Is William Martinez Not Our Brother?

Alexander, William

Published by University of Michigan Press

Alexander, William.
Is William Martinez Not Our Brother? Twenty Years of the Prison Creative Arts Project.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/687

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1816960
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the youth and adults in the Prison Creative Arts Project workshops, exhibitions, and portfolio and linkage work, thank you. Every time you take a risk with your voice, pen, brush, and body, you reinvent and strengthen yourselves and encourage those of us who are fortunate enough to be in your presence to do the same.

To the PCAP associates, what can I say? While I cannot tell each of your stories and cannot list your 165 names, you have the final chapter of this book to yourselves, a chapter that is about all of you. At a July 2009 PCAP meeting, Evelyn Smith asked us to write down the talent we bring to PCAP. Matt Erickson wrote, “Showing up.” That sticks with me. Matt shows up for everyone’s readings and performances, no matter how long the drive. He drove to Ionia and Coldwater for his workshops. He drives formerly incarcerated citizens to meetings and events. He always steps up and always brings his ideas and voice to meetings whether he thinks they will be popular or not. He is always present. He represents the ways you all showed up, often for each other and for PCAP, but most of all for the urban youth and incarcerated youth and adults with whom you worked. Thank you.

Karen Goodyke, Laurie Hess, Pilar Horner, our early part-time administrators, and our later full- and almost full-time administrators and coordinators, Jesse Jannetta, Suzanne Gothard, Rachael Hudak, phoenix Moore, Emily Harris, Jaime Nelson, Sari Adelson, Ariella Kaufman, Jean Borger, and Mary Heinen, thank you for your ability to respond to stress, for your troubleshooting, for your willingness to sit at the table with each other and me and the members of PCAP and to work things out, for your willingness
always, in spite of all, to embrace rather than condemn, and for your knowledge always at the end of the day that while this was about who you were becoming and wanted to be, it also was really not about you.

If one is to work in prisons, juvenile facilities, and urban high schools, one needs tough-minded, direct, honest guides who believe that every human being has the right to become more fully human. There are not enough such people in these places, but there are many more than most people imagine. PCAP and I could not have lasted twenty years without such people.

Gary Coakley, Sherri Gerber-Somers, Sue Keagle, Carol King, Wendy Kearney, Marlys Schutjer, and Denise Thomas, how can I thank you enough? Not only for the guidance you have given us, but for your immense energy, your long long hours far beyond what was asked of you, and your dedication to the youth most people judge and abandon and in whose possibilities you so fervently believe. Many boys and girls who pass through Adrian Training School, Boysville, the Calumet and Lincoln Centers, Maxey Boys Training School, and Vista Maria, in spite of all odds, are living whole lives now because of your belief in them and the demands you made on them. Your fiber is in my students as they go on to work in parallel fields.

Michelle Busby, Patricia Dowling, Joan Galica, Angel Glenn, Jane Grant, Roberta Herter, Andrew Kemp, Caryn Mamrack, Janice Rowley, and Charlotte Smith, your clarity about your teaching mission to high school students at Cooley, Henry Ford, and Crockett Technical high schools and Catherine Ferguson Academy, your firmness and flexibility, your demands and challenges, and your humor and love for your work in some of the most difficult teaching circumstances in this country, have been personal resources for me and taught me staying power. You have greatly influenced the University of Michigan students who have worked with you.

Wardens Luella Burke and Millie Warren and Bill Lovett, former strategic planner in the Michigan Department of Corrections, as active members on our National Advisory Board, you have told us the truth and have explained the complex purposes of the department when something comes at us out of the blue. Your direct intervention with your peers has saved our work countless times. Warden Carol Howes and Warden, then Regional Prison Administrator, Barbara Bock, your advice for us, your outspoken support, your advocacy for individuals, and your constant efforts to make programs and growth available to incarcerated men and women mean everything. Pat Caruso, when you became director of the Michigan Department of Corrections, the climate changed and everything changed for us. You are
all clear- and tough-minded humanists and progressives working in painful places and are my friends.

So many others at all levels, Sherry Burt, Bruce Curtis, Fred Goff, Silva Goncalves, Mary Jo Pass, Ken Romanowski, Dennis Schrantz, Chuck Sprang, Denny Straub, and Mary King and Joe Summers (with the Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative) (I could go on naming for a long time), have been forthright and supportive and have cleared the way for our programs and for individual prisoners and returned citizens. Thank you.

Christina Bates, Pete Cabell, Jody Cantwell, Pete Kerr, Phil Klintworth, Boyd Meyers, Roxanne Strouth, Beth Tuckerman, Bobbie Waldron, Cal Watson, and Kay Williams, I don’t know that I could do your work. As special activities directors, you are close to the bottom of a hierarchy that is loaded on the side of security, and yet you come in each day and advocate for programs and for opportunities for prisoners and stick up for the creativity and imagination we bring into the walls. So many of your peers across the state, as we travel to select art for the annual exhibition and when we do workshops at the borders of our driving capacities, have also been accommodating, enthusiastic, and eager for our presence. Beth and Phil, you especially have understood the depths of what access to the arts means to the incarcerated, and have most fought to make it possible.

Herschell Turner, thank you thank you thank you. So many men are artists because of you. They think of you always.

Thank you, members of our National Advisory Board. One of the most important things we have ever done was find you and then listen to you. You have made all the difference, both you who have been consistent in attending yearly meetings—Gary Coakley, Julie Ellison, Suzanne Gothard, Pat Gurin, Emily Harris, Rachael Hudak, Jesse Jannetta, Michael Keck, Chiara Liberatore, Bill Lovett, Luella Burke, Andrea Scott, Marlys Schutjer, and Patsy Yaeger—and those of you who from far away have checked in and responded to our calls for advice—Harriet Barlow, Ellen Barry, Bell Chevigny, Norma Green, DeeDee Halleck, Richard Kamler, Phyllis Kornfeld, Leslie Neal, Matthew Schmitt, and Andrew Rubinson. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Thank you Lester Monts, thank you John Matlock, thank you Terry Sullivan and Terry McDonald, thank you Sid Smith and Patsy Yaeger and Bryan Rogers, thank you Connie Cook, thank you Mary Sue Coleman, thank all of you at the University of Michigan, more colleagues and administrators than I can name, thank you all for the faith you had in PCAP from
In spring 1969, I stood in my jacket and tie sipping sherry in the Eliot House Senior Common Room before dinner. I was a young lecturer in English at Harvard, uneasy in the academic stiffness of such moments. Forty years later I can picture where I stood when Brooke Hopkins, a graduate student and house tutor, appeared at my elbow and asked me to join him teaching a full-year seminar on *Madame Bovary, In Remembrance of Things Past, Ulysses*, and the films of Bergman, Fellini, Godard, Resnais, and Truffaut that were appearing during those years. For the next two years we spent long mornings in an Eliot House basement running and rewinding the films, talking them through on the most personal and political terms. It was learning as it should be, and we brought it to the remarkable students who signed up for the seminar and for the second year when we split into two seminars to some extent because of the difference of our teaching styles, Brooke passionate, flamboyant, outspoken, I quieter, stirring the pot until it boiled. Those years changed my trajectory as a teacher and person. They also led to a lifelong friendship as letter writers, engaged talkers, hikers. Brooke, lucid, inquisitive, probing, demanding, challenging, intellectually, personally and physically courageous, with a capacity for life as large as any I know, I wouldn't be where I am, where this book is, without you.

Peter Wetherbee, thank you for insisting I leave my sleeping bag that dark night on the canoe trip we took down the Connecticut River after graduation in 1960 and for figuring out how to tell me I didn't need to reach the Atlantic. That has steadied my hyperactive self all these years. Thanks for a lifetime of friendship, for the quality and character of your work, including your work with the men incarcerated at the Auburn Correctional Facility, and for believing in me, as did you too John Radner, before I believed in myself.

Peter Wood, you are the best storyteller I know, a great American historian with deep ethics and wisdom who knows the stories under the stories, analyzes the permeating continuing story of racism in this country, and constantly reminds me of the balance and justice we should be seeking.

To my great-great-grandfather Sheldon Peck, I have visited your home in Lombard, station on the Underground Railroad where my great-grandfather listened to the stories of courageous fugitive slaves hidden in the potato cellar, where you painted portraits and raised twelve children, I thank you for your life and my opportunity to draw upon it. To my long-gone mother
and father, your civic engagement and truth to your roots is my deepest source. To my six siblings, your wonderfully stubborn Alexander strengths, the ways each of you have found what you love, and your struggle, however troubled at times, to keep family has meant everything. You have little idea how much I draw on you. To my children Jon and Allegra, thank you always for your love and for the resilience and spirit with which you have always addressed obstacles.

My thanks once more to the people I identify in the introduction to this book, community members and community-based workers who are among my and PCAP’s most powerful resources: Marta Arce, Tomas Temoche and Yawar, the theater group of Villa El Salvador, and Yuyachkani; Robert Alexander, Augusto Boal, Alan Bolt, Nidia Bustos, John Gaventa, Ross Kidd, John Malpede, Doug Paterson, Susan Perlstein, Peggy Pettit, Pregones, and Everyday Theater; Paulo Freire, Herbert Kohl, Myles Horton, and Jonathan Kozol; Miguel Ayala and Silvia Leon, Javier Mujica and Vicky Coronado, Father Jeronimo Olleros, and Rosa Maria Puma Roca and my other godchildren in Peru.

Finally, I wish to name and express my debt to four of my greatest mentors, three lifers and an ex-lifer in the prisons where I have worked. They live or have lived in the desperate condition of those who may never leave the walls, and they have taught me more than anyone what it means to be a human being. Their love for others, their courage, their laughter and resistance, their daring to create hard and true stories, their struggle to maintain the light in their souls, their great spirits are all part of who I have tried to become, and they stand behind every piece of our work. Thank you, George Norris Hall, Mary Heinen, Romando Valeroso III, and Sharleen Wabin dato.

It has been a formidable and frightening task to write these acknowledgments. It shakes me that I will have forgotten someone and that I cannot include others who people me and are deep resources. You will know who you are. Please accept my apology.

This book was written in a number of peaceful places. Its seeds grew during work on another manuscript at the Blue Mountain Center, the Hambidge Center, the Headlands Center for the Arts, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. The book itself rose at the Blue Mountain Center, one of my real homes (thank you Harriet Barlow and Ben Strader!), the Lillian E. Smith Center for the Creative Arts (thank you Nancy and Robert Fichter!), during two months in a cottage on a bluff over Lake Michigan (thank you
Mike Deem of Timber Bluff!), in a casita twenty minutes south of the Santa Fe Plaza (thank you Bart Herbstman and Laura Epler!), and in the Santa Fe home of Ian and Lois Alsop and the guest house of Elise and Tom Noble, whose continuing friendship has been sustaining.

Julie Ellison, thank you so much for seeking this book out for the New Public Scholarship Series and for being encouraging in every way possible—you gave me incentive to keep working. Alison MacKeen, as my first editor, your excitement about the book and your saying that you found my voice compelling gave me confidence and a sense that perhaps I really had something here. Judith Tannenbaum, dear friend, it meant everything that you were willing to read an earlier version of the manuscript and give me the thoughtful criticism I needed. Stephen Hartnett, dear friend, your careful editing of a portion of this manuscript and your constant cheering me on on every front, I always draw on that. And editors Tom Dwyer and Alexa Ducsay and director Phil Pochoda at the University of Michigan Press, thank you for hanging in there with me during rough spots and for believing in this book.

Janie, there are many reasons I’ve dedicated this book to you. The least is our understanding that you are PCAP’s secret weapon. The most is the vibrant, warm, laughing, compassionate love you have brought into my life for seventeen years now.

Nate, I miss you always.

Buzz Alexander

looking out over the redbud tree
Ann Arbor, August 5, 2009