THE EMPTY SEAT

Heads bowed in prayer
gratitude for this day.
Respect and a listening ear
for heads that’ve turned gray

Laughter from children
running to and fro
trying to stay focused
so my mind won’t go
to places of loss and utter defeat.
Because at this table,
I still see the empty seat.
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 9, 2013
Editor’s Note

Often, and unintentionally, we sometimes forget there is so much more taking place than our own individual wants, needs and desires. At a great number of dinner tables on any given day —there will be empty seats.

For so many, the reasons are endless. Some have passed on, others are ill, some may not be wanted, others may have to make seemingly impossible choices just to preserve their sanity and sobriety. Some may be lost.

In recovery, our strength lies in each other. It is in the examples we set, our commonality and the trails we leave for others to follow.

Gil Gadson
**My best friend**

I don’t know how to share my grief, I don’t know if anyone cares about it the way I do. I sometimes feel weak and feel like I should be stronger than this and then I get angry because it hurts. I feel foolish asking people how long I will feel like this and sometimes I’m afraid to talk about it because I know I’ll cry. He was my best friend and my brother.

Michael Stevens

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**All alone**

I keep seeing her sitting alone. She’ll smile if you smile at her but then it quickly disappears again and I can see her shrink back into herself. I wish it didn’t bother me. She’s not my problem or responsibility but she’s always alone. I wonder if she got somebody who cares about her. I guess I don’t have no choice, I’ve got to ask her or talk to her or something. It just bugs me that she’s always alone and she seems to be a nice person. It’s probably bugging me because what kind of person am I if I just don’t care.

Lisa Pinkett

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**Even still**

I still miss my son. I’ve accepted his death and I’ve forgiven myself for not being there all those years but it’s still unsettling when the loss of him hits. It strikes like a thief without warning. Depending on what I’m doing and where I’m at determines how much and how long it lasts. In all honesty, with time, it has gotten much easier to deal with but I still feel like it often has a life of its own and can strike anytime. I still love and miss my son.

Orlando Gadson

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**In the beginning**

when I found out my brother had stage four cancer of the pancreas and the lungs I was numb. I didn’t know how to talk about it because of the pain. Even with all my family members involved, I still feel alone with the pain and thought of losing him which we’ve been told is definitely going to happen. All I think of now besides my own grief is what I can do for him and I constantly worry what’s in his heart and mind and if he’s scared.

Celeste Riley

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**When will she cry**

I’m still wondering when my mom is going to cry. My brother, her son, passed away suddenly from a massive heart attack. I can’t imagine what’s going through her head. I can see pain in her face and sometimes I get mad because I wonder if her pride won’t let her cry and let it out. She’s 86-years-old and I’m scared of what it may be doing to her. I have no idea what to say to her and I’ve been told by my brothers and sisters that I should just give her space but I’m worried. I haven’t seen her cry.

Annette King

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**I wanna’ be trusted**

How long do I have to keep proving myself? My whole family still treats me like an outsider. I know I did a lot of horrible things but it’s been a year and they still treat me like it was yesterday. My sponsor says I can’t expect what I did to just go away when I want it to. He says the forgiveness thing ain’t up to me.

I guess I just gotta wait. To keep it real, I did alot of bad things to them and myself for years. It really hurts sometimes because when I’m around them it seems like they are having fun without me even though I’m right there.

I wish they trusted me more. This is really hard and I feel I’m by myself a lot.

Gary Mays

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**In this camaraderie, some still feel lonely, cut off, depressed and disillusioned as they anticipate varying degrees of sadness due to loss of loved ones, alienation, economic hardships and separation which can often be difficult because I just lost my aunt to drugs. She had been using for years and she had already suffered a few drug-induced strokes. You would think me and my family should have not been surprised at her death but death has a way of always feeling like a surprise and it can always catch you off guard. We thought she would pull through—she didn’t.**

- Dora Stevenson
When I was a kid my holidays, summers and family reunions were spent in Ohio on my granddad’s farm. I can never remember being happier.

There were horses, hogs, pigs, chickens, cows and even a bull. Everything we ate came from scratch—nothing tasted better. For a young girl, this was pure heaven. I had eight aunts. One of my aunts was only three years older than me and we became the closest. She came to live with me and my family when I was thirteen.

My aunt was beautiful, she could cook, she was kind and she always had a way of making people feel very special and safe. My aunt was my idol. She did things other people only dreamed about. She had boyfriends but not just any kind of guy. Her boyfriends had influential jobs, worked in the music industry and were at her beck and call. More times than I can count she included me on her dates.

She never knew I was a spy sent by my mom to keep tabs on her. I don’t think she ever cared because she always made me feel like she wanted me there.

When my aunt started using, my feelings for her never changed. I never stopped loving her and never judged her. I loved her too much. The last stroke that killed her still hit us all by surprise even though it wasn’t her first. Something about who she was just made it so hard to accept that she was gone. In my journey, addiction also became a problem but gratefully, that’s in my past.

When my aunt died, I remember thinking how thankful and grateful I felt that it didn’t happen when I was still in my addiction. I cannot imagine how I would have handled it. My recovery allows me to see things just as they are. Some things I can change and some things I cannot. Most of all, I just remain grateful for the life I have. I will never forget my aunt. Our times were priceless.

Dora Stevenson

Hoagie

We were together for 22 years. He was nicknamed Hoagie because he just loved his hoagies. We were very close. We went everywhere together.

Of course, there were times when we got on each other’s nerves and may have had a few arguments, but we always found a way to stay together.

I loved my man more than I could ever say. He was kind, funny, he loved helping others. He really loved his oldies music and would bring his music outside. We would sing and dance on the porch with the neighbors and we would dance with each other.

Hoagie was very well liked in the neighborhood, everyone loved him. We did so much together. The ordinary things were so much fun with him. We took many walks and loved to just window shop. He always held my hand and had no problem freely telling me how much he loved me.

One morning he went to take care of some business and as he was coming back down the street, one of my neighbors asked if I had given him her message. As he walked up to my neighbor, they started joking about something the neighbor had said. The love of my life turned as someone called him and lost his footing and balance and fell backwards, hitting his head. I at first I thought he was okay and maybe joking.

I called his name and he didn’t answer. I remember he had the most peaceful look on his face. He was taken to the hospital where it was discovered that he had a blood clot that if not removed, would kill him instantly.

After removing the blood clot, the love of my life fell into a coma and remained there for the next year and a half before he died.

I cannot explain the feeling of loss and pain. Pain like this isolates you and makes you feel so alone and helpless. These days I’m picking myself back up. We were truly in love and it’s been pointed out that one of the best things I can do now is to do what he would have wanted—be happy.

He always made me laugh and liked to make me happy. So, I’ll hold on to the memories and for myself and him. I will move on and try to keep the smile on my face that I know he loved.

Arezona Cheeseboro
I had a friend

I had a friend. I met him at Narcotics Anonymous. We ran into each other often. He was much younger than me but we became friends.

We both loved music and knew some of the same people. I saw so much potential in this young man. He was very talented and possessed many skills. I just saw a world of potential for this young man and to me his future looked so bright.

He had been clean for seven months and even though he was well loved he never really told anyone what was really going on inside.

One morning he was found dead from a heroin overdose.

Everyone who knew him were shocked, stunned and crying. I was just numb.

The fact that others were an emotional mess and I wasn’t bothered me somewhat, it made me feel cold and jaded. The truth was that I have seen so much death. So many have left so suddenly, either underestimating how lethal drugs can be or being swallowed up by their own misery.

Reflection on these things leaves a cold harsh reality about the deadliness and folly of taking drugs. Even though drugs seem to give temporary escape there is no love, peace, serenity or happiness in self-medicating. I choose to stay in recovery. I choose to keep the truth on the table.

I choose to surround myself with those who are about what I’m about. And mostly I choose to share and give hope, belief, and a faith that propels others to keep moving forward. I will also keep an eye out and stay aware to notice when someone else is struggling and crying out for help because someone else noticed when I was shutting down and near the end of my rope.

We in the recovery community will have to make a stronger effort to stay aware of our brothers and sisters. We cannot take it for granted that they are always okay. I wasn’t—but I’m still here.

Eric Sollenberger

My sister’s husband died two years ago. Everyone who met or just saw them always thought they were on their honeymoon, even after they had been together for years. When he died, my sister was resolved to thinking that she could never find happiness again. I did my best to be there for her at all times. She revealed more of her heart at this time than at any time in our lives.

And as she told me her innermost feelings, heartaches and secrets, I felt us becoming closer than we had ever been. And as we became closer my concern became greater. Now, I must be clear, my sister is one of the strongest human beings I have ever met, male or female but my concern stemmed from me knowing that she lived a distance away and now lived alone and I worried about her heart.

However, through my concern, I learned. I had constantly sought to change what was not mine to change and I ultimately realized there was only one thing I could offer that came without assumption and judgment. It came one evening as we talked on the phone and she spoke of the things he used to do to entertain her and how he could always make her laugh. And then it hit me and I simply said to her “Hey sis, what do you think he would want you to be doing right now”?

The phone went silent for a minute and then as she composed herself, she whispered into the phone that he always said he loved when she laughed, she said he always told her she looked even prettier when she was laughing and he always kissed her after she stopped and looked at her in a way that filled her up. He really loved to see her laugh. She thanked me that day and even through the pain of loss, she laughed before she hung up the phone.

I think love has a power that transcends death in that memories brought on by love can live forever in our hearts. I’m happy that my sister has found those heartfelt memories and pulls them out when she needs them. And now she laughs again.

Gilbert Gadson
How we feel
The road we traveled
brought us here,
And we have traveled far.
We came to heal and face our fears
And this we’re doing thus far.
We write to share our heart and hope
And show that hope is real.
Our higher power said to share...
...so this is how we feel.

A new music
My smile was gone,
all colors were gray
The mornings were no longer mine.
My ears couldn’t hear
I was full of fear—
that I would never, ever fi nd
A way to live and love again
with the one I’d loved forever gone.
Then someone loved me
and brought music back
so I’d hear a diff erent song.
The song I’d heard had made me helpless
and weak,
Not letting me see my way was wrong.
I’d chased hope away
And without faith ,
my belief seemed forever gone.
I’d wallowed in pain and helplessness
each and every day
until a song was played
bringing life again-
to a heart that had become made of clay.
The lyrics danced and gave me strength
As I rediscovered hope.
They suggested I dance and sing again
So I’d be able to cope.
He can’t come back
But I’m still here...
And I know he’d want me to smile
So maybe this pain
will ease a bit and I’ll cry for only a little while.
There are others here
who may need who I am
So I gotta’ get rid of this fear-
this fear of living and smiling again
and living inside of my tears........
Orlando

What should I do?
I can’t measure her heart
or the pain inside. It doesn’t belong to me.
I love her deeply and feel pain too,
but the lost was hers.
I wanna’ tell her to stop crying;
But who am I to say when she is done?
I’m feeling loss too and I feel guilty
and hopeless too
because my hugs aren’t stopping her tears.
All I have to give is my love
and I don’t know if it’s enough.
But I can’t stop giving it to her
I wish God would give me a way
to take some of her pain away.
All I know is to keep loving her
...and sometimes be still.....
Kamar Jenkins

I miss you
When all is said and done
with each setting of the sun....
I miss you
When need exceeds reason
when want is in every season...
I miss you
When pain is forgotten
when knowing, in my heart -you got in....
I miss you
I don’t know why
I don’t even want to try
to forget you.
With every breath I take
I breathe for your sake
knowing you exist.
With every minute that goes by
I count the seconds as they fly—
and then I remember why...
I miss you
I do...

So, no matter where you go
there’s something you need to know—
as life ebbs and flows...
as always,
once again,
forever,
I miss you......
Storm

Danny
His name was Danny
a simple and friendly name.
He was my mom’s boyfriend...
but he belonged to me.
kind of heavyset, big belly-
but strikingly handsome and he dressed
his butt off.
But most of all... Danny loved me.
I loved my sisters and brothers
but he belonged to me.
He had a smile that could melt your heart
and make you forget he got you mad.
His laughter made you laugh
whether you wanted to or not—
and his stories took you to foreign lands
and unseen places.
His songs were songs I never heard
and he danced the Danny dance for us all.
Danny is gone now
it’s been many years
I am now a man...
but he is still here.
Everyone I line up that cue ball
I remember how he taught me the fine
good art of shooting pool.
He is still here
when I meet someone new and
remember
that he taught me the power of humor
and the beauty of being who you are.
He is still here
when I tell someone new and
remember
that he taught me the power of humor
and the beauty of being who you are.
He is still here.
I talk and listen to the young with all
my heart, gaining their trust and love
the way he had mine.
And I hold on fiercely to the little boy
he loved so much and who he paid so much
attention to...
And I try to love as he did. Freely and
openly... with all the fun and humor in
the world...thank you Danny
You are still here my man...in
me........Junie
We all have our struggles—I certainly have. One of my biggest personal struggles has been the loss of my older brother. He is alive literally, but figuratively.

For the last 34 years, I’ve watched my only brother destroy his life through drug addiction. He’s never been married, raised children or lived on his own. As far as I am concerned, he’s never really lived at all. He sheltered himself in the confines of the room in my mother’s home that we once shared as kids, surrounded by the same posters we hung as young adolescents. I am deeply saddened because there is nothing that I can do but hope and pray for some divine intervention. I honestly don’t think he will survive much longer. My 80-year-old mother is his only lifeline. She is frail, and in declining health. What will he do—where will he go when mom dies.

Our relationship has been too tumultuous for me to even consider having him live with me. But, still I struggle, because he is lost, and he is family. As I said, we all have our struggles.

For me working in the behavioral health field, first as a youth counselor fresh out of college in 1984, and now as Communication Director for the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, has given me great satisfaction. It gave me the satisfaction of helping others live, grow, and truly face life’s challenges, while I’ve faced my own.

We cannot hide from our demons. They will only manifest themselves at an inopportune time.

I am very proud to be a part of this publication. It has been a source of motivation and inspiration. I am especially proud of Gil Gadson, the driving force behind these stories. His passion and commitment to supporting other people in recovery, has given me a very special gift.

For me, there is no greater gift than the ability to touch a person and leave a positive impression on their life. Expressions in Recovery has given me that opportunity.

And for that, I am grateful to the entire Philadelphia recovery community for fighting the good fight. I’m not saying things are all rosy. I’m saying you keep fighting the fight.

This is my last issue as Executive Editor of Expressions in Recovery. So as I close another very important chapter in my own personal and professional journey, I leave feeling somewhat fulfilled in knowing that I touched the lives of people who truly want to grow.

But, more importantly I have been touched by so many caring people, and, I too have grown.

The Struggle Continues

Gary L. Brown
Executive Editor and Founder
Expressions In Recovery