



# WALKIN' IN SOMEBODY ELSE'S SHOES

poetry by Port Townsend Police Officers and Youth

CONNECTING CHORD, PORT TOWNSEND, III  
March 8-12, 2004

**PARTICIPANTS**

PORT TOWNSEND POLICE OFFICERS

Officer Troy Surber, returning participant  
Officer Tony Polizzi, returning participant  
Officer Dan Huynh

PORT TOWNSEND YOUTH

Sarah McDonough, returning participant  
and Youth Leader  
Sarah Gizinski, returning participant  
and Youth Leader  
Gabe Maranos            Chris Zukas  
Lizzie Padgett           Stephen Smith  
Seth Mitton               Michelle Cesmat  
Willie Nelson, returning guest speaker

JEFFERSON COUNTY JUVENILE COURT PROBATION OFFICER

Christine Schmidt

ASSISTANT TO CHRISTINE HEMP

John Anderson

VIDEOGRAPHER

Natalie Holder

## **CONNECTING CHORD, PORT TOWNSEND, III MARCH 8-12, 2004**

“Connecting Chord,” the week-long program with officers and youth offenders, is happening in Port Townsend for the third time. And things are rolling toward the future: Police Chief Kristen Anderson has now declared this program an annual event. With the help of the community, we are planning for long-term influence; already there is continuity: This year’s group includes two returning officers and two returning teens, all of whom asked to come back. The camaraderie and sense of purpose is now being passed from year to year. We thank the officers at Jefferson County Juvenile Services for choosing teens they believe will benefit from this week of writing poetry, speaking the truth, and making music. The JCJS also provides cheerful drivers to shuttle the participants from home to Fort Worden and back, a critical link in logistics.

The writing that emerges from the “Connecting Chord” program never fails to take my breath away. These officers and teens learn to see one other as humans, as poets, and even as friends. With courage, they learn to put themselves in one another’s shoes. What better way to reinforce a community? Just listen to the their words for yourself. You’ll see.

*Christine Hemp*

*Port Townsend, March 18, 2004*

### **THE HISTORY OF “CONNECTING CHORD”**

*Christine Hemp has worked with the Metropolitan Police Force and youth offenders in the highest crime-rate borough of London, England – using poetry as a tool for crime prevention and brokering racial understanding. Brixton Chief of Police called the program “a milestone event.” Since then “Connecting Chord” has gone to Philadelphia, and has been covered by radio and magazines. Christine Hemp’s own poems and commentary are heard on National Public Radio’s Morning Edition and are published widely. She recently received a Washington State Artist Trust Fellowship for Literature, and she has taught at the U.S. Navy; the S’Klallam Tribe; Harvard University, and the University of Washington Extension Advanced Creative Writing Program. She lives in Port Townsend.*

“Connecting Chord” was made possible by:

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For more information about *Connecting Chord*, visit [www.christinehemp.com](http://www.christinehemp.com)

## THIS WEEK

by Seth Mitton (age 16)

This week was a very strange and weird week but also fun. I’ve actually learned from being here which surprised me. I’ve learned a lot about the people here and what they’re really like. I never would’ve even found out Troy had a wife, a daughter, a new house, that he drove trains, and served four years in the Navy. Now I know what this class is like. I would do it just for fun not just to knock off some work crew days.

Now I know why they call it “Connecting Chord” because you do connect with the people who are in it. I’d just like to say this has been a great experience. Thank you all for letting me be here. You’re all pretty cool in your own way!

## IF I COULD

by Officer Troy Surber

If I could I would tear down my armor.  
I would find my patience.  
If I sang I wonder what my style would be.  
I would laugh like little kids.  
If I could be water, this would flow.  
I would be like a hemlock tree, bent at the top.  
If I could I would keep trying.  
I would find my way.  
If I sang I could be content.  
I would drink like a thirsty dog.

My place right now is unknown.  
I thought my boxes were un-packed .  
I want to load and unload  
how I feel.  
My memory bench is empty.  
I need to finish fencing  
my last three acres.

## BEYOND TOMORROW'S HARP

by Sarah Gizinski, Youth Leader (age 14)

Beyond tomorrow is a pink bear full of luckyness.  
Like a red echo hat I will see many places.  
I won't try to float away like bubbles.  
I will go through life's twists and turns like a bicycle.  
I will survive mornings with my Starbuck's coffee cup.  
I won't keep my life in order like a folder.  
I won't shape myself for others like the water in a bottle.  
I will stay bright like a bright purple cup.  
I will always be liked like a can of soda.  
I will stay with my family like pencils in a cup.

## BEYOND TOMORROW'S NOTHING

by Chris Zukas (age 17)

Beyond tomorrow is a cookie.  
Like a cup, I will try to melt cheese.

A pin will pop many bubbles  
and tape will wrap wood.

A pen changes paper  
like a rock changes the pond.

## GRATITUDE

by Probation Officer Chrissie Schmidt

If I could fly without an airplane  
I would find ruby jewels on hands of gold dust.  
If I sang with Roberta Flack  
I would laugh like children in the park.  
If I could be curled up in quietude  
I would be fragrant like clover blossoms.

## A SOLDIER

by Sarah McDonough, Youth Leader, age 17

I remember a single word that changed my life.  
The smell of damp fear that glowed in all our eyes  
as we sat nibbling olives and an apple or two.  
9 minutes to go was all I could think about. That was  
all the time left in the world where I felt safe. Seeing  
the tear-stained face of the boy crouched next to me.  
“Let’s move,” rang through my ears as my trembling  
body lifted itself to the command. Scooting a rat  
from my chest I stood with the paint across my face  
and the riddle in my hand. I stepped out  
into the blood-stained streets...smoke and the sound  
of guns. Screams ringing through my ears...those  
who left the outer shell of their bodies. Women, children,  
me.

## I LIED

by Seth Mitton (age 16)

I lied when I said I don't give a fuck  
I do.  
Drunk walking.  
Ditch the police.

I lied when I said I only care about myself.  
I care about my family,  
my friends,  
their faces swimming through my head.

I lied when I said fuck life.  
Fuck everyone.  
Fuck the police.  
If you do give a fuck, people will care.

I lied when I said I don't give a fuck if I do life in prison.  
Fuck rotting away.  
Don't say fuck it.  
Give a fuck.

I

by Lizzie Padgett

I lied when I felt blindness from aching pain.  
Like an abused and abandoned child,  
I wore a shield of armor to cover my sores,  
like she would hide under clothing.

I lied when I failed.  
Like Willie Coombs,  
I slowly started killing myself  
and I feasted like a hungry beast.

I lied when my soul cried to me.  
Like a deaf man, I couldn't hear.  
I was filled with ignorance and  
I fueled my rage.

I lied when I was hiding.  
Hiding in the dark from  
evil snickers chasing me.  
I was hiding from myself....

IF

by Officer Tony Polizzi

If I am a barn swallow in the air flying,  
I'm not thinking about the nine minutes to go,  
eating olives and an apple or two, moving the shell  
of my body gracefully like big fat roly  
letters from a ball-point pen  
writing a single word.

## THANK YOU TO STEVE, MY POET PARTNER

By Officer Dan Huynh

Thank you for telling the story of your near-death experience.  
You were making artistic aerial stunts on your bike  
passing the time.  
That was when it happened: disaster.  
The color of your red shirt represents the blood  
that came out of your body, as if your life was draining.  
Relief came as doctors said that death almost took you.  
Your spleen was ruptured but your spirit was not.  
Like the watch you wear, time eventually  
healed you. Now you can talk  
about it and pass the experience on to others.  
You've come up with the courage to start  
with aerial stunts again, like the poems – we are glad  
and you survived to tell us. Thank you.

FOR CHRISTINE HEMP, MY POET PARTNER

by Chris Zukas (age 17)

Thank you for telling me about your band  
and for wearing red glasses  
instead of writing with a red pen.  
For contributing energy,  
like getting a bang out of all the sheep  
and living with the cards and socks.  
Like a giddy Celt,  
you helped start Morning Dew,  
though Mountain Dew would have been good, too.  
Striped shirts like a ballad,  
a Scottish ballad about sheep,  
staining the Folk Club  
with hysterical laughter  
like a hyena wearing a scarf.  
Being in a fun band,  
like being in a family.  
Thank you for not being sheepish.

FOR CHRIS, MY GUITAR-PLAYING POET-PARTNER

by Christine Hemp

Thank you for your chords that connected  
us this week. Like your lost skateboard  
we would have missed your E-major, A-minor, and E-minor,  
an empty stage without you, tall as a tuning fork.  
Though your words are few, your voice is strong  
like the taught strings of your guitar.  
Red shoes, red shirt, the spikes  
on your sleeves –all holler for applause, and it's here!  
We're clapping like loons for your tunes and lines  
of poetry as your future opens like a full  
metal jacket. You're standing straighter now,  
eyes full-on the final show as well  
as rehearsal. Your buddies would drop  
their rock-band jaws to see you now – jammin'  
with this poet-band of hoods and cops. Hey! I cry,  
to the guy who shares my name – Thanks, Chris!

ON A WALK IN FORT WORDEN  
ONE DAY IN MARCH

by Lizzie Padgett (age 17)

a crow's cry  
broken tree stump  
dead end trail  
mossy stream  
swampy bunker hole  
cracked concrete  
dead ferns  
everlasting ladder  
butterfly  
life  
laughing  
stomping feet  
rocky path  
arch of stairs  
Heaven  
an endless tunnel  
female deer (doe)  
uncontrollable ivy  
win  
soupy grass  
echoes  
buzzing bee  
spurting madrona tree  
endless water

## I LIED

by Michelle Cesmat (age 14)

I lied when I said I understand.  
I lied when I ran away from you for 10 days and 11 nights.  
I lied when you asked me if everything was all right.  
I lied when I said I loved you.

Just like a shadow in a far corner, myself.  
I lied within. But now nothing is a lie.  
Lie is a word you use only in time  
of fear. Like the famous dude once said once,  
“There is nothing to fear, but fear itself.”  
That’s pretty true, but I think you shouldn’t  
even let fear scare you. Fear is an emotion trapped  
in a bottle inside everyone’s body. No matter how much  
you want to get rid of that bottle – you can’t. Lies  
are illusions...Don’t be afraid.  
Stand tall and set your balance  
on this earth. Try to stay  
focused. Don’t let fear bring  
you down. You’re better than that.

UNTITLED

by Natalie Holder (videographer)

Torn blood-red upholstery.

The house is hungry.

The curtains have been  
closed.

If these are the walls,  
where is the door?

Torn blood-red upholstery.

The chair in the chest  
is empty.

Shadows stand guard  
while the body sleeps  
at the entry.

## BEYOND THE FOLDER OF TOMORROW

by Seth Mitton (age 16)

Beyond tomorrow is a notebook recording my life.  
Like hyenas I chuckle.

Every day I try to wipe away my past  
like a napkin wipes a face.  
Always taping over my faults,  
trying to erase the bad like a pencil erases mistakes,  
pulling my hat down to hide my true self  
more full of lies than a cup filled with pop.

Like a marker, I bleed through many things.  
Sometimes I'm as empty as a string cheese wrapper.

## BELONGING

by Officer Troy Surber

Beyond tomorrow are bubbles  
like a well-written book.  
I will try to burst my bubbles by taking off  
my sunglasses.  
The page for tomorrow will be blank.  
I will stir my still pen  
to ripple my waters  
by changing and mixing my colors of red, blue,  
and yellow. I will remove  
the tape from the boxes.  
I will open the lid to belong  
and let my feelings fall free like pine needles  
to the ground. I will embrace  
my experiences like a bear  
embraces a salmon.

## BIRTH OF AN EVIL

by Gabe Maranos

Beyond tomorrow is a rickshaw peddle  
like a hill so steep.  
I will try to hurt the Hobbitses,  
the precious is mine to keep

Oh, the razor-back  
fish skeletons once so crunchy-  
sweet, try to eat the bones  
'n' all for all is good to eat!  
My vulgar smile can travel  
a mile, my nasty hair so  
good to wear. Gollum is Smeagle is  
Gollum for real, can't wait to see  
me eat another meal.  
When you find the suspense a bore,  
I'll shove you in the fiery pits of Mordor!!!

## AM I PERFECT?

by Sarah Gizinski, Youth Leader (age 14)

If I could be perfect  
I would find something wrong with me.  
If I sang I wouldn't sound perfect.  
I would laugh like a donkey.  
If I could be perfect  
I wouldn't be perfect.

If I couldn't be perfect  
I would find that I am perfect.  
If I sang I would sound like golden harp.  
I would laugh like a child.  
If I couldn't be perfect  
I would be perfect.

## ATMOSPHERE

by Sarah McDonough (age 17)

If I could be a stone, I would skip myself across eternity's waters.

I would find purple people-eaters and waterfalls of chocolate.

If I sang like Lyrical Lizzie, I would get dizzy

from the echoes off the mountains.

I would laugh like Willie Coombs, a mad-man with his gun.

If I could be walking in someone else's shoes,

I would curl up in solitude like an unopened tea bag.

## WORDS

by John Anderson, Assistant to Christine Hemp

Words make things true:  
You can be a tomato  
when you're six  
an olive, an apple, too.

Words can swallow whole  
countries – Vietnam, even China's  
Great Wall will fall  
with the right syllable.

Move slow, let them grow  
only in the quietest of all places.

## I LIED

by Stephen Smith

I lied when I thought that it wouldn't happen to me.  
The thoughts are as paper scraps.  
At first you don't see them--  
Then after, you realize you have a mess.

I lied when I thought nothing was wrong,  
As if pushing the dirt under the rug  
to seem clean. Then realization appears  
and it was ignorance hiding under that rug.

I lied when I said I was done.  
Irritation of the thrown-about pop cans.  
One may have the fanciest work,  
but without a picture, the frame can't be hung.

I lied when I fooled myself  
like the autumn leaves were still on the trees.  
Then leave others to rake up the mess.  
I lied.

TO OFFICER DAN, MY POET-PARTNER

by Stephen Smith

Thank you for choosing law enforcement.  
The apprenticeship helps the contribution of wisdom.  
Positive choices led to positive results.  
You care how things work – like biology and math.  
Not everyone likes history.  
But it is true that when you lost your Honda  
you got blue.  
The hair-gel and Abercrombie shows goody-goody.  
Let's see if he can run the Great Wall, could he?  
Dragging Dan wears name brands.  
I also hope you get to see your family  
in far away lands.  
Surely his affirmity shows how we liked his fraternity  
Could last an eternity.  
And I wish you years of safety  
on PTPD, showing your bravery.  
Thank you.

#### 4 GABE

by Officer Tony Polizzi

Thank you for volunteering, raising your hand first  
You do have a Willie Coombs, worse he is  
your father, sitting in Pelican Bay.  
When I asked you his  
name, you say "William, never heard of it...  
He calls himself Rashine...I saw a picture  
of him for the first time a year ago."

I hope you find the strength to control him  
some day, like your pilgrimage  
to Omaha to meet Josephine Dillion.  
You stumble and ignore the names  
of Malcom X, the Black Hills, Black  
Bird SRH, Wounded Knee, Pine Ridge,  
Leonard Peltier and Russell Means  
Like a blind Percival, swordless,  
stumbling in the  
forest. The words "Luke I am your  
father" echoing in your head.

Thank you.

Thank You Poem to Tony  
by Gabe Maranos (age 15)

Thank you for playing with Gangsters  
for if you hadn't you may've become one.  
Even though you didn't fit in,  
high school was strange and fun.  
Your uncle and aunt, Tut and Cheryl,  
raised a better cop –  
maybe not as notorious, but just as glorious.  
That word like the bird I ate for  
dinner, the meat is crunchable, the  
bones grow thinner.. Your guardian taught  
football on an Indian reservation. You help  
the nation, I'm on probation. Cesar Chavez  
lives down the road, was he good?  
Was he bad? Only one in the room knows.  
Thank you for disarming that bum with the knife.  
You went to Stewart Nebraska, then your wife.

## BEYOND TOMORROW'S SWAMP

by Officer Dan Huynh

Beyond tomorrow is a pen and paper.  
Every life has an interesting story.  
Like a roll of tape waiting to be torn off, the line  
of all our lives are unpredictable.  
Take a life of a bear, it may live peacefully  
with no problem, yet it may be a hunter's next meal.  
Life is like water. In different cups it takes  
different shapes.

## LYRICAL LIZZIE

by Natalie Holder (videographer)

Thank you for your stories  
about family and friends  
you have lost  
a sewing machine  
eclipsed a woman you will never know  
a high speed car chase  
two boys cast off their lives  
like a torn shirt. A bed in  
Idaho tied a dead woman to her dream  
The ghost of a boy haunts his broken body  
in a hospital room  
Together you said goodbye to his life  
You do not carry these ghosts with you  
Your own dreams and plans like a  
pair of strong leather boots carry  
You safely across playgrounds and battlefields  
Thank you for the example of strength  
more like a river than stone  
a powerful current moving beyond  
the ghosts and debris

## IF I COULD LEAVE

by Michelle Cesmat (14)

If I could leave my life alone,  
I would find nothing.  
I do not know what the future holds.  
If I sang, I would sing to my dog.  
I would laugh like a cow  
or maybe my mom.  
If I could be nothing,  
I would stay nothing.

If I could be nothing  
I would find nothing.  
If I sang nothing,  
I would like nothing.  
If I could be nothing,  
I would not feel like nothing.

## THANKS TO CHIEF KRISTEN

by Christine Schmidt (Probation Officer)

Thank you Chief Kristen for being yourself  
So young, such responsibility, such guff,

writer's confluence from the water to the bluff  
where creativeness flourishes in the rough,

Your mother spoke of you dearly.  
She devotes her time to writer's craft yearly.

We talked about you, a chord connecting soul tariff.  
You challenged custom by running for Sheriff.

Because of you, this kid's happening gains momentum.  
Scared kids spin words flywheels, the poems they invent them.

The joy this workshop can inspire  
comes back to the world to admire.

Thank you Chief,  
you've inspired belief.