



ELM
CITY
ECHO

TEN-YEAR ANNIVERSARY ISSUE | SPRING 2021

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Ten-Year Anniversary Issue | Spring 2021

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.



Scan this code to let us know what you think!

Editorial Staff:

Editors: Eliana Rose Swerdlow & Chibuzo Enelamah

Team Leaders: Chelsea Wang & Laura Haight

Staff: Rose Bae, Adriana Ballinger, Dominique Castanheira, Cheryl Chen, Lauren Chong, Jack Denning, Aurelia Dochnal, Arushi Dogra, Erin Hill, Krystal Liu, Avery Long, Annie Radillo, Flora Ranis, Maayan Schoen, Kennedy Schwiebert

Designers: Cheryl Chen, Lauren Chong, & Annie Radillo

Contributing Photographer: William Ohl

Letter from the Editors:

Dear Reader,

We are delighted and proud to welcome you to this very special Anniversary Edition of the *Elm City Echo*! Whether the *Echo* is familiar or new to you, we are grateful for your readership as we celebrate our tenth year of publication.

Through a community-oriented platform since 2011, the *Echo* has been committed to centralizing and amplifying the voices of those experiencing extreme poverty and/or homelessness in New Haven. In years past, our team has visited the sites of our various community partners to facilitate the creative process through dialogue and workshop. Sometimes, we're a listening ear to a personal story. Other times, we're a fellow poet discussing whether or not we think a line break could be here or there. Above all, we prioritize creating and maintaining spaces in which storytellers are safe, heard, and free.

Though we were not able to safely gather and collaborate with storytellers and print new pieces this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our team knows the power and necessity of storytelling, especially now. From our rooms across the globe, we have come together virtually and reflected on the *Echo's* artistry and diversity to curate this Ten-Year Anniversary Edition. Here are only some of the remarkable pieces we've had the pleasure to revisit in a tremendously difficult year. To document the pandemic's presence in New Haven, we have included photography in our magazine for the first time. We're especially grateful to the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and its support for printing this issue.

As you listen to the diverse voices gathered here, please join us in celebrating both our differences and our common humanity as we open our eyes wider to see the individual and structural injustices that pervade our world. While we can only bear witness to how these stories have changed our individual lives, we are hopeful they will have a profound impact on your life. We thank you for your readership.

With hope,
Eliana Rose Swerdlow & Chibuzo Enelamah

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Check us out at ybhapp.org/ece and facebook.com/elmcityechoNH

FALL 2014 –

FALL 2016



William Ohl

Everyday Stress

Scott

The crunch of the snow at my feet
The nasty feeling of the clothes that
I have had on for days
The thoughts racing somewhere between
Worry and anger
The cigarette burning quick
Wondering how to hustle a dollar
To get two more

Blood boiling
Hands freezing
The sting of the wind on my face

Looking at the time
It's 2:15
Still have 3 hours before dinner
Stomach growls at the thought of it

Wander into Burger King
Try to stay hidden
Once discovered then I'll
Have to go

Oh, too late, here she comes "Yes, ma'am, I'll be gone"
As I slam the door on the way out
Shake my head and keep moving
Off to nowhere

Stardust

Dana

There once was a little girl who would gaze up at the stars. When she looked up at the stars, she imagined what it would be like to float through space. She imagined being able to circle around Saturn on its rings and what the dark side of the moon looked like. When she looked up at the night sky, she was free. Free from all that kept her down and depressed her on earth.

She kept looking up at the night sky all through the years as she got older. A lot changed over the years for her, and she changed as well. But one thing that never changed was the need to look up at the night sky and be free, even if it was for a brief moment. When she got older, she even began to watch shows about the universe. One day she saw a show about how the stars seeded the Earth with minerals and complex elements. She learned that we, as humans, have stardust in our bodies in the form of elements. We are made of stardust, as well as comets and asteroids. She was so excited that her love of the stars all her life may have come from the fact that she, and all others, are made up of stars. She learned that she has a connection to the beautiful lights that lit up the night sky. It was more than a connection. The stars are part of her.

Now forty years old, she still looks at the night sky and smiles. She remembers being the little girl who found peace in imagining floating through space. Knowing now that the stars are really part of her makes her smile even more. She looks up at the night sky that gave her peace and not just smiles but finds a different kind of peace in the fact that she doesn't have to float through space to touch the stars. All she has to do is touch her arm or her hand to touch the stars. And that makes her smile.

I am what I am

Frank

I am what I am.

I am Frank, not a so-called normal man or human. I say, at times, I was hatched. I became in April of 1961. My life was to be one of many obstacles and triumphs.

My mother gave my brother and me up to the State at the age of one. An orphanage in Boston was to be my home for the next four years. I remember a few things: I broke an arm in the elevator, broke my leg jumping bunk beds. I used to escape from there; I found a key and it fit the elevator, so I'd leave periodically and go on adventure after adventure. I got caught after a while—someone told on me. I made a mistake of taking others with me.

What I remember most was how I felt like I was a piece of meat being sold. How these people would come around and point at you and others. Then they would disappear, and I knew that the people took them. I went on many of these home runs, where I would go for a few days and either stay or be sent back.

I guess I felt like an abandoned dog. I was not good enough, too strong-willed, too disobedient. I did something they didn't like, so back to the orphanage they sent me.

Life

Joseph

Out on York Street, panhandling.
As the sun goes down, around 5 o'clock,
The crowd becomes slim
And then it's only you
As the night falls.
It's only you on this journey, hoping to find home.

We the People

Kristi

Now onto the subject of homelessness: it is pathetic that this country has so many bouncing through the shelter system, especially when many of them are veterans who have served this country. Many of them are very educated and are homeless due to the downsizing of corporate America, yet another gift to this country given to us from that all too familiar foe: greed-infested capitalism. I personally know a married couple who is homeless in Atlanta. Both have master's degrees, but due to downsizing he lost his six figure income. Shortly after he lost his job, she got cancer and lost her six figure income because of her illness. We all know that cancer treatment is outrageously priced, so they ended up losing all of their savings and their home. They now bounce through the shelter system and homeless "urban camping" sites in Atlanta. The first thing most would say to a homeless person is "McDonalds is always hiring." How do you tell someone who you don't know to take a job way beneath their education and qualifications? That is classism at its finest. Corporate America and even its smaller businesses are always willing to get some good PR by taking food and clothes to places where the homeless are. Sounds and appears like they are "helping the homeless" right? Well here is the real scenario: businesses exploit the misfortunate by bringing a camera crew down to a shelter and getting pictures "helping the homeless," which is nine times out of ten nothing more than a marketing strategy. Also keep in mind that they get tax breaks for "helping the homeless." What would truly "help" the homeless is to give them an income so that they can feed and clothe themselves, and, most importantly, acquire a roof over their own heads. It is a totally ignorant assumption that homeless people are homeless due to drug addiction or circumstances of their own doing.

Now watch this: A homeless individual that just got done being "helped" by being a part of their marketing strategy of being fed and clothed at a shelter on a weekend sees on Monday that their company is hiring. That homeless individual thinks under false assumptions that the company cares about the betterment of mankind, so this individual goes with his very professionally done resume in hand to apply for the position that he is more than qualified for. Upon arrival, he is treated as less than human and then told they are not hiring for the position that they saw online. They take the resume and say if anything comes up they will let them know, but the resume gets trashed as soon as the person walks out the door. Two days later at the library, the person sees the open position still online. What they should have told that person is: "We don't hire homeless people for anything that will really help them help themselves, but we can go get tax breaks and good PR for "helping the homeless." This scenario happens all too often, leaving people with feelings of hopelessness that honestly turns civilians into criminals on occasion. What Congress needs to do about this situation is stop giving the tax write-offs to businesses who donate things without at least hiring a certain quota of homeless individuals.

Also, they should get tax breaks and incentives for offering job training for high salary positions to the homeless that have gotten themselves into a home. Also, as you read on applications and such, the Equal Opportunity Act states that it is illegal to be discriminated against based on gender, race, sexual orientation, or religion, yet nothing is said about present economic or living

situations. It needs to be written into law that an employer can't discriminate against employing anyone homeless for any position that they are qualified for. The banks need to get tax breaks for working with those who have been in a homeless situation for a while to get them into their many foreclosed homes with reasonable interest rates that can help them build their credit up again and get them a sense of self back by them being a homeowner. If "we the people" start standing up for our fellow "people" and not allow society to dictate who is who, that right there would be helpful to ending homelessness.

Get active. Here is a link that gives you each state's Congress members: [http:// www.congress-merge.com/onlinedb/](http://www.congress-merge.com/onlinedb/) Please I urge all who reads this, contact your Congress and let them know that "we the people" need change and to stop this debate, because "we the people" are not that ignorant. Let's bring about our real freedoms and level out a playing field where we all who were created equal can be treated as equal.

My Hero

Amy

My son, AJ, is my inspiration in life. A text waits on my phone every morning from him telling me that he loves me. There is a text from him when I go to bed every night that tells me that he is proud of me, is there for me, and doesn't want me to give up. I saw him applying to jobs at the age of sixteen. Working at Subway, Staples, Olympia Sports. He saved money from working and bought his own car. And now he is going off to college in the fall. He is inspiring me to push myself more than I ever have before.

I call AJ my worry-bug because he is always worrying about me. I constantly tell him to let me worry about me—he should be busy being a kid. But he doesn't listen; when I am at a warming center each night, he texts to make sure I am safe. He makes that his top priority.

But AJ doesn't just look out for me. His caring and sweet personality touches everyone he is around. When my son was in elementary school, there was a boy in his class that was mentally challenged. That boy would always grab my son roughly, and my son never minded or called him out about it. One day, that boy's mother came up to me and thanked me. She said that AJ looked at her son as if her son were one of the other boys, and when AJ was around his 'cool' friends, he never acted mean to her son. She said I was raising a good young man, and it really meant a lot to me. I realized right then and there what kind of person AJ was growing up into.

I can honestly say that AJ is the reason that I get up every day. He lives with his father now, but he shows me all of the time that I am with him in his heart, so that makes things much easier. He always makes it a point to tell me how proud he is of me, how much he is there for me, and how much he loves me.

At the end of this, I just want to thank my son for being there for me. I want him to know that I am here in this world because of him. And I want him to know that I love him.

Court Run

Jennifer

It starts about five days before
The burning, churning feeling in my stomach
I can't ignore.

I lay out my best uniform,
My hair will be in place.
I can't let them see my tear stained face.
With a little cold water and makeup, it's done.
I'm gearin' up for another COURT RUN.

The buzzer goes off—you wake us at three,
A cold court breakfast—handcuffs and shackles for me.

I pray for courage and strength and no more tears.
I feel my insides trembling with fears.
The bus is cold.
The girls are loud.
The tension is building—it's in the air.
In all the confusion I wonder if the judge could possibly be fair.

The Marshals are here to take us to court.
My defenses are strong as a fort.
Showing the world I still have dreams,
No matter how crazy you think it all seems.
Praying and hoping to hear "You are free!"
What's this? OH NO they're shackling me!

One more trip to Niantic. I go.
It's hurry up now—time for another strip show.
I get back to my cell as fast as I can.
My roommate is waiting with soup and coffee in hand.
As I drop to my knees, to thank the man above,
I'm grateful to my bunky for showing me kindness and love.

Un Cuento

Auer

O, cuento. Un cuento. Ok. Más o menos, de mi vida.

Sí. Me pasó mucha cosa. The first time I got here, I got in Florida. Yeah, Florida. De Puerto Rico, Florida. De Florida, over here. That's it. I don't know, I come over here, maybe change my life. Maybe tenían nineteen o eighteen años. Sólo. No tenía miedo, no. No. No sé. Soy un poco fuerte. Fui, y ya.

De comer, cuando era niña?

Que me gustaba comer? O ho ho ho, Díos mío.

It's different, porque I lived in Puerto Rico, as a little girl. It's got different food. Plátanos, bananas. O, bacalhau, fish. Mucho meat. Me gustaba mucho banana, o yeah. Beans, mixed con arroz. The rice. Gandules. That's hispanic food. That's ah, como beans. Pero that's a little different. Porque they have a lot of beans, but that's different. Ah, tomatoes. My father planted, and I ate it. Oh yeah. Oh my goodness, a long time ago. My father died, my mother died. Oh yeah, I work with my father. Everything planted. My family, my sister, my brother, everything.

Me hace feliz? My granddaughters. My daughters. O! Papá Dios. Que yo hablo every night, o Papá Dios. My god. That's it. No more.

Estoy bien orgullosa de mi familia. De mis hijas, de mi grandsons, mi nietos. Beautiful. Bien lindo. Conmigo, lindo. Ellos tan bien. Beautiful. Bonitos. Me quieren mucho. Me hablan bien. Me tratan bien. All in Puerto Rico. My daughter here. Pero my family, all in Puerto Rico. Mis hermanos, en Puerto Rico.

Bonito, eran buenas.

Me gusta aquí, más que Florida. Aquí. Sí, me gusta. I don't know. I don't know, pero me gusta aquí. I like it. El snow, el invierno, yeah. I don't know, pero me gusta. I like it. Es good, se siente fresco, it's beautiful yeah. That's beautiful. En Florida, no nieva like, como here. No.

From home to less

Thomas

I was married with a lot of drama but just living a life. But it was falling apart for years and years. My wife used to be in the hospital with liver cancer. She got out in October. We had a son but lost him years ago. He's coming on fourteen now. It's hard to deal with that. He was my only son. I was in prison, and she was heavy on drugs, so he was adopted six, seven years ago.

I've been homeless a year. It was because of domestic issues. My first night was inconvenient because, when you live where you live all your life, everything you take for granted can be gone. I got zero from my house when I left. I slept on the ground for eleven days before coming to Columbus House. Grand Avenue was the worst because of the rules and bed bugs.

You think the Green looks nice, but there are knife fights and a lot of people fighting. While I was there, there were six people on the Green. I slept under the mayor's window. She couldn't miss me because I was out there on the bench. Some nights were really cold, and if you didn't have a blanket, you were in bad shape. I don't think anyone deserves to be homeless regardless. Forget shelters. Everyone should have affordable housing.

I got a referral and got on a list and called every day. I waited ninety-two days to get into Columbus House. Because I have a felony on record, housing may be difficult to get. I have an income because of disabilities. If you get \$400 dollars or less, you get LOS. Because I make more because of my disability, I only can stay for ninety days. I don't want to go back to another shelter because I won't be getting anywhere.

I leave here at 6:30. I'm gone all day and come back at 4:30. I have two hours for classes and two years of probation. I have a lot of appointments, doctors, classes, and little free time for myself. Twice a week I have classes for domestic issues. The classes make shit hard because I got to be there. It makes life miserable. I can't put anything together that is positive. I want to start going to the gym, but it's hard with so many classes.

Homelessness is the worst possible life. For me, always growing up in a home, to end up like this is very shocking. Your life changes in a minute and you're not prepared for that.

We had issues when we were together for twenty years. We had a lot of trouble because of yelling and screaming, but they were just typical Italian family issues. See, in my case, the man loses the house. You may be able to go back in two years. The systems don't care—classes and courts—I fail, and then I go back to jail. Two years to them is short but in two years a lot can happen. I'm not twenty-years old. I don't have much time.

Nothing violent happened. We had our arguments. It was always just arguments. I got five years and two years until I can go into my house because now it is considered burglary. I have classes two times a week for \$140 a month. I'm not blaming anything. I did this to myself—not with evil intentions though.

It was just arguments. I'm sure it even goes on in the judge's house, but he doesn't go to jail.

After the first time, it snowballed because I got arrested after probation. We did counseling and all those things, but both of us are strong-willed people. Twenty years with cancer and drugs couldn't stop her. I guess I was fighting a losing battle. I went back after my first probation because I love her. I don't hold grudges. I can be intimidating I guess. My heart never had evil intentions. I was just angry.

Being instantly forgiving isn't good these days. It hasn't given me any justice at all. The world holds things against you forever. I try and let things go on. I act more out of my heart than my head, which is stupid and gets me in trouble. It's out of my emotions rather than my intelligence. I acted mainly for her and not caring how I felt, which is another big mistake. It took a while to realize this. I realized this three or four years later from the first arrest when things got progressively worse for me. I didn't break my feelings for her regardless. I didn't dwell. I just let it go and just continued life even though

deep down inside I knew we were heading down a bad road. I took what happened for what it was. I didn't imagine the long-term effects, and if I did, I still might have done something because of the emotional connection we had. I'm not sure of all of the reasons why everything happened, like not wanting to be alone. Why I continued to take abuse, I don't know. I didn't think it was selfish if I wanted to keep something right.

When we went to marriage counseling, we were so much alike—they said we didn't know where one left off and the other began. That could be a good thing, maybe, but in this case it wasn't.

My goal is to have a place to live on my own. I want to get to the gym, tan, change, lunch—just stay relaxed and then just watch movies at night. Just be as relaxed as possible. I'm fifty-eight, and I'm not going backwards in time. I made a few mistakes, and now I'm tortured and destroyed. The case manager working for me is in charge of housing applications, but I'm not hopeful. My friends aren't successful either. Belle Vista rejected me because of my record, but I'm going to appeal so I'm assuming they can help me as well. Every situation is different—it always looks worse in writing than in actuality.

Domestic issues are in vogue. Drugs used to be the big things. I understand they can't understand what is a minor and what is a big argument. I'm also trying to see a warden for a pardon. My wife is willing to go to court with me. In the heat of the moment, she can say this and that. They don't care how you feel. Because of stigma, I will always be stigmatized. At times, they knew she probably wanted me back. But they can't determine each person case by case. I'm a living hostage. She could send me to jail.

I'm not going to not care if she is alive or dead. We still want to be together but the courts don't want that because we've been fighting for years. I want to have a happy ending. Because it hasn't all worked out yet, it hasn't ended yet. As long as me and her are still alive, we'll still have a connection. I believe anything is possible.

Red Hots: a Story from an Anonymous Writer

Anonymous

One day, I was babysitting my granddaughter Jenny, who was six years old at the time. We were sitting together watching TV, and I was eating some candy, those spicy ones called Red Hots. She was intently watching me eat the candy. Finally, I asked her if she wanted some. "Jenny, they're hot. Are you sure?"

"Yes," she insisted. I dropped some into her palm and turned back to the TV.

About five minutes later, I glanced over at her. I was surprised to see that she hadn't touched a single one of the candies. Instead, she was cupping the candies in her hand and hunching over them.

"Jenny? You okay? What are you doing?"

"Grandma," she said solemnly, "I'm waiting for them to cool down."



TRAIN DEPARTURES 3:25pm

Time	Train	No.	To	Status	Track
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1000	New Haven	On Time	10
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1001	New Haven	On Time	11
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1002	New Haven	On Time	12
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1003	New Haven	On Time	13
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1004	New Haven	On Time	14
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1005	New Haven	On Time	15
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1006	New Haven	On Time	16
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1007	New Haven	On Time	17
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1008	New Haven	On Time	18
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1009	New Haven	On Time	19
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1010	New Haven	On Time	20
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1011	New Haven	On Time	21
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1012	New Haven	On Time	22
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1013	New Haven	On Time	23
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1014	New Haven	On Time	24
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1015	New Haven	On Time	25
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1016	New Haven	On Time	26
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1017	New Haven	On Time	27
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1018	New Haven	On Time	28
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1019	New Haven	On Time	29
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1020	New Haven	On Time	30

New Haven Union Station
WELCOME TO NEW HAVEN UNION STATION
Monday March 16, 2020

Welcome to New Haven Union Station

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3:25pm	New Haven Local	1000	New Haven	On Time	10
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1001	New Haven	On Time	11
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3:25pm	New Haven Local	1019	New Haven	On Time	29
3:25pm	New Haven Local	1020	New Haven	On Time	30

New Haven Union Station
WELCOME TO NEW HAVEN UNION STATION
Monday March 16, 2020

New Haven Welcome to

SPRING 2017 –
SPRING 2018

Per diem friends

TG

I waited on the platform
Watching the seasons change.
How warm weather friends
Turned lukewarm and then chilly.
Understanding the meaning of
Fair weather.
How emotions are as fickle
As the wind.
Rising and falling
Like waves on an ocean shore
And as unpredictable
As the flow of currents.
Dragging a piece of drift
Wood to its newest location.
Relationships caught in a tidal wave.
Never stagnant. Changed. Ruined. Drying.
To bring forth new life and new
Beginnings.

Suffering

Ronnie

People are suffering because politicians are debating about money.

The people who sit behind the computers work for the system. The system is broken. We don't have a budget in the state of Connecticut. Places that help people like us are closing.

They were here last night in the legislative building. The governor and all the politicians trying to come up with a budget. I slept in the rain last night, even though I'm still sick a little bit. It was beautiful. I just lay there and I let the rain fall on my face, and before I knew it I was asleep.

Knowing that they were in there debating money, I felt horrible because I wasn't the only one out there sleeping in the rain. Other people were out there too. There are animals, dogs and cats that have beds and we don't.



Life Stories

Susan

CW: self-harm, suicide

Week 1

I began my life as a normal kid. I was an honors student and an athlete. I went to school (kindergarten to eighth grade) with the same children. Then we moved to Monroe, where I had to start high school with a bunch of kids I didn't know. I felt out of place, nervous, and insecure. There were two groups of kids—the jocks and the heads. The jocks were into sports. The heads were into drugs. Well, since I was a nervous wreck, I chose the drugs. That was the beginning of the end. I tried every drug and found the ones I felt best on were tranquilizers and opiates. I became an addict, and my life has been hell ever since. I am now on methadone to keep me from using and keep me normal.

Week 2

My first story took you from my childhood to adulthood. So now I'm addicted to methadone and klonopin. But I get them legally. Before, I would obtain my drugs illegally (by calling in fake prescriptions). I got caught after two years and got sent to prison for two years (NIANTIC, the only women's prison in Connecticut). It was horrible. I saw things I will never forget. Most of the people were in there for drugs, but there were some in there for violent crimes—murder, stabbings, arson, baby abuse, etc. My cellmate was in for murder! She was a drug dealer, and one of her workers (sellers) stole \$300 dollars from her, so she had him shot and he died! Over \$300 dollars!! Then another girl was in for two counts of murder for hiring a fifteen-year-old. He was supposed to light the house on fire when no one was home. She paid with a five dollar bag of pot. But he did it at a time when everyone was home. Everyone got out except for a pregnant woman. She died and the girl who hired the fifteen-year-old (who told the cops everything) got twenty years for two counts of murder.

After I got out of prison, I went to a drug program for eighteen months. While I was there, I did several life changing things. I learned how to function without drugs because even when I was in prison, I was able to obtain drugs and continued to get high. Not in the drug program though. The drug program was called EDON house, which stood for End Dependency On Narcotics. While I was there, I went to speak about my life. From an honors student in a great family, to a drug addict that lived to get high, then to just being sick. I told the truth about everything, hoping to keep even just “one” person from becoming an addict. I felt good when I left the school—very positive.

My personal life started when I finished the program. I got married at twenty-three to a very nice looking boy who had everything. We wed and got a small house, and he had a good job, and I started my own house cleaning business which did very well. Then I started finding drugs in people's houses that I cleaned. In the kitchen or bathroom or master bedroom. So I started my drug career again and everything fell apart—my marriage, my job, everything I held dear. All I cared about

was getting high. So my marriage ended. And I spent the next 10 years doing drugs again. My life was terrible. I did things I would never do if I was straight. I went back to prison and straightened out again. This time I didn't do drugs. I was tired of being sick and tired. I did twenty months and got out. My parents were sick of my crap, so I met a nice guy who had two children—six and eight years old. We married, though the mother of the kids was an alcoholic. She told her children it was time their Dad “loved them,” and she gave them to us. We were happy and so were the children. A boy—six—and a girl—eight years old. Their mother eventually drank herself to death. The children were upset of course, but we went to therapy as a family, and they had counseling one-on-one. Everyone got over the disaster and went on with our lives. I went out with my younger sister one day, and she was getting high. The kids were at Grandma's house, my husband was at work, so I got high again. It ended badly, and my husband found out and divorced me. I'll stop here for now and continue next week.

Week 3

After my second marriage ended and I went back to drugs, it was the worst ever!! I started to lose everything by pawning things for drugs, even my car! I traded my Toyota Corolla for heroin and cocaine. I kept moving around from place to place—sister's, friends', boyfriend's. Then I met a man who was in a group with me (about drugs). I became suicidal and slit my wrists and received seven internal stitches and seven external stitches, but I survived. I still had the relationship with the man I had met who eventually became husband number three!! My life has been one chapter after another until I hit rock bottom. I went back on methadone and have been clean ever since. My husband is also on it, so we ended up marrying, we're still married—eleven years. It's been rough but I often give up on men so I'll just wait this one out. I will not go back to doing drugs illegally. I'm now fifty-eight years old and started smoking pot and doing acid at twelve years old. So I just took off from my teen years until eleven years ago.

My mind used to be so sharp. I was an honors student. Now I tell people I am a senile citizen. I hope my health gets better because I have had two heart attacks— first one at age forty, second one at age forty-five. Then at age fifty-six, I went into a diabetic coma for five days and went blind for three months. Now I'm stable and hopeful. I hope someone can learn from my mistakes. My life could have been so different. I am now homeless and living at Columbus House, waiting for a place to live. It's real, real difficult. I pray whoever reads this will turn their life around before it's too late.

Thanks for listening, and letting me vent. I still have more stories, such as a rape that happened to me while I was cleaning a house to pay off a coke bill. Lots of things like that. I have PTSD from all the bad events in my life. Don't put yourself in these kinds of situations. Again—thank you for letting me talk and tell some of my stories. I truly hope that by telling them I can possibly stop someone from ruining their life.

Precious man

Gabrielle

CW: self-harm, suicide

I'll tell the tale of a precious man
Where in his mind hides a master plan
He fools them all, he plays the part
But all the wrong things consume his heart
For him to want to take it all away
He must be incredibly hurt today
He's been thinking about this for a while
And now a chance to go out in style
Like fate, a weekend spent at home
Now he has a place to be alone
So he wanders into his room
To him could be his future tomb
How many pills does it take to end this
How many slashes to the wrist
And he thinks and he waits
But nothing will calm his heart filled with hate
Maybe this time he buys a gun
And who's to blame for his life undone
He's rash, his thoughts are spinning
Right now the devil is surely winning
So now the question is does he survive
As of right now he's still alive
But his story doesn't stop when I finish writing
Every day he will continue fighting.

I Have a Dream

Tonya

I have a dream my Life will change
no more pain, Drowning my pain into
CRACK COCAINE
Chasing, searching, selling my body to
support that HIGH
5 to 10 minutes of cloud 9 then GONE
I have A DREAM I will face my FEARS
My ADDICTION!!!
I see Dark Clouds I have brighter days
Do Have How?
Because I am BLESSED to
wake up, walk, talk, hear, see, and smell
But don't REALIZE
Still wanting that HIT
Doing anything for that FIX
I HAVE A DREAM
My strength will come
Because
God Rest My Sister's Soul
Lisa Marie Brown
No more Drowning my Pain
INTO CRACK COCAINE
I HAVE A DREAM

Let's Try This Again, Shall We?

Doug

In part two of my last article, "...and I'll Be Home for Christmas (Hopefully)" (written October 2016), I spoke about how I became homeless, my struggles, and where I was at the time with my apartment search and my appeals to Social Security.

Here is how things have been since then...

(November 2016) Since I am on a limited income, I've been looking for a place that has all utilities included. I looked at a place on Winthrop Avenue. It looked "okay" at best, but no utilities were included. Dealbreaker.

I then went to look at a place on Derby Avenue. This time I went with a friend who was interested in sharing an apartment with me at the time. The date was all set to meet with the person in charge of renting. (It wasn't the landlord.) My case manager, my friend, and I showed up for the appointment. The "renter" never showed up. I called his number, but all I got was his voicemail. The realtor's number on the sign in front of the building was out of service. Oddly, the "renter" answered when my case manager called. He (the "renter") claimed that he left messages for me saying that he wasn't in charge of renting apartments there anymore. (He didn't.) The rent was ideal; and right on the bus line too.

But, c'est la vie. Back to square one.

(December 3, 2016) I was involved in a car accident. The same friend from above & I were on our way to catch a bus on Chapel Street. She & I crossed the street at different spots. She made it across. As I was taught as a kid, I looked both ways before crossing—twice. All clear. Halfway across the street, a car backed into me from out of nowhere. I bounced off the trunk and landed on my left side. Fortunately I didn't break any bones or hit my head on the pavement. I landed on my left knee. The only visible injury I got was a bruise the size of my kneecap. As if the arthritis I have in my knees wasn't bad enough...

(December 16 through 19, 2016) On December 16, I had a follow-up appointment with my doctor. I showed her my knee, which was still very bruised. The nurse drew three vials of blood for testing.

On December 19, I received a call from the doctor's office, saying that I should report to the hospital immediately. The nurse/receptionist said that they found something wrong with the blood they drew. What was wrong? They didn't tell me over the phone. Now I'm thinking the worst—cancer? Turns out that my blood cell count was high. The knee was infected. I was in the hospital for ten days including Christmas Day. Happy ***** holidays to me. I was released on December 28th. There went my "due date" for getting my own place. I spent the next two months on the Medical Respite Floor at the Columbus House recuperating & getting physical therapy. New Year's Eve—I watched the ball drop in Times Square on my laptop— and was glad 2016 was finally over...

(Mid-February 2017) I'm back in the general population. A "new year" to resume my search for an apartment.

Also at this time, I received a letter from Social Security saying that I have a hearing date for

my appeals—April 7. I notified my lawyer, who works at Columbus House on Social Security cases, of the date. Enclosed with the letter was a CD with all of my medical information from the previous year or so. I gave this to her.

My case manager told me that, with Social Security, more doors open up in finding an apartment.

(Early March, 2017) My lawyer and I had a meeting so she could prepare me for my case in April. I told her that I was extremely nervous at this point—and my hearing was a month away. She told me not to be and to just answer the questions as honestly as I could.

(April 7, 2017) My hearing date. Honestly, I was less nervous than I was at the aforementioned meeting with my lawyer. At a last minute meeting, my lawyer repeated to me to answer the questions as best and as honestly as possible.

Overall, the hearing went smoothly. The worst was over. Now it's time to play "the waiting game." My lawyer told me that she was 99.9% sure the ruling would be in my favor. I will hear one way or another in three to four weeks.

(April 11, 2017) My fifty-first birthday.

(2017) May 1st marks two years of being homeless. With this writing and in the previous issue, this is my life—the good, the bad and the ugly.

I ask those who read this and other articles in this edition to please keep the homeless in your thoughts. Please remember that we are human beings who have had a run of bad luck regardless of the circumstances. We are just like you. We deserve the same basic needs as you. Remember—you could be in our position.

Thank you.

Jail Story

Ernest

When you go into jail, you never tell nobody your story. Not even what's the crime you came in for. Because the guys that's in there, they hold it against you. They pick with you, they nag you, and some will fight you. So what you do is you go in alone, and you come out alone. You have some fights, and you have some arguments. But if you can't fight, just don't pay it no mind, because you will learn how to fight in jail, and you will learn how to be a man in jail. Just don't let the small things bother you—the bartering, the bickering, the going back and forth. If you're not going to fight the dude there's no need for arguing. All it's going to do is give you a headache. If you let the small things bother you, you'll be all messed up, because jail will make you or break you. I know, because now, at fifty-three years old, I finally came to my senses and realized that.

The True Story of a Tranny

Monique

CW: abuse, rape, suicide

PART I

Living the life I live is not easy; I don't know if it's my record or my lifestyle.

I've been in and out of jail all my life, since the age of thirteen. My mother was doing drugs, and I always wanted to be like her. One day her door was locked, and I took a butter knife to undo it. I saw her doing drugs. And that was it. I was molested by her boyfriend, and she never believed me.

I have a lot of issues. I do robberies because I never felt loved by my family so I acted out—I feel bad about it. I'm forty-five, and I can't get a job; I've never had a job. They put me in a men's correctional facility, and I was raped, even though they put me in a room alone. I don't wanna go back; I'm trying my hardest.

I don't know how many medications I'm on right now. I cry a lot; I've had depression since I was little, diagnosed in jail but I didn't believe them until I got out here. I hear voices so I lash out at people. I once shot a dart at my sister and hit her in the face. I had a lot of fights trying to hide my gayness, bullied. People call me fag, I was ready to fight. But now I don't care as long as they don't touch me. It's my motive, love it or hate it.

When I turned eighteen, I started transitioning to a woman. I had to sneak my sister's clothes out of the house. My mother wanted me to be a regular gay person and not a tranny; my name used to be Chastity because I was a virgin until I was twenty-five, but no one believed me. Then I started prostituting; I tried to sleep with people who had AIDS to kill myself.

Life as a tranny is hard. Bathrooms ain't nothing. I used to do escorts but I stopped, I can't be a white trap piece. I don't want people using me for sex. I had a couple friends that have been killed, fooling people. Pam and Janine. They're wild and crazy. I'm not here to fool with anybody. I gotta get myself together before a relationship. No sex—I ain't got time for that. If it's real, it's real. If you pressure me for sex, I don't believe you. The furthest thing from my mind is sex.

I told my mother I'm sorry for all the things I put her through, I don't know if she accepted it. Now she drinks instead of doing drugs, and that's my trigger, that's why I robbed her. She gotta know what triggers me—her drunk talk like “You're stupid, you don't know nothing, you been in jail your whole life.” My mother has a lot of health problems. She's in a motor wheelchair, has an oxygen tank. I tried to kill her before—I was living with her in the old folks home, and I took the oxygen tank off while she was sleeping and poured bleach in it. Later I told her everything (my lawyer told me not to) and said sorry, and we both cried.

I have a gay sister who says I can't be around her kids. It hurts my feelings not to see them. I love my nieces. One died in her sleep, and I only saw her once. I love my family and I want them to accept me for who I am. I don't care about anyone else. I don't have any friends. They say they're my friends but then they're asking me to do drugs with them. If you're my good friend, you don't do that. Me and my mother argue a lot, but she gave me \$30 for an ID so that's a start. My other sister

told me, “I’m proud of you.” We’re trying to get along better.

I don’t want my life to go to waste. I want to help other people. I don’t like people to be made fun of, like on TV. If I ever get out of here... I would like working with handicapped people or old people. I really am a good person, if you get to know me. I’m trying to be remembered by the good stuff that I did. And I like to look good every day. I stole some make-up today—I ain’t proud of it. But I do my own hair, I make my own clothes. It takes a lot of work, but I do it. Whitney Houston is my idol, I like Mary J. Blige, and I might change my name again to Samantha Fox, that’s a celebrity name.

PART II

Today I might go to a little club, not a big club. I don’t drink though. People don’t believe me; I’m not into that. A couple sips, and that’s it for me.

I quietly think about my life.

My sister, the lesbian, had a child. She was gonna give him up for adoption but then she got attached. When he turned fifteen, he was being bullied for being a momma’s boy. He ran away and stumbled upon a woman’s dead, beaten body. The DNA didn’t match, but the judge said he must’ve been involved somehow and he got seventy-five years. My sister tried to kill herself, she’s so sad. That’s her only child.

I write to him, tell him I’m sorry.

It was ’89, he’s twenty-seven now, on year twelve;

She doesn’t like living alone.

(His father, the man that raped her, is in jail.) My brother was with this white girl stripper, who never told him—I didn’t know he was sick until he died of AIDS. Six months later. The girl came over, we all jumped on her, beat her up bad. My sister is trying to sue her, saying it’s murder. She’s still walking, giving it to people.

I’m closer to my family than ever before. I try to be the best person that I can be. I try to change my ways. I wish I could start back when I turned thirteen.

I’m HIV free, thank God. For me to say I love somebody, I gotta love myself first. I don’t talk with psychiatrists like this.

Life is a joyful thing to have.

I just want all this hatred against gay people to stop. My sis says, “You should go back to being a boy,” “You don’t need to dress that way every day, you can do it once in a while.” But this is who I am.

I struggle with the Lord.

One day God loves you. One day, “It’s an abomination what you’re doing.” I believe God made me this way. People say I’m going to hell, I say you’re not God. People think I don’t have feelings, but I regret all the things I have done in my life. I just want to inspire somebody to do everything in their life, appreciate life, get to know God better.

Tomorrow is not guaranteed.



FALL 2018 –
SPRING 2020



William Ohl

Fisherman's Story

Tyson

I'm homeless, and it's hard. You don't know where you'll sleep, eat, or how you'll survive. I have two daughters too. One is eight years old, and one is ten years old. I have to worry about them and their needs. It's really hard to be happy because I can't see them all the time. I haven't seen them in seven months. We would like to watch TV, do homework, play outside, and fish together. We always went to lakes to fish, and we would fish for all kinds of fish.

If I had one day to do anything, I would go fishing and hunting. I'd also work on trucks. I like to drive trucks. I had a truck at one point in my life. My ex-wife rolled it. My strongest skill is fishing. I've fished all my life. I taught myself. When I am fishing, I feel free. I am free from everything. It's relaxing. Fishing feels like an escape. The best time to fish is when it's drizzling. That's when the fish bite more—when it's drizzling.

Last summer was the last time I went fishing. I was out on a boat, and I caught twenty-three fish. I released them all. When I eat fish, I cook them myself. My daughters have eaten the fish I've cooked for them.

Missing You

Ivy

I am sitting here today in a nice quiet place. Today's date is April 20th. I'm thinking about you. I remember the night you died. 1997. While I sat in my jail cell, I could feel my heart break, a pain I'd never felt before. And as I was saying to you I'm sorry, I heard your voice saying, It's ok, Mommy. You know months before, I could feel that something was going to happen. My first question to God was are you going to have a hard life? Thirty days before you died, I asked God were you going to die? But I tell you, I miss you so much. And I wish my young man could be here right now. You know, your brother celebrates your birthday every year, and he goes to your gravesite and has a drink. But for me, I mourn you every year. The anniversary of your death is the hardest for me. Thinking about my boy, but knowing he's ok. RJ, Mommy loves and misses you. And always will. So as I get through this day, I'll remember my love for you, and wishing that I could still hold you one more time. I know your spirit lives on and that you're with the rest of your family and your brothers and sisters who are with you. And I'll see you all one day.

Love and miss you,
Mommy

Being a Single Mom

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.

Darlene

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 twenty-two years. She birthed me. I will always call her name.

Mental Illness

Cheryl

CW: abuse

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 something was 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.

At the Cocktail Party

Harry

I went to a party at a swank apartment complex. Everyone in attendance was holding a red plastic cup with beer in it. But I was not holding a drink. Many of the guests said to me, “Dude, why don’t you have a drink?” I gave a different answer to each of them. Here were my answers:

1. Because I’m not thirsty.
2. Because I’m a non-conformist.
3. Because drinking loosens your tongue, and you start saying “like” all the time.
4. Because I don’t want to be mentally impaired.
5. Because drinking is a crutch, and I don’t like crutches.
6. Because I have to walk home.
7. Because everyone here is holding a red Solo cup.
8. Because I don’t like the food.
9. Because I drank something at home.
10. Because I am protesting the nomination of Judge Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court.
11. Because this is not the beer that made Milwaukee famous.
12. Because my canteen is in the car.
13. Because they don’t have my favorite beverage (peach tree schnapps and cranberry juice).
14. Because I gave it up for Lent.
15. Because the bartender looks like Bill Cosby.
16. Because it’s St. Patty’s Day, and there’s no green vodka.
17. Because it would make me feel like I’m on a reality show called the Real Housewives of Milford.
18. Because there is a wicked leprechaun on my shoulder who keeps telling me to drink the green beer.
19. Because I would rather smoke pot, but nobody has some.
20. Because I don’t want to be one of the lemmings who are going to jump off the nearest cliff when this party comes to an end at dawn.
21. Because people are playing beer pong without a table.
22. Because there were 99 bottles of beer on the wall. Since I didn’t want the drunken crowd to start singing that song, I refused to take one.
23. Because the world’s most interesting man said, “Stay thirsty, my friends,” and I’m just trying to follow his advice.

Siempre Serás Mi Niña Hermosa

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.

I Am

I Am

I went to the store to get some food,
and when I got there,
I forgot why I went.

How silly of me.
I saw this dog, and he looked at me
and barked. I asked him

“What’s the matter?” He turned
around and ran away.

In my life, I like to do good
and help people. I like to walk
with other people too.

This makes me sing. Once,
I sang a song about Jesus,
and someone said,
“Sing it again.”

We went outside, and I sang
it again. There, I saw this lady
who was walking a cat.

I said, “Hi, Kitty Cat.”
The lady asked me
what my name was.

I said, “I Am.”

I went back to the house,
where a man was sitting inside.
I asked him, “Who are you?”

He said his name was Hammer.
Then, he asked me
why my name is “I am.”

I went to sit down,
and he started to cry.

I did not know what to do
but to keep to myself.

I was glad that he helped
other people
and even pets, too.

I think to myself:

Roses are red
Violets are blue
and, to him, I said
I love you.

At the Window's Edge

Kevin

Standing at the window's edge
thinking of the trouble ahead.

Decisions that will be made
hurt and pain cannot be avoided today,
let's open the window just a crack.

Is there a breeze? Or are there flies and gnats?
Is there a chance we can close this window back?

What if it slams and the glass just shatters, cutting
our wrists and necks?

Is it really that bad to face this relationship we made?

Why can't we call it quits...? Shake hands and start over as
friends.

What's wrong with honesty and honor? Sincerity holds so
much power.

Forgiveness followed by a hug. Let's edify one another in
the mist of this emotional shower.

Baby, we're standing at the window's edge.
No one wants to jump. Let's support each other instead.

Friends then it shall be...stepping away from the window's edge.

Elmo

Heidi

I did animal rehabilitation when my children were growing up. We've had rabbits and chipmunks and squirrels, raccoons, possums, and deers, to name a few. But I was especially drawn to rehabilitating squirrels, because they're so funny. We had one squirrel who was named Peanut who wouldn't leave, and each time we let him loose, he came back to the front door. We raised him for eight and a half years, and then he passed away.

A few years later, I got another baby squirrel that had fallen from its nest, and I named him Elmo for the Elm City where he was found. He had a disability: His teeth didn't grow downward, they grew backward, the front two teeth. So I found a vet, a very special person, who neutered him and trimmed his teeth and nails each month. I couldn't have released him because he would've starved to death, because his teeth grew into the roof of his mouth. He used to sit on my lap and watch TV like a cat, and you could pet him. He was free to roam my bedroom, and he only peed in his cage. He was potty-trained. And he had all his nuts all over my clothes, in my bedroom, in my shoes. You should've met this squirrel. He was such a doll. The vet cut his teeth and nails without having to anesthetize him. The vet was in love with him. She used to show him to everyone else in the office and say, "This is the best squirrel." I wish you could've seen him. You would've loved him. He was really, really cute.

It was three seasons that I lived in my mom's house, without heat and without air conditioning. So I went through the seasons with this squirrel. And he would sleep in different spots for each season: one area with a breeze for the summertime, and during the winter he made himself a warm nest out of my socks that he snagged. He was really fast too. He was really a little imp. I used to buy him nuts that were shelled because he couldn't open them because of his teeth. I bought him cashews and pignoli nuts at \$6.99 an ounce. So he ate very well. Expensive, but I had raised my children, so he was my only baby to spoil.

But the time came for my mom to sell her home, and I had to move, so Elmo had to stay at my boss's house next to the barn. Her cat decided that Elmo was fair game and knocked his cage over. And Elmo ran, not knowing how to avoid predation, and fell into the horse's water bucket and drowned. I was sorry to see him go, but I know he had three and a half wonderful years that he couldn't have had if we had never met. And I know now he's running around the trees in heaven, with chocolate coconut Lindt bars—we had favorites together, and we used to tear those up. But his time had come, and my time had come. I was grateful to have three and a half years. So that's Elmo.

Dreams of a Homeless Man...Only Nightmares

Terry

The world today is so confused and out of touch with what normal is. Because if you're being judged by society as normal based on the things you have, it's very sad to be a part of any society. Society calls people normal because they have a place to live, because of the money they have, the cars they drive, the clothes they wear or the food they eat; their dreams are bright, colorful, and sweet.

Being a homeless person, my dreams are darkness, stress, hunger, and loneliness. My dreams were so bright and beautiful before I became homeless. I dreamed of making the good money, but now I dream of getting fifty cents or a dollar. I know the nightmare of asking or standing with a sign for eight or more hours a day and not getting a penny. I dreamed of having my own home, but now it's a nightmare to go to sleep and wake up to realize all that you have has been stolen. Or freezing to death in your sleep. Or being arrested for trying to sleep like normal people. Trying to get from place to place with all your belongings is like that nightmare when you wake up in a cold sweat, because it was that real. When you're told you can't get on a bus to go to an appointment, because you have too much stuff to bring on the bus: it's the nightmare of knowing that you have to leave your things behind and that your stuff is your entire life, only to return to find out your life has been stolen.

The normal people get crazy when their car radio gets stolen. Normal people eat three or more meals a day and waste more than they eat. But I have nightmares of trying to get at least one meal a day and hoping I don't miss that one, because if I do, I know it will be a long night of drinking water and fighting that pain that won't stop.

Even though I am living these things on a daily basis, I don't see different people; I see people as equal. It's very small-minded of people to base a person's worth or whether they're part of society based on the things they have. There is not one homeless person I have met since I have been out here that wants to be homeless and doesn't want to get rid of the nightmares every day of their lives. So for all the normal people that look down on that homeless person, think before you react. Because that person may be the one that gives you a hand if you're in trouble, or keeps you from becoming homeless and called not normal, away from all the nightmares.

The greatest one
I know was born homeless
And now he's the king of
Us all.
(Jesus Christ our Savior)

Communing with the Wind

Cedric

As the wind blew, my ears heard the sound of a gentle song. It was a beautiful symphony that had the power to engulf my soul, as I could hear the passion in the tone. I tried to follow the person who was singing this melody of bliss, but to no avail; I just couldn't find the source of the song that echoed in my head as the wind blew. As I walked aimlessly through the meadows under this star-filled sky, I wondered if the song I heard was the wind blowing over the land, as if to signify a sign of hope. But as I almost gave up on trying to find this singer who touched my heart, I came across this beautiful lake with a waterfall. In the center of the lake was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. As I tried to call out to her to find out the name of the song she was singing, the wind stopped blowing when she stopped singing. She started to slowly make her way to me. It was like her hair was that of gold shining in the moonlight, and her eyes were such a light blue that they looked like they were glowing. I asked her for the name of the song she was singing, and what she said I will never forget: "I was not singing. I was talking to the wind about the world and this beautiful night we are having." I then asked why the wind stopped blowing, and she simply said it was taking in the beautiful view.

The Meaning of Tattoos

Richard

Tattoos bring me joy. It's not a special kind of joy, but it's like a song kind of joy. At night I turn into a gargoyle, and I fly across the world with my tattoos through a graveyard, through the night. And I am in the sky, floating around in the sky with my wings. I'm very careful and very scared of tattoos because they bring a lot of pain on my body. I fly like a gargoyle in the sky, day or night. My tattoos don't like drugs or alcohol. They like to be clean to bring more power to my tats. The story never stops. Tattoo power is joy, bring pain, bring tears, bring blood, bring joy. The story is about to end because my tiger paws are a white and black, blue-eyed tiger. It's a little cub but it turns big sometimes when somebody stomps at it and it attacks. Goodbye.



This was tough to shoot; it was just after dawn and there was very little light. I liked the haunting and ominous vibe the scene offered. It could be more interesting, that's for sure, but the mood offered caused me to go with what I captured. The testing site is adjacent to where I'm living now; it opened two or three weeks ago. A day has yet to pass by without there being a long line of people in cars waiting their turn for the test. We're heading in the right direction; we still have a long way to go. —William Ohl

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