

# Expressions **in** Recovery

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



**Love, care, commitment and purpose bind us together in this endless circle of life. Some of us define ourselves by these interactions—good or bad—that we share on a daily basis and by what is given as well as what we give.**

**Often our heartfelt efforts seem futile as we try to help others heal. We also experience great joy when we play a part in each other's recovery. It is a privilege to see our heartfelt wishes for others reach fruition. In this we gain the strength to continue doing what we do.**

**Gil G.**

## **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

We are husbands, wives, children, brothers and sisters. We all have affected or are directly affected by someone dealing with mental illness and/or substance abuse.

So many of us have never truly shared our feelings. So many of us have not related the pain and pleasure we experience as those we care for, and those who care for us fall and rise. This issue is dedicated to the people whose lives are impacted by people in recovery.

***Editor's Note:***

Life carries so many unforeseen occurrences. It seems that when things are going so well...life shows up and hands us some adversity. Unfortunately, many of us fold under pressure. We find it extremely difficult to climb our way back to some semblance of normalcy.

Our perspective shapes how we deal with problems. For many of us, it is very hard to see the positive through the negative. It's been said that it's not how many times we fall that defines us, but how many times we get back up that strengthens and shapes our lives and character.

# Here and Now

*Short reflections*



I used to rationalize and tell myself that if I asked for nothing and kept what I was going through away from my mother that I was free of responsibility and blame.

I never knew that I was still selfish on so many different levels.

The sleepless nights she must have had. The guilt of self-doubt as to whether or not she had done enough. The agony of not knowing whether I was sick or well, free or incarcerated, dead or alive.

I am blessed now, to be someone who makes his mother proud, but I will never forget the pain she endured.

G.G.

I now have the opportunity to share myself with my children. I now know the true meaning of quality time. I always provided the physical necessities as a parent. However, the true essence of being a parent and family were sorely absent. The reconnection, emotionally and spiritually brought a joy and a definition that is hard to put into words.

The sheer happiness that I experience on a daily basis with my children has exceeded my wildest dreams. Are there problems at times—absolutely! Life will always shows up. True happiness and family fulfillment has entered, and I refuse to ever let it leave again!

*Wanda Hudson*

I thought I was a good dad, but compared to what I do now and the rich relationship I now have with my

children—WOW! There is no comparison. It feels so good to be reliable and dependable. It feels so good to see the confidence in my children's faces when they ask me to do something with a look that says they trust and believe in me. As a man this feeling can't be bought. The word fulfillment barely describes how I truly feel. Relationships come and go, but my children are my children forever.

These days it just feels so good when they call me "DAD".

*Spencer Hale*

My mother is dead and my father lives far away, and is not in my life. However, my family is huge. My family is the family of recovery. Almost every day I volunteer at the Frankford Resource Center. This fills my days and gives my life meaning by helping others. My attitude is different, my outlook is different, and who knows what tomorrow may bring. I am blessed.

*James Prettyman*

I've been blessed with the opportunity to be an outreach coordinator. Through this outreach process I feel I have a purpose and the courage to encourage and give hope to others that change is possible. By speaking of my own journey, I feel I can relate to others. I've shared the pain and triumph. I'm truly grateful.

*Jake Fleming*

# Featured Stories

## This is my life

I'm not sure if I can be accurately called a middle child because I have two older and one younger sibling. But this is my life.

I was an unexpected surprise for my father. Not that he didn't want me, but because of his age he didn't believe it was possible for him to have a child. For two years, I lived with my mother and two other siblings. This was about the time my younger brother was born.

My father came to visit me and was surprised that we shared a common birthmark.

This caused him to rethink his role in my life story. After a long debate, the choice was made. I would be taken from the home my mother was making for us to ease her burden. My father would raise me with the money he was making from his appliance business.

Private schools and baby-sitters would shelter me from the dark reality of the early 80s. I lived sort of a "hood privileged" lifestyle that my father financed. I can remember bits and pieces of a man with a smooth exterior. He wore three-piece suits and would shoot the breeze with his co-owners over a beer.

I could feel the love that radiated from his cool facade however few times the words made it past his lips. The kids in the neighborhood were considered hoodlums. That left me with a limited choice for playmates. I was not allowed to leave the end of Bristol Street and only allowed to cross Germantown Ave. with an approved escort.

On March 1, 1991 I was changed forever. I lost the man that had sheltered me from the pain of day-to-day reality. When my father died, it left me with a deep emotional scar that, to this day continues to trouble me. My mother took me back in along with my three siblings.

Even though there was no father present and hardly enough income for my mother to feed herself, she still maintained enough to take care of us. She never gave up.

By the time I was 13, things took an even more drastic turn when the house caught on fire.

During the next three years, I would learn more about my mother's addiction than she would allow in previous

years. I would struggle in school with work that was normally a breeze. I wouldn't attempt to build social relationships, and soon I would shy away totally from social situations. Drawing and writing was all I had to keep my sanity.

With poverty, a lost father, unpopularity and my mother's addiction, there was nowhere to turn.

Finally at the age of 17, I was enrolled in Job Corps along with my little brother. It was there that I would build lasting relationships and acquire a lot of life lessons. It was also the time I learned about the drug game and how to make fast money. By the time I left Job Corps I had a certificate, a diploma, some street knowledge and more book smarts.

However, there was something missing. I was so young with skills an adult could put to use. Because I did not enjoy high school the way a teenager should, I acted out as an adult. I wasted money and precious time just freelancing, getting high and chasing women.

I didn't blame anyone for my mental status but me. For years after Job Corps I would struggle to gain employment, save money, have my own place and just be productive.

During these years marijuana, alcohol, pills and cigarettes were my biggest friends. Somehow I believed by hiding from my problems they would go away. If life had taught me anything it was that hard work and effort only got you so far. If you did not make the right choices in life, you could find yourself lost, like me, at age 30.

My mother thinks she's the reason for my mishaps when all along it was me and the choices I made in life. I can see by her drastic turn around that anyone can live above the influence and be happy if they allow themselves to. My mother is my inspiration, she has been clean for a few years now and manages her own depression very well. Seeing her get better and better keeps me going.

**Michael V. Blatch**

## Hope...for me and mine

I first became aware that something was wrong with me at the age of five. I remember very well how ugly I thought

I was because my body was covered with what was called, "asthma of the skin".

The doctors had never seen a case like mine before, and there was no cure for it. The doctor told my mother that it would eventually clear up and the disease would settle into my lungs. That is exactly how it happened and to this day I still have asthma.

I could not be around grass and trees or dogs and cats (all the things a little girl likes) or my condition would flare up. I required a lot of attention. Having 11 siblings obviously made it impossible to get the attention and nurturing I needed to grow up "normal". I'd scratch sometimes until I bled. I stayed in the house a lot and my sisters and brothers had to suffer because of me.

I said all that because I believe this is when I developed all those negative thoughts and behaviors about myself. I believed my siblings did not like me. It was always my fault that they couldn't do things or go places because it would make me sick.

Around the age of seven, I started feeling sad all the time and the asthma attacks became more frequent. That's when the depression began, but I never knew and neither did my parents (this was not known back in those days). I just knew I always felt ugly, shy and sick, never wanting to go outside.

My mother was an alcoholic. My father also drank. Mama left us when I was nine years old. I saw her leave. I was afraid to tell my daddy because I thought he would find her and kill her. I saw and heard things that I should not have. I internalized some feelings and emotions and never talked about them to anyone as a child growing up and really not even as an adult.

So all I could do was depend on my own feelings and emotions, which became my reality. By living this way, I could never be in a healthy relationship with people, friends, lovers, children, etc. I just never learned to show love in a way that was healthy for me. I've always been afraid to tell the truth because I'm afraid to lose the love a person may feel for me.

I have been in many relationships in my 55 yrs on this earth and the only one that lasted any amount of time was the one with alcohol and drugs. This is the way I handled my feelings and my emotions whenever someone left me.

I need to say that I have four offspring. They have felt the effects of my disease in many ways. Two of them are suffering mentally and emotionally now in their adult years. Their suffering led to substance abuse. They do not acknowledge it right now but I see all the symptoms and behaviors because I have been where they are.

All I can do for them is lead by example, pray for them and stay focused on my recovery so that I am stronger for them. I have 27 months free of the disease of addiction and

my mental and emotional fight is still ongoing. I believe with all my heart that my children will be alright by the grace of God and through those that are willing to help and share the hope.

**Karen Hines**

## The affect of my effect

About ten years ago, I started to experience weird feelings of hopelessness and impending doom. I adopted two major compulsive behaviors: spending money and having sex. Though I had not initially been diagnosed, it was evident something was wrong.

I no longer wanted to hang with family and friends, everything just made me sad. My behavior became erratic. No one ever knew what was going to come from me next. To others, my behavior was weird. I was ridiculed both privately and publicly. Yet still this didn't bother me because no one knew what I was going through.

Then one day I had an experience and ended up in the waiting room at Hall Mercer. I spoke with therapists and psychiatrists. Ultimately, my diagnosis was bi-polar disorder. I realized that I had impacted the lives of those around me.

My mother could not understand why she would see her child on Monday and never see or talk to her again until the following Tuesday. My sister couldn't understand why I didn't want to hang around her anymore and she couldn't get the sisterly advice that she longed for.

My daughter couldn't understand why her mother didn't have any weekend activities planned for us. My grandparents saw the child they helped raise begin to hang in the streets with the wrong crowd while being sexually promiscuous. I spent all my money on frivolous things while avoiding priorities. I created an illusion of life for me living in a world where everything was perfect and where you have no problems. Bills get paid on their own. I could do whatever I wanted.

My behavior not only affected me, it affected my friends and family. I lost the person I was. I lost the person who treated her friends and family with dignity and respect. I lost the person who prided herself for the hurdles she had overcome.

Now, ten years later, I have come to know a man who has promised to never forsake or leave me. He is my strength during times of weakness. I am stabilized on medication, but there are still times when even the medication does not help.

I draw on strength from family who are supportive, from friends who understand, from co-workers who are there when it matters, and a father who makes sure that

what I need is always there.

It is hard to explain the affects of bi-polar disorder to those who do not understand the realm of mental instability or do not believe that the mind can control you this way. It is, and it can be frightening for those caught in its clutches and for those who witness an episode.

People think that you should just shake it off or get over it. It doesn't work that way. It is a daily struggle. Some days I win, some days "it" wins. My days are a gift that I choose to view with anticipation, not with dread or fear because through it all and no matter what, I am never alone.

**Shameka Lewis**

## 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...*

### Philly and Me

*I'm travelling on a train to a place I used to call home  
understanding, it's a place  
I feel, I no longer belong.  
I left under God's directions,  
longing to be free.  
Now, a couple of months later,  
I'm getting a glimpse of me.*

*Through honesty and getting help,  
I've been doing some cleaning  
and my life has turned around  
and taken on a new meaning.*

*Doing things on a daily basis  
I never thought I could do.  
Feeling little pangs of hope  
that my dreams can still come true.  
What other people see in me*

*I'm working to believe  
I'm on the road to confidence  
with each small goal I achieve.*

*I'm taking steps to change myself  
And with help, I've grown.  
That's why I now believe  
Philadelphia,... is my home.....*

**Charles Spann**

### A friend like you

*When people don't understand  
I'll call you  
when I have secret,  
I'll tell you that too.  
When I'm happy and content,  
you need to know  
I take you with me  
wherever I may go.  
And when you're sad  
please call me  
and if you're mad....  
we'll try to see  
another way for you to feel  
a perspective,  
a laugh, or  
a touch that heals.  
And I'm so happy  
'cause I know what to do  
and God gave me a gift...  
A friend like you!*

**Junie**

*then showed me just what I must do  
and now, my life's begun.  
I face each day fully armed  
with the power of his will.  
And his gifts,  
so many,  
so beautiful, and so pretty  
and more he gives me still.  
His love...  
such love,  
he gives to me  
and I'm nothing but a man.  
And with this love  
this awesome love.  
I know now that I can.  
Yes...now I share this heart of mine  
and give my very soul  
for he, to me,  
is always kind.  
My God has made me whole.  
I love now with a confidence,  
a purpose  
and my heart.  
The beauty is,  
it's just begun...  
today I touched a star.*

**Gil Gadson**

### Freedom Train

*This is train I speak of  
Leads to a very special station,  
Where piece of mind*

*Is its destination.*

*Where people who've climbed on  
Didn't have to pay  
And found an alternative  
To throwing their life away.*

*We're given a free pass  
On train to freedom  
Whose passengers have a conductor  
Named LAC to lead 'em.*

*Freedom from your fears  
Anxieties and addictions,  
Self-doubt, self-pity,  
Hopelessness and afflictions.*

*Martin Luther King,  
Harriet Tubman, Thurgood Marshall,  
To this freedom too,  
They will would be partial,  
They'd urge us to try to  
Take back our lives  
And make the most of it,  
As they did in this world of strife.*

*Just take it a day at a time  
And try to maintain  
Remember if you should fail  
You can get back up again.*

**Ronald Young**

### To be blessed

*I once was lost  
and had no hope  
then God told me to smile  
He gave me strength,  
the will to live and the heart  
of a newborn child.  
He let me see the pain and loss  
that others suffer from*

## Accentuating the positive

Everyday, as we read the newspapers, we are assaulted with the stories of man's inhumanity toward man.

We hear of the greed, lies and deception. We are given horrifying statistics of the accidents, rapes, suicides, murders and any number of deprivations. In the midst of all this horror and negativity, where is the good news?

There may be stories of someone performing a good deed but they are few and far between. Why is this? Why are we so quick to point out the negative with such vigor and enthusiasm?

The newspapers and magazines are billion dollar industries that cater to the most sensational, materialistic and

shallow stories they can find. Often, leaving out the good and focusing on the most base instincts of humanity such as food, sex, fads, the newest technology and human greed.

We need to focus on the positive. We need to encourage and inspire each other. We should shout about those who devote their time and their very lives to the service of humanity.

We should honor those who rise each and every day, focused on simply helping someone else. These are our true heroes. We should honor the mothers and fathers who live only to see their children grow, learn and become mature human beings rich in spirit and purpose.

We need to recognize the courageous ones who give a voice to those who have no voice. We need to showcase our children who have chosen to excel as opposed to concentrating on fads, drugs and sex.

We must instill in them the pride of true accomplishments and the honor of integrity.

This we can do by rebuilding the human family and re-establishing true spiritual values where the focus is on kindness, love, commitment, care and true purpose. These are the things we need to talk about each day. And we must do it now.

## The Last Word

Every time I get to this last page, there's a tear in my eye. A happy tear, A tear for all the raging emotions I feel after being blessed with sharing so many lives and vicariously living and feeling what my brothers and sisters have felt and gone through.

I have laughed until my stomach cramped. I have hugged and cried with a furrowed brow, amazed at the perseverance and strength of some. I've sat speechless as the beauty of the human spirit has revealed itself before my very eyes.

I've gained friends, family, confidants, brothers and sisters, mentors, guides and role models. The most wonderful part is that you can witness and be a part of it everyday—volunteer. Make it a part of your life to be involved in helping

others. The rewards are never ending. A constant affirmation of your humanity and place in this sometimes cruel and heartless world.

I've found that recovery is stunningly beautiful and amazing to behold. For those who have contributed, you have my heart, and I thank you.

Together, we have made this another positive aspect of recovery and a vehicle that showcases who we are, what we do, what we want and our fondest hopes and dreams.

Words are not enough, again, I thank you.

*Gil G...Editor*



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