

WRITINGS ON THE HEALING WALLS

On this wall . . . I speak
Thru these walls within walls . . . I speak
I . . . once brother
Born, named, once innocent, once child of God
I speak
Disowned, unseen, nameless, voiceless, innocence lost
But still . . . I speak
I speak in color. . . in broad strokes
Despite gray matter
Despite narrow space and thought
I speak volumes
Volumes of repentance, shame, compassion . . .
for pain caused . . . for hearts broken
I speak volumes . . .
of years lost on a sea of wrong choices
I . . . loved, unloved
I . . .
Outsider
I speak
From inside
Inside stone & heart & metal
I speak . . . of rebuilding, reconnecting
I speak apology
I speak apology
I am . . . all human . . . all hues of man
. . . once named, now number
I am human
I speak human
Do you speak human?
Can you speak human?
This wall is my voice
It speaks volumes . . .

Ursula Rucker

Also by the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program

PHILADELPHIA MURALS AND THE STORIES THEY TELL

This lushly illustrated chronicle of the Mural Arts Program, co-authored by Jane Golden, tells how murals leave their marks on neighborhoods.

THE MAP TO MURAL-MAKING

A comprehensive guide to creating and sustaining a successful community mural program. Learn how to connect with the community, select an artist and develop a strategy for a successful mural-making experience.

VOICES OF COMMUNITY: THE MURALS OF PHILADELPHIA

Take a Mural Tour of Philadelphia, neighborhood by neighborhood. This comprehensive tour guide shows many of the murals of Philadelphia and tells their stories.

A HEALING KALEIDOSCOPE:

THE PHILADELPHIA MURAL ARTS PROGRAM

A comprehensive documentary by Nancy Rugart and Eternity Productions about the rise of the Mural Arts Program from its roots as part of the city's Anti-Graffiti Network, to Philadelphia's "Outdoor Museum of Art," under director Jane Golden.

THE MAP TO HOPE

A documentary by Lisa Moss of Euro-Pacific Film and Video Productions that takes the viewer step-by-step through the mural process by following two separate projects, *Ridge on the Rise*, by Josh Sarantitis and Eric Okdeh, and *Symbols of Change*, by Donald Gensler. This video will premiere in spring of 2005.

Writings ON
THE Healing Walls

The Philadelphia Mural Arts Program
Jane Golden, Director



HEALING WALLS - VICTIMS' JOURNEY

3065 Germantown Avenue

BY CESAR VIVEROS

WITH ASSISTANCE FROM PARRIS STANCELL,
INMATES FROM SCI GRATERFORD, VICTIM ADVOCATES,
AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM 9TH AND INDIANA.



HEALING WALLS - INMATES' JOURNEY

3049 Germantown Avenue

BY CESAR VIVEROS

WITH ASSISTANCE FROM PARRIS STANCELL,
INMATES FROM SCI GRATERFORD, VICTIM ADVOCATES,
AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM 9TH AND INDIANA.

Note on the Contributors

Numerous contributors to this collection are inmates at the State Correctional Institution at Graterford. By decision of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, the surnames of these contributors do not appear in these pages. All inmates are identified only by their first names and the first initial of their surnames.

Numerous contributors are also members of the Graterford Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program Think Tank. In accordance with Inside-Out policy, both inmate members and outside members are identified in this collection by only their first names and the first initial of their surnames.

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FOREWORD

JEFFREY A. BEARD. PH.D.

*Secretary of the Department of Corrections
of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*

As Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, I am pleased that staff and inmates at the State Correctional Institution (SCI) at Graterford are participating in a worthwhile and unique program with the City of Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program.

The program, which affords inmates the opportunities to work with community members and crime victims, not only helps the inmates to understand issues from the perspective of the community and victims. It also allows them to help brighten communities and to give back to society.

Through the Mural Arts Program, inmates created murals that were painted at the prison on large parachute cloth. The murals were later installed on various buildings throughout the city. Mural designs have focused on the subjects of life, meaning, faith and forgiveness.

Through this collaborative relationship with the City, SCI Graterford has developed the Mural Arts Program into a community work program. Using their artistic talents, inmates will continue to create murals that will assist the City of Philadelphia to meet the demand for more than 1,000 murals.

As corrections professionals, we always look for programs that help develop inmates' talents while allowing them to contribute to society. This program does all of that and more.

I congratulate the Mural Arts Program, SCI Graterford employees and inmates, crime victims and community members for participating in this worthwhile and unique program.

FOREWORD

DAVID DiGUGLIELMO

Superintendent, State Correctional Institution at Graterford

The Mural Arts Program started as a time-limited project some time in 2002 with the idea of producing a prison mural for the auditorium. I must admit that I had no direct involvement with the project and as with many programs, expected to see it come and go within a few months.

As the inmates, volunteers, and muralists worked on the project they came up with many ideas for future endeavors. The most intriguing of all was the Healing Walls Project. As this project evolved, I found there to be many conflicting issues among inmates and their advocates, victims and their advocates, and representatives of the involved agencies. Frankly, from my experience, some of these issues could have jeopardized and ended the project if not for the commitment and sincere desire to come together and succeed. As I look back, this process was important and valuable. I never find that people learn or gain much from easy lessons. It is the hard tasks and the emotional journeys that teach us the most.

I cannot speak for others when it comes to personal healing, but I am proud of our involvement with the Healing Walls Project. I feel that the act of completing the mural has been a positive emotional experience for those involved, but healing is for others to answer.

Finally, this project has been the catalyst for an outstanding community service program that provides our staff and inmates the opportunity to help the City of Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program keep up with the demands.

We look forward to a long and productive partnership.

INTRODUCTION

JANE GOLDEN

Director, Philadelphia Mural Arts Program

While I always saw myself as a very tolerant person, I was nonetheless judgmental towards people in prison. Every time I read an article about a terrible crime I would think, “When that person gets caught, they should receive the maximum sentence.” If I heard about someone committing a crime after being released from prison, I thought, “Why were they let out?” When I thought about murders that were particularly brutal, I felt that the perpetrators should be executed. It was very simple in my mind – there was no justice for someone who took a life. I had never thought about prison, life after prison, or what led a person down the path to prison.

It did not seem logical to me that I harbored this kind of stern judgment. I was not a stranger to this world of criminals. As director of the Mural Arts Program and the Anti-Graffiti Network for twenty years, I had worked with young people at risk. The vast majority of my work was in neighborhoods decimated by crime and violence. I had worked with many kids who had been involved in crime, ranging from petty to serious. This had been my life’s work; why had I not seen a connection between these kids and people in prison? Is societal stigma about prisoners so deep that even socially-minded people, like me, cannot sympathize for adults who have come from troubled backgrounds?

I received a call in the spring of 2001 that changed the way I see the world. Will Ursprung, an Art Therapist at the State Correctional Institution at Graterford, invited me to the institution to give a talk. Graterford is the sixth largest maximum security prison in the country. It has a reputation of being a tough place – I thought of it as foreboding. There were serious criminals there – people I had read about – people I had judged.

I thought about Will’s request for several weeks before I called him back. Graterford was far away...it was scary...I was busy. Eventually, I agreed to go. The night of the talk I drove out to Graterford with my colleague, Ariel Bierbaum. It was raining hard, lightening was illuminating the sky, and thunder rumbled all around us. To make matters worse, we got lost several times. These were not good signs. By the time we arrived we were ready to leave. Yet we did

not turn around – we met Will out front, shook his hand, and proceeded through the front door. We were processed by the guards and followed Will down what seemed like an endless corridor.

There were thirty men in the class seated in a circle. With much trepidation, we began our talk. When we were finished, there was an awkward silence and then came the questions – good questions. They were followed by something I was not expecting: appreciation. They thanked us for our passion, our enthusiasm, and for our commitment to kids. They told us repeatedly “if I’d had an Anti-Graffiti Network or a Mural Arts Program, I may not be sitting here today.”

I thanked the men and as I headed for the door they responded by asking me when I was coming back. This led me to agree to do a mural in the prison. At first, I told my staff and the men that it would be a six-week project. After about twenty-four sessions I began to stop counting. I am not exactly sure why I kept going back to the prison, but I did.

In the beginning, the class was not easy. We met in a hot room, and some of the men were suspicious. I could not figure out the system – how to get on “gate memos” or how to get art supplies approved. Guards searched our bags, they opened our paint; everything was mysterious. To get into the prison, I had to check in at the guard, get my hand stamped, go through a metal detector, and walk down the long main corridor. Everything about the prison was stressful.

We persisted. Eventually the men in the class – assisted by my colleagues Kristen Goddard and Gyan Samara – created a mural in the auditorium. We went on to paint several other indoor murals. By this point, I was noticing changes in the class. I could see the impact that mural painting had on the men. Conflicts were diminishing; men who had mistrusted each other seemed to bond. Instead of talking about the streets, there was talk about saving kids’ lives. We also saw first-hand how the murals affected not just the inmates, but their families as well. Some men encouraged their young relatives to sign up for our after-school programs; others urged their family members to attend our events or request a mural in their neighborhood. While these changes were unraveling, something very personal was happening to me as well. I started to see the men as human, as people with talent and intelligence. I noticed that if given a chance, these men could be productive. Was this wrong? Was I being duped? It did not seem so. Their efforts seemed sincere.

Art seemed to be having an impact. What I find so interesting about art is that it sometimes flourishes in the bleakest settings. People can be inspired to create by an incredible feeling of powerlessness. If these men could face their demons, their struggles, and their pain; if they could attempt to articulate

remorse, and make themselves vulnerable and empathic, could this be bad? In my mind, it was not. Redemption can, in some cases, be possible. It may not always happen, but the potential exists.

When I started working at Anti-Graffiti in 1984, many young men told me that they expected to be dead or in jail by the time they were twenty-five. I began to imagine the men in my class as these children, and imagine the young people in our after-school program as adults. There were so many connections I had not initially seen; now I noticed them everywhere.

As we were painting the indoor mural, the men in the class told me repeatedly that they wanted to give back to the community. I concluded that the next step of this unfolding journey would be to challenge the men to design and paint an outdoor mural. That was the beginning of the Healing Walls project.

We selected a neighborhood in North Philadelphia that many of the men in the class had come from and had helped to destroy. We found empty walls, and we began to hold meetings with all of the stakeholders. Barb Toews of the Pennsylvania Prison Society joined the team to advise us and introduce us to those on the other side of the issue: victim advocates and those who had lost loved ones. The murals were to serve as a bridge between victims, offenders, and the community at large.

We held meetings at the prison between victim advocates and inmates. We created two mural designs: one from the viewpoint of offenders depicting the journey toward rehabilitation and reconciliation, the other from the perspective of victims of crime and their families focusing on the journey toward healing. Over one hundred inmates, victims, and victim advocates participated in the creation of these murals. Once the two murals were completed, I drove by Germantown and Glenwood and parked my car and got out to get a closer look. As I stood there, someone came up to me and asked, "Are you the person I should thank for these murals?" "No," I said, "not me. Thank all the participants that came out to the prison, the men who are in my class at the prison, and the community members who agreed to be involved in a difficult and risky project."

The majority of the murals were painted by the men in the prison on panels of poly-tab "parachute" cloth. Once a month paint days were held at the prison where victims and victims' advocates were invited to participate in morning discussion groups, which were followed by afternoon paint sessions. Additional community paint days were held both at the Mural Arts Program's headquarters at the Thomas Eakins House and at neighborhood churches. The sessions resembled quilting bees, where the participants began by focusing on the task at hand, but gradually began to talk with one another about their personal experi-

ences.

At some point over the previous year, while we were working at Graterford, I decided that our organization needed to play an active role in facilitating discussions about the impact and consequences of crime. We would then transform this dialogue into action. After working in neighborhoods where many men have been killed or incarcerated, with kids who have fallen through the cracks, and with prisoners, I was determined to bring a closeted issue out of the shadows and into the public eye. In our society today, we rarely reflect, in a conscious manner, on the broader consequences of crime. We do not think about the loss of human potential or the cost in tax dollars or the long-term effects on public safety. The Healing Walls project could create such dialogue.

We hope to use public art to facilitate a dialogue about the impact of crime among people who, because of socio-economic and geographic differences, rarely interact. We are trying to raise awareness about the current criminal justice system, its implications and true costs. We are also creating art involving people with diverse experiences.

Murals are perfect vehicles to explore this terrain; they are big, bold paintings that reside in our communities. They speak to our past, our heroes, and our dreams. Murals in this city have come to be a part of the phenomenon of hope and transformation, of seizing change from the jaws of defeat. They are about taking rubble and debris and turning spots of turmoil and blight into places that people stop and admire. Murals are done by the community, for the community. They document the community's journey.

What started out as a single lecture has turned into a formal part of the Mural Arts Program. Now the program at Graterford is a formal work program; the men in the class are paid to create murals for schools all over the city. Although their pay is only 51 cents an hour, they paint with dedication and drive.

In addition, we are continuing our Healing Walls project. Now we are working with young people in detention, the men at Graterford, and a community group in Lower Kensington to design and paint a mural about Balanced and Restored Justice. We know these special projects are not easy – they are difficult and challenging. The original project had moments of tension and conflict. But in the end the spectrum of opinions, ideas and voices were heard, respected, and used as the backbone of the murals' design.

While working in Philadelphia's neighborhoods, I have met women who have one child who is dead and another who is in prison. These mothers understand the deep sadness wrought by a society that cares little for education and promotes incarceration. The sadness in their eyes helps drive our work. We at the

Mural Arts Program stress that we work with the community. For us, “community” means everyone, including not only children and families, but also adults who are incarcerated.

Working at Graterford has given me hope. I hope that we can learn how to save children’s lives. I hope that rehabilitation can occur. I hope that communities will be safer because the men and women getting out of prison may have been changed. What I see through my work is that human repair seems to be taking place. This happens in spite of widespread cynicism. I have changed how I think about prisoners, and how I see the problems of crime and violence. We can break the cycle of violence. But first we need to see the connections between our kids, our prisons and our society. It is all too easy to blame the men in the prison or to blame the prisons themselves. The real truth is far more complex. The many broken lives we find in prison were not created there, but instead were created by communities and neighborhoods long forgotten by the politicians of this nation.

My journey in my work with the City of Philadelphia has taken me into prisons and then back out into neighborhoods that suffer from substandard housing, high rates of violence, and poor schools. In the vacuum that is created, prisons step in. What I did not know before our work at Graterford is that we need to work with everyone impacted by crime. Healing this world is a common task. Breaking the cycle of poverty and violence are tasks that belong to all of us. There is much work to be done. Please join us in our efforts. We can no longer close our eyes to the violence that plagues our streets – it costs us too much as a society not to care.

THE WRITINGS

on the Healing Walls

VIEWPOINTS

I'm Trying to Paint a Picture

Thomas S.

I'm trying to paint a picture
So
Real
Lies fade to nothing.
Then people will see me as I am

I'm looking for a canvas
So
Pure
Filth slides right off it
Then people will see me as I am

I'm searching for a paintbrush
So
Strong
Walls fall before it
Then people will see me as I am

I'm hoping to find colors
So
Bright
Bruises fade beneath them
Then people will see me as I am

My head is hurting
My hands are shaking
Apart
My heart is wrung out
My vision's fading
Away.

I'm trying to paint a picture.

THOMAS S. is a member of the Graterford Inside-Out and Mural Arts Programs.

Advocate Voices

Betsy May

I think that the Mural Arts project was a valuable opportunity for victim advocates and victims to ensure that the true experiences of victims were heard and validated. I had the opportunity to paint and talk with inmates at SCI Graterford. It was a unique experience for me. I had the chance to speak with offenders and ask them questions that I wonder about everyday. I wanted to know why they felt they deserved to be out of prison? What makes them different from the inmates who get out of prison and then end up right back in? These are just a few of the questions I asked. I can honestly say that most of the inmates were very willing to answer my questions.

While I do not see how we can ever bridge the gap between offenders and victims, or if we should even try, I still appreciate the value of this project. I met inmates who I believe genuinely seemed to take something away from our time together and who really appeared to be trying to grasp the concept of what their crime has done to people. However, some offenders appeared to be dismissive of victims. That was hard for me to see. As victim advocates I feel our role there was crucial. We sincerely appreciate our invitation into the project. Jane and her staff have such contagious enthusiasm; they were great to work with.

I have no way of knowing for sure how the mural will ultimately affect the offenders, victims, and the community but I can only hope that some seeds will be planted which will continue to grow.

BETSY MAY works for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of the Victim Advocate.

Unexpected Possibilities

Paul P.

It seems like nearly a year since Jane Golden first explained to us what this Mural Project was about and where the mural would be located. I was thrilled at the idea of being able to do something positive for the North Philadelphia community where I was raised prior to my incarceration almost twenty-seven years ago. As an inmate, I've often felt alienated from the outside world. A prisoner is literally a social outcast, ostracized and exiled from humanity. Being involved in a collaborative effort with crime victims and members of the outside community on such a project has given me a genuine sense of community connectedness.

About a month and a half ago, a group of victim advocates visited Graterford to help us do some painting for the Mural Project. It was a phenomenal experience to see prison inmates and victim advocates painting together and engaging each other in pleasant conversation about art, politics, careers, etc. I will never forget the feeling of hope when one of the victim advocates said, "I'm feeling conflicted in my heart." I believe she was really saying that engaging in conversation with a group of incarcerated men had been an unexpected positive experience. Her remark was profoundly encouraging because it spoke to the possibility of programs like this Mural Arts Program empowering diverse groups of people to come together for the purpose of healing one another and transforming crime-ridden communities into safe places for children to be raised.

I have come to look forward to spending a few hours each week painting one of the 80 panel sections of the mural. Never being very good at drawing or painting, I have found a delightful challenge in keeping my brush strokes within the squiggly lines, funny shaped circles, and curves of the panels. For me, the space created to work on this project has become one of few sanctuaries from an oppressive, often lonely prison environment. Sometimes I paint while enjoying light conversation with other inmates or visitors from the outside community that I would otherwise never have occasion to talk to. I've also found pleasure in just listening to others talk about activities and things outside of my personal experience and knowledge. On more than one occasion, I've found myself therapeutically lost inside the mural, peacefully concentrating on the area I'm painting. I've imagined one day returning to my community and seeing a united neighborhood, filled with hope, joy, and peaceful tranquility inspired by a mural we helped to create.

PAUL P. is a member of the Graterford Mural Arts and Inside-Out Programs.

A Heart on Fire

Barb Toews

A heart on fire...

This image, described by one of the artists at Graterford, hit me like a kick in the stomach when I first heard it. I could imagine not only the burning centralized on the heart but also the heat that must run through the whole body from head to toe. It is painful to even imagine.

This image, and the mural as a whole, gives deep and meaningful expression to feelings, thoughts, hopes and fears that so often do not find words. Whether one is a victim or perpetrator of crime, the journey following the offense is one of making sense of what happened and what our lives mean now. It means giving voice to our experiences, emotions and needs.

In working with incarcerated individuals, I have heard them search for ways to give expression to their own experiences, emotions and needs. As someone who is not in prison, I find it hard to imagine the words that accompany the reality of having committed a crime. I wonder how I would begin to communicate the remorse, anger, sadness, shame and regret that I would feel if I were in their shoes. I do not know how I would let people know that I want to understand my crime and reach out to those I hurt. Could I do it with words that others would understand?

This mural begins to express the experiences of offenders – their emotions about committing a crime, their desire to learn about and from others, their desire to make amends to those they have hurt and even their experiences within prison. It has given them a voice that is often not available inside and even outside the prison. It has given them an outlet for what is in their hearts. They invite you to listen.

It can be hard to listen, however, to people who have hurt others in such deep ways. We want to turn our ears away from them, ignore them. We may, in turn, want to turn our eyes and hearts away from the mural and the artists incarcerated at Graterford. Fortunately, it is hard to turn away from this mural. The artistry and imagery beg us to listen. We do not have to like what we see or hear. We may feel uncomfortable with the images and what they mean to us. But, we are called to engage with it.

The artists, however, are not just saying “listen to me.” They are also saying “listen to the victims, to the community.” These artists accepted the challenge of the unknown to create this mural with the very people they hurt. They return the challenge to us, the mural audience. Are we prepared to remember everyone hurt by crime and to be there for them on his or her journey toward healing?

I am not a prisoner. I have not been a victim of crime. I do not know either of these experiences. With this mural, I don’t need to know the stories first hand to get a glimpse into the journeys and emotions. I just need to open myself to images and to feel them. I can feel a heart on fire and can act to help bring the fire under control.

What the Healing Walls Mean To Me

Cheryl Powell

I am the sister of an inmate who is a lifer at SCI Graterford. My brother is part of this wonderful program as well as the Inside-Out program. My sister told me about the Healing Walls art project.

My husband, Ron, and I went to work on one of the sixty mural panels along with my sister, Cathy, and her friend.

We had a great day, filling in numbers eight and nine. We met a lot of nice people. Some were victims of crime, others were victims advocates, art teachers and relatives of the inmates.

A few days later, my brother called me from prison. He was happy that we worked on the panel. When I told him the numbers and what the panel looked like, he said he had worked on the same panel. That small connection meant the world to me.

I think this program is a very wonderful and positive healing tool for all who have taken a part. This program has made a special connection between my brother and me. I hope and pray that it will continue to heal and bless all who become involved.

CHERYL POWELL's brother, Tom, contributed two writings in this collection.

The Process

Charles L.

The concept of this project was founded on irreproachable thoughts of truly wanting to give something back to the communities we took so much from. Never did we or “I,” think that the process of wanting to give something we thought would add beauty and bring joy to the lives of others, would take on such profound dimensions. When word got out that a group of prisoners at the Graterford State Correctional Institution under the guidance of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program were going to paint a mural that would be placed at 3049 Germantown Ave., it was as if invading forces had just landed on the banks of the Schuylkill River leading into Philadelphia.

This inspirational and innocent vision was met by those that were appalled at the thought that a group of prisoners would dare to think that they would find atonement in what they thought was, a grandiose exploit on the prisoners’ behalf. A cry went out, “what about our loss what about our pain, how do we find healing ?”

Thus the discussions began. Each group expressed their hopes, fears and, eventually, their pains. The words that were spoken were heard by all involved and a compromise was made. There would be another wall added so that each group’s voice could be heard. Each group saw the importance in what the other had to say, and a valuable lesson was learned as each group took what was but a small look into the others’ hearts and minds.

The two walls you now find on Germantown Ave. express a hope that healing is possible if we come together and work things out. I ask that you please look at the Healing Walls and think of them as a doctor would in treating a severely inhibited patient. This is but the first stage in what may prove to be a long healing process on a city that has seen so much suffering. This is but one man’s view from inside.

CHARLES L. is a member of the Graterford Mural Arts Program.

Healing Walls

Charles B.

Working on the Healing Walls Project has been a joy, a challenge and an extremely engaging experience.

Often, I found myself overwhelmed by the far reaching potential of this project. As love and concern radiates from each brush stroke; covering the entire span of these murals... touching the lives of its viewers. . . . I'm confident that "WE", everyone who has worked on these murals or has supported the vision of this project, have made a significant contribution towards making a positive impact on this community and the ones abroad.

I'm grateful for having the opportunity to paint with everyone I was blessed to work with. . . and was deeply humbled and my heart grew softer by having had the opportunity to work with various victims of crime and staff from Victims Rights Agencies. One day, we were in a circle having an open discussion on victimization; when it occurred to me that victims and offenders have some of the same needs and dare I say, issues. At one point a few of the staff from Victim Rights Agencies expressed their outrage, frustration and their being uncomfortable. . . due to a few of my fellow-inmate muralist who spoke regarding their personal victimization. This seemed to open up a can of worms. The problem seemed to revolve around issues relating to accountability. Some of the Victims' Rights Advocates who were present believed that they would have been compromising their beliefs, convictions and credibility as Victim Advocates, if they did not address their uncomfortable feelings relating to inmates referring to themselves as victims.

It was made perfectly clear that the victims – the real victims – are those who do everything they are supposed to do. . . they go to work, raise their children, pay bills, taxes, etc., only to have their lives disrupted and their space violated by some mean or troubled person. The point was articulated with added emphasis that Victims' Rights Agencies represent people who have been violated, had their lives interrupted by crime and violence; yet did not commit a crime but turned to the Criminal Justice System instead, for help. Through that dialogue it became obvious that what the offender/criminal needs who has accepted responsibility for his or her actions; and is able to empathize with victims, is the opportunity to become or be held accountable.

Often, the offender will participate in all of the programs, facilitate those he/she feels are most helpful, long for the opportunity to reach out to his/her communities, to the victim/victims' family when possible (with their permission); only to find, that none of their efforts towards rehabilitation are met with public approval. . . so at some point during the discussion, it was placed on the floor how offenders often need the victims to articulate what their views and perspectives are as they would relate to an offender being held accountable.

At this point there was a break for bagged lunch. After lunch and some small group discussion as to how the morning had gone, we were off to the tables to paint panels and have more discussion. At the table at one point one of the inmates mentioned being an innocent man in prison. . . and quickly, it was pointed out by a Victims' Rights Advocate and another inmate almost simultaneously: "That would be a subject for an entirely different forum," and with that we all preceded to paint and engage in more conversation. At the end of the day, I sensed that there were now many bridges standing where there used to be walls. May each and every brush stroke which has graced these murals represent either new or reinforced bridges which will replace the walls which used to separate us.

CHARLES B. is a member of the Mural Arts and Inside-Out Programs.

Advocate Voices

Mary Achilles

The Mural Arts program experience was interesting and challenging for me. I found it difficult to engage in a process where some of the participants felt that the experience between victims and offenders was new. It was clearly new for them but not necessarily new for all of us. I believe that what is positive is that the final product will be something that victims, their families, and offenders can feel some pride in. The challenging part was seeing an inmate project started and trying to squeeze victims into it after the starting point. This will always be painful for me to witness, as it mirrors the experience for victims, that it is always about the offender. It makes me wonder, at what expense do we have to continually learn the same lesson? I guess that is really what the journey is for all of us.

MARY ACHILLES is the Victim Advocate for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

I'm Just Reaching Back Out

Christopher M.

Hey! I'm in here and you're out there. I hear the word is going around that there's been ground broken between inmates, victims and the community. From what I read, I decided to write instead. Peaches Ramos, I've understood most of the host of emotions you have. The devotion for your kids not winding shot dead can be heard in every word. Six televisions discarded bombarded my hardened feelings. My frustrations hit the ceiling when I was awakened that your three men could not join the race and chase the ice cream truck. Gun shots every few minutes showed that they could be shot by someone's glock. Children ducking and hiding behind cars opened old scars.

Now I hear there's a mural project. Out of respect for the rejects whom just left the community, I said, "Why not me?" A fresh start by offering my art. Whether it's conveyed visually or in writing. You see, I do both, but back to me. I want to make the most of the sea of gifts that God bequeathed me with. Tenth and 11th Street in North Philly will be about giving back hope in the place that I sold dope.

Steven Barkley thinks the idea has appeal. He envisions vacant lots transformed into spots where tots can stop. A place where people can bask, listen and visualize the stories of victims, inmates and the community. The faceless, nameless enemy of society is speaking out. I want to become devout in giving back to those I lacked in respecting. To connect the three groups that were lost in the sea of society is also my dream. Victims, inmates and the community? Am I to understand I can finally become the man my mother wanted me to be? We're all intertwined with the Divine. I see the tremendous long-term effects of pain and death transcends women and men. Mrs Ramos' story can attest to that mess.

It's a life-changing effect when death is met on a violent level. "No" crime is worth the effort and time. The state of denial, the need to be heard, the enigma of forgiveness and the appeal to be healed is being felt in here and out there. Let us work together to get further. This includes fathers, aunts, sisters, brothers, and mothers. Let this "wall" transcend the concepts of small minded men. Let it be a reminder of a kinder generation to humanity. In Unity, there is no you and me, but the "whole" of society!

CHRISTOPHER M. is a member of the Graterford Mural Arts Program.

Healing Walls

Jeffrey Draine

Among colleagues and friends, even among the closest of friends, I find it hard to really know people. It's hard for me to know another's heart, the passions that drive their view of life, and the painful experiences that color that view. Most of us hide behind niceties of talking about the weather and, most often in my crowd, work. "What are you doing these days" usually brings up in me a pat answer of "writing" or "going for some grant money." That is usually the end of the conversation. Perhaps that's by design, mine and theirs. The whole conversation is a litany of perfunctory exchange, a sort of performance because we have each "shown up" in the same space, to evoke Woody Allen's famous phrase about success. As is true of many rituals, this litany is intended to limit exchange, to cut it off before it becomes uncomfortably emotional or too personal. Just think of the last time you got the unvarnished truth when you asked someone "how are you doing?"

Compare this to my newest group of friends. Once a week, I'm at Graterford, participating as an Outside member in the Inside-Out Think Tank, the weekly group that is at the core of a sort of educational collaborative of people from Temple and prisoners at Graterford and other correctional facilities. The ground rules can be summed up as no last names, no delving into peoples' past. The group is about the present, not about what brought us to Graterford. We do workshops, sessions on the criminal justice system for visiting groups. We have participated in the Healing Walls mural project. And we do writing projects. In the process, we talk about how we think about prisons, each other, and the way the world looks upon the issues that bring us together. As anyone who works in issues of justice and deviance will tell you, the real heart of these issues is not scholarly theory or cold empirical data, but human values and the courage to really know the darker side of the human experience.

This fodder for our exchange combined with the ground rules makes for an interesting irony. At the recent Lifers banquet, I noted with one of the "Outside" colleagues in the group, Kay, that we may tend to know more about other members in the group than many people we know on the outside; but still know much less about them in the conventional sense of knowing the facts of their life, even their full names. From them I hear perspectives on society that could easily come from reading Simmel, Durkheim, and Foucault (not to imply these have not been read by members of the group); but these perspectives have a vitality that comes

more from a desire to make meaning of life, inside and outside, rather than the desire to impress or score intellectual points. Members relate to one another, and our exchange is shaped as much by facing the various tensions and alliances within the group (as in any group) as by the activities we share.

One of our more memorable conversations revolved around the collaboration with victims' groups on the Healing Walls project and this book. It became clear that despite the well-intentioned efforts of many in this project to create an exchange between prisoners and crime victims, there remains a gulf between these categories of people, a gulf to understand, explore. The Inside members had taken the often tense exchanges with victims groups and advocates and transformed them into a way of understanding elements of the restorative justice movement that I had not heard before. They saw here a ritual, one that controlled the exchange and created a new wall of division. In their view, the ritual demanded of them an unspecified degree of expressed remorse that, in their view, undercut their access to a human exchange. Saying there is a divide is not to diminish the pain of the victims; it is to make the divide apparent, and to talk about it. This, too, is the work of restorative justice. Understanding this divide is worth exploring, is worth understanding, because it lies at the heart of the human divide that builds prison walls. For all the rhetoric about bringing down these walls, we need the courage to confront the divisions and resist the urge to gloss over them with new litanies of restoration.

In North Philadelphia, another wall will become more visible, more apparent, by the addition of paint and image. The mural creates an opportunity for people to ask about how it got there, the process of working with prisoners, with victims, through the harder questions of crime and justice. Hopefully, people will not ignore the wall. Somehow, ignoring walls makes them more impenetrable.

JEFFREY DRAINE is a Professor of Social Work at the University of Pennsylvania.

The Origin of Healing Walls

John S.

The creation of the Healing Walls murals from the numerous sources that have worked on the project is a rather solid depiction of reminders and expectations. Now, the process of physically creating the murals has been a process of restoring confidence to both the offender and the victim. As it was, and as it stands, these two sides are at odds. Each fears to give the other any power over them.

My involvement in the Healing Walls began in January of 2003, when I joined the Mural Arts Group at Graterford, and the goal of the group began to evolve my own goals. My involvement, or rather the group's involvement, required my entire life as an example of the healing process. Hopefully the process touched everyone that way. Still, not everyone learned from the example. Some were allowed to continue being victimizers. . . to chastise others in the group. And it became a personal situation to stand up and stop giving them any power over me.

If healing is to take place ... how? It is indeed dependent on all the wounds at issue. Including the wounds of the mistreated child who grew up on the mean, cold street; it's just not fair to condemn his miseducation. Who after a single, violent act, which resulted in someone's death, lost his own freedom for life. Who after 20 or 25 years still has a grudge against him, which seems to have no end. One after another, stories like this flood the prisons. Lots of adults with too many improper lessons. I'm no exception.

Healing fits in with the mutual understanding that the offender may have a redeeming quality, and that his offense stemmed from prior abuse and/or bad judgment, which can be forgiven or corrected. Simple bad judgment on the part of an offender may require a life of incarceration. But if the offender has also been a victim of abuse, the focus must go to a forgiving type of correction, which is different from simple corrective confinement. The sight of the Healing Walls will put this into focus, giving the victims immeasurable empowerment and restoring their confidence (as it should), as well as giving them a new appreciation for being less apathetic; because cold indifference and bitter revenge are dangerously close to the bad decisions that the offenders made. The offenders have given their effort to show this authority. And it shows in their daily lives, their own humility and contrition.

Just my being alive is like a stone in the shoe of my victim's family. . . . My pain at this is mild compared to the pain that I caused. But where does my healing come into consideration? There is anguish and frustration because the aspects from my side are of no merit. Everyone in prison faces this cold shoulder. And it's not working.

One question that I ask myself, in trying to understand what a victim is going through, is "how would I feel if it happened to me?" I think of compensation, if it's a matter of property; death or bodily injury is another matter. I also think of wanting to get information about what brought the situation on in the first place. That is a big step for a victim's family to take – to first have the willingness to see things from the offender's side; and second, to put themselves in the offender's shoes. Broken homes and chemically dependent parents have raised some rather misguided children, who matured with distorted values. Do they now deserve a life of incarceration? Think about whipping a chained dog, and about what will happen when you let the dog loose. Men and women in prison are no different.

If the world suddenly truly reckoned with giving a man the opportunity to earn enough money above the table to support a wife and two children. . . . In the name of God, I pray to see this become a reality. This is the foundation of the Healing Walls.

*JOHN S. is a member of the Graterford Mural Arts Program.
This piece is an adaptation, by the editors, of a longer composition.*

A Vicious Cycle

Suzanne Roberts

When I became involved in the Healing Walls project, I didn't have any particular expectations for it. I thought it would be interesting to inform my audience about the project, because the ideas behind it were so unusual, and I like to open up ideas like that to my audience. I had been impressed by the whole concept of mural arts in neighborhoods, and I was eager to see how it was going to be realized in prison. Also, the project seemed like a tie to my father, Samuel Fleisher, and to the generation of prisoners, now all deceased, with whom he worked.

My father was responsible for the closing of Eastern State Penitentiary in 1971 and for getting the government to put out the money for the building of Graterford, where prisoners would have far greater opportunities. I was seven when he died, but I've read so much about him. At Eastern State, the men had no opportunities for rehabilitation or job training or education. My father was appalled by seeing the prisoners sit outside their cell block with nothing to do; if that kind of forced idleness isn't debilitating, I don't know what is. Originally, there was a very large area at Graterford that was used for farming, so that the prisoners could produce their own products, and sell some too. Well, that space today is more cells, because they've enlarged the prison. They had much, much more gardening years ago; now they have more guards, and more guards, and more guards.

When Jane Golden asked me to go to Graterford and meet the Superintendent and the inmates there I didn't think twice. Of course I would go. After all, I've never been one to just sit on committees and support projects without first-hand knowledge. So I welcomed the opportunity to meet the prisoners in the class and find out what I was supporting. I went to Graterford with Jane Golden to talk with the men and to paint with them. I told them I had absolutely no talent to paint whatsoever, and they said everyone has talent. They were very gracious and thanked me for coming. They seemed so sincere. But then I remembered that a lot of prisoners, when they talked to my father, told him how when they got out they were going straight and this and that, and about poetry, and so on. But every one of them, I think, landed back in jail sooner or later.

I have had several different reactions to meeting the Graterford prisoners.

When I was there, they invited me to come back and work with them, painting. I told them I have absolutely no talent whatsoever, and they said everybody has talent, come on and let's work on it together. I thought about it and was flattered, and at first I just resolved to do it. Then, as days went by, I thought about it. I thought to myself: look, you may be taking a chance going back there. Maybe not – but you can't risk it because if just one guy from the twelve or fifteen that are in that project decides that he will hold you hostage in that room. So I just never responded to the invitation. I made up my mind not to take the chance, because there were many things I had not thought out. I was afraid I would end up like my father – too trusting, and taking things too much at face value.

I do think that it's been very valuable for the prisoners to express themselves through whatever medium they can. In this case, it just happens to be art. And I do worry about what will happen to the prisoners who get out. Who is going to hire them? And their families, after they've been in for thirty, forty years – who wants them back? If you go to get a job and you've been in jail a few weeks earlier, you're not going to be hired. So what do you do? You turn to what you know – more drugs, for many ex-prisoners. You can get them and you can sell them. Then you have to start stealing for the money to get them, and it's a vicious cycle.

When you walk out, you are walking into a world you don't know. When I go back now to where I used to live just twelve years ago, there's hardly any sign of what it was. There are all these housing developments – and this was farmland! So now you triple this for these guys – these are major offenders, so there aren't too many of them that are out before fifteen years. They go into an alien world that is alienated against them with very little in their favor. Now I know that you have hired a young man who just got out. That's different. Jane knows him – you've worked with this guy for a long time. Jane's taking a chance in hiring him and hopefully it will work out. That's wonderful. But how many are going to get that chance of the thousands who are in there and the few who get out? What is their chance of success? Is there such a thing?

The Art of Healing

Paul P.

When I hear the words Criminal Justice I think of an apathetic political bureaucracy, saturated with corruption, racism, and class discrimination that operates to the disadvantage of many offenders, victims, and communities that must pay the price of a failed system. Conversely, the words Social Justice bring to mind a process of community bonding and collective determination to ensure that the physical, social, and emotional needs of everyone are provided for in order to meaningfully reduce the need for people to offend. I believe that it is imperative that we (society) make a concerted effort to change the many social, political, and economic realities that operate to create, sustain, and perpetuate crime and violence.

Yet, I'm amazed and deeply moved by how this mural project has brought together such a diverse group of people. Bringing victims, victim advocates, offenders, and community representatives together to work on a project such as this is a phenomenal achievement. This project is evidence of the capacity for human beings to change and grow in ways that can elevate the standards by which we measure a civilized society.

I believe that one of the goals of this project should be to create positive human connections that will foster cooperative efforts to restore a sense of community wholeness. As an offender and life-sentenced prisoner, I've experienced much pain and suffering as a consequence of the punishment received for a crime I committed that caused pain, suffering, and loss to others. As a victim of child abuse, poverty, police brutality and street violence, I know, first hand, the emotionally crippling pain that can be experienced by a crime victim. I know that such pain can linger on for decades and reassert itself full blown with the slightest provocation.

I've lived many years with painful memories of a child full of fear and anger. That child always felt powerless against the physical and verbal abuse of a drunken father, a father who beat the child with a naked fist, awake or asleep, and assaulted him with vicious words almost on a daily basis. That child, emotionally deprived and robbed of a healthy sense of self worth, was me. I'm still sometimes haunted by memories of my mother being brutally beaten time after time by that same drunken father until she couldn't take it any longer. In the middle of one episode of being punched, kicked, and stomped, she escaped into death by diving out of the second floor bedroom window.

I don't know how much being a victim of a dysfunctional family as a child

influenced my choosing to indulge in criminal activities throughout my teens, but I do know that those childhood experiences were so emotionally devastating that they have had an adverse effect on my entire life. In that regard, I can definitely identify with the pain and suffering of others who have been victims of crime and violence. Spending more than half of my life incarcerated forced me to reflect on many things about my past that lead to my taking a life that was not mine to take.

My involvement in prison programs such as the Mural Arts Program, Restorative Justice, and the Temple University Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program has provided me with a much greater awareness of the impact of crime and violence on victims, offenders, and communities. I've gained a profound appreciation for the value of programs and projects such as this in facilitating the healing process of everyone adversely affected by crime and violence. I'm grateful for any opportunity to talk with victims of crime about ways that we can help each other heal.

I'm not motivated by any expectations of forgiveness for expressing my feelings of remorse. I'm motivated by a desire to do whatever I can to make amends for some of the pain and suffering I was responsible for in my community throughout my teen years. Moreover, I've discovered the self-healing power that can come from serving others who need help navigating the stormy seas of life. I think the mural project could be a transformational experience that can empower individuals and communities to take positive steps towards a more restorative approach to criminal justice.

PAUL P. is a member of the Graterford Mural Arts and Inside-Out Programs

Advocate Voices

Kathy Buckley

It's hard to describe my experience working with the Mural Arts Program at SCI-Graterford. For me, this project has been quite a journey. As a victim advocate, I found that the energy needed to insert victim issues and educating inmates and key stakeholders was at times exhausting. . . after all, this project was also about honoring the experience of crime victims, which at times did not feel prominent.

I found my role as a victim advocate crucial in this regard. I had some exceptional conversations with inmates as we painted the mural. In that same breath, I also had some challenging conversations with inmates, some quite painful as they made this project about them. In the end, I feel there will be two beautiful murals and they will both speak volumes. It's the work that happened behind the "scenes," the conversations, the education, and most of all the listening that hopefully people will take with them and learn.

*KATHY BUCKLEY is a victim advocate; she works for
the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of the Victim Advocate.*

The Wall of Hope

Robert J.

A wall that was once empty, is now filled with the message of hope... the hope that our message at Mural Arts will touch the eyes of many and heal the wounds of the old.

Walls were built to shelter and to protect, but our walls at Mural Arts were created to heal through the images that were painted and to give voice to those who wanted to say, "I'm sorry." We realized the words, "I'm sorry" are not enough to heal the wounds of personal pain and suffering, but when you look at the healing wall, remember what it once was and look at what it has now become.

With hope and, in time, we can learn and heal from a wall that was once empty but is now filled with the message of hope...hope that our message at Mural Arts will touch the eyes of many and heal the wounds of old.

ROBERT J. is a member of the Graterford Mural Arts Program.

Wall to Wall

Stan R.

walls

How I hate these tall gray walls
Forbidding, isolating, suffocating
Dream-killing, soul crushing, separating
How I hate these friggin' walls

victims

All sizes, shapes and colors
Young/old, rich/poor, laborer/manager, student/teacher, parent/child,
retired
You get the picture: citizens, neighbors, friends, family
All of us could be victims. . . most of us are victims

Shock, disbelief, anger, tears,
Invasion, suffering, denial, reality
Violence, physical pain, mental suffering,
Damaged souls, vulnerability. . .
I'm lost, devastated, speechless, angry, incomplete!
How could this happen? Why? This was NOT supposed to happen!

Justice, revenge, questions, no answers, payback
Roller coaster, progress, regress, confusion
Justice, restoration, answers, incomprehensible, journey
Sense & senseless, tears and sorrow, joy and laughter, death & birth . . .
rebirth

art

Visual, tactile, familiar, abstract, creative, real
Vision, colors, mixing, design, layout
Process, people, community,
Memories, future, tribute, respect

walls

Colorful? Hopeful? Heart-touching? Uniting?
Is it possible?
Honoring loved ones, paying homage

Uplifting, hopeful, enlightening, inspiring
Walls, how I love these beautiful walls

healing

Gradual, painful, loneliness, support and all over again
Family, friends, alienation, caring
Individual, community, support
On a road too often traveled

A Design for Healing

Cesar Viveros

The Healing Walls project was a journey in many ways, for many people, the materialization of a concept that seemed so idealistic for me back there more than a year ago, when I was invited to put together a design about the impact of crime on people's lives, when I first heard about the concept of healing – a word that even today seems to abstract to me that I remember being hesitant to become part of this project.

When I think about the problem of incarceration in this country, knowing that it is a problem becoming bigger everyday, as the statistics show in different sources, I know that it is a problem so complex that it is not going to be easy at all to find a solution, if we dare to expect to find it.

There are so many perspectives that just the idea of facing them seems an endless process. Because incarceration is the result of confronting an individual that has been involved in committing a serious offense against public law, and because there are an increasing number of jails under construction, it is obvious that there are more people expected to fill them as time goes by. So while we are dealing as a society with this growing problem, we all know that it is urgent to prevent crime before it actually happens in the first place. It is obvious that even with the more horrible ways of punishment, like lethal injection or any other way of executing, a prospect of crime is still expected.

If somebody else's life is taken, the person who did it will probably be facing life in jail or the death penalty. Still, in most cases, this person did not expect to be in that situation, not until it actually happened, happened too suddenly for the person to be able to reconsider it, stop it before it happened; the bullet or knife was faster than the hand; a lot faster than the mind shaken by the turmoil, confused by the anger, clouded by the hate. That precious moment where many destinies are decided, that moment that changes everything – that moment gets used for a purpose unlike the one supposed. . . .

But it seems as if the real problem starts before the actual crime is committed, with something “minor” that may lead to an irreversible situation. There must be many “minor” crimes before the escalation to a more serious stage, such as assaulting, using or selling drugs, stealing, etc.

By interacting with this group of adults inside Graterford; with persons who have been victims of crimes; with advocates of both groups; and also with people living in neighborhoods where some of the prisoners grew up, I have been able to peek into this unfolding complex subject matter that is affecting our society, our children's hopes, our youth's dreams, our faith in a better future, a future where all human beings can live without fears, where we do not have to spend our energy trying to protect each other but instead can care for each other, where we all have the same opportunities to reach our most ambitious goals while enjoying the life that we have all been able to have, to breathe, to transform, to extend, respecting always the individuals around us. . . . It was here, inside this prison fortress, that I happened to think seriously for the first time about how human beings can lead their lives – and I'm not just thinking about prisoners, those classified as the enemies of society, but also about those that are following their path, the way of destruction, isolation and desolation.

And it was at the Eakins House, the home of the Mural Arts Program, the neutral place, where we held meetings with victims of crime and victim advocates, where people opened their hearts, trusting even the untrustable, where I found myself among groups with opposite perspectives of life.

And it was in the Hood where I found people speaking of their lost visions, their hopes for a better future, long gone; it was on Germantown Avenue, where I saw my biggest wall, the most defiant mural, that I had painted, a wall seeming to resent my intrusion, as if I did not have the right to write the untold true story, or to paint the distorted one, even though I myself live there, in the so-called Badlands.

In designing a mural based on this difficult subject matter, I never intended to find a solution, because I know that I may not be able to know the problems as well as an inmate of a Victim of crime could, or as the neighbor of this land eight blocks away from where I live, but I did believe that by approaching it I would probably be able to understand it a little more and probably learn what I CAN DO as an individual to prevent crimes and victimization from happening. If somehow those images painted on the wall can bring attention to the dealer who pretends not to see from his luxury car, to the driver from outside, to the everyday walker on the street, the real fighter who chooses to prevail, to stand up and hold her little child close to her heart and pointing firmly with a strong hand, further, above the wall, above the mural, as high as the eternal and infinite pure sky that surrounds us all equally without discriminating, without a trace of arrogance but with benevolent fresh air into our eyes, so we all can see, so we all can do. . . .

*CESAR VIVEROS is the principal designer and painter of the Healing Walls.
He works for the Mural Arts Program.*

VICTIMHOOD

Emir

Victoria Greene

My son Emir was murdered in 1997 and I became involved in victims' services. That's how I became involved in the Mural Arts Program. I have four daughters; Emir was my only son. He was 20 years old.

Emir was an artist, a comedian. As a teenager he worked with Jane Golden and the Mural Arts Program on the mural at 2nd and Callowhill. He signed his name to that wall. After Emir was murdered, I learned that he had been dealing drugs. I was working, at the time, as a drug-and-alcohol counselor in the Philadelphia County prison system.

When Emir was murdered I felt enormous grief. Yes, Emir was dealing drugs – but he was murdered, and he was my son. Still, there were people who made me feel as if I wasn't allowed to grieve, as if I didn't have any right to my grief. As if Emir, by selling drugs, had not only signed away any claim he had to sympathy, but also signed away any claim I had to grief. All I was entitled to was shame and guilt. It was really hard. As if I didn't already feel guilty enough! The guilt that a parent has over the death of a child ... don't take that trip. She feels more guilt than you can imagine. As for me, I was a drug counselor. I'd taught my children all about the dangers of drugs. And yet, after Emir's murder, all I could think about was: what I could have done differently? What more could I have done? It was really hard.

There are parents who don't come back from the loss of their child. For a while I didn't think I would. At first I was a basketcase; then I fell into a deep depression. I was suicidal, I didn't want to live, my family had to hide all the knives in the house. I knew I had to get help. But one of the victims' groups I became involved with had the view that there were good victims and bad victims, and that their group was for "innocent" victims.

Eventually I did find help - with the Grief Assistance Program. It was run through the Philadelphia Medical Examiner's Office. That was kind of morbid. They helped me enormously, though. I could call someone there whenever I needed to talk to someone, whenever I felt I was going crazy with grief. "I'm going crazy," I would say over the phone. "This is natural," they would tell me. "This is what grief is like." I would say the Grief Assistance Program saved my life.

Eventually I made it back from the place where I felt crazy. How? I made a conscious decision to live. I thought: if I kill myself, what would that do to my daughters, Emir's four sisters? To my mother? She would have dropped dead if I killed myself. And then it would be as if Emir's killer got me too. Damned if I was going to let him take me and my whole family. So, I made a conscious decision to live, and to live the best life possible.

Within a year of Emir's murder, I knew what kind of life that was.

At one point at the Grief Assistance Program, I got into a conversation with a woman and it turned out that her son had been murdered just three days before Emir. We felt a kind of bond because of this, but that forced me to ask myself: what kind of society do we live in when one thing I have in common with another mother is that her son was killed at the same time as my son? I realized that people's children are getting murdered all the time. Then, in 1998, the Philadelphia City paper did an article about Emir. After that article came out, other people in my situation – people I never knew, but who'd also had loved ones murdered, and those loved ones involved in illegal activity – they would come up to me and thank me. They would thank me for talking about it, because they never felt they could. They never felt their grief had a voice.

I decided I would go on trying to be that voice, and to save young boys. So I founded an organization, Every Murder is Real, to tell my story. We talk to victims, mothers, prosecutors, police officers, community leaders – anyone we can. We've held two conferences and various workshops I feel I'm doing something worthwhile.

"Healing" from the murder of your son, – it's not like recovering from a drug addiction, because you will never be the same. Healing from being a victim of crime is about what you do to make your life livable, what you do to feel some sense of purpose, some kind of fulfillment. It doesn't mean being the same as you were, before. I'll never be the same. And some people I know are uncomfortable with the new me. They think it's morbid, the way I've made Emir's death a part of my life. But everyone has to heal in their own way.

Last year, in the early stages of the Healing Walls project, I went to Graterford with Jane Golden and my daughter, Altovise-Love, who is a detective with the Philadelphia police department. We met with guys from the Mural Arts Group and the Inside-Out Group, and I told my story. Afterward, the guys really opened up. Many expressed their sympathy; others wept. One man said he saw the face of his victim every night; another told of how much he worried for his victim's mother. At one point, as we discussed the circumstances of Emir's death, I asked: How could a human being kill another? On the street, one guy

said, when you are selling drugs and all you are thinking about is materialism and money, you cease be be human, and that's how you can kill another person.

This was a powerful statement. I feel that so many of our young men today, so many young men in jail, or dead – I feel our society has failed them. These young men are not monsters. Emir was not a monster. For Emir to have been sucked in to dealing drugs – it made me realize how strong the pull of the streets is, how irresistible peer pressure can be. Especially in the black community. I feel that the black community is traumatized. My daughter Chantay has a good way of putting it: our community is a cemetery and our houses are its tombstones. I have white friends who told me that if Emir and I had lived in their neighborhood, he wouldn't have ended up dead. They told me they have kids who sell and use drugs too, but they don't end up dead on the street.

Healing Walls

Mary Catherine Lowery

There is a war going on in this city that for the most part goes unacknowledged. The battles are sometimes seen on the local news but the war as a whole is not addressed. In today's warfare we use the chilling term of collateral damage when referring to civilian deaths. In the war in our city there are also casualties who often have nothing to do with the struggles for money and power and drugs. They are bystanders caught in the cross fire. I am a victim advocate working with children who are victims of this war. The crimes and circumstances vary, be it the loss of a parent or sibling to a drive by shooter to the loss of innocence or a sense of safety. These children have been victimized by peers through bullying, by neighbors and strangers who have raped, beaten or shot them. Some bear permanent scars from slashing or stabbing, or walk around with bullets lodged where surgeons fear to go to retrieve them. Others have equally, if not more serious scars to their hearts, souls and spirits. They have been robbed of a sense of security, the ability to sleep without nightmares or to leave their homes to go out and play. They do not feel safe even in their own bodies.

For some the aggressor was a parent for many it was a stranger who may never even learn their name. Some will be re-victimized by the justice system where they will go to court many times only to wait and be sent home due to postponement, each time fearing what will be asked of them and what horrors they may have to relive. For so many the question of "why me?" haunts them. If they have no answer how can they ever be safe? It is often easy for me to join them in their anger at these faceless causes of harm. How is justice served in these cases? What is a fair sentence for stealing a childhood or a parent or robbing a child of their dreams or of the ability to feel safe in their house, their neighborhood or in their own body.

This Healing Walls project has challenged me greatly. I was fascinated to hear how my peers in the field characterized the nature of victimization and the toll it takes on victims and their families. At times they were able to put into words things that had confused me or I had struggled to understand. To then see these ideas incarnated into images was awesome. The idea of being able to paint some little piece that I could some day look at and identify is empowering. I was intrigued by the idea of going to the prison to talk and paint with prisoners. As

the time drew closer I was nervous not knowing what to expect and how I might be treated.

What I did not expect were prisoners who would welcome me with gratitude that I thought it was worth my time to hear what they had to say. I did not expect to hear prisoners talk about balanced and restorative justice. I was surprised to be asked what they might do to get a message to youth that would end the violence. I did not expect to be asked how one finds redemption if you can not even forgive oneself.

As we approach the final phase of the project I ask myself “what is justice?” Is there ever a justice solution? Can a debt ever be repaid to society or to victims? I think I realize more than most how victimization can turn children into future perpetrators. I know the demons that plague those suffering from addiction. I have worked in mental health and addictions for 30 years. But I am not sure I can forgive these transgressions. I am not sure I can say “you have now paid your debt your slate should be wiped clean.” On the other hand I look at the talent, the intelligence and the ability to articulate feelings and wonder “why do we warehouse people for so long?” I can’t even imagine how one comes to terms with a life sentence. Do we really rehabilitate or just limit access to the community and some, in time, find their way? What litmus test exists to say who will re-offend? When you tell me I am no longer the person who committed an offense, how do I know if I can believe you? Some days I believe the answers are somewhere in the struggle. I am relieved it is not for me to decide who should be forgiven and when or how justice is served. Is there a way to win the war? I don’t know but if I can make a difference I’d like to try.

V.I.C.T.I.M.S.

Suave

No one really knows what a victim feels, we assume we do, but we really do not know, until the unthinkable comes down rumbling on our home, like a ricocheting bullet piercing through the soul of an innocent bystander.

Still, I ask, what is a victim? The answer seems to elude me, because as a perpetrator of a crime, I'm considered the victimizer, society's worst nightmare, the worst of the worst, still I can identify with victims because crime has ripped through my family like a blizzard storm, turning happiness into agony, smiles into cries, and charming hearts into depths of misery.

Witnessing my grandfather get murdered right in front of my eyes at the tender age of ten, robbed me of my innocence still, I dare not justify my wrongdoing. Today I present myself to you as a perpetrator of the worst crime imaginable, murder. I won't even try to search for a logical reason why my 12-year-old niece was raped by her step-daddy. Still I ask, what is a victim?

The bottom line is, that anyone can become a victim. Crime does not discriminate. It has no face, and its results are shattered lives, broken dreams, endless pain, healing walls, with an untitled storyline, that can fit the average person. Still I ask, what is a victim?

A mother! A father!

A daughter! A brother! A niece!

A sister! A cousin! A grandfather! A grandmother!

You, me, him, her, they, we – it doesn't matter, we all have family, friends, dreams that are left behind to pick up the broken pieces of our lives flowing around. A victim's misfortune affects many lives directly and indirectly.

V. Valedictorian became the transformation from being the worst to allowing my plight here to make me the greatest.

I. I want to be good, I would die for that at any given moment, because it gives my life more meaning.

C. Cathartic releases are refreshing because to suppress anything not worth harboring can produce ulcers.

T. Time and separation from my family will never defeat me here, neverthe-

less, I still long to be as close to them as possible.

I. Insight is a gift and it has allowed me to properly navigate myself through this dark chaotic road – I’ll make it.

M. Measure the length and breadth of all the problems and difficulties in my life, right now and you will wonder what sustains me.

S. Seeing far has been bestowed upon me by the Mural Art program: which is the reason I reach for you; should you start listening you’ll definitely feel blessed because I speak to enlighten and to edify the core of your existence.

The temporalness of my own existence pushes me to communicate my feelings of goodness and worth despite what I have been dealt. It is with a profound reverence that I seek to help others avoid the abyss I have started to escape from. Still I ask, “What is a Victim?”

Official Victims

Angel O.

In Webster's Dictionary, the word victim is defined as "one harmed by an act, circumstances or condition (victims of disasters)."

I'm a victim of poverty, racism, miseducation, injustice and a lack of love, compassion, of father and mother.

It's funny how we stay focused on victims who were traumatized by a loved one lost or a horrific crime. We listen to these victims, we sympathize with them. Yet society seems to dictate to all exactly what persons are victims. To define the meaning of a victim, to set limits and boundaries. By convincing one another that those who meet the requirement belong in this category which society defines as "victims" as the only ones who should receive assistance and support. Where is the balance between official victims and others who have been hurt? We are fighting against victimization of all people, including those in prison. Am I supposed to step out of my condition and pretend I'm not hurting in order to assist others? I don't like to sound like a selfish m/f, but it's hard to turn my back on the existing pain.

It's even harder to channel it right, to find a proper outlet.

I sat for so many years watching my mother fall into the ocean of victimization. She was a vulnerable sacrifice to her victimizer. Since then (that point in time of realization) I made up my mind (at a young age) never to fall into the same ocean. So, I became the victimizer. It was so easy to victimize, and so not fall into the ocean of self-pity. What I didn't realize is that all along I was lost in the same tainted water my mother drowned in. The same pain that I could not understand. I was a "victim" of many things in life; my soul is full of old wounds which developed into scars. Not so long ago I realized how much hate existed inside of me. An endless fire, full of strength. When I sat in the cell with only a bed, four walls and myself to work at for three months, it was a time to reflect, to look inside of myself and re-evaluate my feelings. One day I sat on the bed looking up to the sky. I remember a statement which I don't remember writing (maybe I extracted it from one of the many books I read) which goes like this: Your systematic effort to undermine the truth of your true identity confuses those that believe in your goals, even those that detest your negative side. You're only a reflection of others, who are lost in the dark ocean of self-pity and con-

tinue drowning yourself with others' negative energy. Does this make you a righteous person or just another fool with judgmental criticism?

This is something that made me realize that I was spending too much time trying to help others and too little time helping myself. The meaning is broader, but it was a start in the process of re-evaluation. Maybe I sound selfish, but I'm exhausted with giving, giving and embracing but not receiving in return. Through my life and years I've been incarcerated, this has been the story of my life. People come and go, some memories are lovely – some are painful.

I'm not the Tin Man, who's missing a heart. I'm the king of the jungle, the Lion that's deprived of roaming the jungle, deprived of freedom, deprived of justice. The lion that will not succumb to any boundaries. A lion who will not conform to the rules. A lion that's hungry for freedom, for life, for help. Most of all a lion that's innocent.

I will not be a dead man walking. One who's comfortable and happy to be living another day in this Hell. In this undesirable way.

The Streets

A POEM FOR FATHERLESS FATHERS

Theodore A. Harris

the streets are
asphalt roads muddied
with the bloody
footprints of shoeless men

the asphalt roads are bottomless
potholed-streets swallowing impoverished multitudes
where I search

the eyes
of the human traffic
of black men
for my father

I search for him
on the asphalt roads muddied
with the bloody
footprints of shoeless men
 some of them are bent
 some of them are broken

looking into the anything's-possible eyes
of my two year old daughter
I know what it is

to be a father
unable to see
unable to embrace your children
feeling destitute
 the sounds of their smiles
 a whisper away from silence

I know what it is
to cry
until your face is damp
with the salt of your father's
tears on your tongue

I know what it is
to ask yourself
am I the only evidence
am I the only evidence
am I the only evidence

he exist

Come Trek Along With Me...

Charles B.

An eighty-two year old, 5'5" African-American who served in World War II. He was a loving and devoted husband to his wife of many years (now deceased) and remains a loving and supportive father to his children. An outstanding pillar within his community and a law-abiding and respectful American citizen. Today, like any other day, he pulls into his garage and proceeds to get out of his vehicle but lurking just outside in the bushes was a couple of thugs. One places a gun to his head and threatens to take his life, if he either looks up (as if to try to identify the culprits) or fails to comply when told to give up his wallet.

No!!! You're not reading a transcript from Dateline, 20/20, 48 Hours or 60 Minutes...but rather you are about to trek along with me to my first meeting with the Inside-Out Think Tank Team, here on Lockdown in Graterford.

On this particular evening, we are blessed to have a conjoined meeting with Jane Golden of Mural Arts Ursula Rucker, and the inmate Mural Artists from behind the walls. Jane gives a moving account of how vibrantly optimistic the climate was during a recent meeting with several victims and victim's rights advocates. Ironically, the main attraction for the evening was a victim of violent crime himself. Now, for all intents and purposes, I would like to introduce you to Mr. Carter.

Mr. Carter has always been a very outgoing person and has tried his best to do right by everyone. He is a native of the Tidewater region of Virginia. Though both of his children are well grown and his wife deceased, he still insists on not selling his property here in Pennsylvania and moving back to his native home in Virginia. This is although his community, like many others, has been somewhat on a moral decline due to socio-economic disparities such as the influx of drugs, crime and violence. Now, the embodiment of these elements are lurking outside his garage door one evening as he parks his vehicle to get out.

Since that dreadful evening, when the crime occurred, he has not felt comfortable going to and fro as freely as before. He speaks of the many nightmares and how, at times, he has been stricken by fear of the offenders returning to victimize him again. At times, he is afraid to even answer his phone and, often, his daughter Kathy has to go by to check on him though he has always been the protector, provider and fearless leader in their family. It deeply disturbs her that he has been having to contend with such drama.

By now, tears are more than evident in many of the eyes of those sitting within earshot of his voice. Some offer their condolences while others sit intently on their chairs, while listening to this man's cry for help. Mr. Carter, like every other victim of crime, needs the opportunity to be heard and to receive some clarification as to how this horribly inhumane, anti-social, deviant and criminal act could have ever occurred. Most victims of crime, at a minimum, need to know why the offender targeted them and what drove him/her to do it. They also want the opportunity to confront the offender and, last but not least, to have these questions answered by the offenders themselves. Victims of crime, violence and abuse also need to have some clear indication by the criminal justice system, law enforcement agencies, the community and, where possible, the offenders, that this won't happen again.

How could anyone prey on Mr. Carter? What was going through their minds? Why would anyone victimize another person, period? What can we do to reclaim our rights as human beings? How do we begin to salvage our government, our criminal justice system, our law enforcement agencies, our communities, our homes, our schools, our places of prayer? How? When and where? Where do we begin?

As I wrestle with these perplexing thoughts, I realize that Mr. Carter has given voice to my own victim's family and friends. Once again, for what seems like the millionth time, I begin to evaluate the harm and hurt they must have suffered due to my reckless and callous actions. My victim was speaking directly to me, from his grave, through Mr. Carter.

I have been incarcerated for over two decades. I am serving a life sentence. One of the most difficult and awkward things I've ever had to do was to learn how to forgive myself. Wherever I am, for as long as I live, anything good, humane, thoughtful and selfless that I do; I know that it will be wrought in part because of the remorse I've experienced and the ownership and responsibility I've accepted pertaining to my actions which led to the death of Mr. C.. To have just a little peace of mind and not to ever allow his death to be in vain, I realize I have to continually take on the challenge of becoming an instrument of love and kindness as well as becoming an advocate of justice.

As I look into Mr. Carter's eyes, I see my own victim's family and friends. Instantaneously, I also see my own family and friends and the havoc visited upon all of them as a result of my actions. It becomes increasingly obvious that crime severs the very fiber which serves as mere threads to reinforce our sense of humanity. As long as there is one victim in this world, we are all victims. Once we see ourselves in the eyes of the next man, woman or child and begin to treat the stranger on the street with the same dignity, respect and concern that we would want for ourselves; only then will there no longer be victims.

Too Much Weight: Victims

FoxX

Every time I hear the word, “victim”, my mind starts racing at countless thoughts per second. I feel we put too much emphasis on this specific word. It seems the word itself carries more weight than the actual person who was labeled a victim. It is as if we put victims on a pedestal for someone who needs praising and constant attention. Please do not misunderstand me. I do feel and understand the pain of a victim. I too was victimized, the pain of which runs deep. As time passed by, I wanted to be left alone. I wanted to move on and overcome the pain I had endured. I wished some of my victimizers dead. I wish them behind bars and some even deserved it. As of this day, conversations of victimization dredge up painful memories, and sometimes, those conversations force me to relive my pain which, in turn, re-victimizes me.

We are basically capitalizing off of someone’s pain and misery. I think someone couldn’t overcome their victimization and since misery loves company, he/she got a bunch of other people to join in believing that they need such attention and blew being a victim out of proportion. It’s like they started a cult for victims. Forgive me for sounding so cruel, but I just can’t understand why a person would continue living the pain of being a victim. I have been victimized in every which way possible. I refuse to relive any of those feelings.

I don’t mean to sound like a cold hearted person, nor do I mean to sound like I am trying to say move on and get over it. However, is there really so much emphasis needed on the word victim? Then again if the answer is yes, then why am I so hated and considered such an awful inhuman person. I hurt too. The victimization I endured is just as bad, maybe worse, than my own victimization of others. But, those who victimized me walk free, careless, and without a problem.

Do you not think that those who suffer racial bias are victims? Or those who are forced to dwell in poverty due to reasons which they cannot control to be victims? How about victimization of the supposed victimizer who was victimized by the police and court systems? There are people who reside in prison who were mistakenly identified and are serving time for crimes they did not commit. I can continue listing those acts of victimization which don’t get the attention a victim gets. I think one can see where I am going with this.

Can you honestly tell me that you were never both a victim and a victimizer? If you can answer no to that question, I would like to go a little deeper. How about the fact that some people might not report their victimization? Let us look at it like this, have you ever been driving in a rush and the person in front of you was driving slow, so you recklessly pass this person not acknowledging his or her feelings? If so, you are a victimizer and according to our society, you need to be locked up and mistreated as well. Am I beginning to sound a little extreme and blowing things out of proportion? Let me tell you a little story. My mother was learning to drive. She is a hyper sensitive person. Still she was driving. She was doing pretty well. She was abiding by the traffic laws and regulations like the rest of us do when we first learn to drive. One day as she was driving someone behind her in a rush honked continuously and looked quite frustrated. My mother ignored him and focused on driving. This person quickly passed her by cutting her off and then flashed his middle finger, screaming obscenity. In the process, my mother lost sight of what she was doing. She began to cry and got nervous which nearly caused her to crash. Because of this incident, my mother has been unable to drive. She cannot even get behind the wheel of a car without shaking. The reckless driver destroyed her confidence and injured her emotionally. The key words in this sentence are destroyed and injured. Was my mother a victim? Yes.

I know that this is not the same as a person getting robbed, raped, etc., but in my mother's eyes it could be. Think about it. After this happens (robbed, raped, etc.), the person is destroyed mentally, and sometimes suffers from severe trauma and never feels safe. Does this not fall into the same category as what happened to my mother? Just imagine if we were to report every form of victimization that take place and the victim cult got involved, our society would consist of incarcerated so-called victims.

What I need to know is that is there any glory in constantly being called a victim? What are the benefits? We need to stop putting so much weight on the word victim. Nothing is being accomplished by doing this.

Changing the Paradigm

Maalik B.

What reason does one have for the destruction of a country and its land? Maybe it's for natural resources, money. What reason does one have for starvation? Maybe it's because there are too many people in the world. What reason for crime, divorce, child neglect, domestic violence, racism? There are a number of reasons that one could have for "why" these things occur. Whatever the reasons are, however, these things do occur. My focus is not the "why," but on who lies behind these selfish acts. I'm not talking about armies and navies, or perpetrators of crime. I'm not talking about abusive fathers, alcoholic parents, or even the government for that matter. The people I'm talking about have no say in whether they eat or starve, live or die; they make no decisions on whether their parents get a divorce, or whether they get robbed or shot and have their personal belongings taken from them. I'm talking about the innocent people better known and labeled as victims.

Every negative act of pain, hurt or loss leaves a victim behind. I believe that pain, hurt and loss are three major factors that make up a victim. It's a universal theme that echoes all around the world. No matter in what way a person is victimized, whether through crime or just through personal relationships, these three principals seem always to emerge. Those are three easy principles to understand – hurt, pain and loss – but being a victim is much deeper than that. Being a victim of crime can traumatize a person; it can impede a person from having a normal life. To have a son killed or a daughter raped could mentally and physically destroy a person's life as he or she knows it. To be robbed, to have your house burglarized, to be violated in that manner could change a person's whole outlook on life.

Having experienced being a victim, and the pain, hurt, and loss that being a victim brings, I can honestly say that it does more to you than the meanings of those words express. I felt empty, not complete, not whole. I began to search for things that would fill the emptiness. In my search I went through every emotion except the one I was looking for. I met rage, anger, hate, revenge, sadness, loneliness, depression, and as I went through each stage I wrote a painful story about it. After a while I was able to think clearly. I came to the conclusion that one or two things could happen if I didn't try to repair myself: (1) I could go through with the negative plans I had of getting even, or (2) I could seek closure by find-

ing out why my victimization happened, and so at least address the problem. I never had the opportunity to bring either one of these plans to reality, and because of that I've never forgiven the person who victimized me. To this day, when I think about it I feel pain, hurt and loss.

Victims, innocent people, people of hurt, loss and pain - at some point we all experience victimization. My question is, why? Why do we victimize each other? We know the surface reasons, but isn't there a much deeper reason? Is it that man does not cherish life? Why does he not value emotion? Is it that man only feels emotion when it affects and benefits him? Why is it more important to speak of death than of life? More important to take than to give? These are questions we must answer to change the paradigm and stop the victimization of one another.

In closing, I want to explore one more issue. The thing that dooms us all is also the thing which brings us close together, our social interaction. If we look at our social interaction we will be able to see why we make victims. I believe that as a people we put more emphasis on what a person has, than on the person himself. We love titles and labels; they give us status; they separate and group us. In my opinion, when we can stop labeling and begin to look past the set norms and standards of our society, our social interaction will tighten and victims will slowly fade away.

Plea of the Innocent Victim

Abdul W.

Stop! Listen to the cries of the innocent, of the victims as they tell their stories.

Stop! And imagine the picture of the helpless as they plead for assistance and everyone seems to just walk by.

Repeatedly, over and over again, the innocent and the victims work to conceal their secrets so they can heal from the pain, hurt and humiliation they feel.

Yet, this is no easy task and all that they ask is that you please try to understand what it feels like to be innocent and a victim, whether child, woman or man.

ABDUL W. is a member of the Graterford Mural Arts and Inside-Out Programs.

Healing Walls Statement

Angel O.

One of the main things I treasure from the Mural Arts Program is acquiring the ability to depict the good qualities of any person. This process taught me that no matter how difficult things get, the end results can be beneficial.

I think society should care and remember that we are human and many of us will be back in society. Without society's acceptance and support many prisoners will likely be back in prison. Society dictates the way things function. Supporting prisoners and ex-prisoners, and allowing them to demonstrate to society the good qualities in prisoners, should be part of society's function.

It's time to tear down the wall, break the barriers and allow positive change to unfold. The dedication of the Healing Walls means to me that I'm willing to extend my hands and create changes that can unfold better things for society, especially our youth.

ANGEL O. is a member of the Graterford Mural Arts and Inside-Out Programs.

HEALING

What the Healing Walls Murals Mean to Me

Peaches Ramos

What it means to me is that I am overwhelmed that the guys are trying to make a difference in our community. The men all made mistakes but this wall will mean a lot to me because it's a gift. They are trying to say they are sorry for the things they have done. I was sad and really hurt because the children could not play outside when they wanted to. Now the children can go outside and play without me worrying if they might get caught by stray bullets. I have seen too many kids, innocent kids, get killed. My youngest son is only seven years old and he's attended eight funerals already. I hope the guys from Graterford can show them so that they see fast money isn't everything. Now some of them can enjoy their little ones.

The message I would like on the wall would read as follows: Thank you God for making it possible for me and my kids to enjoy life and not be scared about stray bullets or any other danger. I am glad the guys are using their talents wisely instead of standing on the corners selling drugs. We don't feel like prisoners in our home anymore. I would like to thank them myself. So from my heart to theirs thank you very much.

*PEACHES RAMOS is a community activist
in the neighborhood where the Healing Walls stand.*

Healing and Accountability

Diditi M.

What is healing? In order to even try and answer that question, we need to ask a whole bunch of other ones. What is it like to be hurt? What is it like to be hurt so much that it becomes the center of one's life? What is it like to be able to think of nothing but pain, anger, frustration? What is it like to think that perhaps the loss could've been prevented? What is it like to lose a loved one unexpectedly? What is it like to feel trapped as a result of that loss? What is it like to lose oneself unexpectedly? What is it like to remember what one was like before the loss? What is it like to imagine life before the loss? What is it like to imagine the innocence with which one saw the world before the loss? Most of all, what is it like to feel helpless.

I imagine that these are some of the questions that one asks when one has been "victimized." I also think that these are questions we've all asked ourselves at some point in our lives because we cannot have lived and not have done so. No one escapes. No one is free. It's an aspect of the human existence. The issue of "victimization," then, is relevant for all of us as human beings. That is perhaps our deepest connection with each other as human beings, through sadness and pain. So as human beings then, how do we overcome those feelings, those emotions and cope? How do we heal?

When I think of healing, the first thing that comes to mind is peace. In other words, healing to me is to be at peace with oneself, at peace with the incident, at peace with the person, at peace with one's surroundings and at peace with life in general. How do we achieve a kind of peace that will eventually make room for healing?

I cannot speak for everyone. I can only speak for myself. But I do think that one way to achieve peace and allow healing to occur is to change the way we hold others accountable. When we hold others accountable for their actions, we need to realize that we would perhaps act in the exact same way if placed in their shoes. It is a realization that is humbling. By doing so, others aren't absolved of their accountability. Our hurt, pain, loss or suffering are not trivialized. Instead, we have a lot to gain because that understanding unknowingly extends a hand of friendship, a hand of friendship that is humanizing because it separates the action(s) from the individual. It holds the actions of the individual responsible

without assuming an innate moral inadequacy of the individual. And maybe, just maybe that gesture will lead to true realization in that person and make it possible for the person to accept responsibility for the havoc he or she has caused in our lives.

Furthermore, this alternative form of accountability is the path to self-growth because it can create a space that allows us to recognize our own weaknesses as human beings, a common thread that ties us all, because we are all capable of hurting others. And we don't necessarily hurt others because we are demons. We sometimes hurt others because we are scared and seek refuge in actions that provide temporary shelter for our pain. And we should be held responsible for our actions that have hurt others. We should acknowledge the pain our actions have caused others. But we also hope that someone will listen and understand. It is that understanding when extended to those who have hurt us while also letting them know the havoc they have caused in our lives, that can make room for peace and eventually allow healing to take place, I hope.

Resisting the temptation to believe in evil is challenging. I don't think it's easy to empathize with those who have hurt us. It's a struggle. But we have to believe that it is at least a possibility. If we are at least uneasy and struggle when we demonize those who have hurt us, there's hope. And from those feelings of uneasiness and from the struggle will emerge new lives – new lives with a deeper understanding of ourselves and a deeper understanding of the human existence. Maybe then, we can heal as individuals and as a collective.

The Excursion to Freedom

Christopher M.

My respect for the Mural Arts Program
Might be rejected by my
Counterparts but life in art
Started around the age of five.

Dead inside from being beaten,
Battered, bruised and being
Used, I learned the many hues
Of hatred. I cut my emotions
Off and completely released
The ardent debris that made

My life a mess. In this act,
I became less than a person,
Zealous stability worsened.
I fought any disputant that
Was sent my way. If I could
Not shout my say so, I physically
Acted out. There are hundreds
Of victims in my life that felt
My inner strife

At the age of seven, I cut my wrist with
A knife. Suicide was a ride
I would try to take over and
Over again. A unique experience
Happened since those days.
I was swayed to draw what I
Saw in my inner self. The
Emotional roller coaster ride
I felt inside was free. In
Time, I lost my mind and stopped

Drawing connecting lines. It
Wasn't until 1999, a friend
Introduced me to the truth.
Hurt people, hurt people. A
Serene man lends his hand in
Understanding. He gave me a
Plan.

To come out of my insane
Membrane, it was suggested I
Draw something plain. I did,
And slowly slid out of the
Confined shell that caused me
So much hell in the past. At
Last, the poetic artist/muralist
Came out with a blast. After
Forty years of tears and fear,
My cares were blown in the wind.
Quite the contrary, I did not
Become an artist for glory and
Fame, but to slowly heal my
Inner deranged brain.

Healing Walls Statement

Spel

I believe that as human beings we have the capacity to do the most incredible things in life – yet, by the same token, we have the capability to produce the most ill effects from senseless decisions we make. The very principles and essential needs to connect have been forsaken in this country. The cares of the world's besetting noises have simply desensitized us to the important issues at hand; to discard and abandon people with no thought has become customary in the good ol' U. S. of A.

People, please wake up! The turning of deaf ears to the existing hard matters serves only to increase and amplify the continual clangor of the world, whose beat and precise notes we so easily follow. Fear is stagnating the process in making the difference; people are afraid so much that even our common dreams of a better life are slipping right through our fingers.

WHAT ARE WE AFRAID OF?

People are afraid to think or even act differently. We fear the unknown, trapped by the status quo and afraid to listen to the beat of our own hearts. We follow the pack, hyper-speed, hypnotized by media-hype and by political positions that market fear by the pound.

WHY ARE WE AFRAID?

All this a consequence of our global, corporate culture. Bandits destroying our spirits. It's obvious we're being made to fear; fear is a time-honored form of control. We have to step back and disengage from all these "hypes" destroying us as a whole; they are preventing us from making manifest our innate gifts for problem-solving and connecting. We have the power and the ability to recycle and utilize this power of fear to create new energy in bringing about positive change.

We are at a moment in time where standing together to take action is crucial in repairing our own life support system. So, are you ready for your heart transplant? Let us disconnect from these worldly noises, lest that fear be your teacher. Let us act with courage and light and thereby make it possible, for to forgive unconsciously gives other people permission to do the same...

May our courage be contagious....

SPEL is a member of the Graterford Mural Arts Program.

In Search of Healing

Foxx

Am I to blame for all of the wrong that was done?
The pain that I feel, I don't honestly think I can overcome.
But it's been said strongly, "Two wrongs don't make a right."
I can understand this statement, but is it fair for me to cry throughout the
night?
As the victimizer and the victim, I don't think I can be forgiving.
Emotional roller coaster is what I'm on and how I'm living.
Can I move on and overcome the pain I feel
and brought forth into countless lives?
I prayed for forgiveness, asked why, but yet, the conclusion resulted
in unaccomplished tries.
What can I do to relieve myself of this awful pain?
I want to be healed, but then I question myself,
I'm the victim as well as the victimizer, do I have the right to complain?
But yet, I'm not complaining, asking for neither pity,
nor do I really need others' tears.
I just want to know, how do I overcome all those painful years?

Emir

Altovise Love-Craighead

“**L**ive by the sword, die by the sword.” “He was a drug dealer, what did you expect?” “What did you think would happen?” Just another drug dealer off the streets.” “Get over it.” These are comments people made to my family after my brother, Emir Greene was murdered on March 26, 1997. People seemed to view him as something other than human. To them our pain was temporary, a moment in time. Little do they know. The pain is constant and everlasting. Emir was a drug dealer. I will shout it out loud, “EMIR WAS A DRUG DEALER!” I’ll shout even louder, “EMIR WAS A DRUG DEALER!” HE MUST BE A MONSTER!

Quiet as it’s kept, Emir was also a comedian; he told hilarious jokes that made you cry when you laughed. He was an artist. He would draw pictures, later he created paintings. He was active in many art programs around the city. He always helped people. If he had it to give, he gave it. I figure, if he was a monster than the person who killed him, Steven H., must be an evil indescribable.

The Mural Arts Program, funded by the Department of Recreation in the city of Philadelphia, paints murals around the city depicting various issues. Their newest project involves inmates, in a maximum-security prison, painting a mural for victims.

My mother and I were asked to meet with the inmates and talk about Emir’s murder. I was excited and readily agreed to go. As a matter of fact, my mother was invited and I just jumped on her bandwagon. After divulging my personal information and obtaining a clearance, I went to the prison. I was excited to be at Graterford and ready to tell my story. Once I got there I realized, “This was the facility that housed the evil indescribable!” I began to panic. These monsters would not want to hear what I have to say. These monsters would not care about my brother. These were the monsters that committed violent robberies, burglaries and MURDERS! As I entered the prison, I could hear the loud gate slam behind me. There was no turning back now. I entered a room similar to a classroom.

There were approximately twenty men sitting in a circle. I walked into the room and found a seat amongst a row of empty chairs. I looked around as the inmates conversed with each other. I sat and watched black men, white men, young men, and old men. As we were introduced, I gladly let my mother speak

first. I sat as she repeated the story of my brother's death. A story I had played over in my head many times before. I listened to my mother tell the story, as tears streamed down her face. I began to cry. My tears flowed so quickly that my tissue soon became a wet cottony ball.

Once my mother was finished, I picked up where she left off. I told the inmates about my nephew who never had the pleasure of meeting his father. He was born after his father's death. I told them about the burning pain that continues to creep up when something reminds me of my brother. I sobbed, trying to spit the words out through my tears. I spoke about my grief counseling, pointing out how the pain hurts just as bad, even though it's been six years. I told them how I'd learned to ride the pain out and picked up with my life after it had subsided. I strongly emphasized how I hated the word, "CLOSURE." There isn't any closure; he's not coming back. I call it "NEW NORMAL." I've had to learn to be happy again. As I looked around the room with blurred eyes, I saw the inmates, heads bowed, as if they were ashamed. I heard sniffles, as if they had been crying.

When our story was complete, the men, one by one, began to tell us how sorry they were for my brother and our family. One by one, they opened up about their own crimes, stating that they never thought about what their victim's families faced. At the end of this session, the men surrounded my mother and I. They wanted to shake our hands. They told us how grateful they were. They were grateful that we shared our story. They told us how courageous we were to talk to other inmates (some lifers) and not point fingers. They were grateful that we did not come to tell them how wrong they were. They were grateful that we did not put them down.

I could not believe the response. I could not believe the kindness. They invited us back to talk to other inmates. I COULD NOT BELIEVE IT! I COULD NOT BELIEVE IT! They are not monsters. They are HUMANS THAT FEEL. JUST LIKE EMIR!

Those Who Deserve Love the Least Need it the Most

Cathy Faino

My brother Tom has resided at Graterford Prison since the age of twenty-five, which was nineteen years ago. He was given a life sentence without the chance of parole in the state of Pennsylvania. Although he did not kill anyone he was charged with second-degree murder due to the law of “cause and effect.” Without the means to procure a lawyer, he was given a public defender. The public defender did a poor job, and this resulted in such an unfair sentence.

Initially, my three sisters and I were a bit relieved that Tom was in prison, because at least he was alive – two of our brothers died at an early age. Tom is our only brother left. I must tell you that my brother is a wonderful person with a contrite heart that he was even remotely involved in another person’s death. As the years have passed, I am racked with pain when I imagine what it must be like to never have your freedom, and to live in a place like Graterford.

It seems that Tommy was given a raw deal all his life. His father was unmerciful in his abusive treatment toward him as a helpless infant and child. I’ll spare you the gory details. Not once did this man ever throw a ball to my brothers or, or do anything else with them. Suffering from alcoholism as well as a history of abusive treatment by his own stepfather, he hated his children. It was pretty grim most of the time growing up, as Mom was not all that stable either. My brother was never given a chance from the start.

I’m constantly praying and pleading with God to take all this into consideration. I beg God to somehow make a miracle, to please release my brother from prison and to please have mercy on him. I am forever asking God to please reveal himself to Tommy. Sometimes it feels like it’s killing me; it’s very painful, as I am acutely aware of all the simple little things, which we take for granted on a daily basis, that he doesn’t get to experience. I’m helpless and at times hopeless in this situation.

However, God answers prayers in many different ways. I am so grateful for the people in this world who take care and take time to show love to their fellow man. Which brings me to the Mural Arts Program. Thank you, Mural Arts, for expanding the program to reach out to the inmates at Graterford. Thank you for giving my brother the opportunity to feel self-worth, to express his feelings, and to contribute in a positive way. Thank you giving him the opportunity to paint

on the Healing Walls mural. Thank you for giving me, too, the opportunity to paint – I later found out I painted on the exact panel that my brother had been painting on, while it was at the prison. That meant so much to me.

The work that you do at Mural Arts is helping to heal the wounds not only of victims and their families, but also of the men incarcerated at Graterford and their families. We are all victims. Thank you for including me and for showing Godly Love in action. Matthew 25:35-40.

*CATHY FAINO's brother Tom is a member of
the Graterford Mural Arts and Inside-Out Programs.*

Trying to Put Things Back Together

Lynwood Ray

I got involved in the Mural Arts Program at Graterford. Then, at the end of July, I got out of prison, and now I'm working with the Mural Arts Program on the outside, helping to put the murals up on the walls.

I first heard about the Mural Arts group from a friend. I wanted to get into it because I've been drawing since I was about six years old. When I joined the group, they were almost done with another project, the mural in the auditorium inside the prison, and I didn't really work on that. All I did on that mural was paint a little bird. They said next time we'd get into another project. That was the Healing Walls project.

I didn't really have any expectations about the project. When I first heard about it, I didn't know what to think. Things like that in prison come and go. At the time it was just something to do. It got to be more than that when Victoria Greene came up and spoke about how her son was killed. It's something you never actually thought about, that side of the story, the victim's side. You never thought about it, but now you have to think about it. About the pain and hurt you caused.

The feeling I had when she spoke – it was like feeling scared, like your mom caught you, you did something wrong. Or not actually that your mom caught you, but that someone else caught you and they're going to tell your mom. That feeling of right before your mom comes home – scared, nervous, sorry for what you've done, wishing you'd never done it. But one of the things that healing is, is learning to live with what you've done, and be stronger, and maybe be able to live with that.

Working on this project and trying to help victims – I feel I have a kinder heart, now. Since I've been out, if I'm on the street and somebody asks me for a quarter I reach into my pocket and give them a quarter. I was at the store a couple days ago and somebody was short 35 cents, and I reached into my pocket and gave them 35 cents. That's definitely not something I would have done before.

I don't really know how it happened. Once at Graterford I was in the infirmary, because I had to get some kind of medication through an i.v. Now, I'm not really that sick, but I'm sitting there watching these people around me that actu-

ally have something to worry about. So after that I got a job working with the Special Needs Unit inside the prison, with guys that have to have special medication, whose minds are more like kids' minds. I'd go down and say, "how you doin,' guys, how y'all feeling?" And I'd bring them their water and their food. And then I realized that I like helping people

In the Healing Walls project we wanted to try to help the victims. I guess the hardest part was dealing with some of the people who represent them. Because you got people who think one way, and that's it, and you got people who think another way. So it's like a battle between the two points of view. And I don't know if there's ever going to be common ground between the prisoners and the people who work with victims, because they all have their own agenda. But I think they might be able to put a few things in each others' heads that they don't already know, and take that, and see that it has value. Even if just a little bit.

In the meetings with the victim advocates it seemed there was a lot of "what about the victims, what about us?" and I'd say: All right, let's talk. What do you need? But they didn't seem to say what they needed, just "what about us?" And I can understand that, I got nothing against that. I guess that's part of the healing process, not feeling like you can say what you want to say. But we can't help if they don't know what they're trying to say. If we knew, then we could begin the process of healing. I say, let me know so I can start helping. Because regardless of my situation, and what I've done I'm here now, and I'm asking you what you need.

I think healing is a process, and we work at it, and try to come to terms with what we've done. Because if we haven't healed from our own wounds, we wouldn't be able to do as much to try to help somebody else. So we learn to work with the victims and work around what we're feeling, ourselves. Meaning that maybe we don't completely heal, but maybe we just learn to be a stronger person, and process what happened, and learn from our mistakes, and try to put things back together.

And now that I'm out of prison I still want to try to find out what the victims have to say. Because I don't think that this project is about my healing, the healing of the guys on the inside. I mean sure, we've been victims too. But the point is to help the victims on the outside heal. We've been victims, we've all suffered, but we're not asking anyone to feel sorry for us. It's something that happened, and now we have to deal with it, and live life with that pain, and now try to help someone else and heal victims. It's not about us. Because if we focused on that, then we couldn't help other people heal. And that's what we're about.

LYNWOOD RAY was a member of the Graterford Mural Arts Program when the Healing Walls project began. He currently works for Mural Arts Program on the outside.

Mural Arts Overview

Maurice T.

As a man serving a life sentence, and having served 36 years to date, I have always tried to maintain communications and contacts in the outside community seeking to express the remorse, empathy and responsibility I feel for taking a life.

The Mural Arts Program is one important avenue which allows me to give back to the community in a creative way and share with others the insights of growth I have made over the years taking full responsibility for my actions.

A very important part of the Mural Arts Program allows us to share our views and express feelings with Victim Advocates and other members of the community. This kind of sharing brings to focus the impact crime and violence brings to the victims and to the community and makes those who sincerely share get in touch with inner feelings and is a very positive therapeutic part of the program.

The program brings together people of different gender, cultures, religions and ethnic backgrounds which serves to bring about better relating and respect for each other and hopefully will bring about a more positive community inside and outside the walls as individuals become more aware and get motivated to unite in positive ways bettering the community.

Those who provide the program should know that it does make a difference inside the walls as guys return to their cell blocks and routines, the arts programs opens up communications between individuals who might not otherwise speak or talk to each other, that's another positive, and hopefully that is also reflective of the communications in the outside community too.

As we actually work on the murals together with members of the outside community it helps to bring out the humanity in us all and brings about a better understanding that people in prison are people who have made serious mistakes in their lives and are trying to make adjustments needed to return to the community as positive and productive citizens, and not just numbers behind the walls without faces.

It's a program that can and does changes attitudes and the system in positive ways affecting all who participate in it!

MAURICE T. is a member of the Graterford Mural Arts Program.

Broken Bridges

Charles B.

When we are free from the guilt, shame and thoughts revolving around what we might have done differently, to prevent the crime from ever having occurred. . .

When we can speak freely of our victimization; because, the more we tell our story, the greater our chances of being able to work through the traumatic horror, hurt, and pain that was visited upon us, and the greater our chances of helping ourselves and others; by letting victims everywhere know, we are not alone . . .

When we can be absolutely certain, the offender will be held accountable for his or her self-centered, anti-social and often deviant behavior; when we can be reasonably confident that the crime won't happen again . . . and when the person(s) responsible for committing such an evil, callous and selfish act; will realize, the full impact of his or her actions . . .

When, we are no longer deeply confused, emotionally distraught or have an unquenchable longing to have answers/explanations for the many questions flowing rapidly through our minds . . .

When we can be understood, as opposed to being either ridiculed, judged or taken lightly; and be heard, as opposed to being admonished to just get on with our lives.

When we have been given the necessary time to learn how to trust, breathe freely and live again. . . when we can sleep at night, live without fear, and have Peace of Mind, confident that Justice is being administered, that Justice is being served . . .

Only then "can we take the agony and isolation that is caused by crime and punishment and . . . bring meaning into the lives of those who have suffered."

CHARLES B. is a member of the Graterford Mural Arts and Inside-Out Programs.

Walls that Divide / Walls that Unite

AN INSIDE-OUT EXPERIENCE

Lori Pompa

Some time in 2003, I had the good fortune of meeting Jane Golden, Director of Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program. After about an hour of discussing our respective programs, we decided to work in collaboration on a mural project, which came to be called the Healing Walls. Over the next year or so, Graterford artists, victims, victim advocates, community members, and others worked with muralists on the difficult task of visually representing the complex and nuanced reality of victimization and all that flows from it. But we did more than that. We entered into dialogue to understand the contours of this issue as deeply as possible – both to further inform the work in progress and to further inform our own lives in relation to the issue. It is in these sessions that the participants of the program in which I am involved came into play.

Every Wednesday night, a group of a dozen men inside Graterford Prison and about the same number of students and professors from the other side of the wall come together to work on issues of crime and justice. This group, called the Think Tank, is part of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, a project begun seven years ago through Temple University. The overarching goal of Inside-Out is to bring together people on both sides of prison walls to deepen the conversation and transform ways of thinking about crime and justice. Begun in the Philadelphia Prisons in 1997 and expanded to include Graterford Prison in 2002, the Inside-Out Program is now being replicated in universities and prisons across the country.

The Think Tank was developed as a follow-up to the first Inside-Out class in Graterford and, in 2003, the group teamed up with the Mural Arts Program to help create a set of murals addressing issues related to crime and victimization. The Think Tank became the primary place for conversation about these issues, involving dozens of individuals, both inside and out, from various walks of life. Together we listened as victims and co-victims of violent crime told their stories, we explored the complex reasons for crime and reactions to its effect, and we dialogued about these issues with openness, sensitivity, and a willingness to step into the shoes of those whose lives have been radically changed by crime and violence. These conversations had both a healing and transformative quality to them.

As I reflect on this process, what comes to mind is just how counterintuitive – and essential – this sort of meeting is. What a wonderfully radical (that is,

rooted and of great depth) concept – for individuals serving time inside prison, often for crimes of violence, to join with others who have experienced the pain of that kind of violence in order to work together to create something with the potential to move us all towards further healing.

One of the other goals of Inside-Out is to work at breaking down the walls, both metaphorical and literal, that stand between us – walls that separate us from one another based on our differences on many levels and in many dimensions of our lives. It is striking that here, in this project, it is walls that have brought us all together - black and white, male and female, young and old, those who have committed crimes and those who have had crimes committed against them or those in their families. Many of our lives have been turned inside-out through this experience, as we have developed a deeper appreciation for the impact of crime and the long, tedious process involved in moving through the pain. My hope is that we will allow the power of the images on these walls to continue to bring us together so that, as a society, we can work to heal the pain that both causes – and is caused by – the crime and violence in our midst.

LORI POMPA is the Director of Temple University's Inside-Out Exchange Program.

I Send Up A Prayer

Rev. Myra J. Maxwell

As I sit here thinking of just how many times I awaken in the morning as I begin to thank GOD for a new day moments later I am hearing of some tragedy in the news. Someone raped, stabbed, shot, murdered and all I can do is, I send up a prayer.

I don't even know them and I share in their pain and grief, all the families that are touched by these senseless acts of violence and some I can help and be by their sides but for all that I hear of I send up a prayer.

During a trial or court proceeding I hear the victims tell their stories and I send up a prayer.

For the children who witness acts of violence and become victims themselves for those living in fear I send up a prayer.

I know I can't help everyone who's hurt and pain I only share as hearer of their tragedy but I can always send up a prayer.

If someone were to ask me why I send up a prayer my answer would be because I know GOD will hear. Some short words like "comfort them LORD" is a prayer sent up indeed certainly a prayer that God will hear.

As for me I know that my prayers aren't in vain for every prayer sent up is to ask for God to ease the pain and to give victims/survivors the strength that they need to go on.

So today and tomorrow and days after that I will continue to send up a prayer. For those who have faith and those who are searching, I'll continue to do what I do: I send up a prayer.

*REV. MYRA J. MAXWELL is co-director of Collaborative Response to Crime Victims,
a project of the Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia.*

About the Organizations

THE GRATERFORD MURAL ARTS PROGRAM is a project of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program. In addition to the Healing Walls, its artists have painted murals installed in the Prison's auditorium and, in collaboration with the Philadelphia Eagles, at the Edward Gideon Elementary School in North Philadelphia.

THE TEMPLE UNIVERSITY INSIDE-OUT EXCHANGE PROGRAM is a program of Temple's Department of Criminal Justice. Offering courses in which students from universities and students from prison meet in the same classrooms, it was established to create a dynamic partnership between institutions of higher learning and correctional systems, in order to deepen the conversation about and transform our approaches to issues of crime and justice.

THE GRATERFORD INSIDE-OUT THINK TANK is a project of the Temple University Inside-Out Exchange Program. It consists of members from the State Correctional Institution at Graterford, Temple University, and the greater Philadelphia area.

THE OFFICE OF THE VICTIM ADVOCATE of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania provides an opportunity to better serve crime victims by not only focusing on the notifications and opportunity for input that the Department of Corrections and Board of Probation and Parole provide, but also looking at the system as the victim does. The Office of the Victim Advocate is dedicated to providing crime victims with a continuum of service throughout the post-sentencing process.

THE PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY is a social justice organization that advocates on behalf of prisoners, formerly incarcerated individuals and their families in Pennsylvania. It is headquartered in Philadelphia.

SEEKING SOLUTIONS WITH SUZANNE is a public service initiative broadcast by Comcast Original Programming. Suzanne appears three times a day on CNN Headline News, and every Sunday at 6PM on CN8, the Comcast Network.

THE ANTI-VIOLENCE PARTNERSHIP OF PHILADELPHIA is a non-profit charitable organization that addresses the cycle of violence in Philadelphia communities by providing intervention, prevention and support services.

THE PHILADELPHIA COALITION FOR VICTIM ADVOCACY is a membership organization supporting the needs of crime victims.

EVERY MURDER IS REAL is a social services program that seeks to help prevent drug-related homicides in Philadelphia through mentoring and education. It was founded by Victoria Greene.

