

*Life and
Learning*





The Apartment

Cats scat
Dogs in a cage behave
People in the hall want to stall
Loud noises no faces I see
Insanity is what it will be!

~ Shirley Pettit

The Last Poem Before I Die

I have mastered every river
 Beaten any foe
 Crushed any obstacle
And left it lying on the road.
Yet, life how sad and empty
 As far as I can see,
Victories and worldly possessions
 Are all but vanity.
 Nobody ever told me
 The road would be easy
 Without a headache or two.
I'm just trying to make it to heaven
 Before my time is due.
I've done mastered every river
 Beaten every foe
 Crushed any obstacle
And left it lying on the road.
Yet, life how sad and empty
 As far as I can see,
Victories and worldly possessions
 Are all but vanity.

~ Lonnie Littleton

A Family Lost

Dark emotions fall from my eyes,
As I remember the hurt of deceitful lies.
My blood runs cold and my heart turns to stone,
As I try to find the reason why he left us alone.
The tears of frustration run to my lips,
The ones he used to softly kiss.
The loneliness embraces me,
And I try to break free.
But I feel as though true love will never again find me.
A game of chance,
A family lost.
The price he now must pay,
His family was the cost.
The two that love him most,
He now lives without.
He has no idea what life is all about.

~ Mary Rapp

Inner Child

Dark yearning eyes peering at me
Small waves crashing into the sea
Dreams come and go through my head
Hopes and terror drowning me instead
The past that doesn't want me anymore
Memories of a longing, I do adore
People running to pass me by
Without even stopping to tell me why
A little girl dies from excruciating pain
Nobody even knows her name

~ Regina Mulkey

Life Changes

The highlight of my life in the year 2000 was my decision to focus life in a more positive light. I have my parents and best friends to thank for helping me realize the light. I remember when my friends told me that the other guys I was hanging out with were not good people. I just laughed it all off and told them they were wrong. When I finally realized my true friends were right, it was too late. I had to spend five days in the Juvenile Detention Center. During those five days I kept thinking to myself that jail is not for me. I just didn't belong in jail. This is where I thought about my life and how to change it. When I got my butt in gear, I contacted my friends and told them how sorry I was because I didn't listen to them. I told them that from now on I wouldn't ignore them. They continue to be my good friends, and now I am living a better life.

~ Michael McFadden

Blood

I feel distracted and upset at times
when I can't seem to find the most important
answer in my mind.

I get stressed every day that goes by.
You just let my point of view pass on by.

If you really knew what kind of person I am
you would understand.
I am not just some woman trying to make it in life.
I **am** that woman making it in life.

I will strive to my last breath.
I will go to the deepest depth.
I won't look back.
That light ain't as bright
as the one I have in my sight.

I will put up the biggest fight...

I knew you as my blood.
That all changed when you tossed me out
like a cup of water and just took my daughter.

You ain't no kind of mother.

~ Toshia Smith

Life as a Single Father

Did you ever look through the eyes of a child? I did, and I didn't like what I saw in our home life through the eyes of my sons, Taylor and Alex. They lived in an unstable home with an alcoholic mother and frazzled father. Their mother's illness frightened them. The boys would cling to me and from their fear my need to protect them grew. My sons deserved a safe home to grow up in. Our marriage ended in divorce, and I began a new life as a single dad.

The divorce changed my life dramatically. I am now a single father with primary custody of my sons. Our family situation is somewhat unique. In most cases of divorce the mother is the custodial parent. I have the joy and the challenge of being both father and mother. As in most families, we have our ups and downs, but now we live without fear and with a lot of love. It's a good life.

Life as a single father does have some moments of irritation. In today's world many people think that a father can't nurture his children. Well-meaning but ignorant individuals have instructed me on how to raise my sons. Everyone from the doctor to the grocery store cashier offers unsolicited child-rearing advice. Some people believe children need a mother to experience a proper upbringing. I've learned children need a responsible adult who loves them and cares for them. The gender of that person doesn't really matter.

As a single father I spend a lot of time with Taylor and Alex. We enjoy making crafts, wood working, fixing things together and participating in 4-H activities. I love to spend time with my boys. I love seeing what they do and sharing their lives. It's not easy sometimes; in fact it can be very hard to get all the things done that need to get done. There are bills to pay, cooking and cleaning to do, homework, and caring for our many animals. There is also the need to provide meaningful activities that will help the boys grow and develop. Children need a variety of activities and experiences

to learn about life. I've learned to put my boys first. I realize they will be young only for a short time, so the time I spend with them now is very important not only to them, but also to me.

When you make your children the first priority of your life, having a relationship with a woman is a challenge. Just to go out to dinner can be taxing if you're a single parent. The extra effort dating takes can make it very hard to build a good relationship with someone. Finding time to get to know a woman is important, but in my life it's hard to do. It's also important to see if you like that person before the children get to know her. If she has children, you need to see if the children can get along. Complex, isn't it? Clearly, the life of a single father is busy and challenging, but it is also rewarding. Like most things in life, it's what you make of it.

~ Dale Sherman

A turtle?

Enough is enough! It occurs to me that it would be nice to be a turtle. With the protection of a hard shell and the slow pace of contentment. Even your limbs, heart, and spirit could be protected just by drawing within. It would be warm, dark, and secure in this shell. And green is a comfortable color for me! What could be better than a turtle on a beach? You could turtle-surf in the waves, or turtle-tan, and have turtle love in the shade of the trees! I've convinced myself, I want to be a turtle!

But only for a day.

~ Marjie Mustard

The Paper

Morning is
A new sheet of paper
For you to write on.

Whatever you want to say,
All day,
Until night
Folds it up
And files it away.

The bright words and dark words
Are gone
Until dawn
And a new day
To write on.

~ Christine Seman

Fade Myself

Ready to explode
Wanting to scream
To smoke a big fat blunt
Would ruin my dreams

One day at a time
24 hours a day
The old me is slowly
Fading away

Take care of my business
And ignore the rest
No matter how hard it seems
It's all for the best

~ Faith D. Crabtree

Wings to Fly

I would love to have a set
Of wings,
To look from above to see what
Life brings.
I have to stop asking the
Question "Why?"
If I am ever gonna have the
Chance to fly.
I will focus on the question
"How?"
To make a positive change in
My life now.
This is the one thing I
Have learned
To keep myself from getting
Burned.
I am so grateful for this
Program called Wings,
It's given me the chance to
Learn so many things.
But I must now say "thank
You" and "good-bye."
For it is now my turn,
My turn to fly!

~ Karen Barnes

My Life on the Streets
Mi Vida en las Calles

Las calles, The streets
Of my youth.

Con mis panas, My friends
Shooting hoops.

My height on the court
High like my thoughts.

My head full of smoke
My life was a joke.

Hanging out all night
My parents uptight.

The streets
Are not my life.

Standing on blocks
Listening to hip-hop.

Running from cops
Hearing gun shots.

My life almost fouled out
Like my games on the court
1, 2, 3, 4 . . .

~ *Christian Velez*

Relax, Be Gentle

Relax, be gentle by the ocean day and night.
Listen to the sound of the waves as they rush by.
Hear the birds as they chirp in the sky, flying over
And under the clouds, oh so high.
Listen to the sound of the wind, wildly howling on
A cool, windy night.
Feel the raindrops pouring down all over your body
As you shiver by the coldness.
See the lightning in the sky as it brings a night-light into
The darkness of the night.
Hear the thunder as it roars so loudly, full of authority,
Full of demand like a high voltage power line out of control.
See the calmness up in the sky after the storm. Feel the
Peacefulness of the ocean, oh so quiet.
Relax, be gentle by the ocean day and night.

~ Karen S. Smith

Divorce

Divorce means many different things to people. It meant **Devastation** for my family and me. It happened so quickly that we were very **Insensitive** to each other's feelings, and we said **Vicious** things about each other. We were even **Cruel** to each other.

Our divorce was so **Overwhelming** that it was hard to **Realize** what we were doing. I believe with all my heart that we truly loved each other, but **Evil** influences came into our lives and destroyed what we both believed in. In our own human weaknesses, we were unable to overcome the circumstances that caused us to fail in our marriage.

I speak from my heart and encourage anyone who is married to try to work it out because the hurt from **DIVORCE** lasts a lifetime.

D=DEVASTATION
I=INSENSITIVE
V=VICIOUS
O=OVERWHELMING
R=REALIZE
C=CRUEL
E=EVIL

Each word has a real meaning to what **DIVORCE** can cause.

~ Carol E. Gessner

Hobbies

A hobby is like a side track ride that you take in life-- out of the ordinary hum drum of everyday living. It's not just a nice side trip you are taking, but it can be a very profitable business adventure along the way.

Along this trip, all cares are left behind. Your eyes are set on a goal you want to reach, and you just know you can do it.

Traveling along, depression gets off in the valley; anxiety takes a leap into the troubled waters of Lake Worry; panic gets off at the Gate of Fear. My track is now clear and my thoughts utter, "Joy cometh in the morning."

Nothing can stop me now. My thoughts and hands work effortlessly on a project that is going to turn into a beautiful masterpiece. On and on I work, making things from a few odds and ends.

As I finish, I think of what I have accomplished on my journey, and I think of the person who will take it home, never realizing the journey that brought about this product.

~ Linda Montgomery

Hit Man

Cancer is a terrible disease, but sometimes you see things in a different light. Everyone has life struggles along with hardships and pain. We all have our cross to bear, but you learn to let go and let God.

I lost my mother in a car accident when I was sixteen. That was my first big struggle. Then I got married at twenty-two and a series of problems began. The marriage was a flop. I had two kids from this marriage, a son and a daughter. My son's health was good, but my daughter had numerous health problems.

In 1990, my very best friend died. Before I could really get over missing her, my daughter got very sick again, and spent four days in intensive in critical condition. She finally got better, and as the years passed she really seemed to be doing better and not in the hospital as much. I started to breathe a little easier then.

One day I was exercising and started to change my sweater because I was hot and needed a cooler shirt. That is when I noticed a lump in my breast. My mind started to race, thinking, "This wasn't there all the time; where did it come from and when?" My heart dropped. My neighbor's daughter was dying from breast cancer. She looked so bad I couldn't bear to go over to see her, and she was much younger than I was!

I found out I had breast cancer. I felt like someone had kicked me in the stomach and I couldn't catch my breath. I broke down and cried in the nurse's arms. She even started to cry. I felt like I had no control over my life. Everything was going crazy.

My main concern at that time was if something happened to me, who would take care of my daughter?

I left the hospital and instead of catching the bus home, I decided to walk. It was about an hour walk and I cried all the way. I also prayed, "Just give me a sign; let me find a feather (this was a reminder of my mother) to let me know everything is going to be all right." I walked a little farther and looked down on the grass and there was my feather, lying there looking really beautiful to me! I picked it up and when I did, it seemed that the world lifted off my shoulders, not to mention my heart. This to me was like the Lord was saying to me, "I am the wind beneath your wings."

After that, things got better or at least my attitude did. I had really good friends and family to help me through. I was truly blessed to be alive and not to lose a breast because they first told me that I would. Prayer does change things!

I call cancer the "hit man" because it is a very scary thing, and you never know if or when it may return to try to take your life again. Although I had been stricken with cancer, it strengthened my faith.

Choose your battles carefully and don't let the small things get you down, especially things you can't change. Oh, by the way, it has been six years, and I'm doing well. No "hit man" and the feather I found? I still have it. It is in my Bible.

~ Diane Brown

Liquid Nightmare

I sit at my desk that I bought at an auction for a few bucks, with an assignment to describe a picture out of a magazine. This picture wrenches my insides because I have lost many battles with “Old No. 7”.

My picture is a bottle of Jack Daniels Tennessee Whiskey. One black labeled, square, heavy glass bottle sits on a black walnut rough-sawn table or a bar top, along with two glasses of the same whiskey on ice. The two seven-ounce glasses are two thirds full. Or is it one third empty?

The picture was taken in a room as dark as the table itself; you can't see past the shoulders of the bottle that keeps calling my name. I suppose the two glasses signify two friends having a few drinks, but by the time the last drink is poured, that friendship will be tested.

When you look past the historical name and old fashioned label, you see the whiskey itself, which looks like iced tea, but packs a powerful punch that will make you bark like a dog and gasp for your next breath.

If you can hold it down without surrendering the contents of your stomach, you will feel one of many different ways: you will wish you didn't throw up, wish you were never born, or know everyone is watching you drink your poison. Then you become the man you always wanted to be as well as accepted by the scumbags that are now your new friends.

Alcohol is like a tornado ripping through your neighborhood; it will smash the strongest building and leave a shack. It doesn't care whose house it destroys or leaves untouched. After it's done, the tornado leaves without a care and there's one hell of a mess for its victims to clean up and put their lives back together, with the fear of its return.

To me it doesn't matter if it's Busch Beer, a cheap bottle of Thunder Bird or Mad Dog 20/20, or a bottle of Crown Royal. “This tornado is back!” With no extra cost, when the cap is twisted off, the demon of deception is released. He will tell you, “Everything will be OK this time,” and give you pointers on how to control it.

With one sip, your troubles seem to slip away, or worse yet, guilt and remorse creep in leaving you depressed or in a fit of anger. It'll make you feel ten feet tall and bullet proof or lower than well digger boots. But early the next morning, the troubles that seemed to slip away so easily are the first thing to greet you when you open your blood-shot eyes and are faced with the humiliation of your actions the night before.

So, when I look at this picture I see more than a dark room, two glasses and a bottle of whiskey. I see a troubled past and a bright future if I just turn the page.

A bit of irony: in small print it says, "Your friends at Jack Daniels remind you to drink responsibly." You have got to be kidding me! Responsibility is the first thing to go out the window.

~ Larry Hurd

Life and Choices

I'd like everybody to
think a little bit about LIFE.

It gives us so many beautiful things,
but sometimes we ignore them because
we think about our tasks and problems most
of the time rather than the loveliness of flowers
or the enchantment of a child when he discovers
something new. We close our eyes to them.

Life brings difficulties but we can use them to
our advantage or let them destroy us. We are like
a rough rock, that becomes a diamond through
many cuts and polishings. It's true that
this stonecutting process can be painful,
but it always brings a lesson. Sometimes we do
not take advantage of this lesson and we continue
committing the same errors. We suffer and we
do not grow. Other times perhaps we can find
the solutions.

Who we are today, came from our choices
Yesterday, but our future depends only on
how we handle what life brings us.

Can we improve?
Yes, we can do this.
Think about it!
Try it!

~ Patricia Santos

Shaking Hands

People shake hands more frequently today than they did a few hundred years ago. In ancient times the hand was considered a symbol of power and strength. Primitive man used it to kill animals or fight against his enemies. Extended hands were taken to be a gesture of goodwill and friendship by ancient people.

The practice of shaking hands probably originated in ancient Greece. Greeks prayed before their gods with raised hands, a gesture of devotional acts in honor of the deities.

Nowadays, a handshake has become the most accepted form of greeting and occurs in the most varied cultural areas of the world with a few exceptions. The Japanese, for instance, normally do not shake hands; they bow and the degree of bending is related to the amount of respect due to the person being greeted. In India traditional form of greeting is a Namaste with folded hands. In the Middle East, people exchange greetings by kissing gently on each other's extended hands. However with the passage of time and the influx of Western culture, these forms of greetings are not a rule everywhere. Still these traditions exist among a large number of people in different regions.

A handshake can reveal one's hidden personality. A firm but smooth grip is considered the best handshake. It sends a message of warmth and friendliness. Handshaking usually accompanies all acts like introduction, farewell, gratitude, and congratulations. It is customary to shake every individual's hand when formally joining or departing from groups.

~ Mahammed Kutubuddin