



Fall 2019

ELM CITY ECHO

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Fall 2019 / Issue 17

MISSION:

The Elm City Echo aims to create economic and expressive opportunities for marginalized members of the New Haven community who are experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness.



75% goes directly to the vendors
who sell the publication

25% pays for printing costs

WHERE YOUR MONEY GOES:

When you buy the Elm City Echo, 75% of the cost goes directly to the members of the homeless community who are involved with the publication. These individuals will become permanent vendors, selling copies throughout New Haven. The remaining 25% pays for printing and stipends for our writers.

Our operating expenses receive additional support from donations and fundraising through the Yale Hunger and Homelessness Action Project.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the seventeenth issue of Elm City Echo, our Fall 2019 edition! Whether you heard about us around the city, at the university or just by walking down Chapel Street, we're so glad you've decided to invest in us and by extension, in New Haven.

You may be asking yourself, what exactly did I spend my \$2.00 on? What really is the Elm City Echo?

The Echo is a street paper that showcases the work of those experiencing homelessness in New Haven. As editors, we facilitate our contributors' writing processes through dialogue and workshop, collaborating with them to develop the work. Twice a year, we compile the pieces into a street paper, which is then sold by our tireless vendor around New Haven.

The purpose of the Echo is tri-fold: not only does the paper promote awareness of homelessness and displacement, it also gives contributors a community-oriented platform to amplify their voices. Moreover, the Echo provides people in New Haven who might not otherwise interact with each other the opportunity to engage genuinely with others' daily lives and experiences.

This particular issue of the Echo deals with universal themes like coping with the past, navigating family dynamics, working through grief and overcoming challenges. Some pieces are mournful; others are joyful. Many are both. Works take the shape of vignettes, poetry, prose and prayer. Some stories are written in English, and others, in Spanish; if you are not a Spanish speaker, we encourage you to seek out friends or neighbors that are and to share these stories with them. Really, we hope all the stories will allow you to ask a question or two and start a conversation.

As we hope you'll discover in these pages, the Echo is about community. Our paper is rooted in trust, open-mindedness and a deep appreciation for the vulnerability that comes with bravely sharing our stories. In reading the Echo, we hope you feel inspired to encourage compassion and reciprocity around New Haven and in your communities. After all, our namesake stands in one part for New Haven, the so-called "Elm City," and another part, for the act of sharing. In passing along your stories and the stories of family, friends, neighbors, and strangers, we hope you, too, hear the echo of our vibrant community.

Warmly,

Sophie Neely & Eliana Swerdlow
Editors-in-Chief

We hope you enjoy this issue of the Echo. For past issues, please go to <https://yhhap.org/elm-city-echo>.

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PROGRESS

by Adrienne

I was a young mom—I had a son at fifteen, when I was a sophomore in high school. That changed my life drastically. I was raised in a good home, a two-parent home. My mom and dad always worked, and they took good care of me and my brother. I graduated high school as the valedictorian, and my son, who was two years old, walked me down the stage at graduation.

At the age of twenty-seven, I became addicted to crack cocaine. I thought it was a one-time thing, no big deal. Fifteen years later, I was still addicted, and I lost lots of family and friends along the way. I'd always had my own apartment since my son was about three years old, and I lost that. I went to a drug treatment program, a very good program, and stayed clean for two years.

With obsessive drug use, memory loss and health problems started coming. I was never promiscuous, but then I got hooked up with the wrong people again. I was in Danbury, CT, for six years, in a relationship that was toxic, but I didn't see that. I lost my job, and depression started kicking in.

Then my mom came to me and said that if I didn't get it together, she was cutting me off for life. That was a wake-up call because some people don't even have a mom, and mine was giving me a second chance. I jumped at the opportunity.

Today, me and my mom talk every day, and I'm engaged. With him, I'm clean. We've been together for ten years but haven't walked down the aisle yet. I became homeless because of illegal renting and the like, and I ran out of money.

So I'm here at the shelter for the first time, which is depressing, but it's cold out, so I'm grateful. I'm forty-eight years old. That's pretty much where I am today. I'm a work in progress, struggling with my alcoholism, but it gets easier each day. And I'm blessed that I have someone who's helping me along the way, and I still have my mom and dad. My son and I aren't on speaking terms—he was recently arrested for stealing, and he totaled my car. I haven't seen him in three years, but we talk sometimes. I'm going to try to get a counselor for that.

Just for today, I'm here. I'm a work in progress, but I'm making progress.

MY JOURNEY

by Anthony

This started out when I was forty-nine, when I got to the shelter. I should be out of here in a couple months now—I got an apartment and have a counselor.

I try to keep my journey positive. It's easy to lose focus here, but I have friends who keep each other up. I get along with my peers, and we keep each other lifted. That's a blessing too. It's hard in a place and time like this to find people you can see you, but I have that.

And now I've let God take the wheel—when I did it, I messed up. I crashed, so now He steers. I love God, and God loves me.

I came down here about three years ago. I had found a place, but the landlord sold the house and didn't tell me. There was a new landlord, and now I'm here. Some landlords don't do anything; they just want the rent.

The next step, leaving here, is going to be quite an adventure. This has been an adventure. There's a first time for everything... For a while, I was living with different people, moving around. But that's awkward, living with people, imposing on them, being a guest. Here, it's not easy—not because of the place, but some of the people. But it's gotten better, and I'm so happy.

You know, you have to love what you do. I'm a people person, but some people don't like people. And when you want something, you have to pay the price—time, effort, energy. It's like that with getting an apartment and working with my counselor.

I like it here; it's more laid-back than New York, and it's definitely good. Now I can kick back and enjoy the ride; take off my shoes and keep on moving. I am going to enjoy this moment, this year. This is my year. I'm going to celebrate when I do have the apartment—I should move around June—and I'm going to enjoy the rest of my life.

DREAMS

by Ashley

My dreams are so vivid, I feel like they are real.

I always wonder what they mean. Can they eventually become reality? My dreams have a way of scaring me or making me impatient as I wait for them to be true. Finding real love has always been my favorite dream.

But just recently I do believe that dream has become true. He is so good to me, even though he plucks my last nerve. But he really is the love of my life. I thank God for him everyday.

So dreams can and do become true. Love is true. Love is real. I have the love that I have been waiting for what seems like forever. I finally have it. And I love it. He shows me what true love is, and I love it. Which makes me love him even more.

VIGNETTES ON LIFE

by Andrew

Love

What is love? In my personal experiences, love is a very powerful and unique word. In order to really know what love is, you must have a loving heart combined with life experience of being a loving individual. Love is kindness—love is caring—love is gentle—love is holding her or his hand—love is dropping everything to be with her or him—love is dedication—love is special—love is never cheating on your spouse—love is always putting her first—love is being a dad—love is always uplifting in bad times—love is keeping your word—love is being there for family—love is unlimited—love is awesome and beautiful in every way, in every and all relationships you encounter in life. I'm a giver, so I know firsthand what love is; the effects and smiles it puts on people's faces when you give. I love who I am today, and I love being a dad! Love is humbling and gracious when you love effortlessly. Love is gratefulness—love is amazing!

respect

In life everything starts with respect, but it begins as a child growing up. Respect is earned. As a legend in basketball in New Haven and Connecticut, I'm well-respected and looked up to by most of the younger kids who know me. Respect is also earned and given based on how you carry yourself. Respect is received through vocabulary—how you talk to others and how you speak in general. Being respectful in life can get you a lot farther than not being respectful! I personally believe in respecting and honoring everyone I come in contact with, because it shows your character and your level of respect. My daughter has great respect for me because I've always respected her. In life, you should respect everyone, despite race, gender, height, or weight. I have great respect for myself—that's why I don't smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, or use any drugs! I respect that I'm alive today!

l i f e

Thinking about life today is amazing, knowing I started as an infant, grew into a child, and am a grown man today! I am extremely grateful I had and was given the chance to live this one life. Not only am I alive today, but I have all my limbs and am pretty healthy. Because there's so many ways we can lose our lives, we must value this one life we have and respect it. Life is precious and beautiful at the same time. Being able to live once allowed me to create a life as well. I have a beautiful daughter who will get to enjoy her chance at life too. Life has its ups and downs, but your choices and decisions are what make it the way you want or choose to live it. I'm very thankful and happy for my life today!

h u m i l i t y

This word is what and how Andrew is defined today in life. Being humble and having humility in life is what I know has kept me alive and breathing today! Having respect and not being judgmental to others is a big part of being humble. Being kind is a big part of humility too. Humility is the key to growing and maturing as a man or woman! I will continue to stay humble in my ongoing quest to improve in life.

b e a u t i f u l

This is a word that is very unique and speaks for itself. Being alive today is a beautiful thing! Waking up this morning is beautiful 'cause I got to see Bella, who is someone who has a beautiful personality! Having my sight on a daily basis to see all the beautiful things that make life more enjoyable is beautiful! I've taught my daughter to be a loving, kind, sharing, caring, and beautiful young lady! She also has her dad's looks, so she is a very beautiful and pretty young lady. Of course, all was created and made to be beautiful by the man upstairs!

My grandmother was a very kind and sweet person who taught me everything I know today about life! She had a beautiful soul and a beautiful heart. I miss her so much, but her beautiful soul and heart lives on in her grandson today! Today, things are very beautiful for Andrew cause I'm drug-free and alcohol-free and clear-headed, focused on getting back to enjoying life in a beautiful way! I'm very happy and blessed today because I found my better half, who has a very beautiful spirit, personality, and heart. She's beautiful on the inside, and she's deliciously beautiful on the outside!

IT'S NOT FAIR: EXPUNGEMENTS

by Cheryl

This is about expungements. If people have money and are able to get legal help, they can erase their pasts. So how can it be that those people look down on other people who have had past issues?

There are people I know in some school districts, and four of them are certified teachers because they expunged an aggravated assault charge—a girl was stabbed. Others didn't have parents to expunge them, and they, in the forties, have that on every record, every application.

They expunged everything. Now there's one band teacher, one principal, two teachers.

What's the difference between them and the person who didn't get expunged? They got a professional job, and another person's portrayed as a violent criminal for the rest of their lives.

It's what they call "money talks."

If you were involved in an incident, and my mother got me expunged and yours didn't, how would that feel? I would be able to go to college, pass certifications, and you would have this ball and chain dragging behind you.

The woman who got stabbed lost her kidney. They were all college students fighting over a guy.

I understand how they feel because I have a misdemeanor for having broken up a fight. It was on my front lawn, and I was charged with battery, which was changed to disturbing the peace.

But the people who got expunged are still the same people that did that crime, and so am I. I don't understand. It's not fair.

I think that every crime, except the worst like rape and murder, should be wiped out after the years or so. On Sunday in church, the pastor mentioned embezzlement. That'll go with them forever if it's in the papers, but someone can expunge an aggravated battery charge.

Maybe it's because the woman who got stabbed, her parents were lawyers. It's about who knows somebody and who can pay, and that's not fair. If they hadn't gotten expungements, no way a university would accept them for the next year. Three went to Louisiana Tech and one to Grambling State.

I used to tell a lot of people about Legal Aid. If they'd done it ten, twenty years ago, it would have been very different for them.

Expungement hides someone's background so nobody knows. That shouldn't be allowed, It's easier to get an expungement than it is to get a divorce.

It is what it is.

HOUSING

by Anthony



I have a story with my housing. It's been three years now, and I'm still waiting. I moved to overflow on April 3rd. I have ninety days left; I'm not trying to go to a hotel and spend money like crazy. I'm trying to find the right place. I have a new counselor, so I'm working with her too.

I'm good with people; that's a good thing. I'm taking it day by day, letting God take His course.

It's my first time being homeless. I've been pushing through all the hospitals, all the red tape. My counselor said working on my mental health will make it quicker. I have to keep my focus and faith and push through.

You've got to have a positive attitude, which I have. I keep my appointments steady. Meanwhile, I hope I get my housing, I'm praying for it. I'm saving and still getting no housing—I don't understand it. I'm a good guy. I stay humble, but things happen in life. You have to learn from it—learn from your mistakes. It could be worse, and anything could happen at any time.

But I'm happy to be here now.

TIRED

by Bernadette

I have now been at the shelter for six months. Nothing has changed for me, except I am going to a benefit specialist today about disability. I hope I get it.

I am getting tired of this place. There is a lot of drama—people stealing a lot, breaking my stuff. But that, it's only material stuff. I am staying strong. You've got to in these places. People come and go all the time.

I wish I had listened a long time ago when my mom said, "Don't drink and drive." If I had listened, I would have been twenty-five years clean. I am fifty-three now.

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MENTAL ILLNESS

by Cheryl

As a child, I thought I was different—I didn't like crowds, parks, or having lots of friends.

I couldn't stand crowds, so I knew I was different. As I grew older, I wanted to know why. In high school, I took sociology as an elective, and in college I took as much psychology as I could.

I realized that my behavior in childhood wasn't abnormal, but it was different. I always wondered why. Having been molested as a child, I knew that was something wrong and was affecting me somehow. I learned that people who molested others had an illness, and the victim was never at fault, but the victim can carry the pain and shame forever. Being molested affected me and my relationships with everyone.

I realized that I suffered from PTSD and manic depression because of the molestation.

When I was in my early thirties, I admitted myself for observation for three days; that's when I got my diagnosis. At that time, I was going through a divorce, and my grandma was very sick—it was all weighing heavily on me. After seventy-two hours, I decided to stay for further observation.

Mental illness is like any other illness. People with mental illness who commit crimes are also victims of someone's illness. Sometimes I try to put myself in their shoes—the shoes of the people who commit crimes—and try to see why things happen to victims. The only thing I can come up with is illness. Sometimes people say inner demons, but that's still illness, just a spiritual

versus a scientific point of view. I wish more people would do what I did, admit that they need help and get treatment. People can be incarcerated, estranged because of mental illness; they often want help but can't get it because they are afraid of a label.

People who have been out of jail, it must be hard for them; they have to carry this weight around, because of how society is looking at them and trying to put blame on them. I've never been to jail, but it feels like you've been labeled for life. It affects your entire life. We have to try to understand and not alienate.

That's what it's like to be homeless—alienating.

I've never been in this situation before, and it hurts a lot. And a lot of people are one paycheck away from being homeless.

I wish everyone would try to put themselves in other people's shoes, just for one minute—that's all it takes. You can feel it if you just think about it. I used to do that, look at people who were homeless, but I never thought I would be in a shelter. It's not like it is on TV—not a big, quarantined room with beds. I'm not saying that it's okay, but it's a whole lot better than I thought it would be. And everyone is coming from different situations—everybody's just different.

That's why empathy, trying to see with another person's perspective, is so important.

“THAT'S WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE HOMELESS—ALIENATING.”

WHERE I AM NOW

by Don

I'm going on sixty-two. I've been going to a lot of doctors because I have neuropathy in both my legs and ankles. I'm homeless, living in a shelter. I'm trying to look for work now that I can work.

I worked for a Walmart for fifteen years. I lost my job because I went to Florida to stay with a friend who was dying and passed away. I was working on the warehouse and as a sales associate for them. Before that, I worked for a corporation for 11 years, where I was a forklift operator and worked in manufacturing. I had to leave that job due to the neuropathy—couldn't use my legs.

I've had a pretty boring life. I was married, got divorced. I have four grandchildren. I don't always get to see them, maybe once or twice a year, because they're grown. They call me once in a while. I went to school, but I didn't get through all of high school. I went to school in New York to get my GED, but the state ran out of funding. I'm trying to get it now, for myself.

Right now, I'm just trying to get my life back together.

THE KEY TO CHANGE

by Gregory

I'm going to be talking about my situation, how it is, and what homelessness is like.

If I didn't get in it, I would never know how much humanity homelessness takes out of a person. Granted, it's a good thing they have these sorts of places for these sorts of people, but I know a lot of people there who just gave up on their futures.

I believe that this is just a stepping-stone to get your life back in order. That's what I'm trying to do. Been here about a year, and it's nothing like a pretty sight. They have resources to get you back on your feet, back into society. If it were up to me, I wouldn't wish homelessness on anyone, but sometimes things happen.

I believe, though, that as long as you lay down and say I'm going to stay down, you can still get out of that. I realize now, at my age, that I do have the key in order to change anything I want to. But I have to want to. And it goes the same for anyone else. Just because you're down, it doesn't mean that your life is over. I do feel for all of the people in that situation, because I've been through it and I can see what it does to people. I can tell their humanity's down, and their spirit is taken away from them, and they give up. There is hope, but you've got to want it, like anything else in life. I do have a future. I'm a prominent musician, and I came here out of New York. I do have a couple of degrees and the whole nine yards, but that doesn't mean my life, my whole self—that doesn't get you out of that type of situation.

As I said, this is only temporary, but I know that I have to make the first move. That's what I'm doing. I hope that, eventually, there will be no such thing as homelessness.



Photo by Javier Allegue Barros on Unsplash

SHELTERS IN NEW HAVEN

by David

I believe the shelters in New Haven are meant for misfortunate people in their lives at a time of need. As a homeless person for the last six months, I have lived at the Columbus House emergency overflow shelter. This overflow shelter is basically run by people who are looking at these homeless people not as human beings, but as lazy, objects of pity, drug addicts, or alcoholics, and therefore they get treated like they're nothing—the dog, the bottom of society.

Every day, whether the weather is hot or freezing cold, they make these people wait in a line, sometimes for more than two hours. At that point, at 4pm every night, we are assigned beds, whereby it is mandatory for these people to take a maximum five-minute shower before getting in bed. This particular shelter has 70-75 residents a given night with three showers. The rule is that

three people go inside and take a shower, but people will walk into the bathroom area and wait by the sink while everyone is showering. Therefore, they have no privacy. The condition of this shower is disgusting. People, even though there are bathroom stalls, pee and poop anywhere they want. The floor is wet and dirty, and there's toilet paper everywhere. And they make you take a shower? I was a public health major in college, and it is my understanding that the condition of these showers must be in violation of health codes.

The problem I see is that either Columbus House doesn't care or doesn't want to do anything about it. Complaining to them is one ear in, one ear out. My story is about how someone has to take responsibility for how this company is running its shelters, so far as it's being compensated by the state for helping misfortunate people when

they need help. My purpose is to bring it to the point that somebody is willing to say that they must do something about this. Most people at this shelter are subject to rules and regulations that in certain situations are a violation of their rights.

My intention is to bring Columbus House down if they're not willing to change their way of thinking, change their policies and the conditions of shelters. They must be dealt with harshly. The way they deal with the people in the shelter—"You're a homeless person; you can only go out twice because we say so." Once they assign you to a bed, that's your bed.

They have lots of issues, but Columbus House monopolizes Connecticut. They treat us as if we don't have a choice, but I do. I can go back to the streets.

WHAT IF

by Hayley

What if... you found out,
That your whole life you have been nothing but lied to,
Or that everything you ever thought of as true,
Turned out to be just a story made up by you

What if... every word you have ever spoke,
Has locked up something deep inside you,
An ever-changing complex code you would never be able to
crack,
No matter how hard you tried to

What if... every single person you have encountered,
Has shifted some sort of core combination,
One that is also altered daily due to judgment fear and
hesitation

What if... these were not just some words that rhyme,
But instead a very real internal situation,
And with each and every lie you have chosen to believe,
You have been able to carefully craft the perfect manipula-
tion

What if... there is power in the thoughts you choose to think,
Only again you chose just another form of the very same
human technique,
Leaving you stuck playing the world's oldest Never Ending
game of,
Living heart beating hide-and-go-seek

What if... it's all really been subconsciously done,
Specifically just to help you find you,
A pragmatic set of circumstances that you have,
Strategically set in place just to help remind you

What if... with all the wrongs that you have written,
You somehow conveniently forgot to "right" you,
Etched everything you have ever loved in glass,
And repeatedly threw rocks just to spite you

What if... from the start,
You made an unknowing choice to enslave you,
Becoming a sorrowful willing victim,
To the very same things that could have saved you

What if... every single scar you have is beautiful,
And speaks of a past full of unspeakable pains,
A tiny glimpse of the countless metaphorical wounds,
Where slowly your life's blood steadily drains

What if... this was your last day on Earth,
Meaning you were quickly running out of time,
Would you even know what to take with you,
Be able to separate yours from mine

What if... you never again let even one person in,
Because of fabricated scenarios of what they "might do",
Only by pushing everyone away you were left to learn,
That the only threat to you... actually is you

What if... you "got up" and just walked out,
Not really sure of what exactly you were walking into,
Accepting that you may never fully "get it",
But you were so grateful for just starting to begin to

What if... you were simply "released",
After years of struggling that have only caused you to sink
down deeper,
Realizing these walls have never been what's held you,
You in fact have been your very own keeper

What if... there was "this feeling" in finding your purpose,
A feeling you could never even begin to put a single word to,
An inexplicable paradox of passion,
That completely envelopes and consumes you

What if... you refused to ever give up,
Focusing all of your energy on your goals with tireless per-
sistence,
Truly believing that ANYTHING is possible,
By simply manifesting your new existence

What if... these words are actually a "doorway,"
Much more than just some written deep points of view,
So I ask you to ask yourself these important questions,
Because who knows the important answers better than YOU!?

LIFE AND TIMES OF A 61-YEAR-OLD-MAN

by John

I had three brothers and two sisters. All of them passed away except for two. My father worked as a security guard and was in the Air Force for eight years. My mom worked at the supermarket where she was a butcher. I originally come from New Jersey. But, at age 14, my family moved to Florida. I lived in Florida for 25 years. My mom and dad separated after 23 years of marriage. 27 years ago, I got married. I ended up with five boys and one girl. My marriage ended two years ago, after a total of 25 years of marriage.

I used to be considered a millionaire. But I made some bad choices. I lost almost everything I had. Now, I go from shelter to shelter. With the Good Lord behind me, I will dust off my knees, pick myself back up, and stumble all over again.

Five months ago, I met a new girl. She's a wonderful girl and very beautiful. We met in church. The plan is to get married. We got engaged but haven't set a date yet. But I know that she's all I've been looking for all of my life.

MY STORY

by Lucia

Since 17 years old, I have been going downhill. At 36 now, I'm really trying to "live." I used to want to die. But no. Now it's that I want to really live.

I've been at the Columbus House a few times. After serious surgery, I was put upstairs in the medical respite unit. I had a portable wound vac machine, crutches, and needed wound care every other day. Because I was so scared and in pain, I had to go to the emergency room by ambu-

lance twice. The second time I came back in a medical cab. I went to the check-in window and was told I was being discharged and was given no reason as to why.

Not only was I recovering, but they also put a bottle of oxy in my hand and told me to pick up the rest of my stuff the next day. That night, I slept on my sweatshirt on the gravel behind a building.

HOW I BECAME HOMELESS

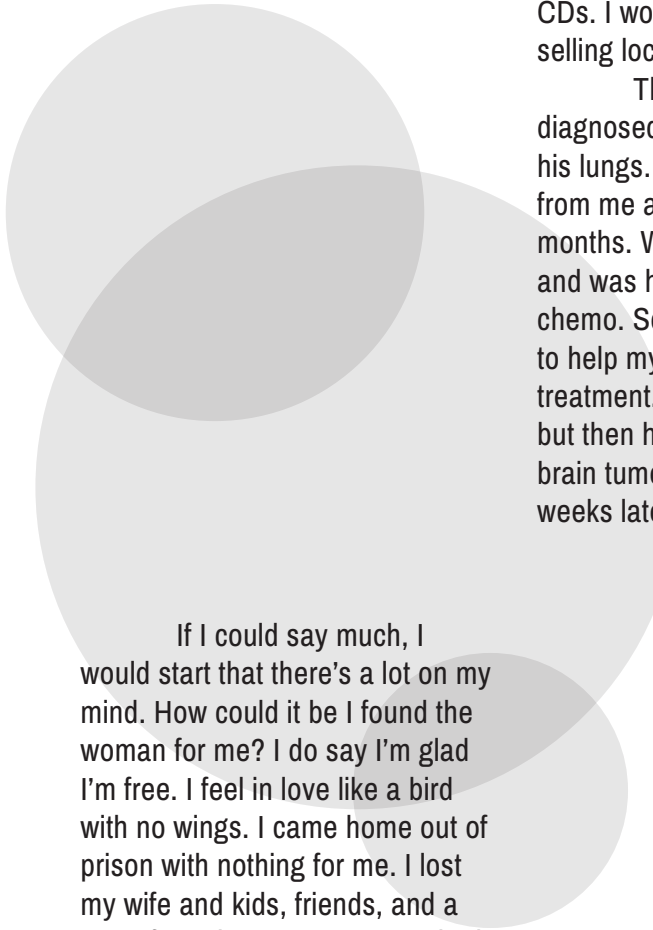
by John

Back in 2008, I was running my own clothing store in northern Delaware. I did that for about a year and met a lot of local musicians. I helped them sell their shirts, hats, CDs. I worked with local vendors, selling local company clothes.

Then, in 2009, my father was diagnosed with stage III cancer in his lungs. This was something he hid from me and my sister for about eight months. We found out he had cancer and was having trouble paying for chemo. So in 2010 I sold the store to help my father pay for his cancer treatment. He had been in remission, but then he found out that he had a brain tumor. He passed away three weeks later.

I went back to Connecticut, where I'm originally from, and I got in touch with a lot of the old friends I used to know in the music business. I started throwing parties with local artists at vendors in New Haven; I was trying to make some money on the side until I found work. When I started working, though, I found out difficult things regarding my health. It was hard to keep up with my diabetes, nerve death, and other issues. So eventually I couldn't work any more, and I ended up in a shelter.

I'm working hard, trying hard, hoping to throw parties again. I want to make both of my parents proud, God rest their souls.



If I could say much, I would start that there's a lot on my mind. How could it be I found the woman for me? I do say I'm glad I'm free. I feel in love like a bird with no wings. I came home out of prison with nothing for me. I lost my wife and kids, friends, and a part of me that you can see. I had my fear, so much that it never goes away. But thanks to Fellowship, I'm starting to see what, indeed, it feels like to be free. I have no family but me.

I met this woman of my dreams. I fell in love so quick, I can feel what it's like now that I got my wings. I'm forty-four years old with only dreams, not a dime in my pocket for me. I met her—

wow, she likes the things in me. I married her after three months out of prison. I ask her everyday why she says she loves me. I can't see—I always wonder what people see in me. No money for her or me, but I still care only for me. I ask for help to make me feel free, but sometimes I only think why me. I see she's the only one, but I don't believe not only in her but

me. I'm trapped in my only cage, just asking to be free. But come to know she already doesn't know.

She has the keys—please, I ask to open up for me. But all I get is a smile and she says you're free, out of harm—prison. Now, you have me.

PRISON FREE, MARRIED NOW

by Juan

BACK TO CONNECTICUT

by Jaxx

I grew up in Wallingford, CT. I had a good family—mom, dad, two sisters. It was a loving family, and my dad coached my baseball and basketball teams. But my mother was diagnosed with kidney cancer early, at about thirty years old, and at the same time, my dad broke his back at work. He was disabled for the rest of his life. He wasn't able to work, so we were living very poor with hardly any assistance. After that, my father kind of lost his mind.

We used to get beaten a lot. Any little thing we did, we got beaten with a belt, a wooden paddle. We got smacked around, held up to the wall by the neck.

I had to go to work at a very early age, thirteen years old, to support my family. I would go to school, and then to work afterwards. Time went on, and I lived with my parents to take care of the house. I finished high school and graduated with two diplomas, one in academics and one in machine and tool. I went to college for one year, and I went to work. I was working on steel factories, landscaping, and then I did electrical work for years.

My mother died in 1998. After she died, I lost my mind for a little bit—I was depressed, lost my job, and couldn't stay in any work for long because I didn't have the will to do anything and I became rebellious. A year later, my dad died, but I really didn't care because I didn't like my father that much. I started doing a lot of drugs—cocaine, crack, drinking. I couldn't keep jobs, so I lived on the streets; I had lost my apartment, and my inheritance had run out. A few years later, I hooked up with this girl; it was a volatile situation, and I was charged with assault and violation of a protective order.

They sent me to prison for about four years. When I got out, they wanted to give me seven years probation. They wanted to control my life, with all these programs and such. I made money by making cigs, selling them for a quarter each.

I couldn't stand it any more, so I took a Grey-

hound to San Diego. I was flying signs, begging for money there, living on the streets. I met a friend and we moved to Colorado. I had no source of income, no food stamps—my ID was stolen and I was a convicted felon, so I couldn't work. I got about \$20-25 a day from begging, enough to buy a liter of vodka, cigarettes, and some food. If I got more, I'd buy meth.

I hooked up with this Navajo woman, and we were living in a tent in the woods at the base of a mountain. We never went to shelters or anything. All this time, we were getting smoking tickets, trespassing tickets, but everything was going well. The police in Connecticut didn't want to extradite me—they knew where I was, so I thought I was home free. Until one day, December 2018, I came into town from fixing up my camp. I had five knives, one butcher blade, and a machete. It was winter, so my coat was covering all that; but as a felon, I can't carry concealed weapons. People in that area were touchy because some people had been stabbed recently. I went into town to get vodka and cigs, and someone called the cops on me. I got a concealed weapons charge, and I knew I was going to be extradited for this. They wanted to give me 90 days, but I got 45. They had thirty days to come get me, and they came three days before the end. They brought me back to Connecticut, to this godforsaken town.

They gave me two and a half months and reinstated my probation. I just got out of jail a week ago, and now I have to start all over again. I'm at a homeless shelter now, and I'm trying to figure everything out—food stamps, Social Security, etc. I'm trying to go with the flow and do the right thing. I'm not doing drugs or alcohol because I don't want to go back to jail—the judge said he'd give me six years.

This is a quick and short version of my story. I also deal with mental illness, PTSD, bipolar, and I hear voices, sometimes see things. I'm trying to see doctors, get my meds going again. I am trying to get on the right path to be a viable citizen.

QUEER AND HOMELESS

by Kira

I'm a transgender woman. I am homeless in New Haven. In New Haven, there's no place for trans people to go for shelters. Sometimes I have to sleep on the street, and sometimes I have to do things that are illegal to make money, like prostitution.

It's hard on the street. I am trying to keep hope that I could get my own place. I've tried to get benefits; they always deny me for some reason, they find a reason to deny me.

I have been homeless for three years.

I became transgender three months ago, but I always knew that I was physically and mentally different.

I was raped while in jail and molested by a neighbor when I was a child. These events are only one part of my identifying as transgender. They happened to me, and they were awful. It never goes away and will always be with me, but I cannot and will not let it consume my life. Some members of my family disapprove of my change, and other parts are accepting. They understand what I went through and are supportive and happy with my decision. Having no support system in New Haven has been very difficult.

I have been back and forth in different hospitals, in and out of prison. Through all that, I have kept moving forward and do not let them control my life. I feel hopeful for this article, that maybe there will be change to help trans people more than there has been before. And if you're going to donate, donate to the New Haven Pride Center, because they have helped me a lot.

QUÉ LINDOS DÍAS

by Milka

Qué lindos días para compartir con mis hermosos hijos contando cuentos que nos hagan reír y recordar los momentos hermosos. Nunca quisiera que el tiempo pasara o acabara. Es el mejor tiempo cuando estoy con mis regalos más valiosos que recibí cuando el doctor me dijo: eres madre. Fue la mejor noticia. ¡Qué feliz estaba mi corazón! Dios me dio el privilegio de ser madre.

Qué lindos días para compartir con mis hijos que tu nueve meses en mi vientre. Ahora veo lo grande que están mis hijos y es más hermoso compartir porque están más grandes y me entienden más. Es tan bonito lo que se puede sentir. Es una linda sensación oír a tus hijos decir mamá. Gracias porque ahora que eres grande no dejas de ser mi amor. Qué lindos días para compartir con la persona que más amo; qué lindos días para compartir y ser feliz.

Qué lindos días para compartir. No tiene precio los momentos con las dos personas más hermosas que he conocido y he compartido y a Dios gracias por ellos.

Qué lindos días para compartir con Kamil e Ivan.

FRIENDSHIP

by Ricky

One time, my friend relapsed and did some heroin. He passed out, and I wasn't going to leave him there. So I stayed, did CPR, hit him with some Narcan. Then he woke up and didn't know where he was or what had happened.

He had ODeD, and if I hadn't been there, he would've died. I think the Holy Ghost, God, was responsible. He works through people, their niceness, where they are.

When the police came, they were very glad that I had stayed and helped him. Because some people, if they get scared, they'll run away. But then he would have died.

I REMEMBER

by Pamela

I was at the park in New York City.

I was discouraged and starting to feel very sad. Suddenly, a stranger came to me and looked me straight in my four year old eyes and told me, "I will move. I can see your tears, but God told me that I would see you here and to tell you that he is with you. Don't cry—no weapon will overtake you."

Then he smiled and prayed for me, and I watched him walk away.

WHY I'M HERE

by Russell

I'll start off with my mother, because she had cancer.

When she passed away, I had to sell her house. That was five years ago. I then got an apartment with her money, but then my job went down—my boss died. From there, we were renting a room for \$150 a week. I got laid off again from my job, and the rent wasn't being paid. I ended up staying in a hotel, then ran out of money and had to leave there.

I lost everything when the apartment was uninhabitable. Bed, clothes, everything, gone. I'm trying to have a lawsuit against my landlord, because he took the money and ran. That's about it. That's why I'm at the shelter now, trying to find a regular job.

THE VICTIM OF THE CORRUPTION

by Elizabeth

I came to Connecticut to be with my children. I came to be with my children. They didn't want to go back to Thailand because they liked it here. So when I came, they came to meet me at the airport—they had come before and stayed here illegally.

There was a Thai man who asked my daughter to marry him, so he could become a US citizen. I told them that we could not do that because we do a lot of business and real estate, and that marriage would concern customers and affect the business. Thanet is the man who wanted to marry my daughter. He's thirty-five himself, but he wanted to marry to get citizenship only. He would get out as soon as possible; he certified himself like that.

So after their marrying, we bought a house. They tried to persuade me to invest money over here, to open a restaurant. I said no, I don't want to. But we need a house to stay, they said, so we bought the house. My daughter and I got three quarters of the house, and Thanet and his mother bought one quarter. After marrying, I found that his mother came to ask me every day to sign the house to them. But I didn't sign. My daughter took me to the finance company in West Haven and asked me to sign the house to them. I asked the finance company what would happen if I did sign it off; they said I couldn't get the house back, so I didn't sign. My daughter got so angry, screaming and jeering while we were driving back. We drove onto a highway, and I didn't want to get in an accident, so I told her to calm down and just go back.

After that, they kept threatening me, and I couldn't stand the way they treated me anymore. I planned to run away. I called the police (they took a long time), and I told them to take me away from there. I had already called Domestic Violence, who told me that I had to go to them. The police wouldn't take me there. I tried to get on the bus, go somewhere, but the police wouldn't let me go; they locked me in the car. Finally, Thanet and his mother came back, and he went to talk to the police. I didn't know what they were talking about. The police called the ambulance to take me to the CMSC Hospital. I stayed there a few days; they treated me, and I said I had already called Domestic Violence. The doctor of the CMSC accused me of delusion. They discharged me to go to Domestic Violence.

And this made me go in and out of hospitals. This made me homeless for ten years and still going. My family, my life, my love, my everything fell apart. For ten years and still going on. They accused me of delusion, then they started getting insurance money out of it for supposedly taking care of me. Later on, I got the diagnosis to prove that I don't have delusions; I spoke to other psychiatrists, including four hospitals in Thailand. The diagnosis here, from Yale-New Haven itself, is that I don't have delusions. And they ruined my business. I have the diagnosis, everything, in my apartment.

But my daughter and Thanet got the insurance and just suck the money out of my name. May I ask the authority of everyone concerning my past to help me stop this corruption.

MI MARIDO

TIME

by Zuleyka

Yo conocí a mi marido en el parque. Yo pasaba por su lado con mi música, y yo estaba con mis amigas del Chester. Yo iba a la tienda a comprar una cosa y en una de esas empecé a hablarle pero mi amiga estaba celosa de mí, porque ella estaba enamorada de él. Pero él estaba enamorado de mí, y yo me enamoré de él. Como es cariñoso lo amo mucho de verdad. Ya me casé con él. Siempre quiero estar con él. Lo amo mucho. Él es mi vida y mi tesoro. Lo amo. Soy un poco celosa pero él es mío siempre. Quiero estar con él adonde vaya. Lo amo mucho y sé que soy un poco loca pero lo amo mucho y siempre estaré con él, hasta la muerte.

Papi, te amo mucho y esta es mi historia. Gracias por todo.

by Lucius

The great robber
It takes everything
With calm and grace
No one is spared
Ask Samson, ask Solomon
Like fools we drink of the life
Not knowing where we are at
No matter...
The spirit is strong!
To the earth with our woes



CHALLENGES AND IMPEDIMENTS

by Thomas

I'm going to tell you my life story.

When I was twenty years old, I was arrested and sentenced to twenty years, suspended after fifteen. It was something I didn't do, but I lost the trial, so I must have done it. It's shadowed my whole life, and now I have to say that I'm a sex offender.

I went into prison when I was twenty, and left at thirty. I thought I'd paid enough of my life for that, but, apparently, I haven't. I have to put it down with where I've worked, lived, etc.

It's overwhelming, and people don't understand.

How much do I have to pay for something? Ten years in prison; I was found guilty but didn't admit to it. The payment goes on and on and on.

My mother used to say that I would go to jail because I talk too much, but who do you talk to about this? It's very taboo. And it has an impact all the time. I couldn't go to a job training because of it. I went to Labor Ready, filled out the paperwork and everything—I got there at 5am. But they told me they couldn't send me out. My ex-girlfriend was understanding, willing to give me a chance, but she found out because of papers left in a duffel.

I'm on a lifetime registry, and now I'm trying to fight this law that came out eight years after I was sentenced. How can they apply it to a sentence given in 1990?

I deal with it, but it's very hard. I'm in a shelter on Grant Avenue right now, and I'm trying to find steady work—it's hard. I applied for a job at McDonalds, and I've been to numerous other places. I had one job, dishwashing, from 5pm to 3am, but at the shelter they wake you up at 6am. I lasted less than a week; I couldn't do it. It's hard now, when you fill out a survey online to get a job; when you did it in person, you were more likely to get a job. I've been trying, but there have been barriers slowing my progress. Eventually you just get tired.

How long do you hold a record? You say you want people to work, but why won't you let me work?

I'm still trying, but it's hard. Doing nothing like this drives me crazy. How long do I have to pay? It might be the rest of my life. It doesn't bar you from everything, but it limits the things you can do. That's the reality of it. I've been dealing with it, and it's very difficult. A lot more comes behind just saying where you live—what else comes behind that for me?

“YOU SAY YOU WANT PEOPLE
TO WORK, BUT WHY WON'T
YOU LET ME WORK?”

HOMELESS

by Anonymous

I OFTEN SIT AND WONDER

by Heidi

what life would be like
if I still had my mother.
She showed me love that
came from the heart
and created a bond that
can't be torn apart.
I lost her at a tender age,
and the anger of her death
filled me with rage.
Holding in feelings I needed
to unload, I was like a
bomb waiting to explode.
Feeling lost with no sense of direction,
I was easily introduced to a drug addiction.
From that point on, my life went to hell
and the pit of misery is where I'd dwell.
I hit rock bottom and hit it hard,
for I had to play the devil's dealt card.
Then, one day, I decided to change.
I cried and I prayed, which for me
was strange.
I tried and tried, but always lost.
I had to have the drug no matter the cost.
All of a sudden, I saw the light and
decided to give it one more fight.
I cried and cried and dropped to my knees
and kindly asked God to hear my pleas.
I asked him to grant these three
wishes for me:
Only that I be

Joyous, happy, and free



Photo by Tom Barrett on Unsplash

The experience of being homeless is not easy. Maybe you think in your life that you are not ever going to be in a shelter. Maybe you never thought about it. Life is full of surprises, happiness, and sadness.

Friends and families are composed of unity and help with a lot of things.

But, when you need help, nobody is there to help you. No one is there to open the doors for you in order for you to keep going. Honesty, help, and integrity is disappearing from human beings.

Being in a shelter is not easy. It's a process that some people go through because circumstances and situations in someone's life changes and because nobody extends a hand to help somebody—even for a short time.

But everything has a purpose, and you have to go through that process and get the purposes in order to show up in life. You have to be grateful for everything and give thanks to God.

Being in a shelter, you get to know new people. You know where they really come from. Some people have a bad past. They've had bad experiences. But nobody has to judge them for their past. God is the only one that could judge them. No one else is supposed to do that.

Thank God for the shelters. Many shelters open the door in order to help people. Bless them.

BEING A SINGLE MOM

by Tamisha

Surprisingly, being a mother transforms you in various ways. Stepping back and reflecting on motherhood at a young age is extremely rewarding in more ways than one. Tracking your maturity before you had your first child. Analyzing your career goals. Tracking your child's milestones. Comparing your partner's growth before and after the child was born. Marriage goals with your partner. And, most of all, doing what is best for you and the child.

Having my first child at twenty-one years old, I was very afraid of the challenges that came with a beautiful, vibrant baby girl who was born December 27, 2008. I was in a relationship with her dad for over three years before she was born.

You sometimes begin to see changes in your partner after the baby is born. He became abusive, physically and verbally, shortly after. As a mother, you wonder if these actions are from the stress of a new baby? Or were these underlying issues that were suppressed by your mate?

I was a hard worker, working as a certified nurse assistant to provide for my baby and family. Your perspective begins to change as to whether what I am doing is best for the baby—should I stay in an abusive relationship just to have some support with the dad, but is it safe to have the baby in the same house with him? My family took a toll on me with their criticism of my being a young, unmarried mom. And my own overwhelming thoughts of whether what I was doing was right, when my child and I were in an abusive home with the dad.

Ultimately, I had to do what was in the best interest of the baby, which was to pick up and leave the home and dad to fulfill the true purpose of being physically and mentally happy. Sometimes the hardest thing to do being in an abusive relationship when you have a child is to pack up and leave. And sometimes as a mother you put your dreams on hold to give your child a winning chance.

LO MIO VINO

by Zuleyka

Bueno, mi historia empieza cómo conocí a mi marido. Yo lo conocí en el parque. Yo pasaba mucho tiempo en el parque con mis amistades y no le hacía caso porque siempre estaba con mi música y con mi gente, pero a través del tiempo empecé a hablar con él por teléfono y nos reíamos mucho. Nos hicimos novios y siempre estábamos juntos. No nos separábamos nunca. Nos casamos en la iglesia el 21 de enero y fue como una magia. Nunca pensé que iba a casarme con mi alma gemela y que lo amaría mucho. Él siempre está allí para mí en todo. Él es mi otra mitad. Él se llama Juan y lo amo mucho. Tú crees que no tienes a nadie pero Dios me enseñó a tener paciencia, que lo mio viene, lo mio vino y es mi marido Juan. Lo amo. Esta es nuestra historia.

EIGHT MONTHS

by Wilson

I was born in Massachusetts. When I was three years old, though, I moved to Puerto Rico with my mother. I grew up in the projects there. I had a good father, good mother, and a good school. I went to church every Sunday. Time passed, and we all grew up.

I started hanging out in the streets with my friends and all different people. On the street, people called me “Chino.” There, I smoked cigarettes. Eventually, I started smoking weed. Then, I tried coke. I was fifteen years old when I first tried coke. I had a girlfriend then. Her mother told me that I had to get a job if I wanted to be with her daughter. She said her daughter needed a “good man.”

Even though I became a mechanic and was trying to be a “good man” for her daughter, I continued using. Every day, I was doing drugs and drinking. One day, her mother saw me drinking. She said, “Chino, look at you. I don’t want you with my daughter.” I kept walking.

Her daughter called me and asked me what was going on. She told me that she didn’t want our relationship to end. I told her I couldn’t be in a relationship with her though.

After that, I started buying cars, fixing them, and selling them again. In 1989, I sold two cars, and then I came to Bridgeport because that is where my family was from.

I met a lot of new people. I came back to Bridgeport a different person. There, I was selling drugs. Because of that, I spent 18 months in jail.

In 1992, I was released from jail. Truthfully—the thing is—I was bad. All of my life, I couldn’t do anything good.

Now, though, I’m grateful to be doing good. I’m almost 8 months clean. I’m trying to do better. For these past 8 months, I’ve lived here in New Haven. I had to get out of Bridgeport.

In my life, I’ve met many people, seen many places, and I’ve done many things. I’m just praying that everything’s going to be good. I really do see everything as beautiful.

Now, I just want to see the results of all of my hard work. I want my family and other people to be proud of me.

ALL FALL DOWN

by Gabrielle

Lost in the silence
spiraling towards the darkness.
Voices echo on purpose
aware of my choices.

Finding happiness somewhere
coming from nowhere.
Travel through the light,
wish I could take flight.

Not sure what life means,
add up all of these things.
All that I have forsaken
need more time to awaken.

All these moments lost
and some at a cost.
Mistakes of the heart
everything falls apart.

SIEMPRE SERÁS MI NIÑA HERMOSA

by Milka

Aunque tenga 18 años eres mi niña hermosa. Siempre recordaré cuando tú naciste, cuando te cogí en mi brazo y te miré a los ojos dije gracias Dios por el regalo más hermoso de poder ser madre. Recuerdo todo cuando eras niña. Tu sonrisa y primer paso, cuando dijiste mamá, esa palabra tan hermosa y mi corazón sintió una alegría porque Dios me dio lo que yo quise. Te amo tanto, eres tan hermosa y no por lo que yo como madre te conozco , sino porque tu mejor hermosura está por dentro, siempre serás mi niña hermosa.

Kamil Merolys Bouza
Ivan Joel Bouza

Son mi vida , los amo. y los extraño.

Y te extraño mamá

Tu sonrisa, tu abrazo cuando eras niña, tu beso. Te extraño cuando me decías: "mi niña, eres mi corazón". Estoy aquí, no lloré y me dormí en tu brazo tan dulce y tierno. No hay nadie como mamá, tan especial y buena amiga. Te extraño todos los días para decirte que te amo y que tienes un espacio en mi corazón que jamás nadie puede ocupar. El mejor cuidado es el de mamá, no tiene precio y no tengo que pagarte todo lo que has hecho por mí y mi hermano. Estoy orgullosa de ti y te extraño.

Muy orgullosa de mamá como tú no hay nadie que me ame. Me diste tu tiempo. Gracias Dios por darme una madre como tú, tan valiosa. Le pido a Dios que te dé muchos días de vida para que estés a mi lado en esos momentos tan hermosos.

STUMBLING INTO PERSPECTIVE

by Anonymous

A few years ago, I had a heart attack. I overdosed on cocaine. I slipped into a coma, and I woke up one month later in the ICU. There, I had suffered from pneumonia and multiple blood clots. While unconscious, the doctors found out that I had Hepatitis C. They recommended I start interferon, which is a mild form of chemotherapy. I had no idea what the side effects would be like.

My doctors also advised me not to work, but I worked under the table anyway. I decided to go to college too. For me, college was like a hobby. I didn't have any goals, but I wanted to kill time. Gradually, though, I started to excel. I made the Dean's list every semester. The National Honors Society asked me to join their group. University of New Haven gave me a full scholarship. There, I studied criminal psychology. Suddenly, something devastating happened to me. During a procedure, a surgeon punctured my liver for insurance money. I had to drop out of school and write my will. Instead of going into the details of this experience, I'm determined to focus on what I learned from it.

Ultimately, this experience has altered my level of consciousness in a really profound way. I've learned to empathize with this surgeon. While his actions were unethical, I realize he felt like he did not have another way to provide for his family. Despite how horrible this experience was, I've learned the invaluable nature of being kind and empathetic towards others. More than anything, I'm motivated to focus on people's lives than my own privilege.

Right now, where I am at is not necessarily a choice. I did not choose to be here. But, I must say, having this perspective allows me to be more comfortable with myself in a place where most people wouldn't be comfortable. I know that success is not necessarily measured by profit. Rather, it is measured by how you treat others. While I go to sleep without any money, I go to sleep with a clear conscious. That is invaluable. And each difficult experience of my life has helped me form this perspective.

TRUE LOVE

by Danita

I remember when I first moved into the Columbus House. I was somewhat quiet, and I stayed to myself. I've always been a people person, and one day, this handsome, clean-cut, chocolate, tall, built man was sitting by himself. So, I started staring at him. I tried not to let him see me staring, but he always caught me. I never said anything because I thought he maybe had a girlfriend or wife, but he didn't. When I laid my eyes on him for the first time, I said to myself, "He's the one for me." As time passed by, we started talking every day. Of course, we had to get to know each other before we got too close. He's definitely the kind of guy you would want to meet your family. It finally became a dream come true. Yes, at first, I thought I was dreaming, but I definitely wasn't. I've never met a man like him, and I mean, never. He treats me like a queen. It's nothing but respect always. He's always there for me. I met his family, and that made me feel really loved and cared by him. We both love each other very much. I thank god for putting us in each other's life. It would be great if women could find that perfect Mr. Right. Well, that's all for now. To be continued. Peace and Happiness.

THE TRUE STORY

by Steve

Last August, I was diagnosed with hip arthritis. Because I'm the kind of person who worries about everyone else before myself, I didn't tell anyone. At this time, I worked in a restaurant. Despite my hip problems, I kept working there because I didn't want the business to struggle without me during the busy holiday season.

Eventually, I told my boss I would get him through the holidays, but after that, he had to take it easy on me. He didn't. During the third week of January, I decided to turn off my cell phone completely. I went to my ex-wife's house, and I didn't call anyone for a week. One week later, I lost my job. I understand why. I continued to stay with my ex-wife for a while. When she got in trouble for hosting me with her at the Bella Vista, she threw me

out. I had nowhere to go.

Looking back, I wish I would have asked for help earlier. I really do believe that it is okay to ask for help. You just cannot wait too long. My story is not about drugs or alcohol. This story is about being smart. Part of being smart is knowing that there are so many resources to go to for help.

Right now, three people know I'm here at Columbus House. Only three people know because I am a very proud person. Never in my life have I looked like this—with a beard and long hair. The first thing I will do once I get out of here is go get a haircut, new pair of shoes, and a real pack of cigarettes. I'm also going to see those three people—not because I want anything from them, but because I want to see them.

EL RATÓN

by Ana

Un ratón en la casa de mi novio y él se asustó. El ratón era muy grande y yo allí sacándolo con la escoba. Esta es mi historia con el ratón en la casa. Pues yo no imaginaba que en los apartamentos había ratones. Esta fue mi experiencia con esta rata enorme. Me asusté pero no lo maté. Esta es mi historia con el ratón.

MI AMOR

by Anónimo

Mi amor por mi esposo es grande. Grande como una luna que brilla mucho. Tan grande que no cabe en mi corazón. Lo amo mucho. Él es mi alma. Lo que a mí me gusta, a él le gusta mucho. A él no le importa si soy fea o gorda. Es muy cariñoso conmigo y siempre está pensando en mí y se preocupa mucho por mí. Lo amo mucho, con todo mi corazón. No lo cambio por nada. Él es el príncipe que siempre esperé con todo mi corazón. Él es todo para mí y ése es mi esposo. Te amo mucho mi gatito.

MY HEART HURTS

by Bernadette

Here I am, sitting at a homeless shelter. Who would ever have thought I would be here? Here at a homeless place even older than I am. I am sad.

I wound up here because of my boyfriend, who passed away from cancer, from Agent Orange, from Vietnam. I was with him for 15 years. I took care of him till the end. One night, I brought him to the hospital. The nurse and people in the hospital said I did a great job taking care of him because he had diverticulitis. If he didn't go to the hospital that night, he would have been dead.

So this is very hard on my own. I am scared. It was Agent Orange. Cancer.

My heart hurts.

DEAR LORD

by MC

Dear lord,

This is a new word of love.
Love cures people, the one who
Receives love and the one who
Gives it, too;

Thank you, lord, for bringing me back. I understand that you put me in this world for a reason. Please, all I ask is that you leave me here for a reason. All I'm asking is for you to guide me in the right direction, for the best. Please lord, I need you to guide me in the right way. I need you to help me get housing. I don't want to go through this again. Please lord, I need you to guide me and help me. That's all I need. A place to call home for my kids and for you to please heal me so I can go back to work. Again, please help me so that my kids can be with me. And please help Jason get on his feet to get a job. And if he keeps doing what he does, please help me not care or get hurt anymore—because life is too short for me to worry about him. Because if he doesn't see what he does, I don't need him in my life. Because life is too short. Just make my heart stronger than before. All I need, lord, are my kids. Please lord, help Jarod. I know kids are a blessing, but you know they both are not ready for a kid. Please lord, you know they both are not ready for this. And please lord, bless me with a good caretaker job.

Love, MC.

THE ONE WHO DOESN'T SEE ANY OUT

by Anthony

I thought life would give me a gift after taking away my wife and my parents. But, after three months, things started falling apart.

When I got into the Columbus House, I thought it was a gift. Then, after six months, they say I am going to be back where I started from.

I did everything I was supposed to. I obtained a part-time job, which I still have. I gave my money every week to the Columbus House. But I am still in emergency shelter, not in L.O.S., where I could pay \$90.00 monthly, stay until I get housing, and pay 30% of my paycheck for them to save like a bank.

They lied. I have been here six months. Did everything they wanted me to do, and I still don't have any kind of housing. So, when the sixth month is over, I will be back in the shelter.

I feel all this was for nothing. I see a counselor. I see a psychiatrist, who found what was wrong with me and finally got me on the right meds. I started going to a gym.

But, if this is the right thing, where is my housing? Where are the case workers here to help me out? So, I am right back where I started from. What good is it?

I feel like I am alone. I was told to pray for the oppressed. Who prays for me? No family, no wife, no house, no way out that I can see. How am I feeling, losing my wife, house, parents? I guess only I know the answer to that.

Sincerely,
The One Who Doesn't See Any Out

CALL ME HUMAN

by Mikel

It is very disturbing that there are people in our lives that "label others," that put us in a group, that call us a certain word.

It is like high school. There are nerds, populars, music and arts, etc...

It is hurtful that people put us into stereotypes, as we are people as well. Everyone has challenges that we go through. And, when we get labeled, it is like we don't deserve to be a part of "Society."

We can't stop being labeled, and that hurts me. Those labels hurt, and it feels just like being bullied. I have been bullied and put into stereotypes throughout my 27 years so far.

If they do want to label others, including myself, call me "a person." Please! I am a human being, just like other people. I deserve to be a part of Society, too! Call me human!

THE STORY OF HOW I GOT MY KIDS

by Esther When I was 18, I got pregnant. It was my first pregnancy. I had cancer back when I was younger, so I was told I couldn't ever get pregnant, but here I was with my first miracle.

He ended up being born a little early. He was perfectly all right for 3 minutes. Then he passed. I kinda hit rock bottom after that.

Two years later, I was blessed with my daughter—my second miracle. Everything was natural with her. I went through a lot to have her, thirty-two weeks on bed rest and all. Her birth was one of the most beautiful moments of my life. After I had my daughter, I put my whole life into her.

Eight years later, I was blessed with a boy who's now 3 years old—my third miracle. Unfortunately, my mental health deteriorated again. I lost everything.

The point of this story is when you think you can't have something, you still can. Something can be the worst thing to ever happen to you and the best miracle at the same time. And that's the story of how I got my kids.

Because of them, I'm starting to pull myself out of this. Hopefully, I can keep working in the right direction to get everybody under the same roof.

GRACIS A DIOS

by Osualdo

Yo soy Osualdo. Yo caí en vicio en el 99 y me fui para un programa en el 2016. Yo empecé a usar cocaína cuando tenía 50. Gracias a Dios, me vine a los Estados Unidos. Gracias a Dios, me limpié. Me dieron 3 ataques de corazón. Soy diabético con presión alta y me estoy tratando médicamente, pero con la ayuda de Dios me sané. Gracias al todo poderoso, estoy libre de drogas hoy día.

WILL

by John

A baby wants to live,
But life is against its will.
It has so much to give,
But its mother takes the pill.

LOST LOVE

by Ashley

All my life, I always wonder why females are jealous of me. Then I always wonder why everyone saw that I'm beautiful, but I couldn't see it myself.

I felt ugly all through school. I would always dress like a tomboy, not really caring about my outside presentation because my inside perception was so damaged. Maybe it's because no one in my family ever told me that they loved me. No one ever told me that I was beautiful.

I always believed that a guy only wanted to be with me because of sex. Now I know my true worth. But this is after my trust has been crushed. My self-love has been pushed to the bottom, lost and gone.

Can anybody help my damaged soul? All I need is love.



IT'S HIS WILL, NOT MINE

by Ricky

At 17, I got a girl who was pregnant out of the hood. She was pregnant with another guy's baby, who wanted nothing to do with her. I took her in. I helped her, and she helped me. When the baby was born, it was the best thing to ever happen to me.

But, her mother got brutally murdered in Central Hotel just up the street. My ex-fiancée started going crazy. My little stepson was calling for his dead grandmother all the time. I had to get the guy for what he did. I found him, I got him, and I got 10 years. I got out just last year.

What happened next, it all comes down to God. If you truly believe in God, He will change your life. Everything that happens is because of God. Those bad times are just the Devil testing you. Whatever mess I'm in, God pulls me out. God got me here.

God is in everybody. He switches from person to person. But you have to give back to keep being blessed. But not because of that. You have to do it because you want to. You can't be blessed without giving blessings away. It's His will, not mine.

JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS COVER

by Mykala

There was a time where I performed at the talent show. At the time, I was being bullied for being overweight. When I sang, everyone who bullied me thought differently because I could sing. Don't judge a book by its cover.

THE MAN OUTSIDE OF BARS

by Javier

As a person who made mistakes in life, I would like to give some advice from the inside. I served 35 years and was suspended after 15.5. My experience through incarceration has been mind-opening. I learned from my mistakes, matured in life, educated myself, and underwent vocational training to better myself.

After all of that, what I have to say is, no matter what crime it is, it doesn't pay to do anything wrong. A real friend wouldn't tell you to commit a crime. A real friend would keep you away from it. The consequences of crime are bad. I was separated from my family—my kids, my grandkids.

Now, I am glad I am free. I know what the value of freedom is. Freedom should be cherished.

I'm a free man, and I try to help. I stay occupied. I volunteer in hospice, at Columbus House, and share my story. I give back to the community out of my own free will. With this, I say and hope that people can see the things I've changed in my life for the better.

I got closer to the higher power. Without Him, I would've been lost. I feel lonely sometimes, when the only thing there is the Spirit. But thank the Lord for the Spirit. The Spirit makes me feel comfortable, at ease.

In this community, I cherish every day. I wake up, and I cherish the air. I cherish the people who volunteer and serve me warm meals. I cherish the staff who makes sure I have a place to sleep at night.

I want to thank the people in my life—teachers, mentors, other guys in the system ahead of me—for enlightening my thinking. Crime doesn't pay.

"I WAKE UP, AND I
CHERISH THE AIR."

DARLENE

by Asia

Smooth, bold, energetic, down-to-earth, open-hearted, strict. A lady named Darlene was loved by many. She had a wonderful personality. I shared a bond with her—I knew her for 22 years. She birthed me. I will always call her name.

MOMMY VERSUS BABY

by Rachael

The baby cries for Mommy.
Mommy cries for Daddy.

It's a time to weep
When everybody's asleep.

The baby wants love and affection.
Mommy wants comfort and protection.

The baby needs to be held.
Mommy needs shelter and wealth.

The baby wants more food
Mommy craves to be understood.

The baby bleeds when bruised.
Mommy hates being mistreated and used.

The baby smiles when Mommy is near.
Mommy knows God is always here.

KEEP ON GOING

by Timothy

I was born in a family of 14. My mother was absent, and my father died. I lost my daughter when I was 16. After that, I had four more kids. And I ended up here three months ago, trying to get housing and employment. That's pretty much my life, I think. Things keep happening and I keep going and going.

GETTING THINGS TOGETHER

by Amber

As a child, I grew up in the quiet Connecticut town called Wallingford with my wonderful single mother. I enjoyed life and all my mother had to offer me. I was always into sports and was supported by my mother. In high school, I was playing lacrosse and loving life until I hurt my ankle, and the doctor prescribed me pain pills. That changed my life forever.

I soon became addicted, and my wonderful life fell into a pile of nothing. I have been homeless most of my

adulthood. I've been trying to get my life together slowly. I'm staying at the Columbus House and learning how to live sober and safe. I am trying to learn to love life again. Things fell apart fast, and getting them together is going to take some time. I am very grateful for all of the Columbus House staff and volunteers that are here to help.

"EVERY DAY IS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE."

WHAT I AM LOOKING FOR

by Tracey

I'm in the closet, under the bed, in the bathroom combing my head.
I'm on the roof in a chair, looking to heaven because it's there.
I'm down the street now in the store, at my house on the floor,
looking under mats and rugs,
only to see the creepy bugs.
I'm outside now in my yard,
looking around corners, stressing hard.
I'm on the phone with no one to call,
back outside, repeating it all.
Time is moving never to stop;
I'm off and running to the mall to shop.
"What is going on," you may say,
but, if I tell it, it's gonna come out in a different way.

The truth be told, I'm looking for God.
Have you seen him in these parts?
They begin to laugh and one did say,
"Have you checked you heart any time today?"
I stopped moving, then sat down,
looking at my hands as I put them on my face,
feeling lonely and foolish because she was right—where the heck
was she the other night?
"Look in your heart," she says with a smile on her face
as she stood there with her hands crossed.

My heart. My heart. "How did you know?"
And she said, " I CAN TELL THEM BY THEIR FRUIT, I CAN SEE
WHAT OTHERS CANNOT SEE, I CAN FEEL WHAT OTHERS
NEVER FELT."
And I asked, "Who are you?"
And she said, "THE ONE YOU ARE SEEKING".

I thank my Lord and God for being faithful because I am not ca-
pable alone, without them to be faithful in return. I thank the Lord
Christ Jesus, who makes it work for me. THANK YOU JESUS
FOR YOUR DEDICATION TO MY EXISTENCE BEFORE THE
FATHER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH; THE CREATOR OF ALL
THINGS; AMEN...

OVERCOMING LIVING IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL HOME TO LEARNING HOW TO LIVE A NORMAL LIFE

by Joseph

I want to write about myself. About my own life. I am from a family of five brothers and one sister. My mother was a single parent and was involved with a very dysfunctional marriage. My father, who I feel was only the donor of my birth, was an alcoholic drug addict. He was very abusive to my mother, physically and mentally. Which, I feel, had everything to do with the outcome of my own life.

Becoming a drug addict myself and breaking the law to supply my own drug addiction meant that I ended up doing more than half of my life in prison. I ended up having no direction in my life and didn't know how to live until becoming a much older man—learning mostly everything on my own.

I'm saying all this because I just feel it's important that you can overcome any obstacle in your life. All you have to do is be persistent about changing yourself, loving yourself. Today, I'm clean for 10 months with no drug or alcohol abuse. And I have meaning in my life.

