



 Elm City Echo



# Elm City Echo

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# Elm City Echo

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## Mission

*The Elm City Echo is a street periodical. All of our content is produced by marginalized members of the New Haven community who sell each issue on a micro-enterprise model. Our mission is to create economic and expressive opportunities for those experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness.*

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# Letter from the Editors

Dear New Haven,

We hope you enjoy reading the 10th issue of the *Elm City Echo* as much as we have enjoyed putting it together. Over the past five years, much has changed in New Haven. Yet, the *Echo* remains a steady entry point into a community that persists even when the city around it shifts. As the new Editors-in-Chief of New Haven's only street periodical, we are very excited to keep the publication alive and to see what the next few years have in store.

The *Echo* aims to serve as a platform for the voices of New Haven's homeless communities. Our volunteers visit shelters in the city each week to help individuals find a story they want to tell or workshop pieces they've already written. Twice a year, we compile the written stories and publish them in the *Echo*, which our homeless vendors sell around New Haven, keeping the majority of the profits for themselves.

There's a lot of love in this issue. We enjoyed talking to Margaret about her love of cooking—be sure to look out for her delicious stuffing recipe—and to Sidney about all of his ways of loving. His poem, "Unconnected," captures the dance between two individuals in a courtship. Dana shared a more distant love of the constant presence of the stars.

Too often, it is too easy to avoid the many faces of homelessness in our community. However, in 2015, around 3,600 individuals experienced homelessness each night in Connecticut. Nationally, 578,000 individuals a night sleep without a home of their own. That's slightly less than the entire population of Las Vegas. These people tend to sleep outside, in emergency shelters, or in transitional housing programs.

As you read these stories, you'll notice that people find themselves un-housed due to a number of issues, both structural and personal. Stories like Jasmine's teenage pregnancy, Thomas's mental disability, and Dee Dee's drug addiction illustrate common personal causes of homelessness. While personal reasons reveal themselves more in the issue, structural issues are just as important to the enduring reality of homeless in New Haven and the United States. Poor housing markets, the effects of deindustrialization on cities, and discrimination deeply effects these individuals' lives as well.

We hope these stories will not only make these faces visible, but show them to be more than their living situations. Especially now when it's cold and all we want is to make it quickly to the next warm place, it's easy to forget to acknowledge one another as we rush past. We hope the *Echo* will remind readers to seek out other's stories beyond these pages. Thank you for taking a moment to buy and read the *Echo*. Stay warm until spring!

Yours,



Julia Hamer-Light  
Editor-in-Chief



Abigail Schneider  
Editor-in-Chief

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## I am what I am

by 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 awhile: someone told. 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.

## It's another day

by Andrew

You have to get up  
and live for today.

You have to face  
the things in your life  
of homelessness.

You have to try  
to better your life  
by working to get what you need  
such as food  
and a place to live  
because it is getting colder.

But if you don't try  
to get off your seat  
to get it,  
don't wait for it  
to be given to you.

You have to work  
to get it  
because you weren't born  
with a silver spoon in your mouth.  
You have to make it  
and you can never stop.



# My first experience in the shelter

by Iesha

It was the most horrible experience of my life. When I walked in I didn't know what to expect. I forced myself to go there even though I didn't want to be there. What brought me to the shelter was not committing to an agreement with my family members. I was tired of getting kicked out and sleeping in the streets. Tired of being cold. A lot of my belongings got stolen from the shelter in Waterbury and in Columbus House. I hated being there but I had to stick it out in order for me to get the help I needed. The food was horrible. It was bed bug infested. The showers were nasty. It just wasn't my cup of tea. I don't ever want to go through this again in my life. Being in Columbus House is way worse than being in the Waterbury Shelter. Columbus House is very strict and I don't like it at all. But I am a strong survivor in the shelters. I don't want any of my loved ones to ever experience what I experienced in the shelter. They treat us like we are nothing, like we aren't human. They don't treat us right. They act like we can't have personal belongings that we need. Every shelter is different, so every experience is different. My boyfriend James stuck by my side 100% whether I was right or wrong. He stuck with me until the end of my experience in the shelter. Big shout out to my boyfriend because he had my back no matter what, and I want to say thank you to him.

---

## Untitled

by Grace

Age 14 was my first line of blow,  
Moved to crack, never took it slow.  
Raped and molested just trying to numb the pain,  
Life wasn't easy, it always seemed to rain,  
Dazed 'n confused the razor became a friend  
Slitting my wrists is where it began  
How did this happen, when will it end.  
I've needed a way out for oh so long,  
That's the only reason I bought that gun.  
16 years old one bullet to the brain,  
could have ended it all, yet I'm still here in pain.  
Now living this life day by day  
Praying to God just to save me anyway.

## Livin' life

by Rhonda

People make this world of  
ours worth livin'. Sometimes livin'  
life's hard to do, all  
the joys and the sorrows that  
surround me, well I'll take the time  
and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'm gonna  
sit down and sing this song out loud, let  
the people hear my song around  
the land, give them happiness and  
love, share their freedoms, and  
give out from my heart all that I can!  
A song by the "Voice" Don Grady's singer,  
musician, and entertainer extraordinaire!



# A gift from God

by Angie

Life is a struggle.  
I never thought I would have to struggle being in a shelter, being here, meeting people like my family—  
I never thought I'd be in this predicament.  
I pray to God every day to fulfill my needs that I can get back on my feet,  
That I can be back with my family.  
I miss cooking, cleaning, listening to music, dancing,  
Helping people in the street.

I never forgot where I came from:  
Grew up in the Hill neighborhood.  
Whenever they called me, I was there.  
My door was always open  
I watched people's kids  
Raise they children up, from their community.  
Tell them, don't go down the wrong path like I did.

Hopefully things will get better in my life, God willing.  
I'm a strong person  
I'm a go-getter  
I'm a people person.  
I pray to God things will get better for me and my family someday. I lost a lot:  
I buried my child  
I buried my son  
I buried my father.  
God gave me another chance at life.

I never thought I'd live to see forty.  
I met a man, I named him forty.  
My first son, he was my angel.  
I call him Tootoo, cause I couldn't  
Call him after his father  
I couldn't give him his father's name because he was my angel.  
He was my Tootoo, he was my everything.

I have two beautiful, lovely daughters  
I call my queens.  
I have two beautiful daughters  
They mean the world to me.  
I look at 'em, they look just like me.  
They have an attitude  
They have an attitude I can't explain  
But their personality is still the same  
They sweet as can be  
I always told 'em don't grow up to be like me.  
They have beautiful smiles  
They have funny jokes just like me.  
When I hear them talk they sound like me.  
I thank God every day I live to see my grandchildren  
I thank God I gave birth to my children  
I love them with all my heart.  
And my other child, Antwan  
He's in heaven  
He's my other angel.

I'm Angie B, I'm an Angel of God  
That's how I look at myself.  
I'm like a floating butterfly.  
*continued on page 9...*



... continued from page 8

I like to cook, sing, dance, swim. I like to have reunions, gather my family together.  
I give people uplifting, give 'em good feedback.  
I'm a very positive person. I just pray to God  
I come out of my struggle.  
You never know where you're gonna go  
But life's a bitch. I'm learning every day how to survive.  
I'm a survivor. There's no turning back.  
I feel like I'm reborn.  
I lost a lot,  
I gained more in the end. Things gotta get better for me, my kids, my grandkids.  
I been in and out of prison.  
Things gotta get better for me. Things gotta get better,  
I pray to God, amen. There's no turning back. Keep on moving.  
And I learned to love myself today.

# I like to cook

by Margaret

My ma used to cook me some squash and I used to go to bed hungry. All of that stuff is rabbit food. Squash, okra, beets, cauliflower, I don't eat none of that. Never.

I like potato salad, spaghetti, lasagna, salad—that I'll eat—hamburgers, mac & cheese, barbeque spare ribs, fried chicken, kale, and rice.

My son is a chicken guy, but my girls like their pork shoulder. My daughter Dana, if you put something in front of her, she'll eat it. Emma's not going to eat it if it's not junk food. Cookies, candy, chips, Mickey D's, Chinese. She's a junk food junkie. Tamara, she'll basically eat anything as long as it's food.

My-My, my granddaughter, she wants to cook real bad. She's 7 years old. Her mother won't let her near the stove. I would let her do the things she can do, as far as letting her beat the cake mix or mix up the salad. She wants to be one of the best chefs in the world so I won't have to do anything. She wants to get herself a big house with two built in ovens. I don't like to bake, but with two built in ovens, I'll learn how. It could get burnt up and I'll just try again. And I'll dirty up all the dishes. My-My told me the other day, "When I grow up I'm gonna do that but I'm gonna do that different." She's a good kid, she really is.

## *A stuffing recipe from Margaret*

I get the old fashioned cornmeal off the truck, and some eggs, butter, and some turkey legs or even wings, and some celery. I sprinkle bread-crumbs and put some bell seasoning in there. I get a can of chicken broth and throw a little in there to loosen it up. I let it brown, leave it in there for about an hour. The ends have to be crispy.



# Untitled

by Shay

I've spent years on the ceiling to finally come down.  
crash. feel. be  
my own self.

It hurts down here on the floor. The ground is evil.  
Who stole my wings? Many times I find myself reaching  
to the sky grabbing at the clouds. Maybe it's better  
having my feet on the ground and my head in the  
clouds.

Jealousy, envy the sexy beautiful people I am  
chasing, always striving to be.

If I was stronger I would throw up more than I do,  
VOMIT.

But time has told me I am a coward, couldn't even  
find the job of ending my own life. Pathetic, lazy get  
to the gym.

Hiding from the world I am so unsure. What are you  
running for? No one is going to want a sex object that  
isn't sexy anymore.

Is it that I can be broken so easily because I don't have  
the power of pussy? I am an empty woman. If there  
was a prince for me, he was just too late.

I am treated like a woman but lesser.

Women's rights issues while being called pato nigga  
faggot thing. A thing, always a thing.

A monster may be devouring everything I am capable  
of but I am so anxiety stuck I cannot even jump for  
my prey. I am the prey, the hunted. I always thought  
it'd be the other way around.

Living socially awkwardly, feeling everyone's eyes  
raping me every second of everyday.

They want me. They hate me. They are disgusted by  
me. Some are jealous. Some are vicious. This is what

I wanted. No. This is what I'm getting. Empty prom-  
ises. Shattered dreams like broken glass. Cinderella's  
slipper will never fit this foot.

But I will pretend every trick that has ever picked me  
up was like her chariot ride to the palace to find a  
prince. DISTORT YOUR REALITY IT MAKES IT  
EASIER TO SWALLOW LIKE ALL MY PILLS.

Kill me pills, no one cares. I got pills 'cause I'm me, I  
got pills 'cause you're you, I got pills 'cause I'm blonde,  
I got pills 'cause you're dead, I got pills so baby forget  
what I said. I got pills 'cause I'm old, I got pills 'cause  
you're gone, I got pills for my pain, I got pills not to  
gain. I got pills for my sleep, for my PTSD dreams. I  
got pills, kill me pills, give me pills to shut my mouth  
and control my vulgar human nature, numb me, but  
they don't. Those haven't been invented yet; my toler-  
ance forsakes me.

I am barely breathing. You are all holding my head  
underwater, my weave is loose, do you see the tracks?  
All my loves in vain, all my loves in blood. I cannot  
find a vein ... you come to me injectable and ready  
to digest where lullabies come cry at night, where no  
one's ever slept.

You want her on the bed with her legs wide open and  
her ass all spread,

watch her wrap her legs around this world

Stab the gutter right out of that girl, standing on the  
hooker strip—

I think that's when I lost my grip  
and my soul began to rip.

If the ocean's in the way, I will swim to you and you  
will hit me and it will feel like love.

He hit me and it felt like a kiss.

*continued on page 11...*

*...continued from page 10*

When you're in the whirlpool and they try to suck  
you in remember you aren't going to drown baby, not  
until you've had a life  
Hang on to me forever baby, I could always swim.  
Hush your highness, don't you breathe baby hold me

in your arms, I'm shivering, what WAS all that for?  
If I was the battle baby, you have won the war.  
I cannot help your suffering.  
I am not here to ease your pain.  
I'm never coming back to your surrender  
Baby I am gone forever.

## *Poems by Sidney*

### Unconnected

What if  
Why not  
Maybe so  
Still, it's not happening.

Could be  
Just might  
Very soon  
Still, it's not happening.

You  
Me  
Still, it's not happening.

### Wisdom

If there's a sun in the sky,  
then let it shine with heat and warmth.

If there's a sky up about,  
then let the rain fall out of the clouds.

If there's love amongst us,  
then why is there war upon us now?

### Sensitive Man

I know you have that image to live  
upstanding it stayed  
I'm like that too  
wanting the best from you/out of you  
do the best  
giving in ain't giving up

so where is that perfect plan  
for such a sitting soul  
with strong gazing stares

you  
set what can't be still  
as you are what you are  
you are what you are

sensitive man

you think I don't care or love  
see, sometimes I fall behind it all

say you know my thoughts  
I wonder  
as I think of you  
is there an illusion of you

No, just a perfect fusion found  
keep it  
nice to let it hang around...

# Talking about my dog Molly

by Tracy

We got Molly when she was a pup. She was a very big pup – so big that when she came in the door I thought I couldn’t pick her up. Then I walked right up to her and picked her right up because she was so beautiful and so cute I couldn’t resist. When I put her on my chest, she started sucking my earlobe like she thought I was her mother trying to feed her. She was young, and she just missed her mother a lot. So a few days went by, and I got the doggy cookie treats out. I put one in the middle of the floor, and I taught her how to bark. When my mother heard Molly’s high pitched bark, she yelled at me, “WHY’D YOU TEACH HER HOW TO BARK?!”

After a couple months, as Molly was growing up, she was going through her awkward stage. Her ears stood up, but they were crossing each other and they looked really ugly—of course, we couldn’t tell her that. As months went by, her ears stood up straight, and she looked really beautiful. We took her to the vet, and they started putting her picture up all over the place. Then they started taking pictures of her and putting them in magazines.

As she got bigger, my mother told me she was my twin sister, and that she was better looking than I was. Ever since then, she’s been my sister. I get in trouble for whatever she does. She and I did everything together for a few months. She is my best friend, and I love her so much.

Her father (my stepfather) takes her to play outside. She plays fetch, but she hasn’t got the idea yet. She just doesn’t bring back the ball, so you have to chase her to get it back. And if you don’t play with Molly, you will play, because she’ll make you play. She’s a very demanding dog.

When she comes in from outside, she goes right for the cookie box. She has to have her cookies. And she can’t eat just one. She has to have two before she eats her breakfast. She’s very demanding about her breakfast, too. Breakfast must be on time. Then she goes outside and does her business, and when she comes in, she just lays down and goes to sleep.

It’s her birthday in November, and she’ll be seventy (in dog years). I wouldn’t trade her for the world.

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# Untitled

by Tina

I was talking to my chubby cousins, Tizzy and Da-Da, about the importance of keeping themselves fit by posing this question: What if one day while you were in the grips of your favorite video game, the First Alert system interrupted you to tell you of an emergency and continuously repeated, “This is not a drill!” Would you have the stamina and the wherewithal to get yourself and your mom, who for some reason or another has gone into shock, a full ten blocks to the nearest fallout shelter without collapsing in a heap? And in the midst of your tears you hear me say: If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.

# Finding love in a shelter

by Rhonda

*I need to tell my story to people who have lost hope when it comes to love. It is possible to find intimacy in a relationship when you're in a shelter.*

I had to put my life back together in the shelter because it had become dysfunctional. I lost everything—materialistic stuff, emotional stuff, my feelings, my dignity, my respect. When I became homeless I started calling on Jesus and He is now the center of my life. Jesus began to restore everything that I lost in my life like my family, my friends, my associates, my co-workers. Everyone around me began to come back into my life. But one thing that I was really missing was intimacy with a partner who I can call my lover and who I can share my sorrow, my tears, my joy, and my finances with.

My lifestyle is homosexuality and I am not ashamed to say that or tell anyone about that. I can be honest and say that I was just sitting there not even thinking about love or relationships. All I knew is that I had an empty place in my heart that needed to be filled. As I was sitting in the shelter and thinking about that void, this special person walked past me. I knew she was special because we made eye contact and even though I didn't believe in love at first sight, I knew she was the one. I was bashful and shy. I didn't know how to approach her so I used one of my girl friends as a mouthpiece to ask the special person if I could talk to her. My special person let my friend know that she didn't go that way. But I pursued the matter because it didn't matter to me whether she went that way or not. I knew she was the one for me.

I tried to be her friend, say hi, sit at her table and play cards, eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner with her. We became associates. I started spending quality

time with her on Saturdays going down to the Green, sitting in the library, getting acquainted. We were always talking about each other's lives because I needed to know her very much. Then we started going on dates. We went out a couple of times and she still was turning me down, but deep in my heart I was still sure that she was the one. I began to really be persistent about the issue. I remember on one day I told her that I really admired her and she smiled. Even at nights I used to walk up to her bedroom and I didn't enter into the bedroom, I would just stop at the doorway just to say goodnight. That went on for a month. I believed it was love at first sight, but she said I was infatuated. I knew the difference between infatuation and love. And what I felt for her was love.

As the days went on I still was persistent about how I felt. We went to the movies, went to lunch, talked about each other's strengths and weaknesses. It was just one day that I popped that question. Would you like to be my lover? She didn't say yes or no; we just began to draw closer. I told her that I wanted her heart. She answered that God already had her heart. I said that I didn't want all of her heart, just a part of it. Following that day, there was one special night we became intimate, and it was okay with her. Then we became committed to each other. She didn't love me as much as I loved her but I had to show her, prove to her that I was worth her love. I did that and finally she fell for me. Now she loves me also. I am in a relationship with her today. It seems like we've been going together for many years. It is scary but I know I trust her. There is an age difference, but age is nothing but a number. Each and every day we still learn more about each other. That is how I found love again in a shelter.

# Dear Reader

by Manon

*Dear Reader,*

I have been homeless for a year and a half, but only half of that time is taken into account because you must be officially considered homeless by recoding in a shelter. So if you're not considered chronically homeless you can't receive help. I'm up at 5:00am and out at 6:45 am and scared; I must find something to do until at least 3:00pm. It could be worse, but it's scary. I graduated Newbury College with an Associate degree in Hotel Restaurant Management. I am a certified electromechanical technician. I never imagined I would be homeless. I have a son and four grandkids. They are wonderful. I graduated high school (Long Island, New York) and moved to Boston to go to college. I was sixteen years old. I went to Northeastern University for Criminal Justice. I met a pimp and my whole life was turned around. I was on the honor roll and studying to be a lawyer some day. Well that all changed. I became a street walker still determined not to give up on my studies. After a year, of course I failed my courses. This man changed my life so much I didn't know if I was coming or going.

I went to school, I came home; I was going to the corner store. A car drove by and skidded on the brakes. He followed me, he followed me home. He said, you got red hair to turn me on. I gave him my phone number. That's where I messed up. He pulled off my hat, talked about my red hair, and I gave him my phone number. He called me. And he kept calling me.

He called me, and he asked me out to dinner. And he asked me where I wanted to go. And I said dinner and a movie. And he said he wanted an Indian massage. I asked what that was and he said a nude massage. And I didn't want him to call me anymore after that because that's not what I was into. But he kept calling.

I had two part-time jobs and I was going to school full-time. He said he stole drugs from someone and they were gonna hurt him and I believed him. I took out all my money and my savings and I gave it to him. It was about \$350. It wasn't a whole lot.

The drug dealers were supposed to be after him if he didn't pay them. And I got drawn in. I didn't want them to hurt him, so I got more involved. In criminal justice, and there I was spending time with a criminal. I thought I was on a good path. Sixteen and in college and in my own apartment. I was on a good path and then I met that guy. And he turned out to be my son's father. I married him when I got pregnant. I was seventeen when I got pregnant. I had my son when I was eighteen.

He wouldn't leave me alone. My mother said, "Of course he's not gonna leave. He has it made. Free place to live. You're supporting him." But back then I didn't understand that basic needs were enough reason to stay with someone.

You can't really blame someone for the mistakes you made because you made them on your own. I fell in love, head over heels. The best thing ever. He still calls me. He is in touch with his son and his grandkids.

You don't know what I've been through with this man. I was with him eight years. I paid twice for him to go away. The second time I paid \$2,000 for a ticket to send him to California, and that time he didn't come back. He's been gone 25 years. He came back about three years ago, just popped up. My son got to see his father.

# My life & my family

by Evelyn

My mother would buy us ice cream cones and they would be dripping, and she would say, “I need to fix it.” Then she would lick all around the ice cream cone. We always went to Friendly’s.

Everyone played tricks on each other. Mom and dad laughed mostly, but when the rough housing got too much they told my brothers to go outside. There were nine of us. I had six older brothers, which made it hard whenever I brought boys home. My brothers would give them wedgies and if they complained my brothers would call them wusses. The boyfriends would tell me about it at school, talk about it to our friends. It happened whenever my boyfriend turned around to talk to me.

I remember one time Jackie (my sister) wrapped my father’s remote in Christmas paper. We hid it under the tree and he spent weeks looking for it, asking my mom if she had put it anywhere. Whenever it was our time to aggravate dad our mom loved it. When it was time to open the remote, we opened all the other packages first and then Jackie went and got the remote and handed it to dad. He just got so angry. With his thick Boston accent, the funniest thing was when he got angry. My mom would be laughing so hard, “Did you know about this?” he would ask her. “It’s your girls!” she would reply, still laughing.

We would also put maxi pads on our heads, or wrap presents in them. He would get so embarrassed. He hated that we had to buy them.

My father worked for a DJ—Wolfman Jack. I’ve always been really good at singing, I sang in a lot of choirs as a kid. I made a demo tape with my choir teacher for him. He said “I could make her a star,” but my mom put her foot down. She didn’t want her baby to go—and I understand. I’ve always been a mama’s girl. My father was an alcoholic and when they fought she’d say to me “come here baby girl.” And I would

sing for her. I would practice my plays in front of her.

I sing to my kids now, or I did. I would sing them to sleep. “Mommy, come sing to us,” they would say. Then when my mom passed, I started running the streets, and that took a toll on my body. I haven’t been singing much since. But I’ve been clean.

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## Untitled

by Jasmine

So I graduated with my first child. I was 17 when I got pregnant with him and I was still attending school when I was pregnant. I had him when I was 18 years old. That is when it got hard for me as a young mom. I fell off and started getting into the street and I started drinking, smoking, and partying. I was not showing my son the attention that I was SUPPOSED to give him. Then, my baby father and I had bad problems. We used to fight all the time, get into domestic violence situations a lot. This was when I was pregnant with my son and I thought I was not going to have him or have issues.

That’s when I become homeless at the age of 18 because me and my mom had a bad relationship. I had to give my son to my mom because I couldn’t stay on the street with my son. I had to come to the shelter for the first time and it was a bad experience. I did not want to stay in the shelter. At the age of 20 I just got so depressed because I did not want to be in the shelter and my mom had custody of my son. And now I am still trying to find housing and am changing my life around to get my son back. Now I am pregnant with my second kid at the age of 21, going back and forth from shelter to shelter trying to change and get my life right.



## Lessons learned

by Sherry

I had money. Not a lot, but money coming in. And bills paid, not owing anything. I had a friend coming up from Florida—David. And he borrowed. \$5 here, \$10 there. And I couldn't say no, he was my guest. It got to the point where he had mail sent to my house. And I could not get rid of him. He was there for 3 weeks. He became permanent. Borrowing, borrowing.

\* \* \*

He leaves me in the lurch. And I end up here, and he's still calling me. And I've been here 2 months today, and he's still calling me.

I'm trying to be upbeat. You have to be. Laugh, smile. Lining up for dinner, smoke break. I'm paying to be here. But I got a roof over my head and water to use. And you feel degraded. People are here three months, leave three months, come back for three. And it's a cycle. I'm looking for someplace to live near where I'm from, near Guilford.

I go to church. I'm practicing. You have to have faith somewhere, and that's where mine is. It's got me through a lot. Accidents, broken bones. And I may not like where I am right now, but you got to smile. I'm always happy no matter what. I was paralyzed. That was after the car accident. I have these obstacles but I keep getting through them. It gets better afterwards. I'm not going to say it has to, it does. I believe it does. I learned to walk again after a car accident. I can do this. Positive is the best word. What they told you in kindergarten—turn that frown upside down—it's true.

Be careful who you lend money to. This is someone I knew from kindergarten. But everyone grows up to be different and we all have our downsides, I guess.

## Life and its hurdles

by Maria

What we face in life is many curveballs  
We don't know how to accept them  
We don't know how to change them  
We don't know which ones will stay and which ones will go

Sometimes we have misunderstandings  
We must face things each day of our lives  
We must face the past, the present, and the future  
Family and friends shouldn't tell us how to react to things

We all have barriers  
We have to do that on our own  
We should be able to accept one another  
Love one another  
And be there for one another

Life passes us hurdles  
Sometimes life can give you happiness, sometimes sadness

One of the main things is to always have a prayer  
God will answer you through magazines

Through TV

And through other people

God is there for us 365 days a year, 24/7

He wants us to come back to Him

All He wants is for us to be loved and accepted in our lives

# Not everything

by Dee Dee

I kind of have a rough life. I left home when I was thirteen and was on the streets for a long time, doing drugs and drinking. I always believed in God and I had the strength to get through what I had to get through. When I was fifteen, I started doing heroin, and I was really bad on that for quite a few years. I didn't believe in anybody then. It was just me and the heroin, and I was really afraid to be around people. It took a long time before I could trust anybody and believe in myself. What helped me was believing in God, and talking with him, and asking him to give me strength. That helped me get clean. One day I was really high, and it was just enough. I wanted to commit suicide but I didn't want to die. I learned about believing in myself and that not everything in life is bad.

# Finding laughter

by Heather

My life has seen good and bad times, easy and hard. I have found that some of the best things in my life are the hardest things to keep. I struggle daily to keep moving forward after losing so much. I have lost my home, all of my belongings, and I no longer have my daughter living with me. Of all the things lost, not having her with me is the hardest to take. My daughter is my reason to live and breathe, my guiding star out of a dark place in my life. My first thought in the morning is that my daughter needs me in her life, so I need to get myself back on my feet.

I always try to find something to laugh about, because if I don't laugh all I will do is cry. Every day brings new joy and sorrow, and every day I survive I get closer to finding a better part of my life.

## *Poems by Jessica*

### Tan walls

More cryptic than steel bars  
These walls stabilize existences most cunning,  
Dangerous, driven, unempathizingly corrosive,  
ideas,  
Driven by an equally impressive mechanic,  
These concepts run 24/7 with one mission,  
To host or impregnate its perpetually  
(oh so ironically)  
Impotent madness, most like parasites.

### Glass

Perfectly transparent is the sharpest of matter.  
Can cut and slice whatever it comes in contact with,  
But how oh so magnificent is its flawless transparency  
Can cure or hurt brilliant and small radiant and common.  
Place it in the ocean, and it will tumble. Through every  
Tide it will manifest, rounding and smoothing,  
Rounding and smoothing, then what once was transparent  
Has eventually become clouded.

# Getting clean

by Kamara

I am currently 29 years old. I stay in the shelter. I am a recovering addict learning how to live life clean and sober. I would have had four kids. My oldest passed away at the age of six years old. That was four years ago. After that I ended up relapsing. Never got a chance to really grieve through that process so then I started back doing drugs. I had a miscarriage because of all of that stress. Then three and a half months ago I had another little girl but she passed away 24 hours after she was born and now I have been clean for 66 days. Thanks to the help of God. I am still continuing this spiritual path with his guidance and help. Now I have two little girls left, a nine year old and a two year old. They stay with my mother. I really appreciate my mother for taking them in. I say the serenity prayer every day. I can never forget that I am a recovering addict. I attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings every day.

Four years ago, I was at Boston Children's hospital because my oldest daughter went for a bone marrow transplant. She went unconscious and then got unplugged from the life support machine in my arms while I was asleep. First my mother and I had decided not to unplug but then my mother said, "yeah, go ahead," which made me mad. I don't know why my mother chose to do that. Fifteen minutes after she died, my nephew was born at Yale Hospital.

My mother had temporary custody at the time because of my addiction. It was my choice. My children didn't get taken from me.

Her name was Ke-ajohnie. She was a cheerful little girl. She was a miracle baby because I wanted a baby the month of my birthday or the day of my birthday and she came four days before my birthday. I wasn't really in her life because of my addiction.

When she was five, a couple weeks after her birthday, she started getting sick. She fought her sick-

ness for a year and a half. She had HLH. I forget what it stands for. My mom called me and I got there at 1:20 in the morning and she passed away at 12:30 that afternoon. I knew something was wrong with my baby but I didn't know it was from her being sick still. She had done chemotherapy three times and her body had rejected it. I didn't know she was dying.

A day later, I came back to New Haven and ended up relapsing. I was crying. As soon as I got off the bus, right across from the train station, the jungle, that's the quickest place to get drugs. I knew the drugs would ease the pain and I've been getting high ever since.

I was living on the street tricking, selling myself. I was by myself for holidays and Christmas. Losing the baby three months ago made me want to get clean. I just kept asking God to get me off of drugs and he gave me my prayer.

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# Untitled

by Carlos

I've been in Connecticut for a little over a month now, and it's been interesting to say the least. I came from Puerto Rico to receive health treatment at the West Haven VA. I have seen very little of New Haven, but the little I have seen has been good, and the help I get at the VA is top of the line. My living situation is not good at all but I take it as a blessing to have a roof over my head and food on the table. I thank God daily for all that he has given me to survive during my time in Connecticut. Thank you.

# Un Cuento

by 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. Gandures. 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

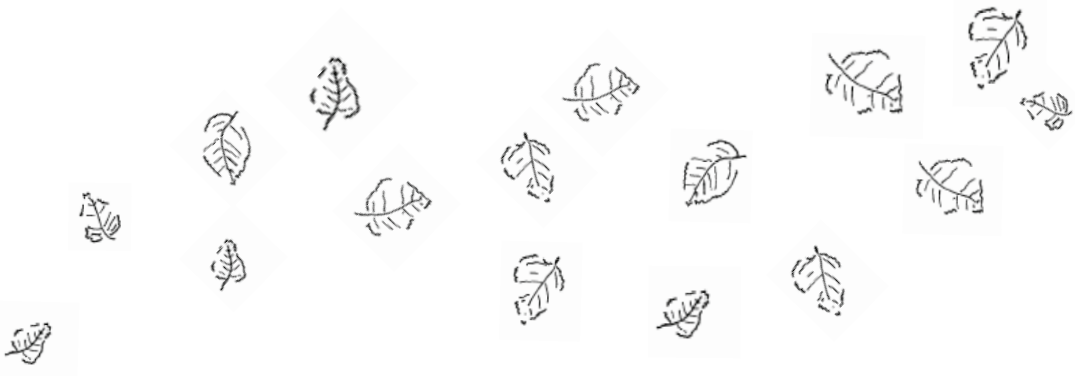
ago. My father died, my mother died. Oh yeah, I work with my father. Everything planted. My family, my sister, my brother, everything.

Me hace feliz? My granddaughters. My daughters. O! Papa Dios. Que yo hablo every night, o Papa 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.



# Catch me if you can

Anonymous

I was dropped off in Morristown, NJ from a half-way house in another New Jersey town. I didn't know anyone in Morristown, but someone told me about a shelter that you can stay at for thirty days. I have been surviving in shelters for a long time, so I was happy for this opportunity.

When the thirty days were over, I was asked to leave the shelter. I didn't know where to go from there, because I still didn't know anyone in the town. But luckily, I met a nice guy in Morristown and he invited me to live with him. As it turns out, I stayed at that guy's house for a while. Isn't that lovely? This man was a blessing, and the situation shows that God works in mysterious ways.

While I was living at the guy's house, I worked to earn a little bit of money. I used this money to pay the guy a small amount to stay in one of his bedrooms. The place was beautiful and I loved the time that I spent with the guy. We became friends and we went fishing together often. He trusted me because I respect people and their belongings.

There were other people living in the house and they had to pay the landlord for rent each month. My friend and I thought that they were paying the rent, but one day my friend turned to me and said, "Son, the cops are here!" It turns out that the other tenants at the house had not been giving the landlord the monthly rent.

You know what I did when the cops came to the house? I hid inside a coat closet. I know that cops like to look in closets when they come into a house, so when I went in the closet I made sure to hide wisely. You have to stay ahead of the cops if you want to survive on the streets, so I have learned how to do so over time. I hid in the back corner of the closet and held onto the coat hangers. This way, when the cops looked inside the closet and tried to move the coats, the coats would stay in place. Finally, a cop opened

the door of the closet and tried to move the coats. But none of the coats moved because I was holding onto their hangers. So, luckily, the cop closed the door of the closet and left.

After an hour, my back was hurting from hiding, so I slowly came out of the closet. I paid attention to the sounds around me to make sure that the cops had left the house. When I was certain that no one was around, I grabbed my duffel bag and walked out of the house—and bam, I was gone.

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## As I am

by Thomas

After serving fifteen years in prison, I came home with a disability called MS. For a while I couldn't accept that I was going to lose my legs because of the progression of the disease. At first everything was difficult. After so many years of doing what I wanted on my own the reality hit me that I would have to have help for the rest of my life. I took it to the point where I gave up on love, friendship, and family. All I saw myself as was a burden.

Things changed for me after a point, and I tried to do things, but I had a limit to what I could do. I finally got the help I needed from my friends. They took my stubbornness away, and it made me turn to the reality that I can't do it alone.

At this point in my life, not only have I accepted the help, but I have come to terms with my disease. It's not as bad because my friends helped me along the path. I have reconnected with my family and have found my hope for life. In the beginning I thought there was nothing to live for, but God is good and so much happiness has been brought into my life. I can love again and be in love as I am.

# Family

by Alandra

I'm 29 years old. I have a ten-year-old son now who's in custody with my mother. She's a gospel star.

Here I am, and I feel so behind. I've always been Little Miss Princess. I'm the oldest of five girls. I suffered a lot of emotional distress. Every day my mom would yell at me until I was sixteen. She'd tell me, "Go sweep the kitchen! Go cook dinner!" I felt like Cinderella; I felt like a step-child but I wasn't. My sisters were eleven years younger, but they were really mean to me as they got older. That left marks and scars on my heart.

Before I graduated high school, I had to go to summer school. Around the same time, I met my son's father, Kendrick. We didn't mean to. We were happily in love together, walking around without a care in the world. And then along comes my son. I did graduate, finally, but I had this child so my role changed. He was my everything. He still is my everything. I missed out on college life. I went for six months; I was on my way. But I missed out on college life and had to move in with my mom.

And then we were still together. Our love was so strong that nothing could tear us apart. We were Ken and Barbie, Romeo and Juliet. That's why we had to split. It was too much love and the world couldn't understand us. The world was like, "just leave him alone, 'cause his image is a rapper, a gangster, a thug." But I knew his heart. So we had to split. Our hearts were broken. Chained and bound.

So now we're fighting for our son's custody. He desperately needs our help. He feels he is abandoned. He cries out for his mommy every day, longing for me. And I just can't get him back like I want to. We've learned to cope with our pain. Now my mom sees my pain, and I believe it changed her mind. She's really, really supportive now. She'd never been this supportive, ever. We were humbled by our Father who art in heaven.

# Stardust

by 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 here 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 40 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.

# Never give up

by Edward

A thirteen year old girl had a kid. His name was Edward. She never left me, and I was always by her side. She brought me up. I went to Catholic schools. I also went to a Jewish school. My grandparents were Muslim. My grandmother was Pentecostal. So I'm all mixed up in it, religion. And I do believe in God.

She bought her first house when she was twenty-three, with my stepfather, Rudolph. He was a very decent, strong, willing man. I met him when I was ten years old. He was a hard-working man. He was very disciplined. Firm and disciplined, but fair. But I had people in my ear from my real father, saying Rudolph wasn't my real father. So I rebelled against him, everything he tried to teach me, to be a man. I worked in a bakery. I worked as a paperboy. I joined Cub Scouts. He didn't believe I should have a girlfriend. But he taught me about hard work.

We fought. I cried, he cried. I moved out of the house. I moved out of the house at 16. But before I moved out of the house they sent me to the job corps. I took the letter out of the mailbox and pretended I didn't receive it. I didn't know that somewhere down the line you need a trade.

I miss him. I love him. I never had the chance to tell him. So many times when people asked me, I said he was my stepfather. But I realized he was my father. He taught me everything I know. And somewhere, down the line, I will have another child. I'm gonna name him Rudolph.

\* \* \*

I used to play a lot of sports. Raised in an Italian neighborhood. My grandfather was a drunk. He didn't realize what his daughter was doing. I guess she was looking for attention. So they tried to hide the pregnancy by sending me to Antiqua in the Vir-

gin Islands. Didn't let nobody know that a thirteen-year-old was having a kid. It was very peaceful down there. I came back to this country, I see chaos. Cops, family members fighting, my grandfather drinking. But he was a good grandfather. He was just a drinker.

I start rebelling in school. Not trying in school. Not like I was a dummy, just, like, I didn't give two—you know—two hoots about it. All those years, I abused myself, I took advantage of my education.

My grandmother was the glue. Once my relatives came up from the islands, she helped everybody down. She helped everybody become successful. Even though she went through my grandfather being an alcoholic. She was the reason I read the Bible. She was strong in her faith. She's the reason I'm still here—because she prayed for me. She was 82 when she passed. She raised me. She taught me to respect people. I miss her. The day she passed away was her birthday. She came in a vision to my dream. It was so real, she gave me a kiss and let me know she was leaving this earth.

Deep down inside I believe we are spiritual beings. That means we were here before and we never die. Our flesh will die but our spirit will live on. So one day I trust I will see her again. I believe I will see her again.

\* \* \*

I made bad decisions to end up here. I saw the train coming but I didn't stop it. I lost the car, the condo, my wife, my kids. I tried to please other people and myself at the same time. I wanted to be the center of attention. That was the mistake I made.

I have two kids. Herman is down south in Co-

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lombia teaching them how to speak English. He got a grant from Yale. He graduated from Hamilton College. They got snowmobiles up there, I've never seen them. Dante is in Waterbury in high school, trying out for the basketball team.

I had twenty-three years of a relationship with Mary. She was a good woman—matter of fact, she's still a good woman. I was the bad one. She was a beautiful person, you know. The things I put her through. She couldn't give me a child. She helped me out with mine. It was about her heart. How she cared for people, other people. She was a caring person, a caring-natured person. She's living with her daughter, who's a retired correctional officer. Mary is a nurse. Eventually, she couldn't take no more. Told my son to sell the house.

\* \* \*

I used to sell drugs for 40 years. A decision that I made, a bad decision, another one of the bad decisions I made in the midst of selling, I began to start using. I was drinking, sniffing, and I started using heroin last year. I was going to strip clubs, gambling, getting into trouble with bookies, couldn't keep up with my habit. Fornicating with different women at the same time. And I was scared because my father had HIV and I didn't want to be in the same situation like him. So I shut that down. I was in and out of jail. Repeated assault charges, drug charges, extortion, racketeering.

I seen two of my friends get killed in front of me. I got PTSD. I had flashbacks and dreams sometimes. I could hear their voices, coming through the walls sometimes. I was traumatized. I'm still dealing with that right now. I couldn't hold onto no job. I always wanted to be the boss.

After my son sold the condo, I wound up at the shelter in Waterbury. Making great progress but still selling drugs. Caught me with a

bag of weed at Waterbury. They kicked me out, and I was living in my car. I had five different beautiful nurses telling me to get help, to go to rehab. They wanted to keep giving me medicine. They continued doing it, even though I was living in my car. I went to New Haven, for my first rehab. This is recent, I went to the Stoneton Institute. Bought into what they was talking about. My therapist Alison and my instructor Wayne told me how precious my life was. No one ever told me how precious my life was. I stayed there, started going to meetings, started reading the bible.

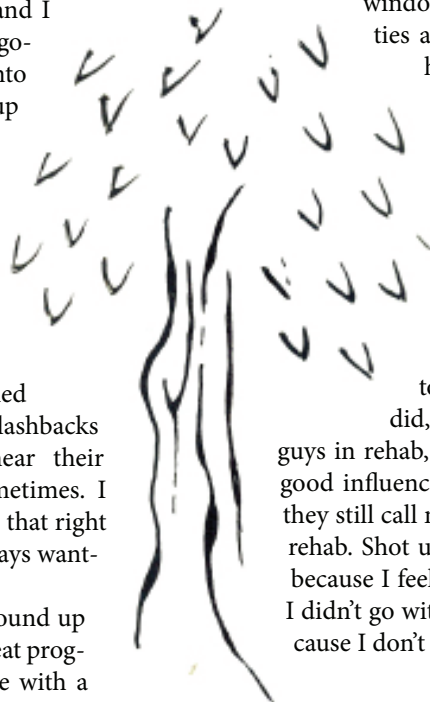
Wind up here in New Haven after I left Stoneton. I couldn't get a sober house because of my insurance. So back to the shelter again. I seen a place called 180 Center, says turn your life around. And they do a lot of bible studies there. So I bought into that, and I was thinking about what Wayne and Alison was saying, how precious my life is.

I met my therapist, Adam. I went to see him. So I told Adam and he told me things I told him we could keep between me and him. And I told him: 32 years ago, I don't know if I killed somebody or not. So patient-client confidentiality was out the

window. He went to the authorities and he told them what I told him. Under the law, he had to report it. The police came here to interview me last year about it. He broke the trust between me and him. So they looked into it; they didn't find nothing.

That same day my friend Jimmy called me. He told me he relapsed. I told him to go to rehab. So he did, he went back. A couple other guys in rehab, they call me. I guess I had a good influence on them, in their recovery, they still call me to this day. Jimmy died, in rehab. Shot up a bag of dope. I feel guilty, because I feel like I let him down, because I didn't go with him. I couldn't go back because I don't do drugs no more.

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## ✿ Elm City Echo

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Deep down inside my heart, I'm mad at Jimmy because he was selfish. He left two kids behind. They lost a father. His mother and father lost a son. So I pray that God will give me the strength to move on.

Now, I'm in New Haven, I'm getting a fresh start on life. Chance to get back what I lost. Find my way in life. Find who I am. And I love who I am today. I do. And I respect and love God. I respect everything He's done for me, carrying me here. I was shot twice, stabbed three times, but I'm still here. My goal right now is to get my GED, become a drug counselor, and give back to others what life has taken from them. I want to give back to my community, the community I destroyed, I helped destroy.

Diagnosed with schizophrenic paranoia. Sometimes I dealt with it, sometimes I can't. But I think I'm pretty alright right now. I like New Haven. And I like Yale College. I walked in it by accident. It's beautiful. It's so big I didn't know it was so big. Getting back, learning how to read and write, and understanding the Bible. I thought it was bad, that reading was difficult, but it wasn't that bad.

I still love people. But I'm trying to learn how to trust people. I have to learn to set boundaries. In the past, I feel guilty and my heart was too open. I'm trying to pay back the past but I can't pay it back, it's the past. You're gonna laugh, but I never thought I would have a black doctor. Asian, black, there's opportunities for all people in New Haven. I thank God for this shelter, for leading me to New Haven. And I'm glad I met you, so I could share my story.

## Being happy

by Andrew

This is the time for Happiness, for everyone to have peace of mind on earth with all men and the Homeless too. People should have the spirit of Christmas in their heart, and give them a token of appreciation. That's the spirit of Christmas, it's giving. So say thank you for All the things you have and thank the man up above for the things you have, and Behave for what you have: Life, Love and more. Every Day, Bless everyone and have a happy Thanksgiving and a merry Christmas and new year's and a Blessed year.

*Thanks for reading!*

