

This book is dedicated to
those who believed in us,
those who didn't,
and those who are willing
to change their minds.

We write to remember and to forget
We write so we can step beyond bottles and broken dreams
Into a world where there is still hope

We write to be free of low expectations
and cursed predictions
of what we wont amount to be

We write to be able to escape the nightmares
that come in the daytime
To avoid being the one who pulls the trigger
Or the one on the other end of the gun

We write because we have to
Because we need to
We write to remember
So that maybe
We can forget

KUJO

I am Kujo
Who is complicated, underrated,
most hated and segregated.
Who belongs to the west end.
And hates and loves the west end.

I am the hood
Who cares about the brick building and corner store
And dreams of having a child the opposite of me

I am a feather in a pile of needles
Who worries that I might fly away from my little brother
Who sees the crack in the aluminium pipe
And hopes for more feathers so I can finally take flight

I am misunderstood
I need the hood
I give a Band-Aid
And get blood

I am Kujo
Who is a beast
Who imagines that he's off the leash
And believes that one day, any way, I'll be free.

-Miguel

LOOKING FOR THE LIGHT

I AM NOBODY
CALM, ANGRY, AND DARK
WHO BELONGS TO AN EMPTY FOREST
AND LOVES MY MOM

I AM A LONELY CHILD
WHO CARES ABOUT MY MOM
AND DREAMS OF LIVING LIFE WITHOUT A STRUGGLE

I AM WALKING DARKNESS
WHO WORRIES ABOUT WHERE MY LIFE IS HEADING
WHO SEES THE LIGHT FOR MY LOVING MOTHER
AND HOPES FOR MY MOM TO LIVE LIFE BETTER THAN SHE IS NOW

I AM SUPPOSED TO BE STRONG
I NEED HAPPINESS
I GIVE LOYALTY
AND GET NOTHING IN RETURN

I AM UNKOWN
GOING THROUGH THE DARKNESS
LOOKING FOR THE LIGHT

-JAQUAN

MONSTER

I WONDER WHO IS GOING TO BE THERE WHEN HE'S NOT

I WONDER WHAT HE SEES IN HIMSELF

I WONDER WHO IS IN CONTROL

IS THIS MONSTER REALLY HIM?

OR IS IT THAT MONSTER

THAT LIES DEEP INSIDE HIS SOUL

THAT FINALLY AWOKE

IS THIS MONSTER REALLY HIM?

OR IS IT A BODY MASK THAT HE JUST WEARS

I WONDER WHO IS THERE TO PULL HIM OUT

AND TELL HIM IT IS OVER

I WONDER WHO IS GOING TO BE MY ROLE MODEL AGAIN

AND I WONDER IF THIS SO CALLED MONSTER

WILL EVER COME BACK TO ME AND MY LOVED ONES

-WILLIAM

The Hood

I am The Hood

*Who is dirty, beautiful,
death, and life.
Who belongs to the city.
And loves the people.*

I am a world of my own.

*Who cares about the people under the bus stops who have no place to call home
And dreams that a charming billionaire will care enough to give the block a loan*

I am a medusa

*Who worries that the beauty of my reality is scarred by the snakes
Who sees the empty liquor bottle in front of the lake
And hopes for the wop to have better days*

I am the West

*I need to get the officers foot off my chest
I give more
And get less*

I am Zack

*Who is the lil boy walking around the hood with one pair of pants
Who imagines I'll make it to the day I get to see a high school dance
And believes I have a chance*

-Miguel

Happiness by Shaun

*There are red clouds in a red sky
and a child's broken toy under a bed*

*There is a volcano exploding
and a hammer hitting a nail on the head*

*Like poison ivy in my back yard
and a relaxing walk in hell with the devil*

There is pain

*There is a baby being ignored
and someone being mugged by a punk*

*Anger bottled up
is not permitted to come out*

*It's hiding in the closet
hoping for the love of God*

*Fear is like a rock
it's rough and cold*

Not real

But it stands at my door

Like the Grimm Reaper

Courage to Change

*I was a lost young girl
I remember losing my brother
I heard my cousin busting in my front door
I saw my brother laid out on the ground, covered in blood,
I worried that after I lost him, I was going to lose myself
I thought my life was going to go downhill*

*I am a strong, smart young lady
I think I will be successful
I need to finish school and take the next step
I try to think of my future and where I want to be
I feel brave and proud
I forgive my mom, my father, and myself*

*I will finish high school and go to college
I choose to ignore any negativity
I dream to be successful and famous
I hope I fulfill my goals and become the person I dream to be.*

~Anastasia

JUST BECAUSE

JUST BECAUSE I'M LOST
DOESN'T MEAN I'M FORGOTTEN
DOESN'T MEAN I'M GONE
AND DOESN'T MEAN I'M DONE

JUST BECAUSE I'M MAD
DOESN'T MEAN I'M SAD
DOESN'T MEAN I'LL CRY
DOESN'T MEAN I JUST MIGHT LOOK TO THE SKY

JUST BECAUSE I THINK A LOT
DOESN'T MEAN I OVERTHINK
DOESN'T MEAN I THINK BEFORE I ACT
DOESN'T MEAN I ACT BEFORE I THINK

JUST BECAUSE THERE IS PAIN
DOES IT MEAN IT DEMANDS TO BE FELT?
DOES IT MEAN WE HAVE TO GIVE OUR LAST BREATH?
TO THEIR UNDYING HEART?
WE DON'T DIE, WE FADE.

-MICHAEL

I Am Jalen

I am Jalen

Who is smart, sensitive, gorgeous, and afraid

Who belongs to the African-American race

And loves cheerleading

I am someone powerful

Who cares about making everyone happy

And dreams of becoming a police woman

I am a light skinned woman

Who worries about life

Who sees a strong female

And hopes for a positive future

I am strong

I need my family

I give thanks to Passages

I am Jalen

Who imagines world peace

And believes in anything and everything

Change

I was a girl always in trouble
I remember when my father passed away
I heard sirens in the night
I saw his grave
I worried about my family
I thought my life would be the worst life ever
But, I want to change and be happy

I am sweet down deep
I think the world is a messed up place
I want to be the best mom EVER!
I try hard at school
I feel emotional but mostly happy
I forgive my mom
Now I can change for the better

I will be a beautiful person inside and out
I choose to control my temper
I dream of meeting my father again
I hope for a successful happy life

by Marieli

Within Myself

*I was a kid who got in trouble
I remember when I first got locked up
I heard my brother tell me when I was a kid that
What happens in the dark must come out to the light
Then I saw my brother take his last breath
I worried I'd be nothing and I was going to die with nothing
Change has to start with me
I am strong and smart and will succeed
I think people are always out to get me
I need to learn how to trust others but I got to trust myself first
I try to be the person I know I can be but sometimes it's hard
I feel bad for all my mistakes in life because it hurt my family and myself
But I've learned from my mistakes
I forgive myself for dwelling on my brothers death
Now I can change
I will be a better man than my father
I was reckless because I was too young to see that there is more to life
I dream to live my life on a straight and narrow path
I hope to make a difference*

-William

Anastasia

I am Anastasia

*Who is smart strong beautiful and different
Who belongs to God, Kailynn, and Passages
And loves expressing herself*

I am open minded

*I care about almost everyone
And dream of being successful
And rich in personality*

I am a powerful young lady

*Who worries about nothing
Who sees everyone's potential
And hopes for the best for myself and others*

I am amazing

I need strength

I give love

And get love and respect

I am Anastasia

Who is optimistic

*Who imagines life being great
And believes it will be one day.*

I Am Josh

I am Josh

Who is loyal, honest, responsible, and dedicated

Who belongs to Connecticut

And loves his family

I am Josh

Who cares about my father

And dreams of serenity

I am a tranquil person

Who worries about the well being of others

Who sees the brightness in those who suffer

And who hopes for the best

I am loyal

and I need my family

I give love and affection

To those who don't know how to love themselves

And get respect in return

I am Josh

Who is tranquil

Who imagines peace

And believes addiction can end

-Josh

I Can Change

I was miserable

I remember when my Mom died

I heard my family cry

I saw things change

I worried things would get worse

I thought the world was going to end

I am honest

I think the world is 50/50

I need a billion dollars

I try to stay positive

I feel comfortable

I forgive my father

Now I can change.

Juan

FORGIVENESS

I WANT TO FORGIVE MY MOTHER

FOR ME BEING STUCK WITH DCF THIS LONG.

BUT I'LL LET THIS GO

BECAUSE IT WOULD MAKE HER FEEL BETTER.

FORGIVENESS MAKES ME FEEL WEIRD

AND OKAY TOO.

IT FEELS LIKE EVERYTHING CAN GET BETTER WITH MY MOTHER.

IT MAKES MY HEART FEEL CALM AND HAPPY.

IT MAKES ME BELIEVE THAT THERE WILL BE MORE HAPPINESS.

IT HEALS MY SOUL.

NOW I GUESS I AM READY TO TRY AGAIN.

-Ana

I'll Make It

I was rebellious.

I remember having my mamma cry over me.

I heard I was never going to make it.

I saw betrayal happen right in front of me.

I worried that I would never get out of the system.

I thought I was going to be dead or in jail.

But, I want to change.

I am wiser and smarter than who I was in the past.

I think the world would be a better place if we united as one.

I need to make it and prove everyone wrong.

I try to stay away from all negativity.

I feel very ambitious.

I forgive my mother for what she has put me through.

Now I can change.

I will become rich and famous.

I choose not to ever let anybody bring me down.

I dream of putting my Momma in a big house.

I hope that I make it.

I won't stop 'til I make it.

I know I'll make it.

Lilly

Change

I was afraid

I remember everyone left him beside a few braves

I heard he didn't make it

I saw him on the floor and I knew he wasn't gonna make it

I worried that the ambulance wasn't gonna make it

I thought I was the next one in the casket.

I am better than before

I think things are getting better

I need to learn how to forgive

I try to be positive

And I forgive my father for not being there

I will be better than ever

I choose to have a better life

I dream to be a marine

I hope I will succeed.

-Hector

I Am

I am Deykevious
Who is kind, motivated, smart, and chasing dreams
Who belongs to myself
And loves myself

I am motivated to do great
I care about my future
And dream of providing for myself and my family

I am tall and dark skinned with curly hair
I worry about staying on track
And hope for a great future

I need my family
I give a lot of time to trying
And get stressed when I am not doing good

I am Deykevious
Who is very motivated
Who imagines he will be somewhere great
And believes he can make all the bad and hurtful things
that was told to me as a child be wrong.

Courage to Change

I was audacious and rebellious

I remember no one could stop me from continuing down the path of failure

I heard my mom cry as she worried about my safety

I saw the fear and pain in everyone's eyes

I worried I would never change my ways

I thought nothing about where my negative actions were taking me

I am careful and tamed

I think about how inconsiderate I was

I need to focus on my goals toward success

I try to keep my eye on the prize that will keep me motivated

I feel confident with the path I am now following

I forgive my past experiences

Understanding that they have created the person I am today

I will continue to follow my dreams

I choose to stay away from any negativity that could bring me down again

I dream to continue learning from my mistakes and be successful

I hope I never follow down the path I was before

And use what I've gone through to help others

-Alyssa

I Am Ana

I am Ana

Who is nice, colorful, caring, and unsure

Who belongs to my mom

And loves music

I am an understanding girl

Who cares about the only friend I have in the world

And dreams of spending time with him

I am confused

And worry about going to jail if I keep fight too much

I see torture

And hope for more real people

I am creative

I need happiness

I give help

And get disrespect

I am Ana

Who is understanding

And believes good things

-Ana

Courage to Change

I was hurt.

I remember when Jennifer committed suicide.
I heard a couple of months after my friend got murdered.

I saw my aunt get a stroke.

I worried that nothing was going to get better.

I thought my life had lost its meaning.

I am stronger now.

I think that everything will fall into place slowly.

I need to graduate high school.

I try to distance myself from negativity.

I feel relieved.

I forgive my mother for not always being there.

I will become successful and have my dream career.

I choose to leave the past behind me.

I dream that one day I'll design my own car.

I hope that one day I can look back and say "I made it."

~Nicole

A Change Poem

I was a sad kid

I remember when my grandmother passed away

I heard my grandfather has liver cancer

And I saw my grandmother in her coffin

I worried that I will lose my whole family

I was distant

I want to change.

I am a nice guy

I think the world is an amazing place

and I need to be happy

I try to do better everyday in school

I feel happy when I am with people

I forgive my ex for breaking my heart

Now I can change.

I will be a singer and actor

I dream about the future

I hope I can be the best of the best

-Julio

*Growing up I heard a lot of adages
Like "by changing nothing, nothing changes"
But I was servile to the streets.
It was like it was a house torn down.
Cops beat and treated people like rubble, straight garbage
So the vigil I had on life precluded me
It would either shoot down the negative stuff these streets held within me
I wish life wasn't a wrangle
All the noise in the streets has a lot to do with anger and not having much
But if we could learn how to collaborate and work together
People wouldn't try to jostle and push by just to get to the top
and grope these streets like a blind man trying to find his door.
So growing up I laggard a lot
'cause I thought there wasn't more to life
I moved slow
But now I decree
Life is bright for me*

-William

MY LIFE

I WAS A BRAVE MAN
I REMEMBER GOING AWAY
I HEARD MY LIFE GO BY
I HEARD MY FRIEND DIE
I WORRIED ABOUT GOING HOME
I THOUGHT I WAS GOING NOWHERE
BUT, I WANT TO CHANGE.

I AM A SMART PERSON
I THINK THERE'S BAD EVERYWHERE
I NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL
I TRY TO BE KIND
I FEEL JOYFUL
I FORGIVE MYSELF
NOW, I CAN CHANGE.

I WILL BE GREAT
I CHOOSE TO FOLLOW MY DREAM
I DREAM TO HAVE HARMONY
I HOPE FOR PEACE.

-MICHAEL

I USED TO

I USED TO ONLY THINK OF THE PRESENT, NOT THE FUTURE.

BUT NOW I LOOK AT THE BIGGER, BRIGHTER PICTURE.

I ALWAYS SAID I SHOULD DO THIS & I SHOULD DO THAT,

BUT I NEVER ACTUALLY ACTED ON IT.

I ONCE GAVE IN TO THE PRESSURE,

BUT NOW I HAVE ELIMINATED IT FROM MY LIFE.

IF I COULD CHANGE THE PAST,

I WOULD LEAVE IT THE SAME.

I NEVER WOULD ALTER MY PAST,

BUT I MIGHT LEARN FROM IT.

I CAN'T CHANGE WHAT I DID,

BUT I CAN DO BETTER NOW.

I WON'T REPEAT THE SAME MISTAKES,

BUT I MIGHT HELP OTHERS NOT TO MAKE THE SAME ONES.

-JOSH

CHANGE

I WAS IMMATURE AND IRRESPONSIBLE
I REMEMBER I HAD TO GO TO MY GRANDMOTHER'S FUNERAL
I HEARD MY FRIEND WAS IN JAIL
I SAW MYSELF GETTING ARRESTED IN MY OWN HOME
I WORRIED THAT I WOULD BE IN JAIL FOR A LONG TIME
I THOUGHT THAT MY LIFE WAS GOING TO BE RUINED
BUT, I WANT TO CHANGE.

I AM MATURE AND RESPONSIBLE.
I NEED TO FINISH HIGH SCHOOL
I TRY TO BE MOTIVATED
I FEEL STRESSED
I FORGIVE MY FATHER
NOW, I CAN CHANGE

I WILL BECOME SUCCESSFUL
I WILL GO FAR IN LIFE
I DREAM TO BE IN THE ARMED FORCES ONE DAY
I HOPE THAT ALL OF MY DREAMS COME TRUE.

-ZACH

I used to sell drugs and not care about my life
But now I follow a path to succeed in life

I always dreamed of being a better man than my father
But I never thought life would be hard living positive

I once gave up on hope for myself
But now I just do things the positive way

If I could I'll go back and fix my mistakes
I would make things right for myself

I never get my hopes high anymore
I might break down sometimes but I pick myself up

I can't give up on myself
But I can keep living a positive life

I wont live a negative life
But I might mess up sometimes but can't give up

I used to sell drugs
But now I'm positive and living on a good path

-Anonymous

I was scared and alone

I remember when my grandma was starting to get sick

I worried that she was going to die

I heard I'd have to live with my sister

And worried it wouldn't work out

I am bold, smart, proud, and brave

I think the world is mystical

I need to improve my behavior

And try new things before judging

I forgive my mother who caused me pain

I will always be true to myself

I will follow my dreams

And become a better person

I hope to never become my mother or my sister

~Janaira

*I used to be the happiest child
But now I've become so sad*

*I always end up sad again
But I've never been this low*

*I once was able to go weeks without crying
But now I cry myself to sleep every night*

*If I could take all my mistakes back
I would start my life all over*

*I never thought I would end up like this
But I might end up a rich person*

*I can't give up and let them win
I can make it through*

*I wont give up
But I might conquer*

*I used to be the happiest child
But now I've become so sad*

-Anonymous

A Man

*I was a boy trying to become a man
I remember I lost the only example I had
I heard making money makes you a man
I saw the white come out the pot
I worried I'd die before I had a chance
I thought the streets make you a man
But I want to change.*

*I am an impulsive boy
I think the world made me less than I am
I need to be who my momma wants me to be
But I feel like to be a man
I have to take another man's manhood away
I forgive Jaylen for leaving us
Now I can change.*

I will be a man.

-Miguel

HOLD ON

HOLD ON TO FOREVER
HOLD ON TO FEELINGS
EVEN IF THEY'RE BAD
HOLD ON TO HAPPINESS
EVEN IF YOU'RE SAD
HOLD ON TO LIFE
EVEN IF IT'S SHORT
HOLD ON TO COURAGE
EVEN IF YOU'RE AFRAID
HOLD ON TO EVERYTHING
EVEN WHEN THERE IS NOTHING.

-MICHAEL

Courage to Change

I was a happy child
I remember when my Dad passed away, R.I.P
I heard my mom might pass away
I saw two females overdose on drugs
I worried I would lose my Mom one day
and I thought I was going to jail
But, I want to change

I am lazy
I think the world is ugly
I need to escape reality
I try to stop worrying about others
and lose the weight on my shoulders
I forgive my Dad
Now I can change.

I will own my own company
I choose to change my attitude
I dream to become a Doc or Florist
I hope I can achieve my goals.

-Jaquan

I USED TO

I USED TO BE A DADDY'S GIRL
BUT NOW I AM A MOMMY'S GIRL
I ALWAYS TRY TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT
BUT I NEVER FEEL LIKE I DO
I ONCE FELL IN LOVE
BUT NOW I AM ALONE
IF I COULD I WOULD TRY IT OVER
I WOULD MAKE SURE THE PERSON IS RIGHT
I NEVER LEARNED HOW TO MOVE ON
BUT I JUST MIGHT HAVE TO
I CAN'T BE A DADDY'S GIRL
BUT I CAN BE A MOMMY'S GIRL
I WON'T GET IT WRONG
BUT I MIGHT GET IT RIGHT
I USED TO BE A DADDY'S GIRL
BUT NOW I AM A MOMMY'S GIRL

STEPHANIE

Change

I was a good kid

I remember everything started to change

I heard my Mom, my family, the cops, the judge, then my P.O.

I saw so much violence towards females.

I worry that the same boys will come back and do it again.

I thought I would never change.

I am a good citizen in society who needs a little fixing

I think I can forget and forgive

I need to find better coping skills

I try to make my Mom happy

I feel unsure

I forgive some of the boys

I will do better

I choose to stay in school to succeed in life

I dream to make it to 18, go to college, and get a permanent job

I hope that my Mom will one day be able to trust again

-Jalen

COURAGE TO CHANGE

I WAS A LEADER

I REMEMBER WHEN I DIDN'T MAKE GOOD CHOICES

I HEARD I COULD BE ANYTHING I WANT TO BE

I SAW MY FUTURE HEAD THE WRONG WAY

I WORRIED ABOUT THROWING MY GIFTS AWAY

I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO DIE ON THE STREETS IF I DON'T CHANGE

BUT, I WANT TO CHANGE.

I AM DETERMINED.

I THINK I'LL MAKE IT FAR IF I FOCUS

I NEED TO MAKE IT OUT OF THE STREETS

I TRY NOT TO GET SIDE TRACKED BY THE STREETS

I FEEL I CAN STAY FOCUSED

I FORGIVE EVERYONE THAT DON'T THINK I WILL MAKE IT

NOW I CAN CHANGE.

I WILL STAY FOCUSED AND PROVE PEOPLE WRONG

I CHOOSE THE RIGHT PATH

I DREAM I'LL BE SUCCESSFUL WITH SPORTS

AND FULFILL MY POSITIVE DREAMS

I HOPE I MAKE IT VERY FAR IN LIFE.

-DEYKEVIOUS

I Used To

I used to enjoy the thrill
But now I slow myself down without pills
I always reach for a deal
But I never sold my brother for a mill
If I could bring all my loved ones back
I would never again terrify the cul-de-sac
I never went fishing with my dad
But I might give my brother everything I never had
I can't repent for everything that I did
But I might put food in another mother's fridge
I used to talk
But now I have poetry coming from my lips

-Miguel