

Notes From 4 North Monroe County Jail

When You Fail Part of Me Dies

BY
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CAST

Twelve Student / Inmates

BEATS

Created by Tech Productions and Mansion Studios, Arrangement by Breon Walker

SETTING

The play takes place on an adolescent unit in Monroe County Jail.

Twelve students / inmates are seated, six on one side of the stage facing the audience, six on the other side of the stage facing the audience.

The Cast

Stop, look, and listen to what this play, to what our notes are about. I am much more than a young man locked up. I want my future to be filled with love and prosperity. I am tired of being handcuffed. I am tired of my life stopping in the blink of an eye.

Do you want to reverse the cycle of lost dreams, broken hearts, broken homes, and fallen victims?

Who do you think is paying attention to the number of youth incarcerated as adults? Who do you think cares? I grow older and the world gets colder. I am weighed down by the pain of being in here.

The only truth of our youth is we grew up with consequences.

What does the world hold for me?

I am setting the scene. I am living in pain with cells all around me. I am a statistic, sixteen and in jail.

These are our notes to the world.

The first student / inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

First Student / Inmate

Inside it feels like my life is a small rock that just sits here. It's hard.

Time is all I have.

I am tired of saying I wish I did this instead of that.

Track 2 (Let beat drop before speaking)

I'm tired.

I'm tired of being here. I'm tired of not eating enough food. I'm tired of wearing orange jumpers instead of regular clothes. I am tired of wishing I were at home. I am tired saying I love you and I miss you instead of saying I love you and see you tomorrow.

It's like I'm carrying a lot of weight.
I get really tired wondering what the judge will say.

He steps forward still in the center of the stage facing the audience.

Look me in the eyes!

Look me in my eyes and tell me whom you see!
Do you see someone who can be free and make it
or do you see someone who can't survive and needs to be on the street?
Look me in the eyes and tell me whom you see!
Do you see someone who's stingy and shows no sympathy?

When I look in the mirror and look at myself
I see someone who didn't have to make the choices he made.
Can you judge me?
Look me in the eyes and show me I am someone
by not judging me.

This note goes out to whom it may concern.
I see me in each one of your eyes.
When you fail part of me dies!

Don't treat me like a tool.
Show me I'm valuable.
School me by showing me.

Beat Fades

Student / Inmate goes to a side and sits. Second Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Second Student / Inmate

I've looked death in the eye so many times
that deep in my soul I know I am running out of lifelines
with no place to go.
My father doesn't know and my mother doesn't care.
Does it matter to anyone if I am in here or if I'm where?
What am I supposed to do?
It's a cold world.
I have it tattooed on me just to remind me every day.
I am a RCSD drop out.
What can I say,
just like the statistics state, I ended up in MCJ.

These are notes we wrote to you, notes from us here on 3North and 4North at MCJ, to you, to our families, to our schools, and to our city.

Why?
We have things we want to say,
things that no one ever asked us about.
If you want to know who I am,
listen.

I am looking for attention.
I am looking for love.

When I first came in,
I didn't know what to expect.
I felt like I was in a movie.
This is my first time ever being sent to jail.
I started looking for fights because of my image of jail.
Really though it's just a whole bunch of people who are just looking to do their time.
Along with this comes fights, extortion, and anger.
I automatically adopted the same qualities.
Now it really feels like a movie because I'm just acting,
my real feelings are paranoia and regret,
and I don't know when or where or how to express them.

Criminal life is easy,
success is a dream.

I'm speaking real.
Watch my soul bleed.

I live in Rochester, New York.
It's a cold, cold city.

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Third Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Third Student / Inmate

Today I have to get
locked into a cell
and every time that door closes I feel
like I'm going through HELL.
I am lost,
lost
in a sea of confusion.

I'm in jail,
goodbye world,
I'm locked in!

To my family
I'm a ghost,
locked away,
left alone,
distant
and forgotten.

I pace in my cell.
I am guilty until proven innocent
that's how the system seems to work to me.

I live in four walls filled with hurt.

Track 6 *(Let beat drop before speaking)*

Locked away,
locked away from the world,
forced to live in a big room
with lots of little rooms attached
called cells,
locked away from freedom,
cooking food in bags,
forced to always look mad
when truth be told
I am really sad,

sad
because freedom is a distant memory,
sad because
I am basically told when I can eat,
sleep, and watch TV.

Beat Fades

My name is not my name anymore.
My name is a number
Deps say when to lock in and when to lock out,
and I have countless hours for slumber,
for waiting,
waiting for days,
for months,
and possibly even years.
My burning face feels no pain
except for these acid tears.

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Fourth Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Fourth Student / Inmate

Me in jail,
my first impression of losing my freedom
is like hearing people say you are not leaving jail
and I knew I would be here for more than a minute.
It made me feel like I would never see my family again.

I see my family's faces every time I sleep,
every time I sit in my cell for three hours.
I think about why did I put them in such a predicament like this.
What can I do to change?
In my cell, like the more I think about my family
the walls start to close in on me.
It seem like the more I think about time it goes a second slower.

R.I.P. Shy

Seeing you, my brother, die on Remington and Boston made me feel like I won't make it to twenty-five. The reason why I write this is because seeing people die that used to be on the corner or go to jail before they hit twenty-five years old makes me feel like I'm going on the same path. It makes me feel like we have no future in Rochester at all.

I am.
I was.

I'm going to be
eighty-six days in jail.
I am just a kid trying to be a man.
Some people gangbang, but they don't really understand.
I am just a young boy.

I look around my cell; all I see is a bed and desk.
I get lost in my dreams because I'm in jail
thinking about my family and why jail reminds me of what Hell must be like.
I pray to God everyday that He will give me that second chance.
I'm trying not to die in jail.
It is 2010, and there are more brothers in jail, more then ever.
It's pain, tears, and an empty soul, that's what's inside of me.
Why? Can I blame all this on the society?

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Fifth Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Fifth Student / Inmate

Me, I was labeled. I was in put in a Special Education class in school and put on a pill for ADHD. The pill was uncontrollable. I woke up early, took the pill and zoned out. With every step I got lost in myself, and I lost myself in the pain. I didn't understand why I didn't feel the same. My expression changed. My face was dull, and I was unable to show my true name. I was looking out at the world through my eyes, but I was unable to act in a manner in which I was comfortable.

I told them I wasn't going to school unless they took me out of Special Education classes.

There were seven of us in that Special Education class. People walked by and pointed in the glass window and said, "Look at the retards." I stopped doing my work, and I left the room. I got into fights, and I got suspended for not doing what I was told. They passed me though whether I did any work or not.

I didn't get an education.

Once you get kicked out of class, it's easy to get influenced. I smoked weed in the basement of the school.

This is the way I grew up. I didn't fit in. I fit in to the negative group. Now I'm here.

Track 6 (2) (Let Beat drop before speaking)

The uncontrollable beating at the break of day,
there is no comfort shut in without speaking.

Is there no ending?

The Judge looked at me with a you had a choice eye
The D.A. looked at me like time for the imperfect paradise.

What a nightmare, wow what a nightmare. I wake in an uncontrollable sweat, breathing hard with hard grasps for air. Nearly a scream, but I'm unable to get my voice out of my throat. I am trying to understand what it is that I just saw and remember every scene. Was I meant to get out of the dream, what am I missing? Was there a reason why I just had this dream or was it something I was thinking about before sleep? Whatever the cause was it scared me and has me thinking about the sane and insane things that are wrong with my life.

Beat Fades

Has the way I lived my life caused these horrible images to appear?

What can surviving do that makes me unable to sleep at night?

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Sixth Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Sixth Student / Inmate

Track 10 (Let beat drop before speaking)

The system,
it doesn't work.
If we know this,
why doesn't anyone do anything about it.
Why does Rochester not do anything about a system that isn't working.
If a car doesn't work,
you fix it.
Aren't Rochester's children worth as much as a Toyota?

People's mentality gets worse and worse.
Adapting to jail make you feel like dirt.
The system,
it really hurts me and other children.

The system,
I don't want to be here.
I can't show fear,
but at nighttime the tears fall.

In the system
I have felt dead and gone,
sad and miserable because I knew I was all alone.

The system,
it doesn't work,
it doesn't help me.
It doesn't help any children.
It makes things worse.
In the system,
there is no hope.

I have to stay strong inside.
Hopefully I will make it and not cry
and lie on my bed feeling dead inside.

Beat Fades

This note goes out to whom it may concern.
I see me in each one of your eyes.
When the system fails part of me dies!

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Seventh Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Seventh Student / Inmate

Me,
I remember being young and people telling me I would a die at an early age.
I'm still young.
I still can die at an early age.

Track 5 (Let beat drop before speaking)

If you look into my eyes can you see the pain?
Do you see a handsome young man or a grown man who is insane?

What does someone who did not make it in school look like?
Look at me.

What does Rochester's drop-out rate look like?
Look at me.

Can you see it?
Am I joking around?
Am I playing a game?
What is the only way to tell?
Do you feel?
It feels like I'm physically on earth
but mentally on a different planet.

I miss all of the holidays with my family.
I'm having a heart attack with no actual damage.
Do I have to wear glasses to show you I'm legit?
We may wear the same size shoe,

but my shoes don't fit.
It seems like me and freedom don't mix.

I don't have anyone to blame but me.
It hurts my heart like I got shot in the chest without a bulletproof vest.
Who am I to say that I don't deserve to be here?
I could be in a grave

I am a Rochester statistic,
a young Black male sixteen years old.

I'm lost because of what I chose to do.
This is who I am.

Beat Fades

I'm going to end this note with this,
this comes from the core of my heart.
It seems that I don't want to stay out
and that doesn't make sense.

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Eighth Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Eighth Student / Inmate

My life is all regrets. I regret treating everybody in my family like shit because all they tried to do is help me and every time they did I just walked away and did I wanted. I regret coming to jail because I stress my mom out everyday. I regret not listening to my mom because if I did listen I wouldn't be here right now. I regret not staying in school because if I did I wouldn't be in jail looking at three years in prison. I regret not being a better brother, son, and grandson because if I were I wouldn't be in jail stressing them all out.

Track 2 (2) (Let beat drop before speaking)

Every time my mom comes to visit me it looks like she wants to cry, but I see her holding it back. When I was little I used to see my mom getting beaten by her boyfriend.

Last time my mom came for a visit she looked like she had not slept in weeks. She pleaded with me not to make the same mistake again. When she said that I stood quietly for a couple of minutes. It hurt to see her like this. This was the first time I have seen my mom like this.

I started doing drugs and drinking at the age of thirteen because I was always stressed and depressed. Drugs made me feel less anger about everything that was going on in my life.

I know I messed up by not going to groups and smoking, but please know how much I want another chance. Since I have been in jail I have learned that I have problems. I care enough

about me that and I want to change. I've been going to N.A. meetings, school, and groups. I know now that I need help with my anger, my drug problem, and everything else. In jail I learned to care enough about myself to want to change.

Beat Fades

Every night when I lock in I look in the mirror I ask myself if I know who I am?

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Ninth Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Ninth Student / Inmate

Track 5 (Let beat drop before speaking)

Me, I did everything to impress other people instead of living my own life. I didn't want to disappoint my mans. I didn't think about my moms sitting at home thinking her baby boy was in school. We don't think what mothers think. I didn't think if I got killed or hurt that it all applied to my mother. Just like how I didn't want to disappoint my friends, but what about my moms and my baby brother? The people who love and care for me with all unconditional love, they are the ones I should be impressing. Sitting on the block, hanging, and waiting to be killed, hurt, or incarcerated just causes pain for me and for my family. Now I'm incarcerated for my irresponsibility and my mistakes. I'm sitting in my own self-pity. Now I realize I'm not doing the time solo, my mistakes, shame, and pity are on my mother's shoulders too. I see the disappointment held in my brother's eyes every visit. I see my mother's disappointment.

I'm lost in life and I'm only sixteen.
Money and drugs kill families.
I sit in my cell day after day with my head hanging down.

Please listen to me.
I'm sorry.
I'm sorry.
Look me in my eyes
Can you see the pain.

Beat Fades

If I had game then why am I sitting in these oranges?

If I had game why am I incarcerated and why is pain all I feel?

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Tenth Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Tenth Student / Inmate

My note, my life,
squad car with handcuffs,
removed once inside,
booking,
fingerprints, information,
TB shots.

Drunks in here.
It stinks.
They talk to themselves.
Very noisy.
Hard to sleep.
Things settle down at night.

Three days and no shower.

Reception.

3North for five days.
Does everybody have some form of craziness?

4North now.

Track 1 (Let beat drop before speaking)

Thirteen in jail at Westfall
for four months.

Buffalo, Hopeville
eighteen months.

Williamson,

St. Joseph's Villa
seven months.

Westfall.
two months.

Pyramid in the Bronx,
two weeks.

Industry,
one and a half years.

Monroe County Jail,
two years.

My dad died when he was twenty-one.
He came home with food when I was five years old.

Two brothers,
one twenty-one and one nineteen.

Two sisters
one twenty-five and one twenty-two.

I remember my dad finding a rat in the basement.
I remember playing in the yard.
I remember a playground in the yard
and Charlotte Beach and
Seabreeze with a season pass from a friend.

I saw my mom go to jail, and she got bailed out.

Beat Fades

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Eleventh Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Eleventh Student / Inmate

We want to be heard.
We want people to know our thoughts.
We want people to know our pain
We want people to see the way we had to live.

We want to be heard by
our families,
the school system,
judges.

Hear us please.

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Twelfth Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Twelfth Student / Inmate

Track 7 (Let beat drop before speaking)

Inside these walls, there is
a smell of fear, the sight of tears,
a place where you are alone.

Inside these walls, you feel your flesh burn.

You are hungry and you hear your stomach turn.
You ask yourself did you learn.
You are stuck inside these walls.

Stuck in jail where identities are numbers,
a place so far, so distant from the thunder,
a place of all metal.

Cages, and cages, and cages,
a place filled with rages.
Jail,
a place unfit for animals, a place where you are unknown,
fights, and extortion, inmates on each other bones,
a place so far from home,
trapped and locked down,
a no fly zone.

I'm in a hole that only gets bigger. Each day things get worse, the lockouts seem shorter. Am I insane? No I'm not. What will I do? I have no idea. I couldn't sleep this morning. I don't know why. When do I get out? When will I fly?

Jail is a place of murder.
When you do time, you die more and more.
Something inside you no matter how big or small dies.
What dies inside you?
Hope dies out.

Beat Fades

I have learned some things during this period. Never look frail and stay alert in jail. People will try to violate you in many ways, so trust no one. My brother wrote me from Attica, and I told him I would not trust anyone. In no time I broke my vow. The stress of being locked in, and I didn't know anyone coming here, so I knew I would get into at least one fight.

Writing is a way to express myself.
When I write I have the freedom to say anything.
To write is to be free.
To me it is a way to vent myself out.
I can always rely on writing to relieve stress,
and I can put my soul into it.

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. First Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

First Student / Inmate

The play is about us, about kids in jail who didn't make it in school, about kids who are poor, about kids who have a lot of pain in their lives. We know our happiness and our safety are never addressed. We know our wrong behavior is. Is this why so many of us in here are the way we are?

Track 9 (*Let beat drop before speaking*)

None of us want to be here.
I don't want to be here. I wish I were home.

Here
it feels like I died.
It feels like
when I cry
it doesn't mean anything
at all,
like all I did was shed a tear.

I have so many dreams,
but being in jail slowly fades them away.
I lose hope every time I go to court.
I watched other people mess up, and I always told myself I'll never be in jail.

This is Rochester, New York.
There is nowhere to go.

Everyone makes mistakes,
and I did too.

Beat Fades

If life was a walk around the corner,
I have passed a hundred blocks.

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Second Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Second Student / Inmate

Track 13 (*Let beat drop before speaking*)

My father was incarcerated.
I always told myself I was never going to be like him.
I guess I should never say never.
I ask myself if I inherited all his bad genes.
Maybe, but I can't say my father is to blame.
I lived my life not my father,
therefore I'm the fault at blame.
After years of the same things you would think I would want to change.
Do I?
Do I?

I still feel hurt,
hurt by the fact that my father wasn't there.

I asked my father why he wasn't there.
He told me he thought he was doing the right thing.
I laughed at him.
He told me that I was disrespectful and how I wouldn't be that way I am if he was there.
IF HE WAS THERE!!!
I told him too bad he wasn't.
I'm 18 now. What can he tell me, nothing.
There's nothing he can tell me.

Beat Fades

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Third Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Third Student / Inmate

At court all I heard was that I was facing three to fifteen.
My first offense, my mind went blank.

I've been shot, stabbed, and robbed.
The money overwhelmed me.
I was addicted to it.
Now I wish I could take it all back
because in these oranges the money means nothing.
My freedom is gone and there nothing I can do.
I'm state property now.

I want to watch my daughter succeed.
I went from watching my dad leave me
to watching my mom having a heart attack
and watching her die in front of my eyes.
I found out my dad was homeless and a drunk.

My baby's mom cried when she found out I went to jail.

Today I woke up feeling down.
I'm tired of this life.
I dream about being home.
The popping of my cell woke me up and brought me back to reality.
I'm just getting more and more tired.
I just don't want to go on any more.

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Sixth Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Sixth Student / Inmate

I'm riding the wave and I don't even know how to surf.

Regret. I regret what I did to my baby's mama. I regret how I put her and my family through so much pain. I regret not listening to my mom. I regret how I put my baby's moms through so much stress. I regret losing my daughter. I regret how I used to be in the streets 24/7. I regret how I made my mom drop so many tears. I regret how my brother and I used to fight like cats and dogs. I regret how I lied to my family. I regret how I used to leave without permission. I regret how I used to do stupid stuff just to get money. I regret how I used to act towards my brother. I regret not spending time with my family. I regret how my mom used to tell me stuff, and I didn't listen. I regret how my baby's moms cried over me. I regret how I used to act towards her. I regret how much pain she has been through. I regret calling people friends when they were really not.

In here people totally forget about you.
In here I live in fear.

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Seventh Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Seventh Student / Inmate

Track 11 *(Let beat drop before speaking)*

Is being locked up disappearing?
I see my face and it fades away.
I can't see anyone and they can't
see me.

Being
locked up is more like being wiped out of life,
more like an upset of things
that care and love you.

I'm not disappearing.
It's more like people who are on
my mind disappear because every
time I go to think about them,

soon after awhile those images
fade away.

We were outside playing.
Shots rang,
cop cars sang.
I can still smell the blood
in the air.
More people gathered around.
His young body lay on the
ground.
I looked at him, his eyes
still out.

That day was the day
I will never forget.
I cry and shed tears every chance I get.

That day.

Today's a world against all odds,
a world of up's and downs to make it in this life.
I'm lonely in my cell at night.
All I can do is write.

Today is the January 20th.
I don't know how many days I been in here,
but all I know is that has been too many days.
I feel like an animal right now
being locked down all day.
This here is not for a person.
Really this isn't for anyone.
I would never wish jail upon anyone.

People told me to slow down, and I keep moving as fast as I could.
I know I could be dead right about now.

So I ended up back here again.

Beat Fades

Who am I?
I am eighteen years old.
I go to Freddie Thomas.

The first time I heard the word jail
was when my mother told me my dad was in jail for life.
This was when I was ten years old.

I'm a young Black man who is trying to make it in this world.
It's hard times out there.

I look in the mirror and see just a black face.
Where are my eyes? Where is my nose, my mouth?

I try to scream and can't hear my self.

Who am I.

What can I do?

Why am I always coming back here?

This writing to me is not just writing.

It is more than words on a paper. It's life.

This is the way we all tell it in black and white.

This writing is our faith in ourselves

reaching out to you.

I wish I could have learned more about life before I started to have to really live it.

I wish. I wish. I wish.

I wish when I was growing up there were more things for me to do

so I wouldn't have been in the streets the way I was.

I think if my dad were around I never would have been doing the bad things in the town.

Student / Inmate goes to the other side and sits. Ninth Student / Inmate walks to the front of the stage facing the audience.

Ninth Student / Inmate

I am locked in this cage

with nowhere to run.

I hide myself

and look at the wall.

There is a vent that air comes through

but all that comes through is the pain

of being locked up.

There is no place to run.

There is no place to hide.

There is no place to run.

There is no place to hide.

My young world is on fire,

days and more days locked up,

more missing the moonbeams and sunrise.

Fire,
before I expire what do I want to do?
I want to make someone proud?
Play with fire and you get burned.
This note goes out to whom it may concern.

Why me?
Why me never free,
why me caught up in the fire?
I'm burned
I have not been sentenced.
I see me in each one of your eyes.
When you fail part of me dies!

Open up and spit me out.
This isn't what life's all about,
captive in the belly of the beast,
shackled and chained,
the devil feasts on my soul.
Thrown into a deep dark hole,
the hole to crossover is much too high.
The hurt doesn't show, but why?
Why does it feel like the truth is one big lie?

I am surrounded
by teardrops from lying down in a deathbed.

This note goes out to whom it may concern.
I see me in each one of your eyes.
When you fail part of me dies!

Eleventh Student / Inmate

Please hear my prayer tonight. I need so much guidance to live my life right. Sometimes the pressure is so hard to bare. I often wonder if anyone cares. How can I wake up and face a new day knowing I must live my life in this crazy way?

Give me strength to resist the wild life. I need help to escape temptation and the fire. Please help my family whose eyes silently plead for me not to do wrong. They pray for me. I love my mother who cries every night worrying I'll be killed in a fight.

Please let me know that someone is listening. What's it all for?

I wonder how I will die, by a bullet or a wound or a knife in my side.

Will someone show me the way?
Will someone show me the light?
I want peace in my heart so I won't ever fight.

This is my prayer.