



# By Heart: Poetry, Prison, and Two Lives

*Judith Tannenbaum, Spoon Jackson*

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"A boy with no one to listen becomes a man in prison for life and discovers his mind can be free. A woman enters prison to teach and becomes his first listener. And so begins a twenty-five year friendship between two gifted writers and poets. The result is *By Heart*— a book that will anger you, give you hope, and break your heart."—Gloria Steinem

For most of their adult lives, since meeting as teacher and pupil at San Quentin State Prison, Judith Tannenbaum and Spoon Jackson have conferred, corresponded, and sometimes collaborated, producing very different bodies of work resting on the same understanding: that human beings have one foot in darkness, another in light. Moving stories of their childhoods and adult creative lives reveal both tragedy and beauty.

In alternating chapters—part memoir, part essay—*By Heart* reveals painful truths about prison, education, and which children our world nurtures and which it shuns. At its core are two stories that speak for human imagination, spirit, and expression.

**Judith Tannenbaum** is a nationally respected poet, educator, lecturer, and the author of *Disguised as a Poem*, among other works, including poetry, anthologies, and guidebooks for teaching arts in prison. She coordinates training at WritersCorps.

Born into an impoverished family of fifteen boys, **Spoon Jackson** was sentenced to life without possibility of parole by age twenty. He discovered himself as a writer for the first time in prison, eventually becoming an award-winning, internationally-known poet and essayist, as well as a facilitator of creative writing classes for other prisoners.

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