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2019 Storytelling and Social Change Stories

Sylvia Gale

University of Richmond, sgale@richmond.edu

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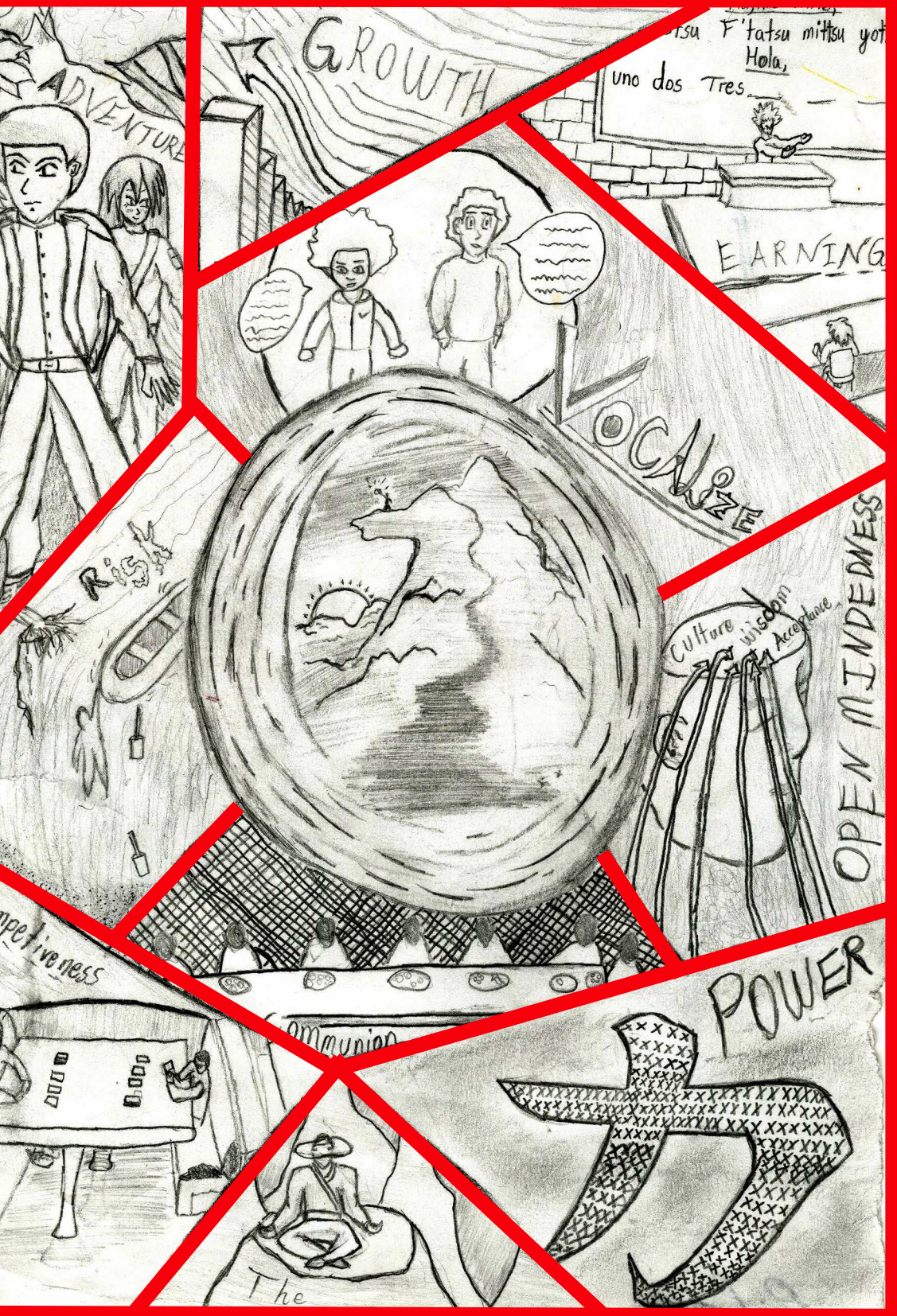


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A special thanks to Sylvia Gale,
Beverly Tackett, and the Bonner
Center for Civic Engagement.

Dear Reader,

This book is the final product of a six week long storytelling journey in which 39 young writers, poets, artists, and most importantly, humans came together and worked as partners, sharing with each other their own life stories -a part of their identity and something that makes them who they are. What you will be reading is the compilation of the physical works some of these humans created in hopes of sharing their life beyond this storytelling group -with you and any other reader who chooses to delve into our lives and what they offer.

As you immerse yourself in the stories inscribed within each page, you may notice that some of these storytellers used art to capture these fragments of their lives, whereas others chose written reflections. These variances reflect the storytellers individualities and differences, something that cannot be set aside. Nonetheless, these works may also exhibit the bonds these storytellers formed along the way. Indeed, getting to know each other became a by-product of sharing these stories.

However, if you at one point are unable to see the bonds and connections that we, the storytellers, so inevitably expected to form along this journey, then you are not wrong. Along this journey, we found that some of us were quick to connect, whilst many others were still in the process even when our time together had come to an end. Thus, in making this book, we, as the storytellers, feel the need to acknowledge that humans are complicated beings. We may be all different, our backgrounds polar ends, our circumstances extreme or easy, yet being a human is what we all ultimately share. As you now read the many stories, you may then be able to see this shared humanity reflected on each page.

Ultimately, we wanted to create something that captured the youth and spirit of our work and more importantly our storying process. We hope you see this reflected in the different dynamics of each page, each section and the whole book itself.

This book compiles our time together and we are now sharing it with you...

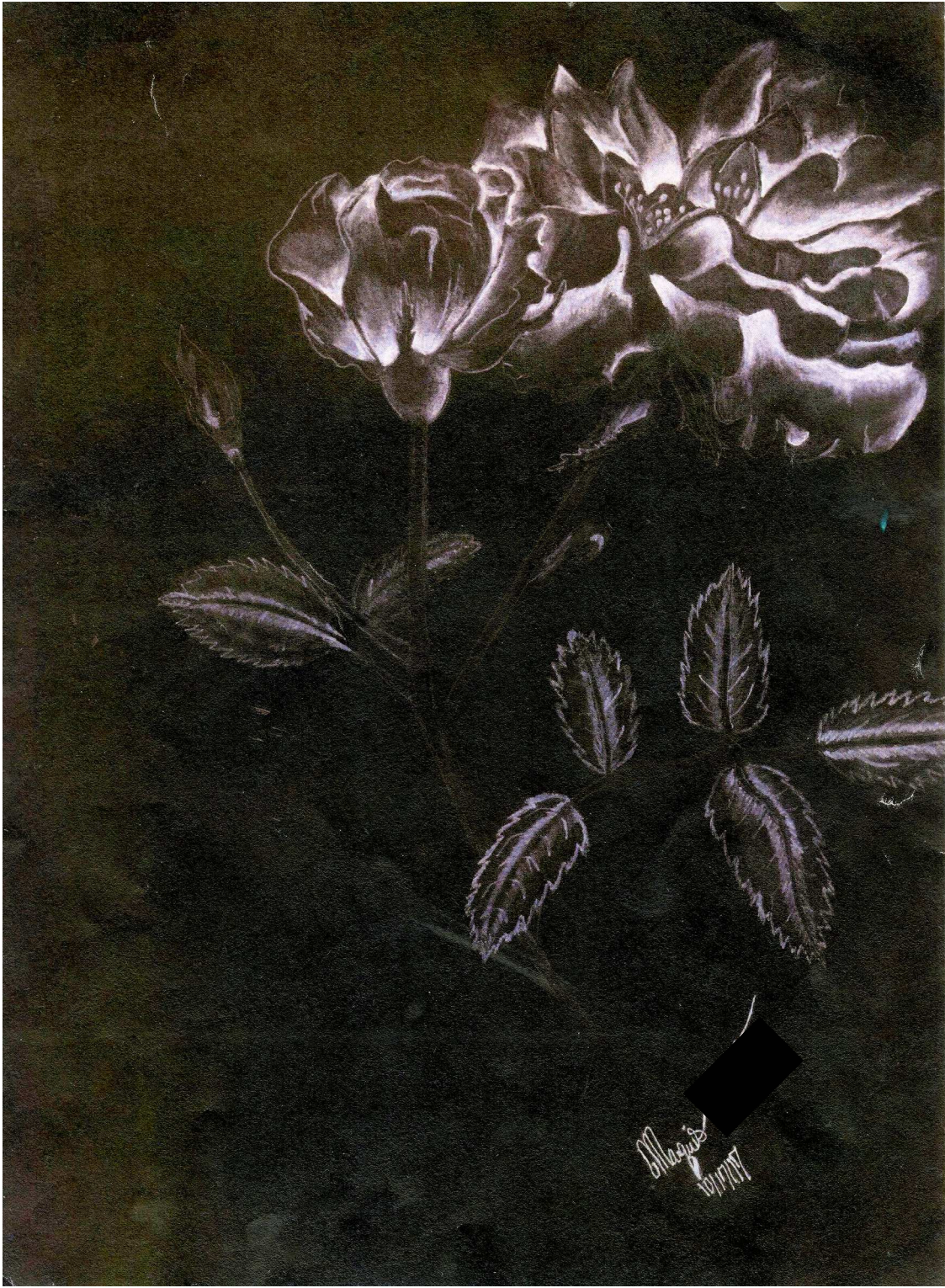
Yours truly,
The Storytellers
April, 2019
Richmond, VA

"Flower Bomb" by Halle, Nassir and Marquis

A flower in a dark place
The leaves beneath
I see shadows
And shiny petals

Without sunlight, this flower still has life
it holds in its veins
emotions and thoughts
about a future

About potential
About making an impact
About strength
About surviving the darkness



The Place I'm From....

Tompkins Housing Projects (apartment B7) is where I was born and raised. These Projects are located in Brooklyn, NY, a place that's for Section 8 and helps with low income families. In Tompkins is where everything happens far as gangs, selling drugs, murder, and etc. The average family living in these projects never left the borough of Brooklyn. Growing up in Brooklyn there is a strike against you. In Tompkins I lived on the second floor of a building with 13 floors and 22 apt on each floor. My family and I had an two bedroom apt that was for my parents and my 3 siblings. The feeling I had growing up in Tompkins was ok and comfortable for me, I never felt any different because that lifestyle is all my community know. When I was young and looked around me my friends, we all had the same background so I didn't feel left out at any time.

By Kalil

My city is terrible, and in small ways, wonderful. Your perspective depends on how big your bank account is. Not a single family member of mines or any close friend from my city that wants to stay there. But its filled with some beautiful people. Beautiful people with BIG DREAMS. I know of many that died before even reaching 20, much less their goals. My own sister is in now counted among them. She was to grow up a strong, beautiful woman, chasen her dreams. But the city had other plans. The city's street life grabbed a hold of her at an early age, and my sister was smothered to death, before she could truly begin her life.

The city can stress you to the point of death. As in the case with Uncle Kev. He was constantly asking for my help to move himself to VA. "This City is Killing me." I coulda talked to someone, I know people that would have helped him. But I didn't talk to anyone. I didnt do anything. ‡ He died on us. So the city still Haunts me even when Im not there.

my own experiences are that of Domestic Violence, Drugs, ‡ Foster homes, Kiddie jails ‡ mentle hospitals.

By Cain

THE PLACE I'M FROM...

When I think about the place I'm from, my first thought is Virginia Beach, a suburban beach town on the east coast. But when I really think about what it felt like to exist in that place, I think about growing up in a bi-cultural household. Both of my parents are Asian immigrants. Throughout my childhood, they tried really hard to make sure my brother and I were connected to our heritage. We learned Mandarin at the same time we learned English; my mom taught Chinese language and music classes that she would make us go to; we ate traditional meals, we took our shoes off at the front door, we visited our family in Taiwan every few summers. Even though I did all these things, I often did them reluctantly and tried to hide these parts of my life from my friends - who were pretty much all white. I guess as a kid, you just want to fit in. So you're embarrassed about anything that makes you feel different. Honestly, it wasn't until I got to college that I began to truly embrace and appreciate these parts of my identity. The more experiences I have away from home, the more I realize how lucky I am to be from my home. How lucky I am to have parents who gave up their everything to give me my everything. Today, I am proud and thankful for the place I'm from. I'm from a place of rich history. A place of selfless sacrifice. A place of uniqueness.

A place of love.

By Jeanette

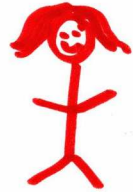
KALIL + CAIN + JEANNETTE



It is infinitely better to have a few good men than indifferent ones.



We should be a mirror of being; we are God in miniature.
-Friedrich-
-Nietzsche-

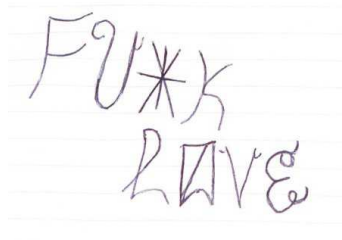


Stories matter simply because the people in them matter.

My favorite part of this experience was writing about different moments and hearing what the other person got to say.

"Pain" by Brian

I've been through a lot of shit in my life, ups and downs. I had been hurt so many times and I would always hide the pain in me. But shit ain't sweet no more something hurt me so bad I got to be real with myself and let it go. My pain is about my kid, my baby boy, my lil gangster. My ex girl took him away from me and it hurt me because I can't see him no more and he is going to grow up not knowing who the fuck I am and that shit sad. I can't even look in the mirror cause I'm too hurt. Thinking it's all my fault for getting locked up and my ex girl left me after 4 years we been together, but fuck shit ain't sweet. All I ever wanted is to see my kid and be with him and watch him grow cause full all that other shit can't trust not other girl no more that saying they will hold it down for you but they hoeing around like if that shit sweet.



FUCK
RAVE

"A Place I'm From" by Hannah

The summer after my junior year of high school, my friends and I decided to go camping. My parents didn't like the idea of girls and boys and tents, but let me go after hours worth of arguments and me claiming that they were, in fact, ruining my life.

We packed up two Subaru's, one old and red, the other new and blue, and headed to the coast of Washington. We didn't have a plan, only the desire to escape our lives, caught between childhood and adulthood, so we could engage in whatever we felt was necessary to live the wild lives we thought we wanted.

This trip quickly became routine, as our group got larger and our trips got longer. Last summer, we went to Lake Chelan. We took different cars (the red Subaru was no longer with us) and packed them with more people and even more supplies, the sleeping bags covering the many bottles of beer and the rest making it impossible for the four hour journey to be comfortable. In fact, nothing about the environment was comfortable. The air was still with hotness during the day, but windy by the lake during the night. The veggie burgers I packed were inedible, and we got kicked off our campsite after the first night. Our new location was up miles of dust, surrounded by trees, and with no one in sight. But the people were comfortable.

During the day we would fly down the dusty roads, hanging out the windows, to find a spot by the lake to call ours for the day. Mexican music, the smell of barbecue, and our laughter wafted through the air, as we lay on our colorful towels dotted across the grass. Some of us got sunburned, others gained new freckles. We pushed each other off the dock, finding the same joy in the last surprise as the first. We climbed trees and swung off rope swings into the clear water below.

At night, after the heat of the sun had attempted to slow us down, the music would continue to play, Tom Petty or maybe J Cole, as we filled our red solo cups, and danced around the fire. Sometimes, I would catch myself looking up at the stars while my friends swirled around me. We had a spirit I like to pretend we inherited from the pine trees and blue mountains around us. A spirit that left me feeling wild and free, but also at peace. I thought about how much had changed, we were older and attended schools on opposite coasts, but when we came back during the warm months, when Seattle traded its clouds for sun, nothing had seemed to change.

What was your favorite moment of our time together?
What do you wish had been different?

*When we got to know each other and I wish we could
continue our communication - Duh.*

*They came to us
And gave us a new word
To speak, to hear*



By Robert:

One time, I was with three of my friends, just hanging out on a summer day. We were all eleven years old and felt the typical naive confidence every child feels at that age. We were still young enough that everything was a mystery to solve, but now we were old enough to find the answers. The world would bend to my will if I could just find where to poke it at.

We all figured ourselves to be geniuses and so somebody asked something about religion. Discussion ensued about how big God was, where He was, and if He was real. We argued for a bit until the real question emerged: Was God good, or bad, or just there? I was puzzled. God was supposed to be good, yes? But how could such bad things happen in our world? I felt suddenly pensive and honestly just wanted to stop talking about the whole thing. It seemed like the keyhole sized view I had of the universe was getting bigger, wider. . . But did I really want to see inside?

I was saved by a sudden “Boom!” as thunder distracted us. The sky was getting dark fast, so we ran back home. I was almost relieved to not have to face my fear of knowledge; already my armour of willful, youthful ignorance was crutching. Could it withstand another blow?

In the end it didn't matter. . . that was the end. That was the day I saw God's real face. That was the day I learned what type of world we live in. That was the day my grandmother died.

By Leah:

When I was 16, I spent the summer at a camp in central Maine. Mostly, this summer was perfect- full of sunburns, late night dance parties, adventures with my friends and sneaking out to be with the boys from the camp across the lake. One night, my friends and I sat on the dock and sang. Lindsay played her guitar, and we hummed familiar tunes, softly. The moon was the kind of full moon where it looks huge, and lights up the whole sky. I felt calm and at peace. In that moment, I thought of my grandmother. She was sick. The doctors told us that it could be any day now. I wondered how she was doing. I was worried. That night, I cried myself to sleep, but I wasn't quite sure why. The next morning at breakfast, one of the camp administrators told me to come to the office because my parents were on the phone. My breath caught and instantly I had a pit in my stomach. I knew my parents hadn't called with good news. I thought about refusing to go to the office and take the call, as if that would somehow change things. The conversation with my dad was short, but I stayed in the crowded camp office for a long time, sobbing silently. I was at a loss, numb to feelings but unable to stop crying. Two of my friends noticed that I had never returned to breakfast, and came out to find me. After that, for hours, the three of us sat on the dock. We didn't say a lot. They just sat there with me and let me cry.

I expected to meet my partner, write some stories, and enjoy the program. These expectations were exceeded. I was not expecting this program to change me as a person in the way that it did.

I expected that the program would be more juvenile and silly than it turned out to be.

"A Moment When I Grew Up" by Eliza

When I was 11, I found out that my best friend Sarah was moving to South Africa. She had been my best friend since I was 6 years old and her entire family was like family to me. I spent almost every weekend at her house. I didn't know what I was going to do. I was worried that she would quickly find friends at her new school and forget about me. I might have been being a little dramatic, but it was a big change for an 11 year old. On her last day of school, I cried in front of everyone in my class, which made me more upset because I was so embarrassed.

My family and I came over to her house on the day that the movers came to pack up her stuff. As I watched the attic be packed up, I remembered all the time we spent playing up there when we were little. It was crazy to think that I was never going to go up there again and I felt like my childhood was ending. In that moment, all I wanted was to be 8 years old again. A few weeks later, I watched from across the street while new people moved into the house. It made me so angry that these strangers were going to be living in the house that was basically my childhood home.

There were a lot of times in middle and high school when I felt like I had no one to talk to because the person that I had always told everything to was so far away. This meant that I had to make more of an effort to put myself out there and reach out to other friends, which became easier over time. Sarah is still one of my closest friends though, and I am so grateful to have her in my life. Having a close friend in another country makes me realize that the world is a lot bigger than we think and that time and distance doesn't have to end friendships if you don't want them to.

"My Life" by Mandio

I was born on August 22, 2000. I grew up in a hood where violence was taking place and I had to grow up between the violence. At eleven years old I started hanging out with my homies and committing crimes to survive. I started smoking and drinking. I was happy with that kind of life because I found everything. At 13 years old I almost lost my life in the streets because of the gang life. That day I lost my homeboy.

After that day I felt like I was going crazy because they killed the only person who looked out for me in the streets. I thought the only option I had was to find the people who killed my homeboy. Next day I got locked up for attempted murder. After one year locked up they find me not guilty. I got released. I was fourteen when I got released and came home. I thought about change my life and I did. I met a girl who made me a new person. I fell in love with that person, I did everything to make things better but after five months my past life came back to take what I have. Being with that person made me forget everything, also what I did at eleven years old to survive in the streets. The same gang came back to get their payback.

Their payback is to killed the only person who give me everything and who show me that I can be different. They killed my girl. After that I ran away from my country. I chose to come to the United States. I got to the USA in 2015. I started doing better and finding better opportunities. I met a lotta girls but I was not ready to start a true relationship. It took me a year to accept that I was ready to start a new relationship because I was scared to lose that person again. I started dating that girl for a few months. In October 12, 2016, I remember that night when I was coming from work and two people try to rob me. I fought with them and the only thing I remember being on the ground with blood on my whole body. Next thing I know is waking up in the hospital with handcuffs on my wrist. The police told me that day I was being charged with attempted murder. At this day I still locked up but I took a different way to change and become a better person. I'm working hard to get my diploma and hopefully go to college or go to the army or become a fireman.

I came from the streets where you find love, happiness and family. Also a new environment but remember to not fall in love with what the street give to you because the same streets is going to take everything away from you.

*I didn't really know what to expect, but my
experience has definitely gone above and
beyond anything that I would have thought.*

"Moment Where I Grew Up" by Nicole

Growing up, I spent seven weeks, for seven summers, living in wood plated bunks that were flooded with bunk beds and could house upwards of 37 girls. Each summer, we ventured up to Harrison, Maine by bus and the trip took nearly eight hours. I loved every minute of that long bus ride because nothing compared to spending time with my camp friends. It was as if we were picking up exactly where we had left off the summer before, as we relived memories and predicted what bunks we would be living in.

Our days at camp consisted of scheduled activities and surprise ice cream shop visits, and sharing stories before going to bed. On my last night of my last summer, though, reality set in as I realized that I would no longer be able to escape from everything for those seven weeks. I had formed such close bonds with my friends and camp became my home away from home. I was afraid of growing apart from the girls who I had lived with since age nine. Tears filled my eyes as the bus pulled out of the dirt driveway for what would be the last time. With sadness in our voices, we sang our final round of camp cheers. It felt like I was letting go of a piece of my childhood and in the moment, I didn't feel like I was ready for it.

By Menelik:

It was April 13th @ 5:30 in the morning when I abruptly woke from my slumber. I was still tired due to the fact that I was nervous about the test the night before. Once I got out of bed I brushed my teeth and what not and then I got dressed. I was very anxious to go because this would be my first time going back in the community since 2017. I was quiet the whole 30 minute ride there. Once we arrived I immediately noticed that it was a lot of students there to take the ACT (around 300). The registration line was super long. After about 20 minutes it was finally my turn to register. I gave the lady my admission ticket and I was told I would be testing in Room 33. After a few questions about directions and wrong turns, I finally found Room 33. Once all of the examinees were present, the proctor began to read the test instructions and had us sign our test booklet then prompted us to begin. Test 1 + 2 (english and math respectively) were fairly easy I finished both way before the proctor called time. Then we had a painfully short break (it was barely enough time to use the restroom). Afterwards, we took tests 3 + 4 (Reading and science).

Afterwards we were dismissed and now I'm just waiting on my score. :)

Favorite moment? Every moment.



A time we felt out of place or ‘uncomfortable in our own skin’

Rose:

A point in time where I felt extraordinary out of place was my first day of school my junior year of highschool. After pulling into the parking lot, way before classes started, I sat in my car staring at the beautiful front doors of my new school. I sat there for so long, trying to gain the courage to get up and walk inside: inside to a sea full of people who I had never met or even seen before. With five minutes until my first class was to begin, I decided it would be worse to walk in late, so I gained the courage to set out and find my way to my class. Walking into the huge wooden front doors was overwhelming. It felt as though everyone in the commons stopped in their tracks and looked me up and down; It was as if I literally had a flashing sign on me that said “New Girl!

Much to my surprise, as I am sure I looked frazzled and lost, a girl named Claudia yanked my arm saying “Hey! Ya look lost! Need help getting somewhere?” Before I could even get out my full sentence, she started dragging me to STEM 103. Laughing the whole way there, I knew the day wasn’t going to be half as bad as I thought, thanks to my new friend.

Tanner:

I just moved to VA Beach last week I don’t have any friends and it’s my first day of school. The day started off bad because I didn’t get much sleep the night before so come time for my mom to take me to school she basically has to drag me to the car. I was nervous on the car ride to school I wanted my mom to turn around so I could go home and go back to sleep. When I finally got to school I felt alone but I was surrounded by people. When I finally got introduced to the class everyone was staring at me like I was an animal. Lunch time was the worst because I was the kid that sat alone. Walking back from lunch to class someone punches me in the arm, it turns out to be my friend from Richmond. This was the only good part of the day. The rest of the day dragged by I couldn’t wait to get home. My mom picks me up and we don’t talk the ride because I’m mad about my first day.

"Proud of Myself" by Lana

A time I was proud of myself was when I hiked the Appalachian Trail the summer before my junior year. I did not know any of the team members when I embarked on the two week trip, but part of the challenge was becoming partners and supporting people you had just met. At the start of the trip, I felt physically unfit and uncomfortable socially. Starting the trail, we hiked about 8 miles a day, which increased to 15 miles a day by the end of the trip. The first few days dragged on and I seriously wondered if I had any place being on this trip, and a part of the team of people who clearly had more experience hiking and camping than I did.

Over the course of the first week, I pushed myself physically and mentally. I felt that I had the chance to prove to myself, and my peers on the trip, that I could be a valuable part of the group. I learned how to cook in the backcountry and pitch a tent under 5 minutes.

As the trip progressed into the second week, I became used to the mileage that we were hiking, and the camping way of life. Everyone learned how to support each other and be a team player. By the end of the trip, I was physically tired, but sad to leave the true friends that I had met on the trip. I will forever be proud of my perseverance that I had to find in myself to get through, and thrive during this experience.

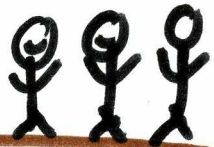
This was worth my time because I met someone I probably would have never met, but who I ended up connecting with.

"Proud of Myself" by Christian

Growing up I was a troublemaker. I didn't care about school, I was always getting suspended. I started smoking and selling drugs at the age of 12. At 13 I got the hang of the drug game. I would skip school often, but when I went it was just to get in trouble. In eighth grade I got kicked out of school, by that time I was 14. I had my own apartment. Then I got locked up for a month and some change for a gun and 3 ounces of weed they also took \$2000 and some change from me. After I got out, I went back to the same thing selling drugs and playing with guns. I went on the run for 8 months. I did a couple shootings, on April 1st, 2016 I was caught and brought in to custody. On April 6th, 2017 I was sentenced to 9 years. Being here made me realize that there is more to life than drugs, money and guns. So I started to do my school work and started planning for the future. Now I am about to graduate and take my ACT test. Once released I will apply to U of R and major in counseling. I have done some bad things in the past but now I am a changed man.

CLASS of 2019

ACT

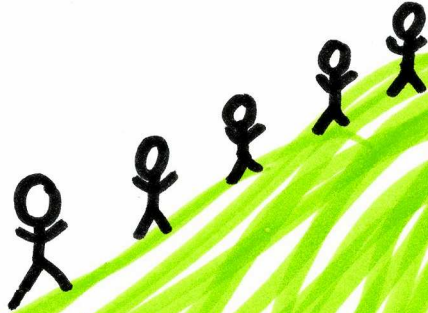


Christian



Appalachian Trail

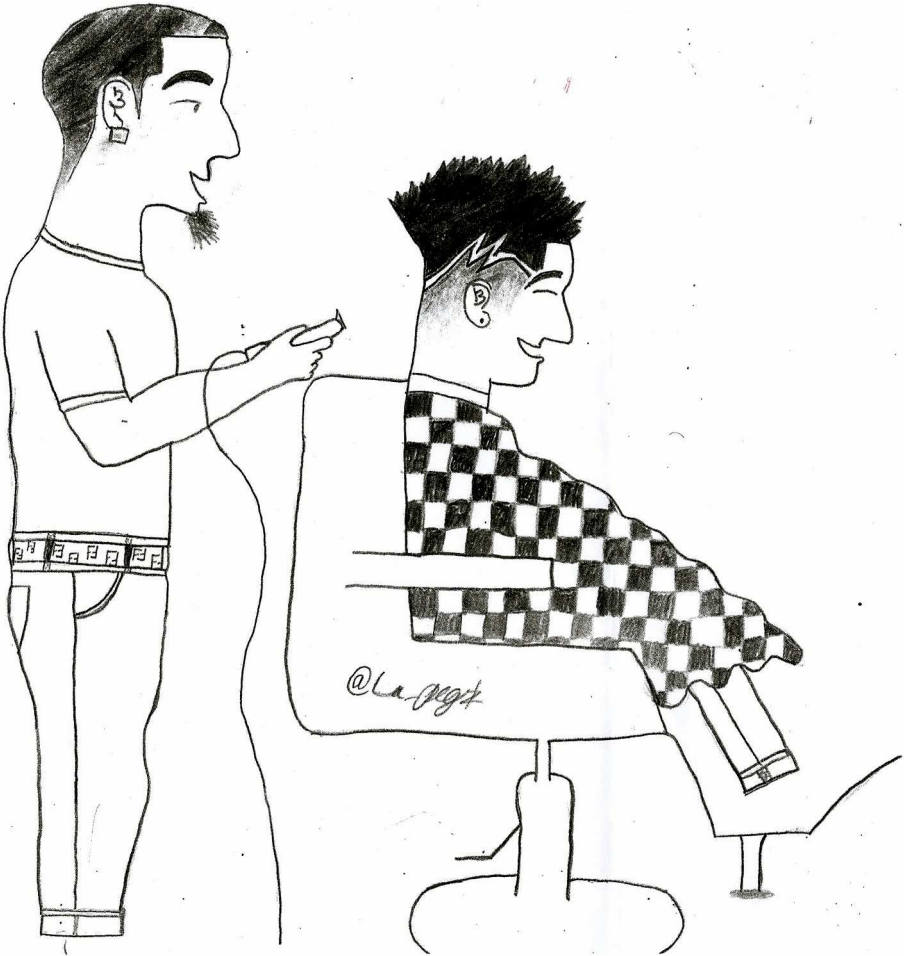
Tanya
hana



Was this worth your time?

Yes, because I would've otherwise never gotten to meet and work with such a talented tonsorialist. He is really passionate in his work and was a source of inspiration at times. Really glad to have met him!

Yes, because I enjoyed bonding with someone who seemed to enjoy my presence. Plus my partner had experienced a life outside of the U.S.



"Life is a Taper..." by @La_pegz

I was here at Bon Air when I started my barber school. It was a late summer day when the class began and I thought I was going to learn out a textbook first but I was wrong. I felt nervous, just like anyone who starts a new class. When I got there I was more surprised -they had all the tools and equipment out! We first cleaned and then my instructor taught the class how to set up and put away the tools. After about an hour, kids started coming through the doors and sitting in the barber chairs. I was anxious to just start, feeling very nervous too. The first client I had was a kid from my unit named Jimmy; he had a very long and uneven head and it seemed like a challenge. He told me he wanted to get a tapered (fade) haircut but I hadn't even done a simple cut before. Still, I put a guard on the clippers and just dragged it across his head. All I could see now was his scalp. As I looked up, everyone was staring and laughing. Seconds later, my instructor came over and yelled at me for not asking for help. Today I am so skilled that three quarters of the campus, including the staff, wants me to cut their hair.

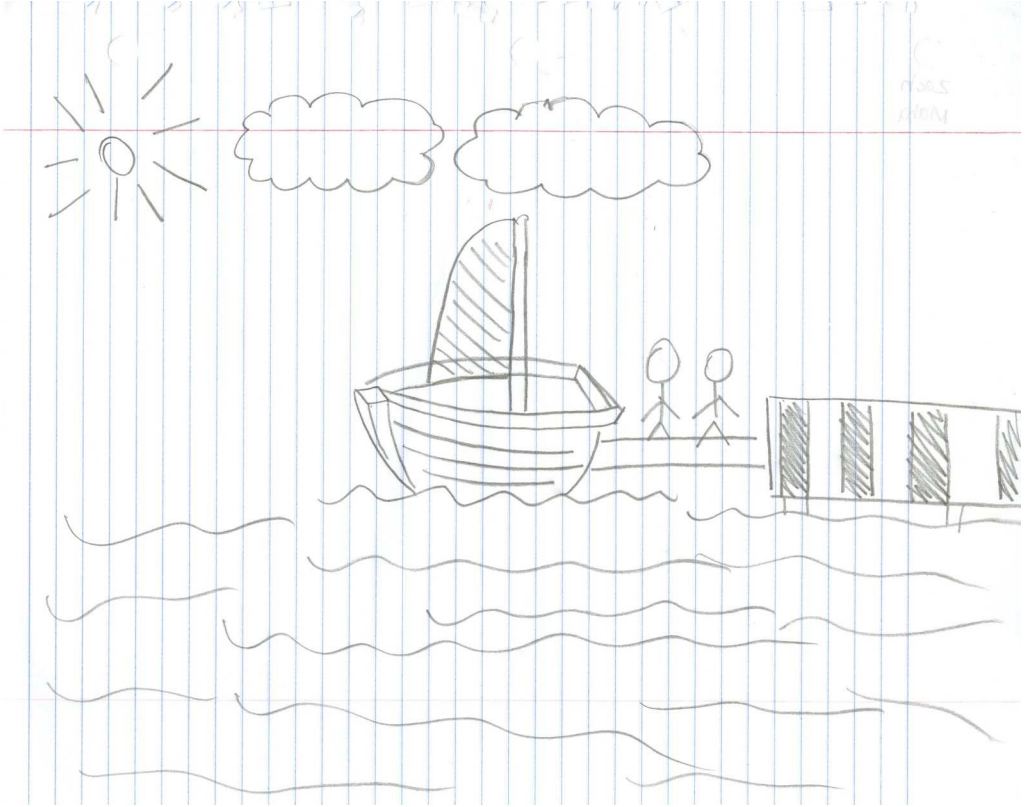
As I look back at where I started in my profession, I just admire my growth as a tonsorialist. Also, now I don't have even have 5 minutes to sit down when I'm at the barbershop!

Life is about the (everyday) choices you make...by S.K.

It was early August and I was very excited to start my new school. I was going to have a fresh start, and who doesn't like starting all over, right? Well, little did I know, you have to experience it to be able to judge it. So, I arrived, like a newbie amongst hundred others. Walking into the dining hall for the first time, I started noticing happy smiles, people hugging each other, fist-bumping, laughing and chattering; a sense of positivity was all in the air. I mean, being in a new environment for the first time, one wouldn't imagine the sense of comfort I was already feeling in this place. It was already starting to feel like I'd known this place for months, even though it had only been for a few hours. Was this all a trap perfectly set up for me? Or was I over thinking? I remained a bit skeptical but the excitement and joy of arrival overpowered me. Perhaps to a point that i was about a make a terrible mistake I'd regret the rest of my life...

I was really hungry in the moment because I hadn't eaten anything since the morning, so a stupid me decided to stuff his plate up with all the possible stuff. Fries, pizza, burger patties, you name it! It was all there and the plate could suffice all. "Oh how can I forget the soup then?" a thought rushed through my mind. It was a "Hot & Spicy" day and I couldn't resist. A bowl came to my assistance as I put my plate on the counter, and filled the bowl up with soup until it dripped down its edges. Now, this newbie had to find a place to sit whilst carefully carrying a chunk of food and liquids. Seems easier said than done.

Unfortunately, the only spot visible was at the very end of the hall where an empty chair was waiting for someone -a person who'd sit on it and give it the same warmth and love all the nearby chairs were deserving. So it was, I chose to travel through the rush of what felt like a million people, as I protected my beloved food from falling down. Suddenly, droplets of sweat were all over my forehead and I started to feel an itchiness. Did I mention it was a warm, sunny day? So, I needed to scratch the spot now or do something about it. The journey to the chair was closer than ever, yet this new dilemma added onto the handful of food all over my hands, made it seem impossible. The next thing I know, the bowl first drops and with it all my soup. Then comes the plate and the person carrying it. I'm not sure if this was order of the events, but I know for sure that my food and I were both on the floor at this time. Surprisingly, instead of coming to help me, these same bunch of seemingly nice people that I first described, all rose up from their places and started clapping. Within a minute, the round of applause turned so loud and evident, I felt as I had just performed and the audience was giving me a standing ovation or something....Apparently, it was a dining hall tradition that I was unaware of: You drop the plate, you get an applause. Sounds weird right now but a year later when someone else was in the same situation and I clapped for them, it felt nice to be on the other side. It's hard to tell why it felt that way...



It made me realize that some people don't look at people in prison as if they're animals

"A Time We Helped Someone"

Zack:

This one time, I helped this kid feel less left out. So this guy moved to my neighborhood. He had a lazy eye and walked kind of funny, so nobody wanted to hang out with him. I decided to hang out with him and we became best friends. Our families looked out for each other and we were very close. I helped the guy go to parties and meet other people. People saw me hanging out with him, and started to hang out with him as well. I used to talk to him, and that helped other people talk to him as well. Now, when I call and ask him what he has been up to, he tells me that he's doing all these things and has settled well in the neighborhood. I think that's the coolest thing ever.

Maha:

As I was walking back from the library one night, I suddenly heard a very loud noise coming from someone behind me. It was a girl sitting on the steps, with tears streaming down her face. I approached her and asked if she was okay, confused as to how she might respond to a stranger coming up to her at such an ungodly hour. The burning anger, coupled with pure sadness was something that is still such a vivid image in my mind. She gave me a fake smile, and I gave her a hug. She thanked me for being there for her. In that moment, I felt uncomfortable that she was thanking me. I smiled and sat with her, in case she wanted to talk about whatever was on her mind. At the same time, I did my best to make sure that she knew that I wasn't owed any explanation. She decided to talk to me about what was troubling her, and I felt grateful that she made the decision to trust me. We began to walk towards her dorm, and I understood just how important it was to listen to the other person, without the intention of simply responding. At the end of the night, seeing her fake smile become genuine made that night one of the most powerful nights of my life.

"A Weekend I Really Enjoyed Myself" by Kaitlin

For my 16th birthday, my mom decided to take me and my two best friends, Magda and Sofia, to California. From the plane ride to California to pulling into my house after it was over, every second was full of laughter and good memories. It was the weekend of Valentine's day, but we decided to make it Galentine's day. We got each other flowers, went shopping, learned how to surf, and attempted to cook dinner for ourselves. Every second of that weekend was full of laughs. When we went surfing, we were so tired afterwards, but it was so fun. Even though we were absolutely terrible at it, we still found a way to make it our own. One night, we went out to dinner by ourselves. We felt like such adults, even though we were just kids. The Friday that we were there, we went to Santa Monica and spent the day people watching and shopping. It was a simple day, but I will never forget how happy I was to be in California with the two people that made me happiest. Even just being in the hotel room and laughing while trying on clothes was as adventure. The pictures we took, the videos we made, and the memories we made, I won't forget any of it. One night we ordered room service and watched a movie. I don't think we ended up even watching the movie, we talked straight through it. We also met up with another one of our friends, Christina, who's grandma has a house a few minutes away from the hotel. That week was one that I will never forget, and whenever I am not feeling great, I just reflect.

"A Weekend I Really Enjoyed Myself" by Ski

On a Friday, the beginning of our weekend, me and 3 of my friends Jahuan, Dante, and Karon decided to go to the mall. While at the mall we ran into a few people we knew from school. We talked to a few people, took pictures, and ate at the food court. The day was going good. As we were about to leave we ran into our friend Caleb. He was with his girlfriend and 2 of her friends. After we talked to Caleb and took a few pictures we were on our way out of the mall until he called us back. He told us his girlfriend friends wanted to talk to me and Karon. So we went over there and started talking. I found out the girl I was talking to name was Janiyah, and the other girls name was Makayla. After talking for about 10 minutes we exchanged numbers and later that night decided to meet at the skating rink the following day. The next day me, Dante, and Karon played basketball to past time. Around 3:30 we all took showers got dressed went to the barber shop to get haircuts and was on our way to the skating rink. Since Caleb lived on the other side of town we all agreed to meet at the rink. Once me, Dante, Karon, and Caleb were all together we got our skates and chilled until the girls arrived. Once they showed up we all went our separate ways. I went with Janiyah, Karon went with Makayla, and Caleb went with his girlfriend Serenity & Dante went and talked to other people who were there. Me and Janiyah talked and skated and after we got tired of skating we just sat down and continued our conversation in one of the booths. The night was fun me and Janiyah learned about each other we ended up taking a bunch of pictures as well. At the end of the night me, Karon and Dante left to catch the bus back to our side of town but before we left we all decided to do something together again next weekend.

Sharing our future plans was a big step in our relationship.



A Day We Want to Relive

Lauren:

Woken up at 8:30 by the sound of the ocean, I walk into my family's kitchen. My grandmother and my mom are sitting out on the porch that connects, and I can see them chatting through the screened in window. They yell inside to me to get ready, as they have a fun day planned for my sister and I, who are 10 and 8. Soon, we are off in the car driving down long winding roads until we reach our favorite up island spot: a small town with a population of only 300 people. The entire day, we explore the huge cliffs that jut out of the land into the water and collect seashells that lay on the sand below. We spend hours picking out the perfect shell that can be made into a necklace, and soon my grandmother finds it buried in the sand. She washes it off in the ocean and hands it to me. When we arrive back at our home, we find string and my sister, grandmother and I sit on the same porch as we weave the shells into necklaces. We laugh and reminisce on our day, as my mom prepares sandwiches for us inside. I felt so truly content and calm this day, and wish that every day could be as peaceful as this. While my grandmother has passed away, and we no longer return to this island as frequently as we did when she was alive, I am thankful to have had these lovely memories with my family and days in which I would love to relive again.

Eli:

When I was younger living in Texas an me, my brothers, an sister went to a six flags an my mother dared me and my sister to get on a ride. I wish I could relive it because I was scared of heights. After that day I never rode another ride after that. Now every time I go to amusement parks, I just sit and watch other people get on rides. Still at age 18 I'm still afraid of heights and never rode any rides since.

Stories Are Gifts

every story is a gift

On the first night I thought we didn't really have anything in common. Now I think we actually have a couple things in common. This was worth my time because I met someone new.

On the first night I thought that conversation would be forced and awkward and that we wouldn't be able to connect. Now I think that all it takes is a little bit of effort to find things we have in common. I think this was worth my time because it allowed me to check my own preconceptions and meet people that I wouldn't have otherwise.

"A Time I Didn't Want Something to End " by Sage

When I was growing up, my room was right across the hall from my older brother's. He's always been the most musically inclined member of my family, and he used to stay up late into the night teaching himself to play new songs on the bass. The sound of him strumming away became a sort of lullaby for me. I would ask my mom, "Can you leave the door open?" after she said good night to me so that I could hear him playing. After fifth grade, my brother left for college. I was afraid of a lot of things about him leaving: not having someone to drive me to school, to show me new music, to stay with me when our parents went to visit our sister. But I was also afraid I wouldn't be able to fall asleep. How was I supposed to sleep in a quiet house? I thought without my brother there making noise, it would be easier for something to creep up on me. I was nervous that my parents would start closing my bedroom door because there was no longer a reason for me to want it open and then I wouldn't be able to see the hall light.

Eventually, I got used to falling asleep to silence, even though I didn't want to. Adapting to sleeping in the quiet meant adapting to not having my brother around, which unsettled me. I soon discovered though, that I never had to get used to being without him because I never was. He still showed me new music and would talk to me when our parents were gone, it was just from a distance. He showed me that special things don't end, they just change.

"Raccoon Dog"

The day I found out about the best animal on earth The Amazing Raccoon dog *it was a nice sunny day I went to the school library to check out some books as I was looking around there was this one book that just stood out to me a very big book with a jaguar on the cover *titled "Wildlife of the world" I thought the book was in 3D because the animal on the front looked as if it was going to jump right out of the cover so I started flipping through pages that's when the greatest animal on earth was discovered I couldn't believe my eyes when I first seen it I thought it was a joke so I read the passage in the book about the raccoon dog *it didn't really say much so I had to go do a little research and sure enough *it was a real animal an actual dog that looks exactly like a raccoon *it kinda swaks they can't do the same things raccoons can do but to have a dog that looks like one would be awesome I thought it was so cool that I told everyone even my family

ever since I found out such
an animal exists I knew from
that moment forward ~~and~~ raccoon
dogs and I were destined to
be best friends so I made it
my personal goal to own one
even if I have to leave the
U.S. it would be totally worth
it just to get my hands on the
best animal ever.

By Lamarion

"A Day I want to Relive" by Erica

I lost my grandma in March of 2015. She had cancer for about three months, and we knew that she didn't have much time left. One February day my mom pulled my sister and I out of school; my grandma was having a good day, and with her having a limited number of those days left, my mom thought it would be a good opportunity to be with her. It was a horrible feeling, knowing that every time we saw our grandma, it could be our last. I didn't know this at the time, but this time would be the last time I would ever see my grandma. However, we spent our last time together in the best way possible. My sister, my grandma, and I all laid down together in my grandma's bed for hours, tangled in blankets, listening to my grandma talk and share little random anecdotes from her life. She told us so many different stories, about her, her husband, our mom, growing up in Brooklyn. We just listened to her tell us everything she wanted us to know. It was almost as if she knew this could be our last time together, and she wanted us to walk away knowing every little detail about her. It was the best day I had ever spent with my grandma; I have never felt so close to her, and I will always wish I could live in those moments all over again.

By Phillip:

When I was 13 I got shot in the back right beside my spine the doctor told me that I will not play at my next two games and probably more so I just couldn't believe that my career was over already it would have never happened if I didn't go to that party but I wasn't trying to hear the doctor after a week I was out of the hospital and already back on the court the next month I went back to the doctor to get the bullet removed he told me that a piece of it was too close to my spine and now it's still there and will be for the rest of my life but it's my motivation to live and never stop pushing to the end.

“I will always remember how Phillip encouraged me to put myself out there, as well as never failed to give me some new TV shows to watch every week” - Erica

“I will remember you should always know that it's a better way to live life and Erica made me think about college in the future and better things” - Phillip

"I Time I Felt Pain" by Halle

May 10th, 2005--5 days after my 5th birthday, and 5 days after my little brother Zachary was born. That was the day I got bit by a dog in the face.

The dog's name was Raven. She was my next door neighbor's dog-- a black lab with big brown eyes. She spent her days tied up by a chain in her backyard. Most days after school, I would throw my bag down in the house and rush outside to play with her. I've always loved dogs, and Raven was no exception. Throwing my arms around her felt like hugging a teddy bear. I would ride on her back like she was a horse, throw sticks around the yard for her to play fetch with. Even though she scared the other kids in the neighborhood, Raven never scared me.

And then the neighbors had a newborn son, and Raven had changed. I didn't know this, but apparently something went mentally wrong with Raven after their son was born. So, when I ran outside that day and threw my arms around her, Raven snapped. I was no longer her friend. She lunged at my face, and in less than a second, chunks of it were lying in the grass as I screamed. Each tear carried with it streaks of blood down my cheeks. My mother described it as though it were a scene in a horror movie--seeing her 5 year old daughter with an unrecognizable, bloody face, clutching the ground on all fours, yelling out at the top of her lungs.

My dad rushed me to the hospital. Terrified of doctors and put into a straight jacket to stop me from flailing around, I was faced with what seemed like a million long, sharp needles coming right at me. 3 nurses had to hold me down to keep me from messing up the stitches. I ended up getting ice cream and Chinese food for "being so brave," as my mom described it. I never felt brave, though. I felt embarrassed. I felt worried about Raven. What did I do wrong? Did I hurt her? Was she okay?

And then I went home and felt guilt. Pain. Anger. Sadness. Raven was put down after she bit me. Even at 5 years old, I understood what it felt like to feel as though you were the cause of losing a friend. My scars on my face are a reminder of that horrible day. I hope Raven feels peace wherever she is.

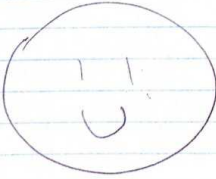
"Tell a story about someone you lost" by Nasir

Let me tell you about the time I lost my homeboy Erv, his real name is Ervin, some people calls him Ervin, Ervda Perv, Erv or EJ but he prefers Erv. He was shot November of 2017, by a boy him & I grew up around. He was found dead behind a church with a fun wound to his head, he could have lived but no one was there to save him before he bled out. 2 years ago when I was up here the 1st time me & my boy from the same way was on the unit he was on the phone, when he got off the phone he was like "Ay Nas come here" we went to da bathroom area & he says "You won't believe who just died" I said who he said "Erv" I said "hell no." When, where, how? He said his mom had just told him I felt so sick my whole mood went from okay to Not Okay I just couldn't believe it. I was in my cell dying for answer but something was telling me it had to be someone close to him because he wasnt known to be slippin. My last memory with him was one night we were riding round deep 4 boys 2 girls just smoking. We took a few pictures and that was our last time chilling a few weeks later I got locked up. My last time seeing him was before I came up here 1st time, he had got locked up and I never saw him again only in pictures and Memories

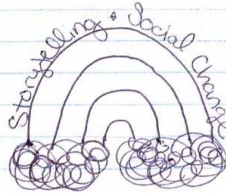
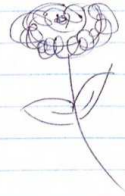
Sincerely Nasir 

~~scribble~~

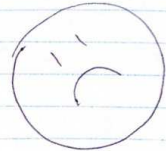
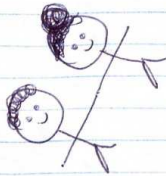
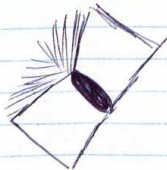
I feel grateful



TELL A STORY ABOUT A TIME



HI MY NAME IS...



*I wonder how close I will grow to this kid,
how deep our conversations will become,
and how hard it will be to leave when this is
all over. Where will our lives take us? I
struggle with the fact that I will never know,
and if my words ever have or will have some
sort of an impact...*

"A Person Who Inspires You the Most" by Emma

In my family, I'm the oldest. As the oldest, I loved being able to be a support system for my younger sister, but I dreamed and dreamed of having an older sister. Being a role model for my sister is something that will always be important to me, but I wanted to have that same support and guidance I gave her everyday. When I was in second grade, my parents went to New York City for the night, and left us with a new babysitter from my school, named Elizabeth. She was a junior in high school, and I immediately loved her. I wanted to be just like her. I remember playing a hybrid version of hide-and-seek mixed with tag that my sister and I invented, and we played that for hours on end. We would make up an endless number of games, dress up to make music videos, or build forts. She was always open to do whatever my sister and I wanted to do every time she came over, and was the happiest, most enthusiastic person.

It's been almost 12 years since the first day we met Elizabeth. To this day, my parents call her their third child, we spend every Christmas together, and she is truly the fifth member of our family. She just turned 29, got engaged to the most amazing guy, and is getting married in a few months. If you had told my second grade self that I was getting an older sister, I would have laughed and called you crazy. But Elizabeth truly is my older sister - I call her all the time, whether I have the best news to share or if I had the worst day imaginable. Since I was a kid, I've tried to model myself after Elizabeth. She's taught me so much more than she will ever know, and she will always be my role model, my inspiration, and my big sister.

"A Time You Felt Pain" by Jarell

It was the day my brother died. I was in school when one day I got a call saying he was in a car accident. But he had just left my crib like 3 hours before that. I just hoped it wasn't too serious as I rushed to the hospital. But to find out he was brain dead. I gather with my friends and we prayed. As the guy that was in the car came and told me that he flew out the front windshield on impact, it hurt me to the soul. As I prayed staring out the window I closed my eyes. All I could see was his face smiling. As soon as I looked up I seen it raining I just had that gut feelin. He was gone. It felt as if somebody shot me from the inside of my heart. Hours later doctors informed me that he gave up. It was the worst pain I had felt mentally. I mourned his death. It hurt me to the soul. He was my right hand man I had to bury at 16 years old.

"What Inspires Us the Most" By Grace

Without a doubt, my very own mom inspires me the most. As a Junior in high school, starting our annual field hockey game against a traveling team from Saint Louis, my mind could not stop wondering why my parents were missing from the stands. My head automatically glanced at the stands every blown whistle and every hit ball. I felt confused after the two hour game almost to the point of nausea. I drove home thinking of frightening scenarios to explain my parents' absence. I called my sister and let out my bottled up worries by belting out shrieks in the midst of a pool of tears. The crying did not stop that night.

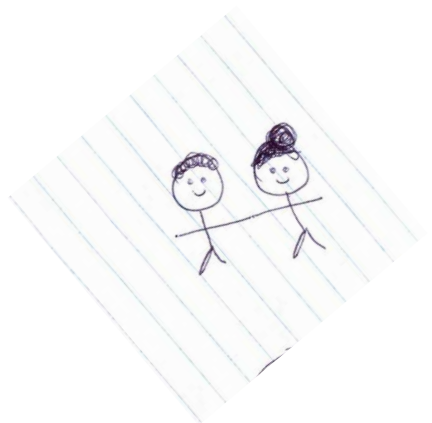
My mom and dad told me about my mom's cancer diagnosis when I got home, something that I learned does not go away overnight. It was the new reality. Fighting the rare and rapidly spreading cancer, cholangiocarcinoma, my mom fearlessly tackled every obstacle and surprised doctors everyday with her gracious attitude from a position normally riddled by bitterness and grief. She never let anything set her back or take away her contagious smile even during times it was easiest to give up. My mom's incredible strength was visible to everyone. One nurse even said, "Miss Julie, you're not like anyone here. You're not bitter. You're not angry, You're still kind. I hope I can have as much grace and strength as you do when my time comes." Her ability to put the disease in her back pocket and enjoy time with her visitors no differently than before was truly unbelievable.

Whether it was my brother frustrated about one high school football game or me and my sisters fighting over something trivial, my mom was always cracking jokes from her hospital bed. Sounds like it should be the other way around, right? My mom's enormous amount of strength shined everyday through the windows of the hospital room. Whether it was, by decorating the room for halloween, cheering for the Chiefs every Sunday night in her fuzzy Chiefs socks, or having the courage to put on a nice outfit with jeans to try to feel normal, my mom, family and friends had a surprisingly good time in the hospital room. I never expected so many laughs to come out of the hospital room my family and I unexpectedly spent months in: we learned to call "our new living room." Each day I wake up making the decision to have a good day just like my mom was able to do while fighting this relentless, unforgiving disease. Proud doesn't begin to explain how I feel to be her daughter. She will forever be my biggest inspiration, the reason for my strength, and my best friend.

"What Inspires Us Most" By Darrell

When people ask me what inspires me or motivates me, I say “you mean who” because nothing inspires me more than The women in my life. My sisters, my mother, my grandmother, my niece they truly bring me the most joy in the world. Being around them is like having Christmas everyday, I could never get enough of them. They always push me to be the best I can be no matter what it is they support me 100%. Waking up in the morning knowing I’m not just living for myself but I’m living for them is the biggest inspiration I could ever ask for. With everything we been through all the ups and downs all the trials and errors, they always stood by my side so when you ask me who inspires me the most it is the women who made me into the man I am today.

I will never forget the dynamic that we shared.



By Lily:

On the first night, I thought that it could be hard to connect below the surface level because we seem to come from such different backgrounds. Now I understand that my partner and I were able to connect and relate to each other with such ease even during the first time. We spoke to each other almost as if we had always known each other which made each time we were together much more meaningful.

On the first night I expected that maybe he would not be too interested in being there or care much about our purpose for the visits. These expectations were definitely not met considering he would always answer each prompt with care and intention and was willing to share vulnerable details of his past. He made it seem like a privilege to participate in the program and his interest and involvement in the storytelling each week was something that I always looked forward to. Looking back, one thing I will remember most from this experience is the way my partner would talk about his mother. We both related to a close relationship with our moms, and the way he talked about looking forward to her visits and her close involvement in his life always made me smile. We both shared how our moms have been through a lot and are so grateful to have them as role models and sources of support in our lives.

Our Futures

Georgia:

When I think about my future, I envision myself surrounded by family. I never want to move far away from my siblings and hope that we all stay as close as we are now, both emotionally and geographically. I imagine big family gatherings like what I experience now, with cousins, aunts, and uncles. When I see my mom and her siblings interact, they immediately put their guards down and seem as though they are taken right back into their childhood again. My siblings are my rocks and my support, and I do not know what I would do without them. When I think about my future, all I can think about is them and being surrounded by the people who make me most happy.

Penny:

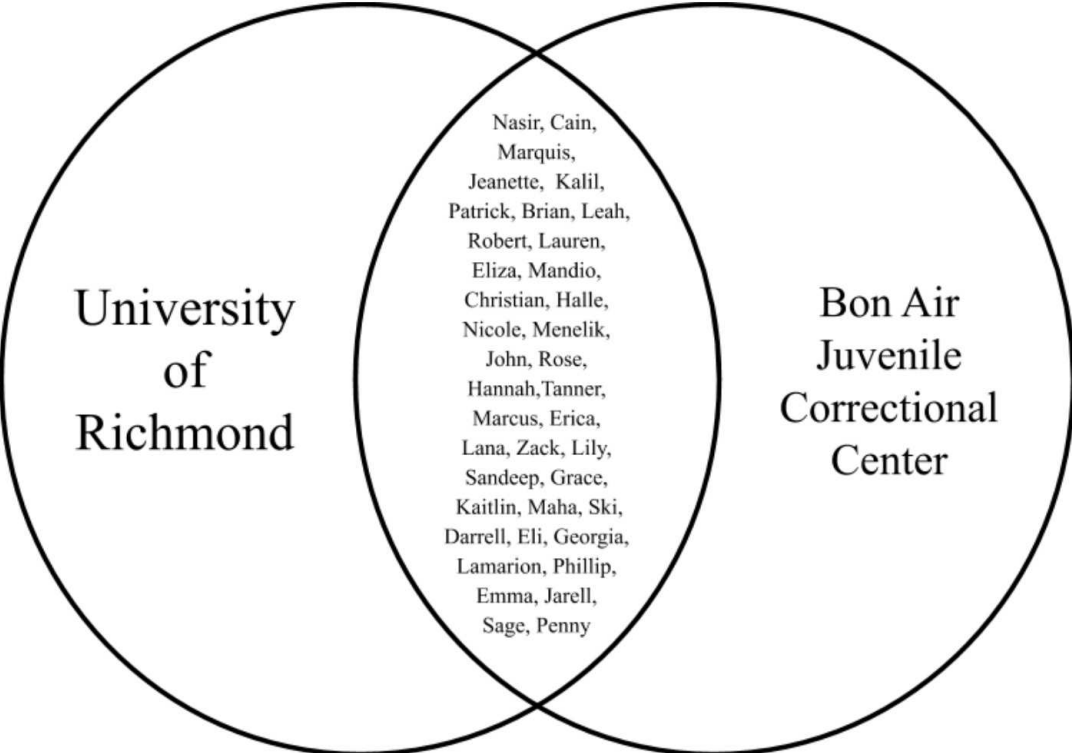
I want to do HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) and start my own company. But that's not the only trade I want to have, I want to be a jack of all trades. But focus on HVAC. I want to start small businesses so I could put some money aside for my family.

John:

I want to be a mechanic and build my own dirt bikes because I feel like my dirt bike would be the best brand there is out there. I fell in love with dirt bikes as a young kid and it motivated me to build something better and faster. It would be called The Crasher because of my past. Where I'm from, they have dirt bike groups who ride throughout the city. I always wanted to be a part of them when I saw them out my window or in my neighborhood. It is something I've always wanted to do.

Dear Reader,

Now that you've read our stories, we hope you have a better understanding of the power of storytelling and what it can do. Accordingly, it is now time to thank the most important individuals who brought this journey to life: storytellers who came from both the University of Richmond and Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center. As storytellers, we chose to communicate with each other using our first names and for this reason, we have decided to present the following acknowledgments in the same manner. The storytellers are as follows:



University
of
Richmond

Nasir, Cain,
Marquis,
Jeanette, Kalil,
Patrick, Brian, Leah,
Robert, Lauren,
Eliza, Mandio,
Christian, Halle,
Nicole, Menelik,
John, Rose,
Hannah, Tanner,
Marcus, Erica,
Lana, Zack, Lily,
Sandeep, Grace,
Kaitlin, Maha, Ski,
Darrell, Eli, Georgia,
Lamarion, Phillip,
Emma, Jarell,
Sage, Penny

Bon Air
Juvenile
Correctional
Center

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the goal of this piece is to share the stories that have deeply impacted and affected us and we hope that they will do the same for you. We have dedicated many hours to this project, and in return, all we ask is that you make an effort to pass these stories on. Once you have read this collection, give it to someone else so that they may also experience the different personalities, hopes, passions and, most importantly, stories that are included inside. Thank you in advance for your continued help with this final and important step.

Yours Truly,
The Storytellers

A special thank you to Cain for
designing the cover of this book.

