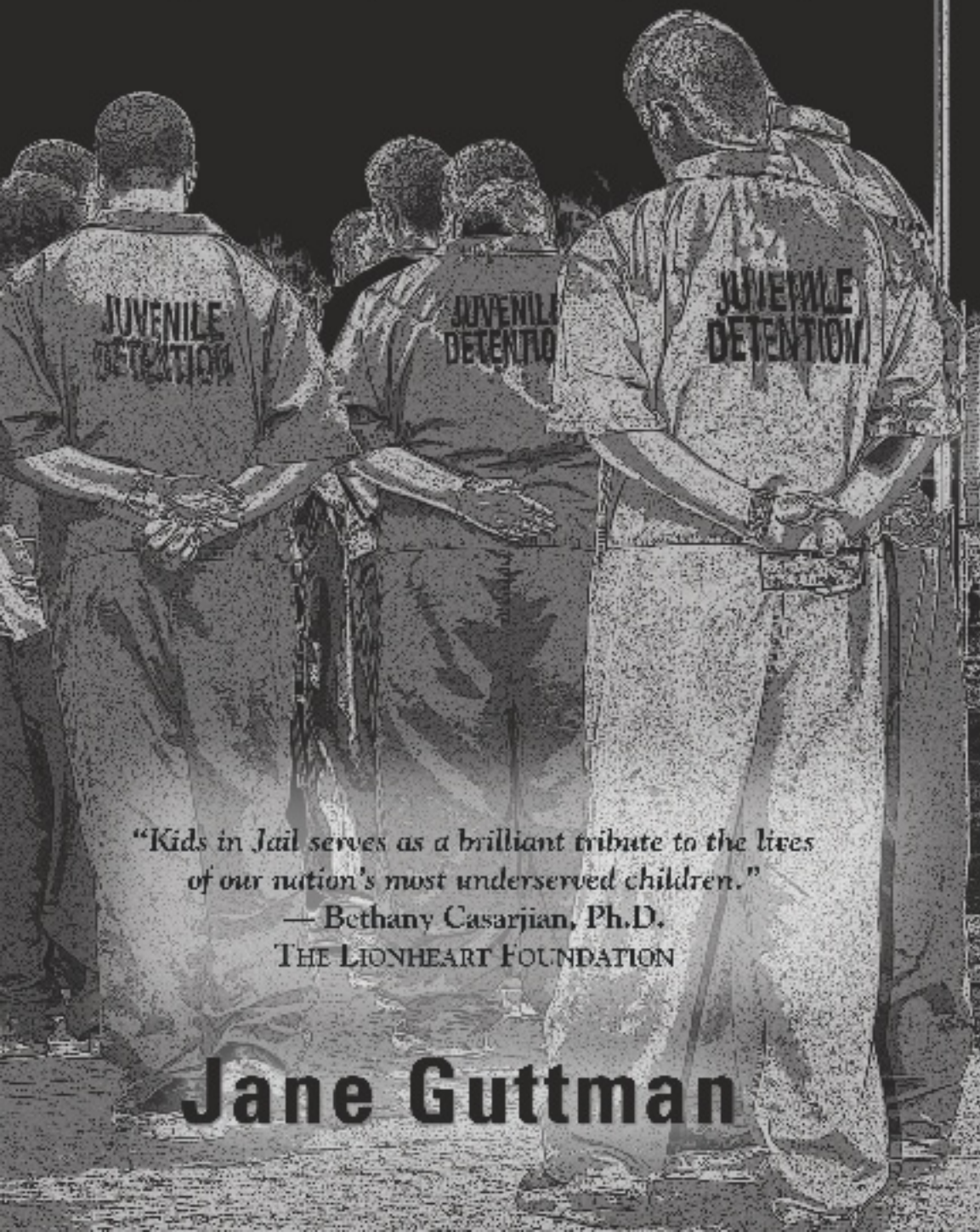


Kids in Jail

A PORTRAIT OF LIFE WITHOUT MERCY

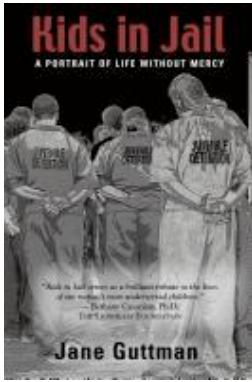


"Kids in Jail serves as a brilliant tribute to the lives of our nation's most underserved children."

— Bethany Casarjian, Ph.D.

THE LIONHEART FOUNDATION

Jane Guttman



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Kids in Jail: A Portrait of Life Without Mercy

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Kids *in* Jail

A PORTRAIT OF LIFE WITHOUT MERCY

JANE GUTTMAN

JMJ Publishing
Lake Arrowhead, California

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Printed on acid-free paper.

First Printing, 2016

JMJ Publishing
ISBN: 978-0-9672861-1-2

*Front cover photograph by Bob Riha Jr.
Back cover photograph by Richard Ross*

ALLIE

This bitter teen could live her entire life incarcerated, or rise up from the rubble of ruins that has defined her troubled life. Allie understands her assets and she may be determined enough to use them in her quest for a life without bars.

I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.

— Abraham Lincoln

I am a hugger and a screamer.
If you meet me you won't forget.
You'll love me you'll hate me.
But you will not rub out my mark.
I have spent my childhood in this cage.
My tears line the hallway.
My screams locked in the walls,
a record of my pain and woe.

I've sat on this bench year after year
trying to find the part that's whole.
Listening to too much yelling and commands
that make me retch.

I see your hardened hearts
smirking and muttering.
You are stars at disrespect
and I'm learning well.

Thank you for teaching me more about anger
and how to judge and blame,
qualities I'm sure will serve me
in the next step of my captive life.

You met my spirit
that longs to hear the morning bird.
To touch the soft face of a newborn chick
and gather in the smell of roses.

Yes, I really am human
but you don't see it,
while you hammer away
at the scraps of my hope
and pieces of my promise.

Do you know that your words
punch and bite
scorch and sting
stab and scorn,
while my ears long for love?

.....

I am strong and I am broken.
I am harsh and I am crushed.
My voice sputters and spits,
choking on venom while
hatred seals my heart.

Juvy is my home
but I don't have shelter.
Walls that punish and puncture.
Today is a curse
that will become yesterday's defeat.

I am tall and I am tough.
A fleeting piece of promise.
A giant with wings of poison
that wrap around a splattered
future going nowhere.

.....

A Portrait of Life Without Mercy

Too many sad stories up in here.
One girl cryin' and cryin'
cuz her mama didn't have no food,
stayin' in a motel with all the kids.

Then, guess what?
Teacher met the mama in the parking lot
with a week of groceries.
Not even Christmas,
just groceries.
Goodbye tears.
Then they went to sleep
on a pillow of peace.
The mama and the homie.
One in jail, one at the motel.

Not much peace for me.
Will you pull me back
to a hopeful shore,
toss me a line in my sinking waters,
chase away the demons,
unlock the waiting gift?

Oh I do know that I am smart!
And I could catch the bus to fame
riding in the lane of dignity,
triumph rising from a trench.

I am almost eighteen
time to tell the truth
about how some of you
really do care.

I know it.
I saw Ms. U. stayin' over on her shift.
Not watching the time, just stayin'.

Kids in Jail

Some special program and she didn't complain.
Then some new staff, real young,
asks our teacher for books.
Wants us to read.
Wants us to succeed.
Wants us to get outta here and stay out.

I fight against admitting it
so I can stay a victim.
Sometimes your caring is real
and I fall asleep with your compassion.

.....

There is that big question.
Will I live my life in prison,
a snarling tigress in a twisted jungle
or will I climb to freedom's shore?

My voice booms out.
A drum of anguish
for lost days and bitter nights.
A cold tune of fear but not the finale.
There is more to me
than shackled times and weeping rivers.
I dream of dignity and praising voices
though I walk with a stumbling step.

Take my hand that I might find
a gracious road
that delivers me
to a song of mercy.

WILLIAM

William is a heartbreaker. Tragedy has met him at every turn and he longs to be important to even one person. He is a cutter. Suicide has been on his mind. In his anger and in his sorrow, we find the depth in which we have failed him. Betrayed by family, unseen by teachers, William has survived by a slender thread. His life, in the present and in the past, is and was wretched. He is a scar on all of our hearts.

You can chain me, you can torture me, you can even destroy this body, but you will never imprison my mind.

— Mohandas Gandhi

Huddled in my bed
wrapped like a mummy
inside a blanket smellin' like Clorox,
fumes killing the decay in my heart.

You can scream at me.
You can threaten me.
You can shove me.
You can spray me.
You can kick me.
You can starve me.

You can beat me.
You can degrade me.
You can detest me.
You can molest me.
You can do it all.

I don't care.
Oh for one flashing second
I feel the sting of your words and your acts.
Don't worry,

you're not the first.
No one likes me, nobody.
Been that way forever.

Tonight I wail in walls of cement,
secretly, silently,
while the world on the outs
sings and eats cookies
decorated with bright colors
and happy figures.
Holiday angels and snow people
dance across snowy fields.
Whispers of love and surprise
packages, I imagine,
but not in my life.
Just hollerin' staff and the ones
who feel sorry for me and all of us
sittin' in cement, cold and alone.

My foster mom is used to visiting me here
at holiday time, anytime, and her tears
could wash away my fury.
Then I'd have to face my sadness
that pierces my wall of steel,
and feel that mountain of pain,
crushing and cutting me.

.
A chorus of tears roars,
a symphony of our suffering.

My life has been one long tear
but you won't ever see me cry.
My silent sobs suffocate me,
keep me crouched and stiff
and one step this side of death.

A Portrait of Life Without Mercy

That's right,
I'm dyin' and it's okay with me.
I'll figure out a way,
not today.
And would you even care
or will I vanish into a wave of nothin'?
Will you cry at my grave,
regret your disgust,
feel sorry for my lost life?

No one will ever call me a rising star.
My life just rolls on
with no beat, no tune, no song.

I look around and time just blurs.
Kids millin'
around but going nowhere just like me.
We got pencils in our hands,
quite a story to tell
but no one is listenin'.
Our words just rant,
tellin' a dark story.

This one's dark.
Real dark.
Kid at Rikers.
Out in New York.
In solitary.
Knew he was dying.
Kept cryin' out for help.
Screaming in pain.
Wanted to call his mama to say goodbye.
Died on the floor of his cell.

Another one, too.
Down in Florida.

Kids in Jail

Kid got beat to death.
By other kids.
Someone said staff gave snacks for the attacks.
Maybe even a Whopper.
I ain't been asked to beat no one.
Not yet.
But I seen mean things in here.

They call it honey bunning.
Staff gives some treats
and the kid does a beat down.
Punches fly and fists find the mark.
The kid in Florida got bunned.
RIP homie.

.....

I been watchin' to see if anyone cares.
I see this one and that one
puttin' a piece of kindness into a voice.
Then, one of 'em yells and seems to despise me.
Loser is marked on my face, in their eyes,
I am nothin', nobody.

I gave up on my life way too early.
Don't know how to pick up the pieces
of a shattered me that chokes and sputters.
I can't even remember the last time I laughed
and felt the fun of life, with moments
that didn't have no tears and scowls.

I saw a bunch of kids at a park, gigglin'
with screeches of joy,
some grown-ups even joinin' in.
I don't think that ever happened to me,
to live light and bright and feelin' special
with someone tall and smilin'

reachin' down to pat my head.
Or let words of praise roll out
on a carpet of love.

.....

Some of the days get
very dark.
I mean very dark.
So seein', really seein'
is a big effort
that I sometimes can't make
and I crawl way up inside
my own heart and self,
like that's all there is
and then, my tears
crowd out too many thoughts.
When that well goes dry
I'm left with one big lump in my mouth
and some big ideas about slashin' my arms
or slicin' my face.

No one understands the part
where I pick up something sharp
and away I go,
designin' my body with shame and hurt,
with times I can't even remember,
times I can't seem to forget.
So I paint a picture of woe
across the canvas of my body
to silence the racin' words
that say way too much,
and to stop the river of anguish
crushin' me with its wicked waters.
That pain doesn't scare me,
it comforts me in some strange
awful way.

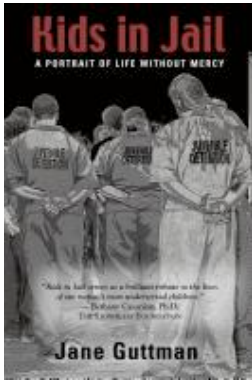
And even though
I can't explain it,
it waits for me
while I do a dance
of survival.

Sometimes I feel a sharp slice of pain
riding through my body on wings of shame,
then, a rush of relief
to feel that throbbing jolt as a sting
cuts across my flesh and I bathe in blood and tears.

Then, there is such a fuss.
Call the Watch.
Call a therapist.
Get help for the wacky kid
who treats his body like a
slice of meat.

Pain is my constant companion.
Awake and asleep it finds me.
I long for relief.
Searchin' for some peace.
Can't remember any other way.
Even though I'm lost,
I hope to be found.

Just so you know —
There is a part of me that feels.
That cares.
That grieves.
That believes.
That I may never find.



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