

HOPE OUTSIDE THE WALLS



Writing for the
Soul Workshop™



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Workshop™

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*“Something negative in your life
created something positive for
us.”*

-Texas ReEntry Services Client

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Forward by Kay Smith

I grew up in a family of five kids, four boys and myself. We were not the story-book family. Far from it. Ours was a life of poverty, adultery, child molestation, and children raising children. None of us graduated from high school, and nearly all of us left home at an early age. As adults, the five of us went our separate ways. I got married, raised a family, and became a contributing member of my community. My brothers, on the other hand, never honored their marriages, abused drugs, and sexually abused children.

In the late 1970s, my brothers got involved in organized criminal activities around the manufacturer and distribution of methamphetamines. In 1983, my brother Gary died from drug abuse. He was getting

the drugs from his other brothers. In 1985, my three remaining brothers were arrested and sentenced to a total of 582 years in prison. Four years later, I embarked on an educational journey, beginning with obtaining my GED, and then continuing with an Associate of Arts degree in Mental Health, a Bachelor of Science degree in Family Science, and a Master of Science degree in Social Work.

While visiting my brothers in prison, I realized that they would face many barriers and challenges when it came time for them to reintegrate back into their communities. Like them, many formerly incarcerated persons are today, returning to broken homes and low-income communities, adding their numbers to the existing indigent, poorly-educated, and under-employed

population. These ex-offenders lack critical documents such as state IDs, birth certificate, and social security cards which are required for employment, housing, and community services. Many have physical and mental illnesses, requiring immediate enrollment in community health care programs. Sadly, many experience adjustment disorders and some suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

In 1998, I created Texas ReEntry Services INC., a 501(c) 3 non-profit agency, to remove those barriers and to assist with the challenges for ex-offenders who, like my brothers, choose opportunities, rather than a return to their old life and prison again. Since its conception, we have provided reentry services to over 10,000 individuals each with their own unique set of

circumstances that prevent them from returning to our communities successfully.

Methamphetamine by J. Smith

I'm not really sure how to start this letter off. It is not easy to tell a loved one goodbye. You have been the biggest part of my life for the past 20 years. I feel like I'm doing something wrong by telling you goodbye this hurts me down to the every given of my being because I love you so much for the past four years I have not been able to take a breath without thinking about you.

You have been there for me through the best times of my life. You were there for me when all three of my girls were born. You were there for my marriage. You have even comforted me through the bad times. Whenever I would get sick, you were there for me every time.

You have always made me feel better no matter what. When Uncle James passed away remember I was in the halfway house, you were the first one to hold me tight. You were the one that took all my pain away just like you have done for me in the past. You have loved me more than my mother, brother, friends, wife or children. You have been there for me every time that I would call you.

You are so loyal to me that If I went more than a couple of days without calling upon you, you would come track me down. If I weren't home, you would look for me at the lake, Easy Mart and even Walmart. There was that one time that I even tried to hide from you. I took my wife and moved to Conway Arkansas. You even found me there.

You have that; I cannot hide from you. I've never had a girlfriend as long as you, 18 years. It wasn't until we got married and I put you in my veins that I realize that I loved you more than my wife and children. It's hard to explain the feeling that I had as you ran up my arms and through my body. I have never had anyone or anything make me feel as good as you do.

For this reason, it's so hard to tell you goodbye. I love you so much even though I have lost everything and everyone that has ever love me. 17 years of marriage is down the drain one of my kids won't speak to me. I've had to truck stolen because of you. I have nowhere to live and no more decent clothes to wear.

Even with that being said; I love you, but this marriage is not working out for me anymore. I am divorcing you as of now, so please do not bother to call me because I have changed my number. You can try to find me, and I know that you will try, but you won't find me I'm not the same person I don't look the same, I don't talk to same, I don't walk the same. It will do you no good any longer.

I'm taking my life away from you and giving it back to my Father (Jesus Christ) so that he will allow me to live.

P.S. You need to leave my family alone as well. I beg of you to please don't bother my little girls.

I'm Truly Sorry by Anonymous

As I start my day, I give thanks to God for the gift of another day. I can't help but wonder how my son has tossed and turned with dreams of his father not being there. When these thoughts fill my mind, I can't help but feel angry for the pain I've brought to him during the first nine years of his life.

I have been on probation for 17 years, and during this time I married a wonderful woman. She's truly a gift from God. We have two beautiful children one nine, and one who is six. I have another chance to do things right. Yet I see the pain every day that I bring because of the past decisions I chose to make and how it weighs in on them.

On my son's first day of school, I should have been there, but I wasn't. It would have

violated a condition of my probation if I chose to go. He was a total trooper. Head held high, shoulders back and a smile from ear to ear, but deep down I know he wanted me to walk him in. Mom tells me that he asked why I couldn't come. She tries to explain, "Sometimes Daddy can't make every event because he has to go to work. But he'll be there afterward to play ball and ride bikes with you."

My little buddy, and my sweet princess I am so sorry for causing so much confusion. So much uncertainty -all because of my weakness. I'm still learning to connect with other people, but you guys make it so much easier. Thank you for being so wonderful, so patient and so forgiving.

Love you always.

Recovering by J. Rios

My name is Javier Rios, and I'm a recovering addict from Fort Worth, Texas. I was born October 1, 1996, to a beautiful woman named Virginia.

When I was a baby, my mother left my father and married a man that she hardly even knew. He was a drug user. I have two sisters by my real father and a two-year-old my step-dad. He was incarcerated and had to serve two years in prison, but he had already done time before he got married to my mother. My second year in elementary was the first time I saw my mother smoke crack cocaine, and she was so high that she was hiding under a pillow stuttering telling me "B-B-Boy get out!!" Every day that I came home, she was doing the same thing in her room. I start seeing different guys come

over to hang with her in the room with the doors closed and sometimes she would even make us go outside. During my fourth year of elementary school we moved to the east side of Fort Worth to a littler neighborhood name "Poly" with one of my mom's friends because she couldn't afford the apartment no more, so I guess you can say we were homeless, but I never told anyone. My mother was still using, and that's where I witnessed my first drug deal at only six years old but never really thought about it because when you're a child, you seem to forget things that aren't your business or maybe that's just how I was raised. My brothers (Ilan, Eric and, Mico) started getting involved in a gang known as the "5 Deuce Hoover Crips" and always started wearing blue because that's their color. My sisters (Lucia, Thalia, Liegiea, and Lety) on

the other hand were the best sisters a brother could ask for. They treated me special cause I was the baby brother and knew that our mom was on drugs. They watched over me and made sure I stayed on the right path in school. My step dad was released from prison in 2002, and when he saw where we lived, he automatically became angry with my mother. I don't know why. He's the one that introduced her to the drug. They got into an argument that night, and he hit her in the face with his palm because she told him she had sex with other dudes just to try to pay for our apartment that we moved from. I cried that night because I wished I could have helped her, but I was too young to get a job so I just cried my way to sleep wondering if my mom was alright. That year my stepdad got a job driving and delivering for an ice company,

and he saved up enough money to move us in with another drug user of crack cocaine and had no intentions of quitting no time soon. Eric (My Brother) started getting into a lot of trouble at school, and that lead him to a T.Y.C. (Texas Youth Commission) located in Gainesville, TX where he served 18 months, but before he came home things were getting worse. My sister (Lety) ended up getting pregnant a sixteen and kept the baby, so she started leaving the house a lot. I used to want to go with her, but she knew that I still had to go to school so she told me one day I would be able to go where ever she go. I was glad I was gonna have a nephew and show him how to play football, but when she had the baby it was different than I thought it would be. When my brother came home, he was worse than when he left. He started fighting a lot and getting into

drugs again. He started hanging with dudes who sold drugs and carried guns. He started doing the same thing. My mom and stepdad started buying from him. He even gave them some for free so that they could try it to see if it was good. My other brother started following in his footsteps. I was only nine years old when I witnessed all of this. So, I didn't know any better; I just remember seeing all this. Mother's sister (Ligeia) got pregnant at 16, which includes all my sister at the age of 16. I didn't get it. I was wondering why they all got pregnant at that age, but I guess that's up to the Man above. My mother lost all her friends behind it. Her and my stepdad really didn't care about anything but when they were going to get their next bump. Eric started taking Xanax also known as "4 bars", and would do crazy stuff like go outside and shoot guns and beef

with rival gangs which were normally the "Bloods." My other brother "Ilan" started hanging with him all the time, and they became real close. There were days where they would argue with each other and get into a fist fight, but Eric always won because he was older than Ilan.

My sister Lucia and I started spending the night with my real dad to get away from the madness sometimes. I never wanted any of my other brothers and sisters to come over because I felt some kind of way for leaving them, but again I was too young to have any say so.

One day my mom had hit my sister (Lucia) in the face for not doing her homework, so Eric confronted her about it because my

stepdad was at work. When he was talking to her I was sitting beside her, and I could smell the alcohol on her breath. I never really thought anything of it, but it made my brother angry that my mom hit her in the face. When Eric was high he was not the brother that I remember growing up with, which kind of scared me, but I was too young to tell him how I felt. Maybe I was afraid to come off as a friendly little brother and he might not want me to be around him. These things went on for years. My parents smoking crack, my brother selling them crack and all my sisters raising babies. My oldest sister (Lety) moved out and started going to College to be a dentist, but she winded up having two more kids and had to quit school to get a job to support her new kids plus the one she already had. Ligeia my other sister was sexually assaulted when

she was 17 years old. She was at her friend's house when a guy that they thought they knew offered to take her out to eat. The next morning my stepdad got a phone call saying that she was at JPS hospital and the police needed to ask some questions about the incident. My dad was angry that this happened to her, so he made her stay at home 24/7, and that drove her crazy. She ran away but not for long because he reported her as a runaway. She was picked her up from her baby daddy's house.

One day I fell asleep in the living room, and Eric had company over to smoke and to "post up", so he carried me to the back room where my sisters (Ligeia and Lucia) were sleeping. I went back to sleep thinking that everything was okay, but that day changed

my whole life. A part of me died that day. I was awakened by my stepdad saying "Come in the kitchen, Ilan just shot Eric! " When you're just waking up, it takes time for things to register in your head and to realize what's really going on. I saw Eric laying on the kitchen floor gasping for air, but I didn't see any blood. There were two holes in his white T-Shirt with burn marks because Ilan had the pistol against his stomach when he pulled the trigger. Ilan called the police on himself because he was so full of the 4 bars that he really didn't have any feeling or remorse at the time. The news reporters surrounded our house hours later and was asking my parents a bunch of questions and my brother Mico as well. My parents didn't even cry when they pronounced him dead. They were getting so high that following week that they forgot they had to plan Eric's

burial. Ilan was being held in juvenile because he was 16 when he shot and killed Eric, who was 22 when he died. At the time of the shooting, there were four others that were in the house. They all had to go down to the police station and get questioned because they witnessed the whole thing and what lead to the shooting. They were all asked where the guns came from. The guns were all reported stolen from different places.

Ilan wasn't able to attend the funeral because he was still locked up, but the day after the incident he called home and asked how Eric was. My stepdad told him that he died. Ilan went crazy and broke down on the phone. Ilan told him that he didn't mean to hurt him he was just trying to get him to quit beating him up because he was tripping on

the Xanax. Eric was thinking that it was Ian trying to disrespect him when really he was just telling him the truth that everybody was asleep and he shouldn't be bringing people in and out the house while everybody was resting. When I went to Eric's wake, it was like I finally came to my senses that he was never coming back and wouldn't be there to protect me or make me laugh no more. A couple of days after we buried him my mom wound up having two strokes and went to the hospital to recover, but she was back home in no time and was back to the drugs.

In 2008 my mom quit using crack cocaine and moved out from my stepdad's house to get fully away from the drugs but she wanted us to come live with her, but we were so use to doing whatever we wanted to that we decided to stay with my stepdad.

Ilan came home in self-defense for taking someone's life. He was on the right for a whole month then I started noticing that he was acting like Eric more and more, but we never mention Eric's name ever again. It was like nothing happened that night and we went on with our lives. Ilan started robbing people and brought my sister (Liegia) into the scene. So one day they robbed a dude and took his truck, plus his money. The Police were told who did it and came and arrested Liegia. Then they got Ilan in the truck that was reported stolen so he was busted and served 22 months in T.Y.C. Liegia got 6 years at T.D.C. They charged her with aggravated robbery and she doesn't come home until 2017 because she wants to make her whole bid so she can be able to have her freedom instead of worrying about her parole or anything. I

only had my brother Mico and my sister Lucia at home with me now and they wasn't really a bonding with my brother and me at first, but the more time we spent together the more we started understanding each other.

I started smoking weed in the 7th grade with my best friend Christian who I been knowing since the 4th grade. At first I was scared, but I remember Eric smoking at the house and rolling it up in a "Blunt" as they call it. I started acting differently in school. I became quiet, and isolated myself from the kids in school. Plus, I started skipping a lot with other troubled kids who was doing the same thing. My stepdad then started selling weed and started letting me smoke in the house like my brothers, and that made me feel grown -like I had the best stepdad ever. But

in reality, I know he might have felt guilty for smoking crack in front of us for 13 years straight. So, he thought if we were going to do a drug he wanted us to do it in the house instead of trying to hide it from him only to get in trouble by the police for getting caught by them. I started stealing weed from him to support my habit. I'd take like a whole zip (28 grams) because he had pounds of it. He started letting me bag up his weed for him. He even taught me how to use my first scale and how much everything cost and what amount of weed I have to give them. I went from smoking "corn" (which is cannabis but with a low THC level) then got introduced to Xanax, and I fell in love with the feeling. It had me; it was like it took all my stress and depression away. I was finally free! I felt like everything was alright, but It was far from alright. I started stealing

money from my stepdad because the Xanax's made me feel like he owed me for treating us like we were little brats when we were young and was smoking crack. Now that I look at it in a sober vision, he didn't make me who I am today. I chose to make the decisions I made, and I wish I could forgive him for it, but somewhere in my heart I still have that hate. I broke into my first house at 16, and what happened changed my life or maybe just for a little bit. The neighbors called the police while I was still in the house. When I opened the front door to leave with a TV, a police officer was standing in front of me with a pistol directly at my face. I spent my first night in the Tarrant County Jail. I was trying to call my stepdad, but he didn't pick up the phone. The only person who came to visit me was my real dad and my sister Lucia. He told me I

needed to come live with him so that I wouldn't get into any more trouble, but when you're in jail, it's like you would do anything to get out even if that means lying. But it didn't feel like a lie at the time if you understand where I'm coming from. I moved in with my real dad and started a sober lifestyle but not for long because my father is a real strict parent. He is a person of God like he always wanted me to go to church with him, but I always made an excuse on why I couldn't go. He never really forced it on me. He suggested that I should find God, but I started hanging out with the same people and doing the same old things. I started going to my stepdad's house every day again getting weed and selling it, knowing that I signed for five years' probation., I just thought I had to be real careful this time around. My brother Mico

started selling crack again because he was having a hard time getting a job, but then he was pulled over and had 31 grams of cooked crack on him. He signed for eight years in T.D.C, but he only did 24 months and got out on parole. While he was locked up, Ilan got out of T.Y.C. Once again one day I looked at him and thought "*You killed our bother!*" I tried to put myself in his shoes ...then I felt his pain. I felt what he probably felt every day when he wakes up, and I couldn't imagine how strong his mind must be to deal with that. One day he asked me, "If Eric would have lived, do you think he would have forgiven me?"

"Yes. He was our brother, and he couldn't have stayed mad forever." That night we told each other we loved each other for the first time that I could remember. I ended up

violating probation and had to do six months at a Substance Abuse Felon Punishment Facility (SAFP). Since being here, I really have got to know myself. A man here named Eric Jones convinced me to share my story. He said it would help me on the inside. He was right. It has helped me a lot, but I hope my story will help you too. Telling my story will hopefully get you to understand that you don't have to be a product of your environment, and that you need to get on the right path before it's too late. I know my Higher Power is telling me something that I already knew, but never took the time to listen to it. I'm ready to face this life with values, and to trust the truth as we say here at the Johnston Unit. I want to move back in with my birth father and tell him how sorry I am that I wasn't around him like I was supposed to be. I just hope you read this and

realize that time on this Earth is too short to
take for granted.

Levels by Paul Kurko

In my life, there has been many ups, and downs. There were times in my life when I thought that I wasn't going to make it. I would think my soul was starving.

On a couple of those rounds, there were many times that I sat in the dark, and wondered why I was in the dark. Many of my actions brought about the darkness. Many times in my life I sat there and thought to myself, *“How am I going to get out of this?”* *What’s life going to be like after I get up, and should I even try?”* There were many times that the demons from my past would show their ugly faces. Let me tell you something; my demons put the fear of God in me. In my life, there was a big lack of guidance.

Most people born into this world have a mother and a father. Both of which love their kids so much they stop the single life activities. You see, I don't know if I told you or not in my book "*Issues*", but my grandfather and my grandmother adopted three girls and one boy. The boy they adopted was my father.

Grandmother, and grand paw, they were both brilliant people. I believe that my grandmother was barren and she couldn't have kids. But don't quote me on that!

My grandparents adopted three girls that were from the same family. With them came concerns for how well they could do raising these kids. I'd heard that they had their parents shot execution style. I do not know their ages. My father came as a baby from what I heard was an Indian lady.

My grandparents were highly educated. Therefore; their way of making it in life was pretty good. The good part comes to making great decisions. Now don't get me wrong, I understand that my parents were young when I was conceived. If I'm correct, my mom was 18, and my father was 21. I was conceived on accident.

They weren't willing to work things out. My mom was unfaithful. It became one issue after another. I'm fine now with what they were to do for each other, and for me.

The moral of this part of this story is that I really didn't have the guidance I probably needed. The guidance to successfully strive for the best in life. My grandma was the one that delivered all the answers no questions asked.

Growing up, my dad was an addict. In the last few years, of my father's life, his health deteriorated due to Diabetes, which took my dad down a dark path.

To me, it was his hell on earth, and a heartache to boot.

So, when I talk about making it, I'm talking about making it in life in general. Making it in life to me is when all your bills are paid. You got food on the table, your kids are taken care of and you have a faith felt feeling that you're going to be alright.

It is the point of making it, that I relate to now that I've straightened my life up. I've been clean and off parole for almost nine years now. When I was on probation, I was messed up all the time. It surprised me that they let me off. Can you say, "LOOP HOLE!"

I fell through the cracks; it was if I was given a second chance. The wildness continued for me. The first year that I off parole was a very hard year for my wife and I. It's safe to say that 90 percent of the people in our life was always on dope.

I took it upon myself to change some of the places I went. On the cool, I quit getting high. My wife had to face her charges, so I had my boy by myself for seven months. My son saved my life hands down.

At the point when you can go to the store to get what you need to survive –you pretty much have made it in life. When you no longer fear getting up in the morning. When you do not cringe at your reflection. When the morning rituals of getting ready for a day in the, "Work Force" is something you enjoy. All these are indications that you

know you're going to make it. There are levels of addiction. At least, there was for me. I'd like to begin with a level of a making it that I'll call: Just Existing

Just Existing, not happy, nothing in life seems right. None of it seems to go right at all. The storm starts to build, and depression just keeps getting deeper and deeper. The clouds darken, the wind becomes hate filled rage. Every time you wake you dread the day.

With every day that passes, the dread became worse than the day before. It feels like losing someone you love. To exist seems all you can do. Then comes the next level: Depression

Depression kicks in, and everything in your life seems to come to a halt. When this happens in your life, you're prone to do anything to take away the pain. This is where the misconception comes in. It becomes easy to tell yourself, "*Drugs will make it better.*" This is a lie and can hurt you. Once drugs are in your body they will amp up your Dopamine levels.

The biggest thing many people don't know is that when the chemicals you ingest are gone, your body is depleted of the natural chemical. The user is then free falling in to the darkness of depression. I have seen depression take life, after life.

For those of us who make it past depression, the next level is what I call: Maintaining.

Some people think that they are living the "High Life". Nothing is wrong as long as they Maintain. This means they get up a functioning addict in the morning, drink some coffee, do some of what ever drug they enjoy and then off to work they go. They do good at work, or good enough to stay under the boss man's radar. If you talk to them, you will find it hard to see that there is anything wrong. This is from the outside looking in.

If you could look from the inside out, you would see everything that drives them. Like all the deceit they as functioning addicts have to live with.

I myself spent more than half my life in this situation right here. I thought I was doing fine. As time goes on, the disease of addiction grows worse. The addict starts to

lose control. The next level of addiction is what I call Denial.

We deny that we have a problem when those who care about us point out our addiction. We mask the problems as if I were taping off a car to be painted. We only see what was to be covered by another layer of paint. You can't see in the car ...you don't see the windows, nor the tires it will ride down the road on. They're all covered in masking tape. All you see is the pretty shiny paint. I lived most of my life masking off something from the public eye. If you can make it past this level, you've almost made it my friend.

The next level is what I call Acceptance. Life has become so unmanageable, and you know within yourself that you have a problem.

You are now willing to fight for your life. You stop being independent, and began to become dependent on a Power greater than yourself.

Many things that I learned in while in treatment have come flooding back to me as I write this! I can see now that what they taught me was not without truth. The last level is what I call: Recovery.

We'd admitted that our life had become unmanageable, and began to journey down a path to recovery. There are many paths to recovery. May you find your path now.

As I process this all on paper, I think what I was fearful of was that I would not have the chance to do what everyone else could with two parents. What I have to be thankful for

today is that I had a grandmother who loved me unconditionally. Even when I didn't understand all the issues that were in play around me.

If you're in recovery, try to stay there. There are many times that you may stumble and fall flat on your face. When you get to that point (and some of us will) get back up. Don't ever give up. Please.

Purgatory by J. Howle

Being a Meth addict is a lot more than you would think. Mentally at least. Well for me it was. After I'd burn every bridge, run away from every problem, buried every dream, I was left with just myself.

What myself loved to do more than anything besides the ritual of meth, was reminding me minute by lost minute of every bit of pain I was causing my kids. I was choosing something made out of farm chemicals in a bathtub in Waco, Texas over the two humans I once swore never to hurt.

I was living in a tent on the edge of a state park in Miserable Wells. I was living in a stolen tent -on stolen blankets just a five-minute walk away from my welding job. All this should've made me regret my choices.

It should've have made me reconsider my life.

I saw it all as penance for the pain I caused my kids.

I wasn't there.

I deserve punishment.

I wasn't there.

I needed to suffer for hurting them.

Because of an autism spectrum disorder, I have trouble connecting with people. The only time in my life that was not a hard and first rule was the first time each of my kids looked at me. The second they looked at me, I knew I'd do anything in the world to anybody to keep them from turning into me one day. Speed made me break that

promise. Speed made me hurt them. Speed made me leave them. No, I made me do all of that. I made my kids victims of speed.

I deserved every scrape, bug bite, animal scare, pipe burn, dealer beating, unshowered week and hungry night. I earned it by letting speed in. But they didn't.

As a Victim, I Created a Victim

by G. Egger

As a small child, I went through a great deal of trauma from molestation, rape, and neglect. My father traveled, and my mother was addicted to pills and had some very questionable friends. I learned early that I was alone and angry. That anger turned inward and fueled a raging addiction which I almost died from. Later, it would go on to fuel my alcoholism as well.

I had three kids starting when I was just 20 years old. We lived where I grew up, which as suburb outside of New Orleans. I was in and out of the hospital for years. Some of these trips included psych wards. Eventually, my kids were split up (different dads) because I could not totally care for them. My boys went with my parents, and

my daughter with her dad. All three of them inherited my anger and rage.

After Hurricane Katrina and all that devastation, I met my current husband and moved to Texas. I got a phone call in 2008 from my Dad. He simply told me there had been an accident, and that my son Larry (oldest) was dead from a shotgun wound. Life will never be the same. I lost a son, but Jeremy my youngest son basically lost his Dad, brother and best friend that night. Jeremy developed his own addiction to heroin and other opiates. He had been moving back and forth from my home to girlfriends, etc.

One night I was drunk while Jeremy was living with us. I got up at 7 am, and he didn't look okay. Jeremy had overdosed and was not breathing. I realized this and called 911.

Jeremy's brain was without oxygen for 2 1/2 hours. He was not supposed to live and if he did, he'd be a vegetable. Then there was a miracle. Jeremy is okay today - slightly paralyzed and stutters. We are both in recovery now. We're both sharing our hope with members of our 12-Step program and surviving together.

The anger I created in Jeremy caused his own world of hurt, pain, and addiction. An addiction that almost took his life.

Memoirs From an Imperfect Dad by M. Masburn

312 Days Clean

I want to start off by telling you two boys how much I love y'all! Words can't describe how sorry I am for not being around... I'm writing this to tell y'all about my life of addiction and a little about where I come from. I couldn't let y'all think I never loved you. I was caught up in my addiction for 21 years of my life. I'm sitting in prison right now with a sober mind ready to tell you two boys not to go down the path I've traveled. Maybe my life story can help you or maybe even others.

Let's see ...I'm originally from Pensacola, Florida born and raised! I love that city, grew up on the beach at my grandparent's

house; my mom worked hard her whole life. So, I pretty much ran the streets while she was working double shifts at Waffle House. She's a very caring mother. No matter what I've done she's always there for me, even until this very point and time in prison. Well, my father was never around much. He was a real bad alcoholic. He was in the Army during Vietnam. Not sure if that had anything to do with his addiction. He always called me and told me he was coming to pick me up, but I was on the curb by the house for hours, and he never showed up to get me. That's about all I remember about him. It seems like I turned out just like him, I was full of empty promises. I never knew how to be a father because I never had one. So, through most of my childhood, I didn't have many friends or associated with too many people. I was afraid of getting hurt and

loving someone that would hurt me just as my father had done my whole life.

I had an awesome life 'till I moved to Texas when I was almost 13 years old. I spent most of my childhood with my grandparents while my mom worked. My grandparents were great people! We called them GrandFran and PapaDon. We were always at the beach, cooking out, doing family things.

When I came to Texas at 13, I started working with my stepdad, Jim. My first day of work painting is when I found out what addiction was all about. I worked with the boss' son, Ben. He was three years older than me, and he had a truck. He'd quit school, etc. That same day after work he asked me, "Do you want to hang out tonight?" After work he came and got me,

and that very night I tried Xanax, weed and, Moonshine. My addiction started strong and out of control. From that day on, it was an everyday thing for me. I was going to school playing football, etc... I always had a job, but my checks always went to drugs. When I couldn't find any drugs, I would drink cough syrup. You can be addicted to anything. Anything that alters your mind, and way of thinking and actions. I did these things to hide my feelings from people I most loved. I hurt a lot of people in my life, people I love dearly. People that put up with my addiction and never turned their back on me no matter what. Your mom stuck by me for a long time. I put her through hell and back a few times. Time after time and I told her I'd change, but I didn't. She's a very strong loving woman. I was very lucky to have her in my life.

As I was growing up I was a very angry kid, I had a temper, and when I started to use drugs, I started selling them too.

When I became part of this crazy life, it grabbed hold of me and didn't go. I was so far into my addiction I became a monster. I used and abused people as I wanted to. Mentally and physically, I had no respect for the law or people. I got high and did what I wanted to, I didn't care about the consequences at all! Jail was a joke to me; it wasn't a punishment. It was like a vacation to me being locked up with my so-called friends and just not taking life seriously at all.

I've been left for dead on the streets many of times, and still never change. I had a gun put to my head and was robbed for everything. Still it wasn't enough to stop me,

because I was doing the same thing to the same people. God save me so many times and I never thought once to thank him until now. 34 years old and in prison –it finally clicked in my head that life is precious and you only get one life to get it right. At 34 I became a man! I'm telling you all this not to scare you or glorify anything. I want you boys to know what this type of life brings. It only brings pain and suffering to you and the people you love and care about. Life isn't always about what you want, it's about God and family and stepping up and doing the next right thing. I've got seven years invested in the system, and nothing good has ever come from the things I've done.

I started going to jail when I was 15. My stepdad and I got into it, and I damaged his truck pretty good. It was about \$12,000 worth of damage. Then when I was 18, I

went to jail for stealing computers from Wal-Mart. It was downhill from there on out. I've been caught with drugs, reckless driving, DWI's, ...the list goes on.

I don't remember much up until I met your mom. I saw her at a friend's house one night and fell in love at first sight! We hit it off. I remember that night. Her smile. Her hair. She was beautiful. I couldn't take my eyes off her. We played pool and talked all night long. We saw each other almost every day after that. I was still deep in my addiction though, and even for her, as much as I loved her, I wasn't going to stop doing what I was doing. Her mom and family didn't care much for me at all. Don't blame them though. They didn't know anything about me, but they had a good idea. My record spoke for itself, all they had to do was ask the police. They

knew me real well. Towards the end of your mom's senior year in school, she was pregnant. At the time I had some warrants out for me and using drugs heavy. Still out there in the streets selling... but I was there with your mom mostly, I was excited about having my first baby boy!

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I told myself I would always be there for you and your mom. I was in the beginning when you were born. I was there. I was so scared that day because reality hit me that I was a father. I had no clue what to do? As I said, I knew nothing about being a father; I loved you from the day I saw you! I was sober that day, but my emotions ran through me like a freight train, but I get myself together. A couple of days later, on a rainy day, we took our baby home from the hospital. I was so

excited that day. It was truly the best day of my life. Even as good as that felt, my addiction was holding on strong. I tried getting a real job and stop selling drugs, but I wasn't ready to quit. Remember, easy come-easy go. My habits were too much for me. Your mom stuck by me for a while. It was nice to be a family.

After I had a pipe roll over on my hand and took part of my finger off, I was at home. Boredom's a trigger for drug use, so I started to use heavy again. This time I went pretty far and moved out, living in a travel trailer with a friend. I was falling fast. After hitting a ditch, I flipped my car and almost died. God saved me again. And still, I never told him thanks for anything. My addiction took my sanity and family from me. It kept me from doing the next right thing, like

being a man. After that, I went to jail a lot. I can't even count the times I been, or the times I escaped with my life. Chance after chance, God gave me to get it right. But I turned my back on Him and my loved ones and acted like I didn't have a soul at all.

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I pray that you two can forgive me in time, and I hope we can be a family again. I'm going to do the best I can to make it up to both of you. This life I lived was crazy and out of control. I'm leaving some things out because some things are better left unsaid. And some things that I did would send me away for life. I lived a life full of sin. I know God will forgive me, and hope you two boys can forgive me one day also with time. The

story will jump around some so just hang in there with me.

I hope y'all never have to go through what I went through, any part or it. I'm telling you now if it feels wrong, **it is** wrong. Always do the next right thing. My life has been a downward spiral for so long that I don't even know what being on top is like. Let me fast forward a little bit. When I was in the county waiting to be sentenced this time, I had a dream about y'all and I woke up in the middle of the night in a sweat. I didn't know just yet how much time in prison I was looking at. I had four felonies, all 2 to 10 years a piece. So I got up, and sat at my desk in the middle of the night and wrote your mom a letter. My mom found her on Facebook, and they got together on the phone and read the letter to her. (Psalms 34:18) I didn't know it was your mom's

favorite verse or one of them anyways. But your mom told my mom she had a dream about me getting my life together. It was the same night I woke up in my cell in maximum security. It's crazy how God works after being apart for over six years, we still had connections in some ways. I couldn't have done any of this without Him in my life. That very same night, I gave myself to the LORD in my cell. It was the best decision I ever made! After I had done that, everything fell into place. I got three felonies dropped. I got ten years probation with six months of substance abuse prison here at the Johnson Unit in Winnsboro, TX. God saved my life again! They don't give too many chances to people like me. But I am receiving the best help I could ever ask for. I need this in my life.

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I have never been offered help with my addiction before I fought for my life in court for eight months, it wasn't looking good at all. But God is good! Without him, I wouldn't have a good thing in life. You two boys were a blessing in my life. The last time I saw you two boys was at my house, and Aidya's was 2 and Jaxson was just crawling. Aidya, the last thing you said to me was, "I love you, Brandon" and hugged me around my neck so tight! You didn't even know I was your dad. Because your mom and I decided it was a good idea 'till I got myself together. I held both of you boys tight! I knew I wasn't going to see y'all for a long time. Your mom gave me so many chances to be there, but I was always in jail or running from the laws. My life was slipping away faster than I could imagine. I felt I had nothing, so I had nothing

to lose. But I had everything. You two boys and my mom, nieces, nephews, brothers. It was all there the whole time but was never sober to realize it. Sometimes it takes bad things to happen to make good things happen. And it got really bad this time, but it got really good in the aftermath your mom told me she didn't let her family say one bad thing about me, and I praise her for that. Because I deserve everything I've got. I didn't have any respect for anybody. You have a great mom. Tell her you love her every chance you get because tomorrow isn't guaranteed. I've gone over a year now without talking to my mom, and I'll never get that time back. She's 63 now, and I'm just now able to tell her how I feel. Life is too short to be pissed off or drug induced all the time. If you never try drugs, you will never have a drug addiction. I promise you that. I

spent most of my life doing drugs just to feel normal again. I know it doesn't make sense, but it does if you ever lived that life. If you two boys never accept me, I'll understand. Just know where I came from and where I'm going. I've done this to myself and could never ask you to feel a certain way about me. But I would love to be your dad and friend if you will let me in due time. I'll leave that up to y'all. Whatever you decide, I will be content with. I hope you two boys don't grow up hating me for the things I've done to y'all because I'm still having trouble forgiving myself for not being a man and taking care of my family. Family is all I need in my life, of course God too! I have another chance at life to make it right so that's my plan when I get out of prison. I want to make things right to all the people I hurt starting with you two first. I'm not sure how to go

about this because I've never done anything good in my life. But I'm sure I'll figure it out. I can't make up the last seven years I missed of your lives, but I can start now. This place I'm in now is helping me with that. We have counselors that interact with us five hours a day, five days a week. But we inmates run this prison. This is a peer-driven institution. They tell us that from the start when we arrive here. I have 67 members in my family here. We run the classes, and we also march twice a week for discipline. It's a Christian based military structure facility. Just to give y'all a rundown of the place. I actually feel like a human being in here instead of just a number that they give us.

When your mom wrote me in jail, I was so happy to hear she was happily married and you boys were very well taken care of. She

said Jeff treats you both with respect and if you were his own. I'm really happy to hear this. It makes my recovery easier that you have a good man in your lives. I thought about you all every day and wondered where and how you all were doing. Your mom sends me pictures of you boys, and it made me cry because I missed the most important part of your lives. I'm so happy God put Jeff in your lives when I wasn't man enough to step in, but everything happens for a reason. Some things are just meant to be. He has a plan for everybody, but it's up to us what path to take and how we end up in this life. He gives us two choices, the high road or the low road. Our destiny is at the end of both those roads just up to us how it ends and which one to take. I know this is my last chance to get it right, I asked for help, so God put me here. I hate this place,

L.O.L—but it's completely different from what I'm used to. Honestly, respect, discipline, tolerance, courage is what this place teaches us in here. Something I knew nothing about.

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Love is very important in life. If you never love or been in love with someone, life seems pointless. If not you're just numb, and anything you do is pointless, that's the way to live life. You should experience every part of life –even pain. Pain has been a big part of my life. I forgot to experience anything else. There's so much more to life than struggle. We sometimes forget to live a little, always focused on the negative. Trust me boys, it could always be worse. Live each day like it's your last and tell all your loved ones how you feel. I lost my

grandparents to cancer and did not tell them when I had a chance and knowing they were not in good health and one day they would no longer be in my life. Every day I wake up with regret on my mind and pain in my heart because I had my chance to make peace but never did. Now I have to live with myself every day. I'm telling you two all this to keep you boys from making the same mistakes I have. I'm sure you boys will make the right choices in life, I'm not denying that at all, but I've been through it all. Not much I haven't done or been through. I'm not glorifying anything; I just don't want you to experience the pain that I have. It's unbearable at times. I ask God to remove my defects of character. It's a working program. I've come a long ways, though I'm sure you can ask your mom about that. I hope all this is making sense to you. I don't know when

your mom will give this to you to read or if ever. I'm going to leave it up to her because she will know the right time and when you are ready to know all this about me. This life I lived has taken a toll on me. I'm 35 years old and feel 50. All I can do now is pray for forgiveness and pursue my life with God.

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My goal in life when I leave here is to start my own business in construction; painting, flooring, remodeling houses, etc. I was always good at what work I've done, at manual labor. I suck at paperwork, never was my thing. Even in school, I wasn't that smart. But in AG, we grew plants. I've done welding, anything with my hands I mastered to perfection. I quit school in the beginning of my 10th-grade year because a teacher called me stupid in front of the whole class.

That wasn't the first time a teacher did that. It happened in the 7th grade too, and the same teacher put his hands on me after school. My older brother went up there and had a talk with him. So, that was about it. I did like school. I played football, ran track, cross country. I tried basketball, but I was very uncoordinated. L.O.L. I went to Gilmer and Union Hill school. Union Hill was small. There were 12 people in my senior class. I was always the quiet one in school, not a lot of friends or anything. I was a loner my whole life; I was the one the kids always made fun of because I was different. Later on, when I quit school and moved to Florida for a year, I came back after my grandpa passed away from cancer something inside of me died. He was always the only father I ever knew. He used to play ball with me in the front yard when I was a kid and used to

help me with my homework, etc. He was a great man! After I came back from Florida is when I started my criminal activities; robbing, stealing, manipulation anyone and anything that I could, I was very good at it in a very bad way! I could talk the talk and walk the walk, my brother Mike said I could sell ice to the Eskimos. Your Uncle Mike is a good man. Out of all of us, he has done very well for himself, never been in trouble. Always did the right thing. He and I have been close most of our lives. He always looked out for me even after disappointing him time after time, my younger brother followed in my footsteps. I showed him the wrong way of life. He watched me sell dope, and I even got him to sell it for me at his school. I guess you could say he looked up to me. He went to prison at 18 years old evading in a motor vehicle. I was a little

smarter about my actions. He liked to showboat his. People were robbing him, and beating him up for his drugs. Then I had to handle his mess up because it was my stuff they were stealing. That life isn't worth the pain, stress, suffering that comes with it. I watched my friends, girlfriends, family crash out and die because of drug deals gone bad. Nothing good has ever come from any of it. I had two cousins die that were close to me. One from an overdose and the other got his head cut off, and body burned a few miles from my house on Cherokee Trail in Gilmer. Even after all that, I still wasn't going to stop. All my friends were dying left and right. My family was thinning out like mange on a dog. My addiction kept me from feeling or seeing what was really going on. I always overlooked it all and never thought it could ever happen to me

because I was unstoppable. I'm not trying to tell you just bad things that happened in my life, but I went through 21 years of all this and nothing good came from any of it. I just want y'all to do right and don't take the wrong path. If anybody shows you the wrong path, or tries to give you drugs they are not your friends. I promise you that. They're just luring you in so they can feed off of you. More addictions, more money. They're all demons trying to collect souls. Addiction is the worse disease you can have. If you never do drugs, you won't ever have to find out about this life I lived. 21 years of this I went through.

The only good things that came from all this is meeting your mom and having you two boys. I was very blessed with that part of my life. I wouldn't trade any part of the good

or the bad for anything. I feel I can help people with the things I've been through. I feel nobody can help anybody if they haven't experienced it for themselves. If I can save one life, I feel my purpose in life meant God put us here for different reasons. Maybe I went through all this to help someone or save their life. What I want to do is live right, and help everyone that wants to be helped. If you want to change, you will. You can't make anybody change until they're ready to. I know from experience.

I'm finally ready to make that change and to be with my family. You boys are my life, and I will die trying to make it up to y'all. If it takes all my time and effort to show you boys that I can be a father you can look up to.

I'm So Sorry by Jerry Johnstone

I was attracted to her the first time I saw her. She was a little thing. I knew from the beginning that she was a mess. She drank too much, but so did I at the time. We had many good times and enjoyed each other's company. The problem was that she had many affairs, but I always took her back. I understood that she had medical issues. She was on medications for this. I could tell when she wouldn't take them. We would argue about this on a daily basis.

We were invited to a birthday party for a friend of mine. Everything went well, and I had a good time. When we left, I believe something at the party upset her because when we got home she ran to her room. I

followed, and she slammed the door on my fingers. I shoved the door back open, which pushed her over the bed. She landed on her chest and broke something. It was a bad accident. I am so sorry, I hope she will forgive me someday.

Climbing Hills by J Goyve

My name is John Paul Goyve, I am 38 years old, I am an honorably discharged Marine Corps Veteran, I am also now a Felon, and I am more than disappointed with myself. From the moment I left the service, I have gone downhill. I am a father of two daughters one from each of my ex-wives. With that being said, both of my daughters have been out of my life now for almost ten years.

Recently when I got out of prison, I found my 16-year-old on Facebook, at first she was excited to talk to me, but it didn't take long for all those feelings of hurt through all those years to come out. She currently doesn't want anything to do with me. Without realizing it all these years, I have

made someone I love more than anything in this life a victim. I tried explaining the most I could about why and what happen. Why I wasn't there for her. I tried to put myself in her shoes and explain what I had done. We had a very special bond that I destroyed. I hope and pray to God that I can restore my relationship with my daughter. Be careful in life when you don't put God first. He loves you and will get your attention.

About 1000 kilometers from the top and I'm standing at the bottom. And I prayed to God. God gives me the will! He did, and it seems like I've been climbing hills for nearly 40 years. John Paul.

Mail Call by B. Prater

I knew the day would come when my freedom would be ripped away once again. I knew going back to prison would be hard this time, but I had no idea how hard mentally it would be. This time I had two little girls out there that I've never spent one night without.

I think it was about three weeks in when the hurt was beginning to fade. Then mail call came that night, and I heard my name for the first time since I had been there. I thought it was a mistake thinking to myself, "*Nobody's going to write me.*" When I read the envelope my heart stopped. It was from two little girls that can barely write their names. They had written me a letter! I was so ashamed and upset that I couldn't even open the letter. You know it's not in the bad

stories that bother you in person, it's the small things you miss or don't think you would ever miss ...till they're gone. By leaving my daughters behind, I made them my victims. I never want to feel hurt like that again, or put any more hurt in their eyes.

Product of my Environment by Q. Foy

OKC born and Texas raised, poverty was too familiar where I come from. Drug abuse, sex, and violence seemed like an everyday lifestyle. I had no father, and my mother was a crack whore. My brother stole what he could just to feed me and my sister. We were made victims to mom's many failed relationships. I became a victim to these things.

Drugged up by age nine, I was having sex with the neighbor's daughters, lying and stealing. Mom ran off after I was hit by a truck. She came to Texas to clean herself up. Somewhere down the line, she fell into another abusive relationship. Anyhow, I met this girl and we ended up having a child as

children. I quit school and started hustling. My hustle was all I knew.

Violence was a factor as drugs blinded us. I choked a lady, got locked up and my wife had the two boys. I walked away from the hustling, drugging and broke in and out of jail. I hit rock bottom before I was able to give in. Now I'm on a path to get right. I've been drug-free now for eight months. I guess you could say that I am a work in progress.

I Won't Quit by C. Wallace

Well, things started to go bad in about 2013. My Aunt had just passed away. Prior to that, my girlfriend had passed in August of 2012 so things were falling around me so to speak. My girlfriend of over 15 years was gone. It was getting real hard. I still have my mother and father living, but at this time I still need the strongest of Dads.

Another year passed, when I met a lady who had a daughter 26 years old, and a son that was 17. We liked each other, so I moved in with them. Things were good at first, but it was a struggle for her son because he loves to his mom's attention. I came in between that -sort of. So, after a while, tension developed and we got into arguments. Drinking alcohol started to play a big part in

my self-medicating. I ended up getting the police called on me. In July 2013, I got charged with assault and ended up on probation for three years. I moved out, but we were still seeing each other.

I violated my probation because I had a wreck and was charged with DUI. March of 2015, I went to court. On May 15, 2015, I was sentenced to 3 years. I did a year in prison, but I stayed close to God. I had a plan to change my life for the better. I have stuck with my plan, and God has been providing for me since I came home July 15, 2016. I am back with my girlfriend, and my kids and I plan to stay focused on God. I am planning to start my own business. Each day, I continue to work hard to be a better person and never give up.

Like Father, Like Son by M. Duarte

I dated my ex for about four years, and I got really comfortable with her. But. I began to follow in my dad's footsteps. How? Beer and violence.

I saw my dad always abusing my mom every time he drank. I was always afraid of him, but I had to be brave to protect my mom and younger sister. So when I started to abuse alcohol, I started to do the same. I just have all this hatred, and anger all the time -even though I quit drinking alcohol seven years ago. Now I deal with anxiety and anger daily.

When my ex and I began dating, I would start the violence after any little argument. I started putting my hands on her, and it kept happening. She begged me to stop and get

help, but I just didn't listen. I went to prison for kicking her door in and assaulting her. I put a knife to her neck. I really took this to another level. I have remorse for what I did to her. That's why I'm sharing this. Believe me; it's not easy to do this. I lost the love of my life and my 3-year-old daughter. And now I'm sitting here thinking, "*If I could have just done things differently.*" I love and miss her. I'm sorry for all the hurt and pain I caused her.

WE DO RECOVER by T. Bancroft

I was 28 years of age when I took myself away from my son Christopher. He was two years old at the time. My son needed me as a father and friend. All I thought about was me, and nobody else mattered. I hurt my baby boy by going away. I needed him as well, but at the time I did not know this. By then it was too late. I hit a dark spot in my life. I was sick of the man I have been. Dope, weed and more weed. Only me, no one else mattered. I did not care about myself all I cared about is what I could get. Then one day, I got on my knees and asked Jesus into my life. March 12, 2010 God came into my life. I am not the same man. God changed my way of thinking, and the way I looked at people. All I want to do is share God's goodness with others. Jesus is the real deal.

I won't go back to where I came from. I can't make up the time I lost, but I can give him the best because I love him ...and God loves all of us.

My Story by B. Laudermith

I want to start by saying thank you for giving me an opportunity to tell you a little about myself!

When I was about 2 1/2 years old, my mom and dad were going through a bad relationship. I had to watch mom fight with my father. The worst day came when my mom didn't feed us all day. When my dad came home from work and found out, he put us all in the car and took us to McDonald's. My mom was sitting in the passenger seat, and she started hitting my dad. I didn't understand what was going on, but it left a stain on my brain. Later when we got home, my dad pulled my mom out the car by her hair. My two sisters and I ran in

the house. I watched my dad actually throw full on punches with my mom. My mom went to the hospital -her face was covered in blood.

Later on in life, my mom and dad separated. I grew up living with my mom and doing whatever I wanted. I ended up living with my father at 11 years old. I couldn't handle being there, so I ran away a lot. When I turned 17 years old, I left home and was doing my own thing. I was on drugs. I found out my sister was in Texas, and that my dad had broke a coffee table over her back. I tried to do things right, but when things didn't work out, I got really high and drank. I went to my dad's house and burned his car. I affected him mentally, emotionally and, financially and was taken out of my family for seven years. They were my victims.

The Flap of a Butterfly's Wing by Anonymous

“In chaos theory, the butterfly effect is the sensitive dependence on initial conditions in which a small change in one state of a deterministic nonlinear system can result in large differences in a later state.” -The Butterfly Effect, Wikipedia

As I sit here contemplating how to share the deepest and most troubling sins of my soul with the world, I wonder, *“What is the point in doing it?”* The answer is as simple as the desire to help another youngster. Somewhere that might be on the path of gravel that I have traveled. See, I think that my past is unique, but the reality is ...it’s not.

I took the life that gave me life. Yes, I took the life of my mother. The woman who

shared her body with my still forming life for eight months two weeks, and nine hours of labor. I know those numbers because she reminded me of it constantly. It's a long story, but that's not the subject of my brief moment of sharing. The purpose of this is to let you know that I discovered something deep in my years of contemplating, analyzing and trying to rationalize my life while in the "Belly of the Beast." What I found out was this: no one's life is solely their own.

Every decision that a person makes and every action you make affects someone else. See I thought anything I did was all about me. But the hard fact is, we're all intertwined and anything we do has an effect on the world -on a cosmic level we

have yet to understand. I know that now.
Thanks for letting me share.

Hurting People Hurt People by E. Cantu

“Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.” – Mark Twain

It started when I was still just a juvenile. My first victim was my mom. I physically, and emotionally hurt her because of my anger within. I was always lashing out in anger. One day I remembered playing, and I thought about all the things I did that caused me to spend six months in juvenile prison. After all the things I did, my mom still supported and loved me through it all.

As I grew up and got older, my abusive behavior got worse. I've been to prison three times for deadly conduct, family and domestic violence. Two of my victims are

both the mothers of my children. I caused so much stress, pain and hurt not only to them but to my two sons also. All my life I've been told that I am an angry person, useless and a nobody. But I'm tired of hurting myself and others.

I am writing this from a Domestic Violence Class that I attend each week here at Texas ReEntry Services. I didn't have to write this, but I want to change. I have God in my life now, and all I want is to love -not hate. Be happy -not mad. Maybe this writing thing can help me, and maybe sharing my story can help someone else. All my life I've always asked myself, *"Why are you mad? What's wrong with me?"*

God help me.

Alcohol is a Drug by K. Owen

My name is Keaton Owen. Back in July 2015, I had just been released from probation from getting hit by Tarrant County Swat. At this time, I had an innocent girl in the house, a girlfriend of two years.

Well after I got out, I found out she slept with the guy that I was getting my drugs from before I went to jail. I had been out two months and couldn't take the heartbreak anymore. Alcohol got involved, and I put my hands on her. No girl deserves that. She was my victim.

Felon by V. Brice

I went to TDC for doing something I didn't do. I was cheating on my girl. She found out, called the police and said I put a gun in her face. When she saw that I was going to jail, she was trying to tell them that she lied, but it was too late. I was a felon. I got two years, but only did 18 months on it. I was locked up for something I didn't do.

It's messed up, but she held me down the whole time put money on my books. We're still together, and we have one little girl who's ten years old. Her name is Bree. This is my story. I'm out now and we're good. I got a good job, and she does too.

Let Writing Set You Free!

by E. Jones, TGIM Digital Publishing CEO

I was given a story that I wanted to share. I read it often. It goes like this: When last year began, it was all yours. It was placed in your hands. You could make it what you wanted.

It was like a blank book and in it, you could put a poem, a nightmare, a dream, a prayer, a child's story –even a song. It is a book forever written. Completed. A book that has been written by you with all the details, and you cannot change it. So, before this year ends, reflect. Take your old book and leaf through it carefully. Please read each page by and hand, and read all of it! Enjoy the pages of your life when you used it best. And those you've me, or those you reunited with …wonderful people. Those you had fun

doing what they liked best. Please check the pages that should never have been written. No, don't try to pull them out. It would be useless. They are already written. But you can read them and re-read them while writing the new book to be delivered. So, you can repeat the good things written, and avoid re-writing the bad.

To write your new book, you will again began with instrument of free will, and will have to fill it with the whole immense surface of your world. If you desire to kiss your old book, kiss it. If you want to cry, cry about it. Cry. No matter how it is.

This year you have been given another book. New, clean and white. You get another chance. What's your story?

Decide 2 Evolve by B. Satterfield

Brian D. Satterfield is a certified peer & recovery specialist; chronic illness and trauma liberation advocate, educator and speaker. He is the author of *A Mental Health Survival Guide: How to Manage the Severities of Multi-Mental Health Diagnosis*, an Amazon #1 bestseller across three categories. It is a memoir of his severe struggles associated with coping with a multi-mental health diagnosis and is full of documented skills, tools and tips he developed as an action plan to cope and manage.

To the family, friends, neighbors, co-workers and person living with severe chronic illness – Brian works in direct care, in the human services field. Brian teaches, coaches, and mentors in conjunction with an

already existing (or development of a) recovery plan. Call 911 or go to your local emergency room for duress and, or crisis of body and, or brain. Should a person want to start a life of recovery, the resources tab located at: <http://www.decide2evolve.com/> has many free resources.

Brian's motivation to help others is based on the deep desire to heal a wounded part of himself. He struggled and suffered from several addictions for 23 years. In conjunction - he struggled and suffered from Insomnia, PTSD, Anxiety, Mood Disorder, Panic Disorder from more than 25 years and since 1994, he has lived with tendonitis tendinitis and arthritis. He has also (at times) suffered from severe seasonal allergies and asthma for 40 years. In 2009, opportunities presented itself and

allowed Brian to evolve, and he found himself experiencing peace and contentment for the first time, ever. He wanted more of it! He implemented a strict recovery-oriented treatment plan he uses on a daily basis. Choosing to finally be content with himself, he was able to leave suicidal ideation, self-medicating and the trauma of nine years of childhood sexual abuse behind him forever.

Now, at the age of 46, Brian is content with finding himself 14 years down the yellow brick road of addiction and mental illness (co-occurring) recovery. He still has bad times and days, but continuously keeps trying and never stops moving forward. He now devotes himself to helping others live a better life. To help others, who have gotten

lost, stuck, struggle, deal, cope, find relief with/from their complications.

Brian lives in South-Central Pennsylvania with Voodoo, Vulcan, and Rylee. He enjoys "Mrs. Right's" (she's Stacey) time and company. He is a workout guru, follows all Philadelphia professional sports teams, enjoys live music, cinema-movies, gardening, flower boxes, tattoos, outdoors, the Appalachian Trail, black coffee, coconut water and cinnamon sticks. Additionally, he is CEO/Founder of Decide 2 Evolve created in 2009. Decide 2 Evolve publishes books on managing many human ailments, presents live keynote speaking engagements and wellness workshops.

Brian is past board member of the Harrisburg, PA Depression Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) chapter. A present keynote

speaker for PA Department of Corrections officer's training of Crisis Intervention Training (CIT), Shippensburg University mental health-criminal justice collation, members of Pennsylvania (PA) Peer Support Collation, Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumer Agency (PMHCA), Pennsylvania Recovery Organizations Alliance (PRO-A), Pennsylvania Disabilities network (DRN of Pa), Mental Health America (MHA of Pa), also his local National Alliance (on) Mental Illness (NAMI) chapter.



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TXRS has developed a wrap-around style of services for persons coming out of incarceration that assists with the reintegration needs of the individual through intensive case management services in order to ease the transition for ex-offenders into mainstream society.

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c/o Submissions

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