

*WRITINGS FROM*  
**U-TURN  
PERMITTED**

real conditions  
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### **About the North Lawndale Employment Network and U-Turn Permitted program**

The stories included in this issue of *Real Conditions* were written by participants in the North Lawndale Employment Network's "U-Turn Permitted" program. The mission of the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN) is to improve the earnings potential of the residents of North Lawndale through innovative employment initiatives that lead to advancement and improved quality of life. The U-Turn Permitted program trains and guides men and women with records of criminal conviction in putting the past behind them while providing them the necessary tools to advance in the world of work. If you would like more information about the North Lawndale Employment Network and U-Turn Permitted, please contact them at 773-638-1825, or visit their website at <http://www.nlen.org>.

# realconditions

## **About Real Conditions**

The Community Writing Project hosts writing workshops for people who ordinarily do not consider themselves to be writers, and publishes their reflections on everyday life in realconditions. Because only the collective efforts of ordinary people can make a better world, we are particularly interested in the creative expressions and unique understandings of those who have been relegated to the margins of society, including the poor, the oppressed, immigrants, and those who risk their privileges to join them. Their stories are found in these pages.

# JEREMIAH BAKER

**This is My Life** I remember one time when I was locked up for selling drugs and my mother and my girlfriend came to visit me with my child. I went crazy because I didn't want my son to see me like that, so I walked out of the visit room crying and went back to my cell. I started thinking about what I was going to do when I got out of there. The first thing I thought about was my son because I know I hurt his heart so much. So now I've got a goal to find a job and to do better in life for me and my family. That's why I think U-Turn is a good program to help you find a better future in life—if it helps me, it can help you.



## Bluebird

*(In response to "Bluebird" by Charles Bukowski)*

There's a bluebird in my heart that  
wants to get out  
but I'm too tough for him.  
I say, stay in there, I'm not going  
to let anybody see  
you.

So, stop beating on my chest  
You show up at the wrong times,  
which makes me feel weakness and sorrow  
I don't want to show my bluebird  
so coming out of me is hard to  
swallow.

It's always about bluebird this  
and bluebird that, but if I let  
my bluebird free, will you  
still think I'm all that?

I think everybody has a bluebird  
which all may come and go, but  
the reality of my bluebird is  
one I just can't let go.

So keep the strength and keep  
the faith,  
'cause one day my bluebird  
will escape.

# D'ANGELO PERCY



## Police Brutality

Police brutality, isn't it a shame  
to see a man punch and kick  
for no apparent reasons – now that's  
more than a shame.

But to me it's the same as saying,  
"You should have run, you shouldn't  
be standing here like you a part  
of these gangs."

That's why I keep moving when  
I see blue & white, 'cause you  
never know what will happen on a  
hot day or a cold night.

For those who might be confused  
or lost by this short poem  
'cause where I live and where  
I am from, the cops  
can be our enemies, so watch where you  
are going.

# MYRON HUDSON

**Certain Books I Keep Around** I keep a lot of Zane books around because I feel that I have something in common with certain characters. I also like this book because it helps me think about how negative situations can become positive by what I put into them. This particular book was given to me by my favorite teacher, Ms. Vogt. She's the reason I like reading sometimes to give bad situations another outcome.

I have something in common with a lot of characters, because most of them went through the jail system. That makes me feel like I'm not the only one. I also recognize situations that have something to do with baby/mother drama. I can relate to those situations because in the past three years, I have lost nine babies. Having something in common with these characters makes me feel weird because when I go through certain things, I feel like those things don't happen to anyone else but me.



**Where I Feel Free** Being able to walk down the street makes me feel free. Hopping on a CTA bus makes me feel appreciative of what freedom provides. When I walk down the street I feel free because I can walk as fast as I want to. I'm able to see a variety of things instead of just seeing bars all the time. I know I'm free when I feel the breeze blowing past my body. When I have to get on the bus and take a ride, I feel like the bus doors are opening new opportunities for me.

For such a long time I didn't have an opportunity to make my own decisions, because while I was in jail, officers told me what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. Freedom is very special, but the decisions I made in my freedom were only setbacks. It seemed like every choice I made was tragic. I wanted more for myself, but could only find more trouble. There were even people looking out for me whom I ignored. My baby's mother, Roslyn, poured her heart out trying to give me good advice on a better lifestyle. By me being set in my ways, I ignored her and kept going the rate I was going. She would sometimes cry and beg me to stay in the house for the day. I'm sorry, but I was raised to take care of my responsibilities. Freedom is a major responsibility, but I didn't realize how special freedom was until I got locked up and was unable to do things on my own. Freedom is something to cherish, and I've learned my lesson—that I won't take freedom for granted because it can easily be taken away.



### **How I Relaxed During the Father's Day Weekend**

Well, I went to the picnic on Thursday and it really gave me an outlook of the trees and green grass – the peace of the wind and the fresh smell of the air, just having a good time with no confusion. And I enjoyed myself at the Blues show Friday night. I went with my boyfriend and youngest son. I think hearing the music makes the body feel good. And I can relate to the words in a lot of the songs, because the blues speaks the truth about what a person may have an experience of in life. On Sunday I washed a load of clothes, watched some TV, and dozed in and out—just lying there giving my body a peace of gravity.

# **VANESSA JOHNSON**

### **Why Do I Fear for my Children?**

Why do I fear for my children? I ask myself that question because I know that I will protect them to the best of my ability, but I will not always be there at their side. When one of them face a scary situation, can they handle themselves? Will they feel alone, scared, or just fearful? Because I try to tell them to have a little faith and to believe, that God will protect you when I'm not around. So I would like them to know that no matter what happens to me there will also be an angel from above, and to remember that they are never alone.



# CORNELL BOLDEN

**A New Man** I am feeling like a new man. How can I explain the feeling I'm about to share? It is hard, but now I have a story to tell about the life I live. I was raised up on the west side of Chicago with two parents—a mother, whom I truly love, a great father who has passed—ten brothers, four sisters. I'm also next to the last baby. Since I left home I have lived through a lot, but now my dream is to get back into school—seeing myself learning and beginning to define in my mind where I belong in life. Some place in this world I have a job to perform—yes, a job to do.





**My Favorite Job** I have had a lot of jobs in my life, but I haven't been able to keep one for more than six months because I have had a problem with authority. But I did like my job working at the spaghetti warehouse working as a porter and busboy. I liked getting up early in the morning, going to work, and working with a positive group of people. They all helped me enjoy myself and enjoy myself at work. We had to wear uniforms and it felt good hearing the customers compliment me on my work. My boss really liked me because I was always on time, and whenever they needed someone to work, I was always there. But what I enjoyed the most was getting off of work, going home to be with my son, sitting down, and drinking a beer, while me and my son watched the basketball game.

# KEITH HARRIS

**Inspired by My Mother** I really don't like my neighborhood because it is filled with crack heads, dope fiends, and drug dealers. I wouldn't want my son or daughters to grow up in this environment. I grew up in a neighborhood similar to this, but I want my children to have a better life, and hopefully I can provide that for them. I wish I could change a lot of the bad things I have done in my life, but since I can't, I am trying to do everything possible to obtain a job. I know now that fast money isn't good money and most of us pay the price in the end, which is with our freedom. I don't ever plan on going to prison again, because it has cost me so many years of my life, and made me neglect the time I could have spent with my children.

I want to be the kind of parent my mother was with me. I love my mother because she is a super woman. She has taken care of me all my life and always been so proud of me. I can remember her keeping all my trophies I received, all the certificates, newspaper clippings, and she came to all my games. I really love my mother because she cherishes my many accomplishments and is always showing them off to anyone who wants to see them. I feel my mother is my number one supporter and always puts her trust in me. I want to build this kind of bond with my children, because I love them so much and I definitely plan on spending a lot of time with them in the future.

**My Inspiration** I enjoy reading the bible. One reason is because it's filled with so many topics, such as deceit, hope, suspense, love, trials and tribulations — all while teaching you lessons, such as how to have faith, patience, humility and love for others. Truthfully, I get a lot out of the bible because it has so many stories and characters I can relate to. I see a lot of me in the Israelites—the way they constantly disobeyed God by trying to do things their own way, but when things went bad or they were in trouble, they would always run back to Him trying to ask for mercy. He would always forgive them, too, and save them from whatever threat that they faced, and that's how it is for me. No matter how much I've done, or how I didn't listen to the warnings, He always redeemed me. So I guess you can say what I learned is to not keep on disobeying or take His love for granted, but to acknowledge it and try to make something of it.



# GREGORY WILSON

**My Duck** My duck has beak-like lips, a pretty yellowish complexion, and is kind of plump in size. She's my everything. She makes me laugh, she makes me happy and proud to even have her. If you're kind of lost, let me break it down for you: my duck is my daughter. She's my only child, she's seven years old, and I call her "Duck" because she has duck-like lips just like me when I was little. Don't laugh, but that was the name my mother gave me: Duck Lips. So I guess I was her little duck, and now that I'm older I have my own little duck.

She's pretty bad, too. She gets into so much mischief everyday, all day. So I have to holler 24/7. Sometimes I even have to do more than holler. Afterwards, I feel bad because I know she's just another me when I was younger. Man, I'm telling you, I was really bad, myself. I stayed in trouble for doing things I shouldn't have been doing. Fighting, cursing, not stopping when I was told to. The list could go on. It's funny because it seems she does all the things I used to do. I guess that's why, when she comes to jump her big bad self into bed with me and fall asleep, I always kiss her and thank God for giving me my own little baby duck.

# TONY SMITH

**My Calling** I definitely feel as if I was placed on this earth to become a motivational speaker for people who don't know about sexually transmitted diseases. Here is somewhat how my personal speaking began: I used to work in health care while I was in prison. So one day my boss asked me if I would like to speak to people about sexually transmitted diseases. So, at first I was shocked that Ms. Belinda Wilkerson had even asked me to do something like that in my situation. Then I had to do some research on my own about AIDS and HIV, and truthfully, I found out a lot about AIDS and HIV. Then I wrote a speech for every single class that I taught, and on my first day I spoke to a class of 30-40 guys. At first I was real nervous, but now I am used to it. Now it's the love of my life. Yes, I found my true gift on this earth, so now I hope I can reach better highs in this life.



**My Quest** In my life I have been through many obstacles, and in some cases they were not negotiable. But through the years of my mistakes, I always wonder how much more I can take. I will never be a perfect individual, but for today I will not take it fast, I will take it slow.

The intensity of life is always about change. That is why I will live my life as a journey and strive for success. Nothing is for certain, except my life and my quest.



# FELIX HOLLIMON

**Dreams** I have dreams of some day being able to live free, free as the wind blowing through the leaves of a fully blossomed tree standing all alone in the middle of the forest. I wish I were that tree in a world of my own, standing in my space without being distracted, disturbed, or even shown.

My dream is to be in a place where there is beauty and peace, where there is no stress, no pain, and no lease. I will be free, while the roots from my branches will bloom from the rays on the sun. That is what I see when I have dreams.

**My Life and Time** Many times I feel like I have no existence in life; for so many years I have had dreams of not having to struggle in poverty. But when I see the struggles around the world, I know my struggles are not as bad as I may think. People from all walks of life are struggling with more dramatic issues than I do. I have to keep up front. There are many things that I have to take a real serious look at, that may be worse than my life and time.

# GREG BUCHMAN

## My Dream Has Come True

My dream has come true.  
I woke this morning a minute  
before I had to;  
So I turned off the alarm clock  
before the shrieking alarm went off.  
A woman picked up a bottle from  
the street  
that I might have run over  
and caused a flat.  
The day was not too hot and  
not too cold.  
The drive to work was peaceful  
as a field of flowers.  
My dream comes true every day  
I see my sweetie.



# JIMMIE LOGAN

**Inside Me** I sit locked up mentally and physically, like I'm still in prison. I pray and do so many things to uncage myself from this misery. I feel as if all my decisions are based on incarceration. I still feel the small cell, 4 plain walls, cold steel, small meals, and my freedom and loved ones taken away from me by a mistake that had been made in my life. I sometimes don't look for places to go because I feel like staying inside or I might see that rotten jail again. I miss the freedom that lived inside me when I was younger and I hate that time was lost. I pray to the higher power to keep me free and safe even inside, because after you've been to a place like jail, you know you always need the higher power. It's inside that needs to be changed because I miss the real outdoors, where jobs, parks, other family, and wider freedom for the soul is at. So I work on the inside of me and stand strong in the world with the grace of the good lord.







## KENNETH GRANT

**Let Nothing Stop You** When you set your mind on something of value, no matter what kind of obstacle may appear remember this: If you have to work extremely hard at obtaining it, let nothing stop you short of possession.

## SHELBY

**My Goal** On my way here I was a little mad because I got out of bed at 6:45 feeling still a little sleepy. I am not used to getting up at that time, but it is cool because in a few weeks, I don't have to go through that. I'll be at home with my family, spending time with my two babies. I know that they miss their dad and I miss them, too. That's why I've got to stop getting locked up—so I can be out there with them and see them grow up. My goal in life is to take care of my two kids when I get out of the center because I think that things are not going right out there for my family. I have to be the bigger man and do what's right to get back out there because being in here is not doing me any good.

## GULLION

# LUIS



**Feeling Free in Puerto Rico** A place where I feel free is Puerto Rico because the mountains are so breathtaking, the rivers are so clean and pure, the forests are so green. At night the skies are so full of stars as far as you can see, so relaxing, so comforting, so unbelievable. The food in Puerto Rico is seasoned differently than in any other Latin-American country: the spices that are mixed together are outstanding. And the women, to me, are the most beautiful in the world: the young ones look like they are grown and the older ones look righteous. At night you can find a party anywhere, any day of the week: people in bars dancing, salsa and merengue, drinking, and having a good time.

When it's time to come back to Chicago sadness takes its toll, but good things always come to an end. I have to go back—the last time I was there was for three months in 1998.

**My Happiest Day** The day my oldest daughter was born was the happiest day of my life. I remember being in the postpartum room with her mother. I was eating a watermelon Jolly Rancher candy and she wanted some, but she wasn't supposed to eat anything but ice, so I said "no." Next thing you know her water broke so hard I went out and called for a nurse. By the time the nurse entered the room, all I heard was a baby crying. I started yelling, "Is anything wrong with my baby?" I was going to snap. They had to tell me three times it was a girl—just what I wanted as my first child. My daughter will be 21 on August 13th and I tell her that she wanted the piece of candy so bad that she came out when I told her mom "No." That's my princess!

My daughter is now going for her degree at Northern Illinois University. She is spoiled like a princess would have been back in the days of knights and kings, and she loves candy.

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