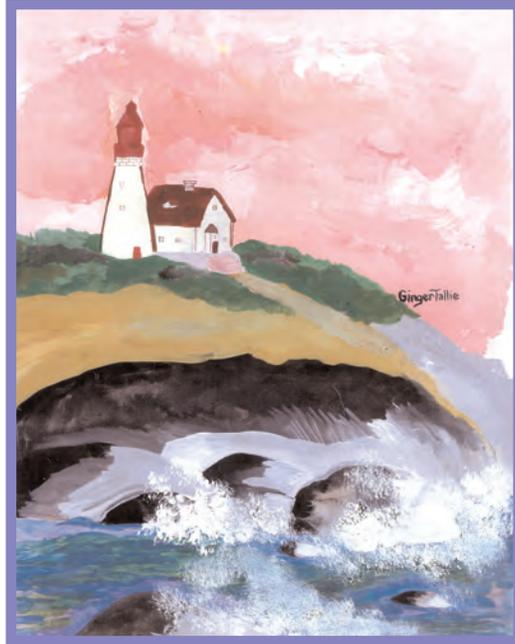


# *I Am Beautiful*



Volume 2  
A Survival Resource  
Created by and for Women



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**A Survival Resource**

Created by and for Women



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

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## *With Gratitude*

We are very grateful to all the women in prisons across the country who opened their hearts and shared their experiences of sadness and joy through their writing and art. Their willingness to share is truly courageous, given all that they have survived. This book represents their gift to the many other women across the country who are traveling with them on the unfolding journey of life.



## *Our Logo*

The *Rose* is the logo for this project, inspired by the words of a woman who contributed to Volume One:

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

## *The Cover Art*

We are grateful to Ginger Tallie for the illustration of the lighthouse on the cover. It is dedicated to all the women who have found their way to the shining truth through the stormy waves of life, that they are beautiful within and without, in the eyes of God, themselves and others, as they stand on the rock of their dignity and self-respect.

## Introduction

### GOD SAT ME DOWN

When Dismas\* showed up at the coffee shop, he bought me a latte and proffered *I Am Beautiful, Volume 1* for my consideration. That's cool, I thought, Dismas n' me are tight—I'm a sinner; he's a sinner; Jesus gets us—you know.

Dismas took off for another appointment, leaving me alone with the book. "By women, for women...a survival resource"--you all know. Intrigued by the glossiness, I numbly thumbed a few pages. Then the words seeped in. With me they always do.

Oh boy, here we go...

A daunting proposition—solicit submissions for volume 2 from incarcerated women in this country's 73 (wow! who knew there were so many) women's correctional facilities? What if no one writes? What if their writing is lousy? What if their words scare me? God looked at me and smiled that little smirk he gets from the corner of his mouth when he knows what's coming and I don't quite yet. He shook his head a little (thankfully, God does not roll his eyes).

And I wrote requesting your submissions.

First was Lisa with her pain and anger all front and center, insisting that I not edit her down to newsletter scale. *I was schooled.*

Dena wrote with imagery that transcended her experience and gave peace and healing. *I was moved.*

Nicole and Julie wrote with humor in the midst of the horrors they detailed. *I laughed aloud through tears.*

Joyce wrote in faith of her recovery—a rally force urging women to heal and overcome. Released, she is proof change can and does happen! *I was inspired.*

As you wrote and drew and envelopes thwacked the floor beneath my mail slot, themes emerged—drugs and alcohol derail many of our lives; abuse may come in myriad forms but always destroys our inner selves; our children are holy, precious, worried over and deeply missed. We are not the sum total of the wrongs we have done or that have been done to us; forgiveness is real; change can happen. All of this resonates in Christ's own passionate death and resurrection.

So, here I sit, gratefully indebted to all of you—the voices, our voices, of healing and hope. May God sit you down only long enough to give you strength and insight for your journey.

With love,

*Fill*

\* St. Dismas was the prisoner on the cross next to Jesus who was promised God's loving mercy.

## SINGING HER TRUTH

*Vicki*

Joyful courage has arisen  
She bursts forth in truth-filled song  
Which acknowledges—  
    Her beauty  
    The distance she has traveled  
    The power she knows she possesses  
    The lesson she has learned.

Life is not perfect and will be.

The song is her personal journey  
    Her choices,  
    Her opportunities lost and taken,  
    Her tragedies and triumphs.

She will no longer let them have her  
Believe she is wrong while they are  
Always right.

She has seen both sides now and knows  
There is truth for both  
And each person from her perspective.

She is singing her truth  
Celebrating her life and all that has been  
    All that she is and  
    All that she will be.



## UNTITLED

*Nicole*

Sitting here in this place  
forced to live with common criminals  
and convicted murderers  
do you think it's an accident  
we were plucked from society  
from all different walks of life  
and placed in this dark place at the  
same moment in time?  
We can either choose to live as sisters  
or divide ourselves into groups  
and deprive ourselves  
of the blessings  
each one of us has to offer the other.

So grab my hand sisters--  
It's time to start listening.

## ONE DAY

*Dena Hankerson*

One day I was married.

I became we.

We played with each other like kids.

We said our vows even before we knew how to get the physical for the license.

We smiled into each other's eyes and with the quarter rings that you buy out of the candy machines that line the walls of every corner store,  
we swore to be together for LIFE...

One day there wasn't any LIFE.

"He's dead," my best friend says.

I hear the words; don't want to believe the words.

Would she lie about those words?

My mind raced back to once when mom and I were mad at one another.

My phone had rung and she said, "Your cousin Jimmy is dead."

I hung up on her because how could she say such a horrible thing, knowing how I felt about him?

So, Crystal, my friend, wouldn't say that about my husband Keith unless,  
as it was true then, it was also true at that very MOMENT...

One day was soon to be a MOMENT

when yesterday's dew that coated the cars and wet the grass and chilled the air lingers.

July may be hot, yet rain cloud days are filled with blank nights.

Winter is upon me.

There's nobody next to me to sneak dead sex in the middle of the night because "I'm too tired"  
or tongues running down my back getting me wet and bothered.

It didn't take MUCH...

One day it was a little too MUCH

Alcohol, drugs, foreign bodies' touch penetrating my soul.

I am too dead. Mercifully, I am non-existent.

I was MARRIED; living LIFE, in the MOMENT and it became too MUCH.

Walking numb, eating merely, laughing hardly and living barely.

I too am dead. Foggily darkness hazes in my mind  
the wants, wishes and DREAMS...

One day I DREAMED

I was a little girl again--climbing trees, running races,  
jumping fences and falling off rooftops.

The nuns are praying for outspoken me

"Sassy" is what they called it...

One day I was AWAKE

I smiled again. It was real.



I told a joke or heard a joke and actually I only heard my laughter, which was new and astonishing.

I felt the snowy sun on my face as I walked to the store with these strangers I met. They were strange, for they existed in my life for so long, yet today I see their FACE...

One day I had a FACE

I looked into the mirror and noticed my eyes.

My eyes are light golden-brown, my skin creamy smooth, with strong cheek structure and a beautiful smile...

To save FACE with so many people whose lives I've touched directly, in-directly, negative and positive,

I have heard only can be done through example.

For words and promises had been broken. I had to FACE REALITY...

One day in my REALITY,

I was MARRIED, living LIFE, in the MOMENT and it became too MUCH.

Today I can recreate a DREAM and not wake up in cold nightmarish sweats.

I awaken to a new dawn with rainbow sunrises instead of green sunsets and I can FACE a true me, life, REALITY.



## EYES WIDE OPEN

*Angela*

Dedicated to my babies: Travis, Becky, Tyler, Keisha, Nathaniel, Keanna

I ask you now to prepare yourself for a very sad story.  
It has no fame and absolutely no glory.  
As a child I had it rough.  
I had to learn to block everything out and make myself tough.  
I was raped by the age of thirteen by someone in whom I had trust.

I told my story and it seemed no one cared.  
I felt so all alone and very scared.  
I had no mother to confide.  
She turned her back on me and said I lied.  
I had a little sister 7 years younger that I really cared about.  
I knew no matter what I had to get her out.  
It came time for court and I told my side.  
I asked him to get my sister out of that house as I sat there and cried.  
Later that week my aunt took my sister so I knew she was safe and secure.  
What would happen to me now, I wasn't sure.

I felt so dirty and just wanted to die.  
Then I met a man much older than myself.  
He wanted me and I wondered why.  
I then ended up pregnant and having a son.  
At the age of 14, my childhood was done.  
I loved my son with all my heart  
and hoped he would be my brand new start.  
The memories of my past just wouldn't go away.  
They kept haunting me day after day.  
After 5 more kids things still weren't right.  
So I turned to drugs and started a new fight.

I thought it was great when I first got my start  
—a needle in my arm eased my heart.  
Now I'm in prison for the second time  
looking at pictures of my kids wishing I hadn't committed a crime.

I realize that even though I am not free,  
I face each day with eyes wide open so I can see.  
I thank my babies for loving me through all my bad,  
and I want them to know being their mother makes my heart so glad.

So, if you get to the point where you feel like you can't go any more  
Remember as I have:  
There's someone out there who loves you that is worth fighting for.



## THE WINDOW

*Sheryl*

I look out between the metal wire diamonds captured  
between glass a mosaic of the world, my world, beyond  
the present ordinary there is bold beauty.



Trees stand tall like majestic kings.  
Birds soar on clouds lifting my mind and soul to new heights.  
The wind moves all about taking my mind out of the realm I dwell in.

Sunshine sparkles like a Fourth of July firecracker bursting in clouds of  
color warming everything it touches, a reflection of joy, peace, love giv-  
ing growth and spirit to the ugly in these cement walls and beyond my  
own prison walls.

I see through the glass stained with memories of many before me.  
I feel them; their thoughts are mine, cold and lonely.  
But beyond and above, with faith, the ice-laden walls will melt away.

And so will the pain with time beyond my walls.

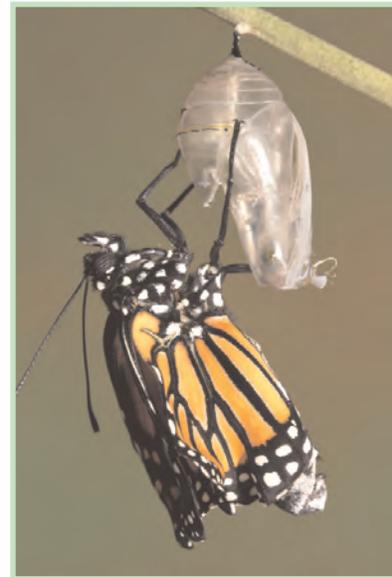
## BUTTERFLY BE ME

*Jessica*

The delicate, fragile wings  
Made strong by opposing winds  
The search for bright, beautiful flowers to feast upon  
Accompanied by a lovely fragrance  
The perfect ambiance for a nourishing meal

A flutter of the wings and the flight begins  
Hard to recall the days of crawling about  
Nibbling luscious green leaves  
Now that she can take flight among the trees

The transformation was painful, no matter how brief  
Enclosed all alone with barely room to breathe  
The more she grew and changed, the tighter the space enclosed  
That was until she  
broke free!



## I AM BEAUTIFUL

*Susan Denise Smith*

When I look in the mirror  
What is it; who do I see?  
Is the reflection that of a hideous monster, a menace  
or type of madness?  
Is the reflection staring back angry, battered,  
bruised, scarred or disfigured?  
Is the image that of helplessness?  
Was the image once that of an innocent precious  
child, now trapped in an adult body?  
Has it ever cried to be nurtured?  
Has the reflection ever wanted and needed to be  
protected, loved and given a chance to grow?  
To laugh, sing, play?  
To be set free?  
To turn back time and do things differently?  
To really live, not just exist  
Is my reflection truly vile, evil, horrendous, full of  
anger and pain?  
Is my reflection a waste or wasted?  
Is my reflection that of someone who had little or  
no chance, choice or hope?  
Is my reflection seeing me?  
Is the face staring back that of someone who  
needs to be treated with empathy, kindness, patience  
and love?  
Do I recognize myself?  
Just who do I see?  
I see me?  
And...  
I am Beautiful!



## I SURVIVED

*Shemira Hawkins*

Four years ago we fought. He'd drink; I'd go to work all bruised up, embarrassed by my blackened eye. Today I've shed my share of endless tears, met many women who've walked my walk, but most importantly, I survived.

The old me fabricated my reality; stood with my back against the wall; was often afraid to yell for help; often afraid to even talk.

I thought very little of my broken bones. I didn't need to enjoy my youth. Good potential wives kept quiet and didn't need to walk.

My only options were to just deal with it. It never crossed my mind to fight back or simply leave.

I was pregnant with our first child. Things will get better. I was over dramatizing when he'd hit me.

Waking up, going to sleep, crying, cooking breakfast, having sex, hoping I'd live to see another day was all the same. Sensing my fear, he'd go get high. We'd argue; he'd hit me harder, enjoying my misery as if it was merely a game.

Last time we fought was fall of 2008, a day forever etched in my memory. I fought back and my only child is living because of me.

I may never meet society's standards of "okay" or even sane due to post traumatic stress, a twenty year prison sentence and the constant nightmare.

I always thought we'd be together, live happily ever after. Pushes mean he love me, shoves mean he sees me, punches mean he care.

Four years ago I was oblivious to my pain. Numb to the abuse, content with the "structure", attracted to the attention and fearing for my life.

Today I can tell my story to *Jennifer, Debbie, Tonya, Rachel and Michelle*. They'll tell their daughters they were blessed with my friendship simply because I survived.

Pushes  
mean  
he love me,  
shoves  
mean  
he sees me,  
punches  
mean he  
care.



## STAY OUT OF MY LIFE

*Angela Blessing Delicino-Woods*

As far back as I can recall...I have memories of you.  
All my family seemed to like you, yet I didn't have a clue.  
You were in my life every day...whether I liked you or not.  
You had many names...like Mary Jane, skunk, weed and pot.  
I remember loving the way you smell.  
Little did I know, you'd be my guide into hell.

In the beginning of our relationship, everything seemed great.  
I was happy and felt butterflies...like being on a first date.  
You made me smile and laugh when I wanted to cry.  
I could even make new friends and not feel so shy.  
I felt so courageous...and no longer afraid.  
I thought I could now measure up...I could make the grade.

You were there through the good times...and the bad.  
I thought you were the best friend I'd ever had.  
There were times, however, when you made me feel lazy and tired.  
So I started making new "friends" and began getting wired.  
My new "friend" gave me energy to get things done.  
Between the two of you...my little party had just begun.  
It wasn't long before wanting you around became more a need.  
I soon couldn't cope, function or get out of bed without my new "friend" speed.

My need for my "friends" turned into abuse.  
No matter how hard I tried...I could not call a truce.  
A war was on...it was to be a battle to the death.  
Had I not surrendered, you'd have taken my last breath.  
I could never have imagined how hard it would be to let you two go.  
But I've decided...it's for the best because you hold me back when I need to grow.

In abusing you...I hurt many people, but none more than me.  
By letting you go, I'm setting myself free.  
Today I can learn and grow...without altering how I feel.  
With support from my Higher Power, family and friends...I am beginning to heal.  
I can, in turn, be a true friend, sister, daughter, mother and wife.  
So I'm writing to tell you, once and for all...

*Stay out of my life!*





## FIGHT BACK

*Vicki*

By day I lived in terror  
By night I lived in fright  
For as long as I remember  
A woman doesn't go out alone at night.

But I don't accept the verdict  
It's an old one anyway.  
'Cause nowadays a woman  
Can't even go out in the middle of the day...

...Some have an easy answer  
Buy a lock and live in a cage  
But my fear is turning to anger  
And my anger turning to rage.  
I won't live my life in a cage.

And so we fight back!  
In large numbers  
Fight back!  
I can't make it alone  
Fight back!  
In large numbers  
Together we can make a safe home  
Together we can make a safe home.



## MUSIC UNKNOWN

*Sheryl*

The clouds, they hang as tiny little dancers  
on silken threads of broken glass  
above an ice-laden pond.  
Ice droplets form on tree tips and overhang  
like needles spun from air.  
They drop, creating a symphony of rings  
atop a hole in a silently still pond...

The breeze sways the trees  
and ripples effortlessly upon the pond  
like waves of music from inside-out  
tiny dancers glide across the water's top all  
in sync...

Sun plays along like a symphony in back,  
the rain begins to fall and prance upon fragrant  
lily pads like acoustic drums playing an  
elegant rhythm.

Sky crashes with the light show it surrounds.  
Echoes of beauty engulf the senses  
as an ocean of color euphoria.

The nature of the band,  
pure and simple and free,  
a difference of notes, every beat different  
every second new, of every day.

No combination ever the same.  
Every concert different,  
Combinations possible unknown  
Unknown as the world which surrounds...

Do you hear what I hear?

## TINY JARS

*Eva Silva*

Couldn't go to sleep, so I stayed up all night  
Just reminisced until the morning light  
I keep all my precious memories inside my head in tiny jars  
On a shelf in alphabetical order, so I know where they are.

Opened up a few to see what was inside  
Quickly closed them shut—those were the ones I tried to hide  
Opened a few more because I was still awake  
Those ones were the recent ones and I began to shake.

So many left unopened—  
Some with my family, the good ones and the bad ones, they all include me.  
The happy and the sad, I'm locked in this cell  
The new ones and the old ones, my life's a living hell  
There's ones when I was young and also when I'm grown  
They all look the same because I'm in there all alone.  
No one I can rely on like so many jars on my shelf  
Heard the jailor coming so I put them back and shut the door.  
Wiped away my tears, couldn't look at them anymore.

My nights are so lonely when I lay here and reminisce  
When I look at my memories it's everyone I miss  
No one remembers me now that I'm locked in this cage  
Keep it bottled in a jar; this one's labeled rage.

Tiny little jars for my memories to keep  
Not sure why I keep them because they all just make me weep  
No one I can rely on, like so many jars upon my shelf  
Wait! I think I just found someone—oh, they look just like myself!



## CHANCES OF...

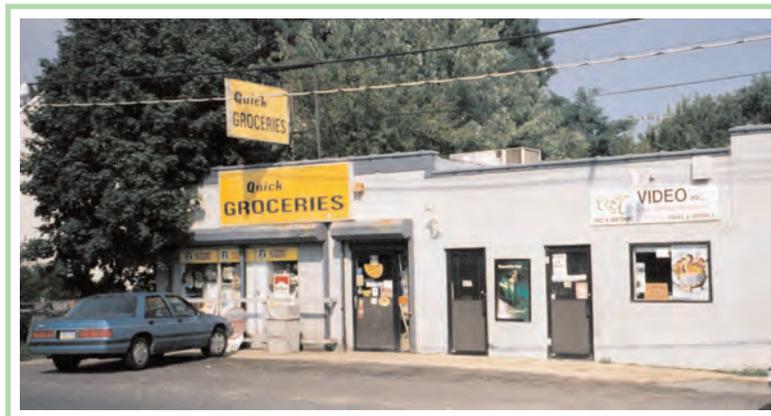
Dena Hankerson

I never thought I would become the person  
Inside a KwikTrip  
Spreading liquid soap on rough brown paper towels;  
Washing my woo woo's and my me-OW.  
Home foreclosure, an un-timely eviction not foreseen in any of my predictions.  
*"I know things will change. They just got to."*

Changing clothes that are neatly in my backpack,  
they bare distinctive pleats not wrinkles, well lined  
Made from the pressing of the Yellow Pages I carry around.  
I outline jobs and apartments as I roam through town.  
Temporary layoffs. Now I'm with no checks to cash,  
standing in a public toilet, trying to wash my ass.  
*"I know things will change. They just got to."*

I never thought I would watch someone eat a sandwich  
hoping they toss the crust of the bread to the ground,  
for the birds, of course,  
And, of course, I take it when no one's around.  
Hey kiss it up to God. Right?  
Right. Germs can't hurt no more than daily hunger pains;  
I'm awestruck that my sanity remains.  
*"I know things will change. They just got to."*

Lipstick on, eyeliner and blush too—  
ssh-yeah there's prostitution but, *"A girl gotta do, what a girls' gotta do."*  
THREE kids in school; I have to feed them tonight.  
You say I'm justifying to make what I do right.  
I say; looking into a distant future, *"I know things will change;*  
*"I know things will change. They just got to."*



## TESTIMONY

Nicole

We pull up to a creek bank in the middle of nowhere. He orders me out of the truck at gunpoint—a fully loaded automatic pointed at my chest. I jump out and obey his orders. I won't allow him to see my tear-stained face. It's muddy and the world stands still.

He puts the butt of the gun against my back and instructs me to walk to the woods. Now my thoughts race. *"Is this where my life ends--here in this lonely place?"* I look up to the heavens as a tear streaks down my face. I turn back to beg him for another chance. *"I promise I'll do whatever you want."* He says he's got me a spot picked out where I'll never be alone. Then God shows His face. He's disguised as a grandpa and a grandson fishing in the creek in a little boat.



I have a split second thought to yell for help. He tells me, *"Say something. Their blood will be on your hands."* He leads me back to the truck, drives me to a farmer's field, and stops. As the rain pours from the heavens, the truck door opens, and my bruised and battered body hits the mud. SMACK! Is the sound his fist makes when it hits my face. THUD! Is the sound my body makes as I hit the mud. He drives off and leaves me to die. All I can do was look up at the sky and cry out to God.

I mutter a small prayer and take off walking. Every step I sink deeper into the mud, but my survival instinct is kicking in and I know every step is that much further away from him. I had tricked him. He'd set the gun in the seat of the truck while driving me to this remote place. I had taken the gun and concealed it in my purse. My purse is muddy, but loaded. I look up and I see a dirt road. I'm almost free from him! I get to the road, and there he sits. He orders me back into the truck. I hadn't outsmarted him.

I think a split second about shooting him, then a still smaller voice says, *"Do you think they'll believe your story based on your record?"* He's mad. The more miles that pass, the madder he gets. I look up. We're driving over a bridge. He pulls the truck over, jumps out and opens the door abruptly and drags me out. As he drags me across the gravel towards the bridge and the water all I can do is look up at the sky and God shows up yet again.

If you've ever been in the city, you know that the people mind their own business. A random car pulls over and the driver pulls a cell phone out. Every second that passes, I'm closer to the river. He says, *"You're on the run. You're not from here. I can murder you and nobody will ever know."* Then he notices the car. Yet again, back to the truck I'm led. After 12 long hours, he turns the truck around. He decided to let me live.

I'm beat, battered, and bruised and he's in the basement getting ready to meet another woman. Just another night in the nightmare that had become my life. Two days later, I was arrested and expedited back to Kentucky. *God saved me from that man and I might be in prison, but I'm more free than I have been in years. God has a plan for me. He'll set me free from this bondage, too.*

## ACHE

*Dena Hankerson*

*Ooh child, things are gonna get easier. Ooh child, things are gonna get brighter. Some day.*

Ache.

Longing for the love of a mother  
Learning how to give head from an older brother  
Yearning painfully for the attention of a busy father  
not sure until close to his end if he even wanted to be bothered

Don't feel sympathy for me in my ooh-wee pain.  
There were many lessons learned and a lot I gained.

I was the mother I desired until these obligations hemmed me up for 15.  
Now it's not me, but my kids who sing...

*Ain't no sunshine when she's gone...*

*It's a hard knocks life for us.  
Instead of treats, we got tricked.  
Instead of kisses, we got kicked.  
It's a hard knocks life.*

Ache.

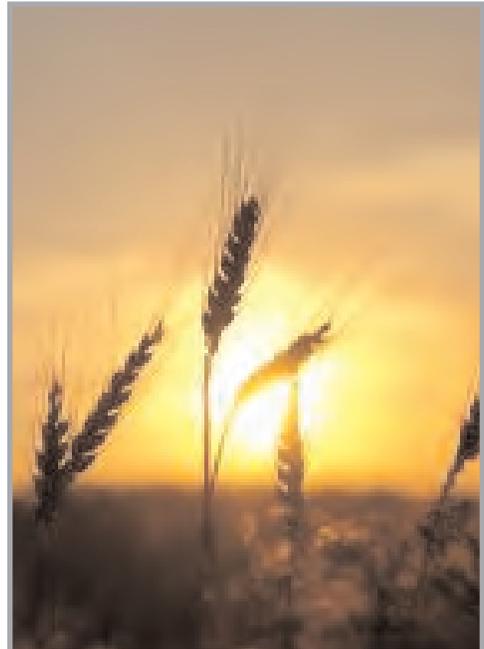
In my identity, I don't find solidarity for my  
emotional baggage has obscured clarity  
Although compassion from me is what flows,  
how I find joy in my sorrow only God knows  
Cause I got the aches of an ooh-wee pain...  
Physically and emotionally exhausted, just drained.

*Oh yeah! Life goes on, long after the thrill of living  
is gone.*

Ache.

I haven't ceased living in my solitary  
I know my circumstances are only temporary  
My inquisitiveness motivates me to see a man who can remedy my intensified pain  
They say he can turn my downs to ups and all I have to do is believe on His name.

*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. There's something about that name.*



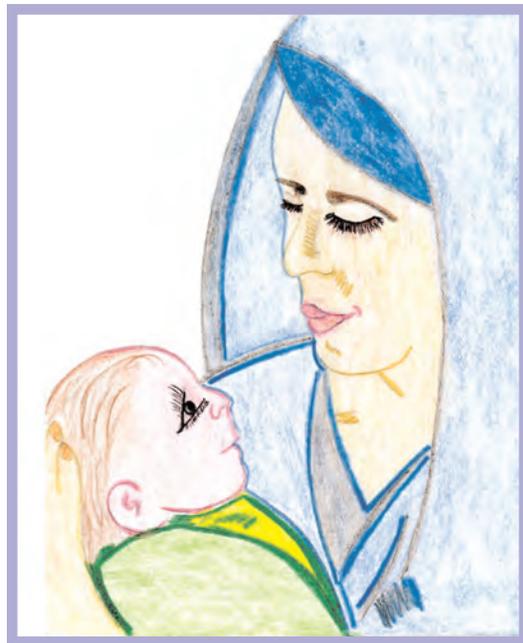
## FREESTYLE 4 MOM

*Heather*

I'm dying inside--you say I must be strong.  
Better days are coming, but miserable nights are much II long.  
I barely had the time II start II catch my breath before  
The ringing of a telephone summoned the knowledge of your death.  
The hurt hangs heavy, despair hovers over my head.  
Satan taps me on the shoulder saying, "Don't you wish you were dead?"

People walk right past me and don't see this look in my eye.  
Deep inside is the urge II just give up the ghost and die.  
I lost my mind the moment that they laid you in the ground.  
In the day I wander aimlessly and at night I jump at every little sound.  
The devils is closing in; I feel his demons all around  
I'm afraid they've taken me II places I wish I'd never found.

I am your child and from your flesh and blood I come.  
Same attitude same lifestyle same obsession with this filthy game.  
Now it finally hits me; you're never coming back.  
I'm stuck in this world with no one, with everything I lack  
God closed your eyes and took you and your spirit out II sea  
But he forgot the child that softly whispered,  
"My Lord, what about me?"



Pamela Hostler

## REFLECTIONS

*Candida*

You looked at me, and now you think you know who I am,  
But in reality you only see a reflection of me.  
It's not a mask I wear nor am I fooling the world;  
I don't know you either so no one's to get hurt.

The woman you pretend to know is part of what you want to see.  
Because if I were to need you, you'd never acknowledge me.  
You looked at me and figured out I'm who you wanted me to be.  
Why should I show you who I really am inside?

There is a heart that beats inside of me  
Filled with emotions and a song to sing,  
Ready to be noticed and handled with care.  
And to be loved and to give the same.

But no need to tell you since you have assumed  
Knowing me enough, when you looked at my reflection  
And the shadow of my past.  
You judged the visible, ignoring my heart.

Farewell to you, from a living soul,  
Because who I am, you don't care to know.  
My friendship was real, and who I am...  
too bad you didn't know.



Pamela Hostler

## I AM BEAUTIFUL

*Charlesetta*

There was something warm running down my face. After being hit in the head with a stick I was dazed and confused. At age eight I didn't know the warm liquid was blood. All I knew was I was rushed to the bathroom and put under the bathtub faucet so the cold water could stop the bleeding.

There was always a tub of red water. It was always quick and the next day I'd have a knot on my head. It would be extremely sore for days. One day I did something else disapproved of—bad—as any child does. Then the mean mamma broke my arm, dislocated my shoulder. I heard it pop.

Today I am handicapped because the broken arm stopped growing at age 8. One of my arms is longer than the other one. But that day my arm was broken, so were my dreams, my future as a whole person, my confidence, my self worth. My ability to love, trust, and discern were broken too.

I learned I was in foster care—not with my family. These strangers had shown me unspeakable pain. At an early age I felt trauma and was traumatized. A child who was supposed to be playing with dolls and trikes, I was hit on and beat on. All my adult life I wandered through life with abandonment issues. Why was I neglected and abandoned by the one person who was supposed to love me and nurture me? All through life I was empty—a big void in my soul, not caring, not loving.

I got on drugs because I needed to feel good. I wasted a lot of years on drugs. The child abuse hindered me from living a normal life.

Then, at age 40, I was tired of being nowhere in my life--tired of being a nobody in life. So I started reading self help books, listening to church music. I also heard the word of God. I knew He loves me—there were too many dangerous situations during my drug use that I knew only God brought me out safely. Then I gave my life to God and felt His love and knew I was His chosen one.

As long as I got Jesus, I didn't need anybody else.

When God entered my life, I got confidence to hold my head up and look at myself and others in love. Then I had to re-teach myself to want better in life. I had to tell myself that I am somebody; I can do all things—any and everything—through Christ who strengthens me.

I had to look in the mirror and give myself positive affirmations. I had to encourage myself a lot of days through church songs and the word of God. Only after I started dealing with the events that had fractured my soul in childhood did I begin to experience God in an intimate way. I discovered great love and joy walking in God's will today.

Today I have a new walk and happy thoughts about myself and my future thanks to God's saving grace and all the mercy He sent my way. I thank God for just loving me...



## ENOUGH

*Vicki*

It's been a difficult struggle to find Enough.  
She's claimed mountainous high peaks  
and walked dark and gloomy valleys.  
The journey circled her back to her beginning.  
back to her creation.

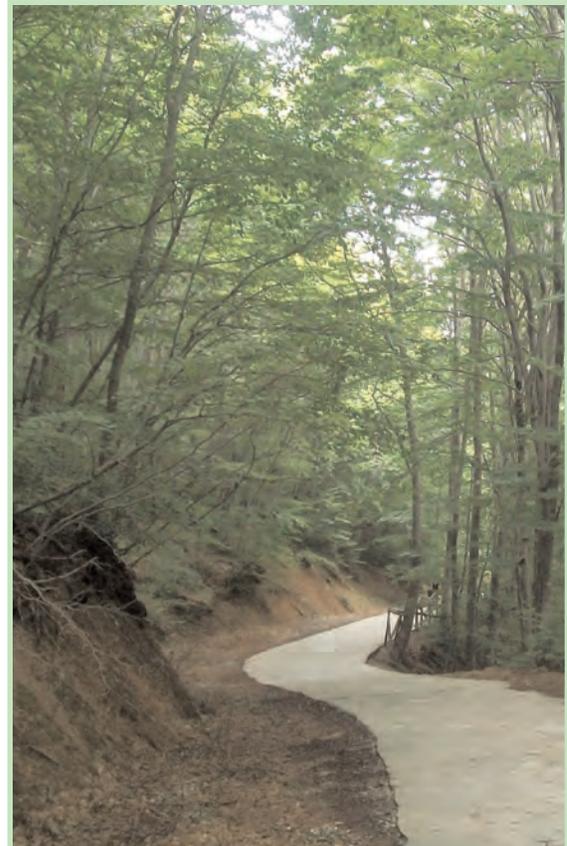
She learned to listen too well to them  
and drowned in their limitations of her.  
The journey's been painful and difficult.  
At times she wished she'd never begun.  
But once that first step was taken  
there was no turning back.  
The veil of denial lifted,  
her shell cracked open to a ray of hope.

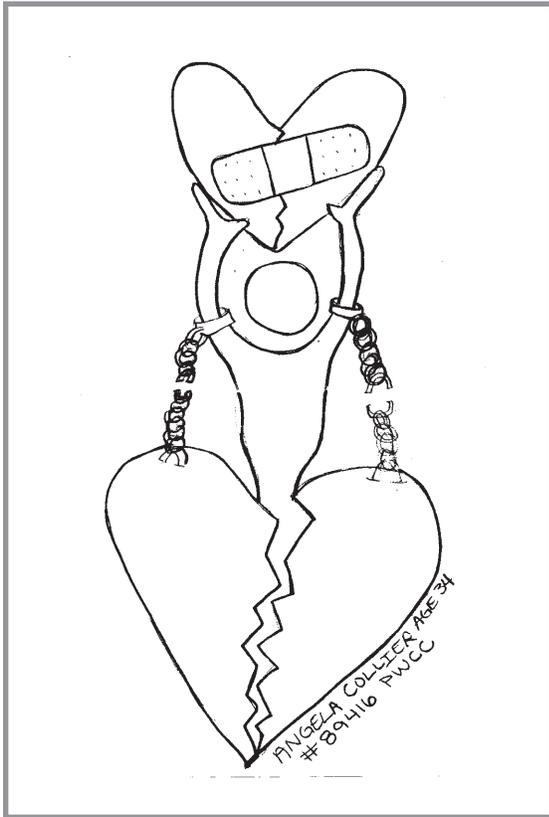
She pushed onward  
not knowing her destination;  
at times it was unbearably painful, others,  
exceptionally joyful.  
Uncertainty lurked around each corner,  
each step was terrifying.

Slowly at first,  
she began to see the other side of terror.  
Well hidden, were greater rewards  
than she ever imagined.  
A beauty that existed in the world  
was becoming part of her world.  
Time that painfully took forever,  
passed suddenly and was gone.  
The pain, disappointments and falling backwards,  
were well worth it.

She discovered it was she who is Enough.  
A truth no one could take away.  
Stretching her arms like a transformed butterfly,  
she unfolds to greet the world.  
She knows a beauty so deep and awesome that only  
the power who bestowed it on her knows  
its true depth.

Joy, excitement, and power overwhelm her.  
Moving from Enough's power she shares it with others.





Angela Collier

## FROM METH TO NOW

A Farewell to my Addiction

*Yvette Klingler*

My need for you was a must,  
and in result I lost much trust.

All those years of taking hits  
has made me lose relationships.

For years you made me feel inferior;  
Now I've got a new interior.

You helped me function without feeling;  
Now I've got new ways of dealing.

You helped me tell many lies;  
Now I see through open eyes.

Every day was filled with strife;  
Now I'm going to live my life.

I always thought you were the one;  
Now I can say, "I'm Honestly Done".

## FREESTYLE

*Heather*

I'm sick of living like this, a slave to my own corruption  
Delighting in the body bags of death and destruction  
Another casualty in the spoils of a war  
Greater than all I have left  
I load my destructions; take a hit—  
I can almost taste my own death  
In the depletion of my breath  
They tell me, get it together—I can't  
They say they love me--they don't  
They tell me I'll die if I truly don't try  
But I know in my mind I won't  
Cause in the end, when he comes calling and I can run no more,  
I'll turn around and take his hand  
And wonder what I was running for.

## MY STRUGGLE

*Amber*

I sit here alone in the depths of my own despair  
Created by my own worst enemy  
Never knowing that enemy out to get me was me.

My pain flushed away temporarily  
With this poison that floods my veins  
Only to return with the light of yet another day.

I hated who I had become  
That person I had turned out to be...  
Just another homeless, needle-using junkie  
Scarred, broke, alone and on the streets.

Sometimes we must lose everything in order  
To really get free and then break away  
I've heard this many times before--  
That's why I started my drug addiction to begin with.

Always trying to fill this empty, hopeless void  
It's the only way I truly knew how.  
To my dismay, it was just another way to punk myself out.

Now I'm worse off than ever, trying to piece myself back together.  
Beyond this prison cell, I try so hard to find this passion: the passion for life;  
The passion for love; the passion for that eternal spot above.

As my soul and spirit struggle,  
No one said it would be easy.  
Time will only tell...  
I hope that those like me will do as well.



Amber Steward

## ME OVERCOMING MY PAINFUL PAST

*Jennifer Helen*

When I was sixteen years old I was raped. It took so much time out of my life to get over it and forgive. But I finally found peace within me.

It is amazing how God is delivering me from my past and helping the sorrow of yesterday be gone. He is bringing new peace within me and hope for a better tomorrow.

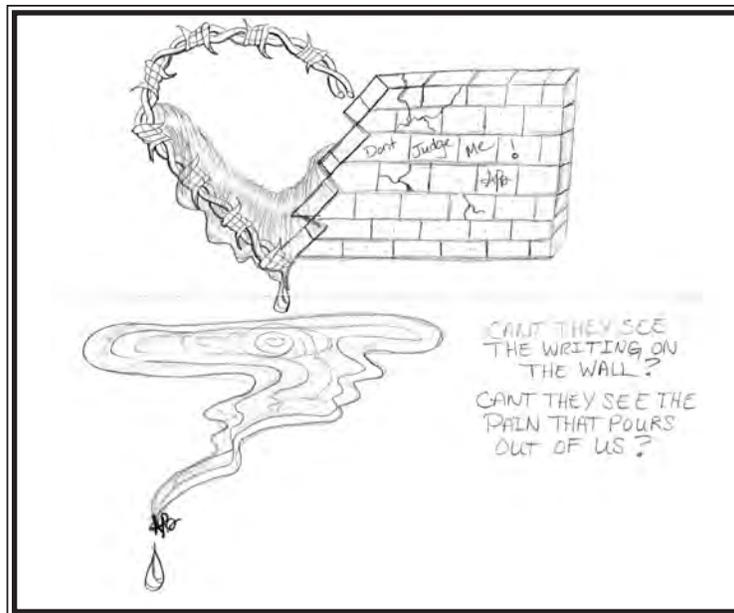
If only I would have opened my heart sooner to God! Life would have been much easier. I was lost and blind before--using drugs and drinking to try to hide my painful past and who I was. All I was doing was hurting myself more and more.

I have learned not to hide anymore and that I can deal with life without using drugs or drinking. If only I would have opened my heart sooner to God, I would have been free from my painful past. I would have never had to come to prison to find myself and God. If only I knew...but that past is gone like yesterday and time that I missed with my kids and family.

But there is hope for a better tomorrow and I am a new, peaceful, loving, happy being like I once was before I ever got hurt and lost myself in pain.

I know I can't change those things that happened to me and things I did, but I know this: I can change tomorrow. I can be a stronger, better-loving person, who is caring and cares about what happens to me. I can love myself and not be ashamed for who I am.

I don't ever want to be lost again and I don't need to use drugs or to drink. All I need is my kids and my family, God and the Bible to overcome hard times. I know I'm not alone any more. I have God and Jesus and my kids and family in my life.



April Puckett

## TESTIMONY

*Simona*

I am 32 years old and the mother of five. I am currently serving time, have been for four years. During my extended incarceration, I have lost a lot, but have also gained a lot. My losses include my husband (left me), my aunt (passed away), my uncle (passed away), my house, cars, and my freedom. Last, but not least, my mother passed away. That was my biggest loss of all.

I had a choice of giving up and failing the program I was in once again, or to dig deep within myself and surrender to the program. I chose to surrender for once. I never knew that I was as strong as my dear mother. She wasn't gone, for her courage and strength were living through me.

It was hard to face reality and to change what needed to be changed. I learned that "if nothing changes, nothing changes". I was determined to change my ways of life and I did. I give all my respect and thanks to The Therapeutic Community Program here at the South Boise Women's Correctional Center. The counselors are amazing. I was able to work on my behaviors and issues that were destroying my life. I have changed a lot.

Besides my losses, I have gained my self respect, dignity, pride, self esteem and my life back. Sometimes we've got to go through hard times to wake up. I am so proud of who I am today. I know that my change will be for a lifetime.

***If nothing changes, nothing changes.***

## ABUSE

*Kimberly*

The abuse I went through was out of this world. I was beaten so black and blue I had to get spray tan to hide from my friends and family what happened. I had a gun put to my head; he broke my ribs—such pain I could not work for about two or three weeks. I had been dancing and selling myself to men for money for drugs. I couldn't make as much money as he wanted, so he abused me more. This abuse turned me away from men.

Then he thought I was lying to him, so he beat me more until I blacked out several times. I was with this man for three years, The whole relationship was about abuse, sex and drugs.

I thought he loved me, but he don't love me. He loves my money and the drugs.

## REFLECTION

*Julie*

As I reflected on those that stood by in this life, there was only one. At the time, however, I did not realize He was standing by my side. Throughout the visits to the grandfather's private places—in a garage no less—to the foster father's lessons in "Christian" education, He was there. The shame and guilt threatened to suffocate me. And yet, He touched my heart.

When the grandfather lay sick and dying and lonely with no family to visit him and no apparent hope remaining, it was me He sent to hold his hand to pray. Despite the humiliation, isolation and degradation, He led me to minister to others.

When I sought human comfort to share the burden of my heartache, it was He who bore the pain. A minister I spoke to showed no compassion, nor offered any spiritual reprieve. Instead he asked me what I had done to bring this on myself. Mortified and filled with hurt, anger, utter despair and feelings of betrayal, it was I who shut Him out of my life.

Too proud and too tough, I needed no one in this world. Fearless, I determined to forge my own way. Because of this my life was filled with miseries most people never know. Some make me cringe in dismay. Suicide seemed the only logical solution. I have been dead, not only once or twice. Even that I couldn't get right. Somehow I knew someone was watching over me, so when I shattered my leg in a drunken car crash and the doctors announced "You'll never walk again", I responded, "Just watch me!" and walk again I did.



F. Caballero

But that did not teach me. Again, drunk, at 52 years old, I took on a car—this time on a bicycle. Surprise! I lost and had a broken arm. Still I did not learn.

I had no anchor in my life. Everything I'd touch was guaranteed to collapse like a haphazardly constructed house of cards. My arrogance was only outweighed by my ignorance, but He stood by, helpless and sadly watching as I struggled to balance bricks atop that fragile house of cards. The inevitable finally happened. Everything came crashing down around me.

I was homeless, desperate and broken. Somehow there was a drink available. "Just a few; it certainly can't hurt." Next thing I'm waking in a stark cell; still I could not say the words that were attempting to burst from my heart. Another week passed; depression began to rear its ugly and all too familiar head. "Oh no, I refuse to go that route again!"

Instead, I got down on my knees and chose to pray. It was like a tidal wave; the floodgates opened. I repented and offered up all my sins. I begged for mercy and another chance—a chance I knew I did not deserve.

Miraculously, just as He promises in His word, He took me back. My Lord, my savior held me in His arms that day! And He has not let me go. After all, He waited patiently for me for more than thirty years.

## **INTEGRITY INSIGHTS**

*Joyce*

1. **AWARENESS:** I learned that awareness is my **ALARM** clock aka my “wake up call” to eradicate my charades.  
**Always Live Authentically—Remove Masks**
2. **HONESTY:** I learned to be **OPEN** and live in the moment and in harmony with my **TRUE SELF**.  
**Overcoming Powerful Evil Notions**
3. **SHIFTING REALITY:** I learned that I need to develop patterns of **CHANGE** that would create attitudes of gratitude.  
**Consider Having Abundant New Genuine Experiences**
4. **REFLECTION:** I learned to be still and see the reflection in the **MIRROR** as the child of God that I am.  
**My Image Reflects Reality, Openness, Recovery**
5. **COURAGE:** I learned that courage elicits accolades of **BRAVO** for achieved successes in recovery one day at a time.  
**Believe Recovery Achieves Verifiable Outcomes**
6. **ACTION:** I learned to use my **RESET** button for proactive choices.  
**Remember Every Situation Empowers Thysel**
7. **FORGIVENESS:** I learned that forgiveness eradicates resentment and produces **PEACE**.  
**Placidly Exist Amid Chaotic Emotions**
8. **AUTHENTICITY:** I learned that the **REAL** me allows me to walk with pride and worthiness.  
**Recognize Every Adversity Limp**
9. **CONNECTION:** I learned that my connected **LINKS** need to be plugged into my Higher Power on a daily basis.  
**Life Is Noticing Kinship Supports**
10. **INTEGRITY:** The Integrity program taught me that a successful recovery **PLAN** requires me to maintain my awareness and practice all the levels as needed throughout my life  
**Patiently, Lovingly And Naturally**

## BRUISED BUT NOT BROKEN

*Alexandria R. Smith*

This drawing combines the good, the bad, and the indifferent--the joy and the pain. It symbolizes the things that have determined my identity...and my very essence.

The money, the drugs, jail, suffering and mourning. The things that I believed I could wipe away with some care, only to find they had been there too long, and had left a stain.

Though the rose is beautiful and in the midst of blooming, there are still thorns that adorn its sides like the injustices and grievances I found so difficult to forgive. My fierce determination is blooming like the flower--determination that is born of my earlier neglectfulness.

The tears are of healing... bringing closure to a painful yet necessary past. Somewhere within myself, in the quietest part of my heart, I make a silent wish. A wish to push through all of the pain of abuse and dysfunction into the realm of light and sunshine.

Maybe, just maybe a crisis is exactly what it has taken to free me from entombment within myself.

In saying all of this, there is always hope to be found in the midst of tragedies. There is a song that still beats within me that propels me towards Victory! The road is for the journey I'm now on to healing and self love. It is a journey of honesty and surrender--sweet...soft...delicate...peaceful serenity.



Alexandria Smith

## HOW CAN YOU SAVE SOMEONE DESTINED TO DIE?

Dena Hankerson

There will be no screeching of tires, for the hit and run car won't stop. Nor will the crowd roar with cheers as Ricky, my brother, runs a dash to catch my now football-thrown body to soften the impact of my head. 35 years has passed. I don't ask; I imagine him thinking this:



*Dear Sis,*

*I write this letter to you wondering why did I dash down the street to catch a body that wouldn't die that day, but dozens of times later? Whew!*

*When the ball was kicked, my head went up following its path, and you are running as it's in the air. BAM! Where did that car come from? I watched in slow motion as your body projected out and up. The car went under you and kept going. Sounds became muffled screams.*

*I can't say honestly that my body would rise to the occasion, running 20 yards, being just a small child myself, If I'd known I would have to watch you beaten by boyfriends, strung out on drugs and withering away in prison. I became the hero that day, but people don't know that what happened was reflex--not necessarily love.*

*Don't get me wrong.*

*I love you now, and I'm glad you survived but let's be real. You were 5 years old. I was 10. You were always under toe in my toys. I couldn't go anywhere unless I took you. Fear was the fuel that fed my feet.*

*Afraid I would get into trouble somehow because you ran into the streets, and you got hit by the car.*

*Your body and the ball bounced at the same time. I watched it out of the corner of my eye. I kneeled; your head landed in my lap--Ba-loop. I heard it first, the sound of your butt hitting the pavement. Arms flung out, your legs came down next. The bounce was more of a shockwave like the ocean, or after an earthquake. Yeah, shockwave. I still feel it today.*

*Ricky*

## I LEARNED

*La'Shontier*

I learned that I'm worthy of love since I've been in the penitentiary.  
I learned that I am respected since I've been locked down.  
I learned that I am needed since I've been in a house of correction.  
I learned that I'm smart since I've been in Sing-Sing.  
I learned that I am brave since I've been in the reformatory.  
I learned that I belong since I've been in the pen.  
I learned that I am blessed and highly favored since I've been in the Big House.  
I learned that I have strength since I have been in prison.  
Most of all, I learned that I am worthy of having a good life.  
No matter where I started in my life, I can change my bad into good in the end.  
For now I am locked up, confined, behind bars,  
incarcerated, detained, in custody,  
and laid by the heels.  
But for the first time in my life I am free at last.  
Thank God Almighty I am free at last!



Pamela  
Hostler

## LETTER TO MYSELF

*Tammy*

*Hi! It's me again, and yes, we need to talk. I know we have had this conversation several times, but I'm hoping we can come to an agreement and work together this time. I'm here to tell you that you are the number one person who is destructive toward my recovery. I need your support and cooperation. It is you and your actions that will make the difference in our being able to succeed this time.*

*I know that this new way of thinking is very different from what we're used to, but I believe it's in our best interest for a better life—for us to start over and be happy! You are worth it. I know it's been hard these last few years. I know you're scared that you'll be alone, so you avoid and push people away because of what you've been through and the losses you've had to face. I know it hurts, but it's real. It's been real. No more pretending; no more hiding. Open those eyes and really look at the life you've made.*

*You have the ability to control what happens. Use the tools you've learned in the classes you done. Ask for and accept the help you need to become a better person. I know you can't do it on your own. I also know it's going to be rough. Don't give up. Work it and keep your good faith in the Lord. Remember this is for you and nobody else. It's time you cared about what happens to you. Change so you have something you can be proud of, Tammy!*

## **BROKEN: FROZEN IN TIME: Jeremy**

*Sheryl*

I loved you from the day we met—Valentine’s Day,  
the day of love, hearts and giving.  
We felt so close to each other; I fell for you.  
I gave you my soul; I loved you deeply...

Time together. Us--almost every minute of every day.  
We became a family; I trusted all of you.  
I gave and gave; you took and took...everything that  
belonged to me inside and out:  
You isolated me.  
You lied to me with hidden agendas--  
Games using the world, our lives as the board and me  
as the game piece—a pawn in a twisted tale...I was scared.  
You said, “I love you”



I did all I could to please you, to fix us, yet it was temporary-- I fixed nothing.  
I only opened more trapdoors...your traps:  
You wanted me to work.  
When I did you made me lose the job and I was made to pay again and again.  
Not with money, but my blood!

You told me no one else would ever love me until I believed that too.  
You ripped my insides out with those words—telling me I was so unworthy every day...  
I did not exist to the world.

I was a girlfriend, a mother to your kids; you said I was good enough to pretend  
that there were no marks--to lie so no one would know.  
Not your kids, my kids, my family...even when it got noticed you made me lie;  
Accidents. I slipped; I fell; you were always sorry until the next day--  
Crocodile smiles...

You repeatedly hurt me, inside and out.  
If I did not give myself to you, you took me for what you wanted.  
Anything went—restraints, bloodbaths with my real blood...“branded”,  
I belonged to you like a dog.  
You locked me up; no food or water until you got your way  
Controlling every roll of the dice for your advantage...  
I was your prisoner!

You are “666”  
You made me sink into your hell.  
You faced not a single penalty for the game you played—me as your pawn...  
Love doesn’t hurt, but you did.  
You’ve broken me.  
You are free...Why?

## KEEPER OF MY CRYSTAL

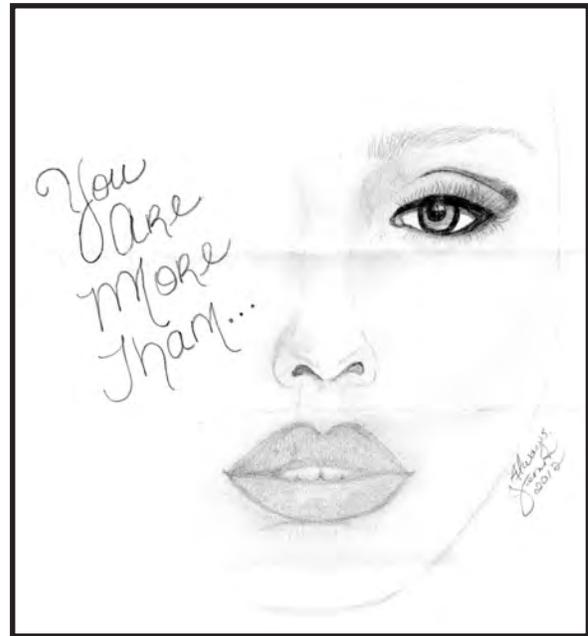
*Vicki*

Lost in an overgrowth of people  
trying to help  
I let them make my decision because  
I believe they know what is best.  
I can't take care of myself.  
What do I know about  
anything of importance?  
I'm not important, but they are because  
they are not me.  
So they keep my crystal—the very essence of me.

With time things changed.  
New people have come.  
I am asked what my values are.  
"You tell me and I will know."  
I am asked what I want from life.  
"You tell me and I will know."

The asking is new.  
They really seem to care.  
They await my response.  
But I have none to give.  
They continue to wait.  
They won't let me off the hook.  
They won't tell me anything  
about what I should do.  
They say that I know,  
that I only need to look within.

Slowly, I too think, maybe,  
I might know something.  
I share what I think.  
They support what I say!  
I have an opinion.  
My strength begins to grow.



Jennifer Malone

## MY CHILD'S PRAYER

*Victoria Ramirez*

Dear Lord,

I want to pray for my mommy, for you to be by her side.  
I know that she was hurting, and I'd always see her cry.  
Lord, I love my mommy and she's my bestest friend.  
I have my mommy with me now, but I'm afraid it's going to end.

I know my mommy loves me, Lord, and she does the best she can,  
But my mommy has a problem...Crystal Meth is her best friend.  
Mommy goes to treatment and she reads a big blue book  
And then I find her crying because she used again.

Lord, Grandma picked me up at school today  
I'm confused and wonder why.  
I asked Grandma where my mommy was and she began to cry.  
Mommy would never pick me up from school again—  
Once again, my mommy lied.  
She used those drugs again today, Lord, and  
Today my mommy died.

I love my mommy with all my heart and soul  
But I think she loved her drugs the most.  
I know that she was hurt and angry, Lord, but  
I am angry too.  
Now I feel so all alone and I don't know what to do.



Pamela Hostler

## ANSWER TO MY CHILD'S PRAYER

Victoria Ramirez

*My Dear Angel Child,  
I am so sorry for this pain that I have caused you.  
I know that I was selfish and that there were so many times that I hurt you.  
I was so afraid to tell you why it was that I cried.  
I never wanted you to know about my abuse or the pain it caused, so I lied.*

*There is one important thing I need you to know--  
From that first day when you came into my life,  
a seed was planted within my heart from which love still grows.  
You were never to blame for any of my actions or the many mistakes that I made  
And even though we are far apart now, my love for you will never fade.*

*I wonder if you'll think of me throughout the years--I'd really like to know.  
When you fall and skin your knees...remember me.  
Close your eyes...feel my touch...I'm gonna kiss it all better...  
I'll be right there.*

*When you are getting ready for that first date...remember me.  
Close your eyes...listen close as I say, "You are so beautiful. You don't want to be late...  
Yeah, I'll be there.*

*When you graduate from high school and wish that I were there...remember me.  
Close your eyes...see, it's me there in the front row crying like a fool...I'll be there.*

*When you are ready to take that walk down the aisle and you are full of fear...remember me.  
Smile...you are gorgeous with all those flowers in your hair...don't be nervous...Close your  
eyes... I am there.*

*When you are in pain as you bring that little angel into this world....remember me.  
Close your eyes...squeeze my hand...I'll wipe the sweat from your brow...  
as your perfect little child is born...I'll be there.*

*Now all I can do is hope and pray that someday  
You will forgive me and listen as I say:  
Butterfly kisses I'll send to you on the wings of a dove  
For when you are feeling down and blue  
Every time that you reach out, I'll be there.  
Grab one or two...they are my way of saying,  
"I'm sorry. I love and I miss you."*

*Love,  
Mom*



Pamela  
Hostler

## MY PAIN STILL REMAINS

*Lisa Williams*

Everyone has a life story with good and bad times  
and as much as it hurts me, I'd like to share mine.  
I am sure there are many who will relate to my pains  
and although I'm much older now--my pain still remains...

People say we should forgive, but how can we if we cannot forget?  
I was only a child then; now my life is scarred by all this.  
Demons from my past control me inside  
not allowing me to love or laugh but to hate and despise.  
I don't want any pity; I want healing inside.  
Like medication for an illness these words will be mine...

My childhood was empty; I felt always alone.  
Although my mother was there; she was like a stranger at home.  
My mother had a boyfriend who gave her drugs.  
He would drink with her throughout the nights  
and when their drugs were all gone their arguments would arise.  
He would tell her she was nothing and often hit her too;  
When he was done hitting her, he'd walk out yelling that he was through.

I often thought of my father, and how I wished he was not dead,  
then I could hear the saying that my father always said,  
"Son, every problem has a solution if we just think it through  
and no matter what life deals you son, your father's here for you."  
My father's long gone and I stand here all alone,  
to find some crazy solution to these problems I have at home...

Two weeks later mother's boyfriend is back with flowers in his hands saying how  
much that he is sorry and he'll never hit again...  
as my mother reaches for his flowers tears fall from her eyes.  
She softly says "come in" to him, then tells me "stay outside".

I never had kisses or even a hug and at seven years old  
I did not know love.  
I never had praise and was told I was dumb,  
So at thirteen years old, the gangs showed me love...  
At thirteen I sold and at fourteen I used  
I thought that I could control it, but I was a fool.  
Confusion filled my mind this paranoia set in;  
I didn't trust no one, not even my gang friends.



Pamela Hostler

Coming down off these drugs was really no fun;  
I slept many days, dreaming only of motherly love  
but when I awoke, I realized I'm alone  
then my tears filled my eyes and this hate filled my soul.

At nineteen looking at ten, I wished my mother would have loved me back then.  
I'm not proud of the path that I've let my life go,  
but without knowing love, how was I to know?

Twenty-six now, I have three until I am free-- released from the arms of these bars,  
I wish it had been my mother's that held me ...  
I finally found love, in the word of our Lord, but my motherly love I will always long for.

No matter how much as adults our lives can hurt,  
always remember our children come first.  
What we teach and show them is who they become—  
Our children are innocent, needing guidance and love.  
So, next time your child sits sad and alone  
tell them you love them and you won't let that love go.  
For without hearing "I love you" or receiving a hug,  
the path they will travel will be dark without love.



Pamela Hostler

## THE HATED ROCK

*Donna*

Was it just yesterday I craved that pipe--the little glass tube that took away all pain?  
It didn't cost much, just \$2.99, then 50 cents for the copper and 20 bucks for the rock.  
I would inhale deeply, then float away. And then start all over again.

There were no friends back then, just me and my rock, and now look where I'm at.  
No family, no friends, no choices to make. I am paying the big price now for that little rock.

Now it's years of heartache, shame and loneliness. Forgiveness comes from God.  
That's easy to say, but family and friends may not feel the same way.

Oh God, how I hate that little rock.



## HUSTLER MUSIC

*Heather*

Hustler music on the block in my hood--  
close your eyes, concentrate & listen real good  
II quick chirps that be them cops  
1 gunshot, 1 thud, 10 footsteps  
that be the melody of the Glock.

Listen even closer, in the background far apart  
one tries II conceal though the hood  
will reveal the chorus of a child's broken heart.

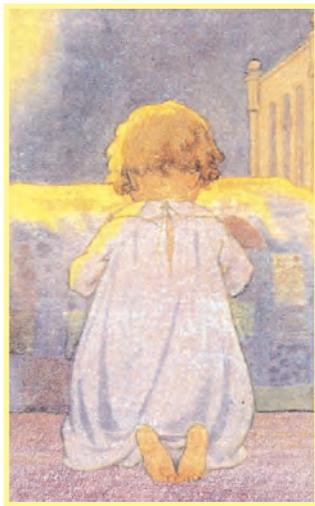
A paragraph of empty promises  
the sparking of a light  
unzipping of zippers, rustling of clothes—that's the secret of the night  
The funeral procession for 1 fallen II the game—  
ashes II ashes dust II dust, the singing of the pain...  
Hustler music.  
It's all there in my head  
But will I yield II the simple sounds?  
Or turn it off instead?



## NOT TONIGHT

*Pamela*

To my daughter, Zoe Danielle



God, kiss my daughter for me tonight  
I won't be there--not tonight  
God please dry my tears and mend my heart  
While we're forced to be apart.  
I'd give all I have to make it right  
But I know that I can't--not tonight  
God watch her grow and make her strong  
And if you can, God, help me hang on  
I can't help feeling that I've got to be strong  
She needs me Lord, but maybe I'm wrong  
I think I'm right, though 'cause I see in her eyes  
A love so special there is a disguise  
I think she needs me to be all right  
But for now, Lord, can you be there tonight?

## TESTIMONIAL

*Monica*

I got in a relationship on Valentine's Day of '08 and I ended up with my kid's dad. When my uncle ended beating me up because I was pregnant with my son Damian, me and my son's dad got ourselves a trailer. When I had my son, he was premature, 4 pounds, 2 ounces. He had a heart murmur and had to stay in the hospital because I had him at 5 months. I almost lost him, and I didn't get to hold him. It took my son 3 weeks to come home. He came home with a monitor and he had episodes of apnea where he would turn gray. I had to take CPR classes for babies because he could have ended up dead.



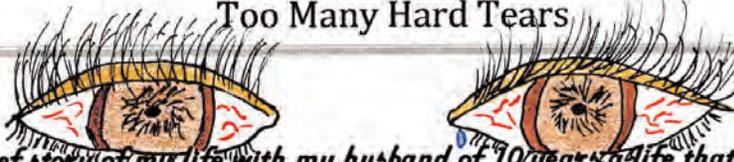
When my son was 8 months, the abuse began with his dad. He was that type of person that liked to have things done for him, so one day I went to work and I dropped my son at my sister's house. When I got off work, my sister picked me up and I went home with my son. Later that afternoon, my kid's dad came home all drunk asking me where his food was at. I was so tired from work and washing clothes and my son was sick, crying. I was so frustrated with everything, so me and my kid's dad got in a fight where he socked me behind my head and pulled my hair back, snapping my neck back. I thought I was going to die. He wouldn't let me go. I told him it was over, but that's when he got even madder. He finally let me go so he was heading out the door but I felt so mad at him for hitting me and mistreating me like I wasn't worth anything. That's when I saw a knife in a cup. I grabbed it and went after him to scare him. He was holding me and when I told him to let me go, I moved my hand where I had the knife. I swung it so fast that I ended up cutting his nose off.

When he let me go, I was wondering why he let me go. That's when he showed me his nose was gone. Blood was everywhere, even in my face and eyes and hair. I was so scared like if I had blacked out. He went running to the mirror and told me to take the car with my son and leave and I told him "no". He pulled me to the shower to wash the thick blood off my body. I was shocked. I didn't know what to do. I thought he was going to die on me. So I got in the car with my son and my son's dad and we drove to my dad's house. My dad didn't know how to react, so he called my uncle to drive my son's dad to the hospital, but my son's dad didn't want to go. My son's dad wanted to find his nose so they could put it back on, so he found his nose and put it in some biscuits and went to the hospital. I was still shocked from it.

I stayed at my dad's house waiting for the cops. It took them five hours to get me. They arrested me and put me in jail and took my son to foster care. I didn't know what to do, not being able to have my kid, knowing my kid's dad has my baby and won't let me see him. He has custody of my son.

I just advise you that if a person hits you, leave him right away before it gets worse, even if you love that person. I had to live it the hard way and look what happened to me—going to jail and to prison, not having my son. I just had a hard life, but I have to live every day of my life.

## Too Many Hard Tears



*This is a brief story of my life with my husband of 10 years a life that changed me and my life forever.*

*At first, all was going as planned. That ended all too soon. It was about a year and a half after we got married, it all changed. We lived in Goshen, Indiana. We were in the car arguing over some trouble he just got into with the police. He was mad at himself but took it out on me by punching me in the face, that was the first time. I was so shocked I couldn't react, I never had that happen before. He said he was sorry and he would never do that again. Even though my gut and heart said leave I loved him and took an oath under G~d so I stayed. That day changed my life for years to come maybe for life.*

*After that first time there was many more punches, slaps, hair pulling, and bruises. Not only did the physical abuse get worse so did the mental and emotional abuse. I was scared, felt alone, and felt like I had nowhere to go I withdrew from the world, my family, as well as myself.*

*I let "K" take from me, my self-pride, my self-worth, my self-esteem, myself love. I let him take me down to nothing. I felt worthless, no good as if I deserved it, as if I did wrong. Like I made him do it. I did things I never thought I would because I feared what would happen if he didn't get his way. I let the person I loved destroy the person I loved, the one I knew, and the person I was. I became a person I didn't know, didn't love, a person I hate. I let him destroy me and change me forever.*

*That was over 6 years ago. I've overcome a lot of what I went thru. I've even got to the point that I forgave him for what he put me thru. I've forgave myself for letting "K" put me thru that and letting him do the things he did for 8 years. With the strength I'm getting from G~d I'm putting myself back together. Even though I may carry memories and scars with me I will never let a person destroy me like that again. No matter how much I love them I will love myself more. When I leave this place behind I will hold my head high cause I KNOW I AM BEAUTIFUL!! I will love myself forever!*



Tammy Richardson

## SOMETIMES MOMMIES GO AWAY

*Leslie*

When I first held you in my arms I said "I love you" every day  
But I forgot to tell you, sometimes mommies go away.

So I'm writing this and hope you'll understand  
Any tears I've caused you were not part of mommy's plan.

Sometimes bad things happen and it's hard to tell you why  
But it always breaks a mommy's heart to see her children cry.

Now I hope you are listening, it's important that you do  
Because I want to tell you about the love I have for you.

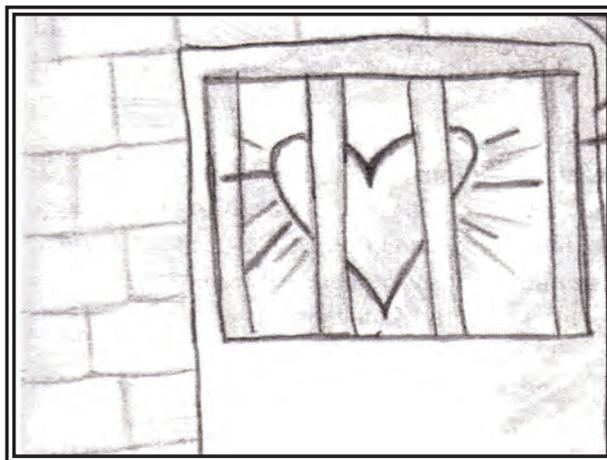
A mommy's love is special; it's a bond we'll always share  
Whether I'm far away or holding you right here.

There hasn't been a single day that I haven't thought of you  
I'm asking your forgiveness for all the hurt I've caused you  
Because Mommy went away.

There is a room within my heart that holds my love for you  
There hasn't been a single day that that room hasn't been full

It's almost time for Mommy to start her journey home  
I know it won't be easy; I know it will take time,  
But together we will find a way to mend our broken hearts.

My promise is to be there and never again come a day  
When you have to turn and see your mommy go away.



Anonymous

## I'VE BEEN BENT, BUT NOT BROKEN

*Ivonne*

I had a pretty hard childhood with my father abusing drugs and alcohol,  
and him always hitting my mother, me and my two sisters...  
I've been bent but not broken.

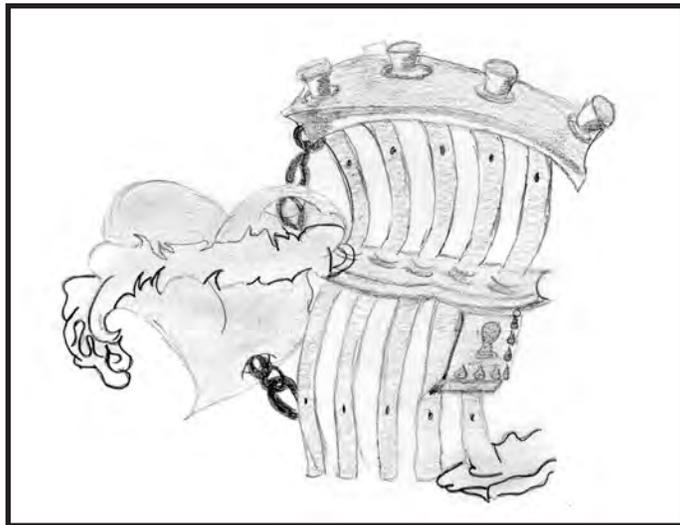
I fell in love with a man that stole my heart, but turned out to be someone else--  
This man abused drugs and alcohol and he was just like my father...  
I've been bent but not broken.

I thought that if I used drugs and alcohol that it just might make a difference,  
but it didn't and I became an addict...  
I've been bent but not broken.

Life blessed me with my beautiful son and daughter and they made stronger so I  
stopped the abuse...  
I've been bent but not broken.

Then one day a man said racist words to me and even hit me.  
As I thought I was safe in my car—it happened in a blink of an eye—  
I hit him with my car and he was gone...  
I thought the day had finally come when I was broken.

But now, as I'm being punished for taking that life away from his friends and family  
who loved him so very much,  
I say to myself and his family that I am very, very sorry for your loss.  
I will accept this time that has been given to me knowing his death will forever be a  
part of me...  
I've been bent,  
but as God is my witness,  
I'm still not broken.



Sherry Dukette

## BEAUTIFULLY BROKEN!

*Mary M. Dimirack*

Hi. My name is Mary. I am 42 and incarcerated at Virginia Correctional Center for Women. I decided to share some of my past and present experiences hoping that it will give someone hope and strength. If there is someone who feels that life is not worth living, and you feel that no one cares, listen, my sweet, beautiful sister. You are a beautiful creation. A princess. You are worth so much more than what you have settled for.

Yeah! That's what I said. Now start seeing yourself the way God made you. Try to see yourself through His eyes. Forgiven, beautiful, kind, worthy—capable!

When I was a little girl, I was repeatedly raped. I was a lost child and very confused. I was a victim of incest and this caused me so many problems throughout my whole life. I did not trust. I was full of rage. I could not have a healthy, normal relationship with a man and I eventually started to victimize them. I felt alone, inadequate, so unworthy and beaten down. I grew up without my father and always felt so abandoned and angry at him. I blamed my mother and felt very misunderstood by her.

My last rape occurred at the age of 14. As I reached my late teens and early 20's I had very deep emotional issues and had gotten addicted to cocaine and heroin. Needless to say my life consisted of days breaking the law, and trying to support my drug habit. I blamed men, society, my family and I hated myself.

I was broken. When I received my sentencing I broke down. I fell to my knees and cried, "God I cannot do this time." An awesome peace came over the whole room and it filled with white light. A voice said to me softly, "I know you can't, but I can." I surrendered my life to this peace that I felt. I made a decision to change, live and get well for my children. Eventually, I learned how to do it for me.

I have been broken. Today, I know that God really loves me and sees the best in me. Be patient—sometimes you just have to close your eyes, breathe, be still and know that God is in control. Remember God has forgiven us and we are all His children. Don't give up!





Lauran W.

## MY NAME

Kellina

My whole life's been a rocky road.  
True love's been such a heavy load--  
Pain and strife took charge of me  
And no way would it set me free.

I've climbed mountains; I got lost.  
Often I paid more than the cost.  
Respect was not at all in store—  
For me. He'd beat me, call me "whore".

I ran away from home one night  
Good thing I did--we were gonna fight  
He said the forecast called for pain.  
He took away from me My Name.

I ran away and then came here,  
Not wanting to—I was full of fear.  
Now I have found, despite my past  
Finally someone cares at last.

## JUST BREATHE

*Dena Hankerson*

Silhouettes follow  
me. Shadows taunting  
me; daring me to run  
i stop  
instead paralyzed in fear.  
It's just a tree. I breathe.

Sudden sounds hit me  
jerking my body uncouthly  
i can't stop reliving  
what you have done to me  
that was 10 years ago...  
Breathe.

Salty flavors aesthetically pleasing  
appropriate no more, my buds  
register bitter blood, bashing of my  
flesh—i stop eating, appetite gone.  
You have 3 meals in your new home.  
Self talk, "I am alive. Breathe."

Socks torment me; I'm choking as i  
tried to breathe, should be worn on my  
feet to protect me...No one could that  
day you attacked me. i can't stop the  
hoarse hollers in my head. i want to  
scream out loud. I remember to breathe.

Savory smells assault me causing  
My head to pound--steaks sautéed onions  
i had the night you...and left me for dead.  
Self talk, "I am alive. Breathe."

## MY TESTIMONY 1

*Eva Silva*

You took my dreams; robbed me of my hope; tried to take my life...

Did you succeed? NOPE!

Reeled me in with just a toke; eventually, my spirit broke.

Kept me believin' all your lies; I saw the truth with my own eyes.

Numbed my heart and made it cold.

Kept tempting me, thinkin' I would fold.

I worked for you-- the devil's deeds.

Anything to fill the people's needs.

Fallen angels and many lost souls  
with no direction, dreams or goals.

Convinced that good does not exist.

Committing crimes, taking all the risks.

Taking over my mind with your evil thoughts.

Surrounded by death as bodies rot.

There is no trust amongst your kind.

I search my soul; my Lord I find.

I've given up. I have no strength.

I pray the Lord my soul to take.

He saves me from my living hell.

It may take time but I'll soon be well.

My mortal soul is barely alive.

He gives me hope, a reason to thrive.

Once the devil's slave,

now he's no longer my master.

Getting high, slangin' dope, my addiction--my disaster.

No longer tempted to get high.

To that dark cold world I said goodbye.



Nicolle Johnson

## ABUSE

Lunetta

I was in an abusive relationship for 7 years. He was the father of my son. He used to beat me until I was blue in the face. I finally woke up after having my first child and I found a different kind of love, an unconditional, everlasting love.

In January 2011 told my son's father that I was done with him for good. Later that day, I was driving and realized I was being followed by my now ex boyfriend. He was trying to run me down. I had my toddler in the car and I didn't know what to do, so I drove to the police station and scared him off. Since he was no longer following me, I didn't go into the police station. Guess you could say I didn't want to make matters worse. Little did I know this was just the beginning.

Next, he started calling my phone screaming and yelling, "I want to see my son". Since this was nothing new to me, I constantly hung up the phone. Soon he found where I was and started following me again. So I decided to give up the fight and drop our son off to him. I thought that would resolve the problem at hand. When I got in front of his house, he got out of his vehicle and demanded that I take his son out of the car seat. I called his mother for help. She came out and tried to calm him down. Upon opening the back seat driver's side door, he reached into the car and hit me in the face.

When his mother tried to stop him, he pushed her to the ground. He did all of this while our son was in his mother's hands. He continued to beat me while our son watched him. After he was done, he snatched the keys to my car from the ignition, got into his vehicle and drove off leaving me stranded, with a black eye and our son. I called the police. The ambulance showed up along with the police.

Now a year later, he sits in Milwaukee County jail on a habitual battery case. He did not get charged breaking the restraining order I had on him for four years. For all he had done, he only was sentence to four months. He left a scar on me that will damage me for a lifetime—not physically but mentally.

He didn't love me. He didn't care. Please don't confuse these two precious things. We have to love and care about ourselves enough to stand up and say, "that's enough." Now is the time to wake up and understand this abusive lifestyle is not the way to continue to live. No restraining order, police officer or abuse advocate can make him stop abusing you. You have to be strong enough to put an end to the abuse. Don't continue to be a victim. His abuse does not mean he loves you. I thought that way, too.

You can't make someone love you for all it's worth. We need to love ourselves. Coming to prison has helped me in many ways. I am able to know my self worth and not take so many things for granted. I know that I am a child of God and that He loves me. His love is the only love I need at this moment. Know that someone loves you and that someone is God!



Jennifer Malone

# letting go of hate...

## MY TESTIMONY 3

*Eva Silva*

Some people look at me and all they see are scars.  
Been a rebel all my life; now I'm locked behind bars.  
Forever covered in scars, I was burned at two.  
Beaten repeatedly, but no one ever knew.  
Took control of my emotions to maintain power...  
Then was raped repeatedly, 'til my heart turned sour.  
Scared to death, but never speaking a word--  
Screaming for help, my voice was never heard.

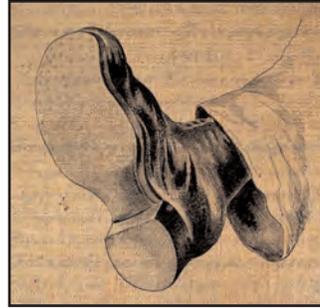
This whole time I was being laughed at in school,  
because my body was burned and the kids were cruel.  
Returning home to be tortured and abused  
I felt worthless as a child...only born to be used.  
Treated like an animal; living in hell  
Finally speaking up, then told, "Shhh! Don't tell!"

Expected to respect authority and the law--  
You wouldn't respect shit if you had seen what I saw.  
My childhood was stolen at such a young age  
Took a long time to forgive and yet my heart is still filled with rage  
Every day that man lived, I wished for his death  
I never would have guessed that I'd one day turn to meth.  
I also drank alcohol and sometimes smoked pot.  
Eventually blessed with motherhood, this cell is all I got.

I can't break the cycle if I'm locked in jail  
and I love my children dearly so I gotta break this spell  
They deserve better than the life I had to live  
They deserve the Best of all God has to Give.

I'm getting right with God  
I'm getting my life straight  
I'm finally moving on because  
I'm letting go of hate.

# I give it a kick...



## TESTIMONY

*Brenda*

My story is a journey of self -discovery, pain and most gratefully, forgiveness. At sixteen years of age, I was raped and repeatedly for some years. You may ask, “Why not report it?” Well, when your own family does nothing, why would anyone else. Instead, I became angry and very hateful. For 12 years I simmered until my hate became rage. So powerful was this emotion that in fact, it helped me become a strong-minded and strong-willed woman. I have strength of character about right and wrong that humbles me, for you see, I have it because Jesus never left me. I feel so blessed in so many ways of my life. I am amazed I’m even able to write about it. Jesus says this is my healing journey.

For so long I never knew the feelings of love, kindness, understanding. I was busy hiding behind those emotions—giving them out yet never accepting them. One day, I just quit caring about how I treated others. I got lost in drug use. I started focusing my rage upon the one I felt was pure evil. I’ve done some really ugly things, yet nothing has touched me as the intentional hurt I gave to another. No matter what he had done, “the rape” never actually touched who I was until that day. That moment, when I hurt another living person out of vengeance or hurt or pain, I did it because I could. And that, my friend, damn near drove me crazy.

For years and God only knows for years, I thought of nothing except this man’s pain and suffering...of how great a joy I would have of hearing him scream. Yet, when I did I realized just what kind of hold that rape had on me--my own memories, my own hate, my own need to destroy that which hurt me. I felt like I had died; I could feel my soul weeping for the loss of goodness that day. No matter what he had done or how many times it happened, my love of Jesus kept me strong. Yet I turned away in a moment of hate.

I tell you, my sisters, in hate, pain and confusion one knows the mind of one who enjoys hurting other is torment enough. God sat me down with an addiction while I was in my vengeful state. With strength of soul He helped me overcome. To this day I have seen things that only faith can find, and I love myself as I do my neighbor.

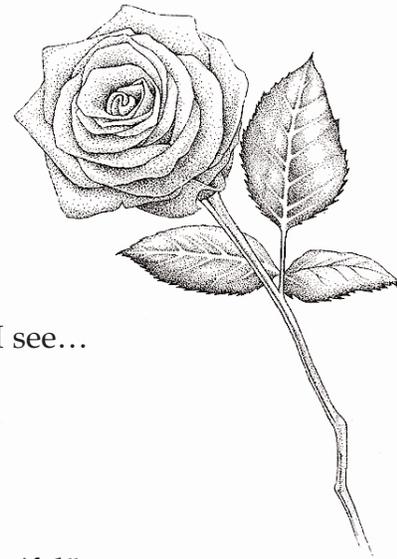
When Evil comes my way, God has given me a boot and it is attached to Jesus. I give it a kick and God does the rest. I leave it to Him.

I hope my story helps others. I’ve never felt a loss so great as when I let go of my faith.

## I AM BEAUTIFUL

Angela Thomas

*I am Beautiful* with my crooked smile and even  
when my hair stands on top of my head real wild...  
*I am Beautiful* with all my missing teeth,  
with bunions and corns on my feet...  
*I am Beautiful* with a jelly belly, a flat butt  
and all over my body are nicks, scratches and cuts...  
*I am Beautiful* because of the inner me--that's the beauty I see...



Beautiful is who I am; appearances are just a sham.

Beauty for me is a clean heart, a right spirit and a love  
for myself, others and God...

with this type of beauty I don't have to try real hard.

This is why I can declare proudly every day, "*I am Beautiful*"  
and mean it no matter what others may think or say...

So today, instead of wanting a nip here and a tuck there, trying to "fix" the outer you,  
May I suggest something else you can do?

Seek to beautify the inner woman with a right spirit and a clean heart...

Then you, too, will be able to boldly proclaim "*I am Beautiful*" and have no shame...



## FORGIVEN

Denise

My soul was heavy  
My sins were great  
I cried for understanding  
And to be relieved of all this hate.

I clasped my hands together  
And prayed the sinners prayer  
I begged for God's forgiveness  
And to show me that he cares

I felt my burdens lifting  
A calm to claim my heart  
I know I have eternal life  
From Christ I'll never part.  
Amen!

## GOODBYE DOPE, HELLO HOPE

*Lowantha*

I say goodbye to my addiction once and for all.  
Goodbye to all the things that made me feel so small.  
Goodbye to the crack, the blow, the alcohol and the weed.  
Goodbye to you all; you're no longer the things that I need.  
I thought Marijane would always be my friend.  
She was there at the beginning and still there in the end,  
But so many things came along the way.  
Alcohol was the next to make me stray.  
Then there was crack to my dismay...  
Although heroin was not far away.  
The speed, the pills, some things I've forgotten about  
That's why I needed to find a way out.

I'm tired of not knowing the things that I've done.  
It's so embarrassing to my parents and to my son.  
I'm tired of hiding while trying to get high.  
I'm tired of telling lie after lie.  
It gets me nowhere I want to be.  
I always end up alone with no one, just me.

My so-called friends don't want to change  
And because I do, they all think I'm strange.  
Most of my friends are liars, thieves and killers.  
But I kept them around, cause they were drug dealers.

For me it's over; I've found something else that is pure, good and true.  
Not only can it help me, but it can help others too.  
It was so simple and has been there all along.  
I just didn't want to do right; I was happy doing wrong.  
I asked for a second chance and it was readily approved.  
It's all up to me to make that move.  
I'm finally moving forward full steam ahead.  
No looking back; the past is dead.

Now I have a new friend  
His name is Jesus and His love has no end.  
With Him comes love, joy, peace and hope  
Maybe trials and tribulations, but no more dope.  
God gives me the strength to stand  
Against all the things of man and I'll never let go of His mighty hand  
Goodbye to my past of nothing but dope  
Hello to my future of nothing but hope.



LOVE  
JOY  
PEACE  
HOPE

## SPIRITUAL JOURNEY!

*Holly*

Wow! Where do I ever begin? I'm not going to start way back at the beginning like most of us so often typically do. Because One: I'd like to think that literally my real spiritual journey began in 2008. And Two: like most, I've come from a very unhealthy background in life's uncomfortable events and bits which at this time I choose not to exhume all over again. If indeed, it's all right with all of you? Cool!

I've already walked through those past occurrences and begun taking out all of the garbage on them. And by all means, along with full determination, to deal and heal them with all my new-found life's processing steps. See, spirit to me is the soul within life. It's my heart's and brain's breath--my entire existence of my thinking and feeling. All the inadequate unhealthy stuff all the way through to the very educated and wise, adequate, healthiness of Holly now--who she is really becoming. So, spiritual to me means breath which I've been given by a higher realm of existence. As I was told then, and as I am learning even more so now on my own, this means the ultimate existence of my savior Jesus Christ and Father.



My spiritual journey re-awakened by way of my broken state and me being badly scarred. I descended back to the state of comfort and love I'd once momentarily known. My background of Jesus was always an in and out transition in life. I had fallen victim to a world of addiction, promiscuousness, abuse and all around bad choices resulting in the loss of my children from my second marriage. I was broken and needed rescuing, true love, help and guidance to help me through this dysfunctional web of deception.

I walked into the church of a woman who had prayed over me recently in a public park. Just torn up, I was. I was so tired of this empty hurt inflicted upon me. From that particular prayer, I knew that I had to at least try to figure out all this Jesus Holy Spirit nonsense and change my thoughts so He could actually help change this horrible pattern I was spiraling into. I never knew or was ever really taught what a righteous, healthy life was supposed to even look like. I wasn't cut from that type of an understanding cloth.

I did know and realize one thing for sure—that Jesus died for me long ago. So there must be a better reassurance in that. When the preacher asked if anyone needed help and was struggling and ready to follow this Jesus guy to please stand up, I stood and I surrendered and raised my hands as they each put a hand on me while he prayed. I cried for Him to help me come to know Him. To help me answer and get through the dealing of and answering all the questions: Why did my husband beat me? Why did he touch our daughter sexually? How could the state take my kids?

My addiction was overpowering my daily life choices. I wanted to see what was important now--I mean really important. What are my morals and ethics? Where does my stability lie? So at that moment I began my faith walk and have been ever since. When I am weak, he is strong. He showed me the depth of what it means to be in my spiritual journey. A man loving me so much that he has laid out my life already and all I have to do is follow his instructions and gain insight. I'll forever have life through Him.

So, you see my newest friends, my time is now and all I can do is heal and chill. Living with the guidelines He has promised me and I'm personally comfortable in this. I can and will do all things through Him. Thank you!



Alexandria Smith

## SUNSHINE AND RAIN

*Alexandria Smith*

This picture captivates many different aspects of my life. My daughter's hands are holding the crystal ball...she has no idea the power that she possesses over my life! It's as simple as someone on the outside looking in as a spectator.

I'm tired yet strengthened by forces way beyond myself. I've fought my battles, and as a result I have become sober.

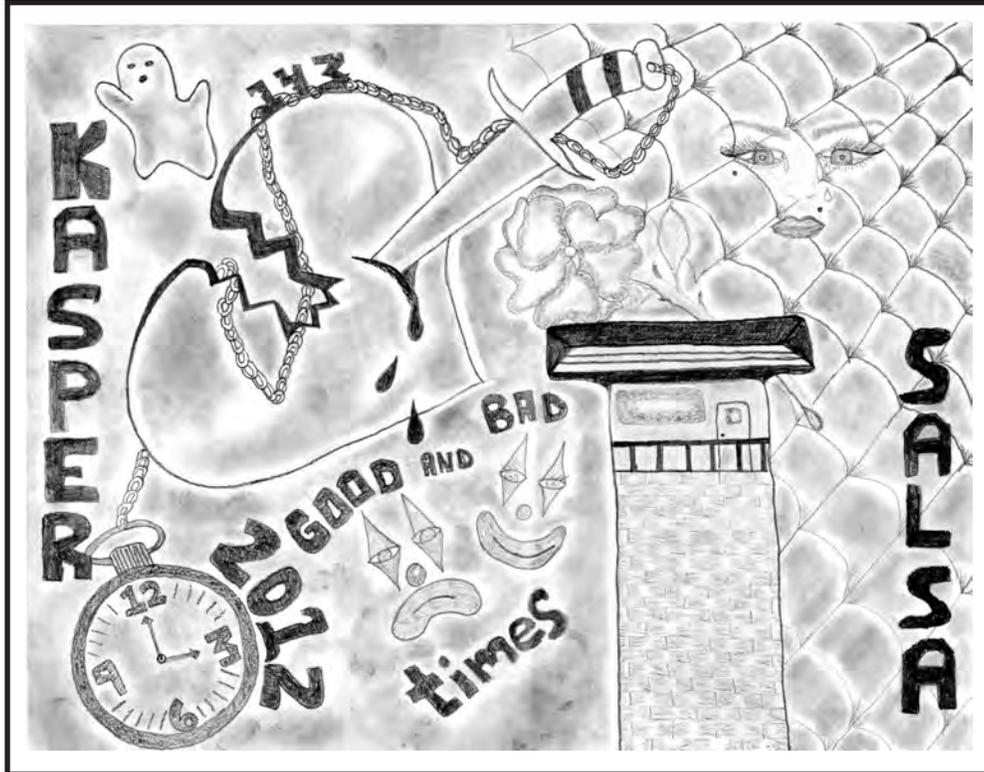
The symbolism of the rain is all the tears I've shed through my many years of abuse and incarcerations...however, I'm still above the wake. It has not clenched its fists around me yet.

The mountain lion represents the beast of addiction and dysfunction that I battle in the shadows of my heart. The bars are the times I have spent in and out of institutions.

The sun and moon represent the times of heartache that have passed through the days and nights of my life.

I still prevail. I am a survivor.

All in all, this picture is joy and pain--sunshine and rain--the places that many of us find ourselves in during this journey we call life.



Tanya Baca

## WAS I FREE TO BE ME?

*Sheila A. Burr*

I had a house	--	yet I got drunk
I had a career	--	yet I got drunk
I was married	--	yet I got drunk
I had many friends	--	yet I got drunk
I ate at fancy restaurants	--	yet I got drunk
I owned a car	--	yet I got drunk
I chose my own clothes	--	yet I got drunk
I lived freely among society	--	yet I got drunk

I now live in a locked cell	--	yet I'm sober
The State supports me	--	yet I'm sober
I am divorced	--	yet I'm sober
Very few friends visit	--	yet I'm sober
I am told what I can eat	--	yet I'm sober
I walk to get around	--	yet I'm sober
I wear an inmate uniform	--	yet I'm sober
I am in prison surrounded by a fence	--	yet I'm sober

I have written this; I am now free to be me.

## ROYALTY

*Cassandra*

As I look, I see how my head was designed to wear a crown  
Not bragging, you see, it's not because of me  
That I'm joined by blood forever to Royalty

Created in His image, it's intended for me to walk in His symmetry  
Symbolic walking in His knowledge gave me understanding to unlock the mystery  
Of the wisdom I seek, the words I speak in faith and belief  
He has given that right because I walk in His light—full of love and heavenly delight  
Prepared to fight, making the enemy flee from my sight!

I come in Jesus' name standing in His redeeming fame  
There is no shame, I proclaim undefeated, seated--with Jesus  
Perpetually growing circumspectly of the world that surrounds me  
Full of perpetrators, haters, traitors of the One who lives.

There's none greater than the heavenly creator  
Who is the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega  
The one who died, yet lives

You see me; you see Him. That's what I was created to be--  
A Kingdom Kid. That's right, a child of the King  
I'm Royalty in a never ending dynasty!



## IN TIME

*Barbara*

I needed to hear but would not listen.  
I needed to see but would not open my eyes.  
I needed to love but hid my heart.  
I needed to ask but would not talk.  
To relieve this pain, I must wait, and with waiting  
Is taught patience.

With patience I have learned respect.  
With respect I have learned understanding.  
With understanding I have gained patience.  
With these things I have gained You, Lord  
The most important of all.

Hold on tightly to what you cannot touch.  
Love deeply that which you cannot feel.  
Don't lose sight of what you cannot see  
For by doing these things You are with me.

# Y

## *Adrenna*

When that judge took four years of my life  
It wasn't the end;  
It was just a sacrifice.  
I've had time to think of the choices that I made doing crimes  
Thinking I was getting paid.  
I'm almost out, but I still wonder;  
How do I maintain to keep from going under?  
They say make a meeting  
Or call a friend.  
That will be my future or until my life comes to an end.  
That's ok; I'll be sober and clean  
Getting on with my life,  
Keeping my memory green.  
Using the steps to get me higher  
Knowing it's God; He got the power  
From this day I pray I wake up, feeling this way  
Although my life was intervened  
It put me in a place with  
Harsh, cruel, and mean people.  
Today I understand why my life took such a turn  
So that my soul wouldn't go to hell and burn!



Tanya Baca

## A NEW HEART

*Sheila*

A sponge and a rock are placed into a fish tank filled with water to illustrate the different influence of the water on rock and sponge. When the rock is removed, it is wet on the outside, but when cracked open it remains dry and hard on the inside.

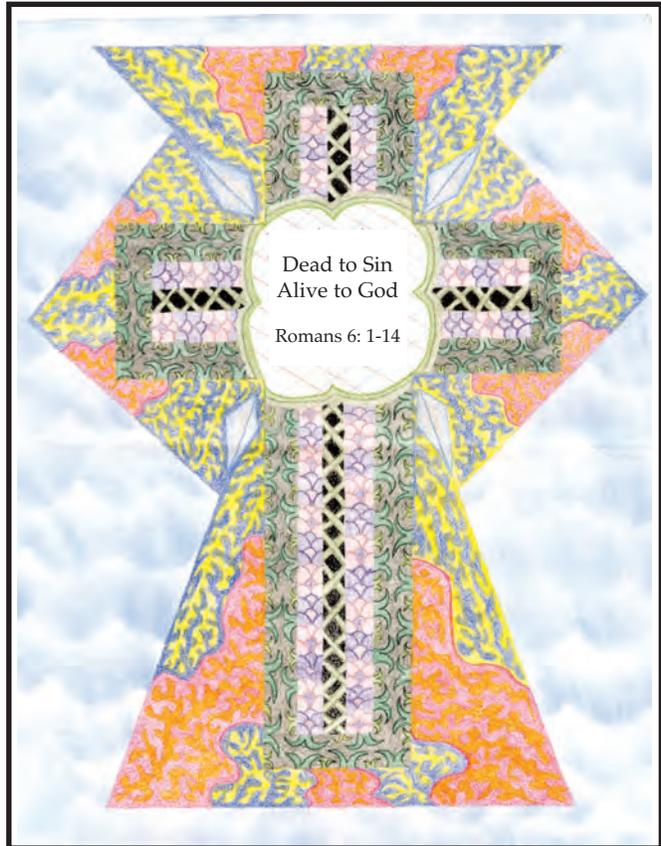
The sponge, however, absorbs the water all the way through. It is completely wet and brings water with it to soak whatever it touches.

We may have hearts of rock and stone—we may be under the influence of God at church and even feel the living water touch and bless us, but deep inside, we remain dry and brittle.

God wants to change our hearts, no matter what circumstance has hardened them. God will replace them with compassionate hearts that forgive. We must guard against things that wound and harden our hearts. Unforgiveness and sin can enter our spirits and steal our joy, love, strength, or authority. A bitter, hardened heart has no room for the Holy Spirit.

A prepared heart welcomes His presence. The Lord wants us to have strong hearts according to His heart.

A humble heart that is surrendered to God is full of joy, worship, and passion for the will of the Lord.



Stephanie Pascual Ramirez

## REFLECTION ON HOPE

*Natasha Hodge*

Even though I am currently serving a 15 year sentence for defending myself from an extremely abusive boyfriend, I have hope.

Though my family has completely abandoned me in my darkest hours, I have hope.

Though Kansas state law says I must be punished for not allowing this man to take my life, I continue to have hope.

Jesus gives me that hope and unshakable comfort. When man turns his back on me—my Father never leaves me. Getting strong in faith doesn't come overnight, but it does come.

Jesus is working on your behalf and mine.  
Stay with Him.



## UNTITLED

*Dollie Ann*

Once I was a drug addict who lived my life in shame.  
Never had a friendship or anything to gain.  
Inside I was so helpless I shed so many tears.  
I spent most my time in a jail cell not too far from here.

When the time came for me to see my kids  
I was too high and would forget how much they meant.  
Yes, drugs were number one and that was all I did.  
I wish I could go back and change the life I lived.  
I would never ever put drugs before my kids.  
And I would have a shoulder that they could cry upon.  
Yes, I am a mother who's pardoned and forgiven  
Because of God the Father  
Who died and now  
He lives.

## TESTIMONY

*Jacqueline*

I am 47 years old. What I know today is the truth. I was sexually abused from a young age and for many years. I used drugs to cover up my ungodly pain. This led me to the prison system and the prison of the mind. This is my fourth and last time in prison.

I had to get intimate with Jesus and be stripped down to nothing. God revealed the truth to me and taught me how to ask for forgiveness and to forgive others. God will use our weaknesses for His glory.

Now I mentor teenagers and women who have been abused. I am an overcomer with the victory of the Lord. I am a chosen child of the most high God. And I have forgiven my abuser and I pray for him. Now I am flexible for the spirit of God to flow through my heart, mind, body and soul.

God's spirit will make us spiritual women of God. Sisters, it is time for women to pick up our crosses and lay our burdens at the cross of Jesus!



## I THANK YOU

*Barbara*

I thank you for my eyes...  
to see all the beautiful creations that You've given us.  
I thank you for my ears...  
to hear the peaceful sounds of birds singing, crickets chirping, children laughing.  
For my nose...to smell fresh clean morning air and to enjoy precious flowers  
For my hands...to hold and read your words  
For my feet...to walk the path that you have planned for me  
And I thank you for my mouth to sing your praises!

For my mind, Lord, to know the difference of the beauty of Your works  
from the pain sorrow and tragedies that we have created in our hearts and lives.

For the wisdom to now know that I have been given the power to turn it all around--  
All You ever wanted, all You ever needed, all You ever asked for  
was my love...which You had already paid for I thank You!

## HELP ME LORD

*Kira Vaughns*

Dear Lord,  
Help me, bless me with some understanding.  
I know at times I can be difficult and demanding.  
I'm trying to be strong here, but can you please meet me halfway!?  
Take away my worry and erase all my doubt.  
I know I don't always do what you want, but I promise you—I'm trying.  
I just don't understand why the people I love keep dying.

My son, the angel, is with you and you helped me when things got rough.  
But Lord, how many angels must you have for it to be enough?  
I know I'm not perfect and I will never be  
but I want the Holy Spirit to live and dwell in me.  
Teach me how to lighten my burdens.

Lord I feel you in my heart and soul  
I know you are real  
And I put my life in your hands  
Do with it what you will.



Jennifer Malone

## FROM A CACTUS TO A ROSE

*Wendy Trujillo*

Living in the hot sun just trying to survive  
With nothing to live on but the rain from the sky  
Don't touch me because I'll hurt you  
Don't caress me because I'll only make you bleed  
But if you break me, I might make you cry  
Late at night I have nothing to hold but the  
Weeds and they don't let go until morning comes and it's  
Time to say good-bye

Suddenly, I hear a voice from heaven  
"My precious, precious flower, why do  
You try so hard to be something you're not?"  
I say, "Whatever do you mean, my Lord?"  
"Well, you call yourself a cactus, but when  
I planted you, I planted a rose!"

## FREE AT LAST

*Joyce*

FROM:

.....monthly reports to my P.O.  
.....feeling like I'm unworthy  
.....the anxiety and fear that I might relapse  
.....restrictions to travel  
.....the guilt my crime created within me  
.....the night sweats, nightmares and sleepless nights

TO:

.....rely on my Higher Power to guide me  
.....believe I am worthy of forgiveness  
.....commit wholeheartedly to my recovery  
.....enjoy the present and build a positive future  
.....love and be loved  
.....be grateful for the blessings each day brings

I AM FREE TO SHARE THESE THOUGHTS WITH WOMEN LIKE MYSELF WHO WILL COMPLETE PAROLE AND BE FREE AT LAST TO MAKE POSITIVE CHOICES.



## I GO HIGH

*Whitney*

I go high to the highest heavens  
Laying before my Lord with my face  
To the floor of His beautiful kingdom.

In complete surrender  
Surrendering all that I thought was mine  
Surrendering what I know to be His  
Letting go my inability to be spiritual  
Embracing His power to connect me to  
The Truth

I am one with You  
I am one with Your son  
I am one with Your Spirit

I am whole.

## DESTINY

*Whitney*

This morning, had a meeting with destiny  
Plans I've dreamt of  
God has made come true

I sit back and watch as He unfolds  
My future  
And the future of those around me  
Evolving into the unimaginable

Evolving into dreams that once sprinkled  
A little girl eyes  
Dreams that took over her mind,  
Hoping and wishing but  
With the reality she lived it was just that,  
A dream.

It took 10 years later  
A death of a baby girl  
And a selfish young boy  
To see these dreams come to pass

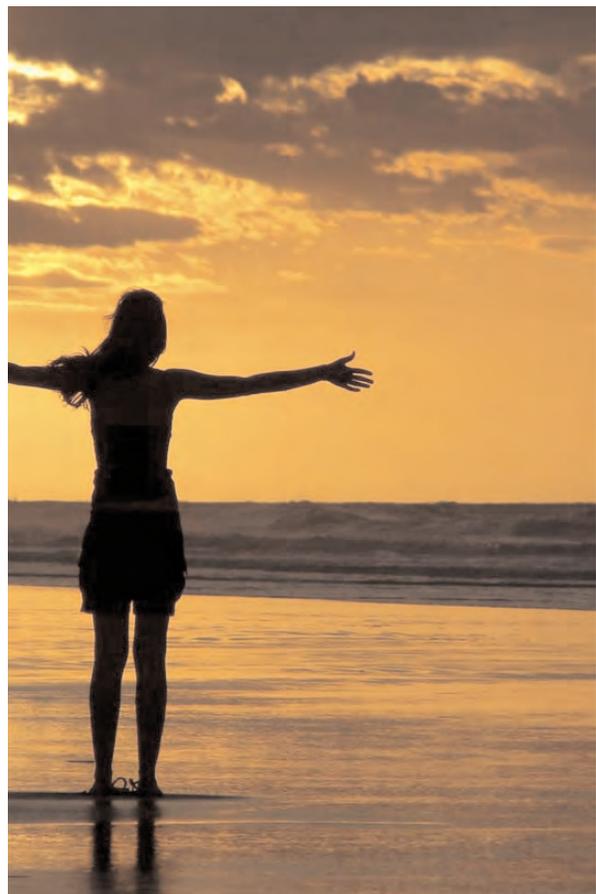
A call to her mother  
Yeah, the one that belittled her  
for more than half her life,  
to hear her say,  
*"I will support you anyway"*

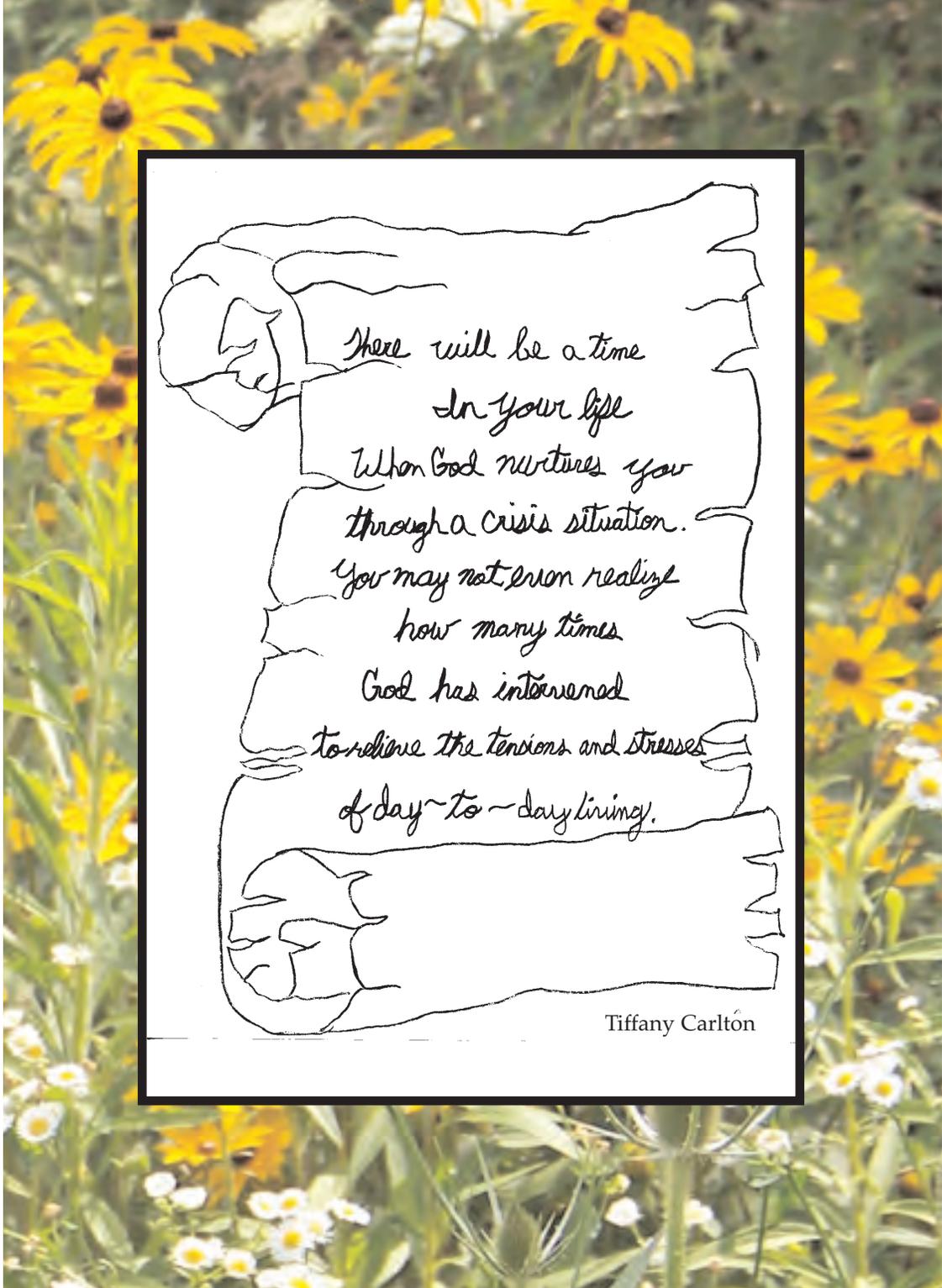
Those words were like the breast milk of  
A mother feeding her little boy

Relationship being reconciled  
All by the power of the blood  
New talents being discovered  
Purpose is known  
Finally, purpose is known

I am me!!!

What once was a scared little  
Girl  
Now set before you a found young  
Woman





There will be a time  
In your life  
When God nurtures you  
through a crisis situation.  
You may not even realize  
how many times  
God has intervened  
to relieve the tensions and stresses  
of day-to-day living.

Tiffany Carlton

## I AM BEAUTIFUL

*Stacy*

*I am Beautiful...*

because God made me who I am.

*I am Beautiful...*

because in all my wrong doing, I cleared a  
fault that made me grow.

*I am Beautiful...*

because my addiction showed me I am better than I have treated myself.

*I am Beautiful...*

because I beat life up and life didn't beat me up.

*I am Beautiful...*

because I ran with the devil, but I didn't sell my soul to the devil.

*I am Beautiful...*

because I have three beautiful girls that show me who I should be,  
not what I used to be.

*I am Beautiful...*

because I lived my life, then God saved me to say

*I am beautifully made.*



## MAY THE SUN

*Rosa*

May the sun

Bring you new energy by day

May the moon

Softly restore you by night

May the rain

Wash away your worries

May the breeze

Blow new strength into your being

May you walk gently through the world

And know its beauty

All the days of your life.



# *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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