

In 1987, my mother, Janna Flessa, served as the Assistant Prosecutor on the trial of Jerome Henderson in Cincinnati, Ohio. Henderson was sentenced to death by electric chair. That death sentence has since been reduced to a life sentence, due to evidence of a racially biased jury selection process. During the trial my mother was pregnant with me; she retired from the Prosecutor's Office after I was born. Jerome Henderson shares my birthday. It seems beyond a reasonable doubt that he was guilty of murder, but was himself victim to an overzealous prosecution team that wanted to push the death penalty. This trial was curious to me because of what I saw as deeply personal and poetic resonances regarding the way in which the United States judicial system serves as a tool of white supremacist domination, and the degree to which my family history intertwines with this function. My mother passed away in 2010, and I am left with only documents to piece through this historical inheritance.

Along with examining public court case records, I have developed an institutionally structured personal archive of my mother's writings, drawings, paintings, journals, and other media, which I used for a solo exhibition at Los Angeles Contemporary Archive in 2018. In this exhibition, I constructed a poetic overview of certain aspects of my mother's life, using her archive as a space to address issues of race, class, gender and mental illness, through suggestive arrangements of the objects she left behind. I am in the process of finding ways to merge elements of her personal archive with the public court records, and to find parallels between her life and the life of the man she helped sentence to death. Both Janna and Jerome show signs of struggle with undiagnosed and untreated mental illness, albeit in vastly different social contexts.

With these twelve images I propose the personal archive in relation to the public archive as a generative space for creating a more critical historical vision regarding the function of the judicial system and the cultural contexts of mental illness, gender, and race in the United States. I am interested in the connection between my mother's poetry and the way that language manifests itself in public record on behalf of the state. The combination of these chronologically disparate objects and texts juxtaposed against one another brings out their relational complexity, creating a new space that suggests underlying

connections.

1 This is the physical evidence. You  
2 will have it with you back in the jury room.  
3 This is what the defendant left behind him,  
4 and what the police got from him.

5 He didn't intend to leave this stuff  
6 for us. He didn't intend for the State of  
7 Ohio to have a single thing to put in front of  
8 you to prove to you beyond a reasonable doubt  
9 that he did this to Mary Acoff. He didn't  
10 mean to leave any of this. This is what we  
11 got. This is what he left behind.

12 The rocks and leaves can't talk to you.  
13 They don't have mouths. They don't have ears.  
14 They don't have eyes. They can't sit on the  
15 witness stand and explain to you everything  
16 that happened.

17 Mary Acoff could have explained to you  
18 everything that happened. But he didn't leave  
19 us everything that was there. He didn't leave  
20 us Mary Acoff, the one person who could have  
21 walked through the door of this courtroom and  
22 pointed her finger at him, and told you what  
23 he did to her before he murdered her.

24 He raped her. But he made damn sure  
25 that she would never walk into this courtroom.

Figure 1. Janna Flessa's closing statement in the trial of Jerome Henderson. 1987.

## my Third 5K

This is for  
my Father  
for all the steps  
he wanted to take  
but could not.

This is for  
Lovey  
for all the Flowers  
and bright blue skies  
she would have seen  
but did not.

This is for  
Mary Acoff  
in a prayer  
for her and her daughter  
in a wish  
to take away  
the horror  
and the pain.

I promise  
I won't stop trying  
I won't stop looking up

Figure 2. Manuscript of "My Third 5K." Poem by Janna Flessa. 2003.

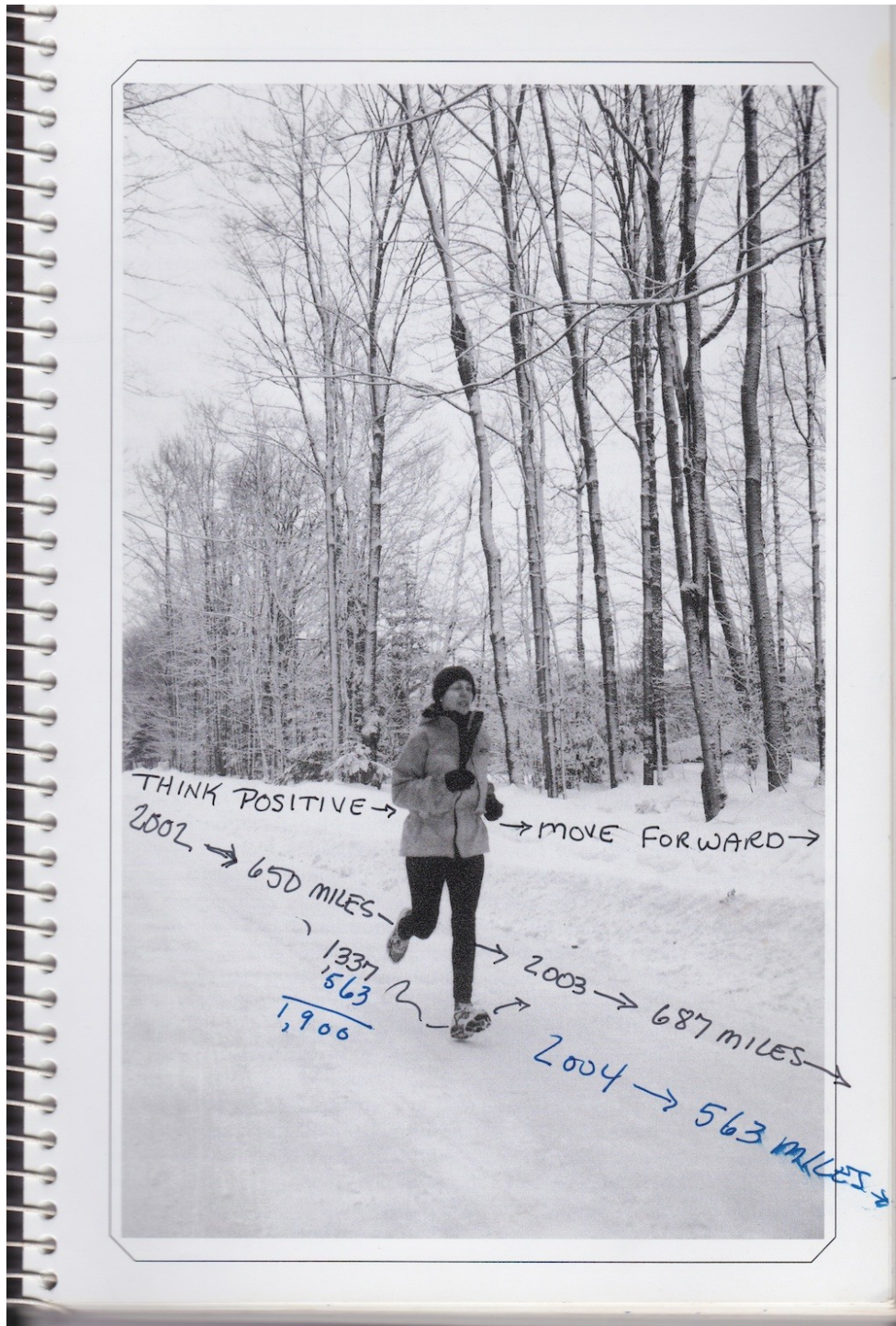


Figure 3. Excerpt from Janna Flessa Running Journal. 2004.

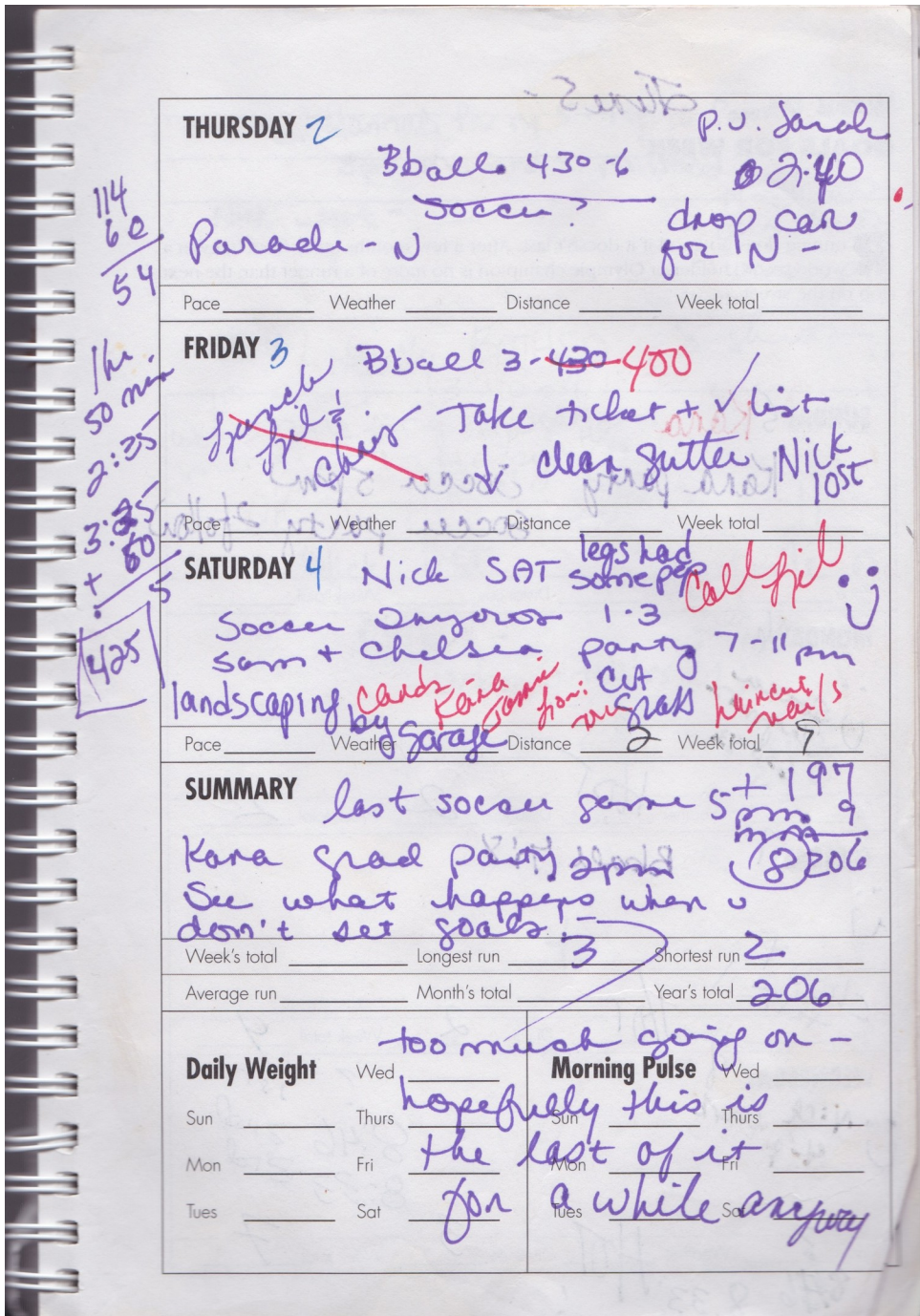


Figure 4. Excerpt from Janna Flessa Running Journal. 2005.

Time  
tubbed  
trached  
traced  
inside lines  
close fits  
squeeze plays  
all of it here  
new  
gone  
Time came & went  
those days  
went & came  
who was to say  
what was  
honesty  
morality

Figure 5. Partial Manuscript of Untitled Poem by Janna Flessa. 1980.



Figure 6. Police lineup from Jerome Henderson investigation. 1986.



Figure 7. Portrait of Janna and Nick Flessa. 1989.

Prisoners --- of a sort  
we all were

it was a trial  
it was a punishment  
for an ongoing crime.

Time Trap:  
minutes cross seconds  
hours, days

bar  
the spirit  
hold  
the heart  
inside.

moments  
crissed and crossed  
upon themselves.

Screams  
were futile  
and some  
times

it seemed  
there  
was no  
point  
in even trying  
to  
escape.

You told me  
not to let it be  
that way.

You told me  
to take the  
time.

It was funny  
that

You  
would say that  
that

You  
would say  
it

could  
be done.

You knew  
as well as I do  
the mind's prison.  
the capture complete.

Time  
Time  
Time

All you have  
You have None.

The heart lives  
in another  
darkness  
blanketed by  
clouds and dew  
black tree branches  
wet with mist  
bramble and break around it.

1/83

12/83

Figure 8. Manuscript of "Prisoners." Poem by Janna Flessa. 1983.

1 MR. SHEA: Just one moment, Judge.

2 The defense will pass the challenges.

3 THE COURT: Prosecutor.

4 MR. VALENTINE: One moment, please,

5 Your Honor.

6 MS. FLESSA: Your Honor, the State of  
7 Ohio would like to thank and excuse Juror No.  
8 6, Mary Reed. I'm sorry, Mabel Reed.

9 THE COURT: Mrs. Reed, you're excused.

10 MR. SHEA: May the record reflect that  
11 that was a black juror?

12 EXAMINATION

13 BY THE COURT:

14 Q. Okay. Miss Mullen, one of the  
15 possible penalties in this case, if there is a  
16 conviction as charged, is death in the electric chair,  
17 and we usually call this capital punishment. Are you  
18 opposed to capital punishment as a form of punishment  
19 for crime?

20 A. No.

21 Q. If you were selected as a juror and a  
22 proper case were given to you, by that I mean if the  
23 evidence and the facts that you heard would warrant  
24 it, that is, call for it, and if the law would permit  
25 it, could you join in a verdict with your other jurors

PETITION  
EXHIBIT-TT  
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Figure 9. Transcript from jury selection in trial of Jerome Henderson. 1987.

keeps your workouts fresh, fun, and, dare we say, sexy? Try to cross train once a week with a bike, swim, or whatever else gets your heart racing.

**Sunday**

Date

Course/Comments marie christening 11ish  
~~Soccer game~~

Distance/Time

Stretching/Warm-Up Soccer game  
450

Speed/Strength

SETS

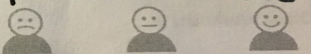
DISTANCE/  
REPS

INTERVAL/  
WEIGHT

I happened on "A Beautiful mind" on T.V. one night and was frightened + enlightened by it. ~~Schizophrenia~~ Schizophrenia is terrifying (and hard to spell) - But, if it can be ignored, then so can

Nutrition/Notes

Feeling



Obsessive compulsive disorder + I suppose just about anything else.

+ 142

**Weekly Review**

Date

Goals Met

11 - w/i  
range I set

Total Miles

11

Cumulative Time

Body Weight

Number of Workouts

4

Notes

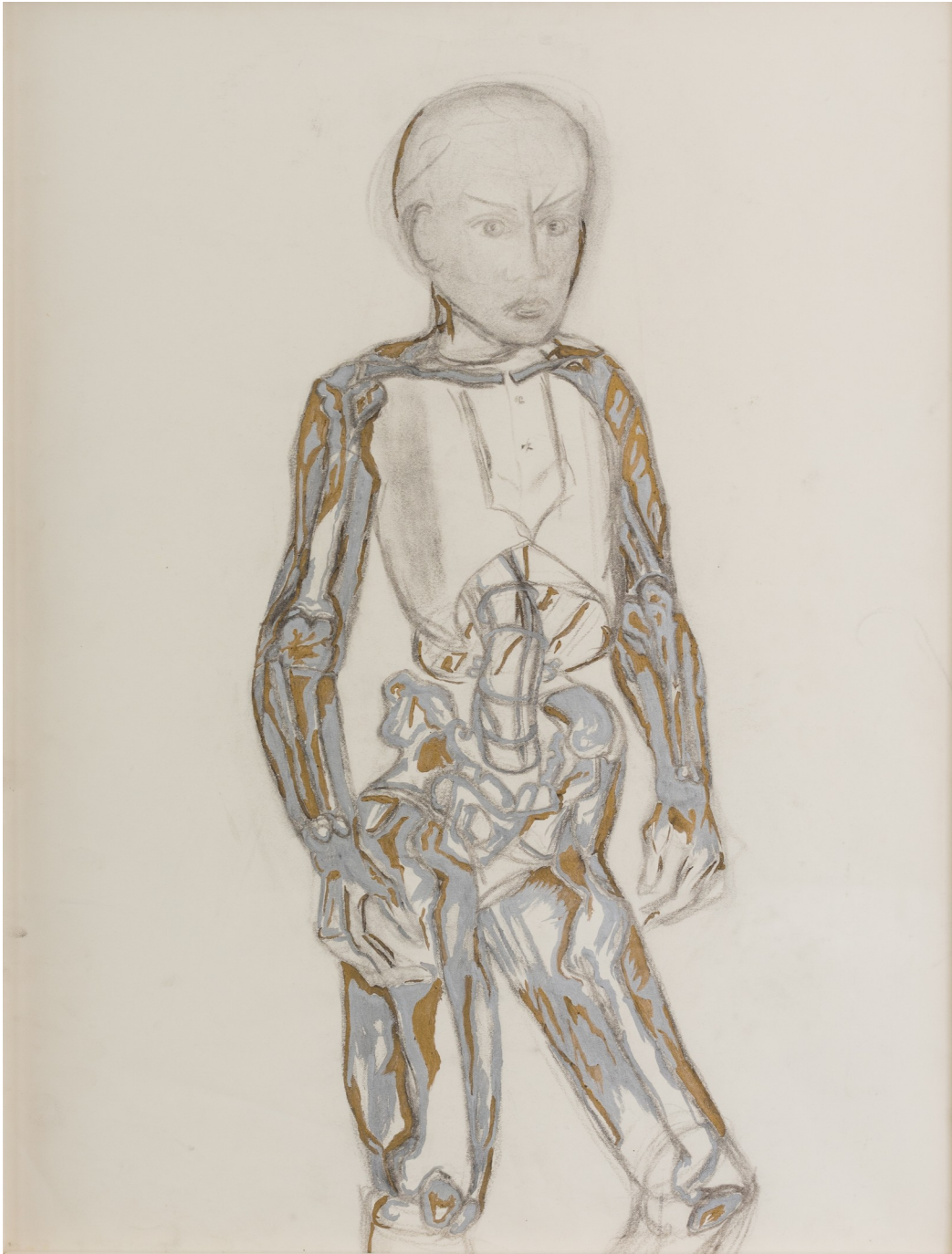
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Good to make 11 - busy week - next week will b even more challenging

Figure 10. Excerpt from Janna Flessa Running Journal. 2006.



*Figure 11.* Charcoal Drawing by Janna Flessa. Date Unknown.



*Figure 12.* Charcoal/Gel Pen Drawing by Janna Flessa. Date Unknown.