

“From the Belly of the Beast, He Heardeth Me Cry”

I’ve been homeless for over five years, due to the poor decisions and my drug and alcohol addiction. But I have come to learn that my spiral down hill was waiting for me. Like my brother being kidnapped by my father and taken to Guatemala. And later on in life, being sent away to a boarding school for troubled teens at 13 where I was beaten and mentally abused. This is where I noticed I had serious validation and abandonment issues. I’ve lived in very messed up places and have seen so many things that leave scars in my heart. I’ve done so many things I’m not proud of. Things have been done to me, that ‘til this day, I am working on healing from them. I will say I thank God for all my struggles because without my struggles I would have never found my strengths. The crazy part about me doing well for myself is that I still have to live in places that have issues. Being in recovery is the best thing that I have CHOSEN for my life. If you were able to read through this whole testimony, then there is still hope and fire left in you to get your life back. It has been said that people in recovery are healthier people than those who have never touched drugs or lived the life of crime. My name is Christian and today I feel comfortable being in my skin. If you feel that no one cares, I do and you can do it!!!

- Christian H., San Bruno

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“Five Years Ago”

Five years ago, I was released from Chowchilla state prison. The picture of the woman in the prison ID was scared, lost, hopeless, addicted to meth w/no intention to stop, addicted to criminal activity w/no idea how to stop, a mother who had no involvement w/ her kids, a woman who considered herself worthless and a victim to life’s circumstances. A woman who was searching for love from anybody who offered it.

The picture of the woman on the right is me today. I have broken through barriers and consider myself no longer a victim, but a survivor. Through accepting support, recovery, and forgiving myself, I am no longer a statistic of the revolving doors of recidivism.

I am a woman in long term recovery who has reconnected with her kids and recently was blessed with her 4th son, married her best friend, has had her own apartment for 3+ years, runs for her recovery & not for the streets, has completed associates of science degrees in communications and human services, and has been given the opportunity to be employed with the County of San Mateo through BHRS working with the re-entry population as a peer support worker.

Breaking the chain of unpredictable behaviors and unhealthy lifestyles. I am living a life full of integrity and a role model for many.

- Corina Shortall-Enriquez, East Palo Alto

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The first time I attempted recovery, I was 1 ½ years clean when I regained custody of my daughter. I very shortly after learned she was molested by her older cousin. I'm grateful I was sober & capable of fighting for justice. However, the aftermath of such a devastating situation ultimately became too hard to cope & it wasn't long before I found myself back in my addiction. It hurt too much to even look at my daughter as hard as that is to admit & I chose to run. I ran for 3 years before my behavior landed me back in jail where I was sentenced to my 1st prison commitment. After receiving letters from my, now, 11 year old daughter, things really hit hard. I had no place to run... no drugs to numb... no choice but to sit in my pain & feel my heartache. I've spend much of my life behind bars but this time was the hardest. I was overwhelmed with guilt & regret. My spirit was broken. It was then that I made a decision not to run from my pain but allow my heartache to motivate me & be the driving force in changing my life. After 2 years, I was released to a program willing to do whatever it takes... I recently transitioned into an SLE while working full time... My relationship with my daughter is in the process of healing, which would never had been possible had I not made a conscious effort to make a real change. I ran towards my fear instead of away from it. I'm happier today because of the sadness I've known and with much faith & hard work I've broken free from the chains that bound me.

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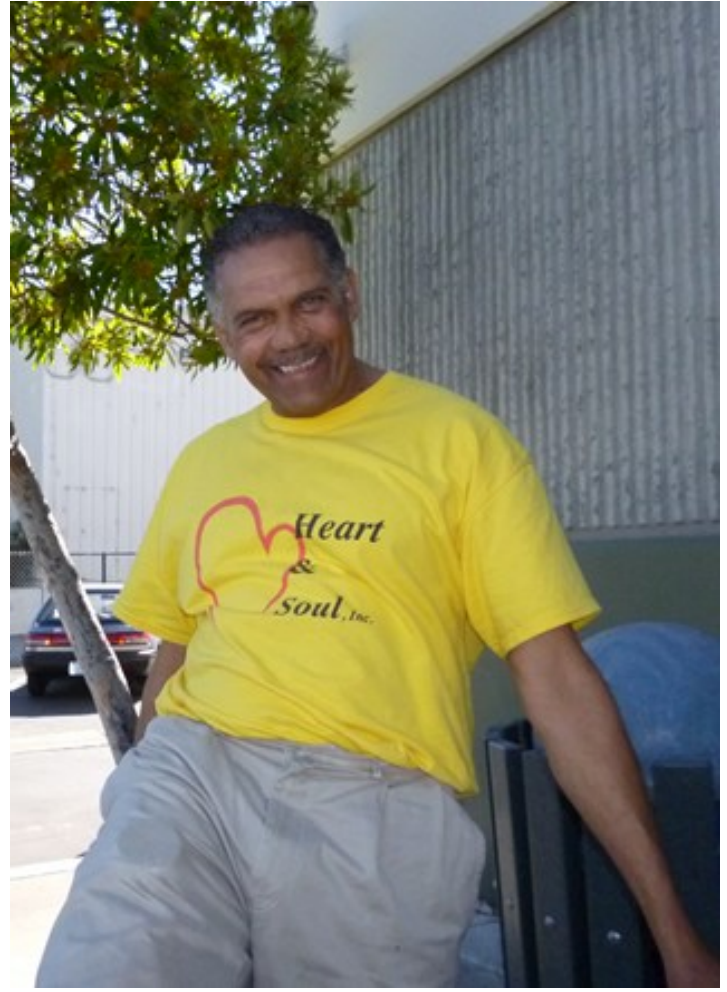
This is not life for me. I've done that — homeless with no hope. I wanted to think this was better for me. I could do whatever I wanted to do, without people telling me. People couldn't tell me not to smoke, not to have sex, they couldn't tell me nothing! I felt free, but at the same time its not the life I want for myself. Even though nobody could tell me nothing, I wasn't happy with myself. I was dirty, I felt nasty.

None of that would've happened if I put more attention to school, to my parents, to the people who tried to help me, to my counselors. I didn't feel like I fit in with friends at school & family. I didn't think they liked me. My family wasn't my real family: I was around with straight people. That's not me! My real family are the people who lived on the corner— they were gay boys and I could do whatever I wanted with them: things that my family wouldn't let me do at that age. The freedom is what I needed at a time of stress in the house— They used to tell me I was a bad person all the time because of my gender and sexuality.

Please find counseling or listen to your parents and your loved ones — they are the ones that know what's best for you.

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“Walking on the Sidewalk”

My name is Myles and I’ve been diagnosed with anxiety disorder — my mind races at times of many decisions.

I learned to breathe and meditate out of fear that I would never actually walk on the sidewalk again. That is where I stood nine years ago when facing trial and 25 years to life. The fear and disappointment in myself would not allow me the chance to give back, pay my debt to society, have the choices and opportunity to grab a bite to eat, go to a movie, window shop, buy clothes, or walk across the cracks on the sidewalk. My anxiety spurred me to change, to get honest beginning with myself, to stop lying, cheating, or stealing.

And now I’m a part of a community, close to people productive, living our lives being social. It’s satisfying to be honest and to not hide anything or feel shameful — forgiven.

- Myles, Palo Alto, CA

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“Flying Straight Together”

Lingering and prowling through the streets of madness,
I was taught to fly straight, and shine with finesse.
Had to live by the code, to hush and be down,
Felt like another player running up to the mound.
Baseball you say, well my team is irrelevant.
Cus none of them care, they cheer for the hell of it.
I veer off and run, for my life for God’s sake,
Am I living a dream, a nightmare, or am I awake?

Turn it around, preparing for lift off,
Got a foundation now, my past I take a loss.
A future to play with, the right way ol’ fashioned,
The American Dream, now attainable, not sanctioned.
Another plane below me, following, learning from me,
I soar flawlessly, flying, a role model I must be.
A Brother of God, I’ll love and never be late,
My Brother of God, I’ll teach to fly straight!

I’m in recovery; I have more than 4 years clean,
Before that, I did drugs, since my early teens.
I graduate Pathways & probation in a week,
I deserve a big hug and even a kiss on the cheek.
Earning A’s and B’s, I graduate college in the Fall,
I learned to be righteous, patient and walk tall.
I want to change the world, so people like me don’t need
stealth,
I’m a clean recovering addict, and I suffer from mental
health.
Not sure if you noticed, but please don’t judge me or my
kind,
Because we are all beautiful, & for everyone happiness
can be hard to find.

- Rafael Solano

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“The Doll House”

This house is one of the joys in my life.

The foundation of my house includes the programs & the people in them that provided me the strengths to build this Doll House. First SMC Drug Court, WRA, SMC Pre to 3, San Mateo County Mental Health Central, CSM Caminar Supported Education, County of San Mateo BHRS. Before I received this home and before I got into recovery, I was out there mentally ill and untreated, using crack to try and kill my life & me. The Doll House is on a dead end street. There are bushes there that I use to go and sit on the ground and smoke crack.

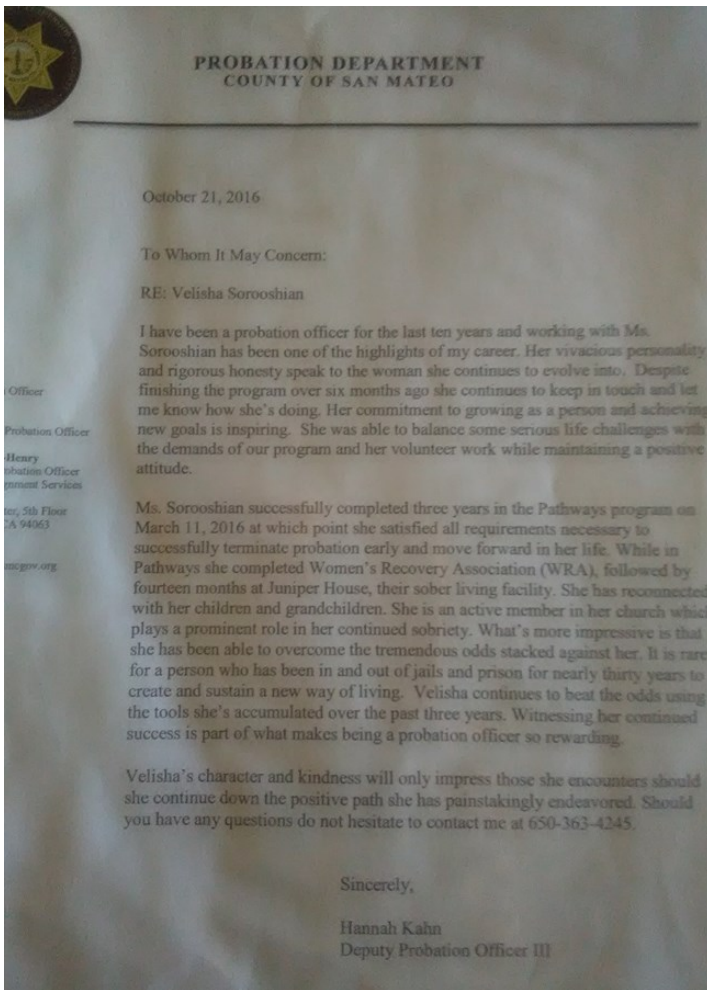
I was homeless. I just wanted to die.

I couldn't take living anymore. So I found crack to do, to kill me. I hid in every bush I could find, like this one on the street right by the Doll House. So now today I own the Doll House to remind me every day that I came a long way and I have it to look at and live in as long as I live.

- Renee Harris

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A lot of housing developments need to help people with mental health disorders and people with low income.

We should have the same opportunities as other people that don't have mental health or criminal records. People that have looked at themselves and are not violent should have a second chance.

Someone gave me a chance. Telecare Corporation & the Marymount Manor. Javier doesn't take Section 8 but he does take Life Moves. He understands mental health & homelessness & he likes to help.

Javier met me. He just saw through me. He knew I was on probation. He knew I was taking a chance with someone in recovery and he just supported me. JAVIER ALSO TAKES LIFE MOVE'S.. Javier DOES WORK WITH MOST (MHA) PROGRAMS INCLUDING ABODE. AT LEAST THERE'S STILL SOME HOPE FOR US. SHAME ON YOU BIG LOW INCOME DEVELOPERS!!! What hurts me most is to see people homeless. People with mental health out there without the funding.

I pay over ¾ of my income on SSI to rent. I still pay my car, gas, insurance and other costs. We need more things to help us.

- Velisha

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