

## **APBP Podcast Live-Recording: “Contact Across the Divide”**

**Tuesday, November 14**

**Colson Hall 130, 6:00-8:00 pm**

*Facilitators:* Beth Staley & Valerie Surrett

*Participants (in reading order):* Rayna Momen; Emilie Shumway; Emma Harrison; Jessica Peters; Jordan Carter; Nat Updike; Lydia Welker; Yvonne Hammond; Katie Vogelpohl; Avery Williamson

### **Script**

**Beth:** (Introduces Project/Podcast) Welcome to the Appalachian Prison Book Club’s first official podcast, "Contact Across the Divide." My name is Beth Staley, and I’m one of many volunteers who have come together for this podcast to tell stories about what facilitates, limits, or motivates our contact with people who are incarcerated. We’ll share quotes by people who write to us requesting books from prisons and jails in six states, and we’ll share quotes by people we meet in reading discussions and writing workshops at a Federal Correctional Institution in Hazelton, WV. We’ll acknowledge statistics and information about incarceration in this country. And we’ll address our goals for ongoing contact across the divide. There are resources we need to keep doing what we’re doing, and they’ll help people on both sides of the divide continue dialogues anchored in social justice, hospitable listening, and letter-to-letter as well as face-to-face activism.

**Valerie:** My name is Valerie Surrett. I’ve worn many hats as an APBP volunteer. Currently, I co-facilitate one of our prison book clubs.

APBP is an all-volunteer nonprofit that sends free books to people imprisoned in the Appalachian region and also facilitates two book clubs inside a nearby prison complex. As you will hear, volunteering with APBP is a labor of love. Both branches of APBP work are labor-intensive efforts. Getting books in the hands of incarcerated people requires donated books, volunteers, trainers, money for postage and supplies, and lots of organizing. We receive about 100 letters every week. This year, we mailed our 20,000<sup>th</sup> book. Likewise, facilitating prison book clubs requires donated books for inside members, commute time, reading time, acquiring prison-approved baggy clothing, and jumping through the institutional hoops of volunteer trainings, background checks, and coordinating schedules with prison staff.

The volunteers who will share their stories are all WVU students and alumni from a variety of undergraduate and graduate programs. Their experiences with APBP include working at the Aull Center, holding internships and research assistantships, serving on the board, facilitating book clubs, and organizing events.

**Valerie:** Reading from men’s book club responses to the prompt “what helps you breathe”

Before we cede the floor to our volunteers, we want to begin with contributions from a few of our inside book club members. At our last meeting, I asked the men in our group to respond to the prompt “what helps you breathe.” The following excerpts were drawn from their responses. I wish you could hear their voices.

- Feelings of Love... Memories...—Anonymous
- Air in the form of “hope” created by the love and undying support of my family and friends; along with my unbreakable spirit—Maurice
- When I eat dry lucky charms and drop one of the marshmallows on the floor sometimes, I question why I woke up today. In a joking manner. On a serious tone the thoughts of everything I plan to do for my daughter helps me breathe. The luxury of wiping my greasy chicken fingers on a piece of bread like a napkin helps me breathe. You know what really helps me breathe? Being able to listen to someone else’s thoughts.—Antoine Beach

- Top Five: 1. Building positive bonds with other people; 2. Making others laugh; 3. Getting fulfillment from others who read my books and really enjoy them; 3. Helping Others; 4. Last but not least, FOOD.—Anonymous
- The power of change. Dreams of hope of life. Uncaged and free. Love of understanding, but understanding the rights and wrongs of the breath of life. Hope of my future lets me breathe life.—Anonymous
- What helps me breathe is the will of Allah. From the womb of a mother unto the milk that I suckled. The nurturing of a family pact. The accepting the life skills that were taught to survive on one's own. To live life without looking back, but yet learning from my mistakes. Being able to know, comprehend, and reciprocate the love that was placed inside of myself lets me breathe.—Marquette Murchette
- What helps me breathe is the fact that my voice is not an echo.—Jonathan Riggins

**Rayna:** I remember the first time I heard about the Appalachian Prison Book Project (APBP) as a graduate student at WVU. Having had family members who were incarcerated on and off for much of their lives, I felt intimately connected to current and formerly incarcerated people from a very young age. However, it was in learning about the APBP that I began to explore the connections between literature and incarceration. As an avid reader, I cannot imagine a world without books. It is a beautiful thing to be able to provide free literature to people who might not otherwise have access to the written word.

Being born and raised in Appalachia, I am conscious of the ways rural landscapes and fractured economies impose limitations on literacy to the people who call Appalachia home, whether they are on the inside or the outside. The APBP serves to bridge this gap by making literature more accessible. I believe every person, regardless of circumstance, should be exposed to literature of all types, because language has the power to transform lives. The 20,000 plus letters the APBP has received over the years serve as a testament.

Too often, institutions fail to recognize the value literature has for imprisoned people. This is directly reflected in their libraries, or lack thereof, in the quantity and range of literature that is housed, and in the regulations imposed regarding who gets access and what hoops they must jump through. Whether administration are supportive or opposed, whether they embrace literature on the inside or sanction those who find ways to read and write against some institution's rules, whether they welcome books sent by the APBP or restrict the flow to distributors, the need is readily apparent. Having worked directly with imprisoned people, I have seen firsthand how transformative literature really is. That alone drives me to do more.

The sheer volume of requests for books, and the sense of urgency many requests convey, attest to how necessary this project is. It is no easy task to meet the demand, which is where donations and volunteers come in, and we could always use more. In my limited experience, the most valuable resource a person can give is their time. While the cost of sending books may be high, the benefits are immeasurable.

**Emilie:** A few weeks ago at the Aull Center, I opened a letter from a man who was finishing David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, and wanted more books written in the same style. I was amazed by the letter; I've tried to read *Infinite Jest* three times now, and never made it past page 300 or so, both electrified by it and worn down by the amount of work it seemed to require, between looking things up in the dictionary and struggling through dense, technical blocks of text. Here was a person with the time and motivation to read a difficult book, sharpening his mind to a point and requesting more tools to keep it honed.

This experience is just one of many that has forced me to confront my own biases and assumptions, to create a more diverse, more complex idea of people who are incarcerated. Every day at the office, I read letters that surprise and fascinate me. Someone wants a book on raising goats; another person wants a specific text on the complicated doctrinal questions of the Catholic faith; a third wants to learn Greek; a fourth wants a James Patterson novel. Each request for a story is its own story. Each request claws its way out of the silencing

darkness of prison to stake a claim of individuality and potential for growth. Each request, almost to a fault, is kind and thoughtful and grateful.

It's rare to find a type of volunteer work that feels so personal and so important for the person on the other end. Sending a book is sending a tool - for learning a skill that can keep a mind sane, for hearing a story that can create new perspective, for developing a stronger vocabulary to better say what needs to be said.

We need more of specific types of books and more hours and volunteers to increase our turnaround - this will get people better tools, faster. My vision is to get people what they need in under two weeks. We've recently caught up to within a month, but every week a new tide of letters comes in, and we're never quite ahead of the ball.

**Emma:** I started working with imprisoned people through the West Virginia Innocence Project. I remember my first legal visit to prison like it was yesterday. It was January 2017, and I was so nervous. I didn't know what to expect. I wasn't scared; I was excited to visit two clients in prison. I was able to take a DNA sample from one of the clients to prove that he is innocent of the crime in which he was convicted. The two hours spent there absolutely changed my life.

The experience solidified my goal of law school, and hopefully to be a public defender. Being able to interact with people that society deems unfit to be in public was eye opening. Imprisoned people are just that--people.

From there, I became involved in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange both at Morgantown FCI and Hazelton FCI. The Inside-Out Prison Exchange is a class held at the facility with 15 WVU students and 15 imprisoned people. One of the classes was sociology, and the other was literature. Both of these classes solidified my desire to work with this population for the rest of my life.

The incarcerated men are some of the kindest, passionate, talented, forgiving, and well-spoken individuals I have ever met. In my mind I guess I was anticipating seeing broken individuals with no life left inside them. The moment I stepped into prison, I knew that was not true. These men are creating art and music, poetry, legal writing, and on and on. However, behind the work being done, this is not a life. I can see it in their art, music, and poetry. Freedom is just behind the fence, just out of reach.

I have also had the opportunity to teach two classes at the Morgantown FCI called "Facing Stigmatization." This class gave me another unique perspective to the prison system. I have been able to read honest, open papers from my students about their experiences with discrimination, racism, bigotry, etc. Again, this class has taught me that imprisoned people deserve to have respect and to be treated like humans. Learning about their experiences has taught me how to be more open, have greater empathy, and try to find a deeper understanding with others, regardless of perceived differences.

My experiences in prison have taught me that we cannot treat these people like animals. If we want them to be contributing members of society, then we should give them the opportunity to practice that. I can't reiterate it enough--prisoners are people too. We have to give them a chance.

**Jessica:** I have only had the privilege to participate in three book club meetings with APBP at the Hazelton Women's Correctional Facility. All of which I consider a privileged, living dialogue in my life. I have a few responses to the writing prompts given...

Privilege limits contact. Six years ago I wanted to write my friend who was incarcerated, but had no reference for how to fit that into my upwardly mobile life. Yet my heart wanted to reach out. Frustrated, I wrote in my sketchbook the word “CONTACT” and six months later mailed a book, anonymously, to my friend. Privilege maintains itself through keeping boundaries, even if we become ignorant of our belonging to humanity. In truth we are all living in a state of neediness. Privilege can leave us unaware of the deep needs we share.

Privilege also can facilitate contact. In my experience, a gesture is usually met half way- but someone has to make the first move. In Katy Ryan’s case, she created a model that works beautifully. These needs we share run so deep. All we have to do is want to face them and we find opportunities to engage. Did I find APBP or did it find me? All I know is it had to exist.

Ethics facilitates contact. Katy’s groups are governed with the wisdom that we are all facilitators. True, individual stories facilitate contact. They level us all in a relational mode of being vulnerable together. And this asks us to practice ethical participation, by curbing habits, and hand the mic over to those closer to the chaos. The need to shine is passé here. The purpose of embarking on a path of contact is to allow it to do its work. APBP goes there.

In the APBP book club what transpires between people happens at a deep level. Like opening a door to questions we can barely bring ourselves to ask. If we do indeed share the burden of our society then we have to ask those questions together. Every time I left the book club, I would be saying to myself “what just happened?”, and to my peers “This is something that needs to happen more.” Life wants more from us and for us. And these are opportunities for lasting seeds of change to be placed within each person present. And it changes our pact with life at the core, forever.

Access and time are our most needed resources for contact. One cannot just walk into a prison. Programs like APBP literally (no pun intended) make it possible. For inmates this is a brave and upstanding, voluntary thing as well. We are missing something obvious about each other. The focus is on the abyss itself. We all long for feeling at home within a nurturing and inspired social reality. Feeling whole is the soul work we are here for. It asks us to stop and get real- together. Come what may. APBP creates a space for open-ended change to resonate between all present. And sets a new precedent for privilege.

**Jordan:** Time and again when I’m asked to write about my experience with Appalachian Prison Book Project, I am drawn to the following quote from Shirley Jackson’s *Haunting of Hill House*.

“In these few seconds, I have lived a lifetime.”

While Eleanor, the protagonist of *Haunting of Hill House*, is not talking about reading, she might as well be.

Books can do so much—provide mental stimulation, increase knowledge and vocabulary, improve memory, help develop critical thinking skills, entertain, inspire hope, and so much more. These skills are imperative, especially to those of us who are disenfranchised in some way. But I think more important than any of that is a book’s ability to provide an escape from this world into another.

And it was these letters from people asking for an escape from their reality that first motivated my contact with incarcerated individuals.

Why? Because books have long been my escape, too. It’s hard to put into words what books have done for me and how they’ve helped, but one correspondence does it well: “It’s wonderful to receive a book to lift the darkness away.”

“When you read a book, you leave prison for awhile,” reads one correspondence.

The writer and I share a moment as I scour our collection of donated materials at the Aull Center and I hand-select a new title to lift his darkness away. I handwrite him a note and wrap and address his parcel and send it away. Doesn't he, too, deserve to live a lifetime?

**Nat:** “All of us are criminals,” explains [Michelle Alexander](#) in *The New Jim Crow*. “All of us violate the law at some point in our lives. In fact, if the worst thing you have ever done is speed ten miles over the speed limit on the freeway, you have put yourself and others at more risk of harm than someone smoking marijuana in the privacy of his or her living room. Yet there are people in the United States serving life sentences for first-time drug offenses, something virtually unheard of anywhere else in the world.”

Alexander's words couldn't be truer. The foundational and deeply-rooted racism existing in our courts, police force, and judicial system plays this sick game of blended Twister and Russian roulette. But, that's almost too big for me to think of.

I'm Nat Updike, and my work with the Appalachian Prison Book Project started about a year ago with the Director of APBP Katy Ryan's nonfiction prison writings course at West Virginia University. In this course, I primarily studied solitary confinement representations in the once popular TV shows *Prison Break* and *Oz*. This need to study solitary confinement came out of my own quote “criminal” behavior in the eyes of the U.S. Government, through my Peace Corps service. During this service, I was repeatedly sexually-advanced by my host father, which re-triggered the six years of sexual abuse I survived as a child. I confided in multiple people above me—the Housing Coordinator, the Security Officer, the therapist, etc.—but all of them kept telling me it was “cultural differences” and I was overreacting.

It wasn't until I reacted, using myself, that the U.S. Government yanked me from the country and forcibly admitted me to a mental hospital in D.C. against my will. For the first three days, I cried and refused to eat. I remember everything about that experience from the eight-petal, navy-blue design on my gown to the darkly humorous off-key piano in the craft room to the way the doors were always locked.

I can never truly compare my short, temporary experience to the nearly two million men, women, and youth who are also behind locked doors, barbed fences, and the clang of metal bars. But, what was instilled in me through that experience is how small a person can be in the face of something as big as a government system. The prison industrial complex is nothing but eyes that only see metal and hands that take.

My work with APBP, then, is fueled to take back. I'd like to think we offer more than books. I want us to allow people in prisons to take back time, memory, experience. Giving someone a dictionary may help them earn their GED. Giving someone a how-to guide may give hope for a future business. Giving someone a hand-written note may help them just pass another day.

Another day living behind locked doors. Another day labeled as “criminal.” Another day, taken.

But, APBP is a part of something bigger that gives and must keep giving. As Katy Ryan once said, our job won't be done until the letters stop coming. Until those doors finally open. And until we, as something larger, something beyond, understand.

**Lydia:** reading Jaye Knight's piece, “The Truth Is”

“What would happen if one woman told ‘THE TRUTH’ about her life? The world would split open!”

THE TRUTH is ... my world split open when my mothers womb split open, March 4<sup>th</sup> ... 1982.

THE TRUTH is ... I was a good baby, curious, ambitious, compassionate, and sensitive too.

THE TRUTH is ... I felt like an only child, my siblings and I were all 10 years apart, the 3 of us are so different, I am the youngest so for me it was hard.

THE TRUTH is ... I didn't get to meet Barbara, My Grandmother, but I carry her name, when she passed away my mother went insane.

THE TRUTH is ... my life was scattered. I stayed with my Aunt for a while. She was like my mom, and I was like her child.

THE TRUTH is ... my mom became well so back to the projects I go, I wasn't mad at all, although the house that I inhabited was never a home.

THE TRUTH is ... there were 9 of us in that little ole space, but the adults couldn't see the sly look on his face.

THE TRUTH is ... I loved my grandfather, but I couldn't remember, all those times that he loved me in the months of September, October, November, December ... I just can't remember.

THE TRUTH is ... they knew all along so why would I say anything, I thought nothing was wrong.

THE TRUTH is ... my aunt kept me in church, I had a father who I couldn't see, He loved me, unconditionally, I just had to believe.

THE TRUTH is ... I went to Emmanuel Baptist all by myself, I was a big girl now ...12 to be exact, that was a safe place to be, a shelter from trouble, a peace haven, a step towards heaven a place where love, wasn't misunderstood, a place where everyone was supposed to be good.

THE TRUTH is ... I found love again right under the staircase, where one of the "brothers" put his love in my face. "I'm getting you ready to be a woman Jaye ... don't you want your boyfriend to love you?" he said kissing my neck. "My grandfather loves me. I already know how." I replied showing him how I know.

THE TRUTH is ... one day when that same "brother" continued to give me unwanted lessons, I received a blessing, an angel his sister caught him during his session ... I simply walked away, thinking that things were OK, knowing in my heart that Love, Love, Love, was really pain.

THE TRUTH is ... I'm an adult now ruined, confused, hungry, needy, damaged, saved, conflicted by Love.

THE TRUTH is ... my womb split open on March 3, 1999, my heart burst at the sight of my daughter for the first time.

THE TRUTH is ... that was a Love that I've never experienced, all at once, in a second. Time stopped, this time I knew what Love was not!

THE TRUTH is ... I found a mixture of Love, along with other things from her father, I was only 16, 17, 18, I was tired of this life, and I thought... why bother?

THE TRUTH is ... he came in on time, the barrel was in place, the metal tasted smooth, cold, much like the tears that streamed down my face, eyes closed, finger on the trigger.

THE TRUTH is ... the blow to my head caught me off guard, my hand free of the gun, my mind spun blinking back the sadness and rage in his eyes, it was replaced with the hatred, a brand new disguise. I hadn't met my demise.

THE TRUTH is ... nothing worked ... pills, razors, self-destruction, in the midst of jobs, school, honor roll, promotions, a beautiful intelligent little girl, my life was masked with such a pitiful world.

THE TRUTH is ... I had a male friend of years later that helped me in my homeless situation, I also turned to women. I liked them, loved them, preferred them over my new friend, who helped me find shelter, he wanted me to repay him he said he was better.

THE TRUTH is ... he was really upset, here I lay on a couch, in the middle of his crack head mom's living room, while my daughter lay peacefully asleep on a fouton oblivious, without a clue... I struggle, I fight, but I don't make a sound, as his hands choke me out, with his pants on the ground "that's right, keep your mouth shut, you don't want her to wake up do you?" he whispers to me... Then come the rip of my cheap white panties.

THE TRUTH is ... it was over soon... I showered, cried, cut, scrubbed, but it wouldn't change what was now inside.

THE TRUTH is ... my womb split open for the second time.

THE TRUTH is ... there goes that feeling again... somewhere inside, its familiar but so many other emotions attempt to override. This time its different. My little boy was only 4 lbs as opposed to his sisters 8... He was a fighter, a tiny little fighter. He inspired me. He conquered his task of gaining 2 lbs before 3 days. He changed my life, in so many ways.

THE TRUTH is ... I'm a go getter, I'm ambitious, I'm resilient, I'm a survivor, I'm a drug addict, I'm a mother, I'm a liar.

THE TRUTH is ... Ecstasy, Weed, Absolut, Razors, Sex, etc took me down further.

THE TRUTH is ... I managed, did good, for a short while raised my kids, in spite of my fast life, drug life, sex life, wild life. They are amazing those two, to be able to conquer all the shit I put in their face.

THE TRUTH is ... one night they went away on the weekend, I needed a break, I lost my job that week so I decided to celebrate... yeah that's right, celebrate the last day of my free life, how ironic huh.

THE TRUTH is ... I didn't follow my gut, "I don't want to go to the club tonight. Lets just stay in" I said, "I got the truck, we got some pills, I got a lb, lets go uptown" my sis told me.

THE TRUTH is ... we went to the club, my sister could rap, so she entered the battle, she won all the money, but they guys wanted their share back.

THE TRUTH is ... everybody was high, everything was moving so fast, the punch is what caught my eye.

THE TRUTH is ... I wasn't myself, it wasn't me. I saw the fight between David and me, that girl was crazy, he beat her up, they were rolling on the ground, but then she got up, she fled the scene and got in the truck. "What happened?" her sister said... "Lets go home, and Roll up." That was her answer. They're driving away, quiet into the night. And then there was noise, with blue and red lights.

THE TRUTH is ... a mom's world was split open, in half, shattered, broken, it was no longer one. When she received the news about her son.

THE TRUTH is ... my world split open when I realized what went wrong. I hated myself, I wished it was me, I cried for his kid, I cried for his mom, I cried for my children, I cried for the whole world, both sides were split in two... how do I put it back together... is it split open forever?

THE TRUTH is ... I'm a mother, I was a murderer, I was a monster, I am a conqueror, I am a survivor, I am a child of God, I am forgiven, I am me, I forgive myself, I will put my world back together, I am doing it now in these 20 years, I am better, I am sorry, I am a new person, I am Jaye Knight.

**Yvonne:** Prison days are always stressful; they are unpredictable in every way possible. If any day it will snow heavily in the Appalachian Mountains, it will be a Wednesday, the day scheduled for the Men's Book Club at a federal facility tucked among the reclaimed mountaintops leftover from coal days. It is the day that I must make sure my morning 'to do' list is tight: license, books, paper, pen, long pants, no underwire bra, snack, but no water. When we walk into the doors of the facility we must lack femininity. Our clothes must be baggy and black; professional, but not pretty; our identity must be 'generic volunteer.' During our volunteer training we are told that if we feel like we look good we are "wrong." They emphasized: you should always remember where you are. They clearly aren't aware that this is not a possibility.

When you walk in the door you face a desk that positions the guards above you. It's hard for me not to think about why they chose that design; was it a matter of form or function? You fill out a sheet that tells them that you aren't carrying any drugs or cigarettes or porn. I asked one time why they bother asking such questions when clearly no one would admit that they were going to come to prison to break the rules. They told me that they can use it in court should they need to document another charge—possession and false reporting. I am not a false reporter, but in my training a man expected that of me and the other volunteers. He said he can't wait for us to break the rules so he can go to court and know that he is doing his job. For him the desk is function and a reminder that he is always watching.

Despite all of this I look for ways to spend time in prison. Over the course of two weeks I will have spent sixteen hours inside. A student of mine recently asked me if I feel scared going in. I told him no; I never feel

scared. The men inside don't scare me; the system does. My work with the men's book club and APBP has shaped seven years of my life. I can't think of a better way to do my time.

**Katie:** Before coming to WVU, I taught for a number of years as a public high school teacher at Highland Springs High School in Henrico County, Virginia. When visiting Hazelton Correctional Facility the other day, so many of the men, after hearing that I had taught high school said something along the lines of "God, that must have been hell." And on some days, they weren't wrong. I still have a reoccurring nightmare about a boy named Isiah, who used to try and climb out of the window in the middle of pop quizzes. But for the most part, my students were incredible. They were fun and energetic and genuinely motivated about their futures. Every one of them truly believed that they were going to be the exception; they were going to be the one that made it out.

Despite being a part of an incredibly wealthy county, Highland Springs was a poor school. 90% of the student body is non-white, and more than 60% of the population comes from an "economically disadvantaged" home. Every year, we would lose a handful of students to prison or violence. My last year there, three of my students were arrested and incarcerated. All were black, all were male, none were older than 17.

In 2015, the New York Times wrote an article entitled "1.5 Million Missing Black Men," listing Highland Springs as having the third largest proportion of "missing" black men ages 25-54 in the country due to either incarceration or early death. We were behind only Ferguson, Missouri, and Shaker Heights, Ohio.

Needless to say, these missing men have an impact. But, as stated by Pastor Marcus of New Bridge Baptist Church in Highland Springs, "when you live in it every day, and work in it every day, you kinda forget what could be, or what should be."

Throughout the country, for every 100 African American women out of jail, there are only 83 African American men. According to the New York Times, currently, there are more missing African-American men nationwide than in the population of Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Detroit, Houston, Washington, and Boston combined.

Losing students from my class once they enter the system is unfortunately too easy. There are still hundreds of students in need, and the empty desks are quickly filled. Sometimes these "missing" students return, newly equipped with angry stares and a blinking ankle monitor, but many times, I never see them again. And for years, I had no way to let them know that they were never forgotten, until I found the Appalachian Prison Book Project.

While I have never actually heard from a former student of mine through the project, they are in my thoughts daily. I think of them and what they would like to read every time I select a book or write a short note. I picture their energy and the intelligence that I saw through their work in school, and hope that these books that we are mailing are doing all that they can to keep foster both their potential and their hope. And I am grateful, every day, for the work and support that I see from the surrounding APBP community in their constant efforts to refuse to forget these "missing" men and women, who I will always remember best as simply my students.

**Avery:** I'll write here some things I think about when I think about work. It is odd to me when we think of activism as work--APBP has taught me that this work is actually just that. We have all sacrificed so much to work on this project but it never seems to be enough. I think a lot about optimism. I don't really like it. What can we do when fighting against a system so large as the carceral one? I think maybe just enough. Which doesn't always 'feel' good. I'm not sure if that's the goal though! As far as what I think I need to make APBP happen it would chiefly be 'understanding'. I'm not really interested in discussing abolitionist politics with people unless I recognize that they understand. So many, at least in this country, do not consider the prisons



impact on the everyday. I suppose I am working all the time to see it--undercover cops, ICE raids, street signs etc. I see these things as part of that carceral system. And so they are problems--I wish more people engaged with the system of incarceration instead of letting it be the invisible injustice. Access is what limits us from seeing that. Recently, I have had to work and advocate with a few people who are 'running through the process' in the legal system. It is exhausting--maybe made to be so. It is, with most bureaucratic systems, difficult to actually see the functioning's of the system. I don't really know who to call...who has the answers...who can change things. It is another void of 'work' it seems. Something a lot of effort and time is dumped into--which produces very little. How typically post-modern haha! Anyway,, I am interested in incarceration as it interacts with the everyday--this feels important. We can discuss more. Just some notes on what I am thinking. See you soon! Thanks for all your work on this--I have been too bogged down to participate in APBP properly at the moment.

**Beth:** From the women's book club at Hazelton, here are some responses to the prompt "what helps you breathe?"

- When one realizes what's right from wrong.
- What helps me breathe is my family, but most of all my son. Knowing that I have someone who is a part of me and loves me unconditionally through thick and thin keeps me going.
- Thoughts of the forest fresh with dew. Thoughts of the ocean waves lapping the beach. Thoughts of the wind blowing the clouds past.
- My sense of success chained by my fear of failure. I breathe though! The obstacle of injustice feed my craving to succeed, which makes me breathe. I breathe through...
- Looking into my grandchildren's innocent eyes... Hearing the magical sound of their laughter... The look their faces when they've learned something new... The way they love me unconditionally... When they hug me so tight and seem to not want to let me go! ☐
- Voices of my children, memory of my mother, laughter of my father, the smell of fresh baked bread, the sour taste of a lemon, the bitterness of black coffee, the pain of a headache, these things help me know I'm alive, and being alive means I'm breathing...
- Love: unconditional, unadulterated, agape love. It never fails. In my darkest hour, love helps me breathe.
- Flowers and the memory of the smells of my garden. Thyme, lavender, mint, cilantro, and the earth. All help me breathe.
- Aiyah, Aubreon, Ariana, Emory, Love, Family, God, Me, A3 + E = My heart and my breath
- -another second with the ones I love -another look at my loved one's face -another moment to watch one grow
- Knowing this is not forever.

**Q&A**