

Spotlight On Recovery

Giving a Voice to the Therapeutic Community



FEELINGS

BY ANGEL RODRIGUEZ

Feelings, Feelings, Feelings, linked like emotions.

Waves of good, and miserable times. Loving, and hating life.
Searching for something, that takes a long time to find.
People putting labels, calling you names,
dropping their garbage in your heart and mind.

You don't even know your own identity,
so you start to think, they must be right.
Thoughts of suicide racing through your mind,
losing your grasp on humanity.

Isolating yourself from everyone.
Feeling lonely with no purpose.
Depression's getting a hold on your life.
Your loved ones have no idea what's going on.
They are concerned but don't know what to do.
So they pray for you.

I pray that you stop feeding on negativity.
I pray that you fall in love with the person you see in the mirror.
I pray that you discover what God has put into your heart.
I pray that you are strong enough to fight your fears
and not let them tear you apart.

I am a prisoner, writing this poetic, inspirational piece.
Sentenced to life, and overcame depression.
Like so many brothers and sisters who lost their way,
I've started a new mission.

My yester-years I cannot re-live.
But still I have much to give.
So my advice to you is to love your family, love your life,
and love your children.

Feelings, Feelings, Feelings, I feel like living.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Inside Cover Poem – Feelings, by Angel Rodriguez	2
Letter from the Publisher, by Robin Graham.....	4
The Best Advice, by Ana Gonzalez Ribeiro	5
Just Between You and Me, by Amy Nicholson.....	6
PARENTAL GUIDANCE	
The Best Advice My Parents Gave Me, by George Hopkins.....	8
The Best Advice My Parents Gave Me, by Alphonso Tanner	9
The Best Advice My Parents Gave Me, by Anthony Vinson.....	10
The Best Advice My Mother Gave Me, by Anthony Tate.....	11
The Best Advice My Parents Gave Me, by Damont Ewells.....	12
The Best Advice My Parents Gave Me, by Kenneth Andersen.....	14
LIFE EXPERIENCE	
The Best Advice My Parents Gave Me, by Zakiya “Kondo” Minwinyi	16
MENTORSHIP/FRIENDSHIP	
The Best Advice My Mentor Gave Me, by Nathan Gilbert	18
The Best Advice My Mentor Gave Me, by Victoria Rader.....	20
The Best Advice I Was Given, by Eddie Bailey.....	21
TEACHER’S ADVICE	
As A Mentor, I Teach My Students: Redefining What It Means to Be a Man, by Jeffrey L. Wright	22
Positive Lessons I’ve Learned From My School Teacher, by Troy Glover	24
An Unlikely Teacher Leaves a Lasting Impression, by Liz Quinn	25
Positive Things I’ve Learned From My Teacher, by Dominique Carson.....	27
Inside Back Cover - Mother’s Day Poem, by Anthony Billings	35

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

APRIL 2021

Dear Friends,

I believe that good advice comes from people who care about your well-being. If you refuse or dismiss advice, you are dismissing more than just a suggestion. You are dismissing the love, the support, the wisdom, and thoughtfulness.

A decision to accept or decline advice is sometimes based on how you are feeling at the time. You may feel that everyone is picking on you and you want to rebel. You may feel that people don't know what they're talking about. You may ask why now, where were these people when I was really struggling? You can always say thanks, but no thanks.

No one said that advice should be a one-way conversation. You can always open up during the sermon and give insight about the road you are walking on. People cannot read your mind. It could be that they're making assumptions, yes. However, they care about you. Trust me, you will know the difference between a person who cares about you and a person who's just blowing in your ear. No one is without a sense of right and wrong, but sometimes things can be blurred when you're under pressure.

Among other things, advice is FREE! No strings attached, just the best possible outcome. Again, if you decide not to take this free advice and everything turns out great, you now have your own advice, that you can freely give away.

I asked my team of writers to submit advice they received from a teacher, parent, or mentor. I don't believe anyone submitted advice they received from a person who did not love or care for them.

Sincerely,
Robin Graham
Robin Graham
Founder/Publisher



THE BEST ADVICE

BY ANA GONZALEZ RIBEIRO

As we go through life, family, friends, co-workers and even acquaintances will offer us advice at some point or another. Whether we accept their advice or not is our decision. Some advice might be good, other advice not so much. The important thing is always to follow our gut, our heart and what we think is best, but when we are not sure what to do, good advice can help us change our lives for the better.

Both my parents give me good advice, one thing my mom always tells me is, “Look ahead, there are many new horizons. There is always something better beyond. Don’t feel trapped in whatever situation you are in right now. A new door always opens to new opportunities.”

Whenever I feel down or trapped in a situation, I think of this teaching my mom has given me and realize that there are other ventures ahead. Whenever I feel down, this phrase helps me realize that I need to keep looking forward to what is ahead in life. I might feel trapped or down right now, but that is not a reason to stop trying for something better.

This teaching has helped me in job situations, my career and my personal life. It gives me hope and doesn’t let me fall in despair and just

throw my arms up in the air and give up. It gives me something to hold on to.

During these tumultuous times, where many families have been hit hard with unemployment, health issues, or the passing away of loved ones, it’s good to know that there is hope. It gives us a new perspective. Yes, we are going through difficulties, unprecedented but there is still hope for a better tomorrow. As dim and weary as things seem right now, we can still believe that there will be better things ahead for us and that we have grown from this tough experience. I think that as a society, we have learned a lot about ourselves, and our communities during these times and hopefully we will be better for it.

My hope is that we will be more giving, more patient, more loving. Hopefully, we will make changes on how we care for ourselves and how we value our families. I do believe things will change for the better. Many folks have shown their true colors during these stressful times. They have shown how generous and giving we can all be, how selfless and how united. These are the kind of human expressions, that give us all hope. The kinds of things that help us realize that yes there are many new horizons ahead.



JUST BETWEEN YOU AND ME

BY AMY NICHOLSON

I don't remember my parents giving me a lot of advice; not verbally anyway. They lived their lives with integrity. If anything, they've taught me by example. There was one valuable piece of advice my mom did give me, though. I remember it to this day. She told me that the only thing that mattered was what my husband and I said to each other. I don't even recall the context under which she was speaking. I don't remember if my husband and I were still dating at the time or if we were already married. But it doesn't really matter. The advice is just as important to me today as it was when she first said it. Maybe more so.

DJ and I started dating at age sixteen. We went out for seven years, and then we got married. We've been married for twenty-six years. We've had our share of disagreements. To be honest, most of them have been about money, how to spend it or how to save it. We still don't always see eye-to-eye, and when a conflict arises, it's not always easy to debate about it right away. Emotions can run high. Sometimes, either we go with his plan or we go with mine, and there is no compromise. Although the natural inclination might be to get on the phone and complain to a friend or get on social media and go on a rant, we don't. We don't take the issue outside our discussions with each other. We don't go to a third party and seek solidarity there. Sometimes we might have to take a deep breath and a couple hours away from the other person, but we dive right back into the difficult conversation and talk it out. It's not always easy, and sometimes one (or both) of us is not happy when the issue is finally resolved, but battling the tough things out together makes us stronger as a couple. And, remarkably, after twenty-six years, we've gotten better at handling conflict. Practice makes pretty good, right?

This is not the way of the world. The world would have us hop right on FaceBook or Twitter or whatever as soon as we were wronged and air every grievance for all the world to judge and add their own opinions. As unhealthy as it may be, some people seem

to thrive on hearing about the conflicts in the lives of others. Before we share personal issues with others, we should pause and ask ourselves if telling them will help our situation or exacerbate the problem. We should examine our motives for sharing such information.

When DJ and I started dating, cell phones didn't exist, much less social media. If we chose to seek outside advice in those early years when things got challenging in our relationship, we had family and friends to add their two cents. That's most likely what led my mom to give her advice to limit what mattered in an intimate relationship to the two individuals involved in that relationship. I'm glad I went into our marriage with that mindset long before social media. It has taught me to respect our bond and its sanctity. Now with the world's attention at our beck and call on the internet, a person can get advice--solicited or not--from just about anyone in the world if we allow them in.

The world will only know as much about my relationship as I will share with them. I think this is where some people find themselves on shaky ground. They share too much information on social media. I think we sometimes forget we have control over the personal information we share. Anyone can judge my husband if I invite them to do so. If I portray my husband as a horrible person, that's what people will believe. That is within my control. If I wanted to, I could say all kinds of terrible things about my spouse and gain a whole group of people on my side. So, I have to ask myself, do I want to bad-mouth my husband to the world? Is it something I might regret later? Even when we differ, he is still my best friend. In my experience, mom was right. Things are best worked out between the two of us -- only.

My husband told me early in our marriage that he never disparages me in conversations with his buddies. I believed him. I still do. Even when the other guys are complaining about their wives, DJ honors me with his words. Am I also honoring him in that way? I have to admit, it's easy to slip. Women love to gripe

about their husbands. It's almost a kind of sisterhood that develops when women sit around complaining about their husbands or boyfriends. But is it a sisterhood we want to foster? What's more important for me in my life? To fit in with the other women or to strengthen the relationship I have with the man I've pledged my life to? My goal is to be the best spouse I can be--the best friend I can be--to my husband.

How do we learn how to be a spouse? We watch our parents. I know I'm fortunate that mine have always been together. Growing up in a family, with strong role models, I learned how to be the wife I am today. My values were established early. My parents were each other's one and only. They still are. The same is true of my in-laws.

In addition, learning what to share with others and what to keep between my spouse and I has served me well in setting an example for our children. Although I do believe it's important not to hide every trial we have as a couple behind closed doors because it's vital for the kids to see us work through our difficulties, I try not to disparage my husband. The kids know I love and respect

him even when we don't agree. These experiences will serve to mold the way they treat their future spouses. If I am treating my husband--and my marriage--with respect, my children will pick up on that message and see where my values lie.

It takes courage to do things differently, to defy the status quo. What if we all tried? What if we kept our private lives, private? When my mom gave me that advice, she was talking about what DJ and I say to each other. She was telling me not to worry about what advice other people (including her) would give me. If I valued my relationship, nothing anyone else would say or do would be as important in my marriage as what was said between the two of us. She was telling me not to concern myself with what other people would say about me, or my husband. The only thing that matters was what we said to each other. Although sometimes the things we have to say to each other are things that might be difficult to hear, one thing is sure--they are spoken with love; sometimes tough love. I would rather hear a difficult word from my sweetheart than ten thousand words from a stranger.



THE BEST ADVICE MY PARENTS GAVE ME

BY GEORGE HOPKINS

I received many jewels in my lifetime, but none more important than when my father stressed me to never, use the word “can’t” when I speak of my abilities in life.

I heard that often as a child, growing up however, it just was not registering to me. But as an adult, I can value these words of advice much more. I now understand the power of Words – as John said, “In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was with God,” (John 1:1)

That is powerful, so much so, that if correctly used the sky can only be the limit, but if incorrectly used it can and will have an adverse effect on our minds – ultimately reshaping our future from the destruction of our thoughts.

So it is exigent to be careful of the Words we use because those Words can have an everlasting impact that creates doubt. And doubt will choke the life out of you. It kills everything in its path... Now I can see why my father was so adamant with not using the word “can’t,” because it leads to doubt, and when all is said and done that equates to death!

We can unconsciously stifle our growth and development; our hopes, dreams and aspirations (be it physically, mentally and spiritually) simply by the use of one word – “can’t.” And from that doubt seeps in,. The Bible equates doubt to a “lack of faith,” (Matt.14:23-33) and if you read those verses, you will see that when Peter lost faith, he began to doubt and eventually started sinking in the sea.

In a nutshell, this is what happens to us if and when we carefully use the word “can’t” in our vocabulary.



THE BEST ADVICE MY PARENT'S GAVE ME

BY ALPHONSO TARODD TANNER

The elementary that holds true are things at times we feel that when we make a decision, our decision is what we feel is right. No matter what others think or feel. But, when we have a governed person like your parents and they tell us something we consider it as well, out of respect and love for that parental bond. But, not me! I always felt the whole world was against me. So, by the time I was 14, I had experienced some of the worst tragedy in my life.

I grew up loving the ignorance of using drugs and staying out late to shield myself from Momma Angel R. Tanner's yelling at me to 'stay out them streets!' "There's nothing good going to come from it! You're going to end up in prison for the rest of your life!" But, in my mind, nothing good would come from staying home either.

Why? Because we had a hood hustling house, or rather bootleg house. We sold quarter single cigarettes, dollar shot moonshine, soul food plates, and soups in the winter. To top it off, we had a swinging roomer house in the back yard. So, the life of crime was at my doorstep. I was stumbling up the porch, when most of the cats my age were jumping off the porch.

In reality, no one in my house would lie on me and steal or cheat me out of my happiness. However, those in the streets did. The friends I supposedly had, set me up with the cops. The wild untamed girls broke my heart. Once again, my mom sat me down and told me, "Son, one day those people are going to get you in that jail system and I'm not going to be able to help you." I should've listened to my ole girl. I'm experiencing that right now as I write this article. I'm serving an illegal sentence and conviction and if my mother was still alive, I'd have someone put it in the media and have something done about it. But, she told me, "Son, when you feel nobody loves you, God does." Now I see that the advice she gave me is genuine and pure like an Ebony tree. Her essence always shines forward and I always can stipulate on these things every day.

My dad, Harold Minnis told me one day, "Son, trouble is easy to get into, but hard as a rock to get out of." He had been to prison for 10 years. However, in my mind, I was like, I got money for bond and to get a lawyer, so how hard is that? So, I continued with my street life, his advice going in one ear and out the other. My dad said to me one day, while he was edging up my Afro, "Son, you don't want to end up in prison like me or with me. You'll experience some of the most racist hatred and misery known to man, and conniving individuals of all races." Yet, I still didn't listen, until one day, he was cutting my hair in prison, and trimming my beard because my Afro was gone and a bald spot grew. My dad was the Master Barber and he cut all the officer's hair because he had been in and out of prison. My dad said, "Tell me, you thought we was just yelling at you to control you huh?" I said, "Yeah, Pops." I kissed his cheek, picked up my prayer rug from the next empty chair, and told him I love him and went to Jumah.

As I do a quick rewind of things I could have done better if I would have paid heed to the wisdom that was being thrown my way. My mom and dad's advice are now jewels that I wear around my neck. I will always remember The Best Advice My Parents Gave Me. Pops up when I feel the world is against me, when I begin to blame others for me being in prison. When I feel down and use prayer to recharge.

To the people who feel like their parents or anyone who is looking out for your best interest should mind their business, please know that when someone gives you advice that it is a support system in words for your well-being. Don't put a description in the way it's coming, just consider the reality of the words and contemplate on it so it will sink in. As we go through out struggles in life, and seem to be combative to the positive because when we tried that it never worked, there's always a reason to listen, really two reasons. You have two ears, and you hear the words of wisdom two times. So make sure you listen.

THE BEST ADVICE MY PARENTS GAVE ME

BY ANTHONY VINSON

The best advice my parents gave me was to never get involved with drugs, gangs, or guns because it will take something that can never be replaced, family and freedom.

It was advice that I should have taken seriously, when I had the opportunity. Stepping up to share about the advice my parents gave me, I see how powerful that advice is to me now. I started to care about myself for a change. I took AA classes, (Alcoholics Anonymous), Anger Management and Self-help classes to better myself in order to make room for change. That advice saved my life and that's why I'm here right now, writing about it.

Truthfully, I have done a lot of things that I am not proud of, but listening to advice has moved me to growth in maturing. I wish to seek forgiveness from the

people I hurt in the midst of my trials and tribulations.

Parents play a big part in their children's lives. They give good advice daily to help their child grow into the future. Hope in giving good strong advice is one thing, but it becomes a great thing when you are able to see a person grow from that advice.

My parents gave me other advice as well, like how to respectfully talk to people, this helped me more times than I can count. Advice is knowledge, which is power, if you use it properly in your life. Live and learn from the advice that you receive and take heed to my story.

You are never too young or too old to take positive, good, self-helping advice in your life and you are never too young or too old to give good advice.



THE BEST ADVICE MY MOTHER GAVE ME

BY ANTHONY TATE

Dear Readers,

I pray that my article finds each and every one of you in good health and spirit, your family also. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed all of our lives forever! Please wear your mask and keep social distance!

I will always remember 2020. My mother went on her home journey, August 4, 2020.

R.I.P. Mama. God Bless You!

That makes this topic real special to me, as a matter of fact, when I received it from Spotlight on Recovery Magazine, I took it as a good omen.

The Best Advice My Parent's Gave Me –

First, let me say that I barely knew my father. I knew who my father was, (R.I.P.), but he wasn't around much. I can count the times on my hands, but I never held that against him. As it happens, all of my best advice came from my mother. At the time, I didn't think it was good advice, Ha! Ha! You know how it is when you're young, and nobody can tell you nothing. Now that I look back, I now know that it was the best advice that a mother could ever give her child. This is the part that stands out in my mind, she told me, "After I'm gone, I want you to look out for your brother."

At this moment in time, I sit and write to you, this is a very profound statement in my life. That's the main reason why this topic means so much to me. I'm living this topic out right, now with my mom gone. I'm constantly worrying about my brother, it's hard to look after him from behind these prison walls and

some things he doesn't understand. However, it's my job to teach him. I put my hurt aside to concentrate on his pain, that's part of the best advice that my mother gave me, (It was Sound Advice). On the other side of that coin, she always told me to keep my head up and always stand strong! "Be a man, son," she would say. That advice will always be a part of me, (Mines to keep forever in my heart).

To my brother's and sister's out there, stand strong through these troubling times. I know that some of you out there have lost loved ones through these troubling times, and my heart goes out to you all. I mean that sincerely.

"Stand strong," through this adversity, think about that (Best Advice), that someone might have given you. They could be a mentor, a family member, or your parents. Let that advice carry you on to victory and when the storm turns to a drizzle of rain, believe me, you will be a better person. Whenever you think about that old storm, your heart will rejoice and be glad. That's what adversity and good advice can do for you when you fight through it.

"When life throws a curve ball at you pick up that same ball and throw a strike back at life!" That was some of the best advice that my mother gave me, because of her advice, I am a better man, and person.

Thank you for letting me share with you, a part of me. Writing is therapy for me.

Please wear your facemask, and don't forget to social distance my dear readers.

THE BEST ADVICE MY PARENTS GAVE ME

BY DAMONT EWELLS

All too well, we know the “Old Sayings,” or clichés that we’ve heard growing up, either from our parents or other family members. While some sayings were based on traditional superstitions, others were jewels to grow on. As funny and sometimes poetic, as they may have sounded to us as children, they were always meant to be the helpful advice of a loved one. Unfortunately for me, I lost my father as a young boy. After his passing, my uncles and aunts helped my mother raise me. I relied mostly on my uncles for the manly advice until my mother later remarried.

Since I was a “Mama’s Boy,” my step-pops and I weren’t really close until I was older. A Mama’s Boy in the hood? You can imagine how much I was picked on, with the constant hazing of my uncles. I grew some thin skin pretty quick. I became temperamental and the teasing turned into fights. Then the fights turned into jail, which seemed to become habitual.

I was caught in that revolving door and my life was wasting away. My mentality was volatile and anger became my go-to reaction in stressful situations. By the time I realized that my idea of liberty cost too much, I had missed the prime of my adult life being locked away. This was all because of irrational decisions. It was time to find a better way, but I didn’t know where to look or how to find it. From my perspective, the world was against me, so I searched for a better view.

I searched my memory for advice I’d been given that may have helped in this area. I remembered something said to me by my step-pops after he was released from prison. It seemed ironic to get advice from him on staying out of jail since he was fresh out, but it was a real jewel. “If you wanna stay out’a jail, eliminate the risk of going.” And, “that unnecessary violence only makes you the enemy,” he said.

I didn’t understand how to process this information. Growing up in a place and time where

being violent meant survival, this advice was foreign to me then.

“Unnecessary violence, what you mean pops?” I asked.

“Well Damont,” he began. “You will stop going to jail when you stop putting yourself in situations where jail is an option. And if your options are always limited to using violence as a solution, jail will always be the equation.” “See boy, violence is only a solution to the one that ain’t got no options. That’s why I said ‘unnecessary’, because there’s always a way around that. If you spend your time chasing knowledge, instead of the illusion of liberty, you’d always have more options.” He stopped to see if it was sinking in and continued. “Look at it this way, Damont. We are God’s perfect computer and our mind is the data processor. The decisions we make are based on the level of information we have stored in our database. Attaining knowledge builds your database. We make stupid decisions because we don’t know enough about the situation. The more data, the bigger the database, the bigger the database, the more options there are. Just think about it, son.” “If you knew better, you’d do better.”

Although his words resonated with me, it would be years before I truly understood his advice. As a gang member, I’d grown accustomed to dealing with stressful situations with violence. Time, and time again I’ve heard “only the strong survive,” so in my eyes, the most violent was the strongest. Before I knew it, I’d grown into my “Gorilla Suit” with a point to prove. I was physically at war with the world and my ego made me believe that I had to win the war to find peace. My pride had blinded me to the reality that I was only at war with myself. I kept bumping my head because I was trying to win a mental war through physical means.

Then all of a sudden, while sitting in my cell one day, it hit me. My step-father’s advice became

crystal clear to me. It's a thinking man's game and I've been playing the game with the wrong set of rules. I needed a bigger database. My step-father's advice didn't become invaluable until I realized it was my ego that was stunting my mental growth. My ego was restricting my ability to retain or utilize the information I was attaining. Although I wanted better, I didn't want to be better. In truth, I was so comfortable in my stinkin' thinkin' that I was scared of change.

I didn't want to appear weak by growing a moral compass, so I avoided myself. My journey began when I decided to be better. I started searching for better information, more knowledge. It didn't take long to learn that a better way could only be found at the sacrifice of my ego. So, I hung up my "Gorilla Suit" and got serious about my search. I had walked around thinking

I was "game tight," but in all my blind arrogance, I kept allowing myself to be tricked by my ego into forfeiting my peace of mind and piece of liberty in exchange for oppressive bondage and a suppressed sense of self, and I was scared to change this?

I guess when you're use to having limited options, you're okay with viewing the world through a cracked lens. It's funny though. We never expect change when we start our search, but change is inevitable because with knowledge comes growth. Now, after you've grown, when you feel a situation may call for your "Gorilla Suit," you try it on and it won't fit no more. The change had started. I began to see alternatives to using violence when it wasn't necessary. My situations were no longer stressful. Yea, options... I get it now. My step-pops gave me a jewel.



THE BEST ADVICE MY PARENTS GAVE ME

BY KENNETH ANDERSEN

The best advice my parents gave me, and the day I grew up was when I was twenty-two years old. I remember the situation well, I had just graduated from the Army Rangers Medic School. Once a soldier passes basic training, an individual can choose specialized schools. They offered me a myriad of special skills training, including auto-mechanics, computer and communications and medical.

I was anticipating that my first assignment would be in the United States of America, as it was said in training that they often kept you in the states to further advance your experience. This is why I panicked when my orders from command suggested Iraq.

Being deployed to Iraq was certainly a shock for both me and my girlfriend. Especially when I was considered to be “new boots,” and normally given stateside assignments for on the job training before going to hostile encounters.

Prior to leaving, I asked a friend to drive me, and my girl to see my parents. Leaving Texas, on the way back home to Colorado, I was sitting in the front passenger seat letting the friendly chatter turn into a noiseless sound as I was deep in thought watching the scenery fly by; the autumn colored leaves were still

bright on the trees, the wind that whistled outside of the car had a chill.

All my expectations have become indistinguishable. As I peered out, arriving into my home town, I remembered I said to myself, “we arrived,” but it felt different. Everything was still the same, it felt homey, but I felt unbalanced as if I didn’t belong here any longer. I realized that I am different, I am now grown-up, my new transformation from the training has given me a feeling of responsibility. I didn’t see it materialize while it was happening, I guess I was so busy in my training exercises that I was following a path that was ingrained into me when I was young.

My father was in the Army Corps of Engineering, from hearing his stories and adventures that prepared him to become an engineer gave me inspiration to do the same. Instead of being an engineer, I wanted to help people in emergency medical needs.

I felt good coming home before departing for Iraq. I wanted to introduce my sweetheart to my parents and family, and it was a great homecoming after so much was happening so fast. I was not feeling comfortable as my plans that I dreamt of, are going in a different direction. This reminded me of a Beatle’s



song my father sang to me called, "Beautiful Boy." The lyrics of, "While you are making plans, life occurs in the meantime," by John Lennon.

As I was still reminiscing, my father broke the silence by shaking my hand and pulling me in for a big hug. He saw my nervousness, and asked, "what's on your mind Charlie?" At first, I didn't respond, my throat felt dry and tight, I looked down at the firm grasp he had on my hand and as he gently shook me in his embrace, I felt the unconditional love and trust.

I managed to croak out, "Dad, I'm scared." He guided me and my guest over to the living room and summoned my mother, brother and sister from the kitchen. They all filed into the room and we shook hands, hugged and I introduced my girlfriend to everybody. My father came in with a tray of beers, handing them out with a big smile on his face. I dropped down on the couch, as if my knees came unbuckled. They all stood for a moment then they found their own seats.

My father said, "I got your e-mail, so happy you came up here! I understand how you feel! I was nervous when the Army sent my unit into Germany at the end of World War II to rebuild. Both mom and I were afraid. I was going to be separated from her, she was pregnant with your older brother." My mother was sitting close and added, "It's normal to feel anxious of changes, however, it is because we fear the unknown." As she paused, my older brother said, "I bet you had anxiety during basic training, those feeling have passed, in fact, that same training you got is going to save your life."

We all clank the bottles of our beers, and my sister said, "Cheers," appropriately. The Army obviously knows you can do it. You have met their challenges and made high scores on your test," my brother pointed out. I started to feel better. My eyes were watery with good spirits. "I know, but..." I was interrupted, "but nothing son, the Army makes sure you had the best training. As a medic, soldiers will look to you and not question your knowledge, when you are in the time of need, your training will be automatic."

My sister said, "it's understandable you fear death, there is a lot of hostility towards our armed

forces, the people who live in Iraq need peace." I looked up out of my gaze towards my family and realized they supported me and they were worried about my well being too. My dad said, "We're proud of you, just remember that anxiety is natural when we feel frightened, the body is getting prepared for a change. Fortunately, you are well trained to encounter opposition and you will know how to deal with it when the time comes." "I didn't actually fight in combat," my dad continues. "We were sent there to rebuild the bridges that were destroyed, so Germany could start to rebuild. I know you are going to see and experience things that nobody should see. I can't tell you because I didn't see it happen. Yet I saw the destruction, Germany was mangled. I couldn't help but to feel the terror." Then he turned towards me with a firm, strong and tough stare and said, "don't let it make you bitter, remember why you wanted to become a medic, because that will never change."

That moment was tender, he looked at my girlfriend and said, "That's my little boy, although he's all grown up, I still see him as my little boy," and smiled.

I completed six years in the military, complete three tours, got married during the course. Every time I came home from Iraq, I met my same big loving family. After retiring from the military, I worked as a trainer for paramedics at the nation's largest Ambulance Company.

One day, I received a frantic call. My father had a heart attack. I arrived at the hospital's emergency room. The hospital knew me because of my profession. After meeting with the doctor, I went to see my father.

I sat next to my father and said, "Dad, it's me, Charlie. Don't be scared dad," just like what my parents told me, my training automatically kicked in. I reached over, took his hand and smiled at him with a reassuring smile, "We are all here to help you get through this one." "Dad, you once gave me some advice about fear, remember? It is the fear of the unknown, you gave me strength when I needed it, it's my turn to give it back to you."

Later that year, he had a triple by-pass that allowed him to live another 23 years. The surgeon said it would only be 10 more years.

THE BEST ADVICE MY PARENT'S GAVE ME

BY ZAKIYA "KONDO" MIWINYI

Since birth, I was a ward of the State of Tennessee: as a result, I had experience with foster, group, and adoptive parents, and the number one lesson all of these parents combined have taught me is to be self-reliant.

The day I was born, I was placed into the custody of an elderly white couple from Pulaski, Tennessee. Although the couple were not racist by any means, due to Pulaski, Tennessee being the birthplace of the Tennessee chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, this couple could not care for me for long. Therefore, I was shipped from home to home inside the Youth Villages Foster Care system until I turned three-years old in which I was placed on the hit

T.V. show Murray, by the State of Tennessee (Western Division) Children Services. Weeks later I was adopted, by a newly married African-American couple down in Dyersburg, Tennessee.

I remember going to school and having to fight the other kids because of the outdated clothes my adoptive parents made me wear. When I would complain to my parents about my school and neighborhood situations, they would do nothing. Therefore, I learned what self-reliance meant.

As I began to fight back, I became quite effective in one on one and two on one combats. Consequently



the more people I fought and won against, the more and more people would jump on me, and being that I was adopted into a family with no male siblings my age, I had to stand up for myself the best way possible.

When I turned eight, my adoptive parents split up and I went into the custody of my adoptive mother. Not having a father figure around anymore, I took over as the man of the house. Therefore, I had to be the one to make sure my adoptive mother was taken care of because she was going through a deep depression, which later on led to the Tennessee Department of Children Services taking me away from her when I was thirteen.

The Department of Children Services placed me in a co-ed group home. In this group home, I watched kids around me receive gifts, visits, and special home passes with their family members, while no one ever came to check up on me.

At times, I felt like killing myself, the world does not care about me and etc., this led to me fighting several boys within the group home and getting shipped to a worse facility.

Eventually, my adoptive mother signed over her rights as my mother which made the State of Tennessee my full legal guardian, this tore me down bad. But, I had to learn with the pain independently, which has made me self-reliant even today while I continue to suffer behind bars, from lack of family support, with a two-year old biological son on the outside whom I have never seen. He's in the care of my adoptive mother. The court system granted her legal custody over my son despite her signing her rights over me away when I was thirteen, despite us not having a conversation nor seen each other since I was thirteen.

In order to overcome this situation, I must be self-reliant, by realizing what I need to do to escape my mental and physical conditions, and what I must do to continue educate/involve myself in fields that interest me the most, for example:

Personal experience writing allows me to escape my mental and physical conditions by giving me the outlet I need to get the majority of my daily life issues off my chest. I learned how to write about my feelings back when I was in Elementary School, when my teacher would have us write about daily topics that she would assign to us on her dry erase board. After we have written about the topic on the board, she would make us discuss our topics in front of the class, then she would grade us based on our written and oral presentation.

I did not know then, but I was in training for my future life career, granted that, I learned how to express myself back in elementary, which carried on into my adult life now.

More so, over the years I have written several Non-fiction and Fiction books, poems, scripts, songs, business plans, and articles that I plan to publish soon. For now, I'm receiving the tools I will need to be more self-reliant from books like: *Writer's Market*, *Writer's Digest*, and *PEN American Center: Handbook for Writer's in Prison*; which is filled with ways to improve one's writing skills, without having to pay a teacher to teach you, therefore you can be self-reliant and learn at your own pace.

Writing has truthfully humbled me by allowing me to have a voice on paper, in which I can be heard and hopefully change someone else's life for the better. I feel that my voice is a powerful tool that can move mountains. As a result, I will continue to use my voice to enact positive change in society, and overcome my current state of imprisonment.

Lastly, I am the only biological parent that my child has left. Knowing that I am the only one I can turn to regarding my child, failure is not an option for me, so I will continue to implement success in my life long career path, and build a legacy that my son can look to and be proud of his father for.

This is the best advice my parent's a/k/a life has given me.

THE BEST ADVICE MY MENTOR GAVE ME

BY NATHAN GILBERT

I had to think about this one. Growing up I never had decent parents or a mentor to give me advice. Everyone was either committing crimes or using drugs or alcohol. After some thought, one person came to mind that made an important impact on my life. The crazy part is I met this individual through prison. Despite the perception that people incarcerated are no good, you do meet some that are wise and one can learn from them.

I was young when I got put into the system with a horrible outlook on life, and an even more horrible little man tough attitude. Hard headed and wanted to make a name for himself attitude. Pretty much, being a d—k. Excuse my language, but looking back that's what it was. I always had this habit where I wanted to change and do better, yet chose the wrong people to do it with. So when things would go wrong, I'd give up.

I'm not sure what made me go up and ask this person if I could play chess with him. Bored I guess. We never really talked before. After the formalities, he noticed the type of people saying 'what's up' to me, and his next choice of words were the start of a new beginning for me. He simply asked me, "What kind of life do you want?"

Now, I've been high most of my life or drunk committing crimes, so I never had the chance to soberly think about this question. He then told me, "Look around you kid. Look at where you're at, the people you're surrounding yourself with. Do you think they care if you're incarceration is longer? Do they care about the people you lost due to crime and drugs? Is any of this worth it to you?"

Those questions had me really thinking the next few weeks. All I could think about was what kind of life do I want. The one thing I knew, was what I didn't want. The lifestyle I was living. I started falling back from the people and distancing myself from the

negative I seemed to find. Signed up for vocational class and did little tasks that little by little bettered myself. I took living a better life more seriously.

I'm not going to lie, it was difficult at times to be out of the way and learning to swallow my pride and look at the bigger picture. I started to notice I was around less people but people who strived to have a better life. That's one thing I did discover, if you're serious about changing, surround yourself with people that also desire to change. You tend to build each other up. Be around people that not only believe in themselves, but also see your true potential.

If you hang with the old crowd, they only expect you to live a certain way, a certain lifestyle. You can never grow as the person you desire or grow in the life you want. If you're serious about a positive life, be serious about a positive you.

This is all coming from someone who never valued himself. A person who has the biggest heart yet used it for the wrong people. A person who said, "To hell with trying;" because I kept failing. I didn't fully try until that complete stranger came into my life and asked me the ultimate question we all deep down ask... What Kind of Life do I Want?

As of today, I am nowhere near the person I was. I extend my heart to those who had added positivity to my life and no longer have that "little man complex." You can do the same. If you feel as if you don't have positive people in your life or burnt bridges with them, show them by action that you're serious about a new life. People tend to view our lifestyle by the people we surround ourselves with, so fall back and get a feel for people. If they're going towards goals you desire, extend your hand out.

Just as my mentor was a stranger that believed in me, I extend my hand out to all of you reading this

saying, I BELIEVE IN YOU. I HAVE FAITH IN YOU, simply knowing you want a better life by reading this magazine. You would not have taken the time to do that if you didn't have the desire to change or continue to change.

Keep your eyes on the goals you crave and never give up on yourself. When circumstances change, the

main question will remain the same: What Kind of Life do You Want?

Please continue to believe in yourself, continue to live life without giving up, and most importantly, continue to love yourself.



Solving All Your Printing Needs...

*Business Cards • Flyers • Journals
Banners • Plaques • Magnets*

And A Whole Lot More!

Flatbush Copy Center, Inc.
2149 Utica Avenue • Brooklyn, NY 11234
718-434-3643 • (F) 718-434-3672
orders@flatbushcopycenter.com
www.flatbushcopycenter.com

Spring Sale
through June 2021

*Full Page
Ad \$87.50*

*Interested in
Advertising?*

Contact Robin Graham
347-831-9373

Subscriptions:

\$25 for 1 year \$40 for two years

Bulk orders are
12 copies \$30.00
20 copies are \$50.00
30 copies are \$60.00
50 copies are \$125.00

Add \$5.95 for shipping and handling of all bulk orders

Contact Robin Graham
347-831-9373

THE BEST LESSON I LEARNED FROM A MENTOR

BY VICTORIA RADER

When I was sixteen years old I started my first job at a factory. I was married and had a four-month old son. My sister-in-law who was already working in this factory helped me secure a position.

On my first day at the factory, I was taken to a sewing machine, where I learned to sew fingers onto jersey gloves. The company I worked for was called, The Indianapolis Glove Company. It was my very first job in a factory. I was a very hard worker, so I thought.

One day after I had been there for about three months, the main boss came to my station and just watched me sew. After all my hard work, getting out four bundles a day, which equaled seventy-two pairs of gloves, I thought I was doing well. Finally, she told me I was doing good work and hardly ever got any back for repair, however I needed to get out more production. I told her I was getting out all I could. She told me “no, you are not and if you don’t increase your daily amount, I will have to let you go.” Now let me tell you, that hurt.

I asked her to please tell me what I have to do to increase my output. She said she knew I was working very hard and trying and she would tell me what I

needed to do. “If you push yourself to get out ten extra pairs of gloves a day, I am sure you can make it.”

Everyday, she would come by and see how I did. I pushed myself and was worn out at the end of the day, but I got those ten extra pair of gloves completed. Finally, I hit the quota for the day, I was ecstatic and she came around the next day and congratulated me. I am glad I never gave up and had a boss that encouraged me.

I didn’t stop there, I keep pushing, because when you got over the quota you started making more money. It was piece work and I liked that extra money. While I was there, I signed up for other jobs, and got them and always made quota.

The factory is no longer there. I spent five years with the Indianapolis Glove Company and I loved it.

Later on, every new job I ever got in different factories, if they had piece work I always made quota. To this day I have always been a hard worker and never gave up, all because of my first boss who never gave up on me.



THE BEST ADVICE I WAS GIVEN

BY EDDIE L. BAILEY

The best advice I received came from a friend recently when I was about to explode and do something stupid. I was stressing real hard lately about how the police keep killing black men and now Breonna Taylor. My friend told me to never allow myself to stress over things that I have no control over, or the power to change. He also told me to never permit myself to stress over things that does not directly affect me personally. He said to me, "You are only human, not some super hero. You have no control over all the tragedies that has plagued the world. It makes no difference if it was caused by a human being or caused by Mother Nature." He told me to "Allow God to deal with the people who are doing evil deeds for the devil."

Karma is definitely real and it will take its course no matter if we witness it or not. God has his own way of punishing us for our sins. He does it in his way and in his own time. Now, I understood the logic behind my friends advice, and it couldn't have come at a better time in my life because I have police around me every day. There are good ones and bad ones. My mind had taken off on some negative thoughts.

Did I want to hear this advice? To be honest, No! Now, did I listen to it? Yes! So, allow me to elaborate as I convey my views and thoughts to you with pen and paper. I am a realist and strongly believe what's good for the chicken is also good for the rooster. What I mean by that is this, a man was sentenced to 65 years, for breaking into a home where he stole a universal T.V. remote control. A man was sentenced to 40 years, for DUI. (Driving Under the Influence), road rage and reckless driving. Another man received a life sentence for killing a police dog that was unleashed on him. I can go on, and on with examples to prove my point, but I feel that the readers and people who aren't reading this article already know. We see the videos of the police officers on several occasions gunning down black men and getting away with murder. What makes the police any different from the citizen of Society.

These recordings clearly show the police were

wrong and that they were the ones who committed a crime. Yet, nothing is happening to the killers. Now, that they killed Breonna Taylor, and her family was compensated with 12 million dollars for the loss of her life, but where is the justice for Breonna Taylor's life?

I am so afraid for my sisters and brothers because it seems as if the police have a license to kill Black people and get away with it. Do Black Lives Matter? If so, to whom? It's obvious that Black Lives Don't Matter to the Justice Department. Where is the justice for Gray, Walter, Martin, Scott, Floyd, and now Taylor? The justice that the foundation of this country stands on, that they so proudly pledge, "LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL."

It's now apparent that this constitution is only for a certain clientele and if you are not considered to be in that reign then all you will get is "Just Us," but no real justice.

Now, I am sure there are some things that can be done to have better police officers serving our communities. They can provide better background checks on incoming officers. They need to dig a little deeper into the person's past because none of the corrupt cops are wearing the word 'racist' on their forehead.

I don't want people to get it twisted, because there are some good people who are police officers and they really do want to do their job and help people instead of hurt them. So understand that my venting is only at the corrupt police officers and the judicial system.

My friend's advice was sane, and I must admit it's very hard for me to follow his advice but it's good to have a friend like him when I'm going through it mentally. We are all going through it mentally, and I hope you too have a friend you can talk it over with before your negative thoughts get the best of you because Black Lives Do Matter in Every Way!!!

AS MENTOR, I TEACH MY STUDENTS: REDEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MAN

BY JEFFREY L. WRIGHT

Quite often when many participants first begin attending the self-improvement programs offered by the Department of Corrections, they walk through the door with different ideas about what they intend to receive from the groups.

Some are only there for the certificate needed for meeting parole or community release requirements. Others may attend to get out of their cells, and a whole host of other reasons besides seeking the help many believe they even need, much less want. So as a Peer Mentor, which is a polished student rather than a teacher, I've learned that it's of the utmost important to somehow redefine for the participants what it means to be a man. This is something not so easy to achieve in a prison setting where everyone is supposed to be hyper-masculine, invulnerable and impenetrable.

No one wants to appear soft, so it becomes my responsibility to help them gradually understand the importance of shedding the masks most of us wear on the outside for everyone else to see, and feel so safe to hide behind. Once they begin to settle in and accept the fact that their greatest strength lies in their ability to acknowledge weakness they begin to buy into the idea. They begin to acknowledge that it is within the group where we acquire the strength we need for building strong character that shall enable us to push our way through the resistances and up and coming obstacles lying ahead for all of us on our path to recovery, and road to self-discovery.

The truth is that because most of the mates who fill up the prisons throughout the U.S. have become desensitized and partially dehumanized by this culture of hyper-masculinity where boys are indoctrinated during our earliest developmental years to believe that we are supposed to be sufferers, but who are seen as weak and feminine for displaying any soft emotions.

We are discouraged at the earliest ages by a society of parents, teachers, coaches, athletes, entertainers, and actors on movie screens from being what our society has called, "men who are in touch with their feminine side," as if the softer emotions being reserved for women is somehow in accordance with the natural order of things. Because these emotions are not properly perceived as those that make one a more holistic and complete human being, most misinformed males grow up to be husbands, fathers, and leaders, who are more inhuman than human.

Emotionally fragmented individuals who especially shy away from and deny having feelings of fear, vulnerability, helplessness, uncertainty, loneliness, and end with an inability to feel empathy for those capable of experiencing all of the above.

Therefore, as a mentor I hope to convey to the participants of:

Anger Management, Domestic Violence, Embracing Fatherhood, Good Intentions, Bad Choices, and all the other self-improvement programs, that in order for any real and lasting inner-transformation to occur, they're going to have to force themselves to move beyond the fear of vulnerability and experiencing of emotions they may have never even felt before.

The subject of feelings in prison is unpopular and a very slippery slope to traverse – especially since the common disbelief of prisoners is that the easiest way to cope and survive in prison is to live inside one's head, and as far away from the heart as possible.

Therefore, letting go of the "tough guy" persona, and dropping the façade so that one can receive the maximum therapeutic value that the programs have to offer is the fundamental task. This road we invite them to take is primarily centered around getting the message across to the participants that in order for them to get

help, they must prepare themselves for the pain involved with uncovering things about who they are that aren't so pretty. Like one of my Tier 4 counselors used to say, "You Can't Save Your Face and Your _ _ _ at the same time!"

Getting the care of one's issues is like peeling back the layers of an onion. It brings tears.. If I had a Mentor Mantra, it would probably something like this:

A Mentor's Mantra:

The only time we have is now! This very moment of this very day is all that's been granted for making the changes in our lives that need to be made. So, let's live and be present in every moment of life with the sense of urgency that reminds us it just may be our very last.

Let's prepare ourselves right here and now as we move towards the Winter phase of our lives, holding onto no regrets for not having utilized our time wisely – because there is no greater misfortune than failing to seize every opportunity for growth and advancement that the winds of Fortune have blown our way.

Until one develops the sense of urgency that helps them to see change as a matter of life and death, then no true and lasting inner-transformation can occur.

However, as we persevere with this sense of urgency, let us also remain hyper-aware of the importance of practicing patience so that spiritual benefit we've sown finds us while we still possess sound mind and body. Patience is needed for having the self-restraint to remain well composed whenever our desired outcomes

don't eventually materialize, which will in turn generate the inner-peace and, contentment sought after in the "Serenity Prayer" that helps us to "accept the things we cannot change, have the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

This makes it much easier to develop the flexibility, elasticity, or as some might say the adaptability essential for coping with most of all emotionally, life's changing tides. The discomfort and pain produced by the unpredictability, uncertainty, and losses sometimes brought about by adverse circumstances often call upon us to readjust and realign ourselves with life on its terms; so that we never again lose faith and hope in a brighter tomorrow.

In closing, I would like to say that achieving some semblance of heightened self-awareness and emotional equilibrium is a process. Without the help of elder, more, wise and experience individuals in our lives, the desire to achieve such a state may not take root within many until one has endured and overcome tremendous amounts of suffering, and passed through a series of painstaking transformations.

"One repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil." – Frederich Nietesch

As a mentor, I hope I've become skillful enough at passing on the skill of showing the participants how to become empathic thinkers who can in turn show others how to become better students who evolve into more thorough and well-informed teachers.

Thank you.

This issue of Spotlight on Recovery has been designed by:



POSITIVE LESSONS I'VE LEARNED FROM MY SCHOOL TEACHER

BY TROY GLOVER

“Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.”

That rhyme was a common catch phrase many of my elementary classmates would use whenever someone said hurtful things to us. It seems simple. It is straightforward. I mean, sticks and rocks are physical matter, so they can hurt the body. Words are immaterial, so they can't hurt anything. Right? Even a seven-year old can grasp that concept. However, the real power of words is a lot more complex than playing the dozens. That is what my fourth grade teacher Ms. Kimbreaux taught me many years ago.

I had participated in a bout of teasing with a small group of boys, all of whom I considered friends. We were making fun of Chuck, a slightly overweight one of the bunch. Everything was going fine until my little Lord-of-the-Flies clan turned on me. I tried to stand strong under their pelting assault of verbal quips, such as: “Troy's shoes are holey” and “Troy's hair is nappy,” I flung the mantra, “Sticks and stones will break my bones” before me like a trusty shield. But, the little rug rats were relentless. When they came up on a rhyming tease, “Troy, Troy, the doo, doo boy,” I broke. Tears from my eyes like the scattering drops of water from a shower head. The wail of a Banshee burst from my heart and escaped my lips louder than an air raid siren. I ran away from the little gremlins, except Chuck, like a scalded dog seeking his master's protection.

That protection did not come.

Ms. Kimbreaux found me sitting on the steps on the far side of the playground. She had witnessed the whole affair. She took my little chin in her hands and forced me to look into her eyes. When she captured my attention, she sang to me.

“It's fun to pick on people when the world is on your side.

But then things change and you're alone

And you feel so cold inside

Sticks and stones may break your bones

And bring you to your knees

But words are sharp piercing the heart

Inside is where you bleed.”

Her words had little meaning to my young mind. It's haunting melody, however, stayed with me all through middle school and into my high school years. It sat like a seed planted in my flesh and watered by many adolescent tears, tears I shed and tears I caused others to shed. And it was in high school that that tree of compassion finally bore fruit.

I learned that words not only held the power to hurt and hinder. I came to learn that words had the power to help and heal. I grew into an understanding that sticks and stones can inflict wounds that, thought egregious, will eventually heal. Those wounds inflicted by what I say have the potential to cause injuries that will forever fester into something worse than childhood games.

I was reunited with Ms. Kimbreaux 20 years later when I did my nursing internship in a retirement home. She was suffering from Dementia and did not recognize me. I recited the poem she had taught me from so long ago. I wanted to let her know how much of an impact she had on my life. However, she could not remember. It was a bittersweet moment to hold her hands and thank her for those kind and encouraging words she gave me when I needed them as a child. I was grateful that in her later years, I was able to give something of myself in return.

AN UNLIKELY TEACHER LEAVES A LASTING IMPRESSION

BY LIZ QUINN

Sometimes the least likely people make the most difference in your life. A good teacher can inspire and change the course of your life years after the high school experience. At the time that I had Miss Kenney, I was afraid of her and did not even like her. I had no idea she left a mark on me that changed my life.

When I was fourteen, I was nervous going to a private school thirty minutes from home. I knew no one and was not good at making friends. Some of the teachers were eager to introduce themselves and show us around. When I had them in class, I felt at ease and comfortable in the classroom. I was comfortable enough to do everything but pay attention. I doodled, talked to friends, watched others pass notes, and stared out the window. When I passed these teachers in the hall, they would smile and say hello or comfort you when you were emotional.

Miss Kenney was not one of those teachers that you bared your soul to. She was blunt and had a rough exterior. Though Miss Kenney instilled fear in us, she wanted us to learn. She would not take any less than our best effort. She cared about her students on a deeper level that was not obvious at a first glance. She was not good at first impressions but if you looked deeper, you could see the truth and meaning behind her and this is what I related to.

However, the teacher I learned the most from scared the life out of me. She was stern and never spoke to any of the students. When Miss Kenney passed me in the hall, she looked the other way and so did I.

She did not want to be our friend, but she knew her stuff. That is she knew how to teach English. She prepared us for the SAT's, and her class was captivating. She kept us on our toes. Miss Kenney was respected for her work ethic. When I was in high school, I studied and did well, but I could have done better. School was

not as much a priority as being popular, looking good, and trying to get a boyfriend. Watching television and talking on the phone was a must that came before my studies. I had Miss Kenney twice in four years for English class.

As much as I hated to admit it, I looked forward to the class more than any other one. To this day, I still remember what I learned there, as long ago as it was. I remember more than what I learned in college. Looking back, I can envision her walking around opening the windows in the dead of winter, so we didn't fall asleep. A poster of a young Robert Redford hung up beside the old chalkboard. She was an attractive woman in her early thirties just starting to turn gray with chestnut brown eyes.

When I had other teachers for English, they did not measure up to Miss Kenney. They were nice but I realized I did not learn as much in the relaxed environment. Other teachers did not work to hold our interest. They did not analyze literature and relate it to the world around us. Most of the time they offered some insight but mainly read from the book.

Miss Kenney did not seem to like people, but she loved what she taught. In turn, she made us love it as well. I am thankful for this. She was also the only teacher to plan a class trip. In freshman year, she took us to see the play "Great Expectations," by Charles Dickens and in senior year we went to see a modern adaption of "Frankenstein."

Taking approximately 80 students on a bus to center city and account for them is a headache. It certainly was not required yet she did it anyway. Others did not make the effort.

When I was a Junior everyone went to the career center at school mainly to get out of class, but also to plan for college. Most students were rich and wanted

to travel far for their degree. As for me, I did not fit in with these expectations. I was living in the moment and did not think about the future. I tried to encourage my friend from grade school to attend Penn State so we could party and meet men, as if that was all there was to college.

She was quite frank about it and told me she didn't have the brains for college. My mother addressed college with me and encouraged me to attend a local school in Philadelphia, Holy Family College. I did not have much interest in college, but I did not want to be the only one from a college prep school that was not attending. I thought it was bad for my image and that was my sole purpose for going. Yet the four years were the greatest years of my life. I loved learning and felt especially well prepared for the English courses. When I started school, I went in for Accounting because my parents were both Accountants. The advisor told me I had to take what I had a passion for and that was Literature, the Arts and Writing.

I overcame the worst parts of my shyness and

felt more comfortable as the years progressed. After my first semester, I switched my major to English Communications. I thought a lot about Miss Kenney and wanted to become an English teacher because she had such a powerful influence over me. As it turned out, I focused on journalism instead, and became a reporter for a while and loved it.

When I left those four years of high school, I thought I was not going to miss anyone. Friends and some teachers signed my yearbook but not Miss Kenney. After all, she was the scariest teacher in the school. High school was unpleasant for me because of my shyness. I was glad to move on. I did not look back and never visited the school for it reminded me of my former self. I did not shine in Miss Kenney's class and to this day she has no idea that I think about her from time to time. I heard that Miss Kenney retired but I know nothing more. For me what is important is the legacy she left behind. Her job was not to be a friend it was to teach. And that is what she did and for me it made all the difference.



POSITIVE THINGS I'VE LEARNED FROM MY TEACHER

BY DOMINIQUE CARSON

I was a student at Public School 202 from Kindergarten until second grade. I did exceptionally well and was in an honor's class in the second grade. However, once my mother and I found out that I was not having Ms. Spano for third grade, I transferred out of the school. I was then placed in Public School 190, also known as my mother's school. When I entered the school for the first time, I was known as Ms. Peebles' daughter, right before changing her last name. My mother was introduced to Ms. Renee O'Connor, later known as Mrs. Barnes. I enjoyed the third grade because I met great classmates, and I was Ms. O'Connor's buttercup. She was the first person outside of my family, who gave me a nickname and recognized my capabilities. I was off to a great start at Public School 190, and fourth grade just sealed the deal. The school year ended, and my mother started thinking about my fourth-grade teacher and wanted me to have Ms. Ellen Asregadoo. There was no room for negotiation, and she was not taking no for an answer. My mother wanted me to have the best and knew Ms. Asregadoo would be stern, forthcoming, reliable, and knowledgeable about the subject matters.

Ms. A gladly accepted her offer, and during the 1999-2000 school year, I was in her fourth-grade class. Our room number was 4-408, and a few of my third-grade classmates followed me, which was a plus. There were also a few classmates who believed that I was going to act like "I was all that," because my mother was an educator at the school. But you cannot judge a book by its covers and become more receptive. With the constant encouragement from Ms. A, I was known as the "pretty and kind-hearted nerd." Once we figured out each other's characteristic traits as students, we started enjoying Ms. A's overall teaching style.

She knew when she needed to be hard on us and was not fearful about challenging her students. Ms.

A recognized our full potential and figured out each student's strengths and weaknesses, especially during test prep season. Back in the days, we had these specialized tests entitled "C.T.B. and the P.A.M. math exam." We had to take these exams to be promoted to the next grade. We also had a reading program, Success for All (S.F.A.), and we were tested yearly to figure out our reading levels for the upcoming school year. Therefore, Ms. A's testing approach was like a drill sergeant. She timed us for each practice test, made sure we read the directions and questions before selecting an answer, completed homework during after school so we can have more time for test prep, re-mastered literary concepts, the process of elimination, or came up with alternative strategies to solve math problems. Her testing method was essential but necessary, and it worked out in our favor. As a result, these qualities made her different from other fourth grade teachers. In the end, I received a high level 3, which is above satisfactory on my E.L.A. and Math exams. The highest score was 4, so I was very cheerful when I received the score and could not wait to tell my mother and grandmother.

Ms. A changed my life a great deal, and I carried eight principles I have learned from her along the way. I know she touched other students' lives', but I am speaking from my personal experience. I am grateful that I stayed in contact with her after graduating from elementary school in June 2001. I want to give a further explanation of these principles.

Embrace Your Therapeutic Outlet

Writing: One of my writing assignments in Ms. A's class was "What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up," and we learned the five steps in writing. The five stages were brainstorm, writing, revision, final proofread, and publication. Before we started the report, we brainstormed on different ideas that were associated

with the subject. Then, we created a list or drew a web once we decided on our future careers. When I followed the five-step process correctly, Ms. A posted my work on the bulletin board. The bulletin board indicated that your work was ready for publication. But she took it one step further! She asked me to proofread my classmate's paper. At first, I was like, what are you serious? I did not see the connection because I am not an educator. I hesitantly accepted the challenge, revised Erica Booker's essay, and used the editing symbols. Then, Ms. A read her paper with my revisions and advised me to take my writing career seriously. She recognized my "one of a kind" personality as a writer and student and took advantage of every opportunity.

You Can Trust an Adult Outside of Your Family Unit

Even though I was an exceptional student in school, my home life was upside down at the time. My mother and stepfather were continually arguing, and so much verbal, emotional, and mental abuse were displayed amongst them. It took a toll on me and one of these arguments took place days before my standardized tests. It was a turbulent time in the household, and I could not talk about it in school. It was January/March, and we were getting ready to take the C.T.B. Test for Reading, and my nerves were shot. I could not concentrate on the exam, and I was hiding my tears from Ms. A. and my peers. Before we took the exam, Ms. A made sure we had everything we needed for the exam, but when Ms. A looked at me, she saw the hurt in my eyes. She told the testing coordinator, Ms. Griggs, to give us a few minutes to figure out what is going on with me. At first, I told her nothing and then she asked me to come clean. I gave her a synopsis about what is going on at home, and Ms. A was disgusted. She whispered some encouraging words in my ear so I can perform well on the exam. Two months later, I was pleased with my scores and thanked Ms. A. for those sacred words. To this day, I do not remember what she told me, but it worked out perfectly.

Do not be Afraid to Cry When You are Hurting

After we completed the exam, I cried profusely. Ms. A told me crying was a part of cleansing and healing. At first, my mother was livid that I told Ms. A about our home life because she did not want her colleagues

to know her business. However, I told my mother that I would not be in the fifth grade if I did not tell her. My mother eventually calmed down and would inform Ms. A about those volatile arguments, if necessary.

Make Yourself a Priority

Ms. A. encouraged me to heal and take care of myself.

Recognize Your Light, Despite Circumstances

Do not let anyone dim your light! Your light may intimidate people, young and old, but, persevere and keep thriving!

Ask for What You Want, Kids are People Too

At the end of the school year, I told my mother I want Ms. Asregadoo to be my fifth-grade teacher. Ms. A said she only teaches 4th grade, but my peers and I still asked her. After the conversation, she said, "I will see what I can do; I cannot make any promises." A few weeks later, Ms. A said, "I am doing this one time only. I will be your fifth-grade teacher next year," and our class was now 5-408.

Challenge Yourself Outside the Classroom

I excelled in all subjects in the fifth grade. However, outside of the classroom, I entered different contests and workshops that challenged me as a student. I participated in the Dr. Lorraine Monroe's student school leadership conference, applied for former New York Knicks basketball player Allan Houston's "My Teacher is a Hero Award," Women History Contest, science fairs, and received the District Attorney's Citation of Honor award. Nonetheless, I continued to challenge myself throughout my academic career and was granted countless opportunities that expanded my horizons.

Always Keep Your Imagination Alive

Over the years, I needed to have an active imagination even when I was not in school. My dreams were prevalent in my writing, and it is crucial for your mental health. Hence, with a striking imagination, you will have a better picture of your future.

SPOTLIGHT ON BOOKS

“MY TIME WILL COME,” BY IAN MANUEL

At fourteen Ian Manuel was sentenced to life without parole. “My Time Will Come,” is a paean to the capacity of the human will to transcend adversity through determination and art.

“Ian is magic. His story is difficult and heartbreaking, but he takes us places we need to go to understand why we must do better.”
—Bryan Stevenson, author of “Just Mercy.”

“My story has been told many times and by highly regarded experts in their fields—judges, prosecutors, juvenile probation officers, sociologists, journalists. But I would like to try to tell it to you myself. I have reason to believe the experts may be wrong about me. You see, today, thirty years later, I am neither in prison nor dead.”

—from *My Time Will Come*

“Manuel’s account is both heart-wrenching and uplifting.... Manuel vividly captures the terror of an adolescent thrust into adult incarceration and the added trauma of solitary confinement. He portrays the prison bureaucracy as arbitrary in its amplification of punitive measures, including routine beatings and tear-gassings... A disturbing, vital, necessary eyewitness addition to debates about the mass incarceration epidemic in the U.S.”

—Kirkus Reviews

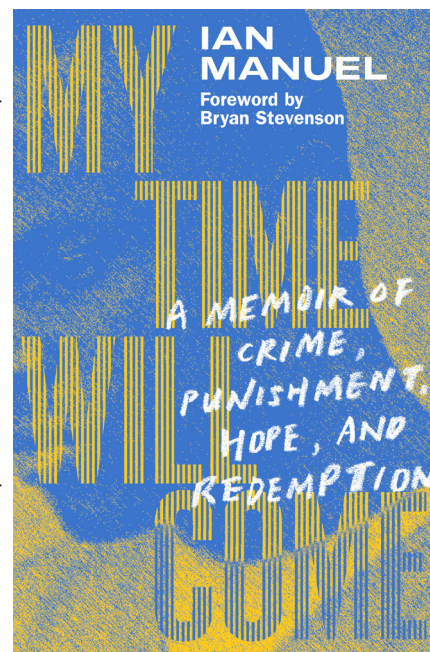
“His story is heartbreaking and hopeful and needs to be told.”
—Booklist

About the author: Ian Manuel



Ian Manuel is a poet, activist, and recent MacDowell Fellow. Ian’s poetry was featured in Bryan Stevenson’s bestseller, *Just Mercy*. In 1990, Ian was living in Tampa in one of the poorest, most violent housing projects in the state. At 13, he was involved in a shooting, which left him one of the youngest prisoners condemned to die in prison in the United States. He was so young that he was put in solitary confinement, where he

remained for the next 18 years. While in solitary, he discovered a special gift; the ability to compose words in ways that move people. In 2006, The Equal Justice Initiative took on Ian’s case as part of their fight to end excessive punishment of children, hoping to ban life without parole for children who were convicted on non-homicides. Ian was released after serving 26 years in prison. Since his release, he has spoken at NYU, Butler University, Florida State University, Columbia Law School, The Federal Public Defender Conference, The School of Visual Arts, Horace Mann, and many more prestigious colleges & organizations. He is living in Brooklyn, New York and writing an innovative memoir that will make you believe in his mantra “The impossible is obtainable.”



“My Time Will Come,” will be available on **May 4, 2021**. Ian will also begin his book tour on **May 4, 2021**.

Tuesday, May 4--San Francisco

9:00 pm ET/6pm PT-- Green Apple Books event. (SF city store).
<https://www.greenapplebooks.com/event/virtual-event-ian-manuel>

Wednesday, May 5--Los Angeles

8:00 pm ET/5pm PT-- Los Angeles Public Library/ALoud event with Bryan Stevenson.

Thursday, May 6--Minneapolis/St. Paul

8:00 pm -- Minnesota Club Book event in conversation with Nadine Graves, board chair of We Are All Criminals (justice reform non-profit in Minneapolis/St. Paul) and host of Waiting Room podcast.
<https://www.clubbook.org/portfolio-posts/ian-manuel/>

Saturday, May 8--San Francisco

7:00pm ET / 4:00pm PT -- Book Passage event. (Corte Madera, SF suburbs)

To contact the author, write to: ianmanuel329@gmail.com
To pre-order visit www.penguinrandomhouse.com

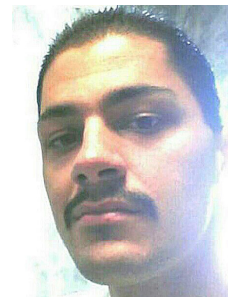
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

KENNETH ANDERSEN About the author: Kenneth Charles Andersen is a 54-year-old male, ex-a-lot of things, who has spent most of his life helping others in EMT/Paramedic work. Kenneth comes from a big loving family. His father introduced him to the outdoors and taught him how to fish. He loves animals, horseback riding, photography, art, and drawing. Kenneth plays the accordion and believes that music is the door into all cultures.



EDDIE BAILEY About the author: Eddie Bailey is a straightforward writer with a message that we can all relate to. Let's listen carefully to his motivational words and move in unison with his vision.

ANTHONY BILLINGS About the author: Anthony Billings was raised in a small town called Susanville, California. He has an A.S. Degree in General Business and an A.A. Degree in Social/Behavioral Sciences. He earned both through Coastline Community College. In 2017, he was one of only 51 incarcerated individuals who was awarded the ASG Merit Scholarship.



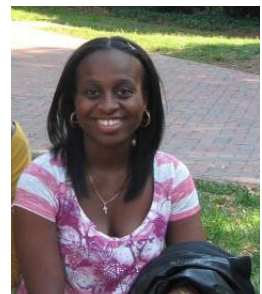
He has been involved in creative writing for over 15 years now and has over 30 published pieces to his credit, including some that have gotten top placement in poetry or essay competitions. Using creative writing as an outlet has not just led to achievement, but has also given him a purpose. He has motivated others to pick up writing, he has used his voice to give a voice to the voiceless, and he has changed the perceptions of others by inspiring those that have read and found meaning in his words.

Anthony has discovered a craft that has proven to be positive, productive, and life changing. His writing career has only just begun and he can't wait to see where it takes him next.

If you would like to contact Anthony Billings, you can send your letters to:

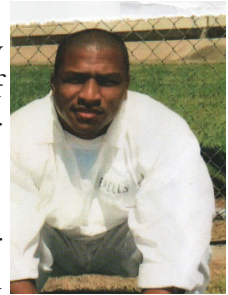
Anthony Billings, #G-50184
Pleasant Valley State Prison - B-1 #104
P.O. Box 8500
Coalinga, CA 93210

DOMINIQUE CARSON About the author: Dominique Carson is an award-winning community activist, journalist, researcher, and massage therapist. She graduated with her bachelor's and master's degree from CUNY Brooklyn College. Carson also received her massage degree and certification from CUNY Queensborough Community College. Ms. Carson has been an active freelance writer for eight years and wrote for many publications including The Amsterdam News, NBC News, The Griot, Ebony, Singersroom.com, and Soul Train, just to name a few. She interviewed many notable figures in the entertainment industry such as Charlie Wilson, Regina Belle, Patti Labelle, Avant, Tito Jackson, Eric Benet, Heather Headley, The Isley Brothers, and many more. Ms. Carson has been a part of various writing projects over the years such as How to Survive Freshmen Year in College, Lefferts Manor Association Journal, and Partnership for Parks.



In 2018, she received the It's My Park Award with her former Man Up! Inc,'s Job Development Center Colleagues for outstanding service in East New York, Brooklyn. Outside of journalism and editorial projects, Carson is also a licensed and nationally certified massage therapist as of fall 2019. Her overall goal is to facilitate people's lives with her hands and words.

DAMONT 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.

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?

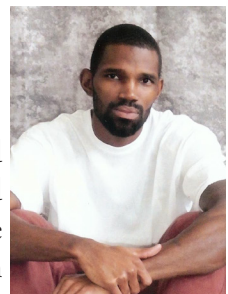
TROY GLOVER About the author: Troy Glover dabbles in everything. He is a composer of song lyrics, poetry and Greeting Card slogans. He writes Sci /Fi, fiction, and non-fiction. Troy Glover may not be an artist yet, but he publishes artwork as well. He has an Associate degree of Theology from Southwestern Baptist. He is a humorous Zen Buddhist trying to figure out the sound of one wing flapping.

If you would like to write to Troy Glover, he can be reached at:

Troy Glover #932481
Darrington Unit
59 Darrington Road
Rosharon, Texas 77583

If you would like to view Troy's artwork, go to:
roninsworld@prisonartware.com

GEORGE HOPKINS About the author: He 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

ZAKIYA "KONDO" MINWINYI About the author: Zakiya "Kondo" Miwinyi, was handed over to the Tennessee Department of Children Services at birth. As a result, he spent the majority of his life in and out of confinements, not having anyone to turn to in his time of suffering. In search of an outlet to relieve his inner pain, Zakiya began writing. He has written several unpublished Non-fiction and Fiction books, poems, scripts, songs, business plans and articles that he intends to have published, once he's released from the Tennessee Department of Corrections in Hartsville, Tennessee.

AMY NICHOLSON About the author: Amy Nicholson hopes to encourage and inspire others through her writing. She has been published in Country Woman, The Old Schoolhouse, The Lookout, and other publications. When she's not writing, gardening, or hanging out with her family, Amy substitute teaches. Read a sampling of her musings at www.amynicholson14.wordpress.com.



LIZ QUINN About the Author: Liz Quinn is a Freelance Writer living in the Pennsylvania area. She has been freelance writing for various newspapers and magazines since 1996. Some of the magazines she has been featured in include: Lifestyle, a local magazine that covered the Bucks County area, Skope and Spotlight on Recovery. She has also published four poems. She received her B.A. from Holy Family University and Master's in Science Communications from Drexel University.



VICTORIA RADER About the author: Victoria Rader was born in Indiana. She is 83 years old and has lived in Ohio most of her life. She has many God given talents of which being a published author of children's stories is one of them. She has been writing for Spotlight on Recovery for many years and loves doing it.



ANA GONZALEZ RIBEIRO About the Author: Ana Gonzalez Ribeiro, MBA, AFC® is an Accredited Financial Counselor® founder of Rise Up Financial Coaching, a fee only financial counseling firm. She is also a Bilingual Personal Finance Writer and Educator dedicated to helping populations that need financial literacy and counseling. Her informative articles have been published in various news outlets and websites including Huffington Post, Fidelity, Fox Business News, MSN and Yahoo Finance. She's been featured on WIBC Indy's News 93.1 FM radio, Blog Talk Radio, Radio Campesina 101.9 and interviewed on Channel 41's Univision morning news program, "Al Despertar." She also founded the personal financial and motivational site www.Ace the Journey.com and translated into Spanish the book, Financial Advice for Blue Collar America by Kathryn B. Hauer, CFP. Ana teaches Spanish or English personal finance courses on behalf of the W!SE (Working In Support of Education) program and has taught workshops for non-profits in NYC and Westchester including Institute for Financial Literacy and KRVC (Building a Better Community 1 Block at a Time!) She also provides financial counseling to the military through

Zeiders, a company that provides human services solutions to support Military and Veteran communities.

ANGEL RODRIGUEZ My name is Angel Rodriguez. I am 28 years old and I love art. I hope to someday share my music and poetry with everyone. I keep myself busy. I'm always striving to better myself. I send my love and blessings to everyone.



ALPHONSO TANNER About the Author: This is Alphonso's seventh article for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine. He has been a contributing writer since 2017.

To correspond with Alphonso, please write to him at:

Alphonso Tanner #X05549

Blackwater River C.I.

5914 Jeff Ates Road

Milton, Florida 32583



ANTHONY TATE 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

East Ark Region

P.O. Box 180

Brickeys, Ark 72320

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

ANTHONY VINSON About the author: This is Anthony Vinson's first article for Spotlight on Recovery. We look forward to hearing more from Anthony in the future.



JEFFREY L. WRIGHT About the author: I have recently become a very proud member of the Spotlight on Recovery writing team, and spent a great deal of my time contemplating and writing about ways to help ex-offenders successfully re-integrate themselves back into society.

As a repeat offender, who is currently serving 25 years for first-degree bank robbery, I strive to play an active role in drawing more attention to the psychosocial factors contributing to the problem of mass incarceration. I believe prisons should be more clinical and far less penal in nature. This change ensures that young boys and girls who enter the system can be properly diagnosed, and never become repeat offenders who forfeit the majority of their adult lives, going in and out of prison.

I'm a poet, essayist, and novelist working to become a widely read published author. I'm open to corresponding with anyone who has ideas about re-integration, restorative justice, and social issues. I believe anyone can make a difference no matter what their circumstances may be. Send your correspondence to:

Jeffrey L. Wright #209168

CCI

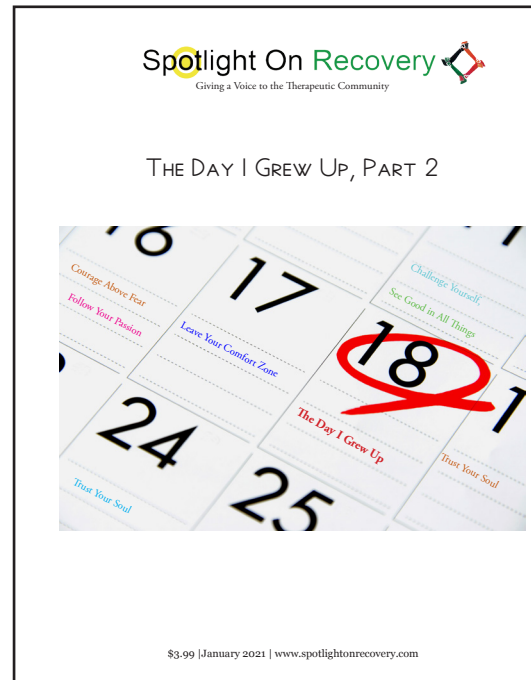
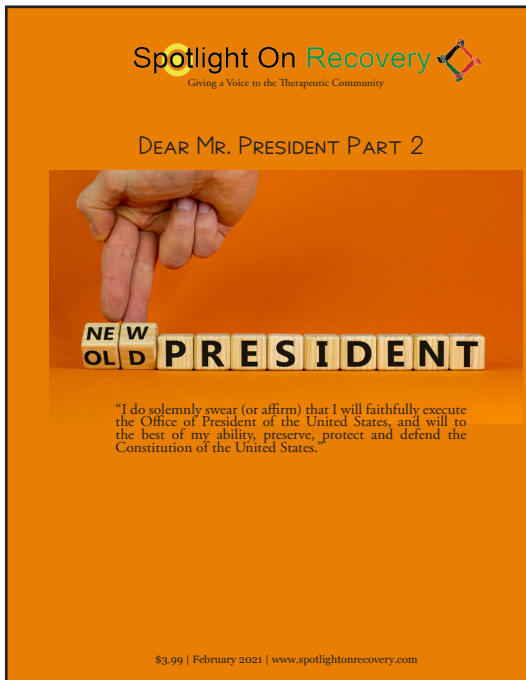
900 Highland Avenue

Cheshire, CT 06410



BACK ISSUES ARE AVAILABLE

To order back issues, e-mail the publisher at: rgraham_100@msn.com



MOTHER'S DAY

BY ANTHONY BILLINGS

Much more, is surely deserved and this poem helps me to say

Out of everyone on this planet, mothers deserve more than a day.

To appreciate, love, cherish, and let our gratitude be known.

Having a true one in our corner ensures we will never be alone.

Even when we bring you our troubles, and problems in life.

Regardless of what our struggles are, you always push yours to the side.

So many traits to admire that I wouldn't know where to start.

Delivered us into this world and put the beats in our heart.

Always **giving** more than you take you make the rest of us strong.

You're the greatest hero of all time, and I love you Mom.



Mother's Day, May 9, 2021

COMING SOON

The
HAVES
and
HAVE NOT'S