



# Spotlight On Recovery

Giving a Voice to the Therapeutic Community



## WRITER'S CHOICE, PART 4



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# BROKEN MIRROR

## BY DAVID RILEY

Why do I hurt everyone I love?  
Why do I break everything I trust?  
Why is everything so much clearer in a broken mirror?

Why do you care when no one else does?  
Why do you love, when no one else loves?  
Am I still worth it, if I'm not perfect?

Love ends so randomly, maybe I abandon them before they abandon me.  
But you're still here, after all the years, after all the blood, after all the tears.  
And you're still here. So what do I fear?

And why is everything so much clearer in a broken mirror?





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# LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

## DECEMBER 2020

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to end the 2020 year with my fourth installment of The Writer's Choice. The Writer's Choice is the opportunity for the employees to take over the topic center.

It's a fact that 2020 was a miserable and unstable year for most of us. I believe that the word RECOVERY has meant more to people this year than any other in recent history. Yes, we had wars before, but none with an enemy like Co-vid 19 for at least 100 years. Co-vid 19 devoured cities, livelihoods, and human spirits.

Then, we say the names – George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and remember Trayvon Martin, Sean Bell, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner and Emmet Till. We say, “No, not again!” We grieve. We cry. We march. We vote.

In this issue, Spotlight on Recovery Magazine opens their pages for you to say what needs to be said. We have open pages for you to send a hug and share hope. We have open pages for you to pick up the pieces. We have open pages for you to give back.

I want to thank our contributing writers, poets, teachers, and mentors who grace these pages year in and year out.

Sincerely,  
*Robin Graham*  
Robin Graham  
Founder/Publisher





# LIVING WITH CHALLENGES

BY JAY GLENEWINKEL

Sometimes I have to take a moment to remind myself that within each click of every second of everyday, eternity exists. Time does not stand still and life goes on. I try to remember that life is a gift that must be nourished with meaning, just as water and food sustains life.

Anytime that I feel myself getting upset about something, I take a deep breath and imagine what life is all about; life and time, one and the same. It has no wrath nor does it offer a hand of kindness. It simply exists, full of power yet indifferent. When I think about the true meaning of time and life, I realize the insignificance of my own one being and all in humanity is so poignant.

This life that each of us has been given is not something that we are entitled to, it is not a right. If anything, it is a paradox full of hopes and challenges. Challenges often bring crises but with those crises is the opportunity to grow. In addition, with that growth comes possibility. Nothing in life is beyond possibility.

If you can imagine it, then it lives. Creation of the mind is not restrained by any physical laws. Plans, ideas, and dreams in life give a purpose, a reason to hang on. And with each of those plans and dreams exists possibility and those possibilities bring challenges.

However, life is much more than here and now. It is the past, what other beings have known and felt about me. All that I have done is my afterlife and that is something which cannot be undone. It is simply among the challenges that have helped me to grow into the better person that I strive to be.

So when I find myself upset or isolated and not sure what to do, I remember a few simple concepts: We can only help shape our destinies, we cannot control them, and we must accept the fact that we can only do the best that we can. There are many others out there who have endured much worse than I have, and despite the odds have learned to thrive – and that gives meaning to life.





# SURVIVING 2020

BY JULIE SULLIVAN

So far, this entire year has been filled with nothing but ongoing stressful events of all kinds. Some of these happenings have helped to take away from the year 2020 for many including me. However, I realized that I couldn't let all of the turbulent things affect me personally. Can one separate themselves from the onslaught of discord and unrest that is going on in the world? The answer isn't a complicated one. But one that requires a good look inside of yourself to get at personally. You and you alone, are in charge of you, no one else. You have the power to let things get to you or not. You also have the choice to let them get you down and keep you down. Sometimes, it can't be avoided to feel at odds with oneself, based on what is going on in the shifting world that is always shifting. Nonetheless, you can get your grip back on your feelings and prevent the negatives from entirely taking your sense of positivity. How does one achieve this? Read on and learn how I conquered the negatives and was determined to live peacefully this year. Surviving 2020 is possible!

all across America in response to three police-involved killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. Some of the demonstrations were peaceful, while others turn violent. All across the globe, people are also fighting for racial justice. These are just some of the world-shifting events taking place. It's enough topsy-turvy to make anyone feel upset, confused, and at odds with themselves.

How does one fight back against the overwhelming sense of uneasiness that is associated with living in 2020? As was previously stated here, and will be again, the answer isn't a complicated one. However, since we're all different, a solution that works for one person may not work for another. Nonetheless, the survival of anything is a matter of individual determination, and determination must begin with us.

To rise above all the fear and anxiety of 2020, I had to take a stand. At the same time, I had to withstand the fallout of all the changes that were occurring.

I will discuss how to get back to living in 2020. Let's quickly look at some of the significant world events that came into play in 2020 and prove to be an unsettling source for those who come into contact daily. The biggest of the events, without a doubt, is no other than the COVID-19 Virus appearance. The COVID-19 Virus started the pandemic and the national lockdown that we've all been made to experience to stay safe and healthy. The World Health Organization announced on January 9<sup>th</sup> that a deadly Coronavirus did emerge in Wuhan, China. In only a few months, the virus managed to spread all across the globe causing hundreds of thousands to die. Due to the pandemic, people are told to wear masks and maintain social distancing, the two things which only add to stress levels in a big way is people are being isolated from others and told to stay home. Businesses were shut down and living life as we know it is changed for the present.

## Resilience

Resilience isn't something you are born with, it's something that you learn, and the only way to know it is through life experience. Being firm and immovable is a mindset. You decide to do something when faced with opposition, no matter how big or small. You tell yourself you're going to do it, and you do it. Sure, the events of 2020 are disturbing, but there's good and bad in everything. It's a part of life. Life isn't all about good things happening to us. We have to take the bad with the good. The best way to take the bad is to accept the bad, and after receiving it become strong again. Rising isn't an easy process. You can make it happen for you, and the best way to make it happen is by thinking and being positive. The negatives will only hold you down and keep you down. I, myself, decided to say a heartfelt prayer, have faith, and look forward to a much brighter tomorrow. I called on the strength that I needed. You can give yourself the same power too. You can become

The second is the BLM protests that occurred







flexible in your way. It's just a matter of thinking, being, and applying both the thought and the being to become it.

### **Bouncing Back**

Surviving 2020 begins with making up your mind to be tough and able to bounce back. You can feel down for a little bit, but be determined not to stay down for long. A part of getting past the stress is trying to control the pressure and not let it beat you. It doesn't matter what is causing the stress or anxiety, don't let it control you. I take charge of my stress or anxiety right away. A way of achieving this is to do it from the onset before its effects can take you over. Life stressors can be put in their place, and you are the one to make it happen. I tell myself that I have to get past the issue and not vice versa. Never let the problem get past you. The power of resilience is what keeps me bouncing back from anything too disturbing.

### **State of Mind**

The thing that affected me most about 2020 was all the constant turbulence. I just seemed to be sinking into a realm of depression and sadness. I felt like the world was closing in on me. I almost didn't want to participate in everyday life because of all the bad news I was hearing. I would stay in bed and sleep for hours at a time. I kept doing this for weeks until I finally told myself enough and decided to change my outlook from darkness to light. I got in touch with the sturdier side of myself and decided to get into a better state of mind. The state of mind I adapted for me was one of being a survivor. I became strong to fight off the anxiety and fear that I had been feeling. No longer was I going to run away. I was going to stand up and be part of the world again. Sure, the year 2020 seemed dismal to me, but my life was blessed because I was still alive. Life is a

gift from God, not a punishment, and I accepted that for what it meant. A life without any purpose or living is just existing. I needed to live life for me, as well as for those I love most. I couldn't disconnect anymore. There still was happiness. I needed to reach out and find it in myself.

### **Embracing the Change**

I also accepted that no matter which world you live in, life isn't always easy, and changes still happen. You need to embrace the changes and try to go with the flow. Moving on is the same as moving forward. You can't let events in the world negatively influence your world. Remaining positive will keep you lively and promote lots of faith. I realize I temporarily lost my faith, and as a result of that, I became depressed. However, I freed myself up when I found the strength and belief in what I could do once again. I'm now back to being me, and that's the best me I can be to myself and others. Acceptance of yourself as a person is the key to dealing with and taking on the world. We're all born to make a difference somehow, and that's something we should never forget.

### **Finding Your Positive in a Negative World**

Every one of us is a person of value in this world. No matter how bad the world around us may seem to be. You have the choice of being positive or negative about it. I chose to be positive and stay positive. When you're faced with opposition or feeling at odds with the world around you, you can do the same. You know who you are and you know your gifts, use them to do positive things to beat off the negative events. Make lemonade out of lemons. Write a positive article. Start a group discussion. Donate time or money to an organization that you believe in. Change the odds.





# HEALTHY BEDTIME ROUTINES

BY L. FORDE, MA., RP.

These are difficult times we are living in, 2020 is unprecedented, a year like no other. Many emotions and stressors can arise with the uncertainty of 2020, which as a result can greatly impact an individual's sleep. Have you found this year that you have difficulties with falling asleep?

Have you found that you try to fall asleep but lie in bed for hours without actually falling asleep? Maybe you have too many distractions, or distracting thoughts that keep you up at night? If you answered yes, to any of these questions, you are not alone.

Approximately 68% of Americans struggle to sleep at least once a week and 41% of people use over-the-counter sleep aid several times a week. There are many different factors, which impact an individual's sleep – including a person's physical health or emotional challenges.

Do you want to get a better night sleep? By making changes to your existing bedtime routine or by creating a bedtime routine this can help to improve your sleep. Here are 3 simple tips to get you started.

## **Breathe. It all begins with breath.**

Focusing on your breath and regulating your breathing can help to reduce tension within your body and help to improve your sleep. A simple way to regulate your breath is to try a technique called belly breathing.

- Belly breathing starts with placing a hand on your stomach and another hand on your chest.
- Slowly inhale air through your nose - your stomach will expand
- Slowly exhale the air through your mouth - your stomach will contract
- You would continually repeat this technique for 1 – 5 minutes or longer if needed

The benefit with belly breathing is with the

hand placed on your stomach and your chest; it will help to guide you to ensure you are slowly filling your lungs and stomach with air and slowly extracting the air.

## **Stretch. Stretch it out!**

Stretching helps relax our body. It is important for our body to be relaxed to get a good night sleep. However, when we are stressed and overwhelmed, our muscles will become tense and tight. Individuals may experience tension in their shoulder and neck or other parts of their body. Before you go to bed try to stretch for 3 – 5 minutes, your body will thank you!

## **Read**

Consider reading a book before bed. Did you know that studies have shown that spending a few minutes reading before bed can significantly reduce an individual's stress? Grab your favorite book or ask a friend or family member for a book recommendation. Consider visiting your local library, or stay at home and consider downloading an e-book from your local library, it's wonderful how all the resources at the library are free.

## **Gratitude**

The practice of gratitude can help improve your sleep. Gratitude is about appreciation; this could be appreciation for a person, place, thing etc. Gratitude is about recognizing and appreciating what you have. You could have gratitude by taking 5 minutes to savor and enjoy your morning cup of coffee instead of rushing to work.

Perhaps you have a full and demanding day, but by taking the 5 minutes to enjoy your morning cup of coffee you are grateful for this. To incorporate gratitude in your bedtime routine, try keeping a daily or weekly gratitude journal, or you can simply reflect while you are in bed upon a thought, person, place you have gratitude for.







## Consistency

Going to bed at a consistent time helps the circadian rhythm in your body to regulate and help to promote sleep. When we consistently go to bed at the same time, this helps our body to tune in that it should be shifting from wake stage to sleep stage.

When creating a bedtime routine, try to pick a time that you think would work well for you. On average an adult should get anywhere between 6 – 8 hours of sleep a night. Try to go to bed at this specific time out each night and see if this time works well for you.

If this time does work for you – amazing. However, if you find that the bedtime you had selected does not work (e.g. you are still waking up tired). Then consider tweaking the time by going to bed earlier by 10 - 30 minutes and again try this new bedtime for a week and see if it works for you.

Sleep is vital to our overall health and is essential to aid in our overall well-being. I hope these tips will help you to get a better night sleep, you deserve it and your body deserves it.





# THE VALUE OF ATTITUDE

## BY RICKIE RANDLE

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of my attitude on life. What I've come to learn is that attitude is often more important than facts, more important than the past education, money, circumstance and even failures and successes. I've discovered that my attitude is more important than what people think of me, or do to me or for me.

I understand that attitude is more important than appearance, physical skill, or mental capacity. Attitude can make or break a business, church, or home. Perhaps the most valuable thing I've learned

about attitude is that I have a choice everyday regarding the attitude I will embrace for that day.

I know that I cannot change the past, nor can I control the future. And I cannot control how someone else will act, nor can I control someone else's attitude. Nevertheless, I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to what happens.

The greatest part is, it is totally up to me, for I am in total charge of my attitude.



This issue of Spotlight on Recovery has been designed by:





# GOOD NEWS

## BY DENNIS MINTUM

It seems our society has become more and more “immune” to bad news in recent years. A prime example is, when it comes to mass shootings. There was a time, not long ago, when every major TV network would immediately pre-empt whatever was on, and spend hours... or even days, covering the tragedy. Now, most networks just issue a brief bulletin, then tell viewers to tune into their regularly scheduled news for more details.

But, maybe it isn't really the case that we are “immune” to the bad news. Maybe it's just that there is so much of it that we become overloaded with a feeling of helplessness. After all, what can WE do about it?

Our culture has also become one where the bad news has more impact than the good news. One very good and worthwhile charity has a television advertisement that this author absolutely hates. In the commercial, they say, “one in every five children diagnosed with cancer will not survive.” The reason it infuriates me so is that I am old enough to remember a time when a diagnosis of cancer was almost always a death sentence. What about saying, “four out of five children diagnosed with cancer will live... and we need your help to make that five out of five?”

What's needed is a major societal shift - from negative to positive. The first way to do that is to look for the good in even the worst disaster. When my son died of a heart defect at two years old, I was obviously devastated. But, what kept me going was the memories of the two years of love and joy I had with him. And, other good things came out of that tragedy: doctors were able to improve on infant heart surgery and my son's donated organs allowed two other children to live - and gave sight to a little girl who had been born blind.

Yes, there are a lot of things we could do to limit disasters such as mass shootings. All it takes is a little common sense, and people banding together to get

our politicians to do what is needed. New Zealand had ONE mass shooting... and immediately moved to ban assault weapons.

There are many other examples: For instance, instead of spending millions of dollars to “warehouse” people in prisons, what about spending some of that money to find ways to help those people become productive members of society?

We can use our experiences... even disasters and tragedies... to make things better. Why is it that, out of millions of airline flights, there are very few plane crashes? It's because, whenever there is a crash, thousands of hours are spent going over every detail, with the idea to prevent the same thing from happening again. Why don't we (and our government) do that with other things? Many “criminals” could be helped through counseling, therapy, etc. to prevent the “disaster” that landed them in prison from happening again, for example.

The other thing that we need for a societal shift is to bring our focus around to good news. One of my favorite authors and motivational speakers is a man by the name of Zig Ziglar. He often asked, “why does the weatherman say there's a 30% chance of rain? Why can't he say there's a 70% chance of sunshine?” That may be an over simplification, but the point stands. We should look for the good. As one song says, “we sure could use a little good news today!”





# MIXED THOUGHTS

## BY MYKELL EADS

In today's society with all the issues stemming from racism who is more versed in the topic than the mixed kid, the one who grew up not able to identify as anything besides 'other'. In reality, he or she is just as human as the next person. Growing up I was asked what do I identify as when it comes to my race. Being biracial was probably one of the hardest things I had to deal with as a child; growing up with a Caucasian mother and no father, not understanding why I'm not the same as her or my siblings.

They say it's hard being an African American in this country, but no one really understands how hard it is being the mixed kid in America. Not being accepted by other African Americans nor by Caucasians. When the mixed kid is seen by a Caucasian cop, or person in general they're not given any special privileges. They're treated like any other African American. What happens when other African Americans see us? As soon as they find out we're mixed they make fun and call us cracker boy, watered down, soft, or worse than that mulatto. It is especially hard when your parent is a Caucasian woman that knows nothing about African American culture, to even raise a "colored" kid. The mixed kid grows up culturally confused at times not knowing when or where he or she fits in. One minute you have to "act black" or "act white" just to appease those who allegedly love you. But, what is love when it comes with conditions?

I grew up so culturally confused trying to fit in with one while being rejected by both. It became so nerve wracking, not only did I come to dislike either race, but I began hating myself.

The purpose of this article is not to talk about me, but to talk about the social injustice that society faces today from the perspective of the mixed kid, the one looking at the world and its current state from two perspectives or "other eyes." Today there is a movement called Black Lives Matter. The things I say may offend

some. Some may even think I am anti B.L.M. but that is not the case. In the beautiful words of my brother the famous Malcolm X, "I am not a racist. I am against every form of discrimination. I believe in human beings, and all human beings should be respected as such, regardless of their color."

The state this country and the world is in right now is most disgusting and even more, unacceptable. African Americans in this country and other minorities are racially profiled and treated unfairly. Police brutality is wrong. It is not only a Black problem but a problem in general. However, there is an even bigger problem when it comes to Black Lives Matter. Do they? Or do they only matter when a life is lost to the hands of a white person? Why is it that millions of people aren't marching, protesting, and standing up when hundreds of black lives are lost every day by the hands of other African Americans or the thousands of black lives that are being destroyed by the distribution of drugs by the very people who claim black lives matter?

Why is it people are so quick to claim they are products of their environments and victims to society? When in reality we're products of poor decision making and victims of our own selfish desires. For what is it for a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul? We go around everyday selling our own people out for 30 pieces of silver just for the title of I'm that n---a. We are our own personal Judas.

From my own experience with society as a mixed kid, I have come to realize that not all, but most Caucasians in America will always feel the white way is the right way. No matter how much minorities embrace their culture or accept them they will always try to enslave us. White people tend to use blacks like drugs, discretely and on the weekends behind closed doors, for their own entertainment purposes. In a country built on diversity it is beyond repulsive for anyone to say they are better than someone because of their race, sex,







culture, or creed.

America the land of the free yet everywhere you go there is systemic racism, social injustice, and every form of hate one can imagine. Cultural freedom doesn't seem to exist. And where it does exist it comes with conditions set by those who solely believe they are more civilized and better people based on skin color which is uncivilized and even more ignorant. The time to recognize that ALL LIVES MATTER, is now because BLACK LIVES MATTER for only one reason, because we are all humans part of a greater whole and that whole is humanity.

This message is not meant to offend nor is it meant to divide. It is meant to only inspire and open one's eyes to the reality that all life is one life. Until we all learn to love, we will always be slaves. It is due to our own selfishness and inhumane ways that the

world is in the state it is in now. It is time we all accept responsibility for our actions and come to know true love. With that said, I leave you with this,

“ O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other, not that ye may despise each other. Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted with all things.” Quran ch49:v13

If I have said anything wrong, I pray for forgiveness and if I have said anything of benefit it is from God and all praise is due to Him. May He who owns my soul guide us all to His Light and Love that is truly unconditional. as-salaamu'aylaykum (Peace be upon you)





# BLACK MAN..., WHY?

BY RICKIE RANDLE

Black man why  
is it that in the very beginning  
we were dependable  
family men instilled with a  
strong sense of responsibility  
but through time, we've become  
negligent with no sense  
of morality?

And why do we  
fail to see, that a Black  
woman is what women  
of other races strive to be?

And why should  
any Black Woman walk  
around with her  
head down as if she has  
nothing at all,  
especially when God  
blessed them  
with the knowledge,  
wisdom and understanding  
to conquer all things  
when duty calls?

Where is  
the logic of calling  
our women  
Black Queens, if we  
are going to  
constantly disrespect  
them by all means?

And why is it  
the Black Woman we  
choose to use and  
play for fools, and why  
does it have to  
take a separation for us  
to understand

that they're too precious  
to lose?

Why do we  
forsake our women and then  
complain when they  
go seeking security and comfort  
from men of the opposite race,  
and why won't Black men handle their  
business like real men  
so that there would be one  
less problem we had  
to face?

Why is it  
that nine times out of  
ten, when a sister  
meets a new brother  
she's reminded  
of bad experiences with  
past men?

And why can't we  
understand that it's hard for  
a Black Woman not to  
let her past affect her future,  
especially not knowing if a  
man has good or bad intentions.  
And why can't we try  
to relate to that by putting  
ourselves in their  
position?

Why do we  
go out in the street bragging  
to our friends about  
all the women, cars and  
material things  
we've had, but fail  
to mention that  
our kids are at home





hungry because  
of a dead beat dad?

And last, but not least,  
why is it that we  
feel that it's important  
to look good in the  
eyes of a white man's

society, but don't  
even care that in the  
eyes of our women  
we are nothing more  
than manipulations  
of reality?





# HINDSIGHT IS 20

## BY GEORGE HOPKINS

If I knew then, what I know now... Would my decision be any different? Or would I try to manipulate that system (of knowing) un-righteously? Anyone can say, "I would/or wouldn't do this or that!" But seriously, who would actually do the right thing oppose to manipulating that system of knowing?

Hindsight is tricky...

Truthfully, I would like to believe that I would right all the wrongs I committed so that they never happened, but the "Butterfly Effect" (according to the movie), teaches us that if one could change, fix (or do differently), the things of the past, another situation would arise that we would have no knowledge of. Thus, we would be right back to square one – life and the experience it produces.

However, for those who are curious to know my decision, of course I would go back and rectify every ominous action I was ever involved in because by nature I am a good man. And hindsight allows us to see with 20/20 vision (or perfectly), the bad choices we made. I've looked back plenty of times, pondering the decision I've made, not quite sure why my intelligence (or morality), didn't kick in. All I can say now is; when you know better, you have to do better.

To me, the object of life is to live it in such a manner that it impacts our nation (and legacy), in a righteous way. When I began to reflect on my past, it is easy to see that I had a roadmap to what and what-not-to do, if only I listened to the elders before me, because their hindsight was gift wrapped to me through actions and words. However, we all know when a person is young (thinking they know it all), our impetuosity cripples our ability to comprehend. In retrospect, knowing now what I wish I knew then, school would have been a top priority because only through education could I change my circumstances (or at least have an opportunity to), I would have known that just because something is boring doesn't mean that it can't be beneficial.

Knowing what I know now, and seeing it for what it really is, I would not have allowed my upbringing to push me towards the streets. Because truthfully, that very thing is what I despised most, but in the same breath, all I knew at that time I could have went to school; the place I thought was boring. I could have earned a degree in an area that would have turned my negative experience into a positive by becoming an advocate for families and at-risk children, to assist in their struggle. Who better to relate to their pain than someone who went through it? I could become someone who can offer solutions, not only from book education, but more importantly, personal experience.

As I've explained, it was these things that lead me to two of the most horrible experiences I can think of as a black man; Prison and a Deadbeat Father! This all stemmed from my dearth of education and being drawn to the streets, due to my parent's lifestyle.

Let me explain: If I would have known back then, that education is the key to success, history would have been one of my favorite subjects. I would be inspired to study Black History, and the transatlantic slave trade. Why is that important? Well, not knowing your history forces a person to unknowingly repeat exactly what those before them went through. Case and point, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment sends a person who commits a crime into active slavery. The very thing people fought against in the not-too-distant past. However, my "distaste" for school impeded me from ever gaining that particular piece of knowledge.

The actions I performed landed me into a modern day slavery – which pulled me out of my children's life, and forced me to painfully watch them grow up from behind a wall. My absence in their life may be the main reason why the cycle isn't broken, but also the gas to history repeating itself and that is an unforgivable pain and disappointment I have to live with for the rest of my life.





# SELF-DESTRUCTION

## -MY WINNER'S CHOICE -

### BY DAMONT EWELLS

Brain washed by my oppressors, but  
justified by my malfunction,  
in a systematic genocide, on a  
course for self-destruction.

Dysfunction in my beliefs set to go against my own,  
I'm not my "self" right now so I'm  
rebellious to the bone.

Persecuted for my ignorance left alone, and alienated,  
prosecuted for belligerence prone to incarceration.

Made to feel inadequate, they put  
shackles on my brain.  
I may not know what love is, but  
I certainly know the pain.

And I tried to break the chain but  
this cycle has no end.  
Yet it cost too much to be free,  
in a society I don't fit in.

Programmed with a fear to succeed  
and never taught work ethic.

If born with a silver spoon, there's  
three to one odds I'd bet it.

Pathetic, scared to "get it," but call myself a "go getter."  
Won't tolerate the bullsh...., but  
I'm a first class bullsh....er

Accepting oppression from powers  
that be, but I hate it when I see,  
my own kind succeed in life because  
they no longer look like me.

Afraid of a commitment 'cause of  
deep rotted trust issues.  
My true self is a foreigner 'cause  
I'm scared he'll be misused.

I never knew "Love Thy Neighbor," so  
with a perfect hate I'm stuck.  
Mentally screwed by the man in the  
mirror, until I self-destruct.





# DON'T LET YOUR STUMBLES IN LIFE DEFINE YOUR ENTIRE LIFE

BY NATHAN GILBERT

We would only be lying to ourselves if we said there has never been a time in our lives that we never felt lost. Whether it's for our future, for love, or even our sobriety. Sometimes we just get so caught up in things we trip ourselves up. Sometimes we fail, make mistakes. Do we and should we just allow those "lost" moments define us? Or should we fight daily to improve and fix those stumbles. That's all those mistakes, downs and outs, and failures are, they're just stumbles.

We shouldn't beat ourselves up over those stumbles. How else would we learn and progress as people? How would we ever learn about our inner selves? Don't get it wrong, sometimes those little stumbles feel like you're falling off a cliff, but you're still here right? You still have some fight left inside you to continue. Sometimes in society we're given the false perception that if we're drug addicts, or committed a crime or anything negative, that's who we suppose to be our entire lives, as if there's no hope for us.

That couldn't be any further from the truth. As long as you're still on this Earth, there's always hope. Hope for a better tomorrow, week, year and Hope for a better life. Even if you feel like nobody cares, and this is how the world perceives you, all it takes is for one person to reach out to you to verify you enough or even an encounter of the smallest bit of gratitude. Someone

will always care about you. There's always a person who can relate to your situation.

If you're reading this, feeling lost, abandoned, down, depressed, whatever your situation may be, don't give up! There's so much in this lifetime to cherish, to enjoy and to celebrate. Sure, right now you may feel pain and hurt. We have all felt like that at one point in life. Life can be unbearable, even for the person you think has the perfect life. There will always be ups and downs. The only thing we can do is turn those downs up and those stumbles into triumphs. Believe in yourself, please know and understand that people do care and love you. No matter what you've done. There's so much love, hope and blessings for you.

I may not know you personally but maybe you can relate to my journey. I have stumbled many times and I felt like I was alone for the longest but someone showed me they cared and that made a difference.

So, I'm saying this to you now, I love you. I have hope for you. I believe in you and I care about you. There's always a better tomorrow, a brighter day, a happier life! Don't stop fighting for that and don't ever stop loving and believing in yourself! Keep your head up, no matter what.





# MANY TOPICS

## BY ANTHONY TATE

Dear readers, I pray that my article finds you and yours in good health and spirit. We all are truly blessed. I want to talk to you today about many things that affected my life in the past and still affect it today, in a very meaningful way. Sobriety, hope, constructive criticism, motivation, love, support, guidance, and empathy; these are all very meaningful words that play a big role in our lives, especially mines!

When I was sent to my first Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous meeting, I was lost and I didn't think that (AA or NA ), was for me. To be honest with you, I didn't think that I had a problem! But boy, would I be proven wrong. I was sitting in these meetings to please my parole officer and nothing more. I would sit in my seat and look up at the board that had the 12 steps on it.

Step number one: Admit that you are powerless over drugs and alcohol.

Admitting that I had a problem, that was a hard step for me back then before the prison sentences and the countless nights spent in country jail around the country. Today it's very easy for me to admit that I have a problem with drugs and alcohol, and always will, for the rest of my life.

Whoa! That's deep! The rest of my life! Yes, the statement once an addict, always an addict is a true fact that I'm still grasping a hold of as I write to you. The true meaning of this statement is finally dawning on me. What it's telling me is that I'll be fighting for "sobriety" the rest of my life to stay clean.

I didn't understand at that time what all the hype was about a (thirty day sobriety chip). It's only a chip. I would tell myself, and when I got my first thirty-day chip, you can bet I examined that sucker real close. I wanted to see what all the magic was about. I was disappointed!

I didn't know at that time that it wasn't so much the chip that had everybody clapping and hugging each other. It was the meaning of what the chip represented that had everyone elated. Sobriety! I didn't understand that if you had sobriety you had a life. I didn't understand that if you had sobriety you had your family, your kids, your job, your marriage, your respect, you had a roof over your head, you had money in your pocket and most of all you had your sanity.

At the time, I didn't understand that alcohol and drugs could take these things away from a person. I lost my freedom to drugs and alcohol, now after you read this article, I pray that you understand how important your sobriety is. Keep stacking up those chips. They are truly magic chips. Those sobriety chips represent life, a sober life.

Now, let's talk about Sponsors. A Sponsor is a life-line, someone that stands between you and your addiction. Always a phone call away. I have seen the times that the person that sponsors you would help you in any way that he or she could. I'm talking about buying food and sometimes helping you on a bill or two, that's love.

I had to trust and believe in my sponsor. When I felt like I wanted to go back to the streets and drugs, I would pick up that phone and call him. Two o'clock or three o'clock in the morning, I would call. I remember some of those nights very clear. Some nights my sponsor would win and some nights the streets and drugs would win. Yeah, I failed many times in my addiction, many times. I got knocked down numerous times, but I always got back up to fight again.

A good knock down only makes you want to fight harder, everyone gets knocked down. But what separates the losers from the winners is: who stays down and who gets back up to fight again.







I'm sitting in a maximum security prison, but that doesn't make me a loser. You know why? Because I'm still fighting, that's why, and if I get the hope in my veins to keep fighting from behind these walls, I know that you can do it out there.

**Hope:** To desire or anticipate with expectation of fulfillment, the definition of the word says it all. Most times, Hope is all that carries me. Hope is a very powerful word. My hope is no different from your thoughts of hope. I hope that nothing happens to my mother while I'm in prison. I hope that I can stay sober once I'm released from here. I hope that my family is safe. I hope I don't go back to the streets once I get home.

I empathize with you on this type of life. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. The streets are a hard place, but keep your head up and keep the hope, and know that you are loved and know that God is working on your behalf even when you don't realize or think he is.

God is sending love, support, guidance, empathy and hope through other people. How many times have you been told "no," only to receive better than what you were seeking? That's Him!

You have to learn to use "no" as a motivational tool. It might hurt a little and make you feel some type of way, but these are emotions that you will soon get pass. Chalk the negative talk up to good criticism and move on.

When someone says, "you can't," you say "I can." When they say "you won't," you say "I will." When they say your finished, you say I have just begun, let their negative breed positivity within you.

**Motivation:** All of us that's been through anything can relate to this, most people have counted us out a long time ago, but what they fail to realize was that we have a say so in this also. Another person can count you out all that they want to, but what matters is that you don't count yourself out. Yeah! No matter what you're going through or have went through in the past.

Let your past motivate your future. Learn to accept your past and don't be ashamed of it. I'm not saying wear it like a badge or nothing, but know that it's going to stay in the minds of most people and that they are always going to associate you with it. That's okay, you just go right on ahead and keep living in your future. A very bright future, a future laced with support, love, guidance, empathy, hope, motivation, sobriety and constructive criticism.







# POSITIVE MINDED FRIENDSHIPS

BY ARTHUR GENOVESE

At 19 years old, I was sentenced to 15 years in prison followed by 10 years probation in Florida thinking my life was over, separated from my family and a world of trouble and uncertainty on what lies ahead. I began to continue my negative ways by befriending others that engage in negative things. Trying to belong, I began to participate in such activities, which continuously placed me in confinement. I was placed in solitary the majority of the times under investigation rather than being caught doing something.

Every time I took these trips to solitary confinement all my so-called friends would vanish, I would never hear from them. Every time I got back out I rejoined the same way like I never left.

Finally in 2011 an event occurred that led to a five year isolation in confinement, enough evidence was established this time to connect me to the conspiracy based on a witnesses' immunity just to get me. The investigators had enough of me getting kicked out of every correction institution on a belief I was involved as a main participate. This time there was no few short months of confinement, then back to my old ways believing I can do better next time. It was over. I was given an extra year for the introduction of cell phone contraband and permanently placed in administrative segregation the remaining of my sentence, that expired in 2015.

What an awakening. 24 hours a day lockdown, no T.V., or air conditioner as temperatures reach the high 90's, where it's tough to breath, laying in sweat all day. Most of all the mind games being played with the meals, such as if you stand too close to your door when they serve the meals they skip you, and also claim you refused to eat.

As for friendship or being social with others, it's tough. Most guys been there so long and look for amusement so they start a friendly conversation with

you just to gather information then begin to take the information and make pranks on it. Staying to myself became lonely after a while and a transformation of my character began.

I began to study, read spiritual, law, and trying to realize the definition of insanity, such as continually doing the same thing expecting a different result. I opened my eyes, enjoyed the learning and realized my mistakes, the hurt I've done to my family overall.

Having nobody to talk to, I began re-evaluating my so-called friends. Telling myself I have to evolve from this negative mindset, choose my friendships more wisely and distant myself from the negative. Wondering if I ever did have a friend or was it based on material things or a common interest. Given it some thought, I can't really say I had but maybe one friend.

The importance of involving yourself with uplifting and positive minded people is a true friendship that can manifest. A friendship based on negative intentions never lasts and comes with consequences. Likewise, it is important to pick your friends rather than they pick you.

Positive minded people bring positive things in life and a long lasting true friendship. Therefore, question yourself on your association and choose wisely...





# TO HELP OURSELVES IS TO HELP EVERYONE

BY FRANKLIN JUNIOR

First, I want to thank everyone who put forth the effort in making a positive difference in someone else's life. Those who want to see the fruition of our struggle through their sacrifices. Those who came before us, who stood for what was right, the betterment of humanity and those who struggled for our culture. It was not in vain!

It's time to win, win, win. We as a nation of people have to start winning. This is the attitude, the state of mind I set for myself. As a man, father, son, brother, friend, I had to start winning in order to help my family and our culture. Stepping outside the box I placed myself was a must. Stepping out of this prison through my spirit, my love, and my passion; demanding the uprising of the dehumanized, disenfranchised, and deprived people in America. Being born poor is a disadvantage but when you remain that way it's a choice. I don't want to hear those in power won't let you or us Black and Latino people are too ignorant, too divided to get out of our way, to turn back to our godly original nature. To stay content with our current state of existence is losing. That's doing exactly what those who want us to lose want.

I love my people, people of all hues, beliefs, etc... This love helps me not only keep my sanity in an insane place, but extract things out of me that one day may save humanity.

Positive and uplifting I strive to be at all times, yet it's a struggle within itself for me. I have to fare it one day at a time like a recovering alcoholic and drug addict staying sober and clean.

Positive and uplifting I have to be! I have to surround myself with positive people and a positive environment. Never think you can't change or you can't make an impact, for I was once the God of the opposite, a multiple felon, from drug dealing to murder.

I've changed my life and impacted others for the better. Ultimately it won't show, it won't be enough alone until we as a people put forth every ounce of power to revitalize and establish our role in America's society by bringing dignity, power, integrity and honor to our culture.

How, you ask?

Look in the mirror and ask yourself are you truly happy with yourself? Can you be better, helpful? Do you blame yourself or others for the things wrong in your life? Are you selfish?

Do you really love yourself? Are you an innovator, creator, protector, provider, teacher? What will be your legacy when your physical body dies? Everyone wants to be remembered, from the devil to the Pope, everyone.

Those who made an impact in life are going in the history books. Giving your testimony can help. Be someone who cleans their community up every week. Be someone who helps the kids with school work, educating our future leaders, scientists and doctors.

Drugs, alcohol, and gangs continue to be a contagious plague, robbing us of our righteous nature, dimming our life. Malcolm X went from con and pimp to a minister who changed and touched millions of lives. He said that he can still do more so he elevated higher to embrace and love all! He gave his life to show it's bigger than him, it's about each person that's on this planet being connected to each other. So, love your neighbor as you love yourself. In all sense, you are that neighbor.

I sincerely advise for all to be upright, fair, and loving, but use your intelligence.

Angela Davis, a college professor understood





we must be steadfast in educating our children and our culture. We cannot look down on anyone, not even a homeless person. You never know what may have transpired in their lives or the lives of those in prison. That's counter-productive. No one will be left behind, like the Harriet Tubman motto.

Across America, Blacks and Latinos dwell in prison at the highest rate. What does that tell you? For one, no matter how smart or clever you are you will get caught-up! You can only outsmart yourself to prison or the grave. Stop the madness.

We hustle, rob, steal, kill against and with each other, for what... money, money that the Government is going to take then use to build the prisons and mental hospitals to put you in.

I love beautiful women like Ms. Robin Graham who expresses herself and gives someone like me a platform to release my inner-self, my passion to uplift and at the same time, sharing with people who read my words. I wish to impact like the old generation before, during the 60's and 70's, but to be that spirit that raised itself from the pits of hell to be able to deliver the truth. Showing and proving that through righteous endeavors, we help others win.

I hope what I shared touches home or will be encouragement for someone you know. – Franklin Junior, Revolutionary Warrior, and Free Thinker.





# MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH

## BY PHILLIP RODRIQUEZ

Please give me a moment, just a minute or two to say my peace,  
To speak the truth, to practice my preach by reaching the youth.  
So take heed to what I'm about to say to you,  
I've been that route, traveled down that road,  
And best believe it stays the same, this stuff gets old.

It's within you to change. Your future, you hold in your hands.  
So always give your best, and remember to succeed you've got to have a plan.  
So I hope you listen, I hope you stay in school and pay attention,  
Don't be another youth lost in the system, locked away in some juvenile detention.

So double dot your I's, make sure to cross your T's,  
Mind your P's and Q's and shake all ticks and fleas.  
Because to truly achieve success, you've got to believe.





# HONORING OUR PAST BY CREATING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

## BY K. KABASHA GRIFFIN-EL

This essay is born of countless experiences that have enriched my life (half of which has been lived as a prisoner of my own actions). My given name is Keith F. Griffin. However, in 2001, I adopted the name “K. Kabasha Griffin-El,” and I’m known as “Kabasha.” I was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and I’m a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps., diagnosed with service connected Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Regrettably, in 1995 (within 2 years of my honorable discharge), my actions resulted in someone’s death, and my consequent life sentence.

None of that ever should have happened. Sadly, upon my discharge, I was simply a selfish, emotional wreck, in deep denial. Others were able to see that I had changed after my military service. They were polite, and attempted to encourage me to seek psychological support, but at that time, I was unable to acknowledge the need for help. I grew angry each time someone would attempt to intervene. I took offense, believing the false hype of stigma, which promoted the idea that mental illness was for weak people. Unfortunately, the worst happened before I could humble myself enough to express the words, “Help Me.”

Fortunately, throughout my imprisonment, some of the most loving, kind, forgiving and gracious people have freely shared the best of themselves to my benefit. Some are family members, old friends, and pen-pals that have grown to become great friends. Many of them are special people that took part in programs designed to benefit those of us imprisoned. Each of those wonderful people have certainly earned my respect and admiration, and I will never forget how they’ve aided me through some of the most difficult challenges of my life.

This is my first time in prison. There have been days when I’ve found myself deep in crisis...where I

wanted to die. Each person that has shared their time and loving energy became the light I needed during those dark days. They cared for me, encouraged and inspired the best in me. They became my advocate, connecting me to the world, as they reminded me that I still have a purpose in it. Through their inspiration, the desire to become an advocate was born within me.

I accepted opportunities to sit on the governing boards of several prison-based non-profit organizations, and since 2013, I’ve been offering services to other prisoners as a Certified Peer Specialist (CPS). While providing “peer support,” I’ve found irony in the fact that those of us that have once victimized others (by our crimes), are now greatly in need of support. So I deliberately prepare myself to serve, by continuing my education, seeking self-improvement through educational programs such as; Batters’ Intervention Groups, Violence Prevention Groups; Mental Health Support Groups, Alternative to Violence Programs, college course, and various other programs that have served the added benefit of being therapeutic. I’ve embraced this as my obligation, and as a form of retribution in homage to those I’ve victimized.

I utilize the platform provided by my position as a CPS. I enjoy creating programs such as the Unit Literacy Group (ULG), where I’m able to share the wonderful power of the written and spoken word. I boldly share my personal stories, subjecting myself to vulnerability. I do so voluntarily as an example: to encourage; to remind others that they are not alone; and to inspire hope, overall wellness, and recovery. I find healing and great joy in serving this purpose, for I’ve discovered that helping people helps me.

I recently accomplished something that makes me very proud... I WROTE A BOOK! Well, a book of sorts. I’ve been calling it a publication. I’ve titled it Unit







Literary Group: A How-to Proposal guide for Certified Peer Specialists.

The initial purpose for developing the project into a publication, was to encourage and empower other Certified Peer Specialists to write proposals that present opportunities for them to use their creativity, training, talents, and skills to convert punitive prison environments into recovery based environments. The formats used within the various pages are easy to follow, and are intended to be customized according to specific needs. I'm confident that it will be a rewarding, and easy read for all Certified Peer Specialists.

As a way of honoring the past (recognizing my debt to those I've victimized), and creating hope for the future, I was inspired to create the Unit Literacy Group (ULG). The ULG acknowledges the value of creating programs and environments conducive to facilitating literacy, while simultaneously supporting

mental wellness and recovery. Recovery based language, exercises, and modeled recovery behavior are foundational principles shared in each ULG session. The promotion of hope, compassion, forgiveness, choice, self-advocacy, self-discovery, empowerment, validation, communication skills, and coping skills are all part of the holistic approach to wellness promoted by the Unit Literacy Group.

"HONORING OUR PAST BY CREATING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE," can be much more than a title of an essay. We can honor our past by taking time to remember who we were before all the stigmatizing titles such as: "user," "addict," "thief," "cheater," "liar," "prisoner," "convict," "inmate," "offender," "parolee," "lifer," and so on. Learning to focus on the positive in our lives inspires hope and helps us to focus on choices that create further hope for the future. Be well... deliberately. - Kabasha

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# DIVINELY INSPIRED

## BY MIRIAM BEIGELMAN

How do I know I am worthwhile? How do I know I matter? What makes me special? These are some of the questions I pondered as a young adult embarking on my life as an independent person. Yet I did not feel prepared to step out into the world on my own. My inner core was not developed. I needed to exercise my self esteem muscle. How do I go about doing that?

My answer came from a book entitled, “Let Us Make Man” by Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twersky. He writes how at age 40, he still was not comfortable in his own skin. He began to think of his own value and his own sense of self.

Sometimes searching for our sense of self is a lifelong journey, this is not un-common. I may lose it somewhere in the challenges of life. Being in an unhealthy relationship can cause me to question my identity. Having to be someone I am not can erode my sense of self. Chasing the pursuit of money is a cover up for lack of self. It may take years until I recover and find my own voice again.

The good news is that man’s self-esteem comes from G\_d Himself. In Genesis it talks about how G\_d breathed life into man and created him in His image. What better proof to my intrinsic worth? I was created in G\_d’s image. I am G-d like. I have a Divine soul. Wow!

When I question my value, I am strengthened by the fact that I was created in the image of G\_d. This exercises my core being because this fact is not dependent

on external accomplishments or accolades. This is a truth that is mine regardless of the circumstances I find myself in. I can always depend on my Divinely inspired soul.

Of course, this comes with responsibility. First, if I am created in the image of G\_d so is everyone else. Therefore, the way I view another human and the way I interact with him must reflect his intrinsic worth. The person deserves my respect because he has a Divine soul. His external circumstances do not play a role in how I treat him. By virtue of him being created he deserves my respect.

Second, this idea gives us hope that a person who has strayed can find his way back. His soul may have gotten buried beneath the immorality but there is an ember of fire still burning waiting to ignite and bring him back.

Finally, because I have a Divine soul, I have great potential and therefore have a charge to contribute to society. We each have our own strengths. Whatever they are I need to channel them for the good of my fellow man. And the good thing is it is not incumbent on me to finish the work, but I must start.

Being created in the image of G\_d, builds my self-esteem. It also obligates me to live a divinely inspired life. I am a work in progress, continuously exercising my G\_dliness. Twenty years later, I can look in the mirror and own the person reflected.



# FOR [LOVE] SAKE

## BY GUILLERMO ALVAREZ

I LOVE YOU...Quite possibly the three most powerful words in the human vocabulary. Whether it is an “I love you,” from a son to his mother, or a daughter to her daddy.

An “I love you,” from brother to sister, or friend to a friend. These three words build bonds stronger than bridges and create waves like no Tsunami could fathom. It’s power is like no other force known to humanity, and it’s dept dumfounds the Mariana’s Trench.

Love is quintessential, the most tangible, attainable and valuable of emotions, feelings and experience in our entire existence. And with this in mind, What is Love?

I challenge you, the reader to answer this, for me and for yourselves. If you were to grab a dictionary, I guarantee you would find roughly ten to fifteen various definitions ascribed to this mysterious four-letter, one syllable, and Elementary word. Yet, none and all could truly define the enigmatic word. Young adolescents confuse love with lust, and grow caliginous in their view of this beautiful word. Adults too, led by lust, start [broken] homes, and divorce-to-be lives are drastically changed and hearts eternally marked.

Is it sex?

Desire?

Attachment?

Affection?

Passion?

Is it a “Quid Pro Quo”?

Is it based on a return or a set of spoken, [or unspoken] expectations?

Is it contractual?

Is love earned or freely given?

How does it start?

How do you know it is love?

Is love worth dying for?

Fighting for?

Is your own definition of love based on social media’s opinion?

Hollywood’s portrayal?

An artist’s cover via a song?

Is love something you’ve learned by life’s experiences; observed and/or indoctrinated by others?

I asked you this because I have pursued love my whole life. I’ve fathered children out of wedlock, and a failed marriage due to my unhealthy view on love. I have sat with clinician after clinician, read book after book, even expelled myself to personal solitude to study others and attack this question.

I have never known what love really was, but I knew it was what I most desperately wanted. I desired love and I wanted to share love with someone. I discovered that no movie, book, or song could satisfy my hunger for answers.

Fortunately, I continued to endeavor until I accepted that I, was created in the very image of love. My Creator, God, Yahweh, Lord, The Most High, Made Me in His Image and He says that He is Love.... His Love is sacrificing, patient, kind, suffers long, does not envy, isn’t rude nor selfish.





Love is truth and never fails. Love is forgiving, compassionate, present, but most importantly, Love is uniquely unconditional.

So, I had to honestly love myself before I could love anyone and before I could have someone else love me...or else I would continue to run the cycle of the faux love. I learned that I am superfluously flawed. But, I am still worthy... I have numerous defects, blemishes, scars, and imperfections. I am too tall, my arms don't match, my body size, my heard is huge and block shaped. My teeth are crooked, yellow and I don't have a six-pack.

I am a prisoner, and I have kids. However, I am still worthy. I may be viewed as society's trash, but I am more than a discarded soul because He [God] first loved me, I am able to love me! I accepted myself as I am, and learned to appreciate my quirks and awkwardness, the way they are...true and unusual.

Once I accepted myself, I began to see myself the way God sees me, and I grew to love myself the way I never knew to love anything – and in this, love extended itself out of me like the sun in the waking morning's first blink. My failures and successes did not merit the love I deserved. My mood [or lack of] did not offset if I deserved love or not.

For me, love is a gift, given freely, to illuminate the darkness manifesting itself in our beautiful world. I might not be infatuated with the guard who is a jerk, but I know he has a soul and he needs love just as much as you, me or the President of the United States does. I can give love by acts of generosity, kindness or a caring ear to strangers, family, friends, and enemies. [Haters, we all have them] alike. Love is for everyone....

When I say "I Love You," romantically, or platonically, I sincerely mean it Eros or Agape... I can love, and accept love in its mysterious ways because I believe and fully accept that I was hand-crafted in the image of love by love Himself.

Do some soul-searching, and ask yourself if you know Love... This pandemic has created the worst of times, but has truly brought out the best in humanity... Why is that? Because love is essential and monumental, you may not walk around telling everyone, "Hey, I Love You!" However, you can give love, through a smile, a friendly hello, a warm meal, a prayer... Love is unconditional, meaning love is giving without a thank you in return. Right now, it's needed more than a cure. Now I ask you, what is love, for you?





# THE ESSENCE OF BLACKNESS

## BY ARCANE ELEMENT

Being Black is about more than just simply the color of your skin. Your pigmentation is only an introduction to something so much more complex. Blackness is a state of mind. It is being conscious of and understanding your nature. It is becoming familiar with and embracing your pedigree. But most importantly of all, Blackness is utilizing your existence to have the most profound impact on the lives of others that you possibly can.

Black people who both understand and exhibit these characteristics often have benevolent dispositions. They tend to be the sort of individuals who are always willing to assist the next person along the path of elevation and spread their cordiality around generously and without demarcation. That's why the essence of Blackness is, to me, one of the greatest manifestations a Black man or woman can achieve in this world.

When you are true to yourself, you never allow anyone else to tell you who you are and what you can't be in life. That means that no one other than yourself should be able to define your existence for you because you should be confident in either whoever you already are or in the person that you're striving to become. You can become truly secure in your individuality only by obtaining a supreme understanding of your nature and by succumbing to, rather than resisting your natural inclinations. Let the radiant light of your higher self shine through and touch the lives of the people you encounter daily. Refuse to allow anyone or any circumstance to dismiss that light and it will make you feel better as a person. Do not allow yourself to give in to the negativity surrounding you no matter how trying remaining positive can be.

It is all too easy to become the infamous "n--a" because it is the path of least resistance in today's society. It is what we have been driven to believe we are for so long that it has become the accepted standard. We've come to a point where we glorify that image of

ignorance like it's the best thing in the world to be! That's asinine! It's so much more difficult for a Black man or woman to stand up and say, "I will no longer allow myself to be oppressed by society, my environment or my peers. Instead, I will be the best version of me that I possibly can to satisfy myself and secure my position in life." The ultimate challenge lies in rising above the stereotype of the Black "thug" and transcending to the role of the Supreme Black man.

However, in order to do that, we must first free ourselves of the chains that have been wrapped around our minds, causing us to lose our sense of pride and strength for so long that we seem to have forgotten what it is to be warriors! These mental shackles are just as bad if not worse, than the physical bondage that our imparted ancestors faced and that our incarcerated Brothers and Sister face today. These chains have been passed down from generation to generation, since slavery and slavery has allegedly been over for close to 200 years! So why do we still wear them and allow them to keep us down?

It's our responsibility as a collective group comprised of unique individuals to break the cycle. There is no better time than the present to do so. We must learn to once again, carry ourselves with regality as our African ancestors did on the rich soil of the Motherland and we must learn to do it here in America. This is the only country that the vast majority knows, ever has known and perhaps ever will know. That's why it is of the utmost importance that we let our Black pride and Black power show in it by investing in our own people which ultimately results I us investing in ourselves.

In the past, we've been about what "They" the white government of America, would or wouldn't LET us do. There are those among us who still do it today. I'm here to tell you that it's a different time now. No one is preventing us from accomplishing anything meaningful other than ourselves. We have everything we need to



succeed now. We simply must release our reservations of not being able to do and make it happen the way that no group of people can but us. We are perhaps the most creative and resourceful race of people in this world, but we don't capitalize on it either because we're afraid of taking a chance or we don't know how. These are things we can change, because we have absolute control over them.

But even as we strive to better our situation as a people, we must remain diligent against avariciousness (greed) in our own individual ways. Our ancestors believed in a communal way of life they lived and participated in harmoniously. We must figure out a way to do the same so that we have a network of supporters as we work toward both our common and individual interests. Just try not to become so caught up in the quest for material wealth that you forget to show the people who surround you the same care and respect they give you.

In no way am I promoting poverty or telling you that you shouldn't have the ambition to set and accomplish goals in your life. That's the polar opposite of what I believe. I firmly believe that every single person regardless of race, creed, origin, or nationality, whether outside or inside a cell, should strive to create an ideal set of circumstance for themselves. I only believe that you should never forget about those who offer you their support while you're on the path to realizing your vision more.

So, you see, the choice is ours to make. To make our decision, we must first consider the options we have available to us. Do we remain slaves to our own fears of changing the conditioning of our minds that have kept us down for so long because we're afraid of the unknown? Or, do we unite as one and combine our efforts to overcome the plight of Black Americans, real or perceived, in this modern world in which we reside. These are the questions we must ask and answer ourselves because the challenge is ultimately ours to either accept or decline together.

Without a single moment of deliberation, I know what I would choose every single time.

In my humble opinion, this is the epitome of the Essence of Blackness on several levels.

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# WHAT CAN I GIVE BACK?

BY MICHAEL MCKINNEY

Learning the art of giving back  
Is something I always wanted to do.  
Some people don't like to give,  
but if they knew the power of giving back  
they would too.

The world revolves around giving back,  
and the world is in great need of so many things.  
Jobs, education, structure, mediation, and a new king.

What Can I Give Back?  
I have knowledge, understanding, and insight to give.  
The tools I've learned have given me a chance to live.  
In the years' it took me to learn, I could write an  
almanac.

The bottom line is this,  
We are all able to give back something  
that could better the outcome of another's existence.

"We Can't Help Everyone, But Everyone Can Help  
Someone" - Dr. Loretta Scott





## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### GUILLERMO ALVAREZ A message from the author:

Hey ya!, I believe we all have a purpose in life, and mines is found in serving. I love life, and the ups, and downs that follow it. I am from Bakersfield, California. I have children, and I am a man of God. If you have questions regarding my art, contact me. Much love and God bless.

Guillermo Alvarez #AN2949  
ASP – 650  
P.O. Box 906  
Avenal, CA 93204



**MIRIAM BEIGLEMAN** About the Author: Miriam Beigleman married her husband two months ago during Corona, in a backyard wedding in NY. She is now adjusting to her new life down in Florida. As she is about to become a licensed clinical social worker, Miriam looks forward to having a private practice, where she hopes to counsel teens and young adults. Of course, Miriam enjoys sharing her life’s journey through the written word.

**MYKELL EADS** About the Author: My name is Mykell Roshawn Eads, I am in my 30’s. I was born and raised in Riverside, CA. I have been in and out of recovery since I was 12 years old and have now been sober for five years. I started writing when I was 15 in foster care and group homes. I have been a contributing writer for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine since 2017. I’m currently serving a 15 year mandatory prison sentence in Florida. I’ve made some reckless decisions in my life. Most people dwell on regrets, I use to but now I’ve learned that through all the good and the bad it had to happen to make me the man I am now. Even though I’m in prison, I am stronger and healthier than I have ever been. I have five beautiful children who make me happier every moment of every day. My recovery has been a wild and beautiful journey. It is my prayer that my writings are helpful to those who read them. I believe God is using me to change the world one word at a time, one person at a time. If anything that I’ve written is of benefit, it is from God and God alone. May God keep us in the Spotlight of Recovery.

To correspond with Mykell, send your letters to: Mykell Eads #V30161, r2124s  
Lancaster C.I. Work Camp  
3449 SW State Road 26  
Trenton, Fl 32693

**ARCANE ELEMENT** About the author: Arcane Element is a visionary who aspires to bring people together under a banner of harmony and advancement. He loves to write and has written poetry, music, and articles for most of his life. He hopes to help inspire people who will spark the revolution for change.

Currently a hostage in the Arkansas Department of Corrections, he is working towards receiving a reduction of sentence so he may have a second chance at life. All interested parties may contact him at:

Arcane Element #142660  
P.O. Box 600  
Grady, Ark 71644



Please limit any letters to 2 pages or e-mail him at: [ArcaneElement@gmail.com](mailto:ArcaneElement@gmail.com)





**DAMON EWELLS** About the author: While Damont Ewells is a man of many gifts. It was his love for music and poetry that led him to pursue a career in writing. Tired of missing out on life, he decided to turn his life around while serving a sentence of 63 years for possession with intent to deliver marijuana and cocaine.



The now spiritual man intends to use his influence through writing to lead the younger reader away from a life behind bars. At 47 years old, the Compton, California bred writer has been affiliated with gangs and drugs for most of his life. With his life's experiences, he plans to teach moral lessons to appreciate life and enjoy love.

**L. FORDE** About the Author: L. Forde is a Wellness Educator and has worked in the helping field for over 12 years. She regularly facilitates workshops and teaches post-secondary students on the topic of wellness, and has also facilitated several mindfulness groups. She created and facilitated a 10-week program to help students to learn academic study skills and self-care skills. L. Forde helps others to have a better understanding of how interests/hobbies, activities and environments can have an impact our wellbeing.

**ARTHUR GENOVESE** About the author: Arthur Genovese is 38 years old . He is Italian, Sicilian. He is originally from Connecticut, but moved to Florida in 1997. His interests include working out and studying criminal law.

**NATHAN GILBERT** About the author: My name is Nathan Gilbert, I am 28 years old. I was raised in a small town called Biglerville, PA, right outside of Gettysburg, by a single mother who battled her demons.

I didn't have the best of role models, the first time I was drunk, I was nine years old. I fell into a bad crowd. Fighting drugs and alcohol, I kept trying to do right however, life had other plans for me. Although I received probation at the age of 15, I did manage to graduate from high school. I also completed a culinary course, so I can cook a little bit.

I got caught up in the crime and drug life at 19 and went to jail. I did my best to change and kept hitting obstacles. I didn't know how to cope positively. I wanted some stupid "street cred." It took me 5 years ago to really open my eyes up and realize my potential. I finally believe in myself, too old for the nonsense, you know?

**JAY GLENEWINKEL** About the author: Jay Glenewinkel was born and raised in San Antonio. Through his early adult life, he has traveled clear across the United States as well as to Mexico and Canada. His hobbies include railroads, photography, music and writing. In addition, he has been involved in numerous charity organizations from animal rescues to cancer research. Since 1991, he has worked actively as an event promoter in the music industry on a local and regional level as well as working a few years in the transportation industry.



While Jay has been writing for most of his life, he is now focusing his attention on getting his work published. He continues to search for ways to improve his writing and overall outlook on life in general.

**K. KABASHA GRIFFIN EL** About the Author: Kabasha is a former U.S. Marine living with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Depression, and Anxiety. For the past twenty-five years he's been in prison, fighting a life sentence. His personal recovery journey has enabled him to aid others in his capacities of Certified





Peer Specialist (CPS), Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) Facilitator, Certified Tutor, and as Founder of the Unit Literacy Group (ULG). He maintains hope of regaining his freedom to continue his present work.



**GEORGE HOPKINS** About the Author: George Hopkins is currently serving a prison sentence and takes full responsibility for his erroneous decisions in the past. However, since being incarcerated George has rehabilitated his self, and now looks 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)

To correspond with George, you can write to:  
 Smart Communications/PADOC  
 Mr. George Hopkins #MR 3554  
 SCI Greene  
 P.O. Box 33028  
 St. Petersburg, FL 33733



**FRANKLIN JUNIOR** About the Author: I am a revolutionary warrior who writes with my all. A free-thinker screaming loud from a cell. I strive to make Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Frederick Douglas, Marcus Garvey, and Stokely Carmichael proud. As these men have endured the atrocities in their time and strived to do something about it, I am them. I want to make that positive, much needed difference.

**MICHAEL MCKINNEY** About the author: Michael McKinney has been a contributing writer for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine for almost nine years. His work continues to inspire and enlighten.

**DENNIS MINTUM** About the Author: Dennis Mintum 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 PrisonsFoundation.org

**RICKIE RANDLE** About the author: My name is Rickie Antonio Randle, I was born December 13, 1978 in Little Rock, Arkansas, raised by a single parent, who is an amazing wonder woman in the way she reared my younger brother, sister, and me. As a child, I was very gifted and talented beyond my years and peers. By the time I was a teenager, I abused and misused these gifts and talents so much so, I began using and experimenting with drugs and alcohol, and starting a street gang which ultimately lead to my imprisonment.

Three days after my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, I was sentenced to 100 years in prison for four counts aggravated robbery and one count of first-degree murder. I committed the robberies but I am 100 percent innocent of murder. I’ve been in prison 25 years and have been denied parole 4 times since 2016. Over the years, I’ve founded two youth programs: 1. “A Reason to Believe.” and 2. C.I.T.Y. (Convicts Intervention Towards Youth), both of which are incorporated into my mother’s non-profit organization, “Voices Unheard Ministries.”





During my incarceration, I've grown, changed and learned a lot about the true facts of life. Unlike many fellas who came to prison seeking to learn of a right way to do something wrong or a smart way to do something stupid upon release, I've invested my time (most anyway) into discovering an intelligent way to do something excellent and an excellent way to do something brilliant. I am a teacher, tutor, and mentor to others in prison and abroad and committed to using God's gifts of knowledge, wisdom, intellectual and spiritual compass to guide the youth of our future to success.

**DAVID RILEY** The Publisher's thoughts on David Riley's poem: David Riley did not submit his bio in time for this publication, so I wanted to share my thoughts about his poem:

This is David's first submission for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine. I chose his poem for the inside cover because I felt that if people would look in the mirror, they might discover who they are. They might ask themselves a question that only they could answer when they come face to face with the man (or woman) in the mirror. Everyone has a mirror. Everyone has questions. Everyone has a recovery story.

**PHILLIP RODRIQUEZ** About the author: My name is Phillip Rodriquez, I'm from Bakersfield, California, born and raised. I recently turned 26 years old physically, but I grew up really fast, really young and have come to understand that nobody but one's self can change their outcome in life.

I started writing when I was fifteen years old to get things that I was going through out. I hope the knowledge that I have gained and will share with those who will listen, find a better way.

My goal in life is to use my talent of writing to open the eyes of those blind to what they're really here for, because I am the type of person who would rather help one find their way than to do nothing and watch one lost their way.

If anyone is in need of someone to talk to about anything, I'm always available through mail. You can write to me

at: Phillip Rodriquez #AS-3606  
Solano C.S.P  
P.O. Box 4000 – C-13-20-4/L  
Vacaville, CA 95696

**JULIE SULLIVAN** About the author: My name is Julie Sullivan, I love writing and have loved it for as long as I can remember. I wrote my first poem at the age of 5, I've been writing on and off now for several years. I have authored one book on travel to New Orleans that was published on Amazon in 2018. I hope to write more books in the future. My hobbies range from cooking to reading to music to movies. I'm in my mid-50's and reside in Louisiana.



**ANTHONY TATE** About the author: About the Author: Anthony began writing for Spotlight on Recovery last year. We are excited to have this new talent amongst our team of writers. Anthony says, "I'm from a place called Hope, and I would like to hear from you. I am a very humble man."

To correspond with Anthony Tate, write to

Anthony Tate #098521  
P.O. Box 970  
Marianna, Ark 72360

Anthony also says to his Mama, Donnie, Adrian, and Jewel, "Thank you for the support."







# UPCOMING TOPICS

- Dear Mr. President or Dear Madam Vice President, which will focus on our incoming President and Vice President
- The Have and Have Not's – No friends, this is not about Tyler Perry's show. This is about the real issues facing our communities. Let's point out the disparities and offer good solutions. This issue could also focus on teaching people not to disregard the gifts they already possess while craving the material wealth that they feel they have to chase.
- The Worst "No" I Have Ever Heard: Dealing with rejection, loss, and self-confidence. We all had the word "No" said to us at a point in our lives. Some people were deeply hurt by this one word. Share your story with Spotlight on how hearing that word at a time in your life when you really needed a "yes."

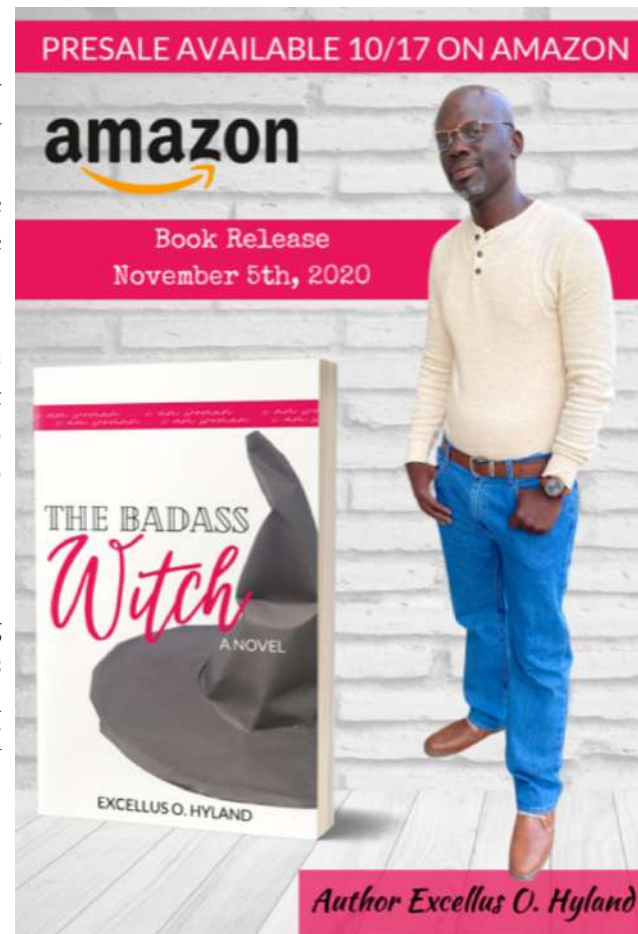
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## SPOTLIGHT ON BOOKS

Spotlight on Recovery loves to keep the writing family uplifted. Today I am introducing Excellus Hyland's new book, "The Badass Witch."

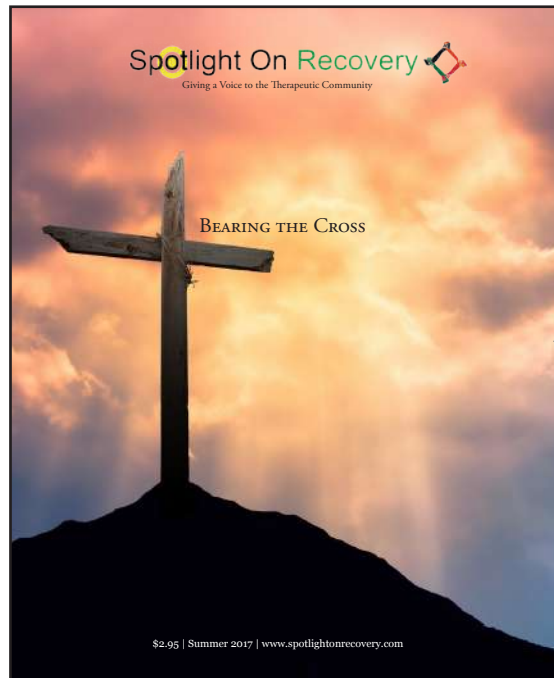
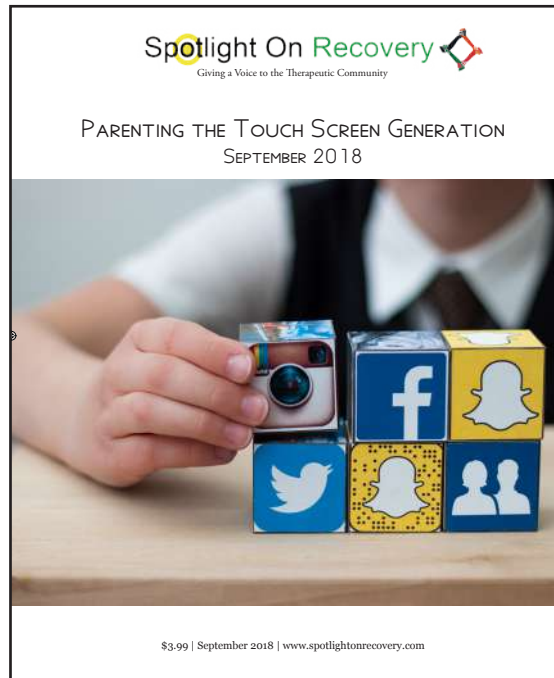
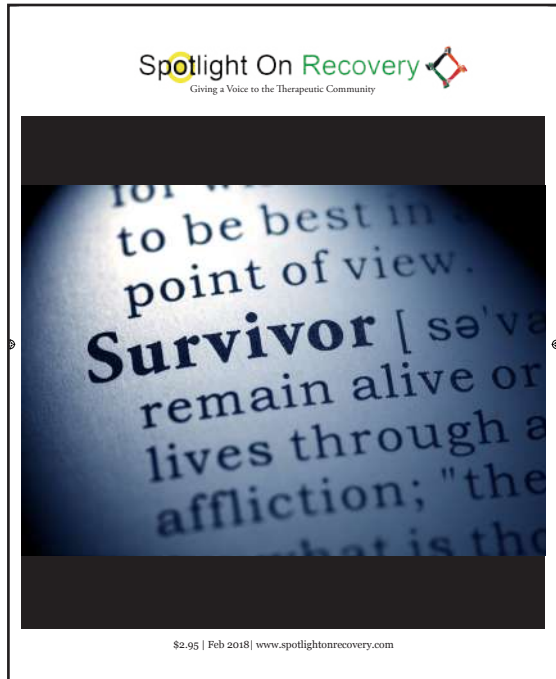
Excellus has been a contributing writer since 2018. We congratulate him on his new journey. The book is available now on Amazon.

About the book: Gwendolyn Thompson is an ambitious businesswoman with aspirations of becoming the youngest CEO of the company she works for, Armedia, Inc. In route to her goal, she meets Octave Royal, the heir of the company who could not help falling in love with the intelligent, outspoken, bold woman, but his attraction to her wasn't reciprocated. So, as her boss, in the midst of the #METOO MOVEMENT, he has to pursue her with precaution to prevent from ending up on a park bench with other former owners and executives saying, "Me too got me, too." This is a story of ambition and love in association with the history of women. "A BOOK EVERY WOMAN SHOULD READ."





# BACK ISSUES ARE AVAILABLE





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code: SHIPSPOR. Discounts and free shipping ends  
January 31, 2021.







# COMING SOON: THE DAY I GREW UP, PART 2

