Is William Martinez Not Our Brother?

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CHAPTER ONE

The Beginning

PCAP began when I was a curly-haired blond boy of five with an odd name who was bullied on Chestnut Street, when I realized the bullying was unmerited since in my home I was loved and affirmed, when in response to the bullying I instinctively developed strategies—reading, modeling myself after my strong father, figuring out how to become popular—and when a seed of anger and resistance at all bullying was planted at my core. It began again when I listened to Europeans as I traveled the summer after graduation from college and settled into my studies at Cambridge and broke from my Republican family and voted for Jack Kennedy. PCAP was born in the three years in England and Italy, as I, still politically shy, thrilled at the civil rights movement back home. PCAP began in 1964 when I knew immediately that the Gulf of Tonkin incident was a lie, in 1968 when I went to New Hampshire to campaign for Eugene McCarthy and co-headed a committee for him in Ipswich, Massachusetts, in 1969 when John Maynard, Everett Mendelsohn, and I initiated Harvard Faculty Against the War, in 1970 when I participated in civil disobedience at the federal building in Boston. It was born when I moved to Michigan in 1971 and knew that what I had learned would stay with me and that I needed to integrate it into the way I practiced my career. It began later in the 1970s when I interviewed courageous men and women from the 1930s for my book Film on the Left, when I cofounded the Ann Arbor Committee for Human Rights in Latin America, co-organized a Teach-in on Terror in Latin America, was turned down for tenure at Michigan and watched my students organize and force a reversal of the decision. It was born most dramatically during my trips to the peasant communities near Cuzco with radical Peruvian agronomist Miguel
Ayala and when I saw an Irishwoman at the Freirean-inspired school, Cenccape CCAIJO, place a thermometer in the mouth of a campesino she was training to be a paramedic, and when I realized, as I walked to the outskirts of Andahuayllilas seeking mobiliad, that I needed to find my own way to join community struggles outside the University of Michigan.

More seeds were planted in 1981 when I created English 319, a course where my students and I produced videotapes supporting the organizing efforts of Locals Opposed to Concessions and Teamsters for a Democratic Union in Detroit, the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee in Pittsburgh, and wildcat Teamster strikers in Toledo. Those seeds grew when I realized that theater was more provocative as a political tool than video because during and after a performance, actors and audience were in the space together, not separated when the videotape ended. English 319 became an action theater and guerrilla theater course. We chose social justice causes and disrupted classrooms, libraries, dorms, and outdoor university and community spaces with our performances. We often contacted community organizations and created skits and plays that contributed to their efforts. Three homeless citizens from the Ann Arbor Shelter joined us in performing Joey’s Story, a project with the Homeless Action Committee, and an AIDS outreach counselor from Vida Latina in Detroit helped plan and performed in our play about AIDS. A member of a local movie projectionist union educated us and performed with us in a series of skits outside theaters owned by the Kerasotes Corporation, a theater chain from Illinois that had taken over twenty-seven Michigan theaters and fired union workers and eliminated senior discounts. While we performed, we passed a sheet collecting several thousand boycott signatures, were sued by Kerasotes for half a million dollars, were defended by the National Lawyers Guild, and won the right to continue performing in front of the theaters. I was drawn to the power of these collaborations across social divides.

And so in January 1990, when Liz Boner approached to ask if two lifers at the Florence Crane Women’s Facility in Coldwater could take English 319, I didn’t hesitate. Joyce Dixson and Mary Glover were lifers enrolled at the University of Michigan, their way smoothed by dean Eugene Nissen, my colleague Dick Meisler, and students like Liz who traveled with course materials and met with the two women. Mary would win a prestigious Hopwood writing award and graduate with honors after writing a thesis on mercy. Both women would graduate Phi Beta Kappa. I had no idea Mary had been lead plaintiff in Glover v. Johnson, a famous lawsuit that had
gained equal educational and other rights for women in Michigan prisons. In fact, I knew next to nothing about prisons and could not in my wildest imagination have imagined that my yes would lead to PCAP and affect the lives of thousands of urban and incarcerated youth, prisoners, and University of Michigan students. I had no idea that seventeen years later Mary and I would remain close friends and be coworkers within PCAP.

Each week Liz and Julie Rancilio (both enrolled in 319), and I made the three-hour round trip to Coldwater and met with Mary and Joyce in the small muster room, just down the narrow corridor past the bubble where we were shaken down. It was an odd and resonant space for PCAP to begin: here the corrections officers gathered at shift change, here incarcerated mothers met with their children and the walls were decorated with a mural of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, here a black woman and a white woman, both sentenced to life in prison, met with a white professor and two white female students from the University of Michigan.

For six or seven weeks we talked theater, university, and prison, we played and improvised, and we analyzed the characters and situations we improvised in terms of race, class, and power. It was an electric, lively, charged, fun space. Yet while at least equal in personal dignity and input, we were not equal in our situations. The three of us were free to come and go, while Joyce and Mary were incarcerated and under the control of others.

In 1985, not comfortable with the dominant, patronizing attitudes of my three University of Lima colleagues on a video project I had initiated in the pueblo joven of Huaycán, a year-old shantytown growing up in dust and rocks outside of Lima, I had asked the people who lived there to put us on camera and interview us. We set up in a space outside one of their woven cane homes, and one at a time they investigated our motives and goals. The power balance shifted. Now we asked Joyce and Mary to brainstorm in a corner of the room for twenty minutes, writing down questions for us.

As I had expected, they first asked, “What are you doing here? Are you ‘interested’ in prisoners?” Now we were vulnerable. We had to dig inside for the honest words that would best explain our presence. I don’t remember now what we said, only that we were not pretentious. They next asked what we would do in certain prison situations. Were I new to prison and another woman stole from me, I said, I would do nothing—I certainly wouldn’t report her to an officer. Mary and Joyce seemed satisfied with this, though I realize now they would have liked to hear that I would also find a way to stand up to the thief. One of my students was told to imagine herself in

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the shower, assaulted by a woman covered with lesions, then rescued by a male officer, who then asks for favors. What would she do? I’m sure Joyce and Mary saw that we were babes in the wood so far as incarceration was concerned and sure that they appreciated our sincerity as we groped our way. When this session ended—and twenty years later as I write this I can picture this moment, where they sat next to each other—Joyce and Mary turned to each other and said, “We have to open this to the entire population.”

Warden Carol Howes approved our proposal for a theater workshop. Notices went up in all the units. One hundred twenty women signed up, some of them believing they would be coming to a performance. Sixty actually came to the large recreation room the first day, in early May. When I asked them to stand in a circle, they held hands, sensing that this was a special place where, as in religious services, they were exempted from the prison prohibition against touch. After a few words about why we were there, I gave them instructions for “Vampire,” an exercise I had learned from Pregones. Everyone walks about with her eyes closed and arms folded across her chest. Then one person, eyes open, puts her hands around someone’s neck; that person transforms into a vampire with a horrendous scream, stretches her arms and feels for the necks of others. Normally the space fills with chilling screams and with deep loud sighs, when hands find the neck of another vampire and turn them back into human beings. But here I soon realized that I was hearing no sounds and encountering no necks. I opened my eyes—I can picture where I stood as I write this: three of us were walking the room, thirty women had left, and another twenty-seven or so were in chairs watching us. Screaming is forbidden in prison. And for a group over 60 percent of whom had suffered domestic violence, “Vampire” may have triggered memories. I hadn’t thought. I hadn’t understood where I was. I was confident and excited, but had so much to learn. We gathered with those remaining, promised them we would come on a weekly basis from then on and that eventually we would create plays. When we closed, several women came up and asked, “Can we scream every time?”

Each week we brought warm-up games, exercises, and improvisations. At the end of the term, Julie left the workshop and Liz continued. I was thoroughly enjoying myself, but also very challenged. As I wrote in a June 4 letter to my friend Melissa Hagstrum,

We’ve been there four times, but on the fourth time, yesterday, we learned
how prison politics—among the prisoners—is threatening to destroy what we are doing. The two women we worked with, strong, admirable people in for life, have been manipulating who can come . . . , and the others are resenting it and some aren't coming, and they themselves have become erratic in their commitment to the work. Neither were there yesterday, and those who were there let us know what was going on, and we've asked them to take over the responsibility for getting people there next time. We're on a six-week trial basis with the prison, and this hasn't helped. We've had powerful moments, one when Bertha was in tears [crying by herself at the side of the room; I had described an imaging exercise on family and had brought everyone to a space to begin], remembering the loss of her twin children through crib deaths. [Joyce went to her, then came and told us] she wanted to work on that loss theatrically. [Everyone was looking at me. I didn't know what to do, then suddenly remembered an exercise John Malpede had taught, so] I had her narrate, crying [her way through it], the story of what happened, while we acted out what she narrated. There are a lot of stories needing to come up and out in there, and they do come out—a substantial majority of women in prison were survivors of abuse before they committed their crime, and the “theatre of the oppressed” exercises we work from enable them to look at situations they bring up and have us work through alternative ways of handling them. It's powerful, though sometimes I feel a little out of my depth.

From my journal on June 24:

Today I am missing an O-33 workshop\textsuperscript{3} at Coldwater, am unhappy to be away from those strong women, Mary, Joyce, Dee, Charanne, Mame, Bertha, Mary W., Ewalk, Char, and on and on. They are survivors, in very tough shape and struggling. Sharon was new last week, said she was going through a lot of bad stuff in her life, and came to the workshop because she heard that we laugh. Last week we did the costume improv and they decided to be at a family picnic.\textsuperscript{4} Charron, who loves acting, was shot part way through and for the last 10 minutes had to lie dead on the floor!

And July 9:

How can I spend two hours in bed talking, holding, making love, talking, feeling so full, then go to the prison where these women have been cut off
from anything even remotely like that; some of them—Joyce, Mary, Char—for life? How can I come into their presence like that? The feeling of helplessness and anger Cristina [J] talks about. And how almost no one knows about what it is like to be in a prison and doesn’t care. For me going to the prison and going to [peasant communities in] Peru are the same thing: when I come back, no one knows where they are and no one gives a shit. They don’t want to hear. They don’t want to ask.

When Liz left the workshop late in the year, I asked Jody Eisenstein, a former student with strong theater background, to join me. On April 28, 1991, in the recreation hall with an audience of eighty women, we performed *The Show*, a collection of monologues, dialogues, and scenes.

Jackie Wilson opened with a monologue, rushing on stage, picking up a phone, and screaming to her mother that her mother’s brother had raped her. Later, she did a stand-up piece about losing her tooth while bowling. That was the range. Lupe Merino, angry that her brother got the toy guns for Christmas, climbed a tree and refused to come down until promised she could have some too. In my first performance ever, I wove an account of a recent restaurant conversation with my brother about his partner’s AIDS with a memory of witnessing the death of a close friend by asphyxiation after her reaction to an anti-allergy shot. Connie Bennett, too shy to act, read from a podium a poem about a runner falling during a race, then rising and finishing. We presented comic prison scenes. In a spoof on the chow, we used a rubber chicken (still a prop seventeen years later) and wore chicken beaks and Mary pranced around in a chef’s cap.

The audience gave us a standing ovation and plied us with excited questions about the scenes and process. We left very high and thought the extreme shakedown we received on the way out simply indicated a stringent shift command on duty that night. I was stunned when I phoned the prison the next day expecting compliments and learned from Deputy Warden Foltz that we were fired. A letter from Warden Howes a few days later said our performance had bordered on inciting to riot.

The chow scene and two other comic scenes were the culprits. In one, as a corrections officer, I told a prisoner to pack up because she was being transferred to the Annex. She didn’t wish to go and talked back until finally the corrections officer prevailed. In the other, three women rehearsed a dance for the upcoming performance. I, again a corrections officer, appeared, and as they noticed me one at a time, they stopped dancing until one remained
dancing alone, and he cut off the radio. The audience was delighted and amused.

Dean Nissen wrote an official letter to Warden Howes, backing the project. My own letter described theater as an art form and explained that the offending scenes were simply a comic rendering of common prison occurrences that we thought would be enjoyed by all. We were not satirizing officers. As it turned out, we were lucky in our warden. Carol Howes was an advocate of programs and very supportive of the women. She was also on the advisory board of the local theater. We made an appointment with her and learned the security issues: officers who are made fun of lose authority, which can lead to disobedience and even assault. It was a useful lesson, and I vowed to follow it. She called in Assistant Deputy Warden Terry Huffman, who had been offended by the scenes, and told her the program would continue.

As I look back 243 prison plays later, I think of the moment in that office and will always be grateful to Carol Howes. It was my first experience of the difference between the creative and sometimes naive language and behavior we bring in from the outside and the equally legitimate and necessary inside language of restraint and security. Without Carol, it might have been fatal.

Word began to spread. Assistant Deputy Warden Silva Goncalves of the Western Wayne Correctional Facility in Plymouth asked me to start a theater workshop there. Then Penny Ryder of the American Friends Service Committee relayed a message from George Hall of the American Lifers Association at the Egeler Correctional Facility in Jackson: the lifers wished to create a play that would convey their real humanity to an outside audience. Soon I found myself in a meeting room at Egeler with about twenty men, all or almost all of them, I thought, connected to at least one death. They were friendly, they brought me coffee, they made me comfortable, it was like any meeting out in the world. Their agenda included voting to raise funds for the homeless in Jackson. We discussed their goals, I talked about the play-building process I had in mind, and we reached an agreement. Heartened by these contacts with Western Wayne and Egeler, I phoned the Cotton Correctional Facility in Jackson and offered a workshop, which was enthusiastically accepted.

Silva became a great collaborator, Penny, one of the great activists I know, a longtime colleague, and George a lifelong friend. When George left Egeler after our first play, we began a correspondence. Then in 2004
he turned up in the Poet’s Corner, a workshop I was cofacilitating at the Southern Michigan Correctional Facility, and proved to be one of the best poets I know. Now, confined to a wheelchair at age seventy-four, he is the one prisoner the Michigan Department of Corrections policy permits me to visit. With the women at Florence Crane, with these three and with many others to come, I was entering a world where people resist the humiliating, traumatic effects of incarceration. It was life-changing.

And so English 319 evolved. Winter term 1992 it was part action/guerrilla theater, part prison theater. In April the men at Western Wayne and the students produced A Time When . . ., a series of monologues, dialogues, and scenes reflecting their experiences inside and outside of prison. A shaken, admiring prisoner family member told me afterward, “That was totally real, that’s how it is.” At Egeler they presented monologues, dialogues, and scenes held together by an ongoing card-table conversation set in the prison yard. Although we didn’t yet have any notion that we were the Prison Creative Arts Project, the Cotton group produced the first full-fledged PCAP play, A Thin Line Between Life & Death. Two hundred prisoners watched this play about AIDS from gym bleachers. During a break between scenes, a prisoner living with AIDS told the audience about the respect and understanding he and other prisoners with AIDS needed from them. A year later, English 319 would be committed entirely to prison theater.

In the fall of 1989, my colleague Anne Gere called to tell me she would love to see me work with the children at the Dewey Center for Urban Education, a K-8 magnet school that serves Detroit’s Jeffries Homes (housing projects). Two excellent teachers, Toby Curry and Debra Goodman, had established a holistic method of instruction, and two University of Michigan lecturers I admired, George Cooper and Dave Schaafsma, were already at work there. In January five students and I established three video projects at the Dewey Center, each team working with two fourth graders, two sixth graders, and two eighth graders. The children came up with the subject matter, having to do with the school neighborhood, and carried out all the interviewing and taping. The grandmother of one of the sixth graders Jeanne Gilliland and I worked with owned a soul food kitchen on Woodward Avenue. The girl’s mother had baked the birthday cake for Rosa Parks’s seventieth birthday, complete with the sculpted buildings and buses of downtown Montgom-
The children produced an utterly charming tape with interviews of the warm, wise, delighted grandmother, the mother, and customers. A cutaway showed the daughter, who planned to become a fashion designer, watching a fashion show. Fernando, a talented fourth grader who could dance like crazy one moment and be in tears another, whose grandmother kept her door in the projects heavily barricaded, told me the next fall that he had watched the tape every night that summer.

In the spring of 1991, after three semesters at the Dewey Center, I worked with my colleague Ralph Williams, then chair of the English Department Curriculum Committee, to put through that committee and its College of Literature, Science, and the Arts counterpart a proposal for the creation of English 310, so that the students volunteering at Dewey might receive course credit. The first version started in the fall, and the course would go on to bring workshops in all the arts to area high schools and juvenile facilities.

We continued at the Dewey Center through the fall of 1992, adding photography and theater workshops. In the third year, three sixth-grade girls, Nikia, Tamesha, and Tamarra, wrote Tell It Like It Is, a play about girls working in a beauty parlor. One of the characters was unpopular, but when her father decided to force her to enter the military because he didn’t like her boyfriend, the others rallied behind her, converted the father, and the play ended with a wedding. We brought the play to the university. I went to the back of the auditorium just before we went on and found the three girls alone, talking about how they missed their fathers: one was dead, one just plain gone, and the third incarcerated in Wisconsin. The play was an unconscious response to their disrupted homes and a wish for something better with the men who were and would be in their lives. With these children, we were entering the world of the families of the incarcerated.

A new principal came to the Dewey Center and decided after a semester that we could continue only as classroom apprentices to her teachers. She was adamant. Her vision, a committed one, was different from ours, more strictly focused on academic preparation. We were unable to convince her—she wouldn’t even meet with us—of the importance of our creative projects. We had to seek a new site.

Anne Gere connected me with Roberta Herter, who taught both in the day school and in the late afternoon and evening Adult Basic Education Program at Henry Ford High School. While I was away on sabbatical during all of 1993, Scott Dent, Kyle McDonald, Kendra Lutes, and others slowly began to work in the evening program, which served high school youth with
children, daytime jobs, or suspensions from day school. In January 1994 in English 319 we started up two theater workshops. In the evening workshops stretched two hours, the school was not crowded, and the atmosphere was casual. I was there the night a custodian dropped into a chair, observed, and then told an actress playing a pregnant teen how to get tough with the boy she was confronting. One evening the night school principal and a hall guard paused to watch us rehearsing in the hall a situation proposed by one of the students from his own experience: a black and a white policeman pull over a black youth who is violating no laws; when he talks back to the white policeman, he is told to step out of the car. The principal and guard stopped us and explained to Dennis Guikema how to position himself at the window (Dennis had been facing the driver, not looking over the driver’s shoulder) and to the boy playing the black policeman how to place himself alertly at the back of the car. This turned out to be the most powerful of a series of scenes the two workshops presented in April. When the white policeman raised his fist to strike the boy, the scene became frozen sculpture. One at a time they stepped out of the sculpture and spoke—the boy about what he was feeling at that familiar moment, the white policeman justifying his behavior by the precedent of the beatings he had received from his father, and the black policeman deciding that he couldn’t permit this to happen to his community. When they then emerged from the sculpture, the black policeman blocked the white policeman’s fist and calmed him down, then walked the boy to the police car.

Roberta, an established and great teacher, was also a Ph.D. candidate in the University of Michigan School of Education. She decided to write her dissertation about our collaboration. She placed a video camera in the room for one of the workshops, then wrote about what she saw. She and I had an understanding about the collaboration: neither I nor my students would come to Henry Ford as arrogant know-it-alls from the University of Michigan; the youth would determine the content and style of the plays; we would be in complete communication with her and respond to her advice and guidance. Yet the dissertation reveals that at first she feared that we would condescend to her students, fail to believe in them, and, given our class position and educational standing, be abusive in at least subtle ways. That this fear disappeared over the period of the project is a tribute to her, to the self-confidence of her students, and to the sincerity of my students and the developing work of PCAP. It is also an early lesson that of course we would not and should not be trusted anywhere until we had proven ourselves.11
When Governor John Engler cut off funds for much of adult education and the Adult Basic Education Program closed, we moved to the day school. Roberta found us odd empty rooms where we could work with her students who chose to be in a theater, art, or creative writing workshop once a week during class time. In 2008 the principal and all teachers were fired, and Joan Galica, our present liaison, another great teacher, chose to retire. We followed the assistant principal to Cody High School. In our fifteen years at Henry Ford, the youth created forty-six original plays and participated in another fifty workshops in other arts. In 1995 we added the Phoenix School, a Washtenaw County school for rural youth who had dropped out or been expelled from high school. By 1997 we realized that doing a workshop once a week wasn’t sufficient time for us to be effective with that particular group of students, and we left reluctantly. In January 1998 we added Cooley High School, where we continue to work (forty-seven plays and many poetry and other art workshops). When PCAP member Melissa Palma became a teacher at Southeastern High School for two years, she brought us in for four theater workshops from September 1999 through April 2001; we began there again in 2007. From September 2003 through April 2006, students at Catherine Ferguson Academy (a wonderful high school for pregnant girls and girls with babies) produced four plays, a poetry reading, and a dance performance, and participated in our one-on-one portfolio project. In the fall of 2008 we added Crockett Technical High School.

In the summer of 1992, after the Western Wayne actors had completed *A Time When . . .*, I went out to meet with them. We sat in a scraggly circle in a loose group of chairs in a large, nearly empty room behind the chapel space where they had rehearsed and performed—Willie Birmingham, Ter-rance Crawford-El, Nate Jones, Harold Murphy, Todd Rash, Romando Valeroso III, and myself. They told me that while rehearsal had enabled them to “leave prison” each week, and while *A Time When . . .* had caused the audience to think, the best rewards were personal growth, learning to work together, and the way both they and the students had moved from suspicious preconceptions to friendship.

But when I said, “Well, what do you want to do next?” their faces sharpened and whipped around, their bodies straightened. It was not just pleasure and surprise. Awareness of some new connection, some unusual com-
mitment, was suddenly in the air. It had not been some one-time project by a class at the University of Michigan. It had been a beginning. And so they took me on, brainstorming, tossing around ideas, deciding in the end to create a personal play that would speak to youth who were on the path to prison. They wanted to perform it for youth incarcerated at Maxey Boys Training School. I promised to explore that possibility.12

In September, Julie Nessen (lecturer in Musical Theatre at the University of Michigan), Maria Stewart, and I met with the same group minus Rash and plus David Hudson-Bey and Willie Clay-Bey. The group committed to the project and decided the play would be about situations and events in the actors’ youth that had led them toward prison. Over the following months they began trying out ideas and scenes. I checked in a couple of times. Later Valerie Miller, who had worked with the first group of men, rejoined. I started to investigate the Maxey possibility. Bill Lovett of the Michigan Department of Corrections, Julie, Maria, and I first met with Western Wayne warden Luella Burke and Silva Goncalves, then with Maxey administrators and counselors. In April 1993 Lovett enthusiastically submitted our proposal to Department of Corrections director Kenneth McGinnis: for each performance, a unit of ten youth would accompany their counselors to Western Wayne; after the play they would talk in small groups with the actors, with follow-up counseling at Maxey. We had the support of Burke and of Ernie Pasteur, the new director at Maxey. In August, Maxey counselors attended a work-in-progress performance of the play now titled Inside Out and were “on their feet,” Nessen reported to me (I was on sabbatical in New York): “They want all youth to see it.” But in early October, Director McGinnis turned us down, stating that it was against department policy to allow youth into an adult correctional facility.

I had long admired John Gaventa’s work in video exchange at the Highlander Research and Education Center, especially his 1974 project in which he brought a tape of messages from striking Harlan County miners to striking Welch miners and then brought back their responses. Anticipating McGinnis’s response, I had already asked Fran Victor, a student of mine from the 1970s and friend, and Bill Harder of Victor/Harder Productions to film the Western Wayne Players’ performance, then participate in a video dialogue between prisoners and youth. We proposed this to Maxey, but after McGinnis’s decision in October, Pasteur stopped returning phone calls, then finally notified us in January 1994 that Maxey “has no time” for the project. Nor, he said, did they have time for the theater workshops his
counselors had requested after seeing *Inside Out* and learning how we work.

We turned to Marlys Schutjer, director of the Adrian Training School, met with her counselors, and received approval of the video exchange. I had returned from sabbatical and joined Maria Stewart for a furious rehearsal and filming schedule, until at the beginning of May the video *Inside Out* was completed. When we filmed, the five actors who had not been transferred to other prisons were Birmingham, Jones, Valero, Ron Moyes, and Richard McLauchlin. On the final day of filming, they gathered in the room next to where we were filming, held hands, prayed, and spoke together, then, each taking a deep breath, stepped up into the camera and spoke directly and powerfully, two of them in tears, to their youth audience.

For all of us something profound had happened with this project. Everyone had risked so much. Perhaps even more than with the Sisters Within Theater Troupe at this stage, I realized the necessity and depth of this work at its best. And it bound the six of us for life. I was with Nate Jones until the end and in sporadic correspondence with Willie Birmingham until he succumbed to a virus at the Lakeland Correctional Facility in April 2009. Fifteen years later I correspond now and then with Moyes. Valero, whom the Michigan Parole Board will not release despite his acceptance by the University of Michigan MSW program, is one of my dearest friends.

On May 16 we began the interactive video project. Ten incarcerated youth who shared a cottage and spent all their time together entered the small school chapel building with their counselor, Marlis Nuzum, and sat in two rows facing the screen. Although they were highly kinetic, *Inside Out* kept them focused and tense. Fran and Bill recorded their reactions and their questions to the actors. On May 17, back at Western Wayne, we showed that material to the five actors and recorded their responses. We returned to Adrian Training School on May 19. Now the youth began to give the kind of calculated responses they thought their counselors would want them to give, so I decided to link each actor with two of them, to keep the dialogue more intimate, direct, and challenging. Valero, who is both a powerful and demanding presence and very honest and fatherly, we assigned to the two most resistant, most reluctant and hurt youth, and they engaged with him. We linked Ron Moyes with a newcomer who was heavily medicated and with a boy who, like Moyes, liked to draw. We returned to Western Wayne on the twenty-sixth, then went back and forth twice more, on June 1 and 10 and July 6 and 8.

The youth seized the opportunity, asking about prison food, discipline,
exercise, entertainment, tattoos, danger, sex, visits, loneliness (Q: “What was it like when you got locked up?” A: “I cried the whole first night, had an emotional breakdown”); about reliving crimes (Q: “Do you have remorse for what you did? Do you have empathy? Flashbacks? Dreams at night?” A: “I have them, flashbacks and dreams”); about coping (“What keeps you going when you are depressed . . . when you get scared and lonely?”); about handling anger (“I would drink and beat up people and wake up with blood all over me. How can I control my temper?”). How were the men breaking their patterns of substance abuse? What about returning to their old neighborhoods? How could the youth avoid becoming atrocious people like their fathers, as Jones had done? The fathers among these boys wanted advice on parenting and talked about relationships with women. They shared their crimes, stories of abuse and neglect, their difficulty trusting, their need to trust. What, they wanted to know, had made the five men “start caring about others and getting away from the me-too?”

The men further committed themselves, sharing increasingly personal stories and proposing techniques for taming anger and for walking away from violence and temptation. They urged the boys to think for themselves and to seek systems of support. Several of the boys were interested in McLauchlin’s faith, and he shared interpretations of the Bible with them. Others exchanged poems. Marlis asked the two boys paired with Nate Jones how they felt about how easily Jones cried. One of them felt uneasy and found himself turning away; the other respected but did not want to imitate the tears. This led to a dialogue between them and Jones about vulnerability and dignity. Jones graphically described how in a prison group therapy session he risked sharing his personal past and allowed himself to cry and how he felt a tremendous weight lift from him as he did so. The boys satisfied some of their father hunger in this dialogue with these older men; the men satisfied some of their hunger to parent, to make up for the harmful parenting of their own children.

In October we showed Inside Out to a group of youth in the Adult Basic Education Program at Henry Ford High School. Birmingham and Valeroso participated from prison in the ensuing video dialogue. Jones, now at age forty-six a full-time University of Michigan student and English 310 theater workshop cofacilitator at Maxey, joined us at the high school. Most of the youth belonged to a local gang; nearly all were tangled in the romance and fear of street violence. At first somewhat belligerent and more sure of their invincibility than the incarcerated youth, they too began to share their lives
(“It’s bad as hell out here, worse”; “It is hard to do the right thing when there’s nothing to fall back on”; “You can’t trust nobody”) and the hopes that kept them in high school. The dialogue gave Birmingham the idea for the next Western Wayne Players play, Rico’s Story, a study in how to get out of a gang.

When Ernie Pasteur told me that they had no time for workshops at Maxey, I phoned Denise Thomas, a counselor at the Green Oak Center, Maxey’s maximum security unit, who had spoken in a class of mine a few years earlier. I asked her if she had time for a theater workshop. The answer was an enthusiastic yes, and that month we began our first two workshops in a juvenile facility, one at Green Oak under Denise and the other, under Carol King, at the Huron Center, which housed youth with learning disabilities and severe damage. In April 1994 we had our first performances, a collection of scenes by the Huron Center Boys and the Green Oak Center’s Waiver Right: Right or Wrong.

That was the beginning of PCAP workshops with incarcerated youth. Adrian Training School was next. December 1994 saw a play by one of the
boys’ halls and *Growing Up in the Hood* by the West Hall Drama Troupe, a girls’ group. In the summer of 1997, hearing that an institutional crisis might make it impossible for Maxey to give us workshops, I phoned Gary Coakley at Boysville, and Sister Anna Joseph Wallette at Vista Maria, and we had our first plays at those facilities that fall. In the summer of 2005, the Calumet Center, a maximum security boys’ juvenile facility in Highland Park (Detroit), requested workshops. We started with an English 310 poetry workshop and in December heard the group’s reading: *Time to Hear It All at the Writers’ Ball*. As of this writing, we have had sixty theater performances at Maxey, thirty-three at Adrian Training School (which closed in January 2009), thirty-four at Boysville, twenty-eight at Vista Maria, four at Calumet, and two at the Lincoln Center, which we added in January 2008, plus numerous art, dance, and poetry workshops.

When did we become the Prison Creative Arts Project? At first we were feeling our way. Either consciously or unconsciously we remained under the Michigan Department of Corrections’ radar, working individually site by site, not wanting anything to be sent up to Lansing for a generalized negative. “We” were the students in the early courses, the students working not for credit in the schools, and those of us who continued, outside the courses, the work at Florence Crane, Cotton, and Western Wayne (where in 1994 we added a second workshop with the medicated prisoners in the Residential Treatment Unit). We were friends, hooked by the meaning of our collaboration with the youth and prisoners. We didn’t have a name.

Janie Paul arrived in December 1994, began an art workshop with the men at Western Wayne in the spring of 1995, and in the fall began sending her students to lead art workshops in juvenile facilities and prisons. On October 16, 1995, I deposited some award money into a bank account Pilar Anadon, my partner at two prisons and an early leader and force, and I agreed should belong to something called the Prison Theater Project. When Janie got wind of this, she objected vehemently. It was certainly not her—nor our—intention that we restrict ourselves to theater. We changed the name to the Prison Creative Arts Project.

That was our name on paper, and perhaps we referred to ourselves as such. But even as we added Henry Ford and Phoenix High Schools, Maxey and Adrian Training Schools, and four more prisons—Adrian Temporary
and Gus Harrison in Adrian, Ryan in Detroit, and Scott in Plymouth, we still had no organization, no meetings, no structure, no policies. As a group we had carried off two very exciting annual exhibitions of art in the early months of 1996 and 1997 and were flushed with energy from the attention they had received and from what the artists were telling us the exhibitions meant to them. Sara Falls remembers what came next.

Before PCAP was an esteemed and acknowledged organization, but after it was established and [had the] important classes that you taught, it was something in between: a small but regular and dedicated group of friends. I remember distinctly the summer of ’97. Several of us had continued volunteering as facilitators in various prisons, but we weren’t officially enrolled in your classes, and we missed the camaraderie and support of the classes. You were away (were you on sabbatical or just on summer vacation? I think the latter), and so we started meeting at Chiara’s house. It was Chiara [Libera-tore], Laurie [Hess], Vanessa [Mayesky], Karen Goodyke, Talya [Edlund], Michael Burke, Matt [Schmitt], and I. I must be missing some. I think Pilar [Anadon] came once or twice, maybe Charity [Claramunt], Chris Lussier. We met weekly to discuss our workshops, tell our stories, seek support around non-understanding family members or callous guards or frustrating workshops. We brought food and shared bottles of wine. We talked and laughed. We planned and put into effect guerrilla theatre during the Ann Arbor Art Fair, protesting harsher sentencing for youth. We helped each other think about how to move workshops forward. This was the start of PCAP the organization; though I don’t think any of us consciously thought about it being an organization: it was just the community we had built. After you returned and fall classes started again, the meetings became more formal. For a time we met at Matt’s and my house, and then we outgrew that and had to find a larger space.15

Once we identified ourselves as an organization with regular meetings, everything took off. In 1997 we added four more prisons—Huron Valley Men’s Correctional Facility in Ypsilanti, Ionia Maximum Facility and the Michigan Reformatory in Ionia, and the Saginaw Correctional Facility in Freeland—and had twenty-nine plays. In 1998 we added the Mound Correctional Facility in Detroit and the Parnall and Southern Michigan correctional facilities in Jackson, and there were forty-three plays. In 1999, despite the temporary closing of most of our theater workshops at the prisons, we
had fifty-one plays. In 1998, we added creative writing workshops in the prisons. In 1999 we had our first exhibition of art by incarcerated youth, “The Freedom of Art.” Our National Advisory Board was created at the end of that year and met for the first time in the spring of 2000. And in 2000 our elected executive committee began meeting. An Access Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2001 brought us our first full-time paid administrator and the beginning of our Linkage and Portfolio projects. Although we had been speaking about our work all along, 2001 saw the establishment of our speakers bureau. A 2002 Rockefeller PACT Grant enabled us to continue and develop the two new projects and to fund our annual exhibitions, and added to our prestige within the university. In 2003 we scrambled for funds and were able to hire our first coordinator of the Linkage and Portfolio projects. My Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Council for the Advancement and Support of Education National Professor of the Year for Research Universities Award in 2005 gradually led to our current three years of stabilized funding from the University of Michigan. In the spring of 2006 we celebrated our first 429 plays in the high schools, juvenile facilities, and prisons and in the spring of 2009 celebrated our 500th play and brought to light the first number of *On Words: Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*. In 2006–7 we were able to hire our first program coordinator and added a course, Incarceration and Citizenship. We began to talk with other prison arts activists around the country about a national coalition, which might include a Center for Prison Arts at the University of Michigan.