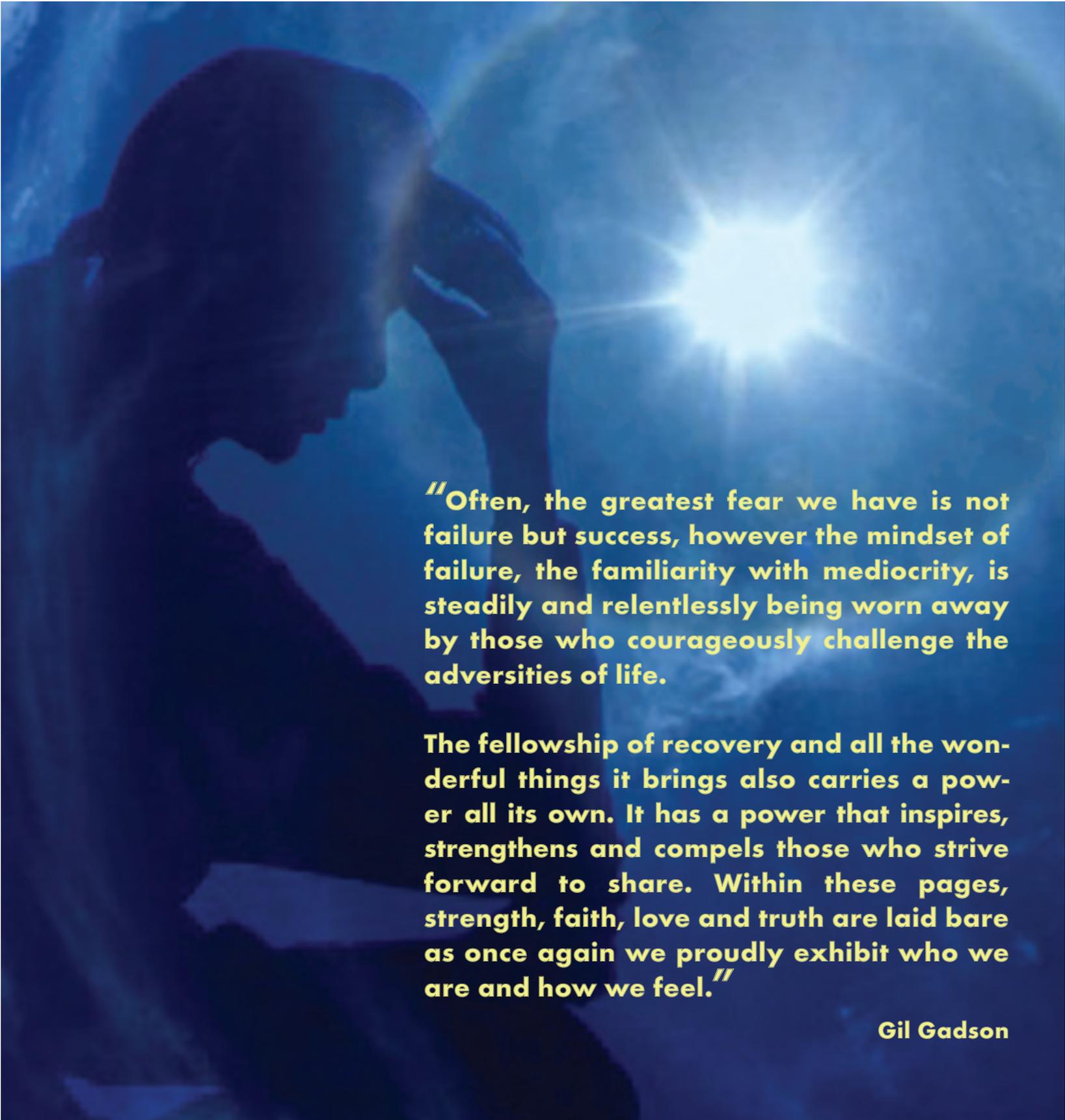


Expressions *in* Recovery

A digest for people in recovery describing their current state of mind, progress, and future outlook



"Often, the greatest fear we have is not failure but success, however the mindset of failure, the familiarity with mediocrity, is steadily and relentlessly being worn away by those who courageously challenge the adversities of life.

The fellowship of recovery and all the wonderful things it brings also carries a power all its own. It has a power that inspires, strengthens and compels those who strive forward to share. Within these pages, strength, faith, love and truth are laid bare as once again we proudly exhibit who we are and how we feel."

Gil Gadson



Our Mission

OUR MISSION IS TO PROMOTE HOPE, FAITH AND A BELIEF THAT TOGETHER IN THIS JOURNEY OF HEALING AND GROWTH, OF RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE ANYTHING WE STRIVE TO ACHIEVE IS POSSIBLE.

TO FACILITATE THIS MISSION, THIS NEWSLETTER —YOUR NEWSLETTER WAS CREATED. THIS FORUM WAS CREATED BY AND FOR THOSE IN RECOVERY TO GIVE A VOICE TO OUR CONCERNS, HOPES AND TALENTS.

Rules for Submission

ART, POETRY, PROSE, TRUE OR FICTIONAL STORIES ARE WELCOME. THE PURPOSE OF THIS NEWSLETTER IS TO PROVIDE HOPE, FAITH AND INFORMATION. IN KEEPING WITH THE SPIRIT OF THIS ENDEAVOR ALL CONTRIBUTIONS MUST BE FREE FROM PROFANITY AND VULGARITY.

Department Descriptions

Here and Now

BRIEF STATEMENTS OR PARAGRAPHS FROM PEOPLE IN RECOVERY DESCRIBING THEIR CURRENT STATE OF MIND, PROGRESS, AND FUTURE OUTLOOK.

Feature Stories

ACTUAL LIFE EXPERIENCES INCLUDING INDIVIDUAL RECOVERY STRUGGLES AND TRIUMPHS.

Expressions in recovery Poetry, prose, art etc.....

Last Word (in closing)

INSPIRATIONAL SUMMARY BY THE EDITOR OR GUEST CONTRIBUTORS.



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From the Editor

***Welcome back!** Many people were touched and inspired by our premiere issue. I do not have the words to adequately thank everyone who contributed and those who wish to contribute to future issues.*

No value can be placed on the gift of sharing. When we share our tribulations as well as our triumphs, we share the relief that hope and faith brings. This relief comes from realizing that our adversities are shared and we are not alone.

I've talked to so many, people and for most of them, their recovery began when someone simply cared and listened. Through this we can create life-long and life-changing fellowships that prove to be invaluable. We find examples to follow and emulate, and in doing so, become equipped to help others on this road of recovery. To awaken each day knowing that you have helped someone and have the opportunity to do it again enriches our lives and fuels our dreams.

It is my heartfelt wish that this publication fosters an atmosphere of hope, faith, strength and an open door for those who wish to enter.

Let's continue on this path of discovery and recovery as we read and see ourselves on the pages of "Expressions in Recovery"

Gil Gadson.

Here and Now

Short reflections



The simplicity of understanding the simple things in life-meaning the truthful. The discovery of self and God plays a major part in my recovery. Today, I feel transformed, reborn and brand new.

Leroy Smith

When I first came into a program, I felt as if I didn't need it. In spite of everything, I learned a lot and grew. I learned that everyone's an individual.

We all may have had disagreements, but through those disagreements I learned so much more. Through this process being the oldest in my group, I thought I knew more than others in my community. But, it was the younger members who taught me to be more humble and open to new ideas.

This led me to become more in touch with myself and the world around me. I gained more information than I ever dreamed. Through a support group, my family and a loving significant other, I am so grateful and happier than I've been in my whole life.

Rene Tindal

I woke up this morning, prayed and thanked God for another day. I thought about how great recovery feels and

is for me. I have a job, I love, I got my license back and I'm helping others every day.

Ronald Wilcox.

Today, I am feeling connected with my recovery and much more attached to the rooms and people of recovery. I say today because the people that helped and showed me a new way in recovery stressed that I stay inside this very day that's been given, and if necessary—this very moment!

I feel a sense of freedom, not only from the incarceration of my mind but from a stronger bondage than that—the disease of addiction. Today, I will make it my goal to obtain more tools to enable myself in staying clean and placing more balance in my life of recovery.

Kenneth Harris

Spirituality within recovery is a never - ending journey. It involves saying yes to all we are and all we hope to be. So many times we search for meaning and value, and yet it exists in the magic of the moment. The center of our heart is where we find light, life, peace and overall fulfillment. It is the gateway to a more controlled existence.

Fred Lynch

Featured Stories

Still Blessed

Hello, my name is Sylvester Jackson, and I'd like to tell you a bit about myself and my recovery. I've been clean for 23 years.

In 1986, after being clean and sober for nine months I was diagnosed as someone with major depression and put on medication which I still take today. I must say that my process has been a long and challenging one. I am also a recovering alcoholic, I am H.I.V. positive. I have Hepatitis C. I have hypertension, and sleep apnea. I am bi-polar, manic-depressive with a schizo-effective disorder.

It hasn't been easy. Some days are worse than others. Through the grace of a power greater than myself, I'm blessed and I'm still here. There were bad days when I felt like I wanted to give up. I remember many days when I did not want to wake up and face another day with the depression, mood swings, paranoia, racing thoughts, anxiety and panic attacks. I was incoherent, disoriented, hopeless and frustrated. There were suicidal and homicidal thoughts and despair.

The physical illnesses left me feeling extremely tired, fatigued and barely making it because of the physical pain, agony stress and confusion. I would lose weight, gain weight, eat too little, and eat too much. My nights were sleepless nights — tossing and turning. I was in and out of the hospital for medical and psychiatric reasons.

The feelings of hopelessness and not wanting to live but too afraid to die plagued me. I longed for some emotional stability that I thought impossible. I had crying spells and feared I would totally lose my mind. I took many pills every single day. I had two nervous breakdowns.

And now there is today. Today, I've reached a point of emotional stability, acceptance and hope. There is joy and gratitude. It definitely hasn't been peaches and cream, but my struggle has been worth it because I truly have a recovery story as well as a testimony. Faith, courage, willingness, hope and gratitude have come out of this. To say it has been miraculous is an understatement.

God works in mysterious ways. I got a new lease on life. He renewed my mind with insurmountable strength to carry on and sustain me through it all. I'm moving on to deeper depths and higher heights one day at a time through this spiritual journey of recovery. The sky's the limit. I'm in my fourth training class. I've taken Recovery Foundations Training, WRAP, Storytelling Class and WRAP Facilitators Training Class. I have extensive experience in the mental health field and human resources.

Who would have ever thought that this wretched soul, this old drunk and dope fiend would be able to make a difference in the lives of others. I am now able to offer hope, faith and gratitude, and ultimately freedom. But for the grace of God things can happen beyond your wildest dreams and imagination. My life is fulfilled today and I am truly blessed.

Them is we—or Landing in the Cuckoos Nest

Recovery for me is all about peers. It's about people with holes in their boats who somehow manage to stay afloat,

and it's about what you can learn about yourself, and about everything you can share together as "them" becomes "we".

When I picked social work as my profession, I spent some time, as all social work students do, thinking about all the ways a person could use a social work degree —private practice, school social worker, hospital discharge planner, etc.

When I stopped to consider being a social worker in a psych ward, I felt ashamed of myself. I was ashamed because I was afraid to work in that setting, afraid of the patients I would be responsible for and afraid of myself really. I thought I couldn't hack it. All I could envision was the movie "One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest"!

I told myself that I didn't have to be willing to work in all the places that social workers can work in order to be a good social worker. Some others would be better suited for psychiatric social work than me. They would take jobs in the psych wards. I ended up doing mental health administration.

Ten years later when I put my daughter in a psych ward after multiple suicide attempts, I still didn't feel much better about working in a psych ward. I was less afraid of "them"

I even sort of enjoyed visiting my daughter and watching one of the patients shoot at imaginary ghosts.

By then I had over a decade of administrative work under my belt. I was safely ensconced in an office far from the world of hallucinations, catatonic stares and wild raging. I also by that time, had a diagnosis of depression that was being managed quite well with Prozac. When my daughter was released after five days, she went back to her life and I continued on with mine.

Flash forward another 10 years and I'm sitting in a WRAP class learning how to manage a depression that is affecting every area of my life. I'm sitting there and I'm trying to figure out how this WRAP thing actually works for depressed people.

As I listen to the explanation, I get stuck on two things: First, for me, at least, low self esteem, feeling unworthy, is a fundamental part of my depression, so while I am writing this plan I seriously doubt that I will ever show it to the people who need to be a part of it. Because, I just don't feel worthy of their help, not to mention the overwhelming fear that they might say no.

The other thing I am battling with in my head is how to go to the hospital? Seriously, when you live alone and you find yourself deeper in the pit than you've ever been and you don't know how much further down you can fall. At what point do you make "THE CALL". Sure, you call 911, but what do you say?

I've never been in a psych hospital. I need a serious dose of reality here. What is it like when it's time to go and what do you say? In my WRAP group, I found people kind enough and brave enough to share how they were and what they did when they were on the brink. Sorry to say, the mental health professional facilitating the WRAP group didn't have anything helpful on the subject.

Only three months later, I'm sitting at breakfast my first morning in the psych ward, not as a staff person, but as a

**"At what point do you make" THE CALL".
Sure, you call 911, but what do you say?"**

patient. One by one I'm checking out the others. Them!

There's the really hyper, loud guy, the frail 80-year-old who screams: NO! no! no! when anyone tries to get close to her, the teenage boy playing keep away with his one-on-one staff, the chatty chick that seems to know everything. She was like a female version of Cliff Clavin, the mailman on "CHEERS", and the x-ray technician tells us the government is putting GPS units in our food.

All of them different, but we were all in this place together. Mostly everyone seemed sad, silent, introspective and wondering what is next. I could definitely relate!

I was there a week and it surprised me how quickly everyone became a part of a family and had a story. The longer I was there the more "them" turned into "us" and I saw how alike we were, despite our different labels and different arrays of meds. I really bonded with a few of the women there. I was surprised how much I cared about them all.

And I wasn't afraid of any of them. I wasn't afraid of me anymore. In fact, it seemed like maybe we helped each other a little. Feeling like I helped my peers a little made me feel more worthy. I also felt worthy, when my peers wanted to help me.

My discharge date came as quickly as the change in me—as soon as the meds kicked in. I think of the hospital now as a place to wait for your delusions to leave and your meds to arrive. I asked my hospital shrink if they had groups for us to go to after discharge. We helped each other get to the point of discharge. Why couldn't we continue to help each other recover on the outside?

The doctor told me a story about if you have a boat with a hole in it, do you need someone else with a boat that has a hole or do you need someone whom has a boat with no holes at all. Well, it was my first time in a psych ward. What did I know? So I bought his logic and didn't bother to share my contact information with anyone before I left.

I met with a social worker on my last day. We talked about how I needed to build my social supports. I asked her why she didn't recommend the nearby consumer center. She told me I was too high functioning to go there. She couldn't think of any other place where I might fit in. So I left the hospital after a week with new meds but none of my holes were mended.

I had no better supports than when I went in. No outpatient program, no case manager. The one thing I knew for sure was that I really missed the people in the psych ward. My regular psychiatrist kept on managing the side effects of the meds for \$30 every two weeks, but my boat still had a hole that meds couldn't fix.

After a while, I went to the consumer center anyway. So what if I was higher functioning? Maybe these folks knew better than me how to deal with holes in boats. I met several amazing people, including Sam who has had a hole in his boat for 20 years. He shed many tears inside psych wards. He's managing five different medications at once and he can still talk and walk without falling down. That's better than I could do for sure!

When it comes to coping with mental illness, he's higher functioning than I might ever be. Somehow just talking with him about meds, mental health issues, and everyday stuff helps. And it gives me hope.

Around the same time, I met Jazmin Banks, who signed me up for storytelling training. Through her, I really started to learn what recovery is all about. I've taken two

trainings with Jazmin and we began each day with a room full of strangers who, by the magic of sharing, openness, intimacy and refusing to judge one another, were transformed into peers.

Recovery for me is all about peers. It's about people with holes in their boats who somehow manage to stay afloat, and it's about what you can learn about yourself, and about everything you can share together as "them" becomes "we".

JEAN M. LAVASSAUR

No Matter What

In 1998, I was diagnosed with a manic depression/bipolar disorder. My first reaction was utter disgust, despair, and hopelessness.

I remember rising up from my seat with extreme resentment, slamming down the pen, rolling my eyes at the therapist, walking out of the office, slamming the door, vowing never to return. I said to myself, "who do these people think they are? How can they say such a terrible thing? What is the world coming to?"

Never did I realize the severity of my condition. So as you can imagine, I continued to have multiple ups and downs, absolutely destroying every relationship that I came into. I was very arrogant and full of false pride, but the bottom line was that I was ignorant and totally clueless.

Eventually, I had no other choice but to go in for treatment and receive medication which was a journey all in itself. While I was in treatment I came across a resource packet full of free DBH/MRS training and other opportunities delivered to us as a gift from a woman named Jazmin Banks. I began to do research on this thing called system transformation spearheaded by a man named Dr. Arthur Evans. He believes that the dignity of the individual coming in for treatment should be preserved at all times in order to effectively serve and empower the person receiving services. I totally grasped this concept and took hold of this philosophy and my life has never been the same.

Because of the exposure I received from the DBH/MRS training, I was able to establish myself in the human services field and in the community at large. I'm currently engaged to a beautiful woman who developed the resource packets that changed my life forever.

So I just want to encourage you today and tell you that nothing is impossible! Nothing is too hard for God!

Keep your head up to the sky. Look adversity dead in the eye, and walk in all truth. No matter what may come my way I have learned to say it is well with my soul. Press past your circumstances. Press past your condition. Press past your situation.

We no longer have to live according to our diagnosis. At some point we are no longer the victim of our dilemmas, we are volunteers. Say yes to life, say yes of hope. Say yes to peace and say yes to unspeakable joy.

Today, I am a minister of the gospel of truth, a motivational speaker, community activist/mobilizer and a leader in the realm of recovery.

There is no disgrace to fall on your face, the disgrace is if you stay there. Get up from where you are. Wipe your eyes! Hold your head high! Be glad to be alive and strive, strive, strive!

Not too long ago I was deemed by some so called professionals as incurable, treatment resistant and in a seemingly hopeless state of mind, body and soul. But, somehow I have miraculously

recovered and now serve as a ray of hope to the community and society at large.

I have committed and dedicated my life to carrying the message of hope to the individual who is still sick and suffering. For we must persevere despite all odds and take our rightful place in society and be all that we can be!

William Webb

How Do I Feel

I am young black woman who's working through the process of the in between stage. I have been diagnosed with both mental health disorders and medical problems that demand to be addressed on a daily basis.

One of the most recent things that I have been struggling to get through is post traumatic stress disorder (P.T.S.D). I have been suffering from the hold that my past has tortured me all the way from my childhood.

Fear, anger and resentment have dictated my life, caused me to run, mask my feelings, live a life of false pride, relapse and create a fictitious identity so that the real me wouldn't stand up.

Medication, psych wards, and self - mutilation have been

a part of my story. Some times through the course of the day I suffer from flash backs, suicidal thoughts and depression. The medication that has been prescribed to me doesn't work for me and causes more side effects than my actual diagnosis

But, I refuse to lie down without a fight. My question was always "How am I ever going to get passed all of this?" Then my question became "What can I do to help myself get through all of this?"

Today, I made a decision to surrender to a power greater than myself, whom I choose to call God. I am learning that I don't have to go through anything alone and that there are people who are willing to help and love me. Instead of having a pity party, I will celebrate life one day at a time and thank God for choosing me to be an example to those who are coming behind me.

Having others reach out to me and lend a helping hand is a blessing. But reaching forward to help myself is a motivational skill to overcome obstacles—no matter how big or small.

Before, I fell by the way side and had no hope—in between. I am taking a personal stand to live life to the fullest. I will make each day count and help the next person in line.

Rearcie Roberts "Queen Rearcie"

Expressions in Recovery

Talent, ability, truth and the beauty of expression resides in every facet of life. The human condition - be it good or bad has always been shown through mediums such as art, writing, singing and speaking.

Then following pieces exhibit the innermost thoughts of those who wish to share their heartfelt thoughts and feelings...

When God laughs

*I told God I was sad
and he laughed at me
I told God that I was mad
that he just didn't see*

*I prayed to take away
pain that was not there.
I complained once again
that no one cared.
Then God stopped laughing and
opened my eyes
He lifted me up as I begin to sigh.....*

*A breeze, I caught
as it passed me by
the whisper of a wing-
the sun in the sky.*

*The laughter of a child-
a child in play-
made me sit for awhile
inhale and pray
A prayer of gratitude
for all I possess
a prayer
of patience
and tenderness*

*a prayer for the grass beneath my feet
a prayer for this body and eyes that see.
I thank him for his love which he freely
gives
I thank him for this day in which I live*

*And now I smile when someone else com-
plains-cause' now I see all that we have
gained.
I keep it simple-
this life of mine.
My God keeps it simple
Simply.....My God is kind*

G.

Blessings

*Rainy days and sunny days are
are all the same to me.
The beauty that each day can hold
is plain for me to see.
The rain is food for the earth
and quenches the birds who sing.
From the earth the flowers blossom
and sweeten the fruit it brings.
There are no dreary days for me
for me I love them all
even as the seasons change
and summer turns to fall.
I marvel at what God has done -
he never makes mistakes
he sets a banquet out for me
and tells me to partake.*

*At one time I never thought
that life would get this good
He promised me that it would be.
When I did as he said I should*

Orlando

Be judged

*As I'm walking down the street,
I feel sad,
I feel cursed,
And then I stop and realize,
When I have it bad,
Many others have it worse,
There's a woman with four children,
And no shoes upon her feet,
With a stroller, and a bottle,
Her feet pound along the street.
She looks homeless,*

*And she smells,
All her children, black and dirty,
Who am I to criticize?
To judge her, I'm not worthy.
For I do not know her problems,
And I don't know the extent,
Because I do not know the reasons,
I might feel hurtful, maybe repent.
While I take the time to judge her,
I take focus off myself,
I should take the time to love her,
Until she learns to love herself.
I won't look at how she's dressed,
And how her makeup's slightly
smudged,
I let her know that someone loves her,
And only by God can she be judged.*

Star

Hope

*I saw a pregnant woman today-walking
carrying a life.*

*I hoped a husband was nearby
somewhere*

I prayed she was someone's wife.

I prayed the child would grow to be

someone to change the world

someone with hope faith and love

for all the boys and girls

Someone to dry the tears

that stains the faces of us all

Someone to inspire

someone who'd stand tall.

*A beacon of light
in a darkening world-
making sense of all the turmoil.*

*I hope she's carrying a leader-
an author, maybe a scientist
a righteous rebel
a crusader
who marches with a clenched fist.
Someone to love, someone to care
who will fill the need...*

No lies,

no pain,

no deceit

just giving, knowing no greed.

*Why can't I dream for one like this
to save this troubled world.*

*It makes no difference at all to me
if it's a boy or girl.*

*Sometimes I think they're already here-
sleeping in me and you-
and as I stop and look around
some of you see it too.*

J. G

The Last Word

As we recover and rediscover spirituality, strengths and hope, we also become more resilient in this process. Our perception of life and all that it brings changes and grows.

What was once an obstacle becomes a welcome challenge. What was once difficult becomes routine as we move forward in life. The fellowship of recovery and sharing who we are becomes an integral part of our lives.

In this issue we've seen examples of determination, strength, faith, hope and resilience. We've all had adversities that we had to face and found the beauty in seeing these things as challenges that when faced together - become welcome.

I cannot fully express my heartfelt thanks to those who sat with me and shared their stories of struggles and triumphs.

I am humbled when others speak of past problems, adversities, obstacles and unforeseen occurrences that make mine pale in comparison. I strive harder when others relate their pain, confusion and daily struggles and still laugh, help others and are grateful for each day. Life is relative, what is pain to one is routine for another, however through sharing and fellowship we gain new strengths and insight. I eagerly look forward to the next issue and the opportunity to record our hopes and dreams on the pages of "Expressions in Recovery".

Gil G...Editor



Expressions in Recovery

A digest for people in recovery describing their current state of mind, progress, and future outlook