

# Long-term Recovery from Addiction and Underlying Psychological Issues using Expressive Writing as a Potent Tool

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**Abstract:** This article follows a recently published book, titled: *Effective use of Creative Writing in the Treatment of Chemical Addiction* (Kreuter, 2021 – Nova Science Publishers). In that book, the writing of over sixty men in recovery from addiction express their feelings, thoughts, inspirations, and creative works all geared towards their long-term recovery. This article features work of men and women in both short-term recovery (28-day and 90-day settings, as well as beyond the dates of completion of their respective rehabilitation programs. Through ongoing weekly creative writing workshops, the alumni of Kreuter's work at St. Christopher's and Kreuter and Gilligan's work at Resource Recovery of Orange County, deeper writing demonstrates the effectiveness of the therapeutic device referred to as creative writing. As case studies herein demonstrate, use of creative exposition guided by topical prompts and the offering of therapeutic insight yielded significant benefits to those who suffer from traumatic incident(s) in their lives. Through the writing of stories and letters, writers who came to the drug and alcohol rehabilitation center for chemical abuse are impacted in a healthy way through the attenuation of, at least, part, of their deeply repressed angst over the trauma. In theory, they may have a much easier time completing their recovery program and continuing their active lives with less risk of relapse because of the work they did on the underlying psychological condition. The use of profanity in some of the writings is purposefully left uncensored out of respect for the authors and has been found that such use signifies sincerity on the point of the writer. Use of language is a frequent topic in rehabilitation.

**Keywords:** Addiction, recovery, creative writing, storytelling, trauma, drugs, alcohol, stigma, relapse, hidden turmoil, disease.

## PREFACE

Ann Knickerbocker

This may be nearly impossible to believe but before I was an addict, I was a person. Between the cultural messages, pervasive stigma, and internal emotional turmoil, it is easy to forget there is a real human being behind every troubled addict, each with stories and struggles that may be vastly different. Despite these variances, certain fundamental suggestions from 12-Step and/or psychology-based programs seem to yield positive results.

If one is to take a step back for a moment and consider the beginnings of addiction, one way to look at things is with the following question: If addiction was the solution, the question then becomes, what was the problem?

Furthermore, is there even a clear-cut way to answer such a question? Or perhaps, the answer is never a definitive one found on the on-going journey called recovery. What is in these stories will make you want to read more? These pages are aimed at exploring the plight experienced during active addiction, the journey through long term stays at hospitals and/or institutions, and the continued

experiences after treatment. Many contributions shared in these pages depict struggles amidst a paradigm shift while transitioning from active use to sobriety, the many emotional phases, as well as the plethora of triggers known to cause relapse.

Sobriety's hopeful tomorrows are still riddled with trials and challenges. Some of the hardships encountered are vocalized in the various contributions and depict the uniqueness of each addict. Pain shared is pain lessened. That which goes unshared will go unhealed. Emotional obstacles to be grappled with and tools to manage them are what bind addicts together, bringing us to identify with one another over common goals. So, through these meetings and these pages we can share our experiences, strength and hope that will allow addicts to continue the journey of recovery, with the faith it will bring a better tomorrow.

## INTRODUCTION

Eric A. Kreuter<sup>1</sup>

Addiction can be treated, and various methods are used to do so. Some believe addiction is a choice; therefore, a behavioral problem. "This is erroneous

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because the known neurobiological dysregulation, plus the availability of new medications that work to reduce relapse, clearly stamp Addiction as a medical brain disease” (Erickson, 2018, p. 207). As an adjunct to traditional treatment regimens, the authors believe in the efficacy of creative writing, including art and music, to help the addict heal internal pain and conflict. In doing so, recovery from substance abuse disorder is, perhaps, more achievable, especially for the long term. While many recovering addicts do relapse and some overdose and die, many stay connected to their recovery program and not only survive but thrive in their lives. Those who have become a regular part of Creative Recovery have reported very positive feelings about the help it has provided them. Like other support groups for recovering addicts, participation in Creative Recovery has served as a purposeful venue for addicts to voice their concerns and receive support from their peers. Healthy new connections are made in the process.

During morning lecture at St. Christopher’s, I ask the men to stand up for Step 10 (self-admission of errors and wrongdoings and expressions of gratitude).<sup>2</sup> By focusing on gratitude, the person is better able to see the positive side of life, despite troubles. This mindset also enables writers to unlock hidden turmoil in their lives. “One major setback of being emotionally jaded and depressed a writer or any kind of artist could experience at some point is a creative block” (Labeeb, 2020, p. 2). I hear writers complain of blocks in the flow of their thoughts. When this happens, I recommend taking a short break and going out into nature to observe the sights, sounds, and smells of the world around them as a way of re-energizing their minds. “True, it was an established fact how our brain is capable of being rewired to stay happy by just thinking up few blessings or things in our life that we are grateful for, for about three weeks” (p. 3).

I also like to tell the writers, including those new at the practice, that “writers write.” One individual said he wanted to write his own story (part anecdotal and part fiction). But he did not know where to begin or how to start the work. I suggested he take the next week and write one page per day. The following week he produced six pages of excellent writing—a true beginning of what may become his first full-length book. He shared in group the first few pages and received very positive feedback from those listening.

For him, the experience of being able to begin the craft of writing a book and sharing his words with others (making him vulnerable) led to a new sense of confidence in his abilities and in the worthiness of his chosen subject. He is well on his way as it is harder to start something new than to finish something that has momentum. The subtlety of expression helps the addict open new pathways to embrace healthier aspects of their personality and character, leading to sustainable positive behavior. Williams (2002) wrote:

...drug addicts tend to suffer under a strong and highly punitive superego. What seems to happen in addiction is that the ego is squeezed between a fierce and severe superego and the weakened ego itself, which is left to mediate a powerful id, that is, excessive infantile need and demands which have avoided development processes and seek instant relief and satisfaction (p. 7).

Everyone can write creatively. “Although each creative idea should be different from the next, the process by which we get to a creative idea is generally the same” (Clear, 2022, p. 2). When we feed the soul with external information, we are better equipped to produce stories, poems, and other artistic morsels, originating often from the depths of our souls (that special chasm between the conscious and the subconscious). “Through the use of poetry, the therapist can open up a channel with the interiority of a person” (Kreuter, 2006, p. 41).

One individual in the creative writing group stated that he had recently relapsed. He was open and candid about what he did and described the circumstances surrounding his decision to drink after 72 days of sobriety. He even said one of the people in attendance gave into temptation and drank after five years of sobriety.

Relapse is part of recovery. I spoke with the young man in my group about his courage and strength to admit his relapse and that it does not define him or derail his long-term prospects for recovery. In his telling, he had used for over five years. After the recent relapse, he was back on his recovery program so the relapse could be looked at as being one day. He did, however, also admit to having thoughts of using one month prior so his relapse spans the month if we consider relapse starting with the initial thought to use. We can refer to this as the urge. Fagan (2021) wrote:

<sup>2</sup>Part of the Twelve-Step program originated by Alcoholics Anonymous.

Clients can “white-knuckle” through the early stages (from a few months to a year) and find other means to distract and avoid the compulsive behaviors that got them into treatment in the first place. But more times than not, there will be what we call a slip or relapse. While it may feel discouraging to the patient and their family members, I try to see this through the prism of harm reduction (p. 2).

As a new writing exercise, I asked him to write about his definition of wants since he shared that he has routinely wanted what he wanted now and not later. It is, perhaps, this internal driver to expect immediate satisfaction of internal wants (even those that are self-destructive) as the risk of relapsing. We further discussed the “benefit” he perceived in using. He did not report positively about such benefit and came away from the situation with a negative self-image and stated afterwards he curled up into a ball position and despised himself. Such self-loathing has its own consequences and leads to depression and the possible temptation of using even more.<sup>3</sup> This can be a perpetual pattern and clearly shows the power of the addicted brain to propel a person to abuse chemical substances even when there are known consequences. When he referred to the other person relapsing after five years, he said that person described having the “fuck-its.” This instant disavowing of a long-term strategy demonstrates the importance of remaining full vigilant for any signs of giving in to the urge.

In the group, the young man received understanding, supportive, and comforting words from a young woman, herself in recovery for alcoholism. She expressed her appreciation for the honesty and trust in the man’s report. Both have a very positive view of writing freely and creatively to work through the dynamic of addiction. In the case of relapse, it is even more imperative to use all available tools to remain living a sober life. Poems and song lyrics have tremendous therapeutic value. “What objects a person construct, draws, models, or writes about may be used for interpretation. If a subject does not do one of these things on his own accord, he may be asked to do it as an exercise or test” (Murray, 1938, p. 259).

<sup>3</sup>“The self is a complex achievement rather than an endowment, built up successively through innumerable interactions with our carers in the past, who are significant to us because they not only meet our physical needs but also function as our self-objects, responding continually to our psychological needs” (Weegman, 2002, p. 32).

The material that follows are excellent poems and essays written by persons in recovery from addiction to drugs and alcohol. They are presented as a variety of approaches taken by unique individuals to address somewhat of a common theme: that of addiction. Underlying each contribution are mental health concerns or life experiences that are certainly personal and, perhaps, less common. For the reader: therapist, addict, or family member/friend, it is an objective of this article to portray hope to those in addiction, to promote use of creative writing as a treatment modality adjunct to traditional therapies, and to encourage those who have not found a path to recovery to try this approach.

Theme: Letters to family to express long-repressed feelings:

## CASE STUDY

### Letter to Mom<sup>4</sup>

Ann Knickerbocker

Dear Mom,

Let me start first by saying... you have enabled me by:

- Allowing me to lie about my addiction
- Allowed me to avoid shame, you allowed the harm reduction, and permitted me to delay or not experience the consequences of my actions
  - Mostly social
  - Emotional
  - Indirectly but in many ways financial consequences of my addiction
- Likely blamed yourself for my active addiction, choices, destructive behaviors (or both myself, my career, our family, friends, other social ties, property, finances), so like basically everyone and everything went down the tubes with my addiction
- During my active addiction, you would worry far more than I did that I was doing the right things to keep from getting in deeper trouble

<sup>4</sup>Letters are a very good way for the recovering addict to inform friends and relatives of their views and feelings about the past.

I'm not sure if I would have cared more if I didn't know you were worrying about things... most likely not. However, it was not fair for you to worry as you did - which is why I would sometimes try to hide stuff from you.

- As my mother, you felt it was your responsibility to bail me out of trouble when it probably would have only been helpful for you to support an "on-track" Ann. Not just "do anything" Ann (not sure you realized I was drinking).
- Putting my wants and needs before all your needs. Making sacrifice after sacrifice, I would make all kinds of claims that on some occasions were completely ridiculous. Yet you would appease me and my selfish destructive addictive whims.
  - The crazy part is addict Ann would find reasons to hate you
- For helping too much
- For helping too little
- For simply trying to love me when I was trying to ruin my life and hate myself as aggressively as I could
  - Granted, once sober I would be immeasurably grateful, but grow to hate myself even more, thus the downward spiral of addiction would be perpetuated.
- Minimize or deny problems... because what mother wants to admit their child has an issue. According to society's standards, that would imply that to some degree, you (as a mother) are to blame for some of the defects of your child.

Through this journey, I've prolonged my active addiction, I've engaged in horrific behaviors that have ruined multiple holidays, birthdays, and family vacations... because it clearly wasn't enough to disrupt one or two of those... but Over the Top Addict Ann... she is all kinds of extra and must do all the above.

I have even engaged in dangerous behaviors, and you would ignore them, my guess is because you didn't know what to do, how to help, or most possibly was terrified I would do far worse if you tried to get me to stop. My strong will was sometimes a factor that made me the most impossible addict to reason with.

Given those circumstances, you would do things that I should have been able to do for myself. I would feign helplessness so you would handle my responsibilities, and guess what? I would continue to drink like a fish.

So, moving forward when I'm stressed, I need:

- To be given space
- To be given positive affirmations on the progress I've made
- To be given just enough support to prevent a relapse
- To remain honest and ask for help when necessary
- To be reminded that I am human (and make mistakes)
- When I'm not stressed, I need:
  - To be called out on my junk when I make nonsensical excuses
  - To be told the truth about family news and not have information withheld
  - To be expected to act like an adult (and not an addict child)
  - To work out the hurt of my past (emotional trauma)
  - To be reminded I am not a child (which may hurt and frustrate me)

My recovery journey with you has certainly been a complicated one... that has not been limited to alcohol, but rather began with food (which yes, partially had to do with me rebelling against having our family dynamics being shifted).

I must come to realize my addiction stems from a place of fear and need of control. Recovery has been learning to relinquish that control and find some capacity to turn things over to my higher power.

Hoping to attain perfection or obtain a breath of power and choice that supersedes normal human measure... obviously that desire comes from the voice of my inner addict. The times we have shared battling my addiction feel as though they are more filled with sadness than with moments of triumph. It pains me to

admit this, however, a big part of my sobriety promise was to continuously tell the truth, no matter what.

Throughout this process, there have been so many moments I have hated you, or I was so filled with rage... I'm embarrassed to admit, I felt like my old sperm donor (who prioritized money and work over people and feelings... even when those people were his children that he claimed to adore). But let's not compare, because comparing often leads to the greatest source of unhappiness.

What I will say is both of our actions prove we have not only learned a lot individually but also about each other, as well as the human psyche in general. By no means am I saying either of us has a solid handle on things. Instead, we are both aware of the continued work and efforts needed to be made. It is frustrating and at times exhausting to acknowledge recovery and learning about it will be a lifelong process, for both of us. As cringeworthy as that may feel, recall that no one asks to get cancer... the same way no one begs to have an addiction.

One thing I know for sure, I am more than blessed to have someone like you in my life. Through all this mess, there would honestly be NO WAY I would have been able to come one quarter this far without all your love and support. As much as your enabling has continued my addiction, your love and support have gotten me through some very dark times.

I sometimes wonder if I would still be around if it was not for your strong and relentless love despite my horrific addict ways, particularly those of a self-loathing nature.

For that reason, I am certain I will never be able to fully re-pay all that I owe you well, more than the usual "the entire existence that a child owes their parents." This is different if one considers parental duties as selfish.

And before I tangent too far, I merely hope to let you know that:

- Your love is one of a kind
- I hope to return your love in your old age, when you need caring for, as I did
- I hope to live by your example and make you immortal, by spreading your values and messages you taught me growing up

In conclusion, it is not my place to judge the circumstances which arose from you enabling me. It is simply my job to maintain (1) recovery, (2) honesty, and (3) working on making amends. Doing all of that, I am sure (especially with your support) I will continue to be my best self and maintain a slow and steady recovery.

### Letter to Dad

Dear Dad,

As far as my struggles, my mental health all the "real" aspects of my life, well, I know this is all new.

To fully clear the air, I knew you enabled some of my bad teen behavior because of the divorce. That rift in our once whole family really hurt my heart. More than my siblings, I remember the amazing team you and mom were, which is what made the split more painful and had me questioning what a real relationship was supposed to be... and I guess I am still trying to figure it out.

Along the way I know I said some VERY hurtful things. I also know that my actions were equally as hurtful at times. For that reason, I felt it was my fault we grew distant. Moments like that remind me of the movies like "*Liar, Liar, and Mrs. Doubtfire*," where the dad got the unfair deal (until the end), however, if you recall sometimes the dad was not always making the best choices before I knew it, you will try to be there but oftentimes it felt like money and work ALWAYS came first. That hurt my very lost and broken sense of self-worth growing up.

I am so glad we have come to a place where we can have open lines of communication, collaboration, honesty, trust, respect, and most importantly, share love. For that reason, I know how detrimental a relapse would be for me (and my recovery), our relationship, and my legal case. In fact, I know you will not support me if I were to use again, especially considering how much court might cost, which is nothing short of insane.

When I am stressed, I need:

- To be given suggestions from wisdom accumulated from years of life experience
- Positive feedback from when I'm not a total screw-up
- For you to take the time to listen

When I am stressed, I do not need:

- For you to tell me what to do, as if I am a child
- To hear your criticisms
- To feel like you don't have time for me (like when I was little, after AJ was born, or when Helen entered the scene)
- To be talked at, instead of having a conversation with me

Becoming aware of my problem (my addiction), a part of my support has all happened so fast. It has been a VERY INTENSE JOURNEY. Considering how many years you have been out of the loop, particularly when you legally disowned me, well one would hardly know.

There are still more layers of my life you have not been made aware of. But the fact that you have finally come to accept and believe all the trauma I have experienced (you originally denied as possible at your wedding), it has been a major starting point for mending and re-establishing our relationship.

As this relationship is built, I'm beyond aware that you will at no point be accepting of any of my addictive behaviors, pre-relapse hallmarks and/or a relapse. Your support comes with the condition that I continue the right path.

Your love... I am "assuming" or maybe a better word is "trusting" in either case, your love I hope is NOT conditional as it once felt. Albeit back then things were immensely tumultuous and there was very few and far between that had any order/sanity/predictability/rhyme or reason to how things would pan out. Although recovery is not about focusing on the past, instead it is about being present, and doing your best each day.

With you as a role model and support, I know I won't fail because...

1. I am very much like you and keep forever busy with projects/exercise/other ways to push myself so I can continue to learn and grow.
2. I remain positive, so even on "bad days" I find ways to keep my chin up (even while being kept in a facility that gave ridiculous living circumstances as well as unreasonable punishment).
3. Aim to remain teachable/take suggestions/challenge myself with being uncomfortable.

4. Granted, I won't lose your love, but I will lose your support and the consequences of that are too immense to begin to fathom. So, for that reason, on track is where I will and need to stay.

Through this journey together, I've become "your little girl" again. The one who felt uncared for during those years of daily abuse, the days that broke me, yet allowed me to emerge into a skillset and awareness unique to abuse survivors.

However, the healing that has transpired since has had exponential impacts on my self-worth and my capacity to battle my self-loathing. I foresee your love as a linchpin to act as an encouragement and conditional support to function as a healthy level of pressure to "stay the course."

Theme: Writing as a way of dealing with trauma

**Jared F. Rodriguez<sup>5</sup>**

### Writings

#### Beautiful Silence

Losing you, I felt I lost myself.

Two souls ripped apart.

Scars that could never forget rising daily like a sun within.

Scattered notes of pain from my heart flee through the orchestra of the mouth.

Yesterday I was drowning in a sea of regret.

It was under the water I found you.

You breathed new life into my lungs.

It was there where our two souls were married.

No longer alone, we are one.

One body. One heart. One Soul.

You grew within like a rose in a garden of silence

My tongue became that garden while love flourishes like the rose.

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<sup>5</sup>Jared worked through decades of underlying trauma, which, for him, creative writing became a primary solution to work through the impact. He initially reported having more than a decade of serious nightmares. Writing directly to the trauma led, eventually, to Jared's nightmares to end. Today, his dreams are positive. According to Jared, his addiction became the symptom because he did not previously know how to cope with the impact of trauma. Jared became a prolific and highly gifted writer in the program and began to read extensively, especially books by the poet Rumi. His writings were shared with the authors for purposes of this article and used by permission.

It was not the music of pain played through the mouth  
that found you.

It was silence and peace within my heart that showed  
your beautiful face.

## LOVE

Love is life. Without love do we ever really live, love is the essence of life. From the earliest memories I have had I always craved that which I was always lacking, Love. What I have found in the constant search for love is that we only feel it when we are accepting of it. Like a rock is accepted by a river when it is thrown from the shoreline. The water welcomes the rock, the water embraces and hugs the rock. The acceptance is the key. Allowing yourself to be loved is an act of Love. For me to receive any love I first had to love myself. This is where I had the hardest time in recovery. I couldn't get around all that I have done to others. I couldn't understand after all I have done why should I be loved; why should I love myself.

I have always asked the question, why. I have always tried to seek an answer that I was never going to get. I read a poem early on in recovery from Rumi, it said *"questions never revealed an answer, pain was the price the heart had to pay"*. I have lived in constant pain for too long and my time has come. My time has come as a child of God, my time has come to start the life he has planned out for me. I am learning that from the pain I lived I can bring comfort to others. It's like the flower that blooms after the brutal storm. The storm wreaks havoc on everything just like addiction, but after the storm is gone, after hell is unleashed, you see beauty in its wreckage. Love can only come once we know pain, once we feel loneliness. My storm has passed; it is up to me to build a beautiful life from the wreckage left behind.

Through my time in treatment, I have realized more and more that love is not just a part of life, it is life. Once we love ourselves, and we can love others, that is

when we start living truly. That is when we start living as God wanted us to live. Everything we know started with Love. God gave us his only son because of the love he has for us. If God loves me, how cannot I love myself.

## Peace and Death

You tell me to stay in the moment,  
But in this moment, I'm in pain.  
It's as if my regrets turned into water,  
And I'm standing in the rain.  
As these waters rising,  
It locks in all my fears.  
Then I realize it's not raining,  
I've been drowning in my tears.  
I feel the pressure build inside,  
And these tears are my release.  
Staying in the moment won't ease my pain,  
Only death will give me peace.

## Piece of Soul

What a beautiful feeling,  
Not drowning in my dreams.  
In silence I find peace now,  
No longer frantic screams.  
When I put this pen to paper,  
I'm releasing all the pain.  
Mind no longer a prison,  
Where thoughts drove me insane.  
I found acceptance and understanding,  
In my heart he does reside.  
I never feel alone,  
As if he never died.  
I know I still can't hug him,  
For his body did depart.  
But on his soul's way into heaven,  
A piece flew in my heart.

**Questions for God<sup>6</sup>**

I wonder Who I Am?  
 And I wonder who'll be?  
 I wonder if this world,  
 Only has what I can see?  
 I wonder if I never lost my brother,  
 The person I would be?  
 I wonder if he wasn't with God,  
 Would he be sitting next to me?  
 I wonder if my kids are good,  
 Without me by their side?  
 I wonder if they saw my pain,  
 And heard me when I cried?  
 I wonder if this pain will heal,  
 The hole I have within.  
 I wonder if Gods cleansing rain,  
 Will wash me of my sin?  
 I wonder if God loved me,  
 Why give me this Disease?  
 I wonder if the answer,  
 Would put my mind at ease? I wonder if he forgives  
 me,  
 For all that I have done?  
 I wonder if he regrets,  
 Killing his only begotten Son?  
 I wonder if these feelings real,  
 And his love will continue to grow?  
 I wonder if I should stop asking these questions,  
 Cause only God would Know.

**The three wise men of St. Christophers' Inn**

St. Christopher has given me three wise men,  
 A gift from heaven above.

These men were very different,  
 But all agreed upon Gods love.  
 First came Father Angel,  
 An absolute joy to be around.  
 When this man of God would speak.  
 No one else would make a sound.  
 He emanated intelligence,  
 And told me what the world could be.  
 He said "Gods' gifts are right in front of you,  
 But you must open your eyes to see".  
 I remember the last time I saw him,  
 In his wheelchair under a tree.  
 I wish I told him I loved him,  
 For the love that he showed me.  
 Next came Father Bernie,  
 The most brutally honest of them all.  
 This man of God would break me down,  
 And then pick me up after the fall.  
 Father Bernie never minced words,  
 And he hated this affliction.  
 It was him who said I was running from God,  
 And towards the Devil named addiction.  
 If we had one more conversation,  
 I'd thank him for tough Love.  
 He proved that he was one of us,  
 Never acted as if above.  
 The last man was Father Bob,  
 More beautiful than you could know.  
 Whenever we a conversation,  
 I would feel Gods love in me Grow.  
 He heard all my confessions,  
 All the evil I have done.  
 He said if I confess my sins,  
 I'd forgiven as Gods son.

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<sup>6</sup>Co-author of this poem – Matt A.



These three men meant so much to me,  
 I am blessed more than most.  
 The all share a part within my heart,  
 With the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

### Untitled

Death offers us so much more than what we see. I have come to a place where faith in God has given me a better understand of death. In my heart I truly believe that when I die, I will be resurrected into the kingdom of God. This is the beauty of death. When we truly believe in God, when we faithfully believe that he resides in us all, I must believe that when I die, I will be resurrected in the hearts of all those who I love. In my life, like many others, I have seen death far too often and much too close to home. As humans we can hardly understand the concept of forever. To some, death is the only forever we can associate with. In my readings of Rumi, Chopra, and Dante, I have been opened to this new place beyond any sight and sound.

There is little said about the place between this world and the after. We look at the two absolutes always, life and death. Depak Chopra talks about the space between here and there as the transitional space. This space of tranquility has been attained by many people over the years, but a very few have been able to stay there for an extended period. This place, this peace that resides there, for many has become the meaning of life. Knowing and doing are two very different things.

### Torment

I'm that voice inside you,  
 I give you the blame.  
 I set your world on fire,  
 Then I fanned the flames.  
 I punish you with pain,  
 I am all your fears.  
 I am the one who made you crazy,  
 For over 30 years.  
 I can make you numb,  
 And take away your breath.  
 I can rid you of this guilt,

And forget about his death.  
 I can be so many things,  
 with me you are afflicted.  
 I have always been the drug,  
 And you are the addicted.

### Always a Brother's Christopher<sup>7</sup>

A mother begins to cry  
 Like the April rains fall.  
 Walking up the cobblestone sidewalk  
 To put his brick upon the wall.  
 Her baby boy is gone,  
 The tears are her release.  
 Even though she misses him dearly,  
 She knows he is at peace.  
 So, she summons up her strength,  
 And lifted the stone.  
 Then she realizes the names around him,  
 And he is not alone.  
 Then a wind came from the heavens,  
 And whispered in her ear.  
 It said "mommy I'm with God,  
 And all my brothers are here".  
 To hear his voice again,  
 It took away her breath.  
 Thank God he's a brother Christopher,  
 During life and now in death.

### Alyssa the Rose

Our family is a garden  
 And you my sister are the rose.  
 No matter how far apart we are,  
 Your love in me still grows.

<sup>7</sup>All men in the rehabilitation program known as St. Christopher's Inn (Garrison, NY) are referred to as Brother's Christopher, including alumni of the program.

You're the essence of the garden,  
 You're the one who gives it love.  
 All the other flowers envy you,  
 You're a blessing from above.  
 And when the skies turn cloudy,  
 And heaven sends the rain.  
 You can count on the flowers around,  
 To shelter you from pain.  
 Even though the rose,  
 Is the most beautiful flower at all.  
 Sometimes you lose your pedals,  
 Its then you must stand tall.  
 So, times when you are hurting,  
 And through the world you see rejection.  
 Remember how beautiful you are,  
 Perfect in imperfection.

### **Beautiful Angry Sun**

Stand tall within the flames,  
 He will make you fire.  
 And once you feel his love,  
 It's all that you desire.  
 So rid yourself of all your guilt,  
 Your Shame and all your fears.  
 At this moment when you are nothing,  
 His grace will dry your tears.  
 Now that you see clearer,  
 His promises in sight.  
 Remember it is he who gives us the moon,  
 And only he can steal the night  
 Nothing else can be love and hate,  
 God is the only one.  
 So, after he sends a cleansing rain,  
 Comes a beautiful angry sun.

### **Bleeding Rain**

I bleed from the pen these words,

To release me of this pain.  
 If I can rip them off this paper,  
 With blood I'd make it rain.  
 I'd take off all my clothes,  
 And stand naked with a grin,  
 And pray the blood keeps pouring down,  
 To wash me of my sin.  
 And once the blood stop pouring,  
 From this pain I now am freed.  
 I'll pick up the pen again,  
 And on the next page I will bleed.

### **The Gardener**

It wasn't until my eyes had been sewn shut, my ears closed, and I laid a veil over my mouth that I was truly able to see Gods beauty, to hear the whisper of his words and speak his wondrous deeds. I did not see it in the rain, I did not hear it in the thunder, and it wasn't in the taste of the forbidden fruit. I found everything in nothing, I found the most beautiful sounds in silence. In quiet contemplation I was able to hear the music that God was playing using my heart as an instrument. Each note being played as a symphony of heartbeats. The sound from within unlike any heard before, a beauty that my eyes have never seen and a thirst quenched with the purest of water there is, taken from the reservoir of my soul.

There is only one joy that compares to loving God and that is being loved by God. This love is so deep so intense it has made strong the weakest of men and it has weekend, the toughest of hearts, only the love of God can break down and build up simultaneously. A life built on shame, guilt and loneliness shattered to pieces with only a willingness to accept his love. There is a certain beauty in using these broken pieces as a foundation to the beautiful life he has meant for me. So, I build. I take the pain and misery of my past and create a joy and love for the future. All the while never losing the willingness to allow my heart to do the only thing it was meant to do, keep me alive by accepting that which makes it beat, Gods love.

I have had so many misconceptions about my relationship with God. I have tried to rationalize everything he has given me and everything he has taken away. I have come to realize that God has not

only been the boat on which I sailed through life, he has always been the ocean. He is the fire, the flame and the amber that makes it burn. What else but God can be all and nothing, he is the answer and the question. It wasn't until I was able to realize that I am but a vessel of God, that I was able to find meaning of life. It is through me that God can show others that from brokenness can come fulfillment, from pain can come joy and from anger, compassion. This love, this water of life has nourished the barren garden in my soul. Once a desolate dry empty space has become a beautiful field of flowers. Today I understand that I am but a flourishing flower in the garden of life and God has always been the Gardener.

### **Creative Eric**

You handed me a pen,  
To release the pain inside.  
There was nowhere for me to run,  
On this paper I can't hide.  
So, I allowed this pen to bleed,  
And I've been crying from the start.  
But you won't see tears come from my eyes,  
They are pouring from my heart.  
These feelings kept me sick to long,  
This pain I must endure.  
So, when you handed me this pen,  
You handed me the cure.

### **Dante's Mountain of Release**

In the valley of addiction,  
Just over Dante's Mountain of release.  
Roamed a man with a heavy load to bare,  
And an incurable disease.  
His backpack filled with bricks,  
Representing his emotions and his fears.  
Not knowing how to save himself,  
He's been in the valley 30 years.  
The valley can get quite scary,  
Especially when alone.

Where that mythical land called recovery,  
Is unmanageable and unknown.  
So, he wanders through the valley,  
Getting sicker every day.  
When one day he hears this frantic cry,  
Saying "brother come this way".  
In excitement he lifted his head,  
Towards a voice he never knew.  
While tears trickled down his face,  
And his savior came into view.  
Now this man was still quite stubborn,  
There was still pain in his core.  
But the savior that came over the mountain,  
Said 'Don't worry I've been here before'.  
Now the tired man got silent,  
While the two of them stood still.  
Then the savior said five beautiful words,  
"Just give God your will"  
So, the man became quite willing,  
Any other way he would be dead.  
That's when the savior grabbed his hand and said,  
"Freedom lies ahead".  
Now at the bottom of the Mountain,  
Looking up the man gets queasy.  
But the savior says I'm right by your side,  
I know this won't be easy.  
Then the savior reaches in the pack,  
And takes out the brick named shame.  
He lays the brick at the man's two feet,  
And says, "you no longer bare the blame"  
Excited the man steps forward,  
As the load it did get lighter.  
The savior says,  
"You haven't seen anything yet"

The skies get so much brighter.  
 As the two men kept ascending,  
 For the journey was very long.  
 He took out the brick named guilt,  
 And said "You don't need this; you did no wrong"  
 Two more steps and a thousand more tears,  
 As if he never cried.  
 The savior takes the brick called loneliness and says,  
 "God is by your side"  
 The mountain is both steep and high,  
 So, the men walk day and night.  
 He can feel freedom at his fingertips,  
 And a new life just in sight.  
 The savior stops again,  
 They have walked so very far.  
 He takes the brick named confidence and says,  
 "You're perfect as you are".  
 The backpack a little light now,  
 And the bricks they line his path.  
 And when the savior grabs the bricks named Anger,  
 They look at each other and laugh.  
 Not laughing like it's funny,  
 As they watch the anger fall.  
 They laugh because they rid the man,  
 Of the heaviest brick of them all.  
 The journeys almost over,  
 And freedom he will gain.  
 But the man still has two bricks left,  
 Their names are fear and pain.  
 When the savior grabs these bricks,  
 The man begins to yield.  
 Then the savior says  
 "I promise you, God will be your shield".  
 Now they are at the top,

Where freedom is attained.  
 Not only did he rid himself,  
 But an angel he has gained.  
 The savior keeps on walking,  
 But this story doesn't end.  
 So, the man says goodbye to the savior,  
 "I'm going back to save a friend".

## Letters between JARED and KEITH

### 1. Jared to Keith

Hey Bud,

I miss you! There is so much to tell you. The moment you hit the water, the ripples you produced have resonated through our entire family.<sup>8</sup> That day, I not only lost my best friend, but I lost any hope at a normal family. Mom tried to hide her pain with the mask of a clown, but I saw right through it. She thought she was teaching me how to smile, but she really taught me how to hide. Dad thought his tough façade was a mark of pride, but I saw his pain, I felt it. He taught me how to suppress it. It was hard for me; I was at the age where I couldn't run away.

I was five. Was scared, and I was in pain. I was confused and I was alone. Our older brothers were gone, they had an escape, I didn't. So, I was at home with a loving mother who was shattered to pieces and a father too proud and broken himself to pick up those pieces. So, I would look for you wherever I could, but to no avail, you were gone. You had gone to a place beyond anything my small mind could imagine, only to visit me in my dreams. I remember the first time I saw you there. We were both drowning. I felt the air seep from my lungs and turned and there you were, your face just out of reach. I was so scared; the water was yellow; I just couldn't save you and I felt so helpless.

For a long time, I tried to fill that piece of my heart that I lost when you died. I tried so hard to think of the good, but it all took me back to that day. I did the best I could until I was able to escape. I found a pill that allowed me to forget, and I thought this was the solution. The only problem was I would forget everything, good and bad. But you always found a way to come back. I saw you in my dreams again and I just couldn't save you. I was hopeless, the water was red.

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<sup>8</sup>Keith drowned.

Life went on unfortunately, home wasn't where the heart was. An empty shell, lifeless, full of pain and sorrow. Sometimes I thought you were lucky. Is a grave not better than a home devoid of love?

So, I took more pills, there was just so much I wanted to forget, unbeknownst to me, the ripples I was creating with my drug use were just as shattering to our family as yours. The only difference, my death has been a long and slow process while yours was instant. For so long I wanted to die; I want to be with you. I would pray to God that he would take me in my sleep. But he didn't. I was tired of living without you. You came back to my dreams again. I tried so hard to reach out to you, but I couldn't. I was so empty inside; the water was black.

Time has gone by now and our family is the same. I still tear through them with my drug use, and they still cry for us both. I tried so many times to stop, but the memories were just too much to take. I wasn't just losing you, I lost it all. I lost my best friend, my mom, my dad, all my brothers. I lost my innocence and my heart. Forty years and the ripples still penetrate my heart. But a new day has come for me. Today, I am trying to remember. Today, I am clean of that pill that made me forget. I feel you now; I feel my heartbeat when I imagine your face. But I also feel the pain of losing you. I am realizing that it is okay to hurt. It's okay to cry, because without those tears there would be no smiles.

I am beginning to celebrate you instead of mourning you. For so long I would silence your voice in my head. Now I can hear you as if you were whispering in my ear. I saw you again in my dream last night. I couldn't breathe under the water. I turned and there you were, reaching out to save me. I was hopeful...the water is clear.<sup>9</sup>

**Love, Jared**

## **2. Keith to Jared<sup>10</sup>**

My Big Brother,

I can't tell you how happy I was to have read your letter. There is so much I want to say to you. First off, I am sorry I never got a chance to say goodbye. That

day came as such a surprise to us all, but it was my time to come home. Even though your eyes could not see me, I never left your side. I remember the first time I came into your dreams. You couldn't see my hand reaching out.

The was just too yellow.

The amazing thing about leaving your world is that through heaven I can be in many places at once. There were so many days that I would dry mommies' tears as I held Dad's head up high. They welcomed the comfort I was trying to give. Unlike you who fought it off. I remember when you found that pill. I was screaming in your ear to stay away, but you became numb to my voice. So, I tried again to see you in your dreams. I wanted to give you hope. You couldn't see my hand reaching out to you.

The water was just too red.

As time went on, I thought you forgot about me. You became blind to all the beautiful memories we shared together. That pill not only made you forget about my death, but it also made you forget about my life. Time and time again, I tried so hard to come back into your heart, but your heart became just an empty shell. Comfort could never live in such a place. You must have thought I left you for good. In all reality, it was you who left me. So, again, I visited you in your dreams. You seemed so lonely. I wanted to give you the company you needed. You still couldn't see my hand reaching out to you.

The water was just too black.

I can't tell you how happy I am that you are finally back to a place of peace. A place where we can be one again. Two best friends, brothers. What you need to realize is that when you are helpless, it is me that offers you the help. When you are hopeless, it is me who can give you the hope you need. And when you are lonely, I am, as I have always been, your loving companion.

The water was so beautifully clear.

So now when you want to hear my voice you need only listen to your heart. We are one. Until your tired eyes fall asleep forever, just remember, I would never leave your side.

You need only look down.

I am your shadow.

I love you,

<sup>9</sup>The imagery of colors in the water is remarkable and depicts the vividness of Jared's dreams and how they became increasingly transparent as his thoughts progressed. This opening up of what was a deep-seeded torment allowed Jared to slowly come to better terms with the death of his brother.

<sup>10</sup>The reader is reminded that Jared is writing these letters currently from both his and Keith's voices though the death took place many years prior.

**Keith**

### **3. Jared to Keith**

Dear Keith,

Thank you so much for writing back. Receiving your letter really gave me some clarity. Just knowing that you miss me has allowed me to feel the part of my heart that has since grown numb. I am so happy that you are with God now. Not only with God but you also see through his eyes have his compassion and share in his forgiveness. For so long I have beaten myself up with the question that I could not find an answer to until yesterday. Do you forgive me? Yesterday I spoke to Papa Joe, a beautiful man of God. We walked and we talked, and we spoke about Rumi and Jesus. He said to me that once we are in heaven, we release ourselves of earthly attachments and earthly feelings. There is no other forgiveness other than the forgiveness of God. It is his Kingdom that you were born into and through his heart which you love. This conversation has allowed me to come to an amazingly freeing realization. If I believe that God forgives me, I must believe that you forgive me. It is one and the other not one or the other. You Dwell in the heart of the lord. You love and forgive as he does.

Waking up today after coming to such a beautiful conclusion felt as if I was woken up to love. Your death had taken such a toll on my heart that it held me back from loving others. My heart was so consumed with a lost love that it was not able to allow a new love. Before you went home to God my heart was a vessel of love with many rooms separated only by veils of understanding. I felt many kinds of love. The day you died the veils all fell into an abyss of my heart and the only love I was able to feel was the love that I lost. There was no other love allowed. At one time my heart was an open palm, welcoming in all love it could find. After you were gone the welcoming open hand to love closed and became a fist that had only one type of love within it. A love that causes more pain than being stabbed directly in the heart, a lost love.

God has a beautiful way of showing us the err of our way. He is so subtle yet so profound. I had been so shut off to acceptance and understanding that everything and everyone that God sent me to shed light into the dark closed heart came and went without notice. It is not that I didn't want to gain freedom from the pain I felt. It was just that I was so closed minded and hurt that I was unwilling to accept anything other than misery. I needed to be that victim now because I

couldn't be the victim then. But God has given me a great new understanding, You, even though you died here, were not the victim. You were the chosen. You did not die you were reborn. How can you be a victim and gain the greatest gifts anyone can ever get, Gods faith, Gods understanding, Gods love and forgiveness, but also being reborn into his kingdom. Like I said in my last letter your soul was married to my soul because Gods kingdom is within us all. So, like you weren't the victim then either was I. How could I be a victim if I was given an amazing gift also, my brother was born into the Kingdom of God that resides within my soul.

Your love in my heart is so profound right now. The only thing more encompassing than a lost love, is a found love. The pain I felt for all those years is nothing compared the joy I am starting to feel today. It's like the past 39 years was the longest night of my life, dark, no spark, no candle, no light of love at all. And as the sun within my heart rose and bleed into the marmalade skies of my soul I was awoken to your beautiful face. The wind whispered I love you into my ears and it's as if you never left at all.

I love you,

**Jared**

### **4. Keith to Jared**

Dear Jared,

It's amazing after all this time you have finally become willing to have an open and honest conversation with me. I know this must be hard and I know you will never fully recover from the pain. But you must realize now, since we have been taking again, that I am at peace. I am where I am supposed to be. I am home, with the Lord. For year I had tried to reach out to you. I have come to you in your dreams; I sent the wind and whispered in your ears, all to no avail. The minute you took that first pill numb yourself of the pain you took the first step of forgetting me. I was right in front of you every time you looked in the mirror. Yet, you only saw an empty shell. I think you may have mistaken what you were missing all the while. I watched you continuously try and fill the void within yourself after I went home. You thought it was love, but you were already loved. You thought it might be companionship, but you were never alone. You looked for someone to rid you of the blame, but deep down you knew it wasn't your fault. I watched you every day looking for everything but the one thing you needed to fill the void, faith.

I know you have struggled throughout life with the concept of faith. You need to understand that when you lost faith, you lost me. The only way I can truly live on in your heart is if you genuinely have faith that I live in God's kingdom that resides in you. Since coming to heaven I have been able to witness so many amazingly beautiful occurrences. The beauty is that I see them through the eyes of Christ. I feel love with his heart just as I forgave you as he has. It took you many years to accept that forgiveness. How many times have I come into your dreams with an outstretched hand, yet you just failed in the dark yellow, red, and black waters created by your own fears? How many times have I become your breath when you would stop breathing from taking too many pills? How many people have I sent you over the years as messengers from above? All my signs went unnoticed because of the wall of denial created by the pills you so madly indulged. I am so happy with the new clarity you were able to seek out my latest angel, Joseph, and our message. There are no coincidences my dear older brother. You both went through a lot to wind up in the same place at the same time. Papa Joe has given many gifts to many people; he has changed many lives in his years being a messenger of God. I will forever be grateful to him for helping you realize that I was not only home with the Lord, but I, as he does, forgives you.

As I said before there are many gifts that come with the souls' ascension into God's kingdom. The most amazing gift of them all is love. You see I understand now what true love is. There are no attachments that come with the love of God. I do, as God and always has love you completely, just the way you are. You lost that idea for so long. I think the only thing on the level of loving as God does is when you see someone you care about accept God's love. The clarity you have found in life has matched the clarity of the water in your dreams. You see me clearly now; you understand that I have been reaching out to save you for so many years.

I read your last letter to nanny she misses you dearly, also. As we were talking, she told me how she misses sitting with you at the table before sleep saying all her prayers. You see, nanny never lost faith. She always knew that I was where God wanted me. She believed with every beat of her heart that God's kingdom is real, that God was love and love is everything. She knew that when she was to depart the physical, she too would be with me both souls, within you. It was only you that didn't believe at the time. Now you do. All that you loved, all that you lost, has been found. All the tears you cried were not in vain, your

tears became a river and faith was the raft that brought you right here. Where God wants you to be, with me.

You have two options my brother. You can veer off the trail placed by God and return to the empty shell of an existence you were living. Or you can keep on this road paved with faith and stay open and willing to the many gifts that heaven has in store for you. The answer may seem easy enough, but the answer will not be found in words but in actions. Know that I am living inside your heart because you believe I am. That belief is the chain that binds our souls together. Once that faith is gone, so am I. Now that you understand this, now that I have told you all these things about love, and faith. It is up to you to continue and pass along these gifts. There is one last thing that I need you to realize. Once you pick up the drugs again, I am gone, not because I would ever leave you, but because every time you slowly kill yourself you are slowly killing me. Why would you ever want to kill that which you love?

I look forward to your next letter and please don't forget to write nanny. I know she would love a letter from you. She has been on this same journey with me, fighting for you every step of the way. We love you so much and can't wait to see you and be with you on this new journey. Nanny and I are only two souls in a fishbowl of loved ones that find home within your heart, only your faith will allow us to stay there.

I love you,

**Keith**

### ***Creative Recovery***

#### Essay on correspondence between here and there, life and death, Keith, and I

To say that this correspondence between Keith and I was a relief would be an understatement. This exercise in inner contemplation has started a complete transformation from where I was to where I am now, and to where I am going. The loss of my brother had left such a hole in my heart. It was through this process that I learned that, in the past, I either ran from the hole and occupied my time with drugs, or I just sat in the pain and fell into a depression. I never worked through the loss and closed that hole that was left behind. Until now.

It truly wasn't until I realized that I would never understand why he died, I just had to understand that he died. Questioning such things like life and death never unraveled the truth or an answer. This would only confuse the mind. Through my addiction, I was so

occupied with the anger and guilt from the situation, I would use drugs to suppress those feelings. Taking drugs never revealed the answer, it just made the question disappear. So, where there was no question of why he died it's as if he never lived at all.

Going back in time, I always felt incomplete, I always felt diminished, and I always felt alone. These feelings were all born from the guilt that I always ran from. I have come to realize that I could search the world over, but I would have never found what was needed to fill that void until I was able to look inside me. Until I was able to drop the veil of my heart, I could work on repairing the scars left behind. I think that's the beauty of scars, they are left behind after the pain heals, but are visible as a constant reminder of what was. Keith has left me with beautiful scars.

Understanding a question instead of knowing the answer can start unraveling a truth from within. When Keith died, I thought he was gone for good. I was mad at my mom, my dad, my brothers and mostly at God. It was God who took him away. That was my negative thinking. It was all about what God has done to me and not about what God has done for me. God might have taken my brother away, but it was also God who had given Keith to us. That's where my thinking, through this process, has started to change. I cannot on one hand thank God for giving him life and on the other curse him for Keith's death, I had to accept one and the other. Not one or the other.

The most beautiful part of this work was that my realization that, although Keith died in his physical form, he was reborn into the kingdom of God. If I truly and faithfully believe that God lives in me then it is in me that Keith was reborn. His soul did not die it was just absorbed by the ones who loved him. The irony is that my whole life I thought I was living without him, all the while he was living within me. I like to think of it as a marriage of two souls. I was a baby born with one soul, but over time, I have absorbed the souls of the loved ones I lost. I am who I am because of the love I have accepted.

This wasn't an easy process. The first thing I had to do was one of the hardest to do, sit alone in my pain. Once I was able to sit alone, I was able to start processing the feelings and memories that were needed to work through the trauma. It's such an amazing feeling to be working through pain instead of running away from it. Pain from loss had kept me locked up in a prison of my own thoughts, where freedom only came from understanding and accepting.

Acceptance did not come in the form that I thought it would, but it did eventually come, and it has filled my heart with what I was missing, love.

No longer underwater, blinded by suffering, my dreams now are of love. I dreamt the other night that I was pushing Keith on his rocking horse. I heard his laughter instead of his cries. That's the amazing thing about getting clarity, you see joy for what it is, and you see pain for what it is. You don't just see one or the other. For way too long I harbored on the pain of his loss and not the joy of his life. Now I understand that without the pain of his cries, I couldn't hear the joy of his laughter.

There is no better feeling to not only love someone so deep but to be loved so deeply. Through this I have honestly felt his love be reborn within me. I no longer feel as if I am alone on this journey. I no longer must face any of life's struggles, especially my addiction, alone. Peace comes in many different forms for people. But for me it's the understanding that my brother never left this world. He has always been right here. It wasn't him that was lost, it was me. Now that I have come back to the place of understanding I have come to the greatest realization of them all.

I have never been alone.

I will never be alone.

I am him and he is me. We have always been one.

Jared

**Dear Jared,<sup>11</sup>**

I am that sparkle within you,

I am your guiding light.

I am the one who holds your head up high,

Even though I'm out of sight.

I am the one who eases your pain,

I also dry your tears.

I am the one who never left your side,

Not once in 40 years.

I am the who restarted your heart,

When you took too many pills.

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<sup>11</sup>In the Creative Recovery workshop Jared was asked to write a letter to his brother who had died many years prior. Jared remarkably can move forward with his life accepting the death of his brother



In your dreams I gave you breath underwater,  
As if you were a fish and you had gills.  
I am the answer to all your questions,  
No reason to ask why.  
I am the dimples when you smile,  
And that sparkle in your eye.  
I am that beautiful voice in your head,  
And that whisper in your ears.  
I am that security that you need,  
To guard you from your fears.  
I held our family together,  
Especially our father and mother.  
I am the one who sits with God,  
I AM YOUR LITTLE BROTHER.  
Love, Keith

### **Dreams**

I dreamt of you one night. I dreamt of holding you like we were children again. Your face was so beautiful, you glowed as if you had just been touched by the hands of God. It was total euphoria, we danced between life and death, and we landed in my dreams, together. I saw something in your eyes that night, I no longer saw a fear when you looked at me, it was as if you are telling me everything will be o.k. I've asked thousands of questions since you died, and you answered them all with one glance. Your eyes whispered in my heart I love you. With that the spark within me ignited a fire in my soul.

There is a beauty in finding a lost love. There is a certain irony in being completed with that which made you incomplete. No longer fighting with the moon to stay away, I welcome night, I look forward to dreams. Even while awake, my heart that does not forget, plays memories as if our time together was a movie and I am the only patron in the theatre. I found a freedom in knowing that I can always see your face, I can always hear your laughter, I just must look within. There is nothing that can keep me from seeing you, not even the separation between life and death.

In memories and dreams we linger between here and there. Sleep, a distant cousin of death, brings the loved ones we lost out of their slumber to dance with us

again. They whisper in our hearts and reaffirm that God has been and always will be within us. That night I saw you as love, I saw you as a reflection of God. I knew at that moment there was no more you and I, it is us and God. We are one.

I dreamt of you again last night. I saw your beautiful face, I felt nothing but love. You reached out to me, and our hands became one. It's as if our souls were merged. You turned to me with a smile that melted my heart. It was at that moment that I realized you were dreaming of me too.

### **Dear Keith**

I feel your love when I wake up,  
And I see you when I rest.  
You're the bird whistling in my ear,  
Upon my heart you made your nest.  
You give me comfort in my pain,  
You right me when I'm wrong.  
You're the one I want to be with,  
40 years is way too long.  
When the pills put me in a coma,  
You were there to help me cope.  
You were there when I tried to hang myself,  
It was you who cut the rope.  
You are the answer to my questions,  
I no longer seek a truth.  
And when I'm sad and feel unloved,  
It's your embrace that gives me proof.  
You're a blanket when I shiver,  
You're my shelter in the rain.  
And when I say it was all my fault,  
You rid me of the blame.  
I thank you for never leaving my side,  
I would never want another.  
I can't wait to see you next to God,  
WITH LOVE YOUR OLDER BROTHER.  
Love Jared

**Addicted World**

The honeybee needs the Queen,  
 The King he needs the power.  
 The koala needs eucalyptus leaves,  
 The gardens need the flower.  
 The child needs the mother's milk,  
 The mother needs the child.  
 The Lions need to eat the lambs,  
 To survive life in the wild.  
 The cops they need the criminals,  
 The fish they need the water.  
 The husband needed a son,  
 The wife needed a daughter.  
 The farmers need the rains to come,  
 To put their minds at ease.  
 The teacher needs the students,  
 The doctors need disease.  
 The grass it needs the sun to grow,  
 The glutton needs to eat,  
 The vain needs adoring fans,  
 Kneeling at his feet.  
 The envious need more,  
 The lonely needs a friend.  
 life is nowhere without death,  
 every beginning needs an end.  
 The Jewish needs debates,  
 The Muslims need to pray.  
 The Catholics need confession,  
 And Night its needs the day.  
 Eve needed the fruit,  
 And Adam needed eve.  
 Even God isn't immune to this,  
 He needs us to believe.  
 So, when you're looking down on an addict,

Your thoughts may be conflicted.

No matter where you look in this world,  
 Everything is addicted.

**Grace on fire**

God gave me his Grace,  
 And took away desire.  
 Then he sparked a flame in my soul,  
 And I became the FIRE.

**Happy in Death**

If crying alone could ease all my pain,  
 I'd be crying forever; through my eyes it would rain.  
 If praying to God, would rise you from the dead,  
 I'd never leave my knees or take my elbows off the bed.  
 If I was promised to be with you forever in the sky,  
 I would dive into the deepest ocean and sink till I die.  
 But heaven has a price, for my sins I must pay.  
 I need to be with you again, my heart will find a way.  
 Even if after this life, I end up in hell.  
 I'll bargain with the devil, and my soul I will sell.  
 If only for a minute, to see you at Gods side.  
 I'd die a thousand deaths and be happy that I died.

**Heavens Rose**

Even after death,  
 My love for you still grows.  
 If God made my body a garden,  
 In my heart you'd be a rose.

**In My Soul**

My lips have now grown silent,  
 Through a pen I release this pain.  
 My fears no longer hold me captive,  
 Locked in a prison of my brain.  
 I spent way to long in misery,  
 Searching for a key.

Until I heard that whisper in my ear,  
 Saying "the answer is in me".  
 The voice was just so gentle,  
 And it brought me to tears.  
 But where was this when I needed it the most,  
 I've been in pain for all these years.  
 So, I look at all my memories,  
 And I go back to the start.  
 Then the voice comes back again,  
 This time it's in my heart.  
 "Stop looking with your eyes,  
 This search has taken its toll".  
 "Just sit down in silence,  
 You will find me in your soul".  
 Those beautiful words were cleansing,  
 Like standing in the rain.  
 Now words no longer leave my mouth,  
 Through the pen I release this pain.

Theme: Experiences in recovery:

### **Robert Giardina**

#### ***Untitled***

I remember when I first arrived at St. Christopher's Inn ("SCI") and security brought me to my locker on the second floor. Guys kept coming up to me and introducing themselves which was weird to me. I've lived in places for years and never said hello to any neighbors, so I was taken back by everyone welcoming me. My first thought was "what a polite prison". It didn't take long to learn it wasn't a prison at all. People kept telling me what a spiritual mountain we were on, I didn't buy it. I thought it was just more propaganda, and I wasn't going to drink the Kool-Aid.

I think it was around the beginning of June when I arrived at SCI and my first Saturday there, we went to the soccer field and played kickball. It was a beautiful, sunny day and I remember on the half mile or so walking back from the field to the main building, one of the guys I was with spotted a beautiful, tri-colored bird perched in a tree and pointed it out to us. I didn't think on it again until we got mail later that night. The same

guy who noticed the bird first got a card from his mother, and on the cover of the card was the same bird we had seen. A bird none of us had ever seen before was on the card and we were stunned.

More of these types of things happened during my stay. One morning over breakfast, a friend was telling me that this day, five years ago his wife had died. He had previously told me how much she loved hawks. She collected little statues of them, and pictures and paintings of hawks were hung all over their home. After breakfast we both took a walk outside and much to our surprise, we spotted a hawk on a tree limb staring at us. As we got closer to the tree, to get a better look, the bird didn't move but continued to watch us. We stood and watched back, and my friend said that he believed that hawk was the spirit of his wife. After about five minutes the bird flew away. I turned to look at my friend and he was in tears.

When I first arrived at Graymoor I didn't believe in much. I believed there was a God, but only prayed when I needed something. There was no spirituality in me at all. After spending some time at SCI, I began to feel a presence. As though there was someone with me. Someone I didn't know well, but someone I needed to know better. I started going to mass on Sundays, something I had never done before in my life. I started praying for other people, instead of the foxhole prayers of the past. I began to feel God in my heart.

It was in the fall when the alumni had their annual bonfire, and I was there with my roommate. But first, let me tell you about the Jesus rock. High atop the holy mountain where SCI and Graymoor are built is a very large boulder about ten feet high on the side of a cliff. Many people swear they see the face of Christ etched from the stone. I went to see for myself the first couple of weeks I was at SCI, and I didn't see what others saw.

At the bonfire, my room mate was taking pictures in the dark of night of all of us around the fire. The next morning, he started yelling for me to look at his phone. It was a picture of the flames dancing amid the fire, and in the middle, as clear as day, was the face of Jesus. I got goose bumps and the hair stood up on the back of my neck. There was no way to deny the presence of God on the mountain and now in me also.

#### **Where I Live**

It's lonely where I live  
 I feel like I'm the only one here

The walls are high where I live  
 No one gets in, no one gets out  
 There's no one to speak to where I live  
 I feel like I'm talking to myself  
 I labored and struggled up a steep mountain  
 Where I'm digging a deep, dark hole  
 I live in my own prison

### Untitled (2)

Well, here I am again, back in rehab. Is it my fault? Who's responsible? I never made any vodka. I don't know how to grow poppies or make pills. Blame it on Smirnoff or Pfizer. Just don't blame me.

But what if they're right? And I am responsible for myself. My brother drinks and he doesn't have 2 DUI's. My mom took pain pills when she had surgery, and she didn't sell everything she owned. So why am I so different? Why was I chosen to be the family addict?

Is it because my family didn't love me when I was growing up? Or was it that I didn't love them? Maybe, it's because I didn't get that new bicycle I wanted, or the jeans I wanted. Or maybe they spoiled me too much.

Does any of this even matter now? What difference does it make how I got here, I am here?

### Untitled (3)

I grew up hard in one of the softest towns. One of the poorest kids in the wealthiest of towns. I left home and saw things that scared me more. I left home an immature child and I came home ten years later a broken and immature man. I've always been sad but found happiness once on the side of a mountain with Friars. I tried to reclaim that happiness years later but couldn't find it.

I was asked to write my bio, and the above is what I was willing to offer. It's not the truth, it's not a lie either. But the truth is I drink when I'm happy, I drink when I'm sad, I drink. They gave me pills and shots to stop, but I drink. I've had nearly decades of sobriety and to me they feel like times I was treading water. I'm comfortable drinking. I've ruined every good thing in my life by drinking and I'd still rather be drinking.

People don't ask me what it was like to fish commercially for big eye tuna in Alaska. Or what it was

like to sail competitively. They ask me if I'm sober. I am Bobby G., and I drink.

Theme: Existential reflections of a recovering addict:

### Failure?

**Adam Souda**

I don't fear failure

I fear pain

I look around

And seeing no one in my lane

Although I know this is not possible

I still have the fear

Because one day I'll grow old

I'm afraid that that day is near

It's not an excuse to run

It's not an excuse to hide

I'm just showing you what's inside

I know what's right

I accept it

I'm just letting the pain scab

I will take care of it

So, it does Not grow with sepsis

Theme: Collaborative writing between two persons in recovery who met in the writing group:

### Who Are You and Who I Am Now?

**Robert Giardina and Gregory R. Gilligan**

Who are you?

So small, so quiet, so afraid

**I am tall, confident**

Who are you?

So sad, so sullen

**I am happy and joyful**

Who are you?

So tired, so scared

**I am refreshed and full of courage**

Who are you?

At the bottom of a bottle

I know who you are

**You know who I was**

***I am NOT that person anymore***

**Theme: Guilt**

**500**

**Constantinos Doonan**

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am the darkness in the corner of the room, I am the voices talking to you in your heads, I am that energy, that feeling of right that gut instinct. I am the feeling of guilt you have so often, I am your "should haves", "would haves", I am 500 versions of you!

That earnestness, that feeling of power you must embrace.... Go with your gut...seek the victories you deserve...for God's sake people you are right! If you have the answer, speak it. Who knows how many times you could have been saving someone's life? You are the most powerful of them all; embrace your intuition, your knowledge learns to love who, and what you are. Your empathy can do wonders in this world.

Think about it, you were the only kid in the classroom with the cheat sheet to every quiz, test on life and you have the power to heal. Don't waste your vulnerable years being afraid or thinking you're a god damn X man like I did. Go out and do right in life and go out and make a name for yourself. You all have a gift, go, and use it. And you, the ones with drug and alcohol problems, go and get help and stop killing your precious beings. You are not crazy, you are not monsters, and you are highly gifted intelligent people.

You have a purpose in life, you matter, and empathy is real. Put down the drink or drug and go out there and heal the world. Go out, be seen, be heard and do what is right! The ones afraid to leave their house or can't be near people are the ones that are self-loathing. You are not alone, and you can channel all this negative energy. You can learn how to ignore it, and you can be happy.

You are real and I promise you there is a life worth living. I mean the world needs your help and you are

dearly wanted by many. Go out, get out and heal yourselves and start healing the ones around you. I promise you my brothers that we matter, and we are loved, and people need us to open and be the free spirits we were meant to be. Go out and heal the world brothers. Over and out.

**Poison Beauty**

Poison beauty you are so fine

You make my world so divine

Please let me drown in your gown

As I look upside down

From this casket, just you and I

As we watch dirt fall from the sky

Never more shall we divide

We stayed together through every ride

Now they think we're here to die

But here we lay in our velvet pine

Nothing more than two lost souls

Getting ready for us to combine

Poison beauty will you dance with me

Time is of the essence

So, lets chose who will get this

Not you and I, but them and why?

Let our worlds intertwine

This once and final time

**Untitled**

Our lives were great until this

Virus took us out of place

Now we're surrounded by a bunch of fakes

Trying to tell us how to break

This everlasting cycle of hate

Ran by the ones we want to assassinate

Do they even realize what's at stake?

And that we can just escape these

Fucking restraints of false faith, shit open

The gates, don't even try to hypnotize us

With your fucking lies that just  
 Criticize our "awful minds" and you  
 Wonder why we write these rhymes  
 Of hate and disgrace because  
 You assume our fate maybe try  
 To appreciate that you still have  
 A face to participate in this world  
 Of hate that you helped create  
 Remove your masks it's time to  
 Eliminate these ignorant fakes

Theme: the anxiety of change:

### **Painful Change**

**W. T.**

I the wind of unforgiveness  
 We hold with concrete hands  
 As a sudden, silent breath  
 With a steady eye in a struggling fight  
 With a sudden feeling of enemies  
 Passing behind me with swirling tension  
 With painful words without voice  
 In the wind of unforgiveness + steadyess  
 Taunting shadows  
 Clawing at my spirit  
 As it fuels my fears  
 In a burst of determination  
 I scream....  
 I must stand up! In the face of my own  
 Worst enemy  
 With pain searing through my veins  
 I fight to reach the spot of light  
 That seems to get farther and farther  
 As I push against the wind of strife  
 It echoes! You will not win!  
 But my stubbornness persists

To push thru the threshold of hell  
 A whisper falls into my ears  
 Take your power back  
 By surrendering to yourself  
 So, the steadiness of time, it fell over me  
 I looked at it with tears falling down my cheeks  
 Dripping off my chin  
 A light burst into a blinding light  
 Turning the evil to ash  
 I then rose to my feet to see  
 A beautiful light of cobalt blue  
 Pushing a sound so beautiful  
 It calmed my very soul  
 White wings cloak over me keeping  
 Me warm from the coldness of hell  
 I was in  
 Suddenly a voice whisper again  
 Go to your loved ones  
 As my eyes open slowly  
 Hear my kids' voices of joy

### **Untitled**

In shock I went downstairs  
 My kids ran into my arms  
 As my wife smiles behind them  
 That burns not from the heat  
 But by how cold it can get  
 In the shadows an evil lurks  
 Eyes of yellow fear appear in the darkness  
 The evil speaks...  
 I am the demon of painful anguish and  
 Endless fears. You will live in pain endlessly  
 Cause you are me  
 And I am you!  
 So, the demon comes closer to finish me off

With the pitter, patter of his claws  
 As blood and drool drip off his fangs  
 A voice speaks silently  
 You are him and he is you  
 Suddenly my eyes widen and bravery snatches  
 My spirit  
 I reach deep into myself  
 My spirit explodes with an earth shattering  
 Powerful earthquake with immense light  
 That shook the ground which the demon stood

### **A Sobering Death**

Heavy eyes during fickle daylight hours struggling not to lose my soul, fail to rise without knowing as my spirit soaks into the fainting soul seeping cautiously into the living earth.

Confused by the internal, empty peace in my wondering mind, desperately trying to connect to the earth as the energy pulls deeper & deeper flowing forward into the arms of Mother Gale with my sudden surrender of stillness with my hollow mind & wordless speech.

The honorable warrior lays down his sword. The lids of his eyes lowering as if he was drugged and body losing feeling in the slowest of motion feeling the roots, rock & soil sealing against his armor as silence prevails and numbness succeeds to push my mind, body & soul through the mesh to find myself in the warm belly of Mother Gale. At that moment, regaining the feeling of my body, numbness slowly lifts & rises from myself. Consciousness starts to clear to begin my journey not knowing my path, scaling cavern to cavern, feeling loose.

Suddenly a soft voice appears to my ear, and I turn towards the woven direction to where it bounces off the belly of the mother of man. A blindness of light appears from the dark and the voice sounds again "Do not fear". With an echo in the sound, turning towards the bellows, a distant turbulence inside.

Before my sight, a magical beauty appears kicking off the cavern walls of bright crystal and mysterious diamonds with flowing, colorful energy fields, floating like clouds being guided by the wind. Suddenly, a Godly peace unheard or felt by life, a sudden force

floats my body off my feet, slowly carrying me to a lost paradise of peace, giving a knowing and having a warmth of unconditional love, and my body burst like a collapsing star, with soft hands into millions of flies marinating and soaking into the glittering, bright diamonds, and crystal glowing cavern walls, waiting to save the next soul.

Theme: Resilience in recovery:

### **Things I will Gain Back in Recovery & How I Will Stay in Recovery**

#### **R. D.**

First and foremost, I will gain back my identity through my recovery. Like anybody, my identity consists of many things. From my purpose in life, my beliefs, the way I spend my time, the friends I hang out with, my common behaviors, and even the food I eat.

Within my refurbished identity, I will gain back patience and self respect through the trials and tribulations of this process; one must struggle to progress. Patience will give me peace of mind; remind me to work on one thing at a time so that I don't overwhelm myself. Before I even go about gaining back my purpose in life, I must first sit with myself, become comfortable in my own skin, and to just be in the present, and to truly appreciate everything around and within me. I believe this practice of mindfulness will prepare me for the life ahead of me.

I would like my purpose in life to be some form of giving back to my community and being a truly active and benevolent member of society. Through my mindful process, I will gain back the integrity, charisma, resilience, initiative, and consistency to do so.

Another aspect of my identity is the way I spend my time. From the friends I hang out with to my daily routine. Gaining back new sober friends will shed light on my perspective on life. Listening to their stories and familiarizing me with them will create a powerful bond and sense of connection with one another. Having that sense of connection will help shape my daily routine in a healthier manner. It's imperative to express my identity to others and the world around me, to make myself known and to teach people how to treat me. The root of identity is to show the world who I am, to truly present myself and to manifest my life into the lives of others.

About my internal identity, I will gain back my confidence through the talents and hobbies that define

me. I want to have a more structured practice of my talents. To focus on the people, places, and things that will inspire me. However, inspiration can be a spontaneous discovery. It's my job to harness that spontaneity into my creativity. At last, through this recovery, I will gain back the sensation of inspiration and the ability to perpetually express those feelings through the work I create.

How am I going to stay in recovery you ask? Well, let's open my weapon inventory. I have four lethal, cognitive devices that will protect me from relapse and a multitude of physical weapons as well. These weapons I carry guard the temple that is my mind, body, and spirit. They surround my temple from the invasions of temptations, cravings, and other negative emotions that will attack me from time to time.

My first cognitive weapon of defense is mindful meditation which I previously brought up. This weapon of self-defense will alleviate the emotions of anxiety, boredom, and depression through mindfulness and meditation. I can become more self-observant of these emotions, instead of reacting to the negative feelings (that everyone in life experiences). I shall greet and welcome these emotions to understand the root of their existence. It is the weapon of love, to embrace these feelings with all my heart, and to accept the fact that emotional pain is inherently in all of us, it's just a matter of letting it be and knowing it soon shall pass. Emotional pain is what makes us human, it's the obstacle that builds our character. When we use, we are running away from these emotions. Whether it's because we're scared to experience the feelings or afraid that we can't control them. However, the more we run away from these inevitable emotions, the less likely we'll be able to conquer them and discover our true self.

My second weapon is very simple yet extremely effective. It's the power of our words, and the words we choose to use. I believe that our word is our bond, and the more we recite them, the more powerful and real they become. Words are the ammunition that we shoot out into the universe. Words can destroy and manipulate our reality and they can also blossom the acknowledgment of our existence. In addition, we must be very careful with our choice of words, for they can dictate the way we perceive ourselves and the world around us.

My choice of ammunition comes in the form of a mantra, these bullets are, *"easy choices, hard life, hard choices, easy life"*. When I recite this mantra, I do get

feelings of anxiety and nervousness, for we all must face daunting decisions at some point in our lives. But that impending fear is our awareness and wariness of life and promotes a sense of self-worth. Choosing the more difficult route, will in return, make us a more worthy and noble knight. Making those hard choices will prove to ourselves and those around us, our internal strength. Of course, this is easier said than done, but I believe reciting this mantra will remind me of my never-ending journey of recovery and preparation for future crossroads that I'll soon face.

My third internal weapon is memory and practicality, or in other words, *"playing the tape"*. Whenever I get cravings, I remind myself of the inevitable conclusions; the blackouts, the hangovers, the withdrawal, and the inability to basically do anything. It reminds me that no matter how good it feels to be intoxicated it's never worth losing my natural state of mind. When I *"play the tape"* I see myself locked in my own mind, stuck in my room, paralyzed on my bed as my dilapidated temple implodes in on its foundation. And I think to myself, *"Wow, what a Debbie Downer, get a backbone dude, the world is waiting for you"*. So, I laugh at myself, because when I look back on those solemn, isolated days, they don't seem as depressing. I was just being childish, scared to get out of bed and face the world like the man I know I am.

My fourth weapon against the madness of addiction is analogies, metaphors, and ways of personifying the addiction. It enables me to visualize my internal demons. When I visualize my addiction as an actual thing, it becomes less of this ambiguous feeling and turns into a target I can see, aim, and shoot at with precision. The turtle and the fox are an analogy I like to use. The story goes that a turtle finds itself being hunted by a fox. Instead of running away, it retreats into its shell. As the fox does all it can to extract the turtle from its shell, the turtle observes the desperate attempts the fox makes. Soon, the turtle's fears dissipate, and it learns through observations how to become friends with the fox. When I visualize my negative emotions and addiction as a fox, it makes these feelings more mentally concrete, approachable, and accessible to control.

The way that water goes down the path of least resistance can be seen as a metaphor of the easy choices we make in life. To pave a new path for ourselves we must exert more passionate energy. The same way a powerful current after a rainstorm will carve a creek into a river. It reminds me that it will take



a lot of internal and external energy and strength to change my life. As daunting as that may seem, a beautiful metaphor, like life being a creek and slowly transforming into a prospering river puts me at ease and gives me a faithful outlook on the path I will carve.

As one may have guessed, my physical arsenal is working out my body, the support from my friends and family, the food I put into myself, the creations of my artwork, the sounds of my music resonating with the cosmos, the labor of my work benefiting a better tomorrow, and the love I give and receive.

These weapons that guard my temple are also the tools that build the fortress around it. It is a construction project that will be in constant repair as the resistance will remain the same. It's highest peak perpetually ascending, beyond the stars, and its foundation deep, to the core of my being. A never-ending labyrinth that is my mind, body, and spirit

Theme: Use of metaphor in creative writing:

## **The Forest of Life**

### ***Sherard Julian***

I am on the road of recovery, like a bear navigating through a forest looking for food. A savage on a fierce search as my stomach is running on empty. The nourishment for which I seek would fulfill and replenish my energy and strength. However, I am in a dilemma. I must choose from which source I will receive my substance. Shall I quest the natural foods God has unveiled before me and deal with the challenges I face to acquire them? Fruits and vegetables from the soil to the fish swimming in the nearby stream are beneficial to my health. To have them climb up a tree, swim and fish in the stream, and trudge along through long lengths of the forest.

The other source is the quick and easy method of going through camping grounds where those humans have their picnics food of deliveries food. When they are preoccupied with other matters and forgetting their precious goods, it is an opportunity to seize what I feel belongs to me. Even though this method is easy, it is dangerous. These humans can attack me with guns, arrows, and other lethal weapons, resulting in me to live a short life. Their food can also be unhealthy in the long run, but so tempting and attractive to me right now.

I want to use my fearless ability to go the extra mile, the natural foods in the forest, which my body is

accustomed to. I must utilize my days and my natural balance abilities to climb trees to gather the fruits and berries. I feel that I have the intelligence and strength to overcome the challenges of finding food for myself and my family as opposed to the short cut, risking my life. I am also building shelter for my family and summer through the harshness of winter.

So, my question to myself is, will I accept the challenges of navigating and commandeering the forest of life and learning how to survive until I thrive to success, or should I cheat and steal to find the shortcut and thus risking my life?

## **The Force**

I was always amazed at certain individuals' fortunate circumstances. I was envious of their situations. They would have the fantastic career, spouses they would consider their soulmates, drive the exotic cars imported from a foreign land, and possess spacious mansions surrounded by acres and acres of land. I wonder how they got so lucky. As I searched, I found reasons for their good fortune. Some inherited from family, while others received it by means of illegal activities.

However, a certain percentage of people have achieved these riches on their own. I have studied these individuals throughout the years to find out the methods or activities they utilized that resulted in their enormous success and reward. There were various methods but was a similarity that these folks had in common.

First, they had a dream or goal that they desired. Second, they work diligently and consistently toward that goal. The third thing is what I believe in; a force greater than themselves has been unlocked to facilitate these individuals' efforts to claim massive success. When mentioning: "A force greater than we" many people have different words for it. Some refer to energy, the light, higher power, or God. But whatever name one calls it, no one can deny the opportunities and benefits that it gives us, as it seems to come from nowhere. A problem that you have tried so hard to solve miraculously gets resolved. If you work hard at a job, you suddenly get a promotion with a raise. When you are searching aimlessly in dating websites, you suddenly find "the one" who completes you. It even worked through me when writing this essay. The force helped me to complete it. As the old saying goes: "God helps those who help themselves"

Theme: Importance of delving into the soul for answers:

## Untitled

### C. A.

For all those fathers' suffering from addiction, who feel like they mean nothing to this world, that are lost, alone, and not in their child's life, please take the time to hear my message. I know how it feels to come from a broken home. I completely get how it feels to be lost, broken, alone, and no one gets how it feels to be an addict. I understand being an absent father and having my own father absent in my life. How about just wanting to be happy? Look, I've been beating myself up for years trying to be a better person than my father. But isn't it ironic that we end up just like the person we despise? I'm saying this because during my active addiction nothing mattered to me, not even my son. Trust me; to this day those words still haunt me.

But nothing matters when it comes to not waking up sick each morning, thinking about how I am going to get more money for another bundle. Yes, I am a heroin addict. I didn't grow up to think that I would be a drug user, but nonetheless I got HepC. Did you think your life was going to go to shit when you first started using? I think we all know the answer to that. I wallowed in self-pity for years, blaming my son's mother for leaving me, and I blamed my use of drugs on her. Before she left, I was sober, but what changed was I got so depressed. I felt worthless, a man not worthy of love and respect, and I hope some of you can relate to that. I didn't plan on being absent in my son's life for over five years, but that's the truth.

We can't change our past, and some of us got dealt a shitty hand, but it's how you play it that makes the difference, and for a long, long time I played them horribly. After five years of struggling, I've come to terms that she just didn't feel the same way about me. A bitter pill to swallow, wouldn't you say? But why do our children have to suffer this? Why did our parents do the same to us that we are doing to our kids? I love my son!

I was getting high to not feel the pain, the pain of being hopeless, alone, depressed, not being the man, I wanted to be. The list can go on, but you are not alone, and many of us did the same thing, with some dying and never getting another chance. For those that do, I hope that you can get something from this. We can't just get clean for our kids, because honestly, I couldn't. We need to fix what's broken inside. Someone said to

me it's like peeling an onion, there are layers that you must go through to find the core of the issue, whatever that may be. Everyone's situation is different, and it's going to take time. It's not going to happen overnight, and we can't just get our kids back in a day. If you're not happy with yourself then how the hell are you going to be a father and make your children happy?

We need to find peace within ourselves, and we need to change our whole lifestyle. But we only must do that *just for today*. Whatever your drug of choice is, if we don't pick it up, we can't get high. Yeah, easier said than done, that went through my mind when I first heard it. But really think about it, we complicate things so much. Don't we think so far ahead of the future? Just try being the best person you can be *just for today*. Try that everyday and see how it goes. Our kids need their fathers in their lives. We think we can't live up to those standards because of the worry of our past. We can and we need to believe in ourselves. We can't change what's in the past, although it would be nice if we had a time machine, but we don't, so stop dwelling on it. Think instead about "what can I do to make the future better"?

I hope these words touch one of you, if not all of you. I hope that you can find peace in your heart. It's never too late, it's such a cliché, but it's the truth.

Theme: Regaining lost strength through writing:

## Keys to Freedom

### Tim Taylor

Break the chains that bind you, free yourself. Your self-made prisons no longer serve you to participate, create, explore, discover, care, and share. Surprise yourselves, take risks, be vulnerable and stand on your own two feet.

Find your beliefs and begin to act on them. Make decisions based on your values, not your fears. Walk through the fear. Rub the sleep from your eyes people and wake up. Wake up to the miracles that are all around you. Shake the dreams from your hair and wake up. Wake up to the blessings that have been gifted to you. See them open your eyes and see them for the gifts that they are. What once you deemed as curses can open the door for your greatest opportunities. All we must do is open our eyes and become aware of the signposts for a higher connection to consciousness.

Live here and now in the only moment that exists. Find gratitude in all things, reverence for all things, and

connect to the force that willed a universe. Tune into the higher, vibrational energy that surrounds and envelopes us. Life is not about finding yourself, but about creating yourself, and creation begins with a thought. That thought is energy that can be measured, and it grows when you say that thought out loud. And when you put forth action that supports that thought, it grows even more. Thought, word, and deed are the process by which we manifest our reality. Time represents the opportunity for growth, so step up to the challenge and be open to the lessons, go within or you'll go without.

Search inside for your higher truth and you will discover your higher self and begin to live your truth and become your authentic self. When you become aware of this you will awaken and reach a higher level of consciousness, and you can begin to move through life with grace. There will be a peace about you that will attract other energies to you. You will have found your purpose and that purpose will be to have shaken the "sleepwalkers" from their slumber. Show them the way as you have been shown so they can see the blessing as you have. Give them that gift and they will gift others.

There is a spiritual evolution going on. Get on board, ride the peace train, but know for spiritual evolution we must fight a revolution. We must revolt against hatred, injustice, and our only weapon is love. We need to be compassionate, kind, and care for one another. To care for one another is to care for you. Love is contagious, so spread your gift of love and this revolution of spiritual evolution will be won. Like a conquering king, the world will be taken over by love.

So, create yourself anew and be the greatest vision of the greatest version you ever held of who you are. You've been in the darkness for way too long and need to step into the light. Be the light and be that beacon of hope that brings others to the light in their darkest hour, especially in their darkest hour. Be that beacon of hope, this is your job, your calling, your purpose. Find your light and share it with others knowing we are all one. One with the "source", each other, and one with it all. I'll put it this way, each of us are a soul and souls are like waves and there's no telling where one wave ends, and another begins, and all waves make up the ocean. So, you see ladies and gentlemen, we are the waves, and the "source" is the ocean. We are one with each other and one with the "source". Tap into the "source", that consciousness, that divine intelligence that runs this universe.

Right now, the collective consciousness of the world is running on fear. It has run on fear since the beginning of time. So now, our job, our purpose, our responsibility is to tip the scales towards love. Turn the tides; it all starts with you, so join the revolution of spiritual evolution. We need soldiers, so be a soldier for love. There are "spiritual soldiers" joining across the globe. There is a spiritual movement happening and we need you. We need you to spread a message of hope stating that they too can walk thru their fears and come out of the dark and into the light. Be that beacon that is so bright, people can see it even in their darkest days. Do this and you will see the world turn from a fear-based world to one based on love.

The reason the world is the way that it is stems from individual egos and the collective ego are fighting this change. It is a losing battle, and they cannot win. It does not know this, so it will fight if it can. But make no mistake; the wheels of the peace train are already in motion. This doesn't mean we can rest and think the war is won. The battle is still raging and the powers that be are making their last-ditch effort to survive. But it will not win because spirituality is evolving, and the old ways do not serve us. They used fear as a tool to keep the people of the world in line. But we don't need fear to be good because we can be good out of love. We are one, and if the whole world comes to believe that then we no longer hurt one another. In hurting one another we are hurting ourselves. I know this is all a bit much, and it won't happen overnight, but I'll venture to say it won't happen in our lifetime. Evolution of spirituality is real ladies and gentlemen, and it is constantly growing and changing, but it is always loving and caring. Spirituality is the bridge that can unite all nations bringing all people together. The collective conscious must change direction from fear to love.

Thank you all for coming and don't forget to pick up my latest book for the revolution of spiritual evolution that shows you how to reach a higher level of consciousness. You too can change yourself to change the world. Thank you and goodnight.

### Compass

My compass cannot be true,  
For it led me to this stormy place.  
Bide the waves of time be due  
The sea unforgiven holds no Grace.  
The island of hope so small

In a vast sea of misery.  
 My bow's been battered by its rocky shores  
 Leaving in my wake, debris

Theme: Graphic writing to express the interiority of a person:

### Wish

#### *Nathaniel Longtin*

I wish you didn't fucking care so much  
 so, I could hate me  
 in peace and pieces  
 falling apart in glorious fashion  
 a malfunction of wires  
 and chips  
 and chemical misfires and floods  
 in the dim corner  
 of who's that and I don't know him.  
 I wish you didn't fucking care at all  
 so, I would destroy me  
 in quiet and solitude  
 in soliloquies Shakespearean  
 and bleak  
 sadness complete  
 among the discarded and forgotten  
 just as he, not me.  
 I wish I didn't fucking care  
 what you thought and think and love and need and  
 want and see  
 so, I should post the end card  
 of pain delayed, never avoided  
 and allow the critical acclaim  
 that will never come  
 that never was promised  
 that involves caring and wanting and dreaming of better  
 than this  
 I don't get better

it's never gotten better, and I don't want the cruel joke  
 that

it gets better now

but then, why would I ever get what I want?

I don't get better

I don't get the girl or the car or the house that becomes  
 a home or the

Or I cowardly continue

pretending it's better than the alternative

when the alternative

is all I've dreamt of and for and about and deserve and  
 need

I wish you didn't fucking care for me.

### Hank

Hank's always telling me to mind my own damn business. That's the sorts of things Hank says to me every day. I can't walk through the door or peek at his desk without him telling me to get out or screw off or whatever clever way to leave him alone he's thought of that day. You'd think he spent hours crafting them, and when I hear him talk to himself as I'm cooking or on the other side of the bathroom door, I can swear he's whispering new ways to tell me what a pain in the ass I am. I'm starting to wonder if maybe, just maybe, he might be right.

On my hard days, it takes hours to get out of bed days, that's when he's the worst. He'll take one look at me, bed head and morning breath at two in the afternoon, and sneer an insult like, "Christ, Dipsy—" he calls me Dipsy, short for Dipshit, "—Dipsy, I know sex dolls more fucking animated than you." Or "Hell in a Texas blizzard, I can smell you from the fucking front door." I try to tell him that's not helping, but it's hard to argue the point when I must stand up to have it. "Got your lazy ass out of bed, didn't it? Now go shower so you take care of that stench. Christ, Dipsy, you'd think you had a skunk fight in a dung yard."

I don't know what skunk fight is, much less a dung yard, but it paints a very particular image, doesn't it? On the good days, I'll come home from work or errands like grocery shopping to find Hank hard at some craft or college homework on whichever table or desk he found first. He'll have papers strewn over every flat surface while standing at the kitchen counter, fridge wide open, a beer in one hand and a highlighter in the other,

reading some text and cooking at the same time. It drives me crazy, and he knows it. Now I make him clean up immediately by pretending he's not there and just putting my things on top of his, ignoring his profane protests until he organizes himself. But before, we would get into screaming, belligerent rows that could wake the dead, coma patients, and the staff of the DMV.

"You cannot spread out like you're the only one that lives here." I would be livid, hands flapping like I was directing commercial airliners. "Well, when you start living, I'll fucking stop." Hank wouldn't even have the decency to raise his voice.

I'd turn purple with fury. "Your redneck ass wouldn't know living unless it bit your backside twice, and then you'd fucking kill it and claim self-defense." That would succeed in pissing him off. "The second amendment is not on fucking debate in this house. Your liberal ass can move the fuck out if you don't like it," he'd reply, spittle sprayed in every direction his drawl could launch it.

Hank claims all of this is because I don't know how to communicate, that I don't say what's really bothering me, as if it couldn't possibly be that I don't want to share an apartment with a disgusting pig totally inconsiderate of my space and needs.

"Tell me what's really wrong," he'd say, expecting something profound. "YOU ARE A PIG," I'd respond every time. Now it's the silent treatment until he gets the hint. I'm not sure that it's necessarily healthier, but I don't have to yell anymore. And I get to be a little superior—the only time I get to take that stance. Usually, he acts like I'm in the way, inconveniencing him at every turn. "Do your own damn homework, Dipsy," he mutters any time I try to help him with a paper. He hates the flash cards I use to study for every test, too. "Why the hell would I rewrite notes I've already taken?" "Maybe because it helps you remember the information."

Hank scoffs each time I take out my index cards. "Seems a damn sissy way of studying to me." You'd think all of it would have changed, Hank have gotten softer, when we started sleeping together. If anything, it's gotten worse. "Don't be a fucking idiot, Dipsy," he'll whisper in my ear any time I ask him what is going on, what we are doing.

"I'm not an idiot. I'm sleeping with a guy that I don't even know is gay or not. I'm not some casual sex, whoop-de-do, thank you, dude, sort of guy." I'll resist

the urge to whine, to cling to him, and inevitably my voice will drop to a whisper in embarrassment. "I don't think I could handle if this isn't real."

He'll growl low at that, liquor, and frustration in his baritone slur. "Why the fuck does everything have to have a label with you? What even is real?" "Don't try to get out of this conversation with some philosophical bullshit, Hank." I'll roll away from him at this point. Somehow, I always end up naked and alone in my bed, never his. I'm not allowed in his room. "This isn't just sex for me, and if it is for you, this has to stop."

"Fucking hell, Dipsy!" He yells, climbing nude from my sheets, evidence of our fun still wet on his stomach. "You're like a fucking woman with this shit." I keep my back to him, hiding my tears. "Wouldn't you like that? It would make your life easier."

"AHHH!" Hank bellows, just like last night and tomorrow. "You're such a fucking pain in the ass. How can't you know what you are?" "Just your dirty little secret."

"I love you, you fucking moron! And fuck you for not knowing it." And then he slams the door closed, leaving me stunned and silent, alone. On the mornings after, I always wake reaching for him, forgetting he won't be there, forgetting that late night call months ago, forgetting. Forgetting. Forgetting the pain and the cops, the shock and the mundane bureaucracy of it all. Forgetting that call to his family. Forgetting that they had no idea who I was, that I was just his college roommate, that I was still just his roommate all these years later. "You're so damn DUMB, Dipsy."

"I am not dumb." He cocks an eyebrow and says nothing, arms crossed and a grin threatening to surface on his face. "I am NOT dumb. You're the fucker who left me. You died and left me just your roommate." "Labels again. Isn't screaming I love you every night fucking enough for you?" "NO! No, it's not enough. I don't have you anymore and it will never be enough." "Tough shit, Dipsy. It's all you get. So, get your ass out of bed and fucking live." I get out of bed and swing at him, missing entirely.

"Look at you. Can't even throw a decent punch. And stay out of my room." He's always saying things like that.

### **Hank (cont.)**

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## Untitled

I have the nightmare again. I wake with a start, breathing hard and throat sore. Had I been screaming? I feel like I must have been, with the words "No, stop!" lingering on my lips, bitter acid on my tongue. My heart thumps painfully, like it wants to rip my chest open and run from the hurt and tears staining my cheeks. It takes me longer than it should to remember where I am, to know that I'm not actually there but safe in my bed, alone and unharmed. I am alone, and I find that both comforting and sad.

He'd been there, of course. I remember flashes and images, fear and inept, inert rage as I struggle, fighting fruitlessly against his powerful body over me. I feel the rush of my high, too high, too much for me. I've never felt like this, never felt so helpless and turned on. I don't want to enjoy this, and I don't.

The nightmare is never much more than that. I am thankful I never see his face, don't even try to remember him. I'm not even sure I could pick him out of a lineup, finger pointed as I tell some grizzled and weary cop that he did it, that's the one. I just dream the feeling, the knowing something is so very wrong, the violation of not having control, not having even a voice. I think I scream now because I couldn't then. I scream now because it's all I can do.

Now I must deal with the fury, the shame, so that I can try to find my way to some rest. I've long given up wishing it would stop. The hatred and disgust of me, of

my body, of my weakness just makes the nightmares worse, more vivid. I used to turn it over in my head, try to remember how I finally left, finally got away, get to the ending, thinking that by finishing the story I would not return to the dream when I fell asleep once more. But nothing stops it once it's started, and I now know it's better to get up, move and shake and pray and watch something funny for ten minutes or an hour. Let me and my tortured mind forget I was reliving it again.

I wish I didn't have to relive it again. Comedy works wonders, stand up and sketches, anything short or fast-moving or in bits and pieces. The pain cannot continue when I'm smiling, the memories pale before the brightness of laughter. I cannot dwell in shame and chuckle at the same time. What a sight I must be, my face still blotchy and wet as I crush a pillow to my chest and idiotically laugh at some YouTube clip in the dark well past midnight. Eventually, I will feel that wave of exhaustion roll over me, hallowed out and floating to sleep again. And if I'm lucky and did it right, I won't wake again until sunrise, my iPad dark on the floor. I'm usually lucky.

I just wonder if they will ever stop. If I'll ever make it a full week without feeling him hold me down and hurt me again. And I wonder if he even knows, if he wouldn't be able to sleep if he did. I doubt I'll ever get that. Sure as hell won't ever get justice, whatever that is. Or maybe this IS justice, that they're right when they insist everything happens for a reason, and maybe the reason is that I deserved this for my sins and failures, my selfish transgressions.

I just wish I knew, and that knowing would stop the nightmares. Because if the nightmares stop, maybe then I can look at myself and not fear the reflection looking back at me in the mirror. Or the look of pity in your eyes. Until then, I'll drink some water to soothe my torn-up voice and go back to sleep. I've survived worse.

Theme: Becoming newly aware through creative writing:

### **Iceberg**

**Chris Hendrickson**

There's a mirror that hangs above my fireplace with a photograph imbedded in it.

When I walk pass and stare-in, there is still hope that the picture will turn into a reflection alongside my own. Ever since she left, nothings really seemed

important. My head is just as disheveled as my apartment. What was I thinking by staying here? There's nothing here for me anymore, besides a dead plant that I've neglected more than my own family, and a bunch of old books and letters that are littered with memories of the past. Every time I dare to revisit them, somehow the flood gates always seem to open. I don't know why I can't just throw it all away. I let myself go because I couldn't let us go. Just like a floundering ship, I can feel myself sinking.

How couldn't I have seen the iceberg? All the signs were there, I just couldn't turn fast enough. Or maybe I didn't even want to. My life fed off of chaos, which in-turn bred catastrophe. This descent into the abyss needs to be stopped, or I won't be afloat much longer. I don't want to give up, but I can't fight against the current again. I need to escape. They say just on the horizon that there's a beautiful life awaiting. I pray that someone out there will see my smoke signal, but am I willing to burn the past to find out?

Theme: Writing about darkness:

### **Dearest**

**J. E.**

It's been over a year since I've danced, written,  
dreamed, or felt good.

I'm no longer riding the wave; despite being sober.

Forever chasing the pink cloud high of Grace.

The tow of darkness heavy as lead; the proscenium  
curtain closed, even to me: The Mystery. The Dread.

It's movement I yearn for, but feel trapped—a  
specimen entombed in sap, addicted to the bitter  
sweetness. Or is it unity in death I seek.

Surely, it's my fault, after all, it always is, the Fourth  
Step pensive shows.

Easy as, 'Snap out of it', or so they say.

Feeling irreparably broken.

the perceived moral failings of man,

father, son, addict.

Irredeemable, beyond repair.

And so I turn it over.

All that is left is a willingness to be willing, to be willing  
to will,

to abandon and renounce will, to do Her will.

The faint and distant whisper to be well; as moms  
everywhere  
wish—for us, a full and happy life.

A hunger to leap the gap years between dark and light.  
To move  
between the chasm easily and fluidly, to take a good,  
hard and  
loving look at the current reality, to succumb and  
surrender,  
without being obstinate.

‘To Flow’. How I hate that word!

Often, I taste mouthfuls of chalk, or smell and taste  
nothing at  
all.

The lighthouse of our conjoined spirits calling, urging  
me  
forward and into action, as automatic and predictable  
as a  
heartbeat; yet frozen, unable to swim these warming  
waters:  
fight, flight, freeze, these moves I know.

Upended by a gentle hand.

And so, I reach, I grasp, I write. Pen to paper, I narrate  
myself  
towards truth and reconciliation.

Wave’s crest and fall, fall and crest, again and again.  
How I wish  
I could atone, if ONLY to myself.

If ONLY I could erase the footsteps as easily and  
swiftly and as  
completely as the tide does...

**Letter to St. Christopher's Inn (March 30, 2018):**

I'd like to thank you for the care and attention you showed me these last four months. I never could have imagined I'd be so thoroughly transfigured by my experience at St. Christopher's Inn. I am grateful to the Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Atonement, as well as the staff, for the food, shelter, clothing, compassion, and life-affirming treatment I received. What had to

happen, for me to arrive at your door? I dare you to find the map of causation; I've yet to locate it myself. But let's start with the obvious, and even then, they're insufficient markers of addiction.

In December 2013, I lost my father to a heart attack, with whom I was estranged, over my sexuality and other life choices. Family rejection and living effectively outside one's tribe, is an indescribable experience and leaves lasting marks. It seemed as if I was flawed from the start. Destined to a life of disadvantage from the moment I drew my first breath. Even as a child I felt as an outsider, a loner, a gecko hiding behind the portrait on the wall, coming out only when safe. Docile one minute, full of venom the next, when provoked and I could strike at any moment. White scorpion they called me.

Wonderful defense mechanism, even as a child, you'd dare not threaten it. As an adult, and I regret this now, the instinct for self-preservation, self-determination, that inalienable right to be seen, to be heard, to be loved, to belong, without conditions; to exist, and impose myself outwards; to claim my rightful place in this world, without fear and reservation, had all but been blunted, at first imperceptibly. I had to be reminded, 'Know your place' and so before I could take flight, I was made to clip my own wings, imprisoned terrestrially to a cage of my own design. While humbled, hobbled, and handicapped, one's true nature cannot be squashed; like radiation, it seeps out from under its containment dome, in search of nearby water. How far from the tree, did I fall?

An identity forged by privilege for security, position for belonging, and achievement for a lack of self-worth; still, and despite the debilitating fear, the spirit is unlikely to remain inert forever. With persistence, the canary eventually finds an out. The price of freedom and self-actualization a heavy burden. I would turn 40 in treatment. I would recall earlier poems: 'I could see the dull of my eyes darkening in the mirror; the sapphire blue of my eyes dimming.' 'The view from my vanity: the forms of a candle that had burnt too bright, possible of melting brass.' "The ominous cry of the foghorn, a siren of my sleepless nights, almost inaudible.' 'God, please let there be light to this darkness'. Be careful, what you wish for God answers fox prayers, just not in the way you imagine. inherit, a gold coin and \$6,300, the weight of all that is unresolved. Even today, it's hard to recall the events of that day: the morning after, thick clouds of cigarette smoke, the Venti Ice Coffee with Two Pumps Classic, the phone calls, doing the laundry, dressing for work,



using my dad's death as an 'excuse' to play hooky from work, but not at first, I would work, until I could not. Later that evening, inviting a stranger over for sex, the way he fucked me standing, and the look in his eye when I begged him to stay, my obsession to camouflage the void, at whatever cost. The relief in my aunts' voice that I'd been informed. Inadvertently, life had not been easy, that was clear. My great excuse, 'if you'd had my life you'd drink and behave the way I did'; and I was haunted by the trauma of my past. I was certain I was an alcoholic, and I'd wear this badge with pride. Fast forward to my partner's liver and rare cancer of the bile duct in 2016, the long journey ahead, the chance he might not survive, the terror of being left alone, having just returned from San Francisco, to give our 'marriage' another chance. It's only a hiccup or so I thought at the time. How I cursed my bad luck?! I thought of the movie *Blue Jasmine* and Cate Blanchett sitting on a park bench lost to herself, 'You can lose a family once. Lose her twice,' it's enough to make you batshit. What was the breaking point? Fall of 2017, a marriage that could not be resurrected, a dance career on the road to nowhere, the unmanageability and powerlessness of a worsening drug and alcohol addiction, the downward spiral. I was paralyzed by fear. Beyond work, I could take no action. Work I overcame by drinking on the job. Ruin, the great secret. My mental state, fast deteriorating. I could see and hear the stage curtain closing on me. A church on the Upper East Side, a performance of yet another company gala, the only thing flowing was the wine. That moment during a curtain call, peering back at an audience of patrons, and knowing the gig's up. Cat scratches on my arms. Running into a friend of Walker's and badmouthing him and his family to her in a bar. I could hear and see the house lights being turned off, one by one. I had come to the end of the rope and wished for death's ultimate repose. The thought of ending my life with a double-edged razor, the view the of the tub from my desk, tantalizing; the spectacle of a life force draining in a final act. A poem I wrote, the suicide letter sent to Walker by mistake, a marriage not yet formalized, after all, how could it be? It was only legal a year. His name on the lease; the pull of Evan, the hair colorist taking him away from me; my in-laws and the evaporating promise of unconditional support—I should have known! —was the backdrop catapulting me straight into treatment. The exorbitant cost of treatment a roadblock to accessing help sooner. And so, I quit my job, hoping that a week left of medical insurance would foot the bill. Bellevue, Detox, Rehab, and finally, a train ride to St. Christopher's Inn, where I arrived broken and spiritually underserved— 'discarded' that's the word, disposed of, as readily as the rich throw-out what is no

longer useful. The time had come to admit to the vacuousness of my great facade, an identity hollowed-out by dissatisfaction, denial, and disgrace, unable to accept anything but self-sufficiency and her evil twin, servile interdependence. I had finally said, 'When' and the teacup had shattered. 'How did I get here?' The only question I could formulate with any clarity. That look of sorrowful longing on the beach as I gazed towards Mexico from the Hamptons, 3,000 miles away. My partner and his family under the protection of parasols, could they know what I was thinking? What I'd left behind to be there? Rage, not anger, was the only feeling I could connect to in the first few weeks of treatment. I've been duped and I was the last to know about it. Through your charity, loving kindness, patience, and grace, I was rocked back from the ledge. Therapy at the level of master craftsmanship, is what I obtained. I awakened to the presence of a Higher Power deep inside me, drawing me nearer and closer, each day I spent at Graymoor. I'd gone to hell and back, and my heart began to thaw. With the help of Sister Violet, Fr. Ken, Janet in the kitchen, my counselors, Tracey and Bryant, heads David Gerber, Kevin Douglas, and Michael Boccia, and great effort on my part, 'I took a long, hard, and loving look at my current reality' and slowly began my process of recovery. 'I See. I Hear. I Matter. I Am': 'A good man worthy of love and respect'. And without me realizing, great tectonic displacements, began to occur, finally allowing lava to flow. These were the resounding words I should've heard as a child'; and so, on top of pumice, like a sapling that clings to the ashes, and I built me a foundation: that gave birth to my awakening; that penetrating lightness of being. The suffering through which self-discovery is possible; self-acceptance and forgiveness; the Greek word *Kairos* mentioned in your homily: the right, critical, or opportune moment. Gods' once in a lifetime opportunity that changes the course of your life. As a witness, I paid homage to Advent, the Birth of Christ in Light—a time of great rejoicing and celebration—Lent, in prayer and meditation, and a few days short of Good Friday, I left a new and transformed man. It was Easter and I was ready to write my next chapter, not knowing how thorny the road would be. St. Christopher's Inn, transposed metaphorically into a Lighthouse, in the words of Virginia Woolf, a sort of mooring, anchor—our guide in a sea of darkness and hopelessness.<sup>12</sup> A monastery perched on a bluff, a lookout, beckoning, welcoming, all those who are shipwrecked. I do not purport to know God's plans for

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<sup>12</sup>"Hopelessness creeps up on people who dismiss any potential positive moves in their lives and instead choose negative activities or prefer the status quo, which has fewer requirements" (Kreuter, 2013, p. 16).

me, but I know I needed to thank you in writing. I appreciate you taking the time to listen to me. I felt the need to express the joy and gratitude I feel when I think of my time there. Also, my separation speech did not do justice to the important work you do on our behalf, as part of your vocation. Therefore, I hope you can find purpose—a thank you letter, just as I have as I recall the events that led me to your gate. Truly yours,

Brothers Christopher

November 2017- March 2018

Written March 30, 2018, and since expounded upon.

My poem 'Dearest' is a reference to this letter and largely, inspired by the work of Virginia Woolf. I was first introduced to her, while at Bates College by a professor of literature, a mentor of mine who was openly gay and happily partnered. My love of her work deepened as I studied feminism and radical queer theory. For me, *To the Lighthouse*, represented what could be if we were freed to be as we were. It read to me as a manifesto of a woman, despite her social constraints and mental illness, who nevertheless, served as anchor to others and who co-created a type of community I could envision. This despite the isolating affects that mental illness has on the sufferer, and the degree of care sexual outcasts take to not be discovered. I would recreate that sense of community with the help of my close group of female contemporaries, who themselves were on the margin, and were discovering their voice and important place in the world. In the mid 90s, if you were gay, you risked losing family and friends. Those were some of the tradeoffs to disclosure, beyond a lack of acceptance or disapproval, was outright rejection. What you were to your family is lost forever, and with it access to care and protection. This is not the case for most protected classes, nor is true for other gays, but this was my experience. I would wait 25 years for the Pope to declare we were 'children of God' and deserving of family. With the absence of family, my friends stepped-in at a critical stage in adolescence. Former experiences in schools among classmates, bullying by boys and assaults in and out of school, made men suspect to me and as part of my healing, I surrounded myself with like-minded women who were able to accept me for whom and what I was. Before, I could see myself vaguely reflected in popular culture, as is the case now, I had to find myself depicted in literature, and find love and acceptance in the rarified world of ballet.

Midpoint through my time at St. Christopher's Inn, I was asked by my supervisor at the convent where I worked in maintenance, if I had a favorite book. (In an effort to understand how I'd made a ruin of my life, I endeavored to re-read and re-visit the books that had made an impact growing up and it so happened that the library at the Inn had many of the books I needed.) So, I told her, *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf. I would receive the book as a parting gift. It would be the second book I was gifted by staff while in treatment. The other was *The Alchemist* by author Paulo Coelho. Virginia Woolf would figure prominently even after leaving treatment. The book would be passed onto another addict in recovery, as was the custom. It would be another three years, two painful relapses, and a major geographic, before I could face Walker. Of course, soon after leaving St. Christopher's Inn, I'd had a chance to gather my belongings, but a real reckoning of the profundity of the loss, and true amends would take time. The fact that despite my pleas and invitations, Walker did not visit me while in treatment, further testament of the shame I carried, built into an edifice of my own hate for him and self-loathing. He wrote and texted and phoned relentlessly, 'thinking about you', 'wishing you're well', 'I hope you're good', 'Happy Birthday', 'I need you', but I could not formulate an adequate response to the fury of betrayal and abandonment I felt. Not visiting a partner of 12 years in treatment, not even as a friend, seemed to me totally unforgivable, and he did not merit a reply. We think that when we get sober, life's going to great. But for a person with intractable and seemingly incurable major depressive disorder and trauma, no amount of AA-related step work and fellowship, could 'cure' my troubled mind. Out of nowhere, I could be immobilized by blankets of depression, heavy as drapes, and without the sedative effects of alcohol and/or drugs, that much forceful was my power of recall and I did not want to remember all the ways I fucked myself. It had been two years since I'd last spoken to Walker. I was sober, employed full-time, living alone on the Upper West Side, dancing, working a program of recovery, to the best of my ability. An old fling from Los Angeles was taking part in an HBO Latin-American Shorts Festival and asked if I wanted to attend. Showing that evening: a story of a young boy fleeing Castro's Cuba and the scene of a son and mother divided by a glass partition at the airport; an oppressive coming out story from Chile, about a middle-class and right-wing catholic family, their hatred and violent rejection of their gay son; a story of the corroding nature of alcoholism in a Lesbian marriage; the rhythms of life for a boy and single-father as they struggle with loss; a story of a

mom's in fatigable quest to support and advocate her developmentally challenged son. It had been a long time since I'd had sex. I'd yet to have intimate relations since my divorce with anyone and this was the opportunity, perhaps to rekindle an old love affair or to experience intimacy for the first time sober. It was late Friday evening, the screening had ended, the magic of foreplay all but vanquished, and I could not see myself joining him at his hotel. On my way home, feeling wretched and emotionally handicapped, beneath Times Square, on route to the 2,3-subway line underground, I see Walker fast approaching from the opposite end. I quickened my pace, softened the sounds of my heels hitting the ground, made my way to the tiled wall, my gazed fixed to the cement floor; I all but avoided being seen; I wanted to be swallowed up, consumed right there and there by people on their way to their commutes. Reduced to strangers, ocean liners passing each other in the dark.

Who was this person I married? I remember he looked gaunt, defeated, anxiously typing on his phone, unwell and in a manic state, as only I could identify. Had the cancer returned or the worst of his mental illness? The agony I felt at the strangeness of it all, the thought, 'you did this to him', as you've done to everybody that has crossed your path. Right, "Hurt people, hurt people," above all, themselves.

Theme: Writing about the self:

### **I am Wolf**

**Gregory R. Gilligan**

Some call me werewolf

Some call me Canis Lupus

Some call me Rufus

Most call me Greg, some Gregory

A few people call me Goyo

Some fear me

Most love me

I am cunning, quick witted, smart

I can be rapacious

I can be charming

My eyes are piercing

And expressive

Sometimes alluring

At all times they are wandering

Searching

Observing

Ever aware of my surroundings

I can be stealth

Hiding in this concrete forest

Of mortar, steel, and glass

Sometimes I am in the open

Vulnerable to assault from my flank

My ears are keen, and I listen

I hear them talking in front of me, and on either side

But I cannot hear them behind me – I am cautious

Peering over my shoulder, searching for the enemy  
trying to kill me

I am too evasive; I will not let him catch me

I am resilient

**STRONG**

A warrior of the forest

I survive

### **Soul**

According to Webster's dictionary, the soul or spirit is the animated and vital principle of a person credited with the faculties of thought, action, and emotion conceived as forming an immaterial entity distinguished from but temporarily coexistent with the body. Soul is also defined as the spiritual nature of a person in relation to God, regarded as immortal, separable from the body at death, susceptible to happiness or misery in a future state. The soul is also defined as the central or integral part of something. It can also mean the immortal essence of all beings, or the emotional nature in a person as distinguished from their mind or intellect. In Matthew 27:50 it says: **"And Jesus cried out again and yielded up his spirit(soul)"**.

Personally, I believe all the above definitions. The soul, in my opinion is conceived at birth. It is coexistent with the fertilized egg cell creating human life. the souls can't be seen, and it is not part of a physical makeup, as it is metaphysical. The soul comprises thoughts, emotions, and actions of beings. It is a spiritual entity that records every single event in a being's life and has

total recall. We can reach back in time and replay events of our lives because of the soul. Our soul is also what allows us to communicate with our creator, God (Higher Power). Our conscience is part of our soul giving us inner thought and allowing us to distinguish between right and wrong. It makes us remorseful when we are wrong and a sense of jubilation when we are right.

All my life my soul has guided me. Even in addiction my soul has been active. My thoughts and actions during my addiction to alcohol are part of my soul. I chose to use alcohol and there were good times that were had (weddings, family gatherings), and I can have total recall on those events. Unfortunately, there were too many bad memories using alcohol and consequences to go along with it, such as now being in rehab to satisfy legal obligations. More importantly, I am here to strengthen my foundation and build my fellowship with others like myself that suffer from this malady of addiction. I have many great memories of being in sobriety and these are also part of my soul.

I liken the soul or spirit to the "cloud" where data is stored. I often look towards the stars at night and think of my family and friends that have passed. I see them twinkling in the sky and I smile, knowing they are in a place or dimension that we are all destined to go to in our own time and place. Billions and billions of "souls" twinkling, with more and more each day.

### **My Locker**

My locker contains what I have

But I search for what I'll be

The contents are in the footlocker of my soul

I find my gratitude, tolerance, and humility

With these tools I find my way, it's a slow journey

But minute by minute

I replenish the footlocker of my soul, my being

What other tools will I find on my journey?

### **I Am**

I am because I know I am

But do you know who I am?

If so, how do you know I am?

Can you see me?

Hear me?

Touch me?

Does that prove my existence?

Will I be remembered for being, or just a footnote in the book of life?

I am known by my creator

And that's all that really matters

### **Will It Ever Be the Same?**

Pandemic, social distance, shelter in place

Face masks, gloves, sanitizer

New words in our vocabulary

Will it ever be the same

Supermarket shelves are bare

Only two per customer

Will it ever be the same

Family sick and dying with no hand to hold so near

No wakes, no mass, no service

Only standing at the grave

Will it ever be the same

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

That much has not changed

Trees bloom, grass grows, birds singing

The song remains the same

I want to lie down in green pastures

The quiet of still waters

That much has not changed

I am strong and of good courage

I am not afraid

But the question is still unanswered

Will it ever be the same

### **Untitled**

It's the same old seat

I've seemed to have earned it

My name in brass is a warm welcome

I sit with my best friend  
 I came here through a soul that was not mine, but  
 passed onto me  
 I'll eventually pass it on to another  
 We learn  
 We grow  
 We exist  
 All together

### **Ode to Beau (A brick on the Wall)**

I sit and smell, taste and listen  
 To these bricks and benches  
 Their stories of glory, triumph, death, and despair  
 The homeless and addicted  
 The hopeless, those who hunger for freedom  
 From themselves, from pain, from death  
 In the gentle breeze, I hear the story  
 Of Jeff, Thomas, and Jim  
 Who were bright, witty, and kind?  
 Of Daniel, Oscar, and Jerry  
 Happy to be alive  
 So are, Yukito., Emil, and Zahra  
 Frank, Joe, and James  
 Then there is Beau  
 Bookmarked with crosses, alone yet surrounded  
 By Steven, Ken, and Jane  
 Brother James to his left, Olga to his right  
 Is Beau still remembered?  
 How did he lose his fight?  
 Was it a bottle, a needle, a pill?  
 How did he get his thrill?  
 Was it just a snort that cut his life so short?  
 Was he a unique force?  
 A tireless advocate for the hopeless?  
 Was he a father, a son, a brother?  
 What about his mother, does she cry alone?  
 I pray that God gave her courage, serenity, and hope

Did he hear God calling, walking on the trails of this  
 Holy Mountain, or was it just the wails of those men so  
 hungry, angry, tired, and lonely? I believe Beau was  
 compassionate, generous, and a devoted servant to his  
 friends. A patriot, a leader. True blue to the end.

To those who have passed through, to those here  
 now, and those yet to come, say a prayer for Beau and  
 know that there is hope.

### **What I Have Learned**

Augustine, Aquinas, Asimov,  
 Buddha, Bishop, Eckhart. Fromm, Gyatso, Marx  
 This much I have learned  
 The past has no power over the present  
 Obstacles don't block the path, they are the path  
 For me to understand nothing takes time  
 I will be giving, forgiving, compassionate and kind  
 I will think of what I will become, and I will always live  
 happy, living with my heart  
 If I think I can, or think I can't, I will always be right  
 The time I enjoy wasting, will not be wasted time  
 I will use my energy to build and not destroy  
 I will say what I mean and mean what I say  
 I realize it takes no more time to see the good side of  
 life than it takes to see the bad side  
 I will be strong by being myself  
 I am stronger today than I was yesterday and today is a  
 new beginning  
 I will wake up each day and say I can change this one  
 day at a time  
 I will try to be patient and realize that sometimes I will  
 have to go through the worst to  
 get to the best.  
 I have been taught that my only limit is my mind, and I  
 will get what I work for, not what  
 I wish for.  
 I refuse to be defined by my past because my past was  
 just a lesson and not a life  
 sentence.  
 I AM enough

I AM smart

I attract positivity

I AM confident

I attract opportunity

I AM kind and I AM

worthy of good things

I will learn to expect nothing and accept everything

Life will not stop for my procrastinations and my fears,  
it will continue without me

I know that I will die someday, and I will die without  
regrets

I will live my life to the fullest, being the best possible  
version of me that I can be

### **Crickets**

Crickets chirping in the night

So called "friends" denying light

Self-absorbed, requires "light"

Started off, seemed so right

What went wrong, I can't recite

Looking back, I just got used

Spilling guts, just abused

Just as before, just different

So now I must protect myself

In recovery, it doesn't change

People are people

Self-serving, aggressive

I thought I changed

But they have not

It's not my fault

People are people

Life really has NOT changed

Depressing

Theme: Writing about the internal plight of addiction:

### **Prisons**

**Ryan McNamee**

Prisons are empty spaces

All moves are angular

Shapes rectangular

The damned are hollow empty fales

The turnaround is as fast

As bullets blow past

Fueled by the ironic

Narcotically... Psychotic

Beings, plagued with a dark death

Bubonic

Maimed

Lamed

Untamed

Unkempt

Blamed

Crimes of, attempt, contempt

Named

Wit numbers

Your description is an encryption

Of digits

Treated like mental midgets

Nervous tics and fidgets

Can cause random acts of violence

Tidbits

That shatters the silence

The blood is warm

Before it grows cold

There is a quiet before the storm

That's what I've always been told

But if you haven't been down that rabbit hole

If you haven't been there

You haven't felt that electricity in the air

The pigs don't care  
To uphold the law, they swear  
The capacity for compassion is bare  
Empty spaces  
Different races  
Vacant faces  
Fighting cases  
Insane and sane  
Trading places  
What a wild web we weave  
What's profound is only fantasy  
The gifts we receive  
Are the lies we deceive  
Emptiness is our progress  
This mess is filthy  
Innocents are guilty  
Can new save what's left?

### **Taken**

I'll take your clothes  
I'll take your shoes  
I'll take the world  
Have you seen the news?  
I'll take your days  
I'll take your nights  
I'll take your birthdays  
Without a fight  
I'll take your years  
I'll take your smiles  
I'll take your fears  
I'll take your tears  
I'll take your heart  
I'll take your lungs  
I'll take your kidneys  
Just for fun

I'll take your friends  
I'll take your phone  
I'll take your family  
Leaving you alone  
I'll take your mom  
I'll take your dad  
Take all your kin  
Now broken and sad  
I'll take your future  
Ruins for past  
I'll take your fight  
You will not last  
I'll take your husband  
I'll take you wife  
I'll take your soul  
I'll take your life!!

### **"Richards"**

Drop the "Tion, A-Dic is what you are  
A-Dic in every single way  
A-Dic for sure, by far  
You lie, you cheat, you steal  
You tell us what we want to hear  
As fake as it is real  
You take lives, you take homes  
You take jobs, you take phones  
You take souls, you take hopes  
You keep us up against the ropes  
You take laughs, you take jokes  
You take everything, even how we feel  
Eventually there is nothing left  
Because everything you steal  
If I could hate only once  
The once I hate is you  
A-Dic for everything you've done

And for everything you do  
 Now I can only wish that  
 Everything you've ever done  
 Comes back 2-fold unto you  
 A-Dic is just what you are  
 A-Dic is what is you

### **"Apex"**

It's the climax. It's what we  
 Always strive for,  
 There is a moment for every moment,  
 A pivot where the opponent becomes  
 The opponent,  
 My favorite point of everyday is,  
 My favorite time of every night  
 This is the exact moment that,  
 The dark starts to become the light  
 That very pinnacle is quite cynical,  
 But there is no doubt of its  
 Existence,  
 The point that hot starts to become cold, life becomes  
 death,  
 The scared become bold,  
 There is always an apex before the descent  
 Where remorseless repent,  
 That one, just one,  
 Split second where exist no  
 Wets nor dries. Ground nor skies,  
 Where yin becomes the yang,  
 How can something so small be  
 So vast,  
 So slow be so fast. And yet,  
 We tend to let the moments pass  
 Without any thought to the  
 Shadows they may cast.  
 There was nothing. Then  
 There was mass. Yet,

There is a point of north  
 Becoming the south, east becomes  
 The west.

Life at its best may flash before  
 Your eyes right before your death.

And right then accept that you  
 Have not accomplished nothing yet.

Left, with nothing, but regret

Unless, unless.

You take time out for the moment.

If you look really hard you will see

That for that split fraction of a

Second you own it

Now take it. Put it to the side collect a giant pile

Now your life is no surprise,

Moments small enough in size they

Cannot be seen with naked eyes

Yet so beautiful

There is no debate

That a higher power and only

A higher power could create

Now from this life until the next. These moments will

Attest.

You can use your higher power

To reach your apex.

Theme: Philosophical writings:

### **RE-TAKEN**

#### ***Roger V. Casuso***

I wrap my smokes a few times  
 and draw and light the cigarette.

I taste the smoke and reflect on  
 my sorrow, my sins, and my regret.

This world has been brutal at times.

It's taken much joy and left much strife.

It's taken more than its fair share.



but these days, I'm retaking my life.  
My body is weaker, but fixable.  
My doctor is concerned about my heart  
I'm getting so much stronger now  
that me and the poison grow further apart  
I'd be lying if I said there weren't times  
I longed to get comfortably numb.  
But that would be a slap in the face to the forces  
and people who have helped me overcome  
This humid night is sticky, heavy  
and black. memories flash of the age  
of booze and smack. guilt floods my mind  
with my sins and all that I lack.  
but I choose to not lose all  
I've gotten back. it'll be gone in a blink  
if I slip from this track  
Addiction had me down, bound in chains.  
A world of nightmares, fear, and pain.  
I found a reprieve.  
I build on what remains.  
Every day I learn  
what quality my soul retains  
some things got taken.  
Now things get regained.  
Through the trees, the sky turns light.  
Dawn is hours away.  
My cigarette's held firm  
by a subtle, proud smile.  
tomorrow may be tough.  
Come what may.  
When have I last looked forward?  
To a coming day?  
It's been a while.  
I still got shit to do.

Life's got valleys and peaks ahead.

I'm still no angel.

No candidate for sainthood.

But my feet are on the ground.

My hands are strong.

And my outlook is good

### Frozen Moments

Tragic death?" The invisible specter that forces anyone with a heart to stop what they are doing, and involuntarily project a wave of deep concern. It is hardwired into our DNA.

It is a video deemed graphic that has no graphic images or sound. It is not controversial. If anything, it's the opposite, and that's the point. That's the reason it digs at me so that the video of the larger setting is banned by omission. To have every witness in that moment across every continent unconditionally unified in a frozen moment, hoping for one man's health and life - without conflict or contempt, malice, or blame. A truly rare and life-affirming event.

Most of my jobs over the decades have revolved around the internet, including website development, marketing, and social networking. I have seen the worst and most divisive aspects of the internet flare up worse than my wildest expectations and scorch the entire world, especially since 2019. We have the racial divide. The generational divide. The political divide. And the COVID divide (be that about masks or vaccines. As an aside, I have often wondered if people couldn't so easily sweep under the rug the hundreds of thousands of American deaths, and 3.9 million deaths worldwide if they weren't largely confined to isolated hospitals and other distant unseen corners. This way, there is no personal impact about the preciousness of life).

I was compelled to write this essay out of profound respect for the human condition. It was so heartwarming to think that for a moment of time - especially for Christian Eriksen, his teammates and loved ones - that all the other noise of this enclosed, quarantined, isolated, oppositional, superficial, antagonistic world faded away. What remained was the shock and horror of being nose-to-nose with perhaps the great Truth of life; that it is all too fragile and brief. That we could be gone any moment, and that all of our distractions, spite, loathing and hate amounts to

nothing more than spinning wheels in the mud. That life is not fair, but neither is it unfair. It simply is and makes no promises. And we all must cope with that. I think the best way to do that is together, but that's a more complicated challenge than it sounds.

The world united in hope and prayer for nothing more than one more heart to regain its beat. Afterwards, everyone was relieved, and they moved on. The match didn't even stop, and there was never an announcement in the stadium that Eriksen was alright (though social media probably spread the word to attendees through cell phones after 30-60 minutes). When this unanimous collective hope and wish transcended all of the major problems and flaws with our society today, our species showed the heavens its best aspects. Is it too much to think that more people could keep that Truth in mind, and treat one another with the love and compassion they had for Eriksen? And rejoice that we are alive like him, and live life with passion and purity? Or is it only to be for fleeting frozen moments? It's like That the other day I had to get out of work at 7pm on a hot summer day and walk a mile for dinner - round trip. The entire time, I felt grateful to be able to do so. That's different for me.

I was grateful for work because I remember the times, I couldn't find work or hold a job. I remember that fear, and those constraints of being without. I don't only remember them - like one might recall a significant date in history. I can link back emotionally to what it felt like to have no options, only worry.

I was grateful for the weather and being able to remember my youth; which had hundreds of fun, warm, summer nights. Sometimes spent with people I won't see again until after I shuffle this mortal coil. Some with my parents, who are blessedly still alive and in their right minds. Well, what will have to pass for them, anyway.

I was grateful that I was able to jog a little because I've had nagging injuries. Some I'm still babying and trying to work around. But I have good friends that aren't even able to jog. I feel for them, and I would hate for that to be me.... although who knows? We all encounter obstacles out of our control when we age. Maybe one day, for a short while or even for years, maybe that's in store for me. I will enjoy a nice stroll or a nice workout when I can. I was grateful for the food I had. Any food I wanted. No one was going to choose it for tonight. don't miss those days. I was grateful for my tale.

How I got this way. How I ended up where I am. It's my tale. When I spout off on gratitude, I don't think as many people find it as relatable as I would like. But it works for me. It's an accomplishment.

The pizza place was next to the liquor store. I was grateful I didn't really entertain getting a bottle or a nip or anything. I didn't long for it. There was no fight to be had. It's just not something I would seriously consider doing. Much like drinking Drano or Liquid Plumber, there is nothing to stop me from drinking it - except sanity. I have fought enough and lost to know that there is no outcome where I drink and keep anything I value. To drink is to immediately forfeit everything good in my life, as amazing as that is. It's a reaction as certain as a sponge changing shape, size, and weight when you douse it under the tap.

Gratitude is a practice. These aren't just revelations due to changes in perspective. These are the results of practicing minimizing darker voices within. Although I do believe it is appropriate to acknowledge them from time to time too. After all, this personality shift has to be born out of authenticity and rigorous honesty. Drinking or sober, there were plenty of shitty things that happened to me. It's ok, to say it, it's ok to admit it. But if I don't practice the effort of being or acting grateful, or entertaining gratitude, I don't get better at it. It's a skill. Crazy, right? I'm grateful someone told me that, and I ran with it. Mental/spiritual push-ups to help me keep the ship afloat. And now the moments where gratitude is an act of labor are outnumbered by times when it is a fruit of that labor to be enjoyed and savored.

I walked back with my pizza slices and, my soft seltzer "mocktails". That's another thing I'm so grateful for, having drinks of either iced coffee or seltzer where I can kick back, unwind, and drink without having to worry about sneaking around, or lying. I can just enjoy my time my way and cool off.

But I'm grateful that everything I've been through, the good, bad, ugly, and nightmarishly horrific and scarring - that everything has create a state of inner peace and acceptance in me. It's the acceptance that the high standards can rub the wrong way. I could be better. I can try harder. But if I obsess over it, I lose perspective. And I'm having one of those moments - walking through a safe neighborhood, stretching my legs, doing what I want to do, lots of promise in the road ahead - where my perspective has a lot in common with those tantalizing Corona beach commercials. But I'm living in mine, and I have the good sense to know that there are more days like this

ahead as long as I don't have a Corona or anything like that.

### **I Get to Dream**

I lay down for bed. It's dark. My bed is nothing special.  
Cozy. My day was unspectacular. Unsatisfying.  
Another day.

I listen to some relaxing music to help lull me to sleep.  
A trick that seems to get harder with every year,  
especially in these troubled times.

As the music washes over me, my mind wanders. The  
music I choose to relax has no surprises, no  
crescendos. Comforting routine. At times, my mind  
drifts to my daily routines. The simple acts of an  
ordinary life. Shopping. Cooking. Eating. Cleaning.  
Laughing. Sometimes there are soft tender emotional  
sections. This evening, for reasons I can't figure, my  
mind drifts to my friend Chris. He was a year older than  
me when he fell to depression and suicide. That was  
over 20 years ago. I have also been depressed about  
half of my life.

My life is unremarkable, but it is mine. Chris visits my  
dreams occasionally. I swear, it is as if he directs these  
dreams himself. He acts more believably himself than I  
feel I am capable of portraying or conjuring. We joke  
and laugh. He is aware he is dead, and it's no big deal.  
It would be a shame if we didn't make light of it. He's  
not in pain anyone.

I can very clearly remember months and years with no  
joy. Only agony. Only doubt and self-loathing. And a  
bitter hatred for a universe that would tolerate so much  
misfortune being thrust on someone so unjustly for so  
long. Long enough to crush their spirit. And long for  
nothing more than a pitch-black permanent end to pain  
- even at the expense of hope.

But those days are over. Survived. Endured. Prevailed  
over. The soft orchestration music whisps me to sleep.  
But before it does, I have stunningly concrete thoughts  
in the nebulous floating black void.

I will eat tomorrow. I get to sleep in a cozy bed tonight.  
Chris is fine, and he's doing plenty of things I can't  
even imagine. But he doesn't get to eat. Or cook. Or  
clean. Or drive. He doesn't get to feel new sensation or  
encounter a new original concept. I get to do all those  
things. And I am so grateful for my small,  
unremarkable, sometimes dreadfully unfair ordinary  
life. I truly love that I can eat again. Drink again. Laugh  
again. Feel the grass under my feet if I want to. I'll be

with Chris soon enough. But for now, I swim lovingly in  
this gift of life and future possibilities. I get to sleep. I  
get to ponder. I get to love. I get to hurt. I get to bitch  
and moan. I get to beg. I get to hope. I get to dream.  
And that's all just too wonderful for words.

### **Moving Forward in Health**

Life is a series of hurdles

Ups and down

Rarely flat and hardly calm

Movement stifles the doubts in my head

Thought contained become toxic

Let me spew the venom out

Otherwise, I will poison myself

Healing comes from within

My health is paramount

How can I maintain momentum?

The written word holds the key

Unlocking hidden, harmful secrets

I sit and write

Thoughts for the day,

Finding answers to questions.

Solutions to problems.

Writing about a share that someone in a meeting  
expressed.

I may be able to offer advice.

In helping others or giving advice,

I heal myself.

The written word holds the key.

On this, I'm sure I agree. Many other things require  
context, and definition of terms. But writing never hurts,  
it always helps.

Calm seas create doomed sailors. Tough times  
make tough men. Be proud of your scars. Learn from  
them.

Overcome the ways the pain ties you down, makes  
you less than. Challenges are opportunities to develop  
new strengths.

Healing does come from within. If one does not go within, they go without.

But healing also comes from others. Empathy and sharing. Your story is your own, and sharing it makes a difference to those you share it with. We learn from each other, sometimes carry each other.

We are part of a social species, and it can be hard to fathom the depths of how social we truly are; how primal, vital, and basic the link to one another is. Doesn't addiction make you isolate? Where can it do more damage? Is it any wonder that one hip new saying amongst addiction treatment professionals is that 'The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, it's connection'?

Time heals. Connection heals. Introspection and expression heal. Health is paramount - physical, mental, social, and spiritual.

### **What is Normal?**

It can be helpful to re-evaluate what "getting back to normal" means in sobriety. There is much in experiencing addiction - either directly, or second-hand, through someone you care about - that certainly feels deviant.

What is the prevailing philosophy on normal? Normalcy is common and good, and deviance is an exception -- an aberration. Dangerous and wrong. No, not just wrong. Indecent. Judged as less than, and defective. Sentenced to be cast out or cast aside.

Almost everyone goes a few rounds with normalcy in adolescence. Fitting in is so important. Those who can't fit in are desperate to do so. Yearning and aching, feeling some primal, subconscious need to be accepted by the flock. Those who get lost in the flock struggle with a need to stand out - in the right way. As part of the best, strongest, or most beautiful of the flock. Our genetics and our culture are steeped in millennia of conformity. It is foolish to disavow it completely, but just as foolish to slavishly adhere to it without questioning it and straying from it, from time to time.

Normalcy was keeping up with the Jones's. Leave it to Beaver and Donna Reed. That incessant need for conformity and tranquility - better living through chemistry (we tried our version of that, haven't we?) - that mindset was born of war fatigue. Escapism from the horrors of Global War, mechanized genocidal atrocity, and fear of the potential of nuclear poisoning,

or perhaps even Armageddon. We insisted things would never be that chaotic. We insisted things would stay normal. We would make it so. We would be the world police, and the moral authority. That was somewhat effective. Sixty or seventy years ago. As most absolute philosophies tend to do, it withered and failed, and its champions were, and still are in denial.

"Normal" as a descriptor of the actual human condition is about as applicable as the concept of defectiveness is to the day's weather. As viscosity to a postal worker's job performance, or as purpleness is to this writing you're reading or hearing. It simply does not apply. It's just the wrong way of looking at it.

Normal has no bearing on the big questions of human behavior. Appropriateness as a concept is important, but it must be understood to be situational, and context dependent. The most normal people of those swell days gone by, who are believed to have no outstanding/deviant qualities or inappropriate tendencies or cravings, are very much abnormal for those very reasons. And more than that, usually fictional. Everyone has skeletons. If we cannot produce a truly normal, exceptionally unexceptional person as a standard, why dwell on this criterion of judgement?

We do it because addiction is certainly a deviant act - no matter what normal is. It is an axiom, to those who encounter it. A feeling lurking in the background that cannot be disproven - especially because time and time again, the tragedies associated with addiction reinforce it so. No matter what good is, no matter what one wants to do in life, addiction will deviate you from the path. Deviate your mind from your heart and your soul from this realm. No matter what "right" is... addiction isn't it. It is natural to want to return to simpler times, to times free from the pangs and thorns of addiction, and to call that normal. But it wasn't.

Normal is good for measuring things like flowing rivers, harvests, the stock market, and blood pressure. It is important to be able to define what mark is "good enough" for the job to be done. Even if one is compelled towards excellence, one still has to have an idea what is adequate first.

Normal can be a viewpoint on frequency. Commonality. Mathematical mean. There are many situations or fields where these concepts are unavoidable. Crucial to be able to pinpoint. Normal is not a bad guy. But it is folly to indulge, or obsess over it, or to think that acting more normal, and in line with certain expectations will inevitably produce success.

Life is chaotic. It is better to temper expectations, be fluid, adaptable. Accept quirks. Accept that you cannot always be in control because you are one drop in an ocean. Accept that all those feelings - good and bad, love and hate, bliss and dread, fear, and empowerment - they are all part of the typical human experience, and there is no one typical human experience because there is no one typical human.

That is normal.

### **A Sobriety Plan Over Time**

Time is a strange phenomenon and concept. It is rare, but not unheard of to find tales of how the occasional small Native American or Pacific Islander culture has developed a language that is otherwise sophisticated but lacks words to talk about basic concepts and units of time. No words for 'yesterday', 'before', 'week' or 'year'. There are context dependent ways around it to get the message across of the proper timing for something. But the common relationship to time as something that must be universally set to rigid numbers to measure is not something all people have concluded unanimously.

In fact, as lessons of physics trickle down into the mainstream, we are learning it is just as much of a fallacy to bisect time from space as it is to think that the round and flat sides of a coin are two different objects. We don't make that mistake because of how we can wield and manipulate a coin with ease and wrap our brain around it. Time, or the time/space continuum isn't so accommodating.

I don't mean to imply that a higher understanding of time is necessary to comprehend my sobriety plan. If anything, it is quite the opposite. People who focus on time (like Tom Hanks's character from *Cast Away*), are those with grand, multi-layered schemes. They need to be in control to accomplish vast goals, with countless factors, and high degrees of time sensitivity. They need to be able to pivot, re-tool - load, fire and reload in response to the many ways the universe can tamper with one's plans. The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry.

Learning to loosen my grasp on the mentality of seeing myself as the center of the universe, the director of the grand play about my life (while everyone who isn't me is just an extra) meant learning to ease up on the reigns of my plans. Being placed in institutions with almost no contact with the outside world will force one to appreciate this. One memorable addiction counselor

had a poster on his wall that said "Relax. Nothing is under control." Adapting this view helps a person not get their feathers ruffled when things fall apart, as they inevitably do in life. But beyond that, it helps people like me not get anxious when they don't have a firm (and often delusional) idea as to what the next stage of their plan is, that it is ironclad, foolproof, and leading to progress.

One day at a time is one of the most popular sobriety clichés. It is one of the most polarizing ones as well, sure to make at least some eyes roll when it is recited to addicts or people in recovery. And it can mean many things, be applied to one's life, practices, view, and habits as universally as a Swiss army knife. For it to start having meaning and use for me personally, I had to think of it as a way of telling myself... "I have no idea how I'm going to earn enough money to leave this sober house yet. I have no idea how I'm going to mend fences with my loved ones. I have no idea how I can get my car or computer, or any of my prized possessions back. I'm not going to solve any of these problems this day, or even this week. I might as well stop my mind from racing about them though and accept that if there is going to be a solution it is going to come slow, bit by bit, at the appropriate time. And I don't get to decide when that time is, so stop worrying, and save tomorrow for tomorrow - think about today instead."

So, as you can see, part of accepting reality meant thinking about life as birds or squirrels do. Maybe they do a little planning here and there. Maybe they take their actions based on instinct, not fully comprehending that today's actions affect tomorrow's livelihood - maybe they do it out of instinct. It feels "right" for an infant to cry out. Dogs just chew on bones; I don't think they do it because they understand it improves their jaw and teeth.

Another thing I had to slam the breaks on was wrapping my mind around the enormity of the word "never" in the sentence "I can never drink again". It's a big word. It has enormous implications, because of the role alcohol played in my life when I was able to co-exist with it. Now, it cannot be overstated that this is one of many examples that show that I am an addict, and my disease dramatically distorts my thinking. It should be obvious that an addict who has amassed a litany of casualties and scorched earth in their wake that they can never drink or use again safely. It should not be a big deal to accept that there will never come a day where I can drink safely.

But since I have a disease centered in my brain, which influences all my thoughts pertaining to drinking, not only is the weight of that topic unnecessarily and disproportionately burdensome, the process of trying to cognitively examine it and incorporate its findings leaves me absolutely no choice but to pick it apart, dissect all the reasons behind it, and all the circumstances related to it. In other words, I'll involuntarily come up with any number and any type of false conclusions. I'll paint things in prettier shades, view my memories through rose colored glasses. I'll come up with new, "safer" ways of keeping alcohol in my life that really won't make sense. I don't think it's safe to say I'll be deluding myself, my thoughts about alcohol, if I linger on them will always drift towards delusion, but it'll be obvious to everyone but me.

In my experience, an addict/alcoholic's quest to stay sober is like spinning a basketball on one's finger. It's a neat trick, considering how everything is obviously always pulling one down. It's a delicate balance that is constantly being tested in microscopic ways. It takes not only a keen sense of balance, but constant additional energy to be carefully applied. The added spins from the original ones maintain the trick. Rocking the precarious balance by allowing an obsessive barrage of analysis is much more harmful than good. I do not understand everything about how AA, my God, my fellowship, and my support system keep me sober. I just know that it works. And the moment I think I know better, and challenge that balance for my own gratification is the moment I might as well pack my bags, and prepare to lose my home, my girlfriend, be physically ill for weeks or months, and start again in a new town with no help. And that's one of the better case scenarios.

Because addiction is a fatal disorder, only momentarily arrested by spirituality, attitude adjustment, constant work on personality defects, and practicing good deeds, actions, and thoughts<sup>13</sup>. It is a miracle that such a disease can be held up without a medicine to counteract it. Every day I'm sober, I get a temporary reprieve, and while I need to do certain things for it to take affect that reprieve is generated and delivered from a greater power than myself. I don't need a grand plan for down the road. The plan is

outlined in the Big Book, and to a certain extent, it is flexible. I don't need to control it, or plot, plan or scheme. I just have faith that it will work for me, because it has worked for people just like me, and with more dire cases than mine.

But the plan is constant and daily. Plan one day at a time. Live for the present. Do not worry about the future or the past. The plan is to get through the day without a drink, be good, be honest. Help people, go to meetings, do what my sponsor tells me, and no matter what, do not take a drink, or even resort to addict-like thinking, patterns, or behaviors. Pavlov (1991.1928) wrote about conditioned reflexes, which sheds some light for us:

Only one thing in life is of actual interest for us—our psychical experience. Its mechanisms, however, has been and remains, wrapped in deep mystery. All human resources—art, religion, literature, philosophy, historical science—all these unite to cast a beam of light into this mysterious darkness (p. 80).

It's Like That the other day I had to get out of work at 7pm on a hot summer day and walk a mile for dinner - round trip. The entire time, I felt grateful to be able to do so. that's different for me I was grateful for work because I remember the times when I couldn't find work or hold a job. I remember that fear, and those constraints of being without. I don't only remember them - like one might recall a significant date in history. I can link back emotionally to what it felt like to have no options, only worry.

I was grateful for the weather and being able to remember my youth, which had hundreds of fun, warm, summer nights. Sometimes spent with people I won't see again until after I shuffle this mortal coil. Some with my parents, who are blessedly still alive and in their right minds. Well.... what will have to pass for them, anyway.

I was grateful that I was able to jog a little because I've had nagging injuries. Some I'm still babying and trying to work around. But I have good friends that aren't even able to jog. I feel for them, and I would hate for that to be me.... although who knows? We all encounter obstacles out of our control when we age. Maybe one day, for a short while or even for years, maybe that's in store for me. I will enjoy a nice stroll or a nice workout when I can.

I was grateful for the food I had. Any food I wanted. No one was going to choose

<sup>13</sup>Kreuter & Moltner (2014) described the process of awakening to new opportunities: "Each day presents a clean slate in the sense that whatever negative energy filled the prior day may not necessarily need to repeat in the future with the future described as the present day. What catalyzes new forms of energy is making the choice of a new and improved attitude—one more positive" (p. 97).

It for me tonight. I don't miss those days. I was grateful for my tale. How I got this way. How I ended up where I am. It's my tale. When I spout off on gratitude, I don't think as many people find it as relatable as I would like. But it works for me. It's an accomplishment.

The pizza place was next to the liquor store. I was grateful I didn't really entertain getting a bottle or a nip or anything. I didn't long for it. There was no fight to be had. It's just not something I would seriously consider doing. Much like drinking Drano or Liquid Plumber, there is nothing to stop me from drinking it - except sanity. I have fought enough and lost to know that there is no outcome where I drink and keep anything I value. To drink is to immediately forfeit everything good in my life, as amazing as that is. It's a reaction as certain as a sponge changing shape, size, and weight when you douse it under the tap.

Gratitude is a practice. These aren't just revelations due to changes in perspective. These are the results of practicing minimizing darker voices within. Although I do believe it is appropriate to acknowledge them from time to time too. After all, this personality shift must be born out of authenticity and rigorous honesty. Drinking or sober, there were plenty of shitty things that happened to me. It's ok, to say it, it's ok to admit it. But if I don't practice the effort of being or acting grateful, or entertaining gratitude, I don't get better at it. It's a skill. Crazy, right? I'm grateful someone told me that, and I ran with it. Mental/spiritual push-ups to help me keep the ship afloat. And now the moments where gratitude is an act of labor are outnumbered by times when it is a fruit of that labor to been enjoyed and savored.

I walked back with my pizza slices and, my soft seltzer "mocktails". That's another thing I'm so grateful for, having drinks of either iced coffee or seltzer where I can kick back, unwind, and drink without having to worry about sneaking around, or lying. I can just enjoy my time my way and cool off.

But I'm grateful that everything I've been through, the good, bad, ugly, and nightmarishly horrific and scarring - that everything has create a state of inner peace and acceptance in me. It's the acceptance that the high standards can rub the wrong way. I could be better. I can try harder. But if I obsess over it, I lose perspective. And I'm having one of those moments - walking through a safe neighborhood, stretching my legs, doing what I want to do, lots of promise in the road ahead - where my perspective has a lot in common with those tantalizing Corona beach commercials. But I'm living in mine, and I have the

good sense to know that there are more days like this ahead as long as I don't have a Corona or anything like that.

Theme: Collaborative poems:

### **Moving Forward in Health (Collaborative)<sup>14</sup>**

Life is a series of hurdles

Ups and down

Rarely flat and hardly calm

Movement stifles the doubts in my head

Thought contained become toxic

Let me spew the venom out

Otherwise, I will poison myself

Healing comes from within

My health is paramount

How can I maintain momentum?

The written word holds the key

Unlocking hidden, harmful secrets

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Thoughts for the day,

Finding answers to questions.

Solutions to problems.

Writing about a share that someone in a meeting  
expressed.

I may be able to offer advice.

In helping others or giving advice,

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On this, I'm sure I agree. Many other things require context, and definition of terms. But writing never hurts, it always helps. Calm seas create doomed sailors. Tough times make tough men. Be proud of your scars. Learn from them. Overcome the ways the pain ties you

<sup>14</sup>Collaboration between the client and the therapist adds richness and efficacy to the therapeutic work. "Therapy, then is understood to be a process whereby therapists and clients engage in collaborative conversations leading to the cocreation of new narratives. It is through conversation that problems dissolve. The therapist maintains a nonexpert, unknowing position by assuming no preconstructed knowledge about the client. The use of language in this approach contributes to the humanization of therapy and informs a possibility therapy perspective" (Bertolino & O'Hanlon, 2002, p. 10).

down, makes you less than. Challenges are opportunities to develop new strengths. Healing does come from within. If one does not go within, they go without. But healing also comes from others. Empathy and sharing. Your story is your own, and sharing it makes a difference to those you share it with. We learn from each other, sometimes carry each other.

We are part of a social species, and it can be hard to fathom the depths of how social we truly are; how primal, vital, and basic the link to one another is. Doesn't addiction make you isolate? Where can it do more damage? Is it any wonder that one hip new saying amongst addiction treatment professionals is that 'The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, it's connection'?

Time heals. Connection heals. Introspection and expression heal. Health is paramount - physical, mental, social, and spiritual. Secrets that only I know. When shared I can let go

Listening to my heart, afraid of what I hear

Begging God to quell my feelings

Of fear

Revealing to others that I can be strong

Learning from life's turns that seemed

Wrong

At last peace, no longer being coy

In my recovery, I experience ongoing joy

### **Serenity on the Mountain (Collaborative)**

Pine trees oak and ash

Majestic sentinels point toward the sky

Aligning with the slope of the mountains

Reaching for heaven

Rocks everywhere topped with green moss

Marking the path ahead

Solitude abounds, voices on the wind

Inviting inner thoughts to emerge

Birds sing in happy melodies praising Mother Earth

Reminding us of complete freedom

Streams travel endlessly

Soothing sound of rushing water along the rocks on shore

Snow survives the sun

Secluded and safe

Clean air

God' gift to us

Peace envelopes all who wander

Healing the wounds of worry

SCI

Creative Recovery

Collaborative poem

January 16, 2022

### **The coldness of winter warmed by love**

Tree made barren by the onslaught of bitter cold, rain, snow, and wind

But new buds emerge in spring awoken by the warming sun

Birds find refuge from the harshness of winter

Planning new nests while sheltering from the storm

Sheets of snow atop the roof; an icy shell

Insulating the rooftop and occupants below

Icicle rests of the edge of my pain

As the eyes start to open, I can see again

New vision; new life

Old ways; frostbite

Prune what was grown

Same roots; new vines

Frozen hands in icy covered mittens

A mother heating marshmallow-topped cocoa

A wolf searches desperately for signs of prey

He is watched by a snow rabbit hoping his efforts are fruitless

A cold winter sunrise on the horizon

Cotton candy skies over snowcapped peaks

The frost sparkling on the pines

Thawing frogs awaken with hope the gnats will soon return



A new day shows its face  
 Rising as the sun smiles through the clouds  
 The harshness of winter collides  
 With the beauty of spring  
 Gardens rise through the frost  
 Covered ground that still remembers winter  
 Life springs eternal  
 Reborn after its death from winter's cold  
 Baby birds take flight  
 Guided by the promise of summer's blessings

Theme: Gaining empowerment:

### In What way am I Energized to Start

#### Joseph Bachini

Being sober gives me motivation and energy to take care of what I need to take care of. Even when I am not so energetic and motivated, I am still capable of pushing myself and generating motivation and energy to start / continue a task. If I was still getting high, I would so easily be talking myself out of getting things done. Being sober makes me want to pursue the goals that I have been putting off for so long. I want a better life; I want to do my part to help others and society in general. Being sober allows me to care about **"The right thing to do"**. It allows me to continue to develop my integrity. I want to keep **"Adding"** as opposed to **"Subtracting"**. I want to be around good, healthy, and alive kind of people. The fact that I **"want"** good things means there is a want, a **"passion"** inside me that exists now because of sobriety, to do good things, progressive things, and to continue to do them. I owe a big thank you to the drug, rehab industry for providing those who were in it, services to help me clean up my life and help me find my love for life and motivation.

#### Letter to Addiction

You are such a pain in the ass. You are like an opponent in a game that you know are better than me, but you allow me to build up my confidence which in turn allows me to think I'm winning, then you're slick, you start showing your true skills that you can take me down. I will work on my weak points and figure out what causes you to arise. I will get better at keeping you suppressed, keeping you up against the ropes instead of the other way around. When you pop up all my dreams, confidence, integrity, cares seem as they

never even existed. You have even figured out how to allow me not to care about my own **HEALTH** and my own son. The joy of him having a sober father and wanting to get to know me more. All that joy goes right out the window. Consideration of his feelings, respect and wellbeing mean nothing when you are around. I'm going to ask nicely at first, **"PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE"**. I want no part of you and that lifestyle you lead to. I will also ask you to look inside yourself and turn your life around. You've seen me succeed; you've seen me change. Instead of trying to pull me back, why don't you try to move forward with the rest of us. It's not easy but I believe you, yes you. **"Addiction"** can change for the better.

#### How Does Daily Journaling Help Me?

I love to write. Daily journaling for me is like a twice a day writing assignment. It's more than that. It's a way to keep me on a positive schedule, to keep reminding myself of who I am, who I truly am, my strengths to keep in the front of my mind and my weaknesses. To pull forward and work on them. I realize that I write down on paper the stuff about me that I have not fully absorbed and put into action just yet, but it is in my mind enough that I know it's a better way.

Since I started daily journaling, my stress level has dropped. My extra excited levels became humbler, and I look at life more seriously. I sleep better, I remember more vivid dreams and I just remember more period. They have done studies finding that journaling has positive physical health benefits. For me personally, I work out regularly and maintain a healthy diet which takes care of my physical health, so I haven't noticed any physical improvements. I can definitely back up any studies that claim journaling has great mental and emotional benefits. Journaling helped keep me motivated when I was in an atmosphere where it was very easy to get frustrated, angry, and slack off, straying from goals and focus. I kept writing how I must remain motivated and focus on my goals, not letting other people's nonsense get to me. After multiple weeks of continuously writing similar phrases to stay motivated and focused, not letting nonsense penetrate inside me. Leading me on my goal oriented path, I was **(MISSING WORDS)** living what I had been writing and no longer needed **(MISSING WORDS)** writing about it.

Motivation and shielding against negativity became automatic and "second nature". I **"willed"** it into existence. You can say that I **"wrote"** it into my DNA. That type of thinking is now a part of me. Today, June 9<sup>th</sup>, is my 60<sup>th</sup> day of daily journaling, and tonight will

make the 120<sup>th</sup> entry. I must admit, and let it be known that by the end of the first week I was getting to sleep quicker, opposed to a night of tossing and turning. Emotionally, I felt more relaxed and was very excited because it was still new. All positive things came from such a simple, almost effortless daily task. I would recommend it to anyone, at any age, struggling with any lifestyle, addiction or not.

### Speech to 500 People

My name is Joseph and the kid in me absolutely loves life. The adult in me has his ups and downs. What I have learned about that is that it is up to me and no one else. If you are looking to be successful, you must succeed internally first. True success comes from within. It's not always easy because none of us are perfect, and we all have struggles. We all have levels of selfishness, worries, anger, etc... What I have come to realize is that it is very important not to run and hide from my flaws. I must admit when I am wrong so I can start to figure out how to make it right. If I don't face my own wrong doings, then I would only be living up to half my potential as a human being. Even though it may be greed, anger, confusion or pure hatred toward something or someone, it was still me generating those thoughts, feelings, and actions. I'm not saying it's okay to do bad things, but if and when you do just admit it and keep moving forward. I am a strong believer in God and the trust God, whoever he or she may be, let's call it "nature" for arguments sake. Nature (or God) is the most honest life form in existence. Can a tree ever say or act as if it is not a tree? Never in a billion years. One day it might provide some cooling, comfortable shade on a very hot afternoon. Another day its roots might be tearing up your drainpipes up or concrete causing you all kinds of stress. One day it will be a beautiful view to look at in the fall with all kinds of bright yellows and oranges, with browns and lightened greens. Then you'll have to clean up its mess because it just dropped all its leaves on your beautiful lawn. Whether admired or causing aggravation, a tree is going to stand strong, doing what is in its nature to do and never not be a tree. It's going to live up to its truest potential to be its truest self, the way God made it to be. So, my advice would be to be your truest self, the way God made you to be. The way God wanted to express himself to others through you.

### My Story

I've heard my many times, many ways by listening to others' stories. Which means that I am not alone, and neither is anyone reading this. There are so many like me, like you, like us.

I come from a typical working-class upbringing, I was taught good morals, do good in school, respect others, listen to your elders, etc. While growing up, I wanted to always be accepted by my peers, as it really meant a lot to me. So, I made sure that I was, and it was cool and more., and comforting for a while. Meanwhile my parents were always telling me, **"Be careful who you choose your friends to be". "Not all of them are your friends"**. In one ear and out the other, I mean they are just my parents, what the hell did they know, right? The answer is "right! "They know enough to try and pass some wisdom down to me. It was me who was stubborn and rebellious.

So, I learned the hard way and went through emotional pain finding out that certain friends really weren't friends. Most didn't stand by their word and to be honest, neither did I a lot of the times. Typical teenage shit, trying to find myself, get in where I fit in. not realizing that I already fit in with myself and the higher power. Not realizing that by just being my true self and doing and defending what I really cared for and living life the way God intended me to live, I already am connected to the biggest friends and family membership in existence.... God and his kingdom. So, in failing to realize all of this, I was always on the search for "the next big thing". That's what I did, moving from crowd to crowd, because I thought who was cooler, who was more real and tough, and who accepted me and had my back. What a waste of time and energy. I learned stuff along the way, I mean if it really wasn't meant to be then it wouldn't have happened the way it did.

All of that must have led up to my addiction, trying to fill the hole inside me. The joy, the excitement, the confidence, etc. One night I'm hanging out with friends, and we are drinking, and someone pulls out some cocaine, so I tried it. I was 21 years old, and I felt like I was my own man, having life all figured out. I figured, "why not?", I'll try it, how bad could it be? A friend looked at me and said, **"Joe, you shouldn't, you just might like it too much"**. Again, in one ear and out the other, what did he know, right? I did a line or two and fell instantly in love with it. I said to myself, **"I feel like a million bucks"**. Nothing could stop me; this is what I've been wanting for such a long time. The energy, the upbeat feeling to keep going and going, and all I got to do is sniff a little powder. From then on that's all I wanted. The high was so awesome. I was young, living at home and had very few responsibilities at all. I figured this could be the life for me, and it was for a few months until the money ran out. Then I had to get back to work to make money to buy the cocaine.

For the next six years that's all I cared about, even after having a son and seeing how much he looked up to me. I still did not care, I wanted that quick fix, that instant gratification and I knew raising a son was not going to be instantly gratifying. His mother and I did not get along after he was born. Instead of working through the hard times and aggravation I just ran from the issues that needed to be addressed. What the hell did this kid see in his father to still want to look up to him? It was the natural love of any son to his father and that still was not enough for me to wake up and start doing the right thing. I dissed him so many times and when I think about it, I sometimes burst into tears of shame and guilt. I was so selfish, and I still battle selfishness and greed. Little by little I'm getting better, but it still exists in me. I just want what I want when I want it.

Speaking of father and son relations, I had one of the selfless fathers in the world and I'm not just saying that. This man was just a local 814 moving and storage teamster, not a high paying job at all, mid five figures at most. It didn't matter, he did anything my brother and I wanted to do just to keep us having a good time, and our friends too. Like I said: **"not selfish at all"**. He also instilled, or tried to anyway, good family values. **"Your wife comes first", "when you have kids, your kids come first, your wife second, and yourself last"**. He used to say that's what it's like when you're in love, you put the people you're in love with first and yourself last. That always made sense to be, and still I failed to perform that way. The truth was that I always put my own selfish needs and wants first. I still do sometimes and I'm still working on that one too. You would think I would be ready to be a father at a young age given the type of father I had. You would also think that he and I had a great relationship. NOPE! not me, I was right and everyone else didn't know what they were talking about. Especially as I get older and realized that I had a real problem with cocaine. I would take my anger out on him because I was really mad and ashamed at myself. Before cocaine, my father and I had a great relationship, he was my hero. Even throughout the years of my cocaine abuse, he and I were still pretty good, but it could have been so much better, and that falls mostly on me. (As I'm writing this part, I was crying. So much so that I had to call my father and let him know about it.) I explained the writing assignment, the book, my feelings, and I apologized for all of the mistreatment, and bullshit arguments that I started. Of course, he was very understanding and said that he appreciated it very much. Then we had some laughs after I stopped crying so much. We talked about my son and his first girlfriend, and we laughed. I told him

that he needs a girlfriend (He's 76 years old, mind you), but he said he's working on it. GO POPS!

Eventually my father and I stopped living together. So here I was on my own with my own room and a serious addiction problem. About two and a half months go by and I could not pay the rent, I was barely showering, eating ramen noodles, asking people at work to buy me lunch, living like a real low life, and felt like a real demoralized piece of shit. So, I decided that I should go to rehab because I obviously could not do it on my own. I called my brother, and he was glad to hear it. He and I also did not get along well due to my addiction habits and irresponsibility's. but he was right there to help when I was serious about helping myself and I will never forget that. I made phone calls and picked a rehab in Rockland County called Blaisdell. They were good, but it could've been better because I didn't really start paying attention until about 2 weeks in. Then the help really started.

Rehab was great! Absolutely! After I started paying attention to the lessons that were being discussed that was a high. I wanted more and more of it, which is good right? Simple, honest conversation was all it took for me to get my "high", my "feelings of enlightenment". Now that I look back, it's a nice, new beginning. But that way of thinking would lead to another issue I had yet to deal with..." outsourced gratification". I did not notice it at the time, so I rolled with it. It was nature, not a poisonous substance. I was hooked on rehab, and I was reading, working out, participating, eating healthy, feeling alive again, making progress. After 21 days I moved to St. Christophers Inn, what a place!

St. Christopher's Inn is such a beautiful facility. They own a large amount of property with multiple buildings. They are a Catholic based program but welcome all religions and have been around for over 100 years. They are a spiritually based program and are very big on spirituality. I learned a lot there, mainly that I have the power to change and it's up to me if I put the work in. I learned that there is no outside source that can affect me more than my own self esteem affects myself. I really had to learn that at 36 years of age. I started to understand that, but not always, there was still a lot of street mentality, addiction, and selfish mentality still very much alive inside me. St. Christopher's Inn really did help.

At St. Christopher's, I met Eric Kreuter, a counselor who teaches a creative writing class on weekends. I always liked writing when I was younger, but that faded as addiction took over. A lot of my creativity and open mindedness faded with addiction in general. When I

took the class for the rest of my time there I could not stop. My pen really left the paper. What an escape from the stress and this was much more of a “high” than conversation, and I was hooked on writing. Even though good, honest conversation and writing are positive activities they were still outside sources that I found to try and solve a problem that existed within. But still, I did not see it. so I rolled with it again. But with writing, as it comes from within, I held on to it so much, and it helped. I can’t fully describe how much it helped but it allowed me to dig deeper and deeper within myself, pulling out the garbage and begin facing some real personal issues.

St. Christopher’s Inn was great! I didn’t complete, I was getting frustrated. My mother gave me an opportunity to live with her and I accepted it. I was feeling good, feeling strong, I wanted out of rehab already and wanted to get back into the real world. I wanted to get back to work and back to life. The new me wanted to shine and I had addiction figured out. I was ready and nothing could stop me. The day I got out of St. Christophers was great at first, but then everything felt and looked weird. I just spent 90 plus days in two facilities. and it took a few days to adjust back into the world. Memorial Day weekend with my family was great. Great company, great food, and great atmosphere. I still felt that I was missing something and started to feel disconnected from recovery. I started with zoom meetings, and they were great. I was attending 2-3 a day. It was like another “high”, another natural one, which is good, or so I thought. The week ended and Memorial Day fun to an end. Back to work the following week, living in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina with my mother and grandmother. What a place! It is gorgeous down there. I was walking almost every day and enjoying the beach and my aunts swimming pool as often as I could. Attending in person meetings for the first time again was another natural high that kept my spirits upbeat, and life felt progressive. Things were going good in the summer. I started to feel the need to be with a woman, and eventually it was a desperate feeling. All these good things I had going on just wasn’t enough to keep me excited and in a good mood most of the time. Doing all kinds of positive things, living in a great environment, being around good people, family, good food and all good things. Something was missing, a woman! Yeah, that was it, a woman.

### **How would I update the AA/NA Book?**

Personally, I do not have any suggestions to update the books. I think they are fantastic to what I have read so far. I have not read enough to go ahead and start

making suggestions, and I have not been in recovery long enough to be telling others about rules, regulations, and lifestyles of a successful, sober individual.

### **My Top Three Questions About Addiction That I would Like Answers To**

1. How can it just go away?
2. After learning so many coping skills and relapse prevention skills, how do you keep popping up every so often?
3. Are you really a disease, or is addiction just a stubborn selfishness that people themselves just don’t want to grow out of?

### **A Day in the Life of My Recovery**

I wake up, gather my thoughts, do my usual bathroom routine, whether motivated or not, I push myself and psych myself up to a morning workout. I find it is entirely helpful, and it gives me my first sense of achievement for the day. Along with the heightened endorphins and blood flow, mentally it puts me in a focused and motivated state of mind to accomplish another goal. I eat healthy and do my best to discipline the amount of food I intake. I look at it as if I keep making better choices and by doing more of what I need to, as opposed to what I want to, then I will be stronger and in good habits already should those cravings and thoughts of addiction arise. After my morning workout, I write my morning journal entry. Writing helps me express and analyze my thoughts and feelings early in the morning. It helps set a mental focus for the day and helps me remember what today’s goals are so I can continue accomplishing tasks and stay in a positive attitude. Whether I go to work or have the day off I focus more on my thoughts and feelings and how they are coinciding with whatever task is at hand. (at work I put aside feelings and just get to it). I find that paying more attention to my thoughts and feelings helps keep me in control of them throughout the day. I do what I can to keep making the better of the choices presented. I try to get in some reading and education, anything to keep my mind stimulated and my motivation levels up, as well as working out throughout the day. I journal at night and before bed to reflect on the day and plan for tomorrow. So far this is working for me.

### **How do I stay Connected to Recovery? What Works for Me?**

The best thing that worked for me was making meetings. From the first zoom meeting to first and last

in person meeting, meetings are great. They help the best for me to feel connected to recovery. Staying in contact with others in recovery is also a great thing to do. Most people who take their recovery as a serious lifestyle and not just a short, brief fix, really do get involved in all types of activities that help others and in turn help themselves, thus allowing their lives to move forward and progress by keeping in touch with such people. It gives me ideas on how to improve my life and stay positive. A support network with other recovering addicts is extremely helpful. Most serious recovering addicts are very welcoming and understanding to the importance of needing help. Finding some people, I like and staying in touch has helped tremendously. Writing itself helps me stay in touch with recovery. Eric always has great writing assignments and reading from the 24-hour book is good stuff too. I want to say the thought and memories of my relapse also keeps me to stay connected to my recovery. The fact that I lost so much of my progress so quickly, what a disappointment I was to myself and family. Mostly myself, I am so angry with myself for not taking recovery seriously as a complete lifestyle. I guess I wasn't ready to get serious then. The thought of losing so much of what I gained, living in a rehab, shelter system, being around people who are **not** ready to change for the better. Not having phone or internet access, not being able to move forward at a decent pace. So many restrictions, being broke, working for horrible pay...all of those things are what I do not want in my life anymore. Thinking of all those losses and annoyances help me continue to say "NO" to using drugs.

### **On Relapse, What Worked to Bring Me Back to Sobriety**

The most honest answer is a very selfish one, I did not have the money to support myself. I owed my landlord rent that I did not have, and he is also in recovery for many years now. When I came home late one night as high as a kite, he came into my room in the morning and said, "Joseph, aren't you going to work?" I had to tell him the truth and finally he said: "You know you can't stay here if you're getting high." As my landlord, he was very angry knowing that I did not have the rent money. But as a fellow friend in recovery, he felt extremely bad for me. He started crying and gave me a hug. I was "confused" and at the same time I still felt "welcomed", not physically welcomed, obviously. He was telling me I could not live there anymore and telling me I need to go to rehab. But my true self, the person that I am on the inside, was

still welcomed to the recovery lifestyle of sobriety. That memory stood with me all throughout rehab and will always be with me. I want to say that was the very first moment that I felt a touch closer to recovery after I put myself at such a distance from sobriety for the months prior. So, my landlord, also named Joseph, played a big part in bringing me back to sobriety.

Theme: Use of powerful expression in creative writing:

### **Untitled**

#### **Ramell Bohler**

Drip... drip the rain splashes across the windshield as I drive down the highway in search of a rest station. My legs are tight, and my eyes are beginning to close, this journey has been very long.

Drip... drip as the rain falls on top of the hood making the most elegant sound. It almost sounds like a band playing on pots and pans, the rhythm has my legs moving, tap... tap my foot hits the gas pedal, the engine purrs louder as if it connected to the beat of the raindrops. The rain finally stops so I pull over for a stretch, oh my that felt good. I look out into the horizon, and I swear I saw God smile at me or maybe I was just too exhausted from the long ride that I thought I saw something that made my heart smile. I looked up again and there it was that wonderful smile shining through oh my what beautiful rays the sun had that day and not to mention the rainbow cascading across the sky with such a beautiful assortment of bright colors. Drip... drip this trip has finally come to an end as the last drop falls from my eyes, the excitement that filled my heart because I have finally surrendered to the sounds of my own fears, I have become one with the drips that dropped from my soul endlessly. I have taken the ride of a lifetime. On my journey I dropped fear, resentments, failure and so much more. On my journey I have picked up new habits, love, family, guidance, and most of all I got out of the car and took some time to talk to the real me and convinced him to come along for the ride.

### **No More**

No more time to waste. No more misplaced values. No time for attitudes and judgmental mentalities. No more of saying no more just action. No more excuses. No more sporadic whatever's only long-term endeavors. No more I thought we were family but where were you when the lights went out and I was crying out for help. Shit no more of nothing that keeps me in bondage, that keeps me away from me. No more

injustice, no more solitary confinement but by any means necessary I will welcome solidarity. No more I should have when I now understand choice. No more, no more and no more being afraid to let the world hear my story. No more keeping it to myself to protect others' feelings, what about my feelings? No more living a lie when I know that I'm the truth. My flesh is strong so why should I move like it's weak. No more!!!! No more.

Theme: Impact of addiction:

### **How I Feel like Harry Potter**

**R. L.**

Like Harry, I lost my parent at a young age, living with family that I never fit in with. I had to find my own path and in the beginning that path was the firehouse. I loved it and could not get enough of it. I took every training class offered, and like school I did very well. After some time, I began training to be an administrative officer which required years on the board of directors.

Finally, I was asked if I would like to run for president of the department. At first, my "fear of failure" (a recurring theme in my life), made me say no. However, the board was persistent and convinced me I was qualified for the job. I ran for office and won the election, keeping the job for six years. Pardon the pun but I got "burnt out". I started to drink in my sixth year, and it became obvious to others I was struggling with the challenges of my life.

For five years, I took on the responsibility of taking care of a family friend who had dementia. You see, this is the person who looked after me when I lost my dad. I felt it was only fair to return the care and love that I received. The pressure of this task took its toll on me, and I would not want anyone to think that I didn't know the task I undertook in advance. The bond I share with him is greater than father and son, or brothers. It was truly a spiritual connection, and I see that now. I helped his family get him into a nursing home, and I paid all legal fees and the monthly fee until his insurance was settled. I did this for me to know he would be safe and to ease the guilt that I had failed in my task.

My drinking had increased, and my home was now empty and became just a house. My depression got worse, and I no longer felt comfortable in my own skin. The shame and guilt brought me to a very dark place, and I decided the only answer was death. I put my affairs in order, wrote a will, assigned power of attorney

and healthcare proxy to my fire department partner, and named his son as my heir. Later that night, I put my dress uniform on my clothes tree along with my patent leather shoes, new socks, underwear, and a tee shirt. I sat on the side of my king size bed with a snack table. I opened a \$100 bottle of Jameson gold label and a bottle of Tylenol 650mg 100-count. I think I had about 10 shots before I started taking the pills. I took them all, drank some more, laid back and watched my TV, I believe it was Star Trek. I awoke 13 days later in the ICU in Peekskill hospital. I was a mess, I had flatlined three times during my coma, and my liver functions were a shambles.

On my nightstand was a book, "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" and I began reading it over the next few weeks. Quite frankly, I thought I must be a wizard too. Turns out I was just an unschooled one. I needed to learn about a higher power (H.P. funny same initials). I needed to go to a special school, on a mountain (Hogwarts on a mountain). Like Harry, someone had to tell me of this special power I had **we** call sobriety. A magic of its own, with each day providing obstacles, pleasures, love, pain, brotherhood, and some days a feeling of serenity. We have many teachers here to guide us, allowing us to answer the questions from within ourselves. That is the true magic here. Putting down the drink was a big step, and let's not take away from that. It is what we do next that is going to keep it down. I believe that today, I have changed on this mountain, and today I am who I am. Open, honest, no mask to hide behind. I try not to worry about what others think because I spent too many years doing that. In all honesty, life is a lot easier this way. I have emotions and I cry when I am happy or sad. I give myself permission. The day I was assigned a track and job assignment, all I could think was, not the kitchen. I feared Janet. This 6'4", 257lb man was scared. When the lady told me my job was facilities, I heard "Griffendorf."

Theme: Collaboratives with new recovery center:

### **Collaborative with RROOC**

#### **A New Day**

I woke up this morning to a new day

Sunshine in my heart and soul

Sun is shining, leaves are falling, serenity all around

Squirrels playing tag on a tree, crows chasing a hawk

Light breaking through the trees like teeth

Leaves are starting to fall from the trees. I'm thinking of  
dreams new and old as I zip up my coat and shiver. It's  
already getting cold.

The window light has a calming touch, birds chirping,  
leaves falling, sunshine in my heart and soul

As I look out my window, I am also looking inward to  
the window of my soul. Life as I would imagine it. I think  
what this is for. To love and be loved as my heart  
would have it

I spoke my world into existence, false reality I couldn't  
have missed it. If I could touch the sky, I would've  
kissed it.

Thanking God for another day, knowing my pain from  
the past, I'm telling it to kiss my ass.

I am grateful for today; cause yesterday was dark and  
cold. I thought about the last ten years and how they've  
taken their toll

Another day has set to give rise to a new one

When I went to bed, I wasn't so sure how the new day  
would treat me. I'm glad to be blessed with the wonder  
of another chance to make this day a better one than  
the last

God has blessed me with the strength to be sober and  
blessed me with another day to be alive. For this I shall  
forever be grateful. May the sunshine in my heart and  
soul forever shine.

But I have failed in the past, I have failed today, but  
today is just today, and today is over

Tomorrow is a new day

### COMPASS

My compass cannot be true, for it led me to this stormy  
place

I finished last in this race, my pain I cannot erase

Dark clouds swirl around me...stuck in the shadows of  
internal hate

Lift me from these trenches

Grab my hand and pull me free

Eye to eye against myself

You are not the enemy

Dropping down all defenses

Finally allowed to breathe

Somewhere I found the grace this time

I will slow down and just embrace

And success will finally take my place

Theme: Writing from a deeply introspective place:

### The Accidental Letter

#### Michael Galbraith

I'm starting this letter without a clear destination in  
mind. Perhaps it will become the preface to the book  
many suggest I write. It never ceases to amaze me that  
the life I have lived, my story as it were, would be of  
any interest to anyone else. It's a feeling that comes  
from the awful place in my heart and soul that has  
convinced me that it's not significant.

The good news is that after many years of therapy,  
prayer, calamity, and faith, I have made the arduous  
journey from my head to my heart. It hasn't been  
graceful, stylish, or swift. But it has been real. It has, as  
stated in the "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous,  
been a trudge along the road to happy destiny." A  
journey wrenched in the entire range of human  
emotions, sometimes in the span of half an hour. I  
digress. It speaks like the tragedies of Eugene O'Neill,  
the inertia of Anton Chekov, the irreverent humor of  
Ken Bruyen, the anger of James Ellroy, the very cool  
conversation of Don Winslow, the conviction of Bono,  
the acerbic wit of Arlene Young, and the genial gab of  
John Anthony Galbraith. The former and latter are my  
mom and dad, God rest their souls, a habit of my Irish  
American Catholicism.

So, is this a letter, a story, or both? I am still  
undecided, so I will continue to put pen to paper like  
the old Japanese proverb "Don't push the river, it will  
flow by itself." I am also reminded of a line in an old  
Christy Moore song "I cried 'til I laughed, and I drank 'til  
I died". It's a fitting epitaph for any Irishman, but not for  
me. As it is mine to write, I'd like it to read, "Here lays  
Michael John Galbraith, Seanchai (Pronounced Sha-  
ne- kee, Irish for storyteller and vocal historian),  
Shaman, Chef, Tactile Lover, Rabbi, and Priest". I  
would also love that all of that be true.

I love Ellroy and Winslow for the way the characters  
speak in their stories, the same way I love to listen to  
Bruyen rant in the voice of Jack Taylor, or the way  
Bono talks with a crowd in a stadium show. I always  
feel like I'm at his kitchen table or sitting next to him in  
the "Snug". I really don't want my thoughts to appear  
this disjointed, but it is where I am at.

It's Saturday morning in the library at St. Christopher's Inn. I've been to early Mass, broke the fast with my brothers and drank more coffee than is my custom. I'm going to use this as an excuse for the random nature of my thoughts and for the pace in which they occur and change. I am also unaccustomed to writing this freehand. I much prefer to be using my trusty MacBook. It does many important things for me; It helps to coral my thoughts, as I cannot type as fast as I think, it corrects my abysmal attempt to spell as I go, it makes it easy to edit my musings, and allows me to come and go by saving it in the semi secure cosmic netherworld.

When I started this venture, I had a few potential recipients in mind; My newest friend Padraig, my oldest friend Dennis, my therapist Dancing Jim, Seamus, a very smart and soulful Golden Retriever, Anne Louise, my former love and my future lover, soulmate, muse, companion, and friend who has yet to be identified.

At the Mass this morning, the celebrant, Father Dennis, a Franciscan Friar, shared this amazing meditative prayer. It was given to him by Father Bill, also a follower of Francis of Assisi, the reluctant saint. It is called "The Saturday Morning Prayer" and offers the rejuvenation of a diner breakfast and a nine-dollar cup of Starbucks, the peace and wonder of sunrise at the beach, the quiet stillness of sunset on the mighty ocean, the depth of indigo, and the enharmonic tones of a twelve-string guitar. The prayer became the impetus for the desire to write.

Otherwise, it's an ordinary Saturday at the Inn. Nothing remarkable is happening here, unless you find it remarkable that hundreds of men have been showing up since 1909 in all forms of broken and battered, seeking shelter from all manner of malady including themselves, In my case, from the ravages of drink, despondent, and homeless. If that sounds a bit frightening, it's because it truly is and all that more terrifying while you're in it. It does, however, get better in the absence of resistance, that place where acceptance lives. We are all welcomed to stay by the Franciscan Friars and Sisters of The Atonement and aside from a little work around the place; the only thing they expect of me is to believe that I am a man worthy of love and respect. It's crazy that something that sounds so easy is quite hard.

My mother, a very wise woman, said from the time I was small, "Michael John no human condition is ever permanent". A double-edged sword, but it brought me some peace in the moment. The double edge was

discovered when I realized that it applied to Joy as well as pain. From that I have learned to cherish the good and not dwell on the bad. It's not as easy as it sounds when you're culturally hardwired to maudlin. The Irish mistress can be mighty unforgiving.

To all my intended, I have never been as peaceful and serene as I find myself now. Materially, I've almost nothing left to my name save a storage shed with a few holds over treasures, but I have myself. That is something I have never had. I read books, watch movies, and listen to songs to capture a few prophetic lines and the one that grabs me most right now is "Sometimes nothing is a real cool hand".

The movie is "Cool Hand Luke", and the actor is Paul Newman. Unfortunately, that line has been lost to the scene everyone seems to remember." What we have here (dramatic pause) is a failure to communicate!" True, that is quite a problem in both a societal and intimate sense, but it's not the point. The point is, now that I have what I have, I can communicate.

I need to rethink the purpose of this venture. If I am, in fact, writing a letter I must make a couple of adjustments. The first is the list of potential recipients. In horse racing parlance, one of the favorites has been scratched. Usually when a horse has been scratched, it's because of an injury or behavior that occurs prior to "Post Time". I have decided to scratch my oldest friend Dennis, prior to this "Post" for injuries sustained and conduct unbecoming. In the case, the injuries sustained and conducts unbecoming have affected both horse and jockey. Our recent history has left him hurt, angry and wanting. I haven't been, in the past few years, a good or easy friend. My hurt comes from the vitriolic email he sent a few months back that I was just able to read. His, I guess, from the let down and discovery that I was broken and temporarily beyond redemption. The email was signed, "Fuck you", not much room, left for interpretation.

The second is Anne Louise, my former lover, now a licensed therapist and life coach. I would like to think that I was as important in her life as she was in mine. It's a question that I am way too afraid to ask. Truthfully, it's not the asking that scares me, it's the answer.

What I am sure of is that we were important enough to each other in the times that mattered. As an Irishman, I find it easier to look back at our time together with rose colored glasses.



My list is now down a third, more if you count Seamus, my intrepid Golden Retriever, now enjoying a spirited life on a farm south of Saratoga Springs. Attrition may force me to take the road less traveled.

If it is to become a story, it should probably be about something; a girl, boat, time in history, a battle won, or a murder solved. I suppose it could even become a "Bodice Ripper". I wonder if an aging Fabio is still inspiring cover art.

As fate would have it, I may just be qualified to spin a tale or two. I am genetically disposed to write. My tribal ancestors hail from the emerald isle and spoke the language of Saints, scholars, poets, and kings. I have also loved a girl, sailed a boat, occupied a time in history, and fought a noble fight. I have not solved a murder but have solved a mystery. Nor have I ripped a bodice, but have unfastened a bra, albeit awkwardly the first time.

It is most certainly starting to look like a story in form if not intent. Certainly, if I place the girl on the boat during a raging storm of epic proportions, on a journey to solve a murder, that finds us thrust together in the heat of passion having survived the tempest, I have the beginnings of something. I am all in, completely invested in whatever this is to become. Now that it is looking more and more like a story, I should probably develop a cast of characters.

First the girl: Siobhan McGowan. Think Juliet Binoche, Bridget Moynahan, Ingrid Bergman, and Elizabeth Hurley. I have been thinking that I should also add a blonde. I did in fact marry one and dated a few; they also seem to have more universal appeal. Kate Winslet fits the bill perfectly, need I say more. The one thing that they all have in common, is that they would look great in one of my shirts, just like Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. It is, to me, much sexier than anything imagined by the designers at Victoria's Secret. Collar turned up, top three buttons undone and the suggestion that there is absolutely nothing underneath.

I believe that a Hinckley Bermuda 50 would be the perfect boat, the time in history; the summer Of 2018, the battle fought could be the raging storm, the unsolved murder could be the suspicious death of Charlie Sheen! (I know and am grateful that he is not deceased, I'm taking a little license here) His body, newly discovered by an adult film actress in a suite at the Bellagio, was staged to look like an expected relapse. An empty cuvee of '92 Tattinger is listing to

port in the calm water left in the silver bucket, a liter of Gray Goose lies flat on the chrome and glass table, with just a whisper left inside, and the remnants of a mound of Columbian marching powder coat the inch thick glass like the sugar of a hundred jelly doughnuts, not a bad way to go but a hard way to live.

Enter our hero, in this case me, Declan O'Rourke, Deck to friends, O'Rourke to the rest, a two-time three-time misfit free from the drink but not the hyperbole, slugging it out with the other Dix at the LVPD. I have provided a reference for the femme fatale, so why not for the hero. I'm envisioning Sean Connery, Colin Farrell, Pierce Brosnan, with a hint of Ralph Fiennes and Clive Owen. I should add some George Clooney to address my American sensibilities and to provide the narrative voice. I especially liked him opposite Sandra Bullock in "Gravity, for just that reason. Along those lines I will include a bit of Anthony Bourdain, he's an amazing seanchaí and accidental rogue.

That leaves three down and three to go. Padraig, Dancing Jim, and my future soulmate are all that are left on my list of potential recipients. If I'm still hanging on to the idea that I'm writing a letter, now might be a good time to rethink. Even if it's just to say hello, offer thanks for something I will probably re-gift, ask what's new, or I'm having an affair, a letter has a purpose. A letter would be easier than a story on many levels. That is unless it is a very difficult letter to write with a message so heavy one wonders why it doesn't require additional postage. This is not that letter. I have nothing of any considerable weight to share.

I am going to narrow it down a bit by scratching the future spouse, I am a little surprised that she has lasted this long. I can't even imagine a woman that I just met getting this in the mail. Merde! "Celui qui a envoye ca doit etre fou!" She would almost certainly exclaim, and rightly so. I would be crazy to send her something like this, especially if we haven't slept together. One, it could prevent the former from ever happening, and two its way to intimate. I'm not suggesting that making love isn't a very intimate experience, but it often happens way before emotional intimacy. It is walking back that cat that can be extremely difficult. I think that it would be best to put her on hold for a while and revisit this later. I think that I should also do that with Dancing Jim as well. Although I would still send him the story just because he knows me so well and I would truly respect his insight and grounding presence.

I need to provide a historical reference to Jim's moniker. Several years ago, a men's group was formed

by another therapist for guys to get together informally to support each other in dealing with whatever addiction they were wrestling with. The men came in all shape and sizes and from many different professions and walks of life. There were doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs, carpenters, teachers, mental health professionals, finance guys, a Catholic Priest, and my therapist Jim. Jim was not the facilitator nor was the group's healer, that role fulfilled by another provider.

Men being men, identifying by what they do not who they are, gave each other nicknames like those assigned by a Mafia Don. "Bob the Broker", "Dr. Jay", "Padre", "DWI Steve", etc.... and "Dancing Jim". When Jim decided that he might have a drinking problem and pursued sobriety, he found out that he had a lot of spare time on his hands. Looking to fill that void, he took up ballroom dancing. Years later when I joined the group in its newest incarnation, I became "Chef Mike".

Now back to the problem of Charlie Sheen's mortality. Is there a chance that he's just passed out and the porn stars just panicked? This, however, is probably not the case. I can certainly respect Charlie's hard-won sobriety; it is no easy task. It is Herculean and not for mere mortals or the weak of heart. The fall would be great and the landing cataclysmic. I know from experience. I came to long enough in the ER to hear someone call "Code Blue" and then all went black. The gifted and diligent nurses and doc's prevented cardiac arrest and God did the rest.

Back to Charlie, I don't think he makes it, at least in this story, but I could be wrong. Who would want him dead? Chuck Lorre, John Cryer, Brook Mueller, Emilio Estevez, or some anonymous paramour just finding out his HIV status all certainly fir the bill for a hardboiled detective like Deck.

Theme: Recalling the past:

### **Replaying the Tape**

**M. B.**

Melancholy memories replay in my mind

I'm a victim of time but can't press rewind,

They say the present is a gift,

Well, it sure ain't mine.

"No, I'm fine" I state,

If blinding sarcasm were a line...

Theme: Breakthrough using imagery"

**David B. Willis**

### ***The Billboard***

I see a billboard up ahead, but see the back of it first instead it makes me think of who I am. A false façade, a shell of a man I've become a person I no longer wish to be. Why have my thoughts and dreams come to evade me? Like the back of billboard on a long desolate road, where the weeds behind it grow where the sun doesn't show. The front is shiny, like my smiling face. But behind the billboard is a long forgotten isolated space. The rusty frame and graffiti covered back, is what my mind feels like because love seems to lack. As it sits on this long, dilapidated road, the sun shines on it, but no one see's it, so no one knows. This heavy burden that pulls on my soul, is in broad daylight, but feels as dark as night, no stars, or colors, or even a hint of moonlight. As the sunsets there are no streetlights on this road. Darkness engulfs me all around, so deafening without the cricket's sound. As I wait for break of light, this blackness frees me of my mental pain. Till morning comes, to shine on my billboard face once again.

### **The Billboard (Back Story)**

The back story to the Billboard is about where I've been in my relapse and recovery. I was in the back of a van, coming back from a PHP therapy group and saw the back of a billboard first before the front, because it's on the right side of the road going forward. I thought it was odd for they usually put back-to-back billboards for coming and going traffic. So, all I saw for days, was this lonely billboard on a large open field, so it caught my eye to think about a poem for this lonesome billboard (like myself). The front is my face for all to see, but not what's inside of me. Relapse after relapse, I felt lonely and isolated like, the billboard. The back is rusty with graffiti signs, and weeds grows where the sun doesn't show. The front I saw as my face and the back, my cobweb filled mind, since my brain was full of empty thoughts and long-lost dreams that sat in my head, and almost seem forgotten. Like the billboard, I just sat there not going anywhere, as life goes by, like the sun that rises and falls. I did not budge or move to see life as it is, and what's out there if I pursue happiness. My heart and body felt like the rusty frame stuck in the ground. When it got dark, there's no traffic or streetlights or crickets deafening sound. It plays tricks in my head, as my body shakes in bed. Restless thoughts keep me awake, no matter the amount of sleep meds I take. Hoping that tomorrow, I would not wake. The heavy burden that ways on my soul, are my

wishes that never came to be because, I sat drinking and isolated like the billboard on an old, dilapidated road. How can I break free? I ask myself again and again. So now the sun brings a day of new, to catch up with dreams to make them true.

Theme: Taking life one day at a time:

## Living Each Day

### Gregory Gallagher

The counselors tell us we're building ourselves a new tool kit for a new sober life. Each thing we learn to do is a new tool.

- Make a meeting -HALT -Pause -Say a prayer - Let go and let God -Talk to someone else
- Change a thought take an action -Write a gratitude list -Take a walk -Meditate
- Work out -Eat healthy -Pray on it

Ok so wait, say I'm walking down the street and I bump into an old friend who tells me some folks are going to his place later to hang out and party and I should come by. Well, if it's *that* friend I immediately think of a pile of blow, plenty of vodka and music and some chance to feed my need for lust.

Do I take out my rehab folder - look through all the packets and find the one on relapse prevention? Not likely.

If I haven't let go of my old ways I say— "Sure what time?"

I'm going to need something besides a folder. A tool all right - like a sharp axe or hatchet to cut right through the idea of fun and beautiful women and vodka and powder and happy pills. Break it into a million pieces with a sledgehammer. If I rewind the tape a little to the weeks before Saint Christopher's Inn, I see myself alone and sad. I'm tired, I'm sick, I'm scared, I'm not eating. I'm nauseous all the time from anything that's not vodka. I'm trembling if I don't have enough, I'm completely addicted. Physically and mentally. Envisioning this state of being and the misery that I had grown so accustomed to I see the whole thing coming at me and I punch the disease right in the fucking nose. Someone once told me after an AA meeting that whenever the disease speaks, he tries to punch it in the nose. The imagery of that action appeals to me for getting past a quick, triggering thought.

If I can play that tape and transfer the invitation of good times with old friends into a picture of gloomy existence I have a good shot of saying, "Hey great to see you man, I'm busy tonight I'll see you around."

Or if I can pull out my sword of honesty and it's a good friend, I can say something like "Sounds great man, I hope it's fun. You know I haven't been around for a while because my drinking got out of control. Right now, things are really good so I'm staying away from all the party stuff, but thanks anyways let's get lunch sometime. Tell everyone I said hello."

And that's the thing about the tools of recovery – they can be put into action as quickly as a stinging jab. The lectures and handouts on relapse prevention can be thought of as an arsenal. With consistent acceptance of having a sneaky powerful disease that works against you and the practice of daily prayer and trust in God, all the tools and slogans can be molded into sharp and powerful instruments. My holster of weaponry - ready for action against the moments of real-life craving.

Living each day truly one day at a time, one moment at a time, I can accept the threat of a challenging moment. Because that's all it is, one moment where my decision can cause horrible ripples that build into great storms or can maintain sobriety and know peace. I use prayer as armor, and I wear battle boots as I step into each next right action. I can slice and dice my way through my own negative thinking and land in gratitude. And sometimes - only sometimes - but often, there is no gunfire nearby when I thank God each night and snuff out the lantern in my very own tent of recovery.

## Response to the prompt:

### ***What scares you a little? How do you feel when you're scared?***

What scares me a little is myself and sometimes it's not a little. I'm scared of causing pain even if it's necessary for growth. I'm afraid of having all eyes on me when I'm deciding—is it right? —how will they react? I'm scared of being vulnerable to others and how that would look. I'm scared of not knowing and relying upon trust. I'm scared of my own truths and what they might reveal.

I can manage other fears simply fine—spiders, sharks, heights and, say, earthquakes. I've never become stuck in fear on a hot summer's day staring at the blue ocean waves and think 'those seagulls are

after the minnows and the bluefish are under the minnows and under the bluefish is a Great White swimming way to close to shore circling under the swimmers for a chomp into some nice white leg meat. None of that crosses my mind—I just dive right in and ride some waves.

I do not wallow in fear on the beach, I wallow with fear in my mind. The discovery of something that needs to be discussed with someone and there's the slimmest possibility of conflict is more frightening for me and far more likely for me than to fear JAWS. Or let's say I have an idea, and it's a good one. It involves my future and growth, and it requires risk and uncertainty, and it also needs to stand up to the judgement of others. This kind of fear scares me enough to not take any action at all. They call it paralyzing fear. I don't stop moving, I just give up, grow apathetic and stop trying. Complete stagnation. In my addiction, this stagnation lasted years.

The biggest problem with all my fears is that there is a lifetime of reference points in which each of these fears had the simplest solution. It was the complete absence of all things Spiritual and a lonely existence both physically and in my mind. Alcohol and drugs silenced my fears and stifled my growth. Their use blocked out the sunlight of my soul. Left completely to my own devices, I'd turn to my vices. They remain just an arm's length away for me every day. Today, one year sober and living each day with God in my life, I have a new, more healthy fear. It is a fear of booze, and drugs in any form and of any amount. Just one drink or hit to ease the fear and pain would now be the wrecking ball that tears down all that I am so incredibly grateful to have today.

Theme: Writing about targeted topics to gain clarity:

**Phillip Pullen**

### **Writings**

Writing prompt: When is hope reasonable? When is it hurtful?

#### **HOPE**

Hope. Hope, for many people including myself is that courage, willingness, and most of all vulnerability to believe that whatever it may be will end in your desired outcome. It's supposed to rain all day, the day you're meant to fish and even though all signs point to rain, you still hold on that they got it wrong. Or it's that beautiful girl with the glowing eyes, the ones that have been burned into your mind's eye because you've

spent so much time looking at her profile, that one that stands out more than the rest. That online crush that may not even know you exist. And having the hope that you will have the courage to ask her for a date, and the hope that she will say yes.

Having hope is a very tricky and polarizing feeling for me. Having generalized anxiety disorder, depression, and PTSD, hope is an extremely confusing thing for me. Most people assume that with depression and PTSD that hope is nowhere to be found, my outlook on life must be grim, dark, and full of despair. But this is just simply not the case, in fact, I have more hope than most people. My issue- I have an extremely hard time of knowing when to let go of hope and move on with my life. Which leads me down a dark path, and my ways of coping with any sort of issue in my adult life was to either run away from the issue or turn to drugs and alcohol to try to heal my wounded spirit.

When is hope worth the cost? Who gets to decide? And when it is obvious that your hopes are simply impossible, just pipe dreams, how are we able to turn that hope off? Is it even possible? Looking back, with all the things I hoped for and was disappointed in, in several instances I knew for certain that the outcome would not be in my favor, but there was still that thought in the back of my mind. If I could put hope into a thought, it would be "what if."

"What if" What if she calls? What if they let me go? What if she does love me? What if. What. If. How many times have these What "ifs" ever worked out in your favor? Think for a moment. How many times when you've had hope for something far and long gone, have those what "ifs" ever been answered?

For me it is less than I can count on my hands and toes, but each time has been quite satisfying. On the other hand, these instances where I've blindly put hope into an outcome, knowing full well that this was not going to go the way I wanted, devastated me. I think the answer behind this for me is that I have an extremely tough time accepting reality for what it is. That I hide behind hope, and that because I've put my energy into trying to, that means I should be rewarded. Wanting, waiting, wishing does not do anything other than, when reality settles in, throws me completely off. This is an issue for me in relationships as well. I am always expecting the best from my partner, so when they do something that is completely okay in any given scenario, except mine, I get terribly upset. How can you expect someone to love you the way you need to, without expressing your needs? How selfish is it to

expect someone to be what you want and not what they are? I've felt both sides of the coin- neither are pretty. And neither of those people will be granted access to the mothership again- they've lost that privilege. They only exist as a reminder of who we can be and who we shan't be.

I've learned a lot about what has held me back in some ways and propelled me forward in others just by writing this little blurb. I know that, although my hope is very polarizing, that there is a way to have hope while also practicing acceptance. Hope is good, in the sense that it will drive me to do what I desire and be the person I want to be. Without hope, quite frankly I'd be dead in a sewer with a needle in my throat by this point in time. My childhood alone could drive anyone to that, let alone losing the two most important people in your life at that given time. Hope has pushed me through that, but once I had my head above water again hope has also violently crushed me. Hope has kept me in places where I should have never been in the first place. And hope has led me into some very dark places, just looking for that tiny glimmer that I had thought I saw.

Hope has also kept me alive. Hope is what made me believe that there is something more than just what is in front of me. That I don't need to write that letter that I could change. That I could be happy. I am still hopeful for these things. I will always have hope, because once you've hit rock bottom, which is when you find out what you are who you are. Hope found me there too. Found me curled in a ball, afraid to accept reality but also in denial of what must be done. Hope is how I feel at this current moment. I'm thankful for the people I have in my life right now, and I'm hopeful that the early budding rosebuds of love and happiness may bloom and blossom. How can we love if not for hope?

I am going to continue to have hope. To have faith. To show love and courage and acceptance throughout every facet of my life. Logic tells me that I must practice moderation. Everything needs to be done in moderation and hope is one of the most intriguing drugs I've ever experienced, the highest of the highs and the lowest of the lows. Recognizing and accepting reality is what logically needs to be done, as that aspect is a crucial part of self-preservation and one that I lack, and most of the time what gets me into the most amount of trouble. But I'd rather be a naive hopeful fool, who believes that people will be the best versions of themselves, and have good intentions, than the pessimistic cynical asshole who believes everyone exists purely to fuck the other over. I'll take living each day, being genuinely hopeful that each person I meet

will approach the situation with as much respect as I do. It is the hopefuls that keep this world alive. The ones who stand up for the right thing, no matter how large of a battle, and even if it means life or death, those are the people who will absolutely revolutionize this planet for the best. The ones who go deeper as others turn back. I was asked when is hope helpful and when its hurtful- it has never been and will forever be, a continuous and torturous twisted dance where each participant begins peeling off one face to reveal the other, a teetering balance of both but neither. Hope is where love is born. And love is where I would like to spend my remaining days.

### **The lighthouse**

So many signs that have left me deterred

So many false beacons

A handheld out

Only to rip me forward on my face

I see you there

Shining bright. Sincere

But do I trust this again?

I am not a gambling man

But aren't we always gambling?

Betting that the ones we love will always be there

A bet we will forever lose

A bet i will forever make

You see me alone, in this weary weather

Your light shows safety,

Warmth

But so does the light of the angler fish

That dangling twinkle of security

Only to swallow me whole

Why should I trust this again?

I hardly trust myself

I could sit and wait, but the weather is worsening

Why not risk it one more time?

Life without risk is a life without meaning

But it is also a life without pain

A life without happiness as well

The light brings me in, entices me

So many times, I've ignored the call  
 Expecting more trips and falls  
 But falling can be fun  
 Falling may be what I need  
 Are you calling to me?  
 Or are you answering my cries

## Happiness

The thing I love most about happiness is that so many different things, big, small, important, or only plain insignificant, can incite it and so many things can develop from them. What causes happiness though?

Are we able to create it on demand? If that was the case, why don't we? Why don't I? As I sit here typing out this prompt- I wonder this. I know I have experienced happiness before many times, but what are the actual physical or emotional things that trigger this feeling? What causes me boundless joy and most importantly, how do I utilize this in my daily life and have happiness be a constant, and not fleeting and rare. Well, I'll start this off with what I can think may make me the happiest of any and all things

Without a doubt, the most fulfilling and happiest I feel on a consistent basis is when I go out of my way for others without being prompted, and seeing the look of shock, awe, and appreciation for my efforts. I like to think that I am selfless and that I do things for people because I care and don't want anything in return. This is simply untrue. I do wholeheartedly believe that I am a caring and loving individual, but I know that some of the things I do are for me just as much as others. Seeing the look of happiness and surprise on others is always such a wonderful feeling for me. And seeing it on a face of someone I love and cherish, because of something I did gives me a feeling of true bliss and happiness.

- This one may be a bit different, but when an animal approaches and chooses to sit near me or on me in a room full of people, causes insane amounts of happiness. I don't know exactly what it is but being chosen by an animal is one of the greatest gifts to receive and I will always be a bit salty when someone else receives the attention. I guess for me it is the feeling of being recognized by an innocent creature, who does not necessarily know what they are doing besides looking for love. Which they shall receive heaps of if they come to me!! Tell your pets, pick Phil he's got great pets to give.

- It's going to sound terrible, but that moment you punch out at the end of a long day heading into a weekend is just absolutely sweet. Most of the time that feeling does not last long enough for my liking, usually only until I reach the car, but those moments of knowing another work week is down and now I have a few days to recover gives me such happiness and fulfillment.
- Trust is also a great and different happy for me. When talking with a close friend and they let me in on something that is embarrassing, or hard to speak of, and they open up, completely vulnerable, allowing for judgement and shaming to take place but knowing there will be none is also a very serene sort of happiness. Its validation for me that I am the person I try to be, and that although nobody is completely perfect, this is as close as it gets to truly expressing how much you care and respect someone.
- Those late-night belly laughs, over the most ridiculous things possible. For a while, those laughs were far and few between that i almost believed that they did not exist anymore, but I've seen that as of late my laughs tend to be longer, louder, and full of much more love than they used to be. I guess it's me finally believing that I am worthy of a chance to relax and i will continue to know that hey, it's okay to not have to be vigilant all the time. Life is meant to be lived.
- Ah I've been thinking about this one all day actually but feeling the warmth of the one you love wrapped up in your arms, got to be one of the best and comforting feelings in the world. Especially the first time. But with the right person, the cuddling does not get less intense, it's just a newfound admiration for someone else. That feeling of being able to be comfortable and full- with love and trust. Absolutely beautiful
- Going a different route here, finding something that you had been looking for a long time, based off just the smallest and minute details is so satisfying! Bonus points if it is a friend that is the one to recognize and understand exactly what you've been itching to find out. It's a different kind of happiness for sure relieving satisfaction is the word for it in my opinion
- This one makes me sound like an asshole, but here it goes. Being right after a long-fought battle of words and wisdom, to reign supreme, it may be the competitor in me, or the fact that I lose so

very often in relationships that I absolutely relish in the opportunity to be proven right. And yes, I'm a poor winner, a sore loser, and a beautiful human being

- Accomplishing a goal. There is nothing quite like setting out with a purpose and being able to complete it, especially if things go completely smoothly. Even if they don't that sometimes could make it even better, as that long road to completion may be filled with trials and tribulations, making the completion that much sweeter.
- Honestly, going to sound cheesy as hell right now but I'm truthfully honest about it, writing out this list is making me extremely happy. It is because a lot of times, when things aren't going well, and happiness seems nowhere in sight, I am unable to think back on these things and realize that hey, I can be happy. In that moment I am choosing unhappiness. I'm allowing myself to bully myself and if anyone knows myself its myself! That was fun too right there. I am happy! And I guess in the beginning when i started writing this there was a question whether we can produce happiness from out of nowhere. And right now, I'm starting to believe that we can. Or at least I can.
- Making an obscure reference and having another person not only notice it but double down. Especially not knowing that person and if they were even interested in the same thing. A lot of my strongest relationships have been built on it. I still remember my friend George hearing me talk about StarCraft in the halls in high school as a freshman, coming up to me as if it was a drug deal.... "You like StarCraft?" Good times
- Getting that text from the girl you have no idea how you even got her number in the first place, that first initial flirt, that devilish dance you play, trying not to expose too much of an interest yet also making sure it's clear and known your

intentions. The hunt as some men calls it, I disagree with this saying. It makes it seem like women are meant to be just pieces of meat to be tagged and mounted. Women are mysterious and uniquely elegant in so many ways, the subtle secret meanings behind every move, as if planned for months in advance, and being able to guess correctly is quite the wondrous feeling. To truly connect with another and feel that energy be reciprocated. That is happiness for me.

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