

**Alabama Prison Arts & Education Program
Feature by Paul Brody
WDR 2016**

(AUDIO: Randall Horton-The Gavel)

The Gavel

The gavel
The splintered body
The red-neck guards
The state dungarees
The grey cinder block
The naked shower
The elemental fear
The unspoken yoke
The mercy plea
The awakening
The trembling hands
The walk to chow
The razor fence
The barrel's scope
The Rottweiler's teeth
The hesitation
The guttural pain
The calls refused
The return to sender
The rivulet of tears
The frozen heart
The opaque night
The seclusion
The muffled screams
The masturbation
The silence

(AUDIO: Alabama morning atmosphere)

Narration: It's 5:30 in the morning, spring in Alabama. I'm sitting on the porch of a big white house waiting to be picked up. I down coffee to overcome jet lag, my stomach cramps.

Since I was a schoolboy in the '70s, American history class and media have fed my mind with variations on the phrase *land of the free*. For the last twenty years I've been working as a trumpeter and writer in Berlin, Germany, and while finding inspiration in my adopted home I've been able to rediscover my own country anew.

In America a subculture has emerged that is both justice seeking and clearly unjust, a solution and a problem, sensationalized in media and, at the same time, forgotten. Over 2.2 million people live behind bars. Although we are the *land of the free*, the U.S. has a greater percentage of its population locked up than almost any other country in the world.

As a writer and musician I wonder... what's it like for one of these millions to be creative, to write a story or draw a picture, to exercise the bit of freedom within the borders of the mind? I chose to visit poet and artists in prison in Alabama because it's most known for its flawed justice system: Alabama incarcerates more people per capita than almost any other state. Its prisons are filled to almost twice their capacity, spurring violence. In the last years abuse by guards has caught national attention.

At the same time, the *Cotton State* is initiating one of the most exemplary prison arts and education programs in the country, thanks to Kyes Stevens, whose car is pulling up the driveway.

(AUDIO: Kyes picking me up. Dog story)

Kyes: *I spent about ten minutes on highway 280 this morning trying to catch a dog*

Paul: *On the way here? What was it?*

Kyes: *It was on the side of the road and obviously someone's pet and obviously old. But I was trying to catch him so I just kind of backed off and worked really hard and tried to get people to slow down and let it cross. It's a four lane.*

Narration: We're headed for the Elmore Correctional Facility to listen to Kyes' poetry workshop. I brought along my trumpet as a way to connect with the poets in a music-poetry dialogue. Elmore is two hours from Auburn University, which houses the *Alabama Prison Arts and Education Project*. Kyes founded the program in 2003 and was its sole teacher. It has since expanded to hold 173 courses ranging from engineering to philosophy. Although the project is still looking for funding, it has a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Along with professors from the university, the program attracts students from all over the world who are interested in education. While barreling down a narrow road through Tallapoosa County Ms. Stevens tells me how she sees the land in relation to its justice system.

Kyes: (Audio: Slavery 1)

So one of the things I tell people when we're driving around Rural Alabama or anywhere in Alabama is everywhere you see right now was covered in cotton. And that means everywhere you see right now has been touched by slavery. And that context should never go away. I think it's important that you acknowledge that when you consider the situation of the justice system right now 'cause there's definite correlations.

Narration: After the Civil War the justice system proved the most effective tool to disenfranchise and enslave minorities. Laws were created to allow police to imprison at a whim, and, as Kyes says, life as a prisoner forced to work was worse than before life as a slave.

Kyes: (Audio: Slavery 2)

So what happened, the relationship to the justice system is: if there was a black man walking along the street in, let's say, Tallapoosa County. Then I just go to the cop and say, 'This person looked at me funny.' As a white woman, if I make this assumption, there's a very reasonable chance he's going to be arrested and he's probably going to be put into what is called the convict labor system. And this is where business would rent convicts from cities and counties to manual labor work, agricultural work, road work, lots of work in the coal mines. And they were treated horrifically. The system of slavery is horrific. But the economics of that system meant that if someone had purchased a slave then they made the necessary economic investment into maintaining that life because there was an economic investment into a work outcome. Right? All that went out of the window with the convict labor system.

Narration: Kyes becomes quiet. Instead of another farmhouse, the Elmore Correctional Facility appears through the morning fog. People in white uniforms pace the circumference of the security fence. Others stand around a field about the size of a school playground. The average time for someone in prison at Elmore is 20 years. Recent news articles have reported a fatal stabbing and 240 prisoners on a work strike. Kyes tells me no wallets are allowed in prison, so I tuck mine under the seat. Then she asks:

(AUDIO: Sadness)

Kyes: *Have you ever been in a prison before?*

Paul: *Never.*

Kyes: *Ok. So at the end of your time of this trip you are going to have a certain sadness that sits inside of you about prisons and it will not ever leave. Because you're going to go meet with my students for three days and in those three days your going form a connection with them because they are incredibly likable people and very engaged and they're memorable and that's going to sit in you. Well, multiply that times by ten facilities a semester all over the state times fifteen years.*

Randell Horton: 1

Well, to give you a little about myself, my name is Randall Horton. Currently staying in Harlem, NY. But I'm originally from Birmingham, Alabama. I grew up in the Bible Belt of the South. So very early on I had to be introduced to race in a way a child probably shouldn't have to be.

Narration: We're going to include a parallel Alabaman story: Randell Horton, one of Alabama's most well-known living poets, first learned to write while doing time. He went from prisoner to poet to professor at the University of New Haven.

Randell Horton: 1

*To put it in a nutshell, I was doing anything to make money. I long ago had turned my back on the (working). I (had my own idealisms of what capitalism should be and a lot of times it was operation on the other side of the law- and got introduced to the drug game **and**) started selling drugs and became a smuggler. I ended up getting caught up in an FBI sting: stolen laptops and stolen computer products and things of that nature. And the bottom line is, I received a five-year sentence for that. That's how I ended up in prison. I blame it on drugs. The drug of my choice at that time was cocaine and it definitely took me for a loop.*

ELMORE PRISON SEQUENCE (Three days compressed to one session)

(AUDIO: Buzzer/gates/steps)

Narration: Our bags are checked. We're sent through a series of doors and down a hallway to the main meeting room. The chapel walls are lined with children's pictures of characters from stories in the *Bible*. The church group had also strung long paper chains around the sides of the room, not realizing chains might have another connotation in this environment. A small group of poets come in, nod hello, and help set up chairs.

AUDIO Intro Class

Kyes: *This is Paul. Paul's from Germany, but he's not originally from Germany... (fade to BG behind Narration.)*

Narration: While chatting with the students I'm struck by how words feel different in prison. References to the Internet, travel, food, and personal choice seem grotesquely decadent.

Before discussing the assigned reading, Kyes starts with a playful writing exercise. She gives them the beginning of a sentence to complete by writing a chain of comparisons. *My brother's car smells like...*

AUDIO: Prompts.

Kyes: *I want to start by doing some writing. Just to get our creative juices flowing a little bit. David can we start with you?*

David: *Oh, ok.*

Kyes: *Oh, you got your mouth full of cookies. We could start this way.*

David: *My brother's car smelled like yesterdays garbage, like a bag of corn chips, awful, like a morgue, a football team locker room, a rotten vegetable, like the end of life, the trail to hell, like chitlins not prepared.*

Kyes: *Oh my god, ok. Can we all get a sense of what this smells like? No. Alright, Paul.*

Paul: *My brother' car smells like old dirty clothes and spoiled food and shoes that ran a mile.*

Kyes: *What's the most specific detail?*

Torres: *The shoes that ran a mile. That is pointing to something very specific. And so what happens is -- you giving your description and you, all of you, you're triggering memories in other people. And that's one of the many amazing things about writing. That's how you make human connections. Because you're saying, I've had this experience in my life, I've had this memory in my life, and I know that this is going to trigger something in you.*

Narration: Kyes discusses a bit of the required reading: Peter Heller's post apocalyptic novel *Dog Stars*. It's a story about two men struggling to survive in a futuristic landscape full of disease and thugs, a climate Ms. Stevens feels is not foreign to the prisoners. While discussing how the main character enters his burning house to save his poems rather than pictures of his dead wife, the class gets excited. Kyes asks: what does it mean to save the poems?

AUDIO: Poetry-Memory (Fade in. Full volume at Kyes, He totally risked his life...)

Kyes: *Ok, what you just said is the most beautiful commentary that you could possibly make about why the hell to write a poem. We lose stuff on a daily basis. And what remains are memories and what we write about them. The commentary about that he's going back to get poetry is remarkable. So here is this human being who needs, more than a photograph of his dead wife: poetry.*

Torres: *It's the poems of somebody who's not home. That yearns to be where he calls home.*

Kyes: *Ah, intense question, what is home?*

Henry: *Home is behind a rifle.*

Kyes: *Ok, so part of what we're saying is that part of the concept of home is tied to the idea of comfort, of familiarity.*

Narration: As the discussion finishes, I sense an undercurrent of meaning that I've never experienced in a writing class. Concepts of masculinity, loss, home, and memory have a feeling of urgency in this environment. The students take a break before the open discussion. Andrew approaches me to describe a different reality than laughter and cookies, speaking to me as if passing me something to smuggle out.

Andrew: Statement 1

Prison is a cross-cultural, social anthropological poetry-dish. It's a mix in a controlled environment.

Andrew: Statement 2

This is a prey-predator environment. This is a violent environment. This is a drug-infested environment. This is an infectious disease environment. This is an overcrowded environment. This is an anti-intellectual environment. This is a gang environment. There's racism. That's what prison is.

Narration: Only four students come back from the break. Koran, Henry, and Torres sit with Andrew around the white plastic tables. Two guards in a corner with radios blasting are overseeing a group of people stacking chairs. The students don't seem to be distracted by the racket. I Ask:

AUDIO: BIG TALK to COUNT

PAUL: *What does poetry mean to you while living in these harsh conditions?* **Koran:** *We have a lot of issues of dealing with family and real life issues of dealing with loss and dealing with grief. And learning how to describe the grief. What does grief look like? And me seeing that, and trying to explain it, gives me the vocabulary to explain what is actually going on with me and the issues in my life in prison myself. So I can re-identify with society and what society wants from me.*

Paul: *Do you have a poem? Or a...*

Kyes: *Does he have a poem!*

Koran: *I like this one. I like this one. It's called In the Mirror. And it's very reflective.*

In the mirror

I look in the mirror and I view my physical presence taken of myself from the world's perspective of who I am but what I'm really am is not seen besides for the physical presence.

I wonder if there'll ever be a mirror to reflect to the world from the perspective of how I view myself. Of how I see myself the world can see me as I now only know myself.

We as people spend hours in the mirror making up the person we want the world to see. Never find the confidence of what's in the mirror 'cause what's in

the mirror we know is make believe. But the person we are we hate to see 'cause the very individual we need to be. The only way we can see if we see ourselves in the mirror like we aught to be.

Paul: *I clap with my heart! Thank you, Wow! When did you write that?*

Koran: *They're just some things I reflect on dealing with how the world sees me and how I want people to think of me being a felon and being in this position.* **Paul:** *When did you write that?*

Koran: *I wrote that a couple of years ago at the lost of my grandmother. Especially being a man, you know, we don't talk to people, Hey, I got this going on. We like to hold it in. And the only way you can really deal with it if I can write it down.*

Henry: *Coming out here to this class, I told someone yesterday when I got back to the dorm that I felt like I was coming back from the outside, out in society back to prison. It's like an escape. I've never been a poet. But now my mind is opening up to it. Like I wrote a poem about my grandmother. Stuff I never thought I would get out of this class is coming out. You know, feelings and stuff...*

Paul: *You got that poem for us here?*

Kyes: *It's his decision whether he wants to read it or not.*

Paul: *Oh, I'm sorry. Anything I ask for you can veto.* **Henry:** *I'll read it.*

Paul: *It's all cool.*

Henry *The title was Nanny and I on a Summer Day.*

*A tiny bowl of cotton floats over her garden
pulling me like a John Deer. A plastic bucket holds
her trophies. Rubber boots make a fashion statement. Eyes
shine like stars. Pole beans snap easy. God bless the pea
sheller. Mason jar holds plumb nelly.
Cotton top say's, Cows laying down. Cows don't know, blue
worms are magic. Red wing black bird sings to a cat's tail.
Snake doctor on my last eye. Through the head into the fat
body, toothpick through the eye.*

*Cows laying down. Cotton top believes that stuff. Blue
worms are magic they hang around the brush. I hang in
the brush. Rats make a nest in my real.
Cows laying down laughing. Stupid cows don't know. See,
there he is now. Fight like a champ walking*

on water, no spitting please.

Nylon strings hold my trophies. Blue worm magic.

Stand up dumb cow. Cotton top dancing.

Electric knife boogie. Eyes shine like stars.

*Our plates hold our trophies. Taste buds happy,
laughing. Her eyes shine like stars.*

Henry: *I have pictures of her. They were always bright and shining, especially when she was happy. And especially when I'd bring in a mess of fish, that would just make her day.*

Randell Horton 2

Inside prison, when you take that bus from county jail to whatever place, it's always in the mountains. Usually where they got you is some little country town with dairy farms and you can smell the agriculture. After all that, the first night you go to intake and are assigned a bunk or a cell. Sometimes you get a cell mate and sometimes not. But you're wondering how you're going to do all this time. That's the first thing that comes to my mind is how am I going to do this time? How am I going to make it all these years? And so you can't really think about nothing but the time, and so the time begins to eat you up. Those first moments you're wrestling with your own demons in your own mind, trying to get back some kind of sanity.

Andrew: *I've never written poetry before. And as a matter of fact, I'm a very poor writer. But I began writing once attending these classes and so I've come a long way. I was able to get something published one time at the Michigan University Press in a book entitled, *Four City Essays from America's Prisons* in February of 2014. I had an article in there called, *Mass Producing Mentally Ill in America's Prisons*. I want to read just one paragraph if I may. And this alludes to what Koran had talked about when he said in his poem, *what we ought to be*.*

Humans are highly adaptable to extremes of both negative and positive environments. This adaptability is first and foremost seated in the mind. The mind defines who the person is and every thought is reducible to the neuronal cell unit. That is, the mind is the brain, and is made up of approximately one hundred billion neurons. The adaptability of the brain is referred to as plasticity when the brain changes the individual is changed.

One of my greatest fears of being in prison is the adaptability, which I might become in response to this environment. To put it more bluntly, I'm afraid of

becoming a monster because of having been here for over a decade. That scares me. And as I get older I feel that I might become more susceptible to that understanding the stress upon me and the degree of which dementia might set in in older age, the poetry gives me something to strive for.

Torres: *You had asked what this program means to us and the creative mind.*

Paul: *How it affects your life here?*

Torres: *I've been locked up so long I'm loved but forgotten. When I started to really dive into me as a person I wrote my mom a Mother's Day poem. She said I can't believe you felt like that and throughout the whole poem I cried.*

Kyes: *We take a break for just a second ...well they might have to go.*

Paul: *Oh no. So you have to go somewhere or...*

Henry: *We have to go back to the dorm because they can't clear the count. We get on our rack where everybody's 1,2,3 right in a row...*

Koran: *You have to go back to your bed assignment so they can count you like, you know, eggs in a carton.*

Paul: *Well, I hope I see you in a second.*

Henry: *Fifteen minutes to an hour.*

Paul: *I'm here for you guys all the way from Germany!*

Andrew: *I hope you will advocate to keep the time that you were insured that you would have when we certainly want it.*

Narration: After over an hour three poets come back, looking distressed. We never learn if there was a miscount or if somebody escaped. Henry and Andrew click back into discussion mode, recalling childhood experiences that blocked learning. Although they are from very contrasting backgrounds – Henry is white and from the countryside, Koran is black and from inner city Birmingham – they both talk similarly about education, masculinity, and social structure. The mysterious undercurrent of meaning that I felt during the class reveals itself.

Koran: *What we consider education to be and getting knowledge, a lot of them don't know. The cultures that I come from, the background that we come from, it's not popular to be the smartest guy in the class. It's not popular.*

Kyes: *Where does that come from? Because I would agree that part of it is absolutely cultural. But if you are talking about making a cultural shift...*

Koran: *One of the barriers is when you have identity with things, like when you come from where I'm from in the inner city of Birmingham, we don't have wrestling teams, we don't have debate teams like you see in TV. We don't know about poetry, that's why we don't understand it. We've never been told our ideas are worth anything. So a lot of people go, 'You're going to write your ideas down? What*

you gunna do that for? 'I don't know nobody that's a male, coming from my neighborhood that graduated high school. None of us. Before I even graduated the 9th grade I was in prison.

Narration: Torres comes in a few minutes before we finish.

Before coming to Alabama I asked Kyes if I could give a poetry recital and music workshop as a way to learn about working and work with her students. This is the last opportunity to hear a poem from Torres before leaving Elmore:

(AUDIO:Torres/Tp)

Torres: *I'm just nervous. I, I'm not...*

Kyes: *We all support you.*

Torres: *I'm not the type of person that usually expresses himself in front of a lot of people.*

Henry: *We're not a lot of people. We're not even listening.*

Kyes: *You want us to leave?*

Torres: *No.*

Paul: *Let's do this. I'll leave you space, you leave me space. I'll play and you just ride on top of the note. Let's do one word, one note, one word, until it needs two words or two notes. Let it grow slowly.*

TORRES POEM with TRUMPET

*In the depths of my stomach Where
the pain preys and shocks You left
me like it was nothing
Not a shame and never stops.
Mug me, smear me while humming
The lonely tear my heart just rocks
The ugly fair keeps coming
Now the doors are always locked.*

*But your beauty was stunning,
and your lips, they got me high, I
was higher then a comet with An
angel in the sky.*

*Search the trees, scan the seas
Burning down the third degrees*

*My destiny ran from me, now
I'm praying on my knees.*

*Using me but I was using you,
Puppets acting dumb
What did I do to you?
The usual, nothing, actions numb. I
wonder what it all means, I
Pinch myself if I'm still asleep
Under the spell of a queen And
my slumber plunders me.*

...Thank you.

(AUDIO: SHORT SILENCE)

Andrew: *In over a decade I've not had visits. I don't have family or friends, I'm not from here. There's nothing familiar to me. I anticipated this. I was waiting and waiting and waiting for Wednesday morning to come. I could not wait to see a near and dear friend, closer to me than a brother. And that was you. That was you because you, no way, would have done what you did and arrived here and be with us now, were you not dearly concerned about my well being. And I know that for a fact. And that makes us brothers in heart and mind. And I just love. And that's great. And if I didn't get anything else out of it, I saw a near and dear friend.*

Randell Horton:

I guess prison did force me to become a writer because that is the only way to deal with what I call the silence in your head. When it's all left to you in your cell by yourself and you get to thinking sometimes that thinking becomes so loud that it's so much you got to do something with it so writing became the way of expressing those thoughts. So you're trying to reevaluate your life because all your freedoms have been taken from you The end product is that you sit in your cell trying to reevaluate your life. So for me, the idea of language and words and reading became ways in which I could work out the things that were going on in my head.

(AUDIO: Buzzer & door slam to AUDIO: Poetry Blues-music fades, tractor comes-tractor fades)

(AUDIO: Use as Atmo Tractor: Compost-Elmore)

Paul: *Wow, that smells strong.*

Narration: The Elmore prison parking lot opens up to a field with a compost mountain about a half-mile away. A tractor driven by a smiling prisoner heads for the compost. Those on work parole are allowed this little bit of freedom. Although we're going to Kyes' house to have lunch and visit her 13 cats, 2 dogs, and donkey, Kyes is already typing out emails to organize other parts of her program.

(AUDIO: Use as Atmo: Compost-Elmore) continues)

Kyes: *Sorry, I've got to do one more. (Kyes checking emails)*

Paul: *Totally take your time. I'm discombobulated here.*

Kyes: *Well, they don't like it when we loiter in the parking lot. Let me get to another location and we will regroup. If you're loitering in the parking lot it suggests that your doing something that you shouldn't be.*

Paul: *Got it.*

(AUDIO: Kyes: Henry poem & Prison noise)

Kyes:

I'm so happy with Henry's breakthrough on his poem today that I could just about freaken pop. So here's this guy who signs up for a class because he is absolutely desperate to have an opportunity to just think differently. And to be in a different place. And he gets me as his poetry teacher.

Poetry to me is about seeing first. Then paying attention to language, then coming back and working on, are we going to push this into a form or something like that. It's first and foremost a way of living. And if you are somebody who spends a lot of time in nature, you are already a poet. He didn't recognize that in himself. He did today.

Paul: *While he was reading this tender poem about his grandmother the officer's radio in the background just RRRR, RRR,*

Kyes: *That's the sound of prison and that's the sound of trying to survive in prison. The human need to write a poem, to make a piece of art is so fundamental and so important to our existence on this planet that they can endure through every awful circumstance of the prison, they can still do it.* **Paul:** *When you started the program, did you realize it would take up like, your whole life?*

Kyes: *I didn't know when I began I didn't fully realize that I would be pouring everything into this. But it's come to that...well, that and cats. And I laugh all the*

time. People ask me why do I have so many cats? And I was like, because I have a tough job.

When a student leaves in the middle because he got transferred or released, you don't know what happened to that student. You don't know what their life is like. I do know what the life is like for my island of misfit cats because they're with me and that's a comfort.

Paul: *And without you, you could pretty much assume...*

Kyes: *They would be dead. All of them are rescued. Most of my cats are black. Black cats and dogs do not get rescued. They are discriminated against. And a bunch of them have little personality quirks that make them not too adoptable to people. But they're perfect for me.*

(AUDIO: BG UNDER NARRATION: AT KYES HOUSE WITH CATS) Narration:

After Kyes studied woman's history and poetry at Sarah Lawrence College she moved back from New York to her childhood home: Waverly, Alabama. Population: 145. We meet her pets and have a lunch of vegetables from her garden before driving to Montgomery, the capital of Alabama, where I will interview Senator Cam Ward. But first we meet her thirteen cats, two dogs, and rescued donkey, who all live in the field out back.

(AUDIO: Coming into Kyes's house, fade to BG)

Narration: continues: Cam Ward is a republican state senator who recently helped pass a bill to spend \$800 million to tear down old prisons and build four new super-sized prisons. This decision was made partly in reaction to the federal government's threats to take over Alabama's problematic prison system.

Senator Ward: *We tend to oversimplify the criminal justice system sometimes. Bad, put them in a box and lock the door. Good, you walk out free. We like black and white. There's a cowboy, there's an Indian. When you get into the murky world where 80% is grey, Americans don't like that as much. I don't know why. And so our politics sometimes reflects that. That's why we're real big on, I call them bumper sticker slogans. One sentence explains the entire policy of criminal justice. It sells on votes but it doesn't necessarily make good policy.*

Paul: *And going into that statement, the reasons why the justice system is what it is today as far as the problems?*

Senator Ward: *I some of our law making and social engineering that we do as a country has sometimes created discrepancy that probably does impact one*

group over another. A good example being the sentencing guideline discrepancy between crack cocaine and powder cocaine. Crack cocaine's cheaper. Your demographic is a much poorer population which tends to be African American uses more crack cocaine than powder cocaine. Powder cocaine tends to be more of an upper class drug. So what happened was you spent more time in jail for crack cocaine than you did for powdered cocaine. Well, what happened is that you have more people who are poor using crack cocaine so disproportionately they got sentenced longer. That's a very over simplified one but there are situations like that. I don't think there was ever anyone out there saying, "let's go get the poor. Lets go get this group."

Paul: *America has invented more and more ways to enslave fringe communities?*

Senator Ward: *I haven't heard from any person, I'm from a deep South State. I don't doubt that there's discrepancies and there's issues and most likely there's social scientists who have written books like you mentioned that could probably show data proving their point. I guess from my perspective from where I sit as a law-maker I haven't heard that.*

Narration: In 2010 Newsmax reported that African-Americans make up 26% of Alabama's total population and 54% of it's prison population. ...I thank Senator Ward for his time. He gives me a book about an Alabama prisoner on death row who is allowed to live because of rehabilitation, *Death on Hold: A Prisoner's Desperate Prayer and the Unlikely Family Who Became God's Answer.* (FADE OUT)

Randell Horton 4

Even with the understanding that whenever I get out after doing my time my life was going to be pretty much over because of these felony convictions. I understood they weren't trying to rehabilitate me. That was a very cold hearted awakening experience. These are things that people like to think about. That's why I wanted to write about them as well--When I started writing about prison it changed the way I looked at prison because I don't think I've investigated the prison industrial complex in the way I do now. I couldn't see it because I was just a number caught up. I didn't understand.

In Car with Kyes: (AUDIO: DEAD DOG IN ROAD)

Narration: The next day we're in the car headed back through Tallassee to the Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women.

(AUDIO: Dead Dog)

Kyes: *Running this program has made me be a much more patient and go with the flow person because you have to be. 90% of what you do in prison is beyond your control. You can set up your best laid plans. You can have the most consistent structure for classes, you could be working at that facility for thirteen years and you can go in one day and there's two new people there and all of a sudden everything is brand new and there's two new people working there and they don't know who the hell you are and why are you here and so you just have to be patient with that.*

Uuuuuooo! You're going to have to bare with me. I have to turn around. I can't stand that. I'm going to have to move that.

Paul: *Want some help?*

Kyes: *No, I do this all the time. It's different to me when it's somebody's pet.*

Paul: *Oh!*

Kyes: *Just don't look. It's not a pleasant sight. ...we're on a curb which is not good.*

Paul: *We're on a curb. Oh, oh my god. Poor thing. We can even say a prayer. That's pretty sad and upsetting.*

Kyes: *Well, you know, that's a baby. That's a puppy. Somebody thinks it can survive out here on this road, it can't. And I just can't deal with watching somebody's pet get run over and over and over. Sorry.*

TUTWILER NARRATIVE (CD: The State Songs Vol. 2 Trad. Sung by Rick Pickren)

(AUDIO: fade in CAR ambient)

Narration: Julia Tutwiler has a women's prison named after her because in the early 1900s she established higher education for women in Alabama and advocated penal education, health care, and separate prisons for men and women. She died with the nickname, *Angel of Prisons*.

...And by the way, the lyrics to the Alabama state song that we're hearing were written by Julia Tutwiler!

Ironically enough, in 2013 the Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women was documented to be one of America's worst prisons. Its officer on prisoner abuse became a national scandal, and a new warden was brought in. Over a hundred years after Julia Tutwiler lived, we're visiting the facility because an art class is allowed to paint a mural on a wall in the multi-purpose room. Slow progress is better than none.

(AUDIO: PARKING Tutwiler)

Paul: Now we're going to Tutwiler. Wow, I remember months ago when we talked about this mural being made and you said...

Kyes: We have officers come in and tell us how great it looks. One woman came in the other day and told the ladies, she said, "This looks incredible. I went to the mountains in my dream last night." That was like this beautiful moment of endorsement and appreciation and thankfulness.... alright, there's no parking here.

Paul: How big is this prison?

KYES: I suspect that there are seven to eight hundred women who are incarcerated here.

(AUDIO: O-tone for background or fade out)

Narration: In contrast to the Elmore prison, Tutwiler is an echo chamber. I sit in the front room of the prison waiting to talk with Warden Bobby Barrett. Each time the electric buzzer kicks and the metal door bangs against the massive lock my back grows stiff.

Finally Warden Barrett stands in his office doorway pointing to me but looking at an officer. "Has he had a shake down?" The officer signals that must I step into the bathroom with him for frisking. I forgot to leave my wallet under the car seat. Kyes looks at me flustered, holding the car keys. *Her eyes tell me... I work too damn hard to have these mess-ups.*

Warden Barrett sits at his desk in front of a pile of paper work. He tells me how he's responsible for everything from the allocation of funds to prisoner safety, with an emphasis on preventing the sexual abuse of officers and prisoners. I tell him that I've come from Germany to visit the Tutwiler prison because of the mural being painted in the multi-purpose room. What were his considerations when signing-off on the mural?

Barrett: (AUDIO: Warden on Mural)

Kyes approaches me if I would be in favor of if they did a mural. And of course my first response is, what kind of mural, because I didn't want anything to be inflammatory or it could be a security risk, gang activity, I will say that it's almost an arm to the outside, that they're being able to utilize some of there talents. It covers the whole wall. You'll see it. It's in what we call our old dining hall. It's impressive and I support Kyes and the inmates doing it.

Paul: Do you think about the risk of bringing supplies in?

Warden Berrett: *You know, the security side of you thinks, ok the wrong one gets ahold of the paint, they could color their uniform, hit the fence or escape.*

(AUDIO: Enter sounds)

Narration: The warden gives me permission to record entering the facility. The multi-purpose room is about half the size of a school gymnasium. A handful of art students in white crouch in front of a wall-to-wall mountain range. This is the room where prisoners receive visitors, and even the restroom doors labeled *Guest* and *Inmate* are painted green and grassy, scattered with flowers and cats. Kyes points:

(AUDIO: Mila Artist)

Kyes: *Right there. Student.*

Paul: *Hi. I'm Paul.*

Mila: *I'm Mila.*

(Kyes: Also dann. Eine Kursteilnehmerin.

Paul: *Hi. Ich bin Paul.*

Mila: *Ich bin Mila.)*

(AUDIO: Mila Artist -loud again)

Paul: *This is awesome. It is a huge mountain range!*

Mila: *Isn't it awesome.*

Paul: *Ya. Out there there's the street and the fence and all that stuff. And then here there's the Alps or the Appalachians. What mountains are these?*

Mila: *Just mountains in our head I guess. When we first started, we was so gung-ho. Let's do the whole wall. Cause we just thought that it was going to be just so easy but, boy, when we started on this we realized what an undertaking it was. It's been great. It's been so much fun. And it's kind of therapeutic and it's been a great learning experience. But we never realized the magnitude of this wall until we started it. We wanted to go all the way around the room.*

Paul: *You going to do it?*

Mila: *No. Absolutely not.*

Narration: Another artist introduces herself as *Chainsaw*. Recalling what the warden said about the possible security risk of a prisoner painting I ask Chainsaw about colors in prison.

(AUDIO: Paint on clothes)

Chainsaw: *No color here at all. The only color we see is on the nurse.*

Paul: *So what is it like? Suddenly you have tables full of colors. Even in that little dish you have.*

Chainsaw: *Ya well, let's just say I've managed to spill a lot of color on my clothes.*

Paul: *(Laugh) Is that like subversive art?*

Chainsaw: *Uh ya. I guess so cause I have a pair of pants that's got all this color on my clothes. And they're like, boy you sure are messy when you paint. And I'm like, "Yep, I am." I have purple and pink and green and all these colors on my clothes. So when I want to see color I just wear that pair of pants.*

Narration: Fey stands on a ladder to the far right of the mural. Instead of a tree she paints a giant arm protruding from the side of the mountain. It's holding a paintbrush, which is painting the mountainside. To the left stands a lighthouse. I ask her about using colors.

(AUDIO: Fey)

Fey: *I'm just not used to color. Those flowers have been a million different colors. The water has been a million different colors. I've been stuck in this corner and it's changed and changed and changed. I want people to see what I feel. **Paul:** You see that as something that moves in time, flows through different colors. Tell me about why, what inspired you to change it.*

Fey: *The mountains are symbolic of strength. And you have all this strength and you have all this servility, and you have the flow and you have everything and I just want it to say, "You are able to create your own destiny. You are able to paint your own story." You know what I'm saying? So freedom is not about walking outside this prison. Freedom is about, when you're outside of this prison, being free. I tell people everyday, just because you're ready to go, doesn't mean you're ready to go you have the time to go ahead and recreate yourself. So it's more than just putting pretty stuff on the wall. It's more than just painting colors. It's more than just taking the white off. It's saying we're here and we're mothers and we're daughters and we're wives and we're sisters but we're*

also artists. Don't forget about us cause we're here. It's like they've thrown us in the dungeon, throw away the key. Well, lets paint the walls of the dungeon!

Paul: *You have kids?*

Fey: *I have four boys. 23, 22, 13, and 11.*

Paul: *Wow, that's sweet. And they must find that awesome. (Pointing to the mural)*

Fey: *Ya.*

Narration: Before leaving, Kyes wants to take pictures of the artists in front of the mural to document their progress. The women pose then gather around to look at the portrait.

(AUDIO: Serial Killer)

Kyes: *I think we all look pretty spectacular. Chainsaw: I look like a serial killer in all my pictures. Kyes: Thank you!*

(AUDIO: Door slamming)

Kyes: (AUDIO: Leaving Tutwiler-Kyes)

I'm very conscientious about having people come in to record our program because the general public wants a sound bite for what it means to be in prison and those are not sound bites to me. Those are my students. And the risk of our class for any of our creative classes is that when you are creating, when you are making art, you are in a space that we create, it is very hard to ignore to ignore the things that you miss. It's very hard not to be aware of what you do not have because in the creative process your mind is thinking about everything. So the students who participate in our classes and the ones who persevere all the way through the end, it's an intense act for them. It's not something that's just trivial. It's a full on human investment. They make me think about truth. They make me think about humanness and the barriers that prevent us from truly knowing each other. -There's a deer. You have to watch out for the deer on this road. They're bad.- And why shouldn't we know somebody who's incarcerated. Why shouldn't we understand how they got to where they got. Right?

RANDALL HORTON 5

I probably wouldn't have become a poet if it hadn't been for a poetry workshop and somebody handing me The Essential Etheridge Knight and reading the poem, As You Leave Me out loud. There was something in the diction of that

poem that I thought, Who is this person. He had been to prison and was writing about prison and I thought, wow, there's someone else doing that! Etheridge Knight gave me the license to exist.

Narration: I feel that the act of creating art has a rehabilitative effect on the students. But maybe any variation of daily activities would feel good in the monotonous lives of prisoners. Does doing art really help establish the *fundamental shift* that Kyes talks about?

Lets ask one of America's arts in corrections experts, University of San Francisco public administration professor Larry Brewster. What would he say about Emily's chances of staying out of prison because of her involvement in the arts? It seems the research in America has long since established the benefits of arts in corrections!

(AUDIO: Professor Brewster)

In 1987 the only recidivism study that I know of in the United States based on arts programing. 74% of arts in corrections participants had clean records the first year after release compared with only 49% for other parolees. But they also found, and this is quite noteworthy, is that the longer that the x-offenders were out of prison the more likely that the arts in corrections. Participants would still be on good behaviour compared with the average or non-arts in corrections participants. For instance, within two years of release 58% of the non-arts in corrections participants were in trouble compared with only 31% of the arts in corrections ex-cons. Historically, at least for the last twenty years it's really been the public and politicians who argue for tough on crime laws and an emphasis on punishment over rehabilitation. We must recognize that public safety is enhanced by creating opportunities for these men and woman who paid back society for any crimes they may have committed.

RANDALL 6:

Writing with a lens through prison has probably given me another type of humanity. That others don't see because, like I said before, (prison) is an invisible structure. But for me, going back to the things that brought me to prison, that got me out of prison are intertwined in a way I'm able to see my own mistakes. Through my own mistakes are where I think I've gained a lot of my humanity

because if we're honest with ourselves, we have to acknowledge when we are wrong as human beings. A lot of time that's the bigger problem right there. We can't acknowledge to ourselves that we were the problem and that there's no one else to blame but ourselves. I think for me when I came to that realization that there was no one else to blame I could sit and talk a lot about some of the things I thought led me to prison in terms of society. But ultimately I had to place the blame on my shoulders. So when I do that it opens me up to another humanity because I acknowledge my own mistakes but I'm also willing to forgive myself. If I can do that, I should be able to do the rest for others.

In HUNTSVILLE

(AUDIO Atmo & HAPPY TUNE)

(MUSIC FADES FOR: AUDIO: Meeting Var. 1)

Paul: This is kind of a perfect place to meet. In the open.

Emily: There are no fences.

Paul: There's fresh air.

Emily: There are no guard shacks.

Paul: There's sunshine up above.

Emily: You can actually look out any window you want to or step outside and watch the sunrise or sunset.

Paul: There's fountains, ducks, dogs.

Emily: You can see the pup parade.

(AUDIO: MUSIC GOES FADE BACK UP TILL END)

Narration: When *Emily* was release from the Tutwiler Prison in 2014 she found it difficult to reform her life where she grew up. She was known as the ex-con. So she adopted Huntsville, Alabama, as her new home. Emily suggested meeting at the main park because it's a wide-open space, a good contrast to her 16 years within the grey-white confines of Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women.

Emily: (AUDIO: 1st day out)

The first day I got out it was the day after Thanksgiving and it was not really cold so I spent about an hour just walking on the deck and walking back in just because I could. It was the first time I could open a door without having to ask permission, or be told too. And go out and just enjoy the fresh air without having

someone in the guard tower with a shotgun and a pistol staring at me the whole time. So there was the lack of privacy and then all of a sudden being able to go into my own bedroom with my own bathroom and walk out of it anytime, it was overwhelming for about a week.

(AUDIO: Identity)

Emily: *The thing about being incarcerated, you're dehumanized. There's no room for personality. You're given a number that is you. I was 206100. It's really hard to gather your identity back. So when Kyes came in, the first class I took with her was in 2003, we were not a group of convicts we were a class. We were individuals. It didn't matter that we were in white uniforms.*

Paul: *Did it effect your relationships with other students.*

Emily: *You had people who had their street cred. In prison, who come across as the tough, the bullies, the butches, whatever; and so they would come to class and all of a sudden you would see a totally different person. You see the creative person. You see the beautiful person that's buried underneath all the masks, the posturing. The thing about it is that there was the respect that whatever happened in class, stayed in class. There were no boundaries. No racists. But when you go back out on the hall all those walls came right back up.*

Paul: *How do you see the art and poetry teachers who come into prison to teach?*

Emily: *For an instructor who has no vested interest for real, no personal gain to go inside those gates; for them to step outside of their comfort zone, to come into a hostile environment, because that's exactly what it is. Inmates' correspondence where letters phone calls -everything- all communication from one side of the fence to the other are monitored. So even if you're talking to your mom or your child, so you can't really want to say what you really want to say.*

Paul: *And you're always conscience of this? You're always aware of it?* **Emily:** *They make sure you're aware of it. So these instructors who come in, they are able to take the voices that they hear, the things that they see and they're allowed to carry that out We've had instructors who have come in who are human rights activists, feminists, they take what they see or they hear and they carry it to their public. So they are giving the inmates a voice.*

Randell Horton 7:

I think there is a subculture that has emerged that is a combined work of activists and artists dedicated to justice system issues and I think poetry plays a large part in that. I think more so than ever with the emergence of social media and

platforms like Twitter and Facebook. There's these avenues for people's voices to be heard even louder. That's a catalyst for change.

Ich glaube, es ist eine Subkultur entstanden aus der gemeinsamen Arbeit von Aktivisten und Künstlern, die sich mit dem System der Strafjustiz beschäftigen, und ich glaube, dass Lyrik eine große Rolle dabei spielt. Ich glaube mehr denn je, dass die Entwicklung der sozialen Medien, Plattformen wie Twitter und Facebook Foren sind für die Stimmen der Leute, lauter als je zuvor. Und das löst Veränderungen aus.

(AUDIO: RADIO-PRISON SONG. FADES DOWN FOR NARRATION.) Narration: I

leave Huntsville to drive to the Appalachian Mountains to rest and sort out my thoughts about America, about prisoners, and poets, and art.

Es gibt durchaus Menschen, die die Strafjustiz reformieren wollen. In einigen Bundesstaaten kommen Täter für kleinere Delikte nicht mehr automatisch ins Gefängnis. Auch der technologische Fortschritt könnte einiges in Bewegung bringen. Und es gibt Leute wie Kyes Stevens, die Zuhause die nächsten Kurse organisieren, während ihre Katzen auf dem Sofa schlafen.

Has this changed my view of this strange, uniquely American use of the word, *freedom*? Of the transformational power of the human imagination? I imagine Kyes Stevens at home organizing her program while her cats recline in the far corners of her rustic house. It's ten at night and my car feels like a minnow on the interstate sea of freight trucks heading north. Before the crossing boarder into Tennessee I want to hear Alabama radio before I lose the signal.

(AUDIO: RADO-PRISON SONG continues soft under narration) Narration: I

came to Alabama to pursue prison art culture, but as I leave it seems to be pursuing me through the airwaves! First this song about a prisoner and a warden and a dog, and then the news!

(AUDIO: RADO-GUY ARRESTED)

Radio: *Police charging 22 year old Arington McDowel. Detectives say the targeted coeds walking alone at night near campus using a gun to demand sex or money. McDowel was also charged with robbery in several businesses. He's being held at 120 thousand dollars bond. New tornado sirens...(Fade out)*

Narration: Was the young man brought to Elmore or one of the other prisons where Kyes teaches? Maybe next week at 8 in the morning he'll find himself

sitting with Henry, Andrew, and Koran, or guys like them, trying his best to scribble a few good words in a notebook before going back to his bunk.