The Vineyard

A Poetry Collection

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The Vineyard
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Several poems have been previously published
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"Warm Tears on Cold Skin" and "Pardon Me"
To The Leaves of Our Family Tree
CONTENTS

Introduction by Delbert Williams IX

The Vineyard

Vintage 2004 3
Wine Bottles 4
Jail House Lawyer 5
Visitation 6

Lost Loves

Shattered Hearts 9
Warm Tears on Cold Skin 10
Lifeless Pit 11
Conditional Love 12
A Blizzard's Beauty 13
Ghostly Figure 14

Eyes like Mirrors

Eyes like mirrors 17
Artificial Lights 18
Senseless Teens 19
Illiteracy 22
Dementia 21
Starving Artist 23
Faded Beauty 25

The Nights' Dreams

Chasing the Nights' Dreams 27
Defying Reason 28
Nature Speaks 29
Asleep Machines 30
Spirits in the Ether 31
Desire Driven 32
Raw Desire 33
Leaves of Our Family Tree
The Old Oak  
Gambia's Heartbeat  
Aissa's Offspring  
Broken Branches

Marooned Soul
Stay Positive  
Marooned Child  
Abandoned House  
Nobody

Friendship
Gift of Friendship  
Cold Heart  
When We're Together

Pardon Me
Pardon Me  
Infidelity  
Peace in Each Others Arms  
Butterfly  
A Breeze's Message  
Apple

Equality
Equality  
Sanford P.D.  
Quality of Life  
Grass  

About the Author

VIII
INTRODUCTION

I began writing these poems in the spring of 2018 during a period of personal growth and spiritual enlightenment. While piecing together this book I combed through my journal searching for poems that touched every part of me. I came up with Vintage 2004 which shows both the pain of being incarcerated and the hope for a better tomorrow.

In 2004 I walked reluctantly through these prison gates, like a man being led to his execution, as a sixteen-year-old kid. Since then my entire concept of love and life has changed and my desire for both burns brighter than ever. When you're given an eternity to be alone the most obvious thing to do is practice introspection.

This collection of poetry takes you through my childhood and the struggles of growing up in poverty with my siblings and single father. It also dives deeply into the isolation and abandonment felt from being incarcerated as a kid and it touches on the pain felt for those who suffer through poverty, inequality, and the failure to see the options to fix their broken lives.

You'll read poems of lost loves and gained friends, of social injustice and ancestral bonds. You'll read poems of total desperation as well as uncanny hope and ambition for success.

This journey will take you through the shanties, the prison system, and the plantations only to leave you on loves tear-strewn, each poem is either autobiographical or biographical.

Prisoners are often compared to cattle. We're huddled from point to point, pen to pen, with guards and mimic dogs constantly barking orders behind us. I refuse to consider us cows or to think of prison as a ranch. We're much more than that, and prison is infinitely more dark, dank, and confines than any ranch. I see prison as a Vineyard and I liken the convicts to bottles of wine being stored in those cellars. Collecting dust, maturing, aging, becoming confined, anxious to share their gifts with the world. This is my first of many gifts to you.
Vintage 2004

Similar to liquors and wines
I was picked from a vine
Distilled and refined
Kept in places,
concealed and confined
I was pressed from grapes
bottled up,
left to age
collecting dust in this cellaresque cage
Packed close to others sharing these tilted shelves
Some turn to vinegar and wish to spill themselves
After twenty years I've seen some of them freed
Some who were cheap, some with prestige
I've seen some lose their minds and go crazy
telling me they'd rather be a wine than a raisin
But HEY,
I too anticipate the day
that I'll be sipped and savored
because when this corks popped for a tasting
I'll have the world intoxicated
Wine Bottles

I remember... Playing tank,
while drinking liquor 'til it's gone.
After dark, we're in the park
20 strong.
It was just another school night off, and
we'd break the rules quite often
straight sauced
passing the bottles to my partners.
Now those bottles are my cage.
And it sure is strange how
a world can change in a day.
because each of my tomorrows
I spend caught inside this bottle
everally facing my reflection at the bottom.
Recited law work
'til my jaw hurt.

Read court transcripts
'til nerve damage
made my hands slip.

LexisNexis and all
pardon my Purdon, WestLaw.

Small print left my vision blurred
while appealing this prison term
there's not much that I didn't learn.

Letters to my congressmen.
Pass the bill, Politicians!!!
Sorrow, I never wallow in.

Too busy to cry.
Too involved to be idle.
I have petitions to write.
Blacks Law is my Bible.

The library?
My Temple!
'til I'm no longer the
Defendant.
Visitation

You see people trapped in cages
and find it fascinating.
Like a Zoo exhibit
you're captivated
by dudes imprisoned
toss us vending machine snacks
taunt our senses
tempt us to attack
then snap your pictures
so you can show your friends
that you went to the Zoo for a visit
picked with the gorillas
and threw food in the exhibit
Shattered Hearts

When hearts shatter
sparks scatter
into dark matter.
Pain makes us tear apart faster.
Our tears depart, cascading
down on dark faces.
You and I,
no longer we,
become strangers.
Warm tears heated his cold cheek, as she peered into his stoic features, emotions reeling as her closed fist clinched the bag he lay in. Repeatedly she beat his chest while praying "Don't leave me!" "What about the promises you made?" "You promised you would stay"

So cold and unresponsive he laid in front of doctors on a steel slab in Presbyterian hospital seven gunshots riddled his lungs and chest. His mother clung to her only son's flesh, wishing he would just wake up from this, awake from this ceaseless dream of death. But he couldn't, this was his journey's end. His mother mourned as her warm tears dripped on his cold skin.

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Lifeless Pit

Hearts race and beat rapidly
until they split apart.
Frowned faces as tears depart
from the depths of a soul.
Lost love has nowhere to go,
Nowhere to Grow
Dead leaves drop from trees
with more life than
a broken heart.
Sweet memories that won't leave,
crushed dreams
as fresh tears stream from closed eyes.
There's no prize when lovers split.
And there's no life left in this pit.
Conditional Love

I don't think I'm a good person.
I say I love people, but I'm not sure if I know what love is.
Everyone I know loves differently.
Every love I know is followed by a "but..."
I love you, "but" you're too fat.
I love you, "but" you're too poor.
I love you, "but" I love this more.
I love you, "but" you need to change.
I love water, "but" not the rain.
Did you know there's 16 definitions for love?
I've read 'em all and I still don't know what love is.
I wish it was unconditional.
A Blizzard's Beauty

Snow storms
the cold swarms
my bones core
stealing my soul's warmth.
But leaving me froze more
is the whipping wind.
Punishing my pores
while ripping plenty skin
and rubbing salt in the sores
that didn't mend.
Misery loves many friends
and leaves us all assaulted by storms
what a fitting end
from something so gorgeous.
GHOSTLY FIGURE

Rain made the window wet
but Pain made his silhouette
appear as if he never left.
It's been Nine years since his death
and yet,
I see him through my window pane
strolling through the wind and rain
As clear as day
he smiles and waves
before he turns to walk away
into a ghostly fade.

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Eyes like Mirrors

Silent suffering, morphed into violent eruptions. A life of having the stuffing kicked out of empty stomachs clinched tight because of nothingness. Something fresh was needed to see that hope was not defeated before the fetus was even able to breathe on its own. Eyes reflect like mirrors a life of neglect and terror now that the child left defenseless is grown. A misfit born in hopelessness now known as an anti-socialist learned to suffer in silence alone. In his eyes I see his agony but what seemed to baffle me, was learning that his misery was my own.
Artificial Lights

Artificial lights block my view of the stars
late night I hear the music from cars
filled with occupants
probably cruising to bars.
Full moons show gray clouds floating in black sky
women on the stroll taking cab rides
Maybelline covers their black eyes.
What's done in the dark will come to the light
and what's gave from the heart only gives life.
But selling drugs in the dark under street lights
while hiding guns in the park under the slides
will have you under indictment
rumbling LIFE!
I've seen it happen dozens of times.
Because artificial light blocked my view of the stars
so I grew up watching the dudes in the dark.
We don't pay attention, we
pray for tension intentionally
a group of senseless teens
who wouldn't be free to see their sweet sixteens
some say its meant to be
which means its meant that we
be tried, convicted, and sentenced
then sent to a penitentiary.
This is deep
the consequences of our life styles
was once a bright child
but my up-bringing was quite wild.
Is that how life was meant to be?
Childhood produces senseless teens.
Illiteracy

Foreign symbols scribbled on clean parchment.
Big words from big men resemble obscene jargon.
My ignorance isn’t bliss!
Entire conversations are held in script.
I sense that I’m mentioned in
your world of sentences, but I’m dismissed
as if I’m just insignificant.
Your iniquities will not be continuously
hidden in these paragraphs.
Secrecy ignited a rapturous burning
that took shape as a passion for learning.
Watch as the incorrigible
fish tails around the learning curve.
Conquers grammar with the simplest ease
and laughs in the face of illiteracy.
Dementia

People, places and things cluttered.
Memories jumble
as the figures of his past
trip over each other.
Criss-Crossed and tangled
the truth gets lost in fables
and now we hardly recognize
our friends from strangers.
Missed birthdays and anniversaries.
The last person introduced
is the first to leave.
Dementia the barrel's bottom
a life that's been forgotten.
A bright man's mind has turned to mush.
Starving Artist

Jobless
yet bombarded with charges
from credit card debt
to student loans
and rent on her apartment.
She's honestly swamped,
her drawings
are hardly acknowledged
and when regarded
she's harshly admonished.
Criticized,
talent minimalized
while she's looked on by the dismissive eyes
of visionless guys.
Only if they could see
the pictures elicited
from her gifted mind.
She knew it all, fiction or fact
whether true or false.
She happened to slip into crack
after using raw.
Her puny arms scarred from
her self-inflicted beauty marks
She knew she was addicted but perhaps
it wasn't doing harm.
She could remember way back
when she could do no wrong
now she's stripping for scraps
at all the booty bars
or on the hookers track
chasing after moving cars.
She's just a glimmer of her past self
hard times contributed to her bad health.

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Chasing the Night's Dreams

I rise with the Sun
eyes as dry as my tongue
clear my throat
wipe the sleep from my eyes
here I go
another try to reach my desires
Chasing the night's dreams
might seem
like insanity
my quiet screams
kept inside my mind, pleading
for understanding, we
were left together alone
my thoughts and I
either to rise
or just rot and die

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Defying Reason

Dreams of elevations only obtainable
by knowing no limitations.
Secure words planted in fertile minds
child's dreams come to reality
watching is worth the while
Unlimited their vision
Reason is non existent
They emerge from canyon diving unscathed
and levitate as they ascend to heavens gates unphased
Only to return to the world
of ineffectual intellectuals
Boggled by the reason defying
Nature's Law rewriting
Person who abides by being open minded.

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Nature Speaks

On the perfect night
purple skies
shine so bright
they'll hurt your eyes.
Magnificence is incomprehensible
nature speaks in tones
that we chose not to listen to.
The intellectuals
riddled by the mystical.
Frustrated 'cause we've missed
the message delivered to us.

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Asleep Machines

During the night hours we're most creative
closest to greatness.
Anxiously we twist in our sleep like landed fish.
Street lights flicker within the late night mist.
Our worlds are silent save for the random mouse
or the light snor of an enamored spouse.
As we rest we burn energy
fueling the machines of our dreams.
Still pictures of better living, as vivid
as if we lived it. We envision happy endings.

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Spirit's In the Ether

Magical it seems, the songs that nature sings
the connectedness of all things
the reality in our dreams.
The cosmos where lost souls
are found again
earth where rebirth produces profound men.
The life that's in the ether
contains the lives of every creature
whether insect or amphibian
from the trees, to animals living in them
We breathe the freed souls
who were lifted from their burdened forms
But the mind of man is riddled by the mystical
conflicted by the simple truth.

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Night sounds,
the hype crowd just died down.
Hear imaginary crickets chirp
Lights flicker, minds centered
on plans that didn't work.
It stands to reason
that the believers of their dreams
are conceiving schemes to insure
they finish first.
People who believe they won't need to sleep
until they're in the dirt.
Sun down, Lights out, Lamp on, Candles lit.
The drive of a man who never plans to quit.

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Raw Desire

Defiant souls fighting with a fire
as bright as gold.
Hearts race and stomachs tighten
staunch faces as palms perspire
Their bodies rocked by a calm excitement.
RAW DESIRE!
Taking on all challengers
no matter how powerful
fully committed to weather what may come.
Some call it courageous
yet others may say "dumb"
These defiant souls jump into their dreams
and claim what they want.

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The Old Oak

Held drift to slow
leaning against
the beaten bark of the old willow tree.
Although the old oak is aging slow
time sure takes it's toll.
Each winter freeze brings with it grief
as the daggered tumble
her leaves crumble
dropping lifelessly to the hardened earth.
Beneath this tree stories were shared,
and lives were lived.
She's been here since
his parents were just nippers
and will live to witness
his descendants.
One day his children will know the luxury
of reclining in her old oak branches comfortably.
Gambia's Heartbeat

Trees danced to the jungle drum
every creature in the jungle sung
the lands from which my ancestral mothers come.
Where my ancestral fathers fought
where Aisba was bought
after she was stolen
robbed of her freedom,
beaten until broken
Spirits weep
and we hear their despair in the breeze,
see sorrow in every meadow
feel suffering in the trees.
Every creature cries 'cause the drums no longer beat.

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Aisba's Offspring

A prince by birth right
since my first cries
but my mind wasn't aware of it.
My royal ancestors were
despised by the heretics
mobbed on by derelicts
and robbed of our heritage.
In Gambia Aisba's kidnappers shackled her feet.
She was raped chained battered and beat.
Encaged in a slave ship, left abandoned to bleed
then auctioned off in Carolina to a scandalous fiend.
Made to pick his cotton
and raise his misbegotten.
That's how I happen to be
an African trapped in the "Land of the Free"
Labeled racist by people blind to what I manage to see
visions of slaves hanging from my family tree.
Worried I'll fail at everything I plan to achieve.
Working to exceed the expectations demanded of me.
Broken Branches

A family became strangers
once names and birth dates were forgotten.
We were indifferent and sometimes indifference
can seem malicious.
Our intentions weren't to forget
but that's just what we did.
Leaving a single relative
to hold tight to one-sided relationships.
So destructive was our selfishness
that our children no longer know their own cousins.
Sisters don't know their own brothers.
How despicable are we to know
there's no love for our own blood.
Our ancestors would be ashamed of what had become of us.
A family tree of broken branches.

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Stay Positive

The rare letters I receive are signed "Stay Positive" stay positive although I'm locked in prison and the authors of these rare letters never stop to visit. Instead they wait for me to contact them through telephone calls and missives and when they feel the urge to reply they do every time with "Hey, Stay Optimistic"

I want to tell them where to shove their optimism. I want to tell my siblings that they're the worst bunch. They tell me they love me, I tell them "I can't tell" I was sixteen, 110 months ago. Now I'm 26 with 190 months to go.

Never a single visit. The drive is only 51 miles that's all of 45 minutes. They say I forfeited my right to a family I say that's their excuse for abandoning me. I'm told to stay positive and I am I'm positive that their love is not love.
Offensive as the heartless smile
of the discarded child
whose mother was too embarrassed to be a parent.
The quick disposal this blessing person
who she considered to be worthless
because her own self image was shattered.
He wasn't born with a silver spoon,
he was merciless.
21 months from the womb.
His mother pretended for an age
that she didn't see the pain
misery and hate
that was clearly written on his face.
Through it all he deeply loves her
just for being his birth mother.
He and his spouse
constructed a brick house.
Something they built out of
love for each other.
She was his best friend
so they sold the house,
but for one reason or another
sharing room became uncomfortable.
Divorce ensued,
in court statements
the court fete of
four kids, now separated
who over the years became strangers.
The broken home was sold
back to the bank
and remained vacant
until it was claimed by vagrants.
I cry, nobody answers.
I scream, nobody answers.
I've knocked on the door no
nobody's there.
Nobody comes
to answer my calls
because nobody's heard
of this conscious boy,
loneliness causes
my whole body pain.
Although I hope, I know
it probably won't change.
When I sent for help
nobody came.
That's why I refuse to write anybody's name.
My heart will only let Nobody in
so I'll forever be nobody's friend.
Gift of Friendship

Where time gives way
& lives live, suspended together on public transit,
a kind gift was given freely by a complete stranger,
who initially screamed "Seat Taken!"
when greeted by the vagabond with yellow teeth, stankin'.
Until he realized the drifter was serving a sentence with
mental deficiencies, he who didn't speak, didn't see a path to
tavel, nor could he grasp the babble chattering about him.
But clearly he comprehended the man taking his hand
was taking it in friendship.

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COLD HEART

A freezer burnt heart was thawed
mildewed from the frost
trying to beat again,
feeling secluded and lost.
This heart was unusually calm
never irregular,
but it was abusively harmed
and trapped in unpleasantness.
Nevertheless,
blood started to flow
the pump started to grow
love started to show
from something so hopeless
once discarded and cold.
Life isn't always sink or swim
so think before you leave your friends
because a cold heart can learn to beat again.

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When we're together

When we're together it's... Special
each moment is pressureless
your smile alone puts me in the presence
of heavens bliss.
Your words encourage
they project me toward perfection
when I felt cursed and burdened
you soothed my stresses with affection.
I cherish you
and you accept my imperfections.
Since I share your views
I listen when you correct my misdirection
And I often find myself in awe.
Of such a little woman who's so gentle & yet so strong
but if there's ever a time that you feel weak
I'd do my all to make it better
because I feel most complete
the times that we're together.

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PARDON ME

Pardon me gorgeous but I'm amazed 
by the wonderous way 
you tend to articulately illustrate 
without saying a thang. 
You're so flawless and full of grace 
as sweet as the summer's breeze 
the complexity of your essence 
your presence is where I want to be. 
So PARDON ME 

for trying so hard to be regarded so heartlessly. 
I played my cards and discarded you thoughtlessly. 
How foolish of me, I stupidly kept a joker and lost a Queen. 
I'd give my all for your call but love don't cost a thing. 
So it seems that you're gone from me 
regardless of how hard I fight. 
Baby please don't view me harshly 
Pardon me for my slight.
Infidelity

The open door
summoned her
from her slumber.
She suddenly saw the covers
and wanted to get under.
She wanted me
in her stomach,
urged me,
to gently kiss her
pleaded,
for sensuous whispers
demanded,
to meet my member.
I obliged in my weakened state
and now I must
plead and beg
for my wife
to understand I wasn't
thinking straight.
Peace in Each others Arms

Sweet whispers to troubled minds,
deep whimpers mistaken for subtle cries drowning in cheap liquor.
We held hands strolling past street venders
in our quiet city square,
we stared at over head stars while venders peddled their wares.
Silly caricatures of us kissing.
She giggled at my jibs, her lips quivered.
Our stresses relieved, the pressures of our days were eased,
and we found peace in the arms of our lover, we found peace in each other.

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BUTTERFLY

She floats in the gentle breeze
scarcely flapping her elegant wings.
Her movement is so effortlessly fluent
that she attracts the eyes of admirers
and her eyes descry the desirous.
SHE GLOWS!
Her smooth beautiful complexion.
SHE FLOWS!
She majestically glides through a room with effervescence.
My Butterfly.
She smiles and flutters eyes
while she flutters by.
She has me hypnotized by her aura.
But I'm pained to know she'll never feel the same for the florist.

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A Breezes Message

Winds whisper sweet nothings
to my steaming cup
of tea and honey.
Soft rains send people running
hurried paces and worried faces
as they scurry hastily to working places.
Leather seats and dash boards are getting wet
from open windows of cars owners forget to check.
Under skies the color of smoke from cigarettes
lives intersect
but only for split moments
a woman's umbrella closes as a previously unnoticed co-worker
holds the offices door open.
He smiles as she approaches
while his eyes reflect hopelessness
She strolls through the open door
while simultaneously thanking him for holding it.
Only if he wasn't to hesitant
to relay the breezes message.
Only If...

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She was sweet and slightly bitter,
Firm but also soft enough to nibble.
She had thin skin but a thick core,
and she smelled as good as she tasted.
DELICIOUS.
I remember her from my youth. We grew together.
Familiarized ourselves with each other.
I learned to love her.
She sustains life, protects the heart & lightens spirits.
Her kiss is juicy and crisp,
Consuming.
All fruit should taste like this.
EQUALITY

Is it a vision of deluded minds?
A sight seen only by secluded eyes?
Where equal pay and equal rights
equally exist for all of people kind.
Is it a figment,
a fairy tale?
A story that many know very well.
A concoction of hopes and asperations
that never came to pass.
Or is it just some ones fabrications
they made to get a laugh?
Because I've lived
and never seen
even the most minute,
smallest piece
of what you call equality.
Hello Ms. Martin
I'm Officer Stalling
of the Sanford Police Department.
I am calling
to say I'm sorry
for your loss.

You see, a neighborhood watchman
began following Trayvon when
he caught sight of his dark skin.
After a scuffle the murderous marksman
held Trayvon down and shot him
while he laid face down screaming for help,
an eye witness says he seen it himself.
But we refuse to charge him.
So, while you and I are talking
please call off Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton
along with the new Black Panther Party.
They're all causing Sanford problems
what with all these marches
the media coverage is constant.
If you don't stop it
you'll expose our corrupt police department.
Quality of Life

My childhood home was in squalor,
plus the lights,
were barely on
to the delight
of the roaches who lived amongst us,
just as squallid as the mice.
So when politicians
talk preposterously like
we're all equally impoverished,
check my quality of life.
They rumble
for position
they scuffle.
They grab at each other
like crabs in a bucket.
Constantly disgusted
'Cause one can't climb upward
without a claw pulling them down
agitated they keep moving around.
Is it stupidity
or selfishness
that prevents the unity
of shell fish.
What about the communities
we dwell in?
No plan is a "nigga's" plan
instead of helping each other
we blame the fisherman.
Robert Williams' father continuously urged him to speak the "King's English" in order to enhance the use of proper or "Standard" methods in fully appreciate the English language in its proper form. His father instilled in him a strong sense of community and communal pride during his childhood in Missouri, passing those in him with the ability to help those less fortunate and a deep concern for social injustices.

When he's not writing poetry or articles, he's volunteering his time with a local non-profit organization that mentoring young men in prison to get them to put their minds to a state of opportunities and possibilities.

Mr. Williams currently lives in Sacramento, CA and in a rural area.