



- ✂ PAGE ONE – Tamms Year Ten Campaign
- ✂ PAGE TWO – Mothers Speak Out
- ✂ PAGE SIX – Students Visit Tamms
- ✂ PAGE SEVEN – Creative Corner
- ✂ PAGE EIGHT – Tamms Events

SPECIAL TAMMS ISSUE

TAMMS
YEAR TEN

STATEVILLE

SPEAKS

VOICES FROM INSIDE..

APRIL 2008

THE TAMMS YEAR TEN CAMPAIGN

The Tamms Poetry Committee

Tamms C-Max, located in the southern tip of Illinois, 360 miles from Chicago, received its first prisoners in March of 1998. Modeled after the supermaximum prison at Pelican Bay, California, the partially underground facility was designed to hold 500 men in solitary confinement. There is no physical contact, no phone calls, no communal activities, no classes, no jobs and no rehabilitation programs. The idea was to restrict or eliminate privileges permitted at other general population facilities.

Originally, the IDOC indicated that inmates sent to Tamms for administrative detention could complete all three levels of the behavioral level system in one year. Inmates who were in disciplinary segregation would remain until their terms expired and then be eligible for transfer, or be placed in

administrative detention and thus have the chance to work their way through the behavioral levels. The "extra punishment" at Tamms was meant to be a temporary measure. However, as we write, there are prisoners who have been there since the year it opened. Those men have endured a decade of uninterrupted solitary confinement. And most other men have been there for years and years. We believe that even one year is too much.

Solitary confinement for any substantial length of time has serious effects. Numerous studies have documented the effects of solitary confinement on prisoners—visual and auditory hallucinations, hypersensitivity to noise and touch, insomnia and paranoia, uncontrollable feelings of rage and fear, distortions of time and perception, increased risk of suicide and PTSD. But because these effects are primarily

mental, they are more easily accepted by legislators and voters. Since few Americans outside of prison ever experience anything remotely like extensive solitary confinement, it is easy for most people to grossly underestimate the harsh realities that this kind of isolation induces; the extremes include self-mutilation, smearing of feces, non-stop screaming, and suicide.

The international community sees the matter more clearly. Many international covenants and human rights groups denounce the practice of prolonged isolation. In fact, the United Nations Committee Against Torture questioned the U.S. delegation (in both 2000 and 2006) for the prolonged isolation of prisoners housed in supermax prisons. The Committee remains concerned about the extremely harsh regime imposed on detainees in

Continued on Page 3...

hope / change / redemption

SUBSCRIBE TO STATEVILLE SPEAKS: 2237 SUNNYSIDE WESTCHESTER, IL 60154

Coverage

WHEN YOU NEED IT

INMATES IN EACH DOC PRISON CAN SUBMIT ARTICLES TO
STATEVILLE SPEAKS

Mothers Speak Out About Tamms

Cynthia Kobel



“The ties with family and community that prisoners depend on after release also promote safety during incarceration.” – Vera Institute of Justice, 2006

Tamms is seven hours away from Chicago, where the majority of prisoners are from. At this distance, bonds begin to break down with family and friends. Furthering the harm is an inability to make phone calls. Stress and anxiety is already felt because of solitary confinement, but Tamms adds another factor by never letting a prisoner know when he may be released.

The problem for families is that they must make this trip by any means necessary. A family member or friend must write to the administration at Tamms two weeks in advance for approval for a visit and then hope for an approval from the Illinois Department of Corrections, hope for good weather, good health and the money required for such a trip. There is no public transportation to Tamms. Driving a car is the only way to get to

the prison. From Chicago, it is approximately 339 miles down Route 57 to arrive approximately 20 miles from Cairo, Illinois. Once you get off the highway, you travel back roads to the prison. It is difficult to find if you do not have directions.

Many people, amazingly, make the trip in one day. The most essential reason for making these trips is for the mental health of loved ones who need to know that their prisoner is doing okay.

A mother told me, “It is one thing to go over to Menard or Stateville at the last minute and see my son, but the planning ahead by two weeks is exasperating. When he was at another prison, I could talk to him every Sunday. We had a scheduled time and I could get my coffee and wait by the phone. The phone call may have been expensive, but nothing compared to traveling to Tamms.”

One mother writes: “When I first started going to Tamms the hotel room I stayed in was \$34.00. It is now \$69.00 with a senior discount. (I have grown into that bracket

in the ten years I have been traveling downstate). That is an increase of 60%. A CNN article from April of 1998 indicated that gasoline was on average priced at \$1.05. It is now over \$3.00, an increase of 185%. Postage was 33 cents. Today’s news says that a first-class letter will increase to 42 cents in May, an increase of 27%. My salary has actually decreased since I first started going to Tamms and, as a senior, finances are a major focus in my world.

“I am ten years older now. There are many parents who were seniors when this all began and they no longer visit. I wonder, ‘Have they passed away? Did they die without ever touching their child? Or are they incapacitated physically or mentally? Can they no longer make the arduous trip?’ I am now changing my visits to every other month to save money and the wear and tear on my body and my vehicle,” she wrote.

Personally, in the eight years that I have been going to Tamms, I see a difference in the visiting rooms. They are not as full.

Continued on next page...

Stateville Speaks Staff

Publisher: Cynthia Kobel
Consulting Editor: Bill Ryan
Editors: Donald McDonald, Aldwin McNeal, Anaviel B. Rakemeyahu
Assistant Editors: Stanley Howard, Rich Dyches, Jeanene Clay, Vincent Galloway, Renaldo Hudson, Tom Odle, Mychal Thompson, Ronnie Carrasquillo, Theresa Heater, Margaret Majos
Women’s Issues: Millie Lee and Janet Jackson
Sports Page: Angel Torres
Legal Page: Joe Dole
Layout and Design: Ibi Cole
Copyeditor: Katy Ryan
Printer: Irish Press

"Mothers Speak Out..." Cont.

I have spoken to some people who planned a weekend trip, but they cannot do it very often because they are coming from another state. I have never been at Tamms when the visiting rooms have been full. For the most part, when I visit, I know the other people who are visiting. They are the regulars. I was told by a friend I met through our visits that there are about 25 people who have been coming to see their sons since Tamms opened. An estimate is that about 100 people at Tamms have visits, leaving about 180 men who never have visits.

The federal supermax in Colorado, ADX Florence, where the United States government has sent suspected terrorists, the Unabomber, the shoe bomber, Terry Nichols, Moussaoui, etc., was described like this on the news: the men can make phone calls and, at a higher level, can exercise in a larger area with hoops. All inmates have televisions with closed circuit educational programming and mental health channels as well as cable news and entertainment channels, Public Broadcasting Stations, and National Public Radio. These are privileges men at Tamms have asked for repeatedly. If men get out of Tamms, it is usually because of time served, but some have gotten out in a step-down program in which, after level 3, a prisoner will be sent to Pontiac for three months and then Menard. At that point they are assigned another prison.

"What worries me most is who will my son be when he comes home after being in solitary confinement for 10 years? Will he have a psychotic break, be paranoid or will his health be so bad that his life expectancy will be cut short by years? I want to prepare my home for him and let him settle in, but I know he won't be able to find a job right away nor will he be able to just walk into a room with the whole big family. He gets nervous now, at Tamms, when too many people are around him," a mother said.

We know that supermax prisons are bad for prisoners and their families, but we have no idea what this prison mentality is doing to our country. We have to wonder when our Congress has to have hearings to decide what type of torture is acceptable. We have to wonder why we have the largest prison population in the world, why we are a country that still believes in executions, and why we mentally torture our prisoners with solitary confinement. †



Tamms Year Ten Campaign Cont.

supermaximums, the prolonged isolation, and the effect such treatment has on mental health. The Committee is also concerned that its purpose may be retribution, in which case it would constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Art. 16, 2006). The practice of prolonged solitary confinement for prisoners is opposed by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, the European Court, the

Continued on Next Page...

Subscribe to **STATEVILLE** SPEAKS

Stateville Speaks can only continue toward positive reform with your support.

**1 YEAR SUBSCRIPTION
IS ONLY \$10**

I WANT TO SUBSCRIBE TO STATEVILLE SPEAKS

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

E-MAIL (for e-mail subscription) _____

Mail this coupon along with check or money order for \$10, to: S.S. Subscription, 2237 Sunnyside, Westchester, IL 60154

****This issue of Stateville Speaks is generously supported by the Kenneth and Harle Montgomery Foundation.****

Other Sponsors Include: N.I.V., CURE (Citizens United to Rehabilitate Errants), LT3P (Long Term Prisoner Policy Project) www.ILCER.org & www.Illinoisprisonertalk.com

Join the N.I.V. Mission...

to become part of a force that can influence legislators.

No fees. No obligations.
Urge voting-citizen family and friends to sign up and become a part of a force to improve legislation.

N.I.V. needs **VOTING CITIZEN members to be the most effective**

N.I.V. has over 700+ members

The **N.I.V. Mission Statement** is to better society by assisting to reduce overcrowding of prisons, reduce recidivism and improve societal productivity by strengthening rehabilitation, reforming sentencing and implementing programs to advocate positive change, productivity and restorative justice for the benefit of society as a whole.

Join the N.I.V. Mission in support of positive change.

(signature) _____ (print name) Join the N.I.V. mission. _____ (signature)

ADDRESS: _____

CITY _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

E-MAIL _____

Mail slip to: N.I.V. P.O. Box 8546, Chicago, IL 60680.

Tamms Year Ten Campaign Cont.

European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the Inter-American Court for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, the ACLU, and Amnesty International.

In the summer of 2006, a small group of educators initiated a modest project designed to deliver a small dose of human contact to the approximately 270 men at Tamms. The members of the Tamms Poetry Committee wanted to do one of the few things you can do for a person in solitary confinement—send mail. The plan was to send a poem, and a letter introducing it, to each and every prisoner. (We started with a poem that a Tamms penpal had sent to one of our members, "Emptiness" by Yusuf O. Kassam.) The letter included an invitation to correspond with members of the group and to share poems or other artwork. Not surprisingly, the reaction from within Tamms C-Max was immediate. Many prisoners were happy to have a chance to communicate with a fellow human being.

We appreciated these letters from interesting, expressive people who engaged us in difficult and complex subjects—and wanted the opportunity for personal growth, friendship, education, jobs, connections to their family, and, of course, the opportunity for communal activity and social contact. Some guys argued with us about the poems we were sending, and some surprised us with the poems they liked. Many, many men sent us great poetry and we have used it all at our public events. A couple people said stop sending poetry and just help us. Indeed, once these personal connections were established, and we learned more about Tamms, the Tamms Poetry Committee felt that we had to do more to help our new friends. We weren't optimistic that anything could be done, but we knew we had to try.

We began staging public events where anyone interested in prison reform could find out more about long-term solitary confinement in general, and Tamms in particular. At each event, we foregrounded the words, testimony and art of the prisoners because they made the case

much better than we can. Former Tamms prisoners and family members moved and stunned people with their stories. We continued to hold mailings and letter-writing events for the men, as a way for new people to become involved.

We saw the ten-year anniversary of the opening of Tamms as an opportunity to bring attention to the detrimental effects of long-term solitary confinement for the men at Tamms and to ask the state to reconsider this misguided policy. Along with former Tamms prisoners, family members, new people and organizations, we initiated a campaign called "Tamms Year Ten" to publicize and protest conditions. Now, we are honored to have the support of many allies and endorsers who recognize that Tamms is inhumane, and unacceptable. Together, we are planning events to mark this anniversary, including poetry readings, teach-ins, letter-writing events, film screenings, an original play about Tamms, and concerts. On March 15, there will be a benefit for Tamms Year Ten featuring the great slide guitar player and blues singer Elmore James, Jr. and the incredible improvisational jazz trio of Jaimie Branch (trumpet), Toby Summerfield (guitar), and Marc Riordan (drums).

With the support of prisoner advocates, we are meeting with legislators and will hold information-only hearings about Tamms in the Prison Reform Committee of the Illinois House of Representatives. The hearings will take place on **Monday, April 28, 2008 from 10am to 4pm in the James R. Thompson Center** (100 W. Randolph, Chicago). We need as many people as possible to attend this hearing and contact their legislators about Tamms.

In fact, the Tamms Year Ten campaign urges everyone reading this article to get involved in any way you can. If you are on the inside, urge family members to contact us and get active with the campaign. We cannot achieve these goals without family members. Explain

Continued on Next Page...



Tamms Year Ten Campaign Cont.

how important it is—and tell them that the time to do something is now. For those on the outside, news and information about Year Ten events is available online at www.YearTen.org or by calling 773-596-1950. Tamms Year Ten has at least a dozen ways to volunteer your time and expertise. Please organize your own events in the rest of Chicago and the rest of the state! You can also donate to the campaign with a check to "Year Ten" or on the website—every dollar is well-spent and we have many expenses coming up that we can't cover.

This special issue of *Stateville Speaks* is devoted to Tamms on the occasion of this anniversary. However, please understand that Tamms Year Ten considers Tamms to be a symbol—not an exception—for what is wrong with the Illinois prison system. Other prisons also have dehumanizing conditions and equally destructive methods of solitary confinement and human warehousing. Concerned citizens, family members, and prisoners have to work in solidarity across these issues to promote rehabilitation and reduce recidivism. Together, we can create the wave of reform needed for a humane and effective criminal justice system in Illinois.

TAMMS YEAR TEN CONTACT

Go to www.YearTen.org for more information.
Contact us at YearTen@riseup.net or 773-596-1950.

Write us at Tamms Poetry Committee, PO BOX 47750, Chicago IL 60647.

TAMMS YEAR TEN CAMPAIGN ENDORSERS

8th Day Center for Justice
American Friends Service Committee—Chicago
Black People Against Police Torture Campaign to End the Death Penalty
Chicago Anarchist Black Cross
Chicago County Fair
Chicagoland Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights
Citizens For Earned Release
Coalition to Reduce Recidivism
Critical Resistance Chicago
Education Justice Project, Urbana-Champaign
Illinois Institute for Community Law
Justice Coalition of Greater Chicago
Midwest Books to Prisoners
National Alliance Against Racist & Political Repression—Chicago
National Lawyers Guild-Chicago
Progressive Community Center, The People's Church, Rev. B. Herbert Martin
Saving Our Sons Ministries
Stateville Speaks
STOPMAX/American Friends

Service Committee
Raising Awareness to Inspire Others
Tamms Committee
Tamms Poetry Committee
Temporary Services
Urbana-Champaign Books to Prisoners
Voices for Creative Non-Violence!

Lost?

Wanna Help But Don't Know Where to Begin?



Here are some ways you can help the many organizations committed to positive reform

1.

Subscribe to Stateville Speaks

\$10.00 keeps you informed and us going. Inmates, encourage family members to subscribe

2.

Join the N.I.V. Mission

The N.I.V. is a lobbying force. With a large number of voting members, N.I.V. can help influence legislators

3.

Get on the Web

www.ILCER.org ? www.LT3P.org
www.IllinoisPrisonTalk.com

4.

VOTE

Get Registered TODAY. Call 312.603.0906

5.

SHOW UP

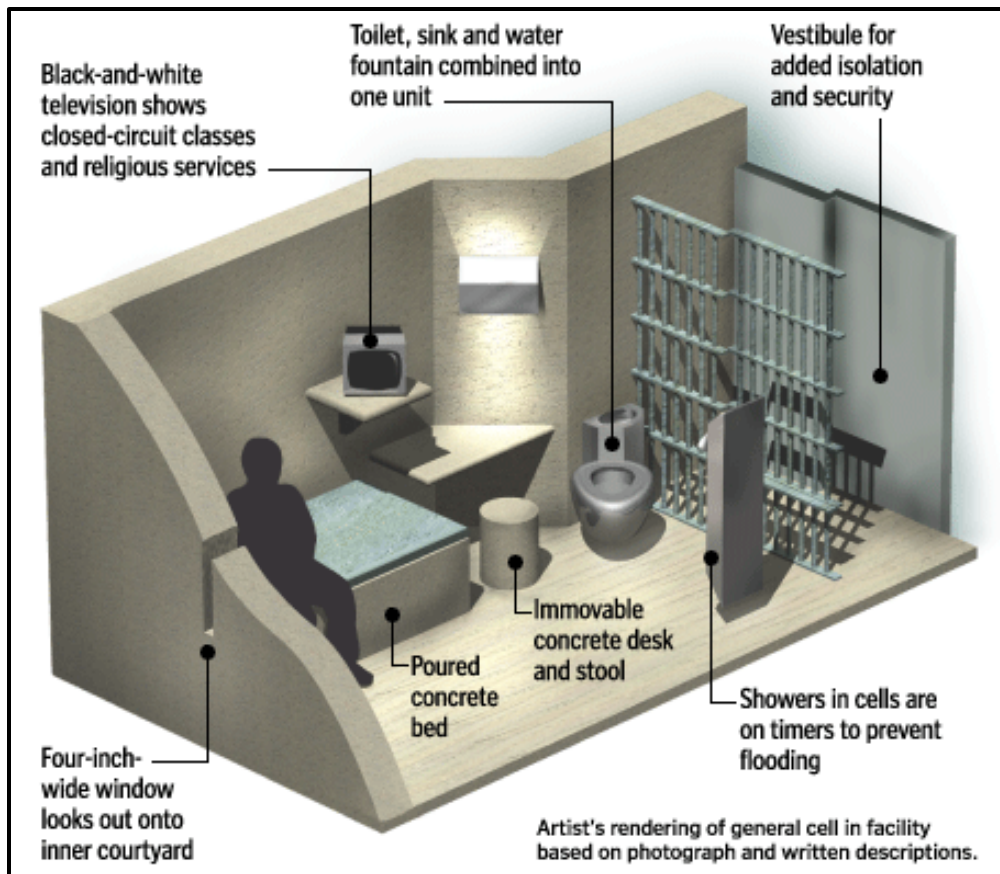
Attend announced HJR80 meetings, CER meetings and TAMMS Events.
Not getting an invitation? Join the mailing list by subscribing to Stateville Speaks!

Essays, Letters and Insight

PROPOSALS AND PERSUASIVE EDITORIALS

Students Visit Tamms

Brianna Bedard and Patrick Moore



Typical Maximum Security Holding Cell

Over the past summer a youth group from the Universalist Unitarian Church of Elgin visited Tamms Supermax Correctional Facility. We consist mainly of high school and college students. Nancy, a friend of mine, had been visiting the prison for two years, and our group decided that it would be an interesting experience to visit a few of the prisoners at Tamms. The visit turned out to be much more than we expected.

After seemingly endless forms and hassles, seven of us were finally on our way early in the morning last July. We were all fairly excited and somewhat

nervous during the long car ride to the prison. When we arrived, our vehicle was promptly searched. We were then brought into the facility where we filled out another form. After that we passed through a metal detector, and we were each taken to a separate room to be physically searched for weapons or drugs.

After this, our group split off to visit two different prisoners. I and three others visited a middle-aged man for two hours, but it felt like it was not more than twenty minutes. This new friend of ours had not had a visitor in

almost seven years. His excitement and nervousness to see us was very apparent and touching.

After the visit, a member of our group said, "The prisoner I visited acted completely unlike any of the prisoners portrayed in the media. He is smart, compassionate, and completely remorseful. Listening to his story made you think about the situation he is in and his options. He does not have many options and he is now paying for a crime he committed years ago with the rest of his life. The tactics used to keep him under control seemed dehumanizing and unnecessary. It makes you wonder who, if anyone, should be subjected to such punishment. I am amazed he is not insane."

Dave, another member of the group, visited a different prisoner but had a similar reaction. "The man I visited is intelligent and compassionate. I would feel comfortable having him as a neighbor."

We were all moved by the remorse and regard that the prisoners had. It made us wonder about the necessity of such an extreme program as a supermax facility. While people argue and protest about the treatment of animals, some of those same people choose not to see the treatment of people in these prisons as unethical. I leave you with a thought: If people are considered evolved enough to be held accountable for their actions, then aren't they evolved enough to be reformed in the consequence of their mistakes? |

Creative Corner

WHEN INSPIRATION HITS...POEMS WRITINGS CONNOTATIONS...



[untitled]

I see myself within myself within
myself within myself
I see what appears to be a reflection
of my soul
I scream for this tortured battered soul
but nobody seems to hear.

Stone walls, steel doors, the
solitude. I search for their
meaning. Does it always have to be so
hard? Must I die
feeling alone? Within myself within
myself within myself

Each day passes, tick tock, I look in
the mirror I see
an old man I do not know, this is what
time has done to me
Old and faded like my memories of
times past. Tick tock. The
moment is now past within myself
within myself within myself

Never truly understanding the evil
inside me, never truly
understanding why I've done what

I've done. It's a constant battle—
am I sane, only time will be the
judge. Does it matter anymore?

A tear escapes and I wipe it away before
anyone sees
Remaining years, have mercy and pass
by quickly
Another tear escapes and I don't care
anymore
Tears on my pillow not a smile on my
face
And I see myself within myself within
myself within myself.

to live without life

as i sit down and speak to neighbors,
their echo answers me;
as i speak, i visualize the gestures
a human being would do
when speaking to another fellow being;
it is not enough to visualize,
so i look in the mirror
to assure myself, yet without surprise
all i see is a shadow;
my eyesight blurs, as a river flows
through them;
i ask myself, is this what i was created
for?

as i hug myself, i realize that this too is
just a futile vision,
for i do not feel myself;
so i try to talk, hoping someone will
hear my echo,
but only a vent answers me, so i

concentrate on its hum;

maybe the answer lies there;
what a surprise, my visualization has
once again deceived me;
i turn and look around, and memories
start to flood my mind;
i try to pick any one of them at random,
but they all come up empty;
this too is futile

i ask for professional help, yet this too is
futile,
for i am at fault, regardless of my
opinions or concerns;
so i keep it to myself;
maybe they'll stop pointing fingers;
yet this too is futile,
for i am a created monster; i tell myself
this isn't so;
i have my own life, yet i am deceived
once again,
for i have been stripped of all life;
only a river of tears reminds me of life

yet this too is futile,
for my vision has deceived me,
for only a life can see, only a life can
feel,
only a life can answer me, only life can
keep me human;
yet i cannot live that life;
for the past two years my life has
stopped;
i no longer have life;
i can only live
without seeing, without feeling—
this is to live without life!

—A PRISONER AT TAMMS

Upcoming TAMMS Year Ten Events

March 1–Saturday–10:30AM. A talk on “Human Contact Deprivation”
Sacred Heart Parish, 337 S. Ottawa Street, Joliet, IL 60436

March 3–Monday–4PM. Press conference and spoken-word event
Jane Addams Hull-House Museum
The University of Illinois at Chicago, 800 S. Halsted (M/C 051),
Chicago, IL 60607

March 8–Saturday–6PM-8:30PM. Tamms Anniversary Letter-writing Event
Mess Hall. 6932 N Glenwood Ave, Chicago 60626

March 10–Monday–10PM. Chicago Peace Party at Danny’s
Benefit for Tamms Year Ten Campaign–half of bar proceeds go to our campaign.
Danny’s Bar. 1951 W Dickens Ave, Chicago, IL 60614

March 14–Friday-8PM. The Tradeshow. Live performance installation by RATIO and Chicago Arts District
1945 S. Halsted, Ste 101, Chicago, IL
(also performed on 3/16 at 2PM and as a Tamms benefit on 4/25 at 8PM)

March 15–Saturday–9PM. A Benefit For Tamms Year Ten
Featuring Elmore James Jr. and Rupert (Jaimie Branch/Marc Riordan/Toby Summerfield).
The Hideout. 1354 W. Wabansia Ave. Chicago, IL 60622

April 17–Thursday–6PM. Gene Siskel Film Center
You Don’t Remember The Time You Do: Moments in the Lives of Prisoners
Space Ghost by Laurie Jo Reynolds and *In Loving Memory* by Rob Todd.
164 North State Street, Chicago, IL 60601

April 26–Saturday–11AM to 4PM. Freedom School Communitarity
Education on the prison-industrial complex. Participants will write letters to Tamms prisoners.
719 S. State St., Suite 3N, Chicago, IL 60605

April 28–Monday–10am-4pm Prison Reform Committee Hearings on Tamms
James R. Thompson Center, 100 W. Randolph, Chicago, IL 60601

April 29–Tuesday–4PM to 5:30PM. Northwestern University Lecture
Northwestern University Center for International and Comparative Studies “Torture in the Era of Democracy” series lecture. Former Tamms prisoner Reginald Akkeem Berry and attorney Jean Maclean Snyder will speak about Tamms.

SUPERMAX SUBSCRIPTIONS
The art group Temporary Services (who published *Prisoners Inventions*) are collaborating with The Tamms Poetry Committee and Sara Ross on a magazines -for-all-Tamms -prisoners drive.

Please check the website for updates and changes. www.YearTen.org

TAMMS YEAR TEN

LT3P



Place
Stamp
Here

STATEVILLE SPEAKS NEWSLETTER
2237 SUNNYSIDE
WESTCHESTER, IL 60154