

(SLIDE 1) as people are entering

ANY ONE OF US: Words From Prison

The V-Day Edition 2013 season

(SLIDE 2) as lights are dimmed

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With an Afterword by Eve Ensler

(SLIDE 3 - 5) top of show in darkness

(SLIDE 6) as lights come up on actresses

YOU CANNOT LIVE MY LIFE...

WOMAN #2

You cannot walk in my life,
Cause you haven't been stabbed in the arm three times
with a knife.

You cannot say you're just like me,
Cause you didn't test positive, HIV.

You cannot say you feel my pain.
Because, you ain't never hold up in the rain.

You cannot do what I did
'cause, I did four years in the pen.

You cannot have my glory.
'cause, mine has been one hell of a story.

You cannot live my dream.
'cause, you ain't been beat by your own damn momma

You cannot say I'm gonna live long,
Do you really think I'm that damn strong?

You cannot live my life...

PREVIEW
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CHORAL

Dare to ask me what I see?

Take it all – the face, the hair, the hips, the smile and anything else you may like.

Every bite, punch, whip, strike, slap, spit, unwanted touch, kiss, rub and stroke.

Take that too.

THE EARLY YEARS

(SLIDE 7)

WOMAN #1

My name is Toni. In 1991, I was a 17 year-old teenager when I was charged and convicted of aiding and abetting second-degree murder for driving the car in a marijuana deal turned murder. Subsequently sentenced to 25 to 50 years in an adult women's prison.

WOMAN #3

July 10, 1975, my ninth birthday. I wasn't sure I was going to celebrate it, because once again my mother was in the hospital. I had hope though. I got up early, bathed, and put on my pretty new red party dress my mother had bought for me. I sat in my room and played with my doll all day.

(SLIDE 8)

WOMAN #1

I was 18 year-old the first time I was raped by a male correctional guard who was not only triple my age, but also had been under suspension for sexual assaults of inmates. This guard claimed me as his own property, even called me "Baby Toni," a name my relatives at home used to call me. He threatened me with major misconduct tickets and told me I would never go home if I told on him.

(SLIDE 9)

WOMAN #3

We celebrated my birthday, my dolly and I. I ate crackers and carrots for dinner and I got a Twinkie from my brother's room. At 8:00 PM I changed into my baby doll pajamas and went to bed. Nobody touched me and I didn't get hit. It was a really good day.

Some time later I was awakened by footsteps outside my door. The door opened and in walked my brother. "Hey kid what ya doing in bed? You didn't even have cake?" He told me to put my party dress back on and come down stairs. I was so excited. I did as I was told and ran down the stairs. My brother was on the couch. In front of him was a cake and a big pitcher of kool-aid. There were balloons and streamers and everything looked so pretty. My brother sang "Happy Birthday" to me and told me to come and sit next to him. He lit the candles on the cake and told me to blow them out. I did and he cut the cake. He also poured me a big glass of kool-aid. He gave me the biggest piece and he took a little one. I was happy. It was my birthday and it wasn't forgotten.

WOMAN #1

In 1993, he entered my cell after I had gotten out of the shower. He ripped off my robe and violently bent me over while ramming himself into me. I can still feel the ripping of my skin as he forced himself in me and the sound of his skin slapping against me while he held me down like I was his dog. I thought he was going to kill me because it felt like he was shredding my vagina walls in pieces.

After this assault, he left a pack of Double Mint Gum on my desk.

WOMAN #3

I don't know how much later it was, but my brother came into my room and sat on the edge of the bed. He said, "I haven't given you your present yet." I couldn't move. He leaned over and kissed me on the lips and whispered, "Today I'm going to make you a woman." I didn't know what this meant, but I couldn't move anything and I was so scared. He put his hand up my nightgown and rubbed my chest. Then he stuck his hand in my panties and tore them. He tore my new

panties. All I could do was cry. When he was done, he stood up and looked at me. He said that I was nasty and dirty and that I needed a bath.

WOMAN #1

The male guards were allowed to perform cross gender pat downs. At any given time they could order you to stand in front of them with your arms straight out, while they rubbed through your clothes fondling your breasts. Foreign hands touching every curve, down your tummy, up your back, smacking your butt cheeks and caressing your thighs. My body was no longer mine. I detached myself from it, because the male guards owned it.

WOMAN #3

When I was able to move, I crawled to the bathroom and started filling the tub. My dog sat in the doorway watching. He didn't get too close because he hated water. When the tub was filled I got in and lay down. I didn't know what I was doing but I needed the pain to stop. I felt a sharp pain in my toe and sat up. My dog had jumped in and bit my toe. I pushed him away and lay down again. Again he jumped in and bit me. This happened two more times. Then I finally sat up and held my dog and cried. I didn't know but my dog had saved my life that day. I was so out of it from the drugs my brother put in the kool-aid. If the dog hadn't bit me, I would have drowned.

(SLIDE 10)

WOMAN #2

My father's parent's family came here to flee from political prosecution in 1959. My mother, also a Cuban immigrant, was here from the age of three and had assimilated, but grew up with the presence of a strong Cuban culture. I was born in Hell's Kitchen shortly after, in July 1962. I was first generation Cuban American.

I was about three when my family moved to the South Bronx where my maternal great-grandfather owned a five-story tenement. My father was hard working. He worked his way up from painter, to taxi driver, to dump truck driver and for a second job he worked security at Two Penn Plaza and Wall Street. My mother was a typical young Cuban housewife who stayed at home with the four children, all girls. She was a good mother. She taught us what Cuban little princesses should learn: manners, submissiveness, respect the macho, domineering men, cook, clean, and love one another.

Like other thirteen year-olds I found ways to get out and took detours along my limited travels and boys were becoming very interesting. I remember having secret loves and infatuations. I was trying to escape the rigidity of my household. It is very hard for me to write about this. I have not talked about this with too many people. I actually can't remember talking to anyone about it. Why now, at the age of 43, is this coming out? I don't understand at all. Well, here goes.

It was dusk. I was supposed to be at Mennonite bible study, however, I took a detour. I had met some older boys. They were probably around 15 or 16. I had a crush on one of them, but it seemed as if his running buddy was more interested in me than he was. The three of us were talking in the basketball court adjacent to the Junior High School. To tell you the truth, I don't even remember what we talked about.

The other guy (not the one I liked) told me I should come to this building across the street so we could talk in private, just the three of us. I was so naïve that I didn't really know what he was talking about. It was a burnt out three story brownstone. As we walked through the smell was-- one I will never forget. It was a combination of burn, dampness, mold, wet, and trash. The walls were down to the slats and the beams were bare. It was cold, dark and wet. We walked through the shell of a building. We came to a room where there was a bare mattress. The other one, started to kiss me forcibly. He then proceeded to rape me. Then he told his friend, "She's all ready for ya." His friend however, was a different type. I don't think that he enjoyed himself as much as the other one did. I remember thinking, "Just do it because they can kill you and nobody will find you. When is it ever going to end?"

They left me there. I crawled out of the building. I was bleeding. I had been a virgin before that horrible night. I went back to bible study. I didn't say a word and they didn't even notice. It was

time to go home. I went home and took my usual evening bath. The difference was that I was trying to scrub my skin off. The smell of the abandoned building stayed with me. I cried in the tub. I was terrified to tell my parents because I was so sure that they would somehow blame me for it because I was not where I said I would be. I had snuck away from bible study (something that deliberate) and got myself raped. I chose to keep it to myself. I chose not to be ridiculed, blamed, or chastised.

(SLIDE 11 and 11A)

WOMAN #4

I remember my first trip to Elmwood Avenue. The ride from my grandmother's house always took us through Highland Park and in the spring you could smell the lilacs as they blossomed. Highland Park was a place of great beauty with all its flower gardens and walking trails, and although we only drove through the park it created a euphoric atmosphere within my tiny little world as I sat peering out the car window. The euphoria passed through as soon as we emerged from the park. The landscape became barren and in the distance one solitary building that reaching into the sky loomed over us.

1600 Elmwood Avenue had a circular driveway just as many other hospitals do and from the outside you would have never guessed this was no ordinary hospital except for the eerie silence. There were no ambulances or people rushing about. The place was a fortress, with security checkpoints and locked doors. 1600 Elmwood Avenue was a psychiatric asylum.

(SLIDE 12)

More often than not I was not allowed to see my mother because children were not permitted in certain areas of the hospital. However, I do remember on one occasion when I saw my mother on a restricted floor and the moments I spent with her in that room before the staff realized a child was in a restricted area has stayed with me.

The room smelled of urine and was filthy. The windows had bars on them and the only furniture in the room was two metal tables with benches attached that were bolted to the floor. What I didn't see when I walked in was my mother crouched down on the floor in a corner. She saw me though.

And when she did she sprang to her feet in a desperate attempt to reach me, but she failed. It was then that I realized she was chained to the floor. My beautiful mother had been reduced to the status of animal. She had bruises all over her body and she appeared to be foaming at the mouth. Initially, I was paralyzed with fear, but hysteria soon took over and I was escorted out and taken to another wing of the hospital.

I was taken to the rehabilitation unit, which was equipped with a bowling alley for the patients. I went from one world into another in just a few seconds. The patients were happy, talkative and well groomed. A far cry from what I had seen on the floor my mother was on. It was as if I reentered the park I had exited on my way there. My childhood was marred by incidents like this, and it was from these experiences that I learned there existed a duality in the world of good and evil in which I would spend a great deal of my life entering and exiting its various facets. For I myself am now confined to an asylum, which has been conspicuously disguised as a correctional institution.

(SLIDES 13 - 17)

WOUNDED CHILD

CHORAL

Dirty, bubbling hat,
festering,
private parts soiled,
spoiled, swelling
murmur, tongue
murmur.

Dirty so bad
you hate yourself,
so bad
you forget yourself,
If I hadn't buried her
she would have died,
gone crazy,

(SLIDE 18)

this ragdoll filled with shame –
must protect –
bleed the bad
cut the hurt
of the hurt world.
Love small,
one trust at a time.
Pain, I am yours
And you are mine.
Swallowing the shadows,
an expatriate
blistering
a big love
split wide open,
embracing the pain
that devoured my little girl,
I tremble.
Anything dead,
coming back to life
hurts.

PREVIEW
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(SLIDE 20)

THAT BASTARD CUT ME

WOMAN #1

I have this cut over my left eyebrow, and I must tell you that it isn't easy carrying this baggage of knowing that this chump got the best of me. He was my friend and I married him off the rebound from the death of my daughter's father. It was an act of desperation. It was an act of defiance. It was a bad judgment call. It was 1988, no 89 when I married an abuser. My now ex-husband Andre and I were living at my parent's house in a nice residential area, the family home that I grew up in.

The blood slowly dripped down my face in clumps, it didn't hurt; I didn't feel a thing. No I wasn't high. I was sober and I didn't feel a thing! Oh hell no, the bastard cut me! I was suspended in time. I couldn't talk, I couldn't think, I couldn't move. "Is this chump apologizing? Is he talking to me? Couldn't be!" I have an open cut on my face and all you can say is "I'm sorry Redbone." You're right. You are the sorriest motherfucker I ever seen in my life. This is just one of the many incidents that I had endured by the hands of my abuser. You see, I was able to leave him because my father and mother chased him anyway, but they couldn't keep him from following me around and popping up at places that I frequented.

That whole experience left me in a bad place. I couldn't digest the fractured bones, black eyes, cut on the face, the slappings, or the fighting. I had no understanding of it. I was 21 years old. I had a man that was kind and gentle to me and now this. I became hostile, I became angry, I became a walking road rage! The next man that attempts to do me any harm, or looks like he wants to do me something, is going to get it! I was skeptical of men and I treated them with very little respect (except for my father). I couldn't separate or distinguish an abuser from a non-abuser. They were all abusers in my eyes.

On early morning in 1992 I was working as a private home attendant and ran into a friend I knew. We went over to her friend's house and I had to use the bathroom. To make a long story short, I left my purse at the house. I returned the next day to retrieve my purse and the man of the house invited me in to look for it. Not thinking anything of it (because he was my friend's friend) I came in. He wanted to have sex! SEX what the hell is that!!!! He couldn't be serious! I looked at this man and I knew that he was. I told him that I was leaving and started towards the door; he grabbed my neck and started choking me. I thought about Andre, that bastard, and I blanked out, I mean I totally blanked out on him. I thought about the black eyes, the fractured ribs, the fractured jaw, the CUT ABOVE MY EYE and I lost it. I reached back into the sink. I pick up the first thing that I could get my hands on. I hit him with everything I could muster. It was a knife and I stab him! It was a knife and I stab him. I deflated, and was devastated that this is what it had to come to. My hopes, dreams, and aspirations diminished in one stab wound. My life just became an algebraic expression $(x+x) = (x+y)$.

(SLIDE 21)

BAD MEN

WOMAN #1

Excuse me Mister, you, walking down the streets going about your day. You tune us out with your ipods, cell phones and other technological mess. I dare you to stand on the street corner, any given corner, and listen. Listen to the wails of the many souls. Listen to the words our lips never told. The things that you have done to damage our souls. Me? You ponder. Yes, you the male. It is because of you that we're living in this hell. This hell of the worst kind. It's in our minds, our bodies and our souls and all of it is taking a toll on me. I dare you to listen. I dare you to be a man of substance. (SLIDE 22) See, I've been a part of certain circumstances for too long. Come take my hand. Let me stand with you as you listen. Allow me to guide you.

WOMAN #4

I met the man who would become my first husband. I was 18. He was 19. He was so sweet and handsome. His past meant nothing to me. I didn't care to hear about it.

CHORAL

Big mistake!

WOMAN #2

Dear Judge Collette, Did I love James Wilkerson? Yes, very much. He was intelligent, an excellent listener, and had moments of extreme kindness and sensitivity. I wanted us to be a family, but more than that, a healthy one.

Was James an abusive man?

CHORAL

Yes.

WOMAN #1

I embarked on adulthood. I went searching for a love of my own. Then I met you. You beat me. You slapped me. You ran me down with your car. You balled me up in a corner and unleashed a beating on me. I let you because, yes, I looked better than you and I unintentionally drew attention to myself. That angered you so you beat me. I made love to you too good, you beat me because I had to have had sex with someone else to learn that move or that touch. I wore your bruises, your scratches, your bites, your knots upside my head. Yes, I even covered up your stab in my side.

WOMAN #4

Within our first year together he had already broken my nose twice, he had given me numerous black eyes and was in and out jail. Our second year together I became pregnant with my second child, his first. He spent my pregnancy in prison. I stood by him because I was afraid to be alone with two children. He was released from prison when our daughter was four and half months old, and within his first month home I was pregnant again with baby number three. Five months into this pregnancy, his violence returned and worse than ever. When he was asleep and the kids cried he would get up and beat me with a leather belt. This happened everyday for two months. Not a day went by that I didn't have black eyes or bruises.

WOMAN #2

Early in our relationship I made an attempt to break it off due to lifestyle differences. James clearly stated if I ever left him, the result would be the death of my children. That I was his.

WOMAN #1

I hated you but I was too afraid to leave you.

WOMAN #4

I stood by him because I was too afraid to be alone with my two children.

WOMAN #2

Too afraid to leave. I was convinced if I just behaved correctly and did what I was told I was somehow helping.

WOMAN #1

You stabbed me with a metal nail file in my side because of the way I moved my hips. Did I tell? No. I pushed my hanging flesh back in that wound and held you as you cried because you loved me. Ha! The funny thing is I should've been crying. The next morning you started with me again. I didn't cook breakfast. You started beating me. I had had enough! I turned into Tina Turner on Ike and beat you back. I gave you a black eye and I ran and I hid in the closet afraid of you. I was shaking, knowing I could've beat you easily. I cried and felt bad for hitting you because I wasn't raised that way. God did you make me pay. You made me take a photograph of your black eye as a constant reminder.

WOMAN #4

I had six puncture wounds in my head, five in my stomach.

WOMAN #2

James placed boric acid on me holding me down to watch the acid burn and eat my flesh away.

WOMAN #4

I didn't have the heart to put him back in jail. He was, after all, the father of my children. At my eighth month of pregnancy, he went out one night, partying with his friends. All I remember was falling asleep on the sofa waiting for him, and being woken-up by a broom smashing me in the head. Blood flying everywhere. I tried to run out the front door but he tackled me to the floor, and started biting my breast literally taking flesh off of them. I worked my way onto the sofa while begging for my life and that of my unborn baby. I kicked out my living room window hoping some one would come to my rescue. He grabbed the broom again which had broken over my head, and began stabbing me in the stomach with it. I finally got out of the house. I had six puncture wounds in my head, five in my stomach.

My pregnancy ended because when he stabbed me in the stomach, he punctured my water bag and my son drowned.

After all of this, I married him before he was shipped off to prison.

WOMAN #2

He was a forensic anthropologist by degree—knew bones and death intimately. He spoke in graphic detail not only about ways he would kill me and my boys but also how to get rid of our remains. He showed me his special axe for skinning that was kept in our bedroom with at least 8 handguns, 3 rifles and various ammunition for each. He emphasized the need to crush teeth into powder and then consume it, stating teeth were how so many sloppy and uneducated killers would get caught. James placed boric acid on me holding me down to watch the acid burn and eat my flesh away as a way of demonstrating how to clean my bones once I was dead. He then spent a large amount of money on creams to limit scarring, confident in his abilities to care for me.

WOMAN #1

See you wasn't a man at all. Violence begets violence and at first I thought I was a victim. But, no. I was as sick as you. I let your sickness infect me. It infected my self-esteem, my thoughts, my worth, my joy, my life, my every fucking waking moment. Do me a favor. If this is love

CHORAL

Then please hate me!

WOMAN #4

A year later he was released. Within that first week he had me locked in a motel room, with my children watching, (ages 4 and a half and 1 and a half.) He stripped me nude, cut up every piece

of my clothing and dumped them outside in the dumpster. He then cut the cord off my blow dryer and began beating me with it. He stabbed me in the wrist with a steak knife, then punctured my neck with it. He refused me medical attention, instead he cut up a towel and tied it around my wrist. Meanwhile, still beating me with his cord. By the second day I was unconscious, without a memory in my head.

WOMAN #1, WOMAN #4, WOMAN #2

I dare you to be a man of substance.

WOMAN #2

James spoke of crushing diamonds and placing them in Rochelle Chocolates so that I would suffer a slow, painful death. He said by the time doctors figured out the source it would be too late because the shards would be embedded upon digestion. He spoke of Anise, a poison found in apple seeds, which I found a bottle of in our pantry. Injection of liquid nicotine was another example of how he would kill me without leaving a trace. There eventually were countless threats of suffocation, shootings, and the quick breaking of my neck to compliment the beatings that did occur.

WOMAN #4

I later found out that the only reason I survived was because he left the motel to go get my kids something to eat. When he left, my four-year-old son ran to the manager's office to tell him his mommy was dead. I was officially pronounced dead by the police, but paramedics found my pulse.

It took four months to recover enough to put clothes on. Here it is ten years later and mentally I'll never recover. Because of him I lost myself, my self esteem, my security, my self respect, and my kids were put up for adoption.

WOMAN #2

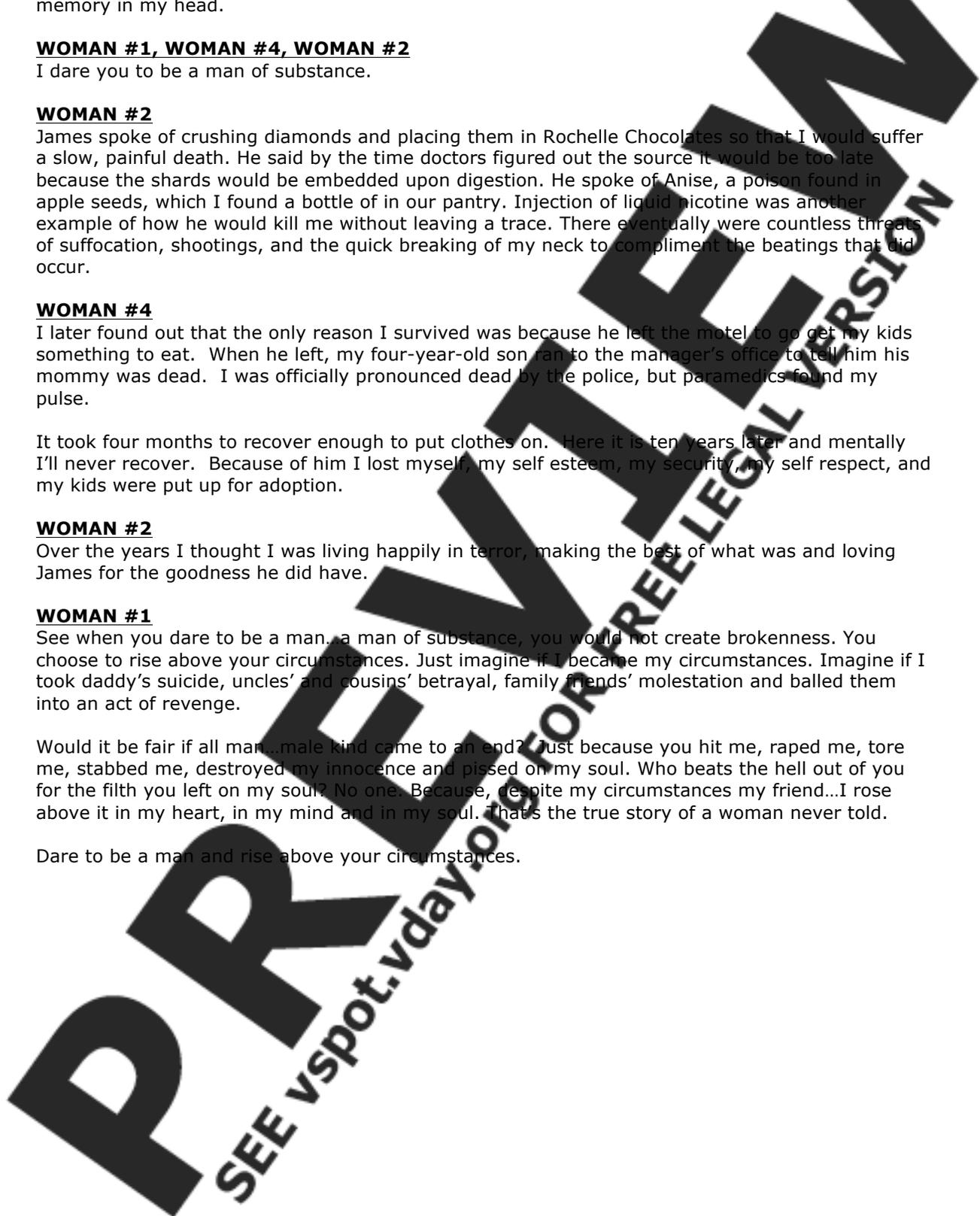
Over the years I thought I was living happily in terror, making the best of what was and loving James for the goodness he did have.

WOMAN #1

See when you dare to be a man. a man of substance, you would not create brokenness. You choose to rise above your circumstances. Just imagine if I became my circumstances. Imagine if I took daddy's suicide, uncles' and cousins' betrayal, family friends' molestation and balled them into an act of revenge.

Would it be fair if all man...male kind came to an end? Just because you hit me, raped me, tore me, stabbed me, destroyed my innocence and pissed on my soul. Who beats the hell out of you for the filth you left on my soul? No one. Because, despite my circumstances my friend...I rose above it in my heart, in my mind and in my soul. That's the true story of a woman never told.

Dare to be a man and rise above your circumstances.



(SLIDES 23 - 25)

[THE FOLLOWING SHOULD BE STACCATO, FAST, OVERLAPPING AS ONE VOICE.]

WOMAN #3

Noise, pounding, vibrating,

WOMAN #4

voices raised loud,

WOMAN #5

loud,

WOMAN #1

loud,

WOMAN #2

competing for center-stage,

WOMAN #3

competing for recognition,

WOMAN #4

somebody listen to that

WOMAN #5

NOISE, tell it to shut its mouth,

WOMAN #1

I don't want to hear it ever again,

WOMAN #2

never again,

WOMAN #3

stop the noise,

WOMAN #4

damn it,

WOMAN #5

stop,

WOMAN #1

stop,

WOMAN #2

stop,

WOMAN #4

I can't stand it,

WOMAN #5

where do they think they are?

WOMAN #1

A shout-off,

WOMAN #2

some kind of prize to be won for being the loudest asshole in the world,

WOMAN #3

here,

WOMAN #4

where asshole reigns Queen for a day.

WOMAN #5

NOISE.

WOMAN #1

So loud.

WOMAN #2

It leaves eardrums quivering in its aftermath,

WOMAN #3

shell-shocked for the thousandth time,

WOMAN #4

forty rounds of shotgun shells,

WOMAN #5

one after the other:

WOMAN #1

Pull!!

WOMAN #2

BOOM.

WOMAN #1

Pull!

WOMAN #5

BOOM.

WOMAN #2

Anger.

WOMAN #3

Like pounding hooves,

WOMAN #4

relentless.

WOMAN #5

Ta dumpf.

WOMAN #1

Ta dumpf.

WOMAN #2

Metal shoes,

WOMAN #3

searing imprints on my flesh,

WOMAN #4

horseshoes,

WOMAN #5

calf's hooves hitting me

WOMAN #1

SMACK!

WOMAN #2

in the middle of my forehead.

WOMAN #3

Like a fist,

WOMAN #4

a hand palm,

WOMAN #5

a belt,

WOMAN #1

a fork flying past my nose at the dinner table.

WOMAN #2

Now,

WOMAN #3

my anger feeds me

WOMAN #4

and I starve.

WOMAN #5

My anger debilitates me

WOMAN #1

and I grow.

WOMAN #2

I carry my anger into bright places —

WOMAN #3

it flashes and sizzles,

WOMAN #4

hot,

WOMAN #5

potent,

WOMAN #1

arrows piercing armor only skin deep.

WOMAN #2

Anger climbs my esophagus ring by ring,

WOMAN #3

straining to climb further,
WOMAN #4
to break out
WOMAN #5
and obliterate.
WOMAN #1
Like a heat-seeking missile
WOMAN #2
my anger finds its target
WOMAN #3
and explodes in a million fragments of
WOMAN #4
toxic,
WOMAN #5
poisonous waste --
WOMAN #1
a waste of energy,
WOMAN #2
a waste of time,
WOMAN #3
a waste of emotion;
WOMAN #4
waste,
WOMAN #5
like yesterday's news,
WOMAN #1
only good for wrapping today's garbage --
WOMAN #2
so much anger,
WOMAN #3
so much waste,
WOMAN #4
'cause after all,
CHORAL
there's no one listening.

(SLIDE 27 – 29 these slides should run completely in the dark before this monologue begins)

PREVIEW
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IF I WASN'T IN PRISON, WHERE WOULD I BE?

(SLIDE 30)

WOMAN #1

If I wasn't here, 32 years old, where would I be?

WOMAN #3

If I wasn't here with a sentence of 4 to 8 where would I be?

WOMAN #5

If I wasn't here with a past of drug addiction and prostitution where would I be?

WOMAN #4

If I wasn't here with dreams of wishing I was somewhere else where would I be?

WOMAN #2

If I wasn't here for a crime I willfully committed and pled guilty to where would I be?

WOMAN #1

If I wasn't here begging for a reversal of institutional charges that I am not guilty of where would I be?

WOMAN #3

If I'd have continued my education where would I be?

WOMAN #5

If I'd have continued to stay in the field of track where would I be?

WOMAN #4

If I'd have gone to law school the way I had planned where would I be?

WOMAN #2

If I'd have not chosen to sleep with dogs where would I be?

WOMAN #1

If I wasn't here for hating everything about my life and everything in it where would I be?

WOMAN #3

If I'd have listened to my parents and not been rebellious where would I be?

WOMAN #5

If I wasn't here fighting to stay alive with this deadly HIV virus where would I be?

WOMAN #4

If If If...

WOMAN #2

If I had none of these things in my past where would I be? And what would I be?

WOMAN #1

Is it the will of God for me to be where I am?

WOMAN #3

Or was it His desire for me to be somewhere else?

WOMAN #1

Only He knows.

WOMAN #5

For if it wasn't for these things of my past that have made me who I am and have brought me here, then I would probably not be.

CHORAL

It's because of these things that I am where I am today.

WOMAN #2

So is it a question of where would I be if I wasn't here?

CHORAL

I am where I am!

(SLIDE 31)

WOMAN #1

When I walk out of the prison gate, I will gently touch the air that surrounds me like a shawl. It is autumn and the leaves are floating in circles of red, browns and oranges. I am with my child in freedom, a reunion with my family and friends who have lived these decades with me. Together with them I step into a new life, filled with uncertainties, the uncharted waters of freedom that we all wait for and do not know really what it means. This will be a voyage of celebration of survival, of gifts of friendship and love, of a weight lifted, of a new day.

Yet, I have another journey to make. I must cross that river of sorrow into the past where the flames burn, with spirits. I will approach and look at your faces, to find your eyes and look directly at you, to go back again to that day, to kneel at the place where I lay on the ground, to retrace my steps, to tell you that your ghosts haunt me. To wail with the flames, Oh if I could only replay that day, I would not have been there, I would not have gone, I would not have my hands in any way touching the tragedy of that day. I will lower myself onto my knees and pray as I have learned in prison to the larger force that we cling to, if I could only push back the clock, remake the past I would look into your faces, that the colors of the flames create and tell you my stories. How when I have held the hands of friends who are dying of AIDS in their youths, long before their time,

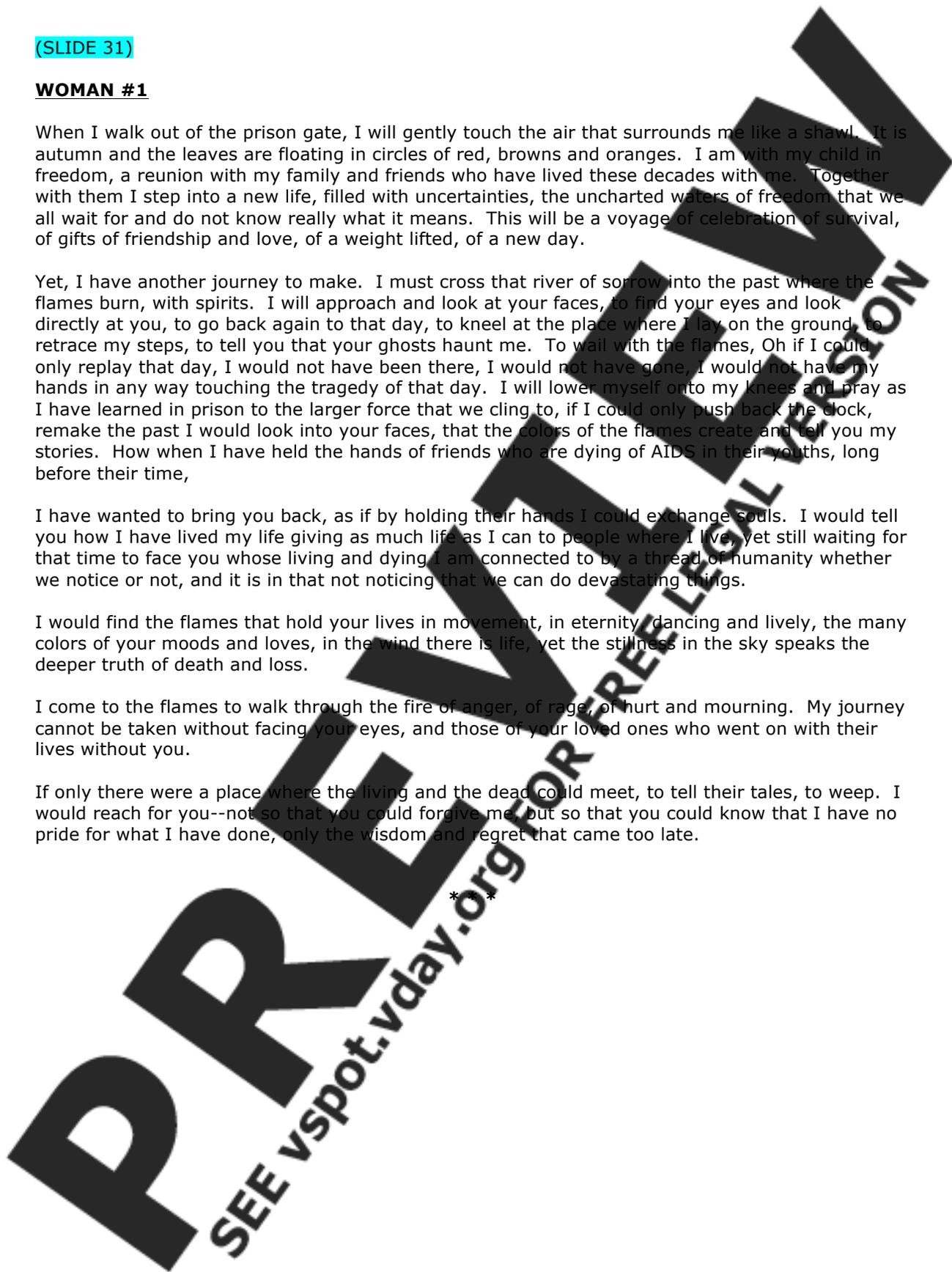
I have wanted to bring you back, as if by holding their hands I could exchange souls. I would tell you how I have lived my life giving as much life as I can to people where I live, yet still waiting for that time to face you whose living and dying I am connected to by a thread of humanity whether we notice or not, and it is in that not noticing that we can do devastating things.

I would find the flames that hold your lives in movement, in eternity dancing and lively, the many colors of your moods and loves, in the wind there is life, yet the stillness in the sky speaks the deeper truth of death and loss.

I come to the flames to walk through the fire of anger, of rage, of hurt and mourning. My journey cannot be taken without facing your eyes, and those of your loved ones who went on with their lives without you.

If only there were a place where the living and the dead could meet, to tell their tales, to weep. I would reach for you--not so that you could forgive me, but so that you could know that I have no pride for what I have done, only the wisdom and regret that came too late.

* * *



(SLIDE 32)

ANY ONE OF US
Eve Ensler

Any one of us
can begin
where there is no beginning.
where there is no floor
no door to keep things
from breaking in
can begin waiting for
a beginning
that isn't made of wishing
you weren't born at all
when you were born
into nothing
into tired
into hungry
into rage.

Any one of us
can have the sheets flown back
and mad whiskey breath take our breath
big grabbing ruthless
hands take our flesh, take our
private
Any one of us
can be that forgotten
discarded
determined other

Can be held back
held under
held down
can end up here.

You say it isn't
that simple
but I tell you it is

Nothing is fixed
well, it's definitely
rigged,
you pull the wrong color
name, accent, mama,

You wake up on his lap
on his hand
his hand up your
his hands around your neck
your fate
you wake up
your body
already public property
already invaded
degraded



not yours
already commerce
already sold
bought
and returned

Any one of us
can get that pissed off
that one time
too many
that instant
that desperate
that pushed against the wall
that humiliated
that disgusted
that hopeless

blind

Can take a gun,
grab the knife, the brick

You say there are bad and good people
I say there are outcomes,
Situations, predicaments,

You say we are all responsible for our actions
I say for each other

You say criminal
I say neglect

You say an eye for an eye
I say I long to see

You say that whore
That junkie
That killer
That convict
I say any one of us.

You say lock them up
I say, when were they free?

(SLIDE 33 - end)

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