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Introducing the Prison Writer to Composition: A Multilayered, Many Stranded, Nested, and Textured 3D Metanarrative That Begins to Unfold the Untold Story of Prison Writing

Alva Natalie Ramon

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INTRODUCING THE PRISON WRITER TO COMPOSITION: A MULTILAYERED,
MANY STRANDED, NESTED, AND TEXTURED 3D METANARRATIVE
THAT BEGINS TO UNFOLD THE UNTOLD STORY OF PRISON WRITING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2016

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Title: Introducing the Prison Writer to Composition: A Multilayered, Many Stranded, Nested, and Textured 3D Metanarrative That Begins to Unfold the Untold Story of Prison Writing

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This narrative inquiry introduces the rich story of prison writing, by and through highly successful career prison writers that have, and continue to publish their writing behind bars. They narrate their lives, design artistic and expressive works relating to their circumstances and environments, draft various legal and other relevant documents, craft essays and editorials, and write to make change and leave legacies of hope and redemption. While this document is from the point-of-view of a composition student with a zeal for the published prison writer and the *field* of prison writing, portions of it are co-written by these very successful and acclaimed prison writers. It is also the purpose of this research, to present a strong argument that the narrative of prison writing belongs in composition; the two stories (one, from the field of writing, and the second, from prison writing) should be amalgamated into one conjoining grand narrative of the historical discipline of composition.

By first following their *beginning*, or initial journey into the field of prison writing (asking each of the co-authors to write his narrative of how he entered into the process of desiring and learning how to write, then also narrating a history of how prison writing began), then investigating the *sustaining* elements that keep each of the writers writing and developing his skills while in prison (again, asking the writers to narrate the forces at work in keeping them writing, but also narrating what keeps the area of prison writing flourishing), and finally requesting that they also include narration behind the intended *legacy* each flourishing prison

writer hopes to leave, and may have already left (from both the participant's personal writing life, but also from that concentration of prison literature), it is the hope of this researcher, to lobby further inclusion and inquiry of the flourishing prison writer and his writing arena (prison writing) within the field of composition.

Composition students and instructors can gain significant benefits from better valuing these voices, their stories, and a story, albeit brief, of that group's history. Prison writers and prison writing have almost been completely left out. Our field can benefit with nearing a truer grand narrative of itself, by looking toward the prison writer, and prison writing. There is still much for us to learn, and with these particular men and women writers beating great odds to learn how to write well, get published, be nominated for, and win various awards and prizes (Nobel), all behind bars, it should be our duty to uncover what these writers can contribute to composition, especially since they have largely been ignored by academia and their fellow writers. Perhaps they hold the key to unlocking some unknown mysteries that we have failed to fully understand, as researchers and scholars in the field of composition.

Through the history of incarcerated men and women, we can read various accounts of rehabilitation – in their own words, and best captured, in narratives. For most, these transformations were inspired through the arts, and for the participants of this study, it happened through the process of becoming successful writers. Today, there is little funding for art programs inside the prison system; in previous years, there was plenty, and it was during that time that prison writers substantially emerged onto the prison writing scene – learning the craft of composing from professors and other published writers who were allowed behind the razor wire to hone the composing skills of those who were willing to learn. And it is from those previous teachers, at that significant period in prison writing history, that a number of prison

writers, who were willing students, grasped a working pedagogy that they have continued to practice and share, to this day – keeping prison writing in existence in the United States.

More importantly, however, prison writers have etched a story into American writing history by way of that persistence to be heard. There is another story within the grand narrative of our field, and it is there, embedded in the very places we tend to dismiss and purposely overlook. The story deserves to be heard, and also integrated into its partnered, communal story of composition; for this reason, I introduce to you a few acclaimed writers in the concentrated area of prison writing, and in doing so, collaboratively begin the task of unfolding their personal stories, as well as a brief story of their specialized group of writers (prison writing).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Of most relevance to the final achievement of this researched story, I owe the greatest sum of thankfulness to my Father and Lord, for it was You that placed the desire in my heart (initiating this metanarrative well over a decade ago), and it was You that walked with me every step of the way (sustaining the interest, research, and writing processes), and it is You who will place this story in its proper place (allowing its legacy to be left wherever you wish). For whatever purpose You have for this story's telling, I offer it willingly and thank you for the journey. To You be all the glory.

Of second most significance, I owe much gratitude to the expert on narrative inquiry, IUP's English department's chair, my committee advisor, Dr. Gian S. Pagnucci. In the body of this narrative, I hope I have somehow presented the value of a mentor in the process of writing – and not just any writing – the writing of a well-researched, high quality, credible, and relevant story to the academic community. It has been through your ongoing efforts to support this research story, that an audience has been created, and established. You have given me the hope and encouragement I have needed to keep pushing through to the end of this effort. No other scholar has aided this research more. I firmly thank you for being the instructor I very well needed in order to get to the absolute stage of completion. Thank you, Dr. Pagnucci, for your years of bearing with me. You are of great value to our field of study, and to me and my writing life. May your narratives always lengthen your legacy.

Thirdly, I absolutely must thank my co-authors. How I wish I could use your real names here, and throughout this document. Believe me; it was awkward and frustrating to think of you as Mil, Cob, Jon, and Marty. I am still not accustomed to it; each of you is known in my mind and heart by your actual, daily, birth names.

Without each of you, this story would continue to be untold. Thank you for allowing me to begin its unfolding. The correspondences I have been privileged to have with each of you has richly blessed my own writing life – as I have long hoped it would, and firmly believed it could. You all have inspired me in so many ways, and I thank you for all your writing – before, during, and after this project. More men and women behind bars can achieve the kind of personal freedom each of you have, if they also aimed to perfect themselves through the transforming process of becoming successful writers. I wish each of you ongoing successes in your writing, in your legacies, and I look forward to visiting with each of you, face-to-face, as I did say I would like to personally thank each of you for being my co-authors and co-researchers in this metanarrative writing endeavor.

Thank you so much – for everything. I have thoroughly enjoyed opening and reading each piece of mail I have received from you all during this time of co-writing your stories, as well as the story of your field – prison writing. You are of great value to the field of composition. My hope is that others will agree – that more students and scholars, and many more prison writers, will continue to invest their research and writing efforts in further developing the story we have begun herein. You all have been real – real honest, real vulnerable, real writers.

Finally, I thank my family and friends. Your questions and patient ears have served their purpose; I am done. Thanks for continuing to support me throughout this journey. My personalized grand story has not only been altered by the remarkable writers who compose from within, but by your listening to their stories and hearing about their lives, I believe your grand story has also been affected by them.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PLOT, OR PROBLEM

We tell remembered stories of ourselves from earlier times as well as more current stories. All of these stories offer possible plotlines for our futures. (Clandinin and Connelly)¹

I write because I have an incessant need to transcend the pervasive negative stereotypes of a prisoner: the dregs of society, the castaway, wretched of the earth, a mere number, percentile, that comprise those national statistics. I write because, well, if I didn't – I would go insane. I write because I want my name indelibly etched into the annals of American Literature. And maybe, one day, in the hallowed halls of academia, there would be fiery intellectual discourse among the students, who'd argue, debate, pontificate the merits of my work. (Le Clair)²

Introduction

In this chapter, I begin with the statement of the problem. I give four explanations to answer the *Why?* question behind this research inquiry. This section, which follows the introduction, is simply named: *Statement of the Problem*. Then, in *Questions to Be Researched*, I answer the *What?* questions: What does the research hope to do, ask, accomplish, and present? In this section, I state the research questions specifically, as they are asked to each of my co-authors, but also to myself, as I address each in chapter 2 with a metanarrative telling many different types of stories. My co-authors address the same questions through narratives, which

¹ Taken from *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (2000, p. 60).

² This is the pseudonym given to one of the highly successful/published prison writers whose quote was taken from his first submission (phase I of this study). His desire, like the other participants in this study, was to be identified and not have a pseudonym utilized. However, research requirements prevented the use of birth names for this study. Furthermore, this writer was later prohibited by his superintendent/warden from continuing in this study.

are mostly presented in chapters four and five, but pieces can be found throughout this research text. In the next section, *A Brief View of My Research Project*, I answer one of the *How?* questions. Here I introduce the three phases of this project, but only briefly. Chapter 3 will better present each of the phases. Then, to answer the final *How?* question of the methodology for this research project, I have another brief section that I have named: *Introduction of Narrative Inquiry Research Method*. Again, this section is intended to be brief and only introduce the method used in this study; more on narrative inquiry and the methodology for conducting this study is found in chapter 3. *A Narrative to Begin This Metanarrative* is the section that follows. In it, I introduce a prison writer and his narrative. I do this to immediately begin presenting prison writing, but also to show how narratives are frequently the genre of prison writing. Furthermore, I begin the unfolding of the untold story of prison writing with Stanley “Tookie” Williams because his life significantly impacted my own professional and academic life, and how I became nested within this multilayered, many stranded, textured, three-dimensional (3D) metanarrative. Then, in *Conflict*, the seventh section in this chapter, I discuss four of the main areas of conflict in prison writing, and for prison writers; they are: *Injustices*; *Less Funding*; *No Desire*; and *Instruction*. More on the conflicting issues behind prison writing and for prison writers will be presented in the narratives in chapters four and five, but also throughout this document. *Cognitive, Social, and Political Gains* is a section that basically considers those areas as a few gains that are credited to writing, as outlined by Victor Villanueva, JR (a composition scholar). I believe these areas are easily found in prison literature. Then, I write about some of the *Benefits to This Study* in the ninth section. This section has six sub-sections: *Benefits to the Successful Prison Writer*; *Benefits to the Prisoner*; *Benefits to the Prison Community*; *Benefits to the Academy*; *Benefits to Composition*; and *Benefits to Society*. In *Final Words*, I give one final

benefit of the study and again push to express the great worth and value of this project – the real need for more investigation and awareness of prison writing in composition. Then, to end the chapter, the last section is titled *Summary of the Chapters*. Here, I very briefly state what each of the six chapters of this dissertation will contain. It is my hope that I have left nothing out; but as researchers, we commonly do – outside our own will. Therefore, it is also my hope that the years of thinking, reading, and writing on the topic of prison writing and its highly successful writers will at least introduce the prison writer to composition in a multilayered, many stranded, nested, and textured 3D metanarrative (explained later) that begins the unfolding of the untold story of prison writing.

Statement of the Problem

In this research metanarrative, I aim to celebrate and place emphasis on the stories of the marginalized – the flourishing men and women writers who publish their writing, and/or write regularly, while in prison. *Why?* First, we (the field of composition) have largely not noticed these fellow writers. To the majority of us, unless we purposely choose to find them, they remain largely unseen – lost, even. These writers are men and women who have, like us, dedicated themselves to gaining knowledge, comprehending, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating the various nuances of the writing life. Yet, they are left to do this learning through writing and writing through learning, mostly alone. They journey, but they have few people to share and discuss those journeys with. The isolation of writers in prison produces a gap in our field – a hole. These valuable resources for developing our inquiry base remain unexplored; therefore, our discipline remains incomplete. How can composition be a whole discipline when it has this hole? It must consider *all* writers.

Secondly, this research offers insights and contributions to the academic community on how individuals become successful writers despite exceedingly restricting, difficult, and many times unfavorable circumstances for writing, such as low reading levels, English as a second language, a mostly absent body of knowledge in the field of composition (prison writing instructors has vastly been reduced in numbers), few mentors and/or models, minimal resources (texts and technology), and/or impending and impeding circumstances and surroundings (like the repercussions of being a successful writer, and the violent and highly oppressive conditions and atmosphere of incarceration). I wish to argue that the field of composition needs this study. My co-authors argue the same. Certainly this research will also contain various markers for pedagogical development in instructional efforts with composition students and instructors, and that is another argument for the value of this research study.

Thirdly, these men and women writers, composing through lenses most of us know little to nothing about, are telling their stories, and these stories are creating a prison narrative that deserves to be told and heard. There should be more scholarly focus on the experience of the *prison writing life*; it, too, like the prison writer, has been left out of our inquiry and research. Therefore, it is through *this* metanarrative that my co-authors and I present a view of successful prison writers and prison writing. Most flourishing writers in prison should be considered life-long or career writers since they have thirty or more years of writing experience – for most, doing that writing in prison.

Through this project, these writers recount their writing life experiences behind bars, and present an opportunity for a metanarrative to be documented and recorded by this composition student and scholars who can also document how prison writing got its start, remains, and leaves a legacy. The stories of these prison writers, along with their co-authoring and researching efforts

(my co-authors are also writing about the prison writing narrative), other prison writers' stories (non-participants), and research studies and stories of prison writing (which is quite limited), are all important. Therefore, it is my hope, and certainly the hope of my co-authors, that this metanarrative will begin to unfold the untold stories of prison writers and prison writing.

Fourth, as part of the endeavor of introducing the prison writer and prison writing into the field of composition, this research also works toward bringing the prison writer into the discussion and narrative development of the grander story of the field of composition; in other words, like all writers, the voices of prison writers matter, and what they have to say about writing should be studied. In attempting to accomplish this task, I have chosen to allow the participants to be co-authors in writing their own narratives, as well as writing the narrative of prison writing, as we, together, compose this metanarrative research document.

These writers have an understanding of writing that is vastly different from those of high school students, college freshman, non-native English speakers, graduate students in all various disciplines and departments across the curriculum, scholars, and all the other types of writers that are read and researched in the field of composition. The writing and research of prison writers can help to richly develop the grand composition narrative, that is, if we offer prison writers the space, and if they choose to enter it. And perhaps the single most effective means of encouraging their involvement in composition discourse is to first study their personal writing life narratives, and then the narrative of the area in which they flourish – prison writing. By putting their writing and their narratives into this research document, I hope I am helping prison writers to be given an introduction so they can take a seat at the table (Burkean parlor metaphor narrated in chapter 3).

Questions to Be Researched

So, now one might ask, “*What?*” do I want this study to do, ask, or accomplish, in the midst of celebrating and emphasizing these voices and telling the individual stories of prison writers prompting the beginning of telling the narrative of prison writing? In other words, what is the plot herein? What will these narratives tell us about these prison writers and about prison writing?

Conceptually, in the mail correspondences I have with these highly acclaimed, life-long writers (Mil, Jon, Marty, and Cob, the four participants in this study, as known by their pseudonyms), my aim is to invite them into the study, introduce them to its purpose, then have them jump into the writing of this metanarrative with me – by having them write their own personal narratives, and the narrative of prison writing. The framework that I believe works best in the telling of their writing lives and of their prison writing, comes from the following questions I have designed to establish an ordered account of connected events and/or stories for this final metanarrative document (which, ultimately, I am writing, but with the incorporation of much of the writing of the prisoners):

- Getting Started Writing

Personal Narrative: What brought you, a highly successful writer, to begin writing and initiating the process of becoming successful? In other words, how did you get started as a writer in prison?

Prison Writing Narrative: What and/or who brought prison writing to its beginning in the U.S.? How did it get its start, and when?

- Sustaining the Writing

Personal Narrative: What sustains your successes and ongoing efforts as a writer?

What keeps you writing and flourishing while in prison?

Prison Writing Narrative: What sustains prison writing in the U.S.? Who and what prevent it and/or allow it to thrive and continue to function as an area of writing?

- Legacy

Personal Narrative: What legacy, as a published and highly successful writer, are you leaving, hope to leave, and to whom and/or to what do you hope to leave your legacy?

Prison Writing Narrative: What legacy is prison writing leaving, and to whom? What legacy do prison writers hope the field of prison writing will leave behind, and to whom?

These questions (which are drawn out in greater detail in letters and correspondence with the writers) design the very structure of this research story; I use these questions to map the writing lives of my co-authors, and how their writing (emphasizing their narratives) embody that narrative of prison writing. I include published prison voices from the present, as well as the past, prison writing instructors (a number have written narratives about their years teaching prison writing), a few prison writing researchers, and other connected narratives and stories for a more textured and layered introductory metanarrative of prison writing. Additionally, in the next chapter, you will see that I construct my own narratives to answer these research questions in telling the stories to answer how I entered this research project, what has kept it sustained, and the hoped for legacy once it has been unfolded, and metanarratively told.

I do recognize that this structure is artificial, however. I cannot go to the great prison writing voices of the *past* and ask each of them these questions. Also, no researcher is capable of producing an investigation that includes all *current* prison writing voices of influence on this topic of the narrative of prison writing; it is not possible. There are innumerable narratives outside past and current prison writers that I could also access that would certainly contribute enormously to the prison writing story; prison staff, administrators, volunteers, chaplains, and teachers are also characters within this story of the prison writer and his writing life. Surely all these shared stories could establish an even more valuable and realized path towards truth (little “t” and big “T” truth is further explained in chapter 4). Yet, I believe that well-written narratives from the most prolific prison writers today can serve as an important starting place for this initial unfolding of their personal and collaborative stories of prison writing. And while I know that I am also certainly leaving out some individuals who very well may be in the process of becoming successful, flourishing, career writers, and that their responses could open even more pathways to additional inquiry and truths, and also at the same time leaving out all other highly successful men and women publishing literature behind bars (this study focuses on only four – Marty, Cob, Jon, and Mil), I can retain the hope of *this* research metanarrative leading other researchers to celebrate and emphasize the many other marginalized voices in the field of prison composition that this study leaves out. So yes, I know that I am manipulating things, but it is the hope of this writer, as well as my co-authors, that this study will direct others into additional research where other prison writers, right where they are, perhaps deep in the trenches of becoming good writers, can unite their writing life narratives with the career writers I will be studying for this story, to then push that prison writing narrative further into its rich plot.

A Brief View of My Research Project

Let us now ask, “*How?*” How will the narratives (data) be collected and gathered for the purpose of arranging and writing the metanarrative of prison writing? In the first phase of this research, a selected number (twelve) of highly successful prison writers in the U.S. will be contacted (via mail) and asked to respond to a ‘Call for Papers’ (Appendix B) – to consider the act of writing, a skill that one begins to learn in early childhood, and develops throughout life, as a type of recursive process. The writer will be asked to compose what will hopefully explore the span of his writing life, and examine as many of the aspects and nuances surrounding his writing successes, and woes, as he is capable of measuring through reflection and self-analysis. It is my hope that by asking them, in this phase, to formulate a metacognitive paper, the process will substantiate, or assist, in awakening some unknowns about their own writing lives; then, the project will ask them to carefully consider these unknowns, and articulate them, as well as those *already* apparent considerations of their writing processes and development. The ideal co-authors for this research are those writers who have entered the prison system with minimal reading and writing skills, and/or English as a second language, but have somehow managed to become successful writers through their continued efforts and publications, and because of the years they have elected to spend a consistent part of their day in the rhythm of writing.

In this study, I use of the term “co-author” in various places. For the purposes of this study, I am not suggesting that the participants and I worked together in collaboratively writing, editing, and revising this dissertation document. I am, in fact, the sole author, of this dissertation. However, co-authorship is an important concept for this work. I name the other writers who are the focus of this study as my co-authors because I am publishing much of their writing – the writing that they have had published before they agreed to be a part of this research, and the

writing they have done while participating in this project. Therefore, my definition of “co-author” is one of authorship based on the large contributions these writers have submitted to me, that I have included in part, or in whole, in chapters 2, 4, 5, and 6. My work as dissertation researcher is helping these prison writers to gain a voice and publish their work. So we are very much co-authors in that regard, and I want to give them credit as valid authors. I did only minimal editing to their work. I believe the term “co-author” is a close descriptor of the prison writers and me because of the extensive amount of writing they have completed on the topics of prison writers and prison writing, which are of significant importance to the overall completion of this research document. There is more on this topic, of the use of the term *co-author*, in the next section of this chapter.

Once this ‘Call for Papers’ is mailed to the twelve individual writers who have demonstrated great successes in writing (numerous publications, literary awards, many years writing in prison, etc.), they will then have the opportunity to make the decision to participate in this study by electing to write in response to the call and then mail their paper and consent form (Appendix E) to my P.O. Box mailing address. However, superintendents or wardens of the institutions where the successful prison writers are located must also grant permission for the prison writer to continue his/her correspondence with me beyond the initial call, and prior to the second and third phases. Unfortunately, one of these sought after voices, a male in a Pennsylvania prison, eager and willing to write his story was muted from this narrative – this time, not by the academy, but instead, by one of those particular wardens/superintendents entrusted with all decision-making powers over such authors’ voices. This is but one complexity in the process of telling the story of the prison writer, but all the same, it is very much a part of the overall narrative and experience of the prison writer. I incorporate more of this particular

writer's story, as well as these complexities in chapter 2. Also, the means used for the selection of the twelve preferred writers can be found in chapter 3.

In phase II, I may create specific questions that emerge from reading the phase I papers for each of my co-authors (Cob, Mil, Jon, and Marty), but this is predominantly when I seek to acquire more of their writing for the development of this metanarrative – collecting the field texts for the individual narratives, as well as the narrative of prison writing. Therefore, it is in this phase that I specifically ask the writers to compose a narrative in response to the research questions listed earlier (What brings them to become writers? What sustains them? What legacy would they hope to leave?). And also, I request their narratives of prison writing, also answering the same three questions, but as they pertain to the writers' specialized group – prison writing.

Following these writing requests and possible questionnaire, I ask for additional materials and resources the prison writers have written, or read, that can aid in the writing of the metanarrative; this is phase III, the final phase of the data collection. Through the jpay.com website, funds will be provided for the writers, should they need them, so that they are able to mail these resources to my P.O. Box. At this point, but also along the way, the phase I submissions, answers to any phase II questions I might have, the phase II narratives, the writers' own collected works and publications, all our written correspondences to one another, and the documents and resources they have sent me are placed in binders and read, analyzed, coded, and evaluated. These three phases and procedures are carefully explained in greater detail in chapter 3. Also in chapter 3, I position this research in composition by further narrating the method I aim to use in this document; it is only briefly introduced in the next section of this chapter.

Introduction of Narrative Inquiry Research Method

And finally, the last answer to the *How?* question. How do we aim to celebrate and emphasize the voices of prison writers to a society that discounts them because of their situation? Narratives: narratives embody the heuristic language of humanity. They also dominate prison writing. Stories are agencies of construction and meaning making; they are places for balancing identities, for performing along societal concepts of valued and devalued *truths*, and for departing from unknowns and/or inaccurate structures of thought and memory, to shape and form a type of reality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 179-181). Narratives help us develop our understanding of our world and the lives within it; they give us meaning, a history, and hope. As Julia Gilstein (2013) describes it, in “Narrative Inquiry,” from the *Salem Press Encyclopedia*:

The focus [of narrative inquiry] is on human knowledge rather than on data that can be easily measured. The value placed on human knowledge is significant, even if it comes from only one person. Narrative is an important part of knowledge transfer and communication. It is tied closely to memory that is perceived first-hand and constructed second-hand from information received.

For narrative inquirer scholars D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2000), in *Narrative Inquiry*, perhaps the two most seminal experts in narrative, the central role of inquiry is that life, as we all come to it, and it comes to us, is held together with narrative fragments, performed in storied moments of time and space, and also considered and understood in requisites of narrative unities and discontinuities (pp. 3-7). Clandinin and Connelly feel inquiry should collect and arrange these fragments. Building on their work (Clandinin, 2000; 2007, and Connelly, 2000, as well as other narrative inquirers), in this dissertation I try to celebrate prison writers by uniting with them – giving them co-authorship of this 3D metanarrative.

In a dissertation, published in 1999 (also through the Composition and TESOL program at IUP), written by Kami Day, and co-authored by C. Mark Hurlbert and Michael Blitz, titled *Completion of Caring: A Study of Successful Co-Authoring in Academia*, Day, like myself, justifies her study in that “very little research has been conducted concerning” the topic, “especially in the humanities,” and she feels a need “to fill gaps in the research” (p. 8). From the onset of her co-authoring efforts, in beginning the writing of her dissertation, Day narrates a story her two co-authors shared with her. They told her of an experience at a symposium where J. Elspeth Stuckey was in attendance. This is what Day wrote:

Stuckey stood up, and in what Blitz described as one of her [Stuckey] “impassioned outbursts that are so accurate and so riveting that the rest of the discussion has to be responsive to that remark,” she [Blitz] said:

We’ve all got these lives and stories that have led to the moment like the one we [are] at, and we act like they weren’t the fuel that brought us here...we act as though what got us here were simply the books we’ve read and the classes we’ve taught and the theories we espouse...what about all this life? (p. 1)

Day then goes on to say that both Blitz and Hurlbert, from their experience hearing Stuckey at the symposium “pledged, as a result of her [Stuckey’s] words, to be as honest as they could, and to actually write a book, about how they got where they are as teachers and as human beings” (p. 1). Then, Day claims that in her admiration of such reflection and honesty, on the part of Stuckey and her co-authors, she had chosen to do the same, and was setting out to begin her own dissertation with how she got where she was – a doctoral student/researcher, co-authoring the topic of academic co-authorship at IUP (another meta-research project). And on page one, her narrative begins. She also admits to her attempt of “approaching the hallowed tradition of the

dissertation in a non-conventional way, and to study scholars who are challenging academic convention” (p.4).

Like narrative inquiry, co-authorship remains a growing phenomenon in research. However, in Day’s study, which is primarily based on her analysis of five co-authoring teams, she found that the co-authors described their co-authoring efforts as “productive, satisfying collaborations” (p. iv). Also, “the interview transcripts revealed that all the co-authors perceive their relationships, both personal and professional, to be at least as important as their products” (p. iv).

Day goes on to suggest that the co-authors regarded each other as friends, and displayed elements of an intimate friendship, as the perceptions of the relationships were “non-hierarchical, respectful, and nurturing,” which “led to the chief finding that all the co-authors employ a feminine approach involving care, nurturance, heterarchy, respect, trust, and attention to context” (p. iv). She also claims that her study implies a “need to think less in terms of competing with each other and more in terms of nurturing each other’s personal and professional development” (p. iv). Her desire is to see composition teachers modeling and providing opportunities for co-authoring among peers in the composition classroom, which in her argument, leads students “toward a more caring, connected stance of their own” (p. v). I argue that a community of composition students and scholars would be a great thing to which to add the voices of prison writers.

Day also carefully varies definitions of co-authorship in her dissertation, but in this particular project, my co-authors and I do not intend to do such a thing. In my study I use the term “co-author” more loosely than Day does. I use the term to represent the inclusion of my co-authors’ writings and my work with them to give them voice. This is not the same as the

collaborative efforts typically understood to exist in co-authored works, but I believe the intent is the same as Day's reasoning. Day in fact claims that the most important implication of her work is "one which is embodied in Nel Noddings' phrase 'completion of caring,'" and is that of a "feminine sensibility which values care and nurturance over competition and autonomy" (p. v). If there is anything that our fellow writers need, especially those writers behind bars, it is care and nurturing – non-hierarchical, respectful, and trusting. Therefore, for me, I have chosen to describe our efforts together as an intimate co-authoring experience – not an impersonal investigation. That is why narrative inquiry also makes sense for this project.

Narrative inquiry research is my method of choice because I hold to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) belief that "if we understand the world narratively, as we do, then it makes sense to study the world narratively" (p. 17). In their book, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write:

Narrative inquiry is, always, multilayered and many stranded. To give a sense of this complexity and the nested quality of stories told, lived, co-composed, and eventually narrated in a research text, we try to place ourselves alongside our doctoral student coresearchers. As we do this, we place ourselves and our research alongside their research with their participants. These nested sets of characters—we as authors of this book, the research team members, and their participants—form a textured space of lives, stories, puzzles, and puzzle-driven narrative inquiry. (p. xvii)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also believe that the social sciences are founded on the study of experience (p. xviii). Experience is what creates the space to make meaning. Studying experience can be an excellent method for unlocking a "multilayered," "many stranded," "nested set of characters," and "textured space." Through the art of telling and retelling great stories with many

authors over different times, places, and spaces (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, pp. 60-62), we can enrich our understanding of complex situations such as writing in prison. Therefore, it is with the narratives of successful prison writers, prison writing instructors, prison researchers, and my own research narrative that this document aims to embody a narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry will be further addressed in chapter 3. Also, I further explain *meta*, as a more specialized form for the organization and construction of this dissertation, in chapter 2 (subsection, *Bamberg and Meta-Awareness*), in *Mentorship* (the fifth section of the chapter).

In the body of this project, metanarrative writing will show how the research and writing (as we define writing with the inclusion of thought processing, memory recall, reflection, and other cognitive actions) for this document began when I was a young girl, and how my stories unite me with my co-authors and their stories and narratives. Together we embark on narrating the process of discovering and understanding the narrative of the prison writer and prison writing in the U.S., from the prison writers' point-of-view and from my own limited outside perspective. Also, I must note: I integrate my outer view, not to place my narrative above that of my fellow writers, but because as a narrative inquirer I use stories to make meaning: layering, nesting, and texturing these stories with multiple strands of data.

It is my desire that we (composition scholars) hear from *them* (prison writers) in *their* own words telling how *they* believe *they* began writing, how *their* unique group (prison writing) got its start, what has kept *them* writing and flourishing, what has moved *their* area of prison writing forward, or backward, and what each has left to others, as well as what *their* field is leaving and has left us all. And in the hope of accomplishing such a goal, the best validation of these writers and their writing successes is not by asking them why they write what they write,

but by making how they do that writing relevant to the rest of us who are endeavoring to do it also.

A Narrative to Begin This Metanarrative

In his 2004 book, *Redemption: The Last Testament of Stanley Tookie Williams, Gang Leader Turned Nobel Prize Nominee*, published one year prior to his execution, Williams writes about his efforts to mimic “Malcolm X’s alphabetical technique for remembering words,” as he explored various methods for developing his vocabulary (p. 235). He said he was “frustrated” and “tired of skipping over certain words, or having to stop and jot down a word to look up” because he was “unable to comprehend” much of what he read (p. 235). He also tells us of “a style of mnemonics” he designed for “memorizing long lists of words on one side of a sheet of paper, then folding it with the definitions on the opposite side” (p. 235). And as he reflects on that time in his life, as he yearned to become learned, there is a pause in his reflective narrative to insert a brief story that seemingly marks the singular moment in his life when he becomes a writer, researcher, and life-time learner:

Treach asked if I was doing any writing.

“Sure,” I said, “I write missives from time to time.”

He let out a hearty, deep laugh and said, “Not that kind of writing, cuz. I’m talking about literary writings, compositions, essays.”

I told him it never dawned on me to capture my thoughts on paper.

Treach responded, “You know, Cuz, a man with your vocabulary should have a collection of essays. One day your work may prove to be a valuable asset.” (p. 245)

He continues with his reflection:

I didn't envision the possibilities then, but he inspired me to write my first essay, "Black Unrest," and then plenty of others. I started off with a style of writing intended to impress people with my flair for words. But in time I toned it down, breaking the stereotype of a prisoner being grandiose in his use of language and vocabulary for the sake of appearing intelligent. Studying was noble. My prison cage was transformed into a study laboratory; a secluded place of challenge to mould an educated mind; a quasi-university where I could increase my familiarity with my culture as well as politics, religion, criminal law, and the world – and get in touch with myself.

Seeking to re-educate myself was the first step toward reasoning. Without a conscience I'd remain an educated fool doomed to repeat his mistakes. (p. 245)

Williams' book is a narrative that takes the reader from his birth, in 1950s New Orleans, through his years, where he claims he "became a slave to the delusion of capitalism's false hope: a slave to dys-education (see Chapter 3 [of his book]); a slave to nihilism; a slave to drugs; a slave to black-on-black violence; and a slave to self-hate" (p. xiv). He also writes about his gang life and eventual incarceration (Part One: Blue Rage). Then, in Part Two: Black Redemption, he writes about his reading struggles and mnemonic devices, the encouragement he gets from Treach, his pursuance of education, and his growth of empathy for others (unnecessary deaths from drive-by shootings, the severely hungry and starved people of the world, the suffering, the diseased, the poor, and others having endured other miseries, states of despair, or genocides are but a few he writes about). He composes a chapter about *moto ndani* (the fire within) that drove him to write books for children, and he also narrates stories around his four nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize, and three nominations for the Nobel Prize in Literature (by Notre Dame and Brown University professors). He writes about the acclaimed movie named after the same title of

his book, *Redemption*, which came out in 2004, played by Jamie Foxx who earned an Academy Award that same year, and his honor and humility to get to meet and work with the actors and filmmakers. Finally, he narrates some moving stories about his sons.

In the last chapter of the book, *Sons of the Father*, Williams narrates the stories of his first visits with his two sons, since his incarceration – Travon, in 1993, when he was twenty, who came with his grandmother (Williams’ mother), and Stan, in 2002, three years before Williams’ execution. In the chapter, Williams explains his “ultimate display of fatherly irresponsibility,” when he forsook his sons “to barnstorm throughout South Central LA in the name of crippin” (p. 307). He tells of how the first visit, with Travon, “was awkward,” knowing that he “had neglected him for all of his young life” (p. 308). He wrote, “I told Travon I understood if he resented me, and I wanted to apologize for committing the ultimate sin, forsaking him to a fatherless childhood” (p. 308). Over the years, Williams held a relationship with Travon through prison visits and phone calls. He wrote of how proud he was of him, and said, “though I wanted desperately to assist Travon, I possessed nothing of material value. I had nothing but words – then again, what could I tell a son who was succeeding in life where I had blundered?” (p. 309). With his other son, Stan, the story was rather different:

“Ajamu, Ajamu, your son is calling you!”

Groggily I asked, “What did you say, Bro?”

“Your son is downstairs calling you.”

I jumped up, misinterpreting the statement as, “Your son is dead!” Then from downstairs boomed a voice, calling the word “father” in Swahili.

“Baba, Baba!”

Since I had never heard Stan’s voice before, I asked, “Is that you, son?”

“Yes, Baba, it’s me, your son. How are you doing, Baba?”

I let him know I was doing excellently because I was able to talk to him. Briefly we engaged in a ritual of salutations. Stan said he was passing through overnight, on a bus headed for Salinas Valley State Prison. As much as I wanted to, there was no way for us to hold a decent conversation with me hollering from the fourth tier down to him on the first tier, and being able to see him seemed impossible. (p. 313)

Yet, Williams was “taken aback” after asking an officer if he could get downstairs to talk with his son, who he had not seen since 1979, and the reply was, “Okay, no problem. As soon as the four o’clock count is over” (p. 314). And in that time, while waiting, he put a package together for his son to take with him. At 4:10 pm, the officer escorted him down the stairs.

When we reached a holding tank area, Stan hollered out, “Over here, Baba!” Fate smiled on me this day: all the cells were empty except for one next to my son. As the officer placed me in the cage, I thanked him for making it possible. I was uncuffed, and faced Stan for the first time in more than two decades. It was like looking in a mirror. (p. 314)

Just prior to this story of their first meeting, Williams narrated the following:

His misfortune was in trying to follow the path I had trod. Stan was an Imperial Court Crip and had christened himself “Little Tookie” in my honour. Older Crips who knew Stan said his attitude was reminiscent of me at that age. Travon had told me that he had met Stan once, that they hung out for a while, and then parted ways. Other than being fathered by me, they seemed to be from different worlds. Needless to say Stan was out there cripin’ like there was no tomorrow and masking his frustrations with intoxicants. (p. 309)

But even though Barbara, one of Williams' long-time outside friends was able to get to Stan, give him a place to stay, and help him clean up so he could rehabilitate and get a job, Williams tells us that Stan "faded back into the madness of the streets," and "this time no one could find him" (p. 309).

Later, Williams learned that Stan had been convicted of murder, and was sentenced to life in prison. So Williams was then able to correspond with his son through the prison mail system, since Stan was no longer on the streets and now had a permanent address. Williams wrote several shorter stories about his correspondence with Stan (through the years leading up to that first visit); here are a few excerpts: "In the beginning I found it difficult to decipher my son's street vernacular" (p. 310); "Although I began to receive letters from Stan, corresponding between prisons was a slow and frustrating process. Our letters were often lost, destroyed, or confiscated" (p. 310); "When I do talk with Travon or write to Stan, I try to enter their viewpoint in order to familiarize myself with their interior lives and their aspirations, to encourage them. My efforts with them recall my own childhood, when my mother tried in vain to impress her wisdom upon me" (p. 311); and,

In every letter I wrote to Stan, I wanted to gain his acceptance into whatever kind of life he had established in prison. I knew there was nothing I could do. In prison, each man has to confront the isolation with his best and strongest desire to survive. It's not a cakewalk. In many of my letters to him I tapped into his views on gangs, politics, religion and black culture. (p. 312)

What I find especially valuable in these stories is how intentional Williams realized he needed to be with his words in his relationships, and that through the writing of these stories he was able to better understand this dynamic, which narrative inquirers refer to as the three-

dimensional space (discussed further in chapters two and three). Williams' communication and letter writing to his sons was moving him backward to his own mother's attempts to impress her wisdom on him, pressing him firmly in the present as he was trying to enter the interior lives of his sons, and driving him forward into the future as a writer hoping to leave a legacy that might still speak into the viewpoints of his sons, or anyone else, for that matter. Also, these stories give us a window in which to peek into a world that might be terribly different from our own, but reflects very similar aspects to all human livelihoods. With the stories of my co-authors in this study, and the story of prison writing, I hope to better present this truth; scholars' narratives are really no different from the narratives of those writing from within.

Williams also reflects on the effect his writing may have had on Stan: "The respect he had for me enabled him to incorporate my hard-earned wisdom into his transition. I was proud when he cleared the first hurdle, abandoning cryptic gang vernacular for more comprehensible language, coupled with an interest in retaining new vocabulary" (pp. 312-313).

So there in the holding area that day, much like his first visit with Travon, Williams got to apologize to his son, in person; he tells us how Stan responded:

He smiled and said, 'Baba, I've already forgiven you. There's no need to explain. I understand the life you lived because I followed in your footsteps. You were Tookie, my father, the most notorious Crip. In my eyes you could do no wrong.' (p. 315)

And after attempting to tell Stan all that he indeed had done wrong, Williams writes:

Staring at Stan, I saw that he projected the thug arrogance I had once exhibited, an arrogance capable of getting him killed. That unsettling thought made it vital that I speak on self-transition. When I discussed the need for introspection, humility and discipline,

he mistook my emphasis on self-control as a pacifistic line, turning the other cheek. (p. 315)

He continues with:

I told him I was referring to the senseless violence that we trigger without reflection on its consequences: the stupid stuff, the vicious canards, the thug stare-downs, the idle words of machismo that prick the ego. (p. 316)

And in his final narrative reflection and dialogue with Stan (about that day and their visit), which is also the last few paragraphs of *Blue Rage: Black Redemption*, he writes this passage:

We must be motivated by our moto ndani, our fire within. We must rise above the grinding, rigid conditions by nourishing our intellect and spirituality. We must out-think negative situations with a common sense approach that radiates masterful countermeasures.

Stan vowed, before he left, to incorporate into his life the disciplines of education, spirituality, exercises, redemption and transition. He had heard that my peers and I had developed our own methodology to oppose the negative forces within and outside of ourselves. Since earlier in the conversation he had unabashedly admitted to following in my footsteps, I posed a question: “Son, are you willing to come anew?”

Without hesitation he said, “I have infinite love for you, Baba, and I’m determined to do what is necessary to change.” (p. 316)

Then, with the last complete sentence of his book, Williams concludes, “at last, with my two sons’ forgiveness, I felt redeemed” (p. 317).

In the Appendix and Postscript of the book, we get to see, in written form, a piece of this methodology Williams referenced – the one Stan had heard about. Williams calls upon the “pure

energy of human beings and institutions – gangs, ex-cons, parents, churches and mosques, schools and universities, youth centers, think tanks, university professors and other educators, entrepreneurs, entertainers, human rights agencies, social organizations, politicians, rappers, newspapers, media broadcast outlets, the employed and unemployed, the wealthy and the poor, the young and the elderly, and anyone else” who might be interested in promoting peace, for the good of their communities and for the safety and well-being of all, to consider his Protocol for Peace (portions are found in *Blue Rage: Black Redemption*, but was formerly found, in full, on his website as a 26-page PDF downloadable document, containing his peace initiative theory, the various points for putting it into practice, and the contracts and agreement pages for signatures). Williams’ domain site, www.tookie.com, is currently for sale and not being used to promote any of his writing. I am unaware of who previously maintained it, why it has been taken down, or for what reason the initial manager finds that there is no longer a need for it, but seeing that it is dismantled, and up for sale, we can infer much. Despite his publication credits, Nobel Prize nominations, big blockbuster film about his life, and redemptive transformation, Williams is no longer celebrated. I must ask: is it because he was a prisoner? Is it because he was executed?

If we open our research and dialogue with men and women prison writers who face greater challenges than most writers, and we write alongside them, developing their skills and having composition’s grand story and skills also developed by them and what they may have to offer each of us individually, as well as our field, perhaps they, like almost all other writers, would be celebrated even beyond their deaths, and usually, in spite of them. Perhaps their writing would gain even more respect once they have left us, and we would attain more insight about all we proclaim to inquire – what it is like to write.

So *how* will this research document be presented – much like Mr. Williams’ narrative – with relevant and pertinent historical stories and reflections (mine, my co-authors’, and from a number of other applicable people’s writing) telling a researched narrative, with numerous stories. It is how I can best put this writing on display and amalgamate the prison writers’ words with mine for this metanarrative, since most of what they write comes by the narrative form.

In the next section, I introduce the writing dimension of the problem (conflict). While the clear goal of this metanarrative is to elevate prison writers by letting them tell their stories and the story of their writing area of concern, while providing composition with an unfolding of the untold realities surrounding how prison writing and prison writers got their start, kept at their craft, and leave legacies, it would be imprudent to neglect to narrate the greatest conflicts that exist in the narratives. Moreover, it is unwise that I should construct a prison writing metanarrative where the biggest problems for prison writers and prison writing instructors are eliminated from the overall narrative. I must not fail to integrate these problems into this metanarrative of prison writers’ lives and the landscape of prison writing. This metanarrative endeavors to tell the story of how these writers come to be flourishing writers, despite their circumstances, sustain their successes as writers, and leave legacies behind, but behind that goal, I believe we should recognize that the majority of prisoners do not write.

Conflict

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), a number of the BJS statisticians (Lauren Glaze, Danielle Kaeble, Todd Minton, and Anastasios Tsoutis), stated that “adult correctional systems supervised an estimated 6,851,000 persons at yearend 2014, about 52,200 fewer offenders than at yearend 2013” (bjs.gov). With the number of imprisoned adults and youth at more than two million in the United States, there have been, however, a good number of

them (prisoners) who have published articles and books, over the years. For a long time, I have wondered: How did they do it? In the past, many prisoners were illiterate upon incarceration, as Malcolm X, Jimmy Baca, and a few others confess in their writings; still, others (like Williams and Eldridge Cleaver) had very minimal reading and writing skills upon incarceration. The National Center for Education Statistics published *Literacy Behind Prison Walls: Profiles of the Prison Population From the National Adult Literacy Survey* (1999), which shows that the majority of prisoners in the U.S. read within the two lowest levels of the five that the center has established. Therefore, the problem of poor literacy skills still persisted in the late 1990s, and while similar surveys have been conducted in other countries, there is no more recent survey data available for U.S. prisoners.

However, many prisoners have authored excellent prose, and the road to publication is easier today because so many others have paved the way and made the procedure more tangible and realistic. In fact, there may be a higher number of hopefuls for publication than ever before. Yet, most prisoners still do not write. We celebrate those that do, and passionately applaud the ones that find success and fulfillment in developing their voices and pursuing that fulfilling legacy, but we still need to acknowledge the fact that many are disinterested altogether; more about these challenges will be found throughout this document. In this section, you will find four sub-sections: *Injustices*; *Less Funding*; *No Desire*; and *Instruction*.

Injustices

We know that injustices exist in the prison setting because almost all successful prison writers and prison writing instructors say so in their narratives. Mistreatment is common, and seems almost accepted. Does this abuse impede prisoners' writing? Certainly it does. As writers, we fully understand the significance of voice, audience, and a sense of being able to be heard.

Because of my research, I have a reasonable understanding of why most prisoners do not or cannot find the motivation to care about such an enterprise in their abusive surroundings.

Commonly, there are prices to pay to be a writer behind bars. Plus, we can easily assume that the guilt and shame of their crimes can cause them to have a sense of unworthiness, which also might stifle their free voice; that subject will be addressed later.

In the last forty years, officials have confiscated typewriters, manuscripts, and years of research from many prison writers. In *Undoing Time*, we read about cells being ransacked, and writings being seized and destroyed by prison officials, but “against the background of greed and indifference, these writers, through the redemptive act of writing, announce to the world beyond the walls and bars that a spark of life still burns in them,” and where “their words collide with their damaged spirits, they strip away the armor and communicate their humanity” (Evans, 2001, p. xi).

Wally Lamb (2007), in his book *I'll Fly Away*, chronicles his experiences with the prison authors of *Couldn't Keep It to Myself*, the first of his published works on the writings of his female prison students. One week prior to the release of the book, “Connecticut’s attorney general Richard Blumenthal, at the behest of the Department of Correction, sued the prison writers – not for the modest earnings they would receive after they left prison, but for the entire cost of their imprisonment” (p. 5). One of the writers serving a forty-five year sentence, which, according to Lamb was involved in a trial that was rife with racism, ended up owing the state \$917,000. As Lamb puts it, “*Couldn't Keep It to Myself* had the power to open minds and challenge stereotypes” and “the lawsuit had the power to silence writers who had just discovered their voices – women who were in no position to fight back against bureaucratic bullying” (p. 6).

In the preface to his 1994 book of vignettes, *Iron House: Stories From the Yard*, Jerome Washington wrote: “In prison... authority is capricious, thoughts are contraband and writing is a deadly, serious business” (p. vii). Another prisoner, Dannie Martin, was placed in solitary confinement when his essays were published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in the mid-1980s.

Fortunately, there are at least four stories that will be told herein of highly successful writers who may not be facing these kinds of *deadly* problems today, and perhaps another study can seek to uncover why, but the vast majority of prison writers including the four co-authors participating in this study, do attest to various fears and/or concerns for remaining under the radar of those running the prison-industrial complex. Their letters to me revealed that immediately.

Well, I believe this should not be; I believe the grandfather field of composition can provide protection and covering of these men and women writers if we were to boldly read them and take them seriously within our field. It seems to me another injustice on them, not to.

Less Funding

Yet, even with publishing accomplishments being easier, due to predecessors and some added protective rights for the imprisoned, the writings of prisoners continue to gain only limited attention in the mainstream world of literature, and more problematically, the act of writing and/or becoming educated or rehabilitated, while behind bars, is less funded today than ever before. Writing classes and other resources for prison writers are often cut and disregarded. When Robert Ellis Gordon, editor of *The Funhouse Mirror: Reflections on Prison* (2000) writes about the Washington Corrections System (where he taught writing for nine years in the four prisons situated in Monroe, Washington, a city of 5,300 that lies some thirty-five miles north and east of Seattle in the fertile Skykomish Valley), he mentions the ironic metaphor of “those three

high security prisons that sit atop the big hill overlooking town,” which consisted of rolling green fields – farm country (p. xii). He says, “there is nothing about these prisons on the hill that brings to mind words such as nurture or cultivate or fecund” (p. xii). He continues:

Unfortunately, however, there has been no clamor for more and better educational programming. On the contrary, the pendulum has swung the other way. In my home state of Washington, for example, as part of a new “no-frills” approach to incarceration, the community college system within our prisons has been dismantled. Even high school degrees are no longer offered to those convicts who want them. (p. xiv)

It is troubling, indeed, when the one possible solution that can begin the process of restoration, and has been proven to reduce recidivism, is getting less and less attention and support. The mere fact that an imprisoned man or woman *wants* to pursue an education while incarcerated is remarkable; in fact, getting to that point, for some, may be the most complicated part to their transition process.

In his book, Gordon also provides additional statistics and facts about education programs being eliminated in state prison systems all throughout the nation – not just his state of Washington. So many prisoners do not write because the teachers and classes that provide them with the education they need, to learn, are no longer in place. Again, with added relevance of this truly unique group of writers by academia and the field of composition, it seems logical that more funding and programs could become available to increase the interest and the aid the men and women might have for either learning to write, or becoming better at it. Unless we scholars speak about these voices as essential and necessary to education, chances are money will continue to be poured into the areas that retain the most interest of society, even if they are void of benefit.

No Desire

Then there is the issue of poverty and/or having been born with less (whatever the *less* might be – education, money, acceptance, love, etc.) that tends to kill hope. The ongoing struggles of control and dehumanization in prison are major factors, especially in the programs that are offered prisoners, only perpetuating recidivism, as Marty³ points out in his 2014 essay titled, “The Trouble with Prison Reformers.” He asserts:

Without our assent, nothing can succeed inside our world. While it is possible to bribe and even cajole some measure of interest, genuine participation in the complete sense is always a voluntary choice. Prisoners are masters at refusing participation in what we deem to be undesirable, regardless of the consequences. (p. 249)

He goes on to argue that various programs aimed at reform, in a U.S. prison system with a recidivism rate of 60%, must involve prisoners “in the conception, design, implementation, and operation;” otherwise, as he puts it, “we will continue to be reluctant participants” (p. 249).

Also in the essay, Marty writes of his participation in the conception of several other projects, namely his 1998 Honor Program, which, according to him, he “had to write it in such a way as to appear to be about rigid rules, but the heart of it was the idea of rewarding positive behavior;” it was written that way, because as he states, it was during the “punishment movement” (p. 249).

He says, “The Honor Program turned the system upside down by reviving a rewards system. It was not anything fancy: just more yard time, a little more property, and the promise of a respite from the lunacy that has overtaken the rest of the prisons” (p. 250). According to Marty, within “one year of full implementation, a facility that had been notorious for riots and drug

³ This is the pseudonym for one of the four participants in this study; Marty is formally introduced in chapter 2, in the section titled, *The Writers*.

trafficking went months without a single recorded disciplinary infraction” (p. 250). He finds that “the program succeeded because prisoner experience and input informed the final product” (p. 250). He also gives a second example of a curriculum he co-wrote, Creating a Healing Society Program, (in effect for more than seven years now, and having a long waiting list for interested participants) that “without the prisoner experience poured into the content up front, it would not have as powerful and resonant an impact, and not have such wide appeal” (p. 250).

Marty’s third example of a project he helped create, The Other Death Penalty Project, which has roughly ten thousand active prisoner participants, has gained much attention. In fact, Marty, along with noted author Luis J. Rodriguez, sponsored “a writing contest for prisoners serving ‘the other death penalty’” which brought about a book of the best collected stories. This book, edited by Marty, is titled *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough* (2013). More about Marty and his prison writing efforts are to come in chapters four (primarily) and five.

To make the point: a tiny number of prisoners might find their stimulus in gaining educational and/or rehabilitative tools from programs behind bars, to potentially give themselves a better chance on the outside (if they are not in for life or on death row), but the majority do not. Some have very long sentences, so they may wonder: *What’s the point?* They may have little hope that they can rise above the circumstances of their parents and the other men and women in their neighborhoods and communities. They have few positive role models.

And what about the prisoners who are illiterate or have English as their second language? They may believe the educational system failed them and their sense of being able to effectively play catch-up has left a very sour taste in their mouth to any form of educational growth. Besides, fewer teachers go into the prison system now – due to the loss of funding for rehabilitation programs, which began in the late 1970s and has mostly stayed the same. Or, these

prisoners may believe they are unable to learn. It is sad, really, but I understand it; my 97-year-old grandmother is still illiterate. She has lived as a fully functioning citizen without the ability to read – her entire life. Therefore, what motivation would someone on death row or with a life sentence have, for turning his life around to become a well-versed writer?

Also, there are incapacitating emotional explanations for the writing block prisoners may experience. They have many distractions, as even I, when I try to write (think) for this dissertation have some, but the comparison is of no value herein. How much more would a man or woman, in his or her cell, be distracted by the interruptions and even dangers that come at him or persist within her mind? Therefore, we hope that this story of prison writing may also uncover and explicate some additional truths behind the reasons why most prisoners do not write, and some worthy concentrations for potential inquiry into that topic. I also hope that through this co-authored metanarrative, we may provide an encouraging resource for motivating more prisoners to pursue the art/skill. And what other resource would prove a better encouragement than one filled with the stories of the very individuals who have already overcome many of these barriers?

When I first started this study, I had no understanding of the narrative of prison writing, much less the life of the prison writer, as each has developed throughout the years of the United States of America's history. Oddly, however, in their writings, most prison writers make almost no mention of *how* they learned to write well or what they went through in arriving at the place of becoming a successful writer. It is as though they never struggled to get where they were – as though they entered prison with their writing abilities already established. However, for most, we know this is not true. Only a few prison writers touch on the topic of their development as writers, and even those choose not to give much detail about their learning and growing process. Therefore, this metanarrative hopes to include the metacognitive aspect of writing about writing,

so that those prisoners who are not writing will gain background stories for aiding in their desire and efforts to begin writing, continue writing, and eventually arrive at that place of having a legitimate legacy to leave behind.

Instruction

This idea of metacognition, as it relates to learning, calls me to think about Richard Shelton's (2007) comment on how most of his work as a prison writing instructor was helping his students unlearn. In his book, *Crossing the Yard*, Shelton talks about bright moments, and bright students, struggles and successes, and when referring to one of his most successful students who had become somewhat famous for his publications, Shelton shares this brief story:

He was undoubtedly the most talented student in the first prison workshop in 1974. While still in prison he published four books of poetry and was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Writer's Fellowship, the first incarcerated writer ever to receive such an honor. And I came within inches of losing him during the first week of the pilot program. I had the temerity to be critical of the first poem he brought in. He was deeply offended. He didn't come back to the next session. Finally, after licking his wounds for two weeks and seeking the solace of heroin, which was readily available on the prison yard, he returned, quieter and less ebullient, but ready to learn. (p. 26)

And it is, to me, that those two weeks "licking his wounds" and "seeking the solace of heroin," which brought the student back into the classroom "quieter and less ebullient, but ready to learn" are two weeks where something specific was happening that could further our understanding of the prison writing life (p. 26). What was going on with Stephen? What exactly was the criticism Shelton offered? What introspection occurred in the offended student, and how much had actually gone into that first poem? Some of these dimensions of conflict are for another study,

but with the participants/co-writers of this narrative, some of these areas of conflict are introduced and discussed in later chapters.

Prison writing instruction then opens up another pertinent area to the narrative. What efforts and methods of the prison writing instructor are utilized? Is there honest criticism? Are prison writing instructors able to be courageous enough to offer their students feedback that will not be met with some form of consequence or retaliation? I find myself listening to Marty's approach in one of his essay submissions for this project; in it, he writes about prison programs: "prisoners must be allowed, encouraged really, to be a large part of the design of such programs" (2014). And at least one of my co-authors in this study has done just that; he has taught many classes inside the prison, and seen great successes from his students. In chapters four and five we will further explore Mil's⁴ narratives and what he has written about the many achievements of his prison writing students. Jon's⁵ teaching experience will also be included later.

Shelton writes about each of his students in detailed clarity, as well. He writes of their relationships in and out of prison, and each student's writing capacity, but he does not attempt to reflect on or describe his teaching methods or pedagogy, neither do the other published prison writing instructors I have studied; they tend to write more about the prison itself and the social elements that work against the various identities that dwell in them. They tell stories about their students and the characteristics that are at play in relating to them. They also provide writing samples and examples of progress and development in the writing itself. In essence, what still remains to be uncovered is how these instructors actually do their teaching. And on another, larger scale, the question also remains: what about those prison writers who failed? Surely we

⁴ This is the pseudonym for another one of the four participants in this study; Mil is formally introduced in chapter 2, in the section titled, *The Writers*.

⁵ This is the pseudonym for another one of the four participants in this study; Jon is formally introduced in chapter 2, in the section titled, *The Writers*.

need to try to better understand why those who wanted to learn to write never did. Perhaps it is the letting go of pride and coming to the place of genuinely wanting to learn, no matter the cost, that prison writers must go through to be successful with the writing process. Does a type of humble submission need to precede good prison writing? Here is another truly valid and worthy study for our field of composition, within prison writing.

Interestingly, some writers for the *San Quentin News* newspaper conducted a phone interview with the highly published Luis J. Rodriguez in 2012, and they asked him to come to the prison, visit the writing workshop, and discuss his writing process. And it is this humility and earnest desire to learn how to write successfully, as well as the meta-awareness of the composing process, that play an important role in beginning the integration of prison writers into composition – and in getting more prison writers to be successful.

Many prison writers commonly feel as though they have been stripped of the ability to ever have a real voice in society. They significantly highlight the oppression and sense of lost voice they continue to suffer under. Not that awareness can change much in the prison system, but perhaps it may one day. Those who write, persevere nonetheless. They almost all state that they need to remain in the shadows at their institutions, and several others proclaim that they experience harsher treatment for being published authors. Even Williams, with his Nobel Prize nominations, the acclaimed movie made about his life, based on his memoir, was not granted clemency, and plenty of prison writers will suggest it was due to the very fact that he did manage to gain notoriety for his writing.

Still, successful prison writers must feel that all their work will somehow provide them with something for their efforts, despite the repercussions that come with the craft. I want to restate composition's need to listen to this metanarrative – to introduce them (prison writers) to

the field, to promote their creditable contributions, to celebrate them as co-writers, and to unfold the untold story of their prison writing lives.

Cognitive, Social, and Political Gains

Now, after reading well over one hundred texts by prisoners, prison writing instructors, and researchers and scholars in various fields, I believe prisoners write for the same personal growth, learning, and cognitive development all writers do; also, they write for that imagined audience and voice.

As Victor Villanueva, JR. (1997) highlights in the Preface to his book *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*, “writing has been credited with learning, cognitive development, social cohesion, political power” (p. xi). In my studies, looking at those who did start from the beginning of their writing development and humbly outlined their learning to read and write (if only minimally) in their narratives (Williams, for example), memoirs, and essays, I can say that they affirmed Villanueva’s claims in their writing. While they may have glossed over their learning how to read and write, and their ongoing composing struggles, they do seem to credit writing with learning, cognitive development, social cohesion, and political power – most particularly, as they have started to gain confidence in themselves as writers. And while they continued writing and producing documents, they recognized their growth and development of increased knowledge and awareness of thinking patterns, even if they did not necessarily present that in their narratives. Most times, as I have come to learn, the minority who do discuss these issues do so in interviews or speeches, and that is why this research hopes to draw from each co-author a narrative that singlehandedly chronicles his writing life – beginning, sustaining force, and legacy.

As this learning, cognitive development, social cohesion, and political power Villanueva suggests begins to occur, prison writers can enter the world that once seemed completely foreign, feeling accepted and established in gaining a voice of worth. They see that their writing can put them in the middle of important conversations. It can earn pardons. It keeps them known, and gives them a platform. For a few others, through their writing and speaking, they gain power in such a way that they become part of real change in this country, or at least, within their prisons. Mumia-Abul Jamal, a published author and death row inmate, is an example of a contemporary political activist and journalist who has been on numerous radio stations and is a regular on some national broadcasting programs. Jamal was asked to participate in this study, but I never heard back from him after mailing the initial research invitation packet, then sending him a subsequent letter. However, as Mil narrates the circumstances (in his second narrative of phase II, presented in chapter 4) surrounding Jamal's life (beginning at the exact time I mailed Jamal the package, inviting his participation in this study), we can infer, with a fair amount of certainty why I never heard from Jamal. However, from his writing and speaking career, it is easy to say that Jamal does embody at least one of these four aspects Villanueva mentions – political power.

However, I cannot think of a prison writer who is a better example, of each of these four gained benefits Villanueva suggests in his earlier quote (learning, cognitive development, social cohesion, political power) than Malcolm X. Malcolm X entered prison illiterate, learned to read, write, developed cognitively, joined a number of social enterprises, gained great political power, and seems to maintain one of the most noteworthy legacies among prison writers. I chiefly appreciate the fact that he modestly exposes the earliest stages of his writing process in narrating how he copied the dictionary, letter by letter, and through that process, learned how to read. In addition, his vocabulary was dramatically enriched. The fact remains, he entered prison illiterate,

and left a man who gained prestige and power – and his primary method for learning to write and speak with such influence, came by way of copying – a teaching technique that has long been tossed aside as ineffective and useless. To think: how much more could he have accomplished with better learning opportunities and a good teacher? Malcolm X’s narrative is an important piece to the narrative of prison writing because many, many prison writers have started right here – copying Malcom X’s method.

While some prisoners, like Malcolm X, do write about writing (not about their learning-to-write methods so much, but about the pleasure and inner fulfillment they experience through writing), most do not. However, their works speak passionately about their relationship with the written word (most are avid readers and quote and/or frequently reference others’ writings and words); they should have long bibliographies at the end of their writings, but they usually do not.

Therefore, it is precisely through their process of entering into writing, continuing to write, and leaving a legacy that they establish a level of joy in being heard, of gaining voice, and of being able to delight in the dialogue of a new discourse – those of the learned, cognitively developed, social, and political kind. They become a part of a community, to whatever niche of writing they find themselves, and it sustains their composing processes and provides opportunity to leave a legacy. It is by, in, and through written words that they can gain moments of deliberate choice and connection; it is where they truly find their freedom. They learn to use the language that allows them to fit into the world, and it is that same language that also allows them to construct new meanings into their lives. After narrating stories of the years of developing his own methods for learning to read and write, since he entered prison illiterate, Jimmy Santiago Baca (2001), in *A Place to Stand*, poetically declares:

Language was opening me up in ways I couldn't explain and I assumed it was part of the apprenticeship of a poet. I culled poetry from odors, sounds, face, and ordinary events occurring around me. Breezes bulged me as if I were cloth; sounds nicked their marks on my nerves; objects made impressions on my sight as if in clay. There, in the soft language, life centered and ground itself in me and I was flowing with the grain of the universe. Language placed my life experiences in a new context, freeing me for the moment to become with air as air, with clouds as clouds, from which new associations arose to engage me in the present life in a more purposeful way. (pp. 239-240)

Baca, no doubt, is a paramount character in the prison writing history narrative. His brief story can be found in chapter 2; but also, his writing and teaching life is mentioned in various places throughout this metanarrative.

I believe that prison writers will not only be able to identify specific moments of cognitive development in their own composing lives, but they will also be able to beautifully articulate these moments of intellectual growth in the narratives I collect from them for this unfolding of the stories telling a narrative of prison writers and prison writing. It is my belief that they simply have not taken this opportunity to write these narratives for themselves. Surely they have thought, reflectively, and even nostalgically about their writing lives. Perhaps prison writers even continue to consider their writing lives regularly, but with almost no research on this subject matter, and with few scholars exploring the composing lives of such men and women, I believe this study will provide my co-authors with the opportunity to finally narrate stories (supply data) artistically and creatively, that are relevant to our discipline. In the narratives (data) I collect for this research, I hope to see these writers compose sophisticated texts about their writing lives, and about prison writing – thus co-authoring this metanarrative alongside me,

learning, experiencing cognitive development, discovering social cohesion, and gaining power and/or confidence.

Benefits to This Study

Prisoners' voices are under-represented and devalued in our world and are left to fall to the wayside because few care to research or hear them – to look, listen, record, and share. There is a general bias against prisoners' voices; this is a problem. However, I am trying to resist this bias with choosing to conduct this research. These writers face great challenges, yet they persist. Even with numerous publications, the most successful prison writers are still only causing minor ripples in prompting changes in today's culture of over-populated prisons and high levels of recidivism. Marty is trying, so is Jamal. However, there simply is not enough coming from inside. Yet prison writers do offer valuable insights for how changes can be made – great changes, changes within our nation, within the prison system, within the prisoner, and within other young men and women in these situations. And they propose these changes in very articulate and sophisticated essays, narratives, poems, and other forms of writing. We must go beyond our basic reasoning in asking why the voices of published prisoners are ignored, and probe these men and women in an examination of telling us how they do what they do – not so much why they do it. We simply need to include them in the field of composition, but not only for our own benefit, but for all of the benefits that follow in the next six sub-sections; these are: *Benefits to the Successful Prison Writer; Benefits to the Prisoner; Benefits to the Prison Community; Benefits to the Academy; Benefits to Composition; and Benefits to Society.*

Benefits to the Successful Prison Writer

The anticipated benefits for those who choose to participate in this study are many. First, through the meta-cognitive process of writing about writing, I believe the prison writers will

likely develop a stronger sense of autonomy and ownership over their written work. They may claim that their writing is inspired by other writers, but with this study, reviewing prison writing from its beginning to its legacy, and more importantly, for them, to study their own beginnings and legacies, I believe the writers will be able to recognize that they have had as much to do personally with the development of prison writing, as past writers who have stimulated and encouraged them. The act of reflecting on life, by way of writing about it, often works toward the development of the independent voice that is essential to good writing. This study has the ability to draw out those kinds of reflections.

The flourishing prison writer will be asked to consider the act of writing, a skill that one often begins to learn in early childhood. Then, he will be asked to write three documents that will hopefully explore the span of his writing life, as well as the field of prison writing, and hopefully the writing requests will draw him to analyze as many of the aspects and nuances surrounding his writing successes, as well as struggles, as he is capable of measuring through reflection and analysis. This meta-cognitive project may also substantiate, or assist, in awakening some unknowns about the co-author's writing life. Therefore, this study can also open new possibilities in the growth and development of a writer's style, voice, tone, persona, and/or sense of power. And as each considers the successes and struggles of prison writing, also by way of reflection, research, and personal experience, the same may occur; unknowns about prison writing may be uncovered, which will deepen the plot of the narrative.

In addition, many published prisoners make the declaration that writing is a form of salvation - for them, individually. However, there is little research on this topic; therefore, this metanarrative may allow individual prison writers the opportunity to articulate, for themselves through writing, how writing provides them with a genuine sense of freedom – should they

choose to write about such subject matter. In doing this, they can strengthen their beliefs in writing, and also provide an opportunity for their fellow imprisoned peers to potentially move beyond the position of reader and into the beginning stages of starting their own writing lives. Once these co-authors witness a fellow prisoner entering the writing life, their sense of service may become more apparent to them, which has potential to lead to even more benefits. One writer has already made this declaration in his correspondence to me, but other prison narratives have stated this to be true.

Benefits to the Prisoner

As already stated, there is a writing problem in prison – for numerous reasons. Prisoners do not write enough, and few write well enough. However, when a fellow prisoner is recognized or addressed positively, others sometimes sit up and pay attention. They may long for a similar acceptance of worth, and credibility from the outside world. If through this metanarrative prisoners come to understand some truths about prison writing, than they may also find encouragement from some of the authors within prison writing, to join in and contribute to the story. This would be a benefit in all the ways that my co-authors detail in their narratives and other works outside this research story.

Benefits to the Prison Community

When prisoners learn that other prisoners have been published and are valuable to the public, it often gives all prisoners a sense of validity, too. They can gain a sense of acceptance and relevance from knowing that others, just like them, have somehow, even minimally, acclimated and/or received acceptance from the outside. Prisoners tend to believe that the majority of the public cast them off completely, especially if they have been given a death penalty sentence, so when a prisoner attains the interest of an outsider, it can prove rewarding

and favorable in developing the hope that is so desperately needed within the prison. Therefore, this study places significance on individuals who have been rejected and ignored by society. Realizing that they have abilities that are beneficial to humanity, prison writers can continue to write empowering pieces that promote change – within the prison culture and beyond.

Perhaps when non-writing prisoners see how their fellow prisoners have used writing to benefit themselves and their community, they may be motivated to start writing too. Maybe they will take a writing course or befriend a writer within their prison. Also, the positive attention a prison writer receives from his/her publications can be a catalyst to get other prisoners to start writing. While I cannot share this dissertation directly with everyone, I can distribute copies of it to my co-authors, as I have already made plans to do (in person); but also, I can share news of the study to various prison publications, even providing them with an electronic copy, as the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (JPP) has already requested I do once I have completed it.

Benefits to the Academy

This prison writer narrative will benefit the academy too. If we can further our understanding of how individuals teach themselves to become successful writers, we can enhance not only writing classroom experiences but other classroom experiences with theoretical and pedagogical applications discovered from studying prison writers. Looking into the successful writing lives of prison writers and the history and narrative of prison writing opens up many additional avenues for further research and inquiry. Instead of studying prisoners, as other fields do, to understand what is wrong or what went wrong in their lives, scholars can take the approach of discovering what we can learn *from* prison writers.

Benefits to Composition

Clearly with a gap like the one we have, which exposes a lack of even minimal awareness of the prison writing life, it is apparent how the larger field of composition can profit from this research narrative. There can be no adverse affects. In addressing these writers as worthy voices to the field, we open up many more layers, strands, and nested and textured spaces; we develop the plot of the grand narrative of the field of composition, and present a fairly impressive subplot. And with more students entering the field and aiming to complete a worthwhile study of their own, in culmination of their Ph.D. requirements in composition, this metanarrative opens an array of additional research opportunities on the understudied group of prison writers.

Benefits to Society

Often in our society the prisoner is viewed stereotypically. Prisoners are seen as beasts, monsters, and as deserving what they get – the isolation, horrid cultural conditions of perpetuated hate and rage that exist all around them, daily, negative mental conditioning, deliberately unfair circumstances, and we can certainly continue with this list. Yet, this research narrative presents an opportunity to break down these common notions of society’s false mindset and endeavor to instill a genuine sense of the noble human character that exists in all prisoners.

And for these reasons, in addition to the fact that we have altogether skipped over the prison writer, unfortunately, I argue that we need, yet again, to stretch ourselves out – beyond the ivory towers, beyond the college campuses, beyond the high schools (public, private, charter, middle schools, elementary schools, or any other free-learning institution where students are studied and researched for the good of advancement, growth, and pedagogical maturity). One valuable area where we can do that stretching and develop new eyes and ears for closely looking

and listening to writers is within the prison walls. I explain this more in the next section, as I refer to the final value of this study.

Final Words

When I first began graduate studies in composition, I do remember a sense of being on the outside of an inner world of unknown speech and vocabulary. After some years, I guess I felt less like an outsider, and partially began to connect with the field. Likewise, when I first started my studies of prison literature, I had thoughts of being a foreigner in an unknown world. Now, I am beginning to get a sense of this place – the mind at work inside the razor wire. The vocabulary still stops me, occasionally, but the speech, I think I get. The authors, I know them; they are you. They are me.

There is worth in these works written by men and women who have persisted to define their legacy. Stepping into foreign lands, as a graduate student, and a prison writing researcher, I have accumulated many experiences and influences on myself as a writer and writing instructor. To leave the prison writer out of the field of composition, we deny our future scholars a fraction of the knowledge that they *should* acquire within this field; worst of all, leaving the prison writer out of composition studies perpetuates the same problems we have seen with prisoners for years: lost voices. Their absence in the field reminds me of how the ESL student must have felt before s/he was finally given room to join in – they were marginalized and oppressed, and for that, could not attain the four advantages Villanueva suggests (learning, cognitive development, social cohesion, and political power). Their growth, integration, and solid voice were stifled by our negligence. Whether prison writers write with humility, a genuine sense of redemption for their crimes, a passion and desire to make a positive difference in the world, or they write to graphically portray horrid details of their past (for some inner gratification, pleasure, or other,

perhaps non-selfish maybe therapeutic reason), each writer's contributions and processes, no matter how wrong, right, or accurate we think their writing is, should be relevant to the field of research within composition. There is much to be learned from these writers.

Summary of the Chapters

In this first chapter, I present: the research problem; research questions/organization; a view of my research project (briefly looking at the various phases); an introduction of narrative inquiry; a prison writer's narrative (Williams); some conflicts; cognitive, social, and political gains; benefits of the study; and a few final words. These sections introduce the plot, or problem behind this research narrative. I find that not only is this research topic essential because composition has not done it, but because it offers us significant insights into further understanding our field. As stated, we are incomplete without this narrative into the field of prison writing.

Chapter 2 begins the unfolding of the metanarrative of this prison writing research story, with stories (or, some literature review) – beginning with my own, introducing the beginning of my involvement with this important work. My stories act as a spring board for the act of meaning making of the metanarrative way, and also to present the three-dimensional (3D) space of experiences (temporally, spatially, and personally/socially) of this narrative inquiry, which “creates an ongoing sense of dislocation as [I] [move] from a remembered past in one place to a present moment in another, all the while imaginatively constructing an identity for the future” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 97). The chapter then continues with additional stories, further developing the meaning making, 3D space, and the prison writing narrative. I do this by introducing: writers; prison writing instructors; the topic of mentorship; the impact of community learning; some histories and legacies; and prison literature. Primarily, chapter 2 serves to tell

back stories to this research, prison writers, and prison writing. Chapter 4 will contain the emphasized, co-authored narratives of the prison writers' narratives of their personal writing lives.

The third chapter provides the setting, or procedures and methods for establishing the space for this story to be shared and these writers to be introduced. I begin with a better defense for narrative inquiry, by providing a brief narrative of narrative inquiry. I also present an explanation for this method as a sustaining force for becoming better at being a narrative inquirer. I explain the textual structure of the document, the process of selecting the co-authors and sites, the data collection, and the interpretive analysis method that narrative inquirers utilize. I also address the various issues relating to credibility, the care and protections of my co-authors, confidentiality, and limitations. Permission request letters, as well as consent forms are also covered. Like all chapters in this document, I close out with a few final words, and a brief summary.

Chapter 4, THE PERSONAL NARRATIVES, OR DATA, resumes with stories – featuring the main characters of this metanarrative, my co-authors. Here, we get a closer look at metanarrative work as the narratives of these highly successful writers, answering the research questions, presents composition with an introduction of the prison writer and the untold story of prison writing – thus, providing more layers, more strands, more nesting, and more texturing for the grand narrative of the field of composition.

Chapter 5 is where we explore the stories that begin the unfolding of the untold story of prison writing – also using my co-authors' narratives.

Chapter 6 is the findings, or conclusion of the metanarrative. Has the prison writer been successfully, narratively, academically, and creatively introduced to composition? Has a

metnarrative, with many layers and strands, texture and nesting of characters unfolded the untold story of prison writing? How can compositionists use this narrative of the foreign and alien area of prison writing to further the grander narrative of composition?

CHAPTER 2

THE STORIES, OR LITERATURE REVIEW

I wonder what sort of tale we've fallen into? (J.R.R. Tolkien)⁶

A key term for us is temporality. Partially we mean, of course, that an experience is temporal. But we also mean that experiences taken collectively are temporal. We are therefore not only concerned with life as it is experienced in the here and now but also with life as it is experienced on a continuum—people's lives, institutional lives, lives of things. Just as we found our own lives embedded within a larger narrative of social science inquiry, the people, schools, and educational landscapes we study undergo day-by-day experiences that are contextualized within a longer-term historical narrative. (Clandinin and Connelly)⁷

Introduction

In this chapter, I would like to *present* the temporality of this research study and my place in it, but also *introduce* the longer-term historical narrative of prison writing (chapter 5 will develop that historical narrative more). I am currently embedded within this accumulation of prison writing experiences and thus linked to a range of prison writers, from novices to some of the most esteemed prison writers' lives. This range of lives has impacted and shaped the design of the landscape for this current prison writing research study – the 3D metanarrative (further explained later). I am embedded because I am here: because I have read and studied the lives and writing of prison writers for many years; because I have corresponded with a few successful, published prison writers for well over a year; because I am writing a dissertation about prison

⁶ Taken from *The Lord of the Rings* (1954).

⁷ Taken from *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (2000, p. 19).

writers; and because, most importantly, I have held onto the same desire and purpose for this research for many years – that purpose: to introduce prison writers and their writing lives, as well as a brief narrative of prison writing, to the field of composition.

The stories (literature review) in this chapter are co-authored between myself and a few of the individuals that are permanently embedded within prison writing, and whom I aim to introduce for one of the purposes of this study. It is the temporal experience of when, why, and how this narrative inquiry on prison writers and prison writing *got started* (the first research question), *is sustained* (the second research question), and has a *legacy* (the third research question), that places this research into a 3D metanarrative situation (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

First, I begin with myself (like Clandinin and Connelly, and other narrative inquirers), and reflectively narrate the various influences and elements that brought me to prison writing; I end with the story of why I eventually chose to use narrative as my research method. This section metanarrates answers to my first research question: in short, how I *got started*, or entered this multilayered, many stranded, nested, and textured 3D space. I have titled this section: *How I Entered the Narrative of Prison Writing*. This section has ten sub-sections; they are: *Teaching; Vita's Imprisoned Father; Uncle Julian; Tookie; The Book, Soul on Ice; Peter Elbow; My Students' Troubled Home Lives; Land, Flower & Hayes, and Williamson; An Independent Study; and Redirection*.

Then, I tell stories of the lives and works of those whose experiences have deepened the contextualization of this metanarrative because I have encountered them during this research, and because they have impacted my view of prison writing. Also, and more importantly, the last four are introduced because they are my co-authors/participants (Jon, Cob, Marty, and Mil) who

I have been corresponding with for over a year. While I could have made mention of a multitude of outstanding writers in this section, I did not, because many are introduced in other sections or sub-sections, and because chapter 5 seeks to address those writers, through my co-authors' narratives. In this section, I begin to answer the second research question, as it applies to this research project, and I tell about how these writers have sustained this study. This section is titled *The Writers*, and it contains nine sub-sections, which are: *Ledbetter, James, and Burns*; *Malcolm X*; *Cleaver*; *Williams (Tookie)*; *Hassine*; *Mil*; *Cob*; *Marty*; and *Jon*.

I then tell more stories in the following three sections: *The Prison Writing Instructors* (containing eight sub-sections: *Shelton*; *Lamberton*; *Hogan*; *Baca*; *Yurcic*; *Tannenbaum*; *Lamb*; and *Gordon*); *Mentorship* (containing five sub-sections: *Pagnucci*, *Narrative Inquiry*, and *This Dissertation*; *Rose and Deficits*; *Bamberg and Meta-Awareness*; *Johnson and Love*; and *Yurcic's Acknowledgement*); and the topic of *Community Learning* (containing three sub-sections: *Baca Gives Back*; *Being a Part of Their Community*; and *Writing Workshops*). I have found these three topics to be thematic within my research of prison writing. Furthermore, I use the stories in each of these sections and sub-sections to continue answering the second research question of what sustains this research.

Finally, I attempt to further enrich the metanarrative by telling stories from other areas of prison writing that have emerged as relevant in prison literature, while still working to illuminate some additional sustaining forces for this research. However, with these final stories, I also answer the last of the three research questions: What is the hoped for legacy of this study? The topics in this section are: *Histories and Legacies* (containing six sub-sections: *The Abbott Story*; *No Clemency*; *No Snitching*; *The Criminality Curse*; *LeClair*; and *Tina*); and *Prison Literature* (containing six sub-sections: *Prison Narratives*, *Memoirs*, and *Essays*; *Poetry*; *Anthologies*;

Newspapers, Newsletters, and Magazines; Journals; and Websites, Programs, and Organizations). I end the chapter with a section titled *Final Words*.

How I Entered the Narrative of Prison Writing

In this first section of the metanarrative, I tell stories in a chronological order of how I entered this research inquiry. Why am I starting with my own story rather than citing a bunch of previous studies as is typically done in a review of literature chapter? I am starting with my story to help readers understand why the literature that follows later matters. The pieces I reference in this chapter are not just a collection of books and articles; they are part of a personal search for understanding, part of a personal story. The literature in this chapter matters because the life of prison writers matters to me in a deep way. This is not only an academic pursuit, a side interest, or something I was mildly curious about. No, this material is vital to me because of who I am and because of the students' whose lives have touched mine. So, while I will be citing research literature soon enough, I want to offer a set of stories that I hope will make you care about that research literature. In the end, I want readers to think about this material not just as a review of literature, but as a way of telling a story that makes that literature matter.

In addition, I would like to mimic the method of most narrative inquirers, in particular, my mentor, dissertation coordinator, and the chair of our English department, Dr. Pagnucci. In the Foreword to Pagnucci's book, *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making* (2004), Lad Tobin introduces Pagnucci's book as "ambitious," asking "provocative questions" which "generate serious thought" (p. x). Tobin also states that in reading Pagnucci's stories, it "made [him] want to tell [his] own stories in return," to "continue the fight to promote and protect narrative, an almost endangered species in the academic world" (p. x). Tobin also writes:

Drop a personal story into an academic article and you're likely to stir up criticism, even if that story is clearly there to illustrate a point and even if the rest of the article clearly demonstrates intellectual rigor and sophistication. Again, I'm not trying to be disingenuous about this: I can understand the argument that for students to be empowered in the university they need to learn the conventions of academic discourse. But I don't see why we should ignore the power that narrative can also have to influence a reader, establish a credible ethos, or make a persuasive point. (p. ix)

Further in the book, Pagnucci also admits:

In this book, I've tried to make *everything* personal. I've tried to show how stories from my life can illuminate the ideas I'm talking about, can help readers connect back to the stories in their own lives. But I've also done this so that the writing will help me learn as I go along. I've written this book as much for myself as for anyone else. That's another problem with the way we've designed our academic world. We've tried to be so distanced and critically reasoned that we've taken ourselves right out of the picture. We've made the academic experience so alienating that even we don't really belong, at least not as persons with all our personal idiosyncrasies. My hope, in the end, is that you will get as much out of reading this book as I have in writing it, and that you'll then be inspired to start writing down your own stories. Maybe part of my role, then, is cheering people on, the way Richard Meyer does in *Stories from the Heart* (1996). (pp. 28-29)

The sub-sections, or stories, I will now share are: *Teaching; Vita's Imprisoned Father; Uncle Julian; Tookie; The Book, Soul on Ice; Peter Elbow; Their Home Life; Land, Flower & Hayes, and Williamson; An Independent Study; and Redirection.*

Teaching

I had a typical middle class childhood with a fairly strong education in Texas – including a Bachelor of Arts degree. I had moved to California after completing the BA to pursue graduate studies in the film industry, and hoped to write screenplays. After a year of working as a manager at a Blockbuster video store in Burbank, taking a few screenwriting classes at the American Film Institute, and barely supporting myself, I finally decided that a teaching job would afford me a better lifestyle, even though at the time I believed I wanted nothing to do with being an English teacher; I was a writer – or so I thought. Still, with all the publicity surrounding the great need for English teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the report of quick and easy hiring, without a teaching credential, and the starting annual salary being close to double what I was making at Blockbuster, I was willing to at least give teaching a year or two. So, I willingly jumped through the necessary hoops to complete the application process, which was a bit tedious; costly tests, medical histories, and background checks were among some of the required clearances. However, once it was all fulfilled, I was given the red light to begin looking for a school which would hire me to teach. And along with that red light, I was also given a very long list of schools all throughout the district that were in need of a secondary English teacher. In several cases, the schools needed multiple English teachers.

On the list, I called the first school (Byrd Middle School) that was within 15 miles of my small duplex condominium in Glendale. The secretary quickly transferred me to the principal, who asked me to come in for an interview – right then. Being that I was still in my pajamas, had the day off from Blockbuster, was planning to spend the day doing something else, and had only started making calls to set up interviews, I chose not to look too desperate, and agreed to meet with him early the next morning, since I was not opening Blockbuster that day.

On my answering machine, one hour after that first interview at Byrd, the principal left a message, offering me a teaching job. The next day I cancelled all the other interviews I had scheduled for the next two weeks, and I decided to take the position at Byrd. Very soon, after some additional paperwork and contract signing, I found myself walking through the halls of a middle school, where it seemed that hundreds of eyeballs were directly staring at me. How I wondered what those inquisitive young minds were thinking about me.

The district required I enroll in a credentialing program, which allowed me to concurrently teach English to middle school students while earning the teaching certificate that was supposed to precede the authority to be in the classroom. Because of the deficit for Math and English teachers at that time, a large number of us were given emergency waivers. I was not completely aware of how underprepared I was for the teaching assignment I had been given, but as I started the credentialing classes, I then recognized my own pedagogical poverties. Educational theories, cultural and social constructs, marginalized student outcomes, teacher efficacy, state testing objectives, student-centered learning, and a plethora of other topics began to engage my mind and prompt the development of a meta-cognitive teaching lifestyle that I have been experiencing ever since – as a secondary English teacher, a college teaching adjunct, a mom, and a home school educator.

It was a new world for me – learning about teaching, and having the freedom to practice, apply, and even alter what I taught, so that I could see the greatest results. The rational mind cannot disassociate theoretical concepts while they are being taught and learned with their applicable subjects/topics, and as they are being applied and put into practice. I became rooted in trying out the various methods for aiding the successes of my students, as I was learning them in my credentialing classes. My students, as viewed by the other teachers at the school, the

instructors I had in my credentialing classes, and from much of the literature I was reading in my classes, were not considered future success stories, but rather, perpetuated problems for our nation; that bothered me greatly. In her narrative inquiry in educational studies, Mary Catherine Bateson writes about continuity and improvisation as characterizing “more and more lives today, lived in uncertainty, full of the inklings of alternative...Adaptation comes out of encounters with novelty that may seem chaotic. In trying to adapt, we may need to deviate from cherished values, behaving in ways we have barely glimpsed, seizing on fragmentary clues” (*Peripheral Visions: Learning Along the Way*, 1994/2009). Basically, she suggests that we improvise as we approach uncertainties in our lives (for me, it was how to help these students), because learning is something all humans endeavor to do. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, “change and continuity are brought together by human agency. Improvisation and adaptation to change allow the past to be connected and to have continuity with the future” (p. 7). Therefore, looking closely at the stories around us, and our own story, we can enter a deeper place of chaos, but with the opportunities for improvisation and adaptation, which tie us to each other in the ways in which we allow these stories to do that, there is so much room for a finer future.

Both the writing deficits of my predominantly Mexican students and my own deficits as a writing instructor made me believe that enrolling in a graduate program in composition would aid my efficacy in helping these fellow Latinos to beat the odds. I applied for a Masters degree program in composition, and after my acceptance into that program, I then gained understanding of additional concepts and lessons in the field of writing which I could integrate into my teaching/learning.

Many of my pupils were not legal citizens, and my rusty Spanish soon became enriched with a stronger vocabulary and a more proper usage of Spanish conjugations. I realized that my

upbringing had not prepared me for this experience. Still, I continued teaching my classes, attending school for my two programs (teaching credential and Masters), and after a year or so, began to view the educational field as a far more worthy career path than the Hollywood life I had moved there to chase.

As my sixth graders moved to the seventh grade, I pleaded with the principal to allow me to move up with them. Then again, in the following year, the administrators privileged me with the true blessing of teaching the same group for their eighth grade year. And because they had become like little brothers and sisters to me, and I was genuinely attached and so strongly desired to see them succeed, I left my position at the middle school to take a job at the high school where the majority of them were headed for ninth grade. So I got to teach most of them, yet again, for a fourth year in a row.

These were Title I schools, so they were in some of the poorer areas of Los Angeles County, with many students having incarcerated parents, and considered destined for the same outcome. It seemed radical for me – a privileged, naïve youth of artistic interests, being sandwiched between these two paradoxical communities – Title I schools in Los Angeles, and the post-graduate programs I attended at California State University. As with most current experiences, we do not usually reflect fully on the experience at the time, and are probably incapable of realizing all that is developing analogously in our lives as the story is unfolding. “When everything changes, the small and immediate to the vast and abstract—the object of study, the world immediately around it, the student, the world immediately around him, and the wider world around them both—there seems to be no place to stand so as to locate just what has altered and how” (Clifford Geertz, 2009, *After the Fact*). Though almost forty years old now, Geertz’ pioneering anthropological research still speaks to issues today. When I was teaching

those students, I could not see what I have now come to better understand as I step into a reflective story of how these circumstances and relationships were determining my future research introspection. These two worlds were shaping new perspectives and a lens that I would be looking through for many years to come, since everything was changing in my life at that time, and I was having to apply improvisational concepts to the continuity of my already developing narrative. Congruently, it was my pedagogical studies (post-graduate credentialing classes) and the composition masters program that engaged my mind, while working with these impoverished students fulfilled my spirit. During the day I was in a place of hopelessness and unrest as I contemplated my lack of ability to teach the students well, as well as the various statistical data that was presented in teacher meetings, which seemed to define the inevitability of failed futures for my students. My evenings were the opposite; I sat in composition classes considering my potential as a student, scholar, and educator in a field that invited me into its discourse – leaving me feeling as though I had great work ahead of me in hopefully testifying to various successes I had with my students. I also, with others like me, in credentialing classes, wanted to offer hope and enrichment to our students. Hollywood dreams of writing big blockbuster screenplays faded for me, and instead I became enmeshed in trying to better understand these two spaces I had somehow entered simultaneously.

I was certainly a part of two new worlds at that time – the world of higher education and the world of marginalized students. And how different are these two worlds? I was in a 3D space – a very temporal here and now continuum with multiple lives affecting my own, while mine also affected others'. One student, Oliva (endearingly nicknamed Vita, or Vivis), affected me and my research interests, more than all the others.

Vita's Imprisoned Father

It was during that first year of teaching ninth grade that I came to learn that a very dear student of mine, one I had known closely for more than three years, struggled with a secret she had kept from me.

“Miss Ramon, can you wait a minute? Don't leave yet,” Vita shyly asked, as I pulled into her driveway to drop her off after another football debauchery at the high school; Poly's team, with a parrot mascot, won zero games that year.

“Yeah. What's up?” I casually asked.

“Well, there's something I've been wanting to talk to you about, like, for a really long time, but I don't know how to say it.”

“Okay,” I finally dropped in the middle of her paused silence, put the car in park, and said, “Tell me.”

She and I glanced at each other, and we both smiled at the same time. A few more moments of silence passed, and she looked down at her hands, in her lap. I knew this had to be difficult because I had never known her to be shy – ever.

She finally decided to tell me about her father's imprisonment in Mexico. It was common for many of my students to spend their summers there, and since I knew her father lived there, her ritual of leaving for the summers to go visit him seemed completely normal to me. So I never suspected that her father was in prison.

That night, we sat in my car, in her driveway, and talked for more than an hour; it was an emotional conversation for her. She feared what I might think of her and her mother (her parents were still married), but she also respected me and felt that she no longer wanted to continue living with the lie that greatly defined her life, and affected our relationship – in her mind,

anyway. She loved her father immensely, which resonated with me that night. I listened to her explain and divulge details of her father's criminal life. After a while, my student's mother finally came outside to check on us, and when Vita explained to her mother, in Spanish, what we were talking about, I was invited inside.

Vita's mother respected me greatly, and trusted me with her daughter. It was not uncommon for me to take Vita home after a dance or football game, or to even pick her up and take her places with me. I had that kind of relationship with a number of my female students, and I was always invited into their homes for birthday parties and other cultural traditions that were normal for Mexican-Americans. Therefore, this was not my first time inside Vita's house.

Since that night, and over the years, Vita and I have spoken openly about her father's incarceration, and his 2011 release, which was cause for a great celebration for her entire family. Today, Vita is married with four children and lives in Arizona, but frequently returns to Mexico to see her parents, who are now reunited, since her mother moved back to Mexico to be with her father. Vita is still a big part of my life, and a few summers ago I spent a few of my vacation days with her and her husband and three sons in their Arizona home. Most recently, she has finally added a baby girl to her family.

While Vita's deep desire to come clean about her father's incarceration had a huge impact on me and the pursuit of this research, I already had my own personal experiences surrounding family members who were in prison; my experiences go back to my mother's youth and my Uncle Julian.

Uncle Julian

“Let’s go. We should get on the road now. I’m not stopping anywhere, either, so use the bathroom,” my father would tell my brother and me as we set out for the hour and a half trip to visit Uncle Julian.

Memories of words like these are probably locked in most adults’ lives as they recall the specific instructions and rituals of their parents just prior to a family road trip. I had no reason to think it odd that we made a trip from our Houston home to the Texas State Penitentiary at Huntsville once or twice a month. We were going to visit my uncle. I know the interior of that prison visiting area has probably changed a few times since I was there, but the bright orange seats and black bars between Uncle Julian and us were the only uncomfortable or odd elements of the surrounding that I look back on and can remember. Everything else seemed normal to me – my mom and dad, before, during, and after the visit, the process of entering and exiting the prison, the conversations we all had with Uncle Julian, the other people in the prison being visited and those doing the visiting, and the soda and candy vending machines that lined up across from the long row of orange seats screwed into the wall.

It was only later in life that some sense of a transformed narrative entered into my reflective thinking about those road trips, orange chairs, black bars, and how I had an uncle in prison. Narrative inquiry expert Michael Connelly (2000) identifies this story reshaping as a three-dimensional (3D) narrative inquiry space (p. 28; pp. 50-62; p. 125; and p. 183). When a doctoral student entered Connelly’s life, his research carried “them both back in time, her to her origins in precultural revolution times in China and Michael to growing up in a rural cattle-ranching community in western Canada where Long Him ran Long Him’s General Store in the nearest two-store town” (p. 51). As Connelly narrates the elements that took his thinking

backwards and forwards through the past and present, in how his “stereotypical sense of China, in which his childhood stories of Long Him were embedded” he explains how “limited his knowing of Long Him was, and how what little he did know was milled by the peculiar cultural qualities of his childhood landscape” (p. 53). One of the memories in which this 3D narrative was able to take place, for Connelly, was from something his mother often said to him as he neglected to finish the food on his plate: “Think of the starving children in China” (p. 53). Similarly, the words my father spoke rather casually before we left for all our road trips, as well as the memories of the chairs and vending machines within the prison, I can see that I also had a peculiar and limited childhood landscape; going to the prison to visit Uncle Julian was positively normal. Additionally, at that time of Vita’s confession, as I reflect back now, I realize that my own backwards and forwards thinking was reshaping my understanding of my own past and present (thinking about Uncle Julian). Today, I am still nested within that temporal 3D space as I contemplate my current landscape, and the implications of how all these experiences alter the temporality of this metanarrative.

My uncle killed my grandfather at the age of eighteen. He was upset that he was not allowed to go rabbit hunting because he had not finished his chore of milking the cows, and in his youthful state of selfish rage, he swung his rifle around and hit my grandfather in the head with it. My mother, who was only eleven years old, sat on the front porch, played with her dolls, and witnessed the tragic ordeal. Months later, she was forced to relive the experience in order to recount all the graphic details of her father’s ruptured skull for a large courtroom. She was asked lots of questions, and was watched closely, by a number of strangers. And as she has mentioned to me, it was a very bloody and gruesome experience to have to retell. However, throughout my young years visiting Uncle Julian, I did not know his crime, nor thought to ask. In fact, it was

well into my later teenage years that my mother finally chose to tell me the story, although it is not my uncle's full story. He was released in his late forties, but unfortunately got into a fight at a bar, which put him back in, where he is now, and will remain for life. Oftentimes, when a young man enters, and it is all he knows, prison life becomes the only normalcy he grasps; this has been the case for my uncle, and so many others.

As a teacher in the Los Angeles County, countless students shared stories of their own fathers, mothers, brothers, and/or uncles in prisons, and to them, as it was to me when I was directed to "hurry up, use the restroom, and get in the car so we can go see your uncle," no strangeness prevailed.

My mother forgave my uncle, and throughout my young years, we made countless trips to the prison to visit him, and they seemed like happy experiences for all of us. Once I learned of students with incarcerated family members, and Vita's father, according to Connelly (2000), I entered the 3D narrative inquiry space which created "an ongoing sense of dislocation as [I] [moved] from a remembered past in one place to a present moment in another, all the while imaginatively constructing an identity for the future" (p. 55). The identity I was constructing was one of value to the fields of education and composition, as I saw a future of being able to add to the composition discourse. I also seemed to imaginatively construct a relative identity to my mother's forgiving nature. The experience, no doubt, also had an impact on my students' family circumstances, and my eventual interest in researching prisoners.

Unfortunately, for my students, they may not have been able to get to the same 3D reflective place, as I. I was fortunate to have parents who finally told me the truth about my uncle and how incarceration is not normal. I was able to go to college and become further educated about such matters. Many family members of prisoners lack this opportunity. In fact, a strong

reason why my students may have been unable to get to that place of recognizing the abnormality of so many incarcerated relatives is because they began a similar cycle of standing before principals, police officers, judges and other authorities who were pressed to quickly deal with them with the punitive steps that are established and received as common in their lives. Like prison writer, Stanley “Tookie” Williams (2004), it may have been after finding themselves behind the high fence that mine and other teachers’ students finally came to experience the “kindling fire within” – that desire to shift from being an uneducated youth of great rage and unkind circumstances, to an empathetic person in the world with a yearning to reflect and enter the 3D landscape to learn and persist in reflecting on all those experiences on the continuum of temporality – to never repeat the same mistakes (chapter 34 of *Black Redemption*).

I did learn, unfortunately, that some of my Byrd students ended up in detention centers and prisons. Each time I heard a student talk about a family member, friend, or fellow student getting locked up, I had the childhood images of the Huntsville prison in my mind – developing new strands of thought about my Uncle Julian, my mother, my father, and those few memories I had. Therefore, imprisonment has been an active topic in my own life, personally and professionally, for as long as I can remember. And as I read, research, and write for this document, I remain on that 3D continuum, and my landscape continues to be a place of continuity and improvisation (Batesman, 2009).

A pivotal moment of major importance to this study’s development, though, was the public outcry, which affected me greatly, to save Tookie Williams’ life after he had clearly kindled his fire.

Tookie

During those same years, while living in Los Angeles, I clearly remember all the media coverage surrounding the great plea to save Williams from execution. There was great debate over the death penalty at that time in California, and Williams was only to be the second person to be executed in the state that year. It seemed somehow wrong to me that a man who had educated himself, written and published numerous books, was nominated seven times for Nobel Prizes (for his series of children's books and international peace efforts with gangs), and who seemed to have rehabilitated himself, all while living in a dangerous, dark, and under-educated setting (San Quentin State Prison), could be put to death. Nevertheless, Williams was executed despite the varied voices praising his merits and requesting clemency and a four-week stay of execution from the governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger. The governor rejected both – the clemency request and the four-week stay of execution.

Williams' series of children's books (*Gangs and Drugs*, *Gangs and Self-Esteem*, *Gangs and the Abuse of Power* – to only name a few) can be credited with great change in the culture of gang life in California, not to mention other states and countries, and as his books increased in popularity, during his years on death row, they were eventually distributed and utilized internationally in other communities where gangs were common.

Williams had completely denounced his involvement with gangs even though he was previously responsible for starting and leading the well-known Crips gang. He had finally chosen a life of peace, and decided to promote a message for a better way of survival for young juveniles in ghettos and for confused or isolated teens. His messages touched many; he spoke to children and young men and women (via his books and audios and video recordings) and vowed to do all that he could to improve circumstances for impoverished African Americans who had

been influenced by his reckless ways while he was living on the streets – before his incarceration.

Because of his destructive experiences of being the founder of the Crips gang, which grew to become one of the largest, most feared gangs in Los Angeles, Williams felt he had an obligation to serve all those potentially at risk of falling between the cracks and choosing gang life as their answer for survival. It was from his life experiences and through reading and learning that he came to better understand his own story – as narrated in his book *Redemption*. Williams said he came to realize that his leadership and organization of the Crips gang was fueled by the hate and ignorance he possessed in his earlier years, and since he knew that he could still influence many with his critical reproach of gang life, that is exactly what he chose to do for the remainder of his life.

And during that same period of time (2005, when Williams was executed), or thereabout, when I was not sitting in one of my credentialing or graduate courses, reading for school, grading papers, attending my students' football games, and/or working on the ever-demanding high school newspaper that my brilliant journalism students put out once a week, I stumbled upon another prison narrative that would greatly affect me: *Soul on Ice* by Eldridge Cleaver (1968).

The Book, *Soul on Ice*

I ruminated on Cleaver's autobiography - that explicit text; I remember it drew out reflections of the deep cogitations I had in the eighth grade, the year I read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and studied the Holocaust (more 3D experiences). I remember being challenged greatly by *Soul on Ice*. Cleaver made reference to authors and historical moments I had clearly missed in my education. Also, he was a prisoner who wrote with a sense of "moral affinity," utilizing "a highly literary and imaginative mind surveying the salient aspects of our common life,"

describing the “historical period and this American culture in terms of the most astringent accuracy, the most ruthless irony, and the most insistent truthfulness” (Maxwell Geismar, *Introduction* to book, p. x). Cleaver’s words and written expression of the mechanics of oppression shot a critique of America I was unready to digest. Were we guilty? Why yes, we were – clearly. Our history proved it. But were we still guilty? Was I, an educator of minority students, guilty? Was I abiding in thoughts, words, and actions that only nourished the oppression problem? And like Cleaver, during his day, I chose to take hold of the racial question in mine.

I read *Soul on Ice* slowly, connecting with Cleaver in a different way than I had with Anne Frank, of course, but I remember that both authors, at that period in my life, changed how I was thinking through these two communities I was nested in – as teacher (at the Title I schools), and student (at the university). Cleaver and Frank moved me to a deep reminder of the cruel oppressiveness that existed in humanity, and I remember my approbation for each was permanently embedded into my writing life. From then on, they aided me in all my academic essays. Their voices were there – in mine – in each piece I composed for my credentialing and composition classes. I was moving backwards and forwards on that continuum, and the future was being shaped by the 3D landscape I had entered.

I cannot recall how I came across Cleaver’s book (library book sell-out, or yard sale, perhaps), but it intensified my interest in prison writers, especially after Williams’ execution. I do, however, recount this book sparking a fresh curiosity in how the topic of prison writing as a source of growth and educational development, could serve me pedagogically. Because of *Soul on Ice*, I became more engaged in learning about the successes of men and women writers who had somehow made their way out of the depths of rage, ignorance, and illiteracy, to write and

publish personal narratives, essays, poems, novels, chap books, memoirs of mental, spiritual, and emotional development, and most importantly, those who were writing to become writers while continuing to reside in prison.

This specific genre of literature (prison writing) gained my attention, because, as I said, I must have thought that I could make some pedagogical connection between these writers, how they had learned to write so well on their own, and how my students who struggled with English, but also faced statistics of high drop-out rates and potential criminal records in their own futures, could learn from them. There was knowledge to be gained in studying these writers, and in doing so, my studies could potentially assist me in teaching the students I cared so much about.

Cleaver's autobiography, *Soul on Ice*, which was the first book I read in this genre of prison narratives, is the one, now looking back, that had the greatest impact on leading me to this study. My uncle Julian, Vita's father, my students' family lives and circumstances, and Williams' execution were steps leading to this inquiry, but as already stated, I read Cleaver's book carefully, and unhurriedly; it was the first I read of its kind. I came to admire Cleaver and his writing abilities. I had experienced empathy for Tookie (Williams), and I was starting to feel an even greater sense of respect and sympathy for all incarcerated men and women, but especially for those who were striving to understand themselves and their circumstances, embrace their stories, write their narratives, beat the odds, and leave a lasting mark on whatever communities were willing to recognize the legacy they left behind.

Cleaver and Williams had excellent prose, and they both had me convinced that a renewal of mind and soul had taken place within them, and that they were in a position to deserve an audience – if not a classroom.

It was somewhere during this season of interest in prisoners, prison writers, prison writing, and teaching writing that I applied to Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) for the doctoral program, Composition and TESOL (Teaching English to Students of Other Languages). I became even more determined to learn how to teach better, but also, to write better. By that time, I came to realize my own struggles as a writer, and I supposed that if Cleaver and Williams could do it well, surely I could, too. But even prior to applying to the esteemed doctoral program at IUP, during my graduate studies (Master of Arts in English, Option: Composition, Rhetoric and Language), I had already come across other compositionists who felt the way I did about writing, which was changing dramatically from what I had learned in my masters classes.

Peter Elbow

Although I had earned a bachelor's degree in English, written for my college university newspaper, taught the subject (English) for nine years in a variety of classes, grade levels, and subjects (also involved in teaching for the Writing Across the Curriculum program at Pasadena City College in California), earned a graduate degree (in the very subject – composition), and was in the process of starting the Comp & TESOL doctoral program at IUP, I still had strong reservations about my own writing abilities, feeling writing was often a debilitating struggle.

“I liked teaching; and that even though the inability to write prevented me from being a student, it was no hindrance to teaching” is what one of composition's prominent voices (Elbow, 1973) said in his book, *Writing Without Teachers*, after having quit the Ph.D. program at Harvard, because he “barely managed to write [his] first-semester papers, and they were judged unsatisfactory” (p. xiii). He eventually said that when he decided to go back to graduate school, he “was deeply scared that [he] would freeze up again when assigned writing by teachers” (p. xv). And when I read Elbow's book, about 13 or 14 years ago, I gained some of my first writing

strategies, which I have taught and used for many writing assignments – the ones I gave, as well as the ones that were given to me.

Writing Without Teachers is also a reflective narrative conforming to the elements of this dissertation and the majority of all stories, as they contain: a.) *a history and/or background* that shows how Elbow came to the place of wanting to learn to write well, with the use of stories throughout this development; b.) *a sustaining force that explains how and why he continued in that particular endeavor* of becoming a good writer, again, with the use of several stories; and c.) *a conclusive legacy or lessons left* for the reader. Elbow begins the story of his childhood years in New Jersey being “a teacher’s pet in grade school, hungry for praise and support,” and developing into a student who was “wounded and tired of school—especially because an English girl [he] loved wouldn’t marry [him]” (p. xiii). Later in the book, as he is describing the writing strategies he began teaching himself, in order to persevere amidst his writing woes, he writes:

I did two things. First, I set myself personal deadlines: if I had to have a twenty page paper by Monday the 15th, I insisted that I produce twenty pages to have in hand by Monday the 7th. This was when I finally learned to force myself to keep on writing, even if the writing was terrible. That was the only way I could get twenty pages. Second, I started writing notes to myself when I noticed something going on as I struggled to write. In particular I tried to figure out what had happened when I got stuck in my writing – and when I got unstuck. (p. xv)

In those early years of my teaching, first at the middle school, then at the high school, I remember suggesting to my students, “Just write!” I modeled freewriting for them, assigned it, talked about it, and continued to practice it with the papers I had to write for my credentialing and graduate classes in composition. And if there was any suggestion my students seemed to find

most helpful to them, and any I can say that have been quite useful to me and my writing life, it is Elbow's freewriting exercises. It is a remarkable experience for a student to fully fill a page with words when the student begins with a blank one. It motivates, encourages, and supports the author with bits of written rewards, as the student pushes ideas out and puts them on paper. Yes, they will certainly need movement, revision, and perhaps deletion later, but having a full page, versus an empty page, ignites and somehow sustains the writing process.

Many other compositionists affected my teaching and writing progress during those years of concurrently being a teacher and a student, and I will share some of their narratives, too, as they give added texture to the metanarrative of how my research on prison writers and prison writing got its start and then continued to be sustained.

My Students' Troubled Home Lives

As I said, my students were familiar with incarceration. Fathers, mothers, brothers, uncles, and/or aunts were behind bars; and yes, in some cases, both father *and* mother were in prison. This being the case, not all my students were nervous about divulging such information to me, so Vita's story was not an unusual one; in fact, it was rather tame in comparison to why some of my other students' relatives were in jail and/or prison.

While Vita's story does seem to have a more positive outcome, unfortunately, during those years teaching middle school and high school in Los Angeles, and since then, I have learned about others' whose stories were less fortunate. Two of my male students were killed before the ninth grade, and a few others died after dropping out. I have also been told of some that are residing behind the razor wire now too.

During my years teaching in Los Angeles, I regularly took concerns about physically abused students to an administrator. We had a number of close calls with knives being removed

from students, and fights were frequent. Students were arrested for shoplifting and the use of illegal drugs and substances. Some students vanished altogether, while others are still very much a part of my life, even though they have struggled with teen pregnancies, alcohol and drugs, physical abuse, and their own troubles with the law.

Because I grew up in an upper middle-class neighborhood (in Houston, Texas), had both my biological parents (who are still married) raise me, and because I was privileged to go to good schools and live in a nice neighborhood, the environment I was working in was causing me to start recognizing certain truths about culture and education. Initially, I naively overlooked the relevance of family and home circumstances to student outcome. However, I quickly realized that my students were not reading or writing at their grade level, many of them were seriously lacking in English skills, and most importantly, their home lives were the greatest factor to their educational failures and/or successes (which were few). Many of my students had Mexican parents who had brought them illegally into the country, and for the very first time in my life, I was exposed to something completely new – children who did not know English very well, and who had very troubled home lives.

In Jeff Evans' (2001) book, *Undoing Time: American Prisoners in Their Own Words*, Craig Haney writes in the Afterword:

that social history is in many ways destiny, that people who commit crimes are often victims long before they become victimizers, that extreme deprivation and trauma experienced early in life leave psychic scars that can shape and influence adult behavior, that the places where people are sent to be helped for the problems they develop often do more to make things worse than better, and that structural barriers such as poverty and

racism, along with untreated addictions, poor education, and little or no vocational training, sometimes make criminality almost inevitable. (p. 250)

Unavoidably, I came to see many of my students as a part of this group of victims, and as some of them joined gangs, became involved in criminal behavior, were arrested, locked up, shot, and even killed, my interest in my students' lives evolved from professional concern, to a full-blown passion. How I wanted them to succeed. With the publicity surrounding Tookie (governor Arnold Schwarzenegger could have granted clemency), my empathy for Tookie's unfortunate execution (considering his redemptive publications and recorded speeches that have ended much gang activity in our country), the various texts I had read (*Soul on Ice*, some of Williams' books, and others I found online), and the gloomy futures I feared for my students, it seemed as though a great amalgamation had occurred; my educational/career experiences (earning a teaching credential, receiving a Masters in composition, and instructing poor students who had difficulties using English) and my personal, and natural interests (students, prisoners, writing, and being an effective English teacher and role model) were defining my future research calling.

Land, Flower & Hayes, and Williamson

By the time I first began discussing the possibility of pursuing a doctorate, I already knew that prison writers, prison writing, and their composing processes were the topics I wanted to research. Robert Land, Director of the Los Angeles Writing Project (LAWP), and Associate Professor at California State University in Los Angeles, was one of the instrumental voices of encouragement in my desire to earn a Ph.D. from IUP. He, being an alumnus from the University of Pittsburgh, knew me from having completed the LAWP Summer Institute in 2005, the year-long Reading Institute for Academic Preparation (RIAP) from 2003-2004, also under his direction, and from portfolio grading meetings I attended while teaching in the Los Angeles

Unified School District (LAUSD) at Poly high school (also during 2003-2004). So, he and I were well-acquainted.

I remember the day we sat in his office talking about my aspirations to get a Ph.D., and as part of my completion of the National Writing Project (NWP) Summer Institute (LAWP's project is NWP's affiliate), Land invited me to attend the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Conference in Pittsburgh that year, at the expense of LAWP. He said he could probably introduce me to some people that I might like to talk to while we were there.

While in Pittsburgh, Land introduced me to Linda Flower, John R. Hayes, and Michael M. Williamson at a dinner meeting where many of his friends were getting together during the NCTE and NWP Conferences to socialize and catch up with one another. Flower and Hayes's research was well-known to me at that time, as I was finishing my masters in composition. I had taken a great interest in composing process research because, at that time, the composing process was the meta-cognitive link in which I based my teacher efficacy and outcome of productively helping my students learn to write and write to learn, so as to beat the odds. In a 1997 survey of College Composition and Communication (CCC), Harris, in *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966* claims:

since its first issue in 1950, Phillips, Greenberg, and Gibson count more than twice as many citations of Flower than of anyone else in the field in the years 1980-1993. (This is with the exception of John Hayes, her co-author!) This remarkable record of citations testifies to how Flower not only influenced a whole set of process studies but also became a key figure for rival social theorists to respond to. Flower's first scholarly work in composition used case studies of novice writers to theorize 'Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing Processes' (1979), and 'Revising Writer-Based

Prose' (1981). She then teamed up with John Hayes to elaborate 'A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing' (1981) and 'Identifying the Organization of Writing Processes' (1980), which together articulated perhaps the most detailed model of the composing process the field has ever seen. (p. 129)

On the other hand, Michael M. Williamson was unknown to me, but Land had informed me that if I was considering a Ph.D. in composition, Williamson would be someone who would enjoy talking to me about the doctoral program at IUP. And he did. After I shared some of my stories (on how I had come to want to research prison writers' composing processes), he acknowledged that my research interest was just the kind of topic the Composition and TESOL program liked to see. I also remember him saying that should I seriously consider applying, and if I came with a strong recommendation from Land, he would do all he could to see that I got accepted into the program.

Therefore, that night in Pittsburgh when I briefly met and spoke with Flower and Hayes, to which I am sure my admiration and intimidation was visible, and also had the lengthier conversation with Williamson, I believed the circumstances were not chance meetings (thank you Dr. Land), but also, that my research path, and school/program choice were confirmed.

An Independent Study

In the summer of 2009, three years after beginning the doctoral program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and one year after taking a narrative theory course, taught by Gian S. Pagnucci, I was able to do an independent study with Pagnucci. He has authored *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making* (2004), co-edited two other books on narrative and technology, wrote *Don't Count Your Chickens! Stories for Kids to Tell!* (2000), and also published other articles, stories, and presentations on the topic of narrative. In the

independent study, having the research interests I had, even though I was no longer teaching high school or the same kids from Byrd (I was teaching college), I chose to research prison writers' processes. At the close of the class, I had read more about process, more about prison writers, and lots of prison writing, but I found no research studies investigating the composing processes of prisoners.

Compositionists have conducted many studies of writers' composing processes. They have researched students at all grade levels (Murry, 1972; Graves, 1975; Ong, 1975; Emig, 1977; Shaughnessy, 1977; Perl, 1979,1980; Sommers, 1980; Rose, 1980) , professional "free" writers (Berkenkotter, 1983), the elderly (Sommers, 1980), and other groups (Flynn, 1988; Irmscher, 1987), but they have not studied prison writers' composing processes. There have been professors (Shelton, 2007), volunteers (Tannenbaum, 2000), novelists (Lamb 2003, 2007), ex-cons (Baca, 2001; Lamberton, 2005; Loya, 2004, Yurcic, 2010), and others (Gaucher, 2002) who have either gone behind bars to teach writing, have written their own books to detail their experiences guiding workshops or writing classes in prison, and/or have written/edited narratives, anthologies, or journals to explore the topic of writing in prison. Yet, a study of how these writers came to be highly successful, flourishing, published writers, appeared to have never been done. It was evident that there was no such research in the field and to me that was an even better reason to do such a study for my dissertation.

Then, I set out to begin this work. Through further research of prison writing literature, I did find that many of these men and women writers found their voices and started writing because someone took the time to encourage their learning-to-write process. I started to recognize some emerging themes in the writings of the flourishing prison writers; the majority had close mentors who guided them through the process of learning to read and then write. These

mentors often wrote alongside them, step-by-step. Also, during the 60's and 70's, when prison writing seemed to boom because of programs, classes, and other types of educational workshops being provided, I recognized that most of these published writers I was reading were taught to write in safe community learning environments, like writing workshops. Therefore, as I intentionally sought to find insights into how these successful prison writers wrote, there was usually a writing instructor, close mentor, or a relative who encouraged their writing abilities with consistent correspondence and feedback – some incarcerated (already established as successful prison writers) and some not (as men and women volunteering in prisons to teach writing, or others on the outside).

Some of these mentors also had publications, and some even wrote narratives about their teaching/mentoring experiences. So in conducting what I thought was a naturalistic study, where I was allowing the emerging ideas to direct the research, I believed I was in a good place, setting up the first three chapters, explaining why the study was relevant and beneficial, and that through a naturalistic approach, I had a valid and worthy topic.

Redirection

“Nobody is talking about process anymore; we are in a post-process period.”

Really? I thought... That is what matters? A “period” we are in?

This has been my topic for years. We've been in post-process for decades. So what?

It's still a very valid and worthy topic to our field, especially with these writers.

I am invested in this, and heavily committed to completing the research on this topic.

Ugh...

We are therefore not only concerned with life as it is experienced in the here and now but also with life as it is experienced on a continuum. (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 7)

Process and Product. People in composition have taken to using rubber gloves for the word “process” (“Oh, we’re *way* beyond the ‘process approach’!”), but an emphasis on process is ineluctably in the blood stream of composition. (Similarly, no one in literature would be caught dead identifying as a New Critic, but the profession has permanently digested that essential methodological contribution of close reading for the sake of focusing on the usually complicated relationship between what’s stated and what’s implied. New Criticism and the focus on writing process were surely the founding—and I dare say defining—events of the two professions as they presently exist.). (Elbow, 2002)

I was clearly not moving along with the times of academic composition; I was on my own path, with my own temporal landscape. I had a heart for my topic that went backwards fifteen years, with the hopes that it could move our understanding of writing forward, and stop denying the prison writer entrance into a field where s/he clearly belonged.

“It is quite normal for this to happen,” she told me over the phone, as I continued to feel heaviness in my throat and chest. “In fact,” she continued, as her voice lowered in tone and the words were more slowly stated, “. . .it’s usually part of the *process*.”

How tremendously ironic that she used *that* word; she did not even know that I was researching that topic. Well, I no longer was.

This study became what it is (a 3D metanarrative that answers how some highly successful, published prisoners and prison writing got started, how the writers and prison writing are sustained, and the legacies each leaves), because it makes more sense. I had failed my three chapter review in November of 2014, and was told that process was no longer a worthy research topic. I *had* to do something else. Then, as I began to recognize where I was temporally nested, and when I assumed the necessary posture of humility, I saw this study as what it really needed to do within composition – introduce the prison writer and his/her story. I would write a narrative about their narratives, a narrative about this study, and use their voices to co-tell each. The best part was in having a committee chairperson, Pagnucci, be an expert in narrative inquiry.

Therefore, after a failed review, some heartbreak, modifications and changes, a new research focus, an attitude of positivity and hopefulness, a genuinely supportive committee chairperson/mentor, and some wonderful writers I have recently come to know, this research has been shifted. Change is good; it is a part of the *process*.

Interestingly, however, in a letter from Cob⁸ (one of the co-authors in this narrative inquiry), shortly after I had informed him of the change in our research focus (not giving him an explanation, except to say that I had been redirected), he wrote about a concern he had, as we moved forward in co-authoring this metanarrative:

Before we proceed, I must tell you that I'm uneasy with your term "narrative." I don't think that you are using it in the way that someone might refer to *The Rime of the Mariner*. I have become vaguely aware that some type of pernicious fungus has infiltrated academia: Post-modernism, Post-this, and Post-that, flipping upside down the usual descriptions of our world. (Cob, 2015)

⁸ This is the pseudonym for the last of the four participants in this study; Cob, like the other three participants, is formally introduced in the next section.

He ended his rant, which I thought was delightfully funny, considering the circumstance I faced in November 2014, and he simply stated, what I do sense each of the writers/participants in this study believe: “All I can hope for my writing is what Hemmingway said about his forthcoming book, *In Our Time*: ‘It will be praised by highbrows and read by lowbrows.’ (Which it was.)”

As for me, I am hoping this study, no matter the topic (process or narrative), intrigues at least a few researchers enough to stop and to consider other writers (those in prison) who are read, even if they are not praised. But more on the legacy of this research will be found later in this chapter.

The Writers⁹

In no way will I be able to produce a full listing of prison writers, their writings, and the genres in which each of them write, but I can attempt to manufacture a brief sampling of one – a preview of the ones that have become nested in this study – the ones that have sustained my research. Unfortunately, there are many successful writers’ names, works, teachers, mentors, and writing careers I will not be including in this metanarrative, who have also contributed greatly to sustaining prison writers and prison literature. I am only highlighting some of the authors and instructors (next section) that have impacted and sustained my research of prison writing – as I have come to see prison writing from the outside. Also, my co-authors have made reference and/or have mentioned (in letters to me, and/or in their phase II narratives), other valuable writers and stories – as they have come to see prison writing from the inside; their names and works may not be mentioned in this section, but will be briefly discussed in other parts of this dissertation – either by myself, or by them. Also, additional prison writers are found in the next

⁹ Pseudonyms are used for all the published writers serving as participants in this study, even if they only participated in one phase. Their consent to the use of pseudonyms, instead of birth names or nicknames was attained for the IRB approval of this research study, and is used accordingly throughout, despite the participants expressing a desire for their full names to be used, so that their identities are not hidden.

section because they have elevated themselves to instructors. So, this particular section is by no means attempting to give a history or account of all successful, flourishing, and/or published writers that have sustained this study; these are only a small few, plus the four participants who are serving as co-authors. I could not commit to such an exhaustive account of writers or history of prison writing; there is far too much there. This dissertation merely *introduces* the prison writer (focusing only on a few key authors in prison writing history), to composition, and simply begins the unfolding of the untold story of prison writing – just as my title implies. I am only presenting those writers and histories that have sustained this particular research study.

I cannot remember the name of the female literature professor who once said, “We carry stories until they no longer carry importance,” but clearly her words have remained with me because they *still* hold meaning in my life. Therefore, this section serves to draw attention to only a few of the highly esteemed prison writers my co-authors and I have carried with us – me, beginning with my independent study with Pagnucci, so many years ago, and resources I have collected, as well as my co-authors, and with whatever resources and/or memories they carry with them. These stories are relatively brief, but they do develop the metanarrative of how these writers have sustained this study, especially as my co-authors introduce themselves later in this chapter. Chapter 4 gives a better view of the four authors that have participated in this metanarrative, and chapter 5 presents a brief longer-term historical narrative of prison writing as my co-authors and I see it. The sub-sections are as listed: *Ledbetter, James, and Burns; Malcolm X; Cleaver; Williams (Tookie); Hassine; Mil; Cob; Marty; and Jon.*

Ledbetter, James, and Burns

According to Mil, in his 2015 essay, “The History of Prison Writing in America and My Role in it,” (one of his phase II narrative submissions for this research):

I began this essay based upon what information I carry around in my head. It goes like this. The earliest start to notable prison writing in modern America goes back to 1925 when Huddie Ledbetter, a Texas prisoner and blues singer was pardoned by the Texas governor in 1925. He had the stage name of Leadbelly, and the blues songs he wrote and sang got him out of prison. (p. 5)

Indeed, Ledbetter was released in 1925 for writing a song requesting release, and also appealing to the religious beliefs of Governor Pat Morris Neff, despite Neff running for governor on a pledge to issue no pardons during his term. Also, however, Ledbetter returned to prison and was again released in 1934 when father and son folklorists (Lomaxes), who played significant roles for the duration of Ledbetter's life, recorded hundreds of songs written and sung by Ledbetter. The Lomaxes then played the various songs for the current governor at that time, as a petition for Ledbetter's second pardon. Within a few weeks of hearing the songs, Ledbetter was free again even though he found himself in prison a third time (Wolfe and Lornell, 1999, p. 28). It is clear to reason that Ledbetter was quite the singer and persuasive writer, but also, that in the period in which he lived governors were more easily persuaded by prisoners than they are today.

Mil continues his narrative of early prison writing history, as he recalls it with, "It is my understanding that Frank James, brother of Jesse James, wrote for the prison newspaper during his imprisonment long before Leadbelly's story, but I wonder if his story should be included" (p. 5). Mil also wondered if prison journalists were worthy of inclusion in the narrative, as they are different than creative writers, but he mentioned James nonetheless. However, in considering that no information on James could be found through my research, I suppose James' story will not be included herein, except to say that his name, brother, and writing genre were *carried around* in Mil's head.

Mil also references Robert E. Burns' (1932) book, *I Am a Fugitive From a Georgia Chain Gang*, which, in Mil's prison writing history knowledge is "often thought of as the first modern prison expose written by a prisoner" (p. 5). The book narrates Burns' 1922 conviction in Georgia after he and two other men robbed a grocery store where the total value of the stolen items was less than \$6.00. For that crime, Burns was given 6-10 years of hard labor, which prompted him to escape the chain gang and flee to Chicago. There, he worked as the editor and publisher of *Greater Chicago Magazine* until his wife betrayed him to local police when he sought a divorce – some seven years later. He returned to the Georgia prison in 1929, even though his Chicago status in the community provided him with powerful individuals willing to help him fight his extradition. Still, he agreed to return when prison officials promised he would only need to serve 90 days of "easy" time. Upon realizing the deception and having served 12 months of hard labor and torture, Burns again escaped the prison. This time he made it to New Jersey, and while lying low, he wrote his autobiography, which was made into a movie. Finally, in 1945, the governor of Georgia permanently pardoned Burns, and today his book and movie are known to be the reason chain gangs no longer exist.

Malcolm X

Born Malcom Little, in 1925, he soon found himself an orphan as his father was killed when he was only six, and his mother was put in a mental institution when he was thirteen (Malcolm X, Haley, and Shabazz, 1987). At 21, he was arrested, put in prison, and did six years for having stolen a watch. While there, Little learned of the Nation of Islam, and began a correspondence with the leader, Elijah Muhammad. Upon his release, he met up with Muhammad in Chicago, and continued to grow within the Nation of Islam. Also, as he grew in

his reputation as a leader and public figure, he wrote and delivered many speeches which have given him credit for being one of the most influential African American men in our country.

Later in life (1963), Malcolm X began writing *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), which had to be completed by Alex Haley, since Little was assassinated. In his narrative, regarding his initial motivation for learning to write, he claims:

It was because of my letters that I happened to stumble upon starting to acquire some kind of a homemade education. I became increasingly frustrated at not being able to express what I wanted to convey in letters that I wrote, especially those to Mr. Elijah Muhammad. In the street, I had been the most articulate hustler out there. I had commanded attention when I said something. But now, trying to write simple English, I not only wasn't articulate, I wasn't even functional.

But later, he states: "It [the desire to write] had really begun back in the Charlestown Prison, when Bimbi (nickname for John Bembry) first made me feel envy of his stock of knowledge. Bimbi had always taken charge of any conversations he was in, and I had tried to emulate him" (p. 178). Little had described John Bembry as "the first man I had ever seen command total respect... with words" (p.178). Through Bembry's mentoring and influence while Little was imprisoned, Little did educate himself, and eventually came to be known as a black man who empowered many black men.

Because Little, and so many other writers express a frustration with an inability to articulate thoughts and feelings, his writing life sustains this study and all of prison literature. No narrative account of prison writing could leave him out. Personally, he sustains my interests in this research because he is a reminder of the students I had in Los Angeles. His illiteracy is also a

reminder of my grandmother. Furthermore, because of the illiteracy in prison, Little's story sustains this research because it is a common narrative of prison writers in this metanarrative.

Cleaver

I already recounted a bit of Cleaver's story and how his writing played a role in getting me nested in this textured study. Cleaver's writings and writing life has sustained my involvement in conducting this research because I know that he was always seeking to find the ultimate spiritual truth in life. This, too, has been a lifelong journey for me. Therefore, Cleaver's personal narrative is a part of mine by way of relational passions, which have led us both to find reading, writing, and studying as resources for meaning making.

Having been influenced by Malcolm X (Little), and other African American writers, like James Baldwin, Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (published in 1968, but written entirely in prison), begins with the observation that it was in the same year that segregation was outlawed by the U.S. Supreme Court, that he was sentenced to prison (1958). From there, it is through his narratives that he addresses a number of political, religious, relational, philosophical, social/cultural, and literary issues. He provides references, gives sophisticated critiques, establishes social and political theories, and backs up and supports his arguments/claims with: other writers' words/narratives; laws; and social ideals he studied. In 1968, shortly after Cleaver's release from prison, he was a presidential candidate on the ticket of the Peace and Freedom Party, but because he was born in August of 1935, he would not have been the minimum age of 35 at the time of inauguration. In that same year, Cleaver fled to Algeria after a fellow Black Panther member was killed in an ambush on Oakland police officers. Cleaver remained in Algeria until 1975, and in 1978, Cleaver wrote *Soul on Fire*, which made references to those years in exile in Algeria.

Cleaver learned how to write well, somewhere. Since he makes no mention of his own development as a writer in *Soul on Ice* or *Soul on Fire*, but does make continual references to texts he has read, we may only be able to assume that his excellent prose is the result of careful reading. However, in 2006, eight years after his death, *Target Zero: A Life in Writing* was published. Cleaver's ex-wife, Kathleen Cleaver, gathered many of Cleaver's unpublished writings, which he wrote during the years leading up to his death, and collaborated with some publishers and Cleaver's agent to oversee the publication. Like Little, it was only in Cleaver's later writing that he disclosed minor relevancies into how he became literate. In *Target Zero: A Life in Writing* (2006), Cleaver finally reflected on his self-education:

I began to study at every opportunity. There was not much else to do in prison, so I had time on top of time to devote to my studies. It was a way of escaping. I had enough sense, however, to realize that prison is really a losing game. I was determined to turn a losing situation into a winning one by improving my mind. I was determined not to go out the same as when I came in. I figured that by gaining information and knowledge, I would get on top of the situation. (p. 11)

But, like Little, shortly later in his prose he admits, "during my studying and talking to others who were studying the same things, I got to know a man named John Hall. He was considered the smartest man in prison, and we all looked up to him" (p. 12). Cleaver then explains how this mentorship led to Hall giving Cleaver a copy of *The Communist Manifesto*. The book was one of the first books Cleaver read, and as he claims, it justified his feelings of rebellion and hatred, but also contained words and thoughts that were completely new to him.

In 1983, after years of religious pursuits, Cleaver was baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where he attended services and lectured at gatherings all the way up

to the time of his death in 1998, where he died of prostate cancer in a Pomona, California hospital.

Cleaver's writing life has also sustained this metanarrative because he, like other prison writers, admitted that he had to first arrive at that place of cognitively choosing to improve his mind, then setting out to do that. Williams' life may be my favorite story of this kind of mind change. Here is more of his story.

Williams (Tookie)

Introduced earlier, Stanley "Tookie" Williams spent the first half of his life as a notorious gang leader and criminal, and the second half as a writer, international peacemaker, and nine-time nominee for the Nobel Prize. *Blue Rage, Black Redemption* (2004), Tookie's last book before his execution, best presents his life by that rare dichotomy; he was 50 years old at the time he authored the narrative, and had spent 25 years in prison.

Williams has certainly sustained me in this study in that I have a strong emotional connection to his narrative. He was truly redeemed and reformed. I believe that wholeheartedly as I have read his narratives and children's books, and watched the movie that was made about his life. He should never have been put to death. He was humbled and glorified through the 25 years he spent in prison learning how to be a man of integrity. If more prison writers on death row, who are genuinely transformed like him, they should be heard now, especially by the academy and the people who can best support them in escaping execution, but also, so their writing could be used to sustain the studies and pursuits of others.

Like some other prison writers, Williams (2004) entered prison with a significantly poor education. However, it was fairly soon after his conviction that he learned about and "tried Malcolm X's alphabetical technique for remembering words," which he said he "found to be

tedious” (p. 246). Nevertheless, Williams persisted in his attempt to learn to read and write, and like my co-authors in this study, I consider Williams to have been a career writer; he had 25 years to exercise and master his writing abilities, and he was well published. Aside from that brief mention of his language development (copying Malcolm X’s dictionary technique), he does narrate stories about his writing influence/mentor, Treach, and his unlearning (reeducating himself) while locked up.

Blue Rage, Black Redemption, tells stories about Williams’ (2004) parents, his childhood, and all the troubles and rage that led him to prison. After a few years in (locked up), he tells of his transition:

No longer would my life, my being, be dictated by blind ignorance. Nor would I ever again allow the excuse of circumstances to dictate whom I should be. It was routine studying and questioning that prompted my soul searching. I began to develop a sense of critical reasoning from which sprang the first stirrings of conscience. This shocked me.

This was the moment redemption fused with my life. (p. 289)

Williams began his comparative study of world religions, claiming to never turn away spiritual knowledge, and stating, “I construct my faith around facts that can best help me to redeem myself” (p. 281). In *Moto NDani (The Fire Within)*, the thirty-fourth chapter, Williams writes more specifically about what it is that sustains his pursuance of that hoped for redemption – *moto ndani* (the fire within him that seemed to draw him to write books for children, youth, and adults who were living with his same hope for peace). And finally, of course, through the stories of his various merits behind bars (publications, nominations for Nobel Prizes, visits from famous individuals, honors, awards, recognition, and international publicity for his writing), and then forgiveness from his two sons, we see that Williams indeed believed that he was redeemed, and

that his writing articulated that reality. And if Mr. Williams were alive today, and able to participate in this narrative research study, it is my belief that he would claim all his writing to be his legacy; it did earn him his notoriety in this country, even if it is also part of the reason he is no longer here today, as many would argue. Later in this chapter, when presenting some of the histories and legacies emerging from the literature of the prison writing narrative, I will further explain how Williams' fame and popularity may have been part of the reason he was put to death, and why his final appeal, which would have ensured him life in prison, and not an execution, was denied; in simple terms, his writing had made him too famous.

Hassine

Victor Hassine, entering prison as a law school graduate, is most recognized for his litigation activities, which have resulted in significant changes in Pennsylvania's prisons; he was an outspoken advocate for prison reform, and his writing advocated many positive changes in the prison-industrial complex. However, he is also known for his writings in a number of genres, and has several publications. Additionally, he was a regular contributor to a seminar course where he corresponded with students for a number of years. Some of Hassine's published books are *Crying Wall* (2005) and *Life Without Parole: Living and Dying in Prison Today* (2007). Hassine died of unusual circumstances in 2008, while still in prison, and because of the work he was doing to reform prisons, and some of the prison circumstances he was exposing to the public, there are questions surrounding the cause of his death.

Mil

Before I begin with Mil, and the other three co-authors in this study (Jon, Marty, and Cob), I would like to make a few relevant points about the next few sections, and all other locations in this document where their writing is quoted. First, I have asked each of the four men

to introduce themselves with personal narratives (the final writing request for phase III of this project). For clear reasons of choosing not to alter or negate authority over a writer's writing, especially as he is writing to introduce himself as a co-author in this research text, I have made no changes to these short introductory manuscripts, and have included all four pieces from each of these writers, exactly as they have been mailed to me. These four narratives are in no particular order, and throughout this metanarrative, I have made an attempt to vary the order in which I refer to each of these writers. Additionally, I would like to point out that two of these writers have access to old word processors and/or typewriters (Mil and Cob), one has some access to a personal computer (Marty), and one has no writing tools other than pens and paper (Jon). Therefore, in keeping the integrity of their writing as close to its original form, and in consideration of their writing devices, there may be underlining¹⁰ and other types of writing styles used that are not aligned to the correct formatting guides. Finally, because of the requirement to keep these participants' names private, all their publications are referenced in their own bios in the appendices. This means that their cited publication material will not be found in the References section of this dissertation, but instead, in Appendix H (for Cob), Appendix I (for Marty), and Appendix J (for Jon). Mil has titled his bio, *Record of Achievement*, which can be found as Appendix G. Here is Mil's introductory narrative (typed on his Smith Corona PWP 2500 Personal Word Processor with only 30 kilobytes of memory):

I am a lifer-dinosaur still left in an American state prison in Somerset,

Pennsylvania after forty-five years. I am innocent, but that is subject of other writings. I

¹⁰ The APA 6th edition style-guide requires italics in place of underlined booked titles, but due to the co-authors having limited, or no access to personal computers or modern writing technology devices, and the desire to uphold the integrity of the co-authors' written word, underlining of various words and phrases, for emphasis or to denote citation of a book title, will be found throughout this document in various places. Additionally, other APA formatting errors can be found in the quoted material of the four co-authors; they were not directed to adhere to any particular style-guide for their essays, narratives, and other research text submissions.

came to prison as a mechanical engineer, graduating from Carnegie Mellon University and working for U.S. Steel in Construction Engineering. Early in twenty-six years at the State Correctional Institution at Pittsburgh (formerly known as Western Penitentiary), I performed clinical duties in the hospital, was re-educated in English and Psychology, and won awards for my writing. I am listed in A Directory of American Poets and Fiction Writers, Contemporary Authors, and more, including in two annotated bibliographies compiled by H. Bruce Franklin for writers in prison. On the “Permissions-Questionnaire” for the American Prison Writing Archive, I shared that “I mostly write about 27 years at Western Penitentiary” and self-reported that my relationship to prison as both “incarcerated” and “teacher” because “I was hired to teach for the Community College of Allegheny County and for the University of Pittsburgh for 20 years, so you may not have a category for me.” [Yes, my essays are posted there.]

On September 1, 2015, I was given a final writing assignment to “write ... a few paragraphs to introduce yourself” by a PhD candidate at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Graduate Studies in Composition and TESOL, who had invested eight years in researching and studying the composing processes used by “successful/flourishing prison writers.” I had been first contacted by mail on November 15, 2014. I like my mail.

My phase I essay for the researcher was entitled “THE JOURNEY OF JOHN PEN” and was submitted with a signed Voluntary Consent Form on December 1, 2014. The first 8,700 word essay told true stories of my experiences in prison college programs, first earning a second college degree from the University of Pittsburgh and then as an instructor for twenty-years, how I co-founded the Academy of Prison Arts, the longest

duration (a decade) prisoner-initiated writing and community performance program in America, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, how I lead in creation of other programs in prison, including: (1) the first children's play area in a prison visiting room, a task only made possible with the help of Fred 'Mister' Rogers, (2) how I became the first and only prisoner who sat for, and passed, the difficult eight-hour Engineering-In-Training examination, (3) how I designed significant improvements to the prison at Pittsburgh, (4) how I was chosen in juried competition among Pennsylvania writers to become appointed to the Poets-In-The-Schools (PITS) program of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and was transported to other prisons to teach PITS poetry workshops, (5) how six of my books are available in Pennsylvania libraries, (6) how a former student, a Mr. Carl UpChurch, wrote a book entitled Convicted in the Womb, and it was made into a Showtime movie entitled "Convicted" earning him \$1 million, how another former student of mine, John S. Thompason, Sr., is even to this day operating a literary magazine and has won photography awards. I answered fifteen research questions and sent along a 2,000 word essay "AS SERIOUS AS..." telling the story of my October 8, 2014 heart attack and excellent emergency treatment at Somerset Hospital by Dr. Pradeep Nair who put two stents in my heart and saved my life with an ancillary procedure to remove blood clots.

On December 7, 2014, I received a second contact letter from the researcher, and I responded with a second 8,000 word essay entitled "VOICES FROM THE NEW LITERARY UNDERGROUND." By this time, the focus of the researcher was more clearly defined as: (1) what got you started as a writer? (2) what sustains you and keeps you writing, and (3) what legacy, as a highly successful prison writer, do you hope to

leave and/or accomplish? My second essay answered the first two questions and gave my overall teaching philosophy that each person has value and should be respected and that within each person is something universal and shared by everyone else. I quoted from Dr. Herbert E. Thomas's first book, The Shame Response to Rejection, and I told the story of how the Staff Psychologist at the Greensburg prison marveled at how I had the mostly young participants opening up about themselves far more than they had ever done with him. (This was because I conveyed acceptance.) I wrote about my lasting relationships with other writers like Etheridge Knight and Michael Hogan, told the story of my paternal Uncle Bill's book published in New York, Sailors, Subs and Senioritas, told anecdotes about the emotional components of what sustains me and keeps me writing, and ended with some discussion about the strength and power of the relationships that I have and maintain with my two brothers. I could not be the successful writer that I am today without their support, period.

Because I had to end that second essay before addressing the legacy question, with a third essay of some 3,000 words, entitled "SAILORS, SUBS AND SENORITAS," I answered the third question about legacy with as much candor as possible under the circumstances.

My next essay used 3,000 words to explore "MY HOBSON'S CHOICE," but it was not submitted to the researcher or offered for publication.

In a big turn of events, on April 14, 2015, the researcher was redirected by the PhD committee and was "no longer researching the writing processes of highly esteemed and successful prison writers" despite "hav[ing] had the same topic for more than eight years," and the committee directed the scholar to conduct an investigation of the overall

history of prison writing. Accordingly, a new, final major essay was solicited by the scholar to be completed “in the next few weeks.” The researcher asked for the same three focus questions about beginnings, sustaining force and legacy to be applied to the field of the history of prison writing. In response to this major new adjustment, I wrote and submitted a 19,250 word essay entitled “THE HISTORY OF PRISON WRITING AND MY ROLE IN IT.”

Any peer-review of research into the history of prison writing in America will require an analysis of how the new researcher has dealt with the seminal researcher’s work. H. Bruce Franklin is generally acknowledged to be the world’s leading authority on American prison literature, however one could begin to argue that the new work of Doran Larson at Hamilton College with The American Prison Writing Archive (2015), The Beautiful Prison (2014), Fourth City: Essays from the Prison in America (Michigan State UP, 2014) is positioning him as a potential successor. Research for my essay on the history of prison writing in America required me to rapidly acquire and read: Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist: EXPANDED EDITION (New York: Oxford paperback, 1989) by H. Bruce Franklin; Prison Writing in 20th Century America (New York: Penguin, 1998) by H. Bruce Franklin; American Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners: Their Writings: An Annotated Bibliography of Published Works 1789-1982 (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1982) by H. Bruce Franklin; Crossing the Yard: Thirty Years as a Prison Volunteer (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), by Richard Shelton; Life Sentences: Rage and Survival Behind Bars (New York: Times Books, 1992) by Wilbert Rideau and Ron Wikberg.

I was happy to discover that my published books were included in both of the annotated bibliographies by H. Bruce Franklin. Considering that it took me about 19,250 carefully chosen and crafted words to tell my version of the history of prison writing in America and my role in it, one would not expect me to be able to even summarize it all here in a few paragraphs. Perhaps it is sufficient for me to say that I believe that I gave the PhD researcher an accurate and complete overall summary of the recorded history of prison writing in America and showed my role in it. I do not know how many other living prisoners can actively define and claim their roles. This short narrative essay was solicited by the scholar on September 1, 2015, and it was designed to introduce me to the reader of the PhD dissertation. I have been told that this essay will become a part of Chapter Two of the dissertation. You are reading it as my contribution to a literary magazine or to the APWA.

Cob

Again, with respecting the authority of each writer, I have made no changes to Cob's introductory narrative, except where he begins his narrative with the inclusion of his full name. Here, in his opening, I have simply removed his name and added "Cob" (his pseudonym), due to IRB requirements of anonymity throughout this research. Also, *Publishing Credits*, Cob's record of publications, can be found in Appendix H. The following is Cob's introductory narrative:

My name is Cob [the first, middle, and last name, as written by the participant, are omitted by me, the researcher, per IRB mandate, and the given pseudonym of "Cob" has been substituted], 68-years-old, country-born and bred, and the father of four children and six grandchildren. I came to prison at the age of 60 for an act of self-defense-without-an-expensive-lawyer-to-defend-me. I had no previous criminal history beyond a 23-year-

old conviction for DUI. During the '80s, before I fell entirely into the bottle, I worked as a columnist, reporter, feature writer, and photographer for two local newspapers, as well as publishing both fiction and nonfiction in several national magazines and one now-defunct literary quarterly. Mostly, though, I ran my own masonry business and drank. I was divorced in 1990.

My grandmother, one of the last one-room schoolteachers in our area, taught me to read before I was five and I never stopped, reading at least two books a week—sometimes more—for over 50 years. That exposure to the Word, and my innate talent, placed me on the path I'm still following: that of a writer.

When I was in 10th grade, my English teacher, Mrs. Ethel Lipnack, read one of my essays, recognized my talent, and encouraged me to write anything I wished—she would read and edit it as a sort of extracurricular collaboration. At the time, my favorite writer was Henry Miller, whose banned novel, Tropic of Cancer I discovered hidden in my father's drawer. By an astounding "coincidence," (as a half-ass Zen Buddhist, I deny the existence of "coincidents" or "accidents"), in Brooklyn, New York, Miller and his wife, June had been her childhood neighbors! Years later, I initiated a correspondence with him and we exchanged several letters. He, too, encouraged me to keep writing, even if "they will hear of you in Katmandu before they do in New York," as he often stated.

One day Mrs. Lipnack wasn't in class. Her husband had died, and for our substitute teacher, we were assigned Mr. Wesley Updike, recently retired from Shillington High, where one of his students was his famous son, John. He hadn't yet been memorialized in The Centaur, and he never read any of my stories, but many years later his son did (the famous Updike homestead of "Pigeon Feathers" and Of the Farm was

only three crow miles from my parents' sheep farm!), and he also encouraged me. A year later, I published my first short story.

Then I began drinking, only to begin writing after I came to prison and sobered up. Since then I have won a short story contest sponsored by Eaton Literary Agency and three PEN Prison Writing Awards for an essay and two memoirs. I've also written three novels and a book-length collection of short stories. That output makes me wonder what I might have accomplished had I never drank.

The realization that I had squandered years of productive writing was the impetus for me to start again behind bars. I felt the ghostly gaze of my grandmother, Mrs. Lipnack, Henry Miller, and John Updike looking over my shoulder, whispering, "C'mon! Quit wasting your talent! Make with the pen and paper already!" And, for once, I listened.

The only legacy I want to leave—prison or no—is a testament of my abiding love for this world, this particular moment in infinite time. I was a writer long before I came to prison, and I would like any of my future readers to understand that prison changed in no important way other than forcing sobriety upon me. My talent was God-given (or earned karmically, which may be the same thing), and always with me, just itching to be given rein. Now it has, and my only concern is whether I have enough time to write everything I would like. And with a shiver, I sometimes think it might be better for my art if I remain sober and productive in prison, than free and at risk of drinking again. Then I reject the premise for the cowardly nonsense it in fact is: Risk is the essence of life, and writing the skill of neutralizing and converting that danger to Art.

And so, I continue to write, attempting to stretch the world's bookshelves another few inches.

Marty

Like Mil's and Cob's bios, which can be found in the appendices, I have included Marty's *Writing Bio* as Appendix I. Also, I have integrated Marty's introductory narrative herein, as it was mailed it to me:

For as long as I can remember, I've had real problems with authority figures, with the unreasonable exercise of authority, and with the assumption that one must always defer unquestioning to authority. It's in my nature to question the rules; it's in my nature to ask that most irritating of questions, "Why?"

When I was a lot younger this questioning nature manifested more as irrational rebelliousness. Because I could not accede to the strictures of polite society, I followed dark paths. By the time I finally awakened from the haze of my misspent youth I was serving life without the possibility of parole in the largest prison system in the country. (Not inconsequentially, I had harmed many people in the process, including killing a man over some poorly chosen words in a drunken rage.) The results of my unfocused rejection of the system of rules and restrictions were profound.

Like many of my fellow prisoners, for a considerable period of time, I internalized my shame and remorse, acting out at first and then becoming a paragon of virtue within a system designed and operated to snuff out my humanity. I think I even managed to suppress my resistance to authority for a time.

But through the act of writing I rediscovered my essential self. I found a way to ask why at the point of my pen and not the point of impact at the end of my fist. For years

I've challenged authority and called into question the accepted status quo, the orthodoxy of the prison-industrial complex, and the too often pitiful complaisance of my peers. I've taken on everything that felt right to take on. There is a sense of satisfaction in doing what you believe to be the right thing.

In the final analysis, after I'm long gone from the scene, it's unclear to me what impact I will have made. I wonder if some future prisoner will be furiously writing in his or her cell about the same sorts of things, fueled by the same moral indignation, the same sense of what is right and what is wrong. And if that turns out to be the case, will I have failed?

More than 35 years into this life without the possibility of parole sentence, the question of success or failure plagues me. The prison system remains unfair, dysfunctional, and grossly, disproportionately punitive. Both the public and my fellow prisoners remain convinced, by and large, that punishment, the infliction of pain and suffering, is the sine qua non of criminal justice. Deeper still, there persists the belief that the denial of one's humanity is a reasonable response to misbehavior, to criminality, to the status of prisoner. I feel thwarted and sad that this is the state of things, no matter the amount of effort put into the opposite condition.

I console myself less with outcome than with process. I believe that my work has intrinsic value, even if I'm one of the few to see it. I trust that some future iteration of me will face challenges, but not the same challenges. I hope the world will have caught on to the truth that punishment for the sake of inflicting pain is both ineffective and wrong. Regardless, for me, it's about legacy now.

Jon

Lastly, here is Jon's introductory narrative, which he suggested I "edit and use what fits." However, like the others, I have included this brief narrative just as it was mailed to me. *Bio for Jon* can be found as Appendix J. I have substituted Jon's real name with his pseudonym (per IRB mandate), as he began with a reference to himself:

Jon [pseudonym substituted for real name] and I found out by accident or destiny that I was a poet. I was on my study journey when I came to prison. I started studying "ologies;" sociology, philosophy, psychology, religion, and any books/subjects I could get my hands on. I started to love words and etymology and/or origin of words in the dictionary. I started to study language, English, and ponder philosophy which always spoke of poetry – something at the time I had no interest in. However, the more I studied philosophy and its branch of psychology, the more I encountered references to Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Jung, Freud, Emerson, and other poets.

One day at San Quentin I heard about poetry classes. There were two of them. I signed up for both. One was taught by a guy and another class was taught by a woman. After a silent year I discovered I was a poet, and poetry opened the doors to my prose writing and then to acting and writing plays. I even had some contact to Samuel Beckett and Barney Rosset and Martin Esslin became two of my advisors. This all started in 1986 and now I've progressed to teaching creative writing.

I came to become a writer in prison because writing was my destiny even when I didn't know it. What sustains my writing is realness I get from meeting people, making friends, and community with mother earth, plants and animals and playing my native flute.

Well, the legacy I hope to leave behind is to tell you to find your niche without having to come to a physical prison. I hope to inspire folks no matter the prison and place he or she is in to walk in their own shoes. I hope I leave a legacy of helping people find whatever they do best through what we inspire together.

Like the other co-authors in this metanarrative (Mil, Cob, and Marty), Jon's personal narrative on how he got started writing, what sustains him as a writer, and his hoped for legacy, as well as his contribution to the prison writing narrative, addressing the same three research questions as they pertain to prison writing, will be presented more closely in chapter 4 (personal narratives) and chapter 5 (prison writing narratives). This section only served to briefly introduce the four men who I have worked with for more than a year.

The Prison Writing Instructors

In considering teachers of prison writers, I naturally sought out those who had publications about their experiences in the prison writing classroom (Shelton, Tannenbaum, Lamb, and Gordon). I have also researched teachers who were once prison writing students (Lamberton, Hogan, Baca, and Yurcic), but are now continuing the legacy of prison writing by teaching writing workshops inside the razor wire. This means they still enter the dark spaces, alone, without the help of compositionists; prison writing remains closed off from composition and so neither is able to help the other.

While these prison writing instructors are not participants in this study (although I have had some contact with a few), they have sustained the study in that their teaching and mentoring have largely impacted those prison writers who are participating. The stories you will read in this section will show that. And if these instructors are impacting my participants, they *are* sustaining this research.

These prison writing instructors have not been formally taught in composition studies or writing pedagogy, but they have taught writing and given prison writers strategies and learning methods that have been used for many years – even today. These men and women instructors have left a legacy on prison writing. The prison writing instructors’ stories that are in this section of the chapter (the sub-sections), are introduced in this order: *Shelton; Lamberton; Hogan; Baca; Yurcic; Tannenbaum; Lamb; and Gordon.*

Shelton

According to Richard Shelton (2007), in *Crossing the Yard: Thirty Years as a Prison Volunteer*, the way he got started with prison writing was when his “association with convicts and former convicts began in 1970 or 1971” (p. 3). He says he cannot be sure of the date because he “never kept very good records” (p. 4). He received a letter from the serial killer “Pied Piper of Tucson,” who had read Shelton’s recent published book of poetry, and was writing to ask Shelton to consider reading some of his (Schmid’s) poems, to provide critical feedback. “When I got that innocuous letter from Charles Schmid asking me to read and comment on his poetry, I didn’t know it, but I was about to find out what I was made of, or at least, over the next thirty years, get some kind of notion” (Shelton, 2007, p. 6). From the newspapers referring to Schmid’s “thrill killings,” to the trials that were major media events, Shelton described the recognition of Schmid’s name as one provoking a “shudder of horror” (p. 4).

Shelton (2007) explains his initial consideration of literary slumming, and the odd thrill of meeting a monster. He narrates:

Without a moment’s hesitation and for all the wrong reasons, I wrote back to him that I would be willing to read and critique his poetry. If I was aware that this young man was

facing the gas chamber in two years, I was not unduly concerned about it. That would make him seem even more exotic (p. 5).

And in his review of Schmid's writing, he says:

Charles Schmid and I corresponded for several months. I found his poetry rough and in need of much revision, but it indicated remarkable talent. It was intense, often dark and brooding, but it had notable verbal energy and immediacy, and it showed that he understood the use of images (p. 6).

And because of his agreement to critique Schmid's writing, and the powerful prison grapevine, more prisoners began soliciting Shelton's advice, through written correspondences. Shelton claims that he was doing the best that he could, "but after a few months, [he] was corresponding with so many men in prison that [he] was spending more time on it than [he] could afford while teaching full-time at the university and trying to do some of [his] own writing" (p. 10). Within a few short years, a workshop was started, and he said he was able to "accomplish in two hours a week what was taking [him] many hours to do by correspondence, and [he] could do a much better job of it" (p. 10).

Still, through his nearly 40 years of teaching prison writing, and in the narrative of his book, Shelton writes reflectively about the prison system, the smells and sounds behind bars, his prisoner friends, their crimes, their personalities, and the ongoing relations he had with them (as they were released, in some cases, or as they remained inside, some even dying while attending his workshops).

While his initial interest in becoming a prison writing instructor was more thrill seeking than academically driven, he eventually got to a place where he acknowledged that perhaps his

greatest contribution to his prison writing students was his harsh criticism of their writing – despite the pain it caused them.

He mentions three of his most successful students: Stephen Dugon; Jimmy Santiago Baca; and Ken Lamberton. It is from his reflections of these three, and the relationships he had with them, that I am somewhat able to locate a small understanding of the process prisoners go through to learn to write well behind bars; Shelton admits, “I was having my own struggles trying to convince my group of hotshot poets that clichés, sentimentality, and doggerel were not necessarily the best ways to go. I was learning that the process of learning in prison often consists of unlearning” (p. 25). Shelton’s critiques of the prisoners’ work made them angry, caused them to drift away, fight and argue, or in some cases, “bite the bullet, settle down, read and write furiously” (p. 28). It was the terrible struggle of illiteracy that he encountered in his students, that he sensed made the difference in how they took criticism.

In an honest and candid conversation, at his home, Shelton came to see just how painful the process of learning to read and write had been for Jimmy Santiago Baca. Baca showed Shelton a letter that he had kept in his wallet for a number of years. It was an expression of Shelton’s disdain for the constant complaining of his students, about their treatment in prison, which he could do nothing about. Baca said he not only kept the letter, but memorized it. He said it kept him from going back to prison. And while Shelton recaps the pain his criticism brought his already scarred students, he says it was the most powerful gift he gave them. Mil believes that “despite philosophical differences, it has to be said that Richard Shelton’s prisoner students have blazed a bright trail across American letters” (phase II narrative, 2015). It is also important to point out the legacy Shelton left as he references the success of his little writing program. It was “to become the oldest permanent floating prison creative writing program in America, and

like the floating crap game in *Guys and Dolls*, it would manage to stay one jump ahead of the cops for more than thirty years” (p. 25).

Lamberton

Upon his release, Ken Lamberton began assisting Shelton in writing workshops throughout Arizona. Now, as Shelton’s wife is ill and he is tending to her, Lamberton is continuing to teach prison writing from what he learned from Shelton. Lamberton has certainly flourished as a writer inside and outside of prison, with many books (see References), articles, essays, and other writings to his credit. Being that he has a background in science, Lamberton tends to write more about nature. His contribution to prison writing comes from the strong mentorship he received from Shelton, and the mentoring he is now giving to other prison writers.

Hogan

Like Lamberton, Michael Hogan was mentored by Shelton. He published two books in 1975, and a poem that won first prize in the Poets, Essayists and Novelists (PEN) Writing Awards for Prisoners. Some years later Hogan edited an anthology and won the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Creative Writing Fellowship. With his \$5,000 grant, he hired a lawyer and got a parole in 1979. Upon his release, he was hired as a consultant to NEA. He also went further in his education to earn a masters degree and a Ph.D. He now lives and teaches in another country and has written twenty books.

Baca

Jimmy Santiago Baca, as mentioned earlier, still has a relationship with Shelton. *Crossing the Yard* (2007) provides more insight into their teacher-student relationship. Baca has had great writing success since his release, and he, too, volunteers in Arizona prisons to teach

writing. One of his many works, *A Place to Stand* (2001), just recently made its final cut in film editing, and is due for release sometime soon.

Adolescents on the Edge, written by Baca and ReLeah Cossett Lent (2010), provides teachers of marginalized students with various strategies and pedagogies for establishing a trusting community in the classroom to promote optimal writing development. The book comes with a companion DVD where Baca and Lent model these various teaching methods with a group of students in New Mexico. In the few hours that they all spent together, lots of writing and sharing occurred. The environment was safe. Baca shared narratives from his prison life and pursuit of learning (overcoming his illiteracy), through writing, and gave the students opportunities to respond with their own writing.

I wrote Baca, after finishing the book and DVD, and posed this question: Are you able to do this with prison writers? He quickly responded. In that email, I also elaborated on my research study, and told him I was so very curious about how he made the prison writing classroom a community of trust, when so many other problems existed in the environment. It was then that he referred me to his latest book, *Feeding the Roots of Self-Expression and Freedom* (2014). He said he thought I would “find a trove of information that will enhance [my] studies” in that book. The book is similar to *Adolescents on the Edge* in that it utilizes Baca’s writings to establish various curricular activities to help writers explore their pains in order to find their joys.

Baca continues to be a powerful advocate of writing and the impact education has on the oppressed. He is a speaker and teacher, and continues to write and publish poetry and non-fiction books that help those who are teaching prison writing.

Yurcic

A fairly new writer, and also a previous prison writing student of Baca (sharing illiteracy struggles), Jason Yurcic has published four books, retired from professional boxing, teaches prison writing, speaks at various schools and colleges, and also trains new and upcoming boxers. His story is very similar to Baca's – perhaps that is why the two are such good friends. He entered prison illiterate, but gained the genuine concern of an ex-con who became his prison writing instructor (Baca) and has been mentoring him through his writing life ever since. Yurcic has four published books of poetry.

Yuric's life story sustains my research narrative in that it shows how generations of mentors function in the prison system. Shelton taught and mentored Baca, and Baca teaches and mentors Yurcic. More on the mentor relationship in prison writing is found later in this chapter.

Tannenbaum

After some performances of poetry in her daughter's elementary class, and a few elsewhere, Judith Tannenbaum got an invitation to perform in a prison. Soon thereafter, she started teaching inside San Quentin. This was during the 1980's, and San Quentin was a maximum security prison that seemed to have lots of lock downs. Tannenbaum learned as much as she taught during those years, and by an assignment given to her, from one of her prison writing students, she went on to write the book, *Disguised as a Poem: My Years Teaching Poetry* (2000). In it, like Shelton, Tannenbaum narrates many stories of the students she taught, and the relationships she had with them. She writes about the prison, its sounds, smells, and rules. She also references and quotes numerous works of both her prison writing students, and famous writers and poets. In fact, in a recorded interview by Kyoko Aoki, on January 1, 2012, for the UCLA Library's Center for Oral History Research, Tannenbaum states that she did not teach

technical or skill-related poetry lessons (2012). In describing her teaching methods, she mentions going cell-to-cell, working one-on-one with the men in lock down, and focusing individually on their work with consultations, where she would make suggestions, give ideas, and bring in materials for them to read and study. She said there was an internal TV station that she was able to use, as well. For at least one successful writer, Jon (2010), introduced earlier in this chapter, Tannenbaum (2010) tells of Jon's means of learning to write; he sought her out and asked her questions. These two have shared many years of friendship, through writing, they collaborated to write *By Heart: Poetry, Prison, and Two Lives*; it is a narrative/memoir that is highly praised.

Tannenbaum tells of how she invited guest poets to speak in the prison. Naturally, because of the race issues that surround any prison, even today, she said she made sure to invite artists of all races and genders – so as not to offend. Still, Tannenbaum said her choices did come with accusations and students leaving her class. However, the one method she discusses most in the 2012 UCLA interview (both her and Shelton speak more about specific teaching practices of prison writing in interviews, versus in their books) is her pedagogy of using literature to do the teaching. She said she was good at being able to know who her students would like, or the kind of poetry that they would most enjoy, so she brought in lots of materials. In *Disguised as a Poem*, Tannenbaum (2000) provides samples of her students' work, and she tells the stories behind the writings and writers. Like Shelton, Tannenbaum has long-lasting relationships with the writers she came to know and teach. Also in the interview (2012), Tannenbaum did not negate her teaching deficits; instead, she spoke of the grace her students gave her because they knew she was there because she cared – which was of the utmost relevance to them, she believed.

With more than 20 years of reflection, from those years teaching behind bars, she has come to see that she learned a great deal about teaching. Since the late 1990's, Tannenbaum has been working as the training coordinator for the WritersCorps in San Francisco. In email correspondences, she has said that she now uses her experiences to train others to teach writing to the underprivileged and oppressed.

It was a prison writer that gave her the assignment to write *Disguised as a Poem*, and it was in her last week at San Quentin that many of her students suggested she continue teaching writing, but to the young, so that she could help prevent children from ending up in prison. I believe her work at WritersCorps fulfills that request.

Lamb

Wally Lamb is a successful novelist with several published books; he also works with female prison writers, although I have recently learned from his editor that he is taking a break from teaching because he has been actively involved in the filming of one of his books. Through the decades of his volunteering efforts, he and his students have published *Couldn't Keep It to Myself* (2003) and *I'll Fly Away* (2007); these books have gained much notice and interest from the outside world. The two books are testimonies/narratives of the lives of several women from the York Prison.

Gordon

Although Robert Ellis Gordon passed away in 2012, his book *The Funhouse Mirror: Reflections on Prison* (2000) is another published account of a prison writing instructor's journey. In his narrative, Gordon takes us into Washington State corrections system, where he taught from 1989 until 1997. It was in that year, 1997, when the program's funding was eliminated by the Washington State legislature, that he stopped teaching. Some of his successful

prison writing students are: Michael Collins; TJ Granack, and Keith R. Landsdowne. Gordan, as well as the other prison writing instructors in this section, and some others who have not been mentioned yet, will be further discussed and referenced throughout this document.

Mentorship

As I have briefly narrated in other sections of this chapter, mentorship is a strong force in the successes of writers; mentors are also very important to my own writing life. Having a mentor feels like a friend who encourages, inspires, and motivates – pushing the level of confidence of the writer forward. Mentors are able to aid writers in their composing pursuits, and guide them along the way.

Jon's story, of having co-authored his memoir with Tannenbaum, after being taught and mentored by her since 1985, and having become a successful writer because of his method of seeking her out and asking her questions about his writing, is a sign of the value of mentors to prison writers, my metanarrative, and to the longer-term historical prison writing narrative. Similarly, Shelton's life-long friendships with many of his prison writing students, in and out of prison, help to motivate prisoners who are prison writing instructors, as expressed by Jon and Mil in their introductory narratives, and as mentioned by other prisoners and ex-prisoners who have been privileged to teach writing while serving time.

Little (Malcolm X), Cleaver, Lamberton, Hogan, Baca, Yurcic, and Gordon, are others who have stories about the influence of mentors, not to mention my co-authors. In this section of the chapter, however, these are the sub-sections I have decided to include: *Pagnucci, Narrative Inquiry, and This Dissertation*; *Rose and Deficits*; *Bamberg and Meta-Awareness*; *Johnson and Love*; and *Yurcic's Acknowledgment*. These individuals have sustained this research study and my pursuit of learning to write in one way or another.

Pagnucci, Narrative Inquiry, and This Dissertation

I entered Pagnucci's class five minutes late each morning; otherwise, the bus I took would have gotten me there an hour before class began. He never said anything about my tardiness, but he always smiled with warmth when I entered the room, lifting any sense of possible tension that could have invaded the student-teacher relationship, which is of vital importance for a safe learning community to exist and function properly. Not all my professors throughout my masters and doctoral classes provided such a safe place. And perhaps that is why I did not do so well in their classes, and had less motivation to care and engage with the material, or them.

For me, and this metanarrative, I can attest to the sustaining power of a mentor throughout this research. As Pagnucci is my dissertation director, he has certainly mentored this writer and her study, not to mention the independent study I did with him. A dissertation can be the most difficult and complicated writing endeavor a student hopes to complete. I know it has been for me. Life has intervened, and my study has been put on hold a time or two. I allowed other circumstances to take precedence, like getting married, and having a child – two of the most impacting non-career moves I have made in my life. Still, Pagnucci has always cared that I would have every opportunity available to finish. He may be the single most important reason that I do.

Pagnucci's narrative is further developed in chapter 3, as I explain how his narrative theory has not only framed how I do life, but also how this dissertation is written. Never had I thought a personal story or poem could, or should for that matter, be used in academic writing. His work has not only welcomed it, but modeled it, and after I took his narrative research class in 2007, I welcomed it and modeled it with my own college writing students. I remember a paper a

student wrote on the lyrics from a meaningful song in his life, and pausing to consider: *Yes! It can be done academically – in research papers.*

I am so grateful to have the director I do. My only wish is that I would have been closer to the campus and him, so that more regular interactions could have taken place.

Rose and Deficits

As I have read from numerous prisoners' narratives, expressing their awe (albeit brief) in the men and women who influenced and supported them, I recall a text I read many years ago – *Lives on the Boundary* (Rose, 1989). I read that book at the beginning of my graduate studies in composition, when I was most insecure in my writing and teaching. Like Rose, I needed someone to come along and guide me.

The first mentor in Rose's (1989) life to be enthusiastic about his learning process is narrated as such:

Lou Minton was a wiry man with gaunt, chiseled features and prematurely gray hair, combed straight back. He had gone to college in the South for a year or two and kicked around the country for many more before settling in L.A. He lived in a small downtown apartment with a single window and met my mother at the counter of Coffee Dan's. He had been alone too long and eventually came to our house and became part of the family. Lou repaired washing machines, and he had a car, and he would take me to the vast, echoing library just west of Pershing Square and to the Museum of Science and Industry in Exposition Park. He bought me astronomy books, taught me how to use tools, and helped me build model airplanes from balsa wood and rice paper. (pp. 22-23)

And there were others (teachers and professors) who mentored Rose's learning, reading, and writing, as he narrates in his book.

I believe that because prison writers do come to writing with great deficits, as I did when entering a Masters program in composition, and Rose did when he was labeled “slow or remedial or underprepared,” a mentorship is almost always needed in order for someone to develop and grow as a student, writer, learner, teacher, and confident, kind human being (p. xi). We are slow and deficient in various areas of our lives. When someone else enters our life at a time when we have a desire to learn how to overcome that deficiency, and that person is strong and capable in that area where we are weak, and they take time to nurture us in that area, by guiding and encouraging us, we grow, and eventually, feel the desire to pay it back, or use the same methods of mentoring on somebody else. To a small degree, I feel that I have experienced some mentorship from Rose through his publications and research on the topic of writer’s block – a topic I have also struggled with, but have studied and confidently taught (to instructors across the curriculum) when I worked for the Writing Across the Curriculum department at Pasadena City College.

Bamberg and Meta-Awareness

I had one professor, Dr. Bamberg, who modeled the mentors Rose described in his book. In fact, I specifically remember pausing at that time in my teaching and learning (as a graduate student of composition), as I was taking her class and reading Rose’s book (required reading on our syllabus), and thinking: *this is exactly what Dr. Bamberg is like; she is a mentor/friend*. I felt her genuine concern for my educational successes, and I believed she cared for me and wanted me to succeed

Also, because I was taking credentialing classes, and was learning pedagogies and strategies on how to best teach writing (which were helping me with my own writing struggles), and how to behave as a mentor to my students (which I was seeing modeled by Dr. Bamberg and

learning about in Rose's book), my understanding of the power of meta-learning, metacognition, or meta-awareness emerged as we talked about it in a graduate class one evening. It was as though the sky of my learning potential had opened up. As originally defined by Donald B. Maudsley (1979), in "A Theory of Meta-Learning and Principles of Facilitation: An Organismic Perspective," meta-learning is the process where learners become cognitive, or, aware of how they perceive, inquire, learn, and grow in wisdom and knowledge – at least, as how they have internalized that process. Maudsley also concluded that this type of learning (meta-learning, metacognition, or meta-awareness) focused on the ideas in which a learner takes control of such habits. In his work, Maudsley enunciated five principles for facilitating meta-learning (1979).

John Biggs' (1985) article, "The Role of Meta-Learning in Study Process" further described meta-learning as "being aware of and taking control of one's own learning (p. 186)." Meta-awareness is basically that awareness of the phenomenon of learning. It is the idea of thinking about how one thinks, writing about how one writes. Meta-learning is not about subject knowledge; it is about a learner perceiving a learning context. For example, when a student is given a rubric, where expectations of an assignment are clearly presented, that student can begin to contemplate the process of conducting the learning task. Even greater a meta-learning opportunity would be having students devise a relevant and important learning task, compose the clear goals and grading system through their own rubric, then fulfilling the meta-learning process by completing the assignment and assessing themselves and their peers according to the rubric they designed. A final reflective element could be added to then consider how learning could be ideally reached from the pros and cons of the entire process, and meta-aware students could even make revisions to the various stages.

Rather than simply using the lessons and teaching methods I was learning in my credentialing classes, I decided to apply this meta-cognitive strategy on my students. I would teach them the methods then have them re-teach them to me and their peers, as they also had some practical and applicable assignment to make that meta-cognitive link. I often had the students develop rubrics and create assignments, too.

I recognize that time in my life as when realities and knowable truths, as they had genuine applications to my life and my student's lives, became foundational to the process of my teaching and learning. From that point on, meta-awareness has been a part of my personal life narrative. I know I learn best through it, and that is another reason why this dissertation (a metanarrative) sustains me and this research study.

I believe that the prison writers who were taught, and then later became teachers, experienced a similar occurrence in their lives – a sense of meta-awareness. As mentors like Lamberton, Baca, and others began teaching, their reflective thoughts as teachers/mentors emerged (they, too, found themselves on a 3D landscape), and thus, the cycle of prison writing has been sustained in that prison writers who have found their voice and acclaimed status as writers, through the efforts of mentors (life-long friends), have understood that success in writing can and does occur when a prison writing instructor mentors his/her students. In the narratives of my co-authors, which is more fully framed in chapter 4, more on mentoring and meta-awareness is narrated.

Johnson and Love

Rose is not the only compositionist who has encouraged and narrated the importance of mentorship; others have told their stories of how mentorship has affected their education and writing and their teaching. So many others allude to it when they set up a teaching framework

that operates under a legitimacy of concern for the student and his/her life. In fact, Peggy L. Johnson, a fellow student in the IUP Composition and TESOL doctoral program, whom I met in Pagnucci's narrative inquiry class, emphasized mentorship, as love, when her research study (dissertation) explored the affects of love on basic writing students. Johnson (2008) said that "The Christian Brothers also believe education that embraces a pedagogy of love through the act of compassion can be the best means by which students reach their human potential because compassion encourages an atmosphere of inclusion and respite for students" (p. 28). In her study, Johnson also references important studies by: Elbow (1973); bell hooks (2003); Mina Shaughnessy (1977); Paulo Friere (1970, 1997, 1998), Rose (1989, 2003) and several others who have paved the way in conducting research, or writing narratives describing writers' writing successes as best flourishing under a caring (loving) teacher/mentor. No doubt Johnston experienced her mentorship at IUP with Claude Mark Hurlbert and Pagnucci on her dissertation committee.

Yurcic's Acknowledgment

Here is a final example of the sustaining power of mentorship. The following passage comes from the *Acknowledgments* page of Jason L. Yurcic's (2005) book, *Voice of My Heart*:

Mr. Baca, dear friend when I called out for your help so many years ago, I was a desperate, uneducated young man about to do desperate things to end my suffering. You have helped me through the darkest and most ugly times in my life by showing me the healing power of words, the importance of reading, and the beauty in the struggle.

Without your gentle guidance I would not have been able to set my father to rest. I would have joined him. Thank you for your altruistic knowledge of the heart. Thank you for the

foresight to see when a person has only life and death as a choice and for the knowledge of how to lead me back towards life. (p. 7)

Community Learning

Another theme I have found in the prison writing narrative is that of community learning. Baca has been publishing books on the topic of community learning for the past couple of years. His personal experiences and reflections of his time in safe writing workshops inside prison, with Shelton and other prison writers, must have influenced him since community learning is one of his current publishing interests. Both Shelton's and Tannenbaum's published narratives on teaching writing in prison tell stories of how their students looked forward to their class time because they could let their guards down and be themselves. Out in the yard, or chow hall, they had to pretend and act a certain way. They could not be seen getting along and/or talking with certain inmates, and they had to be tough.

In their writing workshops, they could open up, be humble, and even vulnerable since it was a safe place, as established by the manner in which Shelton and Tannenbaum taught. In this section, there are three sub-sections: *Baca Gives Back*; *Being a Part of Their Community*; and *Writing Workshops*.

Baca Gives Back

Baca is fostering his learning about writing and writers, with the new realities he is finding as he reflects on his years in prison writing workshops with Shelton, and in years teaching writing behind bars. In other words, like me and Clandinin and Connelly, Baca is embedded in a three-dimensional (3D) metanarrative space where he is nested in the many strands and layers of a longer-term historical narrative. Baca is doing it in a much bigger way than I, however.

Baca and ReLeah Cossett Lent (2010) collaborated to produce a DVD and text (*Adolescents on the Edge: Stories and Lessons to Transform Learning*) on how to most effectively teach writing to marginalized students with providing texts that resonate, and “are not merely words on a page; they are alive – the way stories are meant to be experienced” (p. xiv). His experiences have also brought him to see narratives, mentoring, and a safe community learning environment as optimal for producing flourishing writers. It happened to Baca. It happened to Yurcic, through Baca. It could happen to others if teachers applied what these prison writing teachers had learned. Therefore, like me, as Baca simultaneously entered a metanarrative while he co-authored *Adolescents on the Edge* (2010) and *Feeding the Roots of Self-Expression and Freedom* (Baca, Sheehan, & VanBriggle, 2014), and the longer-term historical narrative of the writing life, he collaborated with teachers, specialists, retirees, and NWP consultants to publish a book that emphasizes the use of narratives and poetry, in helping teachers teach writing. The intent for the book is, as Baca told me in our correspondence, to serve prison writing instructors, and other teachers of at-risk students.

I believe Baca will always use a narrative approach when trying to locate meaning and conduct inquiry to better improve his writing and teaching abilities – although, he is truly successful as a writer and may need no further improvement. In his memoirs, essays, and poems, Baca emphasizes the power of the story and how it gave him life. Baca and Lent (2010) co-wrote their book to help teachers “trust the power of literacy,” by: showing them how to first “create a community” in their classroom; engage and motivate their students (using everyone’s stories – students’ especially); promote self-efficacy and offer challenging tasks; and then practically show students how to utilize “group work, writing, reading, speaking, listening, and project-based learning” to strengthen the voices and transform the learning of developmental students (p.

xiii). Ultimately, it is Baca's and Lent's (2010) claim that "everything we offer comes with the understanding that community is the foundation on which all instruction is built" (p. xiii).

Prompting students to write their own stories, after hearing Baca read and tell some of his, is the beginning of the community building effort Baca and Lent affirm. Little by little, Baca and Lent demonstrate activities that create a trusting environment for the students – starting with themselves (mostly Baca), being open and willing to tell their own stories (Baca's illiterate past, incarceration, and his writing pursuits). Once these stories by Baca and Lent have been shared, they invite the students to write and tell their own narratives.

In the DVD, filmed over a few hours, these students clearly move into a safe place, probably because of Baca; remember, he teaches like a friend/mentor. Some of the students, having known each other for many years, disclose extremely personal details to their peers for the very first time – openly, before the entire class, and on film. The students comment on this development at the end of the filming, and express their beliefs that the stories (both Baca's and the ones of their peers, as well as their own), led to higher levels of learning and enrichment. Community learning with a narrative approach, as Baca is trying to teach other prison instructors and teachers of the marginalized, is leaving a legacy for the prison writing narrative, as well as a legacy of this metanarrative/research text.

Being a Part of Their Community

It is within communities that Little (within the Nation of Islam), Cleaver (within the Black Panther Party and later within the Church of Latter Day Saints), Lamberton, Hogan, and Baca (within Shelton's writing workshops in Arizona), Jon (within Tannenbaum's writing classes), and others thrived as writers. Currently, with my correspondences and co-authoring efforts for this prison writing narrative, I have entered the community of the prison writer. My

co-authors (Cob, Marty, Jon, and Mil) appear to have been open and honest about their lives and pasts, and have been very willing participants to complete the writing requests I have made – and quickly, too. They have shared with me how they got started as writers (while in prison), what keeps them writing and pursuing publication, the legacies they believe, or doubt, they will ever leave on society, and details surrounding their pasts and lives before prison.

I am also a part of the composition community, but there is a hole in it. I would like this study to bridge that gap by providing a safe learning community for the writers who could benefit from us more than any others. I embrace this opportunity of being able to introduce the prison writer to composition, and that sustains me and this study.

Writing Workshops

In the 1960's and 1970's, and to a smaller degree, the 1980's and 1990's, writing workshops had a great impact on prison writers. I believe they still do, and can, but there are far fewer of them, and prison writers, like prison writing instructors, are not writing too much about them in their narratives. I have had to infer about the significance of these communities on prison writers because there is not much narrated about them, aside from what Shelton, Tannenbaum, Gordan, and Lamb have published. However, the way that I have inferred the theoretical relevancy of prison writing workshops/classes in prison writing is by the prison writers who have participated in them and have come out more successful than when they started them. In fact, it seems that there is enough proof to show that without mentors, a safe community learning environment, or writing workshops, good quality prison writing would largely cease and/or fade out of existence, which might actually be the current objective in dealing with prison writers. In fact, that topic will be visited later.

Community learning and writing workshops are presented as highly effective tools for teaching writing within composition, too. With Bamberg as my caring mentor, and director of the composition department at CSULA, I had a safe place where I believed my writing was accepted as worthy for the field. *Writing Without Teachers* (Elbow, 1973) endorses group learning and safe communities, and Joseph Harris (1997), in *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*, claims:

This sense of difference, of overlap, of tense plurality, of being at once part of several communities and yet never wholly a member of one, has accompanied nearly all the work and study I have done at the university. So when, in the past few years, a number of teachers and theorists of writing began to talk about the idea of community as somehow central to our work, I was drawn to what was said (p. 98).

Harris' concept of community is rather different than that of Baca's, since he is talking about building different communities for vastly different writers. I would still suggest that both aim at a relevancy in the safety of a place where learning can best take place when students are given freedoms to move in and out of the various communities in which they are embedded – just like me and this research study. I am moving in and out of communities in which I am now nested.

For prison writing instructors, communities are established in their writing workshops because the students (prisoners) live in a space that is far more complicated and precarious than a college classroom or at-risk after school program. Safe learning communities sustain my metanarrative because I have reflective, 3D connections to them. I am still a mentor/friend to a number of my previous students, and they still link their learning and teaching to me, as some are now in college, writing papers, have completed a degree, are working on post-graduate degrees,

and are teachers. I still share a space with them because I know that teaching many of them for four years in a row gave them a safe place to write – like Bamberg did for me.

As I have already said, I am within the community of the prison writer, and as this mostly untold story of prison writing begins to unfold, it is my hope that other prison writers, prison writing teachers, writing mentors, and compositionists will feel safe enough to also enter and learn from the prison writing community. I believe this project, as I, a compositionist, co-authors this research study with some of the most published and successful prison writers, my own legacy will be left, as I may be the first and only compositionist to plead with the field and attempt to persuade them of the benefit of helping prison writers to enter into the composition community, but also, that we might enter some of theirs.

Histories and Legacies

In composition, there are no significant research studies of prison writers. However, H.B. Franklin (1998), in *Prison Writing in 20th-Century America*, refers to the 1960s and 1970s as a period of literary renaissance in prison writing in America. And Bob Gaucher (2002), in the Introduction to *Writing As Resistance: The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons Anthology (1988-2002)*, finds that Franklin believed “a new wave of prison writers and their literary forms and styles transcended the traditional classifications, transforming them into a new prison-focused narrative,” of which, he agreed, even though proof of that literary renaissance had faded drastically (p. 7). And as editor of this substantial anthology on “convict culture and the discourse of convict intellectuals,” it is this “literary tradition that the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (JPP) strives to represent,” according to Gaucher (p. 7). Gaucher, founding editorial member of the JPP (the most widely published and distributed journal of American and Canadian prisoners), and retired professor in the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa

presents the intention of the JPP, from its earliest conception (early 1980s), to bring “prisoners’ input into official and academic discourse” (p. 8). Certainly that is my hope, as well; it is my sustaining force and greatest academic desire, but it was in the 1980’s when the JPP set out to somehow make that happen and, sadly, the goal has not been achieved. From what I have researched and experienced, it is not happening still. In fact, there is a long history of that not happening.

In this section, I will narrate (along with my co-authors) some stories of legacies that my co-authors, and perhaps all prison writers would like to erase from the prison writing narrative/history. I include these narratives so as to show potential compositionists interested in prison writing some of the stories that have affected the legacies of prison writers and prison writing in general. I also share these stories so that other prison writers and prisoners, who know little about the prison writing narrative, will be informed.

I believe all of the participants in this study have mentioned one or more of these stories, in their own manner and with differing details, but somewhere in their letters, phase I essay, phase II narratives, or other literature they have addressed these histories and/or legacies (albeit negative ones). That tells me that these stories are truly part of the longer-term historical narrative of prison writing because these stories still carry importance. As reflected on earlier in this chapter, the quote “We carry stories until they no longer carry importance” comes to my mind. My co-authors *still* carry these stories. These are the six sub-sections you will find in this section: *The Abbott Story*; *No Clemency*; *No Snitching*; *The Criminality Curse*; *LeClair*; and *Tina*.

The Abbott Story

In one of his phase II research texts, Mil (2015) wrote the following narrative:

Jack Henry Abbott's name, work and fate has to be included in any serious analysis of the literary movement behind prison bars. There is anguish over the missed opportunities he could have created for other writers in prison. For those who do not know the story, it goes like this.

While Norman Mailer, a powerful figure in American letters was researching *The Executioner's Song*, his book about Gary Gilmore, he corresponded with Jack Henry Abbott while he was serving time in a Utah prison for killing a fellow prisoner. Jack Henry Abbott, 37, had spent most of his life behind prison bars, although it was not widely known to the time, in the language of prison parlance, he had become a 'snitch,' a 'rat,' an 'undercover informant,' a 'confidential source.' To me, this choice compromised whatever personal integrity he could have had, and it does more to explain how, after his release from prison, he behaved as if he was 'entitled to special treatment and consideration' because the prison perversely used him up.

In June of 1981, Jack Henry Abbott won parole with the help of Norman Mailer's letters of recommendation, and he moved to York City to become Norman Mailer's research assistant. Shortly after his release, with representation by a famous NYC literary agent, *In the Belly of the Beast* was published, and it almost became a best-seller. (I purposely have never read it.) But despite getting all of these 'breaks,' it was apparently important to Jack Henry Abbott to establish his dominance over a NYC restaurant waiter over the use of a bathroom, and after calling the waiter outside, he stabbed him to death

as if they were back in a Utah prison chow hall. He fled and was captured in two months in Louisiana and was charged with yet another murder.

After this debacle, Norman Mailer and other literary cognoscenti were denounced, including criticism in the *New York Times Book Review* for helping to obtain the release of a dangerous man. Miller's only known public comment on what happened with Jack Henry Abbott was to call it a 'tragedy.' Eddie Murphy created the famous "Saturday Night Live" skit yelling out 'Kill my landlord' from behind fake prison bars. Another "Saturday Night Live" skit called 'Prose & Cons' had literary agent Irving 'Swiftly' Lazar saying: 'Anything by a prisoner is sure to be a best-seller! I tell young writers, 'Go commit a crime and then we'll talk.'

In a February, 1982 issue of *Corrections Magazine*, Mil was quoted by Greg Mitchell, free-lance writer and publisher of "Voices From the New Literary Underground," who wrote an article about the Abbott legacy, as follows:

Even when the media portrays prison writers in a positive light, according to [Mil] of the Academy of Prison Arts, it 'tends to sensationalize – in a destructive way – or make us into folk heroes.'

In addition to Mil, Cob (2015) also includes the Abbott story in his phase II prison writing narrative. He narrates the following:

Finally, in a category of his own, there is Jack Abbott, the protégé of the late Norman Mailer, the overrated blowhard who once stabbed his wife in a drunken brawl, and churned out belabored novels and treatises of burgeoning length when he wasn't propping up a bar and waging war on his liver. Mr. Abbott, a convicted killer, wrote In the Belly of the Beast, a turgid apology for his past life and a lurid account of his oft-

violent experiences behind bars. He was astute enough to initiate a correspondence with the gullible Mr. Mailer, who always sniffing the spoor of a new journalistic prey, promptly fell under Mr. Abbott's diabolical charm, and used his prestige and political pull to get Abbott paroled into Mr. Mailer's care. Two or three weeks after winning his freedom, Mr. Abbott stabbed to death a fellow dishwasher over a matter of "honor," as if a low-life scum such as he knew its face.

After Cob writes a brief imagined internal dialogue of Mailer, to himself, of his "sociological experiment," Cob continues the narrative with:

The sorry saga of Jack Abbott affects every prison writer alive, because the utter failure of Mailer's ill-considered experiment, scares away other established writers who might be willing to aid a serious neophyte writer. But few are adventurous enough to risk it, after the well-publicized Mailer-Abbott fiasco. Its aftershocks are felt today, and, I think, make the already-difficult task of getting published even harder. Editors notice the prison mailroom-stamped envelope and immediately suspect one of two things: A bored prisoner is attempting a scam; or the work contained therein is useless, most likely badly written, illegible, or both. I've often wondered how many manuscripts of mine have been summarily returned, unread.

Marty (2015) also has his take on Abbott, and after admitting to his lack of knowledge of how prison writing got its start, and urging me on in this project for that very reason, he wrote:

Which brings us to the terrible case of Jack Abbott and *In the Belly of the Beast*. For prison writers of my generation, he was both a hero and a cautionary tale, and the source of endless disappointment. He's the first actually imprisoned writer I knew of to enjoy real success. (Although I'm not certain, I think Eddie Bunker, a very successful

writer of the prison experience, did his work after release.) I can still vividly recall a fellow prison writer at Tehachapi, shortly after Jack Abbott killed a waiter in New York, telling me he had given up writing as a consequence. Many of us felt betrayed by that idiotic act of selfishness. (I think most of us, myself certainly, believe that taking a public role as a prisoner is to assume a responsibility to our peers.) To top it off, although the book did achieve considerable success, it was not well regarded by prisoners. The general consensus held it to be a whining, sniveling book written by a guy who did not know how to do time well. (As much as we did envy his success!)

No Clemency

The Abbott story set a precedent of which the prison writing community has suffered from ever since. In chapter 1, as well as previously in this chapter, I referenced Williams' (Tookie) execution and Governor Schwarzenegger's refusal to grant clemency in consideration of all that Williams had done in promoting peace as an anti-gang activist. As I stated, I was deeply moved by Williams' execution at that time in my life. My personal narrative and this prison writing research metnarrative shows that. I also know I was not the only one heavily affected. The national public outcry to save Williams' life is historical. I reflect on the images of the teacher and her students Williams had corresponded with for a full school year, as they went to the prison on the day of his execution, with yellow t-shirts and signs declaring: SAVE TOOKIE!

The Los Angeles Police Department, the Los Angeles County District Attorney, and other law enforcement groups argued that Williams was not reformed at all. They said that his refusal to "snitch" on other gang members and the tactics and means of communication gang members use was proof that he was not a transformed man. Bob Egelko (2005) wrote an article

in the *San Francisco Chronicle* quoting a professor of law and politics from Amherst College. According to Egelko (2005), Austin Sarat, author of *Mercy on Trial* (a book about clemency) claimed that actual innocence is “about the only ground in which governors grant clemency in the modern period...I know of no case in which a death row inmate has been spared (solely) on the basis of post-conviction rehabilitation.” Unfortunately, and I do hate to say it, for a number of reasons, but I fear Williams’ execution may have been the result of a post-Abbot period.

No Snitching

Abbott was known to be a snitch, and Williams refused to be one. In the prison writing narrative, the topic of being a snitch is significant. It is an upside affair. In order to be a prisoner of integrity, one must never rat someone out. In my research for this study, I did see an abundance of stories about snitches and snitching – poems too. If there is but one rule among prisoners, it is: You never snitch!

To me, however small or seemingly irrelevant this might seem, in the grander scope of prison writing, I believe the issue of snitching is an essential one to deeply consider. If reporting prison matters to authorities is so significant within the prison community, it is going to have impact on the prison writer.

The Criminality Curse

Naturally, I have had to face the unavoidable reality that incarceration, in and of itself, strips most anyone of a positive legacy or prospective contribution to the outside world. Like Mil and Marty state, prisoners owe it to their fellow inmates to make good use of their freedom, should they make it out, and not ruin it for the rest of them. However, Abbott’s criminal history, after his pardon, continues to loom over the prison writing narrative, and widely, to the outside, too.

Marty's hearty prison writing career spans 36 years. He was only 19 when in a drunken binge he misguidedly ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time. Long ago, I vowed to myself that I would not allow my participants' criminal backgrounds to impede my efforts in telling their stories, but for the most part, I have experienced the opposite; their stories of arrest and incarceration have mostly made me aware of the dramatic inequalities that exist in our judicial system – predominantly in the 1950's-1970's (when three of my co-authors were arrested and incarcerated, based on their ages and number of years inside), but also today to a slightly lesser degree. This truth about our country's legal system and the detrimental affects to my co-authors has only impacted my reasons for continuing in this research, and getting the narrative of prison writing and the stories of these writers out. While I am not incorporating stories about the criminal lives and circumstances surrounding the trials and sentences of prison writers, these issues are significantly tied into the narrative of prison writing, and this study – my metanarrative, each of my co-authors' narratives (chapter 4), and the prison writing narrative (chapter 5). How can they not be?

LeClair¹¹

Like Marty, LeClair was one of the first writers I read in the initial stages of my research. LeClair has published *Leaving Death Row* (2000), *Inside My Head* (2002), and *Where I'm Writing From* (2005). With LeClair's written consent to participate in this study, which came to me in November of 2014, I was both rejoicing and gleaming with excitement over the fact that he had written me to say: "Respectfully, I graciously acknowledge receipt of your letter," and am "pleased you have read my work," and "I am not at all opposed to aiding you in your research

¹¹ Pseudonym for prison writer who was a participant, but was later pulled, without explanation, from the institution's superintendent.

and quest to acquire a Ph.D. based upon the data and materiality of the subject matter imprisoned writers contribute.”

So when I got word from Joseph Tomkiel, Pennsylvania’s research manager, for the Department of Corrections (DOC), who guided me through the IRB process that is required of anyone conducting research in a Pennsylvania prison or of a Pennsylvania prisoner, that LeClair’s superintendent had chosen to deny permission to allow me to continue corresponding with LeClair, I was frustrated – to say the least. That being said, the superintendent’s disapproval of allowing my correspondence with LeClair, despite the fact that it is perfectly legal and allowed (according to Tomkiel and the DOC’s website), is a vitally important historical piece to the problem of the prison writing narrative; prison writers, even published prison writers, are still often silenced by authorities who may be over-exercising their power, but more than likely, feel the need to control the public exposure of those writers.

I remember thinking it weird that in his very first letter to me, after I had asked him in a correspondence if he could recommend any published prison writers for my research, LeClair (2014) wrote:

...and one of my favorite young writers named, [Tec¹²], author of several books, I showed your letter, enclosures, and I guess this part about the ‘...staff/personnel from your prison open and read all the incoming mail and some of your outgoing mail...’ spooked him. Because the prison is not supposed to read anyone’s outgoing mail unless he/she is being investigated for criminal wrongdoing, that there’s a ‘legitimate penological reason,’ for doing so – and this kid knows the PA. DOC considers me ‘High Profile,’ and tracks, monitors, disrupts, and illegally restricts my incoming/outgoing mail – and he might not want that unwanted scrutiny.

¹² Pseudonym.

He went on to say:

You see, Alva? I'm shocked to even have received your package – because this is the kind of project the prison administration (illegally) withholds and tampers with. Dig it? This is my reality.”

Sadly, some writers prefer to remain under the radar, and others are kept down illegally. Prison writers – their books can get published – but who mostly reads them? It is the general “free” public that superintendents may feel they need to protect. Perhaps they believe another great deception will occur, like in the Abbott case. In *Time Magazine*, Claudia Wolffs (1981) claimed that Mailer was publically criticized and accused of being so blinded by Abbott’s writing talent that he forgot about Abbott’s violent nature. Other accounts, similar to Cob’s and Mil’s, characterize Abbott as having been highly deceptive. If superintendents assume all prison writers are trying to be deceptive, this idea becomes another part of the poor legacy for the prison writing narrative. And this view can lead to prison superintendents feeling they need to prevent prison writers from becoming known to the outside world (discussed more in future chapters and with considering Mumia Abu-Jamal). Even the present research study required that I use pseudonyms for all participants, including those who are highly published. This was a requirement imposed by my university’s Internal Review Board because it views prisoners as a protected category of research participant. Although I tried to argue that prisoners should be given a choice of whether their full birth names are utilized or not, the IRB did not agree with my view, and so I acquiesced to their wishes and have used pseudonyms for all participants (co-authors, or the others who were hoping to take part). I found this disappointing and counter-productive to my efforts to value the prison writers’ voices, but all research projects involve some compromises. I believe there is a lurking legacy of keeping prisoners from getting too

famous, and most states have added laws to prevent media exposure of prisoners. The Abbot story, just as my co-authors claim, is a wretched legacy for them as writers.

Tina¹³

Fortunately, LeClair is the only willing prison writer participant who was prohibited from taking part in my study – that I can prove. I began with seven prison writers consenting to take part, and now conclude with four. Another of the writers I sought was Tina. She was willing to participate, but also unable. I include her story in this section because her legacy may have to speak for itself, which means, it will mostly go unheard, and that is an aspect of prison writing all prison writing researchers should hope to erase.

Three months after receiving all the required consent forms and her incredibly long list of creative achievements (as was requested of all the participants), and while waiting to receive her phase I essay, I finally got a half-torn piece of paper where Tina (2014) wrote to tell me:

Dear Alva,

I'm so sorry to have to tell you that I'm not going to be able to take part in your study. My health has become much worse and I am pretty much out of commission in all areas. I fear what the final outcome is going to be. I know you can't wait around to see if I'm going to get better, so I have to bow out. I would've really liked to have offered the female perspective, but right now I'm fighting for my life.

My best to you,

Tina

I would have really liked to have her female perspective, as well. What kind of *academic* legacy am I able to leave if I cannot include the voice of a female? In all my research, Tina appeared to be the most successful female prison writer alive today. I did not want just any

¹³ Pseudonym.

female perspective; I wanted hers. And like some of my other participants, the story of her arrest, unending proclamation of innocence, and incarceration, seem unjust and terribly unfair – especially by today’s legal standards. Tina has been in prison almost her entire life. Research abounds in informing us of how women’s sentences are generally far longer than men’s. Therefore, in this metanarrative of the hoped for legacy of this research project, not only do I *hope* to convince compositionists of the importance of including prison writers in their work, but I *hope* my plea will prompt specific studies of women prison writers. Tina, unfortunately, did not get to write her narrative or to present the female view of the prison writing narrative.

Prison Literature

What’s interesting to me is that during the same period of time (1970’s) when composition was shifting into a new paradigm of researching and teaching writing, prison writing workshops were flourishing. The academy had its theories and research, and the prison writing workshops had their mentors and safe learning communities. At that time (early 70’s), very few prison writers were actual authors of published books. Plus, the Abbott story had seemed to have crushed much of the spirit for giving prison writers a fair chance to publish. However, thanks to many concerned people and non-profit organizations, prison writers can find some options for assistance with publication.

While I have found that prison writing is a flourishing type of rehabilitation and therapy for the man or woman on the inside, I have also found that most of what is written by prisoners has not been read by the people outside. There are a great many organizations, editors, prison writing instructors, and other people and/or programs that publish prison writing in anthologies, magazines, journals, websites, newsletters, and through other publication companies today. Prizes are given to acclaimed works, and prison writing can be a notable enterprise for the few

who choose to do it. Yet, for the most part, prison literature continues to be poorly celebrated and vastly understudied. In this section, I share programs and publishing resources that sustain the prison writer and prison writing narrative. For the most part, unless a prison writer has a mentor or peer who provides him/her with these resources for putting their writing in print, they are bound to not find out about them. Prison libraries contain legal books and documents because they are mandated to do so, but resources for encouraging publication of writing is not as easily accessed.

There is no doubt, as it is clearly stated in the forewords and introductions to various anthologies and compilations of prison writers' works, prison writers can attain a sense of survival, or freedom, through their writing. Baca, in the Foreword to *Undoing Time* (2001), a well-known anthology of prison writing, states that, "writing changes both reader and writer and helps one to reflect and understand what happened" (p. ix). He says that he:

sensed that writing these narratives [the predominant genre of the anthology] became a creative way for these prisoners to reenter society. Because society wouldn't let them in, they invited society into their world. By doing so, they've become known men and women. And to become known by others is to have others acknowledge your existence and witness your life as a human being. (p. ix)

In addition, Baca (2001) mentions the darkness these men and women experience under indescribable abuse, and how "writing helped shatter the dissociative survival modes of their harrowing lives by breaking the routine pattern of obsessive repetition that their criminal activity represented" (p. ix).

Baca describes the act of writing as redemptive, and he claims that beyond the damaged spirits, a spark of life burns in the prison writer. Through writing, he says that prison writers

allow this vulnerable activity to strip them of the armor they grew accustomed to wearing, and gives them a place to communicate their humanity. Baca (2001) relates these words:

Writing helped these men and women figure out what happened. As one world led to another, the wasteland of their lives came into focus and made terrible sense. Their writing justifies them and the experiences they lived. As writers, they saw things differently because the words they wrote were unlike the words they usually used. When they wrote, they released feelings they had never allowed themselves to feel safe enough to express in any other environment. With their internal ears they heard their own stories being told as they would tell them. At this climactic crossroads, their journey became spiritual—they became meaningful human beings in a society that had branded them as nothing more than worthless criminals. (pp. xi-xii)

What Baca tells us is that the publishing companies and resources listed below are wonderfully valuable to prison writers and can act as motivators for others to learn to write well. Getting published is the high mark of incarceration. Therefore, another hoped for legacy of this metanarrative is that this list will serve the imprisoned. Here are six sub-sections of prison writing I have chosen to mention in this section: *Prison Narratives, Memoirs, and Essays*; *Poetry*; *Anthologies*; *Newspapers, Newsletters, and Magazines*; *Journals*; and *Websites, Programs, and Organizations*.

Prison Narratives, Memoirs, and Essays

There are many reasons why narratives are important to us as people. They expand our understanding of reality when told, and they deepen and widen our astuteness when read. Narratives cause us to relate, remember, consider, sympathize, and ponder. They free us to be teachers and allow others to learn something from our lives.

Memoirs and personal essays are quite the same; they are narrated by prisoners who have a need to make sense of their lives. For this prison writing metanarrative, I have come to find that narratives, memoirs, and essays make up one genre of prison writing that help us further our understanding of the prison writer and the prison writing story. Other than poetry, narratives comprise the majority of prison writing literature.

Many high school and college students have Malcolm X's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Martin Luther King's *Letter From Birmingham Jail* as required reading. These two famous prison narratives undoubtedly contribute to our field of composition, other schools of study, and perhaps to the entire academy of learning, but so many other prison narratives have since been published that have remained outside the academic writing classroom; in fact, the additional prison publications seem to stay mostly inside prisons. And what about all the prison narratives that have been destroyed by the prison-industrial complex?

Next, I will discuss the most prolific form of prison writing, according to the prison writing instructors I have studied and read.

Poetry

Not having formerly studied poetry, or ever really having chosen to write it, and never gaining much of an interest for it, I suffer the consequences in this study as some of my participants are outstanding poets and I am unable to fully recognize them for their creative writing talents. Poetry abounds behind bars, like narratives and memoirs. In fact, most of the prison writers who have made names for themselves began with poetry publications. Here is one that through my reading and research studies of prison writing and prison writers, I was called to listen to and share. The poem comes from the article "Speaking Out for Social Justice: The

Problems and Possibilities of U.S. Women’s Prison and Jail Writing Workshops,” by Tobi Jacobi (2010). The poem is by Alice¹⁴:

Listen Up!

I was born crying to this world
I want to be heard, Here I
Am see me. Not the shadow
Standing next to you. The person,
The individual, sister, friend,
Mother, daughter. I am all of
These things and more.

Be still and quietly observe.
You can see me if you only
Pause briefly. Allow your
Mind, body, and spirit to
Settle. You will see me, hear
Me. When you are ready I
Will be silent no more.
Search within yourself for the
Calm purposeful drive and
Listen. The moments of life
Are full of inspiration.
Just listen.

I do not know if this poem is considered good. I am really trying to understand these men and women through *all* their writing, but in reading the first few pages of the article, with all the statistics of women entering prison with sad and abusive histories, and then coming across this poem, I felt that I must listen. I also feel that other compositionists should listen. The line that reads, “When you are ready I Will be silent no more,” caused me to draw on one singular reality – I am ready.

If my research project does anything, aside from giving a few prison writers another published place in which to be heard, I hope it inspires compositionists to also become ready, so that not only Alice, but other prison writers will have a chance to be heard.

¹⁴ This is the pseudonym that was used for her in the article.

While many prison writers compile poems in hopes of publishing a poetry chap book, some compose poems as a hobby (to add to their collection), for money, for cigarettes, for their loved ones, or to pass the time. Therefore, publishing a compilation of poems is a great accomplishment for a prison writer; however, very few are able to do it. Their greatest hope is to have one prized poem make it into an article, magazine, prison newspaper, or anthology. Both Jon and Mil are considered successful poets who have been widely published and acknowledged for their poetry, as well as their other writings.

Anthologies

Poets, Playwrights, Essayists, Editors & Novelists (PEN) is an international organization with centers all over the world. PEN America is one of these centers, and they have three branches. The organization was the first worldwide association of writers, started in 1921, to present literature and freedom of expression as inseparable. They claim:

PEN has grappled with the challenges to literature and freedom for nearly one troubled century, beginning just after World War I to the buildup and eruption of World War II, then throughout the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union and into today's more nuanced climate worldwide. It has responded to modern history's most dramatic turns, and its heroes have included the most celebrated intellectuals of each era as well as countless tireless and dedicated members fighting to ensure that the right to write, speak, read and publish is forever at the heart of world culture. (PEN.org)

This is why the PEN Prison Writing Program is the most significant one of its kind in the world. PEN draws prison writers in with an annual writing contest that publishes the works of those who are incarcerated in America in an anthology. This anthology is the most well-known compilation of prized prison writing in this country, and the most successful prison writers know

it. They also know about PEN's *Handbook for Writers in Prison*, which features detailed guides on how to write fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and screenplays. The handbook is free, and PEN delivers more than a thousand each year to writers in American prisons.

In addition to the annual writing contest, the PEN Prison Writing Program has also put out anthologies of the best pieces written by prison writers in twenty-five-year periods – a sort of anthology of anthologies. *Doing Time*, published in 1999, is one anthology that has the works of some of the writers I know – my co-authors/participants and many of the other writers identified in this metanarrative.

While PEN's powerful influence is present in the prison publishing process, so are men (Lamb, Jeff Evans, and others) and women (Bell Gale Chevigny) who volunteer their time and diligence to teaching writing and helping their students' voices be heard by editing and overseeing publications of anthologies and chapbooks. Perhaps as an addition to PEN's 1999 *Doing Time*, Jeff Evans (2001) published his own anthology of great works since the 1970's. His anthology is named *Undoing Time*.

Another anthology, edited by Bob Gaucher (2002), titled *Writing as Resistance*, which is a compilation of selected articles from *The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, also contains the work of some of the prison writers named in this metanarrative. It contains what Gaucher considers to be some of the best prison writing from the years of 1988-2002.

Others, like Shelton, Lamberton, and Tannenbaum, incorporate many of their students' writing pieces in their own publications, newsletters, magazines, and/or newspapers – much like anthologies. However, to a large extent, anthologies are few in the subject of prison writing, especially now. The same goes for printed newspapers, newsletters, magazines, and journals (the

next two sections). With less funding for such work, fewer publications like these are completed and distributed today.

Newspapers, Newsletters, and Magazines

Over the years, as arts in corrections have flourished and provided increased opportunities for prison writers to take classes and participate in workshops, and then as these courses, programs and/or offerings have vanished or been removed, a number of prison publications (written by prisoners) have come and gone, but a few remain. The following list comprises those that have gained a credible reputation from the early 1970's, until the present:

Newspapers

- Fortune News
- The Razor Wire
- Angolite
- San Quentin News

Newsletters

- Prison Legal News
- Prison Dharma Network
- PEN Writers Newsletter
- Prison Ministry
- Winning Writers Newsletter
- California Prison Focus
- Lincoln Prison Newsletter
- Walking Rain Review
- Highly Flavored Ministry Newsletter
- Let's Talk
- Someone Cares Prison Ministry
- NEAR Newsletter
- Newsletter in a Prison Setting

Magazines

- *Prison Break*
- *Corrections Magazine*

Journals

A few journals written by prisoners do exist: *Joint Conference*, *Sentences*, *Speak Out! Journal*, and *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*. These publications offer insights into prison life, the prison system, the political aspects of sentencing, appeals, rulings, and a number of other prison-related topics. These journals also provide insight into the prison writing life because it is prison writers who contribute to them.

As the winds of change in prison policy have come and gone, these types of journals are most useful in better understanding some of the climate issues prisoners have had to face over the years, and how the various atmospheres have altered and affected prison writers and prison writing. For the prisoner, these journals provide an opportunity to stay in the know about what is happening in prisons around the country.

Finally, as funding for education behind bars diminishes, we see less and less support of the prison writer. That means fewer websites, programs, and organizations.

Websites, Programs, and Organizations

Shelton, Tannenbaum, and Lamb have seen programs come and go, like prisoners who have been in prison since the early 1970's when the initial boom of reformatory agendas were established. While PEN has had the longest standing influence in prison literature, there are certainly others that advocate prison writing. Here are the ones I have found:

- Prison Talk (www.prisontalk.com)
- The Pennsylvania Prison Society (www.prisonsociety.org)
- PEN (Poets, Playwrights, Essayists, Editors & Novelists - www.pen.org)
- Women and Prison (www.womenandprison.org)
- Arts-in-Corrections
- Art in Other Places
- PEN Prison Writing Program (annual writing contest, mentorship, free publication)
- PSCE (Post-Secondary Correctional Education)
- Arts Council

Prison literature, despite the lack of support or inclusion from our field of composition, has made quite a firm history and foundation for itself. There is a solid legacy that has been established through the men and women writers who have paved the way for those entering this group, and my study is attempting to highlight that legacy by briefly presenting some of the genres, organizations, books, publications, and other resources that have aided in the development of prison literature. Additionally, with this research project, I am hoping to see more programs and research added to the narrative of prison writing, as my fellow compositionists embrace these writers and their specialized group as part of their own.

Final Words

With help from my co-authors, I have narrated how I got started and entered, and became nested in this prison writing research project. I have also shown how my research has been sustained, mostly by the participants who have shown me just how eager they are to do this writing with me, but also because of the mentors I have had along the way. Great prison writers of American history are also credited with being pivotal players in sustaining this metanarrative; the themes in their lives, and the stories of their lives, may be forgotten by many, but their stories are carried by prison writers and those who enter their writing. Lastly, I tried to show how this research is my academic legacy, by pleading with compositionists to join me in supporting this community of writers – to help me tell some of the story of the prison writing narrative.

CHAPTER 3

THE SETTING, OR METHODOLOGY

Narrative theory builds on a spirit of collaboration, taking as a central premise that we need to exchange stories with each other in order to make sense of our worlds.

(Pagnucci)¹⁵

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (Burke)¹⁶

Introduction

We have all heard: learn from others' mistakes. That means that we would have to hear, or read, the story of another's mistake in order to generate some form of learning, so as to avoid repeating the mistake, or failing in a similar way. Regardless, some people do not learn from hearing or reading the stories of others' mistakes; I am guilty of that. Most of us must learn for ourselves, through our own experiences.

¹⁵ Taken from *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making* (2004, p. 3).

¹⁶ Taken from the "Unending Conversation" Metaphor (named the Burkean parlor) in *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (1967, pp. 110-111).

I enjoy reading and hearing stories, and I understand them and do learn from them. I think studying stories as the core to critical thinking and learning (for the B.A. in English), years of teaching students to love and honor stories (being a middle school and high school English and Journalism teacher), and learning methods of engaging students with stories so that they can learn valuable lessons from them, like how to avoid mistakes, for example, (taking courses towards a secondary English credential), have all transformed my appreciation for the influence of stories. However, like Pagnucci (2004), I ascribe to the belief that “Our use of stories from such an early age shows that the drive to narrate experience is, if not instinctive, then at the very least quintessentially human” (p. 41). I cannot explain how I was unable to first see this research as best composed as a narrative, considering each of the personal stories that occurred to bring this study together, in addition to the abundance of narratives within prison writing, but perhaps I was not thinking instinctively. Perhaps I was more centered on the practice of being scholarly. Perhaps, I was not being quintessentially human.

“Bring two people together, and they will soon be telling stories. A child on her grandmother’s lap. Two men in a fishing boat. Strangers stuck another hour in an airport” (Eldredge, 2004, p. 4). It is natural – perfectly instinctive and human. In coming together with prison writers, introducing them to composition, stories are so very adequate for that relational beginning to occur. In *Epic*, John Eldredge (2004) continues:

Look at our fixation with the news. Every morning and every evening, in every part of the globe, billions of people read a paper or tune in to the news. Why? Because we humans have this craving for meaning—for the rest of the story. We need to know what’s going on.

Our boys are ambushed somewhere in Asia. What's happening over there? A virus is rampaging on the Internet. What do we need to do to protect ourselves? Somehow we don't feel as lost if we know what's going on around us. We want to feel oriented to our world. When we turn on the news, we are tuning in to a world of stories. Not just fact—stories.

Story is the language of the heart. (pp. 4-5)

Eldredge tells us that this great fascination with stories, considering the thriving movie industry, “goes far deeper than entertainment;” he says that “Stories nourish us. They provide a kind of food that the soul craves” (p. 5). And in this little book, Eldredge references screenwriting teacher Robert McKee as having said: “Stories are equipment for living” (p. 5). We go to the movies because “we hope to find in someone else's story something that will help us understand our own” (p. 5).

As a young girl, I liked to read. I was engaged in reading, but could I have told you why, beyond my fascinations and interests in the plots, characters, or intriguing settings of a story? I doubt it. Today I see stories beyond their ability to engage my time or thoughts. I see stories as learning devices, along with metacognition (as explained in chapter 1). I read differently, and I listen differently. I would like to say that I am at least somewhat more capable of learning from others' mistakes because of other people's stories. When a story (the plethora of fragmented bits and/or wholes) criss-crosses my knowing, and for those moments when I hear and/or read those bits, I recognize and receive the stories, letting them register as meaningful to my life, whether temporary or carried around for a long time. Chances are those story bits affect and alter what I have already learned. They enhance and advance my thinking, or theories, to solidify and prove, or to disprove and cause my reasoning to be modified – for me to venture backwards and

forwards to varying times, and in and out of spaces and landscapes. This is how stories can offer 3D meaning making opportunities. And occasionally, stories present something altogether new, or at least somewhat novel. Yet, I have not always considered narratives to affect my learning in the way that they currently do, and more importantly, I speculate as to whether my co-authors and other prison writers meta-cognitively see the stories the way that Pagnucci, Clandinin, Connelly, Eldredge, myself, and so many others do – as 3D meaning making tools for processing learning. I imagine they do.

The main purpose of this metanarrative research study is to introduce the prison writer to the field of composition by using a narrative inquiry method. I want compositionists to learn and hear from prison writers – using the stories from within, as learning tools. I want prison writers to join in our conversations about writing and to contribute to the various discussions we have. However, I consider this project to be twofold. As much as I want to introduce my co-authors and all other prison writers to the field of composition, I also hope to introduce composition to prison writers. I want them to become united with us in telling the longer-term historical narrative of the field of rhetoric and composition. Because, like I said in chapter 1, composition's narrative is incomplete; it has gaps. One of these gaps is the contribution of writers living behind bars. Additionally, composition's longer-term historical narrative, like the narrative of all academic disciplines and fields, is easily understood (for me, at least) by the example of the Burkean parlor quoted at the beginning of this chapter in that when we enter the conversation, we only hear bits and pieces and only contribute bits and pieces. The full narrative is not grasped by the individual. Each of us has our own sociocultural experiences we bring into the parlor. By incorporating prison writing, and inviting prison writers into the discussion, and thereby into the

parlor of the field (to which they already belong, essentially), we impact the grand historical narrative of composition.

Therefore, in this chapter, I begin with a brief narrative of one of the conversations within composition, and the one in which this metanarrative is nested – narrative inquiry. I give a condensed and highlighted history of this methodology, and show how a number of texts became points of contact for me, partly out of chance and personal predilection, but also due to my teaching and academic (being a student) experiences. This first section of this chapter is named: *Narrative Inquiry*. Then, I explain the structure of this dissertation and why it is arranged and set up the way that it is, while also explaining the types of texts (data) that are utilized; I have simply titled this section, *Textual Structure*. Next, I give the details behind my selection of co-authors, and the process of gaining the required clearances and permissions from each of the sites where the co-authors are located. I call this section *Selection and Sites*. I develop the explanation of the data collection and the three phases next; this section is called *Collecting Field Texts*. In the next section, *Interpretive Analysis*, I discuss the manner in which I make sense of the documents I have collected and obtained. Then, I present the issue of reflexivity and journal keeping as the methods for how I intend to keep this research credible, naming the section *Credibility*. I next discuss the protection efforts I have taken to ensure that my co-authors are not subjected to any harm by participating in this research. This section is called *Protections*. I then have sections on *Confidentiality* and *Limitations* before ending the chapter with some *Final Words*, and a brief *Summary* of the chapter.

Narrative Inquiry

Returning to the metacognitive manner of learning, which pervaded the outcomes of my credentialing and graduate courses, as I both taught and studied pedagogy and composition

simultaneously, I was introduced to the Burkean parlor concept early in my studies. Naturally, I shared the metaphorical narrative with the students I had at that time, and later I chose to present it at the beginning of almost all the college composition courses I taught. To me, nothing made better sense in understanding academic discourse than that little story. It elucidated most of the confusion I frequently seemed to have when I had to write papers for my composition graduate classes, and it connected my teaching and graduate study work to that meta-awareness I was espousing in all my experiences as a teacher and graduate student.

Upon transitioning from a study of prison writers' composing processes, to a narrative inquiry of them and of prison writing, I reviewed Burke's parlor with a different lens. The metaphor that may have singlehandedly connected me to my field and fellow academes, back when I sat in Bamberg's class, advanced my understanding of discourse in not only the recognition of what the short narrative was saying, but how it was saying it. Burke's metaphor, a mini tale in narrative form, celebrated the ideology of the story. In that short description of some people in a parlor (ourselves being one of them), we gain an ontological, visual experience that connects us with knowing what it is like to be a participant of a longer-term historical narrative space. The parlor frees us from being subject to a banking concept, because in here we are able to speak, and anyone can enter. There are no guards at the doors, or are there?

My co-authors unearth a particular type of pleasure in composing and constructing stories from within their hostile surroundings. They can contribute to the discourse in ways that others cannot because their writing experiences are vastly different than most people's. No doubt their persistence and tenacity comes from the cognitive benefits (among other benefits) they gain from working through all the barbed wires that prevent them from writing. However, I wonder if prison writers share the same belief as I, that narrative is an *ideology* – a manner by which

meaning is constructed and/or co-constructed. Since most people's personal histories and writing lives are so dissimilar from prison writers', I would like to know how prison writers weigh in on narrative as ideology. This is a topic for future study. However, we would first need to work at removing any guards that may be waiting at the parlor to exclude the prison writers' voices from being heard. If prison writers manage to fight the battles to write and get beyond the barbed wire, with extensive publications in major newspapers, magazines, journals, and books, then in my opinion, they should not have to push to get into the parlor too. They are in essence already in, but the rest of us are refusing to listen, to learn from them, when they speak.

In Pagnucci's (2004) book, he references and quotes Kieran Egan (1979) from *Educational Development*, as having defined ideology, from a philosophical understanding, and positing, "The philosophic craving for generality is the means whereby chaotic particular knowledge about the world is reduced to manageable proportions" (p. 44). Pagnucci (2004) then suggests, that "in a sense, we have to develop some sort of structure to organize all the random stories of our lives" (p. 44), and he later states, "I wish merely to argue that one's ideology can be focused on a narrative understanding of the world, that one can make the telling and hearing of stories a central part of one's agenda, a central goal that drives one to act in particular ways" (pp. 45-46). Pagnucci also references David Schaafsma (p. 48), and states that "from a narrative perspective, isolated facts and numbers are not enough to explain the world. Instead, we wish for thick stories that capture events in their full detail." He says that we use narratives to make interpretations of this passing world, but the interpretation is but one of many. Later in this chapter, I talk more about this advantage of narrative inquiry.

I agree with Schaafsma, and I believe narratives are more gratifying – more useful, even – than I did prior to the summer of 2007, when I took Pagnucci's narrative research class. I now

have eyes and ears to see and hear stories everywhere – in everything. To me, stories are one of the structures for how I organize all the random events of my life. For my co-authors, it seems that they may be in a place of having to keep certain stories at the forefront of their lives, particularly the ones that shed light on their current circumstances. From those stories, they are then somewhat forced to restructure and/or shape all new stories, according to how they align with the more prominent ones that remain at the forefront (for example, the stories surrounding how they became incarcerated). It is no different with us, really. Major life events (marriage, childbirth, deaths, etc.) tend to serve as anchors to the construction and re-construction of past, present, and future stories; they take us on that 3D journey. The meta-awareness of how narratives can guide the meaning making process of how we can make sense of our lives and world, embodies the ideological ideal – at least narrative inquirers seem to think so.

When I took Pagnucci’s narrative research class in the summer of 2007, the notion of living a narrative life did not register right away for me. Narrative became an application into how else I could learn and teach. I had mostly seen the way I gathered new learning and progressed my thinking as being metacognitive. So as I became *aware* of the stories in my life and classroom, not just the literary ones my students and I read in our English classes, but the ones happening in and around me, and how these stories naturally wove one into the other, I began to adopt a more narrative way of life – personally and professionally. Clandinin and Connelly’s three-dimensional framework began amending my “meta” approaches to learning and thinking about my career and life experiences.

At the time that Pagnucci (2004) wrote *Living the Narrative Life*, and I begin with Pagnucci’s work for obvious *metanarrative* reasons, he was informing us that the thought among some scholars at the time was that there was a turn to narrative, since academic paradigms had

shifted. The scholars of the late 1990's and early 2000's (Gannett, 1999; Dhunpath, 2000; and Clandinin and Connelley, 1999, 2000), as Pagnucci (2004) claims, were "offering visions of a growing narrative movement" (p. 1). Others, (Gannett, 1999; Gillett and Beer, 1999; Dhunpath, 2000) claimed there was widespread acceptance and proliferation of students, teachers, writers, and scholars producing narratives, to the point that they seemed to abound. Yet, Pagnucci (2004) stated, "I remain, in the end, unconvinced that any real narrative turn has taken place" (p. 1). Instead, he finds "entrenched anti-narrative views" that "continue to make aligning oneself with the narrative camp a troubling prospect" (p. 1). In *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*, we find that Clandinin (2007) states, "To this day, most academic work is non-narrative, and in many disciplines the most prominent theories, methods, and practitioners continue to do work that is based on quantitative data and positivist assumptions about cause, effect, and proof" (p. 14). So why the negative rap? It was back in 1990 when Connelly and Clandinin first used the term *narrative inquiry* and gave a definition of it in "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry." Much work has been done since then. Why no serious turn toward narratives? That conversation is happening in the parlor, but not by me.

In modeling the narrative life, Pagnucci (2004) carefully uses a blending of story, poem, and theory to: "challenge the status quo (p. 1);" to celebrate narrative "as a tool for meaning making (p. 2);" to "add weight to the argument that essayistic literacy is not the exclusive means by which one can create knowledge in the world (p. 2);" to "offer an artistic experience for readers (p. 3);" and to "lend support to those who desire to do narrative research and to use narrative methods" (2004, pp. 1-2). Pagnucci includes stories, poems, essays (which include narratives), and collages (with insights, ideas, and quotes), which works to give texture to his use of narrative form in the demonstration of living the narrative life. He says that he seeks "to

challenge the exclusion of any stories from the work of education” and that the variety offers readers a chance to resonate with the work in their own ways, which strengthens the meaning making theory of narrative inquiry (p. 4). That, too, is what I aim to do.

Therefore, in Pagnucci’s 2007 class, narrative living entered my thinking meta-cognitively – first, relationally, from having him as my instructor and being able to read and study his important work in the field of narrative, as well as the texts from other scholars in the narrative inquiry camp (which I had not previously done in my academic studies elsewhere – ironically), but secondly, because I was nested in narratives, and I now knew it. But aren’t we all, whether we know it, or not?

Yet, narrative inquiry has a narrative of its own, which clearly began prior to 2007, or Pagnucci’s 2004 book. In Clandinin’s (2007) handbook of narrative inquiry, a study of the history of narrative research and methodology (how it got its start) revealed that various disciplines had turned toward narrative inquiry throughout the academic landscape. From a number of published works by those throughout the scholarly landscape conducting narrative inquiries, four themes (turns, as Clandinin calls them) were identified. The term she uses, *turn*, is also defined as a change in direction from one way of thinking or being, toward another way of thinking or being. This is much like what happened to me in the summer of 2007 – after having attended Pagnucci’s narrative inquiry class, and then having returned to California to see myself in a sea of stories; I began turning towards a narrative life, and a narrative ideology.

With the presence of these turns, which can happen immediately, or over a period of time, to an individual, a community, or a discipline, and in any order, the journey begins the movement towards narrative inquiry. The four turns Clandinin identifies in her research of narrative inquiry are: a change in the relationships between researcher and the researched; a

move from the use of numbers toward using words as data; a change from a focus on the general and universal, to the local and specific; and a widening in acceptance of alternative epistemologies (ways of knowing). Then, with these turns *to* narrative inquiry, Clandinin also points to the philosophical turns *from*: reliability; objectivity; generalizability; and positivistic conception of validity. In other words, there is more room for interpretation, and less for positivism. Knowing becomes relational and experiential. There is more intimacy with the phenomena and less dependence on the quantifiable. Researchers enter the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. This is what I hope my co-authors will do. Then, they can get into the parlor – moving from one kind of publication, to the *other*.

Getting back to how narrative inquiry got started, I begin in 1990 with, *The Journal of Narrative and Life History* as it was first published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, with editor, Allyssa McCabe (1990) and associate editor Michael Bamberg (1990). This journal put out seven volumes from the years of 1990-1997, with topics covering: remembering and telling stories; oral histories; linguistic approaches to narrative; narrative genres; narrative theory; children's stories (their uses and meanings); the development of a life story; narrative style, structure, and form; conceptualization via narrative; the role of self in narrative (Donald E. Polkinghorne; Bamberg); gender and emotion in story; co-narration; the rumination effects on story; learning to retell; acts of meaning in narrative (Jerome Bruner); narrativity in ethnography; narrative related book reviews; and other narrative related topics. This journal presented proof that there had been a paradigm shift in research methods (thus providing the sustaining force for narrative inquiry).

Also in 1990, cognitive psychologist, Jerome Bruner (known for his 1956 work, *A Study of Thinking*) became more of an influence in the progression of narrative theory research as a

series of his lectures was published in the book *Acts of Meaning*. His lectures made a sharp turn towards a holistic understanding of the mind, and he wrote and studied the development of a theory on narrative construction. *Critical Inquiry* published Bruner's (1991) article, "The Narrative Construction of Reality." In 2003, Bruner's book *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* was published. Some of his works in the 1980s were included in Clandinin's (2007) *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*.

In 1996, Richard J. Meyer wrote *Stories From the Heart: Teachers and Students Researching Their Literacy Lives*. In 1997, Joseph F. Trimmer edited *Narration as Knowledge: Tales of the Teaching Life*. These two books were also required reading in Pagnucci's class that summer in 2007, and both took the same approach as Pagnucci in that the books were not written in the typical form of the privileged academic discourse, but instead, explored the usage of storytelling devices to demonstrate how daily information, especially in a classroom, is understood through subtle assumptions and slippery assertions. By exercising narrative, the authors attempt to recapture moments, themes, people, and other elements that allow readers the opportunity to find understanding amidst the vulnerability of the stories that can only partially show nuances of life experiences. And as I remember, when I returned to work after that summer in Pagnucci's class, I chose to encourage more narrative writing in my students, using some of the stories in these books (as well as passages from Pagnucci's 2004 book), as models for them to consider. I had been teaching freshman composition courses for a while, but also, I worked alongside other adjuncts and professors in our writing across the curriculum program at Pasadena City College in California. For many of my students, a narrative form was fun and enjoyable to write, just as it was for me in Pagnucci's class; that does not mean it was easier. In a number of ways, it presented a bigger challenge, especially in the selection and motive behind the writing,

for meaning making. Yet, it is this dissertation that has established itself as the most challenging of all writing tasks I have sought to complete – a narrative within a narrative (a metanarrative).

In 1998, *The Journal of Narrative and Life History* was renamed *Narrative Inquiry*, and continued to publish nearly 300-paged issues each year, until 2003, when the journal started to publish two volumes each year. It continues to publish at this rate today. The journal's stated goal is to establish a forum for theoretical, empirical, and methodological work in narrative inquiry. Articles that appear in the journal are said to “draw upon a variety of approaches and methodologies in the study of narrative as a way to give contour to experience and life, conceptualize and preserve memories, or hand down experience, tradition, and values to future generations;” however, the main aim of the journal is to place emphasis on theoretical approaches to “narrative and the analysis of narratives in human interaction, including those practiced by researchers” (<http://www.clarku.edu/~mbamberg/narrativeINQ/>). The journal keeps with their aim, and continues to be a viable resource for those interested in furthering narrative theory, or those, like myself, utilizing narrative methodology and form.

Then, D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2000) published *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, perhaps the most seminal book in the field of narrative research. Their work, based originally on educational research studies and the strong influence of John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy of experience, is where their three-dimensional (3D) narrative inquiry space of experiences (temporally, spatially, and personally/socially), originates. This superlative text was also assigned reading in Pagnucci's narrative inquiry class in 2007, and has supremely guided my work in conducting this study and writing this document in 3D.

Without Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and their vital work in narrative inquiry, which they have continued to further develop and discuss academically (with several other publications), the narrative discussion would not be as lively as it is today; their work has genuinely furthered the field. The *Narrative Inquiry* journal includes articles written by scholars and students in each of the major disciplines of study in academia, and narrative inquiry articles are found in almost all academic journals across the disciplines, and most of them reference Clandinin and Connelly. Unfortunately, however, it does not seem that the journals composition scholars submit papers to, are utilizing narrative form. Narrative inquiry, as methodology, is present, and the theoretical research in the field has drawn more discussions about the topic into the parlor, but the form of most composition journals does not include narrative and is, to some extent, anti-narrative.

However, there are ongoing arguments for narratives. Specifically, “The Politics of the Personal: Storying Our Lives Against the Grain” was published in *College English* in 2001 (Brandt, Cushman, Gere, Herrington, Miller, Villanueva, Lu, and Kirsch). There is Candace Spigelman’s text, *Personally Speaking: Experience as Evidence in Academic Discourse* (2004), which notes narrative arguments as needing to be intended to move learning beyond expression or opinion, catharsis or confession. Instead, Spigelman (2004) argues, narrative inquiry is to be decidedly purposeful. It serves to do something academically – celebrate, shape, frame, and thicken the narrative of the field. *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative* is yet another work that pushes for a turn toward narrative research, methodology, and form; its author, Robert Nash (2004), and his call to liberate scholarly writing is discussed a bit later.

Then there is *Narrative Interaction*, one of a series of nearly annual books published by John Benjamins Publishing Company, which is the same publisher for *Narrative Inquiry* journal

and *The Journal of Narrative and Life History*. *Narrative Interaction* is edited by Uta M. Quasthoff and Tabea Becker (2005), and its articles illuminate narration as “a specific kind of function-bound” interaction, governed by “contextualizing devices, genre-specific sequential regularities and corresponding verbal features” that demonstrate an interactive reality (p. xi). The book also explores the nuances and methods for the co-construction of narratives, which has also been gaining interest in the social sciences. For me, I could not see a narrative inquiry of prison writing, without co-writing the narrative with prison writers. It is their narrative to tell, and our tale to retell.

Also in 2005, Anna De Fina, Michael Bamberg, and Deborah Schiffrin edited *Narratives in Interactions: Identities & Selves*. This text presented more understanding into the ideas and theories of other narrative inquirers (Frosh, 2002; and Freeman, 2003) on identity and difference in narrative.

Bamberg (2007) wrote *Narrative – State of the Art*, and a year later in 2008, *Narrative Methods* was published, written by Catherine Kohler Riessman. Gubrium and Holsteins (2009) wrote on narrative analysis and text-based social practice of constructing meaning through identity – pulling from previous discussions by Bamberg. Also in 2009, David Herman sought to capture the expansiveness of the term *narrative* in his book, *Basic Elements of Narrative* – also characterizing narrative as a cognitive structure and resource for making sense, through text.

Then, David Schaafsma and Ruth Vinz (2011), two compositionists wrote, *On Narrative Inquiry: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research*. This text seemed to preserve or reemphasize (sustain) narrative inquiry in composition at a time when perhaps the method was becoming too loosely understood, and most widely used outside composition. In this book, not only do the authors utilize narrative frameworks to explicate the theory and practice of narrative

inquiry, but they attempt to bring provisional clarity to narrative research by further identifying how one locates story strands, how one maintains subjectivity as a narrative researcher, and how one must set out to plan and best select the strands for crafting the story or stories within the structure of the narrative research. In this text, the authors also contend that while their focus is on refining the understanding of narrative inquiry, there is still no consensus of its academic utilization throughout academia.

Schaafsma and Vinz (2011) posit four aspects of narrative inquiry; these are: a.) research that makes the puzzles of the mind more visible through framings, evidences, stances, theories, and questions; b.) research that seems to challenge the very questions, answers, theories, and outcomes it presents; c.) research that grapples with the issues of responsibility, power, relations, and ethics as it attempts to strengthen the relevance of co-cognitive learning; and d.) research that continues to redefine the theories and methods of research. In addition, Schaafsma and Vinz state that as narrative inquirers, while we set out to decide what goes into the narrative research document, we also create room for salience or the prominent features of our research that seemingly stay with us, or stick out, incompleteness (the gaps and loose ends that seem to be missing within the narrative), and patterns, or emphasis, which seem to allow focalization of the stories. And like some other narrative research theorists, utilizing narrative form, they generate evidence of research being an in-process path, versus a final answer/piece of proof document. They do this by portraying open-ended and generative stories, which I also intend to do with distributing the authorial power to my co-authors, as I strive to situate their writing within this narrative inquiry study.

Since Schaafsma and Vinz's 2011 book, it seems that the majority of contemporary narrative work blossoms from the field of Education, and narrative research theories tend to

shape the curriculum of the classroom (sustaining the field), but not the writing form of academic papers and texts. Two examples of such work are: Sheila Trahar's (2011) *Learning and Teaching Narrative Inquiry: Travelling in the Borderlands*; and *Narrative Inquiries Into Curriculum-making in Teacher Education*, by a collaboration of educators (Pushor, Parker, Ciuffetelli, and Kitchen; 2011). On the contrary, there is another educator publishing books on the use of narratives and stories in the classroom that seems to have no desire to write about narrative inquiry theories, but continues to compose his texts in narrative form.

Baca, an ex-prison writer I reference in chapter 2, finds life's meanings from storied lives; narratives and creative writing/expressive writing frame the very method by which he lives, writes, and teaches. I would certainly say he is living the narrative life. In chapter 2, I mentioned the pedagogical use of stories in Baca's philosophy of teaching – by way of referencing his two books on the subject (*Adolescents on the Edge* and *Feeding the Roots of Self-Expression and Freedom*), which are also written in narrative form. They move inward and outward, backward and forward. They are in 3D, and they are multilayered, many stranded, nested, and beautifully textured. However, are either of his books discussed in the parlor? There are individuals and communities who seem to be making a turn toward narrative pedagogy and form, but like my co-authors and Baca (who teach or have taught behind bars, and embrace the narrative life), their voices are kept out of the parlor.

Today, this academic contribution (my dissertation) is not only of a different context (no longer a study of process), but it is of a discourse that is far more complex and oftentimes messy. It is gossiped about in the parlor, and mostly avoided altogether as a consideration for theoretical research or methodology, but certainly discouraged as a form for academic writing. After years of graduate studies and post-graduate work, new narrative inquiry students might fear doing what

Pagnucci (2004) suggests narrative inquirers do – “capture this spirit of fluidity, motion, chaos, this mass of voices all talking together, like waves crashing into each other” (p. 3). There is a sense of fear because after all those years of scholarly study, narratives are rarely seen in academic work.

Clearly there are many tensions, borders, and boundaries we narrative inquirers face when we begin to live the narrative life, and we should always take such matters into account as we construct and co-construct narratives, or guide others through the writing of them, but let us always remember that narrative inquiry is a worthy and valuable ideology. It empowers narrators, invigorates thinkers, changes the status quo, alters discourses, and strengthens the academy, even if it instigates arguments among those who are firmly positioned in the parlor.

Narratives are supposed to offer perspectives and insights that may not be made available to us through other research methods. Narrative inquiry is meant to illuminate and bring readers to a rumination of the experiences surrounding a particular phenomenon, or problem. As Nash (2004) points out, narratives are inviting to a larger number of voices for joining academic conversations (to which, everyone should be a part of); “folks who don’t inhabit the university space; who don’t speak [our] professional discipline’s highly technical language” can contribute in their own manner of speaking, which makes sense to the majority, anyway (p. 148). Nash goes on to say that narrative inquiry allows us to share our academic experiences with our “family and friends in a jargon-free style so that they might be able to understand and appreciate” the kind of work we do in those ivory towers (p. 142). However, as Nash’s argument continues, it sadly seems that the point-of-view from atop those towers is that, “writing for a lay public is seen as a debasement of genuine scholarship” (p. 143).

One thing we have to try and consider – what I am proposing we consider – is that with giving not only the lay public, but writers behind bars a seat in the parlor, we are helping to change false and oftentimes terribly cruel narratives that permeate the world. We, as narrative inquirers, can establish a potentially positive legacy for all writers and groups of writers. Prison writers and prison writing have narratives that are vastly conflicting with the one that is painted by popular media and politics. Should not our mission, as compositionists be: include the writing of all periods, all places, and all people? We must fully embrace the 3D landscape in which we, compositionists, are nested.

Textual Structure

“Field texts need to be reconstructed as research texts” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 130). But in narrative inquiry, what are field texts? As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) simply state, they are “the texts of which we ask questions of meaning and social significance” (p. 130). They come in many forms, are normally called data or records, but are neither found nor discovered; they are created. The participants and researchers are the creators, and the texts represent the nuances of the field experience. During the gathering and collecting of these texts, the researcher needs to continue to be mindful of the 3D narrative inquiry space. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) illustrate, there are various field texts that can be used. Here are some of the ones they showed being employed by one researcher: stories; autobiographical writing; journal writing; field notes; letters; conversation; research interviews; family stories; documents; photographs; memory boxes; personal, family, and/or social artifacts; and even life experiences. In this inquiry, these are the field texts we (my co-authors and I) will be using:

- my stories
- my autobiographical writing

- my experiences
- my reflexive journal
- my conversations
- my field notes
- my co-authors' stories
- my co-authors' autobiographical writing
- my co-authors' experiences
- my co-authors' published work (published prior and/or during this study)
- my co-authors' unpublished work (texts of various writing genres)
- my co-authors' documents
- my co-authors' notes
- our correspondences
- photographs
- written work by other authors

However, it may be possible that throughout the construction of field texts, and this final research text, other field texts may be constructed and used.

In the introduction to his book, Pagnucci (2004) states: "I have chosen to work in multiple genres, as well, to add weight to the argument that essayistic literacy is not the exclusive means by which one can create knowledge in the world, a view that is too often subscribed to within the ivory towers of academe" (p. 2). And he does. As a narrative inquirer moving from field texts to a finalized research text, he uses the traditional academic/theoretical essay (to satisfy the academy, perhaps, as I feel obligated to do, too), but also short stories and narratives,

and even poems. I have also included in this research text, a few other genres, but I mostly, like my co-authors, write the research sticking mostly with essay and narrative formats.

This document celebrates stories as a tool for meaning making, like my mentor and dissertation advisor, Gian Pagnucci. Therefore, like Pagnucci (2004), “I not only begin and end” this dissertation “with narratives, but also tell stories throughout the theoretical essay(s)” (p. 2). I have also organized my writing within the chapters of this document through main sections that illustrate themes – as already presented in chapter 2. This way, as the narratives of the prison writers is presented in chapter 4, and of prison writing in chapter 5, the readers will have some context in which to make meaning of the lives and history of the writers and the area of prison writing. Again, the epistemological intent of a narrative inquiry project is to put the learning power in the presence of the participant (my co-authors), the readers (my fellow compositionists), and the investigator/researcher (myself). The burden has been to include the most prominent and preferred field texts for those scopes of learning to occur; I believe that with the selection of four highly successful prison writers, and their writing, I have done that.

In this document, I have also carefully chosen, and positioned, a number of quotes to “give them a chance to resonate in their own ways with readers” (Pagnucci, 2004, p. 3). For me, the placement of these various bits of quotes and constructed themes aid in the movement of each person’s ability to build the narratives as s/he sees fit, just as I have done throughout the years of engaging in this research study – fully intending to celebrate and allow others to arrive at their own sense of celebration for the prison writer and prison writing. However, that is why I claim the burden of the collection and usage of the field texts, to then be able to work through the puzzles, and then construct the final research text – this metanarrative dissertation.

Ultimately, however, as I construct the use and placement of the field texts throughout this document, the definitive objective is to answer the research questions. I did this in chapter 2, as I explored how I entered the prison writing metanarrative inquiry 3D space, have remained here, and the legacy that is intended by this narrative research experience. I completed chapter 2 with the careful construction, placement, and reconstruction of the field texts. Chapter 4 presents the research texts that my co-authors designed, using their own field texts. Their research texts were constructed to answer the same questions, but as they relate to their prison writing lives, and prison writing. These are the research questions, again: How did my co-authors begin their prison writing careers?; What sustains their prison writing efforts?; What are their individual hoped for legacies, as prison writers?; How did prison writing begin?; What has sustained prison writing?; and What might be the legacy of this special area of writing? In using the various field texts, listed earlier, and perhaps others, as they may be created during the process of writing this final metanarrative, I aim to place my co-authors final research texts within the structure of this document in various locations, but primarily in chapters four and five, so as to lead all readers to make meaning of the answers to the research questions through my own stories, but by the narratives of my co-authors, as well. This construction of field text placement has been my greatest challenge in this process. Basically, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out, “Negotiation occurs from beginning to end. Plotlines are continually revised as consultation takes place over written materials, and as further field texts are composed to develop points of importance in the revised story” (p. 132).

Selection and Sites

As part of an independent study I did with Pagnucci in 2008, I created a list of highly successful prison writers. The way this was done, I considered the frequency with which I had

found individual prison writers' names mentioned in the literature I had read and/or encountered for the independent study. In the PEN awards, anthologies, magazines, journals, and other books and articles where successful prison writers' names were found and/or introduced for their writing accomplishments and publications, I acknowledged each reference by notating the writer's name and writing credits on a notepad. In addition, I had notated the published prison writing instructors and what they had said about their students who had become highly successful after being mentored or taking classes from the instructors. I kept this notepad as I began my initial work of writing my dissertation research proposal, attaining approval, and starting to compose the first three chapters. I started with more than fifty names of highly successful prison writers, but once I learned of the death or release of some of these writers, or simply could not locate them within the penal system, I omitted them from being a part of the study. At that point, I had fewer than thirty remaining individuals as potential participants. By further reviewing the writing, credits and merits, evidence of current and ongoing writing and publishing efforts of the writers, I eventually narrowed the list to twelve. As previously stated, only one female (Tina) was included in the final selection of the twelve, but there were four others among the 50 that I was unable to track down.

The selected writers range in age, but not by much. Being that they are all career writers (having 20 or more years writing), they are all in their later years (age 50 and up). Also, I chose only adult males and females who are serving in a state penitentiary or other prison – not county jails or rehabilitative centers. Youths were not considered due to accessibility issues, but some of them do begin their writing lives early on, and there are programs and some funding for them to attain books for learning how to write, or for them to work with guest teachers in their centers.

All twelve writers were then mailed the research packet I created. It included the ‘Call for Papers,’ the appropriate consent forms (detailing the study), and a personalized letter from me requesting their participation in the study. Samples of these forms were approved in advance by the IRB (Appendix B, D, and E)

The writers, from the ‘Call for Papers’ were asked to submit an initial essay on the generalities of their writing lives/writing process, as their means of showing their interest in participating in the study, along with their consent form. Once their first paper and consent forms were received, I then requested permission from the corresponding superintendents, as per the IRB requirement.

A sample letter to the warden/superintendent of the institution where the writer is located was required and approved by the IRB (Appendix A). One superintendent informed me that I had to have my research approved by the state’s Department of Corrections, in order to conduct my study in that particular state. The state’s protocol required that I had to submit a research proposal to their IRB. Then, I had to wait for their review and approval before I could continue corresponding with that prisoner within that state, for the purpose of gathering data (field texts) to conduct this study. Once I received this IRB approval, I was then able to continue corresponding and collecting data from that participant. With the help of the research manager for that state, my IRB was submitted and accepted. For the other participants, the superintendents either sent letters or emails to inform me of their approval. Only in the case of LeClair was I not permitted to go forward with collecting field texts for this narrative inquiry, even though he submitted the phase I essay and consent form.

I originally had seven participants showing interest, and six that submitted the phase I essay. I had decided to have between four and six participate, so when I had seven interested, I

knew I would probably have to remove one at some point, but since LeClair's superintendent informed me that I was not permitted to include him in my study, I was then left with six. Tina then wrote to say she was not going to be well enough to be included, and that left me with five. The fifth member – entirely too busy to meet the writing requirements for this study, also bailed out – understandably; he is another career writer with substantial work and responsibilities, and although he expressed enthusiasm and a desire to be included, he simply was not able. As for the remaining five I never heard from, I sent follow-up letters, but still did not receive correspondence from them. It is highly possible that they never received the packet and follow-up letter, but it is also probable that they were not at all interested.

Additionally, I have paid to rent a P.O. mail box from the post office so that the collection of field texts and research texts would be more private and collectively maintained. I am the only person who has ever had access to the key for this box, and the only person who has opened any of the mail. Next, I will further explain the three phases of the inquiry for this study.

Data Collection

In chapter 1, I briefly mentioned the three phases of this project. Because the study changed after the packets were mailed out, the writers received the 'Call for Papers' requesting an essay detailing their writing processes. This first writing request encompasses the first phase of the data collection. In the second phase, I asked for three different forms of writing. The original questionnaire that was part of the study to investigate process was eliminated after the research became a narrative inquiry project. However, I do use the letter format to ask the writers questions and to request additional information pertaining to their writing lives, or prison writing, as they emerge from the process of interpreting and sorting the field texts into the

various aspects/themes/topics of the narrative(s). Therefore, I included our correspondences into the list of field texts used for this metanarrative research.

Also in phase two, each of the writers received letters from me explaining the change in the research from the study of their composing processes to a narrative inquiry about their writing lives and about prison writing. The letters were specific in asking them to write one or two narratives – one narrative answering the three research questions as applied to their personal prison writing lives, and the other narrating the answers to questions about prison writing; they could have also written one text for both topics. In one or two cases the two narratives were requested in one letter, and in the other cases there were two letters; it varied among the four co-authors due to the type of access I had to the writers and where each one was in his writing for this project, as well as his other writing tasks. One sample letter is provided in Appendix F. Also, as with normal communication, follow-up letters with questions and friendly correspondence has been present – the stuff of story making.

Finally, for the third phase, I requested additional field texts from each of my co-authors. A general idea of some of the texts I requested is listed in a sample letter to the participants (Appendix C), although the letter had to be changed somewhat since the topic changed and the approach was no longer focused around a case study method. My co-authors were encouraged to send written documents, stories, published works, and other texts that could be used for best telling their stories and the larger story of prison writing. The last request of their introductory narratives, placed in chapter 2, also fell in the third phase of the data collection.

All the mailed documents my co-authors send are chronologically placed (according to the date it is postmarked) in large binders (which are personalized for each writer, by pseudonym), and kept private and secure in a locked file cabinet that is used for maintaining all

field texts, research texts, and other materials for this study. I talk more about these security concerns later in this chapter.

Interpretive Analysis

“...the best SPN [scholarly personal narrative] interview is the scholar’s self-interrogation” (Nash, 2004, p. 18). Nash (2004) also suggests that the “ultimate intellectual responsibility of the SPN scholar is to find a way to use the personal insights gained in order to draw larger conclusions for readers” (p. 18). I would argue, however, that the prison writer, when he is in writing mode (which mostly consists of thinking/ruminating) is already doing a good amount of self-interrogation. I would also argue that the prison writer fully respects the “ultimate intellectual responsibility” of finding a way to “use personal insights” for artistically and articulately extricating meaning and larger themes from their published and unpublished writing.

Prison writers are outsiders, even though they are on the *inside*, and they simply want to be insiders in a world that has literally thrown them away. As Schaafsma and Vinz (2011) claim, “to *narrate*... is to do more than ‘give’ an account or ‘tell’ a story. The verb *narrate* suggests shaping...” (p. 3). Prison writers know, unfortunately through the epic disappointment of Abbott’s life, that their words, if written well, published, and distributed throughout the world, or at least in the U.S., have the chance to change (not just shape) the narratives about them (which are mostly false). No doubt, with narrative examples like Williams’ *Redemption* or Baca’s *A Place to Stand*, and other works by my co-authors, the writers intentionally organize their narratives “around themes, issues, constructs, and concepts that carry larger, more universalizable meanings for readers” (Nash, 2004, p. 30).

I am in agreement with the belief that I should assume “the basic posture of humility and willingness to learn what was never imagined to be learnable when [I] the researcher started is

even more imperative” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 20). Narrative inquiry scholars declare that we must fight all urges to let beautifully crafted field texts speak for themselves (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 130). We must be sure that we are coming to the archival task (reading; rereading; sorting; narratively coding; noting dates, contexts for the composition of the field texts, characters, and so forth) with an ongoing pursuance of finding meaning and social significance. We must return to the 3D space and position the field texts accordingly. This is where the analysis begins to unfold. Trying to know where to place the field texts so that there is meaning and social significance is crucial at the pre-research, text writing stage. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) claim, interim texts can be written to help move the positioning, but in general:

field texts are not constructed with reflective intent. Rather, they are close to experience, tend to be descriptive, and are shaped around particular events. Field texts have a recording quality to them, whether auditory or visual. Research texts are at a distance from field texts and grow out of the repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance. (p. 132)

The inquirer is perpetually searching for patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes (Carr, 1966). The negotiating is occurring from beginning to end. Plots are forever being changed and revised. There is no series of steps or linear path for doing this work of interpretation and analysis. “For example, names of the characters that appear in the field texts, places where actions and events occurred, story lines that interweave and interconnect, gaps or silences that become apparent, tensions that emerge, and continuities and discontinuities that appear are all possible codes,” and as we get more and more engaged in the interpretive-analytic work, we begin to see certain field texts differently than when we first set out constructing them or

collecting them (Clandin and Connelly, 2000, p. 131). And what is even more challenging is the fact that because field texts carry such vast and rich research potential, we can return to them one day from the next, with “our own restoried lives as inquirers, bringing new research puzzles, and re—searching the texts” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 132).

However, and with greater emphasis, I now position this research in narrative inquiry because it embodies the interpretive process that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) inform us of, in opening us to see that narrative inquiry “carries more of a sense of continual reformulation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem definition and solution” (p. 124). Readers of this narrative inquiry should not be thinking about a phenomena, or research problem, in the sense that they will be locating an answer/solution within this metanarrative, although the research questions outlined in chapter 1 would easily cause someone to think that. As narrative inquirers, we think about the meaning and social significance of the various stories that are positioned within the landscape of the experience – the layers and strands and nested and textured elements. We do not think so much of a fixed truth or solution. Narratives are inherently personalized and as we move through the development of stabilizing the stories of our lives, by identifying the ideologies that guide us through the organization of these field texts, we can find no real end. As Pagnucci (2004) asserts, “Narratives can address contradiction, confusion, and complexity without offering any concrete answers, which is, upon consideration, exactly what real life does” (p. 52). We seek big “T” truths, but along the way, identify many small “t” truths that sustain our search.

Credibility

I have already spoken of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (temporal dimension, personal and social dimension, and place as a dimension) and how it (3D) establishes the foundation for the way narrative inquirers do inquiries. This framework is one that

establishes a credible research project, as each of the dimensions sets a field text firmly into its narrative position to make meaning and be socially significant. Additionally, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), there are four directions to consider within the first two dimensions of the temporal and personal/social: a.) inward (personal/internal conditions, like hope, feelings, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions); b.) outward (social/toward existential conditions, like environment); c.) backward; and d.) forward (temporal/past, present, and future); when one is “positioned on this two-dimensional space in any particular inquiry, one asks questions, collects field notes, derives interpretations, and writes a research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward, and addresses temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and to its future” (p. 50). The third dimension of space is another (fifth) direction of seeing the place of the inquiry within the “concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes” (p. 51). These dimensions and directions are key to the active work of weaving in and out and through the process of taking field texts and interim texts to workable research texts. When we are in a constant state of asking ourselves the questions surrounding these three dimensions and five directions, we are doing what successful narrative inquirers do.

In all academic research pursuits, a level of internal validity is essential for confidence in a credible study. The questions of meaning, significance, and purpose arise. Because “narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical,” and the research interest comes directly from our own narratives of experience, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out, we, as researchers, naturally shape the plot of the inquiry (p. 121). We must constantly be considering the kind of research text that is being composed, and the topics surrounding that text, like: justification (Why do the study?); phenomena (What is puzzling?); method (How will I present

the study?); tensions (How do I manage/deal with voice, audience, gaps, etc.?); analysis-interpretation (How do I make sense of the data?); positioning (Where do I place the texts?, Where do I place the contexts?, What parlor conversation(s) do I want to participate in?, and What inquiries do I want to position mine next to?). There are tensions and areas of negotiation I must consider throughout the movement from being in the field – to interpreting the field texts – to writing the final field research text.

For instance, because my co-authors are in a protected category, I must always be negotiating the tensions that arise in my relationships with them through our correspondence, and how I navigate through their narrative texts and letters to place them within the research text favorably. Purposes of the inquiry can change or be altered (as they were with my research topic being changed), and so I must be in a perpetual place of explaining myself and my motives, to clarify the reasons behind my actions: How do my inquiry actions and choices connect temporally, personally and socially, and in the landscape(s), with my co-authors? I must also negotiate my transitions in 3D and how I move into, through, and out of the inquiry with my participants.

The kind of interrogation we narrative inquirers put ourselves through for credibility and research integrity is always present, but can also be negotiated and navigated through, as Clandinin and Connelly suggest, with some practical actions for a confidence of ongoing legitimacy within the doubts and insecurities of the work. These suggestions can move us through the work of getting the field texts smoothly into the research text so that the form of the document is academic and trustworthy. Clandinin and Connelly suggest reading other narratives. The ideal, of course, is first focusing on the narratives written by narrative inquirers. Verifying what they do and how they do it (as good narrative inquiries detail), allow their steps to also

utilize what I might consider to be more purposeful or meaningful in doing my own inquiry work. As many narrative inquirers suggest, and do in their narrative texts, it is also recommended to seek out metaphors to employ in the movement from gathering field texts to writing the final product. Another consideration is noticing my reading preferences (personal and professional), which according to Clandinin and Connelly, blurs things, so I also need to realize this difficulty as I consider form for the research text. Extensive readers like me must negotiate between what we read that is pleasurable, but somewhat applicable, and what is more on task with the narrative inquiry at hand. Also, throughout their work, Clandinin and Connelly suggest being more experimental with form. However, we must avoid conveying anything within our research text, to the reader, that would cause him/her to freeze the narrative and set the storying quality as fixed or fully factual. We must continue to aim at presenting a narrative that looks at the characters, the stories, the puzzles, and the experiences as being works-in-progress. This is when a reflective journal becomes beneficial in aiding in the credibility of the final research text.

Throughout this study, I will be keeping a reflexive journal for scrutinizing myself and my ongoing thought processes about all the texts that become a part of this inquiry. By writing in a journal 2-3 times per week, and including it within the analytic-interpretive phase with all the other field texts, Rudenstam and Newton (2007) claim that I can also “record impressions, reactions, and other significant events that may occur during the data collection phase of research;” hopefully this journal will prove to be vitally important for the purpose of building meaning and giving the inquiry social significance (p. 111). Another purpose of the journal is to gather additional data, formulating further inquiry and allowing observations to shape the ongoing inquiry method, streams of thought, and constructs of thought that are occurring throughout the study. Also, according to Erlandson, et. al (1993), the “journal supports not only

the credibility but also the transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study” (p. 143).

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), a narrative inquiry poses various “risks, dangers, and abuses of narrative,” that are to be “repeatedly considered over the entire narrative inquiry process” (p. 181). This is where my journal can be most helpful. Clandinin and Connelly posit that one of these dangers is what they refer to as the “Hollywood plot,” where the researcher, within the process of the research, somehow falls into the standard narrative trap of assuming the *plot* of the research needs to provide the *story* (research) with a happy ending, or smooth finish. The “hallmark of this plot in research texts is that they are not conditional, not tentative,” and “this process of creating these clean, unconditional plots” is referred to as “narrative smoothing;” therefore, according to Clandinin and Connelly, “the researcher must make a series of judgments about how to balance the smoothing contained in the plot with what is obscured in the smoothing” (p. 181). One way of doing this is by “being alert to the stories not told as to those that are,” in addition to closely listening to our critics, since “every response is valid to some degree and contains the seed of an important point” (p. 182). We are to take on the role of constant critic of our research plot. In keeping the reflexive journal, I can position a place for me to do this work.

As the journal, essays, questionnaires, narratives, letters, published works of the successful prison writers, and other field texts are being analyzed and interpreted, I will utilize the three-dimensional elements that furnish the research text with the multilayers, strands, and texture that reveal the nestedness of myself and my co-authors.

I will continue to question what I know, how I know it, and my relationship to this knowledge, so I can interpret and/or access field texts to best answer all questions and gaps, or

perceived holes, as thoroughly as possible. The research takes its own shape over time, being affected by what I am capturing about my participants, as well as myself. A good inquiry employs reflexivity so that as I question the various cultural, historical, and political elements that influence the assumptions and expectations that emerge in the research, the narrative inquiry research text will be credible.

And finally, accountability for credibility will be assessed by my dissertation committee chairperson, Pagnucci, as he addresses what he sees in the drafts he reads and in our meetings/conversations. Next, I will consider the areas in which I must be wakeful for the sake of my co-authors.

Protections

In academic research publications, prisoners are considered vulnerable subjects, and are therefore highly protected by Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). Prisoners require more privacy and safeguards than most other subjects because of the nature of their circumstances and setting. The information surrounding their incarceration may need to be withheld, or, it may be at the request of one of my co-authors that I keep his background completely private. So far none of my participants have made such a request. In either case, additional measures for protecting prisoner's identities are necessary for their well-being and interests. It is my duty to protect these fellow writers by ensuring that all the field texts containing personal information about them is secured and kept from the public.

Therefore, providing participants with anonymity is important. Pseudonyms are used for the co-authors in this study, and I will treat their materials with great security and privacy, keeping data locked in a secure, fire-proof file cabinet in my house. The pseudonyms were created randomly, and were chosen as one or two syllable names so as to keep the pseudonyms

simple and easy to remember as I conduct the research and writing of this document.

Additionally, the participants' true identities will only be known to me. But, as previously mentioned elsewhere, none have expressed a desire for anonymity and some have actually requested that their names and works be identified and known, despite the IRB's mandate to use pseudonyms for the writers' protection. Still, I have kept with my IRB's mandate. Furthermore, on my personal computer I will utilize a private username and password for access to all my dissertation files.

Because prisoners are given the right to receive and send mail, and because successful prison writers already spend a great portion of their time in the process of writing, this research study should not pose any substantial inconveniences to the flourishing prison writers. The essays, questionnaires, narratives, and additional materials are all to be collected through the mail, an outlet that is fairly common to this particular group; the mail is their principal form of communication with the outside world. Therefore, by conducting this research through the postal service, and by asking prisoners to write (which they already spend a great deal of their time doing), I am not putting my co-authors at any great risk of harm. The writers for this study are individuals who regularly write, so their lifestyles/routines will not be affected or altered in any way by participating in this study.

Also, the prison writers will be reminded throughout the study that they may withdraw from the research at any time (phase I, II, or III), and my co-authors will always have access to all my dissertation materials that are applicable to them, should they request that I send them back to them, or inform them of exactly what it is that I have in my possession (in their binders). My co-authors will always have the power to determine what I can keep, and they will hold the

decision-making power of determining what materials I can and cannot utilize for the writing of the final document. As Clandinin (2007) points out:

ethics permeates narrative inquiry from puzzle setting and question posing to living in the field to composing field texts and research texts as well as to the ways that research texts follow or haunt participants and researchers, attending to ethical matters is an ongoing and always present part of narrative inquiry. These questions of what it means to work relationally with participants in narrative inquiry takes on added importance as we consider the place of Institutional Research Boards, as we think about the ways participants and researchers are situated in relation to each other in dominant cultural and institutional narratives, and as we think about the ways that engaging in narrative inquiries can shift the stories of both participants and researchers. (p. 42)

Although narrative inquirers have only started to explore some of these questions of ethics in narrative inquiry, we must continue to be mindful of such matters, looking for reasonable areas for further research.

Confidentiality

Information obtained about my co-authors during the course of the study will be confidential. When the possibility exists that others may obtain access to such information, ethical research practices require that this possibility, together with the plans for protecting confidentiality, be explained to the participants as a part of the procedure for obtaining informed consent.

Additionally, when dealing with issues of a sensitive nature, like a prison writer explicitly describing his/her crime(s), or poor conditions of his/her prison, the information will be set apart as not directly related to the overall purpose of the study. I am considering the narrative of the

individual prison writer's writing life, and the narrative of prison writing, so it will be the elements of these two narratives where I will place my focus. Should a prison writer choose to disclose graphic details of his criminal history, which led to his imprisonment, or crimes committed while incarcerated, which then explains his writing life, I will use discretion to favor the portions of the narratives that are relative and present the author most favorably. I will carefully disassociate those portions of their writing that would not further the narrative – emphasizing their writing lives and prison writing as an unexplored area of interest for our field of composition.

I will expect the prison writers to fully understand, through the consent form, any questionnaires, letters, and additionally requested materials, that this project's sole purpose is to further the understanding of the narrative of their successful, publishing, writing lives and the area of prison writing. Any writers failing to understand this purpose, who attempt to veer too far outside the explained area of inquiry, may be completely excluded.

Also, all collected field texts will not be shared with the other co-authors in the study. At no time will I discuss one writer's responses with another, and all materials will remain private and confidential, with exception to authors' published writings that are accessible to others by way of the internet, library, or other venue. Furthermore, I will not reveal the names of the participants to each other, while conducting this research study, much less discuss their texts or writing among them.

Limitations

Because I am allowing the data collection and narrative analysis to concurrently shape the metanarrative of this 3D project, I am hopeful that meaningful, socially significant, and truly credible results will layer the final research text. However, because race is such an issue in the

prison system, and prison writing instructors work diligently towards establishing a fairness in their classrooms with the literature they choose to bring into the classroom, how they respond to their prison writing students, and other such related issues, it is difficult for me to not also attempt to be fair in all areas of the analysis work. Undoubtedly, this limits the inquiry process that is at work as I have identified the most successful prison writers based on their highly successful writing careers – publications, awards, notoriety within prison writing, etc. Therefore, in the selection of the twelve writers, I did try to include various races and both genders. However, the final four may not accurately represent the ethnographic percentages of U.S. prisons, or the U.S. population. Two of the minorities chosen and willing to participate in this inquiry are unable to do so. LeClair, an African American writer was eliminated by his superintendent. Tina, a female, is too ill to participate at this time. A few others initially showed interest and submitted the consent form, but later dropped out of the study. Then, others, who were also considered minorities, never responded at all.

Additionally, as evidenced in narrative inquiry theory and methods books, it is quite possible that my own biases and other personal limitations can color or shade the findings that are presented in the final document. The reflexive journal can aid in the avoidance of such personal biases, as can Pagnucci's assessments. As for other limitations, narrative inquiry is autobiographical; that means it is also based on personal storytelling. Both of these elements rely on memory. And memory, being the funny little thing that it is, varies from one individual to the next, even taking into consideration the exact same event having happened to them. How one remembers it, is nothing like how another remembers it. So basically, this is a common, human limitation. As Nash (2004) points out with his term "truth criteria," narrativists should always aim at "trustworthiness, honesty, plausibility, situatedness, interpretive selfconsciousness,

introspectiveness/self-reflection, and universalizability” (p. 5). While the human condition limits us, we can certainly strive to wrestle against those limitations, always looking for the resources and/or additional field texts and research texts (data) that can make our work more meaningful, more significant, and more valid.

Final Words

It is my hope that this metanarrative will spark interest in the composition community to undertake additional inquiries into the life of the prison writer, perhaps looking first at minority prison writers (since this project could not best represent the ethnographic percentages of the U.S. prison population), and then into the longer-term historical narrative landscape of prison writing, or even an inquiry into how the one (minority prison writers) shapes the other (the broad issue of prison writing). The topics are endless, and per the title of this narrative inquiry, my co-authors and I are only *beginning* to unfold the untold story/stories of prison writing and a few highly successful prison writers’ writing lives. So much more can be done.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced a short historical story of narrative inquiry. Then, I explained the types of texts I will be using in this metanarrative. I also tried to set up a plan (since it will be changing throughout the process) for the structure of this narrative inquiry. Next, I talked specifically about how the four co-authors came to be a part of this narrative inquiry, and how I have taken the necessary steps to do this work with the correct permissions and mandates. I then talked about my data collection phases, of which there were three. Then, in the interpretive analysis section, I further explained the data (field texts) and how I planned to work through the many questions narrative inquirers pose in order to analyze and interpret the data. For credibility, I also looked at what narrative inquiry scholars ask themselves and/or do throughout their

collection of field texts, sorting and coding texts, and constructing the narrative research text, so as to have a credible outcome. I then discussed the additional protections and safeguards I considered in working with my participants, as they are highly protected by the IRB. Confidentiality was the section that followed, giving more specifics about considering the personal needs of my co-authors. I continued with discussing some of the limitations narrative inquirers face and how I can ask additional questions to ward off those boundaries and tensions.

CHAPTER 4

THE PERSONAL NARRATIVES, OR DATA

My father has taught me the absolute value of unconditional love and proven to me that everyone is capable of change given the right structure and help. (Marty's daughter)¹⁷

My experience has taught me that all forms of the death penalty need to be abolished. All prisoners should have the possibility of *earning* their freedom through their own actions. (Marty)¹⁸

Introduction

In this chapter, I have aimed to set aside the space in which to allow my co-authors as much voice as possible, while still maintaining my primary role of researcher, for this project – introducing the writers to composition (why prison writers are relevant to the field). This has not been an easy task. I have wanted to put my co-authors' voices before mine, but have also been aware of, and conceded to the issue that the purpose of this project is to conduct research and present the data so as to delegate the writers as worthy and valid for consideration of our field – both as inclusive members, but also as writers containing rich elements for much study and future investigation. Therefore, this chapter contains the research texts of my co-authors, where they were asked to write a narrative(s) answering questions, as the questions pertain to their personal writing lives. The three research questions are: How did you get started, or begin writing?; What sustains your writing?, and What legacy are you leaving, and/or hope to leave, through your writing? I did suggest that my co-authors write one narrative for their personal

¹⁷ Taken from "Most Matters in Life are not as Simple as Good and Bad," an essay featured, as part of the HBO documentary film, titled "Toe Tag Parole: To Live and Die on Yard A" (August 3, 2015). Not included in References, for anonymity reasons.

¹⁸ Taken from "It's Time to End Life Without Parole," an essay featured, as part of the HBO documentary film, titled "Toe Tag Parole: To Live and Die on Yard A" (August 3, 2015). Not included in References, for anonymity reasons.

writing story, and another narrative for the story/history of prison writing, but I also said they could break the questions up, writing individual narratives for each, or writing one narrative to answer all questions as they address both their personal writing lives, as well as the concentration of prison writing. In fact, I left the construction of the narratives up to them, whether they write one, or several. Additionally, I made no suggestions for particular formats or style-guides in the design of their writing. In the end, all four chose to write personal narratives, and separate narratives for prison writing. One (Mil) even broke his personal narrative into two lengthy texts.

Because each of the co-authors were responding to me and submitting their writing at different times, my letters to them were all different in the phase II and III requests (as an example, see Appendix F), and quite specialized to where each was at in his correspondence with me, submissions of writings (published, unpublished, and current work), supplemental materials (resumes, creative achievement records, etc.), and other writing deadlines/tasks (those requested by me, as well as those they were fulfilling for their own publication or personal writing pursuits). So while I may have written to one co-author (like Appendix F), and provided him with the three main questions as they pertain to his personal prison writing life, but also included multiple sub-questions to aid in the response to writing his narrative, I may have also written to another with all three questions as they pertain to both his personal writing life, as well as the narrative of prison writing. Each of my four co-authors was asked the same primary questions, and was requested to write the same narrative(s), but how each chose to write those narratives varied. Basically, I tried to accommodate them according to their already demanding writing careers, what they already provided in previous texts they submitted, make their writing submissions as unobtrusive as possible, and be willing to take what I could get. What is interesting about their narratives, and the research questions, however, is that I now see that the

questions look less like three, and more like six (with including the same three questions for prison writing), or more, and what I found, in providing them with the sub-questions, they all did their very best to not only answer the primary research questions, but also, they gave narrative responses to all the sub-questions; they left nothing out. In fact, at least one of my co-authors did point out, as he wrote to me to say, “you said you are asking three questions, yet those three questions in your letter look like twenty!” (Jon). It was their consistent willingness to meet all my requests (as first shown in their phase I essays, correspondences, and general desire to be thorough) that led me to try and lessen their loads, but the overwhelming nature of their desire to fulfill all that I asked of them, will become clearer throughout this chapter, as you read their personal narratives/research texts. Chapter 5 will present their prison writing narratives.

As I have said throughout this document, I seek to give authorship to the writers who have worked alongside me for the past year, and this chapter is the main place by which I intend to do that. Where possible, in keeping with a cohesive and organized context, I have tried to include Jon’s, Marty’s, Mil’s, and Cob’s narratives in their fullest forms – only eliminating parts I consider less effective in moving the research text (metanarrative) forward, adding other pieces of their writing from previously published material, and/or interjecting bits of my own voice to simply segue from one portion of their narrative, or from one narrative, to another, or, to make mention of valid information regarding the overall purpose of this research study. This means that their narratives are not simply placed in order, or in their entirety. In fact, portions have been moved around and other selected pieces of their published work are substituted throughout – always aiming to present their writing in such a way that the chosen texts are best responding to the research questions, maximizing the meaning making potential, and keeping with the purpose of a credible 3D narrative inquiry.

This chapter serves to display *their* writing. Who else can better introduce him or herself, than him, or herself? I coded all the narratives, materials, correspondences, my journal notes, and published texts I have for each of them, based on the three questions, and struggled over how to best present their writing. In the end, I have settled on keeping each individual within his own section, using the three research questions as the sub-sections (getting started; sustaining forces; and legacy). I, like other narrative inquirers, find this construction to be best; plus, it is consistent with how I have designed the other chapters of this dissertation – multilayered (using many individuals and topics), many stranded (containing multiple research texts), nested (showing the integral vested nature of myself and the co-authors, through our histories, writing, and comments to this research), and textured (a metanarrative with various styles/genres of writing).

I begin with *Jon*; then, I move to presenting the personal narratives of *Marty*, *Mil*, and *Cob*. These four sections serve to accomplish one of the goals of this research – to introduce the prison writer to composition (presenting the narratives of a few highly successful career writers). These sections also provide, more definitively, some of the layers and strands to this metanarrative. In these sections, we read most of their narratives and other portions of their writing that answer the research questions about their personal writing lives, and how each got started writing (sub-sections titled, *Getting Started*) while in prison, how each is sustained as a prison writer (sub-sections titled, *Sustaining Forces*), and what each hopes to leave as a legacy (sub-sections titled, *Legacy*).

First, there is one detail I would like to point out about the texts within this chapter, as the writers are being quoted in sometimes lengthy portions. There are times in their narratives when they reference and quote, and/or insert comments within their quoted (cited) reference material. To prevent confusion in the minimal number of times where I need to insert brackets ([...]) for

my own informational comments within their writing, I have chosen to use italics within the brackets to set my own comments apart from those of the co-authors, since they also use brackets to insert their own comments. I use italics because my co-authors use typewriters, and they do not have that feature. Therefore, in their essays and narratives to me, there is no use of italics, so as I utilize the brackets and place my comments inside them, using italics, it is easier for the reader to recognize that the comment is coming from me. Their comments, inside the brackets, remain in standard font type.

Secondly, because the use of pseudonyms for the prison writer participants has been required, but they are all published, and their works are referenced throughout this document, but mostly within this chapter, I have not included any of their publications on the ‘Resources’ pages. Instead, I have included the ‘Records of Achievement’ (as sent to me by Mil), ‘Publishing Credits’ (as sent to me by Cob), and the ‘Writing Bio’ (as sent to me by Marty). I have tried to create one for Jon since I did not receive one from him; I apologize for what I may have left out. It is titled ‘Bio.’ All of these pages are found in the Appendices – Appendix G (Mil), Appendix H (Cob), Appendix I (Marty), and Appendix J (Jon).

Third, because the data (field texts) was different for each of the writers, and because the construction of the final narratives (research texts) appear somewhat dissimilar, as well, I will introduce each author/section with an explanation of the process I used for arranging and composing the data into the final narrative in these sections and sub-sections. My work of reading, coding, compiling, writing, and editing these sections is better outlined at the beginning of each section since although I tried to use the same process for each, it was not the most effective means for answering the research questions and adopting the meaning making theory of narrative inquiry. The research texts and field texts (data), for these four writers, is abundant. I

have aimed to present my co-authors and their writing lives in a clear and cohesive chapter that has one objective: give readers the best narratives to interpret the answers to the research questions, for meaning making. I have struggled with this process, but have carefully examined all the data to make as strong a case as possible to make it recognizable that these particular prison writers embody the nature of prison writing in this country, as well as what it is to be a prison writer; my role as researcher might seem to interfere, but it is still my obligation to the field to place my own research perspective within the middle of their writing.

Finally, it is through my own entry into this research, from the writers who have sustained the study, and by my becoming nested within this group (by placing myself as the researcher/observer and inviting other composition students and scholars to embark on further study), I am hoping to allow this dissertation to alter and change the legacies of both the field of composition, but more importantly, prison writing and its almost completely unknown men and women writers.

Jon

For Jon, with his highly artistic and relational manner of writing, I have tried to best capture his “realness” (explained later in this section), by not simply placing his writing in full text form as a lengthy piece, but more like the arrangement of this metanarrative – mutual (co-authored), multilayered, many stranded, nested, textured, and three-dimensional – allowing the reader a more intentional meaning making process. Therefore, after much quoting, deleting, re quoting, and searching with great frustration for the best means to present Jon, through his writing, I have finally rested in the struggle, recognizing that his writing is best revealed relationally, and creatively. Using the field texts of his writing (all his published work, the short film featuring his poetry, his online writing, and all our correspondences), along with his

research texts (phase I essay, phase II narrative, and phase III narrative), and my own writing, I have decided that his strength of poetics is how I must attempt to layer and texturize his texts, while also being nested within them. These are terrible weaknesses for me – co-authoring and creative writing. Yet, in order to be true, and *real* to Jon – at least as how I have come to know him and his highly artistic and relational writing style – I have chosen to take up the challenge.

In chapter 1, as Jon was first introduced, and with the short narrative about his teacher and friend Judith Tannenbaum, (introduced in chapter 2), I relayed some of these ideas about how Jon’s writing is relational, as I quoted Tannenbaum (2000) from *Disguised as a Poem*, in how she viewed Jon’s writing style. He would seek her out; he would ask her questions. Tannenbaum and Jon (2010) would work closely together. Of course, this type of relational, collaborative writing is more visible in their co-authored book, *By Heart: Poetry, Prison, and Two Lives*. In the Preface, Tannenbaum writes:

In the 1980s, when Jon [pseudonym inserted in place of real name] was my student at San Quentin and discovering himself as a poet, he told me that he imagined the two of us giving a reading in Berkeley, working with children on their poems, or creating a poetry performance together. He told me that one day, we would. This prediction made me happy. However when I received a letter from Jon [pseudonym inserted in place of real name] in 2006 proposing that we write a two-person memoir, I set myself to say no.

(p. xiii)

She goes on to explain the various struggles of working in such a manner with someone on the inside. However, as Tannenbaum states, his letter ended with, “You believed in me even when you didn’t know me,” and as she read those words, she looked up; she had been moved by the

gift of his statement, as it prompted her to recognize her desire to write about these subjects (coming to poetry, teaching, and believing in others), once again (p. xiii).

I have used Jon's responses from the phase I essay, titled, "My Writing Process," with his first phase I narrative, which is not titled, my own writing, and also his published works, short film, and online publications, to overlap and intertwine his, and my words, for the sake of best introducing him. Also, I have done this so as to integrate that mutual, relational manner in which I have come to see Jon, as a writer. I have mentioned in my letters to him that he is my co-author for this project, and in a big way, I actually believe collaboration is what Jon desires, as a writer – at least for this project and his book with Tannenbaum, if not others. Since Jon has no typewriter (the only co-author in this study who writes longhand), he has asked that I type and edit/revise all his submissions, and then send them back to him. He has stated in his letters to me that he does not "like to think of, or allow [his] work to be contained in a box." He has also said, "And again, you must be my editor," and in another letter, when we were nearing the end of the project, he wrote, "I have hope that you will allow realness to come forth by the end of this process." So, for me, and for all these reasons, I have chosen to be a bit more creative with the selections and placements of his seemingly poetic responses to the 'Call for Papers' essay, his narrative to the three research questions, all his publications, his phase II narrative, and my own writing. Like with the others, this job of co-authoring, and best introducing these writers and their writing, has been no easy task, especially since our communication is so limited, and I have done almost no collaborative writing in the past. However, with Jon, it has been the most difficult. I hope to serve Jon well in this introduction to the field of composition, but also, to our sister field, literature (since Jon mostly writes poetry). Jon's writing certainly does not fit in a box; I hope to uncover that in this section.

Getting Started

If I did not write, I would be a shadow boxing death. I am a poet first, and then actor, writer, playwright, human rights activist and native flute player. I have no set process in my poetry composing. My poetry comes from many directions and places. My inspiration is endless.

One moment I am writing about a woman's feet, and the next moment an event in nature, or something political, wrong and evil. One moment I am composing something from the past or future, perhaps that has to do with human, or animal rights—it can be a rock sweating under the sun. (phase I essay, 2014)

Purple Fighter

He doesn't move much.
People take him for dead
But he knows there's no place to go
Living in a cup of water.

He sees a reflection in the stained
Glass
But he knows behind that pain
Are a thousand more.

People walk up and push and bang
On the glass.
He wonders what all the fuss is about.
He rests so still he's mistaken for dead.

Purple fighter, a Beta fish
With no Alpha
Alone in a tank.
No longer the fighter
He never was.

He wants to be a lover.
He makes his nest for a mate
Who has never been there.

He does this twice a year.
The bubbles swell and drop
Like boulders back into the stale air.

People think he's so spiritual in his
Silence.
People think he believes in aloneness.
People think he is so beautiful
From behind stained glass.

He doesn't move much
But I understand.
He's forced to live, alone in a cup
Of water
Behind stained glass, and behind the pane
Are a thousand more (from *Longer Ago*, 2010)

Anything and everything is poetry and assessable to pen and paper. Ideas like a dust storm or a cloud burst can come out of nowhere, from a dream, a song, a dance, a kiss or a book. Poetry can out pace my pen.

However, in my prose creations; fiction, non-fiction, articles, blogs, stories and essays, there are some set processes and learned techniques. Inspiration also engendered from life, Mother Earth, internal and external observations, from Q & A's, current events, people and politics.

When producing prose, one must know the rules, read, ponder, study and do research, and most importantly, do a lot of rewrites. Sometimes my writing does come out in streams of consciousness, and I must make sure I get the full stream. I then shape that flow into something real.

Writing is a process, and like life in a constant state of change. My writing quest started after I came to prison. Back then I had no concept of language, grammar, English, or syntax—I had no idea how to create a complete sentence, or how to express myself on

paper at all. I had to learn how to write letters in order to communicate with the outside world. (phase I essay)

What got me started as a writer was my incarceration and then Judith Tannenbaum's poetry class. Before that I knew I had to get better at letter writing, something I would have never had to do if I did not come to prison. I remember at my trial the DA used words on me I had no clue to what they meant and during and after the trial I began to peruse the dictionary and started to love words and gained the confidence to study words. (from first narrative in phase II, 2015)

Sadly, this is the probable misfortune of a number of prisoners, because we see data, like I presented earlier in this document, of the low reading levels of those entering the prison-industrial complex. Jon (2015) continues:

I then signed up for high school and college classes and on my own I studied grammar, language, English and syntax. I gained a love of reading. All these things led me to sign up for Judith's poetry class. (from first narrative in phase II)

Go On

I cannot go on like this
But I will go on –
on and on, even when
on is off.

Something is stirring
in my soul, wanting
to burst out like
a hot spring in the desert

wanting to come out
and I don't know

what it is – in the moment
I hope it's a poem
I hope It's a song.

Something vast like Euripides
Something wise and funny
like Aristophanes
Something deep like Langston Hughes
So deep in the seas
where no light goes.

I know what it is
I want to create my way
off this lockdown
and write my way
out of prison
They allowed redemption
once, but now only condemnation.

I cannot go on
but I will go on –
on and on even when
on becomes off.

Melancholic and sad
They are letting some
lifers go home
some I have known for a lifetime
and that is a good thing.

Yet there is no end in sight for me
and I don't know
anymore where to go
to get strength to go on.

I don't know where
to go to leave
this sadness and pain
and make my heart sing again
and make my spirit soar again.

Everywhere I look
there is a big sign
that says no –

No forgiveness, no love,

no hope, no second chance,
no dreams and no romance.
I cannot go on
but I will go on –
and on and on even when
on becomes off.

But I have nowhere
to go
Nowhere that says
yes.

Yes, it's okay to dream
for some come true
Yes, it's okay to hope for freedom is free
Yes, it's okay to love
for love can be true (*Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough*, 2013)

I don't remember who taught me how to write my name. My most vivid memories of grade school and teachers were being slapped and paddled .(from phase I essay)

My mom and dad tried fifteen times to have a girl baby, but ended up with fifteen boys. We lived in a back house, just off Crooks Street, close to the dry river. A colorless, gray, two small-roomed, square, cement shack. One tiny bathroom and closet and another closet-sized impression of a kitchen. We bathed in an old round tin tub in bath water that had been boiled.

My dad worked for the Santa Fe Railroad. He and my mom came from Texarkana, Texas and Texarkana, Arkansas. My dad left the South first, after he got into a conflict with a white man and punched him, which was a hanging event for a black man in the 1940s. So he left, traveling as far away as he could, landing in Barstow, California, in the Mojave Desert.

There were hardly any fences on the river bottom where we lived. The soft sands rolled under and past Blacks Bridge. Blacks Bridge was all steel with bolts like small biscuits. When I lay under the bridge, and a train ran across, I felt its power like a herd of elephants or bison stampeding across the sky. I watched the different shapes the train's shadows created on the white sands. Usually I wore no shoes so that I could feel the sands of the river as my feet sunk into them.

When I stepped out of our house on Crooks Street, the purple and red clay mountains that surrounded me seemed to hold the whole world. I thought that up must be the only way out, so I had a habit of walking with my head held back, my eyes looking upward. I often ran into things: trees, doors, and fences. Still, I kept my head up. Somehow I knew the universe was limitless. I looked for hours into the sky while lying on a sand dune along the dry river bottom. I had a secret spot beside the river, and sometimes I would whistle and semi-wild dogs would come running from all directions. When all the stars were out, I felt there was something hidden behind each one, as if the stars played hide-and-seek, off and on, like fireflies.

Whenever I saw a rainbow strung across the sky from B Hill to the mountains, I thought of a series of brilliantly colored sidewalks, each one leading into a new adventure, each one having its own mystery. Other times, I saw the rainbow as a gateway into a dream, a new dimension, something everlasting. Life seemed to go on forever. The stars, like the semi-wild dogs, were loyal to themselves, and they always shone together, even on the darkest night.

We had domestic animals on our land: chickens, rabbits, pigeons, turkeys, greyhounds, and hogs. I could sit for hours, for an entire day sometimes, watching them.

Other times I crossed the dry river, a half-mile or so from the back of our house, and watched the desert animals: road-runners, lizards, rattlesnakes, jack and cottontail rabbits, and birds. (*By Heart*, 2010, pp. 31-32)

I did not have any mentors in writing until I signed up for Judith Tannenbaum's poetry class, and discovered that I had, had many teachers in nature, books and other artists living and dead like Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Socrates, Shakespeare, Ralph W. Emerson, Pablo Neruda, Martin Esslin, Charles Dickens, James Baldwin, Silvia Plath, Judith Tannenbaum, Kate D., Diana Henning, Samuel Beckett and many, many more. I have learned a great deal from dead artists, poets, writers, and philosophers about the endless process of writing. (phase I essay)

Sometimes a person's level in something is low because he was not exposed to the knowledge to open it all up, or no teacher had touched him in a way to inspire and flip the switch to learn. Sometimes a tragedy even can flip the switch to learn and books can do that also. What finally made me want to grasp a concept of language, grammar, English and syntax, was because I now knew I could. (phase II narrative)

Yet I always longed to see more exotic creatures, the kinds I had read about and seen in picture books at school. I wanted to see pythons, elephants, bears, whales, and zebras. I wanted to see the large birds of prey, even vultures and buzzards. I wanted to see crocodiles and black panthers. I wanted to see the big cats, the lions and tigers that inhabited faraway places.

So I was very excited about my first field trip. The Parks and Recreation Department ran a summer enrichment program to give children things to do—sporting events and excursions. One trip was to the San Diego Zoo, and I couldn't wait. The night before, I didn't get any sleep; I was up and dressed by three a.m., waiting.

We were to embark on this adventure from the Catholic school. Everyone gathered around the huge yellow school buses as we were loaded on to them. I ran to get a window seat so I could view the passing land as we traveled. I sat looking out of the window, thinking of all the animals I would get to see. (*By Heart*, pp. 33-34)

...that he didn't get to see, at least, not that day. I wonder if Jon ever made it to a zoo before he went to prison. Unfortunately, Jon (2010) was kicked off the bus the day of his school field trip by one of the adults for not wanting to share his seat. When a boy came along and sat in his seat, and "would not leave, I beat him up. Nothing bloody or long" (*By Heart*, p. 34). Jon said, "I wanted to be alone, in a seat to myself, to observe" (p. 34).

There are many ways one can react to this story of Jon's. One can easily react negatively to Jon's violence on the bus. But, in doing this research, I have found myself reacting in other ways too. For instance, I wondered— *What must it have been like to have fourteen brothers, an almost non-communicative father, and a meek mother too afraid to speak?* Was personal space this vital for Jon to protect? Naturally I also considered Jon's reaction inappropriate to the young boy looking for a place to sit on the bus. Yet, I also wonder if this incident played some role, or served as a sign, or catalyst, of Jon's (2010) future choices:

As I stood there watching the yellow vehicles pull away from the sidewalk, one by one, a part of my heart pulled away with each bus. My heart dropped like a sparrow that had been shot. I sat down on the curb in the early morning sunshine and watched the wagons

full of smiling children go on their way. I would have preferred a paddling instead of missing this field trip. (*By Heart*, p. 34)

Jon continues his narrative with describing the differences between the paddlings he got at school, and the beatings he got at home. He writes about the safe “place only dogs, snakes, and spiders lived” – his only safe place, a spot under the house. But it is Jon’s and Tannenbaum’s title of their co-authored book, *By Heart*, and his words in this particular section of his narrative, “a part of my heart pulled away with each bus,” and “my heart dropped,” that reach most tenderly into my own heart for this writer. Something rather central and critical to Jon’s life and narrative happened that day (p. 35).

And as Jon (2010) drew out the stories of his beatings and paddlings, he went on in his reflective narrative to point out:

My hopes, my dreams, my desires—the whole world, everything around me—seemed violent: society, school, church, the pigeons, chickens, hogs, and dogs we raised at home. I stood at the pigeon coop and watched the birds battle over box houses, trying to peck each other’s eyes and beaks out. They slapped each other upside the head with their wings and then turned around in a circle dance. The winner got the love and the female. When the dogs fought, especially the semi-wild ones, their fights were long, vicious, and sometimes to the death. (p. 35)

Today I believe Jon is very different from that boy who missed the field trip. When I consider Jon today, through his writings and our correspondences, I know that if he were able to return to that yellow bus, with all that he has come to understand about humanity and life, he would have found a way to share his seat. He is not that boy who hides under the house and sees the world as violent place in which violence is required to survive.

What would be the first thing you'd do if you were no longer in prison?

I would gather up some food and my native flute and go sit under a bridge, a tree, and then a sand dune, and I would play my flute and hope my bird friends anywhere on Mother Earth where I am playing would come join me. I would sit long and enjoy nature's silence and take in deep breaths. (taken from P.O.P.S. blogsite, January 2015)

Pre-prison, my life had never been one of words. I could barely read, and I spoke as my father did to me, in one-word sentences, shrugs, or by nodding my head. But during the months I was on trial, I sat stunned by all the words the DA used. I had no idea what these words meant and I told myself then that I would not let unknown words trap me. I started studying the dictionary in the county jail and reading all I could. I began to awaken the sleeping student inside me and took my first steps on my journey.

Once at San Quentin, I checked out all the books I could get from the prison library and education department. In one notebook I wrote down definitions. I used my favorite words in sentences in another notebook. I became enraptured with words and reading. I said certain words aloud many times and pondered a word in the way I thought of the garden in front of the prison chapel, or a sparrow singing in the tree by the captain's porch. I took all the adult high school education classes offered in the daytime. At night, I took all the college classes, self-help, and personal expansion programs offered: A Course in Miracles, Transcendental Meditation, and Toastmasters. All of these programs stressed taking responsibility for one's actions, forgiveness, growth, love, and peace.

Question

Education is like a friendship
You treat it with respect
Love and passion
It prospers

Never let a question
Burning
In your soul
Like unwatered

It's like an apple tree
That keeps
Its secret
That it's a rose

Never let hatred
Get in the way
Of your loving
Never let politics
Get in the way
Of your dreaming

Never let walls
Get in the way
Of your freedom
Or your education

Never let a foul
Word spoken to you
Out of fear
Dampen your spirit

Mark Twain
Said it best...
"Never let schooling
Get in the way
Of your education"

But like a thirsty
Desert
Keep your
Heart open

To that mentor
That educator
Reaching across
That darkness (taken from P.O.P.S blogsite, October, 2013)

Indian summer at San Quentin and the sweet sun brings back the times I ran the dry river with the greyhound dogs and lay under the heavy black railroad bridge as the trains rumbled across, shaking the soft sands. In those times, I watched the shadows of the railcars dart by, and when night fell on a hot day, played kick-the-can in pure desert darkness. There were no streetlights on Crooks Street when I was a boy.

My skin feels warm and alive this San Quentin September, as though I am a lizard sunning on a big rock. Instead I wear prison blues—shirt, pants, coat—plus brown high-top boots and dark shades, the coat and the shades I put on whenever I am outside the cell. I sit in my spot on the winding metal stairs of the San Quentin education building and see Judith bouncing down the steps from the Arts-in-Corrections office. I notice her healthy pale skin, small feet, slightly curly brown hair, long flowered skirt, and tire-track sandals.

Yes, I notice that Judith is a woman and at the same time a human being, struggling with life, death, truth, and imagination just as I am. She has already shown me new doors to step into, even in my silence, so I am able to absorb and appreciate that Judith is a woman in an all male prison, but also the leader and teacher of the poetry class.

This warm September afternoon, Judith is not as much a stranger to me as I am to her, for she has had to put herself out there to be credible. I have watched and listened to her share her truth, views, life, wisdom, and poetry. I know her through the books she

suggested, the poetry she read aloud, and the ways she related to the others in the poetry class. (*By Heart*, pp. 9-10)

Having the doors of poetry opened to me by a woman was, I think, very important. As men in prison, we were caught up in a macho, masks-always-on, non-feeling world. In this setting, deep in one of the basement classrooms at San Quentin, having a woman artist teach me poetry was, at times, surreal. It allowed a full integration and expression of self through art. (*By Heart*, p. 12)

As Jon describes how he began his writing career, under the influence of a woman, I wonder if other prison writers share in his insights about how the “macho, masks-always-on, non-feeling world” is something the feminine approach can alter in a man, perhaps better or more quickly than that of a male instructor (p. 12). Undoubtedly, the two sexes have their major differences, and perhaps we can recognize that writing is a form of emotional expression. That being the case, as women commonly struggle less with being expressive, it is a topic of interest and perhaps further study for investigation. Do female prison writing instructors have a greater capacity to urge male prisoners towards the arts? Jon continues to narrate his introduction into prison writing:

My prison journey and my studies had taught me to observe the changes, the vibes, the sounds, and pitches that buzzed around me. I focused in on, or felt, everyone’s gestures, voices, or moves. Silence gave me amazing focus and depth. I had heard Judith speak from the heart, nearly in tears, as some of the fellows in the group drilled her about her motives and reasons for coming inside San Quentin to teach. For me, either I trust somebody or I don’t. I trusted Judith instantly and trusted what she had to offer and

impart. I had no need to test, insult, or belittle her. What people are usually speaks like the sky.

Judith's words, and my fellow students' words, revealed a map to their minds, hearts, and souls. They were not nearly as much strangers to me as I was to them in my shades, chairs, and silence. This silence made many folks, including some prisoners and staff, wonder why I kept coming back after each Monday night class. The conversations, the lessons, as well as the observations I made, stretched my mind and deepened my heart. I felt more in tune with my own inner thoughts and world. When I went back to the cell after class, I read and wrote sometimes all night.

At first in my prison journey, I had just wanted to know what a word meant and how words were constructed into sentences so that high society and political folks like lawyers, doctors, and professors would not be able to say just anything and leave me not understanding. Now, in Judith's class, I began to embrace words in a new way and to allow words to embrace me. Words swarmed inside me like honeybees and took me places—imaginary and true—from the past, present, and future.

Almost everything I encountered in the poetry class was new, raw, inspiring, and fodder for my mind and heart to chew on. My journey had led me here... (*By Heart*, pp. 12-13)

Jon tells stories of his schooling years in *By Heart* – stories that hurt. They would hurt anyone, but especially a teacher. His teachers may not have cared one lick about him. It was the 1960s – 1970s. He is black. Yet, he was a boy. Did they not know he came from a large, hardworking family? “Even the principal, Mr. Chavez, got into the show. One day, in the

hallway, he pulled [Jon] to the side and said, ‘Boy, you will never graduate from high school’” (p. 14). Jon was only in elementary school. He did not know what *graduate* meant, but, he knew what Mr. Chavez meant – he was no good. Jon says the word “shot a hole in [his] already weak self-esteem” (p. 14).

Jon (2010) also tells stories of his time in Tannenbaum’s class. One story, which reveals Jon’s willingness to finally take some “bits and pieces” and “jottings” of poetry into Tannenbaum’s class, thus opening up to the idea of vulnerability, he says:

Sitting in the dungeon room, I see the interested smile on Judith’s face and the curious flow of her voice that seem to welcome the words I have to say and the bits and pieces of writing I show her. There is a lot going on inside me, like the underground waters in the dry Mohave River that no one could see. (p. 17)

Jon was losing his macho ideals, his masks-always-on facade, and his view of the world as non-feeling. Perhaps it was poetry that began that work. He seems to give credit to Tannenbaum, as well. Perhaps it was the peace and silence he finally embraced, so that learning and change could occur. With this opening up to the idea of writing and taking his jottings to his teacher, allowing vulnerability to present itself in his life, Jon entered into the life of a writer. Then, through ongoing support and encouragement, he was able to find other sustaining elements to continue in his writing.

Sustaining Forces

What sustains me is my poetry, and my inspiration from people, nature, life and the pleasure it all gives me to share realness, and to inspire other people to be themselves.
(phase II narrative)

Realness is a natural state, unaffected by time or place, an organic truth that comes out uncensored like an unaltered river over a waterfall. A place children have gone to before their truth is altered by environment and society. It is the sweet smell of lilacs without seeing them and the taste of crisp ripe green apple when there are none around. Realness was that state of letting go when I wrote the poem, “No Beauty in Cell Bars,” and I had no idea where the text came from. (*By Heart*, p. 58)

Poem lines continue to help sustain me, particularly in times of internal pain of the heart and soul. The flow of some lines from “Song of Myself” is like elephants marching in a single file. Whitman’s lines set my spirit free and give it wings to glide beyond prison walls, give me strength to bear prison conditions. The lines help me travel back to the days I ran the dry river with semi-wild dogs. (*By Heart*, pp. 186-187)

On the Teaching Artist Journal ALT/SPACE site (tajaltspace.com), where Jon and other writing teachers write articles from the field about their various teaching projects, it was in February of 2012, a little while into what eventually became a more than six-month long lock-down, that Jon wrote the following (titled “My Reality”):

An officer told me today that a pair of geese came up to the art room fence, honking for me this morning, as loud as fog horns – their voices echoing throughout the corridor. But I will not be there today, at least not physically, because we are on lock-down for I do not know how long. There was a riot yesterday, on the big yard, between some black and brown prisoners.

I will not be allowed out of the cage to run my classes, commune with the birds, or breathe in Mother Earth. So, I focus on the teaching artist fellowships I have through the mail. I have only a few correspondence fellowships with students now, because snail mail has become almost obsolete. (taken from “My Reality” on tajaltspace.com)

It seems that without modern technology, which most students are accustomed to using in classrooms today, Jon might eventually, and unintentionally, be segued out of his teaching fellowships. Waiting for correspondence by mail, no matter the instructor or his/her credits, seems obsolete in today’s pedagogical methods. Even when I taught high school, I accepted student papers by email, and was then able to respond to them with comments within their documents, and return their texts promptly. This form of feedback is vital between teacher and student during the writing process, as it has also sustained my own work in moving through the stages of writing and revising this dissertation with Pagnucci’s council and guidance. Sadly, prisoners are still prohibited to make use of online resources, unless there are certain circumstances allowing their minimal use – prison journalists are an example. Jon continues:

Thus, on this lock-down, I’ll mainly read and ponder books. I’ll cultivate new ideas through my studies, writing and meditation. I’ll give my spirit, heart, mind, and soul fodder to create lessons in the moment, like jazz. The lessons will come out when needed in the future. Tomorrow will bring what it brings. (taken from “My Reality” on tajaltspace.com)

And in reading and pondering Jon’s words, I find myself cultivating some new ideas, as well – at least, about Jon, and perhaps, about all of us. When we are given the ability to be important, to be needed, we are sustained. There is hope.

Another article from the Teaching Artist Journal ALT/SPACE site, titled “Moving Past Hostile Classes,” (January 2012), Jon narrates a type of personal history behind his writing and teaching life:

In 1988, after I performed Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot* before international audiences at San Quentin State Prison, my confidence and belief in myself as a poet, artist and human being rose and flowed with inspiration like a thawing creek in spring. I wanted to share openly and freely whatever gifts I have as an artist and, hopefully, inspire others to share their gifts.

I became a teacher’s aide. I ran small writing, reading and acting groups in the 1990’s at Donovan State Prison and at California Men’s Colony Prison. I remember going into hostile classrooms to recite poetry and Shakespeare and to read my published work. A lot of the cats in the classrooms did not know what to make of me. I could see *who in the hell do he think he is* in some faces. When I introduced myself and told the class how long I had been in prison, some of their masks fell down. Some students with hostile gazes turned away from me and kicked it with their friends. Some maintained their stoic prisoner look throughout the reading, while others ignored me all together.

I kept on reciting, and the teacher in each class would let me know how much he or she enjoyed my presentation. I answered student and teacher questions at the end of the readings and I let the classes know how important it is to ask questions.

Back then, in the 90’s, in those hostile classes, I did touch some hearts and souls with each poetry reading. I kept going back to perform in the classrooms, and more and more of the guys came around to liking my work. My walk as a teaching artist grew around CMC. I became accepted as a poet and a cool weirdo. Some cats shared their first

poems with me. Sometimes, even now, guys come up to me to tell me how my work inspired them back then.

Today I have my own creative writing classes. Word about my work and our prisoner-run-and-taught art programs here at New Folsom has gotten around the yard, the prison system, and some outside local communities. It has also been documented in film, in my book *By Heart* (co-Authored with Judith Tannenbaum), and in my poetry book *Longer Ago*.

These days, here at New Folsom, word is that to get into one of my writing classes quickly you must audition. When I walk into the prison yard, people from all colors, gangs, and backgrounds come up to me. Some recite a poem, verse or rap. Some tell me they are writers, poets, singers, rappers, pimps, gangsters or players. Some express how tight their lyrics and prose are, and that they have written articles, songs, poems and books. I listen and then I let them know I am open to reading their writing; I tell them to show me their skills, not tell me. Some people do bring their text to me at the gate where I feed the birds. Some tell me they have poems and books in their heads and I encourage them to bring it out on paper.

There are long waiting lists for most of our classes. The turnover rate in the classes due to lock-downs, prison politics, transgressions and transfers can be swift and sad. Before I even finished my first post for ALT/space [in October 2011] the student highlighted in this piece, Wikiri Ologun, was transferred, and not because he had done anything wrong. Wikiri had chosen to walk a path of creativity. He wanted to stay in this environment that is open to the creative process. He knew that New Folsom is the only spot in the California prison system to have a creative arts program. Peer pressure and

prison politics on other prison yards that have no arts will are intense, and the art can wither without fellowship. But we keep creating.

Remember

When I walk or fly
out of this place
no one will remember
how the birds came to me
as friends and shared bread

No one will remember
how I planted a garden
of flowers and spices
in a space where growth
is prohibited

No one will remember
the Shakespeare and my poems
I read in hostile classes

I should have known
that once the trees
were all chopped down
like unarmed soldiers
I would be transferred.

Legacy

Well, I am not a prison writer I am a writer in prison (phase II narrative).

This was not only stated by Jon, but by two of my other three co-authors. In my letters to them, I attempted to address my concern about how else I would define them apart from other writers. It seemed somehow unavoidable to only refer to them as writers when this project is distinct in that it attempts to recognize how their imprisonment is the reason that their writing is not deemed credible in most academics. No matter how I approach them by definition, I am in a predicament of not showing them for how specialized and rare they are. In chapter 6, I examine some of the nuances of little “t” truths, and big “T” Truths, and how our words are charged with

meanings that go beyond our individual understandings or experiences. For the writer in prison, the term *prisoner* will always lay a weight over the person; in this country, the term is highly charged for deep negative connotations. I have struggled with the usage of these two words throughout this dissertation, and that is why I have attempted to move towards the term *co-authors*. Unfortunately, with a title of prison writer, a legacy is already injured and the writer has a greater mountain to climb. Still, Jon's faith and hope in his artistic construction of words are how he presents what kind of legacy he is leaving:

My legacy as a writer has been documented in three films and a fourth one to come about. My legacy as a writer is that I make my deadlines and walk in my own shoes. I inspired others to write and walk in his, or her, own shoes. My legacy is also documented in my poetry. (phase II narrative)

Forging my path in life is a melancholic mixture of wonder and sadness. I am not happy, nor will I ever be happy, in prison. (*By Heart*, p. 192)

No Beauty in Cell Bars

Restless, unable to sleep
Keys, bars, guns being racked
Year after year
Endless echoes
Of steel kissing steel

Noise
Constant yelling
Nothing said
Vegetating faces, lost faces
Dusted faces

A lifer
A dreamer

Tomorrow's a dream
Yesterday's a memory
Both a passing of a cloud

How I long
For the silence of a raindrop
Falling gently to earth
The magnificence of a rose

Blooming into its many hues
Of color
The brilliance of a rainbow
When it sweetly lights up the sky
After a pounding rainfall

Picnics in a rich green meadow
We saw the beauty in butterflies
We made it our symbol
Tiny grains of sand
One hour glass
A tear that may engender
A waterfall

The memories
The dreams
Are now
Love is now
There's no beauty in cell bars (*Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough*,
pp. 89-90)

I will be released from prison one day, by a beautiful real life or by a beautiful real death.

In either case, I have found my niche in life which is something not even death can take away. (*By Heart*, p. 192)

Marty

From my viewpoint of flourishing writers in prison, I have come to see Marty as one of the most prolific, contemporary voices for the painfully voiceless prisoner. His publications almost make his name synonymous with prison reform. Unlike Jon's writing, more poetic and creative, Marty writes like me. He composes essays, narratives, editorials, and predominantly

non-fiction/non-creative pieces. Please see his Writing Bio (Appendix I), which actually needs to be updated, again (by him), to include his most recent publications in *Harper's Magazine*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Bay View*, and the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*. As busy as Marty is, he kindly took up the efforts of including my writing requests into his already hectic schedule. For that, I am extremely grateful. Also, he informed me early on that I need not worry about money for postage; "Bottom-line, I'm not hurting for money," he wrote in one of his earliest letters. And Marty has sent me, according to him, "about 95% of [his] published writing in clip form." He said that a few things slipped out of his hands, and a few others were published without him knowing, which is what Mil also attested to in his own efforts to mail out his writings to me. So I have two notebooks filled with Marty's works, not to mention his books, which, he actually mailed portions to me, as well.

Therefore, in working through the coding process with Marty's data, I recognized a number of themes that made their way into this narrative of how he got started, is sustained, and the legacy he hopes for. His writing, because it is similar to my own style, was a bit easier to code. Clearly, two of his published books, his wife and daughter, his visions of prison reform, and his ongoing efforts to educate us about life sentences are the main areas I knew I needed to present, because while reading all his materials, these were the ones that were most recurring. When coding all our correspondences, his writing, his phase I, II, and III documents, and all the other materials I have accumulated for him, these four themes emerged as most prominent, and I edited and arranged all the selected pieces of Marty's writing to best fit within the three subsections (getting started, sustaining forces, and legacy), according to them. This, too, was not a smooth process. With so much data for each of these men, it felt a bit overwhelming at times. However, I believe the reader will recognize that these four themes (Marty's two books, his wife

and daughter, prison reform, and life without the possibility of parole) do embody a strong demonstration of field texts (data) to answer each of the three research questions, even though I have unfortunately had to exclude much of Marty's work. Again, this is only an introduction of the prison writer to composition.

Getting Started

Marty's most popular book, *Mother California: A Story of Redemption Behind Bars* (2009/2015), just released its second edition, and is one that I would consider to be a landmark text within prison writing, even though in the book Marty makes little mention of his writing life. There is a clear change in the narrative at about page 87, as Marty sets up the bleak affairs that are about to occur in his prison life. He proclaims: "It's always in the darkest moments that a person's true character reveals itself" (p. 87). He also goes on to foreshadow upcoming experiencing with presenting one of his primary prison life theories:

There are two fundamental choices in doing time: One is a passive approach that renders the prisoner a victim of fate, as manifested in prisoners who wear ill-fitting state clothes and live in beat-up cells. Those who deal with imprisonment this way will argue they are simply refusing to give in and accept their confinement. The other approach is to become active, to clean up your surroundings and your clothes. By standing up and taking charge of yourself, you influence and create your environment. Your cell is your home. For the defeated, their cell is a cage they flail around in, forever reminding themselves how dismal their lives are. (pp. 87-88)

Then, Marty goes through a number of isolating experiences with being moved and kept in the hole for falsely being diagnosed with AIDS (three times), releasing his "grip on the conscious world around" him, and not being able to have communication with his long-time

girlfriend Anita, who he was about to marry before he was hauled off (p. 92). Anita's letters were showing her increased desperation to know why Marty was unable to write to her, and as she called the prison and arrived for visitation, she was told a number of lies and false information that made her even more frightened about Marty's health. She was also told he was in the hospital, although he was not. She was told that he had AIDS and that it affects the brain first. So as her concern intensified, and he was eventually taken back to his old cell and allowed to visit her again, he explains that, "More than ever before, I see in her the path out of the barrens of my inner life" (p. 97).

Shortly after, they were married, and Marty's memoir takes its all-time low as he narrates his walk back to his cell after forty-four hours with his bride in the family visiting apartment:

I also discover the utter depression of returning to prison after she leaves. Once Anita is processed out and I clean up the apartment, after performing the ritualized strip search, I'm escorted back through the large gate and then an inner gate to the upper yard. This is the first of the many times I make the long walk back to my cell. The bare yard looks particularly confining. The central tower looks taller and more menacing. The front steel door to the housing unit seems thicker and louder crashing closed behind me. My cell feels less like my house and more like the cage it is, no matter my efforts to soften its concrete edges, to claim it away from the system. I have never done harder time. (p. 99)

From here on in *Mother California*, Marty's memoir narrates his "inner journey to self-awareness," by "reading every book [he] can find about personal growth" (p. 100). He also comes to conclude that, "The truth is, these forces are out of my control, but I am in control of myself. For a prisoner, this is a realization of immense proportions" (p. 102). And he finally acknowledges that "at the bottom of [his] journey of self-discovery," he finds the "first

substantial flickering of pride based on [his] ability to make a rational, positive decision” (p. 105). Marty states: “It is out of this, more than anything else, that I’m compelled to speak, to tell my story” (p. 105).

Marty declares that his serious and focused reading was done to “achieve equanimity, to drive disorder out of [his] life” (p. 106). He says that “Stoicism emphasizes the taking of personal responsibility—a character trait and a way of life completely foreign to the world of prison” (p. 106). He also recognized that “as a consequence of the group therapy,” with four other men and a remarkable shrink, which he continued for four years, he and the others were “able to develop a level of trust, to delve more deeply into [themselves]” (p. 107). Also, from the books he was reading (Kant, Camus, Nietzsche, Will and Ariel Durant’s *The Story of Philosophy*, to name a few), “and the incalculable effect of the love [he felt] from Anita—all of this part of the internal journey to master [himself]” he was “determined to rehumanize the man [he] killed” (p. 107).

I have lived with my fears of abandonment and ostracism all my conscious life, but I could never label and own these feelings. The other men in the group are as profoundly affected as I am. At different times, we all cry, we all reveal parts of ourselves not usually opened in the predatory world of prison, and we grow. (p. 107)

Then, a few more pages into his memoir, Marty writes:

One day I notice a posting on the bulletin board for a creative writing class. Anita has told me I should be a writer, an idea that never struck me as more than the puffery of love. I have written a lot of legal briefs in defense of prisoner’s rights, but nothing creative. I’m curious to find out if I have any talent, though, so I sign up. The first meeting is in a few weeks, in the afternoon, in the library. (pg. 115)

In his waiting, he hits the iron pile (outdoor weight benches). Then, he has his first writing class, which he says he cannot imagine anything productive coming out of it since it is a “collection of human odds and ends” (p. 115). He narrates:

The teacher, David Scott Milton, who’s working on contract through the sadly underfunded Arts in Corrections program, strikes me as a little too ruffled around the edges himself. The prisoners range from a couple of old cats to a few youngsters, of all hues and sizes, and with a surprising level of literacy. As in a lot of urban high schools, it’s not a big social plus to be an intellectual in the joint, and what passes for education in here is limited. Those who have managed to accumulate formal knowledge tend to be autodidacts, and keep it to themselves. David makes a couple of points right off that grab my attention. He teaches in the graduate-level writing program at the University of Southern California and compares us to his exceptionally well-prepared, well-groomed, well-educated students who lack significant life experiences; we have an overabundance of life experiences. Most of us have been run over by life experiences. Next, he compares the process of storytelling to a series of “complications.” He tells us to write three complications by next week. I like assignments.

Unlike most prison writers, I don’t fancy myself a budding screenwriter, a songwriter, a poet, or a novelist. I initially see in writing a chance to explore my life, to try to understand all that’s happened, to follow the contours of the dark conundrum. I start writing little vignettes of memory, but quickly realize what I must do before I pursue any serious writing. First, and most painfully, I have to apologize for my actions. David suggests I simply write out how I feel about killing Mr. Fellowes. After many false starts, through the process of writing about the trial I discover the one unfortunate commonality

he and I shared—neither of us had any family members or loved ones present during the proceedings. We were both alone in the courtroom. Sure, the district attorney claimed to speak for Mr. Fellowes, but he didn't know him. The truth is, I knew Mr. Fellowes better than the D.A. did, and I was the last living soul to speak to him. I was the last human being to hear his gruff voice, to see his face flash with color, to notice his workingman's garb. Before I stole the spark from his eyes, before I killed him, I was the last person he saw on this earth. No one came to the trial on his behalf; no one collected his remains. He simply ceased to exist. All of this caused to well up in me a tremendous sense of guilt and sympathy, a profound connection. He wasn't mourned by anyone. I started off the piece, "Who mourns Thomas Allen Fellowes?"

After I finish reading the much-revised essay in class, there is a moment of silence, followed by a smattering of applause, congratulations, and deep breaths. Without meaning to, I have broken through the fourth wall of convicted felons, particularly those who have killed. We struggle desperately to remove ourselves, to create distance between the terrible acts we've committed and our hearts. To dig too deeply into any given story is to risk unearthing things we don't want to know. It isn't generally done. David is clearly moved and excited. He asks me what I'm going to do with my essay. I tell him I'll send it to my hometown paper as a kind of public repentance. He thinks it's a great idea, so a few days later I mail it to the *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, the same paper that used to land on my family's doorstep every afternoon. The paper my father read every day with the same clockwork regularity that governed everything he did. The paper that brought shame to our common name. (pp. 115-117)

Not long after, Marty receives a letter from a friend. In the letter, there is also a page from the *Long Beach Press-Telegram*. This is Marty's first publication. He narrates:

Under the overwrought headline, "Murderer Is Filled with Remorse for Sin," and accompanied by a drawing that looks disconcertingly like me morphing into a skeleton, my apology fills up half a page of the Sunday opinion section. It is printed verbatim.

Though it's a thrill to see my words in print, the subject matter is too disturbing for me to feel good about it. I ultimately receive a number of letters in response to the piece. All of them are positive, ranging from mildly encouraging to downright supportive. The letter I secretly desire, the one from someone in my family, never arrives. I've always wondered what my father thought when he read it.

Mother California is a must read, along with so many of Marty's other publications, like his very first published piece in the *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, because with almost 37 years in, Marty knows prison. But also, like most other well-published, career prison writers, Marty knows redemption and reform. I know he agreed to be a part of this project because he is an advocate and voice for the voiceless, but also, he agreed to share his writing for this research because he is a good man.

Sustaining Forces

As we begin to look at what has sustained and what keeps Marty writing, I would like to address that issue: Marty being a good man. In our letters, from the start, Marty's daughter has been a topic between us. He has sent pictures of her to me, and I have commented on how proud of her he must be. She is in college now, and aside from writing (like her dad), she is employed as Database Coordinator at *Prison Radio*¹⁹ in San Francisco, where she also attends San

¹⁹ Prison Radio is an independent, non-profit, multi-media production studio – not a radio station. They produce content for radio stations, TV, and films, but they do not broadcast. They work with venues to get their content

Francisco State University. In the two quotes at the beginning of this chapter, one from Marty, and the other from his daughter, they both seem to be writing about the same topic – second chances. This theme, from what I gather, also seems to be what the filmmakers were trying to capture in their HBO documentary²⁰ where both Marty and his daughter were featured. Their essays were also featured on the website for the documentary. Marty’s daughter’s essay, titled, “Most Matters in Life are not as Simple as Good and Bad,” informs us that at 19, the same age Marty was “when he was sent away to this place and locked up forever,” it is hard for her to write about his death sentence because she doesn’t “remember a time when all of this hit [her] and became something to figure out instead of live with.” She says, “it’s just always been.”

Then, she goes on to say:

I guess that I can be thankful for that; maybe it makes it easier. I’ve never felt a reason to hide this part of my life from other people. Usually, when I end up talking about my dad, the question I’m ultimately faced with is how I reconcile my father’s past with the man he is now.

She acknowledges that she might come across as protective of him, but after telling us that her “life started where most go to end, on the grounds of a maximum-security unit in the middle of nowhere California,” she goes on to write about their relationship, with stories:

When I think of my dad, I have to go to the beginning. He was the most excited father; constantly ready for any and all of the games I wanted to play, a master LEGO builder, who excelled at putting on as many voices as each book he read to me required.

distributed throughout the world, and their content is designed to challenge the various injustices of mass incarceration, racism and gender discrimination within the judicial system, and the more than 7.1 million people under some form of correctional control in the U.S. today. Mumia Abu-Jamal is probably their most famous and frequent contributor, which as Mil explains later, is the topic of great debate and controversy right now – perhaps explaining why Mumia did not respond to my invitation to be a part of this study.

²⁰ “Toe Tag Parole: To Live and Die on Yard A,” which aired in early August of 2015. Both Marty and his daughter are featured in the film, and unfortunately, I could not gain access to it. However, both Marty’s and Marty’s daughter’s essays, featured on the film’s website, are available publically.

My dad, in his chambray shirt and blue jeans, with his old and fading tattoos suggesting something more sinister, the things the television teaches you make a person harder to love.

On Sundays, mom and I would drive down Avenue J. My smile would grow as the watchtowers came into view, the barbed wire of the fences shining in the desert's hot morning sun. The prison has never been a prison for me. It's a strange type of home, a place that lives inside of me, and the guiding presence of my father's calm voice in my head.

Of course, as I read her words, I cannot disassociate her from her mother, Anita. In *Mother California*, Marty tells us the story of his relationship with his wife and how they struggled with the decision of having a child together. It was something Anita wanted for years, and because of his deep love for her, Marty came to want it too – knowing the future would be hard. Yet, they did it. Marty made the most of his time with his daughter, in all their visits, and in her essay, she personifies his second chance. Her nostalgic memories of him are evidence of one of the major sustaining elements to his writing life. She continues:

As I've grown older, I've surprised myself with how well I've staved off the feelings the outside world has tried to force upon me. I've heard all the comments, been the brunt of many jokes, and have desperately tried to prove to others the meaning of giving someone a second chance.

I now relate. I have listened to concerned words about this work I am doing, and I have heard some unkind comments, too, but I believe this research has changed me to fully understand her words concerning second chances.

Then, Marty's daughter points out that "the number of times [she has] had to defend [her] dad to strangers leads [her] to believe that it's hard for anyone not connected with the system to imagine caring about the group of people we are taught to fear the most." She acknowledges that her father is not "just a number," and not "just somebody society has collectively given up on." She tells us:

My father has taught me the absolute value of unconditional love and proven to me that everyone is capable of change given the right structure and help. In between the laughs and games, my dad has told me all the stories: from the time he hitchhiked across the country in his teens to the senseless violence he found solace in as a young man.

Through each of these stories, I have learned the weight of one's actions, the value of respect, and the truth that many don't want to face because it puts a difficult kind of responsibility on us: that given the right circumstances, we are all capable of violence and that it takes the strongest person to overcome that violence and actively fight for peace. It is foolish to assume that bad things are exclusively done by bad people. The lessons he has taught me have impacted the way I see the world in a way that can never be quantified and for that I am eternally grateful.

It's painful knowing that my dad will never be free, that our relationship will always exist in visits behind prison walls, in phone calls, in letters; but I could never ask for a better man to call my father.

And with that endearing validation from Marty's 19 year old daughter, I believe my statement also seems more believable that he truly is a good man deserving of a second chance. However, if Marty's daughter's testimony of her dad's influence is not enough to convince someone of Marty being a genuinely good man, all his writing will.

In fact, I would say that all of Marty's writing serves to be of positive influence to society, prisoners, and all of humanity – not to mention his daughter, as she is always part of his audience – perhaps his primary sustaining force. From the title and fifty second clip I was able to view of “Toe Tag Parole: To Live and Die on Yard A” (the HBO film), it did seem as though the filmmakers were also trying to make the same argument as Marty and his daughter – people should be given second chances. With the HBO movie, Marty's essay, his daughter's essay, and the two of them being featured in the film, it does appear that the sentence of life without the possibility of parole should be questioned. And since Marty is one of the most prominent prison writers about this and other topics pertaining to prison sentencing and reform, he is certainly one of the primary individuals the filmmakers would want to present.

However, Marty has written on topics of a wide variety: prison reform, prison politics, prison culture, prison violence, visitation days, prisoners' voices, prisoners' reading preferences, guards, tensions, books he is allowed to keep, books that are accurate about prison, his last days before his arrest, stages prisoners with life sentences go through, the Catholic church, informants never being forgiven, “quiet,” as the key to unlock peace, purpose, honor, the power of books, why he needs to know things, transformation, redemption, lockdowns, Facebook, foreign affairs, Christmas in prison, day-to-day prison living, and others. All these topics about prison living are additional sustaining forces for his writing. He writes to inform, advocate, educate, and as already stated, to be a powerful voice for the voiceless. He has taken on that role honorably.

Marty is well-published, and he is widely known, and now, after all these years, and with little public writing about prison writing, he has kindly taken the time to do so for this metanarrative. To an almost uncanny nature, prior to the change in my research topic (from the process approach to a narrative inquiry of prison writers and prison writing history), Marty had

already submitted his phase I essay (titled “Why Write?”), which cohesively, and even chronologically, answers the three research questions (how he got started writing in prison, what sustains him, and his legacy). In fact, it was almost like he knew that this study was eventually going to go in that direction. Here is a portion that presents some of his intrinsic motives, and sustaining forces for writing:

The words rush out of me, a scrawled, sprawling mass of badly shaped symbols resembling letters only barely. When it comes out like this, my primary job is to try not to let my cramped fingers or questioning monkey brain get in the way of what is, essentially, a mysterious process. There is a channel somewhere in my mind that has opened to a place I can’t easily access, although as the years and the many thousands of previous words have passed through, the way to the source is a little bit simpler now. Most important, I trust in my ability to get there, to find that elusive combination of words that says more than each word means by itself, that takes the picture in my mind and paints it in the reader’s mind. In these moments, I’m a writer.

This passage arguably shows that anyone can be a writer. The act is less about quickly attaining a finished product, and more about the process of resting in the capturing of the picture in the mind, and not quitting until we feel we have adequately presented that picture. We all have ideas and thoughts and images to share; when we work diligently to best present those clear and concise thoughts or images for our readers, we are writers. We labor through our choice of words and hone in on what we know to be true, no matter how long it may take, and then we let the readers come to their own understanding. We did what we could, and that is why anyone can be a writer. The process of getting through that writing pursuit is also what sustains us as writers –

not wanting to let our words be incomplete or underdeveloped. In the same phase I essay, Marty writes:

As far back as I can recall, I loved the written word. I never imagined I'd write myself, but I read all the time. My mother taught me how before I started elementary school. She could read a big book in one night; the next day she could tell you the details with pinpoint accuracy. We were book-oriented people. My older brother gave me textbooks and histories for Christmas and birthdays; my father read the paper every night.

The summer between fourth and fifth grade I read every blue, faux-leather volume of the encyclopedia set my great-grandmother had sent as a present all the way from Boston to North Long Beach. It was as if she had sent the world itself into my cramped bedroom. I devoured those books in a hungry couple of months like a monk reading scripture in his cell. I didn't want to do anything else. When I closed the last one it was both satisfying and disappointing, all at once.

In the early years of my imprisonment, back before the great crackdown gathered steam and crushed higher thinking in these places, learning was encouraged and supported. The library at Folsom State Prison was crowded with college textbooks that I checked out and read, cover-to-cover. High-quality literature was shared and discussed on the yard along with the drug trade and who was scheduled to be stabbed. We prided ourselves on being educated barbarians.

Because such conversations like who is to be stabbed, are unavoidable in prison, what is an educated prisoner supposed to do? I have wondered about this, and have concluded that having to adapt to a particular culture, despite knowing that the culture is dead wrong, is another form of intelligence. Marty, and my other co-authors, have had to learn this art of adaptation to the

chaotic climate of prison; it is like being bilingual, but with danger. But not only adapt, they have also had to psychologically disassociate from their surroundings, while still presenting a sense of acceptance to them. What a challenge for a writer. Every word chosen is more carefully selected and ruminated over than perhaps anything written on the outside. Marty discusses this a bit:

Writing with purpose started in my pursuit of love from a beautiful girl I fell for in the depths of my campaign to make of myself the perfect beast. I wrote long, complicated letters filled with obscure references to philosophical theories and ancient battles, tidbits from those encyclopedias and textbooks I studied. I put together cohesive and persuasive arguments that originated inside the pile of good books I'd read, all the way back to that glorious summer of my mind.

Anita kept encouraging me to write. "You're a writer," she'd tell me, "You should write about the world you live in because no one out here understands." I'd been raised on the yard with the prohibition against even talking about what went on in here to the rest of the world. We believed in the secrecy of our isolation, in our vainglorious, false nobility, and we protected it against all outside scrutiny. It was only after I'd decamped Folsom and got far away from that place's utter darkness that I could see how our silence furthered our punishment.

Purposeful writing, in prison, cannot be viewed the same way it is in academia. Surely there are researchers and scholars whose intent is to write about the world of academia because no one outside of it understands it, but are these scholars writing anything that people find unworthy? The mountains by which a prison writer must climb are far more elevated than the ones scholars and students climb. There is more to conquer and defeat – internally, and publically. Yet, as Marty points out, the alternative of silence only worsens the overly callous punitive penalty:

After I got out of the hole for the ninth time in 1992, and I found myself on a boring yard with nothing interesting to do, I signed up for the only program I could – a creative writing class taught by an old Jewish guy who also taught screenwriting at the University of Southern California.

In those days, only twelve years into what was beginning to feel a lot like forever, my rage and frustration were still simmering, threatening to boil over. Although I'd been forced into sobriety by my desire for sex, and though the sex was surely worth it [*Marty's marriage to Anita allowed him conjugal visitation rights*], there were many days when I longed for the release from the harsh reality I'd forced onto myself.

The writing class proved to be a much greater release than I anticipated, mostly because of the quality of the teacher, a man of uncommon depth and seriousness of purpose. He challenged me to attack writing with real honesty, with fearlessness, and with the same kind of stubborn determination that was, and still is, the defining characteristic of my life.

In that I felt a tremendous amount of shame and remorse for pouring all of my unhappiness out onto the head of a drunken homeless man in Ramona Park, I decided to write about that first. What finally came out, after several false starts, examined my conscience and commonality to the man I killed. It was cathartic to write about it, and the fact that I used his real name was a little revolutionary for that time. My writing teacher encouraged me to submit the piece to my hometown newspaper – the same paper that used to land on the front porch of the house I grew up in, the same paper that my father read every night with a cup of black coffee and a Lucky Strike cigarette. I mailed it as a “letter to the editor.” It was published as the lead, signed opinion piece in the Sunday

paper, filling the whole space above the fold, alongside a drawing that looked too much like me not to be unsettling.

Thus began my first writing career, which lasted a couple of years before the institution decided to restrict my writing by deeming it a “business.” (In the fuck-prisoners ‘90s, conducting a business was made illegal just for this sort of purpose.) Before it ended, I wrote about how the ludicrously punitive policies being pursued by the prison system were destined to fail miserably in the passage of time. I predicted that punishment for the sake of inflicting pain would not lower recidivism, that the three-strikes initiative would result in tens of thousands of hapless drug addicts being sentenced to life terms, and that society was being conned by the prison-industrial complex’s constituent parts into spending away their wealth on nothing of value. After the local Fox affiliate sent a reporter in to conduct an interview consequent to a letter published in the Los Angeles Daily News, I think I knew right then the pushback would come. It did, and I regrouped (stopped), for a time.

Several years later, after I’d transferred to another prison, I started writing again for submission. By this time, I had refined my business practices, sharpened my message, and decided to aim at magazines instead of newspaper. I wrote, was published, made money, won some awards, and even opened some eyes. Nevertheless, for reasons related more to my personal life and to my growing sense of frustration with the course of politics out there on the other side of the fences, I stopped, again.

We can recognize that with the stopping and starting and stopping again, this notion of finding the right words to personify the prison life is an emotionally strenuous one. Marty’s hope was

waning, and his spirit to write was crushed time and time again, despite Anita's encouragement and his own personal awareness of the height of the mountain before him. He continues:

I was arranging for a loan for the purchase of the necessary fabrics and patterns to make stuffed animals, gift items for Christmas and St. Valentine's Day, when a friend out there read about a writing contest put on by the Templeton Foundation. The "Power of Purpose" essay contest called for a maximum of 3,000 words and offered a bunch of crazy high prizes. Linda [*a good friend and an ex-girlfriend to one of Anita's brothers*] convinced me it was perfect for me, and I sat down and wrote "A Prisoner's Purpose" about my role in the creation of the Honor Program. I mailed it out and went back to my work assignment, scrubbing out the showers on the upper tier.

A month later, I was called down to the podium in the center of the dayroom. "You've got a call," the officer told me. The lovely voice of a connection in the administration said, "I don't think I'm supposed to tell you this, but I think you won a big writing contest." It turned out I was one of eight finalists, and I won \$10,000 and publication in a book as a result. The idea of sewing stuffed animals holding candy canes and pink hearts suddenly seemed foolish.

Besides the economics of it, and I am a working writer so the economics do matter, the message I received from this unexpected opportunity was clear – I have a voice, like it or not, and with that an obligation to speak out against the forces squeezing the humanity out of us.

Economics and obligation to speak become two sustaining forces for writing, but also, in *Mother California*, Marty makes another key point about the usage of the skills he acquired while

embarking on the journey through “that personal transformation” he sought, because it “is the key to everything [he hopes] to achieve” (p. 123). Continuing with the phase I essay, he clarifies:

The average prisoner does not possess the skills necessary to write through the fences and impact the people out there; the average prisoner doesn’t realize he ought to be doing anything like reaching out. So it falls on us unappreciated few who have know-how and want to speak out to do the writing, thankless task though it often is, sadly.

Another reason why compositionists should include our fellow writers in prison into the field, or the parlor, is because these highly successful writers are doing brave work that deserves public support. Marty, and so many others, have found themselves in the hole for writing. Yes, he was given an unfair punishment for doing what parents and teachers guide children to do – *be* the positive change they hope to see in the world. However, sometimes the writing holds power for those on the inside, as much I believe it could hold for many of us on the outside. Marty explains:

Men with violent histories that stretch back into our juvenile years, who have engaged in violent acts inside of maximum-security prisons and who are sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, don’t get out of prison. I file the requisite commutation applications not because I think they will get me out – they won’t – but because the people who love me need to believe there is hope of my freedom. I know I’ll die in prison, and I’ve come to terms with that reality.

Next, Marty discusses the sense of obligation, duty, and determination as other sustainers to his craft:

A working writer’s life, even one locked inside a prison doing forever, is a life of deadlines; deadlines and obligations, actually, along with requests for favors. It’s seeking

a balance between doing what you would like to do and what you need to do to move your career forward. I suspect only poets get to write exactly what they want, but poets aren't expected to sell anything. I'm expected to sell writing because that's what writers do, and because my college-age daughter is very expensive. And, as an American man of my generation, making money is how this is all measured. It would be nice if there were rewards for only writing what you wanted to write, but that's not been the truth of my life. For a prison writer, the hurdles are higher, and the path to any level of success is more twisty perhaps, but it's not impossible.

If I had to identify one specific trait that any writer has to have, besides some degree of talent – an indefinable aspect – it would be determination. In the world of writing, persistence does pay off. In fact, without persistence success isn't really possible. Maybe for some highly-favored, gifted few, but not for the rest of us mere mortals trying to scratch out a living while telling something on paper worth reading. It's a job, and a tough job at that. There are benefits, still.

With Cob, the last narrative of the four in this chapter, I would say that determination is one of the greater themes behind his writing, but it can easily be said about Mil and Jon, as well. The more manuscripts they send out, statistically the odds of publication go up. And because it is a full-time job for Marty, funding his daughter's college education, he knows he cannot quit; it's another serious sustaining force to his writing. So while monetary rewards are essential for all three, it might be the greatest pursuit of Marty, as dad and funder of college tuition.

Marty also acknowledges the reward of voice:

One of the best parts of being a writer in prison, no less than a writer anywhere else, is being heard. The vast majority of people really do live quiet lives of anonymous

desperation. No one cares what they think beyond a small circle of direct connections. I get letters from all over the world, from magazines and news outlets, from national television services to academics and students – they all want to know what I think, my opinions, how I would describe the goings on of the world in which I live. It is heady stuff, no doubt. I’ve made a lot of friends and people seem to hold me in a considerable amount of respect, which is gratifying. Unlike almost all of my peers, what I have to say is valued. Prisoners’ lives, by and large, have little value beyond filling a bed up for the prison-industrial complex. To experience the sense of being valuable is no small thing in one of these places.

But, one of the worst parts of being a writer, particularly a successful one, is being heard. My fellow prisoners are often hostile for several reasons. I am revealing our world to the light of scrutiny, for one. The real bad guys don’t want any attention because the status quo has served their narrow, self-destructive interests well.

Yet, while being heard is rewarding, it also compromises things for the prison writer. Marty expresses this circumstance better than I could, or any writer or scholar, on the outside, could:

Prison is a lonely, sad place. When one of us is given any kind of positive attention that oldest of human emotions, envy, comes into play. My opinions are sometimes accorded greater weight than they otherwise would be, absent my status as “the writer.” Point of fact, at still deeper levels, I’m a 54 year old white guy who’s served 35 years in prison; the population of prisoners in California, and most everywhere else, is usually not white, isn’t that old, hasn’t served that much time, and hasn’t been published in anything.

The line guards aren’t, generally, big fans of prison writers, either. I tend to expose them to that same level of scrutiny; they don’t like it any more than the bad guys

in blue. As I've pointed out for a mighty long time, the groups who most resist the light of examination appear on the surface to be enemies, but, in truth, they have each derived benefits from what's wrong with the prisons. The guards, like the bad guys in blue, prefer disorder to order. "Corruption and incompetence hide behind chaos," as I've pointed out in many forums. My articles and essays, along with all of the other forums where I've been able to use my voice, have attempted to "out" the guards actual desire for chaos, no less than some of the prisoners. No one likes their ill intent discussed in public.

All of this no less applies to prison administrators and managers. I have the distinction of being one of the few prisoners ordered to be placed in the hole by the Secretary of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation himself. (This was consequent to a report/proposal I drew up and had widely distributed called "The Road to a Rehabilitative Prison System: The Honor Program.") I have, actually, been placed in the hole no less than four times as a result of writing activities that I know of – there could also have been two other times, but it's unclear. (I've been to the hole 11 times in 35 years.)

Unfortunate, but commonplace... I have read other writers' autobiographies and memoirs stating the same outcome of their publications. LeClair's superintendent shut down his participation in this project, simply because he could. He may have had reason, but by law, LeClair is allowed to correspond with whomever he chooses. Nonetheless, this happens all too often. Mumia Abu-Jamal has similar stories that we could have introduced herein, but he, too, was probably prohibited from taking part because of that reason that exists at the forefront of all prison writing.

Again, it is unfortunate, but still very true. More studies of these anomalies need to take place to bring about change; it is the only way to uncover these truths, and get behind the reasons for them. The good, determined, skillful writers like Marty, Cob, Jon, and Mil are aging. Who will step up to continue to push in the right direction? Who will keep the fire burning for change? Marty points out:

These endless struggles with the rest of the prison world, frankly, have become increasingly tiresome. I feel like I've now written the same article a hundred times; I've just used different combinations of the same words. The bottom-line message, that the prison system is designed to fail, that failure, our failure, is their success, that treating human beings with cruelty isn't justice and never results in better human beings, hasn't changed since my first articles started appearing in small newspapers more than twenty years ago.

Marty has not stopped writing what needs to be said. He is doing his part. Activists, scholars, liberal groups, celebrities even, must join together and catapult his voice and others' like his to the frontier of change. As he closes out this sub-section on legacy, examine his level of dissatisfaction, as well as an acknowledgement of the blessings that come with this life; prison writing is a bittersweet duality for him:

For several years now, I've felt an increasing sense of frustration. Although I'm not sure if it's merely an echo of my personal frustration about still being in prison, or if it's rooted in a sense of artistic and creative unfulfillment, it's there, for certain. I know I need to tackle some other challenges, and I also know it's time to move out of the way of others who want/need to write about this world. I harbor no illusions I'm the only one who can do it or even do it best.

As a working writer, I'm constantly busy with projects and jobs, large and small, paying and not paying, even the occasional research project for a doctoral candidate. I write grant proposals for several nonprofits and make some steady income from that source, although the writing is boring and repetitive. I write opinion pieces for newsletters that emanate out of this world of ours, from time to time, usually as favors to friends or for fellow activists. Now and then, a close friend needs something written or edited or otherwise dealt with, something I rarely decline. Being able to write, with any degree of proficiency, in a world with few competent writers, is a mixed blessing. It is, however, a blessing, and I'm thankful for whatever strange chemistry of life experiences and synapses that left me able to write moderately well.

Someday, in the not too distant future I hope, I plan to shift out of being a chronicler of the prison experience into being a creator of invented realities. I want to write fiction, and, specifically, novels. For a long time, I've had a story inside of me that begins with a long-term prisoner breaking out of prison and becoming the hero of a grand journey. His special skills, honed in the confines of rough joints, come into play and prove invaluable to his success. Obviously, this is escapist (pun intended) fantasy for me, but if I can figure out how to put it together well enough that others might want to read it, who knows what might come of it.

Between my version of the Great American (Prison) Novel and my current role as the Master of Sad prison tales, virtual reliquaries wherein the torment and loneliness of this world can be contained and transmitted out to the real world, I plan to put together a last couple of punches into the prison-industrial complex's gut. I've got a few general

articles I'll market, some short stories that could find places, and then it's off to a couple of years of struggle with my story.

The one thing that could interrupt my plans would be a resurrection of the idea for a screenplay from "Mother California." Over the past couple of years, I've had several nibbles by movie people interested in obtaining the rights to the book, but due to a bit of a contractual complexity with the original publisher nothing has come of them, yet. All of that may, finally, be resolved. If a reputable group wanted to work with me, and allowed me to retain some measure of creative control, I might elect to take that exciting detour.

Finally, I would like to close this section on what sustains Marty's writing with a brief passage from his first phase II narrative:

Most fundamentally, I truly believe it is vital and necessary for prisoners to write about prison. Only prisoners truly and actually understand the experience of imprisonment. If we abdicate our responsibility to chronicle this horror and leave it to those who can't understand it, we've committed a grievous act against our successors. That is what most sustains me, the belief that because I can write I have an obligation to write.

Legacy

Writing, now, is about legacy. This past year, 2014, I wrote in a journal every single day, without fail, for my daughter's eyes only, and only after I die. I will write a last few prison reform pieces, no punches pulled, and then I'm hanging up that particular pen. I want to create something more artistic, more creative, more substantial. I want to write a novel that isn't all about the joint. I hate the joint, and I want to write my way out of it, if only metaphorically, inside the pages of a story.

The process of writing, for me, is both a spiritual and intellectual exercise, and a routine, repetitive action. What I hope to write, what I'm trying to write, begins in that hard to understand, harder to describe place, goes through some sort of mental word processor, and then tumbles out onto the page through a black ink pen. And then the real work starts.

I talk to myself and think about how something would be written. I'll see a news item, or I'll receive a suggestion from someone on the yard or in the mail. Now and then, I sit down and engage in some formal brainstorming sessions, although I rarely seem to follow-up on what comes to mind in them. After I determine I ought to write about a particular subject, I put it back into my mind and mull it over. Simple, timely issues come back out in a day or two, ready to go. More complicated, deeper topics, can take weeks, months, years even. At some point, not clear to me why, I know it's time to write.

Many years ago, in a writing-magazine, I read about how it was a good idea to create routines and designate items specific to writing. I ordered a box of "Pilot Better Ballpoint Pens," medium, black ink, that would only be used for writing. I've ordered several boxes of them over the years, and I'm writing this with one. I have an oversized clipboard that sits across my knees upon which is wide-ruled notebook paper. I've tried to write first drafts on a typewriter, but I feel disconnected from the work when I do it that way. (I can write letters, and I do business writing, such as grant proposals, on a keyboard, but not creative writing.) I put my headphones on with classic rock and make myself a cup of black coffee. Then, I try to get out of my way.

Because I'm writing by hand, I've got a couple of hours in me before my fingers won't take anymore. (I've also got a serious problem with writing too hard, with too

much pressure. It's the way I am, and I've had no success with changing it over the years. In fact, when I'm done, the paper tends to have deep fissures running through it from the tip of my pen.) In the time I have to write, if I'm able to tap directly into the vein of good stuff, I can write a couple of thousand words, tops, closer to one thousand usually. If the good stuff isn't forthcoming, I can slog through with a final product of a few hundred words that'll need a lot of editing later. Regardless, even the better first-drafts are just that, drafts that will require rewriting and rethinking, often numerous times. But the process is composed of a series of dips into the material that starts with the first pass of typing and continues until the manuscript is put into an envelope for mailing. Nothing is really completed until it's published. At that point, from my perspective, it's carved in stone. It's not mine anymore; it belongs to the readers.

I've lived by a couple of writing maxims that have served me well. Somewhere along the way, a close friend and confidante described me as the "Master of Sad." I had never analyzed my writing for an emotional tone before that but, on closer inspection, I could see how he'd come to that conclusion. I've written articles that had me in tears writing them, that I still cannot read out aloud without choking up. I remember so clearly that old saying, "No tears in the writer's eyes, no tears in the reader's." I also remember David Scott Milton, my writing teacher, telling me how it's feeling that moves people. My best work has been about emotions, and although I like to see myself as a rationalist, as a sentient journalist and a thoughtful observer, the feelings I've been able to convey are what's mattered to readers more.

The idea is to find the underlying commonality of our world in here with the rest of the world out there. It's to try and show the rest of the world that our world is a part of

the whole world. Finding the meaning and presenting it for the reader to discover for himself, painting the picture of the dismal world in here with enough clarity that the reader can see it next to his own world, and see what's wrong with the picture of this world, that's the goal. It's a part of the goal of all writing, which is to create rhyme out of dissonance, to find harmony in cacophony, and to transmit a message that pushes through the static of unknowing. At least, that's how I see it.

This is how I see it, too. Yes. My struggle is much the same. How do I, outside their world, with only their wonderfully crafted writings, find the underlining commonality and/or meaning, then present all these texts to the reader so s/he can discover, with clarity, the very essence of that commonality and/or meaning? It is the goal of any writer, to be sure. We want our reader to relate, learn, make meaning, and do all such things through their own discovery by the harmony of our words. That passage, by Marty, is a great example of just that – transmission of a message that penetrates the unknown and makes it known.

Marty's phase I essay comes to a conclusion with this question, which, as I mentioned earlier, seemed to answer the legacy question, before I had even asked it. He asks, and answers, as such:

There remains the final question unanswered by this narrative: why writing and writers, especially in prison, matter?

It is perhaps the toughest topic to consider in this research. I am delighted that Marty chose to respond. His voice is prominent; he states:

That's a loaded, even a controversial question. There are many people who truly believe prisoners should have no rights, no voice, no ability to speak out about prison, or about anything else, for that matter. (Years ago, after I published an opinion piece in the San

Diego Union Tribune, I received a typed letter from an anonymous reader so angry that the periods were holes in the paper, who called me everything horrible imaginable for having had the audacity to comment on the state of prisons.) Regardless, I am convinced that writing about prison, especially by prisoners, is a vital and necessary action.

A famous criminologist described prison as a “total experience,” meaning that for a prisoner no part of us isn’t inside; no part of us remains outside, literally and metaphorically, both in the physical reality of our bodies and in the metaphysical realities of our minds. It means, also, that prison occupies all of the prisoner’s consciousness. To draw this out further, as I see it, this also means that no one not in a prison could possibly understand the totality of the prison experience. Not the guards, though they spend a considerable amount of time on this side of the fences. Only those who cannot walk freely back out get this in a meaningful way. And this world of prison is far too important, far too serious an entity, a condition, an experience, to leave to mere observers. It requires participants to explain it and dissect it and lay bare its hidden cruelties and obvious terrors.

No society in the history of the world has ever been so enamored of prisons as this one. America is the Land of Prisons, and it’s a sad testament to who we are as a “people” that this is so. This country has come to the conclusion that the proper response to virtually all wrongdoing is imprisonment, and that the longer the term the better, the harsher the conditions the better, the more money wasted the better. And it’s irrelevant how poorly prisons do to prevent crime, to reduce recidivism, to break the cycle of criminal behavior. It’s no less irrelevant how obvious the damage done to human beings; prison is so firmly ensconced in our society as to be immune to scrutiny. The power of

the prison-industrial complex is now so immense that the words of the United States Supreme Court, which held long ago that the Constitution did not stop at the prison gates, have been all but mooted in practice.

Someday, when the prison hysteria subsides, when all of this is finally exposed for what it really is, a great con job on the taxpayers for money, a reckoning will come. The words of eyewitness testimony will matter. Our words, the words of prison writers, will matter.

And that, in the final analysis, is why I write.

The uncanny, almost prophetic nature of these statements leaves us silent. To be sure, Marty has chronicled the happening from his first-hand testimony. He is one of many primary sources to this shameful period in our nation's history, but I would even say that he may be the most paramount. When this con job subsides, if it subsides, all one would need to do is review Marty's writing. He has uncovered many of the errors and failures in the system after his 36 years of service, even making suggestions and designing and writing programs for change.

Marty's legacy is visible in his writing, and I will conclude this sub-section about his legacy with this final quote from his phase II narrative:

At the end of the 20th century, while the United States of America embarked on a crazy, ill-advised venture of imprisoning as many people as it could, in increasingly harsh conditions, for ever-longer periods of time, at least one guy out in California – the epicenter of the great prison boom – kept a written record of what was happening. And he tried, valiantly, with courage and honor, to put that written record out in front of the public in whose name the system was being operated. That's my legacy. I tried to tell the truth about all of this, as I saw it, and didn't fold under the pressure and retaliation. I want

my daughter to be able to tell her children that although their grandfather did terrible things as a young man, things for which he paid with his life, he still tried to do good in the world; he still tried to be a good man. Whatever legacy I have created is for my daughter. But as for in here, I hope my peers have seen that if they work hard enough and courageously enough, they can change this system for the better. And they have a moral obligation to try and make that change, no less.

Now, I would like to return to my initial desire to present Marty as a good man. To do that, I will highlight an article titled, "Letter From an Old Prisoner," published in January of 2014, for *The Good Men Project*. In the article, Marty takes his years of wisdom, sums them all up, and writes a letter to help his fellow insiders. He says, "I've often wondered what I would say to myself, back 34 years ago, right after I was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. I'm sure it would start with an encouragement to focus on the possibilities of my life, even a life inside." He also goes on to write:

Prison is full of guys who believe this is where they belong. Guys that are filled with remorse and shame, but because these are feelings too hard to deal with, they revert to posturing and posing. I know this because this that surrounds us can be overwhelming. I was overwhelmed.

I've come to believe a few things about this process of serving time and surviving and, possibly, prospering. So, in the interest of helping others benefit off of my many mistakes, I offer up the following reflections and thoughts.

Leverage what's against you into an advantage. In our case, time itself is against us, which means we have more than enough time, too much. We can turn this around by

undertaking long-term projects most people never have the time to accomplish. We can completely remake ourselves over the long haul of our imprisonment.

Number one on any list of self-improvement goals is education. Through education the world becomes something that can be understood. Prison is a backwater of ignorance and superstition. We live in a world dominated by small ideas – racism, drugs, misplaced loyalties to misbegotten groupings and discredited ideologies. To free ourselves from these misconceptions about the reality of life, we have to educate ourselves.

Marty also suggests that his fellow lifers read books. And when referring to books, he says, “I mean real books, substantial books.” He recommends college textbooks on all subjects, and tells them to “check out the classics.” He says the key is “to open your mind to ideas bigger than the prison yard,” and for him, as he states, “writing is the method through which I discovered how to reconnect to the other side of the fences and to myself.” He briefly mentions his initial catalyst (girls) to writing, besides the class he started after being in the hole. He writes: “I began with letter writing to girls, which led to writing letters to the world. Through it all, I unearthed who I am and in what I believe.” He even suggests the arts and exploring inner creativity, and in doing so, he believes that “inside the heart of yourself, you’ll connect to the truest parts of you.”

He talks about keeping a journal, and getting “all of the darkness out onto paper,” about digging down into the self, turning over the rocks to explore what is there, underneath, and continuing to do this until the painful parts are exposed. He promises that this kind of writing will lead to a person coming to know oneself, “and bringing it all out into the light will, help to begin the process of healing.”

He mentions one thing all men crave: purpose. He somewhat defines it and discusses its antithesis. Then he references a quote from Alcoholics Anonymous, which reminds me of another quote (Fake it 'til you make it.), which says, “You can’t think your way to better living; you have to live your way to better thinking.” And he says that in becoming a better man, one must *be a better man*, before he is *sure*, of being a better man.

He finishes with talking more about books, positivity and growth, and then concludes with these words:

But if I could actually reach back to my younger self standing in line at the California Institution for Men’s Reception & Guidance Center, fresh out of half a harrowing year in Los Angeles County Jail, freshly sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, I’d have a single message: Don’t surrender to the darkness of these places. Whatever sense of belonging it provides is transitory. Whatever false sense of glory you think you’ll experience is fleeting.

Don’t surrender to the darkness of these places.

To me, I find that Marty has come full circle in his life because he has turned everything around, for the good, using his errors and lessons to warn and teach others, and as I read this article, and quoted it, in part, herein, I found myself thinking of so many of Marty’s *other* articles that could be compiled with this article, because they provide direct resources and experiential narratives or lessons to carry out these recommendations he is making. In fact, Marty’s writings and life can attest to the fact that he has genuinely practiced what he is advising – be a good man. What a blessing it would be, to so many, in and out of prison, to see Marty’s life narrated from beginning to end. Perhaps a movie or documentary will become of all his labors, or maybe another composition student will take up that endeavor. Either way, his writing life is a three-

dimensional narrative that sets him at the heart of prison writing, and that longer-term grand narrative of composition.

Mil

Mil has certainly accomplished much. In my letters to him, like with the other three co-authors, I have emphasized and encouraged him to narrate his accomplishments and successes, leaving nothing out, using all the field texts he possibly can, from all of his prison writing life experiences, memories, and writings. I am glad to say that Mil has certainly attempted to do that, and in presenting his research texts, I also hope not to leave anything out. However, as researchers, we always do, unfortunately, and for that, I apologize to him and to the reader. If there is any of the three who has provided me with ample field texts, it has been Mil. The job of reading and coding his writing has perhaps been the most complicated for me. I have gone back and forth with myself about how to construct this narrative and present Mil, within the context of the research questions (getting started as a prison writer, sustaining forces, and legacy). In the end, of the four, I have chosen to give his written words the most emphasis since he has labored the most with his narratives and research – or so it seems, to me. He has submitted the most writing, materials, and letters. He has purchased books and done additional research. With all that he has mailed to me, I now have six large binders filled with field texts from him.

Originally, all those years ago (since 2009) when I first began researching prison writers, I came across some of Mil's writing and credits, and felt he would be a wonderful writer to include, but his credibility as a writer has impacted me so much more since he agreed to be a part of this study. For over a year, as he and I have corresponded for this co-authored metanarrative, there has never been a time when I have visited my P.O. Box to pick-up mail from my co-authors, where he had not written and mailed letters (both to me, and copies of letters he had

written to others, or letters others had written to him), articles (related to a number of topics), rough drafts, court papers and appeals (those he had written for himself or others), photos, poems, and so many other kinds of documents – just as I had requested the prison writers do in the ‘Call for Papers’ (Appendix B). I always knew that I would have something from Mil when I went to check my mail, and that anticipation provided this researcher, as well as this research study, one of its most sustainable forces. Also, Mil has shown me a great deal of who he really is, through his writing. Mil is generous, helpful, wise, detailed, caring, highly admired and esteemed, and above all else, a flourishing and successful writer and teacher who aims to look to the well-being of others, before himself. I would also say that Mil is in a perpetual state of service. He is using his writing skills in the same way Marty states: using his *know-how* to speak, but more importantly, to write, to impact others’ lives.

In my first letter to him (after mailing the initial research invitation package), some weeks after receiving a great number of letters from him, as well as his first phase I essay (which I retrieved on a day that was not filled with much *academic* joy), I relayed to him my delight and sheer faith that this study was going to be so much more meaningful with him in it. I told him that I was grateful for his fine essay (which significantly lifted my spirits, about academia, the day I received it), and thanked him for choosing to take part in my project. With the six notebooks filled with various documents from Mil, introducing his writing life story is more complicated than with Jon, Marty, or Cob. His writing life could certainly be a project for another study, by another researcher, of which I would gladly be willing to mail the six notebooks to, with Mil’s permission of course, but this dissertation only aims to introduce the prison writer to composition, and Mil is but one of four I am introducing. This means, therefore, that no matter how I construct Mil’s narrative, I will be doing him a great injustice. His writing

life is multilayered, many stranded, and beautifully textured with so many nested individuals from all across the world, just like my other co-authors, but he has provided me with far more evidence, and I simply cannot include it all.

In the end, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, I have chosen to let Mil speak for himself, as much as possible, with still being nested within the narrative – since I am the primary researcher. His writing of his own research text/narrative, about himself, is ample data for this section. However, I have still had to read all the materials, mull over them, code them, consider where they should go, decide on what to keep and what not to include, where to interject, etc. – a genuinely troubling research endeavor. In the end, I used a simple coding system of keeping everything in one of three sections – how he got started writing, the things that sustain his writing, and what presents his writing as being long-lasting and meaningful to the development of his writing legacy. Also, since his research texts/narratives were divided into these same three sections, for the most part, I felt that keeping his lengthy pieces together was the better format for presenting his final narrative in this chapter.

Before I present Mil’s writing, however, I would like to elaborate on how his mail and correspondence has been one of the most influential and sustaining forces in getting me through this study. He has been my mentor, at times – with his ongoing pursuit to see me succeed. He has even offered to publish this text. Therefore, I have come to value his encouragement and excitement about this research, throughout this project. I value his writing and co-authoring efforts, and ultimately, I value him greatly as a fellow researcher.

I look forward to presenting his writing to you, now. Please also refer to Mil’s record of achievement, as it is presented as Appendix G.

Getting Started

In “Voices from the New Literary Underground,” one of Mil’s (2015) narrative submissions for the second phase, which responds to the first two research questions (What got you started as a writer? and What sustains you and keeps you writing?), he states, “Yes, I will tell you a story” (p. 3). In the narrative, after quoting my letter to him, which outlined the research questions and even posed a number of additional sub-questions to help him think of some related ways to go about writing his narrative, Mil narrates:

As I tackle the first question, I want to hit it in center-mass first. To push the football metaphor further, in order to bring down the whole question, the answer to the middle question [“Do you think it’s [writing is] an inherent trait/ability?”] will determine where the rest of the question goes.

This center-mass question of whether writing ability is inherent is the nature versus nurture argument, that is: Does some genetic factor within our DNA predetermine our writing success, or do environmental factors determine our writing ability and aptitude for success? Said another way, if we have some writing gifts, did they come from something unique to us in our genetic code, or did they come from environmental factors like: education, association with other writers, opportunities to develop and grow writing talents? The answer to this middle-mass question turns out to be rooted in one’s overall philosophy about life itself, including one’s religious and spiritual beliefs.

Since I come to this question with twenty years of teaching experience, including teaching poetry writing for the University of Pittsburgh [Pitt] and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts [PCA] through the Poets-In-The-Schools [PITS] program, including teaching English Composition courses for Pitt, it follows that my belief system about my

personal writing ability is reflected in how I went about teaching others. It turns out that my overall teaching philosophy is eclectic but highly influenced by my own spiritual beliefs that each person has value and should be respected and that within each person is something universal and shared by everyone else. In The Prophet by Kahlil Gibran, he writes of this philosophy. Many times I have articulated to my students that I see my role as seeking to awaken the poet (or the writer) who already lives inside each of us. And there is the Jungian belief in the collective unconscious that permeates each of us, across nations and cultures. The Christian belief-system promises redemption for faith, as a gift of grace. In essence, I ask my students to believe in themselves and to make the leap of faith that they can discover the poet or the writer already living inside, waiting to express themselves. I become an active participant with the students, giving exercises to strengthen their writing muscles. As my friend Doc Thomas points out in his excellent first book The Shame Response to Rejection, we are called upon, in The Gospels of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus (Myer, M. (Translator)): “Jesus said, ‘Love your brother like your soul, protect that person like the pupil of the eye.’” Individuals experience the shame response to rejection when their needs for a sense of social worthiness and respect have been shattered. The cure for this is the ascent into acceptance. Writing a poem and sharing it with others, perhaps by having it published, can bring about the feeling of a divine presence reaching down to surround us, to accept us. As Dr. Thomas wrote:

Men and women in positions of authority in every walk of life, whether it is in a maximum security prison, in a youth development center, or in a university classroom, must always be conscious of their power to cause

pain in those under their authority. When they see someone respond in anger, blush or cry, they must realize that that person may be experiencing a shame response.

And later, in closing the same book, Dr. Thomas writes:

Rabbi Luzzatto, writing in the first half of the Eighteenth Century, said that a soul enters the body in order to perfect itself through good deeds. This holds true for every being. Not for a few superior beings, but everyone. To be a mechanical engineer or to be a mechanic both offer a chance for a person to work to the best of his or her ability. To see a powerful engine is designed the safest way possible or that a truck is repaired and does not break down in a winter storm are equally important tasks. Both the engineer and the mechanic are working to make life safer and more predictable. There is no reason to see one as inferior to the other unless there is a fear of rejection to contend with. To see another as having the choice in doing good by caring for others or not is a sufficient measure of any man or woman.

The Shame Response to Rejection

(Sewickley, PA: Albanel, 1997)

I can relate the story of how the Staff Psychologist at the Greensburg prison sat in on one of my PCA PITS poetry workshops. He came up to me afterwards and marveled at how I had the mostly young participants opening up about themselves far more than they had ever done with him. (It was because I conveyed acceptance to my students.) He

joined me in the belief that such sharing experiences can be cathartic, resulting in personal growth, and therefore, resulting in growth as a writer.

Now, Mil continues in his narrative to present additional stories that shift his discussion towards his teaching philosophy, but also, to inform us of the many students he had that went on to have successful writing careers and achievements:

My boss at Pitt, Professor Ed Ochester, seemed fond of saying to me that he often wondered if it was possible for anyone to teach anyone else how to write poems. By 1977, I began what would turn out to be a twenty-year career of teaching college level courses to my fellow prisoners. After teaching Introduction to Poetry Writing (English Writing 7530) followed by the upper-level courses entitled Poetry Workshop (English Writing 8210 and 8220), I submitted a collection of my students' poems to my boss, and he was pleased with what I was getting out of them. The fact that my students and former students have been published in literary journals and have won prizes like the PEN Writing Award for Prisoners (Al won First Prize for a poem of his) speaks to my doing something right by them. A former student of mine, a Mr. Carl UpChurch, wrote a book entitled: Convicted in the Womb. His book was made into a Made-For-Television Showtime Channel movie entitled "Convicted," and it was broadcast over cable television, earning him \$1 million. Sadly, Carl has since passed away. One of my students, Jack, was regularly published in The Christian Science Monitor, an international daily newspaper, regularly featuring poetry in The Home Forum section. Another, John A. Thompson, Sr., discovered his talents and has operated a literary magazine for many years after his release. [I just discovered that his journal Nite-Writer's International Literary Arts Journal is listed yet again on page 293 in the 2015 Poet's Market by

Writer's Digest Books, advertised as "THE MOST TRUSTED GUIDE FOR PUBLISHING POETRY."] John has won a number of awards for his photography.

The list of published works by my former students would be longer than this narrative, and perhaps it is enough to conclude that my own success as a writer is reflected in the writing successes and accomplishments of students of mine. Since I have taught from the viewpoint of wanting to awaken the poet inside us all, it follows that I believe it is necessarily true of myself, too. Whatever inherent writing trait is inside me, I believe it is shared by everyone. In a time when "exceptionalism" seems to be celebrated, I believe that we all have the capacity to be exceptional. It is a matter of whether or not the writing traits will remain dormant or recessive, or if they will be awakened by the contagion of being exposed to "voices from the new literary underground" or some other such force.

Getting back to the first research question, Mil further reflects on his initial stages of becoming a writer:

To now return to the beginning of the first question about what got me started as a writer, upon reflection, I can recall that I was enrolled in Advanced Placement English in West Mifflin North High School, and I remember how a Mr. Ludwig said that I could write well. I declared an English Minor while studying the difficult course load of Mechanical Engineering at Carnegie Mellon University [CMU]. In my phase I essay to the IUP researcher, I recalled two CMU English Professors. One told me that I could not possibly write poetry. He explained how – despite how popular a poem of mine was among my peers – the structure of it was not right, with no iambic pentameter. I found myself motivated to prove him wrong, and I enjoyed sending him my first two published

books of poetry from Western Penitentiary. In a way, he helped me because I was determined to prove him wrong! Conversely, a second CMU English Professor announced to the entire freshman coeducational class that there was a young man in the room who writes beautifully. I was surprised when he told everyone it was me.

As I was earning my Bachelor of Arts degree from Pitt in the early 1970s, visiting English professors influenced my writing. To this day, I still keep in touch with Robert L. Gale and John Manear. I reflected in my earlier phase I essay that it was only because a letter from retired Professor Gale started me thinking about my being studied by a scholar that I discovered my interest in – and openness to – being studied by a scholar.

Each and all of the forty guest poets who came into Western Penitentiary for Academy of Prison Arts [APA] poetry workshops, as well as the PCA PITS poets, helped to awaken more and more of my writing ability. The individual exercises strengthened my writing muscles. I can clearly recall Michael Hogan's writing exercises, some I would use to this day with students. I remember the poetry workshops with Etheridge Knight, Richard Shelton, Diane Wakowski, Joe Bruchac, W.R. "Bill" Wilkins, Gar Bethel (who would later testify to my good character at a bond hearing), Peter Oresick, Paul Zimmer, Lynn Savitt, and so many others too numerous to mention herein. It does feel like I am often "standing on their shoulders." [While Li-Young Lee was not an APA guest poet, he did come into Western as a Pitt undergraduate student to attend Michael Hogan's APA poetry workshops, where I met him and was so impressed with his then-young talents that I offered to publish his first book of poetry. He recently confirmed that he remembers our meeting.] It also occurs to mention the relationship bond that I formed with Michael Wurster who ran Pittsburgh Poetry Exchange [PPE], a sister organization of the APA in

the 1970s into the early 1980s, who helped us organize some outside-the-walls poetry readings. This tie with the community group allowed me to recommend and encourage poets like Mevin who was released from Western to attend PPE poetry workshops, which he did. I would be totally remiss if I did not mention Ms. Anne Pride, who served as our APA outside coordinator, who was well-known and active in the Pittsburgh community for having founded Pittsburgh Action Against Rape [PAAR]. Our relationship was symbiotic in that it helped the APA obtain National Endowment of the Arts [NEA] and Pennsylvania Council of the Arts [PCA] funding by having her as a highly credible outside coordinator. If Anne Pride was alive today, I believe she would likewise report to the reader that this writer helped her obtain funding for her PAAE projects, projects closer to her heart than the APA.

Sustaining Forces

Mil's relationships are paramount to his writing life. The number of connections, as well as correspondences between himself, and others, over the years, is countless. What is more interesting is that he remembers most of these individuals, and has endeavored to save and organize all his letters to and from them, throughout the years that he has been in prison. I have wondered how this is possible in prison, since my studies have shown that prisoners are not allowed to keep too many personal items in their cells. Still, his correspondences remain a key sustaining force in Mil's life. His connection to others – mostly those of us outside prison – sustains Mil's writing. Mil further explains this rich element of friendship that keeps him writing:

While writing this narrative, I received a signed copy of Kirsten Poems from the poet Laurel Speer in Arizona. I have been corresponding with Laurel since the mid-

1980s, and in the last few years we have taken to exchanging monthly letters. Laurel was an APA guest poet, and when I was recently editing a book of a friend of mine, Have Faith in the Good, by Herbert E. Thomas, M.D., she helped me with some questions that I had about the grammar of Standard American English. [Michael Hogan wrote the Introduction to Doc's excellent book.]

However, even given all of these lasting relationships, something else has occurred to me about a prime motivator for my writing talents, but to explain it, I have to ask the reader to imagine themselves stuck in a maximum security prison with the possibility of having a completely legal day of relative freedom in the outside community if one can read poems in public. In other words, faced with the possibility that one might attain some contraband kisses from a wife, would that help to create new writing talent? By July of 1975, as an Academy of Prison Arts poet, I was regularly obtaining so-called "supervised leaves" to give poetry readings in Pittsburgh at venues like: the Three Rivers Arts Festival, on the American Symphony barge, at Pitt (in David Lawrence Hall), and at the Community College of Allegheny County [CCAC] Boyce Campus. I cannot remember another time in my life when there was a higher incentive (reward) being offered for writing some new poetry, to be able to conduct a credible poetry reading in public. If this was one of those MasterCard commercials, the promise of a relative day of freedom would be "priceless."

So, Mil also finds that the writing rewards sustain his writing, but so does the potential to have a romantic relationship:

Along these same lines, it occurs to me that I met the woman who would become my second wife, Susan, while she was editing a literary magazine in Michigan: Night

Rider. And then it occurs to me that I met my first wife essentially through the Academy of Prison Arts when she attended some of our events. Come to think of it, the woman psychotherapist who I almost married in the mid-2000s, Jacqueline from England, became a published poet and gave her first poetry reading in England during our relationship. (Jacqueline's own psychotherapist in England – every therapist needs a therapist – knew of me because she sat on the National Endowment for the Arts panel in the 1970s when the Academy of Prison Arts was being funded. It truly is a small world.) So what does it mean when one's personal and professional lives merge together? [Upon introspective reflection about my writing process, I had no idea in advance that this narrative was going to go in this direction.]

I have to believe that it is true for successful writers not in prison that their personal and professional lives often merge so that they cannot easily be identified apart from each other. What am I talking about here?

I believe that Mil is making the claim that as a writer, even in prison, the term/identifier *writer* comes before the term *prison*. In other words, like Jon, Mil is saying that he is a writer, not a prison writer. These three women, two of whom became his wife, were also writers, and they saw him as such – beyond the bars that confined him. This acknowledgement of him as writer, from these ladies, kept him sustained as a writer. Yet, he also writes about the inner drive within each of us, and the need to earn a living:

I think it comes down to what makes us want to earn a living in the first place? Other than for basic survival needs, I believe that it is true that we human beings find ourselves working for others, for the benefit of a wife and children, for the benefit of a

husband and children, for the benefit of parents or siblings. Yes, I used the phrase “to earn a living.”

Writers, after all, in the American “pursuit of happiness” have to earn a living, too. Most writers, particularly most poets, teach. And yes, they get paid money to do so, and often those teaching salaries and honorariums for making appearances are more significant sources of income for a poet than from royalties from sales of poetry books. When I was released on bond in 1981 after winning a new trial order, I worked as a Project Engineer for Economy Industrial Corporation in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, as my primary source of income for myself and for my wife and two children, even as I was arranging to do a PCA PITS poetry workshop. It has been my experience that being paid as a design engineer results in a far better income than when teaching. As I report in my Teaching Experience matrix, I worked as a salaried instructor for CCAC, for Pitt, and for PCA while at Western. The APA guest poets initially earned an honorarium of \$300.00, but eventually that grew to \$500.00. I was paid an honorarium of \$500.00 for my PCA PITS poetry workshops, and while I was working for an outside agency at Western, I was paying the prison seventeen percent of my net salary for room and board at the prison. For many years at Western, I was paying room and board for my prison cell. The Warden got a kick out of that fact. So I ask the rhetorical question of the reader: “Why do you go to work every day? Is it because you love your work and find it as a way to perfect your soul [hopefully, yes], or is it because you have to earn a living?”

Then, while discussing his writing and personal growth, Mil explains:

Was I merely lucky (as ironic as it sounds) to have come to prison when prisons were trying to “develop” their people, when there was a climate for giving prisoners

responsible jobs within the prisons and not just warehousing them? As I sit here in my prison cell I cannot imagine that I could have developed my writing like I have done if I would be forced to start now, in 2015! The effort that it took to have a poetry workshop approved and maintained here at SCI-Somerset as a Library program allowing me to teach a weekly one and one-half hour session, funded by the Inmate General Welfare Fund [IGWF] from July 10, 2001 until 2006 or so, was substantial, and the Staff Facilitator (Librarian Marcia Roman) must be credited. We published one anthology of students' writings: Songs of the Bones (Somerset, PA: Atlas Printing, 2004).

Unfortunately, Marcia Roman retired and passed away.

However, even with the development of learning the system to promote more writing workshops and programs, Mil knew that it was his culture that dominated his pursuits and motivations to write and teach writing; he was benefitting. However, as he further narrates:

It may be useful for the reader to know, since this narrative may – at some point in time – be read by prison authorities, at this point your writer feels himself doing some self-censoring. It is probably true that an aspect of my success as a prison writer has been my willingness and ability to recognize when it is best to keep one's mouth shut. After all, a writer does not necessarily have to tell every story he or she knows simply because it is true. A simple example would be a wartime reporter not writing about some pending military operation for concern of jeopardizing personnel. [As Justice Homes pointed out, the First Amendment, although guarantying freedom of speech, does not give a person the right to yell out "Fire" in a crowded theater.] If a writer in prison is often or constantly "crying wolf," when it really comes time to "speak the truth to power," then it can be much less likely to be heard.

In 1960 Caryl Chessman, a Death Row prisoner in California, reached a huge audience when he published Cell 2455, Death Row. But as I remember a conversation with Doc Thomas in the early 1970s, I speculated to him that the reason why California felt compelled to execute Caryl Chessman – despite the enormous amount of support for his release – after the success of his book was precisely because the state felt he could not be quietly pardoned and released from prison. Too many people knew his story!

This begs the question as to why this writer, now serving the forty-fifth year of a life sentence, would allow himself to be studied by a Ph.D. candidate as a “flourishing/successful writer in prison,” thusly raising his low profile stance. The researcher did warn:

I know you stated that you wanted to “be at a low profile,” but my school [IUP] required that I attain the superintendent’s approval to correspond with you for this study, and [I] had to comply. Your superintendent was informed of my interest to write to you to inquire about your success as a writer, and it appears as though he is fine with this request. However, if you find that you do not want to correspond with me for phase[s] II and III of my study, I will understand. Your participation is entirely up to you. Okay?

Since I am obviously saying “yes” to continuing to be studied by the scholar, and since I am submitting this narrative for publication in a literary journal, a reasonable question would be: “Why, Mil [*real name omitted, pseudonym inserted by researcher*]” (p. 3-14).

I believe the answer to his question is clear. In the opening of this section I characterized Mil as I have come to know him. He is sacrificial and of the nature of servitude. He is willing to

do whatever he is asked, within the realm of what is right and good, of course. This is who he is. In fact, one of his dear attorney friends from Pittsburgh contacted me because he sincerely wanted me to know of Mil's kind-hearted nature and sense of service to others. I believe he may have wanted to make certain that I was an authentic researcher with a sincere purpose and legitimate IRB permissions. Yet, without that conversation, I would have come to learn, on my own, that Mil is unique in his willingness to help, especially when being asked. Mil, like the others, is willing to take the risk for us out here wanting to know more about them in there. However, I like his brother's advice, which Mil quotes to begin narrating his response to "why" he is choosing to participate in this study. He writes:

Well, as my brother Jim recently said to me, "Life happens when we are planning on something else" (p. 14). Just before the Ph.D. researcher contacted me, there were two life-changing events.

Here, I briefly pause to say that these two events did greatly impact him. These "life-altering events have resulted in [him] being even more appreciative of each and every day of life," and it is not "a huge leap of faith to have [him] agree to participate" in this research because of the timely council he embraced from his brother, but more than likely because Mil is someone who always wants to be of help to others (p. 18). He continues in his narrative, saying:

perhaps there is now a new sense of urgency since The Grim Reaper has visited so near to me in prison. As I said to both of my brothers, I cannot easily parse out how much of my renewed energy and my commitment to helping the researcher is a result of physiological changes (perhaps better oxygenation of my circulating blood) or psychological changes in the sense that I have been given a so-called 'new lease on life.' Yet even without knowing exactly the answer to, 'Why, Mil [*real name omitted*,

pseudonym inserted by researcher]?’, the researcher is – in a sense – able to take advantage of serendipity, too. (p. 18)

To explain these two events, Mil cites his personal Christmas letter to 100 friends and family (of which I was one), where he first details a surprise visit from his brother, Ken, on October 3, 2014, informing him of their beloved mother’s passing (the day prior, October 2, 2014). According to Mil, his mother, Pauline, “passed away peacefully in her sleep” (p. 14). She would have been 92 on Valentine’s Day. And in this 2014 Christmas letter, he also shares how his other brother, Jim, with his son Ryan, prepared a beautiful story of Pauline’s Life (a large photo of Pauline, which was part of this wonderful booklet for those attending her viewing, was also included in the Christmas letter). And during that October 3rd visit with Ken, Mil claimed to have been having some days of physical discomfort, to which he presumed was acid reflux. When he spoke to Jim, on October 5th, he mentioned that the pain persisted. Then, “on Wednesday morning, October 8th, while at breakfast in the chow hall, [his] chest pain was accompanied by shortness of breath and sweaty palms, so [he] figured it was a time when [his] heart’s distress would show up on an EKG,” so he “asked one of the chow hall guards for help,” and the guard “called the medical department” (p. 15). The EKG showed that he was having a heart attack, and in “a very short while, [he] was transported by ambulance and admitted to Somerset Hospital’s Emergency Room at 8:35 a.m. on 10/08/2014” (p. 15). Mil then describes, with precise details, all that Dr. Pradeep Nair and his skilled nursing staff did, for more than three hours, to save his life – only “two days after [his] dear mother was buried” (p. 17). And as Mil’s habit has been throughout the duration of this year and a half that we have been corresponding, of sending me every piece of writing he completes, I also read the beautiful letter he composed for Dr. Nair and the entire staff at the hospital.

Therefore, since my research package was received by Mil shortly after these two meaningful moments in his life, as he said, he felt he almost had to agree to participate. And in that 2014 Christmas letter to friends and family (which is also fully referenced in this narrative, “Voices From the New Literary Underground”), as he narrated the events of the year, he closed with referencing my words to him in the initial invitation letter to participate in my project. I had written: “I strongly believe your contribution would be a great benefit to our field of composition.” Plus, the same day he received my initial letter, he had a follow-up consultation with Dr. Nair, where Mil had made a personal pledge to himself to deserve what Dr. Nair had done for him, and in his phase I essay, Mil proclaimed that my research packet to him was no coincidence. He had also written to an old friend Robert L. Gale, a retired Professor at the University of Pittsburgh, a few weeks prior to his heart attack, hinting that he would like to be involved in scholarly research, and according to Mil, the universe made it all happen through me.

I, like Mil’s brother Jim, agree more with the idea that “life happens when we are planning on something else.” Remember that I had not moved to California to be a teacher, or suspected that I would continue teaching beyond a year, or two. And entering composition studies for graduate work was never a part of my plan, much less a Ph.D. in the same field. The threading of our lives is certainly a part of the unfolding of the untold story of prison writing; it is also a strong reinforcement of the sustaining powers in our multilayered, many stranded, nested, and beautifully textured lives.

Mil narrates additional sustaining forces for his writing:

I know that both of my brothers support my writing success, and so did my parents. It meant a lot to me when my father told me that he liked the one Slovak poem in Songs of the Bones and, while he was still alive, he earmarked an honorarium of \$10,000

to support my writing. It occurs to me that the money was “found money” for my Dad because it had been left to him by the one author (before me) in the family, my paternal Uncle Bill, his oldest brother. William H. [last name omitted] had Branden Press publish his book entitled: Sailors, Subs and Senioritas. The hard cover book’s dust jacket shows his picture with the “ABOUT THE AUTHOR” as follows:

Born of immigrant parents in East Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, bachelor William H. [last name omitted] was graduated from Vandergrift High School in 1936. After earning a Bachelor of Science degree at Ohio University and further study at the University of Pennsylvania, he joined the U.S. Merchant Marine in 1942. Steady advancement in the Merchant Marine led to one certificate after another, culminating in a Master’s license in 1952. In 1954, Mr. [last name omitted] left the Merchant Marine for two years of uranium prospecting in New Mexico and Arizona. After moderate success in this venture he bought a 75 space trailer court in Phoenix which he operated himself for eight years.

Sailors, Subs and Senioritas is Mr. [last name omitted] first published book. Two previous books, one on seamanship and the other on uranium prospecting, are still in manuscript form.

While my parents cannot read this narrative, those family members (and perhaps Dr. Nair) will read it and know that my parents would be proud of me.

One theme I coded in all four of my co-authors’ data is that of having others be proud of them. Who would argue that this is a desire that each of us has? It is perhaps one of our most common needs. Yet, what is most recognizable about this confession is the vulnerability the writers are willing to expose within themselves, when that characteristic screams weakness in

prison. Mil also contemplates this issue further as he narrates more of the nature of being social, and undergoing a metamorphosis:

Let me first address the emotional components and begin by saying how imprisonment by definition creates social isolation from the larger community of the world. In 1971, when I first came to prison in Western Penitentiary, there were no phone calls, so if a prisoner wanted to communicate with friends and family outside the grey sandstone walls, then writing letters (and visits) were the only options. The enforced social isolation of imprisonment creates a feeling of being disconnected or being disenfranchised or even being disheveled from others in an unnatural fashion. This can create a tremendous desire to re-connect with people beyond the walls. Human beings, no matter where they are living or being imprisoned, are social creatures. [I should mention that this desire to re-connect with those outside the walls is not universal among prisoners. Because there is pain associated with saying “goodbye” at the end of a visit or even after a phone call, some prisoners elect to live their emotional lives entirely behind the walls, in “the gray haze of nonfeeling” according to Michael Hogan. This is why Mike’s poem “Plea Bargains” speaks to me when he writes: “learn to love someone the other side of the wall/dream of a mountain bright with eagles.”]

To return to trying to describe what it feels like to become and to be a prisoner, I go back to the Czech writer (1883 to 1934) Franz Kafka’s short story “The Metamorphosis” where it begins with: “Gregor Samsa awakens one morning to discover that he has become a giant beetle.” The short story progresses from there, and it strikes me how it is so like what Kafka’s character Gregor Samsa experiences when handcuffs are first slapped on a person in a courtroom after a prison sentence follows a guilty

verdict (or, more often, a guilty plea). A person is suddenly transformed, in an instant, into some new creature that one's family and friends hardly know how to deal with.

[Michael Hogan loved this analogy so well that he "borrowed" it from one of my letters to him, repeating it in a film as if it came from him. The whole subject of deliberate or unintentional "borrowing" relates to intellectual property rights, a concept only created within 300 years ago as capitalism aimed to protect a writer's words as owned property.]

Desire to reach beyond the grey sandstone walls of Western Pen manifested itself with my writing, and I wrote and mailed many thousands of personal letters above and beyond published writings. The phrase "a man of letters" applies to this writer. [My letters to Paul Zimmer have been donated to a library containing his correspondence files. And Cousin Kathy wrote at Christmas asking my "permission to read" an envelope of letters that I had written to her mom that she kept for forty years!]

When one is able to sense and to feel how connections to other people, even unknown people, can happen despite imprisonment, there is a positive reinforcement for writing behaviors. And according to operant conditioning, reinforced behaviors tend to repeat themselves. [It is intermittent reinforcement that creates the strongest behavior modification. Thusly, even the role of rejection letters from editors can be understood to impact on positive reinforcements.] Let me share several stories to illustrate the point about how connections to how people can sustain a writer.

In 1981, when I was released from prison on a \$100,000.00 bond after winning a new trial order, I was living with my first wife and children in Sewickley, Pennsylvania. I was working as a Project Engineer with Economy Industrial Corporation in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. During one of my lunch breaks, after I went to a tobacconist to pick up

some Levi Garrett “side chew,” I walked over into the Ambridge Public Library; I pulled Contemporary Authors (Gale Research) from the book shelves. There, low and behold, was my biography as a writer. I saw proof-positive that I had existed outside the walls of Western Pen, and I could easily imagine someone coming into that library and reading what I wrote in response to the Gale Reference Team questions. It was a powerful, sustaining moment.

At one point at Western, a friend of mine, Willie McClendon, won a new trial in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and he had to go “out on writ,” as we call it, to the Philadelphia courts. When Willie was at SCI-Graterford during his temporary transfer, he signed up to attend a PCA PITS poetry workshop. The female poet happened to have a copy of my second book, Patterns in the Dusk (Washington, DC: King Publications, 1978), with her. Upon his return to Western, Willie conveyed to me that there was a moment of dual recognition in the sense that he first realized my book transcended the walls, and the female PCA PITS poet first realized that she had met someone who knew me. As this conversation happened, it was revealed that the PITS poet had purchased my book in a bookstore in Israel. When I was told the story, I marveled at how my book could have possibly found its way to Israel. This was a sustaining event, always available to remind me that after some writings are published, they can travel the globe.

How sustaining is that? The impact of global recognition is one each of my four co-authors has mentioned and proudly discussed in their narratives. As writers, we can all have such a noble ambition as to be heard outside whatever walls bind us.

A third example of a sustaining event happened with my first overseas submission in 2007. Craig Czury, a PCA PITS poet who visited me at Western, wrote to tell me how

ARS INTERPRES, No. 8/9, “An International Journal of Poetry, Translation & Art,” published in Stockholm, Sweden, was doing an issue entitled “From the Labyrinth,” and he recommended that I submit. I did. The literary journal published four of my poems and an essay. When I received my so-called “contributor’s copy” as payment, I happily discovered that the issue No. 8/9 that contained my writings also contained a poem by A.S. Pushkin, the Russian poet, entitled: “Message to Siberia.” [Craig Czury was published in the same issue.] My having been published in the company of Pushkin felt very sustaining because of how I had long told my students about how the Russians have a great admiration for poetry. In America, we fill up stadiums and other such huge venues with musicians; in Russia, poetry readings are huge and significant culture events. During the Second World War, Russian poets were assigned to travel with the troops and to write about the war. [We Americans had our Ernie Pyle, but he was a correspondent and not a poet, although This is Your War has seemed like a prose poem to me. My father kept his book.] When I first saw my name printed on the back cover along with A.S. Pushkin’s name, it was a sustaining moment.

A fourth example of a sustaining event for me has to be how it made me feel when I heard my wife Susan, during my second marriage, tell me how my beloved son Nathan was sitting there in our home and reading my books. Although I could not witness it myself, it was – nevertheless – a powerful image for me to experience and to remember. It is one thing to imagine some stranger holding one’s book and reading it; it is another thing to be able to experience a beloved child reading one’s books.

How are these four examples sustaining me if they are essentially one-time events? The answer is that because they happened, they present the possibility that such a similarly rewarding experience can happen yet again.

Clearly, as we step out in faith to pursue some personal enrichment, and we begin to see positive results, more faith steps occur. I like the following point Mil makes about such faith. He writes:

It has been said that some princesses have to kiss a lot of frogs before they find their prince. Perhaps that is how it is with a writer, constantly stepping up to the blank pages and taking a shot at having something memorable happen. Even now, I can reward and sustain myself by imagining these words appearing in a literary journal or in the Ph.D. researcher's thesis and then in an academic journal. The fact that the actual, big emotional rewards may be few and far between does not diminish the power of them to serve to motivate a writer, to motivate me.

These anecdotes about the emotional components regarding what sustains me and keeps me writing have to include some discussion about the strength and the power of the relationships that I have and maintain with my two brothers. I could not be the successful writer that I am today without their support, period. Enough said there. As a sign of my respect for them, as I mail off this narrative to the Ph.D. candidate/researcher and to a literary journal, I will be mailing my two brothers photocopies of the same submissions. With their busy lives, it may well be that they do not have the time to read everything that I mail to them, but I mail it anyway. Why? Because I feel my connection to them both. I try to call them almost weekly, and I am always open to visiting with them and their families. [For three years Jacqueline was traveling from England to visit with me every

quarter, using all my allotment of five visits per month. Once, we coordinated a visit with my brother Ken and his wife and children so everyone could meet. We played a board game of Monopoly together in the Children's Play Area, and it felt like a benefit of the legacy of my work with Fred "Mister" Rogers at Western when we started the first play area for children in a prison visiting room. Jacqueline met my Mom, and my brother Jim even met Jacqueline in London while he was there on a business trip.] (p. 19 – 25).

In Mil's phase I essay, and in his letters to me, he has told me about how proud he is of his brothers. One is an optometrist (Dr. Kenneth R. [last name omitted]), and the other is a businessman in California (Jim [last name omitted]).

In continuing in addressing the sustaining forces for his writing career, Mil states that he should include the engineer side of himself, and continues his narrative (on page 26), saying that while I "understandably seem to be mostly interested in the composition aspects of [him] being a successful writer," his insight is that "we cannot separate out each and every aspect of our personalities." He goes on:

To be seen as a whole person, we must often include more than one definition of who and what we are. I am a writer and an engineer and the two are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they come from the same creative source. Sitting down and designing something that never existed before comes from the same place where a writer fills up a blank page when nothing was written down before. It is this act of making something out of nothing, the creative impulse and the creative process that permeates the writing process (and the design engineering process) for me. Being creative is both a blessing and a curse. [I tried to touch upon this idea in my phase I essay.]

Then, Mil embarks on telling another story:

For the Mechanical Engineering [ME] class of 1970 at CMU, there were only two students (out of 250+) who were not white males; Judy Resnik and Herb (a black guy). It turns out that I was friends with both of them. This writer has a very clear memory of helping Judith A. Resnik with her Electrical Engineering (EE) laboratory experiments.

The EE lab protocol was for students to physically set up electrical circuits, to apply electrical power to them, and to measure voltages, currents and resistance levels with instruments. Judy was not accustomed to doing such things with her hands, so she was physically unsuited (perhaps a kind way to say “afraid”) to set up her experiments. Because I spent my high school years building a hot rod 1955 Chevy, including assembling a small block Chevy engine in a backyard garage, I was fearless when it came to touching and working on mechanical and electrical equipment and devices. [It amazed me that most of my fellow ME classmates could not work on their own cars and could barely open a hood.] I helped Judy overcome her fear of electrical circuits by patiently showing her how to set up the circuits, how to apply electrical power, how to read the oscilloscope and meters, and how to record the data in a lab notebook.

The irony of my helping Judy to overcome her fears comes full circle when one realizes that Judy Resnik became an astronaut! As the second American woman in space (Sally Ride was the first), not everyone remembers Judy or even that she was killed aboard the Challenger when it blew up. During that fateful flight, the first American schoolteacher was aboard: Crista McAuliffe. People tend to remember that we lost a civilian female schoolteacher aboard in the Challenger disaster, but Judy is generally forgotten.

In 2000, Carnegie Mellon University was celebrating its first 100 years, and then-editor of *Carnegie Mellon Magazine*, Ann Curran, solicited recommendations from alumni (and department heads) for an article “Alumni to brag about” listing successful, outstanding, talented, innovative, noteworthy CMU alumni, both living and dead. As it turns out, I was the only person who wrote a letter nominating Judith Resnik, and she appeared on page 43 with a small photo, wearing a flight helmet, and the alphabetical listing for her read: “Judith A. Resnik (E’70), engineer, astronaut, second American woman in space, died aboard the Challenger.”

I have saved the reply letter from the editor of *Carnegie Mellon Magazine*, and I ask the following rhetorical questions:

Did it mean something special that I wrote that letter and remembered my friend Judy Resnik for the CMU alumni magazine? Do letters matter? Does it mean something special that I am causing readers of this narrative, a narrative written in a prison cell, to think about the ultimate sacrifice Judy Resnik made for the advancement of American science? (pp. 26 – 29)

Yes, Mil. As a researcher of prison writers, I find that your letter to that editor means a great deal. You and I are alike; we treasure stories. We understand the value of connectedness, and the power of retelling the stories of human life.

Mil’s narrative continues, as he reflects on Judy and their friendship. He claims, “For me, when the Challenger space shuttle blew up, I questioned whether I should have helped Judy overcome her fears of physical hazards, her fears of electrical circuits” (p. 29). Mil then talks about his dear attorney friend (Tom), of whom I have had the opportunity to speak with, who helped him (Mil) through that difficult time:

Tom was helpful, years ago, as I first struggled with these feelings, when he commented to me that Judy may well have developed in the same way without my help, based upon something inside her that eventually would result in her becoming seemingly fearless and taking training in what we view as a dangerous role of space exploration.

To bring this back to what sustains me as a writer, it sustains me to be able to tell the reader the instant story about Judy Resnik. She was not some imaginary character in a book; she was a real person. She attended a tough engineering college back when she was the only female. We males had study groups together. She did not. She had to find, within herself, everything necessary to sustain her efforts to graduate in the CMU Mechanical Engineering class of 1970. She did it! It means a lot to me to be able to brag to the reader about Judy Resnik. I want to remember her, to honor her memory.

This remembering of Judy Resnik resulted in thinking about my Promethean climb to professional registration as an engineer. Would other engineers (and non-engineers, too) be interested in reading about how I applied to be the first prisoner to sit for the difficult eight-hour Engineer-In-Training examination, how the examination was administered in Western Penitentiary by two exam proctors, and how I passed it, first try? Most engineers seeking registration sit for the EIT exam while still in college or very shortly afterwards when everything is fresh. I sat for the EIT exam on October 31, 1987, some seventeen years later than usual. Ironically, at the time anyway, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections [DOC] did not require any of the prison maintenance engineers to be a licensed Professional Engineer (PE). Orlando, my non-PE supervisor was titled and paid as a Facility Maintenance Manager (formerly titled Institution Maintenance Superintendent, formerly titled Plant Maintenance Engineer) in the

Engineer's Office at Western Penitentiary; he shared with me about how the head engineer in the DOC Central Office in 1987 was not a PE; in fact, despite his sitting for the EIT exam several times, he could not seem to pass it. the eight-hour examination is a tough one! [This may all have changed in 2015 in that DOC may now have PEs?]

After careful consideration of the question about whether this narrative is the correct forum to detail the how and why of my quest for registration as a Professional Engineer, I think I will refer the reader to my forthcoming book: Working Knowledge. [How is that for leaving the reader wanting more?]

To close out answering the [2] question about what sustains me and keeps me writing, I will share how something came full circle. Early in the 1970s, I was very inspired by Al Masarik's poem entitled "Marilyn Monroe" when it appeared in John Bennett's *Vagabond* magazine. [I wrote about this in the phase I essay and quoted the entire poem.] In 1991, some twenty years after I had been so inspired by Al Masarik's "Marilyn Monroe" poem, Al Masarik wrote to me to ask my advice before he was going to teach a six week "stint in the Georgia prisons, starting a week from tomorrow." Naturally, I wrote back to him and gave him what help I could give him, and he certainly appreciated it and wrote me back on 4/14/1991. I have saved his letter because it sustains me. Al Masarik was a poet who I held as a hero of mine, and he came to me for advice about teaching poetry workshops in Georgia prisons. What are the random chances of that happening? The very fact that it happened sustains me and keeps me writing. (pp. 29 – 31)

Legacy

With having written those last words, Mil then goes on to explain why he will answer the third research question in a second narrative – he had reached the 32-page maximum for most of the literary journals he had researched in the market, to whom he planned to submit this narrative. So now I continue in citing portions of his second phase II narrative, titled “Sailors, Subs, and Senioritas,” after his uncle’s book. Mil narrates:

With the death of Leonard Nimoy on February 27, 2015, at age 83, I recall how, in the early 1970s, I was a prisoner in Western Penitentiary when he strode into the classroom of Trudy Scott and Ann Wyman who were teaching an acting class for the Community College of Allegheny County. I could not believe my eyes. I expressed admiration for his character. At the time, the *Star Trek* movies had not yet been made with Leonard Nimoy reprising the role of Mr. Spock many times, and he had published a book entitled I Am Not Spock by Celestial Arts Publishing. While Leonard Nimoy would later come to embrace Spock, when I first met him he was less than sanguine about his mind-melding with the character of Spock, so much so that he titled his book to deny the bond.

I handed him a copy of my first published chapbook, and while he did not give me the Vulcan salute to signal his acceptance, he appreciated having poems written by a prisoner in one of the oldest prisons in America. When preparing my next manuscript for patterns in the dusk, I asked permission to use his one comment about my writing as a blurb on the back cover of the softcover edition. He agreed, so the following blurb appears: “Powerful.” His death caused me to think about how my paternal uncle, William H. [last name omitted], wrote about his experiences aboard another kind of starship, a

Liberty Ship, during WWII. [last name omitted] family lore says Branden Press told him to “sex up” the manuscript to sell more copies of Sailors, Subs and Senioritas.

My uncle Bill, my dad’s oldest brother, was the only author in our family before me. While Uncle Bill’s book is long since out-of-print, it loomed large in [last name omitted] family lore because it was supposedly submitted without any sex scenes, written more as a “detailed narrative [...] compiled from wartime diaries by a seaman who served in the U.S. Merchant Marine during World War II.” Yet, as the hardcover book’s dust jacket goes on to say:

[...] Only a seaman could have written this down-to-earth account of life at sea, with all its day-to-day concerns: the petty frustrations, the high jinks, the boredom, and – always – the ever present danger from the German U-Boats. The hero of this book is the merchant seaman: how he lived, what he thought, and how he felt; and the seaman’s life is skillfully recorded in this chronological account of life at sea in wartime.

This book contains a full account of the training of merchant seaman, from classes ashore to drills aboard ship – and the author tells us what is in store for the hapless innocent who is crossing the equator for the very first time.

And this book describes the many kinds of work a seaman does, from swabbing to steering, from painting to toiling in an overheated engine room. The whole shipboard cast is present, from Captain to crew, including such stock characters as Sparks and Guns, and the different groups of shipboard toilers, such as the “black gang” of the engine room.

And above all (or perhaps below it), this book contains vivid accounts of what always happened when a ship puts into port, of the girls in every port for which sailing men are famous, and even the girls in the ports the ships missed putting into, for the men at sea are masters of the yarn in all its manifestations, from the tall tale to the hyperbolic understatement. Human, earthy, and frustrated, men aboard ship are interested in anything that wears a skirt. A true seaman, the author comments on everything female from the Captain's wife to the ship's cat, telling us of his exploits ashore with the women he met and his speculations afloat concerning those he didn't meet. This is a bawdy book, but one which is both serious and entertaining.

BRANDEN PRESS

It was this "telling us of his exploits ashore with the women he met and his speculations afloat concerning those he didn't meet" that created a "bawdy book" when the editor/publisher at Branden Press supposedly told Bill to "sex up" the manuscript to sell more copies. There were discussions among my dad's three sisters, Emily, Alice and Martha, that found their way to my young ears. Of the three brothers, Bill, Rudy, and John, Bill was the only life-long bachelor. I am not sure of what I made of all these facts as a young person, but I knew my father, Rudy, really respected, admired and loved his older brother Bill. That singular fact made it very easy for me to love my Uncle Bill. As an adult, when I now go back and read Sailors, Subs, and Senioritas, the sex scenes seem so mild by today's standards. It is almost hard to fathom how the book could now be seen as a "bawdy book" in a time when we have Fifty Shades of Grey and the like. In 2015, my Uncle Bill's book would hardly be seen as being erotic. (pp. 1-3)

Mil's Uncle Bill's book is called into question here, and it is as though Mil is more concerned with his uncle's legacy, than his own. He writes his personal narrative about his writing life, but gives honor to his uncle's writing.

Contemplation of this question caused this writer to discover some rather uncomfortable truths about the direction his writings had taken him into. For reasons that may well become obvious as more is revealed, my writing process began with a strong association in my mind with Sailors, Subs, and Senioritas, and as writing this narrative progressed, the question had to be asked, again and again and again: "Do I really want to write about this?" Obviously, the answer was "yes, yes, yes." (p. 4)

Mil then informs the reader of the importance of this research, to him. He retells the stories of his mother's death, his heart attack, his internal pledge to Dr. Nair, and my package of invitation into the study, which he received on the same day he made that vow (to live so that he would deserve all that Dr. Nair and his staff had done for him, in saving his life). He further expounds on choosing his uncle's book for a symbol that represents legacy as a writer:

Perhaps it is not readily apparent where and how the association with my Uncle Bill's book came about? My association with sailors in the Merchant Marine during WWII is based upon how they, too, endured long periods of boredom punctuated by extreme danger, an all-male environment, and Spartan living quarters. Association with submarines reaches two science fiction movies. [Both movies involved shrinking down a submarine with people and doing work repairing a human body.] Fantastic Voyage tells a make-believe story where an important scientist, rescued from behind the iron curtain, is severely wounded by enemy agents and traditional surgery is impossible. A submarine containing a medical team is shrunk to microscopic size, and once journeying inside his

body, they find themselves threatened by the patient's natural defenses, including blood clots. Innerspace is a science fiction movie where a space pilot miniaturizes for journey through a lab rat (like in Fantastic Voyage in a miniature submarine) and is accidentally injected into a meek supermarket clerk, and together they nab some villains and get the girl. The miniaturized tools that Dr. Nair submarined inside my coronary arteries included a balloon-tipped catheter, and two collapsed wire mesh tubes (stents) were placed over the deflated balloon at the catheter's tip. When the catheter reached position, and this is where the skill of the operator, the emergency cardiologist comes into play, the balloon was inflated, opening up the stent. When properly placed, the balloon was deflated, and the stent remained stretched-open to support the arterial wall. This was repeated a second time, with the smaller stent being nested against and into the larger diameter stent. When the balloon-tipped catheter was removed, the stents were left in place to help keep the coronary artery open.

So when I was asked the question: "What legacy, as a highly successful prison writer, do you hope to leave and/or accomplish?" I struggled with a long and careful examination of all of my myriad writing activities, and this narrative has been written and then rewritten several times. I made a temporary decision that I was not going to complete this narrative, and then I made another temporary decision that I was not going to submit this narrative for publication and also not send it off to the researcher.

Clearly, another theme in prison writing is this rather indecisive back and forth struggle of whether the words will adequately bring color to the image that is perceived in the writing mind, and whether what the writer wants to say is worthy, valid, and/or jeopardizing their livelihood in any way. This shows us how researching this group is difficult – but also, how the

data, once gathered, sometimes painfully and/or with an internal battle, is truly rare and valuable. Like Marty, Mil eventually prevails under the consuming stresses that prison writers face, and he states:

Then, low and behold, I was gradually able to sort out exactly what I felt I wanted to say in a public way in this narrative. So here goes.

There has been a recent development that affects the legacy (or the potential legacy) of prison writers. Pennsylvania has passed the new law, the Revictimization Relief Act [RRA], that allows the state Attorney General, district attorneys, and victims of personal injury crimes (or their family members) to seek court orders preventing the people convicted of those crimes from engaging in any conduct that would cause mental anguish to the victim (or the victim's family members) or otherwise "perpetuate the continuing effect of the crime on the victim (or the victim's family members)." This conduct could conceivably include submitting this narrative for publication.

The RRA is also known as the "Silencing Act." The American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU] filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of journalists, news outlets, advocacy organizations, and community leaders who were formerly imprisoned. The "Silencing Act" was passed in the fall of 2014 in response to a recorded commencement address given by Mumia Abu-Jamal who is serving a life sentence in a Pennsylvania state prison for the shooting death of a Philadelphia police officer in 1981. The RRA law's impact potentially extends far beyond Abu-Jamal, beyond writers in prison. Formerly incarcerated persons as well as professionals, including journalists who work with offenders, could be impacted by the law. Even a research study by a Ph.D. candidate at

the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Graduate Studies in Composition and TESOL could potentially be impacted by the “Silencing Act.”

I believe this is why our IRB protocol requires pseudonyms and anonymity when working with this highly protected group. I have had my own struggle with keeping these men I have grown to respect and admire a big secret; however, I, too, have sorted out the matter and rested in the belief that publicizing them is not the main purpose of this study. Introducing writers in prison, and beginning to unfold the untold story of prison writing *is* the goal; co-authoring with them, is a benefit. Therefore, their names are somewhat unimportant for this project. Besides, I hold strong to the belief that those who are genuinely impacted and interested in this research, considering conducting further investigations of their own, and fully embracing these stories, will easily be able to identify Mil, Marty, Jon, and Cob, should they choose to. Yet, as Mil points out, in quoting Paul Wright, there are additional laws that are in place to continue the protection of free speech:

The federal lawsuit, Prison Legal News v. Kane, is related to Abu-Jamal v. Kane, Case No. 1:14-CV-2148 (Middle District, Pennsylvania) which was filed in November of 2014. Paul Wright, a former prisoner and the editor of Prison Legal News, said:

It is equally important that prisoners be able to speak and the public be able to hear what they have to say as the eyewitnesses of the operation of the criminal justice system with a perspective no one else has. Everyone – even prisoners – has a right to free speech and expression free from government interference.

Reggie Shuford, executive director of the ACLU of Pennsylvania, said:

Laws designed to silence anyone, even people society may find disagreeable, are unconstitutional and bad for democracy. This law reaches broadly, and could

prevent innocent prisoners from seeking clemency, journalists from using sources to expose prison abuse, and formerly incarcerated persons from speaking publicly.

The “Silencing Act” could potentially stifle debate on critical issues such as deficient prison conditions, mandatory life sentences for juveniles, and innocence claims because reporters covering those issues could fear they will be prevented from or even penalized for publishing interviews with prisoners. A person convicted of an RRA violation could be required to pay damages or to pay the victim’s (or the victim’s family’s) attorney’s fees and court costs.

Seven of the eleven plaintiffs have standing, including Prison Legal News, because they rely on and publish speech by individuals convicted of personal injury crimes to inform the public and spur government action regarding issues of public importance, such as: wrongful convictions, prison conditions, penal policy, juvenile life without parole, and clemency. The four other plaintiffs have standing as persons formerly imprisoned for personal injury crimes who share their experience with a wide range of audiences to help reduce crime and facilitate successful prisoner reentry into society.

The plaintiffs are well represented by Witold Walczak and Sara Rose of the ACLU-PA, Amy Ginensky and Eli Segal of Pepper Hamilton’s Philadelphia office, Tom Schmidt and Tucker Hill of Pepper Hamilton’s Harrisburg office, and Seth Kreimer of the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Prison Legal News is also represented by Lance Weber and Sabarish Neelakanta of the Human Rights Defense Center.

While I believe that the RRA or the “Silencing Act” will be found to be unconstitutional, the question becomes what do I hope to accomplish by the act of answering the third question: [3] “What legacy, as a highly successful prison writer, do

you hope to leave and/or accomplish? And would you write your response as a narrative?"

If I answer that question to the best of my ability, will all of my readers be accepting of what I hope to accomplish? Or has the RRA, the "Silencing Act," been like Spock's death scene in the Star Trek II film, subtitled The Wrath of Khan, where Spock said the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one?

In a later film, when Spock is rescued by Captain Kirk and Bones McCoy and others, Kirk says to Spock that sometimes the needs of the one outweigh the needs of the many. (pp. 9-13)

And because from what I have come to know of Mil, and his truly dignified manner of relating to others, I respect and honor his narrative, as it is, because that *is* his legacy, to put his concern for others above himself.

I do wonder, however, how relaying his hoped for legacy, is different from any of his other writing endeavors for publication. The essay for phase I and the first narrative for phase II are not too different, either; they present him, his writing accomplishments and rewarding career, as well as his life experiences which have brought him into relationships with people all around the world. So how would his narrative of a hoped for legacy, "perpetuate the continuing effect of the crime on the victim (or the victim's family members)" be different from the stories he wrote in his other writings to me, or any of his other ongoing writing pursuits of publication to various journals, magazines, and the like? Besides, as he knows, his name is not going to be appearing anywhere in this document. He is Mil. Still, he wrote a wonderful narrative that continues to place us all (compositionists and prison writers) on that 3D, multilayered, many stranded, nested, textured, metanarrative landscape, and I thank him for it.

Cob

While I consider Cob another career writer (having 30 or more years writing), like my other three co-authors, his successes and passion for writing did not begin after he entered the prison system. Therefore, his writing life offers something different to this metanarrative. It was on October 20, 2007, Cob was sent to prison – not when he was young, like Mil, Marty, and Jon. He learned to love words, stories, and books at a very early age – long before his incarceration. And with a few encouraging folks in his younger years, he was able to start his writing life well before graduation. He continued to write, all throughout his *free* years, and has yet to stop. As he will say, in consideration to his writing successes behind bars these past eight years (as a completely sober man), he wonders how much more writing accomplishments he would have had as a free man, had he not resigned to picking up the bottle so often.

In “Stretching the Bookshelves,” Cob’s phase I essay, which sought to respond to the initial questions I was asking him with regard to my original topic of his writing process (the ‘Call for Papers,’ see Appendix B), he actually wrote a piece that is very narrative applicable to the three research questions I designed after my study took its change of course. Like Marty, he seemed to have some uncanny insight behind where this study was headed. Regardless, Marty was kind enough to write three more narratives, at my request, for phase II and III, just like the others.

In doing the coding and composing of Cob’s field texts and research texts, I had to sit with all the materials I had for him, just as I did for the others, and I had to consider all the aspects of conducting narrative inquiry. I had to read everything, consider what I was most connect with, find the places where meaning making was present, code the documents according

to broad topics, as well as more specific, or targeted (to Cob specifically) ones, and organize a plan for presenting all the data.

The main purpose to constructing these narrative sections (*Jon, Marty, Mil, and Cob*), as well as the sub-sections (*Getting Started, Sustaining Forces, and Legacy*), has been to answer the research questions. Also, I have aimed to do this work in regards to showing the reader what I, the researcher, has gained in this process, and how the construction provides additional meaning making for the reader – meaning making about each writer, about prison writing, and about a multitude of other topics, themes, and relevant issues. Still, it has been a process with little comfort to me. I continue to feel that this process of constructing these narratives leaves much out. It feels so loose and messy. These men are dynamic and rare. Their writing lives are fundamentally under-recognized. Celebrating them in a few hundred pages is not enough.

With Cob, piecing his narrative writings together in well-constructed sub-sections, to answer the three research questions has been too easy, I think. His narrative writing responding to the three research questions is composed in a clear and articulate manner, with clever devices and a cohesive flow that runs down the page in a well-developed, meaning making story. The problem: Cob's other writings (data) are mostly fiction – short stories and novels. He *has* published some non-fiction, but his articles were mostly about nature and the outdoors. He has also written articles for newspapers. He has won two PEN awards for memoirs, but I only have access to one, and it tells much the same story he writes in his narratives for this research.

Therefore, my struggle with presenting Cob's narrative has been dealing with his published works – trying to incorporate them, to advance the narrative of his personal writing life in prison. Since his publications are longer than Jon's poems, I cannot simply place them in the text and let them have their creative meaning making power over the reader. With Marty, I could

pull quotes from his various publications, since they are mostly all on the topic of prison life. Mil covered a lot of ground in his narratives, citing, quoting, and referencing himself and his publications.

Summarizing beautifully written short stories and quoting pieces of novels is much like slaughter – at least, as I see it. I have read all that I can of Cob’s works (maybe half of his publications, since some are no longer accessible), and I have had no idea how to present them. This is why I have apologized forthright for my error of leaving much out with each of these four authors; as a qualitative researcher, it is part of the process. However, I am the most apologetic to Cob.

I have enjoyed reading his novel, short stories, short memoir and have related to more than a few characters and plots. I can see how much Cob loved his Granny, in “Painting the Sunset.” I have also placed particular preference on “The Named and the Nameless” short story about Tony, a boy with Down’s syndrome. It is a beautiful, sad story. “The Walnut Tree” is another painfully beautiful short story about Harriet, a silent reproachful sentinel whose reflective thoughts about her life narrate the circumstances of the day when two county investigators come to remove her from her farm, at her son’s request; this story is Cob’s first publication, and perhaps the one I felt most driven to re-read, a few times – looking for any possible way to include it, somehow, herein. His other stories are endearing and well-written, too, but they hardly belong in a narrative about being a writer in prison, as I finally concluded.

Currently, as my other co-authors have admitted to me, Cob is, and has been dealing with publishing woes on account of his present address, especially as a fiction writer. In addition, he has three unpublished novels and years of newspaper articles that I cannot access. So, while I would have liked to have more texts for Cob, it is not possible.

This insufficiency of presenting all of my co-authors' works in a manner that feels adequate to me is what ultimately brought me to change the title of this dissertation to *introducing* the prison writer, and *beginning* the narrative of prison writing. I simply cannot do more, especially when I am perhaps the first compositionist attempting to pursue these topics, and I am covering four writers with extensive publishing credits. However, this is also why I continue to encourage other scholars to take on this work of closer examination of writers in prison, and prison writing. Let us now look at Cob's narratives and correspondences to me. Much like the arrangement of Mil's narrative, I have mostly placed Cob's writing for this research (phase I, II, and II texts) in this section. I believe the texts are still sufficient in answering the research questions and providing the reader with a 3D meaning making experience. Cob's 'Publishing Credits' can be found as Appendix H.

Getting Started

Here we begin with some of Cob's writing, as he answers the research question about how he got started writing, and I attempt to introduce him to composition:

When asked why he wrote, James Jones, author of From Here to Eternity, ducked the question, commenting that "Sitting at a table writing isn't man's natural calling. Standing in a field and bashing other people's brains out with a club is."

John Updike, more of a sentimentalist, decided at a very early age that he would "Ride a thin pencil-line out of Shillington [his home town] into the pages of The New Yorker," which he proceeded to do.

Both of the above authors neatly dodged the question, perhaps not really knowing why themselves. And the only thing these two very disparate writers share is their desire, besides being paid for their opinions, to extend their "lives" beyond the biblical three-

score and ten via the dubious immortality of public libraries and used book stores. And who is to say that the wings of their coevals—the Cheevers, Mailers, O’Haras, Wolfes (Tom and Thomas), et al, etc., etc.—and predecessors—from Lady Murasaki to the 20th century Dynamic Duo of Hemingway and Faulkner—weren’t lofted by the same selfish winds? What more, after all, is writing than a plucky boast to achieve that elusive immortality, to shout boldly into the impassive visage of eternity that, Yes, I once lived and therefore I wrote! Ergo, I was!

This opening serves as a boisterous point to why he writes; may I again introduce you to Cob? Here he is! And now, here he is telling us stories about how he came to the writing life – through his Granny, and through reading:

Although there are as many reasons why someone begins writing as there are writers, it seems apparent that every writer was first a great reader. In my instance, I was fortunate to have a grandmother who was a one-room schoolteacher. A double-divorcee, she evidently had a difficult time finding a man who could live up to her high standards, or in the case of my grandfather, remain sober. She lived with her youngest son—my uncle—in a new rancher a few hundred yards up the road. I lived with my parents in a stuccoed sandstone farmhouse down the hill, and learned to read at the age of four during my many sleepovers with Granny, following her finger as it moved from word to word, and somehow weaving from dots and squiggles of ink a tapestry of wonder, inoculating me forever against boredom with the serum of knowledge.

Not for Granny and I was the typical toddler fare: Spot never barked, nor chased a stick thrown by Bobby or Molly. I fell asleep in Granny’s twin bed to the exotic adventures in Kipling’s Jungle Book and the timeless tales of Scheherazade—bowderized

of course for tender ears. One night, bored no doubt by reading the same story, Granny began skipping words, hurrying the story to a premature conclusion, condensing the copy as ruthlessly as any imperious, space-saving editor.

“You skipped a word, Granny,” I said, pointing with my finger to the errant truant.

“Land sakes, Cob [*real name omitted, pseudonym inserted by researcher*]!” she exclaimed, using the closest expression to an expletive that her Christian beliefs allowed. “Do you mean to tell me that you can read?”

Do bears hide in the woods (plotting mischief)? I thought she knew! At her prodding, I proved I could by slowly reading the rest of the paragraph, then the page. Granny was proud; perhaps more than I, but my newly discovered talent meant the end of our cozy reading sessions. My sleepovers continued, but now I read in my own twin bed as she read the Bible in hers. I fell asleep alone, gripping her hand extended across the darkened space between our respective beds. Before long, my visits ceased for good, and from then on I read myself to sleep in my own bed, in my own home, to the legends of King Arthur or the adventures of Tom and Huck and Jim, a confirmed reader for life.

Cob’s 2013 memoir “Painting the Sunset” won first place in PEN’s annual writing contest, and in it, Granny is the primary character. It informs us of her strengths and his admiration towards her. It also tells the story of her last days, and how Cob was filled with shame and grief over her passing, and somehow honored her memory by going hunting the day she was put in the ground. Cob also tells us a bit about his dad and mom, and their reading preferences:

My father—a great reader himself—also encouraged me to read. Our family was only one rung up from poverty—our 123-acre, 60-head sheep farm was an economic joke—but our living room bookshelves were stocked with not only the bestselling paperback authors of the era—John O’Hara, Robert Ruark, James Michener—but classics from Plato to Shopenhauer to Nietzsche, and older novels from Dickens to Ayn Rand. I was allowed to read anything I wanted, although my father had (not too successfully) tried to hide Mickey Spillane’s “find’em-fuck ‘em-kill ‘em” detective potboilers from my innocent eyes.

I’m not sure how old I was when I decided I wanted to write, although I remember playing baseball with a few of the neighborhood kids in our large yard when I was seized by the need—the overwhelming urge!—to drop my glove and run inside the house to start writing a series of far-fetched science fiction stories, each set on one of the nine planets. For the next few days, in every spare moment, I scribbled and scribbled ten-twelve page tales of interplanetary mayhem between earthlings and the alien inhabitants, both animal and what passed on Mars for “human.” When I finished on frosty, faraway Pluto, I picked up my glove and our never-ending summertime ballgame resumed almost where it had left off. My friends and probably my mother—who didn’t share my love of literature—thought I was daft. But the local rustics and eccentrics had by their antics pretty well inured everyone to the occasional idiosyncrasy of their fellow citizens, so my temporary “leave of senses” was soon forgotten.

I read voraciously through elementary school, culminating in the never-to-be-matched feat of reading and writing one-page book reports on one hundred and fifty two books in sixth grade! I not only depleted our class library—which included an

uncondensed version of Moby Dick—but raided the fifth-grade library too. Finally, near the end of the year, I began reading and reporting on books from home. It was then, in my twelfth year, that I discovered it was almost as pleasurable writing about books as reading them. Maybe it was then that I got the brazen notion that my life wouldn't be fulfilled until I stretched the world's bookshelves another foot or so.

And if I wasn't committed yet one-hundred percent behind that fancy, then my discovery of my father's ill-hid copies of Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn tipped the balance, and how! Miller, an American iconoclast in the tradition of Rabelais, Boccaccio, Mark Twain, and—just for the imaginary hell of it—any of the notorious mountain men, if they knew how to write and had a sense of humor, opened my mind to the possibility of living a literary life. A great, omnivore reader himself, Miller championed scads of obscure writers I might never have discovered until much later—Hermann Hesse, Knut Hamsun, Lawrence Durrell, for example—and showed by example of his own explosive style of Realism-with-a-capital-R, hilarious hyperbole, tongue-in-the-cheek bombast served up with sides of sarcasm and cynicism spiced with cheery optimism and seasoned throughout by hearty dashes of sexual Tabasco sauce, that anything was grist for the literary mill: There were no sacred cows in an author's pasture!

Wow! I thought. This is how I want to write! These are the types of people I want to populate my novels. This is the literary sensibility I want to cultivate! And after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Miller's books weren't obscene, and the rest of his nonsexual writings became available, even my father—a professed Miller apostate—was forced to admit that expatriate Henry, the Great Contrarian, was much more than just a “pornographer;” those sections were the weakest part of his work anyhow. By the time I

had read Black Spring and his coming-of-age-as-a-writer trilogy, Sexus, Nexus, and Plexus, I had decided to someday go to Greenwich Village and become a writer too. Surely, thought I, there would be a June Miller waiting by the Washington Square water fountain to be my muse, too.

I do agree. Habitual reading, and a love for the written word, can lead to writing. Cob had a hyper literate life growing up – a life we would not typically assume would lead to prison. This happens because of misfortunate events, events out of one’s control, events which Cob has narrated to me in his letters and narratives. Like Marty’s and Mil’s confessions of internal struggles with writing or not writing, and/or submitting or not submitting written work, I have debated about whether or not I should include these unfortunate events. Nearing the end now, I have once again revisited the topic of this research’s purpose – *introduce* the writer in prison and *begin* the story of prison writing. Therefore, I continue piecing Cob’s narrative together from the various texts and materials I have for him, as they show us more about how he got started writing. He continues his narrative about his writing life:

In retrospect, perhaps my early exposure to a piss-against-the-wind renegade like Miller complicated my life. A straight “A” student through my elementary years, I lost interest in everything unconnected with literature by eighth or ninth grade. My grades plummeted and I only did enough to scrape by. I constantly read, even openly in class. I kept my nose away from the grindstone of homework, and except for fishing and baseball from March to October, and hunting and trapping all fall and winter, I had no interests. (Well... there were girls, of course, and rock and roll and doo-wop, but let’s not get sidetracked!)

By tenth grade, almost sixteen-years-old—the age of consent—I was on the verge of quitting school. Then, through an odd karmic twist, (or an “accident,” if anyone still believes that such unicorns exist), I encountered the woman who saved me. She prevented me from dropping out, encouraged me to write, and as my tenth-grade English teacher, Mrs. Ethel Lipnack changed my life.

On the first day of class, she asked the students to voluntarily submit a personal essay, listing their hopes and aspirations. She promised not to reveal any secrets so disclosed, and would return each essay if desired. No grades would be awarded, nor demerits for not participating—she just wanted to get a handle on her new student’s personalities, the better to teach them. She gave us the weekend to complete them, and on Monday I presented her with a lengthy Miller-inspired, surrealistic diatribe, the sort of juvenile rant that only someone whose innocence was being slaughtered daily by contemporary events can write. It was a cry of defiance, but at the same time a cry for help that she was mindful enough to discern.

A day later, after she had read the few essays that had been tendered, she asked me to stay after class. I was certain I’d be expelled because of my screed’s content—I hadn’t used any obscenities or included any sexual content—but my disdain for society and the “preservers” of the same were obvious. But to my surprise, Mrs. Lipnack not only praised my essay, but praised it in the sort of glowing phrases that I thought were reserved for established authors! That day we forged a covenant, Mrs. Lipnack and I, and although her course syllabus didn’t provide for a weekly or even monthly essay assignment, she offered to read and correct for grammar and usage any essays, memoirs, or stories I wrote. In short, she volunteered to be my exclusive editor!

Again and again we see the theme of mentorship popping up in the lives of prison writers, but during this time in Cob's life, he was only a boy, and he was already working with another person on his writing skills. This is remarkable. He goes on:

With a few months, I had become an invited guest at her home, where I was doubly-stunned to learn that she not only was a chainsmoker, but had grown up in the same Brooklyn neighborhood where Miller and his arty wife, June, had lived in the early '30s! Mrs. Lipnack remembered vividly watching from her brownstone stoop as June sashayed by, sporting a beret, a long, black cape, and a pair of noisy high heels, clutching in one hand a pocketbook and flourishing in the other a long cigarette holder.

Talk about "coincidences"! Or, as I prefer to quip after later experience with the "reality" drugs, LSD and psilocybin, "How do you like dem old apples of synchronicity?" And if that wasn't enough to beggar belief, for a week in the winter of '63, when Mrs. Lipnack took off a week of school because of her husband's death, Mr. Wesley Updike—the father of John and the real-life model of The Centaur—took her place as a substitute teacher!

Every bit as eccentric as he was portrayed in the novel, Mr. Updike wisely decided against trying to teach our disinterested class the niceties of verb declensions or the subtleties of diagramming compound/complex sentences. Instead he delivered an extemporaneous dissertation on anything that popped into his hyperactive mind. His son had recently achieved a degree of fame for his novel Rabbit, Run, which was set in Reading—only twelve miles away—but I hadn't yet read it, or any of his short stories, and his father only mentioned his son in passing, judging us accurately enough as a passel of hayseeds and milltown boys putting in time until we could be drafted as cannon fodder

by Uncle Sam, or, as Bob Dylan was to later sing, “Strap on the heart attack machine” at a life-long factory job.

As he nervously paced to and fro, tossing off epigrams, droll observations, and witty asides, I realized I was in the presence of an exceptional man. Years later, when I finally read The Centaur, I knew that his son had unerringly hit his mark. And when I began to read John’s early work, deducing from the numerous hints the location of the action, I realized that the noted sandstone farmhouse of “Pigeon Feathers,” The Centaur, and Of the Farm was only three crow miles from my own sandstone farmhouse, built perhaps by the same itinerant gang of stonemasons that travelled from job to job, leaving as their spoor a host of houses, barns, summer kitchens, and underground “caves,” vaulted stone root cellars whose invisible presence was given away by the tiny air vents mushrooming above the earth.

Looking back, I marvel at my unlikely acquaintance, however tenuous, with two such disparate authors, whose only link was the sexual obsessions throughout their oeuvre; Miller and Updike, two giants of American literature whose work represents the antipodes of that literature: the Apollonian and the Dionysian. But there they were, flimsily united by the intercession of my personal muse, my Euterpe, Mrs. Lipnack. Perhaps some might call my linkage of this improbably troika an example of “magical thinking,” but since I happen to believe that we live in a magical world, I reject their argument.

I agree; we live in a magical world. When I think of how I came to be interested in prison writing and prison writers, and how I have managed to get these four successful writers in my

study, I am pleasantly pleased with the magician. Cob's texts to me also present additional topics that relate to how he eventually comes to that place of considering himself a writer:

I graduated (barely) in 1965, went to Greenwich Village in the late summer of '66, planted a seed on the dirty end of Bleecker Street near its dead-end terminus with the Bowery, returned to Pennsylvania for the winter, and then returned to the Village to harvest my crop in time for the '67 Summer of Love, which I celebrated in both the East and West Villages of New York, and the ground zero of the "love-in," ahem, at San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury. After another cycle of Pennsylvania and the two hip outposts on the nether shores of the continent in '68, I decided I had OD'd on the counterculture, if not its drugs (which I largely spurned), and returned home to stay. (Yes, you can return home, Tom Wolfe, but it's not a good idea, as I found out.) I got married, worked a series of menial jobs, raised a family, and drank. I always drank.

My dream of becoming a writer was put on hold. Tormented by guilt, ashamed at myself for squandering my talent and letting down my grandmother and Mrs. Lipnack, whom I had lost touch with, I continued to drink and read. Finally, in the early '80s, unable to face my mirrored image, I made a last-ditch effort to write. I started writing short stories set in my tiny postage stamp of my world, in the same territory that Updike had mined for his early stories and first four novels. My literary sensibility, however, had been influenced by not only Henry Miller, but the gritty realism of Erskine Caldwell and Nelson Algren. Entitled "Suzie's Panties," "Junkyard Mummies," and "Egg Money," populated by the type of redneck grotesques that goody-two-shoes Updike had been warned away from by his mother, my stories were "different," if nothing else. I knew that they had a certain flair, but was unsure of their worth.

Then one hung over Sunday morning, I saw in the local Reading Eagle an article about John Updike, who had returned from his Massachusetts' home to attend his high school reunion. Bravened by the remnant alcohol percolating in my bloodstream from the previous night's revelry, I looked up the number of John's mother in the phone book and rang it up. When she answered, I casually asked if I might speak to John, trying to give the impression that I was one of his old pals. She called him to the phone, he said hello, and I quickly gave my name and explained that I lived nearby and was a neophyte writer, then asked if he'd be kind enough to read some of my stories. Sure, he said, to my utter surprise, bring them over. "Do you know where my mother lives?" he asked in a warm voice.

I assured him that I did, threw three of my favorite stories in a 9x12" envelope, grabbed my three-year-old daughter, Amber, as a foil, and dashed over the Geigertown hill to his mother's Plowville home, where we were received with courtly amusement by him and his gracious mother, who under the byline of "Linda Grace Hoyer" was a published author herself.

We conversed easily; he was more down-to-earth than I expected, although his great intelligence dominated the room like a living entity. I told him that his father had once been my substitute teacher, which elicited several questions about the experience. He asked if I wrote poetry, and I said no, repeating Faulkner's bon mot about how he had began his writing career as a poet but, finding it too difficult, attempted short story writing. Then, after making a hash of that, he settled for the workaday job of a novelist. Updike, a much-published poet of both light and serious verse, laughed. And when I

commented that much of modern poetry left me cold, he agreed, saying, “It just sort of spills down the page, doesn’t it?”

His mother watched and listened to us talk, but contributed nothing. It was apparent that she was perfectly happy to bask in the reflected glory of her famous son. Amber was getting restless, so I handed John the envelope and excused myself. A few weeks later, my stories came back in the same envelope, along with a one-page letter of criticism, encouragement, and a few technical hints that a proud autodidact like I should have already known. More important, he actually praised my style, noting that I didn’t “get hung up on just words,” and that one of the stories (‘Suzie’s Panties’ [!]) “moved me—I heard humanity crying.”

Woo! Hooray! You betcha! Full of confidence, freshly inspired, I redoubled my efforts, minded my tenses and usage, and within a year had my first short story, “The Walnut Tree,” published in a quality literary quarterly in California, *Crosscurrents*. (Unfortunately, it is no longer in existence.) And just about the same time, I began writing an outdoor column for a local weekly, occasionally filling in as a reporter and feature writer. (And photographer, too.)

For the next four years, at two different weeklies, I honed my craft, churning out unedited columns about whatever struck my fancy—at times I used an outdoor theme as a launching pad to send my bile rocketing to distant planets, ones populated by the current bugbears that annoyed me. In 1987, I interviewed Mrs. Updike, photographing her by natural light as she sat in her favorite chair, petting her mutt, Tessie [*Cob sent this article and picture along with his narratives and other publications*]. Behind her was a room-length bookshelf filled with the first editions of all her son’s books. I took no notes; we

talked like friends, like the two country folks that we at heart were. She didn't feel that I had sufficient data to write up the interview, but when it was printed, she loved it so much that she called to thank me. She had loved the photo, too, so I had the newspaper run off several 8x10" black and white glossies, and I handmade four wooden picture frames, cut and installed protective glass, and presented them to her as gifts to her grandchildren. This earned me a personalized, autographed novel from John, whichever one I liked. I chose *Of the Farm*, a novel starring his mother. In return, I presented John with a similarly personalized and autographed copy of the issue of *Crosscurrents* that contained my story, thus closing the circle, connecting the last two dots of the strange literary circle sketched out in the early '60s. I had begun tracing the circle in 1978, when I had found Henry Miller's address in California and written him a long drunken letter, which he enjoyed so much that he wrote back. For two years, until his death in 1980, we conducted a sporadic correspondence, limited on his part by his deteriorating vision. I also gave Mrs. Lipnack a copy of my published story, but she received it coldly, having turned on me when she discovered I had not only voted for Regan, but admired the work and philosophy of Ayn Rand. To a New York City Jewish liberal of her generation, my political heresy was unforgivable and we never spoke again. But she had helped make me the man I had become, and when she died, I attended her funeral, returning to the cemetery from time to time to place large, smooth river stones upon her headstone. And if I were free, I'd visit Plow Church Cemetery and place wildflowers upon John's grave, too. Not only had he encouraged me, in 1990 he wrote a short note of recommendation, which advised any future editor to pay close attention to my work, a note that is still cracking open a few tightly barricaded doors at magazines and quarterlies across the land.

And that is how I became a writer. The good part. Then, in the late '80s, my marriage went south, my writing dwindled to a stop, I quit newspaper work, and took up the bottle, even though I had published both fiction and nonfiction in several national publications. Divorced, living in a self-built cabin in my father's woods, I managed to write a novel over the course of seven years. After major publishing houses praised it as "well-written," they turned it down as "uncommercial." Being a man of scant patience, I jumped at the just-invented method of "publishing-on-demand," and self-published it at Xlibris, whereupon I sold over 200 books without advertising in a town of 2000 people. And not a damn one of them criticized it adversely, except to complain that it wasn't longer! It was published in the spring of 2002, and from then on, until the day my world ended and I came to prison on October 20, 2007, I fell entirely into the grape, writing absolutely nothing, except the occasional bitter letter to the editor of The Reading Eagle. My career had ended. (pp. 1-9)

Sustaining Forces

Cob briefly explains his arrest, incompetent public defenders, his clean background, being present at the birth of all five of his grandchildren, and the guilty sentence he was given for an act of self-defense, in his home. Again, like in chapter 2, where Marty is briefly introduced and I mentioned the sentiments of many (myself included, based on years of reading and researching prison writers and prison writing), pertaining to the unfortunate justice system we have in this country, I hold to the fact that this is certainly an issue for the writers and the group it effects – prison writing. It is an issue – a very big one! But like my co-authors, who have also learned somehow to mostly accept the conditions and try to make the most out of their

circumstances, I aim to do the same. We will leave the studies surrounding unfair and impartial sentencing to the scholars within criminology.

At sixty, Cob was put in prison, and while in county jail, waiting 18 months for a trial, he began writing again. Cob narrates this second beginning to writing, his newfound sustaining forces:

My grandmother hadn't just read to me during my sleepovers, she had spun tales of two raccoons that lived in our barn—a pair of mischievous rascals she named “Smoky” and “Blackie.” I had forgotten the particular stunts they had pulled, but I invented new ones, and writing a chapter a week, produced a 158-page children/young adult book entitled *Coon Tales*. Using the last \$500 of my money after I paid \$5,000 for a useless lawyer to write a useless appeal, it was typed onto a CD-ROM by a friend, who unfortunately for me, Smoky, and Blackie, thought she knew more than I did about punctuation. When I received the first copy, I was convicted, sentenced, and sent to Albion, my “home” jail. I almost tore out what little remaining hair I had when I saw the infestation of unnecessary commas, and the continued misspellings throughout the book of my grandchildren's names. I stopped publication, intending to correct the errata, but that was five years ago! Since I can't have a word processor, I have to depend upon the kindnesses of my daughters, and wouldn't you just know it!, they are SUCH incredibly BUSY ladies! Therefore, it languished unpublished until either I win my appeal (which is likely, if it ever comes to court), or an angel appears to fix matters with a flick of its wand! Which occurrence seems to you more likely?

While this black comedy was playing out, I began writing my long-planned magnum opus—a *Bildungsroman* set in Greenwich Village and Haight-Ashbury during

the Summer of Love in 1967. Entitled *Dreaming of Oxen*, after Thomas De Quincey's observation in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* that "If an ox herder were to take opium, he should dream of oxen," a perfect description of Haight-Ashbury, it is 557 pages long and zips from coast to coast and episode to episode as fast and as smoothly as Neal Cassady drove Jack Kerouac around the country in a series of battered automobiles! I wrote every day, without fail, producing from two to ten pages.

As I have come to learn, prison writers do this, too. However, this was at a time in Cob's life when he was still not in prison. Remember: he was arrested at age 60, only eight years ago. Therefore, we see that the sustaining forces of surroundings were what drove Cob to produce. I wonder about his current surroundings and their effects.

I waited until my cellie [*common term in prison, meaning cell mate*] went to either work or the yard, and squeezed in an hour or two of uninterrupted writing. As the chapters piled up, my enthusiasm grew—I knew I was writing my masterpiece. I had no plot, only a vision of two beatniks throwing a sofa from the fifth-story window of their loft. The characters stepped out of my mind, introduced themselves, and led me quite a merry chase, pen and paper in hand, following them wherever they went, scribbling down madly their adventures. When they decided they had enough, they told me to wrap it up, and VOILA!, I had my novel!

I immediately began to type it up, correcting, amending, adding, subtracting, and improving the work. It took 79 days, typing morning, afternoon, and evening—whenever my cellie left for lockout. While I was writing and typing it, I won two PEN Prison Writing Awards for a pair of memoirs (which you probably have already read), and a first (and only) prize in Eaton Literary Agency's annual short fiction contest. That paid \$500

and earned Dreaming of Oxen an invitation to their reading desks. After I finished typing and copying my novel (at 10 cents a page), I sent it home to my daughter Katie, instructing her to send it via UPS to Eaton, figuring she could afford better than I repeated postage charges for re mailing it to other agents in the event that Eaton turned it down. I figured wrong, it turned out, because—unbelievably!—UPS LOST IT! I didn't find out for five months, because I thought Eaton was trying to make up their minds whether to accept it for representation. When I finally wrote to them in October, they said that they had never gotten it! I almost had a seizure when I read their letter. UPS can't trace it, so now I'm recopying it at the rate of 100 pages a week (all the copies we're allowed to make) after going over it and fixing all the typos by pasting the typed corrections over the errors, a time-consuming, tedious process. When it's finally done, I'll send it myself—damn the cost!—from here via the good old U.S. Postal Service!

This is sadly too common. The conditions for prison writers are unfair. They are under-appreciated, for sure, and this is wrong when we have a system that is supposed to protect such things from happening. It hardly seems as though this type of circumstance would sustain any writer.

Then, with luck, Eaton will sell it to a big publisher, it will become a bestseller, and I'll finally have enough money to hire a good lawyer and beat this unfair conviction. That's the plan, anyhow.

I have read this layout before. It is a hope that most prison writers have amidst the woes of composing and being published.

I've also been writing short stories for the last three years, and sending them (with a copy of the Updike recommendation) to well-paying magazines and quarterlies.

Cob sent me the same typed letter from John Updike, which is actually a nice artifact and addition to my research files.

Although I haven't sold any yet, I've received handwritten rejection slips that praised my style and asked me to send more from The Paris Review, The New Yorker, Epoch, and The Missouri Review. I currently have a total of ten stories at six publications, including all of the above and Tin House and McSweeney's. I've extracted four short stories from my novel, which I altered somewhat, in one instance switching the voice from first person to third. And I try to write at least one story every two months, although I've fallen behind because of the recopying hassle.

I received a letter from PrisonReform101.com two weeks ago. It is (according to their letter) an organization of "award-winning journalists from NBC, CBS News, and USA TODAY," who are starting up an online forum to aid prisoners. They read my PEN memoirs and have offered me a correspondent job. They want me to write 1-3 page articles on any subject that I wish (prison-related, of course), and intend to pay me \$10-25. They are also sponsoring a writing contest that pays a little more than PEN--\$250 for 1st, \$100 for 2nd, and \$50 for 3rd, plus a raft of \$25 runner-up prizes. I sent them three 3-page articles for the contest, plus one 3-page article for the website, instructing them to send the \$\$ to my daughter, Katie. (pp. 10-12)

I don't know, maybe I won't be content until I have stretched the world's library shelves another few inches. Maybe I lust for a dubious sort of immortality. Maybe I just want my opinions, impressions, and reactions to this glorious world's ever-changing face to be recorded as proof that a sentient being named Cob [first, middle, and last name are omitted, pseudonym inserted by researcher] existed. Lord knows I've gotten scant

recognition or praise during my life—even from my family—so why I think I’ll receive it posthumously is a mystery. I guess I love this world so much that I cannot resist penning love letters to her, the cruel, lovely mistress who stole my heart. I had of course, received fan mail during my column-writing days. And I have also had a few people express their enjoyment of my novel, which received a glowing review from the Berks County Library Association, whose newsletter was the sole reviewer of it. These are the carrot at the end of the stick, the impetus to write more.

Approval is important to any writer, but for the prison writer, a positive review and some expressed enjoyment over a text is the stuff that motivates and sustains prison writers above all else. If we think about it, they are in a place to feel more encouragement than other writers because they experience greater oppression and unacceptance for their writing. Therefore, when they get good feedback and some acknowledgement, it can be the very motivator to keep them going – much like Cob’s meeting with Updike gave him much inspiration while he was living outside prison.

Cob tells us of a few other sustaining forces:

My grandmother, Wilhelmina Handlon Corbett Wahl, the person who taught me to read, wrote a novel of her own, which was never published. I remember reading it one afternoon in the attic of my uncle’s home, where she lived. I was only ten or eleven, and thought that it was marvelous; not because of its literary value, which in retrospect wasn’t noteworthy, but because she had dared to bare her soul to the world, all because of “Art.” I thought that was brave and admirable, and I think the incident may have instilled in my subconscious the seed of my future efforts.

Finally, another reason I continue to write is to share with the unfortunate ones the wonderful life I have lived, to introduce to them some of the unforgettable characters I encountered, and in that retelling give them a second life, too. I was poor, but never knew it, and lived in the sort of rural innocence that is no longer possible, I'm afraid. God blessed me then, and it is only fitting that I repay my debt by writing in loving detail of His world. Mrs. Updike once told me that in her girlhood she had "made friends with the flowers" because she had no playmates. She had grown up only three miles from me, and I knew well her "friends"—my grandmother had introduced me to them too. And what do friends do, except praise their friends? Therefore, I write.

Legacy

As far as answering what legacy he hoped to leave and/or accomplish, he said:

I'd like nothing more than to die knowing that my stories and novels will go on providing pleasure to another person. Perhaps they might even inspire another child to become a writer, too. A man could do worse during his short time on this planet/plane/dimension what-will-you than give intellectual pleasure to another being. And it doesn't hurt while a man is still alive to help as many people as he can, either. Hence, my decision to help you.

And in his very first letter to me, he did express:

I'm participating in this because I want to help you. If one of my three daughters asked, I'd do the same for them. I guess I'm just a sentimental Gemini Romantic old fart. And, I believe with all my heart in the life-changing power of literature!

Final Words

In these narratives/essays, composed by my four co-authors, Mil, Cob, Marty, and Jon, we have glanced inside the writing lives of four prison writers in America – looking at how each got started writing, seeing what has kept them writing while in prison, and the legacy each one believes and/or hopes he is leaving. In the next chapter, we will begin the unfolding of the untold story of prison writing, responding to the same three questions of how prison writing got started in the U.S., what sustains it and/or has kept it going, and the legacy it may or may not be leaving.

CHAPTER 5

THE PRISON WRITING NARRATIVES, OR DATA

“A prison renaissance,” as prison poet William Aberg characterizes it, flourished nationwide in the seventies. Prisoners organized to form unions, to fight for humane treatment, and to bring educational, cultural, and religious programs inside the walls. The fruit of their efforts and outside pressures, prison college programs and other rehabilitative programs sprang up everywhere.” (Bell Gale Chevigny)²¹

Public reception of prison writing over the past twenty-five years parallels the plunging and rearing trajectory of attitudes toward prisoners we have seen: enthusiasm and broad-based support in the seventies, doubt growing in the eighties, cynicism dominating the nineties, and beginning to give way at century’s end. (Bell Gale Chevigny)²²

Introduction

In this chapter, I use my co-authors’ narratives, again, to add to the three-dimensional texture that serves another purpose of this study – to begin to unfold the untold story of prison writing. This chapter allows compositionists, my co-authors, and myself to move forward and backward in our own understanding of the field of composition while deeply considering the worth of prison writers, and the valuable essence of prison writing to our field.

In chapter 2, many layers and strands were nested within this metanarrative to give it texture and a three-dimensional landscape. A few prison writing themes were outlined – not in full, or with an intent to be exhaustive. In fact, as the title of this project suggests, this work seeks to *introduce* the prison writer (concentrating on only four), and produce a co-authored

²¹ Taken from *Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing* (1999, p. xv).

²² Taken from *Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing* (1999, p. xix).

metanarrative that *begins* to unfold the untold story of prison writing; simply put, there is so much more that can be researched and uncovered in this rich arena of writing from the inside the American prison-industrial complex. Therefore, this narrative of prison writing, co-authored by the participants, yet constructed by me, is going to be much like what was devised in chapter 4. There are three sections: *Getting Started*; *Sustaining Forces*; and *Legacy*. Like with the other chapters in this dissertation, I end with *Final Words*.

I aim to give voice, on this important history, to those who we might consider to be the most informed of the narrative, from within the system itself – the successful career prison writers. I present the research texts (phase II narratives) of my co-authors. It is the prison writing narratives (data) I have accumulated from the co-authors that are used to unfold this mostly untold story of prison writing – most especially, I do not believe it has ever been told by prisoners. I have coded and organized the data according to the three main topics/sections of this chapter (getting started, sustaining forces, and legacy), and have constructed a chapter that answers the three research questions of how prison writing got its start, what sustains it and keeps it flourishing and producing great writers and publications, and the legacy it is leaving, and/or will hopefully leave society, and others, and I have done this by primarily focusing on the written research texts of my co-authors (their phase II narratives).

Getting Started

I begin with this passage from Cob's second phase II narrative:

Prison writing probably began with the first literate prisoner. (Were the Neanderthal cave painters prisoners of the more-advanced Cro-Magnons? And were the outlined palms their proud signature?) One must always remember that prison is the ultimate bureaucracy where government-appointed nonentities tell you what to do, where

to go, and when to do it. in such situations, a modicum of freedom is attained in the act of writing; it permits the writer to say, in an inversion of Pascal's famous dictum: "I am, I exist, and therefore I think, and my writing is proof!" throughout history, I'm certain that other inmates have felt the urge to explain, to plead, perhaps even to atone. These, after all, are all human emotions, and the prisoner, no matter his crime, is still a human.

When we speak of "prison writing," I assume it to mean the Western experience, the post-Renaissance, post-Gutenberg era. I haven't made a study of the species, but off-hand the first name that occurs to me is Boethius, a 5th century Roman philosopher who wrote The Consolation of Philosophy while under a sentence of death. I haven't read his treatise, and am familiar with it only because the hero of John Kennedy O'Toole's A Confederacy of Dunces constantly quotes from it. Then, of course, there is the notorious Marquis De Sade, a nobleman imprisoned most of his life in the Bastille or, after the French Revolution briefly freed him, in the madhouse at Charenton. Unable to indulge in his perversions and sexual crimes, he turned instead to writing some of the most repulsive works imaginable, in which every perversion short of bestiality is described in depth. (And no doubt he would've revised his manuscript to include it had he lived long enough.) His books are still in print, for except for the unspeakable *A Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom*, his other books possess a certain risqué charm, and he doesn't lack a certain wit. Modern academic champions, who ought to know better, try to make him into a misunderstood philosopher, whose work was a rebellion against the royalty. That is true only in the sense that his work was a rebellion, a shit pie in the face of decency, religion, and morality, and if any spatters landed on the King, it was incidental.

But at least two movies were made about him, and by the low standards of today, that qualifies his life as a success.

In the past century, the names of several imprisoned writers come to mind. There is Martin Luther King, who wrote his famous Letter From Birmingham Jail. And there is the Black Power leader, Eldridge Cleaver, who penned Soul on Ice, which I once read and promptly forgot. To include his self-serving whine with the noble call for justice of Dr. King in the same paragraph is a disservice to the latter, and an unnecessary blurb for the former. And more recently, who can forget the twice-convicted cop killer Mumbo-jumbo Mumia, who actually makes videos from his cell and churns out reams of left-wing tripe to stimulate the useful idiots of the press? All of these authors wrote and are writing from a political perspective. All of them are black. One of them was unjustly imprisoned, and if you can't guess which one it is, go to jail without passing Go or collecting \$200 (Cob).

It is here in the narrative that Cob writes his remembered rendition of the Abbott story (quoted in chapter 2), and its “sorry saga of Jack Abbott [that] affects every prison writer alive.” Next, I include a portion of Marty’s other phase II narrative, from its beginning, up to the point where he gives his own Abbot story (also quoted in chapter 2).

When I first started juvenile time, back in the ‘70s, I recall a few popular books – by George Jackson, for one, and another by an old California death row prisoner whose name escapes me just now – but I was too caught up in the day-to-day struggle to survive that characterized daily life in the joint then. To be completely honest, I didn’t much care for the writings of prisoners. It’s probably one of the deeper problems with the veracity (or, more accurately, verisimilitude) of a piece of prison writing – the writing is only

“true” for that moment in time, for that particular place, and those specific prisoners and guards. The prison experience is so transitory and ephemeral, and so not monolithic, as to be different for all prisoners all of the time (Marty).

This is a valid point for us to consider when looking at writing from any period, or from any author. There is always going to be that rare essence of not being able to duplicate the circumstances for the same outcome. All writing is veiled by this notion, so it is a good point to make early on in this narrative. Also, as we read, awareness of the circumstances outside the prison in which one lives is usually non-existent. Marty continues:

I wish I could be more helpful about the origins of prison writing in this country, but I have practically no knowledge to share. My understanding, such as it is, would be that very occasionally a prisoner with skills wrote something that punched through the walls. (It’s also important to remember that until the second half of the 20th century, prisoners had very limited civil rights; being a prison writer from inside of prison would have been much more complicate and, frankly, dangerous.) Or, very occasionally, an established writer or publication would take an interest in a writer inside and champion him.

For Mil, he chose to have one of his brothers order him some books, so that his narrative could be grounded in some research, and not only from what he could remember. The 1989 book, *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist*, by H.B. Franklin, and his other book, an anthology, co-written with Tom Wicker (1998) *Prison Writing in 20th-Century America* (which I referenced in chapter 2) were two books that he selected for gaining some understanding of the *field* (Franklin and Wicker do consider it as such). Besides those two texts that Mil reviews in his narrative, Franklin also published *American Prisoners and Ex-prisoners*,

Their Writings: An Annotated Bibliography of Published Works, 1798-1981 (1982). A third book Mil reviews in his narrative, *Crossing the Yard: Thirty Years as a Prison Volunteer*, written by Richard Shelton (2007), is also discussed in chapter 2 – mostly in relaying the theme of prison writing instructors, and how Shelton paved the way for many others. Last, Mil reviewed *Life Sentences: Rage and Survival Behind Bars* (1992), another anthology of articles mostly written by the two editors – Wilbert Rideau (editor-in-chief of *The Angolite*, and Ron Wikberg, associate editor).

There are other anthologies and similar texts about prison writing, like that of Franklin's, Franklin's & Wicker's, Shelton's, and Rideau's & Wikberg's. Here are only a few: Mulvey-Roberts, 2007; Gordon, 2000; Weinstein & Jaccoma, 2007; Hudson, Dole, Boswell, & Ryan, 2004; Chevigny, 1999; Gladish & Yehling, 2006; Evans, 2001; Gaucher, 2002; Miller, 2003; Tannenbaum, 2000; Lamb, 2003; and Lamb, 2007. I have all these books, and others previously mentioned which I read as a part of the independent study I took with Dr. Pagnucci in 2009. I have also added a great many books since then. In addition, there are so many essays, articles, memoirs, novels, books of poetry, and other related prison literature that do provide some elements to help in the composing of the prison writing narrative. However, even with all these publications about prison writing, the only text that seems to demonstrate a working historical narrative of prison literature is Franklin's (1989) *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist*, and since Mil writes nearly thirty pages reviewing the book, I will utilize portions of his narrative to introduce it, after he has exhausted all the information about prison writing that he can "carry around in [his] head," as I had asked all the co-authors to do. Here is what Mil knows about the history of prison writing, as he has learned through his decades of being in prison, not from the literature; he reviews some books on the topic later in this chapter.

Here is some of what he was carrying around in his head, about the history of prison writing, prior to any research:

In 1960, Caryl Chessman, a condemned man in a California prison, reached a huge audience with his book Cell 2455, Death Row, and despite pleas from many people, including prominent people, California executed him. (In the early 1970s, while a prisoner at Western Penitentiary, I commented to Dr. Herbert E. Thomas that perhaps Caryl Chessman was executed precisely because his book made him too famous, thus illustrating the potential paradox of a writer accomplishing too much while still imprisoned and subject to the vagaries of the politics of the prison-industrial complex.) As the 1960s went forward, the prison writing proclaimed with most general approval and attention was written by young black men with an extremely sharp political edge to their voices. In a time when the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* was written and published, which contained the story of how the young black prisoner learned so much by reading the dictionary, there was Eldridge Cleaver's Soul on Ice, George Jackson's Soledad Brother, and Miguel Pinero's play, Short Eyes that was later made into a movie. The late Malcolm Braly, author of False Starts, On the Yard and other books was one of the few prison writers of the 1960s better known for his literary qualities, as opposed to his radical political viewpoints.

Another prison writer, who began writing in the 1960s and who I considered as a personal friend was Etheridge Knight. Etheridge Knight came out of the dark of prison to be seen as one of America's most prominent poets. In a 1982 letter to me, he shared this about himself: "I have no academic degrees—not even high school. My literary career began while I was [a prisoner] at Indiana State prison in Michigan City, where I was

sentenced in 1960 to a 10-20 year term for robbery. My first book was published while I was [a prisoner] there, and my second book was completed while [a prisoner] and published soon after my release from prison in 1968.”

To my knowledge, to this day, Etheridge Knight’s famous poem “Hard Rock Returns to Prison from the Hospital for the Criminally Insane” is the only poem written by a prisoner appearing in The Norton Anthology of Modern Verse. That one poem in the one commonly-used college-level anthology may well have been the only exposure that most young college students get to literature from the dark of prison.

I wonder if this is the case today, considering the exposure I have seen to Baca’s poetry in high schools and colleges in Los Angeles county. Plus, with professors like Shelton, and others I mention in the next chapter, it is likely that there are more college students reading the contemporary writings of prisoners like my co-authors. We know that children, all around the world, read Stanley “Tookie” Williams’ books about gangs, and Jon teaches students on the outside; surely these kids are familiar with his poetry as he teaches them writing. Mil continues:

Without “even high school” Etheridge Knight taught at the University of Pittsburgh in 1968, the University of Hartford in 1970-71, Lincoln University in 1972-73, Temple University in 1985, and at writer’s conferences across America. Like Malcolm X who came to prison an illiterate and educated himself (first by copying words from a dictionary), Etheridge educated himself in prison (reading The New York Times Book Review and every book he could get his hands upon, working on the prison newspaper, meeting with Gwendolyn Brooks in the prison visiting room—the 1960s were before prison college programs.)

Etheridge Knight won a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship (\$12,000) in 1974 and a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in 1972. In 1985, he was awarded the Shelly Memorial Award by the Poetry Society of America in recognition of distinguished achievement in poetry. After Judson Jerome asked his readers and later more than 6,000 poets listed in *Poets & Writers* to send their lists of major living American poets, in the November, 1984 issue of Writer's Digest, Etheridge Knight was reported to rank 72nd.

Etheridge read his poems at the Library of Congress (available from Watershed Tapes), in a Town Hall in New York to an audience of 3,000, and to audiences across the country. When he lived in Memphis, Tennessee in the '70s and early '80s, Etheridge became known as a barroom poet who would walk into a tavern, begin reading poems to flabbergasted customers and capture the attention of serious beer drinkers, TV sports fans and shuffleboard contestants.

“The way I figure it,” Etheridge said in a 1987 interview with William Thomas of the Scripps Howard News Service, “a poet has to learn to deal with his audiences, even if that means drunks and hecklers. If a poet can say poetry in a bar, he can say it anywhere.” And Etheridge said it anywhere—in barbershops, beauty shops, college classrooms and prisons. In the summer of 1982, he was a Poet-in-Residence (as my guest choice) with the Academy of Prison Arts [APA] in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In the same interview, Etheridge said, “I still go to prisons and read because I feel blessed.”

I was invited by Lou McKee to contribute to the Etheridge Knight issue of Painted Bridge Quarterly where my biographical essay “OUT OF THE DARK” was published. For writers in prison, I believe there is some unspoken obligation to become

and stay aware of what other contemporaries are doing and to be supportive of their work.

Yes, this seems to be sound advice from one of the leading prison writers in the U.S., yet, how is this to be done? Marty, another stable voice in prison writing openly admitted to his lack of knowledge about this history, and in other passages of his narratives, which are referenced in other places in this dissertation, he states that his awareness of other prison writers beyond his own state is terribly limited. In fact, in his last three letters to me, he has continued to request a bibliography of prison literature.

For Marty, within his own state, I can say that he has been aware of other California prison writing contemporaries. He supported Jon, by writing an article about *By Heart*. Also, Marty has been supportive of a number of writers from California, and a few others from around the country in his book *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough*. However, Marty still feels he is unaware.

This idea of keeping prisoners in the dark about the happenings in other prisons across the country is a means of preventing prisoners from becoming too empowered in their unity. If there were some national publications that all prisoners contributed to, and were able to attain, across the country, awareness would bring about many changes. As it is, there are a number of newspapers and newsletters, magazines, and journals, and other prison written resources (as presented in chapter 2), but not all prisoners have access to them, and distribution is not easy or as regular as most would prefer. So I look to Mil, who seems to have an abundance of well-connected individuals on the outside, able to inform him of prison writing issues, but also, I see how his efforts to continually remain knowledgeable (reading and researching) and in touch with informed people (writers, teachers, lawyers, etc.) keeps him aware. He claims:

From my discussions with Michael Hogan and Joe Bruchac, I know they believe the same thing [*an obligation to stay aware of contemporaries, and support them*], and I have maintained good relationships with them both since the '70s.

Now, in seeing that writing is a skill, Mil suggests that in order for prison writing to have gotten its start, prisoners had to be educated. This can be argued, as we later see how Franklin (1989) credits the beginning of prison writing to the illiterate song writing slaves. Cob says otherwise, at least initially as he narrates the story of prison writing, as he carries it around in his head:

By revealing how Etheridge Knight and Jack Henry Abbott were not the typical prison writers, not the product of a writing workshop or a prison (or before prison) college program but self-taught and self-motivated, although in Etheridge's case, having visits with the outstanding poet Gwendolyn Brooks had to be equivalent to taking an independent study course in college, and in the case of Jack Henry Abbott, we have to wonder if his correspondence with Norman Mailer served as an informal education? It is my belief that every writer has to be educated, formally or informally, and so it is for writers in prison.

I would not disagree that writers have to be educated. I call my son a writer; yet, while he is being educated, his writing is minimal; he cannot become what he does not know to be. Still, I believe that as Mil is writing this portion of his narrative, prior to reading Franklin's (1989) book, he is still thinking of prison writing as published texts. He also asks if prison journalism counts as prison writing. This is my error in the phase II writing requests I sent to my co-authors. Clearly, I failed to define prison writing, and explain that I was not only considering published

authors, or poets and fiction writers. I should have been more clear in precisely stating what constitutes the label of “prison writer,” and the field of “prison writing.”

I think that Franklin’s book, perhaps the only text on the history of prison writing in the U.S., takes us back to a truer sense of the beginning of prison writing. We will get to Franklin’s book soon enough. In the meantime, Mil continues to write about the history of prison writing, as he knows it (holds in his memory from what he has heard, read, etc.):

In the early 1980s, if there was a prison writing network, Joe Bruchac was at the center of it. Five years before Richard Shelton started his now-famous prison writing workshop in Arizona, in 1969 Joe Bruchac received manuscripts smuggled out of Soledad prison in California and published them in 1970 as Words from the House of the Dead: A Kite from Soledad. In 1972, he was asked to teach a writing workshop at Great Meadow, a maximum security prison in New York. Some participants had been in Attica during the riot or rebellion, and they still had psychic and physical scars. Dr. Joseph Bruchac was himself a published poet and storyteller, and he was a professor at Swarthmore College and an editor and owner of Greenfield Review Press. When interviewed in 1982 by Greg Mitchell, Dr. Bruchac traced the increase in prison writing during the 1970s to “post-Attica rage and the sudden emergence of small press publishers willing to communicate it.”

The 1970s and 1980s were an altogether different time in prison history. Rehabilitation was still the plan of action for the prison inhabitants. By the 1990s, that changed drastically. However, one of these highly successful programs, as introduced in chapter 2, was Shelton’s Arizona writing workshop. Mil refers us:

To the story of Michael Hogan, he was one of Richard Shelton's students. Richard Shelton is now an emeritus professor, of English at the University of Arizona. Richard Shelton's prisoner students have blazed a bright trail across American letters. In 1975, Letters for My Son, and If You Ever Get There, Think of Me were Mike's [*Michael Hogan*] first books, and his poem "Spring" won First Prize in the PEN Writing Awards for Prisoners. (Years later, one of my Poetry Workshop students, Albert Altimari, would win First Prize in the same yearly contest.) Mike edited Do Not Go Gentle, an excellent anthology, and won the NEA Creative Writing Fellowship mentioned earlier. The \$5,000 NEA grant allowed Mike to hire a lawyer, and with this help he received his parole in 1979. Mike was hired as a Consultant to NEA, went on to earn a Master's degree in creative writing at the University of Arizona and a Ph.D. in International Relations and History. By his own words to me in a February 20, 2015 letter, "I have made a decent living in another country as a teacher for over thirty years now and have written twenty books." Mike reports: "I am focused mostly on history these days, both the one course I guest teach, and my own writings on the Mexican War and other events of the 19th century. I still continue to write poetry, but is mostly centered in the small community where I live..." Although Mike understandably no longer wants to be identified as a prison writer, he has to be seen as a bright and shining success story, and—frankly—it defies belief that any competent study of the history of prison writing can be made without including Michael Hogan in the narrative. In 2009, he was voted one of the Global 100 at irishcentral.com. His 1996 book The Irish Soldiers of Mexico inspired an MGM feature film as well as an award-winning documentary. His work has appeared in The Paris Review, The American Poetry Review and Colorado Review.

From here, Mil presents a number of prison writers' organizations and other workshops or publications that have been introduced in other places throughout this document, or ones that he is familiar with from his years teaching prison writing in Pennsylvania prisons. With Mil's mentioning of these various resources, he is also responding to the research question relating to sustaining forces within prison writing – some that are in existence today, and others that are not.

Mil finally begins his lengthy summary/review of the 1989 book by Franklin (John Cotton Dana Professor of English and American Studies at Rutgers University). After suggesting that the first two chapters are “mostly polemics about Marxism,” Mil argues that Franklin cannot convince him “that prisons were created in America because of capitalism when Joseph Stalin,” created and “used gulags in the former U.S.S.R.”

Therefore, Mil picks up his review of the book from chapter 3 (“Plantation to Penitentiary: Songs of Slavery, Peonage, and Prison”), and agrees with Franklin that “we need to pay attention to the songs of slavery, to the songs as a form of poetry, to the music of black Americans as oral literature, to the way Afro-American music restored poetry to its primary social functions in music, dance, work and sex, and to the idea that our only true national poets are negro slaves” (p. 30). After another several pages summarizing and referencing various songwriters, laws, abolitionism, and the history of slavery in America, Mil quotes Franklin, from chapter 4, as saying the following:

The sheer quantity of literature by American convicts in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century is far beyond what I had supposed when I began this study. Most of this writing has great historical interest; much of it is deeply moving; some of it is great literature by almost any modern criteria. Yet there have been virtually no critical, scholarly, or even bibliographical publications on this literature. (p. 124)

Then, with another several pages pertaining to the development of the modern prison system's history and some of its early writers (including Jack London, Alexander Berkman, O. Henry, Jim Tully, Ed Morrell, Robert E. Burns, Roger Benton, Chester B. Himes, Malcolm Braly, and others), Mil quotes Franklin as saying, "Malcolm X, who was assassinated in 1965, is still the dominant figure in those hundreds of books [by prisoners] being studied on both sides of the walls (206)." More authors and works are referenced (post Malcolm X), and Mil narrates his bibliographical review of Franklin's closing chapters by also taking a walk down memory lane and providing numerous side stories to his own memories and or interactions with several of the writers, works, laws, and other relative issues that are mentioned in Franklin's (1989) book.

In closing, according to Mil, Franklin seems to be ending "his book [1989] by looking to prisoners to lead a revolution" (p. 59). Franklin and Wicker, in the 1998 book (*Prison Writing in 20th Century America*, an anthology), which Mil only cites from the Forward and Introduction, seem to aim their push on a call for the return of funding and programs, and change to the laws that had recently been put in place to prevent the publication of prisoners. Mil also interjects with his own personal knowledge of such drastic changes since he has been in prison since 1971, and has been a teacher and writer affected on both sides. Then finally, Mil reviews Shelton's narrative (*Crossing the Yard*, presented in chapter 2), and *Life Sentences* (mentioned earlier in this section).

Sustaining Forces

As we formulate some meanings behind the sustaining forces for prison writing, Jon had this to say:

What sustains writing in prison is a deep sense of suffering and pondering and studies. It is the journey each writer/teaching artist or artist in on that fuels his creativity

and growth as a writer or artist. Yes, a lot of the same books one reads or would read or study in the free world are also available to writers in prison. We have access to the same newspapers, books and magazines (phase II narrative).

Marty, acknowledging his own deficit in the topic wrote this:

Again, I'm not sure how to answer your question because of my own lack of concrete knowledge of prison writing. To the best of my knowledge, in fact, I'm the most successful prison writer actually writing from inside of prison, something I say without any egotism. (And, judging by the number of queries I receive from editors and academics, I'm also one of the few well-known prison writers.) But in the spirit of cooperation, here's my take on things.

When academics began to write seriously about prison, about the "total experience," about the impact of "long-term imprisonment," and about the philosophical underpinnings of man's insatiable impulse to "discipline and punish," prisoners, inevitably, read some of these tomes. Likewise, the various newspaper accounts and the propaganda released by departments of corrections, made their way into our consciousness. Because most of this is close to mere bullshit, we that have the impulse to write feel compelled to respond with our own lived truth, situational and subjective though it may be. It could be that prison writing has a reactionary (literally, not metaphorically or politically) heart.

What advanced the field, undoubtedly, was the opening of prisons to educators and artists in the '70s. Prior to that time prison was much more isolated and access to the forms and structures of writing less accessible to prisoners.

Yes. Clearly this movement to provide reform and rehabilitation programs sustained prison writing more than anything else in the history of prison writing in this country. In fact, because of that movement, there are remnant prison writers today, still writing and teaching what they learned. However, with the removal of funds to offer workshops and other programs to prisoners, to learn to write, I wonder how much momentum from the 1970s has been lost. Marty continues with narrating what he knows about what sustains prison writing:

As noted above, prior to the end of the 20th century books and magazines were very limited inside of prisons. Until the U.S. Supreme Court cracked open the doors and afforded to us a measure of civil rights, we were quite segregated from the rest of the world. (I think it's important to interject that I'm talking about nonfiction prison writing. I'm sure that there have been fiction writers in American prisons, but I can't name any of them off the top of my head.) With the advent of that opening, prisoners were encouraged to comment on their own lives.

The darkest days around prison writing, aside from the aforementioned Jack Abbott tragedy, at least in my lifetime, originated in the sale of the rights to the "Son of Sam" serial killer's life story. This spawned a spate of laws around the country, many of which exist still, prohibiting a prisoner from "profiting off of his crime." And even though the courts have consistently overturned these laws whenever they've been challenged, state governments feel obligated to perpetuate them to mollify outraged voters.

On the other side of that coin, the biggest sustaining feature surely must be the public's endless fascination with bad guys (and girls, increasingly) and the steady supply of journalists and other writers willing to ghost write their stories – witness "Monster"

and “The Black Hand,” for instance. As an actual writer, who has written every word under his own name, I’ve always found these collaborations somewhat distasteful. The fact that they tend to focus on the sensational doesn’t help.

The preventative forces would be the public’s disgust and the prison system’s inherent secrecy. The sustaining forces would be the public’s fascination, outside writers’ willingness to cash in, and prisoners’ desire to tell the truth of our lived experience.

Cob seems to have even less to say about the sustaining elements that keep prisoners writing, and I end this section with his brief viewpoint:

You ask what sustains prison writing and keeps it thriving? How about the steady influx of inmates passing through the insatiable maw of the criminal “justice” system? Among those millions there must be frustrated writers, who now find themselves with the time to write. And—and this I feel is of the utmost importance—the would-be authors are finally sober! Alcohol is a great lubricant of the imagination, but it also retards greatly the ability to use that imagination. While many of our best writers were drunks, they to a man (except perhaps for William Faulkner) wrote stone-cold sober. However, for many, the seductive call of the jug is too much to resist when free, and as a consequence little work is accomplished. Jail solves that problem nicely.

Legacy

I have chosen a piece of Cob’s prison writing narrative to begin this section on prison writing legacy. He has the least number of years in, and I find his take rather fascinating. He writes:

You also ask what is the legacy of prison writing upon society and the field of literature. I would turn that question around and wonder how the phenomenon of prison

writing affects the prison system itself, how it changes for better or worse the attitudes of the prison staff toward the inmates. In my experience, it tends to humanize the individual, set him apart from the vast uneducated-and-don't-give-a-damn crowd, and win him a modicum of respect. Even a tiny degree of respect can go a long way to validate ones feelings of worth, particularly in a behavioral sink like state prison. Perhaps the act of one prisoner earning the grudging respect of a cynical guard is the butterfly wingbeat that spreads throughout the system, eventually causing an overt act of human kindness in some unlikely backwater lockup where a prisoner is languishing in despair. A chaos theory of sorts, spurred by the pen.

Anything that I might say about prisons and prison writing must be understood as one man's opinion, based on his experience in mainly one prison: A medium-security facility that bears scant resemblance to the gang-infested horror pits of California and New York State. I've witnessed less fistfights in six years than I witnessed in six months when I used to hang out in bars. Albion is not a country club, but it certainly wouldn't be confused with the hell holes portrayed on television or the movies. I don't know what goes on at other prisons in Pennsylvania, let alone the nation. Up here, at least, there are no writing programs, and damn few courses of ANY kind. By state law, those without a high school diploma must take GED classes, but I wonder how strict and effective they are. Especially when I read misspelled and misspelled flyers from the Education Department! I would speculate that the average prison writer is on his own, dependent upon the advice and editorial help of a more educated cellie or friend. Hence, the deplorable level of much prison writing, and one reason that I avoid encouraging fellow writers. I do not want to spend my precious time proofreading political diatribes, poorly

researched legal briefs, and maudlin autobiographical tracts. I share information, if asked, about writing contests, books to read ([The Writer's Market](#)), and which magazine pays what, but I try to avoid like the hammerhead clap reading any of their work. Sorry, I'm not a believer in group ANYTHING!

I will offer an example of how prison writing can create better relations between the staff and the inmates. For fun, I've been periodically writing short, humorous stories about a well-hung redneck ladies' man. I wrote the first as a lark, something to amuse one of my friends, but he liked it so much that I've written 14 more. I deliberately wrote the outlandish tales with malice aforethought, using the most politically incorrect terms imaginable, and sprinkling the dialogue with inventive cursing. Everyone who has read them finds them hilarious, and I discovered that I like writing them as a break from my serious fiction. I guess my exposure to Henry Miller and Rabelais affected me more than I thought. Anyway, I showed them to a few guys on the block, and unknown to me they showed them to the sergeant! This might've caused trouble—even though none contain over sexual activity, there are plenty of salacious allusions and tons of off-color cornpone jokes. But not only did the sergeant like them, he showed them to other COs, who loved them too! The only trouble I experienced was requests for more! I'm not sure if there's any relevance to your project in this tale, but I think it illustrates how “prison writing” and literature (ahem!)” can bridge the gap between the powers-that-be and their humble charges.

As a lifelong loner with a strong libertarian bent, I've never been a “joiner.” And I've always resented attempts to classify me into a neat category: I'm a man of contradictions. For instance, although I loved Henry Miller's sexually explicit novels, I

detest porn and find it demeaning to all involved. I also believe that the best government is the least government, but recognize the need for a strong military and some sort of social security for the old. And I feel that “prison writers” can’t be thrown together into a one-size-fits-all category. For example, most of the other writers I have met in prison are churning out bad poetry. I’ve yet to meet anyone working in the field of fiction, although there are probably some I haven’t met or heard about. I have discovered that there is a category known as “thug tales,” or “ghetto stories,” first-person accounts of dope dealing, pimping, and all the other quaint aspects of the inner city lifestyle. Published via the “publish-on-demand” method (how I published my first novel), a few have appeared on the prison library shelves. (I may have the terminology wrong, but you get the general idea.) Maybe the other collaborators can shed light on this subject.

I have to add that as far as I know, there are no prisoner-written newspapers in Pennsylvania, except Graterfriends, which is published in Graterford Prison, a real hell-hole like you see in the movies. And although it prints its share of execrable “poetry,” there isn’t room for fiction. (Perhaps my assessment is overly harsh; I think a lot of the “poetry” published in The New Yorker, in the words of John Updike, “just spills down the page,” too.)

The Education Department conducts a yearly writing contest every Christmas. Entries can be poetry, fiction, or nonfiction, but are limited to 200 words. The winner gets \$5 and the runner-up \$5. I submitted entries for two years, until I realized the winners weren’t announced, nor were their entries published. When I asked the man in charge to read the winning entry, to see what I’m competing against, he blew me off, telling me that the winner doesn’t want his name publicized or his story! I told him that

on the contrary, the average writer would give his left nut to see his name in print. After more argument, in which I accused him of running a sham contest, we parted. I've never bothered to enter since, I have no doubt whatsoever that the judges award the prizes to one of their students, someone they wish to inspire.

After being here since July 20, 2009, I have a reputation as a writer. The Cos witness me typing when they walk the rounds, checking for mischief, and know that I present no danger to the status quo—riots are not being plotted in Cell 44, C-block! As a result, whenever the prison conducts a yearly in-depth inspection, replete with drug dogs and a specially trained inspection crew, my cell is given a cursory look, and nothing is disturbed. Other cells are turned inside out and upside down. I haven't the slightest doubt that the regular CO has told the inspection crew not to waste time looking for contraband, it isn't there. (Of course, like Bob Dylan once sang, "If my thought-dreams could be seen/They'd probably put my head in a guillotine.") So, I guess you could say that prison writing has its unanticipated benefits!

Before I wrap this up, I need to impress upon you the general naiveté of many of the prison writers. I actually heard one prospective author say to another, "Wow! There's a book in the library (Writer's Market I assume) that lists all these magazines that give you money for stories!"

This view of Cob's, regarding the legacy of prison writing, seems rather dark. He says it is only one man's opinion, and I would add that this opinion comes from one prison, in one state, in this country with massive incarceration numbers. I, on the outside, am unaware of how much there is to this perspective, but consider that his understanding does merit further research and inquiry. He goes on:

As if they are so starved for stories that they have to advertise. As if these magazines are nothing more than a convenient cash cow. Naturally, they'll scrawl their "thug stories" on a lined sheet of paper and send them off, thereby poisoning the well for serious writers. As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, editors look at the prison-stamped postmark, sigh loudly, and return without a glance another submission. I have even met inmates who didn't know that judges are lawyers! And they are writing legal papers in the law library! It's sad, really, and who is at fault? The inmates or the educational system? What came first, the chicken or the egg?

Again, I find this to be of interest, and wonder how true it is that writing in prison is this poor. My research has shown the literacy to be at low levels, and we know there are few programs for teaching reading and writing these days. Also, our educational system has taken years of heavy criticism in this country, and especially in lower income areas. Surveys and studies on literacy are few, as I referenced a rather dated one earlier in this document, but clearly, here lies another potential area for research within composition – a study of how well or poorly, the majority of prisoners write. Jon takes a bit of a different view on the legacy of prison writing:

The legacy of writers in prison have left an inspirational historical effect on new prisoners, staff and other prison personal, colleges, professors and students who didn't know or ponder the depth of the arts and artists in prison until they encountered my work and the work of artists—writers from the past who chronicled their development in prison (Jon, phase II narrative).

Mil also has a somewhat different view:

In terms of legacy, with Wilbert Rideau being asked by the warden to edit the Angola prison's newspaper, we see how some circumstances have caused some prison

administrators to want prison writing. With the huge change in the entire publishing industry, with so much switching over to e-books and e-magazines and mobile devices, prison writers are going to have to adapt, just like other writers are doing.

We see from Mil, that there is a hope for the future of prison writing:

An example of a new nonprofit organization helping the prison writing community of writers is Dennis Sobin's Safe Streets Foundation that promotes communication through the arts for prisoners and for others involved in the criminal justice system. He offers opportunities for writers in prison to publish their books or plays on the Internet, and he seeks to review prisoner's plays for consideration in their annual "From Prison to Stage" show at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. Their 2014 two-hour show of prisoner-written plays and music at the Kennedy Center had a standing-room only audience. The next prisoner-written show is scheduled to be in September of 2015 at the Kennedy Center. His Prisons Foundation published my new book entitled a book of books on his nonprofit organization's website www.PrisonsFoundation.org. My new book is also posted as a document at www.prisoninmates.com.

Dennis Sobin's two Foundations exhibit art by imprisoned artists; they publish books by prisoners and present prisoner-written plays at the Kennedy Center. Dennis Sobin reports that he "spent 10 years in prison after being falsely accused of a nonexistent crime. Upon his release, he wrote several books and received many awards for his fight against injustice and over-incarceration in America." He welcomes donations at Prison Foundation, 2512 Virginia Ave NW, #58043, Washington, DC 20037.

It could be that since Mil keeps himself informed, and continues to correspond and be connected to those in pursuit of prison writing programs, he has a differing view of prison writing legacy than the others. Mil tells us about a few of these organizations, and validates a point I made earlier about the need for a national publication to keep all prison writers aware.

Mil claims:

I believe that the true legacy of prison writing has not yet been written, but it surely contains the works of men like Dennis Sobin who – after release from prison – created organizations to help other writers in prison.

There is an interesting new initiative of the American Prison Writing Archive, from Hamilton College and their website says:

There is a real need to create a single-site where American prison writers can write about and document their experience and where free-world citizens, -- including scholars and students in a growing field of study of criminal justice and mass incarceration – can access such writing. No such archive yet exists (www.hamilton.edu).

H. Bruce Franklin's two books have established that there is indeed an academic field of study of prison literature in America. I believe the best writings are yet to come.

Again, we can see that Mil has a more positive outlook when considering the legacy of prison writing. He tends to keep his focus on the programs and people who are still working towards keeping rehabilitation programs inside the prison-industrial complex.

Marty also has a view of the prison writing legacy, and here is what he wrote in his narrative:

For me, writing about prison from inside of prison has resulted in a considerable amount of blowback. It's vital to any analysis of this topic to remember that prison systems, as institutions, and prison personnel, as individuals, pretty much universally believe that prisoners should not be allowed to write about this world; they believe, across the spectrum, that what we have to say about this world is fundamentally inaccurate and self-serving. Prison staff, at all levels, tend to be quite defensive about the realities, the deeper truths of the prison experience.

It's hard to imagine what legacy prison writing has left on society. Although prison is portrayed with some frequency, other than the very rare exceptional performance (Jon Voight in "Runaway Train," for one, whose portrayal of an older, old-school white convict is spot on, comes to mind. The movie itself, nonetheless, was mostly not at all accurate.), prison is almost never depicted in anything like reality.

The depiction of prison falls into a few distinct categories. The overly violent, yet strangely not at all punitive prison is the most common. After a truly violent outbreak of chaos in the prison depicted in the television show "Prison Break," the warden announced a 24-hour lockdown with the threat of a whole week if anything else happens. I've been on lockdowns for months for far less serious stuff. The relaxed community with a few bad apples like "The Shawshank Redemption" is another common mistake of portrayal. The concentration camp model used to show up in film noir days. Prison for comedic impact seems to be enjoying a return to vogue with "Orange is the New Black."

Prison writers, myself included, are often pushed into presenting the prison experience in an episodic framework that highlights exciting events. This does a

disservice to the actual life of a prisoner, which is mostly one of boring sameness and stupefying routine.

For the year of 2014, I wrote between 500 and 1,000 words every single day, with the intention of publishing a year-in-the-life-type of book. My intention was to detail the real life of a prisoner. What I quickly realized, about two weeks into the project, was my life is boring. From that point on, I wrote about how I felt, which turned out to be something I wouldn't want published while I'm alive. (My daughter will get all 150,000 handwritten words to do with what she will, after I die. If nothing else, she'll know who I actually was if she reads it.) The boring life of a prisoner doesn't add up to much in the way of a legacy on society.

As to inside the prison systems, most staff only read the occasional sensationalistic account about gang-bangers and serial killers, if they read at all. When "Mother California" came out, after denying all media inquiries to come in and interview me, the California Department of Corrections publicly stated that they had concluded the book posed "no security concerns." The phrase "damning with faint praise," comes to mind. It also doesn't help that the world of prison isn't a literate type of place.

Other than the previously mentioned Jack Abbott and Eddie Bunker, it's hard for me to point to an imprisoned writer whose work has left much of an impression on me. Possibly, I'm a tough audience, but I can't come up with anything but a few isolated articles written by prisoners and the odd poem that stay with me.

The legacy of prison writing is no less difficult to qualify. My sense of it sometimes is that we are educators of the public, with all that entails. That's one of the reasons I've never tried to get my writing into prisoner-oriented publications. I've seen

my mission as that of talking to people who don't already agree with me. (I have also readily participated in academic projects and submitted to academic publications.) other times, I see my writing in a more historical context. Someday, probably a long time from now, some future academic researcher will be trying to figure out how this country became the great incarcerator, the prison nation. Then what I've written will matter; then the "legacy" will be made real. I think for my fellow serious, real writers in prison, that's got to be the common perception of it all because it does not seem to be making all that much of a difference now.

However, to reiterate, prison writing does matter, particularly from the long-term perspective, and studying it does make sense.

Final Words

We can see that with each of these four, there are differing accounts of the legacy of prison writing, the sustaining forces, as well as how these prison writing got started. In fact, prison writing is mostly viewed as negative by these writers in prison, except where Mil seeks to inform us of the new programs and workshops that he seems to know about through people he remains in contact with today.

It is a rather sad narrative. In my studies I have only found Franklin's 1989 text to be of value in giving us some history. There have been several anthologies, however. And while individual writers are getting their memoirs and narratives about their lives behind bars published, it certainly seems as though prison writing might be losing momentum. We can easily agree that this is due to the blowout Marty mentions, and the literacy Cob suggests.

Still, with hopefuls like Mil, and the many activists and organizations still publishing prison writing and awarding prizes to prison writers, we should not give up believing that this specialized group can once again thrive as it did some decades ago.

In the next and final chapter, I aim to present the findings (patterns, threads, tensions, and/or themes that we have discovered during the process of conducting this metanarrative research study. Some of these patterns and tensions that are mentioned in chapter 2 are left out; new ones are added. I have included the most prominent findings of this research, as understood by my co-authors (from their narratives and essays), and from my own research and personal discovery over the past twelve years, or so.

CHAPTER 6

THE CONCLUSION, OR FINDINGS

As doctoral students, we were often forced to take sides. Our research professor trained us to choose evidence over experience, reason over faith, science over art, and data over story. (Brown)²³

And today I proudly call myself a researcher-storyteller because I believe the most useful knowledge about human behavior is based on people's lived experiences. (Brown)²⁴

Introduction

New York Times bestseller, social scientist, and proclaimed research storyteller, Brene Brown (2015) states, in *Rising Strong*, that:

Our job is not to deny the story, but to defy the ending—to rise strong, recognize our story, and rumble with the truth until we get to a place where we think, Yes. This is what happened. This is my truth. And I will choose how the story ends.” (p. 80)

In the research Brown conducted for her dissertation, she looked at how to measure the heart for where and how it finds its sense of worthiness – its wholeheartedness. In that dissertation, revised and published as the #1 New York Times bestselling book, *Daring Greatly* (2012), Brown came to see research as most useful when it examines experience, through stories. *Daring Greatly* was not only a #1 New York Times bestseller, but it was written in narrative form from the research that she did for her dissertation in social work, measuring wholeheartedness in people who seemed to have a healthy and whole sense of who they were. She interviewed thousands of people over six years and came to discover that the wholehearted individuals with

²³ Taken from *Rising Strong* (2015, pp. 1-2).

²⁴ Taken from *Rising Strong* (2015, p. 5).

strong senses of self shared one characteristic: vulnerability. Since then, she continues to conduct grounded theory research and writes her books in narrative form – making her “findings” more relatable to readers. In some of her public talks, available as videos on her website (www.brenebrown.com), and also shared and posted throughout social media (how I came to hear of her), Brown begins these presentations with saying: *Maybe stories are just data with a soul. I say: Maybe more stories should be researched, and more research written as stories.* Narrative inquirers heartedly agree, and this approach certainly has worked for Brown, who has now gained international attention for her appearances on Oprah Winfrey’s network shows.

I have made my research about stories, and I have certainly made the attempt to present my data as stories. Also, I hope this dissertation document comes across as a story – one of composition’s story, perhaps – a story of how our field moved toward the unknown, became nested within that unknown, and convinced other like-minded compositionists to alter and reshape the future of that unknown. The unknown, of course, is the *prison writer* and his/her field of *prison writing*; well, these are loaded terms. From my beginning experiences with telling others about my plans and preferences of *conducting research on subjects who are locked up, put away, and behind bars*, I seemed to get questions and reactions from those *on the outside*, in the *free* world, about this choice. No doubt, like Marty’s daughter suggests, there is a sense of “disgust and mistrust,” when most people think about the word *prisoner*. I have been asked about my safety, and also, about my sanity. I even endured a rather lengthy diatribe by my dentist, while having a root canal.

I believe, as Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1981) argued in *The Dialogic Imagination*, that words carry a sense of fluidity; they are forever changing, and especially among various historic periods and cultures. Words are of a chaotic nature with ideological intentions, based on the

experiences and accepted realities of the speaker's life. Bakhtin (1981) refers to this type of "other's speech" and appropriated expression as "heteroglossia." Pagnucci (2004) clarifies further:

In a narrative world, there is no such thing as a fixed truth. Stories are always fluid, moving, changing. To narrative ideology, the world is Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia," which Bahktinian scholar Michael Holquist (1990) explains as "a way of conceiving the world as made up of a roiling mass of languages, each of which has its own distinct formal marker. These features are never *purely* formal, for each has associated with it a set of distinctive values and presuppositions" [p. 69, emphasis in the original]. (pp. 50-51)

Therefore, fixed truths disperse. Words we use to explain and/or narrate are constantly being altered over time by the people who use them. The same fluidity exists with stories: "the interpretation of facts through stories is always changing. We can agree that there are facts, but we can never agree on exactly the same interpretation of those facts (Pagnucci, p. 51). This really amounts to one thing: within this place of heteroglossia, we cannot attach *Truth* with a capital "T" to our storied lives. And certainly, we would not want to do so either. A capital T Truth limits every one of us; it leaves no room for negotiations, and much of learning comes from being able to position oneself as an active participant along that 3D landscape and continuum of learning (perhaps contributing in the Burkean parlor). Embracing a truth with a little "t" gives us varied interpretations and understandings that texturize the landscape in which we are experiencing and/or presenting the multilayered and many stranded meaning making data.

Yet, for this story of prison writers and prison writing, the unfortunate heteroglossia works against the prisoner, and sometimes, against the person researching the prisoner – as in the

unfortunate case with my dentist and my already painful procedure. Society has emphasized an interpretation of a prisoner, through media and literature that is in many ways false and exceedingly negative. What's worse, these associations have been presented as capital T truths by most news mediums, and seem to have become remarkably worse through the years. Through my own experiences with these writers and their field (as Franklin & Wicker do acknowledge it as such), I have, like Marty's daughter, been able to experience the fluid truth of the prisoner, and not the impeding Truth of contemporary American culture.

Only by entering the space (of the prison writers and their field) and pursuing some form of understanding, is an individual more able to approach a more accurate truth about that particular space. This is another reason why this research project is so important; composition has *not* entered that space. *Prison writer* and *prison writing* are not comfortable topics in the field of composition. I hope this dissertation helps composition scholars to resist the urge to marginalize prison writers and to instead see them as writers who have worth and merit study.

In this chapter, I aim to present some of the things I have learned and been fortunate to experience with conducting this research project, and collaborating with these four co-authors, who have also addressed their own truths in their narratives – answering the three research questions as they pertain to their personal writing lives, but also to the area of prison writing. I begin with briefly pointing out how other countries relate to their prisoners in the section titled *Abroad*. Then, I talk about the issues that are singlehandedly the most relevant topics related to today's prison system: *Recidivism*, *Rehabilitation*, and *Reform*. While we know that in the past programs boomed, today most prisons are barren of such reform incentives; this is a problem, especially as incarceration percentages increase. *Writing Is a Job* is a section presenting one aspect of the prison writing life, as uncovered through the personal narratives of the writers. A

second force for having a prison writing life, as expressed by the writers in this study, is the *Purpose* writing offers them; this is the fourth section in this chapter. Next, in *Becoming Too Famous*, I briefly review the post-Abbott period prisoners live in, and how it affects every prison writer alive, whether they know it, or not. Then a very important topic: *Life Without the Possibility of Parole* is discussed; this topic is of vital interest to my participants since all four of them are lifers. Then, after seeing the number of ex-prisoners who published after their release, intent on making public the horrors of what they endured, I have another short section titled *Couldn't Keep It to Myself* (named after the title of one of Wally Lamb's anthologies of his female prison writing students). I then have a section titled *Good Teachers*, and another that follows titled *A Call for Volunteer Prison Writing Teachers*. Because of the huge impact I have come to see from teachers and mentors working with those behind bars, and how they have affected the lives and writing of prisoners, I make a call for compositionists to consider the rewarding efforts of volunteering to teach writing in a prison. *A Field of Study* simply presents the written responses of my co-authors, in relation to a question I posed to them about prison writing. Because of their responses, the section after that is *A Call for Prison Writing Research*. Then, I turn back to the three (or six) research questions, restating them, and summarizing the answers my co-authors and I came to present throughout this metanarrative, but mostly in chapters four and five. This section is simply named *Our Research Responses*. In *My Co-Authors' truths*, I have tried to capture a passage authored by each of my co-authors, to illustrate what has permeated their writing, from my point-of-view, as at least one of their negotiated little "t" truths. These are but tiny pieces of their writing that have impacted and affected me, personally, aiding in the sustaining forces that have helped me to continue pursuing this effort of introducing them to the field of composition, and sharing their untold stories. I guess this section

somewhat reveals my own little “t” truths about these four men, and how I have come to know/see them. *A Letter to all Writers in Prison* follows. And, finally, I close the chapter, as well as this entire metanarrative research text with some *Lasting Questions and Final Thoughts*, where I ask a few questions this study has brought to the surface, but also end with a number of final thoughts I now have, after having read and researched prison writers and prison writing for well over a decade.

Abroad

Throughout my years pondering the writings of prisoners, I have come across some well-known authors who have written while incarcerated outside the United States. *Don Quixote* was inspired by Miguel de Cervantes’ (1605) five years as a galley slave. Sir Walter Raleigh composed *History of the World, Volume 1* while in prison. Volume 2 was never finished on account of his execution. In the 1800s, Fyodor Dostoevsky spent four years in a Siberian prison for subversive political activities. He later wrote about the atrocities he witnessed in *The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859*. E.E. Cummings (1922) wrote his autobiographical novel *The Enormous Room* while imprisoned by the French during WWI.

Something else I came across a number of times in my research is the difference in the acceptance of prisoners in other parts of the world. Quite simply, prisoners in some other countries are not as demonized as they are in our country, and some foreign prison writers are even celebrated for their writing – much like they were here, decades ago.

First, the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (JPP) is housed in Canada, and publishes 100-200 page journals biannually. When I started out with researching the writing processes of prison writers, and wanted to run my call for papers, I immediately made contact with the editor, Justin Piché, Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa, who

was pleased to place my advertisement. It almost ran too, but only days before it did, when my research took its twist, I asked him to pull the ad. The *JPP* gladly accepts articles from U.S. prisoners, and Marty's, "The Unintended Consequences of Bad Deals" essay was in the most recent publication. Additionally, the *JPP* has compiled a number of anthologies that include the writings of prisoners from the inception of the journal in 1988. In them, we can also locate a number of American prison writers who have been mentioned in this research text.

Second, the PEN American Center (mentioned throughout this dissertation) is a branch of PEN International, which promotes literature and freedom of expression, around the world. They are represented in more than 100 countries, and were originally founded in 1921. They also hold Special Consultative Status at the UN, as they are a non-political organization. Through PEN American Center, like other branches, programs are available for prison writers, and as my co-authors have mentioned, PEN holds prestigious awards annually for writing competitions. PEN also chooses to celebrate the prison writer, and they do it globally. So while funding for and programs to teach writing have mostly been eliminated in American prisons (primarily by the individual states), there still are some outside supporters.

Then there are some universities outside the U.S. who support prisoners despite controversy. In the May 2, 2014 edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, a feature story ("The Professor and the Prisoner") describes a Canadian professor who developed a teaching relationship (at first through letters, then later through visits), with a Toronto-born 15-year-old boy who was captured in Afghanistan by the U.S. military, and taken to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Omar Ahmed Khadr's story is quite fascinating in how support for him from Arlette Zinck and her campus developed. Khadr's case was highly politicized and controversial. When it hit the media, it divided many people as to whether or not he should be aided by Zinck and her

university. Over time (more than four years) of interacting with Khadr, a curriculum was established to help him graduate from high school, and Zinck testified on his behalf. In her testimony, according to author Ian Wilhelm, Zinck actually “prodded the jurors to question the narrative they had heard about him” (p. A24). The testimony was effective, because Khadr was allowed to return to a Canadian prison where he and Zinck continue to visit and work towards the completion of his diploma. Throughout the ordeal, Zinck explains having received a number of death threats. Still, in the article, Zinck is quoted as having made two vitally important points about imprisonment and education. First, she states that she understands “that punishment plays some role in justice, but if that’s all you’ve got, you haven’t got justice” (p. A27). Also, she noted that through it all, she “learned the value of story and how engaging with narrative can open windows and doors in the most isolating prison cells” (p. A27). Perhaps higher education in America can learn the same lesson Zinck learned in Canada.

And finally, if the numbers of our incarcerated mean anything at all, it should speak strongly about our government and its sheer failure to design effective solutions for keeping men and women out. Other countries seem to be doing something right, in that they do not have similar percentages of their people behind bars. Policies can and should be made, to educate and provide curriculum or programs to improve the rates of recidivism, and perhaps more research needs to be done, as well. We are failing. Too many men and women wake up in a cold cell without the hope of overcoming their circumstances, and this should not be. It is time for us, especially academics, to rise up and work towards making the necessary changes that can and will affect the future of our country.

Recidivism, Rehabilitation, and Reform

An impressive 2014 meta-analysis by the RAND Corporation concluded that prisoners who participated in academic and vocational programming exhibited a 43% decrease in recidivism, were more likely to find jobs and scored higher on verbal and mathematical proficiency tests. (Mil's phase II narrative, p. 63)

...the RAND study's most striking finding was that for every dollar spent on prison education, it saves five dollars in corrections expenditures. (Mil's phase II narrative, p. 64)

In the 1970s prison writing was flourishing as was the program reform movement. Unfortunately, since that time, there seems to be a diminishing of rehabilitation efforts within the U.S. prison-industrial complex.

Here is a summarized narrative, titled "A Prison Teaching Story," from *The Journal of the Conference on College Composition and Communication* (September 2013, Volume 65). Laura Rogers, a prison writing teacher in an unnamed U.S. prison was asked to hold a workshop for the GED teachers of the prison. In the workshop, two days before Christmas, and mandated for all the GED teachers, Rogers found herself feeling awkward and underprepared. She only conducted her writing workshops twice a month, and for only two hours each time. She saw how tired these teachers appeared, and "decided to ask them about their students' writing" (p. 26). She tells us that:

One teacher who has taught inmates for over twenty years described the low levels of literacy many inmates possess and the necessity of even basic literacy skills in the prison. She said, for example, that inmates need to be able to write to request

grievance hearings, conferences and individual help sessions with the GED teachers, and special passes to places such as the commissary. She also described the extraordinary efforts she made to teach inmates to read and write. She had, at this prison and others, worked with inmates in pre-GED programs who were almost illiterate. (p. 26)

Rogers says that many of the teachers spoke of the “many educational deficits that inmates bring to the GED program; although there were computers available, many inmates had never used a computer before (one teacher remarked that ‘they don’t even have food at home, much less computers’)” (p. 27). And then the workshop was interrupted by a fire alarm and an assumed evacuation, just to learn that their food, for lunch, was being burned in the kitchen. She said she “somehow could not help but think about Michael Foucault’s characterization of the prison as a huge machine that produced nothing,” because for her, at that very chaotic moment, “the place seemed to [her] like an absurd joke” (p. 27).

If all you have is punishment, for the sake of justice, and there is no skill or trade or educational development present, then you don’t have justice. Currently, in “A Theorist Unchained” (article from *The Chronicle Review*, written by David Schimke, August 7, 2015), the “nonprofit, nonpartisan Prison Policy Initiative, [there are]: 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 2,259 juvenile correction facilities, and 3,283 local jails. Many built to account for a 40-year growth in incarceration rates that, according to a 2014 report by the National Research Council, is ‘historically unprecedented and internationally unique’” (p. B7).

Lisa Guenther, a philosophy professor at Vanderbilt University, in Tennessee, argues that the prison-industrial complex is profit-driven. Guenther is a radical advocate for prison reform, and the character at the heart of Schimke’s article. He says that Guenther has become involved with a number of projects and programs since her attendance of a seminar called “Slavery.” In

reference to the seminar, she says that it was not about “chattel and plantation slavery,” but of the “prison slavery going forth from the 13th Amendment” – the same slavery Franklin (1989) introduces in his history of the start of prisons in America (p. B8). And from that seminar, Guenther has become the “outspoken critic of mass incarceration and the death penalty, and an advocate for radical penal reform” (p. B8).

Schimke quotes Guenther as saying, “We need to think of community accountability, rather than individual accountability, not just for prisons, but for our community over all” (p. B10). “That’s the link between prison reform and prison abolition. You can’t actually do the deep reforms in prison without doing deeper reforms on the outside. And that means the complete restructuring of the way we relate to the justice system, the state, and, most importantly, each other” (p. B10). This is where academics can play an important role. Like Guenther, we can be activists for change, and that can begin with the introduction of prison writers’ narratives into composition, and the numerous narratives surrounding prison writing.

Writing Is a Job

If we are to reform prisons, how are we to do so? One thing that this study shows is that if prisoners are given the opportunity to write, this can have many benefits for them, including giving them a sense of value to society. Both Mil and Marty confirmed that their writing has both funded their lives, but has also cost them, as they have been required to return a percentage of their income to the prison when their writing brings in revenue. At least two of the four kindly insisted that I need not worry about sending them money for postage. And what about their published books? Marty’s *Mother California* is in its second edition (I actually prefer the old cover), and in 2013, *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough* (great cover) was released. How much have these two publications cost him? What about my other co-authors and their published or

winning works, and then let us not forget about all the other career writers who publish their writing from prison? The rewards for being able to hold a job on the outside, while inside, is something that could certainly be up for a research study. We see that my co-authors (but other prison writers do, as well) talk about the pay that comes from writing for magazines and from winning various contests and writing competitions. Marty even made a comical reference to his expensive daughter and all the costs of her attending college. Cob talked about *The Writer's Market* and how some prisoners felt as though they hit gold discovering it.

We should conclude that paid writers have a sense of value and worth because they are monetarily rewarded for their efforts, and this puts them right at the center of living a normal life of supply and demand and in the market of goods and services, even if they do not physically join us on the outside to partake in the enterprise of buying and selling. They can experience a type of commonality with those on the outside, and thus, be more functioning and purposeful from the inside, as Marty writes a great deal about this issue of getting the prisoner to contribute and be a part of the system in which he lives. It is enriching, for them, and for their fellow prisoners. By their writing, and the pay they earn, there is a sense of hope and growth for them all.

There is so much more to prison writing than what society seems to see in TV shows or feature length films. It is a job, and it can do more than pay bills; prison writing, like any paid position, can ignite a sense of worth and validity, even if no payment is earned. Knowing that their words are being published somewhere, read by someone, puts them outside their cells, and gives them what they cannot find inside – purpose and value. How much more would a payment for those words offer them in the way of recognizing their own significance?

Purpose

Would these four men, as well as many others, writing from the inside, be writers if they were not confined to a prison? This question requires thought and consideration. With a deep craving for a sense of purpose, as exposed as essential to a prison writer in most prison writing, and better clarified by my co-authors in their writing, we see that the prison writing life can and does serve them as a job, but it also gratifies their need for a sense of purpose.

Marty seems to lengthen this argument in his own writing as he pushes forward in trying to educate the public about the penal system and the prison industrial complex, not to mention the inhumanity of the sentence of life without the possibility of parole. Marty's purpose is angled toward the expansion of programs that allow prisoners to have a genuine sense of purpose, for Marty understands this craving of people, and the gratification that can be found when that sense of purpose, or legacy, is established.

And the sense of a purpose, behind bars, becomes more clear as we recognize how society seems to have lost sight of the great literacy development that occurs in some of these writers as they move from being unable to write and speak proficiently in the English language, to being fluent and highly acclaimed educators and writers about the realities of prison living and life. We should see how dictionary copying, struggling reading efforts, mentorships, and other literacy skills are acquired for the sake of learning to read and write well, for the purpose of being able to better understand what was happening to these people in the courtrooms, in the prison, and in their counties, states, nation, and world. Through their exertion of becoming literate, they were feeling less and less like a number, and more and more like an individual. They were discovering the treasury of language, and the empowerment of using specific words

in expression. It was liberating for them to learn new words or new phrases – like discovering a new continent or taking their first step on the moon.

Yes, because some of these women and men writers become highly accomplished, it is very easy for us to lose sight of and/or overlook that great wall some of them had to climb over in order to get where they are, or were, as in the case of Malcolm X, Baca, and others. This effort required great courage and determination on their parts, but it also fulfilled these prisoners' need for a sense of purpose.

Prisons should allow this sense of purpose to exist in their institutions; prisons should encourage and promote positive and beneficial programs or ideologies that can provide prisoners with a reason to find hope in their too often hopeless surroundings. Monotony and routines with useless purposes only add to the drudgery of doing time, and perpetuate the feeling of being an irrelevant number. With purpose, prisoners can grasp hope and a stronger sense of self and voice, even if they, like my co-authors and so many others, have been given a death sentence, or a life without the possibility of parole sentence (the other death penalty). There is hope, with purpose. Marty, Mil, Cob, and Jon are proof of this hope.

Becoming Too Famous

Abbott and Chessman's lives are important stories in the history of prison writing. Their very unfortunate circumstances have instilled capital letter T Truths. Mil's phase II narrative told another similar story:

It is appropriate at this point to discuss the paradox of a prison writer allowing himself or herself to become too famous while still in prison. (I believe that my friend Carl UpChurch knew all about this and did not allow his book Convicted in the Womb to be published and made into a Showtime movie "Convicted," until he was released from

prison and no longer on parole. The movie rights to his book amounted to \$1 million.) The prison-industrial complex and the associated political processes have a hard time distinguishing between a prisoner being infamous for the wrong reasons and just being famous for all the right reasons. A prisoner with too much press coverage for any reason can easily become a target, or like with the game “Whack-A-Mole,” he or she can quickly discover how it is better not to raise one’s head. It seems like the prisoners who can manage to stay invisible or at least at a low profile are more likely to be released. No one working in the criminal-justice system wants to be criticized for making a mistake and for having that mistake called to their attention by the media. If an unknown, faceless prisoner is released and comes back to prison, it just becomes a run-of-the-mill item. But if a prominent prison writer—like Jack Henry Abbott—comes back to prison, it becomes front page news, and because that seems to be true, then prison authorities are much more likely to avoid criticism by taking the safe route and simply saying “no” to any early release efforts for a prison writer with some prominence. (Mil, phase II narrative)

During this research, I have come to see that my co-authors, as well as those who were prohibited from participating, had serious concerns about staying below the radar, but I have also come to see that genuine redemption is possible; therefore, for the small number of cases that exploded in the face of the prison-industrial complex, it should not always and definitely be considered a Truth that all prisoners are the same, and will do the same as what others have done upon release. Clearly, not all writers are the same, and so goes it for all prisoners. Is there never a point in which we can say: *They have learned their lesson?* If that is the case, then it is a frighteningly sad case in which our government operates.

Like three of the men in this research study who entered prison before the age of twenty and were given life sentences without the thought of ever being worthy enough to earn their way out, we can see that they have accomplished many great things while inhibited so. Aside from their remarkable publication credits, they have also been given big responsibilities, and have taken on tasks behind bars that the free man could not possibly have been able to do since he did not have the wisdom and knowledge of how the complex works from the inside. These men are insightful to their surroundings in ways that are comparable to our modern theorists. They have designed effective and lucrative programs that have only been shut down because of funding, and sadly, they stay quiet and hidden because they know popularity puts them in the hole, or worse, like Tookie, in the chair. Yet, they attempt to work towards better circumstances for themselves and their fellow inmates, at the risk of various dangers and other uncomfortable circumstances. They do their work peacefully, and try to keep good relations with everyone in the entire prison-industrial complex, at all times – always knowing that treading lightly is what prisoners must always do to be able to write and see their writing get published.

What is even more unfortunate is the treatment of female prison writers. Because this study primarily focuses on the writing lives of the four men I was able to gather for this inquiry, the stories of how women prisoners are treated is left out. However, from my years of studying prison writing, the conditions are truly worse for women. Besides, we do not read any stories of female writers attaining their freedom from their writing abilities, to then find crime again and return to prison. In fact, I have yet to discover a story of a female writer where her writing accomplishments were so celebrated that her sentence was questioned. In *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough* (2013), Tracie Bernardi has this to say about the sad truth of correctional facilities and their ultimate analysis of the truly rehabilitated:

Why do we waste billions of dollars every year building and maintaining prisons and calling them Correctional Facilities? Obviously the name speaks for itself:

“Correctional,” to rehabilitate, improve, or to be corrected. People in prison participate in rehabilitation so that *when* they are released they can enter back into society, emotionally healthy and whole. The word “when” entails a light at the end of the tunnel.

Some of us, however, do not get that chance. We participate in groups, we grow into healthier people capable of transitioning back into society. Yet, we’re not afforded the chance because of our lengthy sentence. No matter what we do, how much we grow, it doesn’t make a difference. We’re still held captive behind the unforgiving fence.

There has to be a change in the law, in order to make a way for a second chance. I recognize that some convicts are irredeemable and should not be released at any time. These decisions should be determined by psychiatric specialists appointed by the court. Lawmakers try to push some career criminals out of the system in order to save taxpayers’ money. They think handing out 90-day sentences will curb the recidivism rate. How could a person effectively utilize the rehabilitation opportunities within a correctional facility if they are released as soon as they arrive? It takes months for people to get on the waiting list for programs. Some people leave prison and mess up, which makes it difficult for lawmakers to trust that other people, given the opportunity, will not do the same thing. However, I believe decisions should be made on an individual basis, not by group broadbrushing. (p. 128)

If individuals like psychiatric specialists were indeed appointed to do such work, and more rewarding stories of rehabilitation and release without a return were discovered and celebrated, perhaps trust would increase. However, it does seem that lawmakers are not willing

to take such a risk. Therefore, the little history of prison writing that prisoners do know, that of Abbott, Chessman, and perhaps UpChurch, or others with similar stories, remains the legacy. This is truly unfortunate for prisoners, prison writers, and for all those who have sought redemption and personal growth.

Life Without the Possibility of Parole

The men who have co-authored this document, who are also a few of the most published and successful career prison writers today, are also sentenced to life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) – at least three of them, anyway. In fact, the other individuals I sought for participation in this project, as I have gone back and now realized, are also lifers, or are on death row. Now, why is this? Why is it that the most flourishing of writers behind bars are those with the least possibility of seeing life, again, outside prison? And what does this reveal to us, even generally? I have wondered if the life sentence penalty was somehow established as a way to prevent Abbott and Chessman’s stories from happening again. I know Marty (2013) has plenty to say about LWOP in his book *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough*, and other writings, but when I think about life sentences and death penalties, and denied second chances, I go back to one of my initial emotional reactions to prison writers and redemption – the life of Stanley “Tookie” Williams. It seems rational to me that men like my co-authors, showing evidence of redemption, men like Tookie, should at least be given some bit of hope at being able to earn their way towards liberty, if not death in a more dignified manner than sitting in a chair or lying on a bed with several unforgiving onlookers celebrating and finding joy in the last moments of another human being’s life. These are not men who have remained unchanged – men committing infractions in prison and ongoing troubles with guards, administration, and wardens. These are

not men who would be released to turn around and commit crimes again. These men are nothing like Abbott.

Because my three co-authors who are serving life sentences have been inside prison since they were young, and are so much older now, they could not do what Abbott did. His pardon came early on in his writing career – quite soon after he was discovered. Marty, Mil, and Jon are established prison writers with a great number of publications and years of writing experience. Also, they have given back. They have served their fellow inmates as well as their prisons. They have done their time well. They are not the same boys they were so many years ago, and anyone who briefly looks into their lives can see that.

Like myself, there are others who have entered this landscape and discovered that something should be in place for the men and women who have endeavored to better themselves in such wretched circumstances – something to give them even a glimmer of hope to know that their efforts of self-development and positive influence could possibly earn them some benefits, and perhaps, release. I am not alone in my thoughts about these writers.

I personally do not understand how hope exists for the man or woman given a life sentence, but in all I have read and studied, the penetrating irony is that some of these very men and women are the ones that seem to have the most hope of all. And throughout Marty's publications, he adequately compares his life sentence with a death penalty – only it being of a slower death. However, Marty does have hope beyond his daily routines of living in prison and knowing that he will never get out. He has an amazing daughter, and he has a truly articulate and powerful voice of sound wisdom, which he uses for the sake of educating the public and attempting to instill the essential changes that need to be made in regards to this slower death

penalty – if not for himself, than certainly for the sake of others. As Marty (2013) puts it, in *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough*:

It's true that one could argue I've still carved a kind of life out of my isolation. I married, fathered a child, published a book, and I'm deeply involved in a number of useful projects, not least of which is the movement to end the other death penalty, life without the possibility of parole. But I'm the exception to the dismal reality of this sentence.

Most of my peers never receive a single visit, not from their families or friends, and certainly not from the children they never had. Instead, they languish in a tortured twilight world between life and death. And this fate isn't reserved for a few super-criminals, mass murderers, or drug kingpins; it's the sentence of more than 41,000 men, women, and children. It's unprecedented, too, in the long course of human history, as nowhere in the past, and nowhere now in the present, in any other country in the world, were or are people sentenced to the rest of their lives in prison. (p. 66)

This topic of life without the possibility of parole is becoming more and more relevant as we understand mass incarceration and the profit-driven aspect of building more and more institutions for locking people up and throwing away the key. Another female prisoner, Patricia Prewitt, writing in Marty's (2013) book, *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough*, explained her thoughts about LWOP as such:

A few years ago I endeavored to reach out and write to every Missouri man locked-up with the same slow death sentence to glean opinions and support for pending legislation. (I already know all the women.) This postage-costly mission opened my eyes to the fact that so many, who have been hopelessly locked up for decades, got in trouble

when they were very young. Many are now good people who are truly sorry for the awful mistakes of their misspent youth and are certainly not worthless souls who should be discarded like used Pampers.

We live without the possibility of parole women are no more incorrigible than those serving a fraction of our time. In fact, the prison depends on old lifers to guide and calm the rest. We are the stable, nonviolent mothers of the camp, but we are also women who have been heaved into the landfill of incarceration to rot, not worth the time or trouble to recycle. (p. 32)

It is a reality that men and women, having made terrible mistakes during their earliest years, when the “age-crime curve” (Hirschi & Gottfreson 1983, 1990; Farrington 1986; Farrington et al. 2013; Moffitt 1993; Piquero et al. 2003, 2007; Sweeten et al. 2013) is present, will grow old inside prison – only leaving after death. Marty describes some of these images in his book; we can envision them, ourselves. In fact, in June 2015, after reading portions of *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough*, I wrote the following in my reflexive journal:

A young man, 18, commits a terrible crime after the use of many drugs, which numbed the pain of having invisible, or abusive parents, and he finds himself in quite poor health at the age of 80, imprisoned still, and moves slowly through the metal and steel of a correctional facility, well-respected, esteemed, and even loved by the hardened and irredeemable men. His hair is white and his bones are fragile. He means no one harm, and no one intends to ever do him any. He has served all his punitive time, and left a legacy by his example of how to do that time honorably. His art – poems that so many prisoners have hanging on the walls of their cells – will be another element of what he has left behind to mark his life of noble reform. He has encouraged hundreds and taught many.

He has inspired staff and guards of what it is to be courageous and principled. The poor choices of his earliest years are no longer remembered by others – only by him, as redeemed individuals often suffer with the ability to truly forgive themselves. Many will grieve and be saddened the day he is finally removed from the prison in his very own body bag.

Unfortunately, “it is well established that antisocial and criminal activity increases during adolescence, peaks around age 17 (with the peak somewhat earlier for property than for violent crime), and declines as individuals enter adulthood” (Sweeten, Piquero, & Steinberg, 2013, p. 921). Evidence for this “age-crime curve has been found across samples that vary in their ethnicity, national origin, and historical era;” basically, “crime bears a robust relationship with age, rapidly peaking in the late teen years, with a decline nearly as rapid soon thereafter, and continued declines throughout adulthood” (Sweeten et al, p. 922). This established curve, however, as identified by many criminologists and behavioral scientists plays no significance in the consideration of sentences and releases today.

At least three of my co-authors, as I have stated, are serving life sentences in such a manner – they committed their crimes during that awkward, antisocial, adolescent period in their lives, and have had plenty of decades to reconsider the actions that put them there. Over time, I believe these prisoners learn to regret the mistakes of their youth. This seems very true of my co-authors who, among other lifers who entered the prison system as teenagers, have served thirty, forty, fifty, or more years of their sentence and have had so much time to reflect on their pasts. They might easily admit what the character Red, in the film, *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), admits:

There's not a day goes by I don't feel regret. Not because I'm in here and because you think I should. I look back on the way I was then. A young, stupid kid who committed that terrible crime. I want to talk to him. I want to try and talk some sense to him. Tell him the way things are. But I can't. That kid's long gone. And this old man is all that's left. I gotta live with that.

Marty, Mil, and Jon are living with that same regret, and they are living well with that. I say they are living well because they have purpose, hope, and know that they, as old men, have a voice. While Red felt regret and wished he could go back to speak with his younger self, he knew that he could not do that, and after many rejections from the release council, he had lost hope.

Another character in *The Shawshank Redemption*, Andy, who was found guilty and convicted of a double homicide, but was innocent, did his time well, also. He had hope. In fact, while sitting up against a high wall, talking about his dream of getting out, owning a small hotel, and buying an old boat in Zihuatanejo, Mexico, Andy told Red that they had a simple choice – to get busy living, or get busy dying. See, Red told Andy that he ought not to dream; he said, “Mexico is way the hell down there, and you're in here and that's the way it is” (1994). Yet, Andy tried to dissuade Red from being hopeless. In Andy's last words to Red, he said, “Remember, Red, hope is a good thing – maybe the best of things. And no good thing ever dies” (1994). As it was, Red was finally released, and the last two words of the film – his last words – as he made his way to meet Andy in Zihuatanejo were, “I hope.”

Marty continues to write appeals. He says he does not write these appeals for himself, because he knows he will never get out of prison. Marty says he writes these appeals for his family. He wants for his family to continue to be able to have that good thing, hope, that good thing that never dies. For Marty, his hope is not in his release. His hope is in being a proponent

of change. His family's hope is in him getting out, but because Marty knows the system all too well, he places his hope and purpose in something more fruitful – his writing, and he lets his family hope in his release. It is the same with Mil and Jon; their hope is in their legacies.

Another one of these individuals who has entered the landscape of the prison writer and the hopelessness of a LWOP sentence is Luis J. Rodriguez. Rodriguez is a constant and significant voice in the advocacy of prison reform, rehabilitation, and the abolishment of the death penalty. He is also an American poet, novelist, columnist, and journalist. For many years, Rodriguez has been very active on behalf of prison writers. Having his own story of being on the streets, and coming quite close to serious prison time and/or a life sentence, one might say that his life and activism is due to his own second and third chances. In the Preface to *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough* (2013), Rodriguez says:

Life Without the Possibility of Parole (LWOP) is life without the possibility of life. It's capital punishment on the installment plan. It's without the possibility of redemption, initiation, or restoration.

For forty years, I've spoken out against the death penalty as unjust in a world where those without means – and often with the wrong face, in the wrong time, the wrong place, or with the wrong lawyers – can get put to death while murderers and other criminals with big bucks or different circumstances get to walk out, many not even arrested or, if they do, end up with no convictions.

The naiveté of the general culture can't fathom this fact: There are thousands of murderers walking the streets. It's simply not true that the law always gets its "man." The vast majority of these will never murder again. The point is you can't use the ultimate

punishment when this depends on factors other than truly blind justice, undeniable evidence, and doing the same thing for everyone – none of which can be guaranteed.

And without a guarantee, anything “ultimate” should never be done. (p. xxi)

Like I have said, when we enter the story, listen to its characters, learn of the oppressive plots, and generally allow ourselves to begin considering outcomes to the narratives, we see the truths that are present, and we want to get involved in being a part of the storytelling – laboring to aid in the altering of the oftentimes, inevitably unfortunate ending, and hoping – hoping for the characters, but more so for humanity. Life without the possibility of parole is a sentence that stamps hopelessness on the heart of us all. It says: there are people who are incapable of contributing anything good to this world. It also says: we as people are capable of being horribly cruel. We need to listen to these aged voices – Marty, Jon, Mil, and Cob. They have much to offer us, and through their writing and wise voices, we can begin to move towards a better truth about our judicial and penal system, and about how awful this life without the possibility of parole sentence is. We need to work to help these prison writers. We need to listen to their stories and use them to create a better world, a world of hope.

Couldn't Keep It to Myself

I do not believe that in any of my research I came across an article or essay, memoir or autobiography, or other piece of literature to suggest that the prison-industrial complex is doing a great job. On the contrary, everything I have read, even from the professors going into prisons to teach, has portrayed the system quite poorly. Ex-prisoners write about injustices and poor conditions, and others pick up the pen to present their form of truth from what they experienced.

University professor and prison writing volunteer instructor, Shelton, had this to say in his memoir about his many years teaching in Arizona prisons:

I don't believe in prisons. After working as a volunteer in the state prisons for more than thirty years, I don't believe the American prison system as we know it should exist. The American prison system is not only a corrupt system, but a corrupting one. It corrupts those who are employed by it and those who are incarcerated in it. It corrupts the contractors who build the prisons and the businesses that supply the prisons with food and materials. It corrupts the legislators who are coerced by threats from the prison administration to allocate larger and larger amounts of money to build more and more prisons. It corrupts the community that clamors for a new prison in order to grow and thrive financially off the misery of others. It corrupts the taxpayers who support it out of fear and on whose backs the entire system rests. It even corrupts the do-gooders like me who try to cut down the recidivism rate and make prison a little less of a hellhole for the people who are forced to live in it. In order to continue our work, we must become subversive and devious. (p. 51)

He is not the only one who has been inside, and felt a need to narrate his experience. There are plenty of examples (all throughout this research text) of other prison writing teachers and ex-prisoners who have done the same. Even family members, like Marty's daughter, feel it necessary to voice their own thoughts on the injustices of the justice system; and perhaps, nothing has convinced me more, than such said stories.

Good Teachers

From chapter 2 we can see the impact of a good teacher on prisoners. There seems to grow a generation of writers from a good man or woman entering the prison-industrial complex to mentor and teach prisoners to write. And with the narratives mentioned in chapter 2, we see proof of one scenario of at least four generations passing the torch, to then give back what was

given to them. What's important, however, is recognizing the impact these teachers have on their students' writing. Many authors blossomed under Shelton, Tannenbaum, Baca, and Gordon. We also read Mil's narratives of some of his students at Western Penitentiary. One prison writing teacher, Gordon (2000) courageously claims, in *The Funhouse Mirror*, which I believe many good teachers also claim, but probably rarely verbalize, that love needs to be there – well, in Gordon's case, he states that love was in his classes, and love is what changed his students' writing because loving them changed their lives.

In an address to administrators and teachers for the Department of Corrections (which he wrote in 1993), Gordon (2000) avowed:

I'd like to begin by talking about the subject of love in the prison classroom, on the subject of loving our students. I am not, of course, referring to romantic or sexual love, but to what would normally be deemed to be appropriate love (call it caring if you will), to the way in which any good, committed teacher handles his or her charges. Some students respond best to what is commonly referred to as tough love. Others – the most abused, whipped puppies in class – deserve respectful, distant love. Some require nothing more than gentle love – the quiet love that enables them to give themselves permission to write their true and oft-wrenching stories. And some students, frequently the hardest and most interesting cases, test us by demanding copious amounts of patient love. (p.103)

He continues with a single story that, in his words, is an example of the “transformative power of love” (p. 103).

In his story, Gordon connects this student's basic writing skills to his “mask of dogma.” The two had a “good rapport,” but then the student realized Gordon was Jewish, and that he, a “militant disciple of Louis Farrakhan” was being taught by “a professional oppressor; a greedy,

loudmouthed, large-nosed, and independently wealthy candidate for ethnic cleansing: one who deserved to be killed” (p. 104). And in the heart of loving him, the patient kind of love, because as Gordon claims, the student was exasperating, the student “began to soften,” and by the “end of the fiction workshop, a few stories had emerged; bittersweet stories about the projects where he grew up; stories he invariably sabotaged at the end with clunky and self-evident moralizing. But at least he was making some progress” (p. 105). And as Gordon left, after nine years with the prison writers, and with another loving Jewish instructor coming in to take his place, the student’s dogma disintegrated, and “the work he produced was first rate” (p. 105).

It is no trivial matter that men and women behind bars might be there because they were not loved. Jon was my only co-author who mentioned the posturing that takes place to present oneself as tough. And good teachers, like the ones mentioned in this research, can guide these writers into their place of finding a voice for themselves, which may be the greatest truth of all; it can guide them out of pretending to be someone, and into becoming who they would like to be.

A Call for Volunteer Prison Writing Teachers

Attaining teaching skills in a prison while working towards the completion of a masters or doctoral degree could be beneficial to many students, especially if s/he has no teaching experience. There might be a few hoops to jump through, or several, but the rewards would outweigh the hassle. Reading the narratives of the good teachers who have written about their experiences is a fine starting place. In prison, educational classes are not offered as frequently as they once were. And volunteers are doing a great service since reform programs have been drastically cut and removed. Many prisoners are anxious to gain skills, and oftentimes there are long waiting lists for the few writing workshops that are offered.

Teaching in a prison is an opportunity to also apply and practice pedagogical theories with a group of students who are certainly the most marginalized in our nation. As a part of this research project, I initially planned to volunteer in a nearby prison, where one of my co-authors is actually housed, but with all the changes that occurred in the process of getting IRB approval and in completing my dissertation, I eventually dropped this plan. Who knows? Maybe I would not have been allowed. Still, it could have been a valuable experience, but it leaves room for others within composition to consider that calling, and follow through; there is definitely a need. As for me, I feel certain that my efforts with prison writers will not come to a complete halt once this project is completed. I imagine I will find my way into a prison fairly soon. I plan to visit these four writers I have worked with, but perhaps, I might also come to know more of the inside life since I endeavor to teach a writing course at some point in the future.

A Field of Study

While awaiting receipt of the books ordered for my research, I turn back to the researcher's question: "And would you consider prison writing a field of study, like a discipline to be credited as a noteworthy subject?" My answer is a resounding, "YES!" (Mil, phase II narrative)

Throughout this dissertation, I was careful not to use the term, *field*, when referring to prison writing. I would have liked to use that word, but seeing that prison writing is not a discipline or field of study, it seems incorrect to refer to it as such. However, as referenced in the last chapter, there are some scholars who would also like to refer to prison writing as a field – a dynamic field, at that. It is rich and unstudied; much can be done in furthering it and developing its writers to contribute to a larger audience of fellow writers and academia.

As Mil points out in his phase II prison writing narrative (a brief portion quoted above), there is a prison writing history that has only somewhat been investigated. To date, there is really only one book on the topic of the history of prison writing (referenced throughout this document and quoted extensively by Mil in his phase II narratives), and most of the writers residing in prison are completely unaware of the book, and the story of prison writing in this country. In fact, most contemporary prison writers are unaware of each other. There is a sad hidden nature and isolation about being a prison writer. This should not be. This group of writers, and their landscape, deserve to be part of the grand narrative of composition since they, too, are included in the story of writing in the U.S. today. You almost cannot have one without the other. Every prison narrative I have read has made mention of other American authors and/or texts. And there is a landmark prison narrative, or two, that high school and college students read at some point in their education.

With the “get tough on crime” acts we have seen in the past few decades, and the extreme move towards the removal of reform programs, prisoners seek an outlet for expression and for moving beyond their guilt. They read a great deal, and they struggle to write. If they were made aware of this beautiful history of writers before them, having in numerous cases learned to read and write while living in the wretched conditions of racism, rage, and hopelessness, perhaps they would then feel as though they were a part of something bigger than their tiny prison cell. Perhaps they would endeavor to expand their field with purposeful and meaningful contributions.

Here is Marty’s take on prison writing as a field of study:

Finally, and this is conjecture and educated guessing at best, until the last quarter of the 20th century, the prison population in this country was actually relatively small, mostly isolated, usually uneducated, and cut off from the media. I imagine every state has

probably produced a few good writers, but we inside the prisons of other states wouldn't likely know.

Nevertheless, prison writing, the eyewitness accounting of a foundational segment of American society, absolutely warrants consideration as a field of study. One of the most troubling aspects of the study of prisons, of the analysis of the lives of prisoners, is the almost complete reliance on the observations of non-prisoners – a set of observations that tend to be dead wrong much of the time. (Marty, phase II narrative)

Therefore, according to Marty, and certainly I agree with him, this hidden nature of writers and the field of prison writing, one from the other (whether it be by state, or institution), perpetuates the bigger problem of leaving the study and observations of prison writers and prison writing up to non-prisoners. Again, this should not be. Closely reading and evaluating the writing of these four men have proven that each of them are capable of conducting their own studies and analysis of prison writing, but they simply are not even made aware, most of the time, of each other, much less the dynamic history they are developing with each publication they pursue during their lifetimes.

In the beginning of this dissertation, I commented on my desire to celebrate these writers. I still aim to do that. Fervently, I plead with other writers and scholars in all fields to combine their efforts with mine to do this celebrating. I do hope to go behind bars to help men and women become better writers, but how much more rewarding could it be to teach classes on this side of the fence about the talented writers and their rich history on the inside? I believe a composition course with required reading of prison memoirs, poetry, and essays, and research of the historical background of prison writing would present a number of possible themes and topics for learning. But again, as Marty points out, observations by non-prisoners tends to be dead wrong. We must

go beyond observing and make a move towards including. We should give the career prison writers a seat at the table, and listen to them intently. They have much to say. In fact, here is Cob's insight on why we should consider prison writing, and it may seem to be of the most common sense response of the four:

And, yes, I do consider prison writing studies to be a valid discipline, in that it combines sociology, psychology, and probably a bunch of other -ologies I'm unfamiliar with. If the logical study of man is man, then why shouldn't inmates be so included, be they male or female? There are as many kinds of prison writers as there are prisoners—each has an individual purpose for writing. Some are trying to win release; others have political axes to grind. Some—like me—just want to resume their writing career after decades of drunken wastefulness. Those are merely interested in their legacy, the dubious immortality of seeing one's name in print, leaving a scribbled record that shouts (silently): “I was once alive, in love with the world, and THIS is what I saw.” So, if scientists can devote their professional lives to the sex lives of an obscure species of bug, why shouldn't the investigation of the prison writing phenomenon be honored too?

(phase II narrative)

Lastly, as Jon specifies (quoted below), prison writing touches people too. My stories in chapter 2 clearly showed how my own teaching and writing life became enmeshed with the writing lives of prisoners – Cleaver and Tookie. And now, after all these years of becoming nested within this arena of highly talented writers, and overall good people, I continue to argue for a great amalgamation to occur. We need their voices as much as they need ours. Like Cob pointed out, man's logical study is of man. It does seem, however, to be the case in other

countries; there is a greater tendency to see prisoners humanely outside the borders of the U.S. – sadly.

Writing in prison is a unique field of study, a discipline—noteworthy, and should be credited. My work has touched Nobel winners, Tony award winners and activists like Samuel Becket, Bill Irwin, Barney Rosset, Ruby Dee, Gloria Steinum and many professors and teachers here and in Sweden. Right now I am doing a letter exchange project with an entire class in Sweden, including the teacher. Other countries consider my work in prison noteworthy and credible. (Jon, phase II narrative)

Yet, here, because of the conclusive difference in how we treat and portray criminals, versus other nations, the writings and publications of prisoners are not considered noteworthy, much less credible, even if Nobel winners, Tony award winners, and activists have been touched by them.

The stigma that is attached to prisoners in this country must be changed if any real field of study is to be introduced. In fact, I believe a movement towards publicizing and educating the people of the faulty judicial system and its portrayal of crime and criminality must initiate such an introduction. Already there are individuals choosing to use their academic influence to promote change (Zinck and Guenther); more need to do the same. Professors and scholars can bring about such change, and I do believe we all have the heart to.

A Call for Prison Writing Research

In numerous places throughout this metanarrative research document, I have pitched additional prison writing research ideas to compositionists. The group of prison writers is unknown – for the most part. Therefore, the potential for research studies is wide and beckoning.

Back in 1989, when Franklin wrote the only major text I have come across that presents a history of prison writing (*Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist*), he said this:

To comprehend the artistic achievement of this literature, we must approach it with an aesthetic radically different from most aesthetics applied in the university and the university-dominated cultural media. In truth, it may not be going too far to say that the university and the prison provide opposite poles inducing the lines of force in the field of aesthetics. What seems most pleasing about both form and content when viewed from the bottom may seem most distressing when seen from above.

I am in no way implying we should apply a lower aesthetic standard to prison literature. The truth is that literature by prisoners has to overcome great prejudices among most college-educated readers, even when it does conform to theories of art promulgated on the campus. (p. 235)

So our first step is to begin overcoming those prejudices. How do we do that? As I have said, we do that by simply entering the landscape.

There is so much literature emerging from these writers, and Franklin suggests it is “an unprecedented phenomenon” (p. 233). Both Franklin and Wicker (1998), suggest that prison writing is a worthy field of study, and in his 1989 text, Franklin makes a call to researchers. Here it is, 2015, and I am doing the same. There is a gaping hole in composition, and plenty of research opportunities to explore within prison writing. Let us consider looking closely at the unknown so that we can better illuminate the lives of those struggling to write behind bars.

Our Research Responses

The three research questions were initially presented in the first chapter. There, I presented the questions as three categories, but with two topics under each category. These are

the general questions related to how the writers got started writing in prison, what the sustaining forces for their writing are, and the legacy they hope to leave, as each of those three questions pertain to the co-authors' personal writing lives, as well as what they knew or were willing to research about prison writing, answering the same three questions. When I wrote to the men, each letter was composed differently, but the general idea behind the questions was the same – getting started, sustaining elements, and legacy. I did, however, elaborate with additional sub-questions to help them understand the kind of response I was hoping they would be able to provide in their narratives. Here are the three research questions, as initially presented in the first chapter of this document:

- Getting Started Writing

Personal Narrative: What brought you, a highly successful writer, to begin writing and initiating the process of becoming successful? In other words, how did you get started as a writer in prison?

Prison Writing Narrative: What and/or who brought prison writing to its beginning in the U.S.? How did it get its start, and when?

- Sustaining the Writing

Personal Narrative: What sustains your successes and ongoing efforts as a writer? What keeps you writing and flourishing while in prison?

Prison Writing Narrative: What sustains prison writing in the U.S.? Who and what prevent it and/or allow it to thrive and continue to function as an area of writing?

- Legacy

Personal Narrative: What legacy, as a published and highly successful writer, are you leaving, hope to leave, and to whom and/or to what do you hope to leave your legacy?

Prison Writing Narrative: What legacy is prison writing leaving, and to whom? What legacy do prison writers hope the field of prison writing will leave behind, and to whom?

And here is an example of how I took one of the questions (how prison writing got started), and elaborated with additional sub-questions to give my co-authors a bit more to consider and/or include in their written narrative responses:

What, from your memory, understanding, and/or research, got prison writing started? In other words, when and how did prison writing begin in this country? What do you know about the roots or beginning of prison writers in America? What historical moments and/or people or key figures initiated and/or prompted the literary movement behind bars? Was it strong writers who first aired their voices with the pen? Was it struggling individuals with poor reading and writing skills that were first heard? Did popular writers encourage and mentor prisoners to write? Basically, in what you know and/or have read and studied, where did prison writing begin? How, did it begin? What brought about and developed this group of men and women writers? And would you consider prison writing a field of study, like a discipline to be credited as a noteworthy subject?

These sub-questions (above) were posed in addition to the general questions, for all the research questions, and for each of the writers. Also, as I have stated, the co-authors wrote fine narratives

answering all that they could from each question I asked them, giving me rich data to read, re-read, compare, contrast, ponder, reflect upon, journal about, and eventually code. From that work, chapters four and five were constructed.

Some of the answers we found to the first research question(s) pertaining to the writers and what it is that got them started writing in prison was a program or writing class that they decided to take in prison. We also saw that they linked their beginnings to their experience in the court room where words went over their heads, and they made that cognitive decision that they wanted to learn. Reading was another starting place to their writing lives. We also see how reading got them started in prison writing because they learned early on that they enjoyed literature, and wanted to compose some of their own. Another catalyst was the opposite sex, or women. They wanted to learn to write beautiful letters to win hearts. We also realized that mentors, or prison writing instructors, were sometimes credited for being a part of getting them started in their writing lives. Classes that were advertised were another factor in getting them started. The authors also mentioned a strong desire for redemption and change. They had come to that place in their life where they finally decided they wanted to tell their story, and/or be heard. And as at least one stated: he started writing because he liked assignments.

As for the sustaining forces, there were many, too. Clearly letter writing is crucial in prison, and when mail is received, a motivator to write is present. And again the court aspect of keeping one writing and writing well continues to be present, as they have written various documents for themselves and their fellow prisoners. In fact, I had several mailed to me during this research, as data. There is also the sense that writing promotes sanity and clarity of mind that is essential for a life in prison. It is also a form of expression and art, which nurtures the soul – a much needed element in prison. We also understand that voice is of the utmost importance to the

prison writer since they are terribly oppressed and stripped down to nothing, but being published gives them an opportunity to be heard and to feel some bit of liberty, so the desire to be heard also sustains them. Another sustaining force is an inner drive to work and earn a living; money was also mentioned. Being able to support others on the outside was a strong motivator. The writers also talked about global recognition. We learned, too, that being seen as a whole person seemed to be a sustaining force. And finally, as one co-author has made it his way of life, *realness* sustains him.

Then, for legacies, my co-authors mentioned their voices as being a primary aspect. They understand that what they have to say may be well-received today, but more than likely not. They write to educate and inform the outside world of the injustices. Their legacy is about their work and what they have left – the expansion of the world’s bookshelf. In other words, legacy is mostly about audience.

Sadly, with prison writing’s start, sustaining forces, and legacy, the four co-authors had varying views that mostly presented negative narratives. There was a little hope, too, but with the writers acknowledging their unawareness of the history of prison writing, and as we read earlier in this chapter, a strong belief that prison writing should be studied, it is clear that research in this area is limited – even in my years of study I did not come across much. Therefore, since an absence of knowledge and a lack of awareness are strongly present, and since we know that prison writing is far less dynamic today as it was decades ago, we can surmise that prison writing might be stagnant and/or losing the momentum it seemed to have a few decades ago.

This is not good news for prison writers. However, I believe they are mostly aware of the tall walls that surround them – keeping them locked and isolated inside.

Still, there is hope and the sense that soon we will begin to see changes. Compositionists can take interest and encourage other scholars to do the same. When the academy talks, people listen. I hope that this dissertation talks loudly, because prison writers and prison writing need to be heard.

My Co-Authors' *truths*

As I stated in the *Introduction* section of this chapter, this particular section has been my own attempt to give a very brief snippet of the little “t” truth, about each of my co-authors that has emerged over our year-long co-authoring time together. In this section, I want to present my personal and relational findings about these amazing men – from their own words. I have selected four short passages of writing from each of my co-authors to not simply illustrate what I have come to know about them, but I do believe that within these brief pieces of their writing, these writers have also arrived at some negotiated little “t” truths about themselves.

I in no way intend to offend or present their writing as a way to say that somehow the passages are capital T Truths. No. In fact, as I hope I have made clear, big T Truths have no place in life, much less in academia. Instead, I have included this section as a reflection of the various entries I have written in my reflexive journal throughout the process of forming relationships with these men – in my attempt to better understand who they are as writers, and by presenting their writing as a means of capturing a small snapshot of who I have come to believe each of these men are in our world. I am to present them and give them the last words before I wrap up this lengthy research document.

In chapter 3, I referenced Rudenstam and Newton (2007) in their work on the analytic-interpretive phase of research, and how a reflexive journal aids in the credibility of the research. I have recorded lots of impressions, reactions, themes, and other significant events as they

occurred during my relationship's development to each of these four men. As I have gone through my entries and let the little "t" truths emerge (for the very last time before I complete this text), I feel that I want to somehow capture what was present within the reflexive journal – the meaning making and socially significant observations that shaped my ongoing inquiry path and intimacy into the lives of my four phenomenal co-authors. I begin this section of short pieces to reflect my perception of my co-authors, with Cob. Then, I cite Jon, Marty, and Mil. Cob's (1984) selection comes from his short story, "The Boy in the Barn":

"C'mon, Daddy," said his son, bored with the bar and its nonexistent residents. "Let's go. Nothing lives here anymore."

As they walked away, he wanted to say, "A little boy still lives there," but he didn't. He merely said, "Just a few pigeons, that's all." Then the man and his son walked out of the barnyard and were gone, leaving the little boy from another time drowsing in the hayloft throughout an eternal summer's day, his mother's faint but clear voice calling in the distance, "Lunch time! Where are you?" (p. 5)

For Jon, who I have chosen to present second, his passage comes from one of his phase II narratives:

I don't believe there is any such thing as prison writing. There are writers in prison, but that does not make them prison writers any more than a writer on the moon or in the hospital would make them moon or hospital writers. Because of a writer being incarcerated there is a level, a depth, an understanding of writing that no other writer, not imprisoned, can grasp or write subjectively about the body being locked up. Besides, there are mental, spiritual, and academic prisons that are not physical and can be found anywhere.

I am presenting Marty (2013) third; this brief portion of an essay from *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough* seems to best summarize my thoughts about his life and journey:

I've already missed too many of the big milestones of her life. She came into the world without me being there to watch her fall into this world. Her first steps happened while I was locked securely away serving life without the possibility of parole. She went off to her first day of school, came home from her first dance recital, and went to bed waiting for the tooth fairy's nocturnal visit without me.

She arrived back when California still thought that all prisoners should be able to spend a couple of days of private time with their families in little apartments on prison grounds. Her mother and I were crazy in love, and we both fantasized that parenthood could work even if I remained in prison. We also labored under the delusion I wasn't actually going to spend all my remaining days locked up. The idea that the state would exact a punishment of forever didn't seem likely; it didn't seem real. Even more, after all this time, there remains a surreal quality to this death penalty. (p. 65)

Lastly, I have selected a short piece of correspondence from Mil (2015), to best emphasize what I have come to understand of him:

At this point, I highly recommend reading a small book, a very powerful work: *The Shame Response to Rejection*, by Herbert E. Thomas, M.D., Albanel Publishing, ISBN 0-9659920-04, available for purchase online, perhaps available by InterLibrary Loan? I am allowed to keep ten books in my prison cell; Doc's book is one of them. If you cannot afford to buy Doc's first book, if you cannot borrow it from a library, then I'll try to arrange to gift you a copy. An essential message in his book is that men and women in positions of authority must always be conscious of their power to cause pain in those

under their authority. To quote him: “In our daily lives, in our encounters with one another, the possibility that we may be seen as rejecting, particularly when we have no such intent, must always be in the forefront of our conscious awareness.”

A Letter to All Writers in Prison

Dear Writer Behind Bars,

Thank you for all that you have contributed thus far, not only through your songs and poems, notes and letters, but for all your unpublished works you share with family, friends, cellies, or self. Thank you for the newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and all other socially constructed publications. Thanks for your winning memoirs, essays, short stories, and other prized pieces that PEN and others celebrate and reward. Thanks for your lengthy novels, autobiographies, publically published political expository articles, co-authored texts, and online publications. Most of all, thank you for your narratives; they have enriched my life.

My plea to you, now, is that you will come in to the parlor, take a seat, join us in our talks, and aid us in doing the one thing we purport to do in all our research work – cover all grounds. Your voices and contributions would be refreshing and insightful. I know you can help us redesign what we do so that we can do it more thoroughly and credibly.

If I, as a student hoping to be given passage into the parlor is held to such a high standard to do quality, worthwhile, valid, and postmodern work of thoroughly explaining why I am doing this inquiry of your writing behind bars, and if I am expected to explain every means by which I plan to do this, but also be credible and have a genuinely valid

product that offers meaning and significance to the parlor discussion, then surely the people in the parlor can be as thorough and effective in their own work as they expect me to be. However, the problem is that they are not, and actually, upon gaining my own entry and acceptance into the parlor, I will not be doing all that I profess to do as a scholar, intellectual, academe – person in the parlor – either.

Therefore, to avoid the hypocrisy of not being a credible and valuable researcher to my field, then with this (my dissertation) and my first discussion in the parlor (hopefully), I would like to ask you, no, entreat you, to keep living the narrative life. I hope together we can keep working to bring your tales into the academic parlor. We all need to hear the stories you have to tell. Please... never stop writing.

Your fellow writer and friend,

IUP, Ph.D. candidate

Lasting Questions and Final Thoughts

What will be the legacy of this research? What will be the legacy of Cob, Marty, Jon, and Mil? What about the legacy of prison writing? And what about narrative inquiry research? I believe this dissertation has made an attempt to present the hoped for legacies for each of these topics and individuals. Ultimately, however, I guess I understand that the legacy of this research, the prison writer and prison writing, is not entirely up to compositionists or prison writers; it is up to all of us, as to how each of these stories end, or merge into the grander, longer-term narrative.

For me, these stories do not end here. I plan to keep in touch with Jon, Mil, Cob, and Marty. They are aware of my plans to visit each of them and get this document into their hands. From my time getting to read their writing and studying all the documents I have gathered for

each of them – coding them and re-reading them with raised brows and sometimes long cogitations that took my eyes out my office window and into the leaves of the tall trees that have been green, orange, yellow, and absent – I am changed. Forever, I am changed. This study may have only cracked opened a small door of inquiry in composition, but it has done so much more for me. I hope that as I age and go forward in various career paths and plans, the door into this hearty landscape of writers, of which I am now permanently nested, and hopefully opened for other compositionists to enter, will get pushed open a little more and a little more. I am not finished with prison writing or prison writers. I intend to continue searching and seeking out avenues of learning within the writers and their field.

This study has made me aware of terrible injustices and cruelty towards those who are already oppressed enough that more of the same treatment can only cause greater tragedy and misfortune to the very nation that claims liberty and justice for all. When I read Cleaver, and was moved towards reflective thoughts of my middle school years studying Anne Frank and the holocaust, I learned a little bit more about this world – its ability to be ugly and inhumane. I grappled with slavery, too, when I first learned of it, but the gas chambers, the stories of people hiding, the starving people to death, and the camps with the mistreatment and massive grouping of people (children and adults alike) for the sake of torturing and abusing them, forever changed me, too. More than anything, I think it was the work of the story that changed me so much – Anne Frank’s story. Cleaver’s story did much the same, as Tookie’s, and now Mil’s, Marty’s, Cob’s, and Jon’s.

Our government is similarly ostracizing and abusing individuals today. In fact, the prison-industrial complex is a modern day gas chamber, with a slow release of agonizing circumstances that choke out life. And, it pains me in a similar way as when I first felt the horror

of the holocaust when I was about twelve or thirteen years old – similarly, I say, because our first understanding of hatred, racism, and sheer cruelty for the sake of supposed superiority and righteousness stuns us most the first time, and each time thereafter, we are shocked less, numbed somewhat by the time before. How does one walk away from such knowledge and then choose to put it away to never ponder it again? The prison system is now permanently a part of who I am. I cannot walk away from it. As the title of this research text suggests, I am nested within this multilayered, many stranded, textured 3D metanarrative

I have learned that there are incredibly good men in prison. I have studied them and seen what they have done. I have experienced friendships with them, learned from them, and I know I have grown because of them. Their writing has touched me because it speaks the same language by which we all write – arranged words from the heart, but filtered through the mind.

Writing, when we shut everything else out and sit still to read it, holds a power to transform the way we think. I have tried to shut everything out and sit still to read what these four men had to write about writing. I have tried to examine the aspects of the space (prison writing) in which they write, from my limited positioning within it. I am so glad I have done this research. I feel a sense of pride in uncovering something that is fairly new to academia – if only, for myself and the few others who might also choose to sit still and read this research document.

Yes, I sincerely hope that compositionists will begin to uncover more about these men and women, and about their group – prison writing. I hope more writers in prison will be invited to co-author and participate in academic research writing. I also hope that academics will push our government into offering better programs and laws for all those who have been caught in a crime they certainly did not want to commit, or, in other cases, did *not* commit.

I have also learned that a world unlike any other, anywhere, exists inside U.S. prisons, and that those who understand it best, have shown evidence of their own transformation and personal development, need to be given positions to make the necessary changes to aid others in succeeding in their own rehabilitation despite the outrageous circumstances of that world. Marty, Cob, Jon, and Mil are capable of making such changes. They have overcome the horrific nature of that world to become productive, healthy, and whole. They know what needs to be done, and others need to trust them to be behind the decision-making processes that so much of our tax money goes to, so that effective changes can be implemented to diminish the prison problem in our nation – or, at least, to somehow make it better.

Finally, I have learned that our judicial system is broken. It does not work effectively, and that affects us all.

Beginning this journey, I set out to study these men for their writing processes. I wanted to understand the steps, motions, patterns, and manners by which they wrote their many publications behind bars. Now, as this journey is somewhat complete, at least as far as this research study is concerned, I have meditated on stories, and written and edited this co-authored metanarrative, which, is still nothing more than another story. This dissertation may have focused on three research questions that were answered by four writers and this researcher, pertaining to those four lives and prison writing, but it was impossible to only focus on those three questions when other plotlines have developed and are continuing to develop within these men's lives and within prison writing in the U.S. today.

It is this researcher's hope that more students and professors will take interest in these stories and their additional plotlines so that the narratives of prison writers and of prison writing will enrich the field of composition.

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- Yurcic, J. (2005). *Word son*. Albuquerque, NM: EMAYA.

Appendix A

Superintendent/Warden Letter

Dear Superintendent/Warden,

My name is Alva N. Ramon, and I am a doctoral student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, in Indiana, PA. I am conducting a study on the writing process, patterns, and procedures of incarcerated men and women. Please review the attached ad (“A Call for Papers”), and the attached Consent Forms for a concise explanation of the study and the various stages that I am planning to conduct. In addition, you will find contact information for both the Chair of this research project (in the consent forms), as well as a way to get in contact with me (my email address, below). Please feel free to get in touch with either of us if you have additional concerns or questions regarding the ad, the consent forms, the study itself, or any other area concerning this research.

I am respectfully writing to you, in request of your approval, to allow _____ (name of prisoner) to participate in my study. It would be a great privilege to have your permission to correspond with this writer, via mail only, for my research study. I am hoping that you will grant my study the liberty of analyzing the essays, questionnaires, and narratives that are written by this particular participant, as s/he has already shown him/herself to be interested in participating. However, if at any stage in the process of this research you no longer wish to extend permission for my analysis of the essays, questionnaires, narratives, or other written materials, from one, or more subjects (should there be more than one), I will cease my study as per your request.

Therefore, I will wait to hear from you before I continue to correspond with _____ (name of prisoner). You may contact me via email at alvateaches@yahoo.com to grant permission, or to refuse my further involvement with the writer. You may also reply by mail to the P.O. Box at the top of this letter. I will not include the prisoner's writing as a part of my research, if your consent is not authorized. Therefore, please contact me, as soon as you are able.

Thank you for your time and willingness to consider my research requests.

Sincerely,

Alva N. Ramon

Appendix B

A Call for Papers

Do you think of yourself as a writer? Do you spend a lot of time writing? Has your writing been published? If you can say “yes” to any of these questions, I would like to hear from you.

I am a college student. I am trying to study how and why you write. I believe writing is like a process; it has steps, or stages, but these steps are not always the same for each writer, or for each thing written. I also think this “writing process” begins when a person first learns to write his abc’s. Then, the process continues all through our lives, since we are always writing – notes, diaries, poems, letters, lists, e-mails, texts, reminders, stories (true and false), songs, and other forms of thoughts put into words on paper. I want to know what *you* think about *how* and *why* you write. I want to know about *your* writing process.

Can you remember a parent or other adult teaching you to write your name? What feelings do you have about writing? What are your thoughts about the teachers who helped you learn to write? I think those questions, and so many more, can help me know about your “writing process.” Memories, books, movies, and almost anything about life can also make our “writing process” what it is, because those things add to our thoughts, and we use our thoughts when we write. Anything we see or do in life becomes a part of what we write, how we write, and why we write.

Think about this: after you write something, and spend a lot of time on it, you probably will not forget it. The words you wrote become a part of you forever. Maybe there are times when you are sitting down writing, and you remember something you already wrote, or read, or saw. When you think back like that, your mind is in the “writing process.”

I am asking you to write a paper on this topic - *your* writing process. Here are some ideas to help you start thinking about what you want to write in your paper, about your process:

- Why do you write? What do you like about it?
- What do you do, think, remember, and feel, when you write?
- How do you plan your ideas before you start writing? Do you make notes on paper, or an outline?
- Do you sit down and start writing something, or do you think about what you are going to write, before you start writing? How long do you think about it before you start it?
- When do you write? Where do you write? How long do you sit to write?
- Do you look things up or read anything before or during the writing process? Do you research a topic?
- Do you write without stopping, or do you stop a lot? If you stop, what do you do? Are there times when you really want to write but nothing comes to your mind?
- Do you write with a pencil and paper, or a computer? Why?
- What gets you upset when you are writing? What makes you happy?
- Do you go back and make changes to what you wrote? If you do, when do you do that?
- Do you ask others to read your writing and tell you what they think? If so, who?
- Does being in prison make a difference in what, how, or why you write? Explain.

I would like you to tell me about your “writing process,” by writing a paper. Write it however you like. I will read and study what you have to say in your paper, but I will also try to learn from how you write the paper.

These papers are for a study, and I want to use them for research. That means I have to get you to sign a form to let me study what you wrote. You must include the **Informed Consent Form** when you mail me your paper/essay. It was mailed with this paper (A Call for Papers), so you might need to get a copy of it if more than one person from your prison is planning to write a paper for my study. If you can’t get one, you can send a letter to me, and I can mail one to you.

Once I receive all the papers/essays (phase I of my study), I will choose 15-20 of the papers/essays. The prisoners whose papers are chosen will be asked to continue into phase II of my research. They will be mailed a letter with more questions. So, after you mail me your paper, and if your paper is picked, I will send you a letter asking you to continue to phase II of my research. If you want to keep going with my study, answer the questions and mail it back to me. If you do not want to continue, that is fine. You do not have to continue.

From the 15-20 who answered the questions, I will then choose 2-4 writers for case studies (phase III). I will send these two or three people a folder with more questions and directions to send other writing samples. If you are selected, and you want to continue with my study, we will begin to send this folder/notebook back-and-forth to each other, as I ask more questions and make more requests. I will provide postage for these prisoners.

If you are chosen, for phase II or phase III, but you do not want to continue, that is fine; you can quit at any time, but if you want to continue, the signed **Informed Consent Form**, which you need to mail with your first essay (phase I), will allow you to participate in all three phases of this research - if you are chosen, and *if* you want to be involved. Please remember that you can end your participation in this study at any time.

I want you to know that all your papers will be opened and used in my research. Also, you may know that staff from your prison open and read your mail.

If you have questions, or would like to know more about my research study, you can write to me and I will answer you by mail. To begin your participation in this research, you will need to mail:

1. The **Informed Consent Form**
2. Your paper/essay (no page limit)
3. A sheet of paper with: your full name and mailing address (include the full name of your prison); your sex; a list of all your published works (if you have any); number of years incarcerated; number of years writing; and your release date, if you have one.

The deadline to submit your essay is:

Please mail your paper to: Alva Ramon
PO BOX 00000
Johnstown, PA 15905

Appendix C
Sample Questionnaire

Dear Prison Writer (Prisoner's Name),

Thank you for your essay submission. We are now moving into phase II, where I will be asking you some questions that will be a part of your case study for the data collection. If at all possible, please try to return your responses by the deadline, but if you are unable to do so, please let me know what time would be better for you; I understand you may already have a number of other writing obligations and deadlines. The deadline I am requesting for you to submit this questionnaire is:

Please mail your questionnaire to: Alva Ramon
PO BOX 00000
Johnstown, PA 15905

1. In your essay, you claim that you ask others to read your writing so that they can give you feedback. What kind of feedback have you received?

2. Did you use the feedback? Why, or why not?

3. You stated in your essay that you took a writing class in prison. You said it was meaningless and unhelpful and that you would never participate in another class again.

Can you explain, in more detail, how the class failed to offer you useful and practical lessons to strengthen your writing abilities?

4. In your opinion, what types of lessons would have been more useful in the prison writing class?
5. You mentioned in your essay that most of your family, friends, and fellow prisoners enjoy reading your poetry. How does this make you feel?
6. The essay was well-organized and easy to read with topic sentences and transitional words and phrases. Since you stated that you performed poorly in most of your English classes throughout middle school and high school, and you did not find your prison writing class to be useful to you, how have you come to learn to write with structure and cohesiveness?
7. What have you done to develop your vocabulary skills?
8. Approximately how many hours did you spend on the essay? You can divide the time according to the activities (thinking, organizing ideas, taking notes, composing, editing, etc.).
9. What, if anything, did you do differently for this essay, than you have done in the past for other writing tasks?

Appendix D

Sample Case Study Letter

Dear Prison Writer (Prisoner's Name),

Thank you for your questionnaire submission. We are now moving into the phase III section of the inquiry. In your questionnaire, you exhibited a thoughtful examination of the various questions I asked. You demonstrated clarity and insight into your writing. Thank you. Now that I have received your narratives, I am asking that you would send me additional materials to place inside your case study for further analysis. I have a list of all your writing credits, awards, and publications. If there is anything else that you would like to have placed in your case study folder, please send that to me, or inform me as to where I might be able to access it. Remember, this can be any written material that you have that may contribute to the narrative of your writing life, or the narrative of prison writing.

Please feel free to contact me with any concerns or questions. The list below may include some items you would want to submit, but only include those materials that you feel comfortable sharing, and if you would like anything returned, please make note of that in your mailing. I will gladly return duplicates, or originals at your request. Here are some items you may want to send:

- Pre-writing materials, outlines, and/or notes
- Writing samples of unpublished work
- Published work (articles, poems, books, etc.)
- Journals
- E-mails

- Essays
- Miscellaneous (anything else you would like to submit that you feel would pertain to this research project)

Gather all the necessary documents and use the mailing supplies and postage label I have included. The deadline for the last and final submission is:

Please mail your case study materials to: Alva Ramon
PO BOX 00000
Johnstown, PA 15905

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form for Prison Writer

Working title: “Discovering the Journey of the Pen, in the Pen: An Investigation into the Composing Processes of Flourishing Prison Writers”

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please ask.

The purpose of this study is to research the composing process of successful writers behind bars. Participation in this study will begin with your essay submission to the call for papers on the topic of your individualized writing process (phase I). If your essay is selected, and if you *choose* to continue with the next stage, an interview questionnaire will ask you specifics about what, how, when, and where you write. This consent form will also grant permission for your involvement in the questionnaire (phase II). Then, if your questionnaire is selected, and you continue to *choose* to be a part of the research, the next phase of this study will be a case study inquiry that will request previous publications, current writing tasks, additional essays, and more questionnaires (phase III).

You may find that writing the essay, completing the interview questionnaire, and undergoing the detailed case study will be a pleasing experience, since you are a writer. This project will allow you to do what you enjoy most – have a voice about something you already know a great deal

about - writing. Also, you may find that participation in this study will offer knowledge and support to other prison writers who are facing many of the same struggles as you.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to “opt out” or withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your status as a prison writer. If you choose to withdraw, you can do that by notifying the Project Director, Dr. Gian Pagnucci, or me. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you do participate, all information will be held in strict confidence with respect to your privacy.

There are to be no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. Therefore, if you should elect to participate in this study, but wish to eliminate particular documents or materials, your request will be honored. I will only utilize the items you permit. Additionally, please know that if you allow your published work to be submitted into this research, your identity and authorship may be discovered, even with the use of a pseudonym, since your published work is public.

Also, I want you to know that all correspondence (papers, letters, etc.) will be opened and used as data for this project. In addition, you probably already know that staff/personnel from your prison open and read all the incoming and outgoing mail.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below and mail it with your initial essay submission.

I will be responding, through mail, those writers who have been selected for the second phase and third phase of this study – the questionnaire and the case study.

Researcher: Alva Ramon, Ph.D. candidate, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

English Department, Leonard Hall

PO Box 00000

Johnstown, PA 15905

Project Director: Dr. Gian Pagnucci

110 Leonard Hall

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Indiana, PA 15705

724-357-2261

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (phone: 724-357-7730)

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Mailing address where you can be reached: _____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature

Date: _____ Witness: _____

Appendix F

Letter to One of My Co-authors Informing Him of Topic Change

Dear _____:

Wow! What a delight it was to receive your first draft. My thoughts were shooting all over the place as I read it. In other words, it serves this research project wonderfully, and gives me plenty to ponder. I see so many avenues I would like to investigate and ask you about in your highly successful writing career. And clearly, you write so much better than I. ☺

So... for the time being, I'd like to let you know that I am preparing your document for those areas of additional inquiry, but would also like to send you the second writing request I have for this project. It may take more of your time to write, or it may take less. Some prefer essay writing, others prefer narratives, and this second paper is of the narrative type. Me: I don't write narratives well, but because of the change of direction I am now driving, as I previously mentioned, I have chosen to write my dissertation in a narrative format. It seems more suitable since the prison writers I am so bent on studying, and those others who have already left strong legacies through their own writing, have mostly written in narrative form. Plus, it fits better for the study that I am now pursuing, which, is really only a move from researching process, to researching three questions you'll read below.

For this second writing request I am asking of you, I am also asking that my participants employ narrative writing, too. I know you have strong writing abilities in almost all the genres, so hopefully this will be easier for you. Like I said, I will also be putting together a questionnaire for you, and then there might still be one or two other minor writing requests I may have, but I will try to get them all out to you soon, so your 12-month calendar white board can be arranged accordingly. ☺

Here are the three questions that I'd like you to answer, as artistically and articulately as possible, in one narrative document.

- What got you started as a writer? In other words, what has *made* you a successful writer? What outside inspirations, role models, pieces of literature, and subsequent literary motivators (people, life episodes, etc.) might explain how you began writing? And I am talking about writing in the capacity to which you currently do it – well, a lot, and with great pleasure. Do you think it's an inherent trait/ability? If so, explain. Or, did it develop procedurally, like character? Did you somehow *grow* into becoming someone we can *call* a writer? And if so, how would you capture that sense of growth reflectively in a narrative? Would you?
- What sustains you and keeps you writing? Would you also be able to write a narrative that articulates your reason(s)?
- What legacy, as a highly successful prison writer, do you hope to leave and/or accomplish? And would you write your response as a narrative?

I apologize for this new direction and change in my research. I hope you understand. The changes are due to a number of factors, but the best explanation can be summed up in... academia! Still, it's as though you already knew this was happening, because your essay "Why Write?" seemed to already answer some of the various aspects of these questions. Therefore, for this second writing task, I would hope to see you expand on these three areas with a lovely narrative that I can quote and quote and quote throughout my own narrative – not that I am unable to do that with your first essay. It certainly has lots for me to quote, and lots for me to scrutinize and further investigate. So, as I said, I will compile additional questions and get those out to you soon.

I believe that is it for now.

Thanks again... so much! I am truly, truly happy to have you be a part of my writing life.

Sincerely,

Alva Ramon

Appendix G

Record of Achievement for Mil

EDUCATION:

Diploma, West Mifflin North High School, 1964, National Honor Society, Varsity Swimming
B.S., Mechanical Engineering, Carnegie Mellon University, 1970, English Minor, Varsity
Swimming, ROTC

Post-baccalaureate study, Mechanical Engineering, Carnegie Mellon University, 1970;
Advanced Strength of Materials

Certificate, Advanced Electrical Control Systems, United States Steel Industrial Program, 1970
Study in Child Development, Community College of Allegheny County, 1972-1975

Certificate, Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program, Northampton County Community
College, 1975

B.A., Magna Cum Laude, English Literature and Psychology (dual major), University of
Pittsburgh, 1978

Graduate Studies, Curriculum and Supervision Program, School of Education, University of
Pittsburgh, 1979-1982

Study in Legal Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 1985-1986

Certificate, Engineer-in-Training, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, October 31, 1987

EXPERIENCE:

1996-1990 New Product Designer, CORRECTIONAL INDUSTRIES DIVISION, State
Correctional Institution at Pittsburgh: designed a Logo Trash Can; designed
custom-made counter-type shelving units with sliding doors and a stainless steel
sink for Department of Environmental Protection; designed a 6-man welded steel
table, custom single and double-tier lockers for Northampton County Prison;
designed a special series of bookshelves for Bloomsburgh University Bookstore;
modified design of pallet racks to assure adequate strength; fabricated new main
prison gate designed previously; designed 1.5 million dollars worth of steel
furniture for five new Pennsylvania prisons built by Rotondo-PennCast; designed
bear traps for Pennsylvania Game Commission; designed stainless steel separator,
weir, splash guard, and conveyors for Rockview prison farm; designed rollover
simulator for Pennsylvania State Police; designed structural steel cantilever rack
and custom shop furniture for East Penn School District; designed heavy-duty
library shelves for SCI-Somerset.

1996-1989 Chief Engineer, NEW DIRECTIONS, a family owned business: Value Added
Reseller of Personal Computers

1996-1983 Paralegal, pro bono public litigation concerning child custody, parental rights and
visitation matters

1996-1978 Teaching Consultant, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH: English, Psychology,
History and Philosophy of Science Departments

- 1990-1986 Assistant employed in engineering office, STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION AT PITTSBURGH: designed a 48" O.D. x 9'5" long, mild steel tank with dished heads to withstand a design pressure of 50 psi.; designed structural steel reinforcement of laundry floor; designed repair of 48" Wysong power shear cracked main bed; designed structural steel reinforcement of live shelf in coal silo; designed complete rebuild of coal handling equipment, including 80; high elevator section; automated monthly and annual reports with PC; AutoCAD drafting; drafting; designed new main "slam" gate for prison.
- 1983-1979 Professional Poet, PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL ON THE ARTS, Poets-in-the-Schools program: enjoyed an internal rating of 5, the highest rating available for poets who work in schools.
- 1983-1977 Instructor, COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF ALLEGHENY COUNTY: Mathematics, Physics, Engineering Departments; Academic Advisor
- 1982-1981 Project Engineer/Consultant, ECONOMY INDUSTRIAL CORPORATION: redesign of ingot casting machine to produce non-standard ingots; redesign of high capacity gas-oil burner system of a ferro-nickel casting machine; redesign of coil tilting machine; calculated conditions at impact of various configurations of "pig knockers" (devices which strike an adjustable blow to the end of each mold as it rounds the head sprocket, assisting in sticker discharge).
- 1975-1972 Children's Play Monitor, Rogers-McFeeley Foundation project
- 1972-1971 Tutor, ALLEGHENY INTERMEDIATE UNIT, Adult Basic Education
- 1971-1966 Engineer, UNITED STATES STEEL CORPORATION, Central Engineering Construction Division: the Irvin Works Plant was undergoing a \$250,000,000.00 "Cold Rolled Sheet Expansion Program," and responsibilities included: CPM scheduling; Electrical Inspection of new substation, made field change to large circuit breakers; oversaw construction of Five Stand Cold Reduction Mill, River Pump House modifications, Recoil Line, Shear Line, Waste Water Treatment Plant; helped resolve limit switch problem; correctly analyzed cause of failure of 12" shaft on new Morris pump
- Summer '65 Mill Worker, UNITED STATES STEEL CORPORATION: repaired large electric/hydraulic powered tractors
- Summer '65 Ride Manager, KENNYWOOD AMUSEMENT PARK: responsible for mechanical maintenance of rides
- Summer '64 Shop boy, KENNYWOOD AMUSEMENT PARK: apprenticed under carpenters, mechanics, and electricians
- 1971-1958 Part-time Land Surveyor and Draftsman for Registered Professional Engineer in West Mifflin, PA (RUDOLPH ANDREW [last name omitted], P.E., No. 4689-E).

MEMBERSHIPS:

- Elected by the Board of Governors to full Member, American Society of Mechanical Engineers: required showing a minimum of five years of "responsible charge" of engineering work
- Founder and Editor, Academy of Prison Arts: author of 12 successful grant applications to the National Endowment for the Arts and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

POETRY, STORIES, AND REVIEWS PUBLISHED IN THE FOLLOWING PUBLICATIONS:

American Ethnic, Backspace, Caprice, Carnegie Mellon Magazine, Confrontation, Gravity, Greenfield Review, Happiness Holding Tank, Hyacinths & Biscuits, Interstate, Journal of Popular Culture, Mill Hunk Herald, New Orleans Review, Painted Bride Quarterly, Poetry Society of American Bulletin, Prison Writing Review, Small Pond, and many others, including poems in national newspapers

PUBLISHED POETRY BOOKS:

Past the Unknown, Remembered Gate (Greenfield Review Press: New York) 1981
Patterns in the Dusk (King Publications: Washington, D.C.) 1978
A Book . (V. Mark Press: Pittsburgh) 1974
(Ed.) Anthology: *Kicking Their Heels with Freedom* (Academy of Prison Arts: Pittsburgh) 1982
(Ed.) Anthology: *The Light From Another Country* (Greenfield Review Press: New York) 1984

POETRY READINGS:

Three Rivers Arts Festival, American Wind Symphony, University of Pittsburgh, Community College of Allegheny County, WYEP-FM 91.5, WQED-FM 89.3, Monitor Radio, Voice of America, and others

SPEAKING CONTESTS:

Winner, 3 technical speaking contests: American Society of Mechanical Engineers and Society of Automotive Engineers, 1970

HONORS:

Winner, Fourth Poetry and Prose Writing Contest, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, 1988
Winner, First Poetry and Prose Writing Contest, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, 1985
Nominated by publisher for "The Pushcart Prize" 1984
Kicking Their Heels with Freedom, honored in *Carnegie Magazine* as one of 20 best books of the year and placed on display at Carnegie Library
Honorable Mention, P.E.N. Writing Award, 1976-1977
Winner, Bicentennial Souvenir Design Contest, 1976 (\$75.00)
Inventor of nonlethal gun appearing in Oct., 1970 *Mechanics Illustrated, Carnegie Technical,* and *Product Engineering*
Winner, two Amateur Athletic Union Power lifting trophies

LISTED IN:

A Directory of American Poets, The International Who's Who in Poetry, Directory of Distinguished Americans, Pennsylvania Writers Collection, Contemporary Authors, Vesta's Who's Who of North American Poets, The International Directory of Distinguished Leadership, International Authors and Writers Who's Who

Appendix H

Publishing Credits for Cob

Short Stories

1983. "The Walnut Tree." *Crosscurrents*, Summer Issue.
1984. "The Boy in the Barn." *Crosscurrents*.
1985. "The Farmer and the Buck." *Pennsylvania Game News*, October.
1987. "Listen to the Trees Sing." *Country Magazine*, August, later anthologized in a hard cover, *Best of Country Magazine*.
2002. "The Man that Could." *Piperliner Hall-of-Fame Magazine*.
2013. "The Named and the Nameless." Winner. Eaton Literary Agency's short fiction contest. Book of collected short stories. *A Land Called Honalee*.

Memoir

2012. "My Father's Violin." PEN America, awarded Honorable Mention.
2013. "Painting the Sunset." PEN America, awarded first prize.

Non-fiction Articles & Essays

- Article about trapping. *Fur-Fish-Game*, 1987.
"The Smallest Barbershop in the World." *Grit Magazine*, 1990.
"The Centaur's Son." First prize winner. PEN Prison Writing Contest. 2015.

Newspaper Work

- 1985-1987 Tri-County Record (Morgantown, PA) Outdoor columnist, reporter, feature writer, interviewer, and photographer
1987-1989 News of Southern Berks (Boyerstown, PA) Outdoor columnist, and occasional reporter
1990-1991 Tri-County Record (Morgantown, PA) Feature writer, photographer, and occasional reporter
10/22/89 Reading Eagle (Reading, PA) Reprint of my Linda Grace Hoyer interview that originally appeared in the Tri-County Record

Novels

- A Haven From Violence. Self-published. 2002. at Xlibris.
Coon Tales. Self-published. 2007. Xlibris. Publication subsequently halted

Unpublished, completed novels

- A Redneck Ragnarok (Magical Realism)
Dreaming of Oxen

Appendix I

Writing Bio for Marty

Marty is the editor of, and a contributor to (“Too Cruel a Fate” & “The Five Stages of Life Without the Possibility of Parole”), *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough* (The Steering Committee Press 2013), winner of the 2013 Independent Publisher Book Award for best anthology. Ken is also the author of the memoir *Mother California: A Story of Redemption Behind Bars* (Atlas & Co. 2009/2015), winner of the 2010 Eric Hoffer Book Award for memoir and a 2010 Nautilus Book Awards silver medalist. He has been widely published in the *New York Times*, the International Herald Tribune, the St. Petersburg Times, the Long Beach Press Telegram, the San Diego Union-Tribune, the Bakersfield Californian, the Vacaville Reporter, and the National Catholic Reporter, writing about prison life and prison reform issues. His magazine articles have appeared in The New Abolitionist, Tidal Basin Review, The Bear Deluxe Magazine, Playboy Magazine, Utne Reader, Notre Dame Magazine, Topic Magazine, East Bay Monthly, Whole Life Times, High Times, and Prison Life. His piece “harder Time,” which appeared in the magazine California Lawyer, won a Maggie Award in 2005 for best-signed editorial. His essay “A Prisoner’s Purpose,” was a prize-winning finalist in the Templeton Foundation’s worldwide Power of Purpose contest in 2004. His piece in the first quarter 2008 edition of the respected academic publication The Prison Journal about the effect of supermax prisons on the consciousness of prisoners is now a part of the curricula of university criminology programs. “The Absent Voice of Prisoners,” appeared in the inaugural edition of J, the journal of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, addressing the need for the inclusion of prisoners’ voices in the process of prison reform. “The Other Death Penalty,” an essay that discusses the broader ramifications of the sentence of life without the possibility of parole, appeared in Journal of Prisoners on Prisons (volume 18:1 & 2; 2009), published by the University of Ottawa Press, and served as the founding document of a grassroots effort by prisoners to abolish this form of the death penalty (See: www.theotherdeathpenalty.org). The Wilson Quarterly (Spring 2011) published Marty’s response to a major criminology issue. Marty’s essay “Searching for the Beautiful Prison” appeared in the academic journal Studies in Law, Politics, and Society (Volume 64, 2014). He has two essays, “The Trouble with Prison,” and “The Trouble with Prison Reformers” in the book Fourth City: Essays from the Prison in America (Michigan State University Press 2014). His essay on spiritual growth, “Seeking Peace,” is in the book Serving Productive Time. His comprehensive essay on the reality of prison and what needs to be done about it, “What Is and What Should Be,” is in the book Honor Comes Hard: Writings from the California Prison System’s Honor ard. The Human Kindness Foundation’s newsletter, A Little Good News, detailed Marty’s writing and prison reform efforts. His work has also appeared on numerous websites, including The Huffington Post, CounterPunch.org, StateofNature.org, OpEdNews.com, RedRoom.com, LATimes.com, SanFranciscoBayView.com, The Good Men Project, and Justice Not Jails, as well as on Jon’sJailJournal blogsite, among others. Marty has also begun his own blog, “The Mother California Chronicles,” located at ww.betweenthebars.org/blogs/7268. [contact information omitted]

Appendix J

Bio for Jon

Jon is a poet, a teaching artist, a native flute player and a prisoner. In 1978 he began serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole, and has served time in more than half a dozen California state prisons. Years ago, while at San Quentin State Prison, Jon enrolled in a four-year poetry workshop run by Judith Tannenbaum. It was there he discovered he was a writer. Since that time he has published several books and is featured in Michael Wenzler's award winning 2011 full length documentary *At Night I Fly – Tales from New Folsom*, the title based on one of Jon's poems. Jon also received international attention for his work when he played Pozzo in the 1988 production of *Waiting for Godot* directed by Jan Jonson. Jon has written plays, poetry, novels, fairytales, short stories, essays and memoir and frequently writes a column for The Good Men Project. With friends from Sweden, Jon started "Peace Gang," to spread and share his poetry, and Michael Wenzler's 2003 documentary "Three Poems by Jon" [pseudonym is substituted for real name] features Jon reciting his poems, taped from telephone calls. Jon has also won four awards from PEN American Center's Prison Writing Program.

Prison of some kind exists everywhere. We all suffer from time and the body that encases our hearts, spirits and souls, no matter who or where we are on this planet. I write from indignation, sadness, peace, pain, love, hope and dreams. What I feel depends on what I am doing or observing. Some poems and prose are written through tears. See my poems "Go on," "How Long," "No Moon," and my prose text "Right Now I Choose Sadness."

Jon has been in the art world and in prison for nearly thirty years. He first published *Longer Ago* (2010), a book of poems, and then co-authored *By Heart: Poetry, Prison, and Two Lives* (2010), a narrative/memoir, with Judith Tannenbaum, his writing teacher (2010). Jon is celebrated for his poetry and four awards from the PEN American Center Prison Writing Program. The awards were in poetry, nonfiction, fiction, and memoir. Additionally, a documentary was made about his life and writing, and the film won awards in five countries; it is named, "Three Poems by Jon (real name omitted, and pseudonym substituted)" (2003).