

# Voices From Within

## An Editorial Note

Those who enter the Louis Gossett, Jr. Residential Center are not the recipients of state scholarships for merit. They are 14-18 year-olds with histories. In some ways they are adolescents, in some ways jaded adults. Gossett is a clean, airy and austere place; a residence, not a home. And yet, there is some sense of family. The staff is committed to educating, training and transmitting courage so these no-longer-children/not-quite men can transform their lives and join us in Lansing (or anywhere else in our nation) as honorable adults - taking care of themselves, their future families and communities. Please listen to them.

## Ricky

I really do hate these ties. I wonder why everyone is looking so sad. This guy talking is really boring. I wonder what people would say if I made a really loud noise. Why is mom crying? Andy, Albion and Tamika, too! I guess maybe I should be crying. This isn't easy. Maybe an onion would do the trick.

Wow! My feet almost touch the floor when I sit straight back. All I have is five more years and then I'll be a teenager. I'll be able to do whatever I want. Instead of listening to this boring guy talk, I'll be able to just get up and leave. Oh, maybe this is over. Everyone is getting up and walking. I guess I should follow. I wish I could see over all these heads. Where are they going.

He doesn't look like my grandpa. A clay figure, he's just lying there. Why is he just lying there? Everybody better stop touching my grandpa. I guess I should see if he's really clay. All that exists is my hand and his. He's so cold. My fingers are so cold. I wonder, did I make an indentation, imprint his icy skin with the tips of my fingers when I touched my grandpa? I'm so cold. I can hear my mom. Why is she still crying? My hands are so cold.

## Frank

I sit in the visiting room and wait to go to court. The room is loud but I don't hear any of the voices. I feel as if I am not there. The date is Nov. 17, 1993. For the entire day it feels as if no one else exists. I feel frustrated and extremely uncomfortable. I lose all patience and I don't know why I am feeling the way I am. Was it something the judge said in court? Was it something a correctional officer said to me? Was it something my lawyer said to me in the court's visiting area?

I don't know because I can't even remember what happened today. Not a single thing. All I know is that I went to court and now I'm back. I need a way to escape this frustration I'm feeling. Maybe I should call a friend to-

night. But I don't want to; I don't have the patience to talk to anyone. I feel exhausted as if I just played three games of football on an extra large field. I know what it is: I need some sleep. Yeah, that's it.

I close my eyes and see an ambulance. I see blood. I see people I know for a second. I feel a surge of happiness. Then I notice these people are sad. Something bad has happened. Something terrible. I feel the tension and I don't want to be here anymore. Somehow, I can't leave. I walk slowly over to where the blood trail leads. I rip the yellow tape line and walk over to the body laying on the ground. I see the face. The face of someone I grew up with...Someone I loved...I see the face of my friend, Lamont.

I open my eyes and realize that I am in the shower room staring at the mirror at my reflection. It is Nov. 19th. Wait a minute. Where the hell did the 18th go? I try to forget what I saw but I can't. I know it is not true. Lamont would never die on me, especially when I'm locked up.

"Frank," someone yells. I spin around, nearly slipping on the wet floor.

"Yeah," I say. "What's up?"  
"Mail, sign here. And make it quick. We have to go to chow in ten minutes."

"Thanks."  
I take the envelope. It is from Margaret, Lamont's mother. I feel my heart racing. I remember my vision. It wasn't real, I think to myself. I open the letter and read the letter that looks like it is soaked in tears.

It is true. Lamont is dead.

## Dale

He came walking in the door as if he lived in this house. I stared at him like he was a stranger. He wasn't really walking; he was staggering! Was he drunk? He always was, ever since I could remember. He looked up at me with those bloodshot eyes and that old wrinkled Indian face. My mom always told me that there was wisdom in people's eyes. It came from their pain and sorrow, she'd say. If

## A Teacher's View

My students at Louis Gossett, Jr. Residential Center discover how writing can help them take hold of their painful experiences and find sense in the sorrow and confusion. Their words, like delicate fingers, reach out to others in stories that rescue them from lonely prisons of despair while connecting them to the world of people. Through the sharing of these stories, my students learn more about strength and about love. They learn more about themselves.

-Robin Rosner

there was any wisdom in him I never heard it or found it in his eyes. He knew of some pain and sorrow. But more than anything else, he knew of hatred.

He's been big ever since I've known him. With his big belly hanging over his belt, his worn clothes and tired looking shoes. His face was dark but unevenly covered, full of lines. Every emotion he felt expressed itself in the over exaggerated movements of his wrinkled face.

He stood in the doorway and looked down at me as I looked up at him. He finally spoke but I didn't understand him at first. I ignored him and turned my attention back toward the TV. He spoke again and this time it was clear. "Come help me out to the patio."

It was raining outside and I could hear the rumble of the thunder overhead. The patio was always his favorite place when it rained. There, he would watch every drop fall onto the clear glass overhead and in front. Without getting wet, he would watch the world change from a dull tarnish to a lustrous green.

I couldn't stand his presence. I ignored him.

"Dale Alan! Come and help me!" Every one of his words slurred and mispronounced.

He must have run all the way from the Texas Hots Bar & Grill just to sit on the patio and watch the rain. That was a good thing about age, I thought. When you're a baby you are slow but then learn to walk and then to

run. When you are old, you become slow again. In my mind I watch him walk out to the enclosed patio by himself, wishing him to trip over the hearth to the fireplace, the aquarium, the entertainment system. I imagine him falling to the ground, calling out, "Why do you always get in my way!" I laugh to myself and get up from the bean bag chair and help him.

"You're lucky. I woulda toad your moder!"

"Ya, ya, ya, whatever, old man."  
He sat down in his favorite chair and let out a sigh of relief. All of his movements, his gesture, get under my skin. I feel hatred shoot through my body.

He sits out there most of the day and into the night. My mom comes home and shakes her umbrella out, walks through the house into her room. She calls out to him.

"Hey, you out there? Get a blanket. It's cold." Why does she like him so much? Even after all he did to her. I can't stand him.

At about 11 o'clock, I stand, stretch out my legs, my arms. Suddenly my mom screams and runs into the dining room. I run to her. She is on the phone, shaking uncontrollably. She can hardly hold the phone speaking into the receiver. Her father has been out on the patio all day. She thought he was asleep. She went out to wake him and found him cold, not breathing.

My mom grabs me and cries into my arms. She is hugging me really tight. "Why would they take grandpa?"

*Saeorloefest...*

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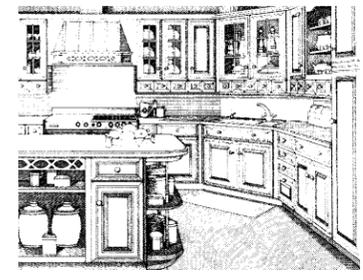
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