

*"I believe in living.  
I believe in birth.  
I believe in the sweat of love  
and in the fire of truth.  
And I believe that a lost ship,  
steered by tired, seasick sailors,  
can still be guided home to port."*

"Healthy wolves and healthy women share certain psychic characteristics: keen sensing, playful spirit, and a heightened capacity for devotion. Wolves and women are relational by nature, inquiring, possessed of great endurance and strength. They are deeply intuitive... experienced in adapting to constantly changing circumstances... fiercely stalwart and very brave... Yet both have been hounded, harassed, and falsely imputed to be... of less value than those who are their detractors."

These are excerpts from two of my favorite books, *Assata: An Autobiography* by Assata Shakur and *Women Who Run With the Wolves* by Clarissa Pinkola Estes. These two books, and many others, were sent to me while I was in prison. Books by Octavia Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, Audre Lorde, Starhawk, Isaac Asimov and more. I cannot overstate the importance of having access to books in prison.

While I took much pleasure in reading in my younger years, being able to read while in prison was such a gift, a life-saving and life-giving gift:

Life-saving in that getting lost in a great story, in the lives of characters, knowing who they were and how they lived, loved, cried, laughed, getting lost in their story, and sometimes seeing myself somewhere in a character, in their sorrows and their triumphs, was both a means of escaping my own circumstances for a brief while and inspiring me to be present with my own circumstances and to move beyond them, to make use of my circumstances, lending me the courage to refuse erasure.

Life-giving. Those books that came to me while I was in prison helped to feed my soul. They helped me to acquire the language to articulate thoughts, feelings and ideas that I'd always had but for which I had no means of expression. Reading helped me reclaim my vision, my clarity of focus and clarity of purpose, my creativity. It helped me remember who I am

and what I'm about. And again, reading lent me the courage and strength to refuse erasure. This erasure I speak of is of the self, which happens slowly but steadily in the prison. Society's refusal to see prisons and prisoners is no minor contribution. We are isolated in the prisons, cut off from our communities and our families. The cost of phone calls and visits contributes to this isolation. Even the cost of purchasing a book to send someone in prison is too much — the \$30 or so that it would cost to buy a book or two is too much for many families, often times it is the choice to either get a book or be able to purchase personal hygiene products from the prison commissary because the prisons do not provide those things for free. Sending letters and books into prison is a means of communicating to us in the prisons that we are seen, that we are cared about.

Those of you sending books to loved ones in prison and/or donating to books to prisoners' organizations are helping us preserve our humanity. And in a roundabout way, you become members of the community we in prison create. I've spoken and written of the community I was a part of in the prison. In our community, we care about and care for one another. So we share of ourselves, including the books we get.

Many are the times I've come back to the housing unit with books I'd received to be met by a cadre of women, so eager to see what was sent to me. "What books did you get?" "Ooh! I want to read that one!" Many are the times I was among the cadre of women gathered around a woman who'd just picked up her books. If one of us gets several books at once, everyone gets a book, a week or so to read it, then we trade off. We have our own little big library, contributed by you. You are helping us build and stay in a community. Know that any book that comes into the prisons is going to be read by at least 10 people. Very probably more. And those books are always appreciated. From myself, and on behalf of every woman who has or will receive a book or five, thank you. Thank you for seeing us, for not letting us be erased.

### **Monica Cosby**

Monica Cosby is a mother, feminist, poet and activist. She is from the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago and comes from a long and rich tradition of activism. Lost to the cycle and system of incarceration for 20 years, she has made her way home. Monica believes in the ideal of "speaking truth to power" and, in Assata Shakur's words, she believes "in the sweat of love and the fire of truth." It is in this spirit that she speaks and writes.

---

## Bound Struggles

---

Writing and Art by Women in Prison

Number Seven

November 2017

Bound Struggles

Editors: Nick Devlin, Regina Ludes, Jo Peerhaas and Vicki White

Design: Dea Boskovich

Cover illustration: Teresa C.

Printing: GIA Publications, Inc.

Chicago Books to Women in Prison

c/o RFUMC

4511 N. Hermitage Ave.

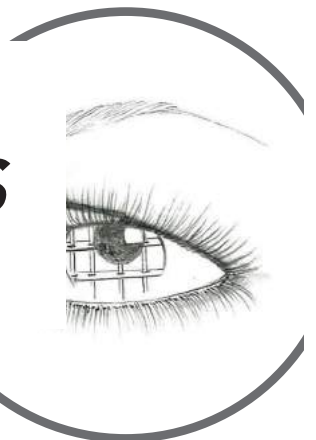
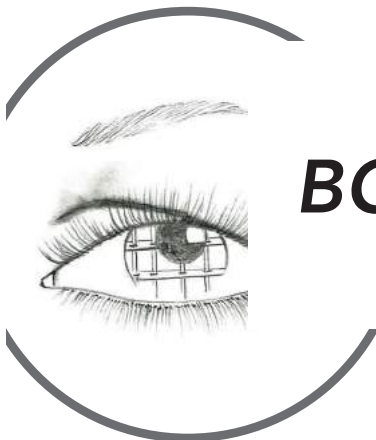
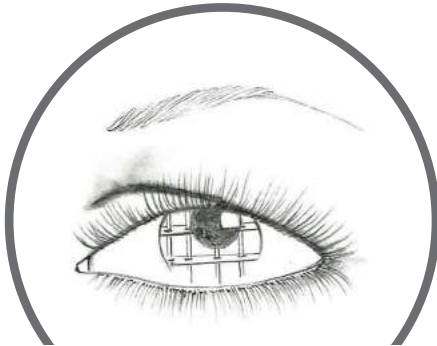
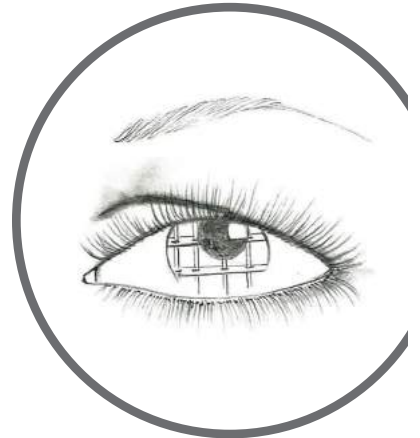
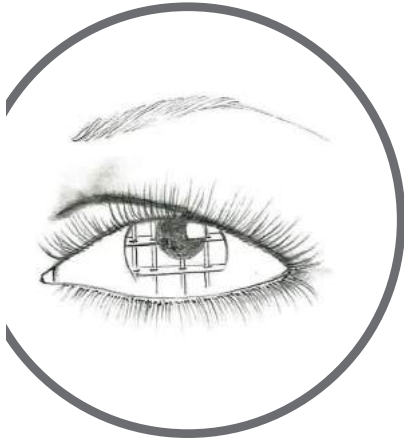
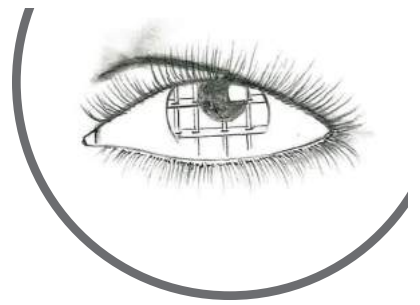
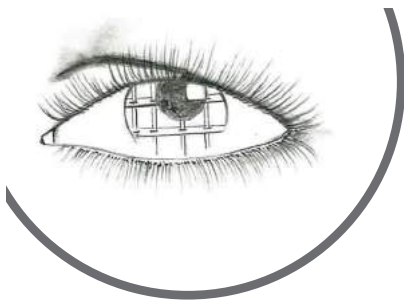
Chicago, IL 60640

[chicagobwp.org](http://chicagobwp.org)

[chicagobwp@gmail.com](mailto:chicagobwp@gmail.com)

©2017 Chicago Books to Women in Prison

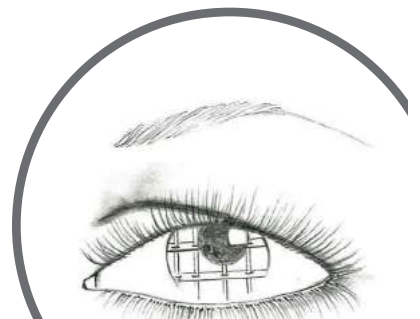
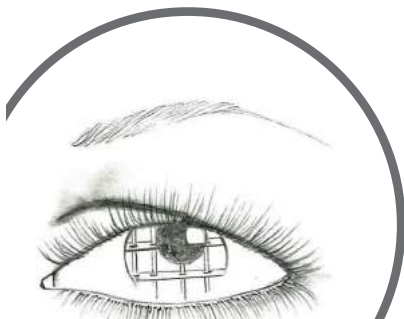
All rights revert to the authors and artists upon publication.



---

# **BOUND STRUGGLES**

---



Chicago Books to Women in Prison  
Number Seven