



Intersectionality, Begging for Help, and The Price of Prisons for Profit – Poetry

By F.I. Goldhaber

Writer’s statement: These poems were inspired by multiple social justice issues.: A Facebook post written by a privileged woman complaining when the prison system captured her mentally ill son inspired “The Price of Prisons for Profit.” Numerous news stories always ending in how the subject’s plight led someone to set up a fundraising campaign to help them pay their medical expenses combined with the GOP efforts to destroy unions, OSHA, the EPA, the ACA, Planned Parenthood, SNAP, etc. inspired “Begging for Help.” Lastly, a graphic that explained intersectionality through examples of privilege and its corresponding system of oppression inspired “Intersectionality.”

Intersectionality

When I study the spoked diagram,
even I am surprised to see how
many times I slip below the line
dividing those with privilege from
those without.

Seven rails have impaled me since my
childhood. One I only accepted
recently and still do not claim for
fear it will be labeled a cry for
attention.

Three I slipped down as my youth trickled
away; one I embraced freely to
pursue my muse. So I dangle from
ten of the fourteen palings without
privilege.

Those who balance on poles above the
line -- straight, white, cis males most of all -- can't
comprehend how their privileges
destroy barriers; pave over their
road through life.

For even if one or two shafts should
elude them, they do not encounter
the same barricades blocking their life
journey that those of us hanging on
below do.

I have a new test for privilege.
If you were at all surprised by the
results of the election, I know
you sit above the line between haves
and have nots.

Only those privileged enough to
ignore racism, misogyny,
heterosexism, religious
bigotry, did not expect fascist
victory.

Begging for Help

Why do you find it acceptable
living in a country where people
who get sick, injured, disabled must
beg for cash to pay medical bills?

Where not only pharmaceutical
makers, hospitals, and insurance
companies enrich their stockholders
on other people's misery, but

crowd-funding sites and credit cards make a killing (sometimes literally) off the suffering of struggling victims of crime, other tragedies.

How does the richest country in the world tolerate people compelled to beg for charity when pushed over the edge by circumstances beyond control?

This is the world austerity built -- health care only for the rich, others forced to live one paycheck away from bankruptcy and homelessness, sometimes choosing between food and medicine.

Where bearing a child, being raped, or just being born female is a pre-existing condition allowing insurers to deny coverage.

Republicans strive to destroy the ability of labor unions to protect workers from exploitation, injury, and death,

eliminating OSHA, worker's compensation, insurance, sick leave, vacations, even weekends, children working, and any minimum wage.

They would eradicate pensions and Social Security, requiring seniors to eat cat food or starve, if influenza does not kill them first.

Restricting women's agency, the GOP wants to deny access to any reproductive care then penalize mothers for giving birth.

They claim to be pro-life, but that ends
at delivery when those born poor,
with dark skin, queer, trans, suffering from
disabilities, whose parents don't

speak English or worship Jesus, are
denied housing, medical care, food,
education, jobs, life, liberty,
or hope of pursuing happiness.

The Price of Prisons for Profit

You ignore millions of people of color incarcerated
for petty crimes -- some innocent -- imprisoned without hope, deprived
of contact with families, proper nutrition, medical aid.

You reject myriad mentally ill patients jailed without their
medications or psychiatric care, treated like animals
by sadistic guards who don't even allow them to know the time.

Left to psychologically rot in jail, often with no pillows
or blankets; bereft of in-person contact by monetary
setups that charge more than they can afford for video visits;

Denied access to life affirming hormones, always misgendered,
abused by both guards and fellow prisoners for daring to ask
for acceptance of identities outside binary genders;

Forced to work for pennies an hour manufacturing garments,
furniture, electronics, and more so corporations that pay
no taxes can claim their merchandise is made in America;

Caged for twenty-three hours a day, prevented from sleeping, hungry,
alone, required to pay hundreds to the governments trampling their
rights and destroying their health; these wretches escape your attention.

Until the trap of private, pecuniary, prisons captures
someone you love, subjecting them to the tortures others endure
day in and day out across the U.S. from sea to shining sea.

Only then do you complain about corruption, assail abuse,
deride the debasement, impugn inequities and injustice,
and discover organizations that have fought this for decades.

You retain attorneys, pay for visits, purchase comfort from the commissary. You advocate for reform, write letters to your legislators, and sign online petitions to the president.

But those who do not have families with resources perish in prison, expiring from exploitation, strangled by their sorrow, succumbing to suicide, murdered via medical neglect.

Once the ordeal ends for your own victim of prisons for profit, will you continue to campaign for those who have no such support? Or will you forget that your loved one's journey is hardly unique?

Will you return to ignoring the relationships ravaged, the communities crippled by losing those sucked into schemes designed to dehumanize those who are minorities, moneyless, mad?

F.I. Goldhaber's words capture people and places with a photographer's eye and a poet's soul. As a reporter, editor, business writer, and marketing communications consultant, she produced news stories, feature articles, essays, editorial columns, and reviews for newspapers, corporations, governments, and non-profits in five states. Now her poetry, fiction, essays, and reviews appear in paper, electronic, and audio magazines, books, newspapers, calendars, anthologies, and street signs including *Black Lives Have Always Mattered*, *11/9: The Fall of American Democracy*, *Star *82 Review*, *Windfall: A Journal of Poetry of Place*, *Gold Man Review*, *In Our Own Voices*, *New Verse News*, *Poetry for the Masses*, and *Diverse Voices Quarterly*. <https://goldhaber.net/>