

FPEP POST

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All of the artwork, essays, and poems included in the magazine are by the currently and formerly incarcerated students around the country, such as William Mann, Ivan Elias Lopez, Michael Douglas, Micheal Taylor, Anthony Cassanova, Michael Taylor, Kevin, Ricardo Lupin, Christopher Dunsmoor and Charles Patrick Newman



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UNVEILING MITIGATION: A Pillar of Restorative Justice for Incarcerated Individuals

DERRICK ST.FORT CCDI, MSW FOUNDER OF MITIGATION AND JUSTICE

Restorative justice encompasses three vital pillars: Mitigation, Education, and Opportunity. While the importance of education during incarceration and postrelease is well-known, the concept of mitigation remains less familiar but equally crucial. Mitigation plays a pivotal role in preparing for sentencing hearings in criminal cases, aiming to diminish the impact of aggravating factors and provide a holistic understanding of an individual's life journey leading up to the offense.

In the current punitive justice system prevalent in the United States, the emphasis has traditionally been on punishment rather than rehabilitation. This approach, however, has proven ineffective in curbing crime rates. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the implementation of tough-on-crime laws in the 1960s coincided with a surge in incarceration rates, highlighting the limitations of punitive measures. From a few hundred thousand inmates in the 1960s, the number has skyrocketed to over two million in 2024. These staggering statistics underscore the necessity of exploring alternative frameworks, such as restorative justice, which have shown promising results in reducing recidivism and promoting rehabilitation.





Paradise Freedom by Michael Taylor

Mitigation offers a comprehensive strategy to present a nuanced portrait of the defendant's life, beyond the singular focus on the criminal act. Just as a puzzle requires all its pieces to reveal the complete picture, mitigation gathers the various facets of an individual's life to provide context and understanding. It prioritizes repairing harm, fostering accountability, and facilitating the offender's reintegration into society.

Moreover, mitigation aligns educational and rehabilitative opportunities for incarcerated individuals, recognizing the transformative power of education in the rehabilitation process. Access to education equips individuals with the necessary skills to make informed decisions, thereby reducing the likelihood of recidivism. Mitigation specialists play a crucial role in identifying educational, mental health, and treatment programs both during incarceration and upon release, crafting comprehensive discharge plans that encompass familial support and employment opportunities.

As society progresses towards a more equitable and rehabilitative approach to justice, mitigation should become a familiar term to all. It represents a beacon of hope for incarcerated individuals, offering second chances and pathways to a brighter future. By embracing mitigation as a cornerstone of restorative justice, we pave the way for meaningful rehabilitation and societal transformation.

Stay connected with us on Youtube, Instagram and TikTok @MitigationAndJustice

WHY? WHY TEACH ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES (ESOL) IN PRISONS IN THE UNITED STATES OR EVEN AROUND THE WORLD

KERRY PURMENSKY, ANNE PRUCHA

The growing need for teaching ESOL for incarcerated individuals is really a reflection of the world around us. As we see movement of populations from around the world due to natural disasters, climate change, economic challenges, political disruptions – all of this affects our communities. This means people who speak other languages will be moving to improve their situations and, in many cases, this means learning English not only in the United States, but all over the world. It can affect any country where language learners are moving. English is currently the “...dominant lingua franca of international diplomacy, business, science, popular culture, technology and aviation,”¹ so knowing English can benefit people from any place or background.

And of course, this movement also means that there is a subsequent increase in our prisons of those who are still learning the language. This creates a special challenge when trying to provide educational opportunities. Incarcerated students are not able to participate fully in educational programs due to language challenges, so of paramount importance is improving their language skills so they can participate in all other educational and skill-based programs to improve their opportunities, especially post-incarceration. Since 1994, the federal bureau of prisons has required English learners to learn English to at least an 8th grade level, but how that has been done at the state and community level is still sporadic. We are really hopeful that ESOL becomes standard in all areas of the system, so our English learners have the opportunity to improve their language and overall education. Certainly, the students we have had so far were highly motivated and showed immediate improvement in a very short time.

¹<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture-online/case-studies/2022/mar/english-often-considered-de-facto-global-language>

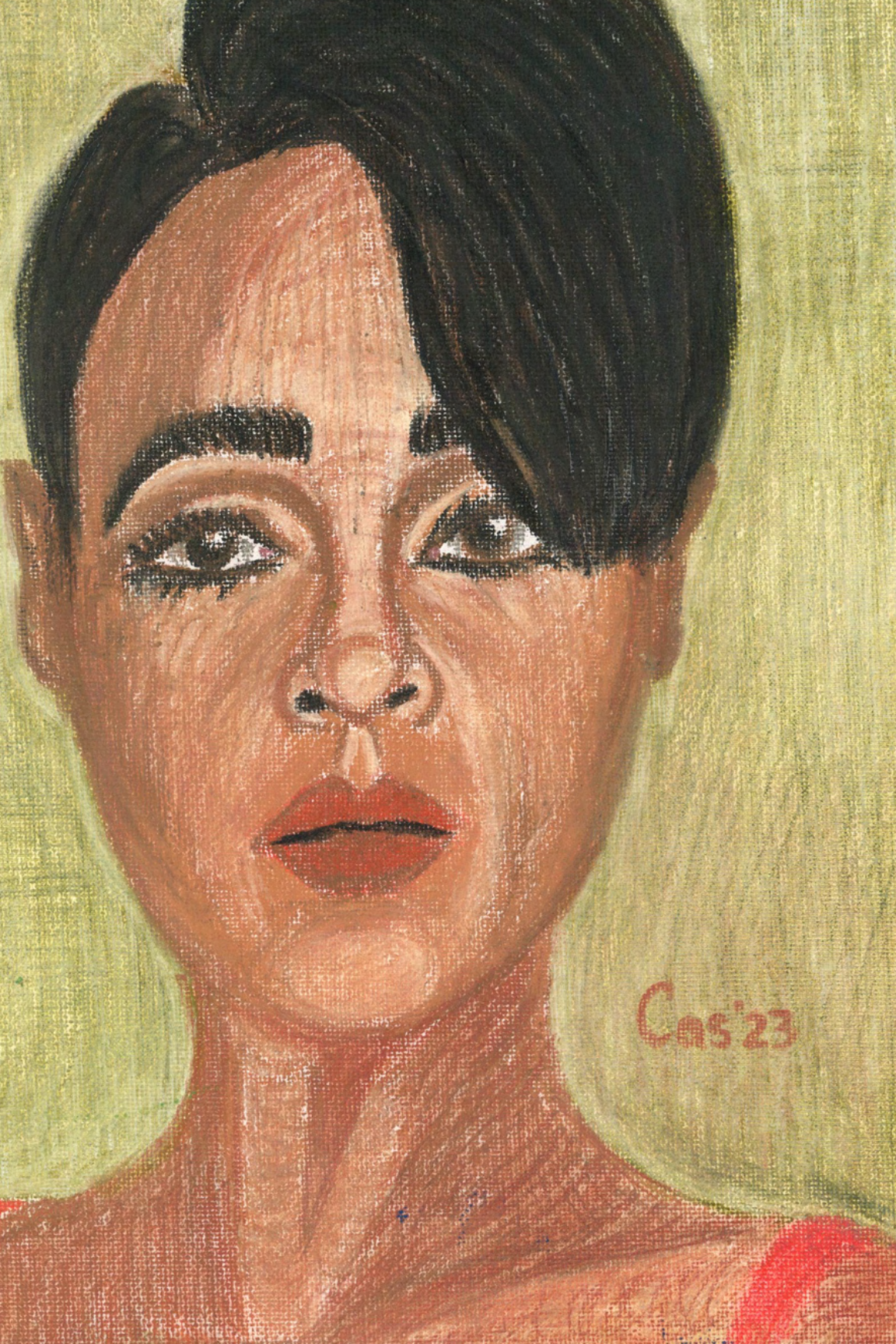
To have students who have chosen to be there and willing to complete any tasks you asked of them is truly gratifying. We remember one day we talked about how they wake up around 3-4 AM for meals, and then have jobs to do, and this class time could be their time to rest. But they preferred to be in class learning a language, looking for change, a better path forward. And after only two classes, instead of asking “when does the class end” they were asking if the classes would continue, could we stay longer, do we have any extra resources to share.

The students were also very grateful to us for our time and expertise. They were excited to respond when called on but frequently contributed without needing to be prompted, asking for clarification and asking questions about all sorts of topics, like vocabulary and sentence structure. They always wanted their English to be correct. Their enthusiasm was palpable.

This is why we become educators- we are really not content with life unless we are working with others to share knowledge and hopefully improve their lives in some way. These are the students we live for, who will be there no matter what other challenges they are facing. And already one of our University of Central Florida TESOL students helped to teach the class, so our goal with sustainability of the program is to mentor our students to teach classes and embrace this service to our community. So, we get the opportunity to provide a special educational opportunity for our UCF TESOL students as well. For us at this point, it is not a want, but a need we feel because we care.



Untitled Pastel and Watercolor Painting by Kevin



Cas'23

GRAPE SEED

IVAN ELIAS LOPEZ

Seed	Hope infinitely chances
Sown deep	The quest held tightest
Don't worry, stop crying	This ain't faith in miracles
Don't lose courage	But spiritual scientific principles
Stay determined	All is from but one source
A dream can never be deferred	Limitless, omniscient, omnipotent
If it can endure	We are gifted to realize this truth
The many cycles and transformations	Keep ya dream of sky height
In mercy by grace	One day you'll face the sunlight
Align will to the Divine	

A WORLD WITHIN A WORLD

MICHAEL DOUGLAS

To the lost incarcerated souls stuck in a loop of recycled pain... I see you. To the future inmates frightened about what they are about to encounter, this is for you.

On June 29, 2023. My life completely changed, I found myself incarcerated after many years of doing the right thing. Most people are just one paycheck away from becoming an inmate, and anyone of us could be incarcerated and most of us are ill prepared. When I stepped into this “world within a world”, right away I saw that I would not fit in. This world is where drugs and murder are celebrated. The question I found myself asking was “how am I going to survive this?”. This world is run by gangs and other inmates, NOT OFFICERS! You have to be careful reaching out to officers for help or your safety or to make a complaint because you might be talking to a gang member and will be retaliated against. Some officers are there to do their jobs and do care, but most are NOT and will tell you “I’m only here for a paycheck”.

The institutions have the words corrections or correctional but there is none... only “Punishment, All Punishment”.

You are locked down 23 or 24 hours a day with nothing to do. Sometimes you don’t know if it’s day or night because there are no windows and if there are any, they are spray painted with black or gray paint.

With that being said about nothing to do, here comes the drugs and gambling... There are all kinds of drugs on the inside. You just need to talk to the right person and you can get what you want. So there is heavy drug use on the inside and it’s really bad. Fights are on an everyday basis sometimes multiple times a day... Really bad fights and those can be gangs or a gang member wants something you have or you have to fight to get a phone call, and also, it depends on your charges, you might not be wanted in some cells.

Earlier I asked myself, how would I survive this? And it was and is only “God”, by the grace of god.

I started a prayer circle at nights and in the days too would council lost boys and men who have no hope and the only thing they know is the streets, and the men on the streets that use them to steal drugs and to steal. The institution is a revolving door for these young men and women and it’s the only world they know. I try to let them know that there is hope and other ways to make a living but all I hear back from some of them is that no one cares about them, and some believe there is no way out. I believe if there were more resources on the inside to help these men and women, and also to evaluate them before they’re released back into society, we would have less repeat offenders.

Someone! Anyone! Please show that you care!

There are so many churches across the country. Why can't they all come together and form The United Churches and Religions to save and help men and women that are lost and in need of help? Because they are men and women that are from every race and religion who are incarcerated. There are so many lost and needy people out there. You too can become an inmate one day unexpectedly.



Untitled by Christopher Dunsmoor


TEACH IN PRISON TO LEARN

CHRISTIAN BECK

I HAVE LONG BEEN AN ADVOCATE FOR FREE ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE REGARDLESS OF SOCIAL STANDING.

Everyone should be able to access things that stimulate the mind and help accrue various forms of knowledge based on individual interest and ability. No one should have their ability to grow, think, and learn stymied or blocked. Especially an incarcerated population that is restricted in so many other ways. Institutions restrict the flow of information because it is a way to maintain their power and further control those that are subject to the institution. While I am always one to subvert institutional dominance and undermine restrictive power structures, I teach in prison to bring something different to the individuals incarcerated, to (hopefully) engender new ideas about the world and how to engage with it.

Teaching in prison is always about the individuals sitting in front of you—as it is with every classroom, but there is more riding on the time spent with your incarcerated students. They are choosing to use their free time to show up; they are choosing to take a course that may or may not get them college credit; they are choosing to learn for no other reason than to learn. Additionally, this is a space where they are away from the overt elements of control—no Correction Officers, no lines on the ground to designate who can walk where, etc.—and they are free to speak and think in their own way. The classroom, then, becomes a sanctuary of thought, a space of learning that also allows for a momentary reprieve from the monotony and discipline imposed upon them by the carceral state institution.




This is not to say that my classroom is unstructured and chaotic—structure does not necessitate hierarchy, and many of the incarcerated individuals are very aware of this. These are individuals that are keenly aware of power structures and how they are deployed; they live this explicitly every day. This type of experience and understanding is easy to tap into and makes discussions of literature properly intriguing. On the first day of my “Contemporary Literature” course at Lake Correctional Institution, we read Langston Hughes’s poem “Ballad of the Landlord.” A man in the back of the room volunteered to read the poem out loud and not only did he immediately find the rhythm and meter of the poem, but read it with emphasis and passion making it clear that he both knew the poem and it had resonated with him. From that point forward, we had an engaging, if not meandering discussion about tenet’s rights, landlord responsibilities, the ethics of property ownership vis-à-vis capitalism, the role of music in poetry, why poetry matters, and who is “allowed” to analyze literature.

While I would contribute and offer some (re) direction to the topics, this discussion was generated by the men themselves. They would speak to each other, intervene if someone was speaking over someone else, and challenge each other to think differently about various topics. In short, it was as close to the ideal classroom as I have ever seen: a self-generating learning environment where individuals speak confidently, but also listen and consider the views of others. This continued throughout the semester and I came to thoroughly enjoy my time teaching in prison.

Initially I thought it was ironic that in a location like prison, I could have the most meaningful teaching moments. Through all the security checkpoints, metal detectors, and identification checks, I find the most responsive and intellectual curious students I’ve ever encountered. But after reflecting on this for a moment, it makes complete sense and the “ironic distance” is simply superficial and extracts agency from those that already have had elements of their agency stripped away. Rather, it makes complete sense that these individuals would want to flex their intellectual, creative, and experienced muscles in a place that does not want them to.

They are confined in an institution that, by their very presence in this place, many negatively assess their social and cultural worth. So why do I choose to teach in prison? Because everyone deserves to read a poem and talk about it. Everyone has ideas about the world and those ideas need to be heard in order for the world to be created. If we only listen to those with power, we only ever get the world that the powerful want. The voices and ideas of the incarcerated are in direct contact with that power and can speak to it more readily, coherently, and unambiguously than most other members of our population. The individuals that give up their free time to read and write about literature in an intensely hierarchized, disciplined environment might have some interesting takes on the world around them and they might be worth listening to a bit more closely.



What am I?

Eye look but I don't see.

I hear but I don't listen.

**I touch it but I don't feel
it?**

I'm a spirit with no soul.

**I'm a full body that is
empty.**

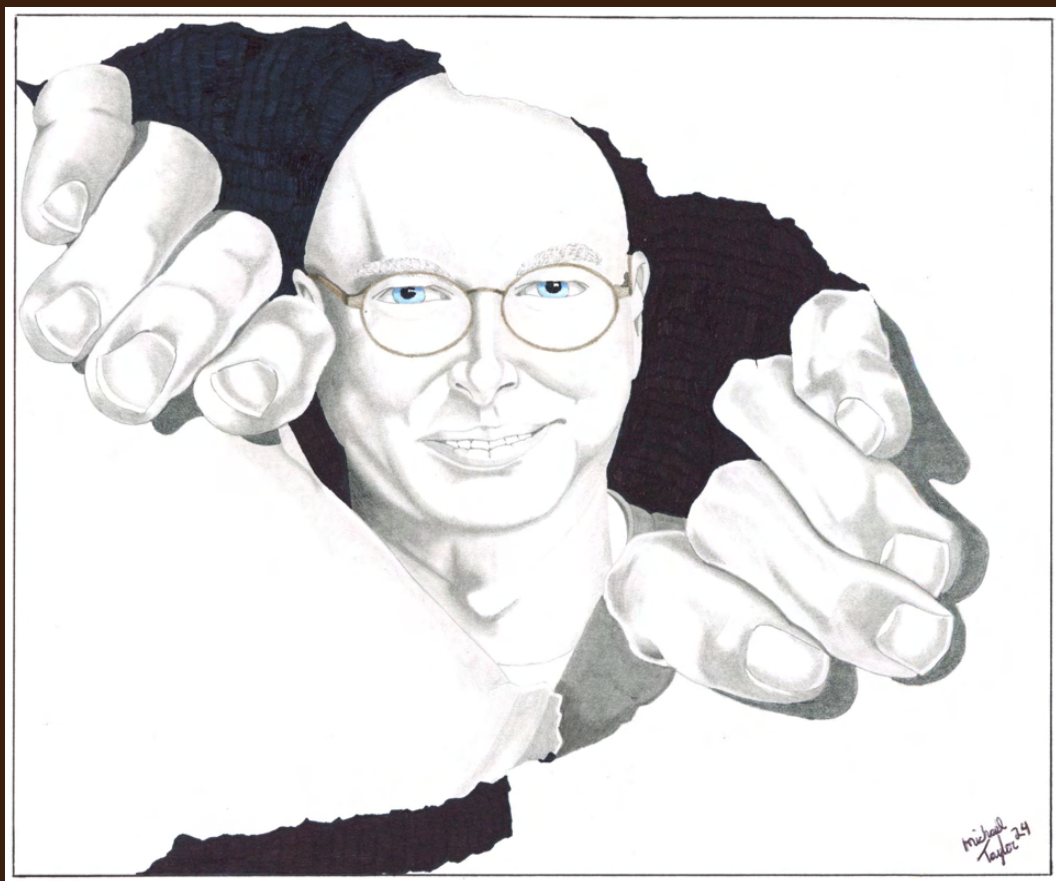
**I just found it but I'm
lost.**

**I'm in a state of ecstasy
without love.**

THAT'S WHO

WILLIAM MANN

MICHAEL TAYLOR



BREAKING FREE

My name is Michael Taylor and I have been drawing since the age of seven. I am self-taught but I have watched other artists to learn their techniques and apply some of it to mine. I started out just drawing buildings, cars, and doing signs for people. Just a few years ago I started doing portraits. I have also taught a few art classes while I have been incarcerated. Art is my way to let my mind go and be some place else. Guess I am what I consider a realist artist because I prefer to draw more or less real things. But I love all art including fantasy art. I enjoy reading, drawing, walking, riding bikes, camping and a bunch of other things. I love building things and working with my hands.

I am eternally grateful to the Florida Prison Education Program and UCF for their instructors. They are very good at broadening our minds in the many types of creative ways to express ourselves. Art is a great way to occupy time because you can put what your feeling on paper. Thanks to this program I am learning new things and techniques I have not done before. They are also showing us how to use different materials and mediums. I am looking forward to learning charcoal and paints. Also learning to do landscapes is something I want to do. Just to be able to be out with nature and paint the views.

This is a self-portrait I call breaking free. I used pen, color pencil, and a sketch pencil. This represents me tearing through my old life a little at a time to be the best me I can be. Showing that

**MY PAST DOES NOT
DEFINE WHO I REALLY AM.**

THE INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE

KRISTINA TOLLEFSON

In the secular parable “The Star Thrower” by Loren Eiseley, a person walks along a beach covered in hundreds of stranded starfish as far as they can see. They come upon another person who is rushing about throwing starfish back into the water one by one. With a chuckle at the futility, the first person asks the starfish thrower what they are doing. The starfish thrower answers, a little confused, “I’m helping the starfish!” to which the first person responds, shaking their head, “but there are hundreds of them, you aren’t even making a difference.” As the starfish thrower tosses another starfish back into the ocean, they look at the person and proclaim, “I made a difference to THAT one!”

I’ve spent my adult life troubled by the American policing and carceral systems and feeling inept and powerless to change them. I do believe, however, in the significance of making a positive impact on individuals and the ripple effect that can have. This has played out in many of my life decisions including my dedication to teaching. When I learned about the opportunity to teach incarcerated students through the Florida Prison Education Program, I knew I needed to pursue the possibility.

The first class I taught at CFRC was Introduction to Technical Theatre. I was anxious that no one would sign up for my class simply because of the stereotypes society and the media have implanted in us about incarcerated individuals. But they DID sign up and I was excited to have ten students my first day. Teaching at CFRC means that a sizable portion of the population is only there temporarily as they are being transferred to their permanent locations. This meant the enrollment shifted throughout the semester. There were only 2 students who earned their completion certificates for being there from beginning to end, but all in all at least 20 students joined my class at some point and all of them made a mark on me including Marcus, Tommy, Marco, Osiris, Dequitisie, Andres, Kirt, Mark, Turtle, and all the others who were transferred before they could finish the course. I’m glad to call them my friends. I still have some of their classwork hanging on my fridge.

I was quick to tell my family about my plan to be approved as a volunteer and they were all as excited by the prospect as I was. The process of getting approved is a convoluted one with invisible roadblocks and ever-changing procedures. I was frustrated when my first attempt led to a dead end, and I put off starting the process again. But my youngest daughter kept me accountable to this commitment by regularly asking me when I would start teaching at the prison. I went through the application process again and was eventually approved.

My first experience entering a prison was early on my first day of class. A colleague met me at the main unit of the Central Florida Reception Center (CFRC) to walk me through getting my volunteer badge. Going through security felt as routine as going through airport security with x-ray machines, metal detectors, and pat downs. Walking out of security and into the sunlight I looked around and felt like I was walking through the courtyard of a very large high school (though less anxiety-inducing than walking through my kid’s actual high school...). All the people we encountered were kind and eager to assist us in finding our way.



Pastel Painting by Ricardo Lupian

If I share with anyone that I teach in a prison their eyes get big and they tend to have the same questions, “Isn’t that scary?” “Is there a guard in the room with you?” They are shocked to hear that it isn’t scary AT ALL. I have not once even felt the slightest bit afraid. Quite the contrary. I feel safe and confident. There are never guards in my classroom with us and, if there is a guard in the building I teach in, I haven’t seen them. And my students are wonderful. They engage in class discussions, they ask questions, and they tell stories to relate the course content to their lived experiences. I assume they recognize that attending class is a privilege and they treat it as such.

In some retellings of the starfish story, the person walking along the beach reconsiders their perspective and begins to help throw starfish back into the sea. And then, as others happen upon them, more people stop to help and, one by one, they return all of the starfish to the ocean. I can’t overhaul our judicial system, but I can join the others who are making a difference for the individuals impacted by it.

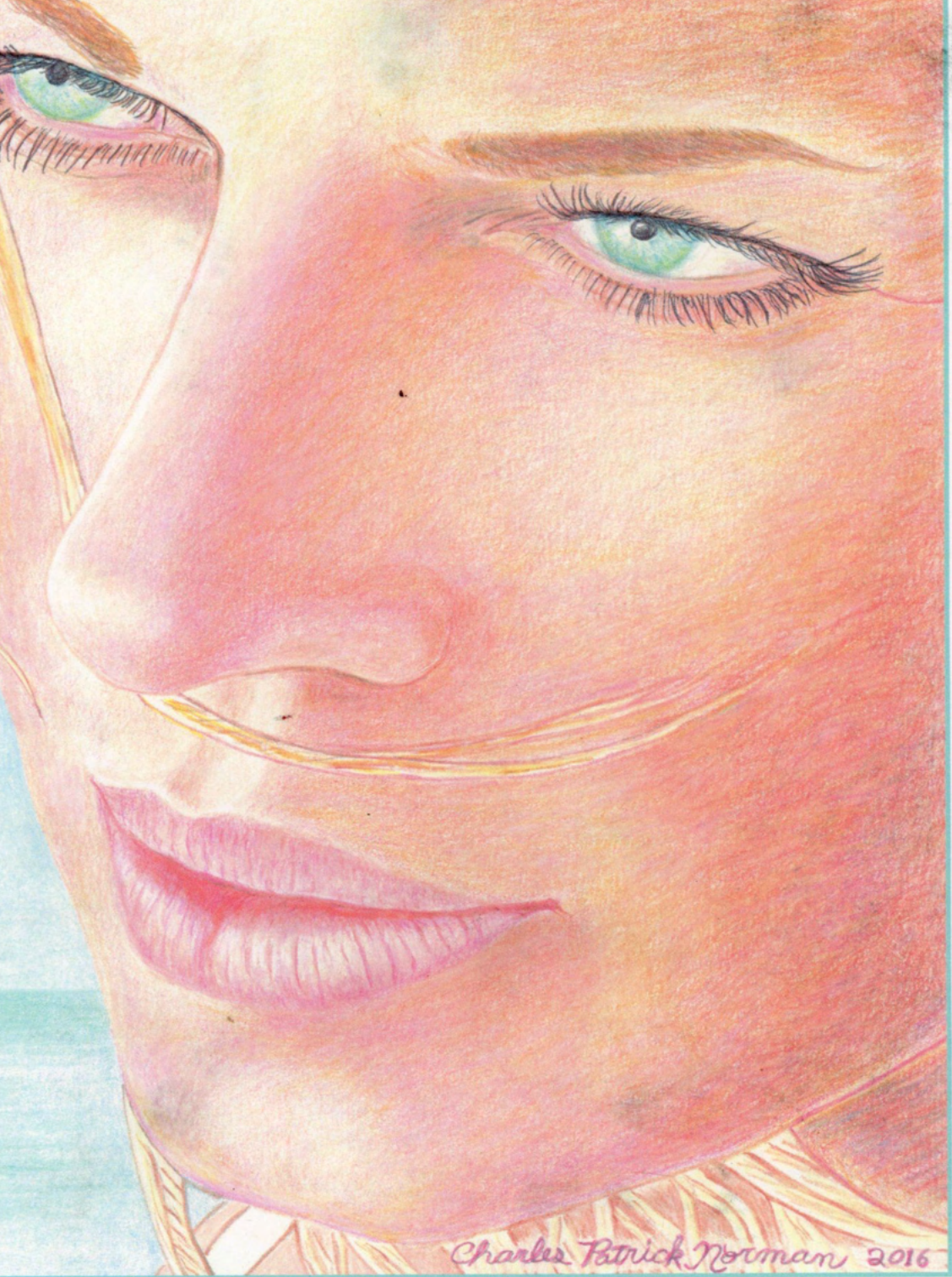
STUDENTS FOR EDUCATION IN PRISON : AN EMERGING MOVEMENT

MARY SAMUELS

As I began volunteering for the Florida Prison Education Project in the Fall of 2023, it became clear that although there was a consistent team of willing students showing up to sort, box, and move book donations, that growth within the student population would require more flexible opportunities for student involvement. While tabling on campus, we were always speaking to students who displayed interest and eagerness to engage with FPEP's mission and initiatives, but we wanted to further develop space for an active student community, so we began planning a student organization. Students for Education in Prison (SFEP) was established at UCF in February of 2024 with the mission of supporting educational programs for incarcerated individuals, educating the student population about the existence and harms of mass incarceration, maintaining a community for formerly incarcerated UCF students, and advocating for an end to mass incarceration.

During our first semester, we had a few general body meetings along with movie nights to watch episodes of the documentary series *College Behind Bars*. We ended those nights with a discussion and were able to share our reactions and dissect what we had learned. Since the conclusion of our first semester—where we were awarded “Best New Organization” by the UCF Office of Student Involvement—we have had valuable opportunities for coalition building within our local community, the state of Florida, and with students at other universities. One of our largest visions for SFEP is to serve as an inspiration to other students throughout the country to engage with their local prison education programs, to shed light on mass incarceration, and to enact change in their communities.

It has been an honor to serve as the President of SFEP in its conception and I am thrilled at the idea of continuing to build a student movement to promote education and to one day witness the end of mass incarceration. If you are a student interested in establishing a Students for Education chapter at your university, please reach out to SFEP.UCF@outlook.com



Serenity

Colored Pencil Portrait by Charles Patrick Norman, 2016

WHY

IVAN ELIAS LOPEZ

Why?

Cause all gifts and laws come from heaven

Allowing all it's time to rise and shine

An enlightened will is guided by wisdom

Why I contemplate before action

Dwell on reasons

Ignore or cultivate ideas

Why I can't die? Truth is..

My babies and family are my heart

So I won't stop at failure just restart

My mind- a tiny drop of Supreme Divine
Mind

In this being time has solidified

Understanding and experience

I am a duality¹

The person and the Self

Hierarchically, as I see it

My i.d. rest on the top shelf

Divine vessel superior to worldly shell

Identification indwelling intell

Reasons, bonds and reality

Confirm only one choice best for we

Unselfish and wise

Receptively intuit then act conscientiously

Creation doing Creator's Will

An angel's envy I fulfill

Life's worth, a grandiose gratitude I feel

What an amazing opportunity

The freedom to choose why

¹ <https://www.amazon.com/Metu-Neter-Vol-Spiritu-al-Cultivation/dp/1877662038>

HOW TO GET INVOLVED.

Vera Institute of Justice: VERA.ORG

The Marshall Project: THEMARSHALLPROJECT.ORG

The Sentencing Project: SENTENCINGPROJECT.ORG

Equal Justice Initiative: EJI.ORG

Prison Policy Initiative: PRISONPOLICY.ORG

For Freedoms: FORFREEDOMS.ORG

Incarceration Nation Network:
INCARCERATIONNATIONSNETWORK.COM

Families Against Mandatory Minimums: FAMM.ORG

The Innocence Project: INNOCENCEPROJECT.ORG

American Civil Liberties Union: ACLU.ORG

Southern Poverty Law Center: SPLCENTER.ORG

Florida Rights Restoration Coalition: FLORIDARRC.COM

Florida Coalition for Criminal Justice Reform:
BETTERJUSTICEFL.COM

No Place for a Child: NOPLACEFORACHILD.COM

Community Outreach Enterprise:
COMMUNITYOUTREACHENTERPRISE.YOLASITE.COM

Florida Prison Education Project: CAH.UCF.EDU/FPEP

Community Education Project: [STETSON.EDU/OTHER/
CEP](http://STETSON.EDU/OTHER/CEP)

Exchange for Change: EXCHANGE-FOR-CHANGE.ORG

Institute for Educational Empowerment: [MDC.EDU/
EDUCATIONAL-EMPOWERMENT](http://MDC.EDU/EDUCATIONAL-EMPOWERMENT)

We Got the Vote: WEGOTTHEVOTE.ORG

Art Equity: ARTEQUITY.ORG

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EDUCATION PROJECT BY MAKING A DONATION:
[HTTPS://CAH.UCF.EDU/FPEP/DONATE/](https://cah.ucf.edu/fpep/donate/)**



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