

ELM

CLY

FECH

ELM CITY ECHO

Fall 2017 / Issue 13



75% goes directly to the vendors who sell your paper

25% pays for printing costs

Where your money goes:

When you buy the Elm City Echo, 75% of the cost goes directly to the members of the homeless community who are involved with the publication. These individuals will become permanent vendors, selling copies throughout New Haven. The remaining 25% pays for printing and stipends for our writers. Our operating expenses receive additional support from donations and fundraising through the Yale Hunger and Homelessness Action Project.

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.

Editors: Khush Dhaliwal, Julia Hamer-Light

Site Leader: Maddy Batt

Vendor Coordinator: Laila Bendrai

Volunteers: Theodore Elliman, Sophie Neely, Maddie Logan, Patrick Shea, Jordan Cutler-Tietjen

Contributing volunteers:

Columbus House, Dwight Hall, Fellowship Place, Martha's Place, Aryssa Damron, Serena Tharakan

Designer: Amrutha Dorai

Thank you to our sponsors:

The Yale Hunger and Homelessness Action Project

The Social Justice Network

The Undergraduate Organizations Committee

Turley Publications, Inc.

Letter from the Editors

Dear New Haven,

We hope you had a good summer and we're excited to be back with a new issue. As the leaves change color and the weather grows colder, we hope we can give you an opportunity to sit down and engage with the new stories in these pages. If this is your first time opening an issue—welcome, we're glad you're here. If you're returning to our pages again, welcome back.

The Elm City Echo is New Haven's only street periodical. We are a platform for the voices of people in New Haven experiencing homelessness. 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 and formerly homeless vendors sell around New Haven, keeping the majority of the profits for themselves.

In 2017, Connecticut has experienced its lowest levels of homelessness to date. Overall homelessness in the state has decreased by 13 percent since 2016, and by 24 percent since 2007 (Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness). Connecticut's efforts to end homelessness over the past decade demonstrate that homelessness is not simply an issue of the individual, but a responsibility of our community and its citizens. We hope the stories we share are one of many ways that we are beginning to have a more complex understanding of issues surrounding homelessness. Stories like Mary's "Living by Rules and Regulations" and Doug's "Let's Try this Again, Shall We?" communicate the difficulties many face while finding a home once more.

Thank you for buying this magazine and taking the time to give these stories the audience they deserve.

Yours,

Julia Hamer-Light & Khushwant Dhaliwal
Editors-in-Chief

Contents

Love

- 5 Angel of Mine *by Jerry*
As it Seems *by Maritza*

Life Story

- 7 Let's Try This Again, Shall We? *by Doug*
The Hood *by Anonymous*
- 9 P.O.M.E. (Product. Of. My. Environment.) *by Lewis*
- 10 Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man *by Lewis*
- 11 The True Story of a Tranny *by Monique*
- 12 Living by Rules and Regulations *by Mary*
One Day at a Time *by Gregory*
2017 *by Susan*
After the Fact *by Janet*

Faith

- 14 Keep Faith *by Roxanna*
God's Will For Me *by Jerry*
Blessed *by Ivy*
- 15 Singing *by Chris*
Conversations with Her *by Maritza*

Homelessness

- 17 A Day in the Life *by Janet*
My Name is Maychris *by Maychris*
Life with Depression *by Lisette*
- 18 My Story *by Noemi*

Family

- 20 My Loving Son *by Miguel*
Mount Rainier *by Chris*
- 21 The Neighborhood *by Anonymous*
The Fog *by Chris*

Poems

- 22 Sick as a Dog *by Malik*
- 23 King of Diamonds *by Malik*
Satan's Pit *by Malik*
I Am Free *by Sheri*
I Matter in Life *by Sheri*
4 U *by Lewis*
- 24 Untitled *by Carolyn*



LOVE

ANGEL OF MINE

by Jerry

What you mean to me, honey,
Words cannot explain,
So in this poem
I'll just use angel as your name.
Cause you're now the first thing I think of
When I wake up each day
And the first person I pray for
At night when I pray.
You are the strongest part of me
Yet you're gentle and kind.
And a good strong woman like you
Today is truly hard to find.
And there's probably nothing
I could ever truly do to deserve you,
So I won't waste my time.
I will just accept you
For what you are:
Simply a blessing from above
And an angel of mine.

AS IT SEEMS

by Maritza

I LOOKED INTO her eyes
As she began to show me
As she began to know me
With her smirked smile
Up on this cliff within that night
Quiet moments
Moonlit and bright
She shivered me with
The gentle touch of her mind
Her softened words
Danced through my body as she
Said what's in her heart
And when we spoke
Oh so quiet
The shifting started
Within my head
It was the eyes
As she sunk deeper
Brandishing views
Upon my soul
And its makeup
Those words spoken
The love we shared
Blew my mind
I cringed at the realism
The view to see
That in her heart
And in there
Lies her reasons
Those sweetened words
As she spoke she spoke of love

Was there between us
And of this love
We did share
Like doves in flight
We circled ourselves
And as we flew
We knew the problems
Her family swore
We'd never be
The tears did roll
As I held her, as I felt her
As she trembled
The tears convinced me
Of our fever and passions
Of our lust, forbidden fruit
Lay before me, I must taste
Then let it go
She cried in passion
And in that moment
The fear released
Upon her brain
It was this moment I do remember
That lasting kiss
The rubs of body
We swayed in moonlight
As we touched and as we loved
And made our vows
The fear of leaving and being apart
The us we have, the we we loved
The oohh so caring
The screams of leaving
Before she jumped!



LIFE
STORY

LET'S TRY THIS AGAIN, SHALL WE?

by Doug

IN PART TWO of my last article, “...and I’ll Be Home for Christmas (Hopefully)” (written October 2016), I spoke about how I became homeless, my struggles, and where I was at the time with my apartment search and my appeals to social security.

Here is how things have been since then...

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

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

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

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

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

On December 19, I received a call from the doctor’s office, saying that I should report to the hospital immediately. The nurse/receptionist said that they found something wrong with the blood they drew. What was wrong? They didn’t

tell me over the phone. Now I’m thinking the worst—cancer? Turns out that my blood cell count was high. The knee was infected. I was in the hospital for ten days including Christmas day. Happy ***** holidays to me. I was released on December 28th. There went my “due date” for getting my own place. I spent the next two months on the Medical Respite Floor at the Columbus House recuperating & getting physical therapy. New Year’s Eve—I watched the ball drop in Times Square on my laptop—and was glad 2016 was finally over...

(Mid-February 2017) I’m back in general population. A “new year” to resume my search for an apartment.

Also at this time, I received a letter from social security saying that I have a hearing date for my appeals—April 7. I notified my lawyer, who works at Columbus House on social security cases, of the date. Enclosed with the letter was a CD with all of my medical information from the previous year or so. I gave this to her.

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

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

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

Overall, the hearing went smoothly. The worst was over. Now it’s time to play “the waiting game.” My lawyer told me that she was 99.9% sure the ruling would be in my favor. I will hear one way or another in 3-4 weeks.

(April 11, 2017) My 51st birthday.

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

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

Thank you.



THE HOOD

by Anonymous

I'M FROM HARTFORD, CT. Murder field. The hood. It's the part of the city with violence, gun violence, prostitutes, drugs...My life has been hard. I've been a prostitute to survive, to make ends meet. I grew up in a family of five - one older sister, and three brothers. My mother and father always had to work to support us. It was hard for them. After my parents separated, we were raised by my mom. In my childhood, I never wanted for anything, at least when my parents were together. Things began to fall apart when they separated. We moved to the north end of Hartford - the rough side of the neighborhood. I made it up to the 10th grade. I had to fight other girls, those in gangs. There was a lot of bullying. Later on, I got mixed up in drug and gang scene. I was shot three times, cut up, and bust up. It escalated for a long period. My life was drugs and violence. My life has been horrific.

In my teenage years, when I was 14, I got pregnant. My mother made me get an abortion. In 1979/1980, I became pregnant with my first child. My mother wasn't always on my side and she wasn't always there, but my dad was there through thick and thin. I had to make a lot of ends meet myself. I got pregnant again in 1981 but because I was pregnant so soon after my first born, I lost the baby. My first born was killed in 2002. I have two boys and one girl left. My son was shot in the head. It was a case of mistaken identity - they thought he was someone else. He was shot on January 12 and died on January 14. It was a devastating blow to me. I went buck-wild crazy. I didn't care about anything. I became a terrible person to deal with. They finally caught the people who shot my son and he's doing life in prison.

I had a job running assembly lines and machines for seven years in the 2000s. Those seven years were lovely, I was lovely. And then BAM. I lost my job and I went back to drugs. I was sleeping in churches and abandoned houses. I scraped for pennies, for clothes, for something to eat. This lasted for two years. I finally got tired last year and went to Stonington, a drug program, and graduated from there. Then I

was at a halfway house, and now I'm here at Columbus House. The struggle I'm having right now is like being on the streets - I don't know which way to turn, what's going to happen, and it's scary not to know the outcome. I'm going through counseling right now and I'm unemployed. I'm fighting, still struggling. I've never been in New Haven before three or four months ago. I'm trying to stay away from bad neighborhoods here. I should have stayed where I was, but I chose the wrong path. What caused me to leave the drug life was that I was simply sick and tired of being sick and tired. I was tired of being hungry and homeless. You don't think clearly when you're on drugs; it's like you have a monkey on your back. I'm on the road to recovery. I had no support because my family didn't trust me. My kids also - they were devastated and confused. I wasn't there for my daughter's graduation or her first period. My parents had to look out for my kids. I'm working on my relationships with my kids. All my three kids are working. They're 24, 30, and 32 years old. They haven't had kids yet; they still want brand new shoes and Timberlands. I made a strong bond with my kids. I never wanted them to be afraid to talk to me about anything. I had them try weed in front of me at home, so that they didn't do it somewhere else. We have a good bond but there are trust issues.

I learned how to sew when I was 16 and I sewed my own clothes. I was a swimmer, an artist in high school. I was on the balance beam, track, and did hurdles. I played softball and soccer. I wanted to be a doctor or a veterinarian when I was younger, but I soon learned that I can't tolerate lacerations. I joined the Red Cross in high school and was an air dropper. Today, I do volunteer services with the Yale New Haven Hospital. I'm a one-on-one volunteer companion. My mother is 93 and my dad is 94 so I know what it's like to take care of the elderly. My patients look forward to seeing me, but sometimes I get too invested. I work all of the floors and bring them to therapy. I talk to them one-on-one. I talk to them, and when they can't talk I talk for them.

P.O.M.E. (PRODUCT. OF. MY. ENVIRONMENT.)

by Lewis

Original

Diz iz my story ery since I was young
My lyfe iz a P.O.M.E. that mean a product
Of my evirment only way 3 differnt doors
Choose ya own fait ever since a young-n I can
Remember wen I thought I got lost juice
Fround the trap spot lost a few love hurts
Envy people speak in 3rd person
Cuz I wear a fake smile does that mean
Im fake Ima go get it My lyfe iz
Like an open book. Use to b in a gain I neva
Had No love for pple on the other side neva let
The money change me the day I ask for
A dollar I relize the game is ova
I pray to the lord my soul he'll take and if
I die b4 I wake we all have a promise date
To leave we can't take the streets w/ us it's
Still go-n ta b here we have blessings
If I eva took a loss is a
Less-n I don't think I'm betta than
Tha next man. I been down b4 the cum □
Lyfe is like the game of wheel of fourtain
It my tyme ta spin
I rather die like a man than die
Like a coward a coward dies a 1,000 death
A man dies one.
So don't be a P.O.M.E. (product of my
environment) cuz I'm not
P.O.M.E.

Translation

This is my story: ever since I was young,
My life has been a P.O.M.E. That means a product
Of my environment. There were only three different doors.
Choose your own fate. Ever since I was young,
I remember when I thought I got lost just
Around the trap spot. I lost a few, love hurts.
I envy people who speak in 3rd person.
If I wear a fake smile does that mean
I'm fake? I'm going to go get it, my life is
Like an open book. I used to be in a gang, I never
Had no love for people on the other side, never let
The money change me. The day I asked for
A dollar I realized the game was over.
I pray to the Lord my soul he'll take and if
I should die before I wake, we all have a promised date
To leave. We can't take the streets with us, it's
Still going to be here. We have blessings,
If I ever took a loss it's a
Lesson. I don't think I'm better than
The next man. I was down before the come up.
Life is like the Wheel of Fortune
And it's my time to spin.
I'd rather die like a man than die
Like a coward. A coward dies a 1,000 deaths,
A man dies one.
So don't be a P.O.M.E. (product of my
environment) because I'm not
P.O.M.E.

DIS LIL BOI N SIDE DIS MAN

by Lewis

Original

Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man is hurt
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - as been homeless
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - is a father ta 2 of his kids
& 1 stepson he calls his son.
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - as been rape
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - as been n & out of foster care
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - acts like a Lil Boi sumtymes
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - has been ta jail 4 tymes
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - has sold drugz
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - haz give-n up sumtymes
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - gives & gives
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - ignores the hurt
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - no's lyfe is chess
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - once was a role model
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - cry's
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - doesn't no who is father is
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - is blunt
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - smokes trees to take away the pain
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - I's closer than u think
Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man - I's.....me
I'm Dis Lil Boi N Side Dis Man.

Translation

This Little Boy Inside This Man is hurt
This Little Boy Inside This Man - has been homeless
This Little Boy Inside This Man - is a father to two of his kids
and has a stepson he calls his son
This Little Boy Inside This Man - has been raped
This Little Boy Inside This Man - has been in and out of foster care
This Little Boy Inside This Man - acts like a little boy sometimes
This Little Boy Inside This Man - has been to jail four times
This Little Boy Inside This Man - has sold drugs
This Little Boy Inside This Man - has given up sometimes
This Little Boy Inside This Man - gives and gives
This Little Boy Inside This Man - ignores the hurt
This Little Boy Inside This Man - knows life is chess
This Little Boy Inside This Man - was once a role model
This Little Boy Inside This Man - cries
This Little Boy Inside This Man - doesn't know who his father is
This Little Boy Inside This Man - is blunt
This Little Boy Inside This Man - smokes trees to take away the pain
This Little Boy Inside This Man - is closer than you think
This Little Boy Inside This Man - is me
I'm This Little Boy Inside This Man.

THE TRUE STORY OF A TRANNY

by Monique

PART I

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

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

I have a lot of issues. I do robberies because I never felt loved by my family so I acted out—I feel bad about it. I'm 45 and I can't get a job; I've never had a job. They put me in a men's correctional facility and I was raped, even though they put me in a room alone. I don't wanna go back; I'm trying my hardest.

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

When I turned eighteen, I started transitioning to a woman. I had to sneak my sister's clothes out of the house. My mother wanted me to be a regular gay person and not a tranny; my name used to be Chastity because I was a virgin until I was 25 but no one believed me. Then I start prostituting; I tried to sleep with people who had AIDS to kill myself.

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

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

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

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

PART II

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

I quietly think about my life.

My sister, the lesbian, had a child. She was gonna give him up for adoption but then she got attached. When he turned 15, he was being bullied for being a momma's boy, he ran away and stumbled upon a woman's dead, beaten body. The DNA didn't match, but the judge said he must've been involved somehow and he got 75 years. My sister tried to kill herself, she's so sad. That's her only child.

I write him, tell him I'm sorry.

It was '89, he's 27 now,
on year 12;

She doesn't like living alone.

(His father, the man that raped her, is in jail.)

My brother was with this white girl stripper, who never told him—I didn't know he was sick until he died of AIDS. Six months later. The girl came over, we all jumped on her, beat her up bad. My sisters trying to sue her saying it's murder. She's still walking, giving it to people.

I'm closer to my family
than ever before.

I try to be the best person that I can be,
try to change my ways.

I wish I could start back when I turned 13. I'm HIV free, thank God. For me to say I love somebody, I gotta love myself first. I don't talk with psychiatrists like this.

Life is a joyful thing to have.

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

I struggle with the Lord.

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

Tomorrow is not guaranteed.

LIVING BY RULES AND REGULATIONS

by Mary

WHEN I WAS eight or nine years old, I picked cotton and looped tobacco in North Carolina. They would dry out the tobacco in a big tobacco barn before curing it and taking it to the market. My parents taught me early to be self-dependent and work hard.

Now I'm sixty-three years old. I've lived in New Haven for all the rest of my life. I lived on Ferry Street for six years before I was evicted on January 12, 2016. I wasn't kicked out because of money, but because of "non-compliance." I was only allowed to have guests seven nights of the year. But I had recently undergone neck and spinal surgery, and I needed by sons and daughter to help me around the house with groceries and cooking and things like that.

I have three children, two of whom are now in jail—my boys. My daughter is homeless, though right now she lives with a friend. I get to see my daughter, but I don't have a car, so I can't see my sons.

Even though I got a settlement after filing a lawsuit, I still couldn't find a place to live. That's because they changed the laws so that even if you have money, your credit history can prevent you from renting an apartment.

So I've been in Columbus House since February. I'm trying to find housing and a job. I want to do sculpturing. I took a sculpting class and loved it. But I had to leave my first sculpture behind as I was evicted. They didn't even let me take my dentures.

ONE DAY AT A TIME

by Gregory

I AM HOPING the Connecticut Mental Health Center will give me a new life where I can learn, with their help, to do the right thing on my own. One day at a time. You never know what the future holds. It is the good and the bad. I have to stay focused to do the right thing. One day at a time. Right now, time to get an apartment. That is my goal. The people from the nursing community will help me. Hopefully in the future, things can get better for me. I need the Christian faith but I don't go to church. I need to be spiritually active to keep me from doing the wrong thing. Hopefully, one day things will turn out better for me, myself and I. I got a quiet brain. That is my mood. My thinking isn't that good on certain things. I am not able to stand well. I was hit by a car in 2015, the day before Christmas. I broke my spine and my neck. The only thing that kept me alive were the doctors and the helicopter. Please don't go through what I went through.

AFTER THE FACT

by Janet

I HAVE BEEN in recovery for a few years. My life is so much better without the drugs. My children are very important to me. I made their lives hard when I was doing drugs while they were growing up. I now have their love and respect again. It took a lot of hard work to regain their good will. I look back on my life with sadness and regret, but I can't change the past. I can be in charge of my future which looks good and even great at times. I say to someone who wants to be clean and sober, it's worth it. You get so much out of life when you are clean and sober.

2017

by Susan

MY LIFE IN the year 2017 has been all around horrible. It started in January; my mother (my friend) passed away and I didn't handle it well at all. I wound up in the hospital (the psych ward) for depression. My mother had smoked cigarettes for 20 years. Then she got sick with emphysema and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) for 20 years. Mom had quit smoking for 20 years but still got sick. She was a great mom and all around good person. It took me a month in the hospital to get over it enough to function in society.

Then I relapsed on drugs and ended up not being able to pay my rent so I became homeless. I ended up at Columbus House, and I've been here for 7 months. The first four months were very hard. My marriage ended. (My husband stopped coming to see me and I finally had it with him.) After I made my mind up about him, I met someone here at Columbus House. He's the nicest, funniest, most loving man I ever met. So the only good thing that happened was meeting my new man. He's helping me get through this awful year.



F A I T H

BLESSED

by Ivy

Part I

Being homeless is not what people tend to think. People tend to think that you've done something wrong, and that's not always the case. Sometimes things take a turn in your life and you find yourself struggling. I've been in this situation for three years, with family actually turning their back on me, family that I love and would help if the tables were turned. They made it seem like I was on drugs, they told lies about me being on drugs and they treated me like an outcast. They told lies that I was turning tricks but I wasn't. I was just struggling—I just didn't have. I didn't have my own income so I couldn't buy clothes. I was on disability and I turned around and lost it. I had brand new furniture, I had to put it in storage but then I couldn't afford the storage, and now everything's gone. And no one helped me.

I came here to Columbus House, twice. I didn't like it here. So I stayed with people, until now when I was forced to finally come here again. I didn't change, that's the good thing, because I'm a good person, an honest person. I didn't let my situation change who I was, or my views. I refused to become a thief. It didn't send me to drugs. And it helped strengthen my relationship with my Lord and Savior, because even through all this I have not been in the streets, I have not been without clothes, and I have not been hungry, so I would say that God pulled me through all this. I made it this far, and I'm not giving up. This place has its ups and downs. A lot can be going on sometimes. But I won't give up until I get to the other side. I'll be humble, and take each day as it comes.

Part II

I have been at the Columbus House for 3 weeks. I fought coming here for 3 years but when I came in, I was ready. As I sit in the dining room watching and listening, I have heard complaining, I have listened to rudeness and watched it too. I found myself almost caught up in the mix of what goes on. I must say, after doing something that I knew was wrong because I found myself angry at a person for who they were, I had to ask God for forgiveness. I took the punishment that was given to me like the woman that I am. But it made me realize that I am there for a reason, not for the help that it looks like I need, but to help others to find their way to our Lord Jesus Christ, our savior, to our heavenly father – their way home. While I am doing that, it will keep me humble, keep me from straying away from the one true god that I love and the way that I want to be.

GOD'S WILL FOR ME

by Jerry

Jesus, for a time, had to leave his throne
Because his will was to bring all mankind
home

His grace is sufficient
And his love knows no bounds.

And he proved that because
He forgave those that were crucifying him
As his blood was still dripping to the ground.

He gave Moses the Ten Commandments to
teach us
And when we still didn't listen
He came down himself to reach us.

You see God's will for all mankind is not the
same
But he did make one thing,
Simple and plain,
That thou shalt have no other God before me
And that's why me, Jerry Williams,
Keeps his face in the B-I-B-L-E
Simply, trying to find God's will for me.

KEEP FAITH

by Roxanna

I HAVE BEEN living in the street for a year - house to house, parks, etc. I, as a woman, have been raped by men and women. I had no shelter and on April 3, 2017, I get my keys. I now have a safe place to go. No drugs. No rape. I will be safe with my key to life. I have found faith in God. They say people, places, and things matter -- no; it's the faith in God that helped me get through this. This, here, right now is bad, but it will get better. I have a place, food, and help with my life right now. We can do it. My faith helped me leave the street life. God walked me through. We can conquer. Keep faith!

SINGING

by Chris

I FIRST SANG in grammar school. My music teacher thought I was an alto. He played the chords on the piano, but I couldn't hit them. Then he went up and I started hitting all of them. He said he wouldn't have guessed I was a soprano, but I definitely was one. I remember singing in one Christmas show while I was in grammar school. People would line up in the hallways and staircases just to listen in.

After that I didn't really have much interest in singing until my twenties after my kids were born. My mom heard me singing and told me that I should sing in the church choir, but I told her that they'd have no need for me there. One day, however, one of the choir members asked my mother who was singing so loudly from the back of the church and in pitch. My mother told them it was me, and I was asked me to join the choir. They said they needed me, but I said no, at first. Eventually, I gave in, and I've been doing it ever since. My favorite hymns are "O Holy Night," "The Lord's Prayer," and "Corpus."

My son joined a choir too. He had a range from bass to tenor. My daughter doesn't sing, but she plays the saxophone, flute, and baritone. Even my grandfather was a musician. He played the piano and clarinet. He was a tool and chain maker. I remember he once told us to come over to his house to hear which ones of us were musically inclined. My oldest brother could hit the notes, but he didn't have the interest. My other brother couldn't hit the notes, but I hit all of them and he said, "this one has the ear."

For me, singing hymns is like saying the Lord's prayer in a different way, but I'm saying it from the heart. It's like second nature to me at this point.

CONVERSATIONS WITH HER

by Maritza

It's NOT JUST being worried or anxious, it's More than that. It's as though my lungs suddenly stopped working and I simply can't breathe. There's pressure on my chest and my head starts to spin. My heart is about to explode and it doesn't matter how many times you tell me it will be okay, there's something inside me that's messed up, I truly believe all of this will come crashing down and I'll be alone, my flaws exposed to the world. I'm afraid they'll see the real me. The me I try so hard not to be. The me I wish would disappear and let the little voice inside shine. You have to understand, I don't want to say I am worth it, I want to believe it. Is that too much to ask?



*HOMER
LESSS
NESSS*

MY NAME IS MAYCHRIS

by Maychris

I WOULD LIKE to tell you a little bit about myself. I was born in New Haven, CT. I'm 51 years old and have been through a lot in my life - drugs, alcohol, and many other things. My mother had eight kids. I'm the fifth and was brought up on welfare. I had started using drugs when I was 23 years old. I became homeless and now I'm here trying to get housing, again. I have given my life over to God. He has been good to me. Please pray for me.

LIFE WITH DEPRESSION

by Lisette

MY NAME IS Lisette. Right now, I am going through a lot of depression. I have no family in Connecticut other than my daughter and grandson. I live in a shelter. It's not very pleasant staying here. You have to follow too many rules and regulations. The staff here think they are correctional officers. They be like do this, do that. I've been in the shelter for over a year. I'm tired of all the depression it is causing me. I feel like killing myself all the time, but I won't do it just knowing all the pain it would cause my mother.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

by Janet

I AM HOMELESS due to my addiction. I have been living in a homeless shelter for four months. The shelter is run like a prison. We are awakened at 5:30 in the morning, up and dressed by 6 AM. After going into the dining room, there is a line for medication. After breakfast and medication we stand in another line to check out which takes place at 7:30. I go to Fellowship five days a week from 8:30 to 1:30, or return to the shelter to go to a church which serves as a warming center until 3 PM. At 3 PM I stand in line to be checked in and patted down. We eat dinner between 5:30 and 6 PM. After dinner, we stand in line again to receive our coats and purses. At that point we get to go to our room. I take a shower at this time, I have my time after the shower. At 8:45, we stand in one more line for our medication. After that it's usually lights out around 9 PM.

MY STORY

by Noemi

I BECAME HOMELESS because I fell into debt. I paid my debt. Then, the housing department told me they would not put me back until the specific program I was in would let me. The program paid my debt for January. Not February. Paid March. I was in debt again but I didn't know. They showed me a letter that said I had to pay. I went to the housing court to figure out how much I had to pay. The attorney came up with a plan of me paying off a debt but I had to move out by March 31. When I moved out, I tried to move in to my parents' house. But me and my mother could not get along. There were physical altercations. Since my son was there, I did not want to be there. She called the cops on me. I got arrested. I went to my cousins'. They didn't like me because I had a boyfriend who they didn't like. My mom got partial custody. My son was on the autism spectrum. I was trying to get help for a year and a half. I received a little settlement. I paid off all of my debts. Bouncing from my cousins' to my uncles'. I was living on the beach for a couple months, in the park in Edgewood, under the pavilion. I had called 211 and they said they had a bed at Columbus House. I got kicked out of Columbus House because they made up that I got into a fight with one of the staffers. I went to my mother's and was on the beach for about 3 months. I got a call from Martha's Place saying that they had a bed for me. That is when

things with me and boyfriend started fizzling out. I was a resident there for almost 5 months. While I was there, I filled out every housing application. I never received any correspondence. So I am bouncing from place to place. I am epileptic. I take medication that the neurologist from Yale gives me. I have had strokes. I am now waiting. My 90 days in the shelter are up. I am on extension waiting. I need help because everything is here – my son and doctors. I either report to this place or to the library. I feel like no one is helping me. With my epilepsy, I forget things. The only thing I receive are medicine, food stamps, and cash. I feel as if no one is helping me. I don't know who else to reach out to. I have all the proof of everything. We have weekly meetings with our case managers. I showed her a whole folder of all the applications I have filled out. I thought she would help me following up.

Before all this, I worked at AT&T for 11 years. I worked at Edible Arrangements. And I moved to Florida to work for JCC. They didn't have the medication I needed in Florida so I had to move back here.

My son is now 17. My mom had full custody. The only way I can get my son back is if I have an apartment. But now he is old and can choose to do whatever he likes. I want to tell my story so that someone can help me.



FAMILY

MOUNT RAINIER

by Chris

MY LOVING SON

by Miguel

MY NAME IS MIGUEL. I'm 49 years old. Born and raised in Bridgeport, CT. My childhood was great. I went to Bariam School from pre-K to 8th grade. High school was hard, and I graduated from that. While I was in high school I was working for a friend's company, called Bridgeport Fence Co. I worked there for 10 years. Then I left for Florida with my family to open Bridgeport Fence Co. down there.

I'd stayed in Orlando, Florida for 5 years. I had a great life over there, I'm not gonna lie, a great life. I loved the amusement parks over there like Disney World. I came back to Bridgeport for vacation, and here I got married to my ex-wife and we had a son together.

He's my world, my son. He's a great kid. He's gonna be 18 years old next month, April 23rd. He's a very active kid—he plays on the baseball team for his high school. He's a straight-edge kid: no drugs, no smoking, no alcohol. When he graduates he's going straight to the Marines. I'm gonna miss him a lot, because he's my world, my pride and joy. He asked me if it was okay with me that I go and I told him yes, he's gotta make his choices. Like I told him, he's gotta become his own man and become three times better than I ever was. And I have a lot of faith in him that he'll become a great man. That's the best thing God ever sent to me in this world. So to him, I grow more. I strive more to live. That's my story right there.

MY WHOLE FAMILY - my two older brothers, me, and my parents - went to Mount Rainier in Washington many years ago. I was 10 at the time, and my brothers were 12 and 13. My father had booked a plane out from JFK to Washington. That was my first time on a plane and it was thrilling and exciting. I had the window seat. My imagination was rampant at the time, and I still remember my father pointing out that clouds looked like marshmallows. That image stuck with me. The farms looked like patchwork and the cars looked like ants. My middle brother got sick on the plane - he looked out and threw up right away.

We got there around noon. It was a warm sunny day. My uncle met us at the airport and drove us to his house. I remember seeing a huge 3-inch slug at his house and running into his house because I had never seen one that big. He asked us if we wanted to go up to Mount Rainier and we said, "Yeah!"

We went over to Mount Rainier and through the petrified forest. When the lava from the volcano comes in contact with snow it turns to stone. There was still a lot of snow that day when we reached the top. There were crocuses coming up at the top too. It was a clear day and the view was beautiful. You could see just trees for miles and miles.

I love to see beautiful things coming up from the ground - any life in general actually.

Then, we went to the Science Museum in Seattle. When we were walking out from the dark museum, my brother walked out and straight into a pole and scalped his head from his hairline to his eyebrows. I remember I kept asking, "Is he going to die? Is he going to die? Is he going to die?" but the best surgeon around at the hospital there fixed him up and the doctors said they would take care of the bill in full.

And that was the trip up to Washington.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

by Anonymous

MY SON'S MEMORIAL happened recently - January 14th. My son - Ernest - was killed in 2002 and he was 22 at the time. He had recently graduated high school where his passion was insects. He knew everything and anything about insects. He knew about how different insects survived, if they were poisonous, what they ate, etc. He wanted to be an entomologist (scientist who studies insects), but I was poor so I couldn't afford to send him to college. He was a bright boy though. After high school, he began working with his uncle in landscaping so that he could start making money to eventually go back to school.

That night on January 12th, he was coming to see me. He had met this girl and he had wanted to bring her up to meet me for dinner. He was on his way to see me with her and as he was driving around the corner to my house, a van came up and someone inside started shooting bullets at him. One of the bullets hit him in his head. They thought he was someone else and shot him. I heard the shots at the time, but I didn't in my wildest dreams think that it would be my son being shot. I remember they came up to me in my house and told me that my son got shot. I ran out onto the street to him and there was blood everywhere. I held him. As a mother, seeing your child like that and not being able to help him...He only lived for two more days. We pulled the plug since it was only the machine keeping him alive. It's still so hard. Every January 12 through 14, I break down all the time. He was my first born.

He was a bright loving son. If I needed anything, he would be there for me and get it. That part of me - the part reserved for him - I would never come to terms with...to have a child and then to lose him after 22 years. At the time, I became a different person because nothing could bring my baby back. I didn't care about anything. I became numb. I became secluded and distant. I didn't want to hear anything. Nothing in this world could hurt me. I became a hard woman.

He's buried in Hartford next to his grandfather. You know the rule of threes in the Bible? He, his father, and his grandfather are all named Ernest. And they all died in January.

I still see him - my son - now. He guides me.

THE FOG

by Chris

THIS ALL STARTED when I was a little kid. My father being the prankster that he was, he decided to take us for a ride one foggy morning. The fog was just skimming across the top of the water. It was just high enough that if you put something between it you'd break the connection.

He told us that the river was on fire. "How do you put water out? You don't!" he said. We all looked at him like he was nuts. Told us afterwards that it was just fog hovering over the water. That was a science lesson for all of us. He came up with the weirdest science lessons he could ever think of.

Which brings me back to the movie "The Fog," which we had watched over and over again as a family. He told us that the reason the fog formed was due to the temperature of the water and the air around the water.

So, he then started it with the grands and the great-grands. The kids were just in awe. They said, "That's not a science lesson!" And he said, "Yes it was, bring it to your teachers." It was the same thing he said to us. We didn't believe him but he was right.

Then we lost him but we never forgot him.



POEMS

SICK AS A DOG

by Malik

I'M SICK AS a dog
My throat feels like a frog
My head is a clouded fog
My body is burning
My head keeps turning
The world keeps in going
The earth is still spinning

I AM FREE

by Sheri

I HAVE TOO many thoughts
inside my head.
They leave me tossing and
turning inside my bed.
I have too many things I
need to let out.
I've been hurt
I've been screwed
Chewed up and spit out.
I need to move on and let
it all go
but I hide it all instead I
don't want my pain
to show.
But that does more damage
than the pain itself
Because I used other
mechanisms
to deal with myself.
But I need to release it
the pain that I felt
forgive and forget everyone
says it's the key.
But no not I, it's
just not me.
I hold onto the hate
and let it ball inside
but I need to let go or
It'll eat me alive.
So I went and sought
help for all the problems
in me.
And low and behold now
I see
During my learnings a man
taught me
to put pen to paper and
now
I'm free!!

SATAN'S PIT

by Malik

I'M TRAPPED IN Satan's pit
He makes me wait with nowhere to sit
If I move an inch, he'll throw a fit
Toss me onto his cooking spit
I'm waiting for God's light to reach me
But there's no light in Satan's pit
God has forsaken me
Here I stay in Satan's pit













I MATTER IN LIFE

by Sheri

I MATTER IN LIFE.
I matter in my life.
You matter in life.
You matter in my life.
She matters in life.
She matters in my life.
He matters in life.
He matters in my life.
They matter in life.
They matter in my life.
We matter in life.
We matter in my life.
I matter in your life.
I matter in their life.
I matter in her life.
I matter in his life.
You matter in your life.
You matter in our life.
You matter in her life.
You matter in his life.
You matter in their life.
He matters in your life.
He matters in your life
He matters in our life.
He matters in her life.
He matters in his life.

4 U

by Lewis

4 u -  'll give my heart to keep breath - u
4 u -  'll give u my last meal so u can b full
4 u -  'll walk to sav u if it takes me days just kno I'll b there
4 u -  'll neva stop b-n a great father
4 u -  'll love u to the moon & back
4 u -  'll give up the streets
4 u -  'll neva stop love-n u
4 u -  'll neva leave u
4 u -  back u wen your wrong or right
4 u -  kno my place
4 u -  will neva betray u
4 u -  u can ask me anything

KING OF DIAMONDS

by Malik

I FOUND A Diamond ring
Master of all dreams
I'm the Diamond King
Destroyer of all things
I'm the Diamond being
Master of the unseen.

I'm the Diamond lord
You must bow down to me
Or deal with my sword
You have disturbed my sleep
What is this for!?
It better be important or I'll bash you to
The floor.

Diamond Lord! Seek vengeance with thee!
You have stolen my wife, you must
Set her free! If you don't let her go, I will
Force you to bleed.

HA HA HA!

You fool,
You weak peasant tool,
You disturbed my slumber
For that you will suffer
Your wife is nothing.
That's All. She is nothing more.

Carolyn

Sept 2017

Hello Jim as you know. Jim the one who screams and yells miles away. As I begin to say what I have to say it will never end. There's always a beginning what I have to say. I don't mean any harm but there are rewards in life that never ends. I had to do something I love and something that I'm happy with. Because Jim and their selling books doesn't exclude me from society. Jim faced with a lot of negative remarks but it's OK. I'm that woman that ignores negativity and goes on with my days with plenty of smiles and happiness.

From Carolyn

