

Spotlight On Recovery

Giving a Voice to the Therapeutic Community



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\$2.95 | Feb 2018 | www.spotlightonrecovery.com

PRISON SURVIVOR

BY NICK SERIGANIS

What am I feeling? Is this where I reside?
Emptiness, loneliness, draining me from inside.
I try to maintain smiles, but often find frowns.
Making it seem I'm alright, while putting on a show for these clowns.

I fight the struggle, day to day, head to head,
Expecting to obtain peace, but find misery instead.
But that's fine, because I'm fighting for a cause
While learning from my oppressors, who help reveal my flaws.

Oh Prison, Oh Prison, many minds and lives you've took and maimed
One by one, few by few, even bodies that lay unclaimed.
I'm scared, I'm confused, battered, beaten and lost.
But find myself I will, no matter the cost.

I will not quit, while confined within your walls.
Faithfully, on bended knee, praying for mercy
God will come to claim me,
So out of your clutch I will arise
From the bottom to the top, no matter my demise.

So consider yourself beat, from the emotional abyss I now ascend,
The pains and wounds you've inflicted, have now begun to mend.
Others will follow me, so I have some work in store.
You may have won many battles, but I shall win the war.

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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

FEBRUARY 2018

Happy New Year Family!

It's a brand New Year and a new opportunity for you to let go of the past and look forward to great things happening in your life.

There are many of you who have survived bad roads, lost innocence or have been in harmful situations. Some of these situations can be looked upon as lessons, others are just painful and unbearable. By the grace of God, you still stood tall when it counted. You still breathed deep and gave what we could.

Each month or so, Spotlight on Recovery asks our writers and readers to come forward and share their struggles with the purpose of freeing someone else from their pain and struggle. My readers and writers may never have met each other to say how important their honest, open interaction has been. The wide variety of stories and poems shared have impacted our readers greatly; lightening their load in life. Therefore, I'm here to tell my writers that your testimony changes many lives for the better.

Thank you writers for sharing, and for giving of yourself to others.

Happy New You, and Happy New Year!

Sincerely,

Robin Graham
Robin Graham
Founder/Publisher



I SURVIVED....U CAN TOO

BY SEDRIC R. JOHNSON

Depression.... A silent assassin that is characterized by an inability to concentrate, loneliness, extreme sadness, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, insomnia, loss of appetite, the absence of pleasure or the ability to experience it, increased thoughts of suicide.

Yes, this agent of doom and gloom is anti-existence – thus presenting a serious problem for those who've had the misfortune of being inflicted by it. It's a dangerous rollercoaster, which takes one, on an often silent, but aggressively ride through the various twists, turns, banks and drops of its symptoms. Most who suffer from this disease rarely notice it on their own and would perhaps remain ignorant were it not for outside intervention. Its harsh symptoms are often dismissed as simple rough patches or attributed to the normal vicissitudes of life. That makes the disease deceptive in nature.

It becomes imperative that one pays close attention, especially when there's a sudden or extreme change in normal thought, feelings, behavior or social routine. Most times it is a traumatic event, be it physical, mental or emotional reaction that can bring on the malaise. However, other times there is no apparent cause that can be associated with its diagnosis. Nevertheless, whether through trauma or not one or more of the aforementioned symptoms will goad its host to either: reach back or forward in a futile attempt to gain some semblance comfort or normalcy or something of familiarity.

In this light, some will reach for religion; thus becoming staunch Christians, Muslims, Buddhist, or pious individuals, almost overnight. Although such conversions in spirituality can be an excellent coping mechanism, they are only affective if done with an authentic heart!

Others may reach for various activities; such as gambling, sports and trivia – all of which can be

innocuous. But once you add the prison element, and the disease of depression, these seemingly harmless activities only exacerbate the symptom, causing a slew of other issues that increase anxiety, garner liaisons which are not genuine and can even cause physical harm.

Then, of course some will abuse substances – be it controlled or illicit. One will self medicate to unknowingly abate the symptoms, for instant gratification (artificial pleasure) or to fill the void – all of which are short lived. Because depression is the driving force behind your need of any given substance, you'll remain incessantly insatiable; thus subjecting you to a perpetual chase for that curt feeling of relief. A feeling that quickly becomes a need –consistently dangling the carrot of feign escape and euphoria; as it silently leads you to your demise!

As for myself, I was true to that destructive process. I did religion, I smoked, I drank, I popped pills. I didn't realize that I was only doing those things to abate the hidden issues of depression, while walking down the wend to destruction.

When it comes to drugs and or substance abuse, there are (3) stages that most people will go through:

1. Pleasure/Experimentation: The beginning, the gateway, you're basically unaware that you are trying to placate deep seated issues. You convince yourself that it's all in fun and recreation. Failing to make the vital connection that your use is associated with your moments of sadness, loneliness, guilt, hopelessness, etc.
2. Dependency: You may or may not know that you're suffering from the disease of depression. Yet you do realize that when you're experiencing one or more of the many symptoms, they've quelled when you medicated yourself. Turning sobriety into an enemy – needing your fix at all cost.
3. Suicide: You may deny it at first because it takes more to get high each time. More to quell those symptoms – so the dosage consistently increases until

you're now ingesting detrimental levels. Knowing that It's wreaking havoc on the inside of your body, no longer experiencing euphoric highs, but blackouts instead.

I AM A SURVIVOR

BY VICTORIA RADER

My name is Victoria, and I am a survivor. Most people are survivors somehow or another. Some people suffer through a bad disease, or they go through physical or mental abuse. Some struggle with drugs, alcohol, or even gambling. Many people have been in an accident or a war. Consequences of being a survivor could include damage to your body or your brain. If you get over whatever it is that controlled your life then I would say you are a survivor; you persevered, and made it through. Most of the time, it takes some kind of intervention. Sometimes one person that hung in there with you and showed you their love was enough to spark a change. Sometimes this meant receiving tough love. It was a combination of love, intervention and good doctors that enabled me to be a survivor.

My neighbor had to remind me that I have been a survivor all of my life. There has been a saying that I have heard most of my life, "Everyone has a story," and here is part of mine. I was 16 years old, married and expecting a baby. I knew during the whole pregnancy that I would have a C section, because my birthing canal was full of marble size tumors. During this time I went to a specialist and once a month he would give me a Bicilium shot in the hip. The needle was big and painful. As soon as my son was born, the tumors started going away.

Later on, I went back and the Doctor took the rest of them off.

Now as I think about tumors I remember my mom telling me about a pea size tumor that was removed from one of my eyebrows when I was a baby. That was the start of my battle against tumors and them being a part of my life.

Later on when I was in my twenties my stomach started growing. I looked like I was about five months pregnant and I knew I wasn't. I went to my doctors.

He examined me and told me I was pregnant. We had a little argument. He insisted I was pregnant. I said, "I know my body and I assure you I am not." "Well I am the doctor and I say you are." He then put me on medications that are given when you are pregnant. When I went out to my sister-in-law's, she was ecstatic and happy. "Don't get too happy because I am not pregnant." I told her. "Well the doctor knows, and he is the doctor." Several weeks later, I went back to him, and after arguing a little more he agreed to do a pregnancy test. Back then, they used a rabbit for the test and mine came back negative so he sent me to a specialist in Dayton, Ohio. The specialist was a very nice man. He examined me and told me I had a very large tumor growing on one of my tubes going to my right ovary, and it was full of fluid. He got me in for surgery as soon as possible. I was told to try not to fall because if it broke they probably could never get it all cleaned out, and it could cause cancer. I did have a fall but the tumor was okay. He removed it with no problems. It weighted ten pounds.

About five years later I started having problems again, you guessed it, another tumor. This one was on the left ovary. It was as big as a grapefruit and was a fibroid tumor. The whole thing was wrapped around the ovary so the ovary could not be saved. I recovered from that one just fine.

A few years later, I was probably in my thirties by then. Yes; more problems! I had to go back to the specialist again for the third time. The little marble sized ones were numerous so he had to remove my uterus. I cried and cried, because I could not have any more children. Little did I know that there would be other medical problems ahead for me.

One year we went to Florida for some sun and relaxation. It was very nice until I got too much sun

resulting in sun poisoning. Since then my face and head have had more skin cancer removed than I can remember. During most of my adult life, I have fought numerous skin cancers. Surgery after surgery they have all been Basal cell skin cancer. I remember the first one I had removed. The dermatologist told me they tested the piece that was cut out and if all the roots were on it, it would be okay, if only some of the roots were there they would have to go back in and repeat the process until it

was all gone. He cut my forehead three different times before it was clean. It got to where I hated going in their office. I have had three different dermatologists, and the last one had taken off so many that he finally gave me a solution that brought out anything that looked like skin cancer. He did biopsies and said I was clear. I thank God for that, because he has made me a survivor.

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MY NAME IS ARCANE ELEMENT AND I AM A SURVIVOR

I was born Marlon Mallory on July 6, 1988 in the small town of Magnolia, Arkansas. When I was still an infant, before I was even a year old, I was relocated to Texarkana, Texas, where I would spend the first 11 years of my life with the man I knew as my father. By the time I was in second grade, I had already begun to suffer the consequences of both mental and physical abuse at the hands of my father, the man who was supposed to be my protector and caregiver, for various reasons in multiple ways. This would continue throughout the duration of my stay with him. I had also witnessed him sell crack firsthand to the neighborhood dope fiends before I understood what crack was and how the crack epidemic was affecting urban communities on a national scale. In fact, one of the more severe beatings I received was due to the fact, that I found his stash on a saucer and cut it with the razor blade that was conveniently present on the same saucer, destroying his product.

Our home was a dysfunctional one to say the least. I watched my father use my stepmother as a punching bag on such a regular basis that it became an expected occurrence to me. To my young eyes, I thought I was observing what a perfectly, normal, functional, loving relationship was supposed to look like. Things got so bad between them that if there wasn't a fight at all during any given week, I would be worried that they didn't love one another anymore. These fights naturally led to her calling the police on him, and it became normal for me to see white police officers come to our home, red and blue lights flashing, and leave with my father handcuffed in the back seat of their squad car. Going to see my father in jail was a routine event for us. This was a recurring theme until my step-mother finally left him and my father got involved with another woman that he, surprisingly, never laid less than a loving hand on.

When my father and stepmother split, I was about 9 or 10 years old. I wanted desperately to go live with her and my baby sister because my stepmother

was my primary source of love and affection since my biological mother was incarcerated. When my father wouldn't allow me to go, I was in great distress.

By 1998, my father and I had moved in with his second wife. I could tell by her attitude towards me that she really didn't want me around but dealt with me simply because I was my father's son. She would be all smiles when my father was around, but always seemed to have a surly disposition in regard to me when it was just the two of us. Finally, she let her true colors show one day. I was home alone afterschool one day, waiting for one of them to get home from work as usual when the phone rang. I answered the phone for my father's best friend who wanted to know if I wanted to go to the movies with him and his kids. After telling him that he would have to ask my father, he hung up and did so which is how they found out that I answered the phone. Well, this drove her over the edge when she had previously informed my father that she didn't want me to answer the phone although I lived there as well. The next day, and everyday thereafter, I was locked in the garage with a loaf of light bread and a gallon of water afterschool until one of them came home from work.

Shortly after my 11th birthday, I moved to Magnolia with my mother's family when my father and his wife got tired of my "behavior." Almost immediately after my transition, I became affiliated and started beefing with guys from the Westside of town and different neighborhoods. Due to my status as an outsider in the eyes of most dudes who had lived in Magnolia all their lives, my affiliation and representing the Southside, I got jumped more times than I care to remember until guns eventually became a factor. After that happened, I watched helplessly as so many of my homeboys began to die. I became paranoid that everyday would be my last among the living and I was determine to do anything it took to survive, no matter what it was, even if it meant I had to murder someone else.

My mother's family was poverty-stricken, so I was never able to have the things that most of the popular kids had. Understanding my predicament, I started selling crack. However, even this alone wasn't enough to satisfy my desire to have nice things and that's when I was introduced to one thing I became great at: armed robbery. When I discovered armed robbery, it became my preeminent source of income and I became addicted to it. I couldn't get over how powerful I felt when I pulled my gun out and saw fear cloud the eyes of the so-called Gangsta Drug Dealers who became my victims. So, I stuck with it until I got incarcerated at the age of 16.

During my stay in the juvenile facility, I worked on my body and thought I was doing the same to my mind, but at that point in my life I didn't have the right understanding of the knowledge I possessed to do a proper job. I wrote songs on a daily basis, and was seriously considering joining the Marine Corps upon my release. Thirteen months after entering the juvenile program, I was released, about 4 1/2 months before my 18th birthday. When I turned 18, I got a job at Wal-Mart and attempted to fly straight, but it just wasn't in the cards for me at that time. I lost my job about a month after I was hired, and turned back to what I knew best; the streets and robbery. My uncle tried to recruit me into the Marine Corps, but by that time I had lost my interest in military life.

In May 2008, at the age of 19 I was arrested and charged with rape. My bail was set at \$200,000 and I needed a minimum of 10% or \$20,000 to be released. That being the case, I didn't stand a chance of getting out to hire a defense attorney. Stuck in jail with no real knowledge of law and only a public defender to shield me from the brunt of a determined prosecutor in a racist town, I entered a guilty plea in August 2008. My public defender, who I recently discovered is allegedly

the brother-in-law of the same prosecutor for my case, advised me that it was in my best interest to accept the deal. Thus, I was sentenced to serve 70% of 40 years plus another 10 years for revocation of probation. By Halloween, of the same year, I was processed and began my stay in the Arkansas Department of Correction.

My first few years on the inside were turbulent because I had no respect whatsoever for any authority figure, especially not one who wasn't even a real cop and my clashes with other inmates didn't help me calm down.

In 2016, I changed my name legally to Arcane Element as a symbolical new beginning. I began studying Black History, Business, Psychology and a variety of other things trying to figure out who I wanted to be and what I wanted to do with my life. In the long-run, my studies have helped me to transform my attitude and gave me the tools to recognize my potential and become a better man.

When I first entered prison, I thought my life was over, so that's the manner in which I carried myself with a major chip on my shoulder. Now, nearly 10 years later, I realized that it was only the beginning of what was to come. That every single decision I made from that point would shape my future. Despite my incarceration, I embarked on a spiritual journey, learned more about myself, and came out a more mature, confident man for it. Everything I ever learned, I picked up the hard way because I had no father who cared enough to teach me. As a result my life was a lot harder than it had to be and I made more mistakes than I should've had to. But in retrospect, I wouldn't have it any other way because my experience made me a stronger individual and gave me a will to survive. Through it all, I've become resilient. My name is Arcane Element, and this is how and why I ultimately turned out to be a survivor.

MY NAME IS NICK SERIGANIS AND I AM A SURVIVOR

This story that I'm about to tell takes place when I was nine years old, this is a very touchy subject and I have not been able to talk about this in over 24 years. It's a story about child abuse and sexual assault at the hands of a monster. The psychological affects still haunt me to this day.

I grew up in a very poor family with 2 older brothers, a mother and father. One day my mother got her food stamps, this is before the EBT cards came out, my mother gave me a one dollar food stamp to go down to the store so I could buy myself 100 pieces of penny candy. I was so happy that I started out the seven block walk to the store. I remember, it was a nice sunny summer day. I went to the store and bought my candy.

I was just a kid so I started to eat the candy before I even left the parking lot. So, I got about 4 blocks and that's when a car road up beside me with the passenger window down. A well- dressed man of say 28 was behind the wheel and he said, "Hey buddy, you look hot, would you like a ride home?" I said "no sir, I'm not allowed to get into no one's car." He said, "I'm not a no one, I'm a police man" and he held up a gold badge which I found out was a fake when everything was said and done.

Being a small kid and being taught to trust and respect police officers, I said "ok" and got in. We started to drive off and he said, "How would I like to do some police work?" I said, "What is it?" He said, "He got a call about a lost dog and he had to find it because it belonged to a handicap little girl. I said "sure I'll help." So, we started off me looking for a dog that was never lost and about 20 minutes later we pulled into a driveway, which later after the fact we found out that was his house.

I asked, "Is the doggie in there?" He said "he sure is" so I got out of the car with him and with the grace of God, the elder man and his wife that lived next door was sitting outside next door and the guy said "hey Jim, who's the little fella?" the man that kidnapped me said I was his sister's kid and we walked inside house.

Thinking back, I really never paid no mind to that comment he made when he said I was his sister's kid. When we got into the house I said where is the doggie, he said the dog was in his room that we should both get him, so we walked up the stairs and into the bedroom. I didn't see no dog, and I was like where is he mister and that's when he hit me and I blacked out. I don't know how long I was out, but when I realized what was going on, I was tied belly down on the bed and I had a sharp pain in my belly and in my rear end, there was also blood on the bed.

I really didn't understand what was going on or what had happened and what was done to me, I tried to call out for help, but something was tied around my head and my mouth gagging me. So, I fight and twisted and somehow I got my hand free, my wrist was bloody from the ropes, but I was able to set myself free and run next door to the elderly couple and they called the police and a lot happened after that.

It took them only two hours to find that man, it took the courts 1 ½ years to put that man away for 79 years with no chance of parole.

I still seek help from psychiatrists and psychologists. I suffer from clinical depression and social anxiety and it's hard to cope from day to day, but my name is Nick Seriganis and I am a Survivor.

MY NAME IS AMERICA

BY CALUM KINSTLER

I am a land of possibilities, where any wish can come true. I don't listen to the critics; I play by my own set of rules. If you're scared to stand with me, just sit back and watch, I'll put on a show. My people are hard-working and never give up – they take complex problems and solve them with ease. The only thing that limits them is their imagination. They're builders, creators, visionaries, and idealists.

I believe in second chances, I'm fair and I'm generous. I'll gladly give you what you earn, but work for it you must. I believe in pushing the limits, of what is real and what is to be. I have survived hardship and struggles, but I still stand on my own two feet. Knock me down and I'll get back up, wound me and I'll recover.

My name is America. I am a survivor.

I am a land of possibilities, where anyone can thrive if they try. All I ask of you is this: to give it your all.

My people, they sometimes need guidance. I'm here to lead the way, I'll shine for them a light. Together they are unstoppable, the world is their laboratory, and they are their own experiment.

I believe that life is worth living, but satisfaction won't come easily. Ignorance is not bliss and effort is rewarded. I have survived some horrible days – beatings and poundings I've taken. They've made me what I am; an immovable force.

My name is America. I am a leader.

I am a land of constant change. Be adaptable or be left behind. I've experienced peaks and troughs, been through expansions and contractions. Through all of this, I've changed, yet it's almost as if I'm still the same.

Not every day was easy, some were harder than the rest. But I set my goals and reached them, I passed the ultimate test. My people have known sorrow, they've also known defeat. But every loss was temporary, and every battle they beat.

I believe in trials and tribulations, in tests and taxing days. Through each of them, you will grow stronger. Every problem solved and every obstacle overcome will be a badge of confidence on your chest. I survived ridicule, threats, and almost certain death. I am a lover and a fighter.

My name is America. I am a survivor.

I am a land of excitement and enthusiasm, of greatness and inspiration. I am still a land of opportunity; just the competition has grown quite fierce. You've got to be better and faster, and willing to work three times as hard, if you want to succeed and prosper, you've got to work to exhaustion, and never let your eyes stray from the prize.

My people are the best and the brightest, I've raised most of them all of their life. I'm a mother, a father, a brother, and a sister. My people have such vast potential they each play a vital role. They've been leaders and followers and everything in between, and I need them, I love them, without them I would not be whole.

I believe in independence, you may have heard of my declaration. Self-reliance is self-empowerment and self-mastery is the noblest of goals. Lean on no one more than you must, for your own shoulder is far more stable. I have survived attacks and bombardments; they've hardly phased me a bit. Through difficulties we must stand together, and always have each other's backs. Positive thinking has kept me alive, and optimism has kept me moving forward.

My name is American. I will never give up.

I am a land of variety and diversity, an abundant refuge of life. Extravagant, brilliant, unique, and beautiful. I am infatuated with myself. My expanses hold mystery and promise, adventure is ripe for the picking.

My people are the greatest in the world. I could not be more proud. They're enterprising, productive, effective, and masters of their daily routines. Give them a challenge, and they will surprise you. Give them a chance, and you'll be glad you did.

I believe in coming back from losses even stronger than before. I believe in self-actualization and becoming all you can be.

I have survived many things.

My name is America. I am the greatest.

About the Author: This is Calum's third article for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine. Calum was featured in the following Spotlight on Recovery issues, "Bonus Round," "Rock Bottom Part 2," and "In the Line of Fire." We hope to hear more from him in the future.

MY NAME IS ANTHONY CLEO BILLINGS AND I AM A SURVIVOR

Yes, my middle name is Cleo. Not exactly the toughest of middle names and definitely one that came with social backlash when I was growing up. Don't worry though, I survived all of the jokes and zingers and I managed to move on with life. But that is a survivor story for another day.

On a more serious note, I have survived through my own share of unfortunate life experiences. You may have gone through worse experiences than I have but it is not a contest nor something that I want to get good at through practice. I would rather lead a good life where I am very happy and content in every aspect of it. But then again, isn't that what we all want? Kind of funny how it rarely works out that way, isn't it?

One thing that I have actually survived through, and continue to survive through to this day is prison. Not the best place to be, nor the safest, and it is a place where people can, and sometimes do, lose their lives. I am not proud to be here but I am proud of the way that I am handling it. I am accomplishing my goals on a consistent basis and not letting my setback hinder my personal growth and progress. I only mention this fact not to brag but to make a point. A praiseworthy evolution for us all should be from a survivor to a thriver, not the opposite.

What I mean by this is that when you survive through something in life, don't give in to the temptation of having a victims mentality. It is easy to go through something dreadful in life and retain the fear of having to possibly experience it all over again. It prevents you from living your life to the fullest and it can literally stifle the joy that you find in living. This can lead to some unnecessary and drastic measures being taken. The brave thing to do, although it is often hard, is to rise above your fear and let your experience serve as a guiding light to help you through the obstacles and stumbling-blocks that you will continue to face throughout your lifelong journey. You need to remember that you survived through something that others have not and that is a fact to embrace.

Sadly, I have seen people survive something horrendous in life and instead of thriving afterwards and being grateful to be alive, they took on a victim's mentality. They felt sorry for themselves, which is fine at first, but then they wallowed in self-pity and continued to do so day after day, month after month, and year after year.

Please try to understand where I am coming from because I am all for post-recovery and taking the necessary time to heal physically, mentally, and

spiritually after the fact. However, what I am not for is someone losing all of their aspirations in life afterwards and letting their fear prevent them from moving past their setbacks. This may sound cold-blooded and callous at first but if you knew me personally then you would know that I am the farthest example from that type of person. I am pro-life, glass half -full, and I strive to always maintain a positive attitude throughout life and that is an ideal way of living that I fully endorse. Another thing that I completely agree with is to always have true and genuine sympathy for those that have fallen on hard times and to show them the compassion that they need.

There will come times in our lives where we will survive a devastating event and it will change our life in an instant. We will feel lost and we will second-guess our future. Nevertheless, you should not let your reason to stop advancing, improving, bettering, or refining yourself be because you suffered through misfortune. Instead, I encourage you to use your suffering as a tool to become an advocate that can speak up and uplift the next person that went through the same thing that you had to endure. You survived your ordeal for a reason and now you have the opportunity to move forward and work to make sure that others who suffered the same can find some closure and guidance. Use your experience to help the next person work through their own.

This message is for those of you that survived domestic violence, drug addiction, cancer, sexual abuse, A.I.D.S., a car crash, terrorism, diseases, tours in a war, a heart attack, natural disasters, and yes even those who survived incarceration. This message is for my sisters and brothers that have survived any of these things. I may have failed to mention something that you survived through, and for that I apologize. However, that doesn't make your struggle and survival story any less important. You are a survivor and now it's time for you to be a thriver.

Stephen Hawking is a huge inspiration to me, not just because he is extremely intelligent, or an accomplished author, but also because he did not let his condition (ALS) stop him from continuing to move forward. He has continued to contribute to the world around him despite his own survival story. His incredible resilience has encouraged me to move past what I have managed to survive myself and become not just a survivor but a thriver.

We have all survived something that is worth talking about, so we all have a story to tell. This world is in desperate need of people like you and now it is time for you to step up to the plate and let others know that there is a path to recovery. Be a voice for the voiceless. Be a leader for the lost. Be the hope for those who can't seem to find it on their own.

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I AM A SURVIVOR NOT A VICTIM

“I AM NOT WHAT HAPPENED TO ME. I AM WHAT I CHOOSE TO BECOME.”

BY SUSAN PERNA

Hi my name is Susan and I am a childhood abuse survivor. I was abused sexually and psychologically by multiple family members. I am also a mental illness survivor. I was diagnosed with a plethora of disorders at a very early age including: PTSD, Tourette's Syndrome, Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), Schizo Typal Disorder, ADHD, and Panic Disorder.

Surviving my abusive past was not easy. For years, I took out all of the anger and rage that I had toward my abusers out on myself and others. I really believed that I was punishing my abusers, but what I did not realize is that the only person I was hurting was myself. Buddha paraphrased it like this: “Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.” Living in my past took a huge toll on me physically and emotionally. I lived in denial for a long time by running from my past. I did not want to deal with the pain so therefore I chose to go down a very dark road of self-destruction that eventually led me to the county jail.

Don't Get Stuck

“The only time you should ever look back is to see how far you've come.” By Team

For years I felt like damaged goods and unworthy of love, and so I lashed out at everyone including myself. Over the years, I robbed from numerous stores, went on drinking binges, and lived life on the edge never thinking of the consequences. I felt like I was spinning my wheels and getting nowhere. I was literally stuck in my past, and did not know how to escape from it. I never thought that I would have to pay the consequences for my riotous living, but I would soon find out that sooner or later your past always catches up with you. I finally got caught shoplifting and driving under the influence,

and spent some needed time in jail.

Hitting Rock Bottom

“When you hit rock bottom the only way to go is up.”

I was bankrupt financially and psychologically. I had hit my rock bottom and there was nowhere to go but up, so I prayed and begged God to help me because I just could not live that way anymore. This prodigal daughter was sick of living a life full of pain and misery and wanted to go back home. Going to jail was a real wake up call for me. While praying on that dirty jail cell floor I found the courage to change. I don't know how I did it except for “there for the grace of God.” Some say it was luck that saved me. Others say it was sheer will power, but I believe it was divine intervention. When I got out of jail instead of going back to my old lifestyle of crime I listened to my intuition and found a good support group.

Facing My Demons

“Life is like an onion:
you peel it off one layer at a time,
and sometimes you weep”
Author - Carl Sandburg

I found a lot of inner strength and stability in my support group. My therapist suggested that I ditch all of the toxic people in my life. So I cut ties with everyone who did not support me, including those so called “friends with benefits” who just used me for sex and money, and in return God blessed me with a new set of true supportive and caring friends who aided to my spiritual growth.



Healing the Many Layers

Group therapy taught me that in order to properly heal myself of my past, I had to face the pain. This scared the hell out of me because I did not know how I was going to face the pain without some sort of vice. Masking pain was the only coping skill I had. My therapist described the healing process as peeling an onion. She said that healing was a process and we are like onions and each of our layers looks like the one before, but since the healing process is like an onion, you pull off one layer, and there is yet another layer under that one. The goal is to get to the innermost core, the deepest layer, but we have to work our way through the outer layer and each time we get through the next layer, we learn more about ourselves and become stronger.

I got a little stronger each time I worked through an unresolved issue and the pain decreased as I worked on peeling back the layers of my heart and exposing all of the bitterness that I kept hidden at a subconscious level. Purging those pent up emotions brought me a wonderful sense of relief. Along with group therapy I started writing which turned out to be very therapeutic. Writing about my painful past allowed me to express my inner most feelings without feeling ridiculed or judged, and in turn just like a ripple effect I was able to help others by passing on the torch of wisdom.

Letting Go

“When you let go, you are truly free.” Author Unknown

After I brought all of my hidden feelings to the surface and expressed them, I was now ready for the next step in the healing process. I knew that I had to forgive my abusers, in order to properly heal. I essentially had to “let go” of the past and all of the bitterness. Now I must say this was not an easy task. I relished in the fact that I had the power to hate my abusers. It made me feel strong and in control. After all, I wanted my abusers to pay for what they did to me, both in this life and the next, but I was fighting a losing battle. Holding in all of that toxic anger was draining me emotionally and physically. I wasted an enormous amount of time and energy on trying to change my past. I spent my entire

life focusing on the past while neglecting my wounded inner child.

To Forgive is Divine

“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.” Lewis B. Smedes

After doing some soul searching, I realized that hating my abusers was not serving my higher good, nor was it helping anyone else. I knew that I could be of no use to myself or anyone else by holding in all of that toxic energy. I had to free myself from the past by forgiving my abusers, so I started writing confrontation letters. I faced some rejection by some of my family members, but I did not let it bother me because I was not forgiving for their benefit but for my peace of mind. Forgiving my abusers freed me from the prison of my past. The road to recovery has been a long and difficult process, but worth all of the pain and suffering I endured because everything in my past has shaped who I am today and for that I am grateful. Today I choose love instead of hate and I choose to go forward instead of staying stuck in the prison of my past.

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February 2018

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MY NAME IS E. PEDRO MORALES, JR.

AND I AM A SURVIVOR

We've all heard stories of successful recovery from bodily injury, crisis, natural disaster, marital issues, and more. But, some things aren't as ENTIRE as we'd like them to be.

Take for instance, the Non-functional drinkers or as the Alcoholics Anonymous ("AA") book puts it - - the "allergic alcoholic." This type of drinker - - even binge drinkers - - may earnestly want to quit but exhibit the propensity of recurring relapse; hence why the "AA" book states, "Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic" (pg. 33, par 2: 4th ed.).

Interestingly, there are other conditions that fit the bill of recovery-for-life. Autism, and its milder cousin Asperger's Syndrome Disorder (ASD) are such conditions.

A whopping number of children exhibit symptoms before age 3. Sadly, the number is more than statistically purported, since - - out of the 75% classified as having mental retardation - - a significant percentage are misdiagnosed, or get diagnosed later in life, if at all.

A fact is that sufferers are dealing with more than the respective malady. They contend with linear judgments and assessments often devoid of gray areas—and not just from some mental health workers who, as fallible humans also have been known to incorrectly diagnose individuals. Then, for lack of a correct diagnosis, and correct treatment, a malady can become more pronounced to the point that society members may grow wary of seemingly antisocial or sociopathic behavior. In addition, if ever incarcerated, they often fall through the cracks of the judicial system or may be arbitrarily determined high risk to society; thereby considered a disproportionate prison sentence—the topic of my published newspaper article: "Warehousing the Mentally Ill" (Manchester, CT Journal Inquirer, May 7, 2014, pg. 20).

As if this weren't bad enough, these maladjusted individuals are then dubbed at the bottom of the pecking order, in prison by fellow inmates merely for their solitary stance, or inability to socialize well.

Sounds like a doom or gloom account of a minutiae of the population? Hardly. Appearing before a parliamentary commission on mental health issues, University of Quebec's Professor and Physician Hubert Wallot, "undertook to illustrate the precarious condition of men's general health. As adults, men make up a percentage of those who present personality DISORDERS related to paranoia and compulsive or antisocial behavior (as evidenced by the large number of them in prison)." – ABSENT FATHERS, LOST SONS Psychoanalyst Guy Corneau.

In Connecticut alone – incidentally, my home state – "there is a mental health crisis," as stated by 2014 Republic candidate for Lt. Gove., Heather Somers (DECISION 2014, 7/27).

Many children, teenagers, and young adults continue being misdiagnosed or diagnosed later in life. This was the case with Author John Elder Robinson. In his book, *Look Me In The Eye*, he recounts his inability to hold eye contact (case-in-point). However, not all folks have this problem, if any of the above, or just marginally. Sadly, all too often those with disability or malady suffer silently; becoming distraught over time, as they contend with the internal and external challenges all by themselves (again, case-in-point).

Take me, for instance: Growing up fatherless and an only son of a mildly challenged mom as hard enough for me in the formative years of life. On top of it, I was declared an abstract thinker by a school teacher. Then prematurely assumed mildly retarded merely for

having consistently poor grades, namely in math.

Interestingly, my inability to wrap my mind around numbers - - which persists to date - -just happens to be among the listed symptoms in an ASD article, titled, Little Professor Syndrome: “Problems with Reading, Math or Writing Skills.”

As a result, my family believed school faculty, who dubbed me mentally retarded. My friends viewed my slowness, and abstractedness, as a natural byproduct of geek status. Scarier were some of the religious zealots who relegated malady to the fringes of demonic possession by showing me proof scripture, such as Matthew 17:15-18.

But the scariest was the outcome that left me with some memory loss. It was the teeth-clenching, tear-eliciting experience of Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) administered at childhood to supposedly, correct my slowness. At this juncture it's noteworthy to mention that ECT in the late 70's - - 80's was just wrong on me as Conversion Therapy (Electroschock) was for children whose only stigma was mere same-sex preference.

According to the Encarta Encyclopedia, “Because of memory loss and the inherently unappealing nature of ECT, it has been among the most controversial treatments in psychiatry.” Although it has fallen into decline - - due to the introduction of major antipsychotic drugs in the late 1950's - - it nonetheless continues being applied to treat depression, and in all likelihood to an existing constituency of autistics misdiagnosed as having a retardation condition.

Tips to the reader are these: Don't settle for one evaluation - - get a second opinion. Contact the numbers (or websites) on the Resources page in the magazine for a broader definition of what qualified as Autism or ASD symptoms, and if applicable don't despair. There are ways in which to manage these non-curable disorders.

TREATMENTS ARE: Behavior Modification, Medications, Facilitated Communication, Vitamins & Mineral Supplements, Auditory Training, and Vision Therapy.

NOTICE: Because individuals respond in different ways, no single treatment works for everyone. In addition, for parents of autistic children, Federal Law in the U.S. requires that states provide early intervention

services for children ages 1-3 with Autism and other disabilities.

It's interesting to note that there are high-functioning autistic children and adults (about 10%) with extraordinary talents, called autistic savants. Take, for instance, famous people for whom there is a lot of speculation that they had ASD: Benjamin Franklin, William Shakespeare, Albert Einstein, and Leonardo da Vinci.

Although it may never be conclusive, it bears mentioning that in absence of constant interaction - - so typical of other people - - their brilliance can be attributable to an unswerving focus in a particular skill. This may well be the key factor behind their great creations and interventions. Therefore, in essence, what may have been an impediment - - or perceived impediment - - can actually turn out to be a blessing after all.

Moreover, it's also interesting to note that some Autistics and Aspergians can live independently or semi-independently as adults. They often succeed in jobs that emphasize certain skills, rather than those that require complex interactions with other people. Take it from me - - one who has suffered silently for most of my life - - customer service just wasn't my cup of tea. However, at least for me, putting words onto paper is my therapeutic; cathartic release. Even though recovery from disorders isn't as ENTIRE as we'd prefer, it can be a collection of strengths and challenges that'll qualify another day.

My name is Pedro, and I am a survivor.

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MY NAME IS “YOU AIN’T GONNA BE SHIT,” AND I AM A SURVIVOR

BY ABDUL ‘DULA-DYM’ FOWLER – AUTHOR, PUBLISHER AND
FOUNDER OF SECOND CHANCE BOOKS

My name is Ain’t Gonna Be Shit, and I am a survivor. I say that my name is Ain’t Gonna Be Shit because growing up I’ve always been told, “You ain’t gonna be shit.” Although a number of people said this to me during my young life, none touched me more, or as deeply as it did hearing these words expressed to me come out of the mouth of none other than my mother.

I was raised by women. I was bounced around between my grandmother and my mother like a ping-pong ball. However, the bulk of my young upbringing was at the home of my Grandmother, who resided in Bad Lands (the low number’s section of Philadelphia). Even though I spent a fair amount of time with my grandparents, aunts and uncles, on my father’s side of the family. My father was non-existent in my life. If I’m not mistaken, I didn’t know who my father was until I was somewhere between the ages of 8 and 11, or at least that’s how I remember it.

Growing up without a father in the environment I was raised in, and looking up to the, what they used to call Og’s and Thugs, I quickly became a product of the streets. And being the only child until I was 12 years old knowing how to fight was essential. Throughout my childhood, I stayed in trouble. Playing hooky, suspensions, shop lifting, fighting, stealing, selling drugs, getting high, taking money, breeding pit bulls, and stealing cars were just some of the things I experienced. When I think about it I was so bad that if there was two of me during that time I wouldn’t have even wanted to hang out with me.

I got kicked out of every school I went to, and if I’m not mistaken I think I did graduate from elementary school. However, I don’t remember ever graduating from any grade past that in my life. Schools were just bumping me up to get rid of me. After being kicked out of five schools, I ended up in Daniel Boone, which was a school for bad boys. However, that didn’t stop me. After a few months of me, they ended up kicking me out and placing me in Glen Mills (a juvenile placement school). After being there for 3 or 4 days, I ran, (went truant, escaped, or whatever have you), only to be caught 6 hours later.

I got lost somewhere out in the boon docks in a white suburban neighborhood, sticking out like a sore thumb. Somebody called the fuzz on me, and it was back to the Mills. When they picked me up they took my sneakers, and had me walking around bare footed like I was Kunta Kinta or somebody. However, they did make me get on the Cross Country and Track Team. Go figure. Due to the fact that I was 17 years old at the time, the adult prison system was something to come in my immediate near future.

I’ve been shot at, stabbed, hit by a car, in high speed car accidents, mobbed, in burning buildings, and all kinds of stuff. I’ve foolishly put my life in imminent danger numerous times, like an idiot, I’ve risked my life in more ways and on more occasions that I care to think about. The only thing I had going for me although I was bad as hell was that (Allah) God blessed me with a head on my shoulders. I was always told that I was smart. Unfortunately, I only cared about using that gift to scheme, get over, and or bust some type of moves. To this day 90% of the boys, fellas, guys and young men that I rolled with growing up are dead, and I can honestly say that I do not have ANY friends whatsoever. Yea, yea, yea a lot of people are cool, and act like they’re thorough and all, but my vision isn’t blurry, I HAVE NO friends.

Why am I a survivor? Because growing up I was always told that I wasn’t going to live to see 25. Maybe that was another one of the reasons why I lived the life that I was living. Because if I wasn’t going to live past or see 25 I might as well have as much fun, and do whatever I wanted, how I wanted, when I wanted, where I wanted, as much as I wanted, and as fast as I could. Maybe the life expectancy for my generation growing up in the street was 25 years old. Which has some validity to it because as I said 90% of my peers didn’t make it to see 25 or 30. I’ve been blessed to just have my 40th birthday, and between the ages of 35 and 40 I not only founded SECOND CHANCE BOOKS (a non-profit organization geared towards helping inmates and offenders do something

positive, constructive, and beneficial with their time and lives). I've also written and published 5 of my own books, as well as 3 other inmates books, and I've done all of this on my own from behind bars.

Although I'm expecting to be released early 2017, I'm using this as my tool to give back and possibly better myself as well as other people. We all have a purpose in life, and that purpose is much bigger than we may even imagine. 10 years ago, I'd never believed that I'd be a published author, or was able to open the doors for other misfortunate individuals to become published authors, and possibly better their lives, the lives of their families, as well as the people of their communities. All of the hardships, turmoil's misfortunes, and strife I've endured throughout my life I've realized that I can use it to be of benefit to not only my life, but to the lives of others as well.

In closing, I leave you with this: in order to give hope, we have to become hope. In order to make a difference, we have to become the difference. In order for things to change, we have to make a change within

ourselves. In order for us to exceed and grow, we have to start counting on each other as oppose to counting each other out. In order to teach, we have to first learn. Since the beginning of time mankind has continued to evolve because of these methods, WHY STOP NOW. If I, me of all people can survive, overcome, excel, succeed, and pay it forward, then trust me when I say, "There's hope for us all". Many times in our lives, we're dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make, and the circumstances that come our way. We feel like we're worthless. But no matter what's happened or what will happen, you'll never lose your value. Dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you're still priceless, are important, and definitely have a purpose in life.

Hopefully, this story, my story was of some assistance to you, and enabled you to look at your own life (what you're doing, what you've been through, where you're trying to go, and what you want out of life). To this day, it still does for me. May Allah (God) guide you and set right your affairs, amen.

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BUILDING A BETTER & SAFER

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**ONE NEIGHBORHOOD
 AT A TIME**

MY NAME IS DENNIS MINTUN AND I'M A SURVIVOR

"5 fixed, 10 indeterminate on count 1; 10 fixed, 5 indeterminate on counts 2 and 3; and 15 years fixed on count 4."

It was worse than I hoped for, but better than I expected. Run together, I would be out in 15 years. Then came the bombshell; "as I feel you are a threat to society, these sentences are to run consecutive."

It took a minute or so for it to sink in. When it finally did, my knees went weak, and my attorney had to hold me up... I'd have to do 40 years before I'd be eligible for parole. And, if they didn't grant me parole, I'd be in prison for 60 years!

My life was over. I would be at least 80 years old before I'd be free again. All my life plans were shot; that wasn't even the end of it. In court, it came out that I was gay. My very conservative family promptly disowned me. They hadn't known because I was married to a transgender who looked female. Worried that she'd be arrested, my wife left town and later divorced me. Then, the business I had owned was sold at auction for pennies on the dollar.

When I got to prison, it continued to get worse. My conviction was for a sex offender. The fact that I hadn't touched anyone didn't matter to the other inmates. To them I was a "mo" (molester). The only reason I didn't get too much hassle was because I weighed over 300 pounds, and looked like a biker. Except for the couple of times a group ganged up on me, I was pretty much left alone. Physically, that is. Mentally was another story.

Anyway, here I was basically doing a life sentence; no family; no spouse; no friends; and shunned by most of the inmates. I seriously considered suicide.

Growing up, I'd been beaten, molested, and verbally abused. However, nothing had prepared me for a lifetime of prison. I honestly did not know how I would survive.

Then things began to happen that would turn my life around. The first was that I won part of my appeal, and the 4th count was dismissed. I went from 40 years fixed to

just 25 (and I'm still fighting). Over the years, as people got to know the real me, I've been able to make some good friends. For the past five years, I've been the captain of a prison softball team. I run a chapel class twice a week that people seem to enjoy. And, besides various stories and articles in magazines like *Spotlight on Recovery*, I've published 3 non-fiction books, (*Kingdom of Eroses*, *The Book of the Magi*, and *Erosian Mythology*), and a couple of fiction books ("A Moral Dilemma" and "Time Changes") on Prisons Foundation.org. I'm constantly writing.

Why? Because, a few years back I learned the secret to surviving - finding a purpose. Before that, all I had to my name was a lengthy prison record and a bad reputation. I finally made a decision: to leave a positive legacy.

Now, I have a number of goals. One is to be a successful author - but not just to entertain. I want everything I write (even fiction) to have a message. Or, at least to make people think. Most importantly, I want to reach out to people who don't think they have anything to live for, and, to help them find a purpose.

I'm not saying everything has been roses. Far from it. Most of my family still won't speak to me. I still get hassled on occasion for my crime-usually by people who don't have all the facts. I've been through some legal battles for civil rights violations. I've been in a couple of serious fights - one where a good friend had his skull cracked open. I've lost a couple of friends to suicide. And, one of only two members of my family who accepted me (my aunt) passed away.

While it gets tempting, at times, to just "give up", I've learned to see the bigger picture, and be a survivor - by helping others survive. I've decided I want to leave this earth knowing that people I've come in contact with are better off than before I met them.

Bottom line: I'm a survivor, because I have a purpose...to help others find theirs.

I AM A SURVIVOR

BY SAHE

Children never ask to be born. In my case, it was the outcome of an action that was committed by two people due to the circumstances of sexual gratification.

Thus I was born, without a care in the world, to a man and a woman that hadn't quite figured it out yet. Poverty, starvation, a dearth of clothes; but more importantly, the love, peace and happiness was so minute, that I'd be hard-pressed to explain it any other way than complete hell!

At night, when there was no heat in our home, my brother and I wrapped tightly together in a blanket, and used our body heat to stay warm, but to no avail. When food was scarce, and trust me, it was worse than a bird scrounging for food in the death of the winter season. We had to rely on sheer instinct, because the stomach rumblings were too much to bear, and that propelled us to devise wicked machinations i.e. stealing to maintain on the life support we were blessed to have. With hardly no clothes, and going to school where children were much more fortunate, I became the laughing stock of the class.

AUTHORS NOTE: Bullying wasn't recognized back then. So I had to get through it the best way I could: fighting, acting out or just plain-ol-crying.

Hi! My name is George and I'm a survivor.....

So many times people in the world can't figure out, or choose not to acknowledge the pitfalls a child experiences that ultimately shape their teenage and adult life.

After watching my parents fall victim to the crack epidemic, I too, fell victim to the same, but in a different light as I became the crack seller. My justification was that I was born this way, and that, I refuse to allow my children to experience the pain of going without the necessities. Therefore, I set out day and night to work. (Yes, selling drugs is a job – all be it a negative one) to provide a better future for my family. The bumps and bruises, which are an understatement are too many to count.

Along this journey, I did plenty of things that I care not to remember, but an amends was just as important as forgetting the past. In 2005, I was sentenced to 30 years in prison! Going through this hell-like adventure was and is mind boggling up until this very point. Since my incarceration, in which I came in a cold savage, I now have the proper amount of diligence, which has enabled me to transform into a man of substance. No longer will I be a liability to my family or a detriment to society. Even though I still have a long way to go until I am released from prison, I just wanted to say, "Hi! My name is George and I'm a survivor...."

MY NAME IS LOLITA DAVIS AND I AM SURVIVOR

"A person regarded as resilient or courageous enough to be able to overcome hardship, misfortune, etc." That is Webster's New World College Dictionary definition of "survivor." I would say both resilience and courage are needed to overcome adversity. Add a healthy dose of curiosity and you have a recipe for a strong willed person who will not only survive, but thrive. Unfortunately, many people living with hardship accept what happened. They do not question whether they actually deserved it.

Even as a child, I innately knew something was

wrong. Trying to stay out of my mom's way because I never knew what she was going to do was frightening and exhausting. Punishment without explanation made me question everything. That just made her more upset. To make the situation worse, only one person in my family of six seemed to care that I was her main scapegoat. My brother often stood up for me but since he was only one year older, his ability to protect me was severely restricted. My father could have made a difference but he just buried himself in work.

People tend to forget that, as a child, you assume

all families operate like yours. You have no way of knowing if your family dynamics are good or bad. It is not until you get older and start talking to others and comparing childhoods that you see the whole picture. Even though I knew something was wrong, I did not know what it was. I always thought there was something wrong with me.

Since I spent my childhood in protection mode or trying to find calm in a sea of chaos, if I was going to survive, I had to retrain myself. The bad behavior had to be replaced with acceptable actions and I relied on others to show me the way. One childhood friend said my mother scared her when she talked. It was when mom was being sarcastic. Since I was used to it, I thought it was acceptable. It took losing a few friends before I learned that most people do not like sarcasm. One boyfriend told me I did not make any sound when I laughed; I would just open my mouth and silently laugh. So I retrained myself how to laugh. Through the years, I listened, learned and re-educated myself into being more “normal.”

Every person I met was a teacher. I even learned from TV and movies. I started with *Leave It To Beaver* then graduated to *Seventh Heaven*. I watched *Mommy Dearest* over and over until it no longer made me cry. Remember the scene where Joan Crawford yells “no wire hangers?” That scene especially agitated me because Mom had the same crazy eyes and wore cold cream like Crawford. I wrote to the author, Christina Crawford, and jokingly said, “Maybe they should do a study to see if cold cream makes people nuts.” She did not respond.

Another movie I watched repeatedly was *Sybil*, the movie about the woman with 16 personalities. This time I used a more scientific approach. Any time a scene upset me, I made a note of the time on the video. I watched the movie all the way through then went back and re-watched those scenes. When my emotions started to bubble up, I used different techniques to release them. “*The Work of Byron Katie*”, *Emotional Freedom Technique 2007* by (Gary Craig), and tools I learned in hypnotherapy class all helped me deal with my feelings. I would watch the scene, perform a technique, then watch the scene again. I would do this until I no longer had an emotional charge and then move on to the next scene.

Sometimes TV or movies were a trigger; other times it happened in real life. I was on a first-time date and we ran into a couple he knew. As they talked, he reached to put his arm around my shoulders. I immediately

ducked. The look on their faces was priceless. The funny part is, I was as shocked as they were. It was an involuntary movement my body learned from past beatings. This was our first and, unfortunately, our last date.

Another incident was revealed when I visited one of my mother’s friends. As we reminisced about the past she said something I did not understand. “Your mom and I would pile you kids (we had five children, she had four) in the car and go to the city for the day. We would visit the zoo or the amusement park. Those were great outings. But you never came with us. I never knew where you were.” I did not recall being left behind, but as I said, I do not remember every punishment. Mom probably grounded me for some transgression she made up in her morphine-addled head. (She had MS and took a lot of drugs.) It was as if she had a mental Rolodex and every time she picked a card, it held my name. She would then go into her toolbox of torture and choose mental, physical or emotional abuse, or all three - and mete it out to an undeserving person, usually me.

I am glad I do not remember all the bad because that would leave little room for the good. My mind hides some of the abuse because if I remembered it all, it might be too much and interfere with my healing process. Repressed memories continue to pop up. During a 5-week course in meditation, one exercise was to color in a coloring book. While everyone else was sprawled on the carpet coloring like happy 5-year-olds, I had a panic attack and was unable to do it. The next day I bought a coloring book and made myself get on the floor and color. I cried the whole time. To this day, I do not know what caused this reaction. I can only surmise that my subconscious remembered but hid from me that Mom got rid of all my coloring books and paints. In fact, everything I had as a child disappeared while I was still young - dolls, Girl Scout badges, the complete set of *Nancy Drew* and other books I bought with my own money. It was as if Mom tried to erase me by disposing of my things.

I have since bought a couple of Barbie dolls to satisfy my inner child. I am in constant contact with my younger self. When there is something she needs, I do my best to get it for her. Whether it is to feel safe, loved or just to act like a kid, I try to accommodate her. She spent her youth in a scary and crazy place. The better she feels, the happier my adult self feels. We both survived the past and are thriving in the present.

MY NAME IS JASON LEE BECK AND I'M A SURVIVOR

My mother was a survivor. She raised me by herself after my father chose to leave us when I was five. Through her example, I draw strength now, later in life. Now, when I need strength, I only need to remember her sacrifices. I recall how, even though she was sick with high blood pressure, diabetes, and COPD, she would never fail to keep clothes on me, and food in my stomach. After my father chose a life of motorcycles and gangs over his family, it left my mother devastated. She picked herself up though and she never let me down. If I could have only opened my eyes to my mother's sacrifices earlier in life, I might not be here in prison writing this – but then again I might not have learned the valuable lessons I have learned along the way. Those are priceless, just like my mother. If my mother can smile like she wasn't crying the night before and can build a solid foundation and life for me while having bricks thrown at her, then I can survive anything, even prison and life after it.

When I came to prison, I chose to not only drag myself through the mud, but also those who trusted and loved me. I chose to let them down yet again. The image I was portraying prior to my incarceration wasn't truly who I was deep down. It wasn't real. It was a set of armor, an armor of self-deception and lies carefully constructed to hide my vulnerable heart. I started to change after some much needed therapy and then I began feeling the weight of my choices, the weight of the bricks cast at me. Every brick had a different word inscribed upon it: addict, adulterer, worthless, thief, betrayer. I earned every brick and I felt them all. Who's to blame though? No one except me. I was to blame. I couldn't shift the blame away, no, not anymore. I made my choices. I chose the muddy road.

When I am released from prison in 2018 (hopefully) I will leave with little more than the ground under my own two feet. I'll be paroling to a half-way house, where I will seek work and begin to stabilize myself in society after six years in prison. I'll form a solid support system of positive people and support groups. I'll find a

therapist. I'll save for an apartment. I will be in a big city alone but not hopeless. I understand that the work I put in during this time will be crucial to fighting the odds that are so heavily stacked against me. I know that if I slip, I will not only go back to prison, but I will show those who think I am hopeless that their claims are justified. Failing my re-entry into society would also mean failing to achieve my life's goal: redemption. Choosing the wrong instead of the right would be like throwing in the towel, and something I have done a lot in my life. One hit, or even one piece of pornography, or anything I am not supposed to do or have, would stop me. I can't have that.

Those who are survivors know that you don't just say the words, "I have survived" you live your survival each day, and you impress that survival upon your heart with every decision you make. I don't think you're ever truly done surviving. If you have survived addiction, abuse, or even the death of loved ones, you endure each day. You must live your survival. It is never finished. You'll still have your hard days, but you must persevere.

History is full of survivors -- those who have been tested and who have lived. They are remembered. You see their names on memorials and in the hearts of those they have loved. I may not have a whole lot in terms of family, possessions, and things others may have an abundance of, but I intend to leave behind something good. Those who come after me will say, "He did make some bad choices, he did do the words inscribed on every brick thrown at him, but he didn't let them tear him down. This man turned his life around, righted his wrongs, and didn't let those choices he once made define him."

This is all I would want from life. If my life is to be taken tomorrow, I would die with a smile on my face because I know I have already started achieving that goal. Redemption has become a way of life and a way for me to say that I am a survivor.

MY NAME IS GORDON DYOMI AND I AM A SURVIVOR

My name is Gordon and I Am a Survivor in so many ways.

I spent some years locked away
and with every bitter fruit I began to consume,
I became a predator,
wondering who I may devour,
the survivor of the fittest, feeling it was the way out
of these inevitable changes.

I have fought with the best of them
and still I survive.
I Am a Survivor.

The days when my back was against the wall,
Still, I survived.

Through the difficult times of these struggles
and these circumstances that have entangled me,
Still, I Am a Survivor.

My name is Gordon and I Am a Survivor

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CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

JASON LEE BECK Jason Lee Beck has been a contributing writer for several years. He was featured in “The Day I Grew Up,” “Nobody, Somebody,” “You Are Not Alone Part 2,” “ Bearing the Cross,” and “Rock Bottom Part 2.



ANTHONY C. BILLINGS was raised in a small town in Northern California called Susanville, where he attended Lassen College to pursue a degree in business. Currently enrolled in courses, he splits his time between his writing, his education, and his enjoyment of life in general. He has been writing since he was a young teenager and he has plans to keep writing for many years to come. If you would like to contact this writer you can reach him by writing to the below address:

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LOLITA DAVIS “Lolita Davis”, pen name for the author of this article has been a contributing writer for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine for two years. Her writing style is distinct; creating a clear image of the experience she portrays.

GORDON DYOMI This is Gordon’s first article with Spotlight on Recovery Magazine. His powerful prose, is written precisely with every word being important. His work is thought provoking.

ARCANE ELEMENT is an aspiring writer who is currently working on completing an urban fiction novel and publishing his first poetry chapbook collection. His passion for writing began when he started composing and performing songs at the age of 11. He is a business minded visionary who hopes to leave his mark upon the business world.

Presently serving a 50 year sentence in the Arkansas Department of Corrections, he is working toward receiving a reduction of sentence so that he may have a second chance at life. His contact information can be found on ADC.gov if you wish to communicate with him concerning any topic.

ABDUL FOWLER About the author: Abdul Fowler, a.k.a. Dula-Dym, was born and raised in Bad Land, which is the low numbers section of North Philadelphia. He spent most his adult life behind bars, which he has learned a life lesson from. During his unfortunate stay in the Pennsylvania D.O.C. he has found a way to give back to the people as well as himself. Not only has he founded Second Chance Books , but he published five of his own books and three other inmate’s books. He feels just because someone is down doesn’t mean they are out. Abdul says “there’s a way to do something positive, get our voices heard, and make people as well as ourselves proud of us for a change. Use this hardship to be of some benefit for you. It’s the only way. We mustn’t waste this time, but use it to our benefit and unite to help support, motivate, encourage and inspire.”

GEORGE “SAHE” HOPKINS He is currently serving a prison sentence and takes full responsibility for his erroneous decisions in the past. However, since being incarcerated he has rehabilitated himself and now looks

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

forward to becoming a positive asset to the community at large and no longer a liability. He is also a published author of 3 books that can be found on Amazon.com.

Book Titles: "On Time with Time" by George Hopkins;
"Like Petals to a Rose" Volume 1 and 2 by Sahe (Pen name)



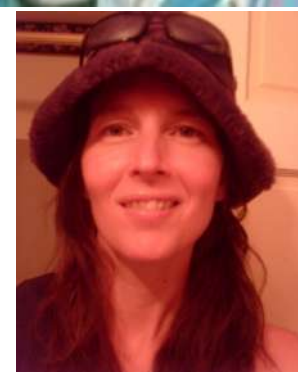
SEDRIC R. JOHNSON has been a contributing writer for Spotlight on Recovery since 2014. He has been featured in "Children are the Future," "Dear Mr. President," "Dads on Call," "Gun Violence," "Nobody, Somebody," "Bonus Round," and "Bearing the Cross."

DENNIS MINTUN has been a regular contributor to Spotlight on Recovery Magazine since 2013, under the pen name of "Cougar Newquist." Because he uses the mistakes of his own past to help others overcome theirs – everyone knows who "Cougar" is. Dennis runs a thriving chapel group that focuses on personal empowerment. He has written articles, stories, and poems for various magazines, and has fiction and non-fiction books at www.PrisonsFoundation.org

E. PEDRO MORALES, JR Pedro is a very talented writer who has contributed to Spotlight on Recovery for several years. His memoir, *Misunderstood and Misdiagnosed (Living with a Disorder)* will be available in the near future.



SUSAN PERNA has been a contributing writer for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine since 2014. She has been featured in "The Bonus Round," "While You Were Sleeping," "Video Game Addiction," "Hope" and "Bearing the Cross."



VICTORIA RADER A message from the author: Writing has not always been a passion of mine. God has given me many talents. As a child, I discovered art, jewelry making, quilting, photography, scrapbooking and card making. I am an honorary member of the Preble Fine Art Center in Eaton, Ohio. In the year 2000, I had a stroke. While recovering from that I would wake up in the middle of the night and have to write. Words, words and more words came. Children stories keep coming, poems came and I had to write. There is a name for this and it's called hypertrophy. This means an abnormal increase in the size of an organ or tissue, concerning the brain. None of my children's books have found a home yet, but I keep trying. My biggest writing accomplishment has been some stories published in Robin's magazine, "Spotlight on Recovery." I love writing for Robin, she tells me what needs to be changed to benefit my work as a writer.

NICK SERIGANIS is a 36 year old writer serving a life term in the Florida prison system. He spends his time studying religion, reading books, writing poems and articles. If you would like to reach Mr. Seriganis, you may by writing to:

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NOBODY CARES IT'S ALL MY FAULT I CAN'T EVER

NO ONE WILL UNDERSTAND

IT TO HAPPEN I AM FINE NOBODY BELIEVES ME

I'M

I DESERVED IT REALLY IT WASN'T THAT BAD



Hope

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COMING SOON
THE WRITER'S CHOICE PART 3

