



I Am Beautiful



A Survival Resource
Created by and for Women



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



Published by
DISMAS
MINISTRY
PO Box 070363
Milwaukee, WI 53207

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With Gratitude

We are deeply grateful to all the women in prisons across the country who so graciously opened their hearts and shared their thoughts and experiences of sorrow and joy through their poetry, stories and art. Their willingness to share is in itself an act of courage, in the face of all that they have survived. This book and their contributions are their gift to their companions on the unfolding journey of life. This book concludes with a *Special Tribute* on the last page to the woman who inspired this project.



Our Logo

We have chosen the *Rose* as our logo,
inspired by the words of a woman
who contributed to this work:

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

The Cover Art

Thank you to Denyce Marovich for her beautiful painting of the mother holding her child. She created this while incarcerated. Let it stand for all who hold themselves as precious and worthy of dignity and respect, first of all, in God's eyes who created them unique and beautiful, then in their own eyes as God's child, and finally in the eyes of all others before whom they stand as tall and beautiful as a fragrant rose!

Special Thanks

We are grateful to Shaina Noll for permission to reproduce her song "How Could Anyone" ("...ever tell you you were anything less than beautiful") from her CD "Songs for the Inner Child." © Singing Heart Productions 2002 - 2010

I Am Beautiful

Let us broadcast words of healing...

Let us take a handful of words and scatter them...as seed;

Some of these words will fall on the path
as we journey through this life

Some of these words will fall in the rocky places
when we are going through hardships

Some of these words will help us overcome the prickly thorns
that try to choke and suppress our joy

Some will fall into the goodness of our hearts
and transform our thinking

Then, we choose and take the responsibility
for the words we allow into our consciousness-
and the words we sow into the consciousness of others

Think beautiful words within
Then, spread them all around

Denise



Senses

*Look into my eyes,
know what you'll see?
Tears and pain
buried in the blackest deep.
Kiss my lips,
know what you'll taste?
Bitterness and envy
left by a past lover's haste.
Touch my hands,
know what you'll feel?
Emptiness and cold
(emanating) from the body revealed.
Listen to my heart,
know what you'll hear?
Love and passion,
lost amongst the bloody fear.
Enter my body,
know what you'll penetrate?
Death and destruction,
surrounded by lustful hate.
Pick up my scent,
know what you'll smell?
Lies and deceit,
flowing from the pit of hell.
Search for my soul,
know what you'll find?
Misery and sorrow,
remnants of me that's left behind.
Test my faith,
know what you'll discover?
Truth and peace,
God's love for me lasts forever!*

Stephanie



Just Some Days

I thought about what I wanted to say and choked back the words.
I looked into your eyes, though you were merely an imaginary image,
I concocted so I could practice the words just right.
Your eyes showed disinterest and I studied you sitting there as I spoke,
pretending to want to care. I know you didn't dare!
Dare to take an interest in someone like me, who freely talks of self-pain,
joys, ups and downs and my life victories.
Yes, you so easily say how you are my friend,
a friend who has been so close I smell your breath,
so near your presence often overpowers,
so inseparable we've been, yet I feel so distant from you.
I ask myself as I look into your eyes,
what about me scares you, that you are afraid to embrace all my sides?
What about me is so deep, you can't seem to reach?
Why, when I look into your eyes, which are mine,
while looking into a mirror, I cry because I don't have the answers
to why I don't love myself...
JUST SOMEDAYS.

Dena



Full Circle

Mastectomy, left breast cut from me.
Chemo running through my veins.
I'm incarcerated-hooked to cuffs and chains.
Long before, I cut off my life.
Ripping the streets causing strife.

Smoking, selling Dope and Hips.
Fighting, writing checks, talking bogus shit.
Abusive relationships, a part of the grime.
That's the mentality of an immature mind.

I've been abusive as well as abuse received.
I don't look in the mirror, trying to deceive-
Who I was-What I'd become.
A disgrace to my family-no good to my daughter and son.

Being nickel slick, feverish, foolish.
Masquerading to be bigger than I was.
Now I pay the price-trying to be nice.
Regretting things I've done.

I can't be the victim for I was fully in control.
I stayed in dysfunctional relationships that raped my soul.
I did the drugs-unprotected sex for cash on most days.
Being locked on the inside is a price I must pay.

Full circle of hurting those I knew and didn't matter no more.
The object for today is to learn to move forward.
Prison is where I now lay my head,
This is also where foolishness shall be shed.

Dena



Innocence Goodbye

- I. Hush, Daddy's the mockingbird, so what you learn, incest is the word.
- II. Officials say, "Don't hold secrets, tell." You try. Expect intimidation, humiliation...he'll make you to be the one telling the lie.
- III. Everyone know daddys rock their daughters to sleep. He isn't that "stranger danger" man we claim to be a creep.
- IV. Daddy protects, provides and in the community he's the one who does his duty; he doesn't have his hand under the blanket touching your bootie.
- V. Daddy buys rocking horses, kittens for the family pet. He's not putting hard, hairy un-purring things in your hand saying, "Kiss it."
- VI. Everyone wants to be a family, so don't tell; or off they will cart him to the nearest jail. Worst part is mama will stand by his side, again confirming it's you telling the lie.
- VII. Hush little scary bird. What will you do, knowing incest is the word? Better hold this secret, telling the officials you hurt between your legs from falling off your bike; because eventually he'll be back in, to tuck and kiss you good night.

Dena





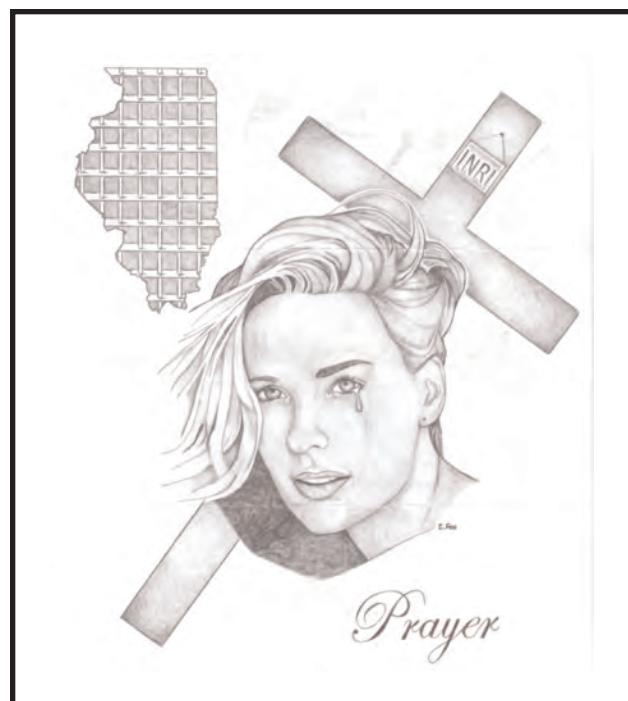
Why Am I Incarcerated?

*One day I woke up
And I was there
Locked in a cell
And no one to care.
Bologna sandwiches
Were being passed out
In my mind I wonder
When will I get out?
What did I do to deserve
This hellhole of a cell?
No window, just feeling blue
I want to be free
Just like you.
Freedom ring, ring now
I cannot do time.
I do not know how
What did I do to be here?
That makes my eyes water up with tears.
I had to wake up
I'm here
Sir, could you tell me why I am incarcerated?
Don't you understand?
I want out of here
Why am I incarcerated?*

Sonia
I Feel It Now

I am a little girl lost
I am a scared and broken woman
I am the victim of a horrible crime
I am an inmate doing time
I am terrified of many things
I am facing my demons
no matter how much pain it brings
I am six years old, lost alone
I am twenty-nine still searching for a home
I am fighting with my inner child
I am boiling with rage
I am watching as she kicks and screams
I am embracing her, we start to bleed
I am slowly healing
I feel it now
No longer is it just a dream.

Tiffaney



Fallen Angel

Mama said, “Don’t talk to strangers,”
but when I looked in the mirror
I knew that I was in danger.
Like a cage made of steel
My eyes were cold and gray
from wounds that just wouldn’t heal.
I put on masks to hide my pain.
Bold and vivid; color me bad
Alcohol and promiscuity were their names
I fell from grace, bound for hell.
Once my daddy’s “doll baby”
Always a fallen angel.

Sandra



Confusion

What is it that I have done to feel so lost inside?
Why must this pain be so tormenting that my soul I must not hide?
Confusion is nothing new when all lost reasons lead back to you



I have done things wrong and paid the time
I have lost my life for this unfair crime
I never meant for any of this to ever go wrong
I never thought I'd wander through an endless entwining throng

What can I do to fix the mistake that I have made?
Why must I continue to do the things that are forbade?
Confusion is nothing new when all lost reasons lead back to you

I no longer know what it is that I must do
I no more want to hurt the life inside of you
I wish only to make it right
I wish that this were a brand new life

What is it I must say to help you understand?
Why can I not get out of this empty deserted wasteland?
Confusion is nothing new when all lost reasons lead back to you.

Stephanie

“Long Years”

Nights and days filled with heart felt sorrow,
Years and years spent looking for tomorrow;
A spot inside that seems as empty as a bottomless hole,
Which at times seems to engulf your entire soul!

Lost within yourself as each new day begins,
Waiting for the moment that the new day will end;
Searching for some peace that you can never find,
Often feeling like you may soon lose your mind!

Fighting over things that doesn't even matter,
Listening to senseless and endless chatter;
Dealing with people who will stab you in the back,
While wondering how long your patience will last!



Trying to hold on to hope and faith as if they were your only friends,
Looking forward to the day this nightmare may end;
Counting the days, the months, even the long years,
'Til some joy in your life will replace your tears!

Holding on to memories that must help you make it through,
Longing for the day your life will once again belong to you;
For those of you who think you understand,
I say you must first walk a thousand miles in the shoes of this woman!

Still Breathing

"Shut up! If you say one more word, I'm pulling the trigger. Always nagging, running your mouth. You're so stupid! No one will ever want you!"

This was the normal occurrence during my teenage marriage to my first husband, which lasted a grueling four years. After our second son was born, I became aware of the torment this could generate on them. I had a decision to make.

My first thought was to kill my husband. My second thought was to run. Leave him and hope he didn't kill me. After a tearful, lengthy night of prayer, I packed our belongings quickly, bundled up two babies and headed to my mom's. This is where I strived to regain my self worth.

Enrolling in Cosmetology school, while working at night. I started to value myself again. The divorce was granted and I completed school. I thought for sure I was well on my way to a better life for my boys and me.

I met my second husband not even a year later, producing our daughter. He was a good man, husband and father at first. The problem was that he was a drug addict who disguised it well for a while. Problems began to arise with money missing, arguing all the time and the stress of possibly going through another divorce. I didn't want that. I became depressed, and thoughts of suicide, thinking how could I let this happen again.

Searching for something, anything that would make me numb and forget about the troubles that surrounded me. I began abusing pain pills, then cocaine. Often times I would go out partying where I met a lot of new people that lead me to cheat on my husband with anyone that made me feel special or important telling me I was beautiful.

I left my second husband, moved back in with my mom, taking my two boys and daughter with me. Hoping again to regain my self worth and get professional help. I became even more depressed, feeling like a double failure now. The addiction became worse, unbearable for me and my family.

One day I woke up, told my mom I was going to the store for cigarettes and that I'd be right back, this way I wouldn't have to take the kids. They could stay there with her. I didn't come back. I took off, just left to rid them of this terrible person I became hell bent on destroying myself.

I used any kind of drug I could get my hands on. Mainly crack and powder cocaine. I used and used until I would pass out. This is when I allowed myself to be taken by a man who offered an endless supply of dope in exchange for sex. I didn't care, all I wanted was to go deeper and deeper in my addiction until the ground swallowed me whole. I was no

good to anyone.

Continued...

The price I was to pay became higher and more costly. I now had to have sex with other men for money which was given to my, well, pimp. I was physically beaten everyday by this man. During this time I received three broken ribs, many fat lips and black eyes. I was choked unconscious twice and he even tried to stab me. I ran away in the early morning hours one day to escape him only to be found two days later. Him, holding a tire iron in one hand threatening my friend that was with me, I surrendered and went with him.

It didn't end there. You see in the game sometimes you're expected to prove yourself, especially after pulling a stunt like I did, trying to leave. In order to prove my loyalty, I had to accompany this man (my pimp) in a home invasion of a customer who tried to rob him two weeks earlier, as payback. The victim was beat and I thought my boyfriend killed him. By the grace of God, he survived. We ran from the law, hiding out from place to place for three days. Roadblocks were set up. Helicopters flew above us and K-9 units were on the ground.

"They found us!" That was the last I remember hearing from my now co-defendant. Laser beams pointed at my body, a dog breathed heavily at my calf muscle ready to attack on command. My hands were brought above my head and pressed against a metal pole in front of me, until a handcuff slapped around my right wrist. My arm slung down forcefully behind my back. The left arm followed and then another slap of a cuff connected them together.

I should be afraid, crying, yelling, fighting, something knowing I will probably spend the rest of my life in prison, but all I could do is breathe.

For the first time in years I can breathe. It's over! I'm safe, saved from myself, and this man.

I've been incarcerated going on four years. I have six more to go, and I'm alive! More than physically I'm alive mind, body and spirit. Thank you God.

I asked God to forgive me of my sins and He washed me clean. I forgive myself and I forgive my co-defendant.

I am finally living again. Sometimes being inside these prison walls can be exactly what you need, to find who you really are. I have contact with all three of my children, my mom, and the rest of my family and I'm still breathing.

Shelley



The Storm

A storm is coming. I'm standing alone in the middle of a field. Blades of long, dead grass, the color of wheat, whip against my legs. Darkness surrounds me, while clouds roll fast encircling me. Thunder rumbles loud and deep in the distance. I'm being blown off balance by strong gusts of wind. The nightgown I wear thrashes against my body, stinging as it hits. I look up and see buildings crumble. Everything begins to fall, self-destruct. The world around me is chaotic. I can't move. All I can do is watch for what seems like an eternity.

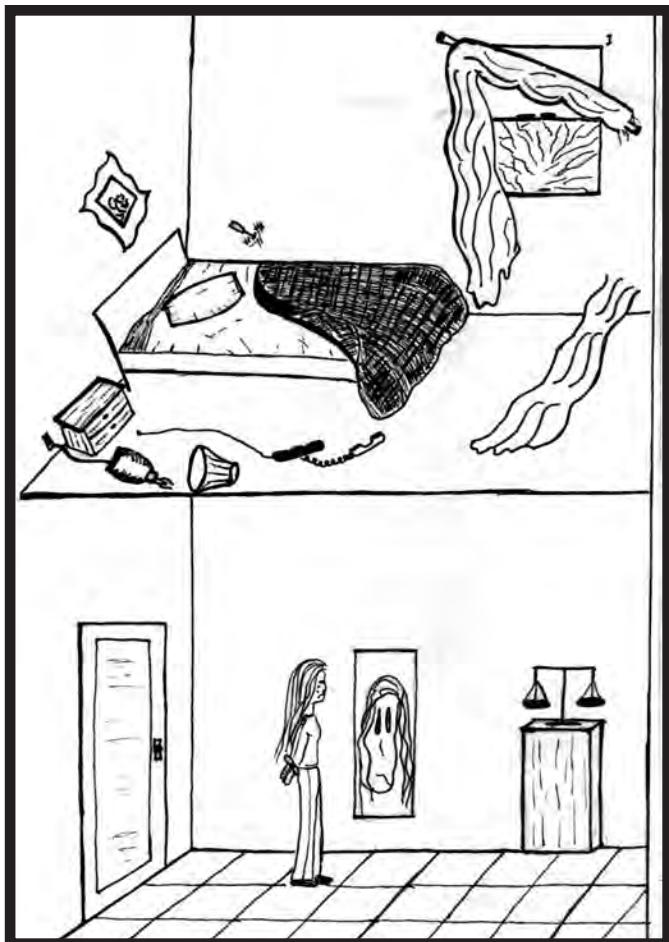
Unexpectedly, everything flashes yellow. I see nothing but the flicker of an illuminating light gradually growing brighter, until it becomes solid white. I feel a sense of warmth and tranquility. So soothing to my restless mind where, from just a moment ago, I was witnessing panic, shock and horror of what was happening around me. I'm happy and content right here in this moment of peace.

Suddenly, the stillness of life is invaded. Air is thrust into my mouth. No, stop, it's too much. I silently scream. I fight to maintain my slow, barely recognizable breathing, still more air rushes into my lungs, choking me. I began to cough as my face receives the force of someone slapping me, calling my name.

Who is it? What do they want? My eyes flutter open, as I stare into the eyes of the monster who first caused the storm. He breathes life back into my lungs. Awakening me to return to his world. I try so hard not to move. Slowly I look around. The room I am in is a disaster with overturned furniture, broken and mangled. Curtains ripped from their place. The phone was on the floor, a buzzing sound radiating from it, no longer on the receiver. A screwdriver stuck in the wall beside where I lay. This I remember was the weapon found closest to me that I tried to use to defend myself. Only to have his massive hand slam it into the drywall right before he choked me.

This was an incident of physical abuse from my boyfriend. He is the monster, who choked me unconscious after an argument escalated. I fought him at first with all my might, then gave in when a feeling came over me that offered peace. I didn't want to fight anymore.

I've had many storms attack me even after this incident. The day I was arrested, my life changed. It is now my own. Free of abuse and addiction by force of incarceration, saved my life. I'm returning to the beautiful woman I was, before men and drugs consumed me. Today, I walk with Jesus, instead of having him carry me along the way.



Shelley

Before I Found Me

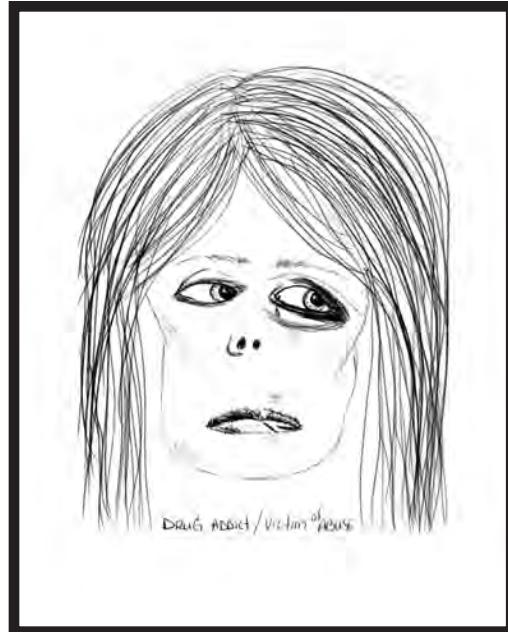
Born loved
Grew up happy
Married trouble, became...

Withdrawn self
Depression, no feeling
Addicted to drugs, lost...

A prostitute
Body broken, dirty
Unable to...

Beat down
Darkness everywhere
Hate, revenge for...

Praying please
Suffer no more
End the...



Shelley

We will thrive and persevere...

My beauty is subtle,
An unpretentious realism,
Resilience is my forte.

Such solace to find myself sensitive,
consistent, still,
after all I have endured.



I am who I am for intention
I will soar upon ambition
with triumph in my eyes.

Jessica

One Day

I once knew a man, sexy and strong
He would never let anything go wrong
 Always thoughtful and kind
 Wouldn't think of leaving me behind
 So confident and caring
 Kept all other men from staring
 A face so handsome
 Worth any amount of ransom
 A truly amazing lover
Even got the approval of my mother
 I couldn't believe I'd found
 A good man all around
His beautiful eyes and warm embrace
 I'd never been in a safer place
 So charming and sweet
 My life felt so complete
 Then one day
 It started to fade away
 He would take a drink
 And I was afraid to blink
A more and more frequent user
He became an aggressive abuser
 A self-centered liar
Who'd do anything to get higher
 He could manipulate
 In ways I can't articulate
 He was such a cheat
Always another woman under the sheet
 We would fight
 Right through the night
 His violence
 Forcing my silence
 "It's just the cocaine"
 I'd tell myself
 "A temporary insane,
 Tomorrow he'll be himself"
 With all the fear
 I shed a tear
As I looked in the mirror
 I begged to see clearer
 Could it be true?
Am I really black and blue?
 His addiction has a cure
 Mine I must forever endure
Oh my heart, he placed an affliction
 He is, my one true addiction



Jesus Is Inside Your Soul!

Stand up and face the mirror,
and in all you will see a beautiful
person, a hero, something more
peaceful within.

Look deeply inside the window.
The window inside your soul.
Release the object you hold onto,
let it escape then be still.
Wait for God to say, "Go".

Discover the beauty inside of you.
Wrap your arms around it tightly.
Hold on to the calmer things and
rock with it all night long.

Encompass the air around you a
nd the beauty that enfolds.
Listen to the whispers directing you.
His words will never lead you wrong.

Minister the words of Jesus.
Moderate your body, mind, spirit and
soul. Stand up and face the mirror.
Stop, look, and listen...Adore.

Search no more cause
Jesus is inside your soul.

Patricia



One More Day

Lord are you listenin'?
What's it gonna take?
I'm lyin' to myself thinkin'
I ain't gonna break,
You give me strength
but I find it hard to bear,
The image I should represent
just doesn't seem too fair,
Take me by the hand before I
completely crumble in doom,
Penetrate this heart of steel
that follows me room to room,
You're it, that's all,
what else is there to say?
Without you I am nothing,
no point in one more day.

April



My Fault

You shattered my emotions as you beat me in my face,
Took the virginity I harbored; left my world without a trace,
A trace of the big brother I grew to love so,
Mentally broken, your anger took its toll,
Year after year you convinced me that I was to blame,
That I deserved the abuse that brought me to shame,
That when I looked in the mirror I saw the black eyes,
Or woke up in the dirt from the glare of the sunrise,
That it was my fault.

Each penetration grew increasingly bold,
My heart pounding in my head made my blood run cold,
Your sweat dripping down my nose and my chin,
The emptiness I felt as you thought your would win,
The blood from my mouth and in between my legs,
The screams and flying fists that followed the begs,
You said it was my fault,

As I shut myself down and let the tears roll,
God wrapped His arms around me and overtook my soul,
Gave me the strength to keep pushing through,
The pain that overwhelmed everything you'd do,
He helped me see the light in my darkest of days,
Gave my future sight in an unrelenting haze,
He showed me how to forgive everything you done,
And that even though you sinned, you too were His son,
Taught me how to love you when I really didn't care,
Made me the woman I am, beautiful and rare,
Because of Him I can say "*thank you*" for turning my world upside down,
You may have stood over my lifeless body
but it was He who lifted me from the ground.

It wasn't my fault.

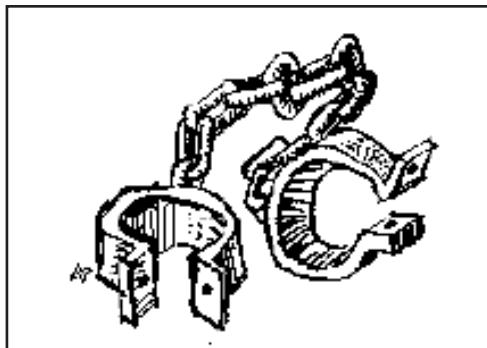
April



Truly Free

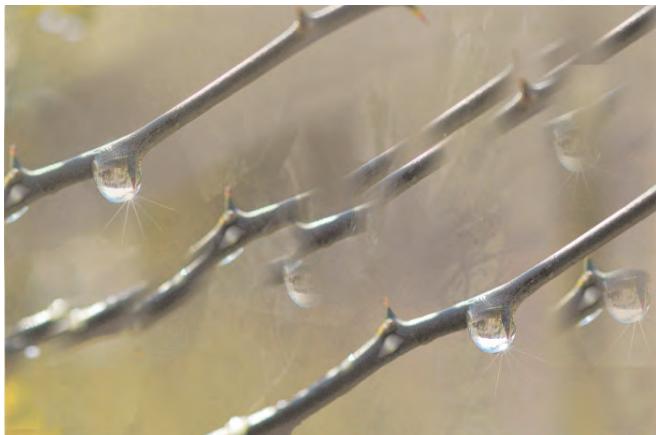
I walked through my life scared and battered
Hated myself, I did not matter.
No self respect, self-love, anger, rage,
Confusion and fear...
No one to help me through the toughest years.
Tears shed, my heart broken, hurting myself,
Pushing everyone away.
I did not want to live another day
Now another state bid
And no loved ones in my life.
I was at my lowest
Wanted to take my own life.
Needless to say God had other plans for me
He opened my eyes to help me see.
I am beautiful. I am smart.
I am loving and giving.
I have so much potential
And my life is so worth living!
I have humbled myself
With what little I have.
I am thankful to be alive
Take everyday with a stride.
I have God's love
That's all I need.
Today I love myself
And I am truly free.

Amy



Untitled

The rain is falling
down to the ground outside,
While gray clouds cover
the early morning sky;
I would love to feel the
rain drops caress my face,
While the wind wrapped
me in a gusty embrace.



Drop after drop
the rain continues to fall
While I'm stuck inside
behind these block walls;
As the rain picks up force
I watch it bounce on the ground,
Yet behind these walls
there is no sound.

I long for a taste of freedom
to stand out in the rain,
To escape this place for a moment
and get out of these chains;
I know in time I will
once again see that day,
When these walls and these
chains won't be in the way.

For now I must endure this place
while each rain drop falls,
Yet life will not always have me
stuck behind these walls;
Soon I'll be able to run
in the rain and chase the wind,
I'll have the chance to live
my life to the fullest once again.

Oh, what a great moment
in life that is sure to be,
When I can taste the rain
while running free!

Stephanie

Wearing the Attire



Wearing the attire
I have on green
So does another Seven
Hundred and Eleven others
Every bodies wearing the invisible chain
With no key-They just hang
To be free-from the officer
We eat the same
We shower the same
We sleep the same
We even use the bathroom the same
This ain't no game
Some calls the leader a warden
Who's runs this place?
Name not-is-this world
Behind the wired fence
From this start
The Judge, the Jury
Still I can't get a decent job
Bills are due
The children need a new pair of shoes
And when morning come,
It still is the same
Every day brand new
Didn't seem so I'll tell you the truth
Everybody still look and act like yesterday
In the prison in?
Wearing the attire

Sonia

"Meth" (I Am Through)

When I look back to my most recent past,
I see a time that went by too fast.
The drinkin' and druggin' and wastin' our time,
Our lives so chaotic without reason or rhyme.
We are all searching both far and wide, for the one thing
we thought made us feel happy inside.

The days ran together til' we had no clue,
We thought we could keep going,
but our bodies were through.

Slowly but surely we lost all possessions we had,
We ran out of meth, coming down we'd get mad.
The anger would build up and turn into rage,
So out of control, we should've been caged.
We're no longer high, our urges are strong,
Again we're out searching, all the day long.

Nothing else matters, not even our health,
Our kids have all suffered,
that's the hand they were dealt.

There is a way out, I want you to know
his name is Jesus, his love now fills my soul.
So you can stop searching for your next high,
God's love gives you fulfillment, you don't have to buy.
So gather your children, look into their eyes,
Tell them you promise to give up this life full of lies.

A glorious new life is waiting for you,
Just ask God to take over and
tell meth that you're through.

Tina





Talking Walls

*If the walls could talk
Their pores would seep out
Wailing with me
From my whispers I sobbed in secret
I am lonely
I miss my family
Then, we could weep some more*

Dena

He's Always Been There

This man is familiar
She's known him before,
His intentions seem honest
Her trust he'll implore.

It starts out the same
Oh! It's love at first sight,
She can't live without him
She's lost her insight.

He seems like he's perfect
He's the man of her dreams,
But he has her fooled
As he's not who he seems.

He's an evil spirit
Who's lying in wait,
Just add alcohol
And he'll dominate.

(“He's Always Been There” continued)



He'll wreak total havoc
When she sees his true side,
He's controlling and jealous
His commands she'll abide.

His words are like razors
That cut at her skin,
There's no sense to fight back
Cuz she'll never win.

He's in a blind rage
So he beats her some more,
Until she hasn't the strength
To try and run for the door.

She begs him to stop
She can't take anymore,
She grabs for a knife
From the kitchen drawer.

He's beaten her down
He thinks he's finally won,
Then she raises the knife,
And the damage is done.

Now she's in the system
Because she chose to fight back,
But because she's a woman
The deck has been stacked.

She'll get out of prison
In twenty-five years,
She refuses to let him
Have anymore of her tears.

Yes, she knew this man
From generations before,
Yes, he's always been there
But he'll hurt her no more.

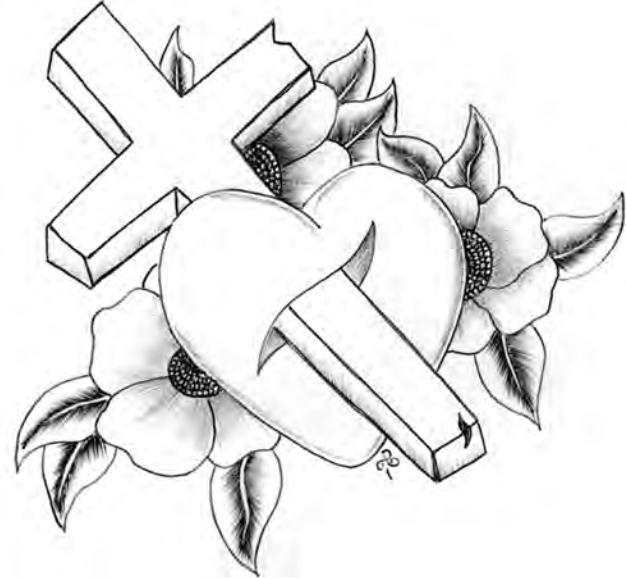
Tina

Still

You had my heart
Open, hungry to please.
The willing fool,
Oh Lord, I did not see.
My love, my life
Twisted high on the stars,
The fall was quick
Black and blue hide the scars.

Inside this block,
Set of concrete and steel,
Thoughts trace back
Forever on that wheel.
Endlessly you,
All the day, all the night,
A wish for me
Tainted with guilt, no delight.

Living a dream
You refuse to walk alone,
The new prize waits,
A masterpiece unknown.
Always decide
Never to be pleased,
She too will fall
For you, never to be seen.



They say to me
Let him go, let it be,
Forgive, forgive
Better for you-for me.
But how to make
Time rewind, pain recede?
Take one more breath
This night may set me free.

Annette

My Story

I would like to share my life with as many people as it can help. My childhood was great as far as I can remember until my sixth birthday. I adored my father; he was everything great to me. I loved my mom as well, but definitely a daddy's girl. The sun, stars, and moon, I just knew he could give it to me. Then came my birthday. I was such a big girl. Six! Wow! That day changed everything. My dad became a monster to me. I was from that day forward a different person. I felt no trust for any one. I hated my dad. I hated everyone, mostly me. Let me go back to the party.

It was amazing, my whole family was there and everything is perfect. I know almost for sure that my cake is strawberry shortcake because my Nana has given me so many hints. I love her so much. I am feeling like the happiest most loved girl in the world. Things couldn't get any better than this. I made sure to dress up and show everyone the big girl I am. There are presents everywhere, decorations and balloons. All this for me? I feel every great emotion there is at this moment. The next memory I have is opening presents. I got everything I asked for, even a few extra things. I was so excited about the strawberry shortcake vanity set. I had wanted it ever since I first saw it at the store. I really thought I would have to wait for Santa for that big of a present, but like always my dad, my hero. Even at this age I knew he always went the extra mile for me, he did this. He found a way to get me my vanity. His love gave me so much security. I had no fears. I knew I would always have him holding my hand forever in this life. Back to my presents, I got a set of Fragile Rock books. I'm so excited! I never even asked for them, I do love the show though. My first thought was alright now dad can read these to me. I run over jumping up and down, "Daddy, daddy, will you read these to me tonight?" Of course he says yes. This day was great, perfect but that night everything changed. My life ended.

I am in bed now. I'm so happy and so excited. I hear dad walking up the stairs. It feels like it takes him forever. I can't remember who picked out the book him or me. I remember his smell; my room fills with the cologne he wears. He starts reading to me. Something changes, he moves closer to me. It's normal, or is it? I am not scared yet. His reading slows down. It gets choppy, nothings is making sense now. Again I smell him, so strong. His face scratches me. I am very upset about it. It feels so rough. Hot breath in my ear, "You know I love you princess." "I know daddy, I love you too." I feel wrong. Am I afraid of my daddy? No can't be. I feel his tongue touch my neck, my lips. His breath is so foul and hot, I hate him. I pretend to sleep. It stops, he is reading again. Good, maybe it was all a bad dream. No, he puts the book away. No, no I can't speak, I can't scream. I can't move, something is touching my legs. It's him again, I'm screaming inside go away but nothing comes out. I hear him say this is what big girls do with their daddies. He touches my face. I don't know what happens next. My bed is shaking so hard, my eyes are closed so tight. Please, what's going on? What was wrong with my bed? Is he gone? Wait! It's me, I'm shaking. He is gone, what happened? Life as I knew it changed that night. This sexual, physical, and mental abuse went on until I ran away from home at the age of

fifteen. Did it get better? Not for a really long time. I wanted to leave so much sooner but I have two younger brothers and I was terrified that if I left they would be hurt. I wanted to protect them but how could I when I couldn't even protect myself. So one day I woke up for school like normal, at this time we lived in Missouri. We had just moved there from Kansas. We moved all the time, like changing addresses would fix everything. Anyways, I stole a check from my parents and after I was dropped off at school I waited for there to be no signs of my mom and I left. I was in the big city looking for the bus station. Now here is a part of my life where I know God had to be carrying me like in the "Footprints" poem.

Here I am fifteen, very scared, alone, lost in a big city. I ask a few people how to get to the bus station. Someone takes me there and drops me off. Looking back I think they knew there was something very wrong going on with me. So I take my parents' check to get a ticket to Kansas. First of all I have no idea what city is at all close to this small town I'm going to where my best friend is. She knows what my dad has been doing to me for a very long time. Next, I'm told "no checks" and looked at weird. So I am feeling my plan has completely failed. I sit down on a bench, head in my hands and cry so many tears. I wanted to die. I feel someone reach out toward me. At first I was terrified. Was it him? No, it was an older lady; she put her arms around me. I kept crying and she kept holding me. I don't know how long this moment lasted but it was definitely what I needed. When I calmed down, she asked me who was hurting me like she already knew. I told her. She bought my ticket and asked if I was sure there was someone waiting for me there. I said "yes" even though I knew no one even knew I was coming. The bus ride was not that bad, the further I got away the better I felt.

Now I arrive in another big city in Kansas and I can't reach my friend calling collect. I have no money. I have no one to call. I am downtown; I'm very scared now. I start walking in the direction someone pointed out to me, when I asked how to get to the town I was headed toward. I did find the highway and began walking; the town is 2 to 3 hours away. Several cars stopped to ask me if I needed a ride. I felt scared so I said "no." A cowboy in a truck stopped and although I was very afraid of men, he did not scare me. He seemed good to me. He asked where I was going. I told him. He said "That's a very long way and I'm going that way." I got in. I was very comfortable. He asked me my age and what I was doing. I told him. He asked "why." I told him briefly about my dad. I still can't believe how open I was with him. He bought me McDonalds and I fell asleep. He woke me up when we made it to the town and I told him how to get to my friends house. I still thank God for the safe landing along with the many others I have had.

So I made it to her house finally. I get a good night sleep finally. The next morning she sits down with me trying to explain to me that none of these things going on with dad and me were my fault and they were not normal. I didn't believe her and it has taken a long time for me to begin to see it that way. The next step, her mom had to call the SRS and it was such chaos and I was afraid and upset. I wanted to stay with them. Anyway I was taken into state custody from here. Instead of my life getting easier and better it became worse and even lonelier. I lost all my family. Even through the abuse, I always

had more family you know. Now I had none. It was from here, group homes, girls' homes, and foster homes. I was constantly running away from everything and everyone. I never felt good enough for anything. There were bad homes and good ones. I never felt I deserved love of any kind, no matter how bad or good. I ran. Then I discovered drugs while living homeless in a condemned apartment. I am sixteen. I began shooting up meth and it seemed to take it all away. All that pain, fear and anger were gone. I soon found out that it just buried it even deeper inside me.

Somehow in the midst of my addiction, I met and later married a wonderful man who loves me through all my many mistakes. I find this part of my life the hardest to write about because of all the pain I have caused everyone that has loved me, especially him. I feel I don't deserve his love. Again always running, I leave them so they can't leave me. I'm finding I'm close to the family I always looked for. I have a wonderful husband, a nice home, nice car, pets and I'm far away from all the drugs and destruction. I had started over. I was so happy and in love, all I was missing were children. I longed to be a mom and I knew he would be a perfect dad. They never came. He was in the army. He tells me one day he is going to Iraq. I was devastated. He was leaving me. He was going to die. I would never see him again. I lost it. I threw away all my clean time. I spent all our money, lost everything. I left, I ran. I went back to what I knew, drugs.

I ended up back in Kansas, high on meth again. That was it. I was on my downward spiral again. I lied, cheated, stole and broke his heart. He stayed through it all. I was not even there to pick him up when he got back from war. I can't stop hating myself for all this. The thing is, I never stopped loving him. I just never loved me. I hated myself since my sixth birthday. We did end up divorced because I kept doing the same things over and over.

Well, here I sit in prison and guess what? He is the only person who is still here for me. I have been trying to get him to give me a chance off and on since the divorce, writing from jail and other places locked up. I did call once not from jail, but he kept telling me "no." I was never going to give this up. I wrote him over a year ago from in here and he finally said he would try. He has given me another chance. Again, thank you God for this. He has taught me how to love, how to heal, and how to forgive, by still loving me now and still believing in the person he knows I am. I thank God everyday for bringing him to me and placing me in this prison, so my life can come back together, finally. I can see a happy future, and I am content with the present, knowing the future I have before me. I can finally feel happiness again thanks to God's gift to me. My husband, his love and the love I have for him. He will always be my husband in my heart.

Tiffaney

An Angel's Tears

While I was standing by the window, I saw an Angel lying down by the Oak tree. As I looked closely, I saw something in her cheeks. It was a glowing tear sliding down. She wasn't looking well. Her clothes were dirty and torn. Her body bruised and battered. Her wings were ripped and cut. It looked like she couldn't continue her hopes and desires in life anymore. She looked tired, hurt, desolate and betrayed. She opened her eyes and the look in her eyes was like searching hope for life. Then, tears were flowing without stopping, all the way to her dull, swollen cheeks. She tried to raise her face but sharp pain controlled her.



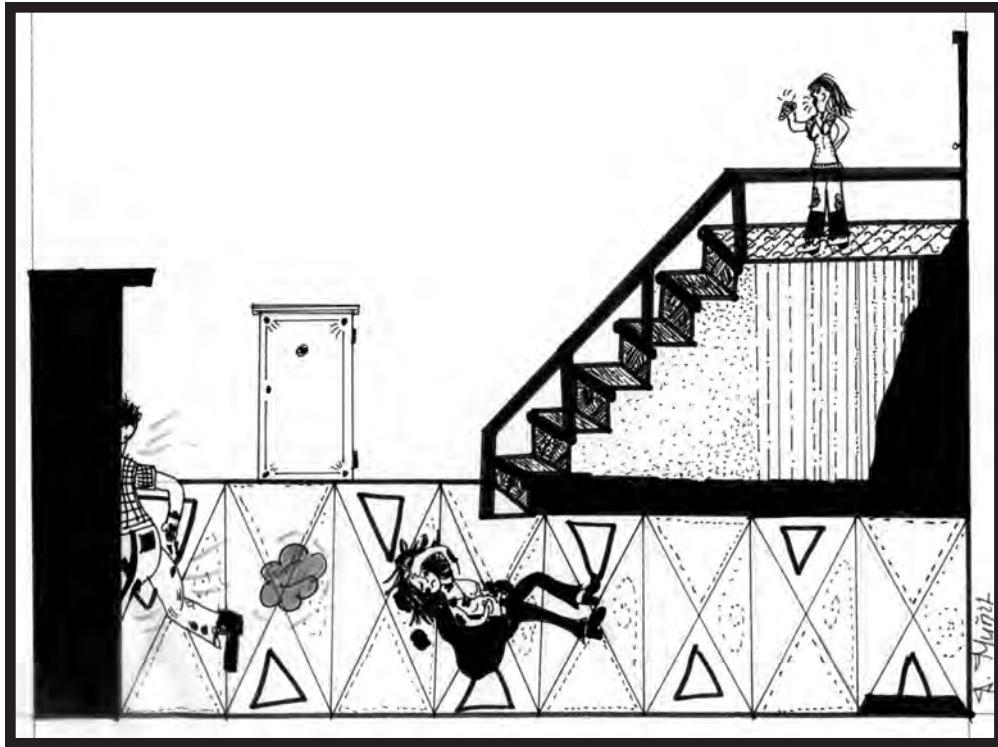
Then she said to me, *"Mother, I am your Angel child. I know I have lived a wild, crazy life. I have broken hearts and broken laws. What you witness now is the result of it. I tried to shield myself with no result, because I kept falling down the same path. I truly have been strong,*

but deep within me, I now choose life. That is why I have come to you. Because I don't want more pain or suffering. The pain that comes from being all alone. You are my last hope, mother of mine."

Something inside my soul took over me. I ran as fast as I could and placed my arms around her, my Angel and held her tight, very close to my heart and tears flowed from both of us. No words needed to be said. I looked up to the sky and thanked God for sending her back to me. We both sighed in peace.

A mother's love never ceases. It's always on hold, until it is needed. It could take a million years, but it will be all right.

An Angel's tears no longer will be needed. Because now the sunshine appears in the horizon accompanied with the mist of a rainbow. *Alba*



"Mom, Hear My Silent Cry"

Mom, as I walked to your bed, I stand in the dark with tears in my heart. I always wanted to tell you that I need you now more than I ever did. I've missed you so much, especially when we were apart. Did I ever tell you, mom, that I love you with unconditional love? I love you more than yesterday, but not as much as tomorrow. I thank God for sending you into my life. Mom, hug me intensely and keep me safe, like when I was a child.

Mom, shh...shh...don't say a word. I hear footsteps like thunder and lighting. Oh, no! It's him! Protect me from dying, please! I am very afraid now, as if it was my last day. Please mom, hear my silent cry.

Mom, my lovely mom, let me tell you what it was like. As many times you've taught me from good to bad. Mom, really, I didn't see the signs. I thought he was a great man, but instead he was an evil one in disguise. He dressed well and was very kind. Many of his friends were very fine. They share drinks and something else went inside. It seems to be a happy hour until it turns into a nightmare hour. I saw his rage for the first time; it looked like a bull's stare. His eyes were a blazing fire and when he spoke he used undesirable language. He rushed towards me like a speeding bullet. To caress my hair forcefully in his fist. I was in a terrible shock. I could not believe it was happening to me. Then, I felt how fast he messed me up in a flash. I tried to scream as hard as I could, but the intense pain grew and grew. I tried to move away from him but instead he shifted in a glide and held me tight. When his dancing fists abruptly messed

everything it touches. The only thing I could do was to cry and cry and ask God for a little light. Mom, I'm so desperate. Did you hear my silent cry? I went downstairs to my father's lairs and with astonishment he was aware. He said to me, "*I love you, my daughter dear.*" He turned around and closed the door. I felt so lost and nowhere to go. Where is everyone? Where are my so-called friends? At this moment, I felt so lost and alone. As I decided to pack my things and close the door behind me, he came out in a sudden surprise. I felt my blood rush into every part of my soul. My heart was desperately pounding so hard as he grabbed me and danced all over the hallway. I saw everything spinning out of the wall. My face was so swollen in a second. He kicked me so hard that I tumbled down the stairs of the third floor. I rolled from steps over steps to the bottom. The rumble was so loud, but no one dare to help me out, afraid of him without a doubt. As I collapse without a breath, someone entered the building and saw it all with a fright.

Right away he screamed, "*What have you done, can you see all the blood?*" I was rushed to the hospital and this was what the doctor said, "*We tried to save your little baby but with no success. I'm sorry we did everything we could.*" I looked up so tired and hurt from deep inside. I couldn't scream, "*Why me God!*" I didn't even know I was pregnant. If I knew it ahead of time, I could of protected forever. Mom, did you hear my silent cry?

He took my hands and promised me the world and he apologized once more again. He will take care of me and not worry because he loves me. I believe him one more time. He sounded to sincere. This time it is real, he changed. As the weeks and months passed by, I was so happy. He was content and kind again. He bought me gifts and I felt his love. Until one day I came home to my surprise. My castle, the moon and all the rest were gone. I thought and I thought. I don't understand where did I go wrong? Was it my fault? Please mom, hear my silent cry.

I always wanted to come back home, but my pride didn't let me. But now you are my last hope. Here is where I belong. I need your comfort, shield your love. I don't feel safe anywhere. I know that it will be dangerous to turn back to him. I have a gut feeling this time, he might succeed in killing me. I'm too tired and all worn out to run away from everything. No one hears my silent cry.

As I lay down in my old bed thinking that the nightmares may ease and I could live in peace. I closed my tired eyes and tried to relax a bit. I felt a tender kiss and a lovely whisper, "*God bless you, my child.*" I felt the love deep in my heart. I drift away with a grand smile.

As the sound of time far, far away. I heard the thundering footsteps approaching very fast. I hid behind my covers and tremble with fear. It is him. I know it. He has come for me. He asked to speak to me, so he says. He had mentioned that he would be moving out of state. He was so convincing, I thought he was for real. I didn't know the end was near. I jumped out of bed, so happy to know his decision. I will no longer be

afraid again. I saw the look on my mom's face. She was not happy at all. She hesitated for me to talk to him. I assured her it was all right to give us only five minutes to say good bye in the hallway. As she closed the door behind me, she gave in a look and walked away.

When he saw me he looked so happy, very sweet and convincing. I walked him down to the exit door. We said goodbye to each other. I wished him luck with his future. At one point, he got closer to kiss me, but I rejected him. He got angry and grabbed my neck so hard I could not exhale any air. Then, I felt a blow his other hand going straight to my face. I tried to scream, but nothing came out. I could see my youth right before my eyes. MOM!!! HEAR MY SILENT CRY!!!

I saw a dim light ahead; maybe this is what it is to be dead. The pain, I can hardly feel no more. I heard voices far-reaching. Maybe is God or the Angels calling me? I pour my heart out to try reaching God and prayed, *"Please, God, can you help me? I love you with all my heart. I don't pray everyday but you are always in my life. I'll promise to serve you."* Then I felt a droplet touch my face. I opened my eyes and there you were. I could not believe it was you rescuing me, Mom. Mom took me in her arms and shielded me with her unconditional love. Her tears were flowing on her cheeks but had a beautiful smile. She assured me that all would be alright from now on. I felt peace, relief and tranquility deep inside of me and the physical pain no longer hurt. She took me upstairs. attended my wounds, nurtured and cared for me from then on. I still get nightmares but when I open my eyes, I'm in my room. I speak to God and I feel the Angel's wings shielding me and sing me lullabies and I feel a serene melody touch my soul and I feel at peace. Then I hear a whisper, *"God bless you my child"* and I felt a tender kiss on my forehead. I felt that before from my mom, and my heart deeply fills with love. I smile and fall asleep in the calm of the night. No more silent cries.

I asked my mom what happened after I fainted. She looked at me and said, *"My dear baby, I heard your silent cry. I had always heard your silent cry, but every time I got close to you, you assured me you were alright. Not to worry, but the sparkles of your eyes were gone and I could see you aging too fast. Your enthusiasm and joy were absent. So I sat down and wailed and wailed until you were ready to be free. As I told you that day I had a gut feeling of things not right. When I closed the door, I sat down and asked God for help to understand and to help you. That's when I felt someone calling my name. I stood up like a soldier with God's shield. Picked up my cell and looked out the door. You were on the floor and him on top of you trying to kill you. I had to make a quick decision. I speed dialed 911 but instead his mother was on the other line. I yelled at him and at the same time, I told his mother in details what he was doing to you. He screamed and called me a liar. I hurried down and placed the receiver on his ear. Whatever his mother said to him made him scared because he looked at me with astonishment. He couldn't believe it. Got up very fast and ran out as fast as he could. He left for good out of our lives. I do not know why 911 did not appear on my phone when I speed dialed. I think it was God's way to help us when I asked for guidance and help."*

"Mom, you don't have to hear my silent cry anymore because now you would hear my happy laughter."

Alba



"I hated God. I hated me. I hated my life! So when I wasn't trying to die by mega hits, I slept. It all was a living nightmare."

Crack

There were soft moans I made when I bent down. I thought the, "Uugh," came from nose connecting with the stench of urine, which ran down my leg to form a puddle in the middle of the floor, but it wasn't that. Three bruised ribs, well kicked sides caused the noise. I watched as the doctors placed the film of X-ray to the ultra bright light board. He used words like hairline fracture, I recognized the scars, those healed and those not...I passed out again, trying to remember how it had gotten to this point, with this man, with this drug, with my life.

Crack: because of its fast track to addiction, it gained quick notoriety before Methamphetamine, Oxycotin and Ecstasy drugs exploded on the block. It was said to be the fastest way to die. I disagree. My addiction was a slow process like Frosty the snowman's meltdown in the transformation of the seasons; cold, taunting, inevitable, yet somehow prolonged. His hat and my highs were at the whims of the wind, causing ups and downs, stops and go's, shifts in our lives and we had little control.

My husband was dead and here six months later I wished I were too. I had hooked up with a man immediately after my loss. You all heard

the saying, "Get one sheriff to replace the last man." Me and my home girls used to joke when one of us did this. "Oh, so there's a new sheriff in town." We laughed. But, this wasn't a sheriff who protected. He was the Bandit.

I took the hard impacts as his fist pounded me, making a dull whacking sound. I expected the ripping of my brown eye as he entered that area which I previously used only to expel feces. I wasn't prepared for someone standing over me while I slept enjoying the look on my face as he strangled me saying, "*Bitch. Is tonight your night to die?*"

I wasn't new to abuse either. With my first abuser, I knew what to expect. He once went hunting for rabbits. When he came home, he skinned them alive so I could hear their screams. Then he gutted one, held its heart, which still was pumping in his hand and said, "*If you ever leave me, this is what I'll do to you and your son.*" It didn't matter to him that my son was his son too. So my fear for my first abuser was leaving, where my fear for the bandit was in staying.

So when I heard how the baseball player died from the usage of crack cocaine and less than a month later a football player was being hospitalized for his involvement with crack, I started to listen to the media more...

Days to come I would put boulders on my pipe. A boulder is the size of a rock. Most people break up the rock and puts hits on it. I kept my rocks whole and this led to more ridicule. Now, I was a greedy whore trying to smoke all the dope, but really I just wanted to inhale, inhale, and inhale. Now heart fail.

It didn't happen. Again, God had disappointed me. First, taking my husband, then allowing me to get involved with this man, and not permitting me to die! I hated God. I hated me. I hated my life! So when I wasn't trying to die by mega hits, I slept. It all was a living nightmare. Even my dreams showed me how out of control my life had become.

Dena

Keep Your Eyes Open

I began searching for Christ when I was 33 years old. I was a very happy, positive young women that had a zest for life. I wanted more. I wanted to know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. In 1996, I had an incredible experience and fell madly in love with Jesus. I was committed to my spiritual growth and truly began to fell complete. I was living a good Christian life.

In 1998, my family suffered several tragedies. One family member after another died suddenly. I was shaken and unable to find comfort. The final tragedy was my abrupt divorce and the death of my parents. I couldn't grieve! I couldn't stop the feelings of desperation and despair my heart carried. It wasn't long after the deaths, I began to serve another god. I turned to drugs and alcohol. It numbed my pain and I took on the ways of the world. No one could stop me. My family tried, my friends cried and I spun myself onto the road to nowhere. Today, I'd like to tell you that my poor choices led me straight to the State Prison. Yes, I am currently incarcerated and have to serve a sentence of 12.5 years. I would like to share with you what life is like on the inside excluded from the world, my friends, my family and my only child. That's right, I have a 9-year-old daughter that suffers without her mommy because of my mistakes.



1. *I live in a 10'x13' cement cell with someone I don't know*
2. *I have to stand in line just to take a "cold" shower*
3. *I have no visits with friends or family*
4. *I have not seen my daughter in 6 years*
5. *I celebrate every holiday completely alone*
6. *I live in the desert completely surrounded by a cage*
7. *Cafeteria food for all meals*
8. *3 orange T shirts and pants, 2 sheets, 1 pillowcase, 2 old blue blankets*
9. *We rake rocks or pick up cigarette butts for 10 cents an hour*
10. *I am surrounded by many evil, angry and violent people*

The list goes on, but I will spare you the unpleasantries of this life here in prison. I encourage each and every one of you to keep your eyes open, look around and take notice. It may not be you that has a troubled heart. It may be a friend, sister or brother that is struggling with something terribly wrong and like me, may not know how to cope. They may be vulnerable and may not know where to turn. It is easy to fall into the hands of the enemy. Drugs and alcohol are everywhere. If you are in trouble, I encourage you to go to your parents, your friends and most importantly to God. He is your Savior and if you already know the Lord, stay close to Him and cling to Him with all your might. Christians fall too. I believed, but I didn't hang on, and I fell, hard.

There is a happy ending to this story. I have a beautiful relationship with the Lord and He uses me to help others in their search for Christ and to help others not make the same mistakes as I did. There are other options than drugs and alcohol or crime. Look up! Keep your ears and eyes open for another troubled soul. God can use you too.

Denyce

Wasted Time

*The time that I've wasted is my biggest regret. Spent in these places I will never forget.
Just sitting and thinking about the things that I've done: the crying, the laughing, the hurt and the fun.*

*Now it's just me and my hard driven guilt behind a wall of emptiness I allowed to be built.
I'm trapped in body, just wanting to run back to my youth with its laughter and fun.*

*But the chase is over and there's no place to hide. Everything is gone, including my pride.
With reality suddenly right in my face, I'm scared, alone and stuck in this place.*

*Now memories of the past flash through my head and the pain is obvious by the tears that I shed.
I ask myself why and where I went wrong. I guess I was weak when I should have been strong.*

*Living for drugs and the wings I had grown, my feelings were lost, afraid to be shown.
As I look at my past, it's so easy to see the fear that I had, afraid to be me.*

*I'd pretend to be rugged, so fast and so cool when actually lost like a blinded old fool.
I'm getting to old for this tiresome game of acting real hard with no sense of shame.*

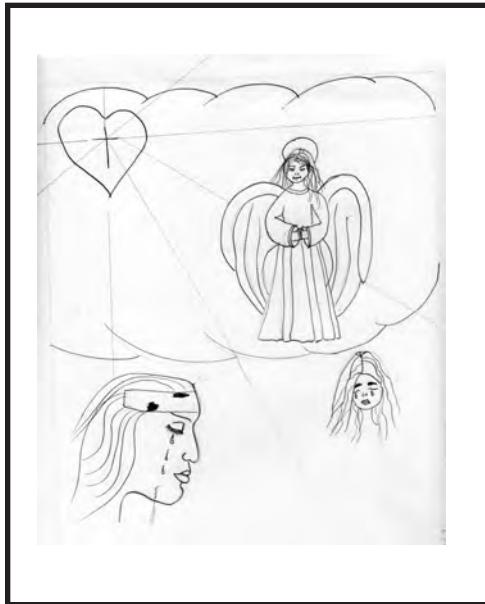
*It's time that I change and get on with my life, fulfilling my dreams for a family and life.
What my future will hold I really don't know, but the years that I've wasted are starting to show.*

*I just live for the day when I'll get a new start and the dreams I still hold deep in my heart.
I hope I can make it. I at least have to try because I'm heading toward death and I don't want to die...*

Nakeea



Not Easily Broken



What does "Not Easily Broken" mean to you?

To me, it means that as a woman, no matter what has happened, no man was able to break me physically or emotionally. As a mother-the pain of giving a daughter up for adoption, the suicide of my first son, knowing I caused my youngest daughter's heartache, when she had to grow up quicker than she should have had to. Knowing the pain my next son had to go through because his father wasn't his father and he is so much like his older brother, knowing my youngest son has to deal with not being with his brothers and sisters, until I leave here.

Even through all this pain I've gone through and the pain I've caused, I am still not easily broken. Why? Because the love of my God has given me the courage to go on. Also, as a woman, we were created to be strong, we were to keep everything together and not falter. As a mother we were made to endure everything from the childbirth to the death of a child, we are to nurture-to love-to heal-to mend.

We might bend under the load. Some days worse than others. But we don't break in two. We don't snap under the weight. We take a deep breath and adjust our load and we give it to God and ask for His help and His guidance and know that He is there and that we will not be easily broken!

Sandra

Epiphany



TODAY, I accept that without TRUTH there is nothing.

TRUTH is the soil out of which sustenance grows to nourish us so that we can move in healthy directions.

LIES have no nourishment, no food value and starve my Spirit.

But TRUTH, as painful as it is, sometimes has a way of “hoeing” and “tilling” itself so that some new growth can come. Even though knowing the TRUTH seems unnecessary or too much to carry—I know it anyway at some level.

To bring TRUTH out into the open gives it a chance to lift the veil of secrecy that has made it feel like a best within and lets it transform into something usable that can again nurture HEALTH and LIFE.

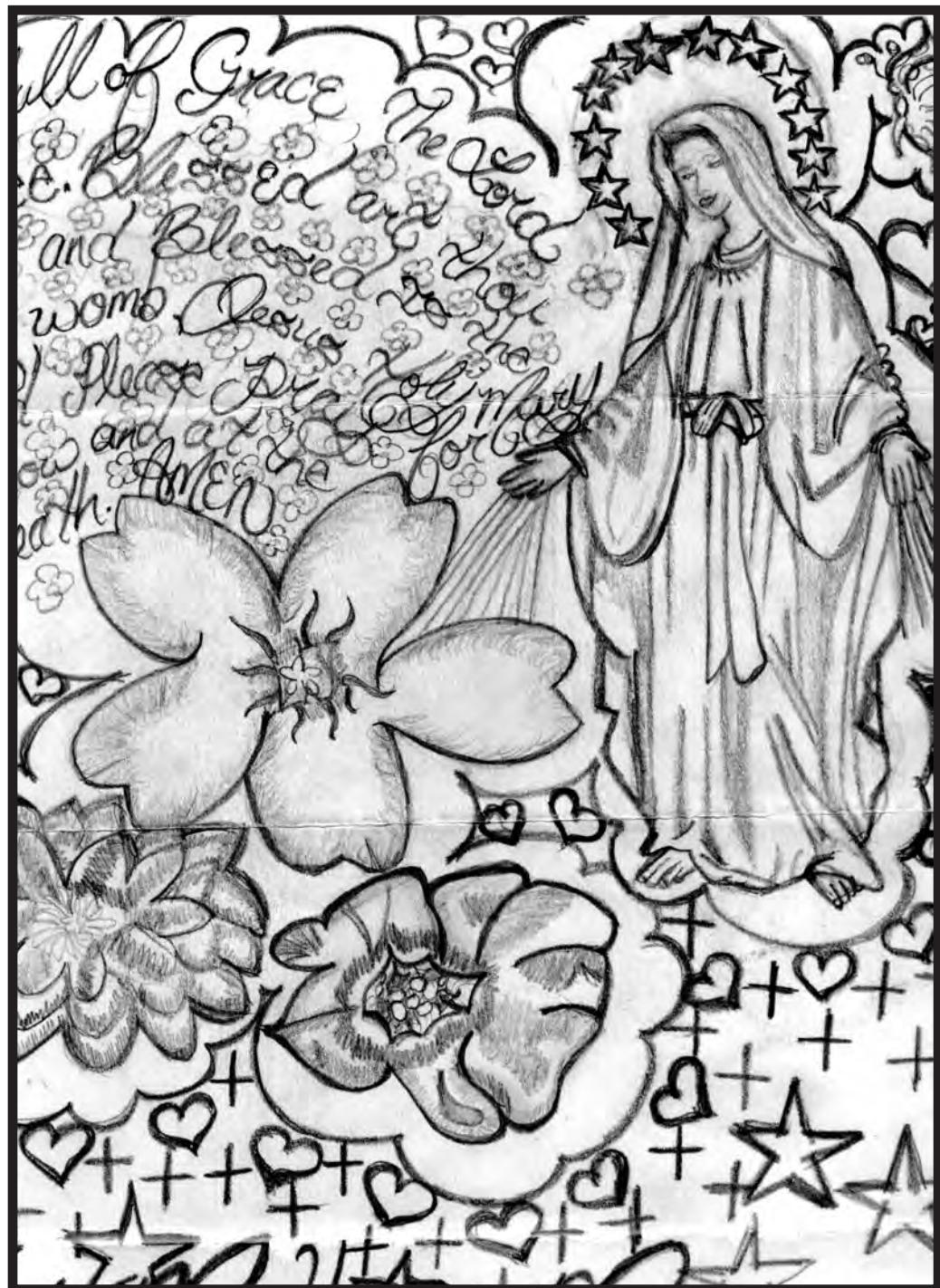
TODAY, I allow the TRUTH to set me free. I didn't expect enlightenment to hurt like this. I thought that if I became “Oh, so Spiritual” and free, the pain would not be there. I didn't realize that an important step on my road to freedom was in releasing my beliefs that: I won other people; that the world owes me something; that I cannot control my Destiny.

I KNOW TODAY, what I cannot let go of has a permanent hold on me. I know that no one and nothing really belongs to me!

LIFE is a journey and Spiritual unfolding is its purpose. I see that my ideas of how things had to be were an illusion and that the time and effort I expended trying to get my life to conform to my illusions and disillusionment kept me from my deeper TRUTH...I can free myself from control and illusion.

THE TRUTH will set you free, but first it will make you mad as hell!!!!

Sylvia



Jessica

Madonna

That Girl Is Long Gone

Talk about your self-image. Who had a good influence on you and who has had a bad one? What have you learned from your experience in prison? I came in prison in January of 2008. I never thought I would end up here. But, with the routes I was taking (not good ones), I was bound to end up here. I was selling dope, living the high life, so I thought. I sold my body for money, did drugs and hung out with the wrong people, who I thought were my friends, but in all reality, they weren't. They were not even close to being my friends. They were bad influences in my life.

I have a father who was there for me even when I was doing all that wrong. I didn't care what he had to say, or anyone else. I just wanted to do my own thing, which I continued to do for years. But, through all those horrible years, my father has been there for me. He is the only real person who has been a good influence in my life. I used to be a very miserable, hateful, and angry person when I first came to prison. Just like how I was before I came into prison.

Now that I have had time to think, I am finding out who I am. I know I am better than that person who came in here. I have grown in my relationship with God. My relationship with my father is amazing. I am no longer miserable, hateful, or angry with myself or others. I guess it took prison to open my eyes. I am no longer the girl who was selling her body for money, selling dope, and doing dope. That girl is long gone.

I feel like I am a beautiful person and will go home a new and improved person. I know I will no longer have those "so called" friends. Because I have learned one important thing, that everyone should be honest with yourself and others. Because if you can't be honest with yourself, than you can't be honest with others. Also, that God is the High Almighty and is really the most important person in anyone's life.



Shamone

The Nightmares I've Experienced the Past 18 Years

*Eighteen years ago I met a man
who played an important role in my life
Four and a half months after meeting him, I got pregnant
and he asked me to be his wife*

*This man told me that he loved me
and I believed everything he said was true
But then I noticed a tremendous change in him
the day I said "I Do"*

*The abuse started with the little arguments
then led to the major fights
As much as I tried to please him
in his eyes nothing I did was right*

*Now I sit in prison broken-hearted
because of a man that has only brought me tears
And all I can do is think of
the nightmares I've experienced the past 18 years*

Yolanda



From a Black Woman's Point of View

*If I could start my life anew
I never would have experienced the abuse
In which my spouse
once put me through*

*No one deserves to be
treated this way
All because of something
they did or didn't say*

*A woman is to be loved
and not smacked around
But my spouse didn't feel like a man
unless he knocked me to the ground*

*In a sense he was like a blind man
because he failed to see
The bruises and the scars left
from his hitting on me*

*He used to beat on me
then take me to bed
I sometimes reminisce
on the hateful things he said*

*It may not be today
It may not be tomorrow
But one day real soon
I'll leave you and end the sorrow*

*So if ever in life
Mental, physical, emotional, sexual and/or verbal
abuse happens to you
Just remember how I Yolanda explained it
from a black woman's point of view*

Yolanda

Just Passing Through

Looking at the distance between what we have done and what we still have to do, we tend to look more at the time we spend just passing through.

We meet certain people along that road of time we walk, some of whom we will never know and some with whom we will never talk.

Then there is the very few with whose hearts we seem to understand, those who feel lost, troubled, alone, abandoned and let down by every man. Those special people who always seem to make it through the worst trials and tribulations, still say, "*I love you.*"

I know at times it seems that those people we may never meet, that only the lucky get to travel down that side of the street. When all else fails and you feel down and out but never let it show you try your best to say sweet things to any friend or foe.

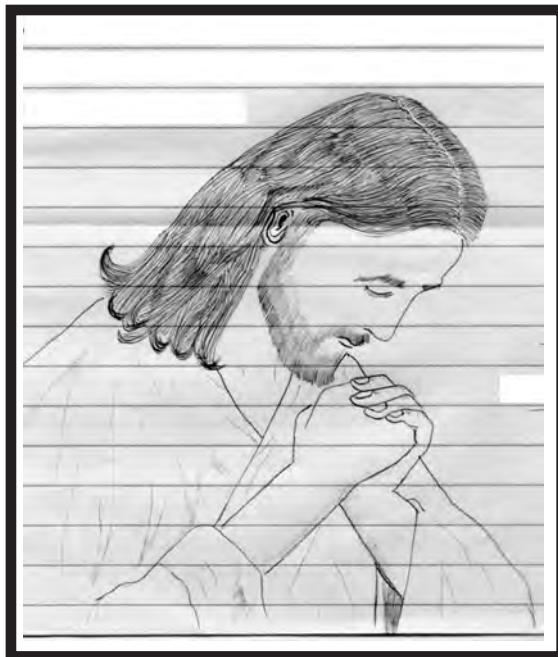
Please do not feel lost or lonely on this broken road we share, remember there are smiles and laughs, it is not always pain and despair. In this distance on the road that we both must do, I am one of those lucky ones because I share this side of the street with you.

Two unlikely people to make a friendship that would do, at this moment in your life I am blessed to be the one just passing through.

Stephanie



Dedicated to a Friend



*Surviving struggles
Surviving pain
Doing what I needed to do
just to stay sane*

*Trusting so called friends
to help you through hard times
They're never there in the end
when you go to prison for the crimes*

*Through every struggle along the way
Just trying to find some hope
or a friend to make a brighter day
Someone there for you in their own way*

*Being in prison living by the code
You live your life trying to be hard
Watching your back along the road
even looking behind you on the yard*

*'Til I meet my friend from the street
says she met a friend who's true
He helps her to stay on her feet
that I should meet him too*

*Knowing this friend will never let her down
I ask her where such a friend can be found
In your heart, just open it and ask Jesus in
I promise you he will love every bit
He will be your true friend*

*I look at her and see a glow
A happiness never there before
Can this really be, though?
Would Jesus really want me?*

*He forgives your sins
Just ask him in
Read his book
Don't just look*

*So here on this day
my life will begin
for I've accepted Jesus
to be my savior...king of friends.*

Trisha

For Strong Women



A strong woman is a woman who is straining.
A strong woman is a woman standing on tip-toe and lifting a barbell while trying to sing Boris Godunov.

A strong woman is a woman at work cleaning out the cesspool of the ages, and while she shovels, she talks about how she doesn't mind crying, it opens the ducts of the eyes, and throwing up develops the stomach muscles, and she goes on shoveling with tears in her nose.

A strong woman is a woman in whose head a voice is repeating, I told you so, ugly, bad girl, bitch, nag, shrill, witch, ball buster, nobody will ever love you back, why aren't you feminine, why aren't you quiet, why aren't you dead?

A strong woman is a woman determined to do something others are determined to do, something others are determined not to be done. She is pushing up on the bottom of a lead coffin lid. She is trying to raise a man-hole cover with her head, she is trying to butt her way through a steel wall. Her head hurts. People waiting for the hole to be made say, "*Hurry up, you're so strong.*"

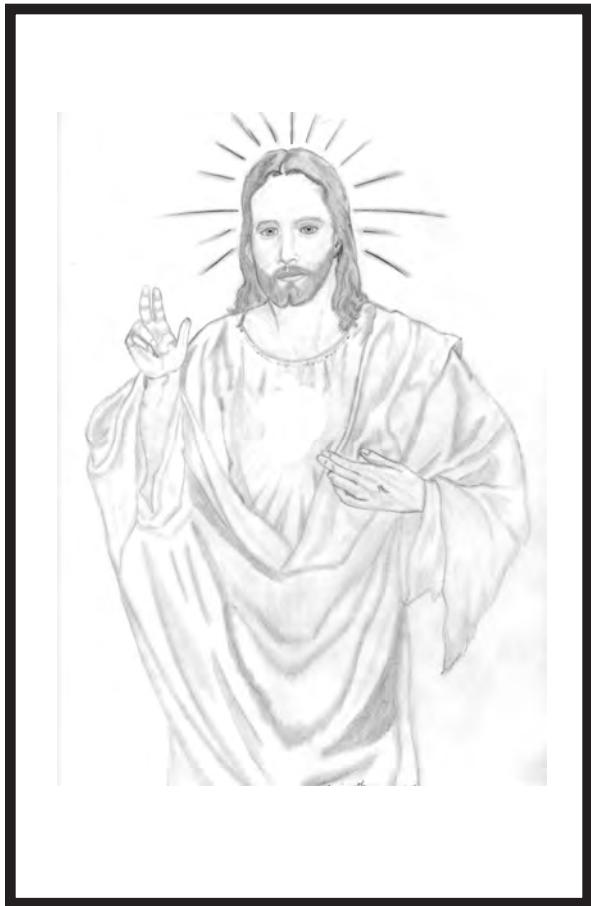
A strong woman is a woman bleeding inside. A strong woman is a woman making herself strong every morning while her teeth loosen and her back throbs. Every baby, a tooth, midwives used to say, and now every battle, a scar. A strong woman is a mass of scar tissue that aches when it rains and wounds that bleed when you bump them and memories that get up in the night and pace in boots to and fro.

A strong woman is a woman who craves love like oxygen or she turns blue choking. A strong woman who loves strongly and weeps strongly and is strongly terrified and has strong needs. A strong woman is strong in words, in action, in connection, in feeling; she is not strong as a stone but as a wolf suckling her young. Strength is not in her, but she enacts it as the wind fills a sail.

What comforts her is others loving her equally for the strength and for the weakness from which it issues, lightning from a cloud. Lightning stuns. In rain, the clouds disperse. Only water of connection remains, flowing through us. Strong is what we make each other. Until we are all strong together, a strong woman is a woman strongly afraid.

Marge

I Am Beautiful



I am beautiful

I didn't notice until today
I look in the tin mirror again
and it was okay
Even though I'm locked in a prison
I still know that He, the Lord, had risen
Glad He did or the world would be over
Remember the facts that the Bible told ya

I am beautiful

Because I am Godly made
No matter what are
nor how you speak
In the eye of the Lord you're
beautiful and unique

I am beautiful

Even skin deep

I am beautiful

Even though I'm doing time
loving God his Son
and the Holy Spirit with me makes it fine

I am beautiful

look at my face, my eyes...
my nose, my feet even invisible
I am beautiful, just look you'll see

Sonia

Shakopee Women

*Living Units bearing names
Of women strong, secure.
Reminding us to stand up tall
Our hearts pledged e'er to endure
The loneliness from absent love
The freedom lost by choice.
Counting days til SRD
Alleluia...we'll rejoice!*

*The history made by women here
Will not be read or learned.
The bravery of broken spirits
No honors to be earned.*



*The silent stillness of the night
Creates the visions yet to see
Reality without touch or sharing
Command post message: "JUST BE!"*

*Shakopee Women-God created
By his mercy, love and grace.
Reveal the history made by us
When we meet Him face to face.*

Joyce



Believe

What good is a dream that you can't perceive, and

What good is God's love if you don't believe?

What good is your life if you have no faith?

How can you expect to escape?

What good are your hopes without insight?

What good are your aspirations if you don't take flight?

What good does it do to walk with Jesus if you're truly not a believer?

How do you expect him to show you his love, mercy and grace?

If you don't believe he has what it takes?

What good will your prayers do if your faith is not really true?

How can you grow if you refuse to know?

He is not the devil, he does not deceive and

He will change your life if you truly believe!

Kathy

I Am Beautiful

From the wreckage of my life, a masterpiece has been formed. Past experiences once dictated my life, but through it all I've emerged into the present I was meant to be in and live in. Now, I can make plans to achieve my goals I've set forth for myself with God as my anchor and guide.

My life began with a sense of loss and despair. I lost my mother when I was only 3 months old. I was raised by my mother's sister. She raised me, my sister and brother along with 5 children of her own. My brother stabbed my aunt to death in front of me, and the police shot and was forced to kill my brother. The house of my best friend caught fire and she burned in the fire and died.

My dad had became an alcoholic through all this, but has managed to come to terms with what it was doing to his health and has been sober for over 20 years. I finished high school through 12th grade, even though I didn't get my diploma. I became pregnant, raised my children, and took custody of a little girl whose mother had a nervous breakdown. She is now 30 years old and still a part of my life today.

I was introduced to drugs, became addicted to smoking marijuana, snorting cocaine, and that progressed to smoking crack and heroin. I was in and out of treatment programs 18 times to be exact. I had been addicted 25 years on and off. Hoping desperately for a solution, I relocated in an attempt to start over. I got a job and during employment, I was brutally attacked and stabbed 25 times by a co-worker.

After that terrible experience, I sought counseling and psychotherapy. Then I was placed on numerous amounts of pain and psych medications. As time progressed, in the attempt to seek help, I committed a bank robbery for which I'm now serving time in prison. During this incarceration I've surrendered myself from all the bad and insane things that kept me bonded.

Reality has finally hit home with me. I'm learning patience, which is something I didn't have. I've had time to identify with my different moods mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally.

God is the head of my life. He teaches me on a regular basis to keep my priorities first in order. I'm a full time student working on my HSED. I'm attending Bible studies on a regular basis, and church participation on Sunday mornings, which I truly look forward to. Once a week, I attend an N.A. meeting to surround myself with other recovering addicts in hopes of sharing my experience and strengths.

I have often found myself reading a lot of T.D. Jakes books and watching not only his gospel programs, but also Joyce Meyers, and believe me, after seeking their words of encouragement it's almost as if a load has been lifted from me. Last but not least my favorite of all time, is Oprah whom I've been inspired by from day 1.

And through the love of my children and grandchildren I've lived to learn what God takes from you only He can replace. He is fulfilling my life with wonderful Bible study mentors and good people whom I greatly appreciate from here on. Even through it all, I was beautiful, and *I am beautiful* today. I would like to dedicate this to the women who are struggling. You can overcome! Just believe and you shall receive: Salvation!

Angela

"I Am Beautiful"



You are beautiful because God made you. He specifically chose you to be a woman. A female reflection in Christ image. You are a one of a kind unique design. You have your own spot in God's woman "photo album of the world." He prescribed you and made no mistake. God is the most famous artist and all of His creations have natural glamour. Genuine beauty. Especially a walking, talking breed like you and me. The definition of a female is beauty. God made females specifically to generate love and beauty all around them.

He delights in women. He also made women for men. That's why men crave women for their beauty and love.

Women are so beautiful that men get addicted and crave for them for the wrong reasons. In relationships, this causes confusion and confliction. Is it love or is it lust? If any one of you ladies lost your companion due to incarceration, (this temporary situation) well now you know what it really was between the two of you. Be grateful to know the truth rather than be living in denial. Be grateful that no more time is wasted that would only cause more emotional pain.

Now if your looking for your new man make sure he is worthy of you. In search for real love can be very tricky. Lust is often mistaken for love. Who deserves your love and beauty? Not to think that your too good now, but to protect yourself from future pain. All females of all living creations were chosen to give birth to a new life. A mother is loving and pure beauty. She gave beauty DNA to her child before even giving birth. Whether she has a son or daughter, her babies will always seek her nurturing love.

It's love that keeps an unbreakable bond and it's love that builds stronger and closer relationships including friendships. All kinds of bonds. It wouldn't be a bond if it wasn't for love. Love produces beauty in all that we do or have. When you love yourself you purify your spirit. You create a beautiful spirit on the inside, which shows, in your walk, talk, smile and all that you do. If you want to glow then love yourself. The beauty in you will reflect. That light within you will project and you will unconsciously give light to others.

Continued...

Loving yourself just as God made you will give birth to a better attitude a positive perspective just all around good. You will be one glamorous female. Your spirit will be very healthy and that's very important to keep alive on the inside while you are incarcerated. Then you can claim yourself *a soul survivor*.

Follow Jesus, obey the Laws of Love. Much of the world's laws are in opposition to God's Laws. The world struggles to share or even show that they care for God's world.

The majority of this world's ways are quite greedy, always looking to receive rather than giving. Ladies, you were meant to be mothers, that's why we are naturally motherly. We must remain warm even when treated coldly. Women are to reflect Jesus' behavior, so detect all your character defects and work on removing and don't give up. Replace defects with God's graceful characteristics while not losing your one of a kind self. Improve.

So nourish yourselves with love, the results are guaranteed to your satisfaction. You will produce bouquets of all different kinds of flowers assorted accordingly to how you're flowing. Internally, all in all, beautiful. You will put beauty and happiness in other people's days without even trying. It simply takes a positive attitude. Friendly greetings, good manners. You don't have to wait for them to give you love first. If you do that your chances on receiving a friendly, "Hi, Good morning," are slim. So stop expecting to receive first. Give.

How you react with others affects your spirit and your day as well. You don't have to say "Hi" to everybody but take a chance every now and then, the more the better. You don't have to know them to send them a friendly greeting. Love your strangers for God is love. If you were made to reflect his image we must be loving. Don't fake your mood though. If you're not cheerful be real with yourself and do some self-research. What's affecting your mood? What's robbing you of joy? There are thieves all around us. Don't let them rob you of your peace, love or joy. Especially not your surroundings.

Peace, love and joy are within your heart, not in your surroundings. God granted you peace, love and joy so don't let anything in this world rob you of the essential three. Are you going to allow a thief to invade your home and rob you of your goods? NO! Are you going to give up your goods? NO! You can be peaceful, joyful and loving no matter what's going on. You have these remote to these three. You can distribute love, which will then make peace and joy active within you and others. If it's a gloomy day outside that doesn't mean you have to be on the inside.

Don't let surroundings control your emotions. You're the boss of your emotions. Right? You don't have to stop by McDonalds for that happy meal. If you ever took

Continued...

your child to McDonalds and ordered them a happy meal, but felt like you couldn't get yourself one. Wrong! No matter our age, we will always be children in God's eyes. God made us give birth to us. We can bake our happy meals each day, if we choose to.

It's good to work at being positive, viewing everything positively. Look for the grace that could take place in all that appears unattractive in life: from situations, to objects, to living creations. Let's live in color, shall we? Color can be added to the dullest situations.

Yes, so cross out (-) like this, (+) so all negatives turn into positive. If you are positive, then you show that you have and follow God in your life. The cross and the positive sign are the same symbol. Being positive shows that you trust and believe in his power and realize that He is in control of your life, therefore His plan is the best plan.

You have to work at being positive. It doesn't just appear just like working out your body. To tone and build muscle in a specific area, you must have that goal and work towards achieving it. Once you achieve it, just like the muscles the shape you gained from physically working out, you must continue to work out to attain it. If you don't follow up after achieving, then you gradually but surely lose it. So once you become so glamorous on the inside, keep at it.

In my opinion, this world needs positive women. Remember she has hope, love, joy, patience, courage, wisdom and faith. Her love and beauty will delete the ugly in this world. This world can be cold and may seem that way to you, but you can warm it up. A positive woman has hope, love, joy, peace wisdom, patience, courage and most certainly FAITH. No one should ever underestimate the power of a positive woman. Faith stands up! When the world around us falls down, you remain beautiful no matter how you've been treated and how cold the world may seem. This world just needs love and beauty. You! You all were born with beauty. Don't let it fade. You all have the ability to love and be beautiful. As the female was meant to operate, lovingly and beautifully. They were meant to reproduce it too.

Positivity will give you elasticity. So no matter how long or hard the journey to paradise is. You can stretch it out. You can persevere. Don't look back, no matter how ugly your past was. Bury the past, for it is gone. Focus on the present. Be proactive with your new positive attitude and look forward to your future. Knowing that the good Lord has a way better plan for you than you could ever even come up with. Yes, Hanukah Mutate (it means no worries) for the rest of your days. God loves you and wants you to be as glamorous as He knows you can be. Beauty comes from the heart so don't worry about the outside. May God bless you.

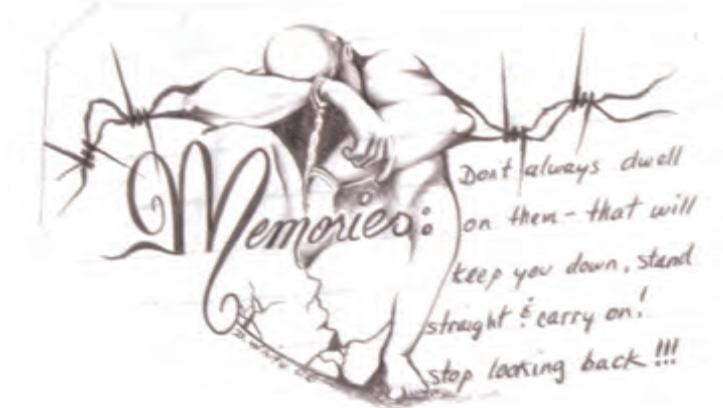
J.E.M.

Lord, please help me.

I feel very depressed.
I'm tired of being here but also tired of the life
I lived outside of these prison walls.
I'm lonely and too old to be just starting out life.
I'm weary from starting over and over again.
I feel so alone. It's a feeling of such despair.
Life goes on for everyone else.
But for me, I'm stuck in the past,
struggling with feelings I've never dealt with.
I don't really know who I am.
I've always tried to please everyone else
by being who they wanted me to be,
and if they were happy, I was happy.
I'm so scared of so many things that I didn't realize.
With you, Lord, I know that no matter what happens,
you will always love me.
The are no conditions to your love.
Please help me. Please lead me in the right direction.
I know it's going to be hard, but please give me
the patience and the strength to endure.
Instead of turning to drugs for strength and confidence,
let me rely on you.
I'm tired of being a disappointment and failure to my family.
I want to make them proud.
I want to do good things with my life and make a difference.
I want to help people and bring goodness to their lives.

Amen.

Deborah



A Grandma's Love

Dear Father,

I'm so alone. I wish I could be a little girl and go to my Grandma's. She was so loving and good. I know she's an angel; I miss her so much. I'd go to her house from school when my Mom was working and I was sick, and MeeMaw would bring me soup, rub my back and pray with me. She'd lie by me until I fell asleep. How I miss my family. My heart aches so much. Please heal my heart, Lord. Maybe once I'm out of this prison, it won't be so bad. I had so many dreams, plans and hopes for the future. I was ready to begin a family, that's all I have wanted for so long. Sometimes I feel I'll never have these things because I don't deserve them. I was on the right track for a while. What happened?

Please fill my emptiness with your Holy Spirit and let it renew me with joy and contentment. Amen.

Deborah



My World

I often think back to my childhood
Trying to figure self out
Wondering why am no good
In my world I've seen pain
Been abused by self and many
Sheltered tears behind the rain
You could ask me a million questions
Though my answer remains to be
When you're ready to enter
My World

Only then will you see
I am a battered soul
No! Am not afraid, open your eyes
Yes, am bold
When am angry or upset
Times I'll blink it off
Most times, I'll take that bet
Tell me, can you handle it?
You'll never survive
My World

For I offer you the realist
You can't help me even now
Pain much more alive
So to pretend your feel my pain
Leaves me to question how
Why exactly should I respect you
When you don't respect yourself
It took years for me to bury his hate
For it to show me it never left
Now you've claimed to want inside
My World

Molestation, beatings, tied up, starved
I ask "Do you serious think you can survive"
I'd scream, beg, plead for my life
Wanted out before age five
Family members would molest me
Telling me it was love
Then I heard an angel whisper
That my home awaits me above

No one alive or resting
Deserves to be abused
Billions have died as a result of their trauma
Under close or microscope watch
You'll find 9/10ths were abuse by mama
Inside My World

You'll find its hush, hush
You'll flash me a smile,
only to see reflected pain,
From past abuse,
I don't care to even blush

You can call me crazy
May even say "*Am a bit insane*"
But
Until you've entered the heart of
My World
You'll never,
No! Not ever
Know of my pain...

Chikita



The Men of Many Disguises

I am Cinthia with a history of abuse nearly all my life. In the beginning life was peaceful, until I came to realize how dysfunctional my family really was. My father was an alcoholic and my parents fought constantly. My dad and mom worked, which meant us kids would need a babysitter. This is where my first encounter began. I was six and we had a male sitter who sexually molested me. I was told never to tell—"this is our secret."

While growing up, my dad would be in and out of my life. My mom became an alcoholic to deal with her life. So I was an uncontrolled kid that did what she wanted. At 11 years old we were always at my aunt's house. Mom and my aunt took care of a 90 year old man and one day my mom took me with her. When mom went into another room the old man approached me and started feeling me in places he shouldn't have. I ran out to find my cousin, just to feel safe, because I did not understand why these things were happening. I learned many years later the same thing happened to my cousin.

Times were hard and mom gave up alcohol, only to work two jobs to support us kids. I was 12 years old at the time and had to become an adult in a kids world with not much of a childhood. I was the caretaker for my brothers.

My friends introduced me to a friend of theirs. He seemed like a nice guy. It was a weekend night and he asked me to meet him at the garage where he worked. One thing led to another, and he was on top of me. It was that quick. I lay there with my mind racing, trying to comprehend why these situations continued to happen—only to hear the whisper—never tell, it's our secret.

One day I began to retaliate—running away from home, doing drugs and alcohol, and getting into trouble with the law. At age 15 I quit school. My mom ended up having me put in a children's group home for about 6 months, which was ordered by the courts.

As soon as I was out I was right back to my old traits, if not worse. I was never home on weekends. I would be partying with friends. In no time, I was with drug dealers and getting into life, because this was what I knew. One day I woke up only to look into the dealer's eyes. I was tied (wrists and ankles) to the weight bench and him pounding into me. I turned my head and let the tears fall. When he was done he told me to get dressed and out. As soon as I was out the door, I ran to the police nearby and they took my statement and asked if I had a ride home. I called my uncle who picked me up and told him what happened—I should say, he made me. The markings on my wrists explained it all.

As time went on, I was to the point that nothing mattered to me but drugs and alcohol. Relationship after relationship continued more abuse. But when you're a young kid growing up in the life style you're in, your mind thinks this is what life is all about, nothing more, nothing less.

By the time I was 19 years old I had a son who was nearly one year old. I met a man that lived not too far from me. We went out a few times and in no time I was moving into his apartment. Everything seemed too good to be true, like a fairy tale. I kept asking

myself—"Did I finally meet a man who wasn't abusive?" It didn't take long to find out the fairy tale was over and the horror began. We were six months into the relationship and were getting married. The trigger of verbal abuse started. I called my mom one evening and told her I wasn't getting married to this man, the wedding is off.

I was forced into the marriage I didn't want, though 10 years of abuse was overwhelming. It was verbal, mental, physical and sexual. I had gone through countless numbers of abuse centers only for him to find me—followed by court orders that were never enforced. Police were always at the home. My older son was abused as well. During these periods my alcoholism seemed to have the better of me. It was my only friend and safeguard from whomever. People just hadn't understood what was going on behind the walls. His control meant I had to ask permission to visit my family. Friends were never allowed calls and if they did I would be punished. If I went somewhere like shopping like shopping and was not home at his leisure, once again a punishment waited. No matter what I did I was downgraded.

One ordinary October day the kids were outside playing and I was helping a friend move. Throughout the day we were drinking and having a good time. My friend walked me home that evening and as soon as I walked into the apartment, he was standing there screaming and his fist raised. Being under the influence of alcohol I didn't expect this would be the last I would see of my husband.

Until I came out of my alcohol high, I didn't believe the police at first when they told me that I killed my husband. A whole new horror began for me. I kept asking to go home, only for them to ignore my request. As the day proceeded I knew this wasn't a joke. It was the real deal. I was never going home and I would never see my three kids. I started to feel sick to my stomach, my head was pounding non-stop. In the way I was thinking and feeling, I wished I had a gun. I didn't deserve to live.

I came to realize the kids were my world to stay alive and keep going, to accept the damage and hurt I caused others. I was sentenced to 33 years to life with the judge's decision wanting to make an example of me. I ask, where is the justice for the abuse?

I have been in 15 years now, and I have accomplished my goals and am working on more challenging ones. Today I can say I have overcome more obstacles by the understanding of my counselor, and the social worker who arranged groups for the women. I learned that I am a human being who has made wrong choices in my life with what little skill I had growing up. To know it is ok to make a mistake and learn from it, take control of one's self, take the risk and ask for help and never blame our selves—it's not all our fault. I continue today to travel into the world of healing. I like learning new things about myself and changes after 39 years. I finally found closure of peace of mind and being reunited with my abuser from the trauma suffered at age six. The courage to know healing isn't over night. It's a journey to follow.

I am in hopes that at least one woman is hearing what she has read and the awareness to make the right decisions—to know the importance of freedom and family, and how quickly it can be taken away, versus drugs and alcohol with no voice.

Cinthia

A Woman in Motion

I heard the saying "*A Woman in Motion*" today for the first time. I like it. I like "Work in Progress" but that saying includes men and women. I like "*A Woman in Motion*" because it is only for women.

We are constantly changing, growing, adapting, learning, and adjusting to the environment around us, to take care and to protect ourselves and our children, to want to change for the better, and teach our children the right way.

Sometimes the motion is smooth, like a well-oiled machine and other times it's like we have sand in our shoes or struggling against the choppy waves when there is a storm brewing in the ocean.

I relate this to softball (I played for 30 years) how smoothly a double play can be executed, or reaching and jumping up high to snag that line drive out of the air when at other times I stumble about blindly.

The constant ingredient in my life is God and my love for Him and His love for me. The feelings that come with His love are so awesome. We can have the peace, joy, and contentment even here in prison.

Sometimes our motions get stopped like we hit a brick wall and we have to pull ourselves up again and try again because we need motion in our lives to take care of ourselves and our children. Because we are *women in motion*, we won't, can't settle for less!

Sandra



Thank You Lord

*Thank you Lord for the struggles you've helped me overcome.
Thank you Lord for the love and memories I share with my sons.
Thank you Lord for the food I receive everyday, even if it is on a tray.
Thank you Lord for loving me in spite of all I've done,
 and showing me that your way is the only one.
Thank you Lord for all the times you've protected me,
 when I ran the streets.
Thank you Lord for the knowledge you instill in me
 and the things you help me to see.
Thank you Lord for my wonderful friends and family,
 without their support, I don't know where I'd be.
Thank you Lord endlessly for the love I possess inside of me,
 and ridding my heart of such things like hatred, greed and envy.
Thank you Lord for good health, but most importantly
 I must thank you for my spiritual wealth!*

Kathy



A Special Tribute

This project began with one woman
who was its inspiration when she wrote
with simple yet deeply moving words
about her gratitude and her courage.
They are translated here from Spanish:

*"I thank God that there are people like you
who are concerned for prisoners.
I give you thanks because with your prayers
you cheer us on to continue moving forward.*

*May God take care of you and enlighten you always.
Please never abandon us.*

*My prison cell has been converted into a palace for me.
I prefer to be here than in any other place."*

D.





I Am Beautiful

A Survival Resource
Created by and for Women

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

Published by
DISMAS
MINISTRY
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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