

EVERY DAY I LIVE, I STRIVE

SARABANDE WRITING LABS, VOL. 9

SARABANDE WRITING LABS

An Arts Education Program from Sarabande Books

Sarabande Writing Labs is an arts education initiative created by Louisville-based nonprofit publisher Sarabande Books. We partner with social service organizations to promote writers in under-resourced communities through free workshops and literary events.

Visit our website for photos, updates, and upcoming events:
www.sarabandebooks.org/swl

ABOUT THIS VOLUME'S PARTNERSHIP:

Sarabande Writing Labs partnered with public health researcher Tasha Golden to provide poetry workshops for young women at Louisville Metro Youth Detention Services. Golden is a poet, songwriter, and doctoral fellow at the University of Louisville, where she researches how the arts can impact public health by amplifying marginalized voices.

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INTRODUCTION

by Tasha Golden

Nationally, the voices of justice-involved girls often go unheard: their stories and needs lost in a system designed for boys. That's one reason it was such a privilege to spend a week writing with seven young women detained at Louisville Metro Youth Detention Services. Other reasons: their laughter, wisdom, and honesty; the importance of their histories and hopes; the intensity of their voices; the depth of their insight.

In *Every Day I Live, I Strive*, these writers describe how others have seen or defined them, how they see themselves, what they need to move forward. Their poems name and rename experiences, redefining and clarifying their worlds. Creative writing is powerful in part because it's a chance to tell one's story for oneself—and there's so much of that power in these pages!

Not that writing was always easy. Between moments of laughter were moments of heavy quiet, of hard questions. How could it be otherwise? Incarceration is heavy and hard,

and so are many of the stories these writers chose to tell. This book is the result of their hard work, their creative risk-taking, their desire to be heard and understood. It's an honor to have had the chance to listen.

And it's an honor to share their work with you. Their hope was that these poems would challenge stereotypes and ignite change: for themselves, their community, and future girls in detention. I believe they will, if we're listening.

“With determination and drive,”

—Tasha Golden
www.tashagolden.com

To the writers: what a privilege to know you. Keep striving.

EVERY DAY I LIVE, I STRIVE

I only can live one day at a time,
so rushing things to happen is not meant to be.
For every day I live, I strive.
I strive to prosper and I strive to change the world.
For my life's not perfect
I try to make a rainy day a positive way
to reveal actions of pride.
I know I am not perfect by any means
and to me life seems unofficial
meaning things can always get better.
Growing up for me was not easy
however, I continued to move forward
and I did not allow trauma to
break me down.
Every day I wake up, I think about my past
not to push me down, but to help me move
to overcome.

—R. T.

I AM FALL LEAVES

I Am Not...

I am not Death, 'cause I'm full of God's Spirit

I am not insensitive, 'cause I'm full of emotion

I Am...

I am fall leaves because I'm color in my own ways

I am curiosity because I love to wonder.

—M. M.

THERE'S SO MUCH MORE

People only see my outer core
but inside there's so much more.

artistic, sweet,
funny, & bright
but they blast me with labels
which just isn't right

I have beauty & brains
& a lot of insight,
but people tend to focus
on what's on the outside.

I take care of my own
and make sure that they eat,
even when I struggle
and am out on the street

I have love in my heart,
not just drugs in my veins
But all I am is a junkie
and it drives me insane.

—*"Tay Renée"*

A BEAUTIFUL BEACH

If I was a landscape
I would be a beautiful beach.
Have cool sand
nice beautiful water
The water would be blue
and you can see through the water
when you get in.
People would have so much fun
with me.

—*H. W.*

MASK

To me I feel that I've put a mask on at the age of 12
and took it off while I've been detained.
I'm 15 now. I've been wearing a black mask,
a thug mask, a gangster mask
to cover up the real me.
I've been through a lot,
so I've put this mask on
to hide and protect my past.
The mask was so thick and hard
that it took me 3 years to take it off.
But once I've took this mask off
people can see who I really am.
My family can tell I've grown
but now that it's off
Imma try hard not to put it on.

—*"Buddha" D. H.*

YOU DON'T KNO ME

You don't kno me
You don't kno what i been through
You don't kno the struggle but lucky for me
i had a strong mother
You don't kno how many times i could have died
but shit 'ats just God telling me it's not my time
You don't kno how it feel to be me
low key going insane mind of a maniac
if you ask me
Pops been locked up all my life
Mama's tryna get me to do Right
It's time to be a role model
but when shit go wrong all i kno
is pick up a bottle

—C. R.

ACTING LIKE I'M OK WHEN I'M NOT!

I always pretend like I'm happy
when I'm not happy
and always smile in people's faces
when I'm hurt on the inside.

—A. M.

MY FUTURE

I want to be a Traveler!
'cause I'm a curious kind
I want to explore & see outside the country
I wanna go to Africa
Paris, France
& India or China.
I love to wonder
& I hope I wander
to different countries!

—*M. M.*

THEY SAY

They say I'm ugly
They say I'm a bad kid
They say I'm tall
They say they care
They say they got me
They say they love me

—*H. W.*

UNTITLED

What I may need to move forward
is guidance
because I see a lack of guidance
as a lack of purpose
to live and to life.
For a lack of understanding
can cause harm to a straight path.

—*R. T.*

THEY SAY

They say I look just like my daddy.

They say I'm talented.

They say they care about me. But...

They say they know how it feels. But...

They say they love me. But...

They say they are going to always be here for me. But...

They say I act older than I really am.

They say I'm smart.

They say I'm really sensitive on the inside, but act hard.

They say it's going to be okay

even when I know it's not.

—*"Buddha" D. H.*

WHAT SOME PEOPLE DON'T KNOW

What some people don't know is

I'm very intelligent

What some people don't know is

I'm only human

What people don't know is

I act dumb so people don't know I'm smart!

What people don't know is

I feel like life's a movie full of suspense

What people don't know is

I have a dad & sister who really cared

—*M. M.*

Y _____,

The baby in your belly
was a gift sent down from God.
Don't let them bring you down
because you're all that baby's got.

Don't worry about your family
saying mean & awful things
saying get an abortion,
because love is what that baby brings.

The love inside your belly
means so much more than life.
It's a future and happiness
no matter how much strife.

You are beautiful and kind
with a heart that stretches wide.
You are smart & so young
but you can change so many lives.

I'll help you through this,
you *are* only 15.
You have a support system
even if it's only me.

—“*Tay Renée*”

YOU DON'T KNOW ME

You don't know how i feel
You don't know what i want
You don't know what i do
You don't know what i see
You don't know about my past
You don't know what i'm going thru
You don't know how bad i wanna go home.

—A. M.

DEAR MAMA,

I love you and I appreciate you
for all you do.

I appreciate the fact you taken care of my son
while I'm locked up.

I know I been careless lately
but everything is about to change.

I'm gone try my best
No it's not gone happen overnight
but soon I'm gone be that daughter
you're proud of.

It's time to get my life on track.

I don't want you to be stressing no more.

I love you.

Love,

—C. R.

THEY SAY

They say you can do it.

They say you're gonna make it.

They say you're gonna go home.

They say keep pushing.

They say I'm proud of you because you did it.

—A. M.

YOU DON'T KNOW ME

You don't know how I feel
about waking up here.

You don't know how I truly feel.

You don't know my problems.

You don't know what I like 2 do.

You don't know how I feel about my R____.

You don't know how I feel about being here.

You don't know what I can do if I go back home.

—*H. W.*

STRAIGHT AHEAD

What I need is guidance, support, and company.
I need somebody to say, “D___ you falling again.
You need to get back right.”
I need somebody I can trust besides a parent
to talk to.
I want somebody who answers my questions
so that I won’t be confused in times.
I don’t wanna look back in time.
I wanna look straight ahead.

—*“Buddha” D. H.*

MY MONSTER

I met the monster.
We held hands and sang.
It was fun at first—
then reality came.

I left the monster,
said goodbye for good.
But he followed me again,
and there he stood.

Strong and fierce,
he wouldn't go away.
He held me down
and forced me to stay.

I tried to leave
again and again,
But there he was
saying we're friends.

I took him back in,
Oh, silly me.
I thought we would be
a one night fling,

but he never left.
He stayed, getting strong
while I got weak
all night and day long.

Two months go by
and I'm rail thin
fighting a battle
I know I won't win

day after day,
lying about him.
No one will know,
I'll just sneak off again.

Then detox comes
dry heaving air
because I never eat
and I have nothing to spare.

My life is in shambles
my eyes filled with tears
sitting in a jail cell
facing 5 years.

Meth is my monster
who never seems to leave.
He waits in the shadows
manipulating the web he weaves,

waiting for the weak
waiting for my time,
to relapse with him
because he calls me "mine."

—*"Tay Renée"*

DON'T CALL ME IMMATURE, CALL ME STUCK

I get called immature by only a few people
friends, strangers & bystanders.

It's my weak mind that sets them to that
'cause I speak before I think
& love to wonder
& I feel like I'm stuck in Time.

Don't call me immature
call me "stuck"
call me "curious"
call me "imaginative"
call me "Traumatized"
call me "Sensitive"
But don't call me *immature*.

I'm not immature.
I got a weak mind,
I'm stuck in my childhood self.
I'm growing physically,
but I'm stuck in time
mentally & emotionally.

—M. M.

STONE COLD

guidance was a lack
hurt was a fact
My mother was a loss
and my family turned they back.

—*R. T.*

YOU DON'T KNOW

You don't know how it feels to be me, period.
You don't know how it feels to have diabetes at a young age.
You don't know how it feels being away from your family a
long time.

To the staff:

You don't know how it feels
being locked up away from the world.
You don't know how it feels
to watch your mama leave but still be stuck in here.

You don't know how it feels to be stuck on something you
can't get off.
You don't know how it feels to have to forgive somebody
that you don't want to.

—“Buddha” D. H.

OUR LIVES WILL BE DIFFERENT

I want to change your life and mine
for better, not for worse
this poem will not be beautiful
even though it's written in verse

our lives will be different
from the homelessness and drugs
from us starving each day
and selling & getting mugged

We won't walk around dirty
with the clothes from last week
We won't walk around exhausted
from the days without sleep

We will be in a home
with food and a bed
without all the substances
that mess with our heads

We won't fight and argue
about silly little things
I won't throw things at you
and you won't pull guns on me

We'll be in love & happy
with possessions of our own
We won't need to steal
and we won't have covers to be blown

Law-abiding citizens,
living normal lives
being a happy couple
with determination and drive

—*“Tay Renée”*

