



# True Notebooks: A Writer's Year at Juvenile Hall

By Mark Salzman

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In 1997 Mark Salzman, bestselling author **Iron and Silk** and **Lying Awake**, paid a reluctant visit to a writing class at L.A.'s Central Juvenile Hall, a lockup for violent teenage offenders, many of them charged with murder. What he found so moved and astonished him that he began to teach there regularly. In voices of indelible emotional presence, the boys write about what led them to crime and about the lives that stretch ahead of them behind bars. We see them coming to terms with their crime-ridden pasts and searching for a reason to believe in their future selves. Insightful, comic, honest and tragic, **True Notebooks** is an object lesson in the redemptive power of writing.

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

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## **True Notebooks: A Writer's Year at Juvenile Hall** By Mark Salzman Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Salzman (*Lying Awake*; *Iron & Silk*) volunteered to teach creative writing at Central Juvenile Hall, a Los Angeles County detention facility for "high-risk" juvenile offenders. Most of these under-18 youths had been charged with murder or other serious crimes, and after trial and sentencing many would end up in a penitentiary, some for life. Sister Janet Harris, of the Inside Out Writers program, convinced Salzman that in spite of his reservations—about teaching writing, about being a white liberal offering "art" to darker-skinned ghetto boys—these children needed to be encouraged to express themselves in writing instead of acting out, needed to feel they mattered to someone. So Salzman started coming twice a week to meet with three boys, although their number quickly grew. He tried to structure each session with a half hour for writing followed by each boy reading his work aloud, although after a lockdown or a class member's trial, he had to loosen the routine. While their writing themes are somewhat predictable—their anger and violent impulses, their relationships with parents and gangs, plus a tedious dose of "pussy, bullets, and beer"—the discussions these essays provoked were personal and often explosive. As productive as these classes were, everyone was always aware of the painful truth that students would soon be shipped out to more brutal facilities. Salzman doesn't dwell on that, concluding that "a little good has got to be better than no good at all." Indeed, his account's power comes from keeping its focus squarely on these boys, their writing and their coming-to-terms with the mess their lives had become.

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From [Booklist](#)

Wanting to add life to a cardboard juvenile delinquent character in the novel he was trying to finish, Salzman (*Iron & Silk*; *Lying Awake*) visited a juvie lockup for high-risk offenders where his friend taught a writing class. Despite entering the facility wishing "we could tilt L.A. County and shake it until everybody with a shaved head and tattoos falls into the ocean," Salzman ended up teaching a class himself. The remarkable results are detailed in this wonderful book. Salzman found students who took writing more seriously than the college kids he'd taught. He also found clowns, of course, who just wanted to goof off or antagonize him, but even the manipulative kids Salzman introduces us to are stunningly *human*. Both selections from the boys' writing and Salzman's taut storytelling give us multidimensional images of teenagers thrown into a justice system concerned only with punishment. Early in the book, a friend of Salzman's complains that there are no good books about juvenile delinquents. Well, there's one now—one that examines a broken system with grace, wit, and gripping storytelling. *John Green*

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Review

"Extraordinary. . . . Everything about this book seems perfect." —*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Fresh, galvanizing and articulate . . . a narrative that asks as many questions as it answers. Cogent, thoughtful and honest." —*The New York Times*

"One cannot read. . . and not be stirred . . . As moving as it is sparse, as revealing as it is concealing, as straightforward as it is complex." —*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"Engaging. . . . Salzman creates a cast of lively, convincing, and hugely sympathetic characters and **True Notebooks** is filled with powerfully moving scenes." —*O, The Oprah Magazine*

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

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#### **Mary West:**

Playing with family in the park, coming to see the ocean world or hanging out with friends is thing that usually you could have done when you have spare time, after that why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. Just one activity that make you not experience tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love True Notebooks: A Writer's Year at Juvenile Hall, you could enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still want to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh can happen its mind hangout guys. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its referred to as reading friends.

#### **Roberto Senn:**

True Notebooks: A Writer's Year at Juvenile Hall can be one of your basic books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to set every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing True Notebooks: A Writer's Year at Juvenile Hall although doesn't forget the main place, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource info that maybe you can be certainly one of it. This great information can drawn you into brand-new stage of crucial contemplating.

#### **Erica Lewis:**

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#### **Kristopher Lewis:**

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