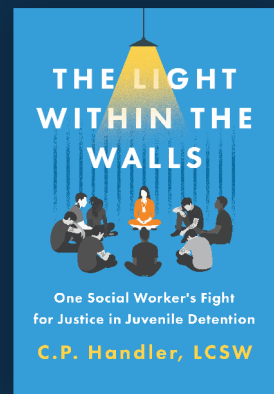


READER'S GUIDE FOR INCARCERATED READERS



INTRODUCTION

This guide was created with deep respect for those reading this book from inside correctional facilities. It is written with the understanding that your experiences, insights, and reflections are powerful and necessary. These pages offer an invitation to explore your own story, your relationships, and the possibility of change—on your terms, in your time.

Trauma-Informed Guidance for Reading

Reading about trauma—your own or someone else's—can bring up strong emotions. These responses are human, not signs of weakness.

- Pause when you need to.
- Talk to someone you trust.
- Write your thoughts down.
- Notice what parts hit you hardest.

Vocabulary for Clarity

This section is not meant to simplify your intelligence—only to ensure a shared language.

- **Trauma:** Deep emotional wounds from past experiences.
- **Resilience:** The capacity to withstand or to recover in a healthy manner from difficulties.
- **Therapeutic relationship:** A trusting connection between a therapist and a client.

- **Systemic:** Problems built into the functions of an institution.
- **Accountability:** Taking responsibility for your actions and their impact.
- **Witness:** Seeing someone fully, without judgment or intolerance.

THEMES FOR REFLECTION

Trauma and Survival

Many of the boys in this book carried wounds long before they entered the system. Reflect on how trauma has shaped your own path.

Trust and Vulnerability

Trust is difficult in places where vulnerability can be dangerous. Reflect on what trust looks like for you inside.

Systems and Power

Institutions shape young people in ways that are often invisible from the outside. Reflect on how systems have influenced your life.

Accountability and Change

Growth begins with honesty—with yourself first. Reflect on what accountability means to you today.

Witness vs. Exploitation

This book aims to honor stories, not use them. Reflect on what it means to be truly seen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

These questions can be used individually or in group settings.

- Which story in the book felt closest to your own? Why?
- What emotions came up for you while reading?
- What anecdotes, if any, surprised you?
- What part of the book didn't surprise you but might have seemed unbelievable to someone with no exposure to the justice system?
- What or who helped you survive your hardest moments?
- Who has shown you compassion when you didn't expect it?
- What does healing look like for you right now?
- What would you want someone on the outside to understand about your life?
- How do you protect your heart—and how do you open it safely?
- What do you want your life to look like in the future? What steps are you taking now to make that a reality?
- What part of yourself are you most proud of today?

WRITING PROMPTS FOR PERSONAL GROWTH

- Write about a moment when you surprised yourself.
- Write about someone who believed in you.
- Write about a time you showed courage.
- Write about the person you want to become.

GROUP DISCUSSION PROMPTS

These prompts are designed for book clubs, dorm groups, or therapeutic circles.

- What does it mean to be seen without judgment?
- How do you build trust in a place where trust is risky?
- What does healing look like when physical freedom is limited?
- How do systems shape the futures of young people?
- What does responsible storytelling mean to you? Do you feel this book accomplished that?
- What does accountability look like, especially if it was never modeled?

CLOSING REFLECTION

This book is not about perfection.

It is about possibility. It is about the truth that you are more than the worst thing you've ever done—and more than what the system has told you about yourself.

It is about the belief that change is possible, even here. Especially here.

If this book and reader's guide impacted you in a meaningful way, please pay it forward by sharing it with someone else.