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ELM CITY ECHO

Spring 2020

A QUICK NOTE FROM THE EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

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Elm City Echo

Spring 2020/ Issue 18

MISSION:

The Elm City Echo aims to promote awareness of homelessness and displacement by giving contributors a community-oriented platform to amplify their voices and experiences..

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the eighteenth issue and Spring 2020 edition of *Elm City Echo*! Since 2011, the *Echo* has been committed to centralizing the voices of those experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness as a community-oriented platform in New Haven. Twice a year, we publish this literary magazine, proud of the sincere care, creativity, and excellence dedicated to each piece.

At Columbus House and Fellowship Place, our two community partners, we facilitate this creative process through dialogue and workshop, collaborating with writers and storytellers each week to develop their prose and poetry. In the creative process, we're inspired and moved by the power of the story over both its listener and its teller as a source of healing, recognition, and compassion. As you can imagine, many of these stories weren't easy to share, and some might be emotionally difficult to read. Still, these pieces are acts of courage with the potential to have a positive, lasting impact on the New Haven community. The pieces here speak to our common ground—our capacity to hope, dream, grieve, resist, forgive, search, and more. Perhaps the next time you interact with someone experiencing poverty or homelessness in New Haven, you might remember one of these stories and recognize the personhood and dignity inherent to us all.

Beginning this year, we've moved to being a freely-distributed and entirely volunteer-based literary magazine in efforts to continue the good work we believe the *Echo* does—reaching wide audiences, inspiring conversations, and amplifying marginalized voices—for years to come.

We thank you for picking up a copy of the *Echo* and encourage you to share it.

Warmly,

Eliana Rose Swerdlow and Sophie Neely
Editors-in-Chief

Recovery

M.O.

I was born on April 4, 1981 at 4 o'clock in the morning
4 4 4

I struggled with addiction from 2003 to 2019
I struggled for a real long time
2019, I got clean
my drug was PCP
it made me really depressed
anxious, sad
violent
OCD
I have to thoroughly bathe!
I don't like crowds of people

I still struggle

I had a lot of women I dealt with
abusive and toxic women
I just recently fell in love with a little person
a lovely person, she treats me real good
I love the woman in the corner over there
she treats me real nice
sometimes she a 'lil crazy
but I guess you could say I'm crazy too
crazy for her

My favorite movie is the joker because
he's nice until he doesn't get his money
that's me

I like to make people laugh
they call me the joker
and then I switch it up, snap on 'em, go crazy
on 'em

I've been in the shelter for 5 months
it sucks
the food is terrible, the people are annoying,
the food sucks, the people are annoying
I'm trying to get housing but they keep denying
me
the food is terrible
I'm playing, this is a place to get yourself to-
gether
I'm glad I have a place to stay

I wanted to go to Yale but my grades were
terrible

I call this recovery
because that's where I'm at right now

All Started When

Amber

All started when I was young, started doing drugs, and life went up in smoke. Became home-
less and ended up here at Columbus House. I came from a good home with a good family and a great
upbringing. I guess somewhere along the way I lost control of my life. Slowly I'm getting it back, and
patience is a new thing I need to learn. Life is going well, and hopefully things will move along for-
ward.

A Diamond Is Forever

William

The year was 1974. I was seven years old; my parents had divorced about two years prior. Nonetheless, my father and I spent every other weekend together. He took me to an arcade, fishing—those sorts of father-and-son things.

It was Saturday, and at about 9:30 in the morning, I sat on the front porch waiting for Daddy to arrive. The wait wasn't that long this time. He pulled up in about twenty minutes. He got out, gave me a big hug, and asked me, "Do you want to have some fun today?"

"Oh yeah!" was my reply, which was immediately followed by my asking what was up.

From the pocket in his jacket, he pulled out two tickets and proudly announced that we were going to Shea's Stadium, the home of the Mets. I had never seen a game at any stadium.

Off we drove, stopping at McDonald's for lunch. The game started at 1:15, he told me, and therefore we needed to get going. After a bit of a drive, he told me we were almost there. Shortly thereafter, I saw it in the distance. We pulled in and headed towards the parking lot. He got a ticket to park, and we were shuffled off to our spot. We got out and joined hands.

Getting closer and closer, the spiral ramps of the structure appeared, and they piqued my curiosity. When we reached the gate, he handed the tickets over; the attendant gave us our stubs. Off we went. It was only a short walk to those fascinating spirals.

Hand in hand, we joined the caravan of baseball fans. I remember the moment we moved from the spiral staircase to what he told me was the

concourse. So many people, and so many vendors hawking their wares. We stopped at a hot dog vendor; he got a couple, and we moved onward. I remember the smell of fresh pretzels, and knew exactly where we were headed. We got one with mustard on it. The signs guided us towards the gate that led to our section.

Emerging from the tunnel, I could suddenly see the field. I couldn't believe it was so beautiful. The crisp green outfield, the sharp white running down the first and third base lines. Even the dirt caught my interest—it was all completely different from the way it looked on TV.

We got to our seats and procured a couple of sodas. Before too long, the game was on; he pulled out a scorecard and pencil. It was completely foreign to me. As the game progressed, he showed me how the whole scorecard thing went. I was introduced to terms like "backwards K," "fielder's choice," and "6-4-3."

I couldn't tell you who won the game. For that matter, I haven't a clue whom the Mets played.

When the game was over, we headed back to the spiral staircase. Hand in hand, we ventured all the way down to the parking lot. On the way, he bought me a hat and asked me if I'd liked the game. Without hesitation, I replied, "You betcha!"

Over the years, we ended up doing a lot of fun things. This much I know. That said, I don't remember very many of our adventures. But the memory of that day with Daddy remains in the forefront of my recollections.

Memories fade, but a diamond is forever.

Relationships

Maria Esther

I lived in New Jersey for 40 years and Texas for 14 years. This week, I'm on vacation, going from California to Connecticut. It's very nice here in the United States. But my life is still in New Jersey. I spent 38 years working in New Jersey, 23 of them working for a company that makes clothes. It was very good work.

But the company closed, and my time working ended at age 58. I retired and moved to Texas. Retirement is good and not good. I have less money now. When I was working, I was so happy to get money. But, after 69 years, it is my time to relax. It's nice to relax, to meet new friends, to have more communication. Relationships with people are the most important thing in life.

Turn My Life Around

Matt

I grew up in Hamden, Connecticut, in a typical white, middle class family. I have one younger brother. My father owned a restaurant at the time, and me and my brother spent a lot of time there. My mom worked at Yale. Before I reached elementary school, we moved to Orange, Connecticut, to a bigger house. It was a nice move. A couple of years later, my father sold the restaurant and went into sales.

I grew up pretty privileged in a nice neighborhood. I went to Turkey Hill Elementary School. I was very lucky to go to a school like that. But I took a different direction in life when I smoked my first cigarette—I was trying to fit in with the neighborhood kids and be cool. I was 14 or 15 when I first tried pot, so I transitioned to smoking marijuana in middle school. My norm was drug use. I fell in love with it from the very beginning.

I kept it together and finished high school and got my diploma. I went to Amity High School, was expelled, and then went to Notre Dame, where I did a lot better. After high school, I didn't really have plans for college, so I floated

around from job to job.

I met a girl. We started dating and starting using together: cocaine, oxycontin... Battling opioids has brought me to where I am now. From the very beginning, I knew that this was my drug. I wanted it. And I wanted it all of the time. I had many chances and some good opportunities in my life. I was a butcher at Statewide Meats. I was a delivery truck driver at Cyso. But I messed everything up with drugs.

Now I find myself here at Columbus House. I am getting good resources and opportunities to turn my life around. I am very grateful for places like this and for the New Haven community at large. It's easy to get caught up in negative thinking and negative behavior. Negative thinking is cyclical when you're forced to be in these living situations.

I just have to remind myself that it is all temporary. I just got news that I will be getting my second apartment. I'm trying to do better this time. I have a job. I'm trying everything I can. I have to always remember not to use drugs, or I'll lose everything.

The Ledger 2018-10

Eric

Have you ever felt like it's not worth the wait
Have you ever kept still lying wide awake
Have you ever lost it all
And felt like giving up
Having dreams at night
Of all the days of times you lived it up
Did you live enough
Or did you die to yourself
And the needs you needed
Apply to everyone else
Have you run out of gas
Have you run out of energy
Have you thought to yourself
This is the end of me
1 pill, 2 pills, 3 pills
1 pill, 2 pills, life starts disimaging

If you feel alone and need help call 1.800.273.8255 (prevention hotline).

My Miracle Baby

Angelique

Grew up in a broken home
Been in and out of foster homes
Became an alcoholic to self-medicate
Realized it wasn't worth it
Sober now for seven years
I think I finally found who I really am.

Now I have a 13 month old baby
He is MY miracle baby
I was not even supposed to have kids
I have endometriosis.
Six months in, I went into preterm labor
But I got blessed with him coming out normal.

He keeps growing up,
He is now walking on his two legs.
I can no longer keep him in one area.

He is all over the place.
He is MY miracle baby,
He is my ray of sunshine.

I was involved in a lot of abusive relationships,
But I still consider myself lucky.
I got out of them with my identity intact,
I am not sure others would have been able to.
I don't think of myself as just a victim—
I am also a survivor.

I have become recently involved with a church,
I have been baptized and saved.
My life has changed a lot from what it used to be
I have God to thank for that.
I have MY miracle baby.
He keeps me going everyday.

Elmo

Heidi

I did animal rehabilitation when my children were growing up. We've had rabbits and chipmunks and squirrels, raccoons, possums, and deers, to name a few. But I was especially drawn to rehabilitating squirrels, because they're so funny. We had one squirrel who was named Peanut who wouldn't leave, and each time we let him loose, he came back to the front door. We raised him for eight and a half years, and then he passed away.

A few years later, I got another baby squirrel that had fallen from its nest, and I named him Elmo for the Elm City where he was found. He had a disability: His teeth didn't grow downward, they grew backward, the front two teeth. So I found a vet, a very special person, who neutered him and trimmed his teeth and nails each month. I couldn't have released him because he would've starved to death, because his teeth grew into the roof of his mouth. He used to sit on my lap and watch TV like a cat, and you could pet him. He was free to roam my bedroom, and he only peed in his cage. He was potty-trained. And he had all his nuts all over my clothes, in my bedroom, in my shoes. You should've met this squirrel. He was such a doll. The vet cut his teeth and nails without having to anesthetize him. The vet was in love with him. She used to show him to everyone else in the office and say, "This is the best squirrel." I wish you could've seen him. You would've loved him.

He was really, really cute.

It was three seasons that I lived in my mom's house, without heat and without air conditioning. So I went through the seasons with this squirrel. And he would sleep in different spots for each season: one area with a breeze for the summertime, and during the winter he made himself a warm nest out of my socks that he snagged. He was really fast too. He was really a little imp. I used to buy him nuts that were shelled because he couldn't open them because of his teeth. I bought him cashews and pignoli nuts at \$6.99 an ounce. So he ate very well. Expensive, but I raised my children, so he was my only baby to spoil.

But the time came for my mom to sell her home, and I had to move, so Elmo had to stay at my boss's house next to the barn. Her cat decided that Elmo was fair game and knocked his cage over. And Elmo ran, not knowing how to avoid predation, and fell into the horse's water bucket and drowned. I was sorry to see him go, but I know he had three and a half wonderful years that he couldn't have had if we had never met. And I know now he's running around the trees in heaven, with chocolate coconut Lindt bars—we had favorites together, and we used to tear those up. But his time had come, and my time had come. I was grateful to have three and a half years. So that's Elmo.

Homelessness

Becca

A long time ago, I was homeless and I was roaming the streets. My family didn't care too much about me, because I asked them for help and they refused. So I was all alone. And then I went to a program for drugs. That was for five months. I went to another program. That was for one month. And then I got out of the program and came here. The beds are good, but I just don't like waking up so early. Next week I'm trying therapy, and I'm pretty excited.

Dreams of a Homeless Man...

Only Nightmares

Terry

The world today is so confused and out of touch with what normal is. Because if you're being judged by society as normal based off of the things you have, it's very sad to be a part of any society. Society calls people normal because they have a place to live, because of the money they have, the cars they drive, the clothes they wear or the food they eat; their dreams are bright, colorful, and sweet.

Being a homeless person, my dreams are darkness, stress, hunger, and loneliness. My dreams were so bright and beautiful before I became homeless. I dreamed of making the good money, but now I dream of getting 50 cents or a dollar. I know the nightmare of asking or standing with a sign for eight or more hours a day and not getting a penny. I dreamed of having my own home, but now it's a nightmare to go to sleep and wake up to realize all that you have has been stolen. Or freezing to death in your sleep. Or being arrested for trying to sleep like normal people. Trying to get from place to place with all your belongings is like that nightmare when you wake up in a cold sweat, because it was that real. When you're told you can't get on a bus to go to an appointment, because you have too much stuff to bring on the bus: it's the nightmare of knowing that you have to leave your things behind and that your stuff is your entire life, only to return

to find out your life has been stolen.

The normal people get crazy when their car radio gets stolen. Normal people eat three or more meals a day and waste more than they eat. But I have nightmares of trying to get at least one meal a day and hoping I don't miss that one, because if I do, I know it will be a long night of drinking water and fighting that pain that won't stop.

Even though I am living these things on a daily basis, I don't see different people; I see people as equal. It's very small-minded of people to base a person's worth or whether they're part of society based on the things they have. There is not one homeless person I have met since I have been out here that wants to be homeless and doesn't want to get rid of the nightmares every day of their lives. So for all the normal people that look down on that homeless person, think before you react. Because that person may be the one that gives you a hand if you're in trouble, or keeps you from becoming homeless and called not normal, away from all the nightmares.

The greatest one
I know was born homeless
And now he's the king of
Us all.
(Jesus Christ our Savior)

Path of a Righteous Man

Bob

I was born and raised in 1955 in Haight Ashbury, San Francisco, California. It was quite different from today, a lot of hippies. My house was down the street from the Jefferson Airplane mansion. Rock stars in fancy cars came and went. In 1971, The Who played in my city, and they were on the radio all the time. My name is Bob, but because of their hit “Baba O’Riley,” my friends started calling me by that. “Baba O’Riley,” “O’Riley,” they would shout. It was a good time.

That time, drugs were popular in San Francisco. They were everywhere and it was the thing to do. I went to Junior High taking LSD. People—the parents of my classmates—gave their kids drugs, LSD tablets. My parents didn’t. They were alcoholics but didn’t mess with drugs. That will be another story. So, in the 60s, San Francisco was a city of hippies: anti-Vietnam, anti-Cold War, peace and love for everybody. Yet I was a patriot. I joined the army, and I thought it was the right thing to do. I still think so. I served in Vietnam.

It was a strange time. You have boys like me dying on the battlefield. And you have people like Jane Fonda, who travelled to Hanoi and met Ho Chi Minh. She told Ho Chi Minh that America would lose the war, because Americans don’t want to fight no more. They thought the war was evil. It was more complicated than that. In Vietnam, people call it the American War, while we call it the Vietnam War. At the end of the day, it was a bitter civil war.

The big thing at stake was the rice crop. All over the country were these small farms. The farmers had lived there for generations. They had no money and no social security. This plot of land they work on was their life, their most important property. North Vietnam and Viet Cong didn’t care. They would come in and took rice door by door for themselves. A

poor farmer can’t stop these men with guns. If the Viet Cong came in and raided his harvest, he loses everything. I thought it was right to defend these people, and when you drive the guerillas away from their villages, people thank you. They hold your hand and thank you. You saved their lives.

I know there were other reasons to fight. They said there was this domino effect—we already lost China and Cuba to communism, and if we didn’t stand our ground, Taiwan, India, Europe—the world would turn red. They also had duck-and-cover drills—have you young folks heard of those? When the nuclear attack happens, you’re supposed to duck under your desk for cover. I don’t know if table legs would be much of a cover. Yet if you grew up at that time, you would believe it. I was honestly believing that I was doing the right thing. I still think I was right.

Many people didn’t think so. Remember, I lived in San Francisco. People harassed soldiers, spitting on them and calling them “baby-killers.” Personally I never got attacked, but I knew many veterans who did, who were spat on and cursed as “baby-killers.” The thing is, these were actual people who were fighting and dying half a world away from home. People back home don’t see that. It was sad. In San Francisco, you simply don’t tell people you served.

It was a strange time. Cities were burning, the president shot dead, Martin Luther King assassinated, wars and revolutions never left the news, and a side of me could never see daylight. My family was supportive, but most of my friends weren’t. I think people should thank the troops, make him proud of what he did. It’s so hard to take someone’s life. I am a Christian, and the Bible said, “Thou shalt not kill.” I never wanted to hurt people, but war was war. That’s why you want to think what

you did was right. It wasn't a good time for veterans. After World War One and World War Two, everyone thanked you; but when you come back from Vietnam, people say, "Thank you for your service," no more. They still don't do it in San Francisco. That's why I like it here in Connecticut. People in the North East sincerely thank YOU for YOUR service. You feel recognized, like a real human.

Back then, I didn't know what to do. I felt lost. I went to prison for years and used drugs for many more. I did heroin. Don't get me wrong. It's not the "dealing with pain" thing that drove me to drugs. It's simply because I liked them. Of course I enjoyed the stuff I took! I enjoyed heroin and alcohol. I still drink. Yet deep down, it was a way to get away from the uniform I once wore, from the silence people forced upon average soldiers. On the bus to VA Medical Center, passengers could tell who's a veteran, but you're not supposed to show it and talk about it. Just stand

still and keep your head down. That ride was always eerily quiet.

I'll tell you one last thing, something I've regretted. Near where we were stationed, this old farmer had several daughters. Other soldiers would go down to the village and use them. I was disgusted. These were my good friends. I told them that I would pay money for them to go to prostitutes. I would buy women to keep them away from the poor farmer's innocent girls. None of the boys listened. I wished I did more. I always want to do the right thing.

I think I did the right thing. The rich and powerful like Jane Fonda don't understand that when they shook hands with Ho Chi Minh and chanted, "Peace, peace, peace," they were killing people. They told us that we were bad, that our lives, our pain, our difficult decisions don't matter at all. I don't think this is the right thing.

I hope I was a good person. I don't know if I am.

Hold onto Life

Wesley

When I start be homeless, I start missing my family, especially my daughter and my mom. I miss them, I can't see them much no more. You know, when you become homeless, people stop trusting you. If you see me out there, you won't trust me. My old friends, my family, my mom look down on me, think there's something wrong.

It's wrong to say I like sleep outside. You haven't slept on the street. It's not cool. It's not fun. It's dangerous. The ground is cold and people mess with you. You got to curl up and hold your life close to your chest. Sometimes when I'm out there, I'm seeing myself in a position without hope, hope to move on. Sometimes I want to kill

myself. I can't do this no more. It was so hard.

I wish I could go back to a home. It's been three and half, four years. But now I have friends. Friends who got my back. When I talk to those friends I have, they understand me because they went through the same thing. I got two people. They're here. I've been living here for a year now. It's better than sleep on the street.

Now my daughter is fourteen, in high school. She plays tennis. I can't see her every day. My mom takes her to school and the games. I saw my daughter play five months ago and she plays nice. Real nice.

Fishing Day at the Reservoir

Lamont

The night before, we went to throw a bucket of frozen fish behind the Kmart. The next day, we went back to the reservoir. Everyone was catching a whole lot of things like catfish. So I made a rod with a stick and they gave me some line and I caught a whole lot of fish.

Threw some bait in the reservoir.

Catching a lot of fish, bass and all.

Find a stick, they give me some line.

Make a whole fishing rod.

Praise the Lord with a New Song

Victoria

When I was growing up, a huge part of my life was about going to church and praising the Lord. In my family with my parents, three sisters, and four brothers, I was known as the gospel singer. Now, I think I am more of a 'street praiser' because anywhere I am, I can just start singing and praising God. I love to sing and bring joy to many people; misery should not have a place in this world. People ask me why I believe in God and how I know He is real. I think the answer to that, is that it is just like anything else in the world that you know is there but may not see. You do not see the wind blowing, but you know that it is there, because you feel it. Same thing with God. I always feel Him, and He speaks to me just as if I was speaking to you. Making new songs out of this feeling is something that brings me happiness.

I grew up in Jacksonville, North Carolina—quite far from here. I made my way to Connecticut when I married my husband, may

he rest in peace, in 1978. I was 16 years old at the time and he was 17 years old. Up until two months ago, I have been in Waterbury, Connecticut and now I am staying in New Haven. I am excited for New Haven, because I love to go to the beach and see the diverse groups of people there. I enjoy making other people happy, because it brings me happiness. I think that this world is all one big family because we are all God's children. The people that I meet on the street are my sisters and brothers, and I want them to be happy and enjoy life. I am also excited for my new beginnings. I want to reset my life here in New Haven. I want to get on my feet. I want to get an apartment. In short, I want to make my life shine.

One of my favorite songs: *"You know the road is rough and the going gets tough and the hills are hard to climb. I started out oh, a long time ago and I've made up, I've made up my mind. Yes in Jesus strong arms where no tempest can harm I'm safe and secure—I've decided to make Jesus my choice."*

Here to Get My Life In Order

Paul

It all started in '06 when my mom died. I started using percocets with my brother, and then he died. And I used it until four years ago. Then I used heroin, because it was cheaper.

That's when I became homeless. I'm originally from Middletown. I came out here to get clean. I've been here for fie months. I've been with my new girlfriend for four.

I don't speak to any family because of my addiction. I don't talk to my 15-year-old son because of my addiction. Now that I'm clean, I use my money for food. We go out to eat, we go to Wooster Park to hang out, we go to things around New Haven. Tomorrow we are eating at Pepe's for the first time.

For my future, that's why I'm here. I'm here to get my life in order—get housing, get a job, get my son back in my life. And eventually, it will happen.

Righteousness

Jessica

I used to have a car.
A mighty fine car too.
I was sleeping over at a friend's house,
The next day my car was no more.

It was a hit and run,
My car was really no more.
Someone had been able to get the license plate,
Maybe now we could know who.

It was a 21 year old,
Driving with a suspended license.
The perfect opportunity to press charges,
And make an example out of bad driving.

But I said no,
I didn't think this was morally okay.
Yes, he hurt my car,
But I didn't want to hurt him.

He sent me a personal check in the mail,
It covered the cost of the car.
He may have gotten away with the bad driving,
But I know I did the right thing.

Trigger warning: suicide, cutting

Fight With a Tempestuous Life

Eric

I've been dealing with depression for 20+ years, but I didn't know I was really depressed until I got older. Once I got older and was talking to doctors, that is when I thought back to how I grew up and was able to identify how I've been secluded since childhood and wanted to do drugs and alcohol with others, because I've dealt with rejection. When I started to understand why I was doing it, I didn't get help because I didn't think I needed it (I thought it was temporary).

I got my high school diploma, then went straight to the navy. Being in the navy opened my eyes to lots of things including how to read people, because I had to deal with politics and I've never been a political person. I started drinking when I was in the navy, and it was light to moderate. I was 18 or 19, my first time away from home stationed in Virginia, far from home in New Jersey. It started out as a social thing. Then I got in trouble in the military a couple times and then was put out after a while—so my drinking picked up. Also, at the time I had PTSD and didn't know it and so drinking became little more than moderate. I did not get a dishonorable discharge but got something similar. My first time smoking marijuana, and first time using cocaine, ecstasy, and heroine, all happened in one week at age 21. My depression got worse, and I felt like I let people and my family down. My anxiety picked up and got very bad; it was out of control because I didn't know how to get help. I tried to kill myself and ended up in a mental hospital. After I got out of the mental hospital, they gave me medication to help, and that was the first time I got help and understood my diagnosis. I didn't stay medicated

for long.

I slipped back into depression and started drinking and cutting myself more. They found me in the bathroom bleeding out. I tried to commit suicide multiple times. Along the way, I had people come and go in my life. I've always been an outcast, never in the in-crowd. Now I get the help I need and have been diagnosed with dissociative disorder. I take 6-9 medications a day. I see a clinician and a psychiatrist every week. People need to know depression is a very serious part of life if it goes unnoticed. If you have a friend that secludes themselves all the time or never reaches out, they don't want to be alone but this may be tough to say up front. There have been many times that I've reached out to people to have them around, because it is when I am alone that things start happening and my mind gets the best of me. But now that I take my meds and see doctors, I don't do drugs anymore, I don't bake. I don't even smoke cigarettes; I barely drink. It is dangerous to drink on my medication anyway. I go once a week to speak about my problems. It feels good to talk about my problems, but it also picks a scab. I relive a lot of things that I wouldn't have been able to talk about a while ago. I'll never be 100%, but I am way better, mentally healthier, and more sociable. There isn't a magazine for us that has conventions or events to talk to people that we can relate to about our problems. People think you pick up drugs just 'cause, which is true for some people, but I picked up drugs because I had a problem I didn't know about. I've been on a lot of medications, I've felt like a lab rat, hopefully they find the right one.

Struggles

Duron

Struggles, pain all the time, like it's something daily
Had a lot of doubts in God, because the world became scary
And I struggled like a sinner, suffered triple on a vary of ways
Though it's hardly sin because of my tarry

I was raised right, but at the same time I always wondered
If the nice guy really finished last through the bumper
Often lost my temper through frustration in summer
Sobered life, barely had any fun and felt dumber

So you wanna know why I was close to the tears?
It's because I was in the dirt for 19 years
And as soon as I hit the 20, my fears became my nightmares running back and forth to my peers

So that I did and found my way on the pavement
Wandering the cold winter nights with no amazement
Dealing with the prostitutes, thugs, and vagrants
Dealing every drug for sex as a good exchangement

No matter how good I try to be
The peers always suspected me of doing things to a degree
Of wanting me to leave their house when I was in need
Giving me no other options but hitting the street

One night went to a complex building for better shielding
Snuck in the back door and tried getting warmer in feeling
Getting caught on camera made me revealing
To the guard watching, coming to escort me out the building

And I might be a nice guy, but sour like tards
Might've been a broke man, but I got BARS
Might've been quiet but I'm bolder on guards
Giving you that insight that was hidden behind my scars

Unity

Alex

God first & last most only Forever now and
After calling to True peace for All Eternity
He is & shall be the most, the greatest.
Forgiveness only if The over All of all,
Merciful Redeemer, Frees Us all from our
Burdens that surround our Hearts. we Feel at
Times that trouble thyself because of our
Choices that seem as though they were a good choice
Or Bad. choices made in our daily lives. we
Proceed to stride into our future while time
Awaits – no! One.
Who we are shows through the content of the actions of our hearts.

On My Knees Praying

Charles

I'm going to be honest with you. I used to lie a lot, and lies did nothing but get me into trouble. I am a recovering drug addict. I used to smoke crack cocaine. I was homeless. I was sleeping on the Green. And then I got on my hands and knees and asked for the Lord to help me, and He led me here.

I came back to New Haven in 2013, and I've been volunteering ever since. On the 22nd of this month, I will have been volunteering at St. Paul & St. James Church for six years through Sunrise and Loaves & Fishes. I'm there every morning around 5:30am. I serve trays, I cut up fruit, I clean the walls, I clean the bathrooms, and I bring in food from the food truck. All so that homeless people can come and have breakfast. Today, 7,000 pounds of food came in. Today, they made me a captain. There, they show me love.

I'm not trying to look down on everybody else. I'm just a person who tries not to live beyond their means. I'm trying to find a place

to live. At Columbus House, I get showers, food, and clean clothes. These things are here until you can do better and lift yourself up. I would like to get stable housing. I'm trying to find a place to live.

I'm a recovering drug addict. I'm not trying to go down that road again. I would like for other people to look at me and also want to try to help another person get out of this. You can't expect somebody to do something without putting the legwork in. There are a lot of people who want to help you, if you do put the legwork in. It's like a bucket of crabs. When one crab tries to go out, the rest of the crabs try to pull him down. I don't do that. If I can try to help somebody else, I do.

Every morning when I wake up, I pray, because not everybody wakes up in the morning. Every day, I carry out God's will. Every night, when I go to bed, I pray for God to forgive me and give me the strength to do better. And what do I do every morning? I volunteer.

The Struggle

Maribel

In the struggle of my life:
Moving to better places,
With the family,
To give my kids a better life.
Moving out of NYC to Bridgeport,
Then to New Haven,
But this time without my kids.
I had to leave my kids.
They didn't want to be in the struggle.
So I left them with their dad.
But, at the end of the day,
Struggle makes us stronger and wiser,
Makes us go harder in life.
When you do it, it is all worth it—
What I do to make a
Better future for my kids.

Fresh Start

Juan

I'm from New Jersey. My father was violent. He wasn't nice to my mom. My father used to beat her every day, and he beat me too. He beat us so hard that the belt circles got imprinted on our skin. My hands and arms had scars from belt buckles all the time.

When I became eleven, I moved to Waterbury. I had three beautiful girls. One now lives in Michigan, and the other two are still around here. When I was twenty-six, I started using heroin. I lost everything because of it. I lost my job, my wife, and all my money. I been in jail for thirteen years. Looking back, it was a rough patch, but I liked it. The world in there made more sense. But now I don't like it no more.

I went to detox many times. I really wanted to get off heroin, but it was hard. Once in detox, I met a female who was HIV positive. She didn't

know she was. It was after I started not feeling well, she found out that she got it from her ex-boyfriend. That changed my life. I began thinking about death a lot. One day you'll just be gone and get buried. It scares me. Many times after that, I've come to a point where I was being a person I really don't wanna be, but I kept living.

Now I'm forty-seven. I'm off heroin but still doing methamphetamine. I wanna get off meth, too. I love my sister, I love my kids and my family. It was also in detox I met my current wife. She was my counselor. I asked her out, and we've been together for twenty years. I'm taking care of my body, because I know if I don't, I won't be alive no more. Knowing you'll be buried one day and there will be nothing more makes me want to live. I want to start fresh.

Trigger warning: suicide

My Version of the Truth

Anonymous

I grew up in North Branford. I have a brother and sister, both older than I am, and growing up, I was spoiled rotten. If my brother was holding me, my sister was crying, and if my sister was holding me, my brother would cry. I was baptized Catholic, but I went to Protestant church. My father's family is from Italy, and they're very Catholic. My mother's family could be considered WASPs, so they felt my mom shouldn't marry my father. Maybe after all this time I agree.

Both of my grandmothers spoiled me to no end. By the time I was twelve, I realized that the world didn't revolve around me. My mother would call on the phone saying that she couldn't deal with this child; all the doctor did was give her some Valium.

But then things came to a halt. My parents divorced; my dad was a chronic alcoholic and never gave my mom enough money.

My mother is rightly called a living angel. She managed to support us all as a single mom, and I admire her for that. She died from a rare blood disease in 2012. She really is an angel. She was so kind, so sweet, the kind of person who always overlooked everyone's funerals. We had grown very close after I realized the world didn't revolve around me. My brother and sister moved out, because they were older, so it was just my mom and me throughout the years.

My mother left a three-family house to my brother and me. My sister had a disability, so it wasn't left to her. But then my brother threatened to sue me for my share. I was stretched out, on drugs, but I ended up buying the house from them; now I had a mortgage when I hadn't had

one before. So I struggled to keep up with this three-family house.

I've been struggling. I hope the shelter will help me with financial aid and to find a place of my own. I've been clean since the summer.

I would live with my sister, but she's so far gone. She can't take care of herself. She's 350 pounds and still eats sugar by the gallons; she's on oxygen and still smokes. Everyone wants to help her, but she doesn't want to help herself. Living with her made me suicidal. I have my own depression, but when I was living with her, I tried to kill myself like three times and it didn't work—that told me there must be something I need to do here. I've met many good people; you have to want to look for them.

I've been going down to Saint Paul's Church. I couldn't stop doing cocaine, snorting it; it's the craziest thing in the world. Most people stop cocaine, then smoking, then drinking, but cocaine was the one thing I couldn't shake. There, I met someone who volunteers every morning, setting up tables and chairs and that sort of thing. I shred cheese, fill bowls up front. It's not difficult work, but they do it for nothing every morning, just because they want to.

God has definitely humbled me. All I had was my car and I was working for Uber, but then I totaled it. And being in a shelter is no joke. Some of the women there took one look at me and made all these assumptions. I'm just trying to get by, just like everyone else! If I see that someone doesn't speak to me, I don't make them, but when I refuse to let them bother me, they think I'm even more of a snob.

But I'm hopeful.

My Life

David

I have lived the worst life in the history of the world. I never really supported myself or had support, and then I let what I think affect me and how I lived my life for the last ten years. Then I let voices ruin my life for the last three years, and I am struggling. And now I am homeless, and the truth is that no one should live the life I did ever again.

The State of Homelessness in Connecticut

David

Having been homeless for a year, I have witnessed the ugliness of the treatment of homeless people in New Haven, Connecticut. In New Haven, you have two main shelters: Columbus House and The Grand Avenue Shelter. The conditions of each shelter is very disgusting. At Grand Avenue Shelter, the homeless people are treated as the lowest of the low of humankind. There is misuse of funds, the mistreatment of homeless people in terms of living conditions, and abuse of power by the staff. You have people fighting, bullying, and lots of stealing of people's property. There is lots of drug and alcohol abuse, and the condition of the bathrooms are intolerable. People are exposed to worrisome health hazard conditions. Last week Mayor of New Haven, Toni Harp, had a surprise visit and found the living conditions intolerable. The Grand Avenue Shelter is now under scrutiny of the city of New Haven. The Columbus House has also been ruined by mismanagement. There, each individual homeless person is subjected to nepotism and favoritism.

I believe that the surplus of the taxpayers money should be able to provide better services and living conditions that could improve the lives of homeless people. It is up to our political system for this to take place. Me, I choose to live in the streets. I feel safer, less vulnerable to having my property stolen and to physical abuse, and there are better health conditions than what these two shelters are currently providing. I don't know who to speak to to improve this situation, where homeless people can be provided with a better quality of life. I urge anyone who has full knowledge of what is happening in these shelters to speak up to city leaders, state representatives, Congress, Senate and make them aware of how these shelters are treating the misfortunate persons at the most vulnerable positions of their lives. Any kind of improvement can contribute to better life styles for them.

Trigger warning: domestic abuse

Call Me Chef

Chris

I grew up in West Haven. I was a minority in my community, and I loved that. I grew up knowing how to interact with anybody. For my brother, growing up was worse. He thought he was a tough guy, and then ten kids came and knocked him out. Now he has a little money so he still thinks he's better, but really he just married into money.

I was abused as a child. My father was a fucking women-beater and a fucking child-beater. He was a mean German man who was beaten by his father who died when he was 19. I saved my mom's life when I was seven by giving my father a big kick that stopped him from doing whatever he was doing. That's when he walked out. We escaped him when I was nine. We bounced around and hid in hotel rooms. After we escaped, my mom became abusive. She kicked me out at 16, because she tried to control my money and couldn't. My dad died of AIDS when I was 17.

In 1995, I was dating a bus girl who broke my heart. I went up to where she was at UMass with .55mm, riding 150 mph on my motorcycle. My engine broke, and I hitched back to Connecticut, got my car and a 9mm, and headed back to Massachusetts at 120 mph. I was chased by state troopers, but I threw my gun in the woods so they never caught it. I took sleeping pills to kill myself, but then I made myself throw them up. I try to be a humble nice guy, but I still do crazy stuff. I'm a risk taker living with mental illness. I got two charges against me last week in North Carolina, because I got into a couple of fights and was hit in the face with a gun.

I went to prison in 2004. It was the best thing that ever happened to me, because I found Jesus. A priest was walking by handing out Bibles.

I asked if I could have one, but he said that he ran out. He came back an hour later and gave me one. The guy in the bunk beneath me had a wife who was a preacher in New Haven, and he told me that he could answer any questions I had. Another guy took my Bible at night and would underline parts for me to read and talk about. Jesus helps me keep things in perspective. There's always somebody worse—a child who's hungry, a mom and her kids who are homeless. God has a plan for your life. The only time I got mad at Jesus was in 2014. That's when I found out my girlfriend was cheating on me behind my back. I went and found the guy on his 4th hole of the golf course and knocked out his front teeth in one punch. But I was only mad at Jesus for a day or two.

Now, I'm in a homeless shelter. I got lucky. There are really cool guys in my dorm. One day, I'm going to open my own professional chef business. I'm tired of working for other people. I've got my resume fixed up by the people here, and I'm ready to go to Manhattan every day with my chef's knife and stand outside of a restaurant until I'm hired.

I like to cook, because I like to make people happy. My mom was a single mom with three kids and was a waitress. At 13 years old, I was washing dishes in the Mexican restaurant where she worked. I became a head cook there, with the dishwasher older than I was. While my friends were drinking kegs in the woods and playing basketball, I learned to sauté and some oven work. When I was 20, I had a two-bedroom apartment, a \$25,000 car, and two jobs. I didn't have my family, but I had work and everyone at work.

The knife taught me how to use the knife. The kitchen taught me how to cook. Some people

don't like Gordon Ramsay, but I understand him. Cooking is very stressful and nothing like cooking at home. It's not the Food Network. It's blood, sweat, and tears. Would I recommend being a chef? Yes and no. A lot of people want to be famous right away, but you need to start

washing dishes. What are you going to do on a Saturday night when your busboy doesn't come? The kitchen consumes your life. I've worked side by side with Michelin star chefs, people who have been on *Chopped*, the winner of *Chef Wanted*. I called them chef, and they called me chef.

Guilty Until Proven Innocent

Brendan

I got laid off from my job. You know how they say paycheck to paycheck living? It's very true. Then after my unemployment ran out, some false charges were filed against me in court, which interrupted my ability to get back to the workforce. About six months after the false allegations, the court decided to drop the very extensive charges—it kind of shows how the court works. There was no evidence. It was all hearsay. It was the fault of a corrupt police officer who continued to file charges without any evidence. That's why it was thrown out in court. I'm thinking of going after him in court, because he was just after me. I don't even know him. It happened in Clinton, Connecticut.

But the court system proved to be effective in that I was proven innocent. However, in the present day legal system, people are guilty until proven innocent. It wasn't just me, it happens all the time. It's omnipresent. I know so many times it's happened to other people I know.

Even attorneys agree that innocent until proven guilty doesn't exist anymore. They don't want to drop charges. They don't care. The officers sometimes put charges on people, and they aren't all lawyers. My cop thought he was Jamie Reagan from *Blue Bloods*, but he hasn't gone to Harvard Law School. (Jamie Reagan is a cop, but he does know the law.)

Columbus House gave me the opportunity to regroup after all of this catastrophe. There's a problem too these days with the press putting things out on the Internet. What's on the Internet is forever—it's really hard to get rid of. That's the thing with First Amendment rights where the press says everything is fair play if it's public knowledge. Because the allegations were made, they could still keep it in the paper.

I would like to help people in similar circumstances. I actually had another time when I had false allegations, and I was able to get it off of the Internet on my own.

Synthia 1-14-19

Eric

On this crowded rail line she sits,
Like most of the riders on board
Some awaiting their stop
Some not ready to get off
As her doubled-paned window sideplays quick images of time
Her mind captures the most memorable
Discarding the uninteresting ones
Chatter is heard about
Some are eager about their trip
Some are going about it monotonously
This is not the metro express but is like it
The train pulls to a stop – a couple slowly shuffles off
She watches as they vanish quicker than they exited the train
Wonder fills her mind, anticipation, anxiety – what awaits her?
Her one way ticket clutched in her damp, warm palm
She faces forward, mind focused on her final destination
-Ray-vin Syndicca

The Struggles

John

After a year in a program, I'm still on the waiting list. I've done more than ten New Haven housing applications, some elsewhere, and I've moved to several different shelters.

I have just been going through the daily routines, everyday struggles—finding clothes, trying to make money with a disability, waiting for my court order to go through. Lately, I've been dealing with some heavy spiritual-like depression and anxiety, causing me to lose focus. With all the depression and anxiety, it has been tough thinking about my mother and father. Family life isn't the same any more—my father and mother have both passed, and rebuilding brother and sister relationships is still tough. And I ask myself questions like whether I'll ever find a place to live, and when I'll ever be happy as a person.

As a thirty-nine year old man, I've grown tired of all the same daily routines, day in and day out. I'm constantly emotional, just thinking of how things could be different, how things could be, how things ought to be. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed just by the possibility of how long it's going to take. Am I finally going to be happy and live the life I ought to?

I've been going to church more, which has been helping with the depression and anxiety a lot; I'm going on a retreat in October with the church, which will be great. From there, I'm hoping to build my character as a man a lot more, and continue to work hard to get my housing.

I'm just hoping and praying for a better future once I get my place.

The Life of the Lost Soul

Joe

Let me begin with when I was released from prison after two and a half years. I was married before I was incarcerated. Upon my release, it was brought to my attention that my wife had cheated on me during my incarceration. I decided I wasn't going back home, even though she wanted to fix things. I said no. No trust, no relationship. So I ended up homeless.

Since my homelessness, I moved from Bristol back to New Haven, where I'm originally from. Instead of dealing with my pain in a proper manner, I decided to bury it by using drugs. I ended up sleeping on the streets of New Haven in a bus stop for three months straight during the wintertime.

Then I found an abandoned car behind the garage on Chapel and East Street. The car had four flat tires, but I decided to sleep in there

with a friend of mine—who was also homeless at the time—because it was a little warmer. Then there was the drug addiction. It caused me to panhandle daily to buy my drugs and to drink whatever alcohol I was drinking at the moment.

Several months later, I was beating myself up because of the way I looked and because of the way I felt about myself. I told the guy that was with me that I needed to get help. I can't do this anymore. And I started to cry. The next morning, I decided to go into the Grand Avenue 180 Center, a Christian program, to clean myself up and get closer to God. So that's what I did.

I became closer to God, learning about the Bible, learning about who is responsible for cleaning me up—because He is. I found my freedom within Him. Now, I've been clean for over one year. I am grateful and thankful for God.

And I Got My Life Back

Mickey

I'm from New York. My name's Michael, but I go by Mickey. I'm in this situation because of drugs, mostly opioids. I had a full scholarship to Quinnipiac, and I was an athlete, but then I tore my ACL—twice. While I was in surgery, I got addicted to my painkillers. At that time, both my parents died out of nowhere. My dad had an aneurysm, and my mom jumped off a bridge. So I went on a crazy run of drugs to numb my pain. By then, I'd already finished up college and had a business degree, so I was making money. But when that happened, I went crazy and spent all my money on drugs.

I pretty much lost everything in my life. I don't have much family, and I have anxiety, guilt, and depression because of it—because of

the drugs. I wanted to die for a long time and didn't care if the drugs killed me or not. I spent four years on the streets smoking crack, shooting heroin—everything—which was very not me at all. To go from being an athlete to being on the streets was a big turnaround for my life. If you had asked me before that where I would be in the future, I'd never have imagined I would be in this situation.

Since then, I got real sick last year from a kidney stone. I got septic and almost died. I spent a lot of time in a hospital and then in a nursing home and got even sicker at first. But even though I almost died, it saved my life. Because I was off drugs during that time, I realized I wanted to live, and I got my life back. And now I'm here.

Change at 38

Tim

I grew up in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and now I am here in New Haven because at 38 years old, my life changed completely. One day, I met a man from Columbia who I got high on crack with. This man had a stolen credit card, and he did not know what he was going to do with it. We would go around to a bunch of gas stations, and we would buy cigarettes. We would buy them by the cartons and then go to the corner store to resell them.

This way, we were not making enough money, so we decided to get into electronics. Using the stolen credit card, we went to Home Depot, Walmart, and Target and would get any types of electronics that we could get our hands on. After getting the items we could, we decided to book a hotel with the goods we got from around Connecticut to then start heading back home to Bridgeport.

Back at Bridgeport, the man from Columbia who was with me decided that he was going to break into a home to steal items. It turns out this was the house of a cop, and the cop tracked all the goods that we had bought with the stolen credit card in our car. I had not been with him at the time, but they waited to arrest him for two days after surrounding his house, so that they could get me, too. When I visited the man from Columbia, I got arrested.

I was not at the house of the cop so I was able to get let go, but they arrested the man from Columbia. However, this man told the cops all about the stolen credit and that I was the one that had the card now. Now I got a warrant out for my arrest and I went on the run for two to three months.

During this time, I really struggled for money, and I was a fugitive running away from my warrant. It got so bad that I went to CVS to steal some items. This was the night of New

Year's Eve, and a friend wanted me to drive him home after we got high together. He left me with a car that I wasn't sure if it was stolen or not, and this is when I went to CVS to steal some items. I got caught by the manager for shoplifting, and now I was terrified that I was going to get penalized for a stolen car as well.

Thankfully the car was not stolen, but as the cops processed my arrest for shoplifting, they also saw the warrant out for my arrest from my time in Bridgeport. I got the option to go to a rehabilitation center in Waterbury for 90 days to get clean instead of prison. I stayed for 90 days there and got clean.

When I got out of rehab, I decided to come to New Haven and that is when I tried to turn my life around. I started a job and tried to maintain my sobriety that I worked hard for. Unfortunately, I became severely depressed. I lost my job, because I was too depressed to go to work. Since I was no longer employed, I got evicted from the sobriety house that I had stayed at. This was last Monday.

After I got evicted, I was in a low place in my life, and that is when I broke my sobriety. At a homeless shelter, I relapsed. Then I got severely depressed for relapsing. I went to a hospital for my depression, and this is when I got diagnosed. I stayed at the hospital for more than a week, and now I am working with a social worker to get my sobriety back. I have also joining the New Beginner Program at Columbus House to become a better me.

A question that might get asked is how this all happened to me when I was 38 years old. I had a stable job and a stable living situation. However, my personality completely changed at 38 years old. I started to feel that I was a robot and I was doing nothing besides going home and going to work, and I got tired

of this. I started to get addicted to getting high on crack when I met a girl that introduced me to it. This happened when I was still working, and my boss started to notice that I was continuously getting high. One time I collapsed in the office, and my boss immediately assumed I had overdosed. I lost my job.

Since I was no longer getting money, I decided to use my other skills to make money without a job. I made my apartment into a shelter for people to get high together and to find drugs.

I got into stealing and shoplifting and scamming others. Then I met the guy from Columbia, and that is what had really changed my life more.

I am now 41 years old and I don't really regret any of the things that happened to me. I think I learned a lot from the past, and now it's time to move forward. Complex lessons were learned, both about me and life in general. It is amazing what can happen in a small span of only three years.

Clean and Sober

Calvin

I was born in New Haven and went to Richard C. Lee High School. As a kid growing up, my ma raised me; my dad was nowhere around. I'm the oldest in a family of four kids: two younger sisters and a twin brother. I was a special ed kid. I was supposed to graduate high school in '79, but ended up graduating in '81. I always thought my ma treated my brother and sisters better than me, because I was special ed. My dad was never in my life when I was growing up. Today he's in my life, and we're close now. I have a good relationship with him. He calls me every week. But when my ma passed away, he didn't even come for the funeral. That really hurt me.

When I was younger, I smoked crack. I was a crack addict. I smoked for fifteen years. I was homeless for five years, living on the street. I smoked marijuana, too, for ten years. I got ad-

dicted to crack when I watched my brother do it one night, and I wanted to try it. My mom kicked me out of the house when I was 30; I had started doing burglaries when I was about 25 to support my drug habit. I've been incarcerated so many times. I ended up in jail in 2015, and I did four years. I just got out on June 7th of this year. I spent half my life in prison, going back and forth in and out of jail.

Now I'm out of jail, clean and sober. I ended up going into a program and getting myself clean. I've been clean six years, since 2013. I go to my groups in the Crest program. I just received my disability a few days ago. I want to see if I can get a part-time job working 20 hours, but it's hard for me to concentrate, because my mom passed away when I was in jail. Still, I go to AA meetings twice a week. I want to stay clean and sober.

Old New to New New

NuNu

My story begins when I was out on the streets. I was on drugs. I smoked crack, and I didn't realize how bad it was. My father moved in with me. He was a good man. Never on drugs and never drank. He served in the army. He drank once in Korea and was drunk for three days. Couldn't understand how people enjoyed doing that every day.

But that didn't stop me. I told him that when he sees me go into my room and close my door, I'm having quality time with myself. He asked what that meant. I told him that he knew. He asked why I did this to myself. I said that it was because I wanted to.

Most of his brothers died of alcoholism. They had surgeries, operations, their voice boxes removed. My father wasn't like them. He couldn't understand why they didn't realize what they did was killing them. I told him, "Dad, everything is killing us." He died of diabetes. I lost my aunt last Thursday and hadn't even arrived home when I was told that another aunt passed away.

I used to have a dog, a shepherd. Once, I went to the store, and I got a call from my neighbor. She asked who was in my house, because she had received a call. I said there was nobody in my house except my shepherd, and she would be barking if there was somebody else in there. When I went home, I found her by her dog bowl. I asked her what she wanted. And she started kicking her empty bowl. She sees me dial the neighbor's number every day, and I think she called her because she wanted food.

I have a son. My son calls me "New New." Except when he's done something wrong. Then he asks, "Are you the 'old new' or the 'new new'?" I tell him it depends on what he did. You better hope that I'm the new new and not the old new.

One day, I woke up, I looked in the mirror, and I told myself that I don't want to be like this

anymore. I ran down the street, chased down the trash truck, and threw away a folded napkin with my drugs inside. It didn't take anybody else to tell me not to use drugs again. I knew I should stop. And I did. I've been clean for over 20 years now. This is a true story.

I didn't do anything illegal. Well, at least, I didn't get caught. I never sold my body, I never went to jail, my house was never busted by the cops. I just did drugs. Me and my home girl now talk about how we were stupid, weren't we? I would put on my sneakers and a bathrobe to get drugs at 3 am. Sometimes one slipper and one sneaker. It's really not funny. That's just how drugs can change your life.

I ended up at Stonington. The girls I was up there with were so sad. They couldn't stand to hear a door open, because they were molested. I'd have to hold them all night. They'd shake all night. In withdraw, hurting all night, needing drugs, not being able to wait till morning. These girls were around 16 years old and had been molested since age 9. When I heard their stories, all I could do was hold them and cry. They were babies. Even when I was clean, I knew I couldn't leave these babies here. These babies with nothing to live for. They needed me to be there so they could sleep at night. If I left, they would feel like they've been left again, abandoned again, incapable of trusting again. I needed to hug them, to tell them that things would get better.

What happened here? It makes you sick. I just can't understand it. A lot of people don't know it, but it happens every day. People need to hear about it. And it's not just young girls. My cousin was the captain of the New Haven Police Department and said she didn't know it was as bad with little boys and molestation, but it is. The little boys are just embarrassed.

I grew up. I laid off the drugs. I've come a long way. But these babies have a long way to go. After I left, I never went back. Two of the girls were found drowned in a river. They need help. They need somebody. It's a sad story. But those are the ones we need to help. We need to let them know that it's not their fault. It's not just grown stupid people who need help. It's children who had no choice in the matter. These children need us. Without us, they'll never be anybody. They'll have nothing to look forward to when they get out. We need to get ourselves together so that we can help the children. They need safety. They need to flip

burgers, to work at Taco Bell, to get off the street, to work for their lives and appreciate it more.

We think we're in a bad place because of the homeless shelter. But we're a step ahead of a whole lot of people. People here don't understand how fortunate we are to be where we are. It's gotta be twice as hard for them to get somebody to believe these babies and to support them. You need to get God in your life and pray. Without the Savior in your life, you'll never make it. I pray for them every night.

Homelessness and Hope

Jennifer

I'm going to give you my homelessness story.

I had my home and kids, but then my husband got put in jail. He was the breadwinner, so he always took care of me, the house, the kids. He went to jail, and I lost it, lost my mind. And after that I got into drugs. Things got really bad at home—I was so badly on drugs that my oldest child was taking care of the younger ones. Child Protective Services got involved, and their god-mother got involved and said she had to take the kids. I was angry at her, because I wasn't thinking right; I was just angry.

After that, I lost my home. I was alone, had no home, had no kids. I was depressed for a year, and one day I looked in the mirror and said that I couldn't do this anymore. I went to rehab; I just had to change my life. I did six months in rehab,

and now I'm in Columbus House—I'm homeless still, but I'm at a shelter.

I'm trying to go back little by little, and I'm trying to get back the trust of my kids and the support of my family. I've been clean for several months now. I'm doing well—I'm close to getting my apartment, and by January, I'll get my kids back. I've been working hard. Of course it's been God, God in my life, working through it all. I've just been trying, trying, trying, and doing everything I can to get my kids, family, and home back.

Things are getting to be so beautiful—my eldest daughter just had a baby, and I got to be there, which I couldn't have been if I were still on drugs. My family is getting bigger, and now they're just waiting on Mom.

I'm so happy that I got my life back.

Slowly, but Surely

Candice

I want to tell you about my health. When I was 14, I had lung surgery and I overcame that. When I was 16, I had back surgery for scoliosis. I'm still having problems with that, but I'm growing every day. Being homeless for a while, I'm now living here, and it's all coming together. Slowly, but surely.

In the future, I've always wanted to go back to school and get my high school diploma. I'd like to work in a daycare, because I've always loved kids. Maybe work with kids with autism, because my brother has autism. I'm pretty good at working with kids with autism. If I can go to

college, that would be great so I can get my own place, have my autistic brother move in with me, and give him a good life.

My brother, Steven, is 27, and he loves Hot Wheels cars. He's very smart and knows all the presidents, their wives and kids, how long their terms were. I also have my other two brothers. There's David. He loves computers. I'd love to help him to go back to school. Then there's James, who is the youngest. He graduated high school and is now a pharmacy tech. I am very proud of him.

Diamond Corporate

Terrellz

I'm currently a business owner who sacrificed everything to open a storefront. It's been a long road, especially as a military veteran. My company is called Diamond Corporate. I named it that because of the nature of diamonds—indestructible, with the ability to withstand things. My company should be able to withstand down times in the economy. You can reach me at diamondcorporate@mail.com. Currently, I'm just advising a friend on the infrastructure of his business, but I'm using a synergy strategy to open up my own business simultaneously.

My passions are music, investing, and helping others. I definitely want to incorporate things like music into my business. However, my main goal is to identify the problems in our

own communities before going to other countries. I want to uplift U.S. citizens. To know the best way to approach problems, you need to know them from the ground up and understand the needs and necessities of individuals. When someone tells these individuals that they can't do something, Diamond Corporate will tell them they can. We just want to give people the help they need to function and do whatever they want to do. Given my family background, most assets are going back to my community.

With the \$20 I receive, I'll just donate back to the Columbus house. I'm still poor, but I'll also match the \$20 you give me with my own donation.

My Journey with Drugs

Becca

My name is Becca, and I was homeless for two years. I had gotten addicted to crack cocaine and started to roam the streets throughout my addiction. As I trekked around these areas, I met a lot of really bad people. One time, I had smoked with one of those people that I met, and he jumped me. A lot of other people then started to hit me and beat me up. I wasn't sure I was going to make it out alive. I thought I was going to die.

To get money, I would have to panhandle sometimes. It was not easy, and I struggled throughout this time of my life a lot. I wanted to get clean from the drugs, and I went to a rehabilitation program for 5 months. When I got out of the drug program, I had nowhere to go and decided to stay with a friend. It did not work out.

One time, I found myself stuck in Pennsylvania with nowhere to go. I was being driven by someone and then I just got dropped off, with nothing. I ended up coming back to Connecticut, because I lived here before, and it's better to come back to a sort of home.

I Had to Grow Up Fast

Jennifer

I was born and raised in Derby, Connecticut. It was a somewhat normal childhood. At the age of 15, I met the man who is now my ex-husband. I got pregnant at the age of 16, so I had to grow up fast. By the age of 23, I was a mother of three. My ex-husband first hit me when my son was about six months, and he apologized for it. For months it was okay, but of course it continued for years, so I turned to alcohol and drugs. After ten years of physical, mental, and even sexual abuse, I got out of the marriage and got clean.

About a year later, my ex-high-school-sweetheart showed up at my door. We started hanging out. We both went to church, so finally I got a Man of God. Everything was great, then I had to have surgery so I was in a lot of pain and

started taking percocets for pain. I started giving my husband the same for his back pain. Eventually, the doctor stopped giving me the pills, so I started buying them off the street. After seven years clean, we both relapsed, and then in 2015 we ended up in the streets. In April 2015, we decided to get clean; we were doing good, but in November 2017, my high school sweetheart's past caught up to him. He is now in prison, and I am here.

But we are both clean and living for God. As of October 15th, 2019, I will be in my own apartment after four years in the streets. To God be the Glory. I had a rough life, but God was always there. I just had to trust in Him. With God, I am truly blessed, and I know I never have to live like that again.

Becoming a Father

Robert

I used to have unprotected sex so much that at one point, I thought I couldn't have kids. My dad was diagnosed with AIDS when I was twenty-one or twenty-two years old. A female friend of mine whom I've known since we were fourteen, Kim, was working in healthcare and offered to help me. She took care of my dad for the last year of his life, because at the time I was working two jobs. When he passed away, we had a little gathering at the house. She was there with me and everyone was a little drunk. She fell asleep in my bed like she's done a million times. All those times before we never did anything, because we were strictly friends.

That night we actually had sex.

She happened to be married at the time and not to me. I was in the process of helping her get out of that relationship, because her husband was abusive to her. About a week later, I left to Florida to get away for a bit and asked if she wanted to come. She said no, she had her job and all. So my boy John and I flew down to Florida, just the two of us.

John's girlfriend at the time, Yolanda, heard a lot about me and was inclined to meet me so she picked us up at the airport. When our eyes first met, there was an instantaneous attraction, even though she was with my boy and we were all going to be living in the same house. She moved out shortly after I arrived, and her only reasoning was, "I can't stay here anymore."

John got me a job working with him in a nightclub as a bouncer and she was coming into the club a lot. I started noticing she was stalking me. Every time I turned around, she was there sipping on a drink, smiling at me. About a couple weeks later, she calls me up and asks if I can keep a secret. I say "yeah," and she hangs up. I didn't hear from her for a few days. In that time, I broke my ankle. Then she calls the house looking for John, her boyfriend at the time.

"No, he's at work."

"Can you come over to the house and hang a few pictures for me?"

"Yeah... but my foot is broken and I don't have the car."

I get there and I ask where the pictures are, and she says in the bedroom. I go into the bedroom.

It was then that our affair began.

A month later, Kim calls me and tells me she's pregnant. I congratulate her, tell her how happy I am for her.

"Who's the father?"

"You're the father."

"How do you know?"

"I haven't been with my husband since you got me out of that relationship."

I was very happy, celebrating, telling everyone I was going to be a father. About three weeks later, Yolanda calls me and asks me to stop by the house when I get out of work.

"I'm pregnant."

"Why are you telling me?"

"You're the father."

Again, I'm asking, "How do you know?"

"Because the day I met you at the airport was the day I decided to stop sleeping with John." John assumed the baby was his, because she was telling people she was pregnant and they were together at the time. He calls home to tell all of his friends and his mom about the baby, but we both know it's mine.

John and I were still living together, and she started coming by the house. I would come home and my bed would be made, John's bed would be made, and she would be cooking dinner. She started knocking on my window at two o'clock in the morning to spend time with me. She would drive to the house and park a block away and then walk through a field just to see me. At this point, she was showing.

One night, I came home to find John lying on the couch. I could tell he had been crying, and I automatically knew why. I thought we were going to fight, but we didn't. We had a discussion, and he moved out. I got a new apartment and moved Yolanda and her kids in with me. John and I were still in the violent stages of our lives, and I felt it was necessary for me to protect her. I was worried he'd come back and hurt her.

When it was time for my son to be born, I flew back to Rhode Island to deliver him. A few

days after, I flew back to Florida. Three months later, I delivered my daughter. That's one thing I am proud of—I got to deliver all of my kids.

Thinking back on it, I believe it was my father's death that enabled me to be fertile. I love telling people this story, because I guess it's just not what you would expect when you hear about someone having two children with different women three months apart. I wasn't a dog—well I guess I was a dog—but it's just not what you would expect, you know?

Anonimity

Anonymous

I usually don't break my anonymity, but I do it when it will help someone.

This January, I will be sober 14 years, but I used to be homeless. I drank, and I was living on the streets. It was terrible.

But everything has changed since I became a Christian. I couldn't have done any of this without God—knowing Christ has made me a new person. Without him, I was garbage, but now I'm a new creation; I was homeless, and now I have a home and a career. People don't often understand that, but I truly have put my old self behind and have been made new.

Since I became sober and have no longer been homeless, I've gotten married, and we've bought a house. I've been a volunteer with Alcoholics Anonymous for years, helping guide women through difficult times, like the ones I experienced. I enjoy guiding and helping people, and it gives some meaning to the challenges I have faced—to be able to help someone going through the same thing. But although I work in a non-profit with lots of inter-

action with the homeless and people experiencing drug addiction, I can't utilize my experience here. It's sometimes frustrating. They don't know that I have been homeless, or have personal experience with these things; they just keep me in an administrative position, because I don't have a degree or formal experience in counseling. For some reason, people begin to look at you differently when they know you have been homeless. It's strange to me that people can come in and joke about how wasted they got at a party, but it's not acceptable to have been homeless or to have struggled with alcoholism.

But in smaller ways I try to help people. For instance, if someone seems to be drinking too much at a party, I might make a subtle comment or ask them a question. It's not a major interference with someone's night, but you might be the only person who has ever stopped and asked them about their relationship with alcohol. And that alone can help.

I am very grateful to have made it to where I am now, and to so soon be 14 years sober!

Family List

Raul

When I was growing up, I had no father. My mother only beat me, and she left me with my grandfather, who forced me to work, to feed myself.

I was raised between my grandfather and uncle, they taught me to be responsible, be careful about who I trust. I didn't have many friends.

I bought my first car with my own money in 1966. 1963 Chevy Impala. It was only six hundred dollars, can you believe that? I also got my first bicycle with the money I made, twenty-four dollars, brand new. I had the car for five years until I entered the service and left for Germany. It was blue and beautiful. I left it to my mother, who gave it to my stepfather, and he sold it. I was so mad when I got back from the army. I used to get up at early morning before work, wipe my car down, so it looked good when I drive around. I didn't trust peo-

ple to clean it. When you trust others, they always hurt you in the back, like selling your car. I don't trust people.

Now I have one son. He is a military police, twenty-seven years old. I have one granddaughter, who is three, and a grandson. He's two months old. I wasn't there when he was born, but next week on Wednesday, I'm seeing my grandson for the first time. I'm sending money to support the child. I try to treat my family well. When my son was about eighteen, I bought him a scooter. Later I also bought him a car, Ford Fiesta. My parents never gave me anything. I don't know my father. My mother just passed away a few months ago. They're not on my list. I give my son what I didn't get from my parents.

Trigger warning: sexual abuse

Speak Out

Donny

In my childhood, I had problems with sexual abuse and all, and I would just like to say some things to the kids. I want them to know that they should speak up, so they don't have to carry the burden with them for the rest of their lives like I have.

I left home at 13 and stayed with a man who was abusing me and paying me to stay quiet. I thought it was ok, because I didn't want to get beat anymore. I went as far as prostitution for eight years, because I was living on the streets. I just want kids to know that, if stuff is going on, they need to let somebody know.

Don't keep it quiet. I got married, had a daughter, and kept it quiet from both of them. It didn't end well. I was working two jobs, my wife cheated on me, and I was divorced within eight months. That's how I became homeless, back on the streets and living in the woods for three or back years, because I didn't want to put my burden on anybody else.

Kids should let somebody know so they don't have to live through that. I just want the kids to be helped—all kids, of any age or race. It affects us all. People are afraid to speak out, but I hope this gets to somebody who can speak out about what's happening to them.

Just Keep Going

Eddilynn

I've been living in New Haven for about 17 years, and I moved from Florida to here. Once I graduated, I went back to Florida for about three years. I then went to school in North Carolina at the Art Institute. I studied interior design. And then from there, I didn't have any money left, so I went back to Florida and became homeless. I slept on a beach for a few months.

My dad's side reached out to me and asked me to come back to Connecticut. Mind you, I haven't spoken to them since I was five years old. I was adopted and separated for a long time. They found me on Facebook. Then I moved back to meet them. It wasn't the best, so I ended up still being homeless.

I'm actually about to leave the shelter now though. I just got my housing and my life is just turning around. I definitely have a couple of ideas. I want to create a mobile makeup van. I also want an app created around it to set up makeup appointments. And I just want to live the rest of my days as a rich old woman.

Just don't be afraid to be who you are, and just keep going, because the hard part is almost over.

My First City Experience

Terry

As a young kid born in a small farm town in South Carolina, I always dreamed of being in the big city. I often read books about the city and heard many stories. So when I finished school and I got the chance to go to Knoxville, Tennessee, I was thrilled and nervous at the same time, because I never had been away from my family. The day I was leaving there was so many hugs and tears from my brothers and sisters. My mom wouldn't stop crying, but my dad kept saying that he was so proud of me, that I was becoming a man. When I got on the bus I was so happy, but after about an hour on the bus, I felt all alone and so lost. I reached my

first stop where I had to change buses and was so tempted to go back home, but I had to keep going to fulfill my dream of finally seeing the big city. After what seemed like hours, I reached my destination.

It was dark when I got there, but the next morning I was up early and I went outside and almost lost my mind at the size of the buildings and so many people that were there, that I ran back inside and called my parents to let me come home, and I promised that I would never return to the city again. I didn't for another 20 years, but that's another long, enjoyable story.

Let Me Be a Better Man

Raul

I was the only boy in my house. I grew up in Puerto Rico. I have family there, but I don't know them. The only person I've felt real about was my mother, and she passed away. I've never spoken to my father, because he left my mother when I was one.

The only person I still talk to is my sister over text. But I lost my phone, so I haven't been able to talk to her in six weeks. I'm too old to make an email now. I've been writing letters to her though, to the address that I still remember. But they keep getting sent back. Even if I have to take a flight, I will bring those letters to her and show her that I've been writing her.

I joined the military at 16. I stayed in Puerto Rico for one year before going to Germany, where I was deployed for six years. Then I went to Fort Raleigh for three months, and then Maryland and New Jersey for 10 years.

I came to Connecticut in 1982 and met people, started dealing drugs, and went to jail for one year before spending 27 months in parole. But then I started using drugs for what became 43 years. After that, I went back to jail for nine months. When I got out, I had to go to the hospital for two months, 7th floor of the West Haven campus. Then I went to Hartford and began living on the streets.

I started using drugs again, and this time I

went to a program that gave me housing. I relapsed, this time for five weeks. I spent \$1,293 in two days. Just five weeks ago, I called my case worker and she got me here. It's all right. They wake me up at 5:00am, and we sit around. The staff is good, and it's clean. Around 5:30, we get a meal and our medication. At nine, I go out for a smoke and my other medications, and then we go to bed.

I stick to myself. I don't associate with people. Everyone has done me wrong, and I got tired. I did drugs for 43 years. Every day. The only time I stopped was when I was locked up.

My advice to other people is to really focus on their stories, continue school, and listen to their parents. Because if they listen, they will stay on the straight path. The same advice I would give my 27-year-old son, I tell everyone else. He is a military police and doesn't do drugs.

I'm 65, but people don't believe it. I'm a veteran and I have so much I could tell you, but I respect the code. I'm sorry—I get emotional when I talk about this. Even the people I had to shoot—I felt bad, because I believe in God. I get sentimental.

And now, all I gotta do is sit here. I keep asking for them to do me right and don't put me back in Hartford, because I know dealers there. Let me be a better person and a better man. I'm too tired and too old.

First Day

Jessica

My name is Jessica. I became homeless three months ago when I got evicted with my two-year-old daughter, Mia. Due to my homelessness, DCF got involved and took my daughter into their custody. They called 211 to refer me to Columbus House yesterday. Today is my first day here.

Breathe for Your Family

Maurice

I'm tired of the life I have been living. I have been getting high for so long on crack & dope. I had to have it every morning, I'd wake up to get my shit.

I actually would eat out of garbage cans so I would not have to spend a dollar on food. It kept me going all the time. Now I'm drug free,

saving money,
gaining friends.

Every day, I've been being made into a new man. It's truly rewarding when I wake up and there's food, coffee, cigarettes.

But also good is the fact that no rat walked across my bed.

I've been gone 2 weeks from my hole. But I found out today that they filled in my pimp hole where I lived and played. They filled my hole with concrete.

I don't think I want to go back to that. Because I have a new life, and without my hole I may succeed in my sobriety.

My life has been crazy as hell. I spent 9 1/2 years of my younger years from 18 to 27 sitting within a prison. It was like I was destined to fail from the beginning. I've been failing since I was 15 years old. My earliest offence was taking a cop's gun at the police station, drunk as hell. Lucky I was a juvenile.

For that, I spent time in Elmcrest. I went from alcohol to cocaine in 3 years, just to become a serious felon facing 120 years in prison.

Thank the Lord it only turned into a 10 to 15 year bid.

So sad that my truest love, my mom, died in my arms. God, I miss her loving arms. She gave me everything, and all I gave back was a drug-addicted idiot.

Remember, guys, those of you that still have your mama,

Please try and make her not want to give up on you. She loves you and misses the old you.

If you're not here for family, then no one's left to turn to. Just remember, just because there's a person next to you, it doesn't mean they are your true family.

These groups were made to help me. You are here as my foster family, trying to help you & me with our sobriety.

So as for me, if I was to pack up and leave, I'd be losing the help and love of all this family, and I'm not ready to lose the love of a family that's proud of me.

But again, as far as the hole goes, the destruction of it is good in many ways. This hole will never be the death of me. I'm on a good path to everlasting sobriety.

No one should hold back in a group because your release helps your sobriety.

Don't let it fester inside of you. Breathe in and let it out.

I just need a helping hand to make it through.

It's like I'm stuck in a drug hole, with 60 separate hands reaching down to grab me and pull me out so I can gain my sobriety.

Thank you, everybody, and I am ready for my recovery. Thank you again.

Sometimes you must bite the bullet and take one on the chin, just so you can keep your sobriety.

For instance, arguments over dumb stuff, no matter how big or small. Ask if it's worth losing it all: 1. Sobriety. 2. The love of your family.

I have to fight myself at times because first I want to get even, but then I breathe and give it a second.

Those couple of breaths may just give you a chance at the greatest gifts: your family & your sobriety.

So fellow clean addicts, always remember to breathe before you leave your family with nobody.

