

# Beginning to Heal



## FROM PAIN TO TRIUMPH

This is a true story about demons that I have conquered and anger that I have channeled and overcome.

There were times when my childhood was bearable; there were times when my childhood was very hard; but never was my childhood unbearable or I would not be here today. If it had not been for James, my counselor, my loving family and friends, and the Lord above, I would still be struggling.

When I was 7 years old, I was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD. On top of that, my father, at about that same time, was suffering a severe nervous breakdown that lasted two or three years. Because of his nervous breakdown, he had to retire at the age of 39, after 21 years as a Cincinnati police officer. He had not made enough money to support the family. When he recovered, he didn't try to regain his job as a policeman; he fooled around with part-time jobs or should I say, "dead-end jobs." Because of my father's poor choices, my mother had to work full time. This created a tremendous predicament for me because I was home schooled. My mother couldn't find much time to teach me, and my father was too lazy. For many years, I free floated. I couldn't spell, I stumbled a lot when I read, and it seemed like there was a better chance of Hell freezing over than me ever learning to work around my disabilities.

When I was 15, my mom took me to see a doctor who specialized in helping people with learning disabilities. I made no progress. I felt like a complete imbecile, especially when other kids laughed at me, which happened quite frequently. Between that, and being verbally abused by my father, I became very shy and easily dominated.

When I was 16, my mom took a class to learn a special teaching method, which was to have me use as many of my senses as I could. When we tried it, I went through the roof with my spelling skills, but the hard part still had yet to come. I still couldn't write a group of sentences adequately.

When I was 17, my father left. Nothing could have prepared me for that. I was confused at first. Then I blamed myself and almost took my own life to punish myself, but I realized that I would not have eased my pain by any means. I started drinking; I drank more and more often to the point where it became a daily thing. I thought that it would make me feel better, and it did, but only in the short run. I was starting to see things from a different perspective. I was angry at the whole world. I took every little thing personally. I was beginning to feel like everyone was out to make me miserable. I became very unpleasant to be around.

My misery didn't last forever. My mom had to work more than ever, so my Uncle Dan started tutoring me. He worked with me for a year and a half and helped me improve my writing skills. By the time I was 18, my writing skills skyrocketed. I was writing poetry and short stories. There was a time when I avoided writing; I was afraid of it. Now, it's one of my biggest hobbies, and, as a lot of people have told me, I am a very talented writer.

When I was 19, the youth minister of my parish, John, and his friend, Matt, who have both become good friends of mine, introduced me to a young adult group. These people have really raised my self-esteem. They have accepted me for who I am.

Three months after my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, I started attending classes at Live Oaks to prepare for the GED. That was a load off, because I was finally setting a goal for myself. I

went through with it, and I have learned a valuable lesson. The lesson I have learned is to look at what I hope to achieve in the future, not what I didn't get in the past. My life has been like a frying pan. If I committed suicide when my father left, I would have been jumping from the frying pan to the fire; but because I hung in there, the pan was taken off the heat, and now my life is better than ever.

For those of you who have learning disabilities, remember one thing: you are **not** stupid. Do not believe anyone who tries to convince you that you are. You just learn differently from most people. There are people who have helped me find the way that I learn; my mom, my uncle, my counselor, and my teachers at Live Oaks. No matter where you live, there are many people who can help you find the way that you learn. It is not a lost cause. For those of you whose parents are getting a divorce, I have lots of advice that I have based on my own personal experience.

Number one: understand that it is not your fault. I am not saying that it *probably* isn't your fault; I am saying that it is *absolutely* not your fault. It has to do with their relationship with each other; it is never your fault no matter what anyone says. It also helps to know how and why it happened, because if you know who is at fault, you'll know who needs your forgiveness and your prayers. If you know that, you will heal much sooner.

Number two: there is no easy way out. Drugs and alcohol are nothing more than band-aids, filthy ones. They will cover up the wounds temporarily, but they will not heal them; they will only make them worse. Suicide is not the answer either. It doesn't solve anything; it only eliminates your chances and hurts the people who love you. Do not try to pretend that it isn't happening. Hiding from it won't make it go away; it won't make you forget it; it will only make your anger build up inside you and make you a walking time bomb.

You have to face it. Just remember that you don't have to face it alone. There are people who love you and want to help you. There are a lot of people who love me and have helped me.

Number three: it helps to know someone who's been through it. My best friend's parents, Christie and Dean, both went through it when they were growing up. My father's siblings, Louis and Keith, went through it. I also have a friend named Stephanie who has been through it. All these people have empathized with me and have helped me come a long way. They all have a special place in my heart. I hope that each of you can find a friend like that because it helps to be reminded that you're not alone.

Number four: if you have a good memory of the parent that you're angry with, hold on to that and forget the unpleasant memories. Hold on to that one good experience that you had with him or her because that's the only memory of him or her that will ease your pain.

Last but not least, remember that it is okay to cry; I'm not just saying that to you girls, I'm saying that to you guys as well. I know that some of you might find it very embarrassing and, frankly, there have been times when I wouldn't have blamed you; but I've done it and it helped. When it was over and done with, I felt 50 pounds lighter. I'm not saying that you have to force yourself to cry, but if you ever get the urge and you can't get it past your throat, take the advice that my friend, Susie, once gave me. "If you get the lump in your throat and you can't get it out, say a prayer because then, at least you're acknowledging it."

It won't work overnight; it will take some time. But I promise you, if you take my advice, you will go from pain to triumph.

~ *Ethan Thomas*

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## DECEPTION

Stacey's phone rang a sweet little jingle as she looked into the mirror and applied her brown eye liner. She reached over and grabbed for her phone with her thin fingers. As her fingertips met the phone, she flipped it open and put it to her ear.

"Hello?" she called. The voice on the other end came back deep and shaky.

"Stacey. It's me. I'm in trouble."

"Who is this? Brandon?" Brandon was a tall and unusually skinny man. He had blond hair and needle marks in the middle of his inner arms.

"Stacey, I need your help. Aaron found me. I'm in the pub. They're going to kill me, Stacey."

Stacey paused for a moment to let the words sink in. "Brandon, I gave you money. I gave you ten grand to give to them a month ago. What happened?" Her voice sounded surprised and frustrated at the same time.

"Uh Stacey, I have no time to talk now. I need three grand now or they are going to kill me."

"Damn it, Brandon!" She paused in thought as she looked around her tiny bathroom. "I'll be there in 20 minutes."

"O.K., sis," he said, his voice trembling. "I love you."

As Stacey hung up the phone, she cursed and looked at her pale slender face in the mirror. She headed for the door as she threw on her coat and grabbed her purse.

Stacey arrived at the pub with a yellow envelope tucked under her left arm. She opened the door and stepped into the darkened room. The bar appeared to be mostly deserted except for six men sitting in a corner booth. As she walked toward the men, she took a deep breath and noticed the bartender duck into a back room. "He's probably as scared as I am," she thought to herself as she got closer. When she was close enough to see their faces, a rather large

man at the end of the booth got up and motioned for her to sit down. She sat lightly on the sticky seat and looked up at her brother's petrified face. He looked as though he hadn't slept in days.

"Brandon," she whispered in a frightened voice.

"Your brother has gotten himself into a bit of a mess." The voice came from the dark-haired man to Brandon's right. The man's name was Aaron. He was Brandon's dealer. He was a very large man, so large in fact that his chin covered his neck completely. When Stacey looked at him, she found him staring straight back at her. Stacey looked down, terrified, but she still felt his eyes staring so hard she thought they would burn a hole right through the top of her head. "He owes us a lot of money," he said as he continued to stare.

"Yes sir, I have three grand with me. I can get you the rest by next month. Please don't..." Her voice trailed off as Aaron raised his enormous hand to silence her.

"He owes us more than you can give, my dear. In fact, more than you earn in a year at the library, but there is an up side. Your brother has found a way to repay us the amount he owes and more." The man glanced at Brandon with a giant grin on his face. He then looked back at Stacey. "Your brother is very twisted."

Stacey looked puzzled as she glanced from the man's enormous face to her brother's reddening face. For only a moment, his eyes caught hers before he put his head down in shame. "Brandon, what are they talking about?" She was terrified at this point. As she stared at Brandon, her eyes widened. "You don't mean...?"

Stacey grew frantic; she took one last look at the fat man and jumped to her feet. She turned for the door and ran directly into the man that was sitting there when she walked in.

"Going somewhere, sweetheart?" The man looked down as he grabbed her shoulders and spun her around to face the giant man now getting to his feet.

“Your brother has no morals. You see, to pay off his debt,” the man paused as he stared at her, “he has given us you.” Aaron’s smile widened as he looked Stacey over. The gigantic man grabbed the yellow envelope off the floor and threw it to Brandon. Brandon let it hit him in the chest then put his head in his hands and wept. Aaron looked at the crying man and shook his head. Then he motioned to one of his men. “Go get the car, bring it around back, and let’s get going.” The man walked quickly off as he turned back to the woman. “Tie her up and put her in the trunk. I would like to get her working soon.”

Stacey looked at her brother and had more hatred for him now than any other feeling. Glancing around the room, she slowly reached into her pocket and pulled out a snub-nosed 38 special. She knew that she would only have time to get off one shot. She lifted the gun and pointed it right between the eyes of the fat man. Everyone in the room froze. Stacey shifted just a bit as she took her only shot. The bullet went right by Aaron’s head and hit her brother right in the left eye. All the men hit the floor as she fired the weapon. For just a moment everyone was silent. They were in shock at the violence that had just occurred. She looked at her brother for a split second longer and ran for the door. Several more shots could be heard as she exited the bar and ran down the street.

~ Heather L. Schrull

BORN ON THE 4<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF NOVEMBER

Born on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of November,  
This is a day that I will always remember.

Life was nice, the baby of eleven.  
Five brothers, five sisters; I was truly in Heaven.

But I should have known that the joy would not last.  
Ten years later my mother would pass.

Don't like to talk about that; it just makes me want to melt.  
Let me tell you more about my life and the hand I was dealt.

Raised by my father; he was a man who loved to drink.  
He gave me the world, even the kitchen sink.

A very proud man that would give you his last ten,  
But I wasn't his first love. I came in second to gin.

My father was proud of me; I could tell by the way he talked.  
Yet, he never had time for simple things, not even to go for a walk.

I craved for attention and was very popular in school.  
I was the best dressed; I looked good; everyone thought I was cool.

Later I dropped out of school because I didn't want to go.  
No one paid any attention, so how would anyone know?

Met a man, and we moved in together.  
I thought we were in love and he would be there forever.

We both wanted children so we worked on that first.  
We wasted no time, nine months later I gave birth.

Just what we wanted – a bouncing baby boy.  
He made us both happy; he brought us so much joy.

Sixteen months later I had another son.  
It wasn't easy; that's when all the drama begun.

He became really violent; everything was my fault.  
I had to have him arrested for attempted assault.

Stayed with him anyway because I was I.  
You can say that I loved him and didn't want to leave.

I was unable to leave, and I couldn't come out of the house,  
Not having friends was a rule of my spouse.

He always would tell me he loved me, and I believed him  
Even when he wouldn't come home and would sleep with  
other women.

He would hit me, smack me, and call me names,  
I would back down, cry, and play his game.

I kept it a secret; I didn't want anyone to know.  
The life that I was living I had to keep on the down low.

I wanted to get out; I was scared to death.  
Then one day I packed up my things, and I finally left.

I moved to Atlanta, GA; my sister said "come, stay with me."  
Didn't want to live with her long; I just wanted to get on my  
feet.

When I got out there, I knew things seemed a little shady –  
The house where my sister lived was the home of some  
other lady.

I knew I couldn't stay there long, living there was sheer hell.  
With all the drama that went on in that house on Creekview  
Trail.

My sister called me childish, said that I hide behind my kids.  
She told me I need to grow up. I didn't even know what I did.

So, I went to a shelter so I could have peace of mind.  
The kids and I were happy there; we would be there only a  
short time.

Living in the shelter was going well if you ask me  
Until February 25<sup>th</sup> when my son was hit by a taxi.

My God, what else can I be dealt, the cards that you have  
given to me suck.  
What made this situation so crazy was that I watched my son  
get struck.

This is a true story, you have heard me correct.  
My son had suffered a brain injury, a broken kidney, leg, and  
neck.

The doctor said it was hopeless; my son's injuries were too  
intense.  
Everything was happening so fast; it didn't make any sense.

A nurse told me he might not walk; the doctor said he could  
die.  
His neurologist didn't know what to think; he said I should be  
glad he had youth on his side.

Jesus was who I had to call on to help my son get through,  
Praying to keep my sanity and raising the other three too.

My children and I made it; we knew it would not last  
Only having one another we knew that this too shall pass.

Perfect strangers came to our aid; people we never knew.  
They helped me to cope with the drama and raised money  
for us too.

Where was my family when I needed them most? I may have  
mentioned them twice,  
But they weren't involved in my simple little life.

Some had work to finish and others had things to do.  
Two came to visit; the rest never knew.

I am a very strong woman as you can tell. I let nothing break  
me.  
With a lot of prayer I've made it through all this adversity.

Life for me wasn't easy, but I always have a smile,  
For who knows what's around the corner or ahead the next  
mile.

So keep your head up, never stop, and always remember to  
pray,  
Because tomorrow is not promised, and neither is today.

~ Donna E. Williams

## ONE DAY AT A TIME

What does it mean to take one day at a time?  
My today is filled with yesterday and tomorrow.  
Tomorrow did not take care of itself; it was waiting  
for me when I got there. Taunting me, saying,  
“You should have taken care of me yesterday.”  
My yesterday told me, “I will never be your past.”  
My one day at a time said, “This is too much for you; let it  
go.”

~ *Mahalia Jackson*

## STRUGGLE

Coming from where I come from, you learn to count your blessings and embrace the truth no matter how bad it is. Lately I've been faced with a lot of truth.

I am a 35-year-old woman with two kids and no man, and I'm struggling on my own. I know that's a story that is told over and over. But mine is a little different. Spring of 2006 I met a wonderful man who took care of all of my needs and wants. He was a proud strong man who lifted me up whenever I was down.

My life was never easy, until he came along. Once he told me he loved me and wanted to marry me. Well, that was something that I thought I would never do. I mean I'm 35; two kids, two baby daddies, and I don't have good luck.

Everyday I thanked God for my man that I wished for. Oh yes, he gave me everything I needed and some things I didn't. He got really comfortable with me and my surroundings. I'll never forget one day he took me on a shopping spree. We went to a wonderful dinner, and that's the night it all began. It started with an argument about how ungrateful he thought I was. Then he decided to slap me to show me how serious he was, then a punch, then to top it all off he kicked me unconscious. That man beat me for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and sometimes dessert.

I stayed through it all and I actually married that fool. I kept up with everything he wanted so he wouldn't beat me. He beat me so much he beat my soul.

I realized that I had to get out for the sake of my kids and my life. I had to go. One day I waited until he went to work, packed my kids, and bolted. When I left I had no

money, no where to go, no idea what to do, but I was free.  
Thank God Almighty I Was Free.

Every morning I woke up with the same boring  
routine. Get my kids together, go to work, and live my life  
strong. Now I appreciate my struggle.

~ *Brandi A. Gilmer*

## DON'T BE LIKE ME

Don't be like me; be better than me. I'm thirty-five years old, and I had a normal childhood growing up. I had a good home life and parents who cared about me. Even today my parents have been married for forty-one years. My life was good and as normal as one could expect. I had good friends and a great life. Then one day it all changed.

I started drinking alcohol when I was sixteen years old. The next thing I knew I had been charged with a DUI (Driving Under the Influence). My parents paid my fines, sent me to DUI school, and managed to keep me out of jail. My parents thought I had learned my lesson, but I did not pay attention to them. I thought I knew everything; I only went to DUI school because I was forced. In 1990, I graduated from high school; then my real problems began. I spent most of my days working in a local bakery. I spent my free time with my friends, and I continued to drink.

In 1993, Labor Day weekend, I cashed my paycheck and met up with my best friend at the bar to shoot some pool. I had had very little sleep the night before and had spent all day working at the bakery. I remember being so tired that night I laid my head down on the bar table. Soon after we agreed it was time to go home. I remember leaving the bar that night with two friends. The rest is kind of a blur. I got behind the wheel and dropped off one of my friends at his home. The other guy, my best friend, stayed in the vehicle. We headed to my house. We never got there.

I woke up in the hospital in intensive care with my mother standing over my hospital bed. When I asked what had happened, she told me I wrecked the car, and suddenly it felt like someone stuck a sword into my stomach. She told me that my best friend didn't survive the accident. I pulled

my hospital gown up and saw seven staples in my stomach. I had two broken femur bones, my heels had been crushed, and my liver was lacerated. The doctors weren't sure I would survive long enough to experience the surgery on my body.

I spent the next nine days in intensive care and finally managed to come home from the hospital in a wheelchair. I had casts on my legs and casts on my heels. I had scars all over my body, and I was in pain. You can imagine the amount of physical pain I was in, but most of the pain I suffered was over the death of my best friend. The scars I had outside were nothing compared to the scars I had inside. While sitting at home, I kept hearing whispers from my friend saying, "Why, Craig, why?"

Over the next several months I saw many doctors about my legs and heels. I remember the doctor telling me that every time I took a step I would remember the accident because my heels would never be the same. My body healed itself and things appeared to be fine until one day the sheriff came to my house and served me a warrant to appear in court. I went to court where I was charged with vehicular homicide, a felony charge. I was found guilty and sentenced to nine years in prison. Prison was a terrible experience. I was scared of the other inmates. The worst thing about prison was that I missed my parents and family. I spent a total of five and a half years in prison and was later released on parole.

When I got out of prison and came home, I could never forget the accident. I still had pain in my heels and could feel it with every step. The wreck and the feelings for my dead friend would not go away, so I washed them away with alcohol. In 2002 I got mixed up with the wrong people. One day I was involved in an altercation and was violently hit in the head. I was life-flighted to OSU Medical Center where

they performed brain surgery. After the incident I remembered nothing. I was weak and they kept me in intensive care for seventeen days. I would go on to live the rest of my life with a severe brain injury. My life will never be the same again.

Now I spend my time talking to others about the mistakes of drinking and driving. Every month I speak at the DUI school. I wanted to find a way to teach others about my mistakes and about the death of my friend. I am now in school to become a drug and alcohol counselor. I thank my teachers Scott Meredith, Gina Bichard, and Selly Bloom for the time and hard work they spend with me each day. As every week goes by, I'm thinking about my best friend's death. He is my drive and determination to become a drug and alcohol counselor. For him I dedicate my work, my life, and my hopes of reaching others.

*~ Craig Morris*

## RACISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and I thought racism did not exist anymore. I learned first hand that I was wrong.

I am Korean and my husband is American. Of course, my two boys are a mixed race. A couple of months ago my younger son met a girl in his physics class. They started going out together as boyfriend and girlfriend. We welcomed her into our home.

The first day my son visited her parents, her daddy didn't welcome my son. He didn't come out to say hello to my son. On my son's second visit he didn't bother to meet him again. When I asked him about the visit, my son told me that his girlfriend's daddy didn't want him going out with his daughter. He doesn't believe in mixed marriage or dating either. When I heard this I was angry. I couldn't believe in America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century such ignorance could exist.

I married my husband more than two decades ago. At that time, in my country's culture mixed marriage was strongly discouraged. Marrying a foreigner was considered shameful. When I told my parents I was going to marry my husband, I knew they would not be happy about it. However, they did not act ignorant. They wanted to get to know my future husband. My parents knew right from wrong. After they learned more about my husband they were happy for me. Mother told me, "It doesn't matter about looks and skin color. What is important is if your husband is nice and makes you happy." If I am happy that is all that matters. This was what my mother told me. Even my parents-in-law told me they were going to trust their son. They believed their son would choose the right person, and they wanted their son happy. This was more than two decades ago.

My son and his girlfriend are still going out together. It made her father angry to know his daughter was seeing my son. My son is not to come in their house at all when her dad is home.

Racism has happened to me several times since I moved to Ohio. I can deal with stupidity and ignorance, but not when it comes to my child. We raised our children very well. They are smart, sweet, handsome, athletic, and well mannered. I never heard from others anything negative about my boys. Every parent, coach, teacher, and even student told us we have good boys. All these compliments from others made me happy and proud of my boys.

I want to ask my son's girlfriend's father why he thinks his skin color is better than others. How many Americans have pure blood? What is wrong with a mixed baby? I want to shout at him, "What color blood do you think you have?" This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The whole world is closer than ever. You sit in a living room and with one push of the button on the TV you can see the whole world.

I was worried about my son. I did not want him to have a scar on his heart. He is still too young to deal with this kind of prejudice. One day we talked about what happened to him, but he understood it better than I. I was embarrassed in front of my son because of what he said to me. He said that he was okay. My son respected his girlfriend's father's opinion. When he said that I said to my son, "This is not an opinion; this is racism." I know this incident has hurt his heart. I told him that I was very proud of him. I said, "You are a better person than your girlfriend's father." When I talked with my son, my heart was angry, and I was crying.

Now I wonder why all my friends told me how good my boys were. They said they wished their daughters would date my sons. I would like to ask them if they really meant it. One

thing I know, and that is I am very proud of my sons. They are better than stupid ignorant people. I want everyone to know that this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and we are all one people under God.

I wish this experience had not happened to my son, but I realize this is the reality in America. I can't do anything to change ignorance, but I can pray. I pray for my son's girlfriend's father and myself. I ask God to help me with my anger. I believe someday we will all be together with God.

*~ Kilcha Canfield*

## THE MANY FACES OF LOSS

Everybody has a story. Some people seem to be lucky, and everything they do succeeds. Others are unfortunate, and everything they do seems to go in the wrong direction. I would like to tell the story about someone I knew nearly 20 years ago.

In 1987 I lived in Santiago de Cali, Colombia. I was married and had two wonderful sons. Although my relationship with my husband wasn't the best, we both enjoyed our boys very much. We lived in a beautiful new condominium. Everyone in the complex seemed to be very happy, except for the lady who lived next door. She appeared to be almost 60 and never spent time with anyone else. I always saw her with her granddaughter who was 12 years old. Sometimes my sons would play or swim with this little girl, so we knew that the two of them lived alone. The children enjoyed spending time together.

As the years passed, everybody in the complex got closer. We had meetings and parties, but this lady never showed up. Her granddaughter, Carolina, grew into a lovely young lady with long black hair and blue eyes. She was sweet and cheerful.

One day on my way home from work, I ran into them in the parking lot. They were very excited. Carolina's mother, who had been living in Spain, was coming back to Cali soon. I said to the grandmother, "Mrs. Carmen, I think we should plan a Welcome Home party for your daughter."

The older lady replied, "Yes, I think my job will be finished by then. My daughter went to Spain when Carolina was only five years old." Carolina was eager to see her mother and her little sister after so many years.

Soon after this, Carolina came to my home to show me her bulldog, Papy, which her mother had given her for her fifteenth birthday the previous year. Carolina took the dog with her everywhere. It was a big, beautiful dog and very protective of Carolina.

Almost everyone in the condominium complex was invited to the party to welcome Mrs. Carmen's daughter home from Spain. The happiness in Mrs. Carmen's face seemed to dissolve years of worry and make her look younger. I felt much sympathy for her because of the difficult life she must have had.

That year at Christmas, our family went to my husband's father's farm for vacation. We returned to Cali in the middle of January. My husband was approached by one of the groundskeepers soon after our return. The man said, "Something terrible has happened! I'm not allowed to say anything, but you can ask one of your neighbors." We thought something had happened in our condo, so we immediately went to one of our neighbors, Mrs. Martha.

"Yes, it is terrible," she said. "It happened in early January. Three guys came to Mrs. Carmen's condo. She wasn't there, but her daughter and granddaughters were. The younger girl was in her room watching TV, and Carolina was with her mother in the living room. The men knocked on the door, and Carolina's mother opened it. Later we heard screaming. After about 30 minutes, the men left."

My heart was pumping fast. I asked her to tell us what happened. Our neighbor told us that minutes after they left, they heard the little girl crying, "Mi mami! Mi mami!" Another neighbor went in and found the two women beheaded. It appeared that Carolina had been trying to protect her mother when she was killed. I immediately asked

about Carolina's dog. Our neighbor said that her mother had tied it up before opening the door. When I asked about Mrs. Carmen, our neighbor said she was in the hospital. We were all devastated by this horrible news.

For the next year we all lived with this terrible nightmare. During this time I gave birth to our third son. He brought much happiness into our lives, though we constantly lived with the memory of this horrible tragedy. I had trouble sleeping almost every night. I even thought this event had brought us bad luck because during this time I was struggling with separation from my husband.

As anyone who has been through this knows, it takes great resolve and determination at a time like this. I had to make decisions and be strong; I decided to take my three boys to their grandparents' home in another city. This meant storing my furniture, renting my home, and looking for a job.

I must explain that looking for a job when you are over 30 years old is very difficult in Colombia. I was in a desperate situation and did not have time to think about other problems. I stopped thinking about Mrs. Carmen since I wasn't living in that complex anymore.

One evening I was just sitting in my car crying. Why did I have to be separated from my children? Why did I have to go through this? The very next day I was in the city looking for a job, and I ran into Mrs. Carmen. We hugged each other and cried. I asked her if she had time for coffee, and she did. She was very sympathetic when I told her what I was going through.

She then told me the story of her life:

I came from a very humble background. I grew up in the country, and when I was 20 years old, I went to Bogota. It was hard to survive in the big city, but I did. At that time, it was not acceptable for young people to leave their homes. After I left, my father disowned me even though I sent money home to them. I went back to visit after about ten years, and my father told me that my mother had already died. I returned to Bogota.

One day I met a man who promised me a wonderful life. I became pregnant. He left two months before my daughter was born, and I ended up raising my daughter alone. I worked as a maid until my daughter was 12 years old. I don't remember ever having a vacation. My daughter eventually married but after several years, her husband began abusing her. My daughter and I then moved to this city. My daughter moved to Spain when Carolina was five years old. From that time on, my dream was to have my family back together.

When my daughter came home, I thought it was the beginning of my happiness. I never imagined my daughter and granddaughter would have such horrible deaths. I don't know why this happened to me, but what I do know is that I have to stand up and move on because I still have my five-year-old granddaughter. She gives me hope.

When I left her that day, I felt that I now had the resolve to fight against anything that tried to take my sons away from me. I was reminded of an old saying: "I used to cry because I had no shoes until I met someone with no feet." I knew how lucky I was.

~ *Emily Nutter*

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TRAPPED IN A CAGE

Here in a place run by a push of a  
A button, thinking in the back of my  
Mind: Does life really mean something?  
I'm trapped in a cage.

I wake in the mornings by a voice  
Saying to get out of bed. It's chow  
Call. It's time to be fed.  
I'm trapped in a cage.

Like an animal waiting to be set free  
The sounds of these doors opening  
And shutting. Man, that really bothers me.  
I'm trapped in a cage.

Three hots and a cot is what they said.  
Waking up to see I'm here are the days I dread  
Sometimes I don't know what to do but I look  
Up to the sky and God sees me through.  
I'm trapped in a cage.

Although there's day ahead being in this cage  
My Lord sees me wake up and go to bed.  
And I will soon be in a glorious place.  
I'm trapped in a cage.

Let the Spirit lead you and you will be set  
Free from all bondage and all anxiety.  
Jesus died for the love of you plus me so  
The day he rises again will be an eternity.  
I'm trapped in a cage.

Amen.

~ Timothy Edwards

## DEAR SON

Dear Elijah'Bleu,

I hope one day you can fully comprehend how grateful I am to have you in my life. Right now you are 1 year old; before we know it, you will be 21. I pray every night that I will be blessed to live the next 20 years so I can see what a wonderful man you will grow up to be.

When you were born, I cried; tears of joy and excitement was the reason why. I would lean over your bassinette and watch you sleep. You would always smile as if little angels were keeping you entertained. To this day I still watch you sleep and I try to figure out why God blessed me with such an amazing child. But I knew from the day the stick turned blue that God truly loved me. He knew that I needed you. You are my second chance at being a mother.

When you were 5 months old, you were hospitalized and had to have surgery due to a spider bite. You were there for a week or so, and I will admit I was scared. I held you in my arms at night and rocked you until you fell asleep. We would watch your favorite DVD, *The Wiggles*, and you would giggle as I sang along. I stood right at your side during the surgery; I rubbed your face and kissed your cheeks. When you got through the surgery, you became really sick and your hospital stay became a little longer. So I prayed that you would heal and I could take you home and comfort you. Within a few days you were released to go home. This experience is an important event in your life, and you will have many more on your pathway to adulthood.

As I write this, I can hear you in your room, and you're not happy. You're at the toddler stage where you want things your way or you will cry and make us all miserable. Of

course I get frustrated at times, but your smile reminds me that you're just an innocent little boy who wants his mommy's attention. I hear you running down the hallway and I know you will come face to face with me and fall into my lap, letting me know you want a hug. You are such an affectionate kid; I hope you will never lose that quality. I look forward to your bedtime hugs and kisses because right now that is your only outlet of showing me how much you love and care for me.

So, my son, my eyes are getting restless and soon I will be asleep never to awake to your smile again. I trust this letter will give you closure, and I hope you will see how much I loved you and how important you were in my life. In closing is my favorite poem that I often read and now dedicate to you.

***You will always have my love!***

You are someone to be proud of  
Someone to be thankful for  
Someone to always love  
In everything you hope and do  
I'll encourage and believe in you  
For your every joy is my joy too  
I will forever love and treasure you.  
- Unknown Author

Love, Mommy

~ Antawanna Burt Witherspoon

## AMERICAN SOLDIERS

My name is Linda Seymour, and my story is about our soldiers. I just want to say that I am very proud of each and every one of our soldiers who have fought and are still fighting to keep America free.

My brother served in the Marines a long time ago, and he has told me stories that would make your hair stand on end. He was in Vietnam. He told me about how mean the men were to the women and kids. They would hit the women if they didn't do what they told them to do.

He also told us about the time that they took one of their kids, who was only fifteen, and put a bomb around his waist and used him as an ambush for U.S. soldiers.

Also, my brother told me that one of his buddies saved his life. They were in a foxhole and his buddy covered him so he wouldn't get shot. Instead of my brother getting shot, his buddy got shot. He rose up to see what was going on and one of the enemy shot him in the head. My brother held him in his arms and cried. He said that was one of the saddest days of his life.

My brother will tell you today that he is very proud that he served his country. He said that he would do it again if he had to. He also told me that the memories never go away, but he's learned how to deal with them. Still today my brother talks to someone at the Veteran's office. He said it helps him to talk to someone, but the pain still remains when a person has gone through what my brother went through.

I just want to say God bless the families who have lost their kids who served their country. God bless them for

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keeping us all safe, and we are carrying them all in our hearts.  
God bless America.

~ *Linda Seymour*

## FEELINGS

Why do we hide our feelings the way we do?  
Is it because that is what we are accustomed to do?  
Some people laugh and smile in spite of their fears,  
Yet behind closed doors, we've all shed tears.

Strong hearts are sometimes filled with joy and pain.  
Some people hide behind others to avoid their shame.  
We shelter our kids from all of the above,  
Wishing our parents had shown that same kind of love.

The moral of this poem is to hold your head high,  
For it's okay to be strong yet cry.  
You deal with your feelings the way you want to.  
Just do one thing for me and always be  
True to yourself and others.  
For at the end of the day  
Your heart won't feel so cluttered.

~ *Angela Bonner*

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DARK FURNACE

As I travel a long and dark road  
where no one will ever want to go  
As I enter behind the bars of my dark nightmare  
I live in hurt, pain, and a loss of respect from my family  
As I stand alone...I see someone  
Watching my every move and listening to my every word  
But there's no movement

I wish I could erase the mistakes or ease my troubled mind  
Erase the hurt I have caused my loved ones  
As this person gets closer, he says,  
*Don't be afraid...I'm your friend*  
*Confide and trust in me that I can give you anything you want*  
*Just believe I will be your strength when you are weak*  
*I will be your confidence when you feel like giving up*  
*I'm the key to your freedom from this dark place*  
*I'm your light when you are unable to see*  
*I'm your guide when you are lost...I will guide you back home*  
*I will forgive you of all your sins, your hurt, and your past*  
*Now it is time for you to know my name*  
*Jesus Christ*

*You are my child whom I love*  
*Go back in time and learn from your mistakes*  
*Do not return to that dark place*

~ Yolanda Ivy

WHEN LOVING TOO MUCH HURTS

I FEEL AS THOUGH I DON'T HAVE A VOICE.

INSIDE OF ME, I AM SCREAMING FOR HELP.

SOME PEOPLE MAY LOOK AT ME AND WONDER,  
WHY THE TIRED AND SAD FACE?

THIS MASK IS GETTING OLD.  
IT HAS MANY LAYERS AND IS STARTING TO WEAR  
AWAY.  
SOON ALL MAY BE REVEALED.

I GREW UP WITH HARDSHIPS.  
THE SAME PATTERNS FOLLOWED.

I HIDE MY PAIN BEHIND OTHERS' TROUBLES,  
BUT THEIR TROUBLES STAY, AND SO DO MINE.

LOVING OTHERS TOO MUCH TAKES AWAY  
FROM ME.

IT'S TOO PAINFUL TO HELP ME.  
I FEEL BETTER BY DOING GOOD FOR OTHERS.

EVERYONE SAYS THAT I'M THE BEST.  
EVERYONE TELLS ME TO SMILE.

NO ONE SAYS, "WHAT'S WRONG?"  
SURELY THEY CAN SEE.

I AM A WIFE,

A MOTHER,

A DAUGHTER,  
A SISTER,  
AN AUNT,  
AND I AM AN ENABLER.  
I AM ADDICTED.  
I AM CO-DEPENDENT.

*~ Christine J. Carter*

## ALL OF ME

I don't want to run  
From someone  
Afraid to speak  
Afraid to cry,  
The truth I seek  
Behind the lies.  
No one knows.  
No one cares  
What I see  
Behind my fears.  
Drown from tears  
Deep inside,  
I hide my pride  
From all I feel.  
My love not real  
Covered in grief  
From all of me  
And who I see  
Just let me be ...

~ *Meghan Marie Piatt*

## UNTITLED

There is more to me than pretty brown  
round, flesh and bone

I want my man to know for real what  
he's got waiting at home

All woman is who I am with feelings and I  
love with all my heart

Sitting here wondering why my relationship is  
falling apart

No one feels my pain, nor would they understand.

Because I can't talk to anyone about how  
I feel lately not even my man

There is more to me than pretty brown  
round, flesh and bone

Sitting here wondering why a heart full of  
love has now turned to stone

*~ Chauntea Henry*

