

ELM CITY ECHO



Issue 20

Spring 2022

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Mission

The Elm City Echo aims to promote awareness of homelessness and displacement by giving contributors a community-oriented platform to amplify their voices and experiences.

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the twentieth issue of the *Elm City Echo*, our Spring 2022 edition! We're so delighted that you have decided to pick up a copy of this magazine.

Now that you have a copy, you might be asking yourself: What is the *Elm City Echo*?

Since 2011, the *Echo* has been a community-oriented literary magazine focused on amplifying the voices and experiences of New Haven residents experiencing homelessness, poverty, and displacement. Each week, our volunteers visit our community partners and help facilitate the writing process for contributors. In practice, this looks like interview-style conversations, brainstorming, transcription, or simply giving our contributors paper and letting them write!

This year at the *Echo*, we have seen how the pandemic has exacerbated homelessness and food insecurity in New Haven, and impacted the ability of our community partners to function as they normally would. Volunteering during this period has also been challenging, but we have done our best to continue our mission while prioritizing the safety and well-being of our contributors. We are incredibly grateful to Continuum of Care, Chapel on the Green, and Sunrise Cafe for their willingness to welcome us into their organizations and work with their guests and clients each week. Without them none of this work would be possible and we truly appreciate the tireless work they do to provide shelter, warm breakfasts, and spiritual support to New Haven residents impacted by homelessness.

The twentieth issue of the *Echo* contains explorations of love, how we learn from children, drug abuse, the shortcomings of systems meant to support vulnerable people, and more. We truly hope you enjoy this issue.

Looking toward the fall, we are eager to return to our more traditional model while considering the safety of everyone involved and the changing conditions of the pandemic. Ultimately, we hope to continue to fulfill the *Echo*'s commitment to valuing and amplifying the voices of the most vulnerable members of the New Haven community.

Warm wishes,

Chibuzo Enelamah & Laura Haight
Editors-in-Chief



Check us out at yhhap.org/ece and <https://www.instagram.com/elmcityecho/>

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Part 1

Gotta Believe in Magic

David

Take to your heart
Show me where to start
Let me play the part
Of your first love
All the stars are right
Every wish is ours tonight, my love

Pity those who wait
Trusting love to fate
Finding now too late
That they lost it
Heaven let them go
They will never know the ways of love

You've gotta believe in magic
Tell me how two people find each other
In a world that's full of strangers
You've gotta believe in magic
Something stronger than the moon above
Cause it's magic when two people fall in love

I may never know why I need you
So all I need to know is this feeling
Handle it with care
We were born to share this dream, my love
You gotta believe in magic
Cause it's magic when two people fall in love

Addison

Monet

Everytime I FaceTime my daughter, she asks me, “Mommy, why are you still sick?” How do you explain to a five year old unaware of life’s hardships that her mommy has a disease that will affect her for the rest of her life?

One day, when she’s old enough, I’ll teach her all about addiction, especially since she has a greater risk of inheriting this curse from both her father and I. It’s not a gift I ever want her to receive, so hopefully I can protect her from that. But her confusion right now kills me everyday. I know she questions why I’m not home with her, why I don’t look sick, or why I’ve been gone for so long. All I can really tell her: “Just because Mommy doesn’t look sick on the outside doesn’t mean she’s okay on the inside. I have to take some time to fix myself so I can be the best mama for you, baby.”

Those are the simplest words I can use for her to try to understand.

I’ve been in treatment since February 6, 2022, but I won’t be done until sometime in June. That’s a long time for a little girl to miss her mama, especially when all she knows is being with me everyday. Thank God for my mother taking on my role while I get myself straight. I couldn’t imagine losing my babygirl, but because of the road I was on, it would’ve happened eventually. That little girl doesn’t realize I need her more than she needs me. She’s my strength through all of this. Whenever I get discouraged, I call my baby to remind myself who I’m doing this for.

I absolutely hate hearing that you can’t get sober for someone else. Yes I can, and I am. Right now, I’m sadly struggling with self-love. Addy is her mama’s inspiration, the reason she’s going so hard in this thing called recovery. Every day I spend in treatment secures more skills I can use to stay clean and ensure I’m alive to raise my princess. It’s far from easy being away from her right now, but in the end it will all be worth it.

The Clown

Amerigo

Identify yourself with the clown. A lot of people ask why — why with the clown? Look at it this way: why does the clown use makeup? To hide his pain, his suffering, and his struggles. On the other side of the mirror, he’s you: the clown without makeup, the clown crying, suffering, and struggling with interior and exterior pain. I am just like the clown without makeup.

Don’t be afraid to show your true feelings and emotions, which help you go to the next step. You are important — with or without makeup — just like a clown.

A Fight

Jaleel

I've been using drugs for about six years, on and off. Now, to have finally become serious about being clean feels good. I've learned that the fight is not about trusting my ability to win, but rather about trusting the tools I've gotten in training!

Advice from a 6-year-old

Lauren

I've suffered from addiction since I was 17. I'm 31 now. This story is about how my six-year-old changed my outlook on my recovery and addiction.

When I was 29, I had just gotten out of number-who-knows-what rehab, and like most rehabs I've finished, I lasted a week and slowly began to start using again. This day in particular I woke up, and before using I kissed my son goodbye, expecting my mother to take him to pre-school. I went upstairs and continued to get high. What I thought would never happen to me did: I overdosed in my home, and, to make it worse, my own mother and son found me. Luckily for me, the ambulance was called and I was okay.

Even after that overdose I struggled with staying clean. I lost custody of my son and went through a few more rehabs. I just couldn't seem to want it enough to do what I had to do to stay clean.

Fast forward to today. About a week ago, I FaceTimed my son and he asked me to come live with him and his grandparents. I explained to him that it wasn't a good idea; he asked why, and I told him mommy's an adult now and should get her own place for him to come stay at. My six-year-old, with all the sincerity in the world, looked at me and said, "Yeah, Mommy, you're an adult now, so that means you can make your own choices, and you have not been making good choices."

It was at that moment that I realized if my six-year-old could see the choices I was making weren't the best, then it was time to get my shit together before he saw in depth what was really going on.

A Place to Be

Clarence

Standing in line in order to get free
Something to eat
A place to stay, just to be.
Gathering warmth from the glow
Of the wood, soft and warm
Not too loud
Seeing the love that's spread
From within. Sharing our hopes
Again and again.
The peace is shared from time
to time, whenever
we all are
Standing in line.

Amy's Pain

James

She woke up at 3:00 a.m. She could hear James calling out to her. She felt his pain. She knew his addiction was killing him and she felt his pain. She tried to reach out to James in so many different ways — to let him know he was loved and that she wanted to help. But she could not get a response. She felt his pain.

God continued to guide her, and brought her right to his hospital bed. When she showed up, she felt his pain.

His addiction and choice to keep using instead of facing life's terms and issues was his way of running from his pain. She and James sat and talked that night.

And when the self-centered aspect of his disease ceased to continue, he listened to Amy and looked in her eyes. It was then that he felt Amy's pain.

Blue

Anonymous

Well, I feel free when I am drug FREE. Let me tell you how this evil drug called fentanyl became my best friend. A best friend that controlled me, made me search and yearn for it, just so I could numb my feelings and fog my mind from reliving the trauma of my life.

I will start with my sibling, his name was Nick, and I used to admire him. I wanted to be just like him. I followed him, I acted like him, I even dressed like him, 'til one day when I opened up the bathroom door and he was drooling, his head down with a syringe hanging out his arm. I wondered what was wrong with him. He was *blue*, he looked like a Smurf. I called mom, she came and threw water on him, threw him in the shower and for the grace of my higher power he jumped out of it the next day. He acted like nothing happened. He argued with my mom and begged her for money. One day, he crossed the line and stole money from her. He even stole the T.V. out the living room. What an evil disease this thing called opiate is. Still, I didn't know. So time passed and he stole my neighbor's power tools... They wanted to hurt him, so my single mother paid them back from the little money she had saved up. I said I'd never be like him.

Fast-forward some time, he finally passed!! It actually relieved me, but I started experimenting with alcohol and pot. Later on, I engaged in the white horse of mystical feeling. I found my grandma, "Nana", swinging off a robe, *blue* again—but not from drugs, from boredom, hurt, and despair. I was so hurt, so I looked for comfort. My so-called uncle introduced me to his girlfriend, called "Heroin". I wanted nothing to do with her, but I wanted this pain to go and he kept pushing until I ultimately started dating her. She destroyed my life, even caused me to turn *blue* once. So here I am telling you about my *blues*. I don't want to experiment with or ever date her again, but she was so intoxicating that she called me in my dreams, even stood by my ears screaming my name. My body yearned for her, my soul loved her, her wish was my command. When she hit my bloodstream, she took over and I had a false sense of hope. How could I cope? She had me, like my grandma with a rope around her neck. I still remember screaming for her not to leave me, to heal me, to take care of me.

Months later, I finally woke up, and I found out I suffered from the disease of addiction. It wanted to conquer and destroy me. I had to get rid of the thoughts and pain and torture of the *blues* that were trying to come back and kill me.

Now I live with thoughts of FREEDOM, of not wanting to ever turn *blue*. Many others have fallen victim to the evil world of opiate addiction, which causes you to turn *blue*, puts you in the ground and destroys the lives of many others.

Hopefully Done

Dave

So here I am back on the run
Life is gonna get really ugly really quick
I know this because I've been on
This merry go round many times before
It won't be long before I go from
Apartment, to car, to tent on the
Riverbank dam. I can't believe I've
Got myself into another relapse
So here I go on my way back to
Detox after a 5 month run
They get shorter and shorter the older I get
I'm sitting here in scrubs and I'm praying
This will be the last time I have
To go through this. For I'm tired of
Living for needles and pipes.

Dear Depression (Part 1)

Toddishia

Content Warning (CW): Mental Illness

I carry you like you're the only thing left inside my heart.
I hold onto you like you will die soon.
I write about you the way Maya Angelou wrote about being a phenomenal woman.
I talk to you like you're my best friend, like no one can take us apart.
I cry to you like you're the only one who will listen, like you know what to say to help me.
And you know what?
You are my best friend.
You know exactly what to do to comfort me.
Yes, you're very toxic.
But
So am I.
If we had to be honest here,
It's only you I've had when I was at my lowest
And sometimes at my highest.
You are the only consistent one.
But you hurt me over and over and over,
To the point where I can't see what others see.
People would always tell me, "Don't feed into depression,"
But what they don't understand is
I'm comfortable with you.

To the people who don't understand what depression feels like to me:
Every single time I've been down,
He's come, taken me by the hand, and walked me through these black smoky tunnels.
I've never seen the light that you 'happy' people said awaited the end of the tunnel.

Depression,
All I had was you.

Dear Depression (Part 2)

Toddishia

CW: Suicide, Mental Illness

You whisper in my ear, "Jump, slice, hang"
Every single day
Several times a day.
I try so hard to block out your voice,
But even when I try to sleep, you haunt me with flashbacks.
I wake up and see nobody.
No one is around to help me like they said they would.
It's always been you.

You make me feel like no one will ever understand my pain,
Like I will always suffer by myself.
You don't only talk to me when I'm sad,
You talk to me when I'm happy too.
You tell me that I don't deserve this
Because of all the bad shit I've done
Because of all the lies I've told
Because of all the pain I've put people through.

I feel like the Joker when he said,
"The worst part about having a mental illness is people expect you to behave as if
you don't."
Am I supposed to sit there and tell you that someday I know I'll be happy again
When all my life ain't been nothing but hurt and pain?
Am I supposed to sit there and put a pillow over my mouth so no one hears me
cry?
Is that what you want?

Depression, you think you have won,
But there is even more fight in me.
You are not my best friend.
A best friend wouldn't have done the shit you did.
They would have helped me get on the right track.
You don't give a damn about people!
You are just one twisted low life fucker.
You are not my master.

Wrecking Ball

Dan

Have you ever heard of a developer building houses just to tear them down? Have you ever watched an author write a book just to burn it and let it go unread? Have you ever heard of a song unsung, not unintentionally or unwillingly? Let me tell you a little about what it is like to be me. Let me give you an inside glimpse into my disease and self-destruction that I call the wrecking ball of addiction.

I am everything your mother told you to not be when I use, but I am also everything she wants you to be when I'm clean. My addiction can't be reduced to just shooting dope or coke. It's anything to hide from the illusion of reality my brain thinks is real, something from my immature thoughts or inability to cope or ability to hide. I never felt normal while clean. Using always felt like I was special.

I am seven days clean, knowing I can have it all — past, present, or future — but still stuck in an attitude where I question whether or not I am willing to go through the process of relearning to live life without drugs in order to recover. To recover, then just knock it all down again by relapsing because of one wrong choice. A kid gets grounded for making bad decisions; you fail a test for not studying. But recovery isn't like that. If you don't fight the disease and work on yourself daily, one bad choice can change your life.

I have had it all — jobs, cars, money, a house, a wife, kids, success, happiness. It didn't matter. Nothing is as strong as the wrecking ball of my addiction. All of those things, they can fit into a needle or a pipe, but they can also be gone when you pick up a drug just once. I always say it won't hurt, but it leads to a darkness, a hopelessness, and a desperation that I wish on no soul. I suffer and fight every day with all my strength knowing that the wrecking ball might swing back at any time.

I wish you could understand the mental horror of asking whether or not this is worth fighting for, only for it all to be destroyed again. Will this be the time I get leveled for good, or will this be the time I plant the seed that grows year-round under perfect conditions, the time things are not ruined? Or am I only fighting against certain death?

Only my wrecking ball knows when my number is pulled. But I can't give up. I still have a chance; I still have air in my lungs. It's not about fighting on the battlefield, but about fighting in the mud. I hope this is my last time.

Parts of My Life Story

Christopher

I was born in Rochelle, NY. For the first twelve years of my life, I was the only child in the family. My first cousin was born eight years later, and twelve years after that my sister was born. That being said, I was spoiled. Holidays and birthdays were very good to me. I played sports and I was good. At the age of 14, I started drinking beer and smoking weed, just hanging out. That's when my life changed. I stopped playing sports as much. Girls came into my life. I started selling drugs and using. As time went on, I got into trouble with the law. At the age of 23, I went to jail for the first time. When I got out, I continued on my path. A few years later, I had my son. I was heavy into selling drugs and I started using, saying all that you can never say what you won't do. I went to jail again, and if my girls didn't have abortions I would have six kids. They would be grown up adults now. I never saw my real father, just like some of my kids—they didn't see me too much. When I got myself together, I soon started screwing up again. Glad my son didn't follow in my footsteps, though. Still today, my mother plays a very important role in mine, my sister's, and her grandkids' lives. Grandma passed away before my kids got to be adults.





Part 2

Just One More Drink

Davone

Heart racing fast, I can barely breathe
Eyes closed, thoughts roaming, can't get no sleep
If it was you, what would you do?
Came too far to turn back now
Stand up, man up
Feet firm on the ground
Time to lace up my boots, fight.
No help, I'm on my own
And I'm ready to fight!
Gotta face my fears
It's been a long road, but the exit nears
Palms sweaty, but I'm ready
Guess it's no more lies
One more drink and I'll probably die
I can feel the wind blow
As the sun shines through the window
Stop and think
Just one more drink
If I take a shot, I just won't stop
Keep going my mind says, but I know I can't
Gotta fight the urge
Wow, stop and and sit down
It's time to live life
Show I can fight
Let's do this right
Stop and think
Just one more drink

Survivor

Rob

I am homeless, but I am strong.
My name is Rob and my days here are long.
I get up in the morning and smoke my last bogey,
Thinking of the money I must make to fulfill my
habit,
A race for the first to fly a sign, and I am the rabbit.
God stays with me and keeps me focused
Even through the struggles and the bullshit.
I am dirty. I am unshaven, I look like a madman
In this place we call New Haven.
But I am a survivor.
I've been doing this for years, even through those
long winter nights
Where I fight back the tears.

I must stay strong, I must stay vigilant. God's got my
back.
Can I vanquish the demons and get back on track?

Yes, I can. Yes, I will. I've had enough of
Waking up and feeling ill.
I woke up one morning, got my methadone, and
headed down to the hospital.
Fuck, this is going to be tough.
I walked in and said that I can't take any more out
here.
I'm dying. Can I stay?
I took a seat and began to pray.

A survivor I am, and that much is true.
God has shown me the way,
Now I know what I must do.

Short Story of My Life

Josh

CW: Drug Abuse

So growing up, there was a lot of alcoholism and violence in my household. My father left when I was seven, and shortly after my little brother was born. My mom continued to drink and date different men who were also alcoholics and abusive to her, my brother, and I. So when I was 12 years old, I moved out and started crashing on my friends' couches or outside wherever I ended up that day. I began to get depressed and anxious, and started experimenting with drugs and alcohol. First it was marijuana, then at 14 I tried heroin and cocaine. The kid I was living with, his older brother shot me up with heroin for the first time. After that it was all downhill. I would get into relationships just because they had something I needed, like an apartment or money or a car. All the wrong reasons just to survive. At 16 I began smoking PCP and I would literally think I was on special missions; I would steal cars almost every day. I don't know why, but I began to get in trouble with the law. For a while I was in and out of prison. It was then that I realized I had a problem. So I went to my first important rehab. I've been in and out of programs since I was 19. Now, I'm 32 and I still haven't figured it out. I have a four-year-old son and I think it's time to get it together for him.

Sunrise Cafe & I

Rick

I've been here at Sunrise Cafe every day since the beginning. It is a unique operation — customers don't pay. The people are terrific. There's an interesting collection of people who are regular attendees, they come from all walks of life. There's a group of friends I made because I eat here. Also it's a very eclectic group of people who volunteer here. Now the dilemma is that we have to go inside. We've already had a couple 30 degree mornings. But COVID is not going away, so we need a compromise between outdoor dining and the old way.

I'm a native New Havener. My father was a UConn football player, lasted one year, and got drafted. My father returned as a decorated, wounded veteran from Germany. He married his high school sweetheart and had me in a year — I'm a baby boomer. I have a sister. I'm the black sheep in the family because I'm the only one who's not a teacher or a doctor. My mother was a New Haven school teacher for 40 years. I was a teacher and also the hockey coach for one year when I was dodging the draft. I'm an attorney by trade. I was a city attorney, and I worked for 20 years.

Finally Free

Kai

Elijah,
You broke me.
At first, it was just a dream.
We made each other laugh, smile.
Then, you broke me.

You know, I am finally free now.
Your loss was another's gain — mine.
Now, I am rid of your toxicity.
Now, I am free.

Life as a Diamond, Life as a Pearl

Carolyn

Life is a thing that we have
To live with and die with
And cry with and
Weep with and deal with.
Cherish life like it's a diamond,
Like it's a pearl.

On Grand Avenue

Robert

My name is Robert and I live in New Haven. Two and a half years ago I was homeless. I went to the homeless shelter on Grand Avenue. I was told that to spend the night there and sleep, I would have to take a shower. Mind you this was in January 2020. It was 10 degrees outside. I told someone at the homeless shelter that the hot water did not work. His response was that he knew and did not care — no shower for me, no bed with sheets and a blanket — and that I had to leave.

There's No End to Love

Carolyn

Homelessness doesn't discriminate — anyone can be homeless. But, to me, “homeless” is a word that doesn't stay. You can overcome it by praying and making yourself a better person. Faith is what gets you out of situations. No one can do anything alone. I'm being the strong person that God allowed me to be. I appreciate what I have, how I live, and every day of my life I want to pass the love, share the love. Love doesn't discriminate, and there's no end to love.

Hogar

José

Dominica República
Mexicana colombiana
Peruana italiana salvadoreña
Las operas saxofones
Hola guitarras
Hola cordión

Waiting

Tony

Waiting
on the phone for food stamps
In the hospital for a place to stay
In a shelter for a rehab bed
In rehab for a sober house
In line for my methadone
for a call from a job applied for
But all I ever get is more waiting

An Experience I'll Never Forget

Robert

I was in an abandoned building with three other homeless people. I slept in this house surrounded by dog shit. I couldn't walk in there without stepping in feces. I was a human being living like a wild beast. That's when I said, Doing it their way wasn't going to work. Now I wasn't going to, say, be a criminal. But it just wasn't right. Denying a man the right to work.

I decided I wasn't going to do any crimes towards somebody. But do people have the right to deny you work? Do a hundred people have that right? What about my rights, life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness? At a certain point it's difficult to be nice to your neighbors when they deny you the liberty of work. And at that time, I was being accused of something I had not done. I just had to take. I didn't harm any human being in the process. And somebody should be grateful for that.

This was not a problem because it was by design. America goes and conquers. They have all this money. 100 million dollars could help many homeless people, and they spend it on conquering people, other countries.

Shining Star

David

I like seeing all of you at places like Trinity Church on the Green on Sundays. I also go to two other local churches for services on Sundays whenever I can. I believe in myself and others enough to want to help bring out the best in everyone. New Haven is very special to me. I wish for it to be a “shining star” to other townships and cities throughout Connecticut. I hope that places like Neighborhood Music School or Audubon St offer scholarships to children and adults throughout the greater New Haven area who do not have money to spend on tuition there.

My Life in a Dance

Columbiana

My favorite thing to do is dance, and I’ve been dancing my whole life — it’s how I exercise. I’m from New York, and people get along with each other there. My mother came to New Haven. I used to live on the New Haven Green; I slept on the Green for three years. I lived out there and saw a lot of people dying. I just got housing. I’m looking to start my own business and help people like me. I’m an addict. I was in prison for 15 years, but I’ve been out for four years. I have four kids, and they all have names that start with Y.

Home in New Haven

Nicole

When I came to New Haven, I got an apartment. My biggest downfall was that I took a lot of people in and lost the apartment. So I ended up being homeless. But I love New Haven. The people are friendly and open. I'm originally from Hartford, but New Haven is my home. When I came to New Haven through incarceration I didn't know anyone. Now, there's not a person that I don't know.

There are a lot of resources here for the homeless. I'm an addict. But I'm proud of where I am with that. My heart and mind are at peace. I love making clothes – I make tie-dye clothes. I do it every day. My step-son passed away a month ago and I made a jacket with his name on it.

What They Take

Robert

A photographic memory is a muscle, and, after you don't use it for many years, you atrophy. Everyone has a photographic memory, when they're young. Everyone has skills. But it's not skills they want to hire; they want to hire robots; want you to be a part of the military complex.

I wouldn't want to do anything in this society, so long as the whites' are controlling it. What am I going to do? Make an invention and have them take it from me in court? The black man doesn't get credit. He doesn't get his name in the books or the money.

They don't respect me as family, or see me as an equal. There's nothing a white man can do better than us. Everything he knows comes from the Moors. It comes from the Moors, from the black man. It comes from Egypt. Talk to white people and they don't even think Egypt is in Africa. They think it's European. That's called gentrification.

Even in Europe – that's not their native land, although that's another story. Ask them where they came from before Ireland and Germany. They don't know. They say they come from apes. Because if they say they come from Adam and Eve, they come from clay. They come from hue and from color. Where do you come from? They don't know, and they don't want to know.

This Too Shall Pass

Davone

As the wind blows east
As the sun shines west
I close my eyes
I hear my heartbeat in my chest
Silence, shh — can't move too fast
I hear a voice say, this too shall pass
Thoughts race as my hands shake
Thinking, just one more taste
Shake it off, shake it off
Gotta stay on task
A little voice says, this too shall pass
Today is the future
Yesterday is the past
Shh! Silence, this too shall pass
Palms sweating, I'm nervous
How long will it last?
Just one more taste
This too shall pass

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