



# EXPRESSIONS IN RECOVERY

A DIGEST FOR PEOPLE IN RECOVERY DESCRIBING THEIR CURRENT STATE OF MIND, PROGRESS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

## I NEVER KNEW

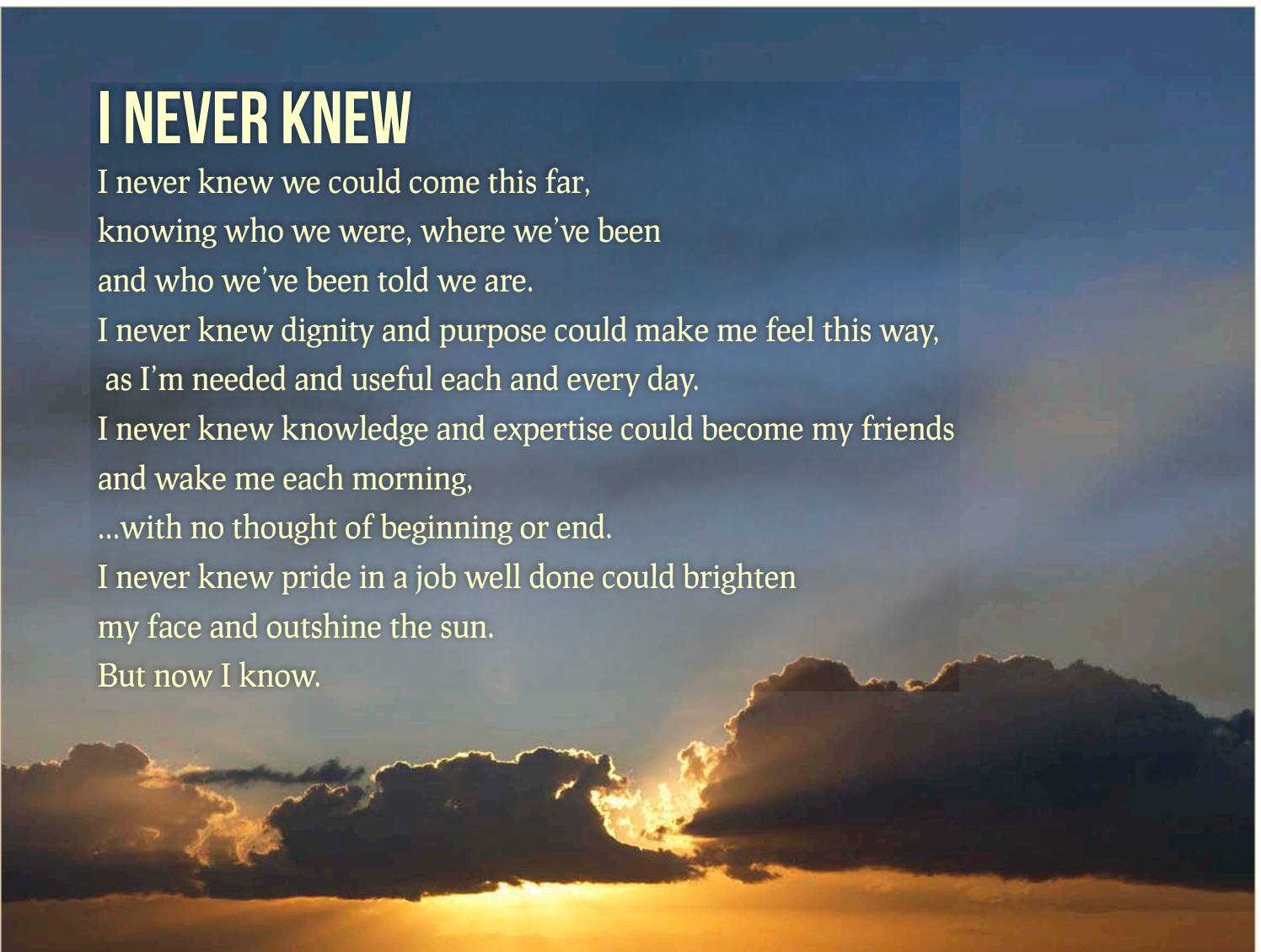
I never knew we could come this far,  
knowing who we were, where we've been  
and who we've been told we are.

I never knew dignity and purpose could make me feel this way,  
as I'm needed and useful each and every day.

I never knew knowledge and expertise could become my friends  
and wake me each morning,  
...with no thought of beginning or end.

I never knew pride in a job well done could brighten  
my face and outshine the sun.

But now I know.



## Expressions in Recovery 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)

EDITOR OR GUEST CONTRIBUTOR'S INSPIRATIONAL SUMMARY.

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Volume 11, 2013

# Editor's Note

A friend once spoke to me and they expressed that finding themselves and a productive place in this world was like going on a treasure hunt. We know that there will be trials, tribulations, difficulties and obstacles but what continuously propels us is the clear vision of that treasure box which contains who we can be, what we can do, the possible lives we may touch and the ultimate fulfillment of self- sufficiency and partnering with others.

The Transformation Initiative in Philadelphia has changed countless lives forever. What others in the past have been ashamed of have transformed into credentials of expertise which have qualified them for jobs resulting in unprecedented fulfillment and purpose.

Come with me and hear these extraordinary stories of discovery and fulfillment on the pages of "Expressions In Recovery"

Gil Gadson



# HERE AND NOW

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## They saw something in me

I basically had worked all my life. After getting clean at Gaudenzia I got a job doing factory work. I had to get up very early, catch the van and worked long hours on my feet. In all honesty, I was grateful to have a job but I wasn't too happy with the conditions. Then something wonderful happened. Gaudenzia offered me a job. I didn't ask for it and didn't expect it. I was going to get paid to help others.

I was honored that they came to me. I knew the job very well by actually being in the program. One of the best feelings is affirmation and recognition and knowing that my behaviors got me this job. Who I had become got me this job without a word from me.

**SHARON GARLAND-LEACH**

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## Being responsible and useful.

Being responsible makes you strong. It makes you resilient. It helps you to conquer challenges. There was a time that I worried about what people said and thought about me. At one time I thought that when people told me about things I needed to change meant that they may not have liked me. I later learned that people often see things in you that you don't see. And I also learned that they told me these things to help me grow. I decided to try some of these things and found the "me" I never knew. This led to knowledge and a desire to really listen. This also led to confidence. I came to realize that making mistakes is a normal function. If looked at the right way you can grow from these self-examinations. These self-examinations gave me the confidence to do what I do now. A counselor once asked me why I often go back to visit the wreckage of my past. At first I didn't know what he meant. But through self-examination I learned that I didn't have to keep making the same mistakes, I just had to change. Change is viewed often as scary but change has to happen so that we can move forward.

Today I'm a Recovery Coach, a Wrap Facilitator and I'm alive. I'm battling a serious illness but each day as I go to work I am strengthen knowing I'm not only helping others but I'm also helping myself. I believe this is my purpose and God's will. I believe God saw something in me that I didn't and he's using me in the best possible way-which is his job.

People come and go but the connections I'm blessed to make each day makes it all worthwhile....And that's all that counts....

**DORA STEVENSON**

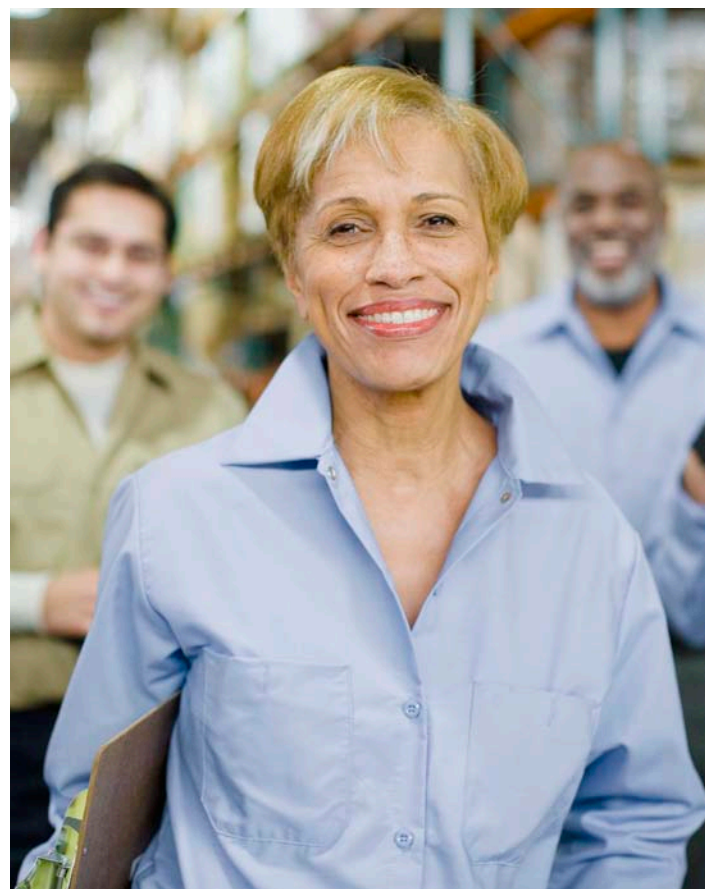
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## Finishing what I started

I spent most of my life skipping from one thing to another, never finishing anything and seeing things through. This became a pattern in my life. I became the best at making excuses and rationalizing things to myself. I never knew that my mental illness bouts and substance abuse was directly related to me not liking myself and my pattern of self-destruction and delusion. At one point I was disgusted with myself. The drugs didn't help anymore and I was having panic attacks every day. They became so common that others didn't know when they were happening. But I knew, and I was miserable. There was one good thing about me-I loved helping others and when I couldn't take the addictions no more I joined a progressive rehabilitation program that focused on realizing your potential through giving back. Through volunteering, I began to see who I was, what I could do and developed a hope for the future. Then I was offered a job. I had never been clean, stable and focused before on a job until now and I had a purpose and I had others working alongside me with the same purpose. It was then that I found the beauty of seeing things through. I found the joy of teamwork, true camaraderie and a job well done.

I never knew dignity and clear conscience could feel this good. I get to feel this a lot now because these days, I finish what I start.....

**WILLIAM BRYANT**





# FEATURE STORIES

## I See No End In Sight

In recovery, for me, one of the main focuses is growth. We see it around us and we seek it. When I transitioned from addiction to productivity, the first beautiful feeling I had was the concrete belief that anything was and is possible. I've always believed that when you help other people, you help yourself. One of the main tools in recovery from addictions is addressing the self-centeredness. You attack this directly by giving back and being in service.

Giving back confirmed in me who I was, who I could be, what I could do and how valuable I am. I've now been working in this field for nine years and I see no end in sight.

I have colleagues now that began as I did and tell me how I encouraged and helped them move forward. I am now a Certified Recovery Specialist for The Office of Addictive Services. I love my work and it just keeps getting better. The editor and writer of this publication you're reading came to a facility I was working at six years ago. I saw great things in him and never hesitated to tell him so and encourage him every chance I got. Now, here we are sitting together and he's interviewing me- Man! I gotta' say, it gets no better than this.

With all of his success, he still says that I was instrumental in the path he chose and took. He says that my words always strengthened him and challenged him to be better and fulfill his potential.

The real beauty of recovery is how it reciprocates. I am as proud of him as he is of me. We are now colleagues and professionals with stories to trade and tell. We're doing this interview after we ran into each other at a WRAP summit. We have both found fulfillment and purpose and I said before, there is no end in sight.....

**THOMAS WARD**

## I Was A Drug Dealer

I learned how to sell drugs at a very young age. I grew up in what we called the "Hood" which is short for neighborhood. My environment was violent, dirty, treacherous and seemingly hopeless. I thought the people who went to work every day were suckers. I saw them struggling to make ends meet every day and thought that they were stupid for struggling so hard for so little money.

Truthfully, deep down, I envied them. There was a part of me that was always jealous of the looks in their faces even as they struggled because their struggle was honest. Their struggle was simple and free. I can remember block parties where I had a pocket full of drug money, expensive clothes on my back, people being kind but still feeling like I didn't belong. I couldn't join in on their conversations about work, school, children, bank accounts, insurance and all the other many things that people with a legal job, a normal life and families talked about.

I couldn't talk about a real future and most of all I couldn't talk about dignity and pride in a job well done. I couldn't talk about working alongside others that I could really trust and what we accomplished. In my life at that time everything was a secret. And as I later learned, secrets keep you sick. Caught up in the madness and chaos of everything I was doing at the time didn't let me see that I was having anxiety attacks and was most likely clinically depressed.

My last time in jail was the turning point. I met a man who had turned himself in on an old warrant. He spoke of how he used to sell drugs and was a hustler. He spoke of how he was tired of looking over his shoulder and being on the fringes of society. He

spoke of not being able to ever be honest about what he did and how his conversations were always limited. He pointed out how no matter how much money he made, he could lose everything in a heartbeat with no warning. He also spoke of how he could trust no one and how his associations were not friendships and treachery was always in the air waiting with death.

What finally got through to me was when he spoke honor, dignity, pride and the absence of these things no matter how much money and material things he had.

This man said he was tired of lying and living a lie. He could never sit with his kids and be an example to follow. He could never get the full love and respect from his wife with her knowing any day everything could be taken away, including his life and freedom.

He said that now his wife was proud of what he did. He said that his children called him dad and now he really felt like one. Now he said he could freely associate with others and have normal conversations. This man said he had a regular job with regular hours and it felt good coming home every day. He admitted that it wasn't easy but it was worth it because he was free. He was free to talk about a job well done with his son and getting an education without feeling like a hypocrite. He was free to have real friends and be a real friend to others. And he also said that he discovered that now he could pray. He said he always wanted to pray before but never felt worthy to talk to God.

This man changed my life. He told me to look him up when I got out and I did. He got me a job where he works. It's not easy but just like him ...now, I'm free, I can breathe and the sky is the limit and my life belongs to me...For once.

**ORLANDO ORTIZ**

## Anything is Possible

I was homeless for 15 years. I've been incarcerated, in institutions and ultimately, I just dropped out of society. I got comfortable with my situation. I got comfortable with homelessness and hopelessness. When I saw others getting their lives together and living, I became convinced that a life like that wasn't in the cards for me.

My turning point came from individuals who came into the streets every day in an effort to help the homeless. What had the most impact on me was that these wonderful people just kept coming. They finally convinced me to go to a shelter and started involving me in the process. Time passed, I began to have hope and then one day after I spoke in front of others, someone came up to me and told me how I had inspired and helped them.

The thought of knowing I could help others gave me a sense of purpose in life. My past had given me an advantage because I was a living example of what was possible when all seemed lost. I was constantly honored by others trusting me, wanting to listen to me and looking up to me as a symbol of what could be and the power and possibility of change. Today I am a Certified Peer Specialist, A Targeted Case Manager for The Community Treatment Team. I have speaking engagements every week where I get to reach people who are homeless.

I am happy, joyous and free today. I sponsor others and through this, I give back and I'm reminded every day of my purpose and thankful for how far I've come.

**KEITH A KIRKLAND**

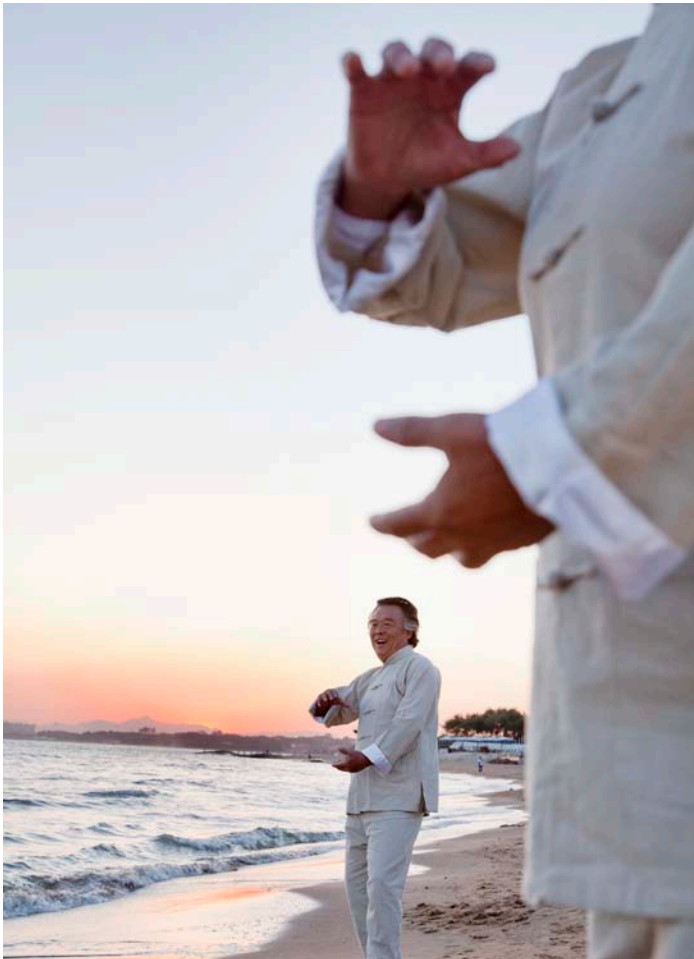
# FEATURE STORIES

## Respect and Purpose

Simply having a job is one thing. Having a job that you love and having co-workers all working toward a common purpose and goal is quite another. These things make you look forward to going to work. I've worn a number of hats in my journey and had a lot of interesting experiences but the most rewarding feeling of all for me was getting the respect of my peers and just people in general. Other people saw things in me and believed I could do things that I didn't. Their belief and confidence in me motivated me to complete all sorts of tasks. And I was even able to inspire others. I was a volunteer for the Compeer program in Philadelphia and because of what I did; my cousin in Sarasota, Florida was inspired to bring the program to Florida.

One day in the year 2000, I was on the El and a huge poster advertising Compeer transfixed me. You see, previous to this, not only had I experienced a breakdown but I had left Compeer. To this day, I believe this was a sign from God telling me to return to Compeer which I did and which facilitated the beginning and turning point of my recovery at that time. All along I believe that God was blessing me because people just kept believing in me even when I doubted myself. I've now been a consultant for seven years for DBHIDS. I came in at the beginning of the Transformation Initiative, brilliantly started by Dr. Arthur Evans. I am honored and privileged to even help set mental health policy by brainstorming with others as well as being involved with a number of trainings. I am more than fortunate to be doing work that I enjoy. I have faith that opportunity will continue to come even though I am getting older. Once a month I speak at my church and this has become my most rewarding activity.....

**JEFF SHAIR**



## 21 Years

I was incarcerated for 21 years out of a 40 year sentence. In my first year locked up, I tried to commit suicide. I was 40 when I went in so I was sure I would die in jail. After the suicide attempt I started to pray, I saw no other way. I asked God to take over and do what he would with me. I was introduced to a program in jail that showed me what I had to offer, what I was worth and another way of looking at things. Through this program, I found my self-worth through helping others as well as changing my outlook. This went on for the next 14 years and with this and my faith I became grounded. I ended up becoming a counselor to others in jail. My first two attempts at parole were refused. Two weeks later I was awakened and told to pack up. I was being released on a new pre-release program. In my mind, it was God who released me.

Culture shock can be paralyzing, scary, interesting and sometimes just plain funny. When I came back to society, not only did it seem like going from the Flintstones to the Jetsons, but there were people walking around doing what appeared to be talking to themselves. I saw a number of them doing this and thought maybe I was in The Twilight Zone or Outer Limits or something. Coincidentally, one or more of the people said my name in their conversations. My last name is Williams, which is very common, so I heard it more than once and thought they were talking to me which to my embarrassment, found out they weren't.

I was out to dinner with my brother at a restaurant and saw this strange occurrence again. When my brother finally stopped laughing, he informed me that the people I thought were talking to themselves had Bluetooths and were actually talking to other people.

My next goal was to gain employment but the first great experience I had was simply acquiring and putting on a set of civilian clothes. Putting on those clothes brought a tear to my eye and totally affirmed and validated the fact that I was a free man now.

My next goal was to get a job. I had worked in 20 of my 21 years in jail so I was used to having something definite to do every day. I went everywhere looking for employment. I got turned down a lot due to my age just as much as the criminal record I now had.

It is a fact that I had to make money to live but what really kept me going was needing to feel like a productive member of society and I also had a fierce independent streak in me that made it hard for me to accept help from family and friends. I kept knocking on doors and one man who had been in jail himself gave me a chance at a uniform company.

The feeling of going to work every day free was a feeling very hard to explain. It was more than liberation. I wasn't at my job for a year and I got laid-off. There was so much gratitude in me for what had and was happening in my life that I had no room to feel bad or doubtful as to my future. And most of all my faith in God was complete. To me, my release was proof-positive that he had his hand on me. To me further proof came when a family member not only gave me an apartment but charged me very low rent and as if that wasn't enough, they told me that I didn't have to start paying for a few months.

Today my life has continued to move forward. I do a number of things too numerous to mention here but what I will proudly say is that everything I do today is in the field of helping others and I am fulfilled.

**CLYDE J. WILLIAMS**



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

## *How we Feel...*

*The road we travelled brought us here and we have travelled far.  
We came to heal and face our fears,  
and this we've done thus far.  
We write to share our heart and faith and show that hope is real.  
Our higher power said to share, so this is how we feel.....*

## Suit and Tie

Smiling in the shower  
as the water cascades down.  
Waiting for the hour  
when I leave and hit the town  
Passing by reflective windows and  
feeling a different high  
Knowing how sharp I am and  
....so clean in my suit and tie.

Arriving where I work,  
nodding hello and feeling a part.  
Dignity is my perk  
and purpose is in my heart.

I push up to the desk,  
push one key and start my day.  
I'm feeling good about myself,  
knowing I'm on my way.

Too soon the day ends  
I pack up with a smile-  
thinking today about what I've done,  
and knowing I'll be back in a little while.

I take my time walking,  
... there's a twinkle in my eye  
I stand taller now when I'm talking-  
Man!..... I love this suit and tie.

I hang it in the closet  
when I finally arrive home  
it may be my first one  
but real soon it won't be alone  
I like the feeling of walking,  
but feeling like I can fly.  
I feel that way each and every time  
I put on my suit and tie.....

**STORM**

## Tomorrow

I'm getting up tomorrow and going to work  
I like my job-being helpful and being a clerk.  
Some days I forget to even look at the time  
I get so wrapped up in what I do  
that what I do, is all that's on my mind.  
People ask me questions and depend on me,  
so I study to be the best I can be.  
Every night I pray and thank the God that I  
know  
I thank him for tomorrow and a place to go  
I thank him for this feeling  
And I thank him for this healing  
And these thanks that I give are never hollow  
Even though I give thanks every day..  
...I always thank him for tomorrow.....

**BERT**



# THE LAST WORD

**DIGNITY AND PURPOSE COMBINED WITH RECOGNITION IS** often the much needed recipe for a hopeless soul, a misguided or confused mind and sometimes even a broken heart. Purpose and focus can take our minds away from pain, loss, suffered indignities and ignorance. Effort and a job well done can erase stigma, instill confidence and the courage to explore, expand and sometimes simply, just try again and again, remembering what was and is possible.

One commonality throughout what virtually everyone shared was how someone or something inspired them and/or had faith in them. In recovery there is no greater power than the power of sharing. We have the awesome privilege of plowing the road for others to travel freely with belief and hope. We get to share in success and validate our very existence by what we do, those we help and the majestic beauty of growth.

Through work, assignments and careers we hold our heads higher everyday as our existence is flavored with purpose and vision. Each issue of "Expressions in Recovery" Is a joy and privilege for me and once again I am reminded why.

As I interviewed the contributors for this issue, I watched their faces light up. I saw smiles outshining the sun as they proudly related their experiences and the unmatched experience of change and growth. Some spoke of having dignity for the first time in their lives and others spoke of the unspeakable gratitude of regaining what was lost.

I too remember that first suit and tie, that first assignment where others had confidence in me. I remember walking and/or riding to work excited-feeling a part of something meaningful and the sweet taste of fulfillment and camaraderie.

I implore others to keep sharing their experiences, resources, skills and most of all vision- a vision that lets us all see the miraculous power of change, opportunity and hope that is there for us all.....Thank you.



**GIL GADSON  
EDITOR**

**EXPRESSIONS  
IN RECOVERY**