

FACES

Presented by the members of I-WISH
(Incarcerated Women Inside Seeking to/for Help)
Maryland Correctional Institute for Women
Jessup, Maryland
Adapted and Compiled by Betty May
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FACES

SCENE 1: INTRODUCTION

MUSIC: “Urban Rap” Track #1: 0:7

LaSCHELLE Good evening/afternoon/morning ladies and gentlemen. We are glad you are here. We are not glad we are here.

I am prisoner #_____. But I am more than a number. I am a person, and I used to be a teenager, just like you. I had hopes and dreams, just like you. And I thought I knew everything, just like you.

We are not here to entertain you. This is not a Walt Disney production. Our goals are two: to let you know where bad choices can take you, and to let you see our faces. I am a person. Just like you.

CONNIE I am a person. I am more than a number. Look at me. Please, look at me. Look at my face. See me.

TONYA L. I’ve made mistakes. Bad mistakes. But I am still a person

BLYTHE I have a brain.

CLARA I have a mind.

DENISE I have a soul.

JUANITA I am not garbage.

TAMMI I don’t deserve to be thrown away.

ETTA I want respect.

DARLENE I deserve respect.

LaSCHELLE Because, I am a person. Just like you.

SCENE 2: CHILDHOOD

MUSIC: “What About the Children?” Track #2: 1:17

DENISE One of my happiest memories is when I was around ten or eleven years old and I got my hair pressed in Shirley Temple curls. I went to a church carnival. I had on a blue and white dress with white socks and black patent leather shoes. I felt pretty and all dressed up.

In Kindergarten or first grade I had this teacher, Ms. Bounds. I loved her. Well, one day we had show and tell. Because my last name is White – W – I was the last pupil to listen to this experiment. She had a rubber band and was holding it to my ear. She was stretching the rubber band so we could hear the vibrations. Well, when she got to me it POPPED, and I had this big red welt on the side of my neck. I didn't like Ms. Bounds too much after that.

SAIRA I think the first flower I learned to draw was a tulip. But I also love the smell of roses. And I love daffodils... or buttercups—the ones you would place under your chin. If it “showed yellow” you love butter. I can't believe I just remembered that—nice.

BLYTHE My very best Christmas was the year I got my purple bicycle. I loved that bike. I took it to every house on the block to show it off. All the neighbors said it was the most beautiful bike they had ever seen.

Hardwood. Hard-boiled eggs. Hard nails. These are good things in life. Hard knocks. Hard head. Hard heart. Hard bed. Hard life is not what we want to look forward to every day. Yet most little girls are taught to believe it's hard in the world and that's that! My mother told me, “If you make your bed hard, you have to lie in it.”

One day I asked, “Why, oh why, Momma, do I have to stay in the hard bed?”

TONYA L. I know my parents did their best based on what they experienced as children. My favorite saying is this:

For what I am today, I can blame my parents.

But, if I stay that way,

Shame on Me!

SCENE 3: GROWING UP

MUSIC: “Childhood” Track #3: 0.0

KIM If I could change anything about my life, it would be my move to the city.

I was looking for my mother. She lived in Baltimore. However the lady who raised me—the lady who was not my real mother—was the best MOM imaginable.

With my real mother, there were no hugs, no tuck me in, no storybook readings, no family talks, no evening meals, and no communication.

There was violence.

What I've learned is that learning comes from experience!

I don't regret the bad times, because I'm happy knowing I've learned that the people God puts in your life may not always be the people you long for.

ETTA I love a pretty mowed green grass. Grass can also be irritating, especially if you're allergic. But grass reminds me of summer.

I remember the first time I saw my dog eat grass then YUCK. That wasn't a pretty sight.

JOYCE One of my saddest memories is when my mother died. I hated her for not loving me. I don't even remember her hugging or kissing me. She tried to abort me when she found out she was pregnant with me. I have no baby pictures. Anyway, my mom passed of cancer and once I got past how much I hated her, I started to understand that she did the best she could do in her own circumstances. Once I realized she was a fourteen-year-old having me and having all these other children at an early age, I forgave her for treating me so bad. When she died, I was truly sad, because you only get one MOM. We did make up before she passed.

SAIRA When I think of trees, I see a weeping willow, its lightweight green branches swaying back and forth. And at night I really can hear the whistling of the tree.

CONNIE Autumn is my best time for trees. The leaves with colors of rust, brick, cinnamon. I love those colors. It's outside. It's nature and it's beautiful.

KIM Love can come in many shapes and forms. I can go to the shopping mall and find love. I can fall in love with the newest fashionable styles or friendly people who roam the isles. How about ordering a double-decker peanut butter ice cream cone, then love the fact that I want to walk alone after eating all that?

I can love the Sandy Beach in the hottest month of July, but I prefer the Springy month of May, lounging in the sand, looking up towards the sky to watch the seagulls fly away.

SAIRA When I was younger, I liked helping people—even strangers. Now I've learned that people can be very bad. I don't trust anyone anymore. I miss that. I would like to be able to help strangers again.

DENISE There was an old lady
Who lived in a shoe

(JERMEL taps Denise on the shoulder.)

DENISE What?

JERMEL Projects.

DENISE Thank you.
Who had so many children
She didn't know what to do.

(JERMEL taps Denise on the shoulder.)

DENISE What?

JERMEL Welfare.

DENISE Thank you.

One was on crack.
One made it back.
One made it out of school.
One thought school wasn't cool.
One was raped. One was molested.
Yeah, you guessed it, it was big Uncle Fested
Don't forget the ones in jail,
Living that life you dare not tell.
All in all, life isn't so bad
When you stop looking at yourself
And see you are better off than others.

SCENE 4: HIGH SCHOOL

MUSIC: "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" Track #4: 0:14

(ALL sing with music.)

ETTA In high school, I was a good student, got good grades, never caused any trouble. I was very popular. My last three years I had perfect attendance. I was in every club and school event, and selected for homecoming queen. I babysat for all my teachers and had a job after school so I could support myself. I also worked while going to college and I earned three degrees. Getting through school was hard, and wondering what direction my life would go was scary.

CONNIE In high school, I went with the crowd. I did whatever I had to do to fit in. Whatever the popular kids did, I did, too. I was cool, and that was all that mattered. And I discovered drugs.

MUSIC: "Urban Rap" Track: #5: 0:0

PARRIS We're here for life and we want to say:
That drugs will never do it; there's a different way.
Drugs knock you out and make you numb
And if you use them you're just plain dumb.

JUANITA You're in a rut, you're lost, you're sick.
You can't do anything without that fix.
You're hyped, you're down, you're all spaced out.
You're wrecking your lives without a doubt.

PARRIS Don't be a user or a junkie or a freak.
Take hold of your life! You can be unique!
Dare to find your place. You can win the race.
With your head messed up you can't compete.

JUANITA When you're all strung out on dope and stuff,
You can't see clearly; you can't see enough.

PARRIS You're desensitized, you're paralyzed,

JUANITA You're anesthetized, you're stupefied

PARRIS You're dazed, in a haze, and you're comatose.

JUANITA You're hooked, you're cooked, and you have no hope

PARRIS and JUANITA And that's no way to go.

PARRIS There are uppers and downers and scag and smack
And grass and pot and weed and crack
They'll rob your mind; you'll do no work,
And the ones who supply them are just big jerks.

JUANITA Your brain will be muddled and all confused.
All due to the drugs that you've abused.
Your mind will be debilitated.
Your life will become (*beat*) stagnated
Forget that junk – be emancipated
'Cause that's the way to go.

PARRIS and JUANITA 'Cause that's the way to go.

ALL 'Cause that's the way to go.

TONYA L. If you're on drugs you know what we mean.
It'll take a lot of work to get yourself clean.
But with some help and trust in Above,
You'll find in you someone to love.

DARLENE My mother always trusted me. She believed everything I said and every story I told her. Until one day she caught me in a lie, then she didn't trust me anymore. It takes one night to lose trust; it takes years to get it back.

KIM This is a story I don't want to tell:

It is my first prom. Barry's big, silver, Chevy Impala comes around the corner and I run to meet it. We are supposed to take pictures and pin corsages and say "ooh" and "aah," so Barry looks bewildered as he opens the car door to let me in.

I am dressed in my gorgeous, pink lace gown. My make-up is perfect and my hair has baby's breath woven in it. I am gorgeous. And I am escaping.

Only hours before, I stood in a small, damp bathroom, wrapped only in a towel, wanting the man on the other side of the door to go away. But he wouldn't. He kept talking in his deep scary

voice. He said he'd make the rest of my life hell if I told. He said Mom would believe him, not me, because he was a grown-up.

I kept saying, "I'm telling." And the fear became determination.

I heard the rattle of Mom's keys in the kitchen door and ran downstairs. I told her everything that had been happening for ten years. No more secrets, no more being afraid. I knew that Mom would be proud of me for how well I'd been able to defend myself all this time. I was her little girl.

He blamed it on me. He said I threw myself at him.

My mother chose him.

Something inside my soul died, but I didn't cry; I kept right on preparing for my first prom.

So, I sit in Barry's car, smiling on the outside, hollow on the inside. I can't tell Barry what happened. What can he do to help in his ridiculous light blue tux with ruffles? He doesn't know anything about the kind of things that go on in my home. No one does. This ugly truth is my own and no one can know my shame.

We arrive at the prom. Lionel Ritchie and Michael Jackson play in a gymnasium filled with streamers and paper decorations. As we dance, I stare at the other teenagers. I marvel at their beauty, absolutely certain that every one of them is lucky, if only because they aren't me.

I think of Jim and of how smug he would be, parked on the plaid couch, smoking his cigarettes in front of the big, wooden console TV, while Mom flits around, trying to please him.

I am her final sacrifice. I am a teenager and I have just learned my worth.

SAIRA In my senior year I joined a gang and the gang became my family. I felt safe. What I didn't know was that I wasn't really safe at all. Because when you're in a gang, you are the target of all the other gangs just because you are in your gang. Still, it is easier to follow; it is dangerous and scary to lead.

CONNIE In high school, you say hello to people you pass.

JOYCE In prison, you look at the floor.

CONNIE In high school, you wear your headphones to hear music.

JOYCE In prison you wear headphones so no one will talk to you.

CONNIE High school is a small community; everyone knows what everyone is doing.

JOYCE Prison is even smaller. People know how you brush your teeth and what kind of toilet paper you use.

CONNIE In high school, you have to have a pass to go to the restroom.

JOYCE We do, too. The difference is, when you leave high school, you won't need the pass anymore.

CONNIE In high school, my friends and I used to go to the mall to look at all the latest fashions.

JOYCE This is what we wear now.

CONNIE In high school, you get high fantasizing about your future.

JOYCE In prison, you get high fantasizing about your past.

CONNIE In high school, time goes slowly.

JOYCE In prison, time stands still.

CONNIE In high school, you probably have a manual of rules and regulations.

JOYCE You should see ours!

CONNIE In high school, you have roll call.

JOYCE In prison, six times a day, maybe more, sometimes in the middle of the night, we have this:

TONYA L. ROLL CALL!

(TONYA L. and the cast act out roll call.)

TONYA L. *(When finished with roll call.)* COUNT'S CLEAR!

CONNIE But other things are similar: gossip, jealousy, disrespect...

JOYCE The difference is that you can leave high school behind and go home.

SCENE 5: ADULT LIFE

MUSIC: "Urban Rap" Track # 6: 0:14

TONYA R./ETTA I left home. I called my parents every few months. When I talked to my mother she would beg me to call more often. "Please call me," she would say. "Come home," she would say. But I couldn't. I was too ashamed. Drugs ruled my world.

DARLENE Song: "Waiting For My Child to Come Home"

JUANITA I have two daughters and two sons who mean the world to me. I was a single mother and life was a struggle. There was nothing in this world I wouldn't do for my children and that meant any means necessary. I didn't want to hustle on the block, but finding a good job was impossible for a woman without a high school diploma.

I'm not ashamed of the things I did because it was about survival. Watching my back from the police, from other hustlers, and from junkies trying to rob me for my supply because they

couldn't afford the drugs I was selling, that is what I had to do. The life of a hustler is all about money, because the amount of money you can make in a week working a nine to five job, I can make in a day hustling.

I never thought my life would turn out the way it did, but life is what you make it, and I made my life a living hell. The company you keep, and the negative things people do, rub off on you, and you become negative, too.

MUSIC: "Ordinary People" Track #7: 0.59

CLARA She hears him at the door and runs to greet him.

"Wha' cha been doing all day?" he says.

"Same old stuff," she says.

She puts the food on the table: baked chicken, mashed potatoes, peas and onions, home-pickled watermelon rind cubes with spicy dill cucumber rounds, and fresh hot biscuits, set on a table with gold plated flatware and matching china.

He takes a few bites, reaches for the pepper, and shakes the container over his food. Nothing. He shakes again. Still nothing. He slams the shaker down on the table and backhands her with enough force to topple both her and her chair over backwards.

"Fill this up, you stupid bitch! Do I have to tell you everything?"

She goes to the kitchen, fills the peppershaker, and returns to her place at the dinner table.

SCENE 6: CRIME

MUSIC: CSI "Who?" Track # 8: 0.17

SAIRA We didn't mean to hurt the old lady. The gun wasn't even loaded. And we didn't see her collapse after we ran away. How could we have known she had a bad heart?

CONNIE She was flirting with my boy friend, so me and my friends decided to teach her a lesson about messing with someone else's man. She deserved my anger; she didn't deserve to die.

JOYCE Something triggered in me when I walked in and saw the man molesting my son. At that moment I killed everything negative in my life. I killed my mother who didn't want me—pushing me to the side like some beat-up rag doll; the father who beat the crap out of my mother in front of me; the boyfriend who battered me; and the man who put a knife to my throat and raped me.

SCENE 7: TRIAL AND SENTENCING

MUSIC: BACH Toccata & Fugue in D minor Track #9: 0.0

SAIRA There were a thousand things echoing in my mind as I stared at the jury. I was still standing, and yet everything in the courtroom appeared to be at a distance. I felt as though I was

two feet tall and everything around me was huge and swirling about, like Dorothy in THE WIZARD OF OZ. Dazed by my unclear surroundings. I appeared to be in the background of my own life, watching it pass me by.

CLARA Dear Jury,

Look upon my face and see the rigidity of my form. Don't ask WHY, because the pain inside is still too much to bear. I was taught from earliest childhood to be still. I could not display emotion. That brought more beatings. If I cried, I might die. My mother knew, but she didn't care and told me not to tell anyone.

Listen to the sound of my Voice. Hear my words and believe I don't belong here sitting in that chair in the witness box. My Automation is mouthing the words for me because I am unable to relive the pain. My shame prevented me from telling strangers what was being done to me until I had to.

You ask why I didn't leave? Instead, ask the police why they were not there, or better yet ask my husband why he beat me. Question the prosecutors. Ask them why my husband was not imprisoned when he broke my bones. Put the judge in that same chair. Ask why the law was not upheld and punishment meted out before my husband beat me that last time.

Look into yourself and ask how you can stop the abuse, and, when you return to that Room to cast your vote, judge me NOT from the comfort of your life, but from the agony and terror of mine. Take with you what you heard while in the Juror's box. Look at yourself and your neighbors. Face your responsibility in this tragic event and do your share that there be an end to lives lived as mine.

KIM I felt like I had been in the courtroom for hours. However, when I blinked and realized where I was, my ears felt as though cotton balls had been removed. I could finally hear what was going on. I focused and realized only a few seconds had passed since the judge's announcement: GUILTY.

JERMEL Will the defendant please rise. (*ALL rise.*) I sentence you to LIFE at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women.

(*Gavel bangs. ALL Sit.*)

CLARA They took my freedom.

They took my pride.

They ripped out my insides

I thought I would die.

I looked up to Heaven

And said with a smile,

“Please God –

Send me an Angel

To guide me for a while.”

I've always been a fighter,

A believer and Your friend,

So please, God, stay with me till the end.

I'll never stop believing in You and Your Son.

And before this is over, the war will be won.
You know my heart and believe in me,
The greatest gift to set me free.
Others don't know me –
The way You do,
I'm really thankful
I have You.

CONNIE You never appreciate the meaning of tranquil,
Until turbulent times appear.
You never cherish peace of mind,
'Til your heart beats to the sound of fear.
You never value your freedom
Until it is threatened to be taken.
You never question tomorrow,
'Til the contemplation of it not being
Becomes a harsh reality.

SCENE 8: PRISON LIFE

MUSIC: “Urban Rap” Track # 10: 0.15

TONYA R. It wasn't long, my jury trial;
The verdict only took a while
Didn't want to kill,
I had no choice.
Did they feel my pain?
Did they hear my voice?

PARRIS The bruises had faded and the bones had healed
No way they could know of how it feels.
How night after night he beat me senseless
And left me broken with no defenses.
How he screamed and yelled and used his fists
And broke my arm with just one twist.
And left me lying on the floor—
I couldn't take it any more.

JUANITA My lawyer said, “Now, don't be worried,
I saw the faces of the jury.”
But all they saw was the bloody knife.
The gavel banged, and I got life.

PARRIS So now I'm here—no end in sight.
I think of him in the long cold night.

I'm sorry, I say again and again.
I believed you that night, that lovely night when
You said you would love me all your life
If I would just become your wife.
But you didn't love me as I loved you,
And for some strange reason, I still do.

JUANITA When I got to prison, I found I had a new name. I was no longer Juanita Robinson. I was Inmate Robinson.

JOYCE Intense therapy here in prison has helped me to talk and talk and cry and cry. I now realize how the violence in my household affected the outcome of my life. I stuffed and stuffed until one day I killed everything negative in my life. I killed all my years of pent-up rage in one person.

DENISE Everything I knew all my life, I lost in a matter of seconds.
So, here I sit with sixteen years of my life gone by.
If only I could turn the hands of time back,
But, I can't. So here I still sit.

TONYA R. No matter what I say, my parents always blame themselves because I'm here in prison. But I made my own choices. It's nobody's fault but mine. I know they still love me and always will. I am forever their little girl.

TAMMI We had our 4th of July meal today. The meal sucked, but I had to thank my God because some people don't have that to eat. I looked up into the sky and quickly turned away. I guess I turned away because it was so beautiful. I don't want to look at it through the window of this prison, because then the sky becomes ugly

CONNIE Sunday is worship day. Well, worship is every day for me because I pray every day and all day. You have to in here to keep your peace of mind. You say your prayer silently in your heart and keep it moving, hoping and praying God gets you through another day.

DARLENE This morning I woke up in a somber mood. Don't know why. I guess it goes along with the life sentence. Your mood changes from sad to happy to hopeful to tearful in a matter of seconds for no reason at all. Makes you feel like you are going crazy at times. Oh, yeah. Let's not forget about the anger that may surface from time to time.

JOYCE (*Sung.*) Sitting here lonely like a broken man,
Serving my time, doing the best I can.
Bars and wire surround me,
But I don't want no sympathy.

(*JOYCE pauses, and then sits and continues.*)

Sometimes it's hard for me to look into a mirror. Yes, even after all these years, I still feel ashamed and even embarrassed. I cry from time to time because it still hurts really bad. And, I ask myself: why am I crying? I guess I still cry for myself and even for my family, especially my

children. But, most important, I cry for my victims. Because in no shape, form, or fashion did “they” deserve any of this. And, the realization of it all makes my heart heavy. I become so sad and empty inside. Lots of times, I look around this place and I can’t believe that I am here. I shake my head and close my eyes and always wonder: What if?

DENISE True feelings and thoughts can sometimes wreck your brain, from watching a cooking show on TV to using the bathroom. I was watching a cooking show and wondering to myself: damn, will I ever be able to taste a biscuit again or eat a Bar-B-Q spare rib? How about a steak or a crab cake? Well, I guess not, huh! That’s why I was placed in prison for the rest of my life, so I would never ever get to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. Like, taking a bath would be nice. Just to sit in a nice hot, steamy, bubble bath and just sit there and soak my body. Soak the prison smell right off my ass and live again.

CLARA Some thoughts are not even worth having, but I do. Like when I see a wedding on TV, tears form in my eyes because I wonder if no one will come along in my life to help me, no lawyer ever takes my case, I’ll never get a chance to wear a beautiful wedding gown, or go on a honeymoon, or make someone happy for the rest of my life. I’ll be here to die, to suffer behind these gates. Isn’t that what people in the free world want? For us “Lifers” to suffer worse than animals and die in here?

TAMMI I’ll never get a chance to go to Hershey Park or Walt Disney World, or ride in an airplane or train, or even go to Las Vegas, Huh? Maybe just watch it on TV and that’s that. Thank God I am alive and keep it moving, Huh? Because what about the victims who will never see the light of day ever again? So, I guess you would call this even, huh? An eye for an eye, Right?

But, you see, what a lot of you don’t realize is, for the rest of my life, whether in here or in the free world, I will always have in mind what happened and how it all went down. I may not be able to find the answer as to why; after all these years, I still ask why. But for the rest of my life, I will never forget what happened. It’s the same for everyone in here. Whether we did it ourselves or not, we did something to bring our behinds here.

TONYA L. Screaming and yelling from about fifteen officers running on the wing like lunatics: “Lock in. Lock in. Lock in now.” What’s going on? Why? What for? Just, “Lock in right now.” Why? Because an officer lost her “walkie.” Well, damn, what does that have to do with us? Doesn’t matter. Goes along with prison life.

So, here we go again, locked down in almost 100° weather. No showers. No ice. No nothing. And some people come back and forth in here two or three times a year, happy to belong, proud to be a part of ---- nothing. Animals in kennels get treated better than this. I wish I was “dead” many times over. Not just because of the lock down, but just so I won’t wake up inside of these walls anymore. I want to die so maybe I can live again. Whether I go to hell or not, it can’t be no worse than this. I have no happy thoughts, no good feelings, and nothing else to say....

JOYCE I broke the razor and climbed into my bunk with the blade in my left hand, legs crossed. I began a delaying cut. I cut a small incision on my right wrist. It stung a little. I flinched, and then the flesh opened up with white meat against brown skin. Red blood began to run down my arm. I waited. Why wasn’t I dead? I tried it again. Another slice. Blood twinkling down again.

Nothing happened. At that moment I knew that it wasn't meant for me to die. Something inside of me wanted to live, even if it meant living the rest of my life in prison.

DENISE Sometimes I picture my life as a documentary. The wind starts to blow as a scene of an empty street is shown. A sanitation worker is sweeping up leaves and putting them into a trashcan. Everything goes into black and white, and then a judge's gavel comes down hard, hits the block, and a cell gate shows up in a flash and slams shut. The scene goes back to the trashcan and leaves start to blow up out of the can. Our faces are in the midst of the leaves, swirling around, trying to be free, but being pushed back into the trashcan.

DARLENE I'm in pain because I've been hurt:

And it's not because I've been looked over for a promotion at work...

I'm in pain because I've been hurt:

Not the kind of pain when you spill coffee on your designer shirt...

Oh, No! My pain goes deeper than that:

It's the kind of pain that rips through your soul;

It's the kind when your heart goes under attack...

You see, my pain comes from my family, the ones in whom I put my trust:

The very same ones who changed my trust to: "It's a must..."

TAMMI It's a must they pay that bill today

Instead of visiting you for an hour, they say:

JOYCE Baby, I don't feel like coming down to see you:

My life goes on, there are other things I must do...

TONYA L. I would come on Saturday, but I must get my hair done:

And Monday's not good for me, I must go to work.

And that's only excuse number one.

KIM Here comes excuse number two on why they don't write:

Girl, you know how I am with pen and paper,

Putting together a whole page for me is a fight...

TONYA L. Girl, when I get my income tax, I'll send you a money order:

But when that money order never comes, you're told:

I went on vacation somewhere South of the Border.

DARLENE When will they realize money isn't what I seek?

I don't need their your money; my heart is what needs the speech...

I'm confused; my tears pour out like rain.

I've been hurt and I'm still in pain.

JOYCE What do you miss, LaSchelle?

LaSCHELLE What do I miss?

I miss gardening.
I miss walks on the beach.
I miss traveling.
I miss solitude (the most.)
I miss my friend, Laura.
I miss the spontaneity of choice in meals, when to bathe, do laundry...
I miss baking, cooking, cleaning, shopping, visiting my family...
I miss my home.

TONYA R. Having the courage to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ after committing the ultimate crime of my life, shall I feel a shame, remorse, or disgust for myself?

Jesus, in the future, how will you have me appear before the people of my time?

I have to get back my courage and stay focused to eliminate my past negatives and capture the positives and sustain my sanity.

So I pass my time away, reading books day to day, but then, when approached by someone to befriend, I don't have much to say.

Now, I'm all settled down at the end of my day, lying on my top bunk, fiddling my thumbs, my mind racing.

Nothing fazes me anymore but the fact that I want to be home with my loved ones.

I feel my chances of happiness pass me by as long as I remain in prison.

JERMEL I want to help other inmates who are thinking about suicide. I've been there; I can talk to them. But it is forbidden. The officers are afraid I will teach them how.

LaSCHELLE I wish that I could see my son graduate from Kindergarten to first grade. Oh, I missed it. Number One.

Maybe I'll make his 5th grade graduation. Oops, missed that one, too. Number two.

Something has to give for his 8th grade graduation night! Wrong. Number three.

I'd do anything to see his 12th grade success. Fast, pray, obey, change bad habits, be a good woman. Anything, Lord!!!

What did you say? Your time is not my time. You'll let me know. When?

It wasn't meant to be. Number four.

JOYCE Here, in prison, I worked hard at my job and I had therapy. I studied and earned my GED, but I had to find something bigger than me. It's something that when you get into trouble, or drink too much, or when someone you love dies and you don't know what to do, you cry out for help, hoping that "something" is listening and has an answer. A part that seems to have no face or mouth or eyes, but you know it exists. "Something" bigger than me.

As tears streamed down my cheeks and face, tremendous warmth overwhelmed me. My hands went up towards the sky. I fell on my knees not knowing why. However, there I was, trembling, head-bowed, submitting to what I believed to be that "missing piece." I was engulfed with solace. Quietness. An overwhelming sensation of completeness. I understood the missing piece. I found that "something" bigger than me.

I found the Good in me and I love her. I love her fiercely!

SAIRA I was standing on line for watermelon. When I got my slice, I stepped out of line to eat it. For one moment I felt I had control over my own life. Then the officer yelled, “Get back in line.”

TAMMI It was a hot, humid, Code 2 day. Two inmates got into a fight and the officers took the ice points away from everyone in the vicinity, so the rest of us didn’t get any ice in our drinks. We have to earn points to get frozen water.

JERMEL I talked to my lawyer the other day. She said there is a possibility the judge might take some time back. “But,” she said, “you will always be a criminal.”

ETTA When I look up at the sky I float—just like the clouds. The sky to me symbolizes a heaven-like state! It’s freedom and forgiveness. I once looked up at the sky and asked my victim to forgive me. Another time I looked up at the sky and asked God to do something with my life because I was so miserable.

Sometimes, I lie down in the grass and look up at the sky and see different animal shapes in the clouds. That is cute and funny.

Sky is beautiful. I wonder sometimes if, when I’m looking up at the sky, is someone else in a different place looking up at the sky, too?

TAMMI: Twinkle, Twinkle little star

I wonder why God is so far
Up above the heavenly light—

I wish I could fly,
You know,
Just take flight—

I wish I may,
I pray I might,
Get my answer of Freedom tonight.

DARLENE My family writes me once in a while. And they came to visit a couple of times. I never saw my friends again. I wonder where they are and what they are doing. I wonder if they know where I am. I wonder if they ever think of me.

JOYCE I imagine how it would feel to be my friend, Betty, tonight. Though not knowing where she was going, the outcome was “out of here.”

While walking alongside her, and seeing myself get closer and closer to the entrance to her exit, she disappeared to where she was going.

And ME – well, I turned around and walked back towards where I was going, looking up at the sky, wondering how it would feel to be in Betty’s shoes: “out of here.”

SCENE 9: THE FUTURE

MUSIC: “Superwoman” Track #11: 0:23

DARLENE When I was a child and committed the wrong,
My mother always said, “Child, come on home.”
When I grew up, my path still wasn’t right.
My friends and family still helped me to fight.
Many struggles I endured; couldn’t see my way through,
Roaming through life, wondering what else could I do.
Although it looked grim, I never gave up.
Not realizing the door to my blessings was never shut.
All in all, I kept looking above
And God was still displaying His love.
Like, at the end of David’s despair, he began to dance
That’s why I know, no matter what, God always gives A Second Chance.

CONNIE Even though I’m in prison, it does not identify who I really am.

TONYA R. In time I have forgiven myself for the rage that I felt towards another human being.
I hope that you will forgive me, too.

BLYTHE Each day is a new opportunity for a new beginning and a new way. If I could stop thinking hard, acting hard, feeling hard, looking hard for something hard to happen, maybe things would ease up—just a little.

I can hardly wait to see good things come my way.

SCENE 10: ADVICE

MUSIC: “I Believe” Track #12: 0:14

CLARA If I could talk with all the parents in the world, I would tell them to remember that their actions, decisions, plans, and words don’t just affect them, but all those who care about them. So they should think before they act. They just might miss a graduation or two, or three, or four, weddings, plays, games, late night talks, and growing pains.

KIM I would tell parents that validation from them is stronger than peer pressure, that kids want to know they are seen and accepted. I would beg parents to see their children as they are, and validate their feelings and thoughts.

MUSIC: “Urban Rap” Track #13: 0:14

JUANITA When I was little I wanted to be
Just like the kids surrounding me.
I stayed with the group, didn’t think for myself
Do what they do or get left on the shelf.

PARRIS I turned sixteen. I went to school.
I joined some gangs 'cause they were cool
I hung out nights. I had some fights.
Took some drugs; got high as kites.
My parents said, "You can't just follow.
Do what's right!" But it was hard to swallow.
They were too old to realize
That staying with gangs was just plain wise,
That standing alone was frightening and scary
And with a gang you have no worries.

TONYA L. At twenty-one I met a man
He said, "Come on," and took my hand.
I followed as I'd always done
We had great times; we had great fun.
But the money ran out. We started to steal.
A few little stores for drugs and meals.
It was supposed to be easy, but instead,
A gun came out, and a man lay dead.

JOYCE So now I'm here for all my life
Filled with guilt and filled with strife.
And what I've learned in this endless time
I'll tell you so your life's not mine.
Be careful when you make a choice.
Follow your heart and follow your voice.

PARRIS You know what's wrong; you know what's right.
Hold tight to yourself with all your might.
Don't turn to others for validation
Trust yourself and your dedication
To your future, your life, and right now, today,
Make a vow to yourself to live life your way.
You don't have to follow, you can lead instead
If you follow your heart and follow your head.

DENISE You've heard all of us and the sins we're confessing.
Now listen up to these few final lessons.
Remember our words and don't forget them.
Bad choices destroy.
Be smart: Don't let them.

MUSIC: "Listen" Track #14: 0.0

BLYTHE Don't rely on your friends too much. It is your parents who will stick by you when things go wrong. Those friends will disappear into their own lives.

JOYCE It's okay to get angry, but allow yourself to love anyway.

CONNIE Think for yourselves. Make decisions for yourselves. Go for your dreams.

TOWANDA And for goodness sake: STAY IN SCHOOL! You need your education. We know it—and you know it, too.

LaSCHELLE Don't follow anyone else. Be a leader, not a follower.

ETTA Don't be a sponge for negativity.

TAMMI If anyone hurts you, tell someone. And if they don't believe you, tell someone else. Abuse is not your fault. Let me say that again: Abuse is not your fault.

CLARA I have learned to trust myself—kind of an “internal trust.” You can, too. Learn to love yourself.

DAGMAR A funny thing happened while we were in rehearsal for this production. In the beginning, we wanted people to know us, to know that we are more than the things we did. But then, we began thinking more and more about you. And suddenly, you became what the play was all about. You became far more important than we were. We told ourselves: If we reach one kid, all our work will be worth it.

And you know what happened? While we were working so hard to do something for you, we began to feel pretty good about ourselves. We were sitting a little straighter, walking a little bit taller, feeling a whole lot better about who we are.

So, try it. Do something for somebody else. You might be surprised at how good it feels.

TONYA R./CLARA You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to have all the answers or always know the right thing to say. You can climb the tallest tree if you want.

You can take chances, make miracles or make mistakes.

You don't have to be composed at all hours to be strong.

You don't have to be bad or certain to be brave. You don't have to have all the answers or even know who you want to be. Just take us with you in your journey, following your heart as we have just done with you.

MUSIC: “No More Drama” Track #15: 0.0

DENISE For all of those who had their innocence lost,

Know that it doesn't go unnoticed.

For the same pain I had to endure every moment,

Wondering how much more,

Is the reason for me to continue on believing.

Believe in yourself,

And know there is a greater reward.

TAMMI You know where the greatest love can be found? The love that resides within you. All you have to do is open up and let some one like me in to find it.

JOYCE I have hope. Because maybe you will listen to what we say and maybe, just maybe, we might make a difference in your lives, and that would give meaning to ours. It may be too late for some of us, but it is not too late for you.

TONYA L. Lock us away out of your sight, but don't put us out of your minds.

KIM I dream of a world with no prisons.

DENISE I dream of a world where children do not suffer.

SAIRA Look at me.

DARLENE Listen to me.

TAMMI I am human. I am real.

LaSCHELLE Because, I am a person—

ALL (*Stand.*) Just like you.

(*Following applause.*) **MUSIC: Playoff “No More Drama”**