

Dr. Ellen M. Taylor
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I support LD 178 because it's our moral responsibility to give people a second chance. I speak as a teacher. I've been working with men at the Maine State Prison for over twelve years in UMA's Prison Education Program. I've seen residents choose to transform their lives, often through education. Many are incarcerated for crimes they committed when they were young, before their brains were fully formed. Many of these young men were addicted, many were abused. Family failed them, foster care failed them, schools failed them, juvi failed them, and the criminal justice system failed them.

In spite of all that, the men I know have reckoned with the crimes they committed, they ask for a second chance. They are not the same people they were when they committed their crimes. Now, they are hospice workers, dog trainers, yoga teachers, master gardeners, beekeepers, and scholars. They are kind, caring, empathic, and capable of giving so much more back to their communities outside the concertina wire of the Maine State Prison.

I speak also as a survivor of a violent crime. I went into the prison with ample reservations about the population I would be working with. But, as a person who believes in social justice, I knew I had to do more than talk the talk. And since my very first class, I learned the power of moving beyond my own trauma and fear and embracing the possibilities of change, in myself and others.

Forgiveness and redemption exists in every spiritual belief system in the world. It should be part of our criminal justice system as well.

Thank you.

Driving with Lorca in Appleton, Maine

Under the maple arches, pick-up trucks
with empty beds and tinted windows
slow down, past a mound of discarded
shelving, a pair of hockey skates, plastic
chairs with broken spines, and a sign: FREE.
Only in America, we see
this wasteland, farms of self-storage,
plazas "Reduced for Quick Sale"
where a *Dollar General* just broke ground.

Oh, where is the village market?
The mango man? The *panaderia*,
and *pasteleria*? Where's the man
repairing soles with his sewing machine
on the corner, his foot strumming
the pedals, his hands fingering the leather
like reading a story of love.
Where is the muchacha embroidering
her camisa for her Sunday stroll after church?

They're in the Zona Franca
making T-shirts for J. C. Penny's
Going Out of Business sale;
They're selling their needle work to pay
coyotes to bring them over the border;
they're hiding from immigration
in ratty apartments with rusty
faucets and moldy carpets.
Ay, Federico, we're not so far from your Spain,
as we pass under the maple arches,
driving through Appleton, Maine.