



Special Issue! *Line Beat Within*

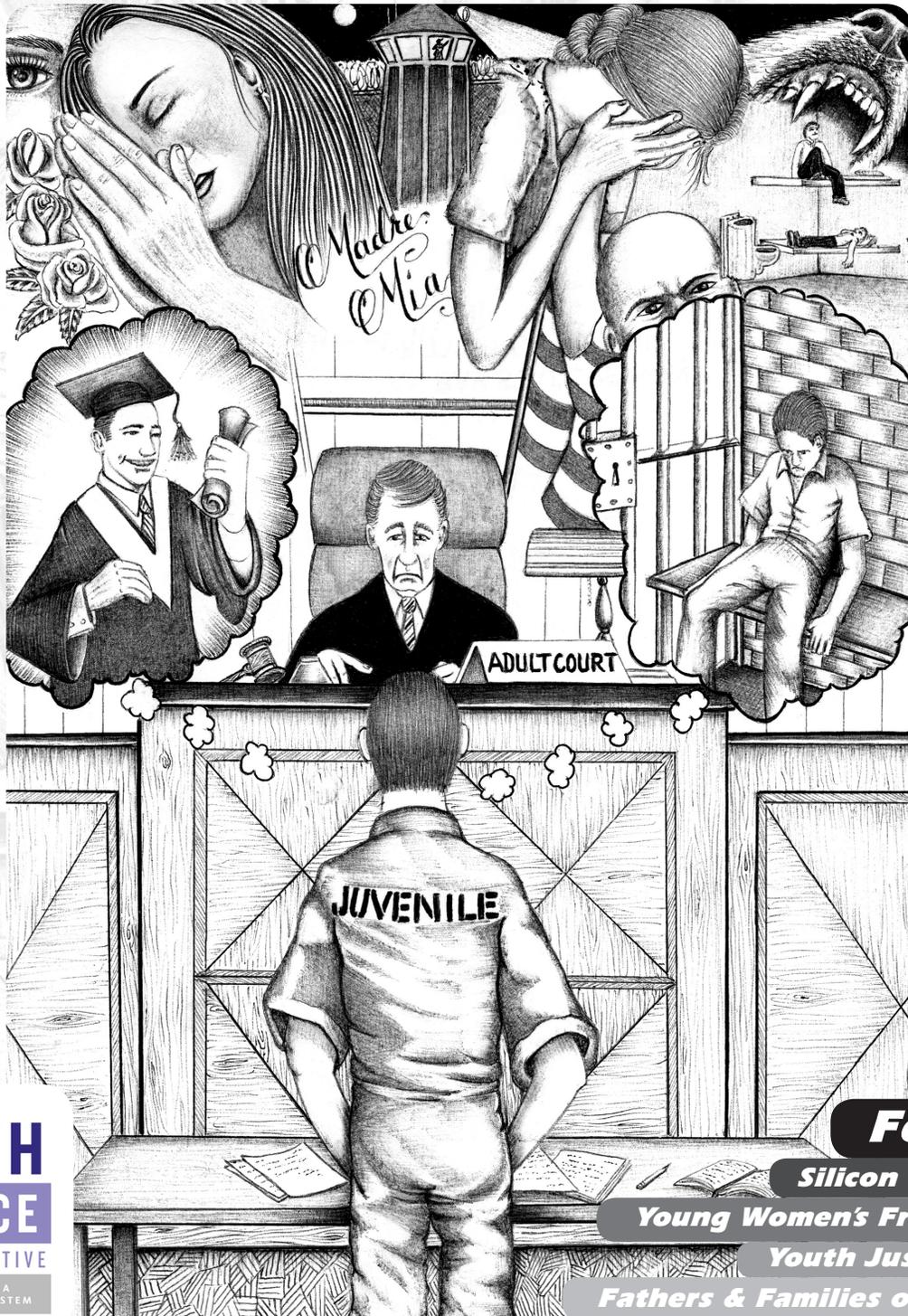


Volume 1.0 ■ November 2017

..... Through Their Eyes:

Young People's Written Truths

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POSITIVE
**YOUTH
JUSTICE**
INITIATIVE

ORGANIZING FOR A
HEALTHY JUSTICE SYSTEM

Featuring

Silicon Valley De-Bug

Young Women's Freedom Center

Youth Justice Coalition

Fathers & Families of San Joaquin

EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to this special edition of The Beat Within for the Positive Youth Justice Initiative. Thanks to the support of Sierra Health Foundation and The Center, TBW had the wonderful opportunity to lead workshops in the community, working closely with four of their PYJI grantees; Youth Justice Coalition-Free LA High School in Los Angeles, Fathers and Families of San Joaquin in Stockton, Silicon Valley DeBug in San Jose, and the Young Women's Freedom Center in San Francisco. The workshops have been such a success, as we get to learn more about each organization and their mission to improve their communities, while working with the adults and youth of each agency, to bring their voices, concerns and stories to the larger community with the ultimate goal of expanding their

power and impact. We certainly hope you enjoy reading volume 1 of this special publication.

We want to give a big shout out to Sierra Health Foundation and The Center, which made this all possible. A big thanks to Sierra Health Foundation President and CEO Chet P. Hewitt who had the back of The Beat founder, David Inocencio, way back in the day, when together they started the Detention Diversion Advocacy Project back in the early 1990s at the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice in San Francisco. Also, we want to thank Matt Cervantes and Alejandra Gutierrez who have been instrumental in making this project such a success.

Enjoy this important read. The writers and artists offer great insight, share powerful stories and poems relevant to today's current events, from the happenings in one's community to world news. Much respect and thanks to Sierra Health Foundation, Young Women's Freedom Center, Silicon Valley DeBug, Fathers and Families, and Youth Justice Coalition for being such powerful allies, friends and collaborators.

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The Beat Within publishes a bi-weekly magazine of writing and art by incarcerated youth.

We are a Member of Intersection for the Arts. Intersection provides resources, community and cultural space in order to contribute to the sustainable practices of artists and arts organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area. Visit www.theintersection.org.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our communities already—we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission. If published, your work becomes the property of The Beat Within, but you authors are free to publish elsewhere.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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SILICON VALLEY DE-BUG

De-Bug's Mission

Silicon Valley De-Bug has 3 core components. One, De-Bug empowers families to positively impact the court of their incarcerated loved ones. De-Bug campaigns both on local and state policies to reform the criminal justice system. Lastly, De-Bug serves as a platform for local writers to have their voices heard.

-Jose Manuel Valle, Community Organizer

SILICON VALLEY DE-BUG

My DeBug Experience

DeBug provides a nest of support and safety for these young people and their families. In just a short series of Beat Within workshops in this nest, I witnessed the youth beginning to explore their experiences and feelings so that their writing could take flight. There are other stories to tell, but I have chosen to highlight three different ways in which three different young people were empowered by our workshops.

The group of young people clustered around the table were quiet and fairly reticent at first, but as we introduced the topics for discussion their interest was clearly sparked. What advice would they give to a rookie police officer? Can you imagine putting yourself in a police officer's shoes? Can you imagine an officer putting him or herself in your shoes? Each of these young people clearly had some experience with law enforcement and had formed deeply held opinions. One young man with shaggy locks and bright eyes was particularly vocal about racial profiling and the fact that there were no police officers in his community that looked like him. When it came time to write, he sat frozen until it was gently suggested that he dictate his thoughts, at which point his animation returned:

"How would you feel if someone didn't give you respect? Do you treat people the way you want to be treated? ...what made you be a cop?... Is it about justice...?" His questions and ideas flowed, and seeing his piece published the next week made those eyes shine even more brightly. The Beat provided the opportunity for this young man and potential activist to feel pride in self-expression, and to begin to

work on building his confidence and ability to express his thoughts on paper independently.

One of the young women sat quietly, responding to the discussion with little more than a shy smile and shake of the head. Once the writing phase of The Beat workshop began, I crouched next to her and she whispered, "What if you want to write about something but you don't want anyone to know it's about you?" Thus the character of Jasmine was created. "Jasmine took the wrong road. She was being a follower, and she saw her friends taking drugs. She got addicted to drugs, and at the end she regretted it." Her message to other youth was not to be followers and "take the wrong path because they don't have a lot of self-confidence." There are few messages more important to deliver or receive. Due to the Beat, "Jasmine" found a safe way to tell her story and hundreds of other disadvantaged young people got to read it.

Another young woman seemed more confident than the other girls. Poised and pretty, she laughed and joked during the discussion, then began to write: "The worst feeling is when you feel trapped and you feel like you can't breathe. I feel like I am drowning in all my problems and there's no way to get to the surface. I feel like everything I love is just going away and there's nothing I can do. I feel like I can't escape from my own sadness and anger ..." Expressing one's feelings is a critical step in healing and finding help. Writing for The Beat Within seemed to allow this young woman to expose the pain, vulnerability, and helplessness that she was hiding so effectively but needed to share.

-Alison Nugent, facilitator for The Beat Within

Do you treat people the way you want to be treated?

Putting the Officer in my Shoes

How would you feel if you got arrested for something you didn't do? Something that someone else did? Why do police pick on some areas more than others? Is it corruption? Did you grow up in the area? I have only seen one cop that looked like me in this area because he knew the lingo of the neighborhood.

How would you feel if someone didn't give you respect? Do you treat people the way you want to be treated? I feel negatively about the police because of these videos showing people being beaten up by cops. I think they judge a book by its cover. There is a lot of stuff happening in the neighborhood: drinking, a lot of gangs, drugs. I remember they drove past and just flashed a light on our house. Did they get a call? They're being nosey. They stop you because you look like the type. They stopped me because I fit the description of someone. They are always stopping me because I look like somebody. Whenever cops pass me by, I don't make eye contact. I think the body cam should always be on in case they do something bad.

I would ask what made you be a cop? Is it about justice or your community?

- Bear

From The Beat: You have a lot of interesting and insightful questions. It is so important for an officer to understand and be part of the community he or she is policing. What do you think motivates most police officers? Do you think there are police officers who effectively serve justice and the community even if that hasn't been your experience? Treating people the way you want to be treated is an important principle for all of us to live by. We really look forward to reading more of your ideas!

Drowning

The worst feeling is when you feel trapped and you feel like you can't breathe.

You can't really do anything about the situation you're in, but you're trying anyway.

There's a lot of stuff on my mind right now, so it's all going to sound weird or it won't make sense.

There are just a lot of things going on in my life, and I don't know what to do.

Another feeling that is horrible is when you feel hated by someone you once loved.

It's hard to explain. I am making it as clear as I can, but it's not coming out clear.

I feel like I am drowning in all my problems and there's no way to get to the surface.

I feel like everything I love is just going away and there's nothing I can do. I feel like I can't escape from my own sadness and anger and whatever else I'm feeling.

- Feeling Pained

From The Beat: We can't escape from our emotions, but we can stop them taking control of us. The first step is always to express what we are feeling, and you have done a beautiful job of that in this piece. We can all relate to that feeling of drowning. We acknowledge your sorrow, but also your strength in putting your feelings into words. Emotions aren't clear, they are often muddled and confused, yet you have communicated yours successfully. Does writing help you when you are feeling so lost? Do you have people you can talk to and share your pain?

SILICON VALLEY DE-BUG

Are You A Follower?

My message is don't be a follower. Just follow your own path. I think it's important to send this message because a lot of people take the wrong path. They take the wrong path because they don't have a lot of self-confidence, but in the end they're going to regret it. Following your own path is the good path.

For example, Jasmine took the wrong road. She was being a follower, and she saw her friends taking drugs. She followed her friends and decided to do drugs. She got addicted to the drugs, and at the end she regretted it.

- Jasmine

From The Beat: This is such an important message, and you should be proud of yourself for having the courage to write about it. Your example brings home the truth of your message, and you are so right that following the crowd is usually because we don't have enough confidence in ourselves to say no. Is Jasmine hanging out with different friends now who won't encourage her to do things that can hurt her? If not, what will the new Jasmine say to her friends the next time they try to tempt her to take the wrong path?

I appreciate everything she does for me.

Why Use Excessive Force?

At times I have felt like the SJPD (San Jose Police Department) did not understand me because they probably didn't grow up where I did and didn't understand where we were coming from.

There was a time when I thought SJPD used excessive force on my brother and his friends. The cops came out of nowhere and asked what they were doing. Some of the guys ran, because they were on probation and weren't supposed to be hanging out with each other. The cops ran after some of the guys and hit and kicked them. They picked the guys up and kind of dragged them to the police car. Some of the other guys were just standing there not doing anything, but they also got arrested.

I think SJPD could improve by not using their sticks and excessive force on the youth when they're not doing anything wrong, and just speak with them.

- Young Community Activist

From The Beat: Unfortunately, these types of stories are common, and we thank you for sharing a personal experience with The Beat. You seem like someone who could really be a positive advocate for the youth in your community. Do you think it is possible to bridge the gap between youth and the cops in your community? How would you begin?

The Way Music Makes Me Feel

When I get mad, I typically turn to music. The music I listen to relates to what I am going through. Certain music relieves the stress that I have, because they talk about what I am going through at that moment. SOB X RBE Humble Pie is the song I identify the most with and it's continually on repeat:

"OG's tellin' me to be humble and worry about nothin',
Family over everything...doin' good in life."

- Bear

From The Beat: We all have hard times when we don't feel like talking or writing, and it would be easy to just let the anger take us over. It's awesome that you have music to turn to during these times. We appreciate you sharing with us even when you're dealing with some tough emotions. Is there anything other than music that helps you when you're mad or sad?

Helping Hand

I asked my grandmother for help the other night because my little brother wasn't listening. I told him to go to sleep, but two hours later he was still up. I woke my grandmother up after thirty minutes when my brother still wouldn't listen to me and wanted to watch TV. She was mad at both of us! She told him to go to sleep in my mom's bed, and he listened.

- Bear

From The Beat: Little brothers can drive us crazy! You seem like someone who tries to solve a problem yourself, but who is not afraid to ask for help if things aren't working out. That's the best kind of combination! What kind of role model do you think you are for your little brother?

Asking for Help

The last time I asked for help was yesterday. I had to get to De Bug, so I asked my grandma for help and to drop me off somewhere. It's kind of hard to ask her because she's always busy, but she did drop me off. I appreciate everything she does for me.

- Grandchild

From The Beat: It sounds as if your grandma is hard-working, and cares for you very much. It's great that you understand how busy she is and that you are grateful for all the things she does for you. During this new school year, what would be the best way for you to show your grandma how much you appreciate her support?

Are You Here to Help?

If I were stuck in the room with a rookie police officer, I would first introduce myself and ask how he/she is doing. If they were being rude or disrespectful, I would ask why they were being that way when the only thing I am doing is being nice instead of how I usually am with cops (putting up my wall and being disrespectful to them). If the officer apologized to me, I would accept the apology and try to start a conversation, asking if he/she really was here to create peace and make San Jose into a better place instead of being like most cops who just make San Jose worse and don't help.

If he/she was really here to help, I would be happy and ask how they planned to help. If they were here just to make San Jose worse by not caring about the neighborhood, participating in police brutality, and making assumptions, I would be really upset and ask why be a cop if it is just for the money? A good cop would be friendly, kind, help out the youth, and would not want the community to feel threatened by them.

- Shorty

From The Beat: Your writing is very thoughtful and clear. We appreciate the way you recognize that mutual respect is so important in order to have an honest conversation. You have the potential to be a positive advocate for your community! How specifically would you advise police officers to help out the youth? We are excited to read more of your writing!

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YOUNG WOMEN'S FREEDOM CENTER

Young Women's Freedom Center's Mission

Our mission is to empower and inspire young women who have been involved with the juvenile justice system and/or the underground street economy to create positive change in their lives and communities.

-YWFC, 2017



YOUNG WOMEN'S
FREEDOM CENTER

The Center for Young Women's Development

How could you forget about me?

My Workshops with The Young Women's Freedom Center

I have been facilitating The Beat Within workshops for nine years and my favorite workshops are the ones when I walk away with new thoughts to mull over, when I feel I learned something important.

Each of the four workshops at the Young Women's Freedom Center gave me this gift. After these workshops I had new information about what it means to be American, what it means to have a kid on the

streets, what twelve year olds really need and rarely get, who our real teachers are, what it means to be a true friend, how one carries the loss of a sibling, and how writing and being published are profoundly important to young people who are putting all their thoughts and energy into stepping firmly into a safe, secure and fulfilling life for themselves, for their families and for their friends and communities. I am grateful.

And I am grateful that thanks to The Beat Within and the Sierra Health Foundation other people too can read these young people's words and have to think.

-Peggy Simmons, facilitator for The Beat Within

What's Up?

You playin', you payin'
dancing con el.
Good times, bad times.
Smile now, cry never.
Lost in time.
An eye for an eye.
Dance with me 'cause all
I do is try
B's change, Ninjas change
Women change, men change
But if the love is real
It will always be the same.

-Me

From The Beat: All you do is try, we get that. Have you found the sort of love that will always be the same? Do you mean it never changes or never dies, or both?

Dear Brother

I celebrate your birthday as if it was mine, as mine is just nine days later. I wish we could be how we used to be. I wish you were very proud of me.

When you told me it's working in the streets or you, I thought it's either living or living without, it's either my food or my heart, it's either making sure Mimi's good, and how could you put all that on me? How could you forget about me?

You raised me. You made me. You took an oath to be my father. We were yin and yang. We were Fric and Frac. We were the cat and the hat.

If you could be who you used to be, you would see a lot has hurt me. A lot has broke me. I used to be your trophy. You used to be so amazed at everything I did. But it started tearing apart. Without you I have no heart, no place.

- Jazmine

From The Beat: We hope you can share this letter with your brother and that you two find a new way to be there for each other.

There is No Way Out, Rookie

Hey you, listen to me!
Why the hell do you want to be a cop?
What convinced you to be a cop?
Where are you from, Rookie?
When did you come up with this dumb decision?
Answer me!
The biggest gang in the world and you
Decide to become a cop?
Have you ever struggled?
Do you know where you're at?
Are you one of those losers in school who got bullied?
Wait, you were a nerd, right?
Oh, I got it, you want to protect and serve?
Have you ever been to juvie, jail, prison?
What's your motive?

Shhh, you probably never stole or missed a day of school?
Have you been impacted by any systems?
Are you a Christian? Probably not!
What's your cultural background?
Let me see your file!
Stand now!
Strip now from head to foot. Now!
Squat now!
Now spread 'em, and cough!
How does it feel to be in our position?
Get the hell up now!
Note from the People: We the People will take no more police killing!

-KI

From The Beat: We like the idea of turning the tables so that cops could feel what you feel. We also really like how you ask where the cop comes from, what brought them to that point, how they might have been hurt as child. It shows compassion.



YOUNG WOMEN'S FREEDOM CENTER

Before 2018

My goals to accomplish before the end of 2017:

- Finish my internship at Sisters Rising.
- Go to class more!
- Work on getting my driver's license.
- Work on my reading and writing.
- Work out more and eat right.

- AshB

From The Beat: Those are great goals! In our experience those kind of goals go better some days than other days, and we just have to keep trying!

What Have The Streets Cost You?

Coming to America, I lost my dad
Leaving El Salvador because of the civil war,
My mom in an abusive relationship
So she got away.
It cost me knowing my dad.
It cost me knowing my country.
Mom always fighting step-dad
and step-dad always hitting her
Cost me my happiness, experiencing
My childhood, that's what it cost me.
Step-dad leaving mom
Cost me having a dad in my life....
Twelve-years-old in a gang
Cost me my childhood....
Smoking and drinking, popping pills
Caused me to not feel any pain.
I've given fifteen years of my life to the system.
It cost me graduating from high school
Cost me having friendships, relationship, family, work.
Being a black sheep in the family
Smoking, drinking, doing pills, sniffing
Cost me having a healthy brain
The cost is having holes the size of quarters in my brain.
I've lost family members
To going to prison.
I was in a bad, abusive, relationship
It cost me two years and four months in prison
'Cause I just wanted to get away.
Growing up, I've lost friends.
Jail, gangs,
Experiencing death in front of me
The cost is having trauma.

-Lucero

From The Beat: Thank for such a moving piece with details of the costs to you and your family. We are struck by how strong and smart you are which makes us think about what how much is left after so much is gone.

Why Do You Want to Be a Cop?

Why do you want to be a cop? See, to me, there's no such thing as "serve and protect." We get no love from the cops.

Where do you get off putting your authority and privilege on the community, stepping on throats and the backs of working colored men and women, flashing your badge and gun, ripping and raping the humanity and sanity of that young man getting stripped and hosed down, or that girl being tortured and violated by the law taking her womanhood over and over again?

Cold hearts, ice-cold hands, filled with sins. You're the real savages. Savage enough to shoot that young man for trying to make a band and living out of what this screwed up system has left for us. Or that girl in survival mode, trying to get the opportunity to come up in the hood.

So, no, cop, or should I say, "pig," you're the true whore. You're the true savage. You are the thugs, the rapists, the ratchets. You just have a licensed gun and a badge with your name on it, but you're still from the hood, baby, just waiting on that door to get popped. So, screw your authority and that badge. Only thing that you protect is your ass.

-Shai

From The Beat: We love the tone of measured rage in this piece. Why DO you think people want to be cops? Power? Do you think any want to make the relationship with the community better "from the inside"? Why?

Dear Police Officer

Let's take a minute to talk to ya about your people and your decisions, on the streets, jail, juvenile, and prison. You are so worried about Daquan who's got dreads, you never saved Felicia who was shot in the head.

See, I can't stand y'all. I believe in street justice with all the police corruption. See, you think you're big and bad, but like Boosie said, "without that badge, you're a bee and a half, taking our mothers and taking our brothers."

That's why I don't call y'all so y'all could shoot me and leave my daughter to defend and protect herself. See, my youngin' can't stand y'all. We used to want stickers and now we're running before sentence, a four-year-old goddess running from an officer, scared he might shoot her or take her to jail.

Don't be that officer, taking advantage of his title, and his right as an unlawful officer. So I still won't bother to call or follow up with you. You can't help me, or my people. It's us against you 'til you see this street we live and been through. So screw you, taking us to jail, giving us tickets just to hit quota on some shhh.

I can't stand cops. Just eat your donuts and coffee, focus on saving your Johns and finding your Ashleys. 'Cause you obviously don't give a shhh about Rashawn or Jose, but that's what the white law says, to treat us black and brown with guns and bullets shooting at y'all, but our hands are on the wall, and fisted up, clenched for protection against your direction. We live in fear, knowing an officer is near.

Sincerely, the sister who hates you.

-Jazmine

From The Beat: This piece is strong, clear and powerful. Continue to help tell the stories of the Felicias, Rashawns and Joses.

Beauty Where I Live

Beauty where I live!
The Mission
The Mish
La Mission
La Cultura
Doña Tere in the corner
Selling corn in the cup
Champurrado
What's up Hitts
What's up with my ninja?
Neighbors say, Hola Lecerito
Spanish music playing loud
From different neighbors' houses
Punta
Merengue
Salsa
Walking with friends
Seeing our folks
Everywhere

What's up? Let's get tacos
On 24th Street
You know that street
With murals between Treat and
Harrison
Murals with homies, familia, our
Latin culture
Aztec, Mayan, the City,
Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua
Taco day at Taqueria Vallarta
Seeing Latinos everywhere
I miss that
Before these techies, gringos, came
and took our culture away
Rollin' a blunt on my corner
Ready for Mangoñada
Oooh
Nah
Let's get them hot dogs on the
corner
Or what about cinco de Mayo when

carnival poppin'?
Or how about La Raza Park
When the lake
Was there before
The skateboard park?
How about the million dollar spot
By Bernal Heights
Where you can smoke
Get away and see the City
From an ugly struggle
in the hood?
Fridays where the functions
poppin'
When we see youth walking
To youth party events
Different hoods
How about when narcs
Are everywhere and
The only get away place
We'll go will be
San Jo Park?

I remember as a kid
Casa Lucas
Moms and her dollar food stamps
How about when all the mobs get
together
Getting High-speeds
All different kinds of ethnicity
All enjoying ourselves
Drink to the left, smoke to the right
Or how about the Aztec Warrior
On 24th and South Van Ness
On top of the tire shop?
And this is the beauty
Of the Latino culture

-Lucero

From The Beat: You make the beauty so clear, sharp and alive! Is your hood changing? Which parts of the culture are being taken away. Are there any parts that could never ever be taken?

YOUNG WOMEN'S FREEDOM CENTER

Cost Me

Cost me shhh, you cost me a lot of pain
 My strength my memory and my common thoughts
 I remember when you climbed on top of me and took my streets
 You looked me in my face with that crook look and banged my streets
 Can't nobody be me
 Can't nobody feel me
 I sit here and look at these white a-holes on the streets
 Using my words taking my swag.
 The streets cost me the hate of that white swag thief
 That wannabe on our black and brown streets so bad
 Living our life tryin' to take our bag
 My Samoan sister surviving off the fiends
 My El Salvadoran sister stabbing to be free
 My Black sister trickin' with the tricks
 The streets cost me

It cost me time with my baby so I can make a thousand a night
 I can't stand white people who come join my life
 See they got it better than us with their white love
 Our grandmothers are slaves refugees and immigrants
 Only thing you could say is what your own people did to you like Hitler
 Yea, my brothers took me 'cause of your white supremacy
 We can't get military guns the police gave them
 I couldn't post an ad unless the system made it
 So y'all want us? Screwed up streets have that tough love
 Rest in Peace to all my homies,
 Sometimes I wish that meant "Return if Possible"
 But the streets took you so that's not an option
 I remember them cold nights off all that powder
 You couldn't walk in my shoes if we had the same dollars
 'Cause we don't got the same color we don't got the same struggle
 You couldn't tell me how to make baking powder look like crack
 Or pour syrup with Benadryl to have people thinking they leaning back
 Only my streets could tell me
 The streets didn't cost me shhh, but to never turn on my colors
 for some white shhh

-Jazmine

From The Beat: We love the fight that is in this piece: the pride that comes with the rage. What are the streets to you now? Which parts of them are in your past? How much are they still yours?

Beautiful Struggle

They tell me to look at the brighter side of things
 Meaning while the brighter side is still a dimmed light.
 They say the grass is greener on the other side
 But the other side for most is concrete and broken glass.
 They say things will get better
 But society puts us in a position to do worse.
 They say "this too shall pass"
 But for most, it's their last.

"Dimmed light": when people can't see the brighter side of things because of where they are living, the things they're going through with being homeless, or on drugs, or being involved with physical abuse.

"Concrete and broken glass": Concrete means people might not even live in a nice enough area to even have grass. And broken glass is when people live in really bad area of poverty.

"Society puts us in a position to do worse": means to me when we have nothing and don't have the things to do better.

"For most it's their last": some people aren't blessed or given the opportunity to get past the worst because of death. It's everywhere, no one's protected from it.

-Shay

From The Beat: This is a lovely poem and we're glad to have your thoughts behind it to know your specific perspective better. Can you tell us why you named this struggle "beautiful?"

What Have the Streets Cost You?

They've cost me and my mom's relationship. The streets cost me my self-worth, my vision, me loving myself, me having love for others, me always assuming the worst! The streets have cost me my brothers and me being evil. But in the end, they cost me a lot but taught me to humble myself and love myself again, like I did when I was a little girl.

Being taken from my family by CPS put me in a depression in the streets. When I got pregnant, I changed because then I had my son and I knew he could love me. I started my own family and that's what made me whole again.

-Lillyana

From The Beat: We are really interested in the streets teaching you humility. We hear all the time how you have to be tough in the streets to survive. Can you be both humble and tough?

Write Without a Thought or Feeling

When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time. I never thought I'd be like this: feeling this way, always seeing the good and never wanting to assume the bad.

I feel that if I could erase these kinds of emotions, it would be the best gift anyone has ever given me. Now I just can't.

I just need to fall back and think if I have been given these chances, why shouldn't I to others? But I just can't help functioning like that.

- Lillyana

From The Beat: You captured a really hard question about wanting to see the good in people, and give them chances, as people have done for you, but knowing the risk involved too. We've never found that easy either.

My Beautiful Sisters

Sis, I see you!
 Sis, I hear you!
 You are beautiful!
 You are so smart!
 I see you Boss Lady!
 You can become that Boss Lady!
 You can become your dreams,
 your daily thoughts!
 Don't listen to them ugly dirty

boys!

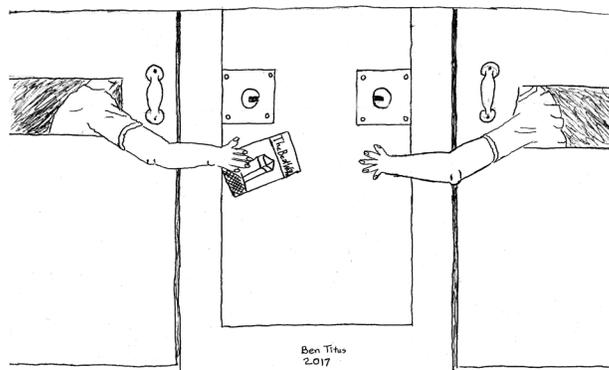
You are a Queen!
 You are a good Mama!
 Today and every day be everything you can!

Do you!

-Monica (Big Sis)

From The Beat: Thank you, Monica! (Monica is a Beat facilitator at the Young Women's Freedom Center workshop. She said, "Listening to all my little sisters speak today was so inspiring. They made me proud!")

The Beat Within



Ben Tins
2017

Pass the magazine.

YOUNG WOMEN'S FREEDOM CENTER



Agent of Change

The idea of change is an ideology of white supremacy in a male-dominated world. Every expectation that the system has of us is from a man's perception. Or the white man who doesn't know or hasn't the experience that made these rules and laws expectations on society. But for what he expects and anything less is unacceptable.

-Lillyana
From The Beat: We know that you have been and continue to be an agent of change in your own life. Do you just make these changes without any regard to the perceptions and expectations of those with power?

I Am A Lover Of Money

I hope to save a coo' amount of money or start saving and cut off all the people who ain't good for me. I will think really hard about who's good for me and who ain't and leave them in 2017. But basically seeing who's on the same page as me and has the same goals and won't bring me down.

I'm at a good point in my life and I just want to strive, to grow, and do even better saving money, maybe for a car or deposit on an apartment or just to have money put aside.

Even though I don't have any friends. Maybe I'm referring to making a decision to stay or break with my side piece or make it official.

- Lilly
From The Beat: You don't have any friends? That's hard to believe. And we are your friends. You seem to be on a really good path working on your goals. So what about that side piece? Is that situation making the other goals harder?

Maintain Our Innocence

I think Kalief Browder's story is a perfect way to tie up each topic together.

- "Be prepared" could mean anything. Not just in a natural disaster, but in life.
- Define America, back to Kalief. America is full of racist hypocrites.
- One thing to accomplish before 2018: everything, because life is too short.
- Things are being loved, people are being used. Again, Kalief Browder is a perfect example.

Kalief was a 16-year-old boy who was wrongfully imprisoned for three years on Riker's Island. He was beaten, starved and tortured by inmates and staff.

His court dates were always delayed and even when offered a great deal, he refused to take it. Maintaining his innocence and getting justice was his goal. In the process, he committed suicide due to mental illness that started when they kept him in solitary confinement for most of his time.

-KC
From The Beat: Thanks for recommending the film "The Kalief Browder Story" - We agree his story brings up a lot of important issues and problems with our society.

The Disagreement

Oh Rafanitor, my best friend, my family, my cousin.

Two different views.

My oldest sister who's seen me get arrested the first time

always on my behind

always giving me consejos.

You've been there for me since day one

never seen eye to eye.

What's right, what's wrong

what not to do, what to do.

Two different life styles.

Two different women, growing up different

family oriented

to hood oriented

to university

to graduating from the streets

chose different choices.

One making the correct one.

The other in a different road.

Young one in abusive

relationships

to helping you give advice in your relationships.

Always telling me to stop being so hard

& in the streets.

Now to me telling you, vice versa.

When can I help you?

The streets ain't what it is.

So, sis,

Can you see that I lived that life?

And it ain't for you.

So when can we see eye to eye?

Or that's what makes our

friendship so unique

to be there for one another

in our differences.

- Lucero

From The Beat: This does sound like an amazing friendship, in your differences, and one that will endure a lot.

No One Is Born Hating

Hatred is full of poison with a disruptive mindset followed by the heart being so dark of pure blackness pouring into the Spirit creating nothing but a rotten soul.

Hatred isn't a natural way of a human being

Hatred is a matrix in this world

full of selfishness and impulsive behaviors

Where's the love?

Love isn't labels,

Love isn't colors

Love isn't alcohol, guns, drugs, or money

Love isn't limited

Love isn't war, it's balance, freedom from hatred

Why do you hate? Because I don't know how to hate.

You hate because it's what you're used to. It's your norm.

You hate because it's what you settle for

Are you willing to learn love?

-Kandy
From The Beat: We love that question at the end, and how this piece about hate turned into a piece about love. How would you teach love to someone whose norm is hate?

YOUNG WOMEN'S FREEDOM CENTER

Define American:

I am not an American't

I don't wear
burgundy hats like
Trump dump

I am a Latina
An alien
A resident

I am not an American't

Lucero H.....
Is not an American name
Is a Latin name

I am not born here
Nothing here is free
This is not a freedom country

American,

No wearing socks
Stinky feet
onion smelling
Bike riding
English spoken
Judgmental
Stuck up, rich
Prick
Sun of a fish

Out of the closet
Thrift-store wearing
Money-hungry
Selfish, wearing
Macy's fish
Hook Fish, Westin
Americans

Hate,

Materialistic
Patriarchy, political hater

American what

Americans created
War so that Americans
Would learn geography

How are you an American
And you migrated
To a country where people
Were already here

Yet, we immigrants?

Or are you?

So who is the American?
Me, or y'all?

Only in America
Pizza comes faster than
An ambulance

Only in America

There are handicapped
parking spaces
In front of a skating rink

Only in America
Do drugstores make the sick
Walk all the way to the back of the
store
To get prescriptions
While healthy people can buy
Cigarettes at the front

Only in American
You can order large hamburger
With fries
And a diet coke

Really

- Lucero

From The Beat: You make some really great points in this powerful piece. Are you saying that being American has more to do with culture and behavior than with laws and papers?

Goals

- Graduate and finish high school.
- Be able to buy my son EVERYTHING he wants.
- Push myself to go harder in life.
- Get my own house and car.

- Besitaas

From The Beat: Great goals! How far along are you in achieving them? What are the next steps?

What is Humbled?

What does it mean to be humbled? Everybody always says they are humbled. But they really ain't. Why say it, but you're really not?

What does it mean to me? To not judge people on how they look or how they are. I still ask myself, "How does humbled look?"

- Besitaas

From The Beat: We LOVE the question, "How does humbled look?" We find that trying to be humble is never finished, but a process as we also grow up and grow confident.

Words from the Wise

Things and Love:

People care too much about things.

People use the people they say they love.

What is love?

Love is not being used.

Things don't matter if you have no one
real to share them with.

-AshB

From The Beat: We agree with most of what you say, but we do find we can enjoy many important things alone: books, music, food, as examples. We do want the people we share thing with to be real, though, true.

Life?

Why is everything expensive? Nothing is free in life. Sometimes I wonder why life is so hard.

My mother says there is always good where there's bad...

When I look at my son, I don't want to give up EVER! I am his hero! And I am the BEST mom.

- Besitaas

From The Beat: Do you agree that there is always good where there is bad? We know you won't give up!

I Want to Feel Something Different

Sometimes I just feel like I'm talking about the same shhh over and over. Sometimes I don't want to be deep, thinking of words to say, 'cause all I ever do is think.

I really just want to shut down. I don't want to talk. Sometimes talking makes you emotional. I want to feel something different. I don't want to feel ashamed.

I can feel my anxiety coming into play. I just want not to think. Please, please stop thinking. I don't want to be emotional. I don't want to cry.

People talk to me so rude some days and I'll have nothing to say. I just want to be by myself. I wish I could lock my feelings in a case and kiss them away.

-Shai

From The Beat: Thank you so, so much for putting into words what so many of us feel and can't say.



YOUNG WOMEN'S
FREEDOM CENTER

The Center for Young Women's Development

Website

www.youngwomenfree.org

Instagram

[www.instagram.com/
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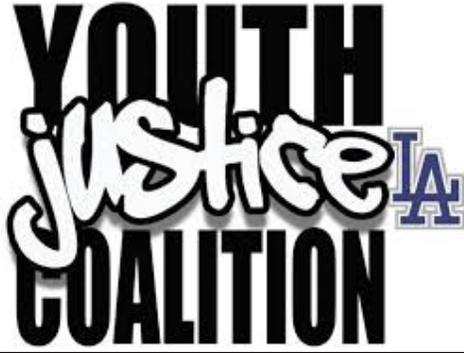
Facebook

[www.facebook.com/
YoungWomensFreedomCenter/](http://www.facebook.com/YoungWomensFreedomCenter/)

Email

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YOUTH JUSTICE COALITION



Youth Justice Coalition's Mission

The Youth Justice Coalition (YJC) is working to build a youth, family, and formerly incarcerated people's movement to challenge America's addiction to incarceration and race, gender and class discrimination in Los Angeles County's, California's and the nation's juvenile and criminal justice systems.

-YJC

I will have to stay focused on my work at school and come on time every day.

Youth Justice Coalition, Free LA High School

Located in Inglewood, the heart of South Central Los Angeles, Free LA High School at Chuco's Justice Center, is the high school I wish I had attended. Their motto is "it's never too late to graduate" and their practices reflect their belief in this statement. For many youth who have been incarcerated, the reality is that they face many barriers in continuing their education. For example, many are expelled from the school district. Free LA High allows formerly incarcerated, and other non-traditional students, to get an actual state certified diploma, not a GED. Students can take all the courses needed to graduate but what makes this school special is all the other assistance they make available. Free LA High provides real-world lessons and guidance that students will definitely use, regardless of their future plans. For example, in order to graduate students are required to turn in a completed resume, something I had no idea how to make after graduating high school. Even more beneficial, Free LA High helps students fill out the Federal Application for Student Aid, which I found impossible to figure out alone while I was applying for financial aid.

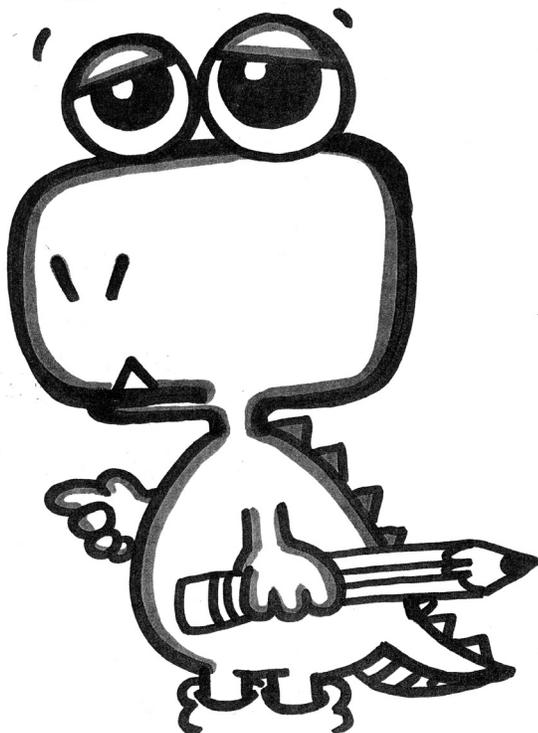
Unfortunately, for many, of these students, barriers to education

are not just clerical. These students face actual problems that prevent them from focusing on school. For example, many of these youth have children or other family members that they provide for. Some students are homeless. Some students work two jobs. The staff at Free LA High knows the reality of the challenges their students face and tackle them head on without trepidation or judgment.

During one of the workshops, a student explained to me that a recent difficult decision he had to make was choosing between paying the power bill or food for the rest of the week. He then told me he chose to pay the power bill because he could eat at Chuco's. Incredibly, breakfast and lunch are provided to all of the students in abundance. They are also given a TAP card that gives them free transportation all around the city. In addition, students can bring their children to class with them. Have you ever seen a high school teacher giving a lecture holding a student's child so the student could focus on content? Up until working with Free LA High, I hadn't. I think one of the students summed it up best when he explained why he respects the staff at the school so much; it is because they put their heart into their work. Conversely, if the students weren't so individually exceptional and full of potential, I don't think the teachers would put in so much effort.

-Andrea Flores, facilitator for The Beat Within

STORY TELLING WITHIN LOCK-UPS INSTITUTIONS!



Planning Ahead

One thing I would like to accomplish by 2018 is getting out of high school so I can move on with my education in college. I would like to get a degree in business so I can have my own business one day and be happy with the job I am doing five years from now. To accomplish the goals I want I will have to stay focused on my work at school and come on time every day.

-Cassandra

From The Beat: You are laying down a pretty solid base for the years to come by focusing on your attendance. Keep at it, showing up is half the battle.

The Natural High

What specifically makes me happy is good vibes from people and places. The reason being the simple fact that you never know what you could say to someone to change their whole way of thinking and ideas. Some are strong-minded people but there are also the not so strong-minded individuals. For me, personally, I strongly love to see others happy or having a good time. It brings me good vibes and makes me feel welcome. For example, say I went out to a lounging spot to hangout with friends. What makes me happy is the good vibes that comes when you're surrounded with people you love. Just remember a time you were with people or a special someone who made you feel comfortable or made you feel like you belonged. Think about how you felt on the inside, a natural high.

-Mistie

From The Beat: You are so right; having a good time just hanging out with the people you love is the best. Do you think you do a good job of spreading good vibes yourself?

YOUTH JUSTICE COALITION

I'd Say Thank You

If I could tell Trump something, I would say thank you. You spoke your truth and gave permission for others to speak their truth. You spoke up about your dislike or disgust of different types of people, you did what you wanted to do and you gave permission for others to do it. You allowed people to be free, without care or concern, and role modeled that for others. Now you have encouraged others to be free.

Now that we are here, what are you going to do to make it right? What are you going to do to role model being free and being conscious of the consequences of your words, actions, and ideas? Let's be free together.

Love,

-Kruti,

From The Beat: Yes, let's be free together. That means coming together, embracing our differences and let them shape a world where freedom's only boundary is respect of others.

The Jam

If I could make any TV show, it would be a drama reality TV show about people in jail, with all the politics and humor. I would even do behind the scenes interviews, with all the show participants, to make it funny like 'Survivor.'

I think it would give people insight to the system in a humorous way. I think what most prison reality shows lack on is real constructive talks with inmates, full of substance and emotion. Most of the time, they focus on the wrong aspect of incarceration, and I feel like they glamourize the prison system.

I don't think TV shows take the time to make proper use of their influence, or even consider the effect they have on society (or they are just indifferent).

-Marley

From The Beat: We agree, media such as TV shows should be used to raise consciousness about society issues. Politics and humor can work hand in hand, in order to reach a wider audience.

The Disagreement

I find myself constantly fighting with my mom. No, not with fists or palms, but with her knowledge and my ignorance. We don't see eye to eye and I honestly see why. I won't admit it to her, because even when I'm wrong I like to believe I'm right.

She knows what the real world is like, and just wants to protect me from it, but I don't see it that way. I see it as she's so mean and unfair that she doesn't want me to have fun or a good time. I know she knows what's out there.

Hell, her job doesn't help my position either. With a mom working in a Juvenile Hall, she can't seem to shake the idea of maybe, just maybe, she won't have to be told her child is sitting in a holding cell.

-Yana

From The Beat: We all question authority at some point, whether it comes from our parents or another figure. It takes time and growth to actually learn the lessons they are trying to teach us! But for what we read, you're getting there.

To Believe

"When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time."

-Maya Angelou

To believe that someone will remain who they are always is to dissolve hope.

-Big Will

From The Beat: We do change, along with our experiences and lessons learned. Do you think we can change completely, or that we always keep the core of ourselves?



End Mass Incarceration

I would make a TV show that displays the life of the currently and formerly incarcerated (from the time out, to time of probation/parole with record expunged).

This would show everything exactly how it is not watered down.

Show people in solitary confinement,

in the yard in jail/prison, fights,

what people do to make change,

basically slavery, how people struggle to see their parole officer within 24 hours of release, housing programs when released, police abuse,

filming people's court cases, struggles to get employment with a felony/strike record,

show people who have no support inside and outside of lock-up.

Show how some people may go back into that same lifestyle of the fast life because it's all they know (recidivism),

show the fights on the outside for people on the inside locked up, such as Prop 47.

I would show successes from people who share our same struggles.

The reason why I would like this filmed is because of my personal experience

with incarceration. I was locked up at LA County Men's Central Jail

at the age of 18 for a year, released with a felony and strike, so I know what it's like to carry the weight.

I have epilepsy, I have seizures.

In lock-up I was placed in solitary confinement for two weeks for having seizures, something I can't control.

When I was released, I had no medication and I lived in Palmdale, so my uncle had to drive up to Central LA to bring me my medication,

and bring me back to Palmdale,

because I had I think only 48 hours to check in with the Probation Department.

It took me a year to find solid employment, and that was with the Youth Justice Coalition.

It was perfect for me,

because everyone here at YJC has in some type of way been impacted

by the system. And I have a passion in fighting against mass incarceration.

Fight the lock-down!

-Dayvon

From The Beat: We wish such a TV show existed! It would be very educational, tackling the root causes as well as the consequences of mass incarceration. Keep this passion alive, it's needed! We hope this is not the last time we hear from you!

YOUTH JUSTICE COALITION

Karma

Dear Number 45,

I haven't been surprised yet. You're a chump, maybe the worst yet.

A long time ago, I began perceiving the presidential election as a corporate fundraising contest. Both sides out to invest and endorse political gangsters and bigots. Only out to further advance their personal interests.

I see through your manipulation agenda, since the beginning I've been very offended.

Perhaps you're a distraction, regardless, this is a wake up call for the people to take action.

We've already seen you speak like a savage, now it's disgusting to see you reap havoc. Nowadays, I don't even get upset, I only focus on ways to make progress through the corrupt government traps.

Karma does come back around, and this letter is just to remind you, you will reap the seeds of hate you've sown in the ground.

-Jelani

From The Beat: You're raising an important question - how do we respond to a government that we consider unfair, or incompetent? Troubled times usually see great movements of opposition budding.

Believe Them The First Time

"When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time."

-Maya Angelou

The words spark a perspective dialogue internally. Am I the one showing or the one believing? If I am the one showing my point of view it is that I do not always show my authentic self, and maybe my external facade is a functional facade that I find necessary. If I am the one believing, I want to see the potential of the person, their best version. Many students walk in and I do not know their backgrounds, habits, or faults. When I later hear by word of mouth past experiences of the youth, I am surprised. That is not the person I know them to be. If my interaction is poor, I also have a hard time believing that another person would act differently with the same situation, but hope they would be.

I guess I would have to disagree with this statement. The angle of the view can shape perspective. Maybe I change the angle. Still love me some, Miss Maya!

-Sayaka

From The Beat: Let's agree to disagree! Indeed, it takes time to know someone fully. We are biased by our own experiences, and may get surprised when looking further than just our first impression.

Accepting Reality

"When someone shows you who they really are, believe them the first time." -Maya Angelou

I actually apply this quote to my everyday life/relationships. It is up to us to believe what people say and/or do. We have so much hope and hope can be dangerous in situations, but it can be a drive to continue fighting at the same time. Sometimes we want people to be who they aren't, and we can't change others. Accepting reality is a hard pill to swallow!

Sometimes our past blurs perceptions of people/roles/gender and hinder or help us in seeing people for who/what they truly are/represent. People's first reactions are their true responses, so be alarmed and take things at face value. It's not always bad that people show you who they truly are, but it can be a life saver if we accept what they show. This is my thought process when I'm met with yellow and red flags from people.

-Queen Shari

From The Beat: Yes, accepting people for who they are is not as simple as it sounds. We can be biased, or have unrealistic expectations. That's why it's good to take time to know someone, and meet them where they are at.

Living Memory

If I could film anything, I would love to showcase different stories of people told with their family and friends.

I would love to showcase stories of immigrants in different US communities, who have lived through parts of history that never made it to text books or movies stories of struggle and achievement, not just through one generation, but even multiple generations.

The story that comes to my mind is even my husband's family, whose grandfather fought through Japanese occupation, to his opera singer daughter down to his grandson living in Los Angeles.

-The Teacher

From The Beat: We also believe that untold stories need to get to the light, be shared and heard by people who would never be exposed to them otherwise.

Apartment Blocks

Darkness. Deep darkness. In the lower right side of our vision, a pale dot of white light glows. Squares of yellow light suddenly appear, their quilt gives form to the apartment complexes as the darkness beyond changes, slightly, from black to grey to beige, to orange, and then blue. Below people appear with bags and leashes, and enthusiastic beings communicating drops of presence. They shuffle these friends down the block and back to their apartments.

The crowded apartments parking lots below cars one or two at a time, as empty streets fill with lines of cars, resting at stop signs, speeding along back streets to boulevards teeming with impatient cars and frustrated drivers hurrying slowly to buildings far beyond. The streets explode as the buildings sigh at the release of activity. The streets gradually loosen their grip on cars leaving a stray grandmother walking with a child, an impressively late worker resigned to their fate. The people have left and light is the only persistent image. The shadows lengthen as the skies darken and cars trickle back lethargically, till the streets once again swell with cars and people.

The darkness reveals yellow squares of light beneath which relieved dogs proclaim their continued existence. Deeper darkness reveals flickering white lights have replaced the yellow squares as this day begins to doze. The darkness envelops the flickering white lights and we see darkness. Deep darkness. In the lower right side of our vision, a pale dot of white light glows.

-Matthew

From The Beat: Beautiful piece, we love how you personify the city and turn it into this strange monster. That's how life in the city feels sometimes... a repetitive and hectic journey.



YOUTH JUSTICE COALITION

Hey 45

What do you mean by make America great again?

Is that make America hate again?

Take indigenous people and exterminate again?

Allow women to be raped by men again?

Make black people slaves again?

Make children work in factories and then

Fill tiny coffins when tuberculosis strikes their lungs with flem?

Make elections crooked and politicians dummies

Stuff ballot boxes with money

Watch hurricanes flood and call it sunny

Laugh at lynchings 'cause you say it's funny?

Make America white again?

Rain small pox down on Indians?

Trade alcohol for guns and

Then force people onto reservations?

Have fracking while the earth shakes again

Make Jewish people bake again, then call the news fake again

Put Japanese in internment camps again

Arrest homeless people as tramps again

Take America back to 45 again?

Drop nuclear bombs for sport again?

I hope you choke on your dreams

Drowned by your schemes

Like Katrina hitting Mar Lago

I hope you float out to the big trash pile in the sea

-Kim

From The Beat: You really laid it out one travesty after another. Solid writing and happy to share your views as well as your whole team's. More later!!



What TV Could Show About My Family

If I had access to a camera, it would be about my family. My parents are from two different worlds. My mother is a Muslim woman from Iran. My father is Black, from Mobile, Alabama. My father was in the Army, he met my mother in Iran. He brought her to California, to the city of Norwalk, the year of 1970.

At the time my mother wasn't following her religion. My father came from a place of slavery and racism. My mother came from a rich family. My parents had four children, two boys, two girls. It was hard being raised in my family, with my parents from two different worlds.

'Till this day, it's still very hard being a mix child. I think it will always be hard for me and my siblings. Now that I am a mother of three beautiful mix children, I have to break the chin.

-Maryam

From The Beat: When opposite worlds meet, it can be fireworks! It is hard to share our vision of life with someone whose experiences felt so different - but, there is also a lot of beauty in this union.

To Donald

I would like to start off by saying I am not a big fan of anything that you do. As a Hispanic man in Los Angeles, California, hearing and seeing what you have set in motion is horrific. I am a hard working man with three children, and still make it the right way day by day. Hispanics, we are America.

-Jose

From The Beat: A lot of people don't support the way things have been going lately. We also believe that the United States are made of diversity, and that's where its beauty resides.

Insight

If I could film anything, I'd film the home life of LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department), because it gives more of an insight of the things that cops feel they have to do. And most of their children like to see if what their parents do affect their daily life, and if their search for justice for the world also affects them daily, in regular situations.

-Jay

From The Beat: It's always interesting to see behind the scenes. As you say, it gives more insight, a deeper understanding of what is happening.

Dear Trump

What's going on dude, you're crazy. How has it been going? I know you've been talking bad and it's not so cool, so I wanted you to keep your comments to yourself. We all are just trying to work. Not all Mexican people sell drugs and kill people.

-Big Truths

From The Beat: We totally agree. Unfortunately, we could not read your last sentence, but we do feel your message. Thanks!

God Is Still

A saved Christian brother like myself, who came from a wreck-less street life and now is an active community organizer and activist ministry. This ministry many not look like our ministry with the church walls, but that doesn't mean I have compromised my beliefs. I have just decided to hit the highways and the hedges and go into places many refuse to go into. This is a place where we ourselves come out of and from. So stop worrying about what don't look, feel, or smell like you. God is still

-Big Will

From The Beat: You are doing the good work. Doing it your way! The right way! Touching lives by hitting the "highways and hedges." Keep on pushing!

Closed Sessions

If I had access to a television camera and could film anything I wanted, I would record all power holders closed sessions. This goes for legislators, supervisors, law enforcement depts and the 45th (Trump) administration. This way we can see their friendly goofy sides, and how the President decides on things. This way we really know how to target our demands, and win everything with them wondering why they keep passing everything with empathy, because we know how to get right through them.

-Tanisha

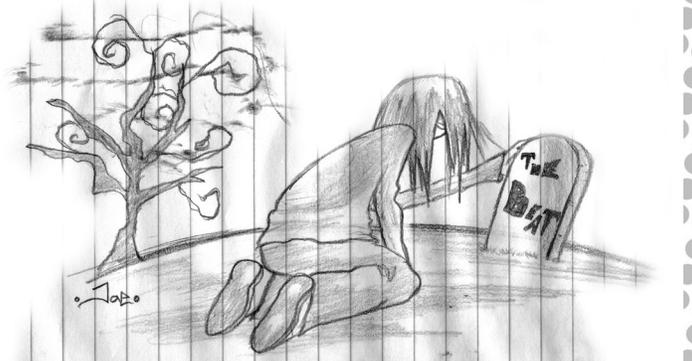
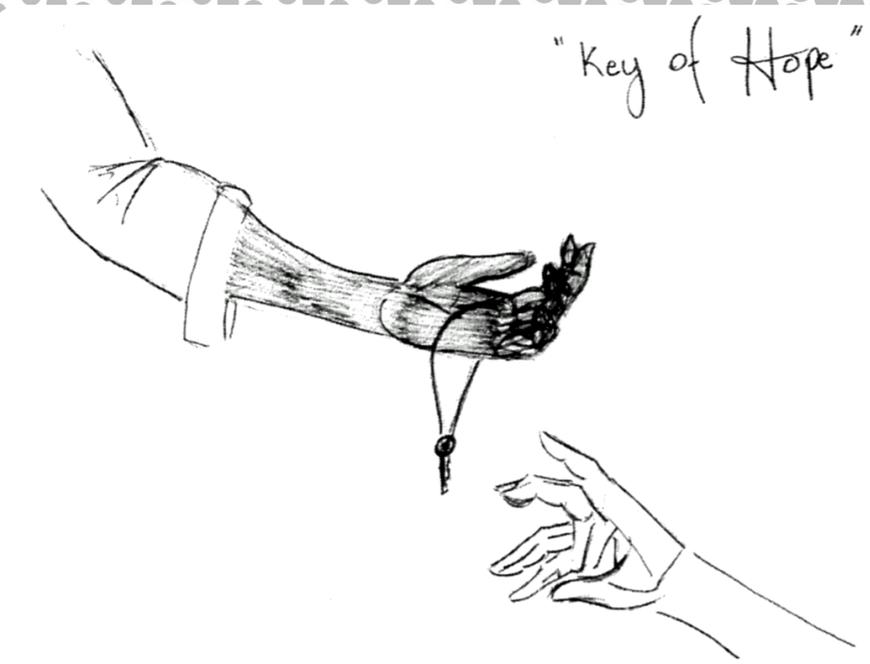
From The Beat: Being informed about the structures of power is the first step, if we want to stand up for our rights. That's how we become aware, and gain some power ourselves.

★ ART GALLERY ★



NOPE





YOUTH JUSTICE COALITION

What TV Could Show: An Immigrant's Story

Although there is a large and vast discussion throughout the United States around immigration, there is a subset of the population that has been virtually ignored. The juvenile offender tried as an adult to face deportation for those criminal convictions, often times many years later, after their release from the prison system. This is my story.

I was brought here to the United States as a child of a refugee. My family fled Cambodia for their lives by trekking across a militarized jungle border and heading into Thailand where I would be born, after they sojourned for two years in emergency refugee camps. In 1981, I was carried off a plane into LAX and into the United States. I was 61 days old.

A couple years later, my parents divorced and my mother abandoned me. I was raised by a single father until I was 16. My father dies from cancer at the end of my junior year in high school. I was left to grieve alone—a time when I needed more support than ever, none was to be had. I wound up gravitating to my peers within the streets. This ultimately led me to being arrested at the age of 17 and being tried as an adult. I was sent to prison with 23 years and eight months looming over my head.

In time, SB260 is passed in California. It is the result of a trifecta of juvenile offender cases heard in the United States Supreme Court. They recognized that juveniles should not be treated the same way as adults, that they should not be subjected to mandatory penalties, that we are “constitutionally different”. This paved the way for my newfound opportunity to appear before the parole board. I was found suitable for parole. One of the few in my category.

For most, liberation brings freedom. For me, that was not the case. I was “released” into a cage inside a van shackled and chained. I was hauled off to immigration detention, to face an unknown. I was taken to see an immigration judge without an attorney. The law does not guarantee representation in this type of court. It is not a federal court and it is not a criminal court. It is an administrative court and the judges can be fired and so they are tough. What is someone to do in a situation like that, facing the most dire of consequences and punishments, to be separated permanently from family, friends, home. Most give up.

I was ordered deported, the rules and laws that said I should be treated differently did not apply. It had no place here. Second chances? None. Even though I had legal status as a permanent resident, the nation's immigration laws are harsh and offer no mechanism to ask any judge to keep my papers. If I was born here, I would not have faced this obstacle. If I was a white American child, I would not have endured this situation.

So if I was ordered deported, how is it that I am telling you this story today, sitting on American soil. After sitting around in a for-profit private immigration prison for six months after being ordered deported, I was released pending my eventual removal from the United States. After 17 years of confinement, I sat on a concrete wall on a sidewalk alone for the first time as an adult. I came home to a state of limbo. The community is full of stories of people being deported years and years later after their release under supervision such as mine was. So I began to live with that constant fear. It kept me awake and uneasy.

Four months later, that day came. I had to go for an instructed check-in with immigration authorities. I was taken back to detention for a flight to a country I have never been in, Cambodia. I had to say goodbye to the only people I knew. I had to bid my farewells. I had to say goodbye to freedom after tasting only four months of it.

I began to push back by using what law I self-taught myself during my many years inside. In that struggle, I was sent to Louisiana, to another private for-profit immigration prison. Deportation Inc.

I continued my fight and my deportation case was eventually reopened. I was brought back to California and I requested a bond hearing. The community came to support me and I was given a bond. Then the community really came together and paid it, so I can be here to fight another day. But if I am to stay in the States, I must receive a pardon from the governor. That is the only window I have. Soon, my time to see another judge will come and I do not know what will unfold on that day.

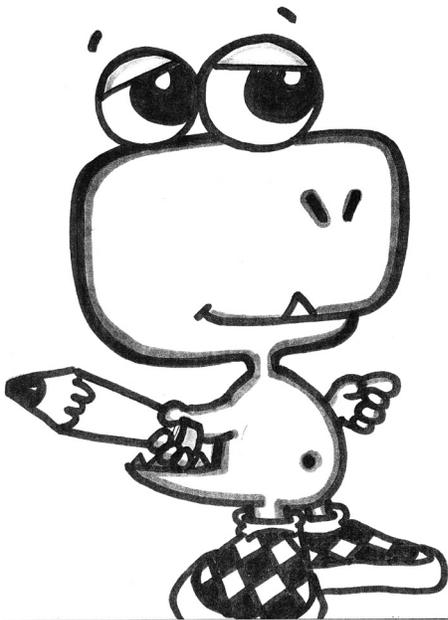
In the nine months since my release on bond, I consistently volunteer in the community, just like when I came home the first time. I gave my time at a non-profit to keep children connected with their incarcerated parent(s). I have fed the homeless, I am part of a local church where I volunteer regularly. I am now an organizer with the Youth Justice Coalition working to protect our youth of today and tomorrow. I am also no longer on parole. I earned an early discharge.

No matter how much good I do, immigration law does not see it that way. It only sees the poor choices I made as a juvenile. It only sees the 17-year old that made poor choices. It does not see the community supporter I am today. It only sees the bad hombre, the bad immigrant. Although the law says juveniles are constitutionally different and should not be subjected to mandatory penalties, my story paints another picture. Justice is not for the immigrant. Deportation is the default.

That is what TV could show.

-Phal

From The Beat: Thank you, Phal! Your story is heartfelt and inspiring! We certainly hope more supporters will read your piece and find inspiration in you and the great work you are currently doing to better our communities.



No Beauty

Honestly, for me, where I live there isn't any beauty. There is too much violence. People that stay in the street make it look like an ugly, nasty community. There are a lot of shootings, people dying in front of my apartment. It is not nice at all.

-Monica

From The Beat: Is there anything that can be done to make your neighborhood beautiful? Have you thought about moving out?

Buying New Things

What makes me happy is buying new things. Every time I have money to buy clothes or electronics it puts me in a really good mood because I know I am going to get something new. If I am sad I try to buy something just because I know it will change my mood. It might be weird but that's just how I am. I think I got it from my mom because she likes to buy new things.

-Ariel

From The Beat: It is true that new things make us happy, but eventually they become old. What are some things that make you happy that can't be taken away from you?

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Music Makes Me Happy

What makes me happy is music. Music has a very special part in my heart that nobody can take away.

Before I was born my mother told me she used to put headphones around her belly and play all her jams. When my brothers wanted to play music my momma used to let them. Pops used to play his music too. He would play New Edition, LL Cool J, Run DMC, Biggie Smalls, 2Pac, and most of the old musicians that are still played today.

-Joshua

From The Beat: Music has a way of transcending time and connecting people. Do you make music? How could you improve lives through music?

My Happiness

Being alive makes me happy. Having my two beautiful daughters makes me happy. Being able to see them every day and every second makes me happy. Having a second chance to make a better life for me and my children also makes me happy.

-Alexes

From The Beat: We are sure that having a mother that loves them makes your daughters very happy. Keep working on yourself for them.

Dealing with Judgment

Judgment exists in this world. People usually judge without knowing that they are doing so. We might see someone with the same clothes for two days in a row and we might think to ourselves, "Weren't they wearing those clothes yesterday?" or "That's kind of gross!" But there could be a good reason behind it. Maybe they got kicked out from their home. Maybe their family had an emergency and had to leave home. Who really knows? For sure not the person asking themselves the question.

It is hard for someone to know what struggles some of us go through. They judge by what they see or hear. Sometimes we expect certain things from certain people because of the roles they have. They could be a mom, dad, older sister or brother, teachers, your boss, the police, the firemen, or even out president. Just by these roles or labels we expect to receive good things from them at all times. Sometimes moms don't want to play that role or aren't good at it. Not all policemen are good people, they don't all play their role to protect and serve.

-Julieta

From The Beat: You make a good point, why do you think it is we judge? Does judging serve a purpose? What do you think people think when they see you?

Asking for Help

Sometimes it is hard to ask for help. Maybe it is because I don't know if others are going through what I am or if they will be shocked. Now, in present times, I can ask for help for almost anything since Chuco's has multiple resources. It doesn't always come easy, sometimes you ask for help from someone and they can't help you. I would use the "what I am going through" act and after hit them with what I need at the moment.

Last time I asked for help was from my teacher. I asked for extra credit. I believe asking for help shows strength because not many people go out looking for resources and help. The main fear is rejection. There is no way you can ask for help and know whether they will say "Yes I can help" or "Sorry we are both in the same shoes."

-Luis

From The Beat: We are glad you have a place where you know you will get help if you ask. You are really lucky. How can you help others who are too afraid to ask?



Life in LA

To live in LA can be one of the most exciting, outrageous and at the same time dangerous experience. In LA it's either you got it, you're showing it off, and if you don't you're considered broke.

Life can be rough living in Los Angeles, California. I was born and raised in Inglewood, CA. It's like, as if you're not doing something productive, you might as well stay in the house.

Police already labels you as a target, especially if you're Black/ African American or Hispanic/Latino/Brown. You can walk down the street and you may get harassed, just because of the way you look. They label you as a threat, a monster. That's the way society labels us. They don't want us to succeed, they want us to fail.

-Zahria

From The Beat: Labels are harmful, because they don't allow us to see the actual person. What could we do to promote a more "human" approach?



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Shady Politics

If I had access to a television camera, I would film behind the scenes of local and state politics. I would film city, county, and state politicians, and how decisions and policies are really made.

I would follow the Los Angeles City Council members, Board of Supervisors, and our State Assembly members and Senators through their everyday lives. I would want to capture the behind the scene dealings and politics that occur in passing local and state policies. We would watch a City Council member going to make deals with other City Council members about supporting or trying to defeat local motions, based on career and power motivation.

I want people to hear the truth, and what decisions are being made for the people that are actually harmful. I would also like to highlight the contradictions of politicians and elected officials. They can and do tell the people one thing, yet they act the opposite way in their actions.

-VM

From The Beat: Transparency in politics is necessary, in order to maintain democracy. We agree that the way decisions are made, and shape the citizens' lives, should be visible to everyone.

Stick to Yourself

The first sentence that caught my attention was "things were created to be used". "The reason the world is in crisis is because things are being loved and people are being used" Is very true. People use you to their benefit. I honestly feel like everyone uses everybody because they are getting something out of it. People were created to be loved, not used. Who wants to be used? People get used every day and they don't even know it. Everybody wants to prove a point; everybody wants to be fake rich. The reason why I say fake rich is because it is temporary. Who wants temporary money? People love things that they cant even take with them when they die, but they will use you like you are not human just like them. Me, personally, I feel like its better to stick to yourself and you wont have to worry about getting used.

-Zahria

From The Beat: it is true that there are a lot of disingenuous people in this world but don't hide yourself in fear of being used. You have a lot to offer.

My School

I like my school,
because it keeps me in a positive mood.

-Young student

From The Beat: School is great! Why does it make you feel so good?

NO WAR
NO WALL
NO RACISM

"You're Always One Decision Away from a Totally Different Life"

What this quote means to me is that you should always make the right decision. If you don't, you're going to be in a life that you don't want to be in. Within that decisions there will come struggles. Struggles you aren't ready for.

-Cesar

From The Beat: What is one decision you could make that would totally change your life? What things would you change if possible?

Things to Look Forward To

In 2018 my number one goal is to graduate and get my diploma. This will make my parents proud of me. I will have to do all my work and come to school every day to achieve my goal. My next goal is to get a job right after so I could get me a car. Then hopefully go to college and do something better with my life.

-Ariel

From The Beat: We know you can make all of this happen. What else do you want for yourself? Dream big.

Last Few Months

There are a few months left in 2017. One of the things I want to accomplish is finishing school. That is a big deal to me.

Another thing is to get my license so I can start driving and going places on my own. I want to get a good job that I like. I love making money. This is what I want to accomplish in these last few months.

-Robert

From The Beat: We know you can accomplish these things, keep at it! What do you think you would like doing?

Cutting Out the Negative

One thing I plan to accomplish before 2018 is to get my high school diploma. I plan to accomplish this by cutting off people that bring bad vibes in my life. Those that make me do things that either put my life in danger or get locked up. I also cut off my past relationships because I worried about others and not me. I stopped gangbanging. I go to Homeboy Industries to remove my tattoos and volunteer in Chinatown. I just got out with nothing, so why not graduate?

-Luis

From The Beat: It sounds like you have a very clear plan about what you want to do. It takes guts to follow our dreams, don't give up.

Always Ask Questions

Speaking for me personally, if I am curious I will ask. If I don't know or if something doesn't click, I will ask so I know. There is no such thing as a stupid question. I believe if you don't know, ask a question so you will learn. That way you wont have to ask the question again.

Sometimes, well very often, students aren't comfortable asking a question in front of a crowd because they are afraid of rude comments or being embarrassed. I have to remind myself to never feel discouraged about what I am asking or what I don't know. If you don't ask nobody will ever tell you. If you don't ask, how will the teacher know you need help? I feel the need to ask questions. If you don't ask for assistance how will you learn?

-Mistie

From The Beat: You will get ahead in life just because you are not afraid to ask questions. Continue to not be afraid!

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What Makes Me Happy

What makes me happy is waking up to a new day every day. Having both my parents and being able to enjoy my family also makes me happy. The opportunity to come to school and be successful in life makes me happy. Another thing that makes me happy is that I am doing better in life. I am becoming the daughter that my people want.

-Name

From The Beat: Congratulations! It sounds like you are growing happier by the day. Keep it up. Being someone you like is they key to happiness.



Defining American

I feel like defining American is complaining, saying I hate America. In terms of the President of the United States, Donald Trump says what the upper-hierarchy has wanted to say for years. Trump is only a puppet. I think the reasons many people hate Trump is because he resembles them, and America, for what it always has been: racism and capitalism. I think everyone in America is prejudiced or racist or they work in that matter. I think people should respect each other, but forcing them things they don't believe isn't going to get change or humanity anywhere.

-Albourie

From The Beat: Do you define yourself as American? Is there anything we can do to change the racism in our society?

True Americans

I think real Americans are the Native Americans because they were the first ones to come to the USA.

I also think the Mexicans are real Americans because they were also here before the Europeans came and took over this whole land.

Nowadays most people just think if you are white then you are a true American.

That is something I disagree with.

-Bonnie

From The Beat: Do you see yourself as a real American? Why or why not?

Treating Women with Respect

I think men treat women with a lot of disrespect because of their parents. They see their father talking to their own mom and disrespecting her. They think, "that's how I'm supposed to treat women." Even the media influences how women are treated. There are videos or pictures where guys are saying bad words to them and all that. There are some girls that like being treated like shhh.

-Ariel

From The Beat: How can we combat sexism in our society? If it is ingrained in people from a young age, how do we convince them otherwise?

Making my Mom Proud

One thing I plan to accomplish is to graduate high school and go on to college. Accomplishing that would make me happy for the simple fact that it would make my momma proud of me. My second goal is to get a good job as a police officer or a social worker to save up enough money to buy my mother a house. I also want to give myself a nice car.

-Monica

From The Beat: We are sure you make your mom proud just by trying, but these are all very honorable goals.

A Friend I Need

What friendship means to me is a person who is loyal, truthful, and doesn't beat around the bush when they have something to say. Friendship is with someone who is kind, loyal and will help you accomplish your goals. These are the true qualities of being a real friend!

-Name

From The Beat: Those are all great qualities. Do you think you have these features?

Plans for the Future

One thing I plan to accomplish before 2018 is to graduate high school and to go to college. The most important thing I want to accomplish is to get a good job so I can provide for my family. I plan on graduating high school by coming to school every day and on time, and also by completing my work. I plan on going to West LA College and then transfer to UC Davis so I can become a veterinarian.

-Cesar

From The Beat: You have big dreams, don't give up on them. Working on your punctuality is something that will serve you your whole life.

Thoughts on the Quote of the Week

Instead of people loving one another they love these things that mean little to nothing to them. These "things", materialistic or not, shouldn't be put over people. The world might be in crisis through the fact that these people use each other in making these things and taking credit. I don't know, something like that.

-Luis

From The Beat: How can the world do a better job of seeing the true value of people? Any ideas?

Goals for the Year

My main goal before 2018 is to finish high school and jump right into nursing school. My other goals, if possible, are to get my own apartment. I also want to get another job and better myself. I know I am a better person than last year but there is always space for improvement.

-Leoniqua

From The Beat: Its true, it is good to be always working toward something. We are glad you are in a better place than last year and still pushing forward.

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Lucky to be Alive

What makes me happy is waking up. Don't you love those stretches in the morning? Going to sleep for five more minutes and waking up again.

Well I love waking up because earlier this year I was told that I have fractures in my skull that needed to be treated. My moms insurance couldn't cover any other expenses after my CT scans. I was told I would have blood possibly flowing through my head, shutting down my brains function. It is now seven months since that and I haven't gone back to the hospital. I haven't had any injuries or felt like my time is up. I would wake up almost feeling dizzy and as if I am going to die. As much as I love sleeping, I love my mornings.

-Luis

From The Beat: You are truly blessed and it sounds like you know it. Continue to cherish every new day. We are glad you are still here! Now keep teaching and sharing your truths!

No Respect Anymore

The difference between this generation and my parents' is that back then there was loyalty and real people. The people back then cared about their community and their people. Black and brown women treated themselves as queens and so did males (some). The same stuff was going on but it was just way more organized. Back then you were safe in your neighborhood, even if you don't bang. Back then women and kids didn't get shot as much. There were more black owned stores. We stuck together and fought for what was right. We respected our color, ourselves, and our community. We cared about our women and education. This generation just doesn't.

-Leoniqua

From The Beat: Is there a way to reintroduce these values into our society? How can we convince people to care more? Is it possible?

Love Yourself

People today don't love themselves and they sit and act like they don't care about today's world.

For example, they are hoeing. They must care because they are selling their body for money and we are supposed to love and respect our body.

One thing I plan to accomplish before 2018 is to get my own place.

-Shawnta

From The Beat: Why do you think people aren't treating their bodies with respect? What could be more important?

My Mom Raise Me
Right BUT I did
Wrong on my own

-JL

Happy

I like football.

I love my family; they mean the world to me.

I love when females look at me.

It makes me feel good because I look good.

-Robert

From The Beat: If having women look at you makes you happy, what can you do to make yourself seem attractive all the time?

The Big One

An emergency we have to be ready for in Los Angeles is the big earthquake, which they call, "the big one". I would prepare by buying important supplies we need just in case our home is demolished. Things like canned food, clothes, water, a radio, and blankets are important supplies. These will help us survive during this time. I haven't gotten any of the important items I need. I think the reason is because we all have some doubt it won't happen.

-Ariel

From The Beat: It is true; there is always a sliver of doubt preventing us from being fully prepared. Hopefully our skepticism doesn't get the better of us!

My Happy Place

What makes me happy is food. I love food. If I am super mad, I eat. I am not fat, only 150, but food makes me happy.

Another thing that makes me happy is TV or basketball. I love watching family guy and I like basketball because I am very good at it. It is a coping skill for me.

-Shawnta

From The Beat: Have you thought about working in the food industry? You could be a food critic or something along those lines.

What Makes Me Happy

The main thing that makes me happy is being around the people that understand you and understand what you're trying to do. Also, being able to do something productive but also having fun while doing it makes me happy. Of course being around my family and friends makes me happy. The last thing I would add is being able to do things for myself and take care of business.

Lastly, being around the right female that you can talk to also makes me happy.

-Colby

From The Beat: Being surrounded by the right people is definitely essential to our happiness. What can you do to make sure you bring positive vibes all of the time?

Things I Want to Accomplish

The goals that I want to accomplish in 2018 or before are: I want to get my high school diploma. I want to be a model. I want to have my driver's license and be a CNA nurse. The reason I want to do these things is because I need to have a high school diploma to be able to help my kids with their homework.

I have always wanted to be a model. I feel that I have a gift from God. I want to get my driver's license because then I wouldn't have to depend on anybody. I would be able to make it to school, doctor's appointments, interviews, etc. To do these things I will come to school on time, look more into modeling, and work hard on learning how to get my driver's license.

-Alexes

From The Beat: These are all really great goals. Is there anything getting in your way?

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Love for Inglewood

There are places you walk by; post up at, and for some it is throwbacks of either good or bad. In my neighborhood there is a park full of grass and kids full of happiness. There are nice beautiful suburban homes with happy families.

Every morning I enjoy the warm sunlight beaming on my skin. Inglewood, born and raised, here I will die.

Now turning to the bad thoughts/memories. Long story short there are gunshots, killings, and prisoners. This is the ugly, but there is beauty where I live.

-Luis

From The Beat: Is it possible for the beauty to get in the way of the bad things? What would need to be done?

Admiring my City

What I admire the most is the beautiful mural that's on the outside of the high school I attended for 9th and 10th grade. If you reside in the Inglewood area you can see it on Manchester Blvd. I am not too sure what the meaning is, but it will make you think and wonder so many things. You would probably think it brings world peace, which it might. It might also be saying to be grateful and appreciate what you have.

There is also this one beautiful mural on Crenshaw, it portrays many things. Wisdom, intelligence, and last but not least brain power.

There are also beautiful parks where kids can have fun, be free, and enjoy themselves. That is Centinela Park.

The city of Inglewood also throws events for kids and families. Events like movie night at city hall and music events where they have food along Market St. They also have this fun event at city hall for Christmas. I loved going there as a kid. It may not be a safe area but everything has its pros and cons.

-Xanna

From The Beat: You live in a very lively neighborhood. You are lucky there are so many events and happenings going on. What can you do to give back to your community?

Questions to a Rookie Police Officer

I would ask a rookie police officer why he would want to protect and serve this messed up country? I would ask if they like their job as a cop. I would ask why they wanted to become a cop in the first place. I would ask if they are different from the cops that are corrupt.

I would let them know the things we need fixed in our community, like people fighting over name and color. I would tell them how people are fighting over race and more. We just need to make our community safe and just do what we can to make our community better.

-Colby

From The Beat: These are all really good questions. How open do you think you would be to hearing the answers?

Beauty Where I Live

What is beautiful about my neighborhood is how different the urban areas are. Every neighborhood is different. Areas can range from most violent to kind of normal. It is very different growing up in these areas.

I admire how some people remain humble hard-workers. Sometimes some neighborhoods seem normal but there can be strange activity going on. There are murals of art and decorate my hood, they are nice.

-Dulce

From The Beat: Diversity is definitely a beautiful thing. What are some of the things you would do to make your neighborhood more beautiful?



Questions for a Rookie Cop

My name is Zahria and if I had a chance to speak to a rookie police officer for one hour I would ask as many questions as I could.

My first question would be what made you apply for this position? What do you like about your job? Do you like arresting people? Are you racist? What is your definition of to protect and serve? What is your goal? What do you get out of this? Are you really doing this to help your community or for a paycheck? How many black and brown people do you arrest a year? Do you like sending people to jail? How do you feel about yourself after you do what you do?

-Zahria

From The Beat: These are all great questions to ask. What do you think the rookie cops answers would be like?

Still Standing

My neighborhood is beautiful because it is still there! It has survived gang activity to become a neighborhood of peace. Even during the most violent shooting, it didn't stop people from going outside or blasting their rock and roll music for everyone.

I would say it helps the community forget about the hardship people face while they live there.

-Albourie

From The Beat: We admire the resiliency and community of your neighborhood. What are some of the things you have learned growing up there?

Follow Your Dreams

My message to everybody is to follow your dreams and never listen to anybody that tries to tell you what you can't do. Do whatever you love that makes you happy. Life is too short to just sit around and not follow your dreams.

The main factor to all this is that if you set your mind to what you want, you will have it. The only person stopping you is you.

-Colby

From The Beat: What are your dreams? What do you want to accomplish?

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My Message

This message is for all the teens that have been in and out of jail. Some teens go to jail for things they didn't do or just because they chose the wrong route.

Well I was one of these people that took the wrong route. I was in jail for three months for something I didn't do, just being with the wrong crowd. I spent my 18th birthday at the juvenile detention center. I was mad that I was in there that long for nothing.

When I got out I changed my life around. I moved to California, got in school, and I got a job. I stayed out of trouble. I can't really complain.

My brother was in and out of the detention center when he was 16. Now he has been at Harrisburg Juvenile Detention Center for a year and some months. He chose the wrong path but he is going to be out in two weeks. I hope he does better. Everybody deserves a second chance.

-Robert

From The Beat: Your brother will probably need your support to do better. What are some of the ways you can help him stay on track?

My Happiness

I am happy when I treat myself to things I have wanted. Especially when I buy the things on my list from sephora, it makes me feel excited.

When I go out with my boyfriend and we go out for dinner, then to a hookah lounge to drink tea and chill together, that makes me happy.

Another thing is when I go to the gym with my boyfriend's brother's girlfriend. We always have bomb workouts together and it makes me happy.

Also when I see improvements on myself at school like my attendance, schoolwork, and communications I have with my teachers.

Most of all though having a full tank of gas makes me happy; it is the best feeling ever.

-Bonnie

From The Beat: These are all things that would make us happy too. Congratulations on your improvement at school! Keep it up.

Beauty Where I Live

The things I like to see in my neighborhood are graffiti. Graffiti makes the hood look better. Like on abandoned buildings or empty fields, or even on the freeway, seeing all these colors and styles wondering how the graffers got up there on bridges or signs.

Another thing I like about my neighborhood is when I am walking down the street I can smell some bomb weed and the food people are making in the street. I also like hearing the train passing at night when I am high and reminiscing about all the crazy stuff I have been through.

-R

From The Beat: We can see the colors and smell the scents through your writing. Would you want other people to see the beauty in your neighborhood to?

Conversation with a Rookie Police Officer

I would talk to a rookie police officer about how it feels arresting a lot of minorities everyday. I would ask if executing minorities made them feel better. I would ask if it makes them feel like they are bettering the community. Why do cops target the minorities in the community instead of going to white communities? They kill each other too.

-Cole

From The Beat: That is a very good question. What can we do to highlight the problems in our communities?

Dear Mom

All these years I pictured you as this loving, caring, and generous person- it turned to be a disaster.

I pictured you as a mom to me but you treated me as one of your friends. The things I wanted from you when I was little turned into things I hate. Being a little girl I wanted you to be there my first day of pre-k. When I had problems I wanted you to help me with homework, little things like that. These little things mean the most to me but you chose not to.

It made me feel empty inside because I was raised by someone who I so badly wanted to be there. I wanted you to be there for bringing your mom to school day. All I wanted you to do is hold me when I had those dreams to be held. I really want to love you, but honestly I do not know you enough to love you. Hey Mom, this is Janae.

-Janae

From The Beat: Unfortunately people fall short of our expectations and needs all the time. It can be very frustrating. Remember it is a reflection of them and not you.

Thankful for Another Day

It is hard when things happen that you never thought possible.

A week ago I was in a car accident and all I can do is thank God that I got to live another day. I can only thank Him that my family and the other family made it out almost uninjured.

Music is a powerful thing. It helps people who are going through depression to be happy or at least feel happy; it can also be a downfall. Music makes you feel all types of ways.

When driving and listening to music it is easy to get distracted and zone out, especially music that causes an adrenaline rush.

Within a split second anything can happen if your focus is not 100% on the road. You can out yourself and everyone around you in danger.

This week has been hard but maintaining my lane isn't hard when you have faith and hope in your future.

-Eddie

From The Beat: We are sure you have a new appreciation for life. What are some of the things you would like to see happen in the next few months?



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FATHERS & FAMILIES OF SAN JOAQUIN

Fathers & Families of San Joaquin's Mission

To promote the cultural, spiritual, economic, and social renewal of the most vulnerable families in Stockton and the greater San Joaquin Valley.

-F&F

I have made many mistakes
but I learn from them...



My Fathers & Families Experience

The Beat Within has had the great pleasure of doing several writing workshops for Fathers & Families of San Joaquin. This inspiring organization in Stockton is like a one-shop-stop for youth and elders looking for a safe place to gather, to access various services, and now, to write for The Beat. Fathers & Families Movement Builder, Raymond Aguilar, was instrumental both in setting up these fruitful workshops, in gathering both the organizations elders and youth to take part in the writing, and to contribute his own writing to The Beat Within. The workshops have been co-facilitated by Beat founder, David Inocencio, and long-time Beat facilitator, Michael Kroll.

The workshops were divided into two parts, the first for elders, the second for youth. Both groups took the writing prompts seriously, and both turned in wonderful pieces for publication. To cite a very few examples, elder Raymond Aguilar wrote: "Words from the wise, let whatever road you choose be a learning experience/Always rise like the sun and rest like the moon and shine bright like the stars..."

Another example comes from elder Muhammad, who wrote: "The river was always the place you could go and get your mind right. The river was home and no matter where you traveled, you always remembered the river's beauty because the river was home."

Youth writing was as inspiring as that from the elders. For example, from Frank: "All I know is the streets and being locked up. I'm here because I want to change my life and do good." Edi wrote to President Trump: "You never fought for country nor stood for it. You're nothing more than a rich white man wanting more and more power." And Dan wrote: "I want to make sure everyone sees the real beauty in my city and the real beauty in our struggle."

Although it is a long drive from San Francisco to Stockton, we found the efforts of these wonderful young people and elders very much worth the time and effort, and we are grateful to Sierra Health Foundation for making these workshops possible. We certainly hope there is more workshops to come.

-Michael Kroll, facilitator for The Beat Within

Ancestors

Dear Creator,

Please wake me up when I'm free.

In this world I live in

all I hear and see is captivity and tragedy.

A place where people judge you on the color of your skin,
not on what you know from within.

My mom will always tell me

Cambodia will never be the same,

our ancestors' souls are screaming in pain.

They died for us to be free.

Now that we live in a land that our ancestors never got to see,

But things still remain the same.

Kids grow up and can't wait to gang bang and kill each other,
like an everyday thing.

-Kaz

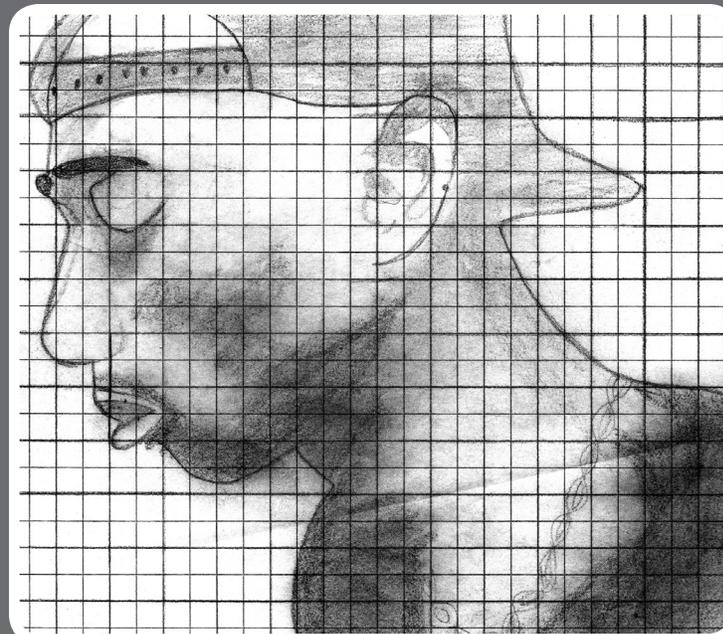
From The Beat: There are a lot of devastating things happening in this world. One way to keep our sanity is to train our mind to see the beauty as well. What are some things you find beautiful around you? Powerful work!

A Better Choice

One of those choices I wish I made that I never made was to make better choices.

-Eeezy

From The Beat: If you could go back in time, what are some of the better choices you would have made? And what can you do to make sure you make better choices in the future?



Home and a Community

I like to give thanks because I came to this country when I was 16 years old I have met many people from different countries and I like them.

I have made many mistakes but I learn from them, this country gives me opportunity to learn and to be a father. I respect everything, thank you.

-Cesareo

From The Beat: We're so glad that you've found a home and community, thank you for expressing your gratitude!

FATHERS & FAMILIES OF SAN JOAQUIN

The river was home and no matter where you traveled, you always remembered the river's beauty because the river was home.

Beauty Where I Live... Stockton, CA

Stockton, CA, a city on the river, a place to swim, run, gather and have fun. The river is called the Delta, and yes it is a beautiful river, but it's just like the city. Still waters run deep, currents can kill you, and it can be cold.

Sunsets can be absolutely stunning, especially in the summer time when the fires are burning and the smoke is in the atmosphere. The sky in West looks like it is on fire as the sun goes down over Mt Diablo.

Ah, Mt Diablo the mountain, an old story says it was where the devil kicked out all the bad souls, so they all moved to Stockton.

Back to the river, where this writer learned to swim, fish, and make money cleaning catfish for all the weekend river rats. Those were the days, the days when innocence was golden, and your mom and dad were still together.

The river was always the place you could go and get your mind right. The river was home and no matter where you traveled, you always remembered the river's beauty because the river was home.

-Muhammad

From The Beat: Thank you for sharing your childhood memories with us. We wish we could keep that feeling of innocence and brightness with us! Beautiful piece!

Off The Drugs

I'm proud of my mom because she used to do drugs and I couldn't live with her. Now, she has a job and she is drug free.

I used to live in Texas with my dad. I moved there when I was six and did not come back until I was thirteen.

I look at my mom and say to myself, "I can do better than her."

-Anthony

From The Beat: It seems you learned from two of her examples. Good luck with your life plan! We appreciate your words too!

The Quote, "When someone shows you who they are, believe them"

When I read the quote by Maya Angelou, "When someone shows you who they are, believe them", I think about the time I met Chris straight out of juvenile hall. At first, I thought he wanted to replace my best friend Darius, but actually came to be another type of person. He was one who I related to like a brother. We both get a little jittery at certain times, like when we're sleepy or hungry. We both yelled back at our parents, but for me, I was angry and bottled up after my juvenile hall experience. He yelled back at his mom because of such a totalitarian rule she was doing to the house and him. We both were struggling. My dad, a retired man, couldn't help me get a car, and I had no job with which to get one.

Chris' family saw him as a failure, just because he doesn't want to go to college, and he doesn't know what to do for the rest of his life. Because of this, he opened up to me, we found out we shared the same growing roots. I didn't see him as someone who wanted to be around for some incentive that he could get from me (like money, trouble, drugs, etc.). Since then, I've given more people a chance to open up. I let the relationship span past months of conversations and let my mind speak those words it has, and reach them to see how they feel.

-Fernando

From The Beat: Listening to others is a skill that many don't have. Have you found other ways listening has helped you learn?

Finishing the Race

It is not who gets there the quickest or fastest, it's about just getting there. Finishing the race. I can honestly say that I fought demons that kept me in bondage. I couldn't even think that I could put together a few days of sobriety. But one day turned into two days. Two days turned into a week. A week turned into several weeks.

Soon I started to feel true inner power, something that I had never experienced before. After feeling that power that was sustained and only sustained by me loving myself, did I start to put myself on a path. The path became my walk and my walk became my quickened stride.

Therefore, weeks became months and my walks became strides. Little by little I got faster. I finished my race, not because I was faster. I finished because I was determined to finish. The road has been tough, filled with many disappointments, but finishing leaves a taste in your mouth and a mind that is as strong as a marathon runner. So I go back to what I said at the beginning. It's not about who gets there the fastest, it's about finishing the race.

-The Marathon Man

From The Beat: Yes, becoming the person we want to be starts with loving ourselves. We can't rush that process, it's a learning experience that takes time and commitment.

Dear Trump

You are a good businessman and TV personality. But as the President of United States and leader of the free world, you are horrible. First, your speeches are hateful and arrogant. When I hear you, it sounds like trash talk in a wrestling ring.

Your policy of illegal immigrants (not just Mexicans) is illogical and not right. This country was built on immigrants. Everyone came from somewhere.

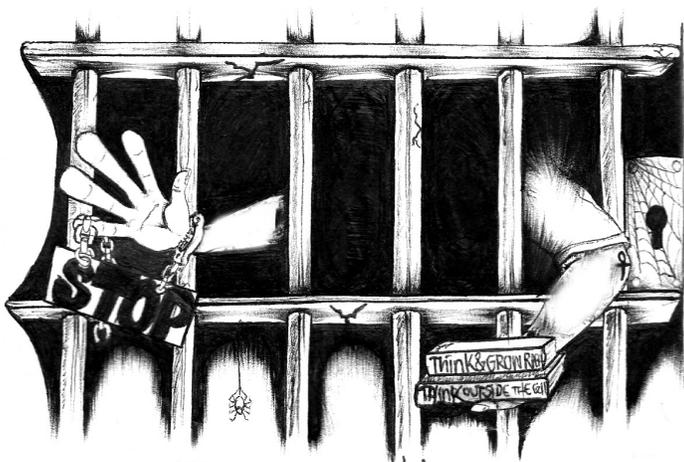
Second, I object to your social media trash talk and blaming the former President when something tragic happens.

Of course, with the current event happening in Charlottesville, VA, you dismissed the terror.

The best you can do is resign because you are a cancer to the United States.

-Andrew

From The Beat: Your thoughts are matched by many citizens. Can you think of any way that the President's unusual behavior has helped our country?



FATHERS & FAMILIES OF SAN JOAQUIN

Home Sweet Home

I'm tired of living in different homes. Why is it that the people who are fleeing and bold tend to hurt me the most?

The most important things I was taught in life were taught to me by either juvenile security or a group home staff. All I wanted while growing up was a stable home. Now the problem is to have a home. The system messed up my life.

-Daniela

From The Beat: Can you think of ways to change the system and still protect children? What are some of your ideas?

Frank

I'm from Stockton.

My name is Frank.

I'm eighteen.

I had a rough life.

I grew up in the streets.

All I know is the streets and being locked up.

I'm here because I want to change my life and do good.

-Frank

From The Beat: Are you certain the streets are all you know? How did you learn there is more to life? We hope you find success with your desire to do better.

Letter to You

I just coolin', thinkin', plottin'
All day I've been thinking of you.

I hate you.

You treated me badly, Baby, but I can't replace you.

You accuse me of cheating, all that stuff.

You miss me when I'm not around.

Baby, I'm out of town. You tell me I blew it.

-Enrique

From The Beat: In what way do you think you failed your friend? How did she fail you? Can you think of a way you can resolve your differences and still be friends?

Stockton

If I had access to a television camera and could film any thing I wanted to, I off tops would film about my city Stockton! I don't know about anyone else but I'm fourteen and not once in my life have I heard someone (before coming to Fathers and Families) say or talk good about Stockton.

Fourteen years may not be a very long time but its still my life time living. See, when people do talk about Stockton It's never good. Everyone always focuses on the bad things in my city. As I was saying,

I never hear anyone talked good about Stockton until coming to Fathers and Families. However we don't think or claim our city is the cleanest or best city in the word. We talk about the bad things and then we talk about how we could make the bad things good or better.

We don't just talk about how though. We get out and make things happen. Anyways, I'm getting off topic, basically I'm just trying to say I would want to get outside with a camera and film my city and the great things in my city. I'm tired of people talking down on my city. I want to make sure nobody talks down on my city and makes sure everyone sees the real beauty in my city and the real beauty in our struggle.

-Ernesto

From The Beat: Great work! We wish you would have mentioned some actual examples to give more detail of the people or places you find that are beautiful. Next time!! Keep teaching and keep sharing!!



The Term of the World

Every nation has a term...a time limit on it based on its balance of freedom, justice, and equality. History teaches us that worlds rise and fall due to the imperfections of that civilization or world. It shows to us that whenever a nation's evil outweighs its good, the universe and everything in it pushes out that world found in want and starts anew. So maybe we have entered a time that the world will leave us and not vice versa.

-Nuri

From The Beat: These are interesting thoughts. Are you suggesting that our world will leave us because our nation's evil outweighs our good? If so, is there a way we can reverse this, to increase the good in our world?

This World

In this world, there's a lot of thoughts that go through your head, but in the end those thoughts are irrelevant to your actions. Our actions should reflect our hearts and when we move with our hearts there's nothing but happiness. Live your life with a smile, because though this world is the worst mate, you're the best.

-Edi

From The Beat: We agree that when actions are the most impactful when they come from your heart. What do you mean when you say that thoughts are irrelevant to your actions?

I Should Have Stayed Home

Two to three years ago, I got wrapped up in something that I didn't do and I had a choice to go to my brother's house, which is in the Bay Area, or stay home. If I had stayed home that week I wouldn't have got a record and wouldn't have gone to court.

The day before I had a bad feeling about going, but instead, I didn't listen to it, and because of that I had to go through something that someone my age shouldn't have to be going through.

If you have a bad feeling about going somewhere, stay home 'cause most of the time something bad will happen. Don't be like me and ignore that feeling, listen to it and if it's telling you to stay home, then stay home.

-Shag

From The Beat: Being able to learn from your mistakes and seeing where you went wrong is really important. Sometimes though, you have to make a mistake before learning the lesson. Do you think that if you hadn't gone to your brothers, you would still have learned the importance of listening to your intuition?

FATHERS & FAMILIES OF SAN JOAQUIN

The Beat Within

Beauty Where I Live

In the early 70s I would spend weeks in my village. I was coming from a then metropolis and city in Nigeria, Ibada, one of the largest cities in Nigeria. My village setting had houses built in a circle according to family and not just visitors or immigrants. In the city where I was born houses, now advanced, are built in the row with many people from different cities in the country unlike my village.

Compared to latest house of mine in Nigeria, relatively like modern first world home every one lives in a flat with very little or no association with neighbors.

The present community setting is at the minimal. To bring back relationships and love and care for one another, we have to come together to alleviate the present social problem that is presently seen in our society, especially on our youth.

-Folorunso

From The Beat: We apologize if we missed some of the wording in your piece. It was very challenging to read your writing. If you choose to write the next time, lets sit down together to make sure we can clearly read your work. We truly want to hear more from you about your life in Nigeria! Thank you!

Note to Trump

You know if you start a war, your fellow white American people will not fight for you. But instead we Latinos and Blacks would be the first out that wall to attack and die. You don't care, so why should we care about you? You should just resign. You never deserved that position. You never fought for country nor stood for it. You're nothing more than a rich white man wanting more and more power. Just leave. There's no real reason to have or need you.

-Edi

From The Beat: Have you considered volunteering with groups that have organized to legally oppose the President's agenda? Perhaps registering voters would be a good start.

Thoughts of Life

First, Trump is racist. He should not be President. He is making us look bad. Most of his friends are Ku Klux Klan. He says that he is trying to help. He is not benefiting our country. Call me a Trump adversary.

Second, if I had a camera to film and be on TV, I would talk about the very poor hood and how it is in my city.

Third, if someone shows you their true colors, listen to what they have to say and pay attention to what they do.

I'm just trying to say I would want to get outside with a camera and film my city and the great things in my city. I'm tired of people speaking badly of my city. I want to make sure everyone sees the real beauty in my city and the real beauty in our struggle.

-Dan

From The Beat: Besides filming your city, are there projects that could improve the city? What do you think would be a big improvement in your neighborhood?

Beauty Where I Live... East San Jose, CA

I grew up in East San Jose California. I have never been anywhere else in which so much diversity was interwoven through the neighborhoods and blocks that I walked on as a youth. We had every nationality, race, culture, creed represented. You could open your door and take in a deep breath and inhale scents of different foods that would put the United Nations to shame. One was able to be exposed to different cultures, practices, and ways of life.

I grew up in apartments, so with every turn there was a different adventure to be had. The neighborhood store was the epicenter of activity. We got our candy and soda fix, and interacted with the people who ran the store because they too were apart of our community. They knew us all by first names, and even had pictures of people who lived in the neighborhood displayed over the cash register.

You could go outside and hear the OGs/Veteranos singing oldies on the corner while they sipped their dollar wine.

We had a pizza parlor which had the very best pizza you would even have the joy of eating. Inside the pizza spot was an old jukebox which played everything from Vicente Fernandez to Smokey Robinson. It provided the soundtrack, while we pumped quarters into video games as we awaited our pizza to be done.

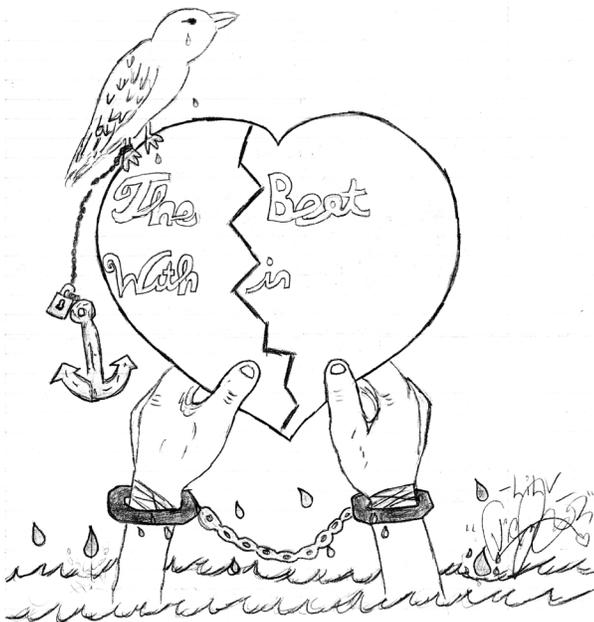
We also had a 7/11 and remember the people who worked their were beautiful people. They were also part of the community. On particularly hot days, we were able to go in and drink non-stop Slurpees.

We had a park nearby that had two man made lakes and a "Chinese Cultural" garden. We used to catch crawdads and tadpoles there. Many days spent just lying on our backs in the grass looking at the clear blue skies in deep thought. Wondering what would the '90's bring. Being young we were so carefree, no real worries. Then life happens. Responsibility comes.

It feels so good to be able to go back to my neighborhood with my children and show them, have them experience my childhood, even if it's just some brief moments in time. I'm thankful to have had the opportunity to grow up in such a balanced environment. I am a proud East Sider, and my neighborhood is beautiful, and still is.

-Maurice

From The Beat: You do an outstanding job in taking us to your community/roots in ESSJ. You write a vivid piece. We can truly see the stores you describe, the tasty pizza, non-stop Slurpees, the jukebox playing Smokey, the OGs singing, the park, being a young person without a care in the world. Well done!!



FATHERS & FAMILIES OF SAN JOAQUIN

Free

My oldest brother Angelo is locked up for twenty years. I wish you would had not made the mistake you made. Now I only see you between glass and there is a time limit when I see you.

-Rico

From The Beat: How will you do things differently? We wish the best for you and your brother. Maybe you can get your brother to write for The Beat!

Thanks

Well, I have so many people in this world and in my life to thank. God, for creating this world as He did. My parents for bringing me into this world. People who have helped me along the way in my upbringing, my marriage, with my children, with the addictions I've had along the way.

I mainly thank God for sending his son Jesus to die on the cross for all my sins, which makes me no better than you all, just forgiven. Thank you Jesus!

-Sandra

From The Beat: We are happy for you that you have so many people in your life that you are grateful for! These people can really bring you strength and stability when things get hard.

Which Road

The road not taken... The road I traveled, was I mistaken?
 Was I mad or just bad; there's a difference you know, it's kind of sad...
 System impacted from an early age, guess that's why I had all this rage...
 Was I product of my society, cultural, or neighborhood within?
 Labels and false identities is what I had to live with!
 Damn, I was a damaged child early and soon;
 guess that's why I turned into a young goon!
 This is my fork in the road, left or right? Does it really matter?
 Regardless, it ends with an internal fight!
 Choices and decisions, is it really mines?
 When your young were forced to live in a world that is cruel and unfair...
 Victims in a systematic place,
 having to grow up with shame, humiliation and disgrace!
 Words from the wise, let whatever road you choose be a learning
 experience.
 Always rise like the sun and rest like the moon and shine bright like
 the stars...

-Raymond

From The Beat: Early traumas impact our life in so many ways. We're sorry you feel that hurt. Many people could relate to your words, and we believe that the power of community can help us heal from these wounds.

Mistakes

Mistakes, mistakes I tend to do,
 mistakes are bait, they call for you.
 If I stayed home and closed the door
 I wouldn't be laying on a bed that feels like a floor.
 Just a bed and a sink in here, nothing more.
 Just a bunch of mistakes that I should have ignored.

-Daniela

From The Beat: We can tell how much you regret these mistakes you've made. Is ignoring your mistakes going to help you prevent them in the future?

The Changing World

I think that this world is changing, like people die every day, but now more people are dying, people getting killed by gangs, drugs, cops and so on, but that's how I see everything going on around me.

-Cesar

From The Beat: Are there any ways you see the world around you changing for the better?



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Love isn't alcohol, guns, drugs, or money

Love isn't limited

Love isn't war, it's balance, freedom from hatred

Why do you hate? Because I don't know how to hate.

You hate because it's what you're used to. It's your norm.

You hate because it's what you settle for

Are you willing to learn love?

read the rest of Kandy's piece on page 8

