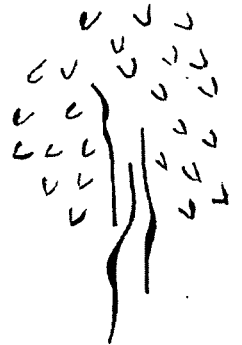


Elm City Echo





Elm City Echo

Where Your Dollar Goes



75% goes directly to the vendors who sell your paper



25% pays for printing costs

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.

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Elm City Echo

Issue 8 • Fall 2014

Mission

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

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Letter from the Editor

Hi New Haven!

Thank you for picking up a copy of the *Elm City Echo*. The *Elm City Echo* is New Haven's only street periodical, meaning homeless individuals produce all of the publication's content and sell its copies in the street.

The *Echo* provides all homeless individuals with the opportunity to become published writers and disseminate their voices in the larger community. Each week, Yale student volunteers visit four of the city's homeless shelters to work one-on-one with homeless writers. Sometimes, volunteers listen to homeless individuals recount stories out loud and help translate the stories onto the page—always aiming to preserve the original voice. Yet often, we encounter individuals who are seasoned writers or poets and we simply work with them to create a polished final product. In our experience as volunteers, the editing process is wonderfully therapeutic. Editors receive the rare chance to hear the raw, personal details of a stranger's story. The writer, meanwhile, is given a forum for expression. In the process, we have both met someone we would likely have not otherwise.

In addition to being a creative outlet, the *Echo* has traditionally been a means of economic opportunity. This year, we have expanded and formalized our vending process. Homeless vendors will sell copies of the *Echo* for \$1 each and will be wearing green *Echo* lanyards to identify as vendors. Vendors will not be allowed to accept donations. However, if you see a vendor, please take the time to stop and ask about the *Echo*, and encourage your friends to do so.

One of our main goals this academic year has been to increase the visibility and readership of the *Echo*. We have partnered with a few local stores to sell the *Echo* at events, like Elm City Market and Edge of the Woods. We have also created a Facebook page

where we will regularly post photographs of our writers along with self-selected quotes from each writer's current work.

As you page through this eighth edition of the *Echo*, you will read stories encompassing three broad themes: life, letters, and love. Each piece is a testament of strength and struggle in the face of adversity, and may leave you swallowing uncomfortable truths about our city. Most importantly, let the stories help you to value the individuals behind these uncomfortable truths. Just by reading, you can play a part in strengthening and connecting our diverse community.

Happy reading,



Cecily McIntyre
Editor-in-Chief



Gina Starfield
Editor-in-Chief

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Life



This is my life

by Kecia

I'm 48. My birthday is July 4, 1966. I'm from Waterbury, CT. I've been in New Haven for nine months.

I had four children, but I lost one in a fire. She was eight. Now I have two girls and a son who are living in the South. They're doing fairly well. I'm trying to be a good mother to my kids, but it's really hard. They want answers, especially my son. My kids are giving me a chance and actually made the initial move to start talking with me.

I got a phone call from my son yesterday, which was surprising. My son is twenty-four and lives in South Carolina, and he is really having a rough time with me. We talked for an hour, and I explained to him how when I was addicted, I wasn't myself and didn't have control. The drugs had so much power over me that I couldn't be responsible for anyone but myself. Whenever I was incarcerated, I would write him, and we would talk through letters, but it wasn't enough for him. He wants to see me, sit down, and really talk to me, but I haven't seen him for twenty years.

He told me how he felt yesterday and was angry that I could let a drug control my life and have my kids taken from me. It turned out to be a good phone call in the end.

I thank God for my family on a daily basis be-

cause they took my kids and raised them. If I didn't have a family, my kids would have been in the government foster system, scattered all around, but they grew up fairly close together in the South. After my daughter died in South Carolina when she was eight, I went down there, and my sister was a great support for me. But even after they buried her, I was getting high and drinking. My son was three, going on four, and I didn't spend time with him like I should have. Now, I'm trying to get my life together so that all my kids will have a place to see me, because I don't want them seeing me living like this. I don't want them to see me sleeping on the streets.

I ran the streets for a lot of years, did drugs for a lot of years. Nothing good came out of it. My addiction was really rough. Shooting heroine, smoking crack, just about everything. Anything that I thought would get me high, I used it. The drugs took priority, and along with drugs comes crime. I've been in and out of jail for twenty plus years. I have a lot of felonies, so it makes it hard for me to get any type of housing, a job, or even volunteer work.

Two years ago, I was clean and had my first apartment. But I was alone, I got bored, and I went back to what I knew. I knew the streets, and I felt comfortable there. I relapsed. I ended up losing my

apartment and everything in it – clothes, papers – due to my addiction.

I've been homeless for about two years now. I've been in rehab programs, in and out of mental health programs. I also have mental health issues. I am bipolar and I have chronic depression, and PTSD as well. I take medication for my mental health issues on a daily basis, which I hate because I'm going to have to be on this medication for the rest of my life to keep me stable. I'm here at Martha's Place, a shelter, trying again to get my life in order. I've been clean from cocaine and heroine for nine months, and that's good. I'm really proud of myself. I live in an area with a lot of drug activity and gangs. But I want everything that I had back, to get my life back on track, to get an apartment, and to get my social security benefits.

The only way I can get it back is to stay clean. I'm determined this time. When I was clean for two and a half years, life was good. I didn't have to worry about watching my back to see whether the cops were chasing me. Today, I don't put myself in those situations. Martha's place has been a great help. I have a counselor. Things seem to be going my way. I have a lot of help, a lot of support. I have AA meetings on a regular basis. They keep me clean. I'm proud of myself because I'm finally getting my life together, and I owe it all to my higher power, who I choose to call God.

A land of inequality

by Arthur

If one was to take a walk around the city of New Haven, it would be difficult not to notice people whose prospects may not be all that bright. Somehow their means of support evaded them and they are becoming more and more dependent on church and charity. Wealth and poverty are closer together in this hardscrabble corner of the city than anywhere else in Connecticut, possibly in all of New England.

How we voice our personal concerns or how we address this serious social shortcoming says a great deal about our values as a society.

How do we inspire the mainstream population to rethink their own ideas about modern day fulfillment, cultural stereotypes—to rethink how to change our lives. I'd like to uplift people's hearts around this holiday season and make them believe what is really worthwhile in life regardless of that higher or lower state.

Part vision for a better future, part eye opener, it's a story of human dignity and a great experience of moving forward. But the growing divide between the rich and the poor is straining communities and leaving them with fewer options to improve chances of success.

Once evicted from their place of residence, the less fortunate ones become trapped in a vicious downward spiral. These struggling individuals are too often reminded of their gross mistakes by being stuck in the same situation for a prolonged period of time. At that point, it's up to that person not to sit idle and wait for the saving grace.

Today's fast moving world is not too forgiving to those who make little serious effort to remain a productive, hard-working citizen.

Here is a land of inequality at its worst statistical yardstick. It's been a known fact that six heirs to Wal-Mart Empire accumulated wealth of almost \$70 billion, which is equivalent to the wealth of the entire 30% bottom of the United States society. The America we have become accustomed to, one of beautiful houses, 2 cars, nice yards still exists, but it's not as prevalent as it was 20 years ago.

But so long as that human sense of caring goes on we should overcome all these negative issues of our time. Life won't be luxurious but it may be doable if people are willing to work hard enough and sacrifice enough to keep the dream of "life is good" alive for many generations to come. The next few generations have a chance to get rid of some of society's afflictions with a true sense of common destiny. But first we must remember what universal human experience we value and act on it with conviction and courage.

From home to less

by Thomas

I was married with a lot of drama but just living a life. But it was falling a part for years and years. My wife used to be in the hospital with liver cancer. She got out in October. We had a son but lost him years ago. He's coming on 14 now. It's hard to deal with that. He was my only son. I was in prison and she was heavy on drugs so he was adopted 6, 7 years ago.

I've been homeless a year. It was because of domestic issues. My first night was inconvenient because, when you live where you live all your life, everything you take for granted can be gone. I got zero from my house when I left. I slept on the ground for 11 days before coming to Columbus House. Grand Avenues was the worst because of the rules and bed bugs.

You think the Green looks nice but there are knife fights and a lot of people fighting. While I was there, there were six people on the Green. I slept under the mayor's window. She couldn't miss me because I was out there on the bench. Some nights were really cold and if you didn't have a blanket you were in bad shape. I don't think anyone deserves to be homeless regardless. Forget shelters. Everyone should have affordable housing.

I got a referral and got on a list and called every day. I waited 92 days to get into Columbus House. Because I have a felony on record, housing may be difficult to get. I have an income because of disabilities. If you get \$400 dollars or less, you get LOS. Because I make more because of my disability I only can stay for 90 days. I don't want to go back to another shelter because I won't be getting anywhere.

I leave here 6:30. I'm gone all day and come back at 4:30. I have two hours for classes and two years of probation. I have a lot of appointments, doctors, classes, and little free time for myself. Twice a week I have classes for domestic issues. The classes make

shit hard because I got to be there. It makes life miserable. I can't put anything together that is positive. I want to start going to the gym but it's hard with so many classes.

Homelessness is the worst possible life. For me, always growing up in a home, to end up like this is very shocking. Your life changes in a minute and you're not prepared for that.

We had issues when we were together for 20 years. We had a lot of trouble because of yelling and screaming, but they were just typical Italian family issues. See, in my case, the man loses the house. You may be able to go back in two years. The systems don't care – classes and courts – I fail and then I go back to jail. Two years to them is short but in two years a lot can happen. I'm not 20 years old. I don't have much time.

Homelessness is the worst possible life. For me, always growing up in a home, to end up like this is very shocking. Your life changes in a minute and you're not prepared for that.

Nothing violent happened. We had our arguments. It was always just arguments. I got five years and two years until I can go into my house because now it is considered burglary. I have classes two times a week for \$140 a month. I'm not blaming anything. I did this to myself – not with evil intentions though.

It was just arguments. I'm sure it even goes on in the judge's house but he doesn't go to jail.

After the first time, it snowballed because I got arrested after probation. We did counseling and all those things, but both of us are strong willed people. Twenty years with cancer and drugs couldn't stop her. I guess I was fighting a losing battle. I went back after my 1st probation because I love her. I don't hold grudges. I can be intimidating I guess. My heart never had evil intentions. I was just angry.

Being instantly forgiving isn't good these days. It hasn't given me any justice at all. The world holds things against you forever. I try and let things go on. I act more out of my heart than my head, which is stupid and gets me in trouble. It's out of my emotions rather than my intelligence. I acted mainly for her and not caring how I felt which is another big mistake. It took a while to realize this. I realized this three or four years later from the first arrest when things got progressively worse for me. I didn't break my feelings for her regardless. I didn't dwell. I just let it go and just continued life even though deep down inside I knew we were heading down a bad road. I took what happened for what it was. I didn't imagine the long-term effects and if I did I still might have done something because of the emotional connection we had. I'm not sure of all of the reasons why everything happened like not wanting to be alone. Why I continued to take abuse I don't know. I didn't think it was selfish if I wanted to keep something right.

When we went to marriage counseling, we were so much alike – they said we didn't know where one left off and the other began. That could be a good thing, maybe, but in this case it wasn't.

My goal is to have a place to live on my own. I want to get to the gym, tan, change, lunch – just stay relaxed and then just watch movies at night. Just be as relaxed as possible. I'm 58 and I'm not going backwards in time. I made a few mistakes and now I'm tortured and destroyed. The case manager working for me is in charge of housing applications but I'm not hopeful. My friends aren't successful either. Belle Vista rejected me because of my record but I'm going to appeal so I'm assuming they can help me as well. Every situation is different – it always looks worse in

writing than in actuality.

Domestic issues are in vogue. Drugs used to be the big things. I understand they can't understand what is a minor and what is a big argument. I'm also trying to see a warden for a pardon. My wife is willing to go to court with me. In the heat of the moment, she can say this and that. They don't care how you feel. Because of stigma, I will always be stigmatized. At times, they knew she probably wanted me back. But they can't determine each person case by case. I'm a living hostage. She could send me to jail.

I'm not going to not care if she is alive or dead. We still want to be together but the courts don't want that because we've been fighting for years. I want to have a happy ending. Because it hasn't all worked out yet, it hasn't ended yet. As long as me and her are still alive we'll still have a connection. I believe anything is possible.



Healing Story

by Roscoe

I was living by myself and I was at home asleep. That night, the police came by to the house, picked me up and arrested me. I felt bad, hurt and I went to jail.

I kept talking to my lawyer—he would come and see me most of the time. I kept asking when would I get out. He was talking to people—the judge and public defendants—working on getting me out of there. That was a lot for me to deal with; it hurt. But as the time wore on, I was getting closer to getting out.

A few months later I was getting set up to get out and I got out. That was the good part. It was beautiful. I was supposed to be in there for five more years but I got out after two. It was the end of a nightmare. I had never been in that long—it wasn't a good feeling.

I got out and I'm looking forward to never going back again. Looking forward to getting my life straightened out on the right path. I'm dealing with programs and staying out of trouble. Now I've been out for a year and some time. Focusing on keeping a clear head. I'm looking forward to doing other things in my life—the right things to do. I used to drink but now I haven't in a while so I'm not trying to go back to it. It's been about a year sober—haven't been drinking anything. I'm finished, it's a wrap, no more. Looking to go forward, stay doing the right things.

Chasing goals

by Gary

I was in Safe Haven today and we got this card from a guy whose giving out information to what's going on. He brought a politician with him who was asking us questions about New Haven.

I was in New York for 6 years and I came back and saw the drug areas and high neighborhoods where I would go to get drugs for my girlfriends and me. I'm proud that they knocked down those buildings where drugs were raging. I'm trying to find out how to move out of affordable housing and prove that things are better. It's better to help people like the homeless via stability, like a light job to pay rent. Welfare isn't fair.

I felt very driven. Yale helped a lot. They got me a tutor, but it was my choice to get out of school because they weren't teaching us anything. The tutor taught me my education and I got a job at an early age

at a Chinese restaurant washing dishes. I worked at the New Haven hospital filing charts, dietetics, bringing food to dialysis patients and patients who slept there. I needed to know how to answer questions because of dietary restrictions. I moved out and lived with my grandmother and my divorced mother. I felt bad about the divorce because the situation was bad.

I realized I needed to keep going but got in a drug habit again, which was my downfall. Then I had jobs and squandered all the money. I had plenty of girlfriends. I went to New York, went to jail once, and got myself together since New York.

Since I've been back in Connecticut, I don't want to squander my life away with drugs and girlfriends. I want some money to get an apartment, a wife who loves me, who won't get divorced, who really maintains a relationship and goes to church.

A brighter future

by Gretlynn

“You’re not human anymore, you’re just your drugs.”

I started drinking at 13, and then started smoking pot in my teens. After that, I married and started sniffing cocaine, then free-basing, then smoking crack. Before the age of 28, I married and divorced twice. Drugs took over my life, and now I have to take it back.

I was born in Hartford, and lived in the projects for a long time. My first husband was a drug dealer, and we were both pretty far in but, when my first daughter was born, I stopped for a while. Throughout my life, until now, I’ve lived in and out of rehab, trying to get clean. But it’s like the drug is talking to you, calling you back. I’m scared of the things that I did while I was high, while I was drunk, I’ve been so out of control for most of my life and now I’m finally taking it back.

Drugs took over my life, and now I have to take it back... I’m 56 years old, and it’s time to start finding myself and a way out of my past towards a brighter future.

My daughters don’t talk to me anymore. One of them is 21 teaching in China; the other lives nearby, has a daughter, and is in the air force. I moved back up here from Florida in order to spend time with her, but I don’t see either of my daughters very often. They don’t talk to me very much because they have trust issues from their childhood when I was still on drugs.

I’ll have been clean four years in February. My best experience with rehab was at the Stonington Institute in Connecticut, where I checked myself in for detox. It’s been a long process of getting clean, and I am still going to AA and counseling meetings for my problems. I need to take care of myself, and put God, recovery, and my own needs first. I still have drug dreams but don’t let myself wallow in it. I don’t feel safe living here, but I’m working on getting a job; hopefully I’ll work at Cracker Barrel tomorrow.

I need to stay away from people and not get involved in relationships. I’m 56 years old, and it’s time to start finding myself and a way out of my past towards a brighter future.

Life

by Joseph

Out on York Street, panhandling.
As the sun goes down, around 5 o’clock,
The crowd becomes slim
And then it’s only you
As the night falls.
It’s only you on this journey, hoping to find home.



Survivor

by Sarah

When I was 20 years old, I was working fulltime as a manager at CVS and I was going to school at night. And one day, I was bringing in the groceries to my house, and three men marched me into my house, and for several hours I was stabbed and beaten and raped. They left my front door open, and me naked to die. I drove myself to the hospital and got cleaned up but I was too ashamed to say anything. They were surprised I made it. About four months later, I realized I was pregnant. I was really thin back then, so I didn't really notice, or maybe was trying not to. I ended up having a son. I gave birth to him 50 minutes before I turned 21. At the time, I realized that the only thing I could do was give him life, so I decided to have an open adoption, and interviewed 12 sets of parents and found a set of parents for him. I've been in his life ever since. He will be 12 on January 2nd, and I'll be 33 January 3rd.

I was adopted and I knew nothing of my parents except they were 17, so it was important to me that my son knew who I was, and in spite of how he came about. I still love him the same as if he didn't come that way. I didn't even get help for it until last January, so if anything good comes out of it, maybe someone else who went through it won't be alone, because women get raped all the time, but it's very rare that they end up pregnant. So maybe if they're in the same situation, instead of thinking about abortion, maybe thinking about actually having the child and giving him life, because it's not his fault. It didn't even occur to me until I got there, but I still think it's a woman's choice to have an abortion, but there's always a family out there looking for a child that can't have one. I actually gave my son to a family that couldn't have children,

so it made me feel better. I was giving a gift to a family that couldn't have something.

My son actually taught me that something beautiful can come out of something horrific, so now when I go through things, I try to find the silver lining – I'm actually legally blind, but I'm glad that I still have some of my eyesight. Because of that, I'm grateful that I still have a little vision. I've been through a hell of a lot. I always try to look at the blessing in disguise. Sometimes it's just very hidden. That one experience gave me the drive to just survive anything. I wouldn't be the person I am now if I hadn't gone through all the things I went through. So I'm tough to break. Being honest about things like that helps other people who don't want to talk about it. Once you realize that you survived it, and you don't give the power to the people that did it to you, you feel a lot better.

Burning room

by Kecia

What happened was, my grandmother called my mother and said that she wanted the grandkids for the day. My mother said, "I can only send you Kecia because Jackie has a doctor's appointment." So when I was getting ready to leave, my little sister was crying, huffing and puffing, because she was very upset that she didn't get to go. My uncle came over and brought his son, Robert Jr. We called him Little Rob. My little sister got mad at me, and went and tore my room up in a temper tantrum. In the meantime, my mother, my uncle, a few cousins, and a few friends were in the living room socializing and lost track of my sister Jackie.

My amazing son

by Kristin

Them two was in my room, lighting matches and throwing the matches under a radiator, and finally a match must have got caught on some wood or something, because one side of my room was on fire, just blazing. My little sister and my little cousin told me that they were trying to inhale the smoke and blow it out the window. Anything could have happened, the radiator could have blown up, and it would have been major problems. The people in the living room smelled the smoke and came running down the hallway, and my sister and cousin ran out the door. All the people went in my room and saw the fire going. They called the fire department and the firemen broke through the walls because they thought fire would be in the walls, but just one side of the wall got burned.

After everything was done, the fire department left, they finally found my little cousin and my sister, crying and hysterical, in a little fort in the woods. “We didn’t mean to do it,” they said, and I asked, “Why was you in my room lighting fires? Do you hate me that bad?” After they found them, they questioned them and asked, “Why did they do it?” My sister got a real beating for the first time in her life, so did my little cousin. They had to put plywood over the burned spot, because it was wintertime. They got beaten, they got punished, and I had to come back home from my grandmothers and cried hysterically because everything in my room smelled like smoke. Me being 13 years old, I was able to chalk that one up for the team. I wanted to kill my little sister, but I knew she was jealous because she couldn’t go. I couldn’t sleep in the room for a week, because of the smell. And now my sister has to be with me at all times, I was like the protector of the family after that happened. So, that’s how the story goes.

This is a story I made up about my son, Christopher, when he was very small. I wrote it down and used to read it to him:

I dreamt that one night, a blue light shined through my son’s window and enveloped him. His eyes began to glow for a few minutes and then the light was gone. I woke up to my son, standing next to my bed, with those glowing blue eyes. The glowing went away quickly so I figured that I must still have been dreaming. The next morning, while Christopher—my son—was eating his breakfast, there was a knock at the door. Without even looking, my son told me that my neighbor was at the door, wanting to borrow some coffee. I chalked it up to coincidence, but it seemed strange. Over the next several days, my son exhibited some strange symptoms. He seemed to know things before they happened and behaved unusually well. One morning, I woke up to find him staring at our cat in the eyes. He then told me exactly what the cat wanted to say. Several days later, as we went to get the car to drive to my mother’s house, my son told me we shouldn’t drive the car because we were going to get a flat tire. I shook it off and told him we would be fine. But lo and behold, halfway to my mother’s house, we got a flat tire. I looked at him and asked him how he could know that. He looked at me and his eyes glowed for a second. “I don’t know Mom, I just did,” he said.

Over the next few months these episodes continued. One night, the blue light returned while my son was at the window, and the glowing light enveloped him again and then disappeared. After that night, there were no more episodes of him predicting the future. He lost his superpowers, but I was happy to have my normal son back.

My son always loved that story. He liked the idea of having superpowers.

Rome with no spaghetti

by Sam

In New York, I was living with my parents in a skyscraper and I met a girl called Gail. I was twenty-four, twenty-five, then.

You know how when you meet someone you always want to hang out at her place? Well, my father had to be transferred to Rome to work with Ghana's embassy. He knew I'd found a girl and I didn't want to come, so he played a trick on me and called me to the house: "I have something very important to tell you –good news!"

When I came to the house I couldn't go anywhere, and the following day we were in Rome. I was with my mom, my dad, and my brothers and sisters. We got there in the morning because we were traveling all night. We had to sleep all day in Rome. We stayed in an English-speaking hotel in Rome. They had a park close by, just like Central Park. It was called Villa Ada, where all the Italians hung out. My brother and I hung out there with the Italians. We played soccer with them; we were the only blacks in the park. The Italians were crazy about us. I grew up playing soccer. I was a goalie.

Then I met a guy called Allen –Italian, but he spoke English...so it was a beautiful thing. I rode with him on his motorcycle. We stayed in the Hotel Panama for eight months until my father got a Villa, Villa Elizabetha. We had a house now, but when we got there, there was no heat because Italian buildings are concrete, so when it got cold, it got cold. Close to there we found a park called Villa Palladini. There, we met new friends. We met this guy called "Felix" and he had a girlfriend called "Claudia," they pronounced it "Cloud-ia." Alexandro, Felix's friend, played guitar and one day he was having a birthday party and I didn't have anything to give him. I knew an Iranian friend, Abbas, who lived in Rome and was a physics teacher. I told him that I didn't have anything to give my friend. He gave me a nice pearl necklace because he told me that in Iran pearls were common things. He was able to give it to me free and said "go, give it to him." And I gave it to Alexandro. I made his day that day.

In Rome they have a lot of wine, so I was into wine. But not big time. We ate all the time in the house, so I still ate rice. I'm not a spaghetti man. Even here I don't eat spaghetti. But who knows, maybe if I find an Italian wife I'll have to eat what she cooks!

TGIF

a story from an anonymous writer

One morning, I sat down for breakfast at Dunkin Donuts. Two construction workers at the table next to me were talking. They were making fun of a fellow employee, some guy who needed instructions to do everything. According to them, he couldn't do anything on his own—he always needed explanations for using the equipment, for finding things, for driving to places. He couldn't even boil water on his own.

The construction workers started snickering.

"I saw his shoes the other day. They say 'TGIF' on them. You know what that stands for?"

"What? Thank god it's Friday?"

"Nah, man. Toes go in first!"

My surgery

by Maria

My life has always been busy and full of moments of independence, life, love, and hope.

As far back as I can remember, I could pick up 50 pounds on each hand and was an exercise maniac. I walked and danced like anyone else.

Everything I used to do then and what I do today is now completely different.

Back in the 2nd and 3rd week of January 2014, I came to the Hospital of Yale New Haven, unable to move either leg, and with a severe pain in my right one. They did all kinds of tests without any results. All the doctors could say was that they could find no reason for my constant pain. I requested a Neurosurgery consultation, and they ran several tests on me and eventually told me that I had Meningioma Tumor of the left side of my brain, and that I had already had it for several years. It was beginning to affect the right side of my body. I was told that I needed a lot of surgery. They set me up for surgery on January 29, 2014. It took 14 hours. The doctor was able to take almost the whole mass out, leaving only a small piece that, if removed, would make me an invalid. The doctor told me that the whole mass was benign. I also had my left eye come out with a bad infection.

When I recovered I found out that I had a family. I had a 27-year-old daughter and a 75-year-old mom who I had completely forgotten. The tumor had already affected my thinking power. I did feel very excited to know that I had a family though.

Five days later I was taken to the Arden House in Hamden, Connecticut where I stayed for seven months. I had to learn to speak and walk up and down the stairs, and go through a lot of other therapy. It went on forever. But, I thank them for all their help. I also thank God for giving me my life back.

Life

by Maria

Life is beautiful

Life is interesting

Life is fascinating

Life is everlasting

Our lives began when we were conceived in our mothers' womb.

We were nourished and raised with the values and expectations of our life.

Life is like a flower that blooms in the spring time.

Let's give life a reason to move into the future.

Let's live life to its fullest.

Always remember to live your life to the fullest, because you can be here in a second and gone the next.

Life is precious, hang on and live it always to its fullest.

Love,
Maria



Letters

Dear friend,

I found proof of a sane and intelligent life, which I discovered in the last place I thought I would, a prison classroom. I got to hang out with and learn from two very intelligent and beautiful women for about six months. The timing was perfect. For the first time in the last 26 years, I really started to be able to learn when I was with them; like I said, it was perfect! They changed my life forever. I couldn't even begin to express my appreciation and gratitude towards everything they have done for me; they bent over backwards to get all they thought I would need to succeed with my education. Just because it took me 26 years doesn't mean it will take you that long. It could be tomorrow for you. Never turn down an opportunity to learn. One day something in your mind will just click and you'll start to get it. I guess I can say it was my destiny to meet those wonderful ladies. My God always has me meet those I need to glorify Him. Even if I feel I was wrongfully put in prison, I don't care anymore because now I've seen why my God put me there, to meet them and start to learn again. My mind has turned into a sponge! Since school, all I've been doing is learning.

Sincerely,

James

Dear friend,

My name is James. I want to help you overcome your brain injury. I'm able to help you not by having a PhD or other degree; actually, I have a degree, from the School of Hard Knocks. I've sat where you sit right now. TBI came to me on February 16, 1985 on Clapboard Ridge Road in Danbury, Connecticut. At least that's what it says on the ticket I got from the police. And a Mr. Bill McLaughlin's wife saved my life; she's a nurse that lived across the street from the crash.

I'm going to tell you and try to give you a mental picture of what you can, should, and in some instances must do in order to not just survive, but excel from where you are now.

OK, let's start this journey. Don't expect to go fast because you're in for a long, bumpy, crazy, and at times, very dangerous, I repeat dangerous, road you must travel.

So here we go! Wait a minute, I forgot to tell you I used to not be able to walk, talk, or think. Now that you know where I'm coming from, we can go... Stop! I'm also an addict. See, after 26 years, I still forget things. It's not going to be easy. I hope you're ready; we can finally get on our way.

Sincerely,

James

P.S. I will write again soon.

Dear friend,

Of all the things I will tell you in these letters, no matter what you think what you're doing looks like, it's not as bad as you think it looks. Remember you've got brain damage, so what you think doesn't really matter, does it? Just do it to the best of your ability at all times. Let's get back to the stuff on the table; practice that for about a week, then work it into your daily life. Whenever you go anywhere or do anything, work what you have learned into everything you do. That goes for everything else I tell you about, also. This is not something that you do for an hour a day and then stop. This is a never-ending process! Move it or lose it, it's that simple. Even if what you're doing isn't perfect or it doesn't look or feel right, at least you're doing it. Now you can try new ways of doing it. After a while you'll get it and if you don't, just keep trying. Every time you do physical stuff or try to fix the way you're doing something, you're learning to use your brain again! And that's a good thing.

There are going to be periods when you make tremendous progress and times when you will make none. The latter is going to mess with your mind twice as bad as any frustration you might have already been going through. There will be plenty of ups and downs. That's where spirituality can save you from depression, drinking, and drugging. Here's another thing: be very careful not to get involved with anti-depressants. **DON'T TAKE ANYTHING THAT ALTERS YOUR MIND.** Seek your God or higher power. Keep your mind as clear as possible.

Sincerely,

James

Dear friend,

I would like to start at the time before I woke up from a coma (11 days). My parents told me that the doctors said that, "if" I ever woke up, I'd be a vegetable. That's funny; I don't look like a cucumber. Sometimes I feel like one, though.

Although this might be considered a veiled sermon in some ways, it is not a religious invocation. I believe in Jesus Christ as "my" savior and I credit him for "my" healing. The purpose of these letters is to help anyone I can with the knowledge I've gotten, and I've gotten a lot from many, many different people, and I'm thankful to all of them.

Let's take a look at the "Serenity Prayer" and analyze it.

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change (Be at peace. You can't change the fact you have a "brain injury"), the courage to change the things I can (You will need extreme courage to overcome and change your mind and body), and the wisdom to know the difference (That's where you're asking your God for discernment. Again, the only way you'll really know if you can change something is by trying).

The prayer makes (helps) for a hearty repossession of your mind, emotions, and body.

I don't want to dwell on past incidents any longer than necessary to explain or illustrate what has happened since my accident. I only want to focus on the results, which were given to me through the power of my God. So far, I've been through a little over 26 years of almost uninterrupted self-therapy. Well, like I said in my Preface, it's a long road to travel and it's not going to be easy but it definitely can be done. The very day you stop trying, that's the end of your recovery.

I know my recovery will never end until I die. That should be your goal, too!

Sincerely,

James

Love



I am love

by Keith

Whatever you dreamed that love could be
Girl, you have found it here within me

I have all the answers you want to know
I am love and I'm to show

That I'm the only man you will ever need
Because I hold the title and the deed

Now tell me how many other guys have you given a
chance
And I can see they didn't know the meaning of
romance

And if they did you would be with them
And your love light wouldn't look so dim

You see I'm the one that would appreciate you in-
nermost feelings
I stand here with open arms waiting and willing

I can see you are looking for a sign from up above
Well look no further because I am here, because I
am love .

A woman's work

by Kevin

You were taken from my side.
In the beginning of time.
Molded and fashioned by a god
Who thought it would be wise;
To give me a mate with beauty and strength...
These things that I say are not a myth.

You're a blessing, a surprise,
Pleasing to another man's eye.
You're a gift and a treasure,
Your graces cannot be measured.

You listen and hear,
The sigh of a man that draws so near.
You carry, then give birth, to this human race
You have so much worth.
More than silver, more than gold, more than dia-
monds,
Let it be told.

My needs you've met; my desires filled,
My problems are solved now we can heal.
I stand by your side, just let me guide,
God gave us a promised land, it's on the other side.

Problem solver

by Keith

This morning I woke up with so many problems on my mind
And the answers to these problems I searched and could not find

So I fell down on my knees
And started asking God please

Just to help me through this day
In his own special way

To help lift these burdens that are weighing me down
Because only within him could all my answers be found

I started telling God about all the things I've done wrong
And as I spoke to him I started to feel strong
A feeling came over me

And something touched my heart
God was blessing me and giving my life a brand new start

At this moment I felt very weak
And tears started running down my cheek

And after I said amen
I knew just then

I didn't have any more problems
Because God had already solved them

At the window's edge

by Kevin

Standing at the window's edge
Thinking of this trouble ahead.
Decisions that will be made
Hurt and pain cannot be avoided today,
Let's open the window just a crack.
Is there a breeze? Or are there flies and gnats?
Is there a chance we can close this window back
What if it slams and the glass just shatters, cutting
Our wrist and neck?
Is it really that bad to face this relationship we made?
Why can't we call it quits?...shake hands, start over as
Friends.
What's wrong with honesty and honor? Sincerity holds
So much power.
Forgiveness followed by a hug, let's edify one another in
The mist of this emotional shower.
Baby we're standing at the window's edge
No one wants to jump let's support each other instead.
Friends then it shall be...stepping away from the Window's edge.



Chemical of youth

by Thomas

I want to explain how, through a chemical, I was able to open up this dormant physical experience.

When I was younger I was into Martial Arts, any form of fighting – I was always fighting with someone for a sport or just for fun. So, I did that for 30 years. It was my total interest. I put a lot into that. So, as I got older life didn't take me where I was going to take it. You know, I'm getting dormant and fat.

Then, this amazing thing happened. This chemical. When I smoke or ingest this chemical, I feel like I'm 19-20-years-old again, and I just start going around, and it's like 5:30 in the morning. It's crazy. So, when I ingest this chemical and I walk to this lot on the corner and I start shadow boxing, but even better than I was 19 or 20. I think I may just be tripping but it happened again. I threw the best punch of my life. It was perfect and powerful.

Steroids can enhance body weight mass but this chemical opens up a part of my brain. I want to get into that 90% of the brain that we don't use. I didn't believe that it was real, but then I tried the same thing and it happened again – it's like a switch. It's so perfect. This is the real thing.

It was like a flow, like an energy that took over. It reminds of that episode of Family Guy where they were smoking weed and thinking it was great but then they got onstage it was awful. So, I get where the doubt comes from but it was real. It was perfect.

Once you try to make something different you lose it. I haven't done this since I was 18. I'm doing it better and correctly now with the chemical. I can't wait to see your faces when you see this thing. I'm telling you it was the best punch in the world.

When I get this video, as proof that it's really real. I know that's what will make it big, if I get a video of it. All these things I tried to do when I was younger are now all there. It was all the chemical. You might call it the chemical of youth.

I never had that when I was learning, but I got what I was looking for 30 years later through this chemical. The chemical of youth. I could make \$100,000. So, I sell this product and all of a sudden all these people are going to be doing all these crazy athletic stunts. I'll keep it real. I'll let people know it's because of the drug.

If the chemical could get me out of here. Hey, I'm okay with doing anything I can possibly do to get me out of here.

Now, at this point we need proof. And if it isn't, then at least we got a good story. But, I know it is. Once may have fooled me, but not twice.

If you think deep inside, you can bring forth a change.

Red Hots

a story from an anonymous writer

One day, I was babysitting my granddaughter Jenny, who was six years old at the time. We were sitting together watching TV, and I was eating some candy, those spicy ones called Red Hots.

She was intently watching me eat the candy. Finally, I asked her if she wanted some. "Jenny, they're hot. Are you sure?"

"Yes," she insisted. I dropped some into her palm and turned back to the TV.

About five minutes later, I glanced over at her. I was surprised to see that she hadn't touched a single one of the candies. Instead, she was cupping the candies in her hand and hunching over them.

"Jenny? You okay? What are you doing?"

"Grandma," she said solemnly, "I'm waiting for them to cool down."

International Sam in England

by Sam

As a young kid, I went from Accra, Ghana to stay with someone I didn't know in Edmonton, England. My brother and I were crying. My uncle had a job there and my dad wanted us to live there. We went to live with someone called Mrs. Marshall. We got used to the English lifestyle, and we went to children's parties. I remember one party where we had to sit in a circle and the girls had to call numbers and then when you called their number they had to come out and kiss you. So I asked what Susan's number was. Susan was my first girlfriend in England. We had a class teacher called Miss Peaches. A guy called Terry and I hugged our schoolteacher while she was teaching. Susan made an announcement in the classroom that I was her first boyfriend. I didn't know what shyness was then, so that was a beautiful thing for her to say.

When I went I wasn't very good at English and we had to do spelling in school. What a beautiful lifestyle. The only place I'd like to be a kid in this life would be in England. Living in England with an English family was the most beautiful thing we had. My uncle had found Mrs. Marshall and her daughter for us to go and live with.

One thing tortured me: the day my brother and I were leaving she brought us to the train station and I had to go back to Paris to see my father. One night in Paris, I had a dream that I was in England with my English friends. I woke up and I wasn't in England and I had tears in my eyes. Years later, I promised myself that if I left Africa and came somewhere else, I was not going to leave there again. That tortured me as a kid. That's why I'm still in America; I don't miss Africa.

I'm not dangerous

by Rhea

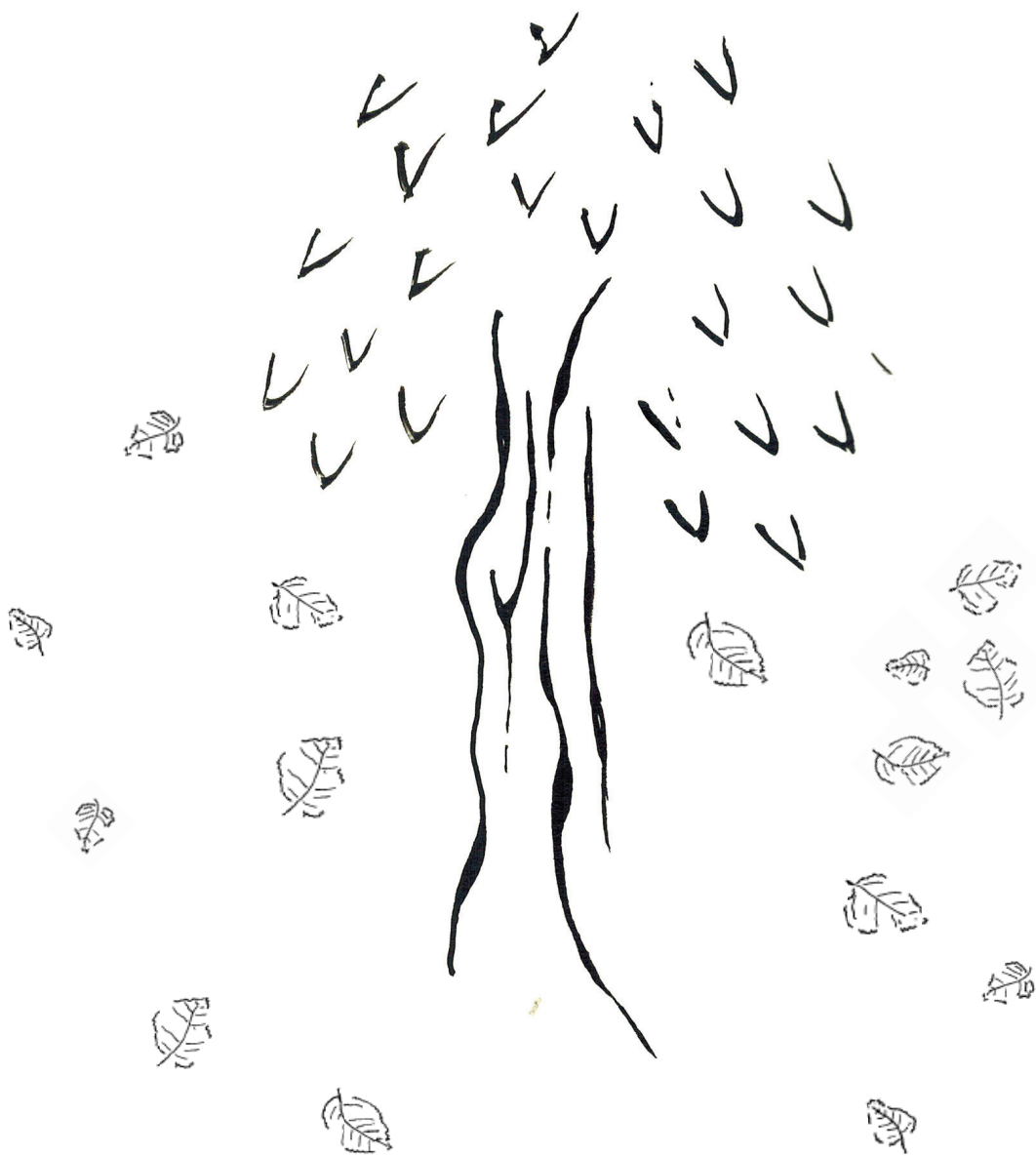
No one ever knows what I'm going through. When men say, how are you, I just say o.k. But I'm NOT. you don't want to go into what's going on but you are so beautiful when you smile sunshine, glow. Handsome "E" scorpio like me, homeless vet, have we met. Walking around town, I'm around people watching, laughing at the sound. Buses running uptown all around we can't be found. Getting lost in your eyes what a surprise in and out of stores like a master in disguise. here comes the night time to catch flight, back to the Columbus house haven't seen a mouse, can't wait to get my own house, laying in bed rest your head, I got pillows for your head. So I'll say good night sleep tight, GOD bless to all, I'll be alright.

I'm collectable

The life of a child

by Joseph

Each day I pick and choose your favorite colors, painting you a picture. So if the screen door slams behind me, it's only because I'm racing to see you.



Thanks for reading!
Contact elmcityecho@gmail.com with any questions

