

**10 May 2016,**

10:30 pm: Drew Topp took me on a tour of the prison. He informed me that the only item I was allowed to take into the facility was my ID; anything else could pose a danger if an inmate managed to get a hold of it. The patrol car (the only location with firearms in the whole facility) met us at the front gate. The officer had me sign visitor paper work and gave us clearance to enter the main building. Drew needed to get the keys necessary for the tour from the control center, located next to the maximum security ward.

As we were waiting, an officer was leaving ward 500, the ward with the highest security. She had been called in because an inmate was trying to commit suicide (which is a common occurrence in the prison along with: cutting, head banging, smearing of feces, masturbation, rape, fighting, and writing on the walls with blood) and had to be moved to an observation cell; where we found him naked and mumbling nonsense to himself. His normal cell was open, so we looked inside. The room was made entirely of concrete and contained a filthy toilet (the inmates are responsible for their own hygiene and, if neglected, will face detainment punishments and other consequences until their cell is acceptably clean), a messy bed, a small desk made from an outcropping of concrete and a shelf that was piled with trash.

Next, we moved to the 400 block where prisoners from the 500 block are moved after demonstrating acceptable behavior. Here, Drew chatted with some of the inmates who were peering through their cell windows. These prisoners were polite in conversation, although they did speak in a paranoid manner. One inmate had written up a petition to give to the on-duty officer, who dismissed the letter because the inmate was criminally insane and does this every evening. We wandered through blocks 300 and 200 and then went to the rec room and the disciplinary detention ward (DD or solitary confinement), affectionately called "the shoe" or "the sandbox". These cells were empty at the time of our visit.

We moved to the prison yard which had two handball courts (rackets would pose as a dangerous weapon in the hands of some inmates), a baseball field (because, as Drew put it, "Baseball bats are more dangerous than tennis rackets, but you know... government logic."), weight machines, and centers of worship for religions that involve the use of fire pits (specifically: a religion based on Norse mythology and white supremacy, a Native American sweat lodge, and Satanists). I asked Drew if many inmates went into the yard during winter. He said that most decide to stay indoors, but there needs to be several officers stationed around the yard if anybody is outside. The prisoners will take turns walking one at a time around the yard so the officers are forced to stay outside in the cold.

Next, I saw the activities center where inmates are allowed to do craft projects, paint, play basketball, and more. We then moved to the building that contained the calmer inmates, mostly sex offenders and drug dealers and abusers. Here, some inmates have jobs doing janitorial work. We found one inmate mopping and one touching up the paint on the walls. Drew and I entered dorm K which housed seven inmates, all of which were awake and freely walking around the room. We briefly spoke with them and proceeded to the top floor of the building which houses the sex offenders. We entered the DD ward here, which contained three prisoners. Two were asleep, but one was glaring at us through the sound proof glass of his cell.

Next, we went to the building that had the humble choir room we will be using. It actually had a carpeted floor. The only piano that was allowed in the room was Drew's cheap electric keyboard. He only uses it to give pitches because the sound is horrendous for accompanying. Finally, we moved to the

visitation area where we will be performing in August. This room had several snack machines from which a visitor could purchase food and soda for an inmate; the inmates are not allowed to have any form of money because, according to Drew, they will find a way of using it inappropriately for trading contraband or favors in the prison. Right after this, we returned the keys at the central control desk and I left at 11:45 pm.

This tour was an eye opening experience. I had no idea the small, rarely talked about prison in Jamestown, North Dakota was as much a high-security place as the prisons in movies. I am excited to work with the inmate choir. We have ten people participating, but only about seven show up regularly. Most of the inmates have not had any musical experience in the past, so the choir sings at about a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level. There are not many fun pieces at that level for grown men to sing, so Drew and I have to arrange tunes in two to three-part harmony. One enthusiastic inmate asked if we could sing the Justin Timberlake song, "Losing My Way" and one inmate wanted to sing a religious song. It will be my job to arrange, teach, and conduct these two pieces in the coming weeks.

### **18 May 2016**

11:00 am: Drew called me to the prison to fill out my volunteer paper work for assistant choir director. There were many forms explaining the rules and expectations of a prison volunteer and a list of what I am not allowed to bring into or do in the prison. I had to watch a few videos explaining security procedures and how to avoid getting conned by prisoners.

### **23 May 2016**

7:30 pm: Today was my first day as assistant choir director. I met Drew at the visitor gate, emptied my pockets, and went through security. We got the keys to the Yellow Ribbon Room (the name of the chapel/choir room) from the control center. Drew was worried about how the choir would sound today since they did not meet last week because one of the inmates had a heart attack at the beginning of rehearsal. We walked down the hall and had the officer on duty call down the inmates. Drew made a few calls to remind guards to bring in a few inmates from the yard. As we were waiting, several inmates came out of a room marked "Barber Shop" with three dogs on a leash. Drew explained that they train seeing-eye dogs at the prison.

The inmates arrived one at a time from upstairs. The first inmate, who was also the most passionate about the choir, was the first one down. I was introduced to him and he told a story about how more inmates need to realize that acting upset and angry at the world will not make their sentence any shorter, and it is better to find the good in what the day will bring. He told us that he was suffering from PMS (Parked Motorcycle Syndrome) and could not wait for the day he could start riding again. Other inmates arrived and I was introduced to Ron, John, and Rodger. There were nine inmates total. We headed for the choir room when all were present.

I helped Drew set up for rehearsal and took some time to talk with the inmates about who I was, where I am from, and why I am doing this (being careful not to disclose too much personal information). I took a seat by John, a 300-pound African-American, in the bass section and Drew led us in a warmup (it was decided that I would only be observing today). One inmate was particularly inquisitive (much to the annoyance of everyone) and began asking me questions about Bismarck and how I knew Drew. He also

wanted me to find him on Facebook and introduce him to “the cute ladies that I obviously know”. I was a bit unsure how to manage this situation, so I simply ignored him when he started asking about my female friends and let Drew start rehearsal.

We sang “Hey Ho, Nobody’s Home” in a round. The choir, though not being very experienced, gave off a deep rumbling sound that one might compare to that of a band of pirates. After this, we sang through Drew’s arrangement of “The Misty Mountain” from *The Hobbit*. The arrangement itself was rather simple. The tenors sang the melody and the basses provided pedal tone harmonies. Most of the inmates had difficulty matching all of the intervals, especially the basses. We spent time working through the larger intervallic jumps and made some progress. We spent a great deal of time solidifying the melody with the tenors because they consistently had trouble matching pitch.

Drew had printed off the lyrics to the popular tune “We Will Rock You” by Queen. The inmates were excited that this was added to their music folders and soulfully participated in singing/yelling the song from memory.

After this, we sang Drew’s arrangement of “The Lion Sleeps Tonight”. The youngest looking bass sang the falsetto solo at the beginning and did a remarkable job. In the back, John and I had fun adding in a third part of harmony for the “a-whim-a-wehs”. We sang the tune twice. It was obvious the choir had spent a good deal of time on it and enjoyed singing it.

The rest of the rehearsal was spent working on “The Misty Mountain”. It was obvious that most of the inmates were bored of rehearsal by this point and were not putting forth much effort. I, the observer, will admit that my attention was drifting after the first five times we sang through the tune. Rehearsal was soon over and I shook hands with the inmates and spoke with a few of them. Rodger asked me what my favorite kind of music was. I told him that it was jazz and asked him what he liked. He told me that he like contemporary gospel music and that he missed his 12-string guitar. Drew and I brought the inmates back to the building we met them in, handed in the keys, exchanged folders, and headed home.

## 25 May 2016

7:30 pm: The security procedures at the front gate have become routine now. Drew and I waited in the hallway for the inmates to come down from their rooms upstairs. We had a new recruit today from the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. The female security guard on duty had to leave the hallway, for some time, just as all of the inmates in the building were transitioning activities or duties, leaving Drew and I alone with 30-40 offenders. I met a few of them as I was talking to Chris, one of the choir members, about his rapping skills.

There were only seven inmates at rehearsal today and it was obvious none of them were in the mood to be productive. I led warmups (my rehearsal plan is in a separate document) and made the focus point on posture and ear training. I felt confident in leading warmups because I have done so plenty of times in the past, but tonight was different, and it was difficult to communicate to the choir members what I wanted them to do. Drew and I agreed that this is because they have never been in a music ensemble before and do not know the correct etiquette found in a typical choir classroom, such as not singing when the teacher is singing and waiting to be cued. Drew led the rest of the rehearsal. We spent most of the time working “The Misty Mountain” which regressed substantially since Monday. The basses needed to be spoon-fed every one of the notes and the choir literally forgot what dynamics were.

There are rests in some measures and we had to remember to actually rest on them. Drew was struggling with having the singers count the rest as a full beat, so I suggested that we clap in the space to fill in the beat. This helped a lot, but we ran into trouble when the inmates (mostly Chris) decided that clapping was necessary for more than just the rests. We quickly looked at “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” but we were missing both soloists, so Drew had Chris sing the opening solo and Justin sing the middle solo. There was a discord between the tenors and basses so Drew put the sections into a mixed formation which actually cleared up a lot of the problems.

After rehearsal, John and Ronnie thanked me for my time, and Chris approached me about some music that he had written during his time in prison. He sang the chorus of a piece that he had written for his mother, and how he wished she loved him, and how much it hurts him that she does not. He rapped several verses after singing the chorus (his voice and ear is a little underdeveloped but he can write a catchy melody) that explained his whole life story about living on the streets and getting into drugs. He mentioned going to prison because he was guaranteed three meals a day, health and dental care, a warm bed, and shelter.

### **1 June 2016**

7:30 pm: After the routine check in, Drew and I gathered the inmates for choir. There was a new person today, an African-American named Boxly, whom Ronnie recruited. Drew speculates that Ronnie is a ring leader among the African-American community in the prison, because of his older age and previous experience, as something along the lines of a drug lord. We put Boxly in the tenor section. I had a conversation with Justin, one of the most enthusiastic individuals of the choir, and he spoke about his 10 years of experience playing trumpet. He even toured with a drum and bugle corp. ensemble for six months.

I have been working on my arrangement of Justin Timberlake’s song “Losing My Way” this last week (see: [Losing\\_my\\_way\\_Revised.pdf](#)) and I was nervous about how it would turn out. The rhythms of the solo parts are extremely complex for an inexperienced choir, so I decided I would teach the ostinato bass pattern and the harmony (see lesson plan: [Losing\\_my\\_way\\_rehearsal1.docx](#)). Only two inmates, Alex—the one who suggested the song—and Carter—whom Alex showed it to, had heard the piece prior to rehearsal.

I began the rehearsal with a warmup that built off of last week’s. I wanted the inmates to learn to sing in tune with each other, so after the initial pentascale exercise, I had the choir sustain a single pitch and voice the proper vowels in Latin. As I had anticipated, the men chewed on the vowels. I was surprised that they sang in tune right away, so I explained how we could sound even better by matching our vowel sounds. I demonstrated to them the proper way, which made them laugh, and had them sing it back to me. It took a few tries but eventually we were able to ascend a chromatic scale. I also had the choir sing a descending pentascale to work on the low register. I mentioned how we need to lift up as we sing lower because our tendency will be to go flat. Finally, I had the inmates do an ear training exercise similar to last week’s, but I extended it to cover a whole pentatonic scale. I must admit that I was surprised by their ability to remember pitches.

Next, I moved the focus of rehearsal to the piece I arranged. My first plan of action was to get the whole choir to sing the ostinato bass pattern found in the first two bars. I had planned to work on this for approximately ten minutes, but the choir caught on fast and sang with acceptable intonation. To

spice things up, I had the choir stomp on beats 1&3 and clap on beats 2&4, which helped keep the rhythm steady and make it more fun. Moving on, we looked at the harmony parts found in measures 3 and 4. I wrote out two different harmony parts because I thought that the first one I wrote (measures 5 and 6) were in uncomfortable registers and intervals. I followed my lesson plan and with a few informal assessments, the inmates sang acceptably well. We tried the second harmony next. After succeeding at singing it, the inmates agreed they liked the second one better (which was the one I originally wrote). I had a few inmates sing the ostinato bass part while the rest of the choir sang the harmony. It was really fun for everybody when the parts came together, albeit a bit rough around the edges, and we stomped and clapped. During this whole endeavor, I went off on a few tangents regarding music history (the inmates fell flat on a perfect fifth and created a tritone. I explained the view of the tritone in the Western church for a greater part of its existence and how it was called the "devil's interval". I said that we used it often in modern times to create different moods while I played a jazz progression on the key board. Ronnie raised his hand and talked about a church he went to in southern Texas and how the music was uplifting [he was not quite spot-on with what I was saying, but it was fun to hear what he said]. I talked about how the view of music, all the way through to the writings of Plato and Aristotle, was to relieve a person of the pain that came from labor.).

I thought that I had planned enough for this lesson, but I was wrong. Drew said I could keep going if I wanted to, so I talked about solos and we sang through some of the other harmonies in the piece. Eventually, Drew said he wanted to do some interval training with them, so I took a seat by Ronnie and participated in learning the intervals of a major scale. After this was finished, Drew and I took the inmates back to the residential building and went home.

## 6 June 2016

7:30 pm: Little was accomplished today at rehearsal. Drew and I decided we were going to have a listening session so the choir could better grasp the music we were singing. In a normal classroom this would have been easy to execute. However, it can be hard to accumulate the necessary supplies in prison. Drew and I needed to get access to a laptop (we got permission to use the one in the chaplain's office) and permission to set up the sound and projection system in the Yellow Ribbon Room. Drew had arranged things so that the chaplain's assistant (an inmate who helps with worship services) would set things up for us when we got there.

The choir members were let in by another security guard and took seats around the projector. Drew had left the notebook that contained passwords for the chaplain's laptop, as well as the security code to access the internet, at home. He made a call using the landline phone found in the office outside of the rehearsal space to obtain the passwords. I had to follow him into the hallway so that we could be within a line of sight with each other while also allowing me to maintain a line of sight with the inmates. The passwords that Drew received did not work and we spent fifteen minutes trying to get the equipment to work. I talked to some inmates while Drew was trying to figure things out with the chaplain's assistant. One inmate said that he was trying to get new razors with which he could shave his face, but that if he did, he would be put on suicide watch for an amount of time because he has previously cut himself shaving before. I played piano for a few minutes for the inmates and answered questions they asked me, such as: what instruments do I play, how long have I been playing, which is my favorite to play.

The technology was not cooperating. I was unprepared to give a whole music lesson today because I had not planned for the technological failure, so I improvised a warmup based on the ones we have done previously and reviewed the materials covered last week. I also guided the choir in rehearsing a new section of the piece "Losing My Way" that features a tradeoff in melody between the tenors and basses. The sections seemed slightly confused at first on how to hold their own part, but by the end of rehearsal we managed to push through with only a few bumps and bruises. In short, the rehearsal today was not very productive musically, but I learned to be better prepared for anything to happen. There is a gate between the Yellow Ribbon Room and the housing units that we lock open with a padlock. I had secured it on our way to rehearsal, but now Drew had to use his key to unlock it. I told him I was not sure if I was supposed to lock it or just leave it open. Drew told me that it is important to secure it because an inmate might steal the lock, put it in a sock, and swing it at another inmate's temple and kill him. The lock thief might also use it to lock up an officer in an inconvenient and threatening location. After rehearsal, I met Drew and his girlfriend Shaina at Applebee's and we discussed the choir, shared a few jokes, and indulged in some cheap appetizers.

### **8 June 2016**

7:30 pm: Due to Monday's technological mishaps, today was a movie day. We watched recordings of all the choir songs plus a few extra videos for fun. I showed the inmates a recording of Leveleven's piece "Nordic Polska" which received mixed reviews from the choir members. Sydney really enjoyed it and told me how he felt. We had a new recruit today (Ronnie gets credit) named Chris. Roger approached me after rehearsal and told me that he did not like the Justin Timberlake song I had arranged because it did not have any happy resolution. He said, "The song, was that a cry for help? If so, where was the answer? I don't feel comfortable singing a song like this if it just ends in despair." To which I replied that we would be singing "Amazing Grace" after that song which provides somewhat of an answer and that I would not hold it against him if he felt uncomfortable singing "Losing My Way". He affirmed that he would sit the song out and, as he was leaving, told me to check out a song by Keith Green called "So You Wanna Go Back to Egypt". I was prepared to work on music today, but we did not have time (see: JRCC\_Rehearsal2.docx).

### **13 June 2016**

7:30 pm: Drew is gone for the next two weeks and I am on my own with the choir. Drew had Sargent MacDonnell (Drew and he used to work on the same floor and the inmates, who gave the nickname "Cheese" to Drew, called MacDonnell and Drew "Mac and Cheese") supervise the choir as I taught. I arrived early so that I could get checked in and be ready on time. It took a while for the inmates to come downstairs for rehearsal because I was so early. There were eight inmates for rehearsal.

In the rehearsal room I learned that I need to be more careful about what I say because some inmates are really immature and will make inappropriate jokes out of the smallest off-hand comments. Drew forgot to leave the music folders with me so I had to improvise my rehearsal plan (I used a modified version of last week's plan).

I started with warmups with a few added drills. In an earlier rehearsal, Drew worked on intervals with the inmates, so I decided to review that material. I had the inmates sing a major pentascale while singing the number of the interval in the scale. After a few repetitions of this, I had the inmates sing the intervals themselves starting with a perfect unison, then a major second, followed by a major third, and so on. Next I played a note and asked the choir to sing the note. Then I had them sing the tonic note. I picked a new note and had the choir recall the tonic note. Eventually, we alternated between indicating with fingers what interval I was playing and singing the interval I asked for.

I moved the focus of the rehearsal to "Losing My Way". I reviewed the bass groove and the tenor and bass harmonies at the beginning. The choir did well in remembering what we previously worked on. I did some work solidifying parts and asked Alex to sing the solo. He did quite well, but I messed up by giving him the wrong starting note. I promptly apologized and had him start over. I was pleased with what the choir was able to do, and Mac gave me a smile and nod of approval. I moved on to teaching the harmonies that I added at the end of the "Can anybody out there hear me?" section. I struggled a great deal with this at first because I forgot to remember how I had been teaching the other parts. I foolishly and absentmindedly thought that I could have the inmates sing three-part harmony by ear and work with all three parts at a time. This did not work at all and confused the participants. I decided to just work with the section alone and put them together, which worked much better.

I am currently working on an arrangement of John Newton's "Amazing Grace" for the choir. However, I had not printed off the music because my printer at home is not working and because I have not finished the arrangement. We simply sang the melody a few times. We sang through "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" which was a blast for the inmates. The inmates voted that Carter should take the falsetto solo at the beginning, which he was nervous for. After some encouragement from the choir and me, he sang an amazing solo and we busted into the main rhythm of the song. Finally, some of the inmates wanted to sing "Down in the River to Pray". I had not heard them sing this song before, so I did not know what to expect. However, the inmates have this song memorized pretty well. The basses could use a bit more work on their part, which we will look at in the future.

## 15 June 2016

7:30 pm: Mac met me at the JRCC. He had prepared everything we needed for rehearsal today: opened the doors, poured a pitcher of ice water, and even turned on the air conditioning. He had also grabbed Drew's backpack with the music folders in it. One of the first things that happened as we were waiting for the inmates to come downstairs for rehearsal was an unexpected complaint from a shirtless inmate. While wielding two baseball bats (remember inmates are allowed to play baseball in the yard but not tennis), he yelled down the hall that somebody has hidden his shirt from him. The guard on duty got him a shirt from a room down the hall and told him to go look for his old one.

The inmates eventually arrived. Those in attendance were Justin, Rodger, Carter, (annoying) Chris, and Chris the new recruit; it was a small group today. (Annoying) Chris told the other Chris that he had terrible breath. He responded, "That's what Ramadan will do to you: no water." Chris had a hard time understanding why he did not simply ignore Ramadan so he could have water, but other Chris explained to him that he does not mind fasting for religious purposes. First Chris said, "I respect that, you know, I'm trying to make myself right with the Lord, too. So, I get you; good for you."

I started rehearsal with a short warm up focusing on lifted tone and higher range. I did an ear training exercise that was pointless because all of the inmates were able to get 100% of the answers (I played notes and had them signal if each successive note was higher or lower than the last). I would have come to rehearsal more prepared, but I was at my other job all day, where I finished the arrangement of "Amazing Grace", but I ran out of time before I could write a lesson. However, I knew what I wanted to accomplish today, and, since there were only five singers today and they were good section leaders, I decided to work our way through the first three versus of "Amazing Grace" (see: JRCC\_Amazing\_Grace.pdf).

I have been getting better at giving clearer instructions, but I do not know what I can do to get the inmates to understand what I want from them within the first three times of giving the same instruction. Previously this summer, I have been teaching 5<sup>th</sup> grade students how to play their first band instrument and these students listen better than the 25-60 year-old inmates. I understand though that many inmates do not even complete 8<sup>th</sup> grade and are prone to have more learning disabilities, which can be a contributing factor as to why they are incarcerated. I altered my approach to giving instruction halfway through rehearsal to be even more specific, which yielded more or less better results.

Overall, the rehearsal today was productive and everybody stayed roughly on task. I really appreciate the effort that the choir members are putting into rehearsal, especially those who do not even know how to read music (which is all of them except Justin). I am excited for next Monday to see how the work today paid off.

## 20 June 2016

7:30 pm: When I entered the visitation gate, I was greeted by a new officer whose first name was Winter. I had never met anybody named after a season other than summer and autumn. Winter called down the inmates for choir, but only three (Justin, Chris, and Rodger) showed up. Chris was down first and he was wearing glasses and carrying some books he had gotten from the library. I complimented him on his glasses and told him that he looked scholarly, especially with the books. Justin came down next and I asked him about his weekend. He said it was not very enjoyable, but he made it through. I had also experienced some personal troubles this weekend, so I told him that mine was likewise. As it turns out, he definitely had a rough weekend (I sometimes forget that I am volunteering at a prison and inmates tend to have troubled pasts, especially problems with wives and children) because he missed his 9-year-old son's birthday and that his kids did not call him on Father's Day. He told me that he had good news as well: his fiancé's phone number was approved to be released to him by the prison and that she is coming next week to visit. I asked him about his children and he said, as best as I can quote,

"Oh, they aren't my kids anymore. After that woman stole my truck, emptied my bank account, and took my kids out of state (all on a Father's Day while I was away helping a friend tow his vehicle), she turned them into little monsters who have completely turned against me. I'm sure she's filled their heads with lies about me to keep them away. I can't really blame her. But it's okay... I can start a new family with my fiancé."

The four of us and Winter went to the Yellow Ribbon Room for rehearsal. I was planning on working on "Amazing Grace" more, but I was hoping we would have more people. I explained that it was going to be a more intimate rehearsal today. We all sat at one table and I set up the keyboard on my lap.



We talked for a short while about nothing important and then began rehearsal. We did a short warm up followed by an ear training activity where we sing the scale degrees as we progressively move up the scale (1... 121... 12321... 1234321... etc.). We never really did this successfully, but I decided to explain how this would evolve into more complex training exercises. By declaring that we cannot sing a certain number, it forces the participant to fill in the space in their head while maintaining tempo (3 is removed—1... 121... 12 21... 12 4 21... etc.). I spoke about how it is important to get our brains to think in different ways because the neural pathways in the brain are what create memories and skills and moreover, how the pathways are not exclusive to the one task we performed and remembered. Dennis Gowen always urges us music students to try eating or writing with our non-dominant hand once or twice a week so that we get used to thinking in different ways. Justin told us about a YouTube video (one that I have seen before: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFzDaBzBIL0>) where Destin, the creator of the channel, talks about his experience learning how to ride a bike that was said to be “impossible to ride”. While Justin was telling his story, Ronnie came in. I shook his hand and told him that I was glad to see him. At one point, I gave a strong sniff to keep the mucus in my nose. Justin said that at least I do not have seasonal allergies. This led me on a brief tangent with them on the one, but extremely serious allergy that I do possess—Stephen-Johnson’s Syndrome. This rare condition is an allergic reaction to a variety of stimuli that differs from person to person and I happen to be allergic to ibuprofen.

We pulled out “Amazing Grace” and began working on what we looked at on Friday. It was almost like they had forgotten everything, but with fewer singers, mistakes tend to show up more. The progress was the same as last week, but we did manage to get through to the key change on the last verse. Ronnie, who was not at last Wednesday’s rehearsal, said that he liked the piece and that he very much appreciates that I arranged such a lovely tune for the choir.

## 22 June 2016

7:15 pm: I arrived a bit early today so I had to wait around with Winter for the inmates to get back in from outside. Rodger was the first to arrive and he told me about his earlier days and how he hated school, but he now has an associate’s degree. He said he was not going to go to college, but after serving 18 months in Vietnam, he decided to use the “free money” that the government was giving to veterans. He really did not know what to study, but he decided that he wanted to go into machining. Justin, Alex (after a week long hiatus), and Chris came down to go to choir. Ronnie said that he was going to get the rest of the people to show up, but, once again, we had a small group.

I started rehearsal by doing a warm up that focused on a nice, even tone and good blend. I also brought back the ear training exercise from Monday (1... 121... 12321... etc.) which everybody except Alex had done before. Apparently Rodger, Justin, and Chris had practiced this because they were able to make it through the whole exercise with only a few mistakes. We did the exercise again, this time removing the third note in the scale. Surprisingly, they were able to do it better than me. It is amazing what practicing can do.

Carter came in right when we finished warmups, so we had an extra voice and it made all the difference. We looked at “Amazing Grace” and reviewed what we have been working on. We were able to sing through the first verse quite well. The second and third verses needed to be dusted off a bit but were sung mostly accurately. I addressed the tone of the choir and did a few exercises to bring out the

tone of the inmates' voices and to reduce their timid approach to some notes. I had given them the choice at the beginning of rehearsal, whether when we finished reviewing "Amazing Grace", if they would want to move on to a different piece or stay with this one. They chose to keep going, so we broke down the first phrase of the final verse. I was really impressed with how enthusiastic the inmates got when we finally pieced the three part harmony together (it was not as much of a challenge to do so with these dedicated choir members). I was greatly pleased by their work today and I am excited to hear what Drew has to say when he gets back on Monday.

### **27 June 2016**

7:30 pm: Drew was back for rehearsal today. He had a good time during National Guard training at Devil's Lake, even though there was a thunder storm with 80mph winds that tore apart most of the tents. Drew and I went through the usual procedures as I told him about the past two weeks and some of the progress and regressions that happened. He was a bit disgusted to find out that more than half of the inmates were skipping rehearsal, but he reasoned that it was because he has not been on duty to remind them to come every day. After discussing this, it was no surprise that only six inmates showed up today again (Carter, Alex, Justin, Ronnie, and [a new recruit] Garland).

I was unable to go to rehearsal on June 29<sup>th</sup> because the summer theater program in Jamestown was having the dress rehearsal for a musical which I played bass guitar in. There was rehearsal on July 4<sup>th</sup>, but I did not go because I was with my family in Bismarck.

### **6 July 2016**

7:30 pm: Rehearsal was very routine tonight. Drew and I have determined that we have a core group of six singers: Ronnie, Justin, Carter, Rodger, Sydney, and Alex. We are concerned that the choir will not be allowed to continue or perform because of the small number of participants, so Drew is going to make posters and talk to more inmates about joining. He asked the current choir members to write letters to the deputy warden about their experiences in choir and why they enjoy it.

Drew led the first half of the rehearsal while I sang bass next to Rodger and Ronnie. He started with a warmup of "Hey, Ho, Nobody's Home" in a round. His directions were a bit confusing, but after five extra minutes of explanation, we were all on the same page. We sang "We Will Rock You" after the warmup. Justin and Carter took Freddie Mercury solos while the rest of us stomped and clapped the ostinato rhythm and sang the choruses. We ended Drew's portion of rehearsal by reviewing "Misty Mountain". We decided to vote on a name for the choir. I suggested "In-chorus-cerated" which the inmates really enjoyed. Ultimately, the members settled on Ronnie's suggestion, "The JRCC Hilltop Choir".

My portion of the rehearsal was spent on singing "Losing My Way". I was impressed with how quickly the inmates picked up on what we had previously worked on. I only needed to give most directions once and the choir would follow. We did have some difficulty in organizing the chorus section, but once we pieced it together, we were able to sing the entire first half of the piece acceptably fluently.

**11 July 2016**

I went out to the prison and waited for Drew to arrive. After fifteen minutes I went and checked with the officer at the check in gate to see if Drew was working. She radioed him and he told her that there was no choir tonight. I walked back outside in the pouring rain and drove to Walmart and then went home.

**13 July 2016**

7:30 pm: I revised some of my arrangements earlier today to be more readable for the choir, but I was unable to get the new music printed before choir rehearsal. Drew arrived and told me that we might be in some trouble because we had to move the performance date, because his team had won the National Guard state shooting competition and the regional competition was on the concert date. I will get to direct the choir alone again for the week he is gone. I told him I went back to UMary in September and we were able to schedule the concert for August 30<sup>th</sup>. Drew also told me that we were getting several new members in choir today and that he was going to radio all of the housing floors individually to make sure that the new inmates come. The deputy warden has allowed candy to be brought to choir. However, the candy has to be OK'd by JRCC and purchased on its budget. The deputy warden said that she would supply the candy and it would be in her office. Drew and I have checked before every rehearsal for the past three weeks to see if she brought the candy, but she has repeatedly failed to do so.

I met the new recruits as they came down. There were only two new people, but some other inmates who had come previously but stopped coming showed up. In total we had nine participants: Justin, Carter, John, Ronnie, Sydney, Rodger, Garland (I am not sure if that is his name, but he has been to rehearsal before and is a follower of Islam), and Phil and Mike (the new guys). The only thing I know about Phil is that he lives on the third floor. Mike has a handlebar mustache and is missing a chunk of his right ear. He told me that he has been playing music in Texas since he was fifteen years old and typically played bluegrass and country music, but he has never read a piece of sheet music once in his life.

Drew led most of the rehearsal. We started with a warmup and review of "Hey Ho, Nobody's Home", which went well considering we had new people and a few who have not been to rehearsal for awhile. We ran through "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" and "Down in the River to Pray" as well. Overall, the inmates sang pretty well and Drew and I let them know that we appreciated the full, resonant sound we were getting from the bigger group. After a few announcements about the change of the performance date and concert expectations, Drew gave me the last fifteen minutes to lead the choir. I decided that we would work on "Amazing Grace". We reviewed/learned the first three verses for the sake of the new guys and inconsistent members. I noticed that having a few dedicated people who are more confident with their part help the whole group learn faster. I am proud of inmates like Justin, Sydney, and Carter who have become leaders among the other inmates. Sometimes it becomes hard to lead rehearsal when they are talking to other inmates, but I know they are helping their neighbor with the music and will better the whole choir. Many of the inmates need to be taught the same thing every week. I have

spoken with Ronnie every rehearsal about how repeat signs work, but he still forgets what to do every week.

### 18 June 2016

7:30 pm: I left my house later than usual today so that I would not have to wait so long for Drew to arrive. Somehow I still managed to beat him by a full ten minutes. I ended up chatting with an old friend of mine who was the officer at the check-in gate. Drew arrived and we went to see if the deputy warden had brought candy in, like she had promised to do. Despite the fact that Drew has been reminding her nearly every day, there was still not candy to be found. We let in the inmates, who came downstairs rather quickly. Sydney asked if there was water in the choir room. Assuming there was not, Drew and I headed to the kitchen and mess hall area to find a vessel to contain some ice water. The kitchen smelled putrid and reminded me of several horror films involving sanitariums. Apparently the smell was the lingering stench of deep-fried fish sticks. We located a cooler, filled it with ice and water, and brought it back to the choir room.

The inmates arrived and we began rehearsal. I lead the group in warmups. My focus today was on gaining a firmer understanding of the tonic note. The men blended very well tonight, probably because there were only six (Justin, Rodger, Sydney, Carter, Phil, and the Muslim guy whose name I can never remember) singers. I lead them in a brief ear training activity, a review of the 1, 121, 12321, pattern, but ending after singing the fifth tone of the scale. Drew suggested that we sing it in a round, which went much better than I feared it would. Rodger asked why it was easier to sing the whole thing (123454321) rather than the shorter patterns. This prodded me to go on a tangent about tonic-dominant relationships and how Western music has nearly forced all of our ears to be drawn to the relationship. Perhaps I should have spared the choir the technicalities of the relationship; it was obvious that everything I said had gone over their heads.

Drew led the choir in singing "The Misty Mountain". I was impressed by the choir's ability to retain the knowledge of previous rehearsals. They are learning! Drew fixed a few things with the tenors' diction and we worked on memorization.

I worked "Losing My Way" with the inmates. Alex is on parole now, so we do not have a soloist. I asked Justin, who has purchased the song on his mp3 player, to sing the solo. I had previously made some mistakes in teaching the chorus (for some odd reason I was reading the bass clef as a treble clef and, because of the harmonies, the parts looked the same). I quickly addressed my mistake and remedied the situation by running the chorus a few times. We reviewed the harmonies at the beginning and added Justin as a soloist. Justin had a tendency to rush the verse, which is a reasonable mistake because the original song is at a faster tempo than our version. I decided to beatbox to keep a steady rhythm for the choir to hear. Not only did the inmates find the beat, they also sang with more enthusiasm and style.

For the last part of rehearsal, we worked on "Amazing Grace" by reviewing the key change and looking at the harmonies. The inmates are making progress on remembering the music from previous rehearsals.

**20 July 2016**

7:30 pm: Deputy Warden Connie remembered to bring candy today! The inmates were super excited even though the candy was equivalent to leftover-from-Halloween-grandma candy. Drew was on duty so he had everything set up for tonight, including the air conditioner (the average temperature today was 96°F; I had a really bad sunburn from going to the beach with my brother a few hours before rehearsal). The lineup of singers tonight included the usual (Ronnie, Rodger, Justin, Carter, Sydney), the seldom-in-attendance (Phil, John, Mike, Chris), and a new comer (Joel). Mac was on duty and so I caught up with him for a bit. He said that today was busy and was not showing signs of slowing down. There was a new bible study in the same building that we were having choir, so he was trying to organize the traffic.

Drew warmed up the choir with “Hey Ho, Nobody’s Home” then he handed the choir over to me. I was able to secure some photocopies of my updated arrangement of “Amazing Grace”. We spent the whole rehearsal working on the last verse. Much of the choir was unfamiliar with my arrangement because they had not been to many rehearsals in the past few weeks, so I had to start teaching it over from the beginning. I started with the lower basses because they have the easiest part, but they are the least proficient singers in the group. I put Rodger in the group with Ronnie and John to provide leadership among them, which he immediately jumped in on. Carter and Phil sang the upper bass part and I did not need to work much with them because they tend to know what they are doing. I had five confident tenors to work with (every teacher’s dream) and I am grateful that I have them. However, they produced such a big, slightly pitchy sound and I had to ask them to sing quieter. This led me to teach a brief discourse on dynamics. I drew dynamic markings from piano to forte and briefly explained what they translate to from Italian. I told them that the piano instrument is actually called a *pianoforte* because it was the first keyboard instrument that could play with a range of dynamics that corresponded to the touch of the performer.

The tenors were still out singing the rest of the ensemble. I had the idea to have everybody sing as quietly as they could while still maintaining a rich sound. This really balanced out the choir, so I only had to slightly adjust the general dynamic of the choir a bit. I am starting to learn patience in my teaching so that I can break down the rehearsal bit by bit without the process becoming trite. I also am trying to keep the energy up, so that the participants who are at the level I would like the whole choir to be at are still enthused and learning something about singing, music, or leadership. We only have about eight more rehearsals left before the concert and I am praying that everything will come together.

**25 July 2016**

7:30 pm: Drew beat me to rehearsal tonight. He actually beat me by several hours because he has begun teaching guitar to some of the higher security prisoners. For fifteen minutes, I was waiting in the lobby of the security gate for Drew to come and let me in. He had already called down the inmates for rehearsal, but only Phil was there when I got in (the list of inmates for this evening included: Justin, Ronnie, Sydney, Rodger, Carter, Phil, Chris, and the Muslim guy who likes to work out before coming to choir). I complimented Phil on the nice pair of jeans and sneakers he was wearing which stood out well against the white and gray clothing the prisoners usually wear. He told me that he had bought the shoes last week and that they cost him \$80. These inmates have jobs at JRCC, but they do not make much

money. I was informed by Justin that all the items in the store were 33% more expensive than similar items found outside of the prison. I understand that prison is meant to be a rehabilitation center for troubled individuals and that inmates are supposed to learn the values of hard work and earning the things they purchase, but it seems a little unjust that their wages for jobs are significantly lower than minimum wage and that the prices of things are higher. Carter informed me how uncomfortable the state issued shoes are and that purchasing a decent pair of shoes from the store was a good investment. "You couldn't pay somebody to take these shoes", said Justin. I told the inmates a story about my grandfather.

My grandfather's family did not have much money growing up. They were farmers, so the majority of their food came from their own fields. My grandfather, in the first eighteen years of his life, got to go to the county fair only once. His brothers and sisters got to enjoy the fun of the fair and ride the rides, but because my grandfather had no shoes, he had to wait outside and watch his siblings enjoy themselves.

I lead the majority of the rehearsal tonight. I started with some basic warmups and discussed what is commonly referred to as "the break". I explained that the Italians call it the "*passagio*" because it is the passage from chest voice to falsetto and can be mastered and manipulated by the singer. I also did an ear training exercise involving Drew and I. He would sustain a single pitch and I would move in and out of tune with it. The inmates would close their eyes and raise their hands when they heard that we were in tune.

We mostly worked on "Amazing Grace". I decided to test the inmates by starting from the beginning and trying to sing the whole piece all the way through without stopping. I encouraged them to find their place should they get lost and to watch me for cues. The run through was not a complete train wreck. The inmates seemed slightly discouraged, so I asked them to find one thing they were content with in their own singing and one thing they liked that the choir did as a whole, then they were to discuss this with their neighbor. Next, I had them think about one thing they could individually improve on and to fix it the next time we run the section. Things eventually started to come together and I did my best to encourage them to be leaders and to sing with conviction.

With ten minutes left of rehearsal, I thought it would be good to look at my new edition of "Losing My Way". I handed out the music only to discover that I actually photocopied the original, leaving me slightly flustered because it threw off what I wanted to work on today. I asked the inmates to hand in the old copies of the song and Drew worked on "Misty Mountain" until the end of rehearsal.

## 27 July 2016

7:30 pm: Once again, Justin was the first inmate to show up. Upon asking him about his day, he told me how he was served divorce papers yesterday and he has not slept because of it. I turned around and was a little startled to find Rodger sneaking up behind me. He claimed he was going to bump into me and pretend it was an accident; my concern over this situation is that Rodger is in prison for molesting a child. Mike came today and I talked with him briefly before Radarey (I finally remembered the Muslim guy's name [*edit: his name is Chris*]) asked if there would be water at rehearsal. Drew and I promptly left to the kitchen to fill a water cooler.

After letting the inmates into the rehearsal room, I had them get into a closer formation and Drew led them in singing "Hey Ho, Nobody's Home". There was significantly less confusion this time around and we successfully sang it three times in a row. Drew and I had talked before rehearsal about cutting "Losing My Way" because Alex was on parole and we only have about six rehearsals left; we decided to let the inmates vote on keeping the song or not. Ronnie and John voted to keep it, but the rest (Radarey, Justin, Mike, Rodger, and Phil) wanted it gone. This took a significant amount of stress off of my shoulders and allowed us to work on memorization and perfecting the pieces.

"Amazing Grace" was what was primarily worked on. We reviewed what was worked on last rehearsal and worked our way to the end of the piece. This was the best rehearsal on "Amazing Grace" that we have ever had. The inmates were responsive to my instruction and even had their own productive inputs on how we could improve. There was also a lot of energy in some of the inmates tonight. Radarey kept joking around with John, who asked if we would be booed at the concert. I told the choir that there was no reason they would be booed because they have already achieved a level of success that is respectable under any circumstance. John's rebuttal was that they would be booed because they were prison inmates. To that, I replied that everybody I have discussed the choir with is extremely happy that this is happening and would be excited to come to the concert. I am excited for these last rehearsals to see what we can accomplish.

### **1 August 2016**

A few hours before choir, I was contacted by Drew and told that there was no choir tonight. Apparently Drew's grandparents went missing while driving to Jamestown from Washington and he was looking for them.

I was informed that his grandparents were found. His grandmother had a dementia episode and his grandfather drove back to Washington. They do not have a cell phone and they forgot to call when they got home.

### **3 August 2016**

I showed up to the prison tonight and did not find Drew to be there. I asked the officer at the gate if he could call him, but the officer refused saying, "I cannot give out personal numbers". I told him that I have his number, I just did not have my phone with me. He repeated his objection to my request. Officer Winter (remember him?) came to the gate and escorted me inside. I asked if he was going to be in the room with me since Drew was not there, because I was not allowed to be by myself. He said he was just letting me in and that I would have to figure it out. The inmates were ready for choir, but I told them that I did not know what was going to happen since I did not have any of the folders and I did not have another officer. The control office called Drew. I was told that there was not choir tonight, so I could go home. After getting home, Drew had texted me that he had forgot about choir today and he was terribly sorry.

**8 August 2016**

7:30 pm: Tonight was a good night. Even though we did not have any rehearsals last week, the inmates really came through and demonstrated their dedication. We were asked to sing on the 23<sup>rd</sup> for the GED graduation ceremony at JRCC, so that will be our dress rehearsal for the concert on the 31<sup>st</sup>. Drew told me that the inmates told him that he owes me a steak dinner because he missed rehearsal last week.

I lead the whole rehearsal. The inmates present were: Justin, Mike, Eagleman (a new recruit with an amazing voice), Chris, Carter, Rodger, and Ronnie. I ran through a brief warm up and began rehearsing "Amazing Grace". I have become a lot more comfortable running rehearsals, even when I have not prepared (notice my lack of lesson plan updates), and tonight was spectacular. The inmates worked really hard and I am so proud of their development as musicians and leaders. We were able to sing through the whole piece several times and that helped solidify harmonies in the last verse. Towards the end of rehearsal, I had the group stand in a circle and sing as I directed without the piano and watched the smiles move across the inmates' faces as they enjoyed the music they were creating. I told them that it may feel uncomfortable to sing together like this, but it is ultimately good for us to do so because it increases our accountability as musicians and lets us blend into the ensemble together. I added that we grow through our struggles and that it is important to be in uncomfortable situations to better prepare us for harder adversities we might face.

As we were leaving, Drew thanked me for being a part of the JRCC Hilltop Choir because he would not have gotten the inmates to where they are now. He said that he did not have enough faith in the inmates to arrange a piece as difficult as mine and expect them to learn it, but I have showed him that the inmates are capable of much more than most give them credit.

**10 August 2016**

I was not at rehearsal today because I was in Bismarck. Drew told me that rehearsal went well. They did a run through of all of the pieces except "Amazing Grace".

**15 August 2016**

7:30 pm: I am surprised how perceptive some of the inmates are. Today, I apologized to the inmates about missing rehearsal last week and explained that I was stuck in Bismarck because of a storm and that I stayed at a friend's house. Radarey inquired, "What's her name?" to which my face turned red because, in truth, I had slept on the couch in a house owned by six friends of mine, including my girlfriend. I said no more to them regarding conversation on this topic, but they persisted with lewd comments about the situation. I learned my lesson of never to tell inmates anything personally important.

Drew handled most of the rehearsal. We decided that I will sing on the pieces he conducts and he on mine. We spent a lot of time working on "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" and spontaneously added new parts. By the time we finished working on Drew's pieces, I had ten minutes to work on "Amazing Grace". The inmates were rather riled-up and it was getting harder to work with them. We managed to sing



through the piece twice, but we did not make much progress. At the end of rehearsal, Drew addressed that the choir needed to focus on the concert for the next rehearsals and take choir seriously. The inmates responded sincerely and apologized and promised to work harder next time.

### **17 August 2016**

7:30 pm: It was an unproductive night. Upon arriving, Drew realized he forgot his utility belt which he forgot at his girlfriend's house. We sped back into town, Drew jumped out of his vehicle to grab the belt, ran back to his truck because the belt was actually at his house, and drove there. We managed to arrive at JRCC only a few minutes late, but once again, there was a new officer at the gate who took his time getting me into the prison. Most of the inmates were already waiting for us to take them to the Yellow Ribbon Room. Drew called down the rest of the inmates, giving us nine inmates for rehearsal: Ronnie, Chris, Carter, Justin, Radarey, Sydney, Mike, Phil, Rodger, and a new, older inmate named Edward who was just observing for tonight.

Rehearsal was not taken as seriously by the inmates as Drew and I hoped it would be. I worked on "Amazing Grace" for twenty minutes with the hopes of fixing intonation and diction discrepancies. I could tell some of the inmates were trying to improve and blend with the group, others glanced around the room nervously, and some decided to joke around with the exercises I was having them do. I do not think we made any improvements on anything tonight, which is sad because we only have one more rehearsal before the GED concert on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Drew did not get much out of the inmates either when he rehearsed "The Lion Sleeps Tonight". After he finished rehearsing, Drew needed to help rearrange some schedules for some inmates regarding the concert on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. I spoke with Mike who is in the GED program. He said that he already received one when he was in a prison in Oklahoma, but his documents got lost and he had to retake the classes here. Supposedly, he is "wiping the floor" with the guys in this prison and graduating from a class a week, but he did not pass his social studies test because he was supposed to have 70 minutes to complete the test but only was given 55 minutes.

Drew and I were rather disappointed after rehearsal. He believes that the inmates tend to give up when things get hard, which is part of the reason they are in prison. We are afraid that the inmates will not take the concert seriously for fear of not doing well; therefore the inmates think it does not make sense to put in the effort.

### **22 August 2016**

I was not able to attend rehearsal tonight because I was playing with the Bismarck-Mandan Symphony Orchestra in Medora, North Dakota. Drew reported that the choir sounded great and everybody was focused.

**23 August 2016**

12:45 pm: The choir performed at the G.E.D. graduation ceremony at JRCC. I arrived at the facility and was escorted in by Drew. We had a brief rehearsal of "The Misty Mountain" and "Amazing Grace" and reviewed concert etiquette, how to hold the folders, song order, and seating order. Drew told the inmates that he was going to have to pat each of them down before and after leaving the visiting area and that he did not want to do so, but JRCC policy requires it. The inmates cracked a few crude jokes and we headed down to the visiting room.

In the visiting room, there were several rows of chairs for graduates and audience members. We were instructed to sit in the back row and to stand when we sang our two pieces. Several people told Drew and I that they were excited to finally hear the men's choir. We rehearsed our concert procedures one more time in this space, gave a few announcements about expectations, handed out programs, and waited for the graduates and guests (inmates and family members) to appear. I spoke with the inmates during this time about nothing in particular. I told a story of how I was bullied in elementary school when I lived in Beulah, ND. Sydney responded, "Hook, line, and sinker." He then told me that he was arrested in Beulah before coming to JRCC. Ronnie asked me if I knew a family with the last name of Smith in Beulah. I said that I do not remember much from my experience in that town, but my older brother or parents might know the people he mentioned (I asked my family later only to find that they do not know a Smith family from Beulah). Justin said his parents were coming to visit and how convenient it was that they were coming through Jamestown at this time. Phil, who never has much to say, asked me when I was going back University of Mary. Mike was busy writing cards for each of the graduates, Rodger was talking to Drew about 1970s praise music, Chris was actually quiet, so I decided not to disturb the peace by saying anything to him. Carter did not have much to say either, but he did inform me his six long years in prison are coming to an end and he might be out by the end of September.

The ceremony started with a brief introduction by one of the directors of JRCC education. Warden Chad Pringle spoke to the graduates and audience about the successes and importance of education. He also said that one of the GED graduates has won a reward from the JRCC library for reading over 22,000 pages of books while working on his degree. Only three of the inmates were GED graduates while the rest were Reading Right (a program I am not familiar with) graduates. Deputy Warden Connie Hackman spoke as well as Bryan Miller, JRCC "math guy" and a previous football coach and 7<sup>th</sup> grade history teacher of mine.

After the speakers finished, Drew and I led the choir in our performance. The inmates sang wonderfully and everybody was impressed by the inmates' professionalism and tone. I have a few critiques about the concert, but I will address them tomorrow in rehearsal. The smiles and look of gratification on each inmate's face was a great reminder of the good that can be done in the world. The choir is super excited for our concert next week.

**24 August 2016**

7:30 pm: Tonight was a bit different from other rehearsals. The first thing Drew and I found out was that Justin was not going to be at rehearsal because he was placed in disciplinary detention for fighting, which seemed way out of character for him. We learned from the captain on duty that he was

actually assaulted by a new inmate who was trying to display dominance in the cafeteria. Drew said the other inmates are not supposed to know that he was put into DD, so if they ask, pretend not to know. We called down the inmates for rehearsal. Drew told me the majority of the prison staff was impressed with the inmates' performance yesterday and the deputy warden even said, "In my 21 years at JRCC, the choir is the most positive thing to come out of the prison."

Drew and the deputy warden had printed invitations the inmates could mail to people on their visitation lists and he had the inmates write addresses on the envelopes for the invitations. Rehearsal was more of a run-through of the concert pieces. Drew thought the inmates performed well yesterday, so we did not need to sing "Amazing Grace" or "Misty Mountain". We practiced walking in during "Down in the River to Pray". We had ten minutes after running through the other pieces so we sang "Amazing Grace" and "Misty Mountain". Finally, we had the inmates organize the folders for the concert.

After practice, Drew asked me if I wanted to visit Justin in disciplinary detention. I went with him to the third floor of the housing units and ran into John, who had stopped coming to choir because Drew was being "racist". He confronted Drew and I about this complaint and even said that I was being racist. He had no real argument. Drew brought up how he keeps pestering John to come to rehearsal and that he was not racist for this very reason and that John should not listen to what the other inmates say. Several other inmates in the hallway made fun of us because we were not in uniform and the fact that I was wearing camouflage shorts.

## **29 August 2016**

7:30 pm: Tonight was the dress rehearsal for the concert on Wednesday. Drew was obviously stressed about the concert and it did not help that Mike did not come to rehearsal and Phil was in the infirmary for fainting issues. Justin was out of the disciplinary detention; it was good to have him back. I asked Drew what I needed to do to get my guests in for the concert. He told me all I had to do was give him my guests' names and he would run them by the office. Rodger and I had a discussion about politics. He reported that the average level of education of inmates at JRCC was 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Apparently, he had met a person who had only made it through second grade, but, as he told me, he puts no blame on the students. Rather, he blames the system. He has always been displeased with public education in America ever since his wife and he started homeschooling their children, which they started doing when their oldest child entered 9<sup>th</sup> grade. His wife, who had an associate's degree in art, taught the kids at home while Rodger went to work. They discovered their daughter knew hardly anything about fractions or how to use them. Rodger then went on to lament about the poor educational quality of public education. He claims that schools, at least in the past, did not give much care to the individual student and only planned their curriculum around textbooks and their instruction off of what they themselves were instructed. He also said that there has been significant trends in adolescent American life since "they took God out of school". The rate of teenage pregnancies, abortions, drug and alcohol abuse, and incarcerations have increased, according to Rodger.

The inmates did not know that we would be rehearsing in the visitation room today. This brought some stress to them because it meant that they would have to be stripped-searched afterwards. Rodger seemed exceptionally uncomfortable with this. Rehearsal was not as smooth as I would have liked it to have been, but Drew seemed stressed out enough already for me to do anything

about it. Our guys were singing alright and were paying attention. With us, we had John, the tech guy/chaplain's assistant, and some other guy (he obviously had been in some sort of accident because half of his head was disfigured and missing an ear) whom I have never met before. I spoke to the inmates after rehearsal about how I have enjoyed my experience with them and how they have taught me better ways of teaching and let me have a glimpse into the lives of prison inmates. I spoke with Carter after rehearsal about his future at JRCC. He told me that he will be transferring to a different prison that will be more like parole preparation and he has a court hearing in December. He said that he has already served six years and is looking forward to finally moving on. According to Carter, he was arrested because a bag of marijuana was found within ten feet of him at an outdoor music event. The bag was not his, but, because he was the most popular dealer of narcotics in town, the blame was put on him and he was found guilty of dealing narcotics.

The inmates were not excited to be strip searched and they joked around with me asking if I was going to be searched too. They reasoned that Drew has already searched me and that is why we never make eye contact. As we were leaving the prison, I asked Drew what a strip search entailed. I regret this decision. After hearing his explanation, I understood why Rodger did not want to be searched. I told Drew that I figured he had diarrhea and going through the process of being searched could prove to be a bit more embarrassing than usual. No, this was not the case. Drew informed me that Rodger, due to his old age, has become incontinent and the embarrassment of wearing absorbent adult undergarments is amplified in prison; hence, Rodger has found other means to control the outflow of his bladder.

On this vivid depiction of a rather personal event, I will close this entry by stating I am immensely excited for the concert on Wednesday. Also, tomorrow, Drew, Ronnie, Carter, and I are being interviewed by the local newspaper, The Jamestown Sun, about the concert.

31 August 2016

6:15 pm: I did not get interviewed by the newspaper yesterday. The warden wanted to hear what Drew was going to say before his words were written down for the public and I possibly was a liability to this. I met Drew early for a quick rehearsal and set up before the concert. Chris was late getting downstairs and this made Drew incredibly anxious. Eventually, we all made it to the visitation room with a short while to rehearse and get comfortable.

Ronnie informed Drew and me that he forgot his glasses and would not be able to read the music. We had to run to the inmate workshop, Ronnie's workplace, and fetch his glasses. I found it humorous that more small things like this kept happening (missing folders, punctual inmates running late, and a soloist with a cold) on the night of the concert, just as I had witnessed every music teacher before me experience.

After the rehearsal, Drew and I walked the inmates through the concert several times. Finally, we felt ready to sing for the guest who were slowly trickling in. Ronnie's wife and his large bull dog came, Sydney's wife was there, and Drew's mother and girlfriend came, as did my grandparents, parents, girlfriend, and a friend. Also in attendance were, the warden, deputy warden, several officers, the inmate tech team, and a few strangers.

The inmates sang confidently and proudly. Drew and I had great fun, conducting and singing, as did the audience. Ronnie's dog even let out a loud bark during our performance of "We Will Rock You". The last piece of our concert was my arrangement of "Amazing Grace". I gave a brief background of

myself and why I worked with the choir all summer. I introduced Rodger as the soloist, gave him the cue to sing, and Mike let out a loud falsetto. I was quite taken aback and I tried to ignore him and continue, but he started to apologize and said the whole concert had been too serious. He then gave me a thank you card, signed by all the inmates, and spoke of the inmates' experience with me. It was a very touching sentiment and it reminded me that the experience was not the point of the choir, but the connection with people and bringing hope to the incarcerated.