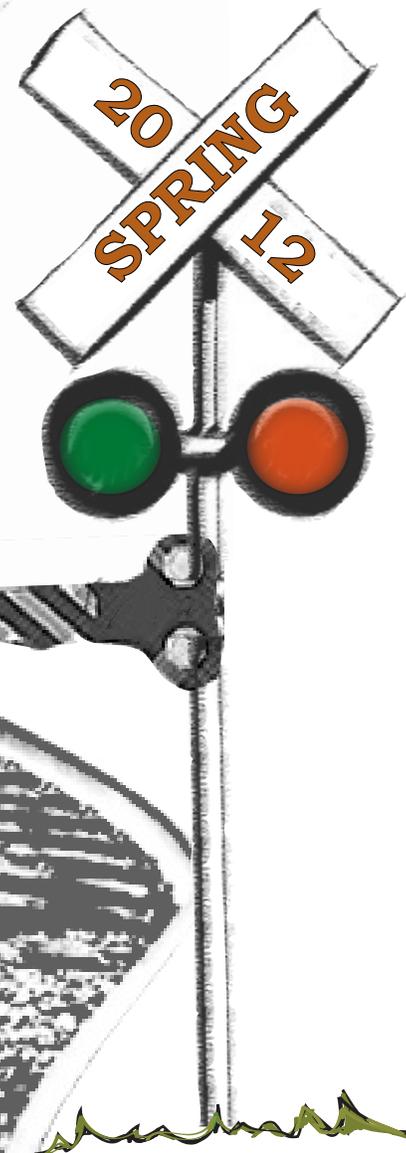


WRITER'S BLOC



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GARY FINE AND PRISONER EXPRESS
FOR THE BEAUTIFUL ARTWORK AND FOR EXPANDING OUR MISSION AND IMPACT

WRITER'S BLOC LITERARY JOURNAL IS AN INDEPENDENT STUDENT PUBLICATION PRODUCED BY STUDENTS IN THE CORNELL PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAM AND CORNELL UNIVERSITY. WRITER'S BLOC IS AN INDEPENDENT STUDENT ORGANIZATION LOCATED AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY WHO PRODUCED AND IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONTENT OF THIS PUBLICATION. THIS PUBLICATION WAS NOT REVIEWED OR APPROVED BY, NOR DOES IT NECESSARILY EXPRESS OR REFLECT THE POLICIES OR OPINIONS OF, CORNELL UNIVERSITY OR ITS DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVES.

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Dear Reader,

In your hands is the collaborative effort of Cornell students in the Ithaca campus and in the Auburn and Cayuga correctional facilities. Each new edition of this literary journal brings to light a new aspect of the incarcerated experience. As many of the pieces in this journal express, the incarcerated experience—much like the student experience—consists of much personal growth on spiritual, mental, and physical levels. In the outside world, such growth is measured by the ways in which everyday interactions with new and old people, places, and things develop and change. Yet in prison, where there is little inter-exchange, we on Writer's Bloc imagine that the walls are often poor mirrors to reflect the immense growth that comes with years of transformative changes. As in the outside world, those in prison still suffer from loss, revel in success, and fall deeply in and out of love. In this issue, we at Writer's Bloc ask, how is it possible to move through the many motions and phases of life when one is forced to remain stationary?

In honor of the first graduating class of the Cornell Prison Education Program, this edition of Writer's Bloc tells tales of loss, success, and love and the human experience of pushing forward through it all. Commencement, while referring to the final academic event in a student's career, means the start of a new chapter. We at Writer's Bloc want to congratulate this year's graduates, along with all current and former students in the program, on their tremendous brilliance and hard work. No matter what lies behind you or what lies ahead, we look forward to the wonderful things you will undoubtedly bring to this world—and hopefully share with us.

Write on!

Writer's Bloc Staff



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SEND YOUR WORK TO:

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“My Shoes!” Mr. Anonymous

As I sit in my cell, my eyes begin to wander. My mind searches for the reason why I'm in this place. Being alone and confined has made me realize what's really been missing from my life. Finally, I focus in on something that I would have overlooked before. You would overlook it too, but being here has improved my vision, so I can see what's really been here all along. They lay there harmlessly, innocently, motionless, seemingly unaware.

They are “my shoes!” They wait and wonder as to what has happened. Where are the streets, the beach, the green grass of the park, or even the occasional mishap of stepping in dog shit? “My shoes” have seen better days. They long for a taste of the past. They ask, “Where are the familiar roads we once traveled on?” Here the roads are the same, day after day.

“My shoes” hide a story. They know where I have been. I know the true story of “my shoes”. I've traveled on the roads to get here. People prejudice. They think that they know the roads “my shoes” have been on. HOW PRESUMPTUOUS! No one knows but ME and GOD. You can only know the roads I've been on if your feet were in “my shoes”. If you knew the steps that “my shoes” took, you would not be so quick to pass judgment.

Now “my shoes” are quiet. They sit and wait as time passes them by. Where will “my shoes” go tomorrow or the next day? The future of “my shoes” looks bleak...God only knows.

From where I'm at, you would not want to be in “my shoes”.

But, I realize, that not many-if any- could even fill “my shoes”...



Drag Racer Lucas W. Whaley

I take another step forward.
Twisted metal. Gasoline fumes. Burnt rubber.
I walk through a wasteland of rock and sand.
I walk through a wasteland of desolation and death.

Vengeful ghosts.
The sky above is roiling pitch,
bleeding its ashy tears down upon me.
Behind the maelstrom there is the barest flash of thunder,
the slightest boom of lightning.

I take another step forward.
Twisted metal. Gasoline fumes. Burnt rubber.
The entire landscape glows with a gray light I can taste on my skin.
It is slick, like razors, and smells cold.
Mountains tower in the distance creating a jagged, pulsing horizon.
They appeared days ago, maybe years,
and despite my relentless march they are no closer.
At least they aren't any further away.

I take another step forward.
Twisted metal. Gasoline fumes. Burnt rubber.

There.

A figure is moving toward me.
A midnight scar against the darkness.
Balled fists.
Purposeful strides becoming frenzied charges.
I curl my fingers into screams.
Roars like the sundering of ages.

I take another step forward.
Twisted metal. Gasoline fumes. Burnt rubber.
My blood rises in a cacophony as I meet my enemy.
Faces rent like concrete gorges.
The symmetry of gaping wounds.



The Traveler **Eric Paris Whitfield**

The road has been lengthy, arduous, uneven...

Arms folded around thoughts of Cartesian.

Even more so because I'm travelling with Deferred Dreams.

Old fringes of yesterday, grabbing at me—Felt...yet rarely seen.

Walking... shoes, once stiff leather, now are bare threaded. Soles eaten by the indignation only time can reveal. Stones pressing through the holes. Life kissing at my toes.

I'm resolved to travel this road.

Traveling... back bent, lungs spent, sometimes fallen, but never giving in.

Embracing the love of those that have been lent.

My past is mere memories. Breath stolen by time.

It's the unscripted, unsoiled pages of the Future that are to become mine.

Today — is my Pen.

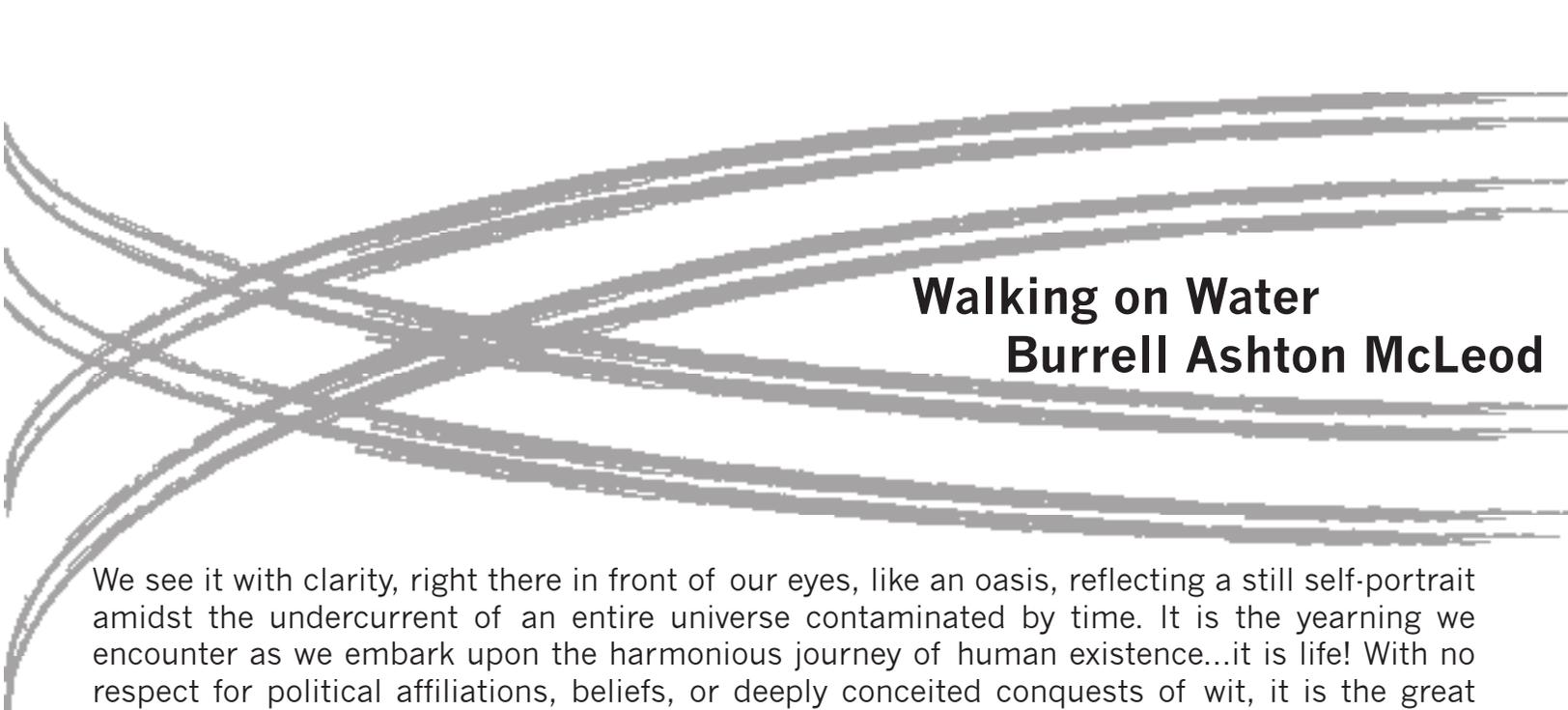
I've nourished the bird in my hands... As I remain vigilant of that sparrow that still eludes me.

My mind is set...

Tempest winds cannot deter my path.

Nor keep me anchored to the lies that cannot last.

My mind is set...



Walking on Water Burrell Ashton McLeod

We see it with clarity, right there in front of our eyes, like an oasis, reflecting a still self-portrait amidst the undercurrent of an entire universe contaminated by time. It is the yearning we encounter as we embark upon the harmonious journey of human existence...it is life! With no respect for political affiliations, beliefs, or deeply conceited conquests of wit, it is the great balance to which we are all conformed.

At a certain point, there comes a time in every individual's life when he or she has to take into account: what will be our final message (or purpose) at the end of his or her childhood? A time when our dreams are no longer scattered images, but one spark will give rise to our desires for a greater common good, and our sense of equality will be another addition to the ideals of civility. I swear to you, I've dreaded that moment far too long; not for want, or the lacking of an eye-opening experience, but more or less where actions would become so instantly matched by my words that they're identical. However, the want for such a virtuous desire can blind one of many obstacles that might befall, or missed opportunities for growth into the next stages of life.

Now, I place these words before you in absence of my human error. As well, I place before you a life and all of nature's unending trials. I am a son, given as a gift to two individuals united in love at one moment in time. Then I had become a father, blessed with the responsibility of my children's upbringing, although life's gift tested me to bear the grief of their souls' departure. I am the companion of a mate whose virtue had been stolen at the hands of human ruin and pillage. Yet, I am a man, torn asunder by the mirage of the gospel of wealth and have taken from my final living offspring the greatest gift they have ever known. I am no philosopher of sorts, nor am I the caretaker of the great divide, but once a partaker in the contaminants of time.

Finally, my dearest Faith and Khamarni, I have walked humbly upon thy clear reflection of that blue sky amidst the uncertainty of much untamed waves. However, I took for granted the lessons of my time and have forsaken my duties, never taking into account the ripples I'd left behind. I am human, and yet still fathered by time, though it seems that walking on water isn't always so clear; nonetheless, you must not be afraid to step forward, walking in gentleness, and in the solace of knowing that you are uncontaminated by the water of my lifetime.

Dedicated to my children and wife

Knowledge
Gregory J. Robinson

I have passed.

I have, at last, returned to life.

I've been taught by writing out narratives of what I remembered.

Becoming numb in increments, excitement, and by reading the writings to my classmates.

I found perspective in the lessons.

I found information sufficient to inform the heat of my spirit.

And now I have become...

aware; I let go the dreaded story of ignorance.

I am here now and I want more.

A man stands and says these words:

I carry on to other places, by other means, lessons to keep.

I take that which has been taught to me, a responsibility.

I've known all along and now I become one with those who will not turn their ears away.

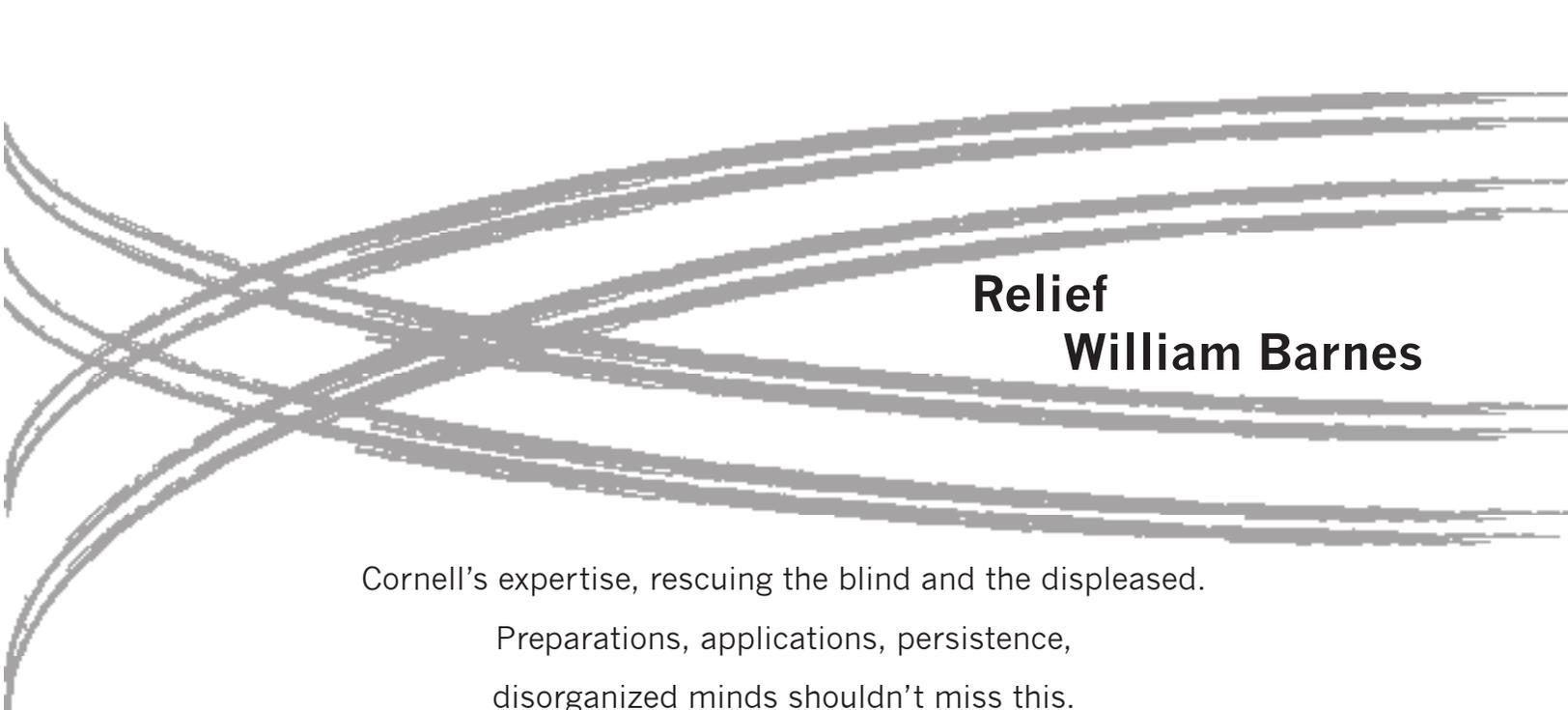
I do not wish to forego what has been so long in coming.

I can't deny my responsibility...

I wonder what will I do!

To know is arrogance, to not know, stupidity...

Life lies somewhere in between.



Relief William Barnes

Cornell's expertise, rescuing the blind and the displeased.

Preparations, applications, persistence,
disorganized minds shouldn't miss this.

Cornell's extending college academics.

Amending, enhancing, and only positively seeking attendance.

Inhaling selections, sorting out rejections.

Cornell's initiating good attitudes, beliefs, expectations.

Introducing goals, reaching student's destinations.

Cornell's a key to many opportunities,

building members to asset productive communities.

Elevation a must, conquering grief equipped with educational knowledge,

The tools of relief.

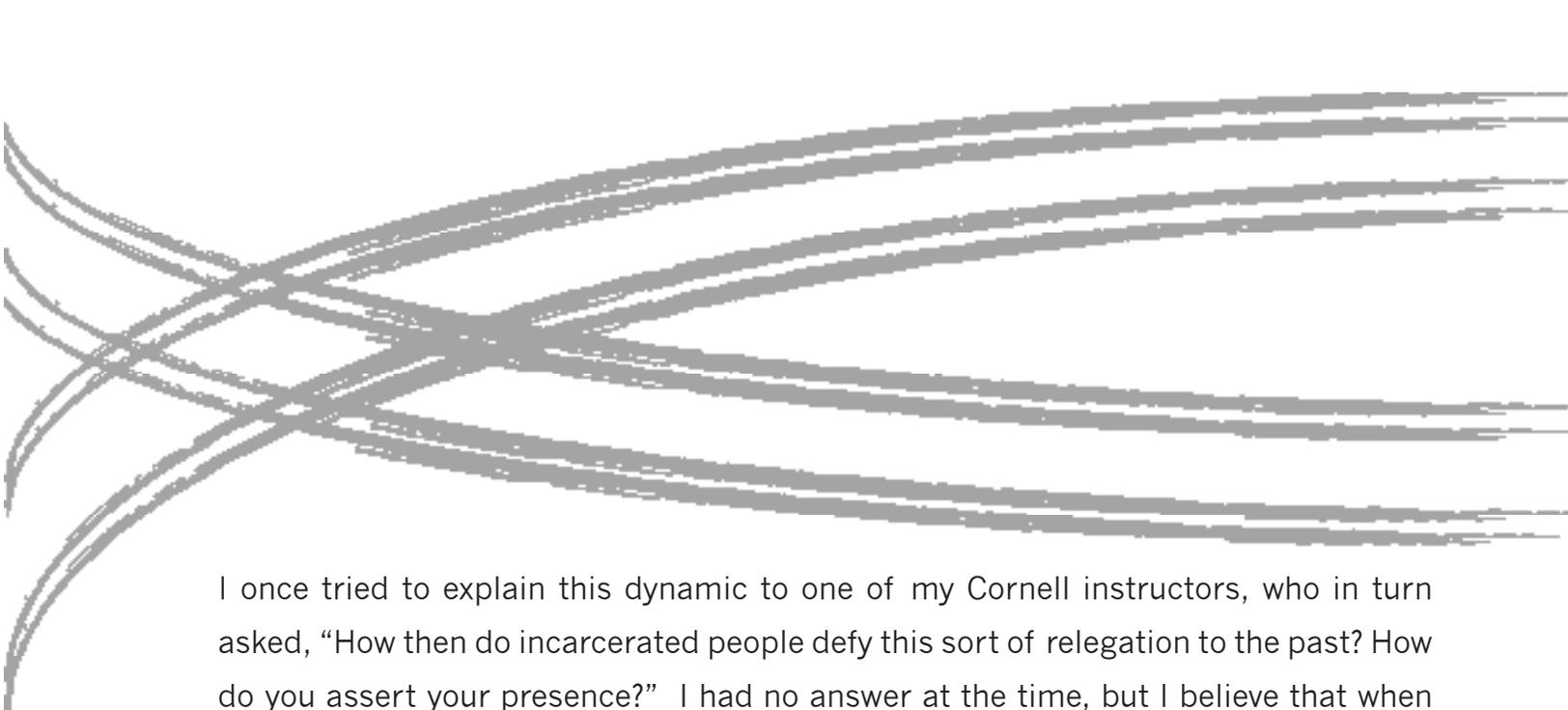
Sublimation

Joshua Keppen

I thought I knew what freedom was when I was young and on my own. I misunderstood it for a type of wildness, but that's not really freedom. I couldn't see how every bad decision I made only narrowed my course through life. Patterns of violence and crime were reinforced every time I pushed a little further. I'd tell myself, "Don't let that kid snap on you like that, bark back at 'em." So I did. That led to fights. I thought, why wait for a fight to happen? Just throw the first punch. So I would set it off. Then others got involved and upped the ante so that we began to feed off each other's aggression. Soon we brought weapons. . . then we always had to have weapons. Using them became reflexive. Suddenly, I found myself in a world without options and everyone else was to blame. Bad decisions became a lifestyle that held me back, like invisible chains. But how do you shake off the shackles that cut so deeply that they bite into your very soul. . . becoming a part of you?

Isaac Asimov once said, ". . . violence is the last resort of the incompetent (man)." He was talking about me. In the "free world," I had thousands of options to solve my problems. But all too often violence and crime were my first choices. These solutions caused more problems than they solved. . . I just couldn't see it then.

Now that I'm in prison, the loss of freedom is profoundly felt. It's not just the choices I can no longer make, but the opportunities that are forever lost to time. Things I could have changed if I was there, I've been powerless to affect. Powerlessness. I feel these last two the most. I cannot change the past and I am constantly haunted by it; as well as by this type of pseudo-existence I share with the people I love. I've become a voice on the phone, ink on paper . . . incorporeal.



I once tried to explain this dynamic to one of my Cornell instructors, who in turn asked, “How then do incarcerated people defy this sort of relegation to the past? How do you assert your presence?” I had no answer at the time, but I believe that when you have nothing (save memories of the past), you learn to cherish the things you can hold onto and use them in new and fresh ways. And so, imagination becomes an instrument of freedom along with self-expression. Our minds can wander, unrestrained by the bars, walls, distances, and time, as they seek sustenance in fantasy.

When matter changes state, it must follow an order of transition. As an example, ice (a solid) must melt into water (liquid) before it can become a gas. Sometimes, in special circumstances, ice breaks the rules and goes directly into a gaseous state. This process is called sublimation. Sometimes, people in prisons break the established rules of order, in a good way. We can follow this process of sublimation and liberate our minds, even while our bodies remain confined. This manner of sublimated transcendence is the way we can keep our sanity and humanity. It’s how we can heal and grow.

The Plan Andre Cates

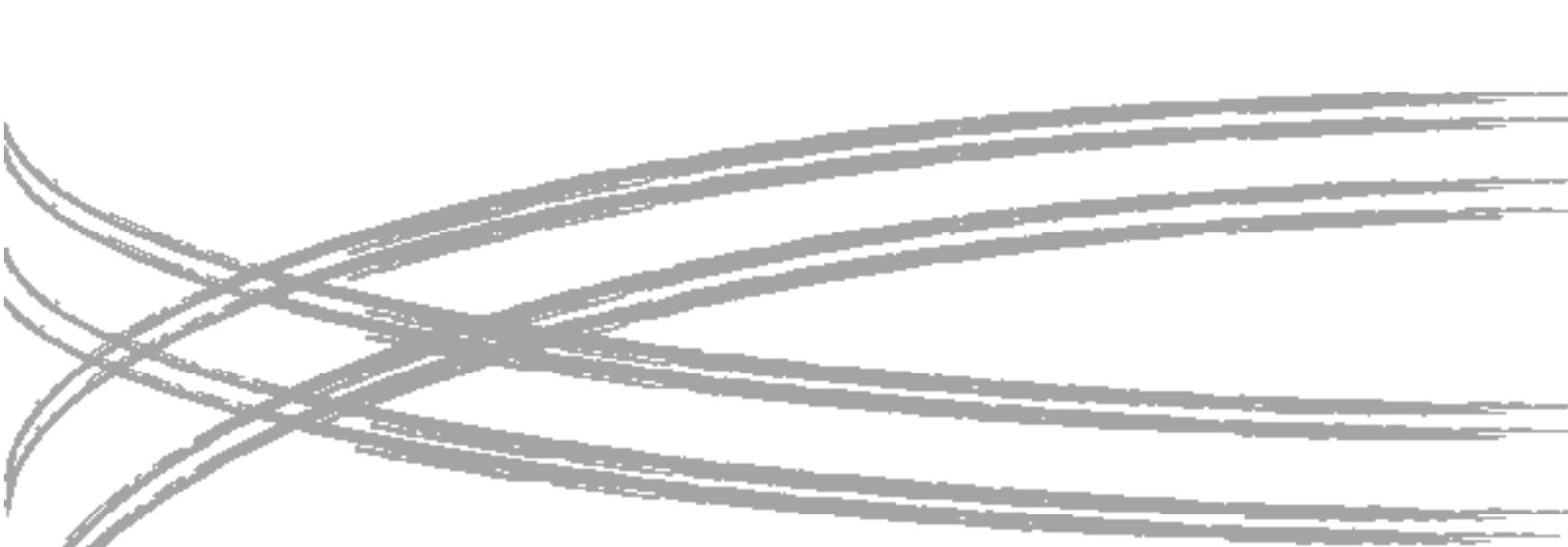
My journey began on a bright sunny day.
 "Nay!" I say
 To my long prison stay.

It seemed like a dream for so many years,
 Through many nights of fears
 That ended in tears.
 They have taught me the way
 (One was even a sensei),
 In which I can realize my plan
 By just holding a hand.

 Thank you professors,
 For what you have given me.
 You have planted a tree
 To inspire all of humanity.
 I intend to spread the wealth
 That is knowledge of the self,
 To those in need
Because of the desire that is their greed.

 You have compelled me by your wisdom,
 Your charisma was even great.
 Now I can relate.
 My brain I do saturate
 With how to contemplate
And excel in this Empire State.

 Your value is precious
 Like a diamond in a colliery.
 You have lent your time and dollary,
 To me! Golly!
I am blessed to have been your student,
 You have shown me how to be luculent.
 Oh yes! I will repent,
 Again, again, and again...



I must not forget the students who came in as well
To an unimagined hell,
To help me unfurl and spread my wings
With all the new things
I intend to bring
To my community.

There is that sea
In my community,
Of children who will be
All that was me,
Before I shook off the misery
And learned that I am great,
Learned not to accept this fate
That is filled with loathing of inmates,
That has jumped into a new seat.

This is just a sneak peek
At my ultimate feat...

So, you see, this is my plan:
To never release that hand
Until from that quicksand,
Which has held me for so long.
I sing a new song
Entitled, "Freedom Is Here To Stay."
The professors and students – they deejay
With an air of happiness.
They won't be listless
In what I accomplish in their name.
In my eyes,
They are famed.

March 12, 2012
Michael Shane Hale

Your belief in humanity,
raises the possibility of rehabilitation.

Your commitment gives life,
to the possibility of re-entry.

Your vision provides a path
for the possibility of restoration.

Your belief, commitment, and vision
Allow us to realize our humanities, lives, and paths.

“Cherish graduation as the seed of the universe, that which is beyond limitation”
-Gregory J. Robinson

“But how do you shake off the shackles that cut so deeply that they bite into your very soul, becoming a part of you?”
-Joshua Keppen

“Mountains tower in the distance, creating a jagged pulsing horizon. They appeared days ago, maybe years, and, despite my relentless march, they are no closer. At least they aren't any farther away.”
-Lucas W. Whaley