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echo

ELM CITY ECHO
FALL 2018

elm city echo

FALL 2018 | Issue 15

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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letter from the editors

Dear New Haven,

With the summer behind us, we welcome you to our new fall issue of the Elm City Echo. In the following pages you will find over fifty pieces, making this issue our largest ever. As New Haven's only street periodical, the Echo showcases the work of people experiencing homelessness. The issues themselves are sold for a profit by homeless and formerly homeless vendors. Working with both our writers and vendors is a cherished responsibility and a privilege. The Echo would not exist without the willingness of our writers to allow their stories to be shared with you, and the tireless hard work of our vendors in selling thousands of copies every year.

This issue of the Echo includes fiction,

nonfiction, autobiography, poetry, prose, and more. There are stories of heartbreak, loneliness, love, loss, anger, frustration, trauma, despair, recovery, joy, and humor, to name a few. The stories encompass the range of human experiences. Luca's "Beautiful Children" and Edward's "Frankenstein's Monsters" highlight the importance of family, friendship, and community. Norman's "Major Tragedy" is narrative of resilience in the face of great loss. Pieces like the "Fun of Homeless New Haven" by Walter recount the structural barriers that prevent members of the homeless community from finding stable employment. "It's Getting Harder" by John is a passionate piece that serves as a call to action to help homeless shelters.

At the Echo, we believe that storytelling is a powerful act. In sharing these stories, we celebrate our common humanity, acknowledge our differences, and fight against the silencing of an entire segment of our community based on their homeless status. In these pages, no voice goes unheard. So, as you read this issue, make the choice to listen well—with an open heart and mind, with humility, with the understanding that you have something to learn from these writers. We appreciate your readership. Thank you for your support of the Elm City Echo.

Yours,

Khushwant Dhaliwal & Madeline Batt
Editors-in-Chief

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*These pieces include potentially triggering material such as violence, rape, and abuse. The warnings marking specific stories provide a guideline but not an exhaustive list of content that may be triggering.

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where your money goes



75% to our vendors

25% for printing

When you buy the Elm City Echo, 75% of the price 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.

love & family

Beautiful Children

Luca

When I was sixteen years old, I married the father of my children. He gave me two beautiful children: one girl and one boy. That was the beautiful thing in my life—my children. I had my children naturally. That's the best thing that can happen to my children. If anything happens to my children, I'll be there for them. My daughter and son grew up in a good family.

My daughter was eight years old and my son was three years old when their father died. My daughter remembers everything about her father. I tell my son everything about his father since he doesn't remember anything about him. When my husband died, my daughter went to the hospital. She crossed her hands, and she put a cross in her father's hands. She started crying. I put my husband in the funeral home. My

daughter knew her father died, but my son didn't.

Since he died, my daughter, son, and I have been closer than ever. They loved me no matter what. Even though I did drugs, they still loved me. I went to a detox place, and I've been clean for six years. My children are very proud of me.

For New Years, I went to Springfield, Massachusetts, and I spent time with my son, daughter-in law, and granddaughter. My son loved my cooking. He loved my food. I played with my granddaughter. It was beautiful.

In March, I'm going to Hartford to spend time with my daughter and my other four grandchildren. One of my granddaughters wants me to cook meatloaf for her—her favorite.

Condenado

Nelson

Vivo condenado por un amor fatal...
Vivo condenado sin poder olvidar la experiencia.

Si no supo amarme y solo hizo de mí una jugada
Porque yo la olvido y trato de renacer
mi vida...

Ella me robó el corazón.
Ella me robó la vida.
Ella me engañó con mil traiciones
Solo hizo amarga mi vida.
Y me convirtió en un pobre ser.
Dispuesto solo a seguirla.

Ella me ha quitado hasta el valor.
Y ha reducido mi hombría.

Vivo condenado al sufrir por un amor fatal.
Y si no la olvido.
Nadie me podrá
Ayudar.

Condenado Vivo Condenado
A una mujer que no me
Supo
Amar.

Fisherman's Story

Tyson

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

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

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

My Stars

Naomi

“I started seeing everyone as an enemy: women, men, but not children—children were like angels for me.”

This is a story about my kids, when I lost my kids. Two of the kids that I lost, it was because of the father. He gave me papers to sign, saying they were for the divorce, but they were custody papers. They were five and four. The other one of my kids died when she was in the hospital—they were doing heart surgery and three days later, she died from a heart attack. She was a year old.

I got post-traumatic stress disorder, and I was depressed. In my depression, I became suicidal. So that happened, and I never forgot about it. I think about it day and night, every single second and every moment. I started seeing everyone

as an enemy: women, men, but not children—children were like angels for me. I started working hard, and I got my kids back.

Then I started having houses, having cars, having everything that I need for me and my kids. Then I started losing everything until I ended up in a shelter. I wasn't thinking right.

Frankenstein's Monsters

Edward

To All the Tims That Are Out There

“Underneath the stone, you can find treasure.”

This story is about a guy I had the pleasure of meeting. His name is Tim H. He is a tall slender fellow that has an amazing personality that I agree with. Now at this point I want to explain things that I agree with and why. The why is really simple so I'll save it for last. Now these are the things that I consider agreeable. People who can smile and laugh, can joke in a decent way, are clever, have charisma, they have swag/are smooth in behavior and finally can groove to the music. Tim has all of these qualities about him and we have hit it off well because of this and though this is a story about Tim H. I have been blessed in this walk to come across a lot of wonderful people who are very agreeable. And now their story has become mine also. Thanks Tim H.

Well now the why: because we all deserve people who are positive.

Romance out of Columbus House

Ivy

There was once a lady in Columbus House who seemed to be the life of the party. She had lots of friends and they would play games with her. One day, a young man came in and spotted this lovely lady. They two became friends. But he wanted more. At first, she wasn't interested, but as they began to know each other more, she became quite taken with the young man. She didn't know if she should get involved with him. But he pursued and pursued, until one day she decided to give him a try. She, then, was about to leave the Columbus House, so he asked her for her hand in marriage. They began a steamy relationship. They got married. They returned to the Columbus House. And, they continue their love affair to this very day. A romance out of Columbus House.

What Kind of Love Is This?

Ivy

I know this young man that's in love with what seems to be a lovely lady, but they keep running into trouble. They break up all the time, and while he keeps going back to her, she keeps winding up in the arms of another. But mind you: she says, I love him. I'm gonna be with him. I want to be his wife. What this young man needs to understand is true love would not leave your side.

Her family doesn't like him so he finds excuses for her behavior and he really wants to marry her. So much so, he went out and bought a ring. 1,700 dollars. And he can't give it to her. So I ask, What kind of love is this? Not one I would recommend.

But we all have to learn sometime. I can only pray that he sees what I see and keeps it moving. So again I ask, What kind of love is this?

“What this young man needs to understand is true love would not leave your side.”

When You Lose Everything

Naomi

I used to work hard for my family. I started buying cars, houses — I had everything. Until one day, I ended up losing everything, little by little.

I had a house. I lost it because my son didn't pay one month of rent. I had my own apartment. I lost it because my son told me to move in with him. His girlfriend and me didn't get along. He decided to marry her, so they went one way and I went my own way. I started moving from friend to friend, and from there, I went to the shelter.

I was born in Puerto Rico, and lived there for 25 years. It was better because there was more help. The government helped with housing, jobs, and schools. But I left because I thought I could get better jobs and better schools for my kids in America.

I've been in New Haven for 26 years. I worked in factories, restaurants, department stores. I used to make uniforms for the Army. I worked for General Electric. I worked at 3 Brother's Sport Shop. I used to make parts for nuclear bombs.

I got sick — they didn't tell us how dangerous it was. They didn't give us a mask or give us any covering. I got COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) in my lungs.

My son and his wife are doing good. I'm not mad about it. He's a working man. He doesn't know I'm in a shelter yet. I haven't told nobody in my family yet. I feel bad — they don't know nothing. If I told them they would come and pick me up, and I don't want that. I want my own place. I know it's gonna be soon.

What I really like to do is sewing and crocheting. I've always liked arts and crafts. Right now I'm making a pink queen-size blanket. It will take me about two months. Pink's my favorite color. When I get a house again, everything is going to be pink.

“I had everything. Until one day, I ended up losing everything, little by little.”

Peanut Butter Pie

Ernest

It's a good pie. An old white lady showed me how to do it, in the country. I used to work for her and she showed me how to do it. I started out washing dishes and she'd sit me down and talk to me about stuff. How to make desserts, other stuff. I know the soul food that my mother cooked, but she was going to teach me a new way of doing soul food. The country way.

You got a bowl of whipped cream. And you get graham cracker and pie crust. We're gonna take the whipped cream and put some vanilla flavor in with a teaspoon. Take 1/8 and 4 spoons of peanut butter. We're gonna put it inside the whipped cream. And we're gonna mix it. After you mix it real good, it's gonna look peanut buttery.

My grandmother, she taught me, you take the peanut butter and whipped cream and all that, after you beat it up and mix it all good, and you pour it inside the graham cracker crust. Alright, after you do that, you put it in the fridge and let it chill for a bit. And then after you cut yourself a piece, you say, "Hot damn, party's over." 'Cause you can eat that pie.

Missing You

Ivy

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

Love and miss you,
Mommy

life story

The Glory of the Southwest

Julianna

Once upon a time, there was a desert. A very small amount of people tried to build a community and the desert was in the south part of Nevada in a town called Las Vegas. Benjamin Siegel went to this desert from Los Angeles in a car and had a dream of building a very elegant hotel. Ten years later, I was born in Las Vegas, Nevada in 1957; there were only seven hotels on the strip.

In 1973, I attended a rock concert in the LV Convention Center, Deep Purple and Fleetwood Mac. But then they announced Deep Purple wouldn't be playing, people started throwing chairs at the stage and rioting. So there were no rock concerts for 10 years there until they built the Thomas and Mack arena in 1983.

All of a sudden they started having very elegant rock stars in Las Vegas. All of a sudden there was a place for musicians to play. On May 12, 1975, my graduation was held at Thomas and Mack, but I didn't go. I took my mom and my husband to the MGM Grand and saw Jimmy Page and Robert Plant. Then I wrote two books about Las Vegas and Jimmy Page and all the concerts I attended. *The Romantic Phenomenon of Jimmy Page* was first published in 2000; that took me three years. *Jimmy Page: Past Presence* was published in England in 2002, limited edition. The first one's a masterpiece. The second one's just average.

I saw Jimmy Page five times. Once, in October 1995, I saw him at the Cal Expo, I was standing at the front of the stage, and the security guard catapulted me over and I went backstage and met him. The second time was May 12, 1995, and I attended a Page and Plant concert in Mountain View, California on October 7, 1995. The fourth was September 24, 1998. I've seen him in Oklahoma City, Sacramento and twice in Las Vegas. Las Vegas is the entertainment capital of the world.

My Life

Tyson

My name is Tyson. I have two daughters that mean the world to me. I've been divorced twice. My last marriage lasted twelve years. This is my story about being homeless. It started doing drugs. I actually started out by camping, then I moved to New Haven because it's easier to get to the clinic from here and there's a lot more help given here. Since moving to New Haven, I've been in and out of the hospital and in and out of shelter. In the future, I want an apartment, and a new girlfriend, but, basically, I want a home.

Bad Luck

Tip Top

When I was in my thirties, I lived in Portsmouth, Virginia, and I had a job working at a company that made air vents for air conditioning and heating. I had a friend named Kevin, and I lived five miles from the job. Kevin would pick me up and take me home. We became good friends for several months. We would hang out after work; we'd drink beer or go to the park. Sometimes, we'd go to each other's apartments or house. After about several months, I got laid off. He took me to the labor department so I could collect. I stayed depressed in bed for two days and two nights. About two weeks later, the receptionist told me that the company's president and two vice-presidents gave themselves a raise after they laid me off—that was my from salary. I had a month before I had to move, and I couldn't find a job. I was not left with much luck. There was a Swedish company that gave the president a new car while I walked from the unemployment office. From that day on, I became a socialist.

I moved back here to New Haven, and I got a job at Saint Raphael hospital. But Yale took over the hospital. When Yale took it over, they downsized. I lost my apartment and car. I moved back in with Mom. After she got sick, I moved her to a nursing home. She had Alzheimer's. In February of 2017, I was in a bad car accident. That's why I have the bad scar on my forehead, and I lost twenty-five percent of my memory. I can't work. I'm sitting here waiting for Social Security to come in. I'm sitting here with a series of bad luck. Before I got here, I slept in a car for three months. It was very cold, so I came here.

Some people say I just have a bad attitude—not bad luck. But if you wake up every morning and step on a nail is that because you have a bad attitude?

I've called Kevin three times since leaving Virginia. He lost his job too. The second time I called him, he got a job working in a prison. The third time I called him, he didn't remember me. I haven't bothered keeping in touch. I was sad when he didn't remember me.

“But if you wake up every morning and step on a nail is that because you have a bad attitude?”

Coming to Connecticut

Larry

It was November 15, two weeks before Thanksgiving. I had just spent the last little bit of money off my food stamp card, around forty dollars. I had \$180 left, and my cousin wanted to buy some of my food stamps, so I made my way to her house. I gave her \$100 worth of food stamps in exchange for \$50 cash. I trusted her enough to leave the card with her, but then I ended up getting locked up. Even then, I trusted that she wasn't going to spend all of my money, so I didn't think of getting off the stamps. But I wasn't aware that she gave it to my sister during that time and when I got home, I called another cousin and he told me the truth. I was kind of mad about it, because money wasn't supposed to be spent when I was locked up. We had a three-way call with my sister, and I asked about my card. My sister said, "It's got \$120 on it." I said, "How could there only be \$120?" My sister started going off, saying I'm accusing her of stealing my money. She said, "Don't call me for the rest of your life."

I hung up. I got on the 35 to go pick up my card. Going by her attitude, I already knew the BS she was gonna do, so I wasn't surprised when she left my card and money outside of the house under the doormat. But then she opened the door and was standing there, all teasing me. I spit on her. She hit me. I choked her. Then I cussed her out real bad and tried to hurt her feelings, but she was nonchalant, not phased at all. Besides, I couldn't put up much of a fight with only \$120. I got back on the 35, to the 19, went to the casino to try and make some money, left the casino, went to the greyhound station and came to Connecticut. I've been here for nine months now.

“Besides, I couldn't put up much of a fight with only \$120.”

My Story

Lisa

I was born in New Haven, Connecticut. My parents moved me to Fort Meyers, Florida, when I was thirteen. I have three kids, four grandkids. And now I'm back in New Haven, Connecticut, after 32 years. The reason I came back, was because I had a stroke, and I had no medical coverage. And since I've been back, I've had two heart surgeries. And now I find myself homeless. That's my story.

Life Worth Living (No Regrets)

Rev

I was the oldest of four, born into the CIA. Catholic. Irish. Alcoholic. I was abused in every way you think of: physically, mentally, sexually. I was raised on the streets of New York, Miami, Dallas, Fort Worth, from the ages of thirteen to twenty-two. I was homeless, and that's where I got my education.

I came back to Providence, Rhode Island. I married the woman of my dreams and had five kids, two careers and an education. Then eleven years in and three grandkids later, I had the problem. My wife had a surgery. She got addicted to opioids. We've been divorced for the last eight and a half years. I was ages 22 to 44 during the marriage and when we got divorced, I was back on the streets. There's a reason that Jesus sent everyone out in two's; you can't go out alone. With the death of my wife and some terrible conversations, where I got blamed for it somehow, after twenty-five years of being sober, I came back to Connecticut so that I could get help with my addiction. It just got out of hand, and that's how I got to Columbus House.

In hindsight, I was angry at my father. I now see that if he hadn't made those decisions, I wouldn't be who I am today. That was bootcamp. I had to immediately learn that street savvy. There's jail mentality, street mentality and regular life. There's a thing called "street cred," and they know when you

don't have it and they take advantage of you. I am now grateful to my father for what I once hated him for. When I was forty-eight, my mother said: "Do you know why he treated you like that? Because he was jealous of you. Because he could never please his father, but his brother could. Because you could do anything you set your mind to."

During the twenty-two years of marriage, I studied theology, graduated seminary. I have an honorary PhD in divinity. I left to go help homeless people. Nobody cares how much you know until they know you care. They want out, I know the difference. Those who need it, get it. And I get to do it in a faith-based way. I am a ministry called Street Harvest. People's lives change, and it only takes twenty minutes. No better feeling than investing in

another's life. Because they go on to help other people, who help other people... I know some activists that will trip over three homeless people to save a cat.

I've been told several times to write a book — I would have to write "fiction," because my life is so hard to believe. But there was much insight to be had working with others. Peace just drips over you. It passes all understanding... I wouldn't be able to explain it to you. Hearing, "Thanks, Rev, I just celebrated four years," feels better than anything I've drank or snorted.

"I would have to write "fiction," because my life is so hard to believe."

A Man Broken

John

I started out working at the ambulance at 85, worked there for 14 years. Then I had two TIA strokes, and I became high risk. I started driving little trucks for various companies. I drove for Napa, Helping Hands, the Salvation Army. Then I had another TIA on July 1st, 2014, and I spent seven days in the hospital. After I got out of the hospital, I lived off my savings and checking for two years, but I've been here ever since 2016.

Everyone has their own story about how they became homeless. There's various reasons why a person might become homeless. That was my story. I just filled out a couple applications today, and I'm just waiting on housing.

Domestic Violence

Luca

TW: domestic violence, miscarriage

When I was twenty-four, I met this guy. His name was Luis. I fell in love with him. In the beginning of the relationship, everything felt like peaches and cream. After a year, he started getting jealous of everything. If I talked to another female, that meant I was lesbian to him. If I talked to a guy, he thought I was prostituting myself. Then, he started verbally and emotionally abusing me. After that, he physically abused me. Hitting me. Punching me.

Then I got pregnant with his baby. When I was nine months pregnant, he threw me from the third floor of the stairs. He took me to the hospital, and I lost my baby. He went to jail for killing the baby. He did time for the baby and for me. After that, I buried my baby. His name was Luis Antonio. Every year, I remember his death's anniversary and his birthday. It's painful.

When Luis got out of jail, he started looking for me. That's why I moved out from the place that I was, and I moved to New Haven. I'm doing better. He knows I'm here, and he can't come see me because then he would have to go back to jail.

Major Tragedy

Norman

TW: suicide

When I was about eighteen years old, my brother Carl hung himself in my brother John's apartment. He had the door locked, music blaring. He did it with an extension cord and a paint bucket. But he didn't break his neck, he ended strangling himself. (In rehab, he was gonna do something like that, too.)

My brother John hung himself over his wife. I was working for him, he paid me but when he died, everything fell apart. Two months later, my mother passed. Then, my sister Diane was heartbroken, and died three weeks later from cancer. God took my mother, and then my wife ended up getting sick with Hepatitis C. I brought her to the hospital, two months after that they said, "Norman, she ain't gonna make it."

She was only forty-two, my wife. After that, everything went to hell. I've been haunted by these people, and I see Diane right behind me. I lost all three people in less than a year. My son overdosed on fentanyl and passed away. I went through a lot of losses. I've been in the hospital twelve, fifteen times. I went to a couple different shelters. People tell me, "God has something good for me," but he's taken everybody, one at a time. My sister, Diane, sold the truck, which I had for fifty-six years, the one I thought I'd better not sell.

I lost a lot. If it hadn't been for my beliefs in Jesus Christ, if I hadn't been a Christian, I wouldn't be here. It's the only thing that's keeping me alive. I was angry when I found out, when everyone was leaving. But He's not taking them from me. So I'm okay right now. I'll be all set when I get myself a trailer and fix it to live in it.

Until They Have More to Give

Ivy

In case you're wondering
What happened to that cute little couple
I have the ending for you, folks.

Well, as life has it
The lady and the young man
That stole your hearts

They looked around and looked around for housing
They came upon a house they thought was nice
And wanted to take it
But God had other plans.

When they thought
They were ready to move
Into the house
They were denied.

Good thing they kept the door open
Because the one waiting for them
Was much better.

They sold the house
And knew it was the one for them.
They put their papers in
And it was granted.

So now those two
Can live happily ever after
In their new home.

Well folks, this is it
Until they have more to give you.

My Destiny

TW: suicide

Mary

I used to live in California. About five years into our relationship, I married a man I loved. He passed away 8 months later. I lived alone for two years, living off his death benefits—he had been a veteran—but eventually the money ran out and I had to move back East. I stayed with my brother for a while, but I couldn't find a job quickly and we ended up falling out. He tossed me out. I stayed in motels for a while until I ended up homeless in the street. Pretty soon after this I started wanting to commit suicide. I was hospitalized, and after that I've been able to get some help. I was placed in Columbus House in the New Beginnings Program, which helped me for 7 months to reestablish my life and start to find housing and a job. Then I was transferred to Fellowship Place through my caseworker. I learned through all of that that you gotta stay positive. I really want to stay independent, but more important than that, I want to be responsible; I went from being very responsible in California to being not at all responsible, and I want to go back to being responsible again.

I feel like I'm starting a new life with New Beginnings. I went from very negative and depressed to more hopeful. I got clean after drinking a lot. Now I feel like I have my own place in the world and I want to give back. If I had more money, I have a wish to donate to the Ronald McDonald House. I adore children. In California, I used to save caps off soda bottles and put them into the containers outside Ronald McDonald House. I always wanted to know that I'd had something to do with making even one or two kids feel better.

At This Time

Steven

Where would I be from, this time, if I wasn't in a warm place, where I can eat, shower, talk with my fellows, mates, spiritually. Everything I hope, it would be better for us, that I have to say at this time.

Not a Nice Day

Daniel

I thought it was a nice day when I was on my way to pay my bills. I had about \$3,600 on me. I ran into my cousin and his friend. They offered me a ride because they saw me walking. I told them I had to pay my cell phone bills and my rent.

The car we were in caught a flat tire. Instead of calling a tow truck, we just drove to my cousin's friend's house nearby. I made the mistake of pulling my money out and counting it in front of them. The reason I pulled my money out was to see how much money I would have left over after my bills. I told them that after I paid my bills, I could loan them the rest, which would have been about \$1,000 to \$1,200. We parked the car in the driveway, and we cut through the path to get to Post Road to go to the cell phone store.

The next thing I knew, my cousin's friend was pulling out a gun and started shooting. I fell to the ground. I took everything that was in my pockets and threw it on the ground. Next, he said he was going to shoot me in the head. Then, my cousin said the same thing. They started going back and forth for a minute. Then, a dog started barking and an old lady started yelling and asking what's going on. My cousin and his friend ran off. I got up and walked out of the path. There was a cop already there. He started yelling and asking where the gun was. He grabbed me, and I shouted out in pain. That's when he realized I was the victim and not the shooter. He called for the EMTs, and off to Yale I was. They took a CAT scan or an MRI of me to see that the bullet traveled around inside of me. They had to operate right away. They asked if I wanted them to call anyone. I told them who and off I went to surgery.

“That's when he realized I was the victim and not the shooter.”

Aftermath

Daniel

After I was shot, everything in my life changed. Now, I don't trust anyone. I don't like being in crowds of people. If I hear a loud bang, I jump. I suffer from depression, anxiety, and PTSD. I have a pin in my hip, two plates, and six screws in my ankle and a bullet in between my bladder and stomach. Living with this trauma has been hard on me. My trust issues are all over the place. I have flashbacks and nightmares. I get super nervous. At times, it's hard for me to open up to people. I now have to take medicine to help me be normal. I now distance myself from the people who I was once close to because I fear that they will harm me. I have to talk to doctors, psychiatrists, and therapists just to try to open up. Then, if my doctor gets changed, I have to start the process all over again. Having to relive it all over again is hard on me. So is all the physical pain. Doctors, like the ones I see, think you're just looking for a high because of all the pill abuse that goes on. So, you can't even get treatment that you need because they are worried that you will abuse the medicine. These are just some ways that being shot has affected my life. I just hope and pray for the best and that it will work out in the end.

Getting Better

Michelle

This is a story of a woman who changed her life...

When she was twenty-three years old, her husband went to jail, and she finally was able to get away from him. She and her two children moved to a new place and were doing great. One day, she bumped into an old friend who was in a bad spot so she gave her a place to stay with her and her two children. They started partying a little bit. They would go to the club or have some friends over to the house. But after a while, it went from two days a week to seven days a week. The woman with two children met a really nice guy, but she went through a lot of painful things with him as well. But things got better. He took her to Canada, and they got pregnant, and they had their little girl. After that, she had a hard time stopping drinking, and she was drinking on a daily basis amongst other things. Before she knew it, she was not working as a medic anymore, and she was asking family to take care of her children. Her battle with this disease went on for ten years. She got very, very ill. She died over and over again. She spent months and months at a time in the hospital. Then one day, she finally got it. She wanted the help, and she went and got it. She stayed clean and relapsed numerous times. But right now, she's pushing three years, and she's feeling very good about herself. She believes with her higher power on her side, she can stay clean and do good things in life. Her family is very proud of her.

The Boy from the Bronx

Samuel

So this is a story about a boy that was born in the Bronx February 28, 1977. His mom left him for a pack of Newports when he was two months old. She came back eighteen years later. It was a long walk to the store.

His father raised him but everywhere he lived was bug-infested. He would get bullied all the time, but he still went to school, still got an education. Then his mom came back when he was eighteen years old. They rekindled a little bit. He got his GED. He did one year of college, went to Puerto Rico to see his father and grandmother, who was HIV positive.

He came back. Then ten to fifteen years later, he met this girl. He moved to New Haven, followed her there, then he had a baby, then the girl left him in New Haven. He found a job at Price Right. Now he's at Columbus House and the story continues.

How We're Gonna Cook this Chicken

Daniel

I love chicken. Good thing to eat. I like everything about it. I eat chicken every day. You can eat chicken with anything. Fries, rice, vegetables, chicken sandwich. You can boil it, fry it. Anything's good with chicken.

First, we're gonna wash this chicken. Then we're gonna clean it. We're gonna paprika, a little salt, a little pepper, garlic salt, onion salt. Put some hot sauce on it. Drown it a little bit. Then you take your hands, and you toss it up, make sure it's seasoned a little bit. Your hands might be a little gushy but that's alright. When you do that, you get some flour, put it in a bowl or a bag, and you put it in and make sure it's all floured up real good. Meantime you got a pot with some grease in it. Make sure it's hot. Then, after you flour your chicken, put the chicken in the pot. Make sure it's nice and brown, and stick a fork in to make sure there's no blood running out. If you take it out and stick your fork in and there's blood, put it back in and give it a few more minutes. That's Ernest chicken, yeah!

The Lost and Found Man

TW: suicide

Norman

About four years ago, I had my brother John hang himself. My mother got heartbroken after that and she ended up passing away 3 months later. My sister, who is a year older, died of brain cancer at 57, and my fiancée—who I had been with for 14 years—also passed away. Then my son passed away from doing a bag of fentanyl.

When my brother passed away, that started all of my problems because I lost everything. I used to work for the company that he owned and when he died I lost my job, and my house. With everything that had happened, I got depression. I was in and out of the hospital for my depression. I ended up in a shelter in Waterbury. Then I had to live in a shelter on Grand Avenue where I got pneumonia. I never went back. After that I ended up at Columbus House, but Columbus House suspended me for 90 days because I missed the bus and I couldn't make it to Columbus House, but I didn't give them a 90 days notice.

But now I am staying at Columbus House. I have a social worker Stephanie who I am grateful for and who has been helping me here. I am homeless and waiting for housing. On May 1st, I go in front of a federal judge to get social security disability.

Everybody's been telling me that with everything that's happened, with everyone dying around, God's got a plan for me. I have a plan and a goal. I want to rehab trailers because I am a skilled carpenter. I've been a carpenter for 32 years.

Waking Up in Puerto Rico

Sammy

When I was twenty-five, I was living with this girl in New York, and we were going through some problems. We were fighting all the time. The fights were pretty serious, and my friend got concerned. My friend and I went out to drink together one night.

While we were out, I was talking about this girl and saying things like "I want to kill her." My friend told me to relax. We drank all night, and I fell asleep. The next morning, I woke up in San Juan, Puerto Rico with twenty-five dollars in my pocket. My friend paid for my trip from Kennedy Airport to San Juan.

I remembered how my dad told me how to get to my grandmother's house in Puerto Rico when I was very young. So, I took a dollar cab to my grandmother's house. From San Juan, we drove to another town. Finally, we got to Manatí, where my grandmother is from. I remembered my grandmother's house, and I went up the hill towards it. I remembered how to get to my grandmother's house with only twenty-five dollars in my pocket.

I stayed at my grandmother's house for a whole year. I got a welding job, and I saved money to go back home. While in Puerto Rico, I spoke on the phone to the friend who sent me there. But when I got back to New York, I lost his phone number.

Straight out of Brooklyn

TW: violence

Anonymous

I left New York was because I was selling drugs. My girlfriend got tired of seeing girls around me, because when you sell drugs, girls just come to you. You have power. When I was selling, a guy told me he wanted to supply me and he would give me protection. I took his offer; it was money-making. They claim they care about you. But this one guy's father was connected, in the 1970s, and supposedly a made man back then. They threatened brothers because they couldn't get to me. That was why I left NYC. Everyone thinks it was something else, but that was it.

When I came over here to Connecticut, I tried to find the right way, work and stuff. The girl I lived with, I made her have an abortion twice; I was too young to have a kid those times. But the third time, she said, "We're keeping it, no matter what." The child died at birth, the umbilical cord wrapped around its neck. It would've been a daughter.

After that I started doing drugs again, selling drugs. I went to prison. Once I went to prison, we were one of the first guys to start a gang. The guy in charge got permission from the Kings in Chicago. He didn't do drugs and stuff — he was educated. They made me the secretary because I was educated, too, though I didn't want to do the job at first because I thought that was a woman's job. It was 1987. There were thirteen of us. Little by little, it grew.

We mainly did it because the blacks would jump the Spanish and white guys that came in alone, take their money, violate them. Basically that was our intention, we didn't know it was going to grow like it did. When I transferred

prisons, I would recruit people; some of the guys I recruited became high ranking members later on in New Haven. Our first war was with a gang called—well, I forgot. The one with the tear-drop under the eye? But one of them was killed. In the mid-80's, they used to have a mini golf course in the prison. They beat him down with a golf club and he died. That was the kind of life we led in prison. I hurt people (whatever) — only because they came after me. I never went and started a fight.

I was born and raised in South Brooklyn, and I'm Puerto Rican. A big thing with Puerto Ricans is respect. It's really huge in prison, too. You get killed over being disrespected. You have to do something or you're going to be run over the rest of your time in prison. After the Rico Act — cracking down on the Mafia and other forms of organized crime — we started getting tried as gang members, all together. After that, it started getting really bad. One time, me and this other Puerto Rican guy got jumped, and the police asked me if I wanted to

press charges. I told the other guy not to say anything; it's a rule not to snitch. I went back to court three times. I told my lawyer, "If you don't get me out of there, I'm either gonna kill somebody or get killed." It sounds crazy, but if a person disrespects me, I go nuts. I'm willing to hurt them. It's a code we got. It's a way of honor that we don't snitch. Whether it's right or wrong, it's a code.

I've been a criminal all my life. I've

robbed a bank, drug dealers. I ran an order shop, burglarized housing. My partner got caught. He took the blame, and spent 20 years in prison. I started selling drugs in 1971, when I was sixteen. My friends were selling heroin and pills. I was selling weed and cocaine. I was making more money than my mother and father. By sixteen, I had three guys selling for me. When I first got busted, it was because one of them got busted and then set me up.

I never expected to live this long. In my school in Brooklyn, in PS 29, my friend, Eddie, told me, "I'm not gonna hit 20," and I said, "If you don't hit 20, I'm not gonna hit 30." Guys on my block were mixed race but we were always fighting against other neighborhoods. People would always call us names, slurs for Italians and Puerto Ricans. It was gang fighting. I was seventeen and had my own apartment. One day, we were all smoking weed, and I got too high and I said, "I'm going home

to sleep." Next thing I know, one of my friends was shaking me and said, "They just

got Eddie." The Italian gang had shot him. I grabbed my gun, and went into the Italian quarter. My mother and brothers came looking for me. I was crying and shaking when my brothers grabbed me.

When I first got out of prison, I smoked weed, then I stopped. It's been nine, ten months clean, the longest time I've ever been clean. I lost my construction job two months ago cause I

“If you don't get me out of there, I'm either gonna kill somebody or get killed.”

got into a fight with the foreman cause he was always yelling and cussing people out. Actually, this is my second time being homeless. I was in 2014 when I got out of prison. I don't go to Kings meetings because I'm homeless. People tell me I'm wrong, but this is such a waste of life. It's like we're all here just waiting to die. Half of us are believers and the other are mixed up: domestically abused, no friends, lost job, etc. I don't see no future. I have three brothers in New York; I'm the youngest. All my life I was in and out of prison, selling and doing drugs;

they distanced me. My oldest brother is a financial consultant, and has been for over twenty-eight years. He's a multimillionaire. He could've retired at 44, but he didn't because the money is too good. He sits behind a desk, working computers all day long. My pride won't let me call up him and ask for help. But who's gonna hire a 62-year-old prison convict?

I've been shot at. I've shot. I've been stabbed, I've stabbed. It's part of street life and prison. Before all this, I went to Catholic school. I was very active in sports; I was actually being

scouted down in Florida, but I didn't make it. I was thirteen and my girlfriend was fourteen when we had a kid, the kid's mother told me I left to Connecticut because they were scared that if he were with me or talking to me, something bad would happen to him, too. I haven't seen my son since he was twelve years old. He's forty-nine now. Every time I try to contact him, I get his relatives and they hang up on me right off because of my reputation. Before I die, I wanna let him know the truth. How can I not love him? He's my only son.

The Rapist Married the Victim

TW: rape

Neomi

When I was eight years old, I was going to school. I passed through a street, and there was an old man. I was stopped by him. I went another way to go to school. When I was twelve years old, I used to go pick up my friend from school, and this old man watched me every day. He had a girlfriend. One day, she asked that she stay with me, and I said yes because I knew her. At 3:00 in the morning, her boyfriend knocked on the door. She answered the door. I recognized his voice. He was with somebody else. I got raped. I was screaming and crying. I was only ninety-nine pounds. He was too strong for me. My mom didn't let me talk when I tried to tell her. I told him I was going to put him in jail. He went to my house and told my father and mother that we were in love. My father married me to him. I married my rapist. I have three children from him. I had so much anger. I beat him up. The next day, I asked for a divorce. He said, "Okay." He did me wrong. Instead of signing divorce papers, he had me sign away my children's custody over to his mother and sister. His sister can have no kids. I suffered a lot. When I found out he had my kids, I became suicidal.

When Somebody Hurts You

TW: suicide

Naomi

I had a husband. Things were going well for a couple of years until things started going bad. I left the house. A friend gave me a ticket to Puerto Rico, where I was born, to get away from him. He was being bad to me. So I used the ticket and went there.

In three days, his sister called me. She was the friend who gave me the ticket. She said that he was gonna call me and record everything that I was gonna say. He was gonna tell me that my son was in jail, my daughter was in jail, and that I was gonna freak out. She said to try not to show my feelings about what happened to kids, and try to be nice.

So he called me, but he never told me what was going on. I told him that I missed him, that I wanted to be with him again. He sent me some money, and I came back the same day. He said that I could stay for two weeks if I played good. When I got here, he was shaking.

I told him to go get a glass of water. When he left the room, I turned on a recorder on my phone and left it there. I had told his sister to get me a radio so that I could listen in to what he was saying. When I left and went to her house, I heard them laughing about what they had done to my kids.

The house I had, he was renting. When I came back, it was full already. I went to him with the recording and I said, listen to this. You're gonna listen to it morning, day, and night. I told him, you're gonna take out my kids from jail, you're gonna take out my grandson, you're gonna empty the house, and you're gonna bring my kids there.

He couldn't get one of my kids out — he was doing 9 months. I had a shotgun. I was going to kill myself. It was too much. I couldn't handle it. But I talked to my therapist. She said, don't do that, you can't help yourself like that, you'll never see your kids again. She helped me a lot. One year later, I had my kids back, and I left the house with my kids.

He's dead now. I don't feel nothing — no hate.

faith

Out of the Darkness

Anonymous

Out of the darkness
stepping out of the darkness
the abyss that was my depression
how I got here I'm not sure
it was a combination of things
really living with this bear my whole life
has been true hell on earth
I see now that the one thing that carried me
this whole time was the one thing that
I fought my whole life that was keeping a good
connection with my higher power
rebuilding my life slowly with the help of my spiritual family
feeling for the first time in a long time truly connected
it's a rebirth just in time for the time of resurrection
not sure yet that I fully understand his sacrifice
but glad to be back in his graces again.

A Beautiful Near-Death Experience

Sam

It was a week before my twenty-third birthday. At the time, I went to Clemson University, I was modeling. I was studying social science and in the honors program. We ran out of gas directly in front of a station just two minutes away from my house. It was me, my sister, my sister's friend and her husband, their little girl. They asked me to help them go get the gas. I said sure, since I'd done it once before, abiding by the traffic laws and having hazard lights on, could I have expected this?

As soon as I got out of the car to help, I remember my sister looked back at me and said, "Make sure you're not blocking the hazard lights." I knew I was not. I took two steps and I went black. I was told later that these events unfolded during this time: it was a nurse who was texting, driving and speeding. She looked up at the last second and swerved to the left and pinned me between the two cars.

The girl was freaking out, and my sister was yelling at her. Then she saw my legs all bent up, my bones were poking out. I told my sister I'm getting cold. I stopped talking in the ambulance as I was going into hypovolemic shock, and left my body.

I'm seeing only out of my eyes but also flying over the earth. I cannot see my body at all. It is the most amazing experience; I see this bright light, very bright, so bright it blinds me. As I step into the light, the first thing I see is his eyes and beautiful, black hair, long and dark. He's got gold armbands on both wrists all over his arms, and he is so bright. He has this regal crown on and a white robe. As he continues to dim down, I begin to realize it was He himself who was glowing, and his skin was a very light shade of blue.

I had such an amazing feeling of peace and love.

I did not want to leave.

The background is white. He walks and talks to me forever. I felt like I was gone for a week. I can't remember anything that he said except I just remember his laugh, as well as the ground. He blocked mostly everything. All he lets me remember is being in my body, looking up at him, then being in his body, and as I stretch out my hand, seeing another me far away. I see out of the body of the me far away, looking at me and him standing together. I have my legs and I'm dressed in white as well. I believe he showed me this to show this body is not eternal and in heaven my body would be healed and perfect again. I don't remember anything we talked about. All I can remember is him saying, "Sam, you can't stay now. But you'll be back very soon."

I thought, *If he's God, he must know the right thing to do.* But then -- I didn't say this, I only thought it -- I thought, "Wait, in *that* body?" He heard me thinking! He just nodded. Then I cried for hours and I felt how bad he felt for me. He touched my shoulder; I felt a gust of wind and then I was staring at my bloody Hello Kitty shirt. I realized I was back on Earth, and I passed out.

I was in the hospital for a year. I didn't know anything about him, I went to Catholic school. But now I have lots of books, I've been tearing up the library. My braces were difficult to use at first, but soon I'll be walking in prosthetics, and spreading God's word. It was a beautiful near-death experience. It means so much to me and I'd rather have it than my legs. Whatever purpose he sent me back for, I'll discover that very soon.

Spiritual Warfare

Samantha

I'm living life as it comes,
One day at a time.
Trying my best to do what's right,
Telling everyone I'm fine.
I hide how I feel inside.
I am truly,
Slowly but surely losing my mind.

To calm down my racing thoughts,
I meditate,
Focusing on peace and God.
All the drama around me permeates the air,
But my spiritual armor protects me,
I can't care.
It cannot be pierced, shattered, or torn.
Through me a true warrior of God is born.

So the next time someone brings you negativity through thoughtless babble,
Get out your armor and prepare for battle!
Always stay positive and do your best,
And you will always be successful and blessed,
Constantly rising above the rest. ♥

The Rock

Anonymous

The time of destruction is over
The things learned from this devastating period is over
People have passed away, friends gone astray
But what was learned from this rebuilding process will
forever change and reshape me.
This is amazing that from such a dark period a rebirth
can emerge, although it comes rather slowly I can feel the
paths opening for me
It's a process for sure but I pray for a slow recovery as it
will be a lasting one. That is the rock, the foundation for
which I will begin the rebuilding, knowing that I only need
myself and my higher power to really begin this journey.
For it was me, not my higher power, that left me. Not sure
what the future holds but I'm sure that my higher power
will carry me to the next step along my path.

You Will Know My Name

Dominique

Blood, sweat, and tears equal pain
Still I maintain.
I feel as though I'm going insane
In my membrane.
I thank the Lord for all of my struggles
Tug o' war is life,
My life is not trife.
I love everything about it now.
I had to learn how to grow;
How to show myself love.

Love: from the man so high up above.
I cannot ever have enough.
The Lord is no bluff
He just keeps on putting me
Through all types of stuff.
Just when, I think I had enough,
He just keeps on putting me through all types of stuff.
Just when, I think I had enough,
He gives me more stuff.
Life! What a wonder you are!

So I pray each and every day,
That he gives me, the strength, courage, peace, and wisdom
To keep pressing on;
To live happy, healthy, and long.

The more I grow,
The more he lets me know.
My life is not a game,
I shall not be ashamed.
You will know my name: Dominique.
Thank the Lord, Jesus Christ for me!

Finding Love and Happiness

Carolyn

Life being yourself inside and out
Loving yourself through God and finding
Inspiration through him, we make mistakes
But some of us try to correct it on our own
But we can't find out who we are
And trying to hold on alone, we can't.
I see faces that are upset and stressed and
Angry and that are in tears but realize who
You must hold on to when you are going through
Situations. No one can who you hold on to.
Man or woman can't pull you through.
Believe in God and find him before you
Call him your man. Don't cling on to a
Mistake that you are not happy with. I
See a lot while I'm selling books. Stay strong
And wait and enjoy yourself.

homelessness

Not Easy

Michelle

Life in shelters is very hard, but it's even worse in the winter months. The shelter that I'm at, especially. You have to be up at 5:30am and out at 7:30am, and if you have nowhere to go, then you're stuck out in the cold until the library opens at 10:00 AM on Monday-Friday and noon on Saturday. And if you have nowhere to go on Sundays, then you're stuck in the cold all day, and there's no exceptions. Then one of the people who runs the place referred to us as less than human beings, homeless, addicted, and mentally ill.

Being homeless is not easy. Stigma is a big thing. We are looked on worse than that. We go to soup kitchens. That's what we depend on for meals. We go to clothing closets for clothes.

But in all reality, we are normal, educated, and well-rounded people who just hit some bad luck. So, next time you see a homeless person, just say, "hi!"

Chris at Columbus House

Chris-Marie

Everyone gets up at 5:30am and eats breakfast-- plenty of milk, cereal and coffee-- but I get up at 4am. I like to straighten my hair, get ready, have the bathroom all to myself, me time. Just a little bit of that time that you don't get much of.

Columbus House is a great program, and the place is clean. We bunk together, around four to five of us to a room. There's a cubicle for privacy, a cabinet for clothes, and space under the bed large enough for a suitcase, or at least three bags of clothes. Then again, I try not to collect stuff, because what am I gonna do with it when I leave? We have a TV and all different kinds of channels. Chores aren't hard, different people have different privileges. I volunteer to do things, because they're nice enough to put us up here for a while.

I'm pretty quiet, sometimes I get depressed. I go in and out of the hospital, staying for a couple days at a time. I lost my husband a year ago, and I started to do drugs. My father died right after my husband. At the beginning of the summer, I weighed 110 pounds, but thankfully, I'm back to my normal weight now. I'm 57 years old, starting to get it together. My social worker, Eleanor, is very cool; I'm part of a program, LOS, which helps us set aside one fourth of our checks to help us get a place. I have three grandchildren: eleven, one and one month. I like comfy clothes and all the 70's clothes. There's a Saver's on Boston Post Road, and today I went thrift shopping. I got a purse and jacket for \$6, and spent roughly \$10! I like to be stylish, with sweaters and boots. A little funky.

I'm grateful that I have a roof over my head; some people aren't. A lot of things are going missing lately. You put a bunch of people from different cultures that were raised differently together, what do you expect? But Jack, Fallon and Glen—they're all great people, real cool. They're the most likely to say, Hey, chill out. It's nice to eat together, even if we argue over stupid things. Some of us have ups and downs, but the staff's really cool. We're just like one big happy family.

Homeless Man

Steven

I stay in the homeless shelter for about one year or so. Now I'm in search of a place of my own. I would be a person that is sober, healthy, safe, staying out of trouble, that likes to party in a nice way, well to the next time.

Fun of Homeless New Haven

Walter

Well, I lived in Maine in the middle of nowhere for 10 years. It was probably not the best thing but at least I wasn't being bothered. I had some trauma at a younger age that made me not want to be around large groups of people. Anyhow, I left that place and came to New Haven, as my mother lives here and I had not seen her for some time. At the time it was not possible for me to stay there, and because I had spent so long in middle-of-nowhere Maine, I really didn't know anyone.

I started out as a stranger in a new town with no friends or anything. No friends, no car, no job, etcetera. For over a year, I tried to get an I.D. so that I could apply for work, and got nowhere. The stuff never seems to come in the mail. So I'm at the overflow shelter (lot of them) and I still have to get an I.D. It is actually very comical to think that in this country, which has cameras everywhere and puts such an emphasis on security "post 9/11," that's it's such a struggle to find an I.D. Haha – it's funny.

So, in the shelter there are good people and it's nice that there is a place to stay. The downsides are no showers and walking out in the cold at 7 AM. It's tough to figure out where to go and what to do in the morning and very easy to feel like you have not gotten anywhere towards getting out of the situation.

First step is getting an ID. Ugh ... sigh. So I have to go try that again AGAIN and hope it doesn't take a year. First you need mail with your name so that you can go to social security to get a card. Then you need a birth certificate, which in my case means sending 60 dollars to Pennsylvania. So I have to find 60 dollars, then fill out the paperwork, and then HOPE it comes in the mail, which it doesn't ever seem to do as I have been there before. I tried it in Florida and they said I would have to wait 4 months LOL. It's very frustrating when you see a place hiring but have no I.D. and it's so hard to get one. So that's where I'm at right now...

If I Didn't Have S**t Luck, I Would Have No Luck At All

Daniel

I was married for twenty years. I got divorced, then I got a girlfriend for six and half years. Then after that we broke up and I had nowhere to stay. So, I went to go live with my mother. My mother passed away after about a year, so I stayed with a friend of mine for about five months, until his mother found out I was living there, and she kicked me out. Then I called 211, and I ended up here. I spent time at the Grand Avenue Emergency Shelter, from July 3rd to December 1st. Then I came here, and now I'm facing possible cancer. That's about it.

My Own Place

Tim

I finally got my apartment at the Fellowship Place Program here in New Haven. I've been homeless for over a year.

I moved in December 15th 2017. It feels good to have my own freedom again. I don't have to deal with the shelter life anymore. I have my independence again.

Everything is close to my apartment: my bank, stop and shop, family dollar, even the bus stop.

I thank the Fellowship Place Program for all their help.

The Man Never Gives Up

D.G.

I was born in 1966, and I came to the United States when I was 13 years old. I grew up in a neighborhood by myself because my mother and father passed away. I didn't have anybody to take care of me, which was when I was introduced to doing drugs: heroin. That's when I became homeless, because I couldn't get a job. I couldn't function like a normal person because of my addiction, and that's when I realized that I needed some help and I put myself in Columbus House, and started looking for permanent housing. I am happy that I am here and that I am filling out applications for apartments. Soon I will have a home.

Untitled

Corine

Didn't think I would ever be homeless, but here I be. I was living with my mom. She got bladder cancer, she had it all removed. And was fine. But one year later she passed away. She was living in elderly housing and I was living with her. As it came to be I was unable to take over the apartment because I was not 62 or disabled so I became homeless. So here I be 3 years later, 63 and disabled. Who would have thought. So with some hope and faith this will be the last year. And all the help I was told will come to be, slowly but surely all I can do is pray. And believe. Hopeful.

Where to Begin...

Luis

I am a 26-year-old man living the homeless life. Seeing how the real world is. This is my 2nd year. I'm not a big fan. Looking for work day by day just to make a living, to earn a home. How I got here, I ask myself every day why. I am as respectful as can be but even so, here I am.

It's me vs. the world, but I strive for peace. What can I do? I once was the man. I had it all: multiple jobs, a girlfriend, 2 cats and a home. I let the stress of the world let me down. I took too long to place a marriage that I wasn't even ready for and she called it quits. That opened the doors to my mental prison. This is where I stand. What is the point? This life I live is not easy. The friends I once knew are now enemies; I barely know my family anymore. Still I stand. I lost it all, but still I stand, still I smile through the pain and agony. Where is the love I once knew? This life I live is not what I want it to be. But it is what it is, and I keep moving forward.

Life moves pretty fast. If you sit around all day you could miss out. Too much pride can either make you or break you. I live day by day in regret. On the outside I wear a mask that smiles and laughs: that's who I want to be. On the inside I am angry—what I don't want. I guess beggars can't be choosers. It's not enough, there's more to life than meets the eye. I think once I find a job I will be happy because I will be that much closer to finding a home.

There's a girl I like. But how, I ask myself, can I love without a home to care for? She's my best friend, I've known her for years. Our love is strong enough to hold yet I cannot hold her. Living two towns away feels like a lifetime away. Love is a strong and powerful feeling. Also it could be the root of pain and anger. What am I truly searching for? I wish I knew.

Where do I begin...

“On the outside I wear a mask that smiles and laughs: That's who I want to be.”

La Orilla

Jesus

I was in the street since 2015, and everybody turned against me. I started to look for a place for me, I was in many shelters. I was looking for my own place many times until I finish at Bethel Shelter. The case manager at Bethel Shelter took my housing and passed it to Columbus House because my time at Bethel was over already. After 4 months, they make you leave. Then the Columbus House case manager started the process for housing and I started to look for many places. In the internet and outside in the street. And finally, my wife and I discovered one place— we looked at that place, because we were interested in that place. We brought the paper to the landlord, but another family had paid for it. They took it from us. Then, the landlord called us. They told us they got another place for us—better, for the same price. We went and saw the place yesterday, and we signed the papers for that place. Now we only have to wait to finish the whole process and have the house.

Finally, I have won the war. It lasted a lot of time. Now I only have to wait.

Tanto nadar para morir en la orilla pero ahora no tengo que nadar. Ahora estoy esperando en la orilla

reflections

Hi, My Friend

Edward

I live in New Haven, CT, which to me is a unique planet. It is a planet that consists of two species. The first is the bullies. Now when I say bullies, I don't mean that typical earth form Neanderthal—what I'm referring to are the ones who reside in New Haven and are fans or athletes of the Yale bulldogs and wear the pride of the bulldogs logo. Another term for bullies is known for English bulldogs, French bulldogs and American Terrier Pitbulls. Shorter name "bullies."

The second species is known as the Yaliens. Like aliens, this species is usually an intelligent life form that has travelled here from afar to study our way of life. They study us, they do studies on us, and they study usually all day. Not all Yaliens do this, but 98% of them.

So if you think New Haven is a typical place, look again through my eyes, and you'll soon see you're surrounded by Yaliens. And this is coming from a New Haven bully.

Dear Malcom,

Mary

Black History Month seemed to be a taboo spoken of.

I often wonder what these times would look like if you were here.

Your life was my life and our lives are lived like we are sheep among the wolves. If it were not for the presence of God who stands in the gap and makes up the hedge we would be most men of misery.

You live every day because I keep your memory alive in my heart, missed most in our daily lives a leader who once seemed to stand alone as Jesus once stood, walk, lived and died your life seemed to represent his life, walk, as he seemed to stand alone. My heart aches for your presence here in today's times. Missed most dearly.

— Mary

It's Getting Harder

John

My name is John. I've been homeless off and on since 2005.

I've gone through a lot of survival throughout the streets of New Haven.

I stopped a woman from being raped only to have the person that was trying to rape her point a gun at me. Luckily, he heard the police coming, so he fled and I survived that moment.

Staying in the local shelters in New Haven was harder than being on the streets on Grand Avenue. My face was sliced over an argument over juice -- it's so real that you never know what's going to happen.

You have these people coming out of jail and now they're looking over people in the shelter. Bad idea, because they are bringing that jail mentality into the shelter.

In 2015 I was attacked by a staff member from the overflow shelter. I called the police and the matter was handled.

I suffer from PTSD, so that's why I need help getting housing. This year I was assaulted by another homeless client, and this person still remains in the overflow which is run by Columbus House.

I called the police, told Columbus House, and still justice isn't served.

Even a staff member had the client to assault me. That's why I never feel safe staying in the shelter. I'd rather go back on the streets.

I've attended Homeless Advisory Commission meetings which are held every second Thursday of the month and expressed my opinions about the shelters, but it hasn't gone well.

I try to help out others just like me but I can't do it by myself. If only other organizations would jump in: let's get these homeless people off the green and get them into homes, rooms, or apartments. But we all need help also with drug addiction.

I always wondered, with all the money Yale University has in its endowment, couldn't they partner up with Columbus House and help these people get their own place, because this is a very big issue. No man or woman should sleep outside, mind you if they do get their own place they should be monitored so they'll know that having their own place is a privilege and it can be taken away if they do wrong.

Life on the streets is very unsettling, and it's getting harder. Can someone from New Haven, Hartford, or anyone from anywhere in Connecticut please help us?

The Ride

Billy

This is a story based on my life experiences growing up in my Brooklyn neighborhood with many different people of different nationalities. I keep thinking about how unaware I was until I got older and experienced more, and I learned how to be in a different environment.

Just leaving my original neighborhood and migrating to Queens made me aware. I met people besides me—people who weren't black like me. My job and migration as a messenger showed me how different people were also from where I came from. I didn't realize how sheltered and young I was.

I took a little train ride from one neighborhood to another to meet different people, and I learned to understand and appreciate them. I wasn't prepared for this experience. It was a hell of a ride. It kept me alive and healthy. Just being aware kept me alive. It

taught me how to appreciate life.

Before this experience, I thought that the right thing to do was to move fast and make money by taking advantage of people at times. But taking that train ride from Brooklyn to Queens taught me that wasn't the right thing to do. I was then more willing to change my responsibilities. I learned that there were other people out there besides me. I learned how to prosper with that awareness. To me, awareness equals appreciation. That became my lifestyle.

I don't believe in labels. Other people are just like me. No better. No worse. Being the age that I am now, I can say awareness is something I really appreciate. I'm sixty-four years old, and now, I compare where I am from to where I've been. Now, it isn't overwhelming. I can appreciate myself now. I'm an individual just like everyone else on the ride.

The Start of a New Ride

Billy

The ride hasn't always been easy on me. I'm sure it hasn't been easy for others too. Today, I'm beginning a new ride—a new experience. I hope that my shared experiences so far can be helpful to others. I hope that my ride is beginning to be a story that people might learn from.

I believe that we must look at our experiences as not just time passing by, but, instead, as an opportunity for hope to be reborn. Time is a beginning. With each new beginning, I've realized that the best thing for me to do is help others. But I've realized that I must help myself first before I can help others. Helping myself gives me hope. If I can help myself, I can help others. I've always wanted to do that.

Now, I'm on another ride in my life. I'm getting out of a hole. I've got a bitter taste in my mouth. But I haven't lost hope.

Together

Edward

Since I came out from prison I have been having a hard time getting myself back on track. Now, I have been homeless before, but I decided this time around I want to be out quick from homelessness and get a job and not feel as hopeless as I do. This is hard. Harder cause I'm sober and refuse to use. See, I'm an alcoholic who loves to drink. Why do I know I'm an alcoholic? For many reasons: blackouts, vomiting, stumbling, acting foolish, we can go on with why. But the reason why I don't want to drink anymore is because I hurt my family this time round, and not intentionally. I didn't drink to be out of control—it was just something fun in the beginning, but

“I want people to know that we are stronger together.”

by the end I would black out and people would tell me what had happened. One time I was babysitting my niece, and the next thing I knew I was waking up in a hospital with stab wounds. That should never have happened. I'm not that per-

son, I'm someone who likes to help people. After that happened, I decided I was done with that kind of life. When I think about me, I know that the real me needs to have his hands on the steering wheel, that the pilot needs to be in control of the plane. So now I'm sober, a sober homeless man who is truly shocked that the term “homelessness” has progressed to something much more morbid than I remembered. It's a trap that's hard to escape.

But the good that came out of all of this is that I've set out to make changes in my life. I refuse to stop, even though I get depressed and have anxiety and am afraid of reentering the workforce and what that will be like for me. I'm glad that I found a church with good church people, as well as other positive forms of social gatherings, which have helped me keep my head up. God is the only one who can forgive, and what gets all of us through is forgiveness, sympathy, guidance, and belief that something better than what we've been through is possible. Through my journey, I don't intend to do it for myself, but rather to

bring other people who are struggling and want a change along with me. If I'm going to donate to charity, I don't give my name because that's not true charity, that's just doing it for the recognition. Don't do it for that, do it because it's the right thing to do. The struggle for me is how I feel, but also how other people feel at this point, and I want to show them that things aren't over for them, that it's possible to stay positive. I want people to see that we are stronger together. Don't tell me you're sorry. Don't say thank you. Just don't say it. Show it. Do it. Don't say “I know,” say “I do.” Pay it forward. People can be selfish creatures, they think that if they help someone improve then they might lose their own job. But what we need to do is learn from our work and teach others. Like this: show me what you know, I'll show you what I know—there's a give and take.

You want to know what you can do? Help each other and work on making the homeless, addicts, and the unfortunate see that there's hope. That we may look like we're drowning, but we've got our heads up. And it starts with togetherness.

The Meaning of Tattoos

Richard

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

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