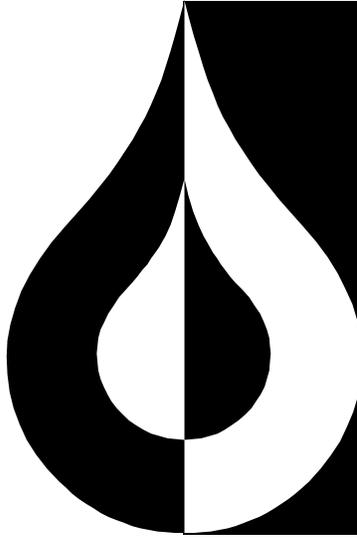


Choices





TODAY IS THE NEW YEAR OF YOUR LIFE

Most people wait until the end of the year to start with a new project or to change a lifestyle. I wonder why people need to wait for a date on the calendar to tell them, "This is the time to begin. "

If you really want to change or begin something, do it now, today, because it is the "new year" for your project. Today is the "new year" for your new lifestyle. Today is the "new year" for all the things you really want to change.

Besides, you never know when it will be the end of the "new year" in your life. Also, you never know if you still have even another year to change.

Don't delay another year! Start your new year today!

Socorro Wood

DISEASE

My disease is a chronic menace to me,
Burning in my head like the pit of my stomach as it absorbs a
cup of Hennessey.
A daily struggle with my disease is to overcome every trigger.
This cunning and baffling disease makes me realize, in
situations, that I am the only Nigger.

This threat that will be with me for the rest of my life is
frightening.
Every flashback that I encounter blasts from nowhere like a
storm of lightning.
It tells me every minute of the day that I am nothing but an
addict.
But my disease jolts my emotions and my conscience causing
overwhelming static.

Even though it tries to discourage me with feelings of guilt
and remorse,
I have to make sure that I stay on track and maintain my
course.
I am able to accomplish goals, just like any other person,
But I have to watch every step I take to make sure my
condition does not worsen.

I wake up sometimes with a deep resentment and feel I
cannot survive
Wondering if I can take the next step to keep my will alive.
Sometimes I feel like a pot of clay because everyone else
seems to be forming my day.
But these things that I am going through are obviously the
price I have to pay.

There is a toll to pay, which is an ultimate cost
To make up for the things I have lost.

My disease tells me to have FEAR, to Forget Everything And Run,
But I have surrendered my disease and I still have FEAR, but now it is Face Everything And Recover, and fix what is undone.

I have severed off the relationship with my disease and I am forming others.
I am trying to regain what I have ruined, like the trust of my mother.
How can her youngest child look upon me to be that responsible older brother?

I cannot do that by myself so I look to my Higher Power.
I choose to call him God because I feel him with me every hour.
He is the only one that has control over my disease because He has kept it from killing me.
I feel now that I am able to renounce it because I am regaining control over my disease.
Now I am learning to live and I am learning not to have resentments.
I do not hold a grudge, I always forgive, and my problems will start to relinquish.

Life is 90% of what comes at me and 10% of what I make it.
I hope not to make my life a hassle, and whatever comes my way, I will take it.

Chris Carter

COMING OUT OF THE DARK

It could have been you that grew up in a foster home with brothers that did not look like you. But it was not you. It was me. I kept asking myself, "Why me? Why did I have a very strong need to fit in, to be part of the family?" No matter what I tried, nothing seemed to work. Well, I said to myself, if I can't fit in at home, I'll fit in out in the street or wherever I can. Who are my kind? Who are my brothers and sisters? Why did my mother give me up and not the others? Was it because I was born first? Why was I full of rage? Why was I all screwed up at a young age? Was that why I used drugs to escape from the maze?

However, the more I ran, the more I needed to run. I used drugs until it was no longer fun. I went from stealing to home invasion. The plot got more elaborate; it went from car thefts to eyewitnesses, to police court, to judges' decisions, to four to twenty-five years in prison.

In prison, locked up for the first time, I did no work on my alcoholism or my mind. As a result, I'm back on the street, blind. I went right back to drinking and using drugs. I had no clue that I was back on the path of self-destruction. Once again I would find myself robbing, stealing, and doing whatever it took to get my fix. I was in and out of one dead-end job after another and homeless more times than I care to remember. I had no idea of what I was doing to my mind and body. I fell deeper into the abyss of drug addiction. I had days that I could not look at myself in the mirror, but at the same time I reached out for help. Help came in the form of another trip to prison.

When I arrived in prison and had time to reflect, I blamed everyone from the judge on down to the prosecutor and my own mother, until a light came on and I realized that no one else was to blame. For years I had refused to look at what I had done to myself. The question was no longer, "Why me?" but, "Was it me?" My first step was to admit I

had a problem. When I finally accepted this fact, the second step was to find help. Fortunately for me, there were programs in this prison that I could take advantage of, and I did with great enthusiasm. I learned a lot about myself and why I used drugs and what drugs did to me. I got involved in a group session. At first I didn't want to go because I would have to open up and talk about myself. This was something I did not like doing. However, the more I went to these group sessions and the more I got involved, the more I helped myself and others. I successfully completed the program; I was transferred to a prison closer to home and after one year, I was released.

As preparation for my release, I filled out paper work for college admission and when I was released I went to Cuyahoga Community College-Metro Campus and worked in the cafeteria. I had a car and attended some AA meetings, but I was still hanging around people who drank. I was not doing what the AA program said to do to stay clean. When the time came for me to turn down that drink, I had no defense. I picked that drink up and I was right back where I left off.

How could I forget all the stuff that just happened to me? I tried to cover up the fact that I fell off the wagon, but those people who knew me could tell something was wrong. I was calling off the job, not going to class, and I stopped paying my rent. I lost my job. I dropped out of college and was put out of my house. Now, I found myself drinking more than before, because I did not want to take a look at what was going on with me. The more I drank, the worse things got. After weeks of being on the streets in the cold, reality hit hard and I had nowhere to go. A treatment center shelter seemed like a good place to be. I was off the street, out of the cold, and had food to eat. I had to sit in group and go to meetings seven days a week. In group, I denied the fact that something was wrong with me. I was mad at myself, and I did not want to be in treatment. But the light came on again, and I knew I needed help. Once I admitted I was powerless over

alcohol and my life was unmanageable, I was on my way. I looked forward to going to treatment and made the most of it. I learned that I had to let go of all my old ways. After eight weeks of treatment, I was ready to build my AA program on a strong foundation of regular attendance, getting a sponsor, joining a support group and remembering, "It's one day at a time."

I'm now in literacy education for the purpose of building up my math and communication skills and in time will re-enter college. I hope to become a counselor and help people trying to recover from drug and alcohol addiction. Just thinking that I may have a chance to help other people, as well as myself, makes me feel good on the inside, which is where the healing starts.

Anthony C. Porter

CHOICES

A path before me,
A choice to make--
Which way to travel,
Which road to take.
A decision ahead,
A fork in the road,
A slow deliberation,
An unknown crossroad.
To take the road
Which to my right lies,
Or to take the road less traveled by.
Whatever the outcome,
The path my feet I send,
I know that each road
Will lead to an end.

Sarah Blair

FLYING HIGH!

I often wonder how far I can fall.
I close my eyes and see my hopes and dreams fade away.
Days go by, and I do nothing at all to stop my fall.
And one day I opened my eyes only to realize I've got wings,
And can fly high!

My hopes and dreams I may have,
But I must work on them to succeed in life.
Learning to flap my wings is just the beginning,
But it's a step up from this long hard fall.
A lesson learned, the weight on my back was not what I
thought,
But instead it was my wings to keep me high so that I may not
fall.

I shall fly high and soar through the clouds,
For that is why I have wings.
I will not fly too high or ignore my goals,
For my feathers may fall off and I may fall again
With nothing else left to help me.
But I will fly high and try to help others learn as well.

Chong Maynard

DECISIONS AND CHOICES IN MY LIFE

In my teens I decided to leave school and party. I made all the common mistakes including my bad choices in men, friends, places, and people I partied with.

When I was sixteen I started to work. I had a small child to care for. My family was always there for me, but I wanted to be independent, and I was. My life was hard, but I managed. I was always able to obtain employment and make a living. My child grew up, finished school, went to college, and married a good man in real estate.

My father became ill, so I went to Montgomery, Alabama, where he resided at the time, and I cared for him. I met a young man, and we were married. This marriage changed my whole life. After a few years of marriage, the abuse began. It was as if I had entered hell on earth.

My new husband beat me, called me names, and did not allow me to go anywhere without him or one of his family members. He drank everyday, all day. I allowed him to steal my joy and self-worth, but then I found God.

God and prayer saved me from my ex-husband and myself. God is good all the time. He blessed me, and I moved back here to Ohio. He blessed me to find a job. He blessed me with a good and loving family. He blessed me with a car. He blessed me to find this school. God has blessed me to make better decisions in my life. I am thankful, and I give Him all the praise.

Now that I am a woman, I am no longer making the mistakes of my youth. I feel as if the Lord has given me the victory.

Marion Ford

A SECOND CHANCE TO LEARN

I would like to tell you about my education and how big a tragedy it was for me. I went to Catholic school. I can remember once in the 4th grade when the Sister asked me if I had trouble seeing the blackboard. I said, "No, I can see fine." Sister said, "Benny, I don't think you're paying attention, so I'm going to move you to the front of the classroom." It didn't help me. I didn't do any better whether I sat in the front or the back. If I asked for help, I was told that I hadn't been paying attention. Sister would keep me after school, and I would have to write on the blackboard many times any sentence that I hadn't completed during class.

I passed the 4th grade. I don't know how or why, but I did.

I then became an altar boy, got involved with church activities, and began to play soccer. I would miss classes because Father wanted me to practice soccer or help in the church. Missing classes only made it worse. When I told Father that I needed help with my studies, he would say, "Don't worry. It'll come to you."

Learning never did come easy for me. I was passed from grade to grade without learning how to read and write. I asked my teacher and my family for help, but no one helped me.

I was so frustrated that I quit school at sixteen and went to work.

I married at eighteen and my wife always helped me with any reading or writing I needed.

It was in my senior years that I discovered a one-on-one literacy organization. I have been tutored for about three years. My tutor is excellent in helping me.

I can't praise the program enough for all the help they have provided for me. I no longer feel frustrated, and I enjoy my classes.

Ben Naidznski

REFLECTION

A lone girl, shattered by the world's scorn, smirks at her image ricocheting back at her off a mirrored wall. Filled with hate, her mind tossing in a torrent of unforgiving waves, she bears much pain. Her hope for living, for bringing peace and joy to her life has been torn from her arms and thrown into a gorge, separated by a bridge of splintered boards, bound by torn twine.

The love and joy that once made the days bright enough for the child to walk through have died like a rose that withers under winter's first frost. The girl cries out, yelling that she wants that love back. Her conscious mind does not realize she has had the love all along.

Standing on that lonely bridge of life, the girl looks up and sees a mysterious and intriguing figure beckoning her to follow it. Rising to meet that figure, a strange peace filters through her like the sunlight through a willow's leaves. She looks into the face of the unknown figure, filled with the pictures and knowledge of the light she once knew – a light of happiness and love full of hope and faith. The girl falls back into the arms that once carried her through life's heartaches and pains.

Looking past the brilliant gleam of those wonderful years, she still cannot quite make out the face of that long forgotten protector. Through a bog of despair, she can almost feel that love and joy again. Reaching out, she hopes to grasp this feeling and hold on to it forever, never to let it escape her heart again.

A voice speaks out from across the bay, a voice with a tone unlike that of any kind known to humanity. This mystical voice tells the young woman of a secret only she is to know and to believe. Those hopes and dreams she thought she had lost so long ago have been buried in her heart and will always be kept there, locked away, for only her to know.

The gentle hands set her back down on the bridge, now free from the loose and tattered boards. Free from the loneliness that once overflowed from her heart, she starts forward immediately to face life's new challenges. The voice of her deceased mother has comforted her and coaxed her from the deep cavern she had shut herself into for so long. The death that held her back has now pushed her forward and taught her to strive for the best, not only in life, but in herself as well.

Amanda Vasbinder

MY HOUSE

My mind, body, and soul are my house, and the inside of this old raggedy house had fallen apart. The outside was even worse, as the brown paint was chipped away. The doors had fallen off, the windows were broken, and, worst of all, the roof was caving in. The foundation was crumbling, so the house was leaning to one side, almost touching the ground.

I had been trying to evict the tenants. My house had gotten too crowded, because of a tenant named Satan, a tenant named Crack, a tenant named Liar, a tenant named Thief, a tenant named Prostitution, a tenant named Hate, a tenant named Carelessness, and a tenant named Charles, my so-called man. They were tearing my house up inside and out. They were going to let my house, my soul, burn up in hellfire.

As the landlord, I decided to stop giving the tenants chance after chance in my life. After praying, I went to the old house and put my foot down. I told them they were evicted and to get out now. Again I prayed and decided to put the house up for sale. As soon as I put up the "For Sale" sign, guess who bought it? My Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Right away He started fixing the house, my mind, body, and soul. He went straight to my mind, to change my way of thinking. He wanted me to think about all the goodness He had given me. He changed my way of seeing, so now I can see clearly that He is the head of my life. He changed the way I talk, so now I can speak His word. He didn't stop there: He went to my heart. I was in need of a new heart. I needed Him to scrub it and wash all the dirt off this broken heart. The heart hadn't loved anybody but those old demons. The heart hadn't cared about the house or those who had cared about the house. So the new owner, Jesus Christ, took that old heart and washed it in His red blood, and it became whiter than snow. He pieced my heart

together so it can work again. It can forgive those who misuse it. The heart learned to love Jesus Christ, my brothers and sisters, my mother, and everything and everybody that is right in the sight of God.

The house isn't perfect yet. The Lord Jesus Christ is still working on it every day. Jesus and I live in the house and work together on all the repairs left to do. We put up the fence of protection to keep the old, unclean tenants out. When they come to visit, I remind them they are not welcome. I only want good people visiting me now. Jesus took my house out of that old neighborhood and put it on a new foundation. Now it stands with the angels all around it on a Solid Rock, Amen.

May God bless my House.

Rebecca Muldrew

