

*Mending &
Alterations*



SOBRIETY

After one year...
Of sobriety and a relapse
Of sobriety and strength
Of sobriety and just a different route

After one year of sobriety and honesty,
I know where I stand.

Ebony Pierce

TOUGH QUESTIONS

People, do you ever wonder, "Why the hell am I here?"
Never knowing the answer to that's my big fear.
Ask yourself how am I here to be me;
Was it from apes or Eve touching the tree?
I ask myself this type of stuff all the time –
Shit like, "Will I work or get paid by crime?"
I look back and wish there were more good times than bad,
But it's not good to dwell when things make you sad.
Sometimes it's best to leave all behind
'Cause things and people can twist your mind.
Is it because I partied too hard?
Was it from eating shrooms and pills or crushing up shard?
Here I am pushing smoke in my soon-to-be-only lung,
And I wonder why I have to write 'cause words get twisted in
my tongue.
It's almost like a test; who's winning this game?
It's not just getting by; it's all money and that's a shame.
Don't get me wrong; I can blow money on a bunch of shit.
That's until I get home and see I can't afford or really need it.
Do we really need everything we have to stay here and
survive?
You could take it all away, and I'm sure I'd still be alive.
Look back at the cavemen who didn't go far.
Today instead of walking most people drive a car.
I'd like to take people out of civilization for about a week.
By the time you put them back, they wouldn't be able to
speak.
Do we all have a match, or are we just on our own,
Constantly reaching for people either by US mail or a phone?
My head's getting dizzy, as these questions I ask myself.
Should I put this in a book and set it on the shelf?

Candice VanSickle

IF

If you continue to think
As you have always thought,
You will continue to be
What you have always been.
If you continue to feel
What you have always felt,
You will continue to become
What you already are.
If you continue to believe
What you have always believed,
You will continue to hope
For what you have always hoped.
If you continue to do
What you have always done,
You will continue to have
What you have already have.
If you continue to will
What you have always willed,
You will continue to live
As you have always lived.

BELIEVE THAT!

Roger D. Wade

THE JOURNEY OF A WOMAN

From the moment she is born into this world, a woman is on an ever-lasting journey to discover who she is. Born to take on her father's last name, her identity not her own.

She is then groomed to grow up to become someone's wife, mother, and grandmother. She has dreams of being a dancer, a singer, a world traveler, all the while expected to be what her father, boyfriend, or husband wants her to be.

The little girl, happy, smiling and innocent is all too soon replaced with a negative, confused and guarded teen, due to the almost constant verbal, physical, mental attack upon her from men in various forms, be it in movies, videos, songs, internet, male relatives. This is when she learns to suppress her emotions in order to survive becoming a woman.

Taught to always put others' needs before her own, she's prone to depression and anger or pressure to be the "perfect" woman. She mentally blocks out all that she has felt she could become. All but a small ember of herself (which burns deep inside) is pushed out of her. Crying on the inside, she shifts her pain to a place not to be looked at until she's in her thirties. That seems to be the age that her mind has matured enough to handle and process and "let go" and let God guide her on her journey's path.

She encounters spiritual sisters (some may not know that's what they are) that offer guidance through talking or deeds. Helping her to trust her own judgments in her life decisions. Spiritual sisters teach her to stand her ground and to be heard. They teach her that she does have something important to say and that she is worth listening to. That small ember begins to flame.

Through that process of discovery she finds that she can choose which way her path will lead her. Her power is

the power of choice. Her choice is change through the love of God and positive thoughts, which become her shield of honor for life.

When faced with negativity, now in this stage of her life, she has armed herself with determination and courage not to accept “no” when it comes to anything she’s passionate about.

Willing to step out on faith and to see past her human frailty, she discovers that she is the daughter of Christ Jesus and that her journey until the end of her days has been pre-ordained to be in his service.

Henrietta Young

MY BROTHER'S ANGEL

Do people really have Guardian Angels? My brother Lucas is living proof that they do. Several times a Guardian Angel has had Lucas's hand. The first time was a story that Mom told me. I was about seven years old, and Lucas was about three years old. My cousins and I were playing in the woods, and the adults were in the yard having a cookout. I came back to the house to use the bathroom, and I saw Lucas inside the neighbors' underground pool, which was about a half of a football field away. The pool had no ladders or any way out. I ran and told my mom. She just froze. Everybody else ran to the pool while my mom stood there in shock thinking of her baby boy underwater. To everybody's amazement that Guardian Angel was with him and lifted him to safety. He was sitting there on the deck just as unconcerned as could be. Are there really Guardian Angels?

Another time was about two years ago. Lucas was seventeen years old. I was living at my grandma's at the time. My parents were out of town that weekend, so Lucas was home alone and decided that he was going to sleep on the couch. Thankfully that was the decision that he made because he woke up to the noise of the neighbors yelling at him from outside the trailer. He opened his eyes and saw that the trailer was on fire. He woke up just in time to get on his hands and knees and crawl out the door, which was right beside the couch. He went out into the bitter cold of winter in his underwear. When he got outside, he didn't know what was going on or even where he was for about ten minutes. The smoke must have gotten to him. My son and I were supposed to stay that weekend. Thankfully, it didn't work out that way because we would have been sleeping in the back bedroom. Once again, in what could have been Lucas's last surviving moments, the Guardian Angel had a hold of him. Are there really Guardian Angels?

Just this past summer, the Guardian Angel wasn't only with him but also with my son Cory. I lived in Newark at the time. Lucas came down to visit us and, when he was leaving, Cory wanted to go home with him. I went ahead and let Cory go. Lucas had to bring him back at 6:30 A.M. He was driving down Rte. 13 to Newark, and somewhere in Thornville a deer ran in front of him. He cut the wheel real sharp and rolled over a bank. The car flipped about five or six times. Cory wasn't in his seatbelt. Lucas said that all he did was look back at Cory in the back seat and could see him going up and down as the car flipped. When the car landed, it landed on the wheels. Lucas grabbed Cory, held him tight, and drove the car all the way from Thornville to Newark (about ten miles) with him in his arms. When they arrived at my apartment, I was in bed. I got up to let them in, and Lucas kept walking from the living room to the kitchen saying, "I'm sorry" over and over. At this time I didn't know what was wrong. I was trying to get Cory to put him back in bed because it was 6:00 A.M., but Lucas would not let go of him. He was still in such shock that he couldn't get out the words to tell me what had happened. He just kept saying that he was sorry.

Finally, I looked out the door and I couldn't believe what I saw. The car was about half its size. Every window in it was shattered out. The tires were all bent and the roof of the car was almost touching the seats. By the looks of that car, you would never be able to picture anyone walking away from that accident. Thankfully, Lucas and Cory both were all right and had not a scratch on them. He was finally calmed down a bit and was all right. He was just so in shock at first, and that was totally understandable. When I laid eyes on that car, I was a little shocked also, but thank heavens that Guardian Angel was by their side protecting them from harm.

There's no doubt in all of our minds that Lucas feels blessed and fortunate that he has been watched over. For

anyone who doubts or does not believe that there are Guardian Angels watching over us, maybe this will strengthen your faith.

I believe in Guardian Angels. Do you?

Monica Ruddock

RESTORATION

Leery I loomed,
My soul consumed,
With a fiery hate my fate is doomed,
I care too much,
And my drugs are my crutch,
In the days of old I didn't think much,
Believed what I heard and not what I touched,

And though I'm tired of the things that I see,
I know it's a result of me
Not being where I want to be,
Refined and declined
For the third time askin' god to restore sight to the blind,
And now I'm hopin',
To see my dreams accomplished with my third eye open,
It's a way to relieve stress, a way of copin',
With a pencil and pad, I define my emotion.

William Norman

MIXED EMOTIONS

I sometimes think, "Why was I born on this earth?"
Sometimes I don't know how much life is worth.
 My mind is completely gone
I sometimes don't know what's going on.
 I just don't know who to trust.
I have a lot of anger that is about to bust.
The voices in my head are driving me insane,
 But they sometimes are not to blame.
It's hard to know who really loves me
 Or who's really my enemy.
 If I was to die
I would wonder who would cry.
 Life is so worthless to me
There's no reason for me to be free.

Jasmin Barham

JUST A GIRL

I am a girl who has fear in her eyes,
I am a girl in a world full of lies,
I am a girl who needs a vacation,
I am a girl who gets in bad situations,
I am a girl without a dad,
I am a girl who gets really sad,
I am a girl searching for love,
I am a girl trying to rise above
expectations to always do what's right,
I am a girl who cries herself to sleep at night,
I am a girl waiting for the dawn of a new day,
I am a girl wishing someone would tell me
that it will all be okay.

Evelyn Bedo

IF I COULD DO IT ALL OVER!

If I could do it all over again,
I would pay better attention to the world around me.
I would focus more on who I could be, instead of who I
would be.
I would familiarize myself with the more important things in
life.
I would empower myself with the necessary knowledge to be
better.
You see, I am only human, and that I could never change.
I make mistakes like anyone else; I've done it in the past.
No doubt I will continue to make mistakes in the future.
I have no control over that; it's an unchangeable ability
For me and for all of us; but nevertheless, I can still improve.

If I could do it all over again
I would work harder to overcome the fears that wrap
themselves
Inside of me like an embryo, crippling me from head to toe.
I would dig deeper to seek out a better plan for the future.
I would search longer for the most important answer of my
life
As if I were on a lifesaving journey, and not give up so easily.
I promise myself to remember all the bad experiences I've
suffered
To give thanks for the special gifts I received throughout my
experiences.
I am not rich in power or in knowledge, but through it all I
continue to grow.

You see, if I could do it all over again
I would be smarter, wiser, and brighter.
I would love me, whoever I am, for what I am.
I would reject not who I am, nor who I was meant to be.
I would not be fearful of the jungle around me, called world.

I would claim my place in the universe and not let it swallow
me up.

I would not give up on my dreams, my life, or my desires.

I would not commit myself to a mental coma willingly.

I would not stop living, only to pretend to exist.

I would have better control over my heart and those I give it
to.

I would be invisible to no one, especially myself.

I would respect and know the power that I possess as a
human.

Finally, I only hope that I can do it all over, before it's too
late.

Maria G. Thomas

LIFE OF A FEMALE HUSTLER

Hustlin' day and night
Trying to get my money right
Staying up late so my children ate
Selling pills so the users
Could get their thrill

While my pockets
Were getting fatter
My mind filled with laughter

Selling them crack, then turning my back
So I could smile by the way they act
And my pockets were still getting fat

Living large and going to fancy bars
Driving the finest cars
Trying to live like a self-made diva
Thinking life would be easier
Selling the world my dream
Only to wake up to an infrared beam

It scared me so bad
It felt like Freddy was in my dream

I was a diva in distress
Trying to make sense of all this mess,
It was a nightmare on Diva Street
I knew I couldn't compete

"Check mate" that's what was said
As the blast just missed my head
I rolled under my bed
At that point I thought I was dead
Losing everything that made me who I am

I looked up and said
DAMN,
“The Lord let me live another day”
At that point I began to pray

Keeva Long

THE RUMOR

I was born in Gary, Indiana, and lived there for two years. Then my parents got a divorce, and we all moved to Kentucky. My sister and I lived with my mom. My dad remarried when I was three to a woman named Lora Neighbors who had a two-year-old son. His name was Aaron. Aaron and I were close in age. We became best of friends.

Aaron was a middle child, as was I. We shared a lot of common interests such as music, art, friends, movies, and so much more. My dad didn't like our choice of friends, and we would sneak out to see them, go to parties, or just hang out. We would sneak into each other's rooms at night to smoke cigarettes, talk half of the night away, and help each other with our problems. Sometimes we drew on each other's skin until there wasn't any place on us that was bare.

We both struggled with our fathers, family, and school. My dad was a drug addict, an alcoholic, and very abusive. His father was never there.

A lot of people disliked Aaron, but they didn't know him, and they had no clue what his life was like or what he'd been through. I would always stick up for him when people would put him down, and I still do.

I would visit my dad on the weekends and all summer. But when I was seventeen, my dad moved to Tennessee, and I only got to go back there on summer vacation. But Aaron and I remained best friends.

When Aaron was fifteen or sixteen, he started doing drugs, such as marijuana, white crosses, and acid. People then thought even worse of him, but I couldn't. It did worry me. I

was afraid he would turn out like my dad, but it didn't change our relationship. I knew what his life was like and why.

I didn't start doing drugs until I was nineteen. Then we did them together, smoking pot and white crosses. We stayed high all the time because the drugs were free to us. My dad and his wife (Aaron's mom) and our friends supplied them all.

When Aaron was seventeen, he got married. He and his wife Michelle lived with my dad. They had three beautiful children, Aric, Alex, and Alyssa. I moved in with my dad shortly after Aric was born. A year later I moved back to Ohio with my mom. A couple years later Aaron and Michelle separated. Aaron moved to Oregon. Michelle and the kids moved to Kentucky. Aaron and I saw each other once or twice before he moved to Oregon. But we didn't see each other for three years after that.

Aaron moved back to Kentucky in 1996. He wanted to fight for custody of his kids. He met a girl named Tabitha. They started dating. She had an older sister, Falcia, who was jealous of their relationship. She started a rumor, saying she (Falcia) was pregnant by my stepbrother Aaron.

Falcia also had a boyfriend whose name was Isaac. He began to hear the rumor and became very jealous. Aaron and Isaac started drinking one evening, and Isaac started questioning Aaron about his relationship with Falcia. My brother was not one to fight. He started to leave when Isaac called him back and told him Tabitha and Falcia's mom wanted him. Aaron started walking back to the trailer. Isaac came up from behind and hit Aaron with a pair of brass knuckles in the back of the head. Then he stabbed Aaron in the chest twice with a knife. Aaron's girlfriend (Tabitha) ran to Aaron, sat down, and held him. Aaron was gasping for air and trying to talk. Ten minutes later Aaron died. He had drowned to death on

his own blood. They caught Isaac and his girlfriend thirty minutes later. She was taking him home.

Isaac was charged with first-degree murder. He came up for parole in December 2005. Aaron died December 22, 1997. Falcia was not even pregnant.

I never got to tell my brother good-bye or that I loved him with all my heart. Now I tell the people I love every day how I feel. Life is too short to take for granted. People die when you least expect it.

Ladonna D. Pharis

JEALOUSY BRUISES

This is what the dictionary says about “jealous”: “demand complete devotion and to feel mean resentment toward a rival or competitor.” I know first-hand what it’s like. I lived it for two years. I loved the guy dearly, but he controlled my life and everything I did or said.

When we first got married, life was great. We did everything together. Then one day it started. At first it was calling work to make sure I was there. Then, he was scanning my phone calls. I couldn’t see my friends or family. Once he snapped, the beatings started. I would have bruises on my arms and face. I would tell my family I fell or walked into something, so no one really knew what I was going through. Then the mood changed. He would get so mad if the house wasn’t cleaned, if there was more mileage on the car than he thought there should be, or if I didn’t come home on time. I could never go anywhere by myself. Every day I would wonder what was going to happen next. He always acted like there was nothing wrong, and everything was fine.

My children didn’t know what was going on until they came home early from school one day and saw him mad and angry, beating on me. The next day the school called me and asked me what was going on because one of the kids told them that Daddy was beating on Mommy. As always, I told them it was not true because I knew if I said something, it would happen all over again.

A few days later we were planning a cookout with the neighbors. That’s when everything came out in the open. I forgot to light the grill, and he started to scream and yell. The neighbor told him not to worry about it since we had all day. Well, needless to say, the cookout didn’t happen. The neighbors went home and we fought half the day behind

closed doors. My children finally called 911. The police showed up, and I told them about the beating and showed them the bruises. They took him off to jail that night but told me they couldn't keep him long. The police took the kids and me to a domestic shelter to stay, and they helped me get a restraining order so he couldn't come around us.

I felt like my whole world had crashed. I was watching everything I did. My children and I moved out of the shelter into our own home. He found out where we lived and came to the house and harassed me. The police would take him away, but he always came back. A year later we were divorced, and I haven't seen him since then. I heard that he remarried, but is now going through another divorce and living in a town close by me. But after five years without him, my life has been good. My children and I have been through lots of counseling, but we have put the past behind us. We have settled down in our hometown and struggled for a year. But we are closer now than we ever were and living a happier life.

Patty Boring

FROM STREET LIFE TO G.E.D.

I was born in 1963, and at the age of three years I lost my mom. She passed away from chest pain in her lovely heart. My dad and grandmother took care of my three brothers, one sister, and me until I was six years old. Soon after my mother passed away, my dad's drinking problem got worse until it was so bad, he couldn't raise five children alone. My grandmother got tired of my dad lying to her and using her by putting pressure on her to raise his kids.

A year had passed since my mom died, and we lost our home because of past due property taxes. My oldest brother Ricky moved out to my uncle's house, and the rest of us moved in with my aunt. Now I was living in a place where I really didn't want to live. When my dad asked me if I wanted to live with my aunt, I said no. But I didn't have a choice.

That was the last time I was in contact with my dad. From the age of seven until the age of sixteen, I had not heard from nor seen my dad. Even though we both live here in Lorain, Ohio, just a fifteen-minute car drive away from each other, he never even stopped by to tell me, "I love you," or to see how I was doing.

Years went by, and I became a freshman in high school needing the material things in life. I was a decent student and a promising athlete with my name well known in high school sports.

I could play the sports, but I was a bitter child. I was full of anger, and I had trouble making my grades. I felt left out because all my friends and classmates went home to their family and had hot meals, while I went home to a hope and a prayer that there would be someone home with food on the table. One September day, our gas was turned off because my aunt had a serious gambling problem and had spent all of our money on the numbers game. She received a total of \$1,465.00 a month from Social Security. That money should

have been spent for the support of my brothers and sisters and me. There is no good reason why we shouldn't have had gas or food in our home.

One day, my neighbor who was a numbers man, a pimp, and a drug dealer came to me and asked me, "Do you need money?" I said "Yes." He told me, "Come to my house to cut my grass." I was there on the spot whenever he asked me. After I cut the grass, he told me to come inside to get something to drink. He asked me if I needed an after school job. I said, "Yes," but asked what type of job it was. He replied, "You can handle yourself in the streets because you have street smarts. I want you to run numbers and sell drugs for me." I said, "I can sell the drugs." My aunt had a problem with the numbers, so I didn't want to be the one to be selling numbers to my aunt! I couldn't do that. My aunt might have killed me. I told him that I would sell the drugs. Believe me, the power you receive from drug dealing is amazing. You have so much power and control over people. Unfortunately, I also got addicted to the power and control, and I left home.

When I was eighteen, I dropped out of high school because I couldn't make the grade. I couldn't play sports, so I had no more interest in high school. Now I had everyone looking for me and calling for me, and I felt like a king.

I enjoyed that feeling and needed the money because my oldest child and only daughter entered the world. I didn't realize my children would see me doing things that I shouldn't have been doing, or that doing those things would take me away from my family and friends. Soon I would be separated from them because I was heading toward prison. I was convicted of drug trafficking and did a total of two years.

I did my time, got back out, and went right back to doing the same things for the next twenty plus years. During that time, I drank the best wine, ate the best food, and saw the biggest stars from the east to the west coasts. By the time I was thirty-five years old, my oldest son was stealing and selling drugs, following in his dad's footsteps. Instead of

getting upset with him, I admired him and did not realize that he was heading for failure in life just like his dad. I felt like I had to sell drugs to support my family, so nothing else mattered to me at that time. Working a regular job was out of the question for me because I was getting money the easy way to support my kids. What I really was doing was causing a problem for Lorain and Lorain County, and I still feel responsible for a lot of gang activity today.

After my last stay in prison, I came out and became a part of the well known M.O.B. gang, which was featured in a gangster rap song popular at that time. You couldn't stand on the street corner and sell drugs without being in someone's gang. You either had to be a member or carry a pistol, so I chose the gang. There I was, back on the street for thirteen years, selling drugs, abusing people, and poisoning the neighborhood.

Years passed, and suddenly it was 2006. I was still on the streets, selling drugs and standing on city corners with the young dealers, watching them skip school to sell drugs to earn money. Somehow, I missed being a man and a positive figure in life. I ended up working with a group of young M.O.B. gang members. At one time, my two sons and 30 cousins were in this gang. Today, I am proud to say that both of my sons have left the gang.

I wanted to make a change and end the shooting and killing. It had to stop. It started to get too close to home for me, but my lifestyle was so fast. I didn't know what to do. I never had parents in my life to guide me and prevent all of this from happening.

I became a parent at the age of 12 to my baby brother and that thought kept me wanting the fast life and the easy money. For me to stop the drug dealing and to live a reduced lifestyle was very hard. Then, in November of 2005, there was a drive-by shooting. The retaliation was supposed to be on us but was directed on the wrong house. I finally said, "Enough is enough." I was finished with gang life, so I had a talk with my cousins and son and told them it was time

for a change. Now, I had to walk the walk and not just talk about it to show them the way. I cashed in all my chips and set a new goal in life. I told my 16-year-old son, "I am going back to school." He was living with his mom before he moved here from Phoenix, Arizona, to get away from the gangs there. We both were ready to change our lives. I had always bought his love with material things. But I didn't need to do that anymore. I had his love and did not know it. I told him, "Son, it's going to be a different life now!" He said, "Dad, you can replace material things, but we can't replace you." My throat got wet and lumpy. I fought the tears back.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services helped me. They listened to my story and signed me up. They gave me a learning test and put me in school to receive my G.E.D. Now, my sons and the rest of the gang look at me in a different way. These boys are looking up to me and asking, "How can I get my G.E.D.?"

It's been two and a half months since I started studying. I have changed, and five other young men are making changes too. That's what motivates me to get my G.E.D. I want to keep on changing lives in the streets where changes need to be made! I want to continue to lead my sons and cousins down the path of a legitimate life. I want to continue to set an example that they can be proud to follow.

Andre Thomas

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

To whom it may concern,
I have nothing to gain, for I have nothing to lose,
I'm ready to die,
I have paid my dues.

To whom it may concern,
I feel no pain,
I will tell you one more time,
As I write this poem with shame.

To whom it may concern,
I live a life full of sin,
I wish this were the end.

To whom it may concern,
This poem is over,
So, I will cry inside,
And my heart will grow cold.

To whom it may concern,
I have changed my ways,
I'm tired of my criminal ways,
I now have a reason for change.

To whom it may concern,
I found out that I'm the one to blame,
I will no longer write this poem with shame.

To whom it may concern,
This poem is now at the end,
I'm no longer full of sin,
I believe my heart is whole again.

Joshua Bourne

AWOKEN TRUTH

I have been a long time behind bars
Surrounded by all these felony superstars
Everything has been stripped but my pride
Lord knows it's been rough on the inside.
 I have not had a single letter come in
 Not a single word from my kin
 Maybe it's because I've done them wrong
 In this hell is where I belong.

I have no end to this time in my sight
But shouldn't I suffer for not doing right
I do what I can, and that is my best
This prison I'm in has put me to the test.
 With each day in here, it seems longer
 My will to be violent, grows stronger
 I fight to stay alive each day
 Back into the hole I must stay.

I have nothing left of my past
This prison from hell has made an evil cast
With all this violence in my eye
The guards have come to take me to die.
 Being led to the gas chamber, wherein I must go
 Where the fumes of death can take me real slow
 Poison fills my lungs, and I start to choke
 Alone in my bed is where I awoke.

I looked around, was this just a dream,
Or part of my God's successful scheme?
I think if I do not change my way
This will be my life someday.

Kenneth Grubb

LIFE ON THE INSIDE

As a kid, I was always in trouble with my home life and the law. At the age of 16, I was court ordered out of school and was thrown out of my house by my family.

Nobody around would help me, and I felt so alone. I walked from state to state, went from shelter to shelter trying to find a place where I fit in, where I belonged.

I made my way back to Ohio in 1999. I bought a room for a week. There, I met a girl named Helen who I fell directly in love with. We got married in one month. Later, we had our son. We lived in a shelter.

The people at the shelter kept saying Helen's parents were going to take our son. I panicked and stole a car. We took my son to my mom's house for safekeeping. Then we drove the car from Washington Court House to Canton, Ohio. There, I was apprehended by the law.

At that moment, I lost everything again; I lost my son and my wife. Helen and I divorced shortly after that day. I was sentenced to 24 months in prison. My first time behind bars. I was terrified!

Prison is a scary place. There you are sleeping in an open area with strange men, you are always watching your back, you are always being yelled at by the guards as to when to eat, sleep, and smoke. But what really hurt was that I had no one to visit me, no one to write to. It was like being back on the streets again, except that I was behind barbed fence.

In prison, I found God. He stayed by my side the whole way and walked me through the days and nights. I don't think I would have survived without Him. Like they say, "He is there for those who take the time and want Him there."

I really hope young people will read this and give God a chance because, if you ever feel like I did, He is always there for you.

Shawn Wycuff

MY ADDICTION – INSANITY

When the shaking starts and the sweat pours off my chest and I'm freezing and the crawling things come up my arms, my legs, and in my ears, I scream for help. I scream and scream and tear at my arms and legs and no one hears, no one comes.

Then my brain is on fire – no, not my brain, it goes much, much deeper than that. I don't have a name for it, this place that is being consumed from the inside out. My soul, perhaps, or whatever is the very essence of me, the core of me, the private, hidden place.

Pain is not a word that can describe this. This every kind of physical and mental anguish that can possibly be experienced, and it's all concentrated on me. On Mike. Every excruciating, blowtorch breath I pray is the last. But I am beyond prayer, beyond help. Beyond, beyond. I cannot come back from this. I can't breathe. I'm suffocating.

Mike Paynter

RETURN TO HEALTH

Your health. Don't take it for granted. We think it will be there always!

That evening I went to sleep as usual, not knowing what was afoot in my body. As morning light came, my mind and eyes slowly took in whole a new day. A shock was in store for me. As my eyes began to focus in the mirror, I wondered who was looking back at me. There was this large, hot thing, almost like a quarter sized football pressed to the right side of my neck. Then panic struck me. The first thing that came to mind was the dreaded "C" word. My heart stopped. I knew I could not feel it beating. But as scared as I was, my mind muddled up with thought, I went to work, telling myself to ignore it, that it would go away.

No it won't just go away.

After I put my thoughts together, I called my family doctor to see him as soon as possible. I had just been there for my blood pressure check up, so when he walked into the room he jokingly said, "What's happened now?" Dr. Neidies and I could always kid one another. We had built a rapport over the years. He came around to stand in front of me. As I showed him my neck, his eyes shot wide open.

"Wow! What bit you?" he asked.

I said I did not believe that it was a bite of any kind. I was scared because I felt that it was cancer. He asked me when the swelling had appeared on my neck. I said it was there Friday morning when I woke. At that point, he told me that cancer just didn't pop up that quickly without some other type of warning signs. He said it looked as if I had the

mumps, took a measurement of it, gave me something to take and said, "Let's see how it looks next week."

A week later it was bigger.

I told doc that until he could prove to me that it was – without a doubt – NOT cancer we were going to look at it as if it were! I was sent upstairs to see the ear, nose and throat doctor. He took a needle biopsy, but also made an appointment at the Cleveland Clinic with Doctor Wood, a specialist.

If you are ever in the same situation, I would suggest you bring along a member of your family. I was glad I had. You need more ears to remember what is said to you. I did, because as he starts to check you over you are not thinking of what he is saying. Trust me, all you're listening for him to say is that you're all right. You do not hear the rest of what he says. As Dr. Wood probed his finger down my throat, it stopped on the back, right side of my tongue. That's when I became aware of what he was saying. Yes, there was a tumor and he was going to take a biopsy of it. He then told me that if I did exactly what the doctors who were going to take care of me said, there was a 95% chance of cure, which was good news.

Even though I felt confident in what Dr. Wood had told me, I couldn't help looking back to a friend of mine from work. Every now and again a group of us stopped after work at the local pub just to blow off steam, shoot some pool, and just get together. One of the people that quit coming to the pub was Jim. We lost contact with him – as we often do – and didn't think anything of it until several months later, when Jim came back to work. He was a big man; he stood out. This was how I recognized him, but as my eyes focused on Jim's face I could see something wasn't right. The left side of his face was gone. As our eyes met, at first I was just as

uncomfortable as he seemed to be. You have to understand how hard it was not to just stare at the void in his face. But as hard as it was for Jim to speak, he was gracious enough to tell me what had happened. He had had jaw cancer. That's the first time I had ever heard of this kind of cancer, so you might imagine now, what I had running through my mind the whole time Dr. Wood was examining me.

I felt it was possible I might lose part of my face like Jim had. Even with Dr. Wood's reassurance, I was still filled with doubt about the outcome of the treatment I was going to have to go through. But thank God for the early warning sign, Doctor Wood, the fine staff at the Clinic, and also to my Doctor Neidies for hearing what I said to him. It was caught in time. Because of the radiation to my neck and mouth area I was having a rough time eating and swallowing anything, even water. The results were my losing 70 pounds and becoming weak. Dr. Adlestien, one of the doctors treating me, said if I couldn't swallow, he'd insert a feeding tube into my stomach. I said, "NO, you will not!" If they could find a way to treat my tumor, they could find a way to get food and water down my throat. He said I was TENACIOUS but wished all his patients had this kind of fight.

I'm now 2 years 6 months in recovery. I had my follow-up CAT scan December 12th, 2005, and heard from Doc Wood that it all looks clear. Now my appointments won't have to be as often through the year. It was a hard treatment to go through, but I'd do it again if I had to – just to hear those words "YOU'RE ALL CLEAR." It's a feeling like no other I know of.

Today, people are more beautiful, and the flowers smell so much better. My point is this – if you feel something is wrong with you, don't just think it will go away. It won't. See your doctor, but take control of your body and the signs it gives

you. DO NOT HESITATE. At the very least, you will come away feeling good to know one way or the other.

TAKE CARE OF YOU AND HAVE A GREAT LIFE!

Robert F. Rojc Sr.

MY SECRET SHINING STAR

It all started when an innocent, young woman discovers she's going to become a mother, such a strong role for an inexperienced person to carry. It's a tender and innocent, yet stern process for mothers to go through. To be a mother you must possess a unique, demanding, and patient character. This is a common and true story that needs to be heard. A 12-year-old girl gets raped. Instantly, her whole innocence and sense of beauty is robbed from her little body. Suddenly, she becomes curious of the whole carnal act, so that's what she pursues blindly.

Another circumstance has her move half way across the U.S., and she falls into love at the age of fourteen. It is simply puppy love. Everything is so brand new and exciting. Puberty is in full effect. I believe it was summertime, almost fall, when this young girl gets the news that her mother's fiancé is ordered to go overseas. Her mother has mixed feelings.

Meanwhile, the confused girl tells her "puppy love" that she and her family are moving. They decide to have a baby and marry so she can possibly stay in the U.S.A. The plan goes through, unexpectedly, and the girl's mother is in emotional turmoil, but she gives her daughter permission to get married. Twelve days after the daughter's wedding, her mother's husband is sent away overseas. She must wait to get her orders to go join her husband.

Time goes by, and the young girl delivers her baby. The girl is now fifteen. She's scared and misses her mother. Her mother left to go overseas exactly one week prior to the birth of her first granddaughter. A month later this hopeful, but sad girl, finds out that her newlywed husband has been unfaithful. She is forgiving and has high morals to stick to her vows and determination to live happily ever after. The girl naively allows her husband to talk her into having a bigger family in hopes of strengthening their rocky marriage.

Eventually, they get their wish and she discovers she's about to endure the special gift of motherhood once again. By this time she is 16 years old having her second child, yet she is still clueless about life. Her first child is only 1 month old, and she is pregnant with her second child.

Around her fourth month of pregnancy, she goes to her first prenatal care appointment and has her ultrasound. The doctor finds something very unusual about the ultrasound. He determines she's carrying a child with gastroschisis. This is medical terminology meaning a child's intestines are outside of his stomach. The doctor tells the young and confused couple that it happens in 1 out of 1,000 pregnancies and can be fixed upon the child's arrival with surgery. In this particular city where they live, the doctors don't have the knowledge or experience to provide proper treatment for the mother and her child. She travels 30 minutes away for prenatal care. During these visits, the worried young couple goes to church frequently and prays hard.

With all the stress, their marriage is weakened and the girl packs up her 9-month-old daughter and moves west where all of her family is. She delivers a beautiful baby boy right before summer. The precious bundle of joy has his intestines put back in slowly and has a scar where his naval would have been. The girl considers this a miracle since the doctors in another state said it would be in her best interest to have an abortion due to the health risk of having a child with this condition.

Nevertheless, faith brings her around. Amongst her profound happiness, her husband is begging and anticipating that his family will be back together again. After plenty of persuading, she finally gives in once again, believing in her vows and staying true to them. The frustrated, now 16 1/2-year-old young lady arrives at the airport with a 1 1/2-year-old daughter and her newborn son. The weather is sultry, and the girl is sweaty and tired. There is no sign of her husband. When she finally arrives at her husband's location, with her

babies, she's eye to eye with him. The infinitely smarter young girl feels infidelity floating around the room but stays cool until there is solid proof. She is fed up at this point but is afraid to tear apart her family and keep the children away from their father. The young couple made a vow to raise their children together because they weren't raised by their biological fathers, and they wanted their family to be whole. With this in mind, she stays.

She starts going to school full-time and works part-time. Her husband works as a night manager. Her family is, finally, joyful and full of good spirit. Christmas Day is only 4 days away, and presents are under the Christmas tree. The tired young lady is exhausted from tests all day at school, working and playing with her children.

When the sleepy babies finally go to sleep, the young mother doses off on the couch. Suddenly, as though there was a mental alarm clock on, she instantly makes her son's bottle. She has an overwhelming feeling of panic, so she immediately runs to her son's room. She starts to feel a million different meanings of the word shock. The poor young lady looks in horror and finds her 7-month-old baby literally stuck in his crib. His face is smashed between the mattresses and bars limply. The mother calls 9-1-1. They arrive and pronounce her precious, courageous baby boy is dead.

The devastated young girl feels like she has lost her mind. Not only is she dealing with the painful fact that her precious son is gone forever, she has to deal with investigators searching her home and her husband blaming her for their son's death. Not to mention that all of her family is spread across the country, and the girl's mother is 8 months pregnant in Germany and can't make the funeral.

The emotionally distraught young girl loses her mind. The devastated young couple buries their son on Christmas Eve, and their lives are completely turned upside down. The girl can't eat, sleep, think, or even concentrate. She has a nervous breakdown.

After all this pain and suffering this young lady has had to endure, she is strengthened from the situation. She learns that God has his reason for everything and feels blessed to have enjoyed 7 months of his life. She sees everything in a brand new light and decides to leave her husband for good and is on her journey to a promising future. Every time she sees a star, it could be a million stars in the sky, she knows the brightest one is her son smiling down on her.

Now, when I hear this story I feel a sense of a young woman learning from her experiences and being a survivor. This is what we all are, survivors. It also reinforces the reality of what is going on in this world. Young mothers subject themselves and their children to unnecessary grief from their children's fathers. So many mothers are living single and having their children around negativity because they can't cope with the stresses of motherhood. There are also mothers who are so caught up in their own personal lives or are never at home to be with their children and end up watching themselves. They're never home to raise them or give them the love and attention they deserve.

On the positive side, there are strong, determined, mothers who are trying to work hard to make a better living for their children. To all mothers with children, think of this true story about this young girl and what she had to go through with her son, just to lose him so quickly. Now she cherishes every precious moment with her children.

They're not kids forever and they need our guidance, attention, support, love, nurturing, discipline, and understanding. With all these tools they will grow up to be productive adults and appreciate you as a parent and a person.

Gloria Portis