

## 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**  
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E-mail: [info@youth-ranch.org](mailto: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](mailto:bsinfo@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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

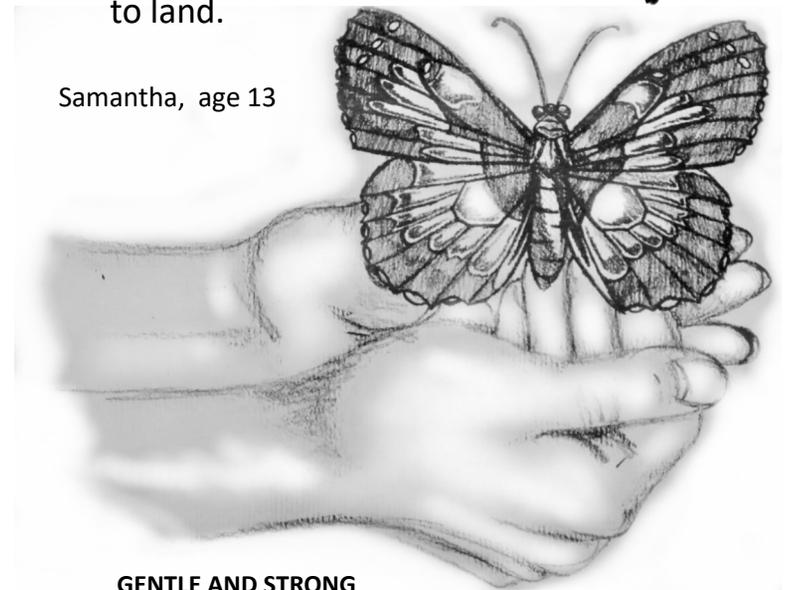
I hope I never do.

Dustin, age 15

TAKE ANOTHER *step*

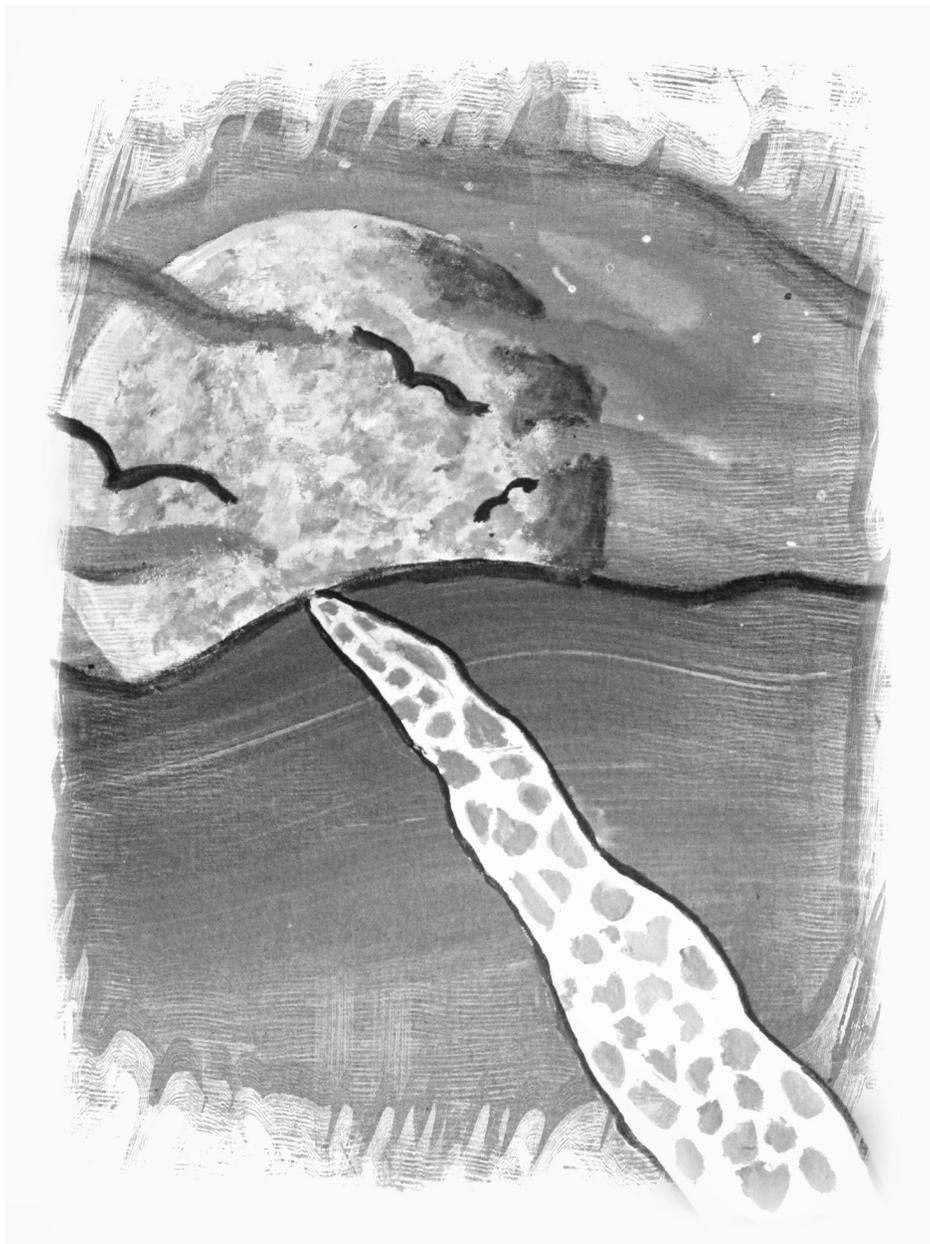
My heart is  
a beautiful butterfly  
trying to find  
the right place  
to land.

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

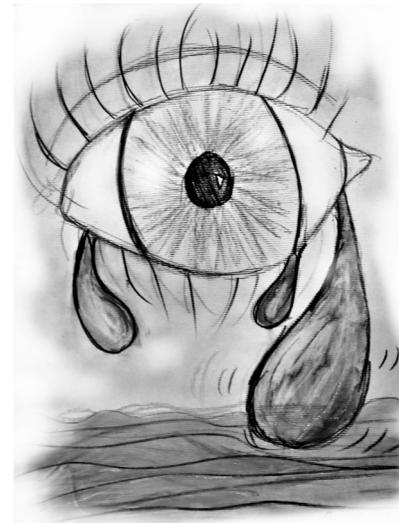
I know that you are not my real father  
but through all the hard times and struggles . . .  
through all the ups and downs . . .  
through the knowing that my family  
will never be together again . . .

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.

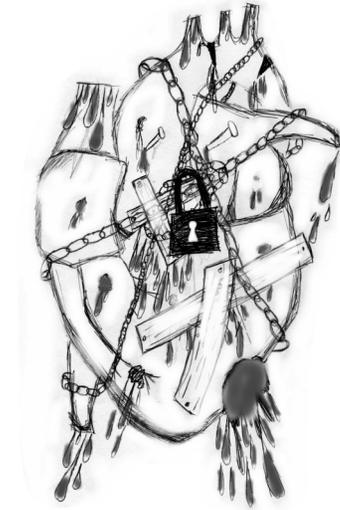
When he would make his little girl  
wait in the bathroom  
while . . . one by one . . .  
his drunk friends  
took turns  
ravaging  
my tiny body.

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 . . .

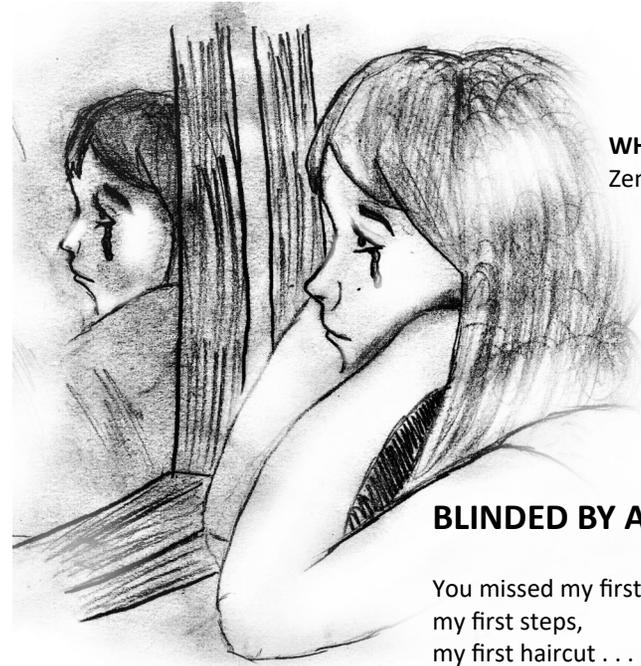
i stared at my little blood smeared face  
and i said to her  
"Why do they want you - you are so ugly?" . . .

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.

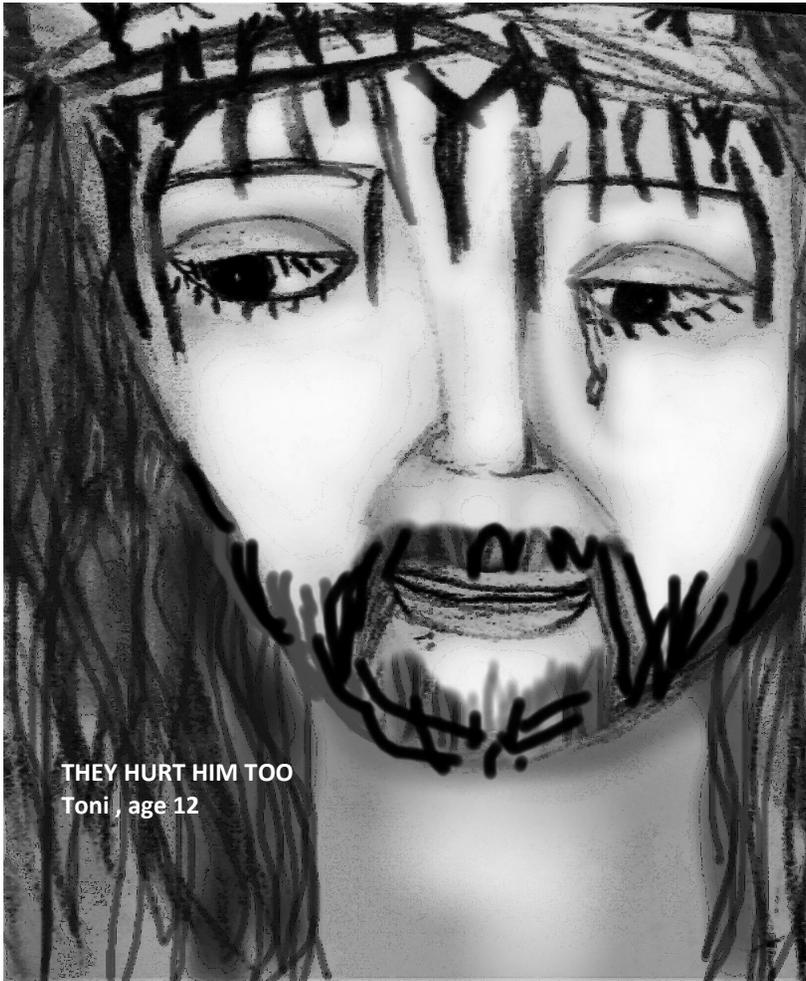
Lord give me a big heart  
so I may help and befriend  
those who need a shoulder to cry on.

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

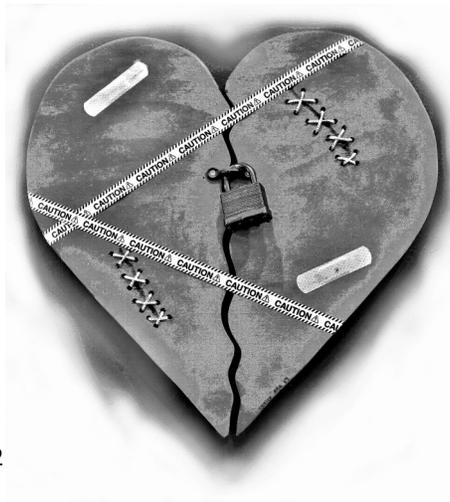
It just seemed like a regular day . . .  
except that I was feeling really sad and lonely . . .  
and I thought  
A hug from Mama would take it all away . . .  
make everything ok.

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.

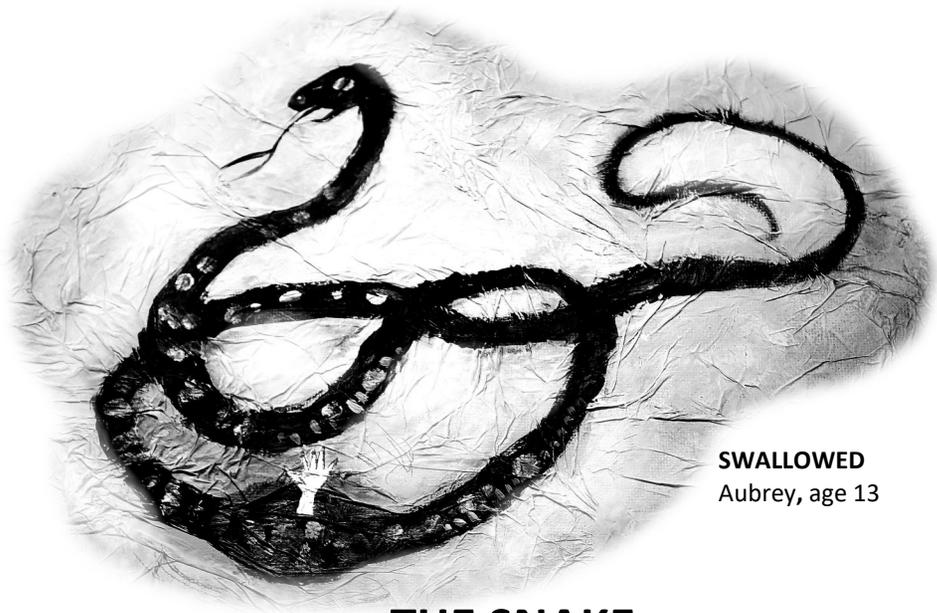
This was not the face  
of the mother  
who read me stories  
and told me to wear my coat when it was cold  
and to eat my vegetables so I could grow up and be strong.  
No, this was not *her* face .

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

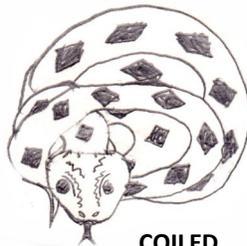
## THE SNAKE



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.

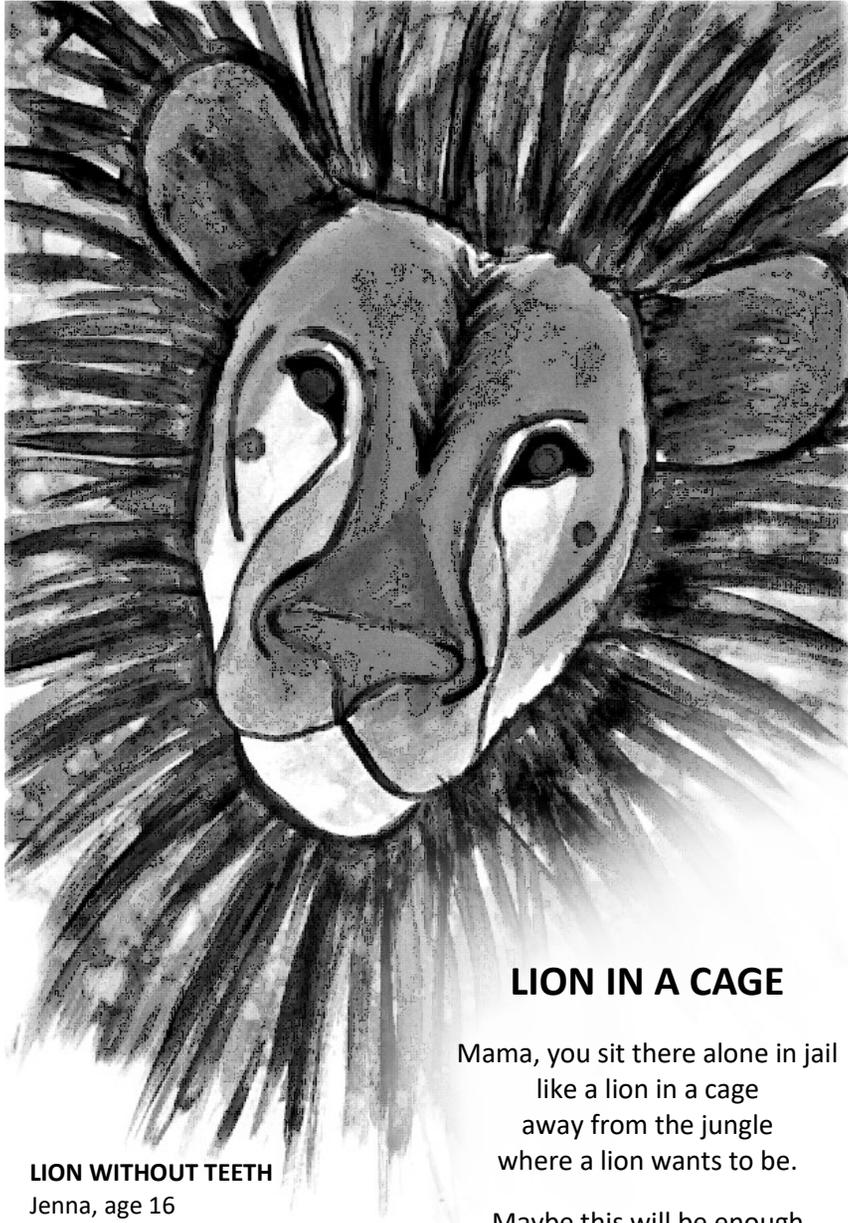
I act like there's nothing wrong.  
I use comedy to escape my pain.  
I use a mask to hide my sorrow.  
And I pretend my past was normal . . .

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.

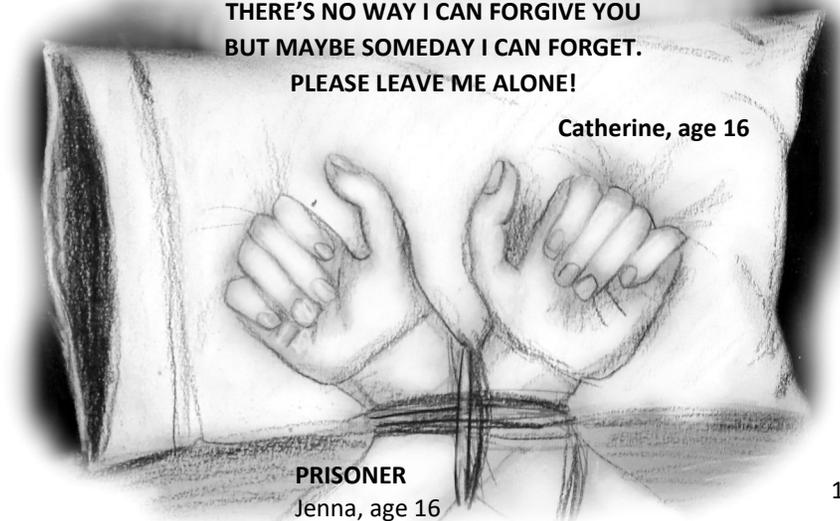
WHEN I LOOK, *ALL I SEE IS YOU,*  
YOU WILL NOT LEAVE ME ALONE.  
*DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU DID?*  
YOU PRACTICALLY DESTROYED MY LIFE.

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



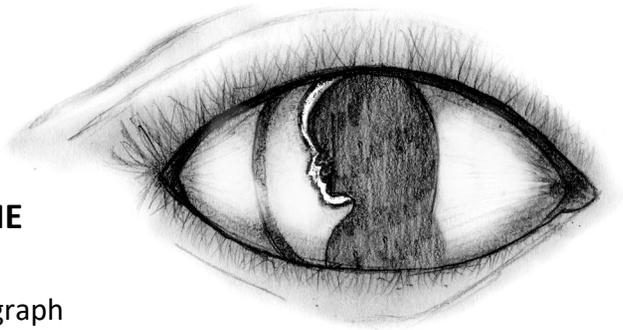
## YOU BROKE ME

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.

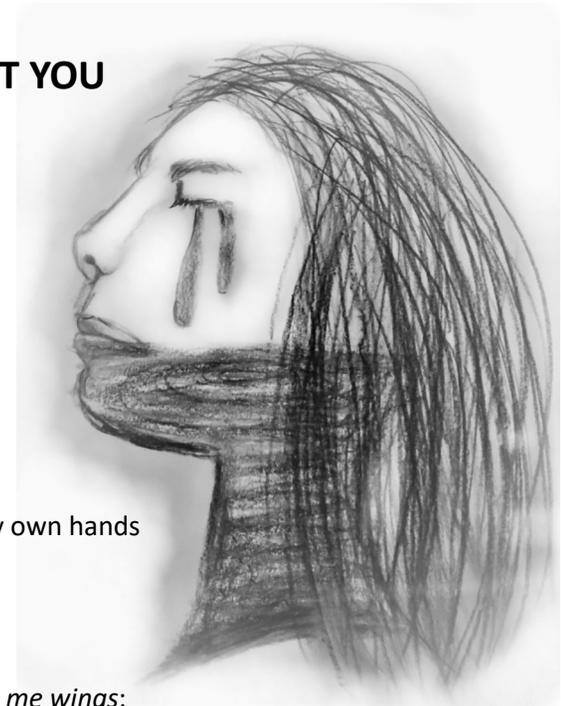
I'm feeling better now  
I see that life goes on.

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

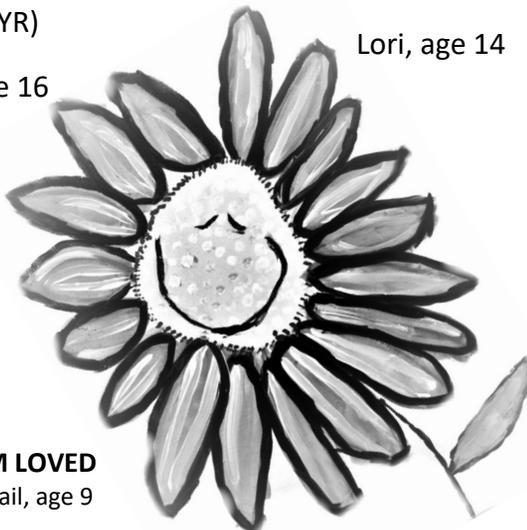
## I REMEMBER

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.

