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**EL CORAZÓN**  
— THE HEART —

A **SPECIAL EDITION** JOURNAL PUBLICATION  
FOR THE **INCARCERATED** STUDENTS OF  
IMPERIAL VALLEY COLLEGE

This publication aims to allow Imperial Valley College students to share their work with a larger audience.

A project of the Arts, Letters, and Learning Services faculty and staff, EL CORAZON allows students to present their work and have selected submissions published and displayed in print, on the library website, and in the library.

### CATEGORIES PRESENTE

CREATIVE WRITING

DRAWING

ENGLISH/SPANISH POETRY

ESSAY

PAINTING

## JOSE AYALA



### And I Rise

Welcome to my topsy-turvy world...  
As these words unfurl.  
Living bent on destruction, programmed to fail,  
How was I to tell?  
Captive to my ignorance, I lost my way,  
My humanity, my freedom, sad to say.  
Marked unredeemable, stripped to a primal state,  
How did I get to this awful place?  
Glorified, vilified, oh unforgiving land,  
Arena of the gods of wrath.  
Descent into darkness, survival takes precedence,  
Such self-created madness.  
Even so, the human spirit cannot be denied,  
Nuclear fission is churning deep inside.  
Thrust into the fire, the CREATOR and VICTIM do battle,  
Hot embers burning, ashes scattered.  
Demons defied, Smokey Mirror evanesced obsolete,  
Today, I rise renewed, transformed  
The CREATOR I was meant to be!

# JASON BERG

## “A Shared Moment”

It is so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Across from me is a kid just a couple of years older than I was when I first entered these walls, but then again, he was not even born yet back then. We are not the same race, yet we are so much alike; we grew up the same way, and it was not easy. We have both suffered and made others pay the price for it.

Right now, he is sitting with his eyes closed, facing me, not five feet away. He is having a hard time keeping his eyes closed because it's a vulnerability we are not used to. He is being told to think of all the pain he has felt throughout his life, and I can see his pain as it splashes across his face. It hurt me to see it because I know this kid is like me. He can deal with direct pain, but it's hard for him to deal with pain directed at those he cares about. So, when I see the pain sketched on his face, I know his family has suffered. My heart goes out to the kid.

Now, he is being told to think of all the pain he has caused others in this world. His eyes open, refusing to face it at first. Then he finds his courage, he closes his eyes, and he tries. I can see the struggle inside him as it plays across his face. After a while, he silently starts to cry. Before long, I began to cry with him, and I desperately prayed, “Please God, do not let him have done the things I have done!”.

## “The Sea Within Me”

My home is a small town by the sea, and wherever I go, I bring it with me. I'll never forget the day my mother introduced me to God. She took me to the rocks at sunset and told me this is where she gets to see God. The sun had painted a beautiful tapestry of colors across the sky; I could feel the vibration of the waves as they crashed against the rocks we sat on and the spray of the mist as it washed over us. I was humbled like never before in my young little life; I felt so small yet a part of something so big I could barely imagine it.

Anyone who grows up at the beach knows the sea gets into your blood. You must understand the sea is untamed, ferocious, and violent. It is also calm, nurturing, and peaceful. It gives life. Slowly but surely, the sea has a way of seeping into your soul.

In my young adolescent life, I lost my way. I became untamed, ferocious, and violent. At 17 years old, I crashed into the prison system as the waves crashed into the rocks. I have not been home in over 25 years, but I take the sea with me wherever I go. Whether I'm up on the sticks of Pelican Bay, in the mountains of Tehachapi, or out in the desert of Calipatria, I bring the sea with me.

The desert of Calipatria has been good for me. They have seagulls that flock to our yard so we can feed them. When I was a kid, I thought of them as flying rats, but now all I see is their beauty, a living piece of home that comes to visit me, a sign of the divine. So now I try my best to be calm, nurturing, and peaceful.

## “Apprentice” (Inspired by: “Mastery” by Robert Greene)

An apprentice I am, to a true Master of words and a scholar of human behavior. He has challenged me to 10,000 hours of hard labor, so I must find a labor of love to help me pass the time. I begin by putting pen to paper. One minute leads to two; two minutes leads to three. One day bleeds into another. Boredom sets in, but I cannot allow it to stand for long. My master tells me to force myself to stay alive, to push my limits, and to never settle for what is comfortable or safe. So, I forge on. My hands ache, my fingers bleed and callous. I don't hold back; the battle is on. I must shed my blood before the moment is gone. Can you feel my suffering, anger, and rage as I put my life on the page? Can you feel my guilt, sorrow, and shame, or has all my work been vain? Have I failed my master in this endeavor? If so, I must find the strength to pick myself up off the floor and push on, for I still have many hours to go. All hail Robert Greene, a true master!



# WILLIAM KING BLACKWELL

## Opulence Surroundings

The more you surround yourself with people who add value to your life, the better off you will be, but make sure that you are adding value to their lives, too. Surround yourself with people that push you to do better. There is no drama or negativity, just higher goals, dreams, and motivation. Surround yourself with relentless humans who plan in decades but live in moments.

Train Like savages but create like artists. Obsess in work, relax in life. People who know this is finite choose to play infinite games. Find people scaling mountains. Climb together.

Nobody wants to tell you why discipline is so important. Discipline is the strongest form of self-love. It is ignoring current pleasures for bigger rewards to come. It's loving yourself enough to give yourself everything you have ever wanted.

I was born with something inside me that refuses to settle for average. I don't know what it is, but I'm glad I have it.

Means to me: Reaching to be the highest form of yourself.

# CORNELIUS BYERS

My name is Cornelius Byers. I've been incarcerated since the 12<sup>th</sup> grade while surrounded by strangers in my isolation, from family and friends. I wrote to relieve myself of sorrow so that when I receive visits, I won't put my burden on them. Through my writing, I learned to pacify myself with encouragement since my environment lacked any inspiration.

## "Optimistically viewing the top from the bottom."

So we're at the bottom, you know, between a rock and a hard place. When every moment feels downhill, and you're tumbling fast. Take a moment to breathe, be still, and understand when you're at the bottom, the only way out is up. What we thought mattered Vanished like yesterday. Unable to get back, leaving us how tomorrow and today shouldn't be. Find new motivation no matter the journey to spark a fire of ambition because being between a rock and a hard place is solid ground to build on. Though tumbling quickly downhill and not being able to slow our pace.

Fearing the speed, we're going the impact we'll have on what's waiting. Scared of being broken, locking at fragments flaming into ashes, of what was once you from the breakage. It's expected when facing what's new, embrace what seems chaotically out of your control. Change is natural so with the same intensity that's forced, look pass what your view is reaching pass what you physically live...

## Moments of my life in a cell

Stagnant, I float a drift, sinking through the cracks in this concrete maze. A pinch couldn't wake an escape from this nightmare. Chanting, "There's no place like home" while clicking these chucks, in a coma. As a wave, I ripple away, forgotten in this ocean...Surrounded by shores of moments cemented as chains. What's considered to be the Lowest, wouldn't dive this depth. I spill, overflowing through these cell walls, evaporating...

# RAUL BRAVO

Since I was a child, art in its many forms has always caught my attention. From the great Masterpieces of the Master to street art pieces, art is in the eye of the beholder. It was only natural that I started experimenting with abstract designs and later moved on to drawing the human body and to what I am doing now, portraits of family and friends.

I don't see a future where I am not creating a work of art, may it be a pen/pencil drawing, miniatures, or now added to my repertoire quasi-poems. Quasi poems came about when I started writing down my musings for a very special person in my life; once she appeared, the floodgates of my heart opened up! The emotional bombs have yet to stop, which have been dropping non-stop since day one with no cease-fire in the near future.

## Just Me

I am lost within the myriad of my emotions,  
Overwhelmed by my own imagination of us,  
There is no us,  
Just me.

I try and try to convince you,  
I battle your demons along mine,  
A battle I am willing to give my life,  
For your happiness is paramount to me,  
If you would only ask.  
Chivalry is not dead,  
It has been put away for a while,  
Waiting for your return,  
Answer me or let me fall back,  
Into my endless slumber.

## Lgrimas de amor y dolor

Que seria de mi sin tu amor?  
Volveria a mi escondite?  
Lamentaria el vacio que regresa  
despues de tanta felicidad?  
Viviendo la vida en tu presencia es  
lo mas divino que me has regalado,  
Como quieres que me olvide de todo  
lo hermoso que vivimos juntos?  
Lgrimas de amor y dolor se confunden  
mientras caen al abismo de mi nueva soledad,  
sin tu amor.

## Tu Dulzura

Tu dulzura le dio sabor a mi amargura,  
Que riqueza tu miel en mi boca,  
Tus labios sobre los mios con la mas  
delicades de una mariposa.  
Refugiarme entre tus senas dos montañas  
cubiertas de nieve pura y virginal.  
Esperando que no me prohibas caminar  
estos pasos nuevamente, para mi deleite.  
Apartir de mañana seremos uno,  
Como lo merecemos desde el comienso.  
Adoro que me conozcas tambien,  
Sabes mis pensamientos, mis deseo,  
mis disgustos.  
Pero sobre todo sabes que eres mi felicidad, eres mi fin!  
Eres la unica Estrella en el cielo que me alumbr  
el camino hacia ti,  
Me das un poquito de esparanza en siempre  
encontrarte, por donde vallas en el mundo.

## Como Quisiera...

Como quisiera ser el viento que  
acaricia tu piel, sentir tu calor.  
Tu cuerpo seria mi nuevo paraíso,  
para perderme en tus ojos relucientes,  
disfrutar tus valles calidos,  
seria una delicia sin fin.  
Eres y siempre seras una mujer,  
complete y inolvidablemente bella.  
Daria la vida con gusto pore star contigo,  
porque es un castigo estar sin ti.  
El tiempo se nos va como la mañana,  
y yo apenas comiensando con esta hambre  
insaciable que tengo para tu cuerpo...

# CRISTIAN DIAZ



## Broken Promises

Oh, monkey on my back,  
We meet again  
Oh, right, you never left.  
Kicking and screaming,  
Kicking and biting.  
Nauseated you make me,  
When you laugh, scratch my back  
Oh monkey, oh monkey, see  
Definitely do.  
Oh no, here comes the pain again,  
My eyes swollen,  
My eyes glow  
From that, I sleep no more.

## The Breaking of The Mind

When the soul cried out,  
The mind said no more.

For the perfect picture,  
Hangs on a single thread,  
In the shade of balance.

Therein lies madness,  
In the shade, which is indistinguishable.

To be practical becomes practical.

To silence the soul is madness,  
For the soul speaks.

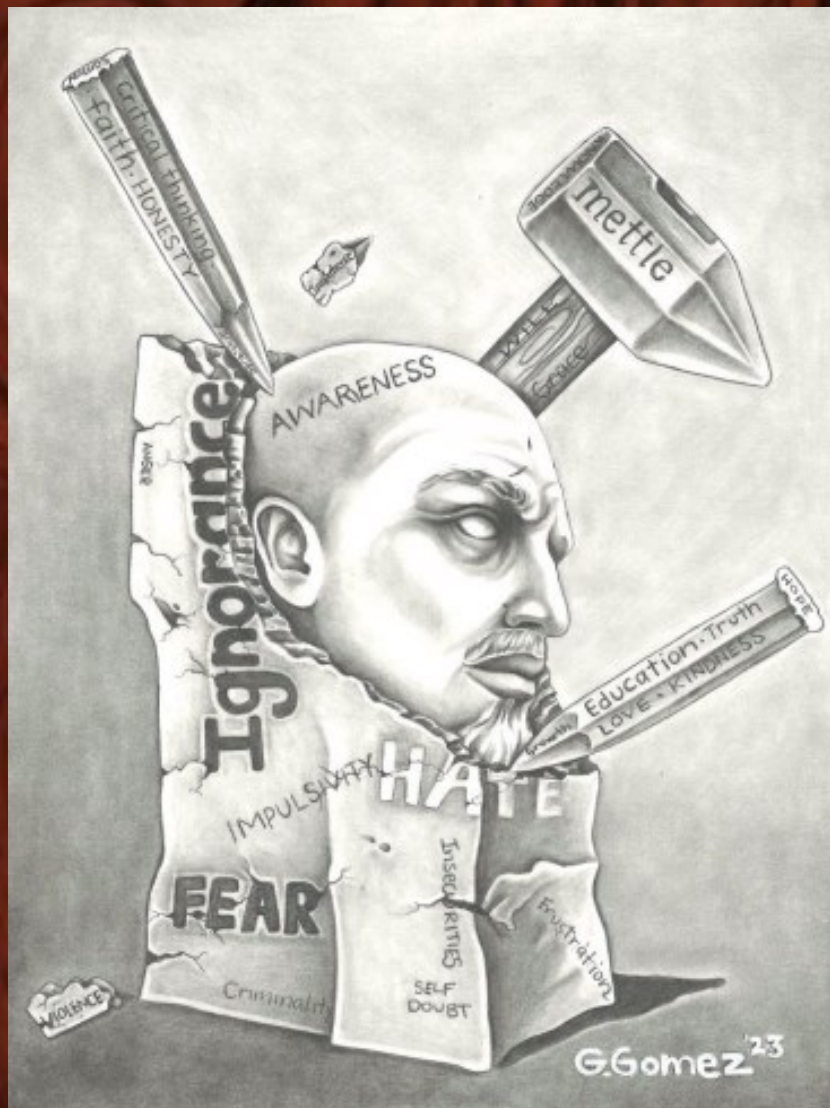
# DOUGLAS STEVEN LOPEZ



# GILBERT GOMEZ

## Chiseling Away Ignorance

This piece of art is symbolic of my life. I am a human being serving a 25-to-life prison term. Prior to coming to prison and well into my term, I had become a person encapsulated in a concrete slate of ignorance. Stemming from a lack of education and learning from poorly educated role models. The result is becoming a highly ignorant, destructive criminal who makes poor decisions. Feeling the consequences of my poor choices, I wanted to do better. Ignorance led to hurting people and to a poor quality of life. After each book I read and each self-help class I attended, I became more confident and began to make smarter choices. In each academic and self-help class, I have started to chisel away the slate of ignorance that clouded my judgment. I have developed chisels and hammers of positivity, breaking away my defects. They say, "Once you stop seeking knowledge and truth, ignorance sets in." So, I have dedicated myself to lifelong learning So that I remain self-aware and stay free from a mental prison of ignorance.



# LAMONT KELLUM JR.

## I Still Have Some Life Left

Two men can look out the same window,  
One sees a life of openness and opportunity,  
The other sees a long dirt road & tall light poles,  
Hay barns in the distance,  
After so-called electrical fences...  
As the sky is so beautiful,  
I can only hope that my freedom is getting close,  
Smiling as I stare out a vertical rectangular window...  
Perspective is everything,  
Though growth is constantly changing,  
Then, you determine that change is a necessity,  
It's empowering after overcoming all adversity...  
Two men can look out the same window,  
From the same scenario, with different goals,  
Through similar circumstances,  
Where different perspectives add weight to different results...  
The simplistic beauty of life,  
That shit was wrongfully taken from me,  
Tragically,  
Sentenced to die in a cage from old age,  
Given by what they said were the acts of me...  
Lied under oath, very strategic though,  
But I stood firm every second, every minute, every hour,  
I had to be strong...  
I grew up misguided, gravitating to an irrational recycled narrative,  
But it's imperative that you listen in...  
I grew up in the trenches,  
The heart of Compton, California, to be specific,  
A good kid in a mad city,  
Taking a liking to the only life I envisioned...  
Everything I saw coming up I normalized,  
I thought I was doing right,  
I thought this was the way of life,  
Until my life was wrongfully taken, and I had to sit,  
Time in and time out, spending my days trying to analyze,  
Life was all fun and games,  
Until I was shot in the eighth grade,  
Critical condition while woo was transitioning,  
I lost all reasoning,  
Then, I contemplated suicide when I was up late one night,  
But my willpower didn't let me give in...  
Lost, angry, and confused,



A good kid in a mad city,  
Early on, hiding the trauma and abuse,  
While that shit slowly devoured my entity...  
Over the years, I learned the hard way,  
All the tragedies I faced,  
Without a full understanding of my destructive choices,  
Then I was convicted of a crime they gave,  
Because I didn't do it, though, that didn't stop the he say, she say,  
It was all hearsay, but it was fabricated their way,  
Cause nobody said I was there that day,  
Or had anything to do with what took place...  
No fingerprints or DNA present of mine,  
Eyewitness said I wasn't present that night,  
No GSR on my clothing excludes me from gunfire,  
Then, three different testimonies from three different responders,  
All three lied,  
It aint about who's wrong as much as who gives the jury the best lies,  
Or even innocent until proven guilty because I was incarcerated throughout my fight,  
Then given time for a crime that evidentially proves my innocence,  
But still sentenced to life,  
For my past gang ties and culture after my upbringing was criticized...  
The days turned into weeks, weeks into months, and those added up the years,  
And I've been through every emotion and gave in to the burning tears,  
Then my resilience kicked into high gear; I knew I couldn't stop here,  
So, I took this predicament as temporary,  
Re-creating the fight in me after taking time to think,  
They thought they saw failure in me; then my success made them frown,  
They expected me to fold under pressure, but shit look at me now,  
They judge me based on the surface of things,  
Missing my divinity deep down,  
I stood, injured and almost breathless against adversity,  
And fought with my head up pound for pound...  
They expected me to be defeated,  
Thinking my ambition was depleted,  
Though I felt against it all,  
I still kept visualizing my motivation for a reason...  
Being at odds with all odds,  
The karate kid in me kept the fight alive,  
Steady king, breathe, you ready king?  
As I braced myself while the internal dialogue rose...  
Trying to block the blows had me kicking dirt when I stepped,  
That hurt and bruised feeling was heavy as heavy gets,  
My mind couldn't rest, my heart was going left,  
When I fell, I felt the deep breaths in the depths of my chest,  
But I refused to lay there and soak it in,  
So, back on my feet, I knew I owed myself a great debt,  
I still have some life left...

## GOLDEN BOY

There once was a kid  
Full of promise with a real bright shine  
He set out from home all on his own  
A Golden Boy in his prime  
Little changes took place and corrupted his way of life  
No longer sober, the cruelty took over  
Became a man without regard for life

O Golden Boy, beware  
She's forest green without the peace  
She doesn't care  
20 plus years, and I'm still here  
Her embrace only leads to death  
O Golden Boy, don't live my regret

I once was told that knowledge is gold  
By a man who lived his life right  
Too blind to see his lessons for me  
Led to a life of crime  
But now that I'm sober and learning took over  
I'm trying to walk as he might

O Golden Boy beware  
She says that she'll fix you  
But her green walls only being on despair  
20 plus years, and I'm still here  
Her embrace only leads to death  
O Golden Boy, don't live my regret

If I knew then what I know today  
I surely would've traded this life  
So much more I left unexplored  
Great adventures and untold delights  
But instead I got dreams  
That never came to be  
Ruined plans run through my mind  
All through my mind

O Golden Boy beware  
She's an ominous green  
And full of crushed dreams she don't care  
20 plus years and I'm still here  
Her embrace only leads to death  
O Golden Boy don't live my regret

Yeah, those lessons he showed me  
Those words that he told me  
They constantly run through my mind...

## JOHN MALAGON



During an Alternative to Violence Project workshop, I was asked to write a letter to my younger self as part of an exercise. That letter inspired me to attempt to write my first song on the guitar that I'm learning to play. My song reflects my life as a "California kid in the Golden State." The "she" I refer to is the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and the "man who lived his life right" was my father GYST. John E. Malagón was a decorated Marine who passed from Covid in September 2021.

I honestly believe that education caused me to experience a change in my belief system. Although my path may seem to me to be difficult at times, I can at least now see a glimmer of light that gives me hope and motivates me to keep pushing forward, to do what's right, not what's easy.

# ISMAEL MEJIA

## Your Name?

Have you ever seen your name written out?

Maybe it's something you never focused on, but have you ever read what comes after your name?

As a kid, I never saw it written out.

I've heard it yelled out, screamed out, and sometimes beat out.

What comes after our name is who we are and what we've done or accomplished.

I must have done nothing for many years, for I have never seen it written out.

Once in elementary school, Student of the Month was a surprise to me, and maybe too many were in the room that day.

**I-S-M-A-E-L**, disturbing the peace, fighting at school,

**I-S-M-A-E-L**, another fight.

**I-S-M-A-E-L**, arrested for petty theft.

Once in Juvenile Hall, sitting in the P.O.'s office, I saw it again.

**I-S-M-A-E-L**, never comes home, is on drugs and alcohol,

Spray painted his room, never goes to school, signed Mom.

Ismael...who am I?

Violent, thief, disobedient, disrespectful, criminal, gang member, hurt.

**I-S-M-A-E-L**, what comes after your name?

Well, I was once in the newspaper...Ismael was arrested for attempted murder, now a prisoner.

Ismael Mejia what comes next?

A number: F45989

**I-S-M-A-E-L**, drug smuggler, participating in racial riots, battering inmates, attempting to kill another inmate, cell phones, contraband, drug user, victim.

**I-S-M-A-E-L** is what comes after my name. What about yours?

Ask yourself, "How's my name written?"

It is written one way; then, it can be rewritten.

Why else does a pencil have an eraser?

Why create white out?

Why else have a phrase called "Second Chance," "Redemption," "Rehabilitation," "Change," or even "Delete" on a keyboard?

Rewrite your name.

**I-S-M-A-E-L**, 30 days of Alcoholics Anonymous, 60, 100 days.

**I-S-M-A-E-L**, a leader amongst his community.

**I-S-M-A-E-L**, was accepted to U.S.C. School of Law, Now I.V.C.

**I-S-M-A-E-L**, now quoted by Catholic Priests, Deacons, his brothers, and Sisters.

**I-S-M-A-E-L**, now written in The Lambs Book of Life.



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