

THE CELL-DOOR



Cell Door Magazine 2023 Edition

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The Sun Has Risen

By: Shaun Blake

Utah

The sun has risen to dewy morn
Damp grass glistens in the warmth
Meadowlark sings joyful greetings
And Squirrel chatters its affront

Worm starts squirming into its bedding
Shy rose blooms with pink blush
Creek gurgles delighted laughter
As Robin catches her breakfast.

These are a few of daybreak's events
That I miss so much
Because I now 'wake only to a
Silent dark prison cell.

MERCY

By: Sarah Ladd

Ohio

**I stand in perpetual light that darkens my
days**

Between bars I wish for death

Long for it

**Call upon her so that she may liquify my
existence**

**I am at the center of an invasion
Cattled amongst other corrupt souls**

Every which way I turn I see myself

Where am I that I am everywhere

I close my million eyes and am the

Lone beggar blinded by the light

No more tongue

No more teeth

Pour my pink flesh into the abyss

For now I am free

In the midst of time, by a most dramatic life,
Where winter emerged to obliterate spring
Through periods of pain, that throbbed inside,
Nothing but darkness and broken dreams.

I searched for hope above the solemn skies,
Not a soul or star in sight
I tried to look past the misery
But it was clear to me locked in penitentiary.

And when depression occurred within my soul,
I had no one to talk to, nowhere to go
All of Faith's doors were closed.

There I sat lonely and cold.
But I began to attend mental health groups of
therapy,
Started to be mind-productive gain clarity
Cause one who has knowledge of self
Progresses to prosperity thought?
Through? Throughout?
Prison Life ain't never been fair to me.

In the Midst of a Dramatic Life

By: Raymond White Jr
California

For my heart has a home for my own
Awakening god, giving me guidance and
A path to escape the odds.

Attitude

By: Todd Pope
North Carolina

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of the attitude of Life. Attitude is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than success, than what other people think or say or do.

It's more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company...a church, a home.

The remarkable things is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past we cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one choice we have and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life 10% what happened to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you...

We Are All In Charge Of Our Attitude.

Forgive Me

By: Sarah Ladd
Ohio

Forgive me
I cannot take away all that I have caused
I can only make amends
As I lay purple hyacinth at your door
I pray that you believe all that I say
I'm sorry up in heaven
I'm sorry deep in Hell
I'm sorry on this planet where we live
In the past I can no longer dwell
Take these purple hyacinths I offer
Let me make amends
I'm sorry up in Heaven
I'm sorry deep in hell
I'm sorry on this planet we live
As the seasons change
I somberly ring hyacinth's bells.

Whispers From A Prisoner

By: Vernon Nelson
Nevada

Emerging from my nest like an eagle
I soar through the sky, observing the world from a 360
degree angle in my mind.
This is how I feel when I walk amongst those who are
spiritually unconscious in the Prison Yard.
Many people both in prison and in the free world spend
so much time everyday
Worrying about things that are meaningless...
We want to maneuver on an elevated level
But what we're doing is
Fooling ourselves, playing ourselves
Destroying ourselves, and running from ourselves.
If we focused more on investing our time and energy in
bringing one another closer together instead of being
severed from each other, we could bend light,
communicate our thoughts and visions and actually
accomplish what we were put on this planet to do.
The most important thing in this world is time
And yet, every day we are running out of it.
How would you like to be
remembered
100 years from now
What would you like to be said about you when you are
reduced to nothing but dust in the wind?
Did you help others? Did you love others?
Did you pardon those that perhaps didn't deserve to be
pardoned?
Well, just remember that is the very thing we will all be
seeking when we stand before the Lord in judgment:
a Pardon.
It's easy to give to those who are friends
and that give back to us
But the true test of God's love is to show mercy and
kindness to our enemies.

By: Darren Smith | Nevada

Dreaming of Home

Here I stand at a crossroads and the horizon is empty – nothing left to give direction
I'm empty and void of hope I've lost myself and I don't know the man in the reflection
I can't bring myself to take the next step on a trap I never saw I fell so fast
I calm my mind and look at the ruins left behind and begin to sort through my past
I was born into a maze with no way out forced to search for some release
I never knew the warmth of a family or felt an innocent's peace
I hid from the facts written in stone and signed by the hand of fates
I still knew inside that no matter how I tried, my life was chosen for me it was too late
I have seen the faces hidden behind their masks painted on to hide the shame
I have heard the truth twisted in lies and know the teller's true name

I have felt the touch of true evil and bear the scars unseen on my soul
I have been so far beyond hope no savior in sight my heart grew hard and cold
I have spoken words I wish I could erase and held back what I wish there was time to say
I walked away from so much and stayed gone for so long I'm afraid I've lost the way
I carry the shame of the choices I've made in weakness and molded by fear
I will never be free of the emptiness I've created of the sins that got me here
I once flew free and forgot all the pain somehow for a moment escaped my chains
I felt the warmth of the sun only to fall back to hell and burn in the very same flame
I was once complete only to watch as the pieces that made me were stolen and erased
I was taken apart and what was my heart was gone and couldn't be replaced

I remember being so much more than I've become looking back it's hard to believe
I discovered the weight of pain and true loss when the world you know is taken o-leaves
I denied my own sins and hid from the truth as I struggled to leave and never return
I begged to be free of life's misery and choked on the ashes as I saw it all burn
I have lived and then died and I swear my heart stopped long before I was dead
I was forced to return only to learn the voices still screamed in my head
I have destroyed what was real and the pain that I feel is never going to end
I caused more hurt than I can repair and now no one is there to hear me say sorry again
I cannot erase or undo what I put those I love through before I leave this place
I only hope that they know I never meant to fail this way in my heart they were never replaced
I have nothing left of yesterday and tomorrow is dark and unknown
I have some miles left to go so for now I go on alone searching and dreaming of home.



Artwork by Lawson Strickland | Louisiana

The Sandbed

By: Calvin Fairley

Texas

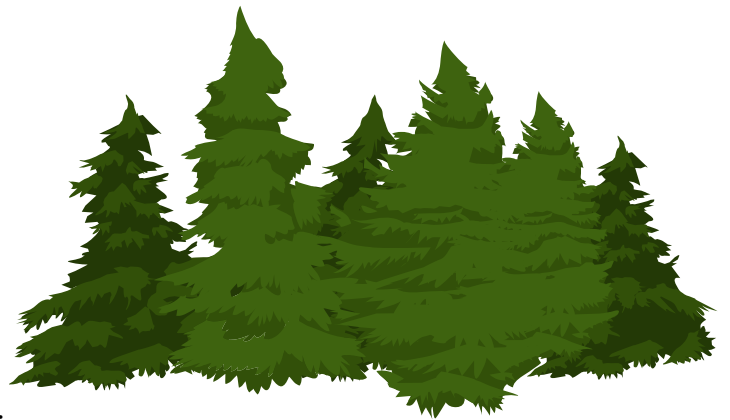
Blackberries, plums, honeysuckles, and pecans
Deep Country, southern Mississippi hot sun
Strolling dusty roads, just my thoughts and me
Bales of rolling hay as far as I can see
Snake spit, dragonflies, mosquitos, and spiders
Shooting pellets at birds high on line wires
Nothing like the feel of warm sand between your toes
Hand me down denim and t-shirts for clothes
Flapjacks, biscuits, fried salmon and eggs
Three minute bath in a washtub before bed
Down home blues blaring through the radio
These things remind me of home long ago

Summer Camping

By: Matthew Feeney

Michigan

Squashed memories of a treasured realm I once frequented
Nights sleeping in a canoe floating down
The Might Miss surviving on Veggie Rice, Bug Juice, and Mac and cheese
23 portages in the same exhausting day in the
BWCA smoking swisher sweets while drowning worms
On a fishing line eating real frog
Legs and redneck sushie the ever present
Leeches, mosquitos and black flies my faithful
Bailey with her own red canine-sized saddlebags
Using blue tarps and raised paddles to
Sail canoe flotillas across Big Sandy Lake
Hearing the loons wailing their mournful goodbyes
To the sun stumbling alone along a
woodland trail at night in a raging
thunderstorm whitecaps, windy weather and canoes flipping
in Voyageurs National Park rope swings and
lost boat engines waking up in my primitive lean-to with a raccoon on
my chest playing capture the flag between two islands chilly nights with long johns
and lotsa Hot cocoa sharing goofy shaggy-dog
stories around campfire embers watching morning fog
silently burn off the perfectly still lake



The last seven years I've been locked in a cage like a wild animal,
But I still dream of those wild magical summers in the woods

Sandman

By: Travis Sicklovan

Texas

Sandman

Hello dear friend

It's about time that you came

Without you

My nights belong to sorrow

And from sadness my days never abstain

I need to see your face

I need to know you're real

For only in your presence

The absence of despair I can feel

Won't you stay?

Won't you help me

Keep azure thoughts at bay?

Although we cannot grasp hands

Nor ever share a simple beer

I'm purely desolate

Yes, desolate

Until you make it here.

In My Shell

By: Tom Somers

Pennsylvania

Here I sit inside my shell

With my thoughts and feelings to dwell,

With these things I dare not tell

In this sadness I hide so well

Not the jokester you know so well

Why I am sad I cannot tell

But I hope it does not dwell

Hopefully one day we will be free of our shell

Home Together

By: Hamza Sharif
California

There once was a man who
started a letter
Telling his daughter how he
would love her forever
He's made some mistakes and
now he's trying to do better.
He wants to come home so that
they'll be together.
There once was a man who
ended a letter.
With I'll always be there and
you'll always be treasured.

A Lakota Father's Prayer

By: Kenton Haase
Texas

Oh great spirit,
my benevolent Father
Hear my cries
You gather the winds in your fist
Our very existence in your breath
So the mistakes of my youth
Do not become my end
Have mercy on me and let me not die
In this cement box behind the iron door
My heart cries out to once again
Be joined with those of my children
Before it's too late
I ask for one more chance
To teach my children never to lie
To be humble
The dust of my forefathers' bones
Cries out to me
I am a prisoner far from my home
I cannot visit their graves
and honor their memories
Or those of my children

To love our mother with all our hearts
I ask for your help
To once more breathe air cleaned by rain
Scented with Tamaracks
To drink cold spring waters from the mountain
The witness the multitudinous arrays of flowers
Among your most beautiful gifts

Let me once again share breath
With the animals and the trees

Then I will be content
To join with the bones of my ancestors
and serve you forever in the Great Beyond
You gather the winds in your fist
Our very existence in your breath
So the mistakes of my youth
Do not become my end
Have mercy on me and let me not die
In this cement box behind the iron door
My heart cries out to once again
Be joined with those of my children
Before it's too late
I ask for one more chance
To teach my children never to lie
To be humble



Artwork by Lawson Strickland | Louisiana

A Cry for Help

By: Donna Hockman
Virginia

Innocent till proven guilty
So not true, really
Convicted, murder in the first degree
Verdict brought me to my knees

Twelve strangers decided my fate,
Courtesy of lies provided by the state
A week-long trial can't believe how it came about
I was in shock and denial with no way out

I testified for hours
How we met, the abuse, and how it all went sour
I found papers stating he was an informant for the FBI
I confronted him, he denied it but I knew it was a lie

At this point, our relationship changed
Stalking, threats, and beatings, he was deranged
He was so afraid I would tell his friends and family and blow
his cover
I told him repeatedly, I'm done! You and I are over

Many times I came home during the day and night
Hiding, waiting in the shadows with his knife
Pulling me by my hair and legs
Taunting me, "You will only leave me in a body bag"

My dog Midnite watched as he invaded my space
She jumped the gate and bit his face
I reached out to the local police
Black-eyed, bruised, and bloody, didn't faze them in the least

He was not arrested after he assaulted me on June 21st
Four weeks before the shooting occurred
Before leaving he laughed and said, "I told you I'm one of
them" (pointing to the cop)
Even after I filed a trespass notice his violence and stalking
didn't stop

Tired of living in fear and quickly going downhill
I was losing myself, my mind, and my will
So many times I wanted to die
Telling God, "I'm a good person, but here I am, why?"

His words always running through my mind
"I'll gut your dogs like deer, I'm going to kill you
and the time is near"
The last call answered, "I'll take it from your beautiful,
daughter. How would you like that shit?"
I hung up enraged, cell phone off, and screamed,
"I've had it, that's it!"

July 24th arrived and when I turned my phone back on,
the threats did too
Going out of my mind, police won't help, what's a mom
legally to do?
July 25th I should have known he wasn't done with me yet,
When he said, "Baby I'm going to change, go back to when
we first met."

His eyes black and hollow "I'm going to kill your fucking
son and then I'm going to kill you"
I panicked, feared the worst, I didn't know what to do
I blacked out before I fired the gun
Moments before going through my mind
he's going to kill my son

Each day I wake knowing I saved my son's life
And I know what I did was within my constitutional right
My loved ones struggle to make sense of it all
Our state ignored the truth and circumvented the law

Slow death in a 10x6 cell
Nothing compares to this living hell
I'll keep on fighting for the truth and justice to set me free
Nothing but facts in one place for all to see!

Invisible Letter

After struggling through another tormentous day, I find myself sitting at the bars of my cell eagerly hoping and wishing for the prison guard passing out the mail to stop at my cell and drop off a letter to me. But just like so many prior days, weeks, and months, he walks past my cell without even a glance in my direction.

I lay back on my cold hard steel bunk and let my mind imagine receiving a letter. An invisible letter, from an invisible person. In opening this letter I sense the aroma of sweet perfume. As I reach for the letter inside, there is nothing inside. Such a cruel trick on me my mind plays.

Over the many years of my incarceration, I have come to realize those who truly love me and those who are my real friends. The way I know this is by all the letters that no one ever writes. With all their forgotten thoughts of me, I am left to sit in the darkness of my cold, isolated, lonely cell. And this is how the past 20+ years have been for me. I am hoping this new year will in some way and how bring about a change in my circumstances.

I am reaching out to all and everyone reading this to also reach out and touch me, and stop my imagination from fantasizing about receiving invisible letters form invisible people and replace my imagination with real letters and people.

By: Al Cunningham
California

Message

By: Joshua White

Texas

Young generation it's time for more concentration

Following what you see and hear is not all bad but take a better observation

There's so much more to life than being "gangstas" and "thugs"

Robbing random people just to support your habits or splurge

Or would you rather spend most of your life behind glass and bars, shackled for

foolish crimes, guns, and drugs

Take it from me, prison is definitely not cool or the best club

Precious time is missed and lost for the ones you truly love

Slow down, sit back, please take your time if you end up with big double digits

You will have to make a serious choice, recline or expand your mind

Time is ticking (tick tock) and it waits for no one

This may be your last message for life is short and you only get one...

Overwhelmed in all that I do

Feeling vulnerable every moment I'm awake

My body feels lethargic

And my brain paralyzed

I am confused more than words can express,

Sitting in this cell feels like my death

Don't need to be tortured for mistakes I've made

How does that help me or society?

Instead I feel resentment towards the law

Just throw me in jail.

Leave me there,

No one will care.

I've made some poor choices

But that does not mean,

That it is the end of the rope for me.

I will stay strong and fight PIC,

They will not make a statistic out of me!

We Are In This Together

By: KITTY'ROSE

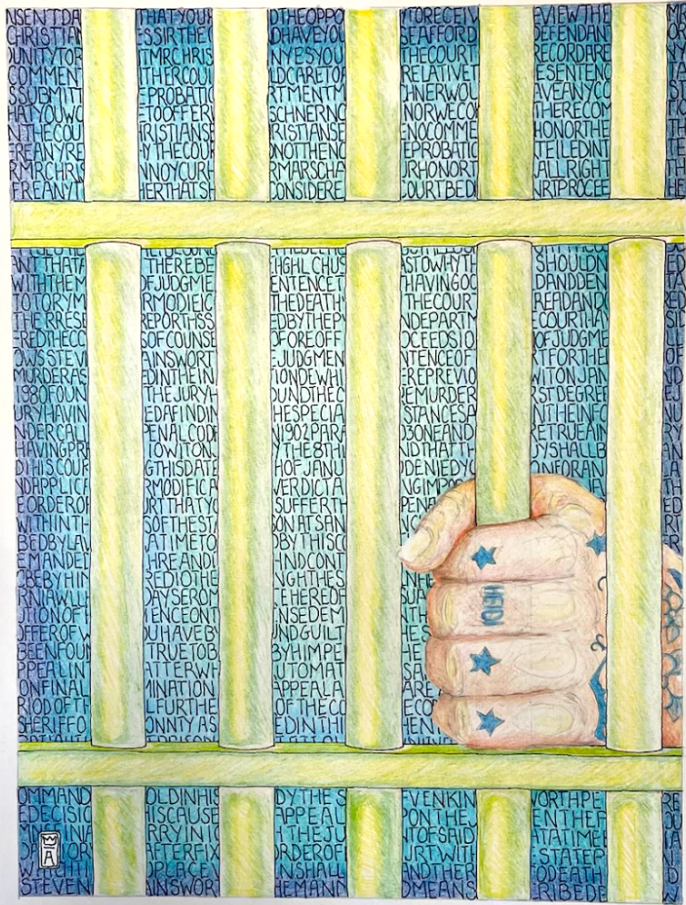
(AKA: Kristal Lis)

Connecticut

DOING TIME

BY: HOWARD POLONUS

NORTH CAROLINA



**"FATALIS CIFRA" @S.K.AINSWORTH
2000 - DEATH ROW - SQ - MIXED
MEDIUM**

Doing time

They lock you up in a cage for your wrongdoings and crimes, somehow justify rehabilitation by just giving you time. As time goes by your thinking only gets worse, they act like this makes you better but in the end

it's only a curse.

You learn more crimes and different ways to break the law, seems to me you're being set up for a fall.

As time goes by you're losing all your family and friends, you have nothing to come home to way before the end.

You have a bunch of felonies and your record looks real bad, shattered all the dreams that you might have ever had.

Everyone makes mistakes that can be corrected in time, so why do I have to come to prison for every one of mine

Now the best that I can do is make 15 bucks and hour cooking someone's food or planting their flowers

I wasted my whole life and I know that it's sad and I feel sorry for all the kids that I never had a chance to have.

The system's fucked up and will probably never work. Like I said in the beginning, it only makes you worse.

The Ghost In The Machine

**By: Toola Taylor
Illinois**

**I am the ghost in the machine
The person nobody sees
But American Prosperity was built
On the backs of people like me
From Day One I was made to believe
That boys like me will never achieve
And that all of the things I see in this world
Will never be, and were never meant for people like me
But, one day, I will rise and excel
From this mental, physical, and emotional hell
Uncaged and propelled into the stratosphere
And with no fear, I will steer
Collective conscious deliberation
With insight and introspection
That's raw and unedited
Hated by people who know
The truth I speak
360-degrees, if they could seize the moment
I would no longer breathe
So, instead, I am caged
Estranged by the faithlessness of my mistakes
Which allowed the Jakes to take
Advantage in the direction of my Fate
But I shall incinerate your lies
And detonate your proposition of who I be
From the heart, I bleed and plead
The TRUTH
For I AM the Ghost in the Machine.**

Untitled

By: Michael Coley

New York

A lot of people sayin
This generation is lazy
And the ones that got ambition
They out there acting crazy
Too many mothers worrying
What's going to happen to their babies
It's either
Lost them to the grave
Or either locked us up in these cages
Police out here racist
And my daughters ain't no safer
I'm prayin
They don't end up like Brianna Taylor
I make a doo-wah
May Allah hear what I am saying
I know he see me strive in
I hope he answers my prayers
If it ain't the violence
Corona Virus knocking them dead
I pray for Allah's guidance
For Biden and Kamala Harris
Government
Governors
Mayors
Are you aware?
They are killing my people
Just because they're black
And we can't breathe
Their foot's on our neck
They are killing my people
With no repercussions
Martin's been gone
We're still marching for Just

In Memory of Laird Carlson

Laird Carlson, my wonderful husband, first started *Cell Door Magazine* more than 20 years ago. Michael Tenneson, an artist, and a Colorado inmate serving life without parole, created the cover for the debut issue. This original artwork reappears here to commemorate all the years of hard work and dedication that Laird and Michael put into production of *Cell Door Magazine*. *Cell Door* came into existence as the result of Laird and Michael (whom we visited often) sharing their inspirations about having a publication for incarcerated citizens that represents them through their own words and visual expression. Just before Laird died, he had chosen the submissions that he really liked for the next *Cell Door*. We thought it appropriate to use those selected contributions for this issue honoring Laird.

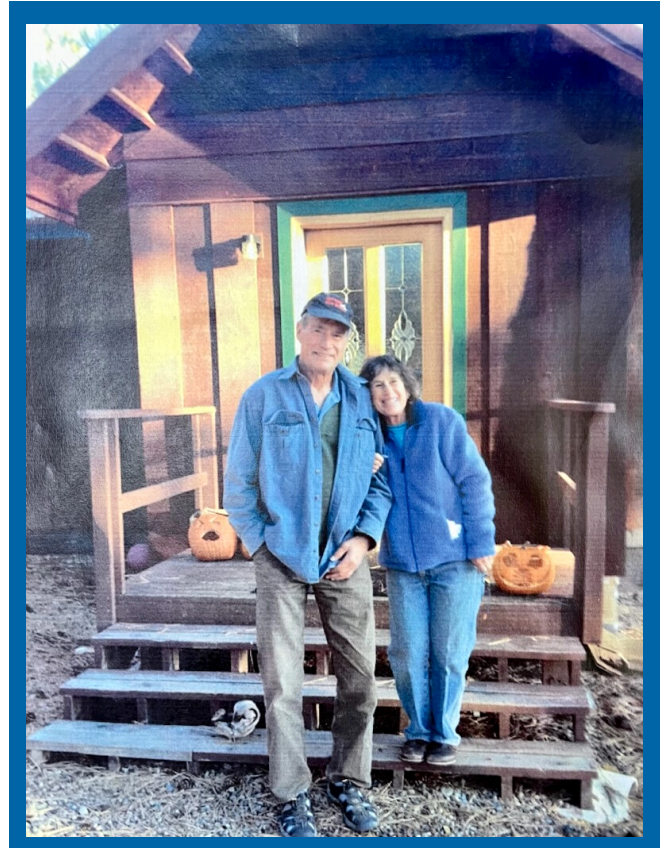
Twenty years ago, prisoners had very little opportunity to share their thoughts, drawings, poems, and essays with other incarcerated individuals and with the world outside. Back then we recognized the incredible wealth of talent hidden behind bars and explored the idea that we could create a publication where this talent could be featured. Our vision for *Cell Door* is and always has been to serve as an outlet for prisoners' creativity by sharing stellar examples of how one can use talent and focus even in the worst circumstances.

Without Laird's input and expertise, we have been unable to produce *Cell Door* until recently when the Goucher College (Claudia's alma mater) Micro-Internship Program came to our attention. We eagerly presented our project to revive *Cell Door* which gained us not one, but two fabulous interns who brought excitement, commitment, and the necessary skills to put together this very special edition of our magazine.

It is our hope that *Cell Door* will not only continue but will thrive again.

Using this new magazine format, we are planning to produce one yearly issue of *Cell Door*.

Please submit your essays, poetry, stories, visual art, and creative writing for our editing team to review for possible inclusion in our next issue.



Pictured: Laird (left) and Claudia (right)

Please Note:

We are no longer supporting individual subscriptions. Due to changes in prison policy and in order to reach more incarcerated citizens we are now sending multiple copies of *Cell Door* to prison libraries to be accessible to the greater population.

Our thanks to Mich Rouse and Jennifer Spar, our Goucher interns for returning *Cell Door* to life and helping us honor Laird Carlson.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Cell Door*.

Claudia Whitman

Director

National Capital Crime Assistance Network

Address: PO Box 758, Mancos, CO 81328

Submissions Welcome!

Cell Door Magazine

Address: PO Box 758, Mancos, CO 81328

Mission Statement: Articles are written by prisoners or people who are closely associated with the prison experience.

Open *Cell Door Magazine* and you will meet the people behind bars. The content of *Cell Door* runs the gamut from poetry to short stories, from art to op-ed commentary. There are self-help and self-pity articles. *Cell Door* contains current topics, insight, empathy and pathos. But most of all it is always focused on the effects of life behind bars.

Our goal is to acquire readers who choose *Cell Door* for its quality and educational/entertainment value, learning in the process that prisoners are intelligent, personable, talented human beings.



Thank you to our interns from Goucher College!

Jen Spar (*she/her*) | Senior Graduating May 2023 | Women, Gender, and Sexuality Major
"I loved the opportunity to format for such great works of art and look forward to seeing the future of the new era of Cell Door Magazine!"

Mich Rouse (*she/they*) | Junior Graduating December 2024 | Sociology Major
"Learning people's stories through their art was incredibly special to look at and put together for many others to see. Cheers to the new era of Cell Door Magazine!"