

Elm City Echo

FALL 2016



Where Your Dollars Go



75% goes directly to the vendors who sell your paper

25% pays for printing costs

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FALL 2016

Hello Friends of the Echo! You may have noticed that we have increased the price of the Elm City Echo from \$1 to \$2. We've decided that in order to better serve our vendors, we want to help them increase their profits. Part of our mission is to provide an entrepreneurial opportunity for un-housed residents of New Haven. They provide a valuable product through sharing marginalized voices of New Haven, and we want their work to be better rewarded.

Now, with each paper sold, vendors will double their profit from 75 cents to \$1.50. When you buy the Elm City Echo, 75% of the cost will still go directly to our vendors as both writers and members of New Haven's marginalized populations. The remaining 25% goes towards printing costs and stipends for our writers. This is especially important as we try to expand our reach through growing both our vending and writing programs. Our operating expenses receive additional support from donations and fundraising through the Yale Hunger and Homelessness Action Project.

If you have any questions or comments about the price change, please feel free to email us at: elmcityecho@gmail.com or check out our website at elmcityecho.com

Mission

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

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The Yale Hunger and Homelessness Action Project
The Social Justice Network
The Undergraduate Organizations Committee
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Letter from the Editor

Dear New Haven,

Welcome back to another issue of the Elm City Echo. If this is your first time opening an issue—welcome. We're glad you're here.

The Elm City Echo is New Haven's only street periodical. We are a platform for the voices of New Haven's homeless. Our volunteers visit shelters in the city each week to help individuals find a story they want to tell. We define story broadly: a piece of nonfiction, fiction, poetry, an opinion piece, or any other form of expression. Twice a year, we publish these stories in the Elm City Echo, which our homeless vendors sell around New Haven, keeping the majority of the profits for themselves.

You may have noticed that the Elm City Echo now costs \$2 rather than \$1. Part of our mission is to create economic opportunities for the homeless, who are often excluded from more traditional sources of income. The price increase doubles their profits and allows us to print more copies for more vendors to sell. We hope you agree that the jump goes to a good cause. We are continually humbled by your loyalty: through your purchases over the past five years, our vendors have made over \$10,000. Thank you.

Soon, the leaves will begin to turn and the wind will blow a little harder. In this newest issue, we hope you won't miss Yvette's poem "The Oak Tree." Maybe read it on a bench while watching the leaves float down. These are beautiful but hard times. As the presidential season reaches a fever pitch, think about Kristi's call to action in "We the People." We hope this issue will give you time to reflect on where we are and what we can do to bring out the best in ourselves and our country.

Thank you again and till winter,
Abigail Schneider & Julia Hamer-Light
Editors-in-Chief

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Why Can't You See

by Kathryn

I miss you, I want you, I need you close to me
I love you I care boo why can't you see

I remember when we first fell in love
It was like heaven sent
I remember I looked in your eyes
It's like my heart dropped right by my side
I remember the walks in the park it was so perfect to me

I miss you, I want you, I need you close to me
I love you I care boo why can't you see

We laughed, we joked, we played around,
We cried together, we slept together, we told each other stories,
We shopped together, we ate together, we watched movies

I miss you I want you I need you close to me
I love you I care boo why can't you see

The Way

by Kathryn

The way I see and feel about you is key to me
In my heart it feels like a shining star
Like the Lord awakens me
The good things I see in you
The good things you see in me
No one else can see
And I know the struggle
That lives inside of you
That's why you got me
That's why I got you
And don't worry
About a thing
Because I'm not going anywhere.

Untitled

by Tina

I met Robert D. at the Columbus House. I really didn't want a man, in my life. It took me a while to tell him, that I don't want him to be in my life. Why I don't want a man in my life is that they want sex. That all they want is sex, mean that don't mean you no good.

Robert D wanted to go with me, but he is married and has a child. I said that we could be friends so now we're friends. I got the Lord Jesus on my mind, my Lord Jesus help me all the ways, and the Lord Jesus who help me,

Thank you,
Tina Smith
Ernestine Smith

From Europe to the United States

by Maria

And I was a believer in my life and I was in this place. It's really new for me. I've been in a lot of pain.

Forty-seven years in the United States. I came here when I was seventeen years old. In 1972. Because of my husband. He's passed away now. My first husband. We both came here and we started a family. We have three children. Two boys and one girl. And he has been deceased now for a long time.

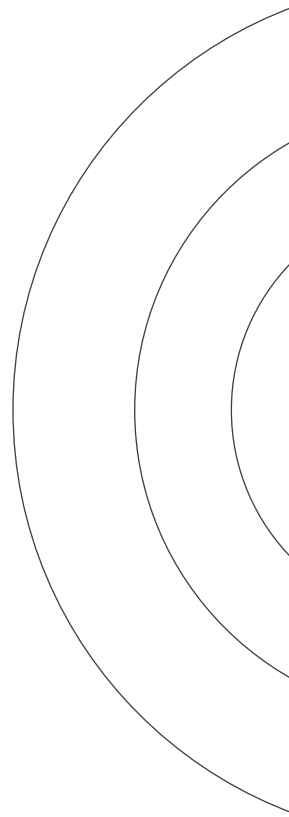
Next week my case manager will come and I hope he gives me a good report and good news. That he finds me some place we could go, me and my husband.

I pray to God each day I find something like a house or apartment for my husband and me.

My husband, nice guy. Whatever I say, he does it. We've been married 25 years. It's a happy marriage. Just right now, we are having a difficult time, in this place. I love my husband very much and he loves me.

We met in the restaurant 25 years ago. Soon we got married. The restaurant was Olive Garden Italian Restaurant. In the United States. I love America very much. I am Italian but I love the United States.

We don't have any children but I'm expecting one. I feel happy about it. I can't wait until when it's born. I'd like to give my baby the name of my brother-in-law, Lincoln.



My thoughts on life...

by Anonymous

Life is what you make of it.

In life, we all need two people. The first is our life partner, and the second is our best friend. In life, we all have a reason to be here.

What we do in life is what we make of it. For me, I need to make it right in life.

Some people are here on earth to help others; some people are here on earth just to help themselves. What is the reason you are here on earth? I am here to make a difference.

In life, you do good, and good will happen to you.

In life, we all go down roads that we might not like, but the roads that we go down are meant for us to learn from.

What does life mean to you?

Hurt and Pain by Eunice

I live in pain and hurt.
You treat me like garbage
 And dirt.
Once upon a time
 My love for you
Was strong and alive.
 Now it's not...
 It has died.
All you do is get high off
 my pain.
The way people get high
 Off of dust or cocaine.
If and when my pain
 Gives you pleasure
I won't do it again.
 This love is a disaster
 You're draining my energy
 Like water running out of a
 Drain, and a water fall flowing.

Untitled by Patti

Love is a many splendid thing.
The love I have for life
Is just like the love on a beautiful spring day
With grass growing and flowers blooming in the afternoon sun
Or a colorful piece of fruit on a honey bun.
But most of all it is the love that comes in the fall off the wall indeed.

Daddy Pink by Lesley

When my sister Robyn called and said that Daddy Pink is gone. I told her that I was happy and sad at the same time. I was HAPPY because I knew he was not suffering anymore, and I knew without a doubt that he was in the Kingdom of Heaven. I was SAD because I will miss him very DEARLY. So I will treasure all of the fun memories of a father and grandfather. I remember when my sisters and I were younger, we used to wait for my granddaddy to fall asleep in his recliner and we would take the top of his hair and braid it up, then we would take a hair roller and roll the braid up. And when he woke up he would be fussing. One time we got the roller caught in his hair so bad they had to cut the roller out.

I will remember him coming home from the railroad and bringing us those big Archway lemon cookies. He would also take us to the store and let us get whatever we wanted. My favorite was when he took us horseback riding. He would grab all three of us and put one of us on one thigh and one on the other, and then he would start shaking his leg and singing in that deep beautiful voice (We will be coming around mountain the way we come pow pow! etc.) He spoiled us rotten.

I also remember seeing him dance at my Aunt Tootsie's wedding and at his 75th birthday party. Boy, could he shake a leg. He truly was a family man and he loved being a grandfather. Daddy Pink was my father, my grandfather, my teacher, my preacher, my scolder, and my molder. His legacy will live on forever, and I will cherish and love him forever.

I will say the same thing that Jesus is saying to him right now:

*job well done daddy pink / job well done well done
my good and faithful servant.*

A loss of a grand parent and the sweetness of memories.

My Hero

by 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 16. 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.

Life After Addiction

by Chip

As of this writing, I have finished the Small Business Academy of New Haven, and I am currently at Gateway for A+ certification. My aim is to be certified in network security—it's my life, it's all I have. I can't believe that I am 55 years old and am now doing the things of a twenty-year-old. I'm working towards a future and being a father to my kids (even though they are not kids anymore). But the mothers of my kids still see me as a loser, deadbeat dad.

I have a 17-year-old son who questions if I am his father or just a guy who made him. Of course that hurts, believe me ... this is not who I wanted to be, but any excuse right now could be B.S. I can't say anything, but the words hurt so deeply. What can I say? "You don't understand addiction." No, they don't understand and there aren't any words that will make them understand my life, my choices. Am I living life or just a period of calm before the storm—again? I need to live, I want to live, but how to live is the question?

Life of Struggle

by Anonymous

Life is a struggle. Life is struggling with family and struggling to grow up to be independent and self-minded. Life is struggling even when family members think you are nothing.

You have to prove that you are better. You have to learn to be independent on your own without anyone else telling you what to do. You have to get used to being the black sheep of the family, used to feeling like you are nothing.

A life of struggle caused me to do the things I have done. Cocaine. Alcohol. Pills. But through it all, I have always tried to make a better life for myself. I tried going to school, but I had to quit when I had kids so I could get a job. I moved to Virginia so I could be a better person for my family and for myself. I never stopped trying to make a better life for myself, even though my life has been a life of struggle.

When I was living in Virginia, my wife got sick and moved back to New Haven. For a while, I stayed in Virginia; I had an excellent job and she didn't want me in New Haven with her. But then I woke up one day, sold everything I owned, left my job, and moved back to New Haven so I could be with my kids. I wanted to be a positive role model for them. I wasn't going to be able to do that in Virginia.

But my life of struggle caught up with me. I lost my

child; he passed away in my arms. I couldn't get help and everything went haywire. I lost my brother and that was the killer. He passed away at the age of 35. He was my best friend. Then I lost my dad. He was my rock. He was my father, friend, and the person I would always talk to.

My mother is still living. I am trying to mend my relationship with her because I feel a lot of guilt over our broken relationship. Fortunately, things are getting better. In addition to working on my relationship with my mother, I am also getting help for my anger and alcohol problems.

I see doctors all of the time—several times each week—and I am going forward with my life. Fellowship Place and an intensive outpatient program have done a great job helping me; the group therapy part of programs is especially helpful.

I feel better about myself today; this is me. This isn't anyone else. I respect the people on the streets; I respect myself on the street. I am on the street but I am moving forward.

I hope to keep moving forward, even though I have lived a life of struggle. I feel that only prayer can help us, a higher power, whatever you want to call it. God is so good. And I just want to say, keep your hope up, keep God up, and keep focused.

Mi Vida

by Ysenia

Hola mi nombre es Ysenia Nuñez. Les voy hablar de mi vida un poco. Soy una madre soltera. No tengo familia aquí en los Estados Unidos. Toda mi familia esta en Puerto Rico. Tengo 2 hijos barones. Tengo un niño de 12 años y otro niño de 6 años. Mi mama tiene mi hijo de 12 años y mi otro hijo de 6 añitos. Lo tienen su papa aquí en CT, Hamden. Nadie de mi familia me habla. Mis 2 hermanos no me hablan porque soy lesbiana. Eso me duele mucho estado en la calle desde que tenia 12 añitos. Sola luchando sola ahora soy madre soltera y estoy luchando por mi vida para mejorar mi vida y olvidar el pasado.

Fixing Hotels

by Anonymous

A while ago, I was working for a guy in Morristown, New Jersey. I installed hardwood floors with him during the days, and I lived with him during the nights. But things weren't very fair—I was paying rent to live with him but he hasn't paying me any salary for installing his hardwood floors. After I told someone about the situation, we agreed that I needed to leave that job and find a new place to live. I was headed to the nearby train station in order to go somewhere new, but I caught sight of an abandoned factory house behind a fence. Since I am someone who takes chances, I threw my bag over the fence and went to live in the abandoned house.

Since I no longer had a job, I volunteered at the Salvation Army. Although they weren't able to pay me, they would give me some of the things that people donated to them. One time, they gave me this very nice sleeping bag, which

was a perfect way for me to stay warm at night. Even though I volunteered there often, they didn't know where I was living—they didn't know I was living in an abandoned factory house.

But then God started working in my life. First, a generous Christian woman asked me where I

was staying, and for some reason I told her. Normally I keep my personal life a secret, but this time I didn't. Not wanting me to be homeless, she paid for me to live in a motel—for nine whole months. And one day when I was volunteering at the Salvation Army, a hotel liquidation

company for Fairfield Inn hotels visited and offered me a job. I gladly accepted the offer and it wasn't long before they offered me a better job in the Midwest. God works in mysterious and wonderful ways. I fixed hotels, and that fixed my life.

One Track Mind

by Brian

One track mind
Thinking back to a time
When I haven't already lost my mind

When I had a purpose and did things because it was worth it
Running through life feeling worthless
All the obstacles and hurdles
The bad tastes that can't be gulged

Pain and struggles while maneuvering away from being murdered
Unsure whether I could make it any further
Everything ain't always rainbows and sherbet
Been hustlin' since Gerber

They say you should follow the straight and narrow
Make Dinero
Split 'em to the marrow

on a one track mind be careful.

We the People



Grateful by Lissette

I would like to thank Dr. Philip Costello and social worker Diana Desmornes for taking their time from their busy schedules to provide us with service, whether here at Fellowship, or at Sunrise Café, or at Columbus House, or at Park Street Church. Thank you Doctor and Social Worker. We are very grateful for your service.

Now on to 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

by Kristi

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.congressmerge.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.

Thankful by Lissette

I would like to take the time to say thank you to Roni, Bailey, Nick, and Samantha for running the Fellowship program. The reason I am saying thank you is that because of the Fellowship program I have somewhere to go in the morning, and I don't have to be out in the cold or in the bad weather. Thank you guys.

I Walk the Streets

by Taz

I walk the streets, day and night
Trying to move a beat
Trying to stand on my own two feet
Trying to keep it real...

I walk the streets, day and night
People around me
Think they can fight
I stand tall in all my decisions
Whether they're right or wrong

I walk the streets, day and night
People try to put me in a situation to fight
Knowing they're wrong
And yes, I'm right

I know it takes a real man to walk away
But people have no respect for the next man to walk away
People have no respect for the next man
They push and test
'Till there's only one thing left—
That's to stand tall and stay strong

Put them in their place
Before I hit them in the face
Go back to a place
So old
So cold
A place where you lose all faith
I stay strong

I walk the streets, day and night
I am strong
And I stand tall
I keep in my mind that misery loves company

I walk the streets, day and night
Keeping it real, all day, all night.

Untitled

by Lee

I was born down in Long Island, and I'm the son of a truck driver. My father died in '73. Myself and my family moved up north to Connecticut. My mom worked to support us. There are eight of us siblings. We didn't have much, but we had each other. We were brought up in the church.

My mom worked two jobs to support us. As a teenager, I had become a bad person in school. The drug scene, something I wasn't very proud of, turned life into going to jail or not, and most of my teens were spent in prison. Mom got cancer, but she beat it. Now she has Alzheimer's. We're dealing with that a lot. I'm going through homelessness, but I know God's gonna see me through it. One day soon I'll receive housing and the people that helped me get this far, I know God will bless them all. I believe that God will bless each and every one of them, and all the homeless people to receive housing, and I hope I'm here to see a lot of my friends receive housing. I thank God for my life and my strength.

Warring with the Wind

by Tina

I was **born** and raised in Stamford and grew up living with my mother, father, two brothers, and grandmother. My childhood was happy and innocent. I remember camping with my parents and brothers in Preston, Connecticut on weekends. My parents had a trailer that stayed there year-round. I didn't know that my father was a prescription drug addict and an alcoholic; all that was hidden from me as a child. My mom died suddenly in 1995 when I was nineteen years old. My grandmother passed away soon after that, and my dad died in 2005. The death of my family members (by heart attacks and cancer) changed my life.

My dad moved out with my brothers after my mom died. My aunt wanted us out of my grandmother's house because she wanted to move in. I came home one day, and my suitcase was on the steps. That was it.

After I left my mother's house, I moved in with a guy and ended up all over the place. I worked at General

Electric for sixteen years, until I broke my back in 2003 and lost my job. When the doctor who treated my back was arrested, I was suddenly taken off painkillers, and no doctor or health professional would help me. No one would talk to me.

I didn't have a sense of self-worth for so many years, but I have self-worth today. I tried to commit suicide a couple months ago and was admitted to the Yale Psychiatric Hospital. From there I went to the Intensive Outpatient Program on George St., and it was the first place that really made an impact. IOP and going to church—that's working for me. The social workers I've been matched with have also helped restore my self-esteem.

I feel like I've been a child, an adult, and nothing in between. I feel like I've been beat down emotionally and now I'm trying to pick myself up. Depression and loneliness try to drown me, but I have two amazing best friends to lean on: Melissa and Dawn. I was introduced to Dawn

twenty years ago; she was the sister-in-law of an old friend. I've since lost touch with that friend, but Dawn and I are still close. Sometimes she visits me in New Haven, and sometimes I take the train to see her in Stamford. Melissa lives down the street and I see her more often. We have similar life stories—we both lost our parents at a young age—and we're good support for one another. I also like to listen to audiobooks, especially to romance stories. Nora Roberts and Sandra Brown are my favorite authors, and right now I'm listening to a collection of stories by Sandra Brown.

I spend a lot of my time these days waiting to hear back from housing programs. I've spent five months at Martha's Place and my last term ends April 18, so I'm looking for a new place to live. If I'm not accepted by a housing program, I'll have to find another homeless shelter. Even though the wind howls and roars, trying to defeat me, I'm a wind warrior, and I won't be beat.

Story of my Life

by Maychris

My name is Maychris. I'm 50 years old, I have lived in New Haven, CT all my life. I have two sisters and two brothers.

My mother has taken sick. She's in an old folks home. My mother was a great mom. She always had food on our table and clothes on our back. She would send us to school with me and my sister's hair done, my brother's hair cut. I'm depressed for her taking sick but life goes on.

I have been homeless for some time now. I'm looking for housing. I had gotten saved and am trying to live a better life with God. Things seems so hard out here trying to live a clean life. But I'm not going to give up, life has just begun for me. So I'm just going to keep on pushing to better myself.

Beginning of my New Life

by Maychris

Today my life is much better. By me giving my life to Christ and rejoining my Church on Sunday.

I have a lot of joy in my heart knowing that I'm safe not out in the streets, living in the Columbus house and meeting new people. My family is talking to me more, I go and see my mother more and it's just great so now I'm just working on myself, trying to stay clean and do better things with my life. I can see and feel that God is going to work out everything for me. I thank God today.

For me to walk back into the Church is because I have had enough of doing drugs and living from house to house, living with people and in the streets. I felt like my life had to turn around for the better so I turned to Christ. God has been doing things for me and I feel great.

Everyday Stress

by 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

Court Run

by 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.

At the Warming Center by Paul

On February 8, 2016, Jen, Amy, Scott, and I went to the Warming Center in a church in New Haven. There were two kids there named James and Sam. James stated that the staff told him they would open up the doors in ten minutes. Fifteen minutes later James and a group of others rang the doorbell before we had arrived. Sam was standing in front of the door on the side, next to Jen, and I was behind Jen. Sam was nodding and he fell into Jen. Jen got pissed about that. Sam was going to ring the doorbell for the second time and I stopped him and said to Sam that staff came to the door and told us not to ring the bell again, that the door will open at 10:00pm. James said something under his breath. Jen overheard James say something, and Jen got into his face. James stated to Jen, "Let's go around the other side to fight." By this time Amy had moved slowly away from Jen myself and James. When Will and Scott saw that I was getting upset, they took my bag off my back. We all thought James was going to hit Jen. By this time I had found out what James said to Jen on the corner. That got me pissed and I asked James to go around the side of the church to fight. Will, James, and I started to walk to the side where James had his back to me. I pushed him and he fell down. I let James get up so we could fight, but staff came out and stopped it. James was running his mouth to staff. Some people thought that I was wrong, but others wanted to join the fight. Staff asked us to leave it alone and leave it out of the church. That's what Jen and myself did.

A Home is a Home by Anonymous

A Home is filled with Love and Joy
A shelter to weather every storm
A place to live to flee from life's despair
A place to sleep at night
To keep to warm to raise your kids
A Home is something that no man can give
A Home is built of wood, brick, and sticks
A Home is where the Heart is
A Home is not inside a Poem.

Homelessness by Anonymous

Homelessness is not a game
It is not something that ends with success
Homelessness is a plague
It is not a way of life or something we choose
Homelessness has no winner we always lose
Homelessness is not listed on the game
Of life you don't get a flat tire or
Stay still for two spins you end up
Lost begin holding a sign believing that
Someone will pay you with food
Homelessness is not a game

Wilted Flowers Need Light

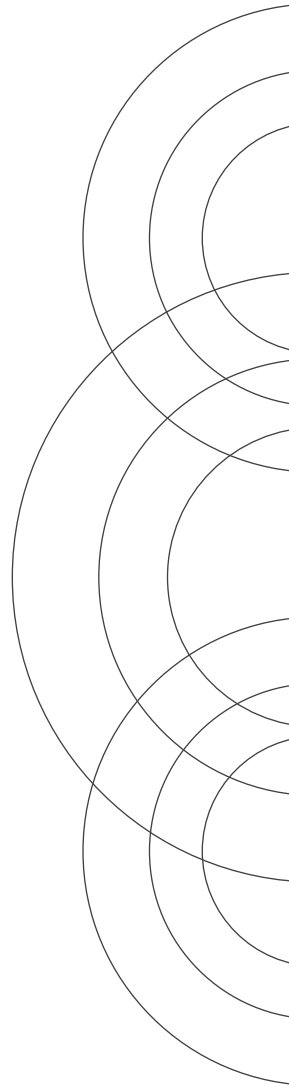
by Anonymous

Today I feel like a wilted flower, like someone has drained all my girl power.
 Today I just couldn't get my second wind. I huffed and I puffed and my house just fell in.
 Today I just felt like God was playing tricks on me, that bad luck was my destiny.
 Today I woke up to the sounds of 12 snoring homeless women who always ask for just a few minutes more of sleep.
 Today I walked the halls at six just to eat bland cereal and weak coffee.
 Today I started my \$90 a week job to pay for my L.O.S. bed.
 Today I felt like a wilted flower soon to be lifted by the morning sunlight but when I discharged at 6:45am there was no sun in sight.
 Damn today I just didn't feel right.

I didn't start out like this

by Anonymous

I didn't start out kicked out
 I used to belong to a family
 I didn't start out pushed out
 I used to live inside of my mother's womb
 I didn't start out homeless
 I used to pay my rent on time
 I didn't start out in a shelter
 I used to have keys that worked in my door
 I used to wake up in the morning and thank God that
 The lights were still on
 I didn't start my day with
 Good morning room B it's
 5:30 time to hit the floor
 If you're not out of bed by
 Six I will write you an infraction
 I used to hit snooze and sleep for a few minutes more
 What happened to me?
 I didn't start out like this.
 How did I end up like this???



New Beginnings by John

Wind blowing in the window of the truck got colder as we left the Gulf of Mexico in search of New England. My mind was running through all the good times I was leaving behind me. Twenty-four hours down the road, Oxford was new and great. Flowers were sprouting up, and the air was so much cleaner than lower Alabama's humid, hot, sticky breeze.

I set out for a new adventure and a new life. I'd seen a pretty blue-eyed lady who said her name was Kelly. I was leaving six years of being a dad to four step-kids with an abusive mom. Locking out feelings of remorse for leaving the kids behind with my crazy ex, whose joy was punching me in the face. Blood always tastes of penny copper. And we had so many arguments over things such as dinner. Step-kids calling me dad gave me the drive to work and provide. Well, all that was gone in a second of surrender.

Kelly seemed so sweet and new, and there was no baggage of kids to be raised up north – there was no country in her. I fell in love and longed to be with her all the time.

Hope by Anonymous

How much I have changed in two months amazes me. On December 20th, 2015, I was admitted to Yale New Haven psychiatric hospital. My world had come undone in a day, even though the downward spiral had been going on for the better part of a year. I was using drugs every single day. I was shoplifting to support my drug habit. I was living in my car and in cheap hotel rooms and I was in a relationship with somebody who didn't care about me.

But the tragedy was that I thought life was great. I was happy and I never questioned the authenticity of that. My world was small and getting smaller. Maybe it was an act of God or something supernatural but I don't think that I would have survived past the New Year if something hadn't happened. For me, that was getting help. It's kind of hard to get help when you don't even realize that you have a prob-

lem. I spent a month in the hospital and it was there that I first found hope. I was able to see just how much damage I had done and I was finally ready to take control of my life. I had a lot of time to put things into perspective and these days I am working on being good to myself. The biggest challenge was letting go of the unhealthy relationship that I was in. I thought it would have been the drugs, and although I still have my slips I am really trying to find joy and ease in my life without drugs. I don't steal any more. I ask for help and I let people in. My life is bigger than an old mini van and a cheap hotel room. I'm scared sometimes, but I persevere. I have dreams today and I am allowing myself to have them. I am the only one that can hold me back. I know that as long as I address my problems today instead of running away from them, life will be good.

Friends by Ray

Got out of jail 90 days, just enough to kick the substance habit. Heroin and klonopin.

Some old friends welcomed me back. Were very happy to see me.

So, a sober friend introduced me to a fellowship here in New Haven. One that meets regularly to share and trade experiences on keeping sober.

Out of jail and onto streets.

This has been an arduous experience. But rewarding and immeasurable in life's lessons.

Learning not to use a drink or drug but to weather life's accomplishments and setbacks without the crutch or numbing effect of a drink has been like a score or win any time life threw its curve ball.

So now, after 19 months, my goals are being met. I'm newly hired to a great compa-

ny and am around people I'm familiar with. My friends are many and my few close ones are Godsend.

See, for so long I felt the sober community wasn't right. Meetings were useless. But today I see it was me. I'm the cause of my troubles. But I'm also the master of my destiny, as dramatic as that sounds. This IS my life. And this I take very seriously. To anyone struggling, it's about you. You can aspire and become a better version of yourself. But unlike taking a drink or drug it requires work. It requires an open mind and honesty. You deserve better than this. Be stronger.

The end.

Friends: They're all sober and clean or struggling to obtain sobriety. They help me and in return I help them. It's reciprocal. With some people it's just being there, and with some people it's a more in depth spiritual understanding.

[do you have a best friend?] I do. We're struggling. He's struggling with a Benzo addiction. And we just sat and detoxed. And he couldn't bring himself to submit a specimen under the watchful eye of the nurse who was there to make sure doesn't alter the specimen.

We met in the Grand Avenue Shelter. [someone else: it's a hellhole. me: is it a hellhole?] For some people it is. It's all about perception. It's all about what you want to make of it. And people are people. Some people want to make your life hell and some want to help you.

At that point in my experience, in this chapter, I didn't realize that I didn't have to take things upon myself. Other people's attitudes, behaviors-- scrutinize and judge them. At that point, I let people bother me, and it wasn't that good of an experience

The Endless Road by Dylan

There's a race of men that don't fit in
They walk the streets to find somewhere to eat
There's a race that can't stay still
From cities to the hills, they cannot pay their bills
So they break the heart of kith and kin
Some think that they commit a sin
One thing for sure, they know how to win
They do not know how to sit still
With their own free will, they climb the endless hill.

Good Bye by Yvonne

Dear Mr. Crack,

We met several years ago and I am writing to say good-bye!

We've had good times and bad times, but I'm afraid this is the end! You have destroyed everything that has ever meant anything to me - from cars to homes to family members and relationships. You were like a vicious cycle in my life, a fungus in my mind! So, needless to say, I am gladly bowing out gracefully.

You introducing me to Mr. Heroin, who was an even bigger obstacle in my life because I fell in love with him instantly. He robbed me from raising my children and made me do things I thought I would never do, taking me out of character to the point of no return.

However, my spirituality was a lot stronger than my drug habit. My father God had a different plan for me. I am now Hep C. C.O.P.D. and my health isn't the greatest, but I will fight this battle until I win and become a successful part of society once again and live life on life's terms.

Victory will be mine.

Untitled

I went to prison when I was 28. It changed my life. I saw a lot of things that maybe I shouldn't have seen. The things I saw brought me back to my childhood. Things seemed to blend into one, the C.O.s became like my father. They hid behind the steel iron gates and professed to want good for all but there hides the rapist. I feel like I may have never started using drugs and never have wanted to experience nothingness had that not happened to me, the guard raping me. Where is the justice?! There is no justice.

I didn't start using drugs until I went to prison. I was introduced to every kind you can imagine. I did alcohol, cocaine but the one that really really got me was dope. I felt like the world could blow apart and it still just wouldn't matter. It would still just be okay. I was full of energy and no one could stop me.

I did absolutely everyone and everything I could to get my fix and now I'm here. I'm homeless. I feel hopeless and I seem to have lost that dream I had as a child. I was going to be a musician. A sense of sadness glooms over my soul that what should have been will never be and for that I cry every night, a pillow full of tears for the life I never had.

I sang in the church and at school and then slowly I found my way to Hollywood and the light blinded me to the demon that lay behind them. There were hookers and it seemed easy for a while, meaning I became one. I hitchhiked from Florida to California to swing on a pole and leave with whoever would help my demon. My demon thirsted for more and more dope.

I was in prison. I was about thirty-four. When I left prison, I was curious - nothing else to do. We were all drinking in front of

by Sophie

a Bodega and you know a drug dealer came along and was just serving everyone and I wanted to know what it was and I found out.

I went to prison for a conspiracy charge of distributing powder cocaine. I got involved just by being alone at 13 and just learning the streets, inwards and outwards. You think you're invincible. You live by your own laws and own rules. It seems odd, but it's true. I was good at it and I became very rich and I lived like that for 10 years and then it all came crashing down one day. 10 years later and here I found myself on a slow road to destruction and later on to becoming homeless.

I was in charge of the drug ring. I got there by manipulating, lying, stepping over other people. It was amazing. They say women are the best at it because they are not distracted by women. They called me the Queen Bee. I was both feared and liked. I had about a 100 people working for me. I moved about 30 kilos a month. I had five and a half years. I had a really good lawyer and that's why I ended up with such little time.

I felt remorse all the time, guilt. There were times when I would be guilt ridden, hurting all those people, knowing I was killing all those people. But that didn't stop me. I didn't stop I think because money and greed.

I would wake up in the morning. I would immediately start getting phone calls like crazy. Everyone knew not to call me until after 12, but they still would. I would wash my face, make a shake, and off to the gym I'd go. I ran 10 miles a day on the treadmill, sat in the sauna, took a shower, got dressed and off I went, off to sell drugs at clubs, to bartenders, wherever my drugs would go out to, lawyers, judges, doctors, they all sold for me.

Survivor by Anonymous

Wake up every day
Don't know whether I'm coming or going
What's the world have in store today?
Can't decide how I feel
What I think
What I believe
But I persevere
Because the alternatives are bleak
I am a survivor
I carry on
If I could turn back time
I wouldn't change a thing
I fight for the day
I am a survivor

Beauty by Jessica

On the tip o tongues, always
Fluent as the coming tides
And faithful as the pupil's eye
Beauty itself has propelled us into orbit

Untitled by Michelle

What was my favorite time in my life? My favorite time in my life was getting clean in a sanatorium in Connecticut. We went hiking, fishing, had birthdays, went to movies, had running groups. My first sober birthday they took me shopping, had a huge cake—things I never had. It was my first sober birthday for 20 years.

I ended up there after calling somebody. I had planned on getting clean for 4 or 5 years, and finally got fed up with it. I had a dream where I saw everyone I knew at a funeral, but I couldn't see the person in the casket. I went to ask a pastor about it and he said I couldn't see the person because the person was me. I've been on the right road since then. Now I help others. I live to give back.

There's more to life than sitting around. You can't pay rent without a job, so I need to work. You gotta work. I started working when I was 13 years old at a bakery, then I worked at Wendy's, and I finally started doing homecare. My mother was a nurse, she taught me a lot, she always had a need to care. My favorite part of doing homecare is seeing the smile on their faces. I just keep them laughing, making jokes. My mother embedded that in me. She was a great woman, she changed some lives.

Black Poetry by Sidney

They tell me I'm black
They tell me I've been enslaved
They tell me things that hurt me
They tell me that I'm nothing
They give me doubts and fears
They tell me the reasons why I don't matter
They tell me I should have been buried alive
They tell me life is empty
They tell me my thoughts are ridiculous
They tell me I won't be found
They tell me if I were missing it would not matter
They tell me no one will visit me
They tell me forgotten hope is mine
They tell me don't talk of yesterday
They tell me that I'm conditioned of the past and of Godlessness
They tell me I have a strong scent
They tell me I think of the thoughts of tomorrow that is never seen
They tell me I have no belongings in a closet
They tell me all my things were burnt
They tell me all my notebooks are intact
They tell me I should not look at them nor read them or write in them
They tell me I should not be excited by my smart mind and written words
They tell me not to worry nor think because I'm stupid and slow
They tell me to rest until death
Then whom would judge ...

Only You by Sidney

If there is a moment that I can remember
it would be you — only you
If there is a time in my life that I think of
it would be the time with you — only you.
And if I pass on I would wait for you —
only you...

This Thing Called Life

by Gray

I got a great new job, something I've been eyeing for a while, and I just got hired on. I did some recovery after a drug and alcohol issue, where it was pretty much debilitating. I've been clean now for twenty months. It's a slow process, but I'm living well, living right, and rebuilding again. I went to one of the anonymous fellowships here in the community, looking for a better life as well. They've been pretty supportive of me.

I started out stepping out of jail homeless on the street, going to soup kitchens, going hungry some days. I would find a hose on the side of a building to shower and do laundry. Then I figured I'd do something productive, so I started volunteering. It built my confidence, gave me a sense of purpose, and something to do in the morning. I met two girls interested in purchasing a food truck, helped get it on the road, and they compensated me with rent for two months, enough to get started. I picked up odd jobs, and covered rent for six months. I left my last job and took to the street again. You'd think it was overwhelming and just awful, coming back to the shelter, and in a physical sense, I guess it is. When you don't have hope, it is.

But I have a great group of people who've supported me and helped me get through all this. Now I've got a roof over my head. My chore here at the shelter is laundry, and I get to

work every day.

Everything's coming full circle again. I take the process seriously. When you're faced with struggles, you need to get through it the right way. Without challenge and struggle there is no growth. I have a strong faith that I grew up in. There's a higher power here to help through tough times. What's good in my life now is an appointment about getting a room to rent, and starting this process of an honest life.

It takes longer for some to get this thing called life. Hopefully we all get it.

Untitled

by Glendella

A reflection of a beautiful person
 Name and letters that describe her
 Gracious and caring from the heart and soul
 Loving of more than herself and others
 Eventually being all she can be for life
 No more heartbreak over destroying herself
 Never giving more than love and passion
 Describing a woman on life's journey forever
 Embracing happiness through the eyes of
 Living for more than the soul of their courageous heart
 Looking at everything that makes wonderful
 Absolutely fabulous beyond ___ dream.

Surviving more than love can give her
 Endurance of hope and generosity of hope
 Taking the initiative to live love her very heart
 Jealous is what she brings to everyone
 Even taking the bad and turning it to good
 Remember that everything is possible if
 You live love and never give up on her
 Lives goal ever remember

Living Situations

by Earl

I was living in a building, and the owner wanted to sell it. I was the the only one still paying rent there, which meant I was the only one who had keys. It was a nine room apartment building – three rooms on the first floor, three on the second, and three on the third. My room was on the third floor. Because it was cold out, I let other people stay there. I didn't want them to have to sleep out in the cold because I've been homeless before and I understood how it was. I let a girl and a guy live on the first floor. I gave them each a room – the guy in the front room and the girl in the back room. The girl's boyfriend broke the windows out in the front room, so I moved the guy, Mike, up to the second floor and gave him a room there. He wanted to sell drugs out of the house, but I told him he couldn't because if he got caught they would arrest me since I was the one paying rent. He got mad about it, so I called the cops and told them he wanted to sell drugs out of my house. After that, I told Mike to go.

Two days later, he came

back with two other guys with pistols. Somebody let him in – probably one of the other people who were staying there – and he came up to my room on the third floor. He put a pistol to my head and robbed me of sixty dollars. He put the pistol in my mouth. It was the worst feeling you could ever believe. I thought I was dead. I get panic attacks from it now. Then Ed, one of the guys with him, told him, "Come on, let's go! The police are coming and we've already got the money." Then Mike said, "No, he called the police. I'm gonna kill this mother-fucker." Ed grabbed him by the arm, and they ran out.

As soon as he left, I called the police and the police came. They caught Ed, and I identified him. I went downtown and made a statement, and I asked them to give Ed a break because he wouldn't let Mike kill me and because he was homeless. I understood the robbery because he was desperate.

I've got a new place now, and I'm not going to let them live there with me. They don't appreciate anything.

Maureen

by Earl

I met my wife Maureen when she was living in an orphanage in New Haven on Whitney Avenue. We were eleven years old, and she originally became friends with my sister. The orphanage had passes to go to the movies every Saturday, and my sister would go to that same movie theater every week. Then, Maureen started coming to my house with my sister when she could get a pass from the orphanage to leave for the day. My mother fell in love with her and treated her just like a daughter.

Four months later, she started coming to my house two or three days a week, and she would spend the whole day with us. Maureen and my sister asked my mother to get her out of the orphanage so she could come live with us. My mother didn't know how to do it, so they explained to her that she would have to get a letter from Maureen's mother, and then the state would have to come and inspect my house. They did, and they approved that she could come live with us.

The first day she came to live with us, I was sitting on the couch. After about an hour of being upstairs with my sister, she came downstairs and asked me if I would walk her to the store. I said yes, and we went to the store together. After that, we were inseparable. She was my childhood sweetheart. We grew up together. We left home together when we were

fourteen and got married when we were eighteen. She was the only girlfriend I ever had.

At fourteen, we went to Daytona Beach with IDs saying we were sixteen. In those days, you didn't need a picture on your driver's license, so I just got blank IDs, typed them up, and got them laminated. The first day we got to Daytona Beach, we slept on lawn chairs behind a big hotel. The next day, I went out, got lucky, and found us jobs at a hotel for old people on social security. They would pay us with a room and \$25 a week to clean up around the hotel, and they would pay us a dollar or 75 cents to run to the store to pick up stuff for the old people. That was good money back in 1966. The old people fell in love with Maureen, and she did most of the running for them while I did most of the work around the hotel. Pulling up rugs, painting, emptying the garbage, washing windows, whatever needed to be done.

We stayed there about eleven months and then came back up to Connecticut. We stayed here for about two months, and then we went to New Orleans since we saved up our money. I got a job working offshore on oil rigs, and she got a job modeling in magazines and newspapers. She never changed her last name, but it didn't matter because I knew we'd never be separated.

Normal Life by Glenda

I'm fifty-six years old. I was married once and have a twenty-five year old son who I raised by myself. We were married seven years. I got divorced when my son was five months old, and that's when I decided to raise him by myself. I had a job in Fairfield. I worked with the same lawyer for fourteen years.

My son used to go to work with me and I'd put him in preschool. I was around for him all the time. I'd pick him up in between work. He did all the sports in school. He's a black-belt, and has a sailing license.

At age twelve, he wanted to move to Miami Florida, I quit my job and we moved there. It was the only school he wanted to go to. We were happy. It was the best time of our lives.

I decided to move back when my Mom got sick. That was seven years ago. She was becoming sicker and sicker. I lost my savings, my car, my apartment. I got depressed and started drinking. Mom had a heart attack, and now she has care. I've started my recovery as an alcoholic. I haven't been able to work because of the hours of the meetings. I just get food stamps from the state.

Here at the shelter, they give us food. When we're out we find our own food to eat. A lot of families volunteer to come and cook for us. Right now I'm in the process of starting my Outpatient Intensive Program, which is going to last six weeks. During that time I'm going to start looking for a job. I keep caring for my mother on weekends.

My son still lives in Florida,

and he's engaged now. They complement each other. Now they're planning their wedding.

With the help of Columbus House, I'll get housing. It's a big sacrifice. We all come from different cultures, backgrounds with different stories. You learn how selfish people can be. Cold, self-centered, nasty to each other, mean. In this place I've seen the worst a human being can become. Because of the situation, what's happened to us. Day by day, you don't know what will happen to you. They could take your bed away 'cause they don't like you.

I come from Guatemala City. I'm very grateful for this place, my bed, and the meals they provide for us. I moved from Guatemala City when I was twenty-three years old. Back home, we weren't rich. We used to travel, which was a luxury. My mother left when I was five years old and came to the U.S. We tried to start our relationship after I came here. Of my father and brothers, I'm the only one left. I would do it again. I learned a lot about people. And the only one who is guiding me today is my higher power.

My son doesn't know me anymore. He doesn't know where I live. He's where I want him to be at twenty-five years old, and I don't want to interrupt his life. He's the only love of my life.

My mom's getting better. She's lost eighty pounds, found housing with an elevator, and has everything she needs. They're my only family. Now I want to take time for myself. My goal is my sobriety. I want to have a normal life again.

Ain't that Something

by Sheila

I've been homeless and on drugs for four years. I was staying here and there, staying in people's houses. I stayed in entryways, even, or in cars. I hit rock bottom. I couldn't take it no more. I prayed for my life. A lot of people used to tell me about the shelter, but at that time, I was out there on drugs. I didn't want to come to a place like that. I was too ashamed. I had to do a lot of stuff for drugs. 'Course I was on it so bad, I used to take from my family and friends, just to get drugs. I stole from my mom, but she forgave me. Through all that, I got COPD, but that still didn't stop me. I kept right on smoking,

I got raped. I got raped five times. I got pregnant and didn't want an abortion, so had a daughter. She comes to visit me now, and I have flashbacks to what happened. It's hard. I lost all the kids I had—eight kids. One died with cancer. She was my oldest daughter. I had two boys and six girls, but I didn't know how to love because no one showed me how to love. But you know what, I got tired of being sick, so I kept going to church, still getting high. The Pastor said to me, keep coming, so I did. Every Sunday, she just kept praying for me, but I still kept smoking. But I went on that Sunday and the Pastor called me up there, and she prayed for me and she pointed her finger and said, "You will not go back." And guess what? I didn't go back. I said to myself, I ain't going to stop, but I did. I'd been high for thirty-five years, and now I just been clean for five months. Ain't that something. God has blessed me, I'm about to get housing. My amazing God is good. If He can do it for me, He can do it for anybody.

Por mi Vida

by Elizabeth

Tengo much vencer contra mi
Familia pero tambien tengo 3 hijos
Queiro habiste en __ tengo una
Mujer que me ayuda
Te amo
Es la pero
Tambien tengo

Untitled

by Elizabeth

Mi nombre es Elizabeth Pabon. Tengo 3 hijos cual no he visto en 9 años. Me hacen falta cada día que pasa los extraño mas y mas. Mi familia no me hable no me ayudan. Llo único que tengo es me pareja Yesenia Nuñez todas las noche le pido a dios que un día yo pueda estar Junto a mis 3 hijos y tener mi familia. Me duele mucho que no tengo mis hijos yo he sufrido mucho en esta vida me siento vacía, sola, pedida sin ellos no se si soy abuela mi hijo mayor cumple 18 años en abril 24 dios protege mis 3 hijos. No pierdo la Fe de verlos.

God's Game

by Dominic

So I had this incredibly messed up, scary, and enlightening freak show of a dream. Before I explain it, I need to set the ground for understanding. Ecclesiastics 1:18 says, "One who increases his knowledge, increases his suffering." I once used to pray to God for wisdom and understanding. At the time, I didn't realize that a higher awareness equals a higher consciousness. And that the more you know and realize, the more you see way, way, more messed up things. Eventually, you come to terms with your inability to do anything about it and it makes you feel like an ant in the universe. Essentially, that's all we are.

This dream was like a severe acid trip, a wet dream, and a nightmare all rolled into one. The message, however, was earth-shaking. There was this black guy, kind of young, and somehow I was in his apartment hanging out on his couch. He told me I could do anything I wanted or play any game I wanted. (He might have said both)

I noticed he had some type of device hooked up to thousands of these wire-like lines. He then scanned some video games with it (from Playstation, Xbox, etc.) and they all appeared on this screen and you could play them immediately after they were scanned.

I remember being excited because I could play literally any game there is—all I had to do was scan...which is something my brain does automatically. But before long the images became distorted.

He said, "Everything is connected and you have to constantly maintain the connections by revising them."

I asked him, "Can you teach me how to monitor, create, and maintain the connections?"

He told me that he would teach me

when I was ready. The trip part of the dream was when you went to play the game, a terrifying, horrible, nostalgic, and euphoric feeling takes you over, and it doesn't let up as long as you remain trapped in the loop. You can never get out of the loop, and it is as if you are unaware that you are even in one. I kept doing the same thing over and over and over again. And it felt in the dream like it took a couple of hours to do it. But somehow, it was much longer.

I was trapped in this loop for three days.

But I was actually sleeping for only about six or eight hours.

It was sort of like an entire cinematic movie of shit in two hours. Days, weeks, and even years go by, but it was all done in two hours. That is what it felt like in this dream when I wanted to access a new game.

I watched adult movies and became aroused. I played a game, fought some dude, and Spidermanned my way up a building to attack some Freddy Kruger-looking dude, and I did so much other weird, wild stuff. I somehow became aware (probably because I was Spiderman at the time) that I was in a loop at the end of the third day and desperately tried to stop it. It was as if I were watching myself do these things on a screen while actually doing them and feeling the sensations. All of a sudden, it stopped. I found myself back in the black guy's apartment soaking wet with sweat, listening to him laugh his behind off at me. He then asked me if I was ready to learn and before I could answer him, I awoke into this world.

When I woke up, I got the sensation I was just trapped in the Matrix.

Or I just woke up into it.

Life of Trauma

by Maria

December of 2013 turned out to be the most revealing time of my life. I found out I had a damaging tumor on the left side of my brain. I lost the ability to realize I had family. I had been sick for a while without realizing it.

In January of 2014, I had a fourteen hour surgery. They told me my mom, who I couldn't remember, had waited for twenty-four hours with my daughter. During the surgery, I died two minutes

in, and was revived. I remember walking through a beautiful white tunnel. I couldn't understand why I was there. Then I was taken away, back to life.

They were surprised to see me talking the next day. In reality, I didn't understand the purpose of the surgery. Was it to bring back the life that I had lost? Who, what, where, and why was I in existence? It took me two weeks to understand I had a reason for living,

that I had a family: a daughter and a mom.

I went through seven and a half months of rehab. I had to learn how to walk up stairs, eat, use my hands, and function as a human being. I realized I was homeless after the surgery. I had to change my life from a working, educated individual.

People aren't homeless because they can't find work. People should be able to understand that homeless people are well-educated people who have fallen on bad times. We are living paycheck to paycheck. We must be able to take care of each other and every individual in society. Many have food and a home. Some don't.

Homeless people have traumatic experiences that lead them down the road to nonexistence and existence. We must grow and learn to love one another for who we are and not for what they perceive us to be.

In other words, tomorrow is never promised.

The Oak Tree

by Yvette

A mighty wind blew night and day,
It stole the oak tree's leaves away.
Then snapped its boughs and pulled its bark,
Until the oak was tired and stark.
But still the oak tree held its ground,
While other trees fell all around.
The weary wind gave up and spoke...
"How can you still be standing, Oak?"
The oak tree said, "I know that you can
Break each branch of mine in two,
Carry every leaf away, shake my limbs,
And make me sway.
But I have roots stretched in the earth,
Growing stronger since my birth.
You will never touch them, for you see,
They are the deepest part of me.
Until today--I wasn't sure of just how much
I could endure, but now I've found,
With thanks to you,
I'm stronger than I ever knew."



The Wonderful World of Colors!

by Yvonne

I started coloring when I started my recovery. I've been clean and sober for one year straight. I used coloring as therapy. It eases my mind and it makes me feel better – especially when I'm depressed ... thinking about my life and where I've been, and where my addiction has taken me. I've learned to follow my heart, because I was always trying to control everything and everyone around me. I came to realize that everything happens for a reason! Coloring controls me. It keeps me calm, it's like serenity for me. I feel at peace and relaxed when I'm coloring. I put some of my coloring on Facebook and I got such an awesome response from a family member who said, "Wow, your mother liked to color and she was good just like you!" I smiled because I didn't grow up around my mom, but to know that I had a trait that she had made me feel special. To do what I really love, to follow my heart, and something as simple as coloring a butterfly means the world to me.