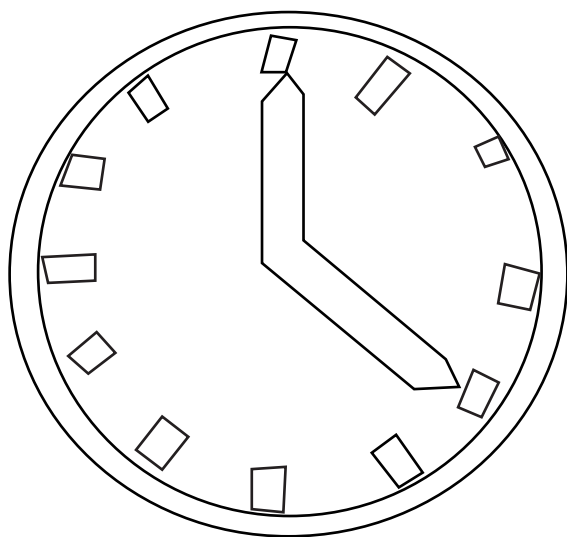
A painting of a tropical beach scene. The sky is a mix of deep blue, teal, and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. A single palm tree stands on the right side of the frame. The ocean is a vibrant blue with white waves crashing onto a golden beach. The text "On The Horizon" is written in a bold, black serif font across the middle of the image.

On The Horizon



On The Horizon



This book belongs to

MY PARENT'S IN PRISON

This storybook was created during *My Parent's in Prison*, a creative writing and illustration project that took place at HMP Oakwood in August 2025. Working with Create's professional writer and artist, six parents wrote and illustrated this story for children who have a parent in prison.

First, the group worked with Carol, Create's writer. They explored various creative writing techniques, discussed their experiences of being Dads in prison, and worked in groups to write the different sections of their story, *On The Horizon*.

Create's visual artist, Chloe, then ran visual art workshops with the participants. They discussed different ways to illustrate their story, exploring techniques including collage, and working in groups. They also designed the front and back cover art.

This beautifully - written and illustrated story is thanks to the hard work, enthusiasm and creative talents of the group of parents at HMP Oakwood.

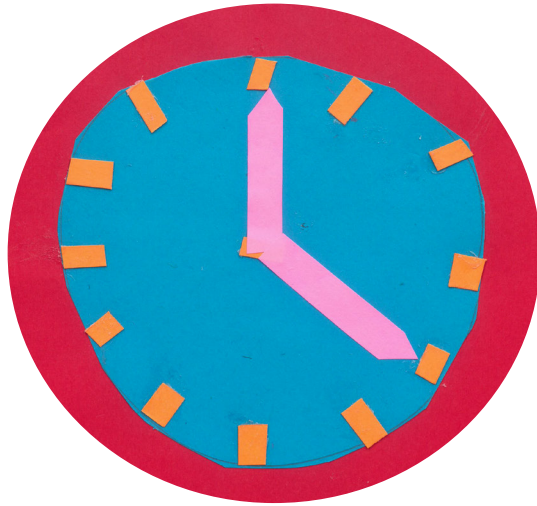
Each participant was awarded a Certificate of Achievement from Create and received two copies of this book, one to give to their child/ren and one to keep.

My Parent's in Prison was funded by Anonymous, The Boris Karloff Charitable Foundation, Elle (via HMP Oakwood), The Leigh Trust, The Michael and Shirley Hunt Charitable Trust.

It is hoped that future *My Parent's in Prison* projects will enable Create to develop a collection of stories for children who have a parent in prison. This book and previous books in the collection, *My Parent's in Prison*, are available to download for free on Create's website:

www.createarts.org.uk

On The Horizon



re:create press

CREATE ARTS.ORG.UK

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Cover illustration, 'On The Horizon', created by participants.

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Designed by Create and participants at HMP Oakwood
www.createarts.org.uk

Create is a registered Charity No 1099733

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Preface

My kids know I am in prison. They have asked me what it is like. I have told them no lies. It's not a nice place but I've told them everything is okay so they feel reassured. I have asked them how they feel. They have said they just want me back. I have told them it will be a bit of time but one day I will be back.



Before

It's a lovely summer's day, the sun's shining and there's a smell of freshly-mown grass. It's a perfect day for a picnic so the family decide to get a packed lunch together and get the kids' bikes and scooters and go to the park.

When they get there, they unload the car and go off, the kids ahead – Noah on his scooter, Hope on her bike, Rex, the dog, on his extendable lead, bouncing along beside them. They see a lovely, big conker tree, which would give them some shade, and sit down to unpack their stuff. The kids have a little play, then Noah says, 'I want some food, Dad, can I have an ice cream?' 'Eat your food first,' says Blossom.

'Where do you think we should go on holiday this year?' says Chris.

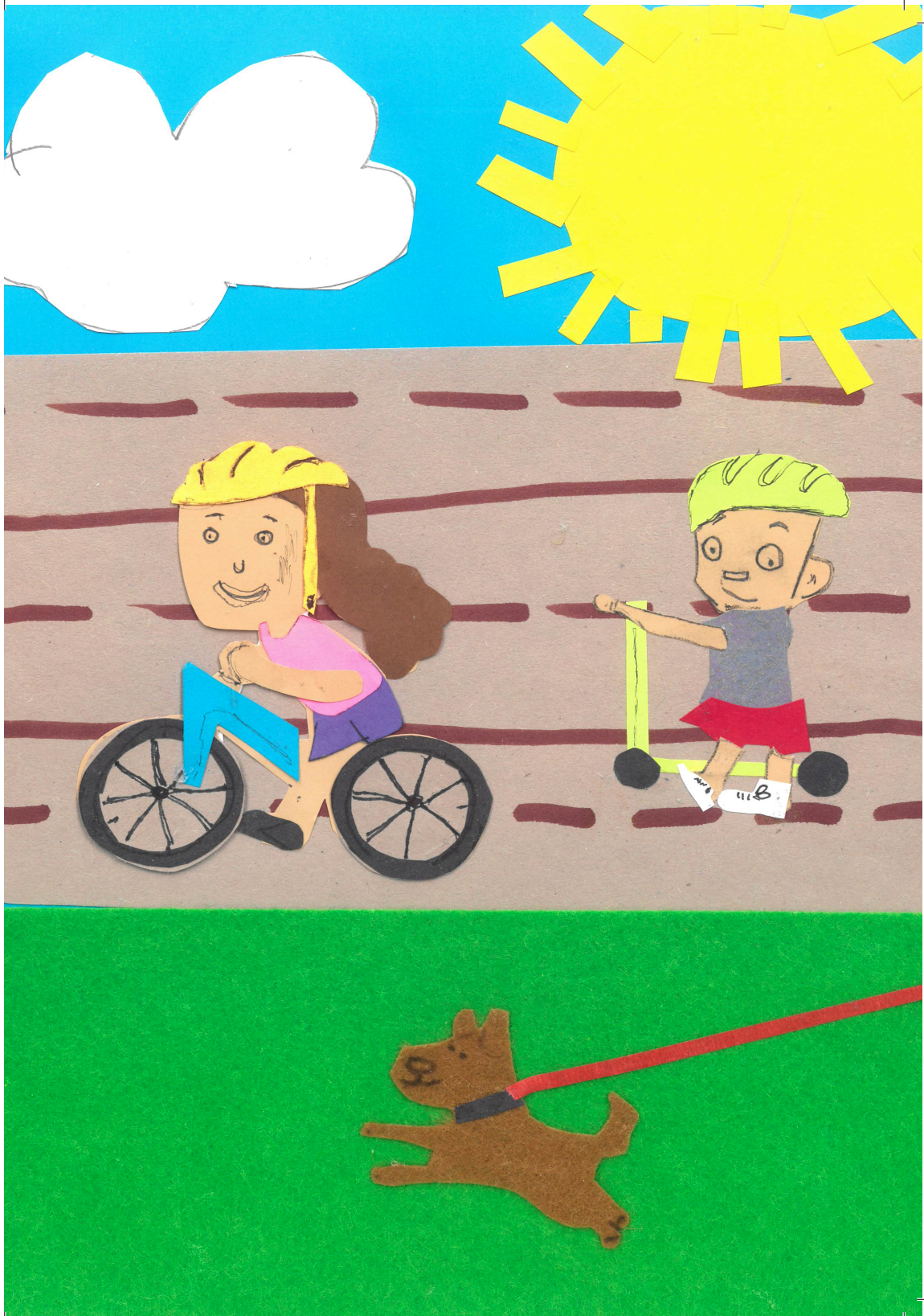
'How about Greece?' says Blossom.

'What do you think about Portugal?' says Chris.

They settle on going to Portugal.

When they come back from the park, Chris says,

'You know, I'm going to take on extra shifts to pay for the holiday', and arranges to do one that afternoon. He's driving his work van when his phone goes. He sees



it's Blossom and picks it up.

'I've changed the holiday,' Blossom says. 'I've found a really good deal for Jamaica, so we can go and see my family.'

'What?' says Chris, 'You said Greece, I said Portugal, we agreed on Portugal and now you've changed it to Jamaica.' His mind wasn't on the road, he was thinking about the holiday and he lost his concentration.

WHAM!



Three Years

Chris: How are you? How was the journey here?
How have the kids been, Blossom?

Hope: We've been *really* good, Dad.

Blossom: Hmm, yeah – and the next joke?

Hope: We played 'I Spy' all the way here in the car.
It was really fun.

Blossom: Yeah, but then you started fighting. I had to pull over, Christopher, and put Hope in the front and Noah in the back to separate them.

Noah: It wasn't fair, her being in the front with you and me being alone in the back. I get to be in the front going home, OK?

Blossom: I think you'll just have to agree to disagree.

Chris: How've they been at home? Have they been squabbling there too?

Blossom: Actually, Noah hasn't been himself in the last few weeks and doesn't want to go to school. I think I'll keep him at home for a bit.

Hope: Why've I got to go to school, then? It's not fair!

Blossom: Well, life's not fair, Hope.

Chris: Why are you feeling so bad, Noah?

Noah: I don't know. I didn't want to upset Mum because I saw her crying over you, Dad. I just wanted to tell you.

Blossom: Why didn't you ever tell me that?

Chris: But why didn't you want to go to school?

Noah: The other kids are picking on me. They're being really nasty to me because you're in prison. They say, 'Noah, Noah, you've got a prisoner Dad.' I just wanted to be a big boy – brave, like you.

Chris: Just talk to the teacher, Noah. Let the adults deal with it. These nasty kids will have no friends when they're older. Don't ever bully anyone. Treat people the way you'd like to be treated. Respect is a two-way thing. You're doing the right thing. You *are* a big boy – you can tell me anything. Even if you've done something wrong, we can work it out.

Hope: Who is it that's been doing this to you? Why haven't you told me before? This wouldn't have happened if I'd been there.

Chris: Thank heaven you weren't because I wouldn't want you to get into any trouble, Hope. I know it's hard for you – and for me too – that I'm not there, but it's not forever. Now let's all go and get some food.



"So that's it, time's up. Please say goodbye to your families." Shouts from the prison staff.

There it goes again, another goodbye. At that exact moment, time stands still and reality kicks in. Christopher can't come home.

They all have a family hug and kiss. Emotions are high but the mask is on, and they say their goodbyes. Eye contact lost and heads down, Blossom, Hope and Noah leave the visitors' centre.

Another breath of fresh air. A big sigh and a sense of relief. Another visit done. Blossom, feeling deflated and heartbroken, gives Hope and Noah some reassurance and reminds them that she loves them.

On the journey home, Hope and Noah are in the back, holding hands and watching the world go by. Blossom's eyes are on the road, but she tweaks her rear-view mirror to check on Noah. "Noah, is everything okay?"

"Yes, Mum, I'm okay."

Blossom says, "You know I'm always here for you. You can tell me anything."

Noah says, "I love you, Mum."

"I love you more," Blossom responds.

When they arrive back home, Rex, the fluffy ball of fun, the family dog, barks with excitement to see the kids home. At the window he keeps barking, tail wagging fiercely. Now he's jumping up at the front door.

"REX! We are home!" scream the kids. Blossom has a glister in her eyes seeing the kids' happiness and their moods immediately lifted.

Blossom says, "Rex ... do you want walks? Hope, Noah - get your jackets. We're going to the park." The family prepare for an afternoon walk.

A lovely summer's day. Blue skies, and there it is ... the ice cream van jingles down the road.

Skipping and hopping down the road, jolly and full of life. The park is in sight, with Rex barking and tugging on Blossom's arm in excitement. It's play time. Blossom lets Rex off the lead. WHOOSH! Like a rocket, he runs into the open field. Blossom feels emotionally exhausted.

Loud laughs, chitter chatter, families everywhere, children playing. Blossom stands alone watching Hope and Noah joyfully playing together. A priceless moment, but one thing is missing: Christopher. Blossom is confused, "Why did this happen to us?"

Oblivious to Mum's emotions, the children ask, "Mum ... Mum ... Mum ... can you come and play?" Mum responds, "But what about Rex?" The children respond quickly, "Oh yeah."

The gut wrench kicks in. Blossom's unable to play because of the dog, and Christopher's not there to help.

The kids are full of joy and decide to push each other on the swings. Such loud laughter coming from them, and then another child on the next swing with one big difference: Mum and Dad both playing with their child. Hope and Noah look at each other in a state of confusion. Eyes watering and mood dampened, they run to Mum.

Blossom knows immediately what's wrong. "Don't worry, babies, Dad will be home before we know it."

Blossom asks the kids, "Shall we do a lap of the park and make our way home?"

Noah gets Rex's ball, throws it with all his reach, and shouts, "Fetch, Rex!" Rex's copper fur runs with the rays of the sun, back and forth, back and forth.

Exhausted and hungry, they settle on the sofa. It's down-time. Get ready for dinner, bed, and household chores.



Seven Years

Chris says, "Well, now I'm in this open prison, the next time you will see me I'll be coming out on home leave."

All hyped up, Hope announces, "You'll finally get to see our new house!"

"Yeah, and you can see my room!" Noah says, with a massive grin on his face.

"Aren't you nervous, babe?" Blossom asks Chris.

"A bit, I suppose, but I can't wait. Are you nervous to have a man back in the house?" he replies.

"Erm, it will be different but I can't wait to have you home," she says in relief.

"Can you come and watch me play football?"

Noah asks his Dad.

"Yeah! Too right," Blossom loudly puts her stamp on events. "Your Dad will be taking you and I'll be putting my feet up," she adds, cheekily.

"I'll take you both to the park!" Chris tells his children.

"Dad! I'm sixteen you know. I need to revise for my GCSEs," Hope tells her father.

"You'll always be my little girl." He smiles and looks at Hope.

Blossom puts her arm around Hope and says, "She's a young woman now. She takes after her Mum."

Noah jumps in with, "Dad, can we have McDonald's, when you come home?"

"Yes mate, we can have anything you want," Chris says, generously.

"Mum, aren't you happy Dad's coming home?" Hope asks her mother.

"Yeah,' Blossom says quietly.

"No! This is the happiest you've ever been!" Hope says, smirking at her Mum.

"Aww babe, I can take Noah to football, take Hope to dance, and take all that weight off your shoulders," Chris tells his family.

"I'll believe it when I see it," Blossom fires back at him.

"I can't wait!" Noah shouts.

"Me too!" Hope adds.

"And you can walk Rex," Blossom tells Chris.

"We'll all go to the woods and take Rex," he replies. Cheekily, Blossom looks at Chris. "And pick up his poo!"

"Yeah, that's your job now, Dad," Hope says, backing up her Mum.

Noah tells his Dad, "I'll help you, Dad, it's not hard."

The Officer shouts, "FIVE MINUTES! FINISH OFF!"

Blossom looks at Chris and says, "It won't be long now until we'll never have to leave you here again."

"This makes a change," he says.

"Why?" asks Hope.

"Well, you and your brother aren't both in tears," he tells her.

Noah blurts out, "It's cos we're EXCITED!"

"TIME!" shouts the Officer.

"I love you, babe. And you two, come here." Chris hugs his family.

"Love you too, babe." Blossom gives Chris a kiss.

Hope says, "Love you, Dad," buried in her Dad's arms along with Noah, who lastly tells his Dad, "Love you more."

Since Chris has been away, the world has moved on so quickly. Technology has taken over, like Facebook and other social media apps, and now AI is the new biggest thing in the world which Chris has got to adapt to, which he is not looking forward to. Also, he's worried about



finding work and what the future for him and his family is going to be like.

Chris goes back to his cell with excitement that he's coming home, but he's also anxious thinking about the changes he's about to face.

Chris knows the world has changed since he's been away. His kids are now in senior school and growing up so quickly.

The kids are so excited about their Dad coming home and seeing their new rooms. It's been a long time coming. The kids are full of emotions, but this time they are good emotions not sad ones.

Blossom is also excited about the reunion of her family, but a lot of things have changed over the years in the whole family's life. But she's looking forward to the future as big things are changing now for the better.

Noah's enthusiastic about his Dad taking him to football and showing him his new skills – and just for his Dad to be present.

Hope's telling her Mum she can't wait for her Dad to come home and start taking her to dance class, as over the years this is something she's always wanted.

For the first time in seven years the family can now see the future is on the horizon.



After

The day Chris comes home for his first home leave, the family's up and ready in anticipation of the homecoming. Even Rex is excited. On the journey to the prison on a festive morning, the children can't stop talking about what they're going to do when Dad comes home, and Christmas songs are playing in the car. They're all in the Christmas spirit.

They get to the prison and Chris is at the gate. He's waiting anxiously for his family to arrive. They pull up and the kids jump out, full of joy, knowing the long-awaited time has arrived. It's felt like a lifetime. On the journey home, Chris begins to feel sick from a mixture of excitement and anxiety, but a short while later, the feeling of joy overcomes the sickness.

He's overwhelmed when he sees the new house. He can't believe he's home with his family again.

He hasn't got a minute to sit and chill out because the kids want him to see their rooms. He's trying to take it all in but there's no opportunity to do this. He paces upstairs after the kids to see their rooms. Noah wants him to see his toys and Hope wants to show him some of her schoolwork.



'Wait a minute, kids,' says Chris. 'I want to talk to Mum for a bit!'

When the kids have shown him round the house, they go downstairs to show him the drawers where he can keep his stuff. Blossom brings him mince pies and a hot chocolate in his mug that he hasn't seen for years. He sits on the sofa and Hope brings him his old slippers. He slips them straight on, sits back against his head rest and thinks to himself, 'I'm finally home!' He can smell the real Christmas tree in the next room. Blossom puts on his favourite Christmas song, *Last Christmas*, then goes to the kitchen to make more hot chocolate with marshmallows. The family's saved the last bauble so Chris can put it on the tree.

They all sit on the sofa and watch a movie together – *Home Alone*, his favourite – and the kids fall asleep. Hope rests her head on his shoulder and Noah falls asleep on his lap. After Chris has taken the kids up to bed, he and Blossom put their presents around the tree. He's made a jewellery box for Hope, a model car for Noah and bought an eternity ring for Blossom.

He has a lovely Christmas, then has to leave to go back to the prison.

'You plan the holiday,' he says to Blossom. 'I'll be back very soon.'

MERRY CHRISTMAS





CREATE ARTS.ORG.UK

Create ~ Charity Times Charity of the Year 2020 ~ is the UK's leading charity empowering lives, reducing isolation and enhancing wellbeing through the creative arts.

People need to create. We are experiencing a time of unprecedented change and challenge. The impact of Brexit and the pandemic as well as the climate and cost of living crises have underlined and exacerbated the inequalities within our society as never before. Create's work has never been more important. Creativity impacts wellbeing, emotional and mental health. It builds skills, brings joy and reduces isolation. It allows us to think differently, to express ourselves and to be heard. It enables us to learn about ourselves and others in new ways. It inspires, empowers and raises aspirations. And, according to industry leaders including the World Economic Forum, it is a core skill for business.

Here at Create, we know that unleashing creativity ignites imaginations, develops confidence and builds relationships. Like setting off a firework, our professional artists light the touch paper and our participants discover new found self-belief and a desire to try more, do more and be more.

We're a national charity that champions local priorities by collaborating with our partners to tailor every project to each individual's needs. We believe that everyone – regardless of circumstances, behaviour, age, gender, race or disability – deserves the chance to fulfil their potential.

Each project is a collaboration with one or more community partners, which have specialist knowledge of local priorities and the participants that they exist to serve.

Our focus is on engaging the most marginalised participants in inspiring, sustainable arts programmes – delivered in familiar settings where they feel comfortable and safe – in areas where provision is poor and engagement in the arts is therefore low. We prioritise our work with eight participant groups: young patients; disabled children and adults; young and adult carers; children in care and young care leavers; schoolchildren (and their teachers) in areas of deprivation; vulnerable older people; young and adult prisoners (and their families); and marginalised children and adults.

Many of our programmes are developed and delivered in partnership with the business community, helping to meet their Responsible Business priorities. Every programme we deliver is rigorously evaluated because we're passionate about providing inspiring and empowering creative experiences that have a lasting impact. We also evaluate the Social Value of our work annually, via a key stakeholder survey and in-depth interviews/focus groups.

We know from experience that drama can build an isolated young carer's self-esteem, that storytelling can strengthen the bond between a prisoner and the loved ones waiting for them at home, and that music can provide an important means of self-expression for a young person experiencing anxiety or depression.

One spark of creative energy opens up a world of positive opportunities.

Create lights that spark.



How long has Dad been away?

Oh, it feels like forever!

Remembering life before he went away.

Imagining life when he comes home.

Zooming into his arms when he's out.

Opening the front door of the family house.

Never – he'll never go away again!

He's back.