

Thoughts of Perseverance



MY LIFE

Life was hard for me growing up in downtown Cincinnati. I was only nine years old when life as I knew it changed. I was on my way to the store to buy some candy. To get to this store, I had to walk down an alley that wasn't even a full block from my home. I got about halfway down this alley when a man grabbed me and raped me. After that, he started beating me. He banged my face over and over on to the ground. He didn't think I would survive his beating, but I did! The police caught him and they told me I would have to face him in court. I was very scared to see him again, but I knew I had to do this so he couldn't hurt anyone else. In court, he kept looking at me, very hateful, trying to scare me into keeping my mouth closed. But I got up there and told the court what he did to me, and they put him in jail for only six months. In my eyes, this was not long enough.

One year later my father was killed while on his way home. Some man stabbed him to death. When the police showed up at our home, they took my mom outside where us kids couldn't hear. She came in crying and told us dad was dead and how he died. At that point, I knew life couldn't get any harder for me.

As an adult, I fell in love for the first time and got married. I was on cloud nine. We had three wonderful children together. Life was good for awhile until I found out he was cheating on me with another woman. We divorced, and my mother has our children now. I am remarried now to a man that I believe is my soul mate. We have been together for seven years come March 10, 2005.

Life is good to me now. On a personal note, I would like to tell anyone who has ever been raped not to stop living life to the fullest. If you do, then they win because you've

given up on yourself and everything life has to offer. I know God loves me, and I know He has a plan for me in this life. I don't know what it is yet, but I know He will let me know when He's ready.

Dink Bishop

MY LIFE EXPERIENCES

It was early 1988, about the month of April, that I started to experience the difficulties of life when I was 6 years old. The first experience of my life was the attack on our village. During the dawn hours, around 4 a.m. Sudan local time, the attackers opened fire on us, including my parents, my brothers, and my sister. The whole village was on fire.

All of us and our neighbors scattered everywhere looking for where to hide from the enemy. My parents and I ran in different directions. As a result I could not find them. I ran alone and hid myself under the pumpkin that was grown by my parents. From my hiding place I saw the enemy slaughtering people. When the enemy were fighting I heard them saying “amsik-um abidiin dell,” which in Arabic means “catch the slaves and let them show us where the rebels are.” I recognized them as government militia from the north of Sudan because they were wearing the green uniform and carrying guns.

The fires were continuing to burn our houses and the light was everywhere. I saw them coming towards me where I was hiding, but I jumped out and ran away. On my way I saw some people lying on the ground. I was unable to recognize them and didn't know whether my parents were among them.

From there I managed to run away on my own. On the way, I found some people with their families. Some of the boys were the same age as I. They asked me where I came from. I started to tell them and pretended to know what was happening in our country, though I really didn't. They told me they were going to Ethiopia, a safe place and told me to come with them. Ethiopia is three months by foot from Sudan. The only thing I could say was “OK!” even though I

knew nothing about where they were taking me. I had to trust that I would be safe and have the chance to go to school again. I accepted their offer and went with them.

I spent three years in Ethiopia and again we were attacked by the government soldiers. We then ran away to Kenya where we stayed for 12 years. We were found by the American government and brought to the United States. From the time I was separated from my parents, I have never seen them or talked to them again.

Peter Waat

MY SEIZURES

When I was born in 1950, I was placed in an incubator for three days and given blood transfusions. My mother had started hemorrhaging during my birth and I had lots of birth trauma. My doctor told my parents that he didn't think I was going to live. He told them that part of my brain was damaged due to the trauma.

But I survived. However, over the years I have had some troubles. In 1963, at the age of thirteen, I started having seizures, at least 2-3 each year. I started taking seizure medication. My seizures and troubles bothered some of my family members. One aunt told my mother, "Why don't you give her away?" My mother told her, "I had her and I am going to keep her." We went on with life and seizures.

A few years later I had married and started my own family. On a bright summer day, I had three seizures in six hours. It was awful. I told my parents what had happened to me, and they took me to my family doctor. Our doctor told us to go to O.S.U. Hospital to a doctor that helps people who have seizures. I was thoroughly checked out and my reflexes were all right. At that time, he did not change my medication.

In 1995, I started to have more seizures; the medication was not working anymore. My doctor felt that I started going through the change of life and that was affecting my seizures. He had started giving me hormone shots once a month. The combination of seizure medication and hormone shots is keeping the seizures under control.

I feel I am very lucky because I am able to keep the seizures under control and I have a good quality of life. Seizures are no fun; they wear you out. I heard that there

are 20 different kinds of seizures, and some people are not able to have theirs controlled. I imagine their life is extremely difficult.

Carol Adams

MY SECRET

Most of us harbor secrets, some small and others significant. Some are revealed and some are not. I have one that I have harbored inside of me for almost 19 years. It's of much significance, and it is very painful to me.

I got pregnant right before my fifteenth birthday; I was a freshman in high school. My mom did not take it very well at all. She took me to her doctor after I had missed my period. When he told her that I was most definitely pregnant she went off on me to the extreme. When she finished her rampage she insisted that my pregnancy must be kept a secret from everyone including my dad, my brother, and all of our other family members. I was a disgrace in her eyes, and I had sinned. She then told me that I had no choice but to give the baby up at birth. I did not want to give my baby away, but I did not have a say in it. My mom had the authority.

As my baby grew inside of me, my clothes got tighter. I could not wear maternity clothes because my pregnancy had to remain unknown to everyone. Going to school was difficult for me because I had to go to the bathroom quite frequently. I was sick a lot and I could not participate in gym class. I was placed in a study hall only because my mom insisted on the change.

Five months into my pregnancy I began feeling the baby move inside of me. It felt weird. Three weeks later the movement was less frequent as I approached 6 months. My freshman year was almost completed when I began having terrible cramps at school one day. I felt so bad that I went to the nurse so I could lie down for a while. When I was in her office I felt something warm come out of me. That prompted me to go to the restroom. I discovered I was bleeding quite a lot, and I was still in pain.

I told the nurse that I needed my mom and that I could not make it in school that day. She did as I wished and called my mother. She picked me up and took me to the hospital; I was in labor and did not even know it. Three hours later I gave birth. My baby boy was stillborn. He came too soon to live outside of me.

I was asked if I wanted to see him and I chose to. He was perfectly normal, and I will never forget his little face and all wrapped up in a blue blanket. He was so tiny. I put my index finger gently on his cheek. This was the only time I touched my first baby.

I could not give him a burial, so the hospital discarded my baby boy. That still makes me cry to this day. He was placed in the trash like he was garbage. That makes it all the more painful for me.

I remember what my mom said. She said it was for the best. I did not think so then, nor do I now. Only one other person knows my secret, my boyfriend; he is the first person I have told this to. At least I know I can talk to him about it, and he listens because he knows how much it hurts me. It will remain my painful secret to the rest of the world.

Lisa Rutherford

MACHINE OPERATOR

*Clock in ten
Minutes early
Get clipboard,
PAPERWORK
And tool box
Put on hairnet
Collect items for work
White gloves, blue gloves
White coat, blue coat
Calibrate my thermometer
Start PAPERWORK
Every 20 minutes
Probe the meat with thermometer
And check temperature. If it is not right
Red stop sign
Make an adjustment
Correct it
Green sign
PAPERWORK
Every hour
Weigh the product
Raw and cooked
If weight is too low
Red stop sign
It becomes rework
Correct it
Green sign
MORE PAPERWORK
Break
Food and drink
Back to the line
Continue temperature check
Every 20 minutes
Every hour*

Check weights
Low weights
Cooked weights
Sauce weights
MORE PAPERWORK
Constant checking
PAPERWORK
Product finished
Tear down time
Gas turned off
Steam turned off
Turn down Formax
Office visit
ORGANIZE PAPERWORK
Clock out
12:30 – 1:00 A.M.
Go home
Go to bed
DREAM ABOUT PAPERWORK

Geeoun Post

ABUSE

I am a father, grandfather, and a great grandfather. A few years ago, I witnessed an abuse case, which involved my family. My son was married with two kids. I would go and visit them. My daughter-in-law was a good cook. My son was a big drunk. There were many problems in their marriage. Many times my son would get drunk or high on drugs. I couldn't see him this way. This went on for years. My daughter-in-law always worked hard to pay for the bills and took a lot of abuse from my son. All she would do is tell him to look for work and help out, and then the fighting would be on.

One day when I went to their home, I witnessed my daughter-in-law with two black eyes, a busted lip, and marks on her arm, and she still wanted to cook for me. I told her that I was taking my cars to get painted about 50 miles away from Adrian and that I was going to ask my son if he would drive one of the cars for me. While he was getting ready to go with me, my daughter-in-law told me she was going to leave my son. She wanted me to help her get away. I told her I would keep my son out for a few hours. The plan was for her to get to a shelter that night, and the next morning I would take her and the kids to Social Services so they could get out of the state.

Well, that morning when I took them to Social Services, my son's cousin was working there as a Social Worker. She wasn't the one handling my daughter-in-law's case, but she saw us there! What could I do but stand for what I believe in? I loved them, and I wanted to help her get away from my son, and I did. I was thinking if they left for a while my son would straighten out, not drink and do drugs, but that did not happen.

My son's cousin told him that I had taken his wife and kids to Social Services to get some help to get out of state. Yes, they left but the worst was yet to come!

One day after his family left him he got high on drugs and drinking and came looking for me. He confronted me with what I did (helping his wife and kids get away from him). It almost cost me my life. He was hitting me, but I didn't hit back. He was choking me. I turned blue and couldn't breathe. I slowly dropped to the floor. My dad and mom heard the noise so they called one of my nephews in to see what happened. My nephew opened the door and stopped my son from choking me. It was just about too late for me. After awhile, I got breath back. The law did come to take my son away. I've asked why didn't I hit back? I tell people I do not believe in hitting any one or being like them.

This all happened some years back. My grandsons are grown up now. Yes, they got into more trouble and went to prison. My son has not spoken to me in years. My ex-daughter-in-law is doing really good now. She went to school to get an education, started a business of her own, and has more kids. She remarried and is happy now. I went to see her once when I was in Ft. Meyers, Florida. She gave me a big thank you for what I did for her and the kids.

I moved to Ohio in 1990. I've been happy living here. I do pray for my son and always ask about him. One day I am going to see if all my sons will meet me somewhere to have dinner so we can put the past behind us.

Today I am glad that I can write what I have witnessed. Abuse is a big thing today. Maybe someone else will read this and help others.

My mission is to help out.

Rudy Perez

THE ROAD TO FORGIVENESS

Many young people make mistakes in their lives. I made one that affected not only me but also the lives of my daughters. It was the biggest lesson I would ever learn in my life. I was 22 years old and lived in Branson, Missouri, with my three daughters.

Kim was seven years old, Jonnea was five, and Tabitha was three at the time. I had met a man through a mutual friend. We started spending time together and then dated. A few months later, the girls and I moved in with Bill. One night our friend had the girls, so Bill and I could be alone for the night. Bill went to one of his friend's houses and when he came back, my life would be changed forever.

When Bill returned, he sat me down and told me there was something I should know about him. He pulled a very small plastic bag with some white powder in it out of his pocket. He then pulled a syringe out and told me the white powder was an illegal drug called crank and that he "shoots" it into his vein in his arm. He poured some of the crank into a spoon, put a few drops of water in with it, and turned the powder into liquid. He put a very small cotton ball in the liquid, put the needle on the cotton ball, and sucked the liquid up into the syringe.

Bill told me if I wanted to be with him, I had to try it one time. Then he said, "I know you'll just love it." He put the needle into my arm and pushed the liquid into my vein. The drug sent me into a whirl, and it was the best feeling I had ever known in my life. He was right; I did love it. That one time was all it took, and I was hooked on him and crank. At first I was okay; the next thing I knew two years had gone by. I was on crank so bad that I had gone from 130 lbs. down

to 80 lbs. in seven months, and I was wearing Kim's clothes. She was nine years old now.

In 1994 we moved to Cuba, Missouri, and my drug problem only got worse. All I cared about was my drugs and myself. Kim had to help me feed the girls, and she had to bathe them and take care of them by herself. I very rarely spent any time with the girls, and by this time, Bill was beating on me. Kim was calling 911 at least once a week for Bill hitting and choking me. The longer this went on, the more I withdrew from the girls and everyone else. Jonnea and Tabitha were totally dependent on Kim by 1997.

I was no good to anyone and so strung out that I was almost totally useless. Then one night in the summer of 1997, Bill beat on me, and I had to go to the hospital. I had several bruised ribs, and my ego and self-esteem were completely shot. That night, when I got home from the hospital, I walked away from Bill and the drugs. That was the longest and hardest five years the girls had ever known. The hatred and resentment from the girls were more than I could bear. Today, I am drug free, healthy, happy, and taking care of my children and two step-children. It has been a tough road to recovery and forgiveness and an even rougher road to make everything right with the girls.

My addiction was a terribly painful lesson for the girls and me. The girls learned just how bad drugs are for people who use them and the people in their lives. I learned about addiction and how a person can lose everything and even die from it. We've gone to counseling and I've been in NA (Narcotics Anonymous). Even after seven years, every day is still a fight to survive. I'll tell my story every day, if I have to, to help people with this kind of problem. Everyone makes mistakes and, even though it takes a lot of time and hard work, we can get better and make things right in the end.

I'm not saying I wish this had never happened. I'm glad it did, because if I had to go through all of this to be able to help even one person the way so many people helped me, I would do it all over again. The only thing I'd change would be that I wasn't there for the girls. I am very lucky and blessed to have them, and they are very proud of where I am today. I could never have gotten this far without them. Their love, support, and most of all, their forgiveness are the reasons I am here today.

Thank you so much girls, and I love you with all my heart; and thank you GOD.

For Kim, Jonnea, and Tabitha! My beautiful little angels!

Shirley Mercer

A PEANUT BUTTER STORY

One of the missions that our church supports is Lifeline Christian Mission. From January to March of each year, we collect 18-ounce jars of peanut butter for the children living in Haiti. In March, a man comes to our church to pick up what we have collected, and it is sent to a storage site in Columbus along with all the peanut butter that other Churches of Christ collect. It is then loaded up and shipped to Haiti. Once there, all the children of the village gather together and each child is given his or her own jar of peanut butter. That is the reason all the jars are 18 ounces – so no child gets a bigger or smaller sized jar. Peanut butter is a major source of protein to the severely undernourished children.

Two years ago, our church collected approximately 200 jars of peanut butter. That is quite good because our congregation averages around 75 people.

Last year I challenged the minister and the two elders of our church. I asked them if we could collect 500 jars of peanut butter, would they get up in front of the congregation on a Sunday morning and sing a special? Of course they agreed to that. However, the rest of the deal was that when they sang, all 3 of them would be wearing a wig – of my choice. They hesitated on that but finally decided it would be for a worthy cause. I also think they never dreamed we would collect 500 jars of peanut butter. Lo and behold, we collected 503 jars of peanut butter, and the men kept their end of the deal. I am married to one of those men. They got up in front – in wigs -- and sang, "I'll Fly Away." There wasn't a dry eye in the church that day. Not tears of sadness, but tears of laughter.

They asked me what I had in mind for this year that could top what they had done last year. I thought and thought on that and here is what I have come up with: If we can collect 1,000 jars of peanut butter by the first of March, I will shave my head totally bald and get up in front of the congregation and sing a solo. Cameras will be permitted. Will we get 1,000 jars? I hope so. Not that I am looking forward to a bald head, but I am looking forward to being able to make a large donation to this worthy cause. It sure is fun being a Christian.

Sharon Russell

DON'T EVER GIVE UP

My one piece of advice about life would be for every teenager to stay in school. If all of our teenagers today knew how important it is to graduate and enjoy their high school years, so many of them would not quit. Maybe they need more encouragement at home from their family and friends.

I really think being a teenager is the best time of your life. You are young and can experience so many great things. High school is always fun, but if you make the wrong choice, it can all be over for you very fast. That's why you should stay in school and do your best at the choices you make.

Once you become an adult, you can't go back. If you quit school like I did, you will always have that regret with you. My wish is for every young person to give themselves that chance in life and they will never have that regret of not graduating. You have your life ahead of you after you graduate to do what you want to do with your life.

I wish someone had encouraged me to stay in school. I quit high school at seventeen. I thought I was mature and knew where I was going in life. I was very wrong. I got married at 18 and thought I knew everything. Once I had my children and was getting older, I regretted not finishing high school. It is really hard to go back to school once you get older. You have a house and family to take care of and no more time for yourself. It's hard to correct the mistakes you've made as a teenager once you are an adult.

I think if our teenagers could see the consequences of quitting school, they would think twice. I strive very hard for my children to understand how important it is to go to school and graduate. If you quit, you will always have that regret. No one should have to live with that regret the rest of his or her life.

Sheila Pittman

WHO AM I? WHERE AM I GOING?

Who am I?

I am small waters tamed by an open sea,
I am the "A" in the alphabet of my family,
I am the wall that builds up organizations,
I am the spark in the plug of civilization,
I am strong, yet I am weak,
I wear many hats but the face is little ol' me,
I am unforgettable,
I am unique,
I dare to dream.
Where am I going?
To the top, you'll see.

Tosha Evans

OBSSESSION OF PERFECTION

So, here you are again, in front of the TV with your closest girlfriends all huddled together engrossed in the latest reality TV model search. Watching along with the rest of the guilty viewers beautiful girls being poked and prodded and picked apart for all to see. Of course, this is their dream so it's not totally degrading. They know what they're risking, what they're subjecting themselves to. Or do they? And you certainly wouldn't judge them since you're drawn, entertained by this madness. At times it's even funny – the pure insanity of it all – but you see their tears, their pain and the brunt of rejection. You have to ask yourself if they, some of the prettiest girls you've seen, don't measure up, then how are you rated? You try to push these thoughts aside, but you can't help but ask why they're being evaluated solely on their physical appearance not their personality, intellect, or spirit. But you just sigh and continue watching this nonsense, even laughing, drinking your diet soda that you just noticed seems to taste terrible.

Everyone at some point has dealt with less than stellar feelings about himself or herself. Feelings of low self esteem, self worth. Maybe you've wished to be thinner, smarter, prettier, even as far as a different ethnicity. The question is at what point do we differentiate what are healthy and unhealthy thoughts? At what point do we take a mature and appropriate look at ourselves and examine ourselves for who we really are? When do we feel content with ourselves yet not give up, striving to be better people overall? There has to be a balance. But there is no simple solution. Everyday, society presents more and more products to enhance our natural state, make us more appealing, better us in some form. And we, the consumers, buy into it. Blindly hoping we'll emerge with more confidence. We're not content with ourselves inside, so obviously we have to

compensate and conceal the outside. We're never enough is what we're saying.

Now, mind you, I am not immune to these behaviors in the slightest. I am just as obsessed with my appearance and status as anyone else, in some ways much more so. I personally, ever since I can remember, have struggled with feelings of inadequacy and the pangs of insecurity. Everyone's struggles differ. Mine has been an insane obsession with beauty. The recognition of beauty is not evil in and of itself. There are a whole multitude of things deemed beautiful and rightly so. But the obsession is that in order to be considered beautiful and acceptable one must be perfect. You have the right body, the right clothes, car, house... the list goes on. I'm a fairly logical person yet I measure myself by the very standards I myself loathe and despise. I know that the pictures of the glamorous women on magazines are airbrushed and much preparation and luxuries are given to them that ordinary women are not provided with. Yet, sometimes, I still long to draw the same breathtaking reaction. This preoccupation is shallow and pointless and deep down I know this. These worries are so petty and trivial in the grand scheme of things and take away my inner peace. But they're there lurking about. It causes me great stress in all of my relationships. My constant desire to be more than what I am makes me doubt the sincerity of those who love me. I push them away by seeking unobtainable things. I'm not a millionaire, a top model, a genius, and I'll never be able to keep up with the ever growing trends in fashion or society's standards.

Whatever the reasons for these feelings, they are not productive or useful to me or anyone in any way! I am tired of apologizing for things about myself I can't change or compromise. For those who feel the same way, I'm sure you are too. So, what do I resolve we do? Give up wearing makeup, never watch TV, shed our clothes, become hermits?!

As long as we're alive and the world keeps going, many of these things will not change. As humans the wish to change something about ourselves won't either. Know that we'll never be what we're intended to be when we're fixated on all the wrong things. I could have plastic surgery, win the lottery, become some sex symbol, but there would probably be something else I would eventually want to change. Another void to fill, another spell of emptiness and insatiable hunger for more...more. I think it will be a lifelong battle, but it isn't as hopeless as it may seem.

It's normal to want to be accepted and desire to be liked, but we don't have to fit some mold in order to do so. Embrace who you are. Know that you have limitations as human beings, strengths and weaknesses, but also your own beauty whether conventional or not. Work more on striving to feed the soul and less on the temporary things. It's not bad to want to look nice or learn more than what we know, but it is terrible to spend your whole life picking apart what you don't like. You can stand in front of that mirror for hours and still see the same reflection. Instead of dreading it, smile and give a sigh of relief that each day is a new chance to love ourselves and love another.

Jessica Merritt

DEPRESSION

Depression is black and grey.

It sounds like gloom and doom.

It smells like burnt leaves.

It tastes like rotten milk.

It looks like cottage cheese.

Depression feels like your whole world just ended.

Maria Thomas

U-MAD

My name is John Lloyd and I am an addict. I have abused prescription pain medication to the point of dependency and beyond. Dependency is just one stage of a vicious cycle known as the stages of addiction.

Most of us were raised with the ideal that drugs and alcohol are bad for us; unfortunately, I had to learn the hard way. Many people have experimented with drugs and/or alcohol. This is the first stage of addiction, better known as the use stage. For many, this is a relatively harmless period of use. For addicts, this is the first step toward something I will call the downward spiral.

At the beginning when I was experimenting, everything seemed wonderful. I loved the way I felt when I was using, and the great part is that there were no real (perceived) consequences. At this point, I escalated my use because everything was great (at least I thought it was).

This led me to the next step (which is when the actual fall begins), misuse. This is where I first felt the negative consequences for my actions. For example, I was arrested for having prescription medications that were not prescribed to me. I spent some time in jail for that, which was not fun, I might add. This was the first tangible consequence I experienced, and I didn't like it at all, but I liked being high more than I didn't like being in jail.

This is where most folks and addicts like me differ in their thinking. Most people would connect the arrest and jail time to the crime and would stop using. Unfortunately for me, my brain's chemical make-up had already started to change. This allowed me to look past the arrest and jail time

and concentrate on getting high again. This is absolute insanity, by the way!

Let me explain that last statement. I really hated being in jail, and I didn't want to come back. On the other hand, I really loved getting high. My brain didn't seem to connect that I got high abusing prescription medication (which tends to upset the police), which is what got me put in jail in the first place. All my brain would think is, "Man that stinks (being in jail). I'll feel a lot better when I get high again." I somehow had failed to connect my actions to the consequences for them. In other words, I expected to do the same things, but expected different results. As the old cliché goes, that's the definition of insanity.

This should give you (and should have given me) an idea just how much power this addiction had over me. After getting out of jail, I was back to taking pills again (after all, it's fun). I started to lie about what I was doing, where I was going, and what I was spending my money on. Even though I had never lied to my wife before (we had a great relationship before all of this), my addiction was more important than our relationship, which destroyed her trust in me. I had started to tell her that I wasn't feeling well, or coming down with the flu, or anything else I thought would suffice as a reason for why I wasn't doing anything or missing a few days of work. I was already going through withdrawal and felt miserable. Of course I couldn't tell my wife that because that would be admitting that I was an addict, which would be admitting I had a problem, which I didn't because I could fix what was wrong with me by using again, right?

This led me to abuse (for labeling purposes, many call it the next step, but to be honest, I was flat on my back and sliding down the spiral I mentioned before). I was put into rehab because I was still using when I had to submit to drug screens, and (big surprise) I failed one. Drugs numbed

my pain and made my problems seem unimportant and distant. If I went without getting high for more than a day or two, my withdrawal symptoms got worse and worse.

Rehab lasted 28 days; the first 8 or 9 were pure hell. By the time I got out, though, I thought I had my addiction beat. That was not the case though. I got out of rehab on January 6, 2004, and was back to using by the first week of March 2004. Despite all I had been through, getting clean, and all I had put my wife through, I went back to abusing pills again. These pills had control of my life.

Welcome To The Wonderful World Of Dependency
All Those Who Care About John Lloyd, Get Ready For A
Bumpy Ride
Not Responsible For Broken Promises, Dreams,
And *Especially* Hearts

Dependency, by the way, is another stage of addiction. This is where the ride isn't really fun, just necessary.

The compulsiveness started to set in; if I was not on my way to pick up more pills, I was looking for them. Even when I had 40 or 50 pills, I was still looking for more. I was terrified I would run out. That mental torture would run through my mind constantly. My addiction had grown to the point that I thought I would die if my supply of pills ran out. Now that I'm clean, I don't want to feel that way ever again.

My tolerance had grown to the point that one dose for me would be enough to kill two normal people. In reality, I would die if there were no intervention.

I failed eight drug tests in a row between March 2004 and August 2004 (two in July and two in August alone). My probation officer gave me all the rope I needed to hang

myself or help myself. Of course, in true addict fashion, I decided the rope felt perfectly fine around my neck, as long as I could get high. My probation officer sent me to the Clermont Recovery Center for placement in a rehab center once again.

While there, I would not abstain from drug use. My last drug test from there reported overdose levels of methadone in my system. My probation was violated on August 9, 2004. I actually went to jail on August 20, 2004, which was my birthday. This is the first day in quite awhile that I went without drugs. At this time, I was in the final stage of addiction: rock bottom.

My life was a mess and so was I. My life was over, as normal people would define life. My life centered on drug use. That's not living; that's just waiting for death. Death or recovery is the end result of addiction.

It may sound strange to some, but I was thankful this happened. As a result of my probation violation, I was sent to Community Correctional Center, where I got my body and head clean. I am thankful that powers greater than myself intervened because I could have never done this on my own. This saved my life.

A lot of people may go through the first or even second stages of addiction (use or misuse). There is no litmus test to determine who will progress into the final stages. However, once an individual hits the abuse stage, the slide down the spiral is pretty fast (and fun, from an addict's point of view), which means it will very likely progress into dependency and beyond. At this point, professional help is needed.

In my personal experiences with stages of addiction, I have come to see them as the quick path to hell. I have

come up with an acronym to describe those who use, misuse, or abuse drugs. U – M.A.D. Here's what it stands for:

Use

Misuse

Abuse

Dependency

John Lloyd

THERE WILL BE A DAY

Growing up was very hard for a person like me. When I was young, my sister and I were taken from our mom. All I know is one day my mom was fine, and then she lost her mind. We had now become foster children, not to a stranger, to some family members. I thought that life would be great, but it was a terrible, terrible shock. When you're with family you think you're safe, but with us that was not the case. My sister was four and I was seven, and all we got were doors slammed in our faces. I remember thinking, "There will be a day."

My sister was young, and I had to stay strong for the both of us. Through the things that went on, I remember having to be tough. I took the blame for a lot of things, even though I was not the one who did them. I just wanted to get in trouble instead of my baby sister. Don't get me wrong, we did have some fun. Growing up we learned to be happy. We played and ran. Those were the things that we really liked to do when we had time. I think we learned a lot because we had so much sadness in our lives. We lost our mother and our brother. All that I remember thinking is, "There will be a day."

When I got a couple of years older, I came in contact with a man that saw the way we were treated and used that to his advantage. He used his charm and played the role, but actually he showed more love to us than our own family. Then one day I got pregnant. Yes, he did what any man would do in that type of situation. Who was going to believe me? Remember I was the one who took the blame for all the trouble. At this point, I was 13, and all I remember thinking is, "There will be a day."

I lived the rest of my days at my family's relatives' home trying to find a way out. Now, I had not only to worry about my sister and I, but also a baby. When I turned 15, I told my sister, "I have to go." As long as I stayed there my days would be so cold. "Don't worry. There will be a day."

I left the home and was on my own with my son. I was now in this cold world with my boy. I had to find a way to take care of him and supply him with some toys. I was in this situation at a young age and could not turn to my family. So, I went to a place where I knew we would be safe and where we would make it. As I grew older the world got colder, but all the things that I promised my little sister I accomplished. I got her out and then we both were fine. I told her, "I told you; there will be a day."

Now I'm much older and life has never been colder, but it still goes on. Now I have other goals to accomplish, and all that I can really say is, "There will be a day."

Blondine Davenport

THE INCURABLE DISEASE

My name is Kelly M. Giffin. I'm a 37-year-old mother of two, and I have Diabetes Type 2. They say that diabetes can be treated, but there is no cure.

I have been living with this disease for 6 years now. I inherited it from my father and two grandmothers. My grandmother on my dad's side lost her left leg just below her knee; then a few years later she passed away. My grandmother on my mom's side started out by losing her toes on her left side. She also lost her eyesight and passed away a few years later. My dad has had four major heart attacks because of diabetes. He is doing fine for now. He will never be able to work again.

As for myself I have neuropathy which means I have no feeling in my feet. My feet burn and sting and are cold to the touch and I'm also losing my eyesight and that has caused me to have headaches for the past eight months.

I have applied for S.S.I and Disability, but the government has said that diabetes is not a disabling disease. It is. The statistics show that there are at least 18.2 million Americans [about 6.3% of the population] with diabetes. It can cause loss of all major organs like kidneys, liver, and heart. It can also cause arthritis. All of these have major impacts on one's quality of life.

The government will give S.S.I. to an alcoholic or a drug addict. According to the government, alcoholism and drug addiction are diseases. Where is our help with our disease? I am concerned about my present and future life, as well as the lives of my children.

The millions of people who have diabetes have to adjust to different ways of dealing with the disease. I can adjust, but I am really worried about the future and what it holds for my family and me. Some people are still able to work without an arm or a leg. Some people are not allowed to work ever again. They are permanently disabled by their disease.

I have a younger sister who almost lost her left foot due to gangrene. She had stepped on a stickpin and her foot became infected. She had surgery on the foot. The doctor saved her foot. She is doing better now. She still has her foot so far.

My husband helps me with my shots. I have to take 150 units of insulin a day. I stick my finger 10 times a day to see how high my sugar levels are, and then I adjust my medications.

If only the government would think about the diabetes problem and help us with this situation by finding a cure! Thank you for hearing my concerns.

Sincerely,

Kelly Giffin

I'M STRONG

While living at home with my parents, I was fighting an addiction I thought I would never beat. But it wasn't until my last trip to the county jail that I finally took hold of my life.

I started cocaine at an early age of sixteen, but shortly after, my addiction took hold of every aspect of my life. At the time I was a junior in high school. I was a so-so student, mostly Bs and Cs with a few Ds. I slowly started to lose any interest I had in school. I started to think that to survive in real life it was all about "the street life." Somehow I managed to pull myself through the 11th grade and start off toward the 12th grade. But first would come the summer break, and my addiction took me to a whole new level.

I began to date one of the town's known drug dealers. I thought I was going to live the life everyone wanted, a life of fast money. I slowly got pulled into the system. I was also getting pulled over, my car searched almost every week. I was beginning to use drugs almost every day. I was slowly starting my trip down to the bottom.

Soon I was bouncing from drug dealer to drug dealer. I was out of control. I had no place to live, no food to eat, and nowhere to take a bath. I was homeless, and I thought I had hit rock bottom, only to find out later I had not.

I decided I had to move back with my parents. I went home, and I had managed to stay sober. I soon found out that I was pregnant. I thought to myself, "Now what am I going to do?" I knew who the father was, so I told him. He denied it and said there was no way he was the father. I knew I had to stay clean for my baby's health, so I did.

It was time to go back to school, and I was doing all right. My grades were good, and I only missed a couple days of school. I was staying sober. On December 20, 2003 I gave birth to my beautiful baby girl. I stayed in the hospital for two days, and then it was time to go home. All of a sudden I lost it; I had the urge to use again. I left home while my daughter was only three days old to begin a binge I would never forget. It lasted for four days.

When I came home my mother was upset; she knew I had relapsed. She told me to pack my things and leave, and she was keeping my daughter. So I left, leaving my daughter behind, where I knew she would be safe. I had also dropped out of school; I was too busy and wrapped up in my addiction to care about anything else. I had lost all contact with my family and friends. I had also stolen a car so the law was after me. I was at my deepest low. I wanted to run home so everything would be all right again. I called my mom and asked her if I could come home, and she said no. She asked me to turn myself into the cops, and I told her I wouldn't do that. But I was out of options and had nowhere to turn, so I finally agreed. She came to pick me up. She told me she was proud of me, because I was finally facing the consequences of my actions.

I went to jail that night. The next day I went to court and the judge ordered me to 90 days in jail. So I started to serve my time. At this point I began to realize how much my life was really worth. I knew it was time to take hold of my situation and do whatever it took to better myself. I didn't know what the fight ahead held for me, but I was willing to commit to it.

I started by making amends to the people I hurt, who really cared about me. I took the time to write letters to express my regrets for how I had hurt them and to ask for

their forgiveness. I was in the deepest state of regret for my past, but I knew all would be ok if I placed it into the hands of God. I had finally found a state of peace I had never felt before. I knew everything would work out as long as I had faith.

After 20 days I was called back into court. The judge released me to my parent's home on house arrest, and I was court ordered to an in-house rehab.

I went home not knowing what life had in store for me. I knew it was up to me and God to decide my fate. I knew this time I was going to do whatever it took to make it work for my life.

I went to rehab where I was taught the steps I needed to begin the process. I went to Narcotics Anonymous meetings, started counseling, found a sponsor, and went to church. I also began my life as a mother. I finally knew what unconditional love felt like. I knew I had to stay strong for my baby girl because her life depended on me. I began to make peace with my past, make amends with the people I could, and let God do the rest. He taught me my life is worth saving. I know everything will be ok if I "LET GO AND LET GOD"!

I've gained the respect for myself that I lost long ago. I will never take for granted what God has given me. There are so many who still suffer from addiction. I am one of the millions blessed to realize that I want more than my past decisions allowed me to have. I don't know what the future holds for me. I will still need the guidance of God and other recovering addicts. I do know I am someone who is willing to look at my past and grow from it, instead of running. Because of that, I'm strong.

Krystal Gibson

