

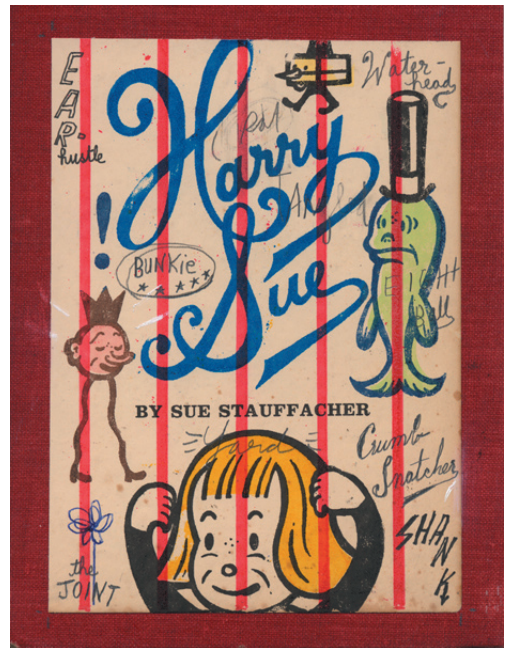
Female Prisoners' Poetry

Welcome to the E-Book of female prisoners' poetry, generously hosted by Family and Corrections Network—thank you Jim Mustin, Director—in conjunction with the publication of my novel for children “Harry Sue” (Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers, \$15.95). Other important non-profit organizations that contributed to the success of this project include the Grand Rapids, Michigan-based Criminal Justice Chaplaincy (www.cjcministry.org) and Pathfinder Resources, Inc. (www.pathf.org), a substance-abuse treatment program. In particular, I would like to thank Betsy Brown, program manager for the horticultural therapy program there, for connecting me to these amazing writers.

In “Harry Sue,” I explore the feelings, hopes and aspirations of a child whose parents are in prison. In the book, Mary Bell, Harry Sue’s mom exists mostly in her daughter’s imagination. But I also want my young readers to know what it feels like from the mother’s perspective. I want them to hear from real moms who have done time for drug-related offenses and/or are separated from their children while in prison or recovery programs. The mothers that I worked with were anxious to do something to help make up for their mistakes. They miss their children desperately. Many consented to use their own names and to write their most painful thoughts in the hope that they could somehow help others. Their children’s names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Feel free to print out these poems and use them in your classrooms or in workshop settings. One possibility is to have your students brainstorm everything they know about Mary Bell: her likes and dislikes, her family relationships, her attitude toward Harry Sue. Then after reading the letters and poems here, they can write the letter Mary Bell would have written. I would also urge you to explore this web site if you have not done so already. It contains very useful information on how to talk to children about adults in prison, how to become a mentor and—just generally—how to help. If you came to this page directly through the FCN website, please check out my web site to learn more about “Harry Sue” at www.suestauffacher.com.

If you are a child with a mom in prison, know that if she is like the mothers I have worked with, her number one concern is not when she’ll get out, but how you are doing. She is sorry. And she loves you very much.



My dearest, my precious, my beautiful daughters,

Hello sweethearts. Yes, it's me, I'm still alive, even though the break in my heart branches out and tears holes in my soul each and every day. Every second since the last time I saw my two beautiful daughters has been filled with agony. You are both loved beyond description. There truly is no possible way to put into words how very precious you both are to me. I know the both of you know deep in your soul how much I love you!!

I am so mad at myself, in fact, at times I hate myself for letting you down. I didn't walk away from you. I was shoved away long before either of you were ever born by becoming a drug addict.

On the days you were born, I held you up and looked directly into your eyes and swore with every fiber of my being that I would always love you and be there for you. And to always protect you, to see to it that you would never hate me for one iota of a second the way I hated my mother and father for all the mean nasty things they did to me, and the way they made me feel worthless. I would always try my hardest to make you both know how beautiful, special, sweet and awesome, smart and wonderful you are.

I know a lot of people tried to make you believe that you two didn't mean as much to me as drugs. They were so wrong. Please don't believe that. I did drugs to keep from hurting deep inside my heart. And I've come to realize drugs don't make it better. It only stops the pain for a minute, then it comes flying back at you, twice as hard.

Both of you meant everything and still mean everything to me. God gave me the opportunity, the beautiful moment, to be your mom. Not just your mother. Any woman can be a mother. But it takes love to be a mom. And I love you with every fiber of my being.

Please don't think for a fraction of a second that it's your fault or that I didn't want you. Because that is not true. It was the drugs. I didn't do drugs, baby girls, they did me! And since you have been gone, not one day has passed that I didn't think of you, miss you or wonder if you were all right. I'm clean now. And I'm gonna stay clean one minute at a time.

I look forward to the day you come home.

Please forgive me! You can go to any courthouse and find me! Just tell them to look it up. It's in the paperwork from the court, the ones that took you away...they have to tell you!

Love you with all of my soul!

Your mother,
Jodelynn Billington

What I Have Lost

I know through the years
There were good times and bad
Unfortunately what hurts
I remember the bad

I've disappointed you
In so many ways
The drinking, the drugging
Almost forgetting your special day

I know you've lost trust
Today is a new day
I'm sobering up
While missing you the same

The days are getting better
I'm recalling the good days
I know that this year
I'll remember your special day

Jill Smith

To my children

Nothing hurts me more right now than being away from you.

I can handle the consequences of jail, fines, community service, rehab, *everything* but the hurt I put you through by being away
Depriving you hurts more than any punishment sentenced to me.
I can only pray that you will learn from my bad choices
and not go through the same mistakes

Please know that it is you that motivates me to do right now and plan for the future. The consequences of being away again is too great to re-offend

Love, Mom

What I Have Lost

Integrity, credibility, job security, freedom, sanity, possessions, schedules, friends, marriage, health, stability, time . . . the hardest loss . . . time with my children. . . gone forever

Cynthia Leigh Waters

Child

Yearns

Never-never Land

Touches

Hurt

Instant Love

All Mine

Loving and Lovable

Emotional

Intricate

God's Child

Hard Life

Wondrous

Admirable

Trusting

Eclectic

Romantic

Sunny

You were my joy and my life,

My everything, my all

You were an answer to prayer

I loved you so much

I had to give you away

You weren't a toy

I would have broken you

You were my sunshine

After you were gone

I lived in perpetual darkness.

I became an underground animal

Never seeking the sun

You are my sun

Betty Phillips

What I Have Lost...What I Have Found

The innocence of childhood
Freedom to be who I am
The unique and precious child
Of my living Father God
Chosen,
 Accepted,
 Valued,
 Cherished,
 Unconditionally Loved

By the One who made me and called me
His own.
 Beloved.

What I have found
The lies which bound me in despair
Failure
 Worthlessness
 Defeat
 Guilt &
 Shame

Are broken, powerless to hold me
Because the One who made me for Himself
Has shined His light, His truth, His Grace
Into my blind and broken self

And set me free.

Prison Life

It's waiting on letters
When you're doing time.
And your family won't write,
or send you a dime.
It's waiting on visits
that never take place,
from friends or loved ones,
who forgot your face

It's hearing them lie
And saying that we're trying,
making you promises
but you know they are lying
It's making plans with someone
Who you thought you knew,
but their plans suddenly change,
and it didn't include you
It's hearing them say how much they care,
but in your time of need
they are never there.

It's hearing them promise
and it goes straight to your head,
But when push comes to shove,
They leave you for dead.
It's feelings and Love
Honor and Pride.
Pain and Emotions and hurting inside

It's expressing yourself to your loved ones,
and friends,
But they can't feel your pain because you're in the pen
It's calling and hearing
“ ‘A’ Block's on the phone.”
But you maintain
Because life goes on
It's really messed up when you're doing time
But that's “Prison Life.”
Out of sight, out of mind.

THE END

People say it is easy to tell
When someone else is going through hell
I see the pain in your eyes
Like a great big bad surprise

I'm hurt. I don't like it
No I don't. Not one bit.
A sad guilty shameful mother
Who once loved but lost her brother
Also her son who doesn't know
How much or how far it will go

A Grandma who works too much and too hard
Emotionally drained and scarred
A Grandpa who doesn't talk too much
But when he does has a hard but soft educational touch
A brother who I adore and loves to score

Well, this is my family which I love and care
This is the love we have to share
These are the things I have to say
To vent my frustrations Day by Day

© Stephanie Singh

What I Have Lost

I lost my mother to a gun
Ever since then I've been on the run

On Mother's Day I cannot phone
She's not here I'm all alone

After she was killed I heard her voice
She said, "I'm sorry I left, but I had no choice."

The man who killed her never did time
It never cost him one thin dime

Betty Phillips

My Children

I love my children
They're always in my heart
I've loved all four
From the very start
My heart cries out
When we're not together
I love them now
And I'll love them forever

I love you my babies
For always, you'll see
My heart is yours
For you, from me

So wipe your tears away
Please don't cry for me
I'm coming home soon...

Sooner than you think.

Love your mommy,
Olga Alvelo

What I Have Lost...Time

I have lost time with my children
I have lost time with my family
I have lost time looking at their faces
I have lost time seeing them grow
I have lost time hearing them laugh
I have lost time when they have cried
I have lost time experiencing their joys
I have lost time taking their picture
I have lost time in their memories

I have lost too much time

I don't want to lose time anymore

Darlene Haley

This is my story...

I started using at age 16
Alcohol and weed at age 18
I was introduced to crack at age 20

I had a baby girl on April 13, 1990, 7 pounds, 4 ounces
I named her Chantelle Marie Williams
I was still using
I quit one month before she was due
That still didn't stop me from using.

August 5, 1991, I had another baby girl
I named her Jameisha Corinne Stevens
7 pounds, 11 ounces
I was still heavy into my addiction

And it was growing worse

I started stealing from stores to attain money
I got into trouble with the law
In 95-96 I went to a place called ONE WAY HOUSE

There is where I had to have someone take my kids

Jameisha's father showed up in court to get custody of her
Chantelle wasn't his but he spoke up to the judge to take her as well
I felt lost and alone and really turned to crime and drugs
I've been in and out of the system
and on the streets until last year 2004

I had a visit for the first time since I lost them in '96
They were all grown up. I barely recognized them
But I knew I had to quit my drug use
So I went and turned myself in
November 22, 2004 February 10, 2005 I got out.
I stayed clean until April 22, 2005
I relapsed at that time.
I was clean when I went to court on March 28th
And got custody of my daughter Chantelle

I was so happy and I still am

I relapsed on April 22.
I went to my parole officer on April 27
And told her what happened

So here I sit at Pathfinders
I'm still working on me for me and my kids

Shelly

So I was separated from my kids for years
And I'm still working on getting them back

What I Have Lost

1. I lost my innocence
2. I lost my childhood
3. I lost my mom
4. I lost my dad
5. I lost my dog
6. I lost my good friend
7. I lost my freedom
8. I lost my pride
9. I lost my husband
10. I lost my grandmother
11. I lost my heart
12. I lost my mind
13. I lost six years of drug-free time

What I Have Lost...What I Have Found

I can't imagine telling you
all the things that I have lost,
all the pain and misery,
and all that it has cost.

My years of drugs and drinking
took many things from me.
It took my pride and self-esteem
and drained my family

I was blinded by the hardships
I refused to see the light
All the hopes and dreams I had
were simply out of sight

I couldn't see the good times
without going through the bad
Always wanting to be numb
is really kind of sad

As I sit and ponder
All the years that have gone by--
all the wasted days and nights
just make me want to cry

The years of drugs and drinking
sure took their toll on me
I thought this way of living
was what would set me free

The life I lived of drugs and crime
caught up with me one day
I looked up in the sky to God
got on my knees and prayed

God, I know you hear me—
Please come back in my heart
I know you never left me
And were there right from the start

God came to me and whispered
Daughter, leave the drugs behind
I will take good care of you
I'm all you need to find