

# walls TO bridges

## Fall 2021 Newsletter

We create educational opportunities in correctional settings where the experiences of teaching and (un)learning challenge assumptions, stigmatization and inequality.

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### A Word from Shoshana



Well. What a 17 months the world has had! After taking some time to absorb the magnitude of the impact of COVID-19 and adjusting in our personal and professional lives, we forged ahead with attempts to keep alive the spirit and momentum of W2B. Not easy. W2B classes were cancelled across the country. We postponed two instructor trainings. We watched the news with fear and concern about the impact of COVID -19 on people in prison. We have still not seen our collective members at GVI in person yet although for the past few months we have been able to see them via zoom for monthly meetings. Despite the many barriers, some W2B instructors across the country persevered to offer modified W2B classes throughout the pandemic, allowing some inside students continued educational opportunities. We appreciate the collective thought and time put into thinking through the values and practices that underpin these efforts. Under the

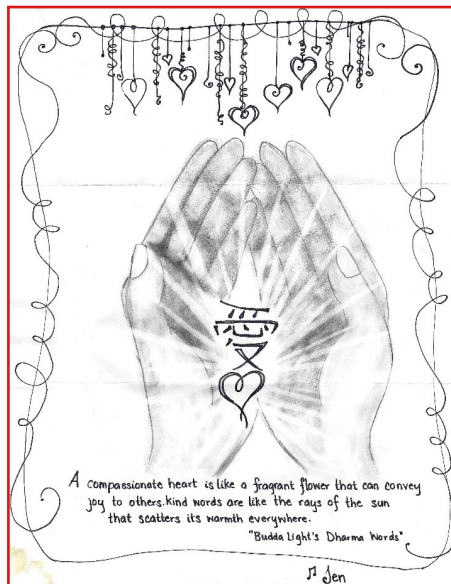
leadership of W2B Canada program coordinator Tori Poe, inside and outside GVI collective members corresponded via snail mail, resulting in a beautiful book - A Book of Collective Survival in Pandemic Times - to stay connected and mark this time in history for W2B.

Speaking of history, we have exciting news! Walls to Bridges Canada turns ten years old in 2021/2022! And we want to celebrate! Partially funded by a SSRHC Connection Grant, we will be hosting four online symposium events, featuring inside and outside alumni of W2B classes and instructors. We will be exploring themes related to the impact of classes on students, power dynamics, emotions, embodiment and collective action, anti-racism and decolonization and W2B, and charting our future for the next decade. We are excited to engage in these reflective conversations with you - our network - and look forward to your participation in these events.

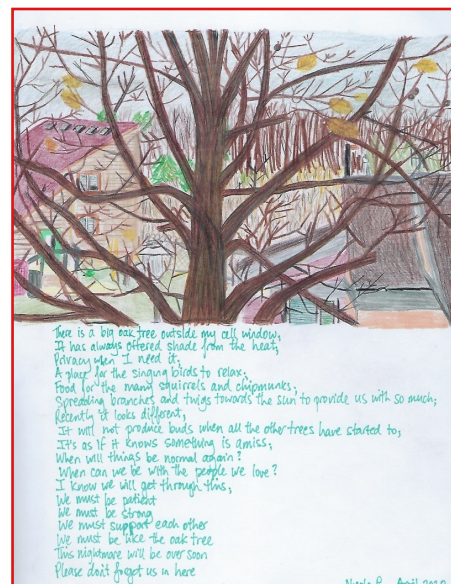
As we look forward to 2021/2022, we are feeling optimistic for the resumption of regular W2B activities. Thank you for keeping up the enthusiasm and collective work. We will see on you online in October 2021 for the first of our anniversary events!

In Solidarity,  
Shoshana Pollack, Professor, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University  
Director, Walls to Bridges Canada

# GVI W2B Collective, 2020-2021: A Book of Collective Survival in Pandemic Times



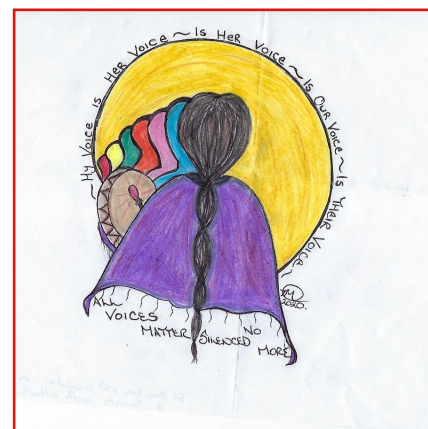
The COVID - 19 Pandemic began in March 2020 and the country shut down. We had no access to virtual means of connection with those inside. With limited access and resources to sustain contact, we exchanged writing, drawings, and poetry - resisting and acknowledging our separation and working to maintain relations. We began compiling our collection of correspondence into A Book of Collective Survival in Pandemic Times. During the summer of 2020, two poets Mercedes Eng who



wrote *Mercenary English* (2013) and Cecily Nicholson who wrote *Wayside Sang* (2018), donated their poetry books for collective members to share in a collaborative reading experience, further adding to our 'collective book'. Mercedes and Cecily were volunteering at Emma's Acres where W2B alumni Nyki and Shay, previous members of the GVI collective and founding members of the BC collective, have been working in British Columbia.

One and half years later, the GVI outside collective members have been able to communicate with inside collective members, using a one monitor screen. Despite the many hurdles, we are continuing to meet, connect and create, planning our virtual presentation for the 10th Anniversary Celebration of Walls to Bridges Canada! We are hopeful to meet again in person and facilitate the W2B Instructor Training program in the future.

- Tori, W2B Program Coordinator



Top Left: Artwork, GVI Collective Member, *A Book of Collective Survival in Pandemic Times*: March 2020 – March 2021

Top Right: Artwork and Poem, GVI Collective Member, *A Book of Collective Survival in Pandemic Times*: March 2020 – March 2021

Bottom Left: *Thinking of You*, Artwork, GVI Collective Member, *A Book of Collective Survival in Pandemic Times*: March 2020 – March 2021

Bottom Right: Artwork in response to Cecily Nicholson's *Wayside Sang*, GVI Collective Member, *A Book of Collective Survival in Pandemic Times*: March 2020 – March 2021



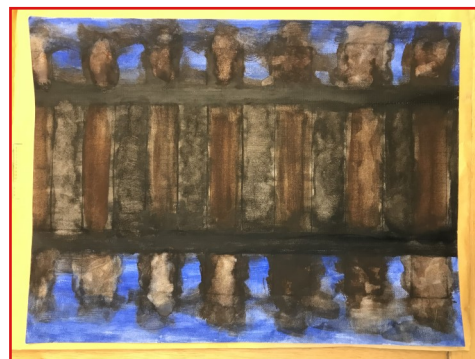
## B.C. Collective Building in the time of COVID-19

It's been a long 16 months of COVID protocols and missed connections. In B.C., as in many jurisdictions, federal prisons have been closed and the access that the outside collective members had to the inside collective members has been extremely limited. Last spring we began working with Cecily Nicholson, Mercedes Eng, and Lawrence Hill who all generously donated books for us to create a poetry project across distance and to bring us all together. This project is ongoing, similar to the pandemic. We loved the Book of Pandemic Survival from the Ontario collective and we are hoping to do something similar as we prepare for the 10th Anniversary celebrations.

We have recently been able to call into the prison, allowing us to have our collective meetings with our inside members once again. This has left us all with feelings of hope for the future, as we work together on our Collective projects.

It may be too soon to say what we've learned from this time — as a collective, we've almost exclusively existed in a pandemic context — but what resonates is that we're still here, together, and keen to do the work. We are exceedingly grateful for the time and support offered to us by the folks in Ontario, and we eagerly await opportunities to connect amongst ourselves, other communities in BC, and hopefully folks across present-day Canada to continue the important work of Walls to Bridges.

- Emily, Gigi, and Shea on behalf of the BC Collective



Left & Right: Art from Coco submitted to the Collective reading project  
Top Middle: Ros at Emma's Acres

## W2B Co-Sponsored Online Talk with Lawrence Hill: Reading and Writing to Free the Mind

Long before Lawrence Hill became a W2B facilitator, he unselfishly volunteered his time visiting folks in prison. It was on such an occasion that I met him. The book club had just completed reading his novel 'The Book of Negroes', and he was there to shed some light on the characters and to provide insights into their idiosyncrasies.

For a well-distinguished author, Larry had no pretentious airs about him. He chatted and joked with us as if he was in his surroundings - a hangout with friends at the gazebo. What stood out for me most, along with all the knowledge sharing and comradery, was that he was accompanied by his daughter, and in a place often talked about as being one of the most violent and to be feared - he displayed not one iota of overprotectiveness. Hence, when asked to be one of the folks to open for his event, I did not hesitate.

On February 26, 2021, Denise and I introduced Lawrence Hill - novelist and W2B Instructor - to a virtual audience of 165. This event was co-sponsored by Walls to Bridges Canada in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University and Laurier's Brantford Campus. Lawrence spoke of his experiences encouraging incarcerated teenage boys to read, volunteering in federal penitentiaries with the group "Book Clubs for Inmates," becoming involved with Walls to Bridges, and teaching a memoir writing class in the Grand Valley Institution for Women. He further reflected on the healing effects of reading and writing creatively, and on how both slave narratives and prison narratives are foundational to the African American and African-Canadian literary canons.

Denise, community-based member, said at the end of her introduction, "Thank you, Larry, for connecting the heart with the head. Much respect is due to you Mr. Lawrence Hill, for the 'we' and 'us' which unifies our shared, all-encompassing interconnectedness."

- Lorraine, Community-Based Collective Member





# Decentering Expertise: Working Collaboratively with Imprisoned

## Announcement

In April 2021, W2B was part of the Ken Seiling Waterloo Region Museum series, *Women's History in the Making Speaker Series*. Nyki Kish-Field, former GVI alumni collective member and current W2B Program Coordinator for British Columbia, and Shoshana Pollack, Director, Walls to Bridges Canada, discussed the histories that brought them to working collaboratively with imprisoned women, the importance of lived experience as knowledge, commitment to solidarity and social justice, and navigating complicated power dynamics.



Thank you Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation for your support & all other folks who have given generously to the W2B program!



**WE ARE ONE**  
NOT THE OTHER

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### SAVE THE DATES!

Building Bridges Between Prisons & Post-Secondary  
Education: Celebrating the Walls to Bridges Program

walls to  
bridges

Please join us to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup>  
anniversary of Walls to Bridges Canada  
(W2B). We are hosting a series of  
online symposiums in 2021/2022!

ARTWORK BY W2B ALUMNI

The W2B National Hub, housed in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University, is located on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishnaabe, and Neutral peoples. Wilfrid Laurier University is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land promised to Six Nations, which includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.

Learn more at [wallstobridges.ca](http://wallstobridges.ca) or contact us at [wallstobridges@wlu.ca](mailto:wallstobridges@wlu.ca)

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

#### Weaving Narrative & Knowledge

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2021 | 1:00 PM-3:30 PM EST

Our series will be launched with a keynote address by author and W2B instructor Lawrence Hill (*The Book of Negroes*, *The Illegal*) and with a presentation by instructors and Indigenous Elders involved in an Alberta-based W2B program.

FOR W2B ALUMNI AND W2B TRAINED INSTRUCTORS ONLY

#### Navigating Power & Creating Impact

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2021 | 5:30-8:30 PM EST

Inside and Outside alumni and instructors from British Columbia and Ontario reflect on the impact of W2B classes and navigating power dynamics.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

#### Holistic Learning & Collective Action

THURSDAY, JANUARY 20, 2022 | 5:30-8:30 PM EST

Alumni and instructors from Ontario and Manitoba consider the role of embodiment, emotions, challenges, and collaboration in W2B pedagogical practice.

FOR W2B ALUMNI AND W2B TRAINED INSTRUCTORS ONLY

#### Evolving Our Work

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2022 | 1:00-4:00 PM EST

Alumni and instructors will facilitate conversations on anti-racism and decolonizing W2B, including the cultivation of authentic leadership of those with lived experience of incarceration.

Registration information will be distributed a month before each event.

W2B is an innovative educational program that brings together incarcerated and non-incarcerated students to study post-secondary courses in jails and prisons across Canada. The National Hub for the program is based out of the Lyk S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) in partnership with Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, ON.

Canada Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada / Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

Canada LAURIER Inspiring Lives

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