

A DREAM

There once was a man who had a dream.

He hated to hear children crying.

He hated to see children suffering.

He had a dream of a place
where children could be happy . . .
where children could be safe.

He needed help to start his dream.

He needed me and you.

So God sent many to help.

As the years passed
cabin after cabin was built.
And children came to this place
called Hill Country Youth Ranch.

They came to heal
and learn how to love.

There is less suffering
and there are a lot less tears

all because of a dream
God gave a man.

David, age 16 (for Gary Priour, HCYR founder)

*"These children who come to us
are our treasures,
who, after all they have been through,
somehow gather the courage
to love again".*

*Mama Carol Priour, HCYR Fine Arts Director
Editor, TAKE ANOTHER STEP*



TEARS WHEN YOU WANTED TO BE STRONG

Matteo, age 17

Hill Country Youth Ranch & Big Springs Ranch for Children

Not for profit homes for
neglected and abused children
of all ages
providing Christian guidance,
vocational training,
personal enrichment,
counseling services,
sports, horsemanship training,
nature awareness,
theater, photography, dance,
graphic arts,
and so much more,
for those who need it most

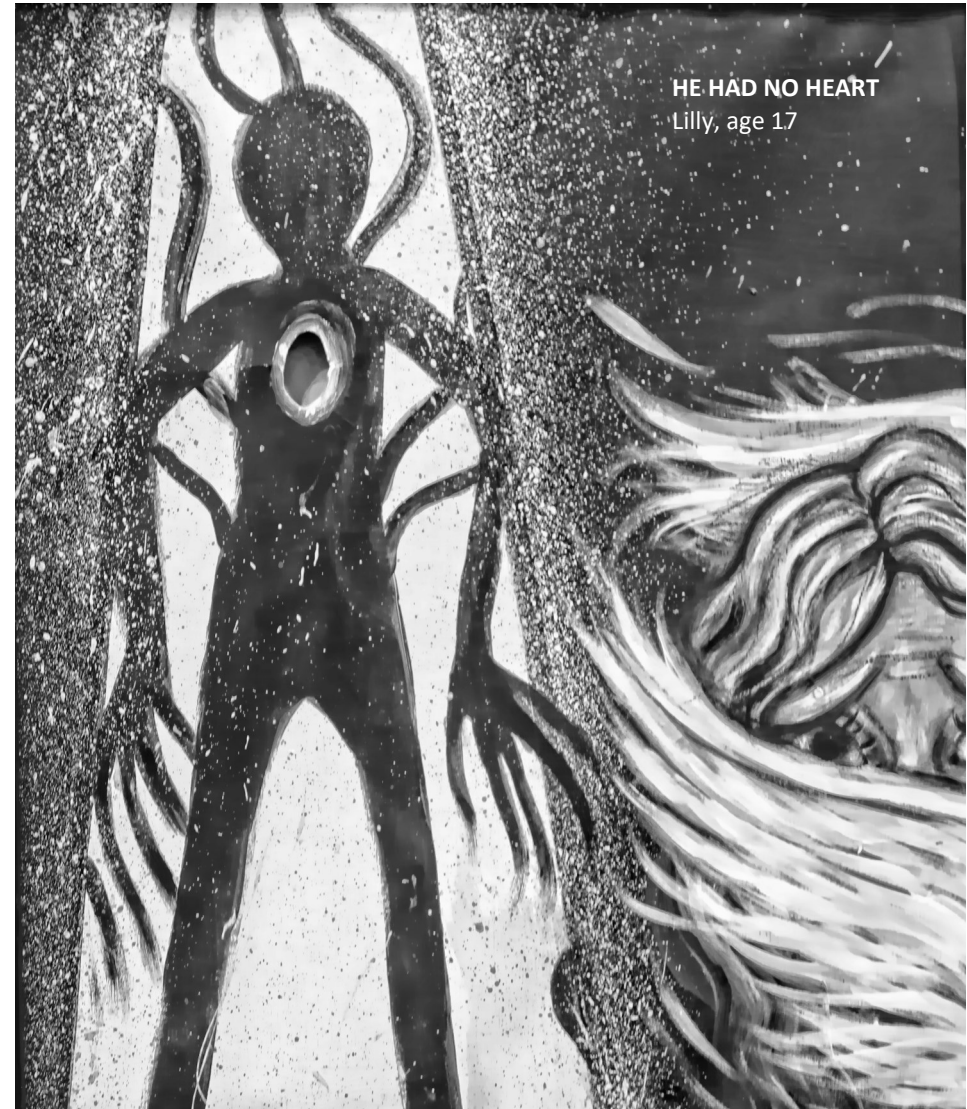
For more information
or to find out how you can help:

Hill Country Youth Ranch
PO Box 67
Ingram, Texas 78025
830-367-2131 Fax: 367-6108
E-mail: info@youth-ranch.org

Big Springs Ranch for Children
10664 U.S. Highway 83 North
Leakey, Texas 78873
830-232-4121 Fax: 830-232-4256
E-mail: bsinfo@youth-ranch.org

Visit our Website
www.youth-ranch.org

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HE HAD NO HEART
Lilly, age 17

Angel

When I look back
on all the times
I was hit and raped as a little girl,
I know, even then,
an angel was always there . . .
or I would have never had the strength
to keep on going.

Nicole, age 16

THINKING ABOUT MY LIFE

Dad's in prison
for killing Mom.

It was at my 5th birthday party when he shot her.

I wasn't old enough to understand
what was happening.

I lost them both on the same day.

I lost my home and everything I knew.

I was angry.

I blamed others for my anger
but now I know it's up to me
to find something good in my messed up life.

I'm thinking about
what I will be when I grow up . . .

I don't want to be like him!

I know I don't want nuthin' to do with drugs...

that's what Dad did . . .

He was always hitting her – calling her names.

She tried to protect us from him,
but sometimes she couldn't and he would beat us too.

I still dream about her
and how much she loved us.

I haven't heard from him.

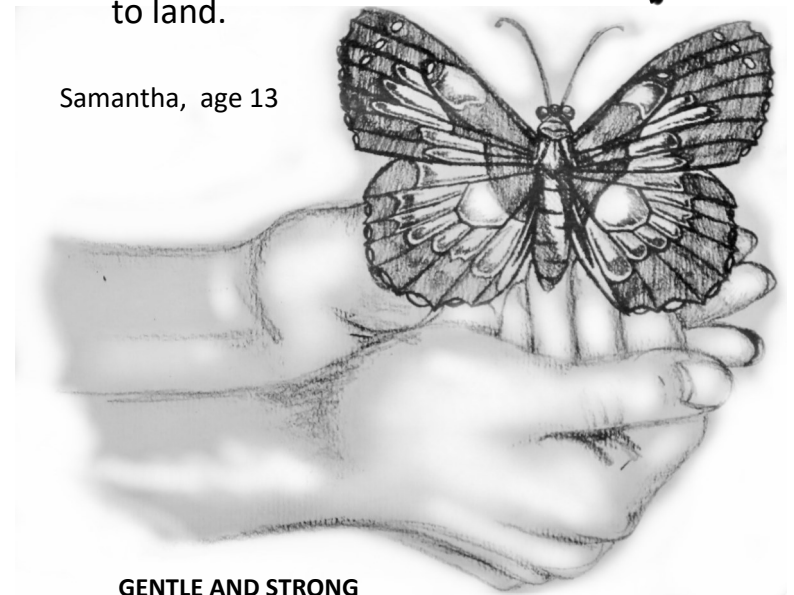
I hope I never do.

Dustin, age 15

TAKE ANOTHER *step*

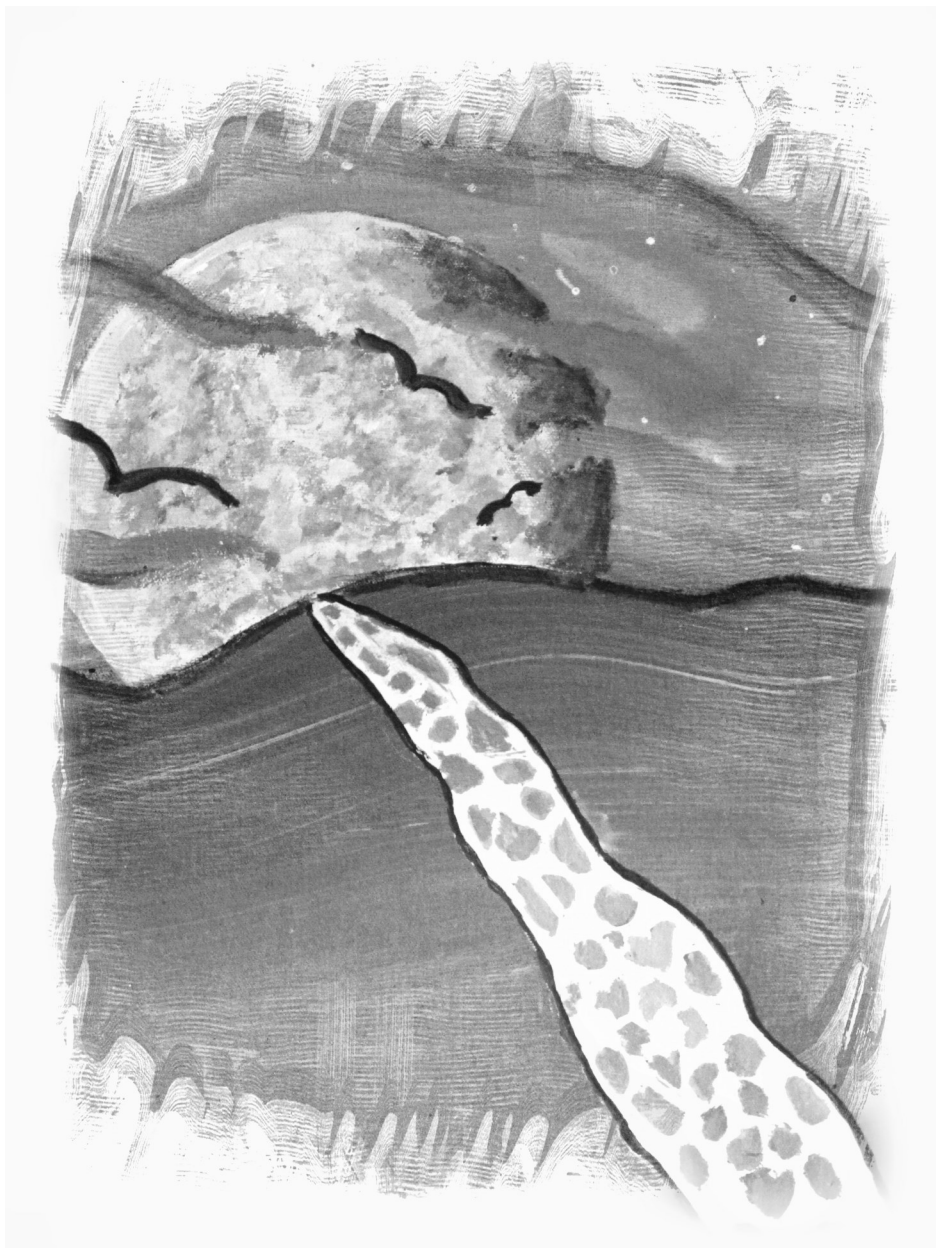
My heart is
a beautiful butterfly
trying to find
the right place
to land.

Samantha, age 13



GENTLE AND STRONG

Juan, age 16



THE LONG ROAD TO HEALING
Kayla, age 15

FIVE SENSES

I smelled his breath.
I felt the beatings on my body.
I tasted the saltiness of my own tears.
I heard my plea, so quiet and weak.
I touched my head and felt the blood.

And I thought,
Is this the way
I have to live?
Nobody believing me.
Nobody listening.
Nobody caring?

I smell fresh air.
I feel safe.
I have taste for what's right.
I hear pleasant things.
I touch the hearts of people
Who have helped me get here.

**MY GOD GAVE ME WINGS,
AND I'M USING THEM TO FLY!**

Mariah, age 15

HOLDING ON

Holding on to everything
you gave me, Mama . . .
teddy bears, pictures,
and the love in my heart.

*Why should I be
the one holding on
when you let go?*

Bre'Ann, age 13

PLEASE HELP US

Facing my mom after all she's done is hard . . .
I don't know if I can.

Finding my mom is hard . . .
Behind the drugs, behind the pain, behind bars . . .
I don't know if I can.

I wish so hard that she could find her way out . . .
Out of the drugs and anger . . . out of jail . . .
I don't know if she can.

Oh Heavenly Father, please help us,
I know **YOU** can.

Amanda, age 13

I ALWAYS THOUGHT

I always thought that I was weird
because I had no family.

I always thought that I was unloved
because no one said they loved me.

I always thought they would be back
but I realized they really left me.

I always thought I would be on my own
but then I found those just like me.

I always thought I was the only one
but it turned out there's millions
who are just like me.

No family or a place to go . . .

All we had were the foster homes.

The shelters and placements . . .

Never staying at one that long.

But soon enough

They became my home.

I always thought I would go nowhere

But I worked hard to get along.

I always thought no one like me could make it
but I've realized

I always thought wrong.

Amberlynn, age 15



YOU ARE STRONG!

AS STRONG
AS THE GROUND
THAT HOLDS OUR FEET . . .

AS STRONG
AS THE WORDS
THAT THE FATHER HIMSELF
HAS GIVEN US TO SPEAK.

For those of us who,
blinded by pain, can't see what
God sees

Zenia, age 13

STRONG INSIDE

Kayla, age 15

TAKE ANOTHER STEP

I let myself love you – that was the easy part . . .

but had I never let myself go
to those horrifying places you had been
You were alone there.

So tonight I am packing a bag
with all the courage I can beg
and I am going back there with you.

I see the day you took **your first step**.

You are so excited!

You put your tiny palms on the cold dirty floor and pushed . . . really hard!

Then you reached for someone to help you pull yourself up . . .

but there was no one there.

Still you found a way to stand, like you always do.

And while you were putting one shaky little foot in front of another
he was knocking your Mama to the floor.

You would be next.

She was so afraid of him, she never even thought of you.

But first, before anyone noticed,

you took another step.

And that would be how you would live your life.

You would always put one foot in front of the other
and somehow **take another step.**

When you'd loved and lost enough times to keep anyone down
when life's storms were blinding
when you were so far down you couldn't even see where you were going
when others tried to steal your spirit and your strength
you would still get up . . . again. And again, And then again.
And **take another step.**

I know someday when I don't know how I can possibly **take another step**,

I will find you—tucked somewhere deep inside my heart

In a place that is yours alone . . .

and you will remind me how to lace up my boots . . . and carry on.

Mama Carol



STRUGGLE

You slowly walked down the hallway
to my bedroom door . . .
I am hidden under the covers.

I hear my door squeak open.
My heart is racing.
You pull off my covers.
Then you pull off my clothes.

I struggle to run
But you are too strong.

Your hands strongly hold mine down. The pain never ends.

After you were done
you got dressed,
looked down
at my broken body
and said,
“if you tell anyone . . .”



Well, guess what -
I did tell
So look who's the STRONG ONE now!!

Skyler, age 16, drawing and poem
after she was abused by her adoptive “father”

YOU ARE THERE

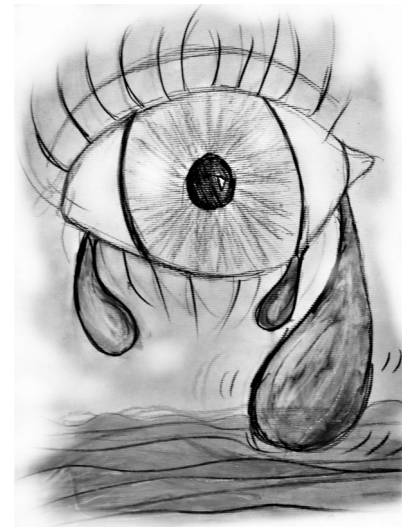
I know that you are not my real father
but through all the hard times and struggles . . .
through all the ups and downs . . .
through the knowing that my family
will never be together again . . .

Through all that and more
you have taken me into your heart
as one of your own . . .
and you have cared for me
when I was feeling alone.

When I'm depressed or sad
you are there.
When I need a friend,
you are there.
When I'm lonely, you are there

And when I wish
for my own father to be here,
it's you who are here to comfort me.

David, age 15 (to the staff at HCYR)



WHAT I SEE

I see life, I see death . . .
I see love, I see hate . . .
I see sadness, I see happiness . . .
I see people.
I see you . . .
But the one thing I cannot see
Is me.

I see darkness, I see light . . .
I see the sun, I see the moon . . .
But even though I try and try . . .
I still can't see
Me.

A RIVER INSIDE
Samantha, age 13

James, age 16

UGLY

Most children fear things like the doctor and the dark.

i was afraid of
my father's Friday night poker games.

Terrified.

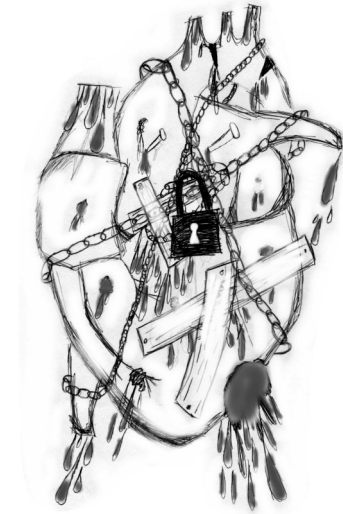
When he would make his little girl
wait in the bathroom
while . . . one by one . . .
his drunk friends
took turns
ravaging
my tiny body.

One Friday night
after all the men were done with
me
and had left or were passed out
on the floor . . .

i looked in the mirror . . .

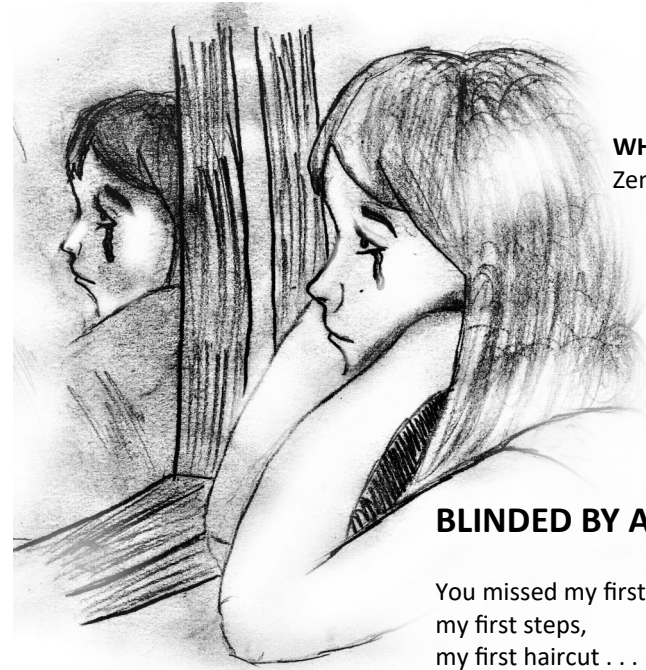
i stared at my little blood smeared face
and i said to her
"Why do they want you - you are so ugly?" . . .

i was five then
and i still feel ugly now.



WHAT I DON'T SAY
Jenna, age 16

Jennifer, age 16



WHERE IS MY DADDY?
Zenia, age 13

BLINDED BY ALCOHOL

You missed my first words,
my first steps,
my first haircut . . .
What else did you miss?

You were drunk the day I got baptized.
You missed my whole childhood.
Some say I've grown into a fine young lady
. . . you're missing that, too.

Through my eyes
if only you could see
what a monster
the alcohol makes you.

The horrible things you used to say,
oh, how they're hurting me;
I began to believe them,
and now I can't see.

You were drunk all my life –
I never got to know the real you.
**BUT IF YOU EVER MEET YOU,
TELL HIM I SAID, "I LOVE YOU, DADDY."**

Mariah, age 15

HURT

You came from behind me
Grabbed me
Hand over my mouth
Touched me
Hurt me
I was 12 . . . 13 . . . 14 . . . 15

I THOUGHT YOU LOVED ME.
You were my uncle
giving me a home
after my mama had died.

All you gave me
were your insecurities.
Jenna, age 16

MOTHER . . . FATHER . . . ME

MOTHER . . . left when I was three months old.
FATHER . . . hit me . . . and used my body for himself.
ME . . . I am learning how to get on with my life . . .
WITHOUT MY PARENTS.

Without parents who care
There are many things you don't learn to do-
things that some people would call simple-
like taking a shower every day,
and keeping yourself neat . . .

There are still times when I get angry
'cause I don't know some things,
and I start to feel different . . . and ashamed . . .
not like others . . . not normal.

But now there are people who care about me –
they tell me
that if I need help
just ask . . .
and they will help me.

Crystal, age 16

BROKEN TOYS

My mom is just a child
Trapped in a child's mind.
And my sister and me . . .
We're the broken toys
She left behind.

Denise, age 13



WHO ARE YOU?

Zenia, age 13

ANGIE

Angie was so tiny . . .
My newborn sister.
I don't know why
She cried and cried that night.
Daddy yelled at Mama
That if she didn't shut her up
Then he would.
Angie kept on crying.
Daddy took her to the bathroom
And put her tiny head
In hot water.

Jennifer, age 16

SCARS

In my home
I got hit
every day
for every little thing
like breathing.
I got hit
with everything you can think of . . .
with whatever she could reach.

I have scars.

I have scars . . .
most of them are in my heart.

Veronica, age 14

HELPLESS

I don't know why
Mama had to hit the baby
She was too little
To do anything wrong.
She was so helpless.

I felt helpless, too
Because
I couldn't help the baby.
Jennifer, age 16

LORD I ASK FOR THESE THINGS

Lord give me protection
for I am scared of life
because it is so big
and you never know
what you will run into.

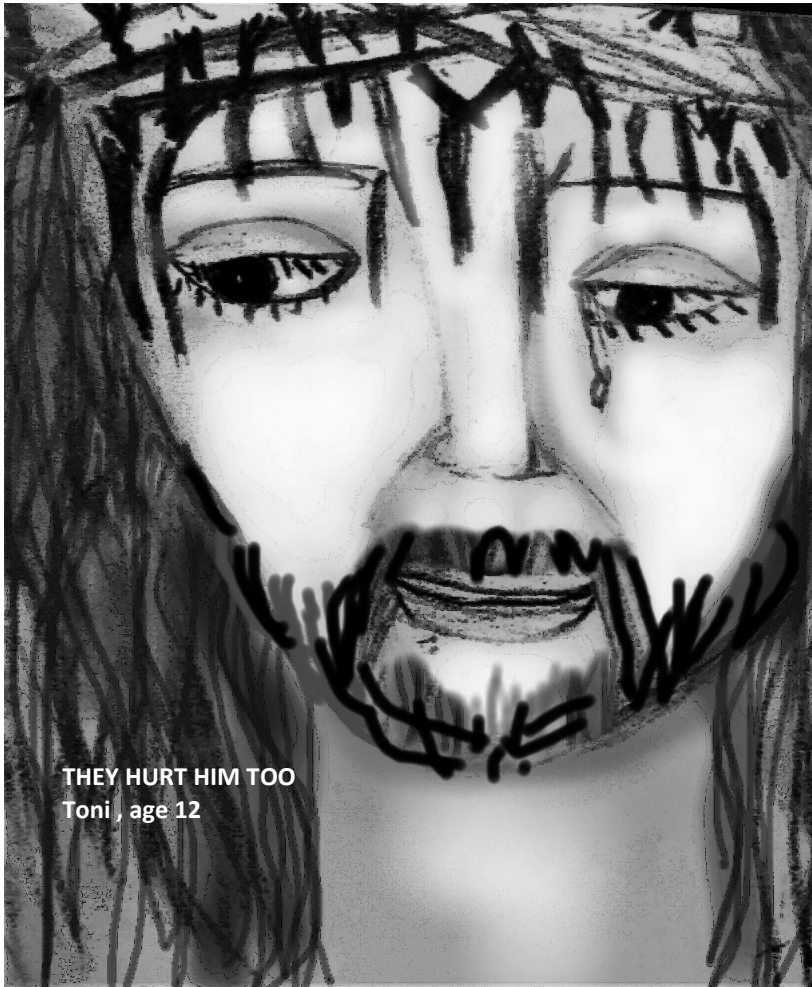
Lord give me a big heart
so I may help and befriend
those who need a shoulder to cry on.

Lord give me sight
so I may see
how I affect those around me
and not be so blind to my actions.

Lord give me forgiveness
so I may stop being a prisoner of my past,
be forgiven,
and move on with life.

Lord give me strength
for some things are hard to deal with
and I need a little help
to pull me through.

Amberlynn, age 15



THEY HURT HIM TOO
Toni, age 12

HE FEELS IT TOO

THE FEAR. THE PAIN.
We all feel like it hurts us more
than anyone else.

But is this the truth?
Could there be someone
who feels what we feel?
Someone who hurts when we hurt?

THE FEAR. THE PAIN.
Jesus hurts when we do.

Linda, age 13

FATHER

Daddy doesn't love me, this he has already said.
He subjected me to abuse even though I was only five.
I have countless memories – wishing I wasn't even alive.

At first it was only Father, then his friends joined in . . .
pushing, punching, thrusting,
taking all of my pride within.

My virginity was no longer mine.

And the price they paid was money.

My face was bruised and bloody
and he thought it was funny.

Sarah, age 15

NOT THERE

I play . . . you're not there
I learn . . . you're not there
I pray . . . you're not there
I sing . . . you're not there
I laugh . . . you're not there
I cry . . . you're not there

I struggle . . .
YOU'RE NOT HERE.

I do all the things a mom should see her child do

But you are not there.

Skyler, age 16





FACES
Jeanie, age 16

MY MOM GONE TO HEAVEN

When I was feeling down
she was never around.

Sometimes I cry about the past –
my dream that didn't last.

She died in jail of some disease like cancer.

I wish I had been there –
I would have said a prayer . . .
asking God to *please*
help my mother.

I remember her lucky number-
it was seven.
But now she is gone to heaven.

Ricquel, age 13



**A TEAR FOR WHAT
SHOULD HAVE BEEN**
Ellena, age 14



HOLDING ON EVEN WHEN IT HURTS
Jenna, age 16

WHO AM I?

I can't fall asleep
I have nightmares
I lie back in my bed
and fall back into another bad dream . . .

Do I care about what happens to me?
"No". But should I?
I just don't know.

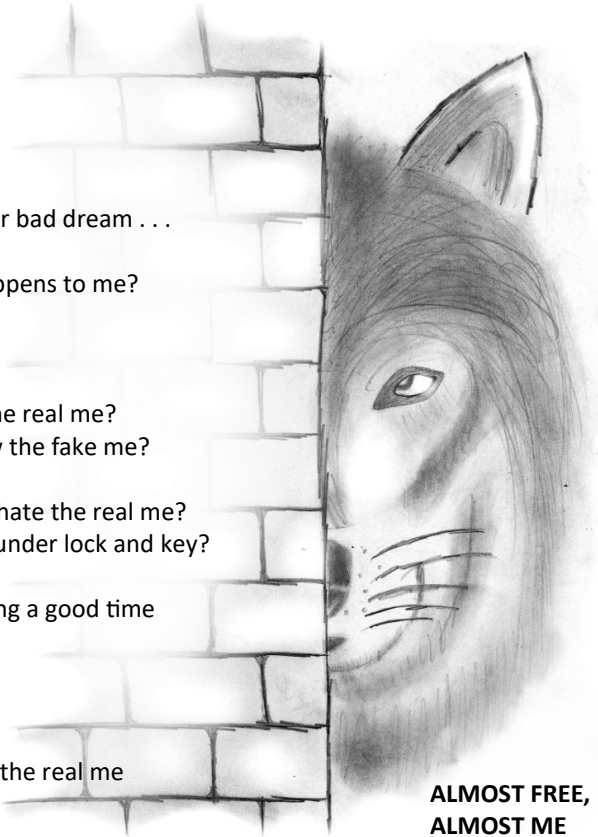
Do people really know the real me?
Or do they actually know the fake me?

Should I let people in to hate the real me?
Or should I hide my self under lock and key?

Should I act like I'm having a good time
or just be me
who is depressed
and is dying inside?

Should I show the world the real me
or the fake me?

Kayla, age 16



**ALMOST FREE,
ALMOST ME**
Ellena, age 14

TWO FACES

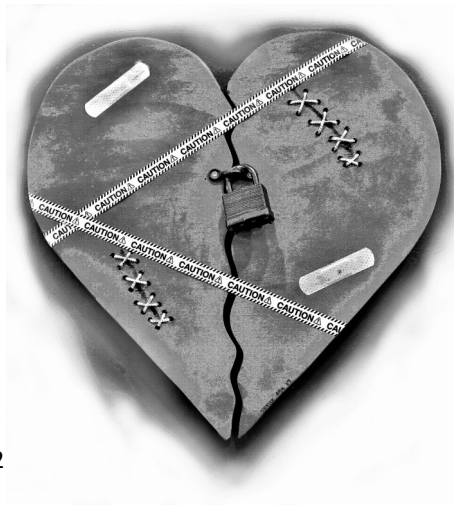
It just seemed like a regular day . . .
except that I was feeling really sad and lonely . . .
and I thought
A hug from Mama would take it all away . . .
make everything ok.

I went to look for her
and there she was
with a needle in her arm
and a look on her face
that didn't even look like my mama -
the mother I thought I knew . . .
the one who loved me.

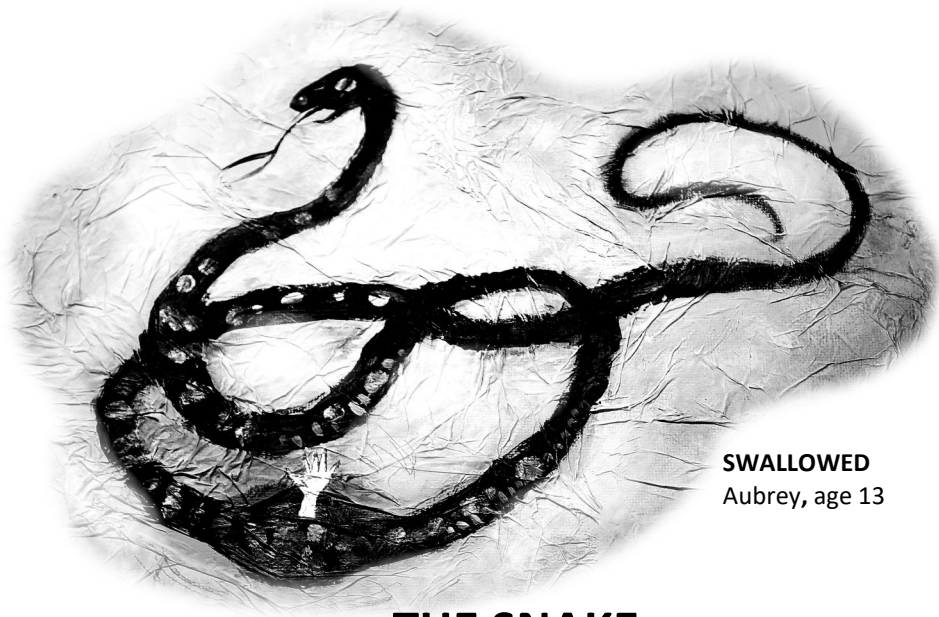
This was not the face
of the mother
who read me stories
and told me to wear my coat when it was cold
and to eat my vegetables so I could grow up and be strong.
No, this was not *her* face .

I GUESS SHE HAD TWO FACES. Michael, age 12

*It seems everybody has many faces
Everybody has a dark side.
Even me.
So I must always remember
Self control
Because I never want it to be
That someday my little boy would look at me
And wonder why
He can't see
His Daddy.
Michael, age 12*



LOCKED UP PATCHED UP HEART
Skyler, age 16



SWALLOWED
Aubrey, age 13

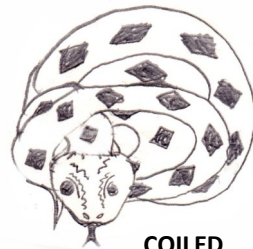
THE SNAKE



Heroin
is a snake.
It will bite you
and hurt you
and hurt the ones that love you
and take away all the things you love.

The snake will poison your body and mind,
then it will kill you and not even care.

My mother found the snake
when she was twelve.
Thinking it was friendly
she took it home with her.
She kept it and cared for it
for twenty years
then the snake killed her.



COILED
Erica, age 16

Michael, age 11

ACTOR

I am an actor.
I use a mask
but I don't participate in festivals . . .
I am a pretender
but I'm not a child anymore.

I act.

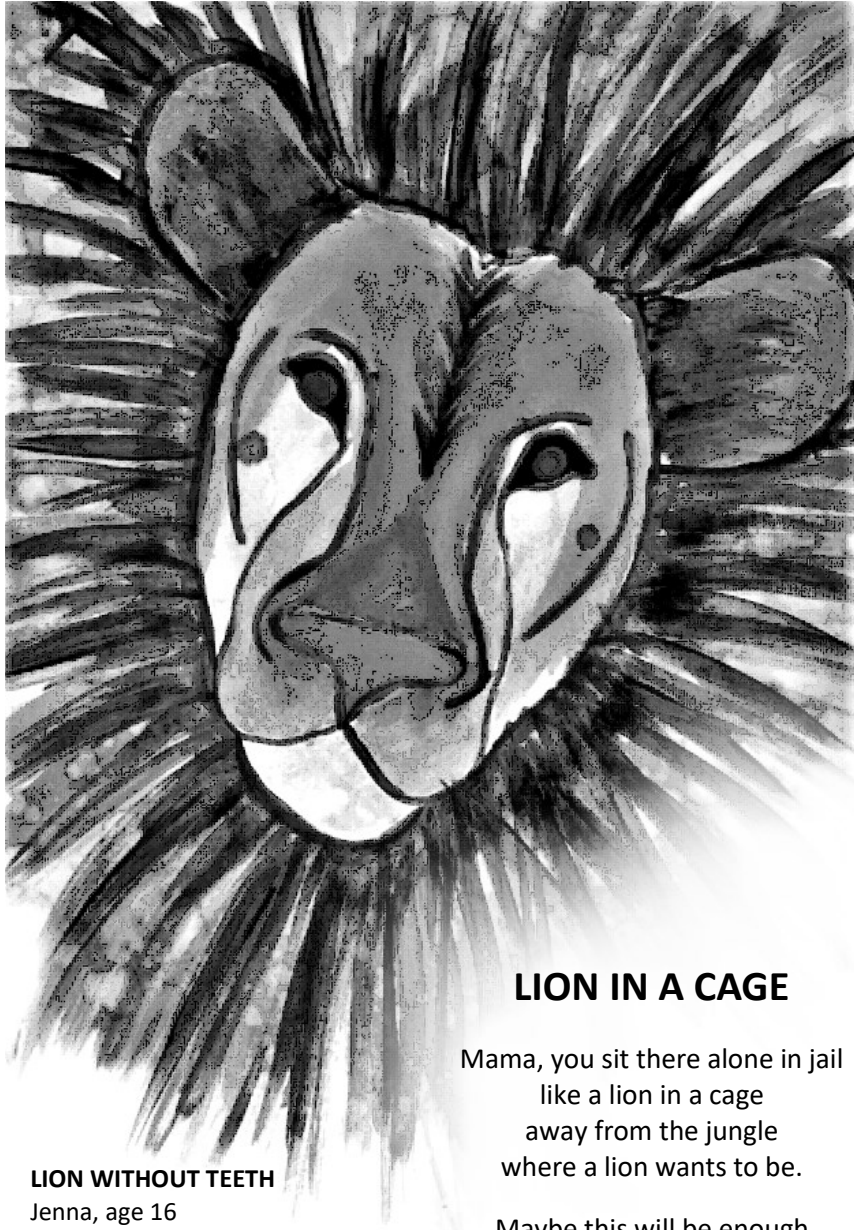
I act like there's nothing wrong.
I use comedy to escape my pain.
I use a mask to hide my sorrow.
And I pretend my past was normal . . .

But I still have no idea
who I am.

Nicholas, age 16



WHO AM I?
Skyler, age 16



LION IN A CAGE

Mama, you sit there alone in jail
like a lion in a cage
away from the jungle
where a lion wants to be.

Maybe this will be enough
to make you see
what losing you
felt like to me.

Kennard, age 10

LION WITHOUT TEETH

Jenna, age 16

MR. DEES

YOU MIGHT NOT REMEMBER ME
BUT I SURE REMEMBER YOU
YOU TAKE OVER EVERY THOUGHT I HAVE
AND EVERY DREAM WHEN I SLEEP
IT'S LIKE THIS – *YOU RAPED A LITTLE GIRL . . .*
A GIRL WHO HAD NEVER IN A MILLION YEARS
DONE ANYTHING TO DESERVE SUCH TORMENT.
I WAS JUST A LITTLE GIRL . . . I DIDN'T DESERVE IT. I DIDN'T.
YOU HURT ME SO MANY WAYS YOU WILL NEVER KNOW.
YOU WILL NEVER FEEL THE FEAR THAT TORMENTS ME
EVERY TIME I TURN OUT THE LIGHTS.

YOU'LL NEVER KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LOOK AT THE FACE OF JESUS
AND NEVER SEE IT.

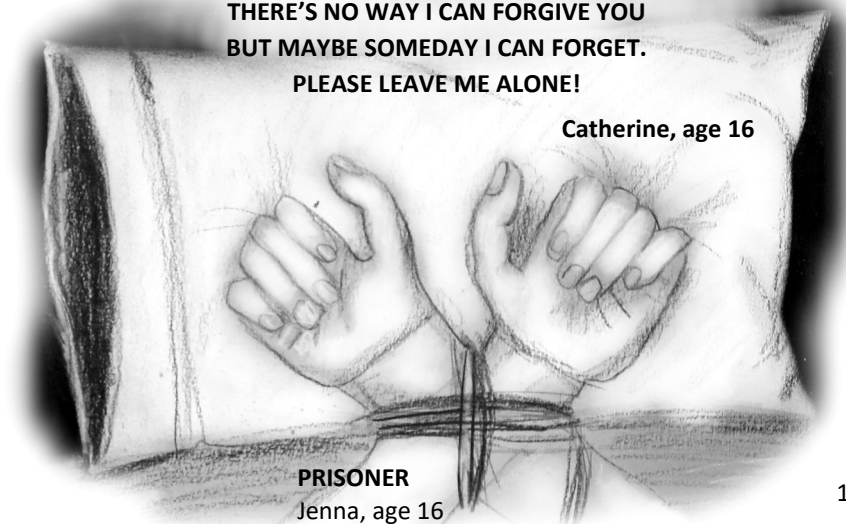
WHEN I LOOK, *ALL I SEE IS YOU,*
YOU WILL NOT LEAVE ME ALONE.
DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU DID?
YOU PRACTICALLY DESTROYED MY LIFE.

IF THERE WASN'T A GOD
I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T HAVE LIVED THROUGH WHAT YOU DID TO ME.
SOMETIMES I CAN'T SLEEP . . . I CAN'T EAT.
I JUST HOPE I MAKE IT THROUGH *ONE HOUR* WITHOUT THINKING OF
THE AWFUL THINGS YOU DID TO ME.

I DON'T EVEN WANT YOUR APOLOGIES
I JUST WANT YOU TO LEAVE ME ALONE!
JUST GO AWAY!

THERE'S NO WAY I CAN FORGIVE YOU
BUT MAYBE SOMEDAY I CAN FORGET.
PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE!

Catherine, age 16



PRISONER

Jenna, age 16



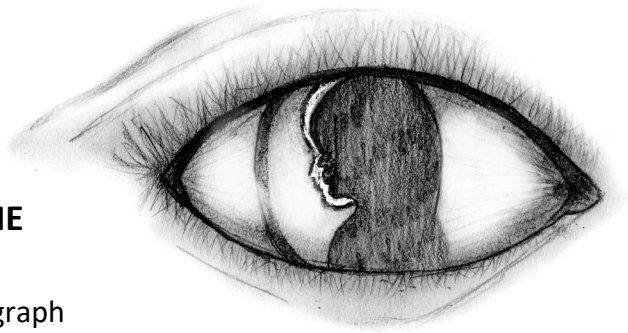
YOU BROKE ME

YOU LOVED ME
HATED ME
HURT ME
BROKE ME
THEN FORGOT ME

Jenna, age 16

THE FORGOTTEN GIRL

Zenia, age 14



YOU LEFT ME

You left me
A bent photograph
And something heavier than lead
To carry forever
In my head
When you left me
Wondering
Why you
Would rather be dead
Than be
My mother.

Michael, age 10

WISHES

Wishing you would be there for me
wishing you would love me
wishing to please you
in every way I can
wishing to grow wings
to fly away from all the beatings.

Bre'Ann, age 13

THE YEARS WITHOUT YOU

(a message to Mama)

The years without you,
the abuse went on and on.
The years without you,
I was half gone.

Lost in *his* world
of drugs and alcohol.
I should not have been there.
Not at all.

Once I even took my life in my own hands
because of my dad.
He always beat me.
He made me feel so bad.

I prayed to God to *please give me wings*;
I wanted to fly.
But since I never got them
the only way out was to die.

Well, I'm still here.
The hurt is almost gone.

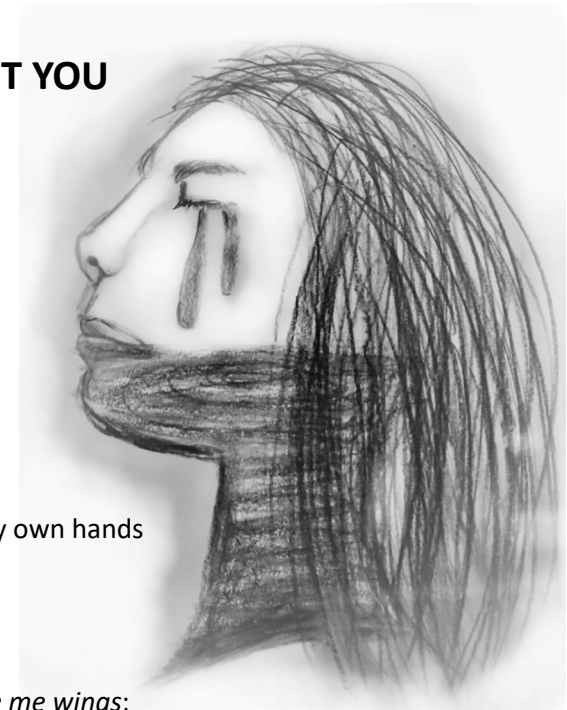
I'm feeling better now
I see that life goes on.

Mariah, age 15

THE TRUTH

I thought my mother would always
be there for me.
I loved her so much that I couldn't see . . . THE TRUTH.
The truth was that she didn't want me . . .
that she never loved me.
She just let me . . . be.

Chris, age 17



DROWNING

Jenna, age 16

HERE AT HCYR

As the light breaks
Through the darkness,
As we see God's glory shine
Through the leaves and the branches,
We feel His love
Coming down upon us.

David, age 15

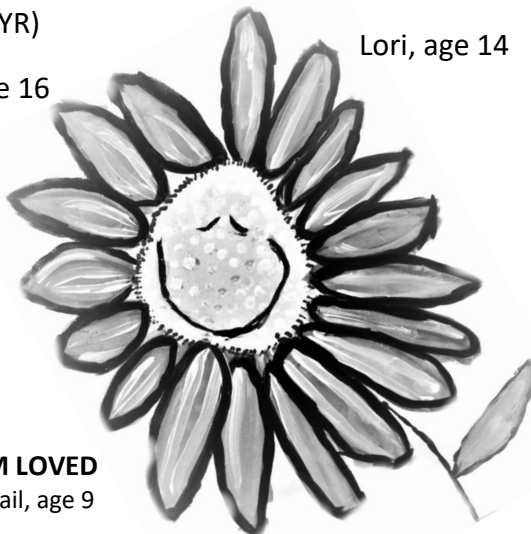
I REMEMBER

I remember the drugs
I remember the neglect
I remember the bruises
I remember the abuse
I remember the screaming
I remember the hate

Then I remember
the day I was safe.

(Dedicated to HCYR)

Skyler, age 16



I AM LOVED
Abigail, age 9

BACK TO COLOR

The whole world was black
when my dad killed my mom.
I felt like I
was coming to an end, too.
No one to live for.

Then one day my Self
came back
into the world.
And so did the colors.

Lori, age 14

A BIRD

I want to be a bird
cause birds can fly way up in the sky
where they don't have to worry.

They don't have to worry 'bout nuthin'
and if they have babies
they just
take care of them.

A bird would never ever
give her baby away
Like my mama did.

I wonder if
I could fly
high enough
to see
God . . .

Veronica, age 14



NIGHT FLYER
Nate, age 16

YOU SAID YOU LEFT BECAUSE

You said you left because of the way I acted.
You said you left because I disrespected my stepdad.
You were right, Mom, I didn't respect him.
He treated me like a piece of trash lying on the ground.
Every night, he sexually, verbally, and physically abused me.
Every night.

You said you left because I lied about my step dad.
What I told you was true.
You blamed it all on me.

Jamie, age 12

STANDING BESIDE HIS BROTHER

The last time Michael stood beside his brother
was just before Javier was lowered into the waiting earth.

Through years that no one could ever describe,
the brothers had stood together.

Together through childhood beatings. Hunger. Fear.
Alcoholism, anger, and abuse swallowed the family of their birth.

Together they came to us – little boys learning how to love
when love had not been offered them.

They grew into fine men, standing up for their country.
Javier an Army man, Michael a Marine.

When we got news of Javier's Death,
we were told he died saving others.

A medic, with healing hands and a huge heart,
standing up for his brothers – giving a love some had never seen.

Horse's hooves in a heartbeat rhythm pulled the wagon
that held the remains of a hero with a brother dressed in deep blue
whose heart will always remember what makes a soldier –
it's the same thing that makes a brother.

Drawing and poem by Mama Carol Priour

HCYR Fine Arts director



Michael and Javier came to the Ranch as young boys, after years of horrific abuse and neglect at the hands of their parents. Javier's arms were dotted with cigarette burns. Michael was sullen and distant. Over time, and with lots of patience from our loving staff, the boys settled into their new home and began to give and accept love. They had to learn how to laugh and play and 'just be kids'.

Both boys joined the military after they graduated from high school.

At age 24, Javier, an army medic, was killed by a rocket-propelled grenade in Baghdad, Iraq. Javier was given a hero's burial with a horse drawn carriage. His Youth Ranch family attended the service, and received his folded flag and honor medals which are displayed at the Ranch. Michael, wearing his United States Marine dress uniform, stands quietly beside the coffin of his older brother to offer his last respects.

