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Transitioning Out of Prison, On-stage
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Woman first performed in prison, now facing reentry and audience of general public

This week, the Judy Dworin Performance Project premieres its latest work based on women inmates at York state prison. *Dreamings* explores the hopes of incarcerated women, and their visions for life on the outside. Carly Beatty, 26, knows the terrain well. "This has changed my dreams so much," she says. "Before any of this happened, I thought my life was going to go down the typical road. I was going to graduate college, I was going to have a job in the business world, I'd get married and have kids and you know, fill in the blanks in between."

That changed in 2005. Less than a year out of Fairfield University, she had moved back home to New Jersey and was between jobs. So was her old college roommate, Julia. "It was Feb 2, Groundhog's Day ironically enough, the day that just keeps playing and play over again," she remembers. With nothing else to do, the two set out on a roadtrip back to their old college campus. "And when we got there, we celebrated the way we knew how to celebrate having gone to school together," she says. "That was to sit back and have a couple of drinks and sort of rehash old times." They made three stops, and downed cocktails at each one. Day faded to night, and they planned to head back south to Carly's house.

"And it was the stereotypical argument with one of my friends – no Carly you can't drive, yes I can, give me the keys. Fine, just take the keys, you're so stubborn," she says. "And I must have driven that road a million times during four years of college. We got on at exit 44 and and I crashed the car at exit 40 in Norwalk. And she died."

Carly was also hurt in the crash, though her injuries were minor. She was released from the hospital the day of Julia's funeral, and she missed it. "When you're responsible for a death of somebody that you love, that was tragic, and could have been avoided, you reach these depths of despair," she says. "I don't even think there are words that could properly explain it." The guilt was punishing, and the legal system had its own penalty to exert. Carly was convicted of 2nd degree vehicular manslaughter. She served 21 months at York prison in Niantic.

That's where she met Judy Dworin, whose theater troupe was putting together its next piece with women at York. For Carly, it was a way to pass the time and to stretch her comfort zone. Showing up that first day was already a leap. "And she said, all right, now you can make your choices. You can be a singer, dancer, writer, whatever," Carly says. "I decided at that moment I'm going to be a singer. I'm just going to do it."

Carly performed in *Dreamings* when it premiered at York last year. Now she is out and living at a halfway house. She says performing in the show again in front of the general public is a whole new experience. "I'm aware to the average person that I might not look like whatever people are envisioning, but I am. I am an convicted felon, but that's part of my life now. I have to own that. I can't live in fear of that. I can't live in fear of other people's reactions to me because I am a felon. That's what I am, and it's up to me to live my life with that being part of who I am, not all of who I am."

Carly is scheduled to be paroled in June. She plans to return home to New Jersey, and may go back to school in social work. She says she wants to stay connected to prison issues and women in prison.

Dreamings opens April 2 at the Charter Oak Cultural Center in Hartford and runs through April 4.