



**ELM
CITY
ECHO**

spring 2018

ELM CITY ECHO

Spring 2018 / Issue 14

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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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.

Letter from the Editors

Dear New Haven,

Welcome to a new year and a new issue of the Elm City Echo. We are thrilled to present you with this fresh collection of stories. Reading and reflecting on the pieces you will find in these pages has been a privilege. As always, we are grateful to the writers who share their work with us and for the opportunity to share it, in turn, with you.

The Elm City Echo is New Haven's only street periodical. The stories inside are all written by people experiencing homelessness. Our writers have powerful voices that will not be silenced by circumstance, and, through the Echo, we have the honor of bringing those voices to you. Each week, our volunteers visit New Haven shelters to gather stories, a term we interpret loosely. Any written form of expression can be a story, and we receive everything from personal histories, to poetry, to fiction, and everything in between. We publish these stories twice every year in the Elm City Echo, which is then sold for profit by homeless and formerly homeless vendors.

Over the past several months, writers have been contributing to the Echo while simultaneously navigating the obstacles and complexities of homeless life. Many of the pieces in this issue offer a glimpse of what that experience is like. Ron's "Suffering," for example, demonstrates how what might be merely a minor annoyance to a housed person—like a rainy day or politicians' failed negotiations—can have profound implications for someone who is homeless. Rosalyn's "Senior Housing," meanwhile, touches on the notoriously long wait times for subsidized housing.

Taken together, the pieces in this issue reflect the fact that there is no one experience of homelessness. In the coming pages, you will read about anger and gratitude, loneliness and love, losing hope and finding it. You will find works offering a range of perspectives on homelessness and works that do not concern homelessness at all. You will encounter writers who defy generalizations, upend assumptions, and are not defined by their homeless status.

Every individual who contributes to the Echo has a different story to tell. Thank you for allowing their stories to be heard.

Yours,

Maddy Batt & Khushwant Dhaliwal
Editors-in-Chief

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& FAMILY

You & I

by Ivy

There's this couple named Irene and Jesse. Irene met Jesse in the shelter, and Irene was a lady that liked to be to herself, and Jesse used to watch her. Irene would read the Bible, and Jesse began to notice what kind of lady she was. He liked that. He liked what he saw. Irene used to joke around with the guys in the shelter, and she began playing this game, the assassination game. And as she was telling one of the guys named Jimmy, "I see you," Jesse was standing there. And Irene could see his spirit. So Irene said, "I see you," to Jesse. Jesse was a shy young man. Irene was an older woman. Jesse became intrigued. "Can you see me?" Irene said, "I see you."

One day while playing the assassin game with Jimmy, Jesse was standing there. Irene touched his back and ran. Jesse became even more intrigued. So they went on with their own game, "I see you." As Irene revealed to him that she actually could see him, they began reading the Bible together. Irene began to fall in love with Jesse's spirit, and Jesse began to fall in love with Irene. Irene was falling for Jesse. Jesse one day said to her, "Can I tell you something?" Irene giggled and said, "Yes." Jesse told her, "I like you." Again, Irene giggled, and said, "I like you too."

From there, as they began to fall for each other, Jesse one day asked her for her hand in marriage, and Irene said yes. They got married and are living happily ever after. Irene still plays the assassin game, but now Jesse is one of her bodyguards. She trained him to be an assassin. Hooray, Irene and Jesse!

My Son

by Jasmine

I want to tell you about my son, and how well he's grown up. His name is Jasmine, he's 13 years old, and he's in the 7th grade. I'm very proud of him. I love talking about him. I still remember--he was a really playful little kid. Now, Jasmine is athletic. He plays basketball--point guard--and likes it a lot. He also likes to play video games, especially basketball ones.

He's in therapy because there's been a lot going on in his life. He lives with his godmother in a nearby city. I talk to him every other day. I try to give him advice: about peer pressure, drugs, what to do when sticky situations come up, about how to choose his friends. I want him to choose positive friends.

**LIFE
STORIES**

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Cursed

by Gregory

I GREW UP IN MIAMI. I'm the 7th child. I believe 7 is the lucky number. I was born on May 7th at 7:45. Well, I had a good childhood. It was great. I didn't grow up in poverty, nothing like that, thank God. I grew up in a racial neighborhood, all white. So I was the only black in the neighborhood. I kind of stood out. My mother's West Indian and my father's Rasta. My grandfather was white and my grandmother was West Indian.

I seen my first body when I was 12. And the first time I seen someone use drugs, I was about 9. My English teacher, she was a very good woman. She told us before we reach the age of 19, we would all be dead or in jail. She was right. My cousin was 15, and he went for 20 years. Two of my closest girlfriends, they went for 15 years. One of our best swimmers, she hit her head on the board, she died at 14. Then several weeks after that, we was at my friend's house and their mother and father were playing Russian Roulette. And at the time, I didn't know what Russian Roulette was. But to make a long story short, the mother got her brains blown out. I didn't really understand it. To know how she was going to grow up without a mother. So all the mothers in the neighborhood basically raised her.

I ended up getting in trouble. And my friend who I got in trouble with, he was older than me. So they charged me as a juvenile, and he got an adult sentence. And, to make a long story short, I guess he probably was having sex at the institution, so as time went by and he got out, he came home and he had AIDS. I didn't understand it, because all the sicknesses that we was used to, you could go to the doctor and be well. It was like a big shock, to know someone who has something and the doctor can't fix them. Being young, you don't understand that.

We was introduced to a new world, we was introduced into pills, which we knew back then as speed. We had this guy, and he was real smart. And he knew how to take the Hustlers and Playboy books and the speed was in the last page. You could order it. So it was I guess hip, everyone in the school was taking speed—purple hearts, black beauties, and speckle birds. And like anything else that's a fad, it was great to us. We did it and thought nothing of it.

Then along came this guy, he moved into our neighborhood. And he was a lot smarter than us. I think he said his mother and father were military and they moved around a lot. And he told us that you don't have to order. He knew

how to make them. Everything was good until we made a bad batch, and they killed the smartest, prettiest girl in the school. She took it and went into a coma. She never came out of it. So it turned me against drugs.

That day on, the school was cursed. It was senior cut day, and a lot of kids took their parents' boats, brought them down to the lake. We all got drunk. And there was 2 twins—one fell in, couldn't swim. The other one jumped in to save her. Pulled him down too. We didn't understand it. How could they be born on the same day and die on the same day? So now we're really taking heed to what the English teacher told us.

At consideration, we did have some good things. We went to state, the best band 3 years in a row. We had an undefeated football team 3 years in a row. We won the state spelling bee 3 years in a row. But we had more deaths than any other school 3 years in a row. We lost more students.

A few of us made it. I got one friend, he's an architect. One friend, he made the NBA. He got hit by a train the next night after he signed the contract. And it seems like every time we would have good times it would always be backed up by bad times.

Me myself, I became a big drug dealer. A kingpin drug dealer. Lot of money. Lot of houses. Lot of cars. I end up getting busted. My bond was \$2 mill. I made it in 2 hours. And I caught a body. So when I went to court they gave me life. I was put in solitary confinement. Confined to one room for 7 years. And it took everything I had to fight the case. Until my 17 year old nephew, they charged him with the same thing, they gave us both life. Cost me \$250,000 to get out. After 7 years, they released me. I lost everything. My nephew will be homeless. This'll be his 2nd Christmas. Here I am in Connecticut and homeless. Do I know how to go back and do it all over again? Yes. But it's not worth it.

The end.

40 Years Before

by Michael

40 YEARS BEFORE
The mast
I found hardships all
On the dreams of
Those who slept there
Too
& Slid all the way
Down the drain
To New Orleans
In the fall.

I Became Sick

by Adam

THIS IS A STORY about the time I became sick...

I was a shift leader at Dunkin Donuts in Milford on I P95-N13, I worked there about 2 ½ years until one day I started to have stomach pain. I ignored the stomach pain every day and tried my best to get through it but the pain started to get worse and worse by the day. I have always been in great health my whole life so I never expected to become sick. I went about 3 months dealing with the pain and lost over 100 lb. One day at work I ate a sub from subway and the pain became on a scale 1-10 a solid 10. I was pouring tears so I went to the hospital by ambulance and was admitted into the hospital for 2 weeks. I was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease and fibromyalgia. Thank God I'm still alive and here to this day 3 years later.

We didn't understand it. How could they be born on the same day and die on the same day?

It Can Happen to Anyone

by Anonymous

LIKE MY THERAPIST SAYS, I'm getting a PhD in Life. Some key words are survivor, spirituality and recovery.

I'm a case manager. I have a degree in sociology. I have major depressive disorder, and alcoholism. I worked at Bridges Milford Mental Health until I was laid off in 2013. That's when everything came to a head.

I have two daughters. My oldest daughter is thirty. I haven't seen her in twenty-two years. She was taught by her father and the experts he hired that I have a chronic relapse condition and that, "She'll never get well and you're going to watch her die." The last time I saw her, in the child therapist office, she didn't say, "Hi, Mom, how are you?" She said, "What step are you on?" What eight-year-old says that? She's a neurologist now; she went to Williams and Harvard, and she's at her fourth year of residence at University of Pennsylvania.

My second daughter is twenty-four. She's going to graduate from Northeastern, for APPRN. She stopped talking to me after graduating high school and going to college, and I didn't know why. I never pushed her because I didn't want what happened with my first daughter to happen with her.

Their dad is an attorney. He went to Yale undergrad and Yale Law School, graduated Summa Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa. I was divorced from him because he couldn't fix me and it scared him.

He wasn't who I thought he would be. He is an extremist; we were in court from 1996 to 2004. He went through six New Haven lawyers. My divorce had 320 motions. Of course, I had my part in it; there are trust issues with addiction, because of the possibility of relapse.

My first husband made me very wealthy. We were married for over ten years, and he was paying me \$1000/week. I met and married a second time. That man turned out to be a con man, and he embezzled everything I had. I sought a criminal lawyer as well as a divorce lawyer. But I still had to sell everything when there was no gain. But I was still getting alimony and I had my own apartment until I got laid off. Eventually, my second husband made amends

to me and we remained friends. I kinda forgave him, bullshit and all. He died in 2011 of cancer, and I was right there with him.

That started my journey into depression and isolation and all that goes with it. There were major life stressors: loss of job, loss of friendship, loss of children. But I did not drink because that scared me, and I knew where that could lead.

I had a \$1200/month rent and a Lexus. Eventually all that went. One day, I walked out of my apartment with the intention of overdosing.

I grew up in a shame-based family. My parents were alcoholics in the 1960s, when you weren't supposed to tell the family secrets. To my family, I am an alcoholic and drug addict. If people heard I was living in a homeless shelter, they would think I was drugging and drinking. My sisters are

ashamed. They have an image to keep, and that doesn't look like they have a homeless sister who rides the bus. But what does homeless look like? It can look like a degree; there are professional and educated people in here. It can look like married to a doctor or lawyer. It can look like successful children.

I'm working on the shame. I used to hide food stamps when I went to Stop n Shop. From eating in Paris to food stamps! I've had nine years of sobriety. There was a time when I'd call my daughter and not remember. I went into my first rehab to first get sober. Three stints of inpatient rehab and they didn't work and I went out. Now, even thinking of drinking makes me sick and I'm glad. Two years ago, I called my second daughter on her birthday and she returned the call. She realized the importance of a mother in her life. Now we talk every week.

Her return really got me back into AA; through the twelve-step program, I've become very spiritual. Since then little things have been happening. Peo-

ple I was isolated from have been calling me and wanting to see me; I haven't told them where I am because unfortunately I care too much what people think and that's the way I grew up.

It's really hard for me to cope at times, and I don't go around telling people here about my background, 'cause I don't want them to think I'm a snob. But I'm a good people person. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. So I sit with everybody and laugh. There's a guy in here loves singing Motown songs and I sing with him. I was outside today, dancing with some other people. Someone said to me, "God put you here for a reason." Maybe. Maybe.

I do believe God puts situations in your life... I was raised a strict Catholic, but I didn't start believing until this bad stuff started happening. I'm not a God preacher, believe me, but I believe there's a higher power. I've been hardened, but I survived. I'm on my way out. Call it divine intervention or whatever you may—I will be with my second daughter at Christmas. For the first time in five years, the holidays will be good for me.

I have great compassion for the mentally ill; I would like to work as a peer support specialist. I love reading and hearing about mental health, illness and people surviving. I used to teach cognitive behavioral therapy, but the doctor got sick too! So I treated myself to a therapist. I always seek out therapists that have been through it themselves. I think it's pretty ironic that my first daughter is into neuroscience. Probably emotions rule her, and that's in God's hands... When I see my second daughter, I will see if there has been any damage done in our estrangement. Depression has a biological and genetic component. My mother had it, my grandmother had it. When I'm with my second daughter, it's all about her, I don't ask about my first daughter. But in time, I will reach out to my first daughter. She's obviously bright and successful but she's not dealing with her emotions about it.

My daughters were always the common denominator of me being who I am. I let go for a while because I wanted them to go through school and be successful. So maybe I had to stop for them to get ahead, but I'm not gone, I'm coming back.

It's lonely here. But I figure, "What the hell?" And I dance.

But what does homeless look like? It can look like a degree; there are professional and educated people in here. It can look like married to a doctor or lawyer. It can look like successful children.

Lady

by Matt

My Story

by Jeffrey

MY NAME IS JEFFREY LEBLANC, I grew up in East Haven, CT. I came from a dysfunctional family, filled with verbal and physical abuse. I have three half brothers and a stepfather, my real father left when I was five, never to return. My grandmother raised me.

I never did well in school, had ADHD I think. They didn't know too much about that back then for I am 45 years old. I dropped out of high school and spent my time practicing playing the drums. When I turned 18, my stepfather had gotten me a job with the state of CT at the 103rd squadron in Orange, CT. I only worked there one year before I decided to move to California to pursue a career in music. I stayed out in Hollywood for about ten years playing in different bands. I fell hard in the game, getting messed up on drugs. My drug of choice was crystal meth. I decided I needed to come back to CT or I would die.

I cleaned up my act and got a job where I met my future wife. I wound up marrying her, had two daughters, moved to Branford and was with her for 17 years until I found out she had been having an affair with a mutual friend for over a year-and-a-half. I had a major breakdown. I've been hospitalized eight times so far and been diagnosed with bipolar and with mania. I lost everything. I'm trying to put my life back together.

MY LADY.

She is a red sky with dark stars.
From a slippery leaf on a high tree,
She fell, and landed on my knee.

With slow, soft grace
Her wings quickly swayed.
She looked at me with curious ambivalence, but stayed.

Delicately I picked her up,
(It was getting late)
And put her down beside me,
I watched her climb a grass-blade
That couldn't support her weight;
Making a bridge for her to walk over
A drip of water from her lips
That she saw as a pond.
I cheered my newfound luck,
And said "Lady, you're so pretty!"

Jail Story

by Ernest

WHEN YOU GO INTO JAIL, you never tell nobody your story. Not even what's the crime you came in for. Because the guys that's in there, they hold it against you. They pick with you, they nag you, and some will fight you. So what you do is you go in alone, and you come out alone. You have some fights, and you have some arguments. But if you can't fight, just don't pay it no mind, because you will learn how to fight in jail, and you will learn how to be a man in jail. Just don't let the small things bother you—the bartering, the bickering, the going back and forth. If you're not going to fight the dude there's no need for arguing. All it's going to do is give you a headache. If you let the small things bother you you'll be all messed up, because jail will make you or break you. I know, because now, at 53 years old, I finally came to my senses and realized that.

I Wonder How Come

by Alik

HOW COULD I CARE,
When the world pushed me away,
A prisoner of my own device,
Everywhere I turned, everything was dark & gray.

How could I give a damn,
When I'm a broken man,
Cutting everyone off,
Even those who offered me a helping hand.

How could I do this,
Turn my back on the ones I love,
All I cared about was ending my life,
From all the misery that comes along with drugs.

How could I?
I asked myself this question a thousand times,
If I had the answers, trust you me
It wouldn't play over and over again in my mind.

My Life

by Ernest

WHEN I WAS A LITTLE BOY, I learned how to cook, clean, and take care of my little sister. I grew up too fast. I started selling drugs when I was 13. I started out selling pot and then as I got older into my 19-20s, I started selling crack cocaine. I had a long run. The first time I went to jail, I was about 23. They planted it on me. They said I threw something down, but I didn't. I was in the store shopping. So they had to let me out because they couldn't find nothing. I lost a lot of stuff, I lost everything. But I got out and started back again, selling crack, weed, you name it I was selling it. I never got caught until I was 25. But then I started fighting, and that's more jail time. So I go back to jail and I come back out again years later. I catch another case. Another drug case and fighting case. I been doing this half my life. So I come out this time trying to be a better man. So far, so good. Everything is working out, and that's that. The end.

Present in My Past Life

by Jasmine

85 MILLIGRAMS. That's how much methadone I take every day. It's a struggle because people on methadone often start taking pills, drinking alcohol, or using crack. I do things everyday to avoid falling back into victimhood. I'm in Intensive Outpatient training, and have to give urine samples. I'm also in a group called Process of Recovery, where we learn about the "12 Steps." I've been doing it for five weeks and only have one to go. It's something to do everyday--gives you some type of purpose.

I was born in the Bronx. It was rough. My mother was on drugs and my father kept going to jail. My grandma had to raise me, and my father was deported to the south. In 2004, I came to Connecticut and gave birth to my son, Jasmire. He's 13 now.

Another group I'm in is called Wonder Woman. We talk about abuse, what we have to go through as women. I am a victim of domestic violence, so I have a lot to say. I know firsthand about being a survivor. Now I know how to tell a healthy from an unhealthy relationship. I really want to stay clean so I can open a center for LGBTQ youth. It will be a center for people like me. A center where they can be themselves, express themselves, and feel comfortable doing so.

Journey

by Anonymous

I WANT TO SHARE MY STORY because I think it's unique. Now I'm in a homeless shelter, but I was a pretty successful businesswoman in New Haven for 20 years. I owned a hair salon and an antiques store. I was a single mom and I have one 30-year-old daughter, who is now a Connecticut state trooper. However, I've had a bad two years, dealing with mental illness, alcohol problems, and a house fire.

I am originally from Burlington, Connecticut, from the suburbs, but it was too conservative of a lifestyle for me. I actually ended up in New Haven because I was into the punk rocker scene. I even had a girl band at one time! I got pregnant and divorced young so I was a single mom for many years. I ended up in hairdressing school because I was doing too much partying for high school and at 30, I opened my own salon. Antiques were also a passion of mine. When my sister moved to the area to help me take care of my dad, we started working in the antiques business together. I taught myself how to upholster and she has a MFA in printmaking so together we were making some really cool pieces together.

In January 2016, I ended up homeless. I was struggling with alcohol and I was actually packing to go to rehab when there was a house fire. Instead of rehab, I ended up going to the hospital with my lungs damaged from the fire.

Since then I've spent some time living and working in a sober house. However, I couldn't do my job after I crashed my scooter and injured my arm, so I ended up in a homeless shelter.

I want to talk about sober houses because I think they're a big problem. I was living in one in New London that cost \$140 a week. Eight girls lived in alcoves in an attic. There were no electrical outlets, the bathroom had sheets for doors, and you couldn't even stand up. These sober houses are also full of shady people with no professional background and there's no regulation. I've seen more people with drugs and alcohol in those sober houses than here in homeless shelters. And it's sad for the families

I've seen more people with drugs and alcohol in those sober houses than here in homeless shelters. And it's sad for the families who think it's going to work. But we just end up here or on the streets.

who think it's going to work. But we just end up here or on the streets.

Anyways, right now I'm focusing on short term goals. I'm an artist, but I haven't been able to make art with my injury. So I just had surgery on my arm and I'm focusing on healing so I can get back into yoga and making art to feel sane again. I'd also like to get back into the antiques business. Since I was 16, I've been really into old Mexican silver jewelry and I've done a lot of research into the industry. I've found ways to search for pieces really cheap on the internet and resell them. I'm hoping that I can heal my injury and get back to my passions.

Never Give Up

by Ralph

Near Death Experience

by Anonymous

ALL AND ALL, I was having a good day. I took a nice hot shower, did some laundry, and talked to my daughter, which was a nice treat. I only have one daughter and she just had a baby boy three weeks ago. I talked to them and then I was watching TV when all of a sudden I lost my vision and I couldn't breathe. So I got paranoid. I thought I was having a heart attack. I thought, "This is it, you know?"

I turned the TV off, went to my room, and sat on the edge of my bed. I went to the bathroom and splashed water on my face but it didn't help. So I went back to bed, but I stood up and when I did, I was holding my chest. I ran down the hallway and banged on security's window and told him to call 911.

I came downstairs, and they gave me a lot of water to drink. The ambulance showed up with the paramedics. They told me my blood pressure was extremely low, 60/70. When I got to the hospital, they hooked me up with IVs and they put 12 bags of fluid back in my body because I was so dehydrated. Luckily my EKG and MRI were ok. Everything checked out ok and I was released. It was terrifying and I thought that I was going to die, but hopefully I'm gonna have a good life.

WHEN WE GROW UP we have a lot of dreams, and those dreams keep breaking up. Sometimes we close our doors and by some token, we anticipate doors that are not there yet. We forget that everything takes effort. We forget that not everything is given to you on a silver plate. And that's a bad hit, because we grew up with the idea that you can be anything you want. There are only some things that you are able to do, and it becomes frustrating.

I was born in New York. I came from a broken home; my parents are first-generation Americans. Growing up on the poverty line is complicated, and you bring with you a lot of habits. And coming from a home that is first generation, being one of the oldest sons, you're expected to play a certain role in the family. When you don't agree to play that role, there's controversy. And that's how my story begins.

My father used to drink and my mother was submissive. Being the second oldest, certain things are expected. I come from a sports family - professional baseball players, boxers, etc. They expected me to become one of these. When I didn't want to, I was going against the family principles. I was rebellious, and I was uncomfortable with family and friend relationships, because all my friends grew up in the same kind of family. I started getting away from home. When I started my first year of college, that was sort of it.

I was just about to be the first one to graduate college, but then I went into the service. When I came back, the expectations were still there. I drifted away, estranged from my family. I started visiting new places; I met people, who were not so positive about life. That's where my street story begins. That's how I got into drugs and drinking.

I was able to manage at the beginning. But when I got separated, that put me

in another place, and contributed to my drug abuse. I also had this burden. Every time I got back to my family, I would get high again. Family was like prison. Although I'd been able to stop drinking, certain drugs were a demon for me. I've also had some harrowing experiences: I was beaten by the cops, and they broke my skull. I lost forty percent of my memory. All of that contributed to my drug use. Because of my drug use, I was estranged. Since my family is a sports family, drugs are a big no-no. They pushed me out of the family setting, and so did my ex-wife.

Time keeps passing by; I'm gonna be sixty years old by the first week of January. Now I look at my life, and I'm

*Time keeps
passing by; I'm
gonna be sixty
years old by
the first week of
January. Now I
look at my life,
and I'm gonna
take everything
I've been through
and use it as
experience.*

gonna take everything I've been through and use it as experience. It's so difficult to try to restart your life, especially at this age. I have tried before but something always pulled me back. There are consequences to that; I didn't trust anyone, and I have schizophrenia, which pushed me into isolation. But I'm in a different space now, and I have an idea of what isolation, schizophrenia and the family setting are. I have a better understanding of all that. I'm trying to pull the pieces together, and I'm having a very hard time. I gotta

lot of responsibility for things I did.

I didn't meet my family's goals, but here I am and this is me and this is how long it took me to understand. I'm gladly passing on to my son, my daughter and my grandkids everything I know and everything I went through. Going through: this is not the end of the road. This is just another stage of my life. I'm using my experience to show my family that there is hope and there are good people, although I got my share of bad ones. Not everything and everyone is bad, and you gotta give life an opportunity. Life is so sensitive. We just can't...be. What you put in is what you take out of life.

The History of My Life

by Jesus

I WAS BORN on February 13, 1988, in Puerto Rico. Because I got out of my mother's belly by myself, I hit the floor. The doctor couldn't catch me. I have one hit in the brain. I was grown up always in pain with my mother because she always trained my sister and I with domestic violence. One time I was playing with my sister, and I fell, and she got an iron and put it on my leg. She hit me with a brick and a chain in the ribs, only for being the darkest one. Then my father's family took custody of my sister and I and took care of us. My brother grew up with my uncle. He don't know nothing about my mother. She always trained us with bad things, especially because I look like my father. I have the picture of him that if I show you you'd say it's me.

At 8 years, I started to work and started to provide a little money to my family. Then, I carried a lot of pain because my grandpa died. And I feel guilty about that moment because my grandfather was fishing, and that moment I got a fish and when he saw what I got he said, "Finally I got my desire complete, I got to see my grandson fishing." He died in my father's arms.

My uncle abused me violently when I was 10 years old. Then I grew up. I was in high school and went to a technical college. I was working in mechanics for Mazda and security. I graduated. For 1 year out of college I was in industrial design. I came to the U.S. to work. On the second day, I found a job. I worked 2 years, helping everybody in my family, but everybody turned against me. They stole all my tools, all my money, and left me on the street. It was my older sister, but everybody else—my mother, my cousins here—nobody helped me.

Then I was diagnosed with TSC, a brain tumor. I had started to have seizures when I was 12 years old but they only discovered it now in 2017. Last week I lost my father by cancer. He only resisted the cancer for one month. But the good thing is I never give up and I am stronger for every transition in my life. With all the bad things of my past in my life, many people say, "You have had a hard life," but I never give up. It's just the beginning.

I Have a Dream

by Tonya

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

Caught Up

by Alik

CAUGHT UP IN A WORLD,
A billion plus, but still feel alone,
Who can I talk to or turn to?
So I'm left to face these obstacles on my own.

Caught up in the mayhem
Day to day wondering where it's going to lead,
The block is all I got
Every day I'm wondering when I'm going to be freed.

I'm caught up in the mess,
Seeing crime, girls tricking for a good time,
Every day it's something different,
Panhandling for nickels, quarters, and dimes.

I'm caught up in the streets,
The life of a hustler,
Where my life goes,
Nobody trust ya.

I'm caught up in the shelter,
It's another storm to weather.
Where men and women complain,
Carrying their bags with them, through the snow, summer
And rain, where we all mask the pain like leather,
We're all hoping for something better,
But we're caught up in the chetter.

Once Upon a Turnstile

by Michael

ONCE UPON A TURNSTILE,
The salmon jumped the ladder,
With an eye on the doughnut...not on the hole,
They kicked the seeds out of a dill pickle,
Lived long, & prospered.

When I Was 16

by Adam

THIS IS A STORY about when I was 16. On Feb 5, I turned 16 and I ran away from home. I went to Milford CT and hung out with my friends, smoked cigarettes for the first time, drank alcohol for the first time, and also was on the wanted list by the police from my mother for running away. It was quite a day for me. I met a lot of new people, went swimming in a pond in Milford, and spent the night in the police station. What I've learned about all of this that night was that I couldn't wait to do it all again the next day. Haha! That's when I also learned how to play the guitar, piano and drums from my friend Matt. I met my friend Matt for the first time that day at a bowling alley. We started talking about music and we ended up going to his place and that's when he taught me. I later made a band with Matt, and this is the end of my story for when I was 16, on Feb 5th 2004.

The Most Dramatic Week of My Life

by Harry

I GOT HIT BY A CAR in 2004. It was a rough week. It happened two days after my mom passed from Alzheimer's, which she had for seven years. I was in a drug and alcohol program at the time; I had completed it, and the only thing left was the job phase. When I had just got word that they were graduating me, I had to come back for my mom's hospice. My mother passed on a Sunday. I had just started to move some of my stuff into an apartment with my roommate, but instead I stayed in my father's house, since I was initially there for parole. You need someone who knows you really well to vouch for you.

The day I got hit by a car: it's a Sunday afternoon and I'm on my way to work, taking the bus from West Haven. It's snowing. I'm standing under the bus stop, and all of a sudden I heard this woman calling, "Sir! You're on the wrong side of the street to get to New Haven." I tried to explain that there was a bus coming into town very soon, and she came over to my side of the street to debate this. She's not agreeing with me when all of a sudden, she sees the bus she's going to take and starts to panic.

I take one step off of the curb, trying to stop the bus. The next thing I hear is, "Lookout!" I don't know what's going on, but I soon realize that I'm about to die. I don't have time to turn or run... that feeling you get? It's true that your life flashes before your eyes.

I found out after the driver slowed down to 40, but she hit me on the side of my knee and sent me flying into the bus stop. I'm in shock— she's shook, too. She

offers to take me wherever I want to go.

When I start to come to, there's a shadow of a police officer over me. "Sir, I have to give you a verbal warning for crossing the street ten feet away from the crosswalk." I try to explain that I wasn't crossing the street, I was trying to help this woman, and I turn to her—but she's gone.

What happened after is vague. I have a lot of anxiety and my anxiety level started going through the roof. I wanted to sue the driver, but she didn't own any property. I got money from disability, though; my health is declining, and

I soon realize that I'm about to die. I don't have time to turn or run... that feeling you get? It's true that your life flashes before your eyes.

I need a knee replacement. I had the toughest judge hearing my case, but she took pity on me. I got \$12,000: \$4,000 went to the state, \$3,000 went to the lawyer and I got \$5,000, which I split with my father.

My father made a very good childhood for me. I wasn't spoiled; I didn't get everything I ever wanted but I never needed for anything.

I have a sister and an older brother, so I was always the baby of the family until my mother had my brother at forty. I was shocked, even at ten. You didn't see that back then. But still, I was glad because I had a little brother and I wasn't the baby anymore.

When I was about fifteen years old, I started drinking. That was when the alcoholism came out, but I didn't realize it then. We had somebody buy beers and party on the weekends. I soon felt that I wanted more, and I believe that you can be predisposed to alcoholism: my grand-

father was an alcoholic, and I was from fifteen to thirty-three. I never woke up and felt I needed a drink, but I did drink a lot. In 1990, I went into detox. My drinking had a taper, but I had already experimented with a little bit of everything: weed, coke, pills on occasion... I didn't do anything hardcore until my thirties. I started percocets, which has the same ingredient as heroin: opiates. I took them for a while, since my friend had a prescription, but he ran out. He said I could get some in a powder form, but I wasn't stupid—I knew it was man made heroin. I was already feeling sick from coming off the pills; then I found out methadone in liquid form is what they use at facilities to keep you from being sick while detoxing. So, I've been on that since age thirty-two. When I was in prison I was totally clean for five years, because they don't give you anything there. (That was very uncomfortable.)

Drinking and drugs were involved with my life until three or four years ago when I realized alcohol had caused permanent damage to my liver. Alcohol is like poison to me now.

But without methadone, I am riddled with pain. I can't even stand up without it.

In some way, these events led up to my situation now, but not completely. I look at life; I'm depressed about the fact that I don't have a place to stay, but I'm not hopeless. I want to walk with my cane again. Being homeless, I've learned a lot about what people go through. When I was with people of other religions in prison, I learned a lot about life. I was brought up Catholic, but I consider myself a Christian. I like to be spiritual but not as spiritual as I wanna be. I believe there is a God and the God of my understanding is Jesus Christ. I'm hopeful; I'm in a holding pattern. Anything could happen.

**SPIRITUALITY
& FAITH**

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Blessing #3

by Ivy

I GUESS THIS IS BLESSING #3. Continuing, that's all. I moved on from one shelter to another--from Columbus House to the Bethel in Milford--and still my family would see me as homeless. But what I see is God using me to tell my story. And for those who can see, they see the blessings. And myself, I see the blessings. He says in his Word that his seed would never be seen begging bread, and I don't. While family members and friends may look down on me as "homeless," it causes me to remember the Lord our savior, who could Himself have built Himself a mansion, or God could have given him a mansion. But he chose to sleep in caves in the wilderness. And while they see me as homeless, I eat every day without worrying where my meal is going to come from. I have a roof over my head. And when you talk about favor, I have more clothes than I have room for.

You tell me what you see. Who's blessed? Is it them, or is it me?

Pie Day

by Anonymous

I WANTED MY OWN HOLIDAY, so I created Pie Day. It consists of enjoying pie. It started on the 22nd of November. I made it official on the 24th, and it continues to this day, to this moment. We've had strawberry rhubarb. We've had lemon, blueberry, apple. You can add whipped cream and ice cream. The more you can add, the better. Word of mouth passes it on. People who tried to have a good day and couldn't, now can have it with a pie. If someone's down, you can say, it's Pie Day, here's a pie, and they'll be better.

I DON'T CELEBRATE THANKSGIVING. I know the facts on it. It's a pagan holiday. I'm a Seventh-day Adventist. Christmas, too--it's not actually on Christ's birthday. Everything is propaganda and overhyped. Valentine's Day, too.

Holidays are such a robotic way of doing things. We need to modernize. I think it's more meaningful to do things when you want--who wants to wait? If you want to celebrate something, celebrate it everyday. If you have a gift, give it--don't wait for a particular day. Don't limit your goal. Me, myself, and I just say be happy when you want. Don't be programmed, don't be stationary. Eat a pie any day, celebrate Pie Day every day.

My Poetry

by Yvonne

I'M FORTY-SEVEN. I'm a poet. My favorite poet is Maya Angelou; I also like Langston Hughes. I've been writing since I was ten, started in my bedroom when I was going through sexual abuse. I wrote instead of telling.

In my teenage years, I wanted to be a rapper. Me and my girlfriends, we would go to different clubs and battle. I got over that, but I stuck with poetry.

I have two unpublished books of poems. It took me seven months total to write them; once I write, I write all day. I write about life: everything I went through as a kid, and as an adult. Besides poetry, I also write inspirational stuff. I started a book called "Time of Change," but it isn't finished yet.

I've been homeless for two and a half years, and I became homeless because of domestic abuse. I was addicted to heroin and benzos. I've been through prostitution and rape and near death, all in drug addiction. I have low self-esteem and PTSD. But I've been clean for four months. And today I'm a better mother, I'm a better grandmother.

I have two kids, a daughter age twenty-six and a son, age thirteen. I have a nine-year-old grandson and a three-year-old granddaughter. My daughter is a nurse's aide, because she likes to help people, and my son plays basketball for his junior high school. My grandkids love Minecraft and Shimmer 'n' Shine. My granddaughter, she likes to color and dress. She's been playing dress-up since she was able to talk and if it doesn't match, she's not putting it on. I also like fashion, I love coordination. I like having my own style, so I put together my own stuff. Something I know no one else would wear, that's how I describe my style.

One day I hope to be a writer, a good writer. I want someone to recognize my skills. One of my poems that I like is called "Soul of Mine," it's about my soul feels. My favorite poem is called "The Lost Girl"; it's about me.

**BEING
HOMELESS**

**BEING
HOMELESS**

**BEING
HOMELESS**

**BEING
HOMELESS**

**BEING
HOMELESS**

Homeless

by Ronnie

I WAS INCARCERATED for 24½ years. I was released on the 30th of May and I've been homeless ever since. It's not like I haven't been trying to find somewhere to stay but it's all the computers and the people sitting behind them and all the red tape and while I remain homeless I find myself sleeping with possums, skunks, and raccoons. Being homeless is damaging to the human spirit. We the homeless need help badly and we need the help from the bottom to the top. We need churches, synagogues, mosques, whoever is willing to help. We the homeless need all hands on deck! Due to my homelessness, I've found myself in the hospital with viral bronchitis and now I'm drinking cough syrup called Cheratussin 3 times a day. I now have an inhaler and I also have to take Methylprednisolone. Being homeless, I could have died, but because of God's grace I'm still here and still homeless!

Done by
Ronnie

On behalf of all of us homeless people

Senior Housing

by Rosalyn

COLUMBUS HOUSE IS NOT A BAD PLACE if you need it, but waiting for senior housing is a pain in the butt. You're stuck waiting around for proper housing, and there's not enough for seniors because you have to share with handicapped people—both mentally and physically handicapped. And this is the stuff that's supposed to be just senior housing, but now it's not. So then you gotta wait. There are 5, maybe 6 people here who are over 60, and they either get bounced from shelter to shelter, or they're lucky enough to win the lottery and get housing.

That's basically it. I wish I could crawl into bed and go to sleep.

My Time on this Earth

by Yvonne

MY TIME ON THIS EARTH
Has not been dull
Addiction and Homelessness
And tons of falls
My time on this Earth
Has not been too light
Trying to figure it out
Fight after fight
If you were to ask
Me about my time
On this Earth
I may have told you
I knew it from birth

Suffering

by Ronnie

PEOPLE ARE SUFFERING because politicians are debating about money.

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

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

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

Thank You Fellowship

by Tim

I'M FINALLY GOING TO RENT A ROOM at the Fellowship Place. I've been homeless over a year. It's been tough, thanks to God I've made it through.

I've been staying at the Beth-El shelter in Milford.

It's one of the best shelters I've been in.

Most of my homeless friends now have their own apartments.

It's finally my turn.

I'm very thankful for the staff at the Fellowship Place for helping me, and their support, and friendship.

Where Am I Going from Here?

by Mary

I'VE BEEN HERE AT COLUMBUS HOUSE for 9 months. I'm looking for a new shelter now. I was evicted from my apartment, and since I've been here I've heard different stories about why it happened. I've heard I trashed the unit and had to move out on my own, or I was not compliant with the eviction papers. I owe the housing authority \$1600, so I can't get a place to live. I'm still waiting for the hearing to deal with the \$1600 debt—the housing authority and all of them seem like enemies, and I'm tired and frustrated.

I used to live in New York; I married a police officer, and we moved to New Orleans. We had three kids: a son who's now about 39, a 30-year-old daughter, and a 27-year-old son. All that seems like a whole different story. How did I get here, how did I become homeless? I look back at my life and I never would have guessed that I would be living in a homeless shelter.

Where am I going from here?

**SHORT
FICTION**

SHORT
FICTION

SHORT
FICTION

SHORT
FICTION

SHORT
FICTION

A Joyful Dream

by Edward

I Like to Sing

by Ivy

Murder House

by Kelvin

I KNOW THIS GUY, he went to jail for a murder that they said he did but he said he didn't do. He went to court, and they wanted to give him the chair. So he told the police who really did it—it was his brother that killed the people. His brother came and asked him, "Why did you tell on me?" He said, "Because I'm not going to take the blame for it." His brother said to him that we both did the murder. So we both are going down together. So the big brother asked the small brother, "Are we going down together?" The small brother said, "No I'm not going down with you. You must kill me now." But they didn't kill him at all. The brothers did life together. So they separated the brothers, put one in one jail and the other in the crazy jail because he tried to kill himself, and the name of the crazy jail was Sing Sing. The brothers just did life together and didn't say a thing to one another again.

THERE WAS A LITTLE GIRL named Trina, and she used to love to sing. She had six brothers and sisters, and her mother bought them all an instrument. Trina got the microphone. As her brothers would play the instruments, she'd sing all day long. As she grew, she sang more. And as people would hear her, whenever she stopped singing, they would say, "Sing me a song." And Trina would sing her little heart out.

As she grew older, she began to be shy. All her brothers and sisters would ask her, "Sing me a song." Trina would say no. But growing up in a family with music, Trina would sing all day long. She'd put on a record and play it and sing along. Her sister heard her one day and said, "Who was that that I heard singing?" and Trina said, "It was me." Her sister cried out, "Sing for me again!" Trina would not. Trina had no idea that her mother heard her too. Trina just kept on singing to herself.

As she grew, one night they were at a party. And as the DJ played records, Trina just sang along. What she didn't know was that her mother set her up to sing, so as the music played, she sang. And this time, everyone heard her golden voice. From that day on, she sang for the world, happily singing the rest of her life until she grew old and gave up the song. After that night, she wasn't shy anymore.

SONG: DEVIL WENT DOWN TO GEORGIA

Well this story starts out in a community where the houses are trailers that are piled up high. This community is very compact. Everyone knows their neighbors, their business, their likes—just about everything a person does. It is the Facebook without boundaries. And in this community there is a certain red scooter that, once you stand on it, will transform into a red violin and you don't need to know how to play an instrument, because once you have it in your hand you will be bestowed with the ability to play and play beautiful music. And people will be mesmerized by the music and be in a trance and feel great about themselves and you (the possessor of the violin) will feel freedom and joy to your heart's content...

Fin

Dream I Had

by Adam

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT A DREAM I HAD.

It started off in a field. I woke up in a field of grass next to a girl. I looked around and began to shake her to wake her up. We both looked at each other and noticed that we were naked. The grass around us was a vibrant bright purple and the flowers were vined up the golden trees. The mountains were filled with jewels, gems, and diamonds, and the animals were all friendly. We began to leave the field and walk into the woods. As we were walking, we noticed these super shiny bright-like-the-sun yellow stones glowing, so me and the girl picked one up. As we grasped it in our hands we felt this unbelievable power. We could lift our bodies up with our minds and fly. We were completely alone in this world with no pain, no sickness, no sadness, only happiness. The fruits on this land were so delicious and the air was fresh. There was no time or darkness, no sleep, only light and beauty. Me and this girl enjoyed our time playing with the animals and exploring the world. This is when I woke up. I have never seen this girl in person before, and I wish I had never woken up. And this is the story about my dream.

Grain of Sand

by Matt

ACATALEPTIC.

I hold the ocean in my hand;
Every drop of water the land can stand to hold
Along with every drop of morning dew.
But I cannot carry you.
It would be like pulling the aether from my soul.

In my other hand the whole boreal wind, which,
Fully gleaned, it drifts;
Remaining there, spinning slow,
Then swirling like a tornado,
Forceable, beginning on my palm and crown
To its summit, and overthrown;
Yet I cannot conceive the power of you.
Abstruse; I cannot break through
The depthless deceivings you imply.

The sky:
Entirely blue,
Becomes a single beam in my third eye.
The clouds I swallow too;
And everywhere it rains at this moment,
I drink from a bucket;
Yet, my field of vision can never fathom you.

Heaven.
You are too small to stand on,
So I stand on God; I stand on Hell;
I stand on Lucifer as well;
And still I have more room;
So, like Shiva stands on Parvati's womb—
I stand on her;
I stand on every god and goddess of every
Language known;
I stand on every being made in every
Concentrical sphere.
Yet as much as I try to,
My feet can't possibly comprehend you.
But how easily you stand on me,
Altering my destiny
In burning-bush strokes.

The stars. Everyone:
Fixed stars, dwarf stars, the dog star,
The day star, every star of every constellation;
My eyes, at once, see every single one;
Yet, with darycrops, I look directly at you,
Trying to see through you;
But I cannot see through!
You're unbearably impenetrable!

Should we be two stars, I'd make
Myself scarce, I'd run farthest
West,
In the Celestial sphere until
We ate apastron.

But even then—you move in slight
Shadows...of my soul,
And I'm lost in a corpse ambedo:
And these shadows fold below
The moon—
Lapse,
Bringing with them the sullen
Slough of old-noon.

