio Garcia

Going to the fairgrounds with my two parents,
As I jumped on my toes back and forward with excitement
Observing the long line to enter.
I feel outgoing as I enter past counted lines.
First thing I seek are the animals with bright colors
Cows white and black.
Also giant rides with loud voices
Of individuals screaming out like it's a scary movie.
I rush to those colorful colors of cotton candy
Eyes bright like shooting stars
Remembering my parents telling me
That will be my last food I will get.
Smelling sweet cotton candy and the
Rest of food I will be missing out.
As I skipped skipped away
My parents rush to get me back into the position
Of holding hands
Like feeling security and loved. Δ

Treasure Hunt

By Erik Thom

My dad and I used to go
on adventure expeditions.
Down to the creek, it became
a tradition.

Looking for treasures, we
usually found, rusted and
random, I was never let
down. >

We hung them in trees and
secret spots, for our next
adventure we would manage
to spot.

Fond memories for sure, times
That seemed so pure, maybe
I'll take ol' dad for a walk
one day. Δ

"Face It"

By Pete Mendoza

Face so dearly loved
that holds those beautiful eyes
that make me dream all the time.
Those lips that whisper sweet symphonies
that shiver the spine.
The nose that smells everything
so clearly.
The one that crinkles with that stare
when it needs your attention.
The face you would love
to wake up to.
With the stubby ears that hear no evil
but listen when you speak.
The one who understands
when you're weak.
The face you can't replace,
the face with no mistakes,
the face I speak to in the mirror.
My face.
Face it.
I'm beautiful. Δ

Remembered Joy

By Russell Xavier

Joys we looked forward to:
The smell of Halloween candy,
the looks of the kids in our
class on show and tell day,
joys of getting caught in the
rain after baseball practice.
We were aware of the joy of our
first kiss, a summer at summer camp,
vacations and water balloon fights in
our family's backyard. The look
out from a stage when performing for the
school play. The feeling of being able
to sleep out at a friend's house and
play video games all night, the list of
Christmas presents we needed to buy,
the holidays, sitting by a fireplace
with family roasting marshmallows. Family parties,
the amazing food and desserts,
seeing everyone grow up so fast. Δ

Facing It

By Pete Mendoza

Watching those who walk beside you
the voice that whispers
I admire you;
I stay lost in the presence of beauty
with a faint hint of disgust
by actions hidden within
the beat of the drum,
vibrations off the rib cage. >

That leads to uncontrollable thoughts
displayed by one's body language.
In a trance, drifting
In and out of the field of dreams,
Struggling with reality. Δ

Balloons

By Russell Xavier

Thousands of air filled balloons
floating along in the air
on strings and in bunches.
They are noiselessly
Balloons that have no identity
just hues of light
Singular-colored and lifeless.
They brighten a child's day
or bring someone happiness for
an occasion. Gently gliding along
in the wind, they bob along
and look bright. Δ

Diamond in the Rough

By Salvatore Caruso

Somewhere deep amidst a synthetic world of
astroturf, lies a diamond ready to become unearthed.
Similar to a needle in a haystack, it's practically
impossible to find that one and only diamond in
a world that has been over-mined. >

But somewhere so low, beauty is growing slow.
Patiently waiting to be unveiled, from the depths of
the rough where the diamond is withheld.

Molten earth churns at an unpredictable pace, in
a society of shifting tectonic plates, the
diamond constantly struggles to find its rightful
place.

The precious gem, with the transparent face. Δ

Grief

By Gaelen Abbas

Dr., I need a remedy
I am distracted.
I am forgetful,
I am lost.

I tried to see
What was there,
To count my blessings
And I feel empty.
Can you treat
The vanity in my life?
I seem to be collapsing.

It's a sensation
In my chest,
My stomach, maybe my back.
I can't stand it. Δ

Media

By Martin Bell

The world deserves the truth
so tired of smoke and mirrors.
The lies told to the masses gives all
these “facts” they give us a bad taste.
Which side isn’t telling all artificial
or genetically modified version of what is unfolding?
In the end,
the choice is yours. Δ

Eyes and Arms

By Darian Shingu

It’s a tired home
For these empty hands
Filled with strange familiar places.
She’ll be home last May
I can last ‘til then
Alone with all these faceless faces.
I wasn’t there when you called my name
But darling believe I know I should have been
So if you see my face
Or when you hear my name
Please don’t look back with guilt or shame
Because I didn’t want you to go
When they took you from me
But I understand now
Why you had to leave. >

Now I won't fight in vain
But I love her just the same
I never knew just what was on her mind
But I did my best to show her mine.

There was a time when we stood
In love
with love
for love
Then I let them in
and let her go
and fell apart

A worried mind and a broken heart
These tears
This blood
My blood
It rains down from my eyes and arms
It does. Δ

Thanksgiving

By Russell Xavier

Thanksgiving is always a time I look forward to.
My birthday falls on this day every four years
so I usually get birthday presents
from my family members.
Turkey, stuffing, green bean casserole,
mashed potatoes, homemade cranberry relish
and Hawaiian bread buns are just a few
of the dishes we serve on this day.
We usually eat by around 4PM.
Desserts are a huge part as well
including homemade pumpkin pie
and Russian cream. >

Our family likes to watch football
and after the food is prepared,
we take home plenty of leftovers.
Everyone shows up for food and drinks
and we usually stay up late
drinking coffee until we have to drive home. Δ

Let's Get Drunk

By Juan Carmona Torres

Drunk, sober, sober, drunk.
Stop drinking, you dumb punk.
I can't stop until
the bottle's empty.
Off I go the
liquor store where
there is plenty.

Once I'm there it seems like heaven,
but my money is scarce, so I guess
I'll buy a cheap bottle
of Seagram's Seven.
I twist the cap off and drink.
The liquor remedies my arching
soul so I can think.

Drink, think, think, drink.
The bottle is empty once again.
I think I need more
so I'll just visit my friend.
Wait, what's happening to me?
The alcohol slurs my speech
and blurs my vision.
Oh well, as long as I can see >

my next bottle of Hennessy.
The intoxicating elixir is inebriating.
I drink 'til my world becomes debilitating.
Drunk, sober, sober, drunk.
That's how I live as a drunk. Δ

Home; CA

By Anthony (Stratton) Fleming

So beautiful, so clean.
Peaceful and serene.
From the waves to the woods
you're an adventurer's dream.
From the snow-capped Tahoe mountains
to the thunderous Maverick's roar.
The sun shines bright and
the climate just right.
A vacationer's dream
how blessed we seem
but there is your dark side too
deeper than black ink tattoos.
Hollywood's dropouts and porn stars;
chasing the dragon begins.
To black tar heroin...
and tent-filled streets.
Once a promise of hope
turned to shattered dreams.
Too many young loved ones lost
without ever saying goodbye.
It's hard at times to see
through that cloud of black smoke.
Praying you part ways
to see a glimmer of hope. >

To the innocent children
who inherit this world,
I feel there is only one thing left to do...
I believe in power of prayer
and I hope you do too. Δ

Thanksgiving

By Anthony (Stratton) Fleming

Something to look forward to each and every year,
Loved ones, family, friends, great food and good waves.
Children laughing and smiling.
Bellies full and stories told.
A four day work weekend;
thanking my union for that.
But this year is different –
stuck behind concrete walls,
the same day over and over,
only the faces and names changes.
The jingle of keys and C.O.'s footsteps
repetitious at night.
Top Ramen a luxury.
No crab, turkey, or desserts
this Thanksgiving night.
However I'm hopeful
and still blessed, you see.
My children happy and healthy
safe in our home.
This time only temporary
and back in my arms
they soon will be.
This time next year
I will be by their side.
Healthy and happy myself >

holding my head up high.
Blessed I still am
to open my eyes each day.
Giving thanks every day;
not just on this designated day. Δ

Through My Eyes As a Kid

By Anthony Koppe

When the merlot hits the shag carpet,
that was always my key to exit stage left,
right, or for that matter, any stage.
The start of all this talk about politics
and how this all came to be.
One thing for sure,
as for me
I'll always be thankful for
this crazy family of mine. Δ

Untitled

By Enrique Cabrera Jr.

Chloe my dear
I can't even tell you the way I feel
being on the other side
still makes me think
is this even real.
Hearing your voice
(Hey Dad)
still gives me the chills.
But seeing you grow so fast
still makes me think like
if I was still taking them pills. >

So I sit here and think
of the foolish things I've done.
Some doing days, months, even
their whole life
but I promise
to be here for you
the rest of your life. Δ

Dear Hip Hop

By Russell Xavier

Dear Hip Hop,
I hear you so frequently
I forget it's you.
I grew up hearing the breaks and beats
watching DJs behind the wheels of steel
even tuning into the MTV Video Awards
On occasion to see the music videos
that I find so enthralling.
Dear Afrika Bambaataa,
What made you use the Roland 808
drum machine to make your music?
That hot drum track is to die for!
I hear Soulsonic Force
on the radio every now and again
and feel like popping and locking
out of sheer curiosity. Δ

Just Know I'll Win

By Anthony Koppe

If it guides me wrong and
I don't win just know I'll
slide back dust off and catch
that win, life come so hard
with no playbook. We make
our own, right or wrong
it guides us on. Δ

Dear 90s

By Russell Xavier

Dear 90s,
I remember Nickelodeon the TV network,
The television shows "Are You Afraid of the Dark?"
and "Hey Dude", also
the cost of a hamburger at McDonald's.
I remember Disneyland at night,
the fireworks and the alternative rock music
on the radio. I can't help but
bring to mind Mad magazine and
nachos from 7-11 with a Slurpee
after school. As well as earthquake kits
they left us with at the end of the year
in school, including granola bars,
a can of tuna and a fruit punch
like some kind of reward for
not going through a disaster
this time around. Δ

Untitled

By Michael Miranda

Long live the Rose that
grew from concrete
Pretty soon it hits the
Street
Maybe standing at a bus
stop sucking on a lollipop
Thorny horny
High heeled mini skirts
Baby watch them coins
Drop
Shit mothafucker you thought
Things was never gonna change
What, bitch, did you think
Me and you was the fuck the
Same? I RISE
You rise we all
Rise
Order in the court Δ

Dear Cast Iron Skillet

By Russell Xavier

Dear Cast Iron Skillet,
You make me a better chef
the way food is so easy to cook with you.
I never use soap to clean you
otherwise you might rust.
Apple pancakes and
sautéed vegetables are a cinch.
All types of cuisine are easily
prepared with you. Δ

Trust Issues

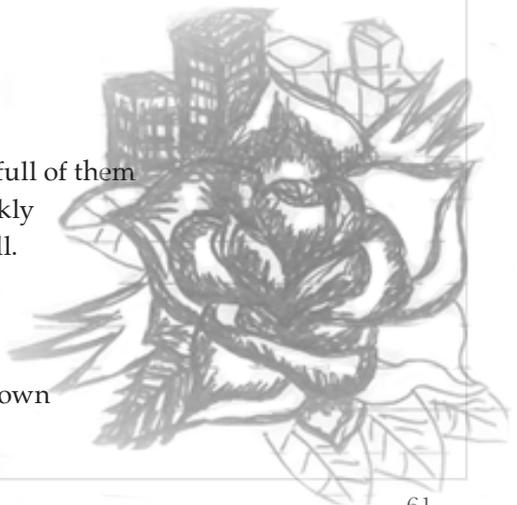
By Anthony Koppe

Who in this world can you trust?
When guns are drawn,
When the sun goes down,
When you're walking in the shadows,
Who can you call on,
Who can you trust?
People call themselves your friends.
They tell you they'll be there but
never show, they tell you they
were there but weren't. Say
they got your back, but don't.
As they get their knives out
two tongues in their mouths, the
one they used to promise, the
other they use to lie,
who can you really trust?
I don't have friends.
I have associates. Δ

Untitled

By Tyler Britton

Did you hear of a Rose
that grew up in the city full of them
So colorful and full quickly
only to find the color dull.
The city of roses
sounds so nice
but only to find
it's the beginning of my own
demise. Δ



Dear Son

By Anthony Koppe

From the day I found out
I knew you would be coming
home one day soon, I drove
myself crazy making sure that
everything was just the way
you would want it for the
day we'd meet, that rainy day came
oh so fast. Clammy hands
gripping the steering wheel as
we rushed her to the hospital.
Knowing how great it
was going to be, that you're
on your way, too soon, not soon
enough, almost eleven hours later
looking like us both holding
you in our arms putting
you in your newly bought
car seat family complete.
Welcome to this crazy
world son. Let's go home. Δ

Life in Portland

By Tyler Britton

I walked down a Portland street
all I hear are police sirens and cars racing
The sounds of gun shots ring
people yelling and buses running
I walk lonely down the street
eyes wide open >

ready for anything on alert.
The streets I know are dark
the lights flicker and shadows roam
the call of hoods whistling in the wind
sound like bird calls but don't be
tricked watch every step
for it may be your last.
The rain and wind hides what's lurking
the snow hides the footstep laid
ahead. Stuck in place til the melt
only to slip the next day when Hell
freezes once more. Only to repeat
the daily nightmares once again.
The fog settles in the morning
as the shadows creep
only to find yourself
6 feet deep. Δ

Neighborhood Watch

By Jason Broca

Watch who you call your friends
they can betray you.

Watch your surroundings, someone's always
watching you like the neighborhood watch.

Watch how you move in the streets
that becomes who you are.

Watch your bad habits that could
become your downfall. >

Watch yourself when you come up
because one wrong move
and it's back to the basics. Δ

Untitled

By Tyler Britton

It starts off a beautiful struggle
as a kid alone and lost
as a child I walked
the block
again alone hard as steel
I think to myself
it's going to be the long walk
down the dark block.
A lone man on the corner
I look up to him as he stands
on a single block,
so tall he stands.
One day I hope to be the man.
He takes me in
hands me the long stock and Glock
to stand alone on the block.
So young dumb and proud
I hold down the ground
from 6 to 6 on 6th and Davis
the only white boy allowed and down
the only one still standing and
holding it down.
So young and proud
now the man
standing on the blocks
on which I stand
from crack to crack
I must watch my back. Δ

The following poems were written by a former poetry student, Justin Marc. Justin went from never having written a poem to being a prolific writer (and much featured in our 2021 anthology). Now released, Justin works at Janus in Santa Cruz, and volunteers teaching poetry to residents. We are pleased to include these poems, and to recognize his achievements! Justin is a working example of the Power of Poetry, and he hopes to publish a collection of his poems soon.

My Wonderful Gift

By Justin Marc

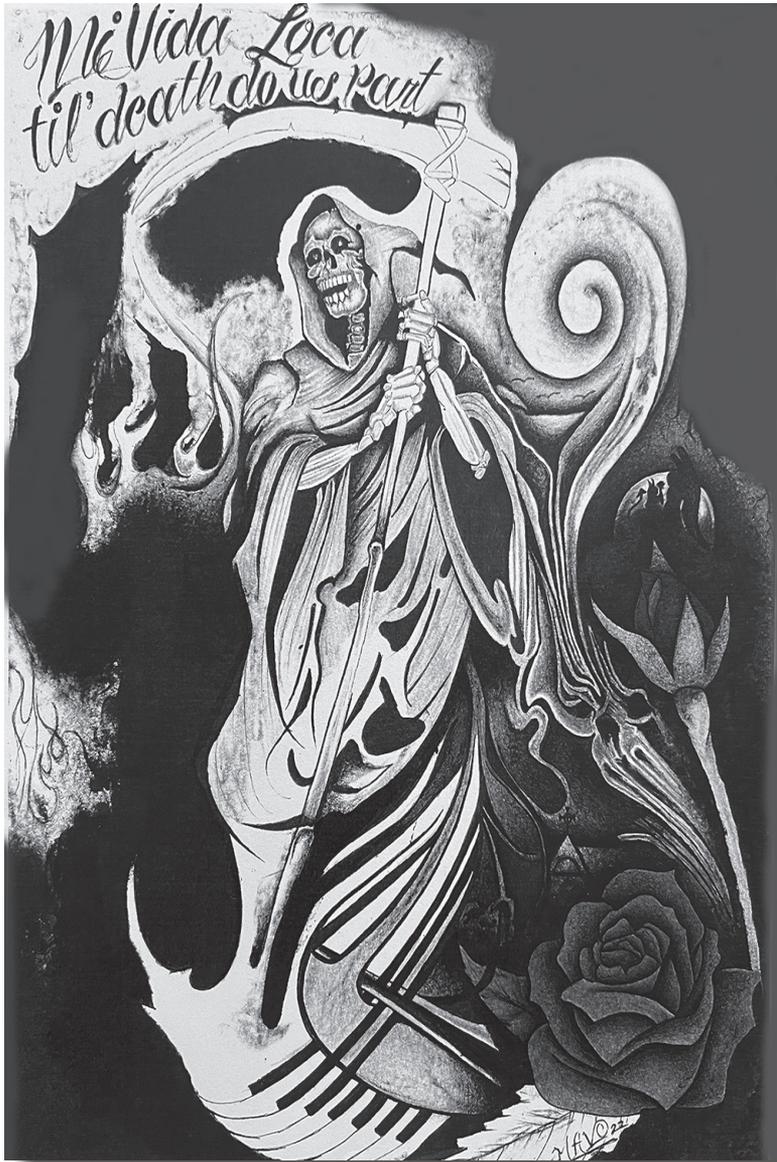
My baby girl's face, there's nothing that can replace.
The moment you were conceived, that very second
I knew God blessed me with a wonderful gift
and I felt Him in the room.
I guess everybody probably feels that way about their child,
but there's something very special about you,
don't take it lightly because it's very, very true.
I'm not trying to preach, but I'm trying to teach,
something you probably already understand:
your gifts are from God, to serve his plan.
Jess, you do bring light and joy
and I never wished I had a boy.
I wish I were a better Dad, but I did the best
with what I had.
I want you to know one thing: I love your mother,
that's why I gave her my ring.
You were born from love, not lust, and this
you can trust.
Now you are grown, and one day
you'll have kids of your own,
and I'll be there until they are grown. >

As a man of 52 I regret some things, but never you.
I've made some mistakes, and so will you,
so please, let me tell you what to do:
Pick yourself up no matter how hard
and just be you.
God, your family and friends love you,
but most of all,
I love you, too!
Happy Valentines Day! Δ

Eleanor Willis

By Justin Marc

Grandma's soft hands and her collection of canines,
The yapping of her Jack Russell Minnie that
drove me insane.
The best French toast ever, ready when I would wake.
Every toy I could think of for me there to play.
Chain smoking Pall Malls, at least sixty a day,
German Roller canaries and the songs they sang.
Blue ribbon roses displayed with pride.
Hee Haw, Lawrence Welk, The Love Boat, and
Fantasy Island on every Saturday night.
Mugs of Old Fashioned root beer floats
and puppy dog tails, Grandma could cook
and never failed.
Finally, teaching me poker
and not letting me win,
so by the age of twelve, I could compete
with any man.
I miss you, Grandma, rest in peace! Δ



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poetryinthejails.org and at the Santa Cruz and Watsonville
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