

Expressions in Recovery

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



We sometimes pass them by — not knowing who they are, how they survive, where they've been and how they feel, as we judge, assume and too often, quickly walk away.

They are someone's brother, sister, mother or father. They may be someone's son or daughter. Some of them were and are us.

They are the homeless, often ignored, disregarded and misunderstood. We must hear their story.

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

Editor's Note:

We often move through our lives, oblivious to the pain and suffering of others. Be it self inflicted, or the victim of circumstance, we cheat ourselves and others by not exploring the reasons for those that are homeless and sometimes, hopeless.

More so than not, the reasons are not what we may have assumed.

Let us open our eyes and hearts as we explore the lives of the homeless on the pages of "Expressions in Recovery"

Gil Gadson

Before Here and Now – The Way it Was



Day by Day Survival

I often wonder how I was able to walk so much. I guess I felt if I kept moving then somehow, I could outrun the misery and the shame. Hunger kept me moving, and I got good at finding food and free meals.

I could never bring myself to beg for money, so I stole stuff when I could and usually sold it for nothing, often drinking the money and spending it on drugs to numb the pain. After awhile, I got used to the looks of disgust and I became invisible, even to myself

Junie

Under the bridge

I remember being at 5th and Callowhill—under the bridge, right off the expressway.

I was panhandling to get money for drugs and alcohol—day and night.

I was trying to forget the pain of the deaths of my loved ones—two brothers and a sister.

Barry Simpson

Lost

Feeling completely hopeless—no sense of direction and full of pain. I was morally and spiritually bankrupt. I was numb. But still, I asked myself “How did I come this far?”

Thomas Moore

Worthless

I felt like I was the worst person in the world. I had nothing and no one. Guilt and shame kept me falling deeper and deeper into my addiction and state of hopelessness even though there were those that cared. I couldn't see or accept that because I no longer felt worthy.

Gary Harris

Let me in

Security wouldn't let us in. It was after 10 p.m.—too late to get a bed. It was crazy, it was unreal. I remember sitting outside of Ridge Men's Shelter and then I was lying on a bench as it started to rain. I even began to pray.

Larnell Butler

For too long

I was homeless for 14 years. I stood in food lines, stole from stores. I felt degraded as people laughed and said horrible things about me as they walked by seeing me sleeping on park benches. More times than I wanted to remember, I wanted to die. I asked God for another chance—not knowing when, how, where or why.

Ronnie Desesso

So close to nothing

I wasn't exactly living on the street after losing my home to a fire, but living in the shelter was no picnic. We had to stay out all day where I just drank to forget. I was stuck in my misery and seeing no way out.

James Greene

Alone

My sister told me I had to leave. I was angry, depressed and starting to feel hopeless. Mostly I felt alone. I began to search for somewhere to go. I walked the streets for hours, not knowing what I was going to do. The thought of suddenly having no home hit me from all sides. It was a disaster.

D-Tron

Dry Bones

Being a spiritual person, I felt like the walking dead, literally. I remember a scripture in the bible speaking of dry bones. I thought I was among those bones. My parents owned a business and were well off, so how did I get here? From eating at a dinner table with six siblings, a mother and father, to scrounging for food—alone.

Raymond March

No Place to Call Our Own

I never slept on the street, or begged for money or food, but sometimes just to keep a roof over my head, sometimes for only a night, I had to sleep with someone.

At first I thought there was a difference in those who walked and slept on the streets everyday and had no where to call home. We are no different, we both had no place to call our own.

Phaedra Felita Brown

Feature Stories



I wanted to do what I wanted to do. I wouldn't listen to anyone.

I never knew the price I would pay. I've slept on playgrounds, in abandoned buildings, in abandoned cars, elevators and even on the beach.

The drugs kept me lost in the illusion that this was an adventure, that this was fun. It wasn't long before the fun ended and I was lost. I felt ashamed and worthless until it was a case of life or death.

At that point I surrendered. I came to Girard Medical Center, where today, I am somebody, I'm not worthless, I have hope and I intend to live for real.

Shirley H.

I feel good now. I pray constantly. I never knew I could be respected and admired.

I was raised in the church, one of seven children. I never knew the things my mother went through trying to take care of us. I only learned this later in life.

Not having a father led me to leave home early. Having no discipline and direction, I soon delved into drugs. I got hooked. I stayed away from everyone out of shame.

They never knew I was homeless, on drugs and losing my mind. I kept up a good front. It was only until I heard the stories of others did I open up. Hearing other people's stories made me cry. It made me remember, and it humbled me and let me know I could share.

I'm not ashamed anymore to seek help any way, any time and any where I can.

A woman I knew for 22 years always told me that when I was ready, she would help. I got ready—she helped. Now I am truly changing my life, moving forward and helping others.

Jeanette Porter

I was raised by the state. I couldn't seem to stay out of trouble. The state got more of my time than my family. Once I reached the age of 17, I rarely went home. As with many others, by the age of 18, the insidious disease of addiction crept up on me. I robbed. I stole. I did whatever came to mind to get money. This led to many bridges being burned, which in turn, kept me on the street, with nowhere to really go. After years of this vicious cycle of madness, institutions and addiction, a moment of clarity sat me down and brought me to recovery.

I feel good now. I pray constantly. I never knew I could be respected and admired. My conduct and character now bears no evidence of who I was. So many people now see me as this good person.

It is this person who I pray for every night and day as I thank god for allowing him to live again and see a new life. I am grateful.

Gary Harris

Feature Stories

Not only did my father work, he was an entrepreneur which led to him being a successful business owner. My mother, a beautiful woman was a devoted housewife. Being from the South Bronx, drugs and alcohol were everywhere as soon as you stepped out your front door.

In the beginning, because of a strict upbringing and being sheltered and protected so much, the only places I went was to church and school. I could only play with kids my parents approved and deemed safe. Needless to say, this only made me more curious about what was out there in those streets beyond my mother's safety net.

It began with drinking and then smoking weed, which I bought with my weekly allowance. As my addiction started to develop, I moved into selling drugs to support it.

My spirit was in turmoil. I was torn between the spirituality which was embedded in me as a child and my increasing addiction and shame.

My mother finally sent me to a recovery house where I still struggled—going in and out of many other houses battling with my addiction.

I found it easier to medicate, to try to forget. I went from shelter to shelter.

Eventually, even the shelters wanted me no more. In utter desperation one day, I surrendered. I prayed and asked my higher power to help me.

I am now at Girard Medical Center at Miracles in Progress. I am sober, I am sane. I am better, and moving forward.

Raymond Mack

I've been all over the country. I must have been in over ten cities by the age of 26. I've been homeless in at least six of those cities.

The reasons are different and varied. While I don't minimize that my addiction played a part, I didn't have a good start. My parents didn't have the means to really take care of me, besides the fact that for some reason I always felt different from the rest of my siblings.

The town we lived in was small, had no public transportation and everyone knew everyone. I felt I had to leave. I had to get away. So, one day, with 20 bucks and a bus ticket I just took off.

For the next few years, I bounced around the country with nothing. Being a woman, I had to sell myself to survive. No one can imagine the sick, perverted, depraved people I came into contact with. I have slept in abandoned tractor-trailers with rats, in

abandoned buildings, waking up in filth and shivering from open, cold windows where glass used to be.

I slept near the railroad tracks where I gave birth to still-born baby-boy who I didn't even know was inside me. I have stepped over dead bodies in abandoned buildings trying to find a place to sleep after sleeping standing on my feet.

Having a warrant was my saving grace. It led to my arrest, which brought me to My Sister's Place. My addiction is being managed and I am full of hope. I've been told that anything in the future is possible for me. We shall see

Alena Mackay

At first I thought I didn't belong in this publication because others have gone through so much more than I. However, my gratitude compels me to speak.

First, through a set of circumstances beyond my control, I lost my apartment. I knew a friend who ran a Christian recovery house. I went there for shelter and to detox from heroin with the use of methadone.

After 21 days I was still sick and started popping pills which led me right back to heroin. This led to my expulsion from the shelter. I was able to go to my mother's house during the day but had to leave at night.

I rode the trains as much as I could, went to chapels and walked the streets. My actual homelessness only lasted a few days but the memory will last forever. I went to St. Joseph's to detox again. I'm trying to stick with it. I have been totally clean for 30 days and have the hope and belief of staying this way.

I give all the glory to my higher power. He saw fit to give me a way out quickly. I was told to be of service to others. That's what I'm starting to do now as I write these words.

Richard Tomasko

I was never truly homeless. I chose to be on the streets. My cousin lived under a bridge. I would sometimes go and bring him food and he would supply the alcohol and drugs. My house was only six blocks away but the drugs and alcohol kept me out there. Once, I clinically died from alcohol poisoning. They had to bring me back. In my insanity, my new years resolution was to drink even more. Clearly, there were higher powers beyond myself at work. I am now in recovery. I am healthy, I am smiling and I have a vision of the future.

Lisa Singley

Expressions in Recovery

Talent, ability, truth, and the beauty of expression reside 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.

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

They don't see me

*Huddled into a ball-
In the rain
Cardboard is my armor.
And my condition gives me the power
of invisibility.
They don't see me.*

*Sometimes ,
I wonder how
They always manage to move out the
way.*

*Avoiding contact,
Never touching
Never speaking
Glancing away
Holding their breath
And yet
They don't see me*

*I cried last night
Its been a long time
I thought I had run out of tears
Been too busy trying to eat, to live, to
stay warm.
Don't even know why I cried, nobody
heard me.*

*One man gave me a dollar yesterday
I wonder how he found my hand
I saw his eyes
I smelled his fear and ignorance
And, he couldn't see me*

*I've lost track of the days, the months,
the years.
I still remember my name
But I don't remember when I became
invisible
But I am because.
They don't see me
- G.O.G.*

Thank you man

*You got a quarter?
I got \$9.75.
Tryin' ta' get \$10.00,
So I can forget
Don't wanna remember where I am
Dont wanna think about how
I got here.
Don't wanna see the fear no mo
Dey think ima' alien or sumthin'*

*I'm jus' lookin' to forget.
Hey miss, I'm tryin' ta eat, You got
a quarter?
No?...okay
Hey Man gimme a quarter
I'm so close
I jus' need a quarter
Ooooooh, awwww thanks.
Thank you man.
-Jus' Me*

Is that box big enough?

*I'll come and sit with you
In the rain and
In the snow.*

*I'll come walk with you
We'll go wherever you want to go.*

*I'll talk to you until you go to sleep
And your stories of pain,
you and I will keep.*

*I brought you a blanket
Newspaper doesn't work that well
And here are some socks, to help
when your feet start to swell.
I know living out here is rough
and I gotta ask ya
Is that box big enough?*

*I used to be where you are
And that's why I come back
Someone came for me
And got me on track
But I still remember clearly
The pain and disrespect
From others
From myself
when I thought I had nothing left.
I remember the elements
That seasoned me
And made me tough
so I ask you my friend.
Is that box big enough?
-Gil Gadson*

Testimony of a homeless man

*For over 20 years
I lived on these streets
Callouses on my feet
Hungry, and nothing to eat
And the places I laid my head*

*Surburban Station.
Yeah, that was my bed
All I did was walk the streets
Hoping to get rescued
And get a good night's sleep.
I even contemplated suicide
But God wouldn't let me die
I said life ain't fair
But God places no burdens upon man
which he cannot bear*

*All up in my head trying
To find a way out this tunnel.*

*Where there is light, there is hope
All I have to do is put down the dope.
The testimony of a man that lived on
the streets,
it's me and my name is Garry.
Today, I don't have to settle for less
With or without you
I'm a miracle in progress too
-Garry Fields*

Less fortunate than me. Parts 1 & 2

Part 1

*I've never been there
With nothing to wear
Nor a place to sleep
A cup, begging for change, so I can eat.
Taking a shower, standing in the rain.
Hoping to wash off the filth and pain
Lives needing to be taken back-
So they can be claimed.*

Part 2

*They lay on the sidewalks with the
same clothes for days, weeks, months
and years
Styrofoam cups, change jingling from
left to right.
The trash we throw away
they pick up our leftovers to make their
night.
I wonder if families care
Maybe they are unaware.
A child without a care, says" look at that
bum sitting there"
They better hope that it never happens
to them.
To all my unfortunate people
take your life back again.
- Krystle Fanis*

The Last Word

Brothers from another mother.

My name is Paul Wilkins, I work for the ATR Program which stands for Access To Recovery. I am a certified recovery specialist, a certified peer specialist and a student at Philadelphia Community College.

I'm also a graduate of the Journey of Hope Project which is a substance abuse treatment program for the homeless, who we also help with attaining housing. I was homeless.

Today, I wake up every morning in my own place, safe, warm, full of purpose and happy. Getting here wasn't easy, but not as hard as I thought it would be.

I come from a very prominent family, but being hardheaded, I chose to run the streets and use drugs. As a result of using drugs, I became homeless. I disassociated myself from friends and family. I slept on the streets, in abandoned buildings and anywhere I could.

At one point, in some perverse way, I enjoyed living on the streets. In retrospect, I was losing or had lost my mind and you can't imagine the madness and pain which was my own. As a result of my dilemma, I was lost and couldn't find a way out.

In 2008, I was on the streets, shooting heroin and smoking crack. A group of people from Newstart, which is a part of the Journey Of Hope Project, engaged me right there on the street. They treated someone with no self-esteem like a human being. They told me that I didn't have to die and that I had choices and could choose to live that day.

They brought me to the New Start Program where I began my process of recovery. I have been in my own apartment for two years now and my life is devoted to helping others. Miracles do happen and I do matter.

- Paul Wilkins

Any organization has a certain amount of business that has to be taken care of. Without taking care of the business aspect you won't have an organization to run. However, in the field of co-occurring disorders, we are dealing with human beings. We are attempting to help those who for a myriad of reasons have lost the way to help themselves. I am often left wanting to do more than I can, having to be reminded of what I've done and totally amazed at the resilience of the human spirit.

I think the most important and meaningful thing that we do is that we actively do outreach. We go to shelters, safe havens and take to the streets to engage people. We give hope, offer choices and opportunities with the objective of helping people live again.

I love what I do. I get to really help other people. I get to treat people with the dignity and respect they deserve. And as I see their

self-esteem, dignity and pride return, I am validated as a human being and I'm reminded that I am doing the right thing for the right reasons.

In the story above you heard from Paul Wilkins. He graduated from the program where I work. We are now brothers in the truest sense of the word. He is my partner and friend, and we constantly strengthen and encourage each another.

Every day when I see him, I am constantly reminded of what I do, what we all should do, what I have done and finally, what can be done. I wake each day with a renewed sense of purpose, knowing I get the privilege of helping someone else. And Paul, my brother from another mother, my friend, is grinning right now and I am reminded of possibilities and what can be done.

- Tim Sheehan, Project Manager, Journey of Hope



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