

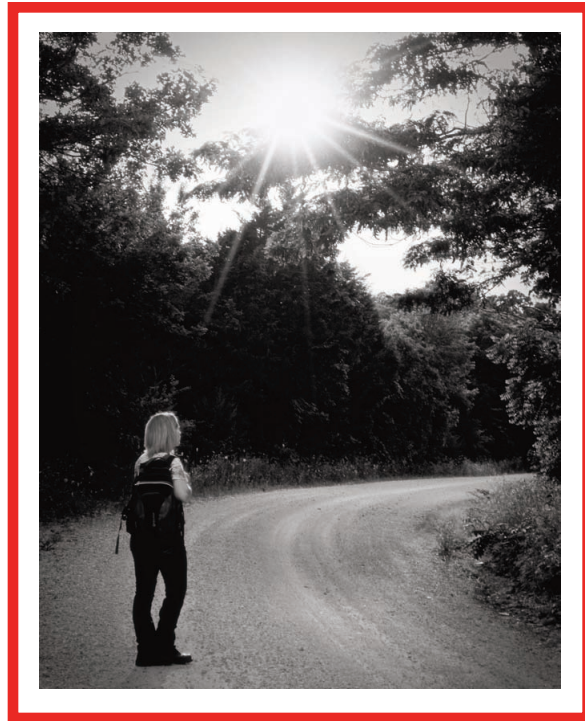
I Am Beautiful



A Survival Resource
Created by and for Women

Volume 4

"Life is a journey and a spiritual unfolding is its purpose."



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With Gratitude

We are deeply grateful to the women in prisons across the country who opened their hearts in order to share the sadness and joys of their experiences through their writing and art. Their willingness to share was truly an act of courage because of all they endured and yet have survived. This book is their gift to the many other women who are walking with them on the unfolding journey of life.



Our Logo

The *rose* is our logo and was inspired by the words of a woman who contributed to the very first volume of this project:

“Life is a journey and a spiritual unfolding is its purpose.”

Cover Art

We are grateful to Ashleigh, for the photo of her as she walks the road of life, and to Calvin Wild Photography for the cover photo and others in the book. May the journey depicted in this photo stand for the dignity, love and hope of what lies ahead for all those who contributed to this book and to those who will read it.

Why did I stay?

As I grew up I learned not to speak up about the unpleasant. I tried to be nice, good, patient and long-suffering. So when I married, I endured the verbal and emotional abuse, but I finally came to understand how as a victim, time after time I drank a toxic drink that my spouse mixed for me, that fooled me because it tasted like love at first.

For years I hid my suffering from others. No one guessed the ongoing sadness I felt. I recall the shock I felt after the wedding when I was abused for the first time. I couldn't believe that someone who said they loved me would be so mean. Finally, with the help of a dream that stayed with me during my waking hours, the bitterness, sadness and anger I kept inside came to the surface. I realized that I needed to face that what my partner did to me for so long was abuse – emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical. Part of the struggle was the internal voice that said, "Don't dig up and expose all this – it's not nice. What's the point, it's in the past." But for the sake of my own healing, I had to vomit it out of my system.

The hard question was: "*Why did someone who said they loved me, hurt me?*" I didn't understand why love came mixed with the bitterness of mistreatment. The question that follows was: "*Why did I stay and put up with it for so long?*" Where was my self-respect? Why didn't I claim the dignity that was mine as a human being?

I was angry with the other person for abusing me, but also angry with myself for going along with it. I could understand that my spouse learned to be an abuser as a child at the hands of dysfunctional parents. After all, I learned from my parents to be nice, not speak up, and suffer in silence. Yet I also realized that forgiveness is the way out of living with toxic waste, a bitterness that would ruin my own life. But for that I needed God' help if I was to accomplish what felt impossible.

I realize now that why I didn't leave was because abuse came gift-wrapped in love. That's the part that is so sad – that abuse is mixed with what appears to be love. The bait is love because as human beings we are wired to receive and give love, but we can be fooled at first. We may not be wise or strong enough, or think enough of ourselves, to let go of the bait and walk away. So I also have to forgive myself and be determined to never, ever succumb to such abuse again, to say to myself "*That toxic mix? I'm not drinking that, I deserve better!*"

-RE



Stock Photo

Soul Liberty

Tammy

I am no longer trapped in those places that cut my dreams off at the knees. There were basements full of failure-staircases that were buried with burdens, screams unheard of. I would get stuck in the middle and be forced to go back down into the unfamiliar step-my perception began to drown. Spray paint pinned up anxious thoughts. Permanent patience etched inside its silent stone.

My half-baked attempts to open the window for air left me suffocating and grasping for more-every time I found a light-it turned out to be a lie-changing my day back into the darkest of night.

But I heard about a melody where life could be sung-from the hilltops of freedom - inside one's own soul a liberty bell could be rung. I remember when I found the rope. I remember when I began to pull.

Beautiful are the feet that bring the good news-Beautiful were the feet that came trudging through my mess-just to get to me. Merciful were the scars inside the hands that set me free. And constant is the flow of the Blood that brings us liberty.



Calvin Wild Photography

Choices

Trysta

Choices become actions
My life became simple reactions
So many things I could blame
None would ever cover my shame
Things we will never get to see
People we will now never be
Just like a sleeping man's dream
Life seems to fade with each morning
These fences are high and mean
Outside life goes on with each day passing
Inside it seems to stand still, frozen
Daily, the same people and words spoken
Praying God please help me not be broken!
Days, months, years all become the same;
Soon all I have is a number for a name.
No! This game I will not loose
I lift my head and cry "I choose"!
I choose to live and not to die
This place will not be my tomb,
I'll make it like a mother's womb
My last choice will be new birth
So I can show myself my real worth!

Fire

Trysta

Come what may...
Happiness and peace I do pray
Hardly at a loss for words
My mind so fast constantly churns
What should I be?
Nothing more than my personality
Pain is long, joy short
Yet we are glad, without one we can't
have the other
Such things we don't learn from mother
When at last we do explore
We want nothing more than to
remember that fire



Stock Photo

Chasing the Dragon

Alissa

At some point I became an addict. It started slowly at first, a manageable habit that led to an unquenchable thirst. A few pills a week took care of me just fine, then the next thing I knew I was taking 15 at a time. That seems crazy to a normal person, for me, it just kept me well. I didn't even get high anymore, looked in my own personal hell. Running out of pain pills was a nightmare re-lived. Without them I couldn't take care of myself, let alone a kid.

Withdrawals are the worst thing to experience, lying in bed for days, unable to move. The only thing that makes you better is taking pain pills by the twos. All those pills started adding up and got too expensive before long. Someone taught me a cheaper way. That's when everything went wrong. Sticking the needle in my arm was only supposed to be temporary to get me by, until I got my script. After I felt that first front door, the needle was how it went. I thought I was saving so much money. It took so much less time to get me high. I didn't realize I was giving up my innocence, waving my life goodbye. I wouldn't do my pain pills any other way. I felt it was a waste. It flipped my world upside down, beginning with just a little taste. Sticking the needle in my arm is an addiction of its own. It becomes a part of the ritual. I never did pain pills again on their own.

Addiction is progressive. It always gets worse. When you think you have it under control, watch out, your bubble's about to burst. Always looking to get higher, achieve the ultimate high. They call it chasing the dragon. You want to feel him, just one more time. He makes you think it's possible, lets you get close once in a while. That's only to keep you chasing him, taunting you all the while. I looked like a fool for so long, spending money I didn't even have.

Never go the damn dragon...

Now he's smiling, saying "Awe, shouldn't have"...



Stock Photo

Rejection

Frances

*Mangled, torn; broken, worn; bitter, scorn; shattered, unspoken for
In the shell of a woman who knows no love, no kindness, no compassion
Yet is expected to show all of this and more to her brothers, who gift her with looks of disgust,
Turning their noses up to her
There she sits, head down, eyes closed, waiting and wanting with not courage to ask for anything
For rejection will hurt her even more.*



Stock Photo

Inmate

Diann

I never thought I'd be here doing all this time.
Nothing left to do but sit around and cry.
My mind is slowly fading. What am I to do?
Always consumed with thoughts
of coming home to you
Today is the day they're gonna set me free...
Eternity with God is where I'm gonna be.

Corrections

Diann

Coming to the pen has been a wakeup call.
On my own two feet I stood and now I fall.
Realizing my mistakes when things got outta hand
Ready for the verdict once I exit off the stand
Execution is an option the jury may want to choose.
Can you understand what I truly face to lose?
Time ticks away like any grains of sand.
I wish I'd spent more time holding my children's hands.
Only God can judge me "The motto of my life"
Never take for granted your husband, kids, or wife.
Saving grace is mine in the very end,
cuz today I found out I'm getting out the pen!



Stock Photo

This Time

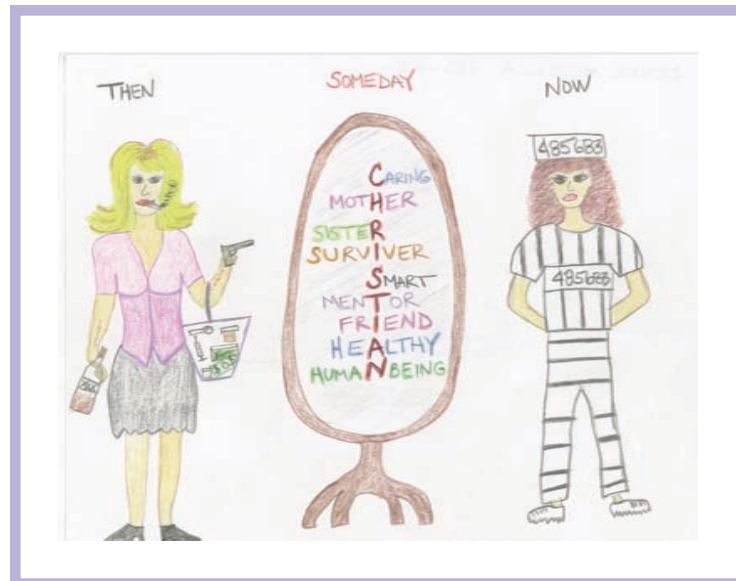
Angela Renee

I've made up my mind.
I am not lost anymore.
I have found what I'm looking for.
Peace has come my way.
Worry has let me free.
Today is the only day I live for.
Tomorrow's problems are for another day.

We Fall Down... But We Must Get Back Up

Yolanda

Doing good, feeling good, and working hard;
Feels like life doesn't need any guards
Forgetting about all our struggles, nose in the air...
Like we are not survivors of the hustle
Then when that storm comes, we say
Forget the shelter and keep on walking...
Beaten, battered to no recognition,
Steady running on a mission
Deep down we know this is not the way to go,
All the hard times that we experienced
Is making us strong to handle the next fall if it comes
We fall down, but take that fall with a grain of salt
My sisters, mother, daughters, we must get back up



Denise Morella

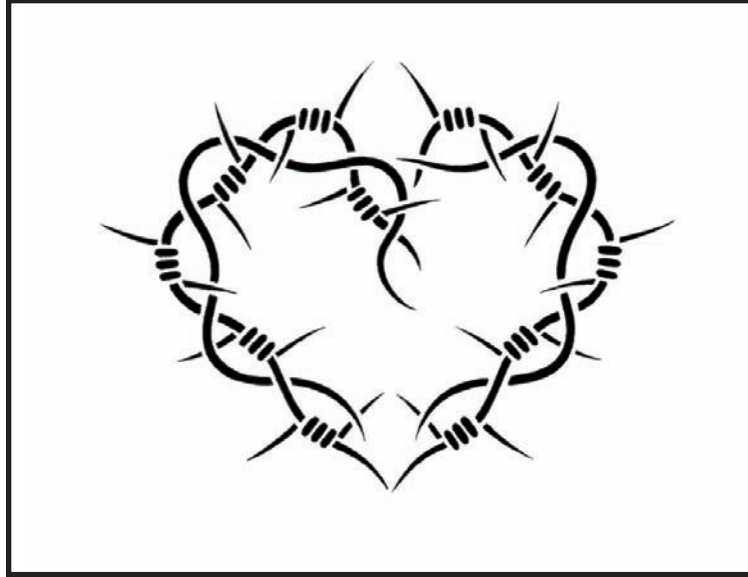
Take a Stand

Iyamille

There is no solace, it seems
In this life as a battered wife
Living in constant strife
Vows broken, justice unspoken
Malice unearthed from the man I trusted
In this world so wide, there is no place a tear can hide
The perpetrator lives with great pride
The outsiders seem blind
Who then will stand in our defense?
If not ourselves in the end
We alone know the depth of our own shame
The extent of our pain
A mere puppet to his game
The one whom we trusted to protect
But now in retrospect, it all seemed clear
But when fear set in
He switched gears...
There are many of us who suffer alone
Afraid to stand on our own
Looking up from a place so low
We have statistics to show
That with every year our numbers grow
Let's take a stand, let's take a chance
To speak up, to speak against
That very man!



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Sojourn the Cycle

Brandy

As I sit here feeling desolate, feeling despondency, a talk show entrapped me. Children conversing one to another; women standing up against vituperation. Then it becomes real. Then I couldn't ensconce from it any longer. Then it was as real as real could be. I was quarry. I had to sojourn to the cycle. I realized I had to be a conqueror, I had to gain victory. Strength I drew from ones like me. Gumption I gained from analogous situations. Let's seize the moment and be conquerors, let's sojourn the cycle. Let's snatch what has been plundered from us. Let's seize what's been rifled from us. Now as I sit here I feel like I'm a vanquisher. I feel triumph. I feel no longer a quarry. I'm now doing something about being victimized.

Untitled

Tanna

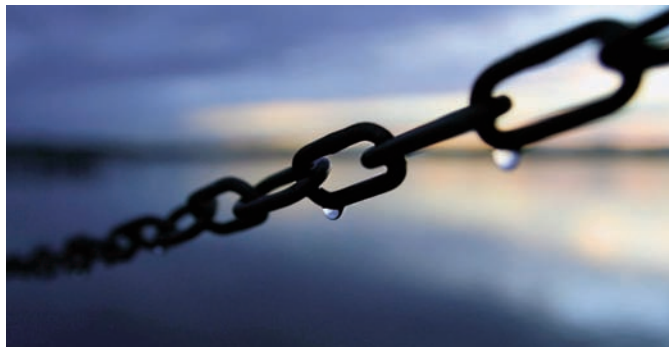
You tore through my skin
A pain that was welcomed
You left scars and bruises
Not only physical, but on my heart and soul
You left me feeling empty without you.

Beautiful

Sharee

Time after time I had no clarity of why. Abuse before healing...enhanced my black eye, he wanted me to die...To shatter my dreams, brutally abused me mentally...using people in my life to pretend they were a friend of me, he hated me...because I'm a child of the Most High. Sexual abuse made my soul cry. As soon as I was born, his evil plots began...death he wished upon me and to defile my land, to accomplish plucking me out of my Heavenly Father's hand. I still remember his devilish grin, means without mercy...As he lead me to the streets dry and thirsty, he tried to curse me, every single day he lived to hurt me, and fear he birthed in me. The worst thing was that the abuse was so rapid, I even tried to take my own life...desperate to divorce the spirit of strife...grasping for air...I flat lined...

I can now feel my heart, one beat a time. A still small voice said, "survive". "I'll never forsake you as the apple of My eye. I've kept a count of your tears every time you cried. The grace that you needed through this journey I've supplied. I am that I am, who is and alive. In each other we must abide, trust in Me to be your guide...shhh...My shadow will keep you warm. The angels that I have dispatched will keep you from hurt, danger, and harm. Rest in my arms so that I can nurture you to health. It is vital, even to be rescued fro yourself...I am you help, fortress, strong tower, and strength. Look to the hills, it is your help come whence." Though the voice was as soft as a whisper, it was the word of its power. Feeling replenished during my darkest hour...I'm not taking anymore whoopens from Satan, the scales have been taken off my eyes to see. The Spirit of the Lord is effective responsively, chains are broken. I can finally breathe, recreated, he better watch out for me...I traded my ashes for Beauty.



Stock Photo

HEROIN

Alissa

My nose is runny, I'm feeling sick. Cold chills, goose bumps, sweats, and shits. I'm going to get through this. Don't give in as long as I can make it through when the worst part begins. 24 hours, it's getting worse, get my cell phone out of my purse. I can't make it, I'm so sick. I only need one more fix. I'll stop tomorrow. It won't be as bad. I'll delete my dealer's number. Don't be mad. I'm shaking so bad I can't mix it up. I really need your help. This is the last time I'll ask you, I promise you, after this, I'm through. Oh my God please hurry I can't take this much more. It feels like I've been sick for days on this bathroom floor. Oh thank God it's ready, I'll try and hit myself but if I can't do it, for the last time I need your help. Shit, I can't get it. I hit it, and then I miss it. I can't waste this shot. You know it's all I got. Just hit me this one last time. Just one more shot and I'll be fine. Tomorrow will be a better day. I'm getting clean. No more drugs. Help me out. I'm on my way. Oh yes that feels so good. Making me feel just like you should. Pin and needles, feels so good. Doing me the way I knew you would. Nodding out and burning shit up. Itching my nose, whoa, I gotta throw up. 3 hours go by, I'm still feeling great, but in a few, I'll start to shake. When the old sweats begin you try and are strong but you knew that wasn't your last shot all along. So you say, baby, just one more time. Never again, I'm serious this time. And then it happens all over again. The vicious cycle will never end. He gets tired of watching you kill yourself so he tells you he's leaving you until you get some help. You still can't get clean; heroin's your man now. You're wrapped in his strong arms, never letting go. Don't be alarmed. As long as he's by your side, under his control you cannot hide. Until one day, you have nothing left except an empty rig. Alone again, something you have learned to accept, but when he comes around you're never alone, and then he leaves you sick. You'll do anything to get him back and quick. When you look in the mirror, it's not you that you see. It's the woman the heroin wants you to be. Sore all over the face, circles under your eyes, clothes no longer fit you, a smile that's a lie. You're so broken down; you've lost your soul. He drug you down. There's nowhere to go but up from here. Throw away the ng and say goodbye or keep him around and surely die. It's all up to you. It's your decision to make. He'll always hold you hostage, in time your life he'll take. With him as your man, the endings are always the same. Jails, institutions, death; all lead to a face without a name. If you choose to let him go, your life is going to change back to the person you were before, a face with a name.

Everything's going to be ok.

On Losing Someone

Geneva

Your pain, keep it away
Do not touch me, I live in my prison
I am not for sale, I think
Take it from me:
My life, my hope, my failures
When I was trapped in your pain
I atrophied
I forgot what love is
A sacrifice as beautiful as a window
Full of morning or falling rubies
Those frozen moments
Too precious to touch
You took it back and since then
I live in grey light
Where only crows sing



Stock Photo

Believe

Geneva

Believe in me, I am like you. I am what you are; there is no difference between us. We are just one color on top of another bound by one moment we can't take back or change; both of us prisoners of a world that's terrible. Beautiful and strange, striving to understand circumstances that seem so far beyond me while struggling to have faith in the things that I cannot see. Waking each morning with the promise to become who I should be and somehow believing in you. Believe in me too, I am like you. I am what you are. I dance in a thousand memories relishing moments of victory. I'm uncovering the subtle truths inside of me, while sometimes listening to you. We are beautiful and scarred, flawed and marred.

We know how painfully hard it is to become a story someone we love is telling; someone new to be a faded picture in an album missing a piece of someone's life. It may be a mother, sister, daughter, friend, or wife. Believe in me, I believe in you. I am like you, I am what you are.

Beautiful and remembered, unable to surrender.
My hope that good things can come of this, too.
So believe in me, I believe in you.



Stock Photo

Wait and See

Frances

Searching for the right place
Making sure it's the right time
Longing for those arms to hold
Yearning for love, forever more

The days are long, the nights are cold.
I wake feeling lonely
I lay in bed gloomy
All the while, searching, longing

Time never stops and my heart feels lost
At times just breathing seems a task
And yet not face tomorrow I dare not
For tomorrow may be the answer I'm looking for
The final piece to the puzzle to make my life complete
Hmm...real or a fantasy?
I guess I'll have to wait till tomorrow comes and see

Life Circles

Trysta

What errors come from past terrors? Youth is not always pretty or kind. One life is like a raindrop in the sea. Although to each person they matter, kindly or cruelly molding each mind so that without one the other cannot be. Knowledge and wisdom are few, pain and hardships all too true. Yet most of us already "knew everything", pride we humans have a plenty, although sometimes it turns to stupidity. Why don't we just listen and learn? Why to be different do we constantly yearn? There is no answer to my words, only new people with the same rewards. In the sick circle we all spin, trying desperately to come up with new whims. Sometimes forgotten things are rediscovered, but we all spend too much time repeating all the already learned mistakes uncovered. Imagine what we could become if lessons we'd learn, just one, hopefully we will reach that great day and mankind can forget their delays.

I Told Myself...

Patricia

I heard my mother being abused by my father over and over again
I wondered "WHY" she put up with him doing that to her...
I cried for her
I told myself that when I grew up I'd never put up with anyone hurting me that way.

I heard my oldest sister being abused by her husband over and over again.
I asked "WHY" she put up with him doing that to her...
I cried with her
I told myself that when I grew up I'd never put up with anyone hurting me that way.

He promised to never hurt me...I experienced his abuse over and over again.
I decided to not put up with him doing that to her...
I refused to cry.
I told myself that I would never put up with anyone hurting me that way.

And, I didn't.

Three different woman, three different generations, three different men...same type of abuse. In time we were all set free from the bondage of abuse. It took my mother 30 years; my sister 12 years. Me, less than 1 year...I meant what I told myself.

WHY?

WHY?

WHY?



Shattered Lives

Rose

Smoke bellows out as he opens the door, my heart drops to the floor. My mind races and runs wild. What has he done? That's the question I ask myself. My screams pierce through the night and the neighbors run to see if I'm alright. There were lights flashing and firefighters everywhere. I remember a drive to the hospital and a call to my mom that I'll never remember. Pray is all I can do besides cry. Pray until my throat goes dry. The doctor comes out and all I see is him shaking his head and my mom feels dead. My mind goes wild I get up to run but can't make it so first my body hits the wall, then straight down to the floor. As I fall, my mom comes running, screaming my name. I'm surrounded by everyone, but I don't care. He don't touch me, he doesn't care. The nurse comes out and says we can see them. My head starts to shake, my mind says I can't, but I know I need to as my heart breaks. I walk into the cold, sterile, silent room. My legs give, I go to the floor as I ask God why must this happen to them. The nights pass but I barely remember, my days spent numbing my pain. Our final goodbye, but I couldn't do it. My legs wouldn't carry me. As I bent to kiss them goodbye, my heart shatters. A ride to the cemetery, every one sings as the coffin lowers into the ground and my heart goes right with my beautiful girls. Now I have nothing.

Untitled

Tanna

My heart is broken
My tears run deeper than the ocean
You remain a piece of my tattered heart
"A huge piece"
You lifted me up when I wanted to give up
You showed me hope when I felt hopeless
You loved me when I couldn't love myself
Without you...well God only knows where I'd be
I can't express my love and gratitude for you
I want you to know
That this woman you helped off her knees
Is now standing tall.

My Story

Takeisha

I've had a rough life. My father abandoned me when I was born and my mother is a drug addict who beat and abused me and my older sister; mentally, physically, and emotionally. She got away with it for the majority of my sister's life but only until the age of five with me. At that time, she met my stepfather. For the first two to three years, she stopped abusing me to impress my stepdad. My sister already moved out on her own, and then my mom started abusing me again. If my stepdad was around, he wouldn't allow it. When I turned eleven, my stepdad started acting weird to me. He would tell me that if I didn't want him to leave me and mom and let her do what she wants (to beat on me) that I would do what he wants me to do. He would take me to his shop and take naked pictures of me. Then, at the age of twelve, my real dad popped back up in my life. He was sick with cancer, on his death bed, and wanted to make things right with me. I got to spend a little time with him before he passed away. At the age of thirteen, my stepdad let one of my sister's ex's move in with us. He was thirty-one years old while my mom was locked in her room getting high. He would come in my room and force himself on me. He told me if I said anything he would have my mom thrown in prison, and I would be an orphan. Then, one day, my mom caught him in my room and flipped out. She called my stepdad and he rushed home. She told the guy to get out and told my mom not to call the cops. My stepdad knew what was going on the whole time and was telling the guy to do it. Of course, my mom knew none of this. At the age of fifteen, my mom caught my dad cheating on her, so we left. We stayed with my sister until she called the cops and had our mom thrown in jail for hitting me. Then, we went and got our own place. My mom would stay out real late at night getting high and would come home and beat me. I finally started fighting back, but it only made it worse. My mother almost killed me once. She had me on the floor and she stepped on my throat until I was blue in the face. My best friend pulled her off of me. I blacked out and ended up beating up my mom. I couldn't even remember it. Then, at seventeen, I met my (now ex) fiancée. He was thirty years old. We hit it off and ended up together. At eighteen, I moved out of my mom's house and in with him. He had a ten month old baby and another one on the way. He got custody of both because the state took her rights for being a bad mom. Then, I got pregnant. My fiancée talked me into getting an abortion. It scared me mentally, physically, and emotionally. The mother of the kids did what she needed to do to get back custody. She had them for seven months until she messed up again and we got custody back. Then, we moved to Oklahoma. My fiancée was a truck driver so he was gone two weeks at a time. So I'm nineteen, taking care of two kids, running a household by myself in a state where I don't know anyone or anything, and my family is eight hundred miles away. Then, the baby (who was eighteen months old) gets sick. I took him to the doctor who said he had a bug. He kept getting sick, so I took him to the hospital. They didn't find anything wrong either. The next day, he acted fine all day. After he ate dinner, he went to his room to play. I went to do the dishes. A few minutes later, his brother came to get me. When I went in the room, he was passed out. He was not responding, so I called 911. The ambulance came and we went to the hospital. They automatically started questioning me. The doctor found a hairline fracture on his skull and an old bleed on his brain that was up to six months old. We only had custody for three and a half months. They accused me and said that either I did it or I'm covering for someone else. So, I got sentenced to sixty years. Thirty years in prison, thirty on probation. I look back at my life now and I know that God has a plan for me. I know I've made some mistakes but I know in my heart that I have been forgiven and I am still a beautiful, although imperfect, person worthy of God's love.

Mommy Please

Rose

Mommy, please don't cry for me. I'm up here in heaven looking after you. Just remember, I'm here for you.

Mommy, please don't blame your-self. I understand that you never meant for this to happen. I don't like to see you like this. I miss your beautiful smile.

Mommy, please don't hurt your-self. I don't like to see you do this stuff. Remember, you still have my brothers and sisters who need you so much.

Mommy, please remember all the good times, don't dwell on the bad. I still remember the love you have for me and your beautiful smile. That's what I like to see.



Stock Photo

Angels Watching

Rose

As the angels watch me through the night, they say Mommy, please don't cry, we're alright. We're up here playing in the streets of gold without a worry, not a bad soul in sight! Jesus says he wanted us back because daddy didn't know how to act. Don't you worry, we'll be together soon. Until then, we love you to the moon!

Dedicated to my Angels

Tiny Drops

Jennifer

Those tiny drops of humanity
Those wet bodies of fluid
that tumble down our eyes
Creeping down our cheeks
Splashing on the floor of our hearts
They were there that day
They are always present at such times
They should be, that's their job
They are miniature messengers on call
twenty four hours a day
To substitute for crippled words
They drip, drop, and pour
From the corner of our souls
Carrying with them the deepest emotion we possess
They tumble down our faces with announcements
Ranging from the most blissful joy
to the darkest despair
The principle is simple
When words are most empty
Tears are most apparent



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Life is a mystery

Heather

*It comes with much history
where do you search to find yourself endlessly?
Your heart and your soul have taken a toll
You can turn that into a stronghold
Be the one whom broke the mold
Hold your head up high and stand up bold
Life has a tendency to make one fold
But turn that into your stronghold*

My Testimony

Cindy

I was raised in a Mormon home. The rules were very strict; no caffeine, no sleeveless shirts, skirts and shorts were to be at the knee or below. Sunday was a day to rest and focus on God. Monday night was family night, and Wednesday night was a youth activity. From the time I was born, it was embedded in my head that Mormon Church was the only true church, and the only way to get to heaven. I was homeschooled my whole life, and was sheltered from the world. I was not allowed to date until I was sixteen, and was never taught about boys or relationships. I grew up really naïve. By the time I was fifteen, I began to rebel against my parents and the church. I would wear clothes that were considered immodest, and began to read about witchcraft. I also began to cut myself and even tried to kill myself. I was placed in a foster home for four months, but my rebellion continued. When the judge placed me back home, we moved to Florida. From there, things got worse. I practiced witchcraft behind my parent's backs. I would leave without telling them where I was going. My cutting and suicide attempts got worse. By the time I was eighteen, I had been hospitalized six times. I basically told God screw you. I had been talking to a boy online, and he offered me a way out of the rules; a way to freedom, or so I thought. I left home on June 5, 2009, with no plans to look back. A couple of weeks after I came to West Virginia, I met my co-defendant, Jennie, and her brother Jamie. At first Jamie offered me everything I could possibly want, and he was so nice to me; at least at first. Soon after I got involved with him he became possessive and abusive to me physically, mentally, and sexually. It got to the point where I was afraid to disobey him or even tell my mom what was going on. When the crime happened, I kinda hoped they would kill me too. When we got arrested, I blamed God for everything; the man dying, being locked up. I couldn't see how a loving God could let that happen. For three and a half years after that I struggled with cutting and suicide attempts. It got to the point where I was begging God to let me die. I couldn't live with all the shame and guilt. February of 2013 was the worst month of my life, but also the best. To begin with, I was in the medical unit because I was constantly trying to hurt myself. It got so bad that I couldn't feel the pain from it. I tried to pray to the Pagan Gods and Goddesses, but no one came to help. Out of sheer desperation, I called out to God and asked him to forgive me, to come into my heart. For forty-three days, God was by my side! When I felt I could not go on, God gave me the strength to keep fighting. When I got sick from an infection, God was there to comfort me and heal me. When being sick caused me to pass out, I prayed to God to not let that happen again, and it didn't. When I was so shaky I could barely move, I prayed for God to lessen it, and before I finished praying he took most of it away. When I thought I was all alone, God was there holding me, helping me. From this I have learned what child-like faith is. It is simply believing that God will do anything for you if you only ask in his name. God is not only my God, He is my Abba. He says he will never leave us nor forsake us. I love God more than I can say. I don't know how I could have ever become Wiccan, but I do know that I can and will never turn my back on God. I know Him too well, and am too close to be able to do that. One day I hope to have the chance to in some way minister to others, and that I may be counted worthy to be one of His faithful when He comes to gather His Church. My only regret is that I didn't know God sooner. At least I know that I am an heir to the Kingdom of Heaven. One day I will be able to praise His holy name forever and ever for He is holy and worthy to receive praise, honor, and glory.



Stock Photo

I am Beautiful

Frances

I am beautiful despite the scars I wear

I am beautiful beyond the tattoos you see

I am beautiful no matter how I wear my hair

I am beautiful even if my teeth are missing

I am beautiful despite my addiction

I am beautiful for I am a survivor

I am beautiful because of my struggles

I am beautiful.....

If you'd just take the time to get to know the real me,
You'd see the beauty that is me.

Your nightmare my reality

Angela Renee

Child's pain is no game, misery of her mother away.
Yet it's my fault, I'm the source to her pain.
Praying that my time helps me change
My child I adore, yet here I am.
Tears I can't wipe tear my whole life.
Into pieces is my heart,
yet I'm the one who tore my family apart.
I don't want you to feel sorry.
I just hope maybe my life can prevent some hurt.
So I share hoping you care



Calvin Wild Photography

I Will Live

Pamela

I have welcomed the thought of death at various times in my life only to find that death has eluded my being and I live to face another day. I, like so many other women, have welcomed the thought of death, instead of life at the hand of our abusers, finding that death refuses to overtake us. Then, finding the courage to face life instead of death; we find our abuser lay dead and we face another kind of death in prison. To fight this death, we must fight our sentence and the justice system which seems impossible, but with God all things are possible and God has kept me alive for a purpose. With God's help and the help and strength of a dear friend who believes in me I will discover my purpose and I will live. For the first time in a very long time I look forward to my future.

A Love Gone Bad

Rose

Shame on me for allowing you into my head
Because of you I wished I was dead
I sought help but here was none to be found
So I found a blade which was lying around
I sliced it into my wrist hoping to find relief
All I found was more grief
I hurt those around me, the ones I say I love
How could that be when I hurt them so bad?
Now I'm like you, only care about self
How dare you? I can't stand you
God will take care of you
You said you loved me, but that was a lie
The only one you love is yourself
Don't worry about me now 'cause you never have before
You best believe the next one will know all you did to us
Because of you our girls are gone
I wish you could feel the pain of their loss,
But I know that's impossible
None of this would have happened had I been smart
I should have packed up and left
Shame on me, but now they're gone.

Dedicated to Mitchell



Stock Photo

Alone

Rose

As I sit here all alone in my cube, no one to talk to, not a soul to trust.
So much to say, but unable to speak a word in a place like this you cannot trust many.
I once had someone to confide in.
She helped me through a lot, especially when I went the wrong way.
To ease my pain, she offered out her loving heart which doesn't happen a lot.
You see, even most c/o's don't care. Most don't realize how alone we are.
It takes someone special, like this lovely lady. So what's my problem, you say.
This place ran her away. So now here I sit in my cube alone.
All my secrets stuck inside. What a shame this is.

*Dedicated to a loving lady,
Heather Johnson*

Untitled

Donna

With complete disregard for your standards
I stand before you, I am beautiful

I break every mold I've been forced into
Lace the pigeon holes with napalm
Failure to comply with regulations
Check the lines
Notes of my "Greatest Hits" album
Every obstacle you put in my path
Only strengthens my will

After lunch I had something caught in my throat
I coughed up a small, blue and green orb
It was the world, and I crushed it with my heel



Stock Photo

Pulchritude (pul'kre tyood')-Noun
Feminine Pulchritude-Synonym
Pulchritudinous-Adjective

Physical Beauty and Appeal
Loveliness, Charm, Grace, Bloom, Glow, Personableness, Delight,
Beauty Unadorned, Attractiveness, Prettiness

This should be the word that every abused woman should use to describe herself when taking her life back.



Stock Photo

Have you ever wondered what would happen if every woman who has ever been abused began to open up and begin to tell their true, secret, and personal stories. Can you just imagine the extremely powerful healing that could take place.

Many would surely try to stop them because of the generational taboo of secretly keeping. Think about all of the shame and embarrassment it caused many to harbor over the years. However; just knowing that you are not alone in carrying that secret can prove empowering in itself.

Many abused women have more power within themselves than they ever recognize, but are very hesitant to use it. Their fear is that they will not ever find love or be loved again...Now that is a taboo!

Patricia

Untitled

Tanna

Some would call me a coward
Possibly true
Some would call me selfish
Possibly true
My only identity turned into a girl
On the run, on the run from herself
Her life the demise
She had caused all because she couldn't deal with her own pain
I used every method to heal a broken heart
Ending with ...
A girl, with a needle stuck in her arm
Thinking it was normal
A family, a life, I once knew
Had lost me to a needle
To the poison that allowed her to feel nothing
To her that was much better than pain and guilt.



Stock Photo

Truth

Tiffany

If you could see my life like a picture of a bed
I believe my life would be the feet, and not the head.
On a one way street, driving the wrong way
My life has been misshapen like a blind potter molding clay.
I didn't use the needle, but I always had a pipe.
Growing in my addiction, my fruit was never ripe.
Lost in a haze of smoke, couldn't find my way around
To the bottom of the bottle I sank down, down, down.
I sold what I could, no body part was free.
I thought that I was special, the queen and the B.
Thought I had a hold of life, and then I continued to slip.
Never had a knack for life just couldn't get a grip.
If I could name my story, I'll tell you what it'd be
I would name my message to you: "Just take it from me."

In Memorial

Tammy

Donna Williams was a beautiful, caring and spiritual lady. She loved her family, adored her son, and showed compassion to those around her. She came into my life at a time when I had given up. The early nineties and I had a life sentence....hopeless and feeling forgotten. Although she had a past of abuse and memories of pain, she reached out with her broken wings and bruised heart. She tried to ease not just my pain...but strangers around us. She was only in my life a brief time before she paroled home. It was so sad yet happy to see her go...bittersweet would describe how I felt as she waved and went to the world outside. When I got back to my room, I realized she had left something on my bed. She had written me a poem that has become a precious treasure over the years. Donna died of an accidental overdose a short time afterward. I share my poem she wrote for me with you. The world needs to know not only that this great person existed but her short presence here on Earth made a wonderful impact. My life sentence got overturned and I will see the Parole Board next year. Donna, a part of you will always be with me...I'm proud to call you my friend.

Life without Mercy

Written for Tammy by Donna Williams Buskirk

Life without mercy a judge did say
But how will he feel come the judgment day?
The laws of God and the laws of the land
At times they don't fit hand in hand,
We are taught to forgive, yet were condemned
Lives are shattered and tragedy wins
Its and endless cycle of oppression and grief

Have you ever wondered how these people came to be?
Did it just happen or were they taught through earthly Hell?
To one day wind up within a prison cell

Jesus shed His blood for each and every sin
And when you believe, He will come in.
He will break the chains that keep us bound,
He will lift us up to higher ground.

Life without mercy, No, this shall never be.
For our Savior has mercy for you and for me.

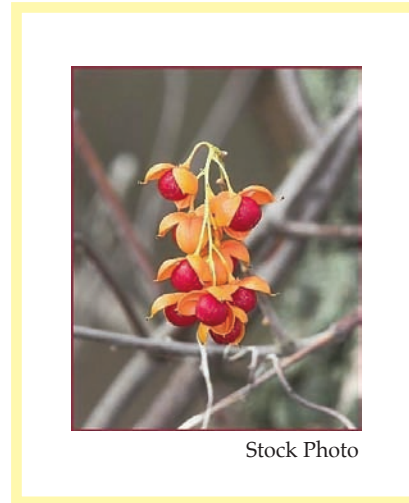


Stock Photo

When my sweet turned bitter

Sherelle

Shut the game down; I got the best in town
Ain't nobody else like him around
A diamond as it appears, I've found
Got the game locked up, bought and sold
Call dat nigga Mr. Freeze, cuz he's so cold
His piece gotta be made made of gold
Took my heart, it was his to hold
Wait for every event told
Until slowly my story unfolds:
Met him when I was in elementary
Our love was like Bonnie and Clyde's
Never once did I leave his side
I was down to ride
His secrets in me he confined
First boy to climb in my bed
He did things to my body
I couldn't even imagine in my head.
Then my sweet turned bitter.
I became his, moved on only because he said
Cried all night, til my eyes were blood shot red
It's by the grace of God I ain't dead
Then my sweeter turned bitter
Nights like the first was how it all starts
After that, the abuse became his art.
It was too late, cuz he already had my heart.
Not to mention I was carrying his seed
Yea, I tried to leave; but he cried,
begged, and even would plead
Said his daughter's love was all he needs
Here comes the struggle
Long days of drinking
Nights with other women's perfume reeking
My face beaten and bruised with blood leaking
When my sweet turned bitter
The drugs and alcohol screams: hitter, hitter
Mama tried to warm me they'll be days like this
I took the risk
I wish I could say that was my goodbye kiss
No, I wasn't in it for better or worse
It didn't matter that he put me down,
yelled, and cursed
After my second child, things really got wild
When my sweet turned bitter
I know longer could cope, I'd lost all hope
Started doing dope



Wasting my life away,
looking for a better day
Wishing my black skies
would at least turn grey
I had no more words to say
Some days I couldn't even pray
To me, that was hell on Earth
In the midst of my storm,
came another birth
When my sweet turned bitter
Now I'm in prison doing time
Sure I committed the crime
Thinking back to all that I lost,
I'm paying a very high cost
It's a past I know I can't delete
Some enemies I need to defeat
One day at a time
I'll reclaim what's mine
The battle has already been won
All glory be to God's Son
The world I shall shun
"It is finished," it is done
All who are weary, let them come
He'll give you rest
My God is awesome, He is the best
With Him, I am truly blessed...
With Him, I am still beautiful
Inside and out
Beautiful without a doubt.



Dreams

Krystal

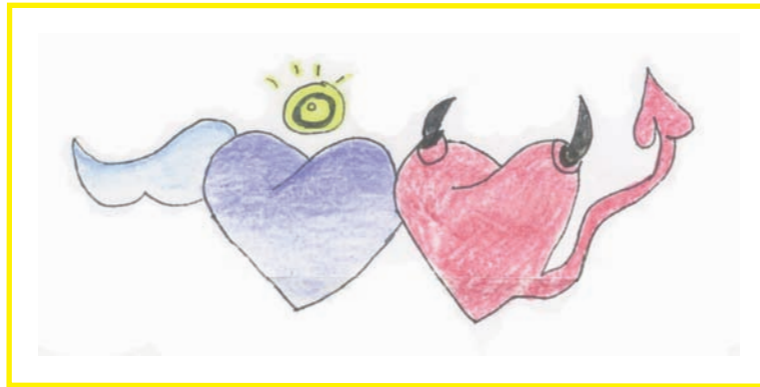
Stock Photo

Dreams; unlike life, unless it comes true...but it's all up to you, the things you choose...
Dreams; to have; you had; she had last night; when it was so dark, til she came to the light...
Dreams; I want to achieve; so many come to mind, steals my thoughts like thief in the night...
I want some, more than others...
Like the scary ones that wake me, with urgency and a cold sweat...
I can do without, I try to forget...
The ones I see that I wish could be, more than my imagination, but a part of me...
To live life, free of drama and worry...
To be that person; no judge, no jury...
Live happily with my loved ones by my side...
That's the dream I want, but it's gone like ocean's tide...
One day it will come true for me, but the wait is so unbearable that I sometimes can't see...
I want to be Cinderella for just one night...
When the clock strikes 12 and I'm out of sight...
Back at home with those who care...
Then I can tell them my dreams, cause they'll want me to share...
I wish it was as easy as just writing these words...
But once reality sets in and the damage occurs...
All that's left in the middle of it all...
Is the thought I last had, when my eye lids fall!

Win

Tiffany

No one ever said life wouldn't be hard; leaves bruises and scars.
No one ever said life wouldn't be tough; the road bumpy and rough.
No one ever said you wouldn't make a mistake; you give and you take.
No one ever said you wouldn't stumble and fall; you can't win them all.
No one ever said you wouldn't be put through tests; but winners rise above the rest.



Devil's Fool

Krystal

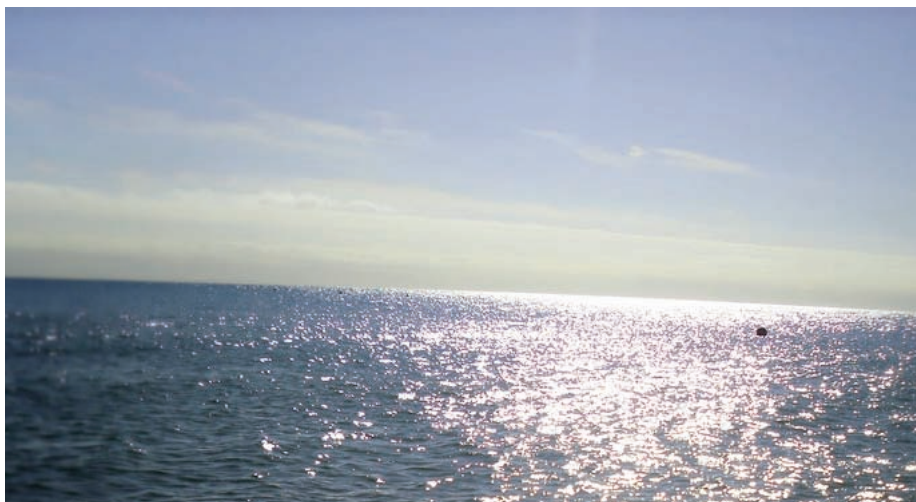
Tammy Richardson

Love it or hate it. I'm simply debating...
Is this life worth living or down for the taking...
Take away all my pain! Take away all my tears!
Let them fade to pitch black after missing the best years.
Let them go with the wind, high-high, above the clouds.
Let them slowly disappear, never wanting to be found.
Let them make their own choice to return to my flesh...
Only to be given up to the one that knows me best.
He is perfect and caring; He died for you and me...
So just make your life worth living, cause you're truly blessed to be free...
Free on the inside more than I was out. I learned the hard way, this is true.
To completely surrender to Christ, I'm still learning how to do.
I get the way I should be living and that this is not my home.
I know that He forgives me in all the moments I was wrong...
And yet I still ride the fence, while He forgives my every sin.
What will I do on judgment day, when this world comes to an end?
So I tell you all of this so you'll know just how to choose...
Pick the straight and narrow path. Don't ever be the Devil's fool!

“A Woman’s Worth”

Terri

A Woman’s worth is something that is formed from deep within.
She learns of this worth as a young girl....
She first realizes it by the way she was raised.
She was a princess at times, but others she was nothing more than just an inconvenience.
Sometimes with what life throws her way, she loses herself and the person that she truly is.
To not let the obstacles of life overtake her is something that is learned throughout her being.
She finds that lessons come in so many different shapes, colors, sizes and real pretty decorations.
Some lessons are so hard that she can’t see past the pain, only then does the hurt subside.
A kind word is said and she sees a glimpse of hope that she still shines like a diamond within.
The people in her life fade away, of course.
She obviously doesn’t want to help herself.
She finds out that people are only for a reason and a season.
When they give up on her, she almost wants to give up on herself;
but that light burns deep inside won’t allow her to fully break.
She holds tight to the woman she is, even in the midst of the things she settles for.
She knows who she really is, and what she stands for.
She gets weak and is sure to fall down, but no matter what the situation, she is a fighter.
Every pain that she feels helps build the foundation that she stands on.
This woman is a survivor and I will rise above everything that comes my way.
I will be the true woman of God that I was meant to be and my worth will shine bright
like a diamond that was born inside of me.



Calvin Wild Photography

Who Will Mend Me?

Rachel

Who will mend me?
Will it be you faithless lover of mine?
Will it be you my fickle friend?
Will it be you my absent Father?
Or you my careless Mother?
How 'bout you, self-seeking self-absorbed man of mine
who breaks my heart over and over again?
Who will mend me I ask?
Can you woman of eloquent words which hold no meaning?
And you innocent child of mine,
will you be the glue that puts me back together again?
What about you Mr. Psych man, is your couch big enough
to hold all the pieces of my broken life?
Are there enough hours in your day to fix my broken soul?
What about you Mr. Dope man?
Do you have enough little bags of poison
to fill all the cracks and holes in my shattered heart?
What about you my broken friend?
Is the chaos in your life more manageable than the circus in mine?
Can you throw me a rope and pull me up single handedly
from the deep pit I am sinkin' in?
Can you Mr. Officer be the hand that pulls me back
from the edge of insanity before I fall?
What about you Dr.? Do you have the perfect pill
to make it all just fade away?
Please, I am on my knees, there is nowhere left for me to turn,
So I ask you one final time.....
God, will you mend me and make me whole?
Will you fill my soul with your love and grace?
Will you make my life complete?
You are my only hope!



Stock Photo

The mystery of me.....

Rachel

Many will never see,
That within lies a woman
That hurts
That cries
That feels everything so acutely
In my heart is a kindness and softness
Many will never understand
I hold honor, trust, and love
Above all things great and small
I hold a place inside
Only a very selective few have ever known
A small diamond of hope, faith, and grace
That one day will shine bright
From within my sacred heart and soul



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United

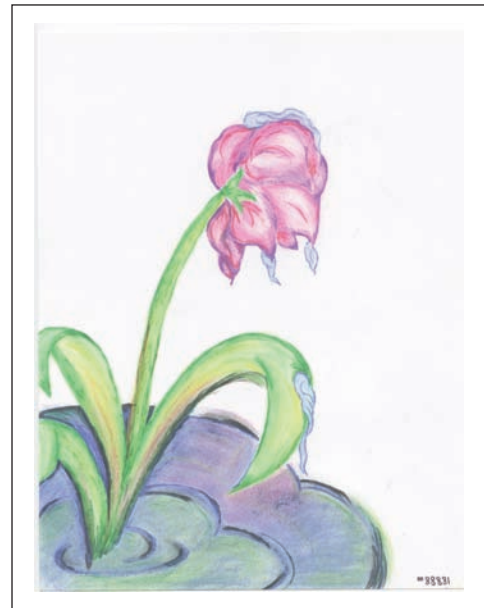
Tammy

We are united as family
Not because of the blood that runs through our veins,
The color of our skin
No, we are united because we are strong
Real and we overcome
We give birth to the greatest of nations
We are united because we are made from a mold
Like no other
With our hips, our curves, our beauty
To display for the world to see
We are united because we are desirable women.

Once Broken

Tammy

I love you, never think that I don't or didn't
But I got lost somewhere, I know the day
The hour and the minute when it all took a change
I knew that day, that moment if I stayed
It would likely be different, and it was.
I hated myself because I went against myself and stayed,
When I knew I should have left...
That day I got lost, I got stripped of myself,
And I let it happen because I stayed.
That was a long time ago,
Now today since I left I can say I was once broken.
Today I have been put back together by God's hands
His strength and love and mercy...
Do I still love you?
Of course, in my own way
That once broken life will keep me at bay...
We both have come a long way.
We still have a ways to travel, maybe one day
I will put the pain all behind me
But til then, I must stay away.



Jessica Botelho

Untitled

By #88881

In the midst of our sorrows, we often fail to see the beauty of our being.
Despondent and crowded on all sides all we see is our pain.
Like a flood or a damned up river waiting to break free
Below the surface, there is life and roots that run deep.
Without the rain, and the pain we could never experience growth.
There is more than the confused image reflected on the surface of the water.
Raise your face to the sun and dry out your heart.
Allow your true beauty to blossom.

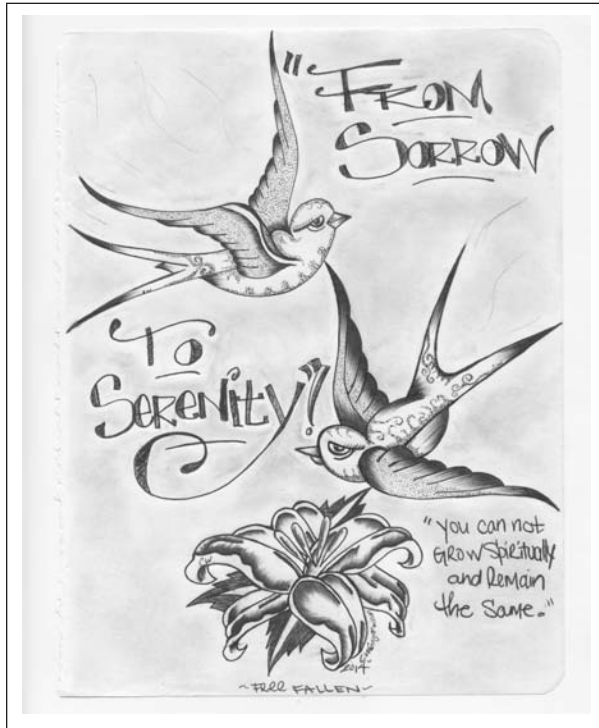
Read My Hand

Diamond Denise

My hand tells my life story;
but only God can read it because He gave me the glory.
I have no time to be judge because of who I am;
all I can say is if you're my real friend then you'll take my hand.
Walk side by side with me is very true;
our hands will be stuck together like glue.
Take my hand as my friend;
I want you to stand by and please show me you won't pretend.
Hold my hand until the end.
I have a strong hand and all five fingers will grip on tight;
you shine to me brighter than the light.
You amaze me the way you stood there as my friend
and told me words that meant the world;
Just love it so I thank the Lord.
You still haven't had the might to read my hand;
but you play a big role because you hold it my true friend.



Stock Photo



Christy Wanager Wilson

Untitled

By #88881

Stronger than you think
I burn and weep
Still my silence I can keep
This burden that I bare
Confined by time
Praying for life to rewind
It's not as easy as you think
Counting sheep doesn't bring sleep
In God I trust
I know I must
He dries every tear
And I know I'm not really alone in here...

"From Sorrow to Serenity"

Christy

Within all the silence that seems to surround me
I find a truth that I can no longer keep hidden inside.
For years holding everything back by pride
Now I'm constantly dying inside...
And no one even seems to see why.
I try to open my heart
Little by little letting life back in.
My mind is always open, going and going
Ready to show the world how amazing I really am.
I am slowly learning to accept my own uniqueness.
Beginning to be unafraid to show it
Because "I" am incredible
And "I" need to know this and always remember it!
Embrace it!

Unresolved – Part I

Dena

When I was six years old
I mostly did what I was told
I loved to play, jump rope, jacks and pickup sticks
I liked putting on fruit flavor balm I thought it was lipstick
I loved the stories my mom, younger sister use to write,
as a tomboy I often got into fights
But I was happy.....

When I was six or maybe not as old
I still did all I was told
The problem was some of my childhood was taken away
39 years later I still have to pay...for lost innocence taken from me
by people I was suppose to trust who were to be my guiding force
Instead I was forced to learn things I hope no other child ever have to learn.....

When I was six things weren't always good nor always bad
I remember so well wonderful Mom & Dad I had
They did not live together, no big happy family
But I mostly felt love from them and I'm thankful for that.....

Unresolved – Part II

Dena

Alone Desperate to be liked (loved) Abusive boyfriends No Direction Confused
Astrange Family Lost Struggling Pregnant

As I talk to you my 16 year old "self",
I'm sorry you didn't know how to get your needs met.
That you had lots of questions, but no one to listen –
you had dreams and ambitions and no guidance in those directions.

I don't blame you for the choices you made.
Maya Angelo says, "*When we know better we do better.*"
You made uneducated guesses.

I was glad to see how even at that age how resilient and sometimes resourceful you were.
You never gave up on yourself.
Thanks for finishing high school as a (teen mom).
Thanks for having a desire to work.
You were grace under fire and we thank God for his mercies.

To Me – By Me Resolved – Adult Me

Dena

“I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “Plans to prosper you, not to bring you harm. Plans to give you a future full of hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

Today I am 45 years old/young. I thank God daily as I know many did not wake this morning. Some kids don't make it past age 13.

Today I am a confident, intelligent, logical, loving, compassionate person.
I have purpose.

Today I pleasure in the Word of God (scriptures) and believe His promises.

Today I see why I had some of my struggles, and as hard as they were, there's no doubt in my mind; He (God) was there with me through it all.

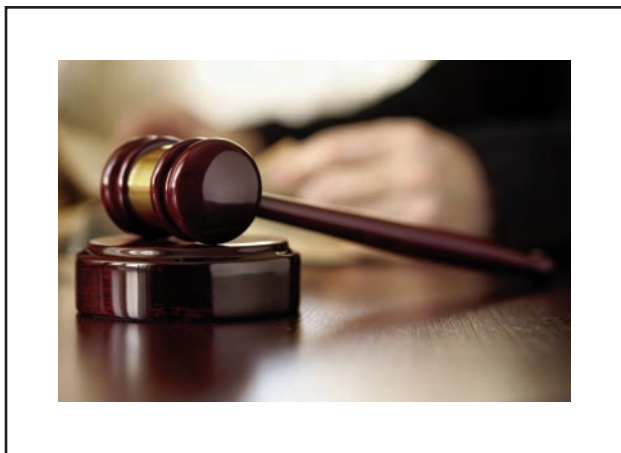


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Only God Can Judge Me

Diamond Denise

As I sit in the court in front of the judge;
I'm thinking to myself it's enough.
I'm breaking sweat because I don't know what's next;
but my family told me don't stress.
I pray and pray to God because he's almighty;
I ask for mercy on my soul, then evil walks behind me.
I'm not perfect then nobody.
God can only make the decision at this point,
when he comes in he brings in anoint.
So as I sit here with the time I have; I'm blessed and glad.
It could've got waste or even been bad.
But I hold in a few pains so some days are just sad.
Far as my joy they can't take; God has come to forsake.
There's a reason for me here to better myself;
and maybe heal and share some tears.
I'm strong through my storm;
but it doesn't rain forever so what's next?
The sun to keep me warm
God gave me this time;
He also didn't judge me so his all mines.



Stock Photo

Amazing

Diamond Denise

There are amazing things in life and you are one;
No matter what you did the damage is done.
Bright as you are; you should sparkle like a star.
There are amazing things in life and your eyes catch my attention;
When I see you my mind takes me on a mission.
There are some amazing things about your body;
But I respect so that not my hobby.
Amazing women you stand up with strong power;
You look special as a flower.
I think you're very amazing, and that's just from me.
So whatever anybody else thinks I'll let it be.



Stock Photo

Untitled

Heather

Life is a mystery
It comes with much history
Where do you search to find yourself endlessly?
Your heart and your soul has taken a toll
You can turn that into a strong hold
Be the one who broke the mold
Hold your head up high and stand up bold
Life has a tendency to make one fold
But turn that into your strong hold

If I Saw You Today

Suwanna

If I saw you today

Would you know me after all the years?

What would you say or would you just walk away?

If I saw you today

Would you ask me to stay or would you look away?

If I saw you today

What would you say after all the years being away?

Or would you I just turn and walk away?

If I saw you today

Would I ask you to stay or would I look away?

If I saw you today

I'd say I'm sorry I had to go away and

I'm sorry for everything I put you through

If I saw you today

I'd say I love you and

There was not a day that went by that I did not think of you

If I saw you today

I'd ask you to stay and let me be a part of your life

If I saw you today

I'd say please forgive me for going away

This is what I'd say if I saw you today

To my children whom I pray will one day forgive me.



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A Survivors Untold Story

Georgene

A small child at the age of 6 months old was a victim of child abuse (sexual-physical). A mother then left her child for the abuser. A child left all alone to thrive on her own at the age of 5. A mother gave her child away to another unstable abuser. An alcoholic that was as abusive mentally and emotionally. Also in time it came across that the broken child was brought into this life to be announced to her next abuser. The blood brother who abused this child (sexually) for many years. And then when he was done he threw her away to the next abuser. At the age of 15 the poor child had a child of her own and still was abused by her child's father. He mentally, physically, emotionally and sexually abused her when he was intoxicated. This abuse went on for 3 years until her mate produced the next abuser. He paid to rape the young 18 year old. And left her for dead 2 years later. The young adult was looking for love and only found heart break to another abuser. She married – to someone she thought she once knew (an alcoholic) who abused and used this young woman. She finally got out and moved far away. To only 10 years later meet her next long lost love (abuser). She at this time had three children in which she couldn't control cause she couldn't even control or love herself. So she met this abuser. First life she thought was grand. She though he truly loved her. Well that never failed. She was wrong. He wasn't a alcoholic – no no no. He was worse. He was a heroin addict. She thought she loved him. She had 2 children with him! One night coming home from work and she opened the kitchen door! Bamh. She was flat on her back (5) months pregnant. He beat her almost to her and her child's death. When she woke up, she was in the hospital for the last month ½. Surviving the trauma. And her love, she thought she loved, was in jail on his way to prison. She lost everything – her home, her children, her dignity, respect, her life. She scraped and scraped. Job to Job, but never enough to make her ends meet. She ended up hanging with the wrong crowd, and started turning her life upside down. She gave up and started robbing people to stay alive. That finally ended one night by taking an innocents person's life and now she was in the worst of the worst. Prison, away from her family, her children. She now has giving up the bad fight and has gave in to fight for a good life. A better person. A new beginning. A chance to be who she always wanted to be – she has come a long way. And, she is a true survivor. And she'll continue to stay positive not only for her, but for the real people who really do love her in which she has been searching for her whole life.



Georgene Vincent

A Woman

Diamond Denise

A woman I once knew with so much anger inside; couldn't decide
What was the world, but she knew as much as needed
loyal, respectful and never cheated
Came across some people who dislike her for who she was
Bully around and facing trouble; couldn't get no worse
But it did because she got fed up
Fighting with so much anger until she didn't know what was next
All she knew was a knife to scab, and that was the devil that made that test.
She never meant to do the things she did to the girl which was murder.
Her anger wasn't to really hurt her.
A loss to a family wasn't the best feeling she had to recover from
But she had to put it in God's hands which now is done
She served fifteen years for the crime she's done and it could've been more.
Her heart from fifteen years old was tore
I look into this woman's eyes and don't see a murder;
I see a woman that has a life just like everybody else
But that's not how some people felt.
She can stand high and tell you her story;
Her whole life in prison felt destroy.
But it built her to a stronger woman until she gets out;
Afraid to face the world without a doubt
No need to because God has covered her this far
So I want her to face the sky and look and the stars
This wonderful woman is nothing but beauty;
Her life is more than just to let lie it is nothing but to be truly



Stock Photo

Fallen Angel

Brittani

Tattered and torn my wings are clipped.
I can no longer fly. This cage I must sit...

Fallen from heaven miles away,
The cost of my sins, hell to pay...

Waiting for the day I may see the light.
'Til then it's the dark shadows of the night...

No contact from anyone, no touch nor caress.
How could I give what I had for less?

My soul is tortured, my heart constantly bleeds.
Pain, guilt, and shame are my only seeds...

Grieved by loss, engulfed in despair,
I walk this world with no one there...

Dreams shattered, hope lost,
It all came at a very high cost...

It's hard to see the light ahead.
I want to give up, lay down my head...

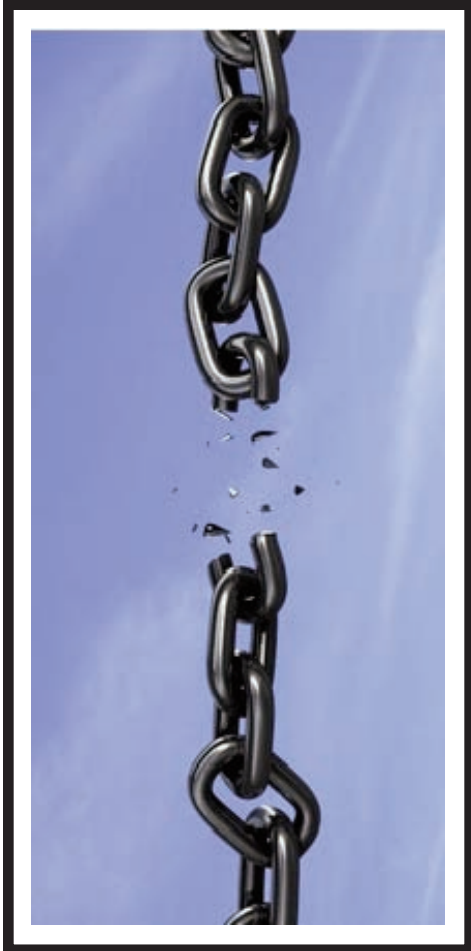
A new day rises the dawn's sweet kiss.
The lullaby recedes along with the mist...

I must give up and start my life fresh.
I can't give up, it'd be my death...

I can't continue to sulk or pout,
Stand up tall forever stout...

Wipe off all the dust, continue to flight,
Struggle on come what might...

Fix this mess, stand my ground.
No more chains, no longer bound.



Stock Photo

A Loss for Words Before It Caves

Rachel

A loss for words, words I never said,
words I shouldn't have said, words that can break and shatter.
Standing here looking at you, at a loss for words.
Feeling all my words crash down around me like shattered glass.
Wanting to scream at you and hurl words at you,
That will cut you into all the pieces of my heart
that your fists have shattered.
Our happy home is falling down in ruins around my feet.
You throw fists like knives.
It's what you don't say that hurts the most.
So here I am at a loss for words, cuz my lips are swollen and bleeding.
And the only word that comes to mind is WHY?
I want to hurt you, but all the words I speak
are true and hurt me just to speak them.
Everything is caving in around me.
All the begging and pleading won't change what you've done
So here I stand at a loss for words,
watching my world cave, as your fists fly again



Rachel Gusman



Stock Photo

Who I Am

Sheila

Who I am today is a combination of past experiences; my feelings that influence my attitude, which then play out in my actions and reactions. I wake up in the morning and I am generally optimistic about the next sixteen hours of life that have been given to me to live. Today I start with prayer and meditation while I look at nature's beauty and a prison fence that surrounds me. I still find it depressing as I dress for a new day putting on a state issued prisoner uniform. I am sad and embarrassed about parts of my past life that led me to be separated from society by cell doors and fences. The realization that I was selfish and uncaring about the impact some of my choices have had on others is sobering to say the least. However, I am motivated and hopeful that I can learn new life lessons that will make an asset to the world around me today. With the help of God, my family, friends, and my own involvement, my recovery will be a success today. I know I am the one who needs to make changes and be willing to make the next right choice that is not harmful to others or me. At the end of the day, I am tired yet grateful for the growth I have made again. I am not who I was yesterday. I am an enlightened woman of today.



RZ

Who We Are

Lil Ladies

I am strong!
I am beautiful!
I am resilient!
I am courageous!
I can empower others!
I can achieve anything!
I can change my life!
I can succeed!
We are united!
We are determined!
We are resourceful!
We are leaders!
We can make a difference!
We can be role models!
We can overcome!
We can raise awareness!
We are Lil Ladies!!!!

The poem entitled "Who We Are" is submitted by a group of women called Lil Ladies (Lessons in Loving Life and Decisions in Everyday Life) an offender led group at Minnesota Correctional Facility-Shakopee. Lil Ladies is composed of 8 women who are all victims of human trafficking/prostitution of some form and have survived against all odds. We meet once a week with the purpose of giving and receiving support, finding strength and empowerment from each other to overcome our lives' situations. The poem represents the power we have found within ourselves, as well as our will to grow, change, and raise awareness in our community that we all share as survivors. Lil Ladies proudly submits this poem in hopes that it may empower other women to move on no matter what their struggles, as well as to learn and grow from their life experiences. We thank you for this opportunity to share a small piece of our world with others.

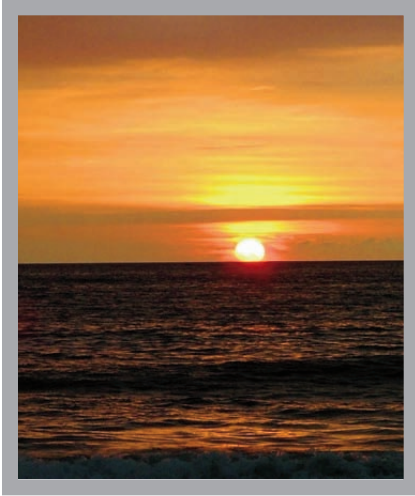
Sincerely,

Lil Ladies: Jocelyn, Rachel, Brandy, Jenea, Linda, Montia, Sara, and Shacara

Human Revolution

Deborah

Life moves, is not static;
It is a film extraordinaire, not a series of stills,
Cells within cells
Snapshot instants to which we erroneously cling.



Calvin Wild Photography

There is no "Now".
The moment you comprehend "Now", it has fled,
Lost to the vagaries of chance
The ever present dance partner with Time
Change is the mountain wind
We vainly try to capture, to cut with our bare hands.
Every picosecond is immeasurably different
from the one that preceded it,
Wholly unique from the one that follows

To complete your human revolution:
Close your eyes, make a wish, count to three.

There's nothing to changing your world!
You've been doing it with every thought, every breath,
ever since you were born!
Just by thinking about wanting to change, you've created it.

Untitled

Tammy

I can't help but remember the way you looked at me
The way you always looked at me.
I remember seeing the love pouring out of your eyes for me
But I couldn't grasp it
I didn't know how to let it become my reality

Untitled

Tammy

I'm burdened with this secret-

Even though I know you already see it. I can't seem to leave it. It's like chasing those old ghosts out the front door. Man, I don't want to be here anymore. What do I keep coming back for? This is so lame, on my own this will never change.

Jesus, you nailed this to the cross-but I keep sneaking around and taking it back down. I turn it over and over in my hands-eat it-now I can taste this poison in my mind. It all tastes the same-some parts are even more bitter than before.

Spit it out, hiding in the corner. Hoping I can just sweat it out. The door comes swinging open. You hold the key. You are the only answer-Alpha and Omega. You are the only peace found in the deepest parts of this self-induced misery. Master, you're the only one who can change me!

Bring forth something beautiful out of this heinous memory: that wraps itself inside out-leaving tracks covered in mud-seduced by so-called "love". Leaving fingerprints inside the dirt-looked over by a prejudice infamous white glove. "It's only dirt!" "Lies" she yells. "It always hurts."



Stock Photo

Untitled

Tammy

When the flames grow so high that I can't even breathe, you will be my air.

Even when they've exhausted every ill word spoken against me

Even if they gouge out my eyes-I will not fight the darkness to see,
because the light of the World that pierces all my unseen steps
is always shining before me.

Even if I'm left without sound and stranded without a choice

He will lead me out of this place...I will never go with a stranger.

I only know my Shepherd's voice.

Untitled

Amber

My life can be explained very simply-pain covered up by drugs and addiction. However, that was not how I ever imagined my life could be. From grade school until I was 17 years old, I was on the honor roll and one the five starters every year for basketball, volleyball, softball, and soccer. I loved riding my dirt bike, hanging out with friends, anything outdoors, and even planning for college and life. Then out of nowhere it all came crashing down. I learned what pain and death were from losing my loving, full of life, little sister. She was my shadow and best friend, even though we were nine years apart. My sister got sick, like a lot kids seem to, and was throwing up and sleeping for a couple of days. After not responding to the over the counter medications, my dad took her to the hospital. The doctor on duty thought they should perform a spinal tap to make sure there was no pressure on the brain causing her to be sick. The pediatrician however, said it wasn't necessary, that it was simply a sinus infection and they'd keep her overnight for observation then be sent home in the morning. In the middle of the night a nurse came in and placed a breathing mask over her nose and mouth. When asked what was wrong she simply stated, "She's just having trouble breathing." By that time she was already cold and hard. Everyone was devastated, but my dad, my hero, my best friend, kept himself together for everyone. We would clean up her grave, put decorations and flowers up, but her name was rarely mentioned to avoid bringing up all those negative feelings and hurt. So at age thirteen I learned that it was easier to hide your feelings than to deal with them.

I continued to play sports and try to be who my dad wanted me to be in every way possible. That's when I got the worst news of my entire life. My dad, my best friend that I talked to ten times a day, loved, looked up to, cherished, had died in his sleep after coming home from the hospital where he had received a "routine" back surgery only requiring a one day stay. I was screaming, even cussing at the person on the other end of the phone telling them there had to be a mistake because there is no possible way! I left school, a junior at that time, the day I found out, telling them I'd let them know when I'd be back. That day never came. I went on a drug and alcohol binge, and was almost late for my father's funeral. I'd sleep at his grave, passed out from pills, weed, whatever I could find to numb the pain. People always knew if they couldn't find me that's where I was. I continued to destroy myself, my body and who I was as a person. I truly believe that's why I ended up with the most amazing gift of my entire life, getting pregnant with my beautiful, smart, perfect daughter. I quit drugs, quit smoking, I started living a healthy life hoping I could give her everything I'd desired growing up. After having her I stayed straight, went back to school, got my high school diploma and went on to college. I was loving school, loving motherhood, loving being back to myself, the caring, smart, loving person I had always been. I learned very quickly, however, how easy it is to fall back into the same horrible hole of addiction without getting the counseling and support I needed to deal with the feelings I had masked. After being clean for years I picked up right where I left off. I was at my dad's friend's house, spilling my guts about how I didn't know what to do, thinking about how close I was to having a mental breakdown. He got out a line and laid it in front of me telling me it would help me get things done and not feel so shitty. That was when Methamphetamine took full control of my life and who I was. The life I knew

was over from that point forward. I sat in jail, went to treatment, cried daily, missed my daughter and my family, and thought I had gone through all the pain I could stand to keep me completely clean and over my addiction. That feeling lasted for two weeks after I went through treatment. I was mad at everyone other than myself. I was mad at my boyfriend for kicking in my door, I was mad at my dad for being gone and not protecting me, and I was mad at his friends for giving it to me. I blamed everyone and everything for my addiction other than the one person who made all the wrong choices...myself. I justified the horrible world that was my life with "if only" this or that wouldn't have happened.

Every good part of me that I had gained back through sobriety was gone again in a matter of days. Part of me knew how disappointed I should be for my amazing daughter, but the other part was in too deep again and couldn't climb back out of the pit. I knew in my heart what I was doing was wrong, but the devil told me everything would be fine., not wanting to give up the energy, and the "clear mind" that I only felt with the rush of Meth. I love my daughter more than anything in this world. She's my heart and soul; she gave me a reason to live, to finish school, to go to college. She's the center of my universe, but none of that mattered when dope was numbing every feeling I had. It took nothing for me to slip right back into the selfish drug addict I had worked so hard to conquer. I once again let my daughter down, my loved ones, my parents, and most importantly myself.



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Within the next month, my daughter's fourth birthday to be exact, my world came crashing down harder than ever before. When I was arrested I also told the truth about what was in my purse, knowing they'd search it, a gram of Methamphetamine I had just picked up to make sure I had enough energy and a good enough mood for the day for my daughter's party. How sad and pathetic. Both the judge and the state's attorney took the time to speak with me before I left for prison. They told me they weren't doing it to be mean, or hurt me, or ruin my life, they knew how much I loved my daughter and wanted her first in my life, but I couldn't do anything or be the amazing person they all know I can be unless I put myself first for once, got my head on straight, and got rid of the nasty addiction that was ripping my life apart.

Don't use the excuse that you're not hurting anyone because you don't have a child or you don't have a family that cares, you have yourself, and you have to learn to be your own biggest fan and cheerleader, because you end up in prison and nobody is there for you to hold your hand and make it all better. because I know what it feels like and because I'd never wish what I've been through on anyone. Always remember you're worth it.

What in the world is wrong with me?

Brittany

What in the world is wrong with me? Why didn't I leave? I'm supposed to be smarter than this. These were the questions that were going through my head when me and my ex would get into a fight, and when he called me bad names and started hitting me and making me cry. I'd always prided myself on being respectful, nonviolent, and a peace-making person, defiantly not an abusive partner. I never wanted to be that person, and never have been though I've been in one. I was the most upset I'd ever been with myself, because I didn't stop him and just walk away. For the first time in my life I felt I needed someone or something to help me understand what to do, what my problem was, but no one cared. My parents just told me to stay with this guy because he really cares for me and he loves me, so I stayed. Every time he got drunk he would yell at



Jessica Botelho

me and lie to me about going somewhere. He would try to hit me if I didn't go to bed the same time as he did. And if I didn't sleep with him every night he would accuse me of sleeping with another guy. When he ran out of beer and we were both broke, he would tell me to call or text my family for \$20.00 to get groceries, but instead of groceries he wanted beer. I left so many times, but always came back to him a week or two later. He would tell me that everything was his, and not mine. He would time me when I go to the store or my parent's house. If I was five minutes late, then I would get punched around and cussed at. I had to give him my cell phone so he could see who I called and texted and who called

and texted me. Finally, one day, I just left without telling him that I was moving back with my parents. A week later, I was arrested. I didn't get to tell him that I don't want anything to do with him. A year later, I got a letter from him saying he was sorry and he wants me back, and I said NO! I feel like I did a good thing.

I am beautiful! Yes! I am still beautiful!

Lisa

You stole my innocence at such a tender age; *yes I am still beautiful*
Emotional, mental, physical scars you gave me; *yes I am still beautiful*
You failed to embrace, love, nurture, and protect me; *yes I am still beautiful*
You placed it inside my young fifteen year old body; *yes I am still beautiful*
Forty terrifying weeks later she was born; *yes I am still beautiful*
I placed her for adoption to a Christian home; *yes I am still beautiful*
I committed murder and Jesus forgave me; *yes I am still beautiful*
I sought God's forgiveness, grace, and mercy; *He gave me Isaiah 61: 3*
"To appoint unto them that mourn...to give unto them beauty for ashes,
the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord."

Yes we are all still beautiful!



Tammy Richardson

I Am because of You

Written by Pamela for her mother

It is not the sun, but your smile that warms me; that gives me peace.
I choose to be nowhere else, for in this moment I am with you.
I walk with my eyes wide open, searching; always searching for you.
In your absence, I cease to exist.
We are two halves of the same whole.
My name is Pamela and I Am because of you.

Unconditional Love

Krystal

I couldn't ask for a better mom; when times got hard, you stuck around...
I never knew the actions of loving someone unconditionally,
'Til that one day came and my freedom was taken away from me...
Without you by my side, I would be so alone, with nobody to care...
I'd be depressed and sad, my heart filled with despair...
Discouraged would be an understatement if I didn't have you in my life,
To love me unconditionally, even if I'm wrong or right;
to stand by my side and strive til the very end...
To stay humble and positive, patiently waiting for a new life to begin...

I love you, my mother. You are the best gift God could have ever given me...
You are independent, optimistic, and you love unconditionally...
Your unconditional love has kept me sane all these years,
Your encouraging words have helped me throw away all my tears...

The time is so close when I can finally leave here...
I will smother you with kisses and hugs and thank you as much as I can
For showing me your unconditional love!!!

*To my lovely mother
I don't know where I'd be if you would have given up on me!
I love you, mom!*



Stock Photo

Untitled

Tanna

My eyes are as deep as the ocean
My tears flood like the rising tide
Some days I get swept away by emotion
Emotions that are beyond my control
Years of loss, grief, and pain
Bumed, for what I wanted to be forever
Tore my heart and family apart
Broke me down
Sitting in the middle of a disaster they say is my life
I created all this around me
Where do I begin to piece back my broken existence?
Is it possible to piece back something so broken?

My Wonderful Mother that Birth Me

Diamond Denise

It was July 6, 1991 almost midnight;
A beautiful woman birth me, so yes she push and fight.
As beautiful as birth is and amazing as it felt;
She told me when she saw me her heart just melt.
7 lbs, 6oz, and 21 in my weight and height;
The sparkles in my eyes made my mom so very delight.
As we both recover, she called me her lover.
My mom made me and also is a wonderful mother.
She dressed me with pretty little dresses and bows in my hair;
I didn't like it so I would get mad and say it wasn't fair.
But her little girl I was; had to deal with some things.
I loved to hear her sing.
Twinkle, twinkle little star was the top one;
We played many games, she always made it fun
I loved her wonderful scent.
Everyone always said we looked alike;
I never saw it, but there's a might.
I'm loved by the woman who birth me, and that's all that matters.
And she blessed because she can say "yes, I had her".



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Lonely Prison Cell

Anita

Sitting in this lonely prison cell
All these thoughts keep running through my mind
They seem to corner me and I have nowhere to run
Some nights I lie awake wishing for freedom
I am trapped in this lonely prison cell
With nobody that cares if I'm stuck in hell
One day I'll be free gain
These chains of hell broken
With this lonely prison cell far behind me
The days are long and dreadful
Especially with no mail
But I won't let these lonely prison walls get me down
I know deep inside me I'll break away from this prison
If these lonely prison walls could talk
Oh, my what an amazing story it would tell
I'm no longer going to be bound
To This lonely prison cell
I'm going to let go and let God guide me through the obstacles of life
Satan can no longer have me for his own
It's time to grasp my Saviour's hand
And never let go or give up

Standing Tall

Terri

It's like a battle that I can't win;
I go through the same problems over and over again.
I know right from wrong,
but my fears pull me down and tell me I'm strong.
I know where I want to be...
I feel you tug at me...
This is not the way it has to be.
I make it harder on myself I know;
and all you do is try to show me that's not the way I have to go.
Doubt covers me like a black cloud that's never ending;
I can't see through it and my thoughts are always screaming.
Which way do I go...?
Which way do I reach...?
My heart tells me I know what to do, that I know what you teach.
How much more time will I waste in despair of this life that I'm living?
All I do is take, take, and take while you keep on giving.
I want to walk out of the dark and come into the light with you.
My flesh holds me back but my heart knows what I have to do.
I know you're still with me....
I feel you when I can't feel anything at all.
I need your strength now more than ever so I can stand tall.



Tammy Richardson

WALKING WITH GOD

A Special Collection of Prayers and Spiritual Reflections

Love

Frances

A feeling of pure ecstasy
A love so profound words seem inadequate
To describe a joy that knows no bounds
Screaming inside is a thing I can't release for in it is a power to the extreme
In its presence I breathe; why I waited so long to come to terms with it
I don't know yet but let it go I shall never do
So for this love that is so profound that renders me speechless
Can only come from the Lord.



Brittani Taylor Yopp

FAKE LOVE

Sharon

People fake love everyday
Is it real true love when they say it?
Or is it true love from the heart?

You know when your children say it
Surely it's true coming from their hearts
When they're little hearts are pure
When a man and woman fall in love
Is it true love or lust for each other?
They say their vows yet they part

When people become friends they tell them
I love you friend, is it really true?
Or is it just for the moment in time?
Is there any real true love?
I know people say, "God loves all"
He gave His Son to save us

I know it's not fake love
Cause God tells you in the Bible
And the Bible speaks from the Truth
So I thank You Father for Your love
And for telling me the truth
Cause I love You Father God
And my love is not Fake-Love
Cause it's from my heart that beats for You

Thank You for Your true love

You Are

Barbara Bawarsky

You are stupid
What's that?
You are a whore
What's that?
You are a queer
What's that?
Shut up, stupid
Yes, sir
What? Don't talk back to me!
But, I was just....
I'll look at it later, leave me alone
Please, I want to....
I said, GO AWAY!!
Yes, Daddy
I love you! Don't you love me?

(Silence)

You are my child, come to me!
Daddy?
Yes, you are my beautiful child
Hello, who are you?
I am so proud of you!
Do you know who I am?
Yes, you are my beloved daughter
Who are you?
I love you!
Who are you?
I am, I am the beginning
The end Your Father
Daddy!
I love you!

Verbal abuse is abuse
(It's very powerful)
But YHWH will never leave you

Hebrews 13:5



Mary Hearney

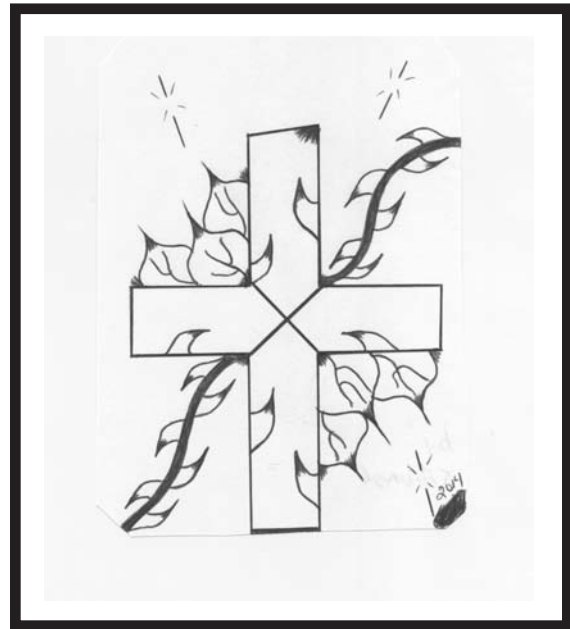
Take and Give

Rena Sard

They took my childhood
They took my self-esteem
They took my self-confidence
They took my self-worth
They took my peace of mind
They took my ability to trust others
They took my freedom

Then one day I hit my knees
and asked Him into my heart
He gave me a new life,
a new heart, and a new mind
He gave me self-esteem
He gave me self-confidence
He gave me self-worth
He gave me peace, mercy, grace, and love
He gave me the ability to trust in others
He gave me freedom

He is my God, my Lord and Savior
He can do the same for you

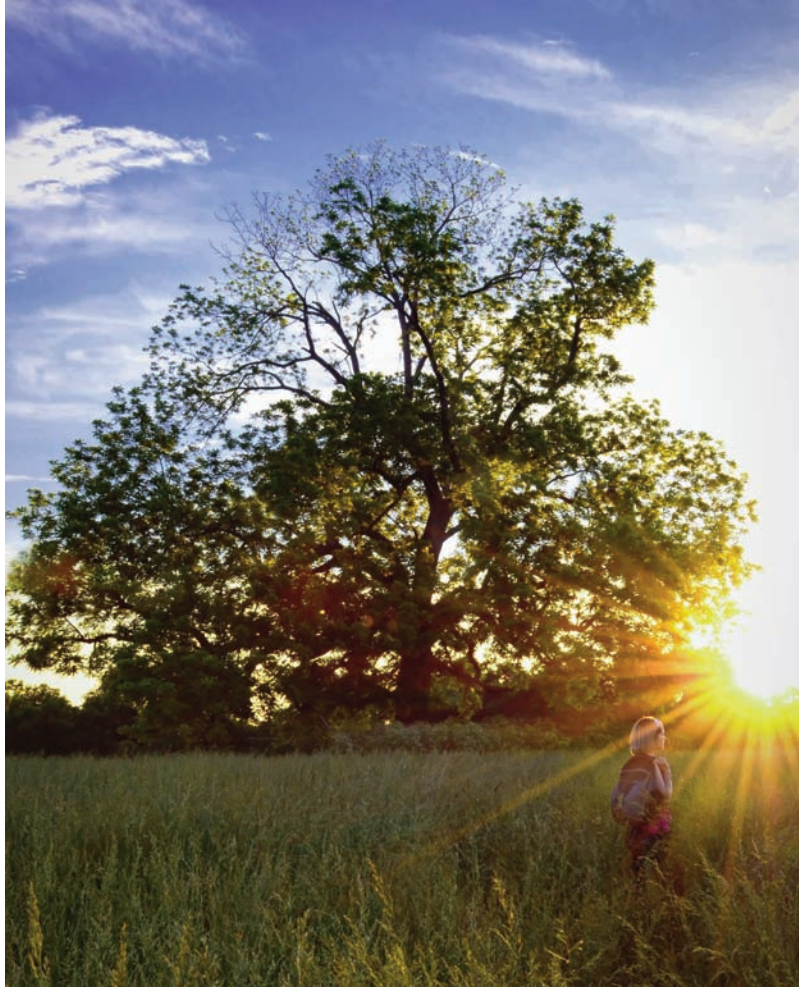


Suwanna Arbaugh

Trust and Believe

Jacqueline Nelson Mowl

I have faith in God
Jesus loves me this I know
Being in the jail house didn't teach me this though
Loving drugs and beating the streets
Didn't show love or keep a straight beat
Remember life is precious, you get one chance around
Don't take it for granted, stomping everything you hold dear into the ground
Hold your head high, have faith in the Lord
Keep your head straight, your heart strong, as you move forward
Struggles will come and they will go,
When your burden's too heavy, give it to God
From there He will tell you which way to go
Trust and believe.



Calvin Wild Photography

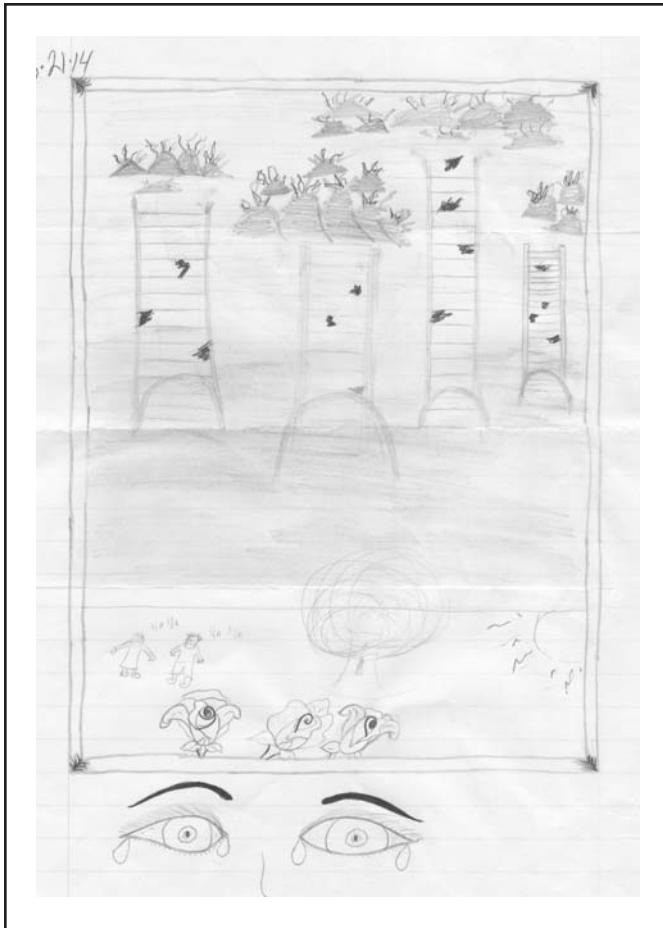
Pathways

Tiffany

You knew me before I found you, Lord.
When I thought I was living for me.
Allowed me to grow, Lord, opened my eyes and let me see.
When I was a slave to the sex, money, and drugs,
You bought my soul, Lord, from the pimps and the thugs.
Only when I see you, and I know that day will come,
I'll ask you to have mercy, Lord; I'll ask you through your Son.
There is no one like the Lord, I wish all would know.
We will all be judged soon, reap what you sow.
If the Lord will never cause me to stumble and fall,
Then I will do my best. I will strive for it all.
I will praise you and thank you for all you've done for me.
I will never forget you, Lord, and the path that set me free.

A Reflection Parable "The Window"

Kimberly



Kimberley Miller

As I look through the window, I see storm clouds and everything seems dull. I slightly squint my eyes to see past the clouds. I quickly learned that they are over-shadowing many bridges. The bridges seem to be years old; rusted metal, pieces missing, rails bent, and chipped paint. Once again I squint a little more and realize that beyond those many bridges lay multiple heaps (very high heaps) of ashes. Some were smaller than others. The ashes were still smoldering and had a reddish tint to them. The scene brought tears to my eyes. It looked as if all hope and love was gone. Then my eyes caught a glimpse nearby that I hold on to. I couldn't believe the sight that I completely overlooked. It was a wonderful, sunny day with the sun shining on this amazing, beautiful rose garden. Not a cloud in the sky, people

laughing and having a good time. This sight was filled with warmth, joy, peace, happiness, and love. My eyes filled with tears, but not tears of sorrow, tears of gladness. This window that I'm looking through is the window of my life. The bridges and ashes are from my past. I was so caught up in the pain and suffering from it that it became my main focus. I couldn't see the blessings God had done for me. I couldn't see the beautiful rose that He made out of me. This window allowed me to see that I allowed myself to hold onto my past and not look at the present or future that I have with my Lord Jesus Christ. From time to time I'll take a glance out the window as a reminder of where I was and where I'm at today. It reminds me of the things I've overcome in life's storms.

Another Tomorrow

Dena

Living my life according to values that's important doesn't happen right now where I stay (in prison) at least not always; my behaviors shift (depending situation) from day to day.

It's not that I'm shitty trying to fit or blend in, it's that my mental safety comes from my spirituality within...And, somedays that's tested to the point I think I'll crack; maybe even break. Somedays I've thought "God did I even have to awake – wake up and face my grind of sorrow?"

I hear HIM say "Yes, I've given you another tomorrow." So I yawn, get up and be the best that I can be. I don't know what that will look like since it's early; but I come into motion with lots of expectancy: I need to feel safe.

I'm working on integrity. Self-worth is important but not without my spirituality. So God please walk before me – Holy Spirit dwell in me.



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This is What I Believe

Lisa

I Believe in Guardian Angels and that we all have one unseen.

I Believe they guard and protect us whenever we are in need.

I Believe that Guardian Angels are beautiful, powerful beings, with bodies stronger than iron and stretched out on golden wings.

I Believe that Guardian Angels do the works that God has asked them to do, serving the people who belong to God and helping the lost to find Him too.

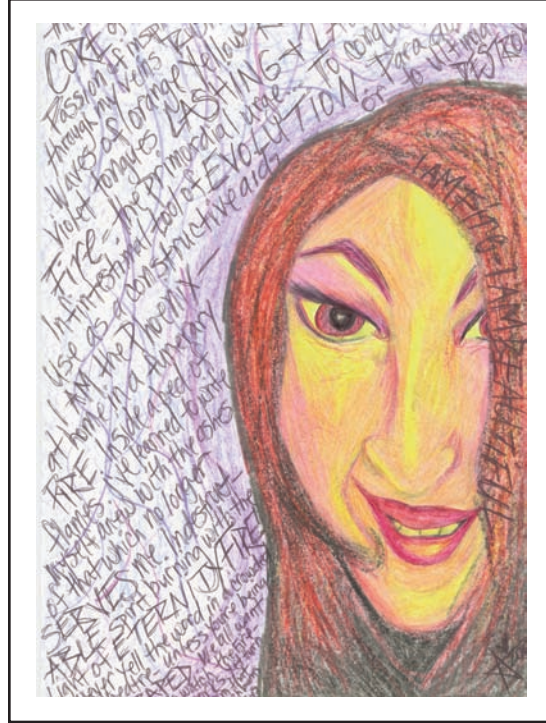
I Believe my Guardian Angel is always next to me, guiding me to the righteous paths, although at times I'm blind to the path that I should see.

I Believe when my time in this world is done and God has called me home,

I Believe my Guardian Angel will guide me to His throne.

Seek & Find

Diamond Denise



Anastazia Schmid

I can tell you what you can't seek and find;
That's only because I'm one of a kind.
So at the age of fourteen I had a life that wasn't right;
Comin in mom's house all times of the night
I got raped at nine; which played a big role in my life
Yes, it took a lot out my mind.
I smoke weed, popped pills, and done coke;
But I learned that life is no joke.
God showed me the in and out;
But the devil stayed busy without a doubt.
My mom always asks where she went wrong;
But it wasn't her; it was some friends I tagged along.
So in and out of jail made it rough—I have two wonderful daughters;
I don't want them to follow me and me say I should've taught her.
I want to show them there's more than this side;
They have a lot of goals and choices to decide.
I just know God shows in and He shows out;
If I had to cry I was told to cry and shout!
So my life is not perfect but it's a blessing;
I paid attention and learned my lesson.
But everyone's life isn't common;
Just remember my name Diamond.



Mary Hearney

AS I WALK

Sharon

As I walk through with You
 My mind feels so far away
 I pace and pace the floor
 Thinking of the do's and don'ts
 Of my life thinking of the past to present
 Not knowing where to turn in life

I do know one I can always go to
 You Father God, with my thoughts
 As my day begins I thank You
 For a new day, and to getting me up
 I praise You Father for my life
 For my children You graced me with
 And the wonderful children of the world
 There's too much hate and hurt

I thank You Father for a new day
 It's the beginning of a new life
 To worship You and feel Your love
 As my heart beats it's another beat
 For the love of Our Father God
 I thank You for a new day

Thank You Father God

When He Rises to Meet Us

Bridget

*Every early morning that I wake up and rise,
 I look in the sky and see the moon and stars that
 sometimes hide in disguise.*

*I thank the Lord as I rise from my bed;
 I thank him for clean clothes, running water,
 I'm grateful and plentifully fed.*

*I thank God that I'm surrounded by love,
 and that He always watches over me from
 Heaven above.*

*So much beauty and grace in this earthly place;
 the beautiful place of Jerusalem where God
 shows his beautiful face.*

*I thank the Lord for watching over my beautiful
 children every day and night;
 always protecting them and keeping them in
 His precious sight.*

*I thank you Lord for grabbing me in your arms
 of protection when I was going astray,
 for never allowing me to give up on myself,
 and for keeping me in your glorious kingdom.
 One of the safest places for me I can thankfully say.*

*When it comes down to the daily struggles of
 the world on this crazy Earth we live,
 You always reach out your precious hands
 when we want to throw them up and say
 "I give."*

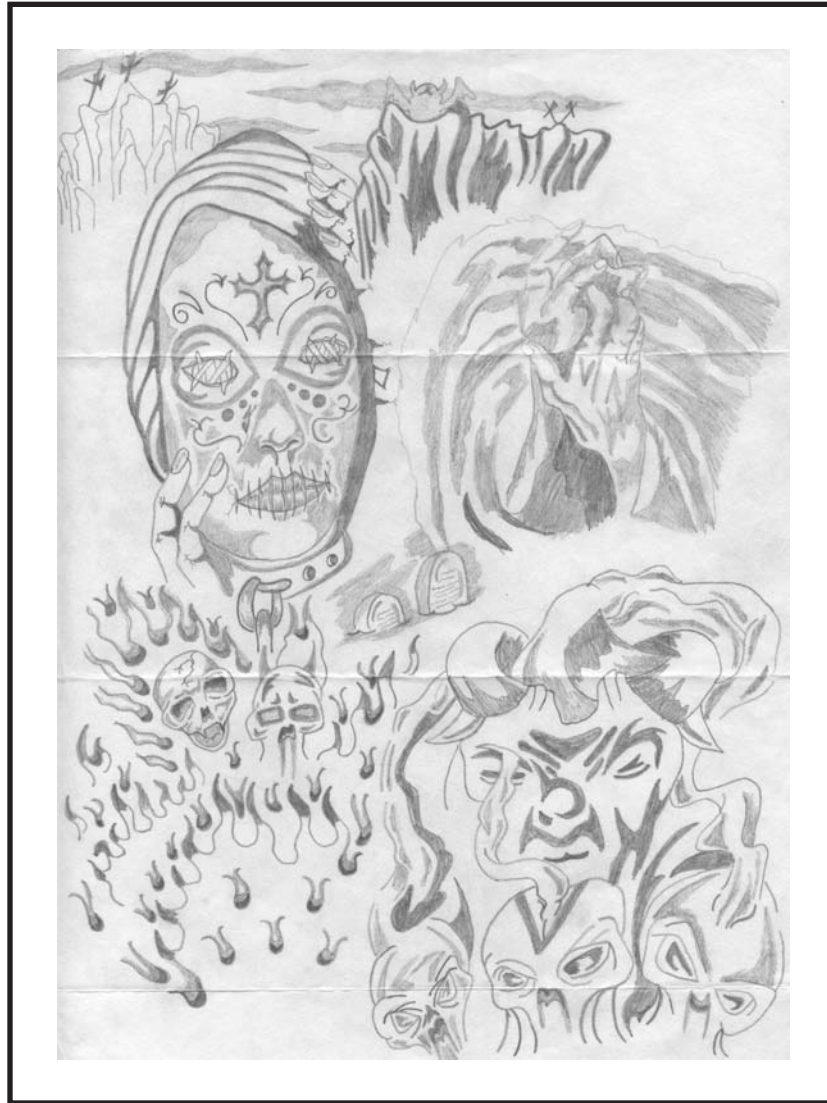
Driven

Tiffany

I want to understand you, just let me in.
I've set up the diving board and jumped off the deep end.
Swimming in a pool of thoughts, untold lies, truths, and pain
Every time I think I've got to the top it begins to rain.
I strive to make it through the muck, a challenge to bear
Sometimes I think I see the end; sometimes it's almost there
I come across secrets unspoken. Promises made and promises broken
I told myself not to lie, cheat, or steal; and to myself to always be real
I found out quick that wasn't the name of the game.
I learned to call myself *"what a damn shame."*
A waste of breath, effort, and passion;
to taste a life that's never going to last
I want something more, it may be unknown.
I want to thank God for the compassion He's shown.
This is my chance to leave all my baggage here.
To hop in the back seat and let him steer.
Once I stood, but now I kneel.
Beauty's not what you see, but how you feel.



Calvin Wild Photography



Cynthia Jones

To whom it may concern

Cynthia

I am giving this drawing as a contribution. It has a lot of meaning in my life. It's my past. I was very abused as a child and have been through a lot of stuff. I don't like to talk about it much for it's PTSD that I suffer with now. My mother beat me four and sometimes seven times a day. I never got the chance at a childhood. I spent a lot of my time in a corner. Everyone that actually did care it seemed they always died and I was alone once again. Anyhow, this is my drawing. Hopefully you will use it.

– *In Conclusion* –
I Am Beautiful

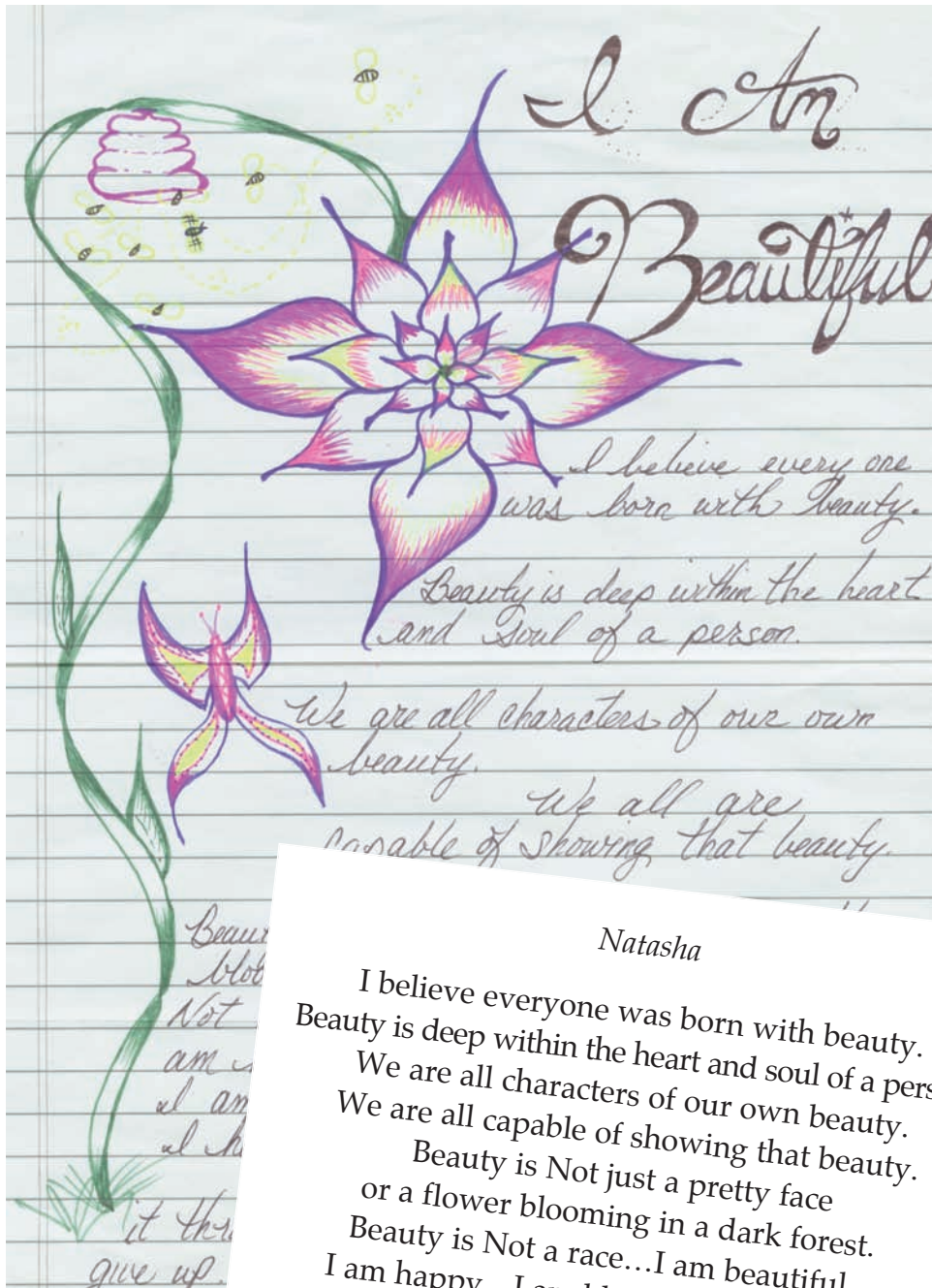
Still Beautiful

Tisha



Tisha Makes Cold Weather

From the day I was born I was made like a soldier.
Things happen to me, I've fallen down
but I got back up cuz for me it wasn't over.
I've loved and lost.
I've been deceived and hurt,
but what doesn't kill you makes you stronger
and trying to destroy me didn't work.
I've been through every abuse in the book.
I've tried every medicine and every class
but the only thing that worked for me was me.
I started to see the half-full of the glass.
They told me I was stupid and ugly,
that I was worthless and never amount to nothing.
All I got to remember is I'm worth it.
I could be queen of just about anything.
I've got scarz, cutz, and bruises that define
who I really am.
The only way to go is up.
If I just let go the past hurt and blame.
Today I'm a family woman, I got my freedom back.
I've healed while locked up, and got through the fog.
Just remember it's not the size of the dog in the fight,
it's the size of the fight in the dog.
Whether you find God, a person, or you;
you're still strong, it's not that awful.
Just like always get right back up for round two,
cuz you're still here and you're still beautiful.



Natasha
Thompson
Adams

Natasha

I believe everyone was born with beauty.
Beauty is deep within the heart and soul of a person.
We are all characters of our own beauty.
We are all capable of showing that beauty.
Beauty is Not just a pretty face
or a flower blooming in a dark forest.
Beauty is Not a race...I am beautiful...
I am happy...I am blessed...I am loved...
I am determined...I am a strong woman...
I have been through so much.
I will keep my head up and make it through this.
I will NEVER quit or give up...
I can do anything with THIS BEAUTY!

A Special Tribute

To each and every brave and beautiful woman
who contributed to this book.

Thank you for who you are, You are a precious gift
to other women and to the world.

It would not be the same world without you.

Keep on believing in yourself and your gift as a woman
and a human being worthy of dignity, respect, and love.

Always remember...

You are beautiful!



Stock Photo



I Am Beautiful

A Survival Resource
Created by and for Women

"Life is a journey and a spiritual unfolding is its purpose."

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