

Four Page One Moments from a Denver Men's Prison

The following 4 stories by William Freemire, Matthew, Lysander Harvey, and Anthony J. Gillespie emerged from a workshop attended by about twenty-three writers at Fremont Correctional Facility in Colorado. This group was possible through collaboration with the University of Denver Prison Arts Initiative (DU PAI); attending writers had other recently finished or were about to begin an ongoing writing class facilitated by an incarcerated writer, Bob Eisenmann. We met for three hours on a single Friday afternoon.



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That Was Your 1st - That Was My Last - 4th of July

by William Freemire

You were learning life on your own terms, but I guess you had to. You were only 5 months old. You learned what the 4th of July was and I witnessed your surprise and fear when the fireworks started their negotiation with the sky. BOOM, the conversation began and your face crumbled as the reverberations echoed in our chest cavities. The sky lit up with fireworks claiming their space. A whistle shrieks a warcry with an angry tail disappearing and silent, then KA-BOOM this arrangement being brokered in the heavens as you tried to discern this foreign language. Tears rolling down your cheeks and I felt helpless with nowhere to hide you from the deafening explosions. I held you tight. I was so mad I didn't have fear protection for you. As this war of the 4th taking claim to the ethers, you deciphered the code in this lingo of compromise. You listened as the multiple whistles burst into rhythmic sparks entangled with the stars. It was a shriek met with the biggest smile and laugh. You stood proud but not as proud as I was witnessing you conquer that moment. You were so cute and it was the only and last moment we called ours.

Inevitable Guilt

by Matthew

Just have faith. Believe. Visualize the outcome. Hell, remember the psychological evaluation I just had. If that shrink of all people recommends I not go to prison, surely all my supporters' belief in the justice system means something. That their well-intentioned feel-good advice might be real. That this judge before me can see through the well dressed narrative about me. That the facts speak for themselves and I'm not going to prison. Oh shit. Time to read my statement to the court.

Why is it so crowded today? I've had countless court dates during the last year and none of them have been as crowded as it is today. It'll be ok, your lawyer liked what you wrote, just remember what your sponsor told you and put your heart into it. Wow. That was real. This is real. Oh my God, I'm about to be sentenced for a felony crime in a court of law. Don't they know what happened? As much as I want to believe, I think the advice from my lawyer applies now. Did I prepare myself enough to accept a prison sentence today? What will my parents do? What will my AA friends think? I'm so happy they all came this morning, but did I actually just invite them to witness my incarceration? Why does it feel like my lawyer is on his heels? He is babbling. He used suck slick ten dollar words when we were together, he made me believe it would be ok. Now he is cowering before the judge,

borrowing his book to double check a statute. Was I so naive to think it wouldn't happen?

It's all over. The DA belittled every positive contribution I've ever made. She gave the guy right before me so much positive recognition for his sobriety. Was mine all for nothing? The judge said this is a "difficult" case, I think the sheer number of people in the courtroom scares him. He can't believe me. I'm the bad guy, bad guys deserve punishment. This past year was mere formality and my lawyer warned me so. Is that why he seemed so unprepared? Resign. Resign. Resign. What is going to happen now? How many years? I didn't hear what the judge said, everything is a blur. I just want to see my mom. Why did everybody jump at me? I'm not trying to look at my accuser. Did you think I was going to run? Where is my mom? I can hear her crying.

Chow Hall

by Lysander Harvey

On our way to chow I entered with him. John, a 6 foot tattoo white guy with short hair. For the last two weeks we've played cards and shared our frustration over our sentences together.

Today was the first time we were allowed in the chowhall. We grabbed our trays and headed for a seat. The moment he realized I was following him, he turned, looked me square in the eye and said, "Hey man, white and blacks don't sit with each other, I'll see you back at the cell house."

Baffled and offended, I didn't know what to say. I started sweating getting warm as I processed what he just said to me. "What!" was the only thing I could bring myself to say to him. He walked off leaving me to stand there lost. Shuffling what to do next I sat down by myself realizing this what it means to be black in prison.

Thirteen Dollars... and Fifty-Eight Cents

by Anthony J. Gillespie

Thirteen dollars and fifty-eight cents is the sum of a month of involuntary labor, and unexplained restitution deductions. How the hell do I survive off this? "Three hots and a cot," bit bro ain't never lied! Immediately my stomach growls at my now sweaty pits as the battle begins: hygiene versus food for the month. Then the growls become howls like a wounded dog in the middle of the night. My sweaty pits begin to drip like a leaky faucet. Then a bad combination of gas from dinner and must waiting to be showered tornado together...can my celly smell that? I've gone up and down this canteen list, written 6 different orders, and they all exceed my dollar amount. Damn near broke, you would think this is easy, but now my watery eyes tell me different. I give up and lay back and play a version of my own "duck-duck-goose" to choose my grocery list. This one it is, 8 different items, 1/2-hygiene 1/2-food, the war is over, thirteen dollars and fifty-eight cents well spent. See you next month canteen order.