

A POET IN PRISON  
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Life went on. Until it didn't.

That's when Zach did what he won't talk about; the thing that had Zach moving from one facility to another for over a year. That's when the thing that happened landed him in ill-fitting slippers shuffling along long corridors and behind scores of locked doors with fences holding him twenty-four/seven.

Zach wants to do good things now. He wants to live well and to "do no harm," as he puts it in his Wiccan-inspired life philosophy verbiage.

But that is questionable. Zach himself is not entirely sure he can change. The rage is right under the surface. The eventual explosion is apparent, even to a stranger.

"I really hope it goes well," he says about his remaining time before release, eyes on the tiled floor.

While he questions himself, he is clear about what he wants in his life. He brightens up when he talks of his idyllic future: adopting kids in the system who have struggled like he has, owning a Victorian house, and a Husky or Chihuahua. He loves dogs.

Noticeably absent from Zach's wish list is love — a man. But young Zach suddenly shows his more grown up and wise side.

"Important, but not necessary," he glibly says. We both simultaneously smile widely.

As we rise to say goodbye the dad in me wants to grab Zach and hug him. A part of me wants to break him out of prison and make sure he gets to where he needs to go in life. My heart is heavy leaving him there after he spilled his guts onto the metal desk and into my notepad. I opt for a firm handshake instead, looking Zach in the eye. "Keep writing," I say.

"If I could get through to somebody ... get (my poetry) out there ... it might do some good in the world," Zach says. "That's my whole goal." Zach turns and walks out of the small room. His slippers slide along the floor.

I get into my truck; I can't drive fast enough to get home to hug my kids. §

Jonathan Kipp is the publisher of *Just Out*. He and his partner were foster parents to seven at-risk boys. Today he is a father of two young children.



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